

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*
*

COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL
CHRISTOPHER'S JOY CAPSIZING AND
SINKING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO
NEAR SOUTHWEST PASS, LOUISIANA
ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2014

Docket No.: DCA-14-LM-020

* * * * *

Telephonic Interview of: CHARLES LEBLANC

Thursday,
October 9, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: LARRY D. BOWLING
Senior Marine Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

LARRY D. BOWLING, Senior Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

CWO [REDACTED] Investigator
Marine Safety Unit (MSU) Morgan City, Louisiana
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED] Investigator
MSU Morgan City, Louisiana
U.S. Coast Guard

LTJG [REDACTED] Investigator
MSU Morgan City, Louisiana
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED]
IC Maritime

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Telephonic Interview of Charles LeBlanc:	
By CWO [REDACTED]	5
By LTJG [REDACTED]	9
By Mr. [REDACTED]	11
By Mr. Bowling	12

I N T E R V I E W

(12:25 p.m. ET)

1
2
3 MR. BOWLING: All right, gentleman, we're -- the digital
4 recorder is live.

5 This is Larry Bowling with the National Transportation
6 Safety Board, Office of Marine Safety. We'll performing a
7 telephonic interview from my office in Florida. It is October the
8 9th, and it is 12:25 Eastern Time, 11:25 Central Time. We'll be
9 interviewing a Mr. Charles LeBlanc, and he is located in Galliano.
10 Also participating in the interview from the office in Galliano,
11 starting with the Coast Guard --

12 CWO [REDACTED] Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED] with the Coast
13 Guard Office out of Morgan City.

14 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigations, Morgan City.

15 LTJG [REDACTED] Lieutenant Junior Grade [REDACTED]
16 Investigations, Morgan City.

17 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with IC Maritime.

18 MR. BOWLING: Okay. Mr. LeBlanc, you are aware that we
19 are going to be recording this interview digitally, and at some
20 time down the road, maybe 21 days or so, I can get you either a
21 written copy -- it'd be a Microsoft word copy of the transcript,
22 and/or an audio file, your choice; you can have both if you want.
23 But are you aware and okay with us recording this digitally?

24 MR. LEBLANC: Yes, sir.

25 MR. BOWLING: Okay. And if at any time my questions --

1 I don't know how the phone connection is, but we're doing fairly
2 good on my end here in Florida, but if you don't understand any of
3 my comments or questions, please let team their know and I'll slow
4 down, repeat them or what have you. But with that said, we'll
5 turn the floor over to the U.S. Coast Guard for the first round of
6 direct questions.

7 INTERVIEW OF CHARLES LEBLANC

8 BY CWO [REDACTED]

9 Q. Okay. Yes, this Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED]

10 Hey, Charles, if you don't mind, sir, if you could just
11 more or less paint us a picture of the operations, what happened
12 that day from the time that you were notified on your vessel that
13 there may be a vessel in distress and they're stopping in the
14 water? And just run us through all the way until the day that the
15 two survivors from the *Christopher's Joy* got off your vessel, and
16 please if you can just be as descriptive as possible, that way it
17 will help us out.

18 A. Three o'clock in the afternoon, my deckhand he came wake
19 me up saying he needed some assistance in a rescue. I got up. I
20 was off shift, got up. When I got up, the two fellows already was
21 on the boat. So we stayed around waiting for the Coast Guard to
22 come in. They called Coast Guard. I think the helicopter came in
23 first, and then the boat.

24 The captain of the *Christopher Joy*, he was -- kept
25 crying, saying they had a guy trapped in the engine room, that

1 they had talked to him for a good 30 minutes and then he was
2 nonresponsive for about 20 minutes. That's when they jumped on
3 our boat. He wasn't responsive no more, so the helicopter they
4 pursued the rescue. They dropped a guy on the bottom of the boat.
5 The boat was flipped over. They tried to communicate with him. I
6 guess they couldn't, and so the Coast Guard boat, they went looked
7 for the guy that was floating in the water. I guess they could
8 never find him.

