

DCA-08-MR-009

Head-on Collision Between

Metrolink Commuter Train No. 111
&
Union Pacific Freight Train No. LOF65-12

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

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Investigation of:

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TRAIN COLLISION
CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA

* Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009

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Interview of: ROBERT HELDENBRAND

Portland Hills, California

Wednesday,
September 17, 2008

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: TED TURPIN

APPEARANCES:

TED TURPIN, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
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RICK NARVELL

JIM REMINES, Inspector
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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. TURPIN: We're interviewing the conductor of a
3 northbound Metrolink train in connection with the accident that
4 happened September 12th, 2008, at Chatsworth, California, ID DCA-
5 08-MR-009. And we're having to conduct the interview at the
6 hospital with Rick Narvell, Jim Remines, Ted Fritz, and myself,
7 Ted Turpin.

INTERVIEW OF ROBERT HELDENBRAND

8
9 BY MR. TURPIN:

10 Q. And if you don't mind, Mr. Heldenbrand, do you realize
11 this conversation will be recorded?

12 A. Right.

13 Q. All right. Thank you. Tell us what happened.

14 A. Departed, departed Los Angeles on Metrolink train number
15 111, 3:35 p.m., stopping in Glendale and downtown Burbank, Burbank
16 Airport, Van Nuys. And, after we left Van Nuys, we stopped at CP
17 Ramer (ph.), waited at CP Ramer for about seven minutes for Amtrak
18 train number 784.

19 And after 784 passed, we got a green signal, proceeded
20 to Northridge, unloaded the passengers, got a green out of
21 Northridge and proceeded to Chatsworth, unloaded the passengers at
22 Chatsworth and high-balled out of Chatsworth. The last thing I
23 did was I was looking out my crew door window as we're required to
24 do for Metrolink, to check the platform to see if there's any
25 passengers that are trying to get to the train at the last second.

1 And the last thing I did before I closed my crew door
2 was I waved to this little old man that's there every afternoon.
3 He's kind of a rail buff. I turned around. I went back to my
4 desk, which is kind of like this little desk here that I work on,
5 I did my report on. And I was marking down my departure time from
6 Chatsworth, because we were about seven minutes late. And
7 normally we would be at Chatsworth at 4:16.

8 So it was about 4:22, I believe -- 4:22, I think that's
9 the last time I looked at my watch. And, as we were leaving
10 Chatsworth, I was standing facing the window, facing my desk, so
11 that the front of the train would be to my right, just like I'm
12 standing right here. And the next thing I knew, the train stopped
13 and everybody lurched forward and that was the end of it.

14 Q. On the -- out of Northridge, do you -- do you recall, do
15 you recall hearing the radio at all?

16 A. I remember him calling out at Northridge. He called a
17 green at the intermediate.

18 Q. Okay. Any, any more radio conversation?

19 A. No.

20 Q. There, there was a report -- I don't know if it was
21 right after (indiscernible), but there was a report that there was
22 possibly a green signal from Chatsworth station. Do you recall
23 the Chatsworth station?

24 A. When I looked up the platform -- and it's real easy to
25 see. When you leave Chatsworth, as you're closing the door, I

1 looked to my left and I saw a green signal at CP Topanga. And
2 that's what I saw. I saw a green signal at CP Topanga because
3 it's, it's, it's almost in a direct straight line right up the,
4 right up the line. In fact, you can stand there at the cab car at
5 the handicapped ramp and look straight to your left and you can
6 see it, and especially in the evening time.

7 Q. So you had your back towards the train?

8 A. So if I -- if this were, this were the crew door right
9 here, and that's the station, here's the track, this is the car, I
10 looked 90 degrees to my left.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. I can look straight up the track and see CP Topanga.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And that's the last thing I saw. We left Chatsworth.

15 Q. Do you know where that little guy, the old guy was that
16 you mentioned, where was he located at that time?

17 A. We were sitting on a -- we were sitting at the --
18 sitting in his little stone bench seat there. It's right in front
19 of the TVM machines.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. He sits there every day and he always waves to us and
22 says hi.

