

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

\* \* \* \* \*

Investigation of: \*

\*

FLOODING OF TOWING VESSEL *UNCLE* \*

*BLUE* ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER \* Accident No.: DCA23FM023

ON MARCH 26, 2023 \*

\*

\* \* \* \* \*

Interview of: WILLIAM SWEEZEY, Captain

*UNCLE BLUE*

Aboard M/V *Uncle John*  
Near Mile 184  
Lower Mississippi River

Wednesday,  
March 29, 2023

## APPEARANCES:

CWO [REDACTED] Investigator  
United States Coast Guard  
Marine Safety Unit, Baton Rouge

LT. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]  
United States Coast Guard

MARCEL MUISE  
National Transportation Safety Board

COREY P. PARENTON, ESQ.  
On behalf of Alexis Marine LLC

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:55 p.m.)

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2  
3 CWO [REDACTED] It's 29 March 2023 at 14:55. We're on board  
4 the towing vessel, *Uncle John*, who's owned by Alexis Marine.  
5 We're investigating the sinking of the *Uncle Blue* on 26 March at  
6 approximately 0500. We're going to conduct an interview with the  
7 master that was on watch at the time of the casualty, William  
8 Sweezey.

9 I'm going to ask everybody go around the room and everybody  
10 to introduce themselves and spell their last names.

11 MR. MUISE: This is Marcel Muise with the National  
12 Transportation Safety Board, M-u-i-s-e.

13 MR. SWEEZEY: William Sweezey, S-w-e-e-z-e-y.

14 MR. PARENTON: Corey Parenton, attorney for Alexis Marine, P-  
15 a-r-e-n-t-o-n.

16 LT. [REDACTED] Lieutenant Sam [REDACTED] MSU, Baton Rouge, [REDACTED]-  
17 [REDACTED].

18 CWO [REDACTED] Mr. Sweezey, is it okay that we record this  
19 interview?

20 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yeah.

## INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM SWEEZEY

21  
22 BY CWO [REDACTED]

23 Q. Okay. If you don't mind, give us a brief history of your  
24 work experience, how long you've been a master, what companies  
25 you've worked for, what kind of operations you've done?

1 A. I've been a master, it was what -- 2020 I got my license at  
2 the beginning of January. I worked for Alexis and Marquette and  
3 then back here as a master of towing and some fleet and some  
4 trips.

5 Q. Before 2020, what was your maritime experience?

6 A. Deckhand, steersman, main pilot, mostly deckhand. I've  
7 decked for 15 years.

8 Q. Is that 15 years with various companies?

9 A. Mostly Knots. Most of it over there at Knots working fleet.  
10 I was with Kim Carrier, SGS and Gulf South Marine and a couple of  
11 others.

12 Q. How long have you been with Alexis Marine?

13 A. Started in -- January 11th of 2020 is when I first started  
14 there. And then I went to Marquette a little bit, for about what?  
15 About a year, and then I came back here. And I've been back about  
16 what -- a year, a little over a year.

17 Q. And how much time do you have on the *Blue*?

18 A. On the *Blue*, I was on there for about a year. Then was off  
19 of it for a little bit. I just got back on it.

20 Q. That one year on the *Blue* was your second time at Alexis  
21 Marine?

22 A. Pretty much, yes, sir. I think it was about almost 8 months  
23 I was on the *Blue* when I came back the second time, and then I've  
24 been on this one for a little while, and I just got back on her.

25 Q. When you say just got back on her, like this is your first

1 trip in a long time?

2 A. They put me on there like what? I filled in for about a week  
3 every here and there but we just got it back from being in --  
4 doing that six pack run. So I'm just getting back used to it  
5 fully now. I think it was 3 weeks, 3 1/2 weeks.

6 Q. You said six pack run?

7 A. From New Orleans to Houston.

8 Q. So for about the last 3 weeks, you've been on the *Blue*?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Can you describe your duties and responsibilities while  
11 you're on board?

12 A. Keeping up with everything that's going on, traffic, driving,  
13 and figuring out orders.

14 Q. What would you say your like normal work routine would be?  
15 Give some examples of things that you do, when you do them.

16 A. Doing a quick walk around, check, see who's going on, who's  
17 up and moving, go up in the wheelhouse, find out what's happening  
18 and try to keep going, drive where we're going, keep up the logs.

19 Q. What kind of work rotation have you been doing for the last  
20 -- since you reported on -- do you have an estimated date of when  
21 you got on?

22 A. You all got a calendar. I can tell you then.

23 Q. Was it in March?

24 A. Yeah, it was March. It would be -- I got back on the *Blue* on  
25 the 9th.

1 Q. On the 9th. And what's your normal rotation?

2 A. 14 to 7. I went from being in the fleeting to fill in on the  
3 *Uncle Blue* to help out with the six pack run, and then they just  
4 put us right back into the fleet with her.

5 Q. And which watch did you stand on board?

6 A. It was 6 hour watches. Then it went to 12 hour watches.  
7 Then back to 6 hour watches.

8 Q. How come?

9 A. Because one of the guys -- captains, we work 6s with no  
10 problem. Then another one, he didn't care for 6s. So we worked  
11 12s. Then we went to the fleet and we worked 12s, and because we  
12 were doing a trip, we were working 6s. Just try to make it a  
13 little easier on the trip-wise.

14 Q. Is there any company policies saying whether you stand 6 or  
15 12 hour watches?

16 A. No, sir. None I found.

17 Q. When you were standing 6 hours, which 6 hours were you doing?  
18 6 to 12 or 12 to 6.

19 A. 12 to 6.

20 Q. About how many days in a row had you been standing the 6 hour  
21 watches, 12 to 6?

22 A. I think we did it for about 3 days. We did it just so we  
23 could -- the trips, these trips and all that.

24 Q. Prior to that, you were doing 12 hour watches?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. About how many days were you doing the 12 hour watches?

2 A. About a -- almost a week and a half.

3 Q. So this barge -- if I can work backwards here. You guys were  
4 pushing that one and two deck barge up to McKinney 220 or whatever  
5 McKinney is, 185, whatever McKinney is?

6 A. I think it 221 I think.

7 Q. Up to McKinney. You had locked through Harvey. Where did  
8 this barge originate from?

9 A. We brought it from -- what is it? Stewart Construction. We  
10 just got done moving a crane for Stewart Construction that we  
11 brought from Harvey down to UBT and back up to Harvey.

12 Q. Where's UBT?

13 A. Right below Myrtle Grove. It's on the 54 mile.

14 Q. (Indiscernible).

15 A. Yes, sir. No, no, not --

16 Q. LR (ph.).

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Harvey, report back to Harvey taking the empty barge.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Prior to that operation, was your six pack to Houston?

21 A. We were in the fleet.

22 Q. A fleet.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Let's start with like when you came on watch. So starting on  
25 I guess early morning on the 26th, the date of the incident, can



1 you tell us everything that happened from the time you got up to  
2 go on watch, going on watch, what happened through the watch, all  
3 the way up to the incident and provide approximate times of  
4 everything?

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Start with -- what time do you usually  
6 get up? You came on watch at midnight?

7 CAPT. SWEEZEY: I came on about 11:30. I think we were just  
8 what -- I'm trying to remember.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Where you guys were?

10 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yeah.

11 BY CWO [REDACTED]

12 Q. It doesn't -- like I said, it doesn't have to be exact.

13 A. Yeah. The place where it was -- that night, I ended up with  
14 a walk around, got me something to eat, went up. My steersman  
15 came up there. He started driving.

16 Q. And who was the steersman?

17 A. Chris Barnes.

18 Q. Was anybody else on the watch with you guys?

19 A. No, sir. Because everybody was out because we took on fuel  
20 and everything like that earlier. So those three guys were off to  
21 bat. We had Tyrome helping out wherever he could if we needed him  
22 or anything like that. I can't even remember where we were.

23 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

24 Q. When you guys take over watch, do you do a verbal pass down  
25 or like any sort of log saying, hey, I have it, this is where we

1 are, this is what time it is?

2 A. Yeah, we've got the red book and all that, and then we've got  
3 the computer. And I think what's messing with me is because he  
4 kept up on me and Chris, I've been trying to get him more familiar  
5 with him.

6 Q. I'm sure. Yeah, yeah.

7 A. So I know he did that, and I think that's what messing with  
8 me on that, but I know right before, a little before we ended up  
9 and called in for traffic. I think we were at CB 064 (ph.) at the  
10 (indiscernible). I think we were close to (indiscernible) fleet  
11 where we were at, if I'm not mistaken because I remember a little  
12 after he started driving, that's when we had a call. Then he went  
13 down, did his little walk around. Then he came back up. We drove  
14 a little bit more. Then we got to -- after we made Branjeer  
15 (ph.), he went back down, did a little walk around, fixed us  
16 something to eat, and then we came up to 81. And I think at 81 I  
17 think we were there by close to 3:30, 3:40, somewhere in there, we  
18 made 81. And that's where I felt the boat lean a little bit but I  
19 figured that was because the boat walking (ph.) up the barge  
20 because if you're hooked up to a rake with a -- and you ain't got  
21 jockeys on it, she'll walk. And, I didn't see the point of  
22 putting jockeys on it with one barge.

23 Q. Can you describe a jockey?

24 A. That's when you got it where you got wires hooked to your  
25 push knees at the top down to the barge. So you've got your

1 normal face wires and then you've got your jockeys up there to  
2 hold the boat from walking and doing all that. We didn't put it  
3 down because, well, we only got one barge and we're only just  
4 running it up. We can always just slow down just a little bit and  
5 let the face wires out and let her settle back down. Came around  
6 81, we felt the boat lean. I was like, well, like we get around  
7 this next bend, I'll show you how to straighten that out. Then we  
8 made it around the next bend and the boat felt like it walked  
9 again but to the other side, I think towards the starboard then.  
10 Got in the straight-of-way, put slack in it. And that's when we  
11 felt the real bad lean. And that was around 5.

12 CWO [REDACTED] The first lean was to the starboard. The  
13 second lean was to --

14 CAPT. SWEEZEY: The first one was towards the port.

15 CWO [REDACTED] The first one --

16 CAPT. SWEEZEY: e was coming around 81. We were at the point  
17 side. The second lean was to the starboard.

18 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

19 Q. And you think about 0330 was mile 81?

20 A. Right about in that area.

21 Q. So you guys had a full hour or so until the next good turn.

22 A. Well, we did the little turn and then we went with the  
23 straight-of-way and --

24 Q. And then the big turn to the --

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. All right. When was the next big one?

2 A. So when we got around that next bend, we got the straight-of-  
3 way, got in slack water. We loosened up the face wires. When we  
4 did, that's when she really started leaning to the port.

5 Q. That was in the straight-of-way, opening part of the  
6 straight. So the boat was rigged, just so I make sure I draw it  
7 right. Would you draw it for me, the wire arrangement that you  
8 remember being on. So I fully understand what you mean by  
9 potential jockey wire, how the face wires were rigged.

10 A. I've got the barge going this way.

11 Q. Um-hum.

12 A. You've got the face wire coming up, going around, and with  
13 the jockey, because that barge has a (indiscernible) there, we  
14 would have hooked it there, come around with a wire and came right  
15 here and hit the push knees.

16 Q. To the top of the push knee?

17 A. Yes, sir, the top.

18 Q. So it's like a vertical triangle versus --

19 A. Yeah, because now you got it sits upwards a little bit more  
20 and the whole boat in place, and we just went with the regular  
21 face wires, one barge.

22 Q. Right.

23 A. We mounted --

24 Q. The jockeys would be used for larger tows?

25 A. You catch a lot of tows with them.

1 Q. You've got torque with them.

2 A. Yeah. We had like a couple of bends, and that was about it  
3 with one barge. So we went with just regular face wires.

4 Q. How about wing wires? Did you use --

5 A. That's what the face wires are doing. You've got ones that  
6 are real close up.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. Shooting up there. And you've got ones going back closer to  
9 the stern quarter.

10 Q. Okay. Kind of like jockey, face, wing?

11 A. Pretty much. Yeah. It's all -- the face wire is all about  
12 the same.

13 Q. I'm trying to use the correct terminology here.

14 BY CWO [REDACTED]

15 Q. You said when you loosen the face wires it leaned hard to the  
16 port. Was it like hard port or like stern port or --

17 A. The way it felt, it felt like stern port but it leaned the  
18 whole boat to port.

19 Q. After you felt that, can you continue on with all the steps  
20 that were taken, like what you did?

21 A. The main guy that pointed it to the bank, the normal sound,  
22 my lead guide was making sure everybody was up, everybody was on  
23 the work flat while I'm trying to announce getting people to come  
24 to see if they can assist while trying to get the boat to the  
25 bank.

1 Q. And when you said your main guy, you're referring to Chris,  
2 the steersman?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Just making sure somebody else didn't pop into the picture.  
5 And he was getting everybody together and getting them to the  
6 barge.

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. Did anybody report any flooding or damage to any spaces?

9 A. That's what he told me when we ended up noticing it leaned.  
10 He went down. He goes the engine room's got water in there. So  
11 we sounded the general alarm, made sure everybody was up and on  
12 the work flat. And we point -- then I brought it over to the  
13 bank.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Who pulled the general alarm? Was  
15 that you?

16 CAPT. SWEEZEY: (No audible response.)

17 BY CWO [REDACTED]

18 Q. Did he say how much water was in the engine room?

19 A. He just said it was coming in, and the way it felt when it  
20 leaned, I'd rather get it to the bank, get everybody off the boat,  
21 and then we can go from there trying to get it under -- try to get  
22 something on the situation. I'd rather got the boat where it  
23 wasn't going to go all the way down in the river and everybody was  
24 accounted for.

25 CWO [REDACTED] Anything else for that right now?

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, I mean I've got some questions.

2 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

3 Q. Did you look towards the stern of the vessel at all any time  
4 once you felt the lean or --

5 A. After I felt the lean, I did. I saw the water roll up on the  
6 deck-wise, but it didn't get that high yet, but you could see it  
7 on the deck itself. And, when I saw that, we were going to the  
8 bank, and then when I got it to the bank, that's when you seen the  
9 (indiscernible) stern boom work starting to go under water.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: When you saw water across the stern  
11 from the helm, and that's when you're like definitely --

12 CAPT. SWEEZEY: I saw water on the back deck, I was like, uh-  
13 uh, we got go.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

15 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

16 Q. When you say you got to the bank, you got to the bank under  
17 your own power --

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. -- before the *Richmond* arrived?

