



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary

Casualty: Contact of *Miss Mollye D* tow with Bayou Ramos Bridge (NTSB No. DCA22FM008)

Date: December 23, 2021, at 0326 CST

Location: Bayou Boeuf, Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, near Amelia, Louisiana, 29°40.67' N, 91°8.37' W

Person Interviewed: Mr. Marvin Robb, On-call Deckhand, Towing Vessel *Miss Mollye D*

Interview Participants: Mr. A. Ehlers, NTSB
LT [REDACTED], US Coast Guard
LTJG [REDACTED], US Coast Guard
Mr. Z. D. Deloach, Deloach Marine Services
Mr. W. Schwartz, representing Deloach Marine Services
Mr. J. Devall, representing Mr. Joseph Giordano
Mr. A. Hayes, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
Ms. Rebekah Esnault, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development
Mr. D. Forrester, Ingram Barge Co.

Summary Provided By: Mr. A. Ehlers, NTSB

OVERVIEW

Mr. Robb was interviewed via Zoom video conference on January 26, 2022. The interview was conducted in conjunction with the investigation into the December 23, 2021, casualty involving the contact of the *Miss Mollye D* tow with the Bayou Ramos Bridge near Amelia, Louisiana. Unless specifically delineated by quotes, the text that follows is not a verbatim record of the conversation. It has been developed from notes of the interview.

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

At the time of the casualty, Mr. Robb was the on-call deckhand of the *Miss Mollye D*. The responsibilities of the deckhand included:

- Conducting hourly walkthroughs of the vessel.
- Checking the engine room every ½ hour.
- Preservation work (grinding, sanding, painting).
- Conducting basic maintenance and upkeep of engineering equipment, to include checking for leaks, checking fluid levels, adding oil, and transferring fuel.
- Reporting any problems to the captain, such as leaks or pump failures.
- At the direction of the wheelman, checking barges (sometimes 2–3 times per watch) and tightening wires as needed.

As the on-call deckhand on the *Miss Mollye D*, Mr. Robb was required to get up whenever needed to help the on-watch deckhand. He was the senior deckhand of the three on board during the casualty voyage. He stated that this was not always the case on each vessel he rode, but he was one of the more senior deckhands in the company. Mr. Robb was trained as a deckhand by other deckhands when he joined the company. Training also involved evaluations and tests.

Mr. Robb's normal work schedule is 28 days on/14 days off, but he can be extended as needed by the company if agreed to by him. At the time of the casualty, he had been on board the vessel about 2–3 weeks.

Mr. Robb has worked at Deloach Marine Services (DMS) for 5 years and is a credentialed mariner. Prior to being hired by DMS, he had worked in the land-based oil field in North Dakota. He was not permanently assigned to the *Miss Mollye D*, having served on seven different towing vessels in the company. He had served on the *Miss Mollye D* about 2–3 months total time prior to the casualty voyage.

Mr. Robb had served in the capacity of deckhand on all the company's vessels and had also been assigned as a steersman on some of the vessels. He explained that the steersman is a pilot in training. His training began with a steersman apprentice training course taken at Griff's Marine Training in January 2019. After getting a steersman endorsement on his license, he began steering towing vessels with a pilot or captain in the wheelhouse with him. He also had to complete the logs and paperwork required by the wheelman on watch. Mr. Robb stated that the pilot training process required 240–260 watches to be completed. He had been working on getting signoffs for his Towing Officer Assessment Record (TOAR), which was nearly complete.

On the *Miss Mollye D*, Mr. Robb served under Captains Ben Moffett, James Snow, and David Boudreaux. He described them as "steady captains."

Mr. Robb stated that the deckhands reported any issues with the generators, engines, or steering system to the captain, who filled out a report that was sent to the company office ashore. The office then arranged for repairs. Junior deckhands may discuss issues with the senior deckhand first. Mr. Robb described his interactions with the captain included talking during walkthroughs of the vessel.

Mr. Robb had served with Mr. Giordano on various vessels when Mr. Giordano was a deckhand, steersman, and pilot, and he had no problems working with Mr. Giordano. He described Mr. Giordano as a friend with which he had a good working relationship.

