

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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DUKW 34 AND M/V CARIBBEAN SEA

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Docket No.: DCA-10-MM-025

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Interview of: BARBARA HOHNER

Sector Delaware Bay
United States Coast Guard
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Friday,
July 9, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,
at 3:12 p.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:12 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. LARUE: Okay, good afternoon. It is 3:12 in the
4 afternoon, Friday, July 9th. This is Liam LaRue from NTSB. And
5 we are going to talk to Barbara Hohner.

6 MS. HOHNER: Yes.

INTERVIEW OF BARBARA HOHNER

7
8 BY MR. LARUE:

9 Q. Okay, great. And, Barbara, how old are you?

10 A. I'm 37.

11 Q. Thirty-seven, great. And if I could get you just to
12 walk us through the whole event, and just tell us everything that
13 you remember, and then we'll follow up with some questions after
14 that.

15 A. From the beginning of the tour or just from the
16 beginning of the water part?

17 Q. What we've been doing with everyone else is to tell us
18 about the briefing the captain gave you, the safety brief, what
19 you remember, and then you can just skip ahead to when you went in
20 the water, if that's okay.

21 A. Sure. So, okay, everyone was seated. The captain just
22 introduced himself, of course, and he started giving the
23 instructions or the demonstrations of the safety stuff. And he
24 actually grabbed one life jacket from, I think, from -- actually,
25 I don't know where from. And just -- I think he pull it over his

1 head, but then just at the same time, he just take it off. And he
2 demonstrated the whole stuff in the air, how to put the thing
3 around you. So, not on his body, but in the air. And then he was
4 kidding about going under water with the goggles, whatever. And
5 he showed us the life jacket on the right side, because, see, the
6 -- from my point of view, the right side were the adults' and from
7 -- you know, on the left side, the kids' stuff.

8 But then at that time, I was thinking that there were so
9 few kids, and all the other people were adults. And I just
10 couldn't count how many larger kids are there for that, but as I
11 could see, everyone needs an adult one. So, I was not sure that
12 are there, you know, enough for the adults or not. You know, the
13 larger kids' were on the ceiling. I didn't see the shelf, but the
14 kids said there was a shelf and they were on the shelf, but I
15 couldn't remember the shelf. I just know the larger kids' were
16 fixed to the ceiling somehow. But the captain -- so, the captain
17 didn't show us how to pull them from the ceiling.

18 And then the tour began, and it was funny, actually. He
19 showed us around. He showed the sites, and he told stories, and
20 it was okay. So, the tour itself was okay. I was satisfied in
21 the facts and everything. And then before we went into the river,
22 we were standing on the top of the hill for some minutes and
23 waiting for something, I don't know. And then it just splashed in
24 the water, like a ride in the waterland.

25 Q. Yes.

1 A. And we were -- yeah, he started the engine and he -- and
2 that motor boat went forward. And we made the trip down in the
3 river, showing the bridge and the big ship from the war. So, the
4 tour guide -- so, the tour sites, we could see everything. And it
5 was fine. And then all of the sudden, the engine got fire. I
6 don't know. I couldn't see fire, just smoke. And it came from
7 the right side at the beginning of the boat, at the front.

8 Q. Forward?

9 A. Yeah. And actually, I was sitting with Timea at the
10 back, not -- just the second row from the backside, from the left
11 side.

12 Q. So, here's --

13 A. If this is the last seat --

14 Q. That's the last seat.

15 A. The two, the (indiscernible)?

16 Q. That's --

17 A. Then we were sitting 16 seat.

18 Q. Okay. So, the two of you were in 16?

19 A. Next to each other, and I was sitting inside.

20 Q. Not by the window?

21 A. Yeah. And the smoke came out from right here, and it
22 didn't last too long. It was just a few seconds. I don't know,
23 but it was really stinky. I could smell like a kerosene or
24 whatever.

25 And then at first, we thought it just part of the show.

1 I think I was the one who told the kids, hey, I'm sure it's just
2 part of the show. It's a funny thing, because the captain was so
3 funny all the time. So, I just, okay, it's just he wants to
4 threaten us a bit. But we had to realize that it's not funny.
5 It's not a show. It is reality that just smoke came out. And
6 then what happened? I don't know. They stopped the boat. I
7 mean, it stopped itself. And they threw the anchor into the
8 water, and we were swimming -- like turning around in one point.

9 And I was really calm. I remember I took out my camera
10 and I took pictures around me, and we were just sitting there in
11 silence. And it was -- as I remember, I wasn't excited at all. I
12 was so calm. And another DUKW Boat was coming from the other
13 side. Probably they have finished their tour, and they were
14 heading to the edge of the river. And, of course, because I was
15 sitting at the back, I couldn't hear what they were talking about,
16 but the captain shouted to the other captain -- I mean the other
17 boat's captain. I couldn't hear what they were talking about, but
18 I was sure that they were arranging something which could help us
19 out. And actually, as I remember, I was informed where I just --
20 I was -- I don't know, told that we will be towed out somehow.

