

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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 IN RE: :
 :
 THE EL FARO INCIDENT OFF THE: NTSB Accident No.
 COAST OF THE BAHAMAS ON : DCA16MM001
 OCTOBER 1, 2015 :
 :
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INTERVIEW OF: ERIC BRYSON

Monday,
 October 12, 2015

Pilot Station
 St. John's Bar Pilots

BEFORE:

MICHAEL KUCHARSKI, Investigator, NTSB
 [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard
 MIKE MILLAR, ABS
 KEVIN STITH, TOTE Services

This transcript was produced from audio provided by the
 National Transportation Safety Board.

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 4:40 p.m.

3 MR. KUCHARSKI: Good afternoon, everyone.

4 This is Mike Kucharski. I'm the group chairman of the
5 NTSB operations group, and it's part of the
6 investigation of the recent El Faro incident, after she
7 set sail from Jacksonville, on or about the 29th of
8 September of this year. It's 1640 on the 12th of
9 October. We're here at the Pilot Station, the St.
10 Johns --

11 CAPT. BRYSON: Bar Pilot.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: -- Bar Pilots. We have a
13 group assembled. We'll ask them to introduce
14 themselves shortly. The purpose of the investigation
15 is to increase safety, not to assign fault, blame, or
16 liability. The NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of
17 confidentiality or immunity from legal or license
18 action. Let me say we don't enforce anything.

19 Our role is just probable cause. The
20 transcript or summary of the interview will go into the
21 public docket. As I mentioned, you will review it, and
22 if you want to submit comments, you're free to do that.
23 The interviewee, you can have one personal
24 representative of your choice. The representative
25 cannot testify for you. The representative comments

1 are limited, and objections are not grounds for the
2 NTSB to refrain from asking questions. Any questions
3 so far?

4 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, great.

6 CAPT. BRYSON: As you talk, I'll listen.

7 Does anybody want any coffee?

8 PARTICIPANT: No, thank you.

9 PARTICIPANT: No.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Do you have a soda?

11 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes, what do you want? Just
12 continue to talk.

13 PARTICIPANT: I'll join you for coffee.

14 PARTICIPANT: And I'll help you carry it.

15 CAPT. BRYSON: Go ahead; I'm listening.

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, I will introduce,
17 starting from my right.

18 MR. [REDACTED] I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the
19 Coast Guard.

20 MR. STITH: Kevin Stith with TOTE Services.

21 MR. MILLAR: Mike Millar with ABS.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: All you are part of --

23 PARTICIPANT: Part of the operations group.

24 PARTICIPANT: We're all a part of the
25 operations group.

1 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, great.

2 CAPT. BRYSON: I'm Eric Bryson with the St.
3 Johns Bar Pilots Association.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Captain Bryson, would you
5 spell your name for the record?

6 CAPT. BRYSON: My name is Eric, E-R-I-C,
7 Bryson, B-R-Y-S-O-N.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: I'll repeat it, E-R-I-C
9 B-R-Y-S-O-N. Is that correct?

10 CAPT. BRYSON: That is correct.

11 MR. KUCHARSKI: Great. Thank you.

12 CAPT. BRYSON: I'm here.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: Captain Bryson, as I
14 mentioned, this is an investigation into what caused
15 the problems or the accident involving the El Faro.
16 Understand that you piloted the ship out of the Port of
17 Jacksonville?

18 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: That was on the 29th of
20 October?

21 CAPT. BRYSON: That was the 29th of
22 September.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Sorry, September.

24 CAPT. BRYSON: The vessel was due to get
25 underway at 2000. I would have boarded her at 1930.

1 The vessel was ready to sail. Got to the bridge,
2 waited for the crew to get out on deck. We started
3 letting go lines and were underway, headed fair in the
4 channel, at 2025.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: 2025. Was there anything
6 unusual about the getting underway?

7 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: Do you utilize tugs?

9 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Is there a docking master on
11 Board?

12 CAPT. BRYSON: There is a docking master on
13 Board.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: How long does that docking
15 master work the ship, if you will?

16 CAPT. BRYSON: From 2000 to 2025.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Great. The vessel then --
18 you conned the vessel, would that be a fair assessment?

19 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes. I directed and
20 controlled the motion of the vessel down the river.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Where did you leave
22 the vessel?

23 CAPT. BRYSON: I left the vessel
24 approximately a half a mile east of the entrance buoys.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Did anything seem

1 unusual in the way the bridge was operated, anything
2 like that?

3 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

4 MR. KUCHARSKI: Tell us your knowledge --
5 you've piloted this ship many times before, is that
6 correct?

7 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: What would you say, five
9 times, 50 times?

10 CAPT. BRYSON: It's difficult for me to say.
11 The vessel had been as the Northern Lights, and I had
12 piloted it then. Then it came as part of the regular
13 run as the El Faro, and I piloted it as often as I
14 would pilot any other routine caller. To ascribe a
15 number to it, geez, I don't know --

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Would you say it's over --

17 CAPT. BRYSON: -- a dozen, but it's a
18 familiar ship.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Have you also piloted
20 the El Yunque, which is a sister ship?

21 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: Is the El Morro another ship
23 that you piloted?

24 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

25 MR. KUCHARSKI: Is that a sister ship, also?

1 CAPT. BRYSON: I said in the previous
2 interview, the El Faro and the El Yunque and the El
3 Morro are very, very similar. The El Faro is slightly
4 different, but all very similar ships in almost every
5 regard.

6 MR. KUCHARSKI: Same propulsion plant?

7 CAPT. BRYSON: I can't testify to that. I
8 can't say that for certain. That would be a matter of
9 what you find in your statistics.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, great. Would you say
11 that they all handle basically the same?

12 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes. They're very similar
13 ships.

14 MR. KUCHARSKI: Let's talk about the El
15 Faro, then. You've handled that ship numerous times?

16 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

17 MR. KUCHARSKI: Dozen times, roughly. What
18 can you tell me about the way it responded to the
19 rudder?

20 CAPT. BRYSON: Nothing unusual. It was a
21 very routine trip down the river. The commands were
22 given and carried out appropriately and quickly. We
23 had a nice conversation amongst the people up on the
24 bridge, very warm, friendly conversation to fill in the
25 spaces between. It was a very nice, relaxed trip down

1 the river.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Let me zero in. That was
3 what I was -- the nature of my question, the actual
4 handling of the ship, when I'm talking about response
5 to the rudder and engines.

6 CAPT. BRYSON: Nothing extraordinary,
7 nothing remarkable, nothing out of the ordinary.

8 MR. KUCHARSKI: From previous trips or the
9 way other ships handle?

10 CAPT. BRYSON: From previous trips. They
11 handle a little differently light and loaded, and I
12 couldn't really quantify that, but based on how they're
13 loaded, they'll handle a little differently. Their
14 handling is very routine to us, so whatever the
15 difference may be, you can immediately account for it,
16 but there was nothing extraordinary, in terms of how
17 that vessel handled, that would cause me to comment on
18 it.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: From comparing it to
20 previous voyages. How about to similar ships in --
21 containers or whatever they're carrying on there. She
22 had containers stacked on deck. She had roll on/roll
23 off cargo underneath. But in comparison to other
24 similar vessels of size, less responsive, more
25 responsive to the rudder, about the same?

1 CAPT. BRYSON: That's hard to say. You take
2 a container ship identical -- they appear identical,
3 965 feet long, 106-foot beam, power plant might be
4 different, size of the rudder might be different. I
5 think probably -- they handled well. When they weren't
6 handling really well, they handled okay.

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: What would be a not handling
8 well situation?

9 CAPT. BRYSON: If they were down by the
10 head, they might be a little directionally unstable.
11 You know what that means. Do I need to explain this?

12 (Simultaneous speaking.)

13 CAPT. BRYSON: Where do you need -- okay,
14 you've got her (Inaudible) into the port or to the
15 starboard. Instead of using 10 degrees of rudder to
16 check it up, you're using it 20 degrees of rudder to
17 check it up. But have never been in a situation on
18 those ships where I felt we were on the edge of
19 control.

20 MR. KUCHARSKI: How about steering at low
21 speeds?

22 CAPT. BRYSON: She'd steer at low speeds.
23 Any vessel really will, you just have to not expect it
24 to -- you don't go from a full head to a dead slow
25 ahead and expect it to do what you want it to do until

1 the hull speed kind of catches up to the turns.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Do you have any idea what a
3 hull speed on there would be, where she was -- she
4 didn't steer well? She lost steerage way?

5 CAPT. BRYSON: No, she steered at dead slow,
6 she steered at full. If you lost propulsion, how low
7 would she go before you lost steering? I really don't
8 know. I never explored that. But that's assuming the
9 conditions we have in the river.

10 MR. KUCHARSKI: There's a fair amount of
11 current in the river?

12 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: Do you recollect what the
14 current was on that day?

15 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes. It was the beginning of
16 the flood, the end of the ebb. We sailed at 2000. I
17 think -- I don't recall -- I think we probably turned
18 to port coming off there because we probably still had
19 a little bit of ebb there. Came off, got set up, and
20 we met the CMA CGM Kingfish just downriver of the high
21 waters.

22 MR. KUCHARSKI: So there was not a lot of
23 current at that particular time?

24 CAPT. BRYSON: No, it was coming up on
25 slack.

1 MR. KUCHARSKI: How about wind situations?
2 Have you maneuvered that ship with any wind on her?

3 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes. To the point where it
4 negatively affected how the vessel handled, no.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: So would it be a fair
6 assessment to say she reacted pretty normally to other
7 ships of about the same size in wind?

8 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: Any restrictions that you
10 talked about in using RPMs?

11 CAPT. BRYSON: I never had them tell me I
12 couldn't get a bell.

13 MR. KUCHARSKI: Response time, would you ask
14 for that bell? How was it?

15 CAPT. BRYSON: The engineers were quick on
16 the bells, pretty steady crews on there. You didn't
17 get a guy that was new in there and was slow getting me
18 a bell.

19 MR. KUCHARSKI: Gents, any questions?

20 PARTICIPANT: On that line of --

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Yes.

22 PARTICIPANT: Nothing on that.

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Any other questions?

24 PARTICIPANT: No.

25 MR. MILLAR: Mike Millar, ABS. Do you make

1 a lot of turns and maneuvering coming out of --

2 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes, it's not a straight
3 river.

4 MR. MILLAR: Was this the kind of vessel
5 that would tend to sway or roll in turns on outbound
6 voyages?

7 CAPT. BRYSON: Not remarkably, no. If you
8 really put the rudder on it, I suppose you could get it
9 to heel over, if she was tender, but she was not.

10 MR. MILLAR: Did you notice any difference
11 between inbound voyages with this vessel versus
12 outbound in behavior?

13 CAPT. BRYSON: Nothing remarkable. I'd like
14 to say definitively something --

15 MR. MILLAR: That's fair.

16 CAPT. BRYSON: -- but it just -- no.

17 MR. MILLAR: Didn't seem any more tender --

18 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

19 MR. MILLAR: -- from previous trips?

20 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

21 MR. MILLAR: What was the maximum speed that
22 you come out, exit out the river?

23 CAPT. BRYSON: Coming into the flood, we
24 probably -- I tend to run them on a half bell coming
25 down. That's a speed where they handle very well.

1 They make a pretty decent speed, and they're not
2 throwing a huge wake. I might drop that down to a slow
3 bell if we're going by a ship or something, where I see
4 we are throwing a wake. I'll keep her on a half bell
5 until we get down here, and then I'll put her on a full
6 bell going out the bar cup (Phonetic).

7 MR. MILLAR: Is that full ahead maneuvering?

8 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes, full ahead maneuvering,
9 that's correct.

10 MR. MILLAR: Do you recollect what that was?

11 CAPT. BRYSON: It's just shy of 14 knots on
12 that ship, I think.

13 MR. MILLAR: That was the maximum speed
14 (Simultaneous speaking)?

15 CAPT. BRYSON: Well no, we wouldn't have
16 been going 14 knots. We were going into the flood. We
17 might have been making 12, maybe 11.

18 MR. MILLAR: So making -- you're talking
19 about speed over the ground?

20 CAPT. BRYSON: (Simultaneous speaking) speed
21 over the ground, yes.

22 MR. MILLAR: You say that was on a flood?

23 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes, it was -- we were coming
24 into the flood. We had gone through the end of the ebb
25 and met the flood (Simultaneous speaking).

1 MR. MILLAR: So it's an adverse current?

2 CAPT. BRYSON: A current against us, yes.

3 MR. MILLAR: Against us, yes. But the speed
4 through the water would be higher than the speed over
5 the ground?

6 CAPT. BRYSON: Speed over the ground, that's
7 correct.

8 MR. MILLAR: Okay. What was the maximum
9 draft of the vessel?

10 CAPT. BRYSON: 32.08.

11 MR. MILLAR: Do you have a forward draft,
12 also?

13 CAPT. BRYSON: I don't. As I recall, she
14 was a little by the stern. I think she had some trim
15 on her, but that would have been in whatever they
16 handed over, I guess, to the shoreside personnel.

17 MR. MILLAR: Does the pilot boat ever look
18 at the drafts on there?

19 CAPT. BRYSON: If I got on a ship and had a
20 question about the draft, I might have them look at it,
21 but there was no reason to question this.

22 MR. MILLAR: Okay. So the after draft was
23 32.08?

24 CAPT. BRYSON: That's correct.

25 MR. MILLAR: But you recollect it had some

1 trim aft?

2 CAPT. BRYSON: Nothing huge. They were
3 loaded going out, and they were probably pretty full.

4 MR. STITH: Kevin Stith, TOTE Services. Did
5 you notice any appreciable list on the vessel?

6 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

7 MR. STITH: Have you ever, either on the El
8 Faro or the El Yunque, piloted the ship when it had a
9 list on it?

10 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes.

11 MR. STITH: How was its handling
12 characteristics compared to when it was (Simultaneous
13 speaking)?

14 CAPT. BRYSON: Handled fine.

15 MR. STITH: Okay.

16 CAPT. BRYSON: It was just shy of five
17 degrees. I don't know if you got the memo on that. It
18 was nothing extraordinary. Handled it coming in. The
19 Coast Guard saw it going by, thought the vessel was
20 having a problem and really had a fit, which compelled
21 SeaStar, at the time, to react, but she handled fine.

22 PARTICIPANT: So she came in with a
23 five-degree list?

24 CAPT. BRYSON: That's correct.

25 PARTICIPANT: Do you know what the problem

1 was? Why she had a five-degree list?

2 CAPT. BRYSON: Weight. It was just weights
3 and fuel, I'm assuming. I don't know for certain.

4 PARTICIPANT: Do you have an approximate
5 date on that?

6 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

7 PARTICIPANT: One month ago, five months
8 ago?

9 CAPT. BRYSON: No, this has been four or
10 five years.

11 PARTICIPANT: Oh, four or five years ago?

12 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes. That'll be available
13 for you somewhere.

14 MR. STITH: Kevin Stith, TOTE Services.
15 That incident, I believe, is well documented. From
16 what I've been told, it was due to improper loading in
17 Port Everglades. They were on a three-port run. They
18 left Port Everglades in that condition and arrived
19 here, and then I believe TOTE has a policy now
20 regarding list as a direct result of that.

21 MR. KUCHARSKI: Any other questions, gents?

22 PARTICIPANT: Nothing (Inaudible).

23 MR. KUCHARSKI: Captain, is there anything
24 you'd like to add?

25 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

1 MR. KUCHARSKI: Kevin?

2 MR. STITH: I do have just one general
3 question in regards to any conversations you may have
4 had with Captain Davidson or any of the mates regarding
5 the impending weather situations or any (Simultaneous
6 speaking).

7 CAPT. BRYSON: Yes, did have that
8 conversation. Nothing specific. I don't recall what
9 it was that I said that solicited this comment from
10 him, but his response to me was -- and I do recall this
11 -- "We're just going to go shoot underneath it." Did
12 not read anything into that, an appropriate response.

13 MR. STITH: Thank you.

14 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the Coast
15 Guard. My only question is was there any discussion
16 about any propulsion issues --

17 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

18 MR. [REDACTED] -- with the vessel?

19 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

20 MR. [REDACTED] It seemed to be handling -- no
21 comments from them, whatsoever?

22 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

23 MR. [REDACTED] Previous voyages, any issues
24 with propulsion on this vessel that you can recall?

25 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

1 MR. [REDACTED] Okay, that's all I have.

2 MR. KUCHARSKI: Mike Kucharski. No steering
3 problems with the vessel in previous voyages?

4 CAPT. BRYSON: No.

5 MR. KUCHARSKI: Mike, anything?

6 MR. MILLAR: Mike Millar with ABS. Captain,
7 when you had that conversation with Captain Davidson,
8 was there a sense of confidence in --

9 CAPT. BRYSON: Absolutely.

10 MR. MILLAR: -- was there any trepidation?

11 CAPT. BRYSON: No, not from him, not from
12 any member of the crew.

13 MR. MILLAR: Essentially a seasoned sailor?

14 CAPT. BRYSON: Very competent sailor, very
15 methodical.

16 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, any other questions?

17 PARTICIPANT: No.

18 MR. KUCHARSKI: Time is 1658, and we'll
19 complete the interview.

20 CAPT. BRYSON: Thank you so much.

21 (Whereupon, the above-entitled interview was
22 concluded at 4:58 p.m.)

23

24

25

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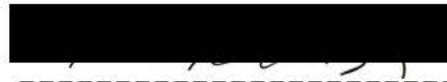
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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: El Faro Incident
NTSB Accident No. DCA16MM001
Interview of Eric Bryson
St. John's Bar Pilots

DATE: 10-12-15

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 22 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



NEAL R. GROSS

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Office of Marine Safety
Transcript Errata

Matter: EL FARO Investigation/Interview
Ref Nbr: DCA16MM001

Dear Mr. Bryson:

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of the two transcripts of interview for **Eric Bryson** taken on **Oct 9 and Oct 12, 2015**. Kindly review this transcript for accuracy and provide corrections, if any, in the attached table.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

11/5/15

Date

Carrie Bell

Major Marine Accident Investigator

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement “no corrections needed” and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEED. _____
Initials

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

Signature of Person providing the above information

Date