9 The captain of the boat, when I got up, I observed him;
10 he was all scratched up. We stayed with the boat, the *Christopher*
11 *Joy*, until about 8:00 when it started to sink.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That's -- the captain, he was pretty much in shock. He
14 was crying; come out of it, cry, come out of it. Say that he
15 never lost a guy. I wanted to jump in the boat -- jump out the
16 boat to go in the water to see if I can assist, but the current it
17 was real bad and all. Had about two to three occasions
18 (indiscernible) foot seas. The current was running probably about
19 a good 2½, 3 knots.

20 What I observed, they didn't have no life jackets. They
21 had told us when they finally calmed down how the -- what
22 happened, that their booms -- the outriggers, they was too far up
23 when he went to make the turn. Somehow the current grabbed them
24 and the outrigger broke, and they came up in the vessel and they
25 started taking on water, The captain of the boat said, telling

1 everybody to get off. One guy jumped in the water, the other guy,
2 supposedly from the water rushing in, got sucked in the engine
3 room. And the captain of the boat said that he held on. The
4 windows blew out and he finally got out. When the cabin filled up
5 with water, he got out.

6 We fed them. I mean, what I don't understand is they
7 had no lifejackets.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yeah. I'd say about 7:30, the EPIRB, we grabbed the
10 EPIRB. They had a ice chest floating, a couple of little tail
11 buoys just swimming around. That's about it.

12 Q. Okay. And this is [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard out of
13 Morgan City. Charles, can you describe the interaction between
14 the two survivors throughout the time they came on board until the
15 time that they left the vessel?

16 A. The one with the -- I can't remember their names. The
17 one with the tattoos, he was there -- he was more mentally with it
18 than the other guy, the captain of the vessel. The captain of the
19 vessel, he was freaking out, crying, kept saying he never lost a
20 guy. He called, he called another shrimp boat. My wife even -- I
21 gave my wife, the owner, the boat owner's number so she can get in
22 contact, but nobody could get in contact with the boat owner to
23 let him know what was going.

24 But other than that, when I had got up for my shift at
25 (indiscernible) I went to bed after the boat sunk. I went to take

1 me a nap. They was sitting on there. They couldn't sleep, up all
2 night.

3 Q. Okay. Just to kind of jump back real quick, when you
4 gave your wife the owner's phone number, was she ever able to make
5 contact?

6 A. No, sir.

7 Q. Okay. Now, did the survivors, were they ever able to
8 make contact with the owners?

9 A. He was talking to a bunch of people, but to my knowledge
10 I still -- I think around 6 or so they had contacted somebody that
11 worked with them. I don't know if it was the owner or what, but
12 they had contacted -- they talked with somebody that's part of the
13 family. I don't know who it was, but they had talked to somebody.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. They used my phone to call, I guess, family members or
16 whatever.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I tried numerous of times trying to contact the owner,
19 but he -- they tried.

20 Q. Okay, and once again this is [REDACTED] with the Coast
21 Guard, Morgan City. Charles, you mentioned that they used your
22 phone?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Do you have that phone?

25 A. I have a phone -- yeah, it's on the boat.

1 Q. And is that the phone that they used?

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Okay. Is how many times you entered those numbers still
4 on that phone?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay, very good. Going back to the description of the
7 vessel. Did the master tell you how the vessel flipped, or was it
8 the crewman?

9 A. The captain of the boat.

10 Q. The captain? Okay.

11 BY LTJG [REDACTED]

12 Q. Do you mind giving us your cell phone number that they
13 used that day?

14 A. I don't know it by heart. It's just a little prepaid
15 phone that we have that works offshore that we contact, get in
16 touch with my wife. I don't know the number right offhand.

17 Q. Can we get the phone number when you get a chance?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. What's your service provider? Is it Verizon?

20 A. That's NET10. This is Verizon.

21 Q. Okay the one that they used?

22 A. That was a NET10.

23 Q. NET10? Okay.

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Did they -- did you take any pictures that day?

