

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

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	
By Mr. Wisniewski	5
By [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	24
By Mr. Wisniewski	33
By [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	35
By Mr. Wisniewski	35

I N T E R V I E W

(1:04 p.m.)

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3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Good afternoon. My name is Luke Wisniewski
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board.

5 I am here at Station New Orleans to interview the coxon
6 aboard Coast Guard CG 29113 involved with the incident with
7 Sailing Vessel *Vanguard* that occurred on May 2nd.

8 Today is Tuesday, May 9th, at 1:04 p.m.

9 If I could have you introduce yourself. Can you give me your
10 name and then spell it out for the transcriber?

11 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes. [REDACTED] [REDACTED],
12 [REDACTED].

13 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to go around
14 the room and introduce everyone here that's present during this
15 interview.

16 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard Sector New
17 Orleans, Investigations.

18 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] District 8, Legal.

19 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. NTSB is here to conduct an
20 independent federal -- you know, we're a federal agency here to
21 conduct and determine the probable cause of the transportation --
22 of this accident and promote transportation safety. We're not
23 part of the Department of Transportation or the Coast Guard, and
24 NTSB does not have any regulatory or enforcement powers.

25 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, and

1 not to assign fault, blame or liability. However, NTSB cannot
2 guarantee or offer any confidentiality or immunity from legal or
3 license actions.

4 A transcript or a summary of this recording -- is it okay to
5 record this interview?

6 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

7 MR. WISNIEWSKI: A transcript will be mailed to you in about
8 a month, and you can review and -- for its factual content and we
9 ask you to correct any discrepancies that there are.

10 You're entitled to representation here today with you, and
11 are you okay with not having someone here?

12 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

13 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. We will go through the events of that
14 day. First, we're going to have a little bit of background but
15 first I want to make sure, if you have any questions or anything
16 comes up during this interview that you're not sure of, just
17 please ask us to rephrase it or, you know, we don't want you to
18 ask or lead you down the wrong path. We're here solely to grab
19 the facts. So just ask us to reword it or if you don't understand
20 the question, we'll try our best to get our point to you.

21 BM3 [REDACTED] Okay.

22 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

23 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

24 Q. So let's just go through -- how many years have you been with
25 the Coast Guard?

1 A. Three and a half years, sir.

2 Q. And what -- when did you enter the Coast Guard? What time
3 and date or month and date?

4 A. August 6, 2013.

5 Q. Okay. Is this your first Station?

6 A. No, sir. Second.

7 Q. Where else have you been?

8 A. I've been to Station Charleston right out of boot camp, and
9 after A School, I went to a buoy tender out of Baltimore, the
10 *James Rankin*, and then I came here.

11 Q. And what's your title and position here?

12 A. BM3.

13 Q. Okay. And are you assigned a certain craft or are you
14 qualified on all the crafts here, all the vessels and cutters here
15 at the Station?

16 A. Do you mean boat crew or coxon?

17 Q. Well, let's start with coxon.

18 A. Coxon, just that day on May 2nd. I'm coxon qualified on 24
19 and 29. And boat crew, I'm qualified on all platforms.

20 [REDACTED] Can you say that? I couldn't hear you. What
21 platforms are you qualified coxon?

22 BM3 [REDACTED] 24 and 29, and I got qualified that day
23 that happened, so it was the first day, first case.

24 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

25 Q. How much training did you receive regarding your coxon

1 qualification? How many hours do you have to have for --

2 A. How many hours for coxon? I've been training for this for
3 the past 8 months. So a lot of hours, sir.

4 Q. Okay. We'd like to go through now and just start with May
5 2nd, go through the events as it unfolded that day, from the time
6 you arrived at the Station.

7 A. Okay. I got at the Station at 7:00, and we did boat checks
8 as usual and ate breakfast at around 8:00. After that, I -- I
9 know at noon, we ate lunch. And then around 3:00, we got the call
10 saying that there was a sailboat adrift east of the twin span.

11 So the OD told me that I'd probably go on it if Sector wanted
12 us to go. So they warned me about that, and I was okay -- I was
13 fine with going. We left Station, I don't know the specific time
14 honestly when we left Station. We got to Rigolets Marina and
15 launched at -- I also don't remember the time, but I do remember
16 when we launched, the weather was fine, wasn't bad. We had in the
17 back of our minds that it was going to pick up that night, in a
18 couple of hours. So we were prepared for that.

19 So we launched and about 10 minutes after we launched,
20 Highway 11 Bridge called us and said that the boat was drifting
21 pretty fast and it was closer to the Highway 11 Bridge.

