



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM019

Interview of: Quinton Eubanks, captain of towing vessel *American Way* and Ryan Powell, pilot of towing vessel *American Way*
Date/Time: March 19, 2021, 1400 to 1445 CDT
Location: Pilothouse of towing vessel *American Way*, New Orleans, LA
Interviewed by: Lt. [REDACTED], USCG and Adam Tucker – NTSB
Attendees: Phoebe Hawthorn, Frilot LLC (attorney representing ACBL interests), Adam Davis (by phone), Phelps Dunbar (attorney representing Odfjell interests)
Accident: March 16, 2021, Contact of the Norwegian flag tank vessel *Bow Tribute* with City of New Orleans Water intakes (NTSB No. DCA21FM019). Nine Mile bend, Lower Mississippi River, mile 104, New Orleans, Louisiana.

This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB and US Coast Guard investigator notes taken during the interview of Captain Quinton Eubanks and Mr. Ryan Powell. The interview was conducted of both individuals at the same time.

- The *American Way* was pushing two empty breasted raked hopper barges southbound in the Lower Mississippi River (LMR).
- The raked barges were 298 feet long and 54 feet wide. The empty barges were about 2 feet in draft.
- The *American Way* is 70 feet long. Its draft was about 9 feet.
- The length and width of the tow overall was 368 by 108 feet.
- Captain Eubanks said there were no mechanical problems with the vessel and all navigation and steering systems were operating as normal.
- The *American Way* is a 2000 total horsepower vessel owned and operated by ACBL (American Commercial Barge Line). It is powered by two Z-Drives, each with 1000 horsepower each.
- Mr. Powell has worked as a pilot with ACBL for 1.5 years and has always been on the *American Way*. He has 6 years sailing as a pilot.
- On March 16, 2021, Mr. Powell was on watch on the *American Way* working the 1100 to 1600 watch. Mr. Powell and the captain both work 6 hours on and 6 hours off. Mr. Powell works the 1100 to 1600 and 2300 to 0500 watch and captain Eubanks works the 1600 to 2300 and 0500 to 1100 watch.
- The *American Way* departed the Covent fleet at about mile 158 on March 16, 2021.
- The winds were about 15-20 mph. On a tow with empty barges, the wind does influence the tow. They were heading to the New Orleans Industrial fleet.
- Mr. Powell relieved Captain Eubanks a few minutes before 1100 for his normally scheduled watch. There was nothing out of the ordinary. They were southbound in the

LMR. There were many ships that overtook the *American Way* during his watch which was normal.

- Normally, ship pilots call them to let them know they are overtaking and what side they will overtake on. The pilots will either inform them that they will overtake on the *American Way's* starboard side (one whistle) or on the *American Way's* port side (two whistles).
- Mr. Powell remarked that during his watch, they were following the southbound tow, *Captain JW Banta* with 2 loads, that was ahead of them all the time. Mr. Powell kept the speed of the *American Way* matched to the *Captain JW Banta* to maintain their distance of about 0.4 miles (statute) ahead.
- NOBRA 68 (the pilot on the *Bow Tribute*) called Mr. Powell (on the *American Way*) on VHF channel 67. He asked if he could overtake them on “the two” (meaning on the port side of the *American Way*). Mr. Powell recalled this took place about mile 107 just before the Huey P Long Bridge (mile 106) as he approached 9-mile Point.
- Mr. Powell recalled the river stage was about 12.6 feet. The current was running maybe 4 mph. He said that once a tow is past the Huey P. Long bridge southbound, you are committed to the bend at 9-mile point.
- Rounding the point, Mr. Powell said NOBRA 68 called him on the radio and said something like, “don’t forget me”. NOBRA 68 then told Mr. Powell that the *American Way* needed to drive out of the bend.
- NOBRA 68 asked Mr. Powell to increase the *American Way's* speed. Mr. Powell said he pushed the propulsion control levers up, but he noticed the speed did not increase much. He also noted that he had to monitor the distance to the *Captain JW Banta* ahead of them to not get too close.
- Mr. Powell called Captain Eubanks to the pilot house upon seeing the approaching *Bow Tribute*. Captain Eubanks came up to the pilothouse “right away” and took control of the sticks.
- Mr. Powell then moved to a position to visually monitor the *Bow Tribute's* proximity to them on their stern while the captain drove the *American Way* out of the bend. The *Bow Tribute* never got ahead of them.
- Mr. Powell recalled there was also a northbound ship making the bend, the *Red Cosmos*, which was passing on the starboard side of the *American Way*. He noted the *American Way* was “boxed in” with the *Bow Tribute* aft of them, the *Captain JW Banta* ahead of them and the northbound *Red Cosmos* on their starboard side. The *Red Cosmos* was tight on the right bank and finished the rounding 9-mile point with no problems that he saw.
- Mr. Powell and Mr. Eubanks said there is always slack water on the point side of a bend.
- When asked of the profile of the *Bow Tribute* as it approached from aft of them in the bend, Mr. Powell said he could see its starboard side and bow. The *Bow Tribute* was “very close” to them.
- Captain Eubanks said that when he arrived in the pilothouse, he took control of the *American Way* and kept the speed and steered out of the bend.
- There was no damage to the *American Way* or its barges.

- The *American Way* continued onward to its destination. There was no need to stop and they were not instructed to do so.
- When asked about the initial call from NOBRA 68, Mr. Powell said this took place when they were on the other side of the Huey P Long bridge. That was about the time when NOBRA 68 asked if the *Bow Tribute* could overtake him.
- Both Mr. Powell and Captain Eubanks agreed that it was common for them to be overtaken by ships, but it is not common for them to be overtaken in a bend.
- Mr. Powell recalled that the *American Way* was overtaken by a ship before nine-mile point on one whistle (the *American Way's* starboard side) with no issues.
- When NOBRA 68 later called, he requested to overtake the *American Way* on two whistles (the *American Way's* port side).
- The *Captain JW Banta* was in front of the *American Way*. They were following that vessel mostly for their entire trip downriver.
- Mr. Powell said that when he approached the bend, he lined up for the turn as normal.
- The northbound *Red Cosmos* passed the *American Way* on their starboard side at 9-mile point with no problem.
- Somewhere around that time, NOBRA 68 called them and said, "don't forget about me".
- Mr. Powell never thought a ship would overtake them in a bend. NOBRA pilots know that tows slide in a bend and therefore ships never overtake them in a bend.
- When asked if there were any local regulations or rules against a ship overtaking a tow in nine-mile point bent, neither Mr. Powell or captain Eubanks knew of any such local rules or regulations. Both Mr. Powell and captain Eubanks agreed it was a general rule of thumb not to overtake a southbound tow in a bend.
- When asked how long it took for captain Eubanks to arrive in the pilothouse after being called, Mr. Powell said he came up "right away". Mr. Powell was going to drive out of the bend, but captain Eubanks took the sticks.
- The *Captain JW Banta* was still ahead of the *American Way* so when coming ahead, they had to be careful to not run over the *Captain JW Banta*.
- Mr. Powell watched the *Bow Tribute* astern of them. The *Bow Tribute* was almost perpendicular to the *American Way* with their starboard side showing.
- When captain Eubanks took the sticks, the *Bow Tribute* was astern of the *American Way*. But the *Bow Tribute* never overtook the *American Way* throughout the entire evolution.
- After the incident, the *American Way* ran slow and continued to their destination (the industrial lock). There was no reason to stop, and they were not asked to stop by the Coast Guard.
- Neither captain Eubanks or Mr. Powell took any pictures or video and none of the crew have come forward with anything.
- After the incident, Mr. Powell contacted the company representative and reported the near miss.
- When asked about the inland rules of the road related to a vessel being overtaken, both vessels had the current with them, but the *Bow Tribute* never got ahead of the *American*

Way or to 22.5 degrees abaft the beam, therefore the *American Way* had the right of way. The overtaking vessel is the give way vessel.

- Captain Eubanks said that when he took the sticks of the *American Way*, it was only about a minute and a half before they were clear of the *Bow Tribute* and gained ground. He used the sticks to turn the *American Way* to starboard. They closed on the *Captain JW Banta* in front of them, but the time was so short that they were able to maintain a safe distance to the *Captain JW Banta* by slowing down once clear of the *Bow Tribute*.
- Mr. Powell recalled the *Bow Tribute* picked up speed from about 16 mph to 17 mph and thought that if the speed of 16 mph was maintained, they could have overtaken the *American Way* tow on its starboard side after the *Red Cosmos* was past.
- Mr. Powell thought that NOBRA 68's intention was to overtake the *American Way* after the bend, which was why he requested him to increase the speed of the *American Way*.
- Mr. Powell said he asked NOBRA 68 if he still intended to overtake the *American Way* on its port side. He recalled when in the bend, hearing the *Bow Tribute* blow the "danger signal".
- Mr. Powell last saw the speed of the *Bow Tribute* at about 9 to 10 mph, noting speed will decrease in a bend.
- When asked of his communications with vessel traffic services (VTS), Mr. Powell said he checked in with VTS just above the Huey P Long bridge.

End of summary