

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

Thursday,
May 11, 2017

APPEARANCES:

LUKE WISNIEWSKI, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Sector New Orleans
United States Coast Guard

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
District 8
United States Coast Guard

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
District 8 Legal
United States Coast Guard

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:21 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Good morning. My name is Luke Wisniewski
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board. We are here at
5 Sector New Orleans. Today is May 11th. The time is 10:21.

6 For the transcriber, could you state your name and spell it
7 for the transcription?

8 [REDACTED] My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] It's [REDACTED], and last
9 name [REDACTED].

10 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay, we'll go around the room. Also
11 present in the room?

12 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Sector New Orleans.

13 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] D-8 Legal.

14 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 4, District 8.

16 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you. NTSB is here, we're here as an
17 independent federal agency. We're here to determine the probable
18 cause and contributing factors of this incident occurring between
19 the Coast Guard CG 113 and the Sailing Vessel *Vanguard*.

20 We're not part of the Department of Transportation or Coast
21 Guard. We have no regulatory or enforcement powers. The purpose
22 of our investigation is to increase safety and not to assign
23 fault, blame or liability; however, NTSB cannot offer any
24 guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from legal or license
25 action.

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

3 [REDACTED] Yes, it's okay.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: A transcript of this record will be
5 available to you in about a month, and we ask you to go through it
6 and ensure its factual content. There will be an errata sheet at
7 the end and we welcome any changes or comments you have on it.

8 Are you aware that you're entitled to a representation here
9 today?

10 [REDACTED] Yes. Yes.

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. And you're fine with not having one
12 here?

13 [REDACTED] Yes.

14 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED]

15 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

16 Q. Okay. Let's just start off with your background, your
17 maritime experience, education. Can you go through when you
18 started with the Coast Guard?

19 A. I started with the Coast Guard in 2006, on the Cease Fire
20 Program. I was 2 years into my academic career at Alabama A&M
21 University. I went to boot camp in 2006, after 2 years in
22 college; graduated, computer science degree. Went to OCS in
23 2000 -- the fall-ish of 2008; graduated December 2008. I went to
24 the Coast Guard Cutter *Dauntless*, there for a year and a half;
25 then I went to Pac TACLET down in San Diego, so did counter drug,

1 counter piracy, stuff in the Middle East. After that, I went to
2 Atlantic Area. So I was assistant force manager for MSRT, one of
3 our units also with the MSSTs, one of our DSF units. After that,
4 I came here, actually last summer, in 2016, and I've been working
5 through the command center.

6 Q. Okay. Let's go now through the night of -- or the afternoon
7 when you came on watch. And what was the title that you had for
8 that unit?

9 A. Command Duty Officer.

10 Q. Okay. Can you go through and discuss some of the
11 responsibilities of the command duty officer?

12 A. Well, basically, the command duty officer oversees the watch.
13 We have other watch positions in our communications unit, our
14 situation unit, and our operations unit. So we basically make
15 sure that they're all doing their job. I'm a direct
16 representative of the captain, so any issues that arise in the
17 AOR, we take initial action to make sure we're following policy,
18 make sure we're at the forefront on the BSAR issues or issues in
19 the Maritime Transportation System. So we're basically the
20 frontline, especially after hours, of incidents that happen within
21 our responsible area.

22 Q. Okay. Let's go into the evening of May 3rd. Tell us when
23 you reported to the station, your turnover. Can you go through
24 that now and just give a narrative of your involvement with this
25 case?

1 A. Yes. So I usually arrive around 1630. I just got on the
2 night watch. So 1630 we arrive on scene -- or, on scene, into the
3 command center. We do a turnover with the off-going watch, so
4 basically discuss what cases are going on.

5 At that particular time, they were kind of wrapping up this
6 case so they can leave watch, so they were discussing with us the
7 case the previous day. So the sailboat was left, I guess, because
8 two people are onboard. And they were taken off and they left it
9 because, I don't know, it was aground. And so the weather that
10 came through, the storm that came through on the 3rd had dislodged
11 it and pushed it between, I guess, I-10 and the Highway 11 Bridge.

