

DCA-06-FR-004

**Norfolk Southern Rear-end Collision
Derailment**

Train No. 226 & Train No. 22R

Lincoln, AL

January 18, 2006

**Interview of Engineer of
Train No. 22R**

13 pages, including cover sheet

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

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Investigation of: *
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NORFOLK SOUTHERN REAR-END COLLISION *
LINCOLN, AL *
JANUARY 18, 2006 * Docket No.: DCA-06-FR-004
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Interview of: PAUL VANCE

Comfort Inn
Lincoln, Alabama

Thursday,
January 19, 2006

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RUSSELL GOBER

APPEARANCES:

RUSSELL GOBER, OPERATIONS GROUP CHAIRMAN
National Transportation Safety Board
DuPage County Airport
31 West 775 North Avenue
West Chicago, Illinois 60185
[REDACTED]

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INTERVIEW OF PAUL VANCE

BY MR. GOBER:

Q. Paul, could you give me your name and address and phone number?

A. Paul Vance, 1400 Norfolk Southern Drive.

Q. And the phone number?

A. [REDACTED]

Q. Okay. On the 18th, what was your job?

A. The engineer on 22R.

Q. Okay. Before we get into the details of that, how long have you worked with NS and in what capacity?

A. This is April it'll be nine years, and I've worked on the ground and as an engineer.

Q. On the ground. Does that mean as a conductor and brakeman?

A. Well, I worked -- I worked in the yard most of the time as a foreman.

Q. Um-hum.

A. --

Q. Um-hum. Okay. What did you do, go through the training program to become an engineer?

A. Yes.

Q. And how long have you been an engineer?

A. Well, I qualified in -- I'd say, five years ago. I got

1 cut back to the ground, went back up and back to the ground. So
2 I'd say, off and on, three years.

3 Q. Okay. Is this run between Birmingham and Atlanta on
4 that train a normal run?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. What do you all do on a normal run?

7 A. Well, we get the train at Birmingham and take it to
8 Atlanta.

9 Q. Okay. As a rule, what kind of work do you do between
10 Birmingham and Atlanta?

11 A. As the engineer, I run the train.

12 Q. Okay. And as --

13 A. I operate the train.

14 Q. As a train, what does -- what does a conductor do with
15 it every now and then? Does he have any work to do or --

16 A. Well, sometimes when you go on emergency, you got to go
17 off the train and make sure, you know, everything's all right.
18 And so other than to set cars out, sometimes you got to pick them
19 up and he had to do all --

20 Q. And does this train a normal automobile train?

21 A. Yes, it has automobiles on it regularly.

22 Q. Okay. Do you work the Honda plant down at --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Do you know whether you were scheduled to work it on the
25 18th?

1 A. We had 14 cars, I believe, to set out.

2 Q. Okay. Is that a normal thing to do?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay. Whenever you went on duty in Birmingham, what
5 time did you go on duty?

6 A. 1:35 p.m. I believe.

7 Q. What time did you leave?

8 A. 2:20. I believe that it was 2:20.

9 Q. After you left, did you have any stops or any unusual
10 delays?

11 A. Well, we stopped at Leeds to pick up Mr. Tifton. He was
12 going to ride with a new trainee, Jeremy Cannon, and we had to
13 stop there.

14 Q. Was there anything unusual after that or --

15 A. Well, we had -- I can't remember -- I think it was -- --
16 calls on the radio and closes that door -- So the conductor got
17 off and Mr. Tifton got on and pulled back where the conductor
18 could close the door. And
19 Mr. Tifton told him to just his drive his car to Lincoln and that
20 he'd pick it up there.

21 Q. Okay. And then after that, what happened?

22 A. Well, we were coming down to -- I believe it was just
23 before we got to Riverside and the dispatcher told us -- The
24 dispatcher told us that he's going to pass him in Coosa -- So we
25 come around at Riverside and got an approach. So we creeped

1 along around there looking for a red board like we're supposed to.
2 When we got around to Coosa we had a divergent approach, so we
3 went into Coosa.

4 Q. And a divergent approach tells you what?

5 A. That means you take a diversion around. You better stop
6 at the next signal.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And that's what we did, stop at the next signal.

