UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	
BOW TRIUMPH VESSEL CRASH INTO WHARF BRAVO PIER NEAR CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA ON SEPTEMBER 5, 2022	Accident No.: DCA22FM040

Interview of: JOHN THOMAS, Pilot
Bow Triumph

North Charleston, South Carolina

Tuesday,
September 6, 2022

APPEARANCES:

LIEUTENANT [redacted] [redacted] Investigator
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I N D E X

I N T E R V I E W

(1:50 p.m.)

LT. [redacted] Okay. Good afternoon everyone. This is Lieutenant [redacted] with Coast Guard Sector Charleston. Today's date is September 6th, 2022. And time is 1350 Eastern Time.

We are here in regards to the Marine Casualty Investigation regarding the *Bow Triumph* collision into the Pier Wharf Bravo at Joint Base Charleston in the area of North Charleston, South Carolina on September 5th, 2022.

And now we will go around the room and do introductions of everyone here.

MR. THOMAS: My name is John Thomas, Pilot Unit Five.

MR. ADWERING: Brett Adwering (ph.), counsel for the Charleston Branch Pilots Association.

MR. SMITH: Rick Smith, President of Charleston Pilots.

MR. GALLOWAY: David Galloway, (indiscernible).

MR. CAMERON: John Cameron, Executive Director, Charleston Branch Pilots.

MR. GILSON: Brian Gilson (ph.) sitting counsel for the owners and technical managers of the *Bow Triumph*.

MR. [redacted] (ph.), Sector Charleston Investigations.

MR. [redacted] (ph.), with Sector Charleston Investigations.

LT. [redacted] And that concludes our introductions. So at this point, I will hand the floor over to Captain Thomas, to tell his story of what occurred yesterday on September 5th.

MR. THOMAS: On September 5th, we had scheduled a ship job from, it was former BP Amaco to Odfjell Terminal on a tanker *Bow Triumph*. I board the vessel a little prior to 1530.

The draft of the vessel was 27 feet, seven inches. There's nothing unusual about that draft. There was nothing unusual about that day. It was a bluebird day.

It was flood tide, and -- which is our procedure for sailing anything from BP or upriver of that, as well as the Naval Weapons Station. We always like to have a little current to work against when we sail ships from up there.

I reviewed the pilot master card. I noted no material deficiencies and I signed the card. The ship was on dock around 1527 by McAllister Towing, and -- who assisted in docking.

I took the conn from the McAllister docking master, Craig Mitchum at approximately 1544. The shop handled normally in all turns. The first turn that we go is a turn towards our submarine base, which in my opinion and my -- in my career, is the most significant turn that we --

(Crosstalk)

MR. ADWERING: It's sort of downriver, making a left hand turn, 90 degrees. The submarines are right there.

MR. THOMAS: So in preparation for any of these, any of these

significant turns, I reduce the power on ships so that during the turn, I have additional power if I need it. This turn, it was actually a very sharp left turn on my port side, it's clear, on my starboard side are three submarines. So we're extremely vigilant during this turn.

These ships that I've been on in my 30 year career, are extremely good handling vessels. They have Becker rudders, which are rudders that will break at a certain area and give you more rate of turn.

And their engine power is usually very, very responsive. The first turn to port, coming from BP Amaco, is a sign turn, again, and this is where I can test the characteristics of the ship. I made that turn on -- with a half bell at port 20, the ship came around without any discrepancies, very well managed, and very well tracked.

Kicked it to full ahead in that turn, I think we were making somewhere around five to seven knots through that area. We transited along the submarines. We make another general turn to the right.

And we're approaching the next significant turn, which is the location of Pier Bravo. After passing the submarines, I again reduced my power from full ahead to half ahead so I could have some power in my pocket, is what we call it, in any significant turn.

We do this on container ships. We do it on any ships. And I

was making this transit and again, I tested the ships characteristics. I used port 20, just to begin my turn, to make sure that the rate of turn was significant and proper to make this turn.

The ship responded immediately to my port 20. So that gave me a comfortable feeling that the ship was going to maneuver this turn as I don't know how many ships I've had through that turn, many, many, many ships.

So it was -- there was no indication that the ship was not going to handle properly. So I went to mid ship for a second to ease my rate of turn, and then to finish the -- complete the maneuver, I put her to port 20 again, and kicked it to full ahead to make the turn, which is a normal procedure for us, especially with a ship with that type of power structure.

And watching the ship after the port 20, I noticed that the rate of turn was not increasing, which was a significant issue for me. It's something I have never seen before. It was totally unexpected.

So I immediately put her hard a-port with full ahead. And at that point, my job is to, you know, to mitigate every possible accident scenario clearly, and keep oil out of the water, and keep people from getting hurt.

So I continue with that hard left rudder, that full ahead power, and my theory was that once she got into deeper water, and we had five meters clearance under the ship, so we weren't, we

weren't in any shallow water as far as that -- as far as I'm concerned.

But she would break to the left, and I've seen ships lock up before for five seconds, ten seconds. I've never seen a ship lock up for whatever that timeframe is. For me, being in the accident, it felt like eternity. I'm sure you guys will have an accurate timing of how long it was.

At no point during that maneuver, or during any of my orders, did the captain question my orders. Captain and the crew were very professional. It just caught a lot of very professional mariners off guard.

We were transiting towards the Bravo dock, and I'm obviously praying that she's going to break left, break left, break left. And it -- in my position, I either have to decide to continue this track and hope that she breaks, or mitigate this collision.

Two ways to mitigate this collision is to drop the port anchor, and hopefully she will -- that would actually help her make that turn to the left. Or it would, worst case scenario, if we're going to hit the dock, we'd hit it broadside instead of dead on.

In correlation with the bridge team at that point, I was pretty confident that we were going to have a collision. We requested port anchor drop. We can't see the anchor. There was, obviously, a good bit of stress on the bridge of that ship.

They were Filipino crew, they were extremely professional,

and I'm not sure if they used English all the time, but I could not tell you whether he ordered starboard or port to his boson on the bow.

And as it turns out, starboard anchor was dropped, which drive us directly into Pier Bravo. And we stopped the engines and we were trying to rest the ship at that point, because at that point, we knew she wasn't going to break to the left.

You know, I can't speculate on what the port anchor would have done. All I can speculate is what our intentions were to save the ship from any collision with that pier.

There was no conflict after the collision. The master was calm, I was calm, Captain Mitchum, who was part of the bridge team, but not the conn. I had the conn on the ship.

Right prior to the collision, we blew our five blasts. I did not -- that order was given and I heard the whistles go off. And we stopped the ship astern and we backed out.

And I would like to say one thing that I did forget in this report, but when we had that hard left, with the last thing I have is a bow thruster, and I had the bow pressure full port. But it, in my experience, anything over five knots of bow thruster is useless.

So it's more of a, I don't know what's the right word for it. But anyway, at some point, I do remember ordering the bow thruster.

We backed away from the dock. We probably knocked out a 300

foot section. There's a tower on the end of the dock. Not that anything we hit kept us from hitting that tower, but that was one of my main concerns was not to knock that tower down and hurt anybody on the ship.

But all these things are going through your mind quick. So backed out, and proceeded to Pier Odfjell. Before that, I asked the chief engineer, chief mate, to please inspect the bow and if there's any sheen, and the cargo hold for punctures.

I asked the captain on the tug boat, and this is the only time I used my phone during the transit, was to please take pictures so that we could see the damage before we proceeded up the river and distributed oil anywhere.

That was, thank God, not the case from what I -- from what we could see. The damage was above the waterline. We felt safe. We contacted Odfjell. They said they were comfortable taking the ship at their dock to discharge the cargo.

The word I got was that it was a ballast tank that had significant pollution issues, that we needed to be concerned about. And everything had held, the valve had held. Clearly, the dock took the brunt of the accident.

The ship proceeded up the river, as it had 100 times when I've been on a bow tanker. So we got no issues. I did tell the captain that I never seen this in 30 years, I've never seen a ship lock up like that with hard port.

And obviously, he was concerned and you know, couldn't have

been nicer. He was clearly concerned about his career. And then so I notified the other point before -- after the immediate collision, within five minutes, we had contacted Coast Guard via my office.

We had contacted my office. And commission of pilot (indiscernible) Coast Guard. Got the word as soon as we can get to it. I stayed in command of the ship until just past the Mark Clark (ph.) bridge. I handed the conn back over to the dock master to push it alongside at Odfjell.

I stay on board foreign ships until the line is on the dock. As soon as the line was on the dock, I gave my regards to the captain and I went to my office for a drug test and to write my statement.

And that's about all I can tell you.

Only thing I would add to that, like on the second page of my statement, is right before the collision, we did blow the whistle. I think I said that. It was not an order that, that was on my mind, as it was an abandoned pier, as far as I'm concerned.

And you know, everything, all the power, rudder, bow thruster, was all operational. We had no deficiencies other than the collision that would have prevented us to continue our transit to Odfjell. So that's all.

I don't think we -- if we made the right decision there. So --

LT. [redacted] All right. Thank you, Captain. All right. So

thank you for your statement, Captain. At this time, the Coast Guard will follow up with some questions.

MR. THOMAS: Okay.

LT. [redacted] And maybe just some clarification.

MR. THOMAS: Yes, ma'am.

LT. [redacted] On some things you went through.

MR. THOMAS: Mm-hm.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN THOMAS

BY LT. [redacted]

Q. Going back to your decision to get underway at that time, what was your assessment of the tides and currents prior to getting underway?

A. It was a manageable flood tide. It's a very common condition. Like I said, we sail all ships from the weapon station north with flood tide.

These turns with ebb tide will set you down into the turn, so we would like -- we always want a little bit of flood tide to work against as we maneuver around buoys and maneuver around turns.

Ebb tide sends us into a shoal. That -- that's, I guess that answers that question as far as the tide's concerned.

Q. Well, do you know what the velocity of the flood current was?

A. I would estimate at the first turn from where the submarines were, I would say two knots, and I'm sure Nillo (ph.) can confirm that.

By the time I got down to -- and the reason that it's a

little bit more constricted up there, you can see where this -- where the channel gets a little smaller, so like a funnel, it gets a little stronger.

You could see it, and we said we'd take the ski off that buoy because you can see the water moving, the whitewater on it. That was the first turn, and that was the first indication that I knew I had a very, as I anticipated, a very good handle on the ship.

She made that turn beautifully. At the point where my -- we had the issue and I would say somewhere between one and two knots, but I couldn't say for sure. The only thing I would add to that is our under keel clearance all along the way was around five meters, plus. So --

Q. Do you believe there was any difference in the current or in your under keel clearance between that turn and the previous two turns?

A. No. I believe there were some hydronamic (sic) differences, but we had -- we never, we never rolled. I've been on ships where you get close to shoal and they'll roll. That never happened. She stayed steady. She handled like she's always handled except for locking up.

And I guess the short answer to that is no.

Q. But you said you believe there was some hydrodynamic --

A. Yes.

Q. -- differences?

A. Yes, I do.

Q. Like what?

A. Well, the first turn, clearly, there's more water to the left of that red buoy. And this turn here, we passed some traditional shoaling, abeam of Pier Alpha. It's always been there in my career.

We're aware of it. We're weary of it. And you know, so we prepare for it. That's part of why we reduce power, that's part of why we leave a little reserve, 28 degrees versus hard port.

But these ships, we've been through this turn I don't know how many hundreds of times. These vessels have been up there without an issue.

So whether, you know, whether you have some bank effect off that port side, but that should have been, in my opinion, not nearly enough to keep that ship from locking up.

I think we'll -- my goal here is to find out what happened so it never happens again. That's my goal. If, you know, so I'm as, I'm as dumbfounded as the rest of my partners, or anybody that does this for a living.

And I clearly haven't talked to a lot of people, but I've never seen a ship lock up like that. And I've never seen -- and we deal with hyrdonamics off shore, with old 1,200 foot ships. We deal with it all the time.

So it's not uncommon for us to be close to the edge of a shoal. And I just want people to understand, this is what we do. And it's -- we try to manage that the best we can. So yeah.

Q. Approximately how many times have you piloted this particular channel?
A. Oh, I've been a pilot since 1994. I started in 1991 as an apprentice, so from 1991 to today, I've probably been on 10,000, 12,000 ships, I would say. I've probably been up there, I don't know, 500 times, give or take.
Q. In this particular --
A. Yes, ma'am.
(Crosstalk)
Q. -- up in the Cooper River there.
A. Yes, ma'am. That's a total guess. You'd have to go through some old records to find that. But as an apprentice, we'd ride 21 days straight all the time. So we're working hard. As a pilot, it would be less.
Q. And approximately how many of those transits were done vessels that are a similar size and --
A. I would say --
Q. -- similar equipment as this vessel?
A. I'd say, I'd say a third, because most of the traffic up there is tugs and barge. I believe we've started to bring more ships up there. Now we have, obviously, we've got Amaco. We have (indiscernible), we have a few. We have two more docks up there than when I started.
And -- but I would say 150 similar ships, or 100 similar. And that would -- and I'm going back to my apprentice days in

1991. Part of our training is junior pilots for -- on junior ships, and so during those days of your training, which is a total of six years, you spend a lot of time on these smaller ships.

It would be a long time ago (audio interference).

Q. Okay. Thank you for that. I think you mentioned it a little bit towards the end, the bow thruster involvement. Can you just clarify to the best of your remembrance of when you started using the bow thruster and when it was not used?

A. The first -- I would have to start that conversation by saying the bow thruster would be useless. Using it just as a last ditch effort, I would say maybe 300 feet before the -- 200 feet before we hit the dock.

But not knowing that the starboard anchor was down, that's, that's one reason that bow thruster didn't do anything, because now you got a bow thruster and an anchor working against each other.

The theory is you would brake and anchor, with a brake on it, to try to get it -- if you dropped the port anchor, put a little bit of brake on it, and then we would hit the dock parallel instead of head on.

Because at that point, I really was worried about that tower. That was my main concern was that tower falling on the ship. Thank God it didn't.

We did use the bow thruster after the collision, so the bow thruster wasn't damaged. And when I backed out, there was too

much debris for the tug boat to get in there to push my bow around.

So we used the bow thruster and once we had cleared the debris, the bow pushed it forward, and I got a tug in there and I got a tug on the port quarter, just trying to maneuver on out of there. Take it up the river.

