

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614

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ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL

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Accident No.: DCA16MR011

AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY

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ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016

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Interview of: JOSEPH SOWINSKI

Netcong, New Jersey

Tuesday,
January 24, 2017

APPEARANCES:

JAMES SOUTHWORTH, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID BUCHER, Railroad Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEVE BURKERT, General Chairman
SMART Transportation Division

EDWARD FLYNN
Region 1
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

BRUCE PARKIN
FRA Region 1

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher, rail accident investigator
4 for the National Transportation Safety Board, and this is the
5 interview of Mr. Joseph Sowinski. He's a trainman for New Jersey
6 Transit, and the interview is relative to the Hoboken accident,
7 September 29, 2016. It's about 2:00, January 24th, and we're
8 going to go around the table and introduce ourselves.

9 Dave Bucher, D-A-V-I-D, B-U-C-H-E-R. To my right I have --

10 MR. SOUTHWORTH: James Southworth, S-O-U-T-H-W-O-R-T-H. I'm
11 the investigator in charge for the Hoboken accident.

12 MR. BUCHER: You can just give your name.

13 MR. BURKERT: Steve Burkert, B-U-R-K-E-R-T, General Chairman
14 for SMART TD.

15 MR. SOWINSKI: Joe Sowinski, S-O-W-I-N-S-K-I, conductor, New
16 Jersey Transit.

17 DR. JENNER: Stephen Jenner, J-E-N-N-E-R, human performance
18 investigator with the NTSB.

19 MR. FLYNN: Edward Flynn, F-L-Y-N-N, Region 1 FRA.

20 MR. PARKIN: Bruce Parkin, P-A-R-K-I-N, FRA Region 1.

INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH SOWINSKI

21
22 BY MR. BUCHER:

23 Q. Okay, Joe, like I said, we're really looking to get your
24 story of what happened the day of the accident. And if you could
25 just maybe start how you're -- give us -- go back to the beginning

1 of your day. Just give us a brief rundown of what you were doing
2 prior to the accident, and then where you were when you saw what
3 you saw.

4 A. Sure. I was -- I worked the extra list, so I was called out
5 extra in the middle of the night for a relay job, wage 3, 7:19
6 sign-up. Got into Hoboken, signed up, see my engineer, job
7 briefing. Spoke, discussed our moves. It was just a relay crew.
8 We went into relay -- 17 depot. Took a train, relayed it up into
9 the yard, Pullman Yard. Electric train which -- MUs.

10 Walking back, I'd say about 8, 8:10, 8:15, back into the
11 depot. We usually stand around the sort of steps in the Hoboken
12 depot. We get together, some of the crews; we talk, we discuss,
13 do things. My engineer, Brian Reynolds, said, Joe, I'm going to
14 go grab something to eat before our relay comes in. So he takes
15 off, he goes, gets an egg sandwich. I said, I'll be behind you.
16 Then I thought better of it. I said, no, no problem.

17 So I was standing in between Tracks 9 and 10 in the depot.
18 Pretty quiet. You know, it was -- I was looking for another guy
19 to talk to, you know, one of the relay crews. We usually speak,
20 talk, discuss things. And I didn't see it, but I heard something
21 rumbling to my right. And, you know, it was odd. So I look over
22 to the right. And from where I was standing to Tracks 5 and 6,
23 there were no other trains in the depot. It's just, like, empty
24 at that time of the morning.

25 So I heard a rumbling. You know, I look and I said, holy

1 cow, here he comes, look at this. Now I'm looking to hear
2 something, you know -- now I'm just -- I fixed -- you know, I'm
3 staring into the cab. I seen them about three cars out, I seen
4 them coming. So now I take a couple of -- I don't know if it was
5 stupidly, but I took a couple of steps towards it thinking that
6 he's going to hit the block. I'm going to have to tie a brake on.
7 Something's going to happen.

8 And then he just kept coming. You know, he wasn't slowing
9 down. I didn't hear any brakes. I said, holy shit, did I do
10 something wrong? Maybe I got too close to the action. And with
11 that, I heard like boom, boom, boom. He hit the block. He hit
12 the ceiling. I mean, I'm trying to stare into the little --
13 there's little windows in the cab. I couldn't see anybody in
14 there. Didn't see him.

15 Now I'm -- hits the block. Hits the ceiling. Hits the
16 thing, boom. Then, you know, people start -- you know, a lady
17 screams. Sparks. Smoke. Everyone's nervous. No one knows, you
18 know, no one knows what's happened, you know.

19 So I -- the train stops, fortunately. I approach it. I seen
20 the young lady laying on the ground. I didn't see any blood, no
21 nothing. I thought she was just unconscious. So, you know, what
22 do you say, you know? Don't worry. We got help coming. You
23 know, stay with us. Nothing. She was -- she wasn't speaking.
24 But like -- no blood, no nothing. I thought she was unconscious.

25 I turned to the -- I hear some guy scream, help me, help me,

1 and I look. What happened was when -- the concrete and the steel
2 had fallen on this gentleman. And he was, you know, please help
3 me, please help me. So I went over. I tried to grab a piece of
4 concrete off of him, because our ceiling was made out of concrete
5 and steel. Picked it up. Got it halfway up. Didn't have the
6 right angle, whatever. Boom. Dropped it on my knee, dropped it
7 on the guy. Now I think I did something wrong. I feel -- I'm
8 getting scared, you know.

9 Now I feel helpless. You know, here I am in the middle of
10 all this. What do you do? You know, I'm looking up. You know,
11 give me -- help me, somebody, you know. I felt someone push me.
12 Put their hand on me, pushes me to the side. It was my boss, Joe
13 Alexander. No words, no nothing. Me, him and another boss, we
14 grab the concrete, take it off the guy. Joe screams, yeah, you
15 know, like he had just scored a touchdown; yeah, great. There
16 were three or four other pieces on top of the guy. We took the
17 concrete off the gentleman. There was steel -- oh, my god, it was
18 -- now the other transit employees are starting to gather around.
19 They jump into the fray. We all get the piece of steel off the
20 gentlemen, take him under the zone. We drag him away from it.

21 And now there's a couple of us, and people are pushing the
22 windows out. Now we're on concrete. We're on twisted steel.
23 We're about 3 foot off the ground. Joe and I just -- don't get
24 off the train. Stay on the train. Don't get off the train. Stay
25 there. So they're pushing the windows out and we're begging them,

1 please -- and they're nervous. They don't -- you know, they're
2 nervous. We don't -- I've never seen this before, so -- stay on
3 the train. Please stay on the train.

4 Joe tells me, call up the power dispatch, get the power out.
5 My hands are shaking. I can't. There's another gentleman next to
6 me. He's trying to call, he can't get it. So I run around to the
7 outside. The way that it hit, I had to go all the way through the
8 waiting area, had to go back around. And fortunately, there were
9 three A-men. You guys -- those are our electricians, that I had
10 worked with them. Joe, what the eff just happened? I said, Eric,
11 stop. Eric, do me a favor, just call the power dispatch and get
12 the power cut off. He goes, all right. Calls them up, 5-6.

13 We run back around. I run back around, and me and Joe were
14 standing there, and then the window's about this high. So a guy
15 pops out. He goes, listen, before you do anything today, what you
16 have to do for me is you got to get my wife off this train. She's
17 pregnant. Now I'm not a young man, Joe's overweight and the
18 window's this high. Now I'm getting nervous about the safety of
19 this woman and her child getting down.

20 Okay. So fortunately there was another transit employee.
21 Chopper (ph.), his name is. Big strong guy. He got the lady off.
22 As luck would have it, 2 seconds later, another female -- now
23 she's bleeding from the head. She says, you know, I'm pregnant,
24 help us down. So basically, we just helped them down. It seemed
25 like forever, but it was a matter of minutes. I'm just -- I'm

1 looking around for help now. I'm looking around for the cops, the
2 firemen. I'm looking.

3 But a couple of transit employees, we jumped in. We're on
4 the concrete, the steel. We started helping a couple of people,
5 you know, off the train. We got them down. The other people are
6 the -- a couple of transit conductors, they started helping. They
7 started, you know, helping the people. Just -- they were so
8 nervous, they just wanted to get away from the train. Just get me
9 away from this.

10 And I couldn't understand why they couldn't walk out the
11 middle of the train, but then looking in the train, there was an
12 I-beam sitting right in the middle. So the only way these people
13 had to get off the train was through the windows. Okay. So a
14 couple of people -- it went well. You know, we had a lot of help
15 there. A lot of people were helping with getting people off the
16 train.

17 I'm looking in the cab. I still don't see no one there. Now
18 my concern turns to the crew, the engineer. Don't see him. Don't
19 hear nothing. So, you know, Joe Alexander tells me, Joe, get all
20 the power in the whole, in the whole depot shut. So I'm running
21 back around to the other side, the A-man, Eric. Everything's
22 dead. It's out, Joe. We came back, got some people off. And we
23 looked in the train. There was a gentleman who was trapped under
24 the brake. I guess his -- whatever it was tore all of his clothes
25 off, so he was there in his underwear and maybe a T-shirt, and

1 he's screaming, help me.

2 Now that -- we had a transit police was there. Big strong
3 African-American guy. So I was glad to see him. But he was
4 telling me, you know, my life is on the line right now; you got to
5 verify that the power's off on this train. You can't -- I mean,
6 you got to go verify. So I told him what I had. You know, I
7 spoke to our A-man. They said 5 and 6 were down and de-energized,
8 the whole terminal was down and de-energized.

9 So he jumped up through the window. He helped some people.
10 I looked at the young lady. There were a couple of people talking
11 to her. Joe said, forget about it. Nothing you can do for her.
12 Leave.

13 Went back around to the other side of the train. And a
14 couple of people were sitting there. A gentleman, he was sitting
15 there. He said, I'm all right, I'm all right. I said, I'm like
16 -- he was busted up pretty bad. I said, why don't you just
17 -- why don't we get up and, you know, get you outside; help is
18 getting here.

