

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FIRE AND SINKING OF THE *CONCEPTION*

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WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR

\*

Accident No.: DCA19MM047

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA,

\*

SEPTEMBER 2, 2019

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Interview of: PAUL BARRERA, Captain

Ventura County Fire Department

Ventura County Fire Department  
Station 53  
Port Hueneme, California

Sunday,  
September 8, 2019

## APPEARANCES:

MARCEL MUISE, Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

BART BARNUM, Marine Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:06 a.m.)

1  
2  
3 MR. MUISE: Okay. This is Marcel Muise, investigator with  
4 the NTSB. It's September 8th. We're at Ventura County Fire  
5 Department, Station 53, at 10:06, interviewing the station captain  
6 regarding the fire aboard the small passenger vessel *Conception*.

7 Captain, if you can, just give us your name and spell your  
8 last name for me.

9 CAPT. BARRERA: This Captain Barrera, Paul Barrera, B-a-r-r-  
10 e-r-a, Ventura County Fire Department.

11 MR. MUISE: And with us also is Bart Barnum, investigator  
12 with the NTSB.

13 Bart, can you give us your name so they can get your voice?

14 MR. BARNUM: Yep, Bart Barnum, NTSB. Last name, B-a-r-n-u-m.

## INTERVIEW OF PAUL BARRERA

15  
16 BY MR. MUISE:

17 Q. So Captain, just for some housekeeping questions, can you  
18 describe the capabilities of your station, your engine?

19 A. We have a regular fire engine, Type 1 fire engine. We have  
20 an ocean rescue, pickup, utility pickup, and we have a jet ski  
21 assigned to that rescue. We also have a boat that we respond on,  
22 that's Boat 15, Ventura County Fire Department, and we operate  
23 with Channel Islands Harbor Patrol.

24 Q. What kind of EMS capabilities do you have?

25 A. We are all ALS. We have a paramedic assigned to the station

1 so we have full paramedic capabilities here for advanced life  
2 support.

3 Q. Could you describe your first-due area for us?

4 A. It's within the city -- all of city of Port Hueneme and the  
5 surrounding areas, including the Port of Hueneme. We also respond  
6 with a fireboat in Silver Strand, out of Silver Strand Island,  
7 Channel Islands Harbor. We respond mutual aid, automatic aid with  
8 the surrounding department ops and fire. We also can respond out  
9 of county for brush fires and large incidents.

10 Q. And Oxnard is its own fire department?

11 A. Yes, that's correct. Oxnard has their own fire department.  
12 The base and the CBC has one fire station there. They have one  
13 apparatus out there with, I don't know, five members. And then  
14 there's Point Mugu -- Point Mugu, which has another fire station  
15 there. And we also will run calls with our own personnel.  
16 They'll come in from the city of Camarillo. You know, we are  
17 County Fire, so Oxnard City has their own fire department.

18 Q. How about Santa Cruz Island? Do you run up there a lot?

19 A. We don't. We will go out, like, on medical calls and we have  
20 an agreement with the Coast Guard that if they get a call out  
21 there they'll respond to us, and we have a written agreement that  
22 Engine 53 will respond to the Coast Guard Station and we'll jump  
23 on the Coast Guard boat with them.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. For medicals. If there's a fire, they'll respond to us and

1 they'll jump on our fireboat.

2 MR. BARNUM: Is it just Station 53 or --

3 CAPT. BARRERA: It's -- Station 53 is assigned. It's a  
4 county agreement with Channel Islands Harbor and ourselves. It's  
5 co-owners of the boat, kind of, you know, they --

6 BY MR. MUISE:

7 Q. Who has -- is there a Boat 4, as well?

8 A. We do not have a Boat 4. City of Ventura has a Harbor Patrol  
9 boat. They're -- actually, Channel Islands Harbor does have other  
10 boats. They have different numbers. But specifically only one  
11 fireboat assigned there.

12 Q. What was the other fireboats that were on scene that night?

13 A. There was Harbor Patrol Boat 3 out of Santa Barbara City and  
14 Harbor Patrol Boat 1 out of Ventura City. So initially when we  
15 responded though, we got responded for a medical.

16 Q. Okay. And that was my next question, just tell us the story  
17 of that night when --

18 A. So we got responded to a medical. As normal operating  
19 procedures go, we have an agreement with the Coast Guard to go out  
20 for medicals. We have a paramedic, so normally it's the closest  
21 who have the resources. But with the Coast Guard boat, we  
22 respond; that's our agreement. We have an agreement.

