

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the matter of: *

*

ISLAND LOOKOUT AND CENTERVILLE *

TURNPIKE BRIDGE COLLISION *

IN CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA, *

Accident No.: DCA21FM005

ON NOVEMBER 14, 2020 *

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Interview of: ADAM PHILLIPS, Mate on Watch

Island Lookout

Via teleconference

Wednesday,
November 18, 2020

APPEARANCES:

ANDREW EHLERS, Marine Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MSSE2 [REDACTED], Investigating Officer
U.S. Coast Guard

RYAN GILSENAN, Attorney

LIBBY SINGLETARY
Stevens Towing Co., Inc.

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:07 a.m.)

1
2
3 MR. EHLERS: Okay, the recording has started. It is 11:07
4 Eastern Standard Time on November 18th, 2020. This is the
5 interview of the mate on watch, Adam Phillips, conducted in
6 conjunction with the investigation into the November 14th, 2020,
7 bridge strike at the Centerville Turnpike Bridge in Chesapeake,
8 Virginia, involving the *Island Lookout* tow. The NTSB reference
9 number for this accident is DCA21FM005.

10 And, Mr. Phillips, can you say and spell your last name?

11 MR. PHILLIPS: My name is Adam Phillips, P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s.

12 MR. EHLERS: Okay. This interview is being recorded. Do you
13 consent to this recording?

14 MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, I do.

15 MR. EHLERS: Okay. This interview is being conducted in
16 conjunction with a safety investigation, the purpose of which is
17 to learn the facts of the accident, determine the probable cause,
18 and prevent future accidents of this nature. Having said that,
19 the NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of confidentiality or immunity
20 from legal action. Do you understand this?

21 MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, I do.

22 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Thank you very much. What I'm going to
23 do is I'm going to once again ask everyone who is on the line or
24 there onboard with you to introduce themselves. You do not need
25 to spell your name since we did that with Captain Briggs. I'll

1 start again. My name is Drew Ehlers, first name Andrew. And I
2 will turn it over to Warrant Officer [REDACTED].

3 CWO [REDACTED]: Yeah, this is Chief Warrant Officer [REDACTED].

4 MR. EHLERS: And from the U.S. Coast Guard.

5 And Mr. Gilsenan.

6 MR. GILSENAN: Ryan Gilsenan, G-i-l-s-e-n-a-n, counsel for
7 Stevens Towing.

8 MR. EHLERS: And Ms. Singletary.

9 MS. SINGLETARY: Libby Singletary from Stevens Towing.

10 MR. EHLERS: Okay. Thank you all very much.

11 Is there anyone else on the line or in the room onboard the
12 vessel, in the space on the vessel?

13 (No response.)

14 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

15 MR. GILSENAN: No.

16 MR. EHLERS: All right, thank you very much.

17 INTERVIEW OF ADAM PHILLIPS

18 BY MR. EHLERS:

19 Q. Okay, Mr. Phillips. Can you tell me your age, please?

20 A. I am [REDACTED] years old.

21 Q. Okay. Tell me a little bit about your background,
22 specifically in the maritime industry, how long you've been in the
23 maritime industry, how long you've been working on tugs and towing
24 vessels, and how long you've been a mate.

25 A. I've been working in the maritime industry and for Stevens

1 Towing, it was January of '08, and worked for Stevens Towing the
2 entire time of my maritime career.

3 Q. And -- go ahead.

4 A. What else do you want to know?

5 Q. So how long have you been a mate?

6 A. Nine, ten years. Nine and a half years, I would say.

7 Q. Okay. Have you always been working as a mate or did you
8 start out as a deckhand? How did you get to be a mate on board?

9 A. I first started in the industry as a deckhand working for
10 J.R. Briggs.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And I went to school for steersman after about a year of
13 working as a deckhand, to become an (indiscernible) and it was up
14 to me from there.

15 Q. Okay. When did you work for J.R. Briggs?

16 A. Sorry, what?

17 Q. I think you said working for J.R. Briggs, is that correct?

18 A. Yes, I worked -- when I first started as a deckhand, I worked
19 under J.R. as his deckhand.

20 Q. Oh, I got it now. I got it.

21 MR. GILSENAN: That's Captain Briggs that we just
22 interviewed.

23 MR. EHLERS: I got it now, I got it. So sorry, a little bit
24 -- I missed it there.

25 BY MR. EHLERS:

1 Q. So when did you get -- well, let me ask this. What license
2 do you hold, maritime license?

3 A. Right now I hold a master of tow.

4 Q. Is that inland or --

5 A. Yes. It's on bridges and inland waters.

6 Q. Okay. How long have you held that license?

7 A. I've had master of tow since 2015.

8 Q. Okay. And say again, when did you start as a steersman, as a
9 mate?

10 A. 2010, 2011, I think it's between there. I can't remember
11 exactly.

12 Q. Okay, all right. Other than on-the-job training, what kind
13 of other training have you had such as at a maritime training
14 center with Stevens Towing, that kind of thing?

15 A. I've taken bridge resource management courses, I'm taking a
16 leadership/teamwork course, ship handling refresher training, some
17 radar, preserver, and the steersman training at school.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And I've possibly done those watching training videos for
20 basic simple stuff.

21 Q. Okay. And the training that you had, where was that, where
22 did you do that training at? Was that a maritime training center
23 or like a Seamen's Church? Where was that at?

24 A. For the steersman training, that was at Southeast Maritime
25 training center, and my bridge resource management was MPT in

1 Florida.

2 Q. Okay, all right. What's your normal work schedule, days on,
3 days off, that kind of thing?

4 A. We work 49 days on the boat and I have 13 days off.

5 Q. Okay. Where were you on that cycle on Saturday morning, like
6 how many days had you been on?

7 A. I came on the boat on November 6th.

8 Q. Okay. So about what, 8 days, is that -- did I get my math
9 right there? Something like that.

10 MR. GILSENAN: Yes.

11 BY MR. EHLERS:

12 Q. And then what's your normal watch?

13 A. My normal watch is I start at 12 o'clock in the afternoon,
14 I'm on until 5:00 p.m., then I sleep from around 6:00 until
15 10 o'clock, wake up, then I'm back on watch until 5:00 in the
16 morning. Then I sleep from about 5:30 until noon.