19 I don't mean to laugh, but here comes a Hoboken police
20 officer. He comes flying in with his arms and wailing, what's
21 going on? What's going on? Where's the control
22 -- where's the command center? I'm like, you're the first guy
23 here. I guess you're it. He goes, get the frick out of here. He
24 goes, really? He goes, what do you got?

25 Said, you know, all the power's out. Spoke to the yard. You

1 know, trains are coming in and out. We had a temporary -- we had
2 done work in the terminal. They were putting rubber ties in. So
3 we had a temporary snow fence, I believe you call it. We ripped
4 that down and they were -- the conductor was -- they were in the
5 process of -- other people, other transit employees, they were in
6 the process of getting the people out of the train. You know,
7 they had to come through -- the side I was through, there was no
8 access, so they had to go through the north side of the train to
9 get off.

10 Basically that was it. The fire -- the police started
11 showing up. I seen the engineer. No, I seen the conductor. No,
12 I'm sorry, the rear brake, Tommy Dugan. Tommy, get off the train.
13 What are you doing? He goes, Joe, my engineer's still in the cab.
14 I'm getting him out. And I'm like, you know, whatever. Police
15 came. We got a ladder. We put the ladder up. We got Tommy down.
16 I walked him out to the -- called his wife, said he was all right.
17 And then he went back. I watched them take the engineer off in a
18 stretcher. They couldn't get through the middle of the aisle
19 because it was all debris. But they pulled him out on a
20 stretcher.

21 And I sent him back in to tell Joe Alexander, my boss who I
22 was coordinating with, what was going on. And, you know, the
23 transit police started coming screaming at me. I said, you know,
24 I'm in the middle of something. I'm helping them coordinate. You
25 know, I got, I got the tracks -- I got no more, you know, trains

1 coming in. This guy behind me, he's an electrician. He's got all
2 the power off, he's grounded. He goes, then -- you know, I guess
3 he's a cop. He started, get the eff out of here before you get
4 arrested. I said, but I'm trying -- so I go, listen, all right,
5 whatever.

6 And then the guy goes, listen -- my A-man, Eric Styles (ph.),
7 goes, listen, I don't know who you are, what you think is going
8 on, but I'm an electrician. I work for New Jersey Transit. Joe
9 works here. We're coordinating this. He goes, I got all the
10 power out and grounded. He goes, all right, I'll tell somebody.
11 I go, okay, good. He goes, okay, good, fine; do what you got to
12 do.

13 Then the police officer said, no, come with me. He goes,
14 Joe, come with me. By then it was, it was catching up to me. You
15 know, I was starting to -- no, no, no, that's it. I walked around
16 the back. My boss, Joe Alexander, told me, Joe, get back down
17 here. You're in the middle of this. You watched everything. You
18 were, you were involved. He goes, get your ass down here now. So
19 basically, you know, that was --

20 Q. Do you want to take a break?

21 A. No, no, no. I'm good. I'm good.

22 Q. You're okay?

23 A. I'm glad to get that off my chest.

24 Q. No, I appreciate it. You know, it's a stressful thing to go
25 through. You were there. You saw it happen. Absolutely.

1 What I'd like to do is ask some more specific questions. And
2 obviously, we're chasing information on the engineer, so why --
3 can I ask you a couple of questions about --

4 A. Sure.

5 Q. -- Mr. Gallagher in your -- how your relationship with him?

6 A. Sure.

7 Q. Okay. We'll do that first, and then we'll go back and talk
8 about the details of the accident; how's that? Give you a little
9 bit of a break. Break it up a little bit.

10 Did you know Mr. Gallagher --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- personally ahead of time?

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. Okay. And how did you know him? You work with him in the
15 past or anything or --

16 A. Yes. I'm a utility guy, so I don't work on the trains often.
17 But I would say maybe three to four times I was a conductor on
18 Mr. Gallagher's train.

19 Q. Okay. And that was, like, within the last year, or have you
20 -- I mean, how long have you been a conductor on the position that
21 you're on, and maybe how long you've been with the New Jersey
22 Transit? That'd be a good starting point.

23 A. I've been with Transit for 23 years. I would say a good 10
24 years of that I've been a utility board conductor. Occasionally
25 when they need help, they'll run -- show up with passenger guys.

1 They tell me to put the uniform on and I go work up on the trains.

2 Q. Okay, okay. Okay, so in the past 10 years, you've worked on
3 and off with Mr. Gallagher as a utility man. Is that safe to say
4 or --

5 A. No, I've -- I don't think I've worked a utility -- a work
6 train with him or a stone train or something like that. I've
7 worked passenger with him maybe three times.

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Could you explain what utility list
9 covers?

10 MR. SOWINSKI: What happens is, I have some seniority, so as
11 opposed to taking a phone -- I work extra. I take a phone call
12 every night. So we have a passenger board. So when the guys take
13 off, they have -- they go to the passenger list for those guys.
14 Utility guys, I will work stone trains, flag jobs, yard jobs.

