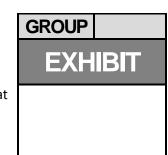


NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD Investigative Hearing

Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Metrorail train 302 that encountered heavy smoke in the tunnel between the L'Enfant Plaza Station and the Potomac River Bridge on January 12, 2015



Agency / Organization

Title

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Interview of: MIKE FARRELL

WMATA Headquarters Jackson Graham Building Washington, D.C.

Tuesday, April 14, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MICHAEL FLANIGON Railroad Accident Investigator

The interviewee was afforded an opportunity to review this transcript for accuracy. No corrections were received.

## APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL FLANIGON, Railroad Accident Investigator National Transportation Safety Board

ROBERT "JOE" GORDON, Investigator-in-Charge National Transportation Safety Board

RICK NARVELL, Human Performance Investigator National Transportation Safety Board

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1	<u>INTERVIEW</u>
2	MR. FLANIGON: Okay. It is April 14th, 2015. I'm Mike
3	Flanigon, F-l-a-n-i-g-o-n, with NTSB. And today, we're
4	interviewing Mr. Mike Farrell, F-a-r-r-e-l-l, who is a rail
5	traffic controller at WMATA. And this is in regard to the January
6	12th arcing incident at L'Enfant Plaza in Washington, D.C. I'll
7	ask my colleagues to identify themselves.
8	MR. GORDON: Joe Gordon, G-o-r-d-o-n, with the NTSB.
9	MR. NARVELL: Rick Narvell, N-a-r-v-e-l-l, NTSB.
10	MR. FLANIGON: And just to confirm, you understand we'll
11	record the interview and get you a transcript to look at.
12	MR. FARRELL: I understand.
13	INTERVIEW OF MIKE FARRELL
14	BY MR. FLANIGON:
15	Q. Okay. Well let's tell us a little bit about your
16	background, how you came to the job you do, how long you've been
17	there, what you do.
18	A. I first started with WMATA in May 2013. I just got out
19	of the military a year or so ago. I was an air traffic controller
20	in the Marine Corps. I got out and applied here and got this job.
21	I've only been working since May, so I don't even have a year with
22	the company yet.
23	Q. Okay. What was your first day of flying solo, so to
24	speak, on the
25	A. Here?

- 1 Q. Yeah.

2	Α.	It was interesting. It was a little nerve-wracking, a	
3	little bi	t of feeling uneasy. But then I felt the same way when I	
4	was an ai:	r traffic controller first day by myself. So, I was kind	
5	of familia	ar with how the feeling was going to be	
6	Q.	Yeah.	
7	Α.	so	
8	Q.	When was that, that you actually started?	
9	Α.	January 11th, I believe.	
10	Q.	Of this year?	
11	Α.	Of this year.	
12	Q.	Just before the	
13	Α.	Just before.	
14	Q.	the smoke incident.	
15	Α.	Yeah. January 11th.	
16	Q.	Okay. Well, some of our questions were, you know, over	
17	the last	5 years, what have you how have you seen things	
18	change?		
19	Α.	Yeah.	
20	Q.	And you	
21	Α.	Can't answer that one for you.	
22	Q.	you weren't here, so we'll kind of skip ahead to	
23	those kind of things. So, we'll, you know, we'll flex here. In		
24	the Marin	e Corps and working as an air traffic controller, there's	
25	some simi	larities	

- 1
- A. Um-hum.

Q. -- to the kind of work. In terms of that, and in particularly how safety is emphasized and managed, what -- how is it the same? How is it different?

I mean, with air traffic control, everything is very --5 Α. 6 I don't want to call it black and white. You know, air traffic 7 control, you need 3 miles of separation between planes. If you break it, you break it. I mean, there's no gray area. 8 I feel 9 more with this, you know, the MSRPA's the rule book that we go by for WMATA. A little bit harder to -- I think it's -- for me, from 10 11 compared to what I'm used to, it's a little bit harder for me to 12 read and be able to understand clearly what the actual procedure is through that book. Or when I was in the FAA and reading the 13 14 7110, it's a lot more written out and a lot more clearer language, 15 easy common language for you to understand. Yeah, it's still 16 written by lawyers, but it's a lot more easier to understand. 17 With this, with this book, it's a little bit more challenging to 18 be able to read it, understand it, and then apply it, if you ask 19 me.

20 Q. Um-hum.

A. That's my philosophy on it. I think it's just harder to understand and be able to apply it just by the way it's either written or even the way the book is kind of laid out. I don't think it's even really laid out the best for, you know, if somebody working the position needs to reference something in the

1 book, it makes it more challenging --

2 Ο. Um-hum. -- because of the way the book is kind of laid out. 3 Α. But I just feel like the procedure's a little bit more gray area in 4 here than it was where I came out of the FAA. 5 6 Ο. Um-hum. And how easy is it or hard is it for you to get 7 any clarification when you need it? 8 It's fairly easy. I mean, all you have to do is ask. Α. 9 And, you know --10 Q. Yeah. 11 -- somebody who's been around for 10-plus years, you go Α. up and ask them and they'll tell you, you know, what's right from 12 13 wrong, which, that's easy to get that information, which is a 14 positive thing. 15 Q. And is it provided in a supportive kind of way? 16 Yes. For me, it's always been supportive. Α. 17 Ο. I know sometimes when you're a newbie in anything; the 18 people who've been around a long time can sometimes be --19 Yeah, they don't want to give you --Α. -- a little tough on you. 20 Ο. 21 Α. I've never encountered that. 22 That's good. And how about in terms of if you see Q. something that doesn't seem right? You know, if you see something 23 24 that you think it unsafe or is of concern, do you feel like the 25 environment's such that you can bring that forward?

1

A. Yes.

2 Q. Do you feel any discouragement from bringing stuff 3 forward?

No, I don't -- I guess it's kind of different for me. 4 Α. I -- coming from this background, it don't really bother me to 5 stand and be like, "Well, I don't know about this. This might not 6 7 be right." For me, I don't mind walking up to someone saying, "Well, I don't think that you should do it this way. You know, 8 9 this isn't right according to rules or procedures and SOP that 10 we're supposed to go by, this isn't correct." That's never 11 bothered me. I guess I have -- I don't know. It just don't 12 bother me to stand up and say something. But normally, it's not 13 usually taken with any type of defensive manner or anything like 14 that. I would say 9 times out of 10, normally it's taken, "Oh, 15 yeah, you're right. Farrell, you're right." Normally, it's taken 16 with a good attitude.

Q. Now, you work in an environment where there's asupervisor there pretty much all the time.

19 A. Yes.

Q. So, sort of on a continuous basis, somebody's in there watching the whole operation. Do any of those -- your supervisor ever specifically kind of watch your operations and give you feedback on how you're doing things?

A. I would say about 75 percent of the time when we'redealing with an actual incident as far as a train malfunction or

any type of incident, a sick customer, arcing insulator, any type of incident on the railroad, normally they're standing behind you at the desk monitoring and giving instructions as needed. But normally, I would say 75 to 80 percent of the time, they're there during an incident helping you give instructions or correcting you if you do happen to make a mistake.

7

Q. How about just under normal circumstances?

A. Normal circumstances, I mean, they make their rounds. 9 It's not a continuous behind your back watching you work 10 continuously. They definitely are aware of what's -- from my 11 experience is -- naturally, it's only -- what are we in, April, 3 12 or 4 months of experience here, in my experience that they're 13 normally pretty observant of what's going on, on the floor.

Q. Yeah, so, how would you describe the organizational culture with relation to safety? Is it emphasized? Is it --

16 I think safety is very emphasized, I do. I think it's Α. 17 emphasized. I believe sometimes that things are more reactive than proactive. I think sometimes we know we'll have a problem 18 19 and sometimes it kind of takes a little bit longer, I feel like, to fix a problem, then it should. That's how I feel. 20 Like T 21 said, I'm coming from a background where, you know, with air traffic control; everything is so much more finer delineation of 22 everything with this, and what I'm used to. I might be kind of a 23 24 biased opinion because of my background, but I think that sometimes they can be a little bit more reactive than proactive. 25

1 You got an example that you could share with us? Q. 2 Not really off the top of my head. I mean, it's just Α. the feeling that I have about it sometimes. 3 Is it urgency or just sort of inertia, organizational 4 Ο. 5 inertia? 6 Α. Yeah, it's more of inertia. It's not really urgency. 7 It's just more of the, like you said the inertia about it, and it's just the vibe that I get, more is it than actual examples. 8 9 Q. You need more sergeants. 10 That's right, to drop the hammer. Α. 11 Drop the hammer, there you go. Q. 12 Α. Gunnies. They're the ones that get the job done. 13 In going -- now, you went through, I'm guessing, a Q. 14 fairly lengthy training program. You came on -- how long did your 15 training last? 16 Α. Well, I started in May and we certified in January. So, 6, 7 months. 17 Ο. 18 Α. So, 6, 7 months. 19 In that training, did you get any information or Q. 20 training on the Incident Command System? 21 Α. No. Do you know what it is, the Incident Command System? 22 Q. 23 Α. No. 24 Q. It's also called the NIMS, National Incident --Oh, the NIMS. Yeah, I'm familiar with the NIMS; once 25 Α.

again, because of my past experience and not so much of -- they
 briefly touched on it, yeah. They briefly touched on it. But in
 depth, no.

Q. And how about any kind of scenario-based training on events that you might have to deal with like smoke, fire, and train wreck --

A. The last about 4 weeks of our training, we got more practical application training where we actually sat at a simulator and did simulations of incidents that we could occur, more training malfunctions than anything else. So, more the normal everyday malfunctions we can get with the train, sick customers, station overruns, things like that, more than -- we did -- yeah, we did fire on the roadway.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. I mean, we did, but it was only for the last --

16 Q. Um-hum.

17 A. -- I would say 4 weeks of our training.

18 Q. Did that include a train evacuation?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. It did. Are you familiar with the Tri-state Oversight 21 Committee, TOC?

22 A. Yes.

Q. And do you ever see them around the Control Center?A. No.

25 Q. How about the functionality, or how well the radio

1 system works?

2 The radio system does not work very well. I would say Α. it works effective communication -- like once again, I'm used to a 3 system where I came from, the air traffic controller, I never had 4 a real issue with radios. They always worked. 5 I think the 6 communication here is poor, I'm not very (indiscernible). You get 7 effective communication probably 70 percent of the time. I would say 70 percent of the time; you're probably getting effective 8 9 communication. And by effective communication, I mean, I transmit 10 to a train, they hear me and they reply to my message. And that's 11 what I mean by effective communication. I would say 70 percent of 12 the time. And then you have dead areas on the railroad that it's 13 just non-existent.

14 Q. During the training, did you get out at all on the 15 lines?

A. Yes. We did several field visits, mostly to the yards. So, we went to the yards and they showed us, you know, switch points, and stuff like that. We did plenty of field visits where we got to get on a line, see the terminal supervisors and the block houses at the end of the line, see switches, all that stuff. Yeah, we got to do plenty of field visits.

22

Q. Do some cab rides in the train?

A. Yeah, yeah, we did a cab ride, yeah. And then weactually got to operate the train at one point.

25 Q. Yeah.

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12

A. So, we did plenty of field visits, we're good on that.
 Q. Okay, good. Do train operators have the authority to
 3 shut off ventilation in the train (indiscernible)?

A. They do now.

5 Q. They do now. Okay.

6 A. They do now.

Q. Okay. Let's see, asked that, asked that. Prior to January 12th, well, you really started January 11th, so this doesn't apply. Didn't have a lot of experience prior to January 12th, did you?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay, we'll skip that one. Can you kind of walk through 13 your understanding of the protocols that you would follow if a 14 train encountered smoke?

15 Α. Okay, so, a train encounters smoke or fire, I actually 16 dealt with the arguments earlier today. That's why I was late. So, the train reported it. Now, the train operator naturally 17 18 holds the authority to turn off their own EV. We instruct them to turn off their EV. If it is safe for train movement, normally 19 20 not, we'd tell the train to reverse ends and take them back to the 21 nearest platform and offload. And then we start single tracking until ERT gets on the scene and either extinguishes the fire or 22 23 ERT and fire department gets on the scene, and either extinguishes 24 the fire or deems it safe for train movement.

25 Q. What's ERT?

1 A. Emergency Response Team.

2 Q. And that's a WMATA -- the maintenance folks --

3 A. Yes.

Q. -- or whoever it is, comes out to deal with stuff. So,
5 is that what happened today, pretty much?

A. Yeah. One train stopped just outside of Bethesda, reported an arcing insulator. That train reversed ends, gave it a block back to Bethesda, offloaded train, single tracked, picked up the customers. ERT's on the scene, rolled down third rail power, knocked the insulator out, brought power back up. Track

11 inspection, safe for train movement.

12 Q. Went smooth, sounds like.

A. I walked out right at the end of the part so I couldcome here.

Q. Well, good. That's probably not the kind of homeworkyou expected to do.

17 A. No, but it's all good. It happens.

18 MR. FLANIGON: I think that's all I have.

19 MR. GORDON: Let Mr. Narvell go since he's --

20 BY MR. NARVELL:

Q. I only have just a couple more. With the understanding you've only been here just a brief period, have you seen anything here that causes you concern in terms of a, any kind of a safety issue or a problem or --

25 A. I mean, the whole fan situation now they're working on,

I mean, every day now, right after rush hour you've got personnel that is out in the field troubleshooting the fans or ensuring that the fans work. I mean, because a lot of these fans, we do have quite a few alarms on either saying they're in local control, which means we can't activate them remotely from the Command Center or some type of alarm on the fan. That's kind of a concern to me, naturally, because of what happened.

8 But other than that, I mean, I don't know if I've been 9 here long enough to really say that anything else truly concerns 10 I think the work load for the controller is a lot, just -- I me. 11 mean, it's a lot for two people to do. Do I think it's almost too 12 much? Sometimes, yeah, I think it's almost too much for two 13 people to be able to manage. And that's a little bit of a concern 14 to me, but other than other major concerns that stand out right 15 now, I don't think I have any, no.

Q. Let's just talk a little bit about the work load.
During those occasions when you apparently you have felt under
pressure.

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Do you have any kind of a resource or mechanism to say, 21 "I need help?" Or, "I can't do this all myself," or something, 22 anything?

A. And that's where it kind of -- we talked about the
supervisor or the assistant superintendent. I mean, they know
when you start to get overwhelmed and that's when they normally

1 come and they stand behind you and make sure that you're staying within procedures and SOP. Like I said, I come from it. I know I 2 3 came from a job where it's a stressful job just like this one is. 4 And I mean, it does get overwhelming at times. And I think that's where the assistant superintendent steps in an normally makes sure 5 б that you're still doing the job. But as far as any type of relief 7 for what you're trying to get at, not -- I mean, they got a quiet room in the Command Center you can go to once the stressful time 8 9 is over, but if I need any type of immediate relief, no, nothing. 10 Just deal with it. I'd like to ask you about the TOC Ο. 11 folks you were aware of. Same question with respect to Federal 12 Transit Administration, or FTA. You ever see FTA ? No, sir. 13 Α. 14 Do you know who they are? Ο. I do not know, like, faces and names, no, sir. 15 Α. 16 Do you know of FTA? 0. 17 Yes, I know of FTA. Α. 18 You just haven't had any interaction. Ο. 19 No, no interaction. Α. MR. NARVELL: That's all I have for him. Thank you. 20 21 BY MR. GORDON: All right, Joe Gordon, NTSB. You spoke about the 22 Q. incident you had today, and one of my questions was, have you ever 23 24 been involved in a smoke event, you know, in the short time that you've been here. And prior to today's event, have you ever had 25

1 any --

2 I mean, I've had a couple dealings with the arcing Α. 3 insulator, and it went just like -- just how I kind of just broke 4 it down just now, same deal. You want me to go through those 5 again? б Ο. No. More to -- I know that from talking to some of the 7 other rail traffic controllers that there's a procedure for clamping a switch. 8 9 Α. Yes. 10 So, have you ever been involved in that reverse movement Q. 11 of the train where that came into play where the operator had to 12 get off and clamp the switch? 13 Α. In a smoking incident? 14 Ο. Yes. 15 Α. No, I have not. 16 So, you've never been in --Q. 17 Α. No, I've never been in the incident where I've had to 18 have the train reverse ends due to smoke in a tunnel and have them 19 clamp the switch. I think it's a unique -- I think that it's really good 20 0. 21 to get to talk to you, you know, a fresh set of eyes with you just getting here. That's probably some of the reasoning to them 22 sending you in here. And I'm glad that they did. You've been 23 24 through the training and -- you know, recently. So, do you feel 25 like the training that they give you is adequate?

1

A. No.

2 And how -- what have you done to overcome that? Ο. 3 Α. That's when you have to take it upon yourself, because 4 if you're not going to get the training, you're still held liable and accountable for the actions you do while you're in the 5 6 position, so it's kind of a -- I'm going to say a pride thing, but 7 if you're held accountable, I don't want to be sitting in this chair not for this reason, but for a worse reason. So, you know 8 9 you've got to take it upon yourself to know what you can and can't 10 do, what's right, and what's wrong, your procedures, your SOPs, 11 your rules. You kind of got to take it upon yourself, because 12 you're not getting any training. You're still held accountable for it. 13 14 So, you're having to do your own homework. Ο.

A. I mean, during training I did some, yes, because the training was, in my personal opinion not up to the standard it should be for the job we were doing.

18 MR. GORDON: I think that's all I've got right now,19 Mike.

20

BY MR. FLANIGON:

Q. Well, just to maybe elaborate a little more on that, with regard to the training, are we talking about the length of the training or the quality of the training or both or --A. The instructors that we had that were the rail instructors from WMATA were outstanding. If it wasn't for them,

the training itself would have probably been a failure. 1 The materials given for the training was inaccurate, portions of it 2 3 were inaccurate. I mean, even down to spelling and grammar issues 4 in the materials. They had issues with that inaccurate material. I don't think the curriculum -- there were days in the curriculum 5 б that we didn't have anything -- the curriculum wasn't put 7 together. So, it was kind of like we were just -- I want to say, let's shoot from the hip so to speak, the whole time we were going 8 9 through the training. It just wasn't standardized. Once again, 10 I'm coming from a background where it's standardized. You get a 11 syllabus; you get a day-by-day payout, everything you're going to 12 do. Take tests on this day; you take simulation package this day. I was used to that and I came here and it was unorganized and once 13 14 again, it might be a biased opinion, but it was unorganized 15 compared to what I was used to. I was expecting to come in, go 16 through an academic portion of learning the book, learning the 17 rules, being tested on it, then going through a simulation portion 18 where you sit in front of a simulator and, and they sim you, sim 19 you, sim you until you become proficient. And then you go to OJT. And I was used to that structure. More or less when I came here, 20 21 it was, all right, we're going to put you in training class for 5 weeks. All right, it's 5 weeks now, we're going to stay another 22 23 week now. Okay, now you're going to go to ROCC training now. 24 It's going to last 10 weeks. All right, it's been 12 weeks now and now you're going to go do simulations. You get 4 weeks of 25

that. Originally, we were supposed to get, I think, 8 weeks on one shift it was supposed to be. They cut our OJT time in half from what it was originally supposed to be when we first got hired for the job. Just the training was very unorganized, at best. That's all I got to say about that, very unorganized. If you weren't a proactive person, it would have been very challenging. That's all I got to say about that.

Q. That's all I wanted to do, explore that a little bit
9 further. You said the rail instructors --

10 Yeah, the actual rail training instructors were Α. 11 outstanding. If it wasn't for them, the class wouldn't be what it 12 was. And those were guys with -- guys and gals, excuse me, with 13 25 years-plus experience just spreading their knowledge to us. 14 This is what's going to happen to you out there. This is how you 15 correct it, and stuff like that. Kind of help and take the book, 16 all the text that's in the book that's hard to read, breaking it 17 down for us to be able to understand it. If it wasn't for them, 18 the class would have been very difficult, because the actual 19 classroom portion wasn't very good.

20 Q. That's helpful.

21 MR. NARVELL: I have a follow-up question on that.

22 MR. FLANIGON: Go ahead.

23 BY MR. NARVELL:

Q. Is there an opportunity for you at the conclusion of all this to provide feedback?

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20

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. And I don't want to assume, but you provided --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. -- your feedback in an honest --

A. Oh, yes. Most of us in the class provided our feedback. Now, mind you that I was in a class -- I came in with a class of -- I was in a class of five and I'm the only one -- well, me and one other are still here. The other person is absent without leave right now. So, I don't know if he's still here or if he quit, but I'm the only one assumingly left in my class.

- 11 MR. NARVELL: Okay.
- 12 BY MR. GORDON:

Q. Joe Gordon, NTSB, again. We've talked a little bit about the procedural changes that have come into play since the January 12th incident. From your perspective, have those been adequate to --

- 17 A. Yes.
- 18 Q. -- address those situations?

A. Yes, a lot more stress has been put on those proceduresnow than before. So, yes, I would say 100 percent yes.

Q. And one final thing for me is -- well, I guess two things. The one thing, the ventilation fans, something that has to work when it has to work.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And is that kind of what -- some of what you're talking

1 about --

9

2 A. Yes.

Q. -- when you talk about the urgency for repairs? A. Yes, it needs to work when you call upon it, because when it doesn't work when you don't need it, it needs to work when you do need it. You know what I mean? It's kind of like, it's not that big a deal if you don't need it, but the second you need it and it don't work, that's a big problem.

Q. Kind of like a parachute.

10 A. Yeah, it's like a parachute. Everyone loves a -- you 11 know, it doesn't matter if it's got a hole in it when it's in the 12 backpack. When you pull the string, it needs to work.

Q. Yeah, absolutely. So, yeah, having an indicator on your screen that says this fan's out of correspondence, local control, I mean, that tells you this fan's --

16 A. Of no use to me.

17 Q. -- no use to me at all.

18 A. That's correct.

19 Q. Yeah, so that's good. I'm glad we talked about that.
20 And the one final, we touched on the radios. I know that you take
21 reports of trouble from the train operators throughout a shift.
22 How often do you get a report of a malfunctioning radio?

A. A malfunctioning radio?

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. Often.

- 1
- Q. Would you say daily on a shift?

2 A. Yes, oh, yeah.

3	MR. GORDON: Thank you. I have nothing further.
4	MR. NARVELL: None from Rick Narvell.
5	MR. FLANIGON: Anything you want to add?
6	MR. FARRELL: No, I'm good.
7	MR. FLANIGON: I will thank you.
8	(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: WMATA INCIDENT AT L'ENFANT PLAZA STATION, WASHINGTON, D.C. JANUARY 12, 2015 Interview of Mike Farrell

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-15-FR-004

PLACE: Washington, D.C.

DATE: April 14, 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.

> Wendy C. Cutting Transcriber