

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

COLLISION BETWEEN TOWBOAT ROYAL *

ENGINEER AND CRANE BARGE STEVENS *

1471 AT THE NORTH CHARLESTON * Accident No.: DCA24FM014

TERMINAL IN NORTH CHARLESTON, *

SOUTH CAROLINA ON JANUARY 4, 2024 *

* * * * *

Interview of: HUNTER HAMES, Mate, *Royal Engineer*
Stevens Towing Company, Inc.

Yonges Island, South Carolina

Tuesday,
January 16, 2024

APPEARANCES:

LT [REDACTED] JR.
United States Coast Guard

MARCEL MUISE, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DAN McCLAY, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DOUG MULLER, Esq.
Moore & Van Allen, PLLC
Representing Southern Dredging Company

SARA PARRISH, Esq.
Burr & Forman LLP
Representing South Carolina Ports Authority

RYAN GILSENAN, Esq.
Hines & Gilsenan, LLC
Representing Stevens Towing Company, Inc.

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Hunter Hames:	
By [REDACTED]	4
By Mr. Muise	20
By Mr. McClay	29
By LT Shcalles	32
By Mr. McClay	35
By Mr. Muise	35
By Mr. McClay	37
By Mr. Gilsenan	38

I N T E R V I E W

(10:18 a.m.)

1
2
3 LT [REDACTED] All right. It's January 16th, 2024 at 10:18
4 a.m. I am Lieutenant [REDACTED] with the U.S. Coast Guard
5 conducting an interview of the mate of the *Royal Engineer*, Hunter
6 Hames, in regards to the allision with -- involving Stevens 1471
7 and a North Charleston Terminal crane. To my right, I have --

8 MR. McCLAY: Daniel McClay, I am a marine investigator with
9 the NTSB.

10 MR. MUISE: And Marcel Muise, M-u-i-s-e, Investigator in
11 Charge for the NTSB.

12 MR. MULLER: And Doug Muller, I'm an attorney representing
13 Southern Dredging Company.

14 MS. PARRISH: I'm Sara Parrish, I'm an attorney representing
15 the Ports Authority.

16 MR. GILSENAN: Ryan Gilsenan, counsel for Stevens Towing.

INTERVIEW OF HUNTER HAMES

17
18 BY LT [REDACTED]

19 Q. All right. Hi, Mr. Hames, I know we spoke on the boat that
20 night, but just so everyone's on the same page we're going to go
21 through it all again --

22 A. Okay.

23 Q. -- same situation. So can you just start off with your
24 background, sorry, experience and -- in the field, industry,
25 and --

1 A. Okay.

2 Q. -- on this particular vessel.

3 A. I've been in tugboats for seven years, worked at this company
4 the entire time. I got my mate's license in 2021 and I got my
5 master's license in September of last year. I've been in a mate
6 position since the day I got my mate license pretty much. I've
7 run most of the tugboats in the fleet, but I spend most of my time
8 on the *Island Fox* and the *Royal Engineer*.

9 Q. About how many transits have you made on the *Royal Engineer*,
10 up the Cooper River, down the Cooper River?

11 A. A handful on the Cooper River, but I worked on the *Royal*
12 *Engineer* for nine months in North Carolina, riding that boat
13 almost exclusively --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- so I'm pretty familiar with that boat.

16 Q. Okay. And the crew, how -- is it the same crew the whole
17 time or --

18 A. Yes. So this, the crew that was on the boat that day is the
19 crew on the *Island Fox*, so we've been working together with those
20 guys for months. It's just our boat, the *Island Fox*, is doing
21 some shipyard repairs, so we're all kind of filling in on that
22 boat.

23 Q. Okay. Any issues with the vessel that you ever experienced
24 or with the crew?

25 A. Nothing to speak of, really.

1 Q. Any mechanical failures within the past six months?

2 A. In the past six months, I don't believe so.

3 Q. No marine casualties or anything like that?

4 A. No, sir.

5 Q. Okay. All right. And tell me, so when did you actually
6 board the -- to start your stint on the *Royal Engineer*?

7 A. What was the date of Thursday?

8 Q. The 4th.

9 A. The 4th. The 2nd, I got on the --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- boat the 2nd.

12 Q. And then was the whole crew going on the vessel at that time
13 or was it just you?

14 A. They did not -- it was just me and the other deckhand, Malik.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. We got on the 2nd here, Yonges Island, brought that boat to
17 Charleston and then the other guys got on the 3rd.

18 Q. Okay, so the 2nd, and you boarded the *Royal Engineer* here at
19 Yonges Island and you went to Pier Kilo?

20 A. Yes, that's correct.

21 Q. Okay. And then from -- what happened from that point, did
22 you do any work in between then and the 4th?

23 A. We did a heavy lift.

24 Q. Explain to me what that is.

25 A. With the Ocean Ranger and Charleston Heavy Lift Company, we

1 did a crane, a crane lift with them and then everybody got on the
2 *Royal Engineer* and we were all on that boat.