12 So they got a report from St. Tammany Parish Office, so they
13 coordinated for a station to go out and tow the vessel, I guess to
14 the nearest safe marina. They passed, you know, what the GAR was
15 -- at that point, I think it was a 21 -- and any other issues, and
16 that was it. We relieved the watch. Do you want me to keep
17 going?

18 Q. Absolutely. Yeah.

19 A. Okay. So they relieved the watch and, shortly after they
20 left, the boat got on scene. And I asked my OU, you know, did the
21 GAR change from when they left to when they got there. It stayed
22 the same.

23 With that, we got a call -- I got a call from the OD saying,
24 hey, the sailboat is taking on water and I asked was there a hole
25 in the hull. He's like, no, it's taking on water over the side.

1 He said the coxon is going to reposition it and is going to make
2 it better. So I was like, okay, and then I said if it gets too
3 unsafe, feel free to leave it out there, you know, obviously,
4 because our main concern is with the 29.

5 Then a little while later, my OU got a call from a BM1 from
6 the station saying the sailboat sank, 29 floated or drifted into a
7 pylon on the Highway 11 Bridge, broke some glass and the towing
8 line was trapped in the props, but they were able to get free of
9 the -- get the towing line free of the props and are headed into
10 the nearest safe marina. And at that point, I called SMC, who got
11 the captain online, and other department heads, and kind of had a
12 conference call regarding the issue. And then there followed
13 several other phone calls to D-8, as well, with the issue. And,
14 of course, later, reports we got that they were safe back at the
15 marina. Of course, the sailboat was sunk along one of the pylons.

16 We got that position and a couple of guys from station were
17 driving out to get their vessel -- not their vessel, their truck
18 and the trailer to move it to the position where they had moved
19 the 29, because it was a different place from where they initially
20 launched, because they just wanted to get to the closest, safest
21 place. So they took the boat and the trailer to that position and
22 got the boat and the crew and went back to station.

23 And that was pretty much it with my dealings. Like I said,
24 just a few other phone calls. After talking to D-8 Legal, I
25 contacted the owner of the boat just to give him a basic scenario

1 of what happened: We tried to retrieve the vessel, because of
2 weather or whatnot, the vessel sunk and we'll be getting in
3 contact with him again later. That's pretty much it.

4 Q. Let's go and discuss a little bit about the owner or the
5 condition of the vessel. Did you know anything -- obviously you
6 talked to him after the incident, but was there anything about the
7 condition of this vessel that you had available to you in your
8 vessel activities or any --

9 A. I vaguely remember someone saying that the mast was maybe
10 broken on it. That was all. That was the only condition I knew
11 of the vessel.

12 Q. Okay. And was it a good condition? Did you hear anything
13 relayed up to you regarding --

14 A. Nothing that was passed down and nothing that I could see.
15 Like I said, the only reports as far as MSL was concerned is that
16 it was aground and that it was dislodged, I guess, by the weather.
17 That's pretty much it.

18 Q. And let's go now into a little bit more detail as far as your
19 discussions with the individuals at the station, what information
20 you were receiving at the time. Can you now go through it in a
21 little bit of a deeper detail, like who did you talk to and
22 roughly the time?

23 A. It was the OD at station. I can't remember time. It had to
24 be around maybe a little bit after 1800, so 6 p.m., that I talked
25 to him.

1 Q. And that individual OD was?

2 A. I can't remember his name. I think it was -- I don't want to
3 guess a name because I honestly don't remember specifically. He
4 said that, basically, you know, the sailboat was taking on water
5 over the side. Of course, you know, when he said taking on water,
6 I initially thought it was something maybe with the hull, because
7 I knew it had been aground earlier. But he said, no, it was
8 taking on water over the side and it was just because of the way
9 they had the tow positioned, and that the coxon was going to
10 reposition the tow and that would make it better. I guess it was
11 in that repositioning where the towline was fouled into the props,
12 which caused the whole incident itself.

13 Q. With that tow configuration, what was relayed up to you? How
14 was it towed?

15 A. Nothing specifically about how it was being towed, just that
16 the way it was being towed, it was taking on water, and that it
17 was repositioned to a different position. I really don't know how
18 they changed it around.

19 Q. And what information did you take from them and pass that up
20 to the SMC?

21 A. I can't remember if I text-briefed or called SMC just to tell
22 them that the GAR was the same and that they were repositioning
23 the tow. I honestly can't remember how I notified that up. But
24 my thing was to make sure that the situation was still safe, and
25 from what I was getting from what I was reported up, that it was

1 still safe for them to conduct the operations. And that was
2 basically all that I would have passed up.

3 Q. Let's go into the GAR itself. You said that it was
4 reassessed and it was the same?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Just discuss that a little bit more. Like, from the time you
7 knew from the first score to the next assessment. I'm trying to
8 understand that a little bit better.

9 A. Well, normally, we would have them -- they gave a GAR when
10 they left the station, but that was from the previous watch that
11 was passed to us. Normally, when they would get on the scene,
12 they would reassess the situation and see if anything has changed.
13 And I asked my SAR controller and my OU, you know, had it changed,
14 and from his talkings with the station, they hadn't changed from
15 when they left the station. So there were no further -- I think
16 the (indiscernible) I think no further discussion regarding GAR
17 happened then.

18 Q. Okay, that's all I have at this time. I'd like to open it up
19 to other investigators. Thank you.

20 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

21 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the sector. Can you tell me about
22 your interactions with the station as a CDO?

23 A. Just in general?

24 Q. Yes.

25 A. Okay. Usually, most of the time, the station talks to the

1 SAR controller. Normally, I only talk to the OD if, like, the SAR
2 controller is busy or they stepped away from the desk and I just
3 pick up his phone. That's usually it. But it would basically be
4 the same interaction as the SAR controller would have, you know,
5 what's your risk assessment of what's going on, or really
6 explaining to them what we want them to do when they go out to a
7 vessel or go out on a SAR case, or any other issues that may pop
8 up. There can be a myriad of several issues. But like I said,
9 normally, it's the SAR controller that's talking to the stations.

10 Q. Okay. Great. As a CDO -- that's okay.

11 [REDACTED] I don't have any more questions.

12 BY [REDACTED]

13 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] So, sir, again,
14 I'm trying to get this picture painted here. Were you aware of
15 the on-scene weather and sea conditions when the boat got on
16 scene?

17 A. I was not specifically aware of them. Like I said, the GAR
18 was reassessed just based on forecast and conditions that were
19 noted there at station. But as far as on scene, I can't give you
20 any specific sea heights or wind values. That's reported back to
21 us in command center. Now, I'm not saying that they weren't
22 reported, it's just I can't recall at this point what they were.

23 Q. Right. And you weren't aware of the condition of the
24 sailboat when the crew got on the scene?

25 A. No, the only condition of the sailboat, like I said, that was

1 maybe passed to me is that the mast was maybe broken. I think
2 that was passed by station when I talked to them about the
3 repositioning of the tow.

4 Q. Okay. Were you aware of the severity of the previous
5 weather, a storm, the cell that moved through, and then were you
6 aware of the forecasted weather that was going to move through the
7 area?

8 A. I was aware of the weather at that time. I can't recite it,
9 what it -- I can't recite what it was, but I was aware of the
10 weather and the systems that were moving through. I know there
11 was a window that they were launching to try to get the sailboat
12 to get it back to a safe marina. But those were all discussions
13 that were had before I got on watch as far as, like, if it was
14 safe to launch or what the weather considerations were for launch.

15 Q. Sir, were you aware that this coxon that responded, it was
16 her first case and that she was limited to daytime operations
17 only?

18 A. I was not. I didn't know that it was a new coxon until after
19 the mishap.

20 Q. Sir, to the best of your recollection or knowledge, do you
21 recall the operating limits of the 29-foot RBS?

22 A. I think it's 25-knot winds, around 6-foot seas. I'm not sure
23 of the draft limitations, but --

24 Q. Sir, were you aware of -- when you did a pass-down at, what,
25 approximately 1700, something?

1 A. Around that time.

2 Q. The pass down, was it done on speakerphone, you, the oncoming
3 and the off-going, everybody speaking with SMC to do a formal pass
4 down, sir?

5 A. Yes. If I'm not mistaken, the off-going -- and I may be
6 mixing up cases. I think I'm accurate here. The off-going CDO
7 got the SMC online, and myself, and the on-going OU got online and
8 just kind of listened to the brief that she gave to the SMC.

9 Q. Do you recall the SMC or the breaking SMC specifically
10 stating that they wanted an on-scene assessment and an on-scene
11 updated GAR? Did that sound --

12 A. I don't specifically recall, but I know that's something that
13 this particular SMC, breaking SMC asks, so I would assume it's a
14 yes, that was discussed in that telephone call. Which is why I
15 asked my OU later, you know, what was their reassessed GAR for the
16 situation.

17 Q. And for the record, you asked your OU for the updated GAR.
18 That OU was who, sir?

19 A. Petty [REDACTED] Kersten.

20 [REDACTED] Okay. No further questions at this time.

21 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

22 Q. Luke, NTSB. I guess (indiscernible) I really have to deal
23 with or discussion with now is back to the owner again and your
24 discussion with the owner, you know, when you told him about it.
25 Did you try to gather any more information regarding the boat from

1 them?

2 A. I didn't. And after talking to legal, just from their
3 guidance, it was just to keep it as plain as possible, discuss
4 with them the situation. Don't express fault or anything like
5 that, just say, hey, this is what happened: We tried to tow the
6 vessel; because of circumstances, the vessel sank. And that's
7 really what I kept it at.

8 Q. Okay, that's all I have. Thank you.

9

BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

10 Q. This is [REDACTED] from the sector. I just have one question. As
11 the CDO, who decides to send what asset on a SAR case?

12 A. Initially, it's the OU who's running the actual SAR case, so
13 they develop the plan. And we have permission, of course, from
14 our captain SMC to immediately launch vessels for cases. We don't
15 have to wait on their approval. Usually, before they even launch,
16 though, I'm briefing the SMC on the situation. But they have
17 launch authority of all of our assets.

18 Q. But is the OU -- just to clarify your answer, the OU decides
19 what asset to send?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. I don't have any further questions.

22 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] No questions.

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: No? Okay.

24 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

25 Q. NTSB, Luke again. I just wanted to wrap up this interview,

1 then, and just ask you if there's anything you'd like to add or
2 change?

3 A. Not at this time.

4 Q. Okay. And as far as -- you know, I know it's been a week
5 now, but as far as lessons learned, hot wash, you haven't had that
6 really conducted yet, but I know this is playing through your mind
7 over and over again. Is there anything you'd like to share with
8 us, or suggestions to prevent this type of reoccurrence?

9 A. I maybe could have been more forward leaning on -- even
10 though I told the station, hey, if this unsafe, you know, feel
11 free to leave the vessel, maybe be more forward leaning on knowing
12 exactly what was going on with the tow. I think a lot of times in
13 our positions we rely a lot on the expertise performing the
14 mission and we may take that for granted, that they have a good
15 grasp on the situation. So maybe getting a better grasp on what
16 exactly was going on with the tow and understanding how that would
17 affect pushing the mission forward.

18 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. That's all I have. This will
19 conclude the interview at 10:41.

20 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded at 10:41 a.m.)
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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 NUMBER: DCA17PM012

PLACE: New Orleans, Louisiana

DATE: May 11, 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.

Lisa Fuerstenberg
Transcriber