



## **SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT**

**NTSB Interviews**

**Flushing, NY**

**HWY17MH015**

(9 pages)

## Responder Interviews

### 1. Captain Anthony Catalanotto

Engine 274- Battalion 52

41-20 Murray Street, Flushing, New York 11355

Date: 9-21-17

Time: 1: 39 p.m.

Captain Catalanotto advised that Engine 274 was the second arriving engine at the scene. Engine 274 approached from the east and made a left onto Main Street to arrive at the location. Engine 273 and Ladder 129 of Battalion 52 arrived first. The lieutenant on the truck company was in charge. Both of these units are housed at the same station located at 40-18 Union Street. Also on the scene was the NYPD ESU unit that is located not far from E 273 on Union Street. A 10-60 was called which is the code for a Major Emergency Response. (See Attached FDNY Communications Manual Chapter 8 on 10-60 Major Emergency Response). Additional units on the initial response were Battalion 46 and Rescue 4.

When Engine 274 arrived on the scene, there were 6-8 victims sitting on the curb which included the driver of the MTA transit bus. There was police officers and EMS personnel already inside of the transit bus, so Capt. Catalanotto ordered his crew to stretch a hose line. When the captain approached the motorcoach, he advised that he looked inside using a flashlight. He could not see the driver. It took him several minutes to locate the driver in the wreckage. The driver wasn't located in the front of the motorcoach, where he was expected to be. Units utilized a saws-all to gain access to the interior of the motorcoach. The extrication of the driver from the motorcoach occurred quickly once personnel had gained entry into the motorcoach. Captain Catalanotto advised that it was impossible to see under the motorcoach and there was no access. He estimates that approximately 30 minutes had passed before they found the male pedestrian in the debris.

A small gas-feed fire started in the rear of the restaurant. The fire was insignificant because the motorcoach had sheered-off the standpipe riser in the front of the building and water was flowing freely into the structure. A small gas line had been severed on a cooker and the fire was quickly extinguished.

Once the scene was secured, a second driver from MTA was allowed access to the transit to remove the accident driver's bag.

Captain Catalanotto advised that command officers on the scene included Division 14- Chief McSweeney, Incident Commander Sangiemo and Dr. Leo, the FDNY Medical Doctor.

FDNY background:

Captain Catalanotto advised that Fire Department and EMS operations are separate though both fall under the umbrella of the FDNY. Overall, 70% of the EMS service is provided by uniformed Fire Department personnel and 30% by private contractor-hospitals. In the Bronx, the percentage between Fire Department and contract EMS service is almost 50% each. The contract EMS services are provided out of NY Presbyterian Hospital and Flushing. They are dispatched through the same 911 system as the Fire Department EMS services and utilize the same dispatchers as the Fire Operation. The EMS services operate on a different channel (radio zone) though a common “fire ground” channel is available to allow interoperable communications between fire and ems services during an incident. The EMS services have their own protocols and command structure and staff. Though promotion from the EMS services to regular Fire Department services is available to uniformed members. Engine company personnel are required to have “Advanced First aid” and receive additional compensation. This is not a requirement for the ladder companies though several ladder company members may have this qualification. However, it is not mandatory and they do not receive additional compensation. Most of the Fire service personnel work a 24 hour on duty/72 hour off duty shift. This, however is a private arrangement between personnel. The official duty schedule for the FDNY is (2) 9 hour days, (2) days off, (2) 15 hour nights with three days off. FDNY allows its personnel to trade shifts amongst themselves and most chose to do so and work 24/72. The only limitation is that no FDNY member (Fire service) can work more than 24 hours in a shift.

## 2. Lieutenant Paul DeLeo

Ladder 129, Battalion 52

40-18 Union Street, Flushing, NY

Date: 09-21-17

Time: 3:29 p.m.

Lieutenant DeLeo reports that they received “the ticket” (the run) at approximately 6:15 a.m. Lt. DeLeo advised that the ticket just said “emergency”. He noted that it lacked detail. Normally, for this type of incident, the response would have included more than one engine and one truck. Later, Lieutenant DeLeo had been made aware of the fact that a police car had been parked on the corner. This raised an issue with the FDNY. As the units approached the scene, at Northern Boulevard the dispatcher provided additional information. The units were advised that a bus or buses were involved in an accident and had crashed into a building. Lt. DeLeo noted that there was a lack of traffic coming towards them (eastbound) on Northern Boulevard which told him that there was an issue since there was normally traffic on that roadway. The units traveled the wrong way (westbound) on Northern Boulevard until they arrived at the scene.

