

M-116

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: April 7, 1980

Forwarded to:

Lt. Gen. John W. Morris
Chief of Engineers
Department of the Army
Washington, D.C. 20314

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

M-80-22

At 1756 c.s.t., on April 1, 1978, the four-barge tow of the Motor Vessel STUD collided with the eastern fixed span of the Southern Pacific Railroad bridge over the Atchafalaya River near Berwick Bay, Louisiana. The collision knocked the span from its supporting piers into the river but did not damage the barges. Damage to the STUD was estimated to be \$4,000. Property damage was estimated to be \$1,400,000, including the cost of replacing the bridge span and rerouting rail traffic for 8 days. There were no deaths or injuries. 1/

The STUD was traveling downriver with a strong downriver current at the time and had to pass under three bridges. The tow struck a glancing blow to the right descending support pier of the first bridge, the Long Allen highway bridge, passed under the second bridge, and collided with the railroad bridge. The master, who was operating the STUD at the time of the accident, approached the bridges along the right descending bank in the stronger river currents. He had transited the Berwick Bay bridges more than 100 times in towboats, including the STUD. The Safety Board determined that the STUD's approach along the right bank placed the tow in an out-of-shape condition to pass under the railroad bridge.

The master of the STUD was not aware of the Atchafalaya River stage and current before he committed the tow to the bridge transit. The Berwick Bay Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) operating procedures require a master to determine if local conditions will permit safe passage through the service area. Although the personnel at the Vessel Traffic Center (VTC) record both the river gauge reading and the current velocity at the railroad bridge at least once daily, the VTS policy does not provide for transmitting this information to participating vessels. A Coast Guard VTS representative testified that there would be little practical value in providing river stage and current information to participating vessels because the information would be stale and because the existing current at the railroad bridge might differ vastly from the current in the bridge

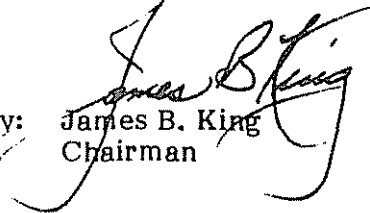
1/ For more detailed information read "Marine Accident Report—Collision of the M/V STUD with Southern Pacific Railroad Bridge over the Atchafalaya River, Berwick Bay, Louisiana, April 1, 1978" (NTSB-MAR-80-5).

approaches. The Safety Board believes that a high river stage or a swift current on the Atchafalaya River could sharply reduce the tow's maneuverability to the point where the small margin for error during a bridge passage would be unacceptable to the master. To provide the towboat master with a more substantial basis for judging the local river conditions, the Army Corps of Engineers should coordinate with the Coast Guard to establish methods to provide continually updated information on river stage and current velocity to vessels transiting the Berwick Bay bridges.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers:

In cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard, establish methods to measure and make available continually updated information on river stage and current velocity to vessels transiting the Berwick Bay bridges. (Class II, Priority Action) (M-80-22)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

By: 
James B. King
Chairman