



National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Date: January 5, 2003

Place: Cell Phone

Person Interviewed: Hutchinson Family – Terry, Cindy, Sara, and Noah

Interview Conducted By: Jim Walsh,
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTRODUCTION

The Hutchinson Family was interviewed in conjunction with the Investigation concerning the sinking of the *Panther* (DCA03MM018). The text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from my handwritten notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge and recollection.

INTERVIEW

The Hutchinsons, Terry (F), Cindy(M), Sara and Noah, arrived at the Park just as a tour boat left requiring them to wait about forty minutes for the Panther. They did not observe anything unusual with the *Panther* prior to boarding. While on prior boat trips Terry normally removed and inspected the life preservers for his family to determine the type and how to put them on. Neither Sara, seventeen, nor Noah, twelve, knows how to swim. Terry didn't have his family remove their life preserver on the 30th.

The Hutchinsons took four seats forward of the captain's console and saw nothing unusual. They passed boats with people fishing, another tour boat passed. The captain suggested that to get a bigger wake people could move to the rear of the boat. The captain made a big turn; some people in back commented that water was coming in. By now the boat was thirty minutes into the trip and approaching the last two islands at the end of the channel. The captain made another big circle and stopped the boat.

Someone in the back was heard asking why have we stopped? The captain responded we stopped so we can let the bilge pumps catch up. People in the back had water up to their knees. About five minutes later someone asked, "When are we going to start again"? The captain replied the water is almost out, just a couple more minutes to get going.

"The intercom was off and the captain was seen speaking into the microphone. Lots of clicks and clucks were coming from the speakers; in retrospect believe the captain was radioing for help. About the time the captain was speaking into the microphone we saw a fishing boat make a right turn and start to come towards us. The captain told everyone to sit down. As the boat came up to us the captain said we all would have to get on this boat. Within three seconds of the boat being within two feet of us our boat, the [*Panther*] sank. All four of us grabbed for the fishing boat and jumped. The water was up to our waists in seconds. As the boat sank and we stood on the backs of seats and the rail trying to climb the fishing boat."

The people in the back of the boat were swimming over to the fishing boat. They saw four people hanging on to a floating piece of the boat. The captain and a couple were hanging onto the part of the boat above water. A pleasure craft picked up the captain and the couple. They heard a man screaming for his son. A crewmember from the Red Rock dove in to help and then was told that the pleasure craft had picked up the son.

They all were out of the water within fifteen minutes. It was perhaps another twenty minutes before the first ENPT Boat came in sight. They got on the Panther II, while others declined to go aboard. They took out their life preservers (LP) immediately. The LPs were old, dirty and smelly. Further to get to the LPs they had to get on their hands and knees.

The captain knew something was wrong. He had five to ten minutes to tell us to get life preservers. No one on the park boats had blankets or medical equipment. They saw several uniforms. They saw a chopper land and a helo pilot came over around 5PM, asked a Ranger if everyone was accounted for. The Ranger said everyone was and it was okay to leave. USCG said thanks and took off.

END OF INTERVIEW

Jim Walsh