

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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ROBERT CENAC AND *MR. DAWG* COLLIDE
WITH HOUMA TWIN SPAN BRIDGE, IN
HOUMA, LOUISIANA ON MARCH 6, 2022

*
* Accident No.: DCA22FM012
*
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Interview of: *JOEL VINCE*, Mate, *Robert Cenac*
Caillou Island Towing

United States Coast Guard
Marine Safety Unit
Houma, Louisiana

Thursday,
March 17, 2022

APPEARANCES:

MARCEL L. MUISE, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

DEREK JOHNSTON, Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit
Houma, Louisiana

CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Investigating Officer
United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit
Houma, Louisiana

MILES THOMAS
(On behalf of Mr. Vince)

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:57 p.m. CDT)

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2
3 LT [REDACTED] This is LT [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with Marine Safety Unit
4 Houma investigations. The date is March 17, 2022. We are
5 currently located at Marine Safety Unit Houma in Louisiana. The
6 time is 0157.

7 The purpose for this recording is for the investigation into
8 the bridge allusion by the crane barge *Mr. Dawg*, which was in tow
9 by the towing vessel *Robert Cenac* on March 6, 2022. This
10 interview will be on -- please state your name.

11 MR. VINCE: Joel Vince.

12 LT [REDACTED] And what was your position on board?

13 MR. VINCE: Mate.

14 LT [REDACTED] Thank you. And if we could just go around the room
15 and just state who is in the room, please.

16 MR. MUISE: This is Marcel Muise, accident investigator with
17 the NTSB.

18 MR. JOHNSTON: Derek Johnston, human performance
19 investigator, NTSB.

20 CWO [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] U.S. Coast Guard investigating
21 officer, Houma.

22 MR. THOMAS: Miles Thomas. I represent Mr. Vince.

23 LT [REDACTED] All right. And again, with your permission, I'd
24 like to record this interview.

25 MR. VINCE: Yes.

1 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Thank you.

2 INTERVIEW OF JOEL VINCE

3 BY LT [REDACTED]

4 Q. So, if you could, please, Joel, just kind of give me a little
5 bit of information about yourself, background into marine
6 industry, licenses that you currently hold.

7 A. I grew up in the swamps and on the water, and feel
8 comfortable on the water. And that's what led me to do what I'm
9 doing now. I started off as a deckhand, worked my way up from
10 there. Got my apprenticeship, did my sea time with that, also
11 learning. And was able to have a few good captains, that showed
12 me the ropes. And, and loved it, and continued on and got my
13 mate's license. And now I'm -- I've actually -- I qualify now to
14 finally get my master's. So, I'll be doing that soon. I can send
15 that off today, if, if I wanted to. But, that's my plan, and --
16 yeah, just I love the water and that's what brought me here.

17 Q. All right.

18 A. So --

19 Q. Has all your experience been in this area? Did you grow up
20 in these waters around here?

21 A. In -- around Pigeon -- I'm from Baton Rouge. But, I grew up
22 hunting and fishing in the swamps of where they call Pigeon and
23 Little Pigeon, and all that. Which is kind of north of Pierre
24 Part area.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I just -- I'm all about the woods and the water. So,
2 that's, that's where I went towards, you know.

3 Q. Started --

4 A. So, but, no, before this I used to work for a family-owned
5 septic tank accompany. I installed septic tanks for eight to nine
6 years, rented out portalets, and ran that business for a long
7 period of time, until decided to go my own way, and that's when I
8 started working here. And I've been with this company ever since,
9 for the last six years.

10 Q. So, is this the only company that you've worked for --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- in the marine industry?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. And you said six years?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. And what position did you start with?

17 A. As a deckhand.

18 Q. As a deckhand. Okay.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. And how long were you a deckhand on board?

21 A. Two years.

22 Q. Okay. With your time on board, are you pretty familiar with
23 transiting these waters around here? Like, what, what are some
24 areas that you would go to? Just so I have a --

25 A. Oh, I mean, I'm -- I feel comfortable from Florida to -- I

1 mean, Corpus Christi, all the way up to Memphis. I feel
2 comfortable on all those waters. I've been around that just --
3 like I said, with hunting we go all the way to Arkansas. I've got
4 a place just south of Memphis, that, I mean, I know all -- I know
5 the river, and just from looking at the maps all day, from what I
6 do, just outdoors, I -- and from being in those waters on the
7 tugboat, as well. I mean, I feel comfortable on all those waters.
8 So --

9 Q. Okay. Have you ever been involved or witnessed a marine
10 casualty on board?

11 A. No.

12 Q. No? Okay. Can you talk to me a little bit about the type of
13 marine training that you've completed?

14 A. Just with my sea time as a deckhand, and then another 365
15 days having my apprentice mate's. And then after having my
16 mate's, I've had -- I've held my license for well over 365 days.
17 It's probably in about the 500 to 600-day range. And, yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I've -- and I, I moved through the ranks pretty quickly, is
20 the way I look at it. But I deserved what I -- where I'm at, I
21 feel like that. I've learned every aspect of everything that I --
22 and there's always room to learn more, but I've -- I feel that I'm
23 deserving of where I'm at.

24 Q. Okay. And you said you've worked with the company for six
25 years. Has it always been on board the *Robert Cenac*, or has it

1 been on board other vessels?

2 A. No, I've, I've been on every vessel with the company.

3 Q. Name some for me.

4 A. The *Alfred*, the *Wilton*, the *Al*, the, the *Robert*. They got
5 the *Billy Cenac*. I've driven that one. I've been on, I want to
6 say, all of them, with this whole company. The *Virgie*, the --
7 yeah, just all of them.

8 Q. Okay. And can you kind of talk to me about what type of
9 schedule you work on board?

10 A. Lately, it's been a 14 and 7 schedule. But I -- for years, I
11 did 20 and 10. I did that for four or five years.

12 Q. So, when you say 14 and 7, what exactly do you mean by that?

13 A. Fourteen days working, seven days off.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And then again.

16 Q. And for your off time, is it around here locally or where
17 your -- like, how does --

18 A. I live in Thibodaux, which is close, right next to Houma.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And that's usually where I'm at.

