

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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COLLISION OF THE BARGES PUSHED BY
THE TOWING VESSELS *RC CREPPEL* AND
THE *COOPERATIVE SPIRIT* ON THE
MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEAR LULING,
LOUISIANA, ON JANUARY 26, 2020

Accident No.: DCA20FM012

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Interview of: DAVID THORPE
Master, *Cooperative Spirit*

New Orleans, Louisiana

Tuesday,
January 28, 2020

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MSSD2 [REDACTED] So -- all right, so I think we've already kind
3 of discussed a little this morning, but we're on board just to get
4 as much information as we can to kind figure out what happened,
5 with our ultimate goal would be to try and prevent this from
6 occurring again, right? So all the details and information you
7 give us it will be really beneficial in our investigation.

8 So let me just start off real quick by asking you if you're
9 okay with us recording this interview?

10 MR. THORPE: Yes.

11 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay, awesome.

INTERVIEW OF DAVID THORPE

12
13 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

14 Q. All right. So for the recording device, can you please state
15 your name and then spell your full name as well?

16 A. All right. My name is David Thorpe, T-h-o-r- -- my last name
17 is T-h-o-r-p-e.

18 Q. Okay. All right. And what is your position, role on the
19 vessel?

20 A. Captain of the vessel.

21 Q. And how long have you been on the *Spirit*? How long have you
22 worked on board the *Spirit*? Not just this -- the hitch and
23 overall?

24 A. Okay. I've been on 28 days this hitch.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I've probably been on here, probably 7 years, I believe,
2 something around there.

3 Q. Awesome. And we're probably all familiar with what the
4 captain's responsible for but --

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. I assume pretty much anything that goes on in this --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- vessel. So whether it's engine room, deck, everything.

9 A. Right.

10 Q. So all right. So what I'd like to do is just kind of have
11 you describe to us, and from your perspective and your version,
12 anything you said, done, heard, witnesses, anything prior to, you
13 know, leading up to the incident, during the incident and post-
14 incident. And just kind of get your version of what happened and
15 then we'll have some questions, I'm sure, to follow up after you
16 kind of tell us --

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. -- from your perspective what happened.

19 A. Well, on that morning I got up at -- they called me at 5,
20 which is normal for me to get up in the morning for my -- to get
21 on my shift. And, of course, it was probably almost 5:30, maybe
22 5:20, you know -- I don't think it was 5:20. Anyway, somewhere
23 close to that area that I come out of my room, and as soon as I
24 come out of my room the general alarm went off. And so I headed
25 straight to the wheelhouse, and about that time the, I guess, the

1 first incident had already occurred.

2 And the only thing that -- me, I seen our port string
3 floating by. So I knew, I knew that we -- something had happened
4 to the port string. I didn't know exactly, you know. And then
5 when I got up there, Todd, the pilot, he informed me that we'd had
6 a collision with the vessel *RC Creppel*. And, but I could not, I
7 could not see the vessel. And so while Todd was still at the helm
8 -- I never did touch the helm -- you know, I rendered assistance
9 to him, what I could. Like, I, you know, picked up the phone of
10 the VHF and I called for assistance, I believe, first or something
11 like that. And then I called the Coast Guard on the radio.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Somewhere around that time I looked back and noticed that
14 there was a ship coming up on our starboard stern and I asked Todd
15 did he know about it, you know, because I didn't know, you know,
16 with stuff going on I didn't -- and he said he was aware of it.
17 And then by that time the -- you know, it was just, it was just
18 too late to -- you know, we had the collision, you know, with the
19 collision with the ship.

20 And when that happened, everything broke and we broke out of
21 tow and -- we already had some help on the scene. But after that,
22 you know, we got a lot of help quick.

23 Q. You had help on scene before the second collision; is that
24 what you're saying?

25 A. Well, I mean, the --

1 Q. Right.

2 A. Some of our tugs at the fleet had started to assist catching,
3 you know, the loose string.

4 Q. Got you. Okay. So I understand you got woken up 5 o'clock;
5 5:20 or so you -- maybe 5:30, somewhere in there --

6 A. Yeah, that's -- I generally go to work, you know, I try to be
7 up there about 5:30, you know, give or take. Sometime -- some
8 days it might be a little early, 5 minutes earlier, 5 minutes
9 later, just --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. But on that particular morning.

12 Q. So at that point did -- you said you heard a general alarm?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Was that before or after any kind of collision that you --
15 you don't know -- it sounded like you didn't know even what
16 happened? So --

17 A. Right. I didn't. I assumed that the general alarm, he rung
18 it as soon as the, you know, the collision occurred.

19 Q. Okay. So at that point, when you heard the general alarm,
20 you went straight to the wheelhouse?

21 A. Yes, sir. That's my --

22 Q. Okay. And when you got to the wheelhouse was the pilot --
23 well, I'm sorry. What's the name --

24 A. Jackson.

25 Q. Jackson, is he -- was he actively engaged? What was he

1 actively engaged in when you first came out to the wheelhouse?

2 A. Well, he was trying to -- I guess he was trying to get the
3 boat maybe to catch the other barges, you know. I mean, it was --
4 and just try to stay out of -- stay in control of the, you know.

5 Q. Catch the port string that --

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. -- came loose? Is that what you --

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. So when you -- also when you first came up there, can you
10 kind of describe what you saw overall? Just whether any radars or
11 just out the, you know, visuals out the windows.

12 A. Well, it was dark.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And like I said, the -- he had the side lights on, the
15 floodlights on, and that's where I could see the empties going by
16 us.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And then I seen the lights and the shadows of the ship, you
19 know, in the lights of the -- from the elevator. It's -- if
20 you've ever been in this area at night, it's pretty bright, sort
21 of lit up.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I mean, you can -- you know, you can almost see without a
24 light. But I mean, you know, it was the silhouette of the ship in
25 his lights.

1 Q. Okay. So did you see any -- did you see the *Creppel* in the
2 water at all at that point --

3 A No, I didn't --

4 Q. -- when you came up?

5 A. I didn't see it at all.

6 Q. You never saw it at all? Okay. Did you see anything else in
7 the water besides the port string at that point?

8 A. No. I mean -- no.

9 Q. Okay. What about anything stand out to you up on the bridge
10 that looked maybe out of place? Any radars on or off or not?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Anything that you --

13 A. Everything was on best I could tell. I mean, you know, we
14 run both radars all the time and, you know, we -- both charts.
15 It's the same chart -- well, one of them's a newer version that --
16 and we just were swapping over eventually and we -- they had
17 installed it and both of them was -- the new chart runs on the
18 port side and the old chart, which is just a -- all the charts are
19 the same but it's just a different upgraded version.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. And, of course, that's all the time, right, that's normal
22 procedure.

23 Q. Okay. So while you were up there then you happened to look
24 out your starboard side, the windows while Jackson was at the
25 helm?

1 A. Right. I was -- I guess I was trying to help, be a lookout
2 for him.

3 Q. No, totally. Yeah, I get it.

4 A. You know, and with the -- because, like I said, by that time
5 the other string of barges had been floated behind us and, you
6 know, and --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- just trying to, just trying to help him out because, I
9 mean, he had his hands full.

10 Q. Did you initially notice the bulker coming up your starboard
11 side on the radar or just visual?

12 A. No, on the visual.

13 Q. Okay. And then when you saw that a collision was probably
14 going to happen, what action did you take or did Jackson take?
15 Was there any other -- did you warn the crew at all or did -- what
16 was, you know, what --

17 A. Yeah. So we -- by that time, see, they was -- the crew was
18 on the emergency channel.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And he -- I'm pretty sure he told them to watch out, you
21 know.

22 Q. So he was dealing more with the vessel operation stuff. You
23 were helping call out to --

24 A. Right.

25 Q. -- Coast Guard and --

- 1 A. Yes, sir.
- 2 Q. -- plead help to retrieve -- recall your barges and stuff?
- 3 A. Yes, sir.
- 4 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. You guys got any questions?
- 5 BY MR. [REDACTED]
- 6 Q. How you doing, Captain Thorpe?
- 7 A. How you doing?
- 8 Q. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the U.S. Coast Guard. Thank you for your time
9 today.
- 10 A. Yes, sir.
- 11 Q. We appreciate it. What type of license do you hold now?
- 12 A. I hold a Master's of Inland, OUTV Master's.
- 13 Q. Unlimited?
- 14 A Yes, sir.
- 15 Q. And how long have you had that license?
- 16 A. Oh, since 1988. I think I'm on my fourth -- I'd have to say
17 offhand I don't -- you know, it's '88.
- 18 Q. Yeah.
- 19 A. But, you know, my addition, I -- we renew every 5 years,
20 so --
- 21 Q. Right, got you. Okay. Do you have any priors or anything,
22 letters of warning, anything on your license from any prior
23 collisions or anything?
- 24 A. No, sir.
- 25 Q. Nothing. Okay.

1 A. No, sir.

2 Q. What about any medical waivers?

3 A. I have a medical waiver on my -- I'm deaf in my left ear and
4 at the time -- and I still carry it, but it's I'm fixing to go to
5 the doctor for it, I have a waiver on my -- I used to be diabetic
6 and insulin dependent.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. All right? I had bariatric surgery last year, last March,
9 and since then I haven't been on any insulin. My doctors have
10 took me off of all that.

11 Q. Good.

12 A. So I have it on my medical certificate and I just talked to
13 -- it's coming up for renewal.

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. And I talked to the lady at the Maritime Center about that I
16 need to go ahead, since -- what I needed to do to get it done.
17 And she says, well, just -- it'll be all right till your next, you
18 know --

19 Q. Renewal?

20 A. -- when my -- yeah, which I plan on doing it when I'm off
21 this time.

22 Q. Okay. Radar cert up to date?

23 A Yes, sir.

24 Q. I take it you're very familiar with this area, running your
25 tow up --

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. -- and down. Do you also -- you're southbound also with --

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. -- tows this size?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. Thirty, forties?

7 A. I have been ever since I worked for ARTCO.

8 Q. Got you. Good company. Northbound with a tow this size,
9 river condition being what it is and what it was Sunday morning,
10 what is your next destination that you're headed to?

11 A. Well, on this trip here we had to -- our next pickup, we had
12 a pickup to pick up at -- a load to pick up at Carline. I'm not
13 sure right now if it was Plaquemines or Geismar. It just -- you
14 know, we had just left the fleet --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- and I really hadn't seen the orders.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. I knew about we had a pickup but I didn't know -- you know,
19 it was one of them fleets.

20 Q. Yes, sir.

21 A. It could have been at either one of them.

22 Q. Did you all have time orders, like you had to be at either of
23 those fleets, whichever one you were talking about, by a certain
24 date or time?

25 A. No, sir.

1 Q. Nothing like that --

2 A. No, sir.

3 Q. -- no -- all right. Did you have any delays when you came
4 out of the fleet down in Kenner Bend?

5 A. I don't think so.

6 Q. So everything was pretty timely there?

7 A. Right. I mean, we come in and -- well, I think -- well,
8 delays, we come in with our southbound tow and they had to -- we
9 stayed with the southbound tow until they knocked two strings off
10 where we could be legal, you know, be legal -- or they could be
11 legal in the fleet. And by that time I had done swapped watches,
12 you know. And then when I come back on watch we was already
13 northbound. So, you know, I don't -- I think they still had a few
14 things to do on the northbound tow.

15 Q. So did you turn a tow? Is that what you did at -- down in
16 Kenner Bend?

17 A. No, I just dropped my whole southbound tow in the fleet.

18 Q. Oh, okay.

19 A. And then, you know, picked up a northbound --

20 Q. Picked up a northbound one?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Got you. Okay. All right. Again, I'm going to go back to
23 -- I'm going to refer to the day and time, weather conditions, tow
24 conditions, everything that was going on that morning. Is it
25 common that coming up this way making 26 Mile Point that you would

1 run the point way?

2 A. Um-hum. Yes, sir.

3 Q. It is?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Why is that?

6 A. Well, some -- most of the time that's the slackest water and,
7 you know -- now, if he was -- now the southbounder's got the right
8 of way. Now, if the southbounder didn't feel comfortable on
9 running the == you know, us on the point, he would have told us
10 and we, you know, we wouldn't. But like I said, I don't know the
11 situation about that particular morning. But yes, I have run the
12 point, you know, and that's the slackest water. You know, run the
13 point and so forth.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. So one thing is to stay out of the bend eddy.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. If you're northbound. Because, you know, we'll get up in --
18 you get up in the eddy, upstream eddy and, of course, she starts
19 picking up speed and, you know, she'll -- you know, it'll -- I
20 guess she'll outrun your steer is what I'm trying to say.

21 Q. Got you. So are you telling me that it would maybe set you
22 over to the bend if you were over in that bend?

23 A. Yeah, it'll suck you, it'll suck you up in the bend. If you
24 get up in --

25 Q. It'll set you over.

- 1 A. Yeah.
- 2 Q. Yeah, yeah.
- 3 A. If you get up in the eddy --
- 4 Q. Got you.
- 5 A. -- which right now the eddy comes pretty well --
- 6 Q. Right.
- 7 A. -- out in the river a little bit.
- 8 Q. So running under the point you've got slack water --
- 9 A. Right.
- 10 Q. -- right? And you've got current running but, you know, once
- 11 you, I guess, get around that point then you can cross over or --
- 12 A. Right. And --
- 13 Q. -- and stay on the other side?
- 14 A. Right. And typically I run the point and then when I get on
- 15 the point where I start hitting the current on this, on my -- on
- 16 the starboard side, I start crossing over. Well, in reality when
- 17 I cross over I'm at -- I'm above the eddy. See what I'm saying?
- 18 Q. At the point?
- 19 A. At the point.
- 20 Q. Right, got you. Okay.
- 21 A. You know, to get over there.
- 22 Q. I'm understating. Okay. All right.
- 23 A. And that's the way the ships run it, the --
- 24 Q. The ships run the same way, under the point?
- 25 A. Just about under -- they favor the point side.

1 Q. Yeah. In high river?

2 A. In high river.

3 Q. In conditions like we have.

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. So let me ask you this. You had mentioned that there was a
6 ship that was going to be overtaking you.

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Right? Would you find -- is that a common practice that
9 you're northbound, you're running the point, and from what I
10 understand I think the ship was going to overtake you on one
11 whistle.

12 A. Right.

13 Q. Right? Is that a common thing that he would come between you
14 and the bank, if I'm picturing this?

15 A. Well, in the situation, I wouldn't have let -- I would have
16 -- I wouldn't have let him pass me -- okay, if I was on the point,
17 under the point, I wouldn't have let me pass me on the one. I
18 would have, you know -- I would -- now, if I had done started
19 crossing over, I would, because, you know, as soon as he comes up
20 he stays in that east bank all the way up in the deep water. But
21 I --

22 Q. Why wouldn't you let him pass you on that side, on that one
23 whistle?

24 A. Because that -- well, under the point I wouldn't because to
25 me it's not safe. You know, for -- it's, you know --

1 Q. Right.

2 A. It was almost, it was almost on a -- you know, if the
3 situation was if we was a little lower towards the bridge --

4 Q. Yes, sir.

5 A. -- he'd come up on a tee.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. But, you know, we're -- and we're --

8 Q. Well, that means he would have passed -- overtaken you on
9 your point side then?

10 A. Right.

11 Q. Is that right? Okay, got you.

12 A. Right. Now, see, on this particular incident I would think
13 that the ship -- we would already have been on the west bank for
14 him to come up on the one if the tows hadn't collided, you know,
15 or --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. Because, I mean, he was well below the bridge I think when
18 the first -- I guess, when it first happened. And then, you know,
19 we lost our headway or we slowed down.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And he, you know, so --

22 Q. When you slowed down at what point is this? When the
23 collision occurred?

24 A. I guess when the collision, because --

25 Q. You could hear it then?

1 A. Well, yes.

2 Q. Okay. I got you. You could hear the engines. Okay. All
3 right. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

4 A. But that's one of them -- you know, it just depends on the
5 position you're in, you know. Now lower river, now I've had them,
6 too, you know, situations where we will just wrap around the point
7 and they would still come up on the tee.

