



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary - DCA23FM008

Interview of: Don T Le - Captain of fishing vessel Captain Alex
Date/Time: November 28, 2022, 1145 to 1235 CST
Location: US Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Texas City conference room
Interviewed by: CWO [REDACTED] - USCG, Adam Tucker (by phone) - NTSB, [REDACTED]
- USCG, Lt. [REDACTED] - USCG
Attendees: Jenny Nguyen - interpreter for Mr. Le (former owner of the Captain Alex and owner of the dock where Captain Alex departed from), Thanh L'han - Owner of Captain Alex, Thu T Deo - crew member of the Captain Alex, Man V Nguyen - crew member of the Captain Alex, Hoi Van Nguyen - crew member of the Captain Alex
Accident: November 25, 2022, flooding and subsequent sinking of the fishing vessel Captain Alex, about 11 miles south of Jamacia Beach, Texas (NTSB No. DCA23FM008).

This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Don T Le, captain of the fishing vessel Captain Alex, provided through translation of Vietnamese to English by Mrs. Jenny Nguyen.

- Mr. Le was driving the nets when he heard an alarm go off, so he went down to the engine room, where he saw some water there. He went in to try to find out where the water was coming in. He found a hole and he tried to stop it with a cloth, and he called the crew to come and help him. He then went up to the wheelhouse and gave the owner (Jenny Nguyen) a call to ask that the Coast Guard come and help.
- Mrs. Nguyen added that after the captain called her, she called the Coast Guard station Galveston directly. That was a little past midnight, it was about 0020 when she got the call from the captain.
- When asked to describe the hole, Mr. Le said the hole was close to where the engine was at. Mr. L'han (speaking on behalf of Mr. Le) clarified Mr. Le said there was a hole underneath a fuel pipe (fuel line). The hole was in the bottom of the boat, underneath the backup fuel tank. There was a puncture from the bottom. The water was coming in, but the Mr. Le couldn't get to the hole. He had to use his leg to step on a cloth to try to plug the hole.
- When asked if the hole was a penetration of the hull, Mr. Le said yes. The hull ruptured in the bottom.
- When asked if the Captain Alex could have grounded or hit something, Mr. Le said no they were in deep water at the time.

- When asked if the hole looked like it was from rot or rust, speaking for Mr. Le, Mrs. Nguyen said normally she has seen this happen for a boat that there could be corrosion on the bottom from over the years.
- When asked what happened when the Coast Guard arrived on scene, Mr. Le said that he was in the engine room trying to stop the hole when the Coast Guard arrived. One or two Coast Guard people came onto the Captain Alex and that is when they realized he was in the engine room diving trying to stop the hole. The Coast Guard brought pumps to the Captain Alex and one of the Coast Guard men asked them to go to the Coast Guard boat.
- When asked if the pump worked, Mr. Le said his crew started the pump, but it would not pump. Two of the Coast Guard men came over after the pump was started and they tried to fix the pump, but they couldn't get it working either. Water would not come through the pump after they started it. The Coast Guard men tried to prime the pump and it would not work.
- When asked if they knew why the pump would not prime, Mr. Le said he heard the Coast Guard say that it was because of the oily water in the engine room, they could not dewater the vessel.
- Mr. L'han, stated he is the owner of the Captain Alex, and the Coast Guard let the vessel sink with a lot of fuel on the vessel.
- Mr. Gentry reminded Mr. L'han that there needs to be more control of the interview, and no one should be stepping on one another, and the focus needs to be on the captain.
- When asked if there was anything the Coast Guard could have done to help the situation, Mr. Le said that if the pump would have worked, they could have saved the boat.
- When asked from the time when the Coast Guard got on board to the time the crew of the Captain Alex were pulled off, and how long he thought that was, Mr. Le said it was about one hour.
- When asked how many feet of water was in the engine room when he left the vessel, Mr. Le said the water was right up to the top of the engine, about four feet.
- When asked if the Captain Alex seemed unstable or dangerous at the time when they got off the vessel, Mr. Le said no, it was normal.
- When asked if the pump was still on board when they got off the vessel, Mr. Le said yes, everything was still on board.
- When asked to clarify where he heard the alarm come from, what panel the alarm indicated from, Mr. Le said he was sitting at the controls in the wheelhouse, and he heard the alarm come from the engine room. They have a high-water alarm in the wheelhouse but the alarm he heard came from the engine room.

