

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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SINKING OF THE SEACOR MARINE

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LB *ROBERT* NEAR LAKE CHARLES,

*

Accident No.: DCA23FM007

LOUISIANA, ON NOVEMBER 20, 2022

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Interview of: WILLIAM JAKE STEVENS, AB/Crane Operator
Lift Boat *Robert*

via telephone

Thursday,
December 1, 2022

APPEARANCES:

BART BARNUM, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

CHARLES ARNOLD, Investigating Officer
United States Coast Guard

██████████ ██████████ Chief Warrant Officer
United States Coast Guard

MICHAEL CENEC, Designated Person Ashore
Seacor Marine

TIM DEPAULA, ESQ., Outside Counsel
Seacor Marine

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:03 a.m.)

MR. ARNOLD: So, today is Thursday, December 1, 2022, at approximately 10:03 a.m. My name is Charles Arnold, I'm a marine investigator with the United States Coast Guard, MSU *Houma*.

We're here to discuss the lift boat *Robert* incident that occurred on or about November 19, I'm sorry, November 20th.

Mr. Stevens, the purpose of this investigation is to find out the cause or causes of an incident, and to provide recommendations to prevent them from happening again.

As mentioned before I started recording, we will record this, this interview so we better understand and, you know, don't misquote you on what you have to say. What you say is important.

I ask that you know, just don't guess, unless we ask you for a, your opinion, and if you don't know, you don't know, so, you know, best answer.

First of all, we'll go around the room. But, before we do that, I just want to make sure that, unless your talking, make sure everyone has their phones on mute, so we don't get any background noise.

So, we'll start off, here with me in the room, here at MSU *Houma*.

MR. [REDACTED] This is chief warrant officer [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
I'm with the MSU *Houma*, investigations.

MR. ARNOLD: Mr. Barnum.

1 MR. BARNUM: Yeah. Bart Barnum with the NTSB office of
2 marine safety.

3 MR. CENEC: Michael Cenec, Seacor Marine, DPA.

4 MR. DEPAULA: Tim DePaula, Murphy, Rogers, counsel for
5 Seacor.

6 INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM JAKE STEVENS

7 BY MR. ARNOLD:

8 Q. All right. Mr. Stevens, first of all, we -- how do you spell
9 your last name?

10 A. Yes. It's S-T-E-V-E-N-S.

11 Q. All right. And what was your -- what are your duties on the
12 lift boat *Robert*?

13 A. Yeah. The lift boat *Robert*, I am a AB crane operator.

14 Q. And do you hold any licenses?

15 A. Yes, sir. I have a 200 ton master, 200 ton mate, inland, and
16 a AB unlimited.

17 Q. All right. How about crane certifications or any other
18 certifications?

19 A. Yes, sir. I have a crane certification and a rigging
20 certification.

21 Q. Are you certified to operate all cranes on the *Robert*, or a
22 particular crane?

23 A. Yes, sir. Yeah. All cranes on the *Robert*.

24 Q. And, what shift do you work?

25 A. I work the night shift. It's from 1800 to 0600.

1 Q. I know the time of departure was November, Friday, November
2 18th. Before that time, how long had you been on your hitch?

3 A. A little over 2 weeks.

4 Q. Had you been on that, on the lift boat *Robert* at that same
5 location at South Marsh 137 on a previous hitch?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. And, about what time was that? On the previous hitch? If
8 you can remember.

9 A. Oh. The dates? I'm not sure. It would have been around 6
10 weeks beforehand.

11 Q. All right. Were you out there when they arrived -- when
12 y'all arrived on location?

13 A. I don't remember.

14 Q. And initially jacked down?

15 A. I'm not sure. I don't remember.

16 Q. Okay. So, when you got there -- we'll start with this last
17 hitch -- so, when you got there a little over 2 weeks before, run
18 me through your operations.

19 A. As far as my job? Or --

20 Q. Yeah. Yes.

21 A. -- the actual operations we'll perform on the vessel?

22 Q. No. What your job.

23 A. Yeah. Just a crane operator on the boat. We were moving
24 some equipment around. We were doing some wire line work.

25 I don't remember -- I don't think that they had a chance to

1 do any coil tubing. So, they were talking about that a lot, but,
2 I don't recall doing any coil tubing. But, it was just mostly
3 wire line and moving equipment around.

4 Q. I'm going to bring it back a little bit because I think I
5 forgot to ask -- how much time do you have on the water?

6 A. Let's see, August made 24 years. On a jacked up boat. I
7 started working with the company in '98.

8 Q. And, have you held the crane operator certification since
9 that time?

10 A. Yes. It was -- I had my first crane card in less than a year
11 being out there. So, yes, it's around 23 years or so.

12 Q. All right. So, y'all started operations and most of your
13 time at night was in the crane?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. So, how would you start out your shift? Run me through a day
16 of operations, starting with what you would do at the start of the
17 shift.

18 A. Okay. Yes, sir. Start of the shift, we would go ahead and
19 do our crane inspection -- 3 of our 4 cranes wasn't really in use
20 at that time, just cause they were not required. So we're using
21 one of the cranes as a primary crane.

22 And, so we would go out and do a crane inspection first.

23 And, no, I'm sorry. We would go to a meeting before the start of
24 our shift. We have a safety meeting with the contractors and with
25 the night crew on the jacked up boat. And we would discuss what

1 the operation is going to be that night.

2 We would go out there and we would have to do a quick little
3 crane inspection, make sure everything was good. Talk to the
4 other crane operators of the ship beforehand as they were getting
5 off, and then we'd go about the operations.

6 Q. How is the -- for that 2 weeks, how was the weather out
7 there?

8 A. The weather wasn't really that bad. The weather was
9 averaging around 15, 17 knots winds. Seas was fluctuating
10 anywhere from 2 to 5 foot. But, us being near the top of our leg,
11 the boat did have a good sway back and forth. I would say about 3
12 foot of so.

13 So, we were kind of limited, you know. We'd have to pick and
14 choose what we could do at what times with the cranes.

15 Q. Now, when you say pick and choose, what time -- is that to
16 conduct safe operations to use the crane?

17 A. Yes, sir. You know, if they wanted to, say for example, pick
18 up something that might get caught in the wind and spin around,
19 you know, we would just pick and choose the safest way to do that
20 operation. If we knew the wind was going to calm down at a
21 certain time of the night, we would pick and choose that time, you
22 know, to make a different list.

23 Q. What type of crane -- you said that one crane you were using,
24 what type of crane is that?

25 A. Yeah. I want to say that is a newer crane that replaced our

1 old crane. 1100 -- think that that's -- oh, man -- on this. Try
2 to -- because we just replaced it with a smaller crane. I want to
3 say it's a 150 ton.

4 Q. Okay. And the operations for that crane, do y'all keep a
5 log?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. And do you log in when you're working and when you're waiting
8 on weather, waiting on swaying, stability issues?

9 A. It's basically a generic log. It's just very, very, broad
10 operations for that day. You know, it might be, you know, work
11 with the devouring crew, off loaded said boat, you know, brought
12 on this equipment. So, it's not very detailed, you know, it
13 wouldn't be -- you know, it's the weather and stuff like that. It
14 wouldn't be each lift per se, you know, and exactly every concern.
15 But yeah, it's real broad.

16 Q. Understood. What's the wind limitations on the 1100?

17 A. I want to say, we, we have a company policy of 30 knots. A
18 sustained 30 knots. But we have the ability to stop work if we
19 feel that under that threshold, would be unsafe.

20 Q. As the crane operator, you are the leader of crane
21 operations, or run the job?

22 A. Yeah. Yes. As far as the crane goes, correct.

23 Q. All right. Were there any times where crane operations had
24 to stop to jack up or jack down?

25 A. Yes, sir. There was a few instances where the sway of the

1 boat increased and they felt safer to pull in the walkway and jack
2 down a few feet before the weather got better.

3 Q. In -- with that, is that a, is that considered normal
4 operations? Is there some type of stop work that needs to be
5 done? Can you walk me through that process?

6 A. Yeah, sure. That would be a decision made by both the
7 captain and the company man, together. I've seen it many a times
8 in the past, when the seas get too rough and the boat's swinging,
9 too far, you know, the gangway might be an issue. And so, they
10 bring in the gangway and they notify everybody, get everybody off
11 the deck inside. And then we lower the boat down to a safe area.
12 Preferably 5 foot or above the seas.

13 Q. Got you. And when the jacking down, jacking up, does the
14 crane stay in the last position? Or, does it go into cradle?

15 A. Yes, sir. All the cranes have to be in a cradle for jacking
16 up procedures.

17 Q. All right. Now, during the last 2 weeks before the
18 evacuation time, do you say that the stop, the work was because of
19 the weather or because of the stability, the swaying?

20 A. The weather. Yeah. I mean, the weather was causing the sway
21 of the vessel, but that's normal.

22 Q. Right. And, did y'all talk about that during safety
23 meetings?

24 A. Oh, yes. Because that sway directly impacted the crane
25 activity. You know, just how we had to operate and things that

1 were okay and not okay.

2 Q. Is, was the swaying -- is that listed as a hazard on your
3 JSA's?

4 A. I don't think so. Partly because if the swaying becomes a
5 hazard, then the crane operations are shut down. You know, the
6 jack the boat always has a certain amount of sway to it. So,
7 that's something that we compensate with on the cranes at all
8 times. So, as soon as the crane operator feels that that sway is
9 overtaking his ability to operate that crane safely, then it
10 automatically goes in a rack.

11 Q. Is that because you're dealing in the Gulf and the water is
12 very powerful?

13 A. Yes, exactly.

14 Q. So, let me ask you this -- you mentioned something about the
15 height - is there any different --

16 A. Uh-huh.

17 Q. -- procedures, or any different operating procedures for
18 cranes working at max elevation?

19 A. No, sir. You know, just working on a jack up, sometimes you
20 have more leg and sometimes you don't. And, it usually does not
21 affect the crane. Just, just everybody knows it's wintertime, you
22 do get some bad weather and so you might have a little more sway
23 of the vessel.

24 It's you know, it's not like being on a crew boat or a supply
25 boat, it's just a slight sway back and forth. So, it's really

1 nothing we're concerned too much about. Except the higher you go
2 on that leg, the worse the weather is going to get, then the more
3 sway you have. And we just keep an eye on it.

4 Q. Okay. Bring you up to the time of the weather
5 notification -- do you remember the time that you were notified of
6 bad weather coming in?

7 A. Yes. I don't know the exact day, but I know it was the
8 weekend of before the Friday that we evacuated. The mate, Corey
9 Boutté, he had made a statement to me about, hey, you know,
10 there's some bad weather coming next weekend sometime, you know,
11 stuff going to keep an eye on.

12 Q. How about the word that you know, the evacuation. Did that
13 come with bad weather's coming in evacuation, was it, we already
14 have weather here evacuation? How'd you get that notification?

15 A. Yeah. I'm not sure of what day, but I was already aware that
16 contractors were going to go in, probably the day before that they
17 evacuated. And I just assumed that we were going to stay on the
18 vessel. You know, we rode out bad weather on jacked up vessels
19 before. We were pre-loaded, I wasn't too concerned about it. And
20 then, probably, let's see, it was Thursday, Thursday afternoon. I
21 was actually sleeping and I was woken up. I was told, hey, by the
22 way, part of the crew is going to evacuate today and then some of
23 the crew, including myself, was going to stay until Friday, and
24 then evacuate that afternoon.

25 Q. All right. So, let me go back to that weekend that you heard

1 about the bad weather. Run me through your days after that.

2 A. The weather would fluctuate from, you know, from good to bad.
3 So, everyday was kind of different. We really didn't know, you
4 know -- like I said, we wake up and have our safety meetings and
5 then discuss the weather and what we were going to be able to do
6 that day.

7 So everything was pretty normal. You know, we would be on
8 tower and have our safety meeting and go do our crane inspections
9 and go to work.

10 Q. Was there any concern about how long y'all were on location
11 and you know, really needed to get the well work done and between
12 the times that y'all would stop work because of weather or swing?

13 A. Oh, no, sir. Everybody has a good understanding that we were
14 a jacked up boat and it was wintertime and the weather gets bad
15 and you can only do what you can do, you know. Everybody was very
16 calm and very considerate about that. So, I didn't feel rushed or
17 hurried or never heard anybody make statements about that.

