



## U.S. COAST GUARD INTERVIEW SUMMARY

**Matter Under Investigation:** July 12, 2021 Allision of the Liberian flag bulk carrier *Jalma Topic* with the Crescent Towing office barge fleet at mile 93.5 lower Mississippi river, (NTSB No. DCA21FM032) New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Interview Of:** Roberto Juricevic, 2nd Mate of M/V JALMA TOPIC

**Date/Time:** July 12, 2021 @ 1130 local time, and again on July 15, 2021 @ 1440 local time

**Location:** In master's conference room, aboard M/V JALMA TOPIC, anchored @ MM 93.3, LMR the first time, the second time was in the same room, but while the vessel was moored at Buck Kreihls.

**Interviewed By:** CWO3 [REDACTED]

**Others Present:** Michael Harowski – Wilson Elser Moskowitz Edelman & Dicker, LLP (representing *Jalma Topic* interests), Garreth Fernandes – New Ship Inc. (representing vessel P&I Club), Mr. Adam Tucker – NTSB.

### Interview Summary:

Mr. Juricevic stated that that he was the vessel's navigation officer and his daily watch schedule was 0000-0400 and again from 1200-1600. He has 7 total years of maritime experience, and had served onboard the company's vessels for five years; two of those contracts were as a master and four were as a chief mate. He joined the vessel for the current contract approximately 4.5 months from the day of the incident. He stated that he had no medical conditions, did not take any medications, and felt well rested at the time of the incident.

Mr. Juricevic said he took over the watch about five minutes before midnight. Mr. Juricevic stated that during regular navigation through the river and up until the steering issue, he was stationed at the "usual position" on the starboard side of the bridge at the backup ECDIS which was nearest to the telegraph forward of a curtain. He stated that there were no issues at all with the vessels' propulsion, steering or navigation equipment that he was aware of. Mr. Juricevic stated that he had never experienced this problem with the vessel's steering gear before, nor any like it on the other vessels he had sailed on.

Mr. Juricevic stated that approximately 15 minutes before the incident, the NOBRA pilot #11 came aboard and they began the standard pilot exchange with no issues noted. He stated that communications were good between the pilot and bridge team, which consisted of an A/B as helmsman, the 2nd Mate as officer of the watch, and the master. The pilot was located in front of the port side radar by the bridge forward window. He had a portable pilot unit which looked like an iPad.

Mr. Juricevic recalled hearing the pilot order a rudder command of "10 degrees port" and the ship responded accordingly. After 10-15 seconds, he heard the pilot order "rudder midship", but the rudder angle indicator remained at 10 degrees port. After a few additional seconds, he heard the pilot's

subsequent rudder commands of “Starboard 10”, “Starboard 20” and finally “Hard to Starboard”, but the rudder angle indicator remained at 10 degrees port.

Mr. Juricevic stated that during the increasing starboard rudder commands, he left his position at the backup ECDIS and ran to the bridge steering console, taking over as the helmsman. He stated that he personally tried to bring the rudder “max” to starboard in hand steering mode, then tried switching it to non-follow-up mode and actuated the non-follow-up lever all the way to hard to starboard, with no response showing on the rudder angle indicator.

Mr. Juricevic recalled that at that time, the pilot attempted to make an emergency radio call to VTS and then ordered the engine be brought to full astern propulsion. Mr. Juricevic attempted to bring the vessel from full ahead to full astern, but the engine would not do this because of a failsafe built into the engine order telegraph. He then successively pushed the telegraph buttons for Dead Slow Astern and Slow Astern and he stated that he believes that the engine responded.

Mr. Juricevic stated that the pilot ordered that he sound the danger signal on the whistle. Mr. Juricevic had to go to find the whistle button for which he had no flashlight, so he had to feel around for the button. The pilot was busy on the radio. The pilot then ordered “Drop Anchors”. Mr. Juricevic relayed this via hand-held VHF radio to the Bosun, who was stationed on the forecastle. The Bosun only dropped the port anchor to two shackles from what he recalled.

Mr. Juricevic stated that seconds after dropping the port anchor, the JALMA TOPIC made contact with the barge at Smith’s Fleet. He estimated that at the time of impact, based on looking up at the speed log, that the JALMA TOPIC’s speed was between 7.0-7.5 knots, but he wasn’t sure if the unit of measurement was speed over water or speed over ground.

Mr. Juricevic contacted the duty Ordinary Seaman and ordered him to wake up all crew, and to energize the deck lights. He energized the “two red navigation lights” to signal the JALMA TOPIC was not under command and recalled the master ordered the crew to sound the ballast tanks. After that he changed the vessels status on the automatic identification system to aground.

When asked why he did not consider switching the steering pumps, Mr. Juricevic stated that things had happened too fast and he was focused on responding to the pilots orders. The pilot at the time was ordering the rudder to starboard, followed by full astern, drop the anchor and sound the whistle. It was dark and the pilot was screaming. Mr. Juricevic had to move from the steering stand to the whistle button, which he had to search for in the dark, and then to the telegraph. He also had to call the Bosun forward to drop the anchors. The pilot was on the radio.

When asked if the steering pump start/stop controls were on the bridge’s helm steering console, Mr. Juricevic stated that they were not, but they were on the panel along the aft bulkhead of the bridge, behind the curtains that were closed. Mr. Juricevic noted that if he had heard a steering alarm, he would have switched the pumps over, but he heard no alarm. He would have had to go back behind the curtains to change the pumps over.

When asked why he thought the Bosun only dropped the port anchor, Mr. Juricevic stated that he believed the pilot separately ordered the letting go of the port and starboard anchors, and he may have relayed those commands separately to the Bosun. Mr. Juricevic noted it was only seconds from when the anchor was dropped to when they collided with the barge.

When asked if he heard any alarms prior to the pilot issuing the helm orders leading up to the contact with the barge, Mr. Juricevic said he heard no alarms. Mr. Juricevic said that when at the steering stand he saw next to the gyro display there was an alarm which he “switched off” just before switching to the non-follow-up mode but things were happening so fast that he didn’t check what kind of alarm it was. He was at the steering stand for “30 seconds or less”.

When asked about the closed curtain, Mr. Juricevic said it was dark forward of the curtain with no lighting affecting their night vision.

When asked during his watch if there were any hard rudder orders given by either of the pilots, Mr. Juricevic said there were none that he could recall.

When asked if he had participated in a steering gear drill during his time on board, Mr. Juricevic said he has and was present in the steering flat and on the bridge for drills.

//s// [REDACTED], CWO3, USCG

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