20 A. Yes, sir. I got it -- well, I got the barge all the way to  
21 the bank, and I couldn't swing my stern into the bank. The  
22 *Richmond* came up and started pushing me in, trying to keep me kind  
23 of close to the bank at all times.

24 Q. And that was under your own power. Both engines stayed  
25 running?

1 A. I had him turn off the port one.

2 Q. Why the port one?

3 A. Because there was going to be too much water on that side. I  
4 didn't want it filling up. We ended up shutting the port one  
5 down, let the starboard one on. The starboard one was staying out  
6 of the water, and so we were using it to keep us pinned. *Richmond*  
7 was chasing down pumps, getting more pumps for us after we got the  
8 two going.

9 Q. When you got the two going, did they do any good?

10 A. It looked like they were. It really did. It looked like it  
11 was starting to come back up, coming back. You started seeing the  
12 deck clearing up with water and everything. You could see it  
13 receding back, and when they got back with two more pumps, I  
14 hopped back onto the boat by myself, was readjusting the pumps so  
15 we could get another two more pumps in place, see if we could  
16 finish getting it back up. While I was there, the next thing I  
17 know, you started seeing the water starting to come back again,  
18 and it was coming back real quick. And the *Richmond* just  
19 forwarded and just shoved us up onto the bank.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm going to get back into  
21 (indiscernible) questions.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

23 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

24 Q. I wanted to back up a bit with Chris being the steersman in  
25 training as well. He's also a deckhand on board?



1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Can you describe to me that delineation that you use him for?  
3 Obviously you want him to be driving sometimes, but he's got his  
4 own deckhand stuff going on.

5 A. Um-hum. I wanted him for the point almost to Branjeer, 81  
6 and something like that. I wanted him to do the good ones. That  
7 way he gets a little more familiar with it, and I let him drive a  
8 little bit more there up until all that. He would run down, do a  
9 quick little run around in the engine room, checking it out.

10 Q. How often does he go down and do -- did you use him to go  
11 down and do those engine room round?

12 A. Before we got all the way up here where all the buoy tires  
13 and turns was, he was doing it every hour, no problem.

14 Q. Every hour.

15 A. Every hour. By then we took a little longer time between  
16 them because you got them two really good turns, points and bends  
17 and all that. I wanted him to do it. So it took a little longer  
18 times between them, those times.

19 Q. That first bend being like 3:30. So he did an engine round  
20 before then I assume?

21 A. No. He did one a little before, right after we got done with  
22 -- what was it -- Gramercy Bridge. Wait. No, no. Sunshine. I'm  
23 sorry. My brain's all scattered around.

24 Q. No, no, you're fine.

25 A. Huh?

1 Q. You're fine.

2 A. Right after we made the bridge, he went down and checked.  
3 After we made Branjeer, from that point on, he checked. Then when  
4 we went around 81 and everything like that, he was going to do his  
5 little check before everybody starts doing -- getting moving and  
6 doing their watch change. But I wanted him to see how to adjust  
7 that when the boat starts walking up the barge, try to show him  
8 one more thing.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. If I would have sent him down there afterwards, I don't know.

11 Q. So would that last engine round have been before mile 81? Is  
12 that what you're saying? Before --

13 A. Yes, sir. Before we made 81 mile point. It was a little  
14 before that. I think he went down there, put the chili and  
15 hotdogs on the stove. He went down there and checked and came  
16 back, got the food and brought it to us.

17 Q. Us.

18 A. It was me and him.

19 Q. Oh, he brought the food. Okay.

20 A. Yeah. He made us something to eat.

21 Q. Gotcha.

22 A. We were waiting on to get groceries but we had to get up  
23 there to get it. So it was all he could fix, what you got.

24 Q. Regarding other deckhand duties, are there certain alarms or  
25 tests or checks or anything besides just looking visual and wiping

1 and cleaning?

2 A. It's a lot of looking, visuals, drilling. Well, most of  
3 these guys are mostly fleet guys, and so they do that. They do  
4 all their checks. They know how to check the engine rooms, walk  
5 arounds and the general alarms and everything, that's usually a  
6 Sunday deal. You check that on Sundays.

7 Q. Sundays.

8 A. Do that by noon so everybody's up and moving by that time  
9 hopefully. You're working the 12s, it depends on when your time  
10 watch change is. Usually that's a Sunday.

11 Q. General alarms meaning just sounding a general alarm or --

12 A. The general alarms, and then they'll go through -- down in  
13 the engine room and hit all the switches.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Just checking to see if everything's working right.

16 Q. Sunday general alarm tests are -- that blue panel I see in  
17 the back, that's all those little -- high level and bilge alarm  
18 and this and that.