22 So when we got on scene, it was probably about 50 yards away
23 from the Highway 11 Bridge. And so I did a couple of circles
24 around it just to see if there were any lines out, checking
25 everything, seeing where I could hook up. It was only two sterns

1 -- two stern cleats on the port and starboard on the stern of the
2 boat and those looked like the best options at that point. There
3 were no front -- there were no bow cleats or anything like that
4 that I could see anyways. The boat looked pretty rundown.

5 The OD told me to call him when I got on scene. So I did.
6 He wanted me to make sure that the boat was registered in Florida,
7 so we can make sure it was the same boat that we were going out
8 for, which it was. So it was registered in Florida, and the OD
9 told me to -- if the sailboat got close to the bridge, to kind of
10 pull it away from it, you know, make sure that it wasn't hitting
11 the bridge.

12 So about 5, 10 minutes go by and I'm doing circles still,
13 looking at the boat for where I can hook up to, trying to see if
14 anything -- if there was another option other than the port and
15 starboard stern cleats, but I didn't see much else.

16 So by the time I had gotten off the phone with the OD, it was
17 almost hitting the bridge. So I got off the phone, and I had BM3
18 [REDACTED] and BM3 [REDACTED] out on the bow and I wanted them to hook up
19 to the I believe port aft cleat on the stern. So it was a little
20 rocky because by the time that we -- I had to do a few approaches
21 because by that time, the wind had really picked up, the waves had
22 gotten bigger. So by the time I got to the sailboat, it was
23 hitting on the bridge. And with the waves, I had to do a few
24 approaches.

25 So I finally got it. He hooked it up to the port side aft

1 cleat, and I backed up and that went fine. I didn't really notice
2 any maneuverability problems at that point. So we didn't know if
3 it was taking on water at that point. Pulled it back -- I tried
4 to pull it back as far as we could. I tried to get in between the
5 I-10 and the Highway 11 Bridge, into safe water so I could figure
6 out how I'm going to hook this up for a stern tow and bring it to
7 Oak Harbor.

8 But by the time I got into safer water, I called the OD and
9 let him know what's going on and I said, I can just tow this into
10 Oak Harbor, it'll be fine. Oak Harbor wasn't far. We could see
11 it. It wasn't far at all. I didn't think it would be a problem.
12 So he said, okay, tow it into Oak Harbor.

13 So that's what I tried to do for a long time, and I realized
14 that I wasn't making any way.

15 Well, I skipped a little. So at first, we had hooked up our
16 bow to their port aft cleat. So I pulled them out like that but
17 when I pulled us into safer water, we had to switch. So we had a
18 stern tow going instead of me pulling them out from the bow. We
19 switched. So we went from our forward tow bit to a stern tow.
20 That's what I forgot to say.

21 And that was also hard to do with waves and wind and I had
22 also at one point -- we were trying to just get a good look and
23 see if that boat was taking on water which we couldn't. I tried
24 to keep getting close to it, and it was hard because of the waves
25 and the wind. It just kept setting us back onto the bridge,

1 setting us back so fast onto the bridge. So I had to keep pulling
2 us out into safe water, trying to find a good place to hook the
3 stern up to, and we didn't come up with any other things except
4 for the port and starboard aft cleats. So we had a stern tow
5 going and it was hooked up to our -- from our stern to their port
6 and starboard aft cleats which thinking back on it wasn't a good
7 idea because Silverettes aren't designed to ride like that
8 especially in big waves.

9 So probably 30, 40 minutes, I tried to make way and I noticed
10 that making way was very, very hard to do. It was almost like we
11 were getting pulled back, and I didn't have much maneuverability.
12 I could barely even steer to port and starboard.

13 So after about an hour of trying to make way, we called the
14 OD and let him know, hey, we don't know what -- we had assumed
15 that it might have been taking on water at that point, but me
16 being not an experienced coxon, I wasn't sure what it feels like
17 to have to tow a boat taking on water. I just didn't know. I
18 assumed that I didn't have maneuverability because of the wind and
19 waves.

20 So I think at that point, that is when -- so as I was towing
21 the boat from the stern, was -- the waves kept going over the
22 stern and over the stern, and I had to keep stopping because we
23 weren't sure if the boat was taking on water at that point. So I
24 wanted to make sure that I wasn't. So I would stop and I'd go
25 super slow and we'd see that the waves would just keep pounding

1 the stern, pounding the stern, and then finally -- finally they
2 told me, all right, the boat's definitely taking on water.

3 So that's when I was like, okay, we've got to cut the --
4 we've got to cut the line because at that point, we couldn't get
5 close enough. I wasn't even going to try to get close enough to
6 that boat because of the waves. So I wanted them to just cut the
7 towline. So I asked them to cut the towline and something was
8 going on with the towline. They couldn't cut it. For some
9 reason, they couldn't cut the towline.

