

CUI

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CUI

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

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UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION INTERVIEW CONDUCTED ON
BEHALF OF NTSB BY THE U.S. COAST GUARD

CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you again for joining us.

COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I'm glad I have the
opportunity to be here, sir.

CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Great. Please, have a seat. So, I'm
gonna take some time up front to explain what we're all
about here and give you a chance to ask us any questions
before we get started. [REDACTED], you've got the digital
recording going. So, today's interview will be recorded.
And so we just need to spend some time on the front end for
the purpose of the recording to get everything set. So, my
name is Captain [REDACTED]. I'm the Commanding Officer of
U.S. Coast Guard Activities Far East. I have with me today
my Senior Investigator at Activities Far East, and for the
purposes of recording, just introduce yourself, [REDACTED].

LIEUTENANT [REDACTED]: Yes. Lieutenant [REDACTED],
Senior Investigating Office at Activities Far East.

CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And I also have with me subject matter
expert, Deck Watch Officer, a former CO of a Coast Guard
cutter. Introduce yourself, please.

Redacted portions of this page have been designated as Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) or as Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: Good morning, sir.
2 I'm Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED]. I am currently
3 serving as an International Port Security Liaison Officer
4 under the charge of Captain [REDACTED] here in Yokata Air Base
5 Activites Far East.

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, we're very much aware of the
7 incident that's occurred and the fact that it's been a very
8 tough thing to deal with for everybody. We also know that
9 you're crew did some amazing things that day and uh -- and
10 uh to save each other and also the ship. So there is
11 something to be proud about about what happened on that
12 day. So, under the authority of Title 46, U.S. Code 6301
13 and Title 46, CFR part 4, that's our internal investigation
14 procedures, an investigation is being conducted into the
15 circumstances of the collision of the USS Fitzgerald and
16 the ACX Crystal on June 17. This investigation is intended
17 to determine the cause of the casualty into the extent
18 possible to obtain information for the purposes of
19 preventing similar causalities in the future. In short,
20 we're not here to assign blame. We just want to find out
21 what happened. And we think that your position and your
22 background and your experience on the Fitzgerald will
23 obviously be very helpful in us understanding the
24 circumstances around the incident back on June 17th. And
25 again, to assist with our accuracy in this investigation,

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 we will be recording today's interview, June 17, 2017 at
2 0900.

3 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: July.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Of July. For the purposes of our
5 recording, would you please state and spell and your name
6 and your position aboard the vessel?

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: My name is Brice Benson,
8 spelled B-R-Y-C-E, B-E-N-S-O-N, Commander, United States
9 Navy. And at the time of the collision on June 17, I was
10 the Commanding Officer.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you. So, Commander Benson, let
12 me just start with your assessment of Fitzgerald's crew and
13 their ability to complete your assigned mission. Can I
14 have you describe your assessment of your crew?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In so far as uh -- can you
16 focus or narrow down the --

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Just a general assessment. So, you
18 recently went to PCO school in the spring. You were the XO
19 18 months prior to that. Around about.

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: About 16 months.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: About 16 months? And so -- yes sir?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yeah, I reported to
23 Fitzgerald at the end of November in 2015 and served as the
24 Executive Officer up and through to about March 12th of
25 2017 under 2 Commanding Officers. The first one, [REDACTED]

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 [REDACTED], and then the majority of the time, Commander
2 [REDACTED]. And so I -- between March and February 13th,
3 when I took command, I executed PCO training Pipeline,
4 where I went to Newport, Rhode Island for 2 weeks for PCO
5 school, perspective commanding officer school, 1 week in
6 Dahlgren, Virginia, to kind of refresh with the latest in
7 AEGIS tactics in core doctrine. And then just several days
8 in San Diego, where I reported in with the TAC Commander,
9 Commander Naval Surface Forces Pacific, for administration
10 and updates with probomatics. So my general assessment of
11 the Fitzgerald crew was I held the crew in large and high
12 regard. They were -- you know, I made public statements
13 that I felt we had the best ship with the best crew in the
14 Seventh Fleet and I was proud to assume command of the
15 Fitzgerald on May 13 of this year. And I really thought we
16 were going to do some exceptional work for our leadership
17 here in Seventh Fleet throughout 2017 and 2018.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And Commander, would you describe how
19 the Fitzgerald's crew and your mission here compared to
20 other ships that you might've been assigned to?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: From the wardroom, it was the
22 best wardroom I'd ever operated with. The engagement and
23 the level of effort and concern and care by my department
24 heads was high. My Chief SMS, they cared. They were
25 technically competent and able to maintain the ship and to

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 take corrective action. The crew was adaptable, flexible,
2 hardworking, all qualities that any commander of a
3 destroyer would desire and want in a crew.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about the operational tempo for
5 Fitzgerald. What was your assessment of the operations
6 asked of the Fitzgerald?

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It was high. It was
8 changing. It was -- presented challenges for long-term
9 planning, both for certifications and training and also
10 management of personnel. I believe, to the best of my
11 memory, we were looking at an operational tempo in excess
12 of 70 percent away from home port this year.

13 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And how did that compare to other
14 ships that you had been assigned to? So high, I interpret
15 that to be relatively high compared to other ships you've
16 been assigned to.

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about with OPTEMPO, of course
19 there is -- it's related to PERSTEMPO. How -- what was
20 your assessment of its impact to your personnel's tempo?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Um, again, I think it was uh
22 -- um, I am unaware of the metric assigned to it,
23 forecasting through the rest of the year, but believe it
24 was -- the thresholds were beyond other ships as far as
25 days away from home port or, so.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Even for Seventh Fleet or in
2 comparison to the rest of the fleet?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Both.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Both. Really?

5 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. For their 2017:
6 The Fitzgerald departed Yokosuka the end of February after
7 completing a maintenance availability and the initial
8 certifications following the maintenance availability.
9 There was a period where the Fitzgerald was going to come
10 back, and this was after I had detached, but real world
11 operations necessitated continuing to remain on station,
12 whether the performance of ballistic missile defense or
13 conducting pacific presence operations. So, otherwise
14 planned maintenance opportunities were foregone, which
15 presented some of the challenges to the personnel
16 management, that PERSTEMPO.

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: What type of planned maintenance was
18 deferred?

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I believe CNO maintenance
20 availability.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I'm sorry. What?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It's CMAV, but CNO
23 maintenance availability.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Just overall maintenance of the
2 vessel repairs. Any repairs get deferred that needed to be
3 --?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes. Yes, sir.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And what kind of repairs?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I'm -- to the best of my
7 knowledge, I cannot recall the number of -- that data
8 should be available through the short port engineer.

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay, we can get that.

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: And the maintenance community
11 of the type of maintenance that was deferred.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Any particular maintenance that stands
13 out in your mind that you were concerned about that was
14 deferred?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I know there was some
16 maintenance associated with some casualty reports, some
17 CASREPs, we had outstanding, that we were gonna use an
18 opportunity to correct. To the best of my knowledge, I
19 can't recall the specific ones, but they should align with
20 our casualty reporting, CASREPs at the time.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Sure. We can get those if we don't
22 have them already. So, thank you. Regarding OPTEMPO and
23 PERSTEMPO, were there any concerns expressed by your crew
24 or XO or department heads regarding the OPTEMPO/PERSTEMPO?

25 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir, issues.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And what were the -- what were the
2 concerns?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The primary concern when I
4 took command on May 13 was finding an opportunity for
5 crewmembers to take leave. And uh, the previous Commanding
6 Officer had indicated to the crew that in light of the
7 deferred maintenance availability, that he would entertain
8 leave periods, or crews an opportunity to take leave while
9 underway. And so when I reported, I -- that was not
10 informed with my philosophy or guidance and I -- the third
11 day of command, I cancelled 4 previously approved leave
12 requests and denied 10 additional leave requests that were
13 going to occur over underway periods. So there was concern
14 of when the crew would be, you know, have an opportunity to
15 take leave.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, uh, regarding -- regarding the
17 leave requests, I would imagine it was a tough balance.
18 You acknowledged the high PERSTEMPO. You see leave chits,
19 but you've got to run a ship. So, what was -- what -- how
20 did you process that request, you know, personnel
21 requirements versus ship requirements? How did you come to
22 a decision on that?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, I -- I evaluated each
24 leave request based on our mission requirements, known or
25 unknown at the time, their value, my assessed value of

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 their position on the ship. And it was really very easy
2 for me to justify their requirement to be on the ship for
3 underway operations. The context of operations at the time
4 of middle of May was we had the Carl Vinson Strike Group in
5 the Sea of Japan. There was some -- what level are we
6 cleared to?

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: This is just unclassified

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Okay.

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Although, I think we all have a
10 clearance here, but unclassified.

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So the -- in essence, the
12 tensions were ratcheting up and we were going to fold into
13 the Carl Vinson Strike Group as an air defense unit, but
14 also be in a position to exercise all the missions that we
15 were required to. And my assessment was we could go and --
16 we needed to be prepared to go into full-spectrum warfare
17 with North Korea, and that necessitated everyone to be
18 onboard. So it was very clear processing for me of the
19 requirement of people and it sort of ran the gamut from E-
20 4s all the way to Chief Petty Officers, Ensigns that had
21 desired to -- had requested in some form leave. So, the
22 nature of the leave requests were balanced from family
23 reunions to the birth of children, in which I sat everyone
24 down and I told them that their posit -- that I valued
25 their position onboard and their requirement to be here.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 The Fitzgerald was undermanned at the time. And in
2 addition to being undermanned, we were not meeting the TEC
3 Commander's thresholds for manning and I had additional
4 people that were off the ship for leave and transfer for
5 other schooling as required to, you know, to increase our
6 readiness. So, where I was at with about an 89%-90%
7 manning, it was further then reduced. I don't know the
8 percentage, you know. And --

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: By incoming personnel, trained.

