

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

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*KRISTIN ALEXIS/BARGE MR. ERVIN* \*

ALLISION WITH THE SUNSHINE BRIDGE \* Accident No.: DCA19FM003

DONALDSONVILLE, LOUISIANA \*

OCTOBER 12, 2018 \*

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Interview of: BLAISE RUDOLPH  
Mate/Deckhand, *Kristin Alexis*

Lamar Dixon Expo Center  
Gonzales, Louisiana

Monday,  
May 6, 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

(3:31 p.m.)

CDR MESKUN: The time is now 3:31. We will go on back on the record. We will call our next witness, Mr. Blaise Rudolph.

(Whereupon,

BLAISE RUDOLPH

was called as a witness and, after being first duly sworn, was examined and testified as follows:)

LT [REDACTED] You may be seated. Please state your name, with the spelling of your last name, speaking into the microphone.

MR. RUDOLPH: My name is Blaise Rudolph. Last name is spelled R-U-D-O-L-P-H.

INTERVIEW OF BLAISE RUDOLPH

BY CDR MESKUN:

Q. Thank you. Would you please describe to us your maritime experience, your background, different companies you've worked for, that sort of thing?

A. Yes, sir. Basically, like, in my family, there's a bunch like in the maritime. I had some grandfathers that worked for trawling, and my other grandpa a captain as well. I've been on the water for about a little over 4 years now and that's about it, really.

Q. Different positions you've held and different companies you've worked for?

A. Yes, sir. Yeah, like my first company I started off as a

1 green deckhand, just worked my way up. And I just recently got my  
2 steersman's license as well, so just trying to work my way up.

3 Q. Okay. Thank you.

4 A. No problem.

5 Q. We have a series of detailed questions that we are going to  
6 ask you, but before we do, I would like you to provide a recount  
7 of everything that transpired on the day of the accident with the  
8 Sunshine Bridge.

9 A. Yes, sir. On the day, we usually wake up at 11, wake up a  
10 little bit, like, before our watch change. Like, I work from  
11 midnight till noon, so I woke up around 11 o'clock to make sure.  
12 And we had our job safety briefing that we go over with before we  
13 get on watch.

14 When I walked up to the wheelhouse, I seen we were in the  
15 middle of trying to face-up to a crane barge. Captain was  
16 referring to me, that we were going to be going back up -- down to  
17 Darrow 175 with it. So I went and did our GAR model to it. It  
18 was in the amber, with restricted visibility, stuff like that.

19 And then, we started going northbound and he told me to go  
20 ahead and relieve Brandon Payne and Jeremy Cooper, that was out  
21 there. Went to go relieve them and they're passing on to me that  
22 they had a bucket that was on the port side of the crane barge,  
23 that it was kind of restricting visibility. They said that they  
24 were -- they also passed it on to me that when we were going up,  
25 that there was supposed to be a crew boat or somebody that was

1 coming to -- that was supposed to move it for us on the way up.

2 And we started going northbound, making up towards the -- I  
3 went up to the head of the tow with the crane barge. I was on the  
4 port side and the other deckhand I was working with, his name was  
5 Nick, he was on the starboard side, and we were keeping lookout.  
6 On the way up, they had some southbound traffic coming with some  
7 tows, and just making sure he was good off that and the fleet as  
8 well, on the west bank side.

9 And as we were going up, once all the tows were past us  
10 southbound, the pilot, Eugene, told us to come ahead back because  
11 everything was clear. And whenever we were getting basically a  
12 little bit around the bend, he would send us back out.

13 So we walked back towards the boat, got on, and a little bit  
14 later he told us that we were going to be approaching -- we were  
15 coming around the bend and he needed us back out there. So me and  
16 Nick started heading back out, and back again, I was on the port  
17 side and my other deckhand was on the starboard side. And told me  
18 that he was going to be going through the bridge on the alternate  
19 span because on the main span they had a southbound tow that was  
20 coming through the main span, so he was going to take the  
21 alternate span.

22 And as we were coming up, I was -- he told me he wanted to  
23 stay center with the green light on the alternate span. And so  
24 when we started going, I was standing on -- they have like a  
25 center cavel that's on the center of the crane barge; it's dead

1 center with it. I was keeping that center point even with the  
2 green light. And whenever he was starting to shift or come off of  
3 it, I was informing him of it, and he was trying to correct it the  
4 best that he can.