10 So at that point, I had to maneuver to get close enough to
11 the sailboat safely in order to disconnect our lines from it
12 because I didn't want us to go down with it. So we got close to
13 it and I'm not sure if they had -- they had disconnected or they
14 hadn't. At some point, I had to put our boat to stern or I had to
15 back up and when I did, I ran over a towline and lost both
16 engines.

17 And at that point, we're probably 20 yards off the bridge.
18 So once we lost engines, I was trying to get them started. Trying
19 to get them started. Trying to get them started. I must have
20 tried about 10 times to get the engines started. I trimmed up
21 port or starboard. I can't remember. I think port engine, and
22 they said that our line was caught into the propeller. So they're
23 trying to get it out. Trying to get it out, and at some point,
24 the mast snapped and fell on top of our boat. And at that point,
25 we were pretty much underneath the -- well, no. We were pretty

1 much about to hit the bridge.

2 So I still didn't have engines. So at this point, I called
3 the OD and I said, listen, this is really not good. I just lost
4 both engines and the sailboat is sinking right now. So as I'm on
5 the phone with the OD, we hit the bridge, starboard side, and I'm
6 telling the OD we need help, we need help. We don't have any
7 engines. So we hit the boat starboard side and then kind of spun
8 and then got stuck between three pilings underneath the bridge.
9 And looking back at it now, it was a good thing that those pilings
10 were there to keep us in one spot.

11 So we're getting beat onto the pilings, one in particular, on
12 our starboard side -- no, I'm sorry, on the port side. Port side
13 was getting beaten up and as that was going on, I'm on the phone
14 with the OD. Everybody's outside the cabin. Cabrera and I are on
15 the back deck and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were on the front and I'm
16 talking to the OD and saying we need help, we need help.

17 And I'm also scoping out the bridge to see where -- if we
18 were to go in the water, where we could climb up on which there
19 weren't. there was one spot that I saw. So I screamed out to
20 everybody, guys, we're going to go to this spot right here if we
21 have to go in the water. So they go, okay, okay, everybody heard
22 me.

23 So some -- at some point, [REDACTED] decided to go back into the
24 cabin and start port engine and it started and we were very
25 relieved that it started. So I told him, okay, we're going to

1 back up first and then we're going to go starboard and we're going
2 to get out of here. So he backed up and he put his bow into the
3 waves and we got out of there. And he drove us back to Oak
4 Harbor, and we moored up at the dock in Slidell.

5 Q. Okay. Thank you for that narrative.

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. I'm just going to follow up with some questions that you
8 prompted from your discussion there. You said they couldn't cut
9 the towline. What was the reason?

10 A. I honestly don't know. I think probably their knives weren't
11 sharp enough probably because the knives we have aren't sharp
12 enough.

13 Q. If you know. If you don't know --

14 A. I don't know. I'm just guessing.

15 Q. What's the size of that towline?

16 A. It's 150 by 3/8 maybe -- 150 feet.

17 Q. Okay. 3/8.

18 A. I'm not sure about the 3/8.

19 Q. I think it's on the stern, right? I think it's on there.
20 Okay. We'll go out and measure it. You also indicated that, you
21 know, you were trying to start the engines for several times. You
22 indicated 10 times or --

23 A. Probably 7 to 10 times.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. And every time I would, like -- when you try to start our

1 engines, the lights come on but -- so the lights were coming on
2 but just nothing. So it had to be the line that was stuck in
3 the --

4 Q. Okay. So that's what I was going to ask. So the line was
5 still you think --

6 A. Stuck in the --

7 Q. -- stuck in both the port and starboard propellers.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. And you indicated that [REDACTED] was able to start it.
10 Was this after -- and which engine did he start first?

11 A. He said port he started first.

12 Q. Port first.

13 A. They got port going. So.

14 Q. Okay. And how much time do you think you were without your
15 engines? An estimation.

16 A. About 7 minutes. It felt like 2 hours, but it was probably
17 only 6 to 7 minutes, I'm guessing.

18 Q. When -- on this vessel, you said -- you indicated this was
19 your first time as coxon on this vessel. As far as tow evolutions
20 on the 29 footers, how much experience, you know, part of your
21 training as coxon did you experience with towing a vessel, either
22 in training or in practice?

23 A. A lot but not in bad weather and not sailboats. I had never
24 towed a sailboat before. We just tow our own boats. So --

25 Q. At training evolutions, you'd tow your own cutters? Okay.

1 A. Our own small boats, yes, sir.

2 Q. Have you ever done a tow or training on a tow with a stern
3 tow?

4 A. No, sir.

5 Q. And just to clarify, none from -- from a sailboat sterning a
6 tow?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. From astern. Okay. Can you go through what checks you
9 perform on the 29 right after you launch it or -- that you're
10 responsible for?

11 A. I am responsible for checking the alarms, cross track,
12 offset, speed. We have to have those all set at a certain -- at
13 certain numbers. I'm also responsible for making sure that the
14 antenna's up, making sure that the windows are either all the way
15 up or all the way down, making sure that the radios work, making
16 sure that all the proper gear is on the boat.

17 Q. In doing your checks, was there any issues reported or
18 anything either from your crewmembers up to you or anything that
19 you found deficient that would inhibit you from towing or any of
20 your operation capabilities?

21 A. Not that I can think of, sir.

22 Q. Your risk assessment, when you were learning that you'd have
23 to, you know, go out to the vessel and -- what was your GAR score?
24 Do you remember?

25 A. I remember we did it on the truck on the way there, like when

1 we left Station but I don't remember what it was.

2 Q. Do you remember what was the biggest concern --

3 A. Environment --

4 Q. The environment.

5 A. -- because we knew that the weather was going to pick up.

6 Q. So you knew the weather was going to pick up. Like what did
7 you estimate the time that this response was going to take for
8 you?

9 A. I thought it was going to be an hour tops. The weather was
10 fine when we launched and then it turned bad really quick. I
11 didn't even think it would take an hour honestly. I thought I was
12 just going to pull that sailboat off and be able to tow it and
13 they didn't even -- that wasn't even -- all they wanted me to do
14 initially was get on scene, make sure that it had Florida -- it
15 was registered in Florida and see what the boat was doing. I
16 didn't -- I didn't even know that I'd be towing it. I wasn't
17 sure. So just to make that clear, I wasn't sure what I'd be
18 doing.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. He just asked me to get up on scene.

21 Q. Yeah. So can you go through a little more, as far as the
22 discussion you had here with the Station and RDO. Who was the
23 individual here you were speaking to? What was his title?

24 A. The OD.

25 Q. Oh, the OD.

1 A. I was speaking with BM2 Spellman and BM3 O'Connor is breaking
2 in OD. So she was break in that day. So they had initially told
3 me get on the scene, let me know if it's got the Florida -- if
4 it's registered in Florida and let us know what it's doing, if
5 it's about to run into the bridge. So when I got on scene, I
6 called them and said it's drifting fast, and I was told to keep it
7 off the bridge. So that's why I attached a line to it and pulled
8 it out into safer -- well, what I thought was safer water but --

9 Q. Okay. And who gave you that instruction to keep it off the
10 bridge?

11 A. BM2 Spellman or BM3 O'Connor.

12 Q. And how did you maintain communications back and forth with
13 them?

14 A. Cell phone.

15 Q. Is it an issued cell phone for the vessel or --

16 A. No, my own cell phone.

17 Q. It's your personal cell phone?

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. They would get ops and position with us every 30 minutes and
21 I figured once we were underneath that bridge and we were getting
22 beaten up against pilings, it wasn't a good idea to be in the
23 cabin and weather was talking on the radio or not --

24 Q. Sure.

25 A. -- I didn't want anybody inside the cabin. So that's cell

1 phone.

2 Q. Okay. And so I guess when you realized in your opinion or
3 what was being discussed from your crew up to you, as far as when
4 things were looking really bad, when did you relay ashore like,
5 hey, we're going to cut this or can you just go through that again
6 for me?

7 A. When did I?

8 Q. Yeah, when did you realize, hey, these things are not looking
9 good. I'm going to shorten the towline. We're either going to
10 tow it or part it or we're going to undo the knots.

11 A. So it was probably about 40 minutes to an hour after I'm
12 trying to make way and I'm just not, and BM3 [REDACTED] and BM3 [REDACTED]
13 were out on the aft deck letting me know, stop right now, stop
14 right now, because the waves were just getting bigger and bigger
15 and the waves were crushing the sailboat. So at one point they
16 could actually tell that it was, in fact, taking on water. So
17 they told me to stop. So I did, and I looked back and we could
18 tell it was sinking. So that's when I told them to cut the
19 towline.

20 Q. Okay. Did you relay that back to the OD that you were
21 cutting the towline?

22 A. At some point I did because I called them -- I called them
23 right as we were about to hit the bridge. I let them know what's
24 going -- I let them know that I lost both engines because I ran
25 over the towline and -- yes.

1 Q. And you say you ran over the towline. Was it a mooring line
2 or a towline?

3 A. The -- it was a towline.

4 Q. It was a towline.

5 A. Um-hum. Because we were attached from our stern to their
6 stern cleats. So it was definitely our towline.

7 Q. Okay. It wasn't the brow or any -- what you may have
8 fastened up on to the stern of the sailboat? It was -- I'm just
9 trying to --

10 A. No.

11 Q. -- clarify.

12 [REDACTED] He used the two mooring lines with a knot.

13 BM3 [REDACTED] Um-hum. So he made a --

14 [REDACTED] It was this?

15 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes.

16 [REDACTED] So it was the towline actually -- okay.

17 BM3 [REDACTED] I believe so, yes.

18 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Can you write just Exhibit so we have
19 that.

20 [REDACTED] Here, I'll --

21 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Draw that out, yeah.

22 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

23 Q. Just help me draw that out where you -- I appreciate it.

24 A. So you want me to draw what out?

25 Q. Yeah, draw out where do you think -- the tow arrangement and

1 how it was -- where you think you got caught at after they undid
2 the bits or undid the knots.

3 A. I mean all I know is it was a bridle and I mean I honestly
4 don't know.

5 Q. Okay. All right. That's fine.

6 A. So I somehow backed up and ran over the towline. I don't
7 know.

8 Q. All right. Do you mind flipping that over then.

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. I'm not so much worried about that then if you're not sure.
11 Can you go through -- you discussed how you were in position to
12 the sailboat? And obviously when you were towing it, but when you
13 decided to come back as far as pulling into your towline, you knew
14 they were going to cut it. How were you in position to the
15 sailing vessel and the bridge? I just want to -- we just want
16 to --

17 [REDACTED] When you decided to break tow.

18 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

19 Q. Yes, when you --

20 A. That's the bridge.

21 Q. When you know the tow was not going to work, you go through
22 and --

23 A. Entrance. This is where we hit, the wooden spot. The
24 sailboat's right here. So this is our boat and I tried to get --
25 come around like this, and somehow get close enough to disconnect

1 that tow, and all I know --

2 Q. This is the bow?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And all I know is as I was trying to maneuver to get closer,
6 the waves were hitting us from this way. So as I was trying to
7 maneuver, I ran over that towline.

8 Q. And you were backing?

9 A. Um-hum. I was backing, yes.

10 Q. Okay.

11 [REDACTED] Can you write like pile --

12 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Yeah, can you just write out for us --

13 [REDACTED] Kind of label this for us. You want to put CG and
14 SB for --

15 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

16 Q. And then both the wind and the waves --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- were on your --

19 A. They were this way.

20 Q. Okay.

21 [REDACTED] Where was the scaffolding? How far was the
22 scaffolding from --

23 BM3 [REDACTED] The -- are you talking about the wooden
24 part or the pilings?

25 [REDACTED] No, the construction. There was some construction

1 scaffolding --

2 BM3 [REDACTED] Construction scaffolding?

3 [REDACTED] -- underneath the bridge. Was that anywhere close
4 to you guys at this point?

5 BM3 [REDACTED] Construction scaffolding?

6 [REDACTED] We can talk about it later.

7 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

8 Q. Yeah, we were just told in a number of interviews that there
9 was construction scaffolding that was underneath the bridge.

10 A. Construction scaffolding? I don't know what that is
11 honestly. Construction scaffolding.

12 Q. Yeah, the metal or makeshift, when they were doing repair
13 work on the bridge.

14 [REDACTED] I think if I know it correctly, it's got like
15 that, correct? A series of arches, right?

16 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

17 [REDACTED] So -- and then somebody else mentioned when they
18 got on scene that there's like scaffolding like this underneath.

19 BM3 [REDACTED] I didn't notice.

20 [REDACTED] And the sailboat was up against it at some point.

21 BM3 [REDACTED] I -- well, the sailboat was against the
22 bridge, but I didn't notice that it was construction scaffolding
23 honestly.

24 [REDACTED] Okay. And there might have been some buoys --

25 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes.

1 [REDACTED] -- around --

2 BM3 [REDACTED] I had to maneuver around buoys to get to
3 them and maneuver back around.

4 [REDACTED] So you did see the buoys then?

5 BM3 [REDACTED] Yes.

6 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

7 Q. Were you hung up on the buoys?

8 A. No.

9 Q. I mean was the sailing boat?

10 A. Hung up on the buoys? No. No, it was hitting the bridge.

11 Q. Just passed the buoys.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. Okay. Okay. Could you just write Exhibit 2 on this piece of
14 paper?

15 A. Yep.

16 Q. And then put your name and then just a signature. Did you go
17 out with the other group, with the MAB individuals here and
18 discuss any of this or no?

19 A. No, sir.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. BM3 [REDACTED] went out with them.

22 Q. Let me go back to some more of my questions here, follow-up
23 questions. Did you -- you indicated that you had a hard time
24 maneuvering the vessel once it was hooked up, the tow was
25 commenced.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Was there restrictions in the ability to turn the rudders or
3 turn the steering wheel or was it just --

4 A. It was --

5 Q. -- a drag from the sailing boat itself? I'm trying to --

6 A. It was hard to make way and it was hard to turn port and
7 starboard but I assume that was because of the wind and waves. I
8 didn't know. It was pretty rough.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. It was pretty rough out there.

11 Q. Did you have full range of motion with the engines back and
12 forth?

13 A. Full range of motion, yes, I did.

14 Q. Okay. The way the tow was set up, there was no restriction
15 there?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. It was just very hard to make way and very hard to turn

19 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. That's all I have at this time. I'll
20 pass the floor to the [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] Coast Guard New Orleans,
22 Investigations.

23 BY [REDACTED]

24 Q. You had mentioned at one point early on that the Highway 11
25 Bridge called.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Call you guys?

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Did they call Station?

5 A. No, they called -- they came over the radio saying Coast
6 Guard boat, Coast Guard boat, this is Highway 11 Bridge, and we
7 had assumed it was us. So we said -- we answered them and --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- they said -- they said that the sailboat was getting
10 closer to their bridge.

11 Q. Okay. And what -- what did you guys talk about?

12 A. We just said roger.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. We just appreciated the information --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- because we weren't exactly sure where the boat was.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I mean we had a lat and long from where it was before but it
19 was drifting. So it was nice to have that lady call us and tell
20 us.

21 Q. Do you know where on the bridge they're manned from because
22 I'm not familiar with that?

23 A. I want to say that by the entrance, but I'm not sure about
24 that.

25 Q. Like from the New Orleans side or the Slidell side. If you

1 don't know, you --

2 A. I'm not sure, sir.

3 Q. Okay. But they could see it I guess?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Okay. Do you know if they were the original reporting party
6 to Sector that day? Do you know who the RP was?

7 A. I'm not sure, sir.

8 Q. Okay. So when you got on scene, and you were talking to the
9 OD who presumably was talking to Sector, was there any
10 conversation about basically whether it's -- I mean I'm not trying
11 to relay like make this difficult or hide anything, but basically
12 was there any -- was there any conversation about the risk in
13 towing this in terms of what it could do to the bridge, in terms
14 of how difficult it would be to tow? Do you remember having that
15 conversation with the OD or Sector? Was it just you can tow it
16 or --

17 A. No. I mean they had originally told me that they didn't know
18 if they wanted me to tow it. So I got on scene and they said,
19 keep the boat off the bridge. So that's what I did.

20 Q. So there was no discussion about like if you could do so
21 safely or what do you think about getting --

22 A. Oh, absolutely.

23 Q. So you did have that conversation?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

1 A. So as I was trying to pull it out into safe -- when I got --

2 Q. Well, I guess what I'm saying is before you even have any
3 lines over, like before you even were going to start pulling it
4 off, like they say like, hey, can you pull it off safely or --

5 A. Absolutely.

6 Q. -- take it out to sea?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. Okay. And then your assessment was it was okay to do
9 that?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Which it was at the time.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Because the weather wasn't as bad at that time, but it just
15 kept getting worse and worse and worse.

16 Q. Okay. So it was to pull it off and then -- and then do what?
17 Just -- because that was kind of more like an alongside
18 configuration? Is that -- because I think you mentioned that --
19 this is the first time we heard today that there was a -- you were
20 actually towing it from the bow at one point, through the bow. Is
21 that correct?

22 A. No, no.

23 Q. I thought you said that.

24 A. I said from my bow.

25 Q. Right. That's what I meant.

1 A. Right.

2 Q. Right. Because earlier today we were all hearing stern to
3 stern configuration.

4 A. For the tow?

5 Q. For the actual tow, right.

6 A. So when I originally --

7 Q. You were going to pull it off.

8 A. Right. So I went from my bow to their port stern cleat and I
9 backed up and backed up and backed up and kept backing up. That's
10 how I pulled them off the bridge.

11 Q. So you were kind of like that or no, you were -- were the
12 bows facing the same direction when you had it in the first --
13 when you were just trying to pull them off?

14 A. No. So --

15 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Is it easier to draw it?

16 BM3 [REDACTED] So -- let's see. So this is the bridge
17 and let's see. Sailboat. Okay. So this is their stern and this
18 is my boat. So I had a line going from my tow bit to their port
19 cleat or -- I'm pretty sure it was port cleat. And I backed up
20 and kept backing up.

21 BY [REDACTED]

22 Q. Okay. Now I understand.

23 A. And I tried to get -- to back up and get enough to get in the
24 safer water but it was getting really bad at that point.

25 Q. What was the plan with that? Just --

1 A. Just to get into safer water.

2 Q. And then release them or take them in tow?

3 A. Well, get them in safer water and then assess the situation
4 which I did and then I let them know that I was in safer water and
5 that we could tow it back to safe harbor (sic), that was Oak
6 Harbor, that was the nearest safe haven which it wasn't far. We
7 -- I mean we could see Oak Harbor. It was crazy how we could not
8 make any way.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. That was the problem.

11 Q. Just to back up a little bit, but there was some talk about
12 maybe putting a person over --

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. -- to maybe get the sail down, or maybe not, just stuff like
15 -- can you talk about that a little bit?

16 A. Yes, sir. The OD mentioned if -- asking if we could safely
17 get somebody on that sailboat to see if it was taking on water or
18 to see what was going on with it, and at that point, I had BM3
19 [REDACTED] go on the bow and we got super close to it, and I asked him,
20 do you feel safe getting on this boat, and he said no. So I
21 backed up and we didn't even mention that again.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So that's how that happened.

24 Q. So there's a -- there's a little bit of a disconnect it seems
25 between like just trying to understand some of the other crewmen

1 are talking about the decision to break tow, whether it was going
2 to be cutting the towline or breaking the knot, right? So -- and
3 this is the first time that I can remember we've heard clearly
4 today that there was a decision to cut the line.

5 A. Well, that's what I told them to do, and I guess they
6 couldn't cut it. So I guess they tried to break the knot. I
7 didn't even know that they were trying to break the knot honestly.
8 I didn't even know that.

9 Q. Okay. It's been a while, but isn't there a knife on board
10 the RVS?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. So each of our RPFs have knives, but we all carry knives.

14 Q. But there's a knife in the boat outfit, too, right? I think.

15 A. Yes. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay. So did they use it?

17 A. I'm not sure, sir.

18 Q. Okay. Because short of cutting it, right, then you guys have
19 to go through this process of shortening tow, backing up and
20 trying to either break the knot or physically remove lines from
21 the sailboat, right? One of the two, right?

22 A. Right, which removing our eyes from that boat would have been
23 way too dangerous. So that's why I just wanted them to cut it.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Just cut it and we'll be safe, just cut the line, instead of

1 trying to get closer to that boat when the waves are knocking it
2 everywhere. That was my thinking anyways. So I told them to cut
3 it and I guess they couldn't. So they tried to take the knot off.
4 I didn't even know about the knot.

5 Q. Okay. So when -- did you ever feel like you were kind of
6 losing control of the -- not control of the situation but like
7 control of the crew? Does that make sense?

8 A. I didn't at that point. No. No, sir.

9 Q. Okay. And I'd have to check my notes because I didn't know
10 that anybody else got on the helm today -- on that day. So [REDACTED]
11 -- [REDACTED] actually --

12 A. [REDACTED] was the one who started the port engine and he was the
13 one who got us out of there, yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay. Why -- why -- I'm not saying it's wrong or right, I'm
15 just trying to understand what happened. So why didn't you take
16 over the helm?

17 A. So at that point, once we got out from underneath -- so he
18 was the one who went through the cuddy cabin and decided to start
19 the engine again. So once he got port started, I told him --

20 Q. You just happened to be there kind of?

21 A. Um-hum. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. So once he got port stated, I told him, okay, so this is what
24 we're going to do. You're going to back up and I was kind of
25 trying to lead him. I told him to back up and then put your bow

1 into the elements, and then we'll get out there. So once he did
2 that and once we got clear of the bridge, we were all so frazzled,
3 and I felt like -- honestly I felt like they wouldn't -- I already
4 screwed up so much, why would they want me to drive them home.
5 Pretty much that was my thinking, sir.

6 Q. Okay. Yeah, let me be clear. I'm not trying to judge. I'm
7 just trying to understand what happened.

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. So.

10 A. I figured I was the one who ran over the towline and -- so
11 that's why I let him drive us home. He was also the -- he was
12 confident in driving home. So.

13 Q. How many times did you tell them to cut the towline?

14 A. Once, sir. I think that's --

15 Q. Okay. Do you remember who -- did you just kind of shout it
16 the back?

17 A. I shouted --

18 Q. -- to the back deck?

19 A. -- it back to them, yes, sir.

20 Q. Did you say it over the radio back to Station, that we're
21 going to cut the towline?

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. Did you say it over the phone back to the OD?

24 A. Well, at that point, the boat was sinking fast, and so I
25 didn't even think about -- I felt like the situation was more

1 important than calling -- stopping and calling the OD. I thought
2 we were going to go down with the sailboat.

3 Q. I get that and that seems pretty reasonable. I'm just trying
4 to --

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. -- just feel out all the avenues if you will.

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. So like --

9 A. That was kind of my thinking though.

10 Q. Okay. And that makes sense, you know.

11 A. Everything happened so fast. So fast.

12 [REDACTED] I don't have anything else at this time, sir.

13 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. I'd like to just go through a little
14 bit more then. Luke Wisniewski, NTSB.

15 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

16 Q. Can you tell me the material condition of the sailboat?

17 A. It's material condition?

18 Q. Yeah, what was it -- how did it look? Did it look like it
19 was well maintained?

20 A. No, sir, it looked pretty raggedy.

21 Q. Can you elaborate a little bit more as far as any visual
22 color, description?

23 A. The sail was all ratty and it didn't look well maintained.

24 Q. You indicated that it was taking on water at some point. You
25 guys made the determination that, yes, we think it's going over

1 the stern. Do you know roughly what time that was?

2 A. Right after BM3 [REDACTED] said, all right, stop, stop, we think
3 it's taking on water. That's when I said, all right. Cut the
4 towline.

5 Q. Oh, okay. So it was that quick?

6 A. Because I looked back and I saw it sinking.

7 Q. How far were you from the bridge at that point?

8 A. I could guess -- 50 yards.

9 Q. Okay. Communication between yourself and the other crew
10 members. Do you feel like you had good pretty good communication
11 the whole time with this crew?

12 A. I felt like we did. I felt like we did.

13 Q. How many times have you been out with this crew in this
14 configuration? This is obviously your first as a coxon but with
15 the crewmembers.

16 A. BM3 [REDACTED] we had been in the same section for a while. So
17 I was -- I had been out with him a bunch of times, but BM3 [REDACTED]
18 and Cabrera, not nearly as many.

19 Q. But no issues with you being in --

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. -- charged like chain of command?

22 A. No, sir, not at all.

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: That's all I have. I'll pass it back over.

24 [REDACTED] Just a very, very quick couple of follow ups.

25 This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] again.

1 BY [REDACTED]

2 Q. How was the qualification process? How did it go?

3 A. It was a long, long process. It took me 7 months to get
4 coxon qualified on the 24 and 29.

5 Q. Okay. I'm just trying to -- just questions and I don't mean
6 anything, but were you in port or report (sic) or --

7 A. No, sir.

8 Q. Okay. Nothing like that?

9 A. No, sir.

10 Q. Okay. So as he was saying, part of what we're doing is
11 understand like how things came to be, right. So are -- so you're
12 pretty confident that the comms were good and that the respect for
13 your position was good?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 [REDACTED] Okay. That's it, sir.

16 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

17 Q. Okay. I just want to wrap up then. Is there anything you'd
18 like to add or change based on what we've discussed here?
19 Anything that came up that maybe we interrupted or you want to say
20 now?

21 A. No, sir.

22 Q. Okay. Do you have any suggestions as far as, you know,
23 obviously you now have this going through your mind for a week,
24 and anything from training to, you know, maybe I should learn this
25 a little bit more or anything that could help you from this type

1 of recurrence? Not just for yourself but for others to learn from
2 because obviously you'll have a hot wash or a lessons learned
3 after this with the Station. So you can share, you know,
4 disseminate information.

5 A. The only thing that I would say is definitely going out in
6 bad weather. We always train in great weather which is not going
7 to be the [REDACTED] 99 percent of the time. So.

8 Q. Okay. I think we asked this, but I just want to -- how many
9 other SARs have you been on today at this Station here?

10 A. Being a crewmember?

11 Q. Yeah, boat crew because you were -- this is your first as a
12 coxon.

13 A. I could guess.

14 [REDACTED] Estimation.

15 [REDACTED] How about a length of time like --

16 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

17 Q. There you go.

18 A. How long have I been boat crew qualified?

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. It took me 2 months to get qualified I believe. So I've been
21 here since end of June. So June, July, 9 months.

22 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. That's all I have, and if there's
23 anything else, this will conclude the interview. The time is 1:58
24 p.m.

25 (Whereupon, at 1:58 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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 NUMBER: DCA17PM012

PLACE: New Orleans, LA

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



National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594

Transcript Errata

TABLE OF CORRECTIONS FOR TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW WITH: [REDACTED]
RECORDED ON May 9, 2017

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
4	5	coxon	coxswain
4	7	May 2	May 3
7	5	2nd	3rd
7	11	OD	OOD
10	7	Silverettes	sailboats

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

[REDACTED]

Printed Name of Person providing the above information

[REDACTED]

Signature of Person providing the above information

Date

02SEP17



National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C. 20594

Transcript Errata

Subj: USCGC NOLA RB-S 9113 and S/V Vanguard towing accident on May 3rd, 2017

Accident No.: DCA17PM012

To: E [REDACTED], USCG

Dear [REDACTED] E,

Enclosed with this email is a copy of the transcript of interview for the towing accident that occurred on the evening of May 3rd, 2017 with United States Coast Guard Station New Orleans CG NOLA RB-S 291113 and S/V Vanguard in Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana. Kindly review this transcript for accuracy and provide corrections, if any, in the attached table. Please print, sign, and return it to me via email by September 15th, 2017.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any question regarding the process please feel free to contact me.

I look forward to your response.

Best Regards,

Luke Wisniewski

Investigator-in-Charge (IIC)
Office of Marine Safety
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, DC 20594

Office: [REDACTED]

Fax: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]