



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Office of Marine Safety

## Interview Summary – DCA18FM029

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**Interview of:** Ronolan, Owner and operator of the fishing vessel *Fayette*

**Date/Time:** February 5, 2019; 1000 to 1045 Alaska Standard Time (AKST)

**Location:** Telephone interview

**Interviewed by:** [REDACTED], USCG, Adam Tucker – NTSB

**Case:** Sinking of the fish tender *Pacific Knight* with one fatality

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- Mr. Jolan was on the fishing vessel *Fayette* on July 25, 2018 in Nushagak Bay, Alaska.
- The *Pacific Knight* was anchored probably less than 100 yards from where he was anchored; on his port side and a little bit downstream.
- The tide was running fairly hard and everyone was anchored, and it was early morning.
- Mr. Jolan noticed the *Pacific Knight* started to list a little bit. It was amazing because when it listed, it rolled to port and it was gone. All the debris floated off the deck. He stated he couldn't see how anyone could have even gotten out of the *Pacific Knight*.
- The boats that were right behind the *Pacific Knight* were way closer than where he was and were likely a part of the *Pacific Knights* fleet.
- Mr. Jolan listened to the radio but did not hear anything. He was watching the situation closely with binoculars.
- At the time, he didn't believe anyone even made it out of the vessel.
- When asked what equipment he saw on deck, Mr. Jolan stated after the accident, he spoke with Mr. Mac who said he thought the *Pacific Knight* was down in the water and tanked fairly heavy. It had net bags and other things on deck. The boat had two knuckle cranes and they were extended up at the time.
- Mr. Jolan hadn't seen the *Pacific Knight* before. It was the first time the cannery had sent him down by the slew in Nushagak to take the place of the *Pacific Mist*. He stated he didn't care for that spot because the "tide runs so damn hard there". It must have been going out at about 3 or 4 knots which must have added to the complications of the sinking.
- Stability wise, the *Pacific Knight* was probably down to its maximum load. It must have had its tanks completely full of water. He thought maybe a tank split the way the boat went down so fast.
- It wasn't blowing, there was no sea at the time. It was just the tide running against all the boats that were anchored there. There were a lot of boats around.
- When asked about the knuckle cranes being fully extended, Mr. Jolan stated he had seen one of them the night before and it was straight up in the air. At the time of the sinking, he was not sure because there was so much happening. One of them was extended for sure.
- That was the first time Mr. Jolan had seen the boat. He normally operates at Coffee Point at a different cannery. His vessel, the *Fayette*, was sent to the slew to relieve the fishing vessel *Pacific Mist*.

- The decks had quite a bit of stuff on it. He noted he had seen the guys working on deck the night before.
- When asked if there were any vessels came alongside the Pacific Knight while they were at anchor, Mr. Jolan stated he could not recall seeing any vessels come alongside them. All the vessels there were at anchor waiting for the next announcement or fishery to open.
- When asked what it meant when the captain of the Pacific Knight stated he was there waiting to buy fish, Mr. Jolan stated it just means the cannery was going to get a hold of him when it was time for him to go on line and replace some other tender. They would pull into the dock and get the fish off. That's probably what Pacific Knight was doing.
- When asked what happens when a cannery calls, Mr. Jolan stated they go to a central location, or at least he does because they are a set net tender. With the size of the Pacific Knight, he was probably a drift net tender. He thought the Pacific Knight would have a station the cannery would send him to, but the cannery would be able to provide that information.
- When asked what he recalled about what investigators were told by previous witnesses about the Pacific Knight swinging back and forth in the current, Mr. Jolan stated all boats swing back and forth with the tide. For his vessel he puts his rudders amidships and he has twin shafts in his boat. It will swing back and forth with the tide. The tide has to be one of the reasons the Pacific Knight went down because it was running fairly strong and the corner which he was at has a tremendous bite on it as it is going out. You do swing back and forth but at the time of the accident, he did not see anyone swinging around. He was having his coffee at the time when the Pacific Knight sank.
- When asked if the anchorage they were at was preferred, Mr. Jolan stated it is common to anchor there because it is right off the mouth of the slew and it is one of the nicest places for as sea conditions and no roughness of the water. A lot of guys choose to anchor there so you can get quite a fleet in there. It gets rougher as you go down towards the point, towards the cannery. The Pacific Knight was in a space they all try to anchor. However, Mr. Jolan noted he is normally not on that side of the bay. He normally operates on the west side of the bay or at Nushagak point because he takes care of set netters. That area usually has a ton of drifters anchored in it.
- When asked of his fishing experience in Alaska, Mr. Jolan stated he has been fishing for 50 years. He stated he had a 110-foot crab boat roll on him one time. They had about 65 pots on board, two of three tanks full of crab and when he activated the jog steering to head towards their next string of pots, he laid the boat right on its starboard side putting the power block under water. If he had laid it down the other way, he would have lost the boat because that was the side with the fiddley and the entrance to the engine room on it. They were lucky. He noted he inquired with an architect after that, and he was told that once you get your beam ends under water, and the belly of the boat with 65 pots on and the third tank tanked down, they were about 6 inches under water. The architect noted that with square shaped hulled boats, once you roll over far enough, the side wants to become the bottom and you careful with them. That boat later went down trying to get to Dutch Harbor in icing conditions.
- Mr. Jolan stated he is careful as to how heavy he tanks a boat. His boat is a 52-foot seiner which packs 20,000 pounds less than other vessels of similar make and size noting that this is because he had 4-5 inches of foam placed in his tanks out of caution that he does not overtank the boat.

- Mr. Jolan stated this is something that should be looked at when dealing with the Pacific Knight, knowing that it has been salvaged, that you probably have to tank the boat down and then do a stability test before ever letting somebody else go out on it.
- When asked if there were any other vessels in the area at the time that may have witnessed the accident, Mr. Jolan stated the drift fleet that was down there were there immediately after the sinking. He had the binoculars looking at the debris field where he saw a bunch of buoys. The guys responded immediately. Everybody has their own frequency they monitor with their cannery so they were all looking to see if people would pop up. It is not very deep there, maybe 3 to 4 fathoms.
- Mr. Jolan noted his lessons learned regarding stability run back to when he laid that crab boat over.
- When asked about the Pacific Knight captains' statement to investigators where there were two fish holds, the forward one three quarters tanked and the aft one had only a ton of ice in it, Mr. Jolan stated the tank with the ice wouldn't have any water in it. He stated it would have been a problem to have the forward hold three quarters full and that's probably what sunk the boat.
- Mr. Jolan noted over the past 50 years how many boats they have lost with guys that think they can have a tank half full of water and go someplace. You can't do it. He stated his boat is rigged so they can press the tank from three different locations. One small and two big pumps allow for his tank to always be full of water if he is fishing. "You gotta be full or empty".
- Slack tanks are the problem. In tendering they don't want to draw too much water because it is shallow, so some guys take the chance and only fill their tank half full. He stated it should be mandatory that tanks need to be fully pressed up if they are to have water in them.
- When asked where he was located when he saw the Pacific Knight sink, Mr. Jolan stated he was off the Pacific Knights starboard side probably less than 100 yards over towards queens slew. The Fayette was right off the mouth of queens slew and he was just to their port less than 100 yards. There were a couple of boats in the vicinity. There is a small channel there that has a mud bottom and doesn't go dry. The tides are so big in Nushagak that you have to make sure there is water under you. The Fayette was a little forward of the Pacific Knight towards the slew.
- When asked if the mud provided good holding ground, Mr. Jolan stated that it was good holding ground. They don't drag anchor there. Most of the bay is good holding because it is sand or mud.
- When asked where he physically was when he witnessed the Pacific Knight sink, Mr. Jolan stated his vessel just has a single house with a flying bridge which he seldom uses unless he is actually seining salmon. His controls are on the starboard side of the house and the galley table is to the left and the stove is against the back wall. He has a helm chair in the cabin, and he was seated there at the time. He added there are windows all around him from where he was seated.
- When asked to clarify what he saw with the Pacific Knight sitting low in the water and what side of the Pacific Knight he was looking at, Mr. Jolan stated he was looking at the starboard side of the Pacific Knight. He had net bags and a lot of stuff on the deck which is normal for a tender. The Pacific Knight definitely listed to the left. The water started gathering up on that side and is what likely took her down [referring to the fish hold that was not full].
- When asked what he recalled what he saw of the Pacific Knight before it began to list and move, Mr. Jolan stated he did not look at the Pacific Knight all that hard. It had a bit of a list which was

strange but not that strange referring to the possibility of ice, totes or nets being on deck on the port side that could have caused a list. He noted the slack tank is unacceptable.

- When asked to describe again what he saw with the Pacific Knight going over and under, Mr. Jolan stated that after he saw it list slowly, he wasn't looking directly at it, and the next time he looked it was over further, and then it augered down into the water, meaning with that anchor out and the tide running like it was, it went down in what he estimated in less than a minute.
- When asked to confirm if it was the port side the vessel went over on, he said he believed it was the port side.
- When asked about the head of the vessel and whether it was in the same direction of all the other vessels in the area, Mr. Jolan stated he didn't remember anything of the Pacific Knight moving side to side but added maybe it was because they all seemed to swing a little. The current was running hard enough that all the anchor lines were stretched.
- When asked about the current, and how he estimated the current was 3 to 4 knots, Mr. Jolan stated he was just guessing based off of his age and experience. When they run against that tide going to the cannery, they know instead of 9 or 10 knots, they will make only 6 or 7.
- When asked if any other crew on the Fayette witnessed the accident, Mr. Jolan stated he had one other crew member and he was in the bunk.
- When asked if he took any pictures or video, Mr. Jolan stated it happened so fast it was totally unbelievable that anybody made it off.
- When asked what he saw after the Pacific Knight sank, Mr. Jolan stated he saw some buoys that were attached to the vessel; red buoys. By then a bunch of guys had responded and were up watching the area by the buoys; two or three boats. He watched a skiff come by and sat there for a while and it wasn't too long and the coast guard was there with a helicopter.
- When asked if saw the two persons that were able to escape the vessel, Mr. Jolan stated no and that he was watching with the binoculars. He noted the bay is a dangerous bay because of the speed of the water.
- When asked if he recalled if the Pacific Knight had any lights on, Mr. Jolan stated no and that it was daylight enough for him to recall if there were any lights on.
- When asked when he arrived at the slew, Mr. Jolan stated he arrived the evening before to relieve the Pacific Mist. The morning of the accident, they departed to head up and pick up some fish from some set netters. It is daylight there almost all the time there anyway.
- When asked why a vessel would put the rudder over to one side or another in that current/tide, Mr. Jolan stated you don't and you put it amidships otherwise you would be swinging back and forth like a yo-yo.
- When asked what kind of bottom of a boat he had, Mr. Jolan stated it had a full keel with two skegs, two wheels and it is flat and draws about 5 feet of water. Typical Alaska seiner.
- When asked who the Pacific Mist worked for, Mr. Jolan stated it was for Peter Pan.

End of summary