

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF MARINE SAFETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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EXPRESS SHUTTLE II :
NTSB #DCA05MM002 :
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INTERVIEW OF :
CAPTAIN GEORGE TRUELL :
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An interview in the above entitled matter was held
on Tuesday, October 26, 2004, commencing at 1:25 p.m.,
before:

NANCY MCATEE, NTSB

P R O C E E D I N G S

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MS. MCATEE: It is October 26, 2004, 1:25 p.m., this is Nancy McAtee, National Transportation Safety Board, fire and explosion specialist. I am interviewing Pasco County Fire Captain George Truell.

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Captain, if you could walk me through, from the time you were dispatched, how you were dispatched, all the way through the incident?

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CAPTAIN TRUPELL: We received a call at, I'm not sure exactly what time that was, but early in the morning, for a mutual aid call to Port Richey Fire Department, for an engine company to back them up on a boat fire.

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When I walked out of the station, I had a large column of smoke, approximately 400 feet in the air, of black smoke. At that time, there was only two people on my engine, myself and my driver, and we responded to the scene with Port Richey, who was already on the scene.

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There was two people on their first arriving engine company, and at that time, the Captain stated that we had this working boat fire, which was obvious from everything that was going on, but they did not have access to the fire, due to the fact the homes in that area are four to five million dollar homes, and so I spoke with the lady that owned the house right behind where the boat was at, and her name was Dr. May Chang, and she gave me permission to

1 use her property as to whatever we needed to do.

2 So, at that time, we had an access problem of
3 getting to the fire, so we pulled the courtyard, we secured
4 a water source from the closest hydrant, which was
5 approximately 400 yards away, and we pulled a pre-connect of
6 150 feet off the back of our truck with a gated Y. Got that
7 down to the water's edge, and then I pulled two pre-
8 connects, which consist of 400 feet, approximately an inch
9 and 3/4 inch line.

10 At that time, we all became mired down in the mud,
11 due to the low tide, so we had to revert to other resources
12 at that time, and I had the police patrol boat that was in
13 the vicinity, to come as close to shore as possible, so we
14 wouldn't have to go through a long area of mud, which he
15 did.

16 We proceeded to get unstuck out of the mud, and
17 get on the patrol boat, and me and the Captain, Rob Gupton,
18 from Station 41 in Port Richey, and two other people, began
19 to fight the fire, while on the patrol boat, which lasted
20 approximately an hour and a half, using water.

21 We had some problems there because of the fact
22 that the pressure from the water hose was so strong it would
23 blow the police boat away from the objective that we were
24 trying to extinguish. So, once we figured out how to fight
25 the fire that way, we went ahead and knocked the fire down

1 after about an hour and a half, two hours, approximately,
2 with water, and then I made access to the back of the boat,
3 which after I cooled down with a substantial amount of
4 water, and then we went to a foam operation.

5 The whole boat was basically gutted at that time,
6 except for the hull, which was still in tact. My biggest
7 concern at the time was the Captain never dropped his
8 anchor, which caused the boat -- he grounded the boat, but
9 the tide started coming in, so now we had a floating boat
10 going down the river on a strong incoming tide, which we had
11 to stop operation to secure the boat, which I did by taking
12 a rope and lassoing the anchor, and tying it off to a piling
13 on the side of the bank, and also had a tow boat rescue
14 vessel assist, come in, and hook to the boat, and keep it in
15 the current, also, so we could continue to fight the fire in
16 that area where we were set up, due to the hazards of the
17 boat floating back into a populated area, where a lot of
18 boat traffic, which was backed up, trying to get out.

19 Then we went to a foam operation, and that went on
20 until about 3 o'clock, when we finally subdued the fire, and
21 put it out, and after that there were a number of officials,
22 the State Fire Marshal was on the scene, Gaming and
23 Freshwater Fish Commission, the Coast Guard was there,
24 initially, but I believe they left. I know they had a
25 helicopter and a small rubberized patrol boat on the scene.

1 After that when we do a mutual aid to a city like
2 that their investigation comes into attack there. Where we
3 do the outside of the city. We take care of the county, and
4 basically that's what -- we flowed about 60,000 gallons of
5 water and 40 gallons of foam, and extinguished the fire
6 approximately at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

7 At that time, the owner showed up with a big
8 pleasure craft, and they were going to proceed to take the
9 boat to Tarpon Springs, I believe I heard them say, but
10 after that we just wrapped up and packed up and went home.

11 MS. MCATEE: The three crew members, were they off
12 the boat by the time you arrived?

13 CAPTAIN TRUPELL: Yes, ma'am.

14 MS. MCATEE: What happened to them, do you know?

15 CAPTAIN TRUPELL: One of my initial rescue cars
16 that were coming in also was -- asked me if they were on the
17 scene there, and they'd already been picked up by an off
18 duty Coast Guard member and taken by another boat to Hooters
19 restaurant. They have a docking area there where the Casino
20 Boat actually is docked at, and one of them, I believe, was
21 transported to North Bay Hospital for treatment of smoke
22 inhalation.

23 MS. MCATEE: Did you ever talk directly to the
24 captain?

25 CAPTAIN TRUPELL: No, ma'am.

1 MS. MCATEE: Were you aware of a manual fire
2 suppression system?

3 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No, ma'am. The only comment that
4 I heard from the captain was that there was, possibly, a
5 valve open in the bottom of the boat that needed to be shut
6 in order for -- to keep the boat from sinking.

