

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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Interview of: ALYSIA PETCHULAT

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

Monday
July 12, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,
at 10:19 a.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

LIAM LARUE, Accident Investigator
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Ride the Ducks

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:19 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. LARUE: All right. It is 10:19 on Monday, July
4 12th. This is Liam LaRue from NTSB and I'm here at Sector
5 Delaware Bay and I'm with the Survival Factors Group and we're
6 here to talk to Ms. Alysia Petchat [sic]. Did I pronounce that
7 right?

8 MS. PETCHULAT: Petchulat.

9 MR. LARUE: Petchulat. And if you don't mind, can you
10 spell your first and last name so we make sure we have it correct
11 for the record?

12 MS. PETCHULAT: Sure. It's A-l-y-s-i-a, and it's P-e-t-
13 c-h-u-l-a-t.

14 MR. LARUE: U-l-a-t. Okay. Great. And I'm going to
15 have everybody here introduce themselves for you.

16 MS. PETCHULAT: Sure.

17 CAPTAIN LAWRENCE: Captain John Lawrence from K-Sea
18 Transportation.

19 MR. FITZGIBBONS: John Fitzgibbons of Ride the Ducks.

20 LCDR Fine: Lieutenant Commander Matt Fine from the
21 Coast Guard.

INTERVIEW OF ALYSIA PETCHULAT

22 BY MR. LARUE:

23 Q. And Alysia, how old are you, please?

24 A. Thirty-one.
25

1 Q. Okay. And the first question is where were you sitting
2 on the boat?

3 A. My son wanted to sit right in the front seat, so we were
4 right behind the captain or driver.

5 Q. So you were in the front seat on the left side of the
6 boat?

7 A. Yes. Yes. I was sitting on the aisle and he was
8 sitting by the window.

9 Q. Great. All right. And what I'd like you to do now,
10 please, is to just tell us your story, what you saw, what you did,
11 you know, as best you can remember and then we'll follow up with
12 any questions that we might have.

13 A. Do you want me to start from the stalling of the boat?

14 Q. Actually, if you don't mind, tell us what you remember
15 about when you first got on the boat and, you know, the safety
16 briefing the captain gave and then you can just go from there.

17 A. Sure. Well, when approached the water we stopped and he
18 indicated that we had to pick up another crew member. And so we
19 stopped and did that and, you know, he went over the safety --
20 talked about the life jackets, said that, you know, the kids are
21 one side, those are for 90 pounds and under, the adults are on the
22 other side, that all you do is pull them down, you reach around
23 your back and strap them. I have to say -- because I know those
24 are Coast Guard approved and I know there's a Coast Guard member
25 there -- those are the hardest things to get on in the entire

1 world. I would like to note that. But that's besides the point.

2 So, he did tell us how to use those and then he had,
3 which I later found out the deckhand's name was Kyle, and he had
4 Kyle drive while he sat in the seat right next to Kyle and spoke
5 with us about what we were seeing on the river. I would say,
6 like, I'm an awful judge of time. I don't know exactly how long
7 we were on the river before we finally stopped, maybe 10 minutes
8 or so. And it was funny because I started smelling, like, smoke
9 and we were sitting right behind it so at first I thought maybe it
10 was just, like, exhaust or something. I didn't know. But it was
11 to the point where I was, like, covering my face and I'm like, oh,
12 my gosh that's awful, and then the smoke just started billowing
13 out. So, immediately Gary had Kyle get out of the driver's seat
14 and he went and sat in the driver's seat and he immediately shut
15 everything off.

16 Kyle, at that time, was told to go to the front of the
17 boat. I guess he was dropping anchor. I'm not sure. But he was
18 kind of just investigating what was going on as far as where the
19 smoke was coming from. The captain said, you know, everybody just
20 be calm; we're going to figure it out. But he did use -- I think
21 he used, like, a walkie-talkie to call the Ride the Ducks to say,
22 hey, we have a possible fire situation, you know, we need
23 assistance. And so they had reported back saying that they were
24 going to send somebody to come tow us.

25 About that time there was another DUKW boat that went by

1 us but they kept going. But they were full of people, so
2 (indiscernible) like, "Are we going to have to try to squeeze on
3 there?" But he said, no, somebody was going to come tow us.

4 So he was -- at that moment in time my son and I were
5 standing up because where we were sitting there was a little,
6 like, door -- I don't know it's for mechanical reasons -- but
7 smoke was just pouring out of it. And he said, "Can you have a
8 seat?" And I explained to him that the smoke was all over and I
9 didn't want to breathe that in. So he duct taped it, which then
10 turned out to be a great joke, you know, duct taping the DUKW
11 boat. But he duct taped it and asked us to sit back down, and I
12 think he really tried his best to maintain order.

