

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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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: JOHN WEST, Leverman, Dredge Brunswick
Southern Dredging and Marine

North Charleston, South Carolina

Wednesday,
January 17, 2024

APPEARANCES:

LT [REDACTED] .
United States Coast Guard

MARCEL MUISE, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DAN McCLAY, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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Moore & Van Allen, PLLC
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SARA PARRISH, Esq.
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Representing the Ports Authority

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Hines & Gilsenan, LLC
Representing Stevens Towing Company, Inc.

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:31 a.m.)

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2
3 LT [REDACTED] It is January 17, 2024, 9:31 a.m. I am
4 Lieutenant [REDACTED] at the South Carolina Port Authority building
5 interviewing John West, the leverman on the dredge *Brunswick*, in
6 regards to the allision of the *Royal Engineer* and the North
7 Charleston container crane. To my right, I have --

8 MR. GILSENAN: Oh, Ryan Gilsenan, counsel for Stevens Towing.

9 MS. PARRISH: Sara Parrish, counsel for Ports Authority.

10 MR. WEST: John West, leverman for Southern Dredging.

11 MR. MULLER: Doug Muller, counsel for Southern Dredging.

12 MR. MUISE: Marcel Muise with the NTSB.

13 MR. McCLAY: Daniel McClay, assistant investigator, NTSB.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN WEST

14
15 BY LT [REDACTED]

16 Q. Thank you, Mr. West, for being here today. Starting off, can
17 you just run me through your experience, you know, working on
18 dredges, what's your experience in the industry, essentially?

19 A. I've been dredging for five years, I was a deckhand for about
20 a year and a half, I was a boatman for a year and a half, I was a
21 mate for about a year or so and I just recently went to leverman
22 in October.

23 Q. Do you hold a Merchant Mariner Credential?

24 A. No.

25 Q. No, okay. And how long have been working on the dredge

1 Brunswick?

2 A. Five years.

3 Q. Okay. So you worked on that dredge the whole time?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Any other vessels that you went on or has that been the
6 primary vessel?

7 A. That's been the primary.

8 Q. Okay. How long have you been working in this specific
9 project in the Cooper River?

10 A. We got there just before Christmas.

11 Q. And you're still working it?

12 A. Well, we just moved the other day, but yes.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. We're working in Cooper River.

15 Q. And run me through how a general day goes, we have the deep
16 draft vessels that have to go down the Cooper, so run me through a
17 general sequence of how you get notified and, you know, what it
18 takes to actually move the dredge so those deep draft vessels
19 could get through.

20 A. Typically, they'll call us within an hour to 45 minutes of
21 where they need to come through at, and at that point I'll go
22 ahead and start what they call washing out, just washing out the
23 pipeline, make sure there ain't no material left. If they need us
24 to move completely out the channel, it takes a little bit longer
25 because -- depending on where you're at, but if they're just

1 passing through, you swing over close to the dock, break the
2 pipeline, push the stern over to the dock and then break the
3 pipeline and drag it across the river out of the way.

4 Q. Okay. And so you said 45 minutes to an hour, is that because
5 it takes that long to break a pipe?

6 A. If you got to move the dredge entirely.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But if you're just moving the dredge from -- just kind of
9 positioning out of the way, it will take 15 minutes, 15, 20
10 minutes.

11 Q. So after the allision with the *Royal Engineer* that day, did
12 you actually move the dredge or did you just break pipe and let
13 them through?

14 A. I had already moved the dredge --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- whenever he hit the crane.

17 Q. Okay. So let's back -- I'm going to back it up a bit.

18 A. Okay.

19 Q. So that day of the incident, he said he passed you going up
20 river, do you remember that?

21 A. No, I think he done that on Wednesday, I didn't get there
22 until Thursday.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. That's our relief day.

25 Q. Okay. So you joined the vessel Thursday --

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. -- the day of the incident?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Okay. At what time did you join?

5 A. Around six eight.

6 Q. Okay. And had any other vessels passed you during that
7 shift?

8 A. No, sir.

9 Q. Okay. And what was the first radio call that you received
10 from the *Royal Engineer*?

11 A. He was in sight.

12 Q. Okay. Do you remember what time that was, approximately?

13 A. I would say 3:30, 3:00, somewhere around in there.

14 Q. Okay. And do you remember the conversation that you had with
15 the captain of the *Royal Engineer*?

16 A. He just asked how I'd like for him to pass and I said if he
17 could go between me and the dock, I would prefer that.

18 Q. So you preferred that he go between the dock or that --

19 A. Just if he could because I had guys downstairs that were
20 working on something --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- and I'd have to stop them to go do something else.

23 Q. If he asked, if he said no, I need you to move --

24 A. Move.

25 Q. Okay. So keep going with the conversation.

1 A. So I swung the bow over as far as I could, kicked the stern
2 over as far as I could, he asked how much room I had, I said I got
3 300 feet between me and the dock, but I wasn't sure, exactly sure
4 how wide that ship was and he said, from his position, he said the
5 sun was in his eyes so he was going to get a little bit closer and
6 see what he got. When he got closer, if I remember correctly, he
7 said that he had enough room.

8 Q. Were you in contact with him as he was passing to give him
9 clearance readings or --

10 A. No. Once he said he was good, I just let him go around
11 (indiscernible.)

12 Q. Okay. And so what were you visualizing at that point?

13 A. I was watching the camera, the guys were downstairs digging
14 in the pump --

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. -- and I was watching them on the camera.

17 Q. Okay. So you weren't watching the vessel as they were
18 passing. So run me through, keep going. What was the next thing
19 that you observed?

20 A. I just heard the -- a loud noise and first thought was that
21 they dropped a container or something and I turned around and
22 realized what had happened and he was backing up away.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And he backed out, he got spun around and he called on the
25 radio and said that his deckhand told him he had enough clearance

1 and then he went across the river and kind of drifted, I'm
2 assuming called his superiors or whoever and he called me back,
3 asked me to break the pipeline, and I had the guys go out there to
4 break it and drag it out of the way for him.

5 Q. And how long did that take?

6 A. Five minutes.

7 Q. He said it took an hour for you to be able to move, would
8 that be incorrect or --

9 A. (Indiscernible)?

10 Q. He said it took about an hour for you to be able to move out
11 of the way.

12 A. No.

13 Q. No, okay. Do you need the 45 minutes to an hour heads up or
14 is that just kind of a courtesy thing?

15 A. Forty-five minutes kind of really cuts it close, depending,
16 like again, it just depends, if you got to like go completely
17 across the channel --

18 Q. Right.

19 A. -- out of the way or something, that would take roughly 45
20 minutes. If you're just stepping out of the way, you can do it in
21 20. But depending on the tide and all that, we just do a general
22 rule-of-thumb 45 minutes just in case something was to happen, you
23 know, a stern break or anything like that to give you plenty of
24 time to calculate.

25 Q. Okay. He mentioned he attempted to contact you before --

1 when the voyage began, on his way up to Nexans.

2 A. I didn't hear it.

3 Q. Nothing. And those phone numbers on the Local Notice to
4 Mariners, are you familiar with that?

5 A. As of yesterday I was familiar with them.

6 Q. Okay. You didn't know who those numbers are for?

7 A. They should be for the dredge phone (indiscernible) and
8 there's like a little flip phone, cell phone.

9 Q. All right. Maybe we'll just call the numbers and see what --

10 A. Should be for that.

11 Q. All right. Have you had any trouble with other vessels
12 passing you during this project?

13 A. Uh-uh.

14 Q. How many --

15 A. No. And at the time of the day it just started up --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- so that was my first day back.

18 Q. Well, how -- when were you on before, prior to? I know you
19 said you started around -- after Christmas.

20 A. We just traveled back from Brunswick, Georgia.

21 Q. So this is your first time on board --

22 A. Correct, since --

23 Q. -- for this project?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Okay. So all your other past experience have been other

1 projects?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Okay. As to the passing arrangements, were those the same in
4 past projects as it was?

5 A. If they can go between me and the dock, do so, if not, we'll
6 break the line and move, whatever we got to do.

7 Q. Okay. Have you ever had anyone hit the pipe or anything like
8 that?

9 A. No, sir.

10 Q. Okay. And just to be clear, the pipe was floating across the
11 entire river?

12 A. Correct.

13 Q. Okay. And was it attached to like a head section or --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. Where was that at?

16 A. It was across the channel, I think the buoy marker was that
17 number 60, where it comes up, and it was coming up out of the
18 water right there to the head section just below Buoy 60, I think
19 (indiscernible).

20 Q. So was the pipe submerged or was it floating?

21 A. Floating.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Most of the pipe is submerged, but the pipe I'm actually,
24 like, pumping to, that is floating.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And then it comes up outside of the channel and then it cuts
2 across the channel to the dredge.

3 Q. Okay. So it's floating across the channel --

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. -- then it goes underwater?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. And where it goes underwater at, that's outside the
8 channel?

9 A. Correct.

10 Q. Do you know the depth of that area?

11 A. I think it's 20, 25, somewhere around there.

12 Q. Would it have been possible for him just to go around that
13 way?

14 A. He said no after the fact because of the spuds.

15 Q. Okay. Was any of that discussed prior to the movement?

16 (No audible response.)

17 BY LT [REDACTED]

18 Q. Okay. Was there any issue with terminal operations while
19 you're dredging?

20 A. Excuse me?

21 Q. Any like conflicting, you know, problems with operations with
22 the terminal as far as like moving cranes and the container -- and
23 the dredge?

24 A. Uh-uh.

25 Q. No. And your primary purpose, were you just dredging, like,

1 so the deep draft being there, was that the purpose of the job,
2 are you aware of? I know this isn't a picture of this, this is
3 reference.

4 A. I was wondering. Basically, just digging the dock face, just
5 making that right there deeper, we weren't really digging the
6 channel --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- right there.

9 LT [REDACTED] So that's the primary of the contract, okay.
10 All right. I'll pass it to the NTSB.

11 BY MR. MUISE:

12 Q. This is Marcel with the NTSB. John, can you just -- I don't
13 know anything about dredges, so how does -- what type of dredge is
14 this, does it have like a suction or a cutter head or --

15 A. Cutter head/suction.

16 Q. Both, okay. Self-propelled or do you have to use a tug to
17 move it or you're driving --

18 A. We have to use tugs.

19 Q. You have to use tugs.

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. So that day what other boats, tugs, did you have tied up
22 alongside you?

23 A. Our tender boats. They're small.

24 Q. Can you draw me a diagram, maybe, show me where everything
25 was, like the dredge and where all the boats were tied up

1 alongside or describe it for me?

2 A. I can try.

3 MR. MUISE: Okay, go for it.

4 MR. McCLAY: Just a picture of the scene.

5 MR. MUISE: Yeah, so just the dredge, where all the boats
6 were, which way you were pointing.

7 MR. GILSENAN: Maybe draw the dock face more --

8 (Cross-talk.)

9 MR. MUISE: Yeah, the dock face would help, too, sure.

10 MR. GILSENAN: -- for reference.

11 MR. MULLER: And this is not to scale, but just --

12 MR. MUISE: No, that's fine, that's fine.

13 MR. MULLER: -- a configuration of everything.

14 MR. WEST: Okay, this would be the dredge and this would be
15 the ship that was there --

16 MR. MUISE: Okay.

17 MR. WEST: -- and we were facing north.

18 MR. MUISE: North of it.

19 MR. WEST: And he was facing south and *Royal Engineer* come
20 this way, and our pipeline was running --

21 MR. MUISE: Off the stern.

22 MR. WEST: -- off the stern and I had a guy back here on just
23 a small tender boat and he was pushing the pipe this way because
24 it will -- there's a rubber connection here, it will fold over, so
25 I had him back here holding everything out of the way so he could

1 come through.

2 BY MR. MUISE:

3 Q. Okay. Is there any other workboats or towboats tied up, too?

4 A. They would all be on this side.

5 MR. MUISE: Of that side, okay. All right. Thank you.

6 MR. WEST: Um-hum.

7 MR. MUISE: That's what I just -- like initially, then, and
8 they'll attach it to your transcript.

9 BY MR. MUISE:

10 Q. So when you say spun over, do you spun the actual dredge or
11 just the pipe?

12 A. The dredge.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Because of pins on anchors, and you swing the bow over and
15 you put the ladder hard on bottom and you pick the spuds up and I
16 get a guy on the back to push the stern over.

17 Q. Using one of those jon boats?

18 A. Can you show me where the spuds were at?

19 MR. MULLER: A spud here. Here's one spud and here's another
20 one.

21 BY MR. MUISE:

22 Q. So you pick this one up?

23 A. Yeah, you put the ladder down hard on bottom --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. -- completely on the bottom, then you pick both spuds up --

1 Q. Both spuds up.

2 A. -- and that way you can pivot on the cutter head.

3 Q. Oh, so you pivoted to -- all right, great.

4 A. And now I would've had to anchor like right up here and
5 there's a cable that swings to it, so I would swing the dredge all
6 the way over, as far as I could, and I would put the ladder on the
7 bottom and then I would pivot off the cutter head and push the
8 stern over.

9 Q. Oh, okay. Do you happen to know where the GPS antenna is on
10 the dredge?

11 A. Right on top of the room. Should be --

12 Q. Is that pretty much center line?

13 A. Excuse me?

14 Q. Is that on the center line, right in the middle somewhere or
15 is it --

16 A. Should be.

17 Q. Are you familiar with how AIS works?

18 A. Not a hundred percent.

19 Q. Okay. In there, there's a spot for you to program it to --
20 to tell it your -- the dimensions of your vessel --

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. -- so that other ships can see, on their display --

23 A. Right.

24 Q. -- what you look like. So when we downloaded it, it was all
25 zeroed out, so yours didn't have that information in there. I was

1 just curious if you've ever seen that before.

2 A. No, I have not.

3 Q. Do you have an electronic chart or anything on your -- at
4 your station, like can you see a map, like an electronic -- you
5 don't have anything?

6 A. Just the program for the digging itself.

7 Q. Oh. Okay, so like some sort of GIS offer (ph.) that shows
8 you what's on the bottom and --

9 A. Kind of, sort of.

10 Q. -- so you don't hit --

11 A. They do a survey and they put in the -- what they call the
12 cut-fast --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- and then we have an engineer that -- survey engineer that
15 does that and then as far as the depth goes, they do their survey
16 and they give us the printout of how deep it is and stuff, and we
17 adjust the length.

18 Q. Shows you where the pipelines and cables are and stuff
19 that --

20 A. Yeah.

21 MR. MUISE: Okay, good. That's all.

22 Danny, you have anything?

23 MR. McCLAY: No, I don't have anything.

24 MR. MUISE: Ryan?

25 MR. WEST: Also, real quick --

1 MR. MUISE: Right.

2 MR. WEST: -- if you want a better diagram, Moses on our
3 dredge has -- like he done something fancy with a computer
4 program.

5 MR. MULLER: Of this?

6 MR. WEST: Yeah. Yeah, (indiscernible).

7 MR. MULLER: We can get that.

8 MR. MUISE: Okay.

9 LT [REDACTED] That would be good.

10 MR. MUISE: Ryan?

11 MR. GILSENAN: No.

12 MR. MUISE: Sir, it's all you.

13 LT [REDACTED] All right. I appreciate your time here, lot of
14 good information, but if there's no other questions, then we'll
15 conclude the interview of the leverman.

16 (Whereupon, at 3:25 p.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,
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Interview of John West

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA24FM014

PLACE: North Charleston, South Carolina

DATE: January 17, 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