



## U.S. COAST GUARD SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATING OFFICER ACTIVITY

Matter Investigated: Capsizing – (Barge) AMBITION  
Vessel: (Barge) AMBITION (ON. CG1647791)  
(ITV) KAREN KOPY (O.N. 1230122)

Interview Of: Tommy Plaisance – Operations Manager for LA Carriers

Date/Time: 13 July 2022 (approximately) 12:18 – 13:18

Location: Jones Walker Office, 201 St. Charles Ave., New Orleans, LA 70170

Interviewed By: CWO [REDACTED], USCG; Adam Tucker, NTSB

Attendees: Alan Breaud – Breaud & Myers (representing Rigid Constructors interests), Jefferson Tillery – Jones Walker LLP (representing LA Carriers interests), Tommy Plaisance - LA Carriers Operations Manager (Party in Interest), John Plaisance – LA Carriers, Jeff Mizzi – Rigid Constructors President of Marine Operations (Party in Interest), Brian Capitelli – representing Captain Chester Murphy, Wayne Zeringue – Jones Walker LLP (note taking for LA Carriers)

This summary of interview is based on the information obtained during the interview of the above individual. Identity was verified via pictured ID. This interview was not recorded.

Mr. Plaisance has been with LA Carriers since 1995 and was the Operations Manager for LA Carriers at the time of the interview.

Mr. Plaisance was asked to explain what needed to be done to accept the contract for the job to move the AMBITION. He replied saying there was no contract and mentioned “Towage at Law”, and prices are negotiated with anticipated costs. He further explained that this meant it was short term work that was not required a contract. It is all documented after the fact because it is based on arrival times and some things change daily, such as fuel costs. There was no documentation for this agreement.

To the best of his knowledge, LA Carriers has never received contracts in the past to move the AMBITION. They have moved the AMBITION but they used a company, Patriot Marine, as a third party and there was never a contact with Rigid Construction. He said the only difference between this voyage and other voyages was the nature of the crane.

Mr. Plaisance said the past voyages used the Gulf of Mexico because of the air draft. He said, “How else could you move it?”.

When asked if there was any discussion for who has responsibility of the barge when underway, his reply was the responsibility for whoever is acting as the tower from point A to point B.

When asked if there were any special conditions for the barge to transit and he said yes, he was aware of some. Cranes are usually in a cradle and this one was not. He knew that before the job was accepted. They also received documents that the vessel could be in 4’-6’ seas.



Mr. Plaisance also mentioned that the barge movement was originally rejected by LA Carriers in February 2022 because they did not know how it was welded with sheet metal on top of the deck. He looked over the documents and decided he could receive it and do this voyage. The other docs taken into consideration were other reports from a professional engineer (PE) stating how it was built to ABS standards.

Mr. Plaisance had a discussion with Mr. Brooks, the owner of Patriot Marine, and ended up accepting the job in February. The trip was not done with the KAREN KOBY and it was in worse conditions than this voyage, swells were 4'-5' at that time. The vessel used for the February trip was the DUSTY, renamed SYDNEY BLAIR, and was pretty close to being the same towing power, maybe a little less, than the KAREN KOBY. The captain initially declined the tow because of construction and condition of the AMBITION. There were no issues in February except the crew being uncomfortable.

This was the third or fourth time that LA Carriers towed the AMBITION and each time was with a different vessel. On one voyage the barge did have to be pulled off to the banks to let weather pass.

Mr. Plaisance was then asked if there was any policy that required the captains to ensure the barges were watertight or weathertight prior to receiving the barge. He replied with, "We're supposed to be supplied with a watertight barge and then they show up." He also said there were pre-voyage checklists done but that does not include watertight or weathertight checks.

Mr. Plaisance was asked if this contract for the AMBITION included transport of any additional cargo. He replied with Yes, but it was not a contract. Each transport is all dependent on the specific voyage and there was cargo mentioned for this one.

For the next set of questions, Mr. Plaisance said the master of the vessel has overall responsibility for the safety of the crew. The master reports cargo conditions to cancel a job if necessary. He also said that Mr. Murphy has never had to cancel a job based on safety but knew he could cancel.

The captains are not required to read the Towing Safety Management System (TSMS) plans but are encouraged to. The TSMS plan allowed stop authority to the captains for items such as visibility, severe weather, or rough weather operations. Mr. Plaisance mentioned that the captains could stop operations and its all determined by the navigational assessment where Rosepoint and weather were taken into account. The master has standing authority.

To help the captains there is also a DPA, designated person ashore. This is communicated by a form posted on the vessel. The risks get mitigated to the best of their abilities but a lot can happen and accidents.

Mr. Plaisance was asked what he thinks may have caused the incident. He replied that he didn't want to speculate.

Mr. Plaisance was asked if he could think of anything that may have prevented the incident from occurring. He said he should/could have rejected the tow.



Mr. Williams was asked if he had anything to add any that was not addressed already that may be important to prevent this from reoccurring. He replied: No.

The National Transportation Safety Bureau representative, Adam Tucker, also continued with additional questions. This is what was added for those questions:

Mr. Plaisance said the KAREN KOBY is ABS classed and Maltese classed with a Certificate of Inspection done annually by the Coast Guard. When asked about the condition of the KAREN KOBY, Mr. Plaisance said his dad built the vessel and ABS inspected it. All deficiencies found were corrected except one. The only deficiency still remaining was the fire control panel showing a fault when there was no fire present. The KAREN KOBY was built at R&S shipyard, Lockport, LA.

Mr. Tucker asked about what is done on the vessel before getting underway. Mr. Plaisance said that anytime the vessel is in the Mississippi River or underway, all watertight hatches are closed. Weather is reported through cell phone apps and not satellite.

When asked about TSMS, Mr. Plaisance said the TSMS plan is only for their vessels. Barges have inspection sheets that are used before getting underway. The AMBITION is considered a deck barge.

In regard to the manhole not all being covered, Mr. Plaisance said that it should have been reported to LA Carriers and they would have required them to be put in place and properly fastened. However, it was not reported to them. He also mentioned that some barges get reputations as leakers or risky jobs but the AMBITION was not one of them. There were no past issues with the barge listing or issues with past tows.

Mr. Plaisance also expressed his expectations for barge preps. He said that LA Carriers are not barge experts and do not lash down cargoes or ballasting. They only do those things with hopper barges. They are only the towers of the barges.

In some instances, you get a load line exemption with a marine surveyor signing off on the towing. In hindsight, this should have been done for this voyage.

There have been no performance issues with captain Murphy and Mr. Plaisance said he had a lot of experience and capable.

Mr. Plaisance is not aware of any other pre-incident pictures or videos. He just became aware of the one from Mr. Scott on July 11, 2022 during the other interviews.

End of Interview Summary.

Full name of person producing the summary:

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SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

14 July 2022  
DATE