National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Fish Tender *Ambition* (NTSB No. DCA16FM045) (USCG Case 1036243)

Date: August 5, 2016 08:19 Alaska Daylight Time

Location: Phone Interview

Person Interviewed: Corey Potter
Owner and Captain, F/V *Ambition*
[redacted]
Phone: [redacted]

Interview Conducted By: K. Williams, Marine Investigator, USCG Sector Anchorage
E. Stolzenberg, Investigator, NTSB Office of Marine Safety

Summary Provided By: E. Stolzenberg, NTSB

Mr. Potter was interviewed in conjunction with the Investigation of the loss of the fish tender vessel *Ambition (AK9035AN)*, in the Bering Sea near False Pass while transiting to King Cove, Alaska on July 23, 2016 at about 1900 ADT. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes and a temporary recording of the conversation**.**

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Mr. Potter started fishing in about 1981, for two years. Then about 1983 he bought his own vessel. He has fished and owned his own boats, crabbing, long-lining, tendering, cod fishing and other activities in the Aleutians, the inside passage and the Gulf of Alaska.

He bought Ambition about 3 years ago, from the Canadian Fish Company. He had the vessel surveyed by Barry Smith before it left Canada, then in Seattle he had a person from insurance company survey it.

Mr. Potter described the basic positions and duties of the crew members onboard the accident voyage as follows:

1) Corey Potter- Captain and Engineer

2) Kyle Potter, Captains son- Engineer in training and crane operator

3) Maybe Potter, Captains wife- Crew (wrote out fish tickets, distributer, cook)

4) Megan Potter, Captains daughter- Crew (crane operator, cook)

5) Erin Tortolano, Crew (crane operator and cook)

Mr. Potter said that since purchasing the vessel, the he worked it exclusively as a tender; primarily Bristol Bay, the Kodiak area, and Cook Inlet. Prior to his purchase, the vessel was a fishing as a drum seiner. He changed it into a tender by removing the drum and deck gear and adding two aft cranes in Seattle. The past year he rewired the vessel and put in all new electronics (in Kodiak). When modified for a tender, no professional stability calculations were done, but he did estimate that the removed deck weight from the vessel was more then added back. He did not know the weight of the vessel from hauling, but guessed it was in the 80 to 90 ton range. He had hauled it up on a grid since purchasing. He said the empty draft was 6-feet and full draft was about 8-feet. He recalled the draft as a drum seiner was a little lower, due to the extra weight on deck.

Mr. Potter described the vessel from stern to stem and above the main decks. Starting Aft the compartments were:

- On a raised deck aft port side, was a watertight Freeman hatch that led to a Lazarette below (the only access). The Lazarette was the full width of the boat, about 24 feet wide, 14 feet in length and was about 6 feet deep. In the Lazarette was a bilge pump with a discharge as “high as possible” from the stern (transom), and a rudder shaft. They were the only penetrations. Looking forward from Lazarette, you would see a bulkhead, to the water tank. There was a bolted cover access plate, which was not ever opened, to clean out the water tank.
- There was a fill cap to the water tank forward of Lazarette on deck. There was no entrance to the water tank except through bolted cover from Lazarette.
- Forward of water tank were two fishholds. Both holds had Freeman watertight access hatches down to them mounted in 5’x5’ bolt down hold covers- the only access. The aft fish hold went from stbd to port side, with no voids on either end. Its aft side butted against forward side of water tank, while its forward side was the dividing wall between the two fishholds. Both fish holds had 12” of spray foam and were fiberglass lined and pipes for RSW (refrigerated sea water). The forward side of the forward fish hold butted against the aft side of the Engine Room. This hold extended under the Cabin (Galley) on the main deck. There were 6” steel pipes on the forward side of the forward fish hold for the refrigeration and circulation system.
- The Engine Room was accessed from inside the Cabin, through the Crews Quarters down to the Tool Room (5 steps) and then aft and down through a door (non-watertight) to the Engine Room (4 steps). The 353 Cat main engine was center mounted and rated at 360 hp. He ran it 800 to 900 rpm, where he had best fuel economy. On the port side was a 40Kw generator with electrical panels above and a work bench. On the starboard side were compressors and motors for refrigeration system, and electrical panels and 70kw generator. Near the aft bulkhead was the sea chest and steel piping to supply cooling, fish holds and refrigerated water. A previously

mounted vertical access ladder to the Engine Room was removed because they did not want the copper refrigerant piping to rub and cause refrigeration leak. The copper refrigeration lines he considered to be watertight. Neither of the two doors to the Tool Room or the Engine Room were watertight (they were wood).

- The fuel tanks were port and starboard in the Engine Room, between the hull and the engine room. Each tank held 2,500 gallons. They were half full and had about 1,250 in each tank at time of sinking (2,500 gallons diesel fuel onboard at time of sinking). There was also a full 250-gallon gasoline tank on deck, which he heard washed up on the beach. The approximately 100-gallon hydraulic tank had about 55 gallons of oil in it.
- Forward and up four steps of the Engine Room, was the Tool Room, which contained the RSW condenser and receiver, the fresh water pump and tools. The Tool Room was full width, that went right to the stem (bow). Under the Tool Room floor, were a hydraulic tank and air void, with lines leading to a bow thruster. There was no access to the bow thruster space. There was a watertight aluminum deck hatch directly above the Tool Room (in addition to stair from Crew Quarters).
- A wood door (non-watertight) to the cabin was on the port side of the cabin at the main deck. It entered the galley. The starboard/forward side of the galley had a door that led forward into quarters with four bunks on each side (port and starboard). There was a head and shower. There was door to the Tool Room and Engine Room on the port forward side. There was a center/forward stair that led to wheelhouse above.
- The wheelhouse was full width. Center had a manual wheel. To starboard was the U-shaped captain's chair with full array of electronics (radios, AIS, navigational systems, sat phone, etc.) There was chart table in the center, and aft there was a sitting area to port side aft, and a master bedroom aft and starboard. Far aft was a storage cabinet. Behind the captain's chair was a door that led to the Upper Deck. There were doors on both the port and starboard side that led out to the Upper Deck.

