

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of:

\*

\*

TOWING VESSEL BARGE STRUCK LOCK

\*

GATE NEAR MILE 88 ON THE LOWER

\*

Accident No.: DCA23FM038

MISSISSIPPI RIVER ON JULY 4, 2023

\*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: KEVIN MELANCANT, Day Shift Lock Operator  
Army Corps of Engineers

New Orleans, Louisiana

Friday,  
July 7, 2023

APPEARANCES:

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigating Officer  
U.S. Coast Guard

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigator, NCOE  
U.S. Coast Guard

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigator  
U.S. Coast Guard

ADAM TUCKER  
National Transportation Safety Board

JEFF JOHNSON, Manager, Compliance and Investigations  
Enterprise Marine Services, LLC

CHRIS ULFERS, Esq.  
Jones Walker, LLP  
Representing Enterprise Marine Services, LLC

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Kevin Melancant:	
By LT [REDACTED]	5
By Mr. Tucker	16
By Mr. [REDACTED]	34
By LT [REDACTED]	36
By LT [REDACTED]	37
By Mr. [REDACTED]	39
By Mr. Tucker	40
By Mr. Ulfers	43

I N T E R V I E W

(3:17 p.m.)

LT [REDACTED] All right, it is 7 July 2023, time on deck is 15:17. Coast Guard and NTSB are conducting a joint investigation into the allision between the *ITV Kitty* and the Algiers Lock portside gate which took place at approximately 19:30 on 04 July and resulted in an estimated \$500,000 or more in damages.

Before we get started, I just want to confirm again, is everybody okay if we record this interview?

MR. MELANCANT: Yes.

LT [REDACTED] Okay, thank you. All right. And we'll do introductions now. This is Lieutenant [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard investigating officer.

MR. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Coast Guard investigator, I-NCOE.

MR. TUCKER: My name is Adam Tucker and I'm with the National Transportation Safety Board and thanks for talking with us today.

MR. MELANCANT: Yes, sir.

MR. ULFERS: Chris Ulfers, Jones Walker, counsel for Enterprise.

MR. JOHNSON: Jeff Johnson with Enterprise Marine.

LT [REDACTED] Lieutenant [REDACTED] [REDACTED] investigator, Coast Guard.

MR. MELANCANT: Kevin Melancant, Army Corps of Engineers.

LT [REDACTED] Awesome. Well, thank you --

MR. MELANCANT: Lock operator.

1 LT [REDACTED] Sorry, sir.

2 MR. MELANCANT: That's all right.

3 LT [REDACTED] Thank you so much for being with us. I'm going to  
4 go ahead and confirm your contact information, so cell phone [REDACTED]  
5 [REDACTED].

6 MR. MELANCANT: Correct.

7 LT [REDACTED] Okay. And then address is [REDACTED],  
8 [REDACTED].

9 MR. MELANCANT: Correct.

10 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you so much, sir.

11 INTERVIEW OF KEVIN MELANCANT

12 BY LT [REDACTED]

13 Q. Yeah, at this time, we're just going to ask that you kind of  
14 walk us through what happened on the day of the incident and we  
15 will not interrupt you. At the end, we will probably have some  
16 questions, though.

17 A. Okay. And I gave the *Kitty* its instructions on where to come  
18 in, how to tie up, whatnot like that. I told them bring it to the  
19 red pin, tie off on either side, whatever side he was comfortable  
20 with, I always do that when I'm with my captains, I want them to  
21 be comfortable on however they want to maneuver their vessel, so I  
22 tell them either side. I had a light boat coming in at the same  
23 time, so whenever we have a light boat we'll go to the red pin,  
24 which is the very last pin. Okay, so that was about -- that was  
25 the beginning of it, that was the beginning. So once he got in,

1 it came down to where his vessel was even with our shack and he  
2 came pretty much to a stop and then he was trying to go in  
3 further, but it was like almost a stop. And then he started going  
4 a little bit farther, inching up, inching up, inching up, and then  
5 he just -- he just kept going after that. That's what I seen so  
6 far, but I could hear the engine revving and all of that as he was  
7 trying to go up farther.

8 Before, it was like a stop and then he was trying to rev up  
9 and then it kept going and then the next thing I know, I had my  
10 man at the other end tell him to stop because you're speeding up  
11 too fast, you're going too fast, if you keep coming, you're going  
12 to run into the gate and after that, it was the bang.

13 Q. So just so I'm clear, you were here in the -- what's this  
14 gate called?

15 A. A shack.

16 Q. The A shack, okay. So you were in the A shack, so you were  
17 basically, I guess, even with where the tug would've been.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. The barges were up ahead there.

20 A. Right.

21 Q. Okay. And you said, as he was coming in the gate, you saw  
22 him trying to inch forward, but he couldn't?

23 A. Yeah, it was like it was almost a stop and I thought he was  
24 just taking his time --

25 Q. Right.

1 A. -- going slowly, slowly, slowly, you know, and then I heard  
2 his engines rev up a little bit and then he kept going.

3 Q. Got you.

4 A. And then --

5 Q. And then this gate, the A gate, never closed, right?

6 A. Oh, no.

7 Q. It just stayed open, right?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. So he was kind of inching forward and did -- yeah, okay. And  
10 then were you the main point of contact with the captain? Were  
11 you the one mainly communicating with him?

12 A. In the beginning we was in a transition of --

13 Q. Right, okay.

14 A. -- changing.

15 Q. Okay, got you.

16 A. But in the beginning, I was the main person, point of  
17 contact, to talk to him and tell him where to go tie off at.

18 Q. Got you, okay.

19 A. And I did let him know there was another light boat coming in  
20 behind him.

21 Q. Okay. How were those communications with him, any issues,  
22 calm, cool, collected?

23 A. No issues, just normal communication.

24 Q. Normal, okay.

25 A. Nothing -- nothing out of the ordinary.

1 Q. Okay. Have you worked with the *Kitty* before?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay. How many times would you say you've seen that vessel,  
4 roughly?

5 A. Oh, I can't even count.

6 Q. Too many?

7 A. Yeah. I really can't.

8 Q. Got you.

9 A. That vessel's been through here quite a few times.

10 Q. Okay. And you've never had an issue previously?

11 A. Never had an issue with -- I can probably count the issues  
12 I've had with tows on one hand.

13 Q. Okay. And how long have you worked here?

14 A. As a 9, I think I've been -- as a 9 -- I've been working here  
15 9 years.

16 Q. Nine years.

17 A. But as a 9, I've been working like 8 years as a 9.

18 Q. Okay. So 8 years as a 9. And did you work your first year  
19 in the other gate, okay, in the other shack?

20 (No audible response.)

21 BY LT [REDACTED]

22 Q. Okay, so you were 1 year there. And what did you do -- well,  
23 I know what you did, you were Navy, previously.

24 A. Yeah, but previously I worked at -- I was an inspector, I was  
25 a pipe inspector, I was a machine re-inspector, and --



1 Q. Was this mainly on vessels?  
2 A. Yes, sir.  
3 Q. All right, cool.  
4 A. I've been messing around with ships for I don't know how  
5 long.  
6 Q. That's awesome, yeah.  
7 A. Yeah.  
8 Q. And then tell me about your Navy service, if you don't mind.  
9 A. Four years active, about 10 years reserve.  
10 Q. What did you do when you were in the Navy?  
11 A. I was an MR, inside machinery and machinery repairman.  
12 Q. Okay, great. Well, we certainly appreciate your service. If  
13 I'm stopping, I'm sorry, I'm just taking some notes.  
14 A. No, that's fine.  
15 Q. Okay. All right, great. Tell me about the weather on the  
16 day of the event.  
17 A. Well, it was clear, there was no -- the weather condition was  
18 clear.  
19 Q. Anything abnormal with the river?  
20 A. No, nothing abnormal.  
21 Q. Okay.  
22 A. Other than it's low.  
23 Q. Would you say this is abnormally low?  
24 A. About once a year it gets like this.  
25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I mean, I don't know what abnormally low would be.

2 Q. Right. But in your mind, the river being this low didn't  
3 cause any concerns in your mind with bringing ships in?

4 A. Yeah, it always does, to me --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- because we do -- low river like that, I'm thinking to  
7 myself, the boats, when they're coming in the forebay, how low,  
8 you know, how low they are, but that's just in my head, though.

9 Q. Right. So just a little heightened level of awareness,  
10 basically.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. I got you.

13 A. It is, because it's -- there's no water on that side of the  
14 forebay and on this side of the forebay there's no water, so  
15 there's only a straight path --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. -- to me.

18 Q. Makes sense. And then do you ever notice any surging of  
19 water coming in and out, like when you have vessels passing either  
20 way?

21 A. I've noticed that the captains tell me about it --

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. -- but I don't -- you know, I wouldn't have no idea on how it  
24 would feel or how it would look. They let me know hey, it's  
25 surging in the chamber or something like that, but me, I'm not

1 going to see water splashing or anything like that.

2 Q. Right. I mean, can you see, as any ships are passing, do you  
3 see the water level go up or down at all?

4 A. I see it move a slight bit, but not a lot.

5 Q. Slight.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. So on the day of the event, how much would you say --

8 A. I didn't take notice to it.

9 Q. You didn't take notice to it, okay. Okay. Were you there at  
10 the -- so once the event occurred, once the incident occurred,  
11 were you there communicating with the captain still at that point,  
12 trying to get any documentation done or anything?

13 A. Yeah. My coworker and I were there trying to get the --

14 Q. Both of you were.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. And how did that process go?

17 A. Well, he was told, the boat captain told us that he wasn't  
18 going to sign anything or give any information, he was told to  
19 back out and go to the port.

20 Q. Okay. So you say he was told to back out, so he was  
21 basically in here and what was your communication once the  
22 incident happened?

23 A. Well, we asked him, it was both of us, we asked him to tie  
24 off --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- so we can get the information, but he couldn't get -- he  
2 couldn't get a good line, he could not get a good line. So far as  
3 I know, he popped like three lines. And so as he couldn't get a  
4 good line, he backed on out and tried to get a line outside the  
5 guide wall and so we tried to get the information when he was  
6 outside the gate.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And he was told to leave.

9 Q. Got you. When he was in here, why did he kept popping lines,  
10 do you know?

11 A. He said it was still surging.

12 Q. Okay. But you didn't see any --

13 A. It's kind of hard to notice.

14 Q. I got you, yeah. So basically, what they're feeling down  
15 there is probably much different from what you can visually see.

16 A. I cannot -- yeah, it is, to me.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Did you notice any type of prop wash or anything?

20 A. Prop wash, yeah, was he was coming in --

21 Q. Um-hum.

22 A. -- trying to go to the pin, yes.

23 Q. So you could see him moving forward, right, and then you  
24 could see him come into reverse and you noticed that?

25 A. When he was coming out, yeah, I did notice that.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Yeah, as he was coming out, yeah.

3 Q. What about when he was trying to slow back, you know, trying

4 not to hit?

5 A. I wasn't noticing it at that part.

6 Q. Okay, got you. I got you.

7 A. Yeah. At that time, I'm listening to my man to see what was

8 going on.

9 Q. Okay. So I guess, in your mind, what would you say caused

10 this, if you had to say something?

11 A. It would be a good guess.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. At the time I noticed a ship passing by, right before he came

14 in.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And it is a good guess, it was an orange ship, it was kind of

17 huge and it was orange and that had to be around, maybe -- maybe

18 around about 5 minutes until 1800. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Seventeen fifty-five. And I've heard captains tell me, when

21 ships pass by, it'll make a surge in here. And I mean, it's just

22 a theory, I don't know, I can't tell.

23 Q. Sure.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. And then I heard all kinds of theories about if you got a  
2 load and you're pushing a load and it's hitting the other gate,  
3 it's pushing water towards and then there's no way for the water  
4 to come back but around, so it's pushing the resistance, I heard  
5 that theory.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. But me, personally, I have no idea, I have no clue, I never  
8 drove a ship like -- a boat with 600 feet in front of me in my  
9 life and don't want to.

10 (Laughter.)

11 MR. MELANCANT: So I have no idea.

12 LT [REDACTED] Yeah, there's certainly a lot of factors at play  
13 there, you know, so it makes sense.

14 MR. MELANCANT: Yeah. So I can't tell you what could've  
15 caused it and how it could've happened or anything like that. But  
16 all I can say is that I never seen nothing like that before.

17 BY LT [REDACTED]

18 Q. Did you notice anything -- so you said you saw an orange ship  
19 passing.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Did you notice anything abnormal about their speed, about  
22 their -- were they close to this side of the bank, at all, or  
23 anything abnormal?

24 A. No. And actually, it was on the other side, the bank.

25 Q. Okay. Oh, so it was even -- it was on the further side.

1 A. It was on the further side, but I just noticed it, I mean --

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. -- because I'm always looking out that way and I'm always  
4 paying attention to what's going on when my boats are coming in,  
5 because I don't want none of that -- we have a piling out there  
6 and some of the pilings have rebar on them and I want them to stay  
7 away from the pilings. So I got to look and see that they're  
8 staying away from the pilings and that they're coming in straight  
9 before I blow my horn and let them come in.

10 Q. Okay, that makes sense. Have you heard of anything that the  
11 Army Corps is doing based on what happened? Are they changing any  
12 policies, putting any restrictions in place, anything different?

13 A. Since the incident here?

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. Not as of yet. Today is my first day at work --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- back at work, but I'm pretty sure it's going to happen.

18 LT [REDACTED] Yeah, right, okay. That makes sense. Okay. Well,  
19 I don't have any further questions right now, I'm going to pass it  
20 off to my colleague here.

21 MR. TUCKER: All right. Thank you very much for talking with  
22 us, and my name is Adam Tucker, I'm with the National  
23 Transportation Safety Board, and my role here is we work together  
24 with the Coast Guard and we gather the same facts, the same  
25 information, the same material, and the Coast Guard is the lead

1 agency in this one and ultimately, when a casualty or an accident  
2 hits a certain monetary threshold for the circumstance, then we  
3 get involved. We usually generate a report, that report is  
4 usually 10 pages to 14 pages in length, it comes out probably  
5 within a year, normally. So that's my role here, I just wanted to  
6 explain that before I get started with a couple questions. And  
7 all of these are just follow-ups to what was discussed already.  
8 Just one, you'll probably see me taking notes here rapidly, I just  
9 want to make sure I capture things.

10 MR. MELANCANT: Not a problem.

11 BY MR. TUCKER:

12 Q. So just to clarify, you're on the day shift, right?

13 A. We do 2 weeks days and 2 weeks nights, it's a swing shift,  
14 you work Monday and Tuesday, you're off Wednesday and Thursday and  
15 then you work the weekend and the following week you just work  
16 that Wednesday and Thursday.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And you do that 2 weeks nights and 2 weeks days.

19 Q. Understood. Okay, so on the day of the accident, July 4th,  
20 you were on the day shift?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. And the day shift runs from --

23 A. Well, we usually do 6:30 to 6:30, but we relieve each other  
24 around 6 o'clock, 1800.

25 Q. Okay. So I understand that you were on shift for almost 12



1 hours or over 12 hours at that point.

2 A. At 12 hours, yes.

3 Q. At 12 hours, okay. So the question is, were there any  
4 problems with the -- I'm going to get my verbiage wrong, I'm sorry  
5 -- with the locks, the gates, any of the machinery, communication  
6 equipment, any problems throughout the day?

7 A. Uh-uh.

8 Q. No? Everything was --

9 A. No, everything was good.

10 Q. Okay. And you mentioned the river was low. How do you know  
11 it was low, was there measurements or anything like that or --

12 A. Yeah, we have measurements on our PLC.

13 Q. PLC.

14 A. Our board which we use to open and close the gates.

15 Q. Okay. Do you remember what the measurements were of that --  
16 around that time?

17 A. Around that time, it had to be around 2 feet in the river and  
18 not much difference in the canal, maybe a little less than a foot.

19 Q. So 2 feet in the river and less than a foot in the canal?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Around .7, .8, something like that.

23 Q. Okay. And how is that measured, is there a gauge or  
24 something like that or --

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Is there a gauge here or do you use --

2 A. There's a gauge, yeah.

3 Q. Okay. And it's just a visual or --

4 A. No.

5 Q. Oh.

6 A. No, no, it's on a computer.

7 Q. Okay. And that gauge, then, is there one up here for the  
8 canal, as well, or --

9 A. There's one on the canal, the channel, the chamber, and the  
10 river.

11 Q. Understood. So that's on that PLC computer you're talking  
12 about?

13 A. Right. And mostly we use the chamber gauge at this time.

14 Q. Okay, during -- at this time, meaning low water?

15 A. Low water.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Because it gives a more accurate reading on what's the level  
18 of the chamber.

19 Q. Understood, okay. And do you remember what the -- I didn't  
20 ask you that. Do you remember what the chamber gauge was at that  
21 time?

22 A. Yeah, 2 feet.

23 Q. It was 2 feet, okay. Got it, all right. And again, I  
24 apologize, I'm completely unfamiliar with this --

25 A. No, that's fine.

1 Q. You'll get some dumb questions from me, yeah.

2 A. No question is dumb.

3 Q. Oh, there is from me. Just ask my wife.

4 (Laughter.)

5 BY LT [REDACTED]

6 Q. All right, so now I understand that. And you worked -- you  
7 were working the day watch, so who was your -- you mentioned your  
8 guy. I'm assuming he was on the other end?

9 A. Yeah, he had left.

10 Q. He had left already.

11 A. The guy that I was working with, he had left.

12 Q. Okay, so the guy you were -- he had already gone, right?

13 A. Yeah, he had already gone.

14 Q. Do you know his name?

15 A. Yeah. Tyrell Clark (ph.).

16 Q. Tyrell. And I know during your watch or during the -- am I  
17 saying that right, watch or your shift?

18 A. Shift, watch.

19 Q. Your primary working place is in this -- the tower or the  
20 shack?

21 A. We call it the A house.

22 Q. The A house, okay. And so is that normally where you spend  
23 all of your time?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay, in the A house. All right. See, I'm learning a lot.

1 A. Because of the gates, A, B, C, D.

2 Q. Okay, all right. And so from the A house you can control  
3 the --

4 A. A and B gates.

5 Q. So the guy on the other end controls the C and D.

6 A. The C and D gates.

7 Q. All right. Clear as mud, clear as mud. Okay. So in the A  
8 house, where you were, what -- I've not been there, hopefully I'll  
9 be able to take a look, but what tools do you have there? I know  
10 you said you have the PLC computer, I'm assuming you've got a  
11 radio or radios. What else do you have?

12 A. Yeah, a radio and a computer and our two -- in order to keep  
13 up with the boat and what they're carrying and when they got on  
14 turn and how much -- whatever their product is and how much  
15 product they carrying and the tonnage of the product they're  
16 carrying.

17 Q. Okay. And any other tools in there to help you with what you  
18 got to do?

19 A. No, that's pretty much it.

20 Q. Okay. Do you have CCTV, like cameras up there?

21 A. One camera.

22 Q. One camera, okay. And where is that camera, is it looking --

23 A. It's pointing toward the gate.

24 Q. Okay, that's the gate camera that we had to let us through.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. All right. But I mean, I've noticed like there's cameras all  
2 over, but --

3 A. They're not working.

4 Q. They're not working, okay. How long have they not worked?

5 A. I really can't tell you.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. It's been a -- I mean, it's been a while.

8 Q. Okay. So 9 years here, those cameras, you said they're not  
9 working, they haven't worked for a while, but the question is, do  
10 -- because they haven't worked for a while, I guess they don't  
11 really help you in doing your job or anything like that or --

12 A. They helped a bit when they were working.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah. The cameras on the -- I could see when a boat's coming  
15 in and how they looking when they coming in, on the cameras on  
16 that end and the same one, that one they had that logged (ph.) us  
17 in. But other than that, they had the cameras in the yard and it  
18 was just for the yard, but it was about two or three particular  
19 cameras that I could -- let's put it this way, I didn't have to  
20 get up as much as I do now.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I have to get up and visually get out there and visually see  
23 now, so it's sort of -- given the take, on one hand it's better  
24 for me to get up out of that chair and go look, rather than look  
25 at the camera.

1 Q. Um-hum.

2 A. On the other hand, it helps when I'm documenting stuff,  
3 sometimes I could look at the camera and get up a little bit later  
4 than I can now. But it's not -- it's a good thing and it ain't a  
5 good thing, so it's not bad I have to get up and go look at extra.  
6 Actually, it's actually better, to be honest with you.

7 Q. Okay. Now, when you have to get up, because I'm looking all  
8 the way down there right now and I know you have a guy down there,  
9 as well, but do you have binoculars to help you or anything like  
10 that?

11 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah, we do have binoculars. If I can't see  
12 something, I got them on.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah, if there's some kind of like, say, something in the  
15 chamber or something like that, some kind of danger, I mean, it  
16 helps quite a bit, yeah.

17 Q. Yeah. And curiosity, I know this didn't happen that night,  
18 but at night, is this place all like lit up so you can see  
19 everything?

20 A. Oh, it's real lit up around here.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Okay. Let's see. So you mentioned you had -- the reason for  
24 this question is unfamiliar, so you told the captain of the *Kitty*  
25 to bring it to the red pin. Why red pin, like what --

1 A. It gives enough room for the other boat. I had a light boat  
2 coming in, a light boat is a boat without a tug.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. I had a light boat coming in and in order to have enough  
5 space for that light boat to fit in, we go to the red pin, which  
6 is the very last pin. Usually, I will go to the green pin before  
7 the last pin.

