

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

*

KRISTIN ALEXIS/BARGE MR. ERVIN *

ALLISION WITH THE SUNSHINE BRIDGE * Accident No.: DCA19FM003

DONALDSONVILLE, LOUISIANA *

OCTOBER 12, 2018 *

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Interview of: CHAD NELSON
Dispatcher, Cooper Consolidated

Lamar Dixon Expo Center
Gonzales, Louisiana

Tuesday,
May 7, 2019

APPEARANCES:

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United States Coast Guard

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United States Coast Guard

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(2:24 p.m.)

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2
3 CDR MESKUN: The time is now 2:24. We are back on the
4 record. We will now hear testimony from Mr. Chad Nelson.

5 Please come forward to the witness table and Lieutenant
6 [REDACTED] will administer your oath and ask you some preliminary
7 questions.

8 LT [REDACTED] Please stand and raise your right hand.
9 (Whereupon,

10 CHAD NELSON

11 was called as a witness and, after having been duly sworn, was
12 examined and testified as follows:)

13 LT [REDACTED] You may be seated. Please state your full name
14 and spell your last name into the microphone.

15 MR. NELSON: Chad Andrew Nelson, last name N-e-l-s-o-n.

16 LT [REDACTED] Please identify counsel, and confirm
17 representation.

18 MR. WOGAN: Ford Wogan on behalf of Cooper Consolidated.

19 CDR MESKUN: Thank you.

20 INTERVIEW OF CHAD NELSON

21 BY CDR MESKUN:

22 Q. Please describe for us what your job is, who you work for,
23 what the job description is like, how long you've worked there,
24 and around the river system.

25 A. I've worked on the river system since I was 18. I'm 47 now,
26 so about 26 years. I've worked for Cooper Consolidated now, since

1 it merged with CGB, for a little -- about a year and a half now.
2 I'm a dispatcher at Cooper Consolidated. I work 12-hour shifts, 7
3 on/7 off, strictly nights, only at night. My job basically is to
4 take the orders from the customers and to pass them on to my
5 boats, whoever is the best suited to do the job.

6 Q. And were you working on October 11th, the day that the
7 Sunshine Bridge was hit?

8 A. Yes, I was.

9 Q. Can you provide a recount of what happened from your
10 perspective?

11 A. The order was given to go start stripping the CMT dock. And
12 I gave the *Captain Whitey* and the *Kristin Alexis* the order to do
13 that. They had four things they needed to do: Strip two barges
14 and then strip the LMO rig, which the *Captain Whitey* did that.
15 And then, the last rig to come off was the *Mr. Ervin*, the *Kristen*
16 *Alexis* did that. And it was their orders to take the barge, the
17 rig, and go north to Darrow Fleet.

18 Q. And when you say strip, can you just clarify what that means?

19 A. To get off -- to take everything off the dock, to turn it
20 loose and get it off the dock and back to the fleet or to wherever
21 it needed to go.

22 CDR MESKUN: Okay. Thank you. We will now proceed with our
23 additional questions, but if you don't understand what we're
24 asking, just let us know and we'll rephrase the question. Or if
25 you don't know the answer to the question, please just say so.

1 MR. NELSON: Okay.

2 CDR MESKUN: Mr. [REDACTED]

3 BY MR. [REDACTED]

4 Q. So starting with when the *Kristin Alexis* went to go get the
5 *Mr. Ervin*, did you talk directly to them to give them that order?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. Did they show any concerns or ask any questions about the
8 crane at that time?

9 A. Not beforehand. At the time that they were going to get the
10 rig off the dock, and by the time that they were leaving, he
11 called me with a concern about a bucket on the deck.

12 Q. How did he contact you?

13 A. By phone.

14 Q. By phone? What happened after that?

15 A. He was just explaining to me that the guys on the deck on the
16 rig were getting a little irate with him, and he didn't know what
17 to do. So I told him I would call the Cooper supervisor to see if
18 there was anything I could do.

19 Q. And who was the supervisor you called?

20 A. I don't remember at the time. I don't remember who it was
21 that I called. I know now that it was Mr. Justin [sic].

22 Q. Mr. Justin? Judson. Okay.

23 A. Yeah, I just met him today.

24 Q. And where did you order the *Kristin Alexis* -- what were the
25 exact orders you gave *Kristin Alexis*?

1 A. His orders was to take the rig off the dock and proceed north
2 to Darrow Fleet, mile marker 175.

3 Q. Were there any time restraints or a deadline in which that
4 had to be done?

5 A. Just, you know, just as soon as they could get it up there.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Can we get Exhibit 49?

7 BY MR. [REDACTED]

8 Q. You have the exhibit over there, too. It's Exhibit 49. Can
9 you explain to me what this log is?

10 A. This is my dispatch sheet. This is where we put all the --
11 our fleet info. This is actually the last page of my dispatch
12 sheets that I fill out every night. And we have on there, we
13 have -- if you look under fleet inspection times, that's the day
14 watch at the top and the night watch giving me fleet check time.
15 We have the date. Anything that they take on, to the right-hand
16 side, that's for fuel, if they take on fuel. And the Zen-Noh Boat
17 Charter is my boat charters for the boats that are working at
18 Zen-Noh Grain Elevator. And then, underneath that is anything
19 that any other boats that I have on charter, it goes down there.

20 Q. A lot of this stuff's coded. Can you just real quickly
21 translate what some of those codes are?

22 A. You talking about under Fleet and Block?

23 Q. Yeah, or Boat. Is that like TR and V?

24 A. All right. The Boat, if it say TR, that's the *Timothy Roose*
25 (ph.). That's our little fleet mate boat that he rides around the

1 fleet on. And then, under Boat on the bottom section, it has a
2 CM. That's for *Clinton Matthew*. That's our lead fleet boat. And
3 SF would have been the *Susan Frances*.

4 Q. Okay. So I'm assuming that --

5 A. And the V that you see under it, it just means that *Clinton*
6 *Matthew* carried down.

7 Q. So, on this log, does it say anywhere where the orders were
8 given to the *Kristin Alexis*?

9 A. No, sir, not at that time.

10 Q. Give me just a second. So can you look at the second page on
11 your exhibit and point out where the order was called for the
12 *Kristin Alexis*?

13 A. *Kristin Alexis*, second line from the bottom. *Kristin Alexis*
14 001 to 605, the 605 representing when the time that they were
15 relieved from the crane. And 001 would have been their start time
16 that they went on charter to bring the crane to Darrow Fleet.

17 Q. I'm just going to go back to the communications. Did anybody
18 request any additional information on the *Mr. Ervin*?

19 A. Like what kind of information?

20 Q. Any kind of dimensions?

21 A. No.

22 Q. So nobody requested the height of the crane?

23 A. No, sir.

24 Q. Has anybody ever requested through dispatch the height of the
25 crane?

1 A. We get the question every now and then. Now it's kind of a
2 standard thing. Everybody's scared of hitting a bridge now since
3 this accident happened.

4 Q. Okay. Before, how often did you ever get the question?

5 A. I mean, we did every now and then, randomly.

6 Q. Did you as dispatcher have that kind of information available
7 to you if somebody called you?

8 A. At the time, no, sir, I didn't. But it was just a phone call
9 away.

10 Q. Who would you call?

11 A. I would call the Cooper super, supervisor.

12 Q. Who would that be?

13 A. Each evening, we get a rundown of what the Cooper rigs are
14 doing. They send that to us by email for what we know what to do
15 that night with the Cooper rig. And on the bottom of it, they
16 have who's on call at what station. So you have who's on call at
17 180, who's on call at 175, and this night, who was on call at CMT.
18 And I would have called that CMT supervisor.

19 Q. Do you know who the supervisor was that evening?

20 A. I stated at the time of my statement I didn't know, but I
21 just met the guy today. His name's Justin.

22 Q. Okay. So that's who you would have called if the question
23 would have come?

24 A. Yes.

25 BY CDR MESKUN:

1 Q. Just want to make sure I heard that last comment correctly.
2 Who did you say that you would contact?

3 A. We call them a Cooper super, but it's Cooper supervisor,
4 whoever's working at each individual job.

5 Q. And it just so happens that it was Mr. Adams that night; is
6 that what you were saying?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. And what information would you seek from him?

9 A. If the boat would have called asking me what the dimensions
10 and the height of the crane was, I would have called him to find
11 out.

12 CDR MESKUN: Okay. Thank you.

13 BY MR. [REDACTED]

14 Q. Do you know if any kind of voyage planning's done before --
15 or tell me how information comes to you and orders come to you,
16 and then you disseminate that out to the fleet.

