



SURVIVAL FACTORS GROUP

FIRST RESPONDER and WITNESS INTERVIEWS

ATTACHMENT 9

Chesterfield Township, NJ.

HWY-11-MH-007
(10 Pages)

1.0 First Responder Interviews

Chief Doug Demeters Incident Commander

Fire District #1 Chesterfield –Hamilton/Crosswicks Fire Department

Drew Tilton FF/EMT

John Tomasulo Captain

Ryan Lynch Lieutenant/EMT

Fred Freda FF/EMT

Brian Clarke FF/EMT

Interviewed Monday, February 20, 2012 at Station House

- When they arrived, there were still approximately 20 kids and several critical patients in the bus.
- There was a noncritical patient under the pile, it was a girl, she was in the last row with her back against the seat pan on the driver side and her legs were under about four or five other kids.
- There was also a boy that was in critical condition still in a seat, on the driver side behind the rear tire area and area of impact area with the dump truck. (The FF/EMT didn't see if the boy had a seat belt on.)
- There was one critical girl that still had her seat belt on and she was hanging into the aisle because her belt was very loose. She was in the last row passenger-side bleeding from the ears and it appeared they she had a severe fracture of her right arm and had obvious left leg trauma because her jeans were blood soaked.
- There was a fatally injured girl on top of the pile.
- There were some kids already out of the bus but the bus driver was still in the bus and stayed in until everyone was out.
- Most of the kids came out the front loading door and the critical kids came out the back.
- The helicopters never transported any injured from the scene they only transported from hospital to hospital.
- Initially the helicopters give an ETA of 15 minutes but due to the bad weather they didn't arrive for almost 35 minutes and by then all the kids were transported by ambulance to the hospitals.

Gary Church

Patrolman Chesterfield Township Police Department

Interviewed February 21, 2012 at the Chesterfield Township Police Department

- Patrolman Church said he was traveling eastbound on CR 528 coming up to the intersection and he saw that there were vehicles stopped and saw the school bus facing in the wrong direction.
- He called dispatch to report the accident and walked up to do a scene size up, checking the stability of the struck pole and see if any wires were down.
- There are still approximately 16-18 kids on the bus when he arrived on scene.

- He went to the bus door and saw the bus driver still in the seat. He asked the driver if he was okay and the driver didn't respond but motioned to the patrolman to the rear of the bus.
- When he got on the bus there's a couple kids in front sitting up and asking if everything was okay and he said yes.
- Patrolman Church said he saw people already on the bus motioning for him to go towards the back. He then went back out and around the back of the bus to the door which was already slightly opened so he opened it all the way.
- Patrolman Church said that when he opened the back door a couple kids got out by stepping on the pile of kids as they got out.
- He saw 4-6 kids piled up near the door and called dispatch to report how serious the crash was. He then went back to his squad to get his first aid bag.
- Patrolman Church said that patrolman Ed Vincent arrived and being an EMT, patrolman Ed Vincent went inside the bus to the back to assess the injured.
- Patrolman Church said he then went back through the loading door and walked towards the back and observed a boy lying on the seat on the driver side, with his feet hanging in the aisle. He asked EMS, who had just arrived on the scene, for a suction unit and patrolman Vincent began suctioning the patient's. He grabbed a headboard from EMS through the broken window and laid it on top of the seats. Patrolman Vincent then put the boy on the backboard and helped hand him out the back door.
- He said he didn't notice belt usage on any of the kids.
- Patrolman Church said after that point he was working on getting more kids off and as EMTs and firemen arrived he got off the bus and started traffic control.

Edward Vincent

Patrolmen Chesterfield Township Police Department

Interviewed February 21, 2012 at the Chesterfield Township Police Department

- Patrolman Vincent said he heard patrolman Church call out the crash and since he was near the elementary school, he hit the lights and siren and was at the scene in less than a minute.
- He pulled up in the eastbound lanes blocking traffic and went to the back of the bus and saw the pile of kids and knew they couldn't get the kids off so he went around to the front to help get the kids off.
- He saw Tommy Stewart who's with the prosecutor's office, already on the bus and said that Tommy Stewart was the one that opened the front loading door. Patrolman Vincent said Mr. Stewart told him that the bus driver tried kicking out the loading door windows.
- Patrolman Vincent said Mr. Stewart told him that a boy was hurt in the back. Patrolman Vincent said he found the boy lying on his back about three seats from the back on the driver side. He checked his pulse and it was weak and just then an ambulance pulled up next to the bus so he asked them for suction because he heard the boy having trouble breathing.
- Patrolman Vincent said he saw a girl right across the aisle from the boy on the floor leaning against the wall with her feet in the aisle and she told him that her right shoulder was hurt. He picked her up and carried her off the bus and put her on a blanket and called an EMT came over to treat her.

- He went back in the school bus and started suctioning the boy and then called dispatch for two choppers and then yelled for the EMTs to bring some backboards. He helped lift the boy onto the backboards and took him off, out through the back door.
- A couple of dad's of the student passengers arrived on the scene and came into the bus and Patrolman Vincent told them that the kids that could move, to take them off and carry them if they had to.
- He also helped carry the kids off along with the parents and the firemen.
- He then started getting witnesses name and put the truck driver in the back of his squad car.
- Patrolman Vincent said someone waved him back to the bus because the driver needed help. They thought he may be having a heart attack so he called an EMT over and the driver walked out and get on the stretcher.
- Patrolman Vincent said he didn't recall seeing any kids with their seat belts on.

Sean Porter

Paramedic/EMT with the Chesterfield Emergency Squad

Interview February 20, 2012 at the Chesterfield Emergency Squad Building, Station 269

- According to Mr. Porter, he exited his squad and saw a police officer waving him towards the back door of the bus. He got to the back door and saw a girl sitting on the floor crying with two kids on top of her legs and another little girl on top of the other three girls. He checked the pulse of the girl on top and couldn't find a pulse. He repositioned her head and checked the pulse again, but no change. He turned to a firefighter EMT and told him the girl on top is black tagged and to triage the others.
- He then ran around to the front loading door and the driver was still sitting in his seat and saw two guys talking to him.
- He then went towards the back by a patrolman and saw a boy supine on his seat with his legs hanging off into the aisle. Mr. Porter said he thought the boy was in the area where the impact occurred with the dump truck. He saw that there was blood in the boy's mouth and nose so he asked an EMT for a suction kit and he suctioned the boy. He said he got a spine board from the firefighters outside and put the boy on it and told a couple EMT's to get him into the ambulance right away.
- He said he never noticed any kids at the back of the bus or remembered seeing any kids with their seat belts on.

Mark Ford

EMT with the Chesterfield Emergency Squad

Interview February 20, 2012 at the Chesterfield Emergency Squad Building, Station 269

- Mr. Ford said he was a driver on a squad and pulled up to the bus on the right side
- He saw a little girl at the back door sitting underneath several other kids with a girl on top of the pile. He went back to get a backboard from Sean, another EMT, and went through the front loading door to help remove the injured.
- He then took a little girl out on a backboard.
- He saw another little girl on the passenger side near the rear tire area that wouldn't get up from her seat.

- Mr. Ford said he carried two kids out and commented that he didn't see any belts on any of them.

1.1 Witness and Helper Interviews

Thomas Stewart

Detective Burlington County Prosecutors Office

Interview on February 23, 2012 at the Chesterfield Township police station

- According to Mr. Stewart, the bus stop his two boys got on was the last stop on Old York Rd (CR660) prior to the accident. He said he watched his two boys enter the bus and he hopped in his car and pulled behind the row of cars following the bus.
- Mr. Stewart said that when the row of vehicles stopped at the intersection he looked down for something in his book bag and when he looked up he saw the roll-off truck come through the intersection and strike the bus and the bus go up in the air. Initially he wasn't sure if it was the same bus his boys were on since he thought there was another smaller bus in the row of vehicles in front of him. He said he watched the bus rotate into the pole and for a second he thought it may roll over. He said after the bus came to rest, he noticed the bus driver's bald head and knew immediately it was the bus his kids' were on.
- Mr. Stewart said he immediately pulled out and drove into the intersection and blocked traffic. He then called dispatch and told the dispatcher that he was at a truck versus school bus crash and gave the location. He got out of his vehicle and ran to the front loading door of the bus still talking with the dispatcher. There was another woman who had been in a black SUV also at the loading door telling the driver to open it. Mr. Stewart said he initially tried pulling at the doors and momentarily confirmed with the dispatcher his location. When he got off the phone, he said the bus driver was attempting to kick out the lower windows of the bus and when that didn't work, Mr. Stewart grabbed the doors with both hands and pried them open enough to where he could shimmy his upper body between the loading doors. He said he then bench pressed the doors further apart, enough for him to be able to enter the bus.
- According to Mr. Stewart, when he got on the bus he saw his boys seated behind the bus driver and saw that that the kids forward of row 5-6 were still seated and most of the kids towards the back were piled up in the aisle.
- He noticed one girl towards the back, next to where the pole impact was, still seated.
- Mr. Stewart said he again contacted dispatch and reported that there were half dozen unconscious kids on the bus.
- He walked towards the back, and came across a pile, of what he initially thought was one child on top of book bags, but then realized that it was three kids.
- Mr. Stewart said he gave the child on top a sternum rub and the girl woke up screaming. He removed her off the pile and found a boy gasping for air. Mr. Stewart said he again attempted the sternum rub on the boy but got no response so he carefully picked him up and put him on the seat.
- He then picked up another child that was on the bottom that was regaining consciousness and picked him up and put him on a seat.

- Mr. Stewart said he continued towards the back of the bus and picked up another child in the aisle on the floor near row 10.
- According to Mr. Stewart, behind the girl in row 10 there was another pile of about four kids near the back door. He saw a blond haired girl on top that was already blue in color.
- Mr. Stewart said that at this point two guys in yellow vest opened the back door and started tending to the kids near the back door. He said he helped put the girl on the backboard and handed her out.
- According to Mr. Stewart, after that he went back and forth helping other kids.
- Mr. Stewart said he never saw any kids with their seat belts on.

Rene Mans

Telephonic interview Tuesday February 29, 2012

- According to Ms. Mans, she was stopped at the stop sign on Old York Rd facing the bus at approximately 8:14 or 8:15 am. She said that due to a big blind spot at the intersection, both she and the bus had to pull forward a little past the white line in order to see. She said she looked to her right and saw the truck coming but it wasn't right on them. Then when she looked straight ahead she saw the bus start pulling away and thought the bus was going real slow and thought "Oh My God" he's not going to make it. The next thing she saw was the impact.
- She said it didn't appear that the truck driver tried to avoid the crash and didn't brake because she didn't hear any braking sounds.
- She said she didn't see if the truck had its headlights on and couldn't remember if she did.
- According to Ms. Mans, when the truck hit the bus, it slammed it sideways and pushed it into the pole where the bus came to a stop.
- She hit her brakes jumped out and ran to the bus door. She said another man also ran to the bus and was at the door trying to get it open. They both started yelling at the bus driver to open the door but he couldn't do it, so then the bus driver started kicking the door to get it open.
- According to Ms. Mans, the other man at the door with her somehow pulled the doors open.
- She said when they got on the bus she could see that the kids in the front seemed fine but the kids in the back were piled up on the floor.
- She said she could see that a lot of the kids were already hurt and bleeding.
- According to Ms. Mans, a school teacher got on the bus and started getting all the kids out the front. By then the police arrived and opened the back door and got on the back of the bus.
- She recalled seeing a severely injured boy named Jonathon lying on the seat. They called for an EMT to get him and take him off right away. She mentioned seeing about 4 or 5 kids on the bus unconscious.
- Ms. Mans said that she saw a little girl lying in the aisle with her seat belt on still on about 5 rows from the back, just forward of the truck impact area (drivers' side). Ms. Mans said she undid her seat belt and the girl started moving around a little so Ms. Mans touched the girls hand and the girl woke up and smacked Ms. Mans'. She told the girl to