19 A. That's what that's for, so they can go through. We make sure  
20 everything is up and still going on that.

21 Q. Do you do drills on Sunday, too, or is it just tests?

22 A. You've got the drills. You've got the tests that we do.  
23 They're assigned to us on the Helm, and we do them all.

24 Q. Helm and all their drills?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Is that all Helm is, is just for drills or are there other --

2 A. You've got that, any reports, anything that needs to be  
3 fixed, employee evaluations, keeps records of people's credentials  
4 and stuff like that. It's got a lot of our information on there.

5 Q. Evals and -- but it's a recordkeeper, not so much like a  
6 preventative maintenance record or --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- or something like that. Okay.

9 CWO ██████████ Does it prompt you to do things or tell you to  
10 do things?

11 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yeah, it'll let you know when something's  
12 coming up. You've got your drills, where you have -- where you  
13 sit down and talk to people and explain how this goes, that goes,  
14 and stuff. You've got all those --

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Does it include like oil changes, oil  
16 filters --

17 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It let's you know about those, too.

18 CWO ██████████ The reason we ask because it's a complex  
19 program and different companies have it set up different ways, and  
20 that's why.

21 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Oh, I agree. It's pretty much got everything  
22 we need in there.

23 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

24 Q. Who's responsible for checking that or being prompted, right?  
25 Because I see a computer alarm, I don't want to go look at it

1 because it's not my job.

2 A. Well, that's usually the wheelhouse.

3 Q. The wheelhouse.

4 A. Yeah, we keep up with that.

5 Q. Wheelhouse meaning whoever's just --

6 A. On watch.

7 Q. -- when it goes bing, bing.

8 A. It don't go bing, bing. Yeah, we just check it periodically  
9 and then you've got your logs and it shows some -- we're always  
10 checking on there. It's usually checks at noontime because that's  
11 when most of our things need to be done.

12 BY CWO [REDACTED]

13 Q. Does Alexis Marine have any policies or anything that says  
14 this person is supposed to be checking Helm and is responsible to  
15 ensure that the bilge alarm gets checked and --

16 A. Wheelhouse personnel.

17 Q. It's the wheelhouse personnel. It doesn't narrow it down  
18 to --

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Pilot on duty, that kind of thing.

20 BY CWO [REDACTED]

21 Q. -- a specific person or pilot on watch?

22 A. No, wheelhouse personnel, the one that's on watch. So we  
23 just check it when -- periodically to make sure everything stays  
24 updated on it. Try to keep it as updated as possible.

25 Q. So wheelhouse watch, like you and the other master or

1 (indiscernible), you guys share the responsibility of managing  
2 that program?

3 A. To keep up with that program, keep it going. So one person  
4 ain't over there staring at it while trying to drive the whole the  
5 time, trying to do everything that needs to be done on there.

6 Q. Do you ever -- how many days have you been on board? Do you  
7 recall? Three weeks or something. Do you guys have like  
8 scheduled meetings or anything to discuss Helm?

9 A. It's usually on Saturdays and Sundays are usually the two  
10 days that all your meetings and safety drills and all that. It's  
11 usually Saturday and Sundays.

12 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

13 Q. Was the last drill and run through and check log the previous  
14 Sunday or previous Saturday?

15 A. I believe so. Yeah, it was. It was --

16 Q. What do you remember about that?

17 A. I don't remember which one it was. I don't know  
18 (indiscernible) or not. I've been on the boats for about 4 weeks  
19 straight now --

20 Q. Right.

21 A. -- and dealing with so many of them drills and safety  
22 meetings.

23 Q. That's all right. I assume we can look at Helm, right, and  
24 that will remind us or tell us?

25 A. Yeah. I can't remember which one it was.

1 Q. Is there a Helm -- is there a maintenance for the employees,  
2 that check on the employees?

3 A. No, we don't have one of those, but now we are going to get a  
4 way on checking those. But we didn't have anything for that on  
5 Helm. I didn't have that in the routine either especially since  
6 we just got done being in the shipyard. That was one of the least  
7 things that was on our mind at the moment.

8 Q. One of the least on your mind.

9 A. Yeah. There was more of everything else going on and was  
10 more important, I didn't really think of that one.

11 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So when do you think the last the  
12 voids were opened? In the shipyard?

13 CAPT. SWEEZEY: In the shipyard, everything was all sealed  
14 and closed in the shipyard because I know they did all kind of  
15 welding on the hull itself but I wasn't on the vessel. So I  
16 didn't know where they were or what they did.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is there a scope of work somewhere  
18 that tells what they did in the shipyard?

19 CAPT. SWEEZEY: I know Danielle has all that information but  
20 I don't know if Helm's got it all. I know Danielle has all the  
21 information.