1 A. I have videos on this phone here.

2 Q. What would be the easiest way to get copies of that?

3 A. I had e-mailed them -- Dale, my first captain, he had
4 came up, he had a little phone with e-mail address. I e-mailed
5 some pictures to it.

6 CWO [REDACTED] Do you still have that e-mail address that
7 you e-mailed them to? This is [REDACTED] Okay, okay.

8 All right. This is [REDACTED] but I don't have any more
9 questions.

10 BY LTJG [REDACTED]

11 Q. [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard. Just go back to the
12 life jackets. You said they didn't life jackets on them. Did
13 they mention anything about having them on board at all?

14 A. No, sir. The way I was understanding, that they said
15 they didn't have really have much time for nothing. But, I mean,
16 that's the first thing you should grab. You should have that at
17 least handy, you know. The wait could have been hours before
18 somebody could have got to them.

19 Q. Now you -- you said they were originally four, but two
20 guys were (indiscernible).

21 A. No, I didn't assist pulling them -- whenever I got up,
22 they was already up.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yeah, there was one guy, the captain of the boat, and it
25 supposedly sucked his clothes off. He just had like some drawers

1 or whatever on.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. They had -- the (indiscernible) -- yeah, they had ropes
4 that they tied them around them. Because one of them said that if
5 they was going to die they wanted their body to be found, so they
6 had tied (indiscernible) around them. That's what the guy told
7 me.

8 Q. Okay. Now the -- when they were communicating with each
9 other, you know, the captain and the other crew member, how did
10 they address each other? By name or by title?

11 A. No, it's just -- they were never really -- like the
12 captain kept, like, man, I can't believe this. They used each
13 other's names. I don't remember their names. I'm bad with names.

14 Q. Okay, no problem. Do you mind just giving us a quick
15 description of them?

16 A. One of them's about my height, the captain, he's built.
17 The deckhand, he was tall, kind of skinny, had tattoos all over
18 him.

19 Q. Okay, all right.

20 BY MR. [REDACTED]

21 Q. This is [REDACTED] with IC Maritime. Charles, can
22 I get your home address, please?

23 A. [REDACTED]

24 Q. And do you have a home phone number?

25 A. No, sir. Cell phone?

1 Q. Yeah, you got a cell number?

2 A. [REDACTED]

3 Q. What's that area code?

4 A. [REDACTED]

5 Q. And that's a different phone than the phone that the
6 crewman used to call?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Okay. That's all I have.

9 CWO. [REDACTED] This is [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard out of
10 Morgan City. Larry, I think we're good on this end for now if you
11 want to go ahead and give a few questions.

12 MR. BOWLING: Yeah, I will. Just a couple quick follow-
13 ups.

14 BY MR. BOWLING:

15 Q. Charles, for the record you described the one individual
16 as being your height. Approximately what height are you?

17 A. 5'5".

18 Q. 5'5", okay. And when you were making that description
19 you were referring to the individual you know as a master or the
20 deckhand?

21 A. The master.

22 Q. Okay. Earlier in the Coast Guard's questions, I believe
23 it was Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED] you used the term they, and it
24 was during your description or your recollection of the
25 positioning of the outriggers and so forth. When you say they,

1 were you referring to the master or the deckhand or both
2 individuals?

3 A. The master and the three deckhands; the one that
4 supposedly was in the engine room and the one that passed away in
5 the water. It was four of them all together.

6 Q. Yes, sir. But I guess my question, to clarify my
7 question, I recall that in your statement you were telling the
8 Coast Guard and myself the -- what I inferred, that somebody was
9 relaying a story to you about the positioning of the outriggers
10 and what happened. Was the master?

11 A. The safety chain, he was making the turn and the safety
12 chain broke, the outrigger came up and it took the boat to the
13 side.

14 Q. Okay, and where did -- what source did this come from,
15 the master or the deckhand?

16 A. The master.

17 Q. Okay. Now I want you to think back with your
18 interaction with the individuals, the two individuals you helped
19 recover. Do you recall either the master or the deckhand telling
20 you or describing what rescue or assistance efforts they tried to
21 lend to either the individual that was trapped in the engine room
22 or the individual at sea? And can you walk me through those
23 again, kind of everything you recall?

