

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION AND SAFETY BOARD

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In the matter of: :
: :
THE INVESTIGATION OF THE :
CAPSIZING OF THE WATER TAXI : Docket No:
LADY D IN BALTIMORE HARBOR, : DCA04MM015
MARYLAND :
ON MARCH 6, 2004 :
: :
INTERVIEW OF: :
: :
BART KOBE, :
BALTIMORE FIRE DEPARTMENT :
: :
- - - - -x

NTSB
Office of Marine Safety
MS-10
490 L'Enfant Plaza East SW
Washington, DC 20594
Friday, March 12, 2004

The above captioned interview convened, upon agreement
of the parties at 8:15 a.m.

BEFORE:

Mariette Burer
National Transportation Safety Board

P R O C E E D I N G S

8:15 a.m.

MS. BURER: I first will introduce myself, then everyone else will introduce themselves, and then we'll go ahead and start with the interviewing.

MR. KOBE: Okay.

MS. BURER: My name is Mariette Burer. I work with the National Transportation Safety Board and today it's quarter after eight, Friday, March 12th.

To my left is:

LT. BARANOWSKI: Lieutenant Scott Baranowski. US Coast Guard Sector, Baltimore.

MR. KOBE: And I'm Bart Kobe, emergency boat operator with the Baltimore City Fire Department.

MS. BURER: Okay. Could you give us a little background of your work experience?

MR. KOBE: I've been employed with the City of Baltimore Fire Department since December of 1989. I spent my first ten years as a paramedic on a medical unit in the city before transferring to an engine company, I guess that was about five years ago, and February 11th I was promoted to emergency boat operator at the fire boat station, Fort McHenry.

MS. BURER: Okay, what I would like to do is have you tell me - are you on shift work?

MR. KOBE: Yes, ma'am.

MS. BURER: Okay. So describe your shift

1 work - when you start, when you end, how exactly that
2 works.

3 MR. KOBE: We work - we work two days, two
4 ten-hour days starting at six in the morning until four
5 in the afternoon, and then on our third day, we come in
6 at four at night and work until six in the morning and
7 that happens for two nights. Every six shifts we're
8 eligible for vacation which gives us four days off, so
9 we end up with 12 days off.

10 MS. BURER: Can you tell me what you - can
11 you take from Friday morning, last Friday morning -
12 just Friday morning and tell me a little bit of what
13 your normal routine would be from the moment that you
14 woke up to when you actually went to bed and then
15 Saturday morning, and then take me through.

16 MR. KOBE: We worked - that week we worked
17 Thursday day, Friday day, Saturday night and Sunday
18 night. So Friday morning I get up at quarter after
19 four. I live on the eastern shore. I usually leave my
20 house, stop at the barn store, grab a cup of coffee and
21 drive to work which usually puts me here about quarter
22 to six in the morning.

23 And then day here is usually a quick check on
24 the boat to make sure nothing's occurred during the
25 night. We eat breakfast sometime around seven.
26 Usually around eight o'clock we start housework, which
27 usually takes a couple hours, and then the rest of the

1 day is spent doing maintenance - maintenance on the
2 boats, inspecting the boats, and since I'm still fairly
3 new here, we usually spend at least two or three hours
4 on what we call training cruise. We'll take the boat
5 out, run around - run around the harbor, do some area
6 familiarization and familiarization with the
7 electronics and operations of the boat.

8 They usually change shifts here around three
9 o'clock in the afternoon, so at three o'clock, some
10 time around three o'clock we exchange shifts, my relief
11 comes in and I go home.

12 MS. BURER: Okay, and then you go home and
13 how long does it take to go home?

14 MR. KOBE: My commute from here to my house
15 is usually about an hour and 15 minutes, give or take
16 traffic, so that would put me home Friday afternoon
17 sometime around four-thirty. I believe this particular
18 Friday, I worked my part-time job as a paramedic for
19 Talbot County, which would put me to work at the St.
20 Michael's fire station from seven that night until
21 seven o'clock Saturday morning.

