Interview with [redacted] (USN)

Date of Interview: 17 Aug 30
Time of Interview: 1137

Interviewers: [redacted] (USCG), [redacted] (USCG), [redacted] (NCOE)
Respondent: [redacted]

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interviewer: Please have a seat. So, good morning.

respondent: Good morning sir.

interviewer: I am [redacted], senior investigating officer of US Coast Guard Activities Far East. Under the authorities of title 46 US code 6301 and title 46 CFR part 4 an investigation is being conducted into the circumstances of the collision between the USS John S McCain and the ALNIC MC which occurred on August 21, 2017. This investigation is intended to determine the cause of the casualty to the extent possible and to obtain information for the purpose of preventing similar casualties in the future. To assist with the accuracy of our investigation we will be recording today's interview which is taking place on August 30, 2017, at 11:37. At this time the individuals assisting me on this investigation will introduce themselves.

interviewer: I am [redacted] from Coast Guard Headquarters, and I am the deck watch officer SME for the investigation.

interviewer: I am [redacted]. I am with the Investigations National Center of Expertise in New Orleans.

respondent: Nice to meet you.

interviewer: If you could please begin by stating your name as well as your position on board the vessel and your watch station billet.

respondent: I am [redacted], undesignated [redacted]. Uh, I stand the usually the helm station or the port and aft lookouts. And uh, that morning it was it was like a normal morning. We all wake up, getting ready for watch, and I relieved the port lookout. And on their, uh, we end up having a contact about 5000 yards out of our port quarter. Me and aft lookout reported it was flashing a white light at us. We, we pass, we reported to combat, and uh they said uh since we were they were only going 12 knots just keep an eye on it, make sure it didn't overtake us. And about five minutes after that we were uh switching out to man our sea and anchor detail, and I go and relieve the helm. We did, I do a full, smooth transaction, relieved the helm, and because the guys are like the ship was still on our port quarter the captain had ordered a CONN to do a course change to 2-3-0. We, uh, change up the course. Um, we steadied at 2-3-0. Then the helmsman that I had relieved before had stayed up and had took over lee helm for thrust control. After we got **(incomprehensible)** uh shifted over everything was smooth. And then I went to steady up on the course, and we ended up showing indication of loss of steering. After that me and the Boatswain Mate of the Watch at the time, he had came up and were assisting me of trying to switch to our backup HPUs, but it was not responding. The HPUs were flashing on the screen, and we could not gain control of them. After that, we had told our OOD and we had manned the aft steering. Once we didn't have steering I hit the emergency override button. They had control on my screen. It showed that they did normal swing checks for positive control, and they did, we ordered the hard-right rudder. The rudder had moved hard right, and we started moving away. After about 10 seconds after that uh moving my rudder to amidships to, since the aft had control, and we ended up losing steering again. It switched back to helm control, which was cause...

interviewer: Pilot house control?

respondent: Pilot house control. And uh the only way to do that, if they manually switch it back to us, which they hadn't. They were trying to keep it on 30 right hard rudder. And uh right on the switchover we uh, me and [redacted], he was up there to relieve the Boatswain Mate of the Watch, and we both, he assisted me. We uh tried moving the rudder to hard right. And uh right when we got to 15-degree rudder, uh left 15 right degree rudder it had lost steering again, and on the screen, it showed it slowly moving back to left. And after that the uh we had sounded the alarm for the hit, they collided with us. Instantly we sounded collision alarm and manned GQ. After that I had, uh or I was relieved by a master helmsman, and I went down to my rep 3 locker uh um, station 2, and we combatted the flooding.

interviewer: What time did you relieve the watch?

respondent: I relieved port lookout, I believe it was around 5:15, and uh when I relieved the helm, I want to say it was about 5:18, 5:19. And uh...

interviewer: So you were at port lookout for three or four minutes?

respondent: Yeah, we were three or four minutes cause I was, we were waiting for the master helmsman and stuff to come up and so since I was a watch stander I always just took control until they arrived. And uh...

interviewer: So, the master helmsman was going to take over for modified nav detail?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: We were, yeah, we were waiting for them to uh station the sea and anchor. I was just there until we stationed it and uh for modified nav and helmsman to take over.

interviewer: Okay. So, you went and then you relieved helm three to five minutes later.

respondent: Yes sir.

interviewer: Okay. Do you remember where the rudder was when you lost steering?

respondent: When I originally lost steering it was, when I was steadying up on the course, it was about 4 left degree rudder. I was moving it back to 3 to kinda keep it steady since the waves were kinda pushing it. And uh right after that I completely lost control of the rudder, and it started moving on its own. HPUs were trying to switch over.

interviewer: Uh, so I'm sorry, first loss of steering was at about 4 degrees left rudder?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And you were already steadied up on your course?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: You were just staying on course? Okay. Staying on course, got it. You began switching, when you say HPU it's helm propulsion unit?

respondent: Yes. What it is, is the alpha and bravos, it's the hydraulics for the engine switch which controls the uh the thrust and the steering. Usually when you switch steering you switch it to, like we were on bravos at the time you would switch to alphas.

interviewer: (incomprehensible)

respondent: And that would switch the control of the steering.

interviewer: Got it. Okay. So, from a systems standpoint, that's on a console? That's an electronic console? Is that what you're dealing with?

respondent: Yes **(incomprehensible)** for switching and for like steering or any kind of modes that's electronic. It's on the on the console, but the actual steering itself, it's powered by electronic but it's actually a manual rudder that we use.

interviewer: Manual helm, okay. So, you switched from bravos to alpha, do a steering check and...

respondent: We still had lost control. The Boatswain Mate of the Watch at the time was [redacted]. We both were trying to switch the HPUs and switch to back up manual...

interviewer: Negative steering check?

respondent: Negative steering check and uh, it had showed that like the screen like a lot of times whenever it shows like uh kinda dark where you are not able to access it, like we weren't able to access there, too...

