

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: TIMEA MERETICZKI

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

Friday
July 9, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,
at 3:34 p.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:34 p.m.)

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3 MR. LARUE: Okay, it is about 3:34 in the afternoon,
4 Friday, July 9th. This is Liam LaRue from the NTSB. And we're
5 going to interview Timea.

6 MS. MERETICZKI: Timea.

INTERVIEW OF TIMEA MERETICZKI

7
8 BY MR. LARUE:

9 Q. Timea, and the last name?

10 A. Mereticzki.

11 Q. Mereticzki, okay, thank you. And how old are you?

12 A. I'm 34.

13 Q. Thirty-four, great. And if you could just walk us
14 through the event and try to --

15 A. Sure. Okay, so, as far as I know, Barbara and me were
16 the last passengers from the Hungarian group to get on the bus,
17 because just before the journey, I wanted to buy a bottle of
18 water. So, that's why all the other group were -- the group was
19 sitting, and we were in the second seats from the back. And I was
20 sitting by the window, and Barbara was on the inside part.

21 And so, we started this tour, and the captain started
22 with the demonstration of how to use this -- the life jacket,
23 which were orange, and they were fixed near the ceiling. But as
24 far as I know, I could see light gray shelf down, so the shelf was
25 like here, and the life jackets went over this. Okay, so, the

1 shelf was almost completely hidden by the life belts. And as far
2 as I know, there were two life belts over each other. And okay,
3 so, the demonstration was, for me, although we could hear quite a
4 many things, because he spoke loud, the demonstration for me was
5 kind of a joke or something like that, because he told us jokes,
6 and it was as if this thing, I mean, the demonstration was just
7 part of the fun and not serious.

8 So, at first, I thought that I couldn't imagine what
9 kind of splash is he talking about, or whether they really go into
10 the river or not. So, he was joking with some kind of, you know,
11 divers. And yeah, so that's why I thought that okay, it's just
12 for the joke's sake.

13 And then we started the tour, and we visited the sites.
14 We took a lot of pictures. Yeah, and the interesting part came
15 when we went into the river. Well, we went there, and we also
16 took pictures. And then we turned back with this ship or whatever
17 it is called. And then suddenly, we could smell some smoke, and I
18 clearly remember that the smoke was something like white or light
19 gray. Yeah, so, I know it, because I could see a girl. I
20 remember her face. She was Audrienn. I don't know whether you
21 interviewed or talked to her or not. But she was sitting in the
22 right part of the ship, somewhere by the window like here or
23 there. I think in the number 3 by the window. And I could see
24 her face, because she turned back and did something like that, and
25 I could see the smoke coming from that direction. So, I'm sure

1 that it was some light gray or white, whitish, so it was not dark
2 at all.

3 And then yes, so, yeah, and then everybody was just
4 astonished what happened. And yes, and the captain shouted like
5 stop, stop, stop. And then yes, because the young captain was
6 driving the boat at that time, and the older one was talking to
7 us, and the old one shouted stop, stop, stop. And he looked a bit
8 frightened, and I felt it like a panic, but Barbara was next to me
9 and told okay, this is just the part of the show, so don't be
10 worried about that. You know, and well, I can't swim, so that's
11 why I suddenly felt something bad, you know. And because Barbara
12 seemed to be so calm, that's why I thought okay, I just overheard
13 things, and I shouldn't. So, I started to take photos around, and
14 I took photos of the bridge and all over and of the historic ship
15 as well.

16 And I think I remember that the barge was coming from
17 that direction, yeah. And yeah, so the ship anchored, and we were
18 swirling around. So, I was a bit glad, because this way I could
19 take a lot of photos from all kinds of directions. And yeah,
20 everyone was talking, and suddenly we turned over, turned back and
21 could see that the barge was coming. It was -- wow, it was huge,
22 and it was quite frightening. But I don't know why we didn't
23 realize this danger. And I think that was because the captain
24 didn't seem to pay attention or didn't seem to be eager to warn us
25 that something wrong was happening.

1 So, that's why I was just sitting there, and, you know,
2 I did stupid things. I mean, I had my camera, and I wanted to put
3 it into my handbag. But, of course, I know that I should have
4 gone and take a life jacket, but I didn't feel the danger at that
5 time. And I could see suddenly that everybody was standing,
6 standing up and going to the life vests and trying to wear them.
7 But because I was sitting by the window, it was, you know, hard to
8 get out of that place and to go to the life vests. And Barbara
9 stood up and went there. And I was just trying to get there too.
10 And then I turned back again, but the only thing I could see was
11 something huge, well, not above me, but very close. And I asked
12 them to -- I wanted to say please give me one, but as far as I
13 know, the only part of the sentence I could say was give me, and
14 one was under water.

15 So, I just went under water. And yeah, when I went
16 under water, I could remember that there was a man in front of me
17 by the window, and he was -- he was in front of me in the water
18 too, and we were just doing movements everywhere with my legs and
19 with my arms and tried to just stay alive. But I didn't keep my
20 breath, and that's why I got down quite a lot of water. And I was
21 in panic, and then I tried to get rid of all the things in my
22 hands. And, you know, because I can't swim, that was -- that was
23 really difficult.

24 Yes, and then suddenly, so I felt as if something
25 stopped me down. And then suddenly, I was looking upward, and I

1 could see light and see things in the water. It was very dirty,
2 and there were things here and there. And all of a sudden, I was
3 out of water. I was pushed upward. I was -- I mean, I got to the
4 surface with my head, and I tried to breathe. And but then I had
5 the feeling that something would suck me down again, and that's
6 why I started to shout help me, I can't swim.

7 And I saw one of our students, and although she looked
8 frightened, she told me not to be afraid, because she can give me
9 a life vest. But, you know, for a person who can't swim, two
10 meters is like, I don't know, ten miles in the water. So, it was
11 very, very far away for me, and I wanted to explain to her that
12 I'm not -- so, I am worried. I am worried, because you are so far
13 maybe from me. And then I started to shout help me, help me. And
14 then I don't know how or somehow it happened, but Jackie suddenly
15 was there, Jackie Kennedy, and life belts were all over around us
16 in the water, and she grabbed one and pushed it towards me. And
17 then I felt that I'm numb, so I couldn't move, and I was shaking.
18 So, she swam to me and helped me to put it on my neck. And yes,
19 and then Barb Anderson also swam to me, and they tried to calm me
20 down. And yeah, and they followed me until I got to the, what is
21 it, boat which came to rescue us.

22 Q. Do you remember what the boat looked like that rescued
23 you? Do you remember a color or if there were uniforms they were
24 wearing?

25 A. Yeah, some yellow color. The back of the boat was

1 like -- okay, so they could switch the direction of the back of
2 the ship like this, because the last person they rescued was the
3 fat man who was sitting in front of me. And when he got there,
4 you know, they wanted to lift it, and it was quite dangerous for
5 the guy, because he was lying there. But they lifted very little.
6 I don't know. I don't know why.

7 Q. I remember somebody talking about that yesterday, but I
8 didn't know if you knew what boat that was, but okay.

9 A. Okay, so you could change the direction of the back of
10 the ship. So, when they came for us, it was lowered down like
11 this. And then when we started to swim away, it was like this.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I can't explain it another way. I'm sorry.

14 Q. So, the back of the boat --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Maybe the boat or something, like
16 the marine police.

17 BY MR. LARUE:

18 Q. Okay, who else got pulled out on the same boat as you?

19 A. Excuse me?

20 Q. Who else was pulled out by the same boat? You said that
21 the larger man?

22 A. Yeah, the larger man last, and then it was Jackie
23 Kennedy, Barb Anderson and her husband or whoever, and I think
24 there were two, perhaps I'm not sure, but perhaps two other guys.
25 I don't know them, because they weren't with us.

1 Q. Okay, so from your group, it was Jackie Kennedy --

2 A. Barbara Anderson, her husband or friend, and me.

3 Q. Okay, was that Paul? Paul is the one that --

4 A. Yeah, okay.

5 Q. Great, all right. And so then they took you to shore?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. All right, did you see the captain on the radio? Do you
8 remember?

9 A. Yeah, I could see his face. I couldn't hear anything,
10 but I could see this movement, you know, and that he was talking
11 to someone, but I couldn't hear anything. I didn't pay attention,
12 because, I mean, of what he said, because I was, you know,
13 occupied by taking photos.

14 Q. Did you hear any sound signals, a horn, anything like
15 that?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Let's see. So, you didn't actually -- you weren't able
18 to grab a life jacket. One was given to you once you came up in
19 the water?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Did you -- I see the arm band, so did you end up going
22 to the hospital?

23 A. This? Yeah, yeah, I was taken to the hospital, because
24 I had a splitting headache as soon as I got the surface. And at
25 that time, I didn't feel anything, I mean, if I touched my head.

