

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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CAPSIZE AND SINKING OF STRETCH DUCK 7 *

ON TABLE ROCK LAKE, BRANSON, MISSOURI, * Accident No.: DCA18MM028

JULY 19, 2018 *

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Interview of: JAMES PLYBON

Captain

Saturday,
July 21, 2018

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL KARR, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JAMES GILLETTE
U.S. Coast Guard

BRIAN DECKARD
FRANK ENGLISH
Ride the Ducks

SGT. TRAVIS HITCHCOCK
TROOPER ROBERT WILKINS
Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP)

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:03 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. KARR: It's 10:03 in Branson, Missouri. I'm Michael Karr
4 of the National Transportation Safety Board. And we're going to
5 go around the room. We're going to interview Captain James
6 Plybon.

7 MR. GILLETTE: Yes, I'm Jim Gillette; I'm an Investigator
8 with the United States Coast Guard.

9 MR. DECKARD: Brian Deckard, Ride the Ducks.

10 MR. ENGLISH: Frank English, Ride the Ducks.

11 SGT. HITCHCOCK: Travis Hitchcock, Highway Patrol.

12 TROOPER WILKINS: Trooper Wilkins, Robert Wilkins, Highway
13 Patrol.

14 MR. PLYBON: Captain James Plybon, Showboat Branson Belle.

INTERVIEW OF JAMES PLYBON

15
16 BY MR. KARR:

17 Q. All right. And just to get things started in general, so
18 during the storm what was your role and position on board the
19 Showboat *Branson Belle*?

20 A. I was the captain on watch at the time of the storm.

21 Q. All right. Well, if you would, just tell me stories about --
22 just tell me your recollection of the, you know, the weather, the
23 storm and your observations of the duck?

24 A. My observation of the storm started in the mid-morning to
25 afternoon. I'd say around noontime I always look at the weather

1 and I observed -- if I recall correctly, there was a system coming
2 in that was kind of moving southeast but it was east of us and was
3 dissipating so I didn't see that being an issue.

4 I got underway on my noon cruise. I knew there was another
5 system coming down from the north as well. I completed my noon
6 cruise. I got back, noticed that -- I got back to the dock around
7 2:00. I had noticed that the -- there was another system coming
8 from north of I-44, like in the Bolivar area. Looked pretty good,
9 so I kept an eye on it but I noticed that it started to dissipate,
10 so I got underway on my 4:00 cruise.

11 When I noticed that front was dissipating I noticed that
12 there was another one coming that was looking pretty rough, so I
13 kind of thought that that might be an issue. So as -- I got back
14 to the dock about 10 to, 10 to 6 on my 4:00 cruise; in
15 anticipation I just ordered the crew to throw extra lines on.
16 Because about 4, 4:00, 4:48, I believe it was accurate time, I
17 received a forwarded text message from my tug captain on watch of
18 a -- the National Weather Service had issued that the storm that
19 was coming could be hail, 70 mile an hour winds, and they were --
20 and, you know, it was possible.

21 So that's why I kind of put all those factors together and
22 just tied up, threw extra lines on my boat. We usually just have
23 singled up lines but with bad weather I just threw extra lines on,
24 threw our night lines on and just, you know, in anticipation for
25 that. So we disembarked our passengers.

1 We started boarding our passengers about 6:50, still just
2 kind of watching it. The storm really started to blow in. I was
3 trying to watch the storm on my phone. So I called our reserve
4 captain, who's our tug captain, he's a captain just like me. I
5 said "Would you go man the wheelhouse?" while I was watching the
6 board and watching the weather, and he went up there and manned
7 the wheelhouse.

8 Well, when he got up to the wheelhouse winds really started
9 picking up. It was blowing pretty good. It was blowing pretty
10 good before that but like it was really starting to kick up.

11 We brought up propulsion, because the way the wind was
12 hitting us it was messing with our passenger boarding ramp. So, of
13 course, we halted boarding, had everybody go in here.

14 We kept passengers that were on the boat already on, kept
15 them on the boat, and we were right there. Our concern was
16 keeping our passenger ramp on and the vessel itself. So we
17 brought up propulsion and was working our propulsion to keep the
18 boat stable, and we were able to get our ramp up.

19 But as all that was going on -- I don't -- do you want me to
20 get into the -- what I saw then? Okay. I looked out and I kept
21 hearing there was two ducks, but I maintained focus on one duck
22 that -- you know, I didn't even notice the other duck because I
23 noticed that duck was struggling.

24 I noticed it was coming northbound and it looked like it was
25 being set into our -- in front of our bow. I was predicting a

1 trajectory to hit our stiff arm, so it really concerned me, but it
2 didn't look -- he was able to get it and he came along our
3 starboard side. And I just -- I went up to our second deck and I
4 was watching him and I could see him -- you know, he was
5 struggling and like and people were asking me like -- you know,
6 they said, "Can you help them, can you help them?" I said -- you
7 know, I said, well, there's nothing, you know, we can do.

8 And I'm watching them. I just -- at that time, I became a
9 spectator and just was rooting for them and but I knew he was
10 having trouble with that wind. I didn't know exactly how much
11 trouble he was having. I just knew that he was really having some
12 time.

13 And he had went around towards the stern -- our paddle wheels
14 and I lost sight of him. So I went to maneuver myself where I
15 could see the duck fully just to watch and make sure they get out.
16 And before I could get into a situation to see it, they said it
17 had gone down and bodies were in the water.

18 And, therefore, I gave -- I immediately gave the command to
19 start rescue operations. My guys' automatic training was to go to
20 the rescue boat. I told them not to launch the rescue boat
21 because the rescue boat would be swamped. They lowered it down
22 into the water and I called the order off. The boat got submerged
23 and it was actually like this. So it was like no go. And so we
24 went into the second contingency which we just started throwing
25 life rings.

1 I ordered life rings, PFDs, and line. We used line, extra
2 line we have on the boat to pull people to the *Belle* and, I mean,
3 at that point it was just -- we were trying to -- we had our boat
4 to deal with, with the storm, and then we were rescuing people in
5 70 mile an hour winds. The winds were blowing consistently 60, 70
6 during that.

7 And then eventually the storm went. We were able to drain
8 our rescue boat, start it and get it out there and do what we can
9 after that. Our tugboat and our barge and our boat became places
10 where we pulled people on and, I mean, that's pretty much the
11 general consensus on the -- on my -- on that.

12 Q. Right. Thanks.

13 A. Uh-huh.

14 Q. What's a stiff arm?

15 A. Oh, I'm sorry, stiff arm is, is what -- our boat docks next
16 to a barge. Stiff arms connect the barge to land and they also
17 allow when -- when high water comes it can go up and down with the
18 water level.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. And it also -- we run our landside utilities through the
21 stiff arm.

22 Q. Okay. The stiff arm you mentioned was -- is that on the
23 outboard side of the vessel?

24 A. No, the stiff arm is on -- would be the inboard on the --
25 just right here facing east -- like it would be the east. You see

1 those two silver arms that go out and attach to the barge.

2 Q. From shore to the barge. So you said that the duck almost
3 hit the stiff arm?

4 A. He was on a trajectory. I don't know how much everybody
5 knows about the marine industry, especially on big boats, you
6 start learning to get ranges. A boat will move in different
7 directions and slide and you can pretty much pick up on a
8 trajectory where it's going to land. And it's just -- it was
9 just, he looked like he was on a trajectory towards our stiff
10 arm --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- because of the way the wind was blowing and everything
13 was, but he was able to pull himself to get out of that position.

14 Q. And which way did you operate your propulsion?

15 A. We were backing astern. So the paddle wheels were turning
16 astern.

17 Q. Did you ever -- did you actually see your paddle wheel in
18 operation at that time when it was going astern?

19 A. At which time?

20 Q. During this, during this event?

21 A. Well, I can --

22 Q. I would like you to, I'd like you to tell -- describe it if
23 you saw it.

24 A. I could -- like I said, I had the captain in the wheelhouse.
25 He was working the controls, but I could hear, I could hear the

1 propulsion on it.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I could hear the propulsion. And, you know, of course, just
4 in the midst of everything that was going on, this was just what
5 was told to me as things were going. This was -- the first duck
6 had went to our stern.

7 And, I guess, the first duck had called the showboat and said
8 he's going to the stern, what are our intentions? Now this is
9 just what was reported to me from the captain. He told that duck
10 that he wasn't going anywhere. We weren't going anywhere; we're
11 just trying to hold our boat against the wind.

