



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM008

Interview of: Grant Daigle – Captain of the towing vessel *George C*
Date/Time: June 17, 2021 1100 to 1150 CDT
Location: Telephonic/conference call
Interviewed by: Adam Tucker – NTSB
Attendees: Brandon Thibodeaux – Frilot, LLC, Brooke Riggs – Frilot, LLC, Curran Greenberg – Frilot, LLC (attorneys for Cvitanovic Towing), Andrew Cvitanovic and *George Cvitanovic* - Cvitanovic Towing, LLC.
Accident: November 22, 2020 Contact of crane barge towed by towing vessel *Trent Joseph*, with the Bayou Barataria swing bridge (NTSB No. DCA21FM008). Barataria, Louisiana.

This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Grant Daigle, captain of the towing vessel *George C*.

- Mr. Daigle was the captain of the *George C* at the time when the tow struck the Bayou Barataria bridge on November 22, 2020.
- They picked up the barges at a fleet on the north bank at the 10-mile buoy on the intercoastal waterway (ICW). The *George C* was at the back of the tow as the tail boat.
- They made the corner of the ICW and down toward the Barataria bridge. The captain of the *Trent Joseph* called Mr. Daigle and asked him what span to take because there were two spans that they could possibly pass through. Mr. Daigle responded that it had been years since he was last through the bridge and that he didn't know.
- The captain of the *Trent Joseph* then called the Barataria bridge tender to ask what span to take. Mr. Daigle recalled it took her a minute to answer back and when she did, she told the captain of the *Trent Joseph*, the side with the house on it. By that time, the *Trent Joseph* was lined up on the other span to pass through, so at the last minute the *Trent Joseph* turned to port to pass through that side of the span, it “cocked everything sideways” and with the fair tide, everything went sideways to the bridge.
- Once the tow was passing through the bridge, Mr. Daigle said he never received any instructions to do anything. He saw the side of the bridge and recalled the bridge tender say that she had to make a report.
- After the contact they split the tow down, meaning they dropped the spuds on the barge, got off the tow and got ready to make their reports.
- When asked to explain the role of the tail boat, the *George C*, Mr. Daigle said they are pretty much “the brakes”, because the guy on the front is on a line and he can't stop the barges, so without a tail boat, if he stopped the barges would run him over without a tail boat to pull back and stop the barges.

- When asked of how the *George C* was configured in the tow, Mr. Daigle said they were connected to the barges by a line. They were not faced up. The line was fitted on the center of the barge and the length of the line was about 10 to 15 feet. The line was long enough so the *George C* would not be under the rake of the barge.
- When asked to clarify if the rake of the barge was facing the *George C*, Mr. Daigle confirmed that it was. The barges were connected to each other with rigging.
- When asked the order that the barges were in, Mr. Daigle said the cement block barge was the lead barge and the crane barge was the aft barge. The crane barge was the one that the *George C* had the line running to.
- When asked of the barge dimensions, Mr. Daigle recalled that the cement block barge was 140 by 40 foot. The crane barge was longer and wider than the cement block barge, but he could not recall the dimensions.
- When asked the type of line running between the *George C* and the crane barge, Mr. Daigle said it was a 2-inch nylon rope.
- When asked to clarify who had asked him what side of the bridge span to pass, Mr. Daigle said it was the captain of the *Trent Joseph*. He called Mr. Daigle first and asked, to which he said he was unsure because it has been a long time since he passed through the area. Mr. Daigle thought it was 10 to 12 years since he last sailed through there as a mate, just before making captain.
- The captain of the *Trent Joseph* then called the bridge tender on channel 13 to ask her what side to pass, to which she replied, the side with the house on it.
- When asked to clarify his comment that, he was lined up to pass through the other side of the span, Mr. Daigle said that the *Trent Joseph* was lined up to pass through the other side of the span.
- When asked of what he recalled for the maneuver of the tow to pass down the side of the span with the house on it, Mr. Daigle said he was not called to do anything.
- When asked about getting instructions from the lead boat, the *Trent Joseph*, Mr. Daigle said the lead boat is the one that passes maneuver instructions to the tail boat.
- When asked what frequency was used for the communications between the *George C* and the *Trent Joseph*, Mr. Daigle said it was on a different radio and channel than the bridge channel, but not recall what channel they were using between both vessels. The *George C* has two radios that can be used for different frequencies.
- When asked of when he first recognized that something was wrong, Mr. Daigle said that was when he saw the bridge. With the way the barges were set up with the crane on it, there was no forward visibility from the pilothouse, and when the *Trent Joseph* turned hard to port to pass the side of the bridge with the house on it, he saw the bridge out of his starboard side window, and that is when he knew something was wrong.
- When asked to clarify how come he couldn't see forward from the pilothouse of the *George C*, Mr. Daigle said it was because of the crane and equipment that was on the barge ahead of them. He could only see off to about a 45-degree angle of each side of the wheelhouse.

- When asked if he was instructed to do anything by the *Trent Joseph* at the time it changed course to port to pass down the side of the bridge with the house on it, Mr. Daigle said he called the *Trent Joseph* captain and asked him if he needed him to do anything but never got a reply, so Mr. Daigle kept doing what he was told to do last.
- Mr. Daigle eventually had to act at last minute before impact, to protect the boat and crew from danger, which was to turn and try to shove the barge over to clear the bridge, to prevent the boat from going under the bridge.
- Mr. Daigle clarified he shoved the barge to port to clear the area where the impact was.
- When asked what exactly hit the bridge, Mr. Daigle recalled it was the notch between the two barges where the one barge was a few feet wider than the other. One was 40-feet wide, and one was 50-feet wide that he recalled. There was a notch of a few feet between both barges, and that is where it made impact. The bridge was hanging out over the fender works and not behind the fender works as it should have been.
- When asked if the fender works were damaged, Mr. Daigle said they were never touched because the bridge was hanging over the fender works.
- When asked to recall his last order from the *Trent Joseph*, Mr. Daigle recalled he was clutched in reverse drifting behind because they were riding a fair tide and the *Trent Joseph's* last orders to him were “clutch reverse”. When asked what clutch reverse means, Mr. Daigle said he was not backing full and just barely in gear, in reverse as slow as possible – like slow astern.
- Since there was a towline between the *George C* and the barge, he had to twist the *George C* and face the boat to port to get the barge out of the way. He put the *George C* parallel to the bridge to avoid getting caught under the bridge just seconds before impact. When asked to clarify twist, Mr. Daigle said the *George C* was a twin-screw boat so he had the starboard engine forward, and port engine in reverse with the rudder to port, which avoided the boat coming ahead but still turned the boat.
- When asked if the *George C* had flanking rudders, Mr. Daigle said it did not.
- The *George C* had 4 crew on the boat. The deckhand on watch was in the pilothouse with him at the time of the accident. The deckhand was standing up outside the pilothouse and looking for anything out there. He was outside the starboard side door when they saw things going wrong. When asked of any communications from the deckhand, Mr. Daigle couldn't recall much because of the time that has passed since the accident.
- When asked if they were using a searchlight to help find the bridge, Mr. Daigle said no, he didn't want to turn them on because of the possibility of blinding the lead boat, so he kept them off and would only use them when requested by the lead boat. There was a good bit of ambient light at the bridge.
- When asked of the navigation lights at the bridge, Mr. Daigle said his view forward was obstructed on the approach so he could not see any navigation lighting. After the contact he recalled looking back and noticing there were no red lights anywhere, but he saw the greens. He explained the green lights were on the top of the bridge. Normally when you go through a bridge there will be a green, red and green and you stay on the red light which marks the center of the bridge and the green will indicate if you are port or

starboard - they are used like a range. If the bridge is open, you would see the lights in a line. There are usually red lights on the fender works, but he didn't see any lights at all on the fender works.

- When asked what schedule he worked, Mr. Daigle said he works 6 hours on and 6 hours off. He was on the front watch when the accident happened.
- When asked of the current, and his comment of riding the tide, Mr. Daigle explained the current was moving with them that night. When asked of the current velocity, Mr. Daigle said he did not recall. When asked what he referenced to know the current was with them, Mr. Daigle said they can use multiple sources such as internet information, NOAA tides or the Rosepoint ECS.
- When asked of the visibility the night of the accident, Mr. Daigle recalled it was a clear night. When asked of the winds, Mr. Daigle did not recall any significant winds that affected the tow.
- When asked of the length of the tow, Mr. Daigle said he could not recall given the length of time that has passed. The *George C* is 64 to 66-feet and it draws about 6 to 7-feet of water usually. The beam was 25 or 26-foot.
- When asked to recall the initial communication between the *Trent Joseph* and the Barataria bridge operator, Mr. Daigle recalled the *Trent Joseph* called, and it took a while for her to answer. Once she answered, there was a conversation about the different spans as well as the *Trent Joseph* saying something like the bridge is not all the way open to which she said that it is open, but it opens too much or something along those lines. He noted he might not be 100% accurate in what he heard, but he remembered hearing a conversation about the bridge not being open all the way.
- When asked how close the *George C* was to the bridge when he heard this conversation take place, Mr. Daigle said it wasn't too far from the bridge but because he couldn't see ahead, it would only be a guess as to how far away they were.
- When asked what kind of engines were on the *George C* and what kind of horsepower the boat has, Mr. Daigle said they were SK 19's but he couldn't recall the horsepower.
- When asked what the name of the waterway was where the accident took place, Mr. Daigle said it was the Barataria waterway. They were southbound (outbound). They were headed for Grand Isle, Louisiana where they were going to be setting an artificial reef offshore.
- When asked of what he recalled of the post contact communications between him, the *Trent Joseph* and the Barataria bridge operator, Mr. Daigle said there was no communication from the lead boat and the only thing he remembered being said was from the bridge tender who said she would have to make a report and that they would have to stop and wait. The lead boat and the tail boat got off the tow lines and got on the side of the barges. This happened just south of the bridge where they could be clear of things.
- When asked of the width of the channel between the fendering, Mr. Daigle said he did not recall.

- When asked if he heard any communications from the bridge operator about the bridge not being open, Mr. Daigle said no. The captain of the *Trent Joseph* asked if the bridge was all the way open because it had an overhang over the fender works which is not supposed to be that way. When open, the bridge is supposed to be behind the fender works. The bridge tender said the bridge was open all the way, but it was broken and opens too much, or something along those lines.

End of summary