15 BY MR. BUCHER:

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Okay, so my working with engineers -- unless you're a yard
18 engineer, I don't work with you too often.

19 Q. Okay. So three or four times in the past is probably
20 correct?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay. All right, cool. I just wanted to clarify that.

23 Do you remember when the last time you worked with
24 Mr. Gallagher?

25 A. Couldn't tell you, no.

1 Q. Couldn't tell. Okay, that's cool.

2 And you -- have you noticed anything unusual -- do you
3 remember working with Mr. Gallagher, anything happening before?

4 A. Tommy, I got to know him. Very, you know, very intelligent
5 man. He's well-spoken. He's very friendly. He'll talk to you
6 alone on break. Great engineer. You know, if I was ever in a
7 mess, I'd want Tommy -- you know, he's -- as far as working with
8 him, you know, he's a -- it wasn't a lot, but I always got -- he's
9 very professional. He was always on his game.

10 Q. Okay, cool. Okay. All right. How about we go back and talk
11 about the accident a little bit? Can you estimate or tell us as
12 the best of your -- how far it was from the front of the train --
13 how far was the front of the train from the bumping block when you
14 saw it first approaching?

15 A. Two and a half coaches out. Maybe 2½ car lengths out.

16 Q. And can you -- what was -- what would you estimate the speed
17 of the train was when you first noticed it approaching?

18 A. I would -- just from being in the terminal often, I thought
19 he was doing 30 miles an hour. I'm sure that's wrong, but he was
20 coming in hard.

21 Q. Okay. Okay, this is your words. And just to go back to
22 revisit the -- whether you could see him or not in the operating
23 cab, could you see him inside the operating compartment, from his
24 location on the train as it approached the block? And I guess
25 what I'm trying to say is, as it came past you or came towards --

1 by you, you couldn't see or -- you could see him or you didn't see
2 him as it approached the bumping block?

3 A. There were a couple of boxes there, and I started walking
4 towards it. And I looked, and right away I'm looking into that
5 little area. And it's not -- there's a little window on both
6 sides and --

7 Q. Right.

8 A. From what I could see, my angle, no, I didn't see anybody.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I didn't see him from --

11 Q. Okay. And just to follow up on that a little bit is, what
12 could -- do you remember whether you could see anything in the
13 operating compartment? Any of the controls, like, the back
14 cabinet or -- as it went by? I'm just trying to get a feel for --

15 A. No. Like right away, you see a train coming in, you see --
16 you see somebody driving a car and you right away look for the
17 operator.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. That was the first thing I looked for, and I couldn't see. I
20 didn't --

21 Q. Couldn't -- and I don't want to put anything in your -- kind
22 of, words in your mouth. But, I mean, sometimes -- I know you're
23 looking up, at best, from a distance and looking up, sometimes you
24 can see the back panel, like in back of the engineer, or -- could
25 you remember any of that?

1 A. I didn't see any lights or anything like -- it's not a big
2 window that's up there.

3 Q. Right.

4 A. And then they have the corner there, then the front window.
5 So I'm looking at an angle, 45-degree angle. And I'm -- like I
6 said, my first concern is the operator. Where is he? What's he
7 doing? And whatever view I had of it, I didn't see Tommy. I
8 didn't see anybody there.

9 Q. Okay. Okay. That's fine. Okay. And is there -- I guess it
10 went by pretty fast at 30 miles an hour.

11 A. Seemed that way.

12 Q. Did you notice, per chance, whether the bulkhead door was
13 open? Was there any light coming in from the passenger
14 compartment?

15 A. No, I couldn't.

16 Q. Okay. Okay, and that, kind of -- okay. Okay, and that kind
17 of answers the next question, was could you see anything through
18 the window? And it sounds like nothing?

19 A. No.

20 Q. Okay. Okay, and you couldn't see whether the seat was
21 occupied at all --

22 A. No.

23 Q. -- going back to whether he was in there or sitting in the
24 seat, or anybody was sitting in the seat? Okay. Did not see.

25 Did you notice anybody in the operating cab? I mean, could

1 there have been somebody else in there?

2 A. No, I didn't see anybody. I looked the front of it, the
3 side. I didn't --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- I didn't see anybody. I couldn't see anybody in there.

6 Q. Okay. Did you notice anybody in the cab after they struck
7 the bumper? I mean, I --

8 A. No.

9 Q. Prior to the rescue people?

10 A. No. In all -- and like I said, in all of this I'm constantly
11 looking up to see, to hear "Help me." I'm right up -- you know,
12 thinking that the engineer's there, he's trapped, thinking that he
13 might be in trouble. But nothing. I didn't see anything. I
14 didn't -- the window never opened.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Nothing.

17 Q. Okay. And I have one more question, and it's for me. What
18 was the job number you were on that -- I was getting my pen to
19 work. You were working extra job number --

20 A. It was a relay. It's relay 3, we call it. It might be
21 LYH07.

22 Q. 07? Okay. And what time were you called for that --

23 A. What time did they call me? Job was on-duty at 7:19, so they
24 called me at 3:19, 3:00 in the morning.

25 Q. Called at 3 a.m. Okay. All right. Appreciate it.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Could you clarify what window you just
2 mentioned?