12 I guess, because they saw our paddles turning in reverse,
13 they felt that, you know, we were going to be maneuvering. And we
14 said, no we're not, we're not maneuvering. But what I was told to
15 me is Jake, Captain Jake talked to them, and when he heard they
16 were going astern he went to detent which -- are you guys familiar
17 with where it's clutch speed? You just go to detent and then the
18 wheels just -- it's just something to hold the boat to dock. It
19 just slows your paddle wheels down and that was it, that --

20 Q. When you're up in the wheelhouse can you hear the radio
21 communications of the duck boats that are traveling around?

22 A. When I'm -- in general?

23 Q. Yes.

24 A. Just when I'm in the wheelhouse usually? Oh, yeah, I mean,
25 we talk to the ducks, arrange passing.

1 Q. Well -- excuse me.

2 A. Oh.

3 Q. Did they say anything that -- you know, during the storm?

4 A. That day? It was reported to me, like I told you just
5 earlier, that the ducks were asking for our intentions because
6 they saw us -- I'm sure they saw us on the wing station, I'm sure
7 they -- when they got to the side they saw the paddle wheels.

8 And, of course, they were probably, you know, wanting to know
9 are you guys getting -- you know, obviously that's just standard
10 marine procedure is to, you know, determine a passing situation or
11 whatnot. So I'm sure they were asking us, hey, you know what are
12 your, what are your intentions? And that -- you know, and it was
13 told to them, we're not going anywhere; you have all the, you have
14 all the room you need. So --

15 Q. Did you witness anybody being -- any of the people from the
16 water coming on board that the showboat picked up?

17 A. Oh, yes, yes.

18 Q. And so where did you bring them? Tell me --

19 A. We, we --

20 Q. -- just tell me about that?

21 A. Well, you know, and everybody --

22 Q. Tell me about what you actually saw.

23 A. Okay, yes. I -- the first victim that -- I gave the order
24 for, I mean, everybody, I used all able bodies. I -- my crew,
25 food staff. I gave the order to -- you know, we have bodies in

1 the water on the stern. We train our people, they know what to
2 do. I said, go to PFDs, get the PFDs, and they grabbed PFDs and
3 we were tossing them in there. We had -- so basically we were
4 bringing people onto the boat from our tug. We have a tugboat
5 down there which is the most lowest place and we were pulling them
6 onto the tug. I believe several people were -- a few people
7 received CPR on the tug. I witnessed at least one person getting
8 CPR.

9 They were getting on the tug and they were moving onto our
10 stiff arm. I saw two people on the stiff arm. I told the people
11 on the stiff arm do not come onto the boat because the tugboat was
12 -- obviously its 70 mile an hour winds, was getting rough. I told
13 them to go to land, so they walked the stiff arm to land.

14 I -- people were pulling them on the tug and they were coming
15 up onto our barge that way. We have a stairs that go up. We had
16 a little -- we were actually bringing people up onto our fantail
17 where the paddle wheels were. People were clinging to our paddle
18 wheels.

19 So my crew, which was sharp thinking, and then they'd stand
20 on one end of the paddle wheels and manually turn them, and the
21 people would jump on our deck that way, and we'd bring them in
22 through our back entrance and put them in the stairwell.

23 I know one little boy, we brought him in and we started CPR
24 on him in our stairwell. There was another boy that I saw in the
25 hallway that we had pulled out, that came into the starboard side

1 of that stairwell.

2 I'm just kind of going through this, no chronological order,
3 just trying to remember everything I seen. One of the food staff
4 had -- we have a starboard door on main deck in the aft that you
5 could see out of but there's nothing there. It's for starboard
6 docking so we can let people out that way if we have to and it
7 stays locked and it -- we looked out there and there was somebody
8 there. They were struggling. They were just under the surface.
9 I was trying to get the door open, could not get this door open.
10 I started ramming it with my shoulder, was able to get it open.

11 Being the captain of the vessel, I'm not supposed to leave
12 the vessel, especially in a situation like that. So, you know,
13 I'm there looking at that and it's just, it's just -- and one of
14 the, one of the guys said, captain, we've got to do something.
15 And I said, you can't jump, you can't jump. And they threw on
16 PFDs and said, captain, I'm going. And I said, go if you've got
17 to, and they jumped and grabbed the lady.

18 Then we -- we had an operation going. Once we got that door
19 open we had an operation going down there. We had lines and PFDs
20 set there so we could throw them out and we had a line, which is a
21 rope line that we could just pull people or they can hold onto it
22 or something.

