



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Office of Marine Safety

## Interview Summary – DCA18FM029

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**Interview of:** George Peterson, Captain of fishing vessel *Amanda C*

**Date/Time:** April 8, 2019; 0830-0944 Alaska Standard Time (AKST)

**Location:** Telephone interview

**Interviewed by:** Kevin Williams, USCG, Adam Tucker – NTSB

**Case:** Sinking of the fish tender *Pacific Knight* with one fatality

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- The *Amanda C* had come out of Wood River to do tendering and was to be anchored overnight and be providing services to the boats the next day. There was no plan to take fish until later that night.
- The *Amanda C* stopped by the *Pacific Knight* late afternoon or evening (the day before the accident) to drop off parts to them. They tied off to them for a few minutes. Then went to their anchor position in Queens Slough which was only a couple hundred yards apart from the *Pacific Knight*.
- The *Pacific Knight* was upstream from them. The *Amanda C* was the next tender down from them a couple hundred yards away.
- The *Amanda C* was anchored up as per their normal routine. They always keep a guy on wheel watch because the current is so strong there in the flood and the ebb. All the tenders there at some time or another have dragged anchor. Sometimes you must get up in the middle of the night and reset the anchor.
- Mr. Peterson was asleep when around 0630 the crew member came down from wheel watch, who was almost hysterical, and told him the *Pacific Knight* rolled over in front of them. Mr. Peterson jumped out of his bunk and ran to the engine room where he pushed the start button for the main engine and went up two flights of stairs to the wheelhouse.
- Once there, he told the two deckhands to pull the anchor immediately. He saw debris in the water, but the *Pacific Knight* was not visible except for the starboard stern corner. There was lots of stuff in the water.
- Mr. Peterson saw Mr. Phillips in the water, and he hollered at the guys to stop hauling the anchor and had them dog it. He shut the hydraulics off and maneuvered the boat over sideways to where Mr. Phillips was drifting to bring him alongside.
- The deckhands had life rings which they threw to him which he caught. The life ring line got tangled in the anchor line for a minute, so the guys cut the life ring line but were still able to bring Mr. Phillips to the starboard side of the *Amanda C* at the crab hauling location.
- Once inside, they gave Mr. Phillips a bunch of towels and gave him some dry clothes. After that, Mr. Peterson instructed the two deckhands to go up and continue to haul the anchor.
- At that time, Mr. Phillips stated there were two people missing.
- Mr. Peterson noted that he has been on the ocean for a long time and this is the first time he had witnessed something like this.

- They continued hauling the anchor and got it on board and headed to the wreck and debris field. He saw a head bobbing in the water and told the guys to get to the crab location and get the lifting harness as he maneuvered the boat up and close to him just as he would a crab pot. Once there he stopped the boat and the guys got the harness on him and brought him on the boat.
- Mr. Peterson noted the deckhand, who he described as a kid, was very weak when they got him on board. He said he didn't know if the kid would have made it down to the next boat.
- There were other tenders getting their anchors pulled to come and assist but the Amanda C was the first there.
- Mr. Peterson noted that his handling of the vessel during the recovery of the two people in the water was similar to how he handled the boat when picking up crab pots.
- Once both persons were on board the Amanda C, they continued to search through the debris field. The state police came on board the Amanda C and they were there very quickly.
- Mr. Peterson stated he had hardly any interaction with Mr. Phillips or the kid noting he don't even remember the kids name.
- The state police (Alaska State Troopers) were with both survivors. Mr. Peterson noted the troopers were very good and professional.
- The two crew members from the Amanda C provided aid and assistance to the two survivors. The kid was fairly hypothermic. They had to put him in the shower and gently bring him up to temperature.
- It was about 20 minutes before the state police boarded the Amanda C. There were a few private helicopters on scene to help with the search. All the other tenders and boats were also helping in the search including some set net skiffs.
- One vessel tied some bumper balls to the wreckage of the Pacific Knight so that the wreck can be identified even at high tide.
- The accident happened in the middle of a big ebb tide and there was a lot of current, but the surface conditions were flat. There was no wind. Just lots of current.
- The Pacific Knight went over so fast. Mr. Peterson remarked he doesn't know what can make a fully tanked boat go that quickly. He thought it must have been something catastrophic.
- The only thing he heard from the two survivors was that they were both asleep and the boat rolled over so fast that the first thing they knew was they were thrown from of their bunks into the water.
- Mr. Phillips the skipper was up in the wheelhouse in the day bunk. The first thing he said he knew was that he was on the floor in the water and the next thing he knew he was outside of the boat in the water. Mr. Peterson said his assumption was Mr. Phillips was blown out of the boat from the air and water pressure from the sinking.
- The kid was down in the stateroom and was thrown out of his bunk onto the floor and the water was rushing in so fast he could not get out the cabin door due to the water pressure holding the door closed from the rapid sinking. The kid had to break a galley sliding window to get out. He had to go under water to an air pocket three different times to accomplish that.
- Mr. Peterson stated that was the only interaction he had with the two survivors noting he was on the wheel the entire time, about 19 hours. The state police had more interaction with the survivors.

