

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CAPSIZING/SINKING OF THE *GOLDEN*
RAY IN THE BRUNSWICK RIVER,
GEORGIA, ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

Accident No.: DCA19FM048

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Interview of:



U.S. Coast Guard

Military Safety Unit
Savannah, Georgia

Wednesday,
January 29, 2019

APPEARANCES:

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

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of [REDACTED]:

By Lieutenant [REDACTED]

4

I N T E R V I E W

(11:56 a.m.)

1
2
3 LT [REDACTED]: Good morning. This is Lieutenant [REDACTED] on
4 January 29th, 2020 at 1156. My name is spelled [REDACTED]
5 [REDACTED]. And I work for the District 8 Response Advisory
6 Team. I'm the supervisor there, and I've been asked to conduct an
7 interview and a report on all things regarding the pollution
8 response and salvage regarding the *Golden Ray* incident.

9 And I'm here with:

10 MR. [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], MST1 from MSU Savannah. Job at MSU
11 Savannah is portside control, and job for the incident was
12 on-water recovery. And my name is spelled [REDACTED], last name
13 [REDACTED].

14 LT [REDACTED]: And do you consent to this interview being
15 recorded?

16 MR. [REDACTED]: Yes, sir.

17 INTERVIEW OF [REDACTED]

18 BY LT [REDACTED]:

19 Q. All right. So kind of start me at the beginning of when you
20 were first notified and what you did from there.

21 A. Okay, so I went in that Monday like a normal workday, did a
22 portside control exam. That evening around approximately 6:00 at
23 night, received a message from [REDACTED], on behalf of
24 Lieutenant [REDACTED], asking if I would like to come down to
25 respond. And I replied back, yes.

1 So I was told to meet the next day, so that Tuesday at 6:00
2 in the morning at Lanier Dock, to conduct on-water recovery. So
3 he kind of told me what to bring and what not. But that was it.
4 So the next morning, I showed up, and I was then instructed to hop
5 on a vessel, a response vessel, and monitor around the vessel for
6 any signs of pollution and make sure that we were recovering it
7 properly.

8 Q. And who was your boss those -- that -- when you first got
9 down there?

10 A. So initially we were reporting to Lieutenant Junior Grade
11 [REDACTED] and also to Chief [REDACTED] But Chief [REDACTED] was more at the
12 unit side, so he was just kind of in the loop in our text
13 messages.

14 And then that shifted to Chief [REDACTED] (ph.), I believe it
15 was. He was our -- like our DIVS at the time. So in the initial
16 stage, he was mostly who we were communicating with via text
17 message.

18 Q. Okay. And Chief [REDACTED] was from a strike team; is that
19 correct?

20 A. Yes. I'm not exactly sure which one; I believe Pacific
21 maybe, or --

22 Q. Okay. I can find that out. All right. And so what were
23 your activities that first day when you were on scene?

24 A. So the first day, we left the Lanier dock, headed down to the
25 vessel. In the morning, we would do -- just encircle the vessel

1 to see if there's any signs of pollution, any kind of sheening.

2 And then also, they had some boom put out at Bird Island. So
3 we'd also go there to see if the boom was holding up, if it was --
4 if they lost any anchor lines, anything like that. And then after
5 that, I mean, we'd pretty much stay on water. And if there's any
6 oil that we could recover, they would use absorbent boom to
7 recover that.

8 And you would stay on the water for the entire day, and so
9 pretty much 6:00 that evening, about 6:00, roughly.

10 Q. Now that first day, when you went to tend the boom at Bird
11 Island, was the boom -- how was the boom holding up?

12 A. I mean, it was definitely having trouble. You could tell the
13 currents were very strong, and the tidal shift is a lot of tidal
14 shift. So you could tell it was having trouble, and they were
15 having to rework it.

16 And I also think, from having so many contractors come in and
17 having to work with each other for the first time, the first few
18 days were just working out that flow of how to fix what and how to
19 work together. But yeah, they were resetting anchors, I know.
20 They were tying up the boom to make sure it was adequate and
21 wasn't being submerged. But it was holding up, but it was having
22 several signs of boom failure for sure.

23 Q. And was that due to the placement, or environmental
24 conditions, or a little of both?

25 A. I would say the conditions for sure. And I would say

1 protection was a hard strategy for the type of currents. I would
2 say, possibly like a diversion technique might have worked better.
3 It would've been harder -- it would've been hard to maintain, for
4 sure, with the tides coming in and out.

5 But also, at that point, I don't remember there being a lot
6 of spare boom. I think what they had is what they put out that
7 day. Eventually, they got more boom. But at the time, they were
8 trying to protect the northeast side of the -- of Bird Island.

9 So --

10 Q. I think it was about 2,000 feet of boom is what they had, or
11 something like that.

12 A. Approximately that.

13 Q. And at that point in time, was there any oil impacts to Bird
14 Island?

15 A. So it was hard to see Bird Island from the vessel. So I was
16 not on the actual island. Eventually, during the response, I had
17 gotten on there, and there was signs of it being impacted for
18 sure. So --

19 Q. Okay. And then so for your on-water portion, that first day
20 you were on scene, was there much oil encountered?

21 A. Not really. I mean, there was some sheening. In the first
22 few days, you would see spots of black oil pop up here and there
23 but not like a huge discharge. And whatever did come out, they
24 would have other -- have some of the response vessels go and
25 collect it. But they would spend the majority of the day just

1 sitting out around the vessel, just kind of waiting for any kind
2 of discharge to come.

3 Q. And so that would've been about September 10th, right, that
4 Tuesday?

5 A. Yes, sir. I think so.

6 Q. Okay. So then -- so you did that. And was that primarily
7 most of your -- just whatever you'd encounter, you'd clean up with
8 sorbent boom. And then what would you do with that sorbent boom
9 once it was raised up?

10 A. So they would put tiebacks on, make sure they had proper PPE.
11 They would bag it up with two bags, tape it off. And then they
12 would transfer that back to the staging area at Lanier.

13 Q. Did the vessel you were on transfer, or did a separate vessel
14 come out?

15 A. A separate vessel will come alongside and grab it.

16 Q. Okay. And then you just -- do you use an new string of
17 sorbent boom?

18 A. Yeah. So then we had other vessels that were coming out
19 bringing more absorbent boom for wherever it was spent.

20 Q. Okay. And that was kind of the whole cycle of that day?

21 A. For that day. For the first initial part, that was pretty
22 much the cycle.

23 Q. Is that -- did you do anything other than that?

24 A. No. I mean, that was it, just sitting out there and --

25 Q. And so about how many days did you do those activities just

1 like that?

2 A. So that -- for the first time I was out there, that was every
3 day; that was every day that they would do that.

4 Q. Okay. So is there any --

5 A. And eventually, skimmers did come out, and we were able to
6 utilize those with wing boats. But it wasn't there initially,
7 so --

8 Q. Okay. And then so the other date that I was informed about
9 was the 13th, right, so --

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. -- where you get the weather that's about to come in.

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. Up until that point, no changes in operations?

14 A. No. It's pretty typical.

15 Q. Pretty typical? And so on the 13th, kind of describe to
16 me -- because that was the first day there was a real decent sign
17 of oil, correct?

18 A. Yes, sir. Yeah. So the 13th, we had a pretty sizeable
19 discharge, and at the time, it seemed to be continuous. And we
20 had a -- we did have Marco skimmers at that point. We had, I
21 believe it was three skimmers at a point.

22 And they positioned their wing boats off the -- after the
23 ship, near the topside deck. And they were in position to recover
24 oil, and we were pretty much getting at it. And we had received
25 word from Gallagher that there were -- the decision was made in

1 the command post to remove all assets due to incoming weather.
2 But that was -- it wasn't communicated the weather was going to be
3 there that day, at the time. We thought they had thought there
4 was going to be bad weather.

5 And on the water, it was very calm, very sunny. It was ideal
6 conditions to conduct recovery. In the skimmer, I believe in the
7 first 15 minutes, they were able to recover quite a sizeable
8 amount. So we initially text and called Chief [REDACTED] and told
9 him, hey, Gallagher is giving the word to pull assets, is this
10 true? And also to let him know that the weather was fine where we
11 were at. We didn't see anything on the horizon or anything like
12 that.

13 So he eventually got back to us saying that they were
14 anticipating incoming weather, I believe it was Sunday, and that
15 they wanted to remove assets. So we kind of reminded him that
16 there was an active discharge going on and that the conditions
17 were fine. And they had gotten back to us and said that, that was
18 the decision that was made. And that was it, pulled the
19 resources. So we went from recovering oil and we shifted to
20 removing boom from Bird Island and the skimmers. And the little
21 bit of boom they had around the vessel was all moved.