23 So we went out there. We got on scene. I met with Petty  
24 Officer [REDACTED] and he informed me that there was a boat fire  
25 that had been reported with possible 33 souls on board. I

1 contacted my dispatch. I requested an additional engine to stock  
2 the fireboat because we were already in the -- you know, so and  
3 plus we need more resources. So we got our PPE, our full  
4 turnouts, our four-gas monitor, all our medical equipment, and we  
5 jumped on the Coast Guard boat, the 45-footer, and we departed as  
6 soon as we could. And Boat 15 departed shortly after that.

7 They were in -- Engine 54 was en route to cover us, so they  
8 were already pretty close to our area, so they jumped on the  
9 fireboat and we both responded out there.

10 We got on scene. En route I talked to Petty Officer  
11 [REDACTED] and said, hey, what resources do you have coming? He  
12 said they had split up two copters, the *Narwhal* was in the area  
13 and was going to respond, and the other 45-foot boat that's  
14 stationed there had already departed and was en route to the  
15 scene.

16 Once we got on the scene -- you know, in my mind I'm thinking  
17 how are we going to take care of this problem? You know, either  
18 -- I was already thinking victim search and rescue. I'm thinking  
19 dive boat, people are jumping off the boat, hopefully, they're all  
20 swimmers, plus the boat may be picking up people. And so I was  
21 trying to plan out in my head, it was, okay, where are we going to  
22 put these people? You know, it was going to be on the 87-footer,  
23 it was going to be the *Narwhal* and in our boat and the fireboat,  
24 and the other 45-footer Coast Guard boat.

25 Upon arrival on the scene, though, it was fully engulfed in

1 flames and, you know, usually it's about 30, 35-minute response,  
2 us getting there. So it was fully involved from bow to stern, and  
3 the likelihood of viable victims that were on the boat, in my  
4 estimation, there was no chance. Like I said, more the mode is  
5 search and rescue in the water.

6 They have a small pump on their boat, a portable pump on the  
7 Coast Guard boat. It would have been inadequate, so we didn't  
8 even engage and, honestly, it wouldn't have done anything.

9 Our fireboat then arrived on the scene and they began  
10 engaging the fire on the *Conception*. We responded to the *Grape*  
11 *Escape*. We treated the one crew member with the injured leg. My  
12 paramedic and my engineer jumped on there, treated him, that's  
13 when the captain was there, the three crewmen. I think it was  
14 just the three -- three or four that were on the boat.

15 We talked to the captain. He wanted to get in our boat. I  
16 talked to Petty Officer [REDACTED] and said, hey, this guy wants  
17 to jump on our boat. I was in agreement with it. We kind of made  
18 a unified decision to put him on the boat. His two other crew  
19 members came on a dinghy. They had been doing a search on their  
20 own. We saw a flashlight in the water, and they came to our  
21 location, to the Coast Guard boat, and we put them onto the *Grape*  
22 *Escape* and instructed the owner of that boat to take the patient  
23 in, and we determined he was stable enough. I wanted my guy, the  
24 paramedic, to be on the boat with us just in case we had any other  
25 kind of injuries. And so they both got back into our boat, the

1 Coast Guard boat, and the *Grape Escape* eventually went back to  
2 Channel Islands Harbor.

3 So during that time, I was making radio transmissions between  
4 me and my battalion chief, Battalion 22 and Battalion 15, both. I  
5 think they were both at the Coast Guard Station upstairs and we  
6 just kind of coordinated efforts. Boat 15 was attempting to  
7 extinguish the fire, you know, but the damage was severe and, you  
8 know, as much as we tried to not put that much water on it, we do  
9 a flat foam.

10 Q. Right.

11 A. It kept on reigniting. The Coast Guard initiated -- did a  
12 search half a mile from the location of the boat, each direction.  
13 The vessel assist boat came out, and eventually the Santa Barbara  
14 Harbor Patrol boat also came out, and our -- we had another  
15 fireboat from Ventura City, Boat 1, came out with extra AFFF foam  
16 to replenish the foam that we had. We had used all our foam. Or  
17 the Boat 15 had used all our foam.

18 So Coast Guard copters were on the scene. I know at least  
19 one was. There's footage of that. And we pretty much sat there  
20 and, you know, observed and looked for possible victims, you know,  
21 from the deck of the boat, and the boat eventually sank with the  
22 ongoing firefighting going on. It did break loose off its anchor.  
23 The vessel assist towboat grapple hooked it -- I'm sure you guys  
24 know that -- pulled it back out a little, and the stability of the  
25 boat, there's just no way we could go on there. I mean, it's just

1 not -- it was not a safe operation at all. It was too far gone.