21 Q. Okay. Where did you meet the *Robert Cenac* for the voyage?

22 A. On that particular time, I want to say we were still -- we
23 were behind the office, whenever I got on. And we stayed and did
24 some little knickknack jobs around the office, before we got
25 called to that last job.

1 Q. Okay. And do you have -- when you're not actively on a job,
2 do you have any type of routine or schedule that you follow?

3 A. When I'm off?

4 Q. I guess if you're on, on board.

5 A. Oh, on -- when I'm on board?

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. My routine is just I maintain the engine room. And just
8 check everything around the boat, and, and drive the boat.

9 Q. Okay. And as the mate on board, who, who do you answer to?

10 A. The captain.

11 Q. The captain. Okay. Can you talk to me about what type of
12 vessels you have experience towing?

13 A. I mean, I've done model bows, push boats. I mean, the bigger
14 boats that I've done, mainly around 1,800 horsepower. I mean,
15 that's just your average towboat, I would --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- look at it like.

18 Q. And what about the, the barges? The type of barges?

19 A. Barges?

20 Q. Uh-huh.

21 A. I've pushed four-packs, with 30s, which are the bigger
22 barges. I've pushed a lot of 30s, and I've also pushed a lot of
23 odd job barges. I mean, construction barges to tow-lining pipe,
24 to -- I've towed a lot. I've pushed a lot. Just all different
25 types of tows.

1 Q. Okay. Have you ever towed a crane barge before?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. About the same size as the *Mr. Dawg*, or bigger?

4 A. Both smaller and bigger --

5 Q. Smaller?

6 A. -- same size of --

7 Q. Was this your first time actually working with the *Mr. Dawg*?

8 A. Yes.

9 LT [REDACTED] Okay. Does anyone have any questions at this time?

10 Okay.

11 BY LT [REDACTED]

12 Q. And next we'll move on to the vessel background, and
13 navigation features that may be on board the vessel. Did you know
14 the height of the crane on board the *Mr. Dawg*?

15 A. I was led to believe that it was 60 foot, based off of when I
16 got into the wheelhouse and we do an overall, like -- basically
17 like a meeting, with me and the -- between me and the captain.
18 And I do that -- we do that every time getting into the
19 wheelhouse, like just kind of saying maybe if the tow is pulling
20 to the right a little, or if we've got a wind from whatever
21 direction, and just -- but I was under the influence that it was
22 60 foot, which give -- gave us every bit of 12 foot. And I just
23 -- I never questioned it once being told that from the captain.
24 And just being relayed that information.

25 Q. Okay. So, if you don't mind kind taking us back to March

1 6th. So, the vessel got underway to go do this job, to go pick up
2 the *Mr. Dawg* and the deck barge. Can you kind of -- from here
3 I'll let you talk and kind of walk us through the events that
4 transpired, so that we have a better idea of what happened.

5 A. I was off watch. I was in bed. I did hear the orders come
6 through the phone. It was on speakerphone, which was Al and the
7 captain talking. And he was told that every -- they told the
8 captain, yeah, that barge is ready to be picked up and that you
9 all can start heading that way to go pick that barge up.

10 Well, we had been sitting behind the office doing 12-hour
11 shifts. And so, I, I had been up most of the day. And so anyway,
12 as soon as he got that call I, I knew I needed to get some sleep,
13 to do what I have to -- to drive the boat, because we were going
14 to continue on east. So, I went and got a good amount of sleep.
15 And I woke up at around 11:20, somewhere around that. And went
16 downstairs, got me a little something to eat, something to drink,
17 and just kind of get up and went to the wheelhouse around 11:40.
18 And by that point, we were already eastbound, with the tow, and a
19 mile from the bridge. And when I assumed watch, I could almost
20 see the bridge. And I just assumed watch, and, I mean, I got with
21 the captain, talked to her, everything, and assumed watch.

22 Q. So, what type of things do you usually discuss when you're
23 doing a watch relief or a watch handover?

24 A. Just anything. Anything that -- which way the wind is going.
25 What, what it's been like pushing the tow -- I mean, if it's

1 pulling to the left or the right, what it's doing. Just anything
2 and everything. We discuss anything.

3 Q. So, what type of things did you discuss that night? And how
4 long was your watch relief?

5 A. My relief?

6 Q. Like, how long did it -- were those discussions that you had
7 with the master before you took over --

8 A. We talked for a good 15 minutes, just on, like, what, what we
9 were doing, where we were going. Because he had to tell me where
10 we were going, what mile marker it will -- the Bayou Perot was at,
11 which will be our turning point to start heading to Loop.

12 Q. Uh-huh.

13 A. And just overall voyage plan.

14 Q. So, who typically fills out the voyage plan on board?

15 A. Whoever is that person picking that barge up, and they're
16 supposed to make a full voyage plan.

17 Q. Okay. Did you at any point look at that voyage plan for the
18 vessel?

19 A. No. He did tell me he filled it out, and that it was
20 complete. And I went off of what the captain had just told me.

21 Q. Okay. Is there any company policies that state that you need
22 to review the voyage plan prior to --

23 A. Not that I know of. No.

24 Q. Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about the *Robert*
25 *Cenac*? Is it -- does it have two wheels?

- 1 A. It's got two propellers.
- 2 Q. Okay. Do you know if they're fixed?
- 3 A. What do you mean by fixed?
- 4 Q. Are they controllable pitch, or are they fixed?
- 5 A. Yeah, they're fixed. They're not zero turn.
- 6 Q. Okay. Does it have two engines?
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. Okay. And do you know the horsepower and the maker?
- 9 A. I remember them being Cummins, if I'm -- I'm pretty sure they
10 were Cummins.
- 11 Q. Okay.
- 12 A. But, that's the first time I had -- or, the second time I had
13 worked on that *Robert*. I think the horsepower was -- I, I, I
14 couldn't -- I don't want to tell you the wrong amount.
- 15 Q. If you don't know, that's okay.
- 16 A. I don't, I don't remember. Yeah.
- 17 Q. That's fine. How do you think the tug handled overall?
- 18 A. Oh, it's a good boat.
- 19 Q. It's a good boat?
- 20 A. Yeah. I mean, you could get it to do what you want it to.
21 You can walk it. You can -- I guess the only thing I would -- it
22 doesn't have a lot of ass-end in the water.
- 23 Q. Uh-huh.
- 24 A. But other than that, it's a, it's a good boat.
- 25 Q. Okay. Has it had any issues recently with regards to any

1 equipment being broken, that has needed to be addressed?

2 A. No.

3 Q. No? Okay. Does the tugboat have radar?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. How many radars are there?

6 A. There's two.

7 Q. Two?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And when you get on watch, can you kind of walk me through
10 your mental process? I know you said that you have a discussion
11 with the master to do a handover. But, what are some things that
12 you identified that evening to check prior to going on watch?

13 A. Well, my first thing is I get in there and just adjust to
14 what's going on. I do fill out my assume watch. But, I can't
15 send it off until after 12, so I, I just -- I close the computer
16 until I get to a safer or -- or past 12:00. At that time, it was
17 -- I needed to be in a better spot to finish filling it out. But,
18 I get up there. I talk with the captain, look at all my
19 electronics, see where we're at. I look on the computer and --
20 while he's still driving, I, I look and see where we're going,
21 where we're at. And when I feel comfortable, I take the sticks.

22 Q. Okay. What type of electronics are you looking at in your
23 watch? I haven't been on board the *Robert Cenac*, so I'm just --

24 A. Just my radar, and seeing what's the depth of them, if
25 they're showing at a quarter of a mile or further. A lot of times

1 with two we'll have one a little closer than the other. Also look
2 at my Rose Point, and just get a good where about of where I'm at.

3 Q. Okay. So, the vessel -- does the vessel have an electronic
4 charting system on board?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. And where, where is that through?

7 A. That's off of my foreside right here. It's on a -- it's just
8 a computer, and it's our Rose Point. And it just shows
9 everything.

10 Q. Okay. Do you -- how do chart updates get completed?

11 A. What do you mean?

12 Q. Is it through your electronic charting system? Is it a paper
13 chart?

14 A. Yeah, it's -- it automatically updates.

15 Q. Okay. So -- because I don't -- can you kind of explain to me
16 how that update occurs? Does it just automatically --

17 A. Just on it --

18 Q. -- downloads it?

19 A. -- yeah, just on its own. I think something will just pop --
20 I have seen -- I don't know this particular -- I'm sure it's just
21 like the ones that I've -- on the other boats, with this company.
22 But I've seen it pop up and just ask if you want to update. And
23 you just update it.

24 Q. Okay. Do you know how to verify whether or not it's got the
25 latest update?

- 1 A. No.
- 2 Q. Okay. Do you remember what range the radar was set at that
3 evening?
- 4 A. I think one was a quarter of a mile, and one was half a mile.
- 5 Q. Do you use paper charts as well?
- 6 A. I mean, I don't. But I, I could, if need be.
- 7 Q. Okay. Who, who on board does the updates to the paper
8 charts?
- 9 A. The captain.
- 10 Q. The captain does?
- 11 A. Yes.
- 12 Q. Okay. Did the vessel have VHF radios on board?
- 13 A. Yes.
- 14 Q. Okay. Do you know what channels you had them set on?
- 15 A. Yes. We had it -- one on 13 and I want to say 23, as well,
16 for communication with the hands on the -- on board.
- 17 Q. Okay.
- 18 A. And for -- if we're not on the deckhands channel, then we'll
19 be on 16 and 13.
- 20 Q. Okay. And were you involved at all with connecting the tug
21 to the barge?
- 22 A. No.
- 23 Q. Okay. Where were you at the time?
- 24 A. I was sleeping.
- 25 Q. Sleeping? Okay.

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. And what information do you know about the Houma Twin-Span
3 bridge?

4 A. Just the location of the bridge and the height. I do know
5 it's 72.8 or .9.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. And I've just always known that, from just, just --

8 Q. Going through it?

9 A. -- going through it, and -- so many times, so --

10 Q. So, let's say I'm -- you know, I'm somebody new on board,
11 and, you know, I'm learning how to -- I'm trying to work on my
12 master's license. What would I -- what would you direct me to on
13 board to look at, if I wasn't sure about the height of a bridge in
14 an area that I'm going to be transiting through?

15 A. My charts on Rose Point. There's also a bridge -- there's a
16 book with all the bridges in it. If you want to get -- and a lot
17 of times that's an actual picture of the bridge, or it's a -- like
18 an architectural drawing of the bridge. And I'm not about getting
19 on your phone, but if that's what it comes down to to look and see
20 what you need to see about that bridge, then, yeah, I would do
21 that -- I would say that too.

22 Q. Okay. That evening, was there any concern that you had about
23 transiting with that crane barge through that area?

24 A. No.

25 LT [REDACTED] Okay. All right. I think that concludes this

1 section, if there's any questions that you guys have.

2 BY MR. MUISE:

3 Q. I do want to clarify. You said your job title is mate? Some
4 tugboats use the term --

5 A. Pilot.

6 Q. -- pilot. So --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- what's the right -- what's the correct --

9 A. Mate pilot. I mean, it's a lot of -- we'll say mate pilot.

10 Q. Okay. At some companies the mate is a senior deckhand.

11 That's why I wanted to be sure I'm getting that right.

12 A. Oh, no. Okay.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah. Well, no, I'm -- well, you can say pilot then. But
15 I've always -- the wording that I've always seen and used it mate
16 pilot.

17 Q. Is mate. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. All right. Appreciate that. The book you said with bridges,
20 can you tell me a little bit more about that?

21 A. We -- I actually know exactly -- on this particular boat,
22 there is an overhang of all different books from just what mile
23 marker -- you could look at all different turns, and that book
24 just has all, all the bridges from -- I want to say just the whole
25 -- it is, it is the whole, the whole intracoastal. It shows all

- 1 the bridges right there.
- 2 Q. Is that an Army Corps publication, or somebody else's?
- 3 A. I think Kirby sent us that book.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. And we've always had it.
- 6 Q. I, I know the Army Corps does do one for the Mississippi, but
- 7 I, I don't know about the --
- 8 A. Okay. It --
- 9 Q. -- intracoastal, though.
- 10 A. I want to say theirs -- and I'm -- I might have that book
- 11 too, but I want to say that was a Kirby book that, that I had
- 12 seen, with the bridges.
- 13 Q. Okay.
- 14 A. It might be based off the same --
- 15 Q. Maybe.
- 16 A. -- thing. I don't know.
- 17 Q. The barges -- the tow itself, do you remember the dimensions
- 18 of the, of the barges?
- 19 A. I, I don't remember the dimensions. I want to say it was 50
- 20 by -- the crane barge, I think, was like a hundred and --
- 21 Q. If you don't know, that's fine.
- 22 A. I, I don't -- yeah, I don't want to say --
- 23 Q. That's, that's okay.
- 24 A. -- the wrong number. But, it --
- 25 Q. How about --

1 A. I knew it at the time of -- because we had discussed --

2 Q. Was --

3 A. -- the barge.

4 Q. -- anything obstructing your visibility from the bridge? Was
5 the crane in the way, the spuds in the way? From your -- from
6 where you're standing driving.

7 A. The crane was in my line of vision, but not enough to deter
8 -- it wasn't -- I mean, I could still see, I'd say, 80 percent of
9 what was going on.

10 Q. Could you see the green line on the bridge?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. How about, is the crane blocking the radar at all?

13 A. No.

14 Q. Interfering with your radar system?

15 A. No. Not at all.

16 MR. MUISE: Okay. That's all I have for you. Thank you.

17 BY MR. JOHNSTON:

18 Q. All right. I just wanted to ask you a few more questions
19 about the watch schedule and the rotation. So, you worked the --
20 what is the watch rotation that you usually work? Or at that
21 time.

22 A. At -- before that, we were doing a 12 and 12, because we had
23 no jobs -- up and coming jobs. We had actually had had
24 information that we were leaving for a job the following day. So,
25 we continued the 12 and 12 schedule. But, as soon as -- I was

1 actually already in bed, so I could wake up early the following
2 morning. And so, when they called at -- I want to say it was -- I
3 don't -- I want to say a little after eight or nine, I'm not, not
4 sure of the exact hour --

5 Q. At night?

6 A. It was, it was -- yeah.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. I was already in bed, and I just continued to get my sleep.
9 And then after that it starts a six and six rotation. Six hours
10 on, six hours off.

11 Q. Once you got the call?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. So, when you -- when it -- you're performing a job, it moves
14 to six on, six off? Is --

15 A. I mean, you can -- a captain can -- we can decide --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- 12-hour watches. But, 12 hours at the wheel is a long
18 time --

19 Q. I know, yeah.

20 A. -- behind, behind the wheel. So, we -- once we started our
21 job, it was -- we -- it was six and six.

22 Q. And the captain said, hey, we're going to go six and six
23 once, once we take it.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. So, the, the 24 hours before, were -- you were

1 maintaining the 12-hour, 12, 12 on, 12 off.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. When you weren't on the job?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. And you all were on board the boat at the, at the office.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Kind of waiting for a job to come in.

8 A. Yeah. Well, we knew of a job that was coming the, the
9 following day.

10 Q. Yeah. Okay. When you did the watch changeover brief with
11 the captain --

12 A. Uh-huh.

13 Q. -- did, did he -- what did he say with respect to the crane
14 barge? Did he give you any information on it, the air draft or
15 anything?

16 A. We discussed it. Based off of what we had, we were under the
17 impression that the spuds were 50 foot, if I remember right. And
18 then he actually went and looked. He had told me that he went and
19 got up on top of the, the vessel to just double check everything,
20 and he, he come up with this probably -- it was a little bit
21 higher than the, the spuds.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. He said it's around 60, around 60 foot. He said it's
24 probably 60 foot. And so, I went with that.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. I was told that. And didn't think nothing else. And I knew
2 the bridge was 72, and that's plenty. That's --

3 Q. Right.

4 A. -- plenty of clearance. So, I just never questioned after
5 that. And kind of given the luck of the draw, I guess, assuming
6 watch when I did, and that's --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. -- that's when it happened.

9 Q. Did, did the boom look -- you said you've towed push barges
10 with a crane on it before. Did the boom look more extended?
11 Like, you know, it's visibility 4. But, did you say, well, you
12 know --

13 A. It was such a big crane I didn't think much of it. Because
14 it was so big, like, yeah, it looked --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- I guess high -- not high, but it looked more at an angle,
17 maybe, of -- but it was just such a big crane that I didn't think
18 nothing of it. It just looked big.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. It was a big -- it was one of --

21 Q. Right.

22 A. -- the bigger cranes I've, I've pushed.

23 Q. Yeah. Have you ever had to calculate the air draft? You
24 know, you get, you get going under a bridge that you don't know
25 off the top of your head.

1 A. If, if I have -- if it's that -- if it's questionable, I open
2 the bridge. I don't -- if I got to question it a little bit -- I
3 mean, based off of the specs on the boat, you should already --

4 Q. Right.

5 A. -- know what -- where you're at to the bridge.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. But if -- I mean, I've had times where they said 3 foot, 4
8 foot clearance, but I'm not taking that chance.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. So, I'll -- I've -- I get them to lift the bridge.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. If it's 5 foot or less, I'll, I'll get them to clear the --
13 open any bridge.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. So there's not taking that much of a chance.

16 Q. Right. Yeah.

17 A. Yeah.

18 MR. JOHNSTON: Thank you. Thank you. That's all I've got.

19 BY CWO [REDACTED]

20 Q. During this voyage, from after you picked up the crane until
21 the allusion, were there any other bridges in that route? That
22 you had to go under.