22 So I took -- went to the union, got all the assets out, came
23 back to just do a circle around the vessel, to see what was going
24 on and to make sure all boom had been pulled out. On the way back
25 out there, I was taking pictures of oil that was in the water,

1 black oil that was recoverable, and sending it back to Chief
2 ██████ and just telling him, hey, there's recoverable oil here.

3 At some point, I was in the vessel with Ferrell LaFont (ph.)
4 from Gallagher. He received a call from the ops section chief at
5 the time. His name -- I forget his name -- I think it was Randy
6 or something like that.

7 He wanted to speak to me and described that he wanted to make
8 sure that we were reporting the same thing up our chains. So
9 obviously, Gallagher was reporting off their chain, I was
10 reporting to Coast Guard. And I just told him that if he was
11 reporting there was recoverable in the water, then that is exactly
12 what we were both seeing. But I could not attest to what
13 Mr. LaFont was telling him. I didn't -- I wasn't aware of their
14 conversations.

15 So at that point, he just wanted to remind me that we needed
16 to, as he said, stovepipe communication, which I assume that media
17 reported the same thing. So I -- so right after that phone call,
18 I contacted Chief ██████ and I told him the conversation that had
19 happened.

20 And once we got back on land, I was asked to go to Embassy
21 Suites to meet with him, Chief ██████, Mr. Martinez, I
22 believe, and a warrant officer from the Strike Team; I don't
23 remember his name. So we met with him that night, and he just
24 kind of went over the whole conversation, what had transpired.
25 And they kind of took care of it from there.

1 So I don't know what was discussed after that. But I just
2 wanted to let him know that I have received that call from the ops
3 section chief. So yeah, I mean, that day, the circumstances were
4 ideal. We were in a good position to recover and you know.

5 Q. Were there resources that were not employed that could've
6 removed boom while you continue to recover, or was all resources
7 actively engaged?

8 A. I would say not all were engaged. Because the skimmers and
9 the wing boats, they -- the wing boats had actually pushed up
10 against the *Golden Ray* and were sitting there holding the boom in
11 position as the skimmers were coming.

12 There were some other vessels behind us that were using
13 sorbents to get whatever we missed. But I mean, there were some
14 vessels definitely that could've been utilized to remove the boom.
15 But removing the boom from Bird Island in conditions is very --
16 it's very difficult.

17 So I mean, they could've had some vessels remove it. But I
18 think at that time, we had plenty of daylight left, and the
19 weather was far enough away that we could've just probably removed
20 it the next day, Saturday, if that was going to be the decision.

21 Q. And then how long were the resources removed from operation
22 for?

23 A. So we removed all the boom. The vessels and everything went
24 back to staging. That's -- the next day, Saturday, we went out
25 with just the vessels; there was no boom. Sunday, I believe that

1 day, they had cancelled operations for the weather. It should be
2 in my 214 exactly. And then Monday -- I believe it was Monday
3 that we put all the boom back out. So --

4 Q. Okay. So there's still some operations kind of going on
5 while you're waiting for the weather, but then the boom wasn't
6 placed out until the suspected weather had passed?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Okay. Makes sense. And was any recovery done over the
9 weekend or just assessments?

10 A. So the next day -- or that Saturday, we went out. There was
11 no oil around the vessel. I mean, there might've been light
12 sheening and what not, but the discharge had -- with those
13 currents, it was not present in that location. So -- and it
14 wasn't -- there was no more continuous or active discharge at that
15 point.

16 Q. Okay. So it was pretty much a 13th event, and then on the
17 14th, there was no more current discharged?

18 A. Not that I would see.

19 Q. Did it appear that there would be -- had been any shoreline
20 impacts from that discharge on the 13th?

21 A. So I can't really attest to that because I was on water. So
22 we would just go out. But I mean, there were other teams had gone
23 out and discovered things, but I did not witness that myself.

24 Q. Okay. Up -- so up until that point, had you made any
25 recommendations for alternate response strategies?

1 A. Yeah. So I discussed with some of the other guys I was
2 working with, we really wanted to see some type of boom around the
3 vessel, maybe not the 24-inch boom that they had there, but maybe
4 some other type of boom, or even if it wasn't to encircle the
5 *Golden Ray*, maybe like a -- some other booming strategy.

6 But we just wanted to see something -- at least try something
7 to recover oil or to deflect it to a better location. So we had
8 recommended that -- we had recommended doing subsurface SCAT, just
9 in case any oil had not made it to the surface, maybe had mixed
10 with sediment, and was suspended in the water column.