17 Q. Okay. Have you always been on the *Island Lookout*?

18 A. I've been on the *Island Lookout* for about 9 years or so.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Really started on the other boat that Wallace Briggs worked
21 on.

22 Q. Okay. So tell me a little bit about the *Island Lookout*. How
23 do you control it, how do you steer it, what's your controls?

24 A. We have electronic throttles, we have electrical -- hydraulic
25 steering, it means steering with a joystick, then we have

1 (indiscernible) motors with our (indiscernible).

2 Q. Okay. And how much horsepower do you got at your hands? And
3 by the way, if you don't know the answer to a question, just tell
4 me I don't know, that's okay.

5 A. It's like 725 apiece.

6 Q. Okay, all right. Have you ever had trouble with the engines
7 or the rudders when you've been in control of the vessel?

8 A. Like mechanical troubles? No.

9 Q. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Have you ever had any other issues with
10 the controls?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay, all right. How does the vessel handle? Does it steer
13 pretty well when you've got a tow on, especially like a tow that
14 you had, a barge full of metal?

15 A. Yes, it normally steers fairly well. In shallow water it
16 does steer a little bit different, but for the most part, it
17 steers pretty well when I'm going forward at a real nice momentum.

18 Q. Yeah. When you say it steers different in shallow water, can
19 you explain what's different?

20 A. Yeah, just we sometimes get affected by bank suction, so that
21 just makes it so it steers different.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. (Indiscernible).

24 Q. All right. Would you describe it as -- is it more sluggish
25 or anything like that?

1 A. It can be. It wants to veer off to port or starboard every
2 once in a while, so we're constantly paying attention and keeping
3 that in check.

4 Q. Yeah, yeah. And how do you keep that in check, with more
5 rudder or how do you do that?

6 A. Yes, with more rudder.

7 Q. Okay. Does it tend to veer to one side more than the other?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Okay. So it just -- it's random?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay, all right. So what I'd like you to do now is describe
12 what happened leading up to the accident, and I want you to go all
13 the way back to when you started the voyage, back -- I think you
14 left from Baltimore, and kind of summarize all the way up until
15 the watch in which the accident happened, and then I'd like you to
16 just tell me what happened during that watch. But can you start
17 back in Baltimore and just kind of take me through the voyage?

18 A. All right. We were in Baltimore, got loaded Friday, I think.
19 Yes.

20 MR. GILSENAN: He's going to check the log book, okay, Drew?

21 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

22 MR. GILSENAN: They do this trip every week, so the days can
23 run together.

24 MR. EHLERS: Yeah, I understand.

25 MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, we got loaded Thursday, November 12th,

1 then we got under way at 2335 that evening, headed southbound to
2 get on the -- bring the barge to Nucor steel mill to get dropped
3 off and off-loaded.

4 BY MR. EHLERS:

5 Q. Did you have that first watch when you got under way?

6 A. I'm always on back watch.

7 Q. Okay, go ahead.

8 A. Twelve p.m. to 5:00 p.m. and then 0200 to 5:00 a.m.

9 Q. Okay. So I interrupted you, but go ahead.

10 A. We entered the bay, (indiscernible) around 2315 Friday night,
11 made my way through Norfolk, got to the Centerville bridge there
12 around -- just before 4:30 when I tried to make contact for the
13 bridge opening, and it took me four times calling him on the radio
14 before he answered the radio. In between waiting for a response
15 in between each time I called him, I was continuing slowing the
16 boat down, because he wasn't responding. So on the fourth call
17 (indiscernible), I told him I was 5 minutes from the bridge, and
18 he told me to bring it on, so I did. It was (indiscernible) so I
19 didn't pick it back up because -- didn't want to pick it up yet.

20 As I made my first approach, the bridge was not opening the
21 -- assuming they normally would open, they got about halfway open
22 when I realized that he was not going to be open by the time I got
23 to the bridge, so I went full astern reverse and tried to stop the
24 barge. And that's when the starboard side of the barge made
25 contact with the -- on the bridge itself. Bam. By the time I

1 made contact, I was doing 0.3 knots.

2 Q. Say that last number again.

3 A. By the time I actually made the contact with the bridge, I
4 was only doing about 0.3 knots.

5 MR. GILSENAN: Zero point three?

6 MR. PHILLIPS: Yeah.

7 BY MR. EHLERS:

8 Q. Okay. Okay. Then what happened after you -- after that made
9 contact with the bridge?

10 A. After I made contact with the bridge, I continued by my
11 propulsion in reverse and made sure I didn't cause more damage to
12 the bridge or right when you get to the marina there or the bridge
13 house or anything. So I backed up the barge, not that I could
14 very much, to get away from that area, and then when I was in a
15 deeper area, we stopped the boat. As I was backing up, that's
16 when I raised my deckhand to get J.R. up here as soon as possible,
17 and then I called the company owner, Johnson Stevens, and then I
18 called the Coast Guard.

19 Q. Okay. Well, let me back up a little bit and just based on
20 what you told me, just talk through a couple things. From what I
21 can see from AIS data, you went through the Great Bridge lock
22 about 45 minutes -- or you departed the Great Bridge locks -- lock
23 about 45 minutes before you got to the Centerville Turnpike
24 Bridge. Do you have any trouble getting --

25 A. (Indiscernible) --

1 Q. Go ahead.

2 A. -- 0345. Yeah, I locked out of the Great Bridge locks at
3 0345.

4 Q. Okay. Did you have any trouble getting in or out of that
5 lock?

6 A. No, it was fairly easy.

7 Q. Okay. And then, I think, fairly quickly you went through the
8 Great Bridge Bridge. When do you call the Great Bridge Bridge to
9 open? Do you call them when you're in the lock or when you're
10 outbound?

11 A. The Great Bridge Bridge likes us to call them as soon as the
12 tug itself clears the lock gate of the Great Bridge Bridge lock.

13 Q. I see.

14 A. As soon as I clear that, my tug clears the lock gate, I call
15 them and tell them I fully cleared the lock and I'll be looking
16 for an opening, and he'll -- roger that, bring it on, we'll have
17 it open for you.

18 Q. Okay. And did the operator of the Great Bridge Bridge
19 respond immediately when you first called him?

20 A. No, it took him two calls on the radio.

21 Q. Okay. What channel on the radio do you call?

22 A. Channel 13.

23 Q. Okay. And that's the normal working channel for bridge
24 openings?

25 A. Yes, it is.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Is that the same channel that's used for locking through, as
4 well?

5 A. Yes, it is.

6 Q. Okay. When you're in the locks or when you're in that part
7 of the channel, can you hear the traffic at the other bridges and
8 at the lock?

9 A. Yes, I can hear -- when there is traffic, I can hear the
10 North Landing Bridge to the vessels when they're coming to it, and
11 that's the furthest bridge.

12 Q. Okay. So you could pretty much hear everybody between the
13 lock --

14 A. Yeah, yeah.

15 Q. -- and the North Landing Bridge.

16 A. Yes, so the bridge tender will talk to the vessels when he's
17 getting ready to open, and they talk to the -- the bridges talk to
18 themselves, too, all three of them.

19 Q. Okay. Was there any other vessels that locked through with
20 you?

21 A. No.

22 Q. Okay. And was there any other vessels underway in the
23 channel as you transited towards the Centerville Turnpike Bridge?

24 A. It was a fairly quiet night; there was no other vessels.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. (Indiscernible).

2 Q. I should ask, I think you mentioned this is a regular route.
3 How many times would you say you've done this route before?

4 A. Roughly, a thousand. I mean, I've worked for the last 10
5 years, it's the same route I've done for 10 years.

6 Q. Okay. And --

7 CWO [REDACTED]: What number? I couldn't hear.

8 MR. PHILLIPS: A thousand times (indiscernible).

9 BY MR. EHLERS:

10 Q. Okay. So you've done this often?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. Have you ever had trouble raising bridge operators,
13 bridge tenders, on the radio?

14 A. Yes, there's been many times where I've actually -- I
15 couldn't get ahold of them on the radio at all and I had to call
16 on the cell phone.

17 Q. Okay. And I mean, how often does that happen?

18 A. Sometimes the machine, especially if I work in the backwash,
19 the night shift, they're harder to reach at nighttime.

20 Q. Yeah. Is this something that happens along the entire
21 intracoastal or is this something that happens in this particular
22 area more often?

23 A. I can't speak to their part of intracoastal. This is the
24 area where the bridge traffic is for the area, the intracoastal we
25 run. The only area we that we have to worry about often is North

1 Landing, Centerville, the Great Bridge Bridge, Gilmerton, and
2 occasionally railroads Norfolk. But then after that, then there's
3 no more bridges.

4 Q. Oh, okay. So you don't have any experience with any other
5 bridge systems?

6 A. Not that much. I ran in other areas, but not that frequent.

7 Q. Okay. As you maneuvered and you started way back in
8 Baltimore all the way up to Centerville, how did --

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. How did the *Island Lookout* and the barge handle, did it
11 handle all right?

12 A. Yes, it handled very well.

13 Q. Okay. How does it handle when going astern?

14 A. When going astern?

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. It likes to -- depending on the water level, so it's shallow
17 or deep, if the water is deep, like real deep, it will back up
18 almost straight, but then it will veer off one way or another. In
19 shallow water, it will veer off a lot quicker and faster, and it
20 doesn't back up straight.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I mean, if it starts turning too much one way, you will have
23 to give it some port on the main. If it was veering off to the
24 port, I'll give it port main so you can get her back straight with
25 full starboard rudder.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Then I'll do, you know, full reverse on both mains to get it
3 so it's straight again.

4 Q. Okay. So I think you mentioned it took you five -- four
5 calls, excuse me, to raise the Centerville Turnpike Bridge
6 operator. Where were you at when you first called him?

7 A. Just over half a nautical mile away.

8 Q. Okay. Was there any physical features, like were you lined
9 up by the -- go ahead.

10 A. With the Centerville Bridge, we usually call them when we
11 come up to the Norfolk (indiscernible) yard on the -- right after
12 the split entrance there, we tell them right around there, that's
13 -- usually need roughly 6 minutes to 5 minutes from the bridge and
14 we request our opening.

15 Q. Okay. What was your speed at that time, do you remember?

16 A. When I first called him, I was doing about 4.5 knots. After
17 the second call and without answering, I pulled my motors back and
18 slowed down to roughly 4 point -- down to 4 knots and continued
19 slowing down as I called him a few more times before he finally
20 answered that fourth call.

21 Q. Okay. Do you remember what rpm you brought it down to at
22 each step?

23 A. After the first call of him not answering, I brought it down
24 to just under 1500 rpms down from 1610, and then I called and he
25 still didn't answer, I brought it down to 1400 -- 1300 rpms.

1 Third call, I brought it down to 1200 rpms, and then that fourth
2 call is when he answered, and that's where I continued rpms after
3 (indiscernible).

4 Q. Okay. So did you stay at -- and I think you said about 1200
5 rpms from that point on until, obviously, you put it in reverse?

6 A. It was until the bridge started to open, and when it was
7 about halfway is when I went full reverse, at 1800 rpms reverse.

8 Q. Okay. When you went reverse, do you remember where you were
9 at as far as, like, were you alongside the marina, do you remember
10 how far out you were from the bridge?

11 A. When my bow was just past, just coming up abeam of the marina
12 is when I first started my reversing.

13 Q. Okay. And when you say your bow, are you talking about the
14 barge or the tug?

15 A. Yes, the bow of the barge.

16 Q. The barge?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay, all right. When you couldn't raise the bridge
19 operator, did you try any sound or light signals?

20 A. No sound signals. I kind of went in my (indiscernible) at
21 the bridge house and was getting ready to call him on the phone
22 when he would then actually answer.

23 Q. Oh, okay.

24 A. On the radio.

25 Q. Yeah, so --

1 A. I was getting ready, I had the phone in my hand, I was
2 getting ready to get their number on the phone to call him.

3 Q. I see. So Captain Briggs told us, I think you have two
4 spotlights and you said you trained -- was it the port spotlight
5 that you trained on the bridge house?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. Where did you have your other spotlight trained, do
8 you remember?

9 A. It was directed -- yes, it was directed on the bridge fender
10 system on the starboard side of the bridge.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Over (indiscernible).

13 Q. Is that typical?

14 A. Yes. Coming up to bridges, we always spotlight the fender
15 systems, whether it's a bridge that opens or just a regular
16 bridge.

17 Q. Okay. So the bridge operator responded and said bring it on,
18 is that correct?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. And is that what they normally say to you?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. They always will tell us bring it on, we'll have it open when
24 you get here, or bring it on, or got you in sight, I see you
25 coming.

1 Q. Okay. Have you ever been told to stop?

2 A. I have been told that, yes. Like when I call them, I'll tell
3 them *Island Lookout* approaching the bridge (indiscernible) they'll
4 say, hold off, Captain, we have a lot of bridge traffic, or we see
5 an emergency vehicle getting ready to come to meet you. They will
6 hold off the opening, so we'll pull back the controls and start
7 reversing slowly and just stop the boat and wait for them to
8 (indiscernible) time for us.

9 Q. Okay. So after the bridge operator said to you bring it on,
10 did you have any other communications with him?

11 A. I did not.

12 Q. Okay. I'm going to ask you a couple questions about the
13 bridge itself. It sounds like you have a lot of experience with
14 it. When it's opened, do you know how wide the channel is?

15 A. According to the -- well, it's written in the (indiscernible)
16 chart, it's stated that it's got 80-foot horizontal clearance.

17 Q. Okay. How wide was your tow?

18 A. Fifty-four feet wide.

19 Q. Okay. You consider that, is that a tight squeeze or is that
20 pretty normal for this area?

21 A. Not much tighter of a squeeze, again, going through like --
22 some of the other bridges there.

23 Q. Okay. Have you ever had trouble getting through a bridge,
24 have you ever hit a fender going through?

25 A. Years ago, I did hit a fender system of the Pungo Ferry

1 Bridge. That was about 6 years ago, maybe 7.

2 Q. Okay. What happened in that -- when that happened?

3 A. That happened because the jumpers on the boat where the -- in
4 the center of the barge got too close to the starboard bank there,
5 and I hit a shoal there and the boat, when it turned, it got
6 turned toward the Pungo Ferry Bridge.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And I ended up hitting the port fender system on Pungo Ferry
9 Bridge.

10 Q. Okay. Do you remember what year that is? If you're not
11 sure, it's all right.

12 A. I would say that was 2014.

13 Q. Okay, all right. And have you ever had any other similar
14 type incidents?

15 A. No, not that I can recall.

16 Q. Okay. So back to the bridge. Can you tell when it's open,
17 fully open?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Now, how do you do that?

20 A. When it's fully open, we can see all the lights on both sides
21 of the fender systems, there's lights on the bridge, and when you
22 see the person's not there, (indiscernible) green bridge and we
23 operate the spotlights, we can see it in the night.

24 Q. Okay. So there's no problem with seeing the bridge itself?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. No, the bridge has got plenty of lights. We can see the
3 bridge.

4 Q. Can you see -- I mean, can you see the outer extremities of
5 the bridge, the corners of the bridge?

6 A. I'm not sure exactly what you mean.

7 Q. Well, I mean, I guess what I'm saying is, you know, when it's
8 night and you've got lights, something might be well lighted, but
9 the very corners of the bridge or something might not be lighted.
10 Let me ask this. As you were approaching the bridge, could you
11 see the full span?

12 A. The full span, yes.

13 Q. Okay. At what point did you realize that it wasn't open?

14 A. The thing is, the bridge started to open, but when it was
15 about halfway open, I realized that at my current speed and the
16 progress that it's made so far, that I would not make it to it --
17 I would make it to it before it finishes opening, that's when I
18 went in full reverse.

19 Q. I see. So essentially, based on your experience, you knew
20 that the timing wasn't right?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. I see. So when the barge hit the bridge, do you have an
23 estimate of how far open the bridge was or, you know, was it
24 almost all the way open? Maybe I should say do you know how much
25 it was hanging out over the fender?

1 A. It was hanging at -- into the chain or the span of the door
2 where we go through by 6 to 8 feet.

3 Q. Okay. What was the weather like that morning?

4 A. Chilly. There was no wind, it was a very fair night, you
5 could see the flashing green all the way when I was on the
6 channel.

7 Q. Have you ever experienced any currents or eddies in that
8 channel?

9 A. There's no current in there. The only time you experience
10 that is when we're in reverse with anything touching and stuff
11 like that, but other than that, no.

12 Q. Okay. So in a normal passing through the Centerville
13 Turnpike Bridge, how do you line yourself up to get through there?
14 It is a pretty tight squeeze. How do you line up the barge to get
15 through there?

16 A. We just set up our barge -- we have the red and green barge
17 lights and the yellow/amber light in the middle. We make sure our
18 deckhand places that amber light in the middle because it has an
19 (indiscernible) hole in it so we can see that flashing.

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. So we know where the center of the barge is, and we have our
22 spotlights on the fender system, and we keep us in line with that
23 sight, but equal distancing where we see the barge will be and
24 where the fender systems are.

25 Q. Okay. So on the morning of the accident, how would you say

1 your lineup was? Were you in the center of the channel, were you
2 a little bit right, a little bit left, far right, far left?

3 A. Up until the point of where I went in reverse, because the
4 bridge wasn't opening fast enough and in time, I was perfectly in
5 line and centered with the bridge.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. But as soon as I went in full reverse, my bow started
8 swinging towards the marina, towards the bridge house, so I had to
9 correct that by giving it port main rudder -- port main engine
10 forward some with the starboard rudder to straighten that out.
11 Once that got out, I went to see (indiscernible) full reverse.

12 Q. Okay. So I'm going to repeat back what I think you told me
13 and I want to make sure I got this right. So you went into full
14 reverse, and at this time, you were parallel with the marina, is
15 that correct?

16 A. Yeah, the marina was off my port side.

17 Q. Okay. And when you went into full reverse, the barge started
18 swinging towards the marina, is that correct?

19 A. Yeah, the barge started swinging towards the port, towards
20 the marina and bridge house. The bridge house is also on the port
21 side next to the marina.

22 Q. Okay. And what was there at the marina? Were there any
23 boats tied up? What was --

24 A. Yeah, there was at least five boats tied up there at the
25 marina.

1 Q. Okay. And how close did the bow of the barge get to the
2 marina, to those boats?

3 A. Not that close, because as soon as I saw that my bow was
4 swinging that way, I quickly countered that swing.

5 Q. I see.

6 A. Prevented it from swinging there too fast and hitting there.

7 Q. Okay. So you countered the swing by going forward on the
8 port engine and a right rudder, a starboard rudder, is that
9 correct?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. And how --

12 A. The starboard rudder --

13 Q. Go ahead.

14 A. -- forward momentum.

15 Q. How much engine did you use?

16 A. I gave it 1,000 rpms of forward momentum, and I still had the
17 starboard main at 1,800 fully reverse.

18 Q. Okay. And how long did you hold the engine and the rudder
19 starboard, port rudder forward and starboard rudder on? How long
20 would you say you had that, that -- how long did you hold that on
21 there?

22 A. Ten, fifteen seconds. I held that until my bow stopped
23 swinging or as soon as it seemed to stop swinging, I straightened
24 my main rudder and then straightened my flanking rudder and put
25 both my mains into full reverse.

1 Q. Okay. And you said that your bow stopped swinging. Did it
2 begin to swing back to starboard?

3 A. Not immediately and -- no, it didn't, it went to the lineup
4 where we were going to -- if the bridge was fully open, it
5 would've been pretty much into the center of the span of the
6 bridge.

7 Q. Okay, all right. And I assume the tow kept moving forward,
8 correct, ultimately through this momentum?

9 A. Yes. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. Could you see where the barge hit the bridge or how it
11 hit the bridge?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Where did it hit the bridge?

14 A. I don't know the terminology, but when it first swings open,
15 there is a (indiscernible) on the other side of the bridge from
16 where I'm facing.

17 Q. Uh-huh.

18 A. It's still stuck in a draw and my starboard corner of my
19 barge hit that, which was when it was still in the draw like 6
20 foot.

21 Q. Okay. All right. So you mentioned you backed -- after
22 hitting the bridge, you backed away. Did the captain come up to
23 the bridge or come up to the wheelhouse?

24 A. Yes. As soon as we hit the bridge, the barge made contact
25 with the bridge, I was already still in full reverse.

1 Q. Um-hum.

2 A. And it made the contact at 0.3 knots, then I backed up, and
3 it seemed like I'm 1.3 knots in reverse away from the bridge, and
4 I was 200 yards from the bridge when Captain Wallace Briggs came
5 up to the wheelhouse.

6 Q. Okay. Did you sound the general alarm or anything like that?

7 A. I did not sound a general alarm.

8 Q. Okay. Did you get any communications from the bridge
9 operator, the bridge tender, after it happened?

10 A. After it happened, I did not talk to the bridge tender until
11 roughly 6:30, 7 o'clock when we exchanged information.

12 Q. Okay. He didn't call you at any time during that?

13 A. No. And I was talking with Coast Guard at the time.

14 Q. Okay. And did you maintain control of the *Island Lookout*
15 until that time?

16 A. I did not. Shortly after Wallace Briggs came up to the
17 wheelhouse, I gave control of the barge to him. After he woke up,
18 he was fully alert, and so he took over.

19 Q. Okay, all right. Okay. I'm going to ask you a couple
20 questions -- let me look here. I'm going to ask you a couple
21 questions, these are standard NTSB questions. We're always
22 interested in sleep and fatigue and how that affects people.

23 A. Uh-huh.

24 Q. I believe you said to me that before you came on watch that
25 you had slept that evening, is that -- Friday evening, is that

1 correct?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And how long did you sleep, do you remember?

4 A. I went to bed roughly -- like I got off watch at 5:10 or so,
5 ate my dinner, and I went to sleep. I actually fell asleep
6 probably roughly around 6:35, 6:40, and I didn't wake up until
7 10:10 -- I mean 10 o'clock.

8 Q. Okay. And how would you describe --

9 A. (Indiscernible).

10 Q. Oh, go ahead.

11 A. And then I (indiscernible) when I woke up, got my cup of
12 coffee or energy drink, and what I drank I don't remember, and
13 (indiscernible) Wallace Briggs and go to my shift.

14 Q. Okay. I'm going to divert from my sleep questions here for a
15 second. When you took over the watch from Captain Briggs, did he
16 tell you anything about how the vessel was handling, did he tell
17 you -- was there any issues that he explained to you?

18 A. No, he did not mention no issues.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. We were mentioning that the weather arriving, that it was
21 supposed to be (indiscernible) out there in the bay, but we made
22 it past all that and we were good.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. We were sailing in from Norfolk.

25 Q. All right. All right, back to sleep here, and I apologize

1 for jumping around. So when you slept --

2 A. That's fine.

3 Q. When you slept that evening, how would you describe your
4 sleep, your quality of sleep?

5 A. When I sleep, I sleep pretty good.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I get pretty well rested on here.

8 Q. Okay. And then did you sleep -- prior to your day watch, did
9 you sleep in the morning time?

10 A. The morning time is when I get my most sleep, because there's
11 like 7 hours off time, and I get relieved at 5 o'clock. I'm in
12 bed at 5:00, before 5:30, and I'm out, and then I wake up at noon.

13 Q. Okay. And you slept well that morning?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay. You mentioned you had a cup of coffee coming on watch
16 that evening. I think you said it could've been an energy drink.
17 How much caffeinated drinks do you normally drink?

18 A. Either one cup of coffee or one -- one can of energy drink at
19 the beginning of my shift and that's pretty much it. Except maybe
20 a diet soda with my breakfast sometimes. Most times water.

21 Q. Okay. You were getting close to the end of your shift when
22 the accident happened.

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Were you feeling tired, fatigued at all?

25 A. No.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. No, I'm -- even when I'm home, I'm up from -- up until
3 5 o'clock in the morning. I just stay on that same schedule
4 because I've been working this for the last 10 -- 9 years, so --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So being up at night like that, it doesn't bother me.

7 Q. Okay. Do you have a cell phone up there with you in the
8 pilothouse? I think you mentioned that you can call the bridge
9 operator.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Is that a personal cell phone or a company phone?

12 A. There's a company phone and my personal cell phone.

13 Q. Okay. Do you ever use your personal cell phone on watch?

14 A. Sometimes, but not -- it depends on the area. Like in the
15 bay, I use it to listen to music and stuff.

16 Q. Okay. Were you using your cell phone at all while transiting
17 down the canal towards the Centerville Bridge?

18 A. It may have been playing music, soft music in the background.

19 Q. Okay. Other than playing music, were you doing anything with
20 your phone?

21 A. At the time of the incident, no. I mean, I talked to my mom
22 while I was waiting for the lock through, and that was it.

23 Q. Okay, all right. Same with the company phone, is that
24 correct?

25 A. The company phone, I didn't use it.

1 Q. Okay, all right. So last question for you, I've got a
2 standard question here. Did you drink any alcohol before your
3 watch or while on watch?

4 A. I haven't drunk alcohol in 20 days because it'll
5 (indiscernible) and I had one drink when I was at a restaurant
6 with my wife.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I don't drink that much [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

10 Q. Okay. [REDACTED] Do you have any other
11 medications you take?

12 A. [REDACTED]
13 [REDACTED]
14 [REDACTED]
15 [REDACTED]

16 Q. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] ?

17 A. [REDACTED].

18 Q. All right.

19 MR. EHLERS: All right, I'll probably have a question or two
20 for you again, but I really appreciate your candidness in
21 responding. I'm going to turn it over now to Chief Warrant
22 Officer [REDACTED] with the Coast Guard.

23 (Pause.)

24 MR. EHLERS: [REDACTED], are you there?

25 CWO [REDACTED]: Sorry about that.

1 MR. EHLERS: Yeah, okay.

2 CWO [REDACTED]: Yeah, I'm here. Can you hear me?

3 MR. EHLERS: Yeah.

4 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

5 Q. Okay, I just got a few questions that I would like to ask
6 real quick. When you were coming up to the Great Log [sic] Bridge
7 and you requested them, did they sound a horn for you there? Did
8 you remember hearing a horn?

9 A. Yes, Great Bridge Bridge, I can hear their horn, yes. They
10 sound a horn when they're getting ready to open and then sort of
11 like as I'm coming through it, when the stern's almost through it,
12 they sound the horn and get ready to close.

13 Q. All right, perfect. And now as you were coming up to the
14 Turnpike Bridge and when you were making your way and you realized
15 that the bridge wasn't going to open or be opened in time, how
16 were you feeling, like, were you feeling anxious or nervous,
17 scared, or just how were you feeling?

18 A. When I had to put the (indiscernible) in full reverse, I was
19 a little scared.

20 Q. Okay, perfect. So when you were coming and you were still --
21 so how did you know that the bridge wasn't fully open? Like,
22 whenever you were making your way up toward it, how did you
23 realize that it wasn't going to be fully opened?

24 A. Because I could see with my spotlight that the bridge was
25 still in the draw, and it was not fully open, and it wasn't --

1 when he opened (indiscernible) I was going into it.

2 Q. So when you called them, did you hear a horn at the
3 Centerville Bridge, as well, that indicated that he was opening
4 it, that he was going to be opening it?

5 A. I did not hear -- I've never heard a horn at Centerville
6 Bridge.

7 Q. So you've made about a thousand runs and never once heard a
8 horn?

9 A. Yeah. I didn't know they had a horn.

10 Q. Yeah, roger that. All right, Mr. Phillips, I think -- so you
11 said you just were feeling a little bit scared whenever you were
12 backing down. Once you got the boat under control and stuff, did
13 you start to calm down and everything like that?

14 A. No, because I made contact with the bridge, and I was feeling
15 sick.

16 MR. GILSENAN: I actually didn't -- I didn't hear the
17 question. I know Adam heard the question, but could you repeat it
18 for me? I just didn't hear, sorry.

19 CWO [REDACTED]: Yeah. No, I just asked Mr. Phillips, once he --
20 when he was backing out, he said he was feeling a little scared
21 and stuff, but once he got everything under control and stuff,
22 just asking if he was starting to feel better about the situation
23 or if he was just still scared in general.

24 MR. GILSENAN: Okay, got you.

25 MR. PHILLIPS: Oh, so the fact that I made contact with the

1 bridge, it's not a good thing, and that's one of the worst things
2 that I could think of doing out here. Other than something worse.

3 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

4 Q. I don't know if you said this earlier, and if you did, I'm
5 sorry. Whenever you were coming up to the bridge, in your
6 estimate, how far from 90 was it or how close to 90 degrees open
7 was it, would you say?

8 A. Is this when I started backing up or when I actually made the
9 contact?

10 Q. Yeah, like when you actually made contact, where would you
11 say the bridge was at?

12 A. It would've been --

13 Q. Just a guess.

14 A. -- roughly 90 percent open, and it had 6 to 8 feet on the
15 (indiscernible) inside the draw between the two fender systems
16 there, so that's where I made the contact.

17 Q. Okay. And then that is when you went to reverse because --

18 A. I went starboard and reverse. Yeah, I was already in reverse
19 before I made contact. If not, I would've made contact at 4.0
20 knots, but I made it at 0.3. If I wasn't in reverse, the whole
21 bridge would've been taken out, but I was already in reverse
22 almost to a complete stop before I actually make contact.

23 Q. Okay. So you would've -- yeah, I got you, I understand.
24 Okay, well, let's see here, what else have I got?

25 CWO [REDACTED]: I think I'm done for right now, Drew, so if you

1 want to continue on, I might have a follow-up question here at the
2 end --

3 MR. EHLERS: Sure.

4 CWO [REDACTED]: -- before we actually hang up.

5 MR. EHLERS: Sure. All right, Mr. Gilsenan, do you have some
6 questions?

7 MR. GILSENAN: Just a couple.

8 BY MR. GILSENAN:

9 Q. Had the bridge been all the way open, Adam, would you have
10 made it through?

11 A. Yeah, no problem, because I wouldn't have to ever reverse, so
12 I would've had no (indiscernible) and would be center straight, I
13 would've been dead center of the draw of the bridge and went right
14 through.

15 Q. Okay. And did you proceed to the bridge because he told you
16 bring it on?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. Have you ever proceeded to a bridge where you were not
19 told to --

20 A. No.

21 Q. -- bring it on?

22 A. No, I've always -- any time I called a certain bridge that
23 had a bridge center, we talk to them, they tell us either to bring
24 it on or I got you, we'll be open for you, that's when I go to the
25 bridge.

1 Q. Do you ever proceed to a bridge where the tender does not
2 tell you to bring it?

3 A. No, because that would be -- that would be wrong, no.

4 Q. Okay. Have you seen at Centerville a bridge tender tell you
5 to bring it on and then still wait before he initiates opening?

6 A. Yes. Especially during daytime.

7 Q. Why do you think that is?

8 A. Don't know other than they just (indiscernible) traffic, keep
9 the traffic and stop vehicle traffic.

10 Q. Vehicle traffic --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- on the road?

13 A. Yes, vehicle traffic on the road.

14 Q. Okay. Do you have problems at any other bridges or -- with
15 that, like where they tell you to come on but they don't open it?

16 A. No. No, at North Landing, they open (indiscernible) unless
17 they have an emergency, and they'll tell us, we have an emergency,
18 and then we have time to fully stop and (indiscernible) and that's
19 about it.

20 Q. But typically with the other bridges, they tell you to bring
21 it on and they open right away?

22 A. For the most part, yeah.

23 Q. Okay. I'm curious about the horn. I have not been to these
24 bridges myself; I don't know the answer to this question. Are
25 there residential houses near the Centerville Bridge and maybe

1 that's not why they sound the horn, like they don't want to bother
2 those people?

3 A. Possible, I think.

4 Q. I mean, can you see from the water what's there?

5 A. Not quite (indiscernible).

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Because I'm really (indiscernible).

8 Q. I get it, I get it. I'm just asking in case you knew. This
9 is kind of --

10 A. (Indiscernible).

11 Q. So you've heard the Centerville Bridge talk to the Great
12 Bridge bridge tender?

13 A. Yes, I have heard them.

14 Q. On Channel 13?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. And you've heard the Centerville Bridge talk to the Great
17 Bridge locks on 13?

18 A. Um-hum.

19 Q. So there's no question 13 goes that far?

20 A. Yeah, there's no question.

21 Q. Okay. So when you're locking, going transit in the Great
22 Bridge locks and the Great Bridge Bridge, you're using Channel 13?

23 A. Um-hum, our regular -- we have one area and we stay on
24 Channel 13.

25 Q. Okay, that was a yes?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. Wouldn't you think that an alert operator at
3 Centerville would've heard you coming southbound through the Great
4 Bridge locks --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- and the Great Bridge Bridge?

7 A. Yes, they would've. (Indiscernible) we call Great Bridge
8 Bridge (indiscernible) and he would know that we are approaching
9 (indiscernible).

10 Q. So it sounds like your last radio contact at Great Bridge
11 would be to thank the Great Bridge bridge tender.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And is that like 45 minutes before Centerville, is it a half
14 hour?

15 A. Roughly 40.

16 Q. Forty minutes?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 MR. EHLERS: Hey, Ryan. Sorry. Ryan, can I interrupt you?
20 It's getting hard to hear Adam. Can you move your phone closer to
21 him?

22 MR. GILSENAN: Yes.

23 MR. EHLERS: Okay, my apologies.

24 MR. GILSENAN: No worries. Did you hear the last answer,
25 that the last radio traffic at Great Bridge would've been about 40

1 minutes before Centerville?

2 MR. EHLERS: Understood, yeah.

3 BY MR. GILSENAN:

4 Q. Okay. And then at Centerville, about how far out would you
5 be when they see your spotlight as you're approaching?

6 A. They can probably see the spotlights a mile or 2 miles, 2
7 miles away.

8 Q. Okay. And your miles are pointed -- your spotlights are
9 pointed down the channel towards the Centerville Bridge, right?

10 A. Yes. For the most part, on the -- they're pointed just like
11 (indiscernible) in front of us looking at the bank and the
12 spotlights, they (indiscernible) the bridge, that far away.

13 Q. When you're calling the Centerville Bridge, who responds? Do
14 you use the same tone of voice when you call?

15 A. No, we just call -- the radio transmission, I raise my voice
16 louder and louder to try and get their attention, make sure they
17 can hear me.

18 Q. Okay. Now, if he had told you the bridge was broken and he
19 can't open it and you're a half mile out where you call him, would
20 you be able to stop?

21 A. Yes, I would've been able to stop because I would've -- I
22 mean, (indiscernible) and I would've been able to back up slowly
23 to where I had better steerage in reverse, pull rudder, more
24 throttle in reverse (indiscernible).

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And it gives more movement in water.

2 Q. The marina's not there yet?

3 A. And the marina's not there yet, no.

4 Q. So if a bridge operator tells you don't come, I got an
5 emergency vehicle coming, or don't come, my bridge is broken, you
6 could stop?

7 A. Yes.

8 MR. GILSENAN: That's all I have.

9 MR. EHLERS: Okay. I'm going to again turn it over to
10 Warrant Officer [REDACTED] to see if you had any follow-up questions.

11 CWO [REDACTED]: Yeah, I just got a few more, actually. Just
12 real quick.

13 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

14 Q. So you said when you're using your radio to do communication
15 between the bridge and stuff, do you know, like, the range of your
16 radio in general, like just your radio, how far it can reach?

17 A. Not off hand, but I know we talk to our other vessels when
18 we're 12 miles away.

19 Q. And that's on Channel 13, as well?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. All right. At least 12 miles you would say, right?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I'm sure it's greater than that, but I have no -- I've never
25 talked to our other boats.

1 Q. Okay. And then do you know the power setting of your radio,
2 by chance?

3 A. One watt.

4 Q. Yeah. Yeah, that works. I'm sorry, did you say what it was?

5 A. One watt.

6 Q. It's breaking up, I'm sorry. Did you say one watt?

7 MR. GILSENAN: Okay, this is Ryan. He said one watt.

8 CWO [REDACTED]: Okay, Ryan, one watt. Got you.

9 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

10 Q. And then the last one I got here, so whenever you were making
11 your approach to the bridge, did you realize that it wasn't going
12 to, like, be open in time? When you started backing down the
13 first time, how open was the bridge? Like when you first started
14 backing down, what would you say the percentage was to the bridge
15 being open?

16 A. Just under 50 percent open.

17 Q. So about, okay, 45 to 50 percent?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. And then that's when you, like -- and then you started to
20 back down because you knew it wasn't going to be open in time?

21 A. Yes, yes, (indiscernible).

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. (Indiscernible) throttle almost full reverse, and then I went
24 to full reverse when (indiscernible).

25 Q. Okay, yeah. So you did a full reverse on both throttles, and

1 it was about 45 to 50 percent open when you realized you
2 weren't --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- going to be able to make it? Okay.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay.

7 CWO [REDACTED]: I think I'm done, Drew. I'm happy on my side.

8 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

9 Mr. Gilsenan, do you have anything before I ask my last final
10 question here?

11 MR. GILSENAN: I just have one.

12 BY MR. GILSENAN:

13 Q. When you were backing down at -- because you saw at 45 to 50
14 percent that the bridge was not going to open in time, did the
15 bridge tender reach out to you and say, hey, I'm not going to be
16 open in time, back down?

17 A. No, he did not. I didn't talk to him until an hour and a
18 half after the incident.

19 Q. So the last thing you heard him say was bring it on?

20 A. Yes, the last thing he -- the last communication with the
21 bridge was bring it on, and I said, roger.

22 MR. GILSENAN: Okay, that's all I got. Thanks, Drew.

23 MR. EHLERS: Okay.

24 CWO [REDACTED]: Hey, Drew, I'm sorry.

25 MR. EHLERS: Yeah.

1 CWO [REDACTED]: It's [REDACTED] I just got one question, one more
2 follow-up one.

3 MR. EHLERS: Go ahead.

4 BY CWO [REDACTED]:

5 Q. Mr. Phillips, whenever he said to bring it on, how far were
6 you, like, from the bridge? Like distance-wise, roughly. Did you
7 say that already?

8 A. We were going 4.5 knots. Roughly five and a half minutes
9 from the bridge.

10 Q. About five and a half minutes. So how far would you say
11 distance-wise would that be?

12 A. Like half a nautical mile away.

13 Q. Okay, so one-half nautical mile?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 Q. Okay, thank you.

16 CWO [REDACTED]: Sorry, Drew, I'm done.

17 MR. EHLERS: All right, no worries.

18 Mr. Phillips, I really appreciate your time. I know it's not
19 easy to talk about accidents when they happen. I just have one
20 more question for you and that is, is there anything that we
21 haven't asked you that you think would be important for us
22 investigating this accident?

23 MR. PHILLIPS: Nothing that's coming to my mind at the
24 moment.

25 MR. EHLERS: Okay. All right, well, if anything does come to

1 mind, you know, please reach out and contact us either through
2 Mr. Gilsenan or directly through Warrant Officer [REDACTED]. But
3 again, I know how difficult this is, but I really appreciate the
4 time you've taken and your candidness in responding to our
5 questions. Thank you very much.

6 MR. PHILLIPS: Yes, you're welcome. Thank you.

7 MR. EHLERS: All right. I'm going to stop the recording now.
8 (Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: *ISLAND LOOKOUT* AND CENTERVILLE
TURNPIKE BRIDGE COLLISION
IN CHESAPEAKE, VIRGINIA,
ON NOVEMBER 14, 2020
Interview of Adam Phillips

PLACE: Via teleconference

DATE: November 18, 2020

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber