

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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GROUNDING OF BULK SHIP *AMERICAN*
MARINER IN SAULT STE MARIE,
ONTARIO, CANADA ON JANUARY 7, 2023

Accident No.: DCA23FM013

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Interview of: MICHAEL BESKO, 2nd Assistant Engineer
American Mariner

via Microsoft Teams

Monday,
February 6, 2023

APPEARANCES:

MARCEL MUISE, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

████████████████████
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I N T E R V I E W

(12:32 p.m.)

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3 MR. MUISE: -- with the National Transportation Safety Board.
4 It's February 6th, 2023, at 12:32 Eastern Time. With us is
5 Mr. Besko, one of the officers from the laker American Mariner.

6 If I could have everybody go around the room, please. [REDACTED]
7 first, please.

8 MR. [REDACTED] It's [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with the U.S. Coast
9 Guard in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

10 MR. MUISE: And Mr. Peterson.

11 MR. PETERSON: Yes, good afternoon. This is Brian Peterson
12 with Grand River Navigation Company.

13 MR. MUISE: Mr. Zwicker?

14 MR. ZWICKER: Adam Zwicker with Gallagher Sharp LLP, outside
15 counsel for Grand River Navigation.

16 MR. MUISE: Captain Layton.

17 MR. LAYTON: Good afternoon, everyone. Captain Jeff Layton.

18 MR. MUISE: And Mr. Besko?

19 MR. BESKO: Good afternoon. Mike Besko, second engineer,
20 American Mariner.

21 MR. MUISE: Did I miss anybody?

22 MR. PETERSON: Mr. Spotts?

23 MR. SPOTTS: Yes. Mr. Spotts representing Captain Layton.

24 MR. MUISE: And Mr. Besko, just so you know, this is a joint
25 investigation between the Coast Guard and the NTSB. In this case,

1 the Coast Guard is the lead agency so we'll follow their rules
2 today. Just so you know, a record of this interview will appear
3 in the public docket eventually online. Do you consent to have
4 this recorded?

5 MR. BESKO: Yes, I do.

6 MR. MUISE: [REDACTED] it's all yours.

7 MR. [REDACTED] Thank you, Marcel.

8 INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL BESKO

9 BY MR. [REDACTED]

10 Q. So at some point, we'll likely have Lieutenant Commander
11 [REDACTED] [REDACTED] as well with the Coast Guard here in the Sault. He's
12 not here momentarily but I'll let you know when he does join. So
13 thanks again, Mr. Besko, for making time. Thank you again for
14 providing the statement that you sent over. It's greatly
15 appreciated.

16 So the Coast Guard's primary objective of the investigation,
17 the accidents and casualties under 46 CFR Part 4 is to determine
18 their cause and provide the necessary feedback primarily through
19 its conclusions and recommendations to prevent similar accidents
20 and casualties from occurring in the future.

21 So with that, Mr. Besko, can you provide your current
22 address, sir?

23 A. As in my residential address?

24 Q. Yes, sir.

25 A. [REDACTED].

1 Q. And is that the address that the National Maritime Center has
2 on file for your credential?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay, and a good cellphone contact for you, sir?

5 A. [REDACTED].

6 Q. Thank you. So I'd like to begin with just a background on
7 you, sir. So how long have you been with the maritime industry?

8 A. I started school in 2015.

9 Q. And when you say school, was that school in Traverse City
10 with Michigan?

11 A. Yes, Great Lakes Maritime Academy.

12 Q. And your year of graduation?

13 A. 2019.

14 Q. So what did you do prior to that? Any maritime work or any
15 -- or was that high school prior to that?

16 A. Yeah, it was just all high school and one year of college.

17 Q. So after graduation in 2019, you went with the engineering
18 side, obviously.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. And what did you do after 2019?

21 A. I took a year to try and find work. I worked shore side and
22 then I took a position with American Queen Steamboat Company in
23 February 2020.

