

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: BRIAN DECKARD

Thursday,
July 26, 2018

APPEARANCES:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(8:05 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. VOLPE: Okay, the time is 8:05 on the 26th of July. My
4 name is John Volpe with the NTSB.

5 INTERVIEW OF BRIAN DECKARD

6 BY MR. VOLPE:

7 Q. Would you please state your name for the record?

8 A. Brian Deckard.

9 Q. And spell your name, please.

10 A. B-r-i-a-n, D-e-c-k-a-r-d.

11 Q. And could you tell me what your title is with the company?

12 A. Maintenance manager.

13 Q. Maintenance manager. And how long have you worked for Ride
14 the Ducks?

15 A. Almost 30 years.

16 Q. And could you explain, briefly, the history of the company in
17 the 30 years that you've worked there?

18 A. Sure. When I started in 1988, Bob McDowell owned the
19 company. At that time we were running what we referred to as
20 fleet ducks, which was basically the military duck with some seats
21 added in it and some additional modifications, you know, bilge
22 pumps and stuff, to meet Coast Guard requirements. We ran those
23 for several years and I believe it was 1996 we developed the
24 stretch duck, the first prototype, and then started converting all
25 of our old fleet ducks and building additional units.

1 We built stretch ducks -- there's various models of stretch
2 duck. There's what we refer to as a stretch rack, which was the
3 original duck, fleet duck, that we would take apart at 15 inches
4 and we would move the cab forward 18 inches and make the deck all
5 on one level.

6 We built -- as we progressed, we made modifications and was
7 replacing more and more material. We raised the gunnel, widened
8 the beam, until, around model number 31 -- actually, it's out of
9 order. Thirty-one is a master jig duck; 32 is a stretch rack,
10 just because of the timing of the way things were built. But
11 anyway, from there on, what's called a master jig duck, which is
12 an all-new hull, has the wider beam, had a freeboard, all new
13 metal. Basically, the only thing that was original DUKW was the
14 frame and a couple of parts from the prop. But other than that,
15 it was a new -- new vessel.

16 We built those until 2005 when we developed what we call the
17 Truck Duck, which is built on an M35 chassis, but the hull,
18 itself, is essentially the configuration of the master jig duck
19 with the exception of a few changes, the prop tunnel, different
20 fender well configuration, but from the outside you wouldn't know
21 the difference. And that's what -- originally, we started with
22 gas and then we started building the diesel; actually, we built at
23 the same time but then the first few was gas while we perfected
24 the diesel. And we built those until 2008 when we -- at the time
25 we were owned by Herschends Family Entertainment and they

1 transferred production to Chance Rides out of Wichita and they
2 built ducks for us through the end of 2014 and that was the last
3 new ducks that we built.

4 Actually, let me back up here just a minute. Bob McDowell,
5 when I started in 1988, Bob owned the company. Herschends bought
6 in, I believe, in 2000 or 2001. Herschends bought in a percentage
7 of the company and they bought the remainder of the company from
8 Bob in 2005. They ran it until 2012, when they sold it to Chris
9 Herschend and Chris Herschend sold it to Ripley's in December of
10 2017.

11 Q. Okay. And in your time here, how long have you been in
12 management? Did you begin?

13 A. No. No, no, no. I started in the shop, I was a mechanic's
14 assistant. We called them paddlers at the time, too, we would
15 service ducks and all of that. But yeah, I started in the shop
16 working nights, weekends, summers, all of that until I graduated
17 from high school. And then I went into the shop full-time as a
18 mechanic and/or mechanic's assistant.

19 I did that until -- don't remember the exact year, but
20 sometime in '93, '94. I would assist with -- at that time, the
21 mechanics, everybody, we would convert and we were building fleet
22 ducks for use in Branson, so it was all kind of intertwined. And
23 then we built, started building ducks, and I became more involved
24 with that and we were building for Boston in '93 or '94. I know
25 Boston opened in '94, but I don't remember exactly when we started

1 building the ducks for them, but I was involved with the
2 mechanical side of the production. And I did that -- kind of
3 after that, I kind of -- I would still do some mechanics on the
4 fleet, but it was more into the building and what's called the
5 finish side of the production. I did that until, like, '96 and
6 then I went into parts, purchasing, basically in charge of all of
7 our purchasing, as well as research for R&D for components and
8 things for our new -- for our new ducks. I was involved pretty
9 heavily in that. I did that until the early 2000s.

10 I was still involved, but we hired some additional purchasing
11 people and I was overseeing our finish, what we called our finish
12 production. We had our manufacturing kind of split up into
13 welding, paint, and then finish. I would oversee finish and
14 somewhat over paint, not as directly involved with paint, a
15 painter supervisor, so at that time, as well. I did that until
16 the Herschends bought it in 2005 and then I took over as general
17 manager in July or August of that year, of our production facility
18 that we called AVM, Amphibious Vehicle Manufacturing. I was in
19 charge of that until we stopped production in 2008.

20 At that time, I transferred more to a corporate role, which
21 was basically anything our franchisees, licensees, whatever they
22 needed, whether it be help with regulatory, training, technical,
23 parts, basically whatever they needed, they would call myself or
24 Frank English, that was kind of our roles. We had a lot of
25 overlap in our roles, but that's essentially what we did. And I

1 did that until Ripley's bought it and -- well, actually, I take
2 that back, let me back up just a minute. In 2016 October, we --
3 Ride the Ducks had a layoff. We let our maintenance manager, as
4 well as some other individuals go, so I took on that role in
5 addition to corporate support and did that until Ripley's bought
6 it in December, where I'm primarily maintenance. I'm still
7 involved in the corporate stuff through an agreement that Ripley's
8 has with Ride the Ducks International. I'm still doing support
9 for the franchisees, licensees, the ones that still require it.
10 But I'm still involved in that, just not as deeply as I once was.

11 Q. Okay. So in your new job, could you, I guess, give me a job
12 description of what you're currently doing?

13 A. As far as maintenance manager?

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. Basically, I oversee the maintenance in the shop, you know,
16 line up the guys, which I have two, two really good shop
17 supervisors, they don't require a lot of supervision, but oversee
18 that schedule, COIs, annual inspections, make sure that's getting
19 done, as well as, like I said, I'm still doing quite a bit of
20 stuff in parts with the -- we're trying to get everybody to be
21 self-sufficient, but I'm still involved with parts.

22 Here lately, especially Guam, Guam, which is our operation,
23 as well as franchisees of Ride the Ducks, I'm still involved quite
24 a bit with them and their parts, they require quite a bit of help.
25 A lot of my time goes along with that, but that's essentially it,

1 just overseeing that the maintenance gets done and that all
2 inspections are scheduled and --

3 Q. Now, how many -- how many personnel are in maintenance under
4 you?

5 A. There's eight. We have 10 slots, but right now we have eight
6 people, as well as Paul that's in parts, John Chance, which is in
7 welding, which is -- I don't directly oversee him, but I work with
8 him pretty closely. So basically, nine, ten.

