

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: EMILY BILLINGS

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

Friday
July 9, 2010

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice,
at 4:20 p.m.

BEFORE: LIAM LARUE
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

LIAM LARUE, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Marine Safety
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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

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United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:20 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. LARUE: All right. It is 4:20 in the afternoon,
4 Friday, July 9th. This is Liam LaRue from NTSB. And we are
5 talking to Emily Billings.

INTERVIEW OF EMILY BILLINGS

BY MR. LARUE:

8 Q. Emily, how old are you?

9 A. Sixteen.

10 Q. Sixteen. Okay. If you don't mind, just walk us back
11 through the whole event.

12 A. Okay. So, we were on the boat, and we were probably out
13 in the water for maybe 15 minutes just floating around. And me
14 and Laura were sitting next to each other, and we looked over to
15 each other because we both smelled something; like, something
16 doesn't smell right. And when I looked back, I see this like huge
17 black cloud of smoke coming from the engine. And that's when the
18 captain started freaking out, and he was yelling, "Kyle, Kyle, get
19 out of the way. Get out of the way. Turn it off."

20 And so, they turned off the boat and he anchored it.
21 And that's when Kyle went to the front of the boat. I don't
22 remember the boat turning around. I don't know if that happened
23 or not before we anchored. That's what everyone else says. So,
24 we were sitting there for a couple of minutes, and I was actually,
25 like, texting my sister, kind of joking around about the fact that

1 I was like stuck in the middle of the Delaware River.

2 And then probably within like three minutes, people were
3 looking behind us saying there's a barge. And every time like I
4 turned around, the barge was like significantly closer. And then
5 that's when people started standing up and were saying, "The barge
6 is going to hit us. The barge is going to hit us." And I just
7 didn't believe it was going to hit us. And the captain was
8 yelling into the, I guess, the radio yelling to the barge like,
9 "We're here. Don't hit us. See us," like, something.

10 And that's when the lady who was with us, Barb Anderson,
11 yelled, "Buddy, we have to get off this boat. He's going to hit
12 us." And she started pulling life jackets down. And that's right
13 when the barge hit, and I turned around and I saw people, like,
14 fall. We all kind of fell forward. And then I realized, like, we
15 started sinking. So, I grabbed for a life jacket and I was able
16 to pull the yellow straps, but I couldn't get one on.

17 And then I was under the water, and I was probably only
18 under for about 30 seconds. I got up, and the first thing I saw
19 was all this like brown, just like water. And I saw a bunch of
20 people like swimming up, and I saw Laura like in the center of the
21 people kind of, and she was stuck, and she was still under water.
22 I just saw the top of her head, and I tried to, like, pull at her
23 and get her up, and I couldn't. But she -- people cleared, and
24 she eventually got up. And I threw my life jacket, just a random
25 life jacket at her, and I grabbed one.

1 And I looked around, and I saw Jackie, who was our youth
2 leader, calling for Laura, and I told her that Laura was okay.
3 And then I just kind of looked at everyone's faces, and there was
4 just all this confusion, and people started like disbursing and
5 swimming back.

6 And I didn't really move, and that's when the current
7 starting taking me and Amanda. So, we began to swim sideways
8 towards the docks. And that's when we saw a woman who was lying
9 on her back with her daughter, who couldn't swim, on her, like,
10 stomach. And they were trying to swim against the current into
11 the shore, and I just, like, knew that they wouldn't be able to.

12 So, I grabbed the little girl's hand, and I grabbed
13 Amanda's hand, and we made kind of like a chain to the piling that
14 the fire officer told us to swim to, because he didn't want us to
15 keep swimming into shore, because that was closest thing. So, we
16 grabbed onto that, and we put the little girl up on top of the
17 piling and gave them our life jackets. And that's when I saw the
18 police officer jump in, and he came over to us. And then soon
19 after, one of the rescue boats came over, and he swam the little
20 girl to the rescue boat. And then the mom was like freaking out a
21 lot, and she was going to go on the boat with her daughter, but
22 then the Navy SEAL boat came and we all got on that boat. And we
23 were right away, like, brought to shore. And like Amanda said, I
24 guess, like, we waited for like five minutes for the little girl
25 to come, and we were escorted right to the museum.

1 Q. The Navy SEAL boat that you got on, was it the smaller
2 boat or was it the big boat?

3 A. It was like a small black --

4 Q. Like rubber sides?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. It was a black one, yeah.

8 Q. So, you were -- what seat were you in? This one right
9 here? Okay, you were --

10 A. I was in the aisle seat.

11 Q. Aisle seat.

12 A. At 8.

13 Q. Seat 8?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay. So, from where you were sitting, you had a little
16 bit better opportunity to hear what was going on up in the front?

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. And so, do you remember exactly what the captain was
19 saying on the radio, even from early on once you guys first
20 stopped?

21 A. When he first stopped and he put out like a distress
22 signal, he was like -- I think he said something like, DUKW number
23 34 is broken down, and he told us [sic], I guess, location, and
24 said, like, we need someone to come get us. And then when he was
25 trying to contact the barge, he was just kind of screaming like

1 something like, "Barge, DUKW number 34 here. You're going to hit
2 us. Stop, stop," something along those lines.