18 Q. Understood. Have you ever had to evacuate from a vessel
19 before?

20 A. No, sir. I was -- there were voluntary evacuations, I've
21 been a part of before, where some of the crew have gone in. I
22 mostly stay on the boat. I feel safe on the jack ups. I been
23 through hurricanes on jack ups before. Yeah. So, I was actually
24 surprised when I heard them evacuating. Because I didn't think we
25 were going to. Yeah, but, from what I was told there was concerns

1 from the company and the captain is very safety oriented and they
2 made a decision we were going to evacuate and I respected that and
3 we evacuated.

4 Q. All right. And I guess that would be to the next question.
5 If it hasn't happened before and you know, you get the word, did
6 you ask any questions or did anything come about that raised maybe
7 a red flag with you or something?

8 A. Oh, no, sir.

9 Q. All right. Y'all were out there on a previous hitch. Was
10 there any issues with stability or weather on the previous hitch
11 when you were out there?

12 A. No, sir. Not that I can remember.

13 Q. Any weather concerns?

14 A. No, sir.

15 Q. With working 24 years, your thoughts on the weather. This
16 time, from your experience.

17 A. It's always better and this time, I know a lot of companies
18 kind of refrain from hiring jack ups around this time of the year
19 just because the amount of down time is just too much for them.
20 You know, but I don't think that the weather's any different.
21 It's always rough during October, November, December, you know.
22 It's always, there's going to be cool fronts coming through. The
23 seas are going to come up. The winds are going to come up.
24 You're going to have to take extra safety precautions, you know.
25 I don't see anything different between this year and any other

1 year.

2 Q. Got you. On the last 2 week hitch, was there any stop work
3 authority used during your night operations?

4 A. Not with me as a crane operator. Like I said, I think the
5 captains made a, or the captain made a decision with the company
6 man to pull the gangway and jack down, once or twice. Yeah. I
7 think the longest stand was maybe like a day, 24 hours, something
8 like that. So, and then, as soon as the weather was calm, they
9 jacked back up and put the walkway out.

10 But as far as crane operations stop work authority, I
11 personally did not shut down the crane --

12 Q. All right. And y'all were at the top deck, I call the top
13 deck the production deck and the bottom deck the well deck.

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Y'all were up on the top deck, the production deck side,
16 right?

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. Okay. That's all I have right now.

19 MR. ARNOLD: Let's see if Mr. [REDACTED] here has any questions
20 for you.

21 BY MR. [REDACTED]

22 Q. Hello, Mr. Stevens. Thank you. 24 years, that's a lot of
23 experience in there.

24 A. Appreciate it.

25 Q. You mentioned that the main crane that was used was the

1 1100L, right?

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Was anything wrong with the other cranes or is it just a
4 matter of, for this job that was the decision made.

5 A. Yeah. They only had use for the 1 crane at a time. The
6 starboard forward crane really couldn't reach a lot of items that
7 they needed to reach. And then we have the 2 back cranes. So,
8 there's was only use for the 1 forward, port crane.

9 Q. And you mentioned that that was pretty new crane. Do you
10 recall roughly when that one was changed out?

11 A. Yes. That was when we were in the shipyard, right before
12 this job started. We came out the shipyard on this job, so a
13 couple of months ago.

14 Q. So, still within this year --

15 A. Go ahead.

16 Q. Still within his year?

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. Oh, okay. Yeah. We don't need the exact -- I didn't want
19 you to worry about getting the exact date or anything.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. And what size crane was removed that was there before?

22 A. That was a, excuse me, a 500 ton crane.

23 Q. All right. And the main reason was probably just for the
24 extension for the arm, do you think? Or, do you know?

25 A. Excuse me?

1 Q. Do you happen to know the main reason why they decided to
2 change out the cranes?

3 A. Yes. When that crane was in Mexico, they had a fire on the
4 crane.

5 Q. Oh, okay. So it was a replacement.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. And with all the 24 years you've had, have you ever
8 experienced having to evacuate a lift boat due to weather?

9 A. Personally, no. And that's only because, like I said, in the
10 past companies kind of refrained from using the hiring of boat
11 around this time period. So, a lot of times, we're sitting at the
12 docks around this time period. Around November, December, you
13 know. So, when the weather gets a little worse, they'd kind of
14 get worried about hiring because they know they can't get as much
15 utilization out of it.

16 Q. Yeah. They'll be paying for down time.

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Just because you're on location. All right. That's all I
19 really had, thank you.

