



# 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. Joseph Giordano, Pilot, 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. Giordano  
Ms. A. Hayes, Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development  
Mr. D. Forrester, Ingram Barge Co.

**Summary Provided By:** Mr. A. Ehlers, NTSB

### OVERVIEW

Mr. Giordano was interviewed at Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Morgan City on February 9, 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. Giordano was the pilot on the *Miss Mollye D*. Mr. Giordano's responsibilities included:

- Maintaining control of the vessel and safe transport of the tow.
- Directing the crew in their daily duties, to include engine room maintenance.
- Maintaining logs.

Mr. Giordano stood wheelhouse watches daily from 0000 to 0600 and 12 noon to 1800, also known as the back watch. His normal work schedule was 28 days on/14 days off. At the time of the casualty, he had been on the vessel about 3 weeks. This was his first hitch as pilot on the *Miss Mollye D*. When he arrived for the hitch, the offgoing pilot was not aboard, since the vessel was coming out of a yard. Mr. Giordano stated that the captain was aboard and informed him that "everything was running as it should." (Quoted text is Mr. Giordano's words during the interview, and not necessarily the actual words of the captain.) Prior to his hitch on the *Miss Mollye D*, he had spent 7 days as pilot on the towing vessel *City of Port Allen*. He had no experience as a pilot prior to the period on the *City of Port Allen*.

Mr. Giordano first joined Deloach Marine Services (DMS) in 2009, serving as a deckhand. After 2 years, he left the company to work as a railroad conductor and engineer in Texas. His departure from the company at that time was based on a family decision and not based on performance. In 2015, Mr. Giordano returned to DMS as a deckhand. In 2017, he began the steersman program, attending a 4-week steersman course at Griff's Marine Training, Inc., in Raceland, Louisiana. For the next 16–17 months (estimated), he trained as a steersman on the water, accumulating 280–360 12-hour days of work. For the first 6 months, he

worked as both a steersman and deckhand on the DMS towing vessel *Sally Ann*. For the remainder of the period, he worked as a steersman only on various DMS vessels (*Sally Ann*, *Vanport*, *Harry Bridges*, *Miss Mollye D*). He stated that his steersman training was principally on the *Sally Ann*. As steersman, he stood watch with the captain of each vessel, generally on the front watch (0600–1200, 1800–2400). When asked, he stated that he stood “very few” back watches during this time. He also stated that the back watch was very different than the front watch, because the back watch involves a lot more time at night.

At the end of the steersman training program, Mr. Giordano completed a “designated exam trip” on the *Miss Mollye D*, a 2-week trip during which the captain, Captain Ben Moffett, observed his performance and determined that he was capable of handling the responsibilities of a pilot. At the conclusion of the designated exam trip, Captain Moffett and Mr. Giordano filled out his paperwork to allow him to apply for a pilot’s license. Investigators noted that a large number of line items in Mr. Giordano’s Towing Officer Assessment Record (TOAR) had been signed off on one day, and the remainder of the line items were signed off on a second day. Mr. Giordano stated that tasks associated with the line items were described or demonstrated during the two-week period using the TOAR as a guide, but the sign-offs were completed at the end. Just before getting his pilot’s license, Mr. Giordano completed a 1-week radar observer course at Griff’s Marine Training.

Mr. Giordano applied for and received his license as a mate/pilot of towing vessels on inland waters and the western rivers. About this time, he was laid off and did not work for the company for 7 months. He stated that he was laid off because work was slow, there were 4 other steersmen, and he did not call his manager at the beginning of his normal hitch as he was supposed to. He stated that he made a mistake of “let him call me.”

After the 7 months, Mr. Giordano was rehired by DMS and worked as a deckhand for 8 months; there were no pilot slots available at the time. During this period, he did not steer any of the towing vessels that he crewed. Following this, he began the 7-day period as pilot on the *City of Port Allen*.

Mr. Giordano stated that he had a lot of experience on the *Miss Mollye D* as a deckhand but had not been a pilot on the vessel prior to the casualty voyage. He was not the normally assigned pilot, but was “filling in.” When asked, Mr. Giordano stated that he felt comfortable maneuvering a tow on his own.

Mr. Giordano described the crew of the *Miss Mollye D* as himself (pilot), the captain, and three deckhands. One of the deckhands was assigned to the front watch, the second was assigned to the back watch, and the third was on call. Mr. Giordano believed that the vessel was adequately manned to safely maintain and operate it.

Mr. Giordano described controls and equipment in the *Miss Mollye D* wheelhouse. On the starboard side of the helm station were primary and backup “short sticks” for the main rudders. On the port side were primary and backup short sticks for the flanking rudders. Back-up controls were engaged by a switch on the helm console. Mr. Giordano had never had to switch to backup steering controls due to a casualty. He stated that he had switched controls in the past to gain familiarity with the switching procedure. Mr. Giordano said that the total horsepower of the vessel’s two engines was 2,000 or 2,200.

Mr. Giordano described the two computer screens mounted on the wheelhouse console. Both screens could be configured by the operator. The first screen, which was aft on starboard side of the console with a landscape (standard) orientation, was normally used by Mr. Giordano to display the vessel’s electronic log. The second screen, which was forward on the starboard side of the console with a portrait orientation (short sides on top and bottom), was used to display the Rosepoint electronic charting system. Mr. Giordano stated that he normally had two navigation windows open on his Rosepoint display, one zoomed in and the other zoomed out. The range of the zoomed-in view was “as short as possible.” In addition to the navigation windows, a status window provided speed over ground, heading, and other parameters (wind speed and direction was provided by a separate anemometer display). The Rosepoint prediction tool, a leader on the display that provided an indicator of the tow’s future position, could be set to between 1 and 3 minutes. At

nighttime in darkness, the Rosepoint computer screen was covered by a “tent screen” which darkened the display “about 30 percent tint” to aid in maintaining night vision. The Rosepoint charts, vessel icon, and prediction leader were visible through the tinted cover, but words could not be read through it. Mr. Giordano stated that the tow dimensions were entered into Rosepoint and depicted on the display.

Mr. Giordano stated that he received weather information from Rosepoint by clicking on an icon on the display and scrolling down and selecting weather. A pop-up window on the display provided a weather summary, including temperatures and conditions. The pop-up window partially obscured his view of the chart, including the vessel icon and prediction leader. In order to read the information on the weather summary, the tinted cover had to be removed. Mr. Giordano stated that removal of the cover did not appreciably affect his night vision. He utilized no other sources for weather information.

Mr. Giordano stated that there was one radar on the *Miss Mollye D*. Other Deloach Marine Services vessels had two radars, which he would have liked: “it would be nice to have an extra instrument.” He stated that he typically had the radar display set to ¾ mile range, but he would change it depending on the area where the *Miss Mollye D* was operating. There were no issues with the radar, AIS, and Rosepoint during the casualty voyage, and he had enough equipment to make “good, informed decisions.”

Mr. Giordano was asked if he knew when the last major maintenance was performed on the engines and steering systems. He did not know about the engines but stated that a steering test was recently performed by a mechanic, Ivan. The test involved swinging the rudder from port hard to starboard hard and checking to ensure the rudders timespan of the rudder shift was within parameters. Mr. Giordano recalled that the timespan of the rudder shift was about 12 seconds. He could not recall why the rudder test was done.

Mr. Giordano was asked if steering or engine checks were done prior to getting underway for a voyage. He responded that the deckhand checked the engines and rudders, ensuring oil levels and other parameters were at their normal conditions. Mr. Giordano did not conduct dedicated operational checks of the steering and engines but stated that he knew that the rudders and engines were working when we worked the tow off the bank at the start of the voyage.

Mr. Giordano was asked what lights were displayed or on when under way at night. He stated that the tow and towing vessel running lights (red, green, and towing) were illuminated. A small blue LED “peep light” was rigged on a 12-foot pole forward, centerline on the tow, facing aft toward the wheelhouse. The purpose of the light was to provide the wheelman with an indicator of the movement of the head of the tow. The main deck lights on the *Miss Mollye D* were also illuminated for the safety of the crew. Mr. Giordano stated that these lights did not affect his night vision.

Mr. Giordano stated that the two spotlights on the *Miss Mollye D*, which were controlled from the wheelhouse, were not kept on constantly during the night. He turned them on when the tow was close to the bank, such as during passing situations when the tow was moved or pushed to the side of the channel. At these instances, he aimed the spotlights at the banks of the waterway. He noted that use of the spotlights affected depth perception.

Mr. Giordano stated that the casualty voyage was not the typical route for the *Miss Mollye D*. The typical route was Morgan City to Port Allen. The voyage was the only time he had been in the waterway as a pilot, and only the second time as a pilot or steersman. During the first transit, when he was a steersman on the *Vanport* in 2017, he was involved in a collision (see below for more information).

