

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

 IN RE: :
 :
 THE ACCIDENT THAT OCCURRED : NTSB Accident No.
 ON LA JUNTA SUBDIVISION AT : DCA16MR004
 MILEPOST 373 ON MARCH 13, :
 2016 :
 :

Tuesday,
March 15, 2016

Cimarron, Kansas

Interview of:

ZACHARIAH BLEA

BEFORE:

TOMAS TORRES, NTSB
 ARNOLDO GONZALEZ, FRA
 CHARLES WHALEN, FRA
 EUGENE SEE, FRA
 STEVE FACKLAN, BLET
 JOHN OBRIEN, SMART TRANSPORTATION DIVISION
 RONALD SPRAGUE, BLET
 DANNY O'CONNELL, AMTRAK

This transcript was produced from audio
provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

1
2 MR. TORRES: This is an NTSB informal
3 interview. My name is Tomas Torres. T-O-M-A-S T-O-R-R-
4 E-S with the NTSB. Today is March 15, 2016. We are in
5 Cimarron, Kansas interviewing the Engineer Trainee in
6 connection with the accident that occurred at La Junta
7 Subdivision at Mile Post 373 on March 13 approximately
8 at 12:10 a.m. The NTSB Accident No. is DCA16MR004.
9 The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety,
10 not to assign fault, blame or liability. NTSB cannot
11 offer any guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from
12 legal or certificate actions. A transcript or summary
13 of the interview will go in the public docket. The
14 interviewee can have one representative of the
15 interviewee's choice. Will that be you?

16 MR. PORTER: Yes, sir.

17 MR. TORRES: Just to let you -- aware, you
18 can't answer for him. He has to answer himself.

19 MR. PORTER: Yes, sir.

20 MR. TORRES: Do you understand that this
21 interview is being recorded?

22 MR. BLEA: Yes.

23 MR. TORRES: Please state your name and
24 spell it.

25 MR. BLEA: Zachariah Blea. Z-A-C-H-A-R-I-A-

1 H, last name Blea, B-L-E-A.

2 MR. TORRES: Title?

3 MR. BLEA: Student Engineer with Amtrak.

4 MR. PORTER: Brian Porter, B-R-I-A-N P-O-R-
5 T-E-R. I am the BLET local chairman for Division
6 Seventeen.

7 MR. TORRES: FRA?

8 MR. GONZALEZ: Arnoldo Gonzalez. A-R-N-O-L-
9 D-O G-O-N-Z-A-L-E-Z. FRA Operating Practices, Kansas
10 City.

11 MR. WHALEN: Charles Whalen. W-H-A-L-E-N.
12 Passenger Rail Specialist, FRA Headquarters.

13 MR. SEE: Eugene See. E-U-G-E-N-E S-E-E.
14 Operating Practices.

15 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, F-A-C-K-L-A-N.
16 BLET Safety Task Force Primary Investigator, here as an
17 observer.

18 MR. SPRAGUE: Ronald Sprague. R-O-N-A-L-D S-
19 P-R-A-G-U-E. I am BLET Safety Task Force Investigator.

20 MR. O'BRIEN: John Obrien. J-O-H-N O-B-R-I-E-
21 N, Smart Transportation Division, Accident
22 Investigator.

23 MR. O'CONNELL: Danny O'Connell, D-A-N-N-Y O
24 apostrophe C-O-N-N-E-L-L, Assistant Superintendent Road
25 Operations for the Los Angeles Amtrak.

1 MR. TORRES: Okay Tomas Torres with NTSB.
2 Can you start on the day that you went on duty? What
3 time you went on duty and what happened at the yard
4 office and throughout your trip?

5 MR. BLEA: Zachariah. I arrived at the La
6 Junta Crew Base approximately about 6:30 p.m. Mountain
7 Time. I went into the crew room, started looking over
8 new orders, bulletins or notices that had been posted
9 for all our current paperwork. Our conductor Will was
10 there already. Chatted with him for a few seconds.
11 Waited for our paperwork to come over the printers.
12 The rest of the crew arrived shortly thereafter. Sign
13 up time was 7:11 p.m. that evening. We were actually
14 commenting on since the time change how it was a little
15 bit lighter out than what it normally was. Did our job
16 briefing, we were looking through our orders, notices,
17 noticed there was a couple of changes to the slow
18 orders. Some of them had been shortened, some of them
19 had even been raised, speed-wise. Train showed up a
20 little bit later, if I recall correctly, and I think we
21 were out of there on time.

22 MR. TORRES: What's an on-time schedule?

23 MR. BLEA: Scheduled departure time out of
24 La Junta is 7:41 p.m.

25 MR. TORRES: And after you departed, can you

1 describe the trip?

2 MR. BLEA: Yes, as a student engineer my
3 instructor Jennifer, she has been teaching me piece by
4 piece increment of the railroad, train handling,
5 methods of operation. And this particular trip I
6 actually started running from La Junta and I ran all
7 the way to Garden City, Kansas where our station stop
8 was. There at Garden City we switched and she took
9 over and throughout the course of the trip it was
10 actually a pretty normal trip. Everything was going
11 smoothly. Train operation-wise we didn't have any
12 issues or anything like that. Talking a couple of
13 times back and forth about methods of operation. You
14 know, why don't we try blending the brakes for this
15 slow order? Why don't we just try to use straight
16 dynamics? Basically her instruction was just going
17 along with what she told me to do. How to handle the
18 train. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

19 MR. TORRES: And up to the point of the
20 incident?

21 MR. BLEA: The point of the incident, as
22 previously mentioned we did switch there at Garden
23 City. She took over the train from there, I was in the
24 fireman's seat. Just nothing seemed out of place.
25 Nothing seemed unusual. We were actually commenting

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1 about the slow orders that had changed that were coming
2 up. Up until that point everything seemed normal on
3 the trip.

4 MR. TORRES: When you came up to the defect
5 on the track, did you see it yourself? Or --

6 MR. BLEA: Yes I did see it. Recalling the
7 event and the few seconds leading up to it, it was dark
8 out. It was clear but it was still---the only
9 visibility of the track was within the beam of the
10 headlight. We were traveling at about sixty miles per
11 hour. The moment we saw it, I sprang up out of the
12 seat and looked forward. Just the shock, like am I
13 really seeing this? And that that moment it was already
14 too late.

15 We were going for a ride and I just grabbed
16 onto the handrails and we went over it and my
17 paperwork, I had it here on the fireman's side, flew
18 across the cab. And it just, the two seconds between
19 the moment we realized what it was and that we actually
20 hit, it seemed like an eternity. I really don't know
21 how long it was, it just seemed like forever. But once
22 we went through it, all of a sudden we were stopped.
23 And that's the initial event from what I remember.

24 MR. TORRES: Did you or the engineer call it
25 out? If there was something on the track?

1 MR. BLEA: There wasn't even time to react.
2 To grab the rail or anything like that or to warn the
3 conductors. It just happened so quickly. From the
4 moment we realized what it was to the moment it
5 actually happened it was like a blink of an eye it
6 seemed. In the moment it took forever but it just, it
7 was quick without suddenly it happened.

8 MR. TORRES: Did you see any motor vehicles,
9 trucks or cars on the highway near?

10 MR. BLEA: No. Honestly I was focused on
11 the kink in the track and that was my only intention
12 and then what the aftermath might be. I mean in that
13 moment, a hundred thousand thoughts racing through my
14 head. Just, oh my God we are going to derail. We are
15 going to go over on our sides. We are going to have
16 this whole passenger train pile up on top. I mean
17 everything you could imagine was just racing through my
18 head at that point.

19 MR. TORRES: You mentioned visibility was
20 dark and clear. Just with a light beam, a head light.
21 How far do you think, do you estimate you could see? I
22 mean, distance-wise?

23 MR. BLEA: I would say probably about three,
24 maybe four car lengths, if that.

25 MR. GONZALEZ: Arnoldo Gonzalez, FRA. Do

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1 you recall -- we know the engineer placed train
2 emergency. Do you recall if it occurred prior to or
3 after the defect in the rail?

4 MR. BLEA: I couldn't tell you. All I
5 remember is just holding on and I looked up and we were
6 already in emergency and stopping. I mean it stopped
7 quick, it seemed. So I imagine at that point, more than
8 likely. Yes. Because it was, like I said once we were
9 through it, it just---everything just went quick.