3 Q. Okay. And where was this taking place at?

4 A. Wando Terminal.

5 Q. Okay. And then from -- when did you actually make the
6 transit up to Nexans?

7 A. Wednesday the 3rd, that afternoon. I brought the 1471 from
8 Pier Kilo to Nexans.

9 Q. So you took the crane barge from Pier Kilo using the *Royal*
10 *Engineer*.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Were you driving the vessel or was --

13 A. Yes. I got us under way.

14 Q. Okay. And you took the crane barge up river?

15 A. Yes, that's correct.

16 Q. Where was the dredge *Brunswick* when you made the transit up?

17 A. She was in about the same area, dredging in the ship channel.

18 Q. Okay. Did they break pipe and move or did you just scoot
19 around them?

20 A. No, there was enough room and there was no ships at the berth
21 at the time --

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. -- when I made the transit up river.

24 Q. Do you know if the cranes were in the down position in the
25 terminal or up?

1 A. They were all boomed up --

2 Q. Boomed up.

3 A. -- and not working.

4 Q. Okay. And then, so this was all on the 3rd, you said?

5 A. Yes, that's correct.

6 Q. And then did you all hang out there at Nexans or did you
7 bring the vessel back down to Pier --

8 A. We stayed up river with the barge --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- the entire time.

11 Q. Okay. So you never broke free from the barge?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Okay. And so then on the 4th is when you made the transit
14 down?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. What time did you assume watch on the 4th?

17 A. Eleven thirty.

18 Q. Okay. And you relieved the master?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. And what kind of discussions did you have with anyone
23 regarding to the actual barge? I know the night of you said you
24 weren't really sure of the height, was there any kind of
25 discussion that you had with the master or Stevens personnel?

1 A. Well, at watch change we have a pretty standard discussion,
2 what's going on, what's the next move and, you know, somewhere in
3 that discussion was we'll be getting under way with this when the
4 job is done, going to pull the spuds, pin them off and be ready to
5 go back to Pier Kilo. And I knew the crane could make the trip
6 because I made the trip up --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- you know, and I knew that once the superintendents were
9 done with the crane, they secure it, get it ready for -- in travel
10 mode, essentially.

11 Q. So did you have a knowledge of -- do you know what the height
12 of the crane is?

13 A. It's a hundred and 52 feet.

14 Q. But then how come you didn't know it the night of --

15 A. I know that now. At the time I did not know the exact
16 height --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- but I knew it was low enough to go under the Don Holt
19 bridge --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. -- which was our lowest air gap that we were worried about
22 for that trip.

23 Q. Did you know any dimensions of the barge, not -- I mean,
24 obviously not the crane height but what about like the draft of
25 the barge, the dimensions, the width, are you familiar with --

- 1 A. I mean, I looked at it and could tell you it's roughly a
2 hundred and 50 feet long, 70 feet wide. There was nothing --
3 there was no depth restriction I was worried about in the channel
4 because I know it's all good water.
- 5 Q. Right.
- 6 A. I know that the horizontal clearance at Don Holt is like 700
7 feet, so I wasn't worried about any width restrictions --
- 8 Q. Right.
- 9 A. -- anywhere.
- 10 Q. Okay. On the route up, did you have -- did you make any
11 contact with the dredge *Brunswick*?
- 12 A. Yes.
- 13 Q. What was that contact, exactly?
- 14 A. Saw them on the AIS, knew they were going to be in the
15 vicinity, contacted them, asked how they wanted me to come around,
16 how to pass them.
- 17 Q. Okay. And what channel was that on?
- 18 A. Thirteen.
- 19 Q. Okay. And how did you know they were there?
- 20 A. Rose Point.
- 21 Q. Okay.
- 22 A. Rose Point chart plotter shows AIS contacts on it.
- 23 Q. Okay. So it wasn't Local Notice to Mariners, then?
- 24 A. No.
- 25 Q. Okay. All right. And how did they move it, did they just

1 pivot on a spud when you made the passing arrangements or were
2 they just far enough away that you could squeeze by them?

3 A. I believe both, I believe they were -- they pivoted on a spud
4 to give me a little more room.

5 Q. At any point, any transit, since they've been working, did
6 they ever have to break pipe and move for you?

7 A. After the allision, yes, but before that, no.

8 Q. How long did it take them, after the allision, to break pipe
9 and move?

10 A. An hour, give or take.

11 Q. Okay. All right, so on the transit -- transit back, just
12 give me -- run me through, you know, what happened on the transit
13 down river.

