



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA21FM032

Interview of: Jeremy Claverie – Dispatcher for Cooper/T. Smith
Date/Time: July 14, 2021 – 1410 to 1520 CDT
Location: USCG Sector New Orleans Investigations Conference Room
Interviewed by: CWO3 [REDACTED] – USCG and Adam Tucker – NTSB (by phone)
Attendees: Kevin Frey - Salley, Hite, Mercer & Resor, LLC (representing Crescent and Cooper/T. Smith interests)
Accident: July 12, 2021 Contact of the Liberian flag bulk carrier *Jalma Topic* with the Crescent Towing/Cooper/T. Smith office barge fleet at mile 93.5 lower Mississippi river, (NTSB No. DCA21FM032). New Orleans, Louisiana.

This interview summary has been compiled based on Coast Guard and NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Jeremy Claverie, a dispatcher on duty on the Crescent Towing/Cooper/T. Smith office barge at the time it was struck by the *Jalma Topic*.

- Mr. Claverie was the dispatcher on duty on the Crescent towing/ Cooper/T. Smith office barge at the time it was struck by the *Jalma Topic*. That morning, he was working dispatch for the Cooper/T. Smith line handlers. His schedule was to work from July 11 at 1700 and finish at 0500 on July 12. There are always two dispatchers working in the building, one for the Crescent Towing tug dispatch and one for the line handler dispatch. The other dispatcher he was working with was Mr. Frank Altobello.
- Mr. Claverie recalled the office barge was struck between 0315 and 0320. He and Mr. Altobello heard one blast on a horn and then right after that, New Orleans Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) called on the tug dispatch line which Mr. Altobello answered. Mr. Warren Nelson from the New Orleans Baton Rouge Steamship Pilots Association (NOBRA) was on the line. About the same time, Mr. Claverie saw a call come in from the US Coast Guard on the phone display. He went to answer but it only rang once, so he didn't pick up. Mr. Claverie started to become concerned as to what was going on. Mr. Altobello was at that point still on the phone with VTS, so Mr. Claverie exited the dispatch office and proceeded to the breezeway located outside of the building on the top level to see if he could see anything going on. The dispatch office is on the top level, river side in the upriver corner of the building. From the breezeway, Mr. Claverie looked at the river and saw a vessel coming in which looked like it was moving sideways relative to him, like it was going to "T-bone" them.
- Knowing Mr. Altobello had a bad hip, Mr. Claverie went back to the door to the dispatch office and yelled to Mr. Altobello, "get your ass out here now" and that was the time the ship struck the office barge. The noise from the impact was "crazy loud". At that time, Mr. Claverie was in the doorway yelling to Mr. Altobello who was still at his workstation. Mr. Claverie was thrown into the hallway and onto the floor upon impact.

He then got back up on his feet, and then felt a second jolt which knocked him down again. He got back up, but still didn't see Mr. Altobello so he ran into the hallway where he then saw Mr. Altobello. They both then exited the door to the breezeway on the second level where Mr. Claverie was then thrown down again.

- When asked to clarify how many times Mr. Claverie was thrown down to the floor, he said once was when he was at the door and thrown into the hallway, the second time he was thrown down he was in the hallway, and the third time was in the breezeway outside.
- Mr. Claverie saw that water was rushing onto the barge at around the middle of it on the river side. He had his hands on the railing and had eyes on Mr. Altobello. The barge heeled to one side as it was pushed up on the bank before sliding back down into the river. When it slid back down, the water receded from the deck of the barge. Mr. Claverie was located at the second level breezeway railing on the bank side, facing the parking lot. That is when Mr. Claverie noticed a cleaner come up the breezeway stairs of the office barge and said, "what the fuck?" Neither he nor Mr. Altobello were aware he was on the office barge until that point. The cleaning guy's name was Joel.
- The office barge was pushed upriver about 75 to 80 feet. The downriver inshore corner of the barge moved to where the gangway was, and the gangway got pushed up into the air.
- After the barge came back down, Mr. Claverie went down the stairs in the breezeway area and went to the river side where he saw the ship off the barge facing upriver. He looked for an exit off the barge but couldn't find one; there was no way to exit the office barge after it was struck. He noted the linemen were all in the parking lot, and they managed to put a ladder out to the barge. Mr. Claverie didn't leave the barge until about 0430. He and Mr. Altobello walked around the barge and checked various areas for damage, fire, and live electrical wires. Mr. Claverie noticed no fire, live electrical wires, or any signs of immediate danger. As for damage, it looked like the aftermath of an earthquake. Everything was knocked over; door frames were bent, and sheet rock was cracked in multiple locations. Mr. Claverie noted that a surveyor showed up quickly.
- When asked if they lost power or not, Mr. Claverie could not recall any specific time where they lost power noting that there was a backup generator on the barge, and it had kicked in quickly.
- When asked to explain the general layout of the office barge, Mr. Claverie said on the first level there was a mechanic shop on the upriver end for the tugs, storerooms, a radio shop, and personnel offices. On the second level, there was a conference room, training room, the dispatcher's office, and offices.
- When asked if he noticed any pollution from the office barge, Mr. Claverie said he did not see or smell anything. He noted the phone lines, and the water were out.
- When asked of what he saw of the ship that struck the barge, Mr. Claverie said when he went down the stairs after the impact, he saw from the first level breezeway on the river side the ship downriver of them. The ship had the anchor down and Mr. Claverie could hear the anchor going out. He didn't see much else besides a light on the bow which he thought was the masthead light. When he first saw the ship approaching, he could see only the starboard side of the ship.

- When asked if he had any injuries, Mr. Claverie said he had no immediate injuries at the time. He now has some back pain and muscle tension. Mr. Altobello did not appear to be injured. Mr. Claverie did not seek any medical assistance after leaving the office barge.
- When asked if there were CCTV cameras on the office barge, Mr. Claverie said there were. There was a camera in the breezeway that was a fisheye camera and one facing the river and another looking down river. There was also a camera facing the parking lot and security guard shack. From the CCTV monitor in the dispatch office, they had the camera on the entranceway into the gangway.
- When asked about tug assistance, Mr. Claverie said the tug *Mardi Gras* was tied up next to them and they were able to respond quickly. The *Mardi Gras* came to the barge first and then went to the ship. Mr. Claverie was not aware of what the *Mardi Gras* was initially doing. They don't have VHF radio in the dispatch office since all dispatch operations are done by phone. They do have a Nextel radio system and the tug *Miriam Cooper* was calling them on that.
- When asked of any previous close calls or accidents with the office barge, Mr. Claverie said they had never been hit before that he was aware of. There were previous close calls from vessels coming from above the fleet.
- When asked of their emergency exit from the dispatch office, Mr. Claverie said they knew their way out which was the door that led to the breezeway where there was a stairwell that led to the first level where the gangway was located.
- When asked of any drills conducted on the office barge, Mr. Claverie said there were no drills on the barge that he was aware of but there were safety briefings. There were life rings around the barge.
- When asked if he took any pictures with his mobile phone, Mr. Claverie said he took 12 pictures which he is willing to share. He said when he initially got up to see what was going on before the barge was struck, he left his phone behind and after the barge was struck, he went back to get it.
- Mr. Claverie said the New Orleans Harbor police arrived on scene and he spoke to them about 30 minutes after the barge was struck.

End of summary