10 MR. GONZALEZ: And then after you guys
11 stopped, can you talk a little bit about what happened
12 up there in the cab? Did you tone up dispatch or can
13 you talk a little bit about that? What occurred up
14 there in the cab afterwards?

15 MR. BLEA: In the cab, once we actually
16 stopped and all that it was just like the adrenaline
17 was running and I don't even remember what the
18 conversation was. It was something along the lines of,
19 well that was bad, or that was a rough one. I remember
20 making the comment to Jen saying, I hope we are all on
21 the rail still. At that point they started
22 communicating with the conductors. They asked us what
23 happened? What did we hit? Or what's going on up there?
24 And we were still trying to piece it all together and
25 all that.

1 Then after that initial communication with
2 the conductor that is when we started to tone up the
3 dispatcher. Just at first we thought okay, well we are
4 in emergency. We've done what the protocol says,
5 transmit emergency, emergency, emergency. Your train
6 number, location, where you are at and all the
7 information that you know at that point. And we tried
8 reaching the dispatcher but there was no answer right
9 away.

10 MR. GONZALEZ: Do you recall how long it
11 took from when you guys first started to get ahold of
12 them?

13 MR. BLEA: It was couple of minutes at
14 least. I couldn't give you an exact time because I
15 stopped keeping track of time. I just started going
16 off instinct and training.

17 MR. GONZALEZ: I understand.

18 MR. BLEA: So we are sitting there and kept
19 trying to tone them up. Call them up. Hey Amtrak
20 Train Number Four. Emergency, emergency, emergency,
21 emergency, Mile Post 373. But there was no immediate
22 response right away. So the conductors got off the
23 train. They started walking back. And I remember the
24 conductor called back and said, Amtrak Four we got cars
25 on the ground. And right then and there I am like,

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1 okay, now we are derailed so this is a pretty critical
2 event.

3 We tried calling dispatcher again right
4 there. I would say probably a moment or two later, he
5 calls back and says we got cars on their sides. And at
6 that moment I told Jen, I said I am turning my phone on
7 I am calling 9-1-1 because at this point the dispatcher
8 still hadn't responded just yet. So at that point I
9 did turn on my personal cell phone, called 9-1-1. I put
10 my safety vest on, climbed off the locomotive. From
11 where we stopped a couple of yards ahead of us there
12 was a short little bridge.

13 And the BNSF they actually post what the
14 Mile Post Number is at that bridge and I believe that
15 bridge number was 372.8.9. So while I was walking
16 there I was calling 9-1-1 and headed back to the engine
17 and finally got a hold of 9-1-1, told them said yeah,
18 this is a crew member on the Amtrak Train here. We are
19 just a little bit west of Cimarron. We have derailed,
20 we do have a potential mass casualty event. Just, we
21 need all the help we can get. They are asking for
22 ambulances, EMT's, anybody you can get down here.

23 And by the time I had gotten through to them
24 they said yeah, we already know. We got people on it.
25 So this will happen relatively quickly and so at that

1 point I hung up with 9-1-1. I climbed back up in the
2 engine and I checked on Jen. I asked her, are you
3 okay? Is everything okay? And I handed her a bottle of
4 water. The funny details that you remember about this
5 stuff. But so we were up there to my knowledge she had
6 not gotten a hold of a dispatcher yet.

7 So while I was up there I asked her, I go,
8 is there anything that you need me to do? Do I need to
9 do anything? And she says no, we are good here. And
10 then at that point I asked her, I said do they need
11 help back there? She called the conductor and asked,
12 do you guys need an extra set of hands back there? Do
13 you guys need help? And they said yes. We need all the
14 help we can get.

15 At that point I told her, I said okay. I am
16 going to go back there and help them. So that's -- at
17 that point I didn't have a personal radio on me. I
18 just went, found the conductor right away, and followed
19 his instructions. First car I went to was the lounge
20 car. They were trying to get a guy out of the lounge
21 car. He couldn't move on his own. We kind of had to
22 carry him out. It was me, the conductor and one other
23 passenger that tried to help him off.