14 A. Okay. Come on watch, discuss everything, talk to the crane
15 guys, you know, I was in the wheelhouse observing them, they get
16 finished up, I think it was like 14:30-ish.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I believe I got under way at 14:50 when we cut the lines
19 loose and left the dock. I'm sorry, I'm jumping ahead. In the
20 process before we get under way I did a voyage plan, checked the
21 Rose Point, you know, to see that the dredge was still there, any
22 ships in or outbound, anything like that. Get under way
23 uneventfully, come down the river. I was aware the dredge was
24 there and I knew kind of the time frame it takes, you know, that
25 they appreciate a heads up when they break the pipeline and I knew

1 I wanted them to break the pipeline, so I started trying to call
2 them an hour out. Called them on -- had them on 13, no answer.
3 Had them again 45 minutes out on 13, no answer. In this part of
4 the Cooper River it's very winding, so even though I'm only a few
5 miles away, there's no -- there's no line of sight, and I didn't
6 get in contact with them until we were in line of sight, and I
7 think that was 20 minutes out.

8 Q. Okay. And you said you attempted to contact them?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. How many times did you attempt to contact them?

11 A. Twice unsuccessfully and then the third time was successful.

12 Q. Okay. And you only tried to contact them via VHF?

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. Okay. Any phone numbers that you're aware of that you
15 could've called other than (indiscernible)?

16 A. I don't have any phone numbers for them.

17 Q. Okay. There is phone numbers on the Local Notice to
18 Mariners, that's why I mentioned it.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. Okay. And you said an hour to break pipe. I don't have AIS
21 up right now, but I can see the pings, I just don't -- I'm looking
22 at this. When you made the transit down, contact, I don't know
23 that these pings are all in an hour, are you sure it was an hour
24 that it took them to break pipe for you to proceed on?

25 A. I mean, it may have been a little less than that, but

1 that's --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- generally the rule of thumb and I know they appreciate an
4 hour heads up.

5 Q. Absolutely, yeah. Just so they --

6 A. It may take them a little less time but, you know, by the
7 time they get moving.

8 Q. Okay. I'll try to verify the exact time it took, as well,
9 when I'm able to pull this up, and I was just curious. All right,
10 so you were -- you made -- you eventually made contact with the
11 dredge, you said, when you were in line of sight with them.

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Run me through how that conversation went.

14 A. Called them on 13, they answered and I told them I was
15 outbound with the crane barge on the head and I was looking to
16 come by them.

17 Q. Okay. What did they say?

18 A. He said I'll swing over and give you 300 feet between me and
19 the port wall, not including the width of the ship, that's
20 another --

21 Q. Okay. And what was your response to that?

22 A. I said okay.

23 Q. Okay. And how did the dredge pivot on the spud?

24 A. They were facing -- spuds astern of the dredge, they were
25 digging facing towards the port, they swung their cutter head what

1 would be up river --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- and kind of swung it towards the direction of out of the
4 channel --

5 Q. All right.

6 A. -- but I mean, obviously they weren't out of the channel.

7 Q. Right, yeah. And so at that point you proceeded forward.

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. What were you looking at, what was your visual out of the
10 wheelhouse?

11 A. Looking down or looking straight ahead, looking at the port,
12 the dredge, the ships in berth, the sun behind the port kind of
13 right in my face. At that point is when I sent my deckhand out as
14 a bow lookout --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- because I knew it was going to be -- you know, we were
17 going to be getting close to some things and visibility wasn't
18 perfect.

19 Q. And was the only -- on your port side was it just the dredge,
20 was there anything else obstructing your port side or was it just
21 the dredge?

22 A. Just the dredge and then their pipeline to the bank.

23 Q. Okay. But the pipeline was on the opposite side --

24 A. The pipeline extended from the stern of the dredge all the
25 way to the bank.

1 MR. GILSENAN: On the east side?

2 MR. HAMES: Yes, on the east side.

3 BY LT [REDACTED]

4 Q. But if you were going to hit anything on the port side, the
5 first thing it would be would've been the dredge?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. All right. All right, so then what speed approximately were
10 you taking this?

11 A. I slowed down when I saw the dredge, I was doing five, six
12 miles an hour, something along those lines.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And then I proceeded -- I never sped back up until like -- as
15 I was approaching the dredge the whole time, I proceeded at a
16 slower speed.

17 Q. Okay. And your deckhand was on the bow, what was -- what was
18 your conversation with the deckhand?

19 A. I asked him, hailed him on our working channel and asked him
20 to go out there and be a bow lookout, told him, you know, we're
21 going to be going between the dredge and the ship so I want you to
22 watch our horizontal on our clearance, you know, watch us on both
23 sides --

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. -- you know, let me know if we get close to something. And

1 then as I got closer, because it's kind of in a slight bend in the
2 river, so once I got closer and got lined up to go to transit
3 between them, that's when I realized the ship-to-shore crane was
4 overhanging the ship.

5 Q. Okay. So you didn't see the crane until --

6 A. Well, I knew they were working, but I didn't realize that
7 they would be boomed out past the ship.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So I took the width of the ship, the ship's beam into
10 consideration in my clearance, but not that there was a crane
11 beyond that. And at that point when I noticed, that's when I told
12 the bow lookout hey, we got to watch the height of the crane, too.

