

Statement of Douglas Harold Brown
Chief Mechanic/Acting Second Engineer
of the Deepwater Horizon

on

Legal Liability Issues Surrounding the
Gulf Coast Oil Disaster

before the

House Judiciary Committee

May 27, 2010

STATEMENT OF DOUGLAS HAROLD BROWN

Introduction

Chairman Conyers, Ranking Member Smith and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before you today.

My name is Douglas Harold Brown. I was the Chief Mechanic and Acting Second Engineer on Transocean's *Deepwater Horizon*. I am 50 years old; married; have a 10 year old step daughter and live in Vancouver, Washington. I served in the United States Army from 1989 to 1998 when I was honorably discharged. I proudly served in Desert Storm. In January, 1999, I started working in the Gulf of Mexico for R & B Falcon, an offshore drilling company. I worked on a semi-submersible drilling rig known as the *C Kirk Reign*. After approximately a year and a half, I was transferred to the *Deepwater Pathfinder*, which is a drillship also in the Gulf of Mexico. In approximately 2000, Transocean purchased R&B Falcon and I was assigned to work aboard the semi-submersible *Deepwater Horizon*. I was one of the original crew members on the *Deepwater Horizon* when it came out of the shipyard where it was built in Ulsan, South Korea. I made the journey with her across the ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. I worked aboard the *Deepwater Horizon* in the engine room since at least 2002 and up until the time of the disaster on April 20, 2010.

Manning Requirements on the *Deepwater Horizon*

The number of crew members in the engine room decreased significantly since I was originally signed to the vessel. This became a progressive problem. Initially the manning requirements onboard the *Deepwater Horizon* for the engine room included the following:

Chief Engineer
1st Engineer
2nd Engineer
3rd Engineer
Motorman
Motorman

Towards the end of 2002, Transocean eliminated the Third Engineer's position as well as one of the Motorman positions. Approximately nine (9) months later, the First Engineer's position was also eliminated. We were told that the reason for the elimination of these positions was that we were downsizing and there was no need for so many men in the Engineering Department.

From some time in 2003, the engine room was left with the following positions:

Chief Engineer
2nd Engineer
Motorman

In October 2009, the 1st Engineer was added back to the engine room. However, that was only for one shift. The other shift remained without a First Engineer until the vessel sank.

Because of the cuts in the number of engine room personnel, we were often days, weeks and even months behind in completing the necessary preventive maintenance (PM) requirements. This was documented in our lack of completion of the PM forms which were transmitted via electronic data to the mainland. I and other employees who worked in the Engineering Department complained to our supervisors and the Captain that we did not have enough manpower to keep up with the work and the preventive maintenance. We were always told “we will see what we can do”.

When the *Deepwater Horizon* initially left Korea, I believe she was flagged Panamanian. Sometime thereafter, she switched to Marshall Islands flagging. Though I cannot testify to the exact Minimum Safe Manning Requirements of Panama, The Marshall Islands, or The United States, it is my belief, which is supported by discussion I have had with other crewmen, that the Minimum Safe Manning Requirements of the Marshall Islands is far less in number than the United States Coast Guard Requirements. Thus, my belief is that the reductions were due to cost saving measures.

I would strongly suggest that all submissions and applications by Transocean to the Marshall Islands be obtained to understand what manning agreements were reached regarding the *Deepwater Horizon*.

My shift of April 20, 2010

My work shift started at 1200 hrs (12:00 p.m.). I attended our pre-tour safety meeting. At that meeting, the Driller, Dewey Revette, was going over the work that the drilling crew would be performing during our 12 hour shift. While the Driller was giving the explanation, a BP representative stood up and interrupted the Driller. The BP representative said that there would be a change to the operations and that a different plan of action was going to be implemented. Because this involved drilling matters, I was not directly involved in the conversation. However, it was obvious that The Driller and the Offshore Installation Manager (OIM), Jimmy Harrell and the tool pusher Randy Ezell, all Transocean employees, were in disagreement with the BP representative’s plan. To the best of my recollection and based on conversations with other crew members, the Driller said something to the effect of “well I guess when we get up there, we will come up with a game plan. The OIM, Jimmy Harrell said, in a last protective thought, “well, that’s what they make them pinchers for”, apparently referring to the annular.

Around 9:30 p.m., I began my end of shift duties entering data into my log book. Around 9:50 p.m. I heard a loud hissing noise like a large air hose springing a leak. We all looked around and we had no idea what it was or where it was coming from. Within a few minutes, we started hearing gas alarms. Those of us in the engine control room looked at each other with confusion as we did not know what was happening. No one ever communicated to us from the Bridge or the rig floor so we had no idea that a blowout was taking place. We did hear the captain make a radio call to the supply vessel, the *M/V Damon Bankston*, to detach the hose and move away from the rig.

Sometime soon after the hissing sound started, engine numbers 3 and 6 began increasing in rpms on their own. These engines are set to run at 720RPMs constant. These engines supply power to the ship's generators which supply electrical power to the *Deepwater Horizon*. I have no idea why these engines were increasing in revolutions but they increased way beyond anything I had ever heard before. I would estimate that they got as high as 1000RPMs. I waited for and expected the (trips) to shut the engines off. There are 4 trips that operate in the following manners:

- (1) Mechanical Over speed – This should kill the engines if they reach around 800 RPMs but it did not work.
- (2) Electrical Over speed – This should kill the engines if they reach around 790 RPMs but it did not work.
- (3) The Rig Saver – This should have killed the engines upon over speed but it also did not work.
- (4) The frequency trip monitors the hertz and it did work but it is not designed to kill the engines but only to disconnect the generators from the switchboard. Therefore, the engine room and all electronics went dark.

