

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

DUKW 34 AND M/V CARIBBEAN SEA *

Docket No.: DCA-10-MM-025

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Interview of: CHAD LAWLER

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

Friday
July 9, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,
at 8:20 a.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:20 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. LARUE: All right, good morning. It is Friday, July
4 9th. It is about 8:20 in the morning. This is Liam LaRue from
5 NTSB. We're here at Station Philadelphia -- or Station
6 Philadelphia, all right. And we're here today. We're going to
7 interview Chief Chad Lawler. Also interviewing with me from the
8 Coast Guard we've got?

9 LCDR FINE: Lieutenant Commander Matt Fine.

10 MR. LARUE: All right. And from?

11 MR. LAWRENCE: John Lawrence from K-Sea Transportation.

INTERVIEW OF CHAD LAWLER

12
13 BY MR. LARUE:

14 Q. Okay, Chief Lawler, could you just give me a little bit
15 of background, how long you've been in the Coast Guard and what
16 you've done in the Coast Guard?

17 A. I've been in the Coast Guard for 15 years. The tours
18 that I've been on have ranged on both -- I guess, all coasts:
19 West Coast, Gulf Coast, and Eastern Seaboard. A lot of -- this is
20 my fourth search and rescue station. I was actually here as the
21 executive petty officer previously, just two years ago. So, I'm
22 familiar with the area. I have been only -- I assumed command
23 about three weeks ago. But, like I said, I've been here before,
24 so I'm pretty familiar with the area and the operations of the
25 job.

1 Q. What's your current position?

2 A. I am the officer in charge of Station Philadelphia.

3 Q. Okay. Okay, and how long have you been here for this
4 tour?

5 A. I've been here about three weeks. It was the 21st of
6 June is when I took over.

7 Q. All right. So, I understand you were involved in the
8 response to the accident on Sunday. Can you just kind of walk me
9 through that that day, what you were doing, how you heard about
10 the accident, and then just walk through the whole story?

11 A. Right. We got the call on Wednesday. It was Wednesday
12 the 7th, I believe, Wednesday the 7th of July. We got the call
13 around 2:45 p.m. The first initial contact to us was through our
14 SAR alarm, our search and rescue alarm. It's a loud bell that
15 goes off to -- that will be energized on cases that are very, very
16 extreme.

17 So, the bell went off. So, immediately, our guys, our
18 officer of the day that kind of runs the day-to-day operations
19 picked up the phone to try to call the comm center, the command
20 center over there, communications center, to find out what was
21 going on. And the bell actually went off three times. That's
22 pretty routine. During the -- it will go off for a certain amount
23 of -- maybe like 10 seconds, and then it will be energized, and it
24 will go off again for about 10 seconds and so on. And then it
25 will follow up with a little bit of information. The information

1 that was piped was a DUKW boat got ran over by a barge off of
2 Penn's Landing.

3 We got that call almost simultaneously. The officer in
4 -- I'm sorry, the officer of the day's cell phone went off. And
5 from what I understand, that was a direct call from somebody that
6 was on the pier at Penn's Landing. And I'll paraphrase, but it
7 was something to the effect of DUKW boat just got ran over by a
8 barge and it's really bad; can you guys help? Something like
9 that.

10 So, the officer of the day contacted me. Of course, I
11 was already alerted because the bells were going off as well. I
12 immediately launched two of our 25-foot defender class boats, and
13 they launched within less than five minutes of the actual bell
14 going off, and I was receiving notice.

15 Shortly after that, we launched another vessel, which
16 was a 41 utility boat. That boat actually was in a so-called
17 Charlie status. What that means is it was down for maintenance.
18 One of the engines was -- they were doing some maintenance on one
19 of the engines at the time. But due to the severity of this case
20 and how many people that potentially could have been in the water,
21 we got that boat underway with one engine. So, we moved that boat
22 out to the on-scene area as well, though it was laboring with only
23 one engine instead of two.

24 I was on the 41 UTB utility boat. I did not go out on
25 the first two rescue boats. The first rescue boat that reached on

1 scene pulled up three personnel, and the reports that he gave me
2 was there is people everywhere in the water. He saw some hanging
3 onto a three pile piling/dolphin type thing, and he began to pull
4 people off of that.

5 The other rescue boat that was out there did not pick
6 anybody up out of the water, but they were trying to immediately
7 trying to coordinate the on-scene efforts. Like I said, I was on
8 the 41. As soon as we came out of our harbor, we could see life
9 jackets everywhere, so we didn't know at that period of time if
10 the life jackets had anybody in the life jackets. So, as we were
11 approaching life jackets, we were checking them to see if there
12 was any people within the life jackets. For us, there wasn't.

13 But then we also approached the tug and barge. That was
14 like one of the first vessels that we approached. So, we touched
15 the tug and barge. We approached them. We were trying to
16 contact them on the radio and, also, we had a brief conversation
17 with them, with their crew that was out on the deck. They were
18 pretty busy, so we went ahead and continued closer to the on-scene
19 area, because it was told to us that an investigation team was
20 going to come out to the tugboats, that we were going to -- at
21 first, we were kind of directed to get a hold of the tugboat, and
22 then we found out that an investigation team was going to go
23 actually out to the tugboat.

24 So, we went to the on scene. Once I got on scene, my
25 two rescue boats were telling me that they were having a hard time

1 finding out exactly the count they were looking for, what type of
2 people we were looking for, you know, the age, gender, that type
3 of thing, and not getting any kind of real information. So, I had
4 them put me on the pier, so I could help coordinate the search
5 efforts.

6 Once I got onto the pier, they dropped me off on the
7 pier, pretty quickly I found the fire chief. I don't remember
8 what his name was, but he was the marine fire chief that was up
9 there trying to help coordinate efforts. I teamed up with him.
10 We started running information back and forth, trying to provide
11 information for the operators that were out on scene conducting
12 the rescue efforts, because everybody was pulling bodies out of
13 the water or, you know, people out of the water. We did not know
14 exactly how many people at this period of time. There was quite a
15 bit of confusion pier side trying to disseminate that information
16 out to the operators, to find out exactly who we're looking for,
17 how many people we're looking for, and that continued for about 30
18 minutes or so.

19 The efforts from the search and rescue vessels that were
20 actually on scene was phenomenal. I mean, everybody was pitching
21 in and working you would think pretty in unison, because from a
22 broad perspective it looked like everything was pretty organized.
23 But, in fact, on the pier, it was pretty disorganized, just due to
24 the fact that nobody was really communicating and running data
25 through one entity, so that's something we might want to look at.

1 From that point, things were starting to settle down
2 because we were starting to get a count of exactly how many
3 people. It had switched from 33 plus 2 to ended up being 35 plus
4 2, and the plus 2 being the crew is what I'm talking about. So,
5 we ended up getting a pretty good count and narrowing it down.
6 Once a good count was done at the Seaport Museum, we realized that
7 there was 35 members, and there was 2 missing. So, we continued
8 the search efforts up to today, basically, today being Friday, the
9 9th.

10 And some of the things I was involved in while I was on
11 the pier, other than coordinating the search efforts, was I was
12 one of two -- I was one of a four-man team that conducted
13 breathalyzer tests on the DUKW boat captain. I didn't physically
14 give the test, but I was there to witness the test, the DUKW boat
15 captain and the crew. There was two.

16 That's pretty much the events of that day, and then, of
17 course, being an officer in charge, I continued the search
18 efforts, helped organize the search efforts all the way up to this
19 day, being Friday, July 9th. And we've had at least, what, about
20 two boat coverage pretty much the whole time since we've been out.

21 Q. All right, well, let's just step back through it real
22 quick. What's the -- you were on the 41-footer. What's the boat
23 number?

24 A. It was 41358.

25 Q. And do you know the other two boat numbers just off the

1 top of your head?

2 A. The other two boats were 41 -- I'm sorry, that's the
3 wrong one -- 25575 and 25740.

4 Q. All right, you said your first indication was the SAR
5 alarm. Is that something that comes from the comm center?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. So, they got the call first?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. They hit the SAR alarm for you guys?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And you were just here at the station?

12 A. That's right, sitting right in the office when the bell
13 went off.

14 Q. All right. And you said it took about five minutes to
15 get underway for both the 25s?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Do you guys have logs or anything that -- do you guys
18 have that system where you --

19 A. We have a system called ALMIS.

20 Q. ALMIS, yep, yep.

21 A. And it can, you know, show you exactly when they went
22 down there and started putting the time in.

23 Q. Is that something we can get a printout from, or --

24 A. Yes. I know one of them was conducted before they
25 actually launched. The other two were data entries when we got

1 back, due to the severity. And we should be able to get something
2 like that for you.

3 Q. Great. How long does it take to get over to Penn's
4 Landing from the station?

5 A. Less than five minutes all the way at best speed.

6 Q. How long do you think it took to get everybody out of
7 the water?

8 A. I can't report on that, because most of the people,
9 except for one that I know of, were already out of the water
10 before I reached on scene, being on the 41.

11 Q. And you said you kind of had issue getting a head count.
12 How did you determine the total number that were on board?

13 A. It was a collaboration of information. My first count
14 came from the fire chief, which was a little bit off at first. My
15 next count came from another Coast Guardsman, which was a
16 different number. And then so we started -- we realized this was
17 going to continue, so what happened was is they got everybody in
18 one single location, and then another Coast Guardsman went in
19 there and counted each one and said this is how many people that
20 are here. They checked the manifest at some point to find out
21 exactly how many people were on the DUKH boat, and that's how they
22 came up with that, and that information got relayed to me. But I
23 didn't physically do that myself.

24 Q. Okay, so you got the manifest from the DUKHs at some
25 point in that scenario?

1 A. I did not, but that information, from what I understand
2 is, is that the Coast Guardsmen that were in the seaport doing the
3 physical count at some point got a hold of the manifest. That's
4 what I understand. But like I said, I didn't physically do that
5 myself.

6 Q. And then do you have any idea what time you guys got the
7 final headcount of 35?

8 A. I have no idea.

9 Q. All right.

10 A. I can only tell you I felt like I was on the pier for
11 35, 40 minutes before I felt like I had a good count there. And
12 then the manifest reflected what they had told me.

13 Q. Did you -- let's see. Can you tell me, you know, about
14 when you made contact with the tug and barge, you know, give me a
15 little bit more information about what you talked about with them?

16 A. When I attempted to make contact with the tug and barge
17 on channel 16, and they would not come up on channel 16. But it
18 did look like the captain was using both hands talking to --
19 apparently it looked like he was talking to a lot of people
20 because he was using two different devices. And we talked to
21 somebody just briefly on the crew. None of that conversation was
22 of any importance. We were just wanting them to stop, but we
23 found out that, you know, they didn't have an anchor and that type
24 of thing, so -- and that's when sector over our radio, our
25 internal radios, said that there would be another team coming out

1 to deal with that, so we proceeded on to the on scene.

2 And during our time, that brief stop at the tug, I was
3 getting relayed information from our two rescue boats that were
4 actually on scene. I mean, I can physically see everything that
5 was going on already, but they were feeding me information. And
6 when I found out that there was a pretty big issue with trying to
7 get the actual count, that's when I had them send me to the pier
8 to help coordinate the efforts.

9 Q. Was the master in the main pilothouse on the tug, or was
10 he up top?

11 A. He was up top.

12 Q. The very top. All right.

13 A. I'm assuming that was the master, because it was the
14 only person in the pilot or in the up top, and it looked like he
15 was -- it looked like one hand was on the radio and the other one
16 had a cell phone. So, it looked like he was pretty busy.

17 Q. All right. I think that's all I've got. Pretty basic.

18 MR. LARUE: Anything?

19 LCDR FINE: No, that's the same question I was having,
20 just any communication with the tug, other than just applauding
21 your rescue officers. Unbelievable.

22 BY MR. LAWRENCE:

23 Q. You did a breathalyzer? You guys did sobriety, or did
24 you do the actual test?

25 A. We did a breathalyzer test on the DUKW boat captain and

1 crew inside the Seaport Museum. That's the only part that I was
2 on. Additionally, we were going to do all the FSTs, field
3 sobriety tests, but we were called off and the investigation team,
4 from what I understand, did that.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. And then also what I understand, there was a second
7 investigation team that came out from the tugboat organization,
8 went out to the tugboats to do that again. And I don't know if
9 that happened, but that's what I understand.

10 Q. They did, yeah. One of our port superintendents here
11 just went up to the tug and did the breathalyzer test, because we
12 were trying to get that within a two-hour period, and right then
13 did a drug test. And then we also had a third party come and do
14 it all over again.

15 Basically, when we first called, when we heard of the
16 incident, we were told it was going to be about three hours for us
17 to get a contractor down to do it. You know, obviously, they can
18 do it on board or from our office too, so we decided, especially
19 with something this serious, we wanted to make sure we did it all
20 within the time frame, and then repeated it again, actually.

21 MR. LARUE: I just remembered something I should have
22 told you guys at the beginning. For the transcriptionist, just
23 say who you are before you start out, before you talk. Sorry
24 about that. So, that was John Lawrence.

25 BY MR. LARUE:

1 Q. Liam LaRue from NTSB again. You tested the master and
2 the deckhand on the DUKW, correct?

3 A. Yes, I was with the testing party.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. It was another one of our crew that physically conducted
6 the test on the DUKW boat captain. One of the Coast Guard
7 investigators conducted the test on the crewmen of the DUKW boat.

8 Q. At the same time or at a later time?

9 A. Around the same time. They were back to back.

10 Q. And then do you happen to know what time that was, off
11 the top of your head?

12 A. I don't.

13 Q. And how did they -- what did you guys use for the
14 testing?

15 A. The Alco Sensor. I believe it's the model IV, but I can
16 get that exact information for you, if you'd like.

17 Q. And do we have a copy of that yet? How does that --

18 A. That report, I believe, went to the Coast Guard
19 investigators.

20 Q. All right. And what were the results?

21 A. I heard they were negative, but I didn't -- I wasn't
22 watching the Alco Sensor.

23 Q. Okay. All right. All right, that's it. Anything else
24 you can think of that we didn't ask you about that might be useful
25 in the investigation?

1 A. I just wanted to point out the little bit of
2 communication issues up on the pier. To me, I think the search
3 efforts on the -- the search and rescue efforts on the water went
4 really good, you know, because there was a lot of different
5 entities working with each other and they just got the job done.
6 But the communication part on the pier --

7 Q. And that would be the communication between the Coast
8 Guard and?

9 A. There was not one single on-scene commander or incident
10 commander, whatever you might call it, within the organization.
11 But that needs to be identified in this area.

12 Q. Well, thank you very much. Appreciate it, Chief, and
13 can you just acknowledge that this is being recorded?

14 A. Yes, I understand this is being recorded, and this is
15 Chief Boatswain's Mate Chad Lawler.

16 Q. All right. Thank you very much.

17 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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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 Chad Lawler

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