17 A. Well, like I mentioned before, usually around 1700, we get an
18 email from Cooper, the Cooper stevedores, and they'll let us know
19 what needs to be done with the rigs each night. And we can get
20 the orders off of there, and we'll also get phone calls coming
21 from the Cooper stevedores.

22 Q. When you say stevedores, are they the ones out on the cranes
23 and the fleet?

24 A. Not specifically on the crane, but whoever's on watch for the
25 Cooper supervisors that night.

1 Q. Where would they be on watch at?

2 A. At each individual location. You know, you got one that goes
3 to 180, one 175. If ships are working in those berths, then
4 they'll go to a different location.

5 Q. So when they -- do you have any involvement in any kind of
6 voyage planning?

7 A. No, sir.

8 Q. Or do you know who plans the voyages?

9 A. I would imagine the captain of the vessel.

10 Q. Captain of the vessel? So, up to the time of the incident,
11 did you have any training or knowledge of any Cooper employees
12 that calculate air gap on the bridge to make sure that it's safe
13 for the crane to -- going under it?

14 A. No, sir.

15 Q. Do you now?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. Can you explain the new process?

18 A. We have a spreadsheet that we use, an Excel spreadsheet, that
19 we just punch in the river gauge and it gives us the air gap.

20 Q. And then, what do you do with that information?

21 A. If need be, we could pass it on to the boat, if they ask.
22 But they should all have it, the same spreadsheet, up in their
23 wheelhouse, that they can get the information.

24 Q. And up until that, though, you did not have that resource?

25 A. No, sir.

1 Q. And have you ever heard any conversations about who to
2 contact in case that information ever got requested?

3 A. If it was requested, I would just call the Cooper supervisor.

4 Q. Cooper supervisor. Did the *Kristin Alexis* ask that night?

5 A. No, sir.

6 Q. Do you have any -- did you have anything in your office that
7 would give you access to that type of information?

8 A. Not at the time, no.

9 Q. And do you now?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Was there any -- do you recall any conversations with either
12 the -- your crew, the Cooper employees, or the *Kristin Alexis*
13 about having a crew go back while the vessel was underway to move
14 the bucket?

15 A. We were going to try to get a crew back out there. It wasn't
16 a guarantee. And we were going to try to catch them around Weber
17 Marine, which is right below the Sunshine Bridge. It, you know,
18 just for crew boatwise, it wouldn't be -- a short trip instead of
19 a long trip down to CMT Dock.

20 Q. Who was that discussion with?

21 A. That was with Justin.

22 Q. It was with him?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. And do you recall any more details?

25 A. He told me he was going to try to get a crew back out there,

1 but I never got a call back after that from him.

2 Q. How were you communicating with him?

3 A. Phone.

4 Q. Telephone?

5 A. Uh-huh.

6 Q. Was the -- do you recall how the connection with him was?

7 A. It was clear.

8 Q. It was clear?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. So was there any communication with the *Kristin Alexis* on
11 that?

12 A. They knew that we were working on trying to get a crew back
13 out there, and they were supposed to let us know when they were
14 approaching the bridge and I was going to give them final
15 confirmation with them whether we were going to get a crew out
16 there. But I had never received a phone call back from Justin to
17 know one way or the other.

18 Q. And when you say "they," it was Mr. Adams?

19 A. Is that his last name?

20 Q. Or Judson.

21 A. Justin, yeah.

22 MR. [REDACTED] It's Judson, right, not Justin?

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Judson, yes.

24 MR. [REDACTED] Judson.

25 BY MR. [REDACTED]

1 Q. So you were under the impression that Judson was working with
2 Weber to try to get a crew back out there?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Did you ever talk to the *Kristin Alexis* that a crew --
5 stating that?

6 A. I mentioned to them that I was working with the supervisor to
7 try to get a crew back out there but it wasn't a guarantee at the
8 time, that I was waiting to hear back from the Cooper supervisor.

9 Q. And how did you communicate with them?

10 A. It was over the phone.

11 Q. Over the phone?

12 A. Yeah.

13 BY CDR MESKUN:

14 Q. Just a couple follow-on questions. Do you know if any of the
15 captains of the boats use the alternate span when they go up to
16 Darrow?

17 A. They don't specifically tell me if they take the alternate
18 span or not, and we don't -- it's up to them. It's not anything
19 that we have to do with. They're in charge of navigating their
20 vessel.