8 Q. Okay. So the red pin's like the last one before the gate.

9 A. Right.

10 Q. And how far is -- do you have any idea of what -- how far the  
11 red pin is from the gate?

12 A. It's 25 feet from the gate on that side and 50 feet from the  
13 gate on this side.

14 Q. Okay. Okay, I understand. I'm starting to get familiar.  
15 Sorry, I get distracted seeing the boats come in, so --

16 A. Okay.

17 Q. -- it's pretty cool stuff.

18 A. Each pin measures 50 feet apart.

19 Q. Each pin, each pin is 50 feet, okay.

20 A. And that's how I can -- I can kind of judge on how much tow I  
21 can put into the chamber.

22 Q. Right, okay.

23 A. I got 780 feet is my full lock length and 75 feet wide.

24 Q. So this is interesting, it is one of the questions I want to  
25 ask you, just to remember -- go back to what you remember in

1 detail, so -- and we're seeing this boat go in now, he's got two  
2 loads, so --

3 A. Yeah, he's 580-something feet.

4 Q. He's 580, okay. So you mentioned, when the *Kitty* kind of got  
5 abeam of where -- of --

6 A. Right in front of my window, yeah.

7 Q. Right in front of the window. So tell me what you saw again  
8 or what you heard.

9 A. He was kind of slowly, like almost a stop.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. So I'm noticing, and he's tilted and he's kind of like almost  
12 stopped and when they do that, they're going for the pin, they're  
13 going to angle towards the pin. So he's kind of like this and  
14 he's just kind of inching up, but he came to almost a stop and  
15 then all of a sudden, he just was going. And so usually I just  
16 figured he just aimed it up and lined it up when he's lining up  
17 with the pin. So that's when -- after that, I heard my man say,  
18 Captain, slow up, you're going too fast or something to that  
19 effect, and he started yelling and --

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. -- the next thing I hear is the accident.

22 Q. And you actually heard?

23 A. Oh, yeah.

24 Q. Yeah, okay. And where were you when that happened, were you  
25 inside, were you --



1 A. I was inside.

2 Q. You were inside.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Windows open or closed-up, air conditioning?

5 A. I don't remember.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Pretty much, it was closed.

8 Q. But you could still hear it all the way back there?

9 A. Yeah. But when I got a relief, when I'm about to relieve  
10 somebody, yeah, excuse me on this, when somebody is about to come  
11 in, I open the windows up for a little, you know, because I've  
12 been in there 12 hours and I don't know how my breath smells or  
13 anything like that and I want to make it comfortable for the guy  
14 coming in.

15 Q. Yeah, yeah.

16 A. So I'll open a window up. So it might've been open, so I'm  
17 not quite sure.

18 Q. Okay, that's fine. Only what you remember, so yeah. Okay.  
19 And you kind of indicated with your hands at an angle, he came in  
20 at an angle, did you say or --

21 A. Whenever the boat's lining up to grab a pin --

22 Q. Uh-huh.

23 A. -- they'll tilt out like this in order for their man to throw  
24 the line on the pin.

25 Q. Okay. So do you know what pin, from your perspective, what

1 pin he was aiming for?

2 A. Yeah, he was going for the red one, but they'll tilt out  
3 ahead of turn to get there and once they grab that pin, they'll  
4 maneuver to close back in to the wall.

5 Q. Okay. But that angle was not abnormal, you've seen that many  
6 -- okay, all right. That's what I was asking to clarify, so --

7 A. No, no. I mean, if you sit there and you watch a boat when  
8 they come in, you will see them come in and they'll tilt in order  
9 to grab a line, the man on the head of the barge grabbing a line.

10 Q. Okay. I understand that. You mentioned the other light  
11 boat, do you remember the light boat's name?

12 A. Yeah, *Pamela Ann*.

13 Q. Okay. Where was she when all this was going on?

14 A. Behind.

15 Q. Was she still -- like was she in transit behind or was she  
16 just kind of holding up in the forebay?

17 A. Holding up in the forebay.

18 Q. Okay, all right. And did she report any problems or anything  
19 like that to you guys?

20 A. After the accident, he said he felt the surge.

21 Q. Okay. This was over the radio or --

22 A. Over the radio.

23 Q. Okay. Is there any detail that he provided or --

24 A. No. Pretty much, that was it.

25 Q. And I'm curious on that, you mentioned there was a ship, an

1 orange ship and --

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. -- it was on the other side of the bank.

4 A. Yeah, I seen it pass by, but I often notice ships passing by,  
5 but the only reason I noticed him is because I was looking at the  
6 boat coming in.

7 Q. Yeah, you were looking at the *Kitty* coming in.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. Right. Okay, so you --

10 A. I was outside at that time.

11 Q. You were outside, okay.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. And you were looking in the direction of the river,  
14 obviously, for the *Kitty* to come in and you said the boat had --  
15 the ship had an orange hull.

16 A. It was orange, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. Just to clarify, was he northbound, southbound, what  
18 do you remember?

19 A. Northbound.

20 Q. Northbound. Large ship?

21 A. Yeah. Not extremely large, kind of a medium class, I don't  
22 know.

23 Q. Okay. Any cranes on deck?

24 A. I seen -- yeah, I seen -- I guess you call those cranes to  
25 pick up --

1 Q. Okay, did he have four, one, do you remember how many?

2 (No audible response.)

3 BY MR. TUCKER:

4 Q. Okay, that's fine. Let's see.

5 A. I don't know whether that was a factor or not, I really  
6 don't. I just mention it --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. -- because boats always tell me about when the ships pass, it  
9 gives them a little surge.

10 Q. Yeah. And I understand that, that you've learned that from  
11 other boats, not from your own personal experience or anything  
12 like that.

13 A. No, never drove a boat in my life, except my 22-foot boat,  
14 that's it.

15 Q. That's about the only boat that I'm safe to operate, so --

16 A. Yeah, me too.

17 Q. -- I get it, I get it. Say that from the Coast Guard, too,  
18 so --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Yeah. So I understand this is low water and there's low  
21 water, there's high water, and then there's kind of this in-  
22 between water, which --

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. -- is, I guess, normal water, I don't know. Have you heard  
25 anybody complain -- not complain, talk about this surging

1 happening in other water levels, not low water?

2 A. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Extremely high water.

3 Q. Extremely, so we're going one extreme to the other.

4 A. To the other, yeah.

5 Q. So what do you remember of being told --

6 A. If I get to about 11 feet --

7 Q. Uh-huh.

8 A. -- or something like that, they'll say they'll surge.

9 Q. Okay. And because we're talking 11 feet, extremely high  
10 water, are there any extra precautions that take place here at the  
11 lock?

12 A. Our procedure is pretty much the same, as we can't -- I mean,  
13 there's nothing else we can do except what we do and keep a good  
14 lookout out. Most of the time I tell my boats to come in slow and  
15 most of the time I don't have to say nothing.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. It's rare, it's rare that I have to tell a boat to slow up.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. It's not all the time, it's a real rare thing, and pretty  
20 much when *Kitty* was coming in, he was coming in normally, he  
21 wasn't coming in fast at all. As a matter of fact, I remember  
22 commenting on how slow he was coming in.

23 Q. And I'm sure, from your viewpoint, you're quite familiar with  
24 what's fast and what's slow.

25 A. Oh, it's easy to tell.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Very easy to tell. You know, fast, you'll see them pushing  
3 up whitecaps.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And slow, you just see them, they're just wading in water,  
6 they'll just be wading. Yeah.

7 Q. Understood.

8 A. So I mean, if they're pushing up whitecaps, I'm telling them  
9 to slow down. Yeah.

10 Q. Does that only apply for loads with barges or --

11 A. No.

12 Q. -- the light boats come in here --

13 A. It don't matter.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Well, light boats, I don't really regulate light boat speed  
16 because -- unless they're coming in with a tow.

17 Q. Um-hum.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. So in all your -- you were asked this already, but in all  
20 your tenure here, have you ever seen anything similar like this --

21 A. No.

22 Q. -- before, in the past?

23 A. No, this was a first for me.

24 Q. Okay. Anything even close?

25 A. No. No, this was a very first for me. I've never been

1 associated with an accident, not bragging, but never been  
2 associated with an accident here before, so this was like a first  
3 for me. I've always come in when they have had accidents, but  
4 this is a first for me. And I almost missed it by 10 minutes.

5 Q. Ten minutes more is all you needed, you could have been home  
6 doing some fireworks on the Fourth of July.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. And speaking of that, a long day already, what time -- what  
9 time did you knock off and finally get your feet up?

10 A. I left about 7:30.

11 Q. Seven thirty, okay, so --

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Crazy delay, but --

14 A. Yeah, but I was -- I was staying here and I was helping my  
15 coworker. Even though he was coming on shift, I have to -- well,  
16 I'm going to help him do the report and whatnot like that.

17 Q. Understood. Let's see. I'm just double-checking to make  
18 sure I haven't asked you already, so -- oh, are there any times  
19 that stick out in your head, during -- part of this, for us,  
20 putting this piece -- putting this puzzle together is to put  
21 together a timeline. Are there any times that you remember that  
22 kind of stand out in your mind for this event?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Do you remember what time the impact was or the time you  
25 heard the sound?

1 A. It had to be about 6:05, 18:05, 1800, somewhere in between  
2 there.

3 Q. Do you have any tools that help you see ships passing or any  
4 -- any traffic in the area?

5 A. Oh, yeah, we have AIS. It's not -- it don't belong to us, it  
6 belongs -- it's a national -- how can I say? It tracks all the  
7 ships and vessels.

8 Q. Okay. And do you have the -- do you use that or do you have  
9 to use it or --

10 A. I use it to find out where the boats are before I call them  
11 in, if they're too far away or anything like that. I never use it  
12 to track ships passing by or anything like that --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- yeah, because not to be -- it's not my business --

15 Q. No.

16 A. -- so to speak.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And ships, staying on the subject of ships passing by, have  
20 you ever been contacted by pilots of ships saying hey, we're  
21 passing by?

22 A. Yeah, I've been contacted by ships passing by that said that  
23 -- asking me do I have any boats coming out.

24 Q. Oh, and coming out, so they're looking for traffic that was  
25 going to suddenly appear in the river.



1 A. Right.

2 Q. Okay, all right. And then any -- besides that, anything else  
3 or --

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I don't even know who six-nine is, but he calls quite often.

7 Q. That's number 69?

8 A. I'm not quite sure.

9 Q. Okay, let's see. Thank you for answering that, for  
10 clarifying of the pins, too. Like I said, this is a steep  
11 learning curve for me here, so --

12 A. Yeah. It is for me, too. I just never been in this type of  
13 inquiry before and it still makes me nervous, I'm sorry.

14 Q. Well, I'm almost done with my questions, so some standard  
15 questions I do ask is did you take any pictures with your phone?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Not at the time.

19 Q. Okay. But of course, after the fact, I understand you guys  
20 had a report to do, so --

21 A. Oh, yeah.

22 MR. TUCKER: Okay. All right, tell you what, I'm going to  
23 give you a break from me for a minute, I always have a question or  
24 two on the back end, so again, Kevin, I really appreciate you  
25 talking with us.

1 MR. MELANCANT: Okay.

2 BY MR. [REDACTED]

3 Q. How you doing, Mr. Melancant? [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the U.S. Coast  
4 Guard.

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. So you made mention that the *Kitty* was abreast of your window  
7 when she was coming in at this point. Okay, I'm going to bring  
8 you up to that point. And she was moving relatively slow, which  
9 you felt was normal.

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. You weren't alerted, concerned, she was doing her job, right?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. And then she started to -- she started to make headway.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Do you recall hearing her engines rev up before she starts  
16 making headway?

17 A. Slightly, yes.

18 Q. Slightly.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Do you know if they were going ahead or do you know if her  
21 engines were astern?

22 A. So far as I know, as a normal thing when I hear that, I think  
23 they're just moving up.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Yeah, because I looked down and he was like three or four

1 pins before the red one, so I would expect he was moving up.

2 Q. Okay. So if he's coming in at a slow rate of speed, a normal  
3 speed, comfortable for you as the lock -- you know, control lock  
4 operator, would you say his headway increased suddenly or faster  
5 than you might expect?

6 A. Well, after I seen him start making headway, I didn't --

7 Q. It didn't dawn on you.

8 A. No.

9 Q. I'm sorry for interrupting, go ahead.

10 A. I'm sorry. No, it didn't -- I mean, it was pretty normal to  
11 me, it wasn't like "vroom," you know, it was pretty normal to me.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yeah. I mean, I actually didn't see anything abnormal until  
14 I heard my man on the other end telling him to slow down and then,  
15 at that, I'm looking and he just kept going. So --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. -- there's a certain point in there where I thought  
18 everything was going well and I was about to leave, so it was like  
19 okay, well, things are going well, I'm leaving, you know.

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. So I didn't -- didn't see nothing out of the way, out of the  
22 ordinary to me at that time.

23 Q. Okay. And also, you had mentioned that sometimes pilots call  
24 you and inquire if you have tows going out into the river.

25 A. Yeah, every now and then.

1 Q. Do you ever have pilots call and inquire if you have tows  
2 coming into the locks?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Never?

5 A. Never.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

7 BY LT [REDACTED]

8 Q. This is Lieutenant [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard. Do you find  
9 those calls helpful at all, those pilot calls?

10 A. Not for me, but for the tows that's leaving out.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. I think it's a good safety measure.

13 Q. Yeah. Is there anything you would try -- like if you had to  
14 make the call, is there anything you would try to implement to  
15 ensure this didn't happen again?

16 A. To be honest with you, I think it was just a freak. The only  
17 thing that we could do to stop it from happening again is probably  
18 -- I mean, this is just my opinion and I don't want to sound like  
19 I know anything too much, but sometimes they be rolling on this  
20 river, I mean --

21 Q. Right.

22 A. And I mean, there was a certain point where they can just  
23 kind of slow down like, say, between this mile marker and this  
24 mile marker, it might help my boats come in with a little bit more  
25 assertiveness, but it just "swoosh" --

1 Q. Right. Do you think --

2 A. That's just my opinion, I'm sorry.

3 Q. No, that's -- no, I appreciate it, that's great. That's what  
4 I'm asking. So you think a reduce speed sign of some sort or --

5 A. Between --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. Somewhere like a mile and a half down this way to a mile and  
8 a half down that way.

9 Q. Sure.

10 A. Like I said, that's just my opinion when they get around  
11 locks. But as a matter of fact, I believe that's why Harvey is  
12 closed right now, because it might be a surge, but their lock is  
13 closer to the river than ours is, so -- but still, they're not --  
14 from where I hear from the captains, it does affect them.

15 LT [REDACTED] Okay, great. Okay, I have no further questions.

16 BY LT [REDACTED]

17 Q. Lieutenant [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard, as well. Kind  
18 of back to the point we were just speaking on, when the vessel is  
19 here next to you and that it did move forward, you said it wasn't  
20 in an abnormal speed or an abnormal jerk, but by any chance did  
21 you notice a gear shift or a change in direction at all or an  
22 effort to changing direction?

23 A. No.

24 Q. So it was just a steady engine noise as they were moving  
25 forward --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- and had a collision with no shift?

3 A. Yeah, I don't -- no, I heard that millions of times. I can't

4 tell you how many locks I've unlocked, how many boats --

5 Q. It sounded all normal and all --

6 A. It sounded all normal to me.

7 Q. And you didn't hear an increase, either, it was just a

8 steady --

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. The same.

11 A. Yeah. It was a slight increase because he had come to like

12 almost a stop.

13 Q. So did you hear the increase of the engine right before the

14 movement or was it after?

15 A. Yeah, before the movement.

16 Q. So you could hear him pushing but he wasn't moving, he was

17 stopped, as you said.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And then he started moving.

20 A. Um-hum. Exactly.

21 Q. So that was the only part that you found a little abnormal,

22 was maybe the amount of push?

23 A. Actually, it wasn't abnormal, I mean, that's --

24 Q. It was just perfect.

25 A. Huh?

1 Q. It was just perfect.

2 A. Yeah, it was just -- yeah, he was just doing good, making the  
3 boat move just a little bit more, trying to get it to go. So it  
4 didn't really sound abnormal at all, I mean, it was quite usual.

5 MR. [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you, that's all I have.

6 BY MR. [REDACTED]

7 Q. One question, Mr. Melancant. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard.  
8 If we look at that boat right now going through these, through  
9 these locks --

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. -- is that a normal headway speed or is that --

12 A. That's it, that's normal.

13 Q. That's normal right there, right?

14 A. That's normal right there.

15 Q. So that would be from entering these east gates, right, the  
16 river gates --

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. -- going into it, whenever he would get in position, he  
19 should be moving or you would expect him to be moving about that  
20 fast.

21 A. Once he unties, he should be about 5 minutes before you get  
22 out from -- to the end of my --

23 Q. Okay, coming into the locks, if these gates are closed and  
24 he's coming in, is that a normal speed for it?

25 A. Yeah, that's a normal speed.

1 Q. That is?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. It's a normal speed, okay.

4 A. That's a normal speed.

5 Q. That's what the vessels do?

6 A. Pretty much, yeah. That's the normal speed right there.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. As a matter of fact, that's what I'm looking for, right  
9 there. I want to be able to walk with the vessel. I mean,  
10 actually, if I'm on the front of the tow, I should be able to just  
11 kind of walk at a steady pace with them coming in. They shouldn't  
12 even be going fast. If they're going faster than I'm walking,  
13 then I tell them to slow down.

14 Q. Did you walk that day with the *Kitty*?

15 A. No, no.

16 Q. Do you think if you would've been walking, he would've been  
17 at that pace with you?

18 A. No, I don't walk with all of them. I walk with some of them.

19 Q. Did you?

20 A. It's because I'm in here 12 hours, I have to walk sometime.

21 Q. Right. Thank you.

22 A. So I get up and I'll walk with the deckhand as I'm going down  
23 and then I'll walk back.

24 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, that's all.

25 BY MR. TUCKER:



1 Q. A clarification. So you said you hear from the captains  
2 about the surging.

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Are they telling you that by radio or do you just know some  
5 captains that talk about that or --

6 A. No, it's strictly by radio.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I only know these guys' voices, I never actually met too many  
9 of them.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And they're familiar with mine, pretty much. I get pretty  
12 good information on what bothers them and what don't bother them  
13 and that was one thing they told me about.

14 Q. Okay, understood. And you did figure something, though, you  
15 said you think Harvey shut down and that's Harvey, Harvey Lock and  
16 that's --

17 A. Harvey Lock, yeah, it is shut down right now.

18 Q. It is shut down?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. And you said --

21 A. Because of the water level.

22 Q. All right. So low water and -- okay, because of the low  
23 water, not because of the surging or anything like that.

24 A. I don't know whether that's a factor in that or not.

25 Q. Okay, understood. Is that an Army Corps canal, as well?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. I'll double-check. And then I guess these guys are  
3 tired of hearing it now, but you know why we're here, this is an  
4 investigation, of course, and part of this investigation, we've  
5 got to put all the pieces of this puzzle together to find out what  
6 happened and maybe ultimately make safety recommendations, if  
7 there are any to be made, to hopefully prevent something like this  
8 from happening in the future.

9 A. I don't want anything like this to happen in the future.

10 Q. No, no. Not that bad, though.

11 A. No. No, I'm just saying for the safety of my --

12 Q. Yes, yeah.

13 A. Not only us, but part of my job is to make sure these guys go  
14 through here safe and get through safely and with everybody, all  
15 the crew members, I don't want no loss of limb, no loss of life,  
16 that is number one factor in this industry.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. So if there's anything I could do or say that'll help, that's  
19 part of my job.

20 Q. Yeah. And you hit a nail on the head and I say it so many  
21 times, and there's no such thing as a good accident, but if there  
22 is, the fact that everyone's got their 10 fingers and their 10  
23 toes on this one, so --

24 A. Yes. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. That's right.

2 Q. So to that, is there anything that I or we have not asked you  
3 that you might feel is relevant or important to tell us of, in  
4 order for us to, you know, put this puzzle together?

5 A. No, sir, I really can't think of anything.

6 MR. TUCKER: Okay. Well, again, we appreciate your time.  
7 Thank you for your service, as well, and that's it.

8 LT [REDACTED] So Lieutenant [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard, I'm going to  
9 open it up to any last questions or comments.

10 MR. ULFERS: I've got just one.

11 LT [REDACTED] Sure.

12 MR. ULFERS: Sorry.

13 BY MR. ULFERS:

14 Q. Sir, if the captain said that he had his engines full astern  
15 but was still moving forward, you would have no reason to disagree  
16 with that, would you?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. No, actually --

20 Q. We talked a lot about the engines revving, I missed all that.

21 A. No, it didn't sound abnormal to me, it was like okay, he's --  
22 he got his angle so he's starting to move up, so he increased the  
23 engine speed and that's all that it sounded like to me.

24 MR. ULFERS: Okay, fair enough. Thank you.

25 LT [REDACTED] If no further questions, we're going to go ahead and

1 conclude the interview. The time on deck is 16:08 and the  
2 interview is concluded.

3 (Whereupon, at 4:08 p.m., the interview concluded.)  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:            TOWING VESSEL BARGE STRUCK LOCK  
                                     GATE IN NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA  
                                     NEAR MILE 88 ON THE LOWER  
                                     MISSISSIPPI RIVER ON JULY 4, 2023  
                                     Interview of Kevin Melancant

ACCIDENT NO.:                DCA23FM038

PLACE:                        New Orleans, Louisiana

DATE:                         July 7, 2023

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.



---

David A. Martini  
Transcriber