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Untrained, but otherwise
11 people off in a TAD, schoolhouse status. Because the
12 requirement to maintain certifications is still resonant to
13 the ship to fix. I wish everyone came full up rounded and
14 trained, but sometimes that's just not the case. So, you
15 know, proactive measures by myself as the executive officer
16 and my team to ensure that people got off to school so we'd
17 meet the TEC Commander's requirement. So, that then is
18 another threshold below the manning that I'm already under.
19 And at that point, I viewed leave as discretionary and
20 subject to my disapproval. So, that created tension, but -
21 - I think within the crew, but I explained my actions to
22 the wardroom and the chief mans. And whether they agreed
23 or not with me, they understood my position of everyone's
24 value onboard the ship.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Were the issues regarding the ship
2 being undermanned and the high OPTEMPO that was required,
3 were any discussions or any concerns raised by you to
4 COMDESRON?

5 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir, through -- it was
6 relayed as XO with the reports up to -- you know, through
7 our ARSEC. While I was in San Diego as part of the -- they
8 call it a TYCOM, tech commander in dock. I sat with one of
9 their manning representatives. I think the N-13,
10 Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED], who does the manning for
11 the force, and I expressed my concerns in key positions.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And what was their answer?

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Acknowledgement that there
14 were concerns. There was -- I saw no action taken.
15 Particularly, since I had reported to Fitzgerald, we have
16 not had a Quartermaster Chief and our Senior Quartermaster
17 is a First Class Petty Officer. This had been one of our
18 leading deficiencies, manning deficiencies, through my time
19 as the XO. The report I got when I talked with Lieutenant
20 Commander [REDACTED] was that the Fitzgerald's Quartermaster
21 Chief billet was the number one priority fill for the
22 Pacific force. And then when U.S. Fleet Forces Command
23 posted the billets, our billet was not there and it was the
24 Destroyer Squadron 15 QMC billet, or Master Chief billet
25 that was advertised.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So it wasn't on the Fitzgerald, it was
2 in the DESRON.

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: That's what -- you know,
4 through the posting of assignment of billets through the
5 Navy Personnel Command; that was the billet that was
6 advertised. I'd ask for clarification on -- you know, what
7 do I have to do to, you know, you know, increase -- you
8 know, as a Commanding Officer, incoming Commanding, you
9 know, Commander, you know, how can I get after manning.
10 And that's just one example.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: There were others I -- you were
12 alluding to.

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: There are others. Um, I take it that
15 their answer to your concerns wasn't satisfactory? Is that
16 fair to say? That their -- you brought your concerns to
17 their attention, and their actions, based on your concerns,
18 was less than what you wanted.

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: A true statement.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Had you considered any further action
21 taking on those concerns with COMDESRON?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Through the processes
23 established with my ISIC I was going to continue to
24 advocate our requirements and urgency of fills for these
25 assignments, considering our operational tempo in 2017.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], did you have any followup
2 questions in that area?

3 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: Uh, yeah. So, I just
4 wanted to see on -- would you generally describe being
5 assigned here in Seventh Fleet overseas versus being
6 assigned stateside, that there are more fill issues or less
7 than your counterparts in the stateside?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, if you look at the
9 manning -- I've had an opportunity to look at the manning
10 writ large for the Pacific force and the -- and this was
11 acknowledged by Admiral [REDACTED] when he came that the forces
12 in Seventh Fleet are under the threshold requirements writ
13 large. While the Third Fleet assets are over the
14 thresholds required.

15 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: And I wanted to circle
16 back on your -- and I hate to jump around with you. If
17 it's all right, sir?

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Please go ahead.

19 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: When you're
20 talking about your CMAV deferment, would you say that,
21 generally speaking, that Fitzgerald's readiness was
22 impacted negatively by that, or not really substantially
23 continued as optimum?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Well, I think any deferment
2 of maintenance for our ships is -- it impacts some aspects
3 of operational readiness.

4 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: Thank you.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Commander, I've got one circle back
6 You mentioned your Chief SMS taking corrective action.
7 That you were pleased with the performance of your Chief
8 SMS in particularly taking corrective action when needed.
9 Can you provide any examples of times when your Chief SMS
10 has had to take corrective action for issues that you've
11 identified or maybe they've identified?

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think to clarify my answers
13 in terms of corrective action for maintenance. So, in
14 terms of when systems were down, they took ownership of
15 their equipment and I never had to direct action for them
16 to maintain their equipment.

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And this is machinery, navigation
18 equipment, nuts and bolts kind of thing?

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. So I think well
20 in, you know, in charge of senior enlisted's job
21 requirements, senior technical, okay, manager of their --
22 they brought solutions and never once did I tell them they
23 had to come in on a Saturday to fix their equipment. They
24 were there already working.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Great. How about personnel
2 performance issues with any actions that the Chief's [MS]
3 had taken -- or your assessment, would be a better
4 question. Your assessment of the Chief's [MS] ability to
5 take action to correct personal performance issues.

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Sir, I observed -- so the
7 manner of which I was pleased with how the Chief's [MS]
8 took corrective action with personnel performance issues
9 was, when there was an incident, they would conduct their
10 disciplinary review board to ascertain the facts and their
11 recommendations for punishment under my authorities as the
12 CO. I think we're sound and took corrective action to
13 remediate to get the sailor back on the path of
14 righteousness, as I would often say. I was pleased with
15 their thoroughness, their attention to detail, their
16 concern for the sailor's wellbeing and to make them
17 productive members, not just of Fitzgerald, but also the
18 Navy.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How many -- just to give me a sense.
20 How many NJP Mast did you have when you were the XO, over
21 your course of being the XO with the Fitzgerald?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Oh. I can't -- I cannot
23 recall the specific number.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Sure. That's all right.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think it would measure in
2 the 10s, teens I think, which would be assessed as kind of
3 an average amount during the course of about a 16-month.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And that's been about average for your
5 experience being on a Navy ship?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Of this size, yes, sir.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Of this size. Okay. Okay, I want to
8 move on and talk about your bridge watch teams and CIC
9 watch teams. Can you provide an overall assessment of your
10 bridge watch teams' performance? All of them.

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: All of them?

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. As a group.

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. The -- based on
14 our operational employment, having spent the majority time
15 in the shipyard in 2016, coming into Command, I knew that
16 the teams would be relatively -- they wouldn't be as
17 seasoned with experience, but the qualifications -- I was
18 confident in their qualification standards and some of the
19 mitigation factors I took to increase navigation and
20 seamanship, level of knowledge, watch team performance
21 while in the shipyard. I had a lot of -- I have a lot of
22 respect -- had a lot of respect for the watch standers that
23 were assigned. We spent no less than 6 provisions on the
24 watch bill prior to getting underway because I wanted to --
25 I wanted to place seniority in controlling watch stations

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 to -- through watch bill management and ensure that there
2 was sufficient levels of forceful backup. Because I had a
3 lot of young -- first-tour division officers going through
4 their qualification paths that I had not personally
5 observed their performance. I had not been able to make an
6 assessment, you know, on their ability to safely navigate
7 to manage watch teams conduct evolutions. So, I put a lot
8 of time and attention into that aspect. The -- I assessed
9 our overall watch team performance as satisfactory.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, Commander, you've mentioned some
11 mitigation that you had taken. I assumed that'd be some
12 kind of performance intervention, you know, coaching,
13 counseling type things. Can you describe or give me some
14 examples of those things that you had to get involved in
15 regarding watch team performance?

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: As it pertained to seamanship
17 and navigation level of knowledge?

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Yes, yes.

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. While I was the
20 Executive Officer, I implemented a weekly NSST. That's a
21 Naval Seamanship Japan link trainer at ATG WESTPAC, where
22 we assigned teams, probably 3 junior officers working on
23 their qualifications with our second tour, our more
24 seasoned division officers as mentors. And then overseen
25 by usually the navigator, you know, who is second tour, but

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 also and some of the department heads as well. The areas
2 of focus were restricted water transits where I had them
3 prepare navigation briefs and use paper charts to
4 understand, you know, navigation as it pertains to how it
5 used to, because I grew up with paper charts.

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I think we all did.

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: And I -- you know, I miss
8 them dearly, but I wanted to still utilize the benefits of
9 paper charts, understanding how much of the operational and
10 environmental data you can get from paper charts, focusing
11 on 3 ports that I felt were tactically relevant to our
12 operations - Sasebo, Okinawa, Guam. And so they -- so,
13 that was one evolution. Another one was just basic ship
14 handling fundamentals. They have an obstacle course. You
15 know, a ship, a derrick, you know just -- you know,
16 icebergs where you take the rudder in hand and maneuver,
17 you know. And we would challenge them to see how well they
18 could perform by maybe limiting their speed or limiting
19 their slowest speed. Just to see how they can handle
20 maneuvering the ship. I feel that the Surface Navy has,
21 you know, since I was an Ensign, has come kind of leaps and
22 bounds with our ability to train with our simulators. And
23 that's why I wanted to try to capture that. And then the
24 fourth -- or -- I'm sorry. The third scenario was ship
25 handling alongside the pier with one tug and no

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 intervention or coaching during the evolution from me. So,
2 this was their opportunity to give all the rudder, engine,
3 tug commands, all here in Yokosuka, to safely get off the
4 pier and come back on in varying scenarios. You know, it
5 was usually harbor master pier east to west or to pier 4 to
6 5. And then, you know, for those that were increasing with
7 their level of knowledge, just increase the environmental
8 factors to see how this. And so that was specific action
9 that I took. We also conducted, I think, some SET. We had
10 an opportunity for SET. I forget. Seamanship something
11 training, where it was folks from San Diego came out and
12 provided instruction. Usually a retired licensed mariner
13 would conduct the training or facilitate the training. And
14 also we had a bridge resource management team come out
15 where I --

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Was that a Navy team? Bridge resource
17 management?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It -- well, it's the same
19 construct, where it's, I think -- you know, sometimes it's
20 a retired captain, but normally like --

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Like a maritime school? A commercial
22 maritime type school, bridge resource management?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Oh, okay. Got it.

25 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. We're familiar with those.
2 Probably a Coast Guard-approved school.

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think it's one that we
4 attend as well, sir, so.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. Great.

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So they came out with -- I
7 know the exact timing and the attendance is documented with
8 the TEC Commander. So, we were with them a period in front
9 of that.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Now, was this program for seamanship,
11 navigation style training, was this program unique to the
12 Fitzgerald? Or is this type training conducted on other
13 ships as well?

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I cannot speak to how other
15 ships do it. I think this was unique to me and Fitzgerald,
16 and the approach I wanted to take to increase level of
17 knowledge for, you know, with respects to seamanship and
18 navigation.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. So, were there any noted
20 performance issues with your bridge watch teams that you
21 were tracking and working on?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Not outside the standard
23 deviation for the level of qualifications for it.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. So you would consider your
25 bridge watch teams -- I believe you had -- well, maybe not.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 You would consider the performance of your bridge watch
2 team's average for your experience?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Satisfactory.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Satisfactory. Thank you. Commander,
5 do you participate in qualification boards of your bridge
6 watch teams?

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In Command, I did not
8 participate in qualification boards, nor was there an
9 opportunity to participate. They were previously
10 qualified.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. So, since May, everyone that
12 was qualified had already been qualified?

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And as XO, had you participated in any
15 qualification boards?

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Um, yes; Officer of the Deck
17 qualification boards. The -- not the requalification
18 boards for some of the second division officers who --
19 surface warfare qualified includes CIC Watch Officer,
20 Officer of the Deck. So those officers coming on their
21 second tours --

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: They'll do a recertification program
23 aboard the Fitzgerald?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, in your experience in being in the
2 qualification boards, any areas that you had identified
3 that were needing improvement?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: There were no noted areas of
5 deficiencies that required improvement that I can recall,
6 sir.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Were there any concerns by any
8 of the department heads or the XO about any watch team
9 performance issues to you as the Commanding Officer?

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: For?

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Performance issues.

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: For those qualified in their
13 current position?

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: For those qualified or for those
15 undergoing instruction.

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. For those in the
17 under instruction period moving to the next level, you
18 know, we had discussions on, you know, who we thought were
19 ready, and frankly, who we thought were not gonna be able
20 to attain -- meet the requirements for qualification as an
21 Officer of the Deck.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. And if you had anybody that it
23 had been discussed, maybe had some performance issues, what
24 was the -- what was the plan or action to be taken when
25 you've identified?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, we had to have an example
2 documented. For instance, was just unable to understand,
3 you know, all the qualifications writ large, from import
4 OD, CIC watch, all underway watch stations, grossly
5 deficient. This was, you know, partly identified in the
6 seamanship and navigation training that I conducted over
7 the summer. Couldn't understand relative motion, couldn't
8 understand his position in the simulator relative to a
9 paper chart. And it was all documented in the form of
10 counseling, letters of instruction and -- my predecessor
11 had removed him from the ship for a --

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: This was Commander [REDACTED]?

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. For an integrity
14 violation, lying. And so -- and then started processing
15 the - it's called nonattainment. You know, its -- you
16 know, essentially they failed to meet the requirements set
17 forward by surface force for qualification as a Surface
18 Warfare Officer. So I endorsed that and I delivered it to
19 him prior to getting underway.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: This -- this last time?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. And he was removed from the
23 ship?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: He was sent to ISIC in a TAD
2 - temporary assigned duty status, and I believe he was on
3 another ship that -- and it was in availability here.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about any others that had shown
5 progress, maybe they didn't reach that level of
6 nonattainment, but essentially were a work in progress.

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

8 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Any other actions like that?

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Could you give me some
11 examples?

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Lieutenant Junior-Grade
13 [REDACTED]. She was a pre-nuke officer, so they
14 have a relatively shorter timeframe to -- before the
15 Nuclear Committee grabs them and pulls them off to school.
16 My assessment of her, she was not able to lead a bridge
17 watch team, nor did she possess the basic competencies as a
18 bridge watch stander. On our first underway, after I took
19 command, I spent some time on the bridge and I used some
20 scenarios, real-world scenarios. We were passing the USNS
21 and I simply told Lieutenant Junior Grade [REDACTED] to, on
22 a maneuvering board, plot their position and give me
23 intercept course and speed to go 1,000 yards of stern.
24 Let's assume they just took us into waiting stage and then
25 we're going to get gas. The -- it took her 10 minutes to

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 be able to come to that solution, which is unsatisfactory
2 in my assessment, to perform as an Officer of the Deck. So
3 my direction to the Executive Officer was to conduct
4 remedial trainings through each watch team, and this is
5 documented in our supplemental night orders from periods of
6 underway from while I was in command. And he reviewed the
7 maneuvering board solutions of all watch teams, one - to
8 ensure that there was compliance with the standing orders,
9 and two - just assess their level of knowledge with
10 maneuvering boards. Because, you know, while I'd like to
11 have the time and the opportunity to evaluate all my bridge
12 watch standers, you know, and the performance of all
13 aspects, where I see one deficiency, my assumption is that
14 there are more, and so I had assigned some corrective
15 action for that one deficiency.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Very good. And so this was an example
17 of a deficiency that you noticed yourself. Any other
18 deficiencies identified by others, maybe your department
19 heads or your XO, that some corrective action was
20 implemented as well?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Can you give me some examples of those?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I'd also identified
24 deficiencies with standard commands with a first-tour
25 division officer. He had to rehearse the command prior to

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 delivering the command, and, to me, that was
2 unsatisfactory. So, I directed the Executive Officer to
3 hold remedial standard command training with the wardroom.
4 It was planned in the POD, widely attended, and he -- his
5 reverberate report back to me was that it was good training
6 attended by all. And so then I had noticed a marked
7 improvement with the same watch stander, as he was the
8 Conning Officer while conducting DIVTACs in preparation for
9 when the Ronald Reagan joined the Carl Vinson Strike Group,
10 Sea of Japan, the first time 2 carriers on record in the
11 Sea of Japan. It's a big picture. So, I was able to
12 observe improvement in his performance. And I attributed
13 that to the training and also, you know, my -- I don't want
14 to say admonishment, but setting the expectations for the
15 Conning Officers to be able to stand at the center line of
16 Polaris and understand that, you know, your voice
17 projection needs to go off of the windows and be heard, you
18 know, understood clearly by the helmsman with verbatim
19 repeat back the first time. You know, and any deviations
20 from that first time is substandard. And so -- so he got
21 better, you know. And, you know, as a Commander, that's
22 what you want to see in your teams, is this improvement
23 over time, so. You know, while there were noted
24 deficiencies in some areas, I assessed that there was
25 improvement. The elements -- the elements that, you know,

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1 I could judge, I could use my judgment which the Navy has
2 assigned me in the position to do, was that we were
3 improving. We were getting better in the areas where I had
4 -- as far as other watch standers and discussions from the
5 Executive Officer or the department heads, I cannot recall
6 of any specific examples. We had talked more in general
7 about qualification paths and providing opportunity for
8 watch standers to get in positions where they could
9 increase their level of knowledge.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Do you feel that if the XO or
11 department heads had a concern about a particular watch
12 stander that they would bring it to your attention and/or
13 take action to fix it?

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Um, talk to me a little bit
16 about the division of duties on the bridge. So, Conning
17 Officer, JOOD, OD, what was your assessment of how they
18 divided up the safe navigation duties on the bridge of the
19 Fitzgerald in general?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, uh, largely in accordance
21 with my standing orders, the Conning Officer's sole
22 responsibility was to focus on conning. No collateral
23 duties, as my standing orders indicated, that they should
24 be involved with. I did not observe that they would, you
25 know, engage in. Every time I was on the bridge, they were

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 focused, eyes forward. The Junior Officer of the Deck, I
2 viewed as the Officer of Deck in training, but also drew
3 that line that said you are not the Officer of the Deck.
4 You know, some -- I know some ships employ Officers of the
5 Deck under instruction. I did not. I do not view that as
6 a job because there's only 1 Officer of the Deck that's
7 responsible for that safe navigation and reports to me
8 directly. So, but the Junior Officer of the Deck would
9 perform duties and responsibilities for safe -- support in
10 safe navigation, contact management, liaison with CIC and
11 Engineering, supporting the watch routines. And then the
12 Officer of the Deck was overall responsible for safe
13 navigation.

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about the division of duties
15 regarding use of the radar? How did you see Conn, JOOD,
16 and OOD using radar on the bridge?

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It -- the use of radar was
18 balanced between the Junior Officer of the Deck and the
19 Officer of the Deck. The Conning Officers focus should
20 have been --should be just on that conning. Now for
21 situational awareness with one hand on the [inaudible -
22 00:48:27], looking over to the ARPA two, able to better
23 ascertain the -- I think that would be acceptable. But for
24 the Conning Officer to be involved in contact management,
25 that would not be in accordance with my expectations.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Did bridge watch teams have some
2 flexibility in how they used each other - the Conn, JOOD,
3 OOD - to divide up their responsibilities or was it in
4 accordance with the standing orders? So, was there any
5 flexibility for the OOD to use the JOOD and Conn in a way
6 that best suited the team?

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: If they were in accordance
8 with my standing orders, the OOD has, you know, through
9 their judgment, to best utilize their watch team for safe
10 navigation.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Were there any differences
12 noted between watch teams? So, did watch teams essentially
13 have a unique way of prosecuting your standing orders and
14 navigating the vessel based on, essentially, a personality
15 of their -- of the watch teams?

