

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the matter of: *

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ISLAND LOOKOUT AND CENTERVILLE *

TURNPIKE BRIDGE COLLISION *

IN CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA, *

Accident No.: DCA21FM005

ON NOVEMBER 14, 2020 *

*

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Interview of: WALLACE BRIGGS, Captain
Island Lookout

Via teleconference

Wednesday,
November 18, 2020

APPEARANCES:

ANDREW EHLERS, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MSSE2 [REDACTED], Investigating Officer
U.S. Coast Guard

RYAN GILSENAN, Attorney

LIBBY SINGLETARY
Stevens Towing Co., Inc.

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Captain Wallace Briggs:	
By Mr. Ehlers	5
By CWO [REDACTED]	26
By Mr. Gilsenan	28
By CWO [REDACTED]	35

I N T E R V I E W

(10:02 a.m.)

MR. EHLERS: Okay, the recording has begun. It is now 10:02 Eastern Standard Time on November 18th, 2020. This is the interview of Captain Wallace Briggs being conducted in conjunction with the investigation into the November 14th bridge strike at the Centerville Turnpike Bridge in Chesapeake, Virginia, involving the *Island Lookout* tow. The NTSB reference number for this investigation is DCA21FM005.

Captain Briggs, can you say your full name and spell your last name, please?

MR. BRIGGS: Wallace N. Briggs, B-r-i-g-g-s.

MR. EHLERS: Okay. And I'm going to ask everyone else on the line to also say and spell your last name. My name is Drew Ehlers, that's Andrew Ehlers, E-h-l-e-r-s.

And Warrant Officer [REDACTED].

CWO [REDACTED]: Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED], [REDACTED].

MR. EHLERS: And Mr. Gilsenan.

MR. GILSENAN: Ryan Gilsenan, G-i-l-s-e-n-a-n.

MR. EHLERS: And Ms. Singletary.

MS. SINGLETARY: Libby Singletary, S-i-n-g-l-e-t-a-r-y.

MR. EHLERS: Okay, is there anyone else on the line or in the room?

MS. SINGLETARY: No.

MR. EHLERS: And that question is to everybody, including

1 anyone else on the phone.

2 (Simultaneous speaking.)

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The mate is Adam Phillips, and he's
4 onboard the vessel; he may pass through from time to time.

5 MR. EHLERS: Okay, all right. What I ask is that he not be
6 sitting in the room for the entire interview. Okay?

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, got it.

8 MR. EHLERS: All right, all right. This interview is being
9 recorded, Captain Briggs, do you consent to this recording?

10 MR. BRIGGS: Yes.

11 MR. EHLERS: Okay, thank you. Also, this interview is being
12 conducted in conjunction with a safety investigation, the purpose
13 of which is to learn the facts of the accident, determine the
14 probable cause, and prevent future accidents of this nature.
15 Having said that, the NTSB and the Coast Guard cannot offer any
16 guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from a legal action, that
17 is legal action. Captain Briggs, do you understand?

18 MR. BRIGGS: Yes, I do.

19 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Thank you, sir.

20 INTERVIEW OF CAPTAIN WALLACE BRIGGS

21 BY MR. EHLERS:

22 Q. We'll start off, then, would you mind telling me your age,
23 sir?

24 A. [REDACTED].

25 Q. Okay. Can you give me a little bit about your background,

1 how long you've been in the maritime industry, how long you've
2 been working on tugs and tows, and how long have you've been a
3 captain?

4 A. Started at Stevens Towing in 2000, first time on a boat. Had
5 my own boat two and a half years, been a captain for 17 and a half
6 years on three different boats. On this boat, approximately 9
7 years.

8 Q. Okay. As captain?

9 A. As captain.

10 Q. Okay. And is that the -- is the *Island Lookout* the only
11 vessel that you've been on during that time?

12 A. In the past 9 years, yes.

13 Q. Okay, all right. What Merchant Marine license do you hold?

14 A. I have a Master of towing with a 200-ton Master of inspected
15 vessels on inland waters, western rivers, and Great Lakes.

16 Q. Okay. Other than on-the-job training, have you had other
17 maritime-based training such as at, like, a maritime training
18 center or at a Seamen's Church, anything like that?

19 A. Sea School, their 6-Pack class, 100 ton class, 200 ton class,
20 Master of towing class, radar, radar renewal, three or four times
21 and I've renewed my license four times. And ongoing Moxie
22 training from Stevens Towing.

23 Q. Okay. What's a Moxie?

24 A. It's sort of a correspondence course --

25 Q. Oh.

1 A. -- on safety and environmental hazards, firefighting, general
2 marine, casualty information.

3 (Computer noise.)

4 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Is that somebody just getting a message
5 or is that somebody joining the call?

6 MS. SINGLETARY: I apologize, that was my machine doing a
7 message.

8 MR. EHLERS: Okay, that's all right.

9 MS. SINGLETARY: My laptop.

10 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

11 MS. SINGLETARY: Sorry.

12 BY MR. EHLERS:

13 Q. All right. I think, let's see here, what's your normal work
14 schedule, that is days on and days off, Captain Briggs?

15 A. Right now we're on a 29 and 13 schedule, 29 days on, 13 days
16 off, and the travel days are considered days on.

17 Q. I see, okay. And does the crew rotate as an entire crew or
18 are they offset in -- at a certain amount?

19 A. We have three wheelmen and three deckhands, two are always
20 off, four are always on. They rotate every 2 weeks.

21 Q. Okay, I see. And what's the total size of your crew on a
22 daily basis?

23 A. Four.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Two wheelmen and two deckhands.

1 Q. Oh, okay. No engineers on board?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. Okay. How is engine maintenance done or engineering and
4 general maintenance done?

5 A. We do an hourly engine room walkthrough. We have scheduled
6 oil changes every 20 days on both generators, every 500 hours on
7 the mains, and it's usually done while we're being -- the barge is
8 being loaded.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. If we need to shut down for a day to get the maintenance
11 done, we will. Every Monday we do Monday maintenance, which is
12 switching the Racors -- we have a double Racor system for fuel
13 filters -- and greasing the boat and checking the belts, and we
14 have a raw water impeller that we change once a month on the front
15 of the main.

16 Q. Okay. Kind of continuing along that theme, tell me a little
17 bit more about the *Island Lookout's* engineering arrangements, how
18 many engines you have, how many rudders, generators, that kind of
19 thing.

20 A. We have two main engines, a D16 inline, six Volvos putting
21 out 675 horsepower each. We have two John Deere Northern Light
22 generators, 40,000 kilowatts each. They are rotated on a daily
23 basis. We have two main rudders, four flanking rudders.

24 Q. Okay. Are the rudders controlled by -- go ahead, I'm sorry.

25 A. The boat is 65-foot long with a 26-foot beam.

1 Q. All right, excellent. The rudder's controlled with a set of
2 tillers, set of sticks?

3 A. The flanking rudders are controlled with a tiller, the main
4 rudders are controlled with an electrical or hydraulic system with
5 a joystick on the chair and on the dashboard.

6 Q. Oh, okay. And either joystick works independently, is that
7 correct?

8 A. Yes, correct.

9 Q. Okay. The rudders, do they -- can they be operated
10 independently, in other words, for your steering rudders, can you
11 operate one rudder at one angle and the other rudder at another
12 angle or are -- do they always operate in tandem?

13 A. They're attached by a jockey bar which makes them both move
14 at the same time.

15 Q. Okay. Is that the same for the flanking rudders, as well?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. Are the engines paired to a transmission and do you
18 know what kind of transmission it is, if it is?

19 A. It's a twin disk five-to-one ratio gear.

20 Q. Okay. And then how are they controlled from the wheelhouse,
21 the transmission and the engine?

22 A. Through an electronic throttle system and the Volvo engine
23 system.

24 Q. Okay. Is it like a throttle handle?

25 A. Yes, it's two handles next to each other.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. And they will synchronize when they're within 100 rpm, I
3 believe.

4 Q. I see. And the throttle handles, they control both the
5 transmission and the engines, is that correct?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. Do you know the last time any major maintenance was
8 conducted on the engines, like an overhaul?

9 A. These engines are relatively new, they have approximately
10 24,000 hours on.

11 Q. Okay, all right. And how about the rudders, has there been
12 any recent work on the rudders, like repacking the rudders or
13 anything like that, that you're aware of?

14 A. These are dripless shafts. There's no stuffing, no stuffing
15 boxes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And we had a seal go bad about 6 months ago and that was
18 repaired and that's all we've had, no rudder problems in the past
19 couple of years.

20 Q. Okay. What did you -- oh, you said a seal went bad?

21 A. Yeah, these are dripless seals, they're ceramic seals.

22 Q. Roger.

23 A. In the olden days, like last year or 2 years ago, on this
24 boat, I think it was 8 years ago they went to a dripless seal on
25 the shafts instead of Teflon stuffing.

- 1 Q. Um-hum.
- 2 A. So now it's basically maintenance free.
- 3 Q. Oh, okay. Okay. Have you ever had any trouble with the
- 4 rudders or the engines?
- 5 A. We had a rudder break off about 3 years ago. We were in
- 6 6-foot seas and I believe we dropped it just south of Thimble
- 7 Shoal Channel. There's no upper Thimble Shoal Channel.
- 8 Q. Oh, okay. I'm familiar with that area, so it's a pretty wide
- 9 fetch there, so --
- 10 A. Across the (indiscernible).
- 11 Q. Yeah. On the --
- 12 A. It's a little rough.
- 13 Q. Roger. On the accident voyage, did you have any trouble with
- 14 the rudders or the engines?
- 15 A. No.
- 16 Q. Okay, all right. You mentioned two wheelmen, I assume you
- 17 are one of the two wheelmen when you're on board, is that correct?
- 18 A. Yes.
- 19 Q. Okay.
- 20 A. The first watch whenever I'm on board.
- 21 Q. Okay. And what watches do you run on board?
- 22 A. From 5:00 a.m. until noon and again from 5:00 p.m. until
- 23 10:00 p.m.
- 24 Q. Okay. And the mate has the off watches?
- 25 A. Correct.

1 Q. Okay. All right, I know that you were asleep up until just
2 right before the accident, but what I'd like you to do now is
3 describe what happened up until the accident starting at the very
4 beginning of your voyage. You don't need to provide a lot of
5 detail towards the beginning, but I'd like to know where you
6 started from, what your work was, and then going up until the
7 accident happened, if you could.

8 A. Okay. We got loaded at Pier 2 at Sparrows Point in
9 Baltimore, Maryland. It was 3,200 tons of threaded steel, and we
10 got underway about -- I believe it was 2:30 in the afternoon, I'd
11 have to have a look at my log book, which I don't have down here
12 with me. And 10 o'clock at night -- yeah, I don't have my logbook
13 down here.

14 This is like Groundhog Day for me. We've done this exact run
15 so many times that I did the same run last week and the week
16 before that, and the last time I was on the boat. I believe we
17 got underway in the afternoon, but this might've been the time
18 that the weather was bad, we didn't get underway until 10:00. I
19 haven't really looked at the log book.

20 MR. GILSENAN: Hey, Drew, this is Ryan. Do you want us to
21 grab the logbook and we can nail down that time, take like a
22 2-minute break?

23 MR. EHLERS: Yeah, why don't we do that? We'll pause here
24 for a minute, if you want to run and get the logbook. That would
25 be great.

1 MR. GILSENAN: All right, we'll go get it.

2 MR. EHLERS: All right.

3 (Off the record until 10:19 a.m.)

4 MR. EHLERS: Okay, the recording is restarted, it's 10:19.

5 BY MR. EHLERS:

6 Q. And so, Captain Briggs, kind of starting where we left off,
7 when did you depart Baltimore?

8 A. Okay, yeah. The week before we got under way at 2:30. This
9 time we got underway at 23 -- 2335. We waited for weather on this
10 date, on Thursday, November 12th.

11 Q. Okay. And do you transit through the Chesapeake Bay until
12 you get to the Elizabeth River?

13 A. Yes, and Norfolk Harbor Reach, and we come in to the
14 Elizabeth River and through all the bridges and down through Great
15 Bridge, then we came to the Centerville Bridge.

16 Q. Okay. Just a quick aside, what was your destination?

17 A. The Nucor plant in Hertford County, North Carolina.

18 Q. Okay, all right. So kind of restarting the accident voyage,
19 tell me what happened, as you remember it, up to the point of the
20 accident.

21 A. Well, everything -- it was a normal trip, until the accident.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Nothing out of the ordinary.

24 Q. Let me ask this, the vessel, you passed through the Great
25 Bridge lock about 45 minutes prior to the Centerville Bridge; I

1 assume that was not during your watch period. When you go through
2 a lock, are you up in the wheelhouse or is the wheelman able to
3 take care of that?

4 A. The wheelman takes care of it, the mate takes care of it by
5 himself.

6 Q. Okay, all right. So what was your first indication that
7 there was something wrong?

8 A. The vibration of the boat in full reverse.

9 Q. Okay. How long was that before -- before the impact? I
10 assume you felt the impact when it happened?

11 A. I never felt an impact. Not with 3,200 tons in front of us.
12 It felt like we were aground.

13 Q. When you say it felt like you were aground, what do you mean
14 by that?

15 A. Well, the vibration. The boat vibrates. I don't know how
16 long it took me to wake up. But when I finally woke up, I thought
17 we were aground.

18 Q. Okay. And when you woke up, then, you said you finally woke
19 up, you thought you were aground, what did you do?

20 A. I ran to the second floor stateroom room door and looked
21 outside, and I was standing next to the railing and saw the bridge
22 in front of us.

23 Q. Okay. Was that on the port side or the starboard side that
24 you were looking out?

25 A. I was on the starboard side, that's the second -- the second

1 deck doors on the starboard side of the boat next to my bedroom.
2 Q. Okay.
3 A. My stateroom.
4 Q. And you said the bridge was out in front of you, I think
5 that's what you said. Was the --
6 A. Yes.
7 Q. -- barge in contact with the bridge at the time?
8 A. No, we were backing away from it at the time.
9 Q. I see, I see.
10 A. I didn't know if we had hit it or not, but I noticed that it
11 was not fully opened.
12 Q. Okay. Can you give me an estimate of when you say not fully
13 open, was it maybe three quarters of the way open, halfway open,
14 almost all the way open? You got a sense of how -- go ahead.
15 A. I would say about 90 percent open. It was probably sticking
16 6 feet out from the center system --
17 Q. Okay.
18 A. -- on the starboard side.
19 Q. Okay. After you saw that, what did you do?
20 A. I ran upstairs to the wheelhouse and I said -- asked if we
21 hit the bridge.
22 Q. And what did the mate tell you?
23 A. I think so.
24 Q. Okay. Did he tell you anything else?
25 A. It just didn't open.

1 Q. Okay. The mate said he -- go ahead.

2 A. At the time, we were trying to get the boat under control and
3 away from the marina.

4 Q. Oh, I see. The marina, that's on the -- would've been on
5 your port side, is that correct?

6 A. Yes, the marina's on the port side and there's about eight
7 boats docked there at the marina and there's only about maybe 100
8 feet between running aground on one side and boats on the other
9 side. We just backed away and I ended up holding it out in the
10 middle of the water until, like, 10 o'clock in the morning.

11 Q. Yeah. Did you take control of the vessel?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. And did you do that immediately when you got up to the
14 wheelhouse?

15 A. Within a couple of minutes --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- after I got my bearings.

18 Q. You mentioned --

19 A. Wanted to get my coffee for about a half hour.

20 Q. Oh, okay. You mentioned your tow was backing away from the
21 bridge. How well, with your flanking rudders and such, can you
22 control when you're -- control a tow when you're backing?

23 A. In shallow water, not very much.

24 Q. Okay. And you would consider the canal there shallow water?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. Let me think here. Did the bridge communicate with
2 you, the bridge operator?

3 A. No. Never heard another word from the bridge for the rest of
4 the day.

5 Q. Okay. What other actions did you or the mate take after you
6 started backing away or once you got settled in the center of the
7 channel there?

8 A. Called the owner of the company and then the Coast Guard.

9 Q. Okay. How did you call the Coast Guard, via phone or a
10 radio?

11 A. Via phone.

12 Q. Okay. Do you remember any alarms sounding before -- when you
13 woke up, before you -- as you were waking up, was the general
14 alarm sounded or anything like that?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. What was the weather like when you first got up there
17 to the wheelhouse or when you first looked out the starboard side?

18 A. Two or three miles visibility, it was clear.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. The wind speed -- it was clear, you could see everything.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. The bridge was lit up.

23 Q. Okay. I'd like to ask you some questions about the bridge,
24 in fact. Do you know how wide that opening is when the bridge is
25 fully open, like what's -- how much room you've got to get your

1 tow through?

2 A. They claim 80-foot clearance.

3 Q. Okay. And how wide is your barge?

4 A. Fifty-four feet.

5 Q. Okay. So you have less than 15 feet on each side clearance
6 as you're going through?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. Normally speaking, how long before you get to a bridge
9 do you signal to have -- ask the bridge to be opened, to request a
10 bridge opening?

11 A. Half mile.

12 Q. Half mile, okay.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. How much time is that, normally? Well, let me ask this.
15 What's your normal speed through the canal there?

16 A. In that area, between 4.1 and 4.5 mile an hour depending on
17 the depth of the water at the time. The depth is controlled by
18 rain and wind. There's no tide.

19 Q. Oh, okay. That was my next question. Is there any kind of
20 current in that canal there, any kind of eddies or anything like
21 that, that moves the tow around?

22 A. No. The only time there's any eddies or current that pushes
23 on the barge is when you're in full reverse and then you get bank
24 cushion and bank suction --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- where the water rushing past the side of the barge in
2 between the bank and the barge can push your bow one way or the
3 other and there's no telling which way it'll go.

4 Q. Sure, sure. Okay. How do you request a bridge opening?

5 A. Call the bridge on 13.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Call Centerville Turnpike Bridge to put out a lookout, they
8 respond.

9 Q. Okay. In your experience going through this area, have you
10 ever had trouble getting a response from a bridge tender when
11 you've called them?

12 A. Yes. Early in the morning and late at night we've had
13 trouble. And you just keep on calling them. I've had occasion at
14 this bridge, it's not documented, but where I ended up coming to a
15 complete stop and shining my spotlight on the house.

16 Q. Oh, okay. That was going to be my next question, is what do
17 you do if you don't get a response, so --

18 A. We also have their phone number. If we don't get a response
19 on the radio, we will call them on the phone.

20 Q. Oh, okay. All right. When you have to stop in the channel,
21 what concerns do you have there? You mentioned there's not much
22 currents, but you can sometimes have bank effects if you're in
23 stern propulsion. Is there any risk in coming to a stop?

24 A. If we don't get a response from the bridge, we have enough
25 time, we do not have to completely throw it in full reverse.

1 First we start slowing down, then if we get no response at all,
2 then we, you know, give it some more throttle and bring it to a
3 complete stop before we get to the marina.

4 Q. I see. How fast do you need to be going to have steer joy
5 (ph.) to be able to control the barge?

6 A. Well, with flanking rudders, whenever you're in reverse, you
7 have some control.

8 Q. I see.

9 A. We only run at one rpm -- we run at one speed. We
10 occasionally slow down for marinas, and if there's anything wonky
11 in the waterway, we'll slow down.

12 Q. Um-hum.

13 A. We only run between 1600 and 1630 rpm, and like I said, if
14 we've gotten no response or if there's someone anchored in the
15 middle of the channel, we can stop.

16 Q. Okay. You said 1600, I think, to 1630. What's your max rpm?

17 A. 1830 is where they usually tach out, but we don't do that.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Unless, you know, if you got it, if you need it, it's there.

20 Q. Right, okay. Take me through a standard communications with
21 the bridge. In other words, you call them up and you request for
22 an opening, what's his -- what's the bridge operator's normal
23 response? Is there any other communications as you're maneuvering
24 towards the bridge?

25 A. The first standard, normally, response is go ahead, *Island*

1 Lookout, stay on southbound approaching the bridge. The bridge
2 tender at that particular bridge usually says, bring it on, and we
3 just continue on at our regular speed; they don't like us to slow
4 down because they want the bridge to be opened as little as
5 possible. And we just continue, and when we get there, the bridge
6 is open, and we go through it. We don't slow down for the bridge.
7 We're only going, you know, 4 mile an hour, so that's how we
8 always go through. I've gone through the bridge close to a
9 thousand times in the past 10, 14 years.

10 Q. Okay. And they'll tell you bring it on even before the
11 bridge is open?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. He acknowledges our request and sometimes he'll even state, I
15 see you coming and bring it on. He's basically telling you I'll
16 be ready for you.

17 Q. Okay. Sorry, I'm looking here. So what kind of lights are
18 on that Centerville Turnpike Bridge?

19 A. There's good lights on it. It's got red lights along both
20 fender systems, it's got lights on the top of the bridge which
21 sort of act as a range, if you know what ranges are.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. It's lit up well.

24 Q. Okay. Is there any kind of light that tells you whether it's
25 fully opened or not? Like a green light or a red light, that kind

1 of thing?

2 A. When the lights on the bridge itself light up, that tells us
3 that it's fully opened.

4 Q. I see.

5 A. Because we have 2,000 watt spotlights, one on each fender,
6 shining on each fender system as we're approaching the bridge.

7 Q. Oh, okay. So that's your standard procedure is to spotlight
8 the fenders?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. Have you ever run into those fenders as you're going
11 through that bridge?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I've had occasions where I noticed the bridge wasn't opening
15 quick enough and I've called the bridge tender and said, you know
16 -- I've actually seen cars still driving across the bridge and had
17 to call the bridge tender again because that's how, you know, we
18 can tell whether he's unlocked it or not.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. And he said, I'm initiating now, Captain, and then I
21 proceeded.

22 Q. Okay. Have you ever had a close call at that bridge before?

23 A. Yes. Last month I had to throw it into full reverse and slow
24 down, and after I got through the bridge, I actually called the
25 bridge tender -- I was so mad, I wanted to yell on the radio, but

1 I knew better, so I calmed down a little bit. But it was within a
2 couple of minutes of going through the bridge, I called the bridge
3 tender and tried to explain that I'm pushing like seven million
4 pounds and that he can't cut it that close.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. You know, because he told me to bring it on, and if I
7 wouldn't have thrown it in full reverse, I'm not sure whether I
8 would've hit it or not, but it was too close for my comfort that I
9 would -- you know. So I called and explained it nicely, and he
10 said I understand, and that was the end of it.

11 Q. Yeah. In that prior incident, how close would you say you
12 got to the bridge?

13 A. Oh, it was probably 800 feet.

14 Q. Okay. Have you ever passed through the bridge while it's not
15 quite all the way open?

16 A. Yes. There were times before they rebuilt the bridge that
17 sometimes the one corner of the bridge would stick out maybe six
18 inches or a foot, but I don't know if there's a lock when it goes
19 open, but I have -- I do remember. It's the same thing at
20 Alligator River Bridge, it occasionally doesn't go a full 90
21 degrees.

22 Q. I see. Can you tell when the bridge isn't quite open? Well,
23 you said the lineup lights, is that how you tell how the bridge is
24 lined up?

25 A. Yeah, you can -- yeah, there's sort of like range lights on

1 the bridge. When they're lined up, you know it's fully open.

2 Q. Okay. And obviously, when the bridge is fully open, it's
3 offset from the channel. How do you line up in the channel to get
4 center line in the channel as you're passing through that bridge?

5 A. Well, we have a -- you know, the flashing yellow in the
6 center of our barge, and I describe it to the people I train as
7 you sort of put your eyes out of focus on both fender systems at
8 the same time and put that -- I have a hole drilled at the back of
9 the yellow light so I can see the center of the barge exactly, and
10 you just sort of put the whole thing in perspective at the same
11 time, and like I said 10 million times, through the middle.

12 Q. Um-hum, okay. So the mate on watch, Mr. Phillips, I believe,
13 how long have you --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. How long have you worked with him?

16 A. Thirteen years.

17 Q. Okay. And how long has he been on the *Island Lookout*?

18 A. I believe 9 years because he came with me from my other boat.

19 Q. Okay. And he's been a mate the whole time?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. Have you ever had any concerns with his performance,
22 with his ability to steer the ship?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I trained him.

1 Q. Roger. Okay. I'm going to ask you a couple other questions
2 here, these are kind of standard NTSB questions because we're
3 always interested in sleep and sleep patterns, so you have to bear
4 with me here. So you had the watch, the prior watch on Friday
5 evening. Did you sleep before that watch?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. How long did you sleep before the watch?

8 A. I usually sleep 2 or 3 hours in the afternoon every day.

9 Q. Okay. And during that afternoon sleep period, how would you
10 describe the sleep you had the night before the -- or the
11 afternoon before the accident? You know, good --

12 A. It was good.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. At my age, I sleep pretty good.

15 Q. All right. And then you were relieved from watch at -- you
16 said 2200, 10 o'clock, is that correct?

17 A. That is correct, yes.

18 Q. And when did you go to sleep, then?

19 A. Probably within a half hour, I usually -- sometimes I'll come
20 down and get a snack, go right up to my room, go to bed and then
21 they wake me at 5:00 a.m., so I'm usually -- I usually get six and
22 a half hours sleep at night.

23 Q. Okay. And until you were woken up for the reversing engines,
24 were you -- did you sleep soundly, did you sleep well?

25 A. Well, I usually get up one time a night to relieve myself,

1 and other than that, I sleep fine.

2 Q. Okay, all right. And, again, these are standard questions,
3 but did you drink any alcohol the day before or the morning of the
4 accident?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. Do you drink any caffeinated beverages?

7 A. Yes, I drink two cups of coffee a day.

8 Q. Okay. And when do you normally have your cup of coffee?

9 A. I have one at 5:00 a.m. and one at 5:00 p.m.

10 Q. All right.

11 A. When I come on watch.

12 Q. Okay.

13 MR. EHLERS: All right. I probably will have a few more
14 questions for you, Captain Briggs, but what I'm going to do now is
15 turn it over to Warrant Officer [REDACTED] to see if he has any
16 questions for you.

17 MR. BRIGGS: Okay, thanks.

18 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

19 Q. Hey, good morning, Captain, this is Chief Warrant Officer
20 [REDACTED]. I just have a couple questions --

21 A. Good morning.

22 Q. -- for you. Good morning. So you said, yeah, you need a cup
23 of coffee. Do you take any medication, over-the-counter
24 medication that we need to be aware of that could affect anything?

25 A. [REDACTED]

1

2

3

4

Q. [REDACTED]

5

A. [REDACTED]

6

7

Q. [REDACTED]

8

A. [REDACTED]

9

Q. Okay. So I got a couple questions. Whenever you guys

10

were -- yeah, I know I will. When you all were headed to the

11

bridge and you were making your way, did you hear a horn or

12

anything being sounded from the bridge tender or anything like

13

that?

14

A. I have never heard a horn at Centerville bridge. I've heard

15

it at North Landing Bridge, I've heard it at Great Bridge, I've

16

heard it at Gilmerton. I didn't know the Centerville had a horn.

17

Q. Okay. And then I know you were sleeping but we'll probably

18

estimate it roughly. Did you hear the mate sound his horn, by

19

chance, when the bridge wasn't opening quick enough, do you

20

remember hearing anything like that?

21

A. No.

22

Q. Then you said you have two spotlights on the port and

23

starboard bridge wings that are used to shine the fender system.

24

A. Yeah.

25

Q. How do you guys (indiscernible)?

1 A. (Indiscernible) spotlights.

2 Q. Seventeen-inch spotlights?

3 A. Yeah, a thousand watt.

4 Q. And how do you adjust them? Like, is it on a controller or
5 do you got to do it by hand?

6 A. There's two control rods 4 feet apart right above the
7 dashboard, easily reached from the seat. They control the
8 vertical and the horizontal.

9 Q. Okay. So you don't have to leave the helm or anything, you
10 can do it right from there?

11 A. You can do it right from your seat. Whenever we're in the
12 intracoastal waterway, both of our spotlights are on all the time.
13 The only time we turn them off is in the ship channel, and they're
14 aimed at the banks so we can stay in the middle.

15 Q. Okay. Roger that.

16 CWO [REDACTED]: Okay, yeah, I think I'm done, Captain.

17 Drew, I'm good, that's it for now. We might have some more
18 in a little bit, but as of now, I'm good.

19 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

20 Mr. Gilsenan, do you have any questions?

21 BY MR. GILSENAN:

22 Q. Yes, I have a few. And, Captain, I'm going to be speaking
23 loudly even though we're 3 feet apart because we're on the phone.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. So you mentioned some close calls with the Centerville Bridge

1 before. I want to clarify that. Each time that's happened, is
2 that because you proceeded without hearing "bring it on through"?

3 A. No, each time -- I wouldn't even approach the bridge if I
4 wasn't told bring it on or you can proceed, Captain, or I see you,
5 keep on coming. That's the words they use. And we would not
6 proceed towards the bridge unless we were told it's okay to come
7 through.

8 Q. Okay. And so you said with these close calls, sometimes
9 you've been told to bring it on through, and so you rely on that
10 and continue, but they delay opening the bridge. Why are they
11 delaying opening?

12 A. Usually when there's another couple cars coming across, and
13 occasionally you have to call them and say hey, and then as you
14 call them the second time, they usually say well, I'm initiating.
15 But the only time we really know they're not initiating is by
16 seeing cars drive across the bridge.

17 Q. Okay. Also, the horns. We've heard about horns. Do certain
18 bridges have horns to tell you that they're going to open? Other
19 bridges?

20 A. Yeah, they usually sound the horn right before they open and
21 they sound it again before they close.

22 Q. Okay. And --

23 A. Great Bridge is the one I notice the most, and Gilmerton.
24 I've never -- I've occasionally heard the bridge at North Landing,
25 but I don't believe I've ever heard the horn at Centerville.

1 Q. How many years have you been doing this run?

2 A. Over 10.

3 Q. Okay. We were talking yesterday about how many times a year
4 you would transit this bridge.

5 A. A hundred times a year. Twice I make a run a week, normally,
6 and that's one way --

7 Q. Up and back?

8 A. Up and back, once a week. That's a hundred trips a year.

9 Q. So you've been through Centerville Bridge about a thousand
10 times?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Have you ever heard a horn?

13 A. I've never heard the horn.

14 Q. Okay. I'm going to ask you about Channel 13. Describe for
15 me where the Great Bridge is with respect to the Centerville
16 Bridge, is it north of it?

17 A. Great Bridge is north of it about -- it's 45 minutes, which
18 is probably 3 miles.

19 Q. Okay, 3 miles. And then are the locks north of Great Bridge?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Half mile.

23 Q. How do you communicate with the locks operator?

24 A. Channel 13.

25 Q. Okay, and he responds on Channel 13?

1 A. He tells us when to come in, when the gates are open, when to
2 come in the lock, then he'll lock the gate behind us, open the
3 gate turner, tell us we can proceed out, and when we come out of
4 the lock, we have to call Great Bridge Bridge. So Great Bridge
5 Bridge usually acknowledges, I heard you coming out of the lock,
6 I'll be ready for you.

7 Q. Okay, so that's Channel 13. So you're --

8 A. They're all on 13.

9 Q. -- communicating with the locks, you're communicating with
10 the Great Bridge tender. Would you expect, being that Centerville
11 Turnpike Bridge is 40 miles away, would you expect, maybe if you
12 were to alert the operator there, he would hear that Channel 13
13 radio traffic?

14 A. He would know, especially at that time of night, because
15 there's not a whole lot of other traffic on the radar.

16 Q. Okay. So the 13 signal gets that far?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. All right. So if he was alert, he would know there's a
19 southbound tug?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay. Do you have any recollections or any thoughts on why
22 the mate, Adam Phillips, had to call the Great Bridge -- sorry,
23 the Centerville tender four times?

24 A. I can only speculate they were sleeping. Normally, a lot of
25 times they'll see us, our spotlights, and call us. I don't know

1 if they have AIS in the bridge or whether they heard us call the
2 other bridges, but sometimes they'll say, *Lookout*, when are you
3 going to be here? It all depends on what bridge tender is in
4 there.

5 Q. Or maybe if it was during the day.

6 A. During the day. During the day they actually wouldn't see us
7 (indiscernible).

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Because at night we have those two 17-inch spotlights on.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And we're aiming down the waterway, so on occasion, it can
12 hit the windows of the house.

13 Q. So they'll see you coming before a half mile, before you even
14 hail them?

15 A. They'll see us when we come through the high-rise at 64.

16 Q. How far out is that?

17 A. The high-rise is, I believe, 168. It's Great Bridge bypass.

18 Q. How far out is that?

19 A. At least two and a half miles, 3 miles.

20 Q. They can see your spotlights?

21 A. Oh, yeah.

22 Q. All right. So if that happens, the radio call at half mile
23 out shouldn't be a surprise?

24 A. We call, I would say, 99.9 percent of the time from the split
25 at Norfolk Towing, which is approximately three and a half miles,

1 three-quarters of a mile from the bridge.

2 Q. Okay. Now, this may sound like a trick question, I'm not
3 trying to be a trick question. When you finally reached the
4 bridge tender, or you reached the bridge tender on Channel 13 and
5 he says bring it on, that means to continue, correct?

6 A. He's acknowledged that we're coming and he sees us, he knows
7 where we are, and he's opening the bridge.

8 Q. Okay. Did they give you another signal that said hey, the
9 bridge is now all the way open?

10 A. No other signal.

11 Q. Okay. So bring it on is the one and only signal you get?

12 A. That's it.

13 Q. Okay. They don't say bring it on but I'm not going to start
14 opening for 2 minutes?

15 A. No. They normally -- sometimes they'll even say bring it on,
16 we'll be open when you get here.

17 Q. Okay. All right, what happens if -- generally with the
18 bridge tenders if you guys go really slow, like 2 knots while
19 they're opening?

20 A. They'll call and tell us to pick it up.

21 Q. Why?

22 A. They want to get that bridge closed to get traffic going
23 again.

24 Q. The car traffic?

25 A. Car traffic.

1 Q. Okay. All right. And was backing down -- in this casualty
2 case where the bridge wasn't open all the way, so there was
3 emergency astern, what was the concerns specifically with the
4 marina on the port side?

5 A. Hitting it with the bow of the barge.

6 Q. Why would that be worse than hitting the bridge, for example?

7 A. Could be people sleeping in one of the boats. The boats
8 could break loose. You don't want to hit anything.

9 Q. Right.

10 A. But you try to just keep it in the middle, you're throwing
11 the flanking rudder back and forth, you just try to keep it in the
12 middle. The bow may swing and you may have to throw full rudder
13 and come ahead and try to switch the bow out. I wasn't upstairs
14 at the time, so I don't know. We were already backing -- we were
15 already moving rearwards when that (indiscernible).

16 Q. Right. Let me ask you this, based on what you observed, had
17 the bridge been open all the way, would the barge have made it
18 through without hitting it?

19 A. I believe so. I believe it would've went straight through,
20 no problem.

21 Q. Okay.

22 MR. GILSENAN: All right, guys, I think that's all I have.

23 MR. EHLERS: Okay, thank you very much. I do have one more
24 question, but I'm going to hold it and just ask Warrant Officer
25 [REDACTED] if you -- [REDACTED], if you have any other questions.

1 CWO [REDACTED] No, sir, I do not at this time.

2 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

3 Captain Briggs, I only have one other question for you and
4 that is a pretty broad question: is there anything that we haven't
5 asked you or haven't talked about that you think is important to
6 the investigation?

7 MR. BRIGGS: Since I was upstairs at the time, just the
8 timeline, you know, I don't know, since nothing on 13 is recorded,
9 how many times the bridge needed to be called. But we've had that
10 problem before. You know, it could be confirmed by a captain to
11 another boat, even, that occasionally you can't get somebody on
12 the radio and you don't understand why. You know, you can always
13 get us on a radio. I can't think of anything else.

14 MR. EHLERS: Okay, all right.

15 CWO [REDACTED]: I have one follow-up, Drew, if I may.

16 MR. EHLERS: Yeah, please.

17 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

18 Q. Okay. Captain, going forward, would you like to see come out
19 of this bridge tenders open the bridges immediately when they say
20 they're going to open them?

21 A. I ran the intracoastal waterways from Charleston to
22 (indiscernible), and South Carolina bridges are on a different
23 channel where there's no other traffic, they're on Channel 9. And
24 it's almost an unwritten rule -- I'm not sure, it might be a
25 written rule -- that when you get within a half mile of a bridge,

1 they start opening. No matter how fast you're going, they just
2 open. They don't wait for traffic, they just open.

3 Q. When you say traffic, you mean vehicles?

4 A. Yes. They just open up and they may be open for 5, 10
5 minutes before you get there sometimes and the traffic might be
6 mad, but you transit the bridge with no problem.

7 Q. It is not like that in Virginia?

8 A. It's not like that in Virginia, no, sir. No, sir.

9 Q. Okay.

10 CWO [REDACTED]: All right, thanks, Captain.

11 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Well, again, Captain Briggs, I really
12 appreciate your time and your experience and filling us in on a
13 lot of the things here, so thank you very much, sir.

14 MR. BRIGGS: Okay.

15 MR. EHLERS: All right, I'm going to stop the recording at
16 this time.

17 (Whereupon, at 10:52 a.m., the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the


NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: *ISLAND LOOKOUT* AND CENTERVILLE
TURNPIKE BRIDGE COLLISION
IN CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA,
ON NOVEMBER 14, 2020
Interview of Captain Wallace Briggs

PLACE: Via teleconference

DATE: November 18, 2020

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber