



## National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Office of Marine Safety

### Interview Summary – DCA23FM038

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**Interview of:** Johnny Cheramie – Captain of the towing vessel Pamela Ann  
**Date/Time:** October 4, 2023 – 0915 to 1046 CDT  
**Location:** Telephonic/Teams – via USCG invite  
**Interviewed by:** Lt. [REDACTED] – USCG, Les Ledet – USCG, Adam Tucker – NTSB  
**Attendees:** Jeff Johnson – Manager, Compliance, and Investigations for Enterprise Marine Services (Party in Interest), LLC, Chris Ulfers - Jones Walker LLP (counsel for Enterprise Products), Michael Neuner - Mouledoux, Bland, Legrand and Brackett – (counsel for Harbor Towing and Fleeting, LLC)  
**Accident:** July 4, 2023, contact of barge EMS 317, pushed by the towing vessel Kitty into the southwest lock gate of the Algiers Lock near New Orleans, Louisiana (NTSB No. DCA23FM038).

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This interview summary has been compiled based on Coast Guard and NTSB investigator notes taken during the interview of Captain Johnny Cheramie, Captain of the towing vessel Pamela Ann.

- Captain Cheramie has had his merchant mariners license since 2005 and has worked on the Upper and Lower Mississippi River and the east and west rivers. He has been working on towing vessels since the age of 16. On July 4, 2023, he was the master of the Pamela Ann, a 65-foot, 140 gross ton, 1300 horsepower twin screw push boat that was waiting to lock through the Algiers Lock together with the towing vessel Kitty.
- On the day of the accident, Captain Cheramie was on watch on the Pamela Ann, and they were going into the Algiers Locks. The Kitty was to go in first which he recalled was a two-piece unit.
- When the Kitty was in the lock, Captain Cheramie recalled hearing the deckhand from the Kitty say over the radio something along the lines of “slow it down – you’re coming in fast” which got his attention. He recalled hearing the deckhand counting down to the lock gate. He heard the operator of the Kitty reply with something like, “there was nothing he could do – it is moving forward on its own”. He heard the operator of the Kitty say he had a surge in the chamber.
- Captain Cheramie said he heard the lock master on the radio saying, “you need to start backing it down”. The operator of the Kitty replied, “I am backing it down”. There was a back-and-forth exchange between the operator of the Kitty and the lock master regarding if the Kitty was backing down or not. The operator of the Kitty said he was backing down and had no control of the surge in the lock.
- Captain Cheramie said he understood the Kitty tow got pushed up against the lock gate from the conversations he heard over the radio.

- Captain Cheramie said he had experienced that same surge effect in the lock before. He was on a boat that went in, and he experienced heavy surge going forward and back. They broke lines and he had to call the lock master to close the gate behind them to get it settled down.
- When the operator of the Kitty said there was surging in the lock at that time, Captain Cheramie said he did believe that surging was the problem there at the time, based on his past experience.
- When asked if he knew why the surge in the lock occurred related to the Kitty tow hitting the lock gate, Captain Cheramie said no. He heard over the radio the operator of the Kitty saying something about a ship passing behind the forebay in the river. Captain Cheramie said he could not remember if he saw any ships back there or not. The Pamela Ann was facing the lock at the time, and he was not looking aft of the boat in the direction of the river.
- When asked if he had a good visual of the Kitty at the time, Captain Cheramie said he did see the Kitty's wheel wash going in reverse. He noted it was quite some time since the accident, so he could not remember everything.
- When asked what company the Pamela Ann belonged to, Captain Cheramie said it was Harbor Towing.
- When asked if he worked or knew the captain of the Kitty in the past, Captain Cheramie said he did not know him.
- When asked of any affiliation with Enterprise marine, Captain Cheramie said he has no affiliation with them and has never worked there.
- When asked during past transits of his interactions at the Algiers Lock, Captain Cheramie said it has always been pleasant. There has never been an issue and there are a bunch of good guys working there.
- When asked if there was anything abnormal that he noticed on the day of the accident, Captain Cheramie said no, it was clear and no wind with no rain. They were at a fairly low stage of the river and the river stage was at the point where it was getting abnormally low.
- When asked, based on his experience, if there are considerations when going through the lock at abnormally low water, Captain Cheramie said none that has been advised to them.
- When asked if the lock alters their routine during abnormally low water, Captain Cheramie said nothing that had ever been relayed to him. He has never experienced anything out of the normal related to the operation during abnormally low water conditions.
- When asked about radio communications, Captain Cheramie said he was on channel 14 standing by with the locks and the Kitty. He had no radio communication with the Kitty that he could recall.
- When asked what position he was on the Pamela Ann, Captain Cheramie said he was the captain and that he worked the front watch (06 to 12 and 18 to 24).
- When asked if he or any of the Pamela Ann crew had any pictures or video that were taken at the accident site, Captain Cheramie said there were none.

- When asked if the Pamela Ann had any kind of recorded video on board, Captain Cheramie said it did not.
- When asked if the Pamela Ann experienced any effects of the surge that was reported by the operator of the Kitty, Captain Cheramie said he could not remember all the details but recalled that he was backing on the Pamela Ann to counter the effects of the surge and stop the boat from going forward.
- When asked if they ever got inside the lock chamber, Captain Cheramie said the Pamela Ann was always outside the lock chamber.
- When asked to recall what he remembered after the casualty, Captain Cheramie said the Kitty backed out of the chamber and they all stayed in the area. Everyone was making phone calls and figuring out what was going on. The job for the Pamela Ann got cancelled since they were not able to lock through.
- When asked to clarify where he was when he had a similar surge experience and broke lines, Captain Cheramie said that was at Algiers Lock. They were going the same direction from the river to the intercoastal.
- When asked to explain the surge experience he had in the Algiers Lock, Captain Cheramie said he had two loads, and they were coming into the lock. The deckhand had caught a line and they were surging back and forth and broke one line. He was trying to back down hard to stop the boat from surging, and the deckhand got another line on which also broke when they surged backwards. Captain Cheramie called the lock master and asked him to close the gates because of the surge in the chambers. Once they closed the gates on the river side, he was able to get the boat settled down. Captain Cheramie said this event happened 10 years ago.
- When asked when he first noticed there was something going on with the Kitty, Captain Cheramie said he first noticed this from the radio. The deckhand of the Kitty was telling the operator they were going to break a line.
- When asked if he saw any rise or fall of the water from his viewpoint, Captain Cheramie said that he did not see any that he could recall.
- When asked if the surge event he experienced 10 years ago in the Algiers lock was during low water, Captain Cheramie said that he could not recall.
- When asked of what he thought could have been done to change the outcome of this accident, Captain Cheramie said he guessed, based on his experience, would be to have the gates closed behind the vessel in the lock to stop the surge from coming in.

**End of summary**