13 He wanted everybody to sit. He continued to talk with
14 us. We were sitting there for a little bit longer and as he was
15 talking I saw him make funny face. And immediately he did pick up
16 the radio. You know, I have read the articles. I don't know if
17 he was on 13 or 16 or what he was on, but he did tell the barge or
18 tugboat, "Barge in Penn's Landing. Reroute. Break. We are
19 anchor down." And there was no response and so then he did it
20 again. No response. I would say he probably did it four times
21 and at that moment I heard him say, "This isn't good."

22 So I immediately stood up, grabbed a life jacket down
23 for my son, threw it on him. I had a hard time getting it hooked,
24 so I just said you need to hang on to this and I, then, at that
25 point in time turned to get one for myself. Everybody at that

1 point also realized what was going on and they were rushing to the
2 front of the boat, and so I couldn't get a life jacket for myself.
3 And so I just grabbed him and said, you know, "Hang on we're going
4 to -- take a deep breath." As soon as the boat hit us, it, like,
5 bumped us from behind and then it felt like it kind of rolled us
6 and so we were underwater.

7 I lost my son at that moment in time under the water and
8 I remember just feeling around trying to find the window. You
9 know, luckily those windows are really big so you -- it was easy
10 to find one and I pushed my way through and just kept swimming and
11 swimming and swimming -- keep swimming. And so I got to the top
12 of the water and I saw the co-worker that I was there with and his
13 daughter and I saw the captain, and then people just were popping
14 up everywhere, but I didn't see my son right away. And so I felt
15 like he might have been underneath me or -- I'm not sure. So I
16 was reaching to try to grab him and try and move over because I
17 felt like he was under me, and at that moment in time he did pop
18 up out of the water. I guess the life jacket pulled him up.

19 I did not have a life jacket on. One of the -- things
20 were popping out of the water. I mean, there was a cooler that
21 popped up, a seat cushion that popped up and the captain, Gary,
22 handed me one of the seat cushions and said, "Here, take this."
23 And so once I was somewhat stable I told my son that we're going
24 to have to swim. You know, "Are you ready to do that?" And he
25 said yes. And so I started to swim to shore and I kept losing him

1 because it's really hard to swim, obviously, a current with a life
2 jacket on. And so, luckily, I still had my purse on my shoulder.
3 I don't know how that's possible but I did, and so I took my purse
4 and threw it back to him and then pulled him up to me and then
5 tried to swim as best as I could hanging on to him and still
6 hanging on to the life jacket and eventually -- or not the life
7 jacket, the seat cushion. Eventually, I just ditched the seat
8 cushion because I wasn't getting anywhere, had him hang on to my
9 purse and kind of back swum -- swam, sorry, until we could get to
10 the edge, and at that -- where we were it was like a huge gap. It
11 was all wooden with big wooden, you know, pillars on it.

12 I don't know if that's the landing or what that is but I
13 would say, you know, 20, 30 feet up there was two gentlemen there
14 who threw down fire hoses. So I put my son on one and they pulled
15 him up and then they pulled me up. So that is the story of
16 getting out of the water. Would you like me to continue or is
17 that good?

18 Q. Go -- you can go ahead and continue and, you know,
19 specifically, do you have any injuries? Did you go to the
20 hospital or anything like that?

21 A. Well, we walked over to where other people were being
22 pulled out of the water. I found my co-worker and his daughter,
23 you know, looked over my son. He had a bruise on his face. He
24 had a bump on his head. I guess whenever he was -- when the life
25 jacket was pulling him out of the water he must have bumped his

1 head on the door, the window. And myself, you know, just had
2 bruises. I didn't require a hospital, but the co-worker that I
3 was with his daughter did, he did help her -- he went on the --
4 she did go into shock, so she was taken to the hospital. And I
5 just figured, well, you know, while they're going, so we could
6 stay together, I went ahead and had my son looked at also just
7 because I was worried about concussion or, you know, something
8 like that. So -- but he was released. They gave him some pain
9 medication for his head and said to watch him for signs of, you
10 know, dizziness or nausea or any of that. So --

11 Q. Great. What I'm going to do now is I'm just kind of
12 walk back through and ask a couple questions that I --

13 A. Sure.

14 Q. -- that I have. When you -- you were talking about the
15 smoke, what color was the smoke that you saw?

16 A. It was white.

17 Q. White.

18 A. It wasn't like black or anything.

19 Q. All right. And you said --

20 A. White.

21 Q. -- and you said it was billowing out. Where were you
22 seeing it billow out of?

23 A. It was coming from everywhere in the front at that
24 moment in time. It was coming from the front of the boat but
25 then, as I said, and if you've got somebody from the Ducks they

1 might know where I'm talking about, but where my son was seated
2 was a little metal door and I don't know if that's to, you know,
3 help with maintaining the boat or what, but the smoke was coming
4 out of there, like, right on us, and then it was also coming --
5 there were spots in the front of the boat where -- it's like
6 everywhere there was a metal seam that wasn't sealed properly --
7 obviously, it's flat metal -- that's where it was coming out of.

8 Q. And that vent, you said it was on the window side. Was
9 it on the side of it, was it on the deck, was it --

10 A. It was right in front of him.

11 Q. In front --

12 A. Right in front of us.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. It's like you had -- there was, you know, the window and
15 then right in front of that. I mean, I had the back view of the
16 -- the back of the captain's seat and the entire boat. So it was
17 -- sorry, I didn't explain that fantastically.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. He was right there and then right next to him was, like,
20 a metal, you know, wall and there was a little hole there.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. That he had duct taped.

23 Q. The radio calls that you heard, you said you heard
24 three, maybe four radio calls.

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Could you just tell me, again, exactly what you heard?

2 A. What I heard?

3 Q. Yeah, what -- try and remember exactly what words he
4 said.

5 A. He said, from what I remember was, "Barge by Penn's
6 Landing." Basically, that they needed to brake or reroute because
7 we were anchor down, and that is what I remember him saying, that
8 they needed to move because we couldn't.

9 Q. Okay. All right. And it was the same thing in all the
10 times he said it?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Do you remember if he changed the channel on the radio
13 or adjusted the radio at all?

14 A. It looked like he did after, like, the second or third
15 call, that he was kind of messing with the, I guess, the channels
16 to get it. But I wish that I would have looked up and saw whether
17 he was on 13 or 16, you know, because I know that's what they're
18 supposed to be on, but, I mean, I did hear him very clearly, he
19 did say, you know, "We're stopped. You need to move." So I, you
20 know, I don't know.

21 Q. And did you --

22 A. I kept thinking they're not responding. I
23 (indiscernible) like, hanging out the window, like, seeing if I
24 could see a person to see if (indiscernible) to try to stop, but
25 at that moment in time I knew that it was, it was too late, like,

1 that it was just going to happen and from then on out it was just
2 a matter of trying to ensure that my son was safe.

3 Q. Did you hear any response at all?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Did you hear --

6 A. There wasn't even static.

7 Q. There wasn't even static?

8 A. That I heard.

9 Q. Okay. And when you looked back towards the barge could
10 you see the tug?

11 A. I don't recall. I don't recall that. I apologize. I
12 did, like, kind of hang out the window, as I said, to see if I
13 could see somebody, but by that moment it was really close and I'm
14 sure if you saw the pictures, I mean, that's the David and Goliath
15 on the river. I mean that was a big old boat. So all I could --
16 pretty much was that time was just the front of the boat coming
17 towards us.

18 Q. Right. Okay. So you got a life jacket down. Did you
19 have any issues grabbing a life jacket?

20 A. No, it was easy to grab. The only problem is the
21 reaching around to clasp it in the front, you know, when you've
22 got a child, you know, is, you know, a little interested about
23 what's going on. A front clasp would have been much easier
24 option. However, I did manage to get his on him, you know. But
25 the system of just pulling that switch and them coming down was

1 relatively easy, but just actually securing it on him was the hard
2 part.

3 Q. Right. And then you said you lost -- you know, you lost
4 your grip on him while he was under water, but that you -- so you
5 specifically remember swimming to get out of the boat. Did you
6 swim up? Did you swim down?

7 A. You know, I believe it was up, but you know by that
8 moment in time I had no clue where I was at. You know, I was
9 trying to recall the facts the next day with my co-worker and I
10 was like it was almost like I was going through two windows
11 because I could feel metal everywhere. I'm not -- like that
12 moment in time, I mean, spatially, I really had no idea whether I
13 was going down or up. I swam for a ways. I do remember going
14 through one window. I remember feeling around but it was almost
15 like maybe I did go through two because I felt like I was
16 underwater for a long time. But, you know, when you're in the
17 midst of a crisis like that time is something that you don't
18 really monitor.

19 Q. Um-hum. Were, you know, were you getting bumped by
20 other people while you were underwater or anything like that?

21 A. Yeah, you could feel other people under the water and,
22 as I said, once I popped up I could feel what did turn out to be
23 my son underneath me.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. There were people under the water -- yeah, I mean, just

1 to see people just popping up out of the water and, you know,
2 hoping to see the person that, you know, you want to see the most,
3 you know, your child or whoever you happened to come there with.
4 Probably the longest 5, 10, 15, 20 seconds of a person's life,
5 so --

6 Q. Did your son tell you what he remembered about how he
7 got out of the boat?

8 A. He basically told me that the life jacket just pulled
9 him up and that he could feel me reaching down and trying to grab
10 him.

11 Q. Um-hum.

12 A. But that was it, that he really explained.

13 Q. So the life jacket just pulled him right up?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Where did you pop up in relation to the DUKW boat?

16 A. Well, by that moment in -- oh, the tugboat. I was going
17 to say the DUKW boat, I think it was gone, so I don't know.

18 Q. No, the DUKW boat isn't what I --

19 A. You know, that was -- as I said, when I popped up that
20 really wasn't my first concern. I recall seeing -- you know,
21 looking for my son and then after he popped up, I guess the
22 tugboat had made a turn and they were on the other side of the
23 river. They had turned but, you know, it was a wide turn. They
24 were almost on the other side, you know, the Jersey side, I guess,
25 is what they appeared to be.

1 Q. What about the DUKW boat?

2 A. Well, the DUKW was gone. I mean, it was -- it was gone.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. You said you and your son swam over to the shore and two
6 men threw you down fire hoses. Were they firemen or were they
7 just people that happened to be on Penn's Landing?

8 A. They were just people that happened to be on Penn's
9 Landing.

10 Q. Okay. And what hospital did you and your son go to?

11 A. It begins with an H.

12 Q. Hahnemann or --

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Okay. And did you get checked out as well or just your
15 son?

16 A. He did because -- you know, I mean, I had a headache
17 and, you know, a couple things like that and they ended up giving
18 me ibuprophen, but other than that I mean, I didn't have any -- I
19 mean, I was bruising, like, on my legs and stuff but I didn't have
20 any cuts and scrapes or bumps, so --

21 Q. Okay. Did anyone give any instructions prior to the
22 barge hitting about what you should do as far as, you know,
23 grabbing life jackets, jump off the boat, anything like that?

24 A. No, not that I remember. As I said, once I heard him
25 say, "This isn't good," I was singly focused on one thing and that

1 was getting the jacket on him and, in turn, me. I did not hear
2 anyone say jump and I did not hear anyone say life jacket, because
3 I was like -- he didn't say put life jackets on, but I'll be
4 damned, I'm putting one on my son, you know. So, I did
5 immediately put one on him.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. And I don't know how many other people had life jackets
8 on. Of the four of us that were together in our group only one
9 did and that was my son.

10 Q. Right. Can you swim?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. And how about your son?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. I think that's all the questions that I've got
15 for right now. I mean, I'll see if anybody else has any.

16 A. Sure.

17 BY MR. LAWRENCE:

18 Q. This is John Lawrence. Just wondering how your son's
19 been doing?

20 A. How is my son doing?

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. You know, he's fine. He was a little shaken up that
23 night, you know, just with everything that happened. He's just
24 glad to be home. You know, he's 11. He's been absorbing himself
25 in video game therapy since he got home.

1 Q. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. I don't have any other questions.

2 LCDR FINE: I don't have anything.

3 BY MR. LARUE:

4 Q. Great. This is Liam from NTSB. You know, the last
5 question is just -- is there anything else you can think of that
6 we didn't ask you that might be important for us to know?

7 A. You know, as far as who's at fault, I don't know. I do
8 feel like that the captain of the boat did, for the most part, did
9 try to contact them, where the power -- the radio wasn't working.
10 As I said, I didn't hear static or what. And I feel like he did
11 try to do what he needed to do, but also, on the same note, we
12 also didn't have life jackets on, which is another report that I
13 heard from one of the newspapers, so -- but that's it.

14 Q. All right. Well, we really appreciate you taking time
15 to talk to us this morning. I'm going to turn off the recording
16 here in a second. I just wanted to confirm that you knew we were
17 recording this and that you're okay with that.

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 MR. LARUE: Okay. I'm going to shut it off.

20 (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 Alysia Petchulat

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-10-MM-025

PLACE: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE: July 12, 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.

Beverly A. Lano
Transcriber