

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

Wednesday,  
May 10, 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

(11:02 a.m.)

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2  
3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Hi, good morning. My name is Luke  
4 Wisniewski. And we are here at Station New Orleans. Today is May  
5 10th. The time is 11:02. We are here conducting an interview  
6 regarding the incident that occurred on May 2nd and 3rd regarding  
7 the CG 29113 small boat and sailing vessel *Vanguard*.

8 At this time, can you state your name, and spell it for the  
9 transcriber?

10 My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] common spelling, last  
11 name [REDACTED].

12 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you. Could we go around and identify  
13 everyone in the room?

14 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I am the [REDACTED] of Inspections at Sector New Orleans,  
16 and I'm representing Sector.

17 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning, I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I'm from District 8 in Federal Projects.

19 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] D-8 Legal.

20 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

21 So NTSB is here to conduct -- we're a federal agency charged  
22 with determining the probable cause of this incident. And we make  
23 recommendations based on the facts that we're here gathering  
24 today. We're not part of the Department of Transportation or the  
25 U.S. Coast Guard. We're an independent agency charged by Congress

1 to come up with probable cause and contributing factors. NTSB has  
2 no regulatory or enforcement powers. And the purpose of our  
3 investigation is to increase safety. It's not to assign fault,  
4 blame or liability. However, NTSB cannot offer any guaranteed  
5 confidentiality or immunity from legal or license actions.

6 Is it okay to record this conversation?

7 BM2 [REDACTED] Yes.

8 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you.

9 A transcript of this recording will be made available to you  
10 in roughly a month. And you'll have the opportunity to review  
11 that for it's factual content and make sure what is in there is  
12 what you exactly stated. There will be an errata sheet, so if  
13 there's any corrections, feel free to elaborate on the correction,  
14 and we'll make that adjustment. Because it will go out on our  
15 public docket, PII obviously being removed.

16 But you understood that you have the ability to have a  
17 representative here?

18 BM2 [REDACTED] Yes.

19 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And you do not --

20 BM2 [REDACTED] No, I don't --

21 MR. WISNIEWSKI: -- wish to have one here?

22 MR. [REDACTED] No.

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.

24 INTERVIEW OF BM2 [REDACTED]

25 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

1 Q. We'll start off a little bit about your background, how long  
2 you've been in the Coast Guard. And we just ask that whatever you  
3 can recall, you know, it's the best of your ability of what you  
4 know regarding this incident. We ask that if you don't understand  
5 a question, just ask us to repeat it. If you don't -- if you have  
6 any changes or anything that, hey, you know, I thought this was  
7 the port side, but I meant starboard, just feel free at any time  
8 just identify what you would like to change, and we'll make sure  
9 that's noted correctly.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. With that being said, please tell us, like, when did you  
12 enter the Coast Guard?

13 A. I entered the Coast Guard in March of 2011. I've been in for  
14 6 years. I started off my career Coast Guard Cutter *Active*. I  
15 was there for a year. And went to BMA school, graduated in 2012.  
16 Went to Station Port Angeles. I was certified as a coxon there.  
17 And I mutual transferred down here to Station New Orleans where I  
18 certified as a coxon on all three platforms in roughly 9 months.  
19 And I'm actually headed to Guam after this, so --

20 Q. Congratulations. Going to concrete island.

21 A. Oh, yeah. I love it.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do too.

23 By MR. WISNIEWSKI:

24 Q. In addition to your Coast Guard time, do you have any type of  
25 maritime experience before you entered the Coast Guard?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Recreational boating, or --

3 A. No.

4 Q. Education level?

5 A. I graduated high school. And I've been slowly working on  
6 college, not as much as I would like to.

7 Q. Keep after it. It's a good pursuit.

8 Let's go right then to what is your position here at the  
9 station, and especially at the time of the incident? What was  
10 your --

11 A. So I'm a BM2. I'm also an officer of the day, qualified as  
12 officer of the day. And I am a tactical coxon and regular small  
13 boat coxon.