13 Q. Okay. How far away were you when you said this?

14 A. Pretty close.

15 Q. Thousand feet?

16 A. Something like that.

17 Q. Okay. All right, so you're heading by three to five knots
18 towards -- keep going, what happened --

19 A. And at that point, once I got closer, I kept slowing down,
20 kept slowing. Going as slow as I could with following current,
21 was doing probably two knots. Kept going. Once we got a little
22 closer and my vision kind of opened up with that, I told him not
23 to worry about the horizontal clearance, I knew we were good, and
24 just watch the crane height.

25 Q. Okay. How much clearance did you have horizontally? I'm

1 just curious.

2 A. Let's see, there's 300 feet, ship's beam was roughly a
3 hundred feet, 200, maybe 175, something like that.

4 Q. On both sides or --

5 A. Between -- no, all together.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. So both sides would be 20, 25 feet on either side.

8 Q. Okay, all right. And what was the deckhand telling you as
9 you were approaching? You said to look at the crane --

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. -- so what was he saying?

12 A. I was asking him what we look like, if we looked like we were
13 going to clear, if it looked like it was close, all of those
14 things. And all the while I'm trying to hold as close to the
15 dredge as possible, obviously without hitting them, but trying to
16 be as -- I'd rather be close to the dredge than the ship.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. And as we got closer I asked him, I said, you know, how do we
19 look, are we good, you know, we're constantly talking the whole
20 time, it's not like we're going periods without conversation. He
21 said yeah, we look like we're good and at that point, I stepped
22 out of the wheelhouse, stuck my head out the door, looked and
23 realized we were not going to clear it. Stepped back into the
24 wheelhouse and went hard reverse. We were making too much
25 headway, that it -- we didn't immediately start backing up. So I

1 was in reverse when we collided and then shortly thereafter we
2 started making sternway and I just kept backing until we backed
3 out of that hole, so to speak, between the dredge and the ship.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Kept backing until I had enough space to turn around and stem
6 the tide.

7 Q. So you actually flipped the vessel around in the channel?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Well, in the turning basin.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Okay. And at what point -- what actions did you take after
14 the allision?

15 A. The master was already into the wheelhouse at that point
16 because he heard the commotion --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- so I didn't have to get him up, and then I called our
19 office and told them immediately what happened and then I was
20 instructed to proceed down to Pier Kilo.

21 Q. At what point did you tell the dredge *Brunswick* to break pipe
22 and move?

23 A. After I got off the phone with our office, was instructed to
24 proceed down river, I then called the dredge --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- and asked them to break pipe.

2 Q. Okay. And -- okay. And how long of a transit, backing up,
3 from Nexans to North Charleston Terminal, how long of a transit is
4 that? Pushing that barge.

5 A. With the tide the way it was, an hour and a half --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- maybe.

8 Q. And when you initially attempted to contact the dredge
9 *Brunswick*, did you attempt before getting under way to contact
10 them?

11 A. No, I did not attempt before getting under way.

12 Q. Okay. When you were in contact with them, you said about 20
13 minutes away?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. Out of curiosity, why didn't you ask them just to
16 break pipe and move at that point?

17 A. I thought that we had enough -- well, I knew we had enough
18 room horizontal clearance-wise to get by them and like I said, I
19 didn't realize the crane was a factor at that time. And I was
20 already there and I just thought we could squeeze by --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- without incident.

23 Q. Was there anything preventing your vessel from waiting in the
24 Cooper River and having them break pipe?

25 A. Just the constraints of just sitting in the river with a

1 following current.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. That is not really easy, you know.

4 Q. But no oncoming traffic that you had to move out of the way
5 for or anything like that or was it just current?

6 A. Just the current, really --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- there was no -- no vessel traffic.

9 LT [REDACTED] All right. I'll pass it over to the NTSB.

10 MR. MUISE: Sure.

11 BY MR. MUISE:

12 Q. So my name is Marcel Muise, I'm a -- I work for the NTSB, we
13 have overlapping jurisdiction with the Coast Guard --

14 A. Okay.

15 Q. -- on incidents like this, so we work together at this point
16 just because we don't have to talk to you twice --

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. -- but we'll split up and go our separate ways and produce
19 our own reports. Sometimes we'll have recommendations to the
20 companies or to the Coast Guard on how to fix stuff like this --

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. -- so, not a law enforcement agency so I have no jurisdiction
23 over your boat or your license or anything like that and so we're
24 here just to look at -- for safety issues, not to point fingers at
25 anybody, really, so -- but I just had a few follow-up questions

1 from what the lieutenant said. The voyage plan, is that a piece
2 of paper or is that just something you do mentally?