22 MS. BURER: Okay, then what did you do
23 Saturday morning at seven o'clock?

24 MR. KOBE: I went home. I don't think I had
25 any plans for that day, so I guess I just ...ed around
26 the house until it was time to leave to come to work.
27 And as I said, we leave here at three o'clock, so I

1 would have left my house sometime around one-thirty,
2 which would have put me to work close to quarter to
3 three, three o'clock, give or take traffic. I got to
4 check the watch book sheets, but I think I probably
5 would have signed in some time around 2:55, three
6 o'clock.

7 MS. BURER: Okay.

8 MR. KOBE: We were having - I know we were
9 having a meal that night, so probably for the first
10 half hour there was some exchange of information, a
11 quick check on the boat, and I think we were - the
12 majority of us were in the kitchen, planning - you
13 know, getting things ready for that night's dinner.

14 MS. BURER: Okay.

15 MR. KOBE: I think some time around ten
16 minutes to four, or four o'clock, we were in the
17 kitchen and it had been a very nice - you know, it was
18 a nice -- I think I ran into like a like a little bit
19 of thunderstorm on my way to work that day, but the
20 closer I got to Baltimore, the weather seemed to clear
21 up. We were standing in the kitchen and all of a
22 sudden it just kind of got like really black outside,
23 and I like, wow, what's going on? And then with that,
24 I had made a comment because the wind had blown right
25 through the fire station and blew the back door - back
26 door of the fire station open, and I was like, man,
27 where did all this come from, because it kind of came

1 out of nowhere. The weather really blew up.

2 And I think one of the other members was
3 upstairs and I heard him come running down the steps
4 saying that he thinks that --he thought he saw -
5 happened to see some people in the water, and with that
6 we all ran out the door and from the steps of the
7 firehouse, we could - you know, saw what we thought
8 were people in the water, waving their hands.

9 My partner, DBA Sebeck and I grabbed our
10 jackets and immediately ran down the dock and put the
11 boat, got the boat in service and headed that way. As
12 we were heading out, the naval landing craft boat would
13 - we all kind of converged on it at the same time.

14 The wind had to have been blowing, probably
15 well over 40 miles an hour, and was at least three to
16 four foot swells in the harbor. We had a - really had
17 a difficult time trying to maneuver in there, and as we
18 made our approach to the pontoon boat, the Navy guy,
19 because they were pointing off to the ramp on the front
20 that they were going to lower their ramp at maneuver
21 in, which was really good. They had a lot heavier boat,
22 they were able to kind of hold their position a lot
23 more. We were like bouncing like a beer can out there.

24 Of course everybody was responding now. We
25 were on the radio. We told them, we radioed in that we
26 had numerous persons on board the boat and they were
27 confirming that they had several people that were

1 unaccounted for, which our command wanted to know,
2 because they were in the process of recalling all the
3 divers from the fire department.

4 The landing boat maneuvered into position,
5 they lowered their ramp and were able to get some lines
6 out to them and were pulling - pulling the people on
7 board, and when they had all the visible people on
8 board, he lowered the ramp even more and picked, kind
9 of picked up the boat out of the water. When their
10 pontoon kind of broke the surface, we could see, I'm
11 thinking it was two, but I think it was probably at
12 least two or three people kind of floated out from
13 underneath of it. One of them was the small, the
14 eight-year-old girl. One of the guys jumped off the
15 naval boat and was able to get her and bring her back
16 around to the platform and we circled around and Bob
17 jumped off our boat into the water and had the one
18 lady. But he didn't an emergency suit on, he was able
19 to hold her on enough to get on to - to grab the ladder
20 of the side of our boat, but when he grabbed hold of
21 it, the weight of everything snapped the mounting
22 bracket off the boat, which caused him to lose her.

23 Luckily there was a police boat was right in
24 the vicinity, so we hollered over to them. They were
25 able to grab her and drag her back around and into the
26 landing platform.

27 I got Bob back in the boat. Everybody that

1 was visible now was on board the boat. They were -
2 people on the boat were screaming that they had CPR
3 progress on the little girl.

4 We maneuvered into position, tied off onto
5 the side of the boat and they transferred the girl, the
6 small girl, and the one naval guy that had did the
7 rescue, onto our boat. We immediately brought her to
8 shore to meet the paramedics, meet the paramedics.