7 Well, the whole boat was involved in fire, so
8 there was no way that we would be able to shut that valve.
9 I'm not sure what he was referring to, why a valve would be
10 open if they were coming in from off shore, and delivering
11 patrons to the Casino Boat, then coming back in shore,
12 unless it was stuck or something that's the only thing I
13 could imagine on that.

14 MS. MCATEE: Do you have any Marine training
15 experience?

16 CAPTAIN TRUELL: I'm a captain, a fishing captain.
17 I own a six pack a license (phonetic sp.) so, I mean, I can
18 take people out for money.

19 MS. MCATEE: So, you know a little bit about boats
20 then?

21 CAPTAIN TRUELL: I was born and raised in Florida.
22 I've had boats all my life, and I fish all of my days off,
23 basically, yeah. I know a lot about the Gulf and the ocean,
24 Atlantic, and stuff, so.

25 MS. MCATEE: By chance, did you hear any detectors

1 or alarm panels going off when you were on board?

2 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No, ma'am. The boat was too
3 fully involved by that time. It was already in the stage.
4 It was a three tier boat -

5 MS. MCATEE: Yes.

6 CAPTAIN TRUELL: -- and it was already collapsing
7 at that time. That's why it took us so long to get onto the
8 boat, so we could actually extinguish the fire.

9 MS. MCATEE: When you first arrived on the scene,
10 was the boat fully involved at that time?

11 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. MCATEE: I know that the wind was blowing that
13 day. I think I was told northwest?

14 CAPTAIN TRUELL: I believe that's what it was, and
15 I know we had a real low tide that day because of the
16 proximity of -- the channel there is very narrow at that
17 particular point, going out to the Gulf, and that's why we
18 had to walk across the mud flats, normally (indiscernible)
19 where we would've started fighting that fire, initially,
20 we'd of had a good three, four foot of water, but it was
21 down so low into the channel that we had to walk across the
22 mud flats to get to there.

23 MS. MCATEE: Beside the wind and the location, did
24 you have any other difficulties with the fire?

25 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Other than the captain not

1 dropping his anchor. In any emergency, a captain knows that
2 at the first sign of trouble, you drop your anchor, you
3 know, when you're on the water. That's your main thing,
4 unless it's a, you know, you're blown out of the boat, or
5 where you can't do something like that, but he never dropped
6 his anchor, you know, so. We had a floating boat on fire,
7 basically, once the tide started moving in.

8 MS. MCATEE: Have you and your (indiscernible)
9 engineer talked about how the call went?

10 CAPTAIN TRUPELL: Oh, yeah. I always critique my
11 people on whether they did a good job or some things that we
12 could improve on and I told them, and I also talked with
13 Captain Gupton, from Port Richey, after the fire. I
14 commended him for his, you know, just being two people
15 himself. The job they did was well done, you know, they
16 don't have that much experience fighting fires.

17 I'm a 28-year veteran of the fire department, so
18 I've had a lot of experience fighting, not only have I
19 fought a number of boat fires, but mostly in marinas, and
20 stuff like that, but yeah, I always critique is what I use
21 it as, a critique to what transpired. How we can improve
22 ourselves next time if this should happen, or stuff like
23 that.

24 MS. MCATEE: In the boat fires that you've worked,
25 have you ever had any dealings with the Coast Guard on

1 those?

2 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Not personally, no.

3 MS. MCATEE: So, no training --

4 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No.

5 MS. MCATEE: -- no drills?

6 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No training, no, I've never had
7 any training other than around the fire department training.

8 MS. MCATEE: Do you drill for boat fires, marinas?

9 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No, because we have no access to
10 them, basically.

11 MS. MCATEE: Okay.

12 CAPTAIN TRUELL: I mean, marina fires, yeah, we
13 know what we'd have to do in a marina fire, but a boat fire
14 off shore, no, we don't have the means to fight that.

15 MS. MCATEE: How many boat fires do you have?

16 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Personally or for the department?

17 MS. MCATEE: Personally, how many have you worked?

18 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Over my career, probably ten.

19 MS. MCATEE: So, they aren't super common?

20 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No.

21 MS. MCATEE: They happen every once in a while?

22 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Yeah, mostly shrimp boats and
23 stuff like that are there in docked at their marina, they'll
24 catch fire, or a sail boat, such as the motorized boats.

25 MS. MCATEE: Tend to be engine fires?

1 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Yeah, most of the time, engine
2 fires.

3 MS. MCATEE: Anything else you'd like to add?

4 CAPTAIN TRUELL: No, that's about all we did on
5 the scene. That's about it.

6 MS. MCATEE: Okay, thank you for your time.

7 CAPTAIN TRUELL: Okay, nice talking to you.

8 (Whereupon, at 1:35 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

DEPOSITION SERVICES, INC., hereby certifies that the attached pages represent an accurate transcript of the electronic sound recording of the proceedings of the National Transportation Safety Board Interview regarding the Express Shuttle II, NTSB #DCA05MM002.

INTERVIEW OF CAPTAIN G. TRUPELL

PASCOE COUNTY FIRE

Eve Jemison, Transcriber