1 And in the hospital I was examined, but they found nothing.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. But until or from that time, I've had a splitting
4 headache, but now I can feel something there, but they said
5 nothing serious.

6 Q. Do you remember what the name of the hospital was?

7 A. Yeah, Jefferson.

8 Q. You went to Jefferson?

9 A. Yeah, I think it was only me was taken to that hospital
10 from the Hungarian group, because Barb Anderson went with three
11 kids who were taken to hospital, three Hungarian kids who were
12 taken to the hospital, but no one was there, I mean in the
13 Jefferson except me.

14 Q. Okay, great. Could you see anybody on the tug or on the
15 barge? Do you remember?

16 A. No.

17 Q. How long do you think it was from the time you were
18 anchored until the collision, until they hit you?

19 A. Oh, it could have been no more than ten minutes.

20 Q. Okay, did you -- does your camera -- did you lose your
21 camera?

22 A. Yeah, yeah, so I was trying to put it into my handbag,
23 but I guess I couldn't, because then we were hit.

24 Q. And you said as you were taking pictures, you do
25 remember seeing the barge, but when it was further away?

1 A. Yeah, yeah.

2 Q. Okay, how far away do you think it was when you first
3 saw it?

4 A. It was -- maybe I'm not sure, but I could see it in the
5 line of the historic ship.

6 Q. So, it was up near the historic, like the navy ship or
7 something up there?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are you talking about the warship
9 or the --

10 MS. MERETICZKI: Yeah, the warship, I'm thinking like
11 the warship.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, was it the one with the
13 masts, the sail ship?

14 MS. MERETICZKI: No, no, the warship, the warship.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There was a warship on the
16 Pennsylvania side at that time, not just the one over in Jersey.

17 BY MR. LARUE:

18 Q. Yeah, there was the big warship, the gray one, and then
19 there were the little black ones. It was far enough away that you
20 didn't think anything of it, right?

21 A. No, no, no. It was like something like gold on it.

22 Q. And then the next time you saw the barge was right
23 before it hit you?

24 A. Yes, because then we were talking, and we had a good
25 time, so to speak. And then suddenly, I turned, and I could

1 realize that okay, it's there, but how. And it was moving to our
2 direction, so I didn't know why we didn't realize it earlier that
3 it will hit us.

4 Q. Were you the first one that saw it out of the group?

5 A. Well, I'm not sure, because I didn't say oh, look at the
6 barge. Maybe the others have seen it, but no one told it loudly.

7 Q. What made you look back?

8 A. Because, you know, I was taking photos, and I wanted to
9 find a good site to take a photo of. So, that's why I was just
10 looking here and there, and then I could see that's the barge.

11 Q. Okay, do you think that the captain had seen the barge
12 at that point?

13 A. He must have seen it, because he was facing the
14 passengers or the visitors.

15 Q. And was he on the radio still? Do you remember if he
16 was making calls at that point?

17 A. Yeah, yeah, yes.

18 Q. Okay, I think that's all I've got, so I'll pass it on.

19 MR. LARUE: Greg?

20 BY MR. BLUMENTHAL:

21 Q. I guess I just have one question. During the safety
22 briefing, do you recall him talking or pointing to that you pull
23 the strap down to release the PFDs, and then you open it up, put
24 it on your head, unclip the D-ring, put it around your back,
25 refasten it, and then pull the T-strap to tighten it around your

1 waist? Does that sound familiar?

2 A. Well, only the -- I remember the beginning of this. I
3 mean, that as far as I remember, he put it on her head, yes, but I
4 don't remember the movement that he was, you know, that he
5 continued the instruction. Or maybe that he told something about
6 that, but I'm sure that he didn't demonstrate it. Because yes,
7 you know, if you were on an airplane, there is a video
8 demonstration there, and everybody is so bored, because you can
9 see it many times, as many times as you travel. But now, I would
10 have been curious how it should be used, because it is the first
11 time I am on that vehicle. So, it would have made sense, but I
12 don't remember that the whole procedure of putting on the safe
13 vest was demonstrated.

14 Q. Okay.

15 BY MR. LARUE:

16 Q. All right, is there anything else you can think of that
17 we didn't ask you that might be important?

18 A. No, I don't think so.

19 Q. All right, well, thank you very much for talking to us
20 today. And then you're okay with us recording this?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. All right, good.

23 (Whereupon, at 3:54 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 Timea Mereticzki

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