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: So, we had to man aft steering.

interviewer: Electronic screen did not show what as accessible? Did not show?

respondent: Um back up manual and like the HPUs, we were unable to access them.

interviewer: Back up manual and HPUs as options. Okay. (Sigh) You said the Boatswain Mate of the Watch was...?

respondent: Uh at the time it was [redacted].

interviewer: [redacted].

respondent: And then during the loss of steering, [redacted] had came up because he was to relieve the Boatswain Mate of the Watch.

interviewer: Okay. After loss of steering was piped?

respondent: Yes. That's when he arrived and assisted me with trying to gain control of the rudder.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: So, this is very standard procedure, right?

respondent: Yes. (incomprehensible)

(interviewer and respondent talking at the same time)

interviewer: You lose steering, you just go bam, switch to HPUs, negative results

respondent: Go to back up manual, that's where we go down to aft steering, and we just followed like step by step everything we were trained to do. And uh, by the time we got to aft steering, they had actually gained positive control. It showed on my screen they gained positive control.

interviewer: Okay. Do you know who went back there?

respondent: Um, I'm not sure who was stationed at the time, but I know [redacted] was down there at the time because he was calling up to pilot house asking when they wanted to call sea and anchor detail. And uh...

interviewer: Say that, [redacted] was, oh because he was asking.

(interviewer and respondent talking at the same time)

respondent: Yeah, cause he was down there call calling the pilot house asking when, what time do we want to station sea and anchor.

interviewer: So, there were people already back there?

respondent: There were already people back there getting ready.

interviewer: Okay. Okay. [redacted] and others already in aft steering.

interviewer: Do you have a name for [redacted]?

respondent: [redacted].

interviewer: So, when they piped steering casualty you, the response was pretty quick?

respondent: Yes, everybody responded fairly quickly once we got to aft steering we showed we had positive control, we did a...

interviewer: So, just really quickly, you switched it to aft steering control?

respondent: Yeah, after we hit the emergency override button to switch over to aft steering.

interviewer: Aft steering, emergency override, okay. Aft steering had positive control. Okay.

respondent: And then they did the hard-right rudder. They, it shows on my monitor, it showed them doing it. We actually started moving away, and then that's whenever it switched back to pilot control.

interviewer: Came to hard right rudder. And what is hard right rudder? How many degrees?

respondent: Uh 30 degrees, right 30-degree rudder.

interviewer: Right 30-degree rudder. So, your standard rudder is?

respondent: Uh, standard rudder is 15.

interviewer: 15, and full is 25?

respondent: Yes. It's between, full rudder is between 20 to 30 and hard right is 30 to 35. It's um really depends like cause it only, like it shows indication that it goes to 40 degrees rudder but it only goes to 30, about 35. So, just whichever the CONN really orders, if its specific, then we will go to that rudder but normally full rudder 30, then hard right rudder would be 35.

interviewer: 35, okay. That's, okay. So, hard right rudder is 35 degrees. Got it. And then full rudder would be 30.

respondent: 30, yes.

interviewer: And then 20 for.

respondent: And then 15-20 would be standard rudder.

interviewer: Which is it 15 or 20?

respondent: It depends on which the Con orders. For standard, normal like, just normal degrees it would be 15-degree rudder would be just what we go to. And if they order to go increase 5 degrees then it would be 20.

interviewer: So, when the Conning officer tells you...

respondent: Whenever he told me uh...

interviewer: ...right standard rudder.

respondent: Right standard rudder, I will automatically go to 15, and then if we need more I will ease it to 20, and that's as high as for a 15-degree rudder. If we have standard rudder restriction... (tapping)

interviewer: Okay I understand that you are able to go 5 degrees on either side, right?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: But when you say right standard, when he tells you right standard.

respondent: We just go to 15 **(incomprehensible).**

interviewer: Got it. Okay. Okay, cool. I just want to make sure I am clear on...

respondent: Okay.

interviewer: Got it. Okay. So, standard is 15, full is 30, hard is 35.

interviewer: They establish positive control in aft steering.

respondent: Yes, um.

interviewer: Bring the rudder right.

respondent: They did left 5 degree, right 5 degree, positive control for our positive swing checks.

interviewer: Swing check.

respondent: And it actually showed up on my monitor, that they were doing positive swing checks.

interviewer: And then came...?

respondent: And then we ordered, the uh hard right rudder. And then they got to about right 30 degrees for full rudder, and at that time, about not even a minute passed by, we switched, the console switched back to my control.

interviewer: The console switched back, so console switched back to pilot house control, is that correctly phrase? To pilot house control when the rudder was at approximately right full, is that what you said?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Now you said originally that you were bringing, once they had positive control you were bringing it...

respondent: Bringing my rudder to amidships.

interviewer: You were bringing the helm to...

respondent: Helm to amidships.

interviewer: Which should have had no impact on the rudder?

respondent: No. It should have no impact cause all electrical control or anything, everything is automatic so...

interviewer: You should be able to do anything you want and there should be no response whatsoever.

respondent: Yes, I can move the helm wheel to whatever degree and it won't affect any of the steering.

interviewer: Okay, and you have a helm wheel, like is it one of those like big 3 or 4?

respondent: Uh, it's about 5 inches diameter.

interviewer: Uh, okay.

respondent: So it's a little wheel.

interviewer: Okay, okay.

respondent: And while I was bringing it down to amidships, in case they, whenever we do get positive control for the helm they switch it back to, if they switch it back to us, it would be at amidships and then I do **(incomprehensible)** course change otherwise it will throw the rudders which either direction, so that's that's...