- When asked what type of alarm he heard, Mr. Le said it was a high-water alarm.
- When asked what time the high-water alarm took place, Mr. Le said it was a little bit after midnight, maybe 0015 to 0030.
- When asked when the nets were being set and where Mr. Le was at that time, Mr. Le said he was in the wheelhouse.
- When asked if they were underway and what speed they were making at the time when the high-water alarm sounded, Mr. Le said they were dragging nets at a speed of around 3 knots.
- When asked of the weather at the time, Mr. Le said maybe 30 minutes prior to the high-water alarm, it was kind of rough but at the time the alarm went off it was a little bit calmer. The wave heights were about 5 to 7 feet. The winds were from the east, but he made no comment on the speed.
- The translator for Mr. Le, Mrs. Nguyen, said that she received the call from Mr. Le about half midnight and that she called the Coast Guard right away after getting the call. After looking at the call log of her phone, she said she got a call from the captain of the Captain Alex at 0057 and she called the Coast Guard at 0101.
- When asked how the call was made to inform the owner that the Captain Alex was taking on water, Mr. Le said it was by cell phone. They were close enough to shore for cell phone reception.
- When asked if Mr. Le ordered the crew of the Captain Alex to abandon the vessel or if the Coast Guard asked them to leave the Captain Alex, Mr. Le said the Coast Guard asked them to abandon the Captain Alex boat.
- When asked how deep the water the Captain Alex was in, Mr. Le said the depth was 57 feet.
- When asked where the hole was, Mr. L'han translated that the hole was right in the V of the hull which is where the fuel lines run over. It was just underneath the ladderway that came down from the wheelhouse. About a little forward of midship. Mr. Le could not reach the hole with his arm, but he could reach it with his leg through the pipes and he was trying to push material into the hole to try and stop the flooding. The hole was under the fuel lines.
- When asked about bilge pumps and their configuration, Mr. Le said there were two bilge pumps on board, and they were using both and they were discharging overboard.
- When asked if the bilge pumps were helpful in decreasing the water flooding into the engine room, Mr. Le said the pumps were not keeping up with the water inflow. That is why when the Coast Guard got there, they were hopeful that the pump that they sent over was going to help.
- When asked how many gallons per minute or hour the bilge pumps were rated for, Mr. Le said he did not know.

- When asked if there had been any time prior to the casualty event where they had to pump water out of the engine room, Mr. Le said no.
- When asked where the boat departed from and what day it departed and when they were due to return, Mrs. Nguyen said she could answer since the boat is kept at her dock, 1028 Harborside Drive. The Captain Alex departed 7 to 10 days before the accident, and they normally stay out about 4 weeks.
- When asked what they were fishing, the translator stated the crew of the captain Alex were fishing shrimp. Mr. Le said there were about 200 sacks of shrimp on board at the time. Each sack weighed an average of 85 to 90 pounds.
- When asked about the size of the boat, Mrs. Nguyen said the length of the boat was about 87 to 90 feet and the width was about 25 feet. The draft was about 12 to 13 feet.
- When asked about the main engines on the boat, Mr. L'han said there were two Caterpillar 3412 engines. There were two generators, one V6 Cummins and a V4 John Deere. Both were 65 kW.
- When asked what engines and generators were running at the time of the accident, Mr. Le said they were all online.
- When asked about a picture taken from on scene from the Coast Guard Boat, referencing the one showing the stern of the Captain Alex with water coming out from the port side main deck of the boat, the Mr. L'han stated the water was from the bilge pump. When asked if the picture was taken while the crew were still on the Captain Alex or on the Coast Guard boat, Mr. Le said they were on the Coast Guard boat when that picture was taken.



- When asked if the Captain Alex had power when the crew left the boat to go to the Coast Guard boat, Mr. Le said yes, the captain Alex still had power.
- When asked once they were on board the Coast Guard Boat if anyone went back to the Captain Alex, Mr. Le said no one went back on board.

- When asked where the other crew were when the captain was in the engine room of the Captain Alex, Mr. Le said the other crew were nearby trying to help him. They were taking turns helping each other out, he would go out of the engine room and another crew would go in.
- When asked about a picture taken looking down into the engine room on the Captain Alex, where there appears to be a crew member in a lifejacket when asked if that was the main access to the engine room, Mr. Le said it was him in the picture and yes that was the main access to the engine room.
- When asked when the Captain Alex was last hauled out, the owner said it was in September of 2022. When asked if there were any past concerns with the hull of the Captain Alex, Mr. L'han said not that he was aware of.
- When asked during the last haul out if there was any hull scraping or painting that took place, the owner of the Captain Alex Mr. L'han said no. The reason the boat was hauled out was to fix the propeller which was bent. The hull to him, looked totally fine to him. The paint was good, and they keep their vessels maintained.
- When asked when they were on the Coast Guard vessel transiting back, if Mr. Le happened to look back at the vessel and see it sink, Mr. Le said he did not see because he and the crew were put in the survivor's compartment of the boat.
- When asked about how long he would expect the boat to remain afloat based on the amount of water coming in, the Mr. L'han said the boat had four compartments so it would have taken a while for it to sink and estimated it would take 2 to 3 hours considering the segregation of the engine room from the fish holds and the lazarette. There was no free communication between the fish holds and the engine room.
- When asked, if not instructed to abandon the Captain Alex to the Coast Guard boat and if he would have opted to remain on board the Captain Alex, Mr. Le said yes, he would have stayed with the boat and if the pump had worked that was sent over by the Coast Guard, would have continued to dewater the boat.
- When asked if the four watertight compartments were in fact watertight at the time of the accident, the owner said there was only one door going from the engine room to the front and that door was always closed.
- When asked of the Captain Alex, Mr. L'han said it was 12.5 to 13 feet but could be more depending on the catch. In the picture taken of the Captain Alex stern, Mr. L'han said it looked "pretty normal", maybe 14 feet.
- When asked to confirm, based on the picture taken of the Captain Alex stern, if the outriggers were extended, Mr. L'han said they were extended. At the time of the discovery of water in the engine room, they had recovered their catch and the crew were in process of separating the by catch fish from the shrimp. There were no nets in the water at the time.

End of summary