



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: Captain David Boudreaux, 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
Ms. 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

Captain Boudreaux was interviewed via Zoom video conference on January 28, 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, Captain Boudreaux was the relief captain of the *Miss Mollye D*. He filled this position while Captain Snow was the acting captain. When the vessel's assigned captain, Captain Ben Moffett, is in command, Captain Snow serves as a relief captain and Captain Boudreaux is a pilot. While serving as relief captain, Captain Boudreaux's responsibilities included:

- Overall in charge of the vessel when the acting captain was off rotation, as was the case at the time of the casualty.
- "Run the boat; run the crew, make sure everything goes."

When asked, Captain Boudreaux stated that voyage planning was also a responsibility, but he "didn't do very much." He stated that he provided guidance to the back watch (the 1200–1800/0000–0600 watch normally stood by the pilot), including weather, tides and currents, and traffic information. This was written down in the 7-hour Voyage Plan, which was completed and discussed at the change of watch. The back watch similarly completed the 7-hour Voyage Plan when turning the watch back over to the front watch (captain or relief captain).

When serving as the relief captain, Captain Boudreaux stood wheelhouse watches daily from 0600 to noon and 1800 to midnight, also known as the front watch. His normal work schedule is 28 days on/14 days off. At the time of the casualty, he had been on board the vessel for about a week into his hitch.

Captain Boudreaux had worked in the towing industry since 2007, starting at Deloach Marine Services. He began as a deckhand, serving in this capacity for about 5 years. He then entered the steersman program, which is a training program to become a pilot. He completed the steersman program in about a year and obtained his license as a pilot. After getting his license, we waited a couple of months before being “cut loose” as a pilot on a vessel. He stated that the wait was his choice. He has worked mostly for Deloach Marine Services, but has also worked for Devall Towing and, for two months in 2021, Magnolia Marine Transport. He stated that he had switched to Magnolia Marine for higher pay. Captain Boudreaux had returned to Deloach Marine Services and had been a relief captain/pilot for 6 months prior to the casualty. Since 2014, Captain Boudreaux has held a license as master of towing vessels for the western rivers, Great Lakes, and near coastal waters.

Captain Boudreaux’s only classroom training was a steersman course taken at a maritime school in Houma, Louisiana.

Captain Boudreaux is regularly assigned to the *Miss Mollye D* but also serves on other towing vessels as needed by the company. He first served on the *Miss Mollye D* when he started as a deckhand in 2007 and has a lot of experience on the vessel – about 12 years.

Captain Boudreaux described the beginning of the casualty voyage. The tow originated in Houston and its destination was New Orleans, with a barge drop in Houma. Before building up the tow, he and the pilot discussed where to build it and how to build it considering the planned drop. Both the pilot and Captain Boudreaux built the tow because a watch turnover occurred during the process. The tow had six barges, with two loaded barges and four empty barges. Originally the tow was configured with the loaded barges side-by-side aft, made up to the *Miss Mollye D*.

The tow was due to depart on December 18, and Captain Boudreaux stated that he conducted a pre-underway walk around of the vessel using a checklist. As recorded in the 7-Hour Voyage Plan, the tow was initially delayed for fog. Captain Boudreaux got under way between 6 and noon and proceeded down the Houston ship channel, but due to stormy weather he turned the tow around at the Fred Hartman Bridge and returned to the fleeting area. The tow departed again on December 19, and from then on “everything was clear.” Captain Boudreaux stated that the Houston to New Orleans voyage was a regular route for the *Miss Mollye D*. He had transited the route often and was familiar with it.

In the wheelhouse, Captain Boudreaux set up the Rosepoint electronic charting system (ECS) using both computer screens available to him. He stated that one screen was set up with a close-in view of the charted area, and the second was set up with a wider view. Rosepoint was also his primary means of receiving weather information (other sources included television and radio). By clicking on a button on the display, a window showing weather conditions opened. He stated that the window comes up immediately (“pops right up”) when the button is clicked and does not block the view of the chart being used for navigation.

Captain Boudreaux stated that, once under way from Houston, the tow “drove pretty good,” and he did not experience any sheering of the tow to port or starboard during the transit. He stated that he had experienced sheering in the past, but it had occurred during high winds with a tow made up of all empty barges. He said that a tow comprised of all empty barges can be affected by wind—sometimes requiring the tow to stop to wait out the wind—but a tow with two loads “drives better.” He said that the *Miss Mollye D* had no trouble with wind during the casualty voyage from Houston to New Orleans.

Captain Boudreaux stated that the tow was reconfigured at West Port Arthur to improve the speed by moving the two loaded barges into the port string. The forward, loaded barge had a raked bow in the new tow configuration, so the *Miss Mollye D* “wasn’t pushing a box.” The *Miss Mollye D* was also moved behind the port string containing the loaded barges (both the port and starboard knees were on the loaded barge aft on the port string). Captain Boudreaux stated that the configuration did not affect handling. The tow was wired up using “4 and halves and long wires...doubled up, with wires and safety lines.” There were no further configuration changes or barge drops prior to the casualty.

Captain Boudreaux stated that there were no factors that make Bayou Boeuf challenging to navigate. Barges or other vessels moored to the banks do not impede traffic, and it is not difficult to pass oncoming vessels in the area. He stated that there is some current in the channel, but it does not affect handling of a tow. There are no outflows from intersecting waterways in that part of the Intracoastal Waterway. Factors that could lead to a tow being set, such as river currents or outflows from a spillway, were not present.

Asked about the Bayou Ramos Bridge, Captain Boudreaux stated that he had not noticed the bridge prior to the casualty. He did not know if the bridge had lights or fenders.

At the end of his 1800-2400 watch the night before the casualty, the *Miss Mollye D* tow was approaching the Bayou Boeuf lock. Captain Boudreaux stated that, during his turnover with the pilot, they discussed having to wait for the lock. They also discussed the weather because fog was a concern. Captain Boudreaux did not think that wind was a factor.

Captain Boudreaux was asked if he remembered that the deckhand was assigned to drain the bilges on the night of the casualty. Captain Boudreaux could not recall, but he remembered that there was fluid in the bilges.

At the time of the casualty, Captain Boudreaux was sleeping. He did not wake up when the bridge was struck, and he could not recall hearing the engines cycle during the night. No general or other alarm was sounded.

Captain Boudreaux was woken up by the deckhand, Anthony Cashio, at 0530 that morning, his usual time to get up before taking the morning front watch. The deckhand did not tell him about the casualty or any other incident. Captain Boudreaux got ready and proceeded to the wheelhouse; he stated that he usually arrived about 10 minutes early for his watch. When he arrived in the wheelhouse, the pilot was in the process of stopping, by pushing the tow up into the bank, due to heavy fog. The tow had passed Sugar House Bend before it stopped for the fog. During the turnover of the watch, the pilot did not inform Captain Boudreaux of any casualties, trouble handling the tow, or propulsion or engineering troubles. About 20 minutes later, Captain Boudreaux got the tow under way again as the fog began to break up.

Captain Boudreaux was informed of the casualty when he was called by the Coast Guard at 0900. The call was made to the company cell phone in the wheelhouse (he also had his personal phone in the wheelhouse, which was permitted by the company). The Coast Guard informed him that the tow had hit a bridge, and the news came as a surprise to him. After the call from the Coast Guard, he called Z. Dave Deloach, owner of Deloach Marine Services.

Captain Boudreaux next directed the deckhand to check the tow. The deckhand reported back that there was damage to the port forward barge, and cement on the barge deck. There were no broken wires.

Captain Boudreaux called the pilot up to the wheelhouse and asked him about the casualty. The pilot told Captain Boudreaux that he got close to the bridge, but he didn't think that he had hit it. The pilot told him that he didn't know what happened. He did not mention having any issues with the engines or steering. Captain Boudreaux stated that he did not speak to anyone else on the back watch about the casualty.

Captain Boudreaux was asked about several maintenance reports, originated between September and November 2021, related to the engines and steering. Captain Boudreaux was not familiar with any of the issues in the reports, stating that most of the issues in the reports had occurred while he was working for Magnolia Marine, before he had returned to Deloach Marine. He stated that during the casualty voyage and after the casualty, he has not experienced any problems with the steering or propulsion systems.

Captain Boudreaux was asked several questions about Mr. Giordano, the pilot at the helm during the casualty. Captain Boudreaux was unsure if Mr. Giordano was a regularly assigned crewmember on the *Miss Mollye D*, but Captain Boudreaux had known him "for a while." They had worked together as deckhands and as deckhand and pilot. While Mr. Giordano was a steersman, they had never been in the

wheelhouse together. The casualty voyage was the first time Captain Boudreaux had ridden with Mr. Giordano as pilot, and the only time he observed Mr. Giordano was during watch changes. Captain Boudreaux believed that Mr. Giordano was a competent pilot, and there was never a time that Mr. Giordano couldn't handle a situation or had trouble controlling the tow. Prior to the casualty, Captain Boudreaux had no concerns about Mr. Giordano's performance. Captain Boudreaux has not made written evaluations of Mr. Giordano's performance.

When on the *Miss Mollye D*, Captain Boudreaux gets about 5 hours sleep each off-watch, for a total of 8–10 hours of sleep every 24 hours. He stated that he is able to “sleep like a baby” while on board with the vessel's engines running. His bunk is located on the second deck.

Captain Boudreaux drank no alcohol the day before or the morning after the casualty. He does not drink coffee, but drinks one Mountain Dew soda at the beginning of each watch.

Captain Boudreaux was asked to describe the term “being posted.” He responded that being posted was when an experienced person shows you a route. He did not know if Deloach Marine Services had a policy on posting.

Captain Boudreaux stated that Towing Officer Assessment Record (TOAR) sign-offs for steersmen were done by the captain of the *Miss Mollye D*, Captain Ben Moffett. Captain Moffett was the captain on the *Miss Mollye D* when Captain Boudreaux was “growing up” on the vessel, and as such Captain Moffett had done the sign-offs for Captain Boudreaux.

Captain Boudreaux was asked what things he expected to be woken up for as relief captain. He replied with the following:

- When a tow is about to wreck or hit a bridge
- If the pilot has trouble handling the boat
- The tow is “out of whack”
- Trouble with the tow
- Anything major

When asked, Captain Boudreaux stated that in his career he had hit or overrun an object with a tow. [Lost connection with interviewee during response to how it felt when tow hit or overran an object.] Captain Boudreaux had an experience where he “brushed up” against the wall of a lock, but he didn't feel it in the wheelhouse; he only saw it.

Captain Boudreaux stated that it was common for barges to come loose (but not break apart), requiring the deckhands to go out and retighten the wires every watch.

When asked what could have caused the Bayou Ramos casualty, he responded that he did not know.

END SUMMARY



A. Ehlers
Marine Casualty Investigator