3 A. No, it's a piece of paper and we keep a log.

4 Q. Okay, can you describe that process for me, what's on that
5 piece of paper?

6 A. Names and watch schedules of the operators, we attach the
7 chart numbers to the voyage plans, the place of origin and the
8 destination, estimated speed, estimated time of arrival, lowest
9 air draft clearances on the route, lowest jet depth on the route,
10 any -- there's a section for special weather considerations or
11 other vessel considerations such as, you know, high ship traffic
12 area or something like that. And that's our standard procedure
13 before we go anywhere.

14 Q. Is that form just something you guys made on the boat or is
15 it something the company requires?

16 A. Yeah, it's distributed by the office.

17 Q. Okay. The air draft, so what was the lowest hazard on your
18 form that day?

19 A. On the Don Holt bridge.

20 Q. Bridge, okay.

21 A. So to clarify --

22 Q. Go ahead.

23 A. -- the form we get from the office is blank, it's our
24 responsibility on the vessel to fill it out before we leave.

25 Q. Okay, all right.

1 A. So it's not --

2 Q. But it's not something made up on the boat.

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I just have the format and I'm the one, or the master,
6 whoever does it, is the one who's supposed to fill in the air
7 draft, the hazards, things like that.

8 Q. Is this a paper form or is it in a database or something or a
9 program?

10 A. It's paper.

11 Q. It's paper.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. Do you have to scan it and send it to the office or just keep
14 it on board?

15 A. We just keep our own copies on the boat.

16 Q. So the Don Holt was the lowest hazard. Your air draft, on
17 the form, is that the boat or is that the crane or both?

18 MR. GILSENAN: I think he said air gap.

19 MR. HAMES: Yeah.

20 BY MR. MUISE:

21 Q. Okay, so the air gap is on the -- I'm sorry, the air gap is
22 the bridge, right?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. So what's your highest air draft, I'm assuming that's on the
25 form as well, right? There's air draft for the boat.

1 A. Yeah. So there's the boat specifics on that form, so it will
2 list like the mast height --

3 Q. So do you put the boat's air draft on there or do you put the
4 crane's air draft on there?

5 A. The boat's air draft is on there.

6 Q. Okay. Do you have any way of knowing what the crane's air
7 draft would be? Does anybody give you that information, like if
8 you're pushing -- I understand this is -- you guys own this crane,
9 but if you're pushing somebody else's crane, do they give you that
10 information, does it go on your form?

11 A. Usually, we get that information from the office, like about
12 -- if we go to get something, how tall it is and --

13 Q. Is there a spot on that, your voyage plan form, to put that?

14 A. Yes, yes.

15 Q. But on that day you had the boat's air draft, not the crane's
16 air draft. I'm just trying to understand that, right, is that --
17 do I have that right?

18 A. Yes. Yeah, there's a section, we had the boat's air draft
19 and the boat's draft printed on that form.

20 Q. Okay. Who fills out the voyage plan, is it the -- whoever's
21 on watch or is it always the captain or is it always the mate?

22 A. It's usually whoever is getting under way with the --
23 whatever tow at the time.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. So if I came on watch and got under way, I'm the one that

1 filled it out.

2 Q. So I understand you guys use Rose Point, which --

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. -- is pretty common. How did you know the beam of the ship,
5 the container ship?

6 A. I looked at it on Rose Point.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So I'm trying to remember, there's so much happening all at
9 once.

10 Q. Sure, yeah. On Rose Point, are you just looking at a dot on
11 the screen where the ship is or can you actually see the footprint
12 of how wide that ship is?

13 A. It's more of like a shape of the ship and then you would
14 click on it to get the vessel specifics.

15 Q. Is the shape the actual size of the ship, like it's usually
16 like a rectangle with a pointy end.

17 A. Yeah, I believe it's pretty close to scale.

18 Q. So you can see actually how wide that ship is on your screen.

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. Can you see the dredge, as well?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Can you see how -- the dimensions of the dredge?

23 A. So on our Rose Point, the dredge, actually -- and tugboats
24 just come up as like a little triangle.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. They're not to scale, but a ship usually is to scale.

2 Q. Did the dredge have any boats or barges tied up to it that
3 would make it wider or longer?

4 A. Yeah, they had a deck barge tied up outside of it.

5 Q. Outside, being their port side?

6 A. Their port side, yes, they had a deck barge. And there's
7 always little tender tugs and stuff kind of floating around while
8 they're working that are sometimes tied up, sometimes not.

9 Q. So they're heading -- their head is actually north, is that
10 right?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And so this barge is tied up on the terminal side or on --

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. -- the left side.

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. So that's impeding you, how big is this barge that it was --
17 it's impeding you a little bit more, actually, than --

18 A. Thirty, forty feet wide, something --

19 Q. So on top of the dredge's beam, you also have this 30- or 40-
20 foot --

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. -- barge that's tied up.

