

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CARGO LOSS OF THE CGA CGM *BIANCA*
AT THE NAPOLEON AVENUE WHARF
IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA,
ON AUGUST 2, 2020

Accident No.: DCA20FM024

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Interview of: DARRE FINNEY, Crane Operator
Ports America

Via telephone

Monday,
August 17, 2020

APPEARANCES:

ANDREW EHLERS, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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

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(On behalf of Ports America)

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(On behalf of Port of New Orleans)

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. EHLERS: Okay. We're recording.

3 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. So this is Lt [REDACTED]. We're doing a
4 phone interview with Mr. Darre Finney regarding the CMA CGM *Bianca*
5 incident in Ports America/Port of New Orleans that occurred on
6 August 2nd.

7 I think, for the purpose of the recording, if everyone could
8 go around one more time and reintroduce themselves as well.

9 MR. EHLERS: And this is Andrew Ehlers with the National
10 Transportation Safety Board.

11 MR. SOULE: This is Scott Soule for Ports America.

12 MS. AMY: This is Jeanne Amy with the law firm of Jones
13 Walker representing the Port of New Orleans.

14 LT [REDACTED]: And if you could introduce yourself as well,
15 Darre.

16 MR. FINNEY: My name is Darre Finney. I work for the Port of
17 New Orleans.

18 LT [REDACTED]: Great. And it's my understanding that you were
19 operating Crane 6 at the time of the incident.

20 MR. FINNEY: That's correct.

21 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. So we'll begin.

22 INTERVIEW OF DARRE FINNEY

23 BY LT [REDACTED]:

24 Q. So how long have you worked in the maritime/cargo operations
25 industry?

1 A. 25 years.

2 Q. 25 years. And, in that time, how long have you been a crane
3 operator?

4 A. I've been a crane operator going on, I think 1½ years -- no,
5 I've been a crane operator for really since I came to the ports,
6 but I've been a gantry operator for 1½ years, almost 2 years.
7 Something like that.

8 Q. And how long have you been with Ports America or working in
9 the Port NOLA area?

10 A. 25 years.

11 Q. 25, okay. And then what other capacity were you working in
12 the area for?

13 A. Oh. Well, I was working for Coastal Cargo actually 3 years,
14 and I was in construction.

15 Q. Okay. And you have other experience operating cranes, just
16 1½ years working on the gantry cranes?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay. And as a -- in your current position as a gantry crane
19 operator, can you describe what your typical duties are?

20 A. My duties are to load and unload the ship with 40- and
21 20-foot boxes.

22 Q. And for your job as the gantry crane operator, what specific
23 training have you received?

24 A. I went to Baltimore twice, and I think it was either a year
25 apart or year and a half apart, and each time I went, I stayed for

1 2 weeks.

2 Q. And what type of training did you receive in Baltimore?

3 A. We learned everything about the crane, what each control do,
4 (indiscernible) card, safety measures. Put us in all kinds of
5 situations where we have to go around obstacles with boxes by
6 tracking, simulator, at least 5 hours to 7 hours a day.

7 Q. Does everyone have to receive this training in order to be a
8 gantry crane operator?

9 A. Yes, ma'am.

10 Q. And what type of safety measures or procedures did you learn
11 during that course?

12 A. (Indiscernible) -- a lot of that was on the job training, you
13 know what I'm saying? If the crane doesn't do what it's supposed
14 to, call crane department, explain it to them, and let them come
15 out. They'll call you when they get there, ask you what's going
16 on, and they'll ask you to do certain things with the crane. And
17 by then, they'll figure out why the crane is not working properly.

18 Q. And when you say on the job training was relied upon for the
19 safety measures, was that on the job training that happened while
20 you were operating in Ports America or in Baltimore?

21 A. Well, yeah, while I was operating in Ports America. Like I
22 explained to you, if something's wrong with the crane, call crane
23 department. If something's not right, just put in park, call
24 crane department, talk to -- it's managed to them. And I have the
25 option to shut the whole thing down if I feel something wrong.

1 Q. And this is the crane department of Port NOLA?

2 A. Yes, ma'am.

3 Q. Okay. And can you describe the qualification process? After
4 you've received the training in Baltimore, are you automatically
5 qualified to operate the gantry crane?

6 A. No. No, you have to train for -- you have to be up there for
7 at least a year.

8 Q. So have you just recently completed the qualification
9 process?

10 A. About 2 years to a year and a half, something like that.

11 Q. What about, so specific to your employer, Ports America, do
12 they require any additional training, possibly for safety or
13 emergencies, that you have to complete?

14 A. They do send you back to Baltimore, I guess that's your third
15 year, fourth year. Sometimes 2 years they'll send you back for
16 additional training.

17 Q. Are you familiar with any maybe company wide policy or
18 training procedures that all Ports America employees are required
19 to complete?

20 A. You're talking about for the gantry?

21 Q. No. Maybe not specific to the gantry but just maybe in
22 general. Safe cargo operation training, what to do if there's
23 heavy weather or any other type of -- a fire, any type of
24 emergency that might happen on the pier.

25 A. Heavy weather, we -- if the weather's too severe where we

1 can't see, we shut it down.

2 Q. Okay. Is that something that is just understood among the
3 Ports America employees and the crew that's conducting the cargo
4 operations, or is that written somewhere and maybe discussed in an
5 informal meeting?

6 A. It was discussed at my -- at the training in Baltimore, and I
7 saw it done a couple of times.

8 Q. Okay. So that's just a general safety rule that gantry crane
9 operators know, that if you can't see, that means to shut down the
10 cargo operation. And you said that you've seen it happen a couple
11 times; can you describe those instances?

12 A. Fog came, eerie fog came.

13 Q. And did you -- have you ever had to shut down a cargo
14 operation?

15 A. Yeah. Yeah, the crane wasn't working.

16 Q. And how did that process work?

17 A. Shut it down and called crane department. Crane department
18 came out, worked on the crane, and went back to work.

19 Q. And did you feel comfortable making that type of decision, or
20 did anyone give you a hard time shutting down the cargo operation?

21 A. Yes, I felt comfortable.

22 Q. Good. Okay. So then, I think next I'll just ask you if you
23 could go into -- tell about what happened on Sunday, August 2nd.
24 And I would say if you were to start from when you arrived at the
25 pier, whether that was before the cargo operations occurred or

1 maybe it was -- you had a change of watch or something like that.
2 A. We -- I had to pull a -- we were working mid. That's what I
3 had. This ship here holds four covers: two mid, one inshore, one
4 offshore cover. We weren't working offshore or inshore cover; we
5 were working the offshore mid. Pick the cover up, I put it on the
6 inshore mid cover and went to work. I pull seven 20 tanks, loaded
7 tanks, land them. Then I pull, before the accident, like five
8 boxes, five or seven boxes.

9 On the fifth box, the alarm was going off and started
10 raining, just a little wet. Didn't move the crane. On the box of
11 the accident, I got to let you know, I was five boxes on my left,
12 four boxes high on my right. In front of me, to get those boxes
13 in that hold, the mid, I had to go up four boxes. The crane slows
14 down on your third-high box on the ship. Once that slows down, I
15 have to wait till it gets to a certain height, then track forward.
16 Once I track forward, I start getting down and align myself to get
17 in that cell guide.

18 Once I lined myself up, I maybe was 5 feet from hitting the
19 cell guide. Crane moves. When I realized the crane moved, I
20 started coming out the hold. It happened so quick, next thing you
21 know, I was on the farthest side, and I couldn't see the box that
22 I had on my spreader bar. I was being tossed around in the crane.
23 I was just holding on for dear life, praying, God, please make it
24 stop.

25 I look in back of me, the ship was at least 8 to 10 feet away

1 from the dock. But the crane was going -- steady-steady going to
2 my left. I heard something, I think that was the box fell. I'm
3 steady-steady going to my left; all the sudden, I stop going to my
4 left and track all the way back to my right. I got even up with
5 the hold, but I track at least, I'd say a good 8 feet to my right.
6 I already lost the box; I'm about to pull another box down because
7 the cable had wrapped around there. Looking back of me, miss, I
8 was just scared.

9 Call crane department, crane department saying the crane
10 (indiscernible), spreader bar was down, whatever you do, get the
11 hell out that crane. I don't know how I got out there. I barely
12 remember. But I know it was raining, and that's my first time
13 ever getting out that crane like that. And I got out it, walked
14 as fast as I can, and went down the steps. That's it.

15 Q. Yeah, that sounds really scary.

16 A. I'm telling you about it, but that's -- I can't really -- I'm
17 surprised I just came out with my life, because that was a scary
18 situation. I know I ain't never been through nothing like that.

19 Q. Absolutely. You said that you were conducting the cargo
20 operation when it did start to rain, and then you said that you
21 did hear an alarm. What alarm was that?

22 A. That's the alarm for the wind.

23 Q. Okay. And was that coming from your crane or Crane 5?

24 A. I don't know about Crane 5. I was hearing it from mine.

25 Q. So you heard it from yours. And do you know at around what

1 mile per hour that alarm might start sounding?

2 A. No, ma'am.

3 Q. You don't know?

4 A. No, ma'am.

5 Q. Okay. If you could guess, or do you know around what mile an
6 hour it might be --

7 A. Miss, I don't, I don't know what they have them set at.

8 Q. Okay. But, at that point when the alarm was sounding, it was
9 still safe to conduct the operation?

10 A. Well, it was going off and on, and when I -- the last box I
11 put in there, when it went off that time, didn't stop.

12 Q. Okay. I understand. And so, when that alarm is sounding,
13 does that automatically mean to stop cargo operations, or is it
14 more of a warning?

15 A. It's more of a warning.

16 Q. At what point -- and I understand that this situation really
17 escalated very quickly. Was there a point that you think maybe
18 cargo operations should've been called off?

19 A. When it got dark.

20 Q. Okay. Was that --

21 A. When the crane moved, and I was trying to get it out of
22 there, and it was -- it just came fast.

23 Q. Yeah. It really went once the heavy wind --

24 A. Yeah. When I decided to stop, it was really too late,
25 because I didn't have time enough to pull that box out the hatch.

1 So let's say I pulled that box out of the hatch, I still would've
2 been in trouble. That means the crane would've -- the wind
3 would've pushed the crane all the way to the house. So there's no
4 way that load was going to go across that house, so either way it
5 go, I just -- I don't know.

6 Q. No, I understand. Thank you.

7 A. I don't know.

8 Q. And when you're saying house, you mean the pilot house of the
9 ship?

10 A. Yes, ma'am.

11 Q. Okay. And you were mentioning that the crane was tracking,
12 so does that mean that the wind was pushing the crane back and
13 forth on the track? Is that what that means?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. And, when you left the cab of the crane, can you just clarify
16 one more time for me where -- what position the crane was in and
17 what was attached to the crane, the spreader bar?

18 A. Say that again.

19 Q. When you finally left the crane and were evacuating, what
20 position was the crane in and what was attached to it?

21 A. The crane -- when I left the crane, the crane was -- one
22 hatch, it was -- it wasn't over the hatch that we was working, it
23 was on my right over the next hatch.

24 Q. And there -- it's my understanding, was there still a
25 container attached to the spreader bar?

1 A. No. I lost the hatch [sic] when the crane got pushed to the
2 left. When I got pushed back to the right, I saw an empty bar.
3 And it wasn't pretty.

4 Q. I understand. And to clarify, so you were loading the vessel
5 with containers; is that correct?

6 A. Yes, ma'am.

7 Q. And had you been on scene during the start of the cargo
8 operations?

9 A. Say that again.

10 Q. Did you -- were you involved with the cargo operations from
11 the start, or had you relieved a different gantry crane operator?

12 A. I relieved -- what was his -- Powell (ph.), the second -- the
13 first operator.

14 Q. And what time did you begin operations?

15 A. I don't know what -- I can't remember.

16 Q. Okay. How long would you say you'd been working before the
17 incident occurred or the weather hit?

18 A. At least an hour and a half, maybe 2 hours. Because we
19 finished that hatch -- we finished the deck, I think it was the
20 deck we finished and -- miss, I can't remember. I know we worked
21 a while before the accident happened.

22 Q. And how much longer were you planning on working?

23 A. I believe we had time enough to finish the whole thing. I'm
24 not sure though.

25 Q. And how long would you say that would've taken?

1 A. I don't know.

2 Q. Well then, just generally speaking, how long does a shift for
3 you last if you could just -- on average?

4 A. It depends on how the crane running. It depends on do I have
5 to go over a lot of boxes to put that amount of boxes in that
6 hatch, on that deck, out in that hatch. It's, it's a certain
7 situation where both our time with the boxes -- a certain
8 situation will slow it down. And that was the situation to slow
9 it down, because I had to go over four boxes.

10 Q. I understand. Would you say for a normal operation for you
11 that you're working maybe 10, 12 hours in the crane?

12 A. No, no. We split it 6 hours, 5 hours. Something like that.

13 Q. I see. Thank you. Do you recall how quickly it was from
14 when you saw the rain to when the high winds hit the area?

15 A. Yes, I (indiscernible).

16 Q. Would you say it was a matter of seconds or minutes?

17 A. I'd say seconds.

18 Q. Okay. And do you recall, did the crane ever lose power?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. It did?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. When you left it? When you left the crane, it kept --

23 A. No, it's -- no, it been lost power. It lost power -- I'm not
24 sure about this, but -- no, I couldn't tell you when it lost
25 power.

1 Q. But you do recall that at some point --

2 A. It lost power, yeah. Because I tried to track to my left,
3 and it wouldn't move. I look at the lights, everything was off.
4 But that was already there, the 45, know what I'm saying?

5 Q. And you say 45, a 45-degree angle?

6 A. A 45-degree angle, so the crane pushed me at least -- the
7 deck -- the hatch was working, the hatch on my left of me, and it
8 pushed me three -- at least three decks down.

9 Q. Okay. And, when you left the crane, were you able to put any
10 type of braking mechanism on before you left the cab or put --
11 maybe put the crane arm in the safe position or anything like
12 that?

13 A. Miss, I wasn't able to do nothing. Crane lost power.

14 Q. Okay. So, when the crane loses power, you're no longer able
15 to operate those type of safety mechanisms?

16 A. Nothing.

17 Q. Okay. I understand. And can you describe how you egressed
18 out of the cab of the crane?

19 A. How did I do what?

20 Q. How you exited the cab and --

21 A. Don't know, miss. I just -- I'm -- after that ride was over,
22 I just -- crane department told me walk on top of the cab and call
23 -- walk up the (indiscernible) and walk the catwalk.

24 Q. And then you took the stairs down and you got to the pier?

25 A. (No audible response.)

1 Q. Okay. Do you remember, before the weather came and hit the
2 area, was there anything unusual with the vessel itself from your
3 vantage point?

4 A. No, ma'am.

5 Q. What about, did you -- besides the weather, was there any
6 other type of unsafe condition on the pier?

7 A. No, ma'am.

8 Q. Okay. What about the cargo operations themselves? Was that
9 a routine operation for you?

10 A. Routine operation.

11 Q. And you were -- you said earlier, so your average -- you're
12 normally working 5 or 6 hours, so that was what you were geared up
13 to do on that day?

14 A. Well, yes. We split the -- if it's 12 hours, I do 6, my
15 partner do 6. If it's 5 [sic] hours, he do 5, I do 5. We always
16 split the shift.

17 Q. I see. Can you describe what the relief process is with your
18 partner? Is there a pass-down? How do you understand how much
19 more of the operation is left? If you could describe that to me,
20 that would be helpful.

21 A. The relief process is crane department will go up there
22 first, sterilize the crane. The foreman give me the okay to go
23 up.

24 Q. And then do you have a conversation at all with the crane
25 operator that was just working the shift prior to yours?

1 A. I don't remember.

2 Q. Okay. What about, I understand that before the cargo
3 operations start that there's a safety meeting and that most
4 members involved or that are part of the crew of the cargo
5 operations, they attend the safety meeting, and they talk about
6 maybe potential hazards. What do you do if you're not at the
7 start of the cargo operations? Is there any other type of safety
8 meeting that you attend?

9 A. The foreman tells me.

10 Q. So you have a conversation with the foreman about safety
11 hazards?

12 A. Yeah. How many boxes, what we have to do, do I have to pull
13 a five-high box down, do I have a heavy lift, things like that.

14 Q. Okay. Did you have a conversation with the foreman on the
15 day of the incident?

16 A. Yeah, we talked.

17 Q. And did you ever talk about any safety hazards or that there
18 might possibly be heavy weather anticipated?

19 A. We wouldn't have no problem that morning. Said everything
20 went smooth. He told me how many boxes that I have, hatches, and
21 shouldn't have to pull nothing down, and he doesn't know if we
22 going to finish or not.

23 Q. Okay. Do you know -- have you ever discussed safety hazards
24 or if heavy weather is anticipated?

25 A. Oh, yeah. If, let's say, I have a evening shift, and the

1 first operator talked to the foreman, he'd call me and tell me
2 what to expect, know what I'm saying? Everything going smoothly
3 and they have no problems, or maybe crane broke down one or two
4 times, might have a problem with this or that. But all we talked
5 about is the work, and everything was going smoothly.

6 Q. Okay. Great. What about your sleep the night before the
7 incident? Did you sleep well would you say?

8 A. Yes, ma'am.

9 Q. And what -- typically, for you, what is a good night's rest?

10 A. Go to bed at 10, wake up at 5. Go to the yard, get the job.
11 Depends on what shifts I got, I'll either come home, do some work
12 around the house, and eat or take another nap.

13 Q. Okay. Can you describe -- I understand that you did sustain
14 an injury during the incident. Can you describe what you're being
15 treated for?

16 A. Back injury and my shoulder, my shoulder is -- well, both of
17 them is bothering me real, real bad. Pain medicine they give me,
18 it help, but it don't -- it help sometime, it don't help some -- I
19 don't know. So they're supposed to send me to some specialist
20 this week. All I know right now, I'm in a lot of pain.

21 Q. Sorry to hear that. Do you remember what might've caused it
22 during the incident? Was there a specific moment that you
23 remember being in pain?

24 A. I don't remember. My adrenaline was so high up. I didn't
25 feel nothing until I got out of the crane, but it was a while --

1 it was like maybe -- I don't know how long it was I got out of the
2 crane (indiscernible) the pain. But when I told the foreman, I
3 said, I might have to go to the doctors; my back, my shoulders
4 really hurt, especially my shoulders this side. So he called
5 Robin (ph.), had Robin get the paperwork.

6 Q. Okay. And you haven't returned back to work yet; is that
7 correct?

8 A. Just right now, I'm not in my right mind to be able to come
9 back to work.

10 Q. Sure. I understand. Going back to --

11 A. (Indiscernible).

12 Q. I'm sorry?

13 A. Physically or mentally.

14 Q. I understand. Yes. I can understand that even if you didn't
15 have physical injury that this has been a very traumatic event for
16 you. I can completely understand that.

17 Going back to the weather, can you describe how weather is
18 monitored within the port? Are you aware of how that's done?

19 A. Miss, I -- all I know is this: I think they need to start
20 monitoring the weather, you understand? Something like that
21 coming, the amount of damage -- we almost lost two operators, and
22 I can imagine the cargo damage and the damage to that crane, you
23 understand? And safety, my opinion, they should start working the
24 crane operators out of that crane until the alarm -- until we get
25 better weather.

1 Q. And I understand the crane itself, they have an anemometer,
2 and that's how that alarm would be sounded due to high winds.

3 A. Yes, ma'am.

4 Q. Is there anything else on the crane or at the pier that could
5 alert that heavy weather is expected or coming?

6 A. That's it.

7 Q. And what about for communications? When you're conducting
8 cargo operations, if you see something unsafe or you want to
9 communicate to someone on the pier or the other crane operator,
10 how do you do that?

11 A. We all -- there's two channels that the gangs work. It's the
12 truck channel with the truck and clerks who send the boxes up and
13 the boxes that I send to the back puts up. There's another
14 channel that the crane operator be on, the foreman, deckman, and
15 the groundman. Now, if I see something unsafe, I'm just not going
16 to do it.

17 Q. And how do those communications work? I mean, are you
18 talking to each other throughout the operation, or is it really
19 just for --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- emergency purposes?

22 A. Yes, ma'am. Especially me and the deckman. The deckman
23 probably see something I don't see, because I'm almost 100 feet to
24 80 feet in the air. So, let's say, if I can't get a box in the
25 hold, he'll say to me, well, what's wrong? Well, you got, you

1 know, here. Or say, well, maybe the cell guide that -- or maybe,
2 you know, anything, know what I'm saying? Pipe down a little bit
3 now, know what I'm saying? So me and the deckman, we constant,
4 constant communicate.

5 Q. Okay. And I understand the deckman is a member of the gang
6 that's actually onboard the vessel; is that correct?

7 A. Yes, ma'am.

8 Q. Do they -- during the time of the heavy weather, did they
9 communicate anything to you?

10 A. Miss, that happened so fast, I don't know.

11 Q. Right. Are you familiar with Ports America having any heavy
12 weather procedures for this type of incident?

13 A. No, ma'am.

14 Q. What about for the safety meetings? So, let's say, you
15 start -- there's a cargo operation that's starting at 8 o'clock in
16 the morning, and there might be heavy weather expected -- a
17 thunderstorm expected at 12 or 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Is
18 that something that would be discussed at the safety meeting?

19 A. Yes, ma'am.

20 Q. And whose job would it be to know that, that type of weather
21 is coming?

22 A. Superintendent.

23 Q. And do you know how the superintendent knows that, that
24 weather is coming? Is it just checking their cell phone?

25 A. I guess they're just checking.

1 Q. Okay. And do you know if the superintendent is monitoring
2 the weather during a cargo revolution?

3 A. I don't know.

4 Q. Okay. You said earlier that the alarms had sounded before
5 and you've stopped cargo operations. Besides high winds, are
6 there other environmental factors that would cause you to stop
7 cargo operations?

8 A. Fog. Crane not working right. Wrong boxes got sent up.

9 Q. And who has the authority to stop work? Can anyone call over
10 the radio to stop the operations because something unsafe is
11 occurring?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And is that, that type of stop, that's relayed via the radios
14 as you were saying?

15 A. Say that again.

16 Q. How is that communicated? If you see something, you're just
17 going to relay it on the radio; is that correct?

18 A. Yeah. I talk to the deckman -- well, I'm talking to the
19 deckman and groundman at the same time, sometimes the foreman.
20 That's not the foreman on the radio, you turn it on the other
21 radio, talk to the clerks who send the boxes up or put the boxes
22 up.

23 But if, if I see something unsafe, I'm just not going to do
24 it, and I'm going to explain to the foreman why I'm not going to
25 do it. Then we adjust, and where I can do it and feel safe, I do

1 it.

2 Q. I understand. And what about, so instances where there was
3 heavy weather and you've stopped the cargo operation, can you
4 describe how that procedure went and what the crew did until the
5 environment was safe to return back to work?

6 A. He tell you to stop. Crane got off, crane went into park,
7 crane operator came down.

8 Q. And does the crew meet in the terminal until you feel that
9 it's safe to return back?

10 A. Yes, ma'am. The superintendent and foreman get together,
11 look at weather, and make that decision then.

12 Q. Okay. Great. I think I'm pretty much done or wrapping up my
13 questioning. The last thing I think I'll ask you: is there
14 anything you wish you could've done differently on August 2nd?

15 A. If there was a wind -- I wish I would, I wish I -- if I'd
16 have got a better warning, if I'd have set that back -- then I
17 still couldn't get out the crane, because it came so fast, so I
18 don't really know. I don't.

19 LT [REDACTED]: I understand, and I thank you for your time very
20 much. You've been very helpful. I'm going to turn over my
21 questioning to Mr. Drew Ehlers.

22 MR. EHLERS: Good morning, Darre. This is Drew Ehlers again,
23 and again, I thank you for your time and telling us about what
24 happened. I got to let you know, my background before I joined
25 the NTSB, I was in the Navy and drove ships for 20 years, so I am

1 new to crane operations and particularly container crane
2 operations. So I'm going to ask you some really simple questions
3 just to make sure I understand how all the operations work. Is
4 that all right? You'll have to bear with me.

5 MR. FINNEY: Okay.

6 MR. EHLERS: Yeah.

7 BY MR. EHLERS:

8 Q. So, when you get up into the crane beginning of your shift,
9 do you have to power it up? Is it already powered? Is there, for
10 lack of a better term, an ignition key or anything like that?

11 A. Yes, you have to power it up.

12 Q. And how do you do it? Is it a key? Is it a button?

13 A. Button.

14 Q. And what position is the crane in then? Is it -- like is the
15 boom, is it lowered, is it parallel? How is that at that time?

16 A. It's lowered before we even get in the crane. And when it's
17 lowered while we're in the crane, that means we're going -- we
18 finished that hatch. Either we're going in back of the house or
19 maybe in front of the house, that's the only way we're in the
20 crane while the boom be --

21 Q. I see.

22 A. -- booming up. And we have to call the crane department and
23 give them time enough to get up there, so maybe I have ten boxes
24 left, eight boxes left, I give them a call before I finish them
25 eight boxes, that way I need a boom up.

- 1 Q. Ah, okay.
- 2 A. I start in the morning, it'd already be down.
- 3 Q. I see. All right. And you mentioned, I think you're lifting
4 hatches, I think you said offshore mid, inshore mid. Are those
5 the hatches to the holds that are below the main deck?
- 6 A. Correct.
- 7 Q. All right. And, in any one bay, how many hatches are there?
8 Again, you mentioned inshore mid and offshore mid. Is there more
9 than just two hatches or is there multiple hatches?
- 10 A. All right. I think that was, I think 17, maybe 18 wide for
11 that ship -- I mean 18 boxes wide, know what I'm saying? So that
12 particular ship had two mid covers.
- 13 Q. Okay. Is there -- outboard of those, is there also covers as
14 well?
- 15 A. Say that again.
- 16 Q. So you said two mid covers. Is there also hatches outboard
17 of those as well?
- 18 A. Yeah. Yeah, inshore and offshore. They had -- the inshore
19 cover (indiscernible) boxes on. You had five-high on the
20 offshore. Inshore, you had four-high.
- 21 Q. I see. And you were working the inshore and offshore mids
22 then?
- 23 A. Yeah. I was working the offshore mid.
- 24 Q. I see.
- 25 A. I put the cover on the inshore mid.

1 Q. So, when you are lifting boxes out of there, you've got to
2 lift them up and over the inshore boxes that are on top of the
3 inshore hold?

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. Oh, I see. So it's a pretty long lift then.

6 A. Well, like I said to the lady earlier, when it's like that,
7 that slows us down. But we -- like, let's say I already did that
8 hatch, the next hatch I don't have to do -- I don't have to go
9 four-high. Maybe go over two, maybe go over three. I can make up
10 now I'm getting the boxes, putting them in there faster.

11 Q. Yeah. And the time -- what slows you down is having to lift
12 it up so high?

13 A. Yeah, yeah. It's that and the river, depends how high it is,
14 you know, how high the river is and how high the ship is, how your
15 day going to go.

16 Q. I see. So does the crane slow down the higher you lift the
17 box, or is it just the distance you have to lift it?

18 A. Yeah. Correct.

19 Q. It's just the distance? Okay.

20 A. No, no, no. It slows down on the certain height. Each crane
21 is different. They got it set -- each crane, they got it set
22 different.

23 Q. Okay. So, if you're lifting something up, once it gets to a
24 certain height, the -- it slows down.

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. I see, I see. And is that just for a safety factor to keep
2 it from swinging or from putting too much weight too high or
3 something like that?

4 A. I think that's a safety factor because you have a stopper
5 (ph.) up there in front. Man, if that thing -- the bar hit that,
6 it cut the whole crane off.

7 Q. Sure. Yeah.

8 A. That's why it slows down.

9 Q. Yeah. So, again, very simple question, how do you know what
10 boxes to offload or unload and where to put them? Do you have a
11 list, or is -- how do you know where to put boxes as you're moving
12 them around?

13 A. The deckman has that list, and he relay the message to me
14 high -- how we loading it up. For example, I might have to flow
15 off four-wide on the floor, or maybe I might have to stack four,
16 five boxes.

17 Q. If you're loading something up or offloading something, do
18 you sometimes have to move a box on the ship to get to a lower
19 box?

20 A. Sure.

21 Q. Say that again.

22 A. Yes, I do.

23 Q. Oh, okay. All right. Thank you. All right. I think
24 that -- thank you very much. That helps me a lot. You mentioned,
25 I think, in talking about getting qualified to operate a gantry

1 crane that you have to be up in the crane for about a year. Is
2 that with another crane operator?

3 A. That's with several crane operators. I did up there a year
4 and 8 months, off and on.

5 Q. I see. And that's with another crane operator there with you
6 until you get your final qualification?

7 A. Well, yeah. Yeah.

8 Q. I see, I see. All right. So, now going to the accident
9 day -- and I apologize for jumping around a little bit; I was
10 listening to your answers you had there for Lt [REDACTED]. When you
11 started your shift, what was the weather like at that time?

12 A. Sun was out. Hot.

13 Q. Yeah. Is it -- I'm up in Virginia; I'm not down there in New
14 Orleans. I understand it's pretty common to have thunderstorms
15 this time of year. Is that -- does that ever cause problems? Do
16 you usually work through rain storms? Or how does that normally
17 work at this time of year?

18 A. They usually work until they can't see.

19 Q. Okay. All right. And, again, on the accident day, did you
20 see weather coming? Did you see a thunderstorm coming or anything
21 like that while you were working?

22 A. I can't remember.

23 Q. Okay. And you said the alarm was going off, off and on
24 before the really bad weather hit. Do you have a sense for how
25 long that alarm was going off and on before, like I said, before

1 the heavy weather hit?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. And, when that alarm goes off, at what -- and not necessarily
4 talking about last Sunday, but talking about just a normal day.
5 When that alarm goes off, at what point do you shut down
6 operations?

7 A. When the crane moved, that's when I started shutting down.

8 Q. Let me give you more like a general -- like in the past, have
9 you ever had to shut down the crane because of high winds?

10 A. Not that I remember.

11 Q. No? Okay. And have you worked in the crane before when the
12 alarm was going off and there wasn't a problem?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. How often does that alarm go off? Is it pretty rare, or does
15 it happen a lot when there's thunderstorms around?

16 A. I think it happen when there's high winds.

17 Q. High winds. Okay.

18 A. Just high winds.

19 Q. All right. And does that happen quite a bit in your
20 experience, or is that pretty rare?

21 A. Well, it happened to me maybe 7 or 8 months ago, but the
22 crane didn't go off, so I was -- I was right there by the house,
23 so I had -- I was fighting with the wind to keep the crane from
24 slamming into the house.

25 Q. Yeah, yeah.

1 A. It worked.

2 Q. Yeah. So, on Sunday, when the crane was getting pushed
3 around, you were at the controls trying to counteract what the
4 wind was doing?

5 A. I didn't have time to do nothing.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Once I felt -- I think I was maybe 5 feet from putting it in
8 the cell, crane moved, that was my sign to pull it out.

9 Q. Sure.

10 A. I might have got maybe 10 feet, maybe 8 feet from the hatch,
11 and that's when hell broke loose.

12 Q. Yeah. So, when the weather hit, you tried to get -- you
13 tried to pull the container, and then it -- like you said, hell
14 broke loose.

15 A. Sir, sir, that's just the way she -- there's nothing I could
16 do.

17 Q. Sure.

18 A. Couldn't come out the hatch with it. The crane slow down at
19 three; I had to go four-high to even get in there. I'm in between
20 all these boxes. Five-high to my left, four-high to my right,
21 five-high in front of me, four-high in back of me. And I --

22 Q. There was nowhere you could go.

23 A. Holding on for dear life.

24 Q. All right. So Lt [REDACTED] asked you about your sleep. That's
25 something we're always interested in. We're always looking at

1 things like fatigue and stuff like that, so I got a couple of
2 questions that are standard questions that I ask. First is, in
3 the 24 hours prior to the accident, did you drink any alcohol?

4 A. No.

5 Q. And, on the day of the accident, did you drink any caffeine
6 products, coffee, soda, anything like that?

7 A. I drank a coffee in the morning.

8 Q. About what time? Do you remember?

9 A. 5:15.

10 Q. And was that one cup of coffee, one -- two cups of coffee?

11 A. One cup.

12 Q. One cup. All right, sir.

13 MR. EHLERS: Okay. I think that's all I have for now. I
14 really appreciate your time again, sir. Thank you very much.

15 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. I think then, if Drew and I are all set,
16 then we can -- Jeanne, do you have any further questions?

17 MS. AMY: Yeah. Lt [REDACTED], I do have one clarifying question
18 if you all will entertain it for just a moment.

19 BY MS. AMY:

20 Q. So, Mr. Darre, I just want to confirm, can you tell me who
21 your employer is?

22 A. Well, I work for Port of America [sic] and Series (ph.). I
23 work for both sides. So I guess Port of America and Series.

24 Q. Perfect. Thank you so much. I just wanted to make sure it
25 was clear on the record. I think, at the very beginning -- I

1 understand that you work at Port of New Orleans -- at the Ports
2 America facility at the Port of New Orleans, but your payroll
3 employer is Ports America and Series; is that correct?

4 A. Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am.

5 MS. AMY: Thank you so much. I appreciate it. That's all I
6 have.

7 BY MR. SOULE:

8 Q. Mr. Finney, this is Scott Soule. And I guess, just to follow
9 up on that to make sure everyone is clear on this, you're a member
10 of the local union; is that right?

11 A. Yes, ma'am -- yes, sir.

12 Q. I got you. And that's Local 3000?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. And, in this particular situation, now that you're a gantry
15 crane operator, you work principally either at New Orleans'
16 terminals or at Ports America if you're working a container ship,
17 right?

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. And if you're not -- well, earlier when you talked about
20 working at Coastal Cargo years ago, Coastal is a non-union shop,
21 right?

22 A. That's correct.

23 Q. Okay. So, when people are asking about payroll, employers,
24 that kind of stuff, you're actually employed through the union,
25 and you get paid by the Waterfront Association [sic]. But on this

1 particular day, for this event, you were working for Ports
2 America, right?

3 A. That's correct.

4 MR. SOULE: Okay. I hope that makes it clear for everybody.

5 MR. EHLERS: Hey, I do -- this is Drew Ehlers again. I'm
6 sorry to interrupt. Darre, I have just a follow-up question that
7 questions helped me pull out here.

8 BY MR. EHLERS:

9 Q. Have you worked with -- the group that you're working with,
10 the deckman, the groundman, the foreman, have you worked with
11 those guys before?

12 A. Several times.

13 Q. Okay. So you're familiar with them, and they're familiar
14 with you?

15 A. We -- all those guys, we did everything together. Load
16 stacks together, work the hold in general, (indiscernible) -- all
17 of us did just about any and everything.

18 Q. All right. And you trust all those guys to do what's safe
19 and everything?

20 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah. We -- they have a safety protocol over
21 there on both sides, PNO and Series.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And we discuss safely -- safe things that we're supposed to
24 do constantly.

25 MR. EHLERS: All right. That's all I have. Thank you very

1 much again.

2 BY MR. SOULE:

3 Q. Hey, Mr. Finney. Just so everyone is clear, I know what
4 you're talking about when you said PNO and Series; PNO was the
5 predecessor company to Ports America, right?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Okay. And when you talked about working -- you've been on
8 Bird's (ph.) gang for years and years; is that correct?

9 A. No, I'm with Stanley Overton's gang.

10 Q. Well, okay --

11 A. I work with Bird's gang off and on. Really I work with --
12 you know, we read the board, figure out what job we can get, and
13 go from there.

14 Q. I got you. So, in response to Drew's questions, most of
15 these guys that you work with, you've worked with 20 or 25 years.

16 A. That's correct.

17 MR. SOULE: Okay. That's all I've got. Thank you.

18 LT [REDACTED]: Great. All right. Thanks, Scott. Then, if no
19 one has anything else, I think we can stop the recording.

20 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Recording is stopped.

21 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: CARGO LOSS OF THE CGA CGM *BIANCA*
AT THE NAPOLEON AVENUE WHARF
IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA,
ON AUGUST 2, 2020
Interview of Darre Finney

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20FM024

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: August 17, 2020

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Autumn Weslow
Transcriber