

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

Docket No.: DCA-10-MM-025

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Telephonic Interview of: JACKIE KENNEDY

Conference Room  
Sector Delaware Bay  
United States Coast Guard  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Monday  
July 12, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,  
at 5:04 p.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE  
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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JOHN LAWRENCE, Vice President  
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JOHN FITZGIBBONS  
Ride the Ducks

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Casualty Investigations Division  
United States Coast Guard  
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I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Jackie Kennedy

I N T E R V I E W

(5:04 p.m.)

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2  
3 MR. LARUE: All right, it is 5:04 in the late  
4 afternoon/early evening, and this Liam LARUE from NTSB. It is  
5 Monday, July 12th. We're here at Sector Delaware Bay and we're  
6 talking by phone to Mrs. Jackie Kennedy.

7 And, Jackie, can I get you to spell your full name for  
8 the record please?

9 MS. KENNEDY: Sure. My given name?

10 MR. LARUE: Yeah, first and last name.

11 MS. KENNEDY: All right, Jackie or Jacqueline. Jackie,  
12 J-A-C-K-I-E, Kennedy, K-E-N-N-E-D-Y.

13 MR. LARUE: Thank you very much.

14 And we'll just get everybody to go around the table  
15 here.

16 MR. LAWRENCE: Captain John Lawrence from K-Sea  
17 Transportation.

18 MR. GLADISH: Chief Warrant Officer Rick Gladish, U.S.  
19 Coast Guard, Sector Delaware Bay here in Philadelphia, Casualty  
20 Investigations Division.

21 MR. FITZGIBBONS: John Fitzgibbons with Ride the Ducks.

## INTERVIEW OF JACKIE KENNEDY

22 BY MR. LARUE:

23 Q. All right, that's everybody here. And to start, can I  
24 get your age please?  
25

1 A. Fifty-four.

2 Q. All right. And do you remember exactly where you were  
3 sitting on the boat that day?

4 A. I remember. I was on the right side as you face the  
5 front of the boat.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. I was in the aisle seat next to the woman from North  
8 Carolina --

9 Q. All right.

10 A. -- and I was, I believe, four seats from the back, but  
11 give or take a row. But I know I was sitting behind Peter from  
12 Hungary.

13 Q. Seated, sitting behind Peter?

14 A. Yes, directly behind on the aisle, just like he was.

15 Q. Okay, perfect. Actually, I'm looking at our seating  
16 chart. That's where we've got you --

17 A. Oh, good.

18 Q. -- so you've got a good memory there.

19 A. Good.

20 Q. All right, so we'll just jump into, you know, the events  
21 of that day. If you could walk us through what you remember and,  
22 you know, just try to, you know -- no detail is too small.

23 A. Okay. Well, we took -- I'd never been on a DUKW boat  
24 tour. So we went on the ride through the city and we got to where  
25 we were going to go into the water. And at that time, a young boy

1 in a green shirt named Kyle boarded, and it was also at that time  
2 that I smelled something kind of funny, but I was at the edge of  
3 the water, okay. You know, I didn't think anything of it at the  
4 time, I guess. It just didn't smell good, but it, you know, it  
5 was the Delaware. There were other vehicles around. I didn't  
6 know what it was.

7 And then, you know, he asked us if we wanted a big  
8 splash or a small splash, although Kyle didn't drive us into the  
9 river, the captain did. And so, you know, we drove in and we did  
10 our splash and we turned right and the captain was still driving.

11 And then a little while later, he gave over the wheel to  
12 Kyle and he sat facing us and commented on that and how he didn't  
13 have his back to us and he could talk to us. And he began by, you  
14 know, the arch and, you know, was talking about things and, you  
15 know, then we went to turn around and come back. Kyle's driving.  
16 I did notice that there were times when the driver would correct  
17 Kyle by telling him either to go faster or slower, or mostly  
18 slower, I think. He'd be like whoa there, he said one time.

19 Q. Uh-huh.

20 A. And then I know that, one time, he helped him in some  
21 steering and I don't really know why. I just know that he was  
22 helping him sort of get lined up somewhere or other because he was  
23 trying to get him to turn or go a certain direction.

