



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Interview Summary – DCA23FM024

Interview of: Rajendrakumar Nikhil Mahajan– Chief Officer of Sirocco
Date/Time: March 29, 2023
Location: On board the Sirocco – ships meeting room – 1138 to 1255 central daylight time
Interviewed by: CWO [REDACTED] – USCG, Adam Tucker – NTSB
Attendees: John Musser – Murphy, Rogers, Sloss, Gambel and Tompkins (representing Sirocco owners), Gareth Fernandes – Newship, Inc. (representing Sirocco interests), Jorge Leon – V. Ships (representing Sirocco operator interests)
Accident: March 27, 2023, Breakaway of the bulk carrier Sirocco and subsequent contact with barge MEM 5087 moored at the Mosaic Uncle Sam dock in Covert, Louisiana (NTSB No. DCA23FM024).

This interview summary has been compiled based on NTSB and Coast Guard investigator notes taken during the interview of Mr. Nikhil Mahajan, Chief officer of the Sirocco.

- Mr. Mahajan said they were at Kenner Bend Anchorage when there was a charter survey carried out for the cargo holds. There were four guys that came on board. One was the port captain for Oldendorff, and another was the draft surveyor. The survey also included a bunker survey. The drafts were checked and all the holds except no. 4 were checked. No. 4 was not checked because it was full of ballast water. The surveyors left the ship about 1630 after the draft survey was done.
- The port captain conveyed special instructions for the Covert dock and Mr. Mahajan wrote them down. The instructions included that no one was to touch the mooring lines alone. It had to always be a duty officer and AB.
- On the night of the 25th into the 26th, they got notification that the pilot was coming, and they got underway at 2120 to head to the terminal. They started to deballast hold no. 4.
- On the night of the 26th, Mr. Mahajan went to rest around 2215 knowing that he would have to be up in a few hours for the intermediate draft survey. He left instructions with the second officer to deballast the ship until midnight.
- At about 0150 on the 27th, the second officer called him to let him know there was 40 minutes to the intermediate draft survey. Mr. Mahajan got up to get ready. He was in his cabin when he heard the master make an announcement for all crew on deck. He got dressed, grabbed his radio, and left his cabin. He recalled it was about 0210 when he left his cabin.
- Mr. Mahajan went to the ships office and put on his safety shoes and hard hat before going out on deck. He had the radio with him used to communicate to the terminal staff. He heard a call to tighten the lines and recalled hearing someone at the terminal saying, “everything you got is going out”.

- Mr. Mahajan ran up the port side and when he got around hold no. 4 and 5, he heard the master say over the radio to let go the starboard anchor. When he got to the bow, he saw that the bow was totally out from the dock, and they were too far away from the dock to heave in. The stern was away from the dock as well.
- Mr. Mahajan saw tugs approaching. The Sirocco was across (perpendicular to) the river at that point. He recalled hearing the master telling the second officer to let go the port anchor.
- They let the port anchor out and held it at about 4 shackles in the water. They put the brake on, but it started slipping and the brake did not hold. The port anchor chain was under a lot of tension, and it ran out to the bitter end.
- The pilot came on board shortly after and they took up anchors and they then went to the anchorage.
- Before the casualty the port captain came on board the Sirocco two times. On each occasion he said the lines were loose. The crew tightened the lines.
- They were loading about 2500 tons of cargo per hour, so the ships drafts were increasing by about 1 meter per hour.
- The port captain came on sometime later and complained that the lines were still slack; they had a stern trim at that time. The second officer was on duty and the port captain told him that the forward springs were slack, so the second officer and AB went out to tighten the lines again.
- The port captain told them the tugs would be removed based on the cost of them being \$2000 per hour for the two tugs. The port captain showed Mr. Mahajan an e mail from his phone showing why the tugs were no longer needed. Mr. Mahajan asked the port captain to show that message to the master.
- The first tug was removed at 1315.
- Mr. Mahajan said the speed of the current was of concern. He recalled the current was about 4 knots. The port captain said it was less than that and that it was 3.2 knots.
- About 0208 Mr. Mahajan recalled the ECDIS indicating the current was about 4 knots.
- Mr. Mahajan said they had 16 total mooring lines out. The breast lines were doubled around the bollard, so really, they had 20 lines holding them. Normally they use 4 plus 2 forward and 4 plus 2 aft.
- Mr. Mahajan presented investigators with sketches of the forward (figure 1), main deck (figure 2), and aft (figure 3) mooring line arrangement.

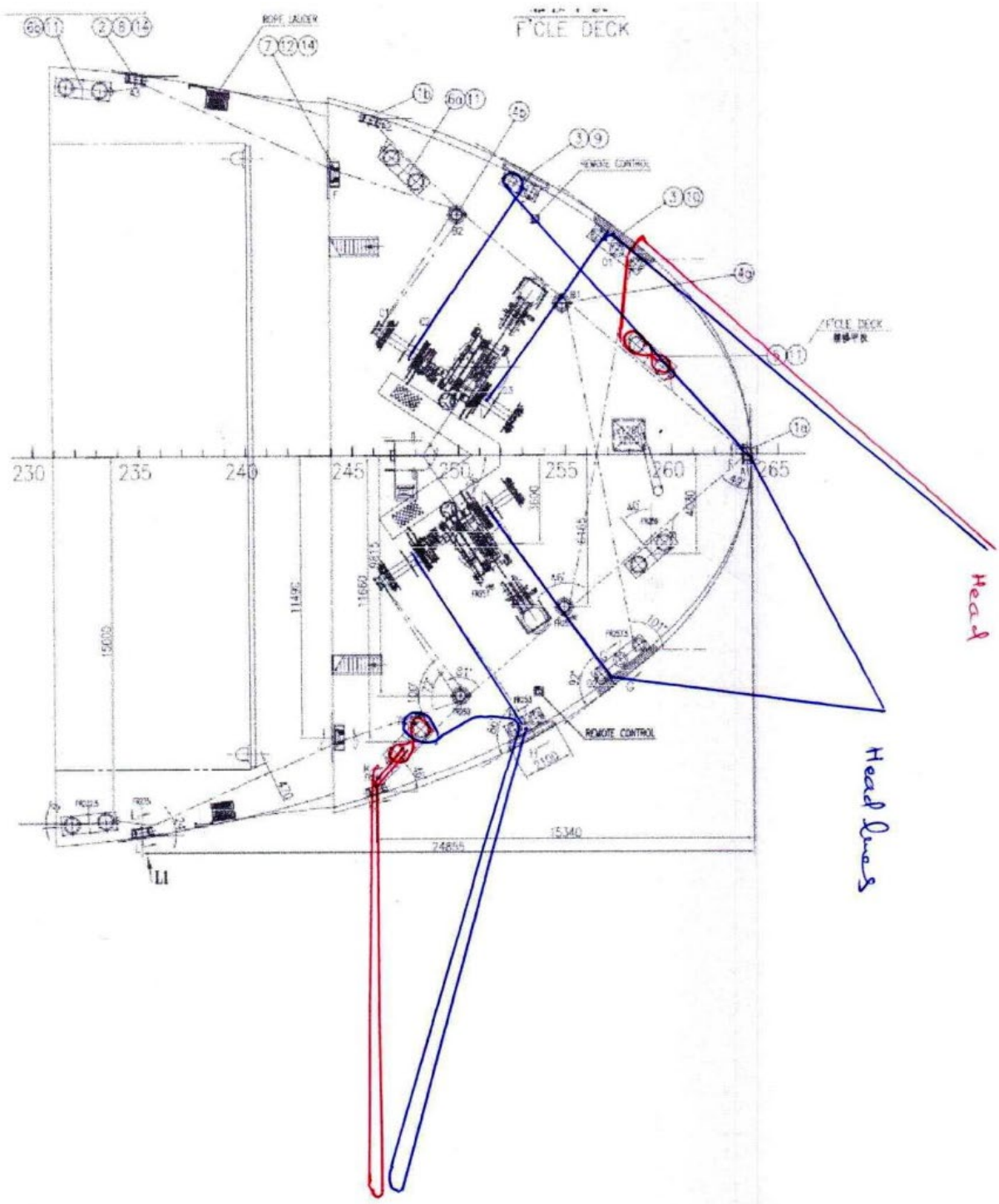


Figure 1: Forward mooring arrangement.

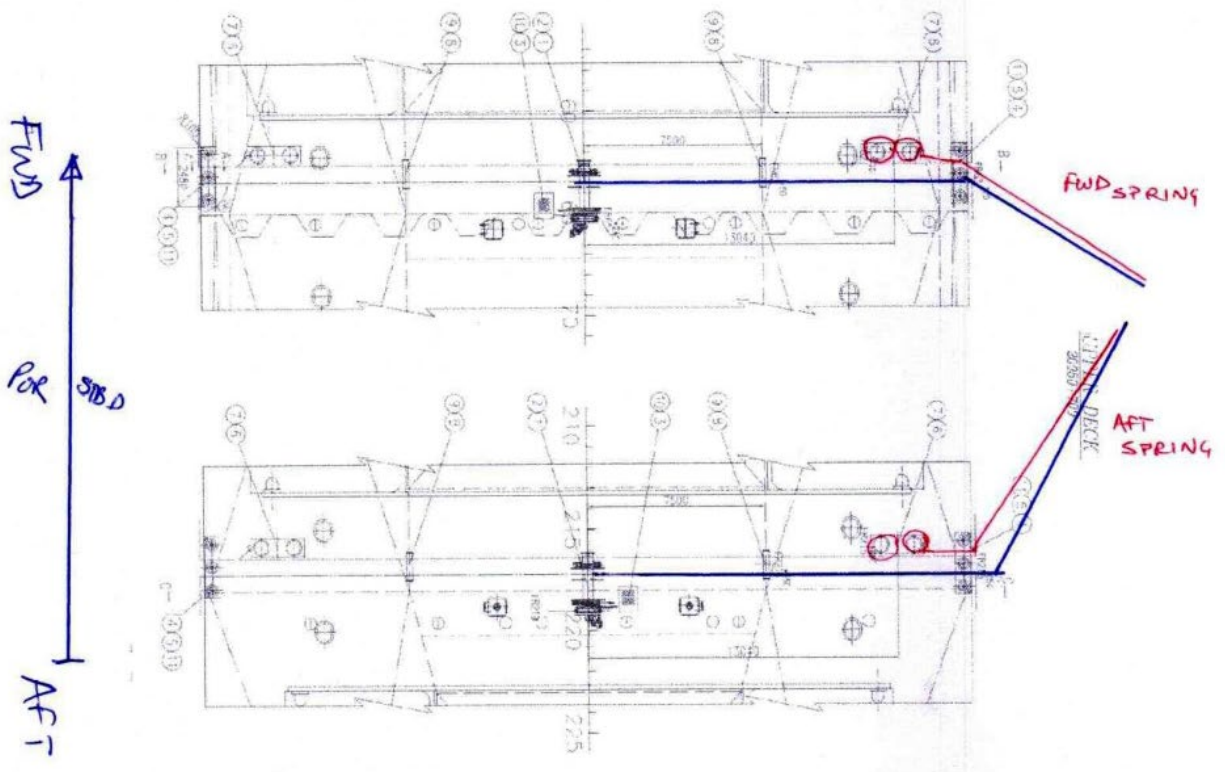


Figure 2: Main deck mooring arrangement.

- At the time the ship came off the dock, they were loading no. 2 hold, which was forward, thus increasing the forward draft. This in turn exposed more of the hull forward to the current causing the bow to be pushed out. The loading was fast, and they were to take 1000 tons per hour at that hold, which would result in a draft change of about 0.5 meters which he estimated would yield a 20 cm change in length of the lines.
- Referencing the cargo loading plan, Mr. Mahajan said they loaded no. 3 and then no. 5 cargo holds. In one hour, they loaded 2500 tons which changed the draft by 1 meter.
- Mr. Mahajan said the use of tugs would be a good solution in the current they faced. Having one tug would have been able to keep the bow in.
- Mr. Mahajan said this was his second time in the Mississippi River. That was in 2021 when he signed off a vessel in New Orleans. He was on a smaller ship then.
- Mr. Mahajan said that as per the port captain instructions, the duty officer and ABs were to check mooring lines and ensure they were tight. Because of that, Mr. Mahajan said he did soundings every now and then because there was no one else available to check. Every 20 to 30 minutes the guys were checking and adjusting the lines.
- In addition to the duty officer and AB, there had to be one guy for the cargo operations and one guy for gangway duty as per the ISPS.
- The guys on mooring watch were walking back and forth from the bow to the stern, almost 200 meters.
- When asked how they would bring the ship closer to the dock, Mr. Mahajan said they would first use the breast lines. The spring lines needed to be tightened up all the time. The instruction from the port captain was that the headlines were to be kept tightened.
- When asked how the mooring lines were held at the winch, Mr. Mahajan said they were held by the brake and the winches were not in gear. They always have to be on the brake. Keeping them in gear would damage the motors. The brakes will pay out with too much tension; 85% of the load. That means that if there is 61 tons of load, the brake will hold to 50.4 tons and let go beyond that. Thus, if there is too much current, the ropes will pay out with too much tension.
- When asked if he had seen the use of hold-in tugs in the past, Mr. Mahajan said he has, but that has been mostly due to port requirements.
- When asked of what happened after the incident, Mr. Mahajan said the Sirocco went to an anchorage where he remained forward until they were finished at stations around 0700. He went to the bridge, and everyone was busy calling people.
- Mr. Mahajan recalled when the ship was coming away from the dock, he arrived on the bow about 0210. When he got there the guys were trying to bring the bow back alongside. The second officer said the bow was coming out. Mr. Mahajan did not recall what winch they were using at the time. On his way to the bow, he was about midship when he heard the call for the starboard anchor to be let go.
- When asked how close they were to finishing loading, Mr. Mahajan said they had to do an intermediate draft survey and the results of that would yield how much more cargo they could top off in the holds based on the drafts. The terminal can load 2800 tons per hour. The Sirocco has a TPC (tons per centimeter) of 71.9.

- When asked what lines were broken, Mr. Mahajan said the aft breast line was broken. That line was a spare line and was secured to a bitt. One aft spring line was broken. That was a blue line on the winch drum between no. 6 and 7 holds. He recalled that line was of HMPE material.
- When asked what loading sequence they were in when loading no. 2 hold, Mr. Mahajan said they were in loading sequence number 14 according to the load plan. They always have a stern trim at the end of loading. He noted when he got the call at 0150 for 40 minutes to the intermediate draft survey, that meant there was another 40 minutes to the completion of item 14 in the load plan.
- The second officer took the drafts of the Sirocco at the end of item number 13 in the load plan as could be seen by the handwritten drafts on the load plan form.
- When asked about the cargo operations log and who maintained it, Mr. Mahajan said it was maintained by the person manning the gangway.
- When asked if the Bosun was on the ship at the time of the incident, Mr. Mahajan said he was not on the ship. The bosun reports to him. They have a deck cadet on board who also does the standbys.
- When asked if any of the surveyors checked the mooring ropes during the charter survey, Mr. Mahajan said yes, they looked at the rope certificates and checked the ropes on deck. There was no report provided to them with the surveyor's observations regarding the ropes.
- When asked of the instructions left by the port captain, Mr. Mahajan said that they were to not touch the headline and aft spring. They were not to ever bring the ship ahead. They were to tighten the forward mooring lines first and the stern last. The stern lines were to be tightened last.
- When asked what M/R meant on the port captains' special instructions, Mr. Mahajan said it meant mate's receipt.
- When asked of the port captains' special instructions that Mr. Mahajan wrote down, to have one tug standing by at all times, Mr. Mahajan said when the port captain came on board, he said tugs were no longer needed as there was no more high water restrictions and that the tugs were costing \$2000 per hour. The port captain told them that when the draft got to 35 feet, they would need a tug.
- When asked if there were any comments or communications from the terminal regarding the mooring lines or any precautions to be taken, Mr. Mahajan said there were not.
- When asked if there were any problems with the mooring winches, Mr. Mahajan said there were not. They do have hydraulic problems, but that does not affect the mooring winches.

End of summary