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: Standard uh...

interviewer: So, when you switch it back to pilot house control you are supposed to...

respondent: I'm already supposed to be at...

interviewer: Your helm is supposed to be at amidships?

respondent: amidships. Whenever the aft, because the only way for helm or to pilot house to gain control again is for aft to switch it back to us. That's how we uh, since that's how we have it set up so that way.

interviewer: sure. That makes sense.

respondent: It doesn't mess up the rudders. And while I was bringing it down to amidships I made it to about approximately 7 or 8-degree rudder.

interviewer: Okay so you were at...?

respondent: I was originally at...

interviewer: You lost steering when you were at about 4 degrees?

respondent: 4 degrees, yes.

interviewer: Left rudder.

respondent: And then when I was moving it to like see, because at first it was cause a lot of times the little thing, the rudder on the screen would kind of bug out so I will like, I will move it over a little bit more and back to see like if it's just a little glitch.

interviewer: Okay

respondent: And as soon as I'm moving it back down to amidships it (knocking) switched back to pilot house control.

Unknown speaker: Can I have your car keys please?

interviewer: Okay.

Unknown speaker: Thank you (incomprehensible).

interviewer: So, while bringing the pilot house helm to amidships, the console shifted control back to the pilot house?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Pilot house, okay, which is...?

respondent: Not...

interviewer: Completely out of the ordinary.

respondent: Usually it's like 95% sure, like impossible to do on its own.

interviewer: Okay. And you have...

respondent: Without...

interviewer: ... you have no ability to take control back on the pilot house as far...?

respondent: No. Unless aft sends control back, and it lights on my screen that I am able to take control, I have no ability to switch control back to pilot house.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: So, there is nothing on the helm whatsoever that you can take emergency control back, away from aft steering?

respondent: No. Unless, like how we have on the helm station we have the emergency override to aft steering they also have an override that they switch to pilot house. (Papers shuffling)

interviewer: Was it communicated that they were going to switch back to you?

respondent: No, because we still had no positive control in the pilot house and they were still doing the course change to hard right rudder, to get away from the other ships. And as soon as I tried to bring my rudder, my helm down to amidships, the console switched back to my control, which is completely unheard of. Um, as soon as that happened the uh rudder had whipped back from 30-degree right rudder, it had whipped back to 15 degree left rudder.

interviewer: Do you remember what the speed of the vessel was at the time?

respondent: At the time before we switched to aft steering loss control we increased to 20 knots because the ship behind us was too close and we were trying to get away from them. So, we had increased speed to 20 knots. Afterwards, whenever we had lost steering and we were switching it to aft steering we had switched it down to 5 knots. For the 15, to 15, between like 10 to 15 knots usually is the restriction when switching over to aft steering. Well, I'm not really sure of the actual reasons because I'm still, I'm still pretty new and stuff, and I'm still learning stuff, but uh, we normally had needed to slow down (incomprehensible)

interviewer: Once you determined the steering casualty...

respondent: We had uh...

interviewer: Started decreasing speed.

respondent: Started decreasing speed.

interviewer: And it was ordered speed to 5 knots?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Ordered speed.

interviewer: Was that simply a throttle change or did they actually try uh, going astern in order to bring it down to 5 knots?

respondent: No, it's an actual, the lee helm has control of the thrust and it's actually electronically controlled to bring it down to 5 knots.

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: And then uh soon, soon as it switches back to positive control, me and [redacted], because he was up there try, uh, getting ready to relieve the Boatswain Mate of the Watch, we both had tried to whip it back to right degree rudder. And at that time, like right before the collision hit, we were trying to call aft steering to regain control. And we had complete loss of IVCS.

interviewer: You lost IVCS during...?

respondent: Yeah, after the second, once I gained control, we were calling aft steering, trying to contact aft steering to make sure they didn't switch it back, and we had loss of IVCS.

interviewer: So, this was before the...?

respondent: Before the collision?

interviewer: So once, after the bridge had helm control again, you contacted aft steering.

respondent: Yeah, we tried contacting aft steering and we had loss of IVCS.

interviewer: They tried to contact aft steering but could not due to loss of IVCS. Okay. (Sigh, breathing heavy)

respondent: And uh we kept trying to contact them, we determined loss of IVCS, we are still moving our rudder to right hard.

interviewer: Uh, um.

respondent: And that's when we lost control the second time.

interviewer: Okay, so you inadvertently got control back? You didn't want it. It wasn't intended. You get control back. How did you know that you had control back? Was there notification

respondent: It had, while I was moving it to amidships, on my screen it showed that it started moving with it, the uh...

interviewer: But you're convinced that that wasn't just a coincidence, that they may have been doing the same thing.

respondent: Yeah, no, cause they were at right full rudder, and I was all the way left. And when I was moving it on amidships it whipped all the way to the left and started moving down with me, like that was completely **(incomprehensible)** usually...

interviewer: Okay, so the display shows, I assume, rudder angle and rudder order, right?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: So, you could see, the display would at one point show you lost steering initially and it would show that your helm was stuck on 4 degrees left, right?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: You see them switch to aft steering, you see them sally the rudder or swing checks as you call em, and then you see them come start working towards right hard, right?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: They get to right full and then you take your helm to basically put the wheel back at 0 degrees.

respondent: 0 degrees, yes.

interviewer: And as you are doing that, what do you see?

respondent: I see, on the monitor, I see it just really fast move...

interviewer: Just slammed right back.

respondent: ...and just slammed back to 15, it moved all the way up to 15-degree rudder, and that was to the left rudder.

interviewer: Wow.

respondent: And as, when we saw that, me and [redacted] we tried whipping it down back all the way to right degree rudder. And as soon as we get to right 15, it, we lost steering again, and it moved on our console it had moved back to left. As soon as we lost it, it still did not move back to left on its own.

interviewer: Sorry. Let me make sure I've got this exactly right. Correct me at any moment if I'm saying it incorrectly. From the top, you lose steering at left 4 degrees rudder.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: You try to switch HPUs, doesn't work. You try to go to emergency manual, doesn't work. Pipe steering casualty. Man, aft steering. Emergency override. They take control. Swing checks. They come right. Their order is right hard rudder. They start coming over that way. They get to about right full rudder. In that process, you decide that on the bridge, which should be completely disconnected and have no steering control whatsoever at this moment, you are going to bring the helm to the center line.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: As you do that, you see on the rudder angle indicator that the helm is immediately shifting towards, about left 15 degrees rudder.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: You and [redacted] realize that and you start turning the helm further to starboard.

respondent: And then as soon as we get to about right standard rudder, we lost complete control again.

interviewer: You lost complete control again.

respondent: And the rudder itself moved on its own to left 15 degrees.

interviewer: And the rudder itself turned on its own to left 15 degrees rudder. And you are talking about this in a matter of seconds?

respondent: A matter of seconds it happened. Because they gained control, aft steering has positive control for about 30, 35 seconds. Afterwards, we gain control back. We are trying to shift it back to right rudder, and then we lose rudder again on its own to left rudder. And at the time after that then the collision happens.

interviewer: And you lost IVCS in between that?

respondent: In between, right, right whenever pilot house gained control of the rudder again, we end up losing IVCS.

interviewer: And there is no, the, is there an alarm or an indication that tells you or you just knew that you had control again because it started responding to you on command?

respondent: Normally there is an alarm. It will, like a siren will sound off, and it will have a thing flashing to accept helm control again. But it had no alarm. The thing didn't flash. It just, on its own, switched back and moved.

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: Normally, as a safety mechanism whenever we are switching different controls it will, our alarm will go off and it would have make it to where the other station that we are switching control to has to accept it. Otherwise controlling will not switch over, as a fail-safe mechanism.

interviewer: Are you familiar with aft steering?

respondent: With, uh, not with aft steering, but the forward steering, like all the steering controls we have in the pilot house, that's usually where I am stationed, because I haven't been qualified yet for aft steering

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: For sea and anchor detail.

interviewer: How many watches did you stand prior to this?

respondent: Just the two, because originally, I was taken off the watch bill because I'm going cranking and work, to work with the **(incomprehensible),** and until the sea and anchor detail manned up they needed to get relieved to eat breakfast. That's when I relieved [redacted] at port lookout.

interviewer: this was the first helm watch you actually had in this underway period?

respondent: No, no. Uh, normally, I had just recently been taken off the watch bill. Normally, usually, like twice we have watch, we have a three-watch section, and I stay lookout about twice a day for watch and every hour we rotate between lookouts.

interviewer: The other times that you stood helm watch, do you recall any irregularities at all?

respondent: No, there was none.

interviewer: How long have you been qualified onboard?

respondent: I've been qualified since about, I want to say, June 5th, so two months, about two months out of the three months I've been on board.

interviewer: HPU is a hydraulic power unit, right?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: That's what they are called.

interviewer: How long between the second loss of steering and the collision?

respondent: After the second loss of steering it was about 10-20 seconds.

interviewer: And what would you say was the total time frame from that initial loss to the collision?

respondent: I would say, approximately like five minutes total.

interviewer: Who else was on the bridge with you?

respondent: We had uh, the Captain and the XO were both on the bridge. Um, can't exactly, I don't remember much of the officer's names. I believe at one point [redacted] was on the bridge. Um, [redacted] was up there for my lee helm. [redacted] was there to relieve Boatswain Mate of the Watch, and [redacted] was Boatswain Mate of the Watch. I can't remember who was standing Quartermaster.

interviewer: Um, you said that the CO was on the bridge?

respondent: Yes, uh, cause usually the CO and the XO go to the bridge when we stand sea and anchor detail. That's usually a custom that they are just up there, to make sure everything...

interviewer: And you weren't there yet, though right?

respondent: No, I hadn't made it up there yet. Like, they were already up there getting ready to station.

interviewer: So, during the emergency, when everything first, when everything started happening, who had the CONN at the time?

respondent: When at first everything started to happen I, that's when I took control of the CONN. Oh, uh, the CONN, I don't remember his name. But, uh, I just remember what he looks like. He was, I believe an Ensign. He was a little bit shorter than I am.

interviewer: But he was aware of everything going on?

respondent: Yes, yes.

interviewer: But the CO or XO they didn't pipe in and said Okay I have the CONN now?

respondent: Uh, after the uh we gained aft control and then we lost uh we lost contact with them, the CO, or the X, our CO had took control. And uh...

interviewer: He took the CONN?

respondent: Yeah, he took control of everything. He said, he started to give out the orders, he took over everything.

interviewer: I'm sorry, this is after the initial loss of steering?

respondent: Yes. Because since the CONN that we had he was still inexperienced, and so he took control of everything to...

interviewer: Did he announce that he had the CONN?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: and just, just for timing, was that after the initial or was that after bridge control came back to the pilot house?

respondent: That was after the initial loss of steering.

interviewer: Okay, so the CO is the one who said let's come down to 5 knots?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Now, when you, after the order was given to come down to 5 knots, and lee helm went ahead and did that, did you see the speed start reducing or that was an ordered

respondent: Yes, whenever it showed that it was ordered and we actually saw it reducing like, we had complete control of our thrust. It was only our steering we had no control of.

interviewer: So, the, the engines did start throttling down?

respondent: Yeah, they started to slow down, we started actually started slowing down.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: Was there any change to the throttle from your port to starboard turbines or were they all just locked together?

respondent: We had, um, we, it's called, on our console it's called gang. So, we had, because we had a split plant configuration, so both starboard and port would move together.

interviewer: So, both, they were all moving together, port and starboard?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: You said you joined the vessel in May, is that correct?

respondent: Yes, May 22nd is when I first reported to my command.

interviewer: And is this your first vessel?

respondent: First, yes. I had just finished A school and came back from leave.

interviewer: Which A school?

respondent: I was an undesignated school, but I was in a new class where they combined the undesignated and the Boatswain Mates into one class.

interviewer: Then, oh. Go ahead.

interviewer: Uh, tell me a little bit about your qualification process.

respondent: Normally whenever you are first trying to get qualified for watch stander, what you do is, you are known as a UI. You always have someone who's already qualified stand the watch with you. For the first couple days, they will still be on the watch. You just kinda sit back and like watch how they do it. And then afterwards like the second day they tell you, like for the helm they teach you the repeat backs and how to do course changes and stuff. After the third day, they let you take control but they stand right next to you to watch you and help if need, if needed.

interviewer: You said you were going to start cranking?

respondent: Uh yes. Basically, what it is, it is whenever the CSs, we go down, we work with the CSs. Cranking is about 60 days, 60 to 90 days, just how long they need.

interviewer: I did 140.

respondent: Um, and uh we will sit there and work. We will either be in the galley cooking the food, or we will do Chief Mess or cleaning dishes and stuff.

interviewer: Is that on your, is that a decision you made to do or you were just up?

respondent: It was, they needed the help so my Chief had said after Singapore I was supposed to go cranking.

interviewer: Are you aware of any other equipment failures that occurred before you came to the watch?

respondent: Everything. Well, by the time I got to watch everything was working just fine, and like it was just that morning before it was all good. We had steel

beach and stuff and everything was still working fine. We even had, I believe we had it in autopilot for a little bit. Everything was just, it was working fine until that morning.

interviewer: Alright, is the autopilot used often on board the McCain?

respondent: No. It's, it's uh, we rarely ever use it. A lot of times if we are just coasting in just um one direction we will just have it on autopilot and uh so that way a lot of times some of the watch standers if we don't have one of the lookouts posted we will put it to autopilot and we will have that watch stander staying in the port or starboard lookout until we get another watch stander up there. Because we are still doing, a lot of our newer guys are doing indoc so they are in class to kinda, to basically **show, tell them about the ship** and teach them the basic qualifications and Naval history. And while they are doing that uh we had to have other people come up and take their watch for them.

interviewer: You're a seaman, full seaman E3?

respondent: Yes, E3.

interviewer: Had you ever experienced a steering casualty before while you were on board?

respondent: Only with drills. We never actually had steering casualty until, that was my first one.

interviewer: When was the crew aware that they were getting close to the vessel on the port side?

respondent: Um, we actually after initial we reported that uh, me and aft lookout reported the vessel was off our port quarter, about 5000 yards out and flashing a white light on us. Eventually it ended up stopped flashing its light and then we had,

um, I had switched over to helm. After that we had, we weren't aware of where the ship was at the time because when we were looking at it all of its lights were off.

interviewer: As in, when you say all lights

respondent: Like, all the, the navigation lights were not showing, and we didn't see the, see them up right on us until after the second initial loss of steering.

interviewer: You said early on that you increased speed to 20 knots because there was I guess a closing vessel or...

respondent: Yeah, the vessel that we had reported was close so we went ahead and did a course change so the way it was at (incomprehensible) quarter we did a course to 2-3-0 to parallel it and increased speed so that way there was no room for it to collide with us.

interviewer: Okay, so this other vessel was not paralleled already, they were kinda coming maybe towards your stern a bit?

respondent: Yeah, they were coming close towards, and like right towards our center. And they were, cause they were about 5000 yards out. They were slowly increasing so we went ahead and after we reported to combat they said to keep an eye on it, make sure it doesn't increase speed and try to overtake us. and then uh, after that, about a minute later, they end up actually turning off, they stopped flashing their white lights at us, and all their navigation lights were turned off. I had to relieve, went to relieve the helm and that's when all, the casualty started happening.

interviewer: Okay, um, so you came to starboard increased speed. Were you able to see what type of vessel that was?

respondent: Um, uh, we knew it was a type 3 but we weren't actually able, it was still too dark to really see what type of vessel it was. But we pretty much classified it as a type 3 cargo of some kind.

interviewer: And what about vessels ahead of you?

respondent: Ahead of us? There was a lot of um, cargos. There was a few oilers. And there was maybe one or two fishing vessels out there but other than that it was like normal, like traffic.

interviewer: Okay so when you went to the helm that's somebody else's job to look out. You are paying attention to the helm?

respondent: Yes, whenever I went to the helm I was relieved by [redacted] at port lookout. And uh, as soon as he uh, I gave him all my equipment, our binos, and our night vision, and the COMMS I had told him about the contacts and I reported and to keep an eye on. After that I went over to relieve the helm. [redacted] was on the helm at the time and so whenever I went up to go relieve him the Captain said stay behind and take over for lee helm.

interviewer: The Captain said that?

respondent: Yes. He wanted, wanted since I'm still not as experienced driving during a sea and anchor detail or uh and with close to port he wanted to have lee helm to help do thrust control and steering.

interviewer: Okay. I apologize if this is a bit of a rehash, but I just want to make sure we have our notes correctly. So again, at roughly 5:18 you switch over to helm.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And you had, again, one vessel kind of to your aft port that was, **(incomprehensible),** we are working on that. So, they are on your port quarter,

there is an adjustment to speed and helm. So that, so I, I get the increase the increase in speed. The change in course, was that given to you or to [redacted]?

respondent: Uh, it was given to me to change course because on increased speed there were still other contacts ahead of us. So, we were making sure we didn't run in. So, we, there was an opening so we did a course change.

interviewer: Alright, what was the course before the change?

respondent: Uh, it was at 2-0-0.