22 BY CWO [REDACTED]

23 Q. Like the voids, you don't think they've been opened since the  
24 shipyard. Is there any company policies or procedures that says  
25 you check them once a week, once a month or --

1 A. I know normally checked them once a month. I did it with my  
2 crews just to make sure but I ain't even been on there for a whole  
3 month. So.

4 Q. Yeah. Is that -- do you just do it from experience or is  
5 there a checklist?

6 A. It's more from experience. I've been on boats that pretty  
7 much will sink in 24/7 if you didn't have the pumps on them. I've  
8 been on them kind of boats. I've been on some really rough,  
9 raggedy boats. So it's more of a routine of once in a while just  
10 do a good check and then I don't think about it. I just do it.  
11 And it's usually once a month when I do that.

12 Q. There's no company policies that say you have to do it and  
13 make a log entry or enter it in the Helm?

14 A. I didn't see anything on that. They might.

15 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

16 Q. Does Helm also track your hours like when you're on watch,  
17 swap at 12s or 6s? Did you guys enter your hours?

18 A. Not in Helm.

19 Q. Not in Helm. Just in the red book?

20 A. Just in the red book.

21 Q. Does the bilge alarm sound at the helm?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Not just the little blue panel in the engine room but also up  
24 there?

25 A. You hear it up there, too. It makes a sound up there.



1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You hear the sound. Is there any kind  
2 of visual indicator?

3 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It's a little red light.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Now, does the red light specify the  
5 bilge or is it just general?

6 CAPT. SWEEZEY: You read -- it's just like the same as the  
7 one in the engine room. That's what's up there in the wheelhouse.  
8 Same exact thing pretty much.

9 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

10 Q. The whole blue panel thing?

11 A. Yeah, but it's a little smaller. We've got a smaller gray  
12 one up there, and it's got all the lights. It's got the names and  
13 it don't have any digital silence or nothing like that like it  
14 does down in the engine room.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the morning, when everything was  
16 happening -- on Sunday morning when everything was happening, did  
17 the bilge alarm ever go off?

18 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Never heard the alarm. We never heard it go  
19 off, the alarm itself. But we had one of our generators, you  
20 can't hit the acknowledge button and it did right half the time.  
21 So half the time when you were on that one generator, the other  
22 one will show that it was low in oil pressure.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: When it was off?

24 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Um-hum.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

1           CAPT. SWEEZEY: So you got a red light that was glowing  
2 already in that corner.

3           UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So to make sure I'm understanding what  
4 you're saying, you don't recall the bilge alarm going off but  
5 there was a generator alarm that went off?

6           CAPT. SWEEZEY: It was the light that was on.

7           UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The light.

8           CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yes, sir. Because we had it silenced because  
9 if not, it was sounding.

10          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, I see. It'll just keep sounding,  
11 not just silence the one time alarm. It would continue to keep --

12          CAPT. SWEEZEY: It'll keep going. So you had to silence that  
13 one as well. When you look at the big blue box, you got switches  
14 all the way up and down it because you just silence one thing, and  
15 that's it.

16          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. From the engine room, not to  
17 the helm.

18          CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yeah. When you did that, it silenced it  
19 going up to the wheelhouse.

20          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So that alarm was silenced because of  
21 the generator?

22          CAPT. SWEEZEY: Because of the generator, just the generator  
23 alarm was silenced. The bilge should have been activated and  
24 going.

25          UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the generator, do you know what

1 type of alarm that was? Oil, water --

2 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It was oil because what it is, when you shut  
3 it down, the alarm will go off letting you know that the oil  
4 pressure dropped, and the acknowledge button is supposed to work,  
5 but sometimes it sticks.

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible).

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If the bilge alarm went off, the  
8 audible noise would have still went on, right?

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

10 CAPT. SWEEZEY: The noise and the light should have went  
11 right off as well. But we couldn't notice a different in light  
12 because, well, you already had that one generator light go on  
13 because like I said, the acknowledge button would stick every here  
14 and there.

15 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

16 Q. You said you also -- not just on *Uncle Blue*, but what was the  
17 boat? *Uncle John*.

18 A. This one.

19 Q. That's this one. Is that the other one you spent time on?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. What kind of bilge alarms does it have on this vessel?

22 A. This one is a little more dated one. They got little small  
23 blocks up there for the wheelhouse that acknowledges the lights  
24 and the alarms. And the acknowledge button's only in the  
25 wheelhouse. It ain't down in the engine room.

1 Q. Oh, I see. So you have total control of acknowledge up  
2 there.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Just one bilge alarm still?

5 A. It's got two different bilge alarms, one for each panel.

6 Q. One for each panel?

7 A. Um-hum.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Now, I'm (Indiscernible) back up.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sure.

10 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

11 Q. Back to the voids. Since you been on board for this 3 1/2, 4  
12 weeks or since the 9th of March, to your knowledge, nobody's  
13 opened the hatches to check any of the voids, correct?

14 A. Not to my knowledge.

15 Q. And in your experience on the *Uncle Blue*, have you ever had a  
16 situation where a void was flooded out and had the opportunity to  
17 feel the boat the way it rides?

18 A. Way before, yes, sir.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Because when we got on face, she did a little lean once the  
21 stern pumped out the void. I think it was a starboard one. The  
22 starboard stern one would leak every here and there, and you just  
23 went out of there and pumped it out.

24 Q. About how long ago was that?

25 A. Probably the last time I was really on, about a year ago.

1 Q. And you felt nothing similar?

2 A. It didn't feel the same. It just felt like we were walking  
3 up the barge. That's what it felt like.

4 Q. Have you heard from anybody else that works at the company  
5 about any problems that the boat's had with any of the voids  
6 taking on water?

7 A. I haven't.

8 Q. All right.

9 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

10 Q. On the transit up, did you guys hit any logs? Was there any  
11 prop damages, any weird propulsion issues, any hard landings?

12 A. No hard landings. I think we got a couple of logs here and  
13 there or tree limbs or something like that coming down.

14 Q. Nothing that made you guys stop?

15 A. Uh-uh. None that stopped us or slowed us down or anything  
16 like that.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. But I was crossing over from slack (ph.) water to slack water  
19 when we catch them.

20 Q. Okay. And no hard enough landings where you thought, ooh,  
21 what was that?

22 A. No.

23 BY CWO [REDACTED]

24 Q. In your role as the master pilot, do you ever make rounds of  
25 the engine room?

1 A. Once in a while. I usually do it once a day.

2 Q. Once a day.

3 A. Just so I can keep on seeing what's going on, what they've  
4 been working on, things like that.

5 Q. Do you know when the last time you made a round was?

6 A. I did it, I think it was at 12 o'clock of a morning. It was  
7 12 a.m.

8 Q. When you were on watch?

9 A. Yes.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Midnight?

11 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It was in the morning.

12 BY CWO [REDACTED]

13 Q. And you didn't see, hear, smell, feel anything out of the  
14 ordinary at that time?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Kind of recapping here, your steersman, Chris, made  
17 approximately two rounds between 12 and 3:30. You started going  
18 around all the bends. So he was focused on steering and didn't  
19 make any more rounds.

20 A. I was trying to help him get through the bends and stuff like  
21 that.

22 Q. And he didn't report anything after he made his rounds or say  
23 anything was unusual?

24 A. No, he did not.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: How long does it take Chris to do a

1 round usually?

2 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Usually about like -- he'd go down, leave  
3 from the wheelhouse, and I think he'd be done by like almost 30,  
4 40 minutes.

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wow. That's a long time. He's just  
6 walking in the engine room.

7 CAPT. SWEEZEY: He'll walk into the engine room, be down  
8 there a little. Then he'll come back up. He might fix something  
9 to eat or go to the bathroom and all that.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

11 CAPT. SWEEZEY: He makes use of his time when he's out from  
12 there. Most of the time when he gets to drive is when we're -- we  
13 were in the fleet on this boat.

14 BY CWO [REDACTED]

15 Q. So, how well would you say you knew -- know Chris? Like how  
16 much work experience do you have with him and everything?

17 A. About almost -- I think what -- about 5 months now we've  
18 worked with each other.

19 Q. So that's pretty --

20 A. Pretty good.

21 Q. -- good out there?

22 A. Um-hum. Good worker.

23 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

24 Q. Is that all on *Uncle Blue*?

25 A. *John*.

- 1 Q. *John*. Thank you.
- 2 A. Yeah.
- 3 Q. *John*.
- 4 A. This was his first round with *Blue*. He's used to this boat.
- 5 Q. So you came on watch just before midnight, 11:30 or so and
- 6 you took on -- and this incident occurred about 5 o'clock in the
- 7 morning?
- 8 A. Yes.
- 9 Q. When were you gone from the wheelhouse?
- 10 A. I stepped down a couple times to go to the bathroom. It was
- 11 one -- where were we at? We were at Carline and then one before
- 12 the bridge, I stepped down from there. Because after he got ahold
- 13 of traffic, I stepped down, came back up. We made the bridge.
- 14 Q. Sunshine?
- 15 A. Yes, sir. And just wanted to make that I didn't have to
- 16 worry about having to go to the bathroom before going to Branjeer.
- 17 So I went down and made sure I went.
- 18 Q. (Indiscernible) came down and no hotdog, chili dog for you or
- 19 anything else?
- 20 A. Just when Chris brought us some up.
- 21 Q. Hey, one might not be enough. Just asking.
- 22 A. No, he even brought the pan up there with him. That way we
- 23 would be able to eat.
- 24 Q. Customer service.
- 25 A. Oh, yeah.



1 Q. Okay. But no other times you left the wheelhouse. Just  
2 those two bathrooms.

3 A. Yeah.

4 BY CWO [REDACTED]

5 Q. The rest of the crew that's on board, how well did you know?

6 A. Tyrome, I worked with him for a long time. I started working  
7 with him in 2020. And Mike, Mike's new. And what's his name? A  
8 little island boy, he ended up -- he's new, too. Eric, still  
9 learning Eric.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: How long have you been working with  
11 Eric?

12 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Off and on every here and there. I think I  
13 done like a couple trips with him to Houston and back.

14 BY CWO [REDACTED]

15 Q. Mike is the new guy? He's new?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. And Brian is the other new guy?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. How would you describe your relationship with the crew?

20 A. Not bad. I know that I like to work first and then hang out  
21 later.

22 Q. Everybody gets along pretty well?

23 A. This was a good little group we had. Everybody worked very  
24 good with each other.

25 Q. How do you like working for Alexis Marine?

1 A. It's not a bad little company. I kind of like it over here.

2 Q. Do you think everybody else on the crew feels like they like  
3 working for Alexis?

4 A. A good bit of them, yeah.

5 Q. Do you ever hear anybody talk negatively about the company?

6 A. No, not really.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If anybody has questions, I'm just  
8 looking back over my stuff.

9 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I just have one follow up about the  
10 weather. Do you remember what the weather was?

11 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Huh?

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do you remember what the weather was?

13 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It was dark, not much wind. I think it was  
14 coming from the west I think it was. No, wait. No, it was coming  
15 from the east, a little light wind from the east side of the barge  
16 and that was about it. And then there was a little light fog. It  
17 was patchy fog every here and there.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No rain though?

19 CAPT. SWEEZEY: We caught a little bit of sprinkling when we  
20 were on the barge. It looked like it was about to really rain.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Temperature?

22 CAPT. SWEEZEY: A little chilly. At the time when the patchy  
23 fog came through, you felt the chill in your bone, but it didn't  
24 help with wet clothes on.

25 BY CWO [REDACTED]

1 Q. So the pumps, what pumps were you using? Your own or from  
2 the *Richmond* or --

3 A. From the *Richmond*.

4 Q. They had -- all the pumps came from the *Richmond*?

5 A. Yeah. Because my guy said he didn't see the -- what was it?  
6 The hose for ours.

7 Q. What kind of pump did you have? Air pump or a jigger one or  
8 gasoline?

9 A. It was a gasoline one, and it was a 2 inch. It was sitting  
10 on the back deck.

11 Q. Is that one you used for barges or --

12 A. Barges and all that. Whatever we need it for, that's what it  
13 was for. He didn't see the hose, couldn't find the hose.  
14 *Richmond* gave us theirs.

15 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Suction hose.

16 CAPT. SWEEZEY: No, they gave us the pumps and all.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right. You said you were missing your  
18 hose. Your suction hose?

19 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yes, sir.

20 BY CWO [REDACTED]

21 Q. Your suction hose for your pump. Therefore, you weren't able  
22 to use your pump.

23 A. Yeah, that's why we didn't grab ours right off. And by the  
24 time we finally got hoses over there, nobody was allowed to go  
25 around that corner.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So can you name who your guy was that  
2 told you he couldn't find the hose?

3 CAPT. SWEEZEY: It was Chris. Chris said he didn't see the  
4 hose. I think what it was, it was over there on the portside too  
5 close to the water. It was going under the water. So he didn't  
6 see it.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Where's the generator stored or I mean  
8 the pump stored?

9 CAPT. SWEEZEY: The pump was right there on the stern. The  
10 hose was on the very back deck on the grating.

11 BY CWO [REDACTED]

12 Q. All that was under water?

13 A. When we got the hoses and all that, you could see the water  
14 starting to come up to the corner, and I wasn't allowing nobody to  
15 go back there because I didn't want nobody to slip and we had to  
16 chase somebody down.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And no fixed bilge system in the  
18 engine room, no fixed bilge pumps?

19 CAPT. SWEEZEY: No, we had little small submersible that sits  
20 right by the shafts just in case they blow or start going.

21 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No large fixed. Just the little --

22 CAPT. SWEEZEY: Yeah.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are we missing anything?

24 CWO [REDACTED] That's funny. I was about to same thing.

25 BY CWO [REDACTED]

1 Q. Is there anything you can think of that we should know --

2 A. Not really.

3 Q. -- that will help us? What do you think happened?

4 A. I have no clue. It just tripped (ph.) me out. It really did  
5 because when we thought we had it, it went back down.

6 CWO [REDACTED] It's 1545.

7 (Whereupon, at 3:45 p.m., 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: FLOODING OF TOWING VESSEL *UNCLE*  
BLUE ON THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER  
ON MARCH 26, 2023  
Interview of William Sweezey

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23FM023

PLACE: Lower Mississippi River

DATE: March 29, 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.

  
Kathryn A. Mirfin  
Transcriber