24 At that point we tried to get him away from
25 the car. We were worried that it might tip over. So

1 we were asking is there anybody else in the car? Is
2 there anybody else in the car? We did a real quick
3 walkthrough and made sure it was clear. Once it was
4 clear the firefighters started showing up and they
5 started to ask us is there anybody in there? Is there
6 anybody in there? And I said no, we, I just walked this
7 car. We both went through it and everybody is clear.
8 Then came back out of the lounge car and that is when I
9 saw all four coaches on their sides.

10 And it was at that point I realized that
11 this was a pretty significant incident. I mean it was
12 one thing to hear the transmissions and the
13 conversations, but to actually see it I think was the
14 moment of realization. And I stopped thinking and
15 autopilot kicked in, just whatever EMS or the conductor
16 or anybody says, help them. Do whatever you can to get
17 the people out of the train.

18 At one point I remember climbing up on one
19 of the overturned coaches. And I was actually helping
20 one of the firefighters pull people out of one of the
21 windows. There was one guy they had to pull out on a
22 backboard. Help them get him off. That same car the
23 firefighters wanted to go down to what was the lower
24 level of the car. To see if there was anybody down
25 there in the restroom area or the baggage area. And I

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1 asked them I said do you need me to go down there? Kind
2 of help navigate you around? And they said yes.

3 So we lowered a ladder and I went in with
4 them and kind of pointed them in the direction. Okay
5 here is where the restrooms are, here is where the
6 baggage area is. And they did their thing, they walked
7 through. Checked for anybody, there was nobody down
8 there. But after that we climbed out and that was
9 probably the moment, that I climbed back out and
10 everybody was already there. I mean I have seen fire
11 departments, Garden City, Ingalls, Dodge City,
12 Cimarron. What surprised me the most was the amount of
13 people that were already taken out of the train by that
14 time. I mean it seemed, once everybody was there it
15 was---like time stood still almost.

16 Everybody was coming out of the train. All
17 of the passengers were lined, standing up on the
18 embankment on the south side of the track. A couple of
19 them asked for blankets. I went up to the sleeping cars
20 and asked the attendant, do you got any spare blankets?
21 Went, grabbed them, took them back to the passengers.
22 And about that point, that's when they started walking
23 through. The firefighters went through the overturned
24 cars and checking everything. And they said we are all
25 clear, and everybody was pretty much off the train at

1 that point.

2 So then it became, I want to say it was a
3 moment like a sigh of relief. I was like okay, nobody
4 was too terribly injured. Nobody was killed, thank
5 God, or so it seemed at that point. And then the
6 adrenaline started wearing off and they started loading
7 people up on the buses and taking them to the community
8 center. And it finally started settling in what had
9 happened.

10 The thing that amazed me looking back at it
11 was, with Amtrak, their training and all that they have
12 us go through emergency prepare. They have us do
13 these, every once in a while these drills and all that.
14 Couple of years ago I was actually the conductor on a
15 yard job that actually had to go through and show all
16 the firefighters and the first responders, okay here is
17 where the battery boxes are, here is where this is,
18 here is where that is. And it is just amazing how that
19 training and knowledge just kicks in and it is like
20 autopilot.

21 So we did all that and then it, I don't know
22 how long it took to get everybody off the train. Like
23 I said the concept of time stood still. It was, yeah.

24 MR. GONZALEZ: Thanks, I appreciate that. No
25 more questions.

1 MR. WHALEN: Charles Whalen. W-H-A-L-E-N,
2 FRA, Passenger Rail Specialist, Headquarters. When did
3 you get ladders out of the sleeping cars? Was it you --

4 MR. BLEA: I did forget about that part,
5 yes? The, after we got the guy out of the lounge car
6 the conductor did ask me. He said go to the sleeper,
7 go get a ladder so we can get these people out of the
8 coaches. I did run up to the, I believe it was the
9 thirty car and I did ask the attendant, do you got any
10 spare ladders down here? And she goes no, we got, the
11 only ones we got are in the rooms. And I said that is
12 fine, anything that you can get to use as a ladder. I
13 did forget that part. But you are right, I did.

14 MR. WHALEN: Did you actually use them?

15 MR. BLEA: I just handed it off to the
16 conductor, and I think one of the EMS's actually is the
17 one that ended up with it, but --

18 MR. WHALEN: That's all I have.

19 MR. SPRAGUE: This is Ron Sprague. S-P-R-A-
20 G-U-E, BLET Safety Task Force. You said you tried to
21 tone dispatcher several time?

22 MR. BLEA: Mm-hmm.

23 MR. SPRAGUE: What tones? What do you mean
24 by tones?

25 MR. BLEA: Toning up, it's on the radio key

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1 pad. There is a certain code you punch in and it
2 connects the radio to the nearest tower which is the
3 radio communications. Each, not each, every couple of
4 stations or citing locations there is a tower assigned
5 to it. And it has also got a number assigned to it as
6 well. So you tone, you hit the number into the radio
7 and it tones that tower. That sends a message to the
8 dispatcher, hey someone is trying to get ahold of you.
9 The tone here for the closest radio was Ingalls. Which
10 is a little bit to the West of here.

11 The tone for that one was 420. So, or the
12 tone I should say is whatever the two digit number is
13 and then whatever -- whether you need the dispatcher,
14 mechanical, emergency or something like that. The zero
15 tone is the dispatcher, four is mechanical, and in this
16 case nine was emergency. So we were trying to tone
17 them up and it took a few minutes. I don't know
18 exactly when he finally responded or not because I was
19 on the ground already at that point.

20 MR. SPRAGUE: Okay but I take it you felt
21 that you needed to get your cell phone out? Is it okay
22 with the rules of your operation to use a cell phone in
23 that time?

24 MR. BLEA: It is my understanding of the
25 rules that in the event of an emergency, it is okay to

1 use it to get what communications you need. The moment
2 the conductor said we have cars on our sides, it was
3 that moment that it would have constituted an emergency
4 in my opinion.

5 MR. SPRAGUE: Don't get me wrong, you did a
6 good job. We appreciate it. I don't have any further
7 questions.

8 MR. OBRIEN: John Obrien, Smart
9 Transportation Division. Just the one question, did
10 you receive any communications from Amtrak for trauma
11 counseling or critical incident program?

12 MR. BLEA: I haven't heard yet. I know I
13 had a bunch of missed calls from yesterday. But my
14 voice mailbox filled up so I don't know if they called
15 or not. Once we got back to the hotel yesterday I just
16 fell asleep. I just basically toned out the world.
17 Finally just relaxing and coming off the adrenaline. I
18 did go through and delete my mailbox, but whether they
19 were able to leave a message or not I am not sure. But
20 I'm going to try to reach out to them sometime today.

21 MR. OBRIEN: Okay thank you.

22 MR. O'CONNELL: Danny O'Connell. O-C-O-N-N-
23 E-L-L, Amtrak. Zach, when did you hire out for Amtrak?

24 MR. BLEA: Zack Blea. B-L-E-A. I hired out
25 for Amtrak in September of 2012. I hired on as an

1 assistant conductor. I went through the training
2 program in Wilmington, Delaware for eight weeks and
3 then an additional two weeks in Los Angeles. I worked
4 as an assistant conductor out of Albuquerque, New
5 Mexico. In November of 2013 I was promoted conductor.
6 I went through the training program, took the tests and
7 worked as a conductor in Albuquerque until August of
8 2015. When I hired out as an engineer I trained in
9 Colorado. I went through their training program in
10 Wilmington once again for the engineers. Couple of
11 weeks in Los Angeles following. Did my first trip as a
12 student engineer out of La Junta on November 8 of 2015.
13 And I have been doing qualifying trips and student
14 trips ever since.

15 MR. O'CONNELL: And when do you expect to be
16 marked up as an engineer?

17 MR. BLEA: I have been told the average
18 number of---the average time for engineers is about a
19 year. But they get theirs up to two years as well. It
20 varies person to person is my understanding.

21 MR. O'CONNELL: Well how about yourself
22 though?

23 MR. BLEA: Personally I think maybe a year.
24 Maybe a little bit more. Depending.

25 MR. O'CONNELL: Okay. You have answered a

1 lot of questions that I already had. But let me ask you
2 one question. Have you ever had to place a train in
3 emergency before?

4 MR. BLEA: No.

5 MR. O'CONNELL: Okay. Because hopefully you
6 will never have to do it again. But there is going to
7 be times and you did; you followed the procedures. You
8 followed the---everything was fine. So I think
9 everybody can agree you guys did a great job. That is
10 all I have.