21 Q. Has any boat ever asked for guidance or direction on that?

22 A. Not to me. I wouldn't have that information. They might
23 converse amongst themselves out there with the other boat pilots
24 who have more experience in the area, but not with me. I wouldn't
25 have that information.

1 Q. Okay. What areas does Cooper work at? Is there like a
2 geographic region? How far up river, down river do they go?

3 A. We have a fleet at mile 207 fleet. We have a fleet at 180,
4 175, 164. I know we have a fleet at 132. And below that, I'm not
5 sure how many fleets we have. But I do know there is a fleet at
6 Belle Chasse. I don't know the mile marker.

7 Q. And then, do you know how many different bridges are in that
8 area?

9 A. From?

10 Q. In that area where Cooper operates and has all those fleeting
11 areas, do you know how many bridges a boat would have to transit
12 through?

13 A. Let's say, if they're going from 132 to 175, it would be two,
14 two bridges.

15 Q. And just a moment ago you mentioned that now you have a new
16 spreadsheet that helps you to calculate air gaps --

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. -- based upon the river gauge.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Does that spreadsheet factor in all of the bridges that they
21 would have to transit?

22 A. Yes, sir. We have each bridge that has a different river
23 gauge that you put in. You got to go look -- you got to pull it
24 up on the NOAA website and get the river gauges on the NOAA
25 website. That river gauge, you punch in. They take the closest

1 river gauge to that bridge and then it calculates from there.

2 Q. Okay. And does that spreadsheet factor in both the main
3 channel and an alternate channel, if it has an alternate channel?

4 A. No, sir. I think it's just the center span, the main
5 channel.

6 Q. Okay. So it only gives you one reading per bridge?

7 A. Correct.

8 CDR MESKUN: That's all the questions I have for now.

9 Mr. Kucharski?

10 BY MR. KUCHARSKI:

11 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Nelson.

12 A. Good afternoon.

13 Q. So I think your testimony was that you didn't know if anyone
14 at Cooper had done a calculation to see if the *Mr. Ervin* could
15 make it safely under the bridge?

16 A. It was my assumption that they didn't because nobody asked.
17 The *Kristin Alexis* didn't ask for the dimensions, so I didn't ask
18 them. So I would assume that they didn't.

19 Q. But somebody -- I guess I'm asking, somebody -- I think we
20 knew about the vessel, but somebody at Cooper that made the
21 calculation?

22 A. I'm sure they did or they wouldn't have known that it can go
23 under the bridge. They wouldn't give us the order to make the
24 bridge if it wasn't going to fit.

25 Q. Well, I guess we'll ask someone else at Cooper, then, if that

1 was done.

2 In Exhibit 49, this is river stages. And there's a "DVILLE"
3 in quotes.

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. What is this? Can you tell us what it is?

6 A. The DV -- that's Donaldsonville, the Donaldsonville gauge.

7 Q. It was left blank. Is there any reason?

8 A. Probably just an oversight.

9 Q. It's blank on both pages.

10 A. With all the chaos that was going on that morning, I was
11 supposed to fill it out and I probably just -- it was an
12 oversight.

13 Q. Do you normally put in the gauge height, the river gauge for
14 that on a daily basis?

15 A. Yes, sir, if I remember. If I don't, then my day person, my
16 day watch person, they'll come behind me and put it in.

17 Q. Thank you. After you found out that the bridge was struck,
18 did you dispatch people or assets to the *Kristin Alexis* or to the
19 Mr. --

20 A. Yes, sir. I sent my lead boat up there, the *Clinton Matthew*,
21 because originally I thought when he said he hit the bridge, I
22 thought he hit it with the deck of the barge and they might have
23 been taking on water. And that boat has pumps on it, being a lead
24 fleet boat, so I sent the *Clinton Matthew*.

25 Q. Is that a boat that's chartered to Cooper or is it a Cooper

1 boat?

2 A. No, it's on charter. It's a Western Rivers boat.

3 Q. Western Rivers, okay. Were there any changes to the
4 procedures that you're aware of for tying up the dock -- any of
5 the barges to the docks since the accident?

6 A. No, sir, not that I was aware of.

7 Q. Prior to the accident, well, even prior or -- let's stick
8 with prior. Was there any procedure when you dispatched a tug, a
9 towboat, to move a crane barge, was there any procedure to provide
10 the air draft to them?

11 A. No, sir, not at the time.

12 Q. And now you say you have a spreadsheet, but you don't give
13 the information out unless they ask for it?

14 A. Well, they're supposed to have that information in their
15 wheelhouse because we send it to all the boats. And anybody who
16 comes to work for us, we send it to them.

17 Q. You send it to the boats?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Was that done before?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. So that's a change in the procedure, too?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. And so you've looked at this spreadsheet, have you, numerous
24 times, yeah?

25 A. Which one?

1 Q. Is it an exhibit?

2 A. Talking about the new spreadsheet?

3 Q. The new spreadsheet.

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Could we maybe get a copy of that, do you think, so we can
6 see that new spreadsheet? And on there, is there -- there's the
7 air draft of the actual crane or the highest -- now here's the
8 million-dollar question. Is it the air draft or is it distance
9 from the deck to the top?

10 A. It's the distance from the waterline to the top of the crane.

11 Q. The waterline, okay. So we have some accounting of the draft
12 or the freeboard, really, of the vessel.

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. You know the difference between draft and freeboard?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay. It was this we went round and round about, you know,
17 the height from the deck to the top of the crane and some -- well,
18 that confusion there, that 130 feet. But now we know that air
19 draft -- well, I think we knew before air draft is from the water
20 to the top, but there was, maybe -- maybe I'm confused, I don't
21 know, but -- you know, the information that's going out. So the
22 information that's actually provided to the towboats or the
23 companies, somebody from the towboat operation, is the actual air
24 draft at that time?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Does that change, that air draft? Do the drafts, to your
2 knowledge, do the drafts of the barges change at all?

3 A. The guys on the rig, they're supposed to keep the barge
4 pumped out, and that keeps it at a certain level of draft.

5 Q. Okay. But do they have water ballast on those barges to your
6 knowledge?

7 A. They have void tanks. As far as any ballast, I don't know if
8 they have any ballast or not.

9 Q. They pump water out. Do they pump water in, do you know?

10 A. No. No reason they should pump water into the barge.

11 Q. Well, I was just wondering. Sometimes they -- I understood
12 in testimony earlier that they try to keep the barge's list even.
13 I was just wondering if they had any way that they put water on
14 there. We'll probably ask that of someone else.

15 You mentioned earlier that you took your orders from the
16 customers. Customers would call in?

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. And then, you passed them on to whom?

19 A. To whoever was best suited for the job, whoever was freed up
20 at the time that the order needed to take place. For instance, if
21 OCCI dock calls me and said they want to spot a barge at 1930,
22 I'll look to see who can make that shift and if they're available
23 at 1930. And then, I'll assign them to go do that.

24 Q. And then the barge is also available or whatever?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay. So it's a two-part then. The asset that you're
2 moving, some kind of a barge, and then the towboat itself, so you
3 marry them up?

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. Okay. So at any time during this -- well, let me back up a
6 little bit so I understand your position clearly. You're sort of
7 the radio go-between the towboat and the supervisor?

8 A. Yes, sir, in a sense.

9 Q. The Cooper supe as you call them or whatever.

10 A. In a sense, yes, sir.

11 Q. Yeah. Okay.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. So if the towboat has a question, they would go to you and
14 then -- a question about the barge, say.

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. They would go to you and then you would relay it back down to
17 the supervisor.

18 A. Yeah, I would call whoever was necessary to call.

19 Q. And vice versa. The supervisor would tell you something --

20 A. And then I'd call --

21 Q. -- and then you're on the VHF and you can talk to the
22 tugboat, or the telephone.

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. So do you know if there's any direct telephone communication
25 or radio communication between the supervisor and the towboat?

1 Can they talk to them?

2 A. I don't know if they carry radios or not. Couldn't tell you.

3 Q. On the morning or the evening of the accident, did you pass a
4 message on that the buckets were not going to be moved?

5 A. No, sir.

6 Q. Or the bucket. I'm sorry.

7 A. No, sir.

8 Q. I think the question was asked that have any other towboats
9 asked you about -- previous to the accident, had they asked you
10 about the dimensions of the barge. Let's go for the height.
11 That's what's the issue here. They had asked you for that?

12 A. Yeah, random times they have.

13 Q. Random times? Did you give them, at that time, the air draft
14 based on -- with the, you know, the freeboard or was it -- do you
15 know if it was the deck, from the deck?

