

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

In the Matter of: *
 *
 ALLISION WITH STATEN ISLAND *
 FERRY TERMINAL MAINTENANCE * DCA-04-MM-001
 PIER AT ST. GEORGE'S, *
 STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK BY THE *
 FERRY ANDREW J. BARBERI on *
 OCTOBER 15, 2003 *
 *

Thursday,
October 16, 2003

Staten Island, NY

INTERVIEW OF:

PAUL ESPOSITO

PRESENT:

ROB JONES, NTSB
RICHARD GONZALEZ, USCG

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 MR. JONES: This is an interview with Paul
3 Esposito, who was a passenger on the Staten Island
4 Ferry, yesterday's accident.

5 Paul, my name is Rob Jones. I am with the
6 National Transportation Safety Board. And you can take
7 us from, you know, where you were, the location and
8 anything you remember about the incident. Okay.

9 MR. ESPOSITO: Okay. So I was walking to the
10 front of the boat, because we were almost at dock. The
11 boat was still going really fast. It didn't seem to
12 slow down at all like normal. And I was started to
13 walk downstairs and I could see the green water and I
14 could see the wood pylons there. And I heard somebody
15 scream, "oh, shit", and I knew something was going
16 down. I still had, I could see the pylons, we were
17 going right for them. So I turned around, started to
18 run back up the stairs. Grabbed, there was an elderly
19 woman on the stairs, middle age, rather, I grabbed her
20 and started to run and the next thing you know, I just
21 heard like this crunching kind of noise. And I felt
22 myself get thrown to the ground, almost like when you
23 are punched in the nose, that kind of weird shock
24 feeling. And there was all debris and I heard all the
25 metal flying. And the next thing you know when I,

1 after all the, you know, the dirt had gone, we were in
2 the middle of the boat, we got pushed that far and I
3 felt myself ride the debris.

4 So, we went all the way to the middle, and I
5 was still on top of her. So, I got up, she looked like
6 she was dead. She was covered in blood, her eyes were
7 just open, but then I guess shock, it was from shock,
8 she started to scream. So, that is when I went to go
9 and push myself off of her. And I could feel that I
10 couldn't walk and I looked down at my legs, and it just
11 like my pants were down and everything was all chewed
12 up looking crushed. So, I knew my legs were gone. And
13 I started to crawl away. And just people everywhere, I
14 could see the side of the boat. It looked like it was
15 ripped out. And as I am laying there, I was screaming
16 for help, this one woman came over, an English woman.
17 She looked kind of like my mom, her name was Carrie.
18 And she came over to me and she told me she is a
19 theater nurse in England. So, she saw my legs, and she
20 started crying and she was like, "Oh, my God". She
21 took a belt from somebody, I don't know where she got
22 it from, wrapped it around my legs and pulled it tight
23 and stood on it, so I wouldn't bleed to death.
24 Basically, she saved my life.

25 She took sweater, she put it over me, she put

1 my head on top of the life preservers and she sat
2 there, she held my hand the whole time. She talked to
3 me and she was the one that was screaming for the
4 ambulance and the fire department to come to get me,
5 that I am still very coherent, I am still here, I am
6 losing blood, but, you know, I am alive still. So,
7 come and get me now. And she brought them over. She
8 gave me the oxygen, she held me the whole time. She
9 helped carry me out to the ambulance. She rode in the
10 ambulance with me. And even when we were going to the
11 ambulance, at first they tried to make us stay out
12 there, like just stand on the side. She said, no, no,
13 we are going now, we are going now. And the ambulance
14 that I had happened to be blocking the entrance way, so
15 we had to leave.

16 So, they put me in there. They cut off all
17 my clothes. She just, you know, nursed, they kept
18 asking me questions to make sure I was still there,
19 still coherent. We got here. She was still in there,
20 she helped me out. And they carried me out. They
21 rolled me in and they left her, when I went in to go to
22 the operating room, the ER, and she just --

23 MR. JONES: Take your time. You are doing
24 great.

25 MR. ESPOSITO: So, that was the last time that

1 I seen her. I remember going into the room, and they
2 were asking all kinds of questions, you know, about my
3 age and this and that. And then they just started,
4 you know, it was a little shocking, because I could
5 hear them saying, oh, look at that piece of metal
6 sticking out his leg and, you know, what they could
7 save and couldn't save. And I was just like, put me
8 under. Drug me. I don't want to feel any of this, do
9 what you have got to do, cut whatever you have got to
10 cut off, just let me, you know, move on from here,
11 because I am still alive and that is it, you know.

12 And that is basically it.

13 MR. JONES: If I could just take you back to
14 the level you were standing at.

15 MR. ESPOSITO: Yes.

16 MR. JONES: You said you were on the stairs.

17 MR. ESPOSITO: I was on the middle level and I
18 started to walk downstairs when I saw the water and
19 that is when I turned back around.

20 MR. JONES: Okay.

21 MR. ESPOSITO: Yeah.

22 MR. JONES: So, you got pushed by the debris
23 field, you said.

24 MR. ESPOSITO: Yes.

25 MR. JONES: You know, halfway up the length of

1 the boat or so.

2 MR. ESPOSITO: Yeah. And that was when I was
3 already up at the top of the stairs.

4 MR. JONES: Okay.

5 MR. ESPOSITO: Because I had grabbed and just
6 got pushed.

7 MR. JONES: Okay.

8 MR. ESPOSITO: And dragged along.

9 MR. JONES: And you had mentioned that you did
10 see, the water seemed to be rushing by faster than
11 normal.

12 MR. ESPOSITO: No, no, I hadn't seen that, I
13 looked out the window of the downstairs doors.

14 MR. JONES: Right.

15 MR. ESPOSITO: And I could just feel that we
16 were coming in so fast and that we are coming right
17 straight, like as I was looking, I was on the right
18 side of the boat.

19 MR. JONES: Right.

20 MR. ESPOSITO: Going down that stairway on the
21 right side, and I could see the wood pylons, whatever
22 those are called, the bulk.

23 MR. JONES: Yes.

24 MR. ESPOSITO: Coming very quickly. Like
25 there was no reaction time. I was like, "Oh, my God".

1 I think that was it.

2 MR. JONES: Do you ride the ferry a lot?

3 MR. ESPOSITO: Yes, every day.

4 MR. JONES: Every day. So you could witness
5 that something was going on.

6 MR. ESPOSITO: Yes. Because it was like,
7 almost like a car when it loses its brake, you feel
8 like, okay, the car should be stopping now, and bam it
9 goes into a tree.

10 MR. JONES: All right.

11 MR. ESPOSITO: It had that kind of feeling
12 like the momentum should have been slowing down, but
13 there was no brakes at all going on. It just kept
14 going straight on.

15 MR. JONES: Was it, before you started to
16 react, was there any announcement or PA system --

17 MR. ESPOSITO: No, no.

18 MR. JONES: -- alarm bells ringing?

19 MR. ESPOSITO: No. The only thing I heard was
20 that one guy scream, "Oh, shit." That was the guy that
21 was downstairs. I don't know what happened to him.

22 MR. JONES: Was it possibly a crew member?

23 MR. ESPOSITO: No, he sounded like a younger
24 Latin guy.

25 MR. JONES: Okay.

1 MR. ESPOSITO: You know, and I don't, from
2 that boat I didn't see anybody --

3 MR. JONES: Okay.

4 MR. ESPOSITO: As I remember, I think he was
5 wearing like a red shirt, because I saw him.

6 MR. JONES: Okay.

7 MR. ESPOSITO: And, yeah, there was no
8 warning, nothing. And even afterwards, the crew
9 members seemed shocked and Carrie was asking them, she
10 was like, don't you have oxygen on here, don't you have
11 first aid, well, you have, I need something, you know,
12 I need to tie him up, whatever. And they didn't have
13 anything. They had this one thing that had just, maybe
14 gauze, that was it.

15 MR. JONES: Okay.

16 MR. ESPOSITO: There was nothing to stop the
17 bleeding. There was nothing for air, you know, it was
18 just horrible.

19 MR. JONES: Right.

20 MR. ESPOSITO: And it took awhile for the fire
21 department to get there and stuff, because they had to
22 push the boat back out with a tugboat and turn it
23 around so the good side can go right into dock and they
24 can wheel us right off.

25 MR. JONES: Right. Do you have an estimate of

1 time, how long, did you ever look at your watch during
2 that, I mean, you were going through enough as it was,
3 but --

4 MR. ESPOSITO: I didn't look at my watch, no.
5 I don't remember what time I got here either.

6 MR. JONES: Well, we could that from a record
7 of when you were arrived with the ambulance.

8 MR. ESPOSITO: Because I looked straight away,
9 but, in-between, it felt like forever. I know it felt
10 longer than it really was, but I was laying there
11 waiting for them because the pain was excruciating.
12 And I was trying to turn over, because somehow I hurt
13 my lower back during that, and I was, I wanted, I was
14 laying on my side and I was just like, please, just
15 push me over. But, you know, I was covered in blood
16 and I guess, you know, you are not suppose to move
17 people when they get injured like that. So, they are
18 just like, stay like that. It just hurt so bad.

19 MR. JONES: Can you estimate about how far to
20 the front of the boat you were?

21 MR. ESPOSITO: Right before the bathrooms.

22 MR. JONES: Okay.

23 MR. ESPOSITO: Yes.

24 MR. JONES: I will have to take a look at
25 that, where they were.

1 MR. ESPOSITO: Yeah. Because I was at the top
2 of the stairs and then there is the men's room.

3 MR. JONES: Okay.

4 MR. ESPOSITO: I was right before that.

5 MR. JONES: Okay. All right. I would like to
6 turn it over to Brian. Brian, if you have got any
7 questions?

8 MR. CLIFFORD: No, I don't.

9 MR. JONES: Okay. Richard?

10 MR. GONZALEZ: No, I have no questions.

11 MR. JONES: Okay. Thanks, Paul.

12 MR. ESPOSITO: Thank you.

13 MR. JONES: Thanks for coming through for us
14 here.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)