UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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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: DOUGLAS BLAKEMORE
Branch Chief

Lamar Dixon Expo Center
Gonzales, Louisiana

Thursday,
May 9, 2019

APPEARANCES:

CDR MATTHEW MESKUN, Lead Investigating Officer
United States Coast Guard

LT [redacted] Hearing Recorder
United States Coast Guard

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United States Coast Guard, District 8
(On behalf of Mr. Blakemore)

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(10:38 a.m.)

CDR MESKUN: The time is now 10:38, and we are back on the record. We will now hear testimony from Mr. Doug Blakemore.

Please remain standing while Lieutenant [redacted] will administer your oath and ask you some preliminary questions.

(Whereupon,

DOUGLAS BLAKEMORE

was called as a witness and, having been first duly sworn, was examined and testified on his oath, as follows:)

LT [redacted] Please be seated. Please state your full name and spell your last into the microphone.

MR. BLAKEMORE: Douglas Alan Blakemore. My last name is spelled B-l-a-k-e-m-o-r-e.

LT [redacted] Please identify counsel?

LCDR [redacted] Lieutenant Commander [redacted] U.S. Coast Guard, District 8, Legal Office, agency counsel for the Coast Guard.

EXAMINATION

BY CDR MESKUN:

Q. Morning, Mr. Blakemore.

A. Good morning, Commander.

Q. We're going to ask a series of questions of you today. If there's anything you don't understand, please ask us to rephrase the question, or if you don't know the answer, please just tell us

you don't know the answer.
A. Okay.
Q. Please describe for us what your job is, what your responsibilities are, your background and experience, all that kind of stuff.
A. Okay. I'm a 1982 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy. I spent 20 years as a commissioned officer. I have a little sea time, almost 3 years, did some staff work, and last 8 years of my career, I was in what we used to call the old marine safety field in the New Orleans area, and I did mostly port operations. I had a little bit of work working with the old Vessel Traffic Service system.

Retired in 2002. Went to work for the Corps of Engineers briefly as a federal employee as a statistician. Left that job. Went to work for Chevron, Gulf of Mexico Business Unit, for 10 years. Seven of those years I was the emergency management director for the Gulf of Mexico. Two of those years, I was involved in vessel health environmental safety coordination with Chevron's chartered vessels down in Fourchon, worked offshore. My last year with Chevron, I did a statistical research project for them. I have a master's degree in operations research.

I left that job roughly 2 years ago and came back into the Coast Guard as a federal employee as the branch director, branch chief, for the 8th Coast Guard District Bridge Administrative Office. I've been in the job currently for 2 years.

Q. Thank you. As the bridge administrator for the District 8, what do you guys do? What is the scope of your responsibility?
A. So within the Coast Guard, there are -- obviously, there are districts. Our area for our branch goes in the coastal region from Mexico over to, basically, the Pensacola area, where the Gulf Intercostal Waterway ends.

We regulate bridge laws for drawbridges, fixed bridges, any type of bridge that's over navigable waterway. In the Bridge Administration program, which is pretty small within the Coast Guard, there are several different fields.

One of the fields deals with bridge permitting, to where a applicant, an owner, or any person in the world, decides they want to build a bridge over navigable waterway. The Coast Guard, when we have jurisdiction, we will regulate that particular bridge to make sure that it is designed to meet the reasonable needs of navigation and that it meets environmental laws, specifically, the National Environmental Policy Act, and that when the bridge is finally permitted, that it is constructed safely to allow vessels to use the waterway. So that's one part of the job.

During the permitting process, also, we regulate any bridge owner that wants to modify or mend or change the actual bridge design, which would impact navigation safety, vertical and horizontal clearances. Again, that's part of our job.

Another area that we're very -- we have responsibility for is drawbridge operations. So down at the 8th Coast Guard District,

there is a total of about 1100 bridges that fall under the Coast Guard permitting authority. This is the coastal zone. We have other zones.

Within our region, we have 203 drawbridges that span navigable waterways. In our role there, we have to make sure that the drawbridges operate according to regulations to allow vessels the reasonable expectation to use the waterway.