- Mr. Peterson stated it he felt it was his responsibility to remain on location until there was no hope.
- Mr. Peterson stated that Mr. Phillips could perhaps have made it to the next boat if the Amanda C was not there but the chances of the kid making it would not have been good.
- Mr. Peterson described the kid as being long and lanky and doubted with his short and stocky physique if he would have gotten out of that window.
- Mr. Peterson stated he is 64 years old and has been on the ocean since he started fishing with his dad when he was 11. When asked if he himself had been in a situation like the one experienced by the Pacific Knight, he stated no.
- Mr. Peterson stated that John, Mr. Phillips dad, was the owner of the Pacific Knight before Mr. Phillips.
- When asked if he had in the past seen the Pacific Knight in the Bristol Bay area, Mr. Peterson stated they had tendered for Icicle. He noted in past years, the vessel wasn't named the Pacific Knight and that John, had a different name on it. Mr. Peterson noted he had not worked in Bristol Bay since 1997. The owner/other skipper of the Amanda C, Paul Blalock, would be more familiar with the Pacific Knight.
- When asked how he ended up on the Amanda C, Mr. Peterson stated the owner of the Amanda C has another boat who didn't want to tender any more so they moved Paul to the tender spot on the *Fierce Leader* and they hired Mr. Peterson to be the skipper of the Amanda C for the tender season. Paul skippers the Amanda C for the rest of the year. Mr. Peterson is only on the Amanda C for the period it is used as a tender.
- When asked about the Queens Slough area in general, Mr. Peterson stated in the Nushagak district there are three or four different areas that are covered for that location. It is a very good anchorage and the one closest to town for any of the gillnet boats. The bigger tenders would be more down toward the border line. The Queens Slough is the most protected area for delivering fish. When the weather gets really bad, all the big tenders have to come up to that area so the boats can safely unload.
- When asked what the average depth was in the area where they were anchored, Mr. Peterson replied, not much, especially when there is a negative tide. The Amanda C draws about 11 feet of water and in that area, there is no danger of going aground on the minus tide but there is not a lot of water left under the boat. Maybe about 4 to 5 feet under the boat on the big minus tides.
- In high water, some of the tides are 25 to 26 feet.
- The tide for that day was a real strong ebb. In the middle of the ebb and in the middle of the flood the current gets ripping at sometimes more than 3 knots.
- Some of the boats in that real strong current will do what is called fish tailing when at anchor. The Pacific Knight did that a lot when they were at anchor. The solution to manage that on the Amanda C was to put 10 to 15 degrees of rudder on and lock it at that spot where it will move over slightly and stay steady instead of fishtailing. Some boats will do that and some wont. Some of the boats with hydraulic steering will not hold a rudder angle when there is no power to the hydraulics. He noted he has no knowledge as to how the Pacific Knight was set up.
- When anchored in shallow water with strong currents, it is difficult to get the anchor set. The Amanda C for example has a bigger anchor than what it should normally have because of the currents there.