11 So we recommended subsurface SCAT. Those are two of the
12 biggest ones that we made for the on-water recovery portion.

13 Q. Okay. And were either of those ever implemented?

14 A. So booming, eventually, they put boom around the topside.
15 They also tried doing these two V-shaped boom configurations with
16 skimmer -- with skimmers just -- I guess it would be -- yeah, just
17 west of the vessel. That didn't really work out, because it was
18 kind of close to the channel.

19 And then they eventually boomed off the -- just the top.
20 They would go from rail to rail around the top where the fuel
21 vents are at. So eventually, they tried doing that. And then at
22 one point towards the end, they even wrapped boom around the bow
23 of the ship, because they were having oil come out from where
24 the -- like the mooring arrangements were.

25 So they had tried some things. But they were trying with the

1 24-inch boom, which wasn't probably the best. And also, at one
2 point, they actually cut holes into the skirt to allow like a
3 underflow so that the skirts wouldn't ride up as much. And that
4 just -- that was pretty much right at the waterline, so water
5 would just pass through. So if oil was to even get in the boom,
6 it would just seep right by. So --

7 Q. And no subsurface SCAT was ever conducted?

8 A. So I -- it was approximately probably 30 days later that
9 subsurface SCAT was done.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And I wasn't part of the subsurface SCAT, but I had received
12 word that there was no result, they had negative results at that
13 point.

14 Q. But at that point, 30 days later, there wasn't much of a
15 discharge, correct?

16 A. No, there wasn't much of a discharge.

17 Q. So we wouldn't expect to see a ton of results?

18 A. No. I mean, whatever had been down there had already been
19 probably mixed with sediment, was either on the bottom or where
20 the currents had been washed away, because it was pretty evident
21 around the vessel that you could see a lot of mixing of sediment
22 around the bow and around the stern. So the currents were very
23 intense around there.

24 Q. Okay. Now, once you got back on scene on the -- so 16th that
25 Monday, right -- yeah, the 16th --

1 A. 16th.

2 Q. What were your activities like from then on?

3 A. So the 16th, we pretty much did the same exact thing, go out
4 to the vessel in the morning. We would deem if it was safe for
5 the smaller vessels to come out, especially the Marco skimmers,
6 because they couldn't handle too much of a sea state.

7 So we'd do a circle around it. And then from there, we would
8 have the response boats come out. And if the weather wasn't as
9 favorable, we'd have the -- they used to call it Butterfly Bay;
10 it's right behind Jekyll Island -- they'd have the Marco skimmers
11 kind of standing by over here.

12 They also had some like mooring balls they set up near the
13 vessel with the boom on it. So that way, the wing vessels could
14 grab it real quick. But yeah, every day, we just pretty much sat
15 around just waiting for any kind of discharge that's come from it.
16 And some days, it was a light unrecoverable sheen, some days, it
17 was a few spots of black oil here and there. But yeah, it was
18 pretty much the same thing every day.

19 Q. Okay. Rough estimate, how much product do you think was
20 discharged on a daily basis?

21 A. On a daily basis? That would be hard to say, because some
22 days, there was nothing, and some days, you might've been dealing
23 with like a few gallons here and there, maybe even tens of gallons
24 on some days.

25 Q. Okay. So -- but not major amounts, right, after the 13th?

1 A. Not that I observed.

2 Q. Okay. And then how long did it go on like that?

3 A. Like that?

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. I would say up until they permanently plugged the vents.
6 From that moment on, discharge was -- you didn't really see that
7 many discharges.

8 Q. Okay. And then --

9 A. And that was another recommendation we had made too, was
10 plugging the vents. Because it was pretty obvious from the
11 topside, if you looked at the starboard side of the vessel, like
12 just forward of the bridge and right around where the basketball
13 court was, if you looked up, you could see two vents that looked
14 like fuel vents.

15 And right below that, there was clear evidence of like black
16 oil that was -- had washed against the ship. So that's one thing
17 we had asked and were concerned about, was whether there was any
18 plans to permanently plug the vents. Because we had divers in the
19 water, and anytime the divers are in the water, we'd have to back
20 away from the vessel.

21 But we didn't -- we weren't exactly sure what the divers were
22 doing, so we were asking that hey, while they're diving down
23 there, is there any way they can plug these vents permanently?
24 Because like I said, you could see that oil was coming in that
25 general direction. So at least we could eliminate that source.