The rudder post was in the Lazarette, since he owned it he had not had to retighten or replace the packing in its packing gland. He did replace the packing to the propulsion shaft in April 2016, with 6 lines of 1-inch by 1-inch rope packing.

The vessel had dedicated pumps to the fish holds. It had three recently-installed individual fixed electric bilge pumps (Rule 4200 rated at 4,200 gpm) and plastic piping systems independently drawing from 1) shaft alley 2) Engine Room and 3) Lazarette. The Rule 4200 pumps were submersible types, they were controlled in the wheelhouse and were always in the "automatic" position, but they had a manual switch as well. The Lazarette system had 1.25-inch piping, which went from the pump directly to the through-hull fitting, with no valves in the system. The vessel also had two portable bilge pumps- a gas-powered 3-inch portable pump and a portable electrical 2-inch pump (run of wall outlet) that could be moved to draw from a space.

Mr. Potter described the timeline of events leading up to the sinking:

- On the 22nd, in Port Moller, they took fish from the *Melanie* which they were to take to King

Cove. Both fish holds were full at the time of the accident. There was between 170,000 to 180,00 pounds of fish, which was close to the maximum 190,000 pounds the Captain said was possible to carry. The Captain said that all the hatches were secured. The bolted covers were secured, and the Freeman hatches were shut.

- He planned to "ride the tide" down, instead of "buck the tide," which was similar to what other vessels in the area were doing. About 2300 they left with a fairly-straight course charted on the computer and in the autopilot (to the entrance to False Pass). They changed wheel watches and stayed on course. The vessel had a bridge watch alarm, that was set for 10-minutes, it was on for the accident voyage.
- The west wind was 25 knots, seas were 10-feet and up to 15 feet, but nothing like the day before or what they had been in in the past. In his opinion it was "pretty good sailing" for the next 17.5 hours with that kind of load for the boat. The auto-pilot was able to hold the course before the flooding.
- Things started happening sometime after 1600 on the 23rd. He was in the wheelhouse with his wife on the wheel watch. He noticed the upper wheelhouse floor was at a different angle, but the boat was steering and operating fine, but just felt sluggish. He estimated the stern was about 5-inches too low, which alarmed him.
- About 1700, he got the crew up and planned with them how they were to begin checking the spaces on the boat. At that time, one crewmember was sleeping, while others were in accommodation spaces.
- Intermittent bilge alarm audible "beeps" began to the Lazarette space. Now the waves were breaking over the Lazarette, and were running 6-inches to 12-inches over the Freeman hatch. As they were readying to check the Lazarette, the alarm to the space was continuously sounding.
- When the opened the hatch to check the space, he knew there was more water in there than they could pump out. They could see 3 feet of dry area of the angled transom, but they could not see forward to the rudder shaft because there was a "wall of water" coming in from the open hatch. They could not see the bottom of the Lazarette.
- During the sinking, he could not see if the Lazarette system was pumping because he did not see the overboard discharge stream in the conditions.
- He checked AIS and called the *Kona Kai*, and asked them to stand by as they had issues "just in case," and they did.
- The vessel began to list to port, so they moved the deck cranes to starboard, but this did not noticeably affect the list. As they discussed hanging extra weight over the starboard side, the entire back deck went further underwater.
- He radioed the *Kona Kai* that they were in danger and would make a mayday call. The *Kona Kai* responded and headed their way, he radioed the mayday, and the *Star Watcher* called him to say they were closer than the *Kona Kai* and would head his way.
- He instructed his crew to get the EPIRB and set it off.
- He sent another mayday call, which the *Kona Kai* told him that the Coast Guard was not getting.
- At the same time, his wife used an InReach device to send an SOS. He stated that within seconds the SOS reached a contact in Vermont, then Ocean Beauty Seafoods in Kodiak, who immediately

contacted the Coast Guard and told them the *Ambition* was taking on water. The captain said that the inReach device was the fastest and most efficient way to get ahold of everyone.

- He considered beaching the vessel, but it foundered too quickly.
- He instructed the crew not to get the EPIRB as the *Star Watcher* was in sight, but instead don survival suits.
- The *Star Watche*r could not get within 100 yards as the Ambition was heeled and going under water. The crew planned the abandonment and went single file out of the Cabin out the back door, and shut the door. They then entered the water and headed toward the Starwatcher. On crew member became entangled in a line, but with assistance was freed. All the crew were pulled aboard the Starwatcher, who threw a life ring to Ambitions crew members in the water. The Captain stated that some water did get in his suit, but warmed quickly. At one point he was nervous because he the Ambition was between himself and the *Star Watcher*. He was the last person onboard. They Ambition crew was cold and stayed near a heater onboard.
- Later in the evening, the *Star Watcher* headed to the abandoned cannery at False Pass, where the *Ambition* crew disembarked and were given shelter and food. The crew stayed there about 5 days. The flew to Kodiak to meet with Coast Guard, but the expense could not be maintained due to delays, therefore with Coast Guard permission the crew flew back to Vermont and planned to speak with Coast Guard later.