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. Okay. You mentioned some current, so the tide was going --

25 A. There was an ebb tide.

1 Q. The ebb tide goes that far up the river?

2 A. Yes, the river's all tidal.

3 Q. How fast --

4 A. So there was an ebb tide, so it was a following current
5 coming down.

6 Q. Do you remember how fast it was?

7 A. I don't have the specifics of that.

8 Q. Well, it was pushing you along a little bit --

9 A. Yeah, I mean, I would say it was one or two knots of current.

10 Q. Okay. For mid-tide here, high tide?

11 A. Mid, mid-tide.

12 Q. And the tidal range is what?

13 A. Six feet.

14 Q. Oh, six feet here?

15 A. Um-hum.

16 Q. Wow.

17 A. Yes, sir. Six foot plus. Six foot's kind of the standard,
18 but you know, if you get a full moon or something, it could be up
19 to seven.

20 Q. Oh.

21 A. So it's a pretty serious current. It may have even been
22 faster than two knots, but that's kind of the standard that it --

23 Q. So does that -- when you -- back to your voyage plan, when
24 you're factoring the air gap with the bridge, are you looking at
25 the tide, as well, because now you just lost three feet if you're

1 mid-tide --

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. -- of space, is that on the form, as well?

4 A. When I'm filling out a voyage plan and I'm looking at that, I
5 would go on my Rose Point, click on the Don Holt bridge and it
6 would tell me the vertical clearances, I believe it's a hundred
7 and 55 feet is what's posted on -- which is their mean low water
8 clearance --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- and that would be the number that I use.

11 Q. But you wouldn't factor in that there's three feet of tide on
12 top of that?

13 A. No, because that number comes from a low water number.

14 MR. GILSENAN: Or high water.

15 MR. MUISE: I take that back.

16 MR. HAMES: A high water number, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

17 BY MR. MUISE:

18 Q. I stand corrected, you're right, that's a high water number.
19 So you actually had more space with it.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Okay, all right.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. That's correct, okay.

24 A. Yeah. Thank you for that.

25 Q. So I heard you say you put it in reverse, do you remember

1 what your speed was before you -- when you actually put it in
2 reverse and what your -- versus what the speed was when you made
3 contact, like how much -- how much time and how much speed did you
4 lose by doing that?

5 A. I mean, my speed was somewhere around three miles an hour or
6 so, I don't know exactly.

7 MR. GILSENAN: Before you went astern?

8 MR. HAMES: Yes.

9 BY MR. MUISE:

10 Q. And then when you made contact?

11 A. I don't know exactly, less than that.

12 Q. How much time was it between you putting it in reverse --

13 A. Less than a minute.

14 Q. Less than -- okay.

15 A. Yeah. Like, it was quick.

16 Q. Do you think that made a difference, did it lessen the
17 impact?

18 A. I think it definitely did, I think it mitigated a lot of the
19 impact.

20 Q. Were you at all concerned having this crane boom over your
21 head when this happened? Was there any concern about the crane
22 boom falling?

23 MR. GILSENAN: The barge crane boom?

24 MR. MUISE: Yes.

25 MR. HAMES: Yes, there was concern. I mean, once I realized

1 we were going to touch, of course, there's concern with
2 everything.

3 BY MR. MUISE:

4 Q. How about the terminal's crane, was there -- did it -- what
5 did it look like from your point of view?

6 A. Well, it looked to me like -- so like I said, I know we can
7 clear the Don Holt, it looked to me like the terminal cranes are
8 higher than the bridge, so that's what I was taking into account.
9 Once I realized that we were actually going to be going underneath
10 one, I looked, looked at the bridge and thought they were higher.

11 Q. Did they have a load in the air at the time, do you remember?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Nothing, okay. Did you talk to the gantry crane operator at
14 all?

15 A. Negative.

16 Q. Do you normally talk to --

17 A. Negative.

18 Q. No.

19 A. Never had any contact with anybody at the port.

20 Q. How about the ship itself, do you normally at all?

21 A. No, sir.

22 MR. MUISE: Okay. Thanks, mate.

23 Dan, anything?

24 MR. McCLAY: Yeah, I do have just a couple questions.

25 BY MR. McCLAY:

1 Q. You said something about putting the barge in a travel mode,
2 what --

3 A. I'm sorry, the crane.

4 Q. Yeah, yeah.

5 A. Crane on the barge in travel mode, so to speak.

6 Q. So what's that like?

7 A. Would be where they boom down and get it to the height needed
8 to go under any of these restrictions while we move.

9 Q. And you keep that in the same position the whole transit,
10 right?

11 A. Yes, yeah. There's not a crane operator on board.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. So travel mode would be pull the spuds up, boom the crane
14 down to the height it needs to be and make sure the crane is
15 secure so that it doesn't move.

16 Q. And the highest point of that crane is where in reference to
17 your boat, is it above you, behind you?

18 A. In front of me.

19 Q. So it's in front of you.

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. So if you're at the wheelhouse can you see the highest point
22 of that crane?

