

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AMTRAK TRAIN 188 DERAILMENT NEAR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA  
MAY 12, 2015

\*  
\* Docket No.: DCA-15-MR-010  
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Telephone Interview of: JOSEPH BRENNAN

30th Street Station  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Monday,  
May 18, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: DAVID BUCHER  
Railroad Accident Investigator

## APPEARANCES:

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL BULL, Operating Practices Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

JAMES GEE, Operating Practices Inspector  
Federal Railroad Administration

JOHN HINES, System General Road Foreman  
Amtrak

DAVID NICHOLS, Chief Transportation Officer  
Amtrak

EDWARD MRUK, Assistant General Trainmaster  
Amtrak

WILLIAM BATES  
National Safety Team  
SMART Transportation Division

CARL FIELDS  
Safety Task Force  
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

DONALD HILL  
BLET Safety Task Force

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:50 a.m.)

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2  
3 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher, Rail Accident  
4 Investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board. This  
5 is a telephone interview of Joseph Brennan, Amtrak train  
6 dispatcher that was riding the 188 train. Interview is in  
7 reference to NTSB's Philadelphia accident investigation, accident  
8 number DCA-15-MR-010. The time is -- I'm going to make it 9:50  
9 and the date is 05/18/2015.

10 To my right I have?

11 DR. JENNER: Good morning. This is Steve Jenner with  
12 the NTSB.

13 MR. NICHOLS: Dave Nichols --

14 MR. BRENNAN: I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name?

15 DR. JENNER: Steve Jenner, J-e-n-n --

16 MR. BRENNAN: Steve Jenner. Okay.

17 MR. NICHOLS: Dave Nichols, N-i-c-h-o-l-s, Chief  
18 Transportation Officer for Amtrak.

19 MR. BATES: William Bates --

20 MR. BRENNER: Okay.

21 MR. BATES: -- Bates, B-a-t-e-s, SMART.

22 MR. MRUK: Edward Mruk, M-r-u-k, System General  
23 Trainmaster with Amtrak.

24 MR. HILL: Donald Hill, H-i-l-l, with the BLET, Safety  
25 Task Force.

1           MR. HINES: John Hines, H-i-n-e-s, System General Road  
2 Foreman, Amtrak.

3           MR. BULL: Mike Bull, B-u-l-l, FRA OP inspector.

4           MR. GEE: Jim Gee, G-e-e, OP inspector, FRA.

5           MR. FIELDS: Carl Fields, Brotherhood of Locomotive  
6 Engineers and Trainmen.

7           MR. BRENNAN: Okay.

8                           INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH BRENNAN

9           BY MR. BUCHER:

10          Q. Okay. Joe, like I said on the phone, if you could just  
11 go back, if you could just start from when you were on the train,  
12 maybe take us through what you felt during the derailment, and any  
13 of the details that you can remember afterwards, we'd appreciate  
14 it.

15          A. Okay. I had boarded the train over at 30th Street  
16 Station. I was on my way to work. I got on in the café car. I  
17 was in the first half of the east end, if you will, of the café  
18 car. It was about the second car in -- I'm sorry -- the second  
19 seat in on the right side.

20                   We had left Philly. The conductor, she was going  
21 around, making her rounds. She had just came up to me, and it was  
22 about that point there was a huge, violent, just abrupt shaking in  
23 the ride there and then it came off the rails. My window popped  
24 out. Everything was being thrown over. People were being thrown  
25 over.

1           When everything finally settled down, I was able to free  
2 myself. I kind of got wedged in there with a table. But I got  
3 myself up to the conductor. She couldn't move. She was in a bent  
4 over position. She was really in pain there with her back.

5           I took a radio and I was trying to talk to CTEC 6. I  
6 told them who I was and I was trying to give them as much  
7 information as I could about what was going on so they had  
8 something to report back. I got on there a couple of times trying  
9 to talk to them.

10           The emergency personnel started entering the train. I  
11 got back on the radio because there was a lot of radio chatter.  
12 And I got on the radio and I told them, have the emergency  
13 personnel, unless it's an emergency right now, don't talk. It's  
14 too much going on right now.

15           One fireman told me, he said, if you can, get yourself  
16 up, pull yourself up; we got somebody on the roof to help you out.  
17 So I was able to get myself out the one window, the opposing side,  
18 and I was able to make my way down. I was assisted.

19           When I got to the street, I really forget the name of  
20 the street or the side road. It was, like, Cole Road or something  
21 like that. It was off to the side where all the EMS, fire trucks,  
22 police, were everybody was at, where they were getting everybody.  
23 There was one woman, I had asked to use her phone because I wanted  
24 to call 40 office to let them know what was going on. She said  
25 you can make a phone call; the battery is dying. I said, okay. I

1 called 40 office, told them what was going on, gave her back the  
2 phone.

3           Then while I was out there, I saw this one guy, he was  
4 sitting down on the ground, he was -- head was busted up pretty  
5 good and everything, but I saw the Amtrak, the badge, the  
6 necklace. I don't even know what to call it. We'll call it a  
7 necklace. And I went up to him and asked him how he was doing.  
8 And I saw he had a cellphone in his hand and I asked him, I said,  
9 "Listen, I work for Amtrak too. I'm a dispatcher. Can I use your  
10 cellphone?" He said, "Sure."

11           I called my ex up to tell her everything that was going  
12 on and I said I need you to call my fiancé up, I need you to call  
13 my parents up. Just let them know I'm okay, I'll be in touch  
14 later.

15           When I got done with the phone conversation, I handed  
16 him back the phone, we got talking. I had no idea who he was.  
17 And when I asked him, I said, "Well, what do you do?" He says, "I  
18 was the engineer of this train." And he was pretty shaken up.  
19 He was -- I mean, obviously. But he just didn't really recall  
20 anything and was just really upset about everything and I just  
21 kind of left it at that.

22           And then after that, I got transported to Aria Hospital  
23 over on Frankford. They are not a trauma center. After they did  
24 their part, they transferred me over to Torresdale.

25           Q. Okay. Joe, do you need to take a break? We can take a

1 break if you want to take a few minutes here?

2 A. No, no, no. No, I'm fine. I'm just -- I'm fine.

3 Q. Okay. We're just going to move into the questions from  
4 the group.

5 A. Okay.

6 MR. BUCHER: To my right, you know -- Mr. Jenner?

7 MR. BRENNAN: I'm sorry, with the speaker phone -- I  
8 don't have a problem with it, but it is hard to hear some of you  
9 guys, if you could speak up a little bit?

10 MR. BUCHER: Okay.

11 BY DR. JENNER:

12 Q. Right. This is Stephen Jenner with the NTSB. Thank you  
13 for your story so far.

14 A. No problem, Stephen.

15 Q. Yeah. We're certainly particularly interested in your  
16 experience talking to the engineer. Had you known him before this  
17 day?

18 A. I have not met him nor have seen him prior to this day.

19 Q. What other injuries did you observe from him?

20 A. He was holding -- the emergency personnel obviously gave  
21 him something. He was holding, like, a cloth on his head, the  
22 left side of his head there on the scalp. His face was beaten up  
23 pretty good. I mean, there was just blotches all over his face.  
24 I don't know if any of it was blood dripping or if any of it was  
25 cuts.



1           As far as any other injuries, that's all I recall. He  
2 was sitting down. I don't know if any other parts of his body  
3 were injured.

4           Q. But he could not tell you his name; is that correct?

5           A. He did tell me his name.

6           Q. He did tell you his name?

7           A. He did tell me his name.

8           Q. Okay. Can you just elaborate what else he told you?

9           A. After -- well, okay, I gave him back his phone. He told  
10 me he was the engineer. He told me his name. I asked him, I  
11 said, "What happened?" And he just looked at me and he said, "I  
12 don't know."

13          Q. Okay.

14          A. And he was shaken up and everything like that and I  
15 just, I really didn't want to talk to him about it. I mean, I  
16 just, you know --

17          Q. Right. Did you see anyone talk to him before you did or  
18 after you did while on scene?

19          A. The only ones I really saw in the area that were talking  
20 was all the police, fire, and the EMS there. There was really  
21 nobody else out there. I was trying to see if maybe any of the  
22 Amtrak managers were out there or anything like that. I really  
23 didn't see anybody else on the spot.

24          Q. Okay. The whole time that you had your conversation  
25 with him, was he always sitting down? Did you ever see him --

1 A. Oh, yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Did you ever see him stand up and walk around a bit?

5 A. No. No. And in all actuality, I didn't even see him  
6 get transported. When they started taking everybody away and  
7 everything like that, I was just kind of going back and forth just  
8 looking at the display there with the train and at one, you know,  
9 one point when I looked, most of the people were already being  
10 taken away. I didn't see him.

11 Q. All right. Okay. Thank you very much. We'll move on  
12 to other questions.

13 A. Okay.

14 MR. BATES: No questions.

15 MR. BRENNAN: I'm sorry, who's this?

16 DR. JENNER: Just one moment. We're getting a little  
17 closer to the phone here.

18 MR. BRENNAN: Oh, okay. Okay.

19 BY MR. MRUK:

20 Q. Hey Joe. This is Eddie Mruk, the system general  
21 trainmaster. I just had one question. Do you know the time frame  
22 from -- basically from when the train derailed until you spoke  
23 with the engineer, approximately how long that was?

24 A. Oh, God. No.

25 Q. Okay.

1           A.    You figure -- I don't even know what time we derailed  
2 there.

3           Q.    No, I'm not asking for specific times, but the -- was it  
4 5 minutes before you talked to him or maybe 10?

5           A.    I would say probably within about 15, maybe 20 minutes  
6 after I was physically off the train.

7           Q.    Okay, Joe. I appreciate that. I have no further  
8 questions. Thank you.

9           A.    Okay.

10           BY MR. HILL:

11           Q.    Good morning, Joe. My name is Donald Hill with the  
12 BLET.

13           A.    Hello.

14           Q.    How long have you been with Amtrak?

15           A.    This will be my sixth year in October.

16           Q.    And you were on your way to work. What was your normal  
17 shift and where do you work out of?

18           A.    My normal shift on Tuesdays is 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. I'm a  
19 train dispatcher up at 40 office in New York City.

20           Q.    Okay. Thanks, Joe. That's all the questions I have  
21 right now.

22           A.    Okay.

23           BY MR. FIELDS:

24           Q.    Carl Fields, BLET. I have a couple follow-ups, if I  
25 may, Joe?

1 A. Okay.

2 Q. Can you hear me?

3 A. You're a little distant there.

4 Q. Oh, boy. I'll try to get a little louder here. How's  
5 that?

6 A. That's actually better.

7 Q. All right. Thanks, brother. All right. When you  
8 approached the engineer initially, was he sitting?

9 A. He was sitting -- the entire time from the time that I  
10 saw him, approached him and walked away from him, he was sitting  
11 the entire time.

12 Q. All right. I just wanted to clarify that because you  
13 did say he was sitting earlier, so -- and then when you asked to  
14 use his cellphone, was it powered up at that time?

15 A. I'm not sure what you mean by covered up, but he was  
16 holding it --

17 Q. No.

18 A. -- in his hand.

19 Q. Let me clarify that. Powered up, where he just gave it  
20 to you, he didn't have to power it up by initializing it with a  
21 code or anything, a security code?

22 A. Okay. The power from the cellphone was on. He had a  
23 screen security that he had to initiate for me, because when I  
24 went to grab it originally, I couldn't do it. He said, here, you  
25 got to do this, and he swiped the screen or did something to

1 unlock it for me.

2 Q. There you go. I apologize. Unlock is what I meant to  
3 say. And working --

4 A. Oh, I'm sorry. If I hit the button there, I'm sorry.

5 Q. Working as a train dispatcher out of New York, upon  
6 speaking with the engineer, did you recognize his voice as a train  
7 engineer, as working in the capacity as a dispatcher?

8 A. No. A lot of times -- I have gotten to know a lot of  
9 crew members, both engineers and conductors, as a dispatcher,  
10 obviously, and I've talked to them on the radio. I haven't spoke  
11 to them too much. I know I've talked to a lot and I didn't know  
12 their names. So if I have talked to him, I really didn't  
13 recognize his voice, you know. And a lot of times, too, on the  
14 radio voices sound different than in person.

15 Q. No, I hear you. That's all I have. Thank you.

16 A. Okay.

17 BY MR. HINES:

18 Q. Good morning, Joe. This is John Hines, System Road  
19 Foreman for Amtrak.

20 A. All right. John, if you could come a little closer?  
21 You're kind of distant there too.

22 Q. How's this?

23 A. Better.

24 Q. Okay. Joe, do you normally deadhead or ride Train 188  
25 for your work shift in New York?

1 A. When I work the night shift, the 11 to 7, I do.

2 Q. Okay. In your experience in riding 188, have you  
3 experienced any issues in riding Train 188?

4 A. I have not.

5 Q. Okay. The conductor that was coming up to you, was --  
6 did you know that conductor?

7 A. I have. Ironically, when I work third trek there, I  
8 usually take Train 79 out of New York back to Philly. She used to  
9 work 79, but now she's been on 188. I know she's been on this job  
10 for a few weeks now, because Tuesday nights, I've seen her the  
11 last couple of times I've taken the train in, so --

12 Q. Okay. All right. I have no further questions for you,  
13 Joe. Thank you.

14 A. Okay.

15 MR. BULL: Hey Joe, it's Mike Bull with the FRA. We  
16 appreciate you being with us here today and I'm going to pass on  
17 the questions right now. Thank you.

18 MR. BRENNAN: Okay.

19 MR. GEE: Joe, this is Jim Gee, FRA. I have no  
20 questions for you for right now.

21 MR. BRENNAN: I'm sorry? You said you have no questions  
22 for me?

23 MR. GEE: Correct. No questions, sir.

24 MR. BRENNAN: Okay. Okay.

25 MR. BUCHER: Okay. I'm going to pass also. I don't

1 have anything new.

2 MR. BRENNAN: Okay.

3 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Joe, I think that's it. You know,  
4 we're not going to hold you on here a whole lot longer. I'd like  
5 to conclude the interview, but if you could just hang on the phone  
6 for a minute, I'd appreciate it.

7 MR. BRENNAN: Absolutely. Absolutely.

8 MR. BUCHER: Okay. This concludes the interview of  
9 Mr. Joseph Brennan.

10 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           AMTRAK TRAIN 188 DERAILMENT NEAR  
                                  PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA  
                                  MAY 12, 2015  
                                  Telephone Interview of Joseph Brennan

DOCKET NUMBER:           DCA-15-MR-010

PLACE:                     Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

DATE:                      May 18, 2015

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed  
to the best of my skill and ability.

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Karen A. Stockhausen  
Transcriber