8 Q. Right, low river.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Yeah, got you.

11 A. Low water.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. But, you know, but my experience, and personally I would have
14 -- if it was going to, if it was going to be close like that, I
15 would have stayed -- let him come up on the two and I would have
16 stayed below the point, you know. But if I knew I had time and
17 our chart tells us, you know, where we're going to meet --

18 Q. Yes.

19 A. -- you know, or AIS does, because when we slow down and he
20 speeds up to the point changes or extends.

21 Q. Yes.

22 A. It depends on -- so on that part, my judgment of the -- I
23 would -- I refer to that, you know, because, I mean, that's a good
24 indicator.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. So tell me this. With that being said and with the known
3 fact of the situation where there was a southbound tow now thrown
4 into that mix --

5 A. Right.

6 Q. -- what kind of conditions would that have all created? I
7 mean, would it mean that, gee, you've got a ship that's going to
8 come up overtake you on your starboard side and you've got tow
9 that's coming down that's going to be on your port side --

10 A. Right.

11 Q. -- not everybody maybe is going to meet all at the same
12 time --

13 A. Right.

14 Q. -- that you're not three abreast, right?

15 A. Right.

16 Q. But some maneuvering has to take place I would think --

17 A. Right.

18 Q. -- to get out of the way of each other.

19 A. Right, right.

20 Q. Am I right?

21 A. Yes, sir. And in that situation, well, in that situation I
22 would stay -- I would have worked it out where I would stay out of
23 the southbounder's way, and it just depends on -- say, if we was
24 going to meet three abreast, okay, I would slow down because, I
25 mean, the ship, he could slow down but he can't stop.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. And, of course, the southbounder's got the right of way.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. But, I mean, with the situation the other day when the
5 collision occurred, it kind of changed the dynamics of the
6 meeting. And I mean, he was already committed. I would assume
7 the ship was --

8 Q. Right.

9 A. -- committed to --

10 Q. Got you. So when you guys start to operate in -- I'm going
11 to call it special circumstances, meaning high river --

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. -- right? Do you and your other officers, your relief
14 captain or your pilot or whoever is riding with you -- because
15 you're lead, right?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. You're first captain.

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. Do you guys ever have any discussions, you know, hey, we in
20 high water now, you know, these things happen -- you know, talk
21 about conditions?

22 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Do you all have discussions --

24 A. We do that. We have our discussion every watch change. We
25 discuss like where we're at, the traffic involved, you know, and

1 like I said, the current conditions and stuff. But yes, when we
2 have a watch change --

3 Q. Got you.

4 A. -- so I'd -- I call it a little maintenance because that's
5 about what it is.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. I mean, it's, you know --

8 Q. Understood.

9 A. And most of the time it -- both of us generally know about
10 where we're at when we come up to the top of the stairs.

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. I mean, you know -- but yes, sir.

13 Q. Along that, are there ever any standing orders from you?
14 Like, you're the senior captain. Are there standing orders, look,
15 if anything happens or it gets a little hairy, I want you to get
16 me up?

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. Or if you're going to meet somebody at this location, I don't
19 want you to -- you know, I want you to hold up; I don't want to,
20 you know, I don't want to put ourselves in that -- or is -- or are
21 there no standing orders that you --

22 A. Well, there's no --

23 Q. -- deem necessary?

24 A. There's -- as far as -- I've always told them, if you need
25 me, you know where I'm at.

1 Q. Yes.

2 A. Meaning that -- I mean, I have intercom system and all he's
3 got to do is call or have one of the guys get me up.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. You know.

6 Q. Got you.

7 A. Now in certain circumstances I have told him, you know, to
8 come get me or something like that.

9 Q. Have you ever been called?

10 A. Yes, sir, a couple of times.

11 Q. Yeah?

12 A. Todd's never called me, but I have been called on other
13 situations.

14 Q. So how long have you ridden or how long has Todd ridden as
15 your pilot?

16 A. Well, as my -- this is his second trip on here, being
17 assigned to this boat, but I have worked with Todd in the past on
18 the other -- on the *Inez Andreas* --

19 Q. Oh, yeah?

20 A. -- for a trip or so. And I rode a trip with him on the --
21 well, a couple weeks in the *Coop Enterprise*, which was in the last
22 -- well, this boat and the *Enterprise* within the last 6 months.

23 Q. Okay, got you. So this situation, a possible or something
24 that could have been done or may have been done if you were at the
25 helm? And I know you can't -- since you don't leave a standing

1 order, Todd is pretty much at will to navigate as he feels best,
2 correct?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. But in a situation like this, the options -- there were some
5 options possibly available to maybe slow down your vessel once
6 passing arrangements had been made with the southbound. Is that
7 -- that's a possibility, to let them get by?

8 A. Well, that would be a call that he would have to make.

9 Q. That's what I'm saying. Yes.

10 A. Right.

11 Q. It's up to the operator at the time.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. But is that -- have you ever done that?