3 MR. SOWINSKI: The side window with the engineer.

4 MR. BUCHER: Right. The control operator's --

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right. That one goes up and down?

6 MR. BUCHER: The one that lowers down. Yes.

7 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Not the ones that the upper passengers
8 pushed out.

9 MR. SOWINSKI: No, no. This is through the control
10 compartment's window.

11 MR. BUCHER: Okay. All right, fantastic. Good. Thank you.

12 We're just going to go around the table. I asked most of our
13 pre-planned questions, but I know we have some follow-up
14 questions. So we'll just start with Dr. Jenner.

15 BY DR. JENNER:

16 Q. Okay. Not too many questions. I was interested, you had
17 worked with Mr. Gallagher before, but -- and you gave us your
18 impression with him professionally. Do you -- I imagine that some
19 engineers have reputations among the conductors. Can you talk
20 about his reputation among the other conductors? Were people
21 comfortable working with him?

22 A. I don't really know. I don't talk to other -- they're kind
23 of professional. Mostly us, if -- there are some slackers out
24 there, but we don't -- keep your mouth shut and you do your job,
25 you make sure you're prepared, and that's it. I haven't heard

1 anybody say anything bad about Tommy, if that's what you're
2 asking.

3 Q. Okay. How did you form your impression of him? You worked
4 with him, maybe, three times. How else did you get to know him?

5 A. There's an engineers' room upstairs. I'll go up there. Hi,
6 how you doing? What's going on? How you been? Friendly guy.
7 Passed by. Big family. We all work together, so we know one
8 another. You know, just hi, how you doing? You know, how you
9 been? Liked working -- like I said, I liked -- some guys, you're
10 all up in the job and you get an engineer and you go, shit, it's
11 going to be a long day. Not Tommy, no.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. You know.

14 Q. Okay. Following up on Dave's questions, I mean, it's very
15 interesting to us to hear that when you looked in the window you
16 didn't see someone. So not to rehash it too much, how confident
17 are you, based on the angle that you had and your time that you
18 had to observe the operating compartment, that there was no one
19 there? Or you're just giving us your observations that you didn't
20 see anyone?

21 A. I seen the train coming in. I knew something was up. And
22 that's the first thing I'm looking for, is -- my eyes go right to
23 where -- where's the engineer? What is he doing? You know, is --
24 and there was -- I was down a little bit lower than the train, and
25 my angle was a little bit. But from what I could see inside -- I

1 didn't have a perfect shot of where he might be sitting, but from
2 what I could see, there was nothing there. There was nobody.

3 Q. If you can just estimate about how long you were looking for
4 him in seconds?

5 A. A couple of seconds. By the time I -- you know, it was
6 happening quick. He was coming in hot. My eyes are fixed. I'm
7 looking, looking, looking. Established in my mind -- I guess
8 established there was nobody there. Boom. Then I just turned to
9 pick up and, you know, see what else was happening.

10 Q. Okay. Okay. Changing subjects, you described the post-
11 accident events, the emergency response and your activities. Do
12 you think things were well-organized or chaotic or somewhere in
13 the middle?

14 A. There were a lot of transit employees on the platform. All
15 these people I know, all my friends. So when it hit, right away
16 I'm looking for the professionals, the police officers, the cops.
17 It seemed like forever, but I'm sure it was just a matter of
18 minutes before they got there. I mean, I was just standing right
19 there.

20 No, it wasn't chaotic. It was -- my impression was, when the
21 train -- I expected to see people cut in half underneath that
22 train. So that's why I was little leery getting closer to the
23 action. And no, everyone -- the transit guys, the -- my fellow
24 employees, they were on the platform. Let's go. They just jumped
25 in. And I understand some people were running away from it and

1 some people were running to it, and then the stupid people start
2 with the cameras, but --

3 For us, there were a couple of trainmen. My boss, Joe
4 Alexander, a couple of the bosses -- I had never seen anything.
5 But just, like, you know, stay on the train. I thought it was --
6 it wasn't hectic. What had happened, when that train come in, it
7 closed off half of the terminal. So I would imagine most of the
8 help was on the north side of the train. So we went inside, there
9 wasn't many people. But no, people stepped away. People stepped
10 to it. People got together. You know, they -- the employees and
11 -- I would say most of the people were off the train before even
12 the police officers showed up, firemen.

13 Q. And the passengers' mood, were -- you mentioned early on
14 there was screaming and yelling. But overall, how would you
15 characterize it?