20 MR. ARNOLD: Mr. Barnum.

21 BY MR. BARNUM:

22 Q. Yeah, Mr. Stevens. Bart here. Thanks again. Tell us on
23 that last point, why did -- if most clients don't hire lift boats
24 this time of year, why did they hire the *Robert* now?

25 A. Oh. That's a decision for the company, I'm not sure. I

1 assume they had work to be done, and if they have the money, go
2 ahead and spend it. But, I don't -- that's not a call that I
3 make.

4 Q. Understood. I just didn't know if it was known around the
5 rig or, there was a well -- was there an emergency?

6 A. Not that I'm aware of, no.

7 Q. There wasn't an emergency. Was the well bubbling at all?

8 A. Not that I'm aware of, no.

9 Q. Okay. All right. No, I appreciate it, Mr. Stevens. Great
10 information there, being really thorough. The questions before
11 me, I don't have any follow up, so, other than that, I appreciate
12 your time.

13 A. Okay. Thank you so much.

14 MR. ARNOLD: Mr. Tim, do you have any questions?

15 MR. DEPAULA: No, sir. I do not. Thanks.

16 BY MR. ARNOLD:

17 Q. All right, Mr. Stevens. So, 24 years of experience, you
18 know, y'all got off in time, we're thankful for that. That
19 everyone is safe.

20 A. Um-hmm.

21 Q. Knowing what happened, is there anything that you would've
22 done differently, in your last hitch there?

23 A. No. No, sir. I believe we did everything possible to make
24 sure that that boat was going to be in condition when we came back
25 out to it.

1 Q. Is there anything that you'd like to bring up, specifically,
2 that we haven't asked you, that you wanted to make known, or just
3 have thoughts on?

4 A. No. I don't think so.

5 Q. How about any recommendations for Coast Guard, for Seacor,
6 NTSB? Any recommendations that you can think of, maybe better,
7 what happened?

8 A. Not at this time. I don't think. I really can't imagine
9 anything that could've been done differently. You know, once they
10 got word of the weather and the company saw that it was going to
11 be picking up pretty good, and with keeping in mind the amount of
12 leg we had, I think they made the correct decision.

13 Q. All right. And as I'm thinking about it, I've got one
14 question that I was just thinking, real quick. In 24 years on
15 lift boats, what is your experience on working at max elevation?

16 A. Well, we used to do it a lot, because the lift boats were a
17 lot smaller back then, you know. I come from working on 135's,
18 145's, as far as the leg height. We were always up near the
19 yellow of the paint. You know, we've had the legs inside the cups
20 before, you know, back in the day. Years and years ago. And that
21 was a common thing, you know, because the contract companies want
22 to use the small of boat as possible to do the job, because it's
23 cheaper. And, so, yeah, we're always up pretty high.

24 Q. How about the --

25 A. Top of the legs.

1 Q. How about the lift boat *Robert*?

2 A. The lift boat *Robert*, I've probably been on for 3 years. In
3 my experience with the *Robert*, I can't recall a lot of work being
4 at the top of the leg like that. Just because the jobs that we
5 were hired to do, they wanted the big back ends, the big cabin to
6 support crew. It wasn't a matter of deep water, you know. So,
7 this is one of the first jobs I can recall on the *Robert* where
8 they hired us because of the length of the legs. Because they
9 knew they were going to be utilizing some length in the deep
10 water. But, yeah, it's not uncommon at all. It's really common
11 to be working at the top of the leg capacity.

12 Q. Thank you. And I don't think I asked this yet either. The
13 shift work, is it 21, 14? 21, 21? What's the hour --

14 A. We're, we are doing 21 days on, 21 days off.

15 Q. 21, 21. Okay.

16 Well, that's all I have. Mr. Stevens, thank you very much
17 again. A lot of good information and we appreciate your time, and
18 again, thanks that everyone is safe and make sure you stay safe on
19 your continued work offshore.

20 A. Okay. Thank you so much.

21 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: SINKING OF THE SEACOR MARINE
 LB ROBERT NEAR LAKE CHARLES,
 LOUISIANA, ON NOVEMBER 20, 2022
 Interview of William Jake Stevens

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23FM007

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: December 1, 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.

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the transcriber.

Angela Allen
Transcriber