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# NewsWatch: Energy

Blogging the business of energy with Tom Fowler

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May 26, 2010

## Today's Louisiana hearing: Argument on rig (updated)

Douglas Brown, chief mechanic on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, testified today that BP and Transocean officials argued on the morning of the April 20 explosion over procedures to take place that day.

One senior Transocean official who disagreed with BP's planned procedures on the day of the explosion expressed fatalistic resignation following a dispute with BP aboard the rig, Brown said.

What Brown described as a "skirmish" broke out during a daily planning meeting and involved BP's representative on the rig it leased from Transocean, known as the "company man," and Transocean's toolpusher, driller and offshore installation manager, he said.

"I remember the company man saying this is how it's going to be," Brown testified at a joint Coast Guard and Minerals Management Service hearing in Kenner, La.

Jimmy Harrell, Transocean's offshore installation manager, complained in the hallway as he left an 11 a.m. meeting in which BP overruled Transocean officials over those procedures, Brown testified.

"He pretty much grumbled, I guess that's what we have those pinchers for," Brown recounted, referring to seal-off valves on the sea floor that are designed to shut in the well in the event of an emergency.

The testimony supports previous eyewitness accounts that suggest BP overruled Transocean on aspects of the operation in the hours preceding the 10 p.m. well blowout and explosion on the Deepwater Horizon that killed 11 workers and touched off a massive oil spill.

When the explosion occurred, Brown said, he was thrown against a control panel in the engine room and then dropped in a hole in the floor opened by the blast. Upon trying to get up, a second blast knocked him back down in the hole and the ceiling collapsed on him.

After reaching the main deck, he described scenes of "complete chaos." He later escaped



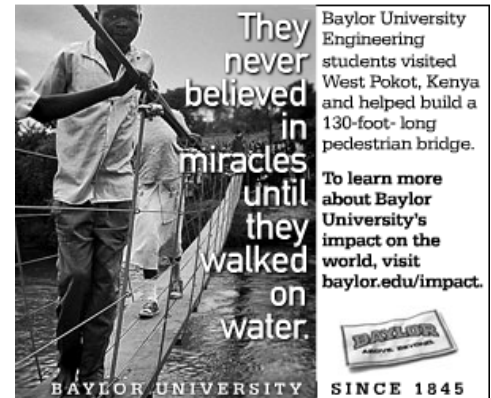
AP/Chris Granger

Doug Brown, left, the chief mechanic of the Deepwater Horizon, waits for questions as his attorneys, Steve Gordon, sitting, and Jeff Seely, speak to each other during a hearing in Kenner, La., on Wednesday, May 26, 2010. Brown testified as part of a Coast Guard/MMS investigation into the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

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## Gulf rig disaster



On April 20, 2010, an explosion on a deepwater drilling rig 40 miles offshore Louisiana launched what could be the largest environmental disaster in U.S. history. Despite rescue efforts, 11 of the 126 workers on the rig are presumed dead. The rig sank, leaving a leak at a subsea well spewing thousands of gallons of crude oil a day. [See our Oil Spill page for complete coverage](#) of the investigation and cleanup of the accident at the Deepwater Horizon, a half-billion-dollar rig owned and operated by Swiss-based Transocean and leased to BP.

## About the blogger

Tom Fowler is a Houston Chronicle energy reporter. Contact him at [tom.fowler@chron.com](mailto:tom.fowler@chron.com) or follow @HoustonFowler on Twitter.

## Energy bloggers



**Barrels and BTUs**  
Bruce Bullock & SMU energy bloggers  
100,000 barrels per day is highly unlikely

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and was evacuated to Mobile, Ala., and treated for injuries.

--**Brett Clanton**

Posted by Don Mason at May 26, 2010 11:14 AM  
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### Comments

this is going to get uglier before it gets over....

Posted by: lil\_o\_l\_me at **May 26, 2010 11:09 AM**

If I felt strongly about what a customer wanted me to do (for incredibly high stakes) I'd want it in writing.

Posted by: ntangle at **May 26, 2010 12:25 PM**

The rig burnt up and sank. All evidence is gone. There would be no chance of retrieving that letter if there were one.

Posted by: Brady at **May 26, 2010 12:56 PM**

This is consistent with the Chief Electronics Technician's statements on 60 Minutes. Transocean's (and Halliburton's) was to set three cement plugs at intervals and to pump heavy drilling mud in between the plugs so that the weight of the plugs would help keep the plugs in place while the cement set up. The Company Man decided that no, they would do that between plugs 1 and 2 but between plugs 2 and 3 they would pump (biocide treated) sea water which weighs much less than the heavy mud initially planned. General consensus among people in the industry I've discussed it with is that it would appear that the combined weight of the first interval of heavy mud plus the second interval of sea water was not heavy enough to keep the cement in place while it set up and the uplift cracked the still setting cement. It takes days for cement to reach it's rated strength, and BP was not giving Transocean or Halliburton NEARLY enough operational leeway to make sure that the plugs were set properly.

This basically boils down to the Company Man, who is GOD for all practical purposes on the rig, making decisions badly and getting into a pissing contest with people who had been doing the job a whole lot longer than he had.

<http://redinktexas.blogspot.com/2010/05/is-it-time-for-tyranny-of-company-man.html>

Posted by: Rorschach at **May 26, 2010 01:56 PM**

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Please use a *valid e-mail address*. We don't harvest addresses, you will not be spammed and your address will not be publicly visible. But if I have a question about your comment, I need to be able to contact you. Thank you.

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Chevron puts focus on Australia projects

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Today's Louisiana hearing: Safety devices failed

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ntangle wrote: ror: I simply mis-spoke (mis-typed... [\[more\]](#))
- Chevron protests land five in jail** (17)  
ThePrize wrote: Protesters stopped at the local gas... [\[more\]](#)
- Today's Louisiana hearing: Power failed for two minutes on night of rig explosion** (2)  
Tery King wrote: When a diesel gets a combustible mi... [\[more\]](#)
- Today's Louisiana hearing: Argument on rig (updated)** (4)  
**Rorschach** wrote: This is consistent with the Chief E... [\[more\]](#)

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