24 A. The master said when the vessel flipped over, the guy
25 that they lost in the water, he -- the current was too strong to

1 go out and get him. He supposedly tried to fight to get back on
2 the boat, but he drifted away. The guy that got trapped in the
3 engine room, they said whenever the water rushed in the engine
4 room, he had got sucked in. And they talked to him. They said
5 that -- the master said he was trying to explain to him how to get
6 out for about 30 minutes, and by the time we got there, they had
7 lost communication with him for a good 20 minutes.

8 Q. Okay. Do recall either of the individuals talking about
9 trying to make the vessel more watertight or prevent the flooding
10 before it capsized?

11 A. No, sir. They said they just had 8,000 gallons of fuel.
12 They said -- that's what we asked. They said when the boat
13 flipped over, they supposed to have a little hatch cover that's
14 supposed to come off when it goes under water. That was in the
15 engine room, he said.

16 Q. Okay, and where did that come from, the master or the
17 deckhand?

18 A. The master.

19 Q. Okay. Do you recall either of the individuals talking
20 about how they were -- how much shrimp they had on board, how they
21 were storing it, anything to that effect?

22 A. They didn't tell us exactly how much shrimp. They said
23 they had about \$30,000 worth of shrimp on there. That's what the
24 master said.

25 Q. Okay. Anything regarding the storage, how much ice they

1 had on board, or anything to that effect?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. Okay. What about any -- do you recall any conversations
4 or exchanges between yourself and the master, or yourself and the
5 deckhand, or between the two of them regarding issues on the
6 vessel prior to the accident? Such as, say, you know, a generator
7 not working or, you know, those kind of things?

8 A. They was saying the booms was improperly rigged up. As
9 far as -- I have a little shrimping experience, but I never really
10 worked on a shrimp boat with outriggers, so I wouldn't know
11 exactly what they meant by that.

12 Q. Okay. And when you say that, do you recall the details,
13 and which one it was coming from? Again, I know you kind of
14 talked about that earlier, but if you recall --

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. The master, sir.

18 Q. And again, what do you recall him saying?

19 A. The outriggers was too far up when you drop them down.
20 More than likely they wasn't going down like they're supposed to.

21 Q. Okay. Now, do you recall either individual talking
22 about person by the name of Mr. Sam, Sam, or Mr. Christopher?

23 A. No, sir.

24 MR. BOWLING: Okay, the team in Galliano, the NTSB has
25 no further questions for Mr. LeBlanc.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) LeBlanc is
2 capital L-e-capital B-l-a-n-c, or?

3 MR. LEBLANC: Yeah.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay, thanks. Nothing over here.

5 CWO. [REDACTED] Nothing on this end. Larry, this is [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard.

7 MR. BOWLING: Okay, and Charles, I'm going to use your
8 first name rather than your last, but we normally turn the floor
9 over to the witness. And again, we all appreciate your sitting
10 down with us today and telling us your perspective of the chain of
11 events. But before we close the interview out, have we failed to
12 ask you any questions or is there anything you'd like to add to
13 the record that may help us find out what went on and to prevent a
14 reoccurrence of this accident?

15 MR. LEBLANC: No, sir.

16 MR. BOWLING: Well, thank you very much. And I know
17 the Coast Guard or myself may get back in touch with you on this
18 -- the cellular issue -- the cell phone issue with regard to the
19 one the two individuals used. But at this point we'll go ahead
20 and secure the interview. Bear with me.

21 (Whereupon, the interview 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: COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSEL
CHRISTOPHER'S JOY CAPSIZING AND
SINKING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO
NEAR SOUTHWEST PASS, LOUISIANA
ON SEPTEMBER 23, 2014
Interview of Charles LeBlanc

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-14-LM-020

PLACE:

DATE: October 9, 2014

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.

Keith J. Maurer
Transcriber