11 MR. WHALEN: Charles Whalen, W-H-A-L-E-N.
12 FRA Headquarters. Did Amtrak put their family
13 assistance program in place for this? Where someone
14 comes from Amtrak to talk to all the people that you
15 had, after the accident? To get them buses?

16 MR. O'CONNELL: Danny O'Connell. O'C-O-N-N-
17 E-L-L. Yes. There are part of the go-team. We have a
18 go-team. As soon as we know what the extent of the
19 incident is. They have a go-team that comes out which
20 includes family assistance to passengers whether they
21 are hurt or not. So, they, I just know of one girl
22 that's not here, that's normally here. Now there are
23 other people that I don't know that are here. So, yes
24 they do. And along that same side too is, the follow up
25 afterwards. The follow up with the injured passengers.

1 We try to stay on top of that.

2 MR. TORRES: Anybody else? Tomas Torres
3 with the NTSB. I am going to ask you a few questions.
4 Some you already answered. On the day of the incident,
5 what was the train I.D.?

6 MR. BLEA: Amtrak Train Number Four is the
7 assigned train number. We had unit number AMTK 153.

8 MR. TORRES: And prior to going on duty on
9 that date, if you can recall the three previous days
10 before going on duty. Do you know what your work
11 history was? How much rest you had?

12 MR. BLEA: Yeah we had come in that Friday
13 morning which would have been Friday the 11th I
14 believe. That was our last work day. My assigned day
15 off with this job is Saturday. So I actually went home
16 and visited some family. That's about three hours West
17 of La Junta. I spent the day with them. Spent the day
18 at home. Sunday, came back to La Junta, stopped and
19 visited family along the way. And ride to La Junta
20 about 5:00 p.m.

21 MR. TORRES: Is this your regular assigned?
22 Do you have or are you assigned to this specific job?
23 Are you just getting a call? Do they call you like
24 whenever?

25 MR. BLEA: Both. My regular assigned days

1 are with Jen. Her regular assigned days are Sunday
2 nights to Dodge City, back Monday morning. And then
3 Monday evening, back out to Dodge City, back Tuesday
4 morning. Wednesdays I am actually on call with her
5 since she covers the extra board on those days. These
6 are what they call 9-J jobs. So they have assigned
7 work days but they also have to cover the extra board
8 the rest of the week. So during the rest of the week I
9 actually cover the extra board with her. So whenever
10 she gets called out I go with her.

11 MR. TORRES: So from La Junta you go on
12 duty? Go to Dodge, get off the train there, get your
13 rest, and then go back the following day?

14 MR. BLEA: Yes. Typically we would arrive at
15 Dodge around 12:30 that night, go to the hotel and get
16 our four hours rest. Go back on duty about 4:55 in the
17 morning to get back on Train Number Three to head back
18 West. Yes.

19 MR. TORRES: So on the day of the incident
20 you were towards the end of your tour of duty? Is that
21 correct?

22 MR. BLEA: Approaching it, yes.

23 MR. TORRES: Do you take any prescription or
24 non-prescription drugs?

25 MR. BLEA: No.

1 MR. TORRES: Again your hire date? I know
2 you already mentioned it. But what is your hire date?

3 MR. BLEA: As an engineer? As a conductor?
4 Or both?

5 MR. TORRES: When did you hire out with
6 Amtrak?

7 MR. BLEA: September of 2012.

8 MR. TORRES: And as a conductor, when did
9 you get certified?

10 MR. BLEA: November 2013.

11 MR. TORRES: And when did you start training
12 as an engineer?

13 MR. BLEA: August of 2015.

14 MR. TORRES: So when was the last time you
15 got certified as a conductor? I guess when was that?
16 2013? When did you become a conductor?

17 MR. BLEA: Yes, November of 2013.

18 MR. TORRES: Okay so your license is still
19 valid. When was the last time you rode with a foreman
20 or train master rode with you or tested you?

21 MR. BLEA: Zach Blea here. My last check
22 ride was with Road Foreman Bullerwell. And it was
23 actually Tuesday, the week before. Which would have
24 been, trying to think of a calendar with my head. I
25 apologize, it would have been Tuesday the 8th I would

1 say. That was another out of the characteristics for
2 the assigned days. There was an incident involving
3 Train Number Three the morning before with trespassers
4 striking La Junta. So they did actually call Jennifer
5 up to work Train Number Four out to Dodge City as a
6 response to that incident that had happened the day
7 before with the other train.

8 So we did do that trip and we went out
9 Tuesday and back Wednesday morning on that one. And
10 Road Foreman Bullerwell rode with me that day.

11 MR. TORRES: Did your training prepare you
12 for the requirements of the job? The positions you
13 hold?

14 MR. BLEA: Yes.

15 MR. TORRES: Did you use your cell phone
16 while on duty?

17 MR. BLEA: The only time I used my cell
18 phone was after the initial incident. I did turn it
19 on, I did call 9-1-1. In the thick of it all, I did
20 forget that I had it on. I just jumped in and started
21 helping people. By the time everybody was off of the
22 train and all of sudden, I did actually walk back up to
23 the engine. I was going to go back and check on Jen
24 again. That's when I realized it was still on, and I
25 did receive a bunch of text messages from family

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1 members, asking are you okay? Is everyone all right?

2 At that point I do want to say I did make a
3 phone call to my fiancée just to tell her I am okay.

4 You don't need to worry about me. Just tell --

5 everybody is asking me are you okay? Are you okay?

6 Let them know and it was a very brief phone call. As
7 soon as I told her that, you know, I am safe, I am
8 sound, everybody is fine. Turned it off and put it
9 back. And didn't turn it back on again until we got to
10 the hotel.

11 MR. TORRES: During the trip it was not on?

12 MR. BLEA: No. Absolutely not.

13 MR. TORRES: Is this a safe place to work
14 for?

15 MR. BLEA: Is Amtrak a safe place to work
16 for?

17 MR. TORRES: Yes?

18 MR. BLEA: I believe so, yeah. I think given
19 the situation, it is a true testament to how safety
20 oriented we are. How intense we are with our training
21 programs. Because like I said if the event happened
22 and it was like autopilot. We knew right away this is
23 what we had to do. There was no---my perception of it,
24 there was no panic. There was no chaos. It was
25 shockingly quiet. Everybody knew what they had to do

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1 and everybody worked together and it was I think a true
2 testament to what we are trained for.

3 You know they always tell you to prepare for
4 the worse, prepare for the worse. And this was a prime
5 example. You never know when the worse is going to
6 happen, even when it happened we really didn't know how
7 truly bad it was until after. And, I would definitely
8 say yes.

9 MR. TORRES: Okay. Anything else you would
10 like to add?

11 MR. BLEA: I believe that is it. If you
12 guys have any other questions or anything?

13 MR. WHALEN: I have a question. Charles
14 Whalen, FRA Headquarters. You got into the cars that
15 were on their side right?

16 MR. BLEA: Yes, sir.

17 MR. WHALEN: Do you remember if the
18 emergency lights were lit in those cars?

19 MR. BLEA: I believe so. There was lights
20 still in the cars when we were walking through them.
21 It wasn't pitch black or anything like that. I think
22 the bright lights weren't on but there was just enough
23 light to where you can make out okay. Here is the
24 hallway, here is the walkway, here is the baggage area.
25 Here is the restrooms.

1 MR. WHALEN: And what about the glow in the
2 dark stuff? Was that working?

3 MR. BLEA: Yes.

4 MR. WHALEN: Okay, thank you.

5 MR. BLEA: That I do remember because I was
6 actually looking down into the car, and that was all I
7 could see at first before we started poking around a
8 little bit more. Was all the signs that were
9 illuminated and the glow in the dark strips that they
10 have in there as well.

11 MR. WHALEN: Okay, thank you.

12 MR. TORRES: Anybody else? I guess that will
13 complete the interview. Thank you. Thank you for the
14 information you provided to us. And it looks like you
15 acted professionally. Thanks again.

16 MR. BLEA: Thank you.

17 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went
18 off the record.)
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21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: Accident That Occurred on
La Junta Subdivision March 13, 2016
Accident No. DCA16MR004
Interview of Zachariah Blea

DATE: 03-15-16

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 27 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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