Q. I believe you said there were two tugs involved.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Can you clarify where they were, whether or not they were made fast to the vessel, or what orders they were given throughout the whole voyage?

A. So we use, in this transit, and it's been our standard operating procedure, we use tugs to sail. We released those tugs once we get turned around, and we sail a ship.

Docking master and the tugboats have control of the ship at the piers. So once we got under -- once we got turned around, I'm making five knots, the tugs are making eight knots going back down the river. They were probably a mile ahead of me, give or take, when we knew there was a problem.

Maybe two miles ahead of me, I couldn't be for sure. The other side of that is -- and one reason tugs can't do anything when you're making, you know, six, seven knots is that they're very -- they're -- it's a tough call there.

So if they had been there, you know, if they were closer, maybe, but in general, we've never, we've never, you know, that's

something we just come in alongside.

And so obviously, they met down in Odfjell after they helped us get away from that pier. But yeah, they were a mile ahead of me or more when the collision happened.

Q. Okay. And they were never made off to the vessel.

A. No, ma'am.

Q. They just -- they came back alongside after --

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. -- you --

A. Because at that point, I didn't know if I had a propulsion problem. I didn't know if I had a rudder problem. When I command a ship, I use my hands, left, right, or starboard, full ahead, full astern.

You know, I use my hands so visually -- because I'm dealing with a crew that can't -- usually most of them can speak a little English but not good English.

So you know, that -- yeah, I wanted the tugs back because I wasn't exactly sure what I had left. So -- and I didn't know what I damaged, you know, because it -- we never know if there'd be a problem. I didn't know if we had -- we had not, clearly had not run aground.

So there must be a lot of water up against that pier. So you know --

Q. Okay. I understand the reason it happened really fast around this time, but just before the collision with the determination

between you and the captain to drop the anchor, can you try to just go through that again in more detail?

A. Yes.

(Crosstalk)

Q. -- that event.

A. Yeah. So the bridge team consists of myself, the master, a mate, and a crew member at the wheel tot, were in the ship with us, but they do what our orders are, left, right, straight, whatever.

And power -- when we got into that situation where we knew we were in trouble, the docket master and I were consulting. He was not the conn. I was the conn. We consulted.

But you know, at this point, I think we needed to drop the anchor because she's not going to break. She's not going to break.

And we agreed on port, and whether that was, you know, clearly we got the anchor down before we hit the dock, which had been the port anchor.

But to answer your question, I think you asked about timing, or are you asking about who was involved in that decision. It would have been myself, the docking master who had no conn position, but he was part of the bridge team, and giving welcomed advice.

And the captain of the ship. That order, I think, was given in his native language, so I did not hear him say starboard. I

don't know if he had said starboard and not that it would have mattered, you know, if he said -- I think he was Filipino, if he said it.

Because when we get in these stressful situations, and my life is very stressful on ships so this, I'll just say this is a very rare terrible occurrence, but there are a lot of situations that are stressful, and when we have these stresses, foreign crew tend to speak their native language.

And then we start to lose just a little bit of control. So now, I'm looking at engines. I'm trying to look at machines that I know I trust.

So I think he gave that order in Filipino, but I don't know. I didn't hear it. He gave it to him, now what he relayed on the radio, I could not tell you what that was.

Q. So --

A. I don't think it was in English.

Q. So to clarify, you recommended to the captain to drop the port anchor.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. And then he relayed --

A. To a man on the bow.

(Crosstalk)

Q. What direction --

A. Yes.

(Crosstalk)

A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. Okay.
A. And that's common so I would like to preface all this at the beginning of this transit, as in with every transit, we keep a man on the bow, standing by the anchor all the time.
So there was a man on the bow, and the captain said his crew was on the starboard side. That's the one I let go. And I think, in their mind, they're thinking we're resting the ship. They're not thinking like we're thinking.
One more, we got one more piece of the puzzle. One more thing to pull out of our box. And that was the port anchor. So --
Q. Meaning you think perhaps he was just thinking that the anchor --
(Crosstalk)
A. -- let's stop the sip.
Q. -- won't stop the ship.
A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. And you were using that as a last resort to help pivot the bow.
A. Yes.
Q. To port.
A. Yep. It's anything to make a collision broadside instead of straight in.
Q. I understand.

A. I mean, that's -- and you know, I've been on docks that hit ships and you want to be as parallel as you can be.

(Crosstalk)

Q. Do you know if --

A. It's a card game.

Q. Do you know approximately what the vessel speed was at the time of the actual --

A. Collision?

Q. Collision.

A. I'd say somewhere between five and six knots, six and a half. And --

Q. Okay.

A. -- I don't know that and the reason -- the only thing I can tell you is we were thinking that the second I give up that power, I'm committed to hitting that dock. So that's the last thing I'm going to do is give up that power.

I got to have the water over the rudder and I'm just -- it's blowing my mind what I'm seeing. And nobody on the bridge team questioned any of my orders through the whole transit.

Even at that part, you know, maybe we need more power, maybe we need more this, that was never, you know, and I understand, understand the hierarchy on the bridge of a ship.

But you know, I guess that answered your question.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. Okay.

Q. And what was the engine order at the time of the collision? I know you had gone to --

A. It's either going to be -- it's definitely a stop bell or a half astern, but you know, ships don't -- these engines take a little time to go from zero to 50. So I'm not exactly sure what it was, you know, the entire time, I'm trying to get the ship broadside.

Because if I back a ship full from a drifting position, or from a floor position, my bow is immediately going to go to the right. So I'm trying to make a turn to the left.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. So the minute I give -- I know this is the part I'm going to the left, I'm going to the left. If for some reason, I backed full, I'm going against everything that ship wants to do. It's going to go to the right.

So I'm giving up on my chance to save the ship. So it's a big decision to put full stern, because then you are, you know, you've given up a piece of the -- you've given up something you can use, I guess is what I'm saying.

Q. Okay.

A. So --

Q. And I know you're -- you said your most recent rudder order was hard to port.

A. Yes.

Q. Can you clarify how many degrees that is?

A. 35, I would say.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm not positive. There was some discussion at the very end of, you know, it was a Becker rudder, and you know, it was hard port -- it was still port while we were, you know, while we were in the dock. I mean, so --
Q. Okay.
A. That rudder indicator, I remember it being black, which is kind of hard to see, but I did see it was hard port.
Q. Going back, I think a little bit from there, you had also mentioned you used your phone one time, or for the first time.
A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. That day.
A. I made --
(Crosstalk)
A. I didn't call anybody. What I asked -- what I had done is once we had made the collision, the crew could not see the damage, but obviously, dealing with a tanker here, I want to see if there's any sheen, I want to see if there's any -- anything that needs immediate attention.
So I asked the crew on the tug, once it got there, to take a picture of the bow and send it to me. I did not look at those pictures because they had told me that we don't see any oil. Everything's good.
I didn't -- I looked at those pictures after we got -- after

I was relieved as conn. So --

Q. Okay.

A. But I needed those -- I needed the eyewitness and if he had said there's damage, you know, I could give it to somebody that -- I don't use my phone. So I, you know, sometimes you got to use it for communication, but other than that, that's a, you know, a --

(Audio interference)

Q. Can you talk about your use of your PPU? Your computer?

A. Yeah. So we have CIQ PPU's that we use. We are tied into the AIS plug of a ship. And like I tell every young pilot that I train, don't put your eyes on that screen, put your eyes out the window.

So it's a tool. It's not 100 percent accurate. It's not the end all save all. It's -- there is a bit of delay in there. The ships position, left to right, the channel is not -- it's not accurate -- it's accurate within probably 50 feet or 100 feet, depending on what's going on.

Sometimes it's dead on. We use it in the fog. We use it in storms. We use it when we're passing other vessels to make sure we're where we want to be.

It's also confirming with our positions in the channel (audio interference). What you see on the chart is not necessarily what you see when you're looking out the window.

When you make this turn, all you see is Pier Bravo. That's all you see and all you care about. It's just like looking at

those submarines. I am not going to touch that dock.

When I drive ships, I drive ships based on what's the worst case scenario that can happen right now. And 99 percent of the time, it's an engine failure, it's a rudder failure, or it's a wrong rudder order.

So that's why I put you know, rudders to mid ship, that's why we, we have the, you know -- I'm kind of getting off the subject here but that's part of the reason why in this turn, we do not hang out to the left.

Because if you have a problem, you're going -- you're not going to get yourself out of it. I'm sorry, to the right. The PPU, yeah, we use it a lot. It's a great tool.

I don't swear by it. I do have -- I've been using it probably five years here. The ships clearly have them. It has a predictor.

Predictors tend to exaggerate the position of the ship, where it's going to be or where it will be in 160 seconds, 120 seconds to 180, you know, minute by minute.

But -- and we keep our tracks, but can't everybody stay on the tracks, so it is what it is.

Q. Okay. So obviously, it sounds like this ship didn't respond as you wanted.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Obviously not the outcome you wanted.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Why was the rate of turn not where it needed to be in your opinion?

A. So when I, when I started -- when I approached the turn from a certain distance, I test the ship again, just like I did, hit the turn (indiscernible).

I give it port 20. I want to see if I'm going to get a significant rate of turn, or a gradual rate of turn. If I get a gradual rate of turn, I'll leave that port 20 on and just let her come around.

This is kind of a two stage turn and we, you know, I start with the port 20. The rate of the turn was exactly what I expected, very fast.

So then we ease to mid ship for a minute, or seconds, and then we come back. That's how we slow the rate of turn.

Q. `Mm-hm.

A. I cannot explain, I cannot explain why from the position after that first rate of turn, when I put 20 degrees port rudder back on there to complete the turn, that I got zero response. And then when I put her hard over with full ahead, I got zero response.

And when I drove into what was deeper water compared to what that channel is upriver, I got zero response. All those things did not make sense to me.

And I've had ships in this, in this world up here where we get very skinny, where they, they -- there's more -- they do lock

up a little bit, but they lock up for five seconds. They don't lock up for 30 seconds.

I've never -- especially when they're entering deep waters. I mean, we're entering, we're entering an area in that turn where there's plenty of water where the bow should drive right into the water.

I mean it should come to the left, but it didn't. I don't know if there's some shoal in there. I don't know if --

(Audio interference)

All I can tell you is part of the reason, you know, the other side, as you can imaging, with flood tide, you're going to get set to the right in that turn, towards the dock.

So that's part of why we hang out to the left. That's part of why we hang out to the left when we come by the submarines. We are -- we can spit on that red buoy. That's what we say.

Because we know we're not going to touch it. Obviously, there's a beacon at that point. We don't get anywhere near that beacon.

But we, you know, I'm always of the position, if I'm too far right, and I get the wrong -- I get a (indiscernible) put the rudder the wrong way, I'm in big trouble. I got, I got nothing.

And I've had it happen. I've had it at Nucor with these small ships and people always say big ship, small ship, small ships can be extremely challenging because they're so responsive.

And they can be extremely challenging because they're so

responsive with tugboats. So you have to be very careful how much of that power -- because they're both (indiscernible).

No tug assistance, no nothing, and so --

Q. Okay.

A. She handled like I thought she would until, obviously, she didn't.

Q. Did you visually see that the rudder angle indicator matched the order that you moved it in?

A. I think so, yes.

Q. To the left and then, you know, hard port.

A. Yeah. Now the only thing I can say about that is I'm looking at an indicator. I don't know what's going on with the rudder. I'm looking at -- that's a mechanical thing. That's what it is. I don't anticipate that you would find any difference there. I don't know.

But she made it the rest of the way after the trip, so the rudder worked perfectly.

Q. Do you believe at any time there was any steering malfunction or steering casualty?

A. No, ma'am.

Q. With the ship?

A. No, ma'am.

Q. Okay.

A. I get told if there's any material deficiencies on that ship that I should be aware of.

Q. And I believe you said it earlier, but the normal steering and machinery checks were all done at the pier.
A. Yes.
Q. All right.
A. So the pier --
(Crosstalk)
Q. -- and the dock master were --
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A We -- well, a lot of that is done by the crew. And it's on the pilot checklist. They will check ahead of stern, they will check the rudder, left to right. Standard procedures, obviously, VHF was on.

I made the security call. I talked to the dredges that I'm going to transit by. There were two dredges that I'd already talked to.

I talk about timing, you know, when we're going to be at the next pier. When we're going to be doing -- you know, things like that, yeah.

That's -- I cannot say that I was there for the, you know, sometimes they will check, they will check their machine before I get there.
Q. Mm-hm.
A. I have -- I don't think -- and anyway, they did check their equipment. It seemed like a very proficient, professional crew.

Q. Do you sign any kind of like checklist?
A. Yes, I do.
Q. That they do?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. I did.
Q. So did you sign the checklist yesterday after they completed the steering checks?
A. Yes. I sign a pilot master form, basically, and they, they are committing to me that they have done all these things. I, I obviously can't go check and make sure that they -- or I may -- or you know, something -- this lot -- this paperwork has gotten crazy, as you know.

So you know, we obviously can't check the ballast tank is sealed, or you know, all the different things that are on the checklist, but they -- that -- when I see that, I see the master's signature, I know that he has gone to through the right procedures.

Q. Okay.
A. So I (audio interference).
Q. Also, when the captain ordered the anchor to be dropped --
A. Mm-hm.
q. -- approximately how far would you say was the distance to the pier at that time?
A. So between the order and actually going down, I don't know

the delay, and I can only speculate 200 feet, 300 feet. I just don't know.

All I do know is that myself and the dock master knew immediately -- not immediately, we were a little befuddled to why the ship was gunning to the right, or it's just because the starboard anchor went down.

Actually pulling to the right.

Q. Mm-hm.

A. The only thing you can do with a ship in that position is drop one shot, two shot with the brake on, that's a decision for the man on the bow because it's a dangerous position to be in, because he's trying to stop that.

There's going to be fire, there's going to be smoke. So I don't want to question when he, when he dropped it or when he broke -- when he tried to brake it. Because he's clearly looking at that water.

He's clearly going, you know, we're making five, six knots, I'm going -- and I've seen -- I've seen ships drop it at ten knots, and when it just pans all the way out and rips right out of the bow.

So you know, I know that's what they're thinking and they got five guys up there and nobody wants to get hurt. So sometimes that's not an option. They did drop it and I'm proud of them for what they did.

But clearly, there was some miscommunications.