9 Q. Okay. Did you make any plans to know where to stop
10 whenever you headed in?

11 A. Well, you want to get the clear, you know. And the
12 engineer trainee forgets to start the counter, so we knew it was
13 about 9,000 feet long, so we just -- you know. We stopped at
14 about, I'd say, five cars from the signal. There should've been
15 plenty of room to be in the clear -- all clear signal at
16 Riverside, because the next signal back is Coosa. So -- sure it
17 was in the clear. And you can't get a clear signal at Riverside
18 if we ain't in clear.

19 Q. And you actually heard that on the radio.

20 Do you know whether those radio conversations are
21 recorded anywhere or not?

22 A. I assume they are. I don't know for a fact. I know
23 they record a lot of stuff.

24 Q. The trainee engineer said there's an old road
25 crossing --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- in there before you get to Embry and -- which is
3 about 20 car lengths before you get to the -- to the end of the
4 track at Coosa.

5 A. Well, it's not that far, not 20. It may be -- I'd say
6 eight. And he said 20?

7 Q. Okay. So you went past that crossing and you stopped?

8 A. Yeah, just past it.

9 Q. Okay. What was your first indication that there was a
10 problem?

11 A. Well, we stopped for about five minutes and we went into
12 emergency. So we saw Matt and he comes down there and he was in
13 the car just waiting on us, and he comes down there and -- about
14 the time we got there, the fire marshal pulled up.

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. And of course Matt got in the car with the fire marshal
17 and went back. Mr. Tifton and Jeremy went back there in his car,
18 but I still didn't know nothing. So --

19 Q. Is Matt your conductor?

20 A. Yes. It's Matt King.

21 Q. And is he a proficient conductor?

22 A. I think he is, yes.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. But -- Anyway, they went back there and they told me --
25 well, they got back down and Matt wanted to cut the crossing. But

1 during that time, the dispatcher called me and said do not move
2 the train and I said okay. And Matt got back there and made the
3 cut and said, I've made the cut -- and he moved it.

4 Q. Um-hum.

5 A. So he got out -- So he told me to shut the engines down
6 and get yourself off the engine. We went to Lincoln where the
7 railroad shack is.

8 Q. And after you got to Lincoln, did you have any
9 instructions then?

10 A. Yes, sir, get inside and stay inside.

11 Q. Was that because of the environment?

12 A. Yeah. You know, it wasn't -- the smoke was blowing away
13 from us, but you know, it could've shifted and so we just stayed
14 inside.

15 Q. Did you spend the night there?

16 A. No, no. Mr. Campbell come and got us --

17 Q. What kind of things --

18 A. Oh, the drug test.

19 Q. Oh, okay, okay. Do you take drugs?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. Do you drink?

22 A. I don't drink.

23 Q. Smoke? Did they check you for nicotine?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. Do you think you passed the test?

1 A. Yeah.

2 MR. GOBER: Okay. Mr. McAvoy, do you have any
3 questions?

4 BY MR. MCAVOY:

5 Q. Yeah. Did they just take a urine specimen only?

6 A. No, they took urine, breath, blood, all three.

7 Q. All right.

8 A. -- got all the fluid they could get out of me.

9 Q. And you said you worked on the ground and I guess the
10 yard foreman?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. And then, how long is your total time with the railroad?

13 A. About nine years.

14 Q. Nine years?

15 A. This April will be nine years.

16 MR. MCAVOY: Okay, that's all I've got.

17 BY MR. GOBER:

18 Q. Just to satisfy my curiosity, what kind of -- what did
19 you do before you started with the railroad?

20 A. -- coal mine for 24 years.

21 Q. So in other words, those guys in West Virginia got a
22 worse job than you've got, right?

23 A. Exactly right. I didn't know it until I started with
24 the railroad --

25 MR. GOBER: Okay. Well, that's all we need.

1 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled matter
2 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: Norfolk Southern Rear-End Collision
Lincoln, AL
January 18, 2006
Interview of Paul Vance

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-06-FR-004

PLACE: Lincoln, AL

DATE: January 19, 2006

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

David Martini
Transcriber