

REPORT OF INTERVIEW

Person Interviewed

NAME: Michael Owen
Michael Sicuranzo, Captain
Michael Kohnany
Anthony Ciancio, Commissioner

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

CITY: Valhalla STATE: NY ZIP: 10595

PHONE: [REDACTED] EMAIL [REDACTED]

OCCUPATION: Valhalla Fire Dept.

Date of Interview: 2/7/15

Place of Interview: Valhalla Fire Department

Others Present: Mary Pat McKay NTSB, DaveTyrell Volpe, Matt Pelosa MTAFD

Interviewed By: Richard M. Green, Railroad Safety Specialist - Region 1

Validated by Interviewee on:

The above person was interviewed relevant to an investigation being conducted by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The following statements, and/or comments, are provided as part of this investigation, and although not verbatim, accurately and fully reflect the statements and/or comments of the participant. In addition, the interview was voluntary and I indicated to the participant that this interview will become an attachment to a violation of Federal regulations, should the investigation warrant such enforcement action.

On 2/3/15 at approximately 6:30PM there was a highway rail grade crossing accident at Commerce Street Valhalla, NY resulting in a fire, 6 fatalities and with an evacuation of passenger train MNCW No.659. The interviewees were part of an emergency response to the accident site to assist in the evacuation of injured and non-injured passengers. The interview was conducted with all participants in the room. The following is a brief synopsis of the interviews.

MICHAEL KOHNANY: Mr. Kohnany was assigned to the rescue truck and was one of the first responders to the scene. He observed another fire truck and medical personnel on the scene. There were passengers both on and off the train and he observed a passenger with a possible heart attack being taken care of by EMS. He walked to the front of the train and met EMS with two patients, one with a broken leg and one with two broken legs. He assisted in carrying these injured to Commerce Street using a sled in the snow on the adjacent track. Ambulances were at Commerce Street to accept the injured. When asked about any fire he may have witnessed he said he saw what appeared to be a small fire at the front of the train and the first car smoldering. He said he then assisted in the evacuation of the passengers from the last car in the train. It was his impression there was no EMS person in charge of triage. There was a question about an "ATV" being used at the site and he said yes there was a vehicle being used to transport equipment and injured between Commerce Street and the lead car of the train.

MICHAEL OWEN: When Mr. Owen arrived in a fire truck on Commerce Street, he arrived on the west side of the track and was blocked by the rear portion of train No.659 at the crossing. He walked along the west side of the train near the cemetery when he noticed passengers evacuating the train and walking in the snow. He directed them to stay on the train and walk through the train to the last car which was on the crossing. He searched the cemetery area for anyone injured. He said that the aerial ladder parked on the Taconic Parkway had a heat sensing detector which could help locate victims. He had assisted a man and woman by walking them through the train. He said he assisted putting some injured passengers on the ATV to bring back to Commerce Street crossing. When asked about the fire he did say he noticed that there was a fire in the front half of the train but not sure where at the time. We asked if the aerial ladder was used to extinguish the fire but he said no, that hand hoses were supplied by Truck 154 from the Taconic Parkway.

MICHAEL SICURANZO: Captain Sicuranzo had two lieutenants and two firefighters with him when he responded to the accident at Commerce Street. They also arrived on the west side and walked between the train and the cemetery to look for victims. They observed people walking towards them in the snow. Two injured passengers were being attended to by EMS on the side of the train. They proceeded to the second head car and boarded the train. They had observed the first car was on fire. They had asked if the third rail power was off. They were checking for any injured passengers in the car. When they got to the north end of the car they could see into the first car and observed a body on the right side of the car that was burning. They got off the second car and walked up to the first car and he said he heard explosions. He directed responders to use the Taconic Parkway to access the fire. He directed the responders to use ladders to gain access over the water stream between the tracks and the Taconic. Three hoses were brought across to extinguish the fire. He believes at one point they used foam. He observed multiple fires within the rail car the hottest being towards the front. They began to pull out the windows to have better access to the fire. He said he observed one body in the back of the car and one in the front. He said it appeared that everything in the car was burning.

ANTHONY CIANCIO: Commissioner Ciancio arrived from the vehicle accident at the intersection of Lakeview and the Taconic Parkway. When he observed the scene he requested additional assistance. He parked his vehicle on the east side of the train at Commerce Street and noticed passengers self-evacuating by jumping from the open doorway on the last car. He told them to wait until they got a ladder to make it easier to get down. He assisted in setting up a headquarters and triage at Commerce Street. He noticed that passengers coming off the train were confused and he directed them to a nearby gym for warmth. He thought there might have been some conflict between the various responders. There was no clear Incident Commander. He commented that he had been a firefighter for several years and he remembered responding to a similar incident in 1984 where a van was struck at the same crossing and that the third rail had been torn out but it did not enter the van and it fell to the wayside. (Note: according to FRA records there was an accident at this crossing on 10/10/84).

ALL: I had asked about any training they might have received concerning responding to an accident involving rail equipment. Mr. Ciancio said he believed they had some training about 10 years ago. Mr. Sicuranzo said he had training when he was with the Scardale FD at the fire academy. The other two men said they did not receive any training. They were aware that training is available. I asked how they knew about the dangers of an energized third rail and they said it was just by living in the area around the railroad.