lie down but the little girl smacked Ms. Mans again and again Ms. Mans told the girl to lie still, don't move around. She tried to calm the little girl down but said the little girl started freaking out.

- She saw another little girl on the pole side, just sitting there crying looking at an injured little boy and she took the girl off the bus.
- Ms. Mans said after they got off the bus she called the little girls' mother and told the mom what happened and that she should come over to get her daughter as soon as she could.
- According to Ms. Mans, a guy who lives across the street came by and told everyone to bring the kids into his house, in order to keep them warm and away from the chaos, which she did.
- She said after a little while she then went back out and asked the police if she should move her car but the officer said "No". Ms. Mans said she went back to her car and waited until police came over and told her to go to the police station and give her statement.
- Ms. Mans said she didn't notice anyone else with their seat belts on other than the one little girl in the aisle.

Nicole Hartman

Telephonic interview Tuesday February 29, 2012

- According to Mrs. Hartman, she is a teacher at the Elementary school and was on her way to the school and ended up directly behind the bus on Old York Rd as it made stops picking up the kids. She said she remained behind the bus as it came up to the intersection where the accident occurred.
- Mrs. Hartman said she saw the bus come to a stop then pull forward.
- According to Mrs. Hartman, due to being blind in her left eye and having a prosthetic, she never saw the truck coming but did see the bus pull out and heard and saw it get hit by the truck and then saw the bus swing into the pole.
- She said she immediately called 911 and told them about the accident and the location but never gave her name.
- Mrs. Hartman said she put her car in park and ran to the bus and got on.
- When she got on the bus, Mrs. Hartman said there was already another woman on the bus and went down the aisle as far as she could and saw a girl lying on the floor with her seat belt still on. Mrs. Hartman estimated that the girl was about 5-6 rows from the back, on the drivers' side.
- Mrs. Hartman said the bus driver was physically shaking and couldn't move. She guessed that he must have been in shock.
- Mrs. Hartman said she got off the bus momentarily to check on her car and when she got back on the bus she noticed an off duty policeman on the bus helping. Mrs. Hartman said he told her they needed to start taking the kids off the bus, so she started getting them off through the front door. She said the majority of the kids on the bus went out the front door.
- Mrs. Hartman said she didn't go to the house across the street but stayed in the field with a little boy and tried calling his parents.

- She didn't recall seeing anyone else with their seat belt on but didn't go all the way towards the back.

Charles Bucky Jones

Retired Firefighter with Chesterfield Township Hose Company Fire Department

Interviewed February 18, 2012 at the Chesterfield Township Hose Company Fire Station

- According to Mr. Jones, he was traveling east on Old York road a few cars behind the bus. He saw the bus stop and proceeded on across and he assumed that he was going straight across. The next thing he saw was the dump truck hitting the bus and the bus swing into the pole.
- When he got to the bus he went in the front the front door which was already open.
- According to Mr. Jones, he tried to calm the driver down as he was just shaking like a leaf.
- When he got on the bus he saw a bunch of kids towards the front standing up and saw a pile of kids at the back door. He said the back door was already open when he looked towards the back.
- He didn't notice any kids with their seatbelts on.
- He went towards the back and saw a bunch of kids piled up on top of each other. There was a bunch of backpacks on top of them and he threw them out the back door.
- Mr. Jones said he went towards the back and saw one little girl on top lying there unconscious and another little girl was trying to get out from under the pile. He told her to hold on because he didn't want to move the girl on top because he didn't want to hurt her or the other kids in the pile.

Theresa A. Ainsworth

Interview on February 22, 2012 at the Chesterfield Township police station

- According to Mrs. Ainsworth, she was three cars behind the bus and there was a truck in front of her. They all came up to a stop on CR528 and while waiting she saw this huge truck come across the intersection from the left. The next thing she saw was debris flying and the bus swing around into the pole. She said she didn't see the truck swerve and she couldn't see the impact.
- She put her car in park and got out, calling 911. She said that by the time she got off the phone talking to the 911 dispatcher, she saw a Chesterfield police squad pull up. She went back to her car, backed up into a dirt road adjacent to Old York Road, parked it and got out. She said she went to the bus and saw kids standing towards the back of the bus and gathered them up to move them away from the bus. She didn't recall the back door being yet open.
- Soon after Mrs. Ainsworth got to the bus, another woman came up to help gather the kids and keep them away from the bus.
- Mrs. Ainsworth said that most of the kids she saw had just cuts and scrapes.
- Mrs. Ainsworth said that a man, who lives across the street, came and offered all of them to come back inside his house.

- She said she stayed around and tried calling a male student's parent and couldn't get through, so when the ambulances came she went with the boy in the ambulance to the hospital.

Anthony Martozzi

Telephonic interview Tuesday February 28, 2012

- According to Mr. Martozzi, he was stopped three cars behind the school bus on Old York Road just prior to the accident.
- He said when the bus started to pull out, it got about half way into the intersection when he saw the truck come from behind the trees and hit the bus. He said the bus swung around and hit the pole.
- He said everyone got out of their cars and ran towards the bus. He said he was going to call 911 but could hear everyone else calling so he didn't.
- According to Mr. Martozzi, as he got up to the bus a Bordentown police squad pulled up and told him to stay back so he went back to his car. A while later an officer came up and gathered his contact information and told him when traffic cleared to go to the police station and give a statement of what he witnessed.

1.3 High School Passenger on Earlier Bus Route

Female High School Student

Telephonic interview Wednesday February 23, 2012

This student was a bus passenger on an earlier route, with the same accident involved bus driver. She described several incidents that occurred during her drive on the school bus the morning of the accident. She did not report these incidences to the School District but her parents called the police department later after the accident occurred. She said she was seated on the driver's side of the bus for the entire trip that morning.

- According to this student, the bus came up to the intersection of Meany Road and County Road 528. There was a stop sign on Meany and the bus driver looked both ways but still rolled through the stop sign. She said as they proceeded through the intersection, there was a green Jeep approaching and the Jeep had to hit the brakes to avoid striking the bus on the passenger side. She said that the kids on the bus started screaming at the driver and asking him, did you not see the car? Did you not see the sign that said stop? According to this student, the driver responded, "I know I know but we made it."
- The student, that same morning when they were at the intersection at CR528 and CR537, they were going to make a left-hand turn off of CR528 onto CR537, the bus driver failed to yield the right-of-way to car coming the opposite direction. The bus driver continued making his left turn and the other car had to beep its horn.
- The student said that same morning when they were traveling on 537 approaching another intersection, she did know which one, and there was a car waiting to turn left and the bus went around the other car in order to go straight.

- The student said the final incident that morning occurred in the school parking lot when the bus driver drove past their normal parking spot and she thought they were going to hit another bus head-on. The other bus stopped and then the accident bus driver ended up backing into the normal parking spot.

According to an investigator with the Burlington County Prosecutors office, no final determination was made regarding this interview and another interview with a high school student that made similar allegations against the bus driver. The investigator added that because they focused their investigation on the circumstances surrounding the accident the claims made by the high school girls did not play a role in determining who was at fault in the accident.