

**DCA-06-FR-004**

**Norfolk Southern Rear-end Collision  
Derailment**

**Train No. 226 & Train No. 22R**

**Lincoln, AL**

**January 18, 2006**

**Interview ((1/20/06) of Conductor  
Trainee of Train No. 226**

**15 pages, including cover**

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

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

Telephone Interview of: BLAKE MASHBURN

Lincoln, Alabama

Thursday,  
January 20, 2006

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to  
notice.

BEFORE: RUSSELL GOBER

## APPEARANCES:

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

TOM MCAVOY  
Federal Railroad Administration

CURTIS WALL  
United Transportation Union

LARRY BARCLAY  
United Transportation Union  
[REDACTED]

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1  
2 MR. WALL: Lincoln, Alabama, I think. January the  
3 20th, 2006.

4 (Off the record.)

5 (On the record.)

6 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hear us?

7 MR. WALL: Yeah, we hear you.

INTERVIEW OF BLAKE MASHBURN

8  
9 BY MR. WALL:

10 Q. Is this Blake?

11 A. Yes, sir, it is.

12 Q. Oh great. Okay, Blake. This is Curtis Wall. I'm  
13 with the United Transportation Union, and I believe Ronnie  
14 introduced you to me there, but anyway, we're with the National  
15 Transportation Safety Board's Russ Gober, and we got Tom McAvoy  
16 in here from the FRA, and there's a few questions we would like  
17 to ask you. We know that, you know, you've had a traumatic  
18 ordeal that happened to you there, but if you don't mind, if  
19 you could just tell us briefly what you remember coming up  
20 through the siding before you had the collision.

21 A. I remember getting a clear signal. We had come  
22 around and as we approached the train in the siding -- I guess  
23 that was 22R. I'm not really sure about the number of the  
24 train, but we got a clear signal. Yes, I was in the clear and  
25 we -- the engineer yells, they got us lined into the back of

1 them. He threw it into emergency and everybody just braced  
2 themselves and --

3 Q. Okay. When you said you had a clear signal, do you  
4 know -- are you familiar enough with that track to know where  
5 the clear was at?

6 A. Are you talking about, like, the milepost numbers and  
7 that?

8 Q. Well, no, like Caloosa, Embry.

9 A. No, I don't know the signal names, Coosa to Embry,  
10 no, sir --

11 Q. Okay. So to get a clear picture in my mind, did you  
12 all have an approach any time prior to coming to the rear of  
13 that train?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay. So what was the next signal you had?

16 A. Clear.

17 Q. And then the next signal was where the train was  
18 sitting in the siding?

19 A. Yeah.

20 MR. WALL: Okay. All right, buddy. I'm going to let  
21 Russ Gober from the NTSB ask you a few questions, if that's all  
22 right.

23 MR. MASHBURN: Yes, sir.

24 BY MR. GOBER:

25 Q. Blake, we're sorry that you were involved in such a

1 tragedy there, but we're glad that you're not hurt any worse  
2 than you were. We are trying to determine how this could  
3 happen and trying to see if we can make some recommendations  
4 that will prevent such accidents from happening in the future,  
5 and you can help us a lot just by telling us what you saw, and  
6 I heard what you said. You're in training to be a conductor,  
7 is that right?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Have you ever worked as a brakeman before?

10 A. No, sir.

11 Q. Okay. So how long have you worked for the railroad?

12 A. My first day back from after my first week of  
13 training was like November the 1st. I've been there about two  
14 months.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. The very end of October and the very beginning of  
17 November.

18 Q. All right. How many trips have you made on the  
19 Alabama division between Birmingham and Atlanta?

20 A. This would have been my second trip.

21 Q. Okay. Do you know the difference between a control  
22 signal and an intermediate signal?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. The last control signal that you went by  
25 before the accident, was it a placed called Holt, H-o-l-t?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Do you remember what that signal was?

3 A. No, sir. Like I said, I don't know Holt. I don't  
4 even know where Holt is.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I don't know the names of the signals --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- Holt or Pell City or none of them.

9 Q. All right. Well, you said that you had an approach  
10 signal and then you had a clear signal and then you had the  
11 accident, is that correct?

12 A. That is correct.

13 Q. Okay. When you got the approach signal, how fast  
14 were you all going and what did you do after that?

15 A. Well, I don't know. I don't know how fast we was  
16 going.

17 Q. Okay. Looking at the event recorder, whenever you  
18 all go the approach, you slowed down to about five miles an  
19 hour and then, when you got the clear, you got up to 53 miles  
20 an hour. Does that sound reasonable?

21 A. Yeah, it sounds about right.

22 Q. Okay. Where were you located in the locomotive?

23 A. I was sitting in the front and the conductor was  
24 sitting behind me.

25 Q. Were you looking ahead as you were going along?



1           A.    Yes, I was looking straight ahead because when the  
2 engineer yelled that they got us lined into the back of 22R,  
3 emergency, and they, you know, tried to get on floor to brace  
4 their selves --

5           Q.    Yeah.

6           A.    -- you know, I was in that front chair and I was --  
7 the boards.

8           Q.    Right.

9           A.    And my armrest was -- my armrest was down and I  
10 couldn't get to the floor --

11          Q.    Okay. Well, tell me what you saw as far as -- did  
12 you see any signals right before the collision?

13          A.    No, sir, I was just bracing.

14          Q.    Okay. Tell me a little bit about what happened after  
15 the collision.

16          A.    After the collision, everybody looked at each other,  
17 you know, in amazement and was just, you know, talking to each  
18 other. Everybody okay, everybody okay? And from that point  
19 on, the conductor said we got to get off of this engine before  
20 it explodes, and that's when I rolled out of the engine and  
21 they got out and they helped me get to -- get of the way and  
22 stuff, because I couldn't walk. My ankle was -- I couldn't put  
23 any weight on my ankle.

24          Q.    All right. I don't -- I don't know if you realize  
25 what you all got out of, but you are all very fortunate. How

1 did you get off of that engine, because it was sticking up in  
2 the air at about a 45 degree angle?

3 A. Yes, sir. I fell -- I went to -- I went -- as I was  
4 getting out, I practically rolled off of it and went down with  
5 the -- and everything else that was under me. I'm lucky I  
6 didn't get hurt getting off of it more than I did getting in  
7 the accident.

8 Q. That's what -- I mean, our opinion would be that you  
9 are very fortunate. Did you see any fire?

10 A. After they got -- after they got off and they helped  
11 me, that is when -- that is when a small fire broke out and I  
12 believe that was -- that was right where the cars were. I  
13 don't know if the cars had gasoline in them. I don't know.  
14 But there was -- yeah, there was a small fire started after we  
15 had got off the engine.

16 Q. Okay. Were you there when the engine caught on fire?

17 A. No, we got -- we got out of sight.

18 Q. Man, you were lucky because it burnt that locomotive  
19 up so bad that it melted the inside of it.

20 A. It melted everything I had in there with it. I'm  
21 just -- when I got off -- when they got us out of there, man, I  
22 broke down in tears and just thanked go.

23 Q. Well --

24 A. And I get emotional right now talking about it.

25 Q. Yeah, we understand and we get emotional listening to

1 you. Tell me what you think happened.

2 A. I don't know. You know, I don't know what happened.  
3 I don't know. I don't know what to tell you.

4 Q. Okay. Well, we understand that. I just need to ask  
5 you to -- you know, you've been out there two or three months  
6 now and I know you don't know everything, but anything you can  
7 tell us would be helpful.

8 A. Yes, sir, I understand that. If there was anything  
9 that I knew to tell you, I would. All I know is we're alive  
10 and I thank god for it.

11 Q. Yeah. Well, don't -- I've been in the railroad work  
12 now for 43 years, so it's a trauma that you were fortunate to  
13 go through in a sense that you're alive. The likelihood is,  
14 you won't ever do it again, so don't let this cloud your hope  
15 for the future now.

16 A. I'm not -- I just hope this don't endanger my hope  
17 for the future.

18 MR. GOBER: Yeah. We -- we know that you had a  
19 difficult time here. I've got Mr. McAvoy here with the Federal  
20 Railroad Administration and he wants to ask you a question.

21 MR. MASHBURN: Yes, sir.

22 BY MR. MCAVOY:

23 Q. Hi, Blake. This is Tom McAvoy. I was just  
24 wondering. You said you couldn't see that last signal before  
25 the collision, and I've got to assume that's because there was

1 a left-hand curve and I understand the engine was being  
2 operated a long hood forward?

3 A. A long hood forward.

4 Q. Yeah, that's, you know, where the long end of the  
5 locomotive is being operated forward.

6 A. No, we were short -- we were short hood forward.

7 Q. Okay. So -- but you still couldn't see that signal  
8 before the collision?

9 A. No. I mean, when he said emergency, I wasn't paying  
10 attention to no signals. I was paying attention to --

11 Q. At this point time, okay.

12 A. I do not remember a signal before the switch and --

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

14 MR. GOBER: Okay, Blake, we certainly appreciate you  
15 taking the time to talk with us and we hope that we hadn't  
16 inconvenienced you too much.

17 MR. MASHBURN: Yes, sir. You all haven't and I  
18 appreciate your concern.

19 MR. GOBER: Okay.

20 MR. MASHBURN: And if you all have any more  
21 questions --

22 MR. GOBER: Okay. Well, we're going to need to talk  
23 to you in a -- maybe two or three weeks to have a little more  
24 formal interview so --

25 MR. MASHBURN: I --

1           MR. GOBER:  Where do you live?  Don't give me your  
2 address.  Do you live in Birmingham or --

3           MR. MASHBURN:  I live in Moody, but I live with two  
4 other guys at railroad --

5           MR. GOBER:  Yeah.

6           MR. MASHBURN:  -- and right now I'm staying in  
7 Odenville with my aunt because I can't drive or nothing.

8           MR. GOBER:  Okay.

9           MR. MASHBURN:  She's the closest to my doctor, so I'm  
10 staying in Odenville as of right now.

11          MR. GOBER:  Okay.  I'm going to shut down my tape  
12 recorder and then, if you would, give us a telephone number.  I  
13 don't want it on the record.

14                   (Off the record.)

15                   (On the record.)

16          MR. BARCLAY:  This is Larry Barclay.  I'm the --  
17 chairman and representative.  The thing -- and I just, as a  
18 part of the notations here, if Mr. Mashburn talks to you today,  
19 he is suffering from a broken ankle.  It is in a cast and  
20 wrapped up and he's under a doctor's supervision.  I just  
21 wanted to --

22          MR. GOBER:  Okay.  We understand that and we'd take  
23 that into consideration, and we're here on a fact finding  
24 mission.  We're not trying to cause him any concern or harm.

25          MR. BARCLAY:  Right.  I understand.  That's just one

1 of the facts I wanted to --

2 MR. GOBER: Right. And we do appreciate you letting  
3 us know that, because we knew he was already hurt and he  
4 couldn't have gotten well that quick so --

5 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Just put it on the record.

6 MR. GOBER: We appreciate you putting it on the  
7 record and I -- tell me your name again so I make sure that I  
8 understand it.

9 MR. BARCLAY: Larry Barclay, B-a-r-c-l-a-y.

10 MR. GOBER: Okay. And, Larry, you're local chairman  
11 for -- from where, now?

12 MR. MASHBURN: Birmingham 622, United Transportation  
13 Union.

14 MR. GOBER: Okay. What's the number where we could  
15 reach you?

16 MR. BARCLAY: [REDACTED]

17 MR. GOBER: Okay, I'm going to go off the record and  
18 then we'll ask you guys some more questions.

19 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled  
20 matter was concluded.)

21

22

23

24

25

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  
Telephone Interview of Blake Mashburn

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-06-FR-004

PLACE: Lincoln, AL

DATE: January 20, 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.

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David Martini  
Transcriber