

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: ROBERT MENESSES, Superintendent
Ports America

Via telephone

Friday,
August 7, 2020

APPEARANCES:

ANDREW EHLERS, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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

SCOTT SOULE, Attorney
(On behalf of Ports America)

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Robert Menesses:	
By LT [REDACTED]	6
By Mr. Ehlers	23
By Mr. Soule	34

I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. SOULE: In a nutshell, we are a union shop, so our labor
3 is provided through -- by the ILA Local 3000, so the longshoremen,
4 crane operators -- there's separate port checkers, but they don't
5 factor into this thing at all. But anyways, our union labor is
6 trained by the Midgulf Association of Stevedores. It's the
7 Steamship Association you might hear someone refer to it as,
8 because that's what it was called for many, many years.

9 So on any given day, a ship's superintendent will make the
10 callout for how many gangs he needs. If it's a bulk ship, they'll
11 go -- they actually have a shape-up hall where guys will
12 physically stand out in the lot, and they'll get picked to be on a
13 gang and stuff like that.

14 Not quite what happens with container operations, but what
15 I'm trying to convey to you is that the foreman that you're going
16 to be talking with later and the actual crane operator are union
17 guys, and they're not direct employees in that sense. So --

18 MR. EHLERS: Understood.

19 MR. SOULE: -- you'll want to keep that in mind when you ask
20 them some of those questions, because -- again, that's why we
21 don't have the credentials for them, because that's maintained by
22 the union or the Steamship Association. Our deal is, we pay the
23 premium so you provide us with qualified people and we don't have
24 to go through that exercise ourselves.

25 And again, as I mentioned earlier, always try and be careful

1 about distinguishing Ports America from the Port of New Orleans.
2 In this particular case, the crane, as you know, was owned by the
3 Port of New Orleans. When you hear people talk about making a
4 phone call to the crane department, they're talking about the Port
5 of New Orleans' crane department. We don't service the gantry
6 cranes; all we do is work them. So any kind of maintenance
7 issues, repair issues, and all that stuff is the Port of New
8 Orleans.

9 So I think hopefully I hit some of the things that you'll
10 hear people say and you'll wonder what -- who's the crane
11 department that's going to take that phone call? Well, that's not
12 us, so --

13 MR. EHLERS: Right.

14 MR. SOULE: All right. Well, good deal.

15 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

16 MR. SOULE: You got any questions before we get started,
17 Lieutenant, or --

18 LT [REDACTED]: I'm okay for now.

19 MR. SOULE: All right.

20 MR. EHLERS: Let me just give you guys a quick background on
21 me. So, before joining the NTSB, I spent 20 years in the Navy
22 driving destroyers. What that means is container ship operations
23 and container operations ashore are pretty new to me. So I
24 apologize, but you may, at times, have to dumb it down so that I
25 can understand; you might have to put up with some dumb questions.

1 But if you bear with me, I'd appreciate it so that we get the
2 right information.

3 MR. SOULE: All right.

4 MR. EHLERS: All right.

5 LT [REDACTED]: Great. Okay. So we'll start the interview with
6 Robert.

7 INTERVIEW OF ROBERT MENESSES

8 BY LT [REDACTED]:

9 Q. I'll just start with a few questions about your background
10 and experience. So how long have you been in this industry?

11 A. October 17th will be 23 years.

12 Q. Okay. And that whole time, have you been employed by Ports
13 America, or different employers?

14 A. It's the same company. It's been changed names a few times,
15 but I've been with the same company.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Since October 17th of 1997.

18 Q. Okay. And how about in your position as a superintendent?

19 A. I've been a superintendent the whole time.

20 Q. Okay. And then, for your duties as a superintendent, what
21 does that normally entail?

22 A. Okay. Well, when I first started, I was a break bulk
23 superintendent, and that's a little different from containers. I
24 started in containers probably around 2003. And so containers,
25 you're a ship superintendent and vessel planner, which is

1 responsible for the stowage of the containers on a ship, and also
2 as a superintendent, the operation of the discharge and loading of
3 the containers on a ship.

4 Q. Okay. And so is it your job to talk with the ship's crew
5 that comes in?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. And where were you during the incident?

8 A. It was at -- excuse me -- it was at 1400 on Sunday. The date
9 escapes me right now because all the days run together. I had
10 just left the location of the vessel, and I was in my office at
11 Napoleon A, and I was refreshing the -- we have a computerized
12 ship program that refreshes moves that are being done, discharge
13 and load, so I was refreshing that.

14 Q. Okay. And normally, in these cargo operations, are you
15 alternating between your office and being pier side?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. Okay. So then I think, as you started to, if you could just
18 explain the events as you remember them.

