

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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PIPELINE RUPTURE NEAR *

HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA * Accident No.: DCA22FM001

ON OCTOBER 3, 2021 *

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Interview of: MITCHELL REITER, VTS Watch Supervisor
Marine Exchange of Southern California

Via telephone

Friday,
November 3, 2021

APPEARANCES:

██████████, Investigating Officer
United States Coast Guard

ANDREW EHLERS, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

KIM WEST, Pipeline Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(15:30 CST)

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2
3 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay, today is Wednesday, November the 3rd, 1530,
4 Central Standard Time. We are meeting today with a supervisor of
5 the VTS LALB, Mr. Mitchell Reiter. My name is [REDACTED], I'm a
6 U.S. Coast Guard investigator with the INCOE and my last name is
7 spelled [REDACTED].

8 Mr. Reiter, can you please say and spell your first and last
9 name for us, please?

10 MR. REITER: Okay. First name is Mitchell, M I T C H E L L,
11 and last name is Reiter, R E I T E R.

12 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay, very good. And also in the interview are
13 the two NTSB investigators and if we could -- Mr. Ehlers, can you
14 introduce yourself?

15 MR. EHLERS: Sure. So, my name is Andrew Ehlers, I'm a
16 marine accident investigator with the NTSB, and I'm also the
17 investigator in charge of the NTSB's investigation into the
18 pipeline leak that happened at the beginning of October, and my
19 colleague is Kim West.

20 Go ahead, Kim.

21 MS. WEST: Good afternoon, I'm Kim West. I'm also the
22 pipeline accident investigator for that portion of it.

23 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay, very good.

24 INTERVIEW OF MITCHELL REITER

25 BY MR. [REDACTED]:

1 Q. So, Mr. Reiter, you are a watch supervisor with VTS at LALB,
2 is that correct?

3 A. Yes, that's correct.

4 Q. And how long have you been a supervisor?

5 A. Since 2010.

6 Q. Okay. Are you a qualified watchman?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. When did you become a qualified watchman?

9 A. 2004.

10 Q. Through what process did you become qualified?

11 A. Well, so there was a -- for watch stander or for supervisor?

12 Q. For the watch stander, I'm sorry.

13 A. Okay. Yeah, I had started in the back as a clerk with the
14 Maritime Information Service. I did that about a year and then a
15 spot opened up out front with the VTS, so I came out and trained
16 out there. Already having some of the knowledge about what
17 happened in the back, I think it was about a three-month
18 qualification process.

19 And then you had to go to -- there are certain signoffs that
20 we had to -- the supervisors had to, you know, make sure that we
21 were able to turn the radars on and off, they teach you all the
22 rules of the road, et cetera, and then we had a board with members
23 of the Coast Guard and the staff here. And then you -- basically,
24 you have to have to have a 90-day probationary period, and then
25 you get your final qualification letter, and then you're certified

1 to be a watch stander.

2 Q. Okay. And what about the process to become a watch
3 supervisor?

4 A. Well, so that was a little more involved, you needed to be
5 here four or five years at least before that happened. And so, it
6 was kind of a combination with the criteria to be a watch stander,
7 but also just much more comprehensive in the sense that you had to
8 understand all of the ways in which the building operated, all
9 the, like, electrical system, the power setup, how to troubleshoot
10 all the equipment, how to sort of man your crew. So, that was
11 about a nine-month process to get everything signed off to be a
12 supervisor.

13 Q. Okay. And as a watch supervisor, what is your work schedule?

14 A. So, there are two day sections and two night sections. So,
15 the night sections the one with the two day sections, so we
16 basically go from 5:30 in the morning until 5:30 at night, and
17 then three days on and three days off.

18 Q. Okay. And as a watch supervisor, how many people are you
19 supervising on a given watch?

20 A. So, it's a three-person watch, so there's myself, and there's
21 a vessel traffics specialist that's a civilian, and then there's a
22 Coast Guard member who basically performs the same duties as the
23 other watchmen.

24 Q. Okay. And as the supervisor, what are your responsibilities
25 over the shore -- the watch standing?

1 A. Well, in a nutshell, it's just to sort of ensure a safe and
2 efficient watch operation. So, that entails just making sure all
3 the paperwork is caught up, getting holds in the Coast Guard on
4 certain vessels, making sure that the holds are noted in the
5 logbook and recorded on the computer, keeping our status board
6 updated, being the sort of contact to the Coast Guard if any
7 notice of arrival issues or other situations pop up. So, I guess
8 the easiest explanation is just you're the person that ensures
9 that the watch is professionally run.

10 Q. Okay. What dissemination of information that you receive in
11 center out to the customers of the VTS? How is that -- how would
12 you (indiscernible)?

13 A. Well, I mean, we have a certain number of prescribers that
14 pay to have access to the information and there are different
15 levels of that. Some of them just have access to the electronic
16 report or other people have telephone access. So, they'll call up
17 and speak to whoever's on watch about when a particular ship is
18 coming in, when it might be leaving, and if we have any
19 information on their cargo, that sort of thing. So, primarily our
20 liaison is, like, if people are talking on the phone, it's
21 typically us and an agent for the vessel or an ancillary business
22 involved in the industry, somebody that's going to be delivering
23 laundry to the ship, or cigarettes, or whatever. So,
24 that's -- typically the conversations that we have primarily are
25 with our customers.

1 Q. Okay. What about any information regarding weather alerts
2 and announcements, would you -- do you get information like that
3 from any type of source?

4 A. Well, of course, we have our own weather coming up here, so
5 we're able to tell if there's high winds in our area. We -- you
6 know, we have our own weather software that we can look at to see
7 what the winds are like. There are other methods for also
8 checking to see what the winds might be like. So, typically we
9 would know if there was going to be a high-wind event that hits us
10 in the next day or two or if the wind's picked up here. We have
11 sensors that tell us what the wind is blowing and then takes the
12 based upon that then we would take any necessary action if the
13 winds get above a certain mile per hour.

14 Q. Okay. And what might (indiscernible) if the winds were to
15 get up a certain -- above a certain mile an hour wind?

16 A. Well, probably one of the things that we would do if there
17 are vessels at an anchorage, for instance, our standards of care
18 dictate that the wind reaches 35 miles per hour or greater. We
19 would then go out to the vessels and ask them to ensure that they
20 have their engines on standby, have a second anchor ready to
21 deploy. Typically, at those we have licensed deck officers on the
22 bridge and the vessel needs to prepare themselves to potentially
23 get ready to get underway if they need to reposition the vessel or
24 even vacate the anchorages.

25 Q. Okay. January 25th of 2021, do you recall if you were on

1 duty that day?

2 A. Yes, I was the oncoming -- leading the oncoming watch.

3 Q. Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the coming on
4 watch and if there was anything unusual, anything that took place,
5 anything had to handle?

6 A. Well, so just --

7 Q. Explain (indiscernible).

8 A. Okay. So, just to be clear, we're speaking about the morning
9 that the *MSC Danit* was dragging an anchor, is that the one that
10 we're speaking of?

11 Q. Yeah. I think that was January 26th if I'm not mistaken.
12 You came on duty, is that right?

13 A. So, I think that was the 25th, actually.

14 Q. 25th? Okay, I'm sorry. Yes, that's right, the 25th.

15 A. Okay. Yes, I would be. So, we were the oncoming watch and
16 the way that the watch is set up is that I take the first radar
17 watch, so it would be 0530 to 0730 I was at the radar watch.

18 Q. Okay. Tell us about the activities that may have transpired
19 that morning?

20 A. Well, I'm sure as you're aware, that was a very unusual
21 morning in the sense that we had a high-wind event. I'm not
22 actually sure if I remember how high the winds were, but I know
23 that they were over 40 knots. And so, there were numerous vessels
24 that were anchored in the (indiscernible) anchorages that had
25 decided to heave their anchor and had gotten underway. They were

1 going to proceed out to sea because they didn't feel that it was
2 safe I think being in such close proximity to other vessels. So,
3 they were going to get underway and head to open water.

4 So, I came in probably between ten and 12 ships that were
5 either leaving the anchorage or already left the anchorage and in
6 addition, there were -- the *MSC Danit* was in CRF2 and I think it
7 was there was an OOCL ship in CRF3. They were both kind of
8 transmitted off to the east and the -- I think it was *The Beijing*
9 having difficulty getting their anchor heaving up, and so the *MSC*
10 *Danit* was trying to get underway and get past them. So, that was
11 one of the unusual events that we were dealing with that morning.
12 But just primarily was a lot of -- it was really unprecedented
13 number of ships leaving the anchorage. So, you know, my job is to
14 sort of keep them from getting in close proximity to each other.

15 Q. Got you. Great, thank you. So, when you take the watch in
16 the morning, is there typically a pass down that's done from the
17 previous watch, the night watch, as you were leaving?

18 A. There is and that morning it was a very comprehensive pass
19 down because there were so many vessels that were in transit. So,
20 as I recall, Mike Conner who was the night supervisor, it seemed
21 like he stayed a good ten to 15 minutes more than he would have
22 just because, of course, we had had the accident where -- there
23 was the incident with the two vessels that had the collision. So,
24 I think he was kind of wrapping up some of the paperwork with that
25 and just passed that on. So, yes, there was a very comprehensive

1 pass down.

