

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the matter of: :

:

ALLISION WITH STATEN ISLAND FERRY :

TERMINAL MAINTENANCE PIER AT :

ST. GEORGE, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK : DCA04MM001 BY THE FERRY ANDREW J.

BARBERI :

ON OCTOBER 15, 2003 :

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INTERVIEW OF: :

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JOHN WHITE :

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Office of Marine Safety
NTSB

October 24, 2003

The above captioned interview was conducted, pursuant to notice.

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PROCEEDINGS

CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Good afternoon. It is October 24th at ten minutes past two o'clock in the afternoon. We're in Captain Ryan's office, Staten Island ferry. My name is Morgan Turrell with the NTSB, and with us is:

CAPTAIN RYAN: Patrick Ryan, New York City Department of Transportation, Staten Island Ferry.

MR. STEFANO: Nick Stefano, Coast Guard investigations.

CHRISTINE: Special ... Christine ..., Coast Guard Investigator.

MR. MURRELL: Robert Murrell, New York State Department of Transportation.

MR. HARDY: Detective Anthony Hardy, NYPD.

MR. WHITE: John White, Junior, Department of Transportation, Staten Island Ferry.

CHAIRMAN TURRELL: And will you please acknowledge you're being recorded?

MR. WHITE: I am being recorded.

CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Okay, Mr. White, would you please tell us how old you are?

MR. WHITE: I am 43 years old.

CHAIRMAN TURRELL: And how long have you worked with the ferry?

MR. WHITE: Approximately 18 years.

CHAIRMAN TURRELL: What is your current position with the ferry?

MR. WHITE: I am Deputy Director of ports and terminal operations. I oversee the custodial work in both terminals.

1 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Can you give us a picture of what you do every
2 day? What your general duties are?

3 MR. WHITE: I supervise custodial staff, schedule planning, regulating
4 time off, supplies, general cleanliness -- supervising general cleanliness in both
5 terminals.

6 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: And tell us, when you first started here 18 years
7 ago which -- did you ever work on the ferries themselves?

8 MR. WHITE: I worked as a deck hand on board ferries for
9 approximately 15 years here at Staten Island ferry.

10 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: In that time did you have occasion to work on
11 the Barberi?

12 MR. WHITE: Yes, I did. I believe I actually worked one bid tour on the ...
13 up there.

14 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: For the record, Charles Cobb, your Coast Guard
15 investigating officer is joining us. Mr. Cobb.

16 MR. COBB: How are you doing?

17 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: So will you please just tell us briefly in a narrative,
18 from your point of view, what happened on October 15th here at the Staten Island
19 ferry terminal?

20 MR. WHITE: From --

21 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: From what you saw.

22 MR. WHITE: From what I saw. I was in my office, which is at the 69th
23 Street building, the 69th Street ferry building. I didn't -- at the time of the crash itself, I
24 didn't notice it. I didn't see it. Might have heard the noise, but with the construction
25 that's going on, at the time I really didn't even pay any mind.

1 Mr. Brady, who works with me in the office, came in to the office some
2 time after the accident. He had left the terminal waiting room, I believe, where he
3 was coming from, and he saw fire engines, emergency vehicles entering the property.
4 He came into the office and said, John, I don't know what's happening, but there's
5 fire engines, ambulances coming down here.

6 When I stood up, I looked out of the window from my office, and I saw
7 the Barberi at that time. What I saw, I saw the clean side of the boat. I didn't see the
8 accident scene until the boat swung around, and when I saw that I realized that
9 something very bad had just happened. I didn't really know if it had hit a pier. I was
10 trying to determine if a boat had hit it. I had no idea what happened at that time.

11 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: So you saw the Brooklyn side of the vessel?

12 MR. WHITE: Saw the Brooklyn side of the boat, correct. And I saw -- I
13 noticed people up on deck, on the saloon deck outside, with life jackets on. I saw life
14 jackets on people, and then when the boat swung around, I understood more what
15 that was all about. And I immediately -- I called my immediate supervisor, Anthony
16 Mantino, and Anthony -- he had been informed that there was an accident. He really
17 didn't know the severity of it, and I explained that, and he said he was on his way.

18 I then went down to five slip where I saw the emergency personnel
19 were gathering there, and when the boat came in to five slip I was actually -- I was
20 down on the main level when the boat came in. I did not go on the boat at any time.
21 Stayed out and basically helped with crowd control outside by the gates.

22 And any people that were hurt, that were walking off the boat, I tried
23 to assist them while the medical people were attending to the more severely injured
24 people.

25 After some time, when all of this was happening, then I saw Richie

1 Smith exit the ferry. I was by the stairs. From where I was, I didn't speak to him. He --
2 he walked just briskly straight out. I heard one of the other captains asking if he was all
3 right -- that was Nicholas Koloras (ph) -- asked him if he was all right, and I believe he
4 just stated, "No, I'm not." and he walked past him, and that was the last contact I had
5 with that.

6 It was shortly after that Captain Ryan came out and asked me if I had
7 seen Captain Smith, and I informed him that I saw him walk by some time before.

8 Then I believe Captain Koloras (ph) came back and informed us that
9 he had seen Captain Smith get into his car, and he believe he left the property. At
10 that time Captain Ryan looked me in the eye and said, "I want you to go to his house
11 and bring him back here. Whatever you have to do." I said, you want me to go now?
12 He said, go now.

13 Eugene Brady and I, we got into a city truck, Department of
14 Transportation truck that we use, and we drove immediately to Captain Smith's home
15 which Mr. Brady knows -- knew where he lived. I asked him that before we left and he
16 informed me he did know that.

17 We arrived at the house. The car -- a car was parked in front of the
18 house that was not correctly parked -- it was parked hastily at the curb. We parked
19 the truck, we went right up to the front door which was ajar. Knocked on the door
20 and Mrs. Smith answered the door. She was very distressed at the time, crying. There
21 was another female in the house, that we later found was Richie's daughter, and she
22 was crying. And Mrs. Smith informed us that her husband was in the bathroom upstairs
23 and that she believed that he was going to hurt himself.

24 So Mr. Brady and I went upstairs and I began -- the door was locked --
25 and I began a conversation with Captain Smith through the door, just telling him who I

1 was, and telling him why -- you know, Richie, please open the door. I want to talk to
2 you. And he didn't sound right at all -- just, it's all right John, I'll be out soon. And I was
3 asking him to open the door. He just -- and it went like that for a little while, you know.
4 Please, Rich, open the door. I just want to talk to you, Rich. And he just -- yeah, I'll be
5 out in a little while. I'll be out in a little while.

6 He asked me if he could speak to his wife, and his wife came up the
7 stairs, and before she spoke -- I had asked -- I didn't know -- I said, does Richie own a
8 gun or anything? And she informed me that she didn't know, she did not think so. And
9 she was speaking to him through the door.

10 Some time in that -- in that area, Mr. Brady had called 911 and just
11 explained the situation. I don't know exactly what words he used to 911 but he
12 explained the situation to the 911 operator. He came back and informed me that he
13 had called.

14 I heard metal -- something metal dropping in the bathroom and it
15 sounded like -- something had hit the floor, at which time Mr. Brady and I decided we
16 were going to break in the bathroom. We kicked the door in and we found Captain
17 Smith, and he was laying on the floor of the bathroom. His head was away from us,
18 feet towards the door. There was blood in the bathroom, a lot of blood.

19 When I went into the bathroom, I noticed a wound on his wrist, and we
20 noticed that there was some type of wound to his chest. A pellet gun was laying by
21 his side. It was cocked -- the pump was cocked open, I grabbed it and I gave it to Mr.
22 Brady and I told him to get it out of the room. I took a towel and put it on Mr. Smith's
23 wrist.

24 His wife then saw him and she started to become emotional. She
25 came into the room, and instead of pulling her out, I said, Mrs. Smith, please hold this

1 on Mr. Smith, which she did. She held it on to his wrist, and she began to talk to him.
2 At which time Mr. Brady went down, he went down to wait for the paramedics outside
3 the front and I just stayed outside the bathroom door in case I had to help her.

4 But, you know, she was talking to her husband, and it was -- she was
5 telling him that they loved him and that -- he said to her it was an accident. She was
6 saying, there was an accident, and he was just very distraught, very distraught, very
7 incoherent.

8 And basically we waited for the ambulance to come. Mr. Smith's sister
9 arrived, and we sort of told her outside the house, told her what happened, and she
10 didn't -- Mr. Smith's wife came out and they embraced and were consoling each
11 other. And then we informed them that we would take them to the hospital -- we
12 would stay with them and take them to the hospital.

13 Some time right after that they brought Richie out on a stretcher and
14 brought him to the ambulance, and Gene Brady drove the car with Mrs. Smith and his
15 sister to the hospital, and I followed in the truck. And he went in and made sure that
16 they were all comfortable at the hospital, and then we just came right back to the job.

17 And that's it.

18 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Did Captain Smith, in that time, ever relate to you
19 any specifics of the accident?

20 MR. WHITE: Not at all. Not at all.

21 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Did you ever talk about any person involved in
22 the accident, or any other crew members?

23 MR. WHITE: No, not at all.

24 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: I'll start with Pat -- go ahead.

25 CAPTAIN RYAN: When you got there, John, was there a blood trail

1 anywhere? Did you notice a blood trail?

2 MR. WHITE: We had gone up the stairs, and from the time coming
3 back down and going back up to the stairs that Gene Brady said to me, John, there's
4 blood on the stairs. And we noticed spots of blood going up the stairs.

5 CAPTAIN RYAN: In the house or outside?

6 MR. WHITE: Inside the house. That was in the main staircase, leading
7 up to the bathroom upstairs.

8 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Did you have an opportunity to look inside the
9 car, in his vehicle?

10 MR. WHITE: I did not look inside the car. Gene might have looked in
11 the car. I did not.

12 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Go ahead, Pat.

13 MR. WHITE: When Mrs. Smith was holding the towel on his wrist, and
14 you said they were talking, did you overhear any of the conversation?

15 MR. WHITE: She was telling him -- your family loves you, we're behind
16 you. He said things like, it's terrible. And she was going -- it was an accident. She
17 called him Jeff, which I didn't know -- I heard her saying Jeff, and evidently that's what
18 she calls him -- Jeff. I don't know. And she was saying, Jeff, but it was an accident.
19 And you said you passed out. And he was just -- it's terrible, terrible.

20 CAPTAIN RYAN: Did you hear him say anything?

21 MR. WHITE: That's basically what he was --

22 CAPTAIN RYAN: As to what happened to him?

23 MR. WHITE: No, I did not hear him say that.

24 CAPTAIN RYAN: Did you hear him say "I passed out."

25 MR. WHITE: No, I didn't. I heard his wife say that to him. So I just

1 assumed before we got there, it was something he had said to her. That's what it
2 sounded like.

3 CAPTAIN RYAN: What was the nature --

4 MR. WHITE: He had moved -- it was across this way and it looked like it
5 had opened very wide. It did not -- there was blood, a lot of blood, but I didn't see it --
6 it wasn't spouting blood, it was just blood that had seemed to ooze out of it. It didn't
7 look like it was spurting blood. I just put a towel on it when I saw it open up. It opened
8 up pretty -- at that moment it looked like it opened up pretty wide to me. I couldn't
9 really judge the severity of it.

10 CAPTAIN RYAN: Was it his left -- his left --

11 MR. WHITE: I believe it was his left wrist.

12 CAPTAIN RYAN: Nothing on the right?

13 MR. WHITE: I didn't notice anything on the right wrist.

14 CAPTAIN RYAN: Did you notice how he did it? Was there any --

15 MR. WHITE: No, I didn't see any cutting implement -- like I said we
16 found -- the pellet gun was in the bathroom. And that -- I imagine that's what I had
17 heard fall in the bathroom. It sounded like a heavy piece of metal fall in the
18 bathroom. And as soon as we went in, I just grabbed it -- and I said, Gene, get this out
19 of here, and I believe he put it into a clothes hamper in the bedroom -- he just
20 dropped it in a clothes basket in the bedroom of the house.

21 CAPTAIN RYAN: How was he dressed?

22 MR. WHITE: A white shirt on, it was open. A T-shirt -- that was it, and his
23 pants. The T-shirt --

24 CAPTAIN RYAN: The T-shirt was over the wound and --

25 MR. WHITE: Over the wound, yes. There was blood on the T-shirt.

1 CAPTAIN RYAN: Blood on the T-shirt.

2 MR. WHITE: On the left side of his chest.

3 CAPTAIN RYAN: You didn't actually see the skin --

4 MR. WHITE: I didn't actually see the wound, no, I did not.

5 CAPTAIN RYAN: Okay.

6 CHRISTINE: When he walked by you when he was leaving the boat,
7 was he stumbling a little, or --

8 MR. WHITE: I -- head down, just walking straight ahead. That's basically
9 what I saw. I didn't know Richie was working the boat, I really didn't even know if he
10 was part of the crew of the boat when he came off. He was just walking straight
11 ahead, right off the bridge of the boat.

12 CHRISTINE: At that point, did you think about stopping him or --

13 MR. WHITE: No, I didn't. I didn't think nothing. I was with a gentleman
14 whose shoulder was separated or dislocated and I was trying to sit him down and just
15 explaining to him that the medics would be with him, and I just looked over and saw
16 Richie walking out.

17 INVESTIGATOR 2: Did he walk by you on the bridge side?

18 MR. WHITE: On the bridge.

19 INVESTIGATOR 2: Coming off the bridge?

20 MR. WHITE: Coming off. He walked straight out.

21 CAPTAIN RYAN: On the lower level.

22 MR. WHITE: On the lower level of the boat.

23 CAPTAIN RYAN: Yes, I have another question I forgot. You said you
24 heard Captain -- what was his name?

25 MR. WHITE: Nicholas Koloras (ph).

1 CAPTAIN RYAN: Nicholas -- N-I-C-H -- how do you spell?
2 MR. WHITE: Koloras -- yes, with a K. It's Greek to me.
3 CAPTAIN RYAN: And you heard him ask Smith are you okay?
4 MR. WHITE: Are you okay, Richie? And I believe his response was "No,
5 I'm not okay."
6 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Can you stop for a moment, just for clarification.
7 Captain Ryan, can you tell us -- tell the folks where this is exactly, where you saw
8 Captain Smith in relation to this, because I'm a bit confused?
9 CAPTAIN RYAN: I saw Captain Smith on the upper embarkation area,
10 still on the boat. I saw him for a couple seconds. He walked off the apron. He could
11 have walked down the stairs and off down -- downstairs and by him.
12 MR. WHITE: It was downstairs, he walked by and out the gate on the
13 main level.
14 CAPTAIN RYAN: There is a staircase down.
15 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Okay. So you saw him on the main level, on the
16 street level.
17 MR. WHITE: Right. Where you come off --
18 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Did he come in the starboard --
19 MR. WHITE: It would have been the New Jersey side. Jersey side.
20 INVESTIGATOR 2: You were on that platform that --
21 MR. WHITE: I was by the platform. I was actually around --
22 INVESTIGATOR 2: That goes up and down with the boat.
23 MR. WHITE: Right, right.
24 CHRISTINE: Now did you see him get in his vehicle?
25 MR. WHITE: No, I did not.

1 CHRISTINE: How far could you see him? What was the last --

2 MR. WHITE: I just saw him, like I said, I didn't see him pass the gate. I
3 saw him walk by and I heard Captain Koloras (ph) speak to him and then that was -- I
4 was with --

5 CAPTAIN RYAN: I'm sorry, I'm -- you saw him before this --

6 MR. WHITE: Before -- I don't know. I was by the staircase. I'm almost
7 positive he walked off the bridge, Patty. I don't think he came down the staircase.
8 Like I said, I was with a man who was hurt. I was -- I had a guy who was hurt, I could
9 swear he walked straight off, but --

10 INVESTIGATOR 2: Was that after the passengers were all off --

11 MR. WHITE: The passengers were coming off the boat -- I tell you most
12 of the passengers that came off the boat, that walked off, walked off on that second
13 level, upstairs. This one gentleman that came off, I mean they were wheeling people
14 off and the triage they were setting up right in the middle, on the bridge, basically, on
15 the end of the bridge. This fellow walked off and as I said, his shoulder was hanging
16 down. I was conversing with him.

17 CAPTAIN RYAN: How long after the boat docked did you see Richie?

18 MR. WHITE: I couldn't give you an exact time. I really -- I don't know.
19 Minutes afterwards? But I don't know exactly how long. If I said five minutes, could
20 have been ten minutes. I don't know. I wouldn't be able to tell you, because so much
21 was happening around.

22 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Can you recall what you were wearing that day?

23 MR. WHITE: Clothes I was wearing. God. I don't know. I might have
24 been wearing this. I don't know. I couldn't tell you.

25 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Was it cold? Were you wearing a coat?

1 MR. WHITE: I don't believe I had a coat on. I probably had my jacket
2 on, because I usually do, this light jacket. This time of year I've been wearing the
3 jacket.

4 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: So when you saw Captain Smith walk by you, you
5 saw what he was wearing?

6 MR. WHITE: I believe he had a jacket on. I thought I noticed a bag
7 over his shoulder, but I'm not sure. He had his head down and walking straight off the
8 boat.

9 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Just think for a moment there, what shoulder was
10 he carrying his bag on?

11 MR. WHITE: I'm thinking to myself the right shoulder, over the right
12 shoulder walking out.

13 CAPTAIN RYAN: Was it something like a back pack or --

14 MR. WHITE: I didn't really see the bag, it just looked like he was holding
15 something up like this.

16 CHRISTINE: I have something else to add. When you and Brady were
17 driving to the Captain's home, do you remember the conversation you had?

18 MR. WHITE: I was sort of telling Gene to slow down a little bit because
19 he was -- he was going, and I told him, don't run any lights. We just -- we didn't think
20 we were going there to -- to stop an attempted suicide. We totally were just going --
21 we really didn't converse about what we were going to do when we got there, just I'm
22 going to talk to Richie. I knew Richie. I was just going to tell him, Richie, you've got to
23 come back with us. I think, you know, I didn't -- I felt at that time, I really -- Pat told me
24 to go get Richie, but I didn't know if Richie -- I really didn't know if he was the Captain
25 on the boat, the AC on the boat, I really didn't even know.

1 CHRISTINE: Nothing else. Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Anthony?

3 MR. HARDY: John, did you know he was going home?

4 MR. WHITE: No, like I said, I didn't even know he left the property until
5 Nick Koloras (ph) came back and said he saw him get in his car.

6 MR. HARDY: Why did you go to his house?

7 MR. WHITE: Patty just went on a hunch. I don't know. He told me to go
8 to his house. I don't know. Pat said to go to his house and bring him back, and that's
9 what I did. That's what I intended to do anyway.

10 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: You said you knew Captain Smith and Captain
11 Gansas. Can you tell us anything you dealt with Captain Smith -- were you familiar
12 with him?

13 MR. WHITE: Great guys. Great guys to work with. I know it would have
14 been overtime that I worked with Richie, I never worked with him on a regular -- well, I
15 did -- but, no, I'm trying to think. I think we did work together, but they're great guys.
16 Overall, great guys to work with. I really don't have a bad thing to say about them at
17 all.

18 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Do you recall hearing a particular person that he
19 would associate with? Do you associate him with some person --

20 MR. WHITE: Probably one of the mates? Hector Barrio (ph) was a
21 good friend with Richie. Mr. Barrio (ph) and they had personal contact off the job.

22 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Do you recall what the nature of that contact
23 was?

24 MR. WHITE: Friendship, that's it basically.

25 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: School mates or --

1 MR. WHITE: No, just friends from the job.

2 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: What about Captain Gansas?

3 MR. WHITE: Mike -- I don't know if I ever worked with Mike. When he
4 was Assistant Captain, my brother is a Captain, he was my brother's Assistant Captain
5 for a number of years. Good guy. Good deck hand to work with.

6 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Were you ever at watch AV on the bridge with
7 Mike Gansas?

8 MR. WHITE: I can't say I was, no. I probably --

9 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: How about Captain Smith?

10 MR. WHITE: -- he was after me when he was an AC. I might have
11 been on with ... I really couldn't tell you definitely.

12 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Did he ever ask you for any favors? Like, hey,
13 can you come out and check something out on the boat for us? Or any dealings like
14 that?

15 MR. WHITE: Not that I can recall.

16 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Anything further?

17 MR. HARDY: Did you have any responsibilities on the ferry, custodial, or
18 ..

19 MR. WHITE: No, mine was just terminals.

20 MR. HARDY: Just the terminals.

21 MR. WHITE: The ... removers, I supervise the ... removers, custodial
22 assistants and attendants in the bathrooms.

23 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: That concludes our interview. Please
24 acknowledge again you're being recorded.

25 MR. WHITE: I acknowledge I'm being recorded.

1 CHAIRMAN TURRELL: Thank you so much.
2 (Whereupon, the interview of John White in the above captioned
3 matter was adjourned.)