

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN

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CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK

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Docket No.: HWY-15-MH-005

FEBRUARY 3, 2015

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Telephonic Interview of: MICHAEL McDERMOTT

Marriott Hotel
Tarrytown, New York

Thursday,
February 5, 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

BRUCE PARKIN, Safety Inspector, Region 1
Federal Railroad Administration

PATRICK VEDDER, Inspector, Region 1
Federal Railroad Administration

KEVIN MAHONEY, Road Foreman
Metro-North Railroad

MICHAEL SCIORTINO, General Road Foreman of Engines
Metro-North Railroad

STEVE NEVILLE, Deputy Chief of Train Operations
Metro-North Railroad

KIRK THOMAS
Association of Commuter Rail Employees (ACRE)

TOMMY COOPER, Metro-North Engineer
Local Chairman, ACRE

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:20 p.m.)

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3 MR. BUCHER: All right. This is Dave Bucher, rail
4 accident investigator for the National Transportation Safety
5 Board. This is the interview of Michael McDermott, train
6 dispatcher for Metro-North. It's relative to the accident that
7 occurred on February 3, 2015, in Valhalla, New York, at
8 approximately 6:59 p.m. The NTSB accident number is HWY-15-MH-
9 005.

10 To my right, I have?

11 MR. COOPER: Tom Cooper, locomotive engineer, Harlem
12 Division,

13 MR. SCIORTINO: Mike Sciortino, general foreman of
14 engines, Metro-North.

15 MR. MAHONEY: Kevin Mahoney, Metro-North, road foreman.

16 MR. VEDDER: Patrick Vedder, FRA inspector.

17 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, Federal Railroad
18 Administration, safety inspector, Region 1.

INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL McDERMOTT

19
20 BY MR. BUCHER:

21 Q. Okay. And, Michael, like I had mentioned, if you could
22 just relate to us your -- what you observed or what you heard
23 leading up to the accident and through the accident and the
24 response that you may have been involved with.

25 A. How far back would you like me to go?

1 Q. Well, I mean, understanding that, you know, that you're
2 operating the Harlem Line and train operations in general leading
3 up to the accident, probably a couple of hours I would imagine.
4 I'm just -- you know, whatever you feel is pertinent.

5 A. All right. I came on duty at approximately 1415 hours
6 that particular day on February 3, 2015. I was assigned District

7 B. My territory ran from Scarsdale to Osage.

8 When I came on duty, I had to stop in Warren earlier, in
9 effect, the Virginia Road. I was preparing myself to give
10 paperwork to that particular stop in Warren. At approximately
11 1430, on track number 1, at CP119, a circuit went down and it
12 stayed down actually through the course of my entire shift. And
13 come to find out later, I found out yesterday actually, two bomb
14 boxes had blown up. So that circuit, you know, after the fact, I
15 found out was never going to come up during the course of my
16 shift. But with that mindset, knowing that that circuit was down,
17 and I had given, you know, ample time to maintainers to pick it
18 up, I decided with my chief to run a northbound rush hour on track
19 2 north of CP119, on 2, and take the southbound through the
20 circuit just to expedite our northbound traffic.

21 In doing so, once we got the maintainers, you know, on
22 page with us and we were able to get southbound traffic on 1 and
23 119 to come through there with southbounds, I started to proceed
24 to flip all the northbounds over to 2 and bring the southbounds on
25 1. I'm sure you guys have probably seen replays or whatever, but

1 at CP130 I was getting ready to bring 674 to 1 south, and I was
2 going to bring 659, the train in question here, to 2 at CP124. I
3 remember calling 659 on the radio. I gave them a brief delay
4 simply because I was waiting for the rundown to fill 2 to 1 south
5 at 130 with 674. I got the rundown maybe 30 seconds after I spoke
6 to him, and I routed him straight through to 2 at CP124, then
7 leading to that particular emergency at Commerce Street. That was
8 my mindset and everything that had transpired up until the
9 accident.

10 I'm busy. I'm trying to move trains to get them all in
11 the right pattern so I can flow north and come south and try to
12 avoid that circuit at 119, when I heard the cries of "Emergency,
13 Emergency, Emergency." It didn't come clear as to who had made
14 the call. I tried to identify -- I tried to identify who made the
15 call. Initially I thought 359 had made the call. That train was
16 at Crestwood. And then I recalled and I heard that 659 had made
17 that particular call of distress.

18 I asked 659, you know, the nature of the emergency, to
19 which he indicated that he had struck a car at Commerce and that
20 the train was on -- the car was on fire and that the train was on
21 fire, the head car was on fire. At which point I believe my
22 assistant chief and chief had heard my questioning of the
23 emergency call and they heard my line of questioning and responded
24 directly with sending personnel to the -- to that location.

25 And from there, it was just a matter of trying to

1 ascertain the injuries, called the power department immediately.
2 I asked for -- actually at the same time this was happening, the
3 power department called me indicating that the breakers had opened
4 up. So as soon as I could, I got back on the phone with the power
5 department to ascertain the status of the energy on track 2 at
6 Commerce, to which they had indicated -- when I had them on the
7 phone, I was talking to the train and simultaneously they killed
8 the power on track 2 while I was speaking to the train with
9 reference to the accident. So the power director, you know,
10 definitely -- he definitely took a proactive approach to killing
11 the power on 2.

