

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

(9:46 a.m.)

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2  
3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Hi, good morning. My name is Luke  
4 Wisniewski with the National Transportation Safety Board. We're  
5 here at Station New Orleans. Today is May 10th at 9:46 a.m. We  
6 are here with the breakin OOD.

7 For the transcriber, can you state your name and spell it for  
8 her?

9 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]: My name is [REDACTED] [REDACTED], spelled [REDACTED]-  
10 n [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Great. Thank you.

12 And this is related to the Coast Guard 29113 small boat  
13 incident with the sailing vessel *Vanguard*.

14 Can we go around the room and identify everyone here?

15 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] So, good morning. My name is [REDACTED]  
16 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I am chief of inspections at the Sector,  
17 and representative for Sector.

18 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Good morning. I'm [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
19 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] And I'm with District 8. I'm at Federal Projects  
20 there.

21 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from D-8 Legal.

22 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Great. Thank you.

23 So NTSB is here. We're an independent federal agency. And  
24 we're charged with determining the probable cause of the  
25 transportation, you know, this incident. We write recommendations

1 to both industry and the Coast Guard. We're not part of  
2 Department of Transportation or the U.S. Coast Guard. We're  
3 independent, and we answer to the Congress.

4 The purpose of our investigation is to increase safety. It's  
5 not to assign fault or blame or liability. However, NTSB cannot  
6 offer or guarantee any confidentiality or immunity from any type  
7 of legal action.

8 A transcript -- it is okay to record this conversation?

9 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]: Yes.

10 MR. WISNIEWSKI: A transcript of this recording will be made  
11 available to you within about a month, and you'll have the  
12 opportunity to review the factual information and make any  
13 corrections to it prior to it being released on the public docket.

14 You can have -- are you aware that the interviewee can have a  
15 representative present?

16 MS. [REDACTED]: Yes.

17 MR. WISNIEWSKI: And you're okay with not having someone  
18 here?

19 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]: Yes.

20 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.

21 INTERVIEW OF MS. [REDACTED]

22 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

23 Q. So let's go first into a little bit of your background. But  
24 before I --

25 If you, if there's any questions that you're not sure of, or

1 the way we ask them, just say hey, I'm not sure what you're after,  
2 can you rephrase that, or I don't understand your question.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. At any time during this, if you feel that something you left  
5 out, or, hey, you know, I said port side, I mean starboard, just  
6 go back, just clarify it with us. We just want to have it as  
7 factually correct as possible.

8 So with that being said, can you indicate, like when did you  
9 enter the Coast Guard?

10 A. I joined 2013, in August, so I went through boot camp in  
11 November, so couple months later.

12 Q. And how many different stations have you been at?

13 A. This is my second unit. So I was at Station New Haven in  
14 Connecticut as a non-rate. And then I went to BMA school in  
15 Virginia. And then I came here right from A school.

16 Q. Can you discuss the process or breakin OOD, officers of the  
17 day?

18 A. So, basically, as the breakin I follow around a senior OOD.  
19 So that day I had followed around BM2 [REDACTED] We have a couple  
20 others in the section, but he was the officer of the day that day.

21 So basically I just follow him around, learn from him what  
22 our daily checks are, armory checks, pyro checks, just running the  
23 daily life here at the station, pretty much. You're making all  
24 the decisions for what's going on that day, who's going on what  
25 operations, what's happening with the boats. You're pretty much

1 in charge of everything that day under the CDO and the commanding  
2 officer.

3 Q. And how long have you been -- as far as this qualification,  
4 how far in are you? Are you close to being qualified, or --

5 A. I would say I'm about a quarter of the way through. I just  
6 started probably last month I would say. So I've been breaking in  
7 for close to a month now. So --

8 Q. And how long is the process?

9 A. They give you six months.

10 Q. Six months.

11 A. But it usually doesn't take that long. I'm trying to get it  
12 done here soon.

13 Q. Prior to entering the Coast Guard, how many years -- do you  
14 have maritime experience? Or were you --

15 A. No.

16 Q. Any personal recreational vessels or anything that you grew  
17 up with?

18 A. Not in particular. No.

19 Q. As far as degrees, do you have any prior -- other than high  
20 school, education as far as technical --

21 A. I have some college. I'm actually in college right now --

22 Q. Oh, great.

23 A. -- for Biology, so --

24 Q. Pursuing a --

25 A. Biology degree.

1 Q. Bachelor's in Biology?

2 A. Right.

3 Q. Thank you.

4 MR. WISNIEWSKI: So let's -- if anyone has any questions,  
5 I'll go around real quick. If anyone has any questions about  
6 background information?

7 Okay.

8 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

9 Q. That being said, let's go right into the first involvement  
10 that you had with the sailing vessel *Vanguard*.

11 A. Okay. So when I came on duty May 3rd, it was my  
12 understanding that a crew had gone out the day before and  
13 responded to this aground sailboat. They didn't do anything with  
14 it, because it was aground.

15 And then next day I come on duty, we hadn't really done much  
16 that day, because the weather was on and off. It was fine. And  
17 then it would pick up, and then it would be fine again, then it  
18 would pick up. So we didn't have a big window of time to go out  
19 and do really any operations that day.

20 And then afternoon we got the call that a sailboat, it wasn't  
21 confirmed yet if it was the same sailboat, was adrift between I-10  
22 and Highway 11. And they wanted us to, basically, initially, to  
23 go out and verify that it was the same boat from the day before.

24 So the OOD and myself were two of the coxons that were on  
25 duty, along with one other coxon and then BM3 [REDACTED] who is



1 our newest coxon.

2 Being that it wasn't a distress call, we thought, oh, this  
3 would be, you know, a great case for a new coxon. It's basically  
4 what we train for. It's two-boat, we do a lot of towing. So we  
5 called the CDO, XPO was here, another BM1 was here. We were kind  
6 of clearing it all through everybody, kind of discussing if this  
7 would be a good first case for her.

8 On top of that, she was very eager to go. Really was adamant  
9 about going. So we came up with her, two other breakin coxons and  
10 then one of our most experienced boat crew members here, and had  
11 them trailer up to Rigolets Marina.

12 At that time, tasking was just to verify that it was the same  
13 boat and how we were going to do that was by state numbering. So  
14 I believe they did a GAR on the way. You'd have to double check  
15 with them. But we got passed over the phone that, the GAR, I  
16 believe, was 21.

17 And then we got a call when they launched. They told me that  
18 they were en route. So I said okay, you know, be safe. Let me  
19 know when you get on scene kind of deal. Either report to me or  
20 through the radio.

21 So they ended up calling me back, told me that they were on  
22 scene, weather was pretty calm at the time. They were in a good  
23 window of time where the weather had really calmed down. I  
24 believe it was like 1 to 2 feet seas, and winds were about 5 to 10  
25 knots. So pretty much perfect conditions for towing.

1           And I asked them to get the state numbering, which they  
2 passed to me through the phone. Then before I hung up, I told  
3 them I was going to give Sector a call back and see what the  
4 further tasking would be, if they wanted us to tow it, if they  
5 wanted us, you know, to just let it do its thing, and drift  
6 wherever it was going to go, or what they wanted us to do with it.

7           I also had texted them earlier and asked them to send me some  
8 pictures, which actually never ended up coming through.

9           But, anyway, so I hung up with them, called Sector, passed  
10 them the state numbering and asked for further tasking. And they  
11 had pretty much considered towing to Rigolets Marina. And based  
12 off my experience towing, I said that that wouldn't be the best  
13 option because of shallow water. Plus towing a sailboat through  
14 there, just, it's a small channel, and they would likely run  
15 aground again.

16           And then on top of that, there's just really nowhere to moor  
17 it up in that marina. There's not any large pier space there to  
18 moor it. So I had suggested Oak Harbor, which was just on the  
19 other side of Highway 11, they have a lot of space there to moor a  
20 sailboat. And we have a good relationship with a facility there  
21 called The Dock. And they were like really cool with us mooring  
22 up a boat there.

23           So I passed over the tasking to the 29113, and told them,  
24 like, look, Sector would really like for you to tow this boat into  
25 Oak Harbor, to which they responded, like, okay, like, we're

1 totally like trying to get lines over and see how it rides with  
2 the tow and everything.

3 And I advised them, you know, like, be cautious. It was  
4 aground. And it's kind of a known thing if a boat was previously  
5 aground, it could be taking on water.

6 So they were like okay, well, we'll try it. We'll see how it  
7 goes kind of deal.

8 So last I had heard from them is they were throwing over  
9 lines, and they were going to start putting in the tow.

10 Probably, I don't know, 20 minutes later, I'd have to look at  
11 the logs to give you an exact time. But I had received another  
12 call from them, and they said that they weren't quite sure,  
13 because they couldn't safely get a person onto the sailboat. But  
14 they said that the boat may be taking a little bit of water. They  
15 can't tell. But by the way it's riding, it looks as if it might  
16 be taking on a little bit of water.

17 And I was asking them like how their tow was positioned. Is  
18 water coming over the bow? Or do you think water's coming up  
19 through the hull somewhere. And they said that they were towing  
20 it stern-to-stern, which isn't a typical way for us to tow.

21 Typically we would tow from our stern to their bow. That  
22 would be the best setup possible. But they had told me that a  
23 piece of a sail had fallen over that forward bit on the bow, so  
24 they weren't able to attach a line there.

25 Then they were telling me that they were going to try to

1 reposition to do a stern-to-bow tow, like how we would normally  
2 do. And I told them okay, be safe. If you feel as if it's taking  
3 on water, by all means, just break tow, and we'll figure something  
4 else out. And they were okay with that.

5 So we ended up hanging up the phone. So at that point, last  
6 I knew, they were repositioning the tow.

7 About ten minutes later, I was on the computer in the  
8 training room working on morale minutes, and I get another call  
9 from them. And it's completely frantic. It's BM3 [REDACTED] and  
10 she's beside herself. I can barely make out what she's saying,  
11 because the wind is blowing through the phone. And on top of that  
12 she's staying stuff like I had to cut the two line, the boat sank,  
13 the boat's sinking. We've lost all power to engines.

14 So I get up and BM3 [REDACTED] was just in the room with me.  
15 He had left the room to go to the head in his room. So I run to  
16 room 1, which is where he stays and knocked on the door. And told  
17 him, like, look, stuff, like it's going south right now. I need  
18 you to try to talk to her.

19 And so he had taken the phone from me at that point. And  
20 pretty much right after I handed him the phone, he had lost  
21 connection with her. So he was trying to call her back over and  
22 over again, with no response.

23 So we came to the watch room, tried having the watch standard  
24 call over the radio several times. No one was responding.

25 It was probably a good five minutes of us trying to get a

1 hold of her before we actually got through to her on the phone.  
2 And still, at that point, she was pretty frantic, still trying to  
3 figure stuff out. I believe we lost communication with her again.

4 And then it was probably another five minutes after that  
5 before we got a calm call from them, and they had told us that the  
6 boat had began to sink. They had to back down. And in the  
7 process of them backing down to try to back the tow, it had got in  
8 the props, which resulted in them losing all engine power.

9 And then the boat eventually  
10 did sink. But now that they had no engine power, they got set  
11 right into that bridge. And the seas, at that point, had picked  
12 up to like 4 to 6 feet. So they were just getting slammed into  
13 the Highway 11 bridge.

14 So I believe BM3 [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] were on the  
15 back deck trying to get that line out of the prop so they could  
16 regain power. And BM3 [REDACTED] was able to get the engines turned  
17 back on. They backed away from the bridge.

18 So then at that point, we had told them, you know, just stay  
19 where you are, get somewhere where the water isn't as rough. And  
20 we're going to try to figure out how to get you guys home, whether  
21 it's sending another crew out to tow you back, or just have you  
22 guys trailer.

23 It ended up being that we had them just go over to Oak Harbor  
24 and moor up. And we sent out another person to drive the trailer  
25 over and get the boat on the trailer. So, and then they ended up

1 coming back later that night.

2 But that's really all I got.

3 Q. Were you still onboard, on watch when they arrived here?

4 A. I was still a breaking in OOD, yes.

5 We actually had another case that night. So after all that  
6 had kind of settled down for maybe 10 minutes, we got another case  
7 of a sailboat aground. So we were working on that.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you for that narrative. It was very good.

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. Just had a couple questions I had for, to follow up with  
11 that.

12 Did the -- you mentioned trying to get a hold of them, radio  
13 VHF as well as repeated cell phone calls. What would you say is  
14 your primary like mode of communication with the vessel?

15 A. Primary would definitely be the radio. But we had already --  
16 I was already on the phone with her when she gave me that last  
17 call where she was frantic. So we were hoping that she still had  
18 a phone nearby, and that would be the quickest way for her to  
19 answer. But typically it's via radio.

20 Q. So you indicated that you were reaching back to Sector, and  
21 you were talking to someone. Can you identify who that person at  
22 Sector was that was giving the --

23 A. Initially it was Mr. [REDACTED]. He was the SMC that day. And  
24 then when I had called back and told them that they might be  
25 taking on a little bit of water, it was an OS. But I don't

1 remember what his name was. I had asked for [REDACTED] [REDACTED] But he  
2 said that [REDACTED] [REDACTED] had left for the day, so I don't know what  
3 that OS's name was.

4 Q. Who was the one that you spoke to, or who you involved with  
5 the decision that you relayed back to the vessel to put it under  
6 tow to keep it away from the bridge?

7 A. That was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] still.

8 Q. And was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] involved with the decision to go to Oak  
9 Harbor as a safe harbor?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. During your discussion back and forth with the vessel, was  
12 there any discussion or topic on the weather conditions, or the  
13 squalls coming in, and the weather that was forecasted for the  
14 area?

15 A. When we originally got the call, we had a little  
16 pushback to begin with because we're not salvage. The only reason  
17 we did send someone out was because it was drifting towards the  
18 bridge, and we wanted to prevent any further damage to the boat or  
19 to the bridge.

20 And then on top of that, yes, we had discussed how the  
21 weather was on and off, good and bad all day. So it was  
22 definitely something that was discussed. But we had seen that  
23 window of where the weather was going to be dying down for a  
24 little bit. So we were hoping to get it done before any kind of  
25 weather would pick back up.

1 Q. Can you go through your understanding of Coast Guard salvage  
2 policy, what you should tow, what you shouldn't, based on what you  
3 know from the comps instructions and salvage plans?

4 A. Basically, salvage isn't our primary mission. So in order to  
5 not take away from commercial salvage, like Sea Tow, or any, or  
6 Tow USA, or any of those other companies, we generally just don't  
7 salvage unless it's to prevent any further damage to property or  
8 life. So that's, in a nutshell, a summary of our salvage policy.

9 MR. WISNIEWSKI: I'll pass the floor.

10 Thank you.

11 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Um-hum.

12 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

13 Q. Good morning. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

14 I have a couple follow up questions. Again. Thank you for  
15 the narrative. That was great.

16 So you mentioned that when you guys initially got underway,  
17 that it was to verify that it was the same boat that had grounded  
18 the previously day?

19 A. Right.

20 Q. Did that direction come from the Sector? Or did it come  
21 from, internally at the station?

22 A. That direction came from Sector.

23 Q. And do you know who gave you guys that direction?

24 A. I know it was between [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. I know they  
25 were both working on it. I mostly have communications with Mr.



1 [REDACTED] And I believe BM2 [REDACTED] mostly talked with Mr. [REDACTED]  
2 Q. Great. And you were communicating with the coxon of the  
3 vessel via cell phone?  
4 A. Um-hum  
5 Q. Is that correct?  
6 A. Yes.  
7 Q. Were you guys using -- are they Coast Guard issued cell  
8 phones? Are they personal cell phones?  
9 A. I was using the OOD's cell phone, which is our Coast Guard  
10 issued phone here.  
11 Q. How about the coxon?  
12 A. She must have been using her personal cell phone.  
13 Q. I have no further questions.  
14 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
15 Q. Good morning.  
16 A. Good morning.  
17 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
18 [REDACTED] could you paint me a picture, give me a timeline for  
19 starters. This all started what time in the afternoon?  
20 A. Yes, in the afternoon.  
21 Q. Approximately what time?  
22 A. I believe it was around, I believe the initial call was  
23 around 5, 5:30 in the afternoon.  
24 Q. So you had about 3 hours, at the most, of light left in the  
25 day?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Were you watching the weather, the radar continuously, seeing  
3 what was --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- headed our way? Okay.  
6 Newest coxon, correct?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Was the crew already pre-determined that morning? Because I  
9 see that you had a BM3 coxon, newest coxon. Did you have two  
10 breakin coxons also assigned to that boat crew?

11 A. Yes. We had BM3 [REDACTED] and BM3 [REDACTED] And they're both  
12 breaking in coxon currently.

13 Q. Would you describe that as a typical scenario, where you  
14 would have a brand new coxon with breakin coxons as well?

15 A. Yes. I don't see why not. We had them already on a crew, I  
16 believe, for the day, for whatever operations. But we didn't have  
17 any operations that day because of on and off weather.

18 Q. So BM3 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were they  
19 your primary crew? Were they assigned primary? Or were they  
20 secondary?

21 A. I don't know if they were a made-up crew yet or not. It was  
22 something that we had come up with when we had heard of what kind  
23 of a case this was.

24 Q. Thank you. Did you have a good idea of how long, what type  
25 of sailboat, the condition of the sailboat, how large the sailboat

1 was?

2 A. I knew it was between 30 and 40 feet. I didn't know what  
3 type of condition it was in. All I knew is it was previously  
4 aground. So that was all the information I had received on it.

5 Q. Why did you decide to take the 29 instead of a 45?

6 A. I believe that they mostly wanted to take the 29, because  
7 they wanted to trailer up there. They didn't want to drive across  
8 the lake. They wanted to trailer and launch out at Rigolets  
9 Marina.

10 Q. Would you have -- wouldn't you think a 40-foot sailboat would  
11 be a little large for a 29-foot response boat?

12 A. No. I think it's definitely doable. Based off of my  
13 experience, I've towed vessels that size with a 29. I mean, 45  
14 would also be a good platform for it, too.

15 I think the main reason, though, like I said, why they wanted  
16 to take the 29 is so that they would be able to trailer in case  
17 weather got bad. They wouldn't have no other option but to drive  
18 across the lake if it got bad again. So they wanted to be able to  
19 have a quick way out if they needed it.

20 Q. What was the condition of the lake earlier? I know storms  
21 were rolling through that day. I think, I definitely remember  
22 that day.

23 A. Right.

24 Q. And I was actually -- I live on the water in that area, and  
25 remember that day vividly. Did -- at times, when those storms

1 were moving through would you have rather been in a 45? Or would  
2 you have rather had the 29?

3 A. I couldn't really say. I mean, at the time that they got  
4 there, it was calm. So I would have rather been in the 29. But  
5 towards the end of their case, I mean, the 45 would have been a  
6 better platform for the conditions.

7 Q. If the coxon would have articulated that the boat was in  
8 really bad shape --

9 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Can I take a quick discussion between us, just  
10 real quick off the record.

11 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Sure.

12 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Is that okay?

13 Sorry about that.

14 (Off the record.)

15 (On the record.)

16 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Good morning. The time is 10:17. We're  
17 reconvening the interview with the breakin OOD.

18 Please.

19 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

20 Q. Again, good morning. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
21 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the question I have to you is do you feel like  
22 the coxon and the crew had painted a sufficient picture of what  
23 was going on on-scene for you to make decisions, or for you to --  
24 because your role is if you feel like risk versus gain that we  
25 should not proceed, your role is to offer advice to the coxon, to

1 say let's not proceed. Let's come up with another plan.

2 So back to my question is do you feel like a sufficient  
3 picture was painted to you?

4 A. I think that they gave me the best of what they had available  
5 to them. She believed she was taking on water, but she couldn't  
6 safely put someone over to determine officially if that's what was  
7 happening. And she conveyed that to me. And then I gave her  
8 advice, and told her, hey, if it starts going south, if you feel  
9 like this is unsafe, break tow, and we'll figure something else  
10 out.

11 Next communication I had with her is the boat was sinking,  
12 and all hell was breaking loose.

13 And then I'm sure in that moment there was probably so much  
14 going on with her, so much that she was trying to settle and fix,  
15 that she didn't have time to tell me everything that was going on.  
16 I think at that point they were in survival mode.

17 Q. So before tow was hooked up, you were aware that she was  
18 going to tow it from astern?

19 A. No, I was not aware of that. I didn't learn that it was in a  
20 stern-to-stern tow until she had told me that they were taking on  
21 a little bit of water, or they could possibly be taking on water.

22 Q. So, again, I want to get a clear picture of what was going  
23 on, of what you were thinking. So before the coxon hooked up the  
24 tow, were you -- did you think that the boat was taking on water?

25 A. No, not at all. I mean, it's something that does happen when

1 boats are aground. But that had not been passed to me at all that  
2 she -- I don't even think she knew, at that moment, that it was  
3 taking on water. Because what she had conveyed to me is after she  
4 had put lines over and began to tow is when she felt that  
5 something was off with the tow. She had to give it a lot more  
6 power than what she had anticipated. So she believed that it was  
7 taking on water at that point.

8 Q. Was your internal GAR score starting to raise?

9 A. When she had called me back and told me that she believed  
10 that it could be taking on water, yes. Because up until that  
11 point, it just seemed as if it was going to be a normal tow. When  
12 she called me back and told me that, I immediately called Sector  
13 and said hey, this is what's happening. Keeping you guys  
14 informed. She thinks that it could be taking on water. We're not  
15 really sure yet. And the OS, I'm not sure what his name was, had  
16 said the same thing I said. If you guys feel unsafe, break tow,  
17 and we'll go from there. And I had conveyed that to her also.

18 Q. At what point in time did you realize that she had the  
19 sailboat hooked up to the stern of the boat?

20 A. Stern-to-stern? When she had called me to tell me that it  
21 could be taking on water. I had asked her well, why do you think  
22 that is. Do you think it's coming through the hull? Or do you  
23 think it's coming over the bow? Or like how is it taking on  
24 water. And she explained to me how the two was set up at that  
25 point.

1 She said well I have it hooked up stern-to-stern. And that  
2 kind of threw up a red flag to me, where I was like, okay, wait,  
3 why? Like why are you towing it that way. And she had explained  
4 to me how there was a sail that was over that forward bit, and  
5 they didn't have a good connection point on the bow of the vessel.  
6 So there is, I believe, two cleats on the stern of the vessel that  
7 they had hooked up a bridle to.

8 Q. Were you thinking -- did you feel like you could be, that you  
9 would be empowered to say stop, break tow, this does not sound --

10 A. Yes, and that's essentially what I did. She was already  
11 coming to that point where she was realizing she needed to do  
12 that. And she just needed that little bit more of, I guess,  
13 reassurance from me to be like okay, I think you should  
14 reposition. And she agreed. She was like, okay, I'm going to  
15 come down and reposition tow.

16 And she had explained to me that there was a handrail that  
17 went all the way around the bow of the boat that she was going to  
18 connect to because at the time, she said that was really the only  
19 connection point that she would be able to get to.

20 So I agreed. I said that sounds like a good idea. Let me  
21 know how it goes. If you need to break tow for whatever reason,  
22 do it, you know.

23 And it was in that process of them repositioning tow that  
24 lines started getting caught in their crawl, and they lost all  
25 power, and the boat started sinking. Everything started happening

1 at once, it seemed.

2 Q. Now, all this time you were feeding the -- where was the OOD?  
3 Where was [REDACTED] at?

4 A. I was sitting in the training room on the computer next to  
5 the projector. And he was in the training office. So we were 20  
6 feet away from each other the whole time. And we were actually  
7 just talking about it. I had told him, oh, she had it hooked up  
8 stern to stern. And I told her to reposition. He kind of was  
9 like oh, good, like thanks for telling her that. That's a great  
10 idea. And we were just talking about that a little bit. And he  
11 was like I'm going to go use the restroom. I'll be right back.

12 And it was in that time period that I had got that final  
13 call.

14 Q. Did the coxon articulate to you that the weather was building  
15 prior to making that final adjustment?

16 A. Not to me over the phone. She may have over the radio. But  
17 it wasn't conveyed to me. It wasn't apparent to me that that's  
18 what was happening with the weather until all was said and done,  
19 until everything had already happened.

20 Q. At any time did you ask the crew to update the GAR score, or  
21 to reevaluate their GAR?

22 A. No, I didn't ask them to. I don't know if they did. They  
23 might have passed that over the radio. I don't know. But it  
24 wasn't passed to me.

25 Q. I'm trying to get a feeling for what you were feeling. And I



1 can see where you probably -- once she said she was breaking tow,  
2 you felt better about things.

3 A. Right. I felt better that she would be going to one of our  
4 more standard way of towing.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. You know, I mean, it's not typical to tow stern-to-stern.

7 Q. I don't have any further questions at this time.

8 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Okay. Thank you.

9 Luke Wisniewski, NTSB.

10 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

11 Q. Want to go into a little bit now of training of the crew  
12 members onboard. Were you involved with the training of the  
13 coxon?

14 A. Not really. I guess somewhat in a way we would talk about  
15 certain things. But for most of her training she was in the  
16 opposite section of me. It was actually her first day in our  
17 section when this case happened. So I really wasn't involved with  
18 her training too much at all.

19 Q. And how about other members of the crew, the --

20 A. The other ones, yes. So both the breakin coxons, BM3 [REDACTED]  
21 and BM3 [REDACTED] I've taken them out several times to do different  
22 types training for coxon. And [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I've been underway  
23 with him countless times. He's one of our most senior crewman  
24 here.

25 Q. And were you involved with the OOD when this crew was

1 formulated?

2 A. So we were in the armory getting everybody gunned up, ready  
3 to go. And he was on the phone with the CDO discussing who was  
4 going to be getting underway. So I wasn't involved too much with  
5 the decision-making on that. We kind of all were putting in our  
6 input. I agreed that it would be a good first case for her, since  
7 it wasn't distress. But I wasn't the one that made that final  
8 call of show was going.

9 Q. Just to clarify, you're saying distress because the original  
10 tasking was to go out, identify the location --

11 A. Right.

12 Q. -- and take photographs?

13 A. Right. That and there was no people involved. It was an  
14 unmanned sailboat.

15 Q. And obviously, you know, you sent a crew out there with a  
16 given task. If things elevated, as they did, as far as your view  
17 of -- and based on what you understand of the crew's abilities and  
18 capabilities, can you give me your assessment of, from now it goes  
19 from a simple take pictures to you've given a task to hook up a  
20 tow. Can you just give me an assessment of your, you know, your  
21 assessment of their capabilities based on the fact that you had  
22 two people breaking in as coxons?

23 A. Um-hum. I think as far as capabilities go, they were very  
24 capable to do what we had sent them out to do. I mean, she's a  
25 qualified coxon. So as a qualified coxon, you should be expected

1 to go out and do any case that comes up.

2 And then as far as two breakin coxons, they know pretty much  
3 everything she knows. They're coming up to the point where  
4 they're about to be qualified, too. So in my opinion, they're  
5 very capable to do the task at hand.

6 Q. And task at hand now being the tow?

7 A. Right. The initial tasking to the tow. Taking pictures,  
8 getting site numbering all the way to doing the tow. It's all  
9 stuff that we do with the training, and as a coxon, as crew  
10 members. So --

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

12 A. Um-hum.

13 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Sector.

14 BY [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

15 Q. You've said a couple times if there was distress, that you  
16 guys might have considered a different crew. If there was a  
17 search and rescue case, or if there were people onboard, would you  
18 guys have assembled a different crew? Or was there a ready crew  
19 that you would have sent instead?

20 A. Not necessarily, no. Because like I was just saying, as a  
21 qualified coxon now she's expected to do any task that requires a  
22 coxon. So I don't think that would have exactly changed our  
23 assessment on that. But it could have, I guess. I don't think.  
24 I can't really say at the time.

25 Q. Do you guys have a ready crew, like an A crew, and a B crew,

1 if there's a search and rescue case the A crew gets underway or --

2 A We do. Every morning when we come in it's actually part of  
3 the OOD's duty. We have a board in coms that we set up every day,  
4 and it has everybody's name. So we compile your primary,  
5 secondary, sometimes even a third crew depending on what we have  
6 going on that day.

7 Q. And so I want to -- circling back. The crew that got  
8 underway that day was not a primary or secondary crew? It was a  
9 crew that was made up based on responding to the incident?

10 A. Right. I believe so.

11 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I have no further questions. Thank you.

12 BY [REDACTED]

13 Q. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] again.

14 So boats, going back to this crew designation, who was the --  
15 do you recall who the primary crew was?

16 A. I don't recall. It would be a guess if I told you.

17 Q. Was BM3 [REDACTED] was she 45 qualified, or just 29?

18 A. She's just 29 qualified, which is another reason we decided  
19 not to do the 45.

20 Q. Who was the CDO?

21 A. It was BM1 Thomas.

22 Q. So was it BM1 Thomas that decided who the crew should be?

23 A. I think it was BM-[REDACTED] and BM1 [REDACTED] together figuring  
24 that out. I know at first they weren't sure if they were going to  
25 send her or not, and I don't know how that conversation went, so,

1 they had decided that without me.

2 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] No further questions.

3 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Luke, NTSB. At this time, I think we're  
4 going to wrap up the interview here.

5 BY MR. WISNIEWSKI:

6 Q. But is there anything that you would like to add or change in  
7 your interview here?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Do you have any suggestions? You know, obviously, you've  
10 talked now with members of the staff here at the station, and, you  
11 know, lessons learned, kind of a hot wash you'll probably have  
12 after these interviews. Is there anything you'd like to share  
13 with us as far as how to prevent this type of reoccurrence?

14 A. I mean, it's something we hit on really hard, especially in  
15 training, is communication. That's our biggest thing.  
16 Communication and safety. Those two things can always get better.  
17 I don't think there's anything anyone can do more here, in  
18 particular, to make those things better, other than just keep  
19 doing it.

20 That's really all I have for that. Yeah. I mean, I can't  
21 think of anything I would change, so --

22 MR. WISNIEWSKI: Well, thank you very much for your time.  
23 This concludes the interview. The time is 10:33.

24 (Whereupon, at 10:33 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

25

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