5 And as we were coming through, he had about 40 to 50 feet of  
6 the bow to crane barge that was starting to come underneath the  
7 Sunshine Bridge. And still everything was going good. We were  
8 still lied off the columns on the side, on the alternate side. It  
9 was -- port side was getting a little closer, but as we were going  
10 through he said everything looked good, to start heading back.  
11 Turned around, started heading back, took a few steps and made  
12 impact. That's everything.

13 CDR MESKUN: Thank you. I'll turn it over to Mr. [REDACTED]  
14 first, with additional questions.

15 BY MR. [REDACTED]

16 Q. We are going to start, I'm going to go back to when you went  
17 to relieve the off-going watch, Brandon --

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. -- Payne. What did you relieve them doing and where did you  
20 relieve them at?

21 A. When we stepped out, sir, they were on their way back towards  
22 the boat. They were telling me that they, that Brandon was -- he  
23 just finished changing the batteries our flashing amber light on  
24 the bow, and Jeremy was on his way back as well.

25 Q. But you relieved them on the bow?

1 A. No, sir. They were on the boat, sir, like they were coming  
2 back on the boat. They just finished changing --

3 Q. They were coming back?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Standing --

6 A. They were on the boat. Like Brandon Payne was on the boat.

7 Q. Okay. The other deckhand?

8 A. The other deckhand was still on the bow. He was keeping a  
9 lookout, deckhand Jeremy Cooper.

10 Q. Did anybody go out there and relieve him?

11 A. Yes, sir, the deckhand, Nick.

12 Q. Who was that?

13 A. His name was Nick Ratcliff.

14 Q. How long was Nick out there after he relieved Mr. Cooper?

15 A. I'm sorry, sir, can you repeat that again?

16 Q. After you guys relieved the watch and the lookout, how long  
17 did you maintain that lookout?

18 A. Me and Nick were both out there for at least a good -- close  
19 to 30 to 40 minutes, because they had bunch of southbound traffic  
20 that was coming. So we were trying to make sure he was all clear  
21 and --

22 Q. Did you notice anything different with the barge?

23 A. The only thing that I noticed from being with the fleet so  
24 long, was that usually I'm used to having the bucket -- usually  
25 the buckets are kind of close to the middle where they have their



1 tractors and everything on the crane barges. It's usually kind of  
2 more in the middle a little bit, than off to the port where it was  
3 at.

4 Q. Yeah. And I should have asked this question first, but have  
5 you pushed the crane barge before, the crane barges before?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. The *Hulk* and the *Mr. Ervin*?

8 A. Yes, sir. Like they weren't -- like both of them weren't  
9 always through the Sunshine, but we did maneuver them, like,  
10 around the fleet a lot.

11 Q. About how many times do you think you --

12 A. I don't remember exact number, but I know it's like multiple  
13 times.

14 Q. In your opening, when you were telling us how long you've  
15 worked and what positions you've held --

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. -- who -- what companies did you work for?

18 A. Like, I first started with Bayou Fleet. I was there for a  
19 little over a year. And then, after Bayou Fleet, I moved to  
20 Marquette to try to move up in the chain with the better benefits,  
21 and I'd heard, like, real good things about them, so I moved up to  
22 Marquette. And I was with Marquette for a little over 3 years, I  
23 think, now, I was with them.

24 Q. Do you still work for them?

25 A. No, sir.

1 Q. Can you explain why you aren't working for them currently?

2 A. I just wanted to try to work on my steersman, but -- to try  
3 to move up with my steersman license that I have. That's really  
4 -- like, I don't really have -- I have nothing else to really say  
5 with it really. Just trying to move up with my steersman license.

6 Q. So did you leave the company? Or was it your choice to leave  
7 the company?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Okay. What -- are you currently working on the river?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. For what company?

12 A. I work for Turn Services.

13 Q. As a steersman?

14 A. I'm a lead deckhand right now with them, sir.

15 Q. In October when you were working on the *Kristin Alexis*, what  
16 was the material condition? Was it in good shape?

17 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was in good shape.

18 Q. Did it have any mechanical issues that you know of?

19 A. No. No, sir.

20 Q. Did you ever hear the captains or pilots talking about any  
21 issues?

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. Your relationship with the crew, how well did you know  
24 Captain Picquet?

25 A. Me and Eugene were real close. Like, we -- he and I actually

1 used to deck together. But besides the whole crew, Brandon and  
2 everybody, like, we were like a family on the boat. We were  
3 really close.

4 Q. Okay. So how long have you been working with Captain  
5 Picquet?

6 A. Like, it was my -- like, for wheelhouse wise, it was my first  
7 hitch with him because I think he was with another company, I  
8 think, at first. But for him, with our boat, it was my first time  
9 like wheelhouse wise.

10 Q. So wheelhouse wise, but say -- and it doesn't have to be  
11 exact, an estimate, how much time overall as deckhand or --

12 A. Oh, like over time, deck and wheel? I'd say a little over a  
13 year that I've known him.

14 Q. Do you know if he's ever pushed a crane barge before? Or  
15 have you been on board while he has?

16 A. No, sir.

17 Q. When you relieved the watch, did you -- do your watch relief,  
18 did you notice anything out of the ordinary with the other crew  
19 members?

20 A. I mean, no, sir. Like they seemed fine. Like they seemed  
21 like their normal self.

22 Q. How much experience do you have working with Captain Smith?

23 A. Captain Smith, I worked with him for a little over -- close  
24 to about a year and a half, with the helmsman.

25 Q. Okay. And he -- everything seemed normal with him that

1 evening?

2 A. Yeah, yes, sir. He seemed normal.

3 Q. So on a normal watch, from start to finish, can you describe  
4 what your duties are?

5 A. Like from start to finish, sir?

6 Q. Yes. What do you do when up come on watch, all the way to  
7 the end of watch?

8 A. Yes, sir. First just making sure that we relieve the other  
9 watch on time, like on a timely manner. Doing the job safety  
10 briefing, making sure it's in a good zone. Checking our engine  
11 room out, making sure we do, regularly, engine room checks. If we  
12 have any painting coming on -- like, during summertime we do a lot  
13 of painting and sanding. Doing a bunch of shifting in the fleet,  
14 working line boats. Even when we moving crane barges, just  
15 sometimes moving it down to the America, that's around the bend,  
16 in the fleet. Do a lot.

17 Q. Okay. Is there anything different you do, like, say like  
18 that you would do before you pick up a crane barge? Is there  
19 anything different you would do?

20 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like, it's a like policy, like, if we ever  
21 have to face-up -- like if we take a crane barge, we have to do a  
22 job safety briefing on it because we're going to have restricted  
23 visibility. So we always have to do another one and -- with us,  
24 the captain in the wheelhouse, like before we start going.

25 Q. Okay. Then you mentioned earlier that you had done that --

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. -- and I think you said what color it was.

3 A. Yes, sir. It was in a amber. Yes, sir. It was in a yellow.

4 Q. When you did your GAR, is that in conjunction -- is it with  
5 the captain?

6 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. We do it all in the wheelhouse with the captain and the other  
9 deckhand.

10 Q. All the crew members in there?

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. Okay. Have you received any training on what to do if you  
13 are anything but green?

14 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like if it's any color besides green, you're  
15 supposed to try to mitigate it, and if it goes into the green  
16 you're good, but if it's in a -- if it's in a yellow or the red,  
17 you're supposed to call the port captain.

18 Q. What kind of training did you get from Marquette to be a  
19 deckhand?

20 A. When I started with them, sir, I had -- first day was a, it  
21 was a classroom orientation. They showed us PowerPoints, safety  
22 booklets that they have, making us go over policies, procedures.  
23 And then the second day, at their office, there's like a mockup of  
24 like a barge with more, like -- I guess you could say like more  
25 like physical stuff that explain what the job task is going to be

1 like before you go on a boat with laying wires, brackets and stuff  
2 like that. So basically it's first day is the classroom, the  
3 second day is a little more physical.

4 Q. Do they cover safety?

5 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

6 Q. So like the GAR management?

7 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

8 Q. Do you get continued training after those first couple days?

9 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

10 Q. Can you describe how that works?

11 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Your first day of the vessel, like whenever  
12 you first step on a boat, they show you -- like if any other  
13 deckhand were to go on, you are supposed to -- the higher up will  
14 show you where the fire station's at, general alarm, what it  
15 sounds like, with GAR models, boarding and departure. Like all  
16 that kind of stuff, you learn that as soon as your first step on  
17 the boat.

18 Q. And as a deckhand, what do they teach you about the stop work  
19 authority?

20 A. Stop work authority, if you ever -- if you ever come up to  
21 something, like a task that feels unsafe to you or doesn't feel  
22 right, you have the right to use your stop work authority card do  
23 stop and analyze it to see if you could do it a better way, a  
24 safer way.

25 Q. On the day of the 11th, or the 12th actually was when you

1 came on watch --

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. -- you didn't notice anything out of the ordinary about the  
4 evolution that would have been a safety factor?

5 A. I'm sorry, sir, can you repeat it again? I'm sorry.

6 Q. The day you were moving the crane --

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. -- on the 12th, did you see or -- see anything that made you  
9 feel like there was any safety conditions, or overhear somebody  
10 talking?

11 A. No, sir.

12 Q. Had you ever heard anybody -- or did you know what the height  
13 of the crane was?

14 A. No, sir, I did not.

15 Q. Did you ever hear anybody talk about or ask for the height of  
16 the crane?

17 A. No, sir.

18 Q. Before or after?

19 A. I'm sorry, sir, again?

20 Q. Before or after this, you never heard anybody talk about the  
21 height of the crane --

22 A. Height of the crane --

23 Q. -- or ask for the height of the crane?

24 A. If I heard anything -- no. No, sir.

25 Q. So when you hit the -- when the *Mr. Ervin* made contact with

1 the bridge, you were standing lookout.

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. What kind of training did you get on how to be a lookout?

4 A. Like from previous, when I was working my way up the chain,  
5 the other mates that I worked with, they were showing us how when  
6 you're on the head of a barge, you're looking out for any kind of  
7 structure that's -- buoy, another boat, tow, anything that you see  
8 that is a structure that you could make contact with, you're  
9 supposed to keep a safe distance and then inform the captain  
10 whether to go port, starboard, or whichever way, to make sure that  
11 you do not make contact.

12 Q. As the lead deckhand, is it your responsibility to train  
13 anybody in safety?

14 A. Yes, sir. Like the mate -- like as a mate, yes, sir. Like  
15 we -- making sure that they understand safety policies, as well as  
16 the captain, sir.

17 Q. And did you receive any training on how to train people on  
18 the safety system?

19 A. Like from previous mates that I worked with, when I was  
20 working on -- just them teaching me and as well as the lead  
21 captains. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Is there any programs or anything on board that --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. -- you do to train?

25 A. Yeah, yes, sir. We have a system called Gulf Docs. If I'm



1 not mistaken, when you click it -- I think it's the F5 button you  
2 could hit on the keyboard. It pops up like little tab, where it's  
3 like a quick search, or if you want to type in PPE or steel-toed  
4 boots, anything safety or policy, you could type it in and it'll  
5 get you straight to it.

6 Q. Can you briefly describe the safety huddles?

7 A. Safety huddles, everybody in a crew go up -- you're supposed  
8 to be there for the 11:40, 11:45. Everybody goes up every day.

9 We, it already kind of -- there's a binder that we have that  
10 already shows you which day, what the topic's going to be about.  
11 And search it up in the computer. We all read over it together.  
12 The captain and everybody read over it. And then on Sunday is a  
13 more intense training with, like, drills that we would do every  
14 Sunday, whether it's -- sometimes it's talking about, like, fire  
15 in a galley or man overboard, or anything like that.

16 Q. So refresh my memory, you've been working at Marquette how  
17 many years?

18 A. I was with Marquette for a little over, I think, about 3  
19 years, sir.

20 Q. So do you understand how the huddle system's designed to  
21 work?

22 A. Yes, sir. It's supposed to be able to basically make sure  
23 that everybody understands the policies and procedures that  
24 Marquette has before stepping on --

25 Q. How can I ask this -- throughout the year, how many sections

1 of the safety management system do go through?

2 A. The year? Basically just depending on your schedule, like  
3 some people work different schedules. But every day when you're  
4 on the vessel, whether if you're working a 28 or a 14, if you're  
5 working 14 days for your hitch, you do 14 different ones. It just  
6 depends on your --

7 Q. So working for Marquette for 3 years, overall, how do you  
8 feel their safety system and practices are?

9 A. I think their safety is really good over there.

10 Q. Do you -- would you feel that if you ever exercise the stop  
11 -- that you could comfortably exercise the stop work authority?

12 A. Yeah, yes, sir. I feel like I could use it without any --

13 Q. And not get in trouble for it?

14 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

15 CDR MESKUN: Mr. Kucharski?

16 BY MR. KUCHARSKI:

17 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Rudolph, and congratulations on your  
18 wheelsman ticket.

19 A. Thank you, sir. Appreciate it.

20 Q. So have you stood lookout often on a tow? You know, we're  
21 not talking about the *Mr. Ervin* tow, but have you stood lookout  
22 often?

23 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

24 Q. And was it limited visibility?

25 A. Like it was nighttime, like, it didn't really have any clouds

1 or anything, it was just normal nighttime. Like I could see the  
2 lights on the bridge and everything really good. I could see the  
3 tows coming.

4 Q. So it's been many times that you've done that?

5 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It's been multiple times.

6 Q. And can you give us a feel for how long you would spend on  
7 lookout? Would it be just a few minutes? Would it be -- could it  
8 be an hour, or so? Or --

9 A. Like it was -- I would stay up there as long as the captain  
10 needs me. Like if he says he's fine and tells us to come back,  
11 we'll come back. If he needs us out there, just --

12 Q. Did you spend as long as a couple hours out there?

13 A. Like down -- for the *Mr. Ervin* you're talking about, sir? I  
14 was -- I don't know exactly how long it was exactly, but I know it  
15 was a -- like, it was a good little time.

16 Q. And did -- on a longer stint, a longer lookout time period,  
17 did somebody come out and relieve you so there was a continuous  
18 lookout?

19 A. Like we always have both deckhands, one on each side, just to  
20 inform the captain.

21 Q. Okay. Did -- when you stood lookout on the date of the  
22 accident, okay, on the accident day, that morning, did you  
23 actually give Pilot Picquet directions on which way to move?

24 A. Yeah, yes, sir. He told me he wanted to stay, he wanted to  
25 stay on the green light on the alternate, he wanted to stay in the

1 middle of the alternate span. And he told me if he does start to  
2 pivot off to inform him. So whenever he was starting to drift to  
3 the port, I was letting him know that he was starting to move off  
4 center and he needed to correct himself to the starboard to get  
5 back to center.

6 Q. So his plan was, according to what he said to you, was to  
7 stay on the green light?

8 A. Yes, sir. He wanted to stay center with the alternate span.  
9 Yes, sir.

10 Q. To stay in the center.

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. And did you give him any distances? Feet?

13 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

14 Q. You did?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Which way to move, left or right?

17 A. Yes, sir. I told him how many feet before he started coming  
18 underneath, how far below he was, how wide he was off the pillars,  
19 if he was on the good side of them, what -- if he was on the bad  
20 side of them. All that, yes, sir.

21 Q. And I just want to make sure, lateral distance, so from side  
22 to side?

23 A. Yes, sir. From port to starboard, yes, sir.

24 Q. Were you involved in other towing operations of the *Mr. Ervin*  
25 and the coal barge *Columbia*?

1 A. I'm sorry, sir. I cannot understand the question? I'm  
2 sorry.

3 Q. Sure. So besides the accident date, were you deckhand on the  
4 *Kirstin Alexis* when the *Mr. Ervin* was towed?

5 A. Like when it was towed, like what do you mean, sir? Like --  
6 I'm sorry. I'm just -- oh, you mean like besides the accident?  
7 Like was I on whenever we were moving it besides the accident?

8 Q. No. In other words, we believe, and I don't want to put  
9 words in your mouth, but we don't believe -- the captain said  
10 that, well, other times that the *Kristin Alexis* towed the  
11 *Mr. Ervin*.

12 A. I can't recall off, like, hand, but I know that we have --  
13 like in the fleet, like at 175, I know that we have faced up on  
14 the *Mr. Ervin* and have moved it around.

15 Q. So you do recollect the facing up on the *Mr. Ervin* at other  
16 times, or no?

17 A. Yes, sir. I do remember, like, in the fleet, like, at 175, I  
18 remember. But not going through, like, the *Sunshine* besides at  
19 this one time.

20 Q. Okay. Okay. Do you have any recollection when you faced up  
21 in the fleet, and you were moving it within the fleet, is that  
22 what you were doing?

23 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was just moving it off. Like, they have  
24 like a lower dock over there that we'd sometimes just shift it  
25 somewhere else.

1 Q. Right. Okay. Okay. Understood. And did you take notice of  
2 the bucket locations?

3 A. I don't really look for the bucket locations. Like, most of  
4 the time that I can remember, it was during the daytime. But as  
5 like bucket locations, no, sir. I really can't remember.

6 Q. Do you remember if it was always a face-up on the boxed end  
7 or square end, the stern, of it?

8 A. Yeah, yes, sir. They always -- we always, whenever I  
9 remember us facing-up on it, we use the -- like, on anchoring, we  
10 usually always face-up on the port side of it.

11 Q. Did you ever face-up on the starboard side or the stern?

12 A. Like ever since I've been with them, but no, sir. We've  
13 never faced-up on the starboard side.

14 Q. You mentioned about the extra JSA when towing a crane barge  
15 or derrick barge, something with a high profile; is that correct?