24 And then we were headed back towards where we had come  
25 in, facing the bridge, with Jersey on our right, and then there

1 was smoke in the front. And the captain, you know, had Kyle get  
2 out of the seat quickly. You know, get out of the seat, a little  
3 bit, you know, excited there. And I never saw fire, I only saw  
4 black smoke. And he lifted the hood and the smoke came out and  
5 they somehow got that under control, and then he set it down.

6 He had his, he had his microphone on until that point,  
7 and then he took it off. So, you know, I'm far enough back in the  
8 boat I'm not really hearing too well. And then I guess we got the  
9 drift that, you know -- and I think I even asked, you know, are we  
10 going to -- is someone coming to tow us in?

11 So, now it's kind of comical and I actually called my  
12 husband on his cell phone at work and I said, you know, we're not  
13 going to believe this, we're sitting in the middle of the Delaware  
14 River and we're stranded, and, you know, and we talked and I got  
15 off the phone. And then I was also laughing at the Hungarian  
16 teachers because when we visited them, something similar had  
17 happened with our bus in Budapest. It had broken down. So I want  
18 to say that that probably took up about eight minutes, five to  
19 eight minutes.

20 Q. Uh-huh.

21 A. The time is really tough because you kind of lose track  
22 of it in that kind of a situation.

23 Q. Right.

24 A. And then -- let's see. I remember -- I -- and I may  
25 have this not chronologically in the right order, okay? But let

1 me just start to talk and see if I can piece. I remember the  
2 captain talking into the, not our microphone, but like talking to  
3 somebody. Because he had already radioed in something which I  
4 didn't hear, because I wasn't worried, and then I heard him say,  
5 I'm anchored and I cannot move, or something to that effect. And  
6 I remember saying -- him saying this is not good. And I remember  
7 looking and seeing just like black steel and being kind of surreal  
8 -- and I stood up and I said, we -- you know, I started -- you  
9 know, we've got to get life jackets. And I'm trying to get them  
10 down, but even though I had listened to his spiel, I thought you  
11 were supposed to pull the strap that goes across them, but then I  
12 figured it out and they started, you know, coming down.

13           Meanwhile others began to do that, then we were rear-  
14 ended. When we were rear-ended, there was a scream and I thought,  
15 okay, he's rear-ended us, like in a car, okay, that's it. I  
16 forgot there was something big and moving behind us. So it was  
17 like not very long, and then all of sudden, we were going in the  
18 water.

19           And I really thought we went down to the left because I  
20 was really trying to figure out which window I got out of. But,  
21 anyway, I went under with the boat. I know I had to get around  
22 steel to get out, but I began to see up with the light and I came  
23 up without a life jacket. And the, I could see the barge pass me  
24 some, you know, as I cleared the barge. It wasn't so close it  
25 scared me -- you know what I mean -- but it was there.

1           And then I screamed like murder for my daughter, and  
2 then when someone said she's here, I was relieved. And then  
3 the -- Timea, the Hungarian teacher, I was swimming towards her  
4 and, you know -- the wake was something, so it was difficult. But  
5 she was holding onto a life jacket and she said, I cannot swim.  
6 Don't let me die. And so I began to help her. Do you want me to  
7 keep going or is --

8           Q.    Oh yeah.

9           A.    Continue?

10          Q.    Continue all the way through.

11          A.    All right. And I put the life jacket -- I said -- you  
12 know, I talked to her and I said, no, you're not, we just got out  
13 of this. It's going to be fine. I will not let you die. And I  
14 put the life jacket around her and began to buckle the front, and  
15 then I was trying to get the strap around her and Barb Anderson,  
16 who had heard me screaming for my daughter, so she located me,  
17 swam over, and we got it around her waist. And then I said just  
18 hold on to me. And that gave me a life jacket, in a way, because  
19 it was getting hard to tread water.

20               And then I -- another girl, Rachel Keller, who was in my  
21 youth group, was over there hanging on to a life vest and I said  
22 we need to -- and she said, I can't swim. I said, we need to get  
23 that on you. She said, well, I can just float. I said, no, we  
24 need to get that on you. So with Timea holding onto me, I got  
25 that on Rachel pretty well, and then I had them both in my arms.

1           By this time, Barb's next to me and -- who was next to  
2 me? Paul. And it's hard to swim forward, so I turn over on my  
3 back and start to kick and I see others trying to swim forward, so  
4 I, I remember shouting out, get on your back, it's easier to kick.  
5 And we began swimming towards the shore on the Pennsylvania side.

6           And then there were boats by then, and so I started to  
7 swim toward a boat and someone said they're coming to you, or  
8 something. And we got, you know, then we got close to a boat and  
9 I, I yelled up, she can't swim, take her first, and I put Timea up  
10 and then I put Rachel up. And then Paul and Barb also got in that  
11 boat, I got in that boat, and a very large man got in that boat.

12           And they did have some trouble communicating. I will  
13 tell you, that was a little scary, but I understand that. They  
14 were in a crisis mode and trying to get things coordinated. And  
15 the big man, getting him into the boat was hard. Then we went  
16 over to -- there's still panic in the boat. Timea was not doing  
17 well at all. And then we got to the dock, and we all got up and  
18 we went into the museum.

19           Q. Did you have any injuries?

20           A. I had bruises is all, and I have a little cut on my  
21 finger, but I'm fine.

22           Q. So did you end up going to the hospital or --

23           A. No, I did not. I sent Barb Anderson with the three  
24 Hungarians, or four, or however many went, because they were, you  
25 know, our guests, and they were foreigners, and it was scary and

1 she's a nurse, and I said I would hold down the fort back here,  
2 which is back at the museum here. So that's how -- what we decided  
3 to do --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- once we figured out who all needed to go.

6 Q. Okay. Let's -- we'll just walk back through it real  
7 quick and -- let's see. You said you thought you heard the  
8 captain calling out to the tug?

9 A. I didn't know who he was talking to at the time. I just  
10 heard I'm anchored and I can't go anywhere --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- or I can't move, or something to that effect.

13 Q. Do you remember if he -- how many times he said that?

14 A. I only heard it once.

15 Q. Okay. And what -- how far away was the, you know, the  
16 tug and barge, the first time you saw it and when you realized  
17 there was danger?

18 A. I -- boy, I'm bad at distances. Let's just say that I  
19 couldn't even see the top of it. All I could see was, you know,  
20 the steel, black steel, I guess --

21 Q. Uh-huh.

22 A. -- coming in through the end. I couldn't tell you and  
23 see how far that was, really. I still, in my mind, thought, oh,  
24 this thing's, it's getting close, but it's going to stop. I was  
25 really in denial that the thing would even hit us. So, silly me.

1 Q. Did you ever see the tug?

2 A. No. The little boat --

3 Q. Right.

4 A. -- that pushes it? No, no, no, no.

5 Q. Okay. And I just kind of want --

6 A. Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Kyle got on the hood of  
7 the DUKW boat --

8 Q. Uh-huh?

9 A. -- at some point. I guessed he was sending him up there  
10 for, you know, to look around, but I didn't quite put together at  
11 that time that he was probably waiving off the barge. So I forgot  
12 to tell you I did see him get up on the hood.

13 Q. Okay. Could -- I just want to kind of walk through and  
14 try to, you know, get you to go back through how you got out of  
15 the boat once you were in the water.

16 A. Okay, you know what? I'm going to, now I'm going to  
17 move upstairs because my doorbell rang and it's going to get --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. All Right. Excuse me. All right.

20 MS. KENNEDY: Just give me ten more minutes.

21 I'm sorry. Okay --

22 BY MR. LARUE:

23 Q. No problem.

24 A. -- now it's okay. Go ahead.

25 Q. I just wanted you to walk back through, you know, once

1 you ended up in the water and under water. If you could try to  
2 remember how you got out, maybe which side of the boat you got out  
3 on?