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I noted no --

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Did you notice?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: -- differences. The only --
19 the only changes that were made to the watch bill were made
20 with my direction, and that was during increased periods of
21 activity. I would've assigned additional people to the
22 bridge team for tactical circuits, maneuvering board,
23 communication with CIC.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. You had mentioned your standing
2 orders. Is there any flexibility given to your standing
3 orders based on the circumstances presented?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, the flexibility in my
5 standing orders comes one way via my supplemental guidance
6 in my night orders. But any deviations from standing
7 orders, you know, shall be required of the Officer of the
8 Deck to notify me if there's deviations. So, while you say
9 is there flexibility; in so far that I'm informed.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. And regarding your night
11 orders, there was on the Fitzgerald an allowance of 500
12 yards right or left of course to -- flexibility essentially
13 given to the OOD to navigate.

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: That's incorrect.

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I'm sorry. Could you explain that?

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, the OOD had flexibility
17 to maneuver for contact avoidance. The requirements I put
18 in the night orders was only to contact me if they go
19 beyond that threshold so that those were not restrictions
20 placed on the Officer of the Deck to keep within those
21 bounds only. It was just an allowance for reporting
22 criteria to me, that if they maneuver for contact avoidance
23 and go outside of 500 yards, then they shall --

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Shall -- shall contact.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Contact, and that's it.
2 There was no restriction -- additional restriction placed
3 on them. It was just a notification to me.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I see. And so sometimes there are
5 some allowances for to go beyond 500 yards. Correct?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Sometimes there -- that --
7 sometimes that's not even -- I mean, the -- per the move
8 RAP instruction for, you know, plus or minus 4 hours and I
9 forget -- I can't recall the lateral distance. But
10 sometimes there are no additional reporting requirements
11 along our position intended movement.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. So it would be the standing
13 orders unless corrected-- unless flexibility is given in
14 the night orders, and sometimes it might be 500 yards or it
15 could be more based on what's in the night orders.
16 Correct?

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Well, it would be whatever I
18 add as a supplemental order in my night orders.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I understand.

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, as the Commanding
21 Officer, I have the, you know, the authority to make it 5
22 yards or out to the move RAP instruction. So, but for that
23 purpose, for that watch, I had -- for the series of watches
24 for that evening, that is a true statement that I put an

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 allowance of 500 yards, left or right of track, just to
2 notify me if they maneuver for contacts.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So it's -- that supplemental is based
4 on the conditions for that particular watch.

5 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Or through the series of
6 watches.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Or the series of watches, right.

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Throughout the evening.

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. I understand. Thank you. Any
10 additional questions on that, [REDACTED]?

11 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: Just to kind of
12 readdress on the night orders that you had pen and inked
13 your night orders for that 500 yards, that 500 yards seemed
14 to be a standard that had been adopted from -- as a change
15 from Commander [REDACTED] standing orders. Commander [REDACTED]
16 standing orders, I believe, allowed for 1,000 yards, and
17 then when you took over as Commander, it was noted through
18 others that we have questioned that you had restricted that
19 to 500 yards. And then in the night in question, you had
20 pen and inked that 500-1,000 yards. Is that your
21 recollection, sir?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I cannot speak to Commander
23 [REDACTED] orders. The -- for the purposes of that watch alone,
24 it was for the series of watches, it was 500 yards. The
25 navigator -- to the best of my recollection, the navigator

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 put that in his because we had talked earlier about --
2 about night orders. We always had a discussion about speed
3 of advance, where we want to be, you know. And I had
4 informed. So he put that in and I may have checked it, but
5 in my section, I think -- to the best of my recollection, I
6 recall writing in those -- that supplemental guidance.
7 Because I had to put general guidance and then kind of
8 supplemental orders would be very specific to watch
9 stations. Now for the watch station in question during the
10 collision, when I departed the bridge on or about 2330, I
11 verbally told the Officer of the Deck that her allowance is
12 1,000 yards left or right of track for notification. You
13 know, she had all -- she had the entire western Pacific to
14 maneuver for contacts, but going outside of 1,000 yards.
15 And that verbal authorization that I gave her was my self-
16 assessment of where I was in terms of fatigue and sleep
17 deprivation. And so I thought by an additional 500 yards,
18 I might -- I could give her the, you know, the allowance to
19 maneuver for contact avoidance outside of reporting
20 criteria, so I could get a little more sleep before the
21 next day.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Was this unique to that particular OOD
23 or would you have given that allowance to any of your OODs?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It was specific at the time I
25 gave it to Lieutenant Junior Grade [REDACTED].

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Was there any relaxation on CPA
2 notification?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No. None.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. I want to move on to the
5 navigation briefing process on the Fitzgerald. So, we've
6 talked to the XO about the navigation reporting process and
7 I've looked at the nav brief. What is your assessment of
8 the navigation briefing process on the Fitzgerald?

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: My assessment was that we had
10 improved significantly from when I reported as the
11 Executive Officer and the briefing process is in accordance
12 with -- the brief itself is in accordance with the -- our
13 readiness manual under the mobility and navigation tab.
14 That was assessed by ATG as satisfactory. I was pleased
15 with how we were executing our TEC Commander's direction by
16 utilizing the PBED method - the plan, brief, execute and
17 debrief - where, you know, it's the core responsibility of
18 the navigation team to conduct the planning. And if there
19 was any concerns during the planning process, they would
20 come and talk to me. And then the brief started on time.
21 It was attended by all personnel assigned to the watch bill
22 in the controlling stations. I think there was good and
23 clear direction. I think we exceeded the standard in some
24 aspects with regards to anchoring. We utilized the
25 anchoring nomograph for a DDG class, which is not a

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 requirement, but, you know, in light of my experience and
2 recent events here in Yokosuka, I felt it was important to
3 instruct the watch teams on the factors that require the
4 length of anchor chain to withhold the resistance of
5 environmental factors. So, there were elements that were,
6 I thought, done well, and at the end we also used it as an
7 opportunity to address the debriefing portions of where we
8 captured some lessons learned and to remind the teams of
9 where we can improve. And then a question and answer
10 period at the end which solicited questions or comments
11 from, you know, across the team from the crew if there were
12 any questions, the department heads for any guidance,
13 Command Master Chief, the Executive Officer, and then
14 myself.

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Do you feel that hazards were being
16 properly identified and risks managed when you received the
17 plan from the navigator?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And in your experience, has there been
20 any additional hazards and risks identified during the
21 navigation brief process?

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think there was a positive
23 change between the previous navigator and the current
24 navigator. For instance, one of the mitigating factors for
25 most evolutions was the CO and XO shall be on the bridge.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 And I said that is insufficient mitigation. Okay? A real
2 mitigation is to conduct bridge resource management with
3 the navigation team to break out the paper charts, to
4 understand the traf -- the expected traffic through the
5 traffic separation scheme and overstripped the water
6 transit. That is mitigation. Just the reliance, you know,
7 -- the sole reliance on the CO and XO on the bridge was
8 insufficient. So those are some changes that we had made
9 over time to identify hazards and take, what I felt, was a
10 proper mitigation.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So it sounds like your team, or maybe
12 your navigator's experience up until that point had been
13 mitigation is CO and XO on the bridge.

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: True said.

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay.

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: But I identified and provided
17 corrective guidance to the team.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. So, regarding the risks, who
19 essentially determined the overall risks for the evolution?
20 How was that determined? Can you describe the process of
21 identification of risks and managing risks, how that occurs
22 within, you know, the PBED process and briefing out? How
23 that -- how does that occur?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It occurs during the planning
25 process, where the navigation officer has the primary

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 responsibilities for planning and, you know, if there are
2 any additional concerns based on environmental factors or,
3 I mean, namely any litany of additional risks, that it be
4 discussed with the ORM manager, the Executive Officer.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And so that's typically the risk has
6 been identified, the navigator in consultation with the XO
7 and yourself would discuss the risks. Is that fair to say?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. And is there any discussion of
10 the risks once the navigation brief has started? As in, is
11 there any opportunity for the team to say, "Maybe we
12 haven't thought about this, or have we considered this in
13 our navigation briefing?"

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: There's the opportunity for that?

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Can you give me any examples of when
18 that might have occurred either during your time as XO or
19 as CO?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, the opportunities during
21 the brief would be during the presentation of that slide,
22 because the navigator --

23 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: This particular one, yes.

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: -- steps through the, you
25 know, the initial and mitigated RAC codes, and there's a

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 pause. There is an opportunity for people to say, "That
2 doesn't look right." And then also at the end of the brief
3 when we talk to the crew and open -- and leave it in an
4 open forum. My approach during these was everyone has a
5 voice. You know anyone that, you know, has a concern or a
6 lesson, has a voice at the navigation brief to bring up
7 additional concerns. You know I think we've -- so there's
8 the opportunity to bring those up. You know, the approach
9 was honest and unemotional. Whereas problems that are
10 brought up in that time, it's good, it's healthy, it's part
11 of the process to avoid -- to buy down our risks, to
12 mitigate risks and to have safe evolutions.

13 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: If I could redirect,
14 sir? So, just so that I have a clearer expectation of how
15 this is implemented, because again, every unit kind of has
16 their own little twist on it. Is the risks that are
17 outlined in this category fixed or some type of
18 predetermined to go off of like the risk categories as
19 they've broken out over recent mishap reports or events?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yeah. So those are the
21 assessed risks with a known evolution.

22 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: And where would the
23 prescriptive guidance for those risks come from? Is it
24 brought forth in an instruction of any kind or is this all
25 unique to the Fitzgerald?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I don't think it's unique to
2 Fitzgerald. I think it's -- they're common on all other
3 ships that I've been on. Now if there are -- if we're
4 doing a unique evolution that we haven't done, moored to a
5 buoy, you know, which we don't do frequently, I think there
6 would be additional risks associated with that that you
7 would not see there. But to answer your question, I'm
8 unaware of an instruction that tells us which risks to put
9 down. I think that would be too prescriptive. But the
10 ORM, you know, instruction manual, you know, directs us to
11 look during the planning process of risks that could occur.
12 Now, it's not an all-encompassing list, but based on teams'
13 experience, and this is where, you know, we put the lessons
14 learned in there of, you know, which are rather benign; you
15 know man up early, establish comms. But, you know, if
16 there was one that was learned in a previous one and then
17 it would be put into the planning process to find
18 mitigation to then further buy down the risks.

19 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: So in the format of
20 the navigation brief, this looks to be predetermined as far
21 as least from a product of that planning session that
22 you're referring to? Would that be in a -- it's my
23 understanding that the nav briefs are done 2 ways. That
24 there's a pre-navigation brief usually held within a day or
25 2 of the intended navigation brief, then followed upon the

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 final navigation brief given to all hands that are involved
2 in the evolution. Would that be a fair assessment of
3 seeing that this is a product of that planning?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I'm unaware of a pre-
5 navigation brief. I did not attend them. If there were, I
6 did not attend while on Command or as XO. Nor was my
7 presence ever requested for a pre-planning. I assume that
8 would be part of the planning process.

9 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED]: For the development of
10 the plan.

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The development of the plan.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, in the process, do you know if
13 crew fitness, fatigue issues are considered in the
14 calculation of risks?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: It is?

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. How about like mission
19 complexity, overall demands on the team, is that
20 considered?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And how about the environment that
23 you're operating in. Is that considered?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. And in your experience, has
2 there been any times where the risk score or the assessment
3 has been beyond your comfort level?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In Command or as Executive
5 Officer?

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Either.

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Not in Command. As XO, I
8 think there were times where it was elevated. I think
9 there were 3; you know, high, medium, low. I think were
10 sometimes, you know, threshold towards the medium. And
11 that was based on, to the best of my recollection, watch
12 team experience. Because those that have more experience,
13 we trust them more based on that experience. Whereas the
14 newly qualified -- so we took that into consideration
15 during the evolutions.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. Um, in your experience, what
17 type of mitigation or actions occurred when there was an
18 elevated level of risk?

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Bridge resource management.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay.

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: That then -- that -- the
22 Officer of the Deck or the bridge watch team that showed
23 less experience just by the sole purpose of their time
24 onboard and their qualifications, would sit down with the
25 navigator and the department head to review charts, sailing

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 directions, to take some deliberate steps to better
2 understand their operational environment.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, for example, the revisions to the
4 watch bill, was that a result of this risk assessment for
5 the day's evolution? Let me state that again. So, the
6 revisions to the watch bill, would that be typically
7 something that's done to mitigate risks in terms of a
8 navigation brief?

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: That's 2 different watch
10 bills you're talking about. I think, sir.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay.

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, there's the sea and
13 anchor watch bill and then there's the condition III watch
14 bill. So the discussions prior to with the sea and anchor
15 watch bill, it was a relatively -- it was a team that did
16 not have a lot of experience for the sea and anchor. It
17 was discussed I believe the Officer of the Deck was
18 Ensign [REDACTED]. He was qualified under the previous
19 Commanding Officer. I was not -- I have -- I had not
20 observed him as an Officer of the Deck underway. So I
21 wanted to be in the position where I could directly observe
22 him.

23 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And that was during the sea and
24 anchor.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: That was during the sea and
2 anchor. And so -- so, to me, that bought down the risk of
3 him standing a watch by himself or in charge of the watch.
4 So I could directly observe how he performed as an Officer
5 of the Deck. I think the -- I do not recall the Junior
6 Officer of the Deck, but the Conning Officer is Ensign
7 [REDACTED]. And I take deliberate measures with my Conning
8 Officers independent of the navigation brief to increase
9 their level of knowledge so that him and I are on the same
10 page in so far that we conduct safe ship handling alongside
11 the pier and go through the rhythm of how it's going to be
12 done to safely ship handle Fitzgerald off the pier, out of
13 the base end, and safely into anchorage, which was the
14 first set of evolutions that day, so. And that specific
15 action was prior to the navigation brief. We walked the
16 pier. We started at the bottom and we looked at the lines.
17 We looked at the environmental factors, the wind. We
18 looked at the trash, position of the Yokohama fenders, the
19 distance we had between, you know, both forward and aft
20 between -- I think there was a barge. There was a barge
21 there. You know, then the Dewey. You know, but just an
22 understanding. And then I walked him to the end of the
23 pier to look at the turning base, to look at the different
24 navigational aids. And that was just specific with my

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 Conning Officer. And then to discuss relationship with the
2 pilot and how that's going to occur.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So with regard to mitigation of risks,
4 your answer was essentially bridge resource management.
5 So, with our given resources that we'll figure out a way to
6 make it work. Is that fair to say?

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No, sir, that's not.

8 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Let me state it another way.
9 Has there been any actions taken to change the plan, change
10 the crew assignments, change the mission, to buy down risks
11 through the navigation brief process?

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think this reporting
13 process is in and of itself buy down the risks. That is
14 the mitigation. Now if the -- at the end, if the risks
15 outweigh the benefits, then that's my decision whether we
16 get underway and assume that risk. And at that point, I
17 would inform my ISIC, the Commodore, that it is not safe to
18 get underway or to, you know, pick your evolution.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you for that answer.

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Has that ever occurred where
22 essentially what's being asked of the ship exceed your
23 capabilities of managing risks?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: While on Command? No. As
25 XO, I do not recall a time where -- I do not recall a

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1 specific incident where the then Commander had to make that
2 judgment.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Do you feel that if that situation
4 were to occur that you would have the avenue and remedy to
5 be able to solve that mismatch? So, if COMDESRON was
6 asking you to do something that essentially put you in the
7 red in terms of risks, do you feel that you would have the
8 avenue to be able to remedy that with COMDESRON?

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In so far as -- I guess that
10 requires, you know, some more specific. If the wind was
11 too great and I said the winds are too strong to get
12 underway, I don't have the remedy to control that.

13 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So how about operational requirements.
14 So, if there were a particular set of operational
15 requirements that were placed upon you - be here by a
16 certain time, conduct the following evolutions - if that
17 were ever given in excess of your crew's capability of
18 delivering and that put you at a higher risk category, do
19 you feel that you would have the avenue to be able to solve
20 that with COMDESRON?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The solutions would have to
22 be, I think, procedural in nature. You know, if one of
23 those redlines was personnel, you know, there are efforts
24 to provide us personnel to meet redline requirements. For
25 example, SAR swimmers. You know, we -- the Fitzgerald has

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1 not only provided SAR swimmers to meet SAR4 requirements
2 for ships to get underway. But I believe we also received
3 a SAR swimmer to meet those requirements. You know,
4 obviously its dependent on time. You know, if the SAR
5 swimmer breaks his leg walking up the brow, you know, then
6 I don't meet the threshold requirements and, you know -- I
7 have confidence that they would address it with as much
8 expediency as they're -- as possible. But in so far as --
9 I feel that as far as if there was any procedural or --
10 they would support as best they can to buy down risks.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Have you ever cancelled a part of an
12 operation or an operation itself based on a high-risk
13 threshold?

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Can you verify, "Cancelled?"

15 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Sure. Essentially, if your boss is
16 giving you a set of requirements and your risk threshold
17 for completing those requirements is beyond your comfort.
18 Have you ever cancelled, either in whole or in part, part
19 of what COMDESRON, in this case, is asking you do to? So
20 for example, on the 16th, sea and anchor detail, Helo ops,
21 boat ops. It's a lot for one day. So, in situations like
22 that where it's essentially a lot of requirements placed on
23 you, the ship, to execute. Has there been any
24 consideration or actual action taken to buy down the risks
25 by a decision of no-go? Like, we can't do that. Has there

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1 been any consideration or any prior experience or action
2 taken to essentially buy down the risks by refusing or in
3 collaboration with COMDESRON, saying that I can't complete
4 what you're asking me to do?

5 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I have not cancelled
6 evolutions.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So, my next question. Has the plan
8 ever changed? I understand a PBED is used. Has the plan
9 ever changed based on discussion at the nav brief?

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I cannot recall any specific
11 incidences where the plan has changed as per the -- to the
12 brief. You know, in so far as -- I guess if there's more
13 fidelity to that question that you can provide.

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Sure. So maybe a track line change,
15 maybe a speed of advance change, any changes from the
16 moment the plan is put together and briefed to you, from
17 that moment until the plan is executed. In your
18 experience, has there ever been any changes to that plan
19 based on the discussion that happens in the nav brief?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Okay. So one change when we
21 were going outbound Sasebo, the navigator had the track on
22 the initial southbound leg. I think -- just -- it was to
23 the -- a little further right than I wanted. I wanted to
24 be in the center of the track. And our discussion was to
25 leave it as is and we'll manage it by staying to the left

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 of track. Because I had a lot of experience pulling out of
2 Sasebo on a previous ship and the vantage point of going
3 down the center of the track is then you can -- as you come
4 around the corner, you can see well of the contacts that
5 are coming.

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So this was with the navigator was
7 actually standing OOD when this change was made?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No, this was at the
9 navigation brief.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Oh, the navigation brief. Okay.
11 Good, good, good. Okay. So it was with the brief and it
12 was felt that you could be safer by being in this part of
13 the track line or the intended outbound --

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It mitigated the risks in
15 other aspects to have that vantage point of transit.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And this was something raised by the
17 navigator during the navigation brief itself?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It was raised by me.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. And once the navigation brief
20 is done, the plan is approved, and we're now in the execute
21 phase, what is your feeling of an OOD, their ability to
22 essentially reassess the risks upon which the plan was
23 built? So, if the conditions, for example, that were
24 briefed were found not to be consistent with how it was

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 briefed, how able is the OOD able to bring those concerns
2 to your attention?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Very able. I guess the
4 context of the question is do they feel comfortable
5 approaching me and talking about changes and otherwise.
6 I'd say yes.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about, do you feel that they have
8 the empowerment, the ability to reassess the risk that was
9 presented to them in the navigation brief?

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I think the formal training
11 that we as Naval Officers receive and the continuum of
12 training that they receive at the basic division officer
13 course, the advanced division officer course, department
14 head school, surface commander's course; all have elements
15 of operational risk management. So at our core, we are
16 trained to evaluate risks. And so for a qualified Officer
17 of the Deck to understand controllable and uncontrollable
18 forces and being as part. Okay? I view that the briefs is
19 always part of training. Okay? Ensure that everyone is on
20 the same page. And if that there's a mismatch between what
21 was briefed and what is observed during an evolution, I
22 feel that the Navy has taken sufficient time to ensure that
23 they're training, we reinforce those principles in
24 shipboard management. And I assess that I fostered a
25 culture where people were comfortable in coming and telling

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 me that the risks have increased and we need to add
2 additional mitigation measures; to do something so basic as
3 ensuring everyone comes home with 10 fingers and 10 toes,
4 which is a line that I used very often, like, with my deck
5 handling teams.

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right. Do you have any examples of
7 your OOD or your bridge watch team reassessing the risk
8 that was presented during the navigation brief?

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: While I was in Command, I
10 have no examples.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about when you were XO?

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: None that I can recall.

13 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay.

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: If they were presented to the
15 Commanding Officer at the time, I was unaware of them.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. What was your sense of your
17 watch teams' sense of responsibility, accountability to one
18 another? And what I'm talking about here is how did they
19 contribute and work as a team overall? Your watch teams.

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Satisfactory.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Any particular problems noticed
22 by you in this area?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: As I discussed earlier,
24 during the first underway, I assessed the kind of
25 deficiencies with maneuvering board application and

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 communication between the Combat Information Center and the
2 bridge.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: What was your assessment of their
4 communication with each other working as a team on the
5 bridge and then extended from the bridge to CIC?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It was satisfactory. You
7 know, while deficiencies were noted, I think it was still
8 part of my responsibility to give them the forceful backup
9 to -- and the discipline to increase their performance
10 standards. So that was done through -- as I already told
11 you about the mitigation, or the remediation with the
12 MOBOARDS and communication forceful backup between the CIC
13 and the bridge teams. This was documented in the
14 supplemental night orders to support this. I had each
15 controlling watch station report to me the status of their
16 training and what they -- their assessment of their
17 performance on watch, their watch team, and report the
18 training conducted while on watch for every watch, and
19 those during the night, come see me the next morning.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: In particular, their communication
21 with one another is the area that I'd like you to address.
22 You know the PQS and the understanding and the ability to
23 plot a MOBOARD is one thing. Being able to communicate
24 what you have in front of you, whether it be contacts as a
25 Conn or relative motion, if you're plotting contacts, or

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 your radar picture down in CIC versus what's seen on the
2 bridge. Your assessment of how they were communicating
3 with each other in comparing their view of -- and surface
4 contacts in particular is what I'm asking about. Their
5 ability to communicate and work with one another.

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So on June 16th, they were
7 satisfactory. They had the ability. I observed that
8 ability that they communicated. They corresponded,
9 correlated contacts. I observed that. It was
10 satisfactory.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Were there any particular concerns
12 with individuals that you had. Not just on the 16th, but
13 just overall, any concerns that you had with any
14 individuals and their contributions to the team?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: From the viewpoint I had on
16 June 16th, any concerns were mitigated by watch bill
17 management to ensure that the most qualified people were in
18 positions to provide each other backup to operate in
19 accordance with my standing orders, standard operating
20 procedures. On the 16th, the watch bill that I approved
21 had addressed all concerns that I had with respects to
22 qualifications within the personnel assigned to their watch
23 stations.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you. Okay. I'd like to talk
25 about the navigation equipment and configuration on the

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 Fitzgerald. Did you have any concerns with the navigation
2 equipment either on the bridge or in CIC on the Fitzgerald?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: All concerns I had in
4 material were documented in our casualty reports and our
5 current ship's maintenance project plan, current ship's
6 maintenance plan - CSMP.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Any in particular that stand out?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I was concerned about the
9 rudder angle indicator on the port bridge wing, that is was
10 OSC and affecting the Conning Officer's ability to evaluate
11 the movement of the rudder from the port bridge wing. But
12 that was a briefed and known discrepancy that was then
13 mitigated by reinforcing verbatim repeat backs. That's one
14 that stands out. There are no additional equipment
15 limitations that I can recall.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about the use of the AIS and its
17 integration with radar and its configuration down in CIC?
18 Any concerns or issues with the use of AIS on the
19 Fitzgerald?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I was -- I had no concerns.
21 I wasn't briefed on any degradations to AIS or integration
22 with radars.

23 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So we understand that AIS was not
24 integrated with the radar picture and that AIS was the AIS

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 visual, the plot, was in CIC. Any concerns with that
2 particular configuration?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: You know this is um -- I was
4 unaware of that configuration, and if that is outside of --
5 you know, it appears to be outside of normal configuration.
6 And any configurations that are outside normal
7 configurations are concerning because that then is a
8 deviation from standard operating procedures and then
9 limits the watch team functionality to --

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I'm sorry. I didn't --

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: -- safely navigate.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I didn't recognize that that was
13 outside of your standing orders. My apologies. Do you
14 recognize that as an issue with standing orders of AIS
15 configuration?

16 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: There was a background issue over
17 whether there was 1 or 2 laptops present and that there was
18 only 1 present on Fitzgerald. No root cause as to why only
19 1 existed. We haven't gotten clear background because of
20 the EMO and STO handoff.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you, Commander. We'll -- we're
22 gonna revisit that.

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yeah, I think it would be
24 appropriate. I mean you understand that I was medevaced
25 from the ship after the collision and have been in -- am

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 still in a med-hold, a convalescent status. So I've had --
2 the only interaction I've had with my crew was one for a
3 dignified sendoff of the 7 men that I lost. Memorial
4 Ceremony. And then the period where I was on convalescent
5 leave, where I promoted, meritoriously, 5 sailors. So any
6 -- if you're bringing any additional information to light
7 that has come by way of the investigation, there are points
8 where that I may need some allowance to process this in
9 accordance with the doctor's recommendations on my
10 participation with it.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: We understand. So, we have reviewed
12 your situation and we understand. So we completely
13 understand that your answers -- well, consideration is
14 given for your answers. We understand. Okay.

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Thank you.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Again, we're here to try to figure out
17 what happened and the configuration of AIS and how it was
18 used onboard is something that we're interested in. And
19 your insights into how it was used both on the bridge and
20 CIC is relevant and what you've given us is good direction
21 for us to look into further. And we hope through our
22 investigation that we're able to uncover maybe a defense
23 that could be used in the future by naval vessels to
24 prevent something like what occurred. So, we do appreciate
25 your cooperation, you being here.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No one wants these answers
2 more than I do. Okay? Because the families deserve the
3 answers. The Navy deserves the answers. You know, and our
4 country deserves the answers to ensure that this doesn't
5 happen. Can I take a break?

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Absolutely.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you again for cooperating with
8 us here.

9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I just want to loop back on the pre-
11 briefs. So I talked about the navigation briefs. Was
12 within the navigation brief, boat ops, flight ops, was that
13 all included in the navigation brief or was it separate
14 briefs?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Separate briefs, sir.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Separate briefs. And they -- when
17 were those briefed?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Immediately following the
19 navigation brief.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay, got it. So, the navigation
21 brief was over. Let's talk about the other things inside
22 of the day's activities.

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Got it. Thank you. So, you had a new
25 XO come aboard. You fleeted up to the CO position in May.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 So only a few months had elapsed since the new XO came
2 aboard. What was your relationship with the new XO?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I thought it was -- I felt my
4 relationship with Commander Babbitt was healthy. I valued
5 his contributions, his experience. It varied from mine,
6 which I assessed that was beneficial to Fitzgerald's
7 performance. And he was receptive to the direction I gave
8 him. He provided me feedback. He kept me well informed of
9 matters that were relevant to his position.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Did the XO ever bring to you any
11 concerns either with the watch team or any other concerns
12 that he had in the short time that you worked together?

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: We had addressed general
14 concerns as far as management of personnel. As I alluded
15 to, there was initial recommendations to stand down some
16 watches and to place different personnel in the watch team
17 composition, which I provided my direction that all the
18 watch stations shall be manned. More specifically, a
19 recommendation that while in condition III, a weapons
20 posture of III, that only a TAO or a qualified Watch
21 Officer is required, which I non-concurred and directed
22 them to have a Tactical Action Officer and a CIC Watch
23 Officer stationed in the watch bill. But then just the
24 other, you know, concerns in so far that my direction was
25 to have more senior personnel assigned to the watch team

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 during our transit from Yokosuka down to the Philippines.
2 Because having only had 9 days underway to evaluate the
3 watch teams, I wanted a more of an opportunity to establish
4 cadence with my Officer of the Decks to observe watch team
5 performance to a greater detail, to evaluate our progress
6 as I observed from the first 2 previous underway periods.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So these were concerns, or these were
8 issues that you had observed. Did the XO ever bring you
9 any concerns that he had observed?

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Not that I can recall.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: How about concerns from the watch
12 standers or your department heads to you or the XO? Any --
13 generally, were you aware of any concerns that others were
14 bringing to the XO that maybe the XO had relayed to you?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: As it pertains to --

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Watch team in particular, but any
17 others -- any other examples will be helpful as well.

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: There were no highlighted
19 watch team concerns based on the composition that I had
20 approved.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. So Commander, who was your best
22 OOD onboard the Fitzgerald?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The best OOD that I observed
24 during my time as the Executive Officer was Lieutenant
25 Junior Grade [REDACTED].

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And what made her the best?

2 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Her leadership. Her ability
3 to direct the watch teams. Her ability to delegate the
4 responsibilities to provide direction. You know, this was
5 validated during our navigation certification or a
6 [inaudible - 01:46:31] check ride, you know. Captain [REDACTED]
7 [REDACTED] made specific mention that she -- or, I should have a
8 good OOD. She's good.

9 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And this particular one is it.

10 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: [REDACTED], yes, sir.
11 So, notwithstanding, you know, there were some of the
12 department heads I had previously served with. I had high
13 confidence in their ability to, you know, perform as OODs.
14 But, you know, in the time that I observed OODs, you know,
15 [REDACTED] was the best.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And is she still onboard?

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. So have you had any experience
19 with her standing watch as you being the CO?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No, sir. Not as Officer of
21 the Deck.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. I see. But as -- in another
23 position?

24 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

25 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: What position?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Air watch or AAWC - Anti-Air
2 Warfare coordinator.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Commander, how often do you get
4 called by the OOD during a normal watch and could you
5 describe the nature of those reports that come to you?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The frequency were, as best I
7 could ascertain in accordance with my standing orders, you
8 know, I received the -- I guess the breadth of required
9 reports to a Commanding Officer from contact reports to the
10 changes in the barometer and wind intensity.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And do you find that reports that come
12 to you are typically full reports, partial reports? Do
13 they typically meet your expectations when the reports come
14 to you?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I assessed they were
16 satisfactory. I think there were some improvements that
17 could've been made. And it was just based on cadence that
18 I wanted to establish with Officer of the Decks when they
19 provided reports, or the TAOs providing reports.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And these are typically templated or
21 taught and trained, you know, you would like the reports to
22 be --

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. I had assessed
24 that their manner in which they were accustomed to
25 providing reports was established under the previous

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 Commanding Officer. I cannot -- I could not -- I was never
2 a part of those conversations of those reports or any
3 feedback that the reports were not in accordance with.
4 While I wanted more fidelity and cadence between the
5 reports, which I assessed was improving.

6 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So were the reports typically missing
7 some key information and your coaching to your OODs was to
8 improve it here in a couple of areas, like I want the
9 following additional things in addition to what you've
10 already been doing?

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir. I think the
12 information was present, but it was not -- did not reach my
13 levels of formality in the types of reports, which I wanted
14 to improve upon. I cannot speak to how -- I cannot speak
15 to the level of formality of the reports that were given to
16 the previous Commanding Officer, but my assessment was that
17 they were rather informal and therefore that's why I was
18 receiving more informal, in the sense of casual. Not the
19 formality that I had expected.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So a little more structure, a little
21 more --

22 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

23 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I understand. Have you ever been
24 called to the bridge by your OOD?

25 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In --

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: As the CO.
2 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Of Fitzgerald?
3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: On the Fitzgerald.
4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No.
5 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: As -- May I readdress the -- as XO?
6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes.
7 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: For a second look to something going
8 on, confusion?
9 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Evolutions.
10 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Evolutions? Any type of support to
11 an OOD, you know, something doesn't look right, calling you
12 down for another set of eyes to --
13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes.
14 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you.
15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: And in my previous Command, I
16 was called to the bridge for support.
17 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: For support of --
18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Of contact management and
19 other.
20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Can you talk about that a little bit,
21 just your experience in coming to the bridge and how that
22 worked in this particular example?
23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In my previous Command?
24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Yes.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I commanded a mine sweeper
2 out of Sasebo and we were transiting from Chinhae to west
3 to do some mine and the fishing -- the squid boats came
4 out, and our planned track was right through the fleet of
5 squid boats. And the OOD passed the word - Captain to the
6 bridge. And a small ship got up there pretty quick and I
7 quickly ascertained that we were heading directly towards
8 the nets of a squid boat, fishing vessel and immediately
9 told the Conn to order hard left rudder, all stop. So we
10 just -- because as they were -- had left bearing drift,
11 starboard side, left bearing drift, nets out, we were gonna
12 go right. So the actions I took were - I think prevented
13 getting, you know, our truss entangled with their nets, and
14 it was second nature to me, so. So that was that incidence
15 in the previous command. Onboard Fitzgerald, we were
16 conducting -- we were doing a small boat transfer with
17 another ship, because we had some riders on. I think this
18 was down in the Guam operating area and it was their rig
19 coming alongside Fitzgerald. I and the Captain were in a
20 meeting and the OOD called me and asked me to come to the
21 bridge because he was uncomfortable. So I immediately went
22 up to the bridge and helped him manage the small boat
23 operation.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Have you provided any instruction or
25 guidance to your watch standers, OOD on the Fitzgerald in

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 addition to what's in your standing orders regarding when
2 you are to be called to the bridge?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Additional instruction? I
4 have provided no additional instruction of when to call me
5 to the -- you know, to request my presence, order my
6 presence. I always felt that, you know, when they need me,
7 all -- it's just Commanding Officer to bridge. You know,
8 whatever they can get out to get me moving in the right
9 direction. That -- to me that action should be immediate.
10 It shouldn't require training. But I did not provide
11 additional scenarios or of when to use the one MC2 to get
12 me to the bridge.

13 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I want to circle back on AIS, but not
14 the AIS picture this time. We understand it's U.S. Navy
15 procedure not to transmit their AIS position to other
16 vessels. Have you ever considered transmitting your AIS
17 position location to other vessels in a seaway?

18 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No, sir.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Do you know of other U.S. Navy
20 ships that have considered or have done that? Has that
21 come up in your training, discussed in the Navy, anything
22 like that?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Not to my recollection.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So it's pretty much standard procedure
2 in the Navy that warships don't transmit their AIS signal
3 to other vessels?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Got it. I understand. Thank you.
6 Regarding the OOD and their communication with you while
7 standing the bridge watch -- and I understand your
8 explanation about the OOD being in charge and the JOOD is
9 not the OOD under your instruction, it's the JOOD reports
10 to the OOD.

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I understand that. Thank you. Do you
13 allow anyone other than the OOD to call you for concerns
14 while they're standing watch?

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay.

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I have, in general, told all
18 officers, Chief Petty Officers, they have direct access to
19 me at any time; an open-door policy with all officers,
20 Chief Petty Officers. I know that differs slightly in the
21 communication question, but I did not put any limitations
22 on people to contact me. The -- I did not put any
23 limitations on people to contact me.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I understand. Do you have any
2 examples of someone other than the OOD contacting you for
3 concerns with the safe navigation of the vessel?

4 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: To the best of my
5 recollection, the Tactical Action Officer provided me
6 reports in reference to stationing in the vicinity of
7 Ronald Reagan when we were operating with them.

8 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So is that typically a report that
9 would come from the OOD or was that something that is
10 typically you would expect from the TAO?

11 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: From the TAO. As far as --

12 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So this is an already-paved path for -
13 -

14 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: True, but I think screening
15 in station assignments is relative to safe navigation
16 operating in company with a carrier strike group.

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So in particular, has there been any
18 notifications that you would've otherwise got from the OOD
19 that came from another source, either JOOD, TAO, anybody
20 else?

21 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: None that I can recall.

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Thank you. Has there been any
23 close calls or near misses that you've had to debrief
24 either as XO or as Commanding Officer of the Fitzgerald?

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Not as -- during my turnover
2 with Commander [REDACTED], as they were approaching Sasebo and
3 going past Teshima -- I think it was Tsushima Strait. He
4 had reported to me that we had a close call with a fishing
5 vessel where they had to order an all back full to avoid
6 collision. So that was discussed during my turnover and
7 subsequently I discussed that with my navigator for proper
8 voyage planning to mitigate the risks of encountering
9 fishing vessels at night or contacts at night. So we
10 applied this on our transit from the Saguaro Passage in
11 company with the striker. It detached us. We adjusted our
12 speed of advance to ensure that we passed through the
13 Tsushima Strait during daylight hours to increase our
14 opportunity to manage the contact picture and avoid
15 collision.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: During the debrief process, were --
17 did the corrective action come essentially from you or were
18 there any other ideas in how to avoid this situation coming
19 from others?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, the -- so the -- in my
21 assessment, the corrective action was -- on my behalf, as
22 far as the watch standers that were involved, I am unaware
23 of any corrective action that Commander [REDACTED] may have taken
24 with those watch standers. But the corrective action was
25 to kind of assess periods where we could better identify

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 known areas of a higher concentration of fishing vessels or
2 contacts during daylight hours.

3 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Overall, safety messages that you give
4 to the crew or in your supplemental standing orders -- or
5 supplemental orders, night orders, how well received and
6 understood do you feel that, you know, your messaging as CO
7 are reaching -- reaching the crew?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So the supplemental night
9 orders are acknowledged by all the watch stations. I took
10 deliberate action to ensure that the night orders was
11 received in a timely manner to the -- to the -- those that
12 had watch evening mid rev. In so far that they were
13 acknowledged, it should be recorded, you know, based on
14 their receiving. In formulating my night orders, in some
15 sense I provided general guidance, you know, which were in
16 line with my Command philosophy, higher order of themes.
17 But in as -- and I specifically put supplemental guidance
18 to specific watch stations so that it was not ambiguous.
19 It was clear direction on how I wanted the watch conducted
20 through, you know, the evening hours.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Did you have a sense of how well they
22 were receiving and taking action on your specific guidance?
23 For example, if -- certainly the initial, you know, they
24 should've read, likely did read. Any sense that they were

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1 absorbing and they understood in what you were telling to
2 do was executed?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I've done metrics to
4 determine the effectiveness of my communication.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Just -- just a sense.

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Other than their
7 acknowledgement, I felt that they -- if they had any
8 questions based, you know, of my guidance, they would ask.
9 In one specific conversation I had with an OOD, because I
10 often put in that extra reporting requirement for going off
11 track, and so I asked one of my OODs, Junior Grade
12 [REDACTED], I said, "Do you know why I put that in there?"
13 He says, "I don't know why, but I know what to do." So, in
14 a sense, he understood the order, but to get to that next
15 level down, I said, "I put that in there so I can establish
16 a cadence and a rapport with you so that there's
17 comfortability in our conversation, so that there's no fear
18 of you calling me in the middle of the night because of the
19 barometric pressure drops, [inaudible - 02:06:36]." You
20 know, it's a requirement for them to do that and so I
21 wanted to increase my communication touch points. And then
22 he says, "Oh, oh that makes sense." Because though I have
23 served my entire tour with Lieutenant Junior Grade
24 [REDACTED], there are others that I haven't and I have to -
25 - and I want to ensure that communication is there and

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 every opportunity I have to increase those communication
2 touch points, I want to reinforce. So, while I think that
3 -- I think that the sole acknowledgement of initialing
4 indicates comprehension of my night orders. I don't think
5 there would be a lack of integrity where people are just
6 signing to move it on. And I also assess that if there are
7 questions regarding my direction they would call and ask
8 for clarification. Now that second orders of the, "whys",
9 you know, I think that comes with time. But to answer your
10 question, I had confidence that they understood my orders.

11 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Did you find that you would get a lot
12 of whys? Certainly, there was this example that you gave
13 with the JG. Did you find that you would get a lot of
14 questions as to why, you know, there was a certain standard
15 either in the standing orders or in the supplemental? Did
16 you get much of that from your watch teams?

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: On one occasion.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Can you provide an example?
19 Can you talk about that?

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: In - while operating with the
21 Ronald Reagan striker group we provided a screening
22 station, a stern of the carrier. And my direction was to
23 maintain a relative position [REDACTED]
24 [REDACTED]. Okay. I received feedback
25 from my Senior Watch Officer, CSO, and the XO that that was

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1 wrong and that we needed to be [REDACTED]
2 [REDACTED], which in the truest
3 sense of surface warfare tactics, yes, that is what you do.
4 [REDACTED]
5 [REDACTED]. But well within -- I
6 wouldn't say well within. I think -- our relative position
7 to Japan was pretty close. Okay? And my confidence level
8 in what I had observed from by bridge watch team
9 performance is the simple act of providing [REDACTED]
10 [REDACTED]
11 [REDACTED], and they were
12 booking. So that only leaves me a very slim margin to move
13 relative to the carrier's position. I didn't feel my teams
14 were up to that level of challenge to [REDACTED]
15 [REDACTED]. While fundamentally, yes, I agree. But looking
16 contextually at where Fitzgerald was in relation to
17 training certification and operating with a carrier striker
18 group, it was zero for the team that I had. No one onboard
19 qualified -- had operated with a carrier strike group. So
20 this was our first time. So my direction was rather simple
21 - maintain a relative position that puts us in the best
22 advantage point so if they turn then our area where we have
23 to make up is reduced so I'm not out of station for an
24 extended period of time. So -- so yeah. So I was
25 challenged. I was told I was wrong and I had a very, you

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1 know, pointed one-way conversation with both the Executive
2 Officer and the Senior Watch Officer, okay, to provide the,
3 "why," of my orders.

4 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So this has happened since May, this
5 particular example?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: This was our first underway
7 after I took command.

8 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: After command in May. And was this --
9 was this challenge to your direction, was that something
10 that was done in public? Was it among everybody or was it
11 kind of a private moment feedback? How was -- how was the
12 -- how was the question presented to you?

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I was on the bridge and the
14 XO brought it to my attention, and I handled it privately,
15 my response back.

16 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I see.

17 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I wanted to establish the
18 limits of the type of feedback, you know, and the
19 opportunities to provide feedback because my view of the
20 error chain is that when you -- when you start to change
21 the plan while in execution, you increase your opportunity
22 for error. And this was right in that direction. Whereas
23 as every watch team had clear direction of where they
24 needed to be relative to position to the carrier in the
25 screen assignment, trying to develop a new plan in the

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 dark, late at night, while screaming down at 25 knots, it
2 was not sound, one. And two, you know, in so far as my
3 assessment of the watch teams' ability [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED], you know --

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: In this particular case, did you feel
6 that the question was warranted and was presented to you in
7 the right way?

8 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: The question was warranted.
9 The presentation was terrible.

10 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: And that was -- and that was addressed
11 on the page you mentioned.

12 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Absolutely.

13 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Meaning the presentation on the bridge
14 was probably not the right place. Is that fair to say?
15 The challenge that came to you came on the bridge.

16 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yeah. And there was a phone
17 -- if I recall correctly, there was a phone call as well
18 that I received on the bridge from the TAO.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I see.

20 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: And then the XO came -- came
21 up to support that position, which --

22 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Support the position of the TAO?

23 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Yes, sir.

24 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I see.

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: So, while fundamentally
2 sound, [REDACTED]
3 [REDACTED] is good. Those are
4 good conversations.

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Sounds right out of the manual, right?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: It sounds -- it absolutely
7 is. But when looking at large -- the context in which
8 we're operating in and -- so, did I feel that the carrier

9 [REDACTED]
10 [REDACTED]
11 The chances were probably low, you know. And if I had a
12 concern I wasn't able to cover, I would've certainly
13 addressed it with my Operational Commander.

14 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Um hm. Um hm. True.

15 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: But we were going to take a
16 picture the next day. That's why we were moving so fast to
17 get to an area.

18 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Right.

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: And so I wasn't in the South
20 China Sea [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]. I was purely transiting to a rendezvous point to
22 take a picture. So, loved it from a sense of a war-
23 fighting stance, but from, you know, a kind of safety of
24 navigation and screen assignment and position, not so much.
25 And it was addressed that evening.

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1 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Thank you for that example. That's
2 excellent. After this particular situation was resolved,
3 did you feel that there were any -- there was any
4 collateral lingering issues about bringing issues to your
5 attention?

6 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: No. He handled it like a --
7 I delivered it like a professional. He handled it like a
8 professional. I drew the lines of authority a little more
9 clearly so he could see them, reinforced the opportunity to
10 exercise, you know, the plan, brief, execute, debrief
11 model. Because had we wanted [REDACTED]
12 [REDACTED] that discussion happens 2 hours earlier so we can
13 get the team aligned, you know. And so that way I can then
14 enforce some other mitigation. Whereas if I have the
15 Lieutenant Junior Grade [REDACTED] as a MOBOARD operator, I
16 could then assign someone that has a little more experience
17 to increase my confidence that we're not gonna drive out of
18 sector.

19 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. So, Commander, I just have a
20 few more questions and we'll be wrapping this up. So,
21 considering all the things we've talked about regarding the
22 bridge team, of course you just came out of PCO school
23 before taking command in May, and having served as the XO
24 onboard the Fitzgerald in the 16 months prior, where do you

Audio transcription - COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON

1 think your vulnerabilities or weaknesses were regarding
2 safe navigation of the Fitzgerald?

3 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: My personal weaknesses and
4 vulnerabilities?

5 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Um, more, more your team, your ship
6 Your ship's vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: My assessment going into the
8 Command was just the experience of operating as a team.
9 Because we had a lengthy in-port period from about May to
10 really the end of January, and though mitigation factors
11 included the use of the simulators, the BRM, assigning
12 other junior officers to ships that got underway to get
13 some experience. The dynamics between lengthy in-port
14 periods and sustained underway periods are almost polar
15 opposites in how, you know, the teams coming together. And
16 so I was concerned, you know, partly to increase our
17 operational proficiency while underway, though I had an
18 increased confidence that after I left they went down to
19 the South China Sea, conducted some Pacific presence
20 operations. I think their performance was satisfactory and
21 then continued on to the Sea of Japan to conduct some more
22 operations. So, overall, their moments with water under
23 the keel, moving under the keel, was increasing. But to
24 really assess their ability to function as a team, I had to
25 put direct eyes on. So, you know, that, you know, that was

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1 -- that was a concern for me, but the progress that -- the
2 proficiency that I observed after taking command and into
3 the performance, the increase in performance during the 9
4 underway days that we had, it increased. So I had an
5 increased confidence that the team operated to a
6 satisfactory level.

7 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Thank you. So we have talked -
8 - we've covered a lot of ground here regarding the
9 Fitzgerald, the environmental board, the climate, your
10 relationships. Um, is there anything you think that we as
11 casualty investigators should know about the Fitzgerald?
12 Just open ended.

13 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I can think of no -- no
14 additional comments to, you know, provide. You know, any
15 clarity or contributing factors to what caused this
16 collision at sea.

17 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: Okay. Do you have any questions for
18 us?

19 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: I have no questions, Captain.

20 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: So this is gonna conclude our
21 interview. Again, we greatly appreciate you coming over.
22 We recognize that this is a very tough situation and that
23 it's been a very traumatic experience for you and the crew,
24 and we do appreciate you coming over and talk to us. And
25 we hope that the information that we have gathered from you

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1 and your crew can help us in determining causal factors and
2 prevent this from happening ever again. So, I'm just gonna
3 turn to my Senior Investigator, Lieutenant [REDACTED], for
4 closing administrative remarks. [REDACTED].

5 LIEUTENANT [REDACTED]: So, again, we definitely
6 appreciate your time here today and answering all these
7 questions for us. If following this interview you do have
8 any additional information that comes to mind that you'd
9 like to discuss, please feel free to reach out to us and
10 we'd be glad to get that information from you. And as
11 well, if there's any questions that come up that you'd like
12 some information from us, we'd be glad to address that as
13 well. The investigation does continue. We will be sending
14 this information up to other investigators who will be
15 digging deeper and asking questions from other parts of the
16 Navy. So, we do ask not to discuss what was talked about
17 here today just in case we do have a question later on for
18 somebody else that they aren't thinking about that ahead of
19 time and getting details mixed up. Definitely appreciate
20 your time here today.

21 CAPTAIN [REDACTED]: I should have provided this on the
22 front end, but this investigation is pretty unique for the
23 U.S. Coast Guard in that the NTSB has asked us to perform
24 this investigation on their behalf. So, I should've
25 pointed that out in the beginning. So, we used the same

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1 procedures as we always do. It's written into our
2 instructions and guidance already, so we're not doing
3 anything different than we normally do. But in this case,
4 it's NTSB authority that we're using to perform this
5 investigation. So again, with no alibis, we again
6 appreciate your time today. Thank you.

7 COMMANDER BRYCE BENSON: Thank you, sir.

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