



## National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Office of Marine Safety

### Interview Summary – DCA21FM008

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**Interview of:** Elena (Marie) Foret – Bridge tender for the Barataria Bridge  
**Date/Time:** June 21, 2021 1705 to 1800 CDT  
**Location:** Telephonic  
**Interviewed by:** Adam Tucker – NTSB  
**Attendees:** None  
**Accident:** November 22, 2020 Contact of barge towed by towing vessels *Trent Joseph* and *George C*, with the Bayou Barataria swing bridge (NTSB No. DCA21FM008). Barataria, Louisiana.

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This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mrs. Elena (Marie) Foret, bridge tender for the Barataria Bridge.

- Mrs. Foret was the bridge tender at the time the tow struck the Bayou Barataria bridge on November 22, 2020. She works for the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) and has worked there for 30 plus years. She has worked on different bridges throughout her tenure but mostly on the Barataria bridge, which has been for the last 15 years she estimated.
- Mrs. Foret said on the night of the accident she heard the *Trent Joseph* over the radio in the Barataria Water Way. He (the operator of the *Trent Joseph*) called and said “Barataria Bridge, I need an opening”. Mrs. Foret replied by asking where he was, to which he replied he was in the Barataria waterway. She asked if he could see the graveyard, to which she received a reply “yeah I’m by it right now”. Mrs. Foret replied that she “will start opening the bridge for you now”, noting the *Trent Joseph* was still a distance from the bridge.
- Mrs. Foret then saw the *Trent Joseph* coming around the bend and then she heard “Barataria Bridge, what side do I pass on” to which she replied, “east side captain, the bridge house side”. She received a reply of “ok ma’am on the east side, bridge house side”.
- The *Trent Joseph* continued towards the bridge, and Mrs. Foret recalled there was a cement barge and a crane barge with a big crane on it. There was another boat, the *George C* pushing.
- When the *Trent Joseph* went through the bridge, he kept pulling with a big rope, and the *George C* was pushing him through. She noticed the *Trent Joseph* having trouble pulling the barge through the bridge, and then she heard a loud noise like scraping metal.
- Mrs. Foret then got on the radio and said “captain I’m going to have to make an accident report” to which she received a reply of “ok ma’am”.

- The *Trent Joseph* continued to pull the barges through. Mrs. Foret noticed there was no deckhand on the barges to help guide them through, which she noted was a common practice and had witnessed multiple times in the past.
- The *George C* was the last boat going through. Mrs. Foret, then requested the captain of the *Trent Joseph* to call her on the bridge house phone number when he had a chance for her to complete the accident report form.
- The captain of the *Trent Joseph* later called Mrs. Foret on the phone and she asked the questions needed to complete the accident report form. The captain gave her all the information she needed.
- Mrs. Foret then called Bridge City DODT and informed that the bridge was damaged “pretty bad” and that the span was struck. After that, an electrician from Bridge City called her and asked if the bridge could be closed, to which she responded that she didn’t think it would close. He asked to try to close it, which she did, and then told the electrician the bridge would not budge. After that, the electrician told her that he would be on his way to the bridge.
- A DODT electrician and engineer later came as well as a Coast Guard investigator.
- When asked what Bridge City was, Mrs. Foret said that was the town the DODT office for their area was in.
- When asked if there had been previous accidents involving the Barataria bridge, Mrs. Foret recalled right before this accident there was a storm that caused an “old casino boat” to drift against the bridge. At that time, she called Bridge City DOTD and the police department to find out who owned the boat. She knew it was from the area but did not know who owned it.
- Mrs. Foret recalled besides that, there were a “few times” when the fender system got hit, but not the span. She noted it is not a very wide area to pass through with only 75 feet between the fenders (fender to fender). The bridge has to open for any boat that is above 10 feet high.
- When asked about the amount of boat traffic they have per shift, Mrs. Foret said in the past there used to be a lot of shrimp boats that passed through along with some rock and water barges, but there is not much vessel traffic anymore.
- When asked if they have to keep logs of vessels that pass through, Mrs. Foret said they have to log the height and name of the vessel, and what direction they are going (north or south). When asked the proper name for the bridge, Mrs. Foret said it is called the Barataria bridge.
- When asked of the visibility conditions on the night of the accident, Mrs. Foret said it wasn’t raining or anything. When asked about the wind conditions, Mrs. Foret said she could not remember what the winds were.
- When asked about the current in the waterway and if they monitor that, Mrs. Foret said they do not. They have no gauge to tell if the water is going north or south. They do have a wind gage which they use to measure the windspeeds. If the winds are 25 mph or more, they don’t open the bridge.

- When asked of the shifts they work, Mrs. Foret said she works 7 days on and 7 days off. During her 7 days on, she works the bridge 12 hours per day from 1800 to 0600 and she always works that shift.
- When asked of any kind of inspections or checklist at the commencement of a shift, Mrs. Foret said they go 10-8 on the radio (police code for in service) to let Bridge City know she is on shift and when she leaves, she goes 10-7 (police code for out of service). They must make sure the lights are working and on for darkness and in the rain.
- When asked to describe the navigation lights, Mrs. Foret said the navigation lights on the bridge house side were out. There was a boat that does repairs of the fender systems, and they were supposed to do repairs on the bridge house side. They pulled the lights off on the bridge house side; the wires and everything. In the middle fendering there were lights which were working. She explained, that is why the bridge accident report form shows that not all lights were working.
- The *Trent Joseph* was completely clear of the bridge by the time the barge struck the span and because of that, Mrs. Foret didn't think the navigation lights were an issue for the accident.
- When asked to describe the bridge navigation lights, Mrs. Foret said that when the bridge is open, the lights are green and when it is closed the lights are red. The fenders have red lights. The bridge span lights turn from red to green. When the lights are green, the bridge is open so boats can go through and when the lights are red, the bridge is closed, and boats are not allowed to pass through. Mrs. Foret said the bridge was fully open by the time the *Trent Joseph* came around the bend.
- When asked where the lights that change from red and green are located, Mrs. Foret said they are located right on top of the bridge span.
- With respect to the fender lights on the long fender, Mrs. Foret said they were all red lights that never change color. On the north side of the fender were three red lights and on the south side, there were three red lights. All the lights on the long fender wall were working, the only ones not working were on the fender on the house side.
- When asked to recall the communications between the *Trent Joseph*, Mrs. Foret said the initial call was to request the bridge to be opened to which she replied by asking his location. His reply was that he was in the Baratavia waterway, and she asked if he saw the graveyard to which he replied he was "passing it now". She replied that she would start swinging the bridge open and by the time he came round the first bend, the bridge was fully open, and she could see the *Trent Joseph*. He then asked "Barataria bridge, what side do I pass on?" to which she replied, "on the east side, the bridge house side", which he acknowledged. The *Trent Joseph* continued toward the bridge. Mrs. Foret told the *Trent Joseph* that he was welcome to use his spotlight because the bridge house side did not have any fender lights, which she received a response of OK.
- The *Trent Joseph* came through the bridge and it was pulling the barges with a very big, weaved rope. At that time, the barge was still in the waterway and it appeared to her that he couldn't control the cement barge. The *George C* was pushing. She didn't hear any communication on channel 13 between the *Trent Joseph* and the *George C*.

- When asked about deckhands on the barges, Mrs. Foret said it is common for her to see on other tows passing through one or two deckhands on the barges with radios to help guide the tow through. For the *Trent Joseph* tow, there was no one there.
- When asked if she saw the tow hit the bridge, Mrs. Foret said she did not see it. She heard the noise which led her to believe something bad was happening.
- When asked if there were cameras on the bridge, Mrs. Foret said there were no cameras.
- When asked about an indication that the bridge is open, Mrs. Foret said that once the bridge is fully open, she sounds a long blast followed by a short blast on a horn to let the boat know the bridge is fully open which she did as the *Trent Joseph* tow approached the bridge.
- The bridge span opens in the middle and there is an opening on both sides of the span. Mrs. Foret said she is not aware of how deep it is on the other side or if there are wires there, but that side is not to be used to pass through the bridge.
- When asked about a console indication in the bridge house, Mrs. Foret said the light is orange when the bridge is swinging to an open or closed position. When the bridge is fully open, she can hear a “click” and then the light changes to red which is the indication that the bridge is fully open. After the light changes red, the control that is used to open the bridge is then turned straight which was all done. After that, the long and short signal is sounded to let the boat know the bridge is fully opened.
- When asked if the light was indicating red on the console the night of the accident, Mrs. Foret said that she verified it was red.
- When asked if there were any technical or mechanical issues with the bridge, Mrs. Foret said there were no problems with the bridge on her shift and she was not informed of any problems by the other bridge tender when she began her shift.
- When asked what is done if there is a problem with the bridge, Mrs. Foret said that she has to call Bridge City on the radio or telephone and they in turn have an electrician call her back to find out what is the problem and to walk through the problem with her. They will then come out and check the bridge to make sure things are in good and working condition.
- When asked if she must log any mechanical or technical issues, Mrs. Foret said, you must write everything down. There were no problems with the bridge when she came on duty that evening. The previous bridge tender would have told her so if there was a problem.
- When asked what direction the bridge swings open, Mrs. Foret said the bridge swings away from the bridge house going south and will stop in the middle of the waterway when it is pointing north/south. When asked if it was a clockwise direction, Mrs. Foret said that was correct.
- When asked if the *Trent Joseph* was using a spotlight, Mrs. Foret said she didn’t think he did. He was already through the bridge trying to control the barge he was towing before it struck the span. She thought it may have been because the *George C* was pushing too much to cause the barge to go more to the west instead of straight through. It looked like the *Trent Joseph* was having a problem pulling with the long rope and there was no one on the barge to tell him how close he was to the bridge span.

- When asked if the *Trent Joseph* ever called her to ask or verify if the bridge was fully open, Mrs. Foret said that he did. He said “Barataria bridge, is the bridge fully open?” to which she replied “yes, it is”. That is when she told him that he is welcome to use their spotlight if they need to because the lights on the bridge house side fendering were out. She tells all the boats they can use their spotlights.
- When asked what happens if the bridge is not fully open, Mrs. Foret said the lights on the bridge would not turn green for a boat to go through and that it would still be red. On the control light indication, the colors are green, orange and red. Red for when it is fully open, orange for when the bridge is moving and green when the bridge is closed.
- When asked how long it takes for the bridge to open, Mrs. Foret said it was no more than 3 to 4 minutes. The procedure is to check for vehicle traffic, put the road gates down, and then you open the bridge. There is not a lot of vehicle traffic in Lafitte after dark.
- When asked how the controls are operated to open the bridge, Mrs. Foret said there are four gate controls that she must turn to make them go down. Two for the west side and two for the east side. Once the gates are down, she turns the controller back to the middle and there is a red indication that the gates are closed. After that, she has to withdraw the wedge, and she then goes to the span control where she can start opening the bridge. The only controls they have are for the four gates, the wedge, and the span, which is a big knob that you must turn to make the bridge open. Once she has the red-light indication meaning the bridge is fully open, she must turn the knob back straight.
- When asked when the bridge is fully open if the bridge protrudes out from the fendering, Mrs. Foret said the bridge is completely behind the fender wall. Mrs. Foret said the barge had big cement blocks with holes in them which appeared to her to protrude from the barge.
- After everything was over with, the bridge looked like it was hanging and was not straight like it normally was. Mrs. Foret noted there were no lights or anything after the contact. The north side fender lights were torn off.
- After the contact with the bridge, and when the tow was completely through was the time when the captain of the *Trent Joseph* called her so that she could complete the bridge accident report.
- When asked if there was a locking mechanism for the bridge to stay in place when fully open, Mrs. Foret said there was not, and that she must turn the control knob once she has the red-light open indication. She noted that once she hears the click, then the red light will illuminate.
- When asked if the captain of the *Trent Joseph* provided any additional information to her when she was completing the bridge accident report, Mrs. Foret said that he did not.
- When asked if she has heard other boats ask what side of the bridge to pass, Mrs. Foret said that yes, boats that are not familiar with the area will ask. Mrs. Foret said that when the *Trent Joseph* said they were passing the graveyard, even though that was still a way from the bridge, she opened it then.
- When asked if there is a restroom in the bridge house, Mrs. Foret said there was. There is no need to leave the bridge house for anything and if there was any reason to leave the

bridge house, she would have to go 10-7 on the radio with bridge city and report 10-8 when back up, but that never happens because she never leaves the bridge house when on shift.

**End of summary**