4 A. I was thinking about that today. At first, I thought I  
5 got out on -- and I'm -- this -- my left and right have to do with  
6 facing the front of the boat.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. At first, I thought I got out of the left side of the  
9 boat, but my bruises on my arm are on the right side. But I also  
10 know that something was hindering me seeing out and I really  
11 thought if I don't get through this opening, I'm history because  
12 the boat, I thought the boat was going to come down on top of me.  
13 So I don't know which window I went out, really. It really could  
14 have -- you know, in retrospect, it sounds like it makes more  
15 sense that I went out the right window --

16 Q. Uh-huh.

17 A. -- but I don't know. I just know that there was  
18 something -- I have bruises on my left arm, but, yet, there was  
19 something hindering me from seeing what -- which way was up on the  
20 right, and then I was able to see some light and get myself up.

21 Q. And were you holding onto a life jacket at that point?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. So you didn't get a jacket until you got to the  
24 surface?

25 A. I didn't get a jacket until I had Timea and Rachel in

1 one and someone said, oh, here's a child's one, take this, and I  
2 just sort of hung onto that one.

3 Q. Okay. Did you hear any instructions from the captain as  
4 far as, you know, what to do before the impact?

5 A. He didn't tell us anything.

6 Q. All right. And how would you classify your swimming  
7 ability?

8 A. I would say that, you know, I knew I could tread water  
9 for a while. I'm not a great swimmer, but I know how to stay  
10 afloat. I knew I could have -- if it was just me, I know I could  
11 side swam or crawled to where I was going, and I knew I could  
12 tread water. The wake was a little tough to deal with because you  
13 weren't -- it wasn't flat.

14 Q. Uh-huh.

15 A. But I'm not a great swimmer, I'm a mediocre swimmer.

16 Q. A good enough swimmer, apparently.

17 A. I could stay up without a life jacket for as long as I  
18 needed to, so that was good.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. But I'm a determined girl. Once I made it out, nobody  
21 was -- everybody was getting back in -- everybody's getting to a  
22 shift, so --

23 Q. Yeah. And do you remember if you heard any kind of  
24 sound signals made by either your boat or the other tug and barge?

25 A. You mean like a horn or something?

1 Q. Like a horn or -- yeah.

2 A. There were no warnings, nothing like that.

3 Q. Okay. All right. That's my questions. I'm going to  
4 see if anybody else here has any.

5 BY MR. LAWRENCE:

6 Q. Yeah, Jackie, this is John Lawrence. Actually, I don't  
7 have any additional questions. You really covered everything, I  
8 think, with Liam. All I wanted to say, I was there the other day  
9 at your home and I just wanted to thank you for opening up your  
10 home to us for that investigation and for interviewing everyone.  
11 And also just to mention that -- it's has probably been said  
12 before and I'm sure all the kids said it to you, but through  
13 almost -- it's just amazing how many times through the interviews  
14 from all the children that your name was mentioned of just what  
15 remarkable things you had done for them --

16 A. Wow.

17 Q. -- and the teachers, Timea, especially. I mean, I, you  
18 know, have her quoted as saying Jackie saved my life, simple as  
19 that.

20 A. Wow.

21 Q. So it's just amazing what you and Barbara had done.

22 A. Well, thank you. And I'm glad that I could do that and  
23 keep those kids in one place together where they could, you know,  
24 be together through this and not be separated. I think that that  
25 was a blessing, so you're very welcome.

1 BY CWO GLADISH:

2 Q. Mrs. Kennedy, Coast Guard here, Chief Warrant Officer  
3 Rick Gladish. I have one question. Do you recount any kind of  
4 safety brief given with regard to life jackets?

5 A. I think the brief was given at the beginning of the  
6 tour, before we left on the ground portion.

7 Q. Okay. And that included the life jacket brief?

8 A. It did.

9 Q. Okay, very good. Thank you.

10 A. You're welcome.

11 MR. FITZGIBBONS: No questions.

12 MR. LARUE: All right.

13 BY MR. LARUE:

14 Q. Jackie, this is Liam again. Is there anything else that  
15 you can think of that we didn't ask you that might be important?

16 A. Not that I can think of right now, no. I think that's  
17 about all I remember.

18 Q. Yeah. Well, yeah. You did a great job going through  
19 all that and we really appreciate it. I'm going to just go ahead  
20 and shut off the recording here. I just wanted to make sure that  
21 you knew that we were recording and you're okay with it?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. All right. Let me just shut it off.

24 (Whereupon the interview was concluded.)

25

