

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: ROSS CREPPEL
Owner, Elite Towing and *RC Creppel*

U.S. Coast Guard Facilities
New Orleans, Louisiana

Friday,
January 31, 2020

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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United States Coast Guard

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I N D E X

| <u>ITEM</u> | <u>PAGE</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Interview of Ross Creppel: | |
| By MSSD2 [REDACTED] | 5 |
| By Mr. [REDACTED] | 15 |
| By MSSD2 [REDACTED] | 26 |
| By Mr. [REDACTED] | 28 |
| By MSSD2 [REDACTED] | 32 |
| By Mr. Karr | 33 |
| By Mr. [REDACTED] | 40 |
| By MSSD2 [REDACTED] | 46 |
| By Mr. Karr | 47 |
| By Mr. [REDACTED] | 48 |
| By Mr. Karr | 49 |

I N T E R V I E W

(10:04 a.m.)

1
2
3 MSSD2 [REDACTED] So it is Friday, January 31st at 10:04.

4 So for the recording device, Ross, can you go ahead and say
5 your name and spell it, and then I'm going to go around to you
6 gentlemen as well and we'll all -- you don't have to spell your
7 names, but just state who you are or your role, and we'll all go
8 around the table. So actually I'll start and we'll end up with
9 Ross. Okay?

10 So [REDACTED] [REDACTED] lead investigator, Sector Coast Guard --
11 Sector New Orleans Coast Guard.

12 MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard INCOE.

13 MR. KARR: Mike Karr with the National Transportation Safety
14 Board.

15 LTJG [REDACTED] Lieutenant JG [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Assisting IO with
16 Sector New Orleans Coast Guard.

17 MR. DUNCAN: Chip Duncan, also known as Elton F. Duncan, III.
18 I'm here on behalf of Elite Towing and their insurance company.

19 MR. MCMAHON: Mike McMahon with Daigle Fisse & Kessenich co-
20 counsel for Elite Towing.

21 MR. CREPPEL: Ross Creppel, owner of the *RC Creppel*. My name
22 is spelled R-o-s-s, C-r-e-p-p-e-l.

23 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay, awesome. Okay, so any questions? Do
24 any of you guys have any questions before we start? Are you okay?
25 All right.

1 INTERVIEW OF ROSS CREPPEL

2 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

3 Q. So all right, Ross, so how long have you owned Elite Towing?

4 A. Elite Towing since 1985.

5 Q. '85, okay. And what did you do prior to owning Elite Towing?
6 Did you have other ventures or --7 A. I worked in different areas, but, I mean, I started in the
8 tugboat business with my dad when I was 18 years old. That was in
9 1973. And I worked on the towboats for him off and on for 15, 16
10 years.11 Q. What is -- did you start Elite Towing from conception or was
12 that your dad's company or anything like that?

13 A. No, we started it from conception.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. A guy named Willie Rogers offered the company, the business
16 to my dad in 1984, I guess it was, and my dad didn't want o be
17 involved in the towboat business anymore so he asked me and my
18 brother if we wanted to do it. So we met with Willie Rogers, said
19 sure, be glad to buy your boat and take over the business. So in
20 May of 1985, we set a corporation up and we've been the owner of
21 that since.22 Q. Okay. And over -- since '85, since May of '85, have you --
23 did you start with one tugboat and acquire more? Did you -- what
24 did you do?

25 A. We started with one tugboat until 2012, when we had the RC

1 built. That's when we just added an extra boat because they
2 needed another boat to run to Chevron in Pascagoula.

3 Q. Okay. So from '85 to '12 you --

4 A. We only had one boat.

5 Q. -- just had one boat.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. And is that still in operation at this point?

8 A. Yes. It's still in operation.

9 Q. What was the name of that boat?

10 A. The *Sonny Cook*, S-o-n-n-y C-o-o-k.

11 Q. Okay. Awesome. And then so you had the *RC Creppel* built in
12 2012 specifically for just the Chevron route or run?

13 A. Well, I had a boat that (indiscernible) already working for
14 me for about 3 years, and then we decided to buy our own boat,
15 build our own boat and put it on the contract.

16 Q. Okay, cool. All right. So let's -- how many -- so you had
17 (indiscernible) and you had two vessels. Did you -- what was your
18 normal crew for both the vessels -- well, how did that work? How
19 did you hire people? What's your --

20 A. Normal crew was four-person crewmembers: two wheelmen and
21 two deckhands on a boat.

22 Q. All right. And so -- and is this for the *Creppel* or is this
23 for both of them?

24 A. Both boats.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. RC Creppel and Sonny Cook.

2 Q. Okay. Now would the crews interchange boats or did they
3 stick with one boat?

4 A. No, they stuck with one boat.

5 Q. Okay. Okay. So, and I don't have this on me exactly, but
6 the names of the crew? I believe it was Lester --

7 A. Yeah, Shawn Pucheu was the captain. Lester Naquin, Jr. was
8 relief captain.

9 Q. Wait. Hold on.

10 A. Oh, all right.

11 Q. Shawn who? Pucheu?

12 A. Pucheu, P-u-c-h-e-u. And Shawn is S-h-a-w-n.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Lester Naquin, Jr., relief captain. Nathan Dugan, deckhand.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mason who?

16 MR. CREPPEL: Dugan, D-u-g-a-n.

17 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

18 Q. And it's Nathan.

19 A. Mason.

20 Q. No, it's Nathan.

21 A. Nathan. I'm sorry, N-a-t-h-a-n.

22 Q. Nathan Dugan?

23 A. Yes, Dugan, D-u-g-a-n. And Matthew, M-a-t-t-h-e-w, Brigalia,
24 B-r-i-g-a-l-i-a. I'm sorry.

25 Q. And I think I have all this information.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. I do have it. So I'm just --

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

4 MSSD2 [REDACTED] No, no, no. No, I'm -- that was my -- I
5 should have come a little better prepared. So I apologize for
6 that.

7 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

8 Q. But -- okay. And I know we had discussed before, but I
9 believe Lester and Shawn had been with you for about 6 or 7 years?

10 A. Shawn has been with me since the boat came out in 2012. But
11 Shawn also worked, when he started out, as a deckhand. He came to
12 work for me in probably '90, '91? Stayed on a boat for maybe 10,
13 12 years as a deckhand, got his license, worked for me for a few
14 years, then he went to Stone and worked for them. And we got the
15 new boat and he wanted to come back to work for me.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. So I've been knowing Shawn since he was probably 17 years
18 old.

