

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

 In the Matter of: *
 *
 "FIRE ON BOARD M/V COLUMBIA" *
 June 6, 2000 *
 DOCKET NO. DCA-00-MM030 *

INTERVIEW OF:

GEORGE CAPACCI

(Captain) General Manager

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Date: June 13, 2000

Place: NTSB Command Post at Juneau, Alaska
Fire Fighter's Training Classroom Building

Interviewed by: Captain Anthony H. Murray
NTSB Office of Marine Safety
Operations Group Chairman

P R O C E E D I N G S

CAPTAIN MURRAY: The Marine Accident

Investigation of the Motor Vessel Columbia. We are about to interview Captain George A. Capacci. And that is spelled, last name is C-A-P-A-C-C-I. And Captain George is the general manager of the State of Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Alaska Marine Highway System.

And today is June 13, Tuesday, the Year 2000.

We are in Juneau, Alaska at the NTSB Command Center.

Captain George, if you would give us your position, your background and the, speak about the management oversight of your company and how it stood up the makeup of that management system and how it is related to the ISM Code and also go into the notification of the fire to the company onboard the Motor Vessel Columbia.

CAPTAIN CAPACCI: Certainly, thank you.

George Capacci, General Manager, Alaska Marine Highway System. I have been the general manager of the Marine Highway System since about January of this year(2000). Prior to that I was a port captain with the Alaska Marine Highway System. And as the general manager, under the ISM Code, International

1 Safety Management Code, I am the designated person
2 ashore or the designated person within the Code, that
3 person with the authority and responsibility for
4 bringing resources to bear to correct non conformities
5 as identified on the vessels. And to ensure
6 application of the International Safety Management Code
7 across the fleet.

8 The Alaska Marine Highway System operates
9 nine vessels throughout the State of Alaska, roll on,
10 roll off passenger ships. And five of our vessels are
11 SOLAS, built to SOLAS classifications. They have the
12 safety requirements as laid out in SOLAS, the Safety of
13 Life at Sea Treaty. And the other four ships since they
14 do not stop in and make foreign port calls, are not
15 SOLAS class vessels but we as a company decided back in
16 1997 and '96, as we were working towards the ISM
17 deadline, to apply the Safety Management System
18 required by the ISM Code to all our vessels. It was
19 not consistent with our safety policy, if there was a
20 safety management system on some ships and not on other
21 ships. So, we made the decision, plus our crews move
22 between vessels, so we made the decision that there
23 will be a similar safety management system applied to
24 all ships.

25 We worked towards the deadline of 1 July 1998

1 to make sure that we had our company document of
2 compliance and that those vessels that are SOLAS class
3 vessels have their Safety Management Certificate by 1
4 July of '98. And those, we met those deadlines. We
5 have contracted through open procurement requests with
6 the different classification societies in the world and
7 through competitive bidding, Lloyd Register Shipping
8 won our contract for ISM auditing and they audited the
9 home office, if you will, the general central office.
10 They audited our engineering maintenance facility at
11 Ketchikan and in Bellingham and audited our policies
12 and procedures that we had in place and issued the
13 Alaska Marine Highway System as documented in
14 compliance.

15 Now, the other ships that were SOLAS class
16 vessels, all got their Safety Management Certificate
17 through internal and external audit procedures and the
18 Coast Guard oversight, because there was an
19 international debate between whether Lloyds could
20 actually do U.S. ships. But, we had contracted with
21 them already, so, the Coast Guard gave us a grandfather
22 clause. Part of the clause was that a Coast Guard
23 inspector had to go along with us during the audit
24 process. So, we had Lloyds Register of Shipping and
25 the Coast Guard personnel along during both internal

1 and external, during the external audits, put it that
2 way, external audits. So, our SOLAS class vessels had
3 met those deadlines of 1 July.