Mr. Robb initially stated that he was not familiar with pre-sail checks for the *Miss Mollye D*, but then stated that during pre-sail deckhands check fluids and make sure equipment is "turning right...working right...running right." He stated that these checks were not written down, but rather "just something we know." Any issues would be reported to the captain.

When asked Mr. Robb stated that a voyage plan included bridges and locks to be encountered, and the times.

Mr. Robb was asked to describe the events of the accident voyage. The route was from Houston/San Jacinto to New Orleans. When the *Miss Mollye D* picked up the barges in San Jacinto, the deckhands checked them for holes and fluid in the bilges. Then they worked to build the tow, laying wires between the barges. Mr. Robb recalled that he was working with deckhand Anthony Cashio at the time.

The barge lashings included wires, rachets, and soft lines. Mr. Robb could not remember whether each barge was full or empty but stated that there were some empties. He stated that the loaded barges were likely aft in the tow. The decision for how the tow was built was up to the captain, and the tow was constructed to take into account drops along the route. Mr. Robb could not recall the destination of each barge and could not recall any discussions he had with the captain about the tow build.

During the transit, Mr. Robb steered the vessel once or twice a day as a steersman, under Captain Boudreaux's oversight. He stated that the tow handled well, and he had no trouble maintaining course. The tow never sheered to port or starboard. Mr. Robb was asked if, while serving as a steersman, he had ever experienced barges coming loose and wiggling. He responded that it had not happened when he had been at the helm.

On the night/morning of the casualty, Mr. Robb had been up assisting the on-watch deckhand during the transit of the Bayou Boeuf Lock. He stated that he talked with the pilot, Mr. Giordano, and there was nothing unusual. Mr. Giordano appeared to be "fine." The tow transited through the lock as one unit – it did not have to be broken down – with one deckhand stationed on either side of the tow. The deckhands and pilot "talked

through the locks,” keeping the tow from “touching up” on the lock walls. When the tow was at risk of touching up, the deckhands made sure there were bumpers in place between the barges and walls. Mr. Robb recalled that the tow may have had assistance (another towing vessel) through the lock. He did not remember any issues with the transit. He recalled that there was “a little fog once inside” the lock chamber, but it cleared up when the tow proceeded through. He could not recall any wind, and the current and sea state were unremarkable.

After the tow transited through the lock, Mr. Robb went to bed, and Mr. Cashio remained on watch as the 0000-0600 deckhand. Mr. Robb stated that he went to sleep quickly and did not wake up again until 0800 or 0900 in the morning. He was woken up by members of the crew so that he could help them drop off barges from the tow, and it was then that he was told of the bridge strike. He said that at that time the tow was “miles away” from the Bayou Ramos Bridge and he could not see it. He never saw bridge damage. There was no evidence of the bridge impact in his room – no mess or fallen objects. He and deckhand Matt Parker conducted a walk around of the barges that morning and found cement on the empty barge at the head of the port string. They did not see any holes on the barge that had not already existed. The deckhands informed Captain Boudreaux about the cement. They were not told to remake the tow.

Mr. Robb did not speak to Mr. Giordano after the bridge strike and has not stood a watch with him. Mr. Giordano left the vessel the day of the casualty. Mr. Robb texted Mr. Giordano after the accident, asking him if he was okay, but they had not had a conversation about hitting the bridge.

When asked, Mr. Robb stated that he had served as lookout in the past, which entailed standing in the wheelhouse or sometimes the barges and reporting anything seen. Examples of when he had stood lookout included transiting through bridges and backing down a tow. He stated that he had never stood lookout during fog because the tows usually pulled over to the side of the channel and stopped during these conditions. The decision to stop or proceed in fog was the decision of the captain based on a “certain amount of visibility.” Mr. Robb could not recall a time that a tow had pulled over and stopped for weather other than fog.

After the accident, there have been no engineering or electrical problems on the *Miss Mollye D* that Mr. Robb is aware of. He stated that if there were problems “the whole crew would know.”

Mr. Robb explained that the amount of sleep he got in any 24-hour period depended on operations, but he had about 12 hours of off time. His bunk was on the bottom (main) deck, and he usually slept well.

END SUMMARY



A. Ehlers
Marine Casualty Investigator