



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary - DCA23FM008

Interview of: BM3 [REDACTED] - Coxswain of 45630
Date/Time: November 29, 2022, 1207 to 1257 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: [REDACTED] - USCG
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 BM3 [REDACTED] coxswain for the 45-foot Response Boat-Medium 45630.

- BM3 [REDACTED] has been qualified as a coxswain of Coast Guard 45-foot Response Boat-Mediums since March of 2022. This was his first response to a sinking vessel as coxswain.
- BM3 [REDACTED] was awakened by the OOD, and he and the boat crew got up and went over to the station. They conducted a brief of the situation and at the time they knew it was a fishing boat that was taking on water. When he got the reported position of the fishing vessel loaded in their system, it looked to be about 22 miles away from the jetty. It was a nighttime operation, and the crew all had their mustangs on because the water temperature was below 60 degrees.
- They went over the PEACE (Planning, Event Complexity, Assets, Communication and Supervision, Environment) risk assessment model and then went to the boat and got underway. Once they got to the jetty tips, just barely past them, they saw the starboard engine was not going over 1200 rpms. They stopped for troubleshooting and notified the OOD. They turned off the engine and started it back up and everything worked perfectly from there.
- They made about 35 knots on the way to the reported position of the fishing vessel. They did not know what to expect upon arrival, whether it was still afloat or underwater. He and the crew briefed all the possibilities for what they could expect. He recalled telling crew if the boat is floating, they must be very aware of how quickly a boat can roll over or go under.

- When they got to the reported position of the fishing boat, it wasn't there. The boat was still moving and going about 4 knots north, so sector tried to find them an intercept point.
- They tried to talk with the Captain Alex, but they had a language barrier and the position they were trying to give them was not accurate based on their last known position.
- The Coast Guard helicopter arrived on scene and found the boat which was about 1.5 miles away from where the 45 was, so they went over and pulled up on scene. The crew of the fishing boat needed a pump.
- He told his crew to prepare the P6 pump for an indirect pass. They used the mooring lines and heaving lines to float the pump over to the Captain Alex and the crew pulled it on board the first try. The fishing boats back deck was high up so that eliminated the option to pull up and pass the pump right over.
- All the instructions, in multiple languages, were with the pump. BM3 [REDACTED] did not want his crew to go to the sinking vessel and expected the fishing vessel crew to be able to get the pump operating.
- The crew of the Captain Alex came out and communicated they needed help with the pump, and their engineer tried to communicate instructions back which did not help.
- BM3 [REDACTED] asked the engineer and the damage controlman (BM3) if they would be ok to go to the Captain Alex which they agreed to. The two crew boarded the Captain Alex's starboard quarter from the 45's port bow. BM3 [REDACTED] posted the remaining crew member on the bow of the 45 as a bridge for communications.
- The 45 crew on the Captain Alex reported to BM3 [REDACTED] that the P6 pump was not going to work and that it was broken and there was nothing else they could do.
- BM3 [REDACTED] reported this to sector, and they asked what his recommendation was, to which he said was to evacuate the fishing vessel. Sector told him to ask the Captain Alex to anchor which he passed along to the 45 crew on the Captain Alex.
- The Captain Alex crew gathered their belongings and dropped the anchor and then mustered on the back deck. BM3 [REDACTED] noted that at that time, it didn't seem like the boat was at a dangerous point, so the 45 crew was trying to get the P6 pump packed up.
- BM3 [REDACTED] said he saw the Captain Alex do a "really slow, sluggish roll" which was at a greater angle than he had seen at any point, so he yelled at his crew on the Captain Alex that it was time to go and to get everyone off immediately.

- When the crew of the Captain Alex boarded the 45, they were stepping up onto the 45's bow. Initially the 45 crew that boarded the Captain Alex had to climb onto the vessel and the back deck, but when they got off they had to step up onto the bow of the 45. He noted when the vessel rolled, water would enter the main deck freeing ports and wash back out.
- BM3 [REDACTED] estimated the Captain Alex sank about 4 feet during the time they were on scene, but noted he had no accurate means to tell.
- They got everyone off the Captain Alex and they pulled away from the boat. It was about 5 minutes after they got everyone off that the lights of the Captain Alex went out. BM3 [REDACTED] noted he wasn't looking at his watch and did not notice the exact time.
- After they got everyone on board, they got blankets for the fishing vessel crew and put them into the survivor's compartment and started the transit back. One of the fishing vessel crew got seasick and they pulled him out so he could be on the back deck of the 45. They had to go slower on the way back, about 12 knots, for the guy that was seasick. It was an uncomfortable ride back.
- The information they were able to gather from the captain of the Captain Alex was that they were running the boat normally and he was driving the boat while the crew were on the back deck. An alarm started going off, so they ran it like a regular drill and hauled up their nets. All the crew members got together and went to check where the flooding was coming from, and the captain said it was about a 4-inch hole from which the water was coming from. They started using their pumps but at some point, their pumps failed and stopped working. The captain said the pumps were working intermittently but were not keeping up with the water that was flooding in.
- Once they got back to the station, EMS was there since the captain was full of oil. All crew rejected medical attention.
- The crew of the Captain Alex were identified, and then they took them to the Galveston Yacht basin and dropped them off there so they could go to their cars. They then went back to the station and moored up.
- When asked about a picture taken of the Captain Alex by BM3 [REDACTED] BM3 [REDACTED] said he did not know when the picture was taken and thought it might have been taken when they showed up on scene.
- When asked of the sea state on scene, BM3 [REDACTED] said it was steadily 2 and 3 footers with occasional 4 footers.
- When asked about the Coast Guard helicopter, BM3 [REDACTED] said they were talking with the helicopter on channel 23A.
- When asked if he considered asking the helicopter to lower their pump upon hearing the P6 was not working, BM3 [REDACTED] said he did not think about it at that point. The helicopter did tell them they had a rescue swimmer and a pump

on board when they pulled up on scene but, he didn't think about the pump on the helicopter at the time he was told the P6 was not working.

- When asked, based on hindsight if he would have had the helicopter drop the pump, BM3 ██████ said he still would have evacuated the crew because of the amount of water that was in the engine room and how quickly he was told the water was entering. He was told water was washing up and over the starboard engine. BM3 ██████ felt further dewatering would have been too much risk to his crew and the fishing vessel crew.
- BM3 ██████ said the helicopter departed the area once he told them that they had all the fishing vessel crew on board. The helicopter asked if they needed anything additional from them, and he told them since they had all the crew on board, that they did not.
- When asked if any of the fishing boat crew pushed back on abandoning the vessel, BM3 ██████ said all of them went and immediately grabbed their belongings and mustered on the back deck. No one pushed back or asked to keep fighting the flooding.
- When asked who made the decision to pull everyone off the Captain Alex, BM3 ██████ said he made the decision.
- When asked if there was any discussion of towing the Captain Alex into shallow water, BM3 ██████ said there was not because at that point the vessel was already anchored. He did not want to send anyone back on board to pull up anchor.
- When asked if towing the vessel into shallow water would have been an option, BM3 ██████ said he did not believe so, since they were 11 miles off the beach. It would have taken time to tow a vessel that size, and there would have been risk if the boat would have gone under while under tow since it could pull them down with it if they were not able to cut the tow line fast enough.
- When asked if he knew what was wrong with the P6 pump, BM3 ██████ said the MK3 told him the primer was broken and he did not know any further specifics.
- When asked if the MK3 was the one priming the pump when it broke, BM3 ██████ said he was.
- When asked if there was anything he would have done differently looking back at this case, BM3 ██████ said he would have considered sending his crew over with the P6 pump to ensure it was set up and started properly. He also said that he would have considered talking with the helicopter about sending their pump down once he found out the P6 was broken.
- BM3 ██████ said that they could have used the direction finder to help locate the Captain Alex, but with the help they had from sector, they didn't need to, and he felt they did not lose critical time in locating the Captain Alex.

