

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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 IN RE: :  
 :  
 THE COLLISION OF THE MOTOR : NTSB Accident No.  
 VESSEL MANIZALES AND THE : DCA16LM018  
 ZEN-NOH GRAIN PEGASUS :  
 THAT OCCURRED ON :  
 JANUARY 17, 2016 :  
 :  
 ----- :

INTERVIEW OF: ROBERT WARREN BILLIOT, SR.

Thursday,  
January 28, 2016

USCG Sector New Orleans  
 200 Hendee Street New Orleans,  
 Louisiana

BEFORE

LTJG [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard  
 LT [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard  
 MICHAEL KARR, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

APPEARANCES:On Behalf of the Interviewee:

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## P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

(Not given)

1  
2  
3 LTJG [REDACTED] This is the United State Coast  
4 Guard investigation with National Transportation Safety  
5 Board into the allision of the Motor Vessel Manizales and  
6 the Zen-Noh Grain Pegasus on January 17th, 2016. Speaking  
7 for the Coast Guard right now, Lieutenant Junior Grade  
8 Shane [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

9 LT [REDACTED] Also present is my myself,  
10 Lieutenant Michelle [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard.  
11 [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

12 MR. KARR: And I'm Michael Karr, K-A-R-R, with  
13 the National Transportation Safety Board.

14 MR. COLOMB: Also present is Michael Colomb,  
15 Dodson and Hooks, Baton Rouge. Attorney representing  
16 Captain Robert Billiot.

17 MR. BILLIOT: Robert Billiot, R-O-B-E-R-T,  
18 B-I-L-L-I-O-T. Baton Rouge pilot.

19 LTJG [REDACTED] Thank you, Mr. Billiot. Okay,  
20 Captain, starting out we're just going to talk about some  
21 basic experience.

22 So how long have you been operating boats on the  
23 Mississippi River?

24 MR. BILLIOT: Even without -- before piloting?

25 LTJG [REDACTED] Just in general. What's your

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1 experience in this?

2 MR. BILLIOT: I've been on the river since I was  
3 17 years old.

4 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. And how long have you  
5 been a pilot?

6 MR. BILLIOT: Twenty-six years.

7 LTJG [REDACTED] How many high water events have  
8 you worked in during that timeframe?

9 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, a dozen or more.

10 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. What about, how many  
11 days have you worked during this high water event?

12 MR. BILLIOT: We work week on week off. So I  
13 mean I'd have to look at the calendar on when it actually  
14 started.

15 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay, that's fine.

16 MR. BILLIOT: I mean pretty much all of it on  
17 my regular work schedule.

18 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. How many days were you  
19 into that work cycle during the, this incident?

20 MR. BILLIOT: Let's see, that was on a Sunday.  
21 So I had started my work schedule that Wednesday.

22 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. BILLIOT: So five days.

24 LTJG [REDACTED] And then what are your work  
25 hours during the day?

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1 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, we work 24/7. I mean with  
2 this high river like this we usually get between, I mean,  
3 guestimate between eight and 12 hours in between calls.

4 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. And then how long are you  
5 actually on the vessel?

6 MR. BILLIOT: This particular vessel or just in  
7 general?

8 LTJG [REDACTED] Just in general.

9 MR. BILLIOT: I mean that can average anywhere  
10 from a two-hour job to a seven, eight hour job. There's  
11 no set --

12 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: Each job is different.

14 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

15 MR. BILLIOT: I mean, I said if you average it  
16 out, four or five hours. On an average.

17 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. And then for this vessel  
18 --

19 MR. BILLIOT: This particular vessel?

20 LTJG [REDACTED] -- how many hours had you worked  
21 that day?

22 MR. BILLIOT: Well, I was ordered on board for  
23 noon. This ship wasn't finished with the cargo yet. That  
24 was probably, I'm guessing, an hour that we sat around  
25 waiting for that.

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1           And then we started, you can look at the times.  
2 I don't know the exact times. But roughly around 1 o'clock  
3 I guess is when we started working her.

4           And then we had problems with the port anchor.  
5 Was stuck in the mud from being there so long. So we  
6 probably spent another 45 minutes working that anchor to  
7 get it up.

8           But I mean I was onboard for noon, started  
9 working roughly around 1:00 I'd say.

10           LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Had you been on any other  
11 vessels that day or was this your first vessel?

12           MR. BILLIOT: That day? No. That my was,  
13 9:00 for noon, that would have been my first one that day.

14           LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. And so you said you got  
15 on around noon. Okay. So just to -- just talk me though  
16 what happened, started with when you actually received the  
17 orders to go to the Manizales.

18           MR. BILLIOT: Well, they gave us a three-hour  
19 notice. So I was called at 9:00 a.m., at my house, for a  
20 noon job.

21           My typical routine, get up, take a shower, get  
22 some cup of coffee and then I head out. And I drive, oh,  
23 where did I drive to? I'm trying to think where I left my  
24 truck at that day. I think I drove my truck to what we call  
25 the point. You know, New Orleans. Where we swap with the

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1 Crescent pilots.

2 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: And I leave my truck there. And  
4 then the transportation company provides us  
5 transportation, you know, to the vessel.

6 So I probably got down at the point some where's  
7 around 10:00, 10:30. And then they brought me up to the  
8 ship. Which I got up there just a little bit before noon.

9 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. When you got on board the  
10 Manizales, what was your understanding of what was -- what  
11 were your marching orders?

12 MR. BILLIOT: Sailing to sea.

13 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. And then, so once you get  
14 onboard, what happens next? After, I mean you said you had  
15 some issues with the port anchor being stuck.

16 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

17 LTJG [REDACTED] So what happened all of that?

18 MR. BILLIOT: After we got the port anchor up?

19 LTJG [REDACTED] Yes.

20 MR. BILLIOT: Well after we got the port anchor  
21 up, I mean we waited for some traffic, flipped it around  
22 and headed on down the river.

23 And in the meantime, because the ship was still  
24 doing cargo when I got onboard and because of the anchor  
25 situation, I explained, me and the captain, look, I mean

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1 I did some time calculations and all I knew that I wasn't  
2 going to be able to make it to New Orleans before dark. And  
3 we got daylight restriction only on southbound vessels.  
4 So I mean, that's when I contacted my office to see what  
5 anchorage spots were going to be available and what times  
6 and, you know.

7 I did my calculating and at that particular time  
8 the only anchorage that my office told me was going to be  
9 available to me was going to be Belmont. And that's when  
10 we made the decision, I told the captain that we were going  
11 to be going to Belmont Anchorage due to the restrictions  
12 we had.

13 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So the daylight  
14 restriction, where do those come from?

15 MR. BILLIOT: I think that's our Board of  
16 Examiners had put that in place.

17 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So based off  
18 calculations, you decided Belmont Anchorage --

19 MR. BILLIOT: Well, that was the only anchorage  
20 available to me --

21 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: -- that I would be able to get to  
23 before dark.

24 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So kind of talk me  
25 through the process of how it's decided, you know, where

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1 you're going to anchor in a specific anchorage area and  
2 conferences you can have with the captain and the crew.  
3 Kind of talk me through that whole process of, okay, we're  
4 going to anchor here.

5 MR. BILLIOT: Well, I mean as far as the  
6 conference with the captain, I just explained to him what  
7 I just explained to you. And I told him, I said, we got  
8 no place, I think Belmont's it. That's all we got.

9 And when we got to Belmont I looked at the  
10 situation and where the ships, where they were situated.  
11 And I showed the captain where we were going to anchor at.

12 And because of high water and because of  
13 everything else, I told him, you know, I was going to get  
14 him as close to the bank as I could, out of the mainstream  
15 of the current. And, you know, I mean of course they don't  
16 usually question you.

17 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

18 MR. BILLIOT: I mean they take in your  
19 expertise. That's what you're there for.

20 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

21 MR. BILLIOT: So I mean if, you know, I just  
22 explained, I like explained to them what's going on, what  
23 we're doing, but they never, very seldom does any of them  
24 question you on anything. So it means we were more or less  
25 a one-way conversation.

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1 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Did he question you on  
2 anything?

3 MR. BILLIOT: No, no. Very good guy.

4 LTJG [REDACTED] So what goes into the decision  
5 making process as far as deciding to anchor, you know, in  
6 a specific location? Like for this incident.

7 MR. BILLIOT: Well, I was looking at, there was  
8 two ships already anchored in the low end of the anchorage.  
9 There was a tug and barge in the upper end anchorage. So  
10 that left one spot, basically, for me to anchor.

11 And once I looked at the situation and seen how  
12 it was setup and knew we would, like I said, always in the  
13 back of my head we're dealing with high water. I knew I  
14 was going above the other two but below the sea going tug  
15 and barge.

16 And the way the barge fleet was setup at the  
17 time, it was a perfect spot for me just to go right  
18 underneath that barge fleet. You know, and I can get close  
19 enough to the bank to where it wouldn't be affected, you  
20 know, because nobody can go the levees at this stage of the  
21 river.

22 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. BILLIOT: So basically what I was lining to  
24 do was drop my starboard anchor right off the tree line of  
25 the Badger. And that way she would sit, and which she did

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1 for 30 minutes. You know, perfect right there.

2 And basically where I anchored at was  
3 underneath the barge fleet, but yet on the inside of the  
4 other anchored ships. Because she was so small. She's  
5 only, I think, 8,000 something on the tonnage.

6 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So can you just describe  
7 that area to me, as far as that anchorage or the barge fleet  
8 and where that boats anchored up? Why did you decide that  
9 that was the best?

10 MR. BILLIOT: Well due to the way the current  
11 runs there and due to a, you know, we got a shallow water  
12 channel that runs right through there. Belmont Crossing.  
13 And just the way the contour of the river is there.

14 I mean you always, the further over you get away  
15 from the current, the better they usually stay. So I mean  
16 just from experience, the closer to the bank you can get  
17 them in this high river, the better off they are.

18 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Can you talk me through  
19 the anchoring process and the evolution itself?

20 MR. BILLIOT: Okay. Well, I had two tug boats,  
21 not that I needed them. Overkill. But then again, high  
22 river.

23 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. BILLIOT: Now if you got them, use them.  
25 So went ahead, one tug boat on my port bow, one on my

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1 starboard bow. Ship had a pitch propeller with a bow  
2 thruster. I mean perfect condition. I mean everything a  
3 pilot wants.

4 You know, we flipped the ship around. Right  
5 on, you know, right even. I just basically breasted her  
6 over using the thruster and my rudder.

7 And when I got into position, where I wanted to  
8 drop my port anchor, we let go of the port anchor. And  
9 then, I mean like I said, with the thruster and the pitch  
10 and everything else, she was beautiful. I just walked her  
11 right on in.

12 And when we stretched out that port anchor and  
13 got to where I wanted, we basically dropped the starboard  
14 anchor, like a normal anchoring job. Let her sit back on  
15 the anchors.

16 And I mean, there was nothing to it. It was  
17 normal, nothing out of the ordinary. Normally anchoring  
18 job, you know.

19 LTJG ██████████ Okay. Were you experiencing  
20 any mechanical issues with the vessel?

21 MR. BILLIOT: No, she was perfect.

22 LTJG ██████████ Okay. When you -- once you set  
23 the anchor, like what goes into setting anchors or how does  
24 that process work when you determine that they're set?

25 MR. BILLIOT: Well, like I dropped the port

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1 anchor. Now I'm out at, I'm guessing it was, I think, if  
2 I remember correctly, I took four on deck on the shackles.  
3 And then what I do, I walk her in until that chain gets  
4 tight. Till she's tight on that one.

5 And then I'll let got the starboard anchor and  
6 try to line them up to where they're both pretty much the  
7 same distances. I mean, you know, I had to get the same  
8 amount.

9 And then once you drop the starboard anchor, you  
10 just let her settle back into them easy. And of course with  
11 this high river, it's not just like stop engine and let them  
12 fallback. I work my engine and I let the ship fallback  
13 slowly and let her sit. Let the anchors sit properly.

14 So what you're looking for is a ten and two on  
15 your anchor chains. And both equal strain. And I mean  
16 that's usually all it takes. And they're usually good like  
17 that.

18 And I mean you can hear on the recording, you  
19 know, I'm still working the engine a little bit. Just, you  
20 know, like I said, ease her back. I just don't let her,  
21 I don't let the current just take the ship back and jerk  
22 it. You know, you either drag anchors or lose the chain  
23 like that.

24 And we just let her sit back easy. And she was,  
25 you know, with the mate giving us the directions of the

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1 chains by radio and telling us the tension on them, you  
2 know, once we got the ten and two and both tight holding  
3 and neither one of them were vibrating, which tells me they  
4 wasn't dragging, and we were done.

5 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. How many shackles were  
6 in the water?

7 MR. BILLIOT: I know, like I said, it's all on  
8 the thing.

9 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. BILLIOT: I think I remember telling him  
11 four on deck, on the port, and three in the water, on the  
12 starboard. I use, me personally, every pilot is  
13 different, I usually put a little bit, a minimum of three.

14 But whatever is on this one, I always put a,  
15 maybe just a little bit more on this one, because of  
16 contour. I'm going to close to the bank, so the natural  
17 contour of the bank is going to be like that.

18 So if you put the same amount of your anchors,  
19 are like this. So I always, you know, a little bit more  
20 on my outboard anchor. To keep it even.

21 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So in this case it was  
22 your --

23 MR. BILLIOT: Starboard was the inboard.

24 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay.

25 MR. BILLIOT: Shore side or whatever you want

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1 to call it.

2 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So between when the  
3 anchors were set or how long did you monitor it or --

4 MR. BILLIOT: What was it? I mean I think it  
5 was 20. We listen to the tape yesterday. I think it was  
6 like 27, 28 minutes. Something like that.

7 I mean, typically I usually stay onboard a  
8 minimum, at least ten minutes with the captain. Make sure  
9 he's good, make sure the mate stays forward and, you know,  
10 the anchors don't start bouncing and we don't start  
11 swinging.

12 I wound up staying a little bit longer than  
13 normal this time. High water. Plus, I didn't have a crew  
14 boat to come get me. So I wound up having to sit there an  
15 extra 15 minutes that I normally wouldn't have anyway.

16 And the entire time we were sitting there, on  
17 anchors, everything else stopped. I mean me and the  
18 captain were just up there shooting the breeze, waiting on  
19 a boat to come get me.

20 She didn't move a lick. She was, I mean she sat  
21 perfect. I mean no wiggling, no nothing to her. I mean  
22 she was perfect.

23 And then afterwards, I mean when the boat got  
24 there, I told the captain, I said, when you get a VDR you'll  
25 hear all this. I did my typical high water speech to him.

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1 I explained to the captain, I said look, I said  
2 we're on a, you know, we're extreme high water, dangerous  
3 situation. We got ships dragging and parting anchor  
4 chains all over this river right now. I said, make sure  
5 your watchmen keep a close eye on this. This ain't nothing  
6 that your watchmen can just sit up here and drink coffee  
7 and text all night.

8 I said -- I took both; I always take my radars.  
9 And I put one radar, I put a mark on the barge fleet right  
10 ahead of me and I put the mark on the ship behind me. Here's  
11 your marks he's got to watch. I said, tell them they have  
12 to pay attention to this. I mean I preached that to him.

13 And I said, you know, according to Coast Guard  
14 regulations and everything else, I don't know if it's  
15 really regulation but I say that, I said you got to keep  
16 your engines and all your stuff, mechanical stuff, ready  
17 to use at a moments notice. I said, if you start to swing  
18 out of there, if you part an anchor chain, just do to what  
19 you got to do with your engine to stem the current until  
20 we get a pilot to you.

21 And we went through all of that and he was happy,  
22 I was happy. Shook hands, I walked off the bridge. And  
23 I mean I was done.

24 And by the time I walked down the stairs, I was  
25 walking up the deck of the ship, I was literally putting

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1 my leg over the handrail to climb onto the crew boat and  
2 I just happened to look up. And when I looked up I seen  
3 the bow swinging out.

4 And I told the crew boat drivers, I said hold  
5 on, something's not right here. Let me go back upstairs.  
6 And I ran back upstairs.

7 And when I got back up on the bridge she was  
8 almost broadside that quick. And I told the captain, hard  
9 to starboard, half full a head, whatever it was. I really  
10 don't remember what command I yelled at first.

11 And that's when the captain told me; he says,  
12 well I already shut everything down. I said, I told you  
13 not to do that. And that's when I started calling tug boats  
14 and blew the danger signal and all hell broke loose.

15 LTJG ██████████ Okay.

16 MR. BILLIOT: And at which point, like I said,  
17 I don't remember what we said on there, but at some point  
18 eventually he got the engine started. I don't know when  
19 that was, you know.

20 At that point that was not an option for me.  
21 Even if the engine, to be honest with you, even if the engine  
22 was ready, I don't know if she could have come out of that  
23 one. Because I mean she was almost broadside but the time  
24 I got back on the bridge.

25 After thinking about it over night, after the

1 incident, like at home, I really think, and I told the  
2 lawyers that yesterday, I said I should think she ported  
3 her starboard anchor chain for her to swing that bow that  
4 quick, out.

5 Now whether, I mean I'm not an expert, I don't  
6 know. When they pull up their stuff they can figure out  
7 whether they got that angle at an anchor side. But I, I  
8 mean in my professional opinion and from what I've seen out  
9 there over the years, I really think she parted that  
10 starboard chain.

11 And that's going to be, she swung out. Usually  
12 they'll do a little wiggling, you know, or go up and down  
13 a little bit and give you a, some kind of signal, I'm fixing  
14 to do something. And I mean she just went, in one swift  
15 motion like that.

16 And like I keep repeating myself, but if he had  
17 the engines running at the time, I don't know if we could  
18 have overcome at that point.

19 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. So after you noticed  
20 that it's swinging, you're broadside, you know, what  
21 happens next?

22 MR. BILLIOT: Once we're broadside and, like I  
23 said, no engine, I mean I knew it was over. There was no,  
24 I can see where we were at. I told the captain, I said,  
25 you know, I started sounding the danger signal. I told the

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1 captain, I said get your crew, we're fixing to hit this  
2 ship.

3 And I was on the radio calling the tug boats,  
4 which thank God were still close by. They had stopped  
5 right there.

6 I called the tug boats, I told them, get over  
7 as quick as you can. I called, I told one of the tug boats  
8 to call the Coast Guard immediately, tell them to shut the  
9 river down right here, we fixing to have a major incident.

10 Because in my head I see us hitting that ship,  
11 that ship breaking lose hitting the third ship and  
12 everything go crazy right there. So I mean I had one of  
13 the tug boats call the Coast Guard, let them know what's  
14 going on, shut the river down.

15 I got on my phone immediately, called my office  
16 and had them, told them to send three pilots out as quick  
17 as they can get them out here. And then I'm dealing with  
18 five, six, seven boats, all at the same time, trying to get  
19 them coordinated over to me.

20 Well in the meantime, ships getting torn to  
21 hell. That little biddy ship on that anchor chain was  
22 getting torn all to hell.

23 The chain actually wrapped around the stern  
24 crane. And when it wrapped around the stern crane, the  
25 other, I didn't notice at the time, the other vessel, the

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1 other ship that we hit, he was coming ahead on his engine.  
2 Which, common sense, you don't want to drag, you come ahead.

3 Well when he started coming ahead, his anchor  
4 chain, he was pulling us. And when he pulled us, that  
5 little ship started doing this. And at one point I thought  
6 she was going to flip over. I mean that's how concerned  
7 I was.

8 And when I, you know, we had nothing on the  
9 bridge. No power, no nothing. We couldn't do nothing.

10 So at one point, like I said, time wise I don't  
11 know. But at one point, after it tore the wing off the ship  
12 and she was dipping like, I made the captain get the entire  
13 crew onto the hatch covers of the ship.

14 I said, we can't do nothing up there, I have  
15 nothing that I can use up there at this point. I said this  
16 ship, if that current -- if she flips, you know, leans  
17 enough and that current hits, it's over with.

18 So we had everybody out on the, like I said, on  
19 the hatch cover of the ship. At that point I'm finding out,  
20 I'm seeing the wheel wash from the Pegasus.

21 I got one of the tug boats to get the Pegasus  
22 over on 77 with me and I'm talking to that captain. And  
23 he had a rather pretty good, I don't know how many degrees  
24 it was, but he had it to port pretty good and he was coming  
25 ahead on his ship like trying to do this.

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1 I managed to get him to midship his rudder and  
2 got him to back down on whatever he was doing with his  
3 propulsion so he wasn't pulling us up the river. She  
4 dipped at least two or three times like that.

5 And at one point I was so concerned that I made  
6 the crew step off the ship onto the tug boat. Which was,  
7 I mean we -- that's how low the ship was. You didn't have  
8 to go up down, you just walked straight across. I made  
9 everybody get off the ship and stand on the tug boat that  
10 was alongside of us.

11 And I told them, I told the captain, I said, we  
12 can't do nothing. I mean there's nothing possible I can  
13 do right now. We hung up on this anchor chain.

14 So finally we, I mean it seemed like forever.  
15 It probably wasn't but two minutes. Once the Pegasus, I  
16 got him to back off on his engine and the chain slacked back  
17 up again, it wasn't pulling us, the ship, you know, quit  
18 doing that dip. And when she did that, the crane come off  
19 the deck and we were free.

20 As soon as we were free, we all got back on  
21 board. Well me, the captain and me, went straight  
22 upstairs.

23 I mean the whole time I'm working tug boats.  
24 I'm getting boats all situated for me to do whatever we got  
25 to do. I told the captain, you know, we did a head count,

1 everybody was accounted for. Nobody was hurt in any kind  
2 of way whatsoever.

3 I cleared that back deck as soon as the incident  
4 started. I had his engine crew go down in the engine room  
5 and do an immediate check for below water damage. Make  
6 sure there wasn't nothing leaking, no holes and do the  
7 hatch, you know, check all tanks.

8 While they were doing that we were on the  
9 bridge. And at this point, now that we're free, the ships  
10 sheering across the river. Went straight for the barge  
11 fleet.

12 So like I said, between the tug boats and the  
13 push boats I had, I managed to get them flipped back around  
14 facing head up river and got her under control. And  
15 stopped her from going over and hitting that fleet.

16 And managed, she drifted down below both ships  
17 that were in the anchorage. And I managed to keep her just  
18 outside of the channel and just off those barges. And I  
19 also, you know, can't let get by the levees because you,  
20 they don't like that right now either.

21 So I mean basically kept her midstream with four  
22 or five boats on me. Until, and I think she sat there for,  
23 what, two days before they could move her down the river.  
24 And that's pretty much the whole thing in a short.

25 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Do you have any

1 follow-up questions?

2 MR. KARR: I do. So let me, I do.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Okay.

4 MR. KARR: So when you talked about the  
5 anchorages, and that was, it sounds like Belmont was the  
6 only alternative left to you.

7 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

8 MR. KARR: Can you give us some background as  
9 to why that was the only alternative left? Why that was  
10 the only anchorage?

11 MR. BILLIOT: Because all the anchorages had  
12 ships either in them or I'm assuming assigned. Ships were  
13 already inbound to spots. I just called, I called my  
14 office and asked my office what availability do I have, for  
15 this ship.

16 MR. KARR: And based on what you know of this  
17 situation of that night, would you know why all the  
18 anchorages were filled that night?

19 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, all anchorages are also full.  
20 Almost 98 percent of the time. Especially with this high  
21 river.

22 MR. KARR: All right.

23 MR. BILLIOT: Let's put it this way, it's not  
24 uncommon for our anchorage to be slapped full. You know,  
25 a lot of times, the way it works, just to give you a

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1 background, if you got a ship at a grain elevator, when that  
2 ship leaves, if one from the closest anchorage moves in,  
3 one from the lower anchorage moves to that spot in that  
4 anchorage and one from out in the sea buoy moves into that  
5 anchorage. It's a constant rotation.

6 So there's not a whole lot of times where we have  
7 open anchorages.

8 MR. KARR: The tug boats that were with you,  
9 were they assigned to you or did they just happen to be in  
10 the area?

11 MR. BILLIOT: Well, the two that were assigned  
12 to me, that helped, they were assigned to me to help me flip  
13 around. And they just happened to be in the area.

14 I mean they stayed, they tied up to the barge  
15 fleet. And then I used like the regular push boats. Not  
16 harbor tugs. I had the fleet, that the ship was going to  
17 hit --

18 MR. KARR: Okay.

19 MR. BILLIOT: -- I had their, every boat they  
20 had came over to assist.

21 MR. KARR: Well prior to you needing  
22 assistance, were those other, were those two tug boats  
23 working with you as you went down the river?

24 MR. BILLIOT: Well they just caught me and  
25 flipped me around. And once they flipped me around, you

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1 know, I was --

2 MR. KARR: But what I'm looking at was, you  
3 know, besides you being the pilot working the ship down the  
4 river, did you have those tow boats following you down the  
5 river?

6 MR. BILLIOT: No.

7 MR. KARR: Okay.

8 MR. BILLIOT: No.

9 MR. KARR: All right, thanks.

10 MR. BILLIOT: Okay.

11 MR. KARR: That clarifies that. Do you know,  
12 when you said that the anchor chains, that you communicated  
13 with the people on the bow to learn that the anchor chains  
14 had an equal strain, besides no vibration, was there any  
15 other way that the crew was -- was there some sort of  
16 measurement device that would determine whether there was  
17 an equal strain?

18 MR. BILLIOT: Not that I know of.

19 MR. KARR: Okay. I had to clarify that.

20 MR. BILLIOT: They just --

21 MR. KARR: It sounded like there might have  
22 been.

23 MR. BILLIOT: No.

24 MR. KARR: I just wanted to clarify that. I  
25 have one more question, but it's one that would be

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1 appropriate to ask at the end.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. I have a couple of follow  
3 up questions, Captain.

4 MR. BILLIOT: Sure.

5 LT [REDACTED] This is Lieutenant [REDACTED]  
6 with the Coast Guard. I just want to go back to your  
7 experience a little bit.

8 MR. BILLIOT: okay.

9 LT [REDACTED] Get a little bit more detail on  
10 that. So you said that you've been working on the river  
11 since you were 17 years old.

12 MR. BILLIOT: Pretty much.

13 LT [REDACTED] And you've been a licensed pilot  
14 for 26 years.

15 MR. BILLIOT: Well I've been in the pilots for  
16 26 years. Yes.

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So can you just explain  
18 to me, I mean do you hold any other licenses, have you been  
19 a tug boat captain? Kind of what is your --

20 MR. BILLIOT: Yes. Well before that I was a  
21 tug boat captain --

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. BILLIOT: -- of a ship. I was a captain on  
24 the harbor tugs before that.

25 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So can you kind of just

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1 walk me through since you were 17. I know that's a long  
2 time ago.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Oh geez.

4 LT [REDACTED] Just your progression. Your  
5 progression.

6 MR. BILLIOT: On all the different jobs I had?  
7 I mean I --

8 LT [REDACTED] Well just kind of like your  
9 progression to this point of you're a state and federal  
10 pilot.

11 MR. BILLIOT: I mean I started out there as a  
12 deck hand for a tow boat company.

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

14 MR. BILLIOT: Worked on the upper Mississippi,  
15 the Ohio River. Lower Mississippi. Found out I didn't  
16 like that too much, switch companies to stay down on the  
17 lower Mississippi closer to home.

18 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

19 MR. BILLIOT: I worked there for, I don't know,  
20 I mean years. I could not tell you.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: Worked for about three or four  
23 different tow boat companies.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

25 MR. BILLIOT: On all different size boats,

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1 barges and you name it.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: And that's when I discovered  
4 harbor tugs. Week on, week off.

5 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

6 MR. BILLIOT: And wondered why my dad didn't  
7 get me there to begin with.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: And I worked for two different  
10 harbor tug companies.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. BILLIOT: And that's --

13 LT [REDACTED] In what capacity?

14 MR. BILLIOT: At deck hand at first.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. BILLIOT: And that's when I got my first  
17 license. Was with the harbor tug companies.

18 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

19 MR. BILLIOT: And then a couple years later I  
20 got my pilots license and, you know, I was captain over  
21 there for a few years before I got into the pilots.

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then, so I know you  
23 said, in terms of working in high water, you've done -- I  
24 mean it sounds like you have worked in high water pretty  
25 much your entire life.

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1 MR. BILLIOT: Oh yes.

2 LT [REDACTED] Have you ever seen the river  
3 like this?

4 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

5 LT [REDACTED] This high?

6 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. About how many times  
8 over the span of your career?

9 MR. BILLIOT: Since I've been a pilot?

10 LT [REDACTED] Yes.

11 MR. BILLIOT: We've had two of them like that.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: '93 and '11. And I think '93 was  
14 the worst of them all.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you for that.

16 MR. BILLIOT: Sure.

17 LT [REDACTED] So I just want to kind of fast  
18 forward a little bit. So where was the vessel getting  
19 underway from? Initially.

20 MR. BILLIOT: We were anchored at Daryl, Mile  
21 175 buoy system.

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. BILLIOT: Or Cooper T. Smith. I think they  
24 changed the name of the system. But it was Mile 175.

25 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So when you got onboard,

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1 you said you got the call at 9:00, you ordered onboard at  
2 noon.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Correct.

4 LT [REDACTED] But when you got there, they  
5 were still in the process of loading.

6 MR. BILLIOT: They were still doing something.  
7 Yes.

8 LT [REDACTED] Still doing something with  
9 cargo.

10 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

11 LT [REDACTED] And pretty much about 1300, 1  
12 o'clock, is when you started getting underway-ish.

13 MR. BILLIOT: Give or take. Don't hold me to  
14 exactly 1300.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Right.

16 MR. BILLIOT: But I mean give or take.

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

18 MR. BILLIOT: Right up in that area.

19 LT [REDACTED] And then you said, essentially,  
20 you -- which anchor did you heave up first?

21 MR. BILLIOT: Well, I mean if you want to go  
22 through that process, when you're in a buoy system like that  
23 you have both anchors down.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

25 MR. BILLIOT: You have stern lines stretched to

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1 buoys and you have headlines stretched to buoys.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: The way the process works there  
4 is we let all stern lines to the buoys go first. That way  
5 I got propulsion if needed.

6 Once the propeller is clear, then the boats, the  
7 little run boats will go forward and we let go all sets of  
8 headlines to the buoys. Once those lines are all onboard,  
9 you always pick up your inboard anchor first. Which would  
10 have been the starboard, because we was on the east bank.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. BILLIOT: Once we got the starboard anchor  
13 up, the last thing holding us is the port anchor. And we're  
14 working on, you know, heaving on that anchor up. And  
15 typical highwater situation, she's stuck.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

17 MR. BILLIOT: And it took us a little  
18 maneuvering. Like I said, I'm guessing it was around 45  
19 minutes of wiggling it up and down and side to side and I  
20 got her off the bottom.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And so you said the  
22 inboard anchor was the starboard anchor?

23 MR. BILLIOT: Correct.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right. And then  
25 you, 45 minutes, came up the port anchor. So then you

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1 flipped around. You said you had the two tugs. What were  
2 the names of those two tugs?

3 MR. BILLIOT: Oh geez. You got that written  
4 down, because I sure don't. We deal with so many tugs on  
5 some many days.

6 LT [REDACTED] I understand.

7 MR. BILLIOT: I know it was two Smith tugs. I  
8 can tell you that much. But who I had, you're not going  
9 to have who I had at the buoys there.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

11 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, I don't know. Two Crescent  
12 tugs is all I can tell you.

13 LT [REDACTED] Two Crescent tugs.

14 MR. BILLIOT: Because it wasn't the same two  
15 tugs that assisted me down river.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Right.

17 MR. BILLIOT: I think that's leaving.

18 LT [REDACTED] Right.

19 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

20 LT [REDACTED] So I just, I want to make sure  
21 we have a clear story of what happened.

22 MR. BILLIOT: Yes. No, it wasn't the same two  
23 tugs that assisted me.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you had the two assist  
25 tugs. Did they actually make fast to you or were they just

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1 there?

2 MR. BILLIOT: Coming out the buoys system?

3 No, I think I just used them for pushing.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So they --

5 MR. BILLIOT: Then again, don't quote me on  
6 that. But I'm pretty sure I did not, I just used them to  
7 twist me around.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So they help essentially  
9 twist you around?

10 MR. COLOMB: Let me interject for you, if you  
11 don't mind?

12 LT [REDACTED] Yes. Just, can you say your  
13 name for the transcript?

14 MR. COLOMB: Yes. This is Michael Colomb,  
15 C-O-L-O-M-B. Captain Billiot's attorney.

16 You told me it was the Texas and the Admiral  
17 Jackson assisting you at Belmont.

18 MR. BILLIOT: That ain't the same two, but yes.

19 MR. COLOMB: Okay. Oh --

20 MR. BILLIOT: But that's --

21 MR. COLOMB: -- you're asking about the two up  
22 at --

23 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, she's asking about the two  
24 at the other end.

25 MR. COLOMB: Okay.

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1 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, that's two different tugs.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So the Crescent tugs,  
3 from what you remember, they were just pushing on you,  
4 helping you flip around the river.

5 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

6 LT [REDACTED] No issues, no problems there?

7 MR. BILLIOT: It takes two minutes just to flip  
8 that little ship around with bow thruster. I mean --

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So then you started  
10 heading down and the original intention was to essentially  
11 take the river all the way outbound? Well, you would have  
12 exchanged pilots.

13 MR. BILLIOT: That was the order.

14 LT [REDACTED] That was the order.

15 MR. BILLIOT: That was the original order.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

17 MR. BILLIOT: And I would have taken it down to  
18 just below Algiers Point, where we do our pilot changes out  
19 and hand it over to a Crescent pilot.

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And so you did your  
21 calculations. And is the restriction right now, that's in  
22 place by the board, that outbound vessels are not allowed  
23 to transit at --

24 MR. BILLIOT: At all.

25 LT [REDACTED] -- all --

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1 MR. BILLIOT: On our route.

2 LT [REDACTED] At all, okay. To go -- so  
3 unless they can get out of the river --

4 MR. BILLIOT: Unless, no, no. Unless we can  
5 get below Algiers Point.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

7 MR. BILLIOT: The Crescent pilots don't have  
8 that restriction in affect. It's just our board --

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. BILLIOT: -- on our route between, you  
11 know, 88.0 to 232.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: That's strictly a New Orleans,  
14 Baton Rouge Pilot Examiner's rule.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay, I'm just going to write  
16 this. Sorry.

17 MR. BILLIOT: That's fine. No, take your  
18 time.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So when you were  
20 ordered, if you had gotten underway at noon, you know, as  
21 the original order, do you think you would have made it by  
22 then or in your mind --

23 MR. BILLIOT: Depending on the speed of the  
24 ship and --

25 LT [REDACTED] Traffic also.

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1 MR. BILLIOT: -- any traffic.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: I mean if we could have got out  
4 of there on time, I mean I think, if I'm not mistaken, that's  
5 around what, 5:45 is dark.

6 LT [REDACTED] I think so.

7 MR. BILLIOT: I mean roughly up in there. I  
8 mean I could have probably, if not made it all the way down,  
9 I would have been able, if she had been on time, I could  
10 have at least got her down towards Kenner Bend --

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. BILLIOT: -- Anchorage area.

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you flipped her  
14 around, start getting her underway. NOBRA Pilots have a  
15 daylight restriction in place where basically outbound  
16 traffic, if you cannot get to the point --

17 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

18 LT [REDACTED] -- by sunset, then you have to  
19 anchor off.

20 MR. BILLIOT: Correct.

21 LT [REDACTED] Crescent, from your  
22 understanding, does not --

23 MR. BILLIOT: They have none.

24 LT [REDACTED] -- have any kind of restriction?

25 MR. BILLIOT: No. No.

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1                   LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you started your  
2 calculations and you determine that basically you weren't  
3 going to make it?

4                   MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

5                   LT [REDACTED] Okay. So then you called your  
6 dispatch?

7                   MR. BILLIOT: Right.

8                   LT [REDACTED] Is that when you call?

9                   MR. BILLIOT: I called my office and said,  
10 look, I am not, I can't even make it Kenner before dark.

11                   LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12                   MR. BILLIOT: What availability do we have.  
13 And of course, we don't have Bonnet Carre anymore --

14                   LT [REDACTED] Right. The spillway.

15                   MR. BILLIOT: -- because the spillway is open.  
16 So that's five, six ship anchors we don't have right now.  
17 La Place had already had ships in it.

18                   I'm not, don't quote, I think we use Reserve as  
19 an emergency anchorage. I think there was tug and barge  
20 in there, if I'm not mistaken, what he told me.

21                   And Grandview was full. Either full or had a  
22 ship bound, already committed to that anchorage.

23                   LT [REDACTED] Okay.

24                   MR. BILLIOT: That I couldn't take his spot  
25 because then he would have no place to go.

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1                   LT [REDACTED] Okay. So from your  
2 understanding, and I mean I just don't know --

3                   MR. BILLIOT: Oh, no problem.

4                   LT [REDACTED] -- but does the dispatch have  
5 like the picture of the anchorages or does he communicate  
6 --

7                   MR. BILLIOT: No, they got everything.

8                   LT [REDACTED] -- to VTC?

9                   MR. BILLIOT: They got the, no.

10                  LT [REDACTED] Okay.

11                  MR. BILLIOT: They got the whole big, in their  
12 office, they got the whole big board up there. And they  
13 can pull up every anchorage and --

14                  LT [REDACTED] See what's open.

15                  MR. BILLIOT: They can tell you how far the  
16 ships are apart with the MRTIS or one of them sites,  
17 something like that, they use.

18                  LT [REDACTED] Okay.

19                  MR. BILLIOT: No, they give us accurate  
20 information now.

21                  LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22                  MR. BILLIOT: Very accurate.

23                  LT [REDACTED] So basically, from what you  
24 understand, is you called him, I'm not going to be able to  
25 make it, I'm not going to be able to make it to Kenner Bend

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1 before, you know, daylights gone.

2 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

3 MR. BILLIOT: He looks at his operational  
4 picture of what is opened.

5 MR. BILLIOT: He looks at what orders he's got  
6 and everything else and tells me, basically you got  
7 Belmont.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So he tells you you're  
9 going to Belmont. And then how long was the transit from  
10 Cooper T. Smith to Belmont?

11 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, I mean two hours maybe. I  
12 mean --

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

14 MR. BILLIOT: -- don't quote me. Like I said,  
15 on times I'm not good on.

16 LT [REDACTED] That's fine. It's all  
17 approximate.

18 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

19 LT [REDACTED] Understand.

20 MR. BILLIOT: I mean; I'm guessing it was about  
21 two hours. If we got underway, I think we got down there  
22 about 4:00.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. BILLIOT: Somewheres up in there.

25 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then I just want to

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1 back up a little bit. So normally, to get from Cooper T.  
2 Smith to the point where you would do the pilot change out,  
3 how many hours does that usually take? An average.

4 MR. BILLIOT: Average?

5 LT [REDACTED] Just average.

6 MR. BILLIOT: It depends. I mean six, seven  
7 hours normally.

8 LT [REDACTED] Six, seven hours. Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: I mean just, if it's a fast ship  
10 with this high river, you can probably make it down in five  
11 hours maybe.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So my question I guess  
13 for you is, that when you boarded the vessel that day, to  
14 get then underway to go outbound, I mean did you think you  
15 were going to make it to the point?

16 MR. BILLIOT: Well, no, I had no idea.

17 LT [REDACTED] You had no idea? Okay.

18 MR. BILLIOT: What I was going to do is flip the  
19 ship around --

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And just --

21 MR. BILLIOT: -- and get her speed going. You  
22 know, whatever my high, top speed was going to be --

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. BILLIOT: -- and do my calculations at that  
25 point.

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1 LT [REDACTED] And just see how far you get  
2 basically.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

5 MR. BILLIOT: I mean that's basically all you  
6 can do.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And is that how you kind  
8 of go into, you go into it every time, kind of like --

9 MR. BILLIOT: Pretty much.

10 LT [REDACTED] -- especially right now.

11 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

12 LT [REDACTED] Just see how far you can get and  
13 --

14 MR. BILLIOT: Well I mean, don't get me wrong  
15 now, not every time.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

17 MR. BILLIOT: I mean it depends on the  
18 situation. Every ship is different. Now if I was on a  
19 100,000 ton loaded oil tanker, oh no, no, we'd have did some  
20 calculations long before I even let the first line go.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: I'm not going to get stuck with  
23 a ship like that, you know, with no place to go.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

25 MR. BILLIOT: On a ship like I was on, 8,000

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1 ton, bow thruster, good, you know, nice little ship, I mean  
2 I could -- if I had to deal with her without tug boats, I  
3 could have flipped her around in an emergency, you know,  
4 without even tug boats and put her outside an anchorage,  
5 if needed. I mean if they shut the river down for some  
6 reason.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

8 MR. BILLIOT: You know, so every ship is  
9 different. I mean you're going to make a different choice  
10 on that.

11 LT [REDACTED] Weigh the risk basically.

12 MR. BILLIOT: Right. Yes.

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay, that makes sense. And  
14 then when you say calculations, is that something that  
15 you're manually calculating or you're punching into like  
16 a device you have?

17 MR. BILLIOT: Nah, just in my head.

18 LT [REDACTED] In your head. Okay. And  
19 you're just taking into account -- what things are you  
20 taking into account in these calculations? Like what are  
21 the calculations?

22 MR. BILLIOT: For me getting down river?

23 LT [REDACTED] Yes.

24 MR. BILLIOT: Speed of the ship and the  
25 distance I got to go. I mean I know if I, you know, it just

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1 --

2 LT [REDACTED] All in there.

3 MR. BILLIOT: -- comes natural to me. I mean  
4 I don't use all that fancy stuff --

5 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

6 MR. BILLIOT: -- like everybody else uses.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you calculated, we're  
8 not going to make it. And he told you, got to Belmont  
9 Anchorage.

10 Now, I have a question about Belmont Anchorage.  
11 How many times have you brought vessels into Belmont  
12 Anchorage? More than 20?

13 MR. BILLIOT: That's one of our newer  
14 anchorages.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. BILLIOT: No, I wouldn't say more than 20.  
17 Because that's actually, I'd have to ask the office.  
18 That's one of our newer anchorages though.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay. When you say new, how new  
20 is new I guess?

21 MR. BILLIOT: We opened it up three, four years  
22 ago maybe. I don't know. I honestly don't know.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. BILLIOT: But I mean, I've been in and out  
25 of that anchorage before.

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1 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Less than 20 times?

2 MR. BILLIOT: Right. If I had to guess, yes,  
3 I'd say less than 20 times.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And how far does the  
5 actually anchorage extend? Like how many mile markers?  
6 Like from mile marker what to what?

7 MR. BILLIOT: Well I think; I don't know the  
8 exact length of that anchorage.

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. BILLIOT: I mean we use; I use shore  
11 markers.

12 LT [REDACTED] Shore markers? Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: We have the barge fleet that's  
14 there --

15 LT [REDACTED] Yes, I saw that.

16 MR. BILLIOT: -- their little office, landing  
17 barge. We kind of use that as an upper marker.

18 LT [REDACTED] Okay. At the top of the  
19 anchorage?

20 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: And then we use, just above the  
23 Belmont light down there --

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

25 MR. BILLIOT: -- is kind of like the bottom of

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1 it. And where I was at was kind of basically almost in the  
2 middle of it.

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So within Belmont  
4 Anchorage, what you were told -- and I'm actually going to,  
5 do you mind drawing me a picture?

6 MR. BILLIOT: I don't draw very well.

7 LT [REDACTED] If not, I can draw the picture.  
8 It's fine. So when I was listening to you earlier --

9 MR. BILLIOT: Okay.

10 LT [REDACTED] -- so we'll just say here's the  
11 river, okay. And this is the extent of Belmont Anchorage.  
12 So we'll say the barge fleet is here.

13 MR. BILLIOT: Okay.

14 LT [REDACTED] And then what you said was in the  
15 lower end in the anchorage there was two deep draft. I'm  
16 assuming vessels, correct?

17 MR. BILLIOT: Actually, they were both light  
18 draft.

19 LT [REDACTED] They were both light draft?

20 MR. BILLIOT: Empty cargo ships.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay, but they were foreign --

22 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

23 LT [REDACTED] -- foreign deep draft ships.

24 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, yes.

25 LT [REDACTED] Okay. But they were both

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1 light. Okay.

2 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then you said there  
4 was a tug in the barge.

5 MR. BILLIOT: He would have been like up here.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So he's above this barge  
7 fleet in here?

8 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, he's like abreast at the  
9 very up end of the anchorage itself.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right. So when the  
11 dispatcher called you he said, go to Belmont Anchorage.

12 MR. BILLIOT: Well --

13 LT [REDACTED] Does he tell you where to go in  
14 Belmont Anchorage or does he just --

15 MR. BILLIOT: No. He just said, the only open  
16 spot is in Belmont. That's what he said.

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Okay. So in terms -- is  
18 this the Zen-Noh Grain?

19 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

20 LT [REDACTED] Pegasus?

21 MR. BILLIOT: That would have been the Pegasus.

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

23 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

24 LT [REDACTED] Do you remember what this one  
25 was?

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1 MR. BILLIOT: No, I have no clue.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So this is just another  
3 -- okay. So I guess, I know my colleague had asked  
4 questions before. So at the time it just seemed like you  
5 have like the most space here, basically. Is that --

6 MR. BILLIOT: That pretty much was the spot.  
7 Yes.

8 LT [REDACTED] That was the only spot  
9 available?

10 MR. BILLIOT: That was the spot.

11 LT [REDACTED] Like there's nothing below  
12 here?

13 MR. BILLIOT: No. The ship at the low end was  
14 pretty much at the bottom end of the anchorage.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So they're at the --

16 MR. BILLIOT: Limitations. Yes. Like that.

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Do you remember -- so you  
18 said Belmont light is the low --

19 MR. BILLIOT: Well, and that's what I  
20 personally used. Even though --

21 LT [REDACTED] Belmont Anchorage.

22 MR. BILLIOT: -- I'm deep in there.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Okay, so you decided to  
24 come in here. Okay, so then can you -- we'll just say, so  
25 this is down river, right. So you're proceeding down

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1 river.

2 Okay, at what point -- now, we're going to talk  
3 about the Texas and the Jackson. Those were the other two  
4 tugs. The Admiral Jackson.

5 MR. BILLIOT: Okay. Yes.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So at what point did you  
7 have them come, like alongside I guess?

8 MR. BILLIOT: They came along side probably two  
9 miles upriver.

10 LT [REDACTED] So two miles away --

11 MR. BILLIOT: I mean that's normal --

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, normal to come along side  
14 early.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And why did you use two  
16 tugs instead of one?

17 MR. BILLIOT: Because they're there.

18 LT [REDACTED] Because they were there?

19 MR. BILLIOT: I mean I don't turn tugs down.

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

21 MR. BILLIOT: And like I said, why not, they're  
22 there, I'm using them. Especially with high river. Why  
23 take a chance.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So it was no kind of  
25 restriction that's in place that made you use two tugs or

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1 anything? That's why I'm asking the question.

2 MR. BILLIOT: Oh no, no, no. I just, no. I  
3 just used them because they were there and why not.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Do you always have a tug  
5 when you anchor? Is that a restriction?

6 MR. BILLIOT: No. I mean if you're going to  
7 flip a ship around --

8 LT [REDACTED] Yes.

9 MR. BILLIOT: -- yes, you're going to use at  
10 least one tug.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. BILLIOT: Depending on the ship.

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then what were the  
14 names of those two tugs? It was the Texas and --

15 MR. COLOMB: Texas and the Admiral Jackson.  
16 Is that right?

17 MR. BILLIOT: If you got it written down I agree  
18 with you.

19 LT [REDACTED] So were there just hanging out  
20 in the area or were they actually ordered --

21 MR. BILLIOT: They was specifically ordered  
22 for the ship.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Okay. All right. So  
24 you're coming down. Was there any traffic or anything in  
25 the area?

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1 MR. BILLIOT: No. At the time, no traffic.

2 LT [REDACTED] So you were clear?

3 MR. BILLIOT: Perfectly clear.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you're heading down  
5 and did they actually make up to or did they push you?

6 MR. BILLIOT: I had, another tug boat was on my  
7 port bow, get a line up.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: The tug boat that was on my  
10 starboard bow was just for pushing. Because I was going  
11 to turn to the left helm. Right into the anchorage.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And you don't remember  
13 which one?

14 MR. BILLIOT: No. Which one was on which side.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Okay. So I guess, so  
16 you started coming along. We'll just draw you here.  
17 Okay. So --

18 MR. BILLIOT: And of course I'm killing my  
19 speed out the whole time too.

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay, so you're slowing down.

21 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

22 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then, so you had one  
23 on the port right here. Just saying that. And then you  
24 had one, where was the one on the starboard?

25 MR. BILLIOT: Well, just both of them on the

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1 quarters here, on the starboard and port. Right like that.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Just after the fo'c's'le.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Just after the  
5 fo'c's'le. Okay. So then you're coming down and then  
6 basically you, was it like a twist or were you just making  
7 a big long turn?

8 MR. BILLIOT: Just, almost like a just big  
9 circle.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you're coming down  
11 like this, basically, to come into here like this?

12 MR. BILLIOT: Well, yes. But more or like a,  
13 I wound up here.

14 LT [REDACTED] Okay. This is where you want to  
15 be?

16 MR. BILLIOT: So it was more like a --

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

18 MR. BILLIOT: Like that.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So what point here did  
20 you drop your port anchor? Do you remember?

21 MR. BILLIOT: Once I was completely flipped  
22 around, facing back up river and was pretty much dead in  
23 the water.

24 LT [REDACTED] Okay. How far out from this  
25 spot, where you actually wanted to be, where you when you

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1 dropped? Do you remember? Were you actually in this spot  
2 when you dropped port anchor?

3 MR. BILLIOT: No, no, no. When I dropped the  
4 port anchor I mean I would naturally, because I'm letting  
5 out shackles, so I mean I was probably just outside of the  
6 last barge here.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So at this point you  
8 flipped all the way around. And I remember you said  
9 there's a bow thruster, right --

10 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

11 LT [REDACTED] -- and it's a -- so you have lots  
12 of maneuverability?

13 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

14 LT [REDACTED] So probably like here?

15 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

16 LT [REDACTED] And then you just start walking  
17 it in.

18 MR. BILLIOT: And I just walked in and just  
19 dropped her.

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And I'm not that  
21 familiar with anchoring vessels. I mean I was on the  
22 Cutter for two years, but we didn't do it that much.

23 MR. BILLIOT: They.

24 LT [REDACTED] And, you know, lots of people up  
25 there to help you.

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1 MR. BILLIOT: Ask what you want, I have no  
2 problem.

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay, so you walk it in. And  
4 then when you drop the starboard anchor, do you kind of walk  
5 back out or do you just stay there?

6 MR. BILLIOT: No, I don't walk it out. It does  
7 it, mother nature takes care of that. Trust me.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: Yes, once I drop the starboard  
10 anchor and I let everything, I go midship and, you know,  
11 let everything settle down.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

13 MR. BILLIOT: She's going to settle into her  
14 anchors naturally with the current and everything else.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you drop the port  
16 anchor, you're walking it in and at this point, when you  
17 drop the starboard anchor, you believe you had four on deck?  
18 Four shackles on deck.

19 MR. BILLIOT: No, that would have been the  
20 port.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: Port.

23 LT [REDACTED] So four on the port?

24 MR. BILLIOT: Port. Yes, I told them four on  
25 deck, four in the water. Which, you know --

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1 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

2 MR. BILLIOT: -- you got to go --

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

4 MR. BILLIOT: Sometimes they mess that up too.

5 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So then you dropped the  
6 starboard anchor. So how many shackles were actually on  
7 the bottom when you dropped out the starboard anchor?  
8 Three or four, do you remember?

9 MR. BILLIOT: On which way? How many on --

10 LT [REDACTED] On the port.

11 MR. BILLIOT: If I'm not mistaken, I think we  
12 stopped it at four on deck.

13 LT [REDACTED] Four. Okay.

14 MR. BILLIOT: I mean the VDR has all that on it.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So then you dropped the  
16 starboard anchor and then essentially mother nature helps  
17 even out the anchors?

18 MR. BILLIOT: Absolutely.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So what -- I guess, why  
20 did you decide to do, you know, and then you said you did  
21 three. Three --

22 MR. BILLIOT: Right. I think there was three  
23 in the water on that one.

24 LT [REDACTED] Three in the water. Okay. So  
25 how did you formulate your decision process as to let that

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1 amount of anchor chain out?

2 Like, you know, was it ever a question in your  
3 mind that I should put more anchor chain out or --

4 MR. BILLIOT: No.

5 LT [REDACTED] -- is this just normally what  
6 you do?

7 MR. BILLIOT: Normally, that size ship --

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: -- and that's all I ever do.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

11 MR. BILLIOT: I mean every pilot is different.  
12 I mean you can talk to a 150 pilots and they'll all give  
13 you a different scenario.

14 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

15 MR. BILLIOT: I mean it's just personal  
16 preference, experience, what's worked for me for 26 years  
17 on anchoring ships.

18 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

19 MR. BILLIOT: And knowing how to deal with high  
20 river.

21 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: And some pilots like to anchor  
23 them boats straight up, some like doing this. I mean  
24 everybody's got their own way of doing it and what they  
25 think works best.

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1 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

2 MR. BILLIOT: That's the way I anchor and  
3 that's the way I've always anchored with high river and,  
4 you know, it's always worked fine for me.

5 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So just to make sure I  
6 understand. So your decision to put that amount of anchor  
7 chain was based basically on size of the vessel, was based  
8 on your experience in high water, all those different  
9 things?

10 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

11 LT [REDACTED] So do you, I just want to make  
12 sure. So you don't always use three or four shackles every  
13 time you anchor, you're just taking into account all the  
14 different --

15 MR. BILLIOT: No. I mean pretty much three or  
16 four shackles is standard on --

17 LT [REDACTED] Okay, so that's --

18 MR. BILLIOT: I mean if it's a 100 something  
19 thousand ton loaded ship --

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

21 MR. BILLIOT: -- maybe we can go to four, four  
22 and a half. Depending on which anchor, every anchorage is  
23 different.

24 LT [REDACTED] I understand.

25 MR. BILLIOT: It's so many variables in that

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1 it's kind of hard to explain.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. But normally you don't,  
3 okay, so normally you don't stray --

4 MR. BILLIOT: That was nothing out of the  
5 ordinary right there.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

7 MR. BILLIOT: If that's what you're trying to  
8 --

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. BILLIOT: Yes. I mean that's normal.

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Have you brought any  
12 other vessels into Belmont Anchorage during this high water  
13 season?

14 MR. BILLIOT: During this high water? Oh boy.  
15 I don't know. We do so many jobs, I don't think I have.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

17 MR. BILLIOT: Honestly. If I had to give you  
18 a yes or no, I'd say no.

19 LT [REDACTED] No, okay. All right. So you  
20 said later on that you think the reason that the vessel  
21 turned so fast, the way it did, was because the starboard  
22 anchor parted.

23 MR. BILLIOT: That's just my opinion.

24 LT [REDACTED] That's your opinion, right.

25 MR. BILLIOT: After thinking about it over a

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1 24-hour period, when it was all over with.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay. What do you think, do you  
3 think there is anything that could have been done then that  
4 could have been done to prevent the starboard anchor from  
5 parting?

6 Anything you would have done differently or  
7 anything else that could have been done to prevent, if you  
8 know, if you're speculating that was the starboard anchor  
9 that parted, that could have been done to prevent that  
10 anchor from parting?

11 MR. BILLIOT: No. If I had to do it all over  
12 again, I'd do it the exact same --

13 LT [REDACTED] Exact same way.

14 MR. BILLIOT: -- way I did it. I mean I can't  
15 help you. I'm not a physicist, I don't know nothing about  
16 strength of anchor chains.

17 I mean if you're asking me what I could have done  
18 different, I'd have done it, tomorrow I'd do it the exact  
19 same way.

20 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So really, in your  
21 opinion then, there's nothing that could have prevented  
22 that from happening --

23 MR. BILLIOT: I don't see it.

24 LT [REDACTED] -- based on the situation that  
25 you were given, with --

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1 MR. BILLIOT: With my experience and what I  
2 know, I mean I don't see it.

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So why do you think the  
4 anchor chain actually parted? Do you think it was current,  
5 do you think it was where the anchorage is itself? Why do  
6 you think the anchor chain parted?

7 MR. BILLIOT: I mean just mother nature.

8 LT [REDACTED] Mother nature. Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: I mean we got, I mean you all can  
10 go back and check, since this high water started --

11 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

12 MR. BILLIOT: -- every anchorage on our route,  
13 there's been at least one ship part anchor chain.

14 Matter of fact, Belmont, after this incident,  
15 as far as I know, this was the first incident at Belmont.  
16 Since that has taken place, they have had at least four or  
17 five incidents at Belmont.

18 The ship below this one parted its chain --

19 LT [REDACTED] Right, we saw those.

20 LTJG [REDACTED] Yes.

21 MR. BILLIOT: -- the next day.

22 LT [REDACTED] We saw those.

23 MR. BILLIOT: And I mean, our board, since this  
24 happened, there's been at least three or four incidents in  
25 Belmont. And they've already cut it down to a one ship

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1 anchorage now because of that.

2 LT [REDACTED] I saw that in your advisory  
3 actually.

4 MR. BILLIOT: There. So whatever --

5 LT [REDACTED] I saw that immediately after  
6 this happened.

7 MR. BILLIOT: Whatever's happened at Belmont,  
8 I mean I don't know. Maybe the river with the current.

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

10 MR. BILLIOT: I mean something has, something  
11 changed there.

12 LT [REDACTED] Right.

13 MR. BILLIOT: Something with the contour,  
14 something has changed there to cause this to all of a sudden  
15 start happening.

16 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

17 MR. BILLIOT: Because as far as I know, before  
18 this incident, we hadn't had an incident at Belmont.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

20 MR. BILLIOT: And we are what, three weeks into  
21 high river now.

22 LT [REDACTED] Yes.

23 MR. BILLIOT: Or something like that.

24 LT [REDACTED] I know this depends on size of  
25 vessels and everything like that, but how many vessels can

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1 usually go into Belmont anchorage?

2 MR. BILLIOT: Depending on how they anchor  
3 them, I think we can fit four or five in there.

4 LT [REDACTED] Four or five?

5 MR. BILLIOT: I think.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Do you know if the  
7 dispatch, when they're telling you like Belmont is the only  
8 anchorage available, do you know if when they're, you know,  
9 thinking about those things if they're taking into  
10 consideration like river condition and current? You know,  
11 when they're telling availability.

12 Because I mean I saw the distance between the  
13 Zen-Noh Grain and the barge fleet and --

14 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

15 LT [REDACTED] -- it was 0.2 nautical miles.

16 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

17 LT [REDACTED] So it's not very big. I guess  
18 my question is, like normally, in non-high water  
19 conditions, they would have had you go in this spot --

20 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

21 LT [REDACTED] -- correct? Okay.

22 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

23 LT [REDACTED] All right. Okay. To your  
24 knowledge, has there been any kind of advisories or is there  
25 ever any concern with anchoring too close to vessels?

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1           Because I also saw, I think we were further down  
2 in the anchorage and we saw some vessels, you know, that  
3 were anchored pretty close together. Is that ever a  
4 concern when you're going to anchorage, when there is high  
5 water?

6           MR. BILLIOT: No.

7           LT [REDACTED] Is that ever, I guess, a risk  
8 factor that you think about when, you know, I know I can  
9 fit here, but if something happened, you know, kind of a  
10 ricochet effect?

11          MR. BILLIOT: I mean not really. I mean us  
12 pilots; I mean we're used to these tight anchor spots --

13          LT [REDACTED] Right.

14          MR. BILLIOT: -- because we don't have many  
15 anchor spots.

16          LT [REDACTED] Right.

17          MR. BILLIOT: I mean we put these things, I mean  
18 sometimes close enough we can almost jump from one to the  
19 other because we have to.

20                 I mean we go, I mean like our board has, the  
21 examiners have high water restriction in place for our  
22 loaded anchorages. They have to be, whatever it is. I  
23 forgot what it is. But they have to have so much distance  
24 between loaded ships. They didn't do that this year, with  
25 this high river, with the empties.

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1                   LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you do have  
2 restrictions? The pilot's association does put  
3 restrictions or advisories in place?

4                   MR. BILLIOT: No, not the association. The  
5 Board of Examiners.

6                   LT [REDACTED] The Board of Examiners.

7                   MR. BILLIOT: Examiners.

8                   LT [REDACTED] Okay.

9                   MR. BILLIOT: That's totally separate from the  
10 association.

11                  LT [REDACTED] Okay. The Board of Examiners.  
12 Okay. All right.

13                  Okay, so I just want to clarify. So in your  
14 opinion, with what you had to work with, you wouldn't have  
15 changed the situation or anything that you did?

16                  MR. BILLIOT: No.

17                  LT [REDACTED] Okay. Is there anything that  
18 you think would have prevented this from happening? Like  
19 kind of in retrospect. You know, would you have, I don't  
20 know, maybe kept the tug alongside if you could, anything?

21                  MR. BILLIOT: I mean you're guessing there. I  
22 mean --

23                  LT [REDACTED] I know you are.

24                  MR. BILLIOT: -- kept the ship going ahead the  
25 whole time, kept a tug boat alongside. Stayed at the dock.

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1 I mean, you know, this is just part of the beast with this  
2 river and this high water. I mean it's been happening at  
3 every one of our anchorages. Sometimes they hold,  
4 sometimes they don't.

5 I mean, no. Me, I'd have done the same thing  
6 the same way.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

8 MR. BILLIOT: I mean when I left that ship, I  
9 was very confident that she was going to stay there.  
10 Captain was satisfied with the way she was. I mean she was  
11 perfect.

12 I showed him everything to do if it happened.  
13 And the only thing, I mean like I told the captain after  
14 it was all said and done, I said captain, I know this is  
15 bad, I said but there's two things here. Nobody got hurt  
16 --

17 LT [REDACTED] Right.

18 MR. BILLIOT: -- nobody got injured. I said,  
19 luckily it didn't happen ten minutes later. Because I'd  
20 have been on the crew boat and I'd have been gone. I  
21 wouldn't have even known it happened.

22 LT [REDACTED] Right.

23 MR. BILLIOT: I said, because if I wouldn't  
24 have been there captain, I said you'd have hit that barge  
25 fleet across there with 200 barges. I said, in this river,

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1 you'd have been national news at this point.

2 LT [REDACTED] Yes. That's definitely for  
3 sure.

4 MR. BILLIOT: Yes. I said, I mean I had to  
5 tell, I said look, I mean there's no bright side to it, I  
6 said, but in my opinion as a pilot, I'm just glad it happened  
7 while I was still here and not ten minutes later. You know.

8 But as far as everything else, no, I'd have done  
9 everything the same way.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And the only reason I'm  
11 asking those questions is because we're still in high water  
12 and we're still getting a flood of calls in of all these  
13 things happening.

14 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, I know.

15 LT [REDACTED] And part of our job, as  
16 investigators, is to come up with --

17 MR. BILLIOT: Now if you're asking me as pilot,  
18 we --

19 LT [REDACTED] -- measures to prevent.

20 MR. BILLIOT: -- already took the measure.

21 LT [REDACTED] Right. By only having one ship  
22 anchorage --

23 MR. BILLIOT: Turned it to a one ship anchor.

24 LT [REDACTED] Right.

25 MR. BILLIOT: Now as much as a bunch of us

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1 pilots complaining about it, I think we ought to have the  
2 same thing for all the anchorages. At least, you know,  
3 whatever they come up with. 0.2 or something. This is  
4 between empties and loads. All anchorage, you know, all  
5 the same.

6 Like we're doing it for the loaded anchorages  
7 --

8 LT [REDACTED] Right.

9 MR. BILLIOT: -- but we're not doing it for the  
10 light draft anchorages.

11 LT [REDACTED] Right.

12 MR. BILLIOT: But we're having just as many  
13 light drafts drag and part anchors as we are loads.

14 LT [REDACTED] Right.

15 MR. BILLIOT: So I mean you asked, this is just  
16 me personally.

17 LT [REDACTED] Yes, and that's what I'm asking.

18 MR. BILLIOT: I'm not speaking for the  
19 association. I'm speaking just for me --

20 LT [REDACTED] Yes, that's what I'm asking.

21 MR. BILLIOT: -- as a pilot. I mean I would put  
22 the restriction on all the anchorages for now.

23 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

24 MR. BILLIOT: As far as the, you know, safe  
25 distance between them.

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1 LT [REDACTED] Right.

2 MR. BILLIOT: Since it's a continuing problem.

3 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

4 MR. BILLIOT: I mean other high rivers, we  
5 never had this problem with the light drafts.

6 LT [REDACTED] Right.

7 MR. BILLIOT: This is something just, like I  
8 said, mother nature is never the same.

9 LT [REDACTED] Right.

10 MR. BILLIOT: This high river is giving us  
11 problems with the light drafts. Last high river, we never  
12 had the problem with the light drafts.

13 LT [REDACTED] Why, do you know why or what the  
14 thought process is by the daylight restriction?

15 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, you don't want to ask me that.

16 LT [REDACTED] Well I'm just, I'm curious  
17 because, you know, I mean in theory, I mean do you feel like  
18 you would have been safe to continue to Algiers Point at  
19 night with this vessel?

20 MR. COLOMB: You can answer it however you want  
21 to answer it.

22 MR. BILLIOT: I'd like to answer that, but I'd  
23 like that not on that recording.

24 MR. COLOMB: No, it's just your opinion.

25 LT [REDACTED] Yes, it's just your, I mean I'm

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1 just asking your opinion. I'm not asking why it is like  
2 that.

3 LTJG [REDACTED] Professionally.

4 LT [REDACTED] Yes, professionally.

5 LTJG [REDACTED] Professionally as a pilot,  
6 would you have felt safe to continue that transit?

7 MR. BILLIOT: Absolutely.

8 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And so --

9 MR. COLOMB: But is that based on the size of  
10 the ship and what you're coming with?

11 MR. BILLIOT: I mean you're going to put me in  
12 a jam with my examiner.

13 LT [REDACTED] I mean we can stop the  
14 recording.

15 MR. KARR: Yes, it's 11:18, I'm going to stop  
16 the recording.

17 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off  
18 the record at 11:18 a.m. and resumed at 11:23 a.m.)

19 MR. COLOMB: All right, we're back recording at  
20 11:23.

21 LT [REDACTED] So this is Lieutenant  
22 [REDACTED] So in the event that Belmont Anchorage had been  
23 full and all the anchorages between Cooper T. Smith and the  
24 Point had been full and with the daylight restriction in  
25 place, what would the contingency plan have been?

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1 MR. BILLIOT: Would have left her where she  
2 was. I mean I checked with my office before I, I made sure  
3 I had a spot to go before I left.

4 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

5 MR. BILLIOT: I didn't just blindly sail out of  
6 there.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So you did your  
8 calculations while you were still anchored?

9 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

10 LT [REDACTED] To determine, okay.

11 MR. BILLIOT: Wait, let me --

12 LT [REDACTED] Because I guess I thought --

13 MR. BILLIOT: -- I'm going to walk you through  
14 the whole thing.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. BILLIOT: When I was onboard, once I  
17 realized, I didn't even know if I was going to make it, even  
18 if it was on time.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

20 MR. BILLIOT: So before I even got to the ship,  
21 I checked with my office the first time, what anchorages  
22 we got and where. Before I was even onboard.

23 Then once I'm onboard the ship and I realized  
24 there's going to be at least an hour delay, I talked to my  
25 office again. What's the update, I might, you know, I'm

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1 not making it out now, give me what I got from Kenner Bend  
2 up. And tell me what, you know, we got at that point.

3 Then once I realized the port anchor, you know,  
4 we're almost an hour into that, then I realized, I'm  
5 probably not going to make it to Kenner. I called them  
6 back. What do I have between, above Kenner  
7 (indiscernible). And that's when he told me, Bonnet  
8 Carre.

9 So I mean it was a process. As I --

10 MR. COLOMB: Bonnet Carre, you mean Belmont?

11 MR. BILLIOT: What?

12 MR. COLOMB: You said Bonnet Carre.

13 MR. BILLIOT: From Bonnet Carre up.

14 MR. COLOMB: Okay. Okay.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

16 MR. BILLIOT: So another words, as I see my time  
17 dwindling away, my window of opportunity shrinking, I'm  
18 checking with them and moving my where I can go up river.

19 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

20 MR. BILLIOT: If I'm explaining that right. I  
21 might not be explaining that right.

22 LT [REDACTED] No, that does make sense.

23 Okay, so essentially you would never put yourself in a  
24 situation where you're already underway and you're  
25 checking to see what anchorages are --

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1 MR. BILLIOT: On purpose? No.

2 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

3 MR. BILLIOT: Now accidentally, fog sets in --

4 LT [REDACTED] Right.

5 MR. BILLIOT: -- different story altogether.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay.

7 MR. BILLIOT: But no. No, not when you're in  
8 a safe berth --

9 LT [REDACTED] Right.

10 MR. BILLIOT: -- you're not going to leave not  
11 knowing you have no place to go.

12 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right. I don't  
13 think I have any other questions.

14 MR. KARR: I just have some minor follow up  
15 questions. This is Mike Karr. You were describing that  
16 Belmont is one of the newer anchorages. So Belmont was not  
17 an anchorage at some point. What --

18 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

19 MR. KARR: What makes it an official anchorage,  
20 as far as you're concerned?

21 MR. BILLIOT: I actually don't know that legal  
22 process. I know the association goes through, I guess with  
23 the Corps of Engineers, to get permits for --

24 MR. KARR: All right.

25 MR. BILLIOT: I don't know nothing about that,

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1 to be honest with you.

2 MR. KARR: So at one point, you did not -- at  
3 some point in the past, you did not anchor vessels at --

4 MR. BILLIOT: No.

5 MR. KARR: -- Belmont? Okay.

6 MR. BILLIOT: Just like White Castle  
7 Anchorage. That used to not be an anchorage. And then  
8 whatever they got to do to make that, now we got a White  
9 Castle Anchorage.

10 MR. KARR: Okay.

11 MR. BILLIOT: I don't know the, that's all  
12 office stuff there.

13 MR. KARR: You anchored at Belmont and the ship  
14 dragged anchor. If you had anchored anywhere else that  
15 day, would the same, would you have dragged anchor?

16 MR. BILLIOT: Possibly. I mean every one of  
17 our anchorages is having problems right now.

18 MR. KARR: All right. Thanks.

19 MR. BILLIOT: I mean, yes. I don't know how to  
20 answer that.

21 MR. KARR: This is an opinion question.  
22 Belmont Anchorage, now there's only one vessel anchored or  
23 --

24 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

25 MR. KARR: -- now there is one vessel allowed

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1 to anchor there. Are they increasing the scope of the  
2 chain?

3 MR. BILLIOT: I have no idea.

4 MR. KARR: Okay.

5 MR. BILLIOT: That I couldn't tell you.

6 MR. KARR: Have you heard of anybody using more  
7 than three or four shackles of chain?

8 MR. BILLIOT: No I haven't. All right.  
9 Thanks.

10 MR. COLOMB: Was that it? Is everybody  
11 finished?

12 MR. KARR: That's --

13 LTJG [REDACTED] I have one final follow-up  
14 question. Not necessarily as it relates to this incident,  
15 but just in general.

16 Have you, during this high water experience,  
17 had any other issues on other vessels, with dragging  
18 anchors that you were personally on?

19 MR. BILLIOT: Oh me personally? No.  
20 Everyone I've anchored, this high river so far, as far as  
21 I know, has never had to go get re-anchored.

22 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Have you had any other  
23 issues, just in general, with vessels that you're on during  
24 this high water?

25 MR. BILLIOT: No. I've had a pretty good high

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1 water season so far. Up to --

2 MR. COLOMB: With one exception.

3 MR. BILLIOT: -- last Sunday.

4 LTJG [REDACTED] Okay. Roger that.

5 LT [REDACTED] I have one more question.

6 Sorry.

7 LTJG [REDACTED] Go ahead.

8 LT [REDACTED] This is Lieutenant [REDACTED] I  
9 just have one more question. So let's say we were not in  
10 high water. How much anchor chain would you have put down  
11 at Belmont Anchorage?

12 MR. BILLIOT: Three and three.

13 LT [REDACTED] Three and three. Okay.

14 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

15 LT [REDACTED] All right.

16 MR. BILLIOT: I wouldn't have even worried  
17 about that extra on the port.

18 LT [REDACTED] Okay. So three and three.

19 Okay, that's it.

20 MR. COLOMB: Let me ask him a question just so  
21 you all have this on the record.

22 LT [REDACTED] Yes.

23 MR. COLOMB: Captain Billiot, this is Mike  
24 Colomb speaking. You've been a pilot for 26 years?

25 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

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1 MR. COLOMB: How many vessels have you moved in  
2 26 years?

3 MR. BILLIOT: Oh Jesus.

4 MR. COLOMB: Do you average a certain number a  
5 month, a certain number a year?

6 MR. BILLIOT: I mean if you figure, I don't  
7 know, if you do a 150 a year times 26 years --

8 MR. COLOMB: Okay.

9 MR. BILLIOT: -- you probably got a pretty good  
10 average. I mean I work a lot of extra time too.

11 MR. COLOMB: Yes. So that's 4,000, 5,000  
12 vessel turns on the Mississippi River?

13 MR. BILLIOT: Oh, I'd say easy.

14 MR. COLOMB: Okay. Plus, the extra turns,  
15 whatever you --

16 MR. BILLIOT: I mean I work a lot when I am off  
17 watch because nobody likes the work.

18 MR. COLOMB: Right. And you've moved vessels  
19 and anchored vessels in high water, high river stages, at  
20 least, you said, three different years in your career?

21 MR. BILLIOT: No, she was asking about the  
22 three major high waters.

23 MR. COLOMB: Okay.

24 MR. KARR: Are we in one of those now?

25 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

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1 MR. COLOMB: Okay.

2 MR. BILLIOT: I mean we get high water, at some  
3 point, every year.

4 MR. COLOMB: Right. So you had, that was my  
5 point.

6 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

7 MR. COLOMB: You have it every year, since  
8 you've been a pilot?

9 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

10 MR. COLOMB: And you've been anchoring ships  
11 all those years?

12 MR. BILLIOT: Correct.

13 MR. COLOMB: Okay. Have you ever had a problem  
14 occur with a ship, like what happened with Manizales on the  
15 Sunday of this incident?

16 MR. BILLIOT: Well I mean, when you have one  
17 anchored sitting perfect and then do that --

18 MR. COLOMB: Correct.

19 MR. BILLIOT: -- while I'm there?

20 MR. COLOMB: Correct.

21 MR. BILLIOT: No, that's the first time that's  
22 happened. I mean I've had ships drag anchors while I'm  
23 onboard.

24 MR. COLOMB: Right.

25 MR. BILLIOT: I've had to re-anchor ships two

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1 or three times while I'm there. But not one that -- that's  
2 the first time on that. One sitting perfect for 20, 30  
3 minutes and then just --

4 MR. COLOMB: And that's what I'm getting at.  
5 You anchored this ship according to your 26 years of  
6 experience --

7 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

8 MR. COLOMB: -- properly.

9 MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

10 MR. COLOMB: It set properly, you waited for it  
11 to make sure it was set properly --

12 MR. BILLIOT: Correct.

13 MR. COLOMB: -- and then you made sure the  
14 captain was happy, everything was good and you left the  
15 ship.

16 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

17 MR. COLOMB: And as soon as you were about to  
18 leave is when it broke loose.

19 MR. BILLIOT: Right.

20 MR. COLOMB: Okay. And that's never happened  
21 in your --

22 MR. BILLIOT: No. That's a, this is a first  
23 for me.

24 MR. COLOMB: Okay. That's all I have.

25 MR. KARR: All right. And this is Mike Karr.

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1 Can you do your best job in describing what the bottom of  
2 the Mississippi River is like in the Belmont area?

3 MR. BILLIOT: I mean, it's just like a soft  
4 muddy bottom. I mean I don't know the, I mean as far as  
5 any details, no. I mean --

6 MR. KARR: Well if it's a soft muddy bottom, I  
7 mean describe how you think the anchors hold on a soft muddy  
8 bottom.

9 MR. BILLIOT: Usually we have no problems.  
10 The only time we have problems with this is when we get this  
11 extreme high river. And that's the only time we have any  
12 problems with our anchorages.

13 All our anchorages pretty much all react the  
14 same way. You know. Sometimes they work good in high  
15 river and, like I said, up until Sunday, we've been using  
16 Belmont for, as far as I know, for the last three weeks prior  
17 to that with no problems with them holding there.

18 And then now, since Sunday, nothing would hold  
19 there. What changed? I mean I don't know. I mean  
20 current speed, current direction, contour of the bottom,  
21 I don't know. I mean I don't know. I'm not experienced  
22 in that to give you an answer to that.

23 MR. KARR: All right, thanks.

24 LT [REDACTED] Sorry.

25 MR. BILLIOT: That's all right.

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1                   LT ██████████ This is Lieutenant ██████████  
2                   So did the stern of the Manizales every hit the starboard  
3                   anchor chain of the Zen-Noh Grain Pegasus? To your  
4                   recollection.

5                   MR. BILLIOT: I couldn't tell you that. I mean  
6                   when we were broadside like that --

7                   LT ██████████ Right.

8                   MR. BILLIOT: -- all hell was breaking loose at  
9                   that point.

10                  LT ██████████ Okay. You're not sure.

11                  MR. BILLIOT: All I know of is that port chain.  
12                  Because it was kissing us.

13                  LT ██████████ Okay. So the port chain is the  
14                  one that wrapped around the --

15                  MR. BILLIOT: The port chain did all the  
16                  damage.

17                  LT ██████████ -- rescue boat davit crane?

18                  MR. BILLIOT: Yes.

19                  LT ██████████ Okay. And then that -- okay.  
20                  All right. I just wanted to know if you recalled at all  
21                  if you had hit --

22                  MR. BILLIOT: That I couldn't --

23                  LT ██████████ -- the starboard anchor chain.

24                  MR. BILLIOT: I don't know.

25                  LT ██████████ Okay. Thank you.

**NEAL R. GROSS**

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1 MR. COLOMB: Are we done?

2 MR. KARR: All right, this concludes the  
3 recording. It's 11:33. Thank you all.

4 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off  
5 the record at 11:33 a.m.)

6

7 Michael Karr, NTSB IIC, listened to the audio recording  
8 correcting incorrect words and spelling in the transcript.

9 Done 3/23/2016.

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