

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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DGNO TRAIN ACCIDENT IN CADIZ YARD,
DALLAS, TEXAS, AUGUST 13, 2018

* Accident No.: RRD18FR010
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Interview of: ROBERT HOLTZ

Hotel Indigo
1933 Main Street
Dallas, Texas

Wednesday,
August 15, 2018

APPEARANCES:

TOMAS TORRES, Rail Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL HOEPF, Ph.D., Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

BRET STRICKLAND, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

NOEL IGNACIO, Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration

JOHN DUNN, Safety Team
SMART TD

DAVID A. BROWN, II, Chief Operating Officer
Genesee & Wyoming Inc.

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. TORRES: This is a NTSB informal interview. My name is
3 Tomas Torres, T-O-M-A-S, T-O-R-R-E-S. Today's date is August
4 15th, 2018. We are at Dallas, Texas at the Indigo Hotel
5 interviewing the --

6 MR. HOLTZ: Robert Holtz, Vice President of Operations,
7 Central Region.

8 MR. TORRES: Oh, okay. With a, with a -- in connection with
9 an accident that happened at Cadiz Yard in Dallas, Texas on August
10 13th, 2018. The NTSB accident number is RRD18FR010.

11 The purpose of this investigation is to increase safety, not
12 to assign fault, blame or liability. NTSB cannot offer any
13 guarantee of confidentiality or immunity or from legal or
14 certificate actions. A transcript or summary of the interview
15 will go in a public docket.

16 The interviewee can have one representative of the
17 interviewee's choice. Do you need a representative?

18 MR. HOLTZ: I do not.

19 MR. TORRES: Thank you. Do you understand this interview is
20 being recorded?

21 MR. HOLTZ: Yes, sir.

22 MR. TORRES: Please state your name and spell it.

23 MR. HOLTZ: Robert Holtz. Last name is spelled H-O-L-T-Z.

24 MR. TORRES: And your title?

25 MR. HOLTZ: Vice President of Operations, Central Region.

1 MR. TORRES: Thank you.

2 DR. HOEPF: Mike Hoepf, H-O-E-P-F, with the NTSB.

3 MR. STRICKLAND: Bret Strickland, S-T-R-I-C-K-L-A-N-D, FRA
4 operating practices.

5 MR. IGNACIO: Noel Ignacio, N-O-E-L, I-G-N-A-C-I-O, operating
6 practices.

7 MR. DUNN: John Dunn, D-U-N-N, SMART TD, Safety Team.

8 MR. BROWN: David Brown, Chief Operating Officer, Genesee &
9 Wyoming Incorporated; B-R-O-W-N, the Second.

10 INTERVIEW OF ROBERT HOLTZ

11 BY MR. TORRES:

12 Q. Okay. Robert, can you tell us a little bit about your
13 background, you know, railroad experience?

14 A. Certainly. I started as a management trainee for CSX
15 Railroad. I was hired in 2005. Since that time, I've worked at
16 various trainmaster roles, both in terminals and line of road.
17 I've been a terminal manager over separate flat yards. I've been
18 terminal superintendent over hump yards. I've been an assistant
19 division manager, which oversees a portion of a network, and I've
20 also been a division manager, all with CSX at a Class 1 railroad,
21 which is again, oversees a portion of a network, before coming to
22 Genesee & Wyoming here in February, as vice president of
23 operations for the Central Region.

24 Q. As vice president for Genesee & Wyoming, what are your
25 duties? You know --

1 A. So, I provide leadership guidance and support for the
2 railroads within the Central Region, which I have jurisdiction. I
3 ensure we provide an optimal service product, we operate
4 sufficiently and productively as possible. I'm responsible for
5 our financial performance. I am responsible for ensuring that we
6 comply with federal regulations in terms of safety, that we align
7 with corporate guidance and fulfill the requirements of the safety
8 culture that G&W has for our Central Region properties and also
9 for the development of the workforce and people that work within
10 the region that I'm responsible for.

11 Q. Okay. And you mentioned that you also have responsibility
12 for safety with FRA regulations and stuff, and how is that, you
13 know, pushed down or, you know --

14 A. Sure. We have a -- obviously we're regulated by the federal
15 government as an industry. I ensure that we comply with those
16 things. I also have an obligation to promote a culture of safety
17 that coincides with the G&W's mission. We've been the safest
18 railroad, outperforming the Class 1's for 9 consecutive years. We
19 want to promote that fact. We want to engrain that in the culture
20 of the railroads we acquire that are part of my region. So I
21 provide leadership support and guidance to the teams that manage
22 those specific railroads, and also, my regional staff, that is
23 segmented so that we have coverage over those properties.

