

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

(10:54 a.m.)

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2
3 Mr. WISNIEWSKI: Good morning. My name is Luke Wisniewski
4 with the National Transportation Safety Board. Today is May 11th.
5 The time is 10:54. We are at Sector New Orleans. We are here
6 and we are interviewing -- can you state the name for --

7 MS. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

8 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And spell it please?

9 MS. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

10 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you. NTSB, we're here as an
11 independent federal agency charged with determining the probable
12 cause and contributing factors and then making recommendations.
13 We're not part of the Department of Transportation. We're an
14 independent agency, and we have no regulatory or enforcement
15 powers.

16 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety.
17 We're not to assign fault, blame or liability. However, NTSB
18 cannot offer any guarantee or confidentiality or immunity from
19 legal or license action.

20 We would like to record this interview. Is it okay to
21 record?

22 MS. [REDACTED] Yeah.

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you. A transcript will be available
24 to you before it goes on the public docket. We ask that you
25 review it and it's about a month. You will have an errata sheet

1 to make any corrections. Are you aware that you are entitled to
2 have one representative here?

3 MS. [REDACTED] Yes.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And you're okay with not having someone
5 here?

6 MS. [REDACTED] Yes.

7 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you very much for that.

8 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

9 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

10 Q. Let's go through your title or the position or role that you
11 were filling the morning of -- no, it would be the night of May
12 2nd when you came on?

13 A. It was in the morning.

14 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Oh, before -- before we start, sorry, I
15 forgot to go around the table and make sure everyone's here is
16 present. Thank you.

17 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. It's [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
18 [REDACTED] from Sector New Orleans.

19 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from D-8
20 Legal.

21 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
22 [REDACTED] from District 8.

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you for that.

24 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

25 Q. Can we go through and just go through the -- yes, your

1 background, maritime experience. And so start off, when did you
2 join the Coast Guard?

3 A. In 2009 I was accepted into the Coast Guard Scholars Program
4 at the Academy. I went to New Mexico Military Institute prep
5 school. Got into the Academy after that from 2010 to 2014,
6 graduated. Went to Coast Guard Cutter *Sherman* in San Diego. Did
7 a crew swap on *Sherman* with the Coast Guard Cutter *Rush* and then
8 short-toured from there and came to Sector New Orleans as a
9 command duty officer.

10 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Hey, hey everyone.

11 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

12 Q. Please continue.

13 A So I've been command -- qualified command duty officer I
14 guess for almost 2 years now -- no, over a year, about a year and
15 a half. And yeah, so that's my qualifications up until now as
16 command duty officer and OU. I was qualified OU to get to CDO.

17 Q. And how long have you been a qualified OU?

18 A. OU was maybe 6 months? It wasn't very long. I wasn't
19 qualified OU for very long before I broke in CDO and then got CDO
20 qualified in April. I think it was in 2016, April 2016, yeah.

21 q. Okay. As far as the CDO qualification --

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. -- what -- give a rough estimate month, year?

24 A. The qualification takes 8 to 12 months to complete, and
25 that's including your OU qualification. So you break-in on SU or

1 situation unit for a few weeks and then you also go back into
2 comms a little bit, and then you go to breaking in OU, go to SAR
3 school, come back finish your PQS and then get your board.

4 And then you stand about -- I think it's, like, 15 days and
5 15 night watches. And then they may -- some people stay OU longer
6 depending on if the schedule, like, they need more OUs at the
7 time. But at the -- when I was breaking in they didn't need that
8 many OUs so I could quickly go to CDO and start qualifying as CDO.

9 Q. Okay. And now let's go through your involvement with the
10 *Vanguard*, so when you came on watch for the first interaction you
11 had?

12 A. So I had -- I didn't -- I wasn't involved in the case to
13 where I guess it was disabled and people got pulled off. I wasn't
14 involved in that part of it. I didn't even know it was a case at
15 the time.

16 But when I got on watch, we had a lot going on. We were
17 dealing with another case that we're trying to get suspension on
18 and a few other cases for other units, like Morgan City. And but
19 we got a call around 1512 is what I have written down from
20 St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Office saying that they had a report
21 of a vessel adrift, a sailing vessel in a position that they gave
22 us. And we were -- at least, I was unsure at the time if this was
23 the same vessel from the previous case. We were, you know, we
24 were thinking about it. We're, like, yeah, probably is the same
25 area, general area, but we weren't able to confirm that because we

1 couldn't get ahold of the owners, which we tried calling several
2 times with no answer. Left messages.

3 So that's when we decided to call -- we meaning the watch
4 section, like the OU and the CDO, break-in -- decided to contact
5 Station NOLA just to give them a head's up and, like, this is what
6 we have going on. St. Tammany called us, and we're pretty sure
7 and it's the sailing vessel from this other case, but we can't get
8 ahold of the owners. And it's drifting out there heading towards
9 the I-10 and the Rigolets Bridge. And we're, like, we don't want
10 it to hit anything, hit anybody. Can we have you guys go out and
11 just assess the situation and see what's going on, you know, if
12 it's dragging anchor or what the deal is?

13 And we got the GAR. I think it was, like, 20 or 21 or
14 something like that, and that was also the day that had the storm
15 come through. And I think that's what caused the vessel to drag
16 anchor or whatever, just to come off where we had the position.

17 So but at the time we were concerned about weather but it had
18 just passed. So I know with station that was another issue, too,
19 was just making sure that it was safe to go out. And I think when
20 they launched they weren't on scene yet when I was relieved, so I
21 don't know what happened after -- before they got on scene.

22 But we did -- so after I told them to launch, we asked for
23 their GAR. We got their GAR and I passed that on to SMC and I
24 told them this is, you know, what their GAR is. And they said
25 okay, just make sure that when they get on scene to reassess and

1 then get -- update their GAR, and they would like to have an
2 updated GAR, is what they asked for. So I passed that on to the
3 OU, who spoke to station.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. And just continue?

7 A. So then I got relieved by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I told him
8 what was going on, that station was en route. They're not on
9 scene yet, and they're supposed to get an updated GAR for SMC,
10 because we didn't know if they even needed to tow or what was
11 going on with the vessel. We didn't know if it hit anything,
12 because we did call the causeway bridge -- the causeway -- the
13 bridge tender, the railroad bridge, and they said they could see
14 it but they couldn't tell if it had hit anything or if it was, you
15 know, damaged in any way. So I told Mr. [REDACTED] that, what we had
16 so far, and that station was en route. And then he relieved me.

17 Q. What time did he relieve you?

18 A. Around 1600. The last entry I have was 1554, so around that
19 time.

20 Q. On what date?

21 A. On the 3rd of May.

22 Q. Okay. And what -- when did you relieve the watch?

23 A. I relieved on the 3rd at 5:00 in the morning.

24 Q. Okay. Now I'd like to just dive down a little bit farther
25 into the discussions that you had. And one that you brought out

1 was the GAR reassessment. And who did you talk to or who did you
2 say, hey, make sure they have a reassessment on the scene?

3 A. The OU. So after I briefed the SMC on what our plan was to
4 launch station, I told them, you know, this is their GAR. And
5 then SMC, okay, make sure once they get on scene to reassess. So
6 then I spoke to the OU, which would be -- I think Mr. [REDACTED] was
7 breaking in at the time, and Mr. [REDACTED] I think, was the
8 qualified OU, I believe. I don't have that down.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. So I told them directly to let the station know to reassess.

11 Q. Okay. Can you go through a little bit more what you briefed
12 up to the SMC prior to relieving watch and how that was conducted?

13 A. I just told them that we got a report of St. Tammany called
14 adrift sailing vessel. We believe it's the sailing vessel from a
15 previous case, but I would like to have station go out and assess
16 the situation and see what's going on. And then I told them that
17 it's drifting west towards the two bridges. And it looks like it
18 may have gone underneath the I-10, but we, I mean, we don't know
19 what's out on scene and if it hit anything.

20 But we'd like to have station go out and see, but -- and I
21 told them that we've been trying to get ahold of the owners and
22 we're going to keep getting ahold of the owners as much as
23 possible. And then they said okay to reassess GAR and then let me
24 know when they get on scene and --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. So --

2 Q. So let me just -- yeah. It's not clear in my head. So who
3 did you say reassess GAR to?

4 A. Oh, the OU.

5 Q. The OU?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And that was?

8 A. That was Mr. [REDACTED] and Mr. [REDACTED]

9 Q. Okay. I think you said that but I just --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. All right. When you -- the information that you had
12 available from the previous activity and MISLE, what did you --
13 did you know at the time as far as the condition of that sailing
14 vessel?

15 A. All I knew was that it was anchored and that two people had
16 come off. And we were trying to get ahold of the owners the whole
17 time, is what I remember, at least from my case. And we were just
18 trying to make sure maybe we didn't have the right owners in
19 MISLE, so that's why we were looking the whole time trying to get
20 ahold of them.

21 I think some registration numbers weren't found. There was
22 some issues with registration numbers that weren't -- St. Tammany
23 ended up giving them to us. That's how we got them. And the OU
24 was busy trying to get ahold of the owner to make sure they knew
25 what was going on.

1 Q. Was -- go through as far as the briefing part, the turning
2 over of the watch at 1700 on May regarding weather.

3 A. Weather, I mean, we told him the GAR of station they passed
4 to us before they launched. And then, you know, they didn't --
5 there was weather concerns, but the weather had just passed. I
6 did tell them that it was -- I mean, you can look it up on the --
7 on NOAA and see there might have been thunderstorms later in the
8 evening that might pick up later, but, I mean, that's as much as I
9 said. I didn't say anything specific other than there might be
10 weather coming in later.

11 Q. Okay. So regarding the sailing vessel itself, there was no,
12 like, material condition, hey, this boat's in very poor shape?

13 A. I did not -- I did not know.

14 Q. Okay. How about even in MISLE regarding the grounding, like,
15 how it was laying? Was there an anchor out?

16 A. I mean, I knew that there was --

17 Q. Was that stuff communicated?

18 A. -- an anchor out. But that's all I can remember. I don't
19 remember anything about the condition of the vessel.

20 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. I'll pass the floor.

21 BY [REDACTED]

22 Q. Good morning.

23 A. Good morning.

24 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Let's, let's
25 talk about -- so your tasking to Mr. [REDACTED] was -- can you tell me

1 exactly what it was?

2 A. I told -- so he's the one that got the call from St. Tammany.
3 And I said, okay, let's check our cases to see if this is the same
4 sailing vessel in that area, that was in that area that was
5 anchored. And then he said, yes, we're pretty sure. Cannot
6 confirm with the owner because he can't -- we couldn't get ahold
7 of him.

8 And then I told him I'd like to send station out there. And
9 obviously I'd spoken to Mr. [REDACTED] who was the break-in, too,
10 but just to see what was going on, especially since it's drifting
11 and it's going towards the bridges. I don't want us to not be out
12 there and not know what's going on with this vessel. And we don't
13 know if it's hit anything, damaged the bridge or anything like
14 that. We hadn't gotten any reports other than from St. Tammany,
15 who said they weren't going to do anything.

16 Q. Okay. So --

17 A. And that's what I recommended to SMC as well.

18 Q. Did you discuss the possibility of towing?

19 A. I remember saying potentially towing, but we don't know until
20 we get out there and reassess and see what's going on.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. And I remember saying that, like, to SMC, you know, because
23 she asked me why did you want to launch? And I said to assess and
24 see what's going on out there. What the -- you know, if it's
25 safe, you know, what -- because I don't know if that is the same

1 vessel. We weren't able to get ahold of the owners so we weren't
2 able to confirm. We were just very sure that it was the same
3 vessel so I'd like to get out there and at least see what's going
4 on, get eyes on scene.

5 Q. So it was your intention to convey ultimately to the OOD at
6 Station New Orleans that, hey, this is going to be get underway,
7 get out there --

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. -- assess the scene and tow this boat to the nearest --

10 A. Safe haven if needed, if you're able to, yes.

11 Q. Right. Were you aware that the coxon that station assigned
12 to the sortie was her very first case?

13 A. No, I was not made aware of that.

14 Q. Okay. Were you aware of any limitations placed on the coxon
15 by the station --

16 A. No.

17 Q. -- at all?

18 A. That was never passed to us, at least not to me.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I had no idea.

21 Q. Were you aware of the -- you indicated that you knew there
22 was future weather coming in.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Did you know the severity or have an idea of the severity of
25 that future weather and when it was going to hit the New Orleans

1 area?

2 A. No, I did not. I just knew that there might be some rain or
3 slight thunderstorms, but I didn't know when it would be coming
4 through. Just it said in the evening, so --

5 Q. Okay. And just for clarification, we -- there seems to be a
6 -- I've heard a couple different scenarios, but St. Tammany
7 called. Was it a boat on scene, a St. Tammany boat on scene?

8 A. I believe so. I believe so, because they're the ones that
9 said they weren't going to tow or they weren't going to assist in
10 any way. I believe it was a vessel.

11 Q. Okay. And I'm familiar with the St. Tammany boats. They're
12 pretty good size. They're about the same size as our station
13 boats. But did they indicate the condition of that boat? Did
14 they relay that to Mr. [REDACTED] and say --

15 A. They may have, but I was not aware of if they said anything.
16 All that I heard from the OU was that the -- they weren't going or
17 going to help. They were just letting us know.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So --

20 [REDACTED] Okay. No further questions from me.

21 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

22 Q. Luke, NTSB, I just wanted to assess and try to understand
23 your understanding of the addendum for salvage for Coast Guard.
24 Can you go through and just discuss that for me?

25 A. Well, we're not a salvage company. We do offer that,

1 especially to commercial salvage companies, especially if it's
2 non-distress. So we wouldn't salvage typically. We do tow
3 vessels in for disabled cases and for cases where it falls under
4 the SAR policy. But salvage is not part of what we, the Coast
5 Guard, do.

6 Q. Okay. Thank you. With that being said, now you're launching
7 a 29 to a 32-foot sailboat.

8 A. Um-hum.

9 Q. We talked about the limitations, but that you leave to the
10 station, their assessment of what asset to send? Or do you have
11 any reach back to say, hey, do you want -- should we send a 45
12 instead?

13 A. Forty-five? I don't remember. They usually tell us what
14 vessel they're taking and we put trust in them to decide to do
15 that. So I don't remember if we -- the OU had a conversation with
16 them about that. But I never had a conversation with them about
17 which vessel they decided to take.

18 Q. Okay. And in the discussion process, is -- do you have the
19 ability to direct what asset you want to send?

20 A. We've -- you can direct, but if the station says it doesn't
21 make sense, then I'm going to listen to my station, especially if
22 it -- I don't know their whole area and know the depths in there.
23 So, I mean, CDOs can direct them to use it, but it would make
24 sense for them to do that.

25 Q. Okay. And so the discussion that you had with your OU and

1 yourself, you were fine with what the station --

2 A. Yes. If that's what they wanted then that -- I trust them.

3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

4 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Nothing further.

5 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

6 Q. Okay. Just to finish up then, is there anything you'd like
7 to add or change to this discussion?

8 A. Nothing that I could change.

9 Q. Okay. One other one that I have then to leave you with is, I
10 know you had a lot of time over the last week now to discuss this,
11 you know, amongst your peers and run through it in your mind. So
12 I'm interested in anything you'd like to share with us regarding
13 any suggestions you have to prevent this type of reoccurrence.

14 A. I just think communications, everything -- especially between
15 all the units, all the stations, just to make sure we're all on
16 the same page, I think that could always be improved.

17 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Okay. That's all I have. Thank you
18 very much. At this time it's 11:15. We will conclude this
19 interview.

20 (Whereupon, at 11:15 a.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 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.

[REDACTED]

Teresa Holevas
Transcriber