Upon arrival, the first thing he noticed was that the city bus was facing the wrong way. He observed a female lying on the ground behind the city bus covered in debris from the building. The woman was leaning up against some type of post. A portion of the store, to include the

awning, was lying on top of her. FDNY personnel were already attempting to extricate her. Lt. DeLeo believed that the woman worked for MTA. She was wearing a blue shirt and he believed that he observed a MTA ID lying on the ground.

Lt. DeLeo entered the transit bus. The front-loading door was open and the bus was slightly listing to the side. The driver of the city bus was not on the bus and the lieutenant never saw him. Lt. DeLeo walked through the city bus and counted approximately 8-10 victims still on the bus. All but one appeared to have been tossed around during the crash. In the center of the bus, one male passenger was still in his seat and appeared to have been asleep the entire time. He was in the seat either immediately in front of or behind the rear door on the passenger side. He was slumped forward in the seat and appeared to be asleep. The lieutenant described this man as a "scruffy looking w/m". He was still seated and appeared not to have moved during the rotation of the bus. Everyone else was on the floor, twisted around. A male subject was observed lying across the rear seat of the city bus. The subject didn't look "twisted" correctly. He believed that all the seats in the rear were down. Several individuals were found wedged under the seats on the right (looking towards the rear-driver's side). Lt. DeLeo radioed the 52 Battalion to advise them since he didn't see them on "the box". (It should be noted that the 52 Battalion was sent to the United Nations on a detail at 5:00 a.m.) The chauffeur (driver) of Engine 273 advised the lieutenant that the 46 Battalion was enroute but was some distance away. The officer of Engine 273 conferred with the lieutenant and both agreed that a 10-60 should be transmitted. Lieutenant DeLeo advised that 10-60s are usually called by an on scene chief but under the circumstances, he decided that it was necessary to call the 10-60 without waiting.

Lt. DeLeo then went to the motorcoach and found that no access was immediately available. Using a ladder and a saws-all, Ladder 129 cut a hole through the window and gain access to the interior of the bus. NYPD ESU unit had to cut a hole in a window on the opposite side of the motorcoach. Once inside, the lieutenant confirmed that the driver was the only occupant. Along with NYPD ESU they worked to extricate the driver. Lieutenant DeLeo noted that the driver was in "extremely" bad shape. He was alive and talking though they could not understand what he was saying. It was unclear, to them, whether this was a language problem or resulting from the injuries he sustained. It took approximately 20 minutes to extricate the driver from the wreckage.

In addition to the woman, the lieutenant was advised by other firefighters that a male subject was also located in the building debris. Later that evening, Lt. DeLeo advised that he was watching the news. None of the deceased victims and their locations matched that of the woman. He assumed that she had survived. Lt. DeLeo confirmed that the transit bus was intact and the woman could not have been ejected from the vehicle.

The lieutenant confirmed that the driver of the motorcoach was alive when the fire department personnel encountered him. Lieutenant DeLeo advised that he sent a member of his unit up to

begin patient care. This firefighter was previously with the EMS service and trained. The firefighter remained with the victim until the trauma medics arrived on the scene and took over patient care. This firefighter confirmed that the motorcoach driver, despite his injuries, had initially survived the crash.

Lieutenant DeLeo noted that if there was one thing that the FDNY would like to see come out of this accident, it would be for a push for a secondary access. The lieutenant advised that going through the windows of the motorcoach was difficult due to the double paned, glazed windows. The windows are not easy to manipulate in an emergency. The motorcoach had only a front door. Lieutenant DeLeo advised that motorcoaches don't possess the same type of windows found in city buses which are easy to pop open from the outside. Neither do motorcoaches possess a rear door like school buses. The lieutenant noted that if more passengers had been on the motorcoach, evacuation would have been more complicated delayed due to the lack of a second entrance. He noted that this was the second time that he has had to force entry into a motorcoach by way of the side window.

The three rows of seats, by the access window, were removed to facilitate the use of a stokes basket to remove the driver from the motorcoach through the window.

After the removal of the driver of the motorcoach, the male pedestrian was located inside of the building during a secondary search approximately 5-10 minutes later. They observed the victim's legs. Lt. DeLeo advised that due to the hazardous conditions, the building structural problems, he wanted to determine if the victim was alive. In addition, it was obvious that the buses would have to be moved to extricate him.

Lt. DeLeo was not close enough to see if the motorcoach driver was wearing a seatbelt. (The lieutenant would check and get back to the investigator). Note: Lt. DeLeo called back after speaking with the firefighter that provided patient care once access to the victim was achieved. The firefighter advised that he didn't see a seatbelt on the motorcoach driver nor did he see anyone remove the seatbelt.

Lt. DeLeo confirmed that the fire was very small. The standpipe broke off and water flooded the building. The small fire was not an issue and the gas was quickly shut off. A hose line had been stretched into the building just in case.

#### FDNY Background:

In 1995/96 the EMS services were operated out of the hospitals and separate from the FDNY. Currently, the EMS service is overseen by FDNY. Ladder company personnel are not usually trained in EMS though individuals could be promoted out of the EMS service into the fire service. An example of this was the firefighter on Ladder 129 who provided patient care to the motorcoach driver.

The EMS and Fire services operate on different channels. They are dispatched by the same communications center, utilizing the same dispatchers. There are interoperability channels “fire ground” channels that allow both services to communicate directly over one common channel. Chief McSweeney was the overall chief of the incident. Due to the size and nature of the incident, there would have been an EMS chief on the scene as well.

FDNY is very flexible when it comes to the shifts their personnel can work. Most firefighters choose to work some variation of a 24hour shift.

Additional units on the scene: Rescue 4 housed on Queens Blvd and Battalion 46

### 3. NYPD Officer Bart Tully

Telephone interview March 13, 2018

Officer Tully was one of the two officers who were near the scene at the time of the crash. He was with Officer Zeppetelli. He was asked to describe what occurred when the crash took place. He responded that he and his partner were ordering breakfast when they heard a loud screech and crash, and dust and debris billowed into where they were at. His immediate thought was that it might be a gas explosion. He and his partner ran outside and saw that it was two buses that crashed into the building. They called in the event and over to the wreckage. He saw a female victim pinned between a light pole and a bus, and she looked badly injured. He did not feel he could help her and went to assess the scene. He saw the driver working to open the door of the MTA bus, and then looked at the motorcoach. He saw that the front end was badly damaged and that there was no immediate access to the motorcoach due to the damage. He returned to the MTA bus and saw that the driver had gotten the door open, and people were exiting the bus. He is also a volunteer fire fighter and EMT. He directed people getting off the MTA bus to a area across the road. He was not sure where his partner was at this time, but returned to the motorcoach to check for passengers. About this time, other responders (NYPD ESU) started to arrive. He and some other responders broke out a left rear passenger window of the motorcoach to check inside. They saw that there were no passengers on the motorcoach, and returned to check on the passengers of the MTA bus. He saw the MTA bus driver and said that he appeared to have minor injuries such as bumps and scrapes. He help attend to MTA passengers as more responders arrived. He and his partner escorted the driver of the MTA bus to the hospital, with his partner in the ambulance and he driving the patrol car behind. He was asked if he recalled the status of the motorcoach immediately after the crash, and if the engine was running. He stated that he did not recall exactly, but did not perceive any risk with the motorcoach, such as it being in gear and wheels turning or trying to move forward. He said that there was not access to the ignition because it had been destroyed, and guessed that it had stopped on its own.

## **Witness interviews:**

### **1. Kim, Yung Jun**

No Fixed Address. Receives mail at [REDACTED] Flushing, New York

Date: 09-21-17

Time: Start: 11:56 a.m. End: 12:31 p.m.

Location: New York Presbyterian Hospital-Queens, Room 326-1

***(Hospital provided interpreter through contractor: Pacific Interpreters. Interpreter: Judith, language Korean. Interview was recorded by investigator. Written notes taken of interview and transcribed below.)***

Mr. Kim advised that he remembered that the crash occurred on Monday, September 18<sup>th</sup>. He advised that he boarded the bus between 5:30 and 5:35 a.m. The crash occurred right after he boarded the bus. Mr. Kim advised that he sat on the row after the 4<sup>th</sup> row (5<sup>th</sup> row) in a single seat. Mr. Kim advised that he wasn't on the driver's side (passenger side seat). Mr. Kim corrected himself and advised that he was in a double seat.