12 I had a train on track number 1, 674. I had them clear
13 the block, go north, and I killed the power on track number 1 also
14 from 124 to 130. I believe I did that around 1830 hours, I killed
15 the power on 1. So both tracks were de-energized as best I can
16 recollect within 3 minutes or so.

17 And from there, it's just a matter of, you know,
18 handling all the other trains and the -- you know, the tracks are
19 blocked up and I was just trying my best just to keep everybody
20 moving and advising them. That's pretty much it, sir.

21 Q. Okay. Dave Bucher again. Just as a little bit of
22 clarification. You had a track circuit on number 1 track about
23 1430 hours. So you made, you know, a common decision to run the
24 northbounds on number 2 track just for efficiency. Does that
25 sound right?

1 A. That's absolutely correct, yes.

2 Q. Okay. And what was the location again for where the
3 track circuits came on, just so I know, you know, where the
4 circuits were?

5 A. Yes, sir. CP119 is the interlocking just south of the
6 Scarsdale Station.

7 Q. Okay. And approximately how far from Commerce Street is
8 that roughly?

9 A. Commerce Street is roughly milepost 26. I'd say 7
10 miles, 7 miles, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Thank you.

12 MR. BUCHER: Okay. That's all I have for now. You have
13 any questions, Mr. Cooper?

14 MR. COOPER: Yes.

15 BY MR. COOPER:

16 Q. Tom Cooper, Mr. McDermott. I -- you mentioned that you
17 communicated -- the engineer communicated with emergency three
18 times, and do you recall if you communicated with him a second
19 time later in the events that happened regarding third rail
20 de-energized?

21 A. Sir, it's ironic you mention that. I clearly recall, I
22 mean clearly, yeah, the conductor identified himself several
23 times. I clearly remember speaking to him, you know, knowing that
24 I was speaking to him. Initially when I got the emergency call,
25 the engineer never identified himself to me as far as, you know,

1 being the engineer. I just recall initially when the call came
2 out, I just assumed that that was the engineer calling me with the
3 emergency call, and then that was the last that I remember talking
4 to him with reference to, you know, being actually the engineer.
5 So I had, you know, several conversations with the conductor, but
6 initially I got the emergency call, I assumed that was the
7 engineer because, you know, it just made sense that was him, and
8 from that point on, any communication I had was with the
9 conductor. Does that answer your question?

10 Q. Yes, sir. Thank you.

11 MR. COOPER: No further questions.

12 MR. SCIORTINO: I don't have any questions.

13 BY MR. MAHONEY:

14 Q. This is Kevin Mahoney, road foreman.

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Mike, you heard the initial emergency transmission. Is
17 that correct?

18 A. Yes, sir. Yes, I did.

19 Q. And at that point in time, you weren't sure who it came
20 from, you thought it might have been 359?

21 A. Yes, sir. When -- it sounded very -- I was listening
22 and I heard like a loud emergency, then a fainter level of
23 emergency, and then like an even dimmer level of emergency. It
24 was a very regressive type of emergency, like emergency,
25 emergency, emergency -- you know what I'm saying? It was like

1 three levels to the emergency. It was like lowered in its
2 audiblence, you know.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. You know, it was hard to hear, you know. I made that
5 pretty clear. The entire process, it was hard to hear in that
6 particular location where that train was located.

7 Q. And when you heard that emergency, you immediately
8 transmitted trying to determine which train it was?

9 A. Oh, absolutely.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Absolutely. Absolutely. That's a serious -- those
12 three words are the most serious words in the business, I think.

13 Q. I agree. I agree. Okay. Thank you very much, Mike.

14 A. You're welcome, sir.

15 BY MR. PARKIN:

16 Q. Hi, Mike. Bruce Parkin, FRA.

17 A. Hey, Bruce, how are you?

18 Q. Good. Thank you. Mike, can you give us your date of
19 hire with the railroad?

20 A. Yes, sir. I was hired May 10th of 2000.

21 Q. And in what capacity were you hired as?

22 A. I started in the track department.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And then from there, I went to the signal department,
25 and from there, 11 years, I became a RTC.

1 Q. Okay. So when did you become a RTC, please?

2 A. I started in October of 2004.

3 Q. October 2004.

4 Q. Okay. And as an RTC, have you received any type of
5 emergency or evacuation or egress type training?

6 A. Oh, absolutely, yes. We have our protocols on levels
7 of, you know, response to these type of incidents, as do the
8 crews. And, you know, together, we -- you know, we try to
9 coordinate together how to safely accomplish an emergency
10 situation.

11 Q. Okay. Is that a formal type of training that you
12 receive from Metro-North in a classroom-type atmosphere?

13 A. Just basically we're given that through the rules class,
14 over.

15 Q. You're given that during rules class.

16 A. Yes, sir. For instance, I'll give you an example.
17 Like, for instance, any situations in the terminal, Grand Central,
18 we know we have evacuation areas. In our rulebooks, we have --
19 our rulebooks all have particular evacuation routes and different
20 protocols based on different emergencies. So, yes, I would say,
21 you know, we are briefed on particular incidences and how to
22 respond based on certain events that may occur.

23 Q. Okay. And do you receive this every year, annually?

24 A. Yes, sir. Oh, yeah, they -- we have -- we get tests, we
25 get tests. As a matter of fact, we get study days and during the

1 course of those study days, we're also given, you know, tests. So
2 we're, you know, we're tested on our working knowledge of
3 evacuation plans and how to respond to particular incidences,
4 over.

5 Q. And one other question, Mike. Did you make the call to
6 the first responders in that location, you know, for the -- where
7 the incident occurred?

8 A. Negative. No. I think that my voice -- my voice can be
9 quite succinct and loud when it has to be. I think that when I
10 questioned the emergency calls three times, when I questioned that
11 call, I think the sound of my voice perked up because I heard my
12 assistant chief and my chief, they were in tune with what I was
13 asking. I think we were all on the same page. I think the level
14 of communication that transpired in our office was really top
15 notch because everybody -- it happened quite quickly and I didn't
16 even have to call. They were on the phone before I could even
17 utter a word.

18 Q. Okay. So you believe that they made the calls then?

19 A. Absolutely. I never got a chance to call the rescue
20 people simply because it was done for me, over.

21 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you, Mike.

22 A. You're welcome, sir.

23 BY MR. BUCHER:

24 Q. Okay. Mike, Dave Bucher again. Just a couple more
25 questions. First, about the operation, going back to the track

1 circuits and the operations on numbers 1 and 2 track.

2 A. Uh-huh.

3 Q. My understanding from earlier interviews is that the
4 tracks are signaled in both directions so movements can be made in
5 either direction on both tracks. But the normal operation is
6 number 1 is north and number 2 is south?

7 A. That's correct. That's the normal pattern of movement,
8 yes.

9 Q. Okay. That's exactly what I was looking for. Thank
10 you. Also, I don't think I got this yet. What was the desk
11 number you were working that had this line you were working that
12 night?

13 A. District B, District Bravo.

14 Q. District B.

15 A. Bravo.

16 Q. Okay. I just wanted to make sure. District B. Okay.
17 And you were the only dispatcher working that desk that night?

18 A. Oh, yes. It is only one of us per desk, yes.

19 Q. Okay. All right. Great. Thank you. Okay. And the
20 chiefs that were working that night, how many chiefs are on duty
21 to assist? You know, I understand there was at least one, but
22 what other --

23 A. There was a --

24 Q. -- what other supervisors, I guess is what I'm heading
25 towards?

1 A. It was an assistant deputy director. There was a --
2 there was three assistant chiefs, and that's about it. Yeah,
3 three assistant chiefs and --

4 MR. McDERMOTT: Right, three assistant chiefs? Harry,
5 you and Vern?

6 MR. NEVILLE: Vern was a chief.

7 MR. McDERMOTT: We had a chief there. So we had an
8 assistant deputy director, a chief, and two assistants, over.

9 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Okay, great.

10 MR. NEVILLE: Dave, there was an assistant deputy chief,
11 one chief and two assistant chiefs.

12 MR. BUCHER: Okay. And, Steve, you have to announce
13 yourself for the record and spell your name.

14 MR. NEVILLE: There was an assistant deputy chief, a
15 chief, and then two assistant chiefs.

16 MR. BUCHER: Okay.

17 MR. NEVILLE: The chief and the assistant deputy are
18 management. The assistant chiefs are union workers.

19 MR. BUCHER: Okay.

20 MR. NEVILLE: Sorry, Dave.

21 MR. BUCHER: That's all right. And that was Steve
22 Neville, N-e-v-e-l-l-e --

23 MR. NEVILLE: N-e-v-i-l-l-e.

24 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Thank you. I'm going to pass it off
25 around, and I think we're just about done.

1 MR. COOPER: No further questions, Steve.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

4 BY MR. PARKIN:

5 Q. Mike, Bruce Parkin again. Is this your regular
6 assignment?

7 A. Negative. I was moved to that job, that particular day
8 and yesterday as a matter of fact. No, I own the District K job,
9 Woodlawn territory.

10 Q. Okay. And then you were just put at the B desk?

11 A. Yes, sir. The person that owns it is on vacation, over.

12 Q. Okay. And one last question. Were you fully rested to
13 perform the duties at that desk that day?

14 A. Absolutely, yes, sir.

15 Q. Okay. Very good. Thank you.

16 A. You're welcome, sir.

17 MR. BUCHER: Okay. Mike, I think that's it. I don't
18 have anything else. So we definitely appreciate you taking the
19 time to give us the interview.

20 MR. McDERMOTT: That's not a problem, sir. Anything you
21 need.

22 MR. BUCHER: Okay. This will be, this will be the
23 conclusion of the interview for Michael McDermott.

24 MR. McDERMOTT: Thank you, sir.

25 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 3, 2015
Telephonic Interview of Michael McDermott

DOCKET NUMBER: HWY-15-MH-005

PLACE: Tarrytown, New York

DATE: February 5, 2015

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 interview.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber