

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016

Accident No.: DCA16FP003

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Interview of: LEONEL LAZARO

Pine Ridge Apartments
8617 Piney Branch Road
Silver Spring, Maryland

Saturday,
August 27, 2016

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: RAVI CHHATRE
Investigator-in-Charge

APPEARANCES:

RAVI CHHATRE, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RACHAEL GUNARATNAM, Hazmat Investigator
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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. CHHATRE: Good afternoon. Today is Saturday, August
3 27th, 2016. We are currently at Pine Ridge Apartments, located at
4 8617 Piney Branch Road, Silver Spring, Maryland. We are meeting
5 regarding the investigation of explosion of building 8701 Flower
6 Branch Apartments, Silver Spring, Maryland, that occurred on
7 August 10, 2016. My name is Ravi Chhatre. I'm with National
8 Transportation Safety Board located in Washington, D.C., and I am
9 Investigator-in-Charge of this accident. The NTSB investigation
10 number for this accident is DCA-16-FV003.

11 I would like to start by notifying everyone present in this
12 room that we are recording this interview, and we may transcribe
13 it at a later date. Transcripts will be provided directly to the
14 interviewee for review and identifying any typographical errors.
15 The transcripts may be posted in NTSB's public docket.

16 Also, I would like to inform Mr. Leonel Lazaro that you are
17 permitted to have one other person present with you during the
18 interview. This is a person of your choice -- your supervisor,
19 friend, family member -- or, if you choose, no one at all. Please
20 state for the record your full name, spelling of your name,
21 organization you work for, and your title, business contact
22 information, such as mailing address, and whom you have chosen to
23 be present with you during your interview.

24 MR. LAZARO: My name is Leonel Lazaro.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Speak up, please.

1 MR. LAZARO: I work for Flower Branch, Kay Management. And I
2 want the -- with me as a representative.

3 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And just give the spelling of your name.

4 MR. LAZARO: It's L E O N E L. Last name is L A Z A R O.

5 INTERVIEW OF LEONEL LAZARO

6 BY MR. CHHATRE:

7 Q. Okay. And, Mr. Lazaro, for the record, tell us any
8 educational background you have, any work experience, how long you
9 have been with Kay.

10 A. Okay. I was a student in my country, in Guatemala. I was
11 like, say, high school -- finish the high school.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And when I came here, I started work paint company. Paint
14 company.

15 Q. Paint company.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And then I start here to for the Kay Management.

19 Q. Okay. And when did you start working for Kay?

20 A. It was like 5 years ago.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I started 2000- --

23 Q. Five years ago.

24 A. Yeah, approximately.

25 Q. And have you been working at this particular location all 5

1 years?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay. And what is your title?

4 A. Huh?

5 Q. Job title -- what is your job title?

6 A. It's maintenance, maintenance technician.

7 Q. Maintenance --

8 A. Technician.

9 Q. -- technician. Okay.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. And what do you do as a maintenance technician for Kay?

12 A. What I do?

13 Q. What do you do?

14 A. Okay. Especially when the people call for they have any

15 problem in the apartment, like about top close, leaks, gas leaks,

16 any problem they have in the apartment for the equipment work okay

17 or --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- something with the plumbing things.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And we can --

22 Q. And were you given any training to do this kind of job by

23 Kay, or --

24 A. Yeah. When I start here, I have a training with -- the name

25 is Chuck. He give me a training.

1 Q. Chuck.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. And do you know the last name?

4 A. Oh, no, I do not remember the last name.

5 Q. Okay. All right.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. And do you know how long, how long the training was?

8 A. I received 1 day of plumbing, 1 day electricity. That's it.

9 Q. Okay. Anything on gas?

10 A. He just showed me -- I remember the -- how to use the gas

11 leak detector.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And also with the liquid, the soap we put on the -- for that.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. And have you done any gas leak testing since you came on

17 board?

18 A. Well --

19 Q. Do you -- have you ever used that meter, the gas testing

20 meter.

21 A. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

22 Q. How often? Do you remember?

23 A. I'm not remembering now, but --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Yeah, I --

1 Q. No, that's fine. So if a gas leak call comes what do you do?

2 A. Okay. Well, first, when I go that in the apartment I check
3 with the gas leak detector, check behind the stove. I pull out
4 the top of the stove, check if it will find something leak, like
5 with the gas leak detector. And go to the furnace, open the
6 furnace doors and check the box -- check the -- all the lines.
7 And then if I don't find nothing with that, I'll put like the
8 liquid thing, the soap thing to -- and wait for it to see any
9 bubbles.

10 Q. Now, when you say furnace are you talking about the oven or
11 the heating unit?

12 A. No, the heating.

13 Q. Heating unit.

14 A. The furnace. The furnace.

15 Q. Okay, heating unit. Okay.

16 A. Yeah. Uh-huh. And also the oven. We check the oven too.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And if you cannot find anything, what do you do?

20 A. If I don't find anything, I let the people know we checked
21 with the -- I checked with the thing and I don't find nothing.
22 And then explain they -- and go to check the laundry room too, to
23 make sure we don't have nothing in the -- on the building. And I
24 write on my ticket, go to the office, turn it in the manager.

25 Q. So, okay, but do you call Washington Gas or you don't?

1 A. No.

2 Q. You don't call Washington Gas?

3 A. No.

4 Q. Do you ask the tenants to call the Washington Gas?

5 A. Yeah. I told them. Because they -- sometimes they say I
6 smell the gas and I'll say we check -- I check. And they -- I say
7 I don't find any leak, but they say I feel that -- and I say if
8 you want, you can call -- if you have any problem during the
9 night, you can call 911 or you can call Washington Gas.

10 Q. Yes. Okay.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. And if the Washington Gas comes, do you know that the
13 Washington Gas has come to answer the call?

14 A. You know, not all the time. Sometime I saw the guys, but I'm
15 not sure if they go there, so --

16 Q. Okay. Now there was a report that on the 25th, around that
17 time, the fire department came because somebody called them for
18 the gas odor. Do you know anything about that?

19 A. No. I just hear that by the news, but I don't know --

20 Q. Do you know who called the fire department?

21 A. No.

22 Q. You do not know?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Okay. Now have you ever gone to 8701, the building that
25 exploded? Have you ever gone into the basement there?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Do you know when? The day of the accident, the day before,
3 or --

4 A. It was before, a day before.

5 Q. A day before?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Okay. And do you remember what did you do in the basement?

8 A. I just -- because we have some supplies there, and I take
9 like a towel paper and Spray Nine. It's a -- you know what Spray
10 Nine is? A supply for clean. That's why I go to take out that.

11 Q. And where are those supplies located in that room?

12 A. Huh?

13 Q. Where are those supplies?

14 A. It was in the enter door, on the left side.

15 Q. Shelf.

16 A. Shelf, yeah. We have a shelf on the left side.

17 Q. Is there any shelf near the gas meters?

18 A. No.

19 Q. No shelf near the gas meters?

20 A. No. No.

21 Q. Any shelf near the water heater?

22 A. No.

23 Q. No shelf near the water heater?

24 A. No, no shelf.

25 Q. Can any shelf -- if the shelf were to fall down, can they hit

1 the water heater?

2 A. No.

3 Q. No?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay. Any shelf can -- if the shelf falls down, can it hit
6 the gas meters?

7 A. No.

8 Q. No?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Did you smell any gas when you went in that room?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Do you know if the room has any windows?

13 A. Yeah. It has a --

14 Q. How many?

15 A. -- windows -- I remember, I think it have -- let's see, two
16 -- I think it's two. And they have a little holes. It had a
17 plywood and it had a little holes open.

18 Q. So a window has a plywood and has a little holes --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. -- in it? And both windows or just one window or --

21 A. Both windows.

22 Q. Both windows had holes?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. And where are the windows compared to the water
25 heater?

1 A. It was on the other side. The water heater is on this side,
2 and the --

3 Q. Opposite side.

4 A. -- it was -- that was -- yeah.

5 Q. Have you ever worked on the water heater in 8701?

6 A. No.

7 Q. No? Have you ever worked on water heater in any other
8 building?

9 A. Sometimes I work on the water heater.

10 Q. And what kind of work?

11 A. Just turning on the pilot because they turn it off sometimes.

12 Q. The pilot, pilot is gone.

13 A. Turning on the pilot, yeah.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Just that.

16 Q. And how many pilots you have worked on?

17 A. How many what?

18 Q. How many pilots you lit? You said you turn on the pilots,
19 right?

20 A. Uh-huh.

21 Q. How many? Do you remember?

22 A. I not remembering now.

23 Q. Okay. I mean, how often it happens? Is it like every week,
24 every month?

25 A. No. About every 2 months or like --

1 Q. Something like -- so, it's not that --

2 A. -- something -- yeah.

3 Q. -- not that often?

4 A. Not, not much. Yeah.

5 Q. Not that common. Okay. And are you familiar with electronic
6 ignition for the water heater or you are only familiar with
7 pilots?

8 A. The pilots. With the pilots.

9 Q. Okay. And all, all the water heaters are pilot or all the
10 water heaters have no pilots?

11 A. We have different. We have different.

12 Q. Different?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Have you ever worked on the water heaters that do not have
15 pilots?

16 A. Yeah. I worked on those.

17 Q. You have?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. Do you know how many of those would be without pilots and how
20 many with pilots in the entire Flower Branch?

21 A. Probably have like -- for the electronic pilot like four --
22 six, five to --

23 Q. How many?

24 A. Five.

25 Q. Five or six with pilots?

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. And everything else is electronic?

3 A. No, electronic pilot -- five or six electronic pilot. And
4 the other ones are like -- the standing pilot, the --

5 Q. Standard flame?

6 A. Standard flame. Yeah.

7 Q. So, most have flames?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. And a few have electronic?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Okay. Do you know what was the water heater in 8701?

12 A. I think it was electronic. But I don't --

13 Q. It was electronic. 8703?

14 A. Electronic pilot.

15 Q. Electronic pilot?

16 A. Yeah. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay. Now do you, do you know -- since you are there for 5
18 years, do you know Mr. Melty Castillo?

19 A. Yeah. He was --

20 Q. Have you worked with him?

21 A. Yeah. He was working there.

22 Q. How long you have been working together?

23 A. I think like 1 year.

24 Q. One year?

25 A. I think. Yeah, 1 year. About --

1 Q. Okay. And since he left, do you have any contact with
2 Mr. Castillo?

3 A. No. No.

4 Q. He had never called you; you never called him?

5 A. Never.

6 Q. He never asked for any key; you never gave him any key?

7 A. No.

8 Q. What about Mr. Diaz? I don't know his last name.

9 A. Diaz.

10 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Diaz.

11 MR. LAZARO: The name -- that is the name?

12 MR. CHHATRE: Yeah, or the first name. Do you --

13 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Walter.

14 MR. LAZARO: Oh, Walter.

15 MR. CHHATRE: Does anybody know the last name?

16 MR. LAZARO: Walter.

17 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Walter.

18 MR. LAZARO: Yeah. I know, I know him.

19 BY MR. CHHATRE:

20 Q. Okay. Do you know him?

21 A. Yeah, he was work -- he was the engineer, and I've worked
22 with him.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. He was working with us, yeah.

25 Q. He no longer works with Kay. Right?

1 A. No. I think he was just work for -- I'm not sure, 3 or 4
2 months.

3 Q. Okay. Are you in contact with him?

4 A. No.

5 Q. You're not in contact with him?

6 A. No.

7 Q. That's all I have. Thank you so much.

8 A. All right.

9 BY MS. GUNARATNAM:

10 Q. Did you know of any odor of gas calls in 8701?

11 A. Uh-uh.

12 Q. That week?

13 A. No? That week, no.

14 Q. You don't know any?

15 A. I don't remember any call about --

16 Q. No one called and said --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- with a complaint? What about in the last few months, at
19 8701?

20 A. I can't remember any calls for that building.

21 Q. Okay. Do you check out -- you said you check the apartment
22 and you check the gas meter room, if there is a call. Do you
23 check outside at all, or --

24 A. Yeah, I try. Because, like I say, if apartment 1 or 2 call,
25 I go first in that apartment and then I try to knock the doors on

1 the, on the side. Go to check the laundry rooms because the
2 laundry rooms have the meters there. In the -- all the laundry
3 rooms, we have the meters.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So I try to check the meters too.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. And the hallway. So -- with the gas --

8 Q. Detector?

9 A. -- check the meter. So that's the way I try and --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. And on August 9th, do you, do you remember anyone else doing
13 any work in the -- that week, in that basement room?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Going in and out?

16 A. Uh-uh.

17 Q. No?

18 A. No.

19 MS. GUNARATNAM: Okay. That's all I've got.

20 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. John?

21 MR. CLEMENTSTON: Nothing here.

22 MR. CHHATRE: Steve?

23 MR. PRICE: Yes, please. The day that you were in there, I
24 guess -- sorry, Steve Price. They've been after me all day
25 regarding this.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All in forgiveness.

2 MR. CHHATRE: This is for transcriber, Steve. She can give
3 credit or blame to the right person.

4 MR. PRICE: Fair enough. Fair enough.

5 BY MR. PRICE:

6 Q. The day that you were in the storage room of 8701, did you
7 notice anything out of the ordinary from your previous visits
8 there?

9 A. No. Nothing, but just open the door and we have the shelf on
10 this side. I just take the supply and that's it.

11 Q. Okay. The door to the storage room during the day, is it
12 open?

13 A. No. Closed.

14 Q. So anytime you have to go in you have to --

15 A. We have to use the key. Yeah.

16 Q. And you keep the key on you for the facility?

17 A. All the time.

18 Q. Okay. There's been some indication that you've had to change
19 your keys out from time to time. Have you ever had to do that?

20 A. Huh?

21 Q. That you had to turn your key in and get new keys because
22 they're changing the locks. Do you recall ever having to do that?

23 A. They change the locks when they, like, they fire somebody.
24 They change the locks, all the time.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. That's the only way they can change them, or the lock is not
2 working and --

3 Q. And what is -- what do you have to do when that happens?

4 A. I just have to return my old key to the manager and she give
5 me a new one.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. So you've had to do that, and you've had to go through that
9 process?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. All right. Do you, do you know whether -- of either -- any
12 individuals that are upset with your company or with Kay
13 Management? Are you aware of any, any problems there?

14 A. No. No. No.

15 Q. Okay. When you were trained on the water heaters with
16 electronic ignition, did you actually -- or when you were trained
17 by Chuck --

18 A. Uh-huh.

19 Q. -- did you actually put -- did you actually have to do any
20 work with the water heater in that training? Did you touch any
21 components?

22 A. No.

23 Q. What was your training?

24 A. That the engineer who was in that time, he trained me like
25 for that. He showed me how I had to do it. Because when I had

1 call like that, in the -- when I start, I called him. And he go
2 with me and he teach me about that.

3 Q. Which engineer is that?

4 A. He was Jose. The name Jose. He's retired, but he was
5 working here in that -- at that time.

6 Q. And what exactly are you -- what did he actually teach you to
7 do?

8 A. He teach me, like, what's -- how to push the button in pilot
9 position. You had to press it -- you had to push it. And then
10 with the lighter, you had to turn it on the pilot. And then you
11 have to wait for like 40 or 50 seconds, and then you leave the
12 button, that the pilot was staying on. Then you turn it on the --
13 above. And then the water heater is on.

14 Q. And those are for the water heaters with the standing pilot?

15 A. Standing pilot.

16 Q. And did he teach you to do anything with the water heaters
17 with the electronic?

18 A. More the time the only thing we do is they have like a
19 connection electric -- electric connection. More the time we just
20 connect and disconnect and connect, and they start work.

21 Q. Is that all you know how to do with the electronic --

22 A. No, I -- mostly, yes. Yes.

23 MR. PRICE: I don't have anything further.

24 By LT. OLIN:

25 Q. Bill Olin, Montgomery County. Your key that you have that

1 you, you -- do you have it with you?

2 A. Yes, right now.

3 Q. Does it say anything --

4 A. Oh, in my pocket.

5 Q. Does it say anything on there about do not duplicate?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Yeah?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. So, that's a -- it's a secure key that you just
10 can't --

11 A. It's secure key. It's secure key.

12 Q. -- you can't get made --

13 A. You can't get a copy.

14 Q. All right. Okay. The rooms that we've looked at, the
15 laundry rooms and the meter rooms, have -- the ones we -- have the
16 piping on the ceiling, the gas lines that's painted yellow.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Do you recall if the pipes in 8701 were painted yellow?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Do you have any idea who did that or when that was done?

21 A. When I came here it was done.

22 Q. It was done when you were here?

23 A. It was like that. Yeah.

24 LT. OLIN: Okay. All right. That's it. Thank you.

25 MR. LAZARO: Okay.

1 MR. CHHATRE: Kelly?

2 BY MR. EMEABA:

3 Q. Kalu Kelly Emeaba. You worked at 8701 Arliss Drive storage
4 room on the 9th of August. Right?

5 A. I worked?

6 Q. You were --

7 A. I went --

8 Q. -- at 8701 Arliss Drive storage room on August the 9th.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. Can you tell me what you did -- your activities? Why
11 you were down there?

12 A. I go to that storage to get supply. It was on the left side,
13 I get like a paper towel and the Spray Nine. That's all that just
14 -- take all those materials, turn the light off and close the
15 door.

16 Q. How long did you spend there all together?

17 A. Like 2 minutes.

18 Q. Two minutes?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. That's it?

21 A. That's it.

22 Q. Okay. I heard you experienced stomach problems. Correct?

23 A. Huh?

24 Q. You experienced stomach problem on the 9th?

25 A. Uh-huh. Yeah.

1 Q. What time of the day did it start, start -- did you start
2 feeling -- having problem with your stomach?

3 A. I was -- with that problem, it was Monday morning. That
4 Monday on the 9th, I was a lot of stomach problems. And I came
5 work Thursday -- Tuesday. I was here to work Tuesday. I just
6 work half day, because I don't feel good. I think I work 8 to 1.
7 Then --

8 Q. Which was on the 9th. Correct? The --

9 A. On the 9th, no. The day, not in -- well, yeah, the 9th. You
10 said the --

11 Q. Well -- the 9th of August. I'm sorry.

12 A. -- 9th, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

13 Q. The 9th of August.

14 A. Yeah, yeah.

15 Q. You worked till 1 because of --

16 A. Yeah. Yeah.

17 Q. -- stomach problems. But you saying the stomach problems
18 started on Saturday -- I mean, on --

19 A. Monday.

20 Q. -- the 8th.

21 A. Uh-huh. Yeah.

22 Q. On the 8th of August?

23 A. 8th, yeah.

24 Q. Okay. And if you can recollect, when you say it started on
25 the 8th, where can -- do you have any idea where you were when you

1 started having that stomach problem?

2 A. When or where?

3 Q. Where. Place.

4 A. The place?

5 Q. Was it at home, at work?

6 A. It was at home. I was at home when I having that problems.

7 Q. It was at home?

8 A. Where I'm at, yeah, in my home.

9 Q. Yes. So you had the problem at home; you came to work.

10 A. Yeah, I came work, because I just use the bathroom many times
11 during the night and I can't sleep like at all. But I came work.
12 And during the day I feel like -- I feel tired, and I told my
13 manager that I need to take a half day off, because she -- because
14 I don't feel good. And she said okay.

15 Q. When you were at the room, even though you mentioned spending
16 just 2 minutes there, do you feel the air, you know, being
17 (indiscernible) kind of -- not having enough air in that room, the
18 storage room, when you went there on the 9th?

19 A. You can feel like -- I don't feel nothing wrong, but I just
20 -- you can feel the air coming from --

21 Q. Okay. You think you have enough air or you think you don't
22 have enough air, like you can someway of passing out because --

23 A. I think you can have -- I mean, you -- no, you can have air.

24 Q. You have enough air?

25 A. It had enough air.

1 MR. EMEABA: Okay. All right. Thank you so much.

2 MR. LAZARO: All right.

3 BY MR. CHHATRE:

4 Q. The door from the -- this is Ravi, NTSB. The door from the
5 staircase going into the room, into the basement, how tight fit
6 that is? Does the door have any gaps at the bottom, at the top
7 and the side?

8 A. No. It was --

9 Q. It's pretty airtight?

10 A. It was airtight. Yeah.

11 Q. Pretty airtight?

12 A. Yeah.

13 MR. CHHATRE: Okay. And that's all I have. Thank you so
14 much. Rachael?

15 MS. GUNARATNAM: No.

16 MR. CHHATRE: No? If not, thank you --

17 BY MR. EMEABA:

18 Q. One more question. Just I forgot. How did you hear about
19 the explosion and fire at the apartments?

20 A. Oh, the lady she live here in the property -- in this
21 property. She's my friend. She called me.

22 Q. She called you?

23 A. Yeah, she called me.

24 Q. And after she called you, what was your discussion?

25 A. Okay, it was -- she called me, it was like 11:40 something.

1 And she told me, oh, the office -- the building office is on fire.
2 And then when I hear that, I called my manager and say, Mayra, do
3 you know -- do you hear something about they say there's a fire at
4 the property? And she say yes, somebody call me. I say, so we
5 have to go there? She said yes. That's why I came here.

6 Q. Okay. Besides your manager, who else did you call or you
7 talk to?

8 A. No.

9 Q. Nobody?

10 A. Nobody.

11 Q. Okay. Thank you, sir.

12 A. Uh-huh.

13 MR. EMEABA: I appreciate it.

14 MR. CHHATRE: Thank you very much for coming. Appreciate
15 your help.

16 MR. LAZARO: All right.

17 MR. CHHATRE: Off the record.

18 (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: THE EXPLOSION OF APARTMENT
BUILDING 8701 OF FLOWER BRANCH
APARTMENTS IN SILVER SPRING,
MARYLAND ON AUGUST 10, 2016
Interview of Leonel Lazaro

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16FP003

PLACE: Silver Spring, Maryland

DATE: August 27, 2016

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.

Jane W. Gilliam
Transcriber