16 A. Quiet. Scared. People were scared. Very quiet. One lady
17 screamed. There was one scream, and then it was like a special
18 effects, the flashing, the smoke, the -- you know, it was quiet.
19 It was, you know -- I would imagine people were scared, myself
20 included. It was --

21 DR. JENNER: Okay, that's all I have for now. Thank you.

22 MR. BUCHER: Ed?

23 MR. FLYNN: Oh, yeah.

24 MR. BUCHER: Name for the --

25 MR. FLYNN: Yeah, Ed Flynn. F-L-Y-N-N, FRA Region 1.

1 BY MR. FLYNN:

2 Q. We met on December 1 at Hoboken. You know, I don't know if
3 you recall. We were doing a site survey there, and we spoke --

4 A. Were you with Dave then?

5 Q. Yes.

6 A. Okay, okay, I remember. Okay.

7 Q. Yeah, I was there with Dave and so was Bruce, you may recall.

8 A. I remember you from the train. Okay.

9 Q. Yeah. Yeah, we went up on the train and we spoke about this.
10 And just -- one of the questions, just to focus on what Dr. Jenner
11 had brought up about your confidence in being able to see inside
12 the operating compartment. On December 1st, you had mentioned to
13 us that you were confident that you could see inside and that
14 there was nobody in there. And I questioned you then about
15 whether or not it was that you couldn't see anybody or you thought
16 nobody was in the cab, in the operating compartment. And on
17 December 1st, you said to me that there was nobody in the
18 operating compartment from where you could see.

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. Are you confident that, you know, from your position, that
21 you could have seen inside that, and you felt that from that
22 position there was nobody that you could see in that cab that you
23 normally would see from that position? Is that what you're
24 saying?

25 A. From -- yeah, from my angle, I had expected to see --

1 Q. You had expected --

2 A. -- to see somebody, a body.

3 Q. Okay, that's what I'm getting at. Because I think that's
4 what you expressed to us on December 1st, that from the angle you
5 were positioned at, you expected to see somebody in the operating
6 compartment, and you did not.

7 A. Exactly.

8 Q. Right? Okay, thank you for that. Did you notice -- one
9 other thing. Was the light on inside the operating compartment,
10 did you notice?

11 A. I don't -- I think it was still off.

12 Q. The light above the engineer?

13 A. No, I don't, I don't think it was -- it was, it was a pretty
14 sunny day.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. And the window's only --

17 Q. I know.

18 A. It's not a big window, so, you know --

19 Q. Right, right.

20 A. And from my angle, maybe 45 degrees, where I was looking,
21 that's the first -- and I expected to see a body. He should have
22 -- there should have been a body there. I would have been -- if
23 someone was upright in the seat operating the train, I feel I
24 would have been able to see him.

25 Q. Thank you. That's what I was getting at. So because that's

1 what you expressed the day when we spoke to you on December 1st.
2 From your vantage point, you said you expected to see, and you did
3 not see anybody in the seat.

4 A. Exactly.

5 Q. Is that correct?

6 A. Um-hum.

7 Q. All right, thank you.

8 MR. BUCHER: Bruce?

9 MR. PARKIN: I have nothing to ask.

10 MR. BUCHER: Dave Bucher. I don't have any more --

11 BY MR. SOUTHWORTH:

12 Q. I have one, just to clarify some other information I have.

13 So you mentioned --

14 MR. BUCHER: Spell your name.

15 MR. SOUTHWORTH: Southworth, S-O-U-T-H-W-O-R-T-H. Sorry.

16 BY MR. SOUTHWORTH:

17 Q. You mentioned Tracks 5 and 6 unoccupied earlier on. No train
18 except for the train coming in hot. Six was empty?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. Just something I wanted to verify.

21 A. Six from all the way to where I was, 9. Typical morning,
22 there were no trains there.

23 Q. They were all empty. Okay. And he's coming in on 5?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay.

1 MR. BUCHER: And you followed up one for me.

2 BY MR. SOUTHWORTH:

3 Q. And the yard you talked about earlier, just for the record,
4 was Pullman Yard?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. That's where we park our --

8 Q. And the engineer is Brian Reynolds?

9 A. Brian Reynolds. He's an NY engineer extra board.

10 Q. That's your engineer that you were working with. And the A-
11 man, the electrician, his name was Eric Stotle?

12 A. Styles, I believe. Styles.

13 Q. Styles? Okay.

14 MR. SOUTHWORTH: That's all I had. I just wanted to make
15 sure, when it's all typed up, it's clear.

16 BY DR. JENNER:

17 Q. This is Steve Jenner. I think you mentioned in your
18 description that you saw the engineer being pulled out maybe on a
19 stretcher? Do you know if he was talking at the time, what
20 condition he was in?

21 A. I was, you know, 20 feet away. And no, I couldn't tell. He
22 wasn't moving as far as, you know, what I could see, the front of
23 the train being blocked. And I imagine the rear brake -- he
24 climbed through the debris to get to him. The windows were all
25 pushed out.

1 You know, there was a police officer up there, a couple of
2 people. And like I said, I helped -- Tommy came down the ladder,
3 the rear brake. I spoke to him. Let's call your wife and make
4 sure everything's all right. I walked him outside. And then by
5 then, they had this orange stretcher and he was strapped into it.
6 He's a big guy, so there was a lot of people involved to taking
7 him out. He was strapped in, so I really didn't notice any
8 movement.

9 DR. JENNER: Okay, thank you.

10 MR. FLYNN: No, I think, I think I'm okay. I have no more
11 questions.

12 BY MR. BUCHER:

13 Q. I just have one more. And it's a little bit about -- you had
14 a lot of experience in the station in the morning. And just for
15 our -- for purposes of, you know, the background of the operation.
16 At that time of the day is it normal for all the tracks to be
17 clear and this being the first train to come in on either 5 or 6
18 track in the morning?

19 A. Yeah, it's normal. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay, cool.

21 A. Trains will come in. They'll relay them out to the yard.
22 The track's open, some trains will turn. But usually in the
23 morning that early, there's -- they'll take a train off to fuel it
24 up at the fuel pit. So it's usually -- there's not a lot of
25 trains sitting in the terminal in the morning.

1 Q. Right. As opposed to later in the day when there's a lot of
2 equipment sitting on multiple tracks.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. And for my benefit, you know -- and I'm thinking of 1
5 through 6 track as sort of the north side of the station. Is
6 that --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay, for purposes of geography. Those tracks get the first
9 trains of the day, or doesn't it -- it could come in on anything?

10 A. We have trains coming in from the Gladstone Branch that are
11 -- they are self-propelled, the MUs. So they usually go up
12 towards 14, 15, 16, 17.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Okay. Then the other, the ones that come -- the diesel
15 engines, they usually come in 1 through 10.

16 Q. One through 10.

17 A. One's a short track, so 2 through 10 they usually come in.

18 Q. Okay. So the Spring Valley trains come in, they go through 1
19 through 10. That's their normal arrival tracks?

20 A. Usually, yeah. Usually, yeah.

21 Q. Okay, okay. And I understand that they can go to different
22 tracks depending on what's going on, but they normally -- okay,
23 just for my background information.

24 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'd like a break.

25 MR BUCHER: You want a break? Okay. Cool.

1 (Off the record.)

2 (On the record.)

3 MR. BUCHER: This is Dave Bucher and we're back. And we're
4 going to go around the table and ask some additional follow-up
5 questions. Steve?

6 BY DR. JENNER:

7 Q. Yes, Steve Jenner. You were involved in the aftermath and
8 what I'll call the emergency response.

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Can you talk to me about sort of background and training you
11 have received in your railroad career that may have come into play
12 here?

13 A. It's kind of basic. When we're in catenary areas, overhead
14 wires, first thing we're told is to don't get off the train.
15 Don't touch the train simultaneously with the ground because there
16 could be a wire that's in the train that could be energized.

17 Told the same thing in the tunnels. If you're in the North
18 River Tunnel, anything happens, keep the train going. Don't stop
19 in the tunnels. Get it out of there. Stay on the train.

20 Smoke. Shut down the blowers so it doesn't suck into the
21 compartments. Try to move -- if there's a fire or something, move
22 the people away.

23 Just basic stuff, you know. Overhead catenary is very
24 important. You know, that's the first thing. Train stops,
25 something happens we don't know why, keep everybody on the train.

1 Nobody leaves the train. Stay on there.

2 Q. Do you feel that you were adequately prepared for this type
3 of event based on the training you received?

4 A. No, no. Not for -- it's just too much. There's so much. In
5 23 years that I -- you see a lot. And how much could they really
6 tell you, you know? The other train stops. There's adjoining
7 tracks. Trains might be passing by. Stay on the train, stay on
8 the train, stay on the train. You know, so that -- they had --
9 stay on the train. Don't get off the train. There could be a
10 wire. He shot up into the, to the roof. I mean, this train --
11 and the catenary wire was right there. Couldn't see it, didn't
12 know where it was, but I knew that it -- he hit the wire. I knew
13 that he -- the train could have been hot. You know, if it shorted
14 out, I don't know.

15 But it was, that was my main concern, everyone's main
16 concern. All of these fellow employees: Please stay on the
17 train. You know, so that was -- but all the other stuff, you
18 know, it's basic. It's nothing major. They don't really prepare
19 us for something like this, you know. It's common sense and --

20 Q. Okay, what -- do you have any thoughts about what additional
21 preparation would benefit people like you in this type of
22 situation?

23 A. I don't know. It's hard to say. You know, anything could
24 happen out there, you know, there's a lot. You know, you just --
25 like I said, they only give you basic stuff. What could we do

1 more? I don't know. I don't know.

2 Q. Okay. Let me just invite you, if -- we're interested in your
3 perspective of this, so we're just -- I'm just throwing this
4 question out for the first time. But I'm interested in your
5 perspective, since you lived this. Maybe down the road, if I
6 could reach out to you and see if you have any thoughts at a later
7 date. Is that okay?

8 A. Okay. Sure.

9 Q. Okay, thank you.

10 A. You're welcome.

11 DR. JENNER: That's all.

12 BY MR. FLYNN:

13 Q. Okay, Ed Flynn, F-L-Y-N-N, FRA Region 1. Joseph --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- would it be an accurate statement to say, and if I was --
16 if somebody was to quote you, would it be accurate for this quote
17 -- let me know if this has to change. Quote, "From where I was
18 positioned and my view of the operating compartment, I expected to
19 see the locomotive engineer in the cab, and there was nobody
20 there." Would that be an accurate statement?

21 A. Sure. That's accurate.

22 Q. Okay. Also, from where you were positioned, did you notice
23 if there were any other trains on the tracks from your position
24 between 9 and 10 track over to 5 track, where the train was
25 arriving when you first saw it? Were there any other trains in

1 the --

2 A. No, there was no other trains.

3 Q. -- in the depot on those tracks between -- okay, thank you.

4 (Whispered conversation.)

5 BY MR. PARKIN:

6 Q. Bruce Parkin, FRA. Joe, when this engineer -- this
7 particular day that train was made up of Comet equipment. Now
8 you're familiar with the Comet equipment?

9 A. Push-pulls, yeah.

10 Q. Okay. Now on the outside of the equipment, there's several
11 lights on each coach, and they're indicator lights with bulbs
12 that, from what I understand, indicate whether the brakes are
13 applied or the brakes are released, or if there's a handbrake on.

14 A. There are indication lights for the door openings, when all
15 the doors are opened and closed. And it doesn't indicate the
16 brakes. It only indicates handbrakes. A red light will come on
17 for a handbrake. From what I know, the indication lights on the
18 side of our coaches, they do not indicate if the brakes are
19 applied or not.

20 We have little things, little red indicators on the side
21 which -- whatever they call them. Excuse my language. A dog dick
22 or something, and they come out. That's the indication for me
23 knowing if the brakes are applied to a coach. But those lights
24 along the side? Green, yellow or red.

25 Q. And not to contradict you in any way, shape or form -- you've

1 worked there for 22 years -- but is the handbrake light the blue
2 light that comes on?

3 A. I'm sorry. You're right. It is blue.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. It is a blue light. What did I say? Red?

6 Q. Yes.

7 A. Yeah, yeah, you're right. It is -- on the engines and the
8 coaches, yes.

9 Q. So then if a red light is indicated, does that indicate that
10 the brakes are on, on that equipment?

11 A. No, not that I know of. The only thing I know, I look
12 outside the door, I see if the lights are yellow or green
13 indicating the doors, if the doors are all shut or open.

14 MR. PARKIN: Okay. No further questions, then.

15 BY MR. BUCHER:

16 Q. Okay. You don't remember what color the lights were? You
17 didn't have time or you --

18 A. No.

19 Q. -- to notice that or --

20 A. No, I didn't --

21 Q. Okay.

22 MR. BUCHER: Okay, thank you. Dave Bucher. Jim?

23 MR. SOUTHWORTH: Nothing.

24 MR. BUCHER: Okay, any follow-up? Any last questions?

25 DR. JENNER: Do we need to get the station line-up of the

1 trains coming in?

2 MR. BUCHER: Well, we have, we have that.

3 DR. JENNER: Then we're good. Okay.

4 MR. BUCHER: Yeah, we have the schedule.

5 DR. JENNER: Okay. No other questions.

6 BY MR. FLYNN:

7 Q. Just if -- Joseph, if you have anything else to add that you
8 recall that we might have missed?

9 A. No, just like I -- where I was standing on the platform,
10 there's a couple of boxes there that are mechanical boxes. So my
11 view was a little bit -- so I took a little bit of a walk, a
12 couple of steps. But I -- when you stand in Hoboken Station, you
13 hear the hiss, the brakes coming on. Or you hear the train
14 slowing down; it gets quiet. I noticed it was getting loud. We
15 have a stick rail on Track 5. So him coming out at a speed, it
16 was really loud for me. I noticed the sound before I seen the
17 train coming.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. And I took a step towards him and I expected to see an
20 engineer. Now I'm -- why isn't this train stopping? What is
21 going on here? And angle, whatever you want to say, from where I
22 seen, I should have been able to see a body if he was in the seat,
23 and I didn't see that. Didn't hear the bells. Didn't hear a
24 horn. I didn't hear nothing. People are walking this way back
25 and forth with their cell phones. And that was -- I'm thinking

1 that lady, she wasn't paying attention. In the morning, she has
2 kids, cell phone. She wasn't looking, you know.

3 BY MR. PARKIN:

4 Q. Bruce Parkin, FRA. Joe, you just, you said earlier that you
5 witnessed them take Mr. Gallagher off on a stretcher.

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. And did you have any conversation with him since that
8 accident to the present day at all?

9 A. No.

10 MR. PARKIN: Okay. Thank you.

11 MR. BUCHER: I have nothing else. Anything else for the
12 group?

13 Okay, this is Dave Bucher and this concludes the interview of
14 Mr. Sowinski.

15 (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: NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TRAIN #1614
 ACCIDENT AT HOBOKEN TERMINAL
 AT HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY
 ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2016
 Interview of Joseph Sowinski

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA16MR011

PLACE: Netcong, New Jersey

DATE: January 24, 2017

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.

Eileen Gonzalez
Transcriber