

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: CORBIN HUDSON

Branson, Missouri

Saturday,  
July 21, 2018

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL KARR, Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

NICOLE ASHBY  
National Transportation Safety Board

MARY PAT McKAY, M.D., Chief Medical Officer  
National Transportation Safety Board

JAMES GILLETTE  
U.S. Coast Guard

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

FRANK ENGLISH  
Ride the Ducks

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:10 a.m.)

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2  
3 MR. KARR: This is Mike Karr of the National Transportation  
4 Safety Board. It's 10 after 11. We're in Branson, Missouri. I'd  
5 like to go around the room and have everyone introduce themselves.

6 MR. GILLETTE: Hi. I'm Jim Gillette, U.S. Coast Guard.

7 MR. ENGLISH: Hi. Frank English, Ride the Ducks.

8 MS. ASHBY: Nicole Ashby, Office of Marine.

9 DR. MCKAY: Mary Pat McKay, I'm the chief medical officer for  
10 the NTSB.

11 MR. HITCHCOCK: Travis Hitchcock, Missouri State Highway  
12 Patrol.

13 MR. WILKINS: Robert Wilkins, Missouri State Highway Patrol.

14 MR. HUDSON: And I'm Corbin S. Hudson, Deckhand, the  
15 Showboat *Branson Belle*.

## INTERVIEW OF CORBIN HUDSON

16  
17 BY MR. KARR:

18 Q. All right. Can you -- before we start, I'll ask, I'll start  
19 with a simple question is how long you been a deckhand and  
20 working --

21 A. I've been there 3 years now.

22 Q. All right.

23 A. The past 3 years.

24 Q. All right. And what I'd like you to do is tell us your  
25 involvement with rescue operations. Tell us about what you saw of

1 the vessel that eventually sunk, you know, just tell us the story,  
2 tell, if you can, make it a chronological story --

3 Q. All right.

4 A. -- of what you did.

5 Q. I was running at the position of first mate in the  
6 pilothouse. Someone has to be in the pilothouse with the captain  
7 at all times, and I had that position today, or the day in  
8 question.

9 We had just started boarding for the 8 o'clock cruise, and we  
10 had been aware the last, well, for most of the day that there was  
11 a large storm moving in from up north. And so, we started  
12 boarding, and the clouds were getting rather heavy. And about,  
13 maybe, 7 o'clock, or maybe 5 after 7, the storm hit. Winds  
14 started increasing. I was watching the weather station up in the  
15 pilothouse, and I watched the winds climb from 20s to high 60s in  
16 a matter of seconds.

17 We have chairs sitting up on fourth deck, and they  
18 immediately all blew over to one side. The waves just,  
19 immediately just appeared on the lake. Instructions started to be  
20 screamed into the radio to stop boarding and then to get everybody  
21 off the bridge, and then to actually get the bridge raised.

22 Q. And you're talking about the passenger boarding bridge?

23 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. The bridge that leads from the barge  
24 and goes onto the boat. The boat itself was, is very heavily  
25 affected by the wind, and these high winds were causing the ropes

1 that moor the boat to the barge to be stretched and the passenger  
2 ramp had come up against the column that it sits next to, and was  
3 in danger of being torn loose. So, the captain immediately  
4 ordered the engine technology to get propulsion up. And it ws up  
5 in matter of maybe a minute, 30 seconds. They did it very fast.

6 And Captain Jacob Stroub came down from landside and came up  
7 to the pilothouse to operate the vessel, and thrust, use our  
8 thrusters to thrust as hard as we could into the dock, and also to  
9 operate full astern propulsion. Even that barely made any  
10 difference at all in the force of this wind. But it was enough  
11 for us to be able to pull the ramp up. The winds were terrible.  
12 We were, nobody could barely hear the radio. Everybody was trying  
13 to be on the radio at once. Nothing was really getting through.

14 We managed to secure the boat, more or less, as best we  
15 could, and Captain Jacob sent me down to see what I could to help.  
16 We had gotten radio traffic from some of our other departments  
17 that a duck boat was having trouble, maybe, like, 5 minutes or 10  
18 minutes after the storm hit. And we actually got in port that the  
19 duck boat was sinking. And I remember looking out at the, out of  
20 the port side door to the wing station that leads out to the  
21 controls and seeing people suddenly in the water to the north of  
22 the tugboat. They were just swimming. And I was, like, what  
23 happened? You know. Oh, wow, it's, it, that boat actually sank,  
24 and there's people out there.

25 So, Captain Jacob immediate send me down to see however I

1 could assist. I went down the aft stairs, I believe, on the port  
2 side to try to get close. Upon reaching the main deck, I believe  
3 it was a wait staff member who told me that there was someone  
4 drowning on the starboard side. And I immediately went to the  
5 service area to the starboard side boarding doors. And Captain  
6 James was there, and I met him, and he was trying to get the doors  
7 open. One of the serving staff, David Griffin was immediately  
8 yelling at me that there was someone drowning out there, and to go  
9 get life jackets. So, I said the heck with it, and -- we're not  
10 supposed to, you know, we're supposed to walk in an emergency, but  
11 I said the heck with it and ran all the way up to second deck,  
12 retrieved PFDs from the locker on the bow, and immediately ran  
13 back. They had the doors open by this time.

14 And I, David next to me donned a lifejacket, and I donned a  
15 lifejacket, and he was yelling at me, we've got to go in, we've  
16 got to go in, there's someone out there, she's drowning. And I  
17 looked out there, and the waves were high, and the storm was  
18 raging. And I saw somebody for a split second, and I didn't know  
19 whether they were drowning, or they had drowned. I didn't know  
20 the state of the victim. All I knew was that he was yelling at me  
21 she's drowning, we've got to go in.

22 And I hesitated, because it's pretty much the first, I mean  
23 that's pretty much the big thing of our boat is you don't jump off  
24 the boat. But Captain James was there, so I had to look to him  
25 for permission. And he hesitated at first, but he relented when

1 he saw that, you know, we were pretty determined. So, he gave us  
2 permission. And we jumped off and struck out for the victim. We  
3 got separated by the wave, me and my, and David. We got separated  
4 pretty fast. I mean, it was rough. And he got blow off down  
5 south alongside the boat. I made it to the victim. She was  
6 floating face down. And I turned her over, and I could see that  
7 she was gone, she was far gone. She must have drowned from the  
8 first couple of minutes that the boat sank. So, I -- there was  
9 nothing I could do for her.

10 So then, I thought well, I might as well try to get her, you  
11 know, try to recover the body. So, I had hold of her. And at  
12 this point, I sucked in water, and I was just focused on breathing  
13 for the next 20 minutes or so, while I fought the waves. I was  
14 still in my full uniform and boots. I couldn't do much swimming.  
15 So, we stayed out there. We were blow far south of the boat. And  
16 we were out there, basically, until the storm calmed down, which,  
17 now, I know, the storm only lasted about 20 minutes. It felt like  
18 an eternity. But storm lasted for about 20 minutes.

19 And by the time the waters calmed down, I had found David  
20 again, and some boats had come from the State Park Marina, and we  
21 were able to flag down one of them, and they came and picked us  
22 up, picked the lady up. Then we searched around a bit, for the  
23 debris. We found another body, a male, and we were able to, with  
24 the help of another marina boat, drag him into our boat.

25 We then searched around the debris, see if we could find any



1 more bodies, but we didn't find any. So, we went back around to  
2 the *Showboat*, around the back side of it.

3 By this time, they had, from what I could tell, they had  
4 gotten all the survivors and pretty much all the other bodies up  
5 onto the dock.

6 So, we went, beached the boat by the north duck ramp. And  
7 there were already some emergency personnel there, and we handed  
8 off the two deceased to them, and me and David went to the boat to  
9 report. And, you know, it was still, you know, people trying to  
10 get stuff under control, lot of people that were receiving aid,  
11 and, you know, being talked to, and we just went and reported to  
12 our respective leads. And, you know, the rest of that was just  
13 retrieving safety equipment and trying to, you know, be in control  
14 of the whole situation.

15 Q. All right. Thank you, Corbin.

16 A. Um-hum.

17 MR. KARR: Jim, do you have any question?

18 MR. GILLETTE: Yes. I just have a couple follow up for  
19 Corbin.

20 THE WITNESS: Yes, sir.

21 BY MR. GILLETTE:

22 Q. On one them you mentioned thrusters --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. -- and stuff. Does the *Belle* have bow or stern thrusters?

25 A. Yes. We have, we do have a small bow and a stern thruster.

1 They're really, mainly, only used for emergencies. They, they sit  
2 just above the water level, and the capitate the boat very, very,  
3 pretty bad. They vibrate, cause a lot of noise. So, we really  
4 only use them for emergencies. But this was a pretty bad  
5 emergency. And we had them at about 1/2 to 3/4 power thrusting up  
6 against the dock with both of them.

7 Q. And are they located port, starboard, center?

8 A. Yes. They're basically a tube that goes right through the  
9 center with a propeller in the middle that can blow either  
10 direction.

11 Q. And then, the other question is just about yourself.

12 A. um-hum.

13 Q. When you were done, did you have to seek medical attention?  
14 Or could you --

15 A. No. I didn't -- the only thing I would have had to is if I'd  
16 breathed more water than I had. It was just a, just a bit, you  
17 know. Kind of made it hard to breathe for a little while. But,  
18 yeah, I was fine.

19 Q. All right. Thank you, Corbin.

20 A. Um-hum.

21 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: I have no questions.

22 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: I have none.

23 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: The person that was face down, you said  
24 they were floating. Did they have the PFD on, or --

25 THE WITNESS: No, sir. None of the bodies that I saw had

1 PFDS on.

2 UNIDENTIFIED PERSON: That would be my only question.

3 MR. KARR: All right.

4 BY MR. KARR:

5 Q. And you said you are the first mate?

6 A. I'm not the first mate. Whenever we run a cruise, we always  
7 have to have, we have to have at least 1 senior deckhand onboard,  
8 and 5 deckhands, and then we have an engineer and a captain. And  
9 we aren't required to have 2 senior deckhands onboard, so what  
10 usually ends up happening is one of us will end up running in the  
11 position of the first mate, but not actually holding the position  
12 of first mate. As long as there is the senior deckhand onboard,  
13 he's usually the one running the deck, or the positions will be  
14 swapped, and we'll, one of us will be running in the position of  
15 senior deckhand without actually holding the qualification.

16 Q. Okay. Thanks.

17 MR. KARR: Any other questions?

18 (No response.)

19 BY MR. KARR:

20 Q. Is there anything you'd like us to know about that we didn't  
21 ask you, or you didn't already tell us?

22 A. Not that I can think of. Everybody did a fantastic job. I  
23 mean, I, just all of the personnel and the agencies really came  
24 together. And I think, I really want to commend that.

25 Q. All right.

1 A. But, yeah, I don't think I have any further.

2 Q. Thanks.

3 MR. KARR: And then, well, with that, I'll note we'll end the  
4 interview at 11:21.

5 (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:           CAPSIZE AND SINKING OF STRETCH DUCK 7  
                                  ON TABLE ROCK LAKE, BRANSON, MISSOURI,  
                                  JULY 19, 2018  
                                  Interview of Corbin Hudson

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.

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of Karen Coen Brooks.

Karen Coen Brooks  
Transcriber