23 I ran down to the bow. We have a stage where we do water
24 rescues and we lowered it down there and we tried to retrieve the
25 two guys that jumped but, of course, the storm just blew them

1 down.

2 But there was -- we were -- I believe we retrieved a few on
3 the bow. I do know we recovered a body from the bow. We
4 recovered a lot of bodies as well. We had, we had a few on our
5 boat. Just throwing out everything I can remember.

6 Guests came up to me and said, Captain, I'm a nurse, or
7 Captain, I'm this, can I help? And I said, of course you can. I
8 used every able body to my disposal. I gave no -- once the storm
9 began to die down, I did give the order to relaunch our rescue
10 boat, I do remember that.

11 I started giving orders to start clearing out everything. We
12 were wanting to get survivors to the -- just off our barge, off --
13 you know, trying our best to get people that way to where
14 everybody was staging on that side of the dock. Just working,
15 working the scene and directing people.

16 And, I mean, it was -- it -- yeah. That's, like I said, no
17 chronological order, just that's kind of basically what the whole
18 run happened. It all lasted just really minutes, under an hour
19 for the whole thing.

20 I believe I had calmed down enough to start notifying people
21 about 19:54. I was able to kind of just start kind of calling and
22 talking to some people in my company and I did notify Coast Guard
23 as well around that time. And like I said, it was just, it was
24 just an ordeal.

25 Q. The person that manned the rescue boat is going to be -- will

1 he be one of the people we will visit with today?

2 A. We're going to try to get him. It was kind of a delicate
3 situation. He came in yesterday, did that. He had to take some
4 kids to -- his kids to Texas.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Back to their mother. But he's trying everything he can to
7 get back here today. So he didn't think he was going to be here
8 at 9 but he's going to try to be here today. We're going to do
9 everything we can -- bring everybody in for you guys.

10 MR. KARR: All right. Well, thanks for answering my
11 questions. Jim?

12 MR. GILLETTE: Yes.

13 BY MR. GILLETTE:

14 Q. Hi, I'm Jim Gillette with the Coast Guard.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And I just have a few follow-up questions and some of them
17 are for clarity.

18 A. Uh-huh.

19 Q. Just so when we do the transcribe and stuff that we have an
20 understanding of what you were saying. You were talking about
21 seeing two duck boats but you were referring to the first duck
22 boat and the second duck boat.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Could you refer a little more -- elaborate a little more on
25 that, which one's which?

1 A. The -- well, the duck boat that I saw struggling was -- I
2 believe, I call that the second duck boat because somebody told me
3 that there was two, like as everything was coming in. You know, I
4 did not view two ducks. I just was watching the one, the one duck
5 that I thought was struggling the most. And, like I said, as I
6 saw him go around to the stern I just lost him. But as we went
7 around and, of course, as the news reports go, there was two. I
8 found out pretty quick there was two and that first one got out
9 and I -- yeah.

10 Q. Okay. But you only just saw the one duck that you saw?

11 A. I just saw the one duck.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I just saw the one duck.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And I know I've seen videos of the two.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But like it just -- my brain went to, went to that one for --
18 you know, that was the only one I viewed.

19 Q. Okay. Then I just have a general question on the *Branson*
20 *Belle*. You were talking about lining up the propulsion.

21 A. Uh-huh.

22 Q. The paddle and stuff, and I take it that's due to weather?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. How often does that happen around here? How often do you
25 have to do that and --

1 A. Oh, well, I mean, you know, the -- Table Rock Lake, you know,
2 contrary to -- its a -- it can get windy out here. And as the
3 years have passed I've noticed that the trends are getting higher
4 in the winds. Used to it would be rare to see 40s -- you know,
5 you would see a 40, you were kind of like, you know, taking off.
6 But now you've really started -- and I'm out here on the lake, you
7 know, constantly, you know, and everybody -- you know, 40 mile an
8 hour used to be rare, now we're starting to see these crazy gusts
9 just come in. I -- you know, you would look at NOAA, and NOAA the
10 hourly, you know, you'd have no weather coming in but you'd look
11 at the hourly and say, 2 miles an hour or 3 miles an hour, you'd
12 be looking at 36. It's like what is going on?

13 It's just a, it's just a -- the wind is just -- it gets
14 rough. It gets rough sometimes out here and sometimes it's flat
15 calm. It's just, it's just really -- it surprises you.

16 Q. How long -- I don't think we asked this -- how long have you
17 been a captain on board here? How long --

18 A. This is, this is my eighth season with the Showboat *Branson*
19 *Belle*. I was a mate. I started out as a mate and then I got my
20 200 pound master's license. So I've been a captain and working on
21 this, like I said, for eight seasons.

22 Q. What's a season?

23 A. Oh, years.

24 Q. What are you talking --

25 A. Like it would be my eighth season, seventh year. So I

1 apologize. So, yeah, yeah.

2 Q. When you saw the sinking --

3 A. I didn't see the sinking.

4 Q. You didn't see the sinking, okay. Did you see as far as
5 debris or stuff, did you see anybody in life jackets other than --

6 A. The only --

7 Q. -- the ones that you guys threw?

8 A. The only, the only time I saw anybody who was, who --
9 survivor with a life jacket was one of ours. I didn't see any, I
10 did see any other life jackets.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I didn't see any other flotation devices. We -- I believe we
13 recovered, when we were gathering debris, we recovered one duck
14 life jacket, I believe, and then the rest were ours, yes.

15 MR. GILLETTE: Okay. Thank you, Captain.

16 MR. PLYBON: Yes.

17 MR. KARR: Travis?

18 SGT. HITCHCOCK: No, actually you asked the question I was
19 going to ask, so --

20 MR. KARR: All right. Rob?

21 TROOPER WILKINS: Yeah, I might have one question.

22 BY TROOPER WILKINS:

23 Q. Do you guys have a general policy on where you would -- what
24 you would consider enough wind that you start tying down and
25 batting down the hatches?

1 A. Well, we, we have a policy that we follow to a tee; that is,
2 22 sustain, 25 gusts, if it's over that we don't go out. But
3 that's because our boat's designed differently than other boats.

4 Q. Correct.

5 A. Our boat only draws 7½ feet of water, is over 100 feet tall,
6 has great sail area. So like 20 miles an hour would bother us
7 more than it would like, say, the ducks or something like that.
8 So they can withstand, you know, more.

9 So we kind of just -- we set that. Nobody's -- we just as a
10 company, we say that's what it is. And to be honest with you, if
11 you drove the showboat enough, 3 miles an hour affects the
12 showboat.

13 So when it's -- so 22/25 is just something we all came
14 together and collaborated and said that's our restrictions and
15 that's what we stick by. So --

16 Q. Go ahead.

17 A. I'm done.

18 Q. Thank you very much. Another follow-up question for me is,
19 so about how many times a season would you do what you did where
20 you, you know, put on extra lines and --

21 A. Any, I mean --

22 Q. Just, I'm just asking for a number, just estimate.

23 A. In general, generally -- I'm going to be honest with you.
24 We'll probably lose 95 cruises due to wind, you know, just at our
25 wind policy. Batten down the hatches that could probably, you

1 know, batten all those extra lines, I mean, that could be like 30
2 times in a year that you do that. Just the captain will call for
3 an extra stern line or because of bad weather, you know, that's
4 just something that you have to do.

5 You watch the weather and just that's what you -- I mean,
6 you've just got to play it by ear after that. We, I don't think,
7 I don't think we log that in any way unless the captain just puts
8 it in the general entries but that's just what, you know, we do.

9 Q. All right. Thanks. And when you looked down at the duck
10 that you were watching, did you notice, was there anything
11 unusual? Did you -- what did you notice about the passengers at
12 that time?

13 A. I, you know, I couldn't see anything. I was, I -- you know,
14 I was just more looking at the navigation of the vessel. Like I
15 said, I was rooting for them at that time. I was, I was just
16 like, you know, go, you know. And it was just -- I was just
17 watching the navigation. I was like seeing his bow kind of get
18 kicked out and I'm like, come on -- you know, it just -- I was
19 more watching the navigation side of it, just watching the vessel
20 in general, the direction it was going, how it was hitting the
21 wind and doing the waves. I was just kind of like, you know, just
22 watching that, just becoming a spectator at that point, you know.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. And I'm -- you know, when I say spectator I don't mean that
25 to sound like it was. It was like there was nothing I could do

1 for him at that moment except watch and be ready in case they
2 needed assistance, any assistance that we could have offered at
3 that point.

4 Q. Okay. Give me, give me an observation -- anything --

5 A. Uh-huh.

6 Q. As you were watching the vessel, as you said, its stern
7 kicked out. Describe what you saw about the --

8 A. Well, well, his bow --

9 Q. -- what, as a captain --

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. -- what, as a captain, what difficulty did you see that
12 captain having?

13 A. Well, just like the general -- you know, I will -- I cannot
14 speculate on another captain's strategies --

15 Q. Understood.

16 A. -- navigation or anything like that. And but what I was
17 looking for -- what I was watching was, like I said, you know, his
18 bow would kick a certain way and it would just like -- you know,
19 and I was just like, ooh, you don't want to do -- you know, you
20 know what I'm saying? Like he didn't want, he didn't want --

21 Q. Well, try to explain it as best you understood.

22 A. Well, what you don't want to do in that situation is, you
23 know, on a vessel is put your bow into the wind and drive like
24 hell. You put the bow in the wind, drive like hell and just keep
25 going. You don't want to get broadside and I could tell he was

1 trying not to get broadside to the wind. He was trying his best
2 just to quarter everything that he could, you know. And I don't
3 know what his -- what he was -- where he was planning on making
4 the turn, if he was just going to quarter it and plan to let the
5 vessel, you know, slide. You know, I don't know any of that.

6 Like I said, when he went around our stern, I -- you know, he
7 just, you know. But you could tell like -- you know, like me, I
8 know, I was like -- you could tell he didn't want to get broadside
9 as he was going if you -- you know, if you just -- like his bow
10 was, like I said, his bow would kick out. Either side you don't
11 want to do -- give too much of your broadside to the wind like --
12 that's just, you know, that's what I was watching. What I meant
13 by that was like how he was doing wind and the waves.

14 Q. Simple basic, where do those boats usually exit the water?

15 A. Well --

16 Q. Is there a little path? I see a little path right behind the
17 boat --

18 A. Yeah, right --

19 Q. -- right behind the *Branson Belle*?

20 A. Right. What they've been doing the last couple years is
21 launching on the south end, this south ramp, and going around the
22 island and coming on this south end right onto our stern. That's
23 how they've been doing the last few years, right.

24 SGT. HITCHCOCK: All right. Thanks.

25 MR. PLYBON: Yeah.

1 MR. GILLETTE: I have no more follow-up questions.

2 MR. KARR: No more questions. Travis?

3 SGT. HITCHCOCK: A couple, yes.

4 BY SGT. HITCHCOCK:

5 Q. Could you clarify again where do they usually enter and where
6 they exit?

7 A. Okay. They, how it's been for the last year and this year,
8 and I don't know for how long, but they've been entering the water
9 on the north end here.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And they would start heading west, go around the island,
12 start heading north and then eventually traject back east to our
13 stern and getting off on the south.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. The south end of -- that south ramp down there on our stern.

16 Q. You also mentioned 95, that you -- it was an estimate as to
17 how many trips you were able to make in a season, is that it?

18 A. I believe that's what was referred to me by our box office.
19 They keep track of all that and I believe that was relayed to me
20 last night. We were -- you know, I was kind of talking. We had
21 just brought that up about the wind and I'm -- that's about the
22 number I'm like --

23 Q. Just for the season or --

24 A. Just for the number of cruises for the season.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. That I'm aware that it is. I -- to me they're, they're all
2 cruises. To me they're all, when you've got -- you know, that's
3 just your stat doc or not, to me it's just that -- yeah. I mean,
4 I don't keep track of that.

5 Q. Well, a quick follow-up on that. Would that -- do you remain
6 at the dock and the customers still come on board?

7 A. They come on board, they come on board. They, you know,
8 obviously we keep track of everything. The boat, our boat, you
9 know, honestly -- you know, I say this loosely, could be one of
10 the safest places to be on a storm, especially when we're all
11 battened down and secure, you know, so -- but we watch that
12 obviously. And, you know, we don't take that chance. If we know
13 a tornado's going to come and we know we're going to be at dock,
14 we'll keep people on land side and we've got storm shelters in our
15 bathrooms. That's where our storm shelter is.

16 I mean, you've just got to -- you've got to watch it and make
17 your call, you know. That's, you know, so --

18 MR. KARR: All right. Rob?

19 TROOPER WILKINS: Nothing.

20 MR. KARR: Oh, excuse me, Travis, were you --

21 SGT. HITCHCOCK: No, I'm finished.

22 MR. PLYBON: Okay.

23 MR. KARR: And then I forgot to get you guys involved. Any
24 questions?

25 MR. DECKARD: That's okay.

1 MR. KARR: Any questions?

2 MR. DECKARD: Mine's already been answered but --

3 BY MR. ENGLISH:

4 Q. Yeah, I just have -- I have one.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. When you noticed your concern with the duck, where was it
7 exact or do you know --

8 A. It was just --

9 Q. -- where it was located when you felt like he was in trouble,
10 relative to the boat?

11 A. It was, it was just --=

12 Q. The bow, the stern?

13 A. It was at the bow.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. It was just to the east of the island. They were actually
16 going between the island and the the point there --

17 Q. Right.

18 A. -- and between us. They -- you know how they usually come
19 around the west side --

20 Q. Yes.

21 A. -- and get that good long view? He wasn't heading that way;
22 he was heading that way. And like I said, he was -- at one point
23 he was right in front of my bow and -- not right in front of my
24 bow, he's still a ways out, but like I could tell he was, you
25 know, he was getting that set and then he got it out. And then,

1 you know, I just -- I had -- once I saw him moving to our
2 starboard side I had left and lost sight of him there until I got
3 to second deck and I could look out the windows, and I could see
4 him --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. Yeah. And that's when I lost him after that. But like I
7 said, right there, I was just looking, you know, watching. If we
8 needed to do something, we'd help, but -- I mean, at that point I
9 just was watching at that time.

10 MR. ENGLISH: Thank you. That's all I have.

11 MR. KARR: Thanks.

12 BY MR. KARR:

13 Q. That completes our questioning. Is there anything that you
14 want us to know about the activities and the events that we
15 haven't asked you about?

16 A. Well, I just want to say, and like this is, this is just
17 coming -- you know, I don't -- you know, what can you take from
18 this other than like, you know, the people that just jumped in. I
19 mean, like my guys made me so proud. Like, you know, we were the
20 first ones in the water, we were the -- you know, we were the --
21 and I say that just because like, I mean, like it was just that
22 everybody worked like a team.

23 I mean, it -- like I said, when I gave command, nobody didn't
24 know -- everybody knew that to do. My crew knew what to do.
25 Even, like I said, I grabbed -- I remember one guest in particular

1 who actually came to me, and there could have been more, to help.
2 And I told -- I just had him grab a line. And he grabbed a line
3 and went. I mean, like there was no -- radio traffic was very
4 smooth and back and forth amongst our people.

5 And as far as that end goes, like that's all I can think of a
6 first note that we didn't talk about was just how, you know, our
7 end like -- you know, we gave it our best and -- yeah. So --

8 Q. To your recollection, how many of your crew actually jumped I
9 the water?

10 A. I only witnessed two jump in the water. I had heard that we
11 had more than that. I even heard a sheriff's deputy jumped in the
12 water, but I did not witness that.

13 Q. Did you witness any passengers jump in the water?

14 A. Did not witness a passenger jump.

15 Q. Did you witness any passengers assisting?

16 A. Like I said, that one gentleman who assisted, grabbed a line
17 and went to the -- you know, helped me with the starboard side.
18 He was the only passenger that came to me and helped.

19 Q. That you witnessed?

20 A. That I witnessed, I would have known. I could not -- at one
21 point it got to where we -- you know, you didn't know. Because
22 people were helping, you assumed the person in regular clothes was
23 a passenger on the deck. You know, it got -- and then as we
24 started organizing and kept people in the theater, you know, and
25 -- I mean, it was just -- you know, we did the best we could.

1 MR. KARR: I'm done. Any more questions?

2 SGT. HITCHCOCK: No questions.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, sir.

4 MR. KARR: All right. Thank you, all. This concludes -- so
5 this concludes the interview. It's now 10:35.

6 (Whereupon, at 10:35 a.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: CAPSIZE AND SINKING OF STRETCH DUCK 7
 ON TABLE ROCK LAKE, BRANSON, MISSOURI,
 JULY 19, 2018
 Interview of James Plybon

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18MM028

PLACE: Branson, Missouri

DATE: July 21, 2018

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.


Cheryl Farner Donovan
Transcriber