1 Q. And that seemed to work, once --

2 A. Well, eventually they put bags onto the vents from what we
3 were told. And that seemed like it may have worked for like a day
4 or two. And then it just started happening again, where you get
5 these small discharges here and there.

6 Q. Okay. And then when was the -- I guess for the 27th, right,
7 were you on scene on the 27th when they had the next kind of
8 decent discharge?

9 A. For the one you're talking about -- I forget the -- what the
10 date was, but yes, I was there. I think it was Chief [REDACTED]'s
11 last day. He had came out to brief the -- I forget what her name
12 is -- the lady that was coming in for ops. But yeah, for that one
13 I was present.

14 Q. And so what were the operations like that day?

15 A. So that day had started out like normal, you know, just
16 sitting around the vessel, picking up any small discharges that we
17 saw, reporting back what we saw. And eventually it started
18 discharging, and it started coming out near the bow.

19 And all the response vessels quickly grabbed some sorbent
20 boom, put it out, tried to recover where they could. The Marco
21 skimmers tried to come into place. And initially, it was kind of
22 going out northeast, and eventually it had shift to going
23 southwest -- yeah, southwest.

24 So they were initially northeast of it recovering what they
25 could. Then one vessel, I noticed that the oil was actually

1 starting to go the opposite direction, saw the vessel shifted back
2 to the underside of the vessel. And I know the skimmers had
3 gotten as close as they could trying to collect it where it was
4 coming out before it got too far.

5 And at that point too, we even had strike team members on the
6 barges, kind of telling us, hey, you know you got oil in between
7 the barge and the ship and help them direct us where we could go.
8 And then the NRC admiral was asked to be engaged. And she put out
9 her skimmer and was trying to skim.

10 But that went in -- we were recovering that. And so
11 eventually, it slowed down and stopped. And they were trying to
12 chase whatever we did not get, pretty much until it was close to
13 sunset. And at that point, it had gotten so late.

14 I remember we had a railroad that was heading outbound, and
15 the sun was setting, and a lot of the boats didn't have navigation
16 lights, so it was just -- it was going to become unsafe. So they
17 decided to call it. And I totally concurred with that. It was
18 just -- it was going to be too late.

19 Q. Okay. I think that was the 30th. So --

20 A. 30th, okay.

21 Q. -- yeah. So the -- it started to discharge, go out to sea --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. -- and then the tide shifted, and it started coming back in,
24 and then you had to just stop operations, right?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Now, I think before that, there was one -- in between kind of
2 the 13th and the 30th, there was one discharge that was observed
3 kind of late in the day, about the 27th, Petty Officer [REDACTED]?

4 A. [REDACTED].

5 Q. [REDACTED]?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. He had said something about a discharge that he kind of
8 got -- came out and got --

9 A. Oh, yeah.

10 Q. -- fuel smell?

11 A. Okay, I know which one he's talking about. Yeah, he was
12 coming out, and he smelt fuel.

13 Q. Um-hmm.

14 A. Yeah. So that one, he came back and smelt it, and he text --
15 asked me if we saw anything by the vessel. And at that point, I
16 was either at Morningstar Marina or at the staging area. And we
17 started heading back to the vessel.

18 And there was another Coastie there that said that they went
19 around the out section of the boat and saw some oil there. So all
20 their boats jumped on it and started recovering what they could.
21 But yeah, so he was -- I think he was heading towards the Back
22 River when he smelt like that fuel oil smell.

23 Q. Okay. So I think -- my question on that one is, it seems
24 like it was discovered kind of late. Was there a lot of resources
25 kind of out of this -- out of the area at the time, is why it

1 might've been discovered late or --

2 A. So they did have resources that were shifting back and forth,
3 for either -- for using the restroom, I would say. They did have
4 like a potty barge out there, but to use the restroom, or to pick
5 up sorbents, or to drop off sorbents. So boats were in and out,
6 but they always had boats around it.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So like the command vessel, they also had like a, it was
9 almost like a secondary command vessel; it was Boat 22. So
10 whenever the command vessel would leave, 22 would kind of be in
11 charge and be circling going around it.

12 But I think some of these days, they had almost become
13 complacent with not seeing too much and just being out there for
14 such a prolonged period of time, which is understandable. But
15 yeah, there were assets there, and they were definitely able to
16 detect, if -- yeah.

17 Q. And not much was recovered that day because it wasn't
18 observed right away --

19 A. No, sir.

20 Q. -- right? But it was -- the 30th and the 13th were kind of
21 the big two major discharges?

22 A. Those were the big days, yeah.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Just wanted to clarify.

1 A. Yeah. I mean, that was also a sizeable one. But I would say
2 the 30th was probably the biggest discharge that had happened, and
3 then the 13th, and then the one that you're talking about, the
4 27th with Scott, the ones that I observed at least.

5 Q. Okay. And then kind of after the 30th, what were the
6 operations like?

7 A. So it was the same thing. We would go out, circle the
8 vessel, same thing pretty much every day throughout the whole
9 response. But from that point, after that point, I would say when
10 they permanently plugged it, and as they were getting more and
11 more fuel off the barge, it just -- it -- we -- you just didn't
12 see that much discharge.

13 So from -- because my last day was October 20th, so pretty
14 much all of October was very -- you didn't see that much at all.

15 Q. Okay. And what was your -- what would you do when you
16 weren't seeing much; what was your daily activities?

17 A. You would still circle around the vessel and stay on scene.

18 Q. And pick up tar ball if you saw them like that?

19 A. Yeah. Oh, yeah. So there would be times where you would see
20 tar balls kind of pop up from underneath the surface and shing off
21 a little bit. And then some of them would just dip back below.
22 And then the ones that we could recover, we would definitely
23 recover.

24 But like Gallagher was saying, it was some type of fibrous
25 material. But we had grabbed a bunch of them. And there was just

1 a lot of oil and sediment mixed together.

2 So -- but yeah, we did see that here and there. And we kept
3 on recommending the subsurface SCAT. Even though it had been a
4 while, we kept on recommending it. And like I said, and then they
5 eventually did it, but it there was just no results.

6 And the ones that we were grabbing from the water, they
7 weren't very tacky. It was a lot of sediment mixed in with some
8 oil. So --

9 Q. And who did you make that recommendation to?

10 A. To, I believe it was Chief [REDACTED] at that point, because
11 I believe Chief [REDACTED] had demobed.

12 Q. Okay. Did you go back for any other iterations, or was the
13 October 20th when you demobed completely?

14 A. No, I -- so I did go back -- I'm trying to think what day it
15 was. But I was there just -- I went back in November. Oh, yeah,
16 on Black Friday of -- in November. So I went back that day, up
17 until, I believe it was like the 22nd of December, like right
18 before Christmas.

19 Q. And what did your activities look like during that portion?

20 A. So that was the same thing, but this time, we would rotate
21 between -- I would do on-water. They would have somebody for
22 doing like shoreline assessments. They were part of the SCAT, but
23 they would go -- it was like a hotshot crew that would go through,
24 try to find anything to pick up, as far as like little tiny pieces
25 of tar on shells and things, and then also, somebody for going to

1 Bird Island to maintain that.

2 So you kind of cycled through these different positions. It
3 has almost gone from like this huge response with one
4 responsibility, and kind of shrank down to include a lot more
5 moving parts.

6 Q. Okay. Throughout the whole response, did you -- were you
7 given like 204s?

8 A. 204s? Yeah. So we had the incident action plan. And I know
9 initially, they were trying to get them out. I think initially,
10 it was almost like every day. And then they started getting
11 longer, and longer, and longer. But yeah, we were provided with
12 that.

13 There was also an app that Gallagher had that you can get on
14 your phone. It was like the IEP app. And you could log into it
15 and access all that from there as well. That was really useful.

16 Q. And do you feel like you knew what the objectives were each
17 day?

18 A. I felt like the objectives stayed the same. I felt like the
19 two and four stayed the same. There wasn't -- they didn't really
20 change a lot. And I know at one point, like during my first time
21 there, they were talking about boom strategy around the vessel,
22 like the two-V pattern I was telling you about. And I was asked
23 whether I thought that was effective or not.

24 But we had never really received like a boom strategy plan or
25 something specific to say like, hey, they're doing this or they're

1 not. So what we saw was just the boom was kind of lined up almost
2 in a straight line. It wasn't even like that big of a V shape.
3 So that's something I had reported back to Chief [REDACTED] too.
4 And he was kind of surprised that it wasn't in the configuration
5 that they agreed upon. But like I said, we weren't really passed
6 that specific information to verify.

7 Q. And you were just on scene, you weren't actually on the boat
8 that was laying the boom, correct?

9 A. No. So initially, we would swap between response boats, like
10 one day go out to Bird Island and see them rework the boom, and
11 one day go on -- go out to the vessel and circle there, and
12 eventually came down to make communications better. They wanted
13 to stick with the same person on a command boat.

14 So that started being me towards the end. So every time, I
15 would go out with a rep from NRC, a rep from Gallagher, and then a
16 rep from MER would be there as well.

17 Q. On the command boat?

18 A. On the command boat. I believe that was Boat 11 initially.

19 Q. And did you feel like you had a good idea of what was going
20 on throughout all the operations on the command boat?

21 A. Yeah, so I felt like communication had definitely gotten
22 better. In the beginning, it seemed like it was Gallagher
23 reporting to their side, us reporting to our side. And
24 eventually, we started -- especially with Mr. LaFont -- we started
25 really streamlining our communication, especially after that large

1 discharge.

2 Because one thing we weren't receiving information from
3 Donjon about really like what they were doing. And the 204s never
4 really reflected exactly what they were doing day to day. So
5 Donjon started calling up Mr. LaFont; and they would brief us on
6 what was going on, so we knew what to anticipate.

7 Q. And Donjon was the salver at this time, correct?

8 A. The salver, correct.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And I think it was, it was specifically their safety guy that
11 would contact us. And then from there, me and Mr. LaFont would
12 review our notes about what was going on for that day and just
13 make sure we were on the same page, seeing the same thing, talking
14 about the same thing, when we would pass that up. And from there,
15 communication had really gotten really good towards the end.

16 Q. And did you observe any shoreline impacts in either or your
17 iterations down there?

18 A. Yeah, so when I went down the second time, when I was able --
19 well, actually -- well, the first time, we had -- I had gone on to
20 Bird Island, and I had seen impact there for sure. And there
21 was -- you could tell it had been impacted a few times, because
22 there was some fresh stuff, and then there was also some staining.
23 So you could tell it had been hit a few times.

24 So I definitely noticed some there. Some of these buoys too,
25 which is kind of interesting, there was this black coat on it. It

1 was dry, but it almost looked like a staining, like something had
2 traveled by and hit the buoys as it had gone. Not certain it was
3 oil, but it was definitely noticeable. But then on Brunswick, or
4 on the Brunswick River, on the south side, there was impacts --
5 because I did an overflight one day from this bridge right here.

6 Q. Lanier Bridge, I believe?

7 A. Yeah, the Lanier Bridge all the way back to 95. I mean, it
8 wasn't completely, but it was sporadic.

9 Q. So up the South Brunswick River?

10 A. Yeah. I'm thinking one of the heavier areas was around this
11 curve; there's like a marina. So there was a bunch here. There
12 was some that was all the way down by the railroad terminal. And
13 then later on -- I think this is Cedar Creek, right? Cedar Creek,
14 there was some impact.

15 And then -- I'm trying to think. There's some shelling right
16 here, some shells over here, that we went on board -- or when we
17 went on shore. And then we were able to see just little tiny
18 specs of oil. But they had been cleaning up for a while. And it
19 was like just little tiny specs of black oil that was dried up on
20 shells and marsh grass and debris like that.

21 Q. Did you have -- feel like that there was input from the --
22 all of our partners as well in the process?

23 A. I mean, I was mostly in the field, so I don't -- I didn't
24 really have a lot of interaction with other agencies, and even on
25 like in the water -- on-water recovery. I mean, the only agency

1 really present was the Coast Guard. And then for my second time
2 down there, same thing, it was only Coast Guard with Gallagher. I
3 know they were out there, I know other people were dealing with
4 them, but I had no direct involvement with them.

5 Q. Okay. Did you have any interaction with the environmental
6 unit?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. No.

10 Q. And do you have any other thoughts regarding the response at
11 all?

12 A. Not really. I mean, that's pretty much it.

13 Q. Okay. Did you -- were you -- did you know the original
14 salvage plan or anything regarding it?

15 A. I mean, just in the field and being around -- Gallagher
16 seemed like they knew a lot, and you could hear them talking.
17 Initially, it sounded like they were going to try to parbuckle it.
18 That was the term that was being used a lot. And then from rumors
19 it was said that they were not -- they were going to not do that,
20 and then they were going to move on to cutting it up. But I had
21 never seen like the salvage plan itself or anything.

22 Q. Overall, what would you say was -- you were most satisfied
23 with the response efforts?

24 A. I would say, towards the end, just the communication getting
25 better. I feel like that was a big key, because it really helped

1 everybody work together to achieve a goal. So I think the
2 communication getting better and better towards the end was
3 definitely a key piece of it.

4 Q. And is there anything that you would like to see go better or
5 that you were frustrated with?

6 A. Yeah, I think the response -- I think we voted to be more
7 aggressive in the beginning. I think just saying the currents are
8 bad, I don't think that was a good enough reason not to at least
9 try some kind of technique or something. I feel like this would
10 be a good time to learn something new, to kind of figure out a way
11 to make it work. If we can't work against the current, we
12 could've deflected it and maybe worked some kind of a response
13 strategy.

14 So I wish that would've happened. I wish they would've
15 probably plugged those vents permanently a little sooner to stop
16 any kind of discharge. I'm not saying that would've stopped the
17 30th, but it may have slowed it down. I mean, I guess we'll never
18 know. And then the subsea SCAT, I wish that would've happened,
19 especially after those large discharges. I wish that would've
20 happened pretty quickly. And then -- I mean, the most frustrating
21 day for me was on the 30th when we removed the boom and we were
22 collecting oil. I think that was the most upsetting day.

23 Q. The 13th?

24 A. The 30 -- or --

25 Q. Right before the storm?

1 A. The storm, the 13th --

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. -- yeah. Sorry.

4 Q. And would you -- finally, would you describe subsea SCAT for
5 the recording?

6 A. So the one they ended up coming with was they were going to
7 take a string of palm-palm snare, they were going to take that,
8 weighted down, and then drag it in certain increments. And they
9 actually -- when they finally did come up with a plan, it had
10 certain increments where they would drag it, pull it up, look to
11 see if there's any tar balls stuck to it. And if there was, then
12 they would go by and do smaller segments to kind of locate where
13 it was at, and then on a map, just mark every time they hit it.
14 So that was the method they were going to use to do it.

15 But yeah, just trying to find anything that suspended in the
16 water column, because oil is not always going to be on top. It
17 depends on the temperature, it depends on specific gravity of the
18 oil, it depends on if it picks up sediment, it can become heavier
19 and not float. On the days that were warmer, you could see the
20 tar balls popping up and then disappearing later on. So it
21 would've been a good -- because I mean, some of these impacts
22 right here from the water -- we didn't have an aerial perspective,
23 so to speak. So trying to see how large of a discharge and how
24 much it's spreading out from the water is a very difficult task.

25 But some of the oil had made it past -- and especially with

1 the impact -- it almost led me to wonder if the oil had not fully
2 come up, if the currents maybe -- if it was on a -- if it come out
3 of fuel, then at the bottom of the ocean, and it's getting pushed
4 by the current, it may be popping up behind us, or it may never be
5 coming up until it hits like an impact or impacts the marsh. So I
6 think the subsurface SCAT would have given us a bigger picture of
7 that nothing was getting by.

8 Q. And so there was very little evidence that I've been told of
9 oil making it past Lanier Bridge, but yet we saw impacts of
10 surface expression --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- but we saw impact past Lanier Bridge. So that's what
13 gives evidence to your --

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. -- one subsurface SCAT; correct?

16 A. Yeah, because that -- I mean, you saw some impact at Bird
17 Island, but it's almost like the oil kind of turned with the
18 channel and really impacted past Lanier.

19 Q. And then were you given trajectories?

20 A. Gallagher had trajectories on the response boats. It didn't
21 seem like they were as accurate, but the weather was changing. I
22 mean, this is the nature of trajectories. But it did have some on
23 the vessel.

24 Q. And so a lot of the -- did any of those trajectories have oil
25 going past Lanier Bridge?

1 A. I don't believe so.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I don't believe so.

4 Q. Anything else you'd like to add?

5 A. That's it, sir.

6 Q. All right. If I come up with any more questions, I'll reach
7 out to you. But if you have nothing else to add, that concludes
8 this interview.

9 A. Definitely. Thank you, sir.

10 Q. Thank you.

11 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: CAPSIZING/SINKING OF THE *GOLDEN*
 RAY IN THE BRUNSWICK RIVER,
 GEORGIA, ON SEPTEMBER 8, 2019
 Interview of [REDACTED]

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA19FM048

PLACE: Savannah, Georgia

DATE: January 29, 2020

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.

[REDACTED]

Jeffrey Johnson
Transcriber