24 Q. So how do you guys like over -- like identify potential
25 problems or problems? You know, I mean, it seems like you have a

1 program to address those things, so how does that work?

2 A. Certainly. So, in terms of personal injury and accident
3 prevention, we conduct a frequent analysis of our performance,
4 also the industry trends, and identify root causes, you know, what
5 are our basic root causes or leading indicators of incidents that
6 occur, and we formulate plans for communication, follow-up, and
7 development of the employees to try to better them at those things
8 and prevent those leading indicators.

9 Q. So at the corporate office, at your level, you identify those
10 things and then it's filtered down to the ground people, like
11 trainmasters and the employees?

12 A. Correct. So we -- you spoke to Dale Anderson earlier. We
13 track everything that transpires, any event. We compile that data
14 to determine leading indicators so we can see what areas need our
15 attention. And then also, as an industry, we have leading
16 indicators for, you know, for causes of human factor incidents;
17 personal injury leading indicators, whether that be slips, trips
18 and falls, or something within the industry that we focus on as
19 well.

20 Q. Okay, and we'll change a little bit here. How about the
21 agreement you have here with the Union Pacific on this property
22 here? I mean, can you explain how that works, the interaction?

23 A. Sure. So, back in 2004, we entered into a joint use
24 agreement. There's four parties in that agreement: Dallas Area
25 Rapid Transit; Trinity Rail Express, which is TRE; Union Pacific

1 and DGNO. That's the four parties to the joint use agreement, for
2 the benefit of the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, for commerce.
3 That joint use agreement allows us to interact and operate on each
4 other's footprint for the purpose of fluidity.

5 Within that agreement, which you've requested and will be
6 provided so you'll have the actual document, there is a note about
7 Cadiz Yard, that we will be given access to utilize that specific
8 location. And I refer to it as a yard, but in reality it's only
9 three tracks off the main line. It's just termed as a yard. It's
10 not a production facility. It's not a manned location that has a
11 yardmaster and a management team. It's simply three tracks within
12 that footprint.

13 Q. So it's not a classification yard?

14 A. It is not.

15 Q. They don't switch or build trains?

16 A. No. It's more of a bucket yard or, you know, to keep certain
17 industries' traffic that are in close proximity, that local
18 switching jobs or assignments may want to deliver to one customer
19 or the other. We may position cars for interchange to the Class 1
20 railroads there for furtherance to, you know, their interchange
21 location, but that is not the designated location.

22 MR. TORRES: Okay. Thank you.

23 Mike?

24 DR. HOEPF: Okay. Thanks Tomas.

25 BY DR. HOEPF:

1 Q. Sorry, I might be getting confused here. Did you respond to
2 the scene of the accident itself?

3 A. I did.

4 Q. You did? Okay, okay. I know there was another Robert, a
5 trainmaster we talked to, and I just --

6 A. That was Robert Corley. You've interviewed him.

7 Q. Right, right. Okay. But you personally went there as well?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Could you just give us kind of a -- you know, your best time
10 stamp, as you can, kind of walk us through a timeline of, you
11 know, your experience just responding to that accident, what you
12 saw and what -- kind of what your take away was for that?

13 A. Certainly. The scene at Cadiz Yard, at the east end,
14 obviously we had a locomotive and nine cars that were coupled to a
15 cut of cars in Track 400. During the course of the shoving
16 movement that resulted in that coupling, a conductor was fatally
17 injured. When I responded to the scene, it was after that fact,
18 and then we began to try to use the physical evidence available to
19 us to understand how that transpired. We feel like that we've --
20 with confidence, can say I understand what took place based on
21 that evidence and based on the facts we've developed at this
22 point.

23 Basically a shoving movement was conducted, initiating at --
24 with the main line switch that permits access to the Cadiz Yard on
25 the east end. The employee responsible for directing that shoving

1 movement was our conductor on the particular assignment. His
2 intent was to shove into Track 401. Unfortunately, a switch was
3 lined other than his intended route by that individual into Track
4 400 where the employee was also handling a derail in the gauge of
5 the track, was struck by his own equipment, the movement he was
6 directing, resulting in fatality to that individual.

7 Q. Okay. Great. Yeah. No, because I thought it would be said
8 for the record, but Robert's our, you know, our spokesperson and
9 so he's been participating in the investigation, so, just, you
10 know, so that's clear.

11 Is there anything, I don't know, any takeaway that you got
12 from that? From, you know, an operation's perspective, do you see
13 anything that, you know, you've learned that is, I don't know,
14 from a safety perspective that could be improved in the yard? I
15 mean, you know, you've heard me talking about the switch and kind
16 of the human factors perspective of that. I mean, you know, was
17 there any kind of takeaway, you know, how you've seen the
18 situation, is there something that can -- went wrong that can be
19 done?

20 A. Sure. So just to clarify a couple items I've heard through
21 during the course of the interview here. When you talk about the,
22 the nature of the work that that these employees are asked to
23 perform, specifically a conductor who's the employee involved in
24 this particular instance, it is fair to say that 90 percent of
25 what these individuals do is unsupervised. They are

1 professionals. That's why they are certified federally as such.
2 The training and development they're provided is so that they can
3 be successful when executing the rules, processes and procedures
4 that are required to operate safely on the railroad. This
5 individual was provided such, in accordance with that. In this
6 instance, that employee deviated from what those rules require,
7 and unfortunately it resulted in the incident that we're here to
8 discuss today.

9 You know, also, from another perspective, when you talk about
10 the planning of the work, you've asked several questions to some
11 participants here about, you know, how do they know what to switch
12 or what to do, to discuss more of that. That's part of a larger
13 system in process with our customer base. Everything is
14 scheduled. Everything is -- aligns with the ordering and
15 expectation of the customers that we service. That work is
16 presented to these individuals, a conductor specifically, that's
17 the scope of his role. He's there to classify cars, ensure
18 they're provided to the right customer's facility and we're
19 pulling the correct ones from that customer's facility.

20 All that work is presented to them via mobile crew, which is
21 a mobile device. You know, you've heard people refer to it as
22 paperwork. The work that's to be performed on a given day is
23 presented to that crew via that mobile device. And it updates in
24 real time so that they can report events of placement and pulling
25 from specific customers. Also, it allows them to have an accurate

1 and updated inventory at all times so that they can see what's
2 where. So this is all part of their initial training when they go
3 to perform the work of a conductor, and that's how they're
4 informed as to here are the expectations of the customers we're
5 serving here today.

6 Then our safety program also is separate from that in terms
7 of, we know the nature of the work in terms of the service that
8 we're providing, here's how to safely perform that service and
9 execute the job tasks that are required to build trains, move from
10 point A to B, ultimately to provide that service.

11 So I wanted to make sure that was clear when you talk about
12 the paperwork and the supervision and the decision making, in
13 terms of job tasks and what transpires between, you know, the
14 start of a tour of duty and the end of a tour of duty, given the
15 demand for that particular job to service different customers.
16 That's within the scope of their role. That is their job.

17 Q. Okay. Yeah, I appreciate, you know, your perspective in kind
18 of clearing that up. You know, again, I always tell everybody,
19 I'm not trying to play the gotcha game or anything like that, but
20 we've kind of been taking about this -- you know, you've got this
21 situation where it seems like there was a conductor who maybe
22 didn't follow the rules. You know, it's -- I hear this all the
23 time in railroading, and not to pontificate, but, you know, if
24 people would just follow those rules, you know, we just -- we
25 wouldn't, you know, we wouldn't be here today. And it's sad, but

1 we know people don't always follow the rules, you know?

2 And, I'm just wondering, you know, as like a -- from a safety
3 perspective as an operations person, you know what do you do with
4 that? You know, what do you see when you see this, you know,
5 accident and you see somebody who goes outside of that
6 prescription of what they're supposed to be -- how they're
7 supposed to, you know, approach a task? Is there -- well, let me
8 just ask you open-ended without leading you. I mean, what is
9 your, what's your takeaway on there? I mean, what can be done?

10 A. Sure. So I think, again, of railroading and it's a, you
11 know, hundreds of year old industry. As a conductor, there's a
12 set of tasks that these guys perform repeatedly. They operate
13 switches. They protect shoves. They apply and release
14 handbrakes. They make couplings. They make air hoses. They
15 mount and dismount equipment. So there's a finite set of basic
16 tasks that these guys perform, and I think my safety officer that
17 was here and testified earlier, Mr. Dale Anderson, he said it very
18 well. The training we provide, we explicitly discuss the steps of
19 how to comply with the operating rules to complete those tasks
20 safely and successfully. And the professionals that become
21 certified following that training, they build habit strength
22 around doing things the correct way.