Mr. Giordano was asked to describe the casualty voyage, up until the day before the casualty. He stated that the *Miss Mollye D* picked up the tow of 6 barges at an Ingram Barge fleeting area in San Jacinto, Texas. The tow had to wait for weather before proceeding eastbound toward Morgan City. (Mr. Giordano was asked if he was ever pressured to get under way while awaiting the weather. He stated that pressure was exerted indirectly by the company’s dispatch through repeated calls to the vessel asking for the status. He stated this happened when there was a “hot barge” in the tow. The tow on the casualty voyage did not have a hot barge.) The tow proceeded to West Port Arthur, where the tow was rebuilt by the captain during the

front watch. Mr. Giordano could not recall why the tow was rebuilt. The tow makeup as it proceeded on included two loaded barges in the port string, with an empty barge at the head, and three empty barges in the starboard string. The two loaded barges each had 1,400 tons of cargo. The *Miss Mollye D* was located toward the center of the tow, but off to the port side. Mr. Giordano stated that this offset position was used to balance out the weight of the tow, and he had maneuvered at tow in this configuration previously.

Mr. Giordano stated that during the transit the tow handled well both before and after the rebuild in West Port Arthur. The tow did not unexpectedly sheer to port or starboard, nor was sheering something he had experienced in the past.

Mr. Giordano was asked how factors such as cargo or wind effect the handling of a tow. He stated that loaded barges can affect the stopping distance of a tow, and empty barges can be susceptible to wind (like "a kite"). The makeup of the tow on the casualty voyage was not affected by these factors.

Mr. Giordano was asked to describe the events during the watch in which the casualty occurred. When he arrived in the wheelhouse to take the 0000–0600 watch, the *Miss Mollye D* tow was "shoved into the bank," awaiting its turn to transit through the Bayou Boeuf lock. Captain Boudreaux informed him of the tow's status; at the time, the tow was #2 or #3 in line for the lock. They did not discuss weather, because there was no fog or wind in their location. Captain Boudreaux did not report any problems with the *Miss Mollye D*'s engines or rudders.

Mr. Giordano took the watch, and the tow was eventually called into the lock. An assist vessel, the *Emilee Alexis*, made up to the starboard forward side of the tow. The assist vessel was required because the south wall of the lock is being rebuilt, and the assist vessel helped keep the tow off this wall. When the deckhand on the *Miss Mollye D* tow attempted to catch a line on a bollard on the north wall, the line parted. At the time, the tow was stopped or moving very slowly, and Mr. Giordano believed the line parting was due to a failure of the line.

As the *Miss Mollye D* tow exited the lock, Mr. Giordano heard reports of fog over the VHF radio. He contemplated stopping outside the lock but decided to continue. Visibility was good. It was "kind of dark" but not as dark as other nights. There were some lights on the north side of the channel. Mr. Giordano was asked if the lights affected his night vision. He stated that it depended on the brightness of the lights.

As the tow proceeded down the channel, there were no currents, eddies, or outflows affecting the tow, and vessels moored along the bank did not encroach on the channel. The vessel's engines and steering system were "running as it should" and he experienced "no difficulty" controlling the vessel.

While transiting the channel, Mr. Giordano took off the tinted cover from the Rosepoint display and clicked the icon to check the weather. Prior to looking at the weather he noticed that the tow had moved to port. After reviewing the weather information, he looked up and saw that the tow was on the port side of the channel. He put the engines in reverse, at first not noticing the Bayou Ramos Bridge ahead of him. He stated that there "wasn't any trees" on the bank. He eventually saw the bridge structure, but, at the time, he did not believe that the tow hit it. He worked on backing the tow back into middle of the channel after waiting for the eastbound tow being pushed by the towing vessel *Philip* to pass. He stated that as he backed the tow, the stern of the *Miss Mollye D* set in the opposite bank. He stated that the process of working the tow back into the channel "took me awhile" and that he was "fighting with it."

Once headed eastbound again, the *Miss Mollye D* passed the towing vessel *Captain Boo*. The operator of the *Captain Boo* radioed the *Miss Mollye D* to report that he heard wires screeching at the head of the *Miss Mollye D* tow and could see the barges moving around. The *Captain Boo* operator wished Mr. Giordano a "blessed trip," and Mr. Giordano responded in kind. After the radio call, Mr. Giordano directed the deckhand to go out on the barges and tighten up the wires.

Mr. Giordano was told that the deckhand had reported to investigators that, after tightening the wires, several of the ratchets were bottomed out and that he intended to contact the other deckhand, but Mr.

Giordano had told him not to do so. When asked why he had directed the deckhand in this way, Mr. Giordano stated that that it was nighttime, the tow was steering “just fine,” and he felt that the situation with the ratchets could wait until the next 6-hour watch in daylight. Mr. Giordano stated that the deckhand did not report any broken wires.

When the watch changed at 0600, the *Miss Mollye D* tow was above Sugar House Bend. At that time, he was preparing to stop the tow because the channel had “fogged out on me.” However, Captain Boudreaux did not stop the tow after he took the watch.

Mr. Giordano stated that he never left the wheelhouse during his watch, and the deckhand never took the helm. He stated that he had no other tasks during the watch other than navigating the vessel and tow.

Mr. Giordano was shown a playback of Coast Guard Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) Ports and Waterways Safety System (PAWSS) video of the area in the time preceding and during the casualty and was asked questions about the maneuvering of the *Miss Mollye D* at specific times in the video.

- At 0232, the tow swung to port as it was transiting just to the east of the Bayou Boeuf lock. Mr. Giordano stated that he had stopped outside the lock to contemplate whether to continue given reports of fog. Once he decided to continue, he turned the tow to port to “steer it off the bank.”
- At 0244, the tow was on the starboard side of the channel. Mr. Giordano stated that the reason for being on the starboard side was in anticipation of traffic.
- At 0246, the tow swung to port
- At 0250, the tow moved to starboard as it passed the westbound *Fritz Cenac* tow. Mr. Giordano noted that passing vessels and the close bank affected the tow’s track.
- At 0300, the tow moved swung to port. Mr. Giordano stated that he was steering away from the bank after passing the *Fritz Cenac* tow and that he probably waited too long before doing this.
- From 0306 to 0317, the tow was stopped in the channel, with the tow angled to port. Mr. Giordano stated that he had stopped to again contemplate what to do about the weather. He had heard over the radio other vessels in the area reporting fog at Sugar House Bend. He considered whether to keep transiting, determining what vessels were coming and from what direction, and looking for places to stop. During this time, he did not look at a weather report. He could not determine a place to stop, and there was no fog at the time, so he decided to continue eastbound.
- At 0319, the *Miss Mollye D* tow passed the towing vessel *Shawnee*. Mr. Giordano could not recall whether the *Shawnee* had a tow, but there was nothing unusual about the passing that he remembered.
- At 0325, the casualty occurred. Mr. Giordano stated that before he looked down at the Rosepoint display to check the weather, the tow was already angled to the port side of the channel. He looked at the display for about a minute to a minute and a half, and, when he looked up, the tow was “not in a good position.” Mr. Giordano stated that he had put the engines at full astern.

Mr. Giordano was asked if he considered calling the relief captain when he was trying to decide whether to proceed or stop due to the impending fog. He stated that he considered it but decided against it. He stated that he trusted the relief captain. Mr. Giordano did not call the port captain ashore, since it was the middle of the night, and he did not reach out to other vessels. Asked why he did not make calls or decide to stop, Mr. Giordano stated that it was a “pride thing” and that, as a new pilot, he was trying to “make as many miles to make money for the company.”

Mr. Giordano stated that it did not take long for the tow to get across the channel when the casualty occurred, because the channel was only 400–500 feet wide. He believed it took not more than 2 minutes. He stated that he knew the tow was pointed to port when he took his eyes off the channel to look at the Rosepoint weather report.

Mr. Giordano stated that when the casualty occurred, the *Miss Mollye D's* spotlights were not on. A couple of minutes after checking the weather, he spotlighted the bridge off his port side. He said that he did not see any damage, but “missed the bottom section.”

Mr. Giordano stated that he gets 8-9 hours of sleep each 24-hour period, split between his two off watches. Asked about the quality of sleep while onboard the vessel, he stated that he “slept fine.” His bunk is on the second deck, port side lead. He said that “all boats are noisy,” but there was nothing out of the ordinary. Mr. Giordano drinks a few caffeinated Dr. Pepper sodas during each watch; he does not drink coffee. He stated that he did not fall asleep during the watch in which the casualty occurred.

Mr. Giordano stated that he drank no alcohol the day before the casualty or during the casualty watch.

Mr. Giordano had two cell phones—a company phone and a personal phone—with him in the wheelhouse during the watch that the casualty occurred. He had a telephone call with his girlfriend while waiting to enter the Bayou Boeuf lock. He did not make or receive any other calls during the watch. He did not send or receive texts, surf the internet, or otherwise use the company or his personal phone during the watch.

Mr. Giordano was asked to describe his understanding of a “navigational assessment,” as required by regulations in Subchapter M. He stated that a navigation assessment required looking at the trip before it takes place and preplan the voyage. On board the *Miss Mollye D*, navigation assessments were conducted both verbally, via a job briefing with the captain, and written in the 7-Hour Voyage Plan. Mr. Giordano stated that the voyage plan was generated by the master. For the casualty voyage, the captain and pilot discussed holding up in San Jacinto for weather and, after the voyage started, they discussed holding up to change the tow configuration.

Investigators reviewed the 7-Hour Voyage Plan for the casualty voyage and asked the significance of the checked sections listing parts of the Intracoastal Waterway. Mr. Giordano stated that he had checked the applicable section, and these provided the wheelmen with information they needed, such VTS information, locks, bridges, and charts. He said, “To me, it shows me all the areas I need to be paying attention.” (He noted that, because Rosepoint provided charts, the paper charts were not used. Paper charts were carried on board, however.) The Bayou Ramos bridge was not included in this information, because it was “not a bridge you need to plan for.”

Investigators noted that, in the watch portion of the 7-hour Voyage Plan for the casualty voyage, several entries were made in the same handwriting. Mr. Giordano stated that the writing in all capitals (which were the predominant entries) were his. He said, “Some guys forget...I try to fast forward or rewind” to ensure there are records in case of a casualty. It also helps remind him and other wheelmen of critical events, such as barge drops.

Mr. Giordano described the casualty that he was involved in as a steersman on the *Vanport* in 2017. The vessel and its tow were transiting westbound on Bayou Boeuf, the same waterway as the casualty currently under investigation. Just prior to the casualty, Mr. Giordano went below to use the head. When he returned to the wheelhouse, the captain told him that he had made passing arrangements with two tows. Mr. Giordano then took the helm for the passing. The attempted passing occurred in the last bend before (to the east of) the Bayou Boeuf lock. Mr. Giordano steered to starboard, then to port. At this time, a collision with one of the other tows was imminent, so he put the engines in full reverse. He stated that the *Vanport* did not have enough horsepower to stop the tow, and a collision occurred. Mr. Giordano described the *Vanport* as a “slow steering vessel,” which he later explained was the tendency of the vessel to react slowly to steering inputs, requiring the operator to “start steering before you need to.” Asked why he thought the casualty happened, he stated that there should not have been three vessels in the turn.

Mr. Giordano was asked to describe the term “being posted.” He responded that being posted was when someone who had been in an area before came aboard the vessel to help guide the master. He did not know if DMS had a policy on posting. He was asked if he had ever been posted before. He noted that he was posted for two weeks with Captain James Snow when he was coming on as pilot. During this time

the towing vessel was working the Intracoastal Waterway on the Morgan City route and did not pass through Bayou Boeuf. During this period the vessel and tow spent 6 days waiting at the Port Allen lock due to delays at the lock.

Mr. Giordano was asked whether he ever performed the duties as lookout while stating watch as a deckhand. He stated that he had whenever passing through bridges, particularly during high water, and other high-risk events. He stated that a lookout was never required while passing the Bayou Ramos Bridge. He said that lookouts were not posted during fog because the vessel should not be transiting in fog.

When asked, Mr. Giordano stated that DMS had a stop-work-authority policy. He explained the policy as any time a situation was observed to be unsafe, anyone had the authority to stop the work. He stated that crew did not get in trouble with the company if stop work authority was exercised. Mr. Giordano said that he was adequately trained and supported by the company.

Mr. Giordano described Captain Boudreaux, the relief captain on the casualty voyage as a "good friend." He stated that he had never been a pilot under Captain Boudreaux but had been a deckhand for him.

Mr. Giordano described Captain Moffett, the captain of the vessel and the person who had signed off his TOAR as "Like a grandfather. The nicest man on the planet."

When asked what could have prevented the Bayou Ramos casualty, he responded with "lighting" on the bridge and "fendering." When asked why the tow was on the port side of the channel, he stated that there was "no reason to be over there" and that the "bridge was not the issue" in the casualty.

However, when asked by parties-in-interest participants, he stated that he would not have swung to port had he known there was a bridge. His action wasn't intentional, but he thought it would be okay. He stated that his decision-making process would have been different if the bridge was lit. He noted that the bridge did not have fenders.

Asked what he would do differently, he stated that he would have stopped and waited after the lock for a safe transit.

#### **END SUMMARY**

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A. Ehlers  
Marine Casualty Investigator