



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Marine Accident Brief

Accident No.	DCA-12-LM-008 ¹
Accident Type	Collision
Vessels	Uninspected towing vessel <i>Natures Way Commander</i> pushing loaded barge <i>ACBL 3111</i> Two moored U.S. Army Corps of Engineers deck barges
Location	Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Morgan City–Port Allen Alternate Route, near Port Allen Lock, Louisiana 30°26.195' N, 91°13.118' W
Date	February 1, 2012
Time	1630 central standard time ²
Injuries	None
Environmental damage	None
Weather³	Winds 34 mph west-southwest, gusts to about 40 mph Air temperature 63° F
Waterway characteristics	Canal was 324 feet wide in accident area, with available clear width reduced by barges (per U.S. Coast Guard)

The *ACBL 3111*, a loaded hopper barge pushed by the uninspected towing vessel *Natures Way Commander* (see figure 1), collided with the moored U.S. Army Corps of Engineers deck barge *CE-858* at about 1630 on February 1, 2012. The accident location is shown in figure 2.

¹ The NTSB had regulatory authority to investigate this accident under 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) 850.15 because it involved a collision between a public vessel and a nonpublic vessel. This report is based on information provided by the U.S. Coast Guard from its informal investigation of the accident. The NTSB did not conduct its own on-scene investigation. It is anticipated that the Coast Guard will not publish a report of its informal investigation of the accident.

² Times are given using the 24-hour clock in central standard time (Universal Time Coordinated [UTC] – 6).

³ Internet weather information was collected by the Coast Guard for a nearby location (West Baton Rouge Emergency Operations Center near Port Allen).



Figure 1. The uninspected towing vessel *Natures Way Commander*.

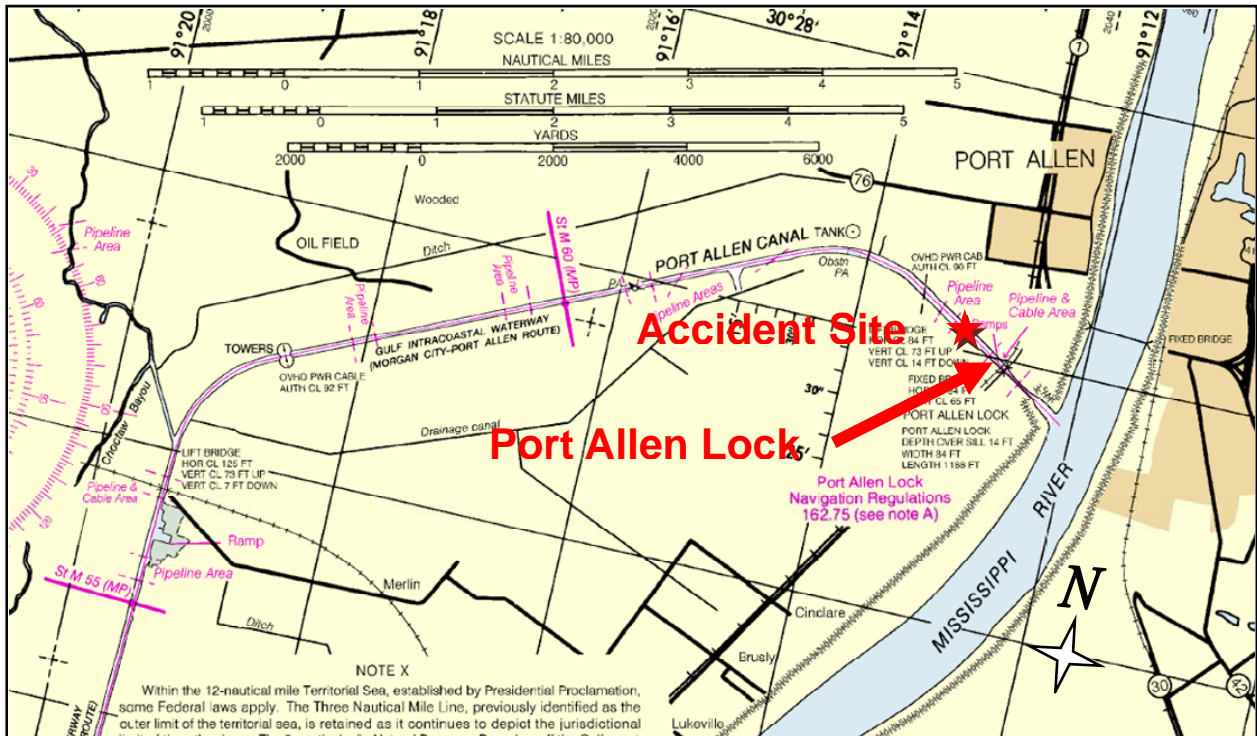


Figure 2. Section of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) nautical chart 11354 in the area of Port Allen Lock. The accident location is shown by the red star; the Port Allen Lock is shown by the red arrow.

About 30 minutes before the collision, the *Natures Way Commander* was pushing six loaded hopper barges, arranged two wide by three long, toward the Port Allen Lock from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway. The pilot⁴ operating the *Natures Way Commander* contacted the Port Allen Lock lockmaster by radio to request entry to the lock for transit to the Mississippi River. The lockmaster recommended that the pilot hold up because of the potential effects of a rainstorm approaching from the west. The pilot agreed and reduced his speed to delay entry into the lock.

As the rainfall intensity and wind speed increased, the pilot's visibility became impaired and he attempted to stop his vessel and barges. However, about 1630 the starboard lead barge collided with the Corps deck barge *CE-858*, which was moored on the starboard (southwest) side of the waterway. According to the pilot, he could not communicate with two deckhands stationed at the head of the tow on the port and starboard sides because of the noise of the heavy rainfall.

Personnel. Following the accident, four *Natures Way Commander* crewmembers were tested for illegal drugs, and the pilot was also tested for alcohol. All test results were negative. The pilot stood watch in a 6 hours on–6 hours off rotation (on watch 1200 to 1800 and 0000 to 0600). He reported to the Coast Guard that in the 96 hours before the accident he slept a total of 8 hours per day, 4 hours before each 6-hour watch period.

Damage. The collision between the *ACBL 3111* and the *CE-858* forced the *CE-858* to impact and displace the spud barge *CE-796*⁵ moored nearby. Damages were as follows:

- *ACBL 3111*: 3-foot by 6-foot tear and hole to the starboard bow corner and upper bilge.
- *CE-858*: 3-inch by 8-inch hole and 2-foot by 4-foot distortion at the headlog as well as 6-inch-square hole and frame distortion to the rake at its starboard upper side.⁶
- *CE-796*: 20-inch-square by 50-foot long spuds bent and bowed.
- Wooden pier and gangway in barge mooring area: damaged.
- *Natures Way Commander*: none.

According to the surveyor's report, total estimated damage to the three barges was about \$61,750 and damage to the pier was about \$44,900.⁷

⁴ The Coast Guard required that the towboat be manned by a credentialed master and mate (pilot), and the vessel operator had added three uncredentialed deckhands to the crew. On inland vessels, the mate (pilot) is often referred to as the pilot.

⁵ A spud barge is a flat-decked barge that has devices similar to legs, called spuds, which are lowered from the barge and pushed into the waterway floor to anchor the barge in place.

⁶ A barge headlog is structural member at the extreme end between the rake shell plating and the deck. The rake is the end portion of the hull, in which the bottom rises from the midship portion to meet the deck at the headlog. The headlog is usually a vertical plate of considerable thickness due to its susceptibility to damage in service. H. Benford, *Naval Architecture for Non-Naval Architects* (Jersey City, NJ: Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, 1991).

⁷ Surveyor report dated February 6, 2012, Mark Shiffer Surveyors, Inc.

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision between the barge *ACBL 3111* and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers barge *CE-858* was the failure of the pilot of the towboat *Natures Way Commander* to anticipate the effects of the heavy rain on his visibility and ability to communicate with the forward lookout as he approached the Port Allen Lock in a narrow waterway and his failure to take appropriate measures to avoid the collision.

Adopted: April 20, 2012

Annex 1

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	<i>Natures Way Commander</i>	<i>ACBL 3111</i>	<i>CE-858 and CE-796</i>
Owner/operator	Natures Way Marine, LLC	American Commercial Lines, LLC	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Crew complement	5	None	None
Port of registry	Mobile, AL	Louisville, KY	Not documented
Flag	United States	United States	United States
Type	Uninspected towing vessel	Freight barge	Double rake deck barge and double rake deck crane spud barge
Built	Breaux Bay Craft, Inc., 1969	Jeff Boat, Inc., 1979	1976 and 1958
Official number	520332	614196	BC10523 and 10419
Construction	Steel	Steel	Steel (both)
Depth (ft)	8.6	11.8	7.0 and 7.2
Length (ft)	64.1	195	Both 120
Width (ft)	26.1	35	30 and 42
Gross tonnage	140	910	Displacement: 603 and 786 long tons
Engine power and type	1350-hp diesel, twin screw	n/a	n/a
Service speed	Unknown	n/a	n/a
Cargo	n/a	Salt	n/a
Persons on board	5 crew	2 deckhands from <i>Natures Way Commander</i> as temporary lookouts and line handlers	Unknown