Q. So you don't know how many shots they let out?
A. I do not know.
Q. And then when did they bring the anchor back up?
A. We backed out from the debris, and heaved the anchor up. It didn't take a minute or two, so it couldn't, it couldn't have been much. It couldn't have been many shots.

And the anchor came up clear without any -- there wasn't stuff or anything under -- any pier stuff, you know.

Q. Mr. [redacted] Mr. [redacted] do you have any follow up questions that I didn't get to? Sure, sure. You got to speak up.

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. So I was listening, I guess you had a SOP, standard practice.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. What is that standard practice?
A. For what part of the transit? From the beginning to end, or from --
Q. Yes. (Indiscernible) SOP's.
A. No. I don't think we use the word SOP. We have some standards. We have, I guess that would be SOP. We have procedures that we use starting with the engine test and the rudder test.

Discussing anything unusual and traffic. There was no traffic around there. There was no traffic to discuss.

Q. Is this all written in like the form of a manual or --

(Crosstalk)

A. No.

(Crosstalk)

A. Master pilot card has a lot of this written in it. And the master pilot card discusses you know, where a tug's going to be. So that would be your -- the place to look for those, for those types of things that need to be discussed.

Q. Okay. So there's no like --

A. There's no book.

Q. Okay.

A. We don't have a book.

Q. Okay. And you mentioned like a (indiscernible) talking to other vessels.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Is this (indiscernible) really part of the standard practice?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Okay.

A. And that's done on VHF 13. It should be on the recorder. That's basically to let dredges know we're coming. I had two dredges I had to get around. We had a little traffic coming back to port, tugboat traffic, minor traffic.

But for the most part, that be a -- that is a piece of the puzzle.

Q. Okay.

A. And that is part of my responsibility, which I consider part of my responsibility.

Q. Did the (indiscernible) have any kind of discussion with the master of, you know, any kind of hazards you might face, you know, on the trip?

A. Yeah. And we would -- I wouldn't characterize it as hazards. I would characterize it as, you know, we're going to see some flood tide. We're not going to see any traffic.

It's a casual conversation. It's not -- nobody's -- we're not sitting in the conference room like this with the bridge team. It's very professional.

I mean, casual's the wrong word but it's very professional, and you know, something we do every day.

Q. Is there any kind of (indiscernible)?

A. No, that's to let us walk to do a --

(Crosstalk)

A. -- while it's towed.

Q. Got it. Did you know if anyone else (indiscernible)?

A. It's been a long day. No thank God. I don't.

(Audio interference)

A. Because that was my concern with dropping that anchor, was that somebody's going to get hurt.

Q. Dropping anchor, you know, you said estimated 1,200 trips --

A. Yes.

Q. -- 150 of a similar size, all estimated numbers. How many of those, have you ever had to drop anchors before (indiscernible)?

A. Yes.

Q. In similar situations?
A. I've had several situations that I've lost engines and lost rudder, and I'd rather go aground -- I've ground some ships off shore instead of blocking the channel. All were mechanical problems.

We had a hydronamic problem here. We did not have mechanical problems that I know of, unless there's something wrong with that rudder, but I don't believe there is.

BY LT. [redacted]

Q. Have you ever had to drop anchor or like take over like emergency procedures in this particular part of the channel?
A. Never. Dropping anchor is a very big decision. It's a big decision and once you -- and not one taken lightly. Because you're just -- everything, all your years of training, you're thinking that the ships going to do what she's built to do.

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. Going back to your master pilot, you said that's kind of like your standard practice.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. (Indiscernible) that.
A. Yes, sir.
Q. You said tugs not being fastened to the vessels was part of that standard. Is that something I see (indiscernible)?
A. You'll see that in the log book.
Q. Okay.

A. The crew will log in, we set out at 1527, I'm assuming it's out of (indiscernible) and we were probably let go at 1544 and they went up the river on their -- to do whatever they do.
Q. Who makes the call to (indiscernible) tugs?
A. Me.
Q. Okay.
A. And, well, and the tugboat company or the captain.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, it's a joint, I guess it's a joint decision. Really, we have -- and the main issue, clearly with ships just like anything, if you have an issue, it usually happens in the very beginning of the voyage, whether it's a failure of something, engine failure, air failure, rudder failure.

And we have tugs, we can push it back to the dock tied up, figure it out.
Q. Okay. So (indiscernible) take tugs all the way out? You know, out of the harbors?
A. There's a -- yes (indiscernible) order.
Q. Okay.
A. When you, when, you know, when you guys are familiar with the deficiency, and we need some backup, we will take them. What I can tell you is in my world, tugs are nice, but if I'm -- but at certain speeds, tugs are useless and they actually can be more dangerous.

So that's -- it's kind of nice to say you have them. If we

were coming in with a ship that has some deficiency but at 12 knots, on a 1,200 foot ship, tugs not going to do anything.

Q. Do --

(Audio interference)

A. No.

Q. They would help?

A. They would help. I'm not going to -- they would help. But that is not something I have ever done.

Q. Yeah.

A. In that transit or --

(Crosstalk)

Q. When we do a (indiscernible).

A. Right. I've never used tugs in transit unless I'm, you know, there's something unusual about a ship or if it's a class of ship that I'm not familiar with, or it's extremely heavy, or there's something that I needed to do, I want to get my feet wet with that ship.

You know, obviously, as we -- you know, from when I started, ships were 600 feet, now they're 1,200 feet. So everywhere along the way, the technology of ships, rudders, they just have kept up with the size of the ships.

But every way -- every step of the way, we are more cautious, we are more useful of tugs. But -- and I know it's hard to vision, I know it's hard to vision but sometimes slow speeds can -- when you have currents, and you need water over the rudder to

make a ship do what it's going to do, sometimes slow is not good for that.

So and that -- it's hard to express that, but that's just (indiscernible). You know, in a plane, you got to be making speed to fly.

BY LT. [redacted]

Q. Then you said you felt like the bow thruster would have been better effective at that speed.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. But you think would -- at that speed, would tugs be more effective than a bow thruster, or it'd been about the same?

A. More. But that being said, if -- it could have gone the other way where if you, if you're pulling a tug at that speed, you can trip tugs, you can get people in trouble, you know.

It's not something we normally would do. We use tugs for docking maneuvers. That's what we use them for. We don't really have, we don't really have -- we're not -- we don't have a huge escort tug system here that we use.

And that's a different type of -- lots of ports do, we do not. We're blessed with nice handling ships and a nice river. So --

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. In past experience, have you only worked here in Charleston or have you worked at other ports?

A. I've only worked in Charleston.

Q. Okay.

MR. [redacted] Lieutenant [redacted] that's all the questions I had.

MR. [redacted] All right. Thank you. I just have a few questions for -- deferring to Mr. Karr.

MR. THOMAS: Yes, sir.

MR. [redacted] But Captain, hey, thank you for a -- presenting all this information for us, and telling us your story, and helping us understand what occurred. The way the Coast Guard does their investigations is we develop a timeline.

MR. THOMAS: Yes, sir.

MR. [redacted] Of different facts, actions, conditions, events that occurred along that timeline.

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. So I'd just like to understand the timing with your orders and making that, making that turn around that point at Pier Bravo. Can you describe a little bit, so your initial port 20 --

A. Yes, sir.

Q. -- order, and the timing between that port 20 order and then the following order to come mid ship, and then following the timing to go to 20 port again, and then how long was it before you realized there was no response and gave the hard to port.