And then our third major function is we call daily operations in which we work with bridge owners, we work with Coast Guard, we work with mariners to ensure that the bridges are operating correctly. On a daily basis, we make it -- we get a lot of information about allisions, lights not being out -- or not working on bridges, fender systems -- I need to back that up. We call these bridge protection systems now -- used to be called fenders -- damages to those systems.

So we work on a daily basis anything that is wrong with the bridge that impacts navigation, our office coordinates with the local Coast Guard Captain of the Port, or Sector Commander, the bridge owner, and the mariners to make sure that the bridge is either brought back into its operational specs or drawbridge regulations.

We have a small staff. That's basically about -- that's Coast Guard 101 on Coast Guard bridge administration.

Q. Thank you. Can you describe start to finish, if you will, the bridge permitting process?

A. Certainly. Permitting process takes about anywhere from 9 months to 2 years. So an entity -- and I'm going to call it an entity -- a bridge owner, all right, or an entity, doesn't matter who it is, private citizen. Somebody wants to build a bridge, a brand-new bridge. We go through a scoping process with the candidate. Let's call them the owner to make it simple.

The owner notifies us of a potential bridge project. We scope out the general concept of the bridge with the owner. And what we do is we get with the owner, and we provide them with information on navigation requirements. One, we tell them what our permitting process is, and within our permitting process, we have three to four major parts of it. The first part is ownership and money to make sure that the person owning the bridge has the legal right to build a bridge, all right?

And we do look at money because if a bridge is being built by the -- or if there's federal highway funds available for the bridge operator, then the Coast Guard has an agreement with federal highway to share the permitting process. And I'll get into that right now. So we go through an administrative review with the owner.

Then we go through a scoping view of navigation. We get down with the bridge owner. We talk about the basic needs of navigation and what the Coast Guard requires to obtain a permit from a navigation point of view. And what we look at is we have to make sure that the bridge design meets the current navigation

needs and projected navigation needs. So if 10 years from now, the Port of Paducah, the Port of New Orleans wants to expand something, we look at making sure that a bridge is designed to support 10 years from now.

We also go and scope out NEPA responsibilities with the candidate, with the bridge owner. Any time you build a bridge, it's considered a major act that falls under the National Environmental Policy Act. And depending on who's paying for the bridge, if Federal Highway is, they would assume the lead federal agent to ensure that NEPA is complied with.

Our office, during those situations, we review all the NEPA documentation. If we are the lead with the railroad company or a private entity, then we're responsible, the Coast Guard is, for completing all the NEPA requirements.

And then the very last thing -- so let me see. We have navigation -- admin, navigation, NEPA. Part of our process, getting down to the very end of it, is that we make sure that we provide the public with the opportunity to comment about the bridge, a major part of our process. So we go through public hearings if we have to. We go through notices in the Federal Register. But we're a public servant. Therefore, we have to make sure that the public is notified of any Coast Guard major action.

Once we go through those basic steps, then the Coast Guard will make a decision on whether or not we should authorize the permit and sign it. Once the permit is signed, then we give the

owner 5 years -- 3 years to start the project, start construction, and 5 years to complete.

During the construction, it is the Coast Guard's responsibility -- part of it is on the bridge authority; part of it is on the local Captain of the Port/Sector Commander authority -- to ensure that the construction over a navigable waterway does not create an unsafe situation to vessels and provides the mariner with a reasonable ability to use the bridge.

And there are several projects that could take days to move equipment into the channel and do their work in which they would want to close the waterway for days. But it's the Coast Guard's responsibility to make sure the vessels can get through there on a reasonable expectation. So part of our job is we coordinate those operations to make sure that, again, the bridge is done -- built safely and mariners have the ability to use it.

Once the bridge is complete, we require the bridge owner to certify that the bridge was built in accordance with the plans. And I can describe that process later on. It's called a completion report. So they come back, they provide us with that information, certify that the bridge was built according to the plans, which includes the vertical and horizontal clearance, and all the design of the fendering system, any bridge protection systems, dolphins, things like that.

We take that information, and we provide that to the mapping agencies. One of them is NOAA up in Silver Spring. They've got

there -- it's where their mapping agency is. And also, it's the Corps of Engineer. We provide the final design, final clearances, and a final report to them, both agencies, that allow them to use the information to chart. And I think that's about it.