23 Q. Now -- we already have that (indiscernible). We know he
24 was mentioned. We've done everything --

25 A. Right.

1 Q. -- in our power to check the (indiscernible).

2 A. Right.

3 Q. As you know, you shouldn't have a green on an occupied
4 line, not southbound. He was already (indiscernible). He was
5 already through the tunnel (indiscernible). That's why I
6 (indiscernible) ask --

7 A. Right.

8 Q. -- (indiscernible) Topanga. So we're doing everything
9 in our power to try to confirm that it was green. And it's just
10 -- it's hard.

11 A. Right.

12 Q. Difficult because the signal method is (indiscernible)
13 and, you know, my -- I know we have to put these two together to
14 make them work.

15 SPEAKER: Did you see any passengers or anything that
16 could see what you saw when you looked up toward the signal
17 (indiscernible), someone that might have been standing very quiet
18 next to the track?

19 SPEAKER: Could the gentleman with the -- that you
20 mentioned earlier, the guy that's there everyday, could he have
21 possibly seen that signal also?

22 MR. HELDENBRAND: He may have, but he's an older guy.
23 He's probably in his 80s, and he's always there in the afternoon,
24 and he always, he always says hello and then he always waits til
25 we roll by and then he always waves and says, hi, Bob, and have a

1 good day, or something like that.

2 SPEAKER: Okay.

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: He's there every afternoon.

4 SPEAKER: Bob, what was your last face-to-face
5 (indiscernible)? Do you remember when that was, what time and
6 then what was his demeanor like?

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: Let me see. Oh, my last face-to-face,
8 actually, face-to-face would have been leaving -- I guess, leaving
9 Los Angeles. We did our, we did our air test. Yeah, we did our
10 air test at -- for train 111 at Union Station.

11 SPEAKER: Was there anything unusual, different?

12 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

13 SPEAKER: Did he say anything was bugging him, sick, not
14 feeling good?

15 MR. HELDENBRAND: No, uh-huh.

16 SPEAKER: Anything out of the ordinary?

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No.

18 SPEAKER: How long had you worked together?

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well, on this past job, we've been
20 together since October, because, you know, every, every six
21 months, October and April, we -- the rotation comes through. So
22 we've been on this job since like April 15th, about six months.

23 SPEAKER: Okay. You said October, but you meant April,
24 right?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

1 SPEAKER: Okay.

2 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

3 SPEAKER: April. Yeah, April (indiscernible). April,
4 yeah.

5 MR. HELDENBRAND: So it would be, what, May, June,
6 July --

7 SPEAKER: You said October (indiscernible).

8 MR. HELDENBRAND: -- August, September, October -- yeah,
9 about five, roughly, five months.

10 SPEAKER: You worked with him before?

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes. Yeah, we worked on and off,
12 because of the rotations.

13 SPEAKER: Right.

14 MR. HELDENBRAND: Because there's actually three jobs
15 out of Montalvo, so we rotated around a couple of times over the
16 last three and a half years.

17 SPEAKER: I don't want go on in too much detail. I have
18 some of this on record. What time did you mark up during the day,
19 like, right before 6 a.m.?

20 MR. HELDENBRAND: 5:54.

21 SPEAKER: Okay. And you work until?

22 MR. HELDENBRAND: 9:26.

23 SPEAKER: And then what happens?

24 MR. HELDENBRAND: Then we're off from 9:26 til 2 p.m.

25 SPEAKER: And then?

1 MR. HELDENBRAND: And then we come back on duty at 2,
2 and then at 3:05, we bring a three-car set from, from Taylor over
3 to Union Station at 3:05, and then we depart at 3:35, and Metro
4 train 111 service to Montalvo.

5 SPEAKER: And then what about the time, something like
6 9:00?

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah, we go up, we go up to Moorpark,
8 turn right around and come back at 1:18. Then we come back at
9 1:18, and then we flip over at 1:19, and then we go home to
10 Montalvo -- or we're due in at 8:35 and off duty at 9:05. That's,
11 that's the official job time.

12 SPEAKER: And this is five days a week?

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes, sir, Monday through Friday.

14 SPEAKER: Okay. What -- I don't -- and maybe you don't
15 know, there's time off during the -- what I call mid-day from,
16 like, 9:30 to 2. Do you know what, what he was doing? Does he
17 rest? Does he -- what does he do, do you know?

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah, normally, he just goes straight
19 home.

20 SPEAKER: He goes back home and then comes back again?

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Normally, what he does is --
22 because he has a house in La Cresenta.