Can you kind of -- I know it's hard to say.

A. All I can tell you is in my experience, I didn't feel like at any time, nor did the bridge team because nobody had any -- nobody

ever spoke up that there was, you know, not that that's ever has -- never happened.

I would have to say between the first port 20 and the second port 20, ten seconds maybe. I don't know but what I want you to understand is that rate of turn didn't change. I mean, it eased up, but it never -- it didn't change.

We use easing of the rudder and when you look at predictors on the ship, that's not what the rudder is doing. That's what a computer thinks the ship's going to do.

Everything stays the same but just one second, and everything goes that way. So I have to think about -- that's what that computer's thinking, but I'm looking out the window and she's coming around great.

I'm going to put her mid ship for a second, and then you know, because clearly, I know there's, I know there's shoaling in this area. I want to kind of -- you know, I wanted to make that turn with a little bit of, with a little bit of cushion.

And then the port 20, the timing, I guess we have (indiscernible). It did not seem, it did not seem -- I don't know what the right word is. Significant to me.

I felt, clearly I felt like it was the proper orders for the time.

Q. Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. Well, would you say you felt the orders were timed properly?

A. Yes, sir.
Q. Okay.
A. Maybe that's a better way to put it.
Q. Okay.
A. I would say yes. The orders were timed properly and in a fashion that I normally would have done it.
Q. Okay.
A. In my history.
Q. Second question is the, the speed, if you can estimate the speed of the vessels collision with the pier.
A. I would have to look at my machine, but probably six knots.
Q. Six knots.
A. But I'm not sure about that.
Q. Because I know the anchor, to (indiscernible) the anchor you thought slowed you down.
A. Yeah. And one thing I want you to notice when you guys look at this, I mean, I know you have, I know you have a VDR and whether it goes this far or whatever, when we use a rudder, a ship will slow down.

It's like a brake. So that's part of why you add power. So when I put her port 20, you can see the speed of that ship go from like seven five to seven one, but all these speeds are the speeds I've been through this turn many, many times.
Q. Okay.
A. And then when you put her hard a-port, you are going to slow

the ship down. We actually use -- we actually what we call wagging the rudder, we will actually go hard to port, hard to starboard, hard to port, hard to starboard, trying to slow the ship down.

It's like a barn door. It will do it. Because like I said, it you use an engine to slow a ship down, you're going to twist that ship. She's going to twist in the channel.

I can use the rudder. I can let it break a little bit right, use counter rudders to center it up, brake it, and I can bring -- I cannot (indiscernible), which is what -- without stopping the engine, you know, right at stopping it.

Because -- I don't want to go on a tangent here, but I'm not (indiscernible).

Q. Somewhat, yes.

A. Okay.

Q. Thank you, Captain.

LT. [redacted] Yes, thank you, Captain. I know we're asking a lot of questions here.

MR. THOMAS: No, I want to --

(Crosstalk)

LT. [redacted] But we're piecing together that puzzle, so I really appreciate your cooperation.

BY LT. [redacted]

Q. Just all in all, I mean, the one question we haven't asked that we always ask in every case is if you could go back at this

point, is there anything you would do differently?

A. The only think I would have done differently, I know there's a shoal there. I don't want to get too close to that, to a shoal. Clearly, I mean, there was some (indiscernible) pushing me off and I was not aware of until it happened.

I don't know whether it's shoaled up in there, but it was -- since the size we have a little less than a year ago, it shoals up there a lot.

Yeah, if I could redo that, I've already done it in my head 1,000 times. I would have left the rudder on, maybe, done a little bit -- maybe continued that mid ship order, made ship in a left ten, and then it -- but the rate of turn was so (indiscernible) and I stand by it as a fast rudder.

It has great response. It's a (indiscernible) all the time. And yeah, I mean, the only thing I wish I'd done different was not been on that ship.

Q. Okay. I have a few other just really basic questions.

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. That I normally save for the end or just have you fill out, but for the sake of the interview being recorded --

A. Yeah, we can do that.

Q. And everyone else being here so --

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. So that everyone's aware of it. Let's see. Clarify again, who is your current employer?

A. Charleston Branch Pilots.
Q. Okay. And what is your official position?
A. Charleston Branch Pilot, Unit Five.
Q. Okay. And how long have you been employed?
A. Since 1991.
Q. Okay. In the same position?
A. I started as an apprentice.
Q. Okay. Describe the rest of your workday prior to this incident.
A. I was on my off week. I reported on at 0800 in the morning, is when my workweek starts, Monday to Monday. My weekend was a holiday weekend, basically.

I was asleep probably by, you know, 2200 the night before, midnight or something the night before or something like that. My first job, which I knew was at 1530, and that was even -- we weren't even sure that was going to happen.

But the week before, I mean, prior to 0800 Monday morning, I was not on call for duty.

Q. Okay.

(Crosstalk)

A. I don't know if that answers the question or not.
Q. So this job yesterday was your first --
A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. -- job of the day.
A. Yes.

Q. Okay.
A. I had not been -- that's right. There was no, there was no fatigue issues. I had a full night rest and full, you know --
Q. Was this a -- and this was a usual schedule for you. Was there anything else unusual about this day?
A. No. It was a beautiful day.
Q. All right. I think you already answered a lot of these. Anything else memorable about the weather? I know you said it was beautiful and we discussed the tidal currents.
A. Mm-hm. Nothing of any significance.
Q. Okay. Any major changes in your health recently?
A. No.
Q. DO you have any hearing problems or wear a hearing aid?
A. No.
Q. Do you have any vision problems or wear corrective lenses?
A. I wear readers.
Q. Do you take any medications?
A. Yes. I take high blood pressure and cholesterol. And it's in my Coast Guard physical.
Q. Okay. And when was the last time you had a Coast Guard physical?
A. Less than a month ago.
Q. Okay. Do you smoke?
A. No.
Q. Drink alcohol?

A. Yes.
Q. When was your last drink prior to this incident?
A. Sunday afternoon, maybe 1500, 1800 something like that.
(Crosstalk)
Q Have there been any --
A. -- since then.
Q. All right. Are any -- any other significant changes in your personal life?
A. No.
Q. And anything else significant about your interactions with the crew on the vessel?
A. Only thing I would reiterate is that the master and the bridge team were very professional. Captain Craig Mitchum was very professional. Nobody had any comments or -- about my orders. There was never any -- I've been on ships where it's chaos when an accident happens.

There was no chaos. Nobody was pointing fingers. Everybody was just as dumbfounded as I was, I believe. I mean, I don't know if you're going to get a different reaction from the crew, but under no -- at no time did I see any stress.

Sometimes I judge a captain's demeanor by the stress I see in him, or you know, (indiscernible). But there was no indication of -- everybody was calm and professional.

LT. [redacted] Anything else? NTSB, I'll open it up to you at this point.

MR. KARR: Thank you. This is Mike Karr with the NTSB.

BY MR. KARR:

Q. Captain, have you ever been a pilot of the *Bow Triumph* prior to this?

A. Not that I'm aware of, but I've been on several ships of the same class, very similar, you know, similar situations. This is a very common ship, class of ship, I would say.

I can get that information to you. But no, I don't believe I've ever been on this ship.

Q. All right. So most of my questions right now for the next few minutes are going to be based on what you've said so I can get a better understanding.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. So I'll be -- so I'll be jumping over what you have discussed already.

A. Sure.

Q. You mentioned zero response. You said the rudder was on, but the vessel did not turn.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. So at what -- tell me again, at what rudder, you know, did you see the rudder angle indicator and you saw no change in the -- no turn from what I understand.

A. On the second port 20 order, which -- you know, the first port 20 was at the beginning, like I say, this is a two phase turn basically.

The second port 20 order, I was missed by that -- why that did not create some rate of turn. I've seen this before. A few ships lock up. I'm just saying in general in my career, where, you know, you had unexpected reactions.

And only that's on a very deep ship or bulk, or very underrated, underpowered vessel. But at port 20, we got absolutely zero rate of turn, which I've never seen, ever, especially when you have five meters clearance under your ship.

And then to add to that, you know, looking at it, it needs to go hard port, and we're going to kick in that last full bell to give it all it got.

Still zero. If you look at the track, we're hitting that dock with a hard left rudder, which was just -- I don't, I don't -- I just can't believe it.

Q. And when you look outside the window, could you tell that there was no rate of turn?

A. Yes, sir. At that point, I was relying on my visual, yes.

Q. All right. And when this was going on, when the rudders were at port 20 and then hard, and nothing was happening to the headings of the ship, can you tell me if the captain provided any comments to -- I'll just say this, did the captain say anything on the bridge when this happened concerning what was going on?

A. At no time did any of the bridge team relay any concerns about my orders until collision was clear and -- the answer is no. He didn't question any of my orders or seem alarmed by any of my

orders, or any of my timing.
Q. With the -- what I'm focusing on is did he react to the fact that there was no rate of turn when the vessel went to port 20 and port full?
A. No. I don't remember. I'm kind of, I'm kind of focused on the immediate situation. I don't know whether was saying something in Filipino to another mate of, you know, why isn't this turning, I don't know the answer to that question except for he didn't relay any of those concerns to me.
Q. Did the mate say anything to you, or offer any advice, or comments?
A. No, sir.
Q. How about the docking pilot?
A. Yes, sir. He -- the only, you know, when we were making those crucial last second decisions about the anchor, you know, and he's got more experience than I do. He's been out here 40 something years.

He's like I think it's time to drop this anchor. And I said I concur. And I gave the order of -- you know, we gave the order. The bridge team gave the order and you know, then he, you know, there was some banter, you know, some remarks between the two of us about, you know, I've never seen this in my entire career. I'm just dumbfounded by it.

So other than that, everybody was very calm. But I would reiterate that, yeah, I was at the conn and the dock master was

not at the conn.

Q. Okay. What I'm looking for is the reaction of what people perceived as to what was going on and what they may have said in response.

A. I didn't see any alarm out of anybody. I don't know, I work with a lot of Filipinos. They are very relaxed people, they're very calm. They do not, they do not show emotion. Nobody on the bridge team showed any alarm.

I don't know if that's part of, you know, you read about this, we go to class, we go to studies, we look at this all the time about hierarchy and why people don't question people's decisions.

You know, whether they're afraid of their captain or whatever, afraid of the boss, or whatever. Nobody, nobody relayed any concerns to me, and I didn't get any indication from anybody that there was verbal or any disorganization on the bridge of the ship.

Q. Yeah. Well, captain, I'm not -- that's not, that's not what I'm looking for. I'm looking for their reaction to the fact that the vessel is not turning. Did they say anything like what the heck, or gosh, how can this be happening?

A. No. I was (indiscernible) and I think, and I know you've done -- you've clearly experienced at this because you're asking very good questions, but on the bridge of the ship, the pilot and the captain sometimes -- and part of the deal is you want people

obviously to tell you what they see, whether they see a small boat --

(Audio interference)

I mean, all I can tell you is no, I didn't get a reaction, I did not get any advice from them, any reaction from them, but that's not uncommon in my profession. Very, very, very rarely does anybody on the bridge team question a pilot's orders.

Very rarely, nor a master's orders. Unless they're just simply confused. Clearly, at the time of the collision, I had a brief conversation with the captain, you know, saying that I've never seen this before. I'm, you know, apologizing clearly that this is, you know, we've -- obviously ruined our day.

You know, he's mentioned that he's not going to have a job tomorrow morning. I said it's not your fault. This was something hydrodynamic. This is something I've never seen.

But I can just tell you that the manner of these Filipinos is just so calm, I just don't think it's in their nature to question authority, whether it's the captain's or mine, or the dock master's.

But I did not get any indication that -- they did not question my orders or like you say, they made no remarks regarding the collision. I was quite alarmed, actually, how calm they were. But we are, you know, we're trained to be calm.

Q. Right. Well, my question is very simple, it can be simple like this. Did anybody react with -- to -- did anybody react to

the fact that the ship was not responding to the hard port rudder orders?

A. Just myself and the dock master. You know, no is the answer.

Q. And -- all right, thank you. Give me one moment.

A. Yes, sir. Mr. Karr, can I tell you that I've been reminded but a lot of these guys, first time they've ever been at (indiscernible), they're not sure what to expect. And they don't know what's normal and what's not normal.

So you know, until it's clearly not normal. They wouldn't even know -- I knew it was not normal the second it put 20 degrees rudder on there and she was not breaking.

And then I knew it was really not normal when I put it hard to port at full power and at that time, she didn't come around, no doubt, and I think everybody on that bridge team thought for sure she was coming around.

So there was no need to be concerned, and no need to question my orders, and no need to say anything. Generally, in these situations of that high stress, it doesn't do any good to start pointing fingers. We're trying to manage the situation.

But I understand your question. But the answer is no, they did not show any reaction to the fact that the ship was not turning.

Q. All right. Thank you.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Was the starboard anchor ever dropped prior to the collision

-- prior to the --
A. No, sir. No, sir. It was dropped before the collision with the dock.
Q. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Was the port anchor ever dropped prior to --
A. No, sir.
Q. -- the collision. All right. And during your entire, during your entire period of time prior to the contact with the dock -- with the pier, were all the engine orders carried out as you wanted, and all the rudder orders carried out as you desired?
A. To the best of my knowledge. I don't know what's happening in the engine room or control room. I can't -- and at that point, the only way for me to know is to look at a RPM gauge or to look at a rudder order.
I was not where the RPM was. I'm relying on the crew to give me those orders. I can't confirm that.
Q. Did the ship seem to be responding the way you had ordered?
A. No, sir.
Q. Describe that to me.
MR. ADWERING: Do you mean on the entire bridge or at the moment of the incident?
MR. KARR: In the --
BY MR. KARR:
Q. Let's talk about that last turn.
A. Okay. No, the ship did not react in the nature of what I've

seen in my extended career. It did not react like I anticipated it would.

And every turn before that turn, the ship acted exactly as I thought it would, with significant rate of turn based on my rudder orders and engine orders.

In other words, a very well handling ship. I got no indication in my three previous turns that that ship was not going to handle the way I anticipated it to.

Q. Understood.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. How about the engines? You mentioned you didn't, you know, you didn't see the RPM's but based on what you were feeling and what you were seeing, was the ship responding the way you had ordered?

A. You know, this ship was a -- is a little but underpowered, so it's not, it's not like on a huge ship that's got 100,000 horsepower.

When you kick it in, you can actually feel that ship jolt. This ship is not that ship. So I didn't not feel, you know, I did not feel the difference in the power.

I clearly didn't see that that power was solving any of my problems, at the moment. I don't know if that answers your question.

Q. It does.

A. Okay.

Q. And tell me about the way the rudder and steering handled, you know, from the time you backed away until you were relieved of the conn. How did the steering respond to your rudder orders?
A. Yes, sir. It was 100 percent and transit was exactly as I would anticipate, as was the first 30 minutes of the transit.
Q. I haven't seen the AIS, so when you were coming down before making the turn, were you, you know, where were you in the channel? On the port side or starboard? You know, where in the channel were you?
A. So these turns are -- I'm going into a flood tide, and these are left handed turns. Flood tide seems to set you to the right. So we setup to port.

We set up on the left side of the channel because we know, we know we're going to go to the right once we stick our nose out in that flood tide.

And it also allows me a little bit more cushion if I get the wrong rudder order. So I would say that I was on the port side of the channel, and my echo sounder was showing five meters.

I didn't feel any, anything there, you know, like I say, all I can say is that the hydronamics of the, of the, of the shoal 200 feet or 250 feet off my port side was different than I've ever seen, as far as, as far as its effect on the ship.
Q. Your location in the channel where you began to turn, were your location in channel, was that where you -- is that -- would that be the perfect location for you? Or was it a little, was it

a little different?
A. It's the same location I've been in historically. Clearly, there's something going on hydronamically (sic) there, so I will not do that, I would not -- I would probably venture to find out what's going on on that shoal before I go back.
You know, we are looking at Pier Bravo, when you look out on the chart, if you're to the right, you can imagine from the bridge of the ship, we're staring at a dock that's sticking out in the river probably 600 feet, or 700 feet. It's a long dock.
And it's abandoned, so we see it and it's clear, but we're, you know, we're clearly trying to stay as far away from that as possible.
Short answer is yeah, if I, if I do it again differently, I'm going to try something else.
Q. Well, based on -- next question is based on what you've always done before, did you make your turn, the first turn, were --
(Crosstalk)
A. Yes, sir.
Q. Where you wanted to?
A. Yes. You're talking up by the submarines? My first turn after leaving the dock?
Q. The -- I should say the first rudder order you gave when you were going to negotiate the turn --
(Crosstalk)

A. -- my position --

(Crosstalk)

Q. -- at Pier B?

A. Yes. I was. And I would reiterate back to your other question, I'm -- the bridge team at no time questioned my positions in the channel.

Q. Understood.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. All right. Can you, can you describe to me how the vessel made contact with the pier, you know, after the anchor dropped. You know, please describe, you know, approaching, dropped the anchor, how the vessel moved and, you know, what angle you hit.

A. It would -- yeah. Complete T bone straight in. She never, ever broke to the left. It was -- it couldn't have been more 90 degree.

Q. All right. And how far --

(Crosstalk)

Q. How far away from the pier were you when you -- when the captain gave the order to the bow to drop the anchor?

A. This is a total guess. I'm thinking 200 feet, or 100 feet. I just don't know. There's going to be a delay and the activity, of course.

Q. All right. Well, would the -- well, describe what the -- describe to me, if you can imagine, how the vessel would have made contact if the anchor wasn't dropped.

A. I think, I think it would have been very similar, maybe a little bit more of an angle to port. You know, when you see the damage to the federal pier, you'll see there's a tower on the end. I, you know, I clearly didn't want that tower on my deck of my ship.

So you know, it was in God's hands at that point. I was kind of, at that point, you know, the short answer, if we had not dropped that starboard anchor, we would not have driven into the dock on the starboard bow where you see the damage.

I think that pulled the bow into the dock harder, which you know, I think if we had not, and I'm totally, totally going on a guess here, but if we had not dropped that starboard anchor, we would have just gone into the dock, and we would pierce the dock and gone through it.

And maybe not, maybe not have damaged -- maybe not have cut a hole in the bow of the ship. I think having anchored down braked, caused that starboard bow to drive into some of that concrete and puncture it.

Total speculation.

Q. Do you know if the brake was applied to the starboard anchor?

A. I do not.

Q. And how far from the tower did the bow of the ship hit the pier?

A. I would say the power of my port bow was probably 200 feet to the port side.

Q. Pardon me? How many feet?
A. 200.
Q. All right.
A. And the section of the dock we knocked out, crumbled when we hit. I guess this has been an abandoned pier for a long time. I haven't brought a ship in here in decades.

So I don't know what kind of condition it was in, you know, when it collapsed, it collapsed remarkably easy and that's -- because I've never done this, I never, ever in my life seen this nor wish it on anybody.

But that tower piece must have some engineering holding it, definitely. Because it did not take that tower down. It stood well.

Q. Going back to the time when the -- when there was zero response from the rudder orders in the turn coming up on Pier B, do you, do you recall looking at the predictor on any devices?
A. Yes. My CIQ showed zero rate of turn to port, which --

(Crosstalk)

A. -- to me, but I could clearly see that out of the window.
Q. Well, so the predictor was showing no rate of turn?
A. Yes.
Q. All right.

MR. KARR: Captain, thank you very much. I have no more questions.

MR. THOMAS: Yes, sir, thank you for your time.

MR. [redacted] I just have one.

BY MR. [redacted]

Q. Did you have any reason to doubt (audio interference) bells?

A. No. The engine was responsive as I would have anticipated.

Q. Okay.

MR. KARR: You know, I do have -- I have a follow up question.

MR. THOMAS: Yes, sir.

BY MR. KARR:

Q. Who on the bridge team was tracking the RPM's to make sure that what you ordered was being done?

A. That would be the second mate or the third mate. I don't know who -- what their scheduling arrangements are.

Q. Was he responding to you, you know, was he responding to you, acknowledging that he was doing what he was doing, that he was doing what you told him to do?

A. Yes. I would hope we hear that on the VDR. You know, there's a lot going on up there but if I say full ahead, he's just going to say, you know, you're not showing 80 RPM's or anything like that, or 60.

You know, he's going to say full or half, bow or stopper. And like I said, there's delay in some of that.

Q. Okay.

MR. KARR: All right. Thank you.

MR. THOMAS: Thank you, sir.

LT. [redacted] Anything else, Mr. Karr?

MR. KARR: Nothing from me, thanks.

LT. [redacted] Okay. I think that concludes the interview. We're also going to go over his computer, but I think we're going to do that offline.

MR. KARR: That sounds good.

LT. [redacted] Okay. Well, I think that concludes the recorded part of the interview.

MR. KARR: I will stop the recorder.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

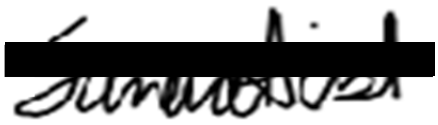
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	*BOW TRIUMPH* VESSEL CRASH INTO WHARF BRAVO PIER NEAR CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2022 Interview of John Thomas
ACCIDENT NO.:	DCA22FM040
PLACE:	North Charleston, South Carolina
DATE:	September 6, 2022

was held according to the record, and that this is the original, complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed to the best of my skill and ability.



Sandra Hirsch
Transcriber