9 It was just a quick exchange at the dock. We
10 dropped him and the small girl off. We immediately
11 backed back out of the slip and raced back over to the
12 other boat that we knew had CPR progress on the lady
13 now, so we circled around them once. We threw our safe
14 basket onto their boat. Bob jumped off of their boat
15 onto our boat. Oh, while we were at the dock we picked
16 up two additional men from Truck 16.

17 So we went back up to the landing craft,
18 picked the girl - picked the lady up that they had CPR
19 in progress on, Bob stayed on board that boat because
20 there were some people on there, they were all
21 hypothermic, they had - one lady was on there with a
22 broken shoulder or a broken arm, so he stayed on board
23 to kind of help with caring for them. I took the boat
24 with the lady in the safe basket that was in full
25 arrest and we raced back to the dock with her and
26 transferred her off.

27 Now it was just a matter of - you know, now

1 we were just loading divers onto our boat, gear onto
2 our boat and we spent the rest of the day shuttling
3 divers and equipment from our boat, from the small fire
4 rescue boat onto to the large fire boat. And when
5 everything was in place, we sort of assisted in
6 certainly searching, searching the area.

7 MS. BURER: Okay. You were - okay, I'm going
8 to start the day, okay? You're working from seven p.m.
9 to seven a.m. at your part-time job as a paramedic in
10 Talbot County, right?

11 MR. KOBE: Yes, ma'am.

12 MS. BURER: Did you get sleep?

13 MR. KOBE: Oh, yes. That station, nothing
14 happens there. Very quiet.

15 MS. BURER: Okay. When you arrived here at
16 3:30 and exchanged information, did ..., can you
17 describe to me a little bit more about the weather
18 conditions?

19 MR. KOBE: When I left home -

20 MS. BURER: The temperature or -

21 MR. KOBE: When I left my house, my wife was
22 on her way ... and I called her on the phone and I
23 said, look, man, will you look off at the sky. I said,
24 the sky's looks really wild. It was like - it was
25 clear in one direction, and then like completely dark
26 in the other direction. When I got to the intersection
27 of 404 and 50, it was really pouring down rain. I mean

1 it rained so hard that people were pulling off the
2 side of the road because they couldn't see.

3 But the closer I got towards Baltimore, it
4 seemed to clear up. And when I got here, the sun was
5 shining and it was a beautiful day. But within - you
6 know, within a half hour, between 3:30 and four
7 o'clock, it just got black. The temperature probably
8 dropped 25 degrees, and the wind - I mean the wind just
9 really - I tell you, it blew hard enough that it blew
10 the doors open on the firehouse. It was - it was wild.

11 MS. BURER: Can you tell me, because I don't
12 know that much about it, can you tell me about exactly
13 what your craft was?

14 MR. KOBE: It's a 32-foot, aluminum hull,
15 fire rescue boat. It's got a ten foot, ten inch beam,
16 powered by twin 225 horsepower Honda outboards.

17 MS. BURER: How many horsepower?

18 MR. KOBE: It has two 225 horsepower Honda
19 outboards.

20 MS. BURER: How many people can it sit?

21 MR. KOBE: I think it has a capacity for
22 eight persons on board, but we were on a two person
23 crew.

24 MS. BURER: And you started with them when,
25 again?

26 MR. KOBE: With the fire department?

27 MS. BURER: No, as far as with the marine?

1 MR. KOBE: February the 11th.

2 MS. BURER: This year?

3 MR. KOBE: Uh-huh (yes.)

4 MS. BURER: Okay.

5 MR. KOBE: I've been with the department -
6 well, I started my 15th year in December.

7 MS. BURER: Right.

8 MR. KOBE: But, I mean, I interviewed for
9 this job several years ago. I hold a U.S. Coast Guard
10 50-ton master license.

11 MS. BURER: Is that a requirement to have to
12 operate the -

13 MR. KOBE: The fire department says that they
14 look if you come down here, they want you to have your
15 license within three years.

16 MS. BURER: Okay. All right. So what
17 exactly did you see when you arrived on the scene?

18 MR. KOBE: We counted - I mean we just did a
19 quick head count, but there was at least 13 to 14
20 people at the overturned boat. Some were standing on
21 it, some were hanging on it. It really - it was a
22 chaotic scene. I mean people were screaming that, you
23 know, that people were missing. They were screaming
24 that there were people trapped under the boat.