14 And at the time of the incident, I was the primary coxon --  
15 or the day before the incident, I was the primary coxon.

16 Q. So let's kick it off. Your first involvement with the  
17 Sailing Vessel *Vanguard*?

18 A. We received a call, it was a little bit after lunch. We had  
19 planned to do two-boat training up in the Rigolets, and a  
20 nighttime kind of training. And we had gotten that call. We were  
21 heading up there anyway, so, you know, we told Sector that we  
22 would -- we told them that we would be able to go over there and  
23 check them out and see how they were doing.

24 So we launched, I can't remember what 24 it was. But drove  
25 across the lake and got on the scene with the sailboat. And he

1 was aground. I can show you on the chart where exactly he was.

2 Q. That would be great.

3 A. So right here, at the North Shore Channel. He was about  
4 right there.

5 Q. Can you [REDACTED] it on that?

6 A. Right where that position is. I got on scene with the sail  
7 vessel, and he had told he bought the boat out of Panama City and  
8 had been sailing it for a month. And he got to the Rigolets, and  
9 he wasn't paying attention, is what he told me. And he went past  
10 the aids, and right into that area.

11 Q. Oh, yeah.

12 A. So, you know, well, it's known that this area right here is  
13 shallow. So we follow the aids out. And even following the aids  
14 out, sometimes, it gets pretty shallow.

15 So when I got on scene, he was listing over to port. And he  
16 had his anchor out. I guess he had been trying to drag anchor and  
17 get himself free. But it just wasn't working.

18 So pretty much I got on scene, talked to them. I asked the  
19 captain if he wanted to get off the vessel. I could not -- I  
20 wouldn't be able to tow that boat with the 24 that we had. And it  
21 would be unsafe to do so anyway, pulling a sailboat off with a  
22 skeg on the bottom of it. I don't know how big the skeg is. It  
23 could possibly rip it off and then cause a worsening situation.  
24 So that was the absolutely last thing I wanted to do. And Sector  
25 concurred with that.



1 I didn't feel the need to forcefully remove them off the  
2 vessel. They had food. They had water. They had power. They  
3 had a generator with gas. And they had friends in the North Shore  
4 area to be able to go and assist them had they needed it.

5 There were two people on board. The captain absolutely  
6 refused. But the female occupant on the boat was kind of back and  
7 forth as far as wanting to get off the boat. At first she did,  
8 then she didn't, then she did. And then at the end she didn't.  
9 So we really had nothing else to be done at that level.

10 At first Sector had asked me to grab kind of a plan, asked if  
11 they wanted commercial salvage to come out. He said that he was  
12 going to get it out himself. He didn't want commercial salvage  
13 and that he had friends that would be able to come out and help  
14 him out.

15 Let's see what else. In the event -- because I had warned  
16 him of the incoming weather that was supposed to be coming in, and  
17 he said that if, you know, things got out of hand, that his  
18 buddies would be able to come and get him.

19 So we left, continued on our mission. We actually found a  
20 life jacket here. So we searched on that for a little bit.

21 And got back, and we received a call from Sector pertaining  
22 to that sailboat at about 11 o'clock, I want to say, 11 o'clock to  
23 midnight, that they wanted to get off.

24 So trailered up to the dock, up in the North Shore. Ran out,  
25 met the vessel. The vessel seemed to have -- more water was

1 coming in. The wind was coming out of the northeast, so it was  
2 blowing water into the lake. So the vessel was no longer aground.  
3 And the anchor was ahead of the vessel, whereas before it was  
4 behind it because he was trying to drag anchor.

5 So the vessel was holding anchor. So I got on scene, and I  
6 took the people off the vessel. I still did not believe that  
7 towing that boat, especially with the winds that were going, it  
8 wasn't beneficial to do it. I still didn't know how much of that  
9 boat was still aground, even though it did appear to be floating  
10 right. I thought it would be a better idea to let them figure it  
11 out as far as commercial salvage goes instead of putting undue  
12 risk on the crew and on their vessel.

13 Then I took them back to the dock. And I got back to the  
14 station about 3 in the morning.

15 And woke up the next day, the day of the incident. I left  
16 the station about 11 a.m. I had to do some paperwork and stuff  
17 like that. And I recall driving across the twin span and seeing  
18 the vessel out there. And the wind had picked up a lot. So I  
19 kind of figured that, you know, we'd probably be launching on  
20 something like that again.

21 Q. Is there anything else when you got back to the station,  
22 any --

23 A. It seemed like, you know, that we really didn't want to touch  
24 that sailboat, as far as myself and Sector, they agreed with me,  
25 as far as salvage of that vessel, just creating that undue risk

1 for that boat. But, I mean, that -- to my knowledge, that's  
2 everything.

3 Q. And who did you relay that up to at Sector?

4 A. I'd spoke with the OU over there. Yeah.

5 Q. Can you describe a little bit more of what you said to the  
6 OU?

7 A. I pretty much told him the situation, they were aground. And  
8 I wanted to know if they wanted me to take the people off. They  
9 asked if it was safe to be on the boat. I said yes, it was. They  
10 had all the basic necessities, food, water, and they had a place  
11 to sleep, they had generator and all that kind of stuff.

12 At first, Sector told me to tell the occupants of the vessel  
13 to call Sector every hour to keep like a comm schedule. But they  
14 changed their mind as I was leaving the boat. I had to actually  
15 drive back to them, told them, don't worry about calling. But in  
16 the event that something more happened, to call the Coast Guard.

17 Q. Sorry to interrupt, but -- and just to -- who changed their  
18 mind?

19 A. So it was the OU that I talked to. So --

20 Q. And what time was this roughly?

21 A. Roughly about 1700. That's about when we got back. Sunset  
22 was about 7 that night, so --

23 Q. Can you describe the material condition of the sailing  
24 vessel?

25 A. It's seen better days. The stanchions on it, some of them

1 were separated off of the deck. They were just being held by Y  
2 rope. Seemed to be a lot of growth on the vessel. It's  
3 definitely seen some better days. But as far as being stable, a  
4 stable vessel -- just cosmetically it didn't look right, but  
5 everything else appeared to be fine.

6 Q. The sails on the vessel, when you -- how many people did you  
7 remove?

8 A. Two.

9 Q. Two personnel?

10 A. Uh-huh.

11 Q. I want to understand how -- what the condition of the vessel  
12 was in when you -- you indicated as far as the anchor was out.  
13 You know, you could see that there was tension on the anchor.

14 A. Uh-huh.

15 Q. And it was, in your view, holding?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. And the vessel was riding well, as far as no longer -- you  
18 could see any type of grounding activity?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Any sharp movements?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Was the sails put away?

23 A. They were put --

24 Q. How was the vessel stowed prior to them getting off?

25 A. The sails were put away. And it was like that when I got on

1 scene the first time, as well. As far as, what other equipment  
2 are you referring to? Just the sails?

3 Q. I'm just -- yeah, I'm just curious of the sails. I mean, how  
4 did they leave the vessel? Like, obviously -- well, okay, the  
5 mooring lights. Was the mooring lights put on, since this vessel  
6 is at anchor now?

7 A. He had -- so he had running lights. And he put a flashlight  
8 up to -- because his mast headlight did not work.

9 Q. So that's good. So that's what I want, more of, like, a  
10 little bit of descriptives of the vessel. Obviously the vessel  
11 sunk, so we don't have any --

12 A. Right.

13 Q. Your snapshot, the picture that you can paint for us, the  
14 better we're off. So --

15 A. So, 32 foot. He had a generator up front. The paint was --  
16 it needed a new paint job. Looked like it had some growth on it  
17 as far as barnacles and stuff like that, but nothing too over the  
18 top. It looked like it had been in the water for a while. You  
19 can see -- when it was aground, you could see where the waterline  
20 was, and you can see the growth on the bottom.

21 The condition of the sails, I couldn't tell you. They were  
22 stowed. The stanchions, like I said, there were a few of them  
23 that were kind of broken off from the deck. And they were just  
24 being held by Y rope. Other than that, the vessel looked fine.

25 Q. The material, the vessel constructed of fiberglass and wood,

1 or just wood construction? What --

2 A. It looked like wood but I couldn't tell you 100 percent.

3 Q. Can you go into like how the bow -- was it a flared bow?

4 Even the stern, how was --

5 A. It wasn't flared. No, it -- I really don't know how to  
6 explain it.

7 Q. You didn't go on board?

8 A. No, I did not. No, nobody from the crew that responded to  
9 the case prior to that day got on that boat.

10 Q. Did they indicate that there was water on board at all?

11 A. No, not at all.

12 Q. No -- was the vessel fitted with like a bilge alarm, or any  
13 type of bilge pumps, do you know?

14 A. No, I don't know.

15 MR. WISNIEWSKI: I'll pass the floor at this time. Thank  
16 you.

17 BM2 [REDACTED] Yes, sir.

18 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

19 Q. Good morning, BM2. This is --

20 A. Good morning.

21 Q. -- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Thanks again for your  
22 narrative. That was informative.

23 You mentioned growth on the vessel.

24 A. Uh-huh.

25 Q. So I'm assuming that you're talking about marine life on the

1 bottom of the vessel. Just wanted to clarify that that was what  
2 you meant.

3 A. Correct.

4 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I don't have any further question.

5 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

6 Q. Good morning, [REDACTED]

7 A. Good morning.

8 Q. I'm trying to get a picture, myself, of what the sailboat  
9 looked like. What did the stern -- was it a sloped stern?

10 A. No.

11 Q. Was it square?

12 A. It was a square stern.

13 Q. It was a square stern?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. Did it have a tiller? What -- did it have a rudder? Did it  
16 have a large wheel? Did it have a --

17 A. It had a -- oh, I'm sorry.

18 Q. -- helm, too?

19 A. It had a helm, sir.

20 Q. It had a helm?

21 A. A large helm.

22 Q. Okay. Single mast.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. The sails were furled. One anchor was out?

25 A. Yes, sir. One anchor.

1 Q. And, of course, as you and I know, he was aground in the  
2 middle ground. And so he probably had a good skeg there. Can you  
3 take the -- you said that that water was low when you first came  
4 on scene.

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. That's with the 24. The water was low, because in Lake  
7 Pontchartrain, winds can blow water out of Lake Pontchartrain, and  
8 then the reverse can happen, it blows water in.

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. So the sailboat was heeled over?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Can you give me an assessment on what you thought the -- did  
13 the captain appear knowledgeable, other than taking the greens on  
14 the wrong side in the middle grounds at Lake Pontchartrain?

15 A. I think, sir, that he had an understanding as far as how  
16 sailboats work. But I don't think that he was the most  
17 knowledgeable of sailors. I mean, he bought the vessel in Panama  
18 City, and -- not trying to make any speculations here, but it took  
19 him a month to get what should be a 3-day transit, so --

20 Q. So you articulated to all of us here in the room that you  
21 would not have towed that boat?

22 A. No, sir. I would not have.

23 Q. And I think -- but what -- you clarified that by saying you  
24 would not have towed that with the 24.

25 A. I wouldn't have towed that vessel that day with any of the



1 vessels that we have at this unit, sir.

2 Q. Did -- who did you articulate that to? Did you articulate  
3 that to -- let me regress. Who was the OOD, the station OOD at  
4 the time? Who were you in communications with?

5 A. I was in communication with BM3 [REDACTED] He was -- it was  
6 either [REDACTED] or Fullmore, sir. I can't recall. He was breaking  
7 in under Petty [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

8 Q. So you talked to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] And what did you tell him?  
9 Did you paint a picture of, dude, there's no way I'm towing this  
10 boat?

11 A. I told him that the vessel was aground, there's really  
12 nothing I could do as far as towing the boat. And most of the  
13 communications, though, was with the Sector.

14 Q. With the Sector. So you felt like you painted a good picture  
15 to the Sector --

16 A. Absolutely, sir.

17 Q. -- at the time, saying this is -- did they ever ask you --  
18 you probably already said this. But did they ask you if you  
19 thought you could tow the boat?

20 A. As far as asking if I could tow the boat, I told them that  
21 the vessel was aground, and without putting the boat and the crew  
22 in undue risk, that there's really nothing I could do as far as  
23 the vessel.

24 Q. All right. And it was heeling over.

25 So let's -- so you painted a good picture to the Sector. And

1 that was about what time? Because they shift, they have a crew  
2 shift at 1800, I believe. So --

3 A. I want to say it was about 1630, probably 1700, sir.

4 Q. So then let's fast track to later on that evening, when you  
5 had to go all the way back again. Seas had picked up?

6 A. They were -- so when I got on scene the first time, the seas  
7 were less than 1 foot. It was pretty calm. And when I got on  
8 scene later that night, it was about 1 to 2 foot coming out of the  
9 northeast.

10 Q. One to 2 foot coming out of the northeast. So that was  
11 blowing water into the Rigolets and then into East Lake  
12 Pontchartrain. So the water had come up. And as you know, I live  
13 right here --

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. -- so I had seen where the water probably came up a foot, a  
16 foot and a half.

17 So paint the picture for me again. You're on scene the  
18 second time. And you -- this time the sailboat appeared to be  
19 floating.

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. And not heeled over. Could you tell if it was kind of  
22 bumping the bottom still? You know that skeg is probably pretty  
23 big.

24 A. I couldn't tell exactly if the boat was hitting the bottom,  
25 sir. It was kind of dark that night.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. All I was really worried about was seeing how the boat was  
3 riding, if it -- you know, as far as if it was going over.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. See if there was any weight inside of the boat for water.  
6 And I was worried about the people on board, getting them off, and  
7 getting of the middle ground to get back in safe water.

8 Q. So what platform were you on?

9 A. I was on the 24, sir.

10 Q. This is the second time, you were on the 24, as well?

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. All right. So you got on scene the second time, and you  
13 communicated with the master?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And did you tell him you're coming off? Kind of describe  
16 that exchange with us, please.

17 A. Essentially I came alongside. They asked me what took so  
18 long. I came alongside, told them to come onto the boat. And I  
19 relayed to them where I was taking them. And I was taking them to  
20 the dock.

21 Q. Did you ask the master if he had a second anchor on board,  
22 maybe, that they could put a -- you know, you could put a stern  
23 anchor out, or anything like that?

24 A. No, sir, I did not.

25 Q. So who was it that told you -- so Sector had communicated

1 with you the second time that said the master had requested to be  
2 pulled off the boat. Is that correct?

3 A. Correct. I didn't really communicate with Sector as far as  
4 the second time. It was more still communicating with the OOD.

5 Q. So and then OOD would have been [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

6 A. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] under the instruction of BM2 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

7 Q. So did you have communications with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at any time,  
8 that second time, on "I'm going in, I'm getting the master and the  
9 crewman," and did you discuss the condition of the boat or towing  
10 or possible towing? Or what -- did you have any communications  
11 with the OOD, with [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on what do do next?

12 A. No, sir. The only tasking I got -- and the only  
13 communication I had was with the station over the radio, and the  
14 only tasking I got was to get those people off the vessel and then  
15 take them in.

16 Q. And then at what point in time did you decide that we needed  
17 to put an anchor light on the mast, an all around?

18 A. I wanted to make sure -- right before I left the first time.

19 Q. The first time.

20 A. I told the master do you -- are you able to produce  
21 electrical power for the lights?

22 Q. What was your conversation -- when you've taken the master,  
23 you put him on your boat, what was your conversation of what was  
24 going to happen next? Did you ask him if he was taking on any  
25 water, was the boat still dry? Did you talk about the condition

1 of the boat and what was going to happen the next morning, or --

2 A. I talked to the master as far as his plans on the vessel, but  
3 I did not speak to him about the condition of the vessel.

4 Q. So when you dropped the master -- you dropped the master and  
5 the crewman off at Oak Harbor, correct? At the dock, or --

6 A. At the dock, sir, over on the North Shore.

7 Q. Roger. So you --

8 A. North Shore's over here.

9 Q. Yeah. There you go. Right there. Okay.

10 Upon putting the master on -- when you dropped him off at the  
11 dock, did you -- what -- did you have any conversation with  
12 Sector, okay, this is what I've done and this is what we're going  
13 to do the next morning, or did you relay any information to the  
14 Sector?

15 A. I relayed that to the OOD. I relayed that I had dropped two  
16 people off at the dock, requesting further tasking.

17 Q. And when you say you relayed that to the OOD, did you relay  
18 that to [REDACTED] or to [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

19 A. [REDACTED]

20 Q. Okay, to [REDACTED] So [REDACTED] was your sole -- you were dealing  
21 with [REDACTED] because [REDACTED] was the break-in. Okay. Understood.

22 So you were off-going the next morning?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Did you discuss with the oncoming duty section, hey, this was  
25 a tough boat, I mean, this is a -- it was hard aground, you know,

1 it's got a big skeg, because it was laying on its side. Did you  
2 kind of paint a picture to the oncoming coxons?

3 A. As far as the oncoming OOD, I spoke with Jerome Spellman a  
4 little bit about the vessel. I told him that I had responded to a  
5 vessel that was aground. And we talked about it briefly.

6 Q. Did he inquire a lot? Because, I mean, it was something he  
7 was going to get stuck with, I'm sure. Did he ask a lot of  
8 questions? Did he -- there wasn't a big hot wash?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Hey, I know you were up all night, and the master's safely on  
11 board, you know, we dropped him off at dry land, but here's the  
12 sailboat, 32-foot sailboat, it's still anchored, we hope, in the  
13 middle grounds? Did you have -- you just had a small conversation  
14 about it or --

15 A. It was just a small conversation, sir. It wasn't a big hot  
16 wash at all, or anything.

17 Q. No more communications with Sector that next day, or anything  
18 like that on this case? Nobody called you and said -- you know,  
19 for any more clarification or --

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. Now, you said you saw the sailboat when you were going home,  
22 going back to Slidell, you were going home, and you were on  
23 Interstate 10, the high-rise, and you saw the sailboat. Did it  
24 still look like it was in the same position, anchored, just not  
25 going anywhere?

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. What was the weather like? Do you remember?

3 A. I remember it got a little more windy. It was coming from  
4 the northeast still, but it was blowing a little harder.

5 Q. And it continued to blow to the northeast. So do you recall  
6 if the water had come up even more?

7 A. I wasn't able to tell, sir. Not driving --

8 Q. But based on your experience, what would you say?

9 A. Looking at the vessel at that time, it looked like it was  
10 still heeled over. It looked like nothing had changed. So I  
11 figured that the water hadn't come up.

12 Q. Roger. Understood. Understood. Yeah. Good deal.

13 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] No further questions at this time.

14 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

15 Q. Luke, NTSB. Just going to go back to the time you were  
16 preparing to take them off. Could you -- did you ask any  
17 questions regarding that anchor chain? You know, could you see  
18 how far the scope and the row was, how much was cleated out?

19 A. I didn't. I should have asked. I didn't.

20 Q. That's not wrong.

21 How about the conversation with the two crew personnel that  
22 you rescued, that you took off?

23 A. It was very, very brief. I pretty much asked him what his  
24 plan was, where I was taking him. He was clearly upset that he  
25 had to get off the vessel. The first time I had went out, he

1 absolutely refused any kind of, you know, assistance as far as  
2 getting escorted off of the vessel. He absolutely refused. And  
3 he said that he was going to get it done.

4 So I figured he was upset. So there really wasn't any  
5 conversation. He kind of sat on the bow of the boat and just kind  
6 of hung out up there.

7 Q. You spoke earlier about they were looking to have commercial  
8 salvage that they had a buddy. Was there any discussion on that  
9 transit in, or during the second time you went out there to them?

10 A. I had asked him if he had a plan as far as the vessel, and he  
11 said -- all he had said was he had buddies coming out to help him.

12 Q. But no time, no time table, or laid out any plan?

13 A. No.

14 Q. In detail?

15 A. No.

16 Q. I'm asking you now to -- you know, I understand it's very  
17 brief time you spent with these two individuals. But can you kind  
18 of assess their ability, their capability with this type of  
19 sailboat?

20 A. I -- well, at the time, my assessment wasn't too high as far  
21 as them running aground here, but I could not give you something.  
22 I had just met them that day and it was very brief.

23 Q. Yeah. I'm just curious, are they local to this area? I  
24 mean, did that discussion occur?

25 A. He was from New Orleans, I believe, and she was from New



1 Orleans. So, as far as the area, and he had mentioned that he had  
2 friends on the North Shore. So I, you know, I figured that  
3 he's --

4 Q. I'm just trying to assess, because it looks like he run  
5 aground in a very marked area. So I just wanted to --

6 A. Absolutely. Oh, yeah.

7 Q. -- assess his sailing. We'll talk to him later. But I want  
8 just your take on it.

9 A. From what he told me, he said he wasn't paying attention. He  
10 said he saw -- there's an aid at the mouth of East Lake  
11 Pontchartrain. And he thought that it kind of just opened up and  
12 was just wide open. That's what he told me. He realized after he  
13 had ran aground that there was a channel that led to the bridge.

14 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Thank you. That's all.

15 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

16 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I just have one more question.

17 I wanted to understand, did I understand you correctly, you  
18 said you were the primary coxon that day?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. So you're on the primary team?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Thank you.

23 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

24 Q. And this is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] again. So that was the day before?

25 A. The day before.

1 Q. So you were the primary the day before, and then typically  
2 what happens when you show up for duty, the OOD assigns a primary  
3 and secondary coxon.

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. Can you discuss what that -- what does that mean?

6 A. So Station New Orleans is a two-boat station. So the primary  
7 crew will be the first to go out on any search and rescue that we  
8 have in our AOR. And the secondary crew will kind of be the  
9 backup primary as far as if we have anything down south in Lake  
10 Delacroix or anything like that, or anywhere else in the AOR, they  
11 would be able to respond.

12 Q. When you first had contact with the sailboat and the master  
13 and the crew, did you go aboard personally?

14 A. No, sir. Not -- at no time during that whole day, the first  
15 time or the second time, did we go aboard that vessel.

16 Q. Was there a reason for that?

17 A. The first time, we were just speaking with the vessel, with  
18 the master, alongside. I didn't see a need to go aboard his  
19 vessel. And the second time, we literally drove alongside, they  
20 got off, and we backed away.

21 Q. I'm trying to figure out how this gentleman ran aground. And  
22 as you and I, we know this area very, very well, whether he was  
23 using electronic charting or paper charts, or he was just -- I  
24 don't know how he was -- do you have any sense of what he was  
25 using to navigate by?

1 A. I didn't see any electronic charting or any paper charts out  
2 on deck. I couldn't tell you, sir.

3 Q. All right. Fair enough. No further questions from me, sir.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.

5 I just want to identify, the coxon was referring to NOAA  
6 chart number 11317 -- I'm sorry, 11371.

7 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

8 Q. And we were looking at Lake Pontchartrain with inside the  
9 limits of the Route 11 Bridge, correct?

10 A. Correct, between the Highway 90 -- so this is -- what are we  
11 looking at? Highway 90 Bridge.

12 Q. There's Highway 90 Bridge.

13 A. This is the twin span.

14 Q. Yep.

15 A. And this is the -- the soundings are in feet, not fathoms.  
16 And the soundings would be in mean low water. The area where the  
17 sailboat would have run aground at was in between 5 foot and 6  
18 foot.

19 Q. And it's marked on the chart, a circle and an X, of the  
20 location of the grounding.

21 Before I conclude, is there anything you'd like to change, or  
22 anything you'd like to add to this?

23 A. I'd like to add, even though it is charted by the 6 foot  
24 right here, the water was low. So water depth on scene was about  
25 3 to 4 foot.

1 Q. No, thank you for that.

2 You've obviously had some time to come back, talk to your  
3 fellow shipmates here and discuss lessons learned. Is there  
4 anything that you'd like to share with this group as far as how  
5 to avoid this type of reoccurrence?

6 A. I think the risk versus gain definitely was not looked at. I  
7 don't know the situation. I wasn't on scene. But to put a vessel  
8 that's taking on water in tow -- and I don't know if they knew if  
9 it was taking on water or not.

10 Honestly, what I would have done, personally, I would have  
11 let it hit the bridge. Let it get somewhere stable. That way I  
12 could get alongside, provide the proper -- you know, if I need to  
13 dewater it, instead of towing something backwards. That's not  
14 what we're trained to do.

15 I wouldn't have put that boat in tow. That's just personally  
16 speaking. But I think there was a huge, I don't know, risk versus  
17 gain, I think, wasn't looked at. So --

18 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Appreciate that. Thank you.

19 Do you have any other follow-up questions based on that  
20 conversation?

21 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I have one follow-up question. But can we take  
22 a break fore a second, please?

23 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Certainly.

24 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Just want to discuss here.

25 MR. WISNIEWSKI: We're pausing at 12:41 [sic].

1 (Off the record.)

2 (On the record.)

3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Hi, good afternoon. This is Luke  
4 Wisniewski. I'm in Station New Orleans. Today is Wednesday, May  
5 10th. We are following up with the coxon from the day before, who  
6 was also the OOD, and just wants to state his, or just clarify  
7 something from the other day. The time is 12:03.

8 And, please, begin.

9 BM2 [REDACTED] Good afternoon. My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
10 spelled [REDACTED].

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And go around the room.

12 [REDACTED] Yeah, and then [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from D-8 Legal  
13 back in for this correction session.

14 BM2 [REDACTED] So earlier I stated that the OOD was BM3 [REDACTED]  
15 [REDACTED] I, myself, was the OOD. So when I was on the case, I had  
16 called the OOD phone, who was held by BM3 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I  
17 relayed all the information to Sector New Orleans.

18 [REDACTED] And that was for what date?

19 BM2 [REDACTED] That was for the day -- May 2nd. The day  
20 before the incident.

21 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

22 Q. And what time frames we talking?

23 A. The first time I launched, so around 1630, 1700. But I was  
24 the OD for the whole day leading up to that. And I took -- I had  
25 the OD that night into the morning. But the reliefs were

1 conducted by BM3 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

2 Q. Okay. Thank you very much. Thanks for clarifying.

3 MS. WISNIEWSKI: This concludes the follow-up at 12:05.

4 (Whereupon, at 12:05 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 10, 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.

---

Karen Coen Brooks  
Transcriber