16 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

17 Q. What was your actual involvement in the JSA process?

18 A. Whenever -- you mean like which -- we all went up there. Me;  
19 the other deckhand, Nick; and pilot, Eugene, we all went up when  
20 -- because Captain Desmond was still up there. He was just  
21 communicating with them before we all stepped down. I told him  
22 since it was nighttime, we had definitely restricted visibility,  
23 couldn't see in front of him. Height, height stuff because I knew  
24 we were going to be -- excuse me -- I knew were going to be coming  
25 through a bridge. So it was all different stuff to put in place,

1 to make it as a caution. It was in a yellow. We have to take  
2 precautions with it.

3 Q. So was the JSA a group process?

4 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was me, deckhand Nick, and the captain as  
5 well, sir. Those are all three of us.

6 Q. And you agreed on what type of a number or what color it was  
7 going to be?

8 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like before we all stepped down, me and  
9 Nick, to go relieve the other deckhands, like we both knew it was  
10 going to be in the yellow.

11 MR. KUCHARSKI: That's it. No further questions. Thank you.

12 BY CDR MESKUN:

13 Q. Thinking back to your time as the lookout on the evening of  
14 the accident --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- could you see the bridge as you guys were approaching the  
17 Sunshine Bridge?

18 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

19 Q. Could you see the navigational lights that were on the  
20 bridge?

21 A. Yeah, yes, sir. I did.

22 Q. Were the red lights and green lights all on properly?

23 A. Yes, sir. They sure were.

24 Q. As you were approaching the bridge, did you notice anything  
25 of concern?

1 A. As we were coming up, the only thing that I was noticing,  
2 that I was informing him on, was he was starting to slide to the  
3 port. Like he was just coming off center a little bit, the center  
4 of the alternate span. So I just kept trying to tell him that he  
5 would have to correct going to the starboard to stay center.

6 Q. Okay. Was he aware of that?

7 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like he told me that he, that he heard me  
8 and that he was trying to steer to correct himself.

9 Q. Do you stand 12-hour watches or 6-hour watches?

10 A. I'll stand 12, sir.

11 Q. Okay. And just to clear things up for me, do you refer to  
12 yourself as the senior deckhand?

13 A. Yes, sir. Yeah, like I was the -- I was the mate on the  
14 vessel, yes, sir.

15 Q. Okay. That's what I was going to ask, is if the mate and the  
16 senior deckhand were the same terminology?

17 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It's like mate and like lead man, stuff like  
18 that.

19 CDR MESKUN: Sure. Okay. I have no further questions. I'll  
20 turn it over to Cooper.

21 BY MR. WOGAN:

22 Q. Mr. Rudolph, my name is Ford Wogan. I represent Cooper  
23 Consolidated. Do me a favor and just look at the screen right  
24 now. This is a part of Exhibit 8. And do you see on the kind of  
25 west span, you see that little green light?



1 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

2 Q. Okay. When you're talking about the green light, is that  
3 actually up on the bridge?

4 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was basically kind of where it was at on  
5 the picture right there.

6 Q. Okay. And you were talking, when CDR Meskun was asking you  
7 some questions, about he was sliding to port? What did you mean  
8 by that?

9 A. When we were coming up -- like, when I walked -- as soon as I  
10 walked up, like, he was -- that center cavel, it was dead center,  
11 like it was straight in the middle with it. And as we were making  
12 more transition northbound, it was sliding towards the bank more,  
13 getting off center with the green light.

14 Q. Okay. Can you estimate how far off the green light you all  
15 were?

16 A. I don't really know exactly, like, how many -- I can't recall  
17 how many feet wise, but I know that he was sliding like a good bit  
18 off. And every time he was sliding, I was letting him know that  
19 he needed to slide back to the port to try to get back center with  
20 it.

21 Q. I got you. So as you're actually kind of starting to go  
22 under the bridge --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. -- is he on the center green line?

25 A. No, sir. He wasn't.

1 Q. How far off is he?

2 A. If I can recall right, it was at least a good, a little over  
3 a hundred feet, I think, sir.

4 Q. Okay. I think you talked earlier when you were talking about  
5 being a lookout, you had been out there for a period of time, but  
6 then you came back in to the -- onto the *Kristen Alexis*, and then  
7 got sent back out; is that right?

8 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like once we were -- like, when I relieved  
9 Brandon Payne and the other deckhands, they had a bunch of  
10 southbound traffic coming.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. So we stood out to talk them safely through coming around the  
13 fleet, because they had a bunch of traffic. And then after that,  
14 all the traffic was cleared, they didn't have anything in front of  
15 them, so he said that we was good for us to come back, and  
16 whenever we were getting closer to the bridge, around the bend, he  
17 was going to send us back out.

18 Q. I got you. But when you came back in, the vessel was still  
19 moving northbound?

20 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was still moving.

21 Q. Okay. And then your understanding of what you were supposed  
22 to be doing as a lookout, was just basically to be providing the  
23 eyes for him -

24 A. Yes.

25 Q, -- because some of his visibility was restricted?

1 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

2 Q. Okay. And that was with respect to the bucket?

3 A. Yeah, yes, sir. Like, whenever I got on watch, I was  
4 informed that the bucket was obstructing his view, because usually  
5 on like -- usually when you face-up on a port side, you get more  
6 like a angle where they could see down the side.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. So, yes sir.

9 Q. And then when you were standing as the lookout, you were  
10 actually in front of the bucket, so you are --

11 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

12 Q. -- you are serving as his eyes.

13 A. Yeah, yes, sir, I was -- yes, sir.

14 Q. When you all were out as the lookouts, did Captain Picquet  
15 have any issues when navigating? Was he having any problems  
16 besides the sliding?

17 A. Besides just the slide coming towards the bridge? No, sir.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. He was fine.

20 MR. WOGAN: LT [REDACTED] would you pull up Exhibit 45 please?

21 Thank you.

22 BY MR. WOGAN:

23 Q. Mr. Rudolph, so is this the GAR form that you were talking  
24 about earlier?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Okay. And so where did you all have your GAR meeting? Where  
2 physically on the vessel were you?

3 A. In the wheelhouse.

4 Q. In the wheelhouse.

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. So, it was you, and I believe if you scroll out, we can see  
7 -- we can see your name, Mr. Picquet's name, and Mr. Ratcliff's  
8 name. Right?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. So you all were the three individuals --

11 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

12 Q. You all are holding this meeting while Captain Smith is still  
13 at the sticks?

14 A. Yeah, yes, sir. He was still -- when we were doing it, me  
15 and Eugene and Nick were still talking because Desmond, he had  
16 control of it when we were going so he kept it until the traffic  
17 was clear, and went up.

18 Q. Okay. I got you. And it looks like it was about 12:05, so  
19 that was right when you came on?

20 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

21 Q. Okay. And then the job task says "moving crane to 175"?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Okay. That first column, "mitigations if needed." Is that  
24 where you list the risk that would be associated with doing this  
25 job task?

1 A. On the mitigation column is basically, like, if it's ever in  
2 the amber or the red, like that, you could mitigate. So first I  
3 have -- make sure we have good communication and stuff like that,  
4 to help to lower the risk. To make sure, like, while we're out  
5 there, that we really do have good communication and stuff.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. It's basically used to help lower the -- like, basically like  
8 tips and techniques to help lower the --

9 Q. I get that. Is there an area on that form where you would  
10 actually list and identify the risks that are associated with  
11 doing a task?

12 A. I'm sorry, you're asking, like, if there's -- like, the risk  
13 if -- I put a on there?

14 Q. Yeah, if there's some -- I think you testified earlier that  
15 you all talked about restricted visibility and the height of the  
16 crane and all --

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. Where would you -- is there a place where you could list that  
19 on this form? Or on another form?

20 A. Probably most likely on the mitigation since we're going to  
21 be having restricted visibility.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Okay. So anything like with respect to any issue with the  
25 bucket, that would gone under the mitigation? Or it could have

1 gone under the mitigation?

2 A. Yeah, but I wasn't aware of the bucket at first, like, before  
3 we stepped out. Because you usually do it, like, before you  
4 stepped out.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. I wasn't aware of it until after we stepped or we started  
7 walking out to the head that I seen it. But I knew for a fact  
8 that we were going to have restricted visibility and it was dark,  
9 and we needed to have good communication with that and everything.

10 Q. Okay. And same for clearance, you knew -- you all had  
11 discussed the clearance?

12 A. No, sir. I didn't know anything with the height or clearance  
13 wise. I thought that they already got that information while we  
14 were moving up. You know, I wasn't sure, so --

15 Q. Got ya. So it was just the restricted visibility?

16 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

17 Q. Okay. Is it common for you all to mark any crane move -- not  
18 just the *Mr. Ervin*, but any crane move, as an amber?

19 A. Most likely, yes, because the restricted visibility, like, it  
20 plays a big role on it --

21 Q. Right.

22 A. -- so most of the time it's always -- most of the time with  
23 anything of that kind, it's usually always pretty much going to be  
24 in the amber.

25 Q. It's a pretty common --

1 A. You need to take caution with it because --

2 Q. Right. It's a common occurrence that you're identifying the  
3 risk, and you're oftentimes going to have restricted visibility --

4 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

5 Q. -- in some form or effect, when moving a crane.

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. When you all had this GAR meeting, did you all talk about  
9 taking the alternate span?

10 Q. He told me, like, as we were finished, when I was about to  
11 walk down, he called me back up before I went all the way down --

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. -- he told me that, hey, I'm just letting you know before you  
14 step out, I'm planning on taking the alternate span because of the  
15 southbound tows coming down the main span.

16 Q. Okay. So that was right after this GAR meeting?

17 A. Yeah, like as we were walking down, like I was putting my  
18 life jacket on, about to head out, and he called me, just letting  
19 me -- he was informing me that that's the take -- we were going to  
20 go.

21 Q. I got you. So that would have been some time shortly after  
22 12:05?

23 A. Yeah, it was a little bit after that.

24 Q. A few minutes after.

25 A. Yeah, yes, sir. It was a little bit after.

1 Q. So the decision to use the western span, the alternate span,  
2 was due solely to the southbound tow?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Based on, at least, what he told you?

5 A. Yeah, yes, sir. He had told me -- well, like from what he  
6 told me, that was the reason why he was choosing that side because  
7 they had a line boat coming with a big tow down the main span.

8 Q. How far away from the bridge were you at this point? Do you  
9 remember?

10 A. From the time he tell me we were going to take the alternate?

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. If I remember right, we were just coming around that -- I  
13 think it's Whitehall, where I make the bend, right there --

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. -- and we were just coming around that bend, I think, when he  
16 was letting me -- when he was informing me on --

17 Q. Is that a couple miles, or do you know?

18 A. Yeah, like it --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah, it's a couple miles.

21 MR. WOGAN: Thank you very much, Mr. Rudolph.

22 THE WITNESS: Yeah, no problem, sir.

23 CDR MESKUN: Mr. Reisman?

24 BY MR. REISMAN:

25 Q. Mr. Rudolph, I just have one line of questioning, and it's



1 just on that last point. My understanding is that you performed  
2 the JSA with your watch team. You came out on topside and did a  
3 watch turnover with the off-going watch. You moved to the head of  
4 the barge to assume the lookout duties, and then at some point,  
5 once some southbound traffic had passed, during which time  
6 Mr. Desmond Smith was at the sticks, that Mr. Picquet took over  
7 the sticks, and then because all the traffic was clear,  
8 Mr. Picquet told you to come back and -- you could come back to  
9 the boat; is that correct?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. And then after some time when you were back in the boat, as  
12 the boat was proceeding northbound with the tow, Captain Picquet  
13 had called you again over the VHF radio and says, I need you guys  
14 to go back out to serve as lookouts because we've got more  
15 southbound -- we have another southbound tow --

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. -- and we're approaching the bridge?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. Is that correct? And so, I'm just wondering if maybe there  
20 was some confusion when Mr. Wogan was asking questions. Did you  
21 first learn that Mr. Picquet intended to take the alternate span  
22 because of the southbound traffic, the second time? Right before  
23 the second time that you went back out as lookout?

24 A. Yeah, like, on the second time when we were heading back out,  
25 yeah, yeah. It was the -- yeah.

1 Q. Okay. And not immediately after you did the JSA, when you  
2 were first going out for the very first time?

3 A. Yeah, yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I'm sorry.

6 Q. Okay. When you started working at Turn Services, how long  
7 was their training orientation?

8 A. Their orientation was a 3-day orientation. At Turn, no, it  
9 was a 2-day orientation as well.

10 Q. It was a 2-day orientation as well?

11 A. It was a 2-day orientation.

12 MR. REISMAN: That's it.

13 CDR MESKUN: Thank you.

14 Mr. Kucharski, any questions? Okay, thank you.

15 You are now released as a witness from this formal marine  
16 casualty investigation. Thank you for your testimony and  
17 cooperation. If I later determine that this joint investigation  
18 team needs additional information from you, I will contact you  
19 through your counsel. If you have any questions about this  
20 investigation, you may contact the recorder, LT [REDACTED]

21 MR. RUDOLPH: Thank you.

22 CDR MESKUN: The time is now 4:11. We will come to a recess  
23 for today and we will reconvene tomorrow morning at, let's say,  
24 0800 a.m. We are now off the record.

25 (Whereupon, at 4:11 p.m., the testimony was concluded.)

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 Blaise Rudolph*

ACCIDENT NO.:                DCA19FM003

PLACE:                         Gonzales, Louisiana

DATE:                         May 6, 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.



Deborah Dowling Sweigart  
Transcriber