interviewer: So, you are at 2-0-0, have a change to 2-3-0, so that's coming to your starboard. And when you are on 2-3-0 that's when you bring the helm back to port a little bit?

respondent: It was uh, we uh steadied up. Usually depending on how it's going we have to move it no more than about 3 or 4 degrees each side to keep it steady. And whenever it was moving too much to the starboard I had moved it 4 degrees to the left for it to kinda steady it back up.

interviewer: Sure.

respondent: And that's when we lost our steering.

interviewer: So, we are at 230, we are staying at 230, we are adjusting as needed, a little bit to port, loss of steering.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And was the loss of steering because there was an alarm, or was there loss of steering because it's shifting away from you?

respondent: It started moving on its own, and I couldn't move it. Normally, during lost steering there would be an alarm indicating lost steering but there was no alarm at all.

interviewer: Is it moving on its own or it just stopped?

respondent: It stopped, and then I noticed **(incomprehensible)** that it started moving on its own.

interviewer: Uh-um.

interviewer: Do you know if you were left or right of the track line? I, I know that's maybe more of a quarter master question, but

respondent: I believe we were slightly right of it, but I couldn't tell you for sure.

interviewer: Sure. We have a talk with them tomorrow. I was just curious of what you were aware of. So, you report to the OOD to...?

respondent: Yes. Uh, I report to OOD. I say "OOD we have indication of loss of steering" and they will say "very well, switch to back up HPUs" and that's when [redacted] (6) [redacted], he was still the Boatswain Mate of the Watch, he came up to help me. Me and him both tried to switch up the backup HPUs, and they were non-responsive. We end up trying to, then we tried to switch to back up manual, which it also was to unable to acquire it. Then we ordered, they had ordered man aft steering. We had over 1MC man aft steering, since there were guys already down there, they already called up and said "hey we're ready to go" and they have the rudder controls so I take the manual, emergency override. They (incomprehensible) positive control and then do hard right rudder.

interviewer: That emergency override, is that at your station or their station?

respondent: Uh, my station.

interviewer: Is there a way they can grab it?

respondent: Uh

interviewer: Like do they have a big red button too?

respondent: I'm not sure. I do know they have on their console up there they can switch it back to pilot house.

interviewer: Uh-um. Alright. So, [redacted], is probably the fella who is back in the aft steering?

respondent: Yes, he was down there before loss of steering calling up to, asking when they need sea and anchor stations.

interviewer: So, it's more than likely [redacted], well, you know he was there at one point.

respondent: He was there at one point, but I don't know who actually manned aft steering.

interviewer: I understand. Thank you.

interviewer: Once aft steering is manned up and they are on station how do they get their orders?

respondent: Um, what we do is um on the helm station we have a phone that we can use, that we call. We had one of the officers that were up there, they took control of the phones and they called down to aft steering "we have positive contact". Any time the CONN ordered a course change I will, or whoever is on CONNS, will relay the order to them.

interviewer: Now that's the person that is talking to aft steering, that's an IVCS system as well?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And there's no other backup? Once that system fails is there a backup?

respondent: Once IVCS fails that's all the systems. Normally, like we would have, like if we had walkie-talkie's or anything that would be the only way we would be able to talk to them.

interviewer: So, no old school, sound powered phone?

respondent: Afterwards, just before the collision we try, we tried to gain back COMMS with aft steering our Q, quarter master had went to grab a sound powered telephone. And whenever we were using it we still couldn't get in contact with them.

interviewer: And before, you said the CO at some point had taken the CONN during this period. Do you recall, is it while you were doing your checks or is it while they said "we need to go aft steering, I have the CONN."

respondent: Yeah, when he said we needed to go to aft steering and he said I have control of the CONN.

interviewer: Okay. So, he gives the command, come down 5 knots.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Whoever is in aft steering has got the steering because he can see the positive check and goes to starboard. And then as you are, cause you are still sitting there at the helm at 4 degrees left rudder

respondent: Yeah, it was 4 degrees left rudder.

interviewer: And holding.

respondent: As soon as they started getting control I started moving to amidships and that's whenever it had switched back to pilot control.

interviewer: And please, I am, very, very limited time at a helm, the difference between 0 and 4, is that several turns or is it...?

respondent: It's just uh, it's a little turn but I had waited until after they had positive control, and they had control for about 10-15 seconds, and then I went ahead and moved, because I was still aware of all the other stuff that was going on, trying to relay orders, telling them where we are at, and trying to get into contact with aft steering, moved it down to amidships and we uh switched, it switched back to our control.

interviewer: Okay so it came back to amidships, or did it keep...?

respondent: It, when I moved to amidships, it had whipped back all the way back to left 15-degree rudder.

interviewer: And so, when you saw it go to left 15, did you keep it at amidships or did you try matching it?

respondent: I tried, going, me and [redacted], we uh once we saw it we started moving right to get it to force back, to right rudder.

interviewer: And was it following you?

respondent: It actually started going back.

interviewer: Okay, and I guess what I'm trying to say is so you put it to amidships, and then it swung to left 15?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Okay. At that point, you went back starboard because you are under, you are under the belief that it is back at your pilot house even though you were

not at left 15, you were not at left 4, you were at amidships. And just in case it is at the pilot house, quick let's move it back to starboard.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And I guess, like how, did you have any indication that it was positive control at the pilot house, like did you do a left and then a right or did you just say right rudder?

respondent: Um, we had, I moved it back and forth left and right, and after that, me and [redacted] had, as fast as we could, moved it back to right rudder. At that point the uh, everybody was on the port lookout and they said that we have a ship incoming so we tried as fast as we could to try to move it back over. And after that we reached right 15-degree rudder we had lost steering again.

interviewer: Uh-um. Um, and I may ask [redacted] to get this in my head the right way, how did you confirm positive control, was at the pilot house, or is that...?