***(At that time, Mr. Kim was shown a diagram of the bus and marked the location where he was seated.)***

Mr. Kim didn't see the striking bus. The crash occurred suddenly, a couple of minutes after he had boarded the bus. After the impact, Mr. Kim advised that he ended up on the floor in the middle aisle-way. He advised that he had fainted but remembers being carried out of the bus by men in uniform.

He also sustained injury to his neck and spine and a fractured to his tailbone. Mr. Kim complained of pain when breathing in and out deeply or when he coughs. He advised that he fainted but was awake when he was taken out of the bus. He remembers being in a lot of pain.

***(Mr. Kim was asked about the other passengers in the bus)***

Mr. Kim advised that he after the collision, he saw several passengers on the floor in front of him. He didn't look to the rear of the transit bus. When he boarded the bus, he believed that there were 4 or 5 people in front of him when he sat down. He didn't see anyone that was seated behind him. He doesn't remember anyone seated on the driver's side. The 4 or 5 passengers he did see were all on the passenger side, in front of him.

***(Mr. Kim was asked to clarify the location where he boarded the bus.)***

Mr. Kim advised that he boarded the bus at a bus stop prior to the bus making the turn on the street where the collision occurred. Mr. Kim advised that when he boarded the bus, he did not see a police car parked at that location.

Mr. Kim advised that he left the hospital on the first day and returned later that afternoon around 3 or 4 p.m. He advised that he left because he was confused and in pain but returned because he needed help.

Background information:

Mr. Kim advised that he does not have a fixed address. He receives mail at [REDACTED] in Flushing, New York. He is currently unemployed resulting from a work injury in 2003. He is currently awaiting a workmen's compensation hearing. Mr. Kim advised that he has a lawyer but could not provide his name or address.

His wife and daughter live in a different state; Mr. Kim believes that they live in Connecticut. His wife's name is [REDACTED]

2. Jose Ferrera-Rodriguez

[REDACTED] Flushing, New York

Date: 09-21-17

Time: Start: 12:32 p.m. End: 12:58 p.m.

Location: New York Presbyterian Hospital-Queens, Room 317-1

*(Interview recorded by investigator. Written notes taken and transcribed below.)*

Mr. Rodriguez advised that he arrived at the bus stop at 5:54 a.m. -5:56 a.m. each morning to travel to work. His employer, [REDACTED]. The bus stop is located at 146<sup>th</sup> Street and Main Street in front of the library. The bus usually arrives at 5:58 a.m., but sometimes arrives as late as 6:03 a.m. When he boarded, the bus was crowded so Mr. Rodriguez had to sit on the right side (his right as he boarded). Mr. Rodriguez advised that at Kissena and Main Street (correcting the address from Roosevelt and Main Street), a number of passengers exited the bus which gave him the opportunity to change seats. Mr. Rodriguez moved to the rear of the bus and sat on the left (passenger) side (***note: Mr. Rodriguez orients himself (left or right) according to his facing the rear of the bus upon entry***). He advised that he was looking down at his phone and didn't see anything. "Everything went black". Mr. Rodriguez advised that he regained consciousness at the hospital and has no other recollection of events.

***(Mr. Rodriguez was asked about the operation of the bus prior to the collision)***

Mr. Rodriguez did not believe that the transit bus driver was speeding at the time of the incident. He noted that he rode that same bus every day and knew the 3 drivers that serviced that route.

Mr. Rodriguez provided a list of injuries he sustained in the collision:

A deep scalp laceration on the left side that required 14 staples to close.

A fracture to a bone in his neck



A fractured bone in the spine  
Eight fractured ribs on the left side  
Bruising to the left thigh  
Unconsciousness

Mr. Rodriguez advised that he was thrown forward and came to rest in the front of the bus. Mr. Rodriguez admitted that he has no independent recollection of this. This information was given during one of the news accounts of the crash.

***(Mr. Rodriguez was shown a diagram of the transit bus and identified his seat location at the time of the collision.)***

Mr. Rodriguez advised that at least 8 passengers remained on the bus after the group had exited and before he moved his seat. He reports seeing one passenger on the passenger side of the bus, seated in the rear. He believes that this passenger was a male.

Next of Kin:

[REDACTED]

Mr. Rodriguez was advised that MTA is in possession of his property. He identified property that he is missing.

White and Gold iPhone 7 (phone number [REDACTED])

Black glasses with “ravens” on the earpiece

Black and red backpack

White and gold earbuds