4 We have been internally auditing our ships
5 under the ISM Code, to sort of back up. We have been
6 internally auditing our ships under the ISM Code on an
7 annual basis. The ISM Code requires that ships be
8 audited externally twice in five years or every two and
9 a half years or so. The Columbia and the other non-
10 SOLAS vessels, the Malaspina, the Bartlett and the
11 Tustumena, have had internal audits. They have not had
12 external audits yet. They were scheduled for external
13 audits this year. I think the Columbia, in fact, was
14 scheduled for an internal audit about seventh, eighth
15 or ninth of June, I mean, it was right after this. So,
16 so, and then we were scheduling an external audit later
17 in the year. Those plans will be changed. But, so, we
18 have, we are working towards the non-SOLAS class
19 vessels, even though there is no requirement to do it,
20 we want them to have their Safety Management
21 Certificate as, after they have been internally and
22 externally audited, to indicate that there is a Safety
23 Management System in place. I think it is the right
24 thing to do because that way the Safety Management
25 System is consistent throughout the fleet. It is

1 consistent for our employees to know what procedures
2 are in place. And so, you could still say that we are
3 in the process of implementing the International Safety
4 Management Code across the vessels.

5 The biggest change for the Alaska Marine
6 Highway System was the additional paperwork, the
7 additional documentation. I think our safety record
8 over the last 38 plus years has been exemplary. And
9 the Safety Management Code required though that we
10 document it, write it down and you know, pick up on
11 some of the drills and training that could possibly
12 confront vessels of our class. The code of, excuse me,
13 the Safety Management System books were developed with
14 fleet input. We had Masters and Engineers and Mates,
15 unlicensed personnel helping to write the book. It is,
16 you know, the credo of International Safety Management
17 Code is, you know, say what you do, do what you say,
18 document it and audit those actions and then take, take
19 action on the differences. So, that is about where we
20 are with the International Safety Management Code on
21 our ships.

22 I was the port captain and involved with the
23 rollout of this program and the general manager was the
24 designated person. I was the delegated designated
25 person. And now as the general manager, I am the

1 delegated, I am the designated person. In fact we have
2 a management review meeting scheduled tomorrow, company
3 wide management review meeting tomorrow. So, that
4 talks about the ISM Code, why we were required to come
5 under the Code.

6 Onboard, do you want to talk about non-
7 conformities a little bit. Non conformities are
8 generated usually through internal audits or external
9 audits. Those non-conformities are brought to the
10 general central office, our STCW, ISM coordinator
11 handles those and documents them and brings them to my
12 attention as the designated person. Also non-
13 conformities can be generated from the monthly safety
14 meetings, or actually there is a requirement they have
15 a monthly safety meeting on our vessels. Since there
16 is two crews, on the Columbia we have two safety
17 meetings a month. Non-conformities could be generated
18 through the safety meetings onboard the vessel or the
19 captain or any of the crew members onboard could raise
20 an issue and it would, could come to the level of a
21 non-conformity that is brought to our attention.

22 A lot of times in the way our company
23 operates, if there is an operational failure, the radar
24 doesn't work, for example, we have redundant radar, but
25 if one of the radars has something wrong with it, a

1 quick phone call to the port captain, a piece of paper
2 that starts the procurement process, and a technician
3 is contracted and brought to fix the ship. If we, it
4 is much faster than a non-conformity, if a non-
5 conformity was generated, it would take some time to do
6 that. Our non-conformity process is usually intended
7 for longer term items that are beyond the capability of
8 the ship to fix, that they bring to our attention and
9 then we, it goes into our planning process for
10 budgeting and shipyard work and things like that. What
11 I'm saying is the emergency repairs that need to come
12 up, are taken care of at a quick basis, quickly, so,
13 non-conformities aren't generated. We don't want the
14 ISM Code to be the only mechanism we have for
15 correcting any discrepancies on the ship.

16 Sometimes there is procedural non-
17 conformities that come up, that the captains, they
18 bring to our attention. They are reviewing the SMS
19 manuals on a routine basis. And when they put those
20 into practice, if something comes up that needs to be
21 changed, there is a couple of options, either the ship
22 conforms to the Safety Management Code, Safety
23 Management System as it is written, or we change the,
24 we change our Safety Management System Manual to
25 reflect what we are actually doing, as long as it

1 doesn't, you know, contravene any other regulations or
2 Coast Guard regulations or anything like that. But,
3 the Safety Management System is ours and it is intended
4 to ensure standard procedures across the vessels and
5 across work functions onboard.

