

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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COAST GUARD VESSEL CG 29113 AND
SAILING VESSEL VANGUARD TOWING
ACCIDENT MAY 3, 2017

Accident No.: DCA17PM012

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Interview of:



U.S. Coast Guard Offices
New Orleans, Louisiana

Tuesday,
May 9, 2017

APPEARANCES:

LUKE WISNIEWSKI, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

█ █ █ Sector New Orleans, Investigations
United States Coast Guard

█ █ █ District 8 Legal
United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:53 a.m.)

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3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Good afternoon. My name is Luke Wisniewski
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board. Today is May 9th.
5 The time is 11:53 a.m.

6 I am here at Station New Orleans to interview a member of the
7 crew regarding the CG 29113, small boat accident with Sailing
8 Vessel *Vanguard*.

9 Could you state your name and then spell it out for the
10 transcriber?

11 [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

12 MR. WISNIEWSKI: We'll go around the room. Also present in
13 the room are.

14 [REDACTED] Sector New Orleans,
15 Investigations.

16 [REDACTED] D8, Legal.

17 MR. WISNIEWSKI: NTSB is an independent federal agency
18 charged with determining the probable cause of transportation
19 accidents and promoting transportation safety. We're not part of
20 the Department of Transportation or the Coast Guard, and NTSB has
21 no regulatory or enforcement powers.

22 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, and
23 it's not to assign fault, blame or liability. However, NTSB
24 cannot guarantee any confidentiality or immunity from legal or
25 license actions.

1 We would like to record this interview. Is it okay to
2 record?

3 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you very much. A transcript
5 will be available to you prior to its release on the docket that
6 you can review and provide for technical and factual information,
7 its accuracy.

8 The interviewee can have one representative of the his
9 choice. Are you aware that you're allowed to have one?

10 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And you're okay with not having one here?

12 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

13 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you. We'll go through the day
14 as it unfolded on May 2nd, and what I ask -- we'll try not to
15 break any of your concentration. You just go through your day in
16 chronological order. If you don't understand any questions that
17 we have, just ask us to repeat it or rephrase it, and if you
18 realize you make a mistake or anything that's not what you intend
19 it to be, we can go back at any time and just say it right there
20 on the record, hey, you know, I meant to say portside and I said
21 starboard. Not a big deal, okay.

22 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

23 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

24 Q. All right. Let's just start off that day. So what's your
25 title, your rank?

1 A. I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] been in the Coast Guard for about 8
2 years. So I got -- I woke up about 5:30 that morning, left the
3 house at 6:00, got to the Station around 6:45, and then started
4 boat checks at 7:00. At 8:00, I had breakfast and then between
5 the hours of 9:00 and about noon, I was doing chart corrections
6 and just ordering navigation stuff for our boats, just general
7 work of the day.

8 At noon, I had lunch and then between 1:00 -- I guess around
9 2:00, we got the call that we were going to go out there. So I
10 was the trailer qualified person that day. So I went and hooked
11 up the 450 to the trailer and one of the coxons brought the boat
12 on the -- got the boat on the trailer, we hooked it up and we got
13 the crew and go.

14 I drove to Rigolets Marina in Slidell, Louisiana. It was
15 pretty calm, pretty normal, not too much wind. We launched at
16 Rigolets Marina, nothing was, you know, still a little overcast
17 day. We went from Rigolets Marina to around the Highway 11 Bridge
18 where the boat was reported. We saw the sailboat and at that
19 point, we were told we were just going to get some numbers off the
20 boat and take some pictures and come back.

21 The boat came and hit the -- well, it started to hit the
22 Highway 11 Bridge and once we told that -- we told the powers to
23 be (sic) that it was hitting the bridge, he told us to get the
24 boat off the bridge.

25 So we put some lines on the starboard aft cleat of that -- of

1 the sailing vessel and began to tow it away from the bridge, to
2 get it off the bridge far enough to where we could -- the original
3 plan was to take a line off the aft cleat and then somehow get it
4 into a stern to bow tow which would be more of a typical tow.

5 Throughout the whole evolution, the winds and waves started
6 to pick up and it began that as soon as we would take power off
7 that vessel, the wind would catch and we couldn't -- it was either
8 we were going to keep it in power and keep it off the bridge, or
9 we were going to try and adjust our lines and let it hit the
10 bridge again.

11 We started noticing it was taking on water whenever it was --
12 we had it in a stern to stern tow, and whenever it would hit waves
13 simultaneously, the water would come up over into the cabin. I
14 guess that was probably like around 4:30 maybe, maybe a little
15 earlier, and we were still trying to recess until eventually we
16 realized that that boat was going to go down. So we disconnected
17 our lines and that's -- I don't -- do you guys want to know
18 anything about like what actually happened to us after that or
19 just with that specific vessel?

20 Q. Sure.

21 A. So the coxon decided that we were going to take our lines
22 back, get our lines back, essentially try to save our towline. We
23 pulled it on, we were undoing the double becket and as that boat
24 was sinking, its mast came down, hit our taffrail which is what
25 covers our or protects our engines and as she came up to try to

1 get away from that, the mooring line that was under the water, we
2 couldn't see it any more from -- it was from our boat, it was
3 attached to its stern cleat, went into the water and got tangled
4 in the props.

5 The mast of the sailboat completely broke off. It was
6 hanging on our taffrail. I saw the entire rail sticking up off
7 our taffrail. [REDACTED] -- Seaman [REDACTED] and Petty Officer [REDACTED]
8 picked it up and dropped it in the water and it sank.

9 And then whenever the coxon went to give power, there was no
10 -- the engines -- both engines died. She lifted -- raised both
11 engines out of the water and there was -- the mooring line was
12 tangled in both our props, and myself started undoing --
13 untangling the starboard while [REDACTED] [REDACTED] went to rig the anchor.

14 At that point, I got starboard untangled before we hit the
15 bridge. She put starboard back in the water, but it wouldn't
16 start, and then we were dragging anchor, the anchor wasn't
17 catching and we hit the starboard side of the 29113 on the -- if I
18 could see a chart -- I'll show you exactly where on the bridge we
19 hit.

20 In this entrance, where we actually come through, the bridge
21 is kind of raised here. We hit the northbound side of this -- the
22 seawall, and or like the wall you drive through and so we hit
23 starboard. We turned around and so where now the bow's facing
24 north, and we went underneath the first pilings of the bridge, the
25 very first ones right here on the north side. So there, there's

1 the --

2 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Can we give him a pencil so he could --

3 [REDACTED] Sure.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: -- mark --

5 [REDACTED] I think we might have a pencil here somewhere.

6 [REDACTED] We got underway yesterday with -- I don't know
7 their acronym, and they took pictures of the area, exactly where
8 we hit and everything. I don't know if that would suffice for
9 what you want to do or if you actually want to see it.

10 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

11 Q. So the other group --

12 A. They took --

13 Q. -- 3B, they went out.

14 A. Yesterday, yeah, I was out there with them and showed them
15 exactly where we hit and they took pictures with a camera and --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- we showed them the closest safe haven which is Oak Harbor.
18 So I don't know if you care where that is. So we were -- so we
19 picked up the boat. It was approximately -- our initial contact
20 was here. They're doing some construction on the bridge here, and
21 it was up against -- they have like scaffolding underneath the
22 bridge where they've been working on it. There's a couple of
23 danger buoys, temporary danger buoys placed there. So we actually
24 went in and got them, towed them out this way and then the wind
25 and the waves -- the wind was coming from the north, pushing us

1 this direction and by the time that sailboat sank, it was here --
2 approximately here.

3 And then we made contact on this piling and then went
4 directly under this, the first -- there was a bridge support in
5 front of us, a bridge support behind us and then coming through
6 here, it's kind of hard -- well, it broke off, there's the Highway
7 11 Bridge, and then this is the Norfolk Southern Railroad Bridge.
8 There's about maybe 50 feet of distance between the bridges at
9 this point.

10 There's a -- I don't know what it's supporting. It's a
11 green-like -- it looks like some type of an electrical connector
12 for this bridge, but there's another post in between these two
13 bridges that was holding us underneath the bridge instead of going
14 and hitting the railroad bridge.

15 So then I -- once starboard was free, we got -- port was
16 free, and [REDACTED] got the engines started, I went to the bow to
17 pull the anchor up and we got out. We got out from under the
18 bridge and we went to Oak Harbor which is right here. We went to
19 a restaurant/bar called The Dock which is right here. So our
20 trailer at Rigolets Marina is -- I think it's right here. No.
21 Right, yeah, yeah. So this is the Rigolets Marina right here
22 where we launched. So our truck and trailer were here, and then
23 we moored up here for -- and then they came and got the trailer
24 and brought it over here to get us.

25 So I don't know whatever questions you guys have.

1 Q. Thank you for the narrative. I wanted to go through as far
2 as what checks specifically did you perform when you launched the
3 vessel?

4 A. All those checks mainly fall on the coxon whenever we
5 actually launched. For me, I was more checking the trailer stuff
6 before we launched but I mean whenever I got on board, I turned on
7 the aft plotter and the radar and while [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was doing the
8 one at forward and we all made sure we had our powers on. That
9 was about it as far as checks go for the actual vessel. The coxon
10 was the one who should do power -- make sure we have reversing and
11 all that stuff, backing and all that stuff. So that was on her.

12 Q. Okay. And there was nothing that you were aware of that --

13 A. Nothing that I was aware of that was hindering that boat at
14 all.

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. That would inhibit the performance or operations?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Okay. And the GAR, the risk model, risk assessment, were you
20 involved with that?

21 A. I was.

22 Q. And what concern did you have based on, you know, the first
23 time and when did you conduct the GAR?

24 A. So we conducted the GAR before we left the Station.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. We knew that there was a second squall line coming, but I
2 didn't realize -- we didn't realize it was going to be that long.
3 Well, at first we thought we were just going to go out there and
4 take pictures and come back. So we thought we were going to be
5 out there maybe 30 minutes. But that was my -- our biggest
6 concern was definitely the weather picking up. At the time when
7 we launched, it was 1 to 2 foot seas. By the time we left, it was
8 4 to 6. So.

9 Q. At any point during the initial GAR to, you know, when you
10 conducted the tow, did you bring any up -- any concern up to the
11 coxon or like things aren't going right as planned? Can you go
12 through and just discuss that? Any type of dialogue you had with
13 any one on board.

14 A. So between me, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] we all were talking
15 about how the tow wasn't going as planned, but as I said before,
16 as soon as she would take up the power, I mean I don't know if
17 anybody else mentioned it, but the sail was -- I don't know if it
18 was the entire time, but it was -- it wasn't going up the mast,
19 but it was like -- somehow it was tight between the deck and the
20 mast pole, and it might have only been like 3 or 4 feet of sail,
21 but it was definitely catching some wind and as soon as she would
22 take off power, that boat was doing whatever that wind and waves
23 were going to do with it. And it was -- it was one of those
24 things that we knew if we didn't keep power on it, or on the
25 lines, that we were -- it was going to go back and hit the bridge.

1 So we were trying to think of ways to reconnect where we had
2 a more difficult tow from stern to bow versus stern to stern, and
3 every time we tried to execute a plan that we talked about, the
4 weather and waves -- I never touched the helm or -- but I heard
5 [REDACTED] always say that it was hard to turn port, hard to
6 turn starboard. I don't know. She probably wasn't used to
7 driving in 4 foot seas with, you know, 25 knot winds but --

8 Q. 25?

9 A. I think it was around 20, 25. I know whenever we moored up,
10 it was definitely way over those parameters, but when we moored up
11 to the dock and you can ask the guys that -- whenever they came
12 with the truck, I mean it was -- we couldn't -- we were going down
13 the interstate like 30 miles an hour. Whenever we got on scene,
14 it was probably 10 knot winds, but it was really rough that night,
15 and after we got the boat on the trailer. So I think it was
16 between 20, 25 knots. I mean I didn't take an anemometer and see,
17 but it was definitely blowing pretty hard.

18 Q. Is there anyone on board that monitors the weather or any of
19 the --

20 A. We have the equipment to. It's not hooked up to the boat,
21 but we have a bag, and it has a handheld anemometer and stuff like
22 that, but we never pulled it out. At that point, everything was
23 happening so fast, we didn't -- they didn't even -- it didn't even
24 cross my mind to check.

25 Q. Does anyone monitor any of the local weather --

1 A. So we have a --

2 Q. -- channel or --

3 A. -- we have an anemometer here at the Station that's hooked up
4 in Station columns that we can see and usually before the OD will
5 check with -- and we have a couple of buoys. I don't know if they
6 measure wind speed. There's nothing out there. The Coast Winds
7 New Canal Lighthouse which is by Landry's. I'm not sure if you're
8 familiar with that area, and there's one down by Shell Beach but I
9 don't think there's anything in the Rigolets that monitors that.

10 Q. Was there any from the Station disseminated to you guys
11 regarding the weather, any concerns that were --

12 A. No, they -- I mean we knew before we left that the first
13 squall line had passed us and were in that lull time before the
14 next one was going to hit. Where that next one was at, I'm not
15 100 percent sure. I just knew I saw it on the radar before we
16 left, and our plan was to try to be back before that hit. So.

17 Q. And from your estimate, looking at the weather report, before
18 you departed the Station, where was that? Roughly what time was
19 that second squall in your estimation going to hit?

20 A. I mean I would -- I couldn't give you a time. I don't know
21 how -- I didn't look at how fast it was traveling, but if I did
22 guess, it was probably around like a little bit farther west of
23 Laplace. So it was probably in about this part of the lake.

24 Q. Okay. What time were you looking to be back by?

25 A. We were hoping to just be out -- go out -- we knew it was

1 about an hour drive out there with the truck because we don't go
2 over -- we're not supposed to go over 55 and then once we got into
3 Rigolets, it was going to take about 20, 25 minutes to get on
4 scene, and then take a couple of pictures and turn around and come
5 back. That was the initial plan, and so I estimated a total time
6 of 3 hours would be pretty sufficient but --

7 Q. You indicated the powers to be (sic), you know, told you to
8 tow the vessel.

9 A. Right.

10 Q. Can you -- do you know who --

11 A. The only person that I know that Shelley talked to was the
12 OD. Now who -- I think the OD that day was [REDACTED] but I'm
13 not sure who told her, like if that was the only person or if it
14 went up the chain more than that.

15 Q. Okay. But from what you knew?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Thank you. Just a couple more, and I'll pass the floor. How
18 many evolutions -- tow evolutions have you been a part of on this
19 type of vessel, the CG -- the 29 footer?

20 A. I've never been an official coxon, but I was a crewmember I
21 mean -- you're including like training like we do with our 29?

22 Q. Sure. Absolutely.

23 A. I mean probably 50 or 60, that's with our training. We do it
24 all the time with it. The problem -- the biggest issue was -- now
25 again I think I forgot to mention this earlier, is that one of the

1 sails from that sailboat was completely covering the bow. It was
2 draped over to where we couldn't see the bow at all, and we had --
3 me and [REDACTED] had talked about sending -- I was going to go
4 over myself and remove that sail off the bow, but we decided it
5 was unsafe because of the way that boat was moving in the water
6 and we were moving in the water. So we didn't, and that's why we
7 didn't have anything to attach to from the bow. So.

8 Q. Can you describe how it was riding in the water?

9 A. At first, it was riding fairly normally, as far as like, I
10 don't know if you'd say high or low, but I know we came alongside
11 of it and this was after we got it off the bridge, and before the
12 wind and the waves had picked up a ton, and we were definitely
13 rocking back and forth and we hit a couple of times, and no damage
14 was done to either vessel. It hit our sponson and I would say at
15 that point, it was pretty normal, but whenever we tow from the
16 stern, we could definitely tell that the -- it had a outboard
17 engine, that had a hole drilled through the stern of that vessel
18 to where they could steer it under power, and I think whenever
19 those waves were coming up, it was hitting that hole and going up
20 into the cabin of that boat and that's how it was taking on water
21 initially.

22 Q. Could you see water in the cabin or --

23 A. I never looked over in the cabin.

24 Q. -- the cockpit?

25 A. No, sir. It was actually a covered cabin or covered -- like

1 a sleeping area or whatever it was and I never got over close
2 enough to see it, not actually inside of it. So.

3 Q. Can you further describe the condition of the vessel?
4 Upkeep, maintenance, you know.

5 A. It wasn't good, not at all. There were -- the hull was --
6 you could see through to a red. I don't know if it was paint or
7 fiberglass or what, but whenever we got on scene, one of the
8 cables that run up the mast pole was broken. I think it was on
9 portside. The -- one of the rails again on portside was held --
10 they had a -- between it and the superstructure of that boat or
11 cabin or whatever you want to call it, there was a 2x4 like
12 supporting the metal railing and so it definitely wasn't a very
13 well kept boat. The numbers were pretty well worn off. I don't
14 know.

15 Q. Were you able to identify like a registration sticker?

16 A. It had Florida -- it had Florida stickers on it. I don't
17 remember the numbers. I think we passed that -- we passed that
18 over the radio to the Station.

19 Q. Did you take any pictures of the vessel's condition?

20 A. I didn't.

21 Q. Did anyone aboard?

22 A. No.

23 Q. I'm just going to ask you a couple more background and I'll
24 move it over. How many years have you been in the Coast Guard?

25 A. Eight.

1 Q. Okay. And when did you enter? What time?

2 A. Year-wise?

3 Q. Yeah, year and date.

4 A. It was May 11, 2009.

5 Q. Okay. How many different Stations have you been to?

6 A. So I was on a 378 as a non-rate out of Charleston, South
7 Carolina. I went to Intelligence Specialist A School in 2011. I
8 did that for about 4 1/2, 5 years, and then I became a boatswain
9 mate in or about a year and a half ago.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. So I've been in Sector New Orleans for about 2 years, and
12 then I went to Coast Guard (indiscernible) unit in San Antonio,
13 Texas, for about 2 years, and then I came here.

14 Q. I think we went through the tows, but how many other towing
15 evolutions have you gone on, on other cutters?

16 A. On the 378 I was on, we didn't do any towing. It was in dry
17 dock the entire time. I was there for 18 months.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I never saw anything but dry dock. And then I was on the
20 *Bertholf* (ph.) when they did a tow, but I was an IS. So I didn't
21 touch anything with that tow.

22 Q. Okay. I'll pass the floor. Thank you.

23 A. No problem.

24 [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Sector New Orleans.

25 BY [REDACTED]

1 Q. So when did you -- when did you become a qualified
2 crewmember?

3 A. I believe it was June of last year.

4 Q. Are you breaking in 29 coxon right now?

5 A. Yes, sir. My date's in 3 weeks.

6 Q. Okay. You said [REDACTED] was OD that day?

7 A. Yes, sir. I believe she's a break in and BM2 Spellman was
8 the actual OD.

9 Q. BM2 Spellman?

10 A. Spellman, yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Is there a CDO above the OD?

12 A. Yes. I believe that day it was BM1 Thomas.

13 Q. BM1 Thomas. Okay. Does the CDO have go, no go authority or
14 does he have to check with the CO or XO?

15 A. I don't know 100 percent. I do -- I do know before they sent
16 [REDACTED] there was some talk about whether or not she was
17 going to go or not, whether she was going to be the coxon going
18 because she was pretty new.

19 Q. What about just for the mission as a whole?

20 A. I couldn't answer that, sir.

21 Q. Okay. All right. So it sounds like you knew pretty early on
22 that it was just go out, take pictures and come back?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. And then when you got on scene, you mentioned something about
25 construction and danger buoys?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. Can you explain that a little bit more? So was this sailboat
3 up on the construction area?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. So can you walk me through that?

6 A. Yeah. So it was actually -- there's been a Notice to Mariner
7 out about that for, goodness, 6 months.

8 Q. Can you show me where?

9 A. It's on the Highway 11 Bridge, and I want to say the
10 construction area starts about in this area and it goes all the
11 way to the shore, to --

12 Q. So it's on both sides?

13 A. Yes. The danger buoys are only on this side --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- that I seen, but they have scaffolding, and I think the
16 Notice to Mariner actually says that the overhead clearance of the
17 bridge is now only like 3 feet.

18 Q. Okay. So the sailboat was against the buoy, against the
19 scaffolding?

20 A. Against the bridge and the scaffolding.

21 Q. So it was up on it?

22 A. Right. So whenever we first saw the sailboat, it was
23 probably about 50 to 100 feet off, and by the time I said, it was
24 maybe a minute, and that boat was on the bridge. So it had just
25 made contact with the bridge.

1 Q. I'm sorry. I don't mean to -- against the bridge or against
2 the scaffolding?

3 A. Against both. So the scaffolding is actually underneath the
4 bridge.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So it's like hanging off the top and then there's nothing
7 like on the side. So actually -- I don't know how readily
8 available those pictures are, but they took pictures of that as
9 well. There's a barge that's right alongside the bridge, and then
10 the scaffolding goes like maybe 30 yards southbound of that barge,
11 and that's where the boat was hitting.

12 Q. So against the scaffolding?

13 A. Against the bridge and the scaffolding.

14 Q. Okay. And was it damaging the scaffolding?

15 A. It was.

16 Q. It was.

17 A. It only bend like maybe two or three -- it's hard to describe
18 because it's not like a normal scaffolding, but it's like a --
19 there was like a couple of posts that it had bent, and that was
20 it.

21 Q. There were no workers, right?

22 A. There was nobody there.

23 Q. Okay. So there must have been some comms about the change,
24 right --

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. -- of the sailboat getting up against --

2 A. Right.

3 Q. -- everything, right. So can you describe that to me?

4 A. The only thing I heard as far as comms was that we were told
5 to keep the boat off the bridge and to take it to Oak Harbor which
6 was the closest safe haven and we did not make very much progress
7 towards Oak Harbor, just due to -- I don't know if it was because
8 that boat was so heavy or the sail was down or what, but we
9 definitely weren't making any progress towards Oak Harbor, and
10 it's not very far. The bridge is here and Oak Harbor is here, you
11 know, it's not very far at all.

12 Q. So -- I don't know how to say this. So like when you guys
13 called back, you pretty much described it as it's -- the
14 scaffolding's getting damaged. I'm sorry to keep going back. I
15 just want to get a really good handle on that.

16 A. So we told them, and [REDACTED] was the one that made the
17 call, we told them that the boat was against the bridge and
18 against the scaffolding because the boat hit on the portside and I
19 know the boat took a little bit of damage. I think it was mainly
20 to the handrails and that's the big reason I knew there was a 2x4
21 there because it actually dislodged from where it was sitting and
22 so as we pulled away, you could hear like the screeching of the
23 metal together, whenever it was getting off the bridge.

24 Q. What 2x4?

25 A. There was a 2x4 that was on the portside holding the

1 handrail. It was like in between the handrail and the deck.

2 Q. This is on the sailing boat?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah, that's -- whenever he was asking about how the
6 maintenance was of the vessel.

7 Q. So it was just --

8 A. It was -- there was a 2x4 used as a support for one of the
9 handrails.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I just know it came dislodged from where it was at.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. The -- I don't think the bridge itself was actually getting
14 damaged. The scaffolding and I think it mainly bent two little
15 pieces of metal and that was about it.

16 Q. And that event was kind of over. It bent them and then it
17 was just --

18 A. Right.

19 Q. -- pressed up it?

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. Okay. And you took -- did you take a picture of that?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Because I know you guys were --

24 A. Well, they -- so we took a 45 out there and so they didn't
25 want to get too close with that.

1 Q. No, no, I mean when you were out on scene.

2 A. No, we didn't.

3 Q. Because the mission was just initially to take pictures and
4 come back.

5 A. Right. So I didn't take any pictures of the boat or of the
6 scaffolding here it was at.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I don't think anybody on the crew did.

9 Q. You mentioned -- I don't want to jump around too much, but
10 you mentioned at one point an anchor.

11 A. Right.

12 Q. That's the first time that I heard the 29 might have been
13 anchored. Is it the 29 that was --

14 A. The 29 was. So when I -- the sailboat -- I saw the anchor
15 holder for it, but there was no anchor in the holder. I want to
16 say I talked to one of the crewmembers that -- because I don't
17 know if you know this, but the night before, they ran aground with
18 that same sailboat and the other section went out and got them off
19 that boat. They ran aground in Rigolets.

20 Q. Say again. They run --

21 A. So in this area, Lake Pontchartrain, that sailboat ran
22 somewhere aground here.

23 Q. That same boat?

24 A. The same exact sailboat.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I know -- I don't know who the crew was, but I know BM2
2 Sheeler from the other section, he's not here today, went and got
3 those people off that boat in a 24. The water came up, boat run
4 aground and it's running this direction, from the wind and the
5 current. So we threw the anchor over but it never -- it never
6 held.

7 Q. So you -- I don't mean to ask a stupid question, but you put
8 an anchor on the sailboat and chain --

9 A. No. No, after the sailboat sank --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- and we didn't have any engines -- like we didn't have no
12 propulsion on the 29 --

13 Q. So we're backing up to the 2nd again, the day of the
14 incident.

15 A. Correct. Right. So the sailboat had already sank, both the
16 lines were tangled in the props.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. So we had no propulsion.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. We threw the 29's anchor over and tried to anchor the 29 --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- before we hit the bridge.

23 Q. Okay. Got you. Because it makes sense. You didn't have any
24 propulsion.

25 A. Right.

1 Q. Okay. So -- but you said you weren't able to anchor?

2 A. Yeah, the anchor didn't hold.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. We dragged -- I think by that time we were so close to the
5 bridge, because there's a ratio of how far you want that line
6 out --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- and we just kept -- I think the anchor grabbed a couple of
9 times, but we would take a wave and it would just pull it right
10 out of the ground, and we kept going.

11 Q. Okay. Did you guys every have a discussion about -- because
12 obviously there a decision to break tow but in terms of how you
13 were going to break tow versus breaking the knot versus actually
14 like sacrificing the towline, somehow cutting it, whatever --

15 A. Right.

16 Q. -- right? So can you walk me through that?

17 A. That was such a quick decision because by that time, there
18 was maybe 2 or 3 inches of the freeboard of that boat sticking
19 out. It was really low in the water, and she just said, let's go
20 get our lines back, that kind of thing, and I think it was just
21 the coxon's decision to go over and do that. So there was no real
22 discussion between the crew of what we should do at that point.

23 Q. All right. So -- and that essentially involved shortening to
24 the point where you could actually break the knot, right?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. And then trying to throw the mooring lines --

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. -- back over?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. But in throwing the mooring lines over, you fouled the props?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. And roughly at the same time, the mast snapped.

8 A. Right. So again, I was on the aft deck at that point and as
9 the boat was -- as the sailboat was sinking, I don't know what
10 pushed us to close but we were close enough to where the mast --
11 like if you -- I mean I'm sure you've seen the 1-3 where the
12 taffrail is broken, the mast -- the cables that connect all the
13 rigging and stuff caught on the horns on the back of the taffrail
14 for the 29, and snapped and the boat continued to sink and the
15 mast of that boat stayed with us.

16 Q. So it was kind of -- so the sailboat was sinking and --

17 A. They were fouled up.

18 Q. -- the rigging and the mast was caught in the horns?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. And that -- you're saying that combination made a snap?

21 A. Made a snap, correct. Yeah. Because if you look around the
22 horns of the 29, there's -- you can see where metal was grinding
23 against metal, where it's like a file and that was where [REDACTED]
24 and [REDACTED] picked the mast up and they had the entire mast in
25 their hand and just dropped it in the water.

1 Q. Okay. When you -- forgive me for jumping around.

2 A. That's okay.

3 Q. Did you get a -- you got a Florida registration. Did you see
4 a sticker, a year on it?

5 A. I didn't see the year, no.

6 Q. The year.

7 A. Like I said, I think [REDACTED] passed that information to
8 the Sector or to the Station and they probably have the actual
9 numbers --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- in the smooth (ph.) log.

12 Q. Okay. When you -- when you guys started the tow evolution,
13 what was the weather?

14 A. Whenever we started, it was probably 5 to 10 knot winds and 1
15 to 2 foot seas.

16 Q. So it was about the same as when you got on scene?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. So then -- so the squall came how much after?

19 A. There was no rain. There was no rain whenever we -- before
20 we moored at the dock. By the time everything was happening and
21 it was going bad, it was probably 20 knot winds easy and like at
22 least 4 to 6 foot seas. I know we -- we got hit by a couple of 4
23 footers when we were underneath the bridge.

24 Q. Okay. Was there any -- was there any issues with the coxon's
25 qualification process that you're aware of?

1 A. No, sir. She just got moved into this section. I've
2 actually never been in a section with her.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. This is -- this is my first time I ever worked with her ever.
5 So the rest of the crew had been away with her a couple of times.

6 Q. Was there any -- do you remember if was passed back to
7 Station that it was stern to stern?

8 A. Yes, we told them. Yes, we told them.

9 Q. You did tell them?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. Okay. And what was --

12 A. I don't know. Most of that information was passed through
13 the coxon, and I don't know what they said.

14 Q. Okay. Do you guys use kind of like Nextel like cell phone,
15 like how you can hold it down --

16 A. Right.

17 Q. -- as a radio or --

18 A. Usually we just use the standard radios on the 29.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. If theirs don't work, we'll just call the cell phone.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I call somebody's cell phone, but I never -- we've never had
23 like a walkie-talkie cell phone.

24 Q. All right. Did you do any -- did you use the cell phone that
25 day?

1 A. Yes.

2 [REDACTED] Okay. I'll -- go ahead, sir.

3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Oh, you passing.

4 [REDACTED] Yeah, yeah. Yes, sir.

5 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Luke Wisniewski, NTSB.

6 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

7 Q. I just wanted to follow up on -- so when you indicated that
8 you were towing stern to stern, do you know who the coxon talked
9 to or not? Who was she in contact with?

10 A. It had to have been to the OD which would have been either
11 [REDACTED] or BM2 Spellman.

12 Q. Okay. And what information -- what channel was this on that
13 they were passing it over?

14 A. I think most of the information was passed via cell phone.

15 Q. Oh, via cell phone.

16 A. Um-hum. I think it was for whatever reason that day. I
17 wasn't in the cabin that much once we got on scene. I just know I
18 saw [REDACTED] on her cell phone like with it to her ear.

19 Q. Okay. And this is a cell phone that's issued to the boat or
20 to the --

21 A. I think it's her personal cell phone.

22 Q. Her personal.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. Do you know any of the discussion that occurred over
25 VHF?

1 A. No, sir, I don't.

2 Q. Through the radio?

3 A. I don't. I was either on the bow or stern pretty much the
4 whole time.

5 Q. And you guys just communicated on board via mouth?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. I'm trying to assess when you first felt -- you first
8 felt things were going awry, to the point of when the mast falls
9 on the vessel. I mean how much time do you think has passed --

10 A. I mean once we got the boat underneath -- out a little bit
11 away from the bridge, and we were going to try to redo or set up
12 our lines differently, and for whatever reason we couldn't
13 maneuver the boat or the 29 enough to -- or find a different point
14 to moor up -- or tie up because of the sail being down, and we
15 continued to fight -- started to fight more winds, more waves, or
16 more seas. I think within 15 minutes of us taking that boat in
17 tow like -- and it wasn't going well, probably within 30 minutes
18 of that, I knew it was going pretty bad. So --

19 Q. So 30 minutes, 45 minutes?

20 A. Probably about 30 minutes from us getting on scene because
21 there was a couple of times that the stern of that vessel went
22 under water and then came back out of the water and -- yeah, it
23 was -- it wasn't going very well, and we were trying to figure out
24 how we were going to be able to turn it around and get the bow to
25 the seas, but I -- we couldn't think of it, not until -- not with

1 the winds and every time we would try to get close to it and take
2 in the line, it would just go like -- move pretty quickly towards
3 the bridge. So.

4 Q. When was the first indication that you said, hey, we should
5 cut those lines or, you know, obviously it's the coxon's final
6 decision, but when did you make any recommendations to?

7 A. It was probably within 20 minutes of us taking it in tow,
8 saying that, you know, I don't -- I was never saying that we
9 should disconnect completely and let it do its thing, but like we
10 need to get this bow -- like this boat's bow to the seas and not
11 stern and that was about all my recommendation was.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So I was trying to let the coxon be coxon --

14 Q. Sure.

15 A. -- and make her decisions.

16 Q. Do you know if any of that information -- and when was that
17 relayed back ashore?

18 A. I'm not sure she ever -- I mean I think the entire crew knew
19 we needed to get that -- we needed to get that boat out to seas
20 but I'm not sure if she ever told that decision that she was going
21 to try to readjust or what. So.

22 Q. You indicated a little bit earlier when you were saying she
23 was trying to maneuver the vessel and the ability to swing it from
24 port to starboard, that she was just unfamiliar with it or not?

25 A. No, she definitely would be familiar. She just kept saying

1 that she was having a hard time turning the 29, and I don't -- and
2 I couldn't tell -- I never got on the helm that day. I couldn't
3 tell if it was because she wasn't used to driving that -- in those
4 weather conditions because I know a lot of times whenever we
5 train, it's pretty calm out.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. But I couldn't tell you why she was having a hard time
8 turning starboard and port.

9 Q. Okay. And this is prior to the mast --

10 A. Yeah, this is --

11 Q. -- falling down? This is just when she was --

12 A. This is whenever the sailboat was still afloat and we were
13 trying to take it to Oak Harbor. So it was -- she had mentioned
14 that, too, like at least two or three times.

15 Q. Did anyone on board look at the engines, look at the -- if
16 there was anything restricting it or just --

17 A. The engines --

18 Q. Did she ask for anyone to look at them?

19 A. She didn't ask but the engines at that point had given us no
20 trouble, and she was able to turn. I could see the engines turn
21 full port and starboard and she -- I don't know what it was. If
22 it was just because that boat had water in it already and it was
23 heavier than we expected or it was -- it looked like she was, like
24 I said, fighting the seas and the winds.

25 Q. Okay. Fair enough. Was anyone else using their cell phone

1 on board?

2 A. No. The only person I saw was [REDACTED] and she was
3 talking to the OD the whole time.

4 Q. Do you know what the Coast Guard policy is for like, you
5 know, personal cell phones on the boat? Is there one?

6 A. As far as I know, I know most coxons, like whenever we're
7 gong into the Mississippi River, they'll say like no cell phone
8 use because it's high traffic, high density, stuff like that, but
9 I don't know if there's actually a Coast Guard policy on cell
10 phone use --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- on board.

13 Q. Commandant or instruction or anything.

14 A. Right. Yeah, I'm not sure.

15 Q. Okay. That's all I have at this time. Thank you.

16 [REDACTED] I want to do a quick follow up. This is

17 [REDACTED]

18 BY [REDACTED]

19 Q. What was the interaction with the crew like? Can you just --
20 did you guys regularly work together well? Can you run me through
21 that? Was there any issues?

22 A. I've never -- just in this particular event or any time?

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. I mean there was no point that we ever had any like arguments
25 or disagreements. It was always throughout the whole evolution, I

1 know if somebody had a suggestion, [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] or
2 whoever, would listen to that and even once we got into some
3 trouble and hit the bridge and stuff, it wasn't -- there was no
4 arguments aboard. It was always -- everybody kind of was just
5 jumping in wherever they needed to help. So I would say as a
6 team, it came together pretty well. So.

7 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

8 Q. I just have a couple more then. So communication on board
9 the vessel -- Luke Wisniewski, NTSB. Communication was okay on
10 board with everyone?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Both up and down as far as being --

13 A. I would say it was completely open. It was a pretty good
14 communication chain as far as the boat, the vessel goes. I don't
15 know what kind of communication [REDACTED] had through the OD
16 and all that stuff, but at no point did I ever feel like I made a
17 suggestion that wasn't, you know, heard or taken -- you know, just
18 kind of blown off or whatever. So.

19 Q. Okay. In -- now this is your opinion. I'm not trying to
20 lead you down a path, but was there any time that you felt you
21 would like a little bit more assistance from ashore or from, you
22 know, the Station or say, hey, we need help with this or did that
23 ever cross anyone's mind out there?

24 [REDACTED] Just real quick. Are we talking about that day?

25 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Yeah.

1 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

2 Q. On May 2nd.

3 A. Whenever we lost engines, I know they were sending a 45 to
4 come get us. The bad part is we all know that that's a 45 minute
5 transit from the Station in good weather, you know. So we knew it
6 wasn't going to be quick, but as soon as we told them we lost
7 engines, I mean the OD was like, we have to have -- we have four
8 people -- I don't know how many people were on the 45 or what, but
9 I know they had a crew that was coming to get us and they had
10 already told us that they were like pulling away from the peer.
11 So as far as that goes, I think, you know, the Station was going
12 to -- and I don't know how [REDACTED] felt as the coxon to be
13 able to, you know, maybe take a picture of the boat and send it
14 back to the OD and say, what do you think I should do? I don't
15 know if that even crossed her mind, but --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- I think they would have tried to help as much as possible.

18 Q. Just a couple more --

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. -- and then I'll pass it over. The workload for that day, I
21 know they had after the post-accident casualty, they had you bring
22 out or fill out the 72 hour or 96 hour on file?

23 A. Seventy-two.

24 Q. Seventy-two hour, okay. You know, as far as your day, your
25 workload that day, I mean did you feel like, because this was

1 later in the day now, at the end of -- end of your shift or end of
2 your watch, were you okay and everyone else on board okay?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Specifically you first.

5 A. I mean we talked about before we left, that's part of our
6 GAR, is how we all feel, and at that point, we were all feeling
7 pretty good. It was about 2:30 when we left. So that's right at
8 the end of the workday. So we had, I mean, a few more hours
9 before we were supposed to go to bed but I mean that -- me
10 personally, I felt fine that day.

11 Q. Okay. And everyone else on board?

12 A. Nobody -- I think I mean that particular was 2 or 3 category
13 that day which is pretty low in my eyes. So I wasn't concerned
14 about anybody feeling under the weather or anything like that.
15 So.

16 Q. At any point did you decide to do another GAR? Was it
17 suggested to conduct another GAR?

18 A. No, sir. No.

19 Q. Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

20 [REDACTED] Sorry. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

21 BY [REDACTED]

22 Q. I just have one more follow up along the lines of again your
23 opinion, and I also don't want to lead you in any way but just
24 hearing more about how the sailing vessel was actually positioned,
25 kind of when you were on scene and a little bit after that. In

1 your opinion, do you think it needed to be towed?

2 A. In my opinion, if we didn't -- well, I think it would have
3 had the same outcome. I think the boat would have sank if we
4 didn't put it in tow. I think, and this is through what I've
5 learned from this experience, I think -- I don't know.

6 Q. That's fine.

7 A. I don't know if I really have an opinion on that. I do think
8 -- I do 100 percent think that if we wouldn't have put that boat
9 in tow, it would sink, yes, because it was up against the bridge
10 and if that storm would have come and as far as bashing it up
11 against the bridge, I think it would have sank anyways. So.

12 Q. Was there -- was there, because I'm not super familiar with
13 that construction, was there any risk that -- I mean this might be
14 hard for you to answer. So if you don't know, forget it. Just --
15 was there any risk that left as it was that it was going to harm
16 the vehicle transit? Was any of the scaffolding -- was there a
17 lot -- was there much -- was the scaffolding close to the vehicle
18 where if the scaffolding broke, it could --

19 A. The scaffolding's underneath the bridge.

20 Q. Right.

21 A. So it's -- I'm not really sure how it's connected. There is
22 no scaffolding

23 Q. There's none along the side of it.

24 A. It's all underneath to where like --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- it looks almost like a worker would either be on his knees
2 or like crawling on his stomach or back to work underneath the
3 bridge.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And again, they have pictures of that, and I don't know how
6 close they were. We were probably about 50 yards from the bridge,
7 but I don't know how much zoom they have to be able to get that.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. But --

10 Q. So I'm trying to see if the roadway was somehow in play.

11 A. The roadway -- so it -- the only thing that would have been
12 hitting the roadway was the mast, because wherever we went under,
13 I think it was about 15 feet from the top of the antenna from the
14 29 and we weren't hitting the top or the bottom of the bridge
15 whenever we were underneath it. As far as I know, all the masts
16 are in somewhat okay, you know, intact. So the only thing that
17 would -- and it might a little bit of its elevation at that point,
18 but I don't know if the cabin of that -- the only thing the cabin
19 was hitting or the superstructure if you will of the sailboat was
20 hitting the scaffolding and the only thing that would hit the
21 roadway was the mast itself as it overturned and the scaffolding
22 might not have allowed that because that scaffolding sticks out
23 about a foot or so from the side of the bridge.

24 Q. So the mast was clearing the top area --

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. -- of the roadway?

2 A. Um-hum. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I can't tell you how tall the mast was but I would say that
5 would be the only thing that would have obstructed the roadway
6 unless, you know, for whatever reason, the bridge or that boat
7 broke the bridge, but I couldn't say that either.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you.

9 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Luke Wisniewski, NTSB.

10 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

11 Q. So I just want to follow up with you said this vessel was --
12 had people on it the day before?

13 A. The day before.

14 Q. And was removed?

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. And the vessel -- you weren't involved with this.

17 A. Right.

18 Q. But people from this Station anchored it or you -- they
19 threw --

20 A. I'm not sure if they threw the anchor over. It was aground.

21 Q. Oh, it was aground.

22 A. Right. Correct, yeah. Somewhere in this shallow area, it
23 was aground. I don't know if they weren't familiar with area, the
24 people transiting it. I -- the story was that I was told was they
25 bought it from Florida, Panama City, and sailed it back all the

1 way here. It took them about I heard 30 days. I don't know if
2 that's true or not.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I know the gas can on it was pretty small. So they had to
5 make a lot of stops. So -- and the gas can actually might be on
6 the 29.

7 Q. Okay. Any other information that you were provided
8 regarding --

9 A. No.

10 Q. -- that, the day before evolution?

11 A. The only thing I know is that it was about 2:00 a.m. that
12 morning and they got them off and took them to a safe haven and
13 then that was it. I don't know who picked them up or if they
14 stayed in a hotel or what. But I just know -- that's what I was
15 told, that it was the same boat because they were saying -- they
16 left the stern light on and I can't remember if they said they
17 anchored it or not, but I know -- this boat had the stern light
18 that was one. So they said the boat wasn't in very good
19 condition. This boat wasn't in very good condition. So --

20 Q. Okay. So is there anything you'd like to change or add --

21 A. No, sir.

22 Q. -- before we conclude this interview? Obviously you're going
23 through this in your head and we've asked a little bit about your
24 opinion, but do you have any recommendations or suggestions on how
25 to prevent this like from recurring, one, to get in that situation

1 of being asked to tow a vessel that you feel that may or may not
2 be seaworthy enough or, you know, is there anything that's come
3 out or come to light for you?

4 A. So I know for me whenever I get my coxon letter, if there's a
5 boat I think is sinking, I'm cutting the towline. I'm not going
6 to even get close to it. That's just my opinion. Honestly, I
7 wouldn't have said that if this had never happened. I would have
8 probably done something very similar, trying to, you know, just
9 thinking, trying to save the towline, but at the end of the day, I
10 think if that was cut, our boat would have been fine. Because we
11 had probably 110 of our 150 foot towline out. There was only --
12 there were very few wraps on the towrail wraps and the only thing
13 that holds it on after those wraps are gone is like a quarter inch
14 little piece of line that holds it to a little eye in there. So I
15 could have cut it with a pocketknife and thrown the 150 foot of
16 towline away and called it a day. So I think that's definitely
17 something.

18 And just being a break in coxon, like I haven't -- I think
19 that's something I'm going to stress, once I'm a trained coxon,
20 I'm going to stress that, like if you come back with a complete
21 boat or boat that's not damaged and a crew that's not hurt and you
22 lost the towline, like we're good, you know. We can replace the
23 towline.

24 And then I think -- I don't -- I know one of the BM1s was
25 trying to describe to [REDACTED] what a boat with water in it

1 feels like, whenever you put power on it, and how it's going to --
2 all that water's going to shift and you should feel that through
3 your boat. I don't know if there's a way that we could implement
4 that in training but if we could, just to have somebody feel that
5 and maybe even -- and for me personally, start implementing like,
6 so here's the boat you're towing, whether it's my perfectly good
7 24 or 29 but, you know, you can't use these bits because they're
8 obstructed for whatever reason, and make coxons think outside the
9 box while they're in a perfectly safe environment training on the
10 lake versus putting them in their first case. So, I don't know,
11 that's just me.

12 Q. That's great. Yeah. We appreciate that. Just one final, as
13 far as injuries, any -- were you cut by any of the glass or --

14 A. I had some cuts on my hands but that was -- the only -- as
15 far as me, I don't know if you've gone down and looked at the
16 boat, on the starboard side, whenever I was going up to get --
17 pull the anchor up, the -- I didn't realize the handrail --
18 because there was glass all in the -- and bent tin into that
19 window there, and so I couldn't reach in for that because I would
20 have obviously cut my hand. So I tried to keep my hand as far
21 back as I could and reach down for the one on the pilot house, and
22 we took like a 4 foot wave and [REDACTED] called me Superman
23 because I like -- I don't know if I jumped or what, but I landed
24 in the bow of the boat and stood up. So I did go and got --
25 because this arm, I hit this arm pretty good. So I got that x-

1 rayed just to make sure my plate was good and my hand but
2 everything's good. I just did that for precaution though.

3 Q. So you went over?

4 A. I didn't go over the side.

5 Q. No, you went over onto the sailboat?

6 A. No.

7 Q. No. What did you jump on? I'm trying to --

8 A. So I was on the starboard side of the 29.

9 Q. Sorry. Yeah.

10 A. The sailboat was already sank.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. So I was on the starboard side of the 29 because the portside
13 was hitting the bracing or whatever you want to call it for the
14 bridge, so I went down starboard and we hit like a 4 -- a 4 foot
15 wave hit us and so I went from like the starboard bow where I was
16 -- or not bow, the starboard beam where I was standing up and I
17 was like in the bow of the boat.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So I got lucky. So [REDACTED] calls me Superman now. So.

20 Q. You missed the gun plate or the --

21 A. The seat.

22 Q. Yeah, the seat.

23 A. You know, it's funny --

24 Q. Did you go far enough forward to hit that?

25 A. It's funny for whatever reason, [REDACTED] put that down like 20

1 minutes before that happened.

2 Q. No kidding.

3 A. Yeah, he either -- he put it down and was messing -- I think
4 it was whenever he was messing with the anchor and he put it down.
5 So I'm glad it was down.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Well, thank you. This concludes the
8 interview. The time is 12:50.

9 (Whereupon, at 12:50 p.m., the interview 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: COAST GUARD VESSEL CG 29113 AND
SAILING VESSEL VANGUARD TOWING
ACCIDENT MAY 3, 2017
Interview of [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA17PM012

PLACE: New Orleans, Louisiana

DATE: May 9, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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COAST GUARD VESSEL CG 29113 AND
SAILING VESSEL VANGUARD TOWING
ACCIDENT MAY 3, 2017

Accident No.: DCA17PM012

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Interview of:



U.S. Coast Guard Facilities
New Orleans, Louisiana

Tuesday,
May 9, 2017

APPEARANCES:

LUKE WISNIEWSKI, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

█ █ █ Sector New Orleans, Investigations
United States Coast Guard

█ █ █ District 8 Legal
United States Coast Guard

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:20 p.m.)

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3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Good afternoon. This is Luke Wisniewski
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board. Today is May 9th.
5 The time is 2:20.

6 This is a follow-up interview with [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
7 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

8 MR. WISNIEWSKI: [REDACTED] We just wanted to bring you in here
9 -- is it okay to record?

10 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.

12 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

13 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

14 Q. We heard everyone's interview and statements or gathered the
15 information from the discussions here today and just wanted to
16 follow up on a few items. We're particularly interested in the
17 discussion and the command and control aspect, when you realized
18 the sailing vessel, when you were towing it astern, waves were
19 breaking over the bow, when you noticed water was going in there
20 or basically it was a group decision that, okay, we need to do
21 something else. This is not working. Can you take us through
22 that again for us in your own words and what you've heard, where
23 you were at, at the time when that went on and then those events,
24 those sequence of events following it.

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. So take it away.

2 A. So I was on the stern of the 29 and whenever we made the
3 decision to break tow, we approached and started breaking down the
4 knot from the double becket being on the towline. The only knife
5 that I had on my person was in the survival vest which should be
6 -- was in one of the pockets. I didn't have any personal knife or
7 anything like that. But we began to break the tow or the knot
8 down and I didn't hear any commands to cut the line or anything
9 like that. So I don't know if you have any more detail or --

10 Q. No. So, yeah, just a follow-up question with that. So what
11 order were you given by the coxon? What do you remember her
12 stating?

13 A. I remember her saying that we're going to go grab the towline
14 and so I started heaving around as we approached that vessel to
15 get the towline back. And soon as we got the knot, I said the
16 knot's on board and I handed that off to -- because as we were
17 getting closer, I handed that to Petty Officer [REDACTED] and I was
18 holding the mooring lines trying to keep them out of the props as
19 he was making sure that it wasn't going to go wrap in the props
20 then after he was untangling the knot. So.

21 Q. Okay. So you didn't hear an order at all from the coxon to
22 cut the line?

23 A. To cut the line, I didn't personally hear it. So -- and if I
24 did, I would have just said I didn't have -- at that point, I
25 wasn't even thinking about the knife in the survival vest because

1 no -- somebody said did I have a knife? I said, yeah, we had a
2 knife. Yeah, we had it, just today we all had a knife in our
3 survival vest. So if that was the [REDACTED] I may have in the moment
4 just dismissed it like, well, I don't have a knife on me to cut
5 this line. So.

6 Q. Okay. Okay. I'll just ask you a couple of more questions
7 about command and control. The coxon, this is her first time in
8 charge of you guys and how was that relationship as far as her
9 giving you orders and you guys following them that day?

10 A. I mean if she would have given me an order, I would have
11 followed it. Whatever she wanted to do that's how it's always
12 been. That's the coxon's decision, the coxon's boat, coxon's
13 crew. That's how I would expect anybody, if I was the coxon in
14 charge, to follow me. So I mean just because she's a girl or a
15 brand new coxon in my head doesn't make it any different.

16 Q. Okay. And how many other times have you been out with her
17 when she was in -- well, you were -- you're training to be a coxon
18 yourself?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. You don't have your qualification, right?

21 A. Not yet.

22 Q. Okay. I mean you're all equals, you're all Third Class Bosun
23 Mates.

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And since I -- and so she's always been in a separate section
2 from me. I've just talked to her in passing. Mainly our
3 conversations revolved around church and stuff like that, but that
4 was my first time ever underway with her as a break in or as a
5 full-time coxon. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] I've been underway with a
6 few times before but as far as thinking I'm better than she is,
7 anything like that, as far as qualifications goes, I mean she was
8 coxon. So if she gave me a command, that's what I was going to
9 do. So.

10 Q. And after that -- after, you know, the props fouled,
11 everything was going -- seems like everything was going amuck,
12 what -- you know, Murphy's law, what can go wrong will go wrong.

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. At any point do you feel like she was not in control of the
15 situation?

16 A. I know whenever [REDACTED] was in the cabin trying to start the
17 engines, she was the one saying if we have to abandon this boat,
18 like that's the meeting location. So, in a way, she might have
19 jumped to the next step, like we're not getting -- like the
20 engines aren't starting, we're done, like -- because she was
21 pointing at a ladder that actually climbed up onto where the
22 traffic would be on the bridge, and that's where she was telling
23 us to go. It was like about 20 feet from us, and so I think at
24 the end of the day, she kept an overall high picture. Now once we
25 left, I could definitely tell she was very upset that -- I mean I

1 have kids or [REDACTED] has kids and she was super upset that, you
2 know, she put children's fathers in danger like that and she felt
3 like it was all her fault and that's why she left [REDACTED] drive
4 back and [REDACTED] was already there. So I think she just kind of --
5 the whole time she was on the phone with the OD, between me and
6 her, we were trying to continue communications with what happened,
7 where we were going and all that stuff. So she never -- I don't
8 think she ever completely lost overall situational awareness,
9 maybe just a temporary like we can still save this boat kind of
10 thing, get out of here on the 1-3 and not through the water. So
11 that would be the only thing I'd have to say on that.

12 Q. I appreciate your candid response. It's very good seeing
13 that you guys are good shipmates to each other.

14 MR. WISNIEWSKI: That's all the questions I have.

15 [REDACTED]
16 [REDACTED] Just very briefly.

17 BY [REDACTED]

18 Q. We can look this up, but I just want to clarify, there's no
19 -- there's no knife that's part of the boat outfit for the 29?

20 A. No, sir, there's not.

21 Q. Okay. And did you know that [REDACTED] had a knife?

22 A. No, I didn't.

23 Q. Okay. Did -- was there any conversation whether there was an
24 order given or not between the rest of the crew about cutting the
25 towline?

1 A. [REDACTED] said he tried to cut the towline but at that point,
2 we got the knot untied. At that point, we were really close to
3 that vessel already.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Because we --

6 Q. [REDACTED] went to cut the line without talking to you guys
7 about it or --

8 A. I don't remember. I mean everything at that point was really
9 hectic but he said -- like we asked him that today, and he said,
10 yeah, he tried to cut the line.

11 Q. Because he was the most junior on board, correct?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. So for him to kind of go out and do that, you know, right?

14 A. I'm not sure of the question you're asking.

15 Q. Do you think that for him to make a decision to cut the
16 towline on his own, what's your impression of that?

17 A. I don't -- I don't know if -- so I didn't hear [REDACTED]
18 cut the towline. She said she screamed it, and if she did, then I
19 think [REDACTED] would have taken that order from her and maybe like
20 I said, I just didn't hear it.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So.

23 [REDACTED] Okay. I don't have anything else, sir.

24 MR. WISNIEWSKI: That's all I have. Thank you very much for
25 your time. The time is 2:29. This concludes this interview.

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(Whereupon, at 2:29 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

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