23 A. So in that particular boat in that wheelhouse, the way the --
24 it's so tall and that barge is not that long, that looking, my
25 vantage point, looking up, my view is cut off by the roof of the

1 wheelhouse so I couldn't actually see the top of it from the helm,
2 which is why I said I stepped outside to see.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Got to stick my head outside and peer around.

5 Q. Now, is that -- is the crane -- now, the crane is higher than
6 the spuds --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- correct?

9 A. Yes, that's correct.

10 Q. And then --

11 A. You have part of --

12 MR. GILSENAN: This is the aft mast of the crane, not the
13 main --

14 MR. McCLAY: Yeah.

15 MR. GILSENAN: -- jib boat.

16 MR. McCLAY: Yeah.

17 MR. HAMES: Yeah, so the highest point is what made contact.

18 BY MR. McCLAY:

19 Q. Okay. And then -- you answered the question about oh, what
20 -- you only handle them on 13, the dredge?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. Okay. And you didn't try to make any contact with either the
23 boat being worked or the port after the allision, anything like
24 that?

25 A. No. No, I did not.

1 Q. Okay. And have you had to arrange passage with this dredge
2 before?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay. So you kind of knew it was in the area before?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 MR. McCLAY: Okay. And I think that's -- yeah, that's it.

7 LT [REDACTED] Follow up with me.

8 MR. HAMES: Sure.

9 BY LT [REDACTED]

10 Q. We're talking about talking to the crane personnel at North
11 Charleston Terminal, do you even have the ability to talk to them?

12 A. Not to my knowledge.

13 Q. Okay, okay.

14 A. I haven't heard of anybody speaking with anyone at the
15 port --

16 Q. Right.

17 A. -- in any instance.

18 Q. Would that have benefitted you to have communications with
19 them?

20 A. Probably. Assuming they would know that they're -- their
21 height, I would've been able to double-check with them.

22 Q. But you didn't know the height of the crane, anyway, right,
23 so --

24 A. Well, I knew it was less than 155.

25 Q. The barge.

1 A. I knew it was less than a hundred and 55 feet because that's
2 the height of the Don Holt.

3 Q. Okay. And then going back to the voyage plan, did you review
4 that before getting under way?

5 A. Yes, I wrote it before I went under way.

6 Q. You wrote this?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. And the master signed it? Because I'm looking at it right
9 now.

10 MR. GILSENAN: I got it.

11 BY LT [REDACTED]

12 Q. This voyage plan?

13 A. That's my signature.

14 Q. That's your signature right there?

15 A. Yes, sir. Is that the --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- same one? I can't see what you got, the glare.

18 MR. GILSENAN: Yeah.

19 MR. HAMES: Yeah. Yeah, that's my signature.

20 BY LT [REDACTED]

21 Q. And so it has the crane height at a hundred and 45 feet. The
22 Stevens 1471. So I'm wondering how you didn't know the height of
23 it if you put a hundred and 45 feet right here. Where did this
24 number come from?

25 A. Okay, okay. I got to see it.

1 MR. GILSENAN: Is this the Don Holt?

2 MR. HAMES: Yeah, lowest air draft on route.

3 MR. GILSENAN: One fifty.

4 MR. HAMES: And then crane --

5 MR. GILSENAN: And then the crane's here?

6 MR. HAMES: Yes, yeah. Okay, so I see my numbers were
7 slightly skewed.

8 MR. GILSENAN: So you got Don Holt at 150 and the crane at
9 145?

10 MR. HAMES: Yes.

11 BY LT [REDACTED]

12 Q. I'm just wondering if you signed this, filled it out, why,
13 the night of the incident when I asked you about the crane, you
14 had no idea?

15 A. I must've simply just forgot. At the time, there was a lot
16 of adrenaline going at the moment.

17 Q. All right.

18 A. And like I -- you know, I know the height of the Don Holt and
19 I knew -- well, I knew we were low enough to travel underneath it
20 because I made the voyage once before, so I know, once we're in
21 "travel mode," that --

22 Q. Right.

23 A. -- it's clear.

24 Q. And I know it's -- yeah. The Don Holt -- yeah. You didn't
25 hit it, it was the crane.

1 A. I'm sorry, that's just my --

2 Q. Yeah. But it is --

3 A. -- reference point.

4 LT [REDACTED] Yeah. That's all.

5 Southern Dredging?

6 MR. McCLAY: Oh, I'm sorry, I have just a few.

7 BY MR. McCLAY:

8 Q. So the height of the Don Holt, when -- you get that
9 information from Rose Point, correct?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And that number you're seeing comes from the high water mark?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. Is there any way to get information on the height of
14 shoreside cranes, that you're aware of?

15 A. It's not charted, it's an uncharted hazard, if you will, it's
16 not on Rose Point or Coast Pilot or anything like that.

17 Q. If you wanted to get it, do you know of a way to get it?

18 A. I have no idea.

19 Q. Okay. All right.

20 A. I don't have it like -- I don't have any, like, point of
21 contact at the port to get answers to those kind of questions.

22 MR. McCLAY: Sure, sure.

23 LT [REDACTED] Anything?

24 BY MR. MUISE:

25 Q. I actually just have one follow-up question, was the -- the

1 boom itself, I understand, was at 30 degrees. Do you know the
2 base of that boom, how high off the deck is it? I'm only asking
3 this because our graphics people are going to want to draw
4 something.

5 A. It's over head height.

6 Q. Over head, so eight feet, maybe?

7 A. Something like that.

8 Q. What's the freeboard on the barge, from the deck to the
9 water?

10 A. Probably six-ish feet.

11 MR. GILSENAN: We can get you plans.

12 MR. HAMES: Yeah.

13 BY MR. MUISE:

14 Q. Okay, all right. Minus the in-line (ph.) draft. And then
15 how -- that crane boom over your head, how far aft behind you was
16 it?

17 A. A good ways, it extends past, past the boat.

18 Q. All the way past the boat?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. Past the stern of the towboat?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Oh, okay.

23 A. So yeah, the position we're made up to, the crane is on the
24 -- what would be the acting bow --

25 Q. Sure.

1 A. -- and made up on the acting stern and it's boomed down 30
2 degrees over the back of the boat. So the gantry is here and the
3 boom's this way.

4 Q. Okay. From the head log on that barge, where's the crane,
5 how much room is there?

6 A. Not far at all, it's pretty close to being on the bow.

7 Q. Five feet, four feet?

8 A. Less than 10.

9 Q. Less than 10, okay. All right.

10 LT [REDACTED] Is the barge still at Stevens?

11 MR. HAMES: It's in Shipyard Creek, they're going to be
12 surveying it tomorrow.

13 LT [REDACTED] Okay. If you want, we can make arrangements to
14 go --

15 MR. MUISE: Okay, all right. Thanks again, mate.

16 MR. HAMES: Yeah. They'll be surveying it tomorrow, you can
17 take a ride on a hundred and 80-foot man-lift up to the top, if
18 you want --

19 MR. MUISE: I don't think we'll do that.

20 (Laughter.)

21 BY MR. McCLAY:

22 Q. Where was your lookout when you sent him out there?

23 A. He was on the acting bow, so that would be where the back of
24 the crane house is where the counterweights are. So he's as close
25 as he can get to where the action is, so to speak.

1 MR. McCLAY: Yeah.

2 LT [REDACTED] Southern Dredging, do you have any follow-up
3 questions?

4 MR. MULLER: I don't think I have any questions for him right
5 now, it may depend on what Ryan asks him, but nothing from me
6 right now.

7 LT [REDACTED] Port Authority? No.

8 Ryan?

9 BY MR. GILSENAN:

10 Q. How did the container crane boom appear to you relative to
11 the Don Holt bridge?

12 A. It appeared to me that it was higher.

13 Q. Okay. And if you knew that it was lower, would you have
14 proceeded?

15 A. No, if I knew that it was lower than my --

16 Q. Than the Don Holt?

17 A. Yeah, than the Don Holt, I would not have proceeded.

18 Q. Okay. And you said the crane height is not published, to
19 your knowledge?

20 A. Correct, correct.

21 Q. It's not on Rose Point?

22 A. Not to my knowledge.

23 Q. Okay. Do you know if there's an air gap sensor on the
24 container crane boom?

25 A. It's not on the NOAA website, if there is one, because that's

1 only for the Don Holt and the Cooper River Bridge.

2 Q. Okay. When you knew that the crane boom, the container crane
3 boom, extended past the ship, Lieutenant [REDACTED] suggested that
4 you were about a thousand feet out at the time when you knew that,
5 but at the same time I don't want you to speculate. Do you know
6 you were a thousand feet out?

7 A. No, I don't know my exact distance or exact time, I know it
8 was close, but I don't -- you said without speculating, I couldn't
9 tell you.

10 MR. GILSENAN: Okay. All right, I think that's all I have.
11 Thank you.

12 MR. MULLER: I have nothing else.

13 LT [REDACTED] All right. That concludes our interview with
14 the mate.

15 (Whereupon, at 10:56 a.m., the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

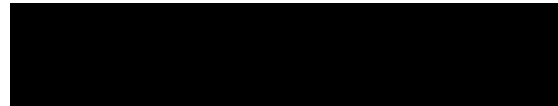
IN THE MATTER OF: COLLISION BETWEEN TOWBOAT
ROYAL ENGINEER AND CRANE BARGE
STEVENS 1471 AT THE NORTH CHARLESTON
TERMINAL IN NORTH CHARLESTON,
SOUTH CAROLINA ON JANUARY 4, 2024
Interview of Hunter Hames

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA24FM014

PLACE: Yonges Island, South Carolina

DATE: January 16, 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber