



Allision of Bulk Carrier *Herbert C. Jackson* with the Jefferson Avenue Bridge

Rouge River, near Detroit, Michigan

MARINE ACCIDENT BRIEF

Accident no.	DCA13LM021
Vessel	<i>Herbert C. Jackson</i>
Accident type	Allision
Location	Rouge River at Jefferson Avenue Bridge, city of River Rouge, near Detroit, Michigan 42° 16.8' N, 83° 07.7' W
Date/time	May 12, 2013 0212 eastern daylight time (coordinated universal time – 4 hours)
Injuries	None
Damage	\$5,000 damage to vessel; \$50 million damage to drawbridge
Environmental damage	None
Weather	Clear with good visibility, air temperature 40°F, southwesterly winds at 17 knots
Waterway information	Rouge River is a 127-mile tributary flowing into the Detroit River at Zug Island, Michigan, a substantially developed industrial and residential area. The lower 1.5-mile section of the Rouge River is dredged to allow vessels inland access.

About 0212 on May 12, 2013, the bulk carrier *Herbert C. Jackson* was cleared for passage through the Jefferson Avenue Bridge over the Rouge River about 6 miles southwest of Detroit, Michigan, when the bridge tender, who was legally intoxicated at the time, lowered the drawbridge, striking the bulk carrier's bow. Damage to the vessel was estimated at \$5,000. The bridge, a registered historic structure, was extensively damaged and expected to remain closed until 2015 for repair and restoration. No one was injured.



Herbert C. Jackson on the Detroit River. (Photo by Mike Nicholls, www.boatnerd.net)

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Rouge River area near the Jefferson Avenue Bridge. (Background by Google Earth)

The *Herbert C. Jackson* was en route to deliver a load of taconite pellets to the Severstal ore processing terminal in Dearborn, Michigan. As the vessel approached the Jefferson Avenue Bridge, the master slowed and sounded one long and one short blast of the ship's whistle to notify the bridge tender of the approach and request a bridge opening. While waiting, the master brought the vessel to a near-complete stop. About 0205, the master saw the bridge begin to open, and when the drawbridge was fully open and green lights were visible on each bridge section, he increased speed.

The master stated that he then saw the bridge quickly lower in front of the vessel about 0211, and he immediately set the engine full astern. He ordered the mates on the bow and stern to drop anchors, and the stern anchor was deployed. The master recognized impact was imminent and sounded the general alarm. Crewmembers quickly left the bow area before deploying the bow anchor.

A minute later, about 0212, the bridge struck the vessel's bow. The stern anchor was retrieved, and the master backed the vessel away from the bridge, anchored, and reported the accident to the United States Coast Guard.

Wayne County Road Commission personnel determined the bridge control system was working properly at the time of the accident.

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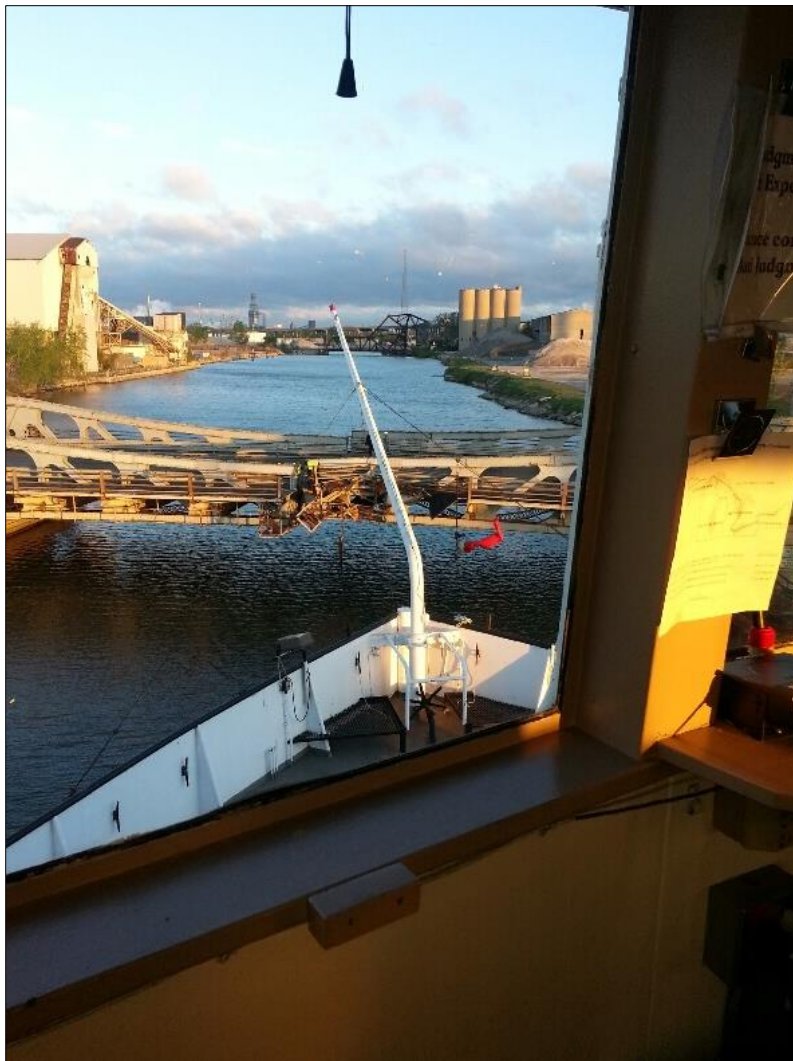
Jefferson Avenue Bridge before the accident, in the open position to allow a vessel to pass.
(Photo by Nathan Nietering, www.historicbridges.org)

Damage to the *Herbert C. Jackson* included a 3- to 4-inch hole in the bow about 2 feet above the anchor pocket. The bridge was closed to traffic, and the cost to repair its structural steel and replace the concrete foundation was estimated at \$50 million.

Following the accident, all crewmembers directly involved in the vessel's operation were tested for alcohol and illegal drugs with negative results. The Coast Guard determined that all of the vessel's equipment was working properly at the time of the accident.

Rouge River police officers responding to the accident observed that the bridge tender appeared to be intoxicated and transported her to a nearby hospital for drug and alcohol testing under county regulations before Coast Guard investigators arrived. The bridge tender's blood alcohol level was found to exceed the legal limit. She had been employed by the Wayne County Road Commission for 17 years with no record of prior issues, counseling, or warnings, and had worked as a bridge operator for 8 years. The bridge tender accepted full responsibility for the accident and her employment was terminated following a Wayne County Road Commission disciplinary hearing.

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View of the damaged Jefferson Avenue Bridge from the pilothouse of the *Herbert C. Jackson*. (Photo by the Coast Guard)

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the allision of the *Herbert C. Jackson* with the Jefferson Avenue Bridge was the intoxicated bridge tender's closing of the drawbridge as the vessel began its transit through the open bridge span.

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Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Herbert C. Jackson</i>
Owner/operator	Interlake Steamship Co.
Port of registry	Philadelphia, PA
Flag	United States
Type	Bulk carrier
Builder, date	Great Lakes Engineering Works River Rouge (Detroit), MI 1959
Official number (US)	278780
IMO number	5148417
Construction	Steel
Length	690 ft (210 m)
Draft	25.75 ft (7.85 m)
Breadth	75 ft (22.9 m)
Tonnage	12,292 gross registered tons, (24,536 ITC*)
Engine type, power	General Electric steam turbine, 6,000 hp (4,854 kW)
Persons on board	24

* According to International Tonnage Convention.

For more details about this accident, visit www.nts.gov/investigations/dms.html and search for NTSB accident ID no. DCA13LM021.

Adopted: October 1, 2014

The NTSB has authority to investigate and establish the probable cause of any major marine casualty or any marine casualty involving both public and nonpublic vessels under 49 *United States Code* 1131. This report is based on factual information either gathered by NTSB investigators or provided by the Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for a marine casualty; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “[NTSB] investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties . . . and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person.” 49 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 831.4.

Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by conducting investigations and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. 49 *United States Code*, Section 1154(b).
