



## National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Office of Marine Safety

### Interview Summary – DCA22FM024

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**Interview of:** Aiden Honaker – Deckhand for Rigid Constructors  
**Date/Time:** July 7, 2022 – 0930 to 1040 CDT  
**Location:** USCG Marine Safety Field Office Lafayette Conference Room  
**Interviewed by:** CWO3 [REDACTED] – USCG, Adam Tucker – NTSB  
**Attendees:** Alan Breaud – Breaud & Myers (representing Rigid Constructors interests), Jefferson Tillery – Jones Walker LLP (representing LA Carriers interests), Tommy Plaisance - LA Carriers Operations Manager (Party in Interest), Jeff Mizzi – Rigid Constructors President of Marine Operations (Party in Interest), Mark Fazioli – 3D Marine (representing LA Carriers interests)  
**Accident:** June 15, 2022, Capsizing and sinking of the e-crane barge *Ambition* in the Gulf of Mexico, about 18 nautical miles offshore of Freshwater Bayou, Louisiana (NTSB No. DCA22FM024).

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This interview summary has been compiled based on Coast Guard and NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Aiden Honaker, one of the Rigid Constructors deckhands assigned to secure the e-crane barge *Ambition*.

- Mr. Honaker has been with Rigid Constructors for 8 months and is a deckhand. He has no previous experience as a deckhand and had no training as a deckhand prior to joining the company. All his training and experience has been during his tenure with the company. He is not in possession of a merchant mariner credential.
- Mr. Honaker said he could not remember the day or date they were tasked to secure the barge *Ambition*.
- Mr. Honaker stated that they were tasked by their supervisor Ronnie to prepare the barge *Ambition* and his instructions were to strap things down and secure things to the deck.
- When asked what kind of objects, equipment and cargo was on the deck of the *Ambition*, Mr. Honaker said there was a man basket (man loader/skyjack lift), the crane bucket, a walkway/gangway and that was all that he could remember. He recalled there was a spare crane bucket at the front right-hand corner of the barge. When asked to clarify the orientation of the spare bucket when referencing a schematic drawing, he indicated it was at the stern of the barge near the port corner. Mr. Honaker said the man lift on the barge was used for maintenance of the crane and it was located under the crane.
- There were four oil container totes on the barge, and all were strapped down to the deck. They were all located under the crane. Mr. Honaker said there was nothing else that he could remember being on the barge.
- When asked if there was any type of checklist used for the preparation and securing of the barge *Ambition*, Mr. Honaker stated no and that this was done just on “common knowledge”.

- When asked if he had worked on the Ambition barge before, Mr. Honaker said that it was his first time to work on the Ambition. When asked if he knew the Ambition had been moved to other locations, Mr. Honaker said he did not know.
- When asked if he secured the scoop for the crane, Mr. Honaker said they had a pedestal that was welded to the barge which the scoop sat in, but he said he was not sure about anything else with it, noting he had no part of securing it. The pedestal would have been near the edge of the crane by the basket.
- When asked when walking around the barge securing things, if he noticed any hatches or manholes open, Mr. Honaker said that he wasn't told to look for that and they had multiple other people working on the barge as well. When asked while he was walking around the barge if he saw any open hatches or manholes, Mr. Honaker said no.
- When asked if he noticed, when walking around the barge, if he saw that the two aft/stern ballast tanks were empty, Mr. Honaker said they were empty when they got there. He knew this because they checked them.
- When asked what open manholes they checked, Mr. Honaker said they looked into two of them. When asked if he noticed if there were covers for those manholes, Mr. Honaker said they did. He did not know what kind of covers they were but said they were round metal covers. When asked if those covers were in place, Mr. Honaker said yes.
- Mr. Honaker was shown a picture of the partially sunken barge Ambition and was asked if there was anything he knew of that could have caused the barge to capsize and sink. Mr. Honaker replied that he did not know.
- When asked how he saw that the aft ballast tanks were empty when they were on the Ambition to secure things, Mr. Honaker said it was daylight and when they opened them, they could see down to the ribs. When asked if there was any water in them at all, Mr. Honaker said, no, and that they had to add water.
- When asked how water was added to the aft ballast tanks, Mr. Honaker said he was not the one who added the water. What he saw was a hose run across to the barge from the dock and the tanks were filled up about halfway. When asked how he knew the tanks were filled halfway, Mr. Honaker said the other deckhand checked it and gave them confirmation the tanks were half full.
- When asked who opened the aft ballast tanks, Mr. Honaker said that Fred the other deckhand opened them. When asked how Fred opened them, Mr. Honaker said he was not sure and that he was not paying attention to that.
- When asked when he saw any manhole covers if he noticed they had any rubber or gaskets, Mr. Honaker said he did not notice.
- When asked to confirm that Fred was the one filling the tanks, Mr. Honaker said that it was. Fred told all of them when both tanks were filled halfway.
- When asked if he saw Fred close the tanks, Mr. Honaker said he did not see him close the tanks but noted they were called back to the barge to close them. They had left and were called by their supervisor Ronnie to come back and close the tanks for the captain of the tug.

- When asked about what time this took place, when Ronnie called them back, Mr. Honaker said they were in the cars driving back home. Ronnie passed on to them that the captain called him and said there was a front ballast tank cover open and that they needed to close it.
- When asked if they were all in the same car, Mr. Honaker said he was in the same car as Dylan.
- When asked where Ronnie was, Mr. Honaker said that Ronnie was filling out paperwork for the fuel.
- When asked where they drove from to get to the barge Ambition, Mr. Honaker said they had to drive from New Iberia all the way to Lake Charles. It was a 2-hour 45-minute drive one way. Mr. Honaker did not remember the name of the dock that they went to board the Ambition.
- When asked when they left the barge if they were headed back to New Iberia, Mr. Honaker said that was correct. The company yard was in New Iberia.
- When asked about the four oil containers that were stowed under the crane and what size they were, Mr. Honaker said they were all 250-gallon tanks – all the same size. When asked what was in the oil tanks, Mr. Honaker said it was run off oil from the drain pan of the crane.
- When asked what was used for securing of items on the deck of the Ambition, Mr. Honaker said they used ratchet straps. When asked if chains were used, Mr. Honaker said they were not needed.
- When asked if there were any safe working load or capacity markings on the ratchet straps, Mr. Honaker said he did not check. They were thick, good size straps.
- When asked if he had worked on other barges in the past, Mr. Honaker said he had worked on other crane and construction barges in the past.
- When asked about securing of the crane, Mr. Honaker said he only secured the bucket for the crane and not the crane itself. There were other deckhands helping out.
- When asked if the crane had any kind of braking or locking mechanism, Mr. Honaker said the crane pedestal would lock into place. When asked if the crane was locked on the day that they were securing items on the barge, Mr. Honaker said he did not know.
- When asked to retrace his footsteps for the day they went to the barge Ambition to secure things, and specifically the time they got on the barge, where they went, what they were told, what he secured, where he was and the times he remembered. Mr. Honaker said:
  - When they got there, Ronnie launched the boat, and they were told to ride the boat to the barge to start securing it.
  - When they got to the barge, the captain was hooked up to the hip. Ronnie went to talk to the captain and then told them what they needed to do.
  - They started securing everything and once everything was secured, they got a confirmation from the captain that everything was good to go.
  - They then spudded up and started moving.
  - About 2 miles down the river, the captain hit a piling.

- Shortly after that, they spudded down and the captain repositioned the tug behind the barge to push.
  - They then spudded up and the barge headed down to Stone Fuel.
  - They got off the barge and took the skiff out of the water and drove to Stone Fuel to wait for the barge to arrive. It was about 4 o'clock.
  - It took the captain about an hour to dock the barge. Multiple tries.
  - When the barge finally docked, they got it fueled up and the ballast tanks were filled.
  - They asked the captain if they were good to go and the captain said they were good to go.
  - Ronnie called them back saying they left a ballast tank cover open.
  - They went back and covered the ballast tank and that was it. They helped take off the ropes for the barge Ambition to leave.
- When asked how many spuds the barge Ambition had, Mr. Honaker said there were two spuds on one side of the barge.
  - When asked how they take the spuds up, Mr. Honaker said they use a spud generator/spud unit.
  - When asked if they were on the barge when they went 2 miles down the river, Mr. Honaker said they were on the barge at that time. The captain lost control of the barge and hit a channel marker and that is when they spudded down so that the captain could reposition.
  - It was getting dark, so they wanted to get the skiff out of the water so once the captain was ok with everything, they spudded back up and they got off the barge.
  - When asked to explain the channel marker that was hit, Mr. Honaker said it was a piling with a sign on it. The spud side of the barge hit it.
  - They were told by the captain and Dillard to spud down the barge. Ronnie was not on the barge at that time.
  - When asked how far down the spuds went when they spudded down, Mr. Honaker said he was not sure. When asked if they went down evenly or unevenly, Mr. Honaker said he couldn't tell.
  - When asked if he noticed any damage from the barge hitting the channel marker, Mr. Honaker said no and that the captain was not concerned.
  - After they spudded back up, they left on the skiff and the barge continued to Stone Fuel where they met the barge there.
  - When asked about the trouble the captain was having bringing the barge into Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said the current was not helping and he had to retry a couple of times. He could not make it into the slip at Stone Fuel, so he had to dock it at the point after another boat left. The point had another fuel station at it.
  - When asked if the tug took on any fuel, Mr. Honaker said no, they refueled the barge only. He did not know how many gallons were taken on.
  - When asked about how long it took to fill the tanks on the Ambition, Mr. Honaker said they had 45 minutes from 4 o'clock to finish everything because stone fuel was closing.

He recalled they started filling the ballast tanks about 4:25. Stone Fuel was closing at 5 PM.

- When asked who the captain was communicating to at Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said he was communicating to Ronnie.
- When asked to clarify where they went with the skiff after leaving the barge Ambition, Mr. Honaker said they went back to where they launched it from and recovered it and then drove with the skiff to Stone Fuel. There were four of them in the truck.
- When asked, when they were called back to the barge, who put the manhole cover on, Mr. Honaker said that it was Fred and Ronnie. Mr. Honaker said he stood at the dock with the other deckhand.
- When asked if he saw crew members from the tug working on the barge with them, Mr. Honaker said he saw a crew member on the barge when they spudded down after hitting the channel marker and again at the fuel dock.
- When asked what he remembered of the weather that day, Mr. Honaker said it was light wind. The water was a “tiny bit choppy”. The skiff rode in it just fine.
- When asked where the barge Ambition hit the piling, referencing a schematic, he indicated it was near the raked end at the corner on the spud side about 5 to 8 feet forward of the forwardmost spud. The piling was knocked over slightly but came back up after, “but it is not straight no more”.
- When asked when at Stone Fuel, where the fuel was being loaded, Mr. Honaker said there was an 1800 gallon tank and a 700 gallon generator tank. The generator tank was under the crane and the tank was under the boom. When asked what water was used to fill the ballast tanks, Mr. Honaker said it was fresh water.
- When asked why the filling of the ballast tanks was stopped at halfway, Mr. Honaker said he was not sure.
- When asked what the draft of the barge Ambition was, Mr. Honaker said he did not know.
- When asked when the barge was spudded up, if he noticed if it had any lean or list, Mr. Honaker said the barge was “pretty even” to him. He couldn’t tell if it was leaning or not.
- When the channel marker was hit, Mr. Honaker was asked where he was. He explained that the skiff was riding behind the barge and they were all sitting on the corner near the Conex box talking with the boat crew. When asked if he felt anything when the piling was hit, Mr. Honaker said no, it was a “pretty small” piling.
- When asked when they left the barge, if anyone remained behind, Mr. Honaker said no they all departed together.
- When asked who Dylan was, Mr. Honaker said he is the operator on their crew. It was him, Dillard, Brady and Fred in the truck.
- When asked if Ronnie was in a separate car, Mr. Honaker said he was.
- When asked to confirm that the aft ballast tanks were halfway full, as informed to him by Fred, Mr. Honaker said that is correct, he was told they were halfway full. He noted the deckhand from the tug came down and checked everything out and said it was ok. The captain then said it was all ok and they left.

- When asked how the deckhand from the tug was talking to the captain, Mr. Honaker said he wasn't paying attention to him and guessed he had a radio.
- When asked if he took any pictures of the barge or on board the barge, Mr. Honaker said no, they are not allowed to use their phones and are not allowed to take pictures. He did not take any pictures of the barge.
- When asked when in the skiff, how high the deck of the barge was to the waterline, Mr. Honaker said they were able to walk from the skiff to the barge. There was about a 2 foot drop from the barge to the skiff. The deck of the barge was about 2 feet higher than the skiff. No ladder was needed.
- When asked what else he strapped down, Mr. Honaker said he strapped down a walkway.
- When asked what was in the Conex box, Mr. Honaker said there were tools, gear and equipment. When asked how it was secured to the deck, Mr. Honaker said he believed it was welded to the deck.
- When asked of the name of the dock they launched the skiff from in Lake Charles, Mr. Honaker said he is not familiar with the area.
- When asked who got on the skiff to go to the barge, Mr. Honaker said there were six in total. Ronnie and the other deckhand Dalton were there.
- When asked where the Ambition was going to be towed to, Mr. Honaker said he did not know.
- When asked if he knew they were going to have to meet with the barge at Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said he just does what he is told.
- When asked if a job safety analysis (JSA) was carried out on the day they went to the barge Ambition, Mr. Honaker said yes, they did a JSA. The JSA was done in New Iberia. When asked if the JSA had any instructions/procedures as to how to secure items on the barge, Mr. Honaker said he was not sure. When asked if the JSA was documented, Mr. Honaker said it was done using a tablet. Mr. Honaker said he was not sure if a record of the JSA was kept.
- When asked when they arrived at the launch in Lake Charles, if there was any kind of safety meeting or instructions as to what they were to do on the barge, Mr. Honaker said no. There was nothing carried out on the barge either.
- When asked if there were specific assignments to them on the barge, Mr. Honaker said they all collectively picked something and got it done.
- When asked if there was one person assigned to manhole covers, Mr. Honaker said no there was not. He noted it was his first time on the barge and he was not aware of how many hatch covers were on the barge.
- When asked if he was aware of the purpose of the manhole covers, Mr. Honaker said their purpose was to keep water out of the tanks.
- When asked how long it took to complete securing things on the Ambition, Mr. Honaker said he didn't keep track of time, but it was "pretty long".
- When asked about the barge hitting the piling, Mr. Honaker said they were on the barge at that time and didn't get off until after they spudded down so the tug could reposition. The tug repositioned from the hip to the bow of the barge.

