



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM014

Interview of: Carl Parfait – pilot of the towing vessel *Sarah Cenac*
Date/Time: May 14, 2021 - 1505 to 1530 CDT
Location: Telephonic/conference call
Interviewed by: Adam Tucker – NTSB
Attendees: Michael Held – Phelps Dunbar, LLC (attorney representing AI Cenac Towing, LLC interests)
Accident: January 13, 2021, contact of barge *H238*, pushed by towing vessel *Robert Cenac*, with CSX Rigolets railway swing bridge (NTSB No. DCA21FM014). Rigolets Pass, Louisiana.

This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Carl Parfait.

- On the morning of January 10, 2021, Mr. Parfait was northbound towards the Rigolets with one empty barge. He called the bridge tender to request an opening between 0300 and 0315. The bridge tender told him to “hold off” due to a technical problem, so he reduced speed and took his time heading towards the bridge. Around 0330 he called the bridge Rigolets bridge tender back to see if they had the bridge opened or not and he was told to hold off a little longer because the technical issues had not been resolved.
- Mr. Parfait decided to push the barge up on a western mud bank, just south of the Rigolets bridge on Catfish Point, as opposed to drifting around in the current below the bridge to wait for it to be opened. He asked the bridge tender to give him a call over the radio as soon as he was able to open the bridge.
- Mr. Parfait called the bridge tender back around 0400, and at that time he was told they were still working on the issue and that the bridge tender would get back to him. Around 0430 the bridge tender called Mr. Parfait over the radio and said he was able to get the bridge open. Mr. Parfait then backed the *Sarah Cenac* tow off the mud. He received a call shortly after from the bridge tender who said he was again having trouble opening the bridge and since he was not far from backing off the mud bank, Mr. Parfait pushed the barge back into the mud.
- Sometime between 0500 and 0530, the bridge tender called Mr. Parfait back and told him they finally had the bridge opened. Mr. Parfait backed the *Sarah Cenac* off the mud again and proceeded through the bridge where he recalled the sun was just coming up as the tow was going through. They were held up for about two hours waiting for the bridge to open. They arrived at the bridge to pass through about 0330 and they didn’t clear the bridge until between 0530 and 0600. Mr. Parfait and the captain were just doing watch change when the *Sarah Cenac* was about to pass through the bridge.

- When asked if the bridge tender gave any specifics as to what the problem was with the bridge, Mr. Parfait said he did not. He thought the bridge tender said at one point something about there being electrical issues and it was going to be a while to resolve the issue.
- When asked of the lighting at the Rigolets bridge, Mr. Parfait said the only lighting they really see approaching the bridge is the railway track lights and not the navigational lights on the bridge span and fender works. He could not recall much about the lights for that morning. Mr. Parfait said that when normally passing through there in darkness, they use the spotlights on the boat to see the bridge and fender works. He could not recall seeing any fender lights noting that by the time they get close, the spotlights illuminate the fender walls. The area requires a spotlight to go through. Typically, on the swing bridges they would have red and green lighting to go through but from what he saw on the bridge span, there was no lighting.
- When asked if they were involved in the same job the *Robert Cenac* was doing at the time it hit the Rigolets bridge, Mr. Parfait said that was correct. The *Sarah Cenac* and *Robert Cenac* were tripping the barges. They would drop one off and pick one up. Three barges with two boats. They would go southbound with a loaded barge and northbound with an empty barge.
- Mr. Parfait said they also use another route for the trips between Heron Bay and Port Bienville which saves about two to three hours of time, but they could only do that during daylight hours using the Pearl River. The Pearl River is usually open from between 0500 and 0530 to sometimes around 2000 in the evening. The only time they would run the Rigolets would be between the time periods of 2100 and 0500.
- Mr. Parfait recalled based on the logs of the *Sarah Cenac*, he arrived at the job site around 0800 so he believed that neither the *Sara* nor *Robert Cenac* passed through the bridge anymore until the time of the accident. He noted the Rigolets bridge barely gets any boat traffic through there.
- When asked when he would normally call the Rigolets bridge tender to open the bridge, Mr. Parfait said it would be anywhere between 15 and 30 minutes out noting that if the current was running out, they wouldn't be moving so quickly. Generally, they would call at least two miles away. If the bridge tender was not reachable by radio, he would call the by cell phone. A lot of times, the bridge tender would say they would have to hold up because there was a train coming, but other times, with no train coming, they would say they would open the bridge right up so they could come on through. Sometimes the bridge tenders would ask them to call when the boat got a little closer to the bridge before they opened it.
- When asked about the electronic navigational chart, displayed on their Rose Point electronic charting system when passing through the bridge, not matching up with the bridge fendering, Mr. Parfait said they navigate visually through the bridge, but recalled there was a discrepancy on the navigational chart. He recalled the fender wall showing longer when coming out (on the north side of the bridge).
- When asked of the information they shared amongst each other, and the other boats, Mr. Parfait said they would share how the tide was running and the winds and currents

coming through. A lot of the time they would call the bridge tender and ask how the current was running, noting that to his knowledge the *Robert* and Sarah *Cenac* were the only ones using the bridge to pass through.

- When asked of what he recalled of the lighting when passing through the bridge, Mr. Parfait said most of the time they use the spotlights passing through because the lighting is not too good. There is only lighting on the railway on each side of the swing span. The swing span itself is not lit. They may be able to see one or two red lights on the fender walls and if so, they aim between the red lights and when they get a little closer, they use the spotlight to find the fender wall. You must have the spotlight on to pass through there. When asked if there were any ranges to steer on, Mr. Parfait said no there were not.

End of summary