

Interview Summary: NOBRA pilot #49 – Ian Grue

DCA20FM012 -- Collision of *Cooperative Spirit* Tow with *RC Creppel* Tow and Cargo Vessel *Glory First*

Date: January 29, 2020

Location: Pivach, Pivach, Hufft , Thriffiley & Dunbar, L.L.C., 8311 Highway 23, Suite 104 Belle Chasse, LA 70037

NOBRA pilot for 8 years. Holds license as Master of Towing Vessels. Started working on towing vessels at age 12. Most prior experience on harbor tugs in New Orleans.

Received call at 2230 1/25/2020 for being on board the *Glory First* at 0130 on 1/26/2020. Was asleep when he took the call.

Vessel fully loaded. Traveling at full ahead. Mate on telegraph. Fighting 5 knot current. Not in heavy traffic. Slowed down occasionally. Good visibility – no fog.

Captain spoke good English.

At about 0500, NOBRA pilot #26 was on a southbound ship and told 49 about the *Cooperative Spirit* and estimated it was pushing 25-35 barges. 49 said he exercises foresight and estimated where he would overtake the *Cooperative Spirit*.

“I was not moving fast – fighting 5 knots of current.” He called the *Cooperative Spirit* to arrange his overtaking. 49 said he estimated overtaking the *Cooperative Spirit* in the Hahnville bar area, across from Valero.

49 said he overheard the *RC Creppel* say it was leaving the St Rose fleet with one barge and believed he overheard the *RC Creppel* and *Cooperative Spirit* discuss their meeting arrangements.

49 initiated call with *RC Creppel* and figured he would meet the *RC Creppel* just above the bridge at the Bisso fleet. Pilot put out a securite call, 49 northbound by Destrehan buoys.

He said he was concerned with the *Cooperative Spirit*. His PPU was in front of him, and the ship’s radar behind him. He saw the stern but not the tow. “I put binoculars on him.” Magnolia fleet on right side – He had a high view of the tow but could not see barges.

He said he heard the call from the *Cooperative Spirit* saying that the *Cooperative Spirit* could not see the *RC Creppel* anywhere.

The pilot said, “Mr. Mate, we have an emergency”. Call the engine room, come down to maneuvering speed now. “Get the captain on the bridge”.

Ship at 70 rpms. He slowed down the revolutions. He stepped forward to check his personal pilot unit.

I saw the lights for the head of the tow of the *Cooperative Spirit*. The lights were around the bend. He was looking at the aspect of the tow. He looked in the ppu. It appeared that the *Cooperative Spirit* was coming off point, crossing the river from the east to the west bank. He could not see what was in front. He saw the *Cooperative Spirit* move across the river.

He heard the *Cooperative Spirit* say, “I have 40, I will try to get her stopped.”

Mate may have said they were at maneuvering speed.

He said the crew spoke good English and that channel 67 was blowing up with a lot of conversations.

He called VTS NOLA to report the collision between the RC Creppel and the Cooperative Spirit and that he could not see the RC Creppel anywhere. He hung up on VTS.

The “door was open for me and then it started to close”. He assessed whether he should stop the vessel, how he would stop and if he was able to stop the vessel. He was concerned with the fleet of red flag barges off to his starboard and lots of boats and people in the area. His first choice was to stick the vessel in the mud, but there was not enough room because of all the vessels and barges in the fleet. He decided to get through the area with as little damage as possible. He referred to the pilot mantra of “Mud, Metal and Man” in responding to a situation such as this. Empty barges “way cheaper than petro barges.” Steer away from “bubble” boat. It was going well until it was not.

“I declared another emergency”. “Mr. Mate, call the engine room.” He asked the mate for emergency sea speed ahead. He believed he gave a hard starboard rudder. He saw the Cooperative Spirit falling down. When he saw that the ship was going to make contact, he asked the mate to sound the general alarm and the danger signal. The ship started “biting”. Big propeller on the ship. He could feel the big engine doing its job.

There was a big “Kaboom” (from the collision). The Cooperative Spirit was heard over the radio saying, “There goes everything.” We hit pretty flat, at a relative angle of 2 degrees to the Cooperative Spirit’s heading. He was then pointing towards the Magnolia fleet and its shallow water. He ordered the rudder amidships and then hard to port. It takes about 28 seconds for the rudder to move from hard over to hard over. He was grinding up the side of the tow. He was looking forward and seeing the boats in the fleet. The engine was coming up. He was “waiting and watching”. The vessel started to swing after “a long time”. After passing the head of the tow, he went to hard starboard – moved to the center of the river and regained control of the vessel.

NOBRA 49 got off the vessel at 35 mile point at about 0700 AM.

He said the current will affect the tow in the bend at 26 mile point.

Pilot said the bend at 26 mile point is a 75-degree turn.

He was comfortable with his agreement to overtake the Cooperative Spirit as a northbound vessel in high water conditions. He said he was polite. He thanks people after passing them.

He said he did not hear any nervousness in the voices of the RC Creppel and Cooperative Spirit pilots.

The doors of the Glory First bridge were closed.

He said he is always reactionary. He said, “I was comfortable with the handling characteristics of ships because I had been on her for hours.” He felt rested.

He commented that he had seen the RC Creppel on his ppu midway up the reach and said that the RC Creppel was doing what he would expect. He recalled that his PPU did not reflect the Cooperative Spirit barges.

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