23 A. Not under, no. I want to say they came through the Houma
24 navigational bridge, which is just south of Houma nav. And -- but
25 no, not -- they didn't have to go under any bridge before that.

1 Q. Was that one -- they had that one opened up?

2 A. It's a swing, swing bridge.

3 Q. What's the height on that one? Do you know offhand?

4 A. The swing bridge?

5 Q. Oh, wait, the swing bridge.

6 A. Yeah, yeah.

7 Q. Okay. Yeah.

8 A. So, yeah, that was the first bridge to go under, is the one
9 we -- the Houma nav.

10 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. That's all I've got offhand.

11 BY LT [REDACTED]

12 Q. So, as far as transiting through the bridges, is there -- is
13 it common practice for you guys to send someone out to go and --

14 A. It depends on -- it could be, maybe, a little bit of fog or
15 something and you -- if, if any question -- if you have any
16 questions on your tow or -- and you think you might want that
17 extra person out there, yeah. I mean, I'd, I'd send somebody out
18 there on certain -- if I -- even if it was, maybe, the wind was
19 affecting me, and I know that I needed to get to that bridge, and
20 then straighten out to get through it. Because I might come at it
21 at an angle --

22 Q. Uh-huh.

23 A. -- and then -- so, yeah, sometimes -- I'd say it's standard
24 practice, to send somebody out there.

25 Q. Uh-huh.

1 A. We sent our deckhand out. Because once you cable in and
2 you've taken off and you move around a little bit, it's, it's good
3 to go check them cables to see if that -- the barge didn't do
4 something to where it will throw a little more slack in that cable
5 that we can't take up. So, originally we, we had the guy go out
6 there to check all that. Well, since -- I mean, we're right in
7 vision with the bridge. It was hey, stay out there and just watch
8 everything. And that's why he was also still out there. But
9 yeah, I'd say it's practice to send somebody out there.

10 Q. Okay. And how many times have you completed a voyage plan?

11 You personally.

12 A. Oh, I -- a bunch.

13 Q. Oh, a lot?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. And in there with regards to -- can you kind of tell
16 me what some items are in the voyage plan?

17 A. Everything from engine room check to your lowest, your lowest
18 draft, as far as what bridges -- the skinniest part of, of where
19 you're going through, which is -- a lot of times would be the
20 bridge. Just what you plan on doing, the whole, the whole voyage.
21 I mean, what the weather is like. It -- just a rundown of your,
22 your engine room check to just every -- it's -- I want to be more
23 specific, but I -- it's --

24 Q. Sure.

25 A. -- it's everything, that it -- your height, your draft, what

1 you're pushing. I even think if you have a load of chemicals it
2 even asks you what your, what your chemicals are on board.
3 Everything.

4 Q. So, when you fill out this voyage plan is it something that's
5 a piece of paper that you're filling out? Or is this something
6 that's on a computer?

7 A. It's on the computer.

8 Q. Okay. And how does that populate? Does it work off the last
9 one that you were using, or does it start with a clean page where
10 it makes you fill in, you know, the answers to --

11 A. It's a --

12 Q. -- the questions?

13 A. -- it's a clean --

14 Q. It's a clean slate you have to --

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. -- manually go and type --

17 A. Clean slate.

18 Q. -- it in?

19 A. Yeah. And if -- and it's -- I think it's a -- it's good the
20 way it's set up. I mean, you have to read the questions. You
21 can't just go yes, yes, yes, yes. Like, you have to answer the
22 questions, as far as what it asks you about -- even on the voyage
23 plan, I want to say it even asks you about, like, like your
24 manhole covers, if that's all secured. And I want to say it, it
25 says that as well. It asks you about the barge, and what you're

1 pushing and --

2 Q. Uh-huh.

3 A. -- everything.

4 Q. Is it possible that in between stops maybe your voyage plan
5 changes?

6 A. It can.

7 Q. Okay. So, if it's -- let's say the master is the one who
8 originally completed the voyage plan. And maybe on his next
9 watch, he makes an update to that voyage plan. At what point, you
10 know, if -- is there a point where you would review the voyage
11 plan to see what the initial information is and then follow on if
12 there's any changes between your first watch and the, and the next
13 watch?

14 A. I mean, he could tell me he did that. But, it -- he's the
15 one that would fill that out. Or I, if I was the one to, to get a
16 new -- it doesn't matter if you're turning around and going two
17 miles the other way, to grab another barge. Yet, you would change
18 the voyage plan. And you would tell the following person that
19 goes on watch what you're doing and -- or, what you did or -- it's
20 whoever fills out the paperwork.

21 Q. So, basically, then, you rely on word of mouth, as far as if
22 there's any changes that you need to know about. Not so much
23 looking at the plan itself.

24 A. For the most part, yes.

25 Q. Okay. Was the crane in the same position that it was picked

1 up until the time of the incident? Was it moved at all?

2 A. No. From the time -- no. It was not.

3 Q. Okay. And what type of communications took place regarding
4 the tow? Like, was there any type of concern about the, the tow
5 height and -- or anything like that?

6 A. No. Not that I know of.

7 Q. What was the visibility that evening?

8 A. There was no moon. It was dark. But, as far as fog, there
9 was no fog. Minimal wind. But, other than that, it was just
10 dark. There was no moonlight, I guess you could say.

11 Q. What about the current? Do you remember the current that
12 evening?

13 A. It wasn't --

14 Q. If there was one.

15 A. -- much of a current, if any.

16 Q. Okay. And do you remember what speed you were going?

17 A. 2.2. At the most it was 2.3, I want to say.

18 Q. Is that knots or miles per hour?

19 A. Miles per hour.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. That's not an area where we, we go very quick anyway. With
22 the houses and --

23 Q. Right.

24 A. -- boats that are docked around that area.

25 Q. Okay. Do you remember the draft of the vessel that evening?

1 The *Robert Cenac*.

2 A. I want to say it was 6 foot. Of the vessel, not the barge.

3 Q. And do you remember what the barge draft was?

4 A. I don't.

5 Q. Okay. Is that information usually recorded anywhere?

6 A. That is on the voyage plan.

7 Q. It is on the voyage plan.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. For the vessel and for the tow?

10 A. Now, it -- we have to do a pickup -- like a barge pickup.

11 So, I, I -- it might not be on the voyage plan. It might be on
12 the barge pickup. But I want to say the draft is also on the -- I
13 mean, you put that in the voyage plan. Yeah, you do put that in
14 the voyage plan, the draft of your vessel and the barges that you
15 have in tow. So, yeah, that is in the voyage plan.

16 Q. Okay. And this barge pickup, is it a document that you fill
17 out?

18 A. Yes. But it's on the computer.

19 Q. Okay. And can you talk to me a little bit about what this
20 barge pickup document is?

21 A. It's got your name, your -- the dates, the times on what --
22 where you're going, what time you're picking this up. That's also
23 another -- it's a full barge inspection as well, with that. It's
24 a full barge inspection, and just everything. If you got a red
25 flag, it's -- it asks everything from the manhole covers to how

1 much fuel is on board with the -- on the barge. What's your
2 product, what's your draft. Just make sure you -- it's got the
3 right codes, it's got the upper -- updated inspections on that
4 barge, in the actual mailbox of the barge. This particular barge
5 does not have a mailbox, because it's just a deck barge --

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. -- with a crane on it. So, I don't know if that only gets
8 filled out with a red flag, now that I'm -- but still, with the
9 voyage plan, that's still all in -- you, you say that there's
10 damage on the barge already. You still say all that in the voyage
11 plan.

12 Q. Okay. So, just for clarification purposes, was there a barge
13 pickup document done for the --

14 A. I have no idea.

15 Q. Okay. That's fine. And on your voyage plan, if you were to
16 fill it out that day instead of the master, when it says height of
17 the vessel what would you be calculating or looking at for that?

18 A. Height of the vessel would be my vessel. The height of the
19 tow, which I want to say that they ask for that in the, in the
20 voyage plan, they, they do ask for that, and I would have stated
21 what I would have been told, or what should have been given to me,
22 as far as -- I'm not -- we don't go and mess with the crane or
23 nothing like that. So, I'm being told from whoever has loaded
24 that crane that this is your dimensions of that crane. So, I
25 mean, I would go off of what was told to me as --

1 Q. So, if you get information stating that -- let's say you
2 reach out to the company and they say it's good, we reached out to
3 the client, the client says it's good. Stowed properly, it's
4 good. What is your written answer in answering that voyage plan?

5 A. I'd go off the feet that they would tell me. I wouldn't just
6 make --

7 Q. So, if you weren't given --

8 A. -- up a --

9 Q. -- you weren't given that information, how do you go about
10 determining what the height is? Other than just hearing it's
11 good?

12 A. You wouldn't leave. I mean, I wouldn't -- I wouldn't leave.
13 You've got to have the dimensions of what you're towing. Even if
14 it's pipe extending 1,000 foot behind you or something 100 foot in
15 the air, you have to have the dimensions to leave.

16 Q. Okay. And on that voyage plan, if it's just specifically
17 stating the height of the vessel, is there anything that you can
18 think of, whether it be good marine practice or whatnot, to say,
19 yeah, maybe my voyage plan doesn't say I need to know the height
20 of my tow, but that's something that you're going to ask for?

21 A. Yeah. Definitely. I mean, that's -- you have to know that.

22 Q. How many people were on board that evening?

23 A. Four.

24 Q. Okay. And who was on watch with you?

25 A. Devin. I'm not -- his name starts -- last name starts with

1 an F, I want to say. I forget his last name.

2 Q. Okay. And did you give him any specific instructions while
3 he was on watch with you?

4 A. Just I had him -- he had already -- the captain had already
5 told him to go out onto the barge. And so, I was talking with
6 him. And -- but other than that, once I -- I told him once we get
7 through the bridge to come on inside. And he has his own duties
8 that he does throughout his watch. So, I just assumed he would,
9 would continue to do that, once we got through the bridge.

10 Q. Okay. And at any time did you leave the bridge while you
11 were on watch?

12 A. What's that?

13 Q. At any time did you leave the bridge while you -- after you
14 assumed the watch?

15 A. Leave?

16 Q. Uh-huh.

17 A. The bridge? I mean, I -- after contact, I backed off the
18 bridge. Also, calling -- well, make sure the -- everybody was on
19 -- in the -- on the boat was good. Am I misunderstanding the --

20 Q. No.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wheelhouse versus bridge.

22 BY LT [REDACTED]

23 Q. Yes. I'm going to -- I was going to let you finish, and then
24 clarify.

25 A. Yeah.

- 1 Q. I, I meant the wheelhouse.
- 2 A. Sorry.
- 3 Q. We call it a bridge as well. So --
- 4 A. Okay.
- 5 Q. -- at any time when you were driving, did you go down below
6 to, to go use the restroom or to --
- 7 A. No.
- 8 Q. -- get a snack or anything?
- 9 A. No, I -- that's done before assuming watch.
- 10 Q. Okay. Just curious, what's the policy if you -- let's say
11 you do have to use the restroom. How does that work with --
- 12 A. The -- there's different methods that you can --
- 13 Q. Sure. Okay.
- 14 A. -- do a water bottle, or if you can -- if you feel confident,
15 a mate to hold the wheel.
- 16 Q. Uh-huh.
- 17 A. Or someone that knows what's going on, in a good area, then
18 that's --
- 19 Q. Okay.
- 20 A. -- done too. I'm not saying I'm doing that, but that's also
21 done.
- 22 Q. Okay. Thank you. And was the vessel, just to clarify, was it
23 being set in any particular direction from when you assumed watch
24 to the incident occurring?
- 25 A. No. We were headed east.

1 Q. Okay. Did you sound any alarms upon impact?

2 A. No. As soon as, as soon as we made contact, I knew -- I
3 could see Devin, the deckhand. And the captain was coming up the
4 stairs. I asked where -- what's his name. I forget -- this is
5 the first time I worked with that deckhand. I forget his name.
6 But I asked about him. He said he's, he's going out there. I
7 guess they had -- the two rooms, the captain's room and the
8 deckhand, they're right next to each other. So, I guess he had
9 told him to go out there and help.

10 Q. Uh-huh.

11 A. So, I knew he was up. I knew -- I could see my other
12 deckhand. The captain was coming up into the wheelhouse. So, I
13 knew everybody was good. I also had traffic coming behind me,
14 with another tow. I immediately called them and told them to
15 stop. And checked other surrounding traffic, but there was none.
16 And just had him stop behind me. He was a good little ways, but I
17 stopped all traffic and made sure everybody was good.

18 Q. Okay. Does the vessel have a safety management system in
19 place that you're aware of?

20 A. Usually it's the wheelhouse, that if any problems or if -- a
21 general alarm goes off, yeah, it's the wheelhouse is what you're
22 -- where the meet-up spot is for everybody.

23 Q. Okay. Is there any type of training that you guys do --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- with regards to the safety management on board the vessel?

1 A. Yeah. We, we go through different -- even on the computer
2 that we had -- the system that we have, they give us, like, daily
3 things to inspect, and then also just routines on what you would
4 do for a fire and, and just -- and they're -- we also have -- even
5 with the company, we have certain little what you're supposed to
6 do in case this happens. We -- and we have to have -- and there's
7 a meeting with the deckhands. Like, we have to personally read
8 that to them. And so, we do that as well. So, I mean, any --
9 anything from a fire, the man overboard, we do all those drills.

10 Q. And how often does that training get conducted?

11 A. A few different ones every month. But it could be something
12 very simple, you know. Or it could be we were going to stop and
13 do a fire drill. It is different little drills that we do.
14 Everything from hitting the general alarm just to hit it, to make
15 sure it works, and seeing the response of the deckhands to just
16 everything. Like, you, you make sure there is -- everybody knows
17 what they're supposed to do when that alarm goes off.

18 Q. Okay. And in your professional opinion, is there anything
19 that you would have done differently this -- knowing, you know,
20 what you've learned from this experience, kind of moving forward,
21 to prevent it from happening in the future.

22 A. The credentials could have -- well, our information could
23 have been better, I guess. But overall, I mean, just double
24 checking everything we did. We triple-checked some things. Just
25 simple enough to send the deckhand to go out and just recheck the

1 wire, after it had been -- they spent an hour and a half making up
2 the wire, you know.

3 Q. Uh-huh.

4 A. The information on the barge. I, I don't think anything -- I
5 thought we did everything real good -- real well. Yeah, I don't,
6 I don't think I would have done anything differently.

7 Q. So, there's nothing that you think you -- could have been
8 done to prevent it?

9 A. The information given. I -- that's what it was. That's what
10 we run off of. That's what we were under the assumption of what,
11 what our tow was. I mean, it was just the information given. As
12 far as how we acted about the situation, the deckhands jumping out
13 of bed and getting their gear on to -- everybody on full alert,
14 and making a game plan on what needs to happen.

15 Q. Uh-huh.

16 A. I mean, every -- everything was done, I thought the right
17 way.

18 Q. Yeah. It, it definitely seems like, as far as the afterward
19 -- you know, the aftermath of the incident, making the
20 notifications to, you know, the police and to the Coast Guard and,
21 and so forth, it seems like you guys were able to mitigate things
22 to the best of your ability. So --

23 A. Yeah, and the captain on board, he's -- I forgot how many
24 years -- I think over 13 years of experience. I learned a lot,
25 the way he reacted. He also like the way I reacted, as far as not

1 -- I'm not a freak out kind of person, so I didn't freak out. I,
2 I got with the deckhand and -- but, I learned a lot from the head
3 captain, as far as how he went about it and how -- because he was
4 immediate. Call, call the, the state troopers' office. Let's
5 call the Coast Guard. Like, it was, it was immediate. So, I
6 learned a lot with that. And -- yeah.

7 LT [REDACTED] All right. Thank you. I have no further questions
8 at this time. If there's anything --

9 MR. MUISE: I do have a couple follow-ups.

10 BY MR. MUISE:

11 Q. The 5 foot rule that you said that you had between --

12 A. That's my personal --

13 Q. That's -- oh, that was my question. Is that a company
14 standard or is that your personal --

15 A. No, that's just my -- because, I mean, the water depth and
16 you just never know. And that --

17 Q. Your comfort factor. That's --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Okay. That's fine. Do you remember if the crane was chained
20 down at all?

21 A. Yeah. It was -- the brake -- the, the base of the, the crane
22 was chained down.

23 Q. Was -- before you picked up --

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. -- the barge? Okay. The call to the police, was that you

1 that did that or the captain?

2 A. The captain. While I was still maneuvering my tow to get
3 over enough out of the main channel. Like, still in the channel
4 but out of the center of the channel.

5 Q. Do you know if he called 911 or was it a different specific
6 trooper he called, or --

7 A. I think he knew the number. Like I said, I was watching
8 deckhands --

9 Q. That's fine.

10 A. I was maneuvering the barge back and out to the side also,
11 because there was a, a wooden seawall right there. So, I had to
12 just, you know, kind of feather to the side. And I think he had
13 the number to the actual department -- the station. I, I don't
14 think he --

15 Q. That -- sometimes --

16 A. -- called --

17 Q. -- that's better, actually.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. You don't know --

20 A. I don't think he called 911.

21 Q. 911 could ring in the next county, so --

22 A. Yeah. Yeah.

23 Q. Your Rose Point, you can see GPS, obviously. Your course
24 over ground speed, or ground. Can you see your heading as well?

25 Is there a compass feeding that Rose Point?

1 A. Yes. It's, it's -- and it's pretty accurate. I -- it's,
2 it's pretty accurate. It shows the, the heading. My main heading
3 is I go off of radar, 90 something -- 99 percent of the time,
4 because that's, that's true to me.

5 Q. Okay. Is there a fluctuating compass or a gyrocompass for
6 you? What --

7 A. There is a gyrocompass --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- in, in front of me.

10 Q. And that shows up on your Rose Point display?

11 A. I don't think that's connected. I want to say there's
12 another thing on top of those that's connected, that shows true
13 point -- your, your direction for the computer.

14 Q. Okay. How about our --

15 A. It might even been connected to the radar. I, I know there
16 is a -- it connects to something up there. I'm, I'm not sure.

17 Q. How about RPMs? Does that show up on your Rose Point? And,
18 and rudder angle indicator, does that show up?

19 A. I have rudder indicators in front of me that aren't on that
20 computer.

21 Q. Are not on Rose Point.

22 A. Yeah. So --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Is there anything else on Rose Point besides that? Weather

1 sometimes? Every company sets it up differently. So --

2 A. No, I -- not weather. I mean, it's just -- it shows just
3 your speed, your direction --

4 Q. How about an alarm? Is there an alarm if you're getting
5 close to something, like a bridge?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. No, there's not.

9 Q. Can you tell it what your air draft it, and would it
10 recognize -- I don't -- I'm not that familiar with the software,
11 so --

12 A. I -- yeah, there's actually -- I got showed this past hitch,
13 on the *Robert*, that you can actually pick -- click on a boat, and
14 you -- it will go to properties, and you actually can see the
15 dimensions of that boat.

16 Q. Yes.

17 A. And a picture of that boat.

18 Q. I've, I've seen that. I'm just curious about the air draft,
19 though. Can you put that in there?

20 A. I couldn't -- I'm not going to say yes, but if I had to guess
21 I'm sure you could.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Because it would go to your properties of your boat, I would
24 think.

25 Q. Okay. I'm a big ship guy, so the, the programs they use in

1 your voyage plan, you tell it what your draft is going to be. And
2 if you're getting close to shoal water, it will tell you.

3 A. Oh, okay. Yeah.

4 Q. If you're getting close to a --

5 A. It's not like that.

6 Q. Okay. And it will beep at you forever, so --

7 A. Yeah. But I'm -- I would think you could put it in, but it
8 still wouldn't -- the way that's set up, it wouldn't -- still
9 wouldn't give you an alarm to, to know the height. I wouldn't see
10 it being able to tell you that.

11 MR. MUISE: Okay. Well, thank you. Okay.

12 BY CWO [REDACTED]

13 Q. A couple questions. You said -- you mentioned that you had
14 Devin out as the lookout, and he was on the crane barge.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. What do you think is their responsibility while being a
17 lookout? Not their normal responsibilities as a deckhand, but
18 when you tell him, hey, I need you to go out here and be the
19 lookout. What do you think their responsibilities are?

20 A. Everything that he thinks I can't see, and even things that I
21 can see. I still let him talk. If they're telling me something I
22 can visually see, I still let them keep relaying information on
23 what, what they're seeing. Just everything they're seeing.

24 Q. Okay. So, you would expect, of course, if you're approaching
25 any of the --

1 A. He was telling me on wide we were, off the head of the barge.
2 Yeah, I mean, he's just telling me what he's seeing and, and
3 relaying what he thinks that I need to know. And if I have to --
4 if I -- there's something I wanted him to tell me, I'll ask him
5 that. Just his -- he tells me whatever he thinks he needs to tell
6 me.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. That he thinks that I can't see or --

9 Q. Would you expect him to also be looking out height-wise?

10 A. In --

11 Q. For the bridge at that point.

12 A. In that case, yes.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Then, you mentioned that there was no moon, it was pretty
16 dark. And I know that for the voyage it was dark, and everything.
17 Around the bridges there's a little more lighting, and all that.
18 But, would he have had a footlight or spotlight or even a
19 flashlight with him at that time?

20 A. Yeah. He has a flashlight.

21 Q. Okay. And then, how often have you been in control of a
22 vessel while going under this particular bridge?

23 A. A lot.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. And the times that you've gone through, have you noticed what
2 would be the max and -- or minimal tide change? Or have you
3 noticed if the tide affects what's --

4 A. Right there, there's not -- it's not much of a difference in
5 tide. I mean, you could have northern winds for a few days and it
6 -- yeah, you might have a drop in the water. But as far as
7 current, you're not getting much of a difference.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It would have to be something serious to actually get that
10 current really moving right there.

11 Q. Okay. And the last question I had is on the barges, when the
12 spuds are usually up, is that a set height or a common standard
13 height for those to be at? Or do they change, depending on the
14 barge?

15 A. Depending on the height of the spuds, really. But other than
16 that, there is a, there is a pin that goes in all them spuds,
17 where they have to lift it up to that particular point to put that
18 pin in, as a safety precaution, in case the cable that lifts the
19 spuds -- if that were to bust, you still have those pins that are
20 in those holes.

21 Q. And height-wise, is there a standard height for all, all of
22 those or --

23 A. No. There's different ones. It could be 10-foot to 50, 60,
24 100-foot.

25 Q. Do you remember what they were for this barge? For the crane

1 barge?

2 A. I was told that they were 50-foot.

3 Q. Fifty?

4 A. Yes.

5 CWO [REDACTED] Okay. All right. Thank you.

6 LT [REDACTED] Okay. If there are no further questions, the time
7 is 2:53 p.m. and this concludes the interview.

8 (Whereupon, at 2:53 p.m. CDT, 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: *ROBERT CENAC AND MR. DAWG COLLIDE
WITH HOUMA TWIN SPAN BRIDGE, IN
HOUMA, LOUISIANA ON MARCH 6, 2022*
Interview of Joel Vince

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA22FM012

PLACE: United States Marine Safety Unit,
Houma, Louisiana

DATE: March 17, 2022

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.



Jane W. Gilliam
Transcriber