



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM019

Interview of: Ethan Frierson, observer on the tank vessel *Bow Tribute*
Date/Time: March 31, 2021, 1015 to 1045 CDT
Location: Telephonic
Interviewed by: Lt. [REDACTED] – USCG and Adam Tucker – NTSB
Attendees: Adam Davis – Phelps Dunbar, LLP (attorney representing Odfjell interests), Mark Pivach and Matthew Pivach – Pivach, Pivach, Hufft, Thriffiley & Dunbar, LLC (attorney for NOBRA), Phoebe Hawthorne – Frilot, LLC (attorney representing ACBL 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 Ethan Frierson, an observer on the *Bow Tribute*.

- Mr. Frierson has a near coastal master of towing merchant mariner's credential. He started working on the water in 2008 working salvage operations offshore. He has worked with multiple companies running tugs. He currently works at Marquette as a relief captain on a fleet boat and is interested in getting his first-class pilots license and hopefully join the federal pilots.
- He knew NOBRA pilot Briscoe Brown through a friend of his and he has offered to help Mr. Frierson get trips in. He has had three trips with Mr. Brown with the third being the accident trip.
- Mr. Frierson was not operating in any capacity of his credential at the time he was on the *Bow Tribute*.
- Mr. Frierson Spoke with Mr. Brown the night before about getting a trip in. The next day he joined the *Bow Tribute* at the Grandview anchorage while the vessel was underway southbound. Everything was smooth and textbook all the way down until they got to the Huey P. Long bridge.
- Somewhere near the Avondale shipyard (a couple miles above the Huey P Long bridge) it looked like they were catching up with the tow *American Way* and were going to meet around upper 9-mile at the point.
- Mr. Brown called the *American Way* and asked him if he had anymore throttle to give to try and get below the point. The *American Way* said yes and that he would speed up.
- About halfway between the Huey P. Long bridge and TT barge, it started to look like the *American Way* was slowing down. Mr. Frierson was looking at the *American Way*'s propeller wash and it didn't look like there was hardly any coming out. It looked like he slowed down, and with that, the current got on the *American Way*'s starboard side and set him harder into

the bend. At that point Mr. Brown told Mr. Frierson to leave the bridge because he didn't want him to be around in case anything bad happened.

- Mr. Frierson thought Mr. Brown wanted him out of there so he could concentrate and do what he needed to do to save the ship and everyone on the *American Way*, so at that point he departed.
- When Mr. Frierson came back, they were already facing northbound, and a boat came out and got both him and Mr. Brown off the *Bow Tribute*.
- When asked where he was when Mr. Brown told him to get out of there, Mr. Frierson said that he was standing next to him on the bridge. The closest thing he saw was the bathroom on the bridge, so he went in there and sat and waited. When he came out of the bathroom the *Bow Tribute* was already facing northbound.
- When asked where he and Mr. Brown disembarked the *Bow Tribute*, Mr. Frierson said it was around mile 104 just below 9-mile. A crew boat came and got them.
- When asked how he knew it was ok to come out of the bathroom, Mr. Frierson said that he texted Mr. Brown and asked him if it was ok to come out. A few minutes later, Mr. Brown replied and said it was ok, and they were going to be getting off the ship.
- When he left for the bathroom Mr. Frierson said, the *Bow Tribute* was around mile 105 above the TT barge dock, maybe 104.7. TT barge is on top of the point on the right descending bank.
- When asked how many trips he needs to do, Mr. Frierson said that he had information that he needed 15 northbound and 15 southbound trips. This was his third trip having completed 2 previous trips total on a ship with Mr. Brown.
- When asked about the *American Way* sliding, Mr. Frierson said the *American Way* was sliding down into the bend, and in his opinion, it was because the operator of the *American Way* pulled back on his throttles, so he didn't have much thrust. The current runs pretty good through there especially when the river is rising. Once you get sideways in the river, "if you're not driving on it, you're going to slide into the bank". The current would have been on the *American Way's* starboard side.
- When asked to explain what he remembered of the propeller wash of the *American Way*, Mr. Frierson recalled that the *American Way* was a Z drive boat, and you can tell if they are shoving hard on it or not. It looked like there was no prop wash coming out from the *American Way*.
- Based on the power and propulsion system the *American Way* had, there should be no way that boat should have fell into the bend that far if the operator would have been driving on it.
- When asked the type of tow the *American Way* had, Mr. Frierson said it looked like two 30,000-barrel barges (jumbo red flags) breasted up so the tow should have been about 110-foot wide and 300-feet long.
- When asked about other traffic in the area, Mr. Frierson said there was a northbound ship and the *Captain JW Banta* was in front of the *American Way*. The *AT Higgins* harbor tug was there as well. The *Captain JW Banta* had the same tow but the barges were strung out, one in front of the other.
- When asked if there were any special rules in the area where the accident took place, Mr. Frierson said there were no special rules but generally a northbound vessel would come up on the right descending side underneath 9-mile point and the southbound would take the bend. North and southbound traffic usually meet "on the two" there.

- When asked about vessels overtaking in bends, Mr. Frierson said it is common to overtake in bends and that he has done it. When asked about ships overtaking him in bends, Mr. Frierson said he has also been overtaken by ships at 9-mile. It depends on the tow size, and the size of the *American Way's* tow was not big.
- When asked if he witnessed any challenges in communication or interaction between Mr. Brown and the bridge team of the *Bow Tribute*, Mr. Frierson said it did not seem like there were any challenges on the way down. He did not witness any problems with responses to rudder commands.
- When asked about crew members on the bridge, Mr. Frierson recalled the captain being up there and a helmsman, but he was not very attentive to that and that he was more focused on looking out the window and seeing how Mr. Brown was running the *Bow Tribute*.
- When asked if he noticed any problems with any of the ships bridge equipment, steering systems, or navigation systems, Mr. Frierson said he did not notice anything.

End of summary