respondent: It's ah, normally if we have positive control it will actually on the screen it will indicate steering location at helm control and whenever we are still paying attention to the screen, it had, we saw, like whenever we also saw the steering location switch to helm.

interviewer: Okay, so you had...

respondent: That's my usual indication

interviewer: That's normally what happens.

respondent: Normally what happens.

interviewer: This time...

respondent: There was no indication, no alarms. Normally when every time we switch steering location alarm will sound off.

interviewer: Okay, so did the console showed it as still in aft steering or?

respondent: Yeah, it still showed aft steering.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: Is it possible that it wasn't at the pilot house?

respondent: Uh, there is a good possibility, just whenever we just saw that aft no longer had control and we did the best we could to move it over.

interviewer: How did you establish that aft didn't have control anymore?

respondent: Um...?

interviewer: Did they tell you that or...?

respondent: Yeah, well, we still had CONNS with them at the time and they said we no longer have control. We looked at it and it had moved left.

interviewer: But the console...

interviewer: So that doesn't mean...

interviewer: .... was still showing aft steering?

respondent: Yes, the console was still showing aft steering.

interviewer: ...and that's what we are trying to get at here.

interviewer: The console showed...

interviewer: So, by the fact that they don't have it it's your assumption and Boatswain Mate assumption that "well, we must have it." So, quick go starboard.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: And, and so as you are going to starboard it is slowly coming...

respondent: Yeah, slowly coming back to starboard...

interviewer: ...to starboard, hit 15...

respondent: ...and hit 15, then we lose steering again. And at that time, we also loose IVCS.

interviewer: And so, when you, when it hits right at 15, and then went back to left on its own?

respondent: Yeah, it started running back to the left on its own.

interviewer: Did it stop at any point? Or?

respondent: By the time the collision actually happened I believe it was around 9 to 10 left degree rudder.

interviewer: And I might be hitting this again the wrong way, um, throttle was brought down to 5 knots. Is there any indicator where it says your actual speed over ground?

respondent: Yes, on the actual where it shows the throttle it shows your ordered throttle and then it has your actual speed, speed over ground, and it also had showed that it was down to 5 knots.

interviewer: Excellent.

respondent: Cause with the actual order of course, like 5 knots, it's a series of numbers that we had moved it down, just those numbers were the ordered. And then the speed of the ground will show what the actual speed is.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: So, ordered speed was 5 knots, and we had, by the time the collision occurred speed over ground was 5 knots.

respondent: Speed over ground was 5 knots, yes.

interviewer: Okay. That's a really responsive

interviewer: It's quick.

interviewer: That's very quick. I've only been on Coast Guard ships, but if you are coming down from 20 to 5 (laughing) you are a good several minutes away from.

interviewer: Regarding radio communications.

interviewer: Do you have any first-hand knowledge of...?

respondent: Uh, normally, the bridge to bridge, while we do a course change we do try doing bridge to bridge contact with them during the loss of steering to basically change course or to kinda stay clear of those, letting other ships know that we have loss of steering.

interviewer: Did you send any whistle signals?

respondent: I don't, uh, I personally didn't, but we had so many alarms going off, I don't know if one of the officers on board did the whistles.

interviewer: Okay.

respondent: We had uh...

interviewer: Who was doing bridge to bridge CONNS?

respondent: Um, the, uh, [redacted] was trying to get CONNS and then one of the other officers tried to get contact with shore, saying that we needed a tug after the collision, but we couldn't get in contact with anybody.

interviewer: Would you know what channels the vessel had been monitoring at the time?

respondent: I am not sure about that.

interviewer: But there were multiple personnel on the radios attempting contacts to various.

respondent: Um, we had we had just one person attempting to do the bridge to bridge contact and contacting shore.

interviewer: Uh-um.

respondent: Um, and then the, our IVCS contact the other stations. It is, um, each channel, uh, we tried every channel and no, none of them worked. It was just all static.

interviewer: Um, I'm going back a little bit. I wish I had caught this a little bit earlier. There was something about the, the helm, you had to do it right and align it right or else you could mess it up. What did you mean by that?

respondent: After another station has control of steering, um, you would move it to amidships for whenever, because if you are no longer on amidships whenever they switch control, back to helm and if you are at say, say if I just left my rudder at 20-degree rudder then it could jam the rudders.

interviewer: Because the system would try to hurry up and catch up to where you are telling it to go.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: Like on some ships if you are going full ahead and you try to go stern, backwards, it will actually lock em up.

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: So, the optimal switch over would be aft steering, I have my rudder at amidships, take control, our settings at amidships we are taking control, switch, and then when they are giving it up they put theirs to amidships.

respondent: And then we uh, they do their thing on the screen to switch it back. We will have a short indication flashing, whether to accept control or to not accept it. Normally, we would hit accept and we would have control again. And CONN, would order a new course and we would move to that course.

interviewer: I assume it's a little bit more difficult if someone's at 30 trying to get your helm to match 30, given that there could be some small adjustments here and there, and it's just so much easier to get it to amidships.

respondent: Then start at amidships and you go to whatever course. Because normally whenever they would switch control they would have moved theirs to amidships and then we would switch control and then while I am at amidships we will do a course change.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: And again, you said, as far as you are aware there is no other mechanical failures prior to this, either during that night or anything that comes to your mind as a, something out of the ordinary.

respondent: Uh, no, everything was good really. Every now and then we would like lose like loss of Nav 1 which occurred a lot (incomprehensible) older systems and like Nav 1 or 2, about 2 minutes later we would regain Nav. And that was just like a normalcy of every now and then we would lose Nav.

interviewer: It that charting?

respondent: Yes, chart for like the maps of where our line is and stuff.

interviewer: Did that happen when you were up there?

respondent: No, we had, to my best knowledge, we had all of our systems running smoothly.

interviewer: Did this vessel, as far as you can remember, did it have any significant blackouts at any time?

respondent: Uh, no. The only thing, that is, whenever we actually collided it shook pretty hard. Um, other than like that, we still had power. And all of our flooding, fire, and uh, we had sounded our collision alarm so like all of our alarms were going off like they were supposed to.

interviewer: But before that, no hiccups or anything like that?

respondent: No, everything everything was working like it was supposed to.

interviewer: You mentioned a collision alarm there. Do you know when that was sounded?

respondent: I believe around 5:25, give or take like 3 or 4 minutes.

interviewer: How long between the collision alarm being sounded and the actual collision?

respondent: We had sounded it at about, uh, 30 seconds before the collision. To be honest, they were uh really close to us, and they were not changing course at all, so we had sounded the collision alarm and manned general quarters when they hit.

interviewer: So, before the collision those alarms were sounded?

respondent: Yes, because we were trying to do bridge to bridge with them. They were non-responsive. We couldn't gain contact with them to have them change their course and uh steer clear of us.

interviewer: If you had to do something by signal light, who usually does that?

respondent: Signal, usually the QMs would do the signals, either by our flags or our lights. Our actual nav lights we did, we had switched it to restricted movement. We had no loss of uh controls. I believe it's red over red, and uh after that I am not sure if they did anything with the spot lights or anything but...

interviewer: So, when you lost steering the lighting scheme changed on the vessel?

respondent: Yes, we had changed the uh, our nav lights to try to tell, like let everyone else know that we have lost steering and were at restricted movement.

interviewer: Restricted ability to maneuver?

respondent: Yes.

interviewer: (sigh) So that second time, so when you saw the rudder swing to left and you and the Boatswain tried change, going back to right, what communications were made to the bridge team that aft steering didn't have it and that you might?

respondent: Uh, while we still had, IVCS was still up and running aft steering said "hey we just lost control of it" and then we looked at our console, we saw it moving over, we tried to shift it as fast as we could back to right degree rudder. And then right after the second, after we lost control again we ended up losing all our IVCS.

interviewer: Right. So, I'm saying so to the CONN, to the CO, to the OOD, what statement was made to the bridge crew that aft steering does not have aft steering?

respondent: Uh, we had notified them. We said uh, one of us had yelled out "aft steering no longer has control" and then the, our captain, had said, if I remember correctly, ordered again hard right rudder, to move it over, back over, and me and [redacted] were just sitting there moving as fast as we can to get it back over, when we lose steering again. Because at that time they were over paying attention to the ship, making sure that uh, trying to get them to change course.

interviewer: And then for the final loss, what announcement was made for that?

respondent: (incomprehensible) have lost rudder again and uh, that's when we found out we had lost IVCS because we were trying to contact aft steering again, trying to man them up again, hey, like what's going on? And we weren't able to contact anybody.

interviewer: And were any additional throttle commands given by the CO?

respondent: Uh, we had all engines stopped. (incomprehensible) We commanded all engines to stop.

interviewer: How far was that before the collision?

respondent: Uh, I want to say, I don't know, it was just right after our second initial loss of steering and, I want to say the vessel was about 500 yards from us at that point.

interviewer: So, seconds then?

respondent: Yeah, a matter of seconds.

interviewer: Is there any other relevant information you think would be, be good for us to know about this?

interviewer: Our consolidated report, as the [redacted] said, you know, is designed to prevent this sort of thing. Is there anything else that comes to your mind, like as you know, if we had known this information or we could have possibly broken the error chain?

respondent: Like, I don't know. The only thing that really comes to mind is just how early the other vessel had flashed its white light at us. Other than that, everything was like, it was just normal. We were just ready to man sea and anchor detail and go on (incomprehensible) day.

interviewer: The, since you were not on lookout, I'm not sure if you would know this or not, the vessel that flashed the light at you and their nav lights weren't visible, is that the same vessel that struck the McCain?

respondent: Yes, it was the same vessel?

interviewer: There was no other vessel that could have been on the port side?

respondent: No, the only other one that was on the port side was two very large, I want to say one of them looked like a barge, and the other one was a cargo. And uh the only, whenever, the way we turned and stuff, ah, one of the other vessels was right on our port quarter we had turned right into them, and they just maintained course and speed and rammed right into us.

interviewer: So, there was no one (incomprehensible), it was the vessel aft?

respondent: Yes, because all the other vessels were fairly far away.

interviewer: Okay.

interviewer: You don't recall what time that was do you?

respondent: Uh...

interviewer: The other vessel, when they were flashing their lights at you?

respondent: Uh, I want to say, about uh, around 5:08.

interviewer: When you were relieving?

respondent: Whenever I relieved port lookout when I first got up there, and that's when I heard me and aft lookout had noticed the guy was really close and flashing a white light at us. We reported it down to combat.

interviewer: So, again we certainly appreciate all your time here today, especially interrupting your lunch. As stated, if there is anything that hasn't come up in conversation or if you have any questions for us, we'd like to open the floor to you. If there is anything you want to ask or tell us we'd be glad to answer that for you.

respondent: Nothing really, just uh, well I guess really just waiting for what's coming next for us. Like if we are staying on the command or if we are going to get ordered to another command or not.

interviewer: Certainly, understand it's a questionable time right now for you to get those answers to you shortly. Um, in the meantime, if you do have any other questions or if something comes up later that you wish you had spoken to us about please feel free to reach out. We'd be glad to talk to you again and get that information from you. The only other thing we ask if that as the investigation is ongoing please do not discuss the contents of this interview with other crew members so that we can ensure our stories are kept separate and that we don't get mixed up details as stories start to mix. Thank you so much for your time again.

respondent: Thank you sir.

interviewer: Have a great day.