16 A. No, it was from the waterline up.

17 Q. It was? It was always the air draft?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. So now you have this new spreadsheet, so we can sort of close
20 the loop on this. You have this new spreadsheet and it has the
21 air draft in there. It has the clearance that you're getting or
22 the -- sometimes it's called air gap or vertical clearance,
23 depending on what --

24 A. Right.

25 Q. Okay. And you have that information. If you see that it's

1 not going to make or there's going to be a problem, are you told
2 to go ahead and contact the boat, or does someone at Cooper
3 contact the boat?

4 A. If we see that it's not going to -- there's a problem, we'll
5 call the Cooper supervisors and say, hey, look, this thing is not
6 going to make the bridge, what do we do?

7 Q. You would call the Cooper supervisor, but would you call the
8 towboat? They're the ones that are going to take it off of there.

9 A. Well, yeah, I mean, I wouldn't -- if I knew it wasn't going
10 to fit, I wouldn't let him go through it.

11 Q. And is that a written instruction to you in any way?

12 A. It's just kind of a verbal thing.

13 Q. A verbal thing, okay. That's all good. I was just wondering
14 if there's any written instruction to do that.

15 MR. KUCHARSKI: That's it. You've been very helpful. It
16 puts a lot of pieces to the puzzle. Thank you.

17 BY MR. [REDACTED]

18 Q. Do you log when you calculate the air gap and then compare it
19 to the air draft of the vessel, are you logging it anywhere?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. As far as your job, you pretty much assign all the boats to
22 do -- or what to do, right?

23 A. What to do.

24 Q. Based on what's available.

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. Is it any boat can do anything?

2 A. Well, we would like to think that, yes, sir.

3 Q. Or do you have any guidance on boats that have restrictions?

4 A. Well, I mean, we know all their horsepower and we pretty
5 much know their limitations. I'm not going to go put 25 barges on
6 a 1200 horsepower boat because I know they can't handle it. I
7 wouldn't even try that. So, basically, it's, you know, whoever's
8 suited for the job, the task at hand.

9 Q. So have you -- did they give you training on how to assess a
10 boat to see if it could perform the tow that it needs to be done?

11 A. Well, no. It's just something I know over my years of
12 experience. No kind of formal training or nothing, no.

13 Q. Is there any resources you have that they provide you that
14 would allow you access to that information?

15 A. The captain. The captain would tell me if they could take it
16 or not.

17 Q. You just rely on them?

18 A. It's ultimately their decision.

19 Q. And then the air gap compared to the air draft of the vessel,
20 when you calculate it, is the guidance that you've been given, is
21 there a threshold that it has to be within?

22 A. I don't know what you're talking about.

23 Q. For example, if the air gap was 145 feet and the air draft of
24 the vessel was 144 feet, would you call that safe?

25 A. It was not my job to call it safe. I would call the vessel

1 and let them know, look, you're only going to have 1 foot of
2 clearance. So I'd let him make that call on whether he was going
3 to take it through or not.

4 Q. Did you get training on that or you just, from years of
5 experience --

6 A. Just from years of experience.

7 Q. -- you thought of that safety factor?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Has any other dispatchers been trained on that?

10 A. I couldn't tell you.

11 BY MR. KUCHARSKI:

12 Q. I can't thank you enough. Very helpful, your answers. Does
13 Cooper have any type of company safety meeting that you attend?

14 A. We attend dispatch meetings when they're called by my
15 immediate supervisor, our dispatch manager, MaryAnn McMillion.
16 She'll call dispatch meetings.

17 Q. Do you have them on a regular basis?

18 A. No. It's just at random times.

19 Q. And that's the only type of safety meeting that you would
20 have on a random basis?

21 A. Well, they have safety meetings every day at Cooper. Just, I
22 work nights, so when I get there, everybody else is gone. I'm the
23 only one there. It's me and the Darrow dispatcher, we're the only
24 two in the building.

25 Q. So do the results of these safety meetings come to you? Do

1 you see them somehow?

2 A. We have -- we get an email, notes of safety meetings, and we
3 also have a website we can log onto, the RCI website we can log
4 onto and look at safety things on there as well.

5 Q. And have you looked at them recently, or since the accident?

6 A. Been about maybe 3 months since I've looked at it, the RCI
7 website.

8 Q. So you wouldn't be aware if this bridge strike or any of the
9 changes in procedures or any of that information was discussed in
10 the safety minutes?

11 A. What they -- no, I wouldn't be aware of anything.

12 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay. Thank you.

13 CDR MESKUN: I have just a couple of few questions here.
14 Then we can move on.

15 BY CDR MESKUN:

16 Q. Do you know how long the transit normally takes from CMT up
17 to Darrow?

18 A. Depending on the river level, extreme low water, just a
19 guess, I would say about 5 hours. But as the water gets higher,
20 the current gets swifter and takes a little bit longer to push it.

21 Q. Okay. And do you know what the crane barge was going to be
22 doing once it got up there?

23 A. No, I sure don't. I don't know if they were going to tie it
24 up or if it was going to go on another ship or not. I didn't know
25 what it -- his orders were after it got up there.

1 Q. So do you know, was there any pressure for it to be up there
2 at a certain time?

3 A. Just it just needed to be up there as soon as possible. That
4 was it. It wasn't like I was telling them, you got to get up
5 there, you got to -- it was just like, get the rig, you know, and
6 go. Get up there whenever you get up there, whatever time you get
7 up there.

8 Q. Okay. Had any of the other captains -- had any of the boats
9 that had moved the *Mr. Ervin* ever complained to you about the
10 visibility, their ability or inability to see?

11 A. They all have a complaint about something somewheres. So, as
12 far as the cranes are concerned, yeah. Yeah, because they all --
13 you know, those are big cranes. Anybody who faces up behind it,
14 they're going to have some reduced visibility.

15 BY MR. KUCHARSKI:

16 Q. Sorry, Just one quick follow-on about these meetings with
17 you, your supervisor, the dispatch supervisor or manager.

18 A. Uh-huh.

19 Q. I wasn't sure; I think you may have answered it. Do they
20 call them at any kind of a regular basis?

21 A. No, sir. It's just random times.

22 Q. No. Did you attend any since the accident where you were
23 told about these procedures, the spreadsheet and everything else?
24 Or how did you find out about that? Just show up or --

25 A. My relief passed it on to me when he --

1 Q. Your relief passed it on.

2 A. -- came in.

3 Q. But nobody else, none of your supervisors or anybody else
4 mentioned this? It's just the word of -- a discussion with your
5 relief?

6 A. Yes. And emailing back and forth with my dispatch manager.

7 MR. KUCHARSKI: Okay, thank you.

8 CDR MESKUN: Mr. Waid, Mr. Reisman?

9 MR. REISMAN: Yes, thank you, sir.

10 BY MR. REISMAN:

11 Q. Mr. Nelson, I just have a couple of questions. You know the
12 *Mr. Ervin* carries about 100,000 gallons of fuel on board?

13 A. I don't know what the capacity of the fuel is.

14 Q. That's not something you keep track of in the dispatch
15 office?

16 A. No, sir.

17 Q. Do you know that when they load fuel onto the vessel she
18 sinks down into the water and her air draft is reduced, and when
19 they use up the fuel, she rises in the water and her air draft
20 increases?

21 A. I would imagine, yes.

22 Q. But that's not something you keep track of in dispatch?

23 A. No, sir.

24 Q. Also, my understanding from your statement is -- I don't
25 think anybody's asked you about it, is that when Captain Smith on

1 the *Kristin Alexis* called you to talk about moving the bucket and
2 you were talking to him about we're going to try to get a crew out
3 to move it from Weber, he told you that he -- because his
4 visibility was restricted, he was going to proceed northbound on
5 the western side of the river; is that correct?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. And do you have some kind of AIS display in the dispatcher
8 office where you can keep real-time track of the vessels that are
9 assigned to you as dispatcher?

10 A. We use PortVision. It's a website-based AIS system.
11 Sometimes it's accurate; sometimes it's not.

12 Q. So you could keep fairly real-time track of the *Kristin*
13 *Alexis* to ensure that the captain was doing exactly what he told
14 you he was going to do?

15 A. Yeah, I wouldn't say real-time. It all depends on when it
16 refreshes.

17 Q. Sure.

18 A. You know, you just set it to refresh for 60 seconds, 10
19 minutes, 15 minutes, however. And then, with Internet lag, it
20 could freeze up sometimes.

21 Q. But that's a tool that you use?

22 A. It is a tool that I use, yes.

23 MR. REISMAN: I think that's it.

24 BY MR. WOGAN:

25 Q. Chad, I just want to clarify, your role as a dispatcher,

1 you're not actually making a determination as to why the *Mr. Ervin*
2 needs to be moved from CMT to Darrow and vice versa, correct?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. That's outside the scope of your responsibilities, correct?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. You don't have a responsibility with respect to how the
7 various vessels are going to navigate, correct?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. You're telling them simply, I need you to move this crane
10 from X spot to Y spot.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. To be clear, I think it was asked, but I just want to
13 clarify, have you ever, prior to the incident, been asked for the
14 dimensions of the *Mr. Ervin*?

15 A. I couldn't tell you if it was the *Mr. Ervin* specifically.
16 You know, we've had so many different cranes come in.

17 Q. You just don't recall one way or another?

18 A. Right.

19 Q. In terms -- there were some questions about voyage planning.
20 And I think this dovetails into your responsibilities with respect
21 to being a dispatcher, but do you have any responsibility for
22 voyage planning other than passing along the instruction that,
23 hey, we need to move this from X location to Y location?

24 A. That's it, just telling them the what and where.

25 Q. You're not giving them any further instructions with respect

1 to how they are to do that?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. Do you have any responsibility for how or any knowledge about
4 how the untying or tying of the *Mr. Ervin* at a dock plays out?

5 A. No, sir.

6 Q. That doesn't fall within the scope of your responsibilities?

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. You were talking about you would have called the Cooper super
9 if you needed some information. If you had received an inquiry
10 regarding the need for any information, regardless of what it was
11 about, the first thing you would probably do is call the Cooper
12 superintendent?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. And that's a person that's identified on a piece of paper
15 that's provided to you at the beginning of each day?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. So it would depend on whether or not -- let's say, for
18 instance, the *Mr. Ervin* was working at the 175 in Darrow. There
19 would be someone identified at 175 as the Cooper superintendent
20 there, correct?

21 A. Correct. It wouldn't be -- if it was at Darrow, it wouldn't
22 be my responsibility.

23 Q. Okay. So your responsibility would be anything at Convent
24 fleet?

25 A. Around 164 fleet.

1 Q. And was it your understanding that if there was a request
2 for information and you made a call to the Cooper superintendent,
3 if he didn't know the information, was it your understanding that
4 he would call someone to get that information?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 MR. WOGAN: That's it. Thank you, Chad.

7 CDR MESKUN: Mr. Kucharski, did you have any further
8 questions?

9 MR. KUCHARSKI: No.

10 CDR MESKUN: Mr. [REDACTED]

11 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, I do.

12 BY MR. [REDACTED]

13 Q. I just wanted to clarify one that Mr. Meskun had asked. He
14 had asked you if anybody had ever called complaining about the
15 visibility while pushing one of the big cranes.

16 A. Uh-huh.

17 Q. Has anybody ever refused to push one of the cranes because of
18 visibility? Or just told you, look, I can't do this?

19 A. Yeah, we've had several times before --

20 Q. Before the incident?

21 A. Before the incident, yes. Yes, sir. And after.

22 Q. Is there any chance you can recall a particular boat or
23 anything?

24 A. There was one time where the boat felt that he didn't have
25 enough horsepower to shove the rig up, because it's a pretty big

1 rig. So he felt he didn't have enough horsepower, so I just
2 assigned it to a different vessel that had enough horsepower to
3 push it.

4 Q. Was there ever any time where it was due to visibility, like
5 I can't see around it?

6 A. No, because they know it's got to move one way or another.
7 So they face up where they can best see and navigate. In this
8 instance, the night of the accident, he faced up on the port side
9 so that he could run up the west bank. That's kind of a guideline
10 for what the rest of the boats will do.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. That's it.

12 CDR MESKUN: Mr. Nelson, you are now released as a witness
13 from this formal marine casualty investigation. Thank you for
14 your testimony and cooperation. If I determine that this joint
15 investigation team needs additional information from you, I will
16 contact you through your counsel. If you have any questions about
17 this investigation, you can contact the recorder, Lieutenant

18 [REDACTED]
19 The time is now 3:04. We will recess for the day and
20 reconvene tomorrow morning at 0800. We are now off the record.

21 (Whereupon, at 3:04 p.m. the testimony was concluded.)
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: *KRISTIN ALEXIS/BARGE MR. ERVIN*
 ALLISION WITH THE SUNSHINE BRIDGE
 DONALDSONVILLE, LOUISIANA
 OCTOBER 12, 2018
 Interview of Chad Nelson

ACCIDENT NO.: *DCA19FM003*

PLACE: *Gonzales, Louisiana*

DATE: *May 7, 2019*

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.



Wendy C. Cutting
Transcriber