2 As far as dewatering's concerned, we have limited  
3 capabilities on that. Our fireboat does have a dewatering pump,  
4 but there was reported 1300 gallons of diesel fuel on board, so --

5 You know, I was concerned about the boat sinking, of course,  
6 knowing that there was 33 bodies. Obviously, that's going to be a  
7 recovery effort. But it did eventually sink. The bow was out of  
8 the water. I had Boat 3 from Santa Barbara do a search of the  
9 debris field, initially. There was no bodies that had come up at  
10 that point. So in conjunction with Petty Officer [REDACTED] we  
11 just stayed out there. You know, I said, hey, as long as you need  
12 us here, we're here. And eventually the operation changed.

13 We had the captain on the boat. I did speak to him. I asked  
14 him, hey, what happened? He did say that he was woken up, went to  
15 the wheelhouse; the wheelhouse was engulfed in smoke. It sounded  
16 pretty rapid that the flames were taking over and his crew, he  
17 told his crew to jump off. And I don't know how he got off. I  
18 didn't really get that story. But he came, like I say, he was on  
19 our boat. Obviously, he was pretty devastated. He saw the boat  
20 sink, so I did ask him how many people, the chances of them coming  
21 off. It was pretty clear to me that it happened rapidly and that  
22 it was -- there was -- the people, passengers weren't able to get  
23 off the boat.

24 Q. Wow. Thanks Captain. Just on that one thought, at what  
25 point did you know how many people were --

1 A. Initially, when we were going out, we had already heard there  
2 was approximately 33 people, 34 people, and we got -- it was 39.  
3 The final count was 39; 5 of him and his members got off. I did  
4 ask him several times, hey, how many people on the boat?

5 Eventually there was radio traffic between my chief on shore  
6 and asking me, and they -- somehow they got a passenger manifest.  
7 I'm sure that was obtainable from Santa Barbara where it came out  
8 of.

9 Q. Before you were on scene you got a number?

10 A. I -- before we got out there, yeah, we had an approximate  
11 number, 34 people. That was 33 or 34. I forgot what I said, but  
12 yeah, we knew there was a lot.

13 Q. Can you describe your incident command system a little bit?  
14 Or you talked about Battalion 22 and 15?

15 A. It was kind of -- radio traffic, we were on our normal radio  
16 channels on our handheld, and Boat 15 has a mobile hand radio  
17 which has a little bit more power, but I stay on our Channel 5,  
18 our Command Channel 5 on our radio system. And we also have a  
19 tach channel, which I would talk direct to the Boat 15 and Boat 1,  
20 which was out of Ventura City. They were dead in the water. They  
21 got out there, had a fuel leak, so eventually they had to get  
22 towed back in. But we did transfer -- they brought us extra foam.  
23 They weren't involved in the firefight. They were -- they came  
24 out later during the call.

25 The county was a unified command with Petty Officer

1 [REDACTED] He handled all his communications via his boat on  
2 their Coast Guard channel.

3 Q. Uh-huh.

4 A. It's -- I don't know how to describe it. It's coded; we  
5 can't hear it. And there's also -- we also had a radio channel --  
6 a radio communications on 22 Alpha, the regular marine channel,  
7 and we also use Channel 16, which is the hailing channel.

8 I think initially that's how that fire got reported, was on  
9 16. Coast Guard LA listens to it. That's how they dispatch.  
10 And, you know, from what I understand, the crew members jumped  
11 off, they swam to the *Grape Escape*, they knocked, you know, jumped  
12 on their boat, and that's -- I'm sure you guys have already heard  
13 that story.

14 Q. So how did you get dispatched? Is it a direct call from the  
15 Coast Guard Station or through your --

16 A. No. We get toned out. They'll call our dispatch.

17 Q. Do you know if it was LA or was it the station here that  
18 calls -- called them?

19 A. No, I think it's LA. LA, I think they received a call for a  
20 medical. Actually, I don't know how. We get called from our  
21 dispatch, FCC, our Fire Communications Center.

22 Q. Uh-huh.

23 A. So I don't know if Coast Guard LA called them or Coast Guard  
24 Channel Islands, but it would seem to be that there's people on  
25 watch for Coast Guard LA and they listen to the Channel 16. If

1 they get an emergency call they, they'll call the Channel Islands  
2 Harbor.

3 Q. Okay. Is this agreement you have with the Coast Guard, is it  
4 a formal agreement? Is this between your department and the  
5 station here?

6 A. No, no. There's a formal written agreement we have with the  
7 Coast Guard to go out on medical calls. So when we got  
8 dispatched, we got called out for a medical. We got on scene is  
9 when Petty Officer [REDACTED] said, hey, we got a call that  
10 there's a boat fire out there.

11 To me, I'm just, okay, this is our response. It's changing.  
12 Give me an additional reason to take the fireboat out. We're  
13 getting out there. We want to get out there as quick as we can.  
14 In agreement with Petty Officer [REDACTED] he's -- we were on  
15 the same mind-set, let's go, let's get out there. Because, like I  
16 said, I've been on a few boat fires and when we get out there,  
17 they're done; they're burned up. You know, that's just the nature  
18 of the fires out there.

19 Q. Whose call was it for you to jump on the Coast Guard boat  
20 instead of your own boat? Was that your call?

21 A. That's my call. I mean, for me, it's the quickest response  
22 to get out there. And knowing in my head the game plan is there's  
23 going to be victims in the water, let's go. So -- and it's the  
24 call as the captain. I need extra resources, let's get the  
25 fireboat going, too. For me to delay to walk around or to take

1 the engine back to the fireboat --

2 Q. I saw where the boat was, yeah.

3 A. Yeah, it's -- you're going to waste time.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And I already know, you know, it's victims in the water,  
6 hopefully, right?

7 Q. Can you describe any kind of mass casualty training you've  
8 done with the Coast Guard? Exercises or classroom training or --

9 A. Not really mass casualty training. We've gone over to their  
10 boat and familiarized us with the crew, you know, checked out  
11 their safety equipment. We discussed informally, you know, what  
12 we're going to bring. I already know we're bringing full  
13 turnouts. Any fire call, ideally we're going to respond with the  
14 boat. That call did initially come out as a medical but that  
15 changed when we got there, so --

16 Q. Is there any pre-incident plans for mass casualties that you  
17 had with them?

18 A. No. We do not have pre-mass casualty, but like with talking  
19 to Petty Officer [REDACTED] on there, you know, I'm determined,  
20 okay, we got 33 people; where we going to put them? While I was  
21 en route. I don't know how far or how long it was going to take  
22 to get there, but I already know it's an 87-foot boat just like  
23 (indiscernible). I know we can put people on that deck. Thirty-  
24 three people, we'll put them on there; we'll put them on our boat,  
25 the -- both 45-footers. We'll put them on the fireboat. And as

1 seafarers know, hopefully, civilians come, right? That's like  
2 Sailor's Creed; you hear a rescue call you go to it. I was  
3 thinking maybe we would get civilian boats.

4 The only other boat we have that I can think of is out of the  
5 port we have a oil supply boat. It's got a flat deck on it. Is  
6 there an agreement with them? No. But that's just, for me, in my  
7 mind as I'm going out there, who else can we call? But I felt at  
8 least the 87-footer could take people.

9 Q. Was EMS or local hospitals notified of a mass casualty  
10 incident?

11 A. Not immediately. We were going out, so I'm sure probably --  
12 because that was a big call, my chiefs get on scene then they  
13 start handling this -- those other kind of responses and  
14 notifications. I don't know if the notifications were made.  
15 Definitely they should be but, again, it was pretty evident to me  
16 getting on scene and realizing the situation that -- at hand, what  
17 it was.

18 Q. How about marine firefighting training? What kind of  
19 capabilities or actually what kind of training has your crew had  
20 in boat fires, shipboard fires?

21 A. We'll have, like, training that we do ourselves, hose  
22 training, you know, we'll -- I've had shipboard training through  
23 the department. It's been a little bit more formalized training.  
24 We've had that. I personally have had shipboard firefighting  
25 training, so -- you know, we just had recently a tabletop drill at

1 Channel Islands Harbor with the port and all the surrounding  
2 agencies talking about (indiscernible) marine fire and our  
3 shipboard firefighting here at the port.

4 Q. The Coasties mentioned this, I think. The one --

5 A. Yeah, they were there, also.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Yeah. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So that's the most recent formalized training we've had.

10 Q. Their fire pump, what kind of range did they have on -- I'm  
11 talking about Coast Guard's, the 45's fire pump?

12 A. What are they? Short? Maybe 100 GPM?

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

14 CAPT. BARRERA: It's a small, portable pump. They really  
15 aren't set up for firefighting. They don't have a deck one, they  
16 don't have a monitor or anything like that. I don't think it's  
17 part of their mission. That's why we have an agreement to go out  
18 with them and, you know, we work all together. I mean, at that,  
19 Petty Officer [REDACTED] did a great job and his communications,  
20 his leadership out there. He stayed calm. He was great.