21 And probably 10 minutes after it, we saw the big barge
22 coming from behind us. And we still couldn't believe that it will
23 hit us. We just -- we were sitting there in silence and no one
24 was excited. No one was panicked and we just, you know, waited
25 for something to happen. And at the very last minute, everyone

1 was standing and screaming and, not me, and trying to grab a life
2 jacket for themselves. But I think the life jackets were just
3 from the seat 13 to the 1. And the last two or three seats
4 couldn't -- I mean, they don't have the life jackets. So, I had
5 to go forward to grab one for myself because there was no life
6 jacket above me at all, not even a junior one.

7 Then I went forward, because I saw Peter, one of my
8 students, grabbing the whole stuff down from the ceiling. I
9 couldn't realize that I had to search and find --

10 Q. Like a snap or something?

11 A. Snap, yeah. I thought that the way we have to move it,
12 just to grab it with, you know, your -- however. But I'm so weak,
13 so I couldn't do that. I couldn't grab one for myself. And my
14 colleague, Timea, was asking for one for herself, because she was
15 standing at the really back of the boat, and I couldn't get one
16 for her and I couldn't get one for myself either. And then, as I
17 remember, I was doing this thing with the life jacket, the barge
18 came and the next moment I was under water, under the boat,
19 because when I was under water, I felt something was over my head
20 and I just couldn't come up because the big white thing, probably
21 the boat, was over my head in the water.

22 And I was a swimmer when I was young, so I'm not
23 terrified of water. I'm really safe. I feel confident in water.

24 And I just was tolding [sic] myself, okay, I can hold my
25 breathing for one minute, not more, because that's the maximum for

1 myself. And I started feeling that one minute is, you know,
2 approaching and I won't be able to breathe. But then the
3 something over me just went away and I could see light and I could
4 come up.

5 And then when I came up, most of the students, most of
6 the people were up, so I wasn't the first who came up. I was, I
7 think, the last one who went up. I think we were the first to go
8 down and the last to come up because we were at the back.

9 And then I told some of my students who were around me,
10 hey, why don't we swim to the edge of the river. And I even told
11 one of my girls to swim back to her stuff because she saw her bag
12 floating on the water, and I said, hey, swim there and grab your
13 bag; swim back and we will go out. And she did it. She swam
14 back, grabbed her bag, and then we swam to the dock, to the edge
15 of the river. And we did -- I think four kids passed me, did
16 this, to the same position, same place.

17 And there were three guys lying on the dock, lying on
18 the surface, and they were just helping us up with their hands.
19 They were holding us, and they pulled us out. And I think we were
20 in the first couple of people who got -- the three of us got out,
21 and then we looked back and the boats were helping out the others.
22 So, when I was in the water, I didn't see any boats coming to save
23 us. So, that's why I started swimming. So, yeah, and then we
24 went into the museum and --

25 Q. Okay, that's great. I just have a few follow-up

1 questions. I know you said you were towards the very back of the
2 boat. Did you see the captain on the radio at all?

3 A. Yeah, because he was standing in the middle, so I could
4 see him. He was sitting here somewhere and looking backwards,
5 looking at us. And yeah, something was in his hand, and he was
6 (indiscernible) but I couldn't hear what he was saying.

7 Q. Couldn't hear. Did you hear any sound signals or a horn
8 or anything on your boat?

9 A. No. I think everyone just thought this is the moment we
10 have to do something. No one said -- or no one told us the
11 instructions. No one warned us. No one said what to do. We
12 ourselves did it. We just stood up, because we had to do
13 something because it was really close. Probably because I was
14 sitting at the back row, and that's why I couldn't hear what was
15 going on in the front.

16 Q. So, you were sitting at the back. You probably had a
17 decent view of the barge. So, the first time you saw it was right
18 before it hit you, or did you see it a long way --

19 A. No, I didn't look that way. Probably that was good I
20 didn't. Because I was busy with the life jackets, I didn't look
21 at the barge.

22 Q. Okay. When you were taking pictures around, you said,
23 did you take pictures -- what did you take pictures of?

24 A. The bridge.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I think the bridge.

2 Q. Did you--

3 A. Not --

4 Q. Not the barge?

5 A. -- the barge, no.

6 Q. Okay. Let's see here. So, you already told us where
7 you were sitting.

8 A. Well, actually, I saw some other stuff. We had the
9 orange life jackets, right. And the captain showed -- I mean, he
10 did the demonstration on a life jacket, an orange one. But the
11 other captain, the young one who drove the boat in the water, he
12 had his own life jacket, which was not an orange one. And I
13 thought, hey, he has a special one; he has something else. And he
14 just ran up somewhere and just came back with his own green or
15 blue, whatever.