25 MS. BURER: What about the debris? Can you
26 tell me a little bit about that?

27 MR. KOBE: We saw probably a dozen or more

1 life jackets floating. You know, a quick scan didn't
2 show that there appeared to be any life jackets that
3 had people in them, just a lot of floating life
4 jackets. I think we may have saw some coats and some
5 jackets, but we were really fixated on the people at
6 that moment.

7 MS. BURER: How many people did you actually
8 transfer back from -

9 MR. KOBE: We transported two - two - one
10 eight year old child that was in cardiac arrest, and
11 the 30-year-old, 35-year-old lady that was in cardiac
12 arrest.

13 MS. BURER: Did anyone perform CPR --

14 MR. KOBE: Yes, there was the one guy from
15 the naval base was on board assisting with CPR.

16 MS. BURER: Okay, how about the ...

17 MR. KOBE: It was just me and the two
18 gentlemen from truck 16, and I think - there was one
19 other gentleman from there also. Oh, and the girl - I
20 think it was the little girl's father rode with us when
21 we transported her too.

22 MS. BURER: Okay, so it was yourself and two
23 guys from truck 16?

24 MR. KOBE: Yes, one unknown gentleman, and
25 then the lady that was in cardiac arrest.

26 MS. BURER: Okay, and -

27 MR. KOBE: I think. I'm - I -

1 MS. BURER: This is your story.

2 MR. KOBE: Well, I mean, I don't want to give
3 you a bunch of false information, but it was - the
4 first 25 minutes of that call were a complete disaster.

5 MS. BURER: How long did it take for you to
6 arrive on scene from you - what time do you estimate
7 you got the first call?

8 MR. KOBE: I think - you know, I think the
9 call actually came to our station at like three minutes
10 after four, but were underway before the - before our
11 dispatch even put the call out. So - I mean we were
12 probably underway close to four o'clock. We - were on
13 the scene probably within two to three minutes. I mean
14 it was right off our dock.

15 MS. BURER: How far off your dock was the
16 boat?

17 MR. KOBE: Seventy-five to a hundred yards,
18 maybe. I mean it was right - it was in the channel
19 just beyond the green buoys. I'm a poor judge of
20 distance, but our dock is here, and it was just outside
21 these green buoys, right in here.

22 MS. BURER: You say right here?

23 MR. KOBE: Yes, right in that area.

24 MS. BURER: Okay, and your dock is right
25 here?

26 MR. KOBE: Yes.

27 MS. BURER: So it's 75 to 100 yards off the

1 pier.

2 MR. KOBE: Right here, like a football field.

3 Whatever? Right there.

4 MS. BURER: What is the formal name of your
5 pier?

6 MR. KOBE: It's the Fort McHenry fire boat
7 station dock, I guess.

8 MS. BURER: Okay. And you said earlier that
9 someone actually witnessed this?

10 MR. KOBE: Our marine pilot was upstairs
11 working out. He just happened to go into the restroom
12 to use the bathroom, and our bathroom window overlooks
13 the harbor where the ... is, there's a window that
14 overlooks the harbor, and he was standing right there,
15 and happened to glance out the window and saw them.

16 MS. BURER: How long do you think that you
17 were - when you arrived on the scene, which was three
18 or four minutes later?

19 MR. KOBE: Uh-huh (yes.)

20 MS. BURER: How long do you think it took for
21 the whole - three to four minutes -- before you went to
22 drop off the first person?

23 MR. KOBE: I would say within 12 to 15
24 minutes.

25 MS. BURER: And then you went back?

26 MR. KOBE: We dropped her off and then we
27 immediately - we picked up the two guys from truck 16,

1 and then we immediately went back to the landing
2 craft to pick up the lady. We threw them a safe
3 basket, circled, tied up, and then Bob got off, the
4 lady was in the safe basket, and we transferred her
5 back to our boat and then we immediately brought her
6 in.

7 MS. BURER: And how long do you think that
8 took?

9 MR. KOBE: Probably, once we got her on our
10 boat, probably not much more than five to six minutes.

11 MS. BURER: Okay, I don't have any questions
12 at this moment.

13 LT. BARANOWSKI: Lieutenant BARANOWSKI, Coast
14 Guard. I think your marine pilot was in the restroom
15 when he noticed it. What did he do after he - what did
16 he see in the water? What did he tell you?

17 MR. KOBE: He came running down the steps,
18 saying, "I think we have people in the water." And
19 with that we all ran to the front door and looked.

20 LT. BARANOWSKI: What did you see again, when
21 you looked?

22 MR. KOBE: It looked - I initially thought
23 that maybe it was a - you know, the rowing - because we
24 have a lot of those rowing clubs around, because they
25 were sitting so low in the water. But, you know, as
26 we're looking, they're waiving their arms, we could see
27 them waving their arms, and we immediately grabbed some

1 coats and jumped in our boat and left. And at the
2 same - that boat was pulling out of their dock at the
3 same time we were pulling out. We all kind of
4 converged on it at the same time. They were just in a
5 better position to accept the rescue than we were.

6 LT. BARANOWSKI: That's the naval vessel?

7 MR. KOBE: Right.

8 LT. BARANOWSKI: You were ... directly on
9 that whole -

10 MR. KOBE: Yes, when we stopped, when we left
11 our dock, we were just on the other side - way off out
12 here is where we ended up on.

13 LT. BARANOWSKI: Did that position change, do
14 you know, when you first saw it, before you left or -

15 MR. KOBE: Well, the wind was blowing so
16 hard, everything was drifting, so yes, it could have
17 been a little harder - it could have been a little
18 farther west by the time we got to them, because I
19 think we didn't -- by the time our launch got to them,
20 we ended up with them over in - was around here is
21 where I think we ended up, tied off - where they ended
22 getting tied off ...

23 LT. BARANOWSKI: Do you remember
24 approximately what time that was ...

25 MR. KOBE: Well, I mean within a half an
26 hour, easily. I mean, it was blowing and things were
27 really moving fast.

1 LT. BARANOWSKI: Did your boat have any ...
2 as far as bringing the taxi back in, did your vessel do
3 that?

4 MR. KOBE: No, that was a private towing guy,
5 I forget his name. At the marine - the ...'s marine or
6 something, ended up towing it in.

7 LT. BARANOWSKI: What was your vessel
8 involved in with the divers?

9 MR. KOBE: Transporting divers and gear from
10 land to the large fire boat. They were diving off the
11 large fire boat.

12 LT. BARANOWSKI: When was the first diving
13 operation completed?

14 MR. KOBE: We immediately left when the -
15 when we first saw the large fire boat got started and
16 was directed by our Chief to hold at the station until
17 the divers got here. So I don't know exactly what time
18 the first divers got here, but there were - it was
19 within 15 or 20 minutes.

20 LT. BARANOWSKI: And do you know the
21 approximate location where they first launched the
22 divers at?

23 MR. KOBE: It was, I believe they started
24 making their first dive around - around this area over
25 here, right around that point, I guess.

26 LT. BARANOWSKI: inaudible question)

27 MR. KOBE: No. I think we had wrote on our

1 log that it was 41 degrees that morning.

2 LT. BARANOWSKI: No more questions.

3 MS. BURER: Would you like to - but you need
4 to speak up a little bit.

5 INTERVIEWER: ... you said you saw people on
6 top of the pontoons. Do you have any idea about how
7 long they may have been ... what the ... may have been
8 ... what their initial starting point may have been?

9 MR. KOBE: No, I really think Chief - you
10 know, when he saw them, that was the first time anyone
11 at our station ...

12 INTERVIEWER: He didn't actually see the boat
13 flip?

14 MR. KOBE: No.

15 INTERVIEWER: He saw them after and several
16 people were in the water?

17 MR. KOBE: Yes, some there were some that had
18 climbed up on top of it, there were some hanging off
19 it, and there was some in the water, clinging to the
20 sides of the pontoon.

21 INTERVIEWER: (inaudible question)

22 MR. KOBE: I don't know, but it was just a
23 second.

24 INTERVIEWER: I don't have any more.

25 MS. BURER: I do. I need a better
26 explanation of - you didn't see any kind of landmark
27 when you - you said the green building, is that

1 correct?

2 MR. KOBE: Uh-huh (yes.)

3 MS. BURER: So what is behind the green
4 building as far as landmarks?

5 MR. KOBE: It sort of been the one - right -
6 this is pier one, and this would be the ... so it would
7 have been something like that.

8 MS. BURER: Okay. So when you first arrived
9 by that green building, right, with pier one sitting,
10 say, right behind it, as a landmark, when you came back
11 after dropping off the second victim -

12 MR. KOBE: We're way down here, now.

13 MS. BURER: Okay, and then going - what was
14 the landmark, do you remember seeing a landmark?

15 MR. KOBE: The Comfort - we were ... Comfort
16 here - and we were over this way, farther.

17 MS. BURER: What is the Comfort?

18 MR. KOBE: That's the naval ship.

19 MS. BURER: Okay. You were facing the
20 Comfort, and you - and how long do you think between
21 the time ... to ...

22 MR. KOBE: Probably - we were probably
23 pushing 25 minutes, 30 minutes.

24 MS. BURER: In the morning, or how often do
25 you ... your company check for water temperature? Is
26 that done periodically throughout the day, or

27 MR. KOBE: No, usually we do it in the

1 morning - when the oncoming shift comes on at six in
2 the morning, we usually try and flip the VHF radio over
3 to the weather station and get the local - you know,
4 the air temperature, the water temperature, wind speed,
5 direction, and we just jot that down in our log.
6 Usually that's just done in the morning, some time
7 between six and seven.

8 MS. BURER: Okay. When you all saw this
9 crash, or when the actual call came in, ... do turn on
10 the weather channel, or is there any kind of
11 communications as far as ...

12 MR. KOBE: No, we bring up channel 16 so we
13 can have communication with the Coast Guard, and then
14 whenever our dispatch assigns a tactical channel on a
15 588.

16 MS. BURER: Okay, so the rest of the time you
17 ended up being a transfer unit for -

18 MR. KOBE: Divers and dive equipment, and
19 then once everybody was in position, we just basically
20 did a surface search from the Key Bridge to - from the
21 Key Bridge to just off our pier. And we kept going
22 back and forth. You know, we checked all the water
23 that we could cover, and then police in their small
24 fire boats were like checking around most of the piers,
25 docks, and that kind of stuff.

26 MS. BURER: How many fire boats do you have?

27 MR. KOBE: We have four.

1 MS. BURER: Four. And would you just
2 describe basically -

3 MR. KOBE: We have two fire boats - two 32-
4 foot fire rescue boats. We've got a ... I think 101
5 foot, and the Grady, I think is 85 foot.

6 MS. BURER: Which one were the divers diving
7 off of?

8 MR. KOBE: They were diving off of the Grady.

9 MS. BURER: You called it a surface search?

10 MR. KOBE: Right, looking - you know, we're
11 just on the water looking for anything we find floating
12 - and that was all done in conjunction with - there was
13 at least three helicopters up that way, looking, and if
14 they spotted anything, they would direct us in and we'd
15 investigate it.

16 MS. BURER: When you were out there, actually
17 starting to do the searching, or when you actually went
18 out there with the divers and the equipment, did you
19 see any other boats in that area? And if so, do you
20 recall which ones they were?

21 MR. KOBE: The police had - I think it was at
22 least two boats out, and I think the Coast Guard's boat
23 was over there soon after we were - at least one of
24 their boats were. I can't remember who else was out
25 there. There wasn't any - I mean ... ended up showing
26 up.

27 MS. BURER: Did the weather change at all

1 during any time of efforts?

2 MR. KOBE: The wind laid down later on that
3 night, but it was still, by no means, calm.

4 MS. BURER: Okay. Thank you. I don't have
5 any more questions. Do you?

6 You need to acknowledge that this recording
7 of this conversation has been tape recorded.

8 MR. KOBE: This is Bart Kobe, just
9 acknowledging that this conversation has been recorded.

10 MS. BURER: Thank you.

11 (Whereupon, the interview in the above
12 caption matter was concluded.)