

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

*

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE *

COLLAPSES AFTER VESSEL * Accident No.: DCA24MM031

COLLISION IN BALTIMORE, *

MARYLAND ON MARCH 26, 2024 *

*

* * * * *

Interview of: LAWRENCE BROOKS, Captain
Retired Coast Guard

via telephone

Monday,
July 15, 2024

APPEARANCES:

DANIEL WALSH, Highway Factors Investigator
Office of Highway Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

MARCEL MUISE
Office of Marine Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

BRIDGET QUINN, Marine Casualty Investigator, Group Chair
Office of Marine Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

SCOTT PARENT, Highway Factors Engineer
Office of Highway Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Agency Counsel
U.S. Coast Guard

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Captain Lawrence Brooks:	
By Mr. Walsh	5
By Mr. Parent	9
By Ms. Quinn	10
By Mr. Muise	11
By Mr. Walsh	13

I N T E R V I E W

(12:03 p.m.)

1
2
3 MR. WALSH: So today is Monday, July 15, 2024. Time is about
4 12:03 p.m. Central Daylight Time. This interview is in regard to
5 the Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore, Maryland, that occurred on
6 March 26, 2024. Specifically, the interview will focus on an
7 incident that occurred on August 29th, 1980, with the vessel *Blue*
8 *Nagoya*, B-l-u-e, N-a-g-o-y-a.

9 My name is Dan Walsh, D-a-n, W-a-l-s-h, highway factors
10 investigator in the Office of Highway Safety, and with me is
11 Mr. Muise.

12 MR. MUISE: This is Marcel Muse, M-u-i-s-e. I'm with the
13 NTSB's Office of Marine Safety.

14 MR. WALSH: And Ms. Quinn.

15 MS. QUINN: This is Bridget Quinn, B-r-i-d-g-e-t, Q-u-i-n-n.
16 I'm a marine casualty investigator with the Office of Marine
17 Safety, the group chair of operations for this investigation with
18 the NTSB.

19 MR. WALSH: Mr. Parent.

20 MR. PARENT: Hello, everyone. I'm Scott Parent. I am a
21 highway factors engineer with the Office of Highway Safety, NTSB.

22 MR. WALSH: Lieutenant Commander [REDACTED]

23 MS. [REDACTED] Hello, everyone. I'm [REDACTED]
24 and I'm U.S. Coast Guard agency counsel.

25 MR. WALSH: And Captain Brooks.

1 MR. BROOKS: Good afternoon. I'm Lawrence Brooks, L-a-w-r-e-
2 n-c-e, B-r-o-o-k-s, retired Coast Guard.

3 MR. WALSH: Thank you, Captain Brooks.

4 INTERVIEW OF LAWRENCE BROOKS

5 BY MR. WALSH:

6 Q. Captain Brooks, can you please talk about the events leading
7 up to the incident in which the vessel *Blue Nagoya* drifted into
8 Pier 17?

9 A. Okay. In August of 1980, I was an investigative officer
10 assigned to the Marine Safety Office, Baltimore, and on the night
11 of 28 August, going into the 29th of August, I was the duty
12 investigating officer on call.

13 I remember receiving a call in the early morning hours of 29
14 August at approximately 1 or 2 a.m., and I was notified by the
15 duty officer at the Marine Safety Office that there was a report
16 of a ship that lost power and was now anchored on the south side
17 of the Francis Scott Key bridge. And they wanted me -- they
18 arranged for a small boat from our Coast Guard station at Curtis
19 Bay, Maryland, to take me out at first light.

20 So next morning, and it was still dark, but I went down to
21 Station Curtis Bay. The boat crew told me that my office wanted
22 him to talk to me. I called the office, and the duty officer, I
23 don't remember his name, but he explained that there were reports
24 from mariners of sections of the camel for the fendering system of
25 the Francis Scott Key bridge that were apparently floating in the

1 harbor. So the duty officer asked me to look around on my way out
2 to the ship.

3 So we got underway in the small boat, and it didn't take us
4 too long to get to the vicinity of the Francis Scott Key Bridge,
5 and I quickly reported that the bridge fendering system had been
6 struck. Severe damage on the north side, most of the fendering
7 system and concrete barrier protective system had been destroyed.
8 Rebar was sticking up in different directions, and it was still
9 dark, and there were sections of the camel wooden fendering system
10 that were floating in the area.

11 We proceeded on and found the ship anchored on the south
12 side, southeast side of the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and I
13 observed and quickly reported to the office there was a rather
14 large hole in the bow of the ship. So in talking to the duty
15 officer over the radio, he said he would notify Maryland
16 Department of Transportation and provide support if they needed
17 (audio drop) section on the water side.

18 I proceeded to go aboard the ship. So at that point, I met
19 with the master of the vessel. I do not remember his name, but he
20 was very cooperative. I don't remember what his primary language
21 was, but we did pretty well communicating. He spoke broken
22 English, and he explained to me why the ship had lost power.
23 We'll come back to that in a minute.

24 My primary concern is why we were not notified that the
25 bridge had been struck, and the master was upset when I told him

1 that and he appeared confused. He explained that the Maryland
2 pilot who was on board had been doing all of the radio
3 communications when the ship lost power and struck the bridge.
4 And so that became one our concerns during the investigation,
5 obviously, that the information was never transferred to the Coast
6 Guard by the pilot.

7 So back to the ship and the loss of power. The master took
8 me below to meet with the chief engineer, and they explained that
9 the ship had an overflow tank for the cooling of jacket water on
10 the main engines. That tank sits up high in the engine room. And
11 in port, while in port, a junior third assistant engineer making
12 rounds noticed the tank was empty, and he thought that was a
13 problem and so he filled the tank with water.

14 The ship got underway. The cooling water for the engine in
15 the jacket started to heat and expand, and what it's supposed to
16 do is go to the overflow tank and fill it up, but the tank was now
17 already filled. So the water overflowed, and the gooseneck for
18 venting the tank was inside the engine room and it flowed out. It
19 flowed down onto the gratings on the walkways in the engine room,
20 up on the upper levels, and then fell down to the lower levels.
21 The ship's power board, main engine boards were down there in that
22 area, and so it shorted out all the electrical and the ship lost
23 power. So when I got on board at about 6 a.m., the power had been
24 restored and we moved on from there basically.

25 So I can -- that's what I remember. I can certainly answer

1 questions in relationship to that event if you have questions.

2 Q. Thank you. Thank you, Captain Brooks. Do you recall how the
3 vessel was wedged into the pier by any chance?

4 A. I thought it was amazing. The supports for the Key Bridge
5 come down in that area on the west side, the main support
6 structure, in an inverted V. And the ship had moved, had
7 relocated already when I got out there, but it was apparent that
8 it struck and then went right in the middle of that V. I mean, I
9 thought we were all very fortunate that night that the ship went
10 in there without hitting a main support structure.

11 Q. And I also understand that it was able to back out on its
12 own.

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And was able to come to a nearby anchorage system; is that
15 correct?

16 A. It backed out, and then went through the bridge. Backed out
17 from the north side, and backed up enough to get back into the
18 main channel and navigate through the bridge and anchor on the
19 southeast side. Yes.

20 Q. Can you describe the damage to the bow?

21 A. I remember approaching the ship and looking at the hole
22 thinking to myself, my lord, you could drive a truck through that.
23 It was extensive. And, I mean, it was opened up and just -- and a
24 large hole there.

25 Q. You mentioned the delay of time that you were notified.

1 Approximately what -- from the time that the bow hit the pier and
2 the time that you were notified, what would you estimate that time
3 to be?

4 A. Four hours. Based on my -- we didn't know the bridge had
5 been hit until I was there. So essentially my being on scene was
6 the notification that the Coast Guard received.

7 Q. Thank you. I have no further questions at this time.

8 MR. WALSH: Scott, can you continue with the questioning,
9 please?

10 BY MR. PARENT:

11 Q. Hello, Captain Brooks. How are you?

12 A. I'm great.

13 Q. Just a real quick question on the bow damage. Was that
14 around the waterline? Was it on the port/starboard side?

15 A. It appeared to be directly on the bow, and I'd say it wasn't
16 very high above the waterline at all. I mean, it was -- so but
17 there was a couple of feet of clearance so I don't know if they
18 shifted any of their weight, you know, reloaded, shifted ballast
19 or anything to bring it up. I don't remember if I even asked,
20 sir.

21 Q. Okay. And the columns were inspected and there was no
22 visible damage on any of the columns of the pier?

23 A. I understood that the Maryland Department of Transportation
24 in daylight was able to see like a scrape on one of the columns,
25 and that was the extent of the damage to the support structure.

1 Q. Do we know if the dolphin that protects Pier 17 was struck
2 during this incident?

3 A. The dolphin, I don't understand Pier 17.

4 Q. So there's a large, it's about a 25 foot diameter circular
5 concrete-filled dolphin. It's about 500 feet, it would be north
6 of Pier 17, in direct line with Pier 17.

7 A. Oh, now that you mention it, I remember the dolphin structure
8 being on the chart. I don't remember how that was involved in the
9 accident.

10 Q. So you're not even sure if it was inspected or --

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure it was there in 1980.

14 Q. All right.

15 MR. PARENT: I think that's all I have, Dan. I don't have
16 any other questions.

17 Thank you, Captain Brooks.

18 MR. WALSH: Thank you, Scott.

19 Bridget will continue with the questioning.

20 MS. QUINN: Thanks, Dan, and thanks, everybody, for coming
21 out today for this.

22 BY MS. QUINN:

23 Q. The only question that I have right now is would this report
24 be able to -- does it still exist anywhere? I can't find it on
25 any of the databases.

1 A. Well, Captain Neubauer (ph), who was in the Office of
2 Investigations at headquarters, asked me to look through my files
3 up in my attic, and I couldn't find anything. Almost all my files
4 are administrative in nature, so I didn't keep any personal
5 copies. So the copy that would have been submitted would have
6 been retained at the office, and I assume eventually filed in the
7 National Archives.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you. And to follow up, do you know if the
9 vessel possibly grounded prior to hitting the bridge?

10 A. No, I don't. I don't remember.

11 MS. QUINN: That's all I have, Dan.

12 MR. WALSH: Thank you, Bridget.

13 Marcel will continue with the questioning.

14 MR. MUISE: And I just have a couple follow-ups on that.

15 BY MR. MUISE:

16 Q. You mentioned notification. Was the group in the MSO co-
17 located or what was the relationship there between the group's
18 comm center and the duty officer at the MSO?

19 A. The group was located at Curtis Bay, Maryland Coast Guard
20 Yard, and that's the base structure, and the Marine Safety Office
21 was located at downtown in the Federal Building, 40 South Gay
22 Street.

23 Q. Okay. So was there a notification to the group comm center
24 when it happened and word just didn't get to the MSO? Is that
25 where the breakdown was?

1 A. Oh, no. No, we had the voice recordings on the radio, the
2 pilot reporting the ship losing power, and the pilot never --

3 (Audio drop)

4 Q. Oh, I see what you're saying. You just didn't know that it
5 hit the bridge. Okay. Do you remember talking to the pilots at
6 all? What was their side of the story?

7 A. They wouldn't let me talk to them.

8 Q. Was the -- *Blue Nagoya*, was she a break wall (ph) ship or a
9 tanker or what type of --

10 A. Combination break wall/container.

11 Q. And last, do you remember was there any changes done to
12 either the waterway or the buoys or the bridge itself after the
13 fact? Like what were the consequences of this hit?

14 A. I don't know. I've thought about some of that, but I was --
15 I only spent six months in the Office of Investigations. I was in
16 a training program while at the Marine Safety Office so, you know,
17 back then you qualified as everything in four years. So you were
18 a hull inspector, did time in the repair yard, new construction,
19 the investigating officer. I was pollution response for a little
20 over a year. A licensing depth examiner officer -- we still had
21 licensing offices in the field -- and the three months at a marine
22 safety basic indoctrination course. So my tour of four years
23 included getting qualified as a hull inspector, and for new
24 construction repair, T-boat inspection, barge inspector,
25 investigating officer, and pollution response officer.

1 Q. That's a lot of quals to do in four years.

2 A. Well, you got it done and you move on to the next one. And
3 every once in a while you got called back for something, or an
4 incident came up and they wanted me because I was already a marine
5 inspector and an IO and a pollution response officer, and I had
6 the combination of skills that the command felt was important for
7 that incident.

8 Q. Okay. Just out of curiosity, what was your background before
9 this? Did you come from a cutter or --

10 A. Yes, sir. I came out of Coast Guard Academy in '75, sailed
11 on an old Wind-class icebreaker for two years. Coast Guard had
12 like 10 icebreakers and then we kind of narrowed it down to just a
13 few, so I found a new career in marine safety.

14 Q. Okay. Great. That's all I have for you. Again, thanks for
15 your time. We knew very little about this accident except for
16 what's been in the media so this is a huge help. Do you have any
17 questions for us?

18 MR. WALSH: Marcel, I may just have a few follow-up
19 questions.

20 MR. MUISE: Yeah, go ahead.

21 BY MR. WALSH:

22 Q. Captain Brooks, were you aware of any other incidents of
23 vessels drifting into Pier 17 or 18 prior to the Key Bridge
24 collapse?

25 A. No, sir.

1 Q. And just one last question. I'd like to get your impression
2 of whether you think Pier 17 had an adequate fendering system and
3 pier protection system.

4 A. Well, based on this incident, and I've talked to Commander
5 [REDACTED] After I retired from the Coast Guard, I taught at your
6 Coast Guard training center, and I helped author a waterways
7 management course for the Coast Guard. And the port operations
8 has been my specialty in the Coast Guard after I started in marine
9 safety. So I spent about 26 years doing port operations, and I'm
10 well aware that bridges get hit. Essentially, we all know that
11 any object in the water is a hazard to navigation, whether it's
12 marked or unmarked. I mean, white ships, lighthouses in the
13 water, we keep reducing their signature and they still get hit
14 from time to time.

15 So I believe there was a study back in the early 1980's on
16 break collisions, and it was never clear in there who has
17 authority to require breech fendering systems that were adequate.
18 Florida has shown some initiative after that Tampa Bay and a
19 couple incidents down there, and a few other states have looked at
20 it closer. I know the Coast Guard regulations in 33 C.F.R.
21 subchapter J, and they don't cover the actual bridge structure.
22 So, yeah, it should be addressed somewhere. I mean, somebody
23 should have some standards. It's sooner or later, it's going to
24 happen again.

25 Q. Thank you.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 MR. WALSH: Are there any additional questions?

3 (No audible response)

4 MR. WALSH: Okay. Seeing none, the time is now 12:24 p.m.
5 Central Daylight Time. We are going to go ahead and conclude the
6 interview. Thank you very much, Captain Brooks, for your
7 participation.

8 CAPTAIN BROOKS: Thank you. Have a great day.

9 (Whereupon, at 12:24 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FRANCIS SCOTT KEY BRIDGE COLLAPSES AFTER
CARGO VESSEL COLLISION IN BALTIMORE,
MARYLAND ON MARCH 26, 2024
Interview of Captain Lawrence Brooks

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA24MM031

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: July 15, 2024

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



Terri Trauth
Transcriber

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Highway Safety

Washington, DC 20594



Interview Clarification Form

Sheet 1 of 2

NTSB Interview of: LAWRENCE BROOKS, Captain Retired Coast Guard

Date of Interview: 15 July 2024

NTSB Case Number: DCA24MM031

INSTRUCTIONS: After reading the transcript or summary of your interview, please note any clarifications or additions on this sheet. If additional space is needed, make as many additional copies of the second page as necessary. When completed, please sign the bottom of each sheet. DO NOT make any marks or notations on the actual transcript.

If there are no changes, please check this box and sign the bottom of this sheet.

Page: 5 Line: 22

Now reads: him to talk to me.

Should read: to talk to me.

Reason for Change: basic clarification

Page: 6 Line: 17

Now reads: (audio drop) section on the water side.

Should read: access to the water side of the bridge.

Reason for Change: clarifying intent and readability

Page: 6 Line: 24

Now reads: My primary concern is why we were not notified

Should read: My primary concern was why we were not notified

Reason for Change: readability - maintain proper tense.

Page: 7 Line: 9 and 10

Now reads: cooling of jacket water on the main engines.

Should read: main engine cooling water jacket system.

Reason for Change: clarity of system terminology.

I declare that I have read my foregoing interview transcript or summary and, together with any clarifications and/or additions made above, the facts stated herein are true.

Name: LAWRENCE BROOKS

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 11 August 2024

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Highway Safety

Washington, DC 20594



Interview Clarifications (...continued)

Sheet 2 of 2

NTSB Interview of: LAWRENCE BROOKS, Captain Retired Coast Guard

Date of Interview: 15 July 2024

NTSB Case Number: DCA24MM031

Page: 11

Line: 16, 17, 19, 23

Now reads: group

Should read: Group

Reason for Change: proper context: the Group is a USCG unit.

Page: 12

Line: 2 and 3

Now reads: and the pilot never -- (Audio drop)

Should read: and the pilot never mentioned the bridge allision.

Reason for Change: important clarification due to "Audio drop"

Page: 12

Line: 7

Now reads: They wouldn't let me talk to them.

Should read: They (the Maryland Pilots) wouldn't let me talk to him.

Reason for Change: important clarification.

Page: 12

Line: 8 and 10

Now reads: break wall (ph)

Should read: break bulk

Reason for Change: Proper terminology

Page: 14

Line: 12

Now reads: white ships,

Should read: light ships,

Reason for Change: Clarification

I declare that I have read my foregoing interview transcript or summary and, together with any clarifications and/or additions made above, the facts stated herein are true.

Name: LAWRENCE BROOKS

Signature: [Redacted Signature]

Date: 11 August 2024