19 A. Well, like I previously said, I had just left the vessel
20 site, and I was in the office refreshing my system. And I heard
21 chatter on the radio that the ship was breaking loose from the
22 wall and that -- as soon as I heard that, I took out of the office
23 and jumped in my vehicle. And when I got in my vehicle to head
24 down there, I called the agent to tell them to bring me tugs --
25 emergency tugs to hold a ship.

1 And by the -- I could not see anything on my travel to the
2 ship. It was like a whiteout. And as fast as I couldn't see
3 anything, when I got to the physical position of where the ship
4 was supposed to be, the ship was out in the river, and I saw the
5 crane dangling the containers over the ship.

6 Q. And what steps did you take after that?

7 A. Well, like I said, on the way there -- when I was there, I
8 called the agent to tell them to get me tugs. I called the crane
9 department, which I mean, it was immediately back to back, wham
10 bam, to get somebody out here. And that had operators -- the
11 first thing, the first thing when I got to the site, I got out of
12 my vehicle, I was looking for men, making sure no one was under --
13 I was trying to save any kind of injury from being done.

14 And I was worried about the crane operators, because I saw
15 that the spreader bars -- one crane, the spreader bar was hung up
16 on the ship as it had gone out, and I could see the crane swaying.
17 So I was immediately trying to get in touch with him, which there
18 was no more radio contact with anybody. And as I saw, one
19 operator ran up with a truck and went and picked him up and got
20 him to muster in a safe position. And then I turned around, and I
21 saw the other crane -- the ship was still moving somewhat, so I
22 went back looking for the other operator, and I noticed the crane
23 was kind of wobbly.

24 And all -- a lot of our men were trying to get safe harbor in
25 this shed that was right behind the ship, and all I could think

1 about was that crane coming down and falling on the shed. So I
2 got in the shed, and I ran everybody out of the shed and got them
3 to muster at 120. And as I was doing that is when I ran across
4 the second operator, and I accounted for all my men and made sure
5 all my men were safe and out of the way.

6 Q. Wow. About how many personnel were on the pier?

7 A. Forty.

8 Q. Forty. And was anyone injured?

9 A. No -- well, we had one injury with the crane operator where
10 he had to climb out of the boom there, was the second operator
11 that I was searching for. And when I finally found him and I
12 asked him how he was doing, he said he was a little sore with his
13 shoulder.

14 And so I immediately called our safety man to tell him that I
15 was sending him -- asked him where he wanted me to send him,
16 because it was on a Sunday, so -- sometimes we send them different
17 places, you know. So I called him to see where he wanted to meet
18 the fellow at, and we made arrangements for that. And I asked him
19 if he was okay, and he said yeah, just a little shook up and he
20 was sore. And so I told him where he was going, and he left.

21 Q. Okay. And do you know, has everyone returned to work? Has
22 he returned back to work? Or you don't --

23 A. I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

24 Q. Okay. And do you recall which -- I believe it was cranes 5
25 and 6 --

1 A. That's correct.

2 Q. -- were the cranes? Do you remember which one was still over
3 in the cargo hold with the crane --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- bar impact? Okay.

6 A. Crane, crane 5 was -- the spreader was not on the ship, but
7 crane 6 was on the ship. Crane 6, the spreader bar was hung up on
8 the ship. You could see the tension wires still dangling -- well,
9 not dangling, but it was hung up on something on the ship, and as
10 the ship would move, the wires would move and would pull the
11 crane.

12 Q. Okay. And how did the situation stabilize?

13 A. I suspect that the captain had dropped the anchor and stopped
14 the ship.

15 Q. Okay. And how long did that period of weather -- how long
16 was that period of foul weather for?

17 A. It seemed like an eternity, but it was probably only 80
18 seconds maybe.

19 Q. Okay. I have some questions about your training, and then I
20 think we'll go into some more questions about the accident itself.
21 Do you have specific training for your job as a superintendent
22 that the company requires you to complete, or maybe as a
23 prerequisite for your job?

24 A. Periodically, we do refresher courses, yes.

25 Q. Okay. What types of courses are those?

1 A. Mostly safety courses. We do regular CPR and first aid and
2 just how to handle our labor.

3 Q. Okay. And you said periodic. Is it once a year, twice a
4 year?

5 A. Well, I think our CPR is -- what, every 2 years?

6 Q. Okay. What about a review of company policy for emergency
7 procedures or things of that nature?

8 A. Well, as far as emergency procedures, I mean, it's pretty
9 much -- we have a procedure -- I mean, I can't go to a chapter and
10 a verse to tell you what it is, but it's there.

11 Q. Okay. So you're aware of the company having written policy.

12 A. Yes, ma'am.

13 Q. Okay. And so what types of policies or procedures are there
14 for safety? Is there, for instance, a heavy weather procedure for
15 an emergency like what occurred on Sunday?

16 A. Well, for an emergency situation, for like something that --
17 accountability is our number one, make sure that we don't -- that
18 we account for everyone; we don't lose anybody. We want them to
19 come back to work just like they left. So, as far as the weather,
20 something like that, I would say that we depend on warnings from
21 the, the Port of New Orleans cranes.

22 Q. Are those something that you frequently receive during cargo
23 operations?

24 A. They have warning signals on the cranes if they get high
25 winds, and we stand down when we get those signals.

1 Q. And it's an alarm or a radio communication?

2 A. It's like a siren.

3 Q. A siren. Do you know at what miles per hour those tend to
4 sound?

5 A. I'd be telling you the wrong number if I tell you I knew.

6 Q. No problem. How often -- especially during the summer, I
7 know the weather can be violent in the afternoon. Is that
8 something you normally stand down for those types -- sirens and
9 alarms?

10 A. No.

11 Q. No? Okay.

12 MR. SOULE: Well, hang on one second. Do you stand down when
13 the siren goes?

14 MR. MENESSES: Yes.

15 MR. SOULE: I think that's what she meant. Let her finish
16 her question and make sure you hear it.

17 MR. MENESSES: All right.

18 LT [REDACTED]: I understand.

19 BY LT [REDACTED]:

20 Q. And I think my question was also just about the frequency of
21 those types of stand downs. Usually I know the weather here can
22 really turn and it can be violent, if those types of weather stand
23 downs occur frequently.

24 A. When we get reports of like hail, we may stand down and get
25 everyone out from -- you know, under cover. But as far as the

1 weather, it's typical southeast Louisiana weather. In summertime,
2 it pops up out of nowhere.

3 Q. Um-hum. And so for the -- back to the emergency procedures,
4 for the -- as the superintendent, is it your primary duty during
5 these emergencies to take the crew accountability -- or the shore
6 side crew accountability?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay. What other responsibilities do you have during those
9 situations?

10 A. Well, my main -- like I said, my main accountability is for
11 my labor and make sure everybody's in a safe place and no one's
12 injured, and if I have anybody injured, to get them immediate
13 attention.

14 Q. And who do you make your reports to?

15 A. As far as -- my safety man.

16 Q. And who is that?

17 A. Emmet Wright.

18 Q. Oh, okay. Sure. And so you mentioned for the weather stand
19 down for hail. Did you recall, that morning, ever having an alert
20 that bad weather was -- that weather cell was going to come
21 through?

22 A. It was a beautiful day. We had no, no recollection of any
23 kind of forecast that could be detrimental to operations.

24 Q. Okay. And what time did the cargo operation start?

25 A. Seven o'clock in the morning.

1 Q. And is that when you were at, were at the pier, or you were
2 probably there before?

3 A. I'm always at the pier 2 hours before.

4 Q. And are you there for the entire operation, or --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. Is there a cruise ship during the operations ever?

7 A. There was going to be a cruise ship at 1800.

8 Q. How long was this operation supposed to last for?

9 A. It was a 15-hour shift.

10 Q. Wow. And so you would have been on scene for the entire 15
11 hours?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. But maybe the longshoremen and the crew working the
14 containers, they would've had a shift?

15 A. They have change-out.

16 Q. Okay. For the vessel itself, did you go onboard the vessel
17 and meet with the crew at all?

18 A. With COVID-19, we have a policy right now that we meet vessel
19 protocol at the gangway and hand over all pertinent information.

20 Q. And so did you go on the gangway?

21 A. At the beginning of the shift, at 6:50.

22 Q. And who did you meet with?

23 A. Just a mate who would take a packet that I would instruct to
24 bring to the chief officer.

25 Q. Okay. And what's in that packet?

1 A. It's a ship plan. It's a PIN file, just a hazardous cargo
2 manifest, brief of cargo manifest.

3 Q. So that's what you're providing?

4 A. It's a safety sheet and, for that particular ship, we have
5 lashing certificates.

6 Q. Okay. And you said something about a PIN plan?

7 A. A thumb drive.

8 Q. Oh.

9 A. With the plan on it.

10 Q. Okay. The loading plan and --

11 A. Right. That's correct.

12 Q. And so that's something that is approved by Ports of America?

13 A. No. There's a port captain that gives us a pre-stow for
14 containers, and we stow the ship, send it to the port captain.
15 The port captain sends it to the ship, the ship sends it back to
16 the port captain with the changes, and the port captain sends it
17 back to us with the changes. We redo it, make the requested
18 changes, send it back to the port captain. The port captain sends
19 it back to the ship, the ship okays the port captain, the port
20 captain okays us.

21 Q. Okay. And so a very fluid process?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And no one loading plan is the same?

24 A. Most of the time, it's never the same as the -- when you
25 started as it is at the end.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Due to different factors.

3 Q. Right. And part of that package that you provided the mate,
4 was there an agreed upon mooring arrangement for the vessel?

5 A. We have nothing to do with mooring.

6 Q. Okay. In your experience, how do you see vessels arranged at
7 the pier? Can you recall a particular amount of lines that these
8 vessels normally have on the pier?

9 A. They're pretty much all standard. You have roughly three off
10 the stern, three off the bow, two spring lines.

11 Q. On the -- two spring ones, fore and aft?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. Was there anything unusual that you observed with the
14 vessel?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. And then, throughout the cargo operations, are you
17 maintaining communications with someone on the vessel?

18 A. We have two deckmen, one for each gang. And if we need to
19 relay anything during this COVID-19 time, we go through the
20 deckmen to get to the chief, or we have a mobile number, and we
21 can talk to him that way.

22 Q. Did you need to reach out to the vessel at all prior to the
23 incident?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Okay. And that's not abnormal?

1 A. That's not abnormal. We -- sometimes, the only conversation
2 we have is at the beginning and at the end.

3 Q. When the incident started to happen, were your deckmen -- did
4 they reach out to the vessel at all?

5 A. My deckmen remained on the ship as it left the dock. The
6 only conversation was that I made the deckmen ask the chief
7 officer and the master on the ship if any of their men were
8 injured.

9 Q. I understand. So your deckmen are actually on the vessel.

10 A. Yes. They left the dock with the vessel.

11 Q. Okay. And so then they'll have a radio and radio back to
12 you --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- an issue. Okay. And what did -- what was the report?

15 A. Everybody was fine, everybody was fine on the ship.

16 Q. And so, for the cargo operations, was this the first cargo
17 operation of the day for yourself, that you were involved in?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. And --

20 A. It was the only ship of the day.

21 Q. Okay. So the first and only. How many usually take place?

22 A. In a day?

23 Q. Right. For maybe that you would be directly involved in.

24 A. Oh, just one.

25 Q. Just one.

1 A. Just one operation.

2 Q. And is that the same for the rest of the crew that might be
3 involved?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. And how long do those normally last for?

6 A. The average ship is between 10 and 15 hours.

7 Q. Okay. And, like as you said earlier, you would remain on
8 that site for the duration of the --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- operation, but there might be a crew change-out.

11 A. Yes.

12 MR. SOULE: And just one thing so we're not clear -- or so we
13 are clear on this, the operators change out more frequently than
14 the rest of the gang. For instance, the crane operators came on
15 at 1:00 in the -- 1300 hours.

16 LT [REDACTED]: Okay.

17 MR. SOULE: So they don't -- you don't have one guy up in a
18 crane cab for 15 hours.

19 LT [REDACTED]: Right. That is good to note.

20 BY LT [REDACTED]:

21 Q. And I guess a question for that would be, when there is a
22 crew change-out, is there any type of pass-down or meeting so that
23 everyone remains on the same page?

24 A. Well, when the ship starts, the crane operators get a
25 sequence of a plan, and it gets left up in the cab.

1 Q. And so they're entrusted to do their own pass-down with each
2 other as they transition watch --

3 A. We'll have (indiscernible) contact with their crane
4 operators.

5 Q. Okay. And what about prior to the start of the cargo
6 operations? Is there a meeting -- do you have a meeting with your
7 crew at all to discuss --

8 A. Yes. We have a safety gangway meeting.

9 Q. And what types of things are discussed in that meeting?

10 A. Most of the time, we discuss that we have proper PPE, lashing
11 safety. We have what we call a three-container rule where we
12 don't want any lashes in the vicinity of where we're working; the
13 closest they can get to where we're working is three containers
14 away. A lot of mobile equipment talks about not cutting through
15 grids in the yard with containers. And then we have three
16 groundmen under each frame, and we talk about overhead loads and
17 keeping overhead loads away.

18 Q. What type of PPE do you -- does the crew wear?

19 A. Vest, hardhats, steel toes, and gloves.

20 Q. And, in these safety meetings, what would you say are some of
21 the biggest hazards that are addressed?

22 A. Some of the biggest hazards can be the three-container rule
23 as far as lashing. We've been a stickler about seatbelts in the
24 mobile equipment.

25 Q. And what about weather? Is that ever discussed?

1 A. Only when we know that the forecast is doomed for the day.

2 Q. And how would you know that? Is that reported in the
3 morning?

4 A. Well, I watch the news and the weather, and if the sun's out,
5 looks like we're going to have a beautiful day. Or we're
6 expecting some storms this evening, you know, I'll have rain boots
7 at the cranes for the men.

8 Q. And so I'm sure if -- is there any -- ever any official
9 weather report, maybe sent from Port of New Orleans or from Ports
10 America?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. But it is a crane operator's responsibility to monitor
13 the weather?

14 A. It's not his responsibility.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. I'm under the assumption that there are altimeters on the
17 cranes and will give us a warning of any incoming high winds or --
18 I mean, we work these ships in the rain. We don't stop -- or our
19 work stops -- unless it's too bad for us to continue, we work in a
20 steady rain.

21 Q. Yeah, I was going to ask that. And so, for the altimeters --
22 so really any type of weather hazard, it's all mechanical. It's
23 not someone visually monitoring it; you're relying on the
24 altimeters to --

25 A. I wouldn't necessarily say that's 100 percent, because a lot

1 of times we can see storms brewing up on the river. Because we
2 work on this river every day, and we know how they come in from
3 this way and this way. We can see them coming up river, coming
4 from down river, or coming across the river; some of them don't
5 even get to us. But it's an eyeball thing, I mean, common sense I
6 would like to think.

7 Q. Did anyone see this squall approach while they were on the
8 pier?

9 A. No.

10 Q. I know you said there wasn't anything unusual with the
11 vessel. Was there anything unusual with the cargo operations that
12 were taking place that day?

13 A. No. Everything was going smooth.

14 Q. And who was ultimately in charge during these operations?

15 A. Myself.

16 Q. You. And so do you have the authority to stop the operations
17 if you think --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. What about if there is an unsafe condition that evolves?
20 Does anyone have the authority to stop?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. So even the lowest man on the totem pole might --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And how would he then report that, or does he make that
25 direct report to you?

1 A. Certainly.

2 Q. Okay. Apart from the altimeters, are you aware of any other
3 equipment to monitor weather that the port -- Port of New Orleans
4 or Ports America has?

5 A. No.

6 Q. And so if, say you visually see the squall approaching, what
7 are the procedures? Or do you continue with the cargo operation?

8 A. Normally. I mean, there's a squall and there's a storm. You
9 won't -- I mean, you won't know until it's on you, and by that
10 time, it's too late. And this was not looking like that from what
11 I'm understanding. It was so fast that it was on top of us.

12 Q. And so, as you've been saying, so really in -- you're working
13 in really most conditions and waiting to hear that siren go off
14 for the high wind.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. Have -- since you've been at Ports America and Port of
17 New Orleans, have you had any type of incident like this ever
18 occur or seen it happen before?

19 A. No.

20 Q. What about something maybe the damage not as high, but just
21 these (indiscernible) tremendous sail area getting pushed off the
22 pier like this?

23 A. Yes, we've had ships break away from the pier, but nothing
24 like this that's with the weather as well.

25 Q. Do you think that this pier face might be more exposed to

1 more extreme conditions or the river current --

2 A. That's above my pay grade.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I'm not an engineer.

5 Q. Fair enough. I think I'm about to wrap up, then I'll ask
6 Drew if he has any questions, but if -- I'll just ask lastly, if
7 you could've done anything differently, would there have been
8 something that day?

9 A. I can't say that we -- you know, it was a freakish accident.
10 If I would've had notice, yeah, I probably would've told them to
11 back down, but we've had stuff come through here before and never
12 once thought about it.

13 Q. Do you think if -- and this is hypothetical, but if the
14 sirens had alarmed, would there even have been time to have
15 stopped operations?

16 A. Sure.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yes.

19 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. Drew, do you have any questions?

20 MR. EHLERS: I do have a couple questions, and you're going
21 to have to bear with me, because they're going to be all over the
22 place.

23 BY MR. EHLERS:

24 Q. So I'm just going to start back with your experience. Have
25 you been a crane operator before -- a gantry crane operator

1 before?

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. Okay. And tell me a little bit more about your work
4 schedule. You mentioned this day you'd had a -- essentially, you
5 thought you had about a 15-hour work schedule. How -- like,
6 during the week, are you couple days on, couple days off? How
7 many hours a day do you traditionally work? Can you give me a
8 sense of that?

9 A. Traditionally, we'll work a ship, and while we're working a
10 ship, someone else may be laying out ship. So I would say roughly
11 we work two shifts a week.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Two 15-hour shifts.

14 Q. I see. So you don't have sort of a regulated, I'm on Sundays
15 through Fridays; it's just whenever a ship is in port?

16 A. That's correct. We work when we have ships.

17 Q. Okay. And, again, I know you said it, but a standard
18 alongside time is about 15 hours; is that correct?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. And you said we. Are you -- do you work alongside another
21 supervisor as well?

22 A. I was saying we as a group. No, there's one superintendent
23 per ship.

24 Q. Okay. How many superintendents work for Ports America?

25 A. We have three, and then one that's a operations

1 manager/superintendent.

2 Q. Okay. And you guys rotate through each port call, each ship
3 visit?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. So, when you say you work two a week, is that you working two
6 a week and then the other folks also working two a week, about
7 that?

8 A. Well, it gets a little iffy, because sometimes ships go 24
9 hours.

10 Q. I see.

11 A. So two of us will break it down into 12 hours each, and if --
12 we rotate like that. It's just that we didn't have a ship for the
13 one Sunday, so it was my turn up.

14 Q. Okay. And you can plan ahead with that based on the number
15 of movements that have to happen with that ship?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. And then, as far as cargo operations on the pier -- I know
18 you already explained this -- each crane operator has a plan, and
19 they're working to that plan; they're not being directed
20 centrally?

21 A. The plan is a wishlist, I would say, a sequence list in order
22 to accommodate the way the containers come out of the yard to be
23 loaded. Routinely, both gangs will be coming out of the same yard
24 area, and we try to guard against that, so we time it out to where
25 one gang may be discharging and one gang may be loading. If we

1 have to deviate, I call the shots; the superintendent calls the
2 shots.

3 Q. Okay. I got it. Let me look here. This -- the *Bianca*, has
4 this ship been here into New Orleans before?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And is this ship bigger than the normal ship that calls into
7 the port; is it about the same size; is it somewhere in between?

8 A. Pretty much -- it's an Asian-route ship, so I'm going to say
9 it's a little bit bigger than some of the ones we -- I mean, we
10 have this route once a week, so it's a little bit larger ship, but
11 it's nothing out of the ordinary. We've had bigger ships.

12 Q. And the loadout that it had with it on Sunday was a normal,
13 if you'd call it that, loadout?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Okay. Roger. Let's see here. You mentioned that you were
16 in your office, and you got in your truck. How far is your truck
17 from the pier -- or from where the ship was, I should say.

18 A. We have a --

19 Q. Excuse me. How far is your office from where the ship was?

20 A. As a bird flies, two football fields, but we have a
21 construction project going on, on the terminal.

22 Q. I see.

23 A. So by the time I made four or five different detours through
24 the turns, I was there in less than a minute.

25 Q. So that didn't affect how you responded to the accident at

1 all?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Okay. You mentioned that you got the crew to muster at 120.

4 I think that's what you said. What's 120?

5 A. 120 is a section on that terminal between Nashville A
6 terminal and Nashville B terminal. It's a wide open wharf.

7 Q. What's the significance of the number? Is that like a marker
8 on the pier, or --

9 A. You'd have to talk to the Port of New Orleans what the
10 significance of the numbers are.

11 Q. Okay. But I mean, what is that number? Is it like --

12 A. I'm assuming the numbers are where they can dock ships.

13 Q. I see.

14 A. Bow in section such-and-such.

15 Q. I got you. It's a wharf designation.

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 MR. SOULE: Drew, this is Scott. You'll probably get a copy
18 of a general arrangement, for lack of a better word, of the
19 terminal facility. Lt [REDACTED] and I are looking over Robby's
20 shoulder where there's a big one right there. So the way it's set
21 up here, Nashville A is the big mother, huge -- that great bulk
22 shed we have. It's almost a quarter mile long. There's a knuckle
23 where it starts making a turn to Nashville B and C.

24 MR. EHLERS: Um-hum.

25 MR. SOULE: Nashville C is the one where the construction is

1 being done right now, and the *Bianca* was basically quayside to
2 Nashville B. And so, when they file their berth application, the
3 dock -- or the Port of New Orleans does designate by section
4 numbers, and that's how the agent knows where to tell the mooring
5 tugs and the linesmen where to be to catch the ship.

6 MR. EHLERS: I got you.

7 MR. SOULE: So, if you're actually out there on the
8 waterfront, if you look -- if someone holds you so you don't fall
9 into the river, and you look over on the side of the dock base,
10 you'll see section numbers spray-painted on, and those people that
11 do that stuff every day know where the sections are.

12 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that. So --

13 MR. SOULE: Yeah, if you're looking at Google Earth, there's
14 a big wide area between Nashville A and B, and you probably see a
15 couple of big cranes casting their shadow. That's the big kind of
16 project cargo area. So what Robby was doing was making sure that
17 all the longshoremen were out and away from the gantry crane, and
18 they moved out to the 120 area.

19 MR. EHLERS: I got you. All right. That makes sense. I
20 just wanted to make sure I understood where each place was, so
21 that makes a lot of sense. Thank you.

22 BY MR. EHLERS:

23 Q. Robby, are there any cranes in the -- excuse me, video
24 cameras in the cranes?

25 A. I don't know.

1 Q. Okay. And that's Port of New Orleans that would know that?

2 A. That would be Port of New Orleans.

3 MR. SOULE: And, Drew, this is Scott. There's not.

4 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

5 MR. SOULE: I asked that question, too, yeah. I think the
6 new ones that are coming in are going to have cameras on them, but
7 these don't have cameras in them.

8 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

9 BY MR. EHLERS:

10 Q. And, Robby, I'll ask this question too. Maybe, Scott, you
11 know. Is there any like security cameras around the facility
12 there?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And do you have any footage of the accident when it happened?

15 MR. SOULE: This is Scott. We do have some footage, and I
16 think that's being put on a thumb drive for y'all.

17 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

18 MR. SOULE: But unfortunately, as indicated, the squall thing
19 blew up, and I mean, it's a whiteout. You can't see the ship for
20 about, maybe 45 seconds, maybe up to 2 minutes even, with the
21 location of the camera. And then the next thing you see is the
22 port side anchor has already been let out, but you can't even see
23 the gantry cranes.

24 MR. EHLERS: Sure. Even that is instructive from a
25 conditions standpoint and from a timing standpoint, so I

1 appreciate --

2 MR. SOULE: Absolutely. Because as the witnesses kind of
3 indicated, I mean, it's frightening, because like 7 minutes later,
4 the sun's shining on the wharf. That's how quickly that thing
5 blew right through.

6 MR. EHLERS: Yeah.

7 MR. SOULE: But we'll get you those copies, and we're getting
8 those copies. I know our IT guy was working on that a couple days
9 ago, so it should be done, I would think.

10 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

11 BY MR. EHLERS:

12 Q. And, Robby, does the crane operator, if he needs to escape
13 the crane, does he got to climb down a ladder? Or a stairwell?

14 A. Yeah. They would climb out of the cockpit onto the top, and
15 there's a trolley rail that goes to the boom. And they get to the
16 boom, and there's a walkway on the boom that brings you back to
17 the elevator or the stairs.

18 Q. I see.

19 A. That brings you down on the backreach of the crane.

20 Q. Okay. So there's an elevator on the backend of the crane?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. And do they -- is that what's normally used to get into -- up
23 to the cockpit?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Do you know if that's what they used to get down during the

1 storm or after the storm?

2 A. Not what they used to get down.

3 Q. Okay. They used the stairs?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. And is that a company policy, or they're just using their
6 head?

7 A. It was the only means.

8 Q. I see. Okay. How do those cranes get power? Are they -- I
9 know they usually have a cable that runs along the pier; is that
10 correct?

11 A. That's correct.

12 Q. All right. Was power ever lost?

13 A. I'm not sure.

14 Q. Okay. I don't know how we'd find out that. I don't know if
15 there -- was there anyone else in the office when you were at the
16 office?

17 A. No. They were -- there's a clerk section in the office, and
18 they had one person up there.

19 MR. EHLERS: Okay. For Scott, I wouldn't mind just checking
20 with that person and see if they remember the lights flashing or
21 something like that.

22 MR. SOULE: Yeah. I mean, I presume you guys are going to be
23 chatting with the Port of New Orleans, and of course their crane
24 department will know exactly what was happening, power wise and
25 all that stuff, to their cranes.

1 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Fair enough.

2 MR. SOULE: Yeah. They have a shop right there. And, again,
3 part of that overview, I mentioned earlier that the clerks and
4 checkers have their own separate union.

5 MR. EHLERS: Oh, yeah. Got you.

6 MR. SOULE: I don't know if -- we have to get in touch with
7 those guys. I suspect that -- I know there was -- would there be
8 a clerk/checker in there?

9 MR. MENESSES: Yeah. There would've been what we call a plan
10 clerk.

11 MR. SOULE: Okay.

12 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

13 MR. SOULE: All right.

14 BY MR. EHLERS:

15 Q. Now finally, Robby, I'm going to ask you a couple questions
16 about fatigue and sleep. These are standard questions that we ask
17 everybody, because we're always interested in how fatigue affects
18 folks. So a question for you is, how much sleep did you get the
19 night before the operation?

20 A. Myself?

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. I slept all day Saturday and all night Saturday.

23 Q. All right.

24 A. I was off. I was laying around, sleeping. Off and on.

25 Q. Can you -- do you got any estimate of how many hours of sleep

1 you had?

2 A. Yeah. Eight hours is too many, yeah. Eight hours.

3 Q. Okay. And would you say you slept well, not so good, good?

4 A. I slept -- I sleep well.

5 Q. Okay. And then, the morning of the accident, did you drink
6 any coffee or any kind of caffeine products?

7 A. I always have coffee in the morning.

8 Q. How many cups do you normally drink?

9 A. Two.

10 Q. Two. Okay.

11 A. Two and a half, maybe.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I probably fix eight, but I'm always going to the ship, and
14 when I come back, it's cold.

15 Q. Okay. I understand that. Did you drink any alcohol the day
16 or the night before?

17 A. I don't drink.

18 Q. Okay. Fair enough.

19 MR. EHLERS: All right. Lt [REDACTED], that's all I have for now.

20 LT [REDACTED]: Okay. Great. Sounds good to me, Drew.

21 MR. EHLERS: Okay. I really appreciate it, Robby and Scott.
22 Thank you for your time.

23 MR. SOULE: And I'll tell you what, before we let Robby go,
24 maybe break down how the gangs work, because I want to make sure
25 we're kind of clear on that.

1 BY MR. SOULE:

2 Q. So you're the superintendent, and you have two foremen; is
3 that correct?

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. And each foreman has a gang of about 18 people?

6 A. Seventeen -- well, yeah. Eighteen people, that's including
7 the operators.

8 Q. Okay. So one foreman has an operator and --

9 A. Two operators per hire. So if he has a 7 o'clock start, he's
10 going to hire two operators.

11 Q. One will start at 7:00 --

12 A. One will start at 7:00 and work till noon, and then --
13 because we were working a CMA ship, they like a break for meals,
14 so we would -- the next operator would come at 1300.

15 Q. Okay. So there's a -- CMA, I guess because they're French,
16 is just on a meal break or something, and the next operator --

17 A. Saving money.

18 Q. Right. So, but amongst the gang members, just so we're not
19 thinking that -- these guys are lashers and all that. You've got
20 truck drivers and top --

21 A. Four lashers for each gang. We have three groundmen
22 underneath the crane that take shoes out and put shoes in the
23 containers, six truck drivers, and two top load operators in the
24 yard putting containers on and taking containers off.

25 Q. Right.

1 A. And a foreman.

2 Q. So, again, if you have it in your mind's eye a break bulk
3 operation where all the longshoremen are on a ship or right off a
4 ship, that's not how it works here.

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. You've got guys --

7 A. And I'm sorry, and I'm missing -- you have two deckmen. You
8 have one deckman in each gang that instructs the crane operator on
9 where the containers are coming from when on discharge and where
10 they're going on loadout.

11 Q. So they're kind of like a flagman or a spotter, if that's the
12 terminology you used?

13 A. I would never call them --

14 Q. I know that.

15 A. I don't know what a spotter is, but it's the second most
16 important person on the ship.

17 Q. I got you. But that's what they do?

18 A. Right.

19 MR. EHLERS: Say again how many lashers are normally in a
20 team.

21 MR. MENESSES: Four, sir.

22 MR. EHLERS: Okay. And --

23 (Simultaneous speaking.)

24 MR. MENESSES: -- and two aft.

25 MR. EHLERS: Okay. And onboard the ship are the lashers and

1 the deckmen, and then off the ship are the groundmen, truck
2 drivers, and toppers.

3 MR. MENESSES: Top loaders. That's correct.

4 MR. SOULE: But, at the time of this incident and the
5 breakaway, the lashers weren't onboard the ship. There were --

6 MR. MENESSES: No lashers were on the ship. We were -- both
7 gangs were loading down below deck.

8 MR. SOULE: All right. So no lashing was being done.

9 MR. MENESSES: No lashing was being done.

10 MR. EHLERS: Oh, I see.

11 MR. MENESSES: Because lashing was over.

12 MR. SOULE: Okay.

13 MR. EHLERS: I get it. Okay. All right.

14 MR. SOULE: Yeah. Just in case you guys start doing the math
15 and say, wait, where were all these other people at? Well, they
16 were out in the marshalling yard or wherever. All right.

17 MR. EHLERS: Okay. I got it. So the only folks on the
18 vessel were the deckmen?

19 MR. MENESSES: That's correct.

20 MR. EHLERS: Okay. All right. I got you. Thanks. I
21 appreciate that. That's helpful.

22 I have nothing else, [REDACTED], if you've got anything.

23 LT [REDACTED]: No, I don't.

24 Thank you, Robby, for your time.

25 MR. MENESSES: Are we good?

1 LT [REDACTED]: Yeah.

2 MR. MENESSES: Thank you.

3 MR. SOULE: All right.

4 MR. EHLERS: All right. I'm stopping the recording now.

5 Thank you.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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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 Robert Menesses

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20FM024

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: August 7, 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