

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: VIRAG BELLA

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

Friday  
July 9, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,  
at 1:09 p.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE  
Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

LIAM LARUE, Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board  
Office of Marine Safety  
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20594  
(202) 314-6000

MATT FINE, Lieutenant Commander  
United States Coast Guard

JOHN LAWRENCE, Vice President  
Health, Safety, Quality and Environment  
K-Sea Transportation

GREG BLUMENTHAL, General Manager  
Ride the Ducks Philadelphia

SHANE LAWS, Chief Warrant Officer  
United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:09 p.m.)

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2  
3 MR. LARUE: Okay, good afternoon. It is about 1:09 in  
4 the afternoon on Friday, July 9th. This is Liam LaRue from NTSB.  
5 And we're going to be talking to Virag Bella.

## INTERVIEW OF VIRAG BELLA

6  
7 (Whereupon, Ms. Bella answered assisted by an  
8 interpreter.)

9 BY MR. LARUE:

10 Q. And, Virag, how old are you?

11 A. Eighteen.

12 Q. Eighteen, okay. And just like with your friend, if you  
13 could just walk us through the whole event and tell us anything  
14 that you can remember that might be useful.

15 A. When we went on board, we took seat, and the captain  
16 went along, and he introduced himself and said some fun thing.  
17 And then he demonstrated his life jacket, and he showed how to use  
18 it, but it wasn't correct because -- it just was my mind, I can  
19 remember, that I didn't understood why he didn't have it on to  
20 show us how to use it. Because he just had it in her [sic] hand  
21 and said that here you have to put your head, and this is the  
22 (indiscernible) that you have to -- I don't know what to do with  
23 that. But he didn't get -- he didn't do it himself. And then we  
24 were on dry land, and everything went all right.

25 And then we went on the -- into the river, and he asked

1 whether we want to have a big slash or -- splash or a small  
2 splash, and we had a big splash. But it was all right. And then  
3 we had a -- we made the circle, and then we were turning.  
4 Immediately, we smelled the smoke and saw the smoke. It was -- I  
5 think it was white or gray, white and gray, a big smoke. And the  
6 captain was -- the older captain who drove on the --

7 (Through interpreter) -- on the dry land, who drove us.

8 (In English) Yes. He was sitting -- he was facing us,  
9 and he was just telling stories. And the other captain, the  
10 young, he was driving.

11 And when they saw the smoke, they jumped up and stopped  
12 the engine. And then the smoke wasn't there anymore after the  
13 engine was stopped. And yeah, the young captain went outside the  
14 boat, and I don't know what he did. I saw only his legs, I think.  
15 And some of us said, oh, it's part of the show, because they were  
16 both all funny and so, we didn't realize that it's serious. But  
17 then we did, because there was another DUKW boat, and as far as I  
18 can remember, but I'm not sure, I think they didn't pass us to  
19 that, near us.

20 (Through interpreter) They weren't near.

21 (In English) But I think they --

22 (Through interpreter) They came a little bit closer when  
23 they saw that something was not right.

24 (In English) Perhaps the captain shouted something. I  
25 don't know. I don't know.

1           And I think at least five minutes passed then when we  
2 saw the barge. But it was -- everything, everybody was pointing  
3 to the barge, and that's why we turned, and we saw it. And I  
4 think we had a minute until we were -- we collapsed, collided.  
5 And in the first 10 seconds, everybody was shocked, and then I  
6 heard somebody crying that we actually have to use the life  
7 jackets. And everybody was standing up and jumping up. And I'm  
8 not quite sure, but I think that it was either -- I don't know his  
9 last name. He was with our group. He's in a -- she's an  
10 American.

11           INTERPRETER: Barbara?

12           BY MR. LARUE:

13           Q. Hohner?

14           A. (In English) No. No, she's the Hungarian teacher,  
15 Anderson, Barbara Anderson. I think she was who had us to grab  
16 the life jacket, because there was a belt. The life jackets were  
17 on --

18           (Through interpreter) Above their heads.

19           (In English) And there was a belt holding it, and she  
20 took the belt so that we could grab them. I was close to these  
21 jackets, so I could grab one, and I just put it in my -- I put my  
22 head on it, but I couldn't fasten it, fasten the badge, because I  
23 didn't know how. And then in two minutes -- two seconds after --  
24 in two seconds after I have put the life jacket on me, we  
25 collided, and I don't know how many minutes I spend under surface,

1 but somehow I came out.

2 (Through interpreter) She got up above the water.

3 (In English) And I saw another life jacket floating next  
4 to me, and I grabbed that too. And my bag was floating right next  
5 to me, and I grabbed that as well. And should I -- so, I saw my  
6 teacher Timea Mereticzki who was -- she was just --

7 (Through interpreter) -- came up from under the water  
8 onto the surface.

9 (In English) And she reached -- so, she --

10 (Through interpreter) She reached towards her and told  
11 her that she couldn't swim.

12 (In English) And then I pushed one of the life jackets  
13 to her, towards her, but then Jackie Kennedy was right next to her  
14 and grabbed her, and so she was already safe. And I was with that  
15 group, with Jackie's group, for about three minutes, and then I  
16 saw that some of us are swimming to the bank. And then I started  
17 to swim as well with Laura Kennedy and her friend. And then we  
18 managed to get on our --

19 (Through interpreter) And they got out onto the shore.

20 Q. How did you get out?

21 A. There was a --

22 (Through interpreter) It was like a floating dock.

23 (In English) And there were some men who --

24 (Through interpreter) -- put a rope down, a thick rope.

25 (In English) And we grabbed them, and they had us --

1           (Through interpreter) They pulled them out.

2           Q.    Okay.  Yeah, from where you were sitting, did you see  
3 the captain talking on the radio?

4           A.    (In English) Yes, I saw, but I don't know what -- but we  
5 cannot move, and so -- but I saw he was talking on the radio.

6           Q.    Could you hear anything?

7           A.    Something I could hear, but I didn't pay so much  
8 attention, because we were just -- we were a little bit worried by  
9 the --

10          Q.    Did you hear any other sounds from the -- from your  
11 boat?  Did they sound a horn or a bell or anything?

12          A.    (No audible response.)

13          Q.    No?  Did you hear anything from the tug?

14          A.    No.

15          Q.    Okay.  And so, we already went through the seating last  
16 time, so we don't need to go through that again.  The only  
17 question I was going to ask you, you said that Barbara Anderson  
18 was the one that undid the snaps for all the life jackets?

19          A.    As far as I can remember, yes, but I am not certain.  I  
20 think.

21          Q.    Was she sitting near you?

22          A.    No, she was sitting -- I think, she was sitting in the  
23 front of the boat, but she came.

24          Q.    Okay, came back.

25          A.    And there was Jackie Kennedy as well who helped.



1 Q. Okay. When she undid the snaps, did the life jackets  
2 fall down, or they were still up there?

3 A. No, still up.

4 Q. So, did you have to -- you had to pull it down?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Were there no problems pulling it down?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. So, you got the life jacket over your head but  
9 not strapped, but not secured?

10 A. Yes. So, I had it on my head, around my neck, but when  
11 I came on surface, and I tried to -- not to hold it, it went.

12 (Through interpreter) She had to hold it, because if she  
13 let go, it would float off of her. She couldn't strap the belt.

14 Q. Okay. Were you hurt at all? Any injuries?

15 A. No, some black --

16 (Through interpreter) Black and blue.

17 Q. Bumps and bruises?

18 INTERPRETER: Bumps, bruises.

19 BY MR. LARUE:

20 Q. Did you go to a hospital?

21 A. (In English) No.

22 Q. And you can swim?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. And where -- you know, you already told us that  
25 you thought that the other two missing could swim, so we won't

1 go -- I think you answered most of the questions just in what you  
2 said. So, thank you very much.

3 MR. LARUE: Shane, do you have any questions?

4 BY CWO LAWS:

5 Q. Shane Laws with the Coast Guard. Did the other DUKW  
6 boat that came by, did it have passengers in it also?

7 A. Yes, I think it had.

8 Q. It had passengers, okay.

9 A. The other DUKW boat, yes, yes.

10 Q. Thank you very much.

11 BY MR. LARUE:

12 Q. Okay. We're going to finish up. Is there anything else  
13 you can think of?

14 A. No.

15 Q. No? Okay. And it's okay that we recorded?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. All right. Thank you very much.

18 (Whereupon, at 1:23 p.m., 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 Virag Bella

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.

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Debbie Mizell  
Transcriber