2 Q. Okay. In that pass down, was it included that the
3 *Danit* -- did you know it had drug anchor?

4 A. Yes, that was something he had mentioned. He said that he
5 had talked to the -- he had noticed that the *Danit* was dragging
6 their anchor and he had gone up to the vessel and proceeded to
7 verify that the vessel actually was dragging their anchor and had
8 gone out to the vessel and relayed -- had a conversation with *The*
9 *Danit* about, you know, repositioning themselves. And so, that was
10 something that I was to kind of keep an eye on. I don't know
11 exactly what time that conversation took place, but I know that he
12 had spoken with *The Danit* about them dragging their anchor.

13 Q. Okay. And when you took watch, were there any sort of
14 conversations to the LALB VTS from *The Danit*?

15 A. Primarily my conversations with *The Danit* were in regards to
16 the -- I think it was *The Beijing*, I don't know for sure,
17 unfortunately. That was the vessel to the south and west of them
18 that was having trouble getting their anchor underway. So,
19 primarily I was talking to *The Danit* to let them know that *The*
20 *Beijing* was unable to move and that *The Danit* needed to take
21 appropriate measures to stay clear of the vessel, they could
22 contact *The Beijing* on channel 14 to make passing arrangements.
23 So, primarily I was just keeping *The Danit* updated about the
24 conditions on *The Beijing*.

25 Q. Okay. Did you know if *The Beijing* did drag anchor as well?

1 A. That I did not know. I just know that they were having
2 difficulty getting their anchor up. I believe the captain stated
3 that the winds were just too strong, so they were unable to raise
4 their anchor. I'm not sure if there was an issue with their
5 windlass getting overheated if that was the problem. But they
6 were actively trying to heave anchor and move as well, but they
7 were unable to do it. So, yeah, that was the main problem with
8 *The Beijing*. Now, I believe it took most of the day for them to
9 get the situation rectified and to -- and then I'm not sure if
10 they proceeded back to anchor or if they themselves got underway.
11 I don't remember.

12 Q. Okay. And overall -- since you've been there as a watch
13 stander and a supervisor for quite some time, in your overall
14 opinion, aside from ships -- those ships leaving their anchorages,
15 was there anything really outstanding due to the circumstance or
16 condition that is (indiscernible) that you may have experienced?

17 A. Well, that was an impressive weather event for me. I'm not
18 sure if it's ever -- I don't recall it ever happening before to
19 have so many vessels at anchorage getting underway all at the same
20 time. That was extremely unusual and of course, it's
21 always -- it's very unusual for two vessels to have a collision,
22 which had happened earlier in the morning. So, for the morning
23 overall I would have to say was extremely unusual. So, I myself
24 have never experienced that before and it was probably the busiest
25 two hours of a radar watch that I've seen in probably my entire

1 time here.

2 Q. Got you. And in your own words, can you give us your
3 explanation -- your analysis to why so many vessels at one time
4 decided to leave and get underway?

5 A. Well, I'm just assuming that the winds had reached such a
6 point that they felt it was unsafe to remain at anchorage and, I
7 mean, I'm just assuming that they wanted to put as much distance
8 between themselves and the other vessels as they could.

9 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay. All right, well, I believe Mr. Ehlers with
10 the NTSB will have some questions for you as well.

11 Drew?

12 MR. EHLERS: Yep, thank you.

13 BY MR. EHLERS:

14 Q. Thanks, Mr. Reiter, I appreciate this. Are you familiar with
15 that pipeline that runs down the -- near the anchorage
16 there -- the SF Anchorage -- CRF anchorage?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. And is that -- has ever a concern been raised with the
19 proximately of that pipeline to the anchorage prior to today or
20 prior to this accident that we're investigating?

21 A. I've never heard of any concern. Nothing's ever been
22 expressed to me, nor have I ever overheard anything like that.

23 Q. Okay. During your turnover with Mr. Conner, did you discuss
24 the pipeline at all and the proximity of *The Beijing* and *The Danit*
25 to the pipeline?

1 A. No -- well, I mean, it was -- I'm trying to remember here. I
2 know that he would -- that he was -- by looking at the radar, we
3 both could see that *The Danit* was directly over the pipeline. So,
4 I think Mike had sort of said off hand he's over the pipeline.
5 But he didn't -- that was the end of that particular exchange, we
6 went onto other things. So, it was just something that was just
7 mentioned kind of in passing almost in the sense that he could see
8 the same thing that I could see, *The Danit* drifting over the
9 pipeline. But that was just -- it was just a quick remark about
10 it and then we were moving onto other things.

11 Q. Okay. Did -- you mentioned *The Beijing* and I think you also
12 said *The Danit* had trouble raising their anchor, did any other
13 vessels that day have trouble raising their anchor?

14 A. No, not that I'm aware of and I'm not necessarily sure that
15 *The Danit* had trouble raising their anchor. From what I can
16 remember, they were just trying to get themselves sort of aligned
17 in a way that they could get underway and get past *The Beijing*.

18 Q. Sure.

19 A. And as far as I understand, it was only *The Beijing* that was
20 having difficulty getting their anchor up. *The Danit* was in the
21 process of heaving their anchor and trying to get underway, which
22 I believe they did in about an hour after I sat down.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I think that one for sure.

25 Q. And *The Beijing* was much longer than that?

1 A. Yes, I think *The Beijing*, as I recall, took most of the day.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I'm not sure if that was an issue with their equipment
4 or -- yeah, I don't know for sure what happened with that.

5 Q. Yeah. Would you consider that unusual that it took so long
6 for them to get their anchor up?

7 A. Sure. Yeah, that's something that usually take 45 minutes to
8 an hour typically. So, yeah, they were definitely having some
9 kind of equipment issues.

10 Q. Okay. The -- you mentioned the collision that happened that
11 night, obviously separate vessels, did that happen before you took
12 the watch or as you took the watch -- when did that happen?

13 A. I think that was around 3:30 in the morning. That's the time
14 that I have in my head. I'm not certain about that, but it was
15 before the oncoming day watch.

16 Q. Okay. So, that situation had been -- I don't know what the
17 right word is. I think rectified is the wrong word, but that
18 situation was passed and opening by the time you took the watch?

19 A. It was. I think he had already -- there's an incident report
20 that's generated when that happens, of course all the calls are
21 made to the various people. So, I believe he was either finishing
22 up his incident report or had already finished it by the time that
23 I arrived.

24 Q. Okay. It's been very much in the news, the port loading
25 that's been happening in the L.A., Long Beach area and the number

1 of ships, has -- in your opinion, has VTS been able to handle the
2 amazing amount of ships that have been anchored and operating in
3 the area?

4 A. Yes, I think so. I think we've actually done -- you know,
5 not having ever faced a situation like this before, it's -- you
6 know, under the circumstances, we've done very well. And the
7 ships are to be commended too, they're always very cognizant of
8 their distance from each other, so the captains of the vessels are
9 periodically repositioning their vessels to be further away from
10 the ships that are closest to them. We haven't -- to my
11 knowledge, we haven't had any close quarters incidents with any of
12 the vessels and there's I think 55 that are sort of loitering in
13 the area now. So, I think as the situation has evolved, our
14 response to it has evolved as well and it think that we're doing a
15 pretty remarkable job considering all the vessels that are in the
16 area.

17 Q. Okay. And looking at the January 25th in particular, do you
18 think you had enough folks, were you manned up sufficiently to
19 handle the situation as it was going?

20 A. Yes, I was very thankful that the person who was on the phone
21 watch -- so, I was at the radar and the person manning the traffic
22 desk was Hector and Hector has been here for about ten years and
23 he kind of knew exactly what I needed and was able to kind of
24 anticipate when the ships might be calling and hearing the exact
25 locations where the ships were when they called. So, that made it

1 very easy for me. So, I was lucky that I had him, he was the
2 right person at the right time for me. So, I felt completely
3 capable of ensuring the safe transit of all the vessels in the
4 area.

5 Q. Okay. Was it -- did you call up anyone else during the
6 beginning of the watch? Did you need to call up anyone else to
7 help out between you and Hector?

8 A. No, I felt fine, you know. I felt pretty confident that he
9 and I could do it and I think the Coasty (sic) was close by just
10 in case we needed a third person to maybe get on the radar and
11 acquire some targets or help out in anyway. But that did not
12 become necessary. But I think the Coasty was up to just in case.

13 Q. Okay. All your systems that day, were they working properly,
14 the radar, the Kongsberg system?

15 A. Yes, if I recall, they were.

16 Q. Okay. All right, visibility was -- what was visibility like
17 that day, do you remember?

18 A. I do not remember exactly. I'm assuming with the winds as
19 high as they were, visibility was probably pretty good.
20 Typically, when we have such high winds like that, it kind of
21 clears everything out -- it's usually pretty clear. But I don't
22 remember exactly, no.

23 Q. Okay. And neither *The Danit* or *The Beijing* reported a
24 specific casualty to you?

25 A. No, they did not.

1 Q. Okay. All right, one of the things we're -- besides January
2 25th, we're trying to -- if not -- either identify or rule out any
3 other time period in which an anchor dragging incident may have
4 occurred. In the last year, other than January 25th, can you
5 think of another time in which you had anchor dragging incidents
6 or anything that sticks out in your mind, particularly regarding
7 that SF anchorage?

8 A. No, you know, we -- vessels have dragged anchor in the past
9 and we've gone out to them, and they reposition themselves, it's
10 always been a fairly seamless process. So, this is the first time
11 I can remember that there were any issues with it.

12 Q. Okay. And I think maybe a week or two ago there was a pretty
13 high wind event if I'm not mistaken, did you -- was there anything
14 involved in that incident, do you remember -- I shouldn't say
15 incident -- that weather event?

16 A. Well, I was on vacation.

17 MR. EHLERS: Oh, okay. All right, I'm not trying to get you
18 to answer for anything you don't know about. Okay. All right, I
19 think that's all I have for the moment.

20 Kim, do you have any questions?

21 MS. WEST: No, I don't have any questions.

22 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

23 All right, [REDACTED]?

24 MR. [REDACTED]: Hold on.

25 MR. EHLERS: I just had to turn you back up. Go ahead.

1 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay.

2 BY MR. [REDACTED]:

3 Q. Mr. Reiter, is there anything -- I'm sorry, is there anything
4 that you would like to share with us that maybe we haven't asked
5 or that you feel maybe of importance to our investigation into
6 this incident?

7 A. I can't think of anything, no.

8 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay --

9 MR. EHLERS: [REDACTED], I've got a few more questions.

10 BY MR. EHLERS:

11 Q. I always forget to ask these. I've got a couple of standard
12 NTSB questions here. We're always interested in the effect or not
13 of fatigue. If you don't mind me asking, what's your kind of
14 standard sleep pattern? How -- what do you normally -- how do you
15 normally sleep, how many hours a night?

16 A. I usually go to bed around 10:00 and get up at 4:30. That's
17 pretty consistent on the days that I work, so six to six-and-a-
18 half hours of sleep typically.

19 Q. Okay. Do you remember what day in your cycle you were on the
20 25th, was that the first day, the last day, the middle day?

21 A. I don't remember.

22 Q. Okay. Do you remember at all if you were fatigued at all
23 that day, if you were tired? I know it was a long time ago.

24 A. Well, if I was fatigued, I certainly wasn't when I assumed
25 the radar watch. I don't remember. Yeah, I usually am pretty

1 alert in the mornings. Even if I don't get a whole lot of sleep,
2 that's usually not an issue for me, so I would say just in
3 general, no.

4 Q. Okay. Do you commonly or usually drink coffee, any other
5 caffeinated products?

6 A. Yeah, I usually have a cup in the morning right around 6:00.

7 Q. Okay. Do you have anything before you come into the VTS?

8 A. No, I don't.

9 Q. Okay. And then is that just one cup a day?

10 A. Yeah, just one cup. I know lots of people like it in the
11 afternoon or the evenings, but for me, just in the mornings.

12 MR. EHLERS: Okay. All right, my apologies for butting in
13 again there, [REDACTED], go ahead.

14 MR. [REDACTED]: That's it, Drew?

15 MR. EHLERS: Yep, I'm good.

16 MR. [REDACTED]: Okay. All right, very good. So, the time is
17 1559, Central Standard Time. We will conclude our interview and
18 recording at this time.

19 (Whereupon, at 1559 CST, 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: PIPELINE RUPTURE NEAR
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA
ON OCTOBER 3, 2021
Interview of Mitchell Reiter

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM001

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: November 3, 2021

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.



Carolyn Hanna
Transcriber



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Transcript Errata

TABLE OF CORRECTIONS FOR TRANSCRIPT INTERVIEW WITH: MITCHELL REITER
RECORDED ON NOVEMBER 3, 2021

PAGE NUMBER	LINE NUMBER	CURRENT WORDING	CORRECTED WORDING
6	10	man	manage
8	4	coming	system
10	6	CRF2	SF-2
10	7	CRF3	SF-3
10	8	transmitted	transiting
12	7	impressive	unprecedented
16	24	hearing	having

If, to the best of your knowledge, no corrections are needed kindly circle the statement "no corrections needed" and initial in the space provided.

NO CORRECTIONS NEEDED. _____
Initials

Mitchell E. Reiter
Printed Name of Person providing the above information

[Redacted Signature]
Signature of Person providing the above information

12-2-21
Date