AVIATION HIGHWAY MARINE RAILROAD PIPELINE

April 1, 2025 MIR-25-12

Collision between Fishing Vessel *Papa Rod* and Anchored Bulk Carrier *Appaloosa*

On May 2, 2024, about 0930 local time, the fishing vessel *Papa Rod* was underway in the Gulf of America, 25 miles south of Venice, Louisiana, when it collided with the bulk carrier *Appaloosa,* which was anchored east of the entrance to Southwest Pass (see figure 1 and figure 2).[1] There were no injuries, and no pollution was reported. Damage to the *Papa Rod* and the *Appaloosa* was estimated to be about $223,000.[2]

Figure 1. *Left to right*: The fishing vessel *Papa Rod* and bulk carrier *Appaloosa* before the collision. (Sources: Black Pearl Fishing Facebook page and Rico Voss, shipspotting.com)

1 In this report, all times are central daylight time, and all miles are nautical miles (1.15 statute miles) unless otherwise noted.

2 Visit ntsb.gov to find additional information in the public docket for this NTSB investigation (case no. DCA24FM036). Use the CAROL Query to search investigations.

Casualty Summary

Casualty type	Collision
Location	Gulf of America, east of Southwest Pass, 25 nm south of Venice, Louisiana 28°53.8′ N, 089°20.8′ W
Date	May 2, 2024
Time	0930 central daylight time (coordinated universal time –5 hrs)
Persons on board	3 (*Papa Rod*), 21 (*Appaloosa*)
Injuries	None
Property damage	$223,000 est.
Environmental damage	None
Weather	Visibility 10 mi, winds south-southeast 8 kts, seas <1 ft, air temperature 82°F, water temperature 67°F, morning twilight 0549, sunrise 0616
Waterway information	Gulf, anchorage; depth 50 ft at casualty site

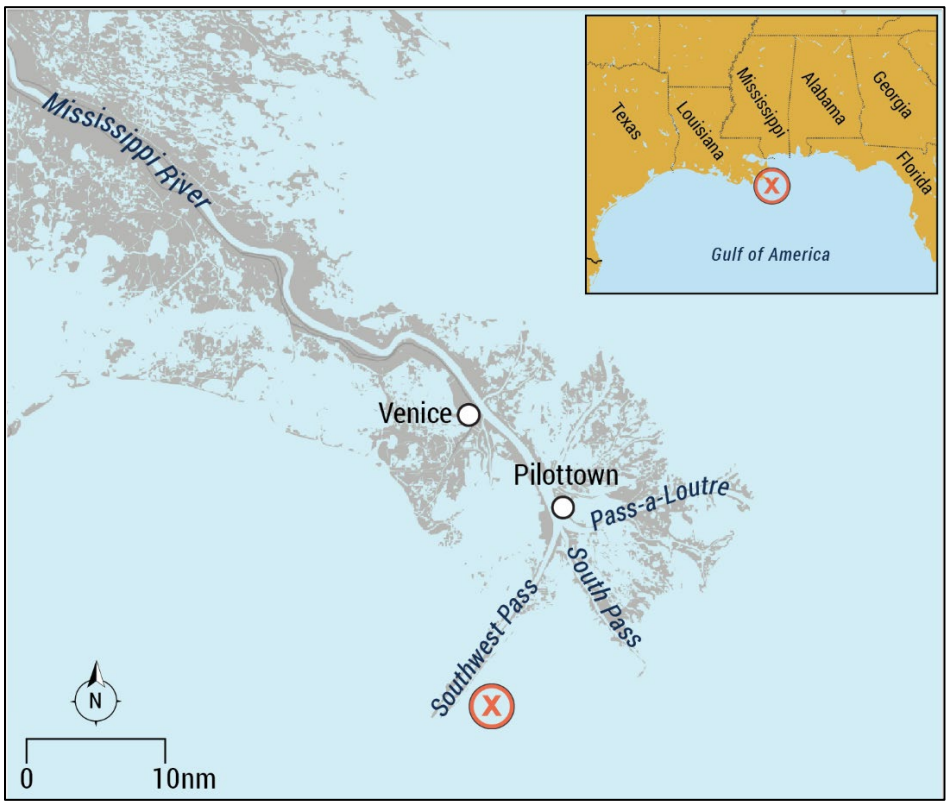

Figure 2. Area where the *Papa Rod* and *Appaloosa* collided, as indicated by a circled *X*. (Background source: Google Maps)

1 Factual Information

On May 1, 2024, about 1230, the uninspected 81-foot-long commercial fishing vessel *Papa Rod* departed Bayou La Batre, Alabama, with three crewmembers—a captain and two deckhands—on board. The *Papa Rod*, primarily a shrimping vessel, was bound for fishing grounds to the southwest with a partner shrimper, the *Evening Tide*. The captain was on watch (there was no set watch schedule for the crew).

About 0400, on May 2, deckhand 1 relieved the captain of the watch about 10 miles from Pass-a-Loutre. After making a turn near the entrance to South Pass, the *Papa Rod* steadied on a course of 248° and speed of about 9 knots. The vessel was being steered by autopilot, which was set to maintain the vessel's heading.

Between 0830 and 0900, deckhand 1 woke deckhand 2, who was in the bunkroom, to take the watch. Deckhand 2 told investigators that deckhand 1 "had to holler at [him] two or three times" to wake him up because he was tired. (Deckhand 2 reported getting about 7 hours of rest before assuming the watch; the deckhand's work/rest history for the 3 days before boarding the vessel indicated only that he was ashore.)

Upon arriving in the fishing vessel's wheelhouse, the deckhands completed a brief watch turnover, and deckhand 2 assumed the navigation watch. Deckhand 1 went below to sleep. According to deckhand 2, a short time after assuming the watch, he fell asleep at the controls as the vessel continued the transit in autopilot (the *Papa Rod* wheelhouse was not equipped with a watch alarm).[3]

An able seafarer was on duty on the 590-foot-long bulk carrier *Appaloosa*, which was anchored about 4 miles east of the entrance to the Southwest Pass with 21 crewmembers aboard, when, between 0918 and 0923, he saw the *Papa Rod* off the port bow. The vessel was heading directly toward the *Appaloosa*. The able seafarer informed the second mate, who called the master and the chief officer and sounded the *Appaloosa*'s horn. However, the *Papa Rod* continued on its course toward the *Appaloosa*.

[3] A *watch alarm* system is an automatic system that monitors wheelhouse activity to detect operator disability or absence. Systems vary in complexity, but a simple watch alarm requires the navigation watchstander to reset the alarm at preset time intervals to prevent the watchstander from falling asleep. If the watchstander does not reset the alarm, visual and then audible alarms activate in the wheelhouse. Additionally, the alarm may be configured such that if the alarm is not reset by the watchstander within a longer time period, it would alarm in other vessel spaces (e.g. captain's stateroom or crew lounge) to alert off-watch personnel.

About 0928, the *Papa Rod*'s bow collided with the port bow of the *Appaloosa*, breaching the hull of the *Appaloosa*—about 4.5 feet above the waterline—on the bulkhead of a ballast water tank, which was full of treated ballast water at the time (see figure 3). The force of the collision woke deckhand 2 at the helm and the captain and deckhand 1 below.

Figure 3. *Left to right*: Bow damage to the *Papa Rod*, and *Appaloosa* hull breach (*circled*). Right inset shows ballast water leaking from the breached hull. (Source: US Coast Guard)

With the *Papa Rod*'s engines still engaged, the fishing vessel slid forward along the hull of the *Appaloosa*, entangling its outriggers in the ship's anchor chain. The *Papa Rod*'s captain entered the wheelhouse, disengaged the engines, then backed the fishing vessel away from the ship. The *Evening Tide* assisted in postcollision efforts, including securing the outriggers of the *Papa Rod*, before continuing southwest to fishing grounds.

The *Papa Rod* returned to its home port in Bayou La Batre under its own power, arriving about 0455 on May 3. The *Appaloosa* received temporary repairs, estimated to cost $48,000, to patch the hull breach on May 4. The estimated cost to repair the *Papa Rod*'s damaged bow was $175,000.

After the collision, the *Appaloosa* crew were tested for alcohol, with all results negative. The *Papa Rod* crew were tested for alcohol and other drugs on May 3. Deckhand 2's urine test was positive for methamphetamine and amphetamine—each

at more than 10,000 nanograms per milliliter—as well as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) metabolite carboxy-THC.[4]

[4] (a) Methamphetamine is a central nervous system stimulant drug. Amphetamine is a metabolite of methamphetamine and is a central nervous system stimulant. Both methamphetamine and amphetamine are available as federal Schedule II controlled substance prescription medications used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, narcolepsy, and occasionally obesity. In addition to being used medicinally, methamphetamine and amphetamine are frequently produced illicitly and abused recreationally. (b) Carboxy-THC is a nonpsychoactive metabolite of THC. THC (which was not a tested-for substance in this case) is the primary psychoactive chemical in cannabis, including marijuana and hashish.

2 Analysis

While the fishing vessel *Papa Rod* was underway in the Gulf of America near Southwest Pass on autopilot, it collided with the anchored bulk carrier *Appaloosa*. The deckhand on watch (deckhand 2) on the *Papa Rod* stated that he fell asleep at the helm.

The toxicology results for deckhand 2 indicated that he had used the stimulant drug methamphetamine and a psychoactive cannabis product. The high levels of methamphetamine and its metabolite amphetamine in his urine (over 10,000 nanograms per milliliter) generally increase the likelihood that methamphetamine had been abused.[5] However, this is not definitive, and urine toxicology results generally cannot be used to determine the precise timing of last drug use or the details of associated impairment. Therefore, whether deckhand 2 was impaired by the effects of his methamphetamine or cannabis use at the time of the collision could not be determined.

Effects from methamphetamine abuse follow a typical pattern, dominated by central nervous system stimulation in the early phase, with features of central nervous system depression emerging later as initial drug effects wear off. Such features of central nervous system depression may include sleepiness, which can be intense.[6] Additionally, methamphetamine and amphetamine use may also interfere with proper sleep, causing sleep loss, which can lead to fatigue.[7] Similarly, cannabis use can contribute to drowsiness in some individuals, either through acute drug effects or interference with restful sleep. Investigators could not determine the amount of sleep deckhand 2 received before joining the *Papa Rod*. Although deckhand 2 reported getting 7 hours of rest/sleep before taking watch, he stated that deckhand 1 had to "holler" at him two or three times before he awakened, indicating he had difficulty waking up. Given deckhand 2's urine results, his difficulty awakening and drowsiness could have been an effect of his drug use or a related sleep debt.[8] However, whether

[5] R. West, A. Pesce, C. West, et al., "Differentiating medicinal from illicit use in positive methamphetamine results in a pain population," *Journal of Analytical Toxicology*, no. 37,2 (2013):83-89.

[6] F.J. Couper and B.K. Logan, "Drugs and Human Performance Fact Sheets," National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT HS 809 725, April 2014 (Revised), https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.dot.gov/files/809725-drugshumanperformfs.pdf.

[7] M. Vrajová, R. Šlamberová, C. Hoschl, and S.V. Ovsepian, "Methamphetamine and sleep impairments: neurobehavioral correlates and molecular mechanisms," *Sleep*, no. 44,6 (2021).

[8] *Sleep debt* is a cumulative effect of not getting enough sleep, which leads to partial or total sleep deprivation.

deckhand 2's drug use increased his drowsiness at the time of the collision could not be determined.

Watch alarms, while not mandatory on uninspected commercial vessels like the *Papa Rod*, are commonly used on vessels to wake the watchstander or alert the crew if the watchstander falls asleep. They require the operator to reset an alarm at preset time intervals to prevent the operator from falling asleep. The *Papa Rod* was not equipped with a watch alarm. Therefore, when the deckhand fell asleep at the helm, there was no mechanism to wake him or alert the other crewmembers.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the collision between the fishing vessel *Papa Rod* and the anchored bulk carrier *Appaloosa* was the on-watch deckhand falling asleep while operating the *Papa Rod*. Possibly contributing to his drowsiness were effects of his drug use or a related sleep debt.

Vessel Particulars

Vessel	*Papa Rod*	*Appaloosa*
Type	Fishing (Fishing vessel)	Cargo, Dry Bulk (Bulk carrier)
Owner/Operator	Papa Rod Inc (Commercial)	Stallion Two Shipping Co. (Commercial)
Flag	United States	Marshall Islands
Port of registry	Bayou La Batre, Alabama	Majuro, Marshall Islands
Year built	1997	2013
Official number	10544811 (US)	538005263 (MMSI)
IMO number	8941303	9646704
Classification society	N/A	American Bureau of Shipping
Length (overall)	80.8 ft (24.6 m)	590.6 ft (180.0 m)
Breadth (max.)	24.0 ft (7.3 m)	99.7 ft (30.4 m)
Draft (casualty)	9.0 ft (2.7 m)	20.7 ft (6.3 m)
Tonnage	140 GT ITC	24,247 GT ITC
Engine power; manufacturer	600 hp (447 kW) Caterpillar 3412 diesel engine	1 x 8,515 hp (6,350 kW); Wartsila 5RTA-flex50 diesel engine

NTSB investigators worked closely with our counterparts from **Coast Guard Sector New Orleans** throughout this investigation.