Q. Good. Thank you. I appreciate that. Has the Coast Guard always been the agency or authority that approves bridges?

A. No. There are several laws that govern bridge administration in the United States. And the old one was the Rivers and Harbor Act of 1910, I believe. The Corps of Engineers, the Army, originally, to the Corps of Engineers, were responsible for bridge permitting up until about 1972.

Then there was an act that was passed, the Bridge Act of 1946, which strengthened the laws about bridges and navigation. The Corps took that over. I think it was about 1972 it was transferred to the Coast Guard, and then the Coast Guard developed, I guess, the program to manage its stuff.

So on the Sunshine Bridge, it was permitted by the Army in the -- 1955 maybe. I believe it was '55 it was -- the design was permitted and then completed in 1961. So we took it over in 1972.

Q. Do you know if the Coast Guard's permitting processes are similar to what was in place for the Army when the Sunshine Bridge was built?

A. No. I really don't. Again, I've been told a little bit that we took some of their basic processes. Some of their basic rules on navigation determinations we accepted; some of the definitions

we accepted. And we work with the Corps of Engineer, by the way, during the permitting process, because they are the agency that permits any sort of structure being placed in a wetland, which includes rivers.

But the Coast Guard currently has a very detailed permitting process. And we've got a very detailed guide to bridge owners and what is expected, what they are required to do -- excuse me -- but I really couldn't go back and say what's similar, what's new and improved.

Q. Okay. And just to be clear, the Sunshine Bridge, you're familiar with, correct?

A. I am.

Q. And is that a bridge that falls under your authority, your responsibility?

A. Yes, it does. Yes, it does.

Q. In your previous testimony about the bridge permitting process, you talked about some vertical and horizontal clearances. Can you just describe what does that mean? Like, what do you actually permit as it comes to the bridge and the waterway?

A. Our requirements for a bridge owner and our requirements to the Coast Guard is that we need to establish the bridge clearance from a mean high water position. So that is our datum. And datum is a term I've been struggling with for a while. Datum is a reference point that everybody can use to basically standardize a height or number.

So we require the bridge owner to provide us with the navigation information. We look at the bridge height from mean high water, and we want to make sure that that height, that vertical clearance, will allow the reasonable expectation of vessels to use that channel, that specific channel.

We require that the main channel on a bridge permit, we establish vertical and horizontal clearances that a mariner can use. We require the bridge owner to do most of the work, but we chart it, or I should say, we approve it from mean high water of that waterway to the low-scale part of the bridge.

Horizontal clearance goes from pier to pier. It goes from the navigable channel, all right, underneath the bridge. You may have a fendering system. You may have a pier system that is slanted. I know the architects can tell you about that. But we look at navigable channel, where vessels can safely transit.

Did I answer that?

Q. That was good. So where might the low steel be? I mean, can you kind of explain or expand upon that a little bit?

A. I'm not an engineer. I'm not a bridge designer. The Coast Guard is not required to be engineers or bridge designers in this field. Low steel is any member of the bridge that would basically make contact with a vessel coming through. It could be a catwalk. It could be sensors. It could be deck plates. It's the lowest part of the bridge that would not allow a vessel to clear it.

Q. Okay. So, then, is it possible if -- let's say the green

lights are on the bridge, and that's like the center of the channel, correct? Is that an accurate statement?
A. Yes.
Q. Is it possible that the area where the green light, the center of the channel are, that it's higher than and there's more, like, a safety factor, if you will, above what that permitted --
A. No, there are no safety factors. We publish one clearance on our design, and there are no Coast Guard requirements to put in, like you say, a safety factor or fudge factor of two feet. There are none. We look at one clearance. Is it reasonable? Will it allow vessels at mean high water to use the bridge?
Q. Okay. So if the water was at that high level, that's where that measurement, the water line would be?
A. Mean high water is the term, mean high water, yes.
Q. That'd be mean high water?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And that goes up to the low steel?
A. Correct.
Q. And then basically, the horizontal distance is safe water pier to pier, wherever there is no obstruction?
A. Or fender to fender, correct, yes.
Q. Okay. And do you solicit information from mariners or from the industry to determine if that measurement is acceptable?
A. Yes. Part of our permitting process, again, is to determine what vessels are using the waterway today and potential. So we

require the bridge owner to provide us with a navigation impact report. It's a navigation study that basically goes out. And they solicit information about the waterway, industry, port authorities, the public, sometimes the public. They come back to us and they tell us that there are so many vessels used in the waterway of a certain type, of a certain size. That's their basic report for us.

We take that information, and we have to validate that that information is correct. So we vet this information through maritime groups. We vet it through trade industries. We vet it through any public entity that uses the waterway. We do that sometimes in public meetings. We do go out on a public notice to all of the maritime groups in the area that use the waterway, let them know. We give them the bridge design. We give them everything. Here's the bridge. Here's the environmental impact of it. Here's the design. Here's the basics on the navigation impact on this bridge.

So we do solicit that. But we also put together working committees and working groups. So example, Huey P. Long was modified years ago. They expanded the -- you guys were around -- put two lanes on that thing, right? Major project. I was here in a different capacity.

But what the Coast Guard did for that is we got the river pilots together. We got the brown water industry together. We got facility owners together. We got port officials together,

state officials together, and we held a long series of coordination meetings to make sure that that design was going to meet the needs of vessels especially in the future, although Huey P., they didn't raise it up any. But no, we -- it's part of our process to do that, to make sure that any user has the ability to comment and provide input on a bridge design.

Q. Thank you.

CDR MESKUN: Do you have any questions before we move on?

MR. KUCHARSKI: Good morning, Mr. Blakemore.

THE WITNESS: Good morning.

MR. KUCHARSKI: And Counselor.

BY MR. KUCHARSKI:

Q. Does D8 approve the installation of air gap sensors after the fact, so if a bridge is built and they want to add air gap sensors, is there any approval process to install those?

A. In the bridge permit, in the Coast Guard permitting process, policy, and doctrine, we have no term "air gap sensors." I've heard the term. I've heard it in Alabama. I've heard it in Mississippi. I've heard it here. But I couldn't even tell you what a proper air gap sensor is. So the answer is, no, we do not.

Q. Okay. So any questions about air gap sensors, you wouldn't be the person to ask?

A. I'd be guessing.

Q. Okay. So when you evaluate bridge clearances, okay, the clearances, okay, there's a vertical and there's a horizontal

clearance, correct?
A. Yes.
Q. And I think we've talked about this before, where there's a navigational box, if you will?
A. That's correct. Yes, sir.
Q. Are you familiar with that term?
A. Absolutely.
Q. Okay. Because span bridges, and I just pulled up the Verrazzano Bridge, for instance, looking at my computer here, and I know it's very wide. It's got a span on it, you know? It has what you were talking about, downward slope?
A. Right.
Q. And it's given -- I know that there's a box, navigational box, that you stay within in that clearance that you have --
A. Yes.
Q. Are you familiar with that?
A. Yes, I am.
Q. Could you discuss that a little bit?
A. So this is -- a bridge owner is required to give us plans, so design plans. We call them plans. And there's about six different parts of a plan that we evaluate. One of them is where is the location. You know, you get into the basic stuff.
And the bridge owner is required to give us an elevation plan of the bridge, and they're required to give us a plan view, which is looking top-part-down on the bridge. And they're required to

give us some design on what a typical pier looks like. And if they've got a bridge protection system, or a fender system, they're designed [sic] to give us the plans for that.

They provide us -- and I'm going to get to the box -- they provide us with the plans. There's about six sheets. We have very specific requirements for the plans that we provide the bridge owner. They give them to us. We evaluate.

Once we get down with the final evaluation of the plans to see if they meet Coast Guard design requirements, then we require that bridge owner to have a professional engineer, a PE, stamp it, stating that the plan has been certified by a PE. We're not PEs. Couldn't do it. They stamp it. They provide it to us.

One of the tools that we use to evaluate the navigation of a bridge is the box. And it's looking at an elevated view. So basically, you all are the bridge. Here's the bridge right down here. So we will take -- we will put a box over the navigable channel, okay, and raise it up to the -- underneath the navigable channel to the low steel, all right, the elevation for the low steel of the bridge, and over. And that's what we call the box.

It's just a reference point from mean high water, channel, bridge height -- excuse me -- bridge clearance.

Q. So have you ever seen where the navigational box or this box is used, or the navigable channel -- let me put it that way -- where it's narrower than the actual -- from pier to pier?

A. Yes, I have. Absolutely. On some of the shallower waters,

it's very common.
Q. And you mentioned mean high water as a datum, right, correct?
A. Yes.
Q. But in areas where there's very little tide -- let's take the Sunshine Bridge, for instance, if you would look at that today, would you be using mean high water as a datum for that?
A. Well, I -- yes and no. I'm sorry. I got to back up here. The Coast Guard requires two datums in bridge design, mean low water and mean high water. And we require, again, yeah, mean low water and mean high water. And for this particular bridge, it was -- the Corps did look at mean low water and mean high water. And we require that now also.
Q. So there's not other datums that are out there, you know --
A. There are. There are.
Q. Yeah?
A. In the river system, some enclosed rivers use what's called a pool calculation on the Mississippi, most of the rivers -- well, there are other datums, but the Coast Guard does not use. There's datums, mean low-low water, mean high-high water. We do not use that in the bridge permitting process.
Q. So how does that come into play, where you have a huge, huge change in the Mississippi River? You know, you've heard the term gauges, yes?
A. Yes, I have.
Q. How does that come into play, then, where -- when you talk

about mean high water and mean low water, does that not -- that doesn't take any tidal effect in there?
A. Mean high water is a 19-year average of the mean high water s of that waterway. So, yes, it does. It's not -- it is not a point on the river today. Okay. NOAA establishes mean high water marks in rivers using 19 years of continuous data. So, yes, it does take into, I guess, seasonal data also, over 19 years. Same with mean low water.
Q. So I understand correctly, like, there were no -- the NOAA charting doesn't go -- it stops around Baton Rouge? You know, you go further up the rivers, there are no NOAA charts; they're Army Corps charts?
A. I'm familiar with that, yes.
Q. Okay. So you're saying that even though you go way upriver, even though there are no NOAA charts, NOAA still provides mean high water and mean low water marks?
A. You caught me. I'm not really sure. I don't know. I'm not sure if I get that from the Corps. But -- I don't know that answer.
Q. You said there were no safety margins anywhere on these bridges as far as, you know, what you see is what you get, basically, on the vertical clearance? The United States, do they -- on any of these clearances, do they factor in a safety margin, or anything like that?
A. No, we do not.

Q. Are you familiar with any other countries and if they have safety margins built into the bridge heights?
A. I'm not.
Q. So I think we have the possibility of a number of agencies that work together, Coast Guard, Army Corps, and NOAA maybe?
A. No, NOAA does not get involved in our permitting process other than if they have environmental requirements that fall under NEPA, but not design requirements.
Q. So let me rephrase that, then.
A. Okay.
Q. I didn't -- you're right. But sharing information, okay, the sharing of information. So when for bridge clearances, is there sharing between agencies of information? So, for instance, the coast pilots, okay, or the NOAA charts have vertical clearances, okay? Where is that information go to them for the NOAA charts? How do they get this information for the charts? Is it coming from the Coast Guard? Is it coming from the Army Corps?
A. Right.
Q. And I'll ask the question of the Army Corps.
A. Well, I think -- I hear two questions out of the, okay? One is what is our -- how do we cooperate with other agencies. And I'm going to go into the bridge permitting. We're talking about permitting just in general?
Q. No. Once you're finished with the permit --
A. Okay.

Q. -- okay, then how does that information, you know, or the actual clearances, because the Coast Guard has this information now. How is it then disseminated to the other agencies? For instance, the Army Corps has their own map books --

A. Right.

Q. But the Coast Guard would be responsible for the permitting process?

A. Correct.

Q. In an area way up the Mississippi, correct?

A. Absolutely. Any -- yes. So couple of -- I'm going to answer this in a couple answers, all right. With the cooperating with other agencies, in the permitting world, okay, in the -- we have MOUs, Memorandums of Understanding and Memorandums of Agreements with Federal Highway, Corps of Engineer, EPA, Department of Transportation that lay out our permitting responsibilities depending on who's going to take the lead federal agency.

So when we put a permit together, looking at a bridge design, we are required to have other federal agencies provide input. That's one. Two, when we get to a design, when we get to basically 95 percent of this permit being ready to go, we send it out in a public notice to everybody that we can.

We send it out to all federal, state, and local agencies for their input. You know, we're getting down to the final thing. So we provide that information to NOAA. We provide it to the Corps, we provide to EPA, we provide it to Historic Preservation Society,

all sorts of things.

Once we finalize a permit and sign it, we notify the owner 3 years to start building, 5 years to build. Once they complete that, then you can go to Exhibit 12. It's called a -- I think this is where you're going here. It's a bridge -- you guys have seen it -- Bridge Over Navigable Waterways, United States, Completion Report.

The Coast Guard is responsible for validating that the bridge was built and the vertical clearance and the horizontal clearance were built as designed according to the plans that we signed. Okay. And this is just the form that we use to do it.

Now, so how do we do that? Well, we go to the bridge owner, and we say thank you very much. Your bridge is built. Fill this form out. And what it is, it's basically -- and I will give this to everybody -- it just -- it goes through the basic stuff. It says it's done. Here's when we started. Here's when we completed. And here are the clearances, all right, vertical and horizontal clearance according to the plans. And then they have to sign that, certify it. We don't go into that.

We take this information down here in the 8th Coast Guard district. I sign it. So I go look at the plans, just review that the data on the report match up with what was signed in the permit. Then we take that information, and again, we send it out to NOAA. We send it out to the Corps for their mapping and charting responsibilities. And we also send it to Coast Guard

agencies or anybody who wants it.

That's how we cooperate during the permitting process, getting to the end of the process, and post-bridge built.

Q. And then the information also goes into the Coast Guard light list?

A. Yes, it does. Yeah.

Q. So you provide that internally?

A. So we have bridge lighting requirements. They fall under 33 C.F.R. 118. And it's not just bridge lighting requirements. It's structures, but the majority of the work falls under the bridge department. And so if the Coast Guard deems that there is nighttime navigation, we require the bridge owner to light the bridge according to its design and certain standards.

Q. Do you know offhand if -- what coast pilot -- I'm sorry -- what light list applies to this particular area?

A. No.

Q. What area?

A. I'm going to guess 11-371, but I couldn't tell you that. I'm sorry.

Q. Yeah, okay. I was just wondering.

A. I didn't look at the light list.

Q. I was just wondering if you've ever had a chance to compare the light list area for south -- from Baton Rouge south as to north?

A. I couldn't tell you. The Coast Guard requires bridges to be

lit on the design of the bridge. If you have a drawbridge, you know, you want to make sure that when it's closed, there's red lights, and when it swings open, there's green lights. And on a fixed bridge, there's certain standards.

Q. And do you know if the vertical clearances are also in the light list?

A. Yes, I believe they are. I'm sorry. The last light list I looked at was for a project on Little Lake, and it was not too big, Little Lake.

Q. Okay.

A. I don't know, sir.

Q. No, it's okay, and I should have added them as exhibits.

A. Sure. No problem.

Q. I didn't mean to blindside you. Back to this navigational box. Okay, we're -- you know, some of them, the low steel may be, you know, on a bridge that has a slope to it, it may be inside the piers, if you will, or the low steel?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Okay. Do you solicit input from the pilots associations, from other stakeholders, you know, that would have input to that navigational box?

A. Yes, we do, absolutely. And part of our scoping process in the early parts of the permitting process -- I like to use the word process -- excuse me -- is we get with the waterway users and talk about the project. We also look at bridge location, not only

design, but location, to try to place a bridge in the safest navigable position as possible.

An example, there's some design concepts in Baton Rouge on the Lower Mississippi River, want to connect the east bank with the west bank. They came up -- the state came up with four different alternative locations, and we took those locations, got with the waterway users, held several meetings, public meetings with them to evaluate that. They provided us with their input, and then we provided the state with our input on what would be the position of the bridge that would provide the safest potential navigation. I can't say safest, because that's a relative term.

Now, they have to turn around, and they have to look at all sorts of other factors on, you know, NEPA scoping, archeological work, money. So, yes, we do that.

Q. Thank you. I don't have any further questions.

BY CDR MESKUN:

Q. I don't know if we've actually asked this question yet, but do you know what the vertical and horizontal clearances that were permitted for the western alternate span are for the Sunshine Bridge?

A. It's one of the exhibits. Which exhibit is that?

Q. Exhibit 13 maybe?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I think it's Exhibit 13.

THE WITNESS: We got 12. It should be there. So looking at Exhibit 13 -- and I'm going to expand Coast Guard's present-day

responsibilities on permitting and clearances. If there are alternative spans at our alternative waterways, we do chart, or we do look at the clearances on those sections also. But we are responsible for permitting the main channel, okay? Our process requires us to note the clearances on the alternate spans.

The Mississippi River has a main channel that is dredged by the Corps of Engineers. That's what we look at. So the alternate spans of the bridge, we do provide that information to NOAA. We do look at it, but it's not something that we would approve or disapprove because it's not the main channel underneath the bridge.

So on this one -- I'm looking at it -- I got for mean high water, the vertical clearance noted in this design 133 feet. And I think the mean low water -- geez, I'm going to have to go out on a limb here -- 167-point-something.

BY CDR MESKUN:

Q. Sure. And if we actually could turn to Exhibit 18, page 2, it has a graphical representation of what the different clearances are. This came out of the bridge file.

A. I've got it, yes. I don't have 18 -- 18? Yes, yes, I do see that. So correct, but in the bridge permitting world and under Coast Guard authority, we don't publish these numbers. This particular document, it's not a Coast Guard document. It's not a bridge permitting document.

Q. This was just provided to you by the bridge designer?

A. No, this was not provided to us for anything. This is not one of our required fields that a bridge owner provide us to look at a design of a bridge. We're looking at the strictly mean high water and mean low water marks.
Q. Okay. And have you seen the Army Corps chart that was --
A. I have.
Q. I think it's Exhibit 8?
A. I have. Yes, I have looked at it. I don't have it with me.
Q. Okay.
A. I have looked at it.
Q. And it's got the profile view of the bridge, and whatnot?
A. Correct.
Q. So back to your previous statement, your responsibility is of the main channel? And then do you -- probably have --
A. Excuse me. We permit the main channel. All right. The term "permitting" is a little bit rough. We are required to make sure that vessels have the reasonable ability to use the main channel under the bridge, and that's why we talked about the box. Auxiliary channels, other channels, they're used all the time, I've been told. I'm not a mariner. But we have to make sure that the main channel is high enough and wide enough so vessels can use it.
Q. Fair enough.
A. That's what we permit. And that's what we approve or disapprove.

Q. Okay. And does that box that you -- area that you permit, do you have any responsibility underneath the waterline with that?
A. No, we do not, not in the bridge permitting function of the Coast Guard. No, we do not look at water depth. And the box is just, again, the tool. It's a visual tool to help people understand an elevation view of what we're trying to make sure meets vessels' needs.

CDR MESKUN: Marquette?

MR. JENKINS: No questions.

CDR MESKUN: I'm sorry. Marquette?

MR. REISMAN: No questions on our end, as well.

CDR MESKUN: Thank you.

The time is now 11:25. We will recess till 1300, 1:00 in the afternoon, for a break.

THE WITNESS: Am I done? Excuse me, Commander, am I done?

CDR MESKUN: I apologize. That's my bad.

THE WITNESS: By your leave?

CDR MESKUN: I have a quick statement to read for you. Back on the record.

Mr. Blakemore, you are now released as a witness from this formal marine casualty investigation. Thank you for your testimony and cooperation. If I later determine that this joint investigation team needs additional information from you, I will contact you through your counsel. If you have any questions about the investigation, you can contact the recorder, LT [redacted]

And we are now off the record.

MR. BLAKEMORE: Very good. Thank you.

(Whereupon, at 11:25 a.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 Douglas Blakemore
ACCIDENT NO.:	DCA19FM003
PLACE:	Gonzales, Louisiana
DATE:	May 9, 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.

[redacted]

Danielle S. VanRiper
Transcriber