- When tendering, sometimes they have two to three 32-foot gillnetters boats tied up to them which depend on their anchor as well. They take the fish from the gillnetters and give them fuel and groceries.
- When asked if he thought it was possible for the Pacific Knight to run out of water where it was anchored and touch bottom, Mr. Peterson said he didn't know. The bottom is irregular, and the Pacific Knight was anchored further upstream of where the Amanda C was, which draws about 2 to 3 feet more than the Pacific Knight. He has anchored in that area before but only because overcrowding due to bad weather.
- When asked about the depth of the water where the Pacific Knight was, Mr. Peterson stated the Amanda C was in deeper water than what he was and that the Pacific Knight was straight up stream of them. The bottom is so irregular that it is hard to say. Also, the shallow spots are different there every year.
- When asked about getting at Queens Slough the night before and the transfer of parts to the Pacific Knight, Mr. Peterson could not recall if he spoke with Mr. Phillips over the radio or not.
- When asked if the Amanda C had AIS, Mr. Peterson stated it did not. The Pacific Knight does. The Amanda C is 52 feet.
- When asked about the pedestal knuckle booms on the Pacific Knight and what he recalled of if they were stored or not, Mr. Peterson stated the booms would only be straight up in the air when they would be taking on fish. He stated Mr. Phillips didn't leave them up and flying except for when he was taking fish.
- When asked if he witnessed them doing work with the booms, Mr. Peterson stated, no. They were all asleep at the time. That hadn't taken any fish at the time of the accident and it was supposed to be their last day of taking fish, which was planned around 1300 or 1400 when the boats would start coming in.
- When asked about salt bags of ice, Mr. Peterson stated they are used for the gillnetters. They can weigh about 500 pounds but that really depends on how long they have been around and how much ice has melted. They pick up the salt sacks from the cannery and they can be on the boat for a couple of days.
- When asked if the Pacific Knight had salt sacks of ice on deck, Mr. Peterson stated he recalled seeing some on deck. He noted the Amanda C dropped off maybe 4 bags to the Pacific Knight and thought he may have taken some more later. There were four bags of ice put on the Pacific Knight from the Amanda C. He didn't see any on deck before then.
- Mr. Peterson stated he believed the Pacific Knight went down to a fish processor and got more bags of ice and then came back up to the anchorage sometime in the evening, the day before the Pacific Knight rolled over.
- When asked about what the crew of the Amanda C witnessed, Mr. Peterson stated the guy on wheel watch told him that all he saw was the boat roll over. He was sitting there and then it just rolled over.
- The guy on wheel watch told Mr. Peterson that movement caught his eye when he was sitting there and playing a video game. Most guys watch a movie or something to try to stay awake. He just caught some movement and looked up and it was going over. It went all the way over and straight down.
- Mr. Peterson estimated it took him 1.5 minutes to get to the wheelhouse and when he got there, there was nothing but the stern railing sticking up from the water.

- When asked about his comment of the Pacific Knight being fully tanked, Mr. Peterson stated he was not told this, but all boats have to be fully tanked if they are taking fish. They need refrigerated seawater for the Sockeye Salmon they take from the gillnetters. The water must be on the boat with the tank valves off so the water can recirculate through the chiller. The water temperature in Bristol Bay is about 56 to 60 degrees (F) and that must be brought down to 36 degrees (F) for the fish. All the tenders up there have tanks of water like a crab boat.
- When asked of it is possible for a tender to not be tanked, noting that when Mr. Phillips initially spoke with investigators that the forward tank was only three quarters full and the aft tank had a ton of ice in it, Mr. Peterson stated, he don't know how the Pacific Knight is set up and only that it sits low in the water. A lot of those southeast seiners look that way with their decks near awash noting that he has heard concerns amongst Coast Guard regulations regarding that style of boat. There is a reason why crab boats aren't that style anymore.
- The Amanda C is a seiner but even with the boat tanked, there is about 6 to 8 inches of freeboard to the guard and another 6 inches to the deck. Even fully loaded, the boat has a lot of freeboard.
- Basically, with a boat like that, if they are ballasted when they are tanked, if there is even a sneeze or hiccup or anything, they go down like a rock. For a boat in flat conditions to roll over like that something had to have gone wrong. Maybe a slack tank issue or flooding in some compartment where an alarm didn't go off, something had to have gone drastically wrong.
- When asked, about the effort to take up the anchor during their initial response to the roll over of the Pacific Knight and whether Mr. Phillips was recovered while at anchor, Mr. Peterson said Mr. Phillips was recovered while the Amanda C was still at anchor. He maneuvered the boat to bring him up on the starboard side, their usual fishing location. Anything they normally do, is usually done on that side of the boat.
- When asked when the deckhand was recovered, if they were at anchor, Mr. Peterson stated they were not at anchor when they recovered him. He maneuvered the Amanda C up and stopped the boat to where the crew could get to him. The two crewmembers of the Amanda C grabbed a hold of him, put the harness around him and brought him aboard.
- When asked if the crew members had to enter the water, Mr. Peterson stated no they did not enter the water and it would have been dangerous to do so.
- When asked when they went back to Dillingham, Mr. Peterson could not recall the exact time of that. He recalled they had the Pacific Knights liferaft on board and some debris as well. He noted they went up to everything that came out of that wreck to ensure it wasn't the missing person. He stayed on location until he felt there was no hope. Once they departed, they went to Wood River where the liferaft and debris were landed. After that, they went back on station and took fish the next day. Wood River is two miles from Dillingham.
- When asked to clarify the distance to the Pacific Knight, Mr. Peterson stated they were a couple hundred yards away. There was nothing to him that indicated a problem with the Pacific Knight the last time he saw the vessel.
- When asked what side he last tied up to the Pacific Knight, Mr. Peterson could not recall. He noted they tied up together two or three times but couldn't remember what side.
- When asked of the ice sacks, and how they get on the Amanda C and how they are transferred, Mr. Peterson stated they are loaded at the cannery by crane and then transferred to the