16 And actually, I didn't see him jump in the water, but I
17 didn't hear him shout "jump" or anything. So, I didn't see him
18 and didn't hear him. But he had a different color, a different
19 type of a life jacket.

20 Q. Did anyone from your group or anyone say grab a life
21 jacket to hold on --

22 A. No.

23 Q. Nobody said anything. Okay. So, you just --

24 A. Actually, I didn't hear that.

25 Q. Okay. So, you just saw the barge, grabbed a jacket?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Because everyone was standing, and everyone was doing
4 the same thing, and that's why I thought hey, I have to do
5 something.

6 Q. Did you get hurt at all? Do you have any injuries?

7 A. No, nothing.

8 Q. Did you end up -- you didn't have to go to the hospital?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay, good. When you did look back and look at the
11 barge, did you see anybody on the barge or on the tug that was
12 pushing it? Did you see people?

13 A. I didn't look back at all.

14 Q. Okay, until the very last second?

15 A. Uh-huh.

16 Q. Okay. What color was the smoke that you saw?

17 A. Actually, I saw it black, but I know everyone saw it
18 white. I say black.

19 Q. Black. So, how long do you think it was between the
20 time that you stopped and threw the anchor in until the barge hit?

21 A. About 10 minutes.

22 Q. Do you know if the two students that were missing, do
23 you know if they were able to swim? Do you know if they were good
24 swimmers or not?

25 A. I'm not sure. Of course, the boy was a sportsman. He

1 was a soccer player, and he looked physically good, strong and
2 muscles. I don't know. I don't know whether they could or not.

3 Q. Okay. And I think that's all the questions that I've
4 got. I'll let the other gentlemen here --

5 MR. BLUMENTHAL: Everything has been answered already.

6 MR. LARUE: Okay.

7 BY MR. LAWS:

8 Q. Shane Laws for the Coast Guard. During the time after
9 the boat engine was shut off and you were just sitting there
10 before the collision, did the captain at any time explain what was
11 going on, what you should expect, anything like that?

12 A. No, I didn't hear anything. No, I don't remember.

13 Q. No. Earlier when you were doing the tour, before
14 anything happened, was he using a public address system, like a
15 microphone to talk to you guys?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Or was he just talking?

18 A. No, microphone, they used microphone.

19 Q. Okay. So, he never, during that period when you were
20 sitting there, he never came over the public address system using
21 the microphone? He never came over that and made any
22 announcements or anything?

23 A. No, I think he always used the microphone, because we
24 could hear him really good -- I mean, yeah. I think he was
25 scared, because when I came up, and he came to the surface from

1 under water, he was just next to me and he didn't have any life
2 jackets with him. And I grabbed two and I gave one to him. So, I
3 was the one who gave a life jacket to the captain, to older one.
4 And I asked him to open mine, because I couldn't fix it, and he
5 did it for me. And that's why I could use one, and I gave one to
6 him.

7 Q. While you were sitting there at anchor, I understand the
8 captain was on the radio. Were there any other activities that he
9 did while you were sitting there?

10 A. No, just the other DUKW boat, he was shouting something
11 at there and -- yeah, using the --

12 Q. And what was the deckhand doing, the other captain?

13 A. He just shouted back something. Probably they arranged
14 that when they get to the edge, they can call someone. I don't
15 know, because I couldn't hear what they were talking about.

16 Q. They were both in the front of the boat the whole time
17 after the engine was shut off?

18 A. Uh-huh. And sometimes they climb up somewhere to the
19 roof. I don't know what is there.

20 Q. Who did that?

21 A. The young one to grab his own life jacket, as I told
22 you.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Because his life jacket came from up somewhere. I don't
25 know what is in their cabin, or I don't know.

1 Q. You didn't see where he went?

2 A. No, I just saw his legs.

3 Q. Okay, where did you see him through?

4 A. Huh?

5 Q. You were sitting toward the rear of the boat and, I
6 mean, where did you see his legs?

7 A. It's over here, like the engine. He was coming on the
8 right.

9 Q. So, he was forward of the window? Forward of the
10 windshield on the right side?

11 A. I think it was from the other side.

12 Q. Yeah, okay.

13 A. So, he was facing us, but saw his legs.

14 Q. Okay. All right. Well, thank you.

15 BY MR. LARUE:

16 Q. Was there anything else you can think of that we didn't
17 ask you about that could be useful?

18 A. I don't know. Nothing.

19 Q. Okay. Well, we appreciate you taking the time to talk
20 to us. And I just want to make sure it was okay that we recorded?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay.

23 (Whereupon, 3:32 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: DUKW 34 and M/V CARIBBEAN SEA
 Interview of Barbara Hohner

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-10-MM-025

PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: July 9, 2010

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Debbie Mizell
Transcriber