9 Q. Okay. And could you just explain the hierarchy in the
10 office, like the difference, what's the difference between
11 operations and fleet operations, because we were actually told you
12 were director of fleet operations.

13 A. I was until Ripley's took it over and I'm still doing
14 essentially the same job, but my card says maintenance manager, so
15 I'm maintenance manager, but I still do essentially the same job.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Well, fleet operations is more maintenance and more -- at the
18 time, like I said, corporate support. It's more corporate support
19 for the franchises, it's not directly involved with the local
20 operations other than we're there for support.

21 Q. Okay. And does fleet operations -- or in your position now,
22 do you guys ever stand the MOD watch? The manager on duty watch?

23 A. Never done it.

24 Q. Do you ever take it for them? Never done it.

25 A. No, never did it.

1 Q. How many ducks are in a fleet?

2 A. We have 22 now that Ripley's purchased from Ride the Ducks
3 International, they're not all certificated. We're in the process
4 of getting those all done. But when they bought the business from
5 Ride the Ducks International, that we swapped five or six ducks
6 with the ones that Ride the Ducks International had in storage
7 that came back from various operations, so they swapped ducks, so
8 we haven't gotten all of those certificated yet. We have 21 right
9 now that are certificated.

10 Q. Okay. The ducks, themselves, is there any way to track the
11 ducks once they leave the headquarters (indiscernible)?

12 A. Like a GPS tracker? No.

13 Q. Yeah. No, okay. Now that you're moved into maintenance,
14 then you were more corporate, are you familiar with the operations
15 manual?

16 A. Vaguely. I'm not -- I mean, I've read it, I didn't help
17 write it, I'm -- very little.

18 Q. Okay. And that went into my next question, that if there was
19 anything specific that you recall that pertains to your job,
20 but --

21 A. Not specific, no.

22 Q. Okay. We'll go into training. Could you tell me who, in
23 Branson, is responsible for training?

24 A. As far as like drivers, captains training?

25 Q. Any type of training. I'm assuming that whoever's in charge

1 of training, and correct me if I'm wrong, is the same person.

2 A. Well, the training, the drivers and captains training, I'm
3 not directly involved with, but I know it's conducted through
4 operations. We have captains trainers and also drivers training
5 that does the trainings for all of our new drivers and our
6 captains and recertifying them every year. There's two or three
7 captains/drivers trainers.

8 Q. Okay. And how about on the maintenance side, is there any
9 type of training that is conducted for the maintenance group?

10 A. Most of that is on-the-job training because, you know, we
11 hire, try to hire mechanics that, you know, obviously already know
12 what they're doing and they learn it. Basically, it's on-the-job
13 training that they'll learn the specifics, usually from our two
14 supervisors, they work closely with them, so we're comfortable
15 that they're able to work on their own.

16 Q. Okay. And this is out of the -- out of the manual. Could
17 you explain what the Duck Central internal website is?

18 A. Yes, that was a site that was posted by Ride the Ducks
19 International that any training documents would go on, any
20 technical documents. There's stuff on there from -- as far as
21 maintenance stuff, there's maintenance manuals, there's all the
22 paperwork for like annual inspections, that kind of thing is all
23 on there. I don't know a lot of what's on there as far as the
24 captains and drivers stuff. I know there's training materials, as
25 well, I can't tell you specifically what it looks like, but

1 there's also places where the different operations, the
2 franchisees, licensees, could go in and put their documents, you
3 know, like put copies of their COIs and, you know, anything like
4 that. Most of them didn't utilize that, but it was there for them
5 if they chose to.

6 Q. And how would you access that?

7 A. You have to have an e-mail address. I believe it's -- you
8 have to set up -- they have to set you up with a Ride the Ducks
9 e-mail address and then a user name and password.

10 Q. Okay. And how about the reference to a duck hotline, are you
11 familiar with --

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. -- the duck hotline?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. And could you explain what that's used for?

16 A. Yeah, there was a hotline set up several years ago that they
17 could call instead of directly calling Frank or myself or whoever.
18 There was a hotline set up that would ring in to typically one of
19 our phones and primarily, it was mine, but it would ring into it.
20 At any given time they could call that and get assistance with,
21 you know, whatever. If I didn't know, I would do my best to get
22 them the answers from operations or whoever depending on what
23 their questions were.

24 Q. Now, since Ripley's took over, is that hotline still
25 available to your knowledge?

1 A. To my knowledge, no, and that's just like Duck Central, we
2 don't -- Ripley's does not own Duck Central. That went with Ride
3 the Ducks International. I mean, we still have access to it, but
4 it's limited. Like I said, it's not -- not ours. It was Ride the
5 Ducks International's.

6 Q. I'm just going to ask you a few questions on some maintenance
7 items. Can you describe the inspection that's done by the
8 maintenance crew in the evening?

9 A. Um-hum. Yeah, typically they bring it in, you know, they
10 fuel it, they check -- check the axles and the hull for water,
11 inspect all that. Check all the fluids. And when they're
12 underneath, they typically, you know, will look at the drive
13 tubes, the boots, you know, all of the safety stuff underneath.
14 That's essentially -- like I said, they'll look at the stuff, too,
15 because they're under the hood, they're under the floorboards
16 inside, checking the fluids like in the transfer case, all of
17 that, but that's primarily what the nightly maintenance consists
18 of.

19 Q. Okay. Is there a checklist that they go by or a maintenance
20 log that they --

21 A. Yeah, there is -- there's not a check sheet, per se, but
22 there is a sheet of which ducks ran that day, they'll record how
23 much fuel they put in them and who inspected. It's broken down
24 into tops and bottoms, and who inspected the top and who inspected
25 the bottom. There'll be initials for that.

1 Q. Okay. Could you explain to me what the DOT annual inspection
2 is? I believe it's a 250-hour inspection.

3 A. Yeah, the 250 hour. Most of that is visual. A lot of the
4 stuff, you know, they go through and inspect, you know, the front
5 end, they'll inspect, you know, the drag links, they'll inspect
6 everything underneath. Grease it, change the oil if it's due. It
7 depends on what -- they don't find anything, you know, that's like
8 a day inspection.

9 Q. Okay. And could you tell me, they talk about the COI and --
10 but they also say a pre-COI inspection.

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Can you describe the difference of the two and --

13 A. Well, essentially, the COI isn't -- our annual is witnessed
14 by the Coast Guard. We have a check sheet that we go through,
15 everything that they check, prior to that to make sure that --
16 verify everything's functional, do everything that we can prior to
17 them getting there. That's not the first time that, you know, it
18 gets looked at. So it's just a check sheet, basically, that we go
19 through and verify that it's ready to go.

20 Q. Okay. And does fleet operations take part in any audits, any
21 safety audits or check audits?

22 A. We have, in the past, more for -- like I said, more on the
23 corporate side. That was more Frank's role. He would go to the
24 various operations around the country and do those. I've been on
25 a few and assisted, but that primarily was not my role.

1 Q. Okay. Would anybody come in and audit your group?

2 A. We would have a third-party audit done periodically, yes.

3 Q. Okay. Inside the operations manual they made mention that
4 the fleet operations would be informed of any hull integrity
5 issues. To your knowledge, have -- was there any hull integrity
6 issues? That you recall.

7 A. Most of that stuff would go to Frank because if it needed a
8 hull repair or procedure, all of that, Frank would -- Frank would
9 handle all of that.

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. For the most part. I mean, I was aware of, you know, when we
12 would get something from, you know, Philadelphia or whoever it
13 was, not in all cases but a lot of cases I was aware of -- aware
14 of it.

15 Q. Could you tell me the -- the maintenance system, I guess you
16 have a computer maintenance system?

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. Could you explain it?

19 A. It's called Asset Works. Basically, it tracks all of our
20 maintenance, they'd open a work order. There's different task
21 codes in there for whatever the repair would be. Like change a
22 water pump, for example, there'd be a task code like that, I don't
23 know if it's specific to, say, water pump, but there's task codes
24 in there for whatever the repair they're doing. They'll clock in,
25 clock out when the repair is done, record any parts that went on

1 that and then of course, the report is closed. Same way with all
2 of our other -- our annuals and all of that stuff is recorded in
3 there. If you don't know what you're looking at, it might be a
4 little hard to distinguish between what would be this or what
5 would be that, but yes, all of the maintenance is recorded in our
6 -- as well as -- as well as it tracks our purchasing and our
7 parts, as well.

8 Q. And has access to that file? Or who actually goes into the
9 file?

10 A. The mechanics. They clock in and out.

11 Q. All the mechanics?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah. As well as parts, myself, and -- yes.

15 MR. VOLPE: Okay. I'm through with questions for the time
16 being.

17 BY MR. YOUNG:

18 Q. This is Brian Young with the NTSB. Thank you, Brian, for all
19 your help throughout the week here and a lot of the questions I
20 may be asking today we may have discussed out there, but just so
21 we can memorialize it and --

22 A. Sure.

23 Q. -- take it on the record, but starting kind of backwards from
24 where John was asking. On the Asset Works --

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. -- is that a system that would also generate work orders and
2 advise you when maintenance items were due?

3 A. Yes. I believe it's set up to show when maintenance items
4 are due. I can't answer that definitively, but it has the ability
5 to do that, yes.

6 Q. And are the work orders based on calendar or running hours?

7 A. It would be on hours.

8 Q. On hours. And as a manager, would you be able to identify
9 any work items that are overdue?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. I understand there are 21 certificated ducks. For any given
12 day are there a certain number of ducks or specific ducks that run
13 that day or do they cycle through all of them?

14 A. It would be, you know, they have their favorites, but it
15 would be whatever the demands were for that day. I mean, they
16 could need two ducks or all the way to 19 or 20, you know, it just
17 depends on whatever -- whatever they have scheduled for that date
18 depending on what they expect the business to be.

19 Q. And would a captain and driver team be assigned to one duck
20 on a day or would they shift ducks throughout their day?

21 A. They would typically be assigned, excuse me, to one for that
22 day unless there was some issue or we needed to take that out from
23 them for some reason and needed to swap, but typically they would
24 start the day and finish the day on the same vehicle.

25 Q. And we had discussed yesterday about the fueling operations,

1 but can you talk a little bit about how the ducks are fueled
2 throughout a working day?

3 A. Um-hum. A duck only has a 40-gallon tank, so typically after
4 -- I believe it's three trips, it might be four, I could be wrong,
5 but they don't get the best mileage, so they have to be fueled
6 midday. On a really busy day, they have to be fueled. Usually
7 sometime two to four o'clock they'll bring them down and fuel
8 them.

9 Q. And do you have your own facility for fueling or --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And is there some sort of a track or a record of how much
12 fuel and when they fuel?

13 A. Um-hum. That'll be on the daily maintenance logs. It'll
14 have a fueling number one and a fueling number two.

15 Q. We did extensive testing yesterday on the 7 for the bilge
16 system. Could you just explain how the -- we'll start from the
17 lowest part and work our way up, but the bilge pumps themselves,
18 can you tell me the different methods of operation for the three
19 bilge pumps on that specific model, the 7?

20 A. Yeah. There's a manual circuit which there's a switch on the
21 dash as well as an indicator light that the captain can turn on
22 the pump manually. There is an automatic circuit which will --
23 this is for the two rears, that the float will come on once the
24 water level gets to a certain point, turning the pump on which
25 will also turn an indicator light on the dash. And then there is

1 a mid-ship -- one bilge pump that only has an automatic circuit
2 that the float will turn on. I believe there's an indicator light
3 on the dash, as well, but there is not a manual, a manual switch.

4 Q. And if the bilge level was to raise above the pump's
5 capacity, how would the operator be aware, made aware of this?

6 A. There is a high water alarm float. There's one on the rears,
7 there's one on the -- in the mid-ship, one in the sea chest, and
8 then the one up front that has an indicator light and an alarm on
9 a separate panel to the right of the driver. Captain.

10 Q. Captains. Some of the vessels throughout the fleet have this
11 pumping arrangement. Other vessels have a -- what's known as a
12 Higgins pump. Can you please describe the difference between the
13 two bilge operations?

14 A. Yeah. The Higgins pump is a mechanical pump that's driven
15 off of the prop shaft when the prop's engaged. It's totally
16 dependent on the engine RPM. Typically, once a sea chest is put
17 in -- the sea chest is a watertight compartment that encloses all
18 of our -- major through-hull fittings is contained within this
19 compartment. When ducks are outfitted with those, the Higgins
20 pump is typically removed and replaced with the electric pump.

21 Q. And what was the capacity of the Higgins pumps, typically?

22 A. Typically, if I remember correctly, it's about 200 -- I mean,
23 again, it's dependent on engine RPM, but at max RPM, I believe, is
24 around 250 gallons a minute.

25 Q. And the three float or manual switch bilge pumps in

1 conjunction with the sea chest, what is their capacity?

2 A. They are rated at 2,000 gallons per hour. That's what the
3 ratings of the pumps, themselves, is.

4 Q. Just -- you said 2,000 gallons per minute, per hour? Per
5 hour.

6 A. Per hour.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. That's what the pump, you know, perfect -- that's what the
9 manufacturer rates them at.

10 Q. Each pump would do 2,000 gallons per hour?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Okay. If the sea chest on some of these vessels took on
13 water, how would the operator know that? Or the captain.

14 A. There's a high water float in the sea chest to notify.

15 Q. In that case, is there any ability to pump the sea chest out?

16 A. No.

17 Q. So how would a captain handle a high bilge level or high
18 level in the sea chest?

19 A. How would he handle it? He'd get off the water.

20 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any instances where that has
21 happened?

22 A. No.

23 Q. So another item we looked at yesterday was the compressed air
24 system that pressurizes the boots.

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. Can you talk about that, at least that system?

2 A. Yeah, yeah. The duck is equipped with an air compressor and
3 a tank and a series of -- a valve that basically the air
4 compressor is on, there's -- any time the ignition is on, the air
5 compressor's on which keeps air pressure in the tank which is, I
6 believe, around eight psi.

7 When the duck enters the water, there's a switch on the prop
8 that triggers a solenoid, it's a little red solenoid that's back
9 there, that sends air to the axles, to all the axles, pressurizes
10 them to one and a half to two psi just to kind of equalize while
11 it's in the water to help keep the water out of the axles,
12 themselves. When it comes out of the water, the props disengage,
13 it closes the solenoid and basically, it vents some -- the
14 solenoid will vent to atmosphere, so it opens it back up so they
15 vent to atmosphere.

16 Q. Other than the axle boots are there any other boots that are
17 pressurized under water?

18 A. No.

19 Q. If you know this, these numbers, you know, that would be
20 great but if you don't, I understand, but of your fleet right now,
21 how many of the vessels are equipped with Higgins pumps?

22 A. You know, honestly, I don't know. I know the newer master
23 jig ducks, I believe all have sea chests in them. I'll have to
24 count. But I do not know, I'd be speculating if I tried to give
25 you a number.

1 Q. Okay, thank you. You had said, also, you had been previously
2 involved with purchasing.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. You're involved with purchasing of vinyl canopies or might
5 you be able to explain some of the specs on it, whether it's size
6 or thickness or a description of it?

7 A. Yeah, I don't know the exact thickness, but it's like 54
8 inches wide, you know, standard -- standard material, we buy it on
9 big rolls. It's a plastic vinyl, reinforces -- it's basically a
10 sign. You see these big billboard signs? That's the type of
11 material it is and it has a reinforced -- a reinforcement in it.
12 I don't know -- it's made by -- or we buy it from a company,
13 Snyder Manufacturing. I can't go over the specifics on it as far
14 as mils or anything like that, but --

15 Q. And is it one solid continuous piece that encompasses the
16 entire canopy or --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- is it two pieces?

19 A. It's two pieces. There's a channel that goes down the middle
20 that it's fastened in. Each side is its own separate piece.

21 Q. And what's the fastening method to hold the canopy to the
22 frames?

23 A. It's stapled into this aluminum channel.

24 Q. And how about the side panels, do you have any description as
25 to the material used for the side panels?

1 A. On the curtains?

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. Yeah, it's a clear PVC vinyl. I believe it's 40 mil. We've
4 changed the materials over the years. I think it used to be 40,
5 though it depends on the age of those. The manufacturer, I don't
6 think, makes 40 anymore. They've (indiscernible) to 20 or 30 mil
7 now. But it's a PVC.

8 Q. And we did a test yesterday of the starboard side curtain on
9 an emergency release and understand there's a lever to --
10 actually, to make it release. Can you just explain that process
11 of how it actually works?

12 A. Yeah, yeah. The curtain is on a roller, but it's set and
13 each end has a channel or a groove on one side, on one end, and it
14 has a little slider that it sets in, it slides in the groove, and
15 the other end is where the motor is at, but it sets in a little
16 keeper, as well. But there's a latch and a handle with a pin that
17 you can pull the pin, trip the latch. The curtain sign that the
18 curtain sets in, it has spring hinges. So when you trip that
19 lever, it releases, springs out, and the curtain will drop off and
20 drop into the water or on the ground or whatever the case may be.

21 Q. And are you aware of how frequently this emergency release is
22 tested on the ducks?

23 A. It's at least tested annually.

24 Q. Annually. In normal operation for the side curtain to be
25 raised and lowered, how is that carried out?

1 A. There's a switch, a momentary switch on the dash, one for
2 each side, that when you push the switch either up or down the
3 curtain will go up or down, but the curtain motor itself has limit
4 switches built in so once it gets to a certain point, either up or
5 down, it will stop even if your hand is still on the switch.

6 Q. And sorry, I apologize for going back, but on the bilge pump
7 system, speaking of momentary switches, if a captain or operator
8 wanted to manually pump the bilges --

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. -- can he flip a switch and it would stay on or is that a
11 momentary switch?

12 A. It's a momentary switch.

13 Q. Okay. Moving forward on the duck into the engine
14 compartment, can you give us a brief overview of the propulsion
15 system of the engine that operates the ducks?

16 A. Um-hum. It's a 427 Chevrolet truck engine, that typical
17 truck application, it's a wet cooling system, it has headers. On
18 this particular -- on the stretch ducks, the transmission is
19 divorced from the engine, it's connected by a short drive line
20 that runs from the flywheel into the torque converter into an
21 adapter that's manufactured that holds the torque converter.

22 And from there, there's a drive shaft that goes through -- if
23 it has a sea chest, there's a boot, and a sealant goes into the
24 transfer case, it connects to the transfer case into the sea
25 chest. If it doesn't, there's just a straight drive shaft. From

1 there, there's a drive shaft that goes down to the front drive
2 axle, steer axle, that's enclosed in a tube that has boots as well
3 as a restrictor, what we refer to as a restrictor, which reduces
4 the opening where the boot is at from six inches to basically -- I
5 don't know exactly, but a lot less. Same way with the rear.
6 There's a shaft that goes down to the drive axle. The rear-most
7 axle on the duck is a dummy axle, it's non-driven.

8 And then there's, off the top of the -- top rear of the
9 transfer case there is a clutch disconnect mechanism that engages
10 and disengages the prop shaft from a lever up to the -- on the
11 left-hand side of the driver's seat where you can engage and
12 disengage the prop. From there, it goes back through a drive line
13 to a packless -- well, there's an original -- on the original prop
14 shaft housing and bearing, but it goes through a packless system
15 that goes out to a bearing outside in the propeller, itself. The
16 prop.

17 Q. And you talk about some boots on the tube.

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. If there was a leak in this tube -- I'm sorry, the boot
20 around the tube, what would be the effects of that with the 7 and
21 the sea chest?

22 A. It would flood the sea chest compartment, it would trigger
23 the high water alarm, notifying the captain that there was an
24 issue and the water would be contained in that compartment,
25 allowing him time to get off the water.

1 Q. Great, thank you. Up in the engine compartment, could you
2 briefly describe the fire detection and suppression system that is
3 installed?

4 A. Um-hum. There is a heat detector in the engine compartment.
5 It is a self-monitoring system, meaning that if the heat detector
6 fails or a wire gets broken, terminal, whatever the case may be,
7 if there's any fault in the circuit, it will trigger the alarm
8 just like there was a fire. There's a panel in the driver's area
9 with a light and an alarm to notify him of the fire. There's also
10 the same sensor at the fuel tank. There's also a separate system,
11 but there's a vapor detector in the engine compartment as well as
12 one at the fuel tank and then the head unit for that is on the
13 dash.

14 Back to your last question, the CO2. There's fixed piping
15 that runs to the engine compartment as well as back into the hull,
16 itself. The bottle is to the right of the captain with a manual
17 discharge. There's also a box that kills the engine. In the
18 event of a discharge, it shuts the engine down, as well as
19 disables the bilge blower, as well.

20 Q. Looking at the 7, we understand there's a way to isolate the
21 air, the incoming air, into the engine compartment and then
22 understand it's a three-step process. Could you just explain
23 that?

24 A. Yeah, there's what we refer to as a hood drop, there's a
25 lever that can be pulled that the hood will drop and close. On

1 this particular one, the front hatch was fixed closed. Some of
2 them, there's a separate -- it's incorporated into the same lever,
3 but this one was fixed. And then one on each side. There's a
4 side dampener door that there's a lever on the right side of the
5 duck and then one on the left side that closes each door
6 independently. Those doors on this particular one are -- there's
7 a latch, but they're spring loaded so when you pull the lever and
8 release the latch, they slam shut.

9 Q. If the hood was dropped and the two side hatches were
10 secured, would the engine continue to run?

11 A. I can speculate a little bit, but it should for a little
12 while. I don't know for how long. I mean, it will overheat
13 because it's not getting any, you know, any air, obviously. And I
14 don't know if there's enough leakage for combustion air, I don't
15 know. I don't know how long it would run. It would run for a
16 little bit. I don't for how long.

17 Q. Okay. We understand some of the cooling system. There is a
18 cooling fan over a radiator. Can the engine be cooled by sea
19 water or air or both?

20 A. This particular duck has a radiator, which is, you know, air
21 exchange, but it also has a keel cooler that supplements the
22 engine cooling. But its primary means is the radiator.

23 Q. If the vessel is on the water and lake water enters into the
24 engine compartment, whether it's the hood or the side exhausts,
25 would that water be contained to the engine compartment?

1 A. For a time being there is a drive, excuse me, an axel tunnel
2 that's underneath the engine that comes up a certain height. Once
3 the water was to get above that level, it would flow over and go
4 back into the rest of the hull. There's various obstructions
5 throughout the duck that the water level would have to be to a
6 certain point before it would be able to go back in. It's not
7 really compartmentalized, but there are obstructions to the water
8 free flowing from one compartment to the other.

9 Q. And just to review, we're talking about the bilge system.
10 Are there any alarms, bilge alarms, that would notify the captain
11 of a high bilge level in the forward compartment?

12 A. Yes, there's an alarm in the engine compartment.

13 Q. And is there the ability to pump that compartment?

14 A. No.

15 Q. So how would that water be dealt with should there be an
16 introduction of water into the engine compartment?

17 A. It would get to a certain level and it would flow back into
18 the midsection where there is a pump.

19 Q. And would that level affect the operation of the engine?

20 A. No. No, because the pump is -- the tunnel that I was talking
21 about, itself -- and again, I don't have an exact measurement, but
22 it's less than a foot high.

23 Q. Before the water would start --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- moving aft? In your 30 years of working here, have you

1 ever heard of water incoming to the point where it actually
2 secured the engine?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Going back a little bit, you were talking about some of the
5 ducks were being constructed in this location. Was that, from the
6 ground up, a brand new construction or were you using a previous
7 body, a frame, from --

8 A. No, we -- well, yes. We would use the -- it depends whether
9 you're talking -- if you're talking master jig ducks, we would use
10 -- we would strip it down literally to two bare frame rails, the
11 original duck. We would stretch the frame, make all the
12 modifications to the frame, and then we would build a new hull
13 around it. As far as this location, we have -- we had the actual
14 ducks in town and then we had another separate manufacturing
15 facility across town that we would do various operations at, which
16 we no longer have that facility, but during the peak, we did.

17 Q. And at that time, were the ducks around the country all
18 modified or built here at this location?

19 A. The ones that we were directly affiliated with, yes.

20 Q. To your knowledge, if you estimate, how many ducks were
21 constructed or modified here and sent throughout the country?

22 A. That was built here, there was 56 stretch ducks and we
23 stopped -- the last truck duck we built was 23 or 24, but there's
24 been 105 ducks total. Chance built the rest of the remaining
25 truck ducks.

1 Q. When you look at the size of the ducks, some of them are
2 about 35 feet long, is that about right for some of them?

3 A. No, they're all the -- they're all the same length.

4 Q. They are.

5 A. Like I said, what varies is the freeboard, the beam, things
6 like that, but the actual length themselves is the same. It's
7 either 32 or 33. Some documents say 32, some documents say 33.
8 It depends on whether you measure the stairs and how you measure
9 it. Thirty-two, thirty-three feet.

10 Q. And I'll get back to that part, but I just remembered, what's
11 the horsepower of the engines on the ducks?

12 A. The true horsepower, I believe GM rates it, I believe, is
13 235.

14 Q. And is it pretty much a very similar engine throughout the
15 fleet?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. It doesn't -- I mean, the question is the stretch part of it,
18 if I understood right, was 15 inches was added to the length of
19 it, is that --

20 A. Yes, there was a section, midsection, around the transfer
21 case, 15 inches was added. And then the -- this was the
22 difference between an original fleet duck and a stretch duck, when
23 we were talking about that. Because we take the original frames,
24 add 15 inches, and then the driver's compartment was moved forward
25 18 inches.

1 Q. And what was the reason to add 15 inches and move the
2 driver's compartment forward?

3 A. Well, there were several reasons. One, to get everything on
4 the same level, because the original fleet duck had a step up in
5 the back that was awkward. But the primary reason was to get
6 another row of seats.

7 Q. One more row of seats?

8 A. Yeah. And get everything all under cover.

9 Q. And all the seats -- and we were looking through the seats
10 yesterday and we understood there was one seat that had a
11 seatbelt. Can you explain why one seat --

12 A. Yeah, the rear center, all the way in the rear, has a
13 seatbelt because when you're entering the water, if they enter the
14 water pretty hard, the -- all the other seats have a seat in front
15 in them or something to brace themselves against, this one does
16 not, and it's to prevent that person from sliding out and hurting
17 themselves. Now, the instructions is for them to put it on. If
18 there's someone sitting in that, they'll tell them to put it on
19 when they go in and take it off immediately before they hit the
20 water.