21 BY MR. MUISE:

22 Q. Did either 45 hook up their fire pumps?

23 A. They wanted to on my boat and I said no because it was going  
24 to be inadequate. It was not going to do anything and --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- and if you prioritize what you go on, on scene, you're not  
2 going to put the boat out. That little pump's not going to do  
3 anything. It's literally going to piss on it, and that's how I  
4 described it.

5 Q. Did they have any foam on board?

6 A. I don't think they had any foam, but that pump is not -- it's  
7 just -- it's a poor fire pump. It can put a small fire out but  
8 you have to be on scene immediately to use it. I mean, if you're  
9 coming in 30 minutes later, you're wasting your time. The effort  
10 should be made to rescue people. That's what you do. You  
11 prioritize; you triage it out. That fire was -- the boat was  
12 fully engulfed.

13 Q. How about the -- are you familiar with the data marker buoy?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Did you see the Coasties launch any kind of buoy at all?

16 A. I'm not sure. No.

17 Q. It's used for calculating drift.

18 A. Okay. No, I'm not sure what kind of actions they took as far  
19 as marking the location. We have dyes and stuff like that on our  
20 ocean rescue or beach rescue and stuff like that. I don't know if  
21 they dropped any of that stuff, but their copter was on scene.  
22 You know, it seemed to me that they were taking action that was  
23 needed, you know, to look for victims.

24 Q. The vessel assist, is that the *Retriever*?

25 A. Yes, the *Retriever*.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. We saw it dispatched. I think I read that in the paper.

3 Q. Can you describe the *Retriever*? Is it a fishing boat?

4 A. No, it's not a fishing boat. It's a vessel assist. It's a  
5 company.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So they're -- it's like having insurance -- it's like having  
8 Triple A for boaters. They have a problem, hey, call vessel  
9 assist, you know --

10 Q. How big is that boat?

11 A. I'm not sure. It's probably at least 25 feet, and it's made  
12 to tow in vessels that, you know, run out of gas or fuel or  
13 somehow they're, you know, not working. So that's, like I said,  
14 it's like the Triple A of the ocean.

15 Q. Okay. The radio traffic mentioned an *American Pride*, too.  
16 Did you see them on scene?

17 A. I don't remember the *American Pride*.

18 Q. And the (indiscernible) talks about a vessel assist, *Ventura*.

19 A. That's the *Retriever*, I think.

20 Q. That's the *Retriever*. Okay.

21 A. Yeah, that's the *Retriever*. I think there's maybe a couple  
22 of those boats.

23 Q. Does your fireboat have AIS? Are you familiar with that?  
24 It's a transponder that's constantly transmitting --

25 A. I'm not sure. We just had a new -- got a new radio package

1 on there.

2 Q. Can you see other vessels? Is there a screen --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- that you can see other vessels?

5 A. Yes, yes. It has radar on it. It's -- if you go to the  
6 boat, you'll see it. It's got radar. That's -- we don't operate  
7 the boat. Harbor Patrol operates it. They're the pilots. So  
8 Harbor Patrol boat officers are the boat operators, they're  
9 licensed, you know, through the Coast Guard or how ever they get  
10 licensed. We operate the firefighting.

11 Q. Is anybody over there all the time?

12 A. Yeah, there's guys there. You can go there today. So --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. There'll be people on duty. They're right next to --

15 Q. I've seen it. I just didn't know if there was --

16 A. Yeah. So their job is to protect the harbor, right, Harbor  
17 Patrol. We have an agreement that they'll operate the fireboat  
18 for us and that they maintain it, so it's a cooperating agreement.

19 MR. BARNUM: Are they on duty 24/7?

20 CAPT. BARRERA: Yeah, they have three, 8-hour shifts.

21 There's always there.

22 MR. BARNUM: Yeah.

23 CAPT. BARRERA: There's not always a lot of people because  
24 they have two offices. They have the one there on Pelican Way and  
25 then there's one farther back into Oxnard city area. We do use

1 them for water rescues out here, Port Hueneme. We'll -- we add  
2 them to the call, they'll come out. They'll go on to possibly the  
3 break. They're kind of limited, but they -- we do have an  
4 agreement with them also for operating the fireboat for us. So we  
5 have responded to fireboats out to Santa Cruz and Anacapa.