23 As supervision in the field, who is monitoring safety and
24 proficiency as outlined in the training program, the documentation
25 of their performance, you know, we're providing, not only

1 oversight but follow-up to always give feedback to that
2 individual. So whether the tests that he has prior result in
3 compliance or not, in either result, we're giving feedback to that
4 individual, either reinforcing positive behavior and reinforcing
5 that habit strength about things are done, or when we see
6 something that deviates from what we would expect, we're providing
7 that feedback as well as corrective action.

8 You know, in this instance, you know, had this employee
9 received a certain set of feedback about maybe the way he did
10 things in this instance, maybe he changes that habit. Maybe he
11 doesn't know he's deviating from that point, or in the moment
12 while during the course of his work, he gets ahead of himself.
13 Which appears to be the case in this instance where he's working
14 ahead, you know, concentrating on maybe what his next move is
15 versus the one that's actually transpiring. So, you know, we have
16 a way to protect against that. We consistently provide feedback
17 to employees. We're consistently training, developing, and
18 following the federal program to ensure that we comply with the
19 oversight that's necessary to keep certification in place.

20 So, in this instance, I think we have an employee with 1 year
21 of experience, which is not much. We usually segment the
22 population in the rail industry generally 2 years of less, and we
23 have an employee who's working one step ahead of where he needed
24 to be, perform some tasks that were unrelated to the movement he
25 was directing. And, you know, is it probable that this would be

1 the outcome? No. Possibly, yes. And ultimately in this
2 instance, we had the very end of the spectrum in terms of an
3 accident period, when -- pyramid when you talk about, you know, a
4 non-compliant behavior.

5 Q. Okay. Well, thanks. No, I -- you know, I just wanted to
6 kind of give you a chance to, you know, give your perspective on
7 the, you know, the accident, because you've been pretty close to
8 it. So I appreciate that.

9 The other bit that we wanted to talk to you about today --
10 Tomas has obviously already opened this, you know, opened the book
11 on just the contracting end, you know, between other railroads.
12 So, really just, if I could you to kind of comment. I'm trying to
13 ask a broad question and let you just kind of fill in the details.
14 But can you explain to -- you know, somebody comes in, they're
15 wondering, from a safety management perspective, you know, you've
16 got this larger company with these smaller companies that are
17 acquired. You know, how do you go about managing safety and
18 trying to -- and it sounds like you said you've been -- I think
19 it's interesting, you said that you're -- I don't know if you're
20 going by your statistics, you're saying you're safer than a Class
21 1 railroads. I think that's interesting. Maybe you can comment
22 on that as you're answering my question.

23 But, you know, how do you just ensure a consistent level of
24 safety across these different sub-railroads, I guess?

25 A. It's the same concept as the operational testing that takes

1 place kind of on a micro level, if you want to look at it that
2 way, on a railroad-to-railroad basis. On a macro level, if you
3 will, from a regional perspective, we're doing that same thing to
4 ensure each railroad is communicated with. We talk about
5 incidents as a group together on a weekly basis so that all
6 railroads can hear the same information. If we've had an incident
7 in one place or the other, we can go through the details of it to
8 benefit the whole. And that's within the course of a weekly basis
9 for the region.

10 So, for me, as I communicate, and I have direct reports that
11 are responsible for the management teams of these individual
12 railroads, it's my responsibility to ensure consistency in the way
13 that we promote the culture of safety through G&W, how we conduct
14 safety briefings, the fact that we conduct operational testing in
15 accordance with the federal requirements, that we clarify the way
16 rules are not only written, but interpreted so that that
17 interpretation is consistent across the region. It's really about
18 being an effective communicator, leading by example, and providing
19 guidance and support for those railroads within the body of the
20 region I'm responsible for.

21 DR. HOEPF: Okay. Great. Thanks.

22 Bret?

23 BY MR. STRICKLAND:

24 Q. Bret Strickland, S-T-R-I-C-K-L-A-N-D, FRA operating
25 practices. Excuse me. Would you mind just kind of a

1 clarification for everyone or -- it get pretty complicated with
2 DGNO operating on the UP tracks and whose rules apply where and
3 all. So could you kind of clear the air on that a little bit
4 about what rules are in place at the Cadiz Yard --

5 A. Sure.

6 Q. -- in particular for the crew that day?

7 A. Sure. So we follow GCOR, which is General Code of Operating
8 Rules. So that's applicable for all parties. Okay?

9 If Union Pacific has any location-specific requirements,
10 which are usually bulletined in the form of a special instruction
11 -- let's say the securement requirement in Track 401 because of
12 its grade and the way it lays is more so than the minimum, that's
13 listed in a UP special instruction, which Robert mentioned we have
14 their bulletins and then we also have access to any special
15 instructions that don't pertain to train movement, we would comply
16 with those requirements that are UP specific, if there were any
17 such.

18 Q. So, again, just to clarify, G&W's safety rules or DGNO's
19 version of G&W's safety rules is in effect for that crew --

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. -- that day. Not the UP-safety rules?

22 A. Not their general practices. But if that have site-specific
23 physical characteristics, something associated with that
24 particular location, we would comply with those special
25 instructions because they are specific to that location.

1 Q. To that location. Then, as a general rule, I mean, is the
2 overall the ABTH Rules and the safety rules of G&W would have been
3 in effect --

4 A. You're correct.

5 Q. -- at that time? And GCOR, which you both operate on?

6 A. Correct. And then again, you know, you work for the FRA,
7 right? So we're federal regulated as an industry, so we're
8 following pretty much all the same regulations. We're all
9 required to do the same thing.

10 Q. Yeah. Just for clarification, so everybody understands, it
11 was -- it get's a little complicated when you have four or five
12 different railroads --

13 A. Sure.

14 Q. -- with different people operating on it.

15 MR. STRICKLAND: That's all I have. Thank you.

16 BY MR. IGNACIO:

17 Q. I'm Noel Ignacio, I-G-N-A-C-I-O. I don't know if this is a
18 proper question to ask. Since, you know, you're following GCOR
19 rules, and on GCOR when you're shoving, that's the only thing
20 you're going to do, right, to watch the shove? You're not going
21 to do any specific task taking up derail, working on derail,
22 you're just watching the shove and protect the shove, right?

23 A. Correct. And that's why I referenced that in response to
24 Mike's question. You know, this individual, again, working ahead
25 instead of paying attention to the move being made, he's not

1 permitted to engage in an unrelated task during the course of
2 directing a shoving movement. Unrelated task in this instance
3 would have been operating a switch while moving, operating a
4 derail while moving. He shouldn't be doing anything other than
5 directing the shoving movement that he was doing, in accordance
6 with the GCOR regulations. Correct.

7 Q. Yeah, that's why I'm (indiscernible).

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. But with this thing happen, you know, there's some -- what
10 management protocol or engineering protocols you can -- you're
11 thinking of doing so people really follow the rules?

12 A. So I think that the requirements for operational testing
13 regarding the observance of shoving moves that Dale referred to in
14 the subpart testing in the federal regulation, that's part of
15 doing that, is ensuring that employees are proficient. Even back
16 to the training, as you watch them perform that task, which is on
17 the checklist, you know, that's the time when you're training
18 properly, communicating, providing feedback as to here's the
19 proper way to do this. Then there's the oversight and follow-up
20 that's required by the federal government with our operational
21 testing program. Then also the additional rules that Genesee &
22 Wyoming has, which most times are more restrictive than just the
23 federal regs about what can and can't be done.

24 We do annual rules classes to reinforce exactly what the
25 expectation is with all employees. Also, we have the follow-up in

1 the field where feedback is constantly given, both through the
2 course of operational testing and also through just direct
3 observation when you're in and around the field.

4 I think for us, moving forward, when you talk about what are
5 the potential risks associated with non-compliance, again, the
6 probable versus the possible scenario, you know, hey, you may walk
7 away with your back to equipment and may try to do something else,
8 and is it probable something's going happen? No, but possible
9 yes, and here's some examples of what can potentially happen to
10 you and the catastrophic result that could occur thereafter.

11 So it's really about communicating, being very transparent
12 about what the details of an incident are, reviewing that with
13 everyone, which we have a process in place to do as a region, so
14 that if something happens on one railroad within the region, we
15 communicate with all so that everybody can have the benefit of
16 understanding the circumstances, and also take corrective action
17 and also reflect on their own operations there. There are places
18 where I have something similar taking place and I can benefit or
19 have a value-added input as a result of having an understanding of
20 something that happened somewhere else, whether it be within the
21 industry or within our own organization.

22 MR. IGNACIO: Okay. Nothing further. Thank you.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions, thank you.

24 MR. TORRES: Any follow-up?

25 DR. HOEPF: I don't think so. I think I'm good.

1 MR. TORRES: Okay. Then no further questions. This will
2 conclude the interview.

3 Thank you.

4 (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: DGNO TRAIN ACCIDENT IN CADIZ YARD,
 DALLAS, TEXAS, AUGUST 13, 2018
 Interview of Robert Holtz

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD18FR010

PLACE: Dallas, Texas

DATE: August 15, 2018

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.


Deborah Dowling Sweigart
Transcriber