19 Q. Oh, wow. Okay. And --

20 A. And Lester Naquin, Jr., he started in December of '18. His
21 dad works for me on the *Sonny Cook* and his dad's been with me for
22 35 years.

23 Q. So the dad is the captain on the --

24 A. On the *Sonny Cook*.

25 Q. -- *Sonny Cook*?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Thirty-five years. Wow, that's almost since you started
3 here --

4 A. Yeah, since -- he came with the boat. When we bought the
5 boat, he was the captain on -- well, one of the captains on the
6 boat.

7 Q. Wow, crazy. All right. Now, from your understanding, do you
8 know who was at the helm at the time of the incident?

9 A. Well, at that particular time Lester Naquin should have been
10 on watch.

11 Q. Was he oncoming or offgoing?

12 A. He was offgoing. Yeah, he came on at -- should have come on
13 at midnight, that Saturday night, midnight. And then Sunday
14 morning should have been getting off around 5:30, 6 o'clock.

15 Q. And normally how -- so they have watches, I assume?

16 A. Have a 6-hour watches.

17 Q. And so Shawn would have come up to been relieving him at some
18 point.

19 A. Yeah, usually between 5:30, 6 o'clock they relieve each
20 other.

21 Q. Okay. So Lester's been with you a little less than 2 years
22 or about 2 years?

23 A. No, about a year, a year and -- a little over a year.

24 Q. A little over a year. Okay.

25 A. Yeah, because it was 2018. Right.

1 Q. So you know his previous experience?

2 A. Yes. He worked for Blessey. He worked for Sittoon (ph.) and
3 he worked for Enterprise.

4 Q. Okay. And about how long? Like so when you -- do you know
5 how long he's been a captain or --

6 A. Not exactly, no. I don't know how long he's been.

7 Q. If you had to approximate?

8 A. About 10 -- at least 10 years, I would say, or longer.

9 Q. Okay. And when he worked for Blessey and these other
10 companies, was this all on the Mississippi River? His work
11 experience --

12 A. Mississippi and Inland -- Intracoastal canal, yeah.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah, he was on that run for us for over a year, so the same
15 run that was Baton Rouge to Chevron Pascagoula.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. When -- so how did you come to the decision to
17 hire Lester back in December of '18? Like what was -- you just
18 needed another captain?

19 A. No. Our guys wanted to spend more time at home so they
20 wanted to go -- the wheelmen wanted to go to a 14 and 14 schedule,
21 14 days on, 14 days off. So we hired another captain. So we had
22 four -- had two captains and two relief captains, however you want
23 to put it, but -- so two guys work on the boat for 2 weeks and
24 they home for 2 weeks. Other two guys on for 2 weeks, then they
25 get off for 2 weeks.

1 Q. Okay. So you had four crew changes?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. So you had a total of four captains or --

4 A. Yeah, four captains and --

5 Q. -- pilots?

6 A -- total of three deckhands. Deckhands still work the 14 and
7 7 shift.

8 Q. Okay. So when you go to hire Lester is there an interview
9 process that you go through when you -- how do you determine
10 like, okay, Lester's the guy I want, you know, to be working for
11 me? What's -- is there anything --

12 A. Well, more it was recommended from his dad.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. You know, but then I interviewed him and, you know, he
15 qualified for our needs.

16 Q. Okay. And so the dad is the captain on that *Sonny Cook*.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. So you had intimate knowledge and personal relationship,
19 obviously --

20 A. Right.

21 Q. So -- okay. Okay. And over the year or so that he's worked
22 for you, have you ever had any issues or anything with Lester
23 that, whether work-related or anything that would have you
24 question some of his -- anything, I guess?

25 A. No, I had not. I mean, he had one incident, but I -- it

1 wasn't a -- it was a minor incident. But anything else was, he
2 was really capable of doing his job.

3 Q. Okay. And what type of incident? Like a disciplinary type
4 or was it --

5 A. No, an accident, a minor allision at around Darrow Fleet.
6 The river was shut down temporarily and he was backing up to hold
7 up, and they had a tow on the east bank side that was sitting
8 there for tug service. And the barges just drifted into a tow,
9 did some minor damage to one of the barges. That's the only
10 incident.

11 Q. Yeah. Okay. And do you happen to know if prior to hiring
12 him if he had had any other incidents? Is that part of the hiring
13 process that you would --

14 A. Part of the process, yeah. No, he never mentioned any, no.

15 Q. Now Shawn, he's been with you a bit longer, right, since
16 2012, I believe since the boat?

17 A. Well, since -- yeah, the new boat.

18 Q. Since the new boat.

19 A. Right.

20 Q. Okay. Similar questions, you know, when -- so he worked for
21 you since -- you've known him since he was 17?

22 A. Right.

23 Q. So you kind of knew his early history. He was -- worked for
24 Stone for a while then he came back to you. Had you -- is there
25 anything that -- disciplinary or any incidents that occurred that

1 you're aware of?

2 A. No, don't have any problems with anything. No disciplinary
3 action, no -- he never had an accident with me.

4 Q. Okay. And do you happen to know about how long he was a
5 licensed pilot or captain?

6 A. Approximately about 15 to 20 years, I guess.

7 Q. Okay. Okay.

8 A. But I don't know for sure. I know I can look that up on
9 his --

10 Q. Right.

11 A. -- license and find out --

12 Q. No. No --

13 A. -- the issue. They don't put that on the license anymore,
14 how many issues you have. They used to do that.

15 Q. Yes. And it depends what the issue is. So but -- okay. So
16 and then Matthew the deckhand. He's been with you for about a
17 year I believe?

18 A. Yeah, a little over a year.

19 Q. Okay. And just for everybody to know, Nathan, the deckhand
20 who survived this incident, he's been how long?

21 A. He's -- approximately 6 years.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Started 2014.

24 Q. Okay. Okay. So what I'd like to try and ask or just see --
25 now do you yourself ever get out on the water and get behind the

1 sticks or anything on any of your vessels?

2 A. I used to, but I let my license expire.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Because I didn't think I had to do it anymore.

5 Q. So about how --

6 A. And I didn't want to do it anymore.

7 Q. How long ago did you -- when did it expire? I mean, I can
8 look it up.

9 A. I'm guessing in 2001 or 2000.

10 Q. So a little bit.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yeah. But, yeah, I used to run the boats. I mean, I ran the
14 boats with my dad. I ran the *Sonny Cook* for a while and then off
15 and on. I just never did run the RC because I didn't have my
16 license.

17 Q. Okay. So as the owner of these boats -- we'll just say the
18 *RC Creppel*, is there -- what kind of procedures are there in
19 place? Do you have like an SMS, a safety management --

20 A. Yes. We have a safety management. We are AWO, RCP
21 certified. We are SIRE'd by the oil companies. That's the only
22 ones at their docks, to be SIRE'd by them, and they are pretty
23 strict.

24 Q. Right.

25 A. We also Subchapter M, COI, M COI.

1 Q. Okay, good. So you're fully in compliance.

2 A. Fully compliant, yeah.

3 Q. Good. So within your SMS, and I can't recall -- I can't
4 recall if I asked you or not, but within your SMS is there
5 arrangements, passing arrangement protocols that are within your
6 SMS procedures?

7 A. I would have to look that up. I'm -- offhand I wouldn't
8 know.

9 Q. Okay. Is that something that's available in your office on a
10 disk or just a hard copy or something?

11 A. I would have a book on it, you know, folded up with all
12 the --

13 Q. Okay. All right.

14 A. -- regulations and the stuff that we need.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And I have them, copies on the boat also.

17 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Do you guys want to -- are there any questions
18 and then you can --

19 BY MR. [REDACTED]

20 Q. Sure. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard INCOE. Once again, I
21 want to share our condolences to you for your loss. I know it's
22 been a terrible thing for you and your company and your
23 families --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- to deal with -- dealt with. So thank you for your time.

1 I'd like to know do you have employee records? Did you guys
2 happen to bring any copies of employee records?

3 MR. DUNCAN: No, we didn't.

4 MR. CREPPEL: No.

5 BY MR. [REDACTED]

6 Q. Do you have those that you'll be able to provide us with?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay, good. what about any type of training records? Did
9 you have any prescribed training that's performed that's by the
10 company --

11 A. As far as --

12 Q. -- for the crews or the crew training --

13 A. For training as far as we have weekly training of -- we have
14 weekly meetings, safety meetings on the boat.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. I have records of most of that stuff.

17 Q. You do? Okay, because they'd provide you with an audit
18 sheet, I guess?

19 A. Yeah, a sheet -- right.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah, they send me a copy.

22 Q. Okay, good deal. In hiring a new hire, do you have anything
23 in place where you go through a pre-employment checkout? I'm not
24 talking physical, drug screen. I'm talking about where you check
25 out their experience and someone evaluates that experience?

1 A. I do, but I just usually call, you know, the people that they
2 worked for before and find out --

3 Q. Prior employers?

4 A. Prior employ.

5 Q. Okay, all right. No physical-type ride with these guys and
6 see how you do and --

7 A. No.

8 Q. -- someone will get back to you? Nothing --

9 A. No.

10 Q. -- according to that? Okay. All right. Safety, you pretty
11 much told us that you have safety meetings on board the vessel.
12 Who conducts those safety meetings?

13 A. The captain of the boat.

14 Q. The captain of the boat would? Okay. Now the captain or any
15 wheelman that would be up at the time?

16 A. At the time, yes.

17 Q. So could a relief captain --

18 A. A captain or a relief captain can do it also.

19 Q. -- he could do it? Okay, got you. Okay. You talked a bit
20 about the SMS that you have in place for the company. Most
21 operators, company operators and boatmen, one of the special
22 circumstances certainly that is a great consideration and concern
23 for us is high water conditions, right?

24 A. Right.

25 Q. Do you have anything in place that addressed or spoke about

1 high water condition operations, maybe what you didn't want your
2 vessels to do or what you would expect them to do in high water
3 situations?

4 A. Well, I know we get Notice to Mariners and let them know,
5 notify them of the high water, but I'd have to check my SMS.

6 Q. Okay. But no specific directives, I don't want you guys
7 doing certain things in high water?

8 A. No, not usually, because of the size of the boat and the size
9 of the tows we push, it's usually not that dangerous for them. I
10 mean, it's dangerous anyway, but it's not --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. We have a lot of power control. We usually -- we only
13 usually push two barges and most of them's, you know, smaller
14 barges not big tank barges.

15 Q. Do you have anything in place real specific, meaning like I
16 don't want you doing any downstream landings in fleets in high
17 water conditions?

18 A. I'd have to look at the manual and see.

19 Q. All right. The contract that you had that's dedicated or
20 that that boat is dedicated to, right -- you have one contract
21 she's dedicated to --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. -- which is working for Chevron?

24 A. No, we're working for Eco Services.

25 Q. What was it?

1 A. So it's E-c-o.

2 Q. What is it?

3 A. E-c-o, just Eco Services.

4 Q. E-c-o, okay. And certainly not the financial parts, but what
5 were the working components of that contract that you have with
6 them? Do you -- as far as what do you do and what you handle?

7 A. I mean, they just hire me to run and operate them barges
8 where they need to go to Baton Rouge, Chevron, Houston, Lake
9 Charles.

10 Q. Okay. And is it, is it ever -- or is it always the same type
11 of barges?

12 A. It's always tank barges, sulfuric acid barges.

13 Q. Red flags? Okay.

14 A. Yes, red flags, but they they have different size barges.
15 They're not all the same size.

16 Q. Okay. And would you always be operating with loads, empties,
17 combinations?

18 A. Combinations.

19 Q. Combination. And what size tows would you normally push
20 (indiscernible)?

21 A. Normally, like I said, it varies on the customer, how much
22 acid they need and how much acid they can -- spent acid they can
23 send back. But usually it's one barge, sometimes its two.

24 Q. What's the most that you would push for them at any one time
25 on a tow?

1 A. Two.

2 Q. Two at a time?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Okay. Talking a little bit about the crew you have assigned
5 to that boat, you have two captains, two relief captains, right --

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. -- three deckhands?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Right? So the same two -- the captains --

10 MR. KARR: Excuse me.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Yes.

12 MR. KARR: Did you say three deckhands?

13 MR. CREPPEL: Yeah.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Yep.

15 MR. KARR: Okay.

16 MR. [REDACTED] Well, assigned to that boat, not working at the
17 same time on that boat, but there should be 3 assigned to it, 14
18 and 7 would dictate that.

19 MR. KARR: Right. That's right, okay.

20 BY MR. [REDACTED]

21 Q. Okay. All right. So two captains and two relief captains.
22 Do the same captain and relief captain always work the same
23 shifts?

24 A. Same off -- yeah.

25 Q. They do?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. And how long had Captain -- right, Shawn --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- Pucheu, he's the captain? How long had he and Lester been
5 working together on the *RC Creppel*?

6 A. That whole year that Lester been there.

7 Q. The entire year?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. All right. Now, when it's a full complement, right,
10 captain, relief captain, two deckhands --

11 A. Right.

12 Q. -- for a shift, is there or who would serve as engineer or be
13 responsible for the engine room?

14 A. The deckhands.

15 Q. Both deckhands?

16 A. Both, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. And what are their responsibilities for the engine
18 room?

19 A. Just to make sure no leaks, make sure no -- change oil,
20 everything's running okay, checking the gauges, the pressure
21 gauges. Pretty much that's it.

22 Q. Okay. And if they ever came in a situation where, let's say,
23 there was a problem, a faulty steering or engine problem, would
24 they -- how -- what would they do? What would be their
25 responsibility to do in that case?

1 A. Well, if they was having trouble operating the boat, they
2 would pull it or dock it and --

3 Q. No, no, I'm sorry.

4 A. Oh.

5 Q. Let me rephrase that. If the deckhand that was serving as
6 the engineer, if he detected something in the engine room --

7 A. Oh, he would report it to the captain.

8 Q. He'd report it to the captain.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. And what type of training does the deckhand have or
11 qualifications to perform engineering duties?

12 A. None.

13 Q. Okay. So what does -- how does he get trained then to --

14 A. Just from being on the boat and knowing what the captain
15 knows. One of the captains that's on a boat was a diesel
16 mechanic.

17 Q. Okay, all right. So he would share his information.

18 A. Information, yes.

19 Q. Got you. Okay. Elite Towing and Creppel Towing, is that one
20 and the same?

21 A. No. We don't have a Creppel Towing.

22 Q. So there is no Creppel Towing. I assumed that. So is that
23 -- what can I say, man, it's a towboat. So it's -- the company
24 name is Elite --

25 A. Elite Towing, right.

1 Q. I got you. Okay.

2 A. Elite Towing, yes.

3 Q. All right. And you operate two vessels --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- right? And only because I truly haven't looked at it, but
6 what is the rated horsepower of the -- was of the *RC Creppel*?

7 A. 2,000.

8 Q. 2,000 was the rated? Was that her actual rate of power?

9 A. Well, I don't know if we ever tested it, but I mean that's
10 what it's rated for on a boat with the engines that we had in
11 there.

12 Q. Okay. And what type of engines did she have?

13 A. Cummings K38.

14 Q. Steering component, what type of steering was she using?

15 A. We had follow-up and non-follow-up steering.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And we had pumps in case one would go out, the other one
18 could be turned on.

19 Q. Okay. In recent time -- well, she's only been since 2012.
20 Throughout that time when she was built to when you had her and
21 you put her in service, was there ever any issues or any major
22 maintenance that had to be done on steering?

23 A. Just some minor maintenance on steering, nothing major.

24 Q. Minor as to how?

25 A. As in maybe rudder indicators were off with the steering,

1 maybe that they changed some kind of switch that, you know,
2 indicates where the rudder was or -- I mean, I'd have to look back
3 in my records and see.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. But nothing recently.

6 Q. Okay. Engines, anything major going on with the engines --

7 A. No.

8 Q. -- over this period of time that you've noted? No.

9 A. No, not in the last few years, nothing. Nothing.

10 Q. Would you happen to have photographs of the vessel itself,
11 inside, outside, and all the components that you'd have inside to
12 navigational purposes?

13 A. I don't know. I don't think so, but I could check.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Okay, if so, could you all provide that to
15 us?

16 MR. DUNCAN: Sure.

17 MR. CREPPEL: I mean, I have a spec sheet on the boat that
18 had all that stuff (indiscernible) pictures.

19 BUT MR. [REDACTED]

20 Q. Got you. What type of face wires?

21 A. Spectra.

22 Q. What type of winch systems did you have on board?

23 A. We had the Spectra line face wire.

24 Q. Spectra line?

25 A. Yeah.

- 1 Q. Okay.
- 2 A. And you said winches?
- 3 Q. Yeah, the face wire winches.
- 4 A. The electric winches, I'm pretty sure it was Patterson
- 5 winches.
- 6 Q. Pattersons?
- 7 A. Yeah.
- 8 Q. Okay. And those could be --
- 9 A. I could be wrong, but --
- 10 Q. I'm sorry?
- 11 A. I said I could be wrong. They could have been
- 12 (indiscernible), but I'm pretty sure they were Pattersons.
- 13 Q. Okay.
- 14 A. I can double-check.
- 15 Q. And those would have been operated from where?
- 16 A. From the wheelhouse all on a deck.
- 17 Q. Okay. And any type of maintenance or issues with any of that
- 18 stuff in recent time?
- 19 A. No.
- 20 Q. Winches, face wires, nothing?
- 21 A. No, nothing.
- 22 Q. Who normally would do the purchase request for anything
- 23 needed for the vessel?
- 24 A. The captain on the boat. Any one of the captains.
- 25 Q. Any one of the captains would handle --

1 A. Yeah, both.

2 Q. -- that? Okay.

3 A. They would call me and then tell me what they needed and I'd
4 get calling.

5 Q. Okay. You would have got it, have to take care of it. Okay.
6 So you were receiving.

7 A. Um-hum.

8 Q. Got you.

9 MR. [REDACTED] Right now I don't have anything further. Not
10 right now, thank you.

11 MR. CREPPEL: Okay.

12 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

13 Q. I have -- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] -- I had one question because we were
14 talking, and regarding SMS I think you had mentioned the MSIBs or
15 things that the Coast Guard would give out. Were you familiar
16 with any MSIBs that had recently come out regarding high water or
17 any of those? And how would have your captains --

18 A. He would have got it from the computer.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Anything from, you know, the Coast Guard the navigation or
21 Grenafa (ph.). I'm with Grenafa also and they send out, you know,
22 high water restrictions or high water, you know, levels and tell
23 you, you know, just to be careful what you're doing.

24 Q. So from what you know regarding your captains, do you follow
25 the MSIB recommendations during high water? Do you direct them to

1 do so or do they -- do you know if they do so?

