

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

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Investigation of:

THE AXEL SPIRIT'S ALLISION WITH
THE AMBROSE LIGHT AT THE
ENTRANCE OF NEW YORK HARBOR
NOVEMBER 3, 2007

Docket No.: DCA08FM002

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Interview of: MIKE CHAMBERS

Sandy Hook Pilots Office
Staten Island, New York

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to Notice.

BEFORE: ROB JONES
National Transportation Safety Board

APPEARANCES:

ROB JONES
National Transportation Safety Board

BILL WOODY
National Transportation Safety Board

CWO JIM PRITCHARD
U.S. Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. JONES: Mike, this is Rob Jones. I'm the Investigator-in-Charge with the NTSB. We're here to ask you some questions about the accident regarding the Axel Spirit, the allision the Ambrose Tower.

With me is Jim Pritchard from the U.S. Coast Guard and Bill Woody from the NTSB.

INTERVIEW OF MIKE CHAMBERS

BY MR. JONES:

Q. If you could, just give us a quick -- when you started with the Pilot organization, what you've been doing up to this point, really quick, very basic, and background and then what your duties were that day and what you saw. All right. And then we'll follow up with some questions.

A. Sure. I started my apprenticeship in February of 2005, and in the beginning I started out as a deckhand aboard motor launches out on station, boarding Pilots and eventually I worked myself up to be a motorboat operator, got my license and now I run the motorboats for our boats out of the station and boarding Pilots on the motorboat.

Q. What are your work hours on the -- when you're not running the motorboat launch itself, your off hours, you're staying on the pilot vessel?

A. Yes, I'm on the pilot vessel for a week --

Q. Okay.

1 A. -- and I work six hours on watch and then six hours off
2 watch.

3 Q. Okay. And how long are you off the pilot boat?

4 A. For a week. I work a week on the pilot boat and a week
5 off the pilot boat.

6 Q. All right.

7 Capt. WHEELER: You ride ships for a week.

8 THE WITNESS: Oh, yes, and I ride ships as part of my
9 training and --

10 BY MR. JONES:

11 Q. To become a Pilot?

12 A. To become a Pilot, absolutely.

13 Q. All right. Just that day you were on watch, this
14 incident happened around 0200 in the morning of the 3rd. Just
15 take us from when you got up, when you got the call to get up at
16 around midnight, and what happened after that?

17 A. Okay. It was a pretty routine watch. The weather
18 started to blow a little bit. We had pretty good winds out there,
19 about I believe 20, 30 knots out of the northeast, and I got the
20 buzzer to let our boat launch go. We boarded the Captain on the
21 boat, everything seemed pretty routine. We came off the pilot
22 boat. We saw the ship off in the distance with pretty clear
23 visibility, came right to the boarding gate and boarded the Pilot
24 on the ship.

25 Q. About how far away was the vessel by your estimation

1 when you left the pilot boat?

2 A. Probably about say maybe a mile from the pilot boat.

3 Q. And about how far from the tower at that time?

4 A. I don't know. I didn't really notice the tower.

5 Q. Okay. What about -- what speed was the vessel going at
6 when you went up alongside?

7 A. Rough guess I'd have to say maybe six, seven knots.

8 Q. Did you notice anything about the vessel itself,
9 anything out of the ordinary?

10 A. No, nothing unusual.

11 Q. Did you take a tour around the vessel at all --?

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- when you were boarding the Pilot?

14 A. No, when I had come off the pilot boat, I, I went right
15 to its portside. It had a portside ladder rigged. So as soon as
16 I came off the pilot boat, I immediately saw the port running
17 light and just made my way straight towards the ladder.

18 Q. Okay. And what did you do after you disembarked your
19 Pilot at the Axel Spirit? Where did you go from there?

20 A. After the Pilot was boarded on the Axel Spirit, we came
21 off the side of the ship and the pilot boat was pretty much in
22 front of us and we made a wedge directly back to the pilot boat,
23 and I believe we boarded another Pilot thereafter on another ship.

24 Q. When the Pilot you're bringing to the Axel Spirit, when
25 he gets up on the ladder and gets safely onto the vessel, do you

1 make a note of that, a log of it. Do you call in what time it
2 was?

3 A. No, we do make a log. We do make a log of it but we
4 don't call.

5 Q. Do you remember the time?

6 A. No, not offhand.

7 Q. Do you have that log?

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

9 MR. JONES: Okay.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I believe it's 0150.

11 MR. JONES: Okay. If we could just confirm that. If
12 you would just make a copy of it.

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

14 BY MR. JONES:

15 Q. Now you're off for a week now or are you riding ships?

16 A. Well, yeah. I'll be busy riding ships and so forth,
17 yeah.

18 Q. Have you talked to -- the Pilot that went up the ladder
19 that day, have you seen him since back on board the pilot vessel?

20 A. No. No, the first time I saw him was today.

21 Q. Okay. Did you discuss anything about the tower?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Nothing's come up?

24 A. Nothing.

25 Q. All right.

1 MR. JONES: That's all I have right now.

2 MR. WOODY: I have one question. It might be --

3 MR. PRITCHARD: You said this the last time you had one
4 question.

5 MR. WOODY: Well, I have a couple of questions.

6 BY MR. WOODY:

7 Q. What's your last name?

8 A. Oh, sure. It's Chambers --

9 Q. C-h --

10 A. A-m-b-e-r-s.

11 Q. Your age?

12 A. Thirty.

13 Q. Okay. When's the last time you can recall looking at
14 the Ambrose Light Tower that evening I'm speaking of?

15 A. You're speaking about that evening?

16 Q. Right. Uh-huh.

17 A. I don't really particularly recall seeing it at all that
18 evening. The next time I recall seeing the tower was the next
19 morning.

20 Q. Okay. Could you tell us what you saw and how far away
21 you were?

22 A. We were still a few miles distant away. I saw the tower
23 a couple miles away and it looked fine. I didn't notice anything
24 in particular about it.

25 Q. You probably already this but did you have any

1 communication with the Pilot after he got up on the ship?

2 A. No, not at all.

3 Q. Do you ever have any communication with the Pilots after
4 they get on the ship?

5 A. After they get on the ship?

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. Pretty much, no.

8 Q. Okay.

9 MR. WOODY: That's all I can think of at this time. So
10 I'll turn it over to the Coast Guard.

11 BY MR. PRITCHARD:

12 Q. Just one -- you didn't have to -- did you have to make
13 any -- did the vessel have to make any alterations for you, the
14 Axel Spirit?

15 A. Prior to boarding the Pilot?

16 Q. Right.

17 A. Yes. When we -- when I had first come close to the
18 ship, before coming alongside, there was a really big swell along
19 the side. So I called our pilot boat and I asked them to, you
20 know, I said, hey, could you ask the ship to swing to get a better
21 a lee for the Pilot and the ship started to swing and the lee
22 flattened out a little bit and that's when I went alongside the
23 ship and boarded the Pilot.

24 Q. Did you have to make any speed increased or --

25 A. No.

1 BY MR. JONES:

2 Q. When something like that occurs, do you normally call
3 back to the pilot vessel or can you directly call the Axel Spirit
4 itself?

5 A. We normally call back to the pilot vessel. We don't
6 directly communicate with the ship.

7 Q. Okay. What channels do you monitor on the pilot, pilot
8 launch?

9 A. Channel 7 3.

10 Q. Okay. Do you have any others?

11 A. We do have a second radio on the boat but it's -- we
12 don't always monitor it either. We just monitor Channel 7 3.

13 Q. Do you have 16 or anything?

14 A. Yeah, yeah, we do have 16 as well, the second radio.

15 Q. And who -- besides the pilot that you're delivering, who
16 else is on board the launch with you?

17 A. Myself and a deckhand.

18 Q. Is that -- what does that deckhand do as you come
19 alongside?

20 A. They'll come out. They usually take the Pilot's bag.
21 They'll grab the ladder, make sure it's not getting pinched
22 between the ship and the motorboat and they'll also, you know,
23 just make sure the Pilot climbs the ladder safely and makes sure
24 there's, you know, makes sure there's no pinching of the ladder
25 and also they'll tie the Pilot's bag up for him and send the bag

1 up on a heaving line or any line they throw down for us.

2 Q. Okay. On this ship, do you remember the ladder
3 configuration? Can you describe it?

4 A. From what I can recall, I think it was just a straight
5 ladder sent down. I don't believe there was a gangway, but I'm
6 not 100 percent sure about that.

7 Q. Okay.

8 MR. JONES: That's all I have right now. Okay. All
9 right. Thanks, Mike.

10 THE WITNESS: You're welcome.

11 MR. JONES: That concludes the interview.

12 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled matter
13 was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: The Axel Spirit's Allision with the
 Ambrose Light at the Entrance of
 New York Harbor
 Interview of Mike Chambers

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-08-FM-002

PLACE: New York, New York

DATE:

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber