

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

BNSF TRAIN DERAILMENT AND COLLISION *
CASSELTON, NORTH DAKOTA *
DECEMBER 30, 2013 *

Docket No. DCA-14-MR-004

* * * * *

Telephonic Interview of: THOMAS COOKS

Fargo, North Dakota

Thursday,
January 2, 2014

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: MICHAEL HILLER
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HILLER, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

RAYMOND LINDSEY
MICHAEL BUCHHOLTZ
Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

KEVIN WILDE, General Director
System Safety
BNSF Railway

B.J. SHILLINGSTAD
UTU Transportation Safety Team
SMART/UTU

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

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:11 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. HILLER: Good afternoon. My name is Mike Hiller,
4 H-i-l-l-e-r, of the National Transportation Safety Board. I'm an
5 investigator on accident number DCA-14-MR-004. Today is Thursday,
6 January 2nd, 2014, and the time now is 1:11 in the afternoon.

7 Today we are here to interview Thomas Cooks, and Thomas
8 is on a conference line. He is calling in from his home address
9 at 1215 7th Street, Northwest, Minot, North Dakota 58703. We are
10 sitting in the hotel meeting room in Fargo, North Dakota. And I
11 will begin introducing the members of the interview team, and I'll
12 start over here to my left.

13 MR. SHILLINGSTAD: B.J. Shillingstad, S-h-i-l-l-i-n-g-s-
14 t-a-d, of the SMART UTU union.

15 MR. KENNER: Dan Kenner, K-e-n-n-e-r, BLET Safety Task
16 Force.

17 MR. BUCHHOLTZ: Michael Buchholtz, FRA Operating
18 Practices, B-u-c-h-h-o-l-t-z.

19 MR. LINDSEY: Raymond Lindsey, L-i-n-d-s-e-y, FRA
20 Operating Practices.

21 MR. WILDE: Kevin Wilde, W-i-l-d-e, BNSF Railway,
22 Safety.

23 MR. HILLER: And on the line we have?

24 MR. COOKS: Thomas Cooks, C-o-o-k-s, engineer, Minot,
25 North Dakota.

1 INTERVIEW OF THOMAS COOKS

2 BY MR. HILLER:

3 Q. Thank you, Tom. So it's my understanding that on
4 December 30th, 2013, you were the engineer assigned to the grain
5 train. And what I'd like you to do, if you can, is to
6 characterize in as much detail the events of your trip, beginning
7 with the time you received the call of duty, up and through the
8 time where you had exited your locomotive and assembled with your
9 team, and then from there talk a little bit about your involvement
10 with the movement of the cars from the oil train. Is that
11 something that you can -- do you have any questions? Can you
12 answer that question for me?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Okay. I received my call to go on duty Monday morning,
16 11:15 Central, at the hotel in Fargo. After getting ready, took
17 the hotel van from the hotel to the yard office, Dilworth, North
18 Dakota. I think I arrived there anytime between -- probably about
19 12:20 Central. At that time I was introduced to the road foreman
20 at Dilworth, Paul Douglas, who let me know he was going to be
21 riding along with us that day for a check ride. We had Student
22 Engineer Andersen. At that time I met my conductor, Conductor
23 Anderson, out of Dilworth there.

24 We had just briefly chatted about bulletins. I talked
25 with Student Engineer Andersen about how his training was going so

1 far in the program, asked him which trip, which number trip he was
2 on. I believe he told me it was his 25th trip and number 9th
3 going to Minot. And I went over our train profile, told him, yep,
4 we got a heavy grainer, asked him if he's had any grain trains,
5 you know, what his experience with DP units were and that type of
6 stuff. And he responded, I think, he had about just -- he
7 mentioned just about most of his training so far had been DP,
8 considering the time of year and the cold weather.

9 So, once we had all our paperwork together, got all our
10 safety cleats (ph.) on, our vests on. Our train was parked at
11 27th Street. That's where we were going to head to get on our
12 train there. So we got word from the inbound crew if we can stop
13 and take a look at the DP, you know, double-check the fuel, a
14 quick inspection and sign the card. So that's what we did.

15 When we first got to the DP, the DP was probably around
16 8th Street on -- you know, the train was parked on main 1. It
17 went down right about where that McDonald's was, about 8th Street.
18 The student engineer and myself took a look at the -- well, took a
19 look at the fuel, quick inspection, and everything looked good
20 with the DP. Signed the card, hopped in a van and made our way to
21 the head end.

22 That's where we met with the inbound crew. You know,
23 they stepped off; we were stepping on. We briefed with them,
24 asked them how the train ran, anything we needed to know about
25 with it. They said it was a good running unit, nothing special,

1 you know, typical grain train. At that time, Road Foreman Paul
2 Douglas also got on the unit with us there, hopped on, looked over
3 everything, and everything looked good on our end there.

4 When we started moving from there, we were -- you know,
5 you do your typical -- got a hold of the terminal dispatcher,
6 Dilworth terminal dispatcher, made sure it was all right for us to
7 proceed west. And he said okay to proceed, signal indication.
8 Student Engineer Andersen was at the controls. He started off
9 running. Sitting right behind him was Road Foreman Paul Douglas.
10 Conductor Anderson was in the conductor's seat. And myself,
11 Thomas Cooks, I was sitting in the brakeman's seat.

12 So, we proceeded west, signal indication. As we're --
13 we proceeded west, I think we had a -- you know, I think we had a
14 slow order, 25 in there somewhere. And, you know, going over,
15 okay, what's our next slow order; you know, what's coming up next?

16 You know, started off clear signals all the way down.
17 Make our way through Casselton, mention the fact that, you know,
18 we had our head end 40 going through there. And as we made our
19 way through Casselton, we were just coming up on the -- as we
20 got -- just came through Casselton, we were preparing to stop at
21 the crossing to let Road Foreman Paul Douglas off, but just as the
22 head end came through west end of Casselton there, I know a Minot
23 East dispatcher got a hold of our train and a train that was
24 ahead, another westbound that was ahead of us, who I think they
25 were already through KO Junction, for a Form A.

1 I know our conductor had the radio. He had just started
2 copying the Form A, and as we're coming through West Casselton
3 there, we hear a signal maintainer. And I saw this vehicle parked
4 right off to the side there of -- parked off to the north side of
5 main track 1 there. And as we're coming through, he gets on the
6 radio, talking over, you know, the dispatcher who was giving us
7 our verbal Form A and says -- mentions something of the effect of
8 westbound grain train -- you know, said something about everything
9 look good on your end or, you know, is everything all right with
10 your train; it looked like a switch heater cover might have come
11 off here, something like that. And he came in kind of choppy
12 because the dispatcher was talking, giving the Form A, and then he
13 comes on the radio. So we kind of, you know, kind of looked at
14 each other.

15 And just after he said that, we noticed our train went
16 into emergency, and it was -- for me, it was kind of hard for me
17 to tell that we actually went into emergency for the fact that it
18 was pretty smooth. There was no -- you know, there was no severe
19 slack, you know, norun-ins, run-outs. It just kind of came to a
20 smooth stop. When he initially got a hold of us, we were still
21 moving track speed, which -- I mean, not -- we weren't moving
22 track speed; we were anticipating coming up to a stop, so I'd say
23 our speed at that time was probably anywhere between 25 and 30
24 mph.

25 But you know, like I said, when he initially got a hold

1 of us, the signal maintainer on the radio, you know, we were still
2 moving on the head end there with -- but right after he gets a
3 hold of us on the radio, you know, that's when we notice we just
4 go into emergency. So -- and like I said, it was a smooth stop
5 from the time we went into emergency and came to a complete stop.
6 There was no severe run-ins, run-outs, slack action. And usually,
7 you kind of hear the air go when a train goes into emergency. I
8 didn't even notice that as far as on the head end, as far as
9 hearing the [makes air noise] of the air going. The one thing
10 that, you know, I noticed, the light, you know, the dome light in
11 the cab turning red. That's kind of what caught my eye that told
12 me that we were in emergency.

13 And immediately Road Foreman Paul Douglas grabs the
14 radio. Because just as that's happening, the eastbound oil train
15 on main 2 is just about going by our head end. Road Foreman Paul
16 Douglas immediately grabs the radio. You know, he says -- he's
17 calling the, you know, eastbound unit train main 2, you know, we
18 just went into emergency. You know, like giving them a heads-up
19 we just went into emergency, and our conductor calls out the
20 "emergency, emergency, emergency." And then we -- I remember the
21 dispatcher was -- the dispatcher is trying to figure out, "Okay,
22 BNSF 6990, westbound grain train, you guys just went into
23 emergency?"

24 And then that's the last I kind of -- as far as the
25 radio contact goes, that's the last thing I heard. We never heard

1 a response from the eastbound oil train, unit train, until we were
2 -- we had just -- we were completely stopped. Then the next thing
3 we hear -- the next thing I remember hearing on the radio is,
4 "Fire, fire, fire. We're getting off." You know, "Fire, fire,
5 fire, rear unit train. We're getting off." And that obviously
6 was the guys, the crew from the unit train there. So, we hear
7 that, we looked back and immediately we just see a big, you know,
8 a big cloud of black smoke and flames.

9 So we -- at that time our train is already in emergency.
10 We figure it's not going anywhere, so Student Engineer Andersen,
11 you know, idled the throttle, centers the reversers, pulls it,
12 pulls his reverser out, and we -- you know, I grabbed my backpack
13 and we all step off the engine, get off and immediately start
14 heading west down the track, away from our train and obviously the
15 big cloud of smoke there.

16 So as we're heading there, as we're walking west toward
17 the crossing -- I'd say we're probably anywhere between a half a
18 mile to a mile from that crossing, and we start heading just
19 straight west down the rail towards the crossing because that's
20 where we initially -- we were planning on stopping to let off Road
21 Foreman Paul Douglas. So as we're making our way away from it, I
22 know Road Foreman Paul Douglas gets on his cell phone and calls
23 911. Conductor Anderson pulls out his portable and he's trying to
24 relay with the dispatcher our location, our milepost, and any
25 contact with the other crew.

1 And that's kind of where that part of the story ends,
2 because we make our way all the way -- it's about to the other
3 side of the -- we make our way west, and then we cross over main 1
4 and then back over main 2 onto the northwest -- north -- I'm
5 sorry, onto the southwest side of the tracks there. And as we're
6 there, I can't remember who it was, which trainmaster it was that
7 was going to be picking up Road Foreman Paul Davis [sic], but he
8 pulls up in his vehicle and that's the vehicle we initially step
9 into. And, you know, we're -- I know Douglas is on the phone
10 still. He's on the phone with the first, you know, 911.

11 And as we're sitting there, kind of just watching what's
12 going on, a red pickup pulls up to us and the person that jumps
13 out there is the -- I believe he's with Casselton Fire Department,
14 because he's in his fire gear and everything. And we kind of, you
15 know, we talk with him real quick, and I know Paul Douglas
16 mentioned, hey, you know, what can we -- is there anything we can
17 do right now that can help as far as maybe pulling the rear, you
18 know, the rear of this unit train away from the DP since we're
19 already here and we're already in position. And we were on the --
20 when he was on the phone with 911, the 911 operator transferred
21 him to one of the fire chiefs that was on scene. I'm not sure
22 where they were located. I believe they were probably somewhere
23 on the other side, the east side of everything. Because
24 everything that I did was all on the west side. I never made it
25 around to the east side. You know, we were just relieved there.

1 But we just kind of -- the firefighter that got there,
2 he says -- he mentioned something to the fact that, you know, they
3 can't get any closer as long as those tankers keep going up. And
4 he said that it seemed like one was going up every 7 minutes, you
5 know, another one would kind of catch on. And from the look of
6 it, they were moving west from the derailment. From the, you
7 know, few minutes we were kind of standing there, it looked like
8 it was kind of moving west.

9 So, in talking with the captain, firefighter that was
10 there with us -- it was only him. Yeah, he was in a red pickup by
11 himself. And of course he had a radio. He was relaying with
12 someone, a chief that was somewhere else on the scene there, and
13 we just kind of come up with the idea if there's any way we can
14 quickly get in there, make the cut and pull those away, you know,
15 let's do it, but we have to do it now, we have to do it quickly.
16 So I know that I told them, I said -- well, me and Student
17 Engineer Andersen, we said, well, we'll go to DP, get a condition,
18 and pull it away. And I believe it was Conductor Anderson and
19 Road Foreman Paul Douglas stayed in the vehicle and -- I can't
20 remember his name exactly, which trainmaster it was that was
21 driving. You know, he was going to drive them down to make a cut.

22 But I know before we did anything, Road Foreman Douglas
23 and the other trainmaster there, they looked at us and they said,
24 now, are you guys completely comfortable with doing this? You
25 know, you don't have to. You know, it wasn't -- like, you know,

1 if you don't feel like -- you know, if you don't feel it's safe to
2 do it, you know, you don't have to. So I, you know, I told him,
3 you know, I don't have a problem. We'll hop on the DP. We'll get
4 a condition. We'll be waiting for you guys to let us know when we
5 can start pulling.

6 So they go back to pull 10 and close the angle cock. Me
7 and Student Engineer Andersen hop on the DP. We get a condition,
8 unlink, ready to start pulling it west on main 2 away from the
9 rest of the derailment there.

10 So, initially, I think we -- initially, when Conductor
11 Anderson went back, he made a cut. I believe we pulled off
12 between, like, 50 or 55 cars initially. They made the cut. You
13 know, we're on the DP. I call out to Minot East okay to -- you
14 know, emergency situation; okay to pull down main 2 from the DP
15 unit of his unit train? I know that unit number of the DP was the
16 BNSF 6684. But we hop on, signal goes to an approach, and we
17 start pulling west on main 2 away from the derailment with
18 approximately 50 to 55 cars. And we pull down past CP 30 on
19 main 2 to about, probably, four cars of that crossing there to
20 make sure -- you know, we didn't want to keep the crossing
21 blocked. So that was our first move.

22 And I think -- I can't remember. I think I -- so if we
23 were told or we told them we would stay on the DP until we figure
24 out whether or not it needs to be moved further, if we need to
25 clear that crossing, move it to the west side of that crossing or

1 not. So me and Student Engineer Andersen stayed with the DP while
2 they were -- I'm not sure if they -- Road Foreman Douglas,
3 Conductor Anderson, and the trainmaster that was driving with them
4 in that vehicle, I believe they went to the other side to kind of
5 further assess the situation. So, we just -- me and Student
6 Engineer Andersen stayed on the DP and just pretty much monitoring
7 the radios.

8 I'm not sure how long we were on it. I'm not sure how
9 long we were on the DP, but then we were -- we saw the same
10 firefighter that was riding around on the west side in the red
11 truck. He pulled up to the crossing and he walked kind of -- ah,
12 he kind of -- like a little, it's almost like a draw, down the
13 rails to us again on the DP unit 6684. And he asked me and
14 Student Engineer Andersen if there's any way we can go back and
15 pull more cars off. And we, you know, we kind of look at him and
16 said, you know, I don't know if they'll let us. You know, I said,
17 I'm not sure; at this point we're not sure.

18 So, I know Student Andersen -- or Student Engineer
19 Andersen mentions to him, I can show you -- you know, he says, I
20 can show you how to, you know, pull a pin or, you know, make --
21 but they, I guess, they -- I told them, you know, I said, I don't
22 know. I said anything I need to do with the engine, I can -- you
23 know, I'm here on the power. I can do what I need to do, but I
24 don't know about getting -- you know, I don't know about sending
25 anyone to get that close back to that fire back there.

1 So, I know that -- I mean, Student Engineer Andersen, I
2 guess he's a former firefighter himself or something. He decides
3 that he'll go back and re-couple and pull as many more cars away
4 that they can. So, I know that he was in -- at that point they
5 had another engine on the southwest side of the rails. They put
6 him in fire gear. Him and the firefighter, and then now there was
7 another engineer, they put him in fire gear. They make their way
8 back to the cut again.

9 And at this point we don't -- we didn't have an extra
10 portable radio. So we, at this point, when we go back to make
11 this -- pull these second set of cars off, we're using the fire
12 department's radios. I have a portable and they have a couple
13 portables on them.

14 I call out to -- I call out on BN's radio, I believe, on
15 our -- on the train, you know, asking -- I think we asked
16 Trainmaster Nick. I can't remember his last name. I think we got
17 a hold of him over the radio, but I believe he was on the east
18 side of everything. And we say, hey, you know, the fire
19 department is here and is requesting us to go back and try to pull
20 an additional set of cars off of that. And he says if you can do
21 so safely, you know, go ahead. But, of course, he's on the other
22 side, so I'm not -- for the most part, he probably doesn't know
23 exactly, you know, how close or how far it was.

24 But we -- you know, Student Engineer Andersen decides
25 he's going to go back and couple and make an additional cut. So,

1 like I said, they suit him up in fire -- in their fire gear. I
2 had one of their portable radios; he had another one. Him and the
3 other fireman go back -- once they step back off the engine and
4 head back, I'm just in the seat kind of monitoring from the
5 mirror. So I can't see them exactly, but I do see they have
6 another -- they have a fire truck that kind of shadows them back
7 there.

8 So he makes his way back there. He gives me the okay to
9 come back, you know, 20, 30 cars. We make -- makes the joint,
10 couples the -- closed the air, opens the angle cock. I think as
11 soon as he opens that, I know I lost my air on the DP. So I have
12 to -- I recover it, but then from the second time, I believe he
13 pulled back -- I'm not sure how close he got to the actual fire
14 and all that, but I know the second time we went back and pulled
15 part of the way, we pulled an additional 20 to 25 cars. So I know
16 initially there was 50 to 55, and the second time 20 to 25.

17 The same thing, we pull -- I start pulling away west
18 again. And, you know, that one DP pulling about 80 cars, I think
19 -- I don't know if I even made it up to 5 mph, but we're just
20 slowly pulling. I pulled to within a car and a half of the --
21 well, I pulled to within about four to three cars of the crossing
22 again, stopped. The fire department -- or the fire -- someone
23 from the fire gets on the radio. I can't even remember if they
24 were on the -- someone from the fire or someone from BN -- now, at
25 this time, I don't remember if it was the portable fire radio or

1 if it was our BN radio on the engine, but he asked if I can pull
2 it -- you know, how much room I had before I get to the crossing
3 so that -- actually, it came over the BN radio. I'm not sure who
4 it was, but someone asked, hey, I'm calling the engineer on the DP
5 of the unit train; can you pull -- I mean, how much more room to
6 that crossing do you have? Can you pull, you know, maybe another
7 couple cars, to clear whatever crossing was back there near the
8 derailment site there.

9 So I had a good four cars, so I pulled up to about a --
10 probably about a car, you know, a car and a half from the
11 crossing. And I say, well, I'll try to get it as close as I can
12 and let the gates come up. And I do remember someone from the
13 signal department says, well, get as close as you need to, to
14 clear back there. If the gates don't come up, give me a shout
15 over the radio and I'll come, you know, I'll come check them out.
16 And that was it. That was the second move.

17 Student Engineer Andersen made his way back up to the
18 power, and then we sat there until we were relieved. We heard
19 that they were going to come back and get us. I think that was
20 around 1700 or so is when we actually got off the engine. So we
21 secured that set of whatever it was, 80 cars or so. I can't even
22 remember how many hand brakes he tied exactly, but I know he tied
23 it. He tied the hand brakes; I secured the engine. You know,
24 isolate it, set our air. We did a set, release, everything else.
25 Then we climbed off and got into the vehicle with Road Foreman

1 Douglas and that other trainmaster that was riding around with
2 him; me, Student Engineer Andersen and Conductor Anderson.

3 And then from there, that's -- I believe that was about
4 1700 or so. From that time is when we went over to the Sanford
5 Health Clinic and started our -- you know, did our urinalysis and
6 blood tests work and all that type of stuff. So that's -- you
7 know, from that point on then we did that. After we did that -- I
8 can't remember how long we were there. It was probably a good
9 little amount of time.

10 At that time when we got there, that's kind of when we
11 first met the other two, the conductor and engineer -- Conductor
12 Rigpl and Engineer Thompson from the unit train. We, you know,
13 for the first time, met them there at the Sanford Health Clinic.
14 And then when we got to the Sanford Health Clinic there was a
15 couple other BN officials there already. I don't remember names.
16 Most of them, they wore ties and for the most part they were all
17 new to me, the first time I was meeting most of them.

18 So, we did that. Once we left the Sanford Health
19 Clinic, we made our way back to the Dilworth terminal, and that's
20 when we did our FRA statements and interviews. And that's about
21 all I remember.

22 Q. That's actually a really good recollection, very
23 detailed. I think I have a couple of questions. Where did the
24 grain train originate?

25 A. I mean, it was -- the symbol, our grain symbol -- our

1 train symbol was GRYLRGT926. So I'm not sure what the RYL is, but
2 I know it was going to Rivergate, Oregon. But like I said, we got
3 on it at 27th Street, main 1, there in Fargo.

4 Q. All right. Now who did the pre-departure inspection?

5 A. The pre-departure inspection?

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. When we got there, me and Student Engineer Andersen, we
8 briefed with the outbound crew. Like I said, they got a hold of
9 us and asked us to stop by, take a look at the DP, to check the
10 fuel and to, you know, look it over, sign the card. We got there,
11 we looked at the outbound crew. They said that they -- you know,
12 the cards were signed on the two head units. They said they did
13 their inspection and everything was good with it. You know, we
14 hopped on. I sent Student Engineer Andersen to walk towards the
15 rear, check -- he checked the fuel and looked it over on the --
16 when we got on it, we -- from the south side, we walked it and
17 looked it over, then hopped on and departed.

18 Q. All right. I got a little confused by your explanation
19 of who went back to make the second cut. Could you just cover
20 that for me a little bit slower? I know the --

21 A. Yes, yes.

22 Q. Yeah, yeah, I think the -- you know, what I have here in
23 some notes, and we recorded it, too, but I just want to make sure
24 that I understand it. The LET -- or the student engineer said he
25 can show the firemen how to pull a pin, but could you start from

1 there?

2 A. Yes. Yes. No, Student Engineer Andersen, we were on --
3 the fireman was on the engine, asking if there was any way we can
4 pull an additional set of cars away. That way they can try to get
5 closer, you know -- they couldn't get any closer with that many
6 cars still being left attached, so if we can get -- any way we can
7 pull an additional set of cars off. And I know -- well, Student
8 Engineer Andersen kind of goes, well, you know, I'm not sure, you
9 know, if we can make that move again or not. And then he said, I
10 can try to -- you know, I can try to show you how to couple and,
11 you know, pull a pin on the car to uncouple it, you know, close
12 the angle cock and uncouple. But I think from that point he just
13 kind of decided, well, you know, I can go do it myself; you know,
14 I mean, I can go do it with you.

15 So that was -- the second time, that was Student
16 Engineer Andersen. Him, with the firemen and fire department, he
17 kind of -- they set him up in the fire gear and he was -- he went
18 back the second time to make that -- to make the first -- make the
19 joint to re-couple, then to cut away the additional 25 cars or so
20 from that second time we went back to pull those cars away. That
21 was Student Engineer Andersen.

22 Q. Yeah. So did you guys communicate on the fire
23 department radios?

24 A. Yes, yes. That time, we were -- like I said, we didn't
25 have a portable. Well, you know, we don't have -- we didn't have

1 a BN portable, so the fire department said, well, I have a couple
2 in my truck, you know. So they left me with one of their
3 portables and Student Engineer Andersen had the other portable.
4 These are fire department portables.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. And so, you know, I think before we did anything, we did
7 -- we called out, and I think that's when we got a hold of was
8 Trainmaster -- first name was Nick. And I believe he was on the
9 east side of everything, and we asked -- we told him what they
10 were requesting of us, if there's any way we can go back in and
11 pull an additional set of cars off. He mentioned, you know, if
12 you can do so safely, then, you know -- something like, you know,
13 if you can do so safely. I think that's what he said.

14 So we do -- so I think I might have called out to Minot
15 East on the radio from the unit there. I'm not sure if I got a
16 response or not. I don't remember. But I know that once Student
17 Engineer Andersen got back there, he gave me the "on the ground
18 protecting, you know, back 20 cars to a joint." I know we made
19 the joint. I know when he cut the air in because the DP dumped on
20 my end. So it took a little -- it didn't take long to recover.
21 Just by the time he gave me the okay to, you know, you can start
22 pulling, I had my air back and everything.

23 So, yeah, the second time we went back and pulled those
24 20, 25 cars, that was Student Engineer Andersen.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. The first time, when we made the cut of the 50 cars or
2 so, that was Conductor Anderson.

3 Q. Understood.

4 A. And like I said, that -- yeah, that second time, I
5 think, you know, Conductor Anderson, Road Foreman Paul Douglas,
6 and the trainmaster that was driving in their vehicle, I believe
7 they were -- they had went to the other side. I believe they were
8 somewhere on the east side because I heard a -- I think while that
9 was going on, I think someone -- you know, I heard on the radio
10 the conversation of someone else on the east end doing the same
11 thing with the grain train. Someone hopped on the DP of the grain
12 train and pulled those cars -- pulled that part of it away from
13 the east end, too. You could kind of hear that conversation going
14 on over the radio as well.

15 Q. Very good. So did you notice any -- let me step back to
16 the time just prior to the train going into emergency. Was there
17 any remarkable performances of the train? Did you notice anything
18 unusual?

19 A. No, not at all. Because like I said, we just went over
20 the -- you know, right as we went through Casselton, from where I
21 -- my guess is -- like I said, it was all smooth. It was -- you
22 know, I didn't feel anything unusual as far as going over the
23 switches or anything like that. It felt like, you know, it just
24 felt like a smooth-riding train.

25 I'm trying to guess. When we stepped off and looked

1 back, my guess was that it was anywhere between the 20th to 30th
2 car, somewhere in there is where whatever happened, happened on
3 our train. And that just -- you know, I can't remember exactly,
4 but that's -- by the time we stepped off the grain train and kind
5 of, you know, looked back, to me, I thought it was like anywhere
6 between our 20th to 30th car, somewhere in there, whatever
7 happened with that, happened right in there.

8 But, no, like I said, as far as riding over that,
9 everything was smooth. Now, like I say, it was -- you know, I was
10 sitting in the brakeman's seat so I didn't have clear sight of the
11 actual, you know, of the actual air flow, on the gauges and all
12 that, sitting in the brakeman's seat. So for me, just sitting
13 there, kind of just looking over, watching, everything seemed to
14 be, you know, functioning as intended. There was nothing that I
15 noticed out of the ordinary.

16 And I think that's what kind of surprised us all when
17 the signal maintainer got on the radio and asked, you know, asked
18 us about our train, was the fact that sitting there, you know, you
19 would have never known anything -- you know, if you didn't have
20 the screen show, you know, PCS open, or the light go off, you
21 would have never known that we were in emergency.

22 Because like I say, right when he's talking to us, our
23 head end was still moving at 25 to 30. You know, we're getting
24 ready to make our stop, but, you know, it wasn't like we came to a
25 rough stop or anything like that. It was smooth. There was no

1 jolting of our head end or our power or anything. So as far as
2 that goes, it was, you know, it was -- everything on our end ran
3 pretty smoothly.

4 Q. All right. I have one more question. Do you feel like
5 you were coerced at all into moving those oil trains?

6 A. No, not at all. I think at the time of the situation,
7 we were in perfect position. Like I mentioned, I said, if there's
8 anything -- you know, if there's anything we can do to help the
9 situation, then, you know, I'm here, we're sitting here ready. Of
10 course, you know, I figured -- you know, we know how to run those
11 engines. If we get there and the fire department's there, you
12 know, there's only so much they can do as far as that. So, no,
13 not at all.

14 Like I said, they made it clear. They said, you know,
15 if you can do so safely, you know, that's your -- you know. And
16 then before we made even the initial first move, when we were in
17 the vehicle with that trainmaster and Road Foreman Paul Douglas,
18 they asked us, you know, now, are you guys okay with, you know,
19 with doing that? So, you know, I said yes. I had no problem with
20 it. We were in the perfect position to help the situation, so
21 that was my thought on it. You know, in no way did I feel coerced
22 into having to do any of that.

23 Q. All right. I have no other questions.

24 MR. HILLER: I'll pass around the room.

25 MR. SHILLINGSTAD: I have no questions.

1 BY MR. KENNER:

2 Q. Hi, Thomas. This is Dan Kenner with the BLET. And I
3 was just curious, when the student engineer got back up on the
4 head end after that second pull of cars, did he happen to mention
5 to you how close to the fire or derailment he was when he cut
6 those cars?

7 A. I think he -- I don't remember. I think he might have
8 been, you know, maybe 15 cars or so. I'm not sure exactly,
9 though. That would be my -- I think he might have said something
10 about 15 cars, but I'm not exactly sure.

11 Q. Okay. Thanks.

12 MR. BUCHHOLTZ: I have no questions.

13 MR. LINDSEY: No questions.

14 MR. WILDE: Tom, Kevin Wilde. No questions.

15 MR. HILLER: Okay, Tom, that does it for us. We are
16 going to conclude this interview. The time here is 1:55, and so
17 concludes the interview. We're done.

18 (Whereupon, at 1:55 p.m., 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 TRAIN DERAILMENT AND COLLISION
 CASSELTON, NORTH DAKOTA
 DECEMBER 30, 2013
 Interview of Thomas Cooks

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-14-MR-004

PLACE: Fargo, North Dakota

DATE: January 2, 2014

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.

Lisa Fuerstenberg
Transcriber