- When asked how they communicated with the 45 crew on the Captain Alex, BM3 [REDACTED] said they used their personal cell phones because they had signal. He said they could also use the boats radios. He noted he told his crew he did not want them going inside the boat where they might be trapped.
- When asked if a 45 is equipped with two P6 pumps, BM3 [REDACTED] said it has one only.
- When asked about a media report of the P6 not working because there was too much oil in the engine room bilge, BM3 [REDACTED] said that was not a correct report. Pumping out the engine room with oil in the bilge was not a concern of his in that situation. When asked of how that report would come about, BM3 [REDACTED] said there may have been miscommunication because they did say there was a lot of oil in the engine room, but that was never communicated as a concern as to why they could not pump out the engine room. He noted that someone with the Coast Guard did a write up about the event which said they could not pump out the engine room because of there being too much oil in there. None of the 45 crew did the write up and that bothered them because it was not a correct statement.
- When asked of the weather conditions on scene, BM3 [REDACTED] said there was no precipitation, it was dark, but he estimated about 7 miles of visibility. There was no fog. There were lights around from other vessels and oil rigs. He could not recall wind direction or speed and noted that the winds were not impactful to their operation. The water temperature was 56 based on the national buoy data center information they pulled before getting underway. The air temperature was in the 60's.
- When asked if he took any pictures, BM3 [REDACTED] said he did not.
- When asked if their AIS was set to law enforcement mode, BM3 [REDACTED] said he did not do anything with the AIS during the mission, so he did not know what the last setting was.
- When asked how many crew members were on the 45, BM3 [REDACTED] said there was himself and three crew members. There was an engineer and two crew.
- When asked about his conversation with the captain of the Captain Alex, BM3 [REDACTED] said he could overhear one of his crew members speak with the captain in the survivor's compartment. His English was broken but he could make out that they were running normal, and he was in the pilothouse with his crew on the back deck. They got an alarm, and they ran it like a standard drill and pulled in the nets. They went to investigate and saw there was water coming into the engine room. They tried to patch the hole, but it was not successful. BM3 [REDACTED] said none of the 45 crew spoke Vietnamese.

- When asked about any dialogue with his crew about the Captain Alex's crew speaking any English, BM3 ██████ said he was told the captain spoke the best English amongst the crew. The rest of the crew didn't speak English.
- When asked if the P6 pump had instructions in Vietnamese with it, BM3 ██████ said he did not know.
- When asked if at any time the captain of the Captain Alex ever requested to remain with the vessel to continue dewatering it, BM3 ██████ said he did not.
- When asked about personal effects he saw the Captain Alex crew with, BM3 ██████ said he recalled seeing at least one backpack and another had a trash bag with his personal belongings in it. He recalled that each crew member had one small bag. They all had their IDs with them and at least one of them had his car keys. He noted they did not check passports, so he did not know if they had them with them or not.
- When asked about his decision to depart the scene and leave the Captain Alex once all the crew was on the 45, BM3 ██████ said they kept about 1000 yards away from the boat to maintain position with the sea state. The lights of the Captain Alex went out before the transit back. They could not see the Captain Alex and they did not go back to investigate if it was still there. He also noted he thought one of the crew members need of medical attention because he was in the engine room swimming in oil, so they wanted to get him to the station for any medical needs.
- When asked if there were any precautions taken related to the Captain Alex being left at anchor with no lights, BM3 ██████ said there were none that he was aware of.
- When asked to describe how the lights went out, BM3 ██████ said the lights flickered a few times and everything went black all at once.
- When asked if he saw any light remaining on, such as emergency lights, BM3 ██████ said no, everything went totally black.
- When asked what 45 he was operating that night, BM3 ██████ said it was 45630.
- When asked about who coordinated the risk assessments, BM3 ██████ said he did, and he solicited all the crew for their opinions and confidence levels. They stopped about 5 times to gather their thoughts and make sure they were doing things as safely as possible.
- When asked about when they arrived at the reported position of the Captain Alex and if they used any tools to determine its position, BM3 ██████ said they used radar and AIS to try to find the vessel. Initially they couldn't find it on AIS but once they had the general location and the helicopter pointed out the vessels position, he looked at the radar and he saw the vessels AIS arrow appearing on their screen.

- When asked when getting underway if he knew the size of the fishing vessel that needed assistance, BM3 [REDACTED] said they were told it was about a 90-foot fishing vessel before they got underway. They got that info from sector and the OOD.
- When asked if a cutter was called to assist the Captain Alex, BM3 [REDACTED] said he was not aware of such. He said his crew's mission was to dewater the vessel or evacuate it. If they were successful in getting the water down, the Captain Alex should have been able to transit in on its own.
- When asked about any policy that the Coast Guard has related to towing vessels, BM3 [REDACTED] said there are policies under the maritime SAR assistance policy where they are to not take away business from commercial salvage and non-urgent and less threatening situations. But since this situation was urgent where lives were in danger, any decisions to tow were fully up to the responding vessel on scene.

End of summary