14 A. Yes, sir, I have.

15 Q. Or you possibly could have denied the overtaking vessel the
16 right to come by -- up on the one whistle. That's --

17 A. Right. So --

18 Q. -- just an option.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Have you ever done that?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. I got you. Okay. All right.

23 A. Now, they don't like it. Them ships don't like it, but yes,
24 sir, I have.

25 Q. Right. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

3 Q. David, I've got another question. I'm sorry, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

4 So with a tow your size --

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. -- typically when arrangements are made, passing
7 arrangements, what is the indication? How would any vessel know
8 the size of your tow? Is that --

9 A. Well, most -- oh.

10 Q. Yeah, go ahead.

11 A. I mean, most of the time they ask, you know, and I've asked.
12 Now, the other line tows, I know just about what they -- you know,
13 by the name of the boat, just about what they got now. Down here
14 it's --

15 Q. (Phone ringing.) Sorry. I'm sorry.

16 A. It's with the little tow -- the tugs, you know, ship boats,
17 it's kind of unknown there. I mean, you know, but we do ask them
18 like what they have in tow, so --

19 Q. Okay. So you being a line haul --

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. -- you're familiar with size of tows more so with other line
22 hauls, for sure, so --

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Have you ever not been a captain or a pilot of a non-line
25 haul tugs, so smaller tows such as the *RC Creppel*? So I guess my

1 question is how --

2 A. No. No, I've always been on a line boat.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I mean, I guess the smallest boat I ever worked is probably a
5 4200.

6 Q. So in -- so maybe you can or can't answer this question from
7 experience, but how would a master or a pilot of a smaller vessel
8 like the *RC Creppel* know the size of tow that you were coming up
9 northbound with? Is there any way they would have any indication
10 of how big your tow was?

11 A. No, not unless I've -- unless they asked and I told them or,
12 you know.

13 Q. Okay. So is it --

14 A. I would think, you know, but -- you know, some of them, it
15 just depends, I guess, on the -- on who the pilot is. I mean,
16 just -- you know, most people that runs down here, you know, they
17 know about what we haul. But, you know, without asking -- you
18 know, without asking they wouldn't know for sure.

19 Q. Okay. And that's not information typically just given when
20 you're making arrangements?

21 A. Not unless they asked, you know.

22 Q. Okay. No, that's great. And nothing on radar I guess or
23 anything that would indicate the size of your tow that they could
24 see?

25 A. Just a blob.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. I mean, because it just depends on the echo on the radar.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Like if you have a tow of open hoppers, you get a ghost out
5 there three-quarters of a mile and --

6 Q. Oh, okay.

7 A. -- even you get a ghost on the empty crane barges with the
8 covers.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And loads is a little different --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- you know, but --

13 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. Awesome.

14 BY MR. [REDACTED]

15 Q. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Sector Mobile.

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. I have two questions for you. What range was your radar set
18 to that night? Or that morning?

19 A. That -- I can only go by what it was when I went off watch at
20 11:30 the night before.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. The port radar, I think I had it on a mile and then the
23 starboard radar was mile and a half.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Now normally northbound, I swap the port radar to 2 miles,

1 but the only reason I had it at 1 mile is because I flank
2 southbound, and when I flank I cut one radar down to a lower scale
3 to watch my flank.

4 Q. And that was headed south?

5 A. That, that -- yes. So I --

6 Q. So if you would have gone north, you would have turned it
7 back to 2 nautical miles?

8 A. Yes, sir. And like I said, I don't, you know, I don't know
9 if it -- what scale it was on --

10 Q. Right.

11 A. -- at the time of the incident. That's just me. Now most of
12 the time, you know -- and it's 2 miles on one or a mile and a half
13 or 3 miles or, you know, just --

14 Q. Yes, sir. And I know there was a lot going on after the
15 initial incident; you're trying to make callouts and can you help.
16 Did anybody specifically call back to the ship that was
17 approaching you from the stern to let them know what was going on?
18 That you recall?

19 A. I don't recall.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. I mean --

22 Q. Did you personally make a call to the --

23 A. No.

24 Q. -- number or was it 49?

25 A. No, I talked, I talked to him -- I wasn't sure about the

1 number, but after the compact and later on, I called to -- and got
2 his number.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. For sure. Now, Mike is -- I mean, Mike, excuse me, Todd's on
5 there. Todd had said he thought -- well, he had told me 49 and I
6 wasn't sure because with all the radio chatter and stuff up there,
7 I wasn't -- but I just wanted to make sure for my -- for the
8 record, I guess.

9 Q. The roster? But you don't recall Todd making a call back?

10 A. No, I don't think so.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. That's all I have.

12 BY MR. KARR:

13 Q. All right. This is Mike Karr. You mentioned an emergency
14 channel. Can you describe that and when it's used?

15 A. Our emergency channel is 71. It's also our standby channel
16 on the boat. I mean, that's our working -- that's the channel
17 that we use. So anytime my deck crew's out on tow, we're on 71.
18 I'm in contact with them, if I need to get ahold of them, you
19 know, and vice versa. And then we do a radio check when they go
20 out on tow and they check when they come back. And then anytime
21 that the general alarm is rang, whether it's any kind of alarm,
22 like a fire alarm -- if our fire alarm system would have went off,
23 the general alarm goes off, too. But anytime the general alarm
24 goes off, it's on the muster list that everybody gets on 71 with
25 the wheelhouse. Like I said, we keep a radio on 71 at all times.

1 We monitor 16, 71, and whatever frequency, 67 or 13.

2 Q. All right, thank you. Question about the bends. Are there
3 any -- tell me, and generally describe what the pilots and
4 captains on the Mississippi River do when it comes to the bends,
5 when it comes to arranging a meeting situation on the bends.

6 A. Well, the -- of course, the southbounder has the right of way
7 and he's the one that has the final say-so on it, but I mean, and
8 just from my experience I know about where he would want me.

9 Say if I was making 26 Mile Point and he -- I would call him,
10 you know, and then if I was southbound I would have called the
11 southbounder, too. I mean, I may, you know -- that's just the way
12 I've always been, you know, even though it's the southbounder's --
13 to me, the southbounder is the one that, you know, that makes the
14 contact. It's not really a standing rule for either one, you
15 know, whoever's got the -- the southbounder's got the right of
16 way, but as far as the contact, the first contact about the
17 meeting, you know, I do it either way. If I'm southbound I make
18 the first call, and if I'm northbound a lot of times I'll make the
19 first call. Or I'll call the vessel and, you know -- now I'll say
20 where I'm going to be, but that's from experience I know about
21 where I need to be and where I don't. Now, if he doesn't want me
22 on the one, I'll do whatever he tells me to, you know, in a
23 situation.

24 Q. I'm thinking, so give me some -- give me a few more moments.

25 A. No, that's all right. Take your time.

1 Q. Thanks. Oh, you mentioned the southbounder has the right of
2 way. Explain to me where that's -- where that authority comes
3 from?

4 A. That comes from the Coast Guard rules of the road.

5 Q. Do you know exactly which one?

6 A. No, not offhand --

7 Q. Okay. I thought you might the way you were -- the way you
8 answered that question.

9 A. Right. I wish I could. I mean, I can't remember -- I mean,
10 I just know the -- just about, but as far as -- I can remember
11 1,000 miles of river but I can't --

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. But that's where it comes from, rules of the road.

14 MR. KARR: All right. Thanks. I have no more questions.

15 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. [REDACTED]

16 BY MR. [REDACTED]

17 Q. [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard. Captain, is there any rule or
18 best practice that you can tell us about as far as a vessel
19 running bend point? What's that all about?

20 A. Well, according to the rules that I'm familiar with from the
21 rules of the road, you always meet on the one whistle. The one
22 whistle is the deferred passing.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. That if, you know, you're on a -- under a point, under a
25 bend. You know, if not in sight. Now that was years ago, you'd

1 blow them one blast. Now we have radios and, you know, we can
2 make communication, you know, up the river, you know.

3 Q. Would you, if you're northbound --

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. -- and you've got a southbound tow that you're going to meet,
6 would you -- by best practice, would you expect them to be coming
7 to pass you, they would take the bend side of the river?

8 A. It just depends on the vessel.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Now, if I'm -- and I may be out of turn here, but I mean,
11 this is the best I can explain it. If I was southbound with my
12 tow, I'm not giving up my point because I have -- you know, with
13 the tow I have. Now it depends on the -- now if the tow -- I'm
14 just going by with the tow that I push --

15 Q. Right.

16 A. -- that I normally push. I would not give up the -- in
17 certain situations, I would not give up -- especially down here, I
18 would not give up the point, because if I give up the point I
19 catch the eddies. And that's basically anywhere below Baton
20 Rouge. Now up the river in some turns and the channels, yeah, I
21 can meet them or, you know --

22 Q. So southbound with a tow that you normally push, that's
23 talking about this -- this is normally the size tow you push,
24 right?

25 A. Well, this --

1 Q. Thirties, forties?

2 A. Yeah. This boat most of the time -- well, with the river
3 stage right now, 30 barges are our max with the horsepower
4 restrictions --

5 Q. Got you.

6 A. -- in Baton Rouge.

7 Q. Would you expect a tow, let's say, of two barges to hold the
8 point also southbound?

9 A. No, sir.

10 Q. No?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Where would you expect him to be?

13 A. Well, he could maneuver in the bend if he wanted to.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. And it would not, it would not -- I guess you'd say he could
16 run me for a point. Do you know what I'm saying?

17 Q. Yes.

18 A. If I was --

19 Q. Got you. Steer off you is --

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. Is that right?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Is that the right term? Steer off you?

24 A. Well, I guess so. I mean, I'm old school. Usually -- well,
25 I always -- we say use you for a buoy, you know what I'm saying?

1 Q. Okay. You said when you came up, when you came up on the
2 bridge I think you said you looked back and saw the ship coming?

3 A. No. Well -- no.

4 Q. After he told you --

5 A. Well --

6 Q. Go ahead. I'm sorry. Tell me.

7 A. The first thing I seen was the port string, and then, you
8 know, when I was sitting there and -- of course, I picked up the
9 radio to call for help. I wasn't sure if he'd called or not, but
10 he had his hands full, so that's -- normally in a situation that
11 I've been in before and I've had other pilots, if I was in that
12 situation, that was what they would do. They would pick up the
13 radio and kind of help, call for help or -- and that's what I did.

14 Q. Yes, sir.

15 A. And then I looked, you know, then I looked around and I seen
16 the ship coming up on the starboard stern.

17 Q. Okay. So you didn't see the ship, like, behind you?

18 A. No, sir.

19 Q. You saw it on your, like, your starboard quarter or --

20 A. Right.

21 Q. -- or midship, something like that --

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. -- coming by you?

24 A. Yes, sir. I don't know if it was midship. It was --

25 Q. Well, close.

1 A. -- probably the starboard corner, you know, of the stern.

2 Q. Got you.

3 A. You know.

4 Q. And in your perspective, I know a lot of things were going on
5 at the time, but in your perspective of that ship passing you,
6 would you say he was going by you at a relatively slow speed, fast
7 speed? Was he passing you quickly or --

8 A. Well, I guess he was running as slow at the time as he could
9 to keep steerage up.

10 Q. Okay. Okay. Well --

11 A. I would think he would have been.

12 Q. Okay. One final question, when you come up on the bridge do
13 you do a quick scope and scan to see -- well, of course you're
14 looking at the breakaway and everything that's happening, you're
15 listening to it and your pilot, but do you get a feel of where you
16 might be as far as located in the river, middle -- excuse me.

17 MR. [REDACTED] Yes?

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can you clarify bridge as in fixed
19 structure or pilothouse?

20 MR. THORPE: Pilothouse.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I was just making sure. You said come
22 up on the bridge.

23 BY MR. [REDACTED]

24 Q. When you go up on the bridge of the pilothouse --

25 A. Pilothouse.

1 Q. Okay. Did you get a perspective of where you might be
2 situated in the river?

3 A. At first I didn't because, you know, I didn't really look at
4 the radars, you know.

5 Q. So you're not certain if you were favoring the middle or
6 the --

7 A. No.

8 Q. -- starboard --

9 A. No, sir, not at the time.

10 Q. -- left descending bank?

11 A. Not at the time, I didn't.

12 Q. Okay. Do you feel like there was ample room for that ship to
13 come by you on that side?

14 A. At this -- I don't know. That's just -- that would be a
15 judgment call.

16 Q. Got you.

17 A. And --

18 Q. And you've pretty much answered that.

19 A. Right.

20 Q. Okay. Thank you very much.

21 A. You're welcome.

22 MR. [REDACTED] I appreciate it. No further questions.

23 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. Well --

24 MR. KARR: Whoop.

25 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Oh, I'm sorry. Mike?

1 BY MR. KARR:

2 Q. Well, I've got -- back to the rules of the road. When you
3 were talking about the southbound vessel having a right of way --

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. -- is there any behavior that that vessel can -- may take or
6 can take?

7 A. You mean to --

8 Q. Well, like if they've got the right of way, are they supposed
9 to hold their course and speed?

10 A. I would think so to make -- once the -- in my experience,
11 once I make passing signals, you know, and when you get to a
12 certain point you're supposed to give way or the northbounder's
13 supposed to stay out of your way, but you're also, once you're to
14 a certain point, you know, you have to give way to him, too, to
15 make sure you pass with plenty of room. But yes, I mean, I would
16 think you would maintain your certain speed or should.

17 Q. Well, but is that in the rules of the road, is that common --
18 I mean, do you do that when you're southbound and you make a
19 passing arrangement?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. And you're coming around a bend?

22 A. Yes, sir. I keep my same speed and, like I said, try to -- I
23 give him as much room as I can, but also keep my tow under
24 control, you know, in wherever we're at, because each bend's
25 different.

1 Q. All right. Well, and based on your experience, if you're
2 that stand-on vessel just -- based on your experience, every time
3 you are in a situation like that, do you have to do an evaluation
4 to double-check the northbound guy?

5 A. Yes, sir. I generally do. I mean, you can -- well, used to
6 all we had was radar but now we have the chart, the AIS, which is
7 a big help. And, you know, I can kind of tell. I can sort of
8 tell, you know, if he's changing his position or holding. Same
9 way with the speed, you know? But no, southbound I ought to hold
10 my position and my -- maintain my speed and, like I said, give him
11 as much room but also make sure I have enough room to pass safely.

12 Q. Yeah. When that's done, is that done by your -- let me see,
13 is there any electronic tool that can help you calculate that or
14 is there a -- it's your experience?

15 A. Well, I mean, you could -- the chart helps a little bit, but
16 mostly it's by my, you know, experience. I mean, in -- I mean,
17 all of that up there, our electronics is tools that we use and, I
18 mean, you can -- you know, the radar can tell you that and the AIS
19 on the chart can tell you that.

20 Q. Can tell you what?

21 A. That about if you're -- you know, about the meeting, if
22 you're going to clear or --

23 Q. The closest point of approach?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. All right.

1 A. And or course your eyesight. I mean, physically stuff like
2 that.

3 Q. All right, thank you.

4 A. I mean, I don't rely on, I don't rely on -- I use everything
5 at my disposal. I mean, the company gives us the tools we need,
6 you know, and it's up to us to use them, you know, for what we do.

7 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. [REDACTED]

8 BY MR. [REDACTED]

9 Q. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard. Promise this is it. So I'm
10 going to give us a situation where north or south, doesn't matter.
11 Anyway, passing agreements -- passing arrangements have been made
12 and agreed upon by both vessels, both captains.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. In the event that either vessel feels that the arrangements
15 aren't -- they aren't developing --

16 A. Right.

17 Q. -- or that the situation is starting to deteriorate, can
18 either vessel or does either vessel normally contact the other and
19 say, hey, not looking good or --

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. -- hey, do something different or hey --

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. That's an option?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Have you ever done any --

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Yeah? Common or rare?

3 A. Well, it's not as common always, and it doesn't happen
4 always, but it has happened, you know. And especially down here
5 sometimes it's -- because I mean it's you got line boats to watch
6 out for, you've got ships to watch out for, you've got fleeting
7 vessels to watch out for, and, you know, the -- oh, I call them
8 ship boats. I don't know the proper name of them at all, but, you
9 know -- because, I mean, you -- somebody's liable to turn around
10 or top off a tow or a fleet right in front of you before you know
11 it. You know what I'm saying? So you have to, you have to be
12 diligent, especially down here. Now once you get above Baton
13 Rouge, it's not as common.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I mean, I mean, we still have the amount of traffic -- well,
16 the traffic's bad up there, but it's not -- you take the ships out
17 of the equation --

18 Q. Right.

19 A. -- above Baton Rouge.

20 Q. Got you.

21 A. So that was -- that's one thing.

22 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you. I promised. Thank you very
23 much. I appreciate that.

24 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. I think we're done here, so let's stop
25 recording at 3:20 --

1 MR. FLOTTE: Excuse me.

2 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Oh.

3 MR. FLOTTE: I think I need to clarify a point. May I?

4 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Sure.

5 MR. FLOTTE: Sure.

6 MR. FLOTTE: I think that --

7 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Your name?

8 BY MR. FLOTTE:

9 Q. Yeah, this is David Flotte. I just wanted to clarify a
10 point. The NTSB was asking you some questions about rules of the
11 road.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. And I think you had said that the -- when there's contact
14 between two vessels, the downbound has the right of way.

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. As a result of the downbound having the right of way, they
17 get the right to have the final say as to whether it's a one
18 whistle meeting, a two whistle meeting --

19 A. Right.

20 Q. -- or something else.

21 A. Right. Unless he gives up his -- unless he says it doesn't
22 matter, and when he --

23 Q. Listen to my question.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. I'm not asking -- you know, I'm asking you to assume that

1 they have a one whistle or a two whistle; it doesn't matter.

2 A. Right.

3 Q. But he's got his say-so as to which it is, correct, if he's
4 downbound?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. Now, you were asked some questions by NTSB about rules of the
7 road and there was -- questions were asked about maintaining
8 course and speed. Do you remember that?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Okay. So in a river, if you're required to maintain your
11 course and speed and the river turns, do you drive your tow into
12 the bank?

13 A. So --

14 Q. I just want to clarify that. When you were saying maintain
15 course and speed, you're saying maintain your position relative to
16 the passing agreement or --

17 A. Yes, sir. That's what I was talking about, the --

18 Q. Okay, but I'm --

19 A. -- passing --

20 Q. When you're giving a recorded statement and you say maintain
21 course and speed, what does that mean to you?

22 A. It means if you're pointing at the bank, you're going to hit
23 the bank or --

24 Q. So that's not really what the practice is, correct?

25 A. Right.

1 Q. The practice, and I'm just trying to make sure that the
2 record's clear.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. I know you know what you do.

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. But I'm not sure what you say is what -- you said that. So
7 I'm just trying to make sure --

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. -- you clarify. Can you clarify that for me?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Whatever (indiscernible), please?

12 A. Yeah, that's right. When I meant maintain course and speed,
13 I meant to -- the course, I guess --

14 Q. Let me try to help with that.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Do you steer by compass?

17 A. No. No, sir.

18 Q. All right. So what's more important, the compass heading or
19 where the potential --

20 A. Oh, well, no. In the river a compass heading is not very --

21 Q. Okay.

22 MR. FRENCH: I guess you could -- sorry to interrupt. Matt.
23 So do you maintain your heading and speed?

24 MR. THORPE: Yeah, that's what I -- that's all right.

25 BY MR. FLOTTE:

1 Q. Okay, and it's heading relative to the current.

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Or the banks?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Okay. So once there is a passing agreement, you talked about
6 when you were downbound with a big tow sometimes you didn't want
7 to give up the point.

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. So if you were pointed toward the bend and you reached a
10 passing agreement where you were going to get the point because
11 you were downbound --

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. -- would you maintain your course and go steer into the bend?
14 If there's an agreement that you were going to get the point?

15 A. Yeah. No.

16 Q. Okay. so at that point the party who initiates the passing
17 agreement, and you might have the right of way if you're
18 downbound, but isn't it -- isn't what you are saying is once a
19 passing agreement is reached, for example, one whistle, each party
20 to that passing agreement should move in the direction to execute
21 the passing agreement regardless of right of way?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 MR. FLOTTE: All right, thanks. That's just what I wanted to
24 clarify.

25 MR. MAHON: And this is Mike Karr. Thanks for the

1 clarification.

2 MSSD2 [REDACTED] All right.

3 MR. FLOTTE: Thank you for the indulgence.

4 MSSD2 [REDACTED] So now we're really going to stop the
5 recording at 3:27. So all right, thank you. I appreciate that
6 David, wonderful insight.

7 (Whereupon, at 3:27 p.m., 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: COLLISION OF THE BARGES PUSHED BY
THE TOWING VESSELS *RC CREPPEL* AND
THE *COOPERATIVE SPIRIT* ON THE
MISSISSIPPI RIVER NEAR LULING,
LOUISIANA, ON JANUARY 26, 2020
Interview of David Thorpe

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20FM012

PLACE: New Orleans, Louisiana

DATE: January 28, 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.

Teresa Holevas
Transcriber