Just before the frequency trip engaged, I started to walk over to the control panel to see what was happening. Then, the lights went out and we lost all power in the control room when the frequency trip activated. I remember saying “we’re dark”. But the engines kept revving, faster and faster, louder and louder and then a massive, violent, concussive explosion picked me up and threw me into the control panel and into a hole which was created in the floor. The next thing I remember is being face down and kind of on my side. I could hear people screaming and shouting that they were hurt. I started to try to get up when the second explosion occurred caving in the ceiling. Debris and wreckage fell down on top of me. I was very scared, confused and starting to panic. I did not know if another explosion was coming. I heard more screams and people shouting they were injured. Suddenly, I realized that Mike Williams, the electronic technician, who had been in the electrical technician (ET) room, was now in the engine control room (ECR) next to me. He was on the floor crawling over the debris and wreckage and he was screaming that he was hurt and had to get out of there. He crawled passed me and was heading toward the back of the control room where the hatch was blown open and bent from the force of the explosion of the number 3 engine.

We could see light coming from the doorway. I noticed my Motorman, Willie Stoner, crawling toward the same hatch ahead of Mike. I began crawling behind Mike. Once outside on the back lifeboat deck, I heard Paul Meinhart, one of our new Motorman, calling out to us that he had found Brent Mansfield, the First Engineer, in the control room and that he was injured. Paul asked someone to help him with Brent. Willie went in to help Paul and I went with Mike Williams to the Bridge.

To get to the Bridge, we proceeded up the back steps to the main pipe deck on the aft end of the rig. The derrick was engulfed with flames over 200’ high. The heat from the fire was incredibly hot on my body. We went to the port side of the rig so that we could get around the fire. We eventually made our way to the Bridge. Once on the bridge, Mike told the Captain that he was

hurt. The Captain told Mike and me to go find the medic who was probably at the lifeboats. Mike and I went to the forward life boats. When we arrived at the lifeboats, it was total mayhem and mass confusion. People were screaming that they had to get off the rig. People were crying and screaming that they did not want to die; there was confusion and panic everywhere. I tried to remain calm but I was very scared. I went to my designated life boat and reported in.

As I was boarding the life boat, Patrick Morgan, assistant Driller, who I have known for 9 years was checking names off the list as we boarded. Patrick looked straight at me and asked me my last name. He had a blank stare on his face and was obviously in shock.

We stood watching the fire on the rig and up through the derrick and waited for more crew members to arrive. People were screaming “why can’t we leave now”... “I don’t want to die”. The fire was growing. We waited and watched for approximately 10 minutes.

The command was given to board the life boats. It was around this time that I realized something was wrong with my leg. Initially, the Coxswain in charge of the boat could not get the engine started in the lifeboat. Once started, the life boat was lowered to the water. Once we hit the water, the Coxswain wanted verification that the lowering hooks had disengaged from the life boat. I and another person opened the back hatch and confirmed that we were disengaged. When I opened the back hatch, I noticed that the boat was drifting or being sucked back under the rig where the water and the rig were on fire; I told the Coxswain we were disengaged and needed to get away because we were drifting towards the fire; he throttled forward and we pulled away from the rig. The Coxswain could not see out of the lifeboat because the windows were covered with soot and mud which had shot out of the hole and was all over the rig floor; we tied up with the other life boat at the *M/V Damon Bankston*.

We boarded the *M/V Damon Bankston* and they began taking a count of who was present. We remained on the deck of the *M/V Damon Bankston* watching the rig burn and wondering who did not make it off the rig. The USCG helicopter showed up approximately an hour later. They lowered a basket and I was raised up into the helicopter and taken to the BP *Na Kika* rig. I was offloaded and carried to a room that was set up for triage; I was then transported by helicopter to The University of Southern Alabama Hospital where I was treated for injuries to my left leg.

While in the hospital, two representatives from Shuman Consulting Company, showed up as representatives from Transocean. One of the Shuman employees drove me and Paul Meinhart to the Crown Plaza Hotel in New Orleans. Upon arriving at the hotel, I was exhausted and still shaken up. I was provided with some clean clothes and then met with the Coast Guard. Rather than being allowed to go to a room and rest, I was then immediately taken to a room and interrogated by two lawyers from Transocean in front of a court reporter.

My injuries

I feel very fortunate to have survived this horrible tragedy. Eleven of my fellow crew members did not and my heart goes out to their families and loved ones.

I do not yet know the full extent of my injuries. I have been diagnosed with a fracture in my left leg and damage and bruising under my knee cap as well as ligament damage and nerve bruising; I have low back as well as pain in my tailbone.

I have a head injury and am suffering from PTSD. I am having memory problems, trouble sleeping, nightmares and flashbacks to that night.

I will never forget this night, the loss of my friends and the effect this has had on so many people.

It's important for Congress to understand what happened that day so that it doesn't happen again. I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

Douglas Harold Brown