6 BY MR. MUISE:

7 Q. Okay. So there's a dedicated crew to run that. You guys  
8 don't actually hop on the boat and run it yourselves?

9 A. No.

10 Q. There's a crew for the boat --

11 A. We jump on as firefighting personnel.

12 Q. Got you.

13 A. If there's something that's in the harbor, like in the marina  
14 or at the dock, they'll even go out there and we'll meet up with  
15 them and then get on the boat. But if it's out here, they wait  
16 for us, and we jump on the boat with them.

17 MR. BARNUM: Will they operate the monitors or is that  
18 something --

19 CAPT. BARRERA: They can. There's only one operator though.

20 MR. BARNUM: Yeah.

21 CAPT. BARRERA: So it's kind of difficult.

22 MR. BARNUM: Uh-huh.

23 CAPT. BARRERA: They do have -- they've been issued turnouts  
24 and they have SCBAs, but when we go we go with our equipment, and  
25 we bring extra equipment, and we'll respond with them and us.

1 That's kind of what we do. We get out there, put water on the  
2 fire, put foam on it, if it's necessary. I mean, I've been on a  
3 couple, and it just -- by the time we get out there, they're down  
4 to the hull. And you do want to salvage it and maybe dewater, but  
5 never have I had the opportunity to even dewater. Vessel assist  
6 will come out; I think they do have some dewatering ability.

7 BY MR. MUISE:

8 Q. Vessel assist is a company?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Yeah. Like I said, they're like the Triple A of the water  
12 out there.

13 Q. Can you talk about the captain, anything that he mentioned,  
14 ignition sources? Did he speculate at all on what might have  
15 happened?

16 A. No, he did not speculate, and I did ask him, say, hey, what  
17 happened? He said, my crew woke me up, and he went up to the  
18 wheelhouse. They said, hey, there's smoke in the wheelhouse. And  
19 it sounded to me that it was a rapid -- rapidly growing fire that  
20 sounds like his crew, they jumped off the side. He doesn't even  
21 know how they -- if they hung off the edge and let go; he doesn't  
22 know. I don't even know how he got in the water. I read that he  
23 jumped from the top, so --

24 MR. MUISE: Okay. Well, Bart, do you have anything else?

25 MR. BARNUM: Yeah, just a couple follow-ups, Captain.

1 BY MR. BARNUM:

2 Q. How far behind was your fireboat from you guys on the Coast  
3 Guard boat?

4 A. The Coast Guard boat can travel faster than that fireboat, so  
5 I couldn't tell you but you can -- should be able to get all the  
6 information from radio traffic, them arriving on scene and  
7 engaging in the fire. Let's just say maybe 5 or 10 minutes. I  
8 couldn't -- I really don't know the facts. I haven't looked at  
9 the timeline.

10 MR. MUISE: Was the first 45 gone when you got there?

11 CAPT. BARRERA: Yeah. They had already taken off. So, you  
12 know, and -- you know, like I said, we get there and [REDACTED]  
13 was there, I said, hey, that boat fire -- well, let's go. Let's  
14 get more gear coming. Let's get the fireboats staffed and let's  
15 get out there. So there was no hesitation and, you know, we both  
16 were in agreement that the quicker we get out there, the better.  
17 In anticipation of seeing victims in the water.

18 MR. MUISE: Sure.

19 Sorry, Bart. Go ahead.

20 BY MR. BARNUM:

21 Q. So when the fireboat got on scene, they engaged the fire.

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Using both foam and water?

24 A. Um-hum. Yeah we have a monitor on there. It has a pickup  
25 tube and we have 50 gallons of Triple F. That does -- you use

1 that up pretty quick. We have more foam in the back that we keep  
2 as extra, but even that runs out but -- you know, they did darken  
3 the fire down, but it just kept on re-flashing with the fuel and  
4 the boat and the amount of --

5 Q. So how many --

6 A. -- materials.

7 Q. How many vessels were actively fighting it at the end?

8 A. Two. Two. Boat 3 from Santa Barbara City, the Harbor Patrol  
9 boat. Now that was staffed with their guys. I don't -- they  
10 didn't have any firefighters on that boat, but they basically were  
11 squirting water out of the monitor and trying to lob the water on  
12 top and kind of keep that fire out. But, again, it would  
13 reignite. Again, I don't know if it was the diesel fuel that was  
14 reigniting, but that does float on water.

15 MR. MUISE: So Boat 3 was Ventura City or County?

16 CAPT. BARRERA: They are -- Boat 3, I think, is Santa Barbara  
17 Harbor Patrol, Santa Barbara City Harbor Patrol.

18 MR. MUISE: Okay.

19 CAPT. BARRERA: Boat 1 is Ventura City.

20 BY MR. BARNUM:

21 Q. Okay. So Boat 3 was actively fighting it and then also --

22 A. Boat 15.

23 Q. -- your boat, Boat 15.

24 A. Yeah, they were both fighting it.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. They stopped for a little bit when it broke anchor. Vessel  
2 assist hooked it.

3 Q. So they broke anchor, vessel assist hooked it up, and they --

4 A. Pulled it back out because it was kind of floating to the  
5 shoreline.

6 Q. Oh, they pulled it back out?

7 A. Yeah, just a few, just because, you know -- just to get it  
8 away so the boats could get around it, and Boat 15 fought it.

9 Q. So finally extinguished the fire and then --

10 A. I don't think it really ever, really completely extinguished.

11 Q. Just constant --

12 A. Yeah, because, you know, it was still smoldering. But, yeah,  
13 at that point it's taking on water. The hull is compromised, and  
14 to me, it seems like that always happens unless you have, like,  
15 dewatering constantly going on.

16 Q. Right. So it sank stern first, bow up?

17 A. Yep.

18 Q. And then did you see it --

19 A. It was -- no, that --

20 Q. -- go on its back?

21 A. I didn't see that part.

22 Q. No.

23 A. By that time they requested us go back to Channel Islands  
24 Harbor, and I'm assuming it was because the captain was on board.  
25 Firefighting efforts were done at that time. We did -- I did tell

1 the guys, hey, if you want us out here -- we stayed out there  
2 after it sunk just to see if bodies would float up, just in case  
3 we had to do some body recovery. And, like I told you, I asked  
4 Santa Barbara City Boat 3 to do a cursory check of the debris  
5 field. Nothing came up. I don't know how long they were on scene  
6 after that. The higher-ups were making whatever decisions they  
7 made. They finally said, okay, you guys, you're released from the  
8 incident. So we came back.

9 Q. Who called you back? Who released you? Was it someone from  
10 the Coast Guard or --

11 A. I'm not sure. I just asked my chief. I said, hey, you know  
12 -- and I talked to Petty Officer [REDACTED] I said, hey,  
13 whenever you're ready, I said, just let us know. We're here till  
14 whenever you need us. At one point he said, yeah, we're going  
15 back in. So (indiscernible).

16 Q. Uh-huh. And you guys didn't recover any victims or any  
17 other --

18 A. No. But en route back, there was two bodies that eventually  
19 came up, and it must have been the *Narwhal* that cruised by. We  
20 gave them two body bags out of the Coast Guard boat. They came  
21 inside the vessel and we gave them bags so --

22 Q. Did you guys ID those in the water or (indiscernible) --

23 A. No. I did not see any -- but we were already on our way,  
24 probably halfway back, back to Channel Islands Harbor.

25 Q. They called, someone called you?

1 A. Yeah. So there was another 45-foot out there, and the  
2 *Retriever* was still out there. I don't know if Harbor Patrol  
3 Boat 3 from Santa Barbara City was out there still. And our --  
4 Boat 1 from Ventura City was being towed in behind us, and then  
5 shortly after we left, Boat 15, I called them and said, hey, we're  
6 going back in; you guys are released. So we all kind of came back  
7 into port at the same time.

8 MR. MUISE: Okay.

9 BY MR. BARNUM:

10 Q. Just back (indiscernible). So after the vessel assist pulled  
11 the vessel back out and it sank --

12 A. I don't know how long that took. They still continued to  
13 fight fire from several -- I mean, because we got out there -- I'm  
14 going to just guess, let's say about 4:15. I don't know what the  
15 radio traffic says. When we arrived on scene I gave a report of a  
16 fully engulfed boat. We are not going to engage our pump at this  
17 time. Our main objective was going to be victim search and  
18 rescue.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. So that's all on the radio traffic. That gives you a  
21 timeline.

22 Q. I was just curious the position of the vessel when it sank.  
23 I was wondering. So vessel assist pulled her back out to fight  
24 the fire, but then it sank. Was there any effort --

25 A. It was relatively in the same effort. I mean, it was

1 relatively the same effort.

2 Q. Was there any other efforts to move it again?

3 A. No, he kept his line on it. The vessel assist kept his line  
4 on it the whole time.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So it broke anchor. It was kind of floating till we backed  
7 off from the fire. The shoreline was very rocky and sheer. If  
8 you go out there you can see that, so it was safer for us to just  
9 pulling back a little bit, and then we reengaged. And, really,  
10 the firefighting effort was just to keep it, you know -- honestly,  
11 it was already to the hull, I mean.

12 Q. Right. Yeah.

13 A. You can see -- I do have pictures I can give to you guys, by  
14 the way. I didn't send them to anybody.

15 Q. Christine's already got them, all those for us.

16 A. Yeah, I didn't send -- mine are -- I didn't send them in. I  
17 just was off duty and I just -- that's all I have. They're  
18 blurry. That's like initially getting in there, you know --

19 MR. MUISE: Do you mind sharing those with us?

20 CAPT. BARRERA: No. I can give them to you guys.

21 MR. MUISE: Okay.

22 CAPT. BARRERA: I mean, they told me not to get rid of them  
23 so I didn't get rid of them. I don't even know what time that is  
24 at -- that's 5:21, so --

25 MR. MUISE: Okay. I'll give you a stick.

1           CAPT. BARRERA: Yeah, that's going to it.

2           MR. BARNUM: I don't know if they requested already, but does  
3 the fireboat have video cameras?

4           CAPT. BARRERA: The fireboat, I don't believe has any video.

5           MR. BARNUM: Okay. Does it have video capability or just --  
6 and it wasn't on?

7           CAPT. BARRERA: I don't think it has video capability.

8           MR. BARNUM: Okay.

9           MR. MUISE: I just have a few follow-up questions from that.

10          BY MR. MUISE:

11         Q. Does the Coast Guard boat have a dash cam or --

12         A. I don't know.

13         Q. How about on-scene weather? Can you describe that for me?

14         A. It was relatively -- there were some swells, but the weather  
15 wasn't that bad because we made it out there. There were some  
16 swells, but that is -- I guess that's a sheltered harbor, Platts  
17 Harbor. It was calm there, especially in the morning, in  
18 daylight, it was pretty flat.

19         Q. How about fog? Any reports?

20         A. There was fog going out and when we got on scene there was  
21 some fog, I do remember, but it -- the visibility wasn't that bad.  
22 There was some going out from the coast, but once we got through  
23 it, it was relatively clear.

24         Q. Okay.

25         A. And we could see the --

1 Q. And then lastly, do you think it sank from the firefighting  
2 water or from flooding or both?

3 A. I think the fire destroyed the boat and inevitably it takes  
4 on water, the hull is compromised, whatever lines that went  
5 through burnt up from the engine (indiscernible) or how ever those  
6 things operated. It's just been my experience that they just  
7 burn, you know.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Whether we're putting water on it with foam, I just think it  
10 just -- you know, I'm not an expert at all, but I've just seen  
11 them. They always sink. I mean, you had to have dewatering and,  
12 you know --

13 BY MR. BARNUM:

14 Q. Have you ever been called out to these boats before for  
15 medical from the Coast Guard?

16 A. Yeah. Yeah.

17 Q. Do you know what vessel in particular? Was it the *Conception*  
18 or a Truth Aquatics boat, or --

19 A. No. Never that.

20 Q. Never them?

21 A. No. No. I've been, like, probably been on vessels out there  
22 for injuries.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Recently we got called out to a possible boat fire that was  
25 here on the beach at Hueneme. It was just an overheated engine.

1 I've been out to a fishing boat. I don't know which one, you  
2 know, reported. We bring the passenger onto our boat. He was --  
3 we respond with the fireboat or Coast Guard, so --

4 Q. Do you have any questions for us or any things that you think  
5 we should be looking at in these boat fires? Anything we should  
6 concentrate on?

7 A. No, I mean, you know, it's a whole tragedy, and I don't know  
8 how the fire started, you know, I don't, like, read the paper.  
9 I'm not following it that closely because, you know, you guys are  
10 going to bring up the boat eventually. You guys can interview  
11 their crew. They're going to be the guys with the most knowledge.  
12 So I can't speculate on anything, you know.

13 MR. BARNUM: Yeah.

14 MR. MUISE: Okay. Did I ask you to spell your name when we  
15 started?

16 CAPT. BARRERA: B-a-r-r-e-r-a.

17 MR. MUISE: Okay. And with that, it's 10:42, and we'll  
18 secure the recording.

19 (Whereupon, at 10:42 a.m., the interview was concluded.)  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FIRE AND SINKING OF THE *CONCEPTION*  
WITH LOSS OF LIFE NEAR  
SANTA CRUZ ISLAND, CALIFORNIA  
SEPTEMBER 2, 2019  
Interview of Paul Barrera

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA19MM047

PLACE: Port Hueneme, California

DATE: September 8, 2019

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

  
Beverly A. Lano  
Transcriber