24 Q. Where is that located?

25 A. They sail upon the Mississippi River. Home office was in New

1 Albany, Indiana.

2 Q. Have they since dissolved?

3 A. No. They -- I believe they changed their offices. I have
4 not followed through with that company lately.

5 Q. How long did you stay with them? Until -- from --

6 A. Until --

7 Q. -- February 2020 until when?

8 A. March of 2021.

9 Q. And what happened in March of 2021?

10 A. I accept a position with Grand River to begin sailing as a
11 third engineer.

12 Q. And which vessels have you sailed on with Grand River?

13 A. The American Mariner and American Courage.

14 Q. Both of those diesel vessels?

15 A. Yes, they are.

16 Q. Are they sister ships?

17 A. I do not know.

18 Q. So roughly, two-and-a-half years with Grand River or is my
19 math off? Is that right? About two years with Grand River?

20 A. Yeah. I believe so, yes.

21 Q. The Mariner and the Courage are the same class of vessel
22 though. Is that correct?

23 A. Can you elaborate?

24 Q. Well, I don't have my documents pulled up. But they both do
25 dry cargo work and they operate in the same areas?

1 A. Yes, I -- yes.

2 Q. So I've read your statement. Going back to January 7th, can
3 you please talk me through your day on board the vessel from the
4 time you came on watch until after getting underway and being
5 relieved?

6 A. Yes. I came on watch at 2330 on the 6th. We were arriving
7 at the unload dock and we got finished with the engines. I do not
8 have that time in front of me. And I proceeded to do ballasting
9 as directed by the mates, operating the ballast system, while the
10 -- throughout the unload. I do not have the times but we do have
11 -- we got these one-hour call for departure and then 30 minute
12 call.

13 So I did my required steering gear test along with control
14 test and started up the main engines, enabled -- and then once the
15 unload was over, shut down the unloading system breakers and gave
16 control thrusters to the bridge. Then we left.

17 I believe -- sorry, I'm trying to reference my notes here so
18 I don't say anything wrong. I was still on ballast when we left
19 because we did not get it all in quite. We were very close
20 though. Taking the seven-port starboard to 15 feet and eight-port
21 and starboard to 20 feet. Charlie Porterson (ph.) showed up and
22 we did our normal watch turnover process. And he was asking about
23 the ballast. Then we went from there.

24 Q. When you say that you were on watch at 2330 on the 6th, so
25 how long was your watch then --

1 A. Eight hours. Eight-hour watch.

2 Q. So you were on watch from 2330 arriving on the 6th until when
3 the vessel departed the next morning?

4 A. Yes, I got off watch at 0730.

5 Q. Is that a standard watch, the eight-hour watch?

6 A. For the engineers on our vessel, yes.

7 Q. And then, what happened at 7:30?

8 A. So Charlie took over. We were talking about our -- what's
9 going on with the plan and such that we were leaving. Then I told
10 him we were still ballasting so he -- I told him that we need to
11 take the sevens up to 15 feet and the eights up to 20 feet.

12 And he noticed that the six port was lower and he asked if I
13 should -- or if it needed to be brought up 20 feet. I said yes, I
14 have it there. And then we looked at it and it was lower. Then
15 we watched it for another duration and I noticed it kept on going
16 down. So I told Gary, the chief, what we were seeing. And he
17 came over to look at it.

18 Q. This was the six port. Is that correct?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. And the sevens and the eights were both holding their water
21 as you ballasted?

22 A. Yes. We were in the process of filling them.

23 Q. So can you describe from the time that the first -- that's
24 Charlie, correct? Am I assuming correctly?

25 A. Yes, you are.

1 Q. So when Charlie came down to relieve, what kind of things did
2 you go over other than ballasting?

3 A. I do not recall.

4 Q. So you mentioned in your statement that as you were
5 discussing or going over reliefs with the first that you had felt
6 a bump at some point.

7 A. Yes, yes.

8 Q. So did you hear anything at that time or is that just
9 something that you felt?

10 A. We -- I just felt the bump in the control room.

11 Q. Do you recall looking at the AIS monitor and seeing any time?

12 A. I do not.

13 Q. So can you explain what equipment was ordered online for that
14 outboard transit?

15 A. Can you explain that a little more, please?

16 Q. Yes. So did you have standard equipment that you would put
17 online every time that you got underway or anything the captain
18 ordered specifically for this transit?

19 A. It was normal. Just thrusters and engines as we do --

20 Q. So both main engines were online?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. And the thrusters were online?

23 A. Yes, sir.

24 Q. Does this have a stern thruster or just a bow thruster?

25 A. It has both.

- 1 Q. So bow and stern thrusters were both online at the time?
- 2 A. We -- yes, I had both breakers closed.
- 3 Q. Does that mean the diesel engine is running and they're both
- 4 ready to use?
- 5 A. They are electric.
- 6 Q. Oh, okay. So they're both ready for use then?
- 7 A. Yes, they were.
- 8 Q. And everything was functional as far as you knew?
- 9 A. To the best of my knowledge.
- 10 Q. Were there any outstanding items for maintenance or
- 11 deficiencies or conditions of class?
- 12 A. I'm not familiar with any that I know about.
- 13 Q. Would you know what I mean though? Had the Coast Guard
- 14 issued any deficiencies or was there equipment that you may have
- 15 had down, that you were working on at the time or everything was
- 16 functional as far as you knew?
- 17 A. The only thing was number two breaker was being serviced but
- 18 that would not affect our navigation at all.
- 19 Q. What was the number two breaker? What does that feed?
- 20 A. Just for the number two generator. We have four generators
- 21 but we only ever need three.
- 22 Q. So the number two wasn't online at the time?
- 23 A. No, it was not.
- 24 Q. What generators were online?
- 25 A. One, three, and four.

1 Q. Is the number two tagged out?

2 A. Yes, it is.

3 Q. Just for a moment, Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED] [REDACTED] is online
4 now, as well. So Mr. Besko, after unloading as completed, can you
5 please explain the normal routine for getting underway or adding
6 ballast, particularly from this dock?

7 A. I don't believe I had ever tied -- or gotten underway from
8 this dock before.

9 Q. So when -- you said you were there at 2330 when you had
10 arrived and you ordered ballast conditions at that point. Or
11 the --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- mates had ordered ballast conditions and you were
14 assisting in the ballasting operations?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Would it be correct if I said that as the ship offloaded, you
17 would adjust your ballast or would the ballasting take place after
18 the offloads?

19 A. It -- we do adjust as the unload progresses.

20 Q. And why is that?

21 A. We are unloading cargo to -- and to displace the cargo
22 removal, we add ballast to the tanks.

23 Q. Are you familiar at all with this dock and -- are you
24 familiar with the dock and the mooring or were you up against --
25 was the ship up against the pier when you were offloading?

- 1 A. I do not -- I was sitting down in the control room.
- 2 Q. So you are not sure if as the offload progressed, the ship
3 would heave around to come closer to the dock?
- 4 A. I am not familiar with that, no.
- 5 Q. So if you stood an eight-hour watch from approximately
6 midnight until 7, 7:30 in the morning, what was -- what would the
7 first rotation be or how many people are in that rotation?
- 8 A. There are three of us in the rotation. First works from 7:30
9 to 1530. And the third engineer works from 1530 to 2330.
- 10 Q. And do you have the same watch the whole time?
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. So in reading your statement, you mentioned the listometer
13 within the engine room. Can you explain its function and its
14 location within the engine room?
- 15 A. We have the trim lights which is the listometer displayed on
16 the ballasting console. And it just shows our current list port
17 to starboard.
- 18 Q. Do you know the tolerance of that?
- 19 A. I do not.
- 20 Q. So if you had one green light, what would that show you?
- 21 A. I am not familiar with that. We just go by one, by the
22 lights.
- 23 Q. So you're unsure of degree of list based on what you're
24 seeing on the actual display?
- 25 A. Correct.

1 Q. You mentioned at one point that you saw those lights change
2 while you were ballasting. Is that correct?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. What did it indicate at the time?

5 A. When we left the dock, we were holding a solid white which is
6 neutral.

7 Q. What would a solid white indicate?

8 A. Center or like neutral.

9 Q. And after -- so it was at center and then how long afterward
10 did you see a change in that?

11 A. I do not have a timeline but it was after we had the bump.

12 Q. How long did those -- and what did it change to? It changed
13 from white to what indication?

14 A. First, it went to green. Then to red and then back to green.

15 Q. So are there one or two green lights?

16 A. At which point?

17 Q. So you said it went from green so it was a single green
18 light?

19 A. It was a double green when I noticed it.

20 Q. So it went from a double green and then changed to a single
21 or a double red.

22 A. And then back, yes.

23 Q. So I'm just curious -- so once you had a double green, and
24 you said it switched to red, was that one red or two reds?

25 A. It was a double.

1 Q. And you were unsure of the time of that occurrence?

2 A. I do not have a timeline. No.

3 Q. Do you have any idea on how long that may have lasted?

4 A. I do not have a timeline.

5 Q. And there was nothing in your ballasting operation that would
6 have caused that changed in the list of the vessel? Is that
7 correct?

8 A. I do not believe there should have been.

9 Q. Shortly thereafter, you mentioned the vessel was
10 approximately three-quarter throttle. What RPM would that be?

11 A. Roughly in the 600s.

12 Q. And what are you basing that -- the three-quarter throttle?
13 What did you see that would indicate three-quarter throttle?

14 A. I noticed the pitch of the turbos in the control room. And
15 the tachometer.

16 Q. Where was the tachometer located?

17 A. To the -- on the screen to the upper left of the ballast
18 console.

19 Q. So it's on the main control panel?

20 A. No, it's between the ballast console and the main control
21 panel.

22 Q. At that time when you mentioned that the vessel was
23 approximately three-quarter throttle, you noticed or you stated
24 that you thought the vessel was -- I think you said 1.5 miles per
25 hour or so. Where did you get that information from?

- 1 A. That was on the AIS screen above the ballast console.
- 2 Q. And that AIS screen gives a readout in miles per hour?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. I know you don't have a timeline in front of you. Would you
5 say that that occurred shortly after the bump or at the same time
6 as the bump?
- 7 A. After but I do not have a timeline.
- 8 Q. When you're in the engine room, can you tell if the vessel is
9 turning or not?
- 10 A. No.
- 11 Q. You mentioned that -- when you saw that -- you thought the
12 vessel was at three-quarter throttle and you were making
13 approximately 1.5 mile per hour. Did you look at the location
14 while you looked at the AIS screen?
- 15 A. I do not recall.
- 16 Q. At any point, did you see the mate come down to the engine
17 room during your watch relief or your time there, the first mate?
- 18 A. No, I did not.
- 19 Q. Where is the outboard motor for the workboat kept? The
20 stowage location.
- 21 A. It is -- it's on the upper deck of the engine room.
- 22 Q. So you mentioned that you had ballast tank orders. Can you
23 explain why the ballast tank would've dropped from that 25-foot
24 level that was ordered in the number six port?
- 25 A. I -- can you elaborate on that a little bit?

1 Q. Well, so the number six -- what was the ordered ballast that
2 you were attempting to achieve by ballasting within the number
3 six?

4 A. Twenty-five feet.

5 Q. So when you had attempted to ballast that, at some point, you
6 weren't able to or did you reach that level at some point?

7 A. It was at that level at one point.

8 Q. And at what point in the process of your relief?

9 A. I do not have the ballast log in front of me.

10 Q. So when the first came to relieve you, you mentioned in your
11 statement that you noticed that that ballast tank was losing
12 water. Is that correct?

13 A. I believe said I had it there. At 25 feet.

14 Q. So did you notice at some point that it had dropped below
15 that 25-foot level?

16 A. Yes, because he brought it up.

17 Q. So the -- when you say he brought it up, who brought it up?

18 A. Charlie, the first engineer.

19 Q. So he brought it up to the 25-foot level and at some point,
20 did you notice that that ballast tank was not holding water and
21 you were losing water out of the ballast tank?

22 A. I'm sorry. I misworded that. He stated to me that it was
23 not at 25 feet. Not that he brought it up.

24 Q. So what would that indicate then? Because you had previously
25 brought it up to 25 feet. Correct?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. So when the first had stated that it wasn't at 25 feet, what
3 would that indicate?

4 A. It could be a faulty sensor or some other item.

5 Q. Or could it be damage to the tank?

6 A. At the --

7 Q. I'm sorry?

8 A. Are you asking at the time?

9 Q. Are you telling me what you're thinking is -- that that
10 you're that it could be a sensor or something else?

11 A. We -- I'm sorry, I guess I'm not understanding your question.

12 Q. I guess, my question is, within the number six port, when you
13 were doing your relief and it was -- you had brought it up to 25
14 feet and then the first assistant engineer mentioned to you that
15 it was no longer at 25 feet, at that point, what did you conclude
16 or what did you think was occurring?

17 A. I had no idea what was occurring. So we decided to just
18 check it.

19 Q. During your statement, you mentioned that the first engineer
20 call the bridge and spoke with the captain to relay that
21 information to the captain. Did you --

22 A. I know --

23 Q. Go ahead.

24 A. Charlie called the bridge. I don't know what the
25 conversation was.

1 Q. So do you --

2 A. He -- I know he asked if they scrubbed the bottom but I don't
3 know what was said on the other end.

4 Q. And that was after the bump?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. So from the time that you were relieved, where did you go
7 from there?

8 A. I went -- after he called, chief went up -- ask me to go take
9 a physical sounding of the tank just in case the sensor was
10 incorrect so I went up on deck and grabbed a sounding item and
11 sound of the tank, the ballast tank.

12 Q. And what were the results of that sounding?

13 A. The sounding tape indicated close to what the ballast screen
14 was saying.

15 Q. And that confirmed that there wasn't a fault within the
16 reading or the system?

17 A. I relayed the information to the chief, yes.

18 Q. Was anyone else there with you when you were doing soundings?

19 A. Yes, it was lightly dark out so Scott held a flashlight for
20 me, the first mate.

21 Q. Did Scott have his radio on him?

22 A. I am -- I don't know.

23 Q. Did you hear Scott notify or call anyone after the results of
24 the sounding?

25 A. I do not know.

1 Q. And when you were out on deck taking tank soundings, was
2 there any indication while you were on deck of any sort of list?

3 A. I do not recall checking.

4 Q. You didn't see any lights on deck that would indicate a less?

5 A. The -- I'm sorry. I do not recall in my memory.

6 Q. So when you were on deck with Scott and he was holding the
7 flashlight for you, did you discuss the status of the vessel and
8 potential grounding or anything like that?

9 A. I do not recall.

10 Q. So when you talked about -- from that sounding that you took
11 on the ballasting, where did you go from there?

12 A. Back to the control room -- or I'm sorry, I sounded the
13 diesel tanks and then went back to the control room.

14 Q. After you were in the control room?

15 A. Chief asked me to go and sound double bottoms in the vessel
16 so I grabbed our short sounding stick and then he went with me
17 down there and we checked the aftmost -- aft two double bottoms in
18 the vessel.

19 Q. And the aft two double bottoms, where are those located in
20 relation to tanks five, six, and seven?

21 A. They are center line of the vessel.

22 Q. So the double bottom is not continuous into the tank.

23 A. No.

24 Q. So the two and three are double bottoms on center line?

25 A. Yes, they are the aftmost two.

1 Q. So would they be adjacent to the five, six, and seven tanks
2 just inboard?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. So they share a bulkhead or a longitudinal?

5 A. I don't have the -- I don't have the blueprints.

6 Q. What were the findings when you sounded the two and three
7 double bottom?

8 A. That we -- as soon as we took the cap off and opened the
9 valve, there was air being sucked into the tank under a vacuum.
10 And there was (indiscernible) present.

11 Q. And what would the air being sucked into the tank indicate?

12 A. It was under a vacuum.

13 Q. Why would that be?

14 A. Gary mentioned that it would be because of the cold -- or the
15 cold would be causing the tank to contract or -- the air would be
16 smaller.

17 Q. But the soundings you took indicated no presence of water?

18 A. There was none. No.

19 Q. And after sounding the double bottoms, what did you do next?

20 A. We went back to the control room and I stood by for further
21 instructions. Then we -- then I went up to breakfast to get a
22 plate and came back down and waited for instructions again.

23 Q. Approximately what time was that?

24 A. I don't have a timeline.

25 Q. What time is breakfast in the morning? Is it the same time

- 1 always or --
- 2 A. Yes, 7 to 8.
- 3 Q. So were you late for breakfast or you --
- 4 A. I was.
- 5 Q. -- were on time and it -- oh, you were late.
- 6 A. The cook had made me a plate.
- 7 Q. So it was sometime after 8. Can you assume that?
- 8 A. I would say it was after breakfast hours. Yes.
- 9 Q. So what did you do after breakfast then?
- 10 A. The chief instruct that we needed to take the mushroom caps
11 off of the vents. So I grabbed tools. Went out there and we took
12 off the safety guards and then were able to get the -- unscrew the
13 caps and shined a flashlight down just to see if we could see
14 anything.
- 15 Q. Could you see anything when you shined the flashlight?
- 16 A. Nothing that we could tell. No. Nothing --
- 17 Q. Where were the vents --
- 18 A. -- there are on the four and aft-end of the tank outboard of
19 the vessel, outboard side.
- 20 Q. Are those on the main deck, the spar deck?
- 21 A. Yes, they are.
- 22 Q. And I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off. Did you say
23 that you saw something or didn't see anything?
- 24 A. No, nothing that we could tell from looking down there.
- 25 Q. Could you see the bottom?

1 A. No, just water.

2 Q. And was there an vacuum, or pressure, or anything like that?

3 A. Not that I recall.

4 Q. So prior to the incident, did you feel rested?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And did you complete chemical tests after the incident?

7 A. I don't understand what you mean.

8 Q. Did you do a drug test or an alcohol test after the incident?

9 A. I did not.

10 Q. So you mentioned feeling a single bump. At any other time,
11 did you feel a vibration or hear anything, or was it just that
12 single bump?

13 A. Just the single bump.

14 MR. [REDACTED] Mr. Besko, like I said earlier, I really
15 appreciate your time. I'm going to -- that'll be it for me. I'll
16 pass it over to NTSB if they have any questions.

17 BY MR. MUISE:

18 Q. Good afternoon, Mr. Besko, again. I just have a few follow-
19 up questions for you. This ballast system, is it -- where do you
20 run the ballast system? From the engine control room or on deck
21 or part of the control room?

22 A. The engine control room.

23 Q. Is it all manual valves or is it hydraulic actuators, or how
24 does the system work?

25 A. The ballast -- individual ballast tank valves are hydraulic

1 but they're electrically controlled from the engine control room.
2 And the engine room valves are electric controlled but controlled
3 from the control room, as well. Same console.

4 Q. Are the valves themselves in this -- I'm looking at one of
5 the drawings. Are they in the tunnel or are they in the tanks?

6 A. They are in the tunnel.

7 Q. So you wouldn't know if a valve was leaking by or something
8 that would account for the water? If you were losing water from
9 there, that would be obvious to you.

10 A. No, there's piping. It's all piped. You can see the valve
11 but not the piping.

12 Q. How about the sensors? Are they pressure sensors or are they
13 on a radar based or how do they work?

14 A. They are king-gage sensors which work based on pressure, air
15 pressure relay. I'm not familiar with the system completely.

16 Q. Can you ballast from the cargo control room or is there a
17 cargo control room?

18 A. No, there is not.

19 Q. Did you happen to open up any of the C-strainers after this
20 and see if there's anything in there, any rocks or mud or --

21 A. No.

22 Q. No, there wasn't anything in there or no, you guys didn't get
23 a chance to --

24 A. No, we did not.

25 (Crosstalk)

- 1 A. We did not look in there.
- 2 Q. The watch -- so you stand an eight-hour watch. Does anybody
3 else get up for getting underway or leaving port?
- 4 A. The chief engineer.
- 5 Q. How about your management procedures? Are they -- where do
6 you go to get -- if you want to look up a procedure? How do you
7 find that? The company's procedures.
- 8 A. In the -- I believe they're in the SMS manual that's
9 available to us.
- 10 Q. It's a hard copy manual sitting somewhere?
- 11 A. No, it's digital.
- 12 Q. That's in the -- where would you go to look at that?
- 13 A. I find it on the ship's computer, on the engine room
14 computer. I'm sorry.
- 15 Q. How about maintenance procedures? Is there a separate
16 program for that?
- 17 A. Yes. Via the NS-5 and our maintenance program onboard.
- 18 Q. The ABS NS-5. Okay, thanks. Then I just got a couple of
19 fill-in-the blank questions about -- what kind of engines do you
20 have?
- 21 A. EMD engines.
- 22 Q. How about the props, are they control pitch or fixed or --
- 23 A. Control pitch.
- 24 Q. And the thrusters, same thing?
- 25 A. Yes.

1 MR. MUISE: Thank you, sir. That's all I have. I'll pass it
2 back to you, [REDACTED]

3 MR. [REDACTED] Are there any other questions?

4 MR. SPOTTS: I have some when it's my turn. But I can wait.

5 MR. ZWICKER: I also have a couple lines of -- basically one
6 line of questioning but Mr. Spotts, if you want to go first,
7 that's fine.

8 MR. SPOTTS: No, you go first, Adam. It's your guy.

9 BY MR. ZWICKER:

10 Q. Mr. Besko, this is Adam Zwicker. Like I said, I'm retained
11 outside counsel for Grand River. I just have a couple of --
12 basically maybe two lines of follow-up questioning. The first
13 kind of question I have is from the time you guys felt the bump
14 until you, your involvement with sounding the tanks, removing all
15 these vents, everything to try and figure out what was going on
16 with the vessel, how much time elapsed from when you first felt
17 the bump until you were done with your evaluation or at least your
18 involvement in the evaluation of the vessel?

19 A. I do not have a timeline.

20 Q. Was it more than an hour or so?

21 A. I do not recall. I don't carry a watch.

22 Q. And who all else was involved in kind of this evaluation
23 after the bump? I've got yourself, the mate Scott Still (ph.).
24 I've got him listed. Who else helped in kind of evaluating what
25 was going on?

1 A. The chief engineer. And Charlie Parsons, the first engineer.

2 Q. A little while earlier, Mr. ██████████ asked you some
3 questions about what in your mind was causing number six port to
4 drop from 25 feet to whatever level it was at when you noticed?
5 Are there are a number of conditions that can cause the level in a
6 ballast tank to fluctuate in a manner that is unintended?

7 A. There -- I mean, there could be a faulty valve but other than
8 that, there shouldn't be any fluctuations.

9 Q. Sure. Also, if there's a hole in the ballast tank, would
10 that cause it to change levels in a way that's unintended?

11 A. I believe it could.

12 Q. Yeah. I guess the point I'm trying to get at is, it's not
13 necessarily only a hole in a ballast tank that could cause it to
14 change levels in a way that you don't intend. Is that fair?

15 A. Yes, that is fair.

16 Q. We listed two so far. A hole and then a faulty valve. As we
17 sit here today, I know I'm kind of putting you on the spot -- can
18 you think of any other things that might cause a ballast tank to
19 fluctuate in a way that is unintended?

20 A. Besides the king-gage displaying incorrectly on the screen,
21 that's it.

22 Q. Now, I think Mr. ██████████ asked you if you had an idea of
23 what was going on immediately after you felt the bump. Putting
24 yourself back in your shoes right after you felt the bump and you
25 notice the tank level changing, did you have, in your mind, a

1 clear idea of what was causing the tank level to change at that
2 point?

3 A. I do not recall that I did, no.

4 Q. Is that part of the reason why you guys were going through
5 this evaluation process of sounding the tanks, checking the double
6 bottoms, and everything else?

7 A. Yes, I was doing as instructed by the chief unchecking that
8 stuff.

9 Q. And was it your understanding that the reason why you were
10 ordered to kind of do that stuff is to try and figure out what was
11 going on?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And it was also your understanding that part -- not only was
14 it to figure out what was going on but also maybe to ensure the
15 vessel was secure or safe or not in any danger or posing a danger
16 to others around you?

17 A. I was just doing as instructed by the chief.

18 MR. ZWICKER: I'll pass the witness.

19 MR. SPOTTS: May I go ahead, Mr. [REDACTED] This is
20 Mr. Spotts.

21 MR. [REDACTED] Yes, sir. Go ahead.

22 BY MR. SPOTTS:

23 Q. Good morning -- well, I guess it's afternoon. Afternoon,
24 Mr. Besko. I'm David Spotts. I represent Captain Layton and I
25 have very few questions and I hope I'm not repeating anything.

1 After you departed the dock, do you remember calling the
2 pilothouse and discussing the ballasting situation with the
3 captain?

4 A. I do not, not.

5 Q. At what stage do you turn the (indiscernible) lights off on
6 deck?

7 A. After we are done ballasting.

8 Q. And is that close to the departure time?

9 A. We were currently still ballasting at the time or after we
10 departed.

11 Q. And you leave them on deck until what time?

12 A. Until we shut them off with -- in the control room.

13 Q. And why do you shut them off?

14 A. To not burn up the contacts in the listometer device.

15 Q. But isn't one of the reasons you shut them off on deck is
16 because as the vessel maneuvers, those lights would be going off
17 all the time?

18 A. We can shut them off to deck and leave them on in the control
19 room. There is a switch for that.

20 Q. Right. Isn't that what -- and isn't that something that you
21 do on your watch? Turn them off on deck?

22 MR. [REDACTED] Mr. Spotts, we're making assumptions here.
23 I think he's stated already that he didn't see the list lights on
24 deck.

25 BY MR. SPOTTS:

1 Q. No, I -- the questions I'm asking you about when they were
2 turned on and off. Not about whether he saw anything or not. And
3 I think the people that turned the list lights off and on are the
4 engineers on watch. That's all I'm trying to establish.

5 A. Yes, typically, we --

6 Q. You understand, Mr. Besko?

7 A. Yes, typically, we turn them off after we are done with
8 ballast operations.

9 Q. Do you have any information as to the use of those lights
10 while the vessel is underway?

11 A. Please elaborate.

12 Q. Sure. When the vessel is underway, she's rolling, pitching,
13 she's turning, she's heeling. Those lights would be going off
14 quite regularly underway. Correct?

15 A. As an open (indiscernible) or -- I guess --

16 Q. Every time she's turning -- when she's turning.

17 A. I'm not familiar because we normally don't have them on
18 except for when we're ballast operations.

19 Q. Well, thank you. Besides a grounding, what affects the speed
20 of a vessel?

21 A. Wind, current conditions I would say. Ice.

22 Q. Ice? Use of the thrusters?

23 A. I'm not familiar on that subject. No.

24 Q. Turns. Do turns affect the speed of the vessel?

25 A. I have never navigated. I've only -- never navigated one of

1 those vessels through a turn.

2 MR. SPOTTS: Those are the only questions I had. Thank you
3 so much. Thank you for participating.

4 MR. [REDACTED] Mr. Besko, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Just one
5 final question. So when you went up on deck or at any point
6 during that outboard transit after you felt the bump, you said you
7 were doing numerous things to try to locate what the issue was.
8 At any point did you stop dead in the water for assessment or was
9 at any point the vessel not moving?

10 MR. BESKO: I don't recall anything about that.

11 MR. [REDACTED] Well, when you were on deck, could you tell
12 if the vessel was still moving or if it was stationary?

13 MR. BESKO: I honestly was not paying attention. I was
14 paying attention to sounding and such.

15 MR. [REDACTED] Mr. Besko, thank you for your time. I
16 appreciate it. Thank you, everyone for joining

17 MR. MUISE: [REDACTED] I want --

18 MR. [REDACTED] Yeah.

19 MR. MUISE: I have one just clarifying question if I might.
20 The listometer, the different color lights single red -- single
21 green, double green, what degree of list do each one of those
22 represent?

23 MR. BESKO: I am unfamiliar with what they represent.

24 MR. MUISE: Thank you. Go ahead, [REDACTED] Sorry.

25 MR. [REDACTED] No, that's fine. So anyone have any

1 further questions?

2 MR. ZWICKER: I do not.

3 MR. [REDACTED] Mr. Spotts?

4 MR. SPOTTS: I do not. No, I'm finished. Thank you very
5 much.

6 MR. [REDACTED] Yep, thank you. Thank you all for your
7 time. Mr. Besko, thank you so much for joining us today and I
8 hope you all have a great afternoon.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you, everyone.

10 (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: GROUNDING OF BULK SHIP *AMERICAN
MARINER* IN SAULT STE MARIE,
ONTARIO, CANADA ON JANUARY 7, 2023
Interview of Michael Besko


ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23FM013

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: February 6, 2023

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.





Katie Leach
Transcriber



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
 OFFICE OF MARINE SAFETY
 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20594

2a/e M. Besko

Interview Transcript

Grounding of the M/V American Mariner
 DCA23FM013

Page/ Line	Original	Correction	NTSB Disposition of Party Comment
8-14	- -	Propulsion	Concur
8-21	Charlie Porterson	Charlie Parson	Concur
9-13	- -	Leave it	Concur
12-7	- -	Up	Noted although the transcript is correct
12-12	Yes	I believe this to be out of order from my response	Disagree. Two individuals were talking simultaneously. The transcript is accurate.
21-10	Indiscernible	No Water	Concur
24-19	c-strainers		sea strainers
29-5	indiscernible		listometer
30-15	indiscernible		lake