- When asked why they had to go to Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said that it was so they could refuel the barge for the next job.
- When asked about the Karen Koby having trouble docking, Mr. Honaker said he could see it because they were on the edge of the dock waiting for the barge to tie up.
- When asked why six guys were at Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said they all went so they could get the job done as fast as possible. They had to refuel and ballast the barge and make sure the barge was squared away. When asked why there was a rush, Mr. Honaker said there was no rush and that they just wanted to go home.
- When asked if he had any schedule, Mr. Honaker said no and that they get off when the job is done.
- When asked if any of the Stone Fuel employees ballasted the Ambition, Mr. Honaker said no, he turned on the water and handed the hose over to Fred on the barge. Brady supervised Fred filling up the ballast tanks. Mr. Honaker then went to do the fueling with Dylan.
- When asked who made the determination regarding how much ballast goes into the tanks, Mr. Honaker said, "I guess the captain". When asked if he and his crew spoke of the level of water in the ballast tanks, Mr. Honaker said we filled them up halfway and a deckhand from the tug came and checked on it and he said they were good to go. Ronnie was the one in communication with the captain via radio, but they were all there and they could hear it.
- When asked if there was a procedure regarding how to ballast the barge Ambition, Mr. Honaker said not that he was aware of.
- When asked if there was a hurry to get out of there because Stone Fuel was closing, Mr. Honaker said no, Stone Fuel gave them an extra 15 minutes to get done after closing. They were nice enough to let them finish what they needed to get done.
- When asked if anyone ever said to him if the ballast tanks should have been filled all the way, Mr. Honaker said no.
- After the good to go from the captain, Mr. Honaker and the Rigid crew departed Stone Fuel. Ronnie was still there working on paperwork. The captain called Ronnie who in turn called them and told them to turn around and come back because there was a ballast tank cover that Fred forgot to close. They went back to the barge, and Fred closed the tank with the cover. Mr. Honaker saw him close it, and the deckhand came down from the tug and gave them confirmation that everything was all good which he communicated to the captain. They then helped the tug crew untie the Ambition from the dock and they then departed.
- When asked about the cover that was left open that Fred had to replace, Mr. Honaker said the cover was indicated on the picture presented to him (below), near the centerline of the barge. He said that was the manhole cover they were told about. Nothing else. The Karen Koby was on the hip at that time.



- When asked if any of their crew were tasked to ensure the manhole covers were in place, Mr. Honaker said no. When asked if it was anybody's job, Mr. Honaker said he was not sure. They all looked at the manhole covers and called the captain's deckhand to come down to give them confirmation on everything and he said everything was good to go.
- When asked if Fred placed a manhole cover over the open manhole, or if it was a pump or piece of angle iron, Mr. Honaker said he could not remember.
- When asked to confirm that he saw Fred place a manhole cover on the tank opening, Mr. Honaker said that he did see that.
- When asked of where the tug was, when Fred put the manhole cover on near the centerline of the barge, Mr. Honaker said it was on the hip on the starboard side.
- When asked if there were problems with any of the other manhole covers, Mr. Honaker said no, the captain's deckhand came down and gave them confirmation that everything was good to go.
- When asked when he saw Fred put the manhole cover on, if any kind of tool was used Mr. Honaker said there was a "turn thing" on the cover and that he was "pretty sure he did it" but he did not see.
- When asked to clarify about it getting dark when they took the skiff back to the launch and recovered it, Mr. Honaker said they took the skiff out of the water and drove to Stone Fuel. This was because if they had taken the skiff to Stone Fuel, it would have been dark by the time they were to leave to go back to the launch.
- When asked about who it was that Ronnie called when they were told to return to the barge at Stone Fuel, Mr. Honaker said he called Dylan.



- When asked if they use any timecards or anything for their hours worked, Mr. Honaker said they have a computer-based program for their work records.
- When asked if there was any additional facts he would like to contribute, or points he would like to clarify, Mr. Honaker said no.

**End of summary**