gillnetters by crane. Specific to the Pacific Knight, Mr. Peterson stated he thought they transferred four of sixteen they had on the Amanda C to the Pacific Knight.

- Mr. Peterson stated some tenders provide services to the fleet while other tenders take the fish. Services can be food, fuel, mail, groceries and spare parts and ice for the gillnetters.
- As far as weight, the ice bags can range from 500 pounds to 150 pounds depending on how much of it has melted from them sitting on deck.
- Boats like the Pacific Knight don't roll over like that unless it is some kind of slack tank issue. Modern boats like the Pacific Knight would have had lots of alarms on it.
- When asked if he or any of his crew took pictures or video from on scene, Mr. Peterson stated the only pictures that were taken were days after the fact when the wreckage could be seen above the surface of the water.
- When asked if he knew Mr. Phillips, Mr. Peterson stated he did not and his only interactions were when they were rafted up together. He did not know anything personally about him.
- When asked if Mr. Phillips came up to the wheelhouse with him after being recovered, Mr. Peterson stated he was there for a little bit but not very much.
- When asked specifically what Mr. Phillips told said to him after being recovered, Mr. Peterson recalled the only thing he really said at all when the guys pulled him out of the water was that he cussed the boat. Other than that, he was so upset about his dad. He didn't have any idea on how he got out of the wheelhouse. The only thing he got out of Mr. Phillips was that, he woke up on the deck in the water and the next thing he knew he was out swimming. Mr. Peterson stated he assumes the water and air pressure blew him out of the top house, noting similar has happened to three of his friends where they were blown out of the wheelhouse windows by the water and air pressure.
- When asked if the deckhand came to the wheelhouse after being recovered, Mr. Peterson stated no he did not. The state troopers spoke to Mr. Peterson about what the deckhand told them about him escaping from the galley.
- When asked who made the initial call to the coast guard, Mr. Peterson stated it was one of the other boats noting that his focus was recovering the guys from the water. Other tenders called the coast guard. Also, a private helicopter from the cannery was the first on scene as he recalled. One gillnetter and set net skiff were also on location within the first five minutes.
- When asked if he heard of any other vessels that witnessed the roll over, Mr. Peterson stated he did not know of anyone else that saw the roll over.
- When asked if the Pacific Knight had a skiff, Mr. Peterson said he did not think it did.
- When asked if Mr. Phillips was hypothermic, Mr. Peterson stated he was not and just needed towels and dry clothes which was given to him right away.
- With respect to the deckhand, they put him in the shower which they told him to keep it luke warm and gradually increase the temperature. He was in the shower for about 15 minutes and was warmed up when he came out. He was really shook up.
- The state police were on the Amanda C fairly quickly and they had most of the interaction with Mr. Phillips and the kid. The kid was really anxious to get off the boat and get to land and fly home. The troopers had been on the boat for about an hour to an hour and a half and arrangements had already been made to get the kid flown out.

- The troopers took the kid and Mr. Phillips with them when they departed. The cannery had already gotten a hold of Mr. Phillips brother and had flown him in from Egegik. After the troopers departed by boat, the Amanda C remained on scene.
- When asked about the liferaft deploying, Mr. Peterson stated the current tore it loose from the cradle and it inflated from that and not from the hydrostatic release. He noted there is almost nowhere in Bristol bay where it is deep enough for a hydrostatic release to work. He stated there are a few boats that have free floating liferafts rather than hydrostatic release rafts.

End of summary