2 A. I would have to -- I mean, we can't ask them, but I'd have to
3 ask my other guys.

4 Q. And I guess I'm trying to ask specifically more of the lower
5 deck, first deck doors, would they be open during transit? Or do
6 you know what kind of practice they used?

7 A. The practice is doors are closed while transiting.

8 Q. All lower deck doors?

9 A. All lower deck doors are supposed to be closed while
10 transiting, yeah.

11 Q. So they had recently departed, I believe, St. Rose?

12 A. Off of St. Rose it would be, yes.

13 Q. And --

14 A. I'm thinking 5:10 according to the fleet report that I got
15 from the dispatcher that shows what time they left with the barge
16 -- barges.

17 Q. You said 5 to 10 minutes?

18 A. 5:10, I think it was.

19 Q. Oh, oh, oh, 5:10.

20 A. Exactly.

21 Q. Departed at 5:10. Got you.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. Okay. And when they were at St. Rose, they just
24 picked up the empty, I believe, correct?

25 A. Right. Correct.

1 Q. The empty sulfur --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And I guess as of now I don't know, but so the practice is to
4 keep the doors closed while in transit.

5 A. Yes.

6 MSSD2 [REDACTED] That's it. Thank you.

7 BY MR. [REDACTED]

8 Q. A couple of follow-up for you.

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard, INCOE. Can you tell me -- can you
11 tell us what kind of equipment was on the bridge, for instance,
12 VHF radios, radars?

13 A. We have two Furuno radars. We have the Rose Point navigation
14 system.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. AIS. There's two or three VHF radios on it, two for sure.

17 Q. Two VHF's?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay. How about -- well, is there any type of motion
20 detection alarm in the --

21 A. Yeah, an incapacitated alarm.

22 Q. Yeah. You have that up there as well?

23 A. I've got that, yes.

24 Q. Okay. Spotlights? Do you have --

25 A. Two spotlights.

1 Q. Two?

2 A. Yeah. One Xenon, one incandescent.

3 Q. Okay. One to see and one to cook with, huh? That Xenon --

4 A. Pretty much.

5 Q. Got you. Okay. What about an internal or external intercom
6 system?

7 A. Yes, we had one of those.

8 Q. You had one of those as well a PA system?

9 A. A PA system, um-hum.

10 Q. And on a daily basis, normal operations, who is responsible
11 or do you have a system set up that your boats check in with you
12 every day?

13 A. Yes. I call them every day.

14 Q. You call them?

15 A. I call them in the morning.

16 Q. About what time?

17 A. About 7:30, between 7 and 7:30.

18 Q. 7:30 you call?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. And you would speak to who?

21 A. The captain on watch.

22 Q. Okay. All right. And this is done through cell phone?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. All right. And then when would you call again?

25 A. Between 3 and 3:30 in the afternoon.

1 Q. 15 --

2 A. Hundred to 1530, yeah.

3 Q. 1500, 1530. And --

4 A. That's every day during the week. On weekend, I would just
5 call them in the morning.

6 Q. Okay. Okay, got you. And afternoon calls, you're talking
7 again to the captain?

8 A. The relief captain, yeah.

9 Q. The relief captain, second man?

10 A. Second man, yeah.

11 Q. Okay. And typically what's the purpose of the call? What's
12 it about?

13 A. To see if they got any change in orders, see how they coming
14 along at the dock with the barge or where they at, what lock turn
15 are they, just pretty much find out what they're doing.

16 Q. Okay. So the Saturday afternoon -- no, the Saturday morning
17 prior to the incident --

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. -- is that right?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Are we tracking there? Are we good?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. You would have spoken to the boat that morning, right?

24 A. That's correct.

25 Q. Do you recall that conversation that day and what took place?

1 A. Pretty much, yeah. I mean, I asked him where he was, which I
2 kind of knew because I follow them a lot of times on AIS.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. And he was getting up towards Carline Donaldsonville to pick
5 up a barge and bring it to Cooper 207 Fleet.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Drop it off and pick up the loaded barge that going to
8 Chevron.

9 Q. Got you, okay. And he was picking up the loaded barge and
10 going to Chevron. That would have been the loaded one he had in
11 tow --

12 A. That's correct.

13 Q. -- Sunday morning?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And where did he get the empty from?

16 A. He took an empty out of St. Rose.

17 Q. Okay. So he stopped at St. Rose, picked up the --

18 A. Stopped it up at St. Rose, picked up on the way down.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. That was -- I mean, I don't have the exact times. I didn't
21 talk to them anymore.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. I mean, I can get it from the fleet, but it was sometime late
24 that night they stopped. They had to wait for tug service.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. The fleet was busy. They picked up the empty, I think
2 between 4 and 5:10 that morning.

3 Q. Got you. Okay.

4 A. And that's when they got underway heading southbound.

5 Q. And who did you speak to that Saturday morning when you
6 talked to them?

7 A. Shawn.

8 Q. You spoke to Shawn.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. And how did Shawn -- I mean, what was -- was there anything
11 that sounded different to you in his voice or his --

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- you know, temperament or anything?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Everything was good.

16 A. Good morning, Rosco, how you doing? What's going on? I'm
17 just checking in, Shawn.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. See what you all getting to, see if you all picked the barge
20 up.

21 Q. Right. No issues? No problems?

22 A. No issues, no problems. Nothing.

23 Q. Okay, got you.

24 MR. [REDACTED] All right. Thank you.

25 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

1 Q. I apologize. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] again. I've got -- as we're
2 talking I'm kind of thinking of stuff that can help us out, too.
3 But you mentioned Rose Point that you have on board the vessel.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Is there any that you're aware of, any backup in the cloud or
6 any information that the vessel may have via, you know, Rose Point
7 or anything else that we would be able to -- that we could
8 retrieve?

9 A. Not that I know of.

10 Q. Okay. I mean, the vessel --

11 A. I mean, I could check if you all want, one of the other
12 captains, see if he knows if it backs up or not, but I don't know.
13 It doesn't as far as I know.

14 Q. That might be something to look into if we can -- obviously
15 the more information we have so --

16 A. Yeah, correct.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: My understanding it's just -- it's
18 specific to the machine, but that's been my experience. There may
19 be exceptions, but --

20 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. That was all I had. Thanks.

21 BY MR. KARR:

22 Q. Mike Karr with the NTSB. And I'll just go back and ask you
23 questions to clarify some of the answers and get some more
24 information about everything you may know about the captains.