3 Q. How many times did he call the barge?

4 A. Just the once right before it hit.

5 Q. Okay. And then you could hear all the radio
6 communications? So, he just had those two calls, the first one --

7 A. Those two calls, yeah.

8 BY MR. FINE:

9 Q. Matt Fine from the Coast Guard. Did you hear anything
10 back on the radio, or did you hear any other voices?

11 A. Uh-uh, nothing.

12 Q. Did you hear any static, like white noise?

13 A. Not at all.

14 Q. Nothing.

15 A. Nothing. So, the only voice -- the captain's voice was
16 all you heard?

17 A. Um-hum.

18 BY MR. LARUE:

19 Q. Okay, how far away was the barge when he made the call
20 that you heard?

21 A. He was pretty close. The barge was pretty close at that
22 point.

23 Q. Okay. Did you hear any -- did he try to pull the horn,
24 do anything like that?

25 A. No, there was no horn.

1 Q. All right. So, you said you weren't able to grab a life
2 jacket before you got hit.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Just not enough time, or --

5 A. I was able to -- well, I didn't actually pull any life
6 jackets down until we were hit. But I wasn't able to get one on
7 because we went right under.

8 Q. Okay. Jumping back a little bit, could you describe the
9 brief that he gave you prior to getting underway in the boat,
10 about life jackets and stuff?

11 A. (indiscernible.) He said we do have -- he said we have
12 to go over safety procedures. We do have life jackets. He was
13 talking kind of, like, fast, but like, you know, like a regular
14 tour guide person, I guess, just like with purpose. And he said
15 something like you have to pull the yellow tabs down, and he
16 showed us how to put them on. It was almost a little bit of a
17 joking matter, but it wasn't -- you know, we were all listening.
18 And I think that how he did it was okay, you know --

19 Q. Did he show you how to hook up the jacket?

20 A. Yeah, he showed us how to hook it.

21 Q. Okay, great. Did you have any injuries? Were you hurt
22 at all?

23 A. No, not at all.

24 Q. So you didn't go to the hospital?

25 A. Uh-uh.

1 Q. All right. How long do you think it was from the time
2 you stopped until the barge hit?

3 A. Ten, 5 to 10 minutes.

4 Q. I think that's it. That's all the questions I've got.

5 MR. LARUE: Greg?

6 BY MR. BLUMENTHAL:

7 Q. When the -- forgive me if this was already asked. I'm
8 sorry. I don't mean to repeat anything. But while the captain
9 was on the boat, did he address you, the group, at all, saying,
10 you know, we're broken down; we're going to -- we're okay; we are
11 anchored; we're going to be towed? Or did he just constantly just
12 work on the microphone and sit in silence when he wasn't working
13 on the microphone? Did he talk to anybody? Do you think he
14 communicated anything?

15 A. No. He made his radio and distress call that we were
16 broken down, and there were people that had to stand up in the
17 front of the boat, like in the front seats, just because the smoke
18 was coming and they were close to the engine. But he didn't like
19 directly say to the whole group that, like, a boat was coming or
20 anything like that, not that I can recall.

21 Q. Okay. And then when he started doing the sort of -- the
22 Mayday calls to the barge, so following after that, that's when
23 you started to try to get your PFDs down, your --

24 A. After the?

25 Q. After he was radioing the boat, is that -- after

1 following that, is that when you started to try to pull the --

2 A. No, not until Barb Anderson said we have to get off.

3 And then right when the boat hit --

4 Q. Within seconds.

5 A. -- we were still getting them down.

6 Q. Okay. Okay, that's all.

7 A. Yup.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, nothing. That's good. Thank
9 you.

10 BY CWO LAWS:

11 Q. Shane Laws with the Coast Guard. What color did you say
12 the smoke was?

13 A. There was like a -- first, it was like a whitish gray,
14 and then it was like really black.

15 Q. Okay. And you mentioned that you turned around a few
16 times and saw the barge. And I'm wondering if at any time when
17 you looked back towards the barge, did you see any people on
18 either the barge or the towboat or inside the towboat?

19 A. Uh-uh. I didn't even see the towboat. All I saw was
20 like the wall of steel. There was another DUKW boat in the water
21 when we were hit. There was another DUKW boat. And it was --
22 there were a few guys. There wasn't any passengers. There were
23 just a few guys on it, but --

24 Q. Was there any communication between your boat and the
25 other DUKW boat when they came near?

1 A. No.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, no, it was four people when
3 we were broken down. We were saying, hey, we're broken down --

4 MS. BILLINGS: Right.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- blah, blah, blah, but that's
6 really it.

7 MS. BILLINGS: Yeah, I think the guy asked if we wanted
8 a tow, but they were like no, you just keep -- he told him to --
9 yeah, there wasn't like any specific communication that we were
10 really aware of.

11 BY CWO LAWS:

12 Q. Okay. So, there were two other DUKW boats that came by?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: There was one before that was --

14 MS. BILLINGS: There was one that was like on another
15 tour that we passed as -- like right before we broke down.

16 BY CWO LAWS:

17 Q. Before you broke down?

18 A. Yeah, and --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, it was during -- I think it
20 was while we were smoking that they passed, and they just said
21 just kept going.

22 MS. BILLINGS: It might have been while it was --
23 started to smoke.

24 BY CWO LAWS:

25 Q. And then there was a second one that came by that only

1 had a couple of people, probably employees of the company that ran
2 the boat?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. It wasn't full of passengers, in other words?

5 A. Right. Yeah.

6 Q. Okay. And that boat didn't converse with your boat at
7 all, as far as you know?

8 A. Not as far as we know, yes.

9 Q. Okay. And -- that's all I have.

10 BY MR. FINE:

11 Q. Matt Fine, Coast Guard. When you saw the black -- you
12 said it turned black, the smoke. Did it stop right after they
13 turned the engines off or did he keep blowing for a while?

14 A. I think it pretty much stopped for the most part, yeah.

15 BY MR. LARUE:

16 Q. And then just the last question is, is there anything
17 else you can think of that we didn't ask you that might be
18 important?

19 A. No, nothing.

20 Q. All right. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

21 A. Thank you.

22 Q. And you're okay with recording it?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. Thank you very much.

25 (Whereupon, at 4:34 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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 Emily Billings

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