6 So, it is a dynamic manual. It changes, it
7 is in a constant state of revision. There is always
8 little corrections that are being made to it. Every
9 time our auditor goes out and every time we get
10 externally audited, things come up that get added or
11 subtracted from the Safety Management System. Right
12 now it is in paper. And my plan years ago was to turn
13 it into a CD, so that it could be, you know, controlled
14 much more easily, rather than trying to keep track of
15 paper. And then the rest of the ships' personnel could
16 have access to it, and not have to worry about, you
17 know, pulling pages out of the Safety Management System
18 book and, you know, being an incomplete set on board.
19 Plus, we could have controlled documents, controlled
20 copies a lot more easily that way.

21 There's a, along that line there is a second
22 effort going on to upgrade computers onboard, so they
23 will have a, in fact, we have upgraded the computers
24 and they do have CD disks onboard. Anyway I won't go
25 off on that.

1 I want to talk a little bit about our
2 response to the Columbia incident in light of the
3 International Safety Management Code. As I was made
4 aware of the incident on the Columbia, on the 6th of
5 June, I returned from lunch and apparently we had got a
6 call just about 12:40 or so in the office, from the
7 port captain that there had been a fire of undetermined
8 origin and detail on the Columbia. It was, I looked at
9 my watch, it was a little after 1300, after they were
10 on the phone to the Columbia, cell phone, I said let's
11 activate the emergency response team and we got our, we
12 went to a separate room within the Department of
13 Transportation, that is right off the Commissioner's
14 conference room. It is kind of a command post, small
15 room, conference room with, you know, bulletin boards,
16 and white boards, and things to write on and stuff, and
17 I just said, we are activating the emergency response
18 team. And I had the, my operations manager and port
19 captain, the engineering construction manager, and a
20 number of other people were up in there and coming and
21 going as need be. The Commissioner would poke his head
22 in and keep, keep attune to what was happening, and he
23 was letting the Governor's Office know and a public
24 affairs person was in there, a safety officer was
25 coming and going on different tasks. All different

1 support activities were coming to their response team
2 in the incident command post.

3 We forward all our phones up there. So, the
4 phone calls that kept coming in from the ship, I had
5 chronically of what went on. We were talking to the
6 Coast Guard. We gave them our number. And I have
7 quite a, this is just my rough notes, but I think the
8 port captain, Captain McLean was taking notes of what
9 took place and had a chronology working.

10 Anyway, we were in there from 1300 until, oh,
11 boy, I am pass 19 already, 1900, it looks like about
12 20, well, I was there until about 2200 that night. And
13 a number of different, I see all kinds of notations
14 here with the Coast Guard, with the passenger
15 transfers. I stayed at the command post and I had
16 Captain Edwards on a team with him, head down to the,
17 because by now the transfer personnel had taken place
18 to the Taku, and he went down to the, to meet the ship
19 as it came in and we had prepared some, some responses
20 to frequently asked questions for all the passengers.
21 And we had a Coast Guard questionnaire that we were
22 distributing to all the people that were getting off
23 the ship. We had come up with a plan for, obviously,
24 during that afternoon and evening, a towing plan and an
25 evacuation plan for the passengers and our response

1 plan when the ship got in to, to get the passengers
2 accommodated for the night and getting them on other
3 ships for the following day. And I think it all went
4 fairly smoothly. It was good to have a command post,
5 one central location for the emergency response team to
6 gather. And if anybody wanted anything to do with the
7 Columbia, they knew right where to go within the
8 building, from the Governor's Office down to, down to
9 the telephone receptionist right in the building.

10 You asked me to talk a little bit about the
11 training kiosk onboard the vessel?

12 CAPTAIN MURRAY: Yes, you showed us the
13 training kiosk onboard the Motor Vessel Taku, and if
14 you could just explain how that works.

15 CAPTAIN CAPACCI: The training kiosk is the
16 Alaska Marine Highway System's effort or, yes, it is
17 our effort to comply with the STCW, the Standards for
18 Training Certification and Watch Keeping for Seafarers
19 1978, as amended by 1995. And what we have embarked on
20 a long process of contracting with a training firm to
21 develop a delivery system to permit our crew members to
22 come in compliance with the STCW code by the February
23 1st deadline of 2002. And there is a lot of
24 information that needs to get passed to all our crew
25 members, both existing employees and new hires. And

1 the training kiosk is a self contained desk, if you
2 will, with a flat screen, computer screen in it, touch
3 screen, computer monitor. Internal there is a standard
4 PC or personal computer, with, it has the ability to
5 pass information that is required under the STCW code
6 for basic safety training. Right now, the basic safety
7 training course has been approved by the U.S. Coast
8 Guard. It was developed by a company called "MGI
9 International". Also doing business as Code Red
10 Mariner. They are out of Vancouver, British Columbia.

11 And recently, over this past winter, they had their
12 basic safety training course approved by the U.S. Coast
13 Guard, for the delivery of the four modules of
14 information. There is a basic fire fighting, life
15 saving, first aid, and I think personal survival,
16 social responsibilities. The four modules that are
17 required under the STCW code for BST, basic safety
18 training.

19 That information is passed, you know, is
20 presented at a self pace type of course and individuals
21 can sit at the kiosk, can go through that in little 20
22 minute bites as their time permits. Once they complete
23 all that course and it is, there is audio and written
24 word on the screen. There is also video clips
25 throughout, to demonstrate the different topics

1 throughout that basic safety training course. And
2 after an individual has completed that instructional
3 part, and this is in lieu of standing in front of,
4 standing in a classroom whenever an instructor teaches,
5 you know, 20, 30 people at a time. We have trouble
6 getting that many people together at any one time,
7 especially during the summer. So, this was an effort
8 to pass this information on an individual basis.

9 And so, after they complete that basic safety
10 training computer part of it, they need to sit down and
11 go through a three day practical demonstration. The
12 course is both computer base training and practical
13 demonstration of the modules that is required by the
14 STCW code. During those three days they get some basic
15 fire fighting and operation of fire extinguishers and
16 operations of SCBAs, self contained breathing apparatus
17 and they get familiarization with the fire fighting
18 turnout gear. And they go into a smoke filled chamber,
19 you know, with non toxic smoke and see what it is like
20 in reduced visibility. That is the fire fighting part
21 of it.

22 Then there is a module on pool safety, water
23 safety. We have to tread water and get in a life raft
24 and use survival suits. So, just some familiarity in
25 the pool with riding a life raft and demonstrate those

1 required elements of the STCW code.

2 And the third day is spent, or the third
3 section of those three days is spent with first aid
4 training, heart saver, first aid. I think heart saver
5 is the new word for CPR. I don't think it is called
6 CPR anymore. I think it is called heart saver
7 training. And then some basic first aid. One of the
8 tenants of the STCW code is not only do you have the
9 "book learning" or the lecture time, but you have to
10 demonstrate that you have those skills. And that is
11 what those three days of practical instruction are
12 there for, practical demonstration, therefore, to make
13 sure there is compliance with the basic safety training
14 code.

15 So, we have one of those kiosks on, did I say
16 that, on all our ships, except the Bartlett. I have a
17 kiosk on every ship, the Bartlett and the, I think the
18 Aurora doesn't have one yet. But, the goal is to put
19 one on every ship except the Bartlett and the Bartlett
20 I have, because it is so small, I have a computer at
21 its home port in Cordova, so, the crew members can get
22 to the kiosk there.

23 And you access the kiosk with your Z card,
24 your merchant mariner document, it reads a magnetic
25 strip and has your name and Social Security number.

1 So, it keeps, not only, it logs you in as under your
2 name, but it also keeps an electronic record of the
3 modules you have taken. There are quizzes throughout
4 the module. And there are also tests at the end,
5 generated tests through a random system that has been
6 approved by the U.S. Coast Guard, again it is Coast
7 Guard approval, there are random tests generated at the
8 end. And it logs electronically that you have
9 completed particular modules and courses. It also
10 spits out, by the way, it spits a little document of
11 completion which is kind of nice for the student to
12 have that "I have done this." And when they complete
13 all those modules on the computer, and then we
14 schedule, we have just scheduled our first couple of
15 classes, or this spring we did a number of classes for
16 existing employees and got them through the whole basic
17 safety training and then they take all that information
18 to the Coast Guard, since it is a Coast Guard approved
19 course and they add it to their STCW certificate that
20 they have completed basic safety training.

21 As a company, we have great plans for the
22 kiosk. We like the training, the computer based
23 training methodology. It is fantastic. People are
24 very receptive to it. They retain a lot of it. They
25 retain a lot more information than just a pure lecture.

1 It is interactive. You have to touch the screen, you
2 know, to response to quizzes and tests. And they can
3 hear it and see it and put headphones on and just, you
4 know, just block out all kinds of extraneous
5 distractions. So, the computer based training
6 methodology is very attractive to us. We are really
7 looking forward to fully implementing this, not just
8 BST, but also crowd management, and crisis management.

9 We have got two courses under contract that are in for
10 Coast Guard approval right now for crowd management and
11 crisis management. We also have a course under
12 development, a computer based training course on
13 proficiency and use of survival craft. And so, the
14 people will get the information through the computer,
15 and then through a series of onboard trained officers
16 will be able to sign off their practical demonstration
17 of raising and lowering life boats and all the little
18 details of raising and lowering life boats. So, part
19 of that collaborative effort is to get our chief mates
20 and our second mates and third mates probably qualified
21 as designated examiners under the STCW code. So, they
22 will, we are setting up a train-the-trainer course for
23 them, so that they can sign people off, if you will,
24 and get into the Coast Guard database.

25 So, our effort is to conduct training onboard

1 for the bulk of that proficiency of use in survivor
2 craft.

3 We had also envisioned putting a lot of our
4 safety information, right now it is all done through,
5 you know, electrical safety, lifting safety, eye
6 protection, hand protection, slips, trips and falls
7 training, hazardous materials training. That is all
8 done through little, little paper, pamphlets with a
9 written test at the end of it. That is an
10 administrative nightmare to keep track of all of that.

11 What we would like to do is eventually put on that on
12 the computer, people can go through there, take their
13 tests, and then electronically would have a record of
14 it for all the training and safety things, and there is
15 hazardous communication training and the whole myriad
16 of little safety things that we have to do onboard,
17 that we would have an electronic base, electronic
18 record for those employees. We have a very stable
19 workforce, so it would be helpful to have it
20 electronically recorded like that.

21 And that database is shared back and forth
22 with the central office on a regular basis, so that all
23 our databases are consistent. Eventually we will go to
24 either an e-mail or an electronic connection, rather
25 than physically moving a zip drive back and forth. We

1 will have electrical connection through e-mail. We
2 will synchronize our base, our database that way. But,
3 that is basically an overview of the, of our training
4 kiosk onboard our ships.

5 We have a number, we have also another couple
6 of kiosks, four kiosks in Juneau and Ketchikan for our
7 employees when they are on shore to come in and work
8 through those things there, too.

9 CAPTAIN MURRAY:: Thank you, Captain, for that
10 explanation of our management oversight and operations.

11 Your stand up of the ISM Code, guidelines and also the
12 STCW onboard training.

13 Finally, Captain, could you explain to us
14 your, give us a synopsis of your maritime background
15 and experience.

16 CAPTAIN CAPACCI: Certainly. Well, I
17 graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1975 and
18 spent a career in the United States Coast Guard as a
19 surface operations specialist. I had served over 10
20 years at sea on six different ships, command of five
21 different ships, I commanded two ships. I commanded
22 the Buoy Tender in Homer, Alaska. And I was, for three
23 years, and I had command of a medium endurance cutter
24 at California, that did fisheries, law enforcement
25 patrols, from the Barren Sea of Mexico. So, and after

1 a 20 year career, I retired and moved back to Alaska.
2 I spent the summer upgrading catamarans out of Juneau
3 here and on sight seeing cruises, if you will,
4 passengers coming off the cruise ships and so we took
5 out the, you know, sight seers looking at the wildlife
6 here in Juneau, for three times a day. And then I
7 started working as assistant port captain with the
8 Alaska Marine Highway System and moved up to port
9 captain. I started working in what, '97 and then have
10 gone from assistant port captain to port captain and
11 now general manager this past year. That is my
12 curriculum vitae.

13 CAPTAIN MURRAY: Well, thank you very much,
14 Captain. And thank you also on behalf of the NTSB on
15 all of the help that you have given us in this
16 investigation and made us feel so welcome here in
17 Juneau.

18 This completes our interview today.

19 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)