25 With the oil companies was there any specific navigation

1 training that you had to do to meet their SIRE requirements? Your
2 crews had -- your captains had?

3 A. Well, I mean, to get the license you have to have radar
4 endorsements, but that's pretty much it. You know, as far as I
5 know no other training.

6 Q. Right. Other than those calls in the morning, did the -- or
7 in the afternoon, did the captains ever call you?

8 A. Yeah, if they had any kind of problems or if they had, you
9 know, hey, the barge is not ready; what do you want me to do? Or,
10 you know, I'm here at the locks, I need something. Anything they
11 needed, yeah, they could call me anytime; 24/7 I was on call.

12 Q. Did they -- can you describe those calls? I mean, were they
13 telling you what they were going to do or were they asking you
14 for --

15 A. Well, they was asking me for orders what to do most of the
16 time or they would tell me they had -- hey, I've got a delay, you
17 know, 2 or 3 hours; you want me to wait for the barge? You know,
18 it depends where we were going and what we were doing if I wanted
19 them to wait or not.

20 Q. All right. Were -- was Shawn, the captain, was he married?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. All right. Currently married?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay, and how about Lester?

25 A. Lester I think was divorced.

1 Q. Do you know if he had a significant other?

2 A. He was living with a girl, yeah.

3 Q. All right. How was the -- what do you know about the health
4 of Shawn -- or let's start with Lester, relief captain. What do
5 you know about the health of Lester?

6 A. He had diabetes.

7 Q. Anything else you can tell us about Lester?

8 A. No, everything else was -- that's all I know about him.

9 Q. All right. Was any -- did you notice any personal issues?
10 Did he talk to you about any personal issues?

11 A. Yeah, about his kids and his -- he calls it baby momma and
12 stuff like, yeah. But he wasn't, as far as I know, having any
13 kind of problems.

14 Q. So to clarify, when he talked about it, he was just talking
15 in general about his kids. Yeah.

16 A. In general. Just talking in general, yeah.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And then how about Shawn, the captain, what do you know about
20 his health?

21 A. His health, Shawn just came up through cancer about 2 years
22 ago.

23 Q. Okay. Well, he came through cancer. Does that mean --

24 A. Yes, he's in remission right now.

25 Q. Right. And if you look at him, would you -- could you tell

1 he had cancer?

2 A. Tell he had cancer? No, you couldn't tell.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. He was, you know, healthy, good shape.

5 Q. All right. Do you know if either of them were taking any
6 medications?

7 A. Yeah, Shawn was on his cancer medicine. I'm not sure what he
8 was taking. And Lester was on his diabetes medicine.

9 Q. All right. And then getting back to Shawn, the captain, did
10 he have any personal issues that you know of?

11 A. No. No.

12 Q. All right. And looking at Lester, the relief captain, how
13 would you describe him as a leader, as a personality? Is he an
14 outgoing person?

15 A. He was an outgoing person, fun-loving guy, talked a lot. You
16 know, joking around a lot, you know, that's about all I can add to
17 that.

18 Q. All right. And the same questions for Shawn.

19 A. Shawn was a little more quiet but he still was -- but he was,
20 you know, tell you how he felt about things and stuff, so --

21 Q. Did Lester ever tell you -- I'm trying to get an idea of the
22 experience of these guys. So did Lester ever tell you about any
23 harrowing experience he's had on the river before --

24 A. No.

25 Q. -- working for you?

1 A. No.

2 Q. How about the same thing with Shawn?

3 A. Shawn? No.

4 Q. The incapacitation alarm, do you know how many minutes that
5 was set for?

6 A. That's not minutes. I think it's seconds, probably like 20,
7 30 seconds. I'm not sure, but I'd have to check on it.

8 Q. Well, do you know, I mean, do you know how that works? I've
9 never heard of one.

10 A. Yeah. If you don't move, nobody moves, you don't have any
11 movement, an alarm goes off. So if you move, you keep on moving
12 around with the sticks and stuff, it's not going to go off. But
13 they, you know, they have it up there if the pilot leaves the
14 wheelhouse and -- or if somebody passes out or, you know, they
15 have it and nobody's moving, then it goes off, set the alarm off.

16 Q. Yeah. I'd like to get -- if you have any technical
17 information on that alarm, I'd like to get it, because I'm used to
18 the one where the fishing boats up in Alaska will be -- you know,
19 so it'll sound every 15 minutes and you have to go hit it.

20 A. Hit it off.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. Turn it off.

23 Q. Yeah. The RC -- for the last year of the *RC Creppel*, out of
24 all the voyages, you know, how many voyages would there have been
25 two barges versus just one?

1 A. Probably half.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And we'd go weekly, maybe once every 10 days make the trip.
4 It just depends on, you know, the lock situation, the dock
5 situation, how we can get in and out of the dock and stuff. And,
6 you know, 10 days to 2 weeks, I mean, but -- the trips, you know.

7 Q. No, I don't know. So what did the trip length have to do
8 with the number of barges that day?

9 A. Well, I explained that earlier. It depends on Chevron, on
10 how low on acid they would be or how full on spent they would be,
11 on how many barges they needed.

12 Q. Roger. Did Lester ever call in sick?

13 A. No, I can't recall.

14 Q. How about Shawn?

15 A. Can't recall, no.

16 Q. Do you recall --

17 A. Except when he found out he had cancer. That was 7, 8 years
18 -- 6, 7 years ago. I can't remember.

19 Q. Yeah, I should have limited it to --

20 A. I can't remember what day it was, but --

21 Q. -- you know, call in sick within the last year or so.

22 A. No.

23 Q. Within the last year.

24 A. In the last year no.

25 Q. All right. I don't have any more specific questions. Well,

1 I do have one more, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. And that is did -- as
2 far as the company training program, did you ever -- did you or
3 the captains ever discuss navigating the Mississippi River and how
4 -- specifically how you should make arrangements for passing?

5 A. Well, I mean, there's nothing formal, but, I mean, it's
6 always talking about it, you know, the river. I mean, if you're
7 out there long enough, you've got to talk about it --

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. -- the dangers of it.

10 Q. Did you ever talk about specifics about passing another --
11 passing large tows?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Did you ever talk about any -- about the bends?

14 A. Oh, yeah.

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. What bends are dangerous, I mean -- yeah, I mean they're all
17 dangerous.

18 Q. Yeah. Well, can you tell -- can you describe any specific
19 dangers that you or the captains mentioned of the bends?

20 A. Oh, just -- I mean, just the eddies you've got to watch for,
21 different eddies in the bends on the points. I mean, if you're
22 out there long enough you know where they are and what's going to
23 happen when you come around them.

24 Q. I'm not a river guy, but can you explain how the eddies
25 occur?

1 A. From under the points, when the current's coming in around
2 the point coming southbound, and it'll work its back up northbound
3 under the point.

4 Q. Under the point. So it --

5 A. Yeah, so it'll push you up. It'll -- you pick up a lot of
6 speed coming up the river if you're right under the point. And
7 then once you come out, when you hit the current, it almost puts
8 you to a stop or it could, you know, make you lose a little
9 control of the tow.

10 Coming down the bends, if you go way deep down the bends you
11 also have eddies working in those bends. There's not too many
12 people can -- you can't go too far down the bend because you'll
13 get set into the bank coming southbound. But northbound you can
14 handle it because you can get your head up.

15 MR. KARR: All right. No more specific questions.

16 MR. [REDACTED] I have some, if you don't mind?

17 BY MR. [REDACTED]

18 Q. [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard, INCOE. Let me ask you this,
19 Captain Creppel. You said you were previously licensed, right?

20 A. That's correct.

21 Q. How long were you licensed for?

22 A. Fifteen, 16 years, maybe 20 -- maybe 20 years. Oh, yeah, 20
23 years.

24 Q. Fifteen to 20 years?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay. Fair enough. And who did you run for? Who did you
2 work for?

3 A. I worked for my dad.

4 Q. You did? Which was who?

5 A. Carl Creppel.

6 Q. Carl Creppel?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay. And what type of tows did you push?

9 A. Oh, we started out in the canal. I just pushed four, five
10 barges linked, five of them strung out on a smaller boat. It was
11 an 800-horsepower boat. Run from New Orleans to Houston, four or
12 five --

13 Q. What would you be pushing? I'm sorry.

14 A. Mixed barges, chemicals --

15 Q. How many?

16 A. Tank barges, four or five.

17 Q. Four or five? Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. After he scuppered that boat, he bought a bigger boat, a 24
21 horsepower -- 2400 horsepower boat. We would just pick up jobs
22 here and there running with two-piece units sometimes, running --
23 sometimes I'd run from New Orleans all the way up to Cincinnati,
24 St. Louis --

25 Q. Wow. Okay.

1 A. -- up to just below Chicago. We'd run with sometime two-
2 piece units, sometimes we'd have four to six regulation barges,
3 tank barges. Got rid of that boat, got another 2400. Worked for
4 George King Company, Wisconsin Barge Line. We would ship barges
5 from the fleets to different elevators. So the most I ever pushed
6 was 21 barges at a time. I had 20 barges northbound, that's low
7 river. High river we'd probably take eight barges at the most.
8 Northbound is all loads, stopping at different elevators from New
9 Orleans to Darrow Fleet.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Come back down south, Darrow Fleet to New Orleans, with
12 empties.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. The most I had with empties was 21 barges with empties.

15 Q. Got you. Okay. So it's safe to say you got quite a bit of
16 experience handling smaller tows and larger tows.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Right?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Over 15 barges --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- and as little as 1 barge?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. All right. So in your career pushing tows, do you
25 ever recall being southbound with one or two barges in dark, at

1 nighttime, southbound with a -- we'll call it, not to be specific
2 footage, but high river condition making 26 Mile Point?

3 A. Just vaguely, vaguely.

4 Q. You've done I before?

5 A. I'm sure I have, yeah.

6 Q. You've done it?

7 A. I mean, I came down probably a bunch of times doing that.

8 Q. Got you. Okay. Have you also had the experience of pushing
9 a 15 to 20 barge tow northbound and making 26 Mile Point with high
10 water conditions?

11 A. High water conditions yes, but not with that many barges, no.

12 Q. Not with 20 -- 15 to 20?

13 A. No, not in high water, no.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Because we couldn't handle that many barges in high water.

16 Q. Your boat couldn't handle it?

17 A. Yeah, my boat couldn't handle it. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I mean, the most we would push in high water would be eight.

20 Q. Got you.

21 A. That would be four long and two wide.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Regulation barges.

24 Q. All right. So based on your experience, okay, and I'm going
25 to reference to southbound, following current, high water

1 conditions, pushing one to two barges.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. And I'm going to ask you, based on your experience with this
4 specific area, which is 26 Mile Point that I'm referencing to,
5 okay, I'm going to ask you just to point -- if you were southbound
6 and you had high water conditions and you were pushing one to two
7 barges, and we'll say one is loaded and we'll say one's empty, can
8 you just point to me -- let me set it up. And you're meeting a
9 large northbound tow, okay?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. And a ship as well coming up. Can you show me with your
12 finger about where you would possibly be to shape up to make this
13 bend, 26 Mile Point, to make this turn --

14 A. Well, I don't know where the whistle -- where I'm going to
15 meet the ship on and the boat. So I'm --

16 Q. Okay. So let's say we're going to assume that you're going
17 to meet them on the one whistle, you've made those arrangements.

18 A. It's impossible to do.

19 Q. Pardon me?

20 A. It's impossible to meet the boat on one whistle, both of
21 them.

22 Q. Why is that?

23 A. Why is that? Because that big tow, 40-barge tow is going to
24 take up the whole river.

25 Q. So you wouldn't -- you're telling me that you couldn't meet

1 him? How would you get past him?

2 A. Huh?

3 Q. If you're southbound, how would you get past him?

4 A. How would I get past? I'd either hold up or he would have to
5 hold up.

6 Q. Okay. So if you were southbound, who would initiate that
7 request, that action?

8 A. I would request it.

9 Q. The southbound?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. You would request. You would tell him you're going to hold
12 up or you're going to ask him to hold up?

13 A. I'm going to ask him to hold up.

14 Q. You're going to ask him to hold up? Okay. So you wouldn't
15 feel -- you're telling me you wouldn't feel comfortable,
16 southbound, agreeing on a one whistle and continuing on unless he
17 was to hold up?

18 A. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

19 Q. Okay.

20 MR. KARR: Can I just point out one thing I heard? When you
21 asked the question, you asked if you would meet the tow and the
22 ship on one whistle.

23 BY MR. [REDACTED]

24 Q. I apologize. That's true. My fault. And maybe that's what
25 you're thinking, that we're talking about a three-abreast passing.

1 Is that what --

2 A. Right.

3 Q. I'm sorry. I apologize. Thank you very much, Mike. That's
4 a great catch.

5 Let's -- let me go back and say that you are going to meet
6 the tow on one whistle and then you would also see the ship on one
7 whistle. Okay? Would you still feel that you'd have the tow hold
8 up for --

9 A. As long as it's not three abreast, and it would still --
10 probably get the tow to hold up.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Okay, got you. All right, very good.
12 Thank you.

13 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Mike, [REDACTED] anything to --

14 BY MSSD2 [REDACTED]

15 Q. Okay. This is [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Do you guys have any questions?
16 I think for now we're -- I -- we're good. We have a few items
17 that -- and other questions if you can ascertain for us when you
18 get a chance, but do you have any questions for our folks? I
19 mean, do you have anything that we didn't ask that you feel could
20 be helpful to help us figure out what happened? You know, it's
21 been a few days --

22 A. No, I'm not --

23 Q. -- maybe something's kind of --

24 A. No. I wasn't out there, so I don't know what happened, so --
25 but I just went and going by the AIS. I mean, the guy's coming up

1 the river and the tow just shoots straight out in the middle of
2 the river. And that's --

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's also been (indiscernible).

4 MR. CREPPEL: He lost control and just -- it was too close to
5 the point for him and then hit the point. Those line boats never
6 come from underneath the point like that. They always middle of
7 the river going to the bend.

8 BY MR. KARR:

9 Q. So can you describe that for me? You go -- the line boats
10 come up the middle of the river and then --

11 A. Usually, yeah, because they, I mean, he's got like
12 (indiscernible). He's coming up -- he's usually coming up the
13 middle of the river, because they can't hardly make that turn
14 without being in the middle of the river. You're talking about
15 1400 feet just the tow itself plus another 200 feet of the boat.
16 And if you're coming up from underneath that point, your tow's
17 going to go straight across my bend, you know? That's how I was
18 told.

19 Q. So, in your opinion, he should have been more in the middle
20 of the river and then made a starboard turn so then he would --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- be closer to the side of the river?

23 A. Well, he can hold that point a little bit better, yes. Where
24 that corner comes it's not the same, you know, coming up at the
25 same time.

1 Q. This is Luling Bridge, Magnolia Fleet --

2 A. Right.

3 Q. -- and 26?

4 A. And Magnolia Fleet's sticking out a lot more than it used to
5 be, too. Like I said, normally they coming up the middle of the
6 river. And if he come here this far in, once that tow gets to the
7 water --

8 BY MR. [REDACTED]

9 Q. What happens?

10 A. It just takes off.

11 Q. And what happens?

12 A. I mean, I'm just guessing what happens. It takes control and
13 pushes the tow out.

14 Q. Further across the river?

15 A. Further across the river.

16 Q. Towards the --

17 A. Toward the middle of the river to the other side.

18 Q. Uh-huh. And let me ask you this, because again, you know, I
19 was asking -- I did, I've asked for your -- first of all, is there
20 any set rule or anything that prohibits tows from meeting in this
21 area that you know of?

22 A. No. I don't know.

23 Q. If safe passage can be done, it's pretty much up to the
24 captains who are navigating that agree on the passings; correct?

25 A. (No audible response.)

1 Q. Okay.

2 BY MR. KARR:

3 Q. And your comment about the fleet, Magnolia Fleet sticking out
4 more than it has, what --

5 A. Well, I don't know if it has, but I mean, it's been --
6 because it hasn't been there forever and it's just it's been there
7 at least 5 or 6 years on that or maybe longer, but it -- that, you
8 know, it was just out there, it's -- you can't get as close to the
9 point, which wouldn't have been any better for him to get any
10 closer, but, you know, it just doesn't have as much room to
11 maneuver in.

12 Q. Yeah. When it's -- so how long as the Magnolia Fleet been at
13 that point?

14 A. Six years probably? I don't know for sure. You know, I'm
15 guessing 6, 7 years.

16 Q. Before that was there anything there?

17 A. Long time ago they had something there.

18 Q. And since -- when it started, did anything change other --
19 over the last 6 years, did anything change?

20 A. I mean, not that I know of, no.

21 Q. Did they move further out, I mean, just in your general
22 impression?

23 A. I mean, not that I know of, no.

24 MSSD2 [REDACTED] All right. I think --

25 MR. [REDACTED] Maybe -- [REDACTED] [REDACTED] INCOE, maybe what Mr. Creppel

1 is maybe saying, and correct me if I'm wrong, but over time it's
2 become more popular, so more barges have been -- more barge
3 operations have used that fleet and that makes it bigger, makes it
4 wider to -- they put more barges in there. Does that sound --

5 MR. CREPPEL: That's correct, yeah.

6 MR. KARR: There's more barges in there so therefore it's
7 further offshore?

8 MR. [REDACTED] Yeah.

9 MR. CREPPEL: Yes, correct.

10 MR. KARR: So you agree with what [REDACTED] just said?

11 MR. CREPPEL: Yes.

12 MR. KARR: All right.

13 MR. [REDACTED] Yeah, in other words, I don't think the fleet
14 itself grew off the bank. It's gotten wider because of the number
15 of barges from the bank.

16 MSSD2 [REDACTED] So wider meaning up and down the river as
17 opposed to out from shore?

18 MR. [REDACTED] I would say yes. I mean, that's Mr. Creppel's
19 call, but I would say that's when --

20 MR. KARR: Oh, so I got -- so then let me clarify. So what
21 you're just describing, is it hasn't gotten wider into the river
22 but just --

23 MR. CREPPEL: Well, it could be both. But a lot of inland.

24 MR. KARR: All right.

25 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. We're good?

1 MR. KARR: We're good.

2 MSSD2 [REDACTED] So, all right, and just want to -- have you
3 been in touch with Nathan? Is he okay? How's he doing?

4 MR. CREPPEL: He's doing okay, yeah. I mean, they had a
5 vigil Tuesday night in Mississippi for some of the family and I
6 saw him then. But he's doing okay.

7 MSSD2 [REDACTED] Okay. All right. Okay, so let's go ahead and
8 stop the recording at 11:04.

9 (Whereupon, 11:04 a.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 Ross Creppel

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20FM012

PLACE: New Orleans, Louisiana

DATE: January 31, 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