

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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BNSF RAILWAY ROADWAY WORKER
FATALITIES IN EDMONTON, SOUTH
DAKOTA ON JANUARY 17, 2017

Accident No.: DCA17FR004

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Interview of: TYLER BILBRUCK

Hot Springs, South Dakota

Thursday,
January 19, 2017

APPEARANCES:

RYAN FRIGO, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

JOHN MARK JONES, Director of Train Handling
BNSF Railway

RAY LINDSEY, Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

DANIEL KENNER, Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

JAMES CHASE, National Safety Team
SMART Transportation

JEFFREY REETZ, Local Chairman
SMART TD, Edgemont 375.

TONY ERICKSON, Superintendent of Operating Practices
Powder River Division
(Posting)

DAN BILBRUCK
(On behalf of Tyler Bilbruck)

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I N T E R V I E W

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2 MR. FRIGO: My name is Ryan Frigo, and I am the Operations
3 Group Chairman for NTSB on this accident. We are here today on
4 January 19, 2017, in Hot Springs, South Dakota to conduct an
5 interview with Tyler Bilbruck, who works for BNSF. This interview
6 is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of two roadway worker
7 fatalities in Edgemont, South Dakota, on 1/17/17. The NTSB
8 accident reference number is DCA17FR004.

9 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
10 the table and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name,
11 and please identify who you are representing and your title. I
12 would remind everybody to speak clearly so we can get an accurate
13 recording. I'll lead off and then pass to my right.

14 Again, my name is Ryan Frigo. The spelling of my last name
15 is F-r-i-g-o. I'm the Operations Group Chairman for NTSB on this
16 accident.

17 MR. KENNER: Dan Kenner, K-e-n-n-e-r. I'm with the
18 Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Safety Task
19 Force.

20 MR. CHASE: Jim Chase, C-h-a-s-e, SMART Transportation, Sheet
21 Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation, and I'm part of their
22 National Safety Team.

23 MR. JONES: John Mark Jones, J-o-n-e-s, director of train
24 handling with BNSF Railway.

25 MR. LINDSEY: Ray Lindsey, L-i-n-d-s-e-y, and I am operating

1 practices with FRA.

2 MR. ERICKSON: Tony Erickson, E-r-i-c-k-s-o-n. I am
3 superintendent of operating practices for the Powder River
4 Division.

5 MR. FRIGO: And you are posting for this interview, sir?

6 MR. ERICKSON: Yes.

7 MR. FRIGO: Is that correct?

8 MR. ERICKSON: That's correct.

9 MR. BILBRUCK: Tyler Bilbruck, B-i-l-b-r-u-c-k, locomotive
10 engineer.

11 MR. FRIGO: Tyler, do you wish to have a representative with
12 you today?

13 MR. BILBRUCK: Yes.

14 MR. DAN BILBRUCK: Dan Bilbruck, B-i-l-b-r-u-c-k, Tyler's
15 representative.

16 MR. FRIGO: And are you okay if we proceed on a first-name
17 basis?

18 MR. BILBRUCK: Yeah.

19 MR. FRIGO: Okay, thank you, Tyler. And are you okay if we
20 record this conversation today?

21 MR. BILBRUCK: Yep.

22 MR. FRIGO: Thank you. I also have to inform you that the
23 purpose of an NTSB investigation is not to assess blame. We are
24 gathering factual information. A copy of this interview will be
25 transcribed and placed in the public docket. And the NTSB cannot

1 offer any guarantee of certificate or legal protection.

2 INTERVIEW OF TYLER BILBRUCK

3 BY MR. FRIGO:

4 Q. Tyler, I just want to thank you for coming in and talking
5 with us today and helping us understand a little bit about what
6 happened the other day. And I think maybe that's where we'll
7 start. If you can talk us through when you came on duty --

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. -- the other day, and we'll go from there.

10 A. Okay. Yeah. We were called, I do believe, 9:15 in the
11 morning. I got to the depot and talked to my conductor, Will
12 Roberts. He handed me my paperwork and we discussed the day. And
13 we had to sit there and wait for our train, so it's just carry on
14 as usual. I mean, that's nothing out of the ordinary. Looking at
15 boards and train tracking and all that.

16 And Will called for our train, and then they were at East
17 Edgemont where we do our crew swap, and we got in our van and
18 headed out there. And we noticed as we went over, over the
19 tracks, that we had an approach signal, yellow light. And we both
20 kind of talked about, you know, what's happening. And we swapped
21 out with our crew, you know, talked to them about how our train
22 was. And we climbed on, and we still had a yellow approach light,
23 and me and Will talked about we knew they were doing work on the
24 Deadwood Y. He asked if the switch came out before or after the
25 signal at 477, and I told him it came out in the block that we

1 were going to be signaled into.

2 And we sat there and just talked for a little bit, and we got
3 an approach medium yellow light. We can't, per our notices, we
4 can't leave East Edgemont unless we have an approach medium light
5 to go. We get the approach medium, and I kick everything off and
6 we start pulling. And I remember going through the yard, and I
7 seen our road foreman, Shad. He was at the crossing, and I waved
8 to him. And then I knew the engineer that was working the train
9 on the Deadwood Y, and they were told that they had authority out
10 behind us. They were pretty far back in the track so I didn't
11 know if they could see our motor number, and so I called them on
12 the radio and told them, you know, if you can't see us, this is
13 the BNSF 8489; we're going past you right now.

14 And we proceeded on and, blind corner, and I seen the tail
15 end of the maintenance vehicle sticking out and blew for
16 equipment, you know, in our rules. And seen the two guys and I
17 immediately started, I mean, blowing the horn as fast as I could
18 to try to get somebody's attention, and I never stopped blowing
19 the horn. And nobody got out of the way. We were maybe less than
20 a half a car from it when one of the people looked up and seen us,
21 and he tried to jump, and I -- I can't tell you when I induced
22 emergency on the train. I just know after it happened, we came to
23 a stop and my conductor ran out the back door to go check on
24 everybody, and I dialed up 911. And we sat there until we were
25 told we can get off our train.

1 Q. Tyler, thank you. I want to ask you some questions, some
2 other -- you gave us a very detailed memory there. Thank you.
3 But I just want to ask you some follow-up on what -- on some items
4 you remember. And please forgive me, if I take you to that -- to
5 the point of --

6 A. Right.

7 Q. You mentioned the half-car length. But let's start back at
8 the -- when you're on and you're charging up and you're ready to
9 go.

10 A. Right.

11 Q. What else do you remember seeing as far as movements? Were
12 there any other train movements?

13 A. I honestly can't recall. I mean, I -- it's bad to say but,
14 you know, it was tunnel vision on those two. I wanted to get them
15 out of the track, and --

16 (Interruption at the door.)

17 MR. BILBRUCK: And, yeah, I wanted to get them out of the
18 track, and I wasn't paying attention to anything around me at all
19 at that point. My main focus was those two gentlemen right there.

20 BY MR. FRIGO:

21 Q. Okay. And what about prior to getting into that Y? What
22 about back when you're -- and please forgive me; I don't -- I'm
23 not qualified on the territory.

24 A. Right, right, right.

25 Q. This is my first time out here. What about before that blind

1 curve? Do you remember any other trains in -- you mentioned the
2 one on the Y.

3 A. Right. We had to actually wait at the crossing to get to our
4 train. We were blocked in by a freight train leaving on Main 2
5 headed east. So we sat at the crossing waiting for it to even --
6 to get on our train to even start.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So that's -- other than that, once we climbed on, there was,
9 I mean, nothing other than what I said. I mean, I seen the road
10 foreman in his vehicle at the crossing, and I looked over to my
11 right on the Deadwood Y to see how far back they were, and like I
12 said, I seen how far back they were and that's why I gave a
13 courtesy so they knew what train was going by them. And -- yeah.

14 MR. FRIGO: Okay. I don't have any other questions right
15 now. Thank you. Thank you.

16 MR. KENNER: I have no questions. Thank you.

17 MR. CHASE: I've got just a couple.

18 BY MR. CHASE:

19 Q. Inside the cab --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- did that engine have the screen for the positive train
22 control? Do you remember?

23 A. I can't recall. I can't even see the inside of the motor at
24 this point.

25 Q. The reason I'm asking is would it have been in your way at

1 all to obstruct your view or anything like that?

2 A. No, they're usually not. The only way they have any kind of
3 obstruction of view is when my conductor kind of sits more off to
4 the left. But, no, I usually have full view of both windows.

5 Q. Okay, very good. Thank you.

6 BY MR. JONES:

7 Q. Tyler, you were westbound, correct?

8 A. Yes, sir.

9 Q. Was there another crew that was on duty prior to you?

10 A. Yep. Thank you actually for reminding me. Because of when
11 we had the yellow light, I wanted to make sure nothing else was
12 going on and so I actually called the train ahead of us that was
13 stopped at 478, and wanted to make sure there was in fact a train
14 ahead of us. So I actually called the engineer. So I can't tell
15 you what time they were on duty, but I just know their train was
16 stopped at 478. That's why we had our yellow light.

17 Q. The 478's in the double track?

18 A. No. No. It's just the absolute inside Marietta. Marietta
19 is the end of --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay. So you did have the one in front of you?

23 A. Um-hum. Yep.

24 MR. JONES: Okay. That's all I have.

25 MR. LINDSEY: Tyler, this is Ray Lindsey. I've got no

1 further questions for you either.

2 BY MR. FRIGO:

3 Q. All right, Tyler. I mentioned to you before that I'd have
4 some other type follow-up questions.

5 A. Right.

6 Q. And if you can't recall, I'd rather have you tell me you
7 don't remember and I could send you a questionnaire later.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. But so you mentioned you marked on at 9:15, you called on at
10 9:15 that morning.

11 A. Yep, on duty at 9:15.

12 Q. Do you remember your -- the 72 hours prior? Could you give
13 me detail on that or is that something I could send you --

14 A. Yeah, I --

15 Q. -- a questionnaire and you could think about it?

16 A. That could be it. But, I mean, I -- everything was going
17 fine prior. I mean, there's no problems around for me. You know,
18 it was --

19 Q. When was the last time you worked before this shift?

20 A. I do believe I had 35 hours off prior to going back on duty.

21 Q. Okay. Did you stay local? Were you --

22 A. Yep.

23 Q. Okay. So you were local the whole time?

24 A. Yep. I remember, I do believe my wife had some days off, and
25 we just do what we usually do and hang out at home. Just kind of

1 relax because we both live pretty hectic lives, so --

2 Q. She had you working around the house?

3 A. Yeah, yeah.

4 Q. I know how that goes. So you remember getting a good night's
5 sleep?

6 A. Yeah. I went to work, felt fully rested. I felt great. I
7 was in a good mood. It's a great time to be called. I mean, I'd
8 rather work a daylight shift than a night shift, but -- so
9 starting out at 9:15 in the morning was great. Me and my
10 conductor are good friends, and we haven't worked together forever
11 it seems like, and so I as excited to get to work with somebody I
12 knew really well. And, yeah, beautiful day out. So, I mean,
13 there's nothing, other than the incident, that was wrong that day.

14 Q. Pretty clear out that day?

15 A. Yeah, a beautiful day out.

16 Q. Cold, or do you remember?

17 A. Not really. Not for here, no.

18 Q. Not for here. So how does it usually -- help me understand
19 how it usually works. You mentioned you were happy getting the
20 call for a daytime run and --

21 A. Daylight trip, it's --

22 Q. So how can I understand how it is to be a locomotive engineer
23 here and --

24 A. Here, I don't know, it's something about working in the
25 daylight, you feel like a normal person. You know what I mean,

1 it's not midnight or 2 in the morning call, which, I mean, we all
2 knew when we signed up for it that there would be those. But it's
3 almost like a little perk of our job actually getting to go to
4 work in the morning and getting to the mine and getting off our
5 train in, you know, 4 or 5 hours, and, you know, it's just a good
6 time. You still have daylight left. You can still go enjoy the
7 day. So, yeah, it's just one of those nice perks about going to
8 work, you know, morning.

9 Q. So is that kind of a usual shift, you would say, getting the
10 daylight or is that --

11 A. No. It's sporadic.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I mean, it's -- you never know, other than the board
14 projections and everything like that. It's just you never really
15 know.

16 Q. How much time do you usually have on -- you know, if you have
17 a daylight run on today, and then when typically when would be the
18 next time they'd call you to work?

19 A. When we get called, we get on our empty coal train and we
20 generally take it to the mines, and we end up getting into a taxi
21 and it brings us back to our railroad hotel, the complex. And we
22 get a minimum -- I think it's like 10½ undisturbed or, you know --
23 I can't think right now, but usually our time is -- we spend 12,
24 13. I mean, I've been there longer than that, and it's just -- we
25 have our own room and we just kind of do whatever, you know. Run

1 to Walmart if you need to or just hang out and relax.

2 Q. Thank you for helping me understand that a little more. So
3 let me ask you a few other questions here. How do you -- when you
4 show up, you mentioned you get your papers from the conductor.

5 A. Yep. Yep.

6 Q. Is there anybody else you talk to when you --

7 A. Unless there's somebody in the depot that I know, generally
8 not. It's usually you walk in and you see who you're working with
9 and your conductor, and by the time you get there -- I mean, they
10 show up a lot earlier than I do, and they get all the paperwork,
11 and they give it to us and we look it over. We look -- you know,
12 big things is our speed and any kind of throttle restrictions that
13 we might have, and tonnage, stuff like that.

14 With the paperwork that we get, we get a engineer, I guess,
15 train list, if you will, that kind of tells us what motor numbers
16 we have, the kind of power we got, and if there should be anything
17 isolated, so on and so forth. And that gives us -- it's basically
18 our safety briefing is that piece of paper. It tells us
19 everything we need to know about our train, along with our general
20 track bulletins, obviously, that tell you anything on the tracks.
21 Form B's, Form A's, important --

22 Q. Anything that's going on out there.

23 A. Yeah. Yep.

24 Q. What about as far as -- how's your health? Are you in good
25 health?

1 A. Yeah. Yeah.

2 Q. Do you get a physical from the carrier or how does that work?

3 A. I don't know, last time I went in for a physical, I guess.

4 It's one of those things -- I mean, I'm only 25, so I never really
5 think about that kind of thing. But, no, I lift weights and run 5
6 days a week and, I mean, it's -- I'd consider myself in pretty
7 okay health.

8 Q. Good. And your -- same goes with vision and hearing?

9 A. Yeah. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay. Are you currently taking any medications? Any
11 prescriptions or over-the-counter?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay. And do -- you know, and this question I've actually,
14 have started asking this question with every train and engine crew
15 that I've talked to recently, and it's been the same question. Do
16 you know what fitness for duty is? Do you know that terminology?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Okay. And some people have heard it, you know, some people
19 have had training on it, but the majority of people, they -- it's
20 a new term for them. And basically what that is, it's a term used
21 to describe an employee's physical state and -- physical or mental
22 state when they come on to work. And some people would say that
23 guy just doesn't look right today.

24 A. Right.

25 Q. So it's kind of like that. But so, again, that's just a

1 question I've been asking lately.

2 MR. FRIGO: Tyler, thank you again. I don't -- I think we'll
3 go around just one more time, but I don't have any further
4 questions. Thank you.

5 BY MR. KENNER:

6 Q. Tyler, I have one question. D.B. Kenner with the Brotherhood
7 of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen. You said you knew that
8 train up on the Y had authority out behind you?

9 A. Yep. Yeah.

10 Q. Did the dispatcher tell you that, or --

11 A. We heard it on the radio.

12 Q. You heard it on the radio?

13 A. Yeah. They called in to see if they could get authority out
14 on the main line, and the dispatcher told us -- or, excuse me,
15 told them that they'd have authority out after us, you know,
16 behind the BNSF; you know, call me after the BNSF 4889 passes your
17 point of entry.

18 MR. KENNER: Okay. Thank you.

19 BY MR. CHASE:

20 Q. I've got one question. Jim Chase -- or a couple here. I
21 might have missed it. Were you pooled or extra board?

22 A. Pooled.

23 Q. Pooled. Oh, okay.

24 And when you got the light to go, you never talked to the
25 dispatcher or anything, you just left and --

1 A. No. We --

2 Q. -- the only dispatcher stuff that you heard was the --

3 A. Right.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And figured the reason why we were getting stopped, why we
6 only had a yellow light, is he told the eastbound train that they
7 were crossing over from 1 to 2 at 478. So we'd obviously have to
8 wait for them to clear up. But, yeah, I mean, we don't generally
9 talk to our dispatcher because it's -- you know, that signal is
10 controlled by him. So, I mean, that's --

11 Q. Right, right.

12 A. -- our authority to go.

13 Q. Yeah, I was just curious.

14 A. Yeah, right, right, right.

15 Q. Okay. Thank you.

16 A. Yep.

17 BY MR. JONES:

18 Q. And what radio channel do you operate on when you're
19 departing?

20 A. When we're departing, we're generally on 87.

21 Q. 87.

22 A. That day, I don't know if something was going on with the
23 radio, but when we tried to talk to our train, they tried to talk
24 to us, you know, 87. I don't know what was going on, but when we
25 climbed on we were on 85, and talked to everybody. And 85 is the

1 -- I mean where we operate anyway. It's a little tiny stretch
2 that we switch over to 87. It's basically right when we get over
3 the first crossing we change radios.

4 Q. And you were on 87 when you talked to the crew on the vehicle
5 train?

6 A. No. We were on 85 at that time.

7 Q. You were on 85?

8 A. Yep.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. When we talked to the vehicle train.

11 Q. And that's the channel you heard the dispatcher talking to
12 them on?

13 A. Yep.

14 Q. Did you ever hear any maintenance-of-way talking to the
15 dispatcher?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Nobody? Okay.

18 A. No, we were never told anything. We were never told anybody
19 was working. I mean, we had our light. We went about how we'd
20 usually do it.

21 Q. And no unusual radio chatter from --

22 A. No.

23 Q. -- anybody outside?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Your crew or the auto train?

1 A. No.

2 MR. JONES: Okay. Thank you.

3 MR. LINDSEY: This is Ray Lindsey. I've got no further
4 questions.

5 BY MR. FRIGO:

6 Q. All right, Tyler, I thought I was done, but I do have one
7 more just to follow up on the -- that question about the radio
8 chatter and --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. In your experience as a locomotive engineer, have you heard
11 other announcements before that roadway workers were out on the
12 right-of-way? Can you recall ever hearing that?

13 A. Generally if we do, we'll end up getting stopped at an
14 absolute signal controlled by the dispatcher. And, you know, you
15 call them up and ask what's going on, and they say I got
16 maintenance working right now; they should be clearing up in about
17 10 minutes or, you know, so on and so forth.

18 But I don't think in my time we've ever been told heads up or
19 anything like that. They generally operate under blocks where
20 there's no air, you know, we can't go, so --

21 Q. Tyler, how long have you been an engineer?

22 A. About 6 years, I'd say. On my sixth year.

23 Q. Okay. So you started when you were about 19?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. And been with BNSF the whole time?

1 A. Yep.

2 Q. Did you start working at the railroad prior to then as an
3 engineer or was that your hire on?

4 A. That was my first hire on. Hired as a conductor, and then
5 went right into the engine program shortly thereafter.

6 Q. Tyler, thank you so much for coming in and telling us your
7 story. Really appreciate it. Helped us understand a little bit
8 more about what was going on out there today. And I just want to
9 ask you, sir, is there anything that -- any clarification or
10 anything that you'd like to add?

11 A. No. I think it's pretty clear.

12 Q. Okay. And, Tyler, I just want to close out by asking you is
13 there anything that you would like to add to the record? Is there
14 anything we didn't ask you that you might want to add or?

15 A. I don't think so, no.

16 MR. FRIGO: Okay. Tyler, thanks again.

17 Going 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: BNSF RAILWAY ROADWAY WORKER
 FATALITIES IN EDGEMONT, SOUTH
 DAKOTA ON JANUARY 17, 2017
 Interview of Tyler Bilbruck

ACCIDENT NUMBER: DCA17FR004

PLACE: Hot Springs, South Dakota

DATE: January 19, 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.

Katherine Motley
Transcriber