23 SPEAKER: Right.

24 MR. HELDENBRAND: He's only like five miles away. And
25 up until January, that's what I used to do, too, because I lived

1 in Glendale. So I would normally -- we have our choice. We can
2 either go to a hotel, hang out at the lounge, and some guys just
3 go home if they live close by.

4 SPEAKER: Do you recall on Friday if he did go home?

5 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah, he went home and took a nap for
6 like two hours.

7 SPEAKER: That's -- well, I'm not familiar with the area
8 here. I'm sorry.

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: Oh.

10 SPEAKER: From his house to where he would get off at,
11 how many miles is that, do you know? You said he's off at 9:30
12 and then he goes home.

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well --

14 SPEAKER: How many miles away? Like I said, I don't --
15 (indiscernible) -- about eight or nine miles?

16 SPEAKER: Real, real close.

17 SPEAKER: Right up (indiscernible) --

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: Oh, yeah. Probably -- I don't even
19 know if it's that far, maybe eight miles.

20 SPEAKER: Eight or nine miles.

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

22 SPEAKER: Real close.

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Not even 10 --

24 SPEAKER: Not (indiscernible) 60 miles?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Oh, no. No, it's not even 10

1 minutes, because I know from Taylor Yard to my house in Glendale
2 is six miles, and he only lives like two miles up the freeway.

3 SPEAKER: You said he did take a two-hour nap, as far
4 as --

5 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

6 SPEAKER: And then he came back to work?

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Yeah. No, he told me that,
8 because he had gone home and, and he told me that. And when he
9 came back on duty, he had told me that he, he had a good rest. He
10 had a good two-hour nap.

11 SPEAKER: Did he describe any health conditions when he
12 was doing that?

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

14 SPEAKER: Any headaches or anything like that?

15 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

16 SPEAKER: Okay. I'd like to go back to the trip from
17 Northbridge to Chatsworth. Do you remember what you were doing at
18 the train at that time?

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Actually, what I was doing is I
20 -- after we left Northridge, I had a gal in a wheelchair that I
21 was attending to. She had gotten on in Los Angeles with her
22 mother, and they had come down on 106 train in the morning. And
23 there was a gal, and she was in one of these special wheelchairs.
24 It wasn't an electric wheelchair, but it was one of those, like,
25 super framework, had a heavy-duty framework.

1 And I had -- I was, I was in the cab car at that time
2 because normally on, on the weekdays we have a guy that rides on,
3 on L.A. to Chatsworth every day, but on Friday he wasn't there.
4 But I was in the cab car out of force of habit because, normally,
5 when we come into Chatsworth, we drop Scotty off. So I was in
6 the, I was in the, I was in the cab car coming in from Chatsworth.

7 SPEAKER: We, we did get a report in dispatch
8 (indiscernible) they just had been calling a flashing yellow. You
9 don't recall hearing that?

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No.

11 SPEAKER: What about this green signal, was there any
12 communications at that point between (indiscernible)? Did he call
13 out the green (indiscernible) from Chatsworth?

14 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No.

15 SPEAKER: Would, would that be unusual or would you
16 (indiscernible) you expect him to respond to you or --

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: Normally, normally, he calls -- when
18 we leave Chatsworth, I would close the doors and say, hi, Bob, and
19 I would say, you know, we came in on a green and, and then I would
20 -- and he would call me back and say, came in on a green, got a
21 green, see if you can (indiscernible). And that's -- 99 percent
22 of the time that's what we had.

23 SPEAKER: But you don't recall that conversation?

24 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

25 SPEAKER: So there was no call, no green --

1 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

2 SPEAKER: -- (indiscernible). Your words, that's, you
3 said, high-ball (indiscernible).

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

5 SPEAKER: And then (indiscernible)?

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

7 SPEAKER: You never had trouble communicating by radio
8 in there with the dispatcher or --

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: You mean as far as?

10 SPEAKER: In his transmissions.

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: The only time we would ever have any
12 trouble like that would be, like, going through the, going through
13 the hills, going through the tunnels. But, I mean, that area
14 right there is pretty good.

15 SPEAKER: But him not calling out the signals
16 (indiscernible) was that not unusual to you (indiscernible) point
17 of Topanga, Topanga, as far as him not calling it out? I just
18 want to know --

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: Oh.

20 SPEAKER: -- if you took any exception to that or the
21 intermediate, him not calling it out on the radio or, you know,
22 or --

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: No, I didn't take an exception to
24 that, no.

25 SPEAKER: Had he been calling the signals previously

1 during the day?

2 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

3 SPEAKER: Okay. And the radios were working --

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

5 SPEAKER: -- working properly? Okay.

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Because normally what happens, we --if
7 we meet -- we normally meet 784, at Ramer, and then we -- and they
8 come through. Then we usually get a green, take off. Then we'll
9 get an intermediate up there by, by Balboa, and then we -- and
10 then, and then we'll get a green coming out of, coming out of --
11 at 4:51 there out of Northridge.

12 SPEAKER: (indiscernible).

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: And normally, normally, we get greens
14 all the way out from there. We would normally get greens all the
15 way til, til we get to Moorpark because, normally, we would, we
16 would just scoot on up to Moorpark and turn around and come back
17 at 1:18.

18 SPEAKER: You were seven minutes off schedule. Did you
19 lose it on a meet that you had earlier? You said you were seven
20 minutes late arriving at Chatsworth.

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes. Yeah, because we, we waited at
22 Ramer for Amtrak 784.

23 SPEAKER: Do you often meet the, the Leesdale local, the
24 UP local?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: Every once in a while, but, normally,

1 if we meet them, we'd meet them up at Davis. Most of the times,
2 we'd meet them at Davis.

3 SPEAKER: Most of the time?

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: He'll be waiting for us at Davis.

5 SPEAKER: So the dispatcher ran him through and it was,
6 it was really kind of unusual then?

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Yeah, normally, if we see them,
8 we would see them at Davis.

9 SPEAKER: Any other unusual conditions? The area --
10 that area is (indiscernible) or complaints or, you know, unusual
11 conditions that you might think you'd have trouble dispatching
12 something or just something that would not meet your
13 expectations --

14 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

15 SPEAKER: -- in that area?

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: No, nothing that I can think of right
17 off the bat.

18 SPEAKER: Yeah. Do you ever see these little young --
19 there's been reports of these young teenage kids hanging around or
20 close by? Do you ever see them or just this old gentleman you
21 mentioned about the Chatsworth area?

22 MR. HELDENBRAND: Most of the time I've seen, I've seen
23 the, the old man. Because he's kind of like a -- it's --

24 SPEAKER: He's consistent?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. It's like having a cup of

1 coffee every morning at 6 a.m.

2 SPEAKER: He's right there.

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: He's there every day. And he's -- I
4 think he's retired. And he just comes down there to the train
5 station and watches trains.

6 SPEAKER: Do you -- have you seen him look at the
7 signals while you're there? I mean, was he that involved in what
8 you were doing to actually look at signals?

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: Only to the extent that, that he would
10 make a comment every once in a while. Like, if Amtrak was really
11 late or something like that, he would say -- he'd say something to
12 the effect as we were leaving, because when we pull in, I'd be at
13 the handicapped ramp --

14 SPEAKER: Right.

15 MR. HELDENBRAND: -- the, the P&A (ph.) ramp, because
16 Monday through Thursday, we always have Scotty, who has cerebral
17 palsy.

18 SPEAKER: Um-hum.

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: He has one of those electric carts.
20 So Monday through Thursday, we always drop Scotty off at
21 Chatsworth.

22 SPEAKER: Um-hum.

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: So I have to be in the cab car to open
24 the door for Scotty and put that one (indiscernible). So, Monday
25 through Thursdays -- the only day Scotty's not there is on a

1 Friday, because Scotty works a four-day work week. So I'm always,
2 I'm always at, at the Chatsworth P&A ramp at the east end, which
3 is the railroad east of the station for, for Chatsworth.

4 SPEAKER: Why I'm asking that is he -- I spoke with him
5 on the station platform.

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Uh-huh.

7 SPEAKER: And he said he had a conversation with the
8 engineer, and he said he looked to the signal and saw it was
9 green. That's one thing he said. And so I just want to know if
10 he could be a credible witness for our purposes.

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: I think he could be because he seems
12 to be -- he seems to -- I mean, even though he's an older man -- I
13 mean, I'm 51, and he's probably got to be in his 70s. I'm just
14 guessing. I didn't really know how old is.

15 SPEAKER: Sixty-five.

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: Huh?

17 SPEAKER: He's 65.

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: Sixty-five?

19 SPEAKER: High (indiscernible).

20 MR. HELDENBRAND: Wow. Yeah, I thought he was older.

21 SPEAKER: We did too.

22 MR. HELDENBRAND: But he seems to, you know, he seems to
23 be very cognizant.

24 SPEAKER: Right.

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: And he seems to be aware of what's

1 going on, you know, as far as what's going on around him.

2 SPEAKER: Okay.

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: I mean, he's not -- in other words,
4 not some sort of, of like --

5 SPEAKER: (indiscernible)?

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well, what I mean is --

7 SPEAKER: (indiscernible).

8 MR. HELDENBRAND: -- educationally backwards or
9 something, educationally retarded. Maybe that's not the right
10 word to use.

11 SPEAKER: Right.

12 SPEAKER: But I know, like, I just wasn't -- you said
13 you (indiscernible) that you saw him. That's why I asked if he
14 got up from the bench and then he walked over to the engineer
15 while he was stopped and you might have seen that.

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: The only thing, I saw him was when we
17 left. He was sitting, he was sitting at his -- on his, on his
18 little bench there. He always sits on that little bench
19 underneath the shelter, which is directly almost, like, 15 feet
20 away from the TVM machines that sit there at the west end of the
21 station.

22 SPEAKER: Well, here's hard stuff, you know, you know
23 what I'm saying. Not only was the signal red by (indiscernible)
24 recorder in terms of (indiscernible) switch, the switch installed
25 in the siding, and, you know, Metrolink (indiscernible) red. So

1 we're trying to piece together this and we're going to run more
2 tests.

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

4 SPEAKER: Because the other part of this picture is how
5 we got -- and I'm sure you've seen them (indiscernible)
6 communicating with these kids (indiscernible). Okay. We've got
7 subpoenas out there and (indiscernible) trying to figure out what
8 happened with the cell phone.

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

10 SPEAKER: And verifying whether it was (indiscernible).
11 Do you recall Robert using his cell phone much when he was
12 operating -- or do you know he had it?

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well, I know he had this thing and I
14 know it was -- it wasn't a phone like mine. It was one of those
15 things with a keypad.

16 SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: That's the only thing I know.

18 SPEAKER: Like that?

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: Exactly. Like a --

20 SPEAKER: BlackBerry.

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well, I call it a BlackBerry, but some
22 people call it a keyboard.

23 SPEAKER: But it had a whole keyboard on it?

24 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

25 SPEAKER: Did you guys ever use your cell phones once in

1 a while if you couldn't use the radio?

2 MR. HELDENBRAND: Every once in a while. But, but very
3 often -- but very, very rarely.

4 SPEAKER: Did you actually call Robert or talk with him
5 on the cell phone, if you couldn't get him by radio?

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Not usually. Normally -- in fact, I'm
7 trying to remember if I, if I -- the only time I ever called him
8 on the cell phone was if it was time to go to work, like, you know
9 -- or, like, he would have called me from home. Like, he called
10 me a few days ago because he was on his way down the hill and he
11 had a flat tire on his Honda Accord. And the only reason I knew
12 that is because he called me on my home phone. Well, I shouldn't
13 say my home -- my personal cell phone.

14 SPEAKER: Do you have a second phone, personal cell
15 phone?

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

17 SPEAKER: Okay.

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: (indiscernible) company phone.

19 SPEAKER: Oh, they issue -- Metrolink gives you a --

20 MR. HELDENBRAND: The, the company issues a cell phone
21 and that's a cell phone that the company issues.

22 SPEAKER: Okay. Just for conductors?

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

24 SPEAKER: Every conductor has a cell phone?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

1 SPEAKER: Okay. Yeah.

2 SPEAKER: If he were at the controls and the train were
3 moving, and he'd be on his cell phone, would you pay attention it?

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

5 SPEAKER: Okay.

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

7 SPEAKER: (indiscernible)?

8 MR. HELDENBRAND: I have -- I had one time.

9 SPEAKER: How long ago was that?

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: Several months back.

11 SPEAKER: And how -- what was his response to you?

12 MR. HELDENBRAND: I, I, I was, I was -- we were leaving,
13 we were leaving Moorpark and I just said, hey, you know, you can't
14 be doing this on the, on the train.

15 SPEAKER: What, was he in the cab car?

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: Cab car.

17 SPEAKER: So you were right there --

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

19 SPEAKER: -- at the time?

20 MR. HELDENBRAND: I happened to be right there. In
21 fact, the reason I was up there is because I had walked up just to
22 mention to him that, that we had a wheelchair coming up.

23 SPEAKER: Was the train moving then or was it
24 stationary?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: The train, the train was stationary.

1 SPEAKER: Okay.

2 SPEAKER: I guess maybe just clarify one thing.

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: Okay.

4 SPEAKER: When we were asking about did he converse on
5 his cell phone, he didn't have any cell phone conversations at
6 work, I mean, while you guys were actually out on the train
7 working? He never had to use his cell phone to call anyone or
8 whatever?

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. They --

10 SPEAKER: (indiscernible)?

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

12 SPEAKER: And you normally would communicate, then, by a
13 hand-held radio on your part --

14 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

15 SPEAKER: -- a (indiscernible)?

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

17 SPEAKER: Would he -- and (indiscernible), would he
18 normally call out signals to you or --

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: Absolutely.

20 SPEAKER: Okay.

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: Absolutely.

22 SPEAKER: Was it unusual he didn't call the intermediate
23 that day?

24 MR. HELDENBRAND: I think so, yes. Yeah. Yeah, he's
25 very good at calling, you know, everything, green -- everything.

1 SPEAKER: How would you rate his operational
2 capabilities? One to 10, was he a great engineer, a 10, or a 5, a
3 mediocre engineer? If you could, give us a (indiscernible)?

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Well, I would say he's like about a
5 9.5, 9.8. And the reason I say that is because very cognizant of
6 what's going on. In fact, it's kind of interesting, whenever we
7 had a Form B or a Form A, he would always make sure that -- he
8 would remind me of it before I even had a chance to remind him of
9 it. Yeah. So like, if we had a Form B at milepost 10 --

10 SPEAKER: Um-hum.

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: -- and you're supposed to call it, you
12 know, two, two miles before or beyond the last station, he would,
13 he would remind me at like milepost 14 and just say, oh, by the
14 way, you know, we got Foreman, Foreman Mendoza coming up. And I'd
15 say, yes, we do, and then I'd call him again on it.

16 So he was, he was ahead -- I guess, what -- I guess,
17 what I'm trying to say is he'd be ahead of the game in that
18 respect. He would call it even ahead of time just as a -- like an
19 additional reminder.

20 SPEAKER: Did you take any exception to the way he came
21 out of the tunnel or anything? You know, proceed on the green and
22 accelerated out of the tunnel. Was there anything to you as far
23 as his operating the train that would have been unusual up to the
24 point of accident?

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No.

1 SPEAKER: You didn't -- weren't alarmed that something
2 was going on with him?

3 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No, nothing, nothing out of the
4 ordinary.

5 SPEAKER: I don't have any more right now, Bob. I have
6 a number of questions, but I'm not going to answer them here
7 because you're still on the mend and these could take a long time.

8 But what I'd like to do at some point is to get -- do
9 you have e-mail?

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right now my computer's dead.

11 SPEAKER: Okay.

12 MR. HELDENBRAND: So the only thing I really have -- I
13 was in the process of moving.

14 SPEAKER: Okay.

15 MR. HELDENBRAND: And so right now the only thing I
16 really have is my, my home phone and my cell phone.

17 SPEAKER: Okay.

18 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah, my, my computer's dead right
19 now.

20 SPEAKER: There will come a time after you're done with
21 your recuperation we'll have a bigger group of people and that
22 wanted -- that should -- that we held out because just what's
23 happened and condition (indiscernible). And we will set up
24 another interview later on and it probably will be after you're
25 released from the hospital.

1 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

2 SPEAKER: What's your prognosis right now? Have they
3 given you time line of --

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No, in fact, on Saturday morning
5 they took me downstairs for a possible surgery because they had
6 noticed after doing a CAT scan, they noticed that they thought
7 that I might have a tear on my aorta. But they went in Saturday
8 morning through here. They did a, a chest tube, put in a chest
9 tube to drain my chest cavity. And they went in and looked
10 around, kind of an exploratory surgery, and determined that there
11 actually was not a tear in the aorta.

12 SPEAKER: That's good.

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: What I do have right now is a pretty
14 good Charlie horse right here, and I think when I sat down --
15 because I was, I was literally like this at my desk, like this.

16 SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: And I think at the time it would have
18 been going this way and I think I went backwards this way because
19 I remember sitting down on my butt.

20 SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

21 MR. HELDENBRAND: And then I, I remember the wind being
22 knocked out of me.

23 SPEAKER: What did you strike? Was it just the ground
24 or another seat or --

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: The floor.

1 SPEAKER: The floor?

2 MR. HELDENBRAND: Floor.

3 SPEAKER: The floor.

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah, because right next to the desk
5 is the hallway.

6 SPEAKER: Right.

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: And behind the desk on either side is
8 those two flip-up bench seats --

9 SPEAKER: Um-hum.

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: -- where they put wheelchairs. So
11 those were both up. And so I remember going kind of this
12 direction and then sort of like going back like this. And, and I
13 think that's why my right arm might have hit -- there's a
14 stanchion right here next to that little desk, because the desk is
15 actually up higher like this, where I put my delay report. And I
16 remember going this direction.

17 But I think I must have landed butt first on my left
18 side and then I think the pressure kind of pushed my rib cage
19 because my rib cage was hurting pretty good. And you know how
20 when you're in school and like some kid comes up to you and
21 punches you in the stomach? That's what it felt like. It
22 literally felt like I got the wind knocked out of me for a few
23 seconds.

24 And the next thing I remember -- I didn't black out, I
25 was, I was conscious and awake the whole time, but I was gasping

1 for breath. And then the next thing I remember is I grabbed my
2 radio and I was calling, "Emergency, emergency, emergency." And
3 one of the passengers -- I was also trying to dial the dispatcher.
4 And I dialed the dispatcher, and I think one of the passengers,
5 named Jeremy, who was riding with another passenger, I think he
6 picked up the phone, my cell phone company phone, and called
7 (indiscernible).

8 SPEAKER: Do you -- we heard a recording of you talking
9 "emergency, emergency, emergency." Was that on a radio or cell
10 phone at that point on the dispatch (indiscernible)?

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: I might have had the phone on at the
12 same time.

13 SPEAKER: There was a sheriff that came into the picture
14 somewhere there. It sounded like you were off the train. Were
15 you off the train at that point? At that time you were off the
16 train or were you still on the train?

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: I was still on the train.

18 SPEAKER: Okay. Because I --

19 MR. HELDENBRAND: There was a sheriff -- there's a
20 sheriff that rides home everyday. He actually -- he's not with
21 Metrolink, but he's with the Sheriff's Division.

22 SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: And his name is John Ebert (ph.).

24 SPEAKER: Okay.

25 MR. HELDENBRAND: And he and another Amtrak employee

1 were the ones who actually helped me off the train. But that was
2 long after the train was stopped. And it was Jeremy, a passenger,
3 who actually came to the car and said, "Come on, everybody, you
4 got to get out now."

5 SPEAKER: Okay.

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: And, and actually it was Jeremy --
7 because I was still, I was still trying to get my wind back.

8 SPEAKER: It sounded like (indiscernible) on the phone
9 conversation that you were just out of wind because you're gasping
10 and yelling, "Emergency, emergency, fire."

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right.

12 SPEAKER: Yeah.

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: Right. And I remember saying,
14 "Emergency, emergency, emergency. We're west of the signal." And
15 I heard the dispatcher call -- I think it was Mark -- say, "Are
16 you west of the signal?" And I said, "Yes, we're west of the
17 signal." And I said we have a fire. I said something like that.

18 And then, after that, I think, that's when most of the
19 passengers were helping other passengers, trying to get out the
20 door, because someone had already snapped the little glass thing,
21 pulled the red cord, and opened the crew door, single crew door.

22 SPEAKER: Anything with respect to Mr. Sanchez that you
23 saw that may have been a distraction to him, preoccupation when
24 you started the trip out of L.A.? Anything bothering him or did
25 he mention anything (indiscernible)?

1 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah -- no, nothing that I'm aware of.
2 The only, the only -- in fact, in fact, we didn't have the
3 wheelchair until we got to Moorpark. And we didn't have Scotty,
4 because Scotty wasn't there on Friday, as far as stopping at
5 Chatsworth.

6 SPEAKER: When you (indiscernible), was he tired? Did
7 he look tired or anything or --

8 SPEAKER: Because he took a good nap that day or was
9 that just --

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No. I think he -- I think that
11 for him a nap like that is a normal thing.

12 SPEAKER: Did he, did he mention that before taking it?

13 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

14 SPEAKER: Go home and get a couple hours sleep --

15 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

16 SPEAKER: -- and then come back in for the evening?

17 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yes.

18 SPEAKER: Did he ever tell you what he slept at night?
19 Did he go straight to bed when he got home or do you know if he --

20 MR. HELDENBRAND: Oh, yeah. Yeah. No, he -- I don't
21 think he was a person who would -- I personally feel he was not
22 one to stay up late, because, because he -- I think he would go
23 straight home and just go straight to bed.

24 SPEAKER: Did he ever complain about not getting enough
25 sleep or --

1 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No. I don't remember --

2 SPEAKER: Did he say anything about what (indiscernible)
3 stuff and all that? You know, they have the (indiscernible).

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Oh, the different -- no, huh-huh.

5 SPEAKER: Did he talk about any of that?

6 MR. HELDENBRAND: No. No.

7 SPEAKER: Did you know him to take any medications at
8 all?

9 MR. HELDENBRAND: No.

10 SPEAKER: And he (indiscernible).

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah.

12 SPEAKER: Just thinking (indiscernible) about an hour's
13 drive home from, from, what, (indiscernible).

14 SPEAKER: Bob, you said leaving Northridge you were
15 attending to a lady in a wheelchair?

16 MR. HELDENBRAND: Yeah. Yeah. The woman, the woman
17 that has her child, they were -- we get quite a few -- we pick up
18 quite a few kids at, at Northridge, because Cal State's back in
19 session. So we pick up a lot of kids at Cal State.

20 So, you know, the -- leaving Northridge, the only thing
21 I was doing was, was basically opening and closing the doors. And
22 I remember the woman -- in fact, there was a couple other women
23 that had gotten on the train. They were settling in in that
24 little four-seater right there, talking with the, with the woman
25 and her daughter. And that was about it, just a little

1 interaction.

2 SPEAKER: You didn't have any conversation with her or
3 anything?

4 MR. HELDENBRAND: Not that I, I -- I don't remember
5 having a conversation with the daughter, but I remember just
6 saying hello or something to the two women that got on at
7 Northridge that were there.

8 SPEAKER: Okay. (indiscernible)?

9 SPEAKER: You have my card here, too.

10 MR. HELDENBRAND: Okay.

11 SPEAKER: What I'd like to do and, again, I don't want
12 to go into this today. I just want to give you an idea of some of
13 the things you'll probably get in the future.

14 MR. HELDENBRAND: Okay.

15 SPEAKER: Before we turn the tape recorder off, I'd like
16 everyone in the room to state their name, spell it,
17 (indiscernible).

18 MR. FRITZ: Ted Fritz, T-e-d, F-r-i-t-z.

19 MR. TURPIN: Ted Turpin, T-e-d, T-u-r-p-i-n.

20 MR. REMINES: Jim Remines, R-e-m-i-n-e-s.

21 MR. NARVELL: Rick Narvell, N-a-r-v-e-l-l.

22 MR. GARCIA: Ramon Garcia, G-a-r-c-i-a.

23 MR. HELDENBRAND: Robert Heldenbrand, H-e-l-d-e-n-b-r-a-
24 n-d.

25 SPEAKER: What time is it?

1 SPEAKER: It's 3:15.

2 SPEAKER: 3:15.

3 SPEAKER: I got some things on here, but I'll have some
4 more and I'll mail them to you and then you can mail them back at
5 your leisure. Maybe by then you'll (indiscernible) and everything
6 is (indiscernible).

7 MR. HELDENBRAND: Okay.

8 SPEAKER: Okay? (indiscernible). There will be some
9 more. I just want to mention just some things in the back
10 (indiscernible).

11 MR. HELDENBRAND: Very good.

12 SPEAKER: Okay.

13 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled matter
14 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: TRAIN COLLISION
 CHATSWORTH, CALIFORNIA
 Interview of Robert Heldenbrand

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-08-MR-009

PLACE: Portland Hills, California

DATE: September 17, 2008

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.

Kay Maurer
Transcriber