

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of:

ALLISION WITH STATEN ISLAND
 FERRY TERMINAL MAINTENANCE
 PIER AT ST. GEORGE'S,
 STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK BY THE
 FERRY ANDREW J. BARBERI on
 OCTOBER 15, 2003

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DCA-04-MM-001

Friday,
 October 17, 2003

Staten Island Ferry Terminal
 St. George, Staten Island, NY

INTERVIEW OF:

JOSEPH ECOCK

PRESENT:

Barry Strauch, NTSB
 Anthony Hoti, NYPD

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. STRAUCH: E-C-O-C-K.

MR. ECOCK: Yes.

MR. STRAUCH: Okay. What is your first name?

MR. ECOCK: Joseph.

MR. STRAUCH: Joseph.

MR. ECOCK: Yes.

MR. STRAUCH: Okay. And what is your title?

MR. ECOCK: Port Captain.

MR. STRAUCH: Could you just walk us through your career here with the Ferry?

MR. ECOCK: I started as deck hand, and worked my way up to mate, assistant captain, and then captain and then port captain.

MR. STRAUCH: And give us you give us the dates, approximately?

MR. ECOCK: Well, let's see. I was deck hand, let's '90, '91 I was mate, '92 I was assistant captain, and towards the end of '92, I was captain. And I worked as captain for, the last three years I have been port captain. This is going on the third year.

MR. STRAUCH: So that would be about 2001.

MR. ECOCK: Yes.

MR. STRAUCH: What did you do before you became a deck hand?

1 MR. ECOCK: I was captain on cruise boats, I
2 have had my captain license since '79.

3 MR. STRAUCH: Did you have any kind of formal
4 education in maritime?

5 MR. ECOCK: Well, I took different courses,
6 course by course to upgrade my license. I started
7 gross tons from 100, 200, 300, 500, 1,000, 1600, and
8 -- gross ton.

9 MR. STRAUCH: All right. What are your
10 responsibilities as a port captain?

11 MR. ECOCK: To ensure that the boats go back
12 and forth, make sure the crews are on the boat.
13 Anything out of the ordinary. What else? Basically,
14 everything that goes on in the operation with the
15 boats, tying the boats up, where they tie the boats up
16 at night time, and fueling the vessels, set them up for
17 the fueling. And the shipyard stuff, when the boat has
18 got to go into the shipyard. May be more than that.
19 Basically, every day I go down with the boats, to take
20 care of them.

21 MR. STRAUCH: We just talked to Captain
22 Morgan, he is also a port captain.

23 MR. ECOCK: Yes, that is my partner.

24 MR. STRAUCH: Okay. And is there like one area
25 of responsibility that is yours and one that is his?

1 How do you avoid duplication in your work, since you
2 both have the same title?

3 MR. ECOCK: Well, he usually works in the
4 morning, and I work the p.m. shift. I work the
5 Whitehall, take care of Whitehall p.m. with the crowd
6 coming back.

7 MR. STRAUCH: Which one of you is supervisor
8 of Captains Gansas and Smith?

9 MR. ECOCK: Both of us are.

10 MR. STRAUCH: Okay. Who does their performance
11 appraisals?

12 MR. ECOCK: Well, it varies, it depends on who
13 gets, he can do it, I can do it.

14 MR. STRAUCH: Okay. Have you written
15 performance appraisals for both of them?

16 MR. ECOCK: Well, Mike Gansas was my assistant
17 captain, I wrote some for him and actually he was on
18 the boat with me when I saved three people that was in
19 a sailboat that overturned. We went out there and he
20 did an excellent job, we got the people out of the
21 water, and within six minutes. It was in the winter
22 time, and he did an excellent job. He was, and Richie
23 Smith, I really didn't work with Richie Smith that
24 much.

25 MR. STRAUCH: How often have you seen Richie

1 Smith operating as the captain?

2 MR. ECOCK: Usually once a day or a couple of
3 times during the week, I go out, take various trips on
4 the boats and make sure everything is all right. If
5 they have any questions that they want to bring up to
6 me, if anything is wrong with the boat, they can tell
7 me about it. And then I go back and I relate it to
8 John and then we work something out. If anything has
9 got to get fixed on the boat, things like that,
10 everything okay with the crew. Stuff like, safety
11 stuff, I go over there and go over on the boat, what
12 would you do if something happened on the boat. Just
13 to make them all feel comfortable.

14 MR. STRAUCH: Since 9/11?

15 MR. ECOCK: Yes, yes.

16 MR. STRAUCH: We heard this morning that when
17 the vessel entered, the accident vessel entered the
18 dock, Captain Gansas was not in the pilot house,
19 Captain Smith was. What is your reaction to that?

20 MR. ECOCK: No information. I didn't hear
21 that information. The Captain is the captain of the
22 vessel. If he doesn't want to be in the pilot house,
23 if he has to go do something, he can do it, as long as
24 he knows a qualified person is in the pilot house, that
25 is the only thing I can say.

1 MR. STRAUCH: So, the policy as to whether, as
2 to who should be in the pilot house is up to the master
3 of the vessel.

4 MR. ECOCK: I don't know if there is anything
5 written in there, but that is the way I always
6 interpreted it, if I am the captain on the boat, and I
7 feel safe that somebody is over there, I can leave the
8 pilot house and come back.

9 MR. STRAUCH: You know it is funny, because we
10 are hearing too many interpretations of that. Some say
11 that both pilots are suppose to be in the pilot house
12 at all times, and we have heard others say what you are
13 saying. I would think with something like this, that
14 there would be no misunderstanding. Everybody would
15 understand what the policy is.

16 MR. ECOCK: I don't know how to put it that
17 way, it is like the captain is, he is the master of the
18 vessel, he is in charge of everything that is on there.

19 If I had to leave the pilot house and do something, or
20 even just had to go to the bathroom, for example, and
21 if I know that guy is qualified, I mean, I would say,
22 okay, I will be right back, I am going to the bathroom
23 now. That is going to bring his attention a little bit
24 more high up, and realize I am going to be back a few
25 minutes.

1 MR. STRAUCH: What about if he had something
2 else that needed his attention throughout the entire,
3 the entire ride, let's say from Whitehall back to here,
4 would that be okay also if he was in the other pilot
5 house -- doing there?

6 MR. ECOCK: I guess so, if he knows that
7 everything is okay with the other person. I don't see
8 anything written that said that he couldn't go.

9 MR. STRAUCH: All right. Is there something,
10 is there a single book or manual that has things that
11 are written regarding how things should be done on the
12 vessel?

13 MR. ECOCK: I haven't seen any.

14 MR. STRAUCH: How would you describe Captain
15 Gansas, his performance?

16 MR. ECOCK: Very good. He is a very good
17 captain.

18 MR. STRAUCH: And what is it about his
19 performance that makes him good?

20 MR. ECOCK: He is, always keeps the men in
21 line, everybody does what he wants, he is well liked by
22 everybody on the crew. I have never had a problem with
23 him. We have had to get him to stay for a couple of
24 hours overtime, and he would say, okay, he would get in
25 touch with his family and say he is going to stay a

1 couple more hours, and never had a problem with him.
2 He never receives any -- at all.

3 MR. STRAUCH: And how would you -- Captain
4 Smith?

5 MR. ECOCK: Same way.

6 MR. STRAUCH: Also, everybody likes him, he is
7 well liked?

8 MR. ECOCK: Yes. Well liked, sure.

9 MR. STRAUCH: Okay.

10 MR. ECOCK: Both of them are.

11 MR. STRAUCH: Also willing to help out if
12 needed?

13 MR. ECOCK: Any time you ask him to do
14 something, he has never, no problem, he will do it. Or
15 he will say if you have somebody else that can do it,
16 let them do it, if you can't, I will take care of it.
17 He might be sick and he says, if you can't get anybody
18 to come in, he will say, okay, look I will try to get
19 in there for a couple of hours, can you please get
20 somebody.

21 MR. STRAUCH: Have you ever had to discipline
22 either one?

23 MR. ECOCK: No.

24 MR. STRAUCH: Have you had to discipline any
25 other captains in your capacity as port captain?

1 MR. ECOCK: No.

2 MR. STRAUCH: And what about medical
3 evaluations, are you aware of any medical difficulties
4 with either one, Captain Smith or Captain Gansas?

5 MR. ECOCK: No.

6 MR. STRAUCH: Is any one taking any kind of
7 medication to your knowledge?

8 MR. ECOCK: Not to my knowledge.

9 MR. STRAUCH: Okay. Suppose someone had a
10 medical condition that required that he take regular
11 medication, what is the ferry's policy with regard to
12 what that person should tell you, not anyone, let's say
13 a captain?

14 MR. ECOCK: It comes to me and tells me he
15 says he --

16 MR. STRAUCH: No, what is the policy, what is
17 he required to tell you, if he needs to take
18 medication?

19 MR. ECOCK: Well, that would be up to him, if
20 he wants to tell me he is taking medication, he should
21 know better, take something that says, do not take or
22 operate vehicles, or whatever, for his own safety.
23 But, if he is going to the doctor, he is suppose to
24 come back and say he is fit for duty. If he went out
25 on an injury or something like that, came back and was

1 taking medication.

2 MR. STRAUCH: So, let's say it is not related
3 to injury, let's say his health changes and he needs
4 medication, whatever it is, you are saying there is no
5 policy -- one way or the other, change in health or
6 taking medication --

7 MR. ECOCK: No.

8 MR. STRAUCH: The other captains that we have
9 seen -- his attitude and so on.

10 MR. ECOCK: He is a little more experienced
11 than --

12 MR. STRAUCH: -- working as an assistant
13 captain.

14 MR. ECOCK: -- but he is --

15 MR. STRAUCH: --

16 MR. ECOCK: The same way -- As matter of fact,
17 he has been there longer than Mike Gansas.

18 (There is a horrible noise in tape.)

19 MR. STRAUCH: As port captain, supervisor of
20 the captains --

21 (Tape is unable to be transcribed at this
22 point because of the horrible noise.)

23 MR. ECOCK: Well, what he does, he signs, he
24 doesn't a boat, until he signs the bottom of it and
25 when the Coast Guard comes out and does the

1 quarterlies, they check to see if they did the drills,
2 they go through the books. And I am sure that was done.

3 MR. STRAUCH: Does the whole crew go upstairs
4 before their shift and sign in the book?

5 MR. ECOCK: Yes.

6 MR. STRAUCH: And that is usually every day?

7 MR. ECOCK: Every day you sign in. And then
8 they have a radio, then everybody has a radio, and it
9 is on one station. So, everybody can communicate with
10 each other.

11 MR. STRAUCH: Okay.

12 MR. ECOCK: That is how they knew there is a
13 full crew, too, everybody signing in, you know you have
14 got a full crew when the boat pulls out.

15 MR. STRAUCH: Okay. The winds the day of the
16 accident, the wind was pretty strong. What is the
17 policy regarding winds, at what point do the winds get
18 so excessive that boats couldn't operate or had to
19 operate differently?

20 MR. ECOCK: Well, we have over a 35 mile an
21 hour substantial winds, they usually close the bridge
22 and have everybody go down a lower deck, that is on the
23 power boats. There is no restriction with the Barberi
24 class because that is non removable. That was just for
25 stability wise they bring the people down from the one

1 deck.

2 MR. STRAUCH: Does the Barberi class have any
3 kind of restrictions of weather related or
4 restrictions?

5 MR. ECOCK: No. Unless the captain aboard
6 decides to sit everybody down, and then they have to
7 stop, that is it.

8 MR. STRAUCH: Has that ever happened?

9 MR. ECOCK: Not that I know of.

10 MR. STRAUCH: I don't have any more questions.
11 Does anybody else? No. Is there anything you would
12 like to add?

13 MR. ECOCK: Those two guys, they are both good
14 captains. I would say, and they have a lot of
15 experience between the both of them. Sorry the stuff
16 had to happen, but, I don't -- the captains.

17 MR. STRAUCH: Joe, thank you very much.

18 MR. ECOCK: Okay.

19 MR. STRAUCH: Appreciate your help.

20 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)