The life raft was not manually deployed, but he heard that it was found deployed couple days after the sinking. The EPIRB was not removed or carried off the vessel, and was not manually activated. The captain was confident the EPIRB was armed and ready. He heard the EPIRB never did transmit after the sinking.

The bilge discharge pipe in the Lazarette was a 1-inch line and its through hull was about 2 feet above the waterline, and the seas were reaching the discharge through-hull. The captain stated that the Lazarette Freeman hatch was open less than a minute and they had readied a portable pump as they opened the hatch as a precaution. The Engine Room was inspected and dry just before they abandoned ship. The only bilge alarm he recalled sounding was for the Lazarette.

He stated that InReach was a DeLorme handheld device required by Ocean Beauty Seafoods for all fish tenders. The device allowed them to communicate with the processer via text, and they did this. Additionally, he understood that the processor could know his position. The registration was $24 per month, and once registered you can turn it on and off. He said for 2 months of tendering, the $50 seemed like a great idea. He praised the device and the system and said he would write inReach to thank them for the system. He said he could text on his cell phone and it would transfer through inReach, and they used it often for this. During the accident, his wife pushed the SOS button on the unit. He said that Icicle Seafoods had mentioned the device in the past. He said Ocean Beauty required it for communication, not safety, but would now consider it a safety item as well.

When asked to recall his heading at time he first discovered the vessel was down by the stern, he stated he was heading 3.5 miles offshore, 4 miles from the entrance to False Pass at a bearing to the entrance. The wind was blowing from the west at 25. The seas were with the wind, quartering, hitting them on the

front quarter starboard side. He changed his heading when they moved the cranes, but found the original direction was the best heading for the situation. Kyle did mention pumping the fish holds, but the he did not want to pump them because they would have had slack tanks, and in his experience the fish would have moved to one side and compromised his stability, resulting in capsize. They decided not to pump the Lazarette with portable pumps because the water downflooding through the hatch from waves on the stern would exceed the estimated pumping capacity of all the pumps.

He said that the Coast Guard did onboard inspections in Kodiak and False Pass. They took about were 4 hours and very thorough in his opinion.

When asked the estimated value of the fish, he did not know, but saw an advertisement that that fisherman were being paid $0.85 per pound at the dock.

When asked what he believed what were the flooding in the Lazarette was from, he said his “gut” was the bilge pump piping to the through-hull. But he later considered the rudder shaft may have been another source. Mr. Potter said that the night before in 20-foot waves, water was not running up to the Lazarette through-hull fitting or over the transom. The only penetrations were the bilge through-hull, the Freeman hatch and the rudder post.

END OF INTERVIEW

E. Stolzenberg
Marine Accident Investigator

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Loss of fishing tender vessel *Ambition* (DCA16FM045)

Date: November 3, 2017 about 1130 EDT
Location: Telephone Interview

Person Interviewed: Mr. Darren Rudger, Ocean Beauty Seafoods, Inc.
[redacted]

Interview Conducted By: E. Stolzenberg, NTSB

Summary Provided By: E. Stolzenberg, NTSB

Mr. Rudger was interviewed by telephone in conjunction with the Investigation into the loss of the fish tender vessel *Ambition* North in Bristol Bay, north of Falls Pass on 23 July, 2017. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes from the phone conversation.

Mr. Rudger was provided a copy of the below interview summary via email on December 5, 2017 for review. He replied via email on December 5, 2017, that the interview summary was correct to the best of his knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Mr. Stolzenberg stated that the intent of the interview was to gain knowledge of Ocean Beauty's use of satellite communication devices with the brand name "InReach," and his recollection of events related to the sinking.

Mr. Rudger works at the Kodiak, Alaska location for Ocean Beauty Seafoods. Ocean Beauty Seafoods has fish processing plants for various fish species in several Alaskan ports, including Kodiak.

Mr. Rudger stated that Ocean Beauty does not require fishing tender vessels under contract to them to have an InReach device on their vessel, but strongly stresses they have one. He said that the Ocean Beauty uses the devices to communicate to their tenders, sending and receiving information regarding their position and status. This information is used to direct the

tenders where needed more effectively. He stated that Ocean Beauty did not develop the use of InReach devices fleetwide for the exclusive purpose of communication in a casualty or emergency, but they have proven, as was the case in the *Ambition* sinking, to be of safety value.

Mr. Rudger stated that the device cannot make or receive a voice phone call, only typical two-way text messages. It can also send an emergency SOS text to 24-7 call center. He said the device can be synced with an operator's smartphone, so texting can be done over a regular smartphone through the InReach device.

Mr. Rudger stated the InReach device only gives the position at the time the vessel operator sends a text. He said that although the InReach device has a "tracking" feature, many fishing vessel captains do not activate that feature because they do not want to disclose their fishing locations to other vessels. He stated that Ocean Beauty also used AIS data from a commercial provider to keep track of vessels in the fleet.

The individual fish tender vessels pay their own InReach service fees, not Ocean Beauty. They are typically $60 per month on an unlimited plan. The plans can be purchased monthly, cancelled and then purchased again for another month. Therefore, in the off-season an owner does not have to pay for service.

Mr. Rudger stated that in the Aleutian Islands fishing grounds the InReach devices typically get through to satellites more reliably than Iridium satellite phones, and that satellite phone connectivity has gotten worse in recent years. He believes that InReach used about 30 satellites as compared to a few satellites for Iridium phones. He stated VHF radio communication was not very useful in Alaskan waters, and especially around the Aleutians, as its range was typically 2-3 miles, 6 miles maximum. He stated the InReach device needs a direct, unimpeded line of site to the satellites, so it may not work inside a steel vessel. Some operators have installed an antenna outside the wheelhouse that connects to the InReach device inside to maintain the line of site without stepping outside to operate the device. He stated that radio telephone (FEA 330) was also used in the Aleutians Islands fishing area.

He stated that the day *Ambition* sank, he got what looked like a regular text, which was in hindsight the SOS text from *Ambition*. He answered the text on his regular smart phone. He called the Coast Guard in Kodiak and gave them *Ambition*'s position coordinates. He also pushed the weblink which came through the *Ambition*'s text to the Coast Guard.

END OF INTERVIEW

[redacted]

E. Stolzenberg
Marine Accident Investigator

U.S. COAST GUARD INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

Accident: Fish Tender *AMBITION* (NTSB No. DCA16FM045) (USCG Case 1036243)

Date: August 9, 2016 13:05 Alaska Daylight Time

Location: Phone Interview

Person Interviewed: Erin J. Tortolano
Crew member, F/V AMBITION
[redacted]
Phone: [redacted] home; [redacted] cell

Interview Conducted By: K. Williams, Marine Investigator, USCG Sector Anchorage
E. Stolzenberg, Investigator, NTSB Office of Marine Safety

Summary Provided By: K. Williams, USCG

Ms. Tortolano was interviewed in conjunction with the Investigation of the loss of the fish tender vessel *AMBITION (AK9035AN)*, in the Bering Sea near False Pass while transiting to King Cove, Alaska on July 23, 2016 at about 1900 ADT. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes and a temporary recording of the conversation.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Ms. Tortolano was working her 1st year on AMBITION and her 2nd year in Alaska. She has no Coast Guard credential (not required). The summer of 2014, she was a deckhand on the fish tender JUDY B, however the vessel did not tender. Her primary duty was a deckhand on both the AMBITION and JUDY B. She is a family friend of the Potter's, who offered a position on the AMBITION.

She met the AMBITION in Kodiak, AK on May 12, 2016. She performed minor maintenance and assisted in painting while the vessel was making preparations for the upcoming tendering season. AMBITION departed Kodiak toward Dillingham at the end of June. The AMBITION started to tender immediately upon arrival to Bristol Bay. There were no problems with the vessel; it was a very smooth ride.

Ms. Tortolano described the timeline of events leading up to the sinking:

- Wheel watches were generally 2 to 3 hours on Ambition. She would typically be on day watch. There was always someone awake, if not in the wheelhouse on her watch.
- On July 22, AMBITION was alongside MELANIE to take on fish near Port Moller. This took a few hours to mid-late afternoon.
- At approximately 2300 on July 22, AMBITION headed toward False Pass.
- Late the afternoon of July 23, while watching videos, she was told Mr. Potter saw something is wrong.

She went to the wheelhouse. She was directed to watch the radio with Maybe Potter in the wheelhouse.

- Mr. Potter said the stern was going under. She helped secure a water trash pump on deck. Everything happened so quickly. Water was coming in faster than they could put it out. On deck about 20 minutes. The pump was never started. The lazarette hatch was never opened to her knowledge.
- She put on dry clothes and returned to the wheelhouse for safety measures. The crew donned survival suits half on. The cabin door was closed to prevent water from entering the vessel.
- Mr. Potter saw F/V KONA KAI on the AIS about three miles away. Mr. Potter radioed for assistance.
- When Mr. Potter made the first mayday call shortly after contacting KONA KAI, there was a port list and the stern was awash.
- Mrs. Potter activated the SOS on the InReach Beacon before Mr. Potter sent out the second mayday call. She said the AMBITION never received call backs in response to mayday calls.
- Shortly after the second mayday call, F/V STAR WATCHER arrived, recommended the crew get off.
- The crew discussed using the EPIRB, but chose not to activate. They also chose not to manually deploy the life raft due to the close proximity of the STAR WATCHER.
- The crew grabbed wallets and proceeded to the main deck. STAR WATCHER was on the port side about 100 yards away. The crew was in awe, and couldn't believe this was happening. The port rail in now underwater. The crew donned the survival suits completely.
- Megan Potter was the first to abandon ship, Ms. Tortolano was second. She started swimming. She remembered from watching survival suit races in Kodiak and started to swim on her stomach with her legs raised.
- The STAR WATCHER tossed a life ring and pulled her up and over the railing. Kyle Potter was the next on board STAR WATCHER within four minutes. They helped throw the life ring and retrieve Maybe Potter. Megan Potter was the fourth crew to board STAR WATCHER. Cory Potter was near the AMBITION bow and thrown a life ring, then pulled on board the STAR WATCHER. It was a very quick and smooth evolution. However, details are blurred.

She stated the vessel rode well whether tanked down or half tanked with water. She was glad they did drills, so she knew exactly how the survival suit felt when worn. She had an adult universal size suit, which was pretty bulky. They were stowed in the port side wheelhouse. She recalled being calmed during the emergency by Cory Potter in the wheelhouse. She was in high praise of practicing mandatory drills.

The first time she was in the wheelhouse, a bilge pump alarm was intermittently sounding. The lazarette alarm sounded when they went down to the deck before donning survival suits. She doesn't recall seeing prior bilge alarms prior to this incident. The only alarm she saw was for the lazarette. All other spaces were dry when they abandoned ship. She recommends all crewmembers carry a small waterproof bag with or without a floatation device inside the survival suits for important documents. She also had an idea for different size waterproof pockets sewn inside the survival suit.

She was very confident and comfortable with the family relationship on the AMBITION as well as the Captain and Engineer's knowledge of the vessel at its systems. The only point of ingress for water in the lazarette was the freeman hatch on deck which was tested and air tight. In addition, a one inch hole on the starboard side below the stern rub rail for the new bilge pump, and a rudder stuffing box. The lazarette was regularly checked throughout the voyage. She was not aware of maintenance to the rudder or packing. There were no leaks from the rudder packing.

She was very grateful for the crew of the KONA KAI and STAR WATCHER, and the False Pass caretaker for their help and assistance.

END OF INTERVIEW

[redacted]

K. P. WILLIAMS
Marine Investigator
Sector Anchorage

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Fish tender *Ambition* (NTSB No. DCA16FM045) (USCG Case 1036243)

Date: August 9, 2016 12:05 Alaska Daylight Time

Location: Phone Interview

Person Interviewed: Kyle Potter
Engineer, F/V *Ambition*
[redacted]

Interview Conducted By: K. Williams, Marine Investigator, USCG Sector Anchorage
E. Stolzenberg, Investigator, NTSB Office of Marine Safety

Summary Provided By: E. Stolzenberg, NTSB

Mr. Potter was interviewed in conjunction with the investigation of the loss of the fish tender *Ambition (AK9035AN)* in the Bering Sea near False Pass while transiting to King Cove, Alaska, on July 23, 2016, at about 1900 ADT. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes and a temporary recording of the conversation**.**

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Mr. Potter has about 11–12 years' experience fishing in crab boats, tenders, gill netters, and cod boats in Alaskan waters surrounding the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea. He has been a crewmember on the *Ambition* since his father purchased the vessel 3 years ago.

He has no Coast Guard credential (not required). He does hold a Fishing Vessel Safety Instructor card, which he obtained after receiving training in Kodiak in spring 2016.

Prior to the fishing season, the *Ambition* had a shipyard period in Kodiak. Work during this time included removal of old/unused wiring, adding radios, and fiberglassing the vessel's holds. Electrical work was done by a contractor; fiberglassing was done by family members.

Also during the shipyard period, additional bilge pumps were added to the lazarette and the engine room. With the additional pump, the engine room had three total pumps. The third bilge pump was also used as a "washdown pump," with suction piped to both the bilge and a sea chest (when used as a washdown pump, suction was take from the sea chest). The pump was electric (110V).

Mr Potter also noted that he "added a light on stern of mast" during the shipyard period.

Mr. Potter described the timeline of events leading up to the sinking.

- Late morning on July 22, the *Ambition* came alongside the fishing vessel *Melanie* in Port Moller to onload fish. The crew pumped aboard about 170,000 lbs of fish, which took a number of hours.
- After completing the onload and waiting for the tide, the *Ambition* got underway from Port Moller about 11PM and headed for False Pass, Alaska. Seas were about 10 ft.
- Through the night and much of the next day (July 23), Mr. Potter and other crewmembers stood wheel watches or watched movies. Seas were still 10 feet on July 23.
- Sometime after 5PM on the 23rd, Mr. Potter was called to the wheelhouse with his sister (another crewmember). Mr. Potter's father (Corey Potter, owner/captain) was on watch, and instructed the crew to check the vessel.
- "We checked everything on the boat." Mr. Potter went down to the engine room and tool room. "Everything was fine." He checked the bow, and then checked the fish holds. The fish holds were still full, not slack.
- Mr. Potter then went over to the lazarette hatch. There was water over the hatch cover. He opened the hatch cover only about halfway to prevent excess water from entering the lazarette. He could see only about halfway in, but didn't see any water. He put the hatch cover back down. Although he hadn't seen any water, he rigged up a 2" shaft pump "anyways." They also moved the vessel's heavy cranes to over starboard side to correct a small list.
- Mr. Potter next returned to the wheelhouse to "talk about what they could do." From there, he looked back towards the stern of the vessel and noted more than a foot of water over the lazarette. At that point, opening the lazarette hatch again would have filled the space with water. "It was happening fast."
- At some point a bilge alarm for either the engine room or lazarette sounded in the wheelhouse. Mr. Potter investigated the engine room and found nothing, but could not access the lazarette.
- Mr. Potter's father contacted the Coast Guard. They also saw on their AIS display that two other fishing vessels, the *Star Watcher* and *Kona Kai*, were close by. Mr. Potter's father called them and notified them of the situation and that they were "trying to get a handle on it." He asked that the vessels standby. The vessels proceeded toward the Ambition to render assistance as needed.
- The crew realized they could not keep up with the flooding and called the good Samaritan vessels to close in. The *Star Watcher* came up beside the *Ambition*.
- The crew donned immersion suits.
- Sometime after their immersion suits were on, the lazarette high water alarm sounded. Mr. Potter was surprised that the lazarette alarm had not sounded earlier based on how far down the stern sank. "The lazarette was huge; there had to be a lot of water in there."
- Mr. Potter was going to deploy the EPIRB and liferaft, but his father told him that there was no need since the *Star Watcher* was on scene. (The Coast Guard did not receive an EPIRB signal when the vessel sank, although Mr. Potter believes it was installed to float free; the liferaft did deploy.)

- As the stern started to go underwater, Mr. Potter's father put the engine in neutral. The sinking didn't seem to get any worse, but the crew weren't sure how fast the vessel would sink.
- The crew, with the exception of Mr. Potter's father, went back aft and went in the water. Mr. Potter's father stayed with the vessel "for a second," but also went into the water as the vessel sank.
- The crew was picked up by *Star Watcher* and transported to False Pass. The *Kona Kai* attempted to put a line to the sinking Ambition for a tow, but couldn't.
- The crew/family spent 4 days in False Pass awaiting air tickets and weather. They were eventually flown to Kodiak, Alaska.

The crew were tested for alcohol in False Pass. Mr. Potter's father and Mr. Potter (designated chief engineer) were tested for drugs in Kodiak.

According to Mr. Potter, the crew practiced regular drills. The crew practiced donning immersion suits, and Mr. Potter ensured crewmembers could don the suits within 60 seconds. He also showed the crew where flares and smokes were. Mr. Potter showed crewmembers where fire extinguishers and liferings were, and walked through how to deploy the liferaft and the EPIRB. The crew practiced man overboard drills and abandon ship drills. "Everyone was prepared." Drills were logged, but the logs were lost when the vessel sank.

The Coast Guard marine investigator asked Mr. Potter if the crew practiced dewatering or flooding drills. Mr. Potter responded that he had addressed this with the crew, telling them to check sea chest to ensure it was not open and other actions. He also stated that the *Ambition* had pieces of rubber, wood, wire available for a patching kit.

Mr. Potter stated that during the accident events, he did not see any water anywhere while going through spaces. His educated guess for the cause of the sinking was flooding in the lazarette.

Mr. Potter was asked about hull penetrations in the lazarette. He responded that there was a bilge pump hose that came out above waterline, about 1" opening. Mr. Potter did not think that this was the point of ingress, since the vessel had transited in 20-foot seas in the past without an issue.

A rudder post also penetrated the hull in the lazarette. Mr. Potter stated that they had checked this when investigating the flooding, but there was no indication of a leak. The rudder hadn't been packed it in 2–3 years, but there was no indication it needed to be packed.

Mr. Potter stated that the vessel's propeller shaft did not penetrate the hull in the lazarette, but rather in the shaft tunnel that begins in the engine room and passes under the fish holds. There were no bulkhead penetrations between the fish holds and the lazarette.

Mr. Potter described the lazarette hatch as a "normal Freeman oval hatch" with a single T-handle and four dogs. When he opened the hatch to check the lazarette just prior to the sinking, he stated that the hatch had been tightly closed. He said he also tightened it when he reclosed the hatch.

Mr. Potter described the bilge pumps and the associated alarms and indicators in the wheel house. With the exception of one 1.5-inch suction pump in the engine room, which was manual, all of

the pumps in the vessel automatically started via float switches located near the pumps. “Jabsco” pump switches, pump running indicators, and alarms were all mounted on a wood panel in the wheelhouse.

Mr. Potter stated that he had never seen any of the pumps go on or alarms sound in the past, with the exception of the lowest pump in the engine room. This pump regularly ran due to water entering via the shaft seal. When the pump came on in the past, a red light indication would come on in the wheel house. The indicator panel was labeled so that they knew which pump was on. When the light lit, Mr. Potter would run down to engine room to make sure everything was okay. He stated that he did not start large engine room bilge pump during accident because there was no water in the space.

Mr. Potter stated that the bilge pump in the lazarette was a fixed pump, and he was confident that the electrical panel for the pump was energized.

Mr. Potter said that high water alarm sensors were only in engine room and lazarette. There was nothing in the stern tube tunnel, but water in the tunnel would have flowed into engine room. Sensors were set a couple inches higher than bilge pump on/off float switches. As designed, these bilge alarms would come on if pump could not keep up. The engine room alarm “was always going off,” as it was in the lowest point in the engine room bilge. It would go off around off once an hour. According to Mr. Potter, the lazarette high water alarm sensor was above the lazarette bilge pump float switch, above the lazarette pump, which was about 4–5 inches tall or bigger. The alarm was about a foot up off the bilge and lower than in engine room.

Mr. Potter told the interviewers that the high-water alarm switches were tested during a Coast Guard examination. During the test, Mr. Potter, while being observed by a Coast Guard inspector, activated the sensor by putting a “clothespin needle” into a hole in the switch’s plastic casing, which lifted the float and set off the alarm. Another Coast Guard inspector in the wheelhouse verified that the alarm sounded. This test was done in both the engine room and the lazarette.

There were no drawing of alarms or bilge pumps available. However, Mr. Potter stated that he would send a drawing of the bilge pumps and alarm system. (The drawing was received by the Coast Guard and the NTSB and is attached to this interview.)

END OF INTERVIEW

[redacted]

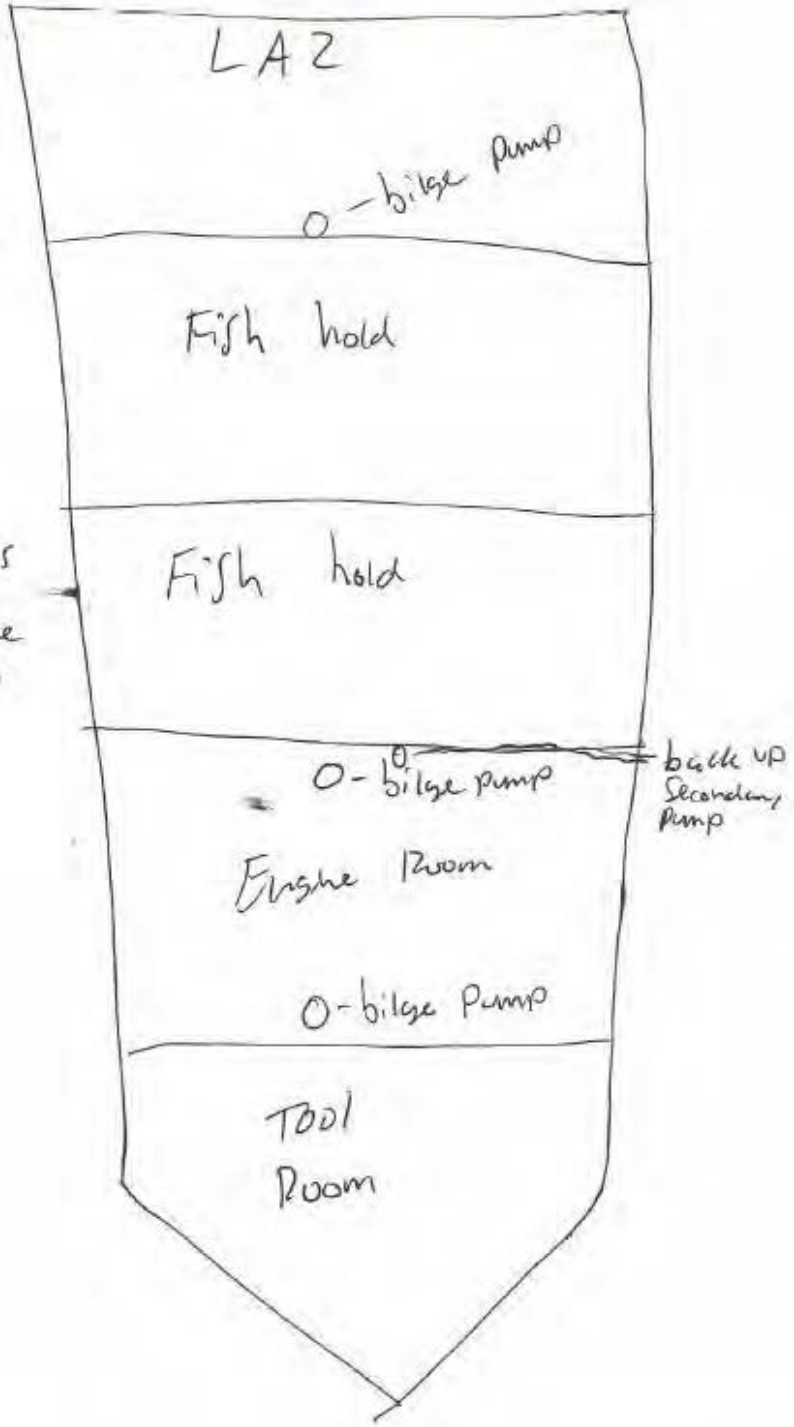
E. Stolzenberg
Marine Accident Investigator

Recieved by NTSB 11 August 2016. from K. Williams USCG
Bilge Sketch from Kyle Potter to accomany interview of 9 August 2017.

Inventory

3 bilge pumps
1 back up Secondary Pump
1 electric Porteble Pump
1 gas Porteble Pump

The three bilge pumps were directly wired to the battery in the wheelhouse with its own Constavolt.



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Accident: Fish Tender *Ambition* (NTSB No. DCA16FM045) (USCG Case 1036243)

Date: August 5, 2016 09:44 Alaska Daylight Time

Location: Phone Interview

Person Interviewed: Maybe Potter
Crew member/Accountant/Cook, F/V *Ambition*
[redacted]
Phone: [redacted]

Interview Conducted By: K. Williams, Marine Investigator, USCG Sector Anchorage
E. Stolzenberg, Investigator, NTSB Office of Marine Safety

Summary Provided By: E. Stolzenberg, NTSB

Ms. Potter was interviewed in conjunction with the Investigation of the loss of the fish tender vessel *Ambition (AK9035AN)*, in the Bearing Sea near Falls Pass while transiting to King Cove, Alaska on July 23, 2016 at about 1900 ADT. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes and a temporary recording of the conversation**.**

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Ms. Potter was working her 2nd year on *Ambition*, and had not worked on fishing vessels before. Her primary responsibility was invoices and fish tickets, the processors took care of the money.

She was involved in fiber glassing the fish hold in Kodiak prior the season's tendering. She said that the steel and hull seemed ok to her in the area's she glassed during that period. She painted the boats back deck and floor at that time. The fiberglass was applied directly to the foam.

Ms. Potter described the timeline of events leading up to the sinking:

- Wheel watches were generally 2 to 3 hours on *Ambition*. She was on the wheel watch when the

vessel first became sluggish, but she did not feel this, the Captain sitting next to here said "something feels different."

- He sent Erin, who was on the bridge to get Kyle, who was to check the back deck.
- She remained on wheel watch, with the autopilot remaining on.
- The others came back to the wheelhouse and discussed what to do.
- The Captain began contacting the *Kona Kai*, and she became upset and went aft to the bedroom. The Captain called the *Kona Kai* again and said he could not contain the problem and told the crew to don survival suits.
- The Captain made his first mayday call, but did not hear a response. She told the Captain to repeat the mayday, but the Captain said there was a protocol to follow and to not interrupt him. She decided to push the SOS button on the inReach unit she was carrying. The inReach worked, and the operator asked her what the problem was, and she said they were taking on water.
- The captain told them to get their identifications, and Kyle also went below and got medication she regularly required.
- The *Star Watcher* arrived, and came to the port side, about 40 meters away, and she wished the boat would come closer. The crew was scared to get in the water because the waves were big. Two females entered the water first, then Ms. Potter and Kyle and the Captain. One crewmember swam quickly to the *Star Watcher,* but the others took longer to reach the boat. She was not make progress toward the *Star Watcher* and became scared that she would not make it, but then the distance closed and she reached a thrown life ring and was brought aboard.
- She originally swam on her stomach, but switched to her back, and then to stomach again to see (but she knew that swimming on her back was best from drill training).
- The captain was the last one picked up by the Starwatcher.

The survival suit was "super huge" on her, and she had to adjust the hood to see. Some water entered the suit when she adjusted the hood. The suit she had was universal size as she recalled. She said that the suit still performed its function.

She described the inReach as "amazing" since it worked when the mayday calls were seemingly not reaching the Coast Guard. She put two emergency contacts into inReach when she set up the device- a friend in Vermont and a contact at Ocean Beauty. She knows that the inReach operator called her friend and Ocean Beauty. The inReach operator called her during the abandon ship and later to confirm she was rescued. She learned later that the inReach operator told her emergency contact in Vermont that they were sinking and asked for the names of the crew. Later, they followed-up with the Vermont contact shortly after the rescue and let them know they were ok.

Kyle had taken training in Kodiak and he went over emergency procedures with the crew.

There was not indicator on the bilge panel if a pump was running. The bilge alarm panel beeped intermittently, then continuously during the sinking. This was the first voyage she heard the bilge audible alarm.

END OF INTERVIEW

E. Stolzenberg
Marine Accident Investigator

U.S. COAST GUARD INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

Accident: Fish Tender *AMBITION* (NTSB No. DCA16FM045) (USCG Case 1036243)

Date: July 27, 2016 13:25 Alaska Daylight Time

Location: Phone Interview

Person Interviewed: Megan Potter
Crew member, F/V AMBITION
[redacted]
Phone: [redacted] cell

Interview Conducted By: K. Williams, Marine Investigator, USCG Sector Anchorage
E. Stolzenberg, Investigator, NTSB Office of Marine Safety

Summary Provided By: K. Williams, USCG

Miss Potter was interviewed in conjunction with the Investigation of the loss of the fish tender vessel *AMBITION (AK9035AN)*, in the Bering Sea near False Pass while transiting to King Cove, Alaska on July 23, 2016 at about 1900 ADT. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from hand notes.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Miss Potter was working her 1st year on AMBITION and her 3rd year in Alaska. She has no Coast Guard credential (not required). Her previous experience was as deckhand on the fishing vessel MELANIE commercial fishing out of Egegik, Alaska. Her father purchased the AMBITION three years ago. Miss Potter said the crew did a lot of preseason work in Kodiak that included a new compressor and generator, spray foam to the fish holds.

Miss Potter described the timeline of events leading up to the sinking:

- The AMBITION was alongside the fishing vessel MELANIE in Port Moller to on load fish the morning of July 22.
- After the on load was complete, Miss Potter had first watch while the vessel remained inport waiting for the tide.
- The AMBITION departed late the night of July 23, so Miss Potter went to bed.
- Miss Potter was awakened by her brother when the vessel was listing to port. Mr. Potter (son) swung the crane to starboard to help offset the list. Miss Potter went back to bed.
- A short time later, her brother woke her up again. This time water was coming over the deck rails.
- She helped set up the trash pump and tied to off the deck. They verified operation with a test run.
- There was too much water over the lazarette hatch; they were able to open just a little bit.

- Seas were a consistent 10- 15 feet.
- Her father told the crew to grab gear and muster in the wheelhouse.
- She looked out the wheelhouse window and saw the situation getting progressively worse. She saw the fishing vessel STAR WATCHER ahead and KONA KAI astern.
- The initial plan was to try and make it to false Pass for safety and the KONA KIA would catch up.
- As the situation worsened, Miss Tortolano and Miss Potter donned survival suits half way. Then Mr. Potter (son) and Mrs. Potter donned their suits.
- Mr. Potter sent his first MAYDAY. The STAR WATCHER responded telling Mr. Potter they could see the bottom of the AMBITION from the starboard side.
- Mr. Potter sent a second MAYDAY as the crew completed donning survival suits and walked out the galley door into the water on deck.
- Mr. Potter waited until the crew was halfway to the STAR WATCHER before he entered the water.
- Miss Tortolano was the first to reach STAR WATCHER and was tossed a ring buoy. She was followed by Mr. Potter (son), Mrs. Potter, Miss Potter, and Mr. Potter. The STAR WATCHER transported the crew to False Pass.

The crew conducted drills learning from watching survival suits races. When she took off the survival suit, she was wearing shorts and a t-shirt which were a little wet for the voyage that took about 1-2 hours she thought. Wilfred at Peter Pan helped the crew get settled in cabin making sure they had food, water, and heat. He then brought clothing the community had collected for a clothing drive.

She stated the start of tendering season is around the end of June. Her brother, Kyle Potter, is the engineer. She had not participated in conducting vessel maintenance in the past 25-26 days. Her father and brother did the engine room work while in Kodiak. She did not like going into the engine room as she is claustrophobic. She does not recall any problems.

She remembers doing alcohol testing with strips on Sunday (July 23). There was no drug testing facility in False Pass.

When asked about the galley door, she said it was slammed twice. She was sure it was closed. She said it is not watertight, and maybe not weather tight.

When asked to describe how she felt when the time to abandon ship was ordered, she said she was hesitant at first, but fairly calm. She was glad this happened in the daytime. She was next to the bow and got scared, so she swam hard away from the AMBITION. Water came into her survival suit when she was swimming. She estimated she was in the water about 15 minutes.

END OF INTERVIEW

[redacted]

K. P. WILLIAMS
Marine Investigator
Sector Anchorage