21 Q. When the duck is operating on land, what's an average speed
22 that the vessel -- that the vehicle operates at?

23 A. Thirty-five to forty.

24 Q. And on the water?

25 A. That's a good question. They typically operate 12 to 1500

1 rpm, so I'm guessing two to three if not -- maybe a little faster,
2 but, I mean, top speed, six, so yeah, it's not real -- not real
3 fast.

4 Q. And would that be six miles an hour or six knots?

5 A. Six miles an hour. Maybe a little bit over. We've done
6 testing in the past, I don't remember exactly, but around six.

7 Q. And when the vessel is operating as a vehicle on the road,
8 there's a normal power assist steering system.

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. How does the vessel steer at sea?

11 A. There is a -- of course, you got your steering column.
12 There's a shaft that runs down to the steering box. On that shaft
13 is a gear. Off of that gear is a chain that runs to a typical
14 bolt helm station that the chain -- there's a gear on that, as
15 well, but the chain between the two, when you turn the wheel, it
16 turns down station and then there's a cable that runs back to the
17 rudder.

18 Q. And if that chain was to break and the steering column became
19 disconnected from the rudder, is there any sort of emergency
20 steering?

21 A. Yes, there's a couple different styles. I believe 7 has --
22 there's a manual rudder arm, which you can go back and install on
23 the rudder arm itself and manually steer it.

24 Q. We have two vessels that were in the lake at the same time of
25 the night of the incident and Number 7 had the accident and Number

1 4 successfully made it to the exit ramp. Can you describe any
2 differences that you're aware of between the two vessels?

3 A. Yeah, 54 is what we refer to as a master jig duck.

4 Q. Can you slow that down? Master?

5 A. Master jig.

6 Q. Jig, j-i-g? Okay.

7 A. And only because we had a jig that we basically -- that's the
8 one that we built the complete new hull. That one has a complete
9 new hull, which it has a little bit wider beam, a little bit
10 higher gull wall, a little more freeboard. The rear bilge pans
11 are a little more rounded so there's a little more buoyancy. I'm
12 sure there's other things, but that's what I can think of off the
13 top of my head.

14 Q. Some of the -- so do you know about how much newer the 54 is
15 compared to the 7?

16 A. As far as age of production, I do not, but they were all
17 built within a 10-year time frame. So 54, we only built 56, so it
18 was towards the end, 2004-2005 era. Seven would've probably been
19 mid to late '90s, because I mean, we built them -- the first one
20 was in '96, but I don't know the exact year.

21 Q. On some of the documentation for the 7, it says it was built
22 in 1944.

23 A. Yes, because that one is the original hull and that's the way
24 they were titled because if we had original paperwork for the
25 duck, that's the way they were titled, is whatever year that the

1 original DUKW was that they were titled.

2 Q. So how much -- when you -- then you say it was built in the
3 '90s, what's the difference between the '44 model and the '90 --
4 '95-'96 model? What was left from the original construction that
5 was --

6 A. Well, on 7, quite a bit, because like I said, that was a
7 stretch rack that we just left the original hull, just stretched
8 it and repaired whatever hull needed to be repaired and added new
9 mechanicals.

10 Q. And the 54?

11 A. Fifty-four was an all new hull.

12 Q. And when you say new hull, when would you say that hull was
13 built?

14 A. Whenever we built the -- reassembled the duck in probably,
15 like I said, 2000 -- somewhere between 2003 and 2005. I don't
16 know the exact year.

17 Q. And when it comes to rebuilding the hull, is that done at
18 your facility or do you send it somewhere else, like --

19 A. No, that was done at one of our facilities. Well, I should
20 say Ride the Ducks International's facilities, but yes.

21 Q. And my last question, and I appreciate all your time, is when
22 Ripley's bought the operation in 2017, did you experience any
23 changes in the operations for the better or for the worse?

24 A. No. They pretty much -- they left management in place and
25 no, they didn't make any major changes. I mean, we had typical

1 stuff, you know, benefits and, you know, stuff like that, but as
2 far as the operations and -- no, they didn't make any changes.

3 MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Thanks very much for all the
4 information. Do you need a break?

5 MR. DECKARD: No, I'm fine. Thank you.

6 BY MR. [REDACTED]

7 Q. Thanks for coming in, Brian.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. You know, we've had a lot of conversations, you and I --

10 A. Oh, yeah.

11 Q. -- over all the investigations that you and Frank have been
12 involved in and I know you guys -- I know you guys really take
13 this personal and take it to heart, so thanks. I mean, thanks for
14 coming in and talking with us. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the U.S.
15 Coast Guard in St. Louis Investigations Office and I just have a
16 few questions.

17 Unfortunately, you're the first one from, really, any sort of
18 management position that we've really been able to check with, so
19 I'm just trying to get -- we're just trying to get an idea, trying
20 to get an idea of some of the positions that are at Ride the
21 Ducks, trying to fill out the hierarchy, if you will. I think
22 John kind of touched on it a little bit earlier. And there's some
23 titles in the ops manual that we just want to put some names on --

24 A. Sure, sure.

25 Q. -- so we know what you're talking to, so I'm just going to go

1 through the list that is outlined in this ops manual. By the way,
2 do you know if the 2000 -- do you know if this is the most current
3 or is there another more current version, possibly?

4 A. There may be a more current version, I'm not aware of it.

5 Q. Than 2012?

6 A. Than 2012.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I know there's a previous -- I know of 2010, I've seen a 2010
9 way back when, but that's probably the newest one that I've seen.

10 Q. Okay. So out of the 2012 ops manual, they identify a -- the
11 general manager. Do you know who that is?

12 A. Yes. It's Curtis.

13 Q. Curtis. They also identify a VP of fleet operations. Now, I
14 know that might be an older title. Do you know who might be
15 filling that role?

16 A. That role --

17 Q. Or maybe --

18 A. That was probably back when Bethany Miller -- that's the only
19 VP that I've ever known who's been involved with operations, but
20 she left the company in 2010, '11, something like that.

21 Q. Okay. A safety director?

22 A. That was probably from HFE times, it was probably just not
23 removed from the manual because we don't have a safety director.

24 Q. You don't have it anymore. Fleet maintenance manager?

25 A. That would've been Jay Hiatt and now myself.

1 Q. Okay. Manager, fleet operations?

2 A. The manager of fleet operations, I believe -- well, I don't
3 know who that -- I don't know who that would be. Sorry.

4 Q. A senior maintenance manager?

5 A. Actually, that would've been Jay Hiatt.

6 Q. Oh, okay.

7 A. I spoke incorrectly, sorry. Because I think that was his
8 actual title, was --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- senior maintenance manager.

11 Q. And then -- but that position is vacant now?

12 A. Yeah. Well -- yeah.

13 Q. Or you absorbed that?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Titles --

17 Q. No, I understand. And then operations manager?

18 A. Operations manager is Matt.

19 Q. Matt. Thank you for that. Kind of throughout our
20 discussions, again, we haven't had a chance to really talk about
21 anybody -- or talk with anybody in operations. Can you describe,
22 kind of, the atmosphere, the relationships, maybe you have with
23 the management or maybe --

24 A. Related to operations?

25 Q. Yes, sir.

1 A. Well, like I said earlier, my thing is with letting us know
2 how many ducks they're going to need, what days, you know, if we
3 have any issues or a duck staying on for maintenance, letting them
4 know so they can -- we can swap it out for something else, letting
5 us know if they have any scheduled wheelchair lifts or any groups,
6 specifically, that we need to know, too, that might be out of the
7 ordinary where I need to have people on staff to cover, you know,
8 because any time we have a duck out, we have people in the shop,
9 that's pretty much my interactions with operations.

10 Q. If, during like a pre-trip inspection or when they're on the
11 road or on the water and they experience some sort of issue, they
12 contact the maintenance shop?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. Who typically handles that? Are you informed of an
15 issue that they find or is that just kind of --

16 A. It depends. I mean, if I've got a radio on, I'm informed
17 directly, but typically, whoever the supervisor is on duty from
18 the maintenance, our shop supervisor --

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. -- will take care of it. Either they'll call and bring the
21 duck down if it's something we can repair onsite, if it's not or
22 if it's not something we can repair quickly, we'll put them on a
23 different duck or if it happens on the road we'll send out a duck
24 and our shop truck to swap ducks and either repair it on site or
25 whatever we need to do to have it brought back to the shop to

1 repair.

2 Q. Okay. On July 19th they had an issue with Stretch Duck 26 in
3 which it was swapped out with 54.

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. Do you recall what the issue was with 26?

6 A. I heard -- I haven't been in the shop much since then and I
7 was not there at the time when it happened, but my understanding
8 is before he went into the water he couldn't get his prop engaged,
9 so that was the reason the vehicle was swapped out, it had
10 something to do with the prop.

11 Q. I know your shop, the maintenance shop, also does the post-
12 maintenance checks, how extensive of an inspection it is. We've
13 heard of the pre-inspection and post-inspection checklist
14 conducted by the captain, but can you kind of briefly explain,
15 like, what the maintenance shop does each evening?

16 A. Yeah. It's like I was telling him earlier, it's part of our
17 daily/nightly service, you know, they'll go through and, like I
18 said, check it for water, check all the axles, inspect the
19 underneath, you know, they'll look at the tubes and the drive but,
20 you know, everything underneath. While they're under there
21 servicing it, you know, they'll look at the wheel seals and the
22 knuckle boots and look for any, you know, leakage or any issues
23 like that. You know, up top, they get under the hood and check
24 the oil, check the brake fluid, you know, whatever they can
25 visually see at that time. The same way with, you know, inside

1 they'll pull, you know, pull boards when they check the transfer
2 case oil and things like that. It's just the typical -- other
3 than checking the fluids, it's visual.

4 Q. Okay. Would you say it's more extensive than what the
5 captains and CDL drivers do or is it on par with what they do?

6 A. I would say it's pretty well on a par. I don't know that
7 it's more extensive.

8 Q. Okay. In terms of, like, checking safety equipment, like
9 high water alarms and things along that --

10 A. That's not part of (indiscernible).

11 Q. It's not part of it, okay.

12 A. No.

13 Q. All right. How involved does the maintenance shop get with
14 the training of the captains to check the ducks, these -- on these
15 checklists?

16 A. We don't.

17 Q. Don't. Who handles the training of the captains on the
18 checklist?

19 A. That would be whoever -- the trainers.

20 Q. The trainers.

21 A. The trainers are. I mean, if there's something particular or
22 something they have questions about, you know, like I said, I try
23 to go to -- as much as I can, I go to our monthly captains'
24 meetings. You know, if there's any questions about something or
25 any issues or something, we'll talk about that stuff then, but

1 unless there's a question or something, we're not directly
2 involved.

3 Q. Okay. I want to back up to the operations and just what kind
4 of relationship do you see between the general manager, operations
5 managers, assistants, that working environment, that atmosphere,
6 do you feel like they have a good working relationship amongst
7 them? From your perspective.

8 A. From my perspective, yes.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I haven't seen anything to the contrary.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I mean, I know Curtis is pretty actively involved in that,
13 you know, because he's --

14 Q. Matt stays fairly involved in --

15 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. And their relationship is not strained in any way
17 or --

18 A. Not that I'm aware of.

19 Q. Okay. Charles?

20 A. Charles, yeah. I mean, they all visually appear to be fine.
21 I mean, again, I kind of stay in my little hole in the basement --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- but, you know, when I'm called out -- you know, some of
24 these people I don't see for two or three days at a time, so --

25 Q. Oh, I know, yeah. No, I get it, I get it. And then who -- I

1 guess this kind of goes back to the hierarchy, but who do you --
2 who do you report to in your work --

3 A. Curtis.

4 Q. -- in your work chain? You work directly for Curtis?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. And your relationship is good with him?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Just a couple of more questions. You mentioned the COI pre-
11 inspection, obviously I'm very familiar with what the COI
12 inspection is, but the ops manual kind of references these -- and
13 I can show you this, maybe it will -- and you probably haven't
14 reviewed it in a while, but it references inspecting officers and
15 I was just curious who those people might be and maybe that would
16 help you. This is page 21 out of the operations manual, dated --
17 or 2012 operations manual.

18 A. Inspecting officers (indiscernible).

19 Q. And my question is if you know who they are.

20 A. You know, I would assume the Coast Guard, but I could be
21 wrong, I mean, because there right above it, the paragraph right
22 above it, it says USCG inspecting officer. This does not. It
23 just says inspecting officer. The section -- or the captain
24 performing emergency drill. That would be -- that's my
25 assumption.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. It could be wrong because the way I --

3 Q. It could be (indiscernible) the Coast Guard?

4 A. That's the way I'm interpreting it.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I don't know who other -- what other inspecting officer
7 that --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- would be involved.

10 Q. So you don't have that title within Ride the --

11 A. Uh-uh.

12 Q. -- Ducks fleet operation? Okay.

13 A. No.

14 Q. I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't something that
15 maybe you had internally or --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- that you were aware of, so -- and the last question I
18 have, we've talked about that north ramp having some issues.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Who owns it, who's responsible for maintaining it?

21 A. It's owned by the Core.

22 Q. Okay, so the Core.

23 A. But we maintain it.

24 Q. Okay. And so Ride the Ducks is responsible for maintaining
25 the grade despite the fact that if maybe the Branson Belle causes

1 some sort of damage with their paddle wheel, it's Ride the Ducks'
2 responsibility to repair that?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Okay. And which part of the -- does that fall under
5 maintenance or operations or is it just kind of -- no idea?

6 A. No, no, no. I don't know exactly who it falls under, but
7 it's usually either Frank, Dennis or I've been involved with it a
8 few times. Usually falls to us.

9 Q. Usually falls to maintenance by default?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. Dennis, who is Dennis? I'm sorry.

12 A. Dennis is -- he's our facilities maintenance.

13 Q. Oh, for like the facilities like --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- the grounds?

16 A. Yeah. He, I think, helped with grading it off a time or two,
17 but usually it's Frank.

18 MR. [REDACTED] That's all the questions I have. Thanks again,
19 Brian.

20 MR. DECKARD: Yeah.

21 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard. I don't have any
22 questions (indiscernible).

23 MR. [REDACTED] Good morning, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the
24 Coast Guard. I have no questions at this time, thank you.

25 BY MR. VOLPE:

1 Q. I just have a couple of follow-up questions. You mentioned
2 Duck -- or 54 was a master jig duck.

3 A. Uh-huh.

4 Q. Could you tell me, was 26 a master jig duck or was it similar
5 to Duck 7, original hull? Because you --

6 A. Twenty --

7 Q. -- said that master jig ducks have wider beams, more
8 buoyancy --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- higher freeboard. Could you tell me if 26 is a master jig
11 duck or --

12 A. Twenty-six is not. Twenty-six is a stretch rack duck. It's
13 probably closer to 7 than 54.

14 Q. Okay. And you also mentioned at the monthly meeting
15 sometimes you show up to the captain and driver meetings.

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Is it a requirement for everyone to go to that meeting or you
18 just go -- you just go to see if they have any maintenance issues?

19 A. Is it a requirement for me to be there?

20 Q. Yes.

21 A. I always try to. I don't know if it's necessarily required,
22 but I like to know what's going on.

23 Q. Is there anybody else from maintenance that goes to these
24 meetings?

25 A. Not normally, no.

1 Q. Okay. And does maintenance have their own separate monthly
2 meeting?

3 A. Yeah, we have -- we have monthly safety meetings.

4 MR. VOLPE: Okay. I have no further questions.

5 BY MR. YOUNG:

6 Q. I just have three more. This is Brian Young again with the
7 NTSB. Can you just talk a little bit about the communications
8 system on board the ducks, how the vessels would communicate to
9 each other and how they would communicate to home base?

10 A. Yeah, there's a two-way radio on board that they switch
11 between channels, I can't tell you the exact channel, but there's
12 the marine side that they'll communicate. Like when they're going
13 into the water, they'll radio the Branson Belle, tell them they're
14 going in the water, any, you know, inbound traffic or anyone
15 that's got a marine radio. And they can switch back or they can
16 communicate back with operations.

17 Q. Do the ducks have the ability to communicate with each other
18 over the VHF marine radio?

19 A. If they have the radio off the mike. If they hang it up, it
20 grounds out, so it -- basically shuts off. If they have it off
21 the mike, they can communicate with each other, yes.

22 Q. Is the Branson Belle always staffed so that they can
23 communicate between the ducks?

24 A. I don't believe so, I don't -- unless they have, you know,
25 tours operating that day, I don't -- I mean, they're there,

1 obviously, a lot of the same times we are, but I don't know
2 definitively, but I don't believe there's someone there if they're
3 not operating.

4 Q. And is there always somebody in the office for the ducks to
5 communicate with when they're on the lake?

6 A. If we're open, there's someone, there's an MOD, yes.

7 Q. And do they have the ability to communicate from the water to
8 the office?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. How about on land?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And it's the same channel?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Would it be the same --

15 A. Well, unless they're -- like, again, like switch between
16 marine, if they're trying to talk to marine traffic. If they're
17 trying to talk back to operations or duck dock, then there's a
18 separate channel.

19 Q. Okay. So they would need to switch. If they were out on the
20 lake and speaking to the Branson Belle, they would be on a marine
21 channel?

22 A. Yes, but I believe -- and again, don't hold me to this
23 because I don't know the specifics of it, but I think it will
24 switch between the two, if -- you know, if they're off and
25 somebody's calling for them, I believe it will switch between the

1 two but again, I don't mess much with the radios.

2 Q. Okay. And just for some of our reports and all, who is --
3 who is the operator of the duck, stretch duck 7? Is it Ripley's
4 of Branson, Ride the Ducks of Branson? Who is the operator?

5 A. The operator, I mean, it's Ride the Ducks, but the COI, I
6 believe, says Ripley's Entertainment d.b.a. Ride the Ducks.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But the actual operator is, you know, obviously Ride the
9 Ducks, that's what's on our name, that's who's operating,
10 operating the vessel.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And then there's the owner and, you know, there's layers
13 there.

14 Q. Layers. And the last question. With all the different --
15 differences with all these duck boats, are there any ducks, to
16 your knowledge, that some of the captains refer to as being more
17 sluggish than the others in response to their throttle commands?

18 A. Oh, I'm sure. I mean, there's -- just like cars, you know,
19 some run more powerful than others even though it's maybe the same
20 engine. Yeah, there's some that's probably more powerful than
21 others. I mean, that's just pretty typical. I mean, they don't
22 all run exactly alike.

23 Q. Was there ever any description of the 7, if it was more
24 sluggish than the others, to your recollection?

25 A. Not to my recollection, no.

1 Q. How about 54?

2 A. No.

3 MR. YOUNG: Thank you.

4 MR. DECKARD: Uh-huh.

5 MR. [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] No further questions.

6 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard. No further
7 questions.

8 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard. No further
9 questions.

10 MR. YOUNG: Do you have any questions for us?

11 MR. DECKARD: I don't, thank you.

12 MR. YOUNG: Anything else that you could offer to assist us
13 in the investigation to try to determine the reason why 7 was not
14 able to successfully complete the voyage compared to the 54?

15 MR. DECKARD: Not at this time.

16 MR. YOUNG: So we may have other questions, too, and we'll
17 obviously contact you through your counsel, but thank you for all
18 your help throughout the week here. We really appreciate it.

19 MR. DECKARD: Absolutely.

20 MR. VOLPE: Okay, thank you very much. Off record at 09:15.

21 (Whereupon, at 9:15 a.m., the interview was concluded.)
22
23
24
25

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 Brian Deckard

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA18MM028

PLACE:

DATE: July 26, 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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber