



**SURVIVAL FACTORS – HIGHWAY GROUP CHAIRMAN’S
FACTUAL REPORT**

ATTACHEMENT 7: LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE RESPONDER INTERVIEWS

Valhalla, NY

DCA15MH006

(43 pages)

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**Transcript of Interview with Metro North Chief Investigator (MTA Chief).
February 5, 2015**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of: *
METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN *
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK * Docket No.: DCA-15-MR-006
FEBRUARY 3, 2015 *

Interview of: MTA Chief

Valhalla, New York
Thursday,
February 5, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: INTERVIEWER 1, Ph.D.
Survival Factors Investigator

APPEARANCES:

INTERVIEWER 1, Ph.D., Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTERVIEWER 2, M.D., Chief Medical Officer
National Transportation Safety Board

INTERVIEWER 3, Chief Safety Officer
Metro-North Railroad

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay. Yeah.

INTERVIEW OF MTA Chief

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So, yeah, why don't you start out just by describing what you remember happening from the time that you found out about -- like, how you found out about the crash, how you got there and what you remember happening?

A. I just took the opportunity to look at, like, a download of my GPS from my vehicle. There was a vehicle accident southbound out at Taconic State Parkway and the southbound traffic had been stopped. There was a head-on collision, as I was told, at Lakeview Avenue. And I was on the Taconic northbound for a very short stretch. I just looked at my GPS. I estimated 20 minutes, but it was 27 minutes that I was sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic. And my --

Q. What street, again, were you on and what direction were you --

A. On Taconic State Parkway, northbound. Northbound, on my way home.

Q. Okay.

A. Left the office shortly after -- just right around 6:00, and basically I was stuck in traffic. As I approached, the first grade crossing at that location is Cleveland. The second one was Lakeview. The third one was Commerce. The fourth one was Stevens Avenue.

As I was between the first two, Cleveland and Lakeview, I'm listening to the local fire department deal with the head-on collision and suddenly the southbound lane that had been closed for quite a while, opened up to traffic, and I heard the fire chief from Valhalla indicate that the units that were responding to -- or had responded to the head-on collision at Lakeview were returning to quarters and the scene was cleared up and southbound traffic had started.

Within seconds, a radio communication came over from the fire control center that there was a train versus a car at Cleveland Avenue, and the responding fire chiefs and units passed me going south, responding to Cleveland Avenue. The fire chief got there and he said there's nothing here. With that, the fire dispatch came back and said we're getting multiple calls, it's got to be in the area, it might be Commerce.

Q. So just to clarify, you said that some emergency vehicles passed you responding to this accident, but they had gone to the wrong location?

A. Right. Because, again, it's Cleveland, Lakeview, Commerce, Stevens. So they were actually -- the accident, the train accident was north of them. They were south of that crossing --

Q. Okay.

A. -- of Commerce Street.

So I just advanced a little bit northbound, and when I heard that it could be Commerce, I know now -- I could see Lakeview. I'm approaching Lakeview and, but I can't see Commerce yet. I actually threw my truck into four-wheel drive, climbed up onto the median and said I'm either going to get there in a big hurry or I'm going to be stuck in snow. Well, I was fortunate enough to climb up on the median, passed the traffic, and I pulled into Commerce, to the grade crossing, parked and jumped out of my truck.

My GPS says that I was there at 6:32. Go ahead.

INTERVIEWER 3: Do you have lights on your truck?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. I have multiple radios for -- you know, all of that. So --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So you're driving a --

A. A response vehicle.

Q. -- fire command vehicle, Suburban-type vehicle?

INTERVIEWER 3: A response vehicle. And you hit the lights when you, you know --

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER 3: -- and went up on the median? Okay.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. When I went onto the median, correct.

So as I said, I pulled into -- my GPS indicates that I pulled into the Commerce Crossing Roadway at 6:32, and I think the time that we're using for the collision is something like 6:29. So I was there immediately, you know, and within minutes of the actual accident. And at that point in time, opened up my car door, grabbed a couple of things and I was immediately approached by a young male who said, my hands are burnt, what do I do? I said, for right now, you're going to stick them in the snow and try to get yourself calm. He was only in a dress shirt, no coat, no jacket.

And as I left my vehicle to walk up to the head of the train, I passed many, many people, some with smoke, some with burns, some with lacerations. And basically, there was a number of people all over the tracks who had self-evacuated.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So when you arrived and parked your vehicle, what types of responders were there already? What types of vehicles? You were the first?

A. Just me.

Q. You even were there before the police cars?

A. Just me.

Q. Okay.

A. Yup.

Q. And so then you started walking from the intersection along the sides of the tracks towards the front of the train?

A. Towards -- yeah, walked north to the front of the train. Because at that point I could see the car burning up against the railcar.

Q. And you were on --

A. On the --

Q. -- the left-hand side --

A. -- east side, on the east side, right side.

INTERVIEWER 3: Towards the Taconic.

INTERVIEWER 1: Right side of the train?

MTA CHIEF: Towards the Taconic, right.

INTERVIEWER 3: Have you seen the crime -- not crime scene -- have you seen the --

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah. I haven't seen the --

INTERVIEWER 3: -- accident scene?

INTERVIEWER 1: I haven't seen the accident scene personally. I've seen photographs.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah, so he's on the Taconic Road, Taconic Parkway side.

INTERVIEWER 1: Right.

MTA CHIEF: Not me. I was on the right-of-way, on the tracks, walking --

INTERVIEWER 3: That's what I mean.

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah. But --

INTERVIEWER 3: But on that side of the tracks.

MTA CHIEF: On that side, right, right, right.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. And so as you were walking forward, in the train you saw people self-evacuating --

A. Yes.

Q. -- and the types of injuries you described?

A. Yup.

Q. At what point did you see that there was smoke or fire?

A. Immediately. Immediately. Just as soon as I looked north. The black smoke coming up from the motor vehicle that was burning, you could immediately see that. And --

Q. Could you see the -- and this is -- so when you started up the tracks, you could see the vehicle at the front of the train?

A. Well, I knew it was vehicle versus car and I didn't have a -- at that point time -- as I walked closer, I then could be able to -- I was able to identify that it was a vehicle --

Q. Okay.

A. -- you know, a SUV, whatever you want to call it. I'm messing around here because a couple of minutes into my -- I took a quick picture --

Q. Oh, okay.

A. -- while I was still walking up the track.

Q. Our fire investigator will love looking at that.

A. Yeah, that's a couple of minutes into it, because I didn't do that right away. I kind of had my hands full. People were -- I was shooing people, you know, back towards --

INTERVIEWER 3: (Indiscernible) past that? No.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. I was kind of shooing people back towards the train and --

INTERVIEWER 3: Back towards that back end, you mean?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, towards -- you know, walk south --

MR. BARTH: That's not all the way down --

MTA CHIEF: -- that were able to, and talking to the fire chief, because he had then -- the fire chief and the units that had passed me going south that were now at the incorrect location had to come back, and the northbound traffic was still jammed and they had opened the southbound. So they basically, from what I understand, had to go possibly through the cemetery to get back to where I was.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So about how long did it take them to get -- for those vehicles to get --

A. For me it was about a lifetime. But no, I would think that I probably didn't see the first chief's car, fire truck for, it had to be -- I would estimate 4 or 5 minutes. The fire truck might have been a little bit longer. Because again, they had to go south and then figure out how to come back north without getting back on the parkway.

Q. Okay.

A. That kind of --

INTERVIEWER 3: Or on Commerce Street?

MTA CHIEF: Pardon me?

INTERVIEWER 3: Or on most of Commerce Street, which was still backed up in traffic.

MTA CHIEF: Right, right. Exactly.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: Exactly.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So that photo does a pretty good job of describing it, but do you remember any details about where you very first saw the evidence of smoke and/or flames?

A. Yeah. Basically when I got out of the car. When I got out of my car and looked north.

Q. But can you describe where on the train? Was it only at the front? Was it distributed?

A. Yeah, only at the front. Only at the front and I want to say the engineer's cab. That area, the flames had lapped up above the car and -- above the motor vehicle and at the engineer's cab. Because I was saying to myself, oh, my God, I hope the engineer got out, because it looked like there was flames coming out of the -- and smoke coming out of the cab window of the engineer's cab. So that whole nose of the train, so to speak, looked like it was --

INTERVIEWER 3: Can I have another look?

MTA CHIEF: -- looked like it was pretty well --

INTERVIEWER 3: Thanks.

MTA CHIEF: -- on fire.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. Then what happened?

A. I'd stopped alongside the head car that was burning, because again, I was able to approach it fairly closely because it was only the very north end front of the car that was burning, and the smoke was starting to migrate, you know, towards the back of the car. And there was a group of people with the man in the snow who they identified him to initially as the amputee. And apparently they had got him out of the train into the snow, and then they picked him up and they were going to carry him the eight car lengths, you know, 1,000 feet to the crossing. And I screamed at the top of my lungs, please put him down, please put him down, please put him down. Because if the poor man, (a) being in the snow obviously wasn't the best place to be, but it was on that embankment and they were trying to carry him and, God forbid, he had any other injuries. At that point in time, you know, just wait for EMS to come. They picked him up and they moved him probably 20 feet and they realized that it was not going to be an easy task and they put him back down and waited for EMS to come.

Q. Okay.

A. At that point in time, the people in the second car, the engineer, I was able to locate the engineer. I asked him did everybody make it out of the head car? He said that he thought he saw at least two or three people who hadn't made it out of the car.

Q. Who had not made it out?

INTERVIEWER 3: Had not?

MTA CHIEF: Had not made it out of the car.

He kind of stood around me for a while. Doors and windows started to open and people had sort of congregated in the second car. And then we said, look, just keep moving to the back. Keep moving to the back. Keep moving to the back of the train. Because I knew that it would take a significant amount of time for the fire to migrate through the car to the second car and it was very unlikely that -- unless that BN window melts out, for it to jump from car to car. It could, but for it to jump from car to car, it would've been a significant amount of time. So I --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So you were having them stay in the train, but just move back?

A. Yeah. Just move back, move back, move back. And then when I finally got some help, fire department people showed up, EMS showed up, police showed up -- because I wasn't about to further -- although people were self-evacuating, I wasn't about to instruct them or tell people to start to evacuate outside the train (a) because I had to ensure that the third rail power was dead on both tracks, and (b) I certainly wasn't going to be able to manage hundreds of people --

INTERVIEWER 3: Absolutely.

MTA CHIEF: -- and try to communicate what was needed. I knew that we had about a dozen injuries at that point because there was people moving and people hurt, people burned and people cut. Because the fire chief at one point came on and gave an instruction and I said, no, two ambulances aren't going to make it. You have about a dozen injuries that I've seen. You probably need much more than two ambulances at this point in time.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Now, did you have a radio with you or you --

A. Yeah. No, we cross-com with the locals, fire service, and obviously with Metro-North. So I can hear Metro-North side. I actually have two radios. So I can -- and I had quite a bit of information between myself and the fire chief, because at one point in time he ordered an aerial ladder up to put water onto the train car and I had to intervene and say it's a steel shell. You put water on the roof, it's not going to do anything to the interior that's burning. So we had quite a bit of --

Q. So you had private -- you had personal radios on you --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- as you were walking up the train?

A. Yeah.

Q. And so you're -- in the middle of all this, you're making communications --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- with the -- were you -- are able to communicate back to the dispatch center or you --

A. Well, no, with the -- with both, actually. Both actually. Because I called the dispatch channel with the fire (indiscernible) call to say multiple ambulances needed, and then I called the fire chief. And I think my initial call, we'll eventually get the playback hopefully, was that they pulled the first engine alongside the Bronx River on the highway. I don't think they realized initially that there was quite a wide stream across for the firefighters to go up to the roadway --

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah, it's how cold out --

MTA CHIEF: -- to the train tracks.

INTERVIEWER 3: -- in the snow, right.

MTA CHIEF: To the train tracks, um-hum.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: So, you know, and then a water source. You know, they weren't about to -- I don't think they were going to pull the water out of the Bronx River there. They have the, you know, local hydrant, you know, kind of thing. So we did a couple of back and forths on a number of items. Yeah, I know the ambulance was one; the tower ladder was another issue. The water in between us and how to get across it, you know, it would've been really tough for the firefighters. And they actually put a ladder across it and crawled across, you know, to get -- and then dragged the hose across, to get to -- ready to put, you know, water on the fire. That kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER 2: Can I ask --

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah, go ahead.

INTERVIEWER 2: -- a couple questions?

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. The initial estimate, you've now gotten out of your car, seen there's a fire, seen some people coming at you. Obviously there's another side of the train. There may be other people on the other side of the train. You're walking up and your initial guess of sort of how many injured, not dead, not unretrievable, but how many injured that you were going to need ambulances for, was a dozen?

A. A dozen, yeah.

Q. Was a dozen --

A. I said a little -- 12 -- because at that point in time, just as I got to the front of the train and ran into the engineer, he said to me there's people on the other side that need help too. So, you know, as I said, I passed and, you know, either had not communicate with them, but seen myself --

Q. Eyeballed --

A. -- eyeballed --

Q. -- more (indiscernible).

A. -- you know, at least 8 or 10 people.

Q. Okay.

A. And then he said to me there's more people on the other side that are injured that apparently went out the window on the east -- on the west side, on the west side of the train.

Q. The left side?

A. Because it was -- there was evacuation windows were taken out, and we sent the EMS over there. And then actually, at one point in time I walked around the nose and an EMT came to me and said that, you know, they were still treating a couple of people over there, try to have the firefighters take it easy with the water because they were killing the people on the other side, that kind of thing, you know, with the water.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: So --

INTERVIEWER 2: Well, I'm not --

INTERVIEWER 1: Oh, go ahead.

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. So one of the things is you got a Level 1 trauma center around the corner. How in a situation like this, you know you have, you know, several hundred people involved --

A. Right.

Q. -- and at least a dozen injured.

A. Right.

Q. Do you interface directly with EMS or with the trauma center?

A. No, I --

Q. Or how does that play out in this sort of environment?

A. -- I actually heard the county dispatch center call for an EMS coordinator.

Q. Okay.

A. So I knew at that point, very early on -- I can't tell you if it was 3 minutes or 5 minutes into the scene that they were calling for an EMS coordinator. Because typically when you have an MCI or something to that effect, they'll get a EMS coordinator dispatched and rolled out, because we have them, you know, throughout the county regionally, so --

Q. Sure. Okay.

A. So I knew that they --

Q. So that was called.

A. So I knew they were ramping up --

Q. Now, that was within 10 minutes --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- into the whole deal?

A. Yeah, yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah, and I don't think it was 10 minutes.

Q. Okay.

A. I don't think it was 10 minutes.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So that was my --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- that was my follow-up --

A. Yeah, yeah.

Q. -- question I was going to ask. So --

A. I just want to add that I believe that the frequency that we were on, Fire 11, basically the conversation that the fire chief and I were having, I'm sure they were hearing.

INTERVIEWER 2: Right.

MTA CHIEF: I'm sure they -- it wasn't like we were on a fire ground channel --

INTERVIEWER 2: Okay.

MTA CHIEF: -- just amongst the people that -- we were on a --

INTERVIEWER 2: Main channel?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, a main channel.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So can you describe, like, what designations you said as like -- you know, like when they first arrived, did you say, okay, like inform the arriving people that I'm the incident commander or by that time was it the fire chief that arrived and then he took incident command?

A. Yeah. Basically, you know, as I said, I was there by myself and I was actually giving him information until he arrived. And then once he started to get himself organized and get his apparatus there, I basically kind of -- I basically advised him on a couple of things throughout for the first several -- because he --

Q. And what's his name?

A. -- actually I don't remember his name.

Q. -----? Does that sound right?

A. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, -----, right.

Q. And --

A. 2481 is his designation.

Q. Yeah. And did he -- who called the mass -- like at what point was the dispatch center notified that it was a mass casualty event and who did that?

A. Yeah. That I couldn't tell you. That I couldn't tell you only because I -- and once I knew the EMS coordinator was going to be dispatched to the location I basically knew that somebody had made --

INTERVIEWER 3: Made that decision.

MTA CHIEF: -- a move to do that.

INTERVIEWER 3: Right.

MTA CHIEF: And that -- you know, I don't know that he did that, but --

INTERVIEWER 1: Right. Okay.

MTA CHIEF: -- I knew that they transmitted a -- looking for an EMS coordinator to respond.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. And then so the next -- so what happened next? What's the next phase of this?

A. The fire department showed up. We figured out that they needed to get across the Bronx River. They -- EMS showed up. They had to walk, you know, the eight car lengths, you know, quite a hike. The fire chief, I know, started calling for additional equipment and apparatus. We had a very brief exchange on shutting the parkway down to get a water source, because he was working on tank water at that point from the engines, and to get a water source because you're not going to -- the amount of fire that we had, as you can see, you know, what was in his engines were not going to, you know, do the job. So they basically shut down the -- and again, I heard all of that. And I believe I exchanged with him maybe once or twice about getting a water source, and they went across to a local street -- across the parkway over to a local street and eventually grabbed a hydrant.

Q. And did you have much communication with law enforcement at this point or were they doing their own separate thing with the traffic and --

A. The only law enforcement I interfaced with was the MTA PD, and I don't know if he was a local or district car. ----- oh, my God, what's ----- last name? He found me, and at that point in time it was probably 8 to 10 minutes into it, he said to me what do you want to do with all these people? And I said now we need to get them off the train and get them someplace. So they started to evacuate off the train. They had a large group down by the crossing. We had

asked for buses -- I asked for buses from either Westchester County or from the MTA bus group, because (a), you know, there was no, like, close by residences or some places where we could --

Q. Right.

A. As it turns out, they were able to open up the rock climbing place across the street and they walked them across the street. Some people walked off the site, I was told. I didn't actually see it. But as you well can imagine, things like this occur, we get, you know, the self-evacuation piece, and I'm sure you've seen it in other places where people just, I want to go home, I'm okay, call somebody to come get them, you know, pick them up, you know, that kind of thing. But my understanding is that they wound up emptying the train, getting everybody together, walking them across the street to that location and kept them there until we were able to furnish buses to move them to wherever they had to go.

Q. So now, your radio frequencies, do the law enforcement -- so when you're speaking on the radio, the dispatch center can hear you, you're speaking with the fire chief and that.

A. Right.

Q. EMS can presumably -- are they on the same frequency as that?

A. I don't think so. I think they have a separate EMS frequency. I'm looking at ---- because he used to work for them guys. I think EMS has a separate frequency and obviously the railroad has a separate frequency. Our operating channels are actually different than police operating channels, and although I can cross-com, I didn't because we had a face-to-face.

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. Right. Am I correct, locally that fire, EMS and police are three separate --

A. Three separate channels, but they can --

Q. Yeah, yeah, yeah, they can merge.

A. -- they have the ability to merge, right.

Q. No, no. But I also -- it's three separate services?

A. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Q. Yeah, yeah. So that's a key point.

A. Definitely. Although I believe the Valhalla Fire Department does have an ambulance group within the fire department, because they service one other community in their township. But again, I'm sure it was beyond their immediate capabilities, so mutual aid had to be immediately, you know, triggered.

Q. And was there any calling out of any other fire departments?

A. There was -- I don't know what the CAD says, but I'll bet you there was 10 of them there.

Q. Okay.

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah, we had --

INTERVIEWER 3: That's what we assumed. I haven't seen the CAD yet.

INTERVIEWER 1: We have a list.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. I'm guessing --

INTERVIEWER 3: I haven't see his list yet.

MTA CHIEF: -- there was at least 10, because one of the mutual aid departments is near the department that I belong to along the Hudson River, and I'm saying to myself --

INTERVIEWER 3: You're far -- from far away.

MTA CHIEF: -- there's got to be 10 fire departments between here and there. Could they all be here? And there were.

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. Well, were there too many people there?

A. No. Because the, when we finally --
 (Off the record.)
 (On the record.)

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. I mean, it's a give and take. It's definitely give -- but that's what I was -- why I said, you know --

A. Yeah. I mean, you know, I'm more familiar with the Hudson side where I come from, on the fire side. But even here, you know, from Valhalla, from where my office is in White Plains, North White Plains, Valhalla, Hawthorne, Thornwood, Pleasantville, they're all probably 2 miles apart. You know, our train stations are a couple of miles apart and there's a fire department at basically every one of those locations, you know, forever.

MTA CHIEF: What's our number?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Two sixty-four.

MTA CHIEF: 264?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 264-123?

MTA CHIEF: No, no, no, no. Our number of --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Of fire departments?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: Fifty-eight.

MTA CHIEF: Fifty-eight? No, no, no, total. Total, system-wide?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, ours? 266.

MTA CHIEF: So we have --

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. That's within the Metro-North (indiscernible) --

A. Within the Metro-North, we have --

Q. Right.

A. -- 266, and then 58 within --

Q. And does that include the New Haven Line too or just the New York ones?

A. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's just fire departments. Within Westchester County --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, that's fire and EMS.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. Westchester County, there's 58 fire departments, and I think all but about 10 have the railroad running through them. So, you know --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. So did the police identify any point of contact, specific point of contact that you were aware of?

A. No. What had happened, what I was aware is that, as people showed up, as different agencies showed up -- because it is multi-jurisdictional at this point, they established a command post and then I could hear they identified the chief as the IC, they identified -- one of his assistants came across the stream and became the operations chief. They started stretching hose lines. I interfaced with him on the ground now.

Q. Where was the command post?

A. On the highway. On the parkway.

INTERVIEWER 2: And I missed this a little earlier. You're saying the parkway got shut down again?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 2: And this time in both directions?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 2: And how long was it shut down for, do you know?

MTA CHIEF: Oh, my God. It had to be --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Throughout the night.

INTERVIEWER 2: I'm sorry?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Throughout the night.

MTA CHIEF: Throughout the night.

INTERVIEWER 2: So it stayed shut down?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 2: Okay.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, a long time. So I could hear --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So can you run down -- so at the command center there was -- so there was an EMS coordinator, there was an operations coordinator, there was an IC?

A. There was an IC, there was MTA Police. Mack (ph.) actually was our -- the Metro-North agency representative in the unified command, so he could probably tell you a little bit more about that. But to the extent that now that once the agencies and the responding chiefs and EMS and police showed up, we even had the watershed police show up because now we're next to the --

INTERVIEWER 3: Water.

MTA CHIEF: -- Bronx River and, you know, should there be some kind of spill or condition, they wanted to be -- so there was many agencies. And they established a command post and basically, the IC worked through his operations guy, and at that point in time I was helping the operations guy out.

Again, as much training and as much information we put out and as much as we do, we're the only railroad that runs through those communities. And they have -- did not all of that - they're never as familiar with what's inside the train and the train car and what burns and --

INTERVIEWER 1: Right.

MTA CHIEF: -- those kinds of things, so --

INTERVIEWER 3: How you going to keep 150 people in this one section --

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER 3: -- up on everything, much less the rest of the --

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, and we did some screaming. We did some, you know --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So what about the EMS? Did they set up a triage center? Where were they for --

A. That I couldn't tell you. Once I got hooked up with the operations chief and try to get the fire out and to make an entry into the car, which we basically never made, because when we climbed into the second car to try to go through the B-end doors, the barrel-end doors, the 4333 end door was basically -- the frame was distorted and the door couldn't be opened.

Q. Okay. And yeah, why don't you go ahead -- so it sounds like, from a personnel evacuation and things, we've kind of moved beyond what you were involved with, with that.

A. Right.

Q. So for our fire investigator, why don't you run down the key points of what you remember about the firefighting efforts --

A. About the fire -- yeah.

Q. -- so that ----- will be happy if we cover that.

A. Yeah. They initially, because they needed more substantial water supplies, they said they're -- initially use their tank water and they opened up a master stream deck gun. And they probably used, I think, the water much faster than they thought, and they thought by cooling down and trying to shoot directly into the train, basically at the same level horizontally, that they could put the fire out. But because now the windows are starting to melt, as indicated in the

pictures -- and this is actually just before water, so to speak -- it kind of pushed the fire through the car and --

Q. The stream pushed the fire through the car?

A. Yeah. Because they're not -- they're kind of fixed at a particular angle to push water horizontally at the train car and it kind of advanced the fire probably a little bit more quickly than it would if nothing was done at that point in time.

Q. And had the third rail been -- at what point was the third rail confirmed off or, you know, secure?

A. The third rail on track 2 where the train sat was confirmed off, because (a) I'm knowledgeable with the system that when it goes to ground, there's a reset period and then it'll go to ground again, and then after the third ground, it'll stay out. So I was familiar, and when I immediately called the rail traffic controller's office, the OC -- or operations control center, when I called the operations control center walking up the tracks, he had said to me track 2 is de-energized and that -- I kind of instinctively knew that, but I needed to confirm it.

Q. Right.

A. So --

Q. So what you're saying is, like, so when there railcar can go to ground, it's like a trip --

A. Yeah, trip, trip --

Q. -- (indiscernible) the railcar and it can't --

A. Right, right.

Q. It resets?

A. Resets.

Q. What's the time frame between those? Like, is that a couple seconds or is that --

A. No, no. My understanding from the power guys, it's a couple of seconds.

Because every now and then, we have to look at printouts and figure out how all this comes together. It's a couple of seconds.

I believe that they narrowed it down today, and I want to say that it was like 10 seconds, because there was some type of -- a feeder got ripped out through all of this. And when you talk to your counterparts who did the interview with our power people, I just learned today that one of the feeders got ripped out by the car when it hit the third rail and there was some voltage that went in a different direction because the system sensed that a feeder was now missing.

Q. Okay.

A. And it may have fed from another direction. And again, I'm not a --

Q. But basically --

A. -- GRI guy.

Q. -- the wreck caused to the third rails to ground, so when you say like 10 seconds, you're talking about the third rail essentially switched itself off roughly 10 seconds after the crash?

INTERVIEWER 3: The -- no. The --

INTERVIEWER 1: Or --

MTA CHIEF: No.

INTERVIEWER 3: It's a little more complicated because the car took out the third rail long before the train stopped.

INTERVIEWER 1: Right.

INTERVIEWER 3: Okay? So --

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah, so it may not be --

INTERVIEWER 3: -- I think we need the power people to really explain the timing.

INTERVIEWER 1: That's fine.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. But we're not talking -- I mean, I just want to clarify it's not like --

A. But it was well within --

Q. It wasn't -- it's not like it was sitting there active -

A. No. Right, right.

Q. -- after the train stopped for --

INTERVIEWER 3: Right.

INTERVIEWER 1: -- a long period of time.

INTERVIEWER 3: No. It --

MTA CHIEF: I'm on scene literally in 3 minutes. And I'm out of my car and I probably went no more than two car lengths walking up the track when they confirmed to me that the power was off on track 2.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. That was basically what --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- that's what I wanted. So the track was confirmed power off within a couple of minutes of you arriving --

A. On track 2.

Q. On track 2? Okay.

A. They did not confirm to me at that point in time that track 1 was dead, because now they have to manually, you know, through our SCADA system, they have to go into the computer and now kill the other track. Understanding that there was a grade crossing accident, our operation control center knew that, but they didn't know (a) how bad it was.

Q. Right.

A. They didn't know things were burning, and they didn't know people were self-evacuating.

Q. Right.

A. So now they have to go through the process in the operation control center to say, okay, now we need to get all of our power distribution system and kill the additional track, kill track 1.

Q. Okay.

A. So in a matter of a couple of minutes.

Q. Yeah. So there's, obviously, there's a lot of complexity here that --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- the power guys will tell us about that.

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. So any other -- what other notable things about the firefighting methods, about the operations of the -- yeah, because we only have a couple minutes here before our next meeting.

A. Yeah. Knowing that -- we can finish up at another time if we need. Knowing that we couldn't get in to make basically, like, a tubular assault inside the cars, we then had to put water from the exterior. We were basically on the east side of the train. And they got additional hose lines -- I think they wound up with three inch-and-three-quarter lines and shut down the master stream and they dumped water as much as they could, you know, through the windows, put some ladders up, you know, shot water in as best they could, that kind of thing, to get the fire out.

- Q. Okay.
 INTERVIEWER 1: We only have a couple minutes left, so I want to give you guys a chance to -- I hope I've covered it reasonably well, but feel free.
 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, I did have a couple questions.
 INTERVIEWER 1: Sure.
 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:
- Q. In terms of the people evacuating, did you see anybody evacuating from the first car or were they all evacuated --
 A. No. Yeah.
 Q. -- they were all evacuated --
 A. Yeah.
 Q. -- by the time you go there?
 A. And when I found the engineer --
 Q. Yes.
 A. -- you know, that's when he had said to me everybody's out but a couple of people; a couple of people didn't make it. Two or three people didn't make it. So --
 Q. So --
 A. -- he gave me the impression we had --
 INTERVIEWER 3: [REDACTED] we have more information about that --
 MTA CHIEF: Yeah.
 INTERVIEWER 3: -- from other things, so we can talk about it after --
 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay, after? Okay.
 INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah.
 MTA CHIEF: Yeah. Is that accurate?
 INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah. It's totally accurate.
 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:
- Q. But also, like, I was interested in the evacuation of the other cars. And you -- so you saw people coming out the doors --
 A. Yes.
 Q. -- on the side you were on?
 A. Yes. Yes.
 Q. You didn't see anybody come out of any of the windows --
 A. No.
 Q. -- on your side?
 A. No, I did not. Did not see anybody come out the windows, no. And again, it was basically at that point in time, you know, the doors were being utilized for --
 Q. People were opening them --
 A. Yeah, yeah.
 Q. -- everything appeared to be functioning?
 A. Yeah.
 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:
- Q. I got one.
 A. Yeah?
 Q. I think you said before the engineer told you people went out the windows on the left side of it?
 A. Yeah, on the west side, yeah.
 Q. Because neither one of those doors could be opened from (indiscernible)?
 A. Yeah, the --
 Q. So they went out the window --

A. Right.

Q. -- and everybody else went out the door?

INTERVIEWER 1: Which doors do you say by neither door?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: On the lead car, the L1 and L2 --

MTA CHIEF: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: -- on the left-hand side of the car.

MTA CHIEF: On the west side or left side of the car, that door, the floor was buckled from the third rail impact. But the window was out, so they managed to get -- and we obviously don't have the finite details, but there is a possibility, because the floor was buckled and the door was buckled, that they were able to probably kick the window out of the door. The door has a large window in it. So they were able to --

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. Which door are you talking about? The --

A. The L1 door.

Q. -- side door?

A. The side door.

Q. Okay. Yeah.

A. Yeah, the side door. The side door in the vestibule.

Q. Because the barrel door was not --

A. Right, right. The barrel door was not accessible.

Q. Right.

A. But the L1 door didn't have --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And the L2, that was -- yeah, the L1, the window was gone.

MTA CHIEF: Right.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The L2 was just jammed shut. They (indiscernible) --

MTA CHIEF: It was jammed shut, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- windows (indiscernible)?

MTA CHIEF: Yeah. And I suspect, and I don't know -- this is just merely my looking at these cars for a couple more hours today. I suspect that the B-end east side door -- I don't know how they're numbered. The B-end east side -- this door. This door that is open, I suspect that people squeezed between the third rails -- this door here with the flames coming out, the door where the flames coming out?

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: That door is open and it's not open completely, but it's open probably about that wide and it opens a little bit wider. I suspect that people squeezed between the third rails, because there's spaces the way the third rails landed, and got out.

INTERVIEWER 1: And what's the designation for that door? Like what would you call it?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, that's on the B end.

MTA CHIEF: B end on the --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: R2 (indiscernible).

MTA CHIEF: -- engineer's side.

INTERVIEWER 3: R2, yeah, R2.

MTA CHIEF: R?

INTERVIEWER 1: R2?

MTA CHIEF: R2. L1, L2, R1, R2. So it's right side.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

- Q. I know you guys go by direction, but that's the lead car, so --
- A. Not me. A door's a door to me. I'm a -- I'm not a mechanical guy.
- Q. MTA Chief, that picture that you had before that you were showing us?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. That's got to be really early on because you can see one of the emergency windows has been pulled and smoke's coming out of that and --
- A. Yes. Yes.
- Q. -- smoke's coming out of the doors.
- A. Yeah.
- Q. But the Lexan windows are still intact.
- A. I had -- yeah, the Lexan windows were still intact. I had just a couple of moments talking to the chief on the radio and I said I'll probably never see this in my life again. As you can see, there's somebody -- there's somebody here.
- Q. But I'm saying, that's early on.
- A. And I believe that's the fire chief who ran up the track and ran back.
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: MTA Chief, would you mind, can you send one of our -- if one of our -- I would think our recorder's engineer might want to get the time stamp off his phone and the time stamp, correlate that with real time. So --
- INTERVIEWER 3: As long as you're willing --
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You don't have to give up your phone.
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, no, he --
- MTA CHIEF: I don't care.
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 4: (Indiscernible) right next to it and he can --
- MTA CHIEF: No, I don't care.
- INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah, I don't know how to get that off. ----- is here.
- MTA CHIEF: I work for the company. I got to --
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't think ----- would just -
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Get one from the other pictures.
- MTA CHIEF: No --
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, you don't know what we've seen.
- MTA CHIEF: No --
- (Simultaneous conversation.)
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) looking at those, no, no, no.
- MTA CHIEF: -- it's a new phone.
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: But I would think he want to be able to correlate your phone time and the time stamp of (indiscernible) --
- MTA CHIEF: No, that's fine.
- MR. INVESTIGATOR 3: That would be really helpful.
- MTA CHIEF: I actually took two pictures very similar. They're both very, very similar.
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. So I would think he would want to have both of those just to have the time stamp for the (indiscernible) crash.
- INTERVIEWER 3: And then that'll help the fire folks too.
- MTA CHIEF: Yeah. And I believe, maybe there's -- maybe -- no, I don't think --
- UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So don't delete it.
- MTA CHIEF: -- I don't think that is the fire chief. I don't think it's the fire chief. Somebody showed up and --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Well, if you have multiple pictures, if you don't mind --

MTA CHIEF: And, you know --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- sharing, we could time stamp them.

MTA CHIEF: Yeah, there's only two pictures. You see the black thing along the track there?

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah. What is that?

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: See the black thing along the track?

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: That's the engineer's duffel bag. When the engineer had his backpack. That's his backpack.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Backpack, yeah.

MTA CHIEF: I had had conversation with him at least three or four times. One time we had -- at least twice we had the conversation about who -- you know, possibly people didn't make it out, because I guess I just didn't want to believe it. The third conversation was go put your jacket on. He was running around in a thermal undershirt. Please go put your jacket on. You don't need to be, you know, on top of everything else, getting sick. The fourth time was go pick your backpack up, because they were squirting water from the highway into the front of the car and it would have gotten -- everything would've gotten soaking wet. I said go pick your backpack up, because he had this timetable was still out and sitting on top of his backpack right there. So I had a number of conversations.

And I was kind of surprised, because he -- it turns out that he, I guess, went to the hospital with some burns. I'm not really sure. But he never expressed that to me. Now, I'm safety officer, investigator for over 30 years, and I must've asked him five times, are you okay, are you okay, are you okay? And he never expressed to me that --

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. We talked to him. We interviewed him already.

A. Yeah, that he had burns.

Q. He's okay. He's okay now. I don't know what his medical issues are.

A. Yeah.

Q. He said smoke inhalation to us.

A. Yeah.

Q. I think he --

A. He didn't express any of that.

Q. -- he was --

A. Which I would've --

Q. -- running on adrenaline, I think, at the time.

A. Yeah. I would've had him handled, along with everybody else, not wait. It was probably an hour, hour and a half into it all when they called me and said the engineer's going to the hospital.

Q. That's probably --

A. Hour and a half --

Q. -- the umpteenth time we're heard that.

A. Say it again?

Q. That's not the first time we've heard that --

A. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q. -- the engineer, some hours later, still on scene and finally, you know, there's blood on his face or there's, you know -- it's been there, that people have asked him about it, and he says no, no, no. And then hours later he says, yeah, okay.

A. Yeah. When you shut the tape recorder off, I'll tell you what I really think.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

MTA CHIEF: No, I'm just kidding.

INTERVIEWER 1: All right. Well --

MTA CHIEF: I'm sorry.

INTERVIEWER 2: All right. Can I just ask one last question?

INTERVIEWER 1: Sure.

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. It's kind of one I always like to ask, which is first on scene, big event, real chaotic event, hundreds of people involved on both the victims' side and the response side. Is there anything in particular that you can say, given that this occurred, okay, given that it occurred where it occurred, is there something that could've, would've, should've gone better from a systems standpoint?

A. You know, I -- off the top of my head, I can't say that there's anything that could've went better or something that we should've done or shouldn't have done or we did too slowly or too quickly. Part of the reason is I'd been at a dead run since --

Q. And that's my next question.

A. Yeah.

Q. If you think of something --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- and it --

A. I will. But you know, I mean, if I would've had the ability to stop the deluge gun, you know, from pouring water. I was able to stop them from putting the aerial piece up to shoot water down on top of the roof of the car, and then they went with the deck gun. And I was probably distracted with some of the EMS stuff, some of the stuff going on the other side of the train. I tried to follow up with a couple of things, calling out for staff, calling for staff to come in. You know, I had to make a whole bunch of things and some other notifications.

I would've probably not had him use the master stream, which again, from my point of view, kind of helped the fire push its way down the aisle, so to speak. But that's, you know, that's his call. You know, they want --

Q. Finesse points is really what you're --

A. -- they want to put the --

Q. -- talking about, yeah.

A. -- wet stuff on the red stuff, you know?

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

MTA CHIEF: If I think of anything, I'll certainly give you guys a --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can I ask one (indiscernible)?

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Was that picture before or after the deck gun?

MTA CHIEF: Before. Before. Before the deck gun. Yeah, before the --

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do you live in the area? Just this isn't --
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
 CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
 FEBRUARY 3, 2015
 Interview of MTA Chief

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-15-MR-006
PLACE: Valhalla, New York
DATE: February 5, 2015

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.

Transcriber

Transcript of Interview with Valhalla Fire Department Chief Who was the Incident Commander and Valhalla Fire Department Chief who was the Operations Commander. February 6, 2015

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of: *
METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN *
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK * Docket No.: DCA-15-MR-006
FEBRUARY 3, 2015 *

Interview of: Incident Commander (IC) and Operations Commander (OC)

Metro-North Railroad
North White Plains, New York

Friday,
February 6, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: INVESTIGATOR 1, Ph.D.
Survival Factors Investigator

APPEARANCES:

INVESTIGATOR 1, Ph.D., Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INVESTIGATOR 2, M.D., Chief Medical Officer
National Transportation Safety Board

INVESTIGATOR 3, Chief Safety Officer
Metro-North Railroad

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1, Battalion Chief
Valhalla Fire Department

I N T E R V I E W

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay, this is the 6th of February; interview with IC and OC.

I N T E R V I E W O F I C

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. All right. So starting with IC, why don't you go ahead and just describe the events of that day and what your actions were.

A. Okay. We first got notified of the train crash as we were returning to fire headquarters from a previous call. So, myself in the chief car, as well as a couple of our apparatus, were already on the road a half of mile from the scene, actually. We were dispatched. We made our way there through a little bit of traffic issues as a result of the previous call we were on.

I got there. I stopped just west of the crossing on Commerce Street, got out of the car immediately. We were already -- I was already being told on the radio that you have multiple injuries and the train was possibly on fire. I got out. I was able to look down the train tracks and I could see a fire at the end of the track. It definitely looked like just the passenger vehicle on fire. It didn't look like a lot of fire at that point. I proceeded to try to -- I went around the crossing, around the back end of the train at that point to go down the side. Because even at that point -- and this is 3, 4 minutes after it happened, probably -- people were already starting to self-evacuate coming down that one side of the train.

So, I went down the parkway side of the train on the east side. The tracks were covered in snow. It wasn't easy to get down there. By the time I got halfway down the length of the train, already at that point I could see that the fire had become two or three times what I saw just a moment ago. At that point I realized that the train itself had to be on fire. At that point I started calling on the radio requesting -- I think I asked immediately for three extra engine companies from neighboring towns. And seconds later, I ran into the train engineer.

I think me a police officer, probably from Mount Pleasant Police or MTA -- I'm not sure -- we were met by the train engineer. He informed me that we're probably looking at a dozen or two dozen injured. He told me that he was able to get four or five people out of the train himself. Passengers were helping people get of the car that was on fire, but he informed me immediately that there were people that were not able to get out of that train, that, you know, he was overcome by smoke and everybody had to get out.

So, within the first minute, literally, of being there, I knew that we were dealing with something where we were going to have fatalities. You know, like I said, at that point, once he informed me of the 20 or so, whatever it was, two dozen passengers that were going to be injured, I called for immediate -- five ambulances directly to the scene, and I believe I asked them to put that many on standby. I told them where I'd want them to be staged, which was this - - The Cliffs Valhalla. It's a sports gym club type of thing, which was right across the street from the accident.

So, I got a better look at how much fire. Like I said, at that point I continued past the conductor -- or the engineer. I got to the front car that was actually on fire. At least three-quarters of it was being consumed at this point. So I knew at that point -- of course, we also have to realize that the third rail is probably still energized. So I knew that entry into the train car that was on fire was almost certainly not going to happen. One, we have to wait it for to be de-energized; and two, being the first guy there, the engine wasn't even there with water yet, so it's not like we could have used water that that point.

At that point, the other units started coming in behind me, the firefighters. The first thing I wanted them to do is get everybody from the next car in out of that car before the fire just kept going down car to car. I didn't know whether it was going to spread from one car to the other. There were already passengers that were on the ground with injuries. One was a leg injury where -- you know, a compound fracture. So there were people on the ground. It was definitely chaotic. But that was my first -- other than over the radio asking for the mutual aid companies, ambulances, and engines, I, you know, wanted everybody to concentrate on getting everybody out of harm's way, evacuating the passengers at least further back in the train at first, and then, eventually, we shifted to getting them off the train. And I used that same Cliffs of

Valhalla as a place to send the passengers, because it was about a 10-degree night and it was getting cold either on the train or even outside.

So, it was probably was about 10 minutes where I was right alongside the burning car. At that point, we had quite a few firefighters, you know, 20 or -- 15, 20 guys, at least, near the train car trying to establish a water source. Danny would have been there at that point. At that point -- the way the fire department operates is we try to put together a command post because all those incoming units have to talk to somebody and they had to be able to report in to the command post. So we usually set that back a little ways from actual fire. So I had to get off the tracks, walk back down out onto the highway, which is where we put the command post.

Q. Can you say exactly where that command post was?

A. Directly across from the train, on the Taconic State Parkway. So, anyway --
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And at what point was the parkway shut down?

Was it shut down by then?

OC: Yeah. When I got out onto the parkway, there was no cars coming at me.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. And that's -- so, that -- you said directly across from the train. Like what portion of the train? Like where on the train?

A. The actually burning car.

Q. Near the front of the train?

A. Yeah, toward the front of the train. So I had a view directly in front of me of the firefighting operations. OC, at that point, we let him handle the operations where he would direct the actual men. Any requests that he'd have for additional support or equipment, he would relay to me on one radio frequency, and then on a different frequency, I would talk to the county dispatch and request those additional units or assets or whatever we may need. I remained at the command post at that point and met up with all the incoming units and led the op, you know, and acted as incident command and took it from there. It quickly became like an ICS thing where it was a joint command. Matt was there and we wind up having -- the county commissioner was there, -----, and it went from there.

Q. And at what point -- so, you were acting as the IC at that command center.

A. Correct.

Q. Did you have -- what other -- did you have designated points of contact for, like, EMS operations or -- like what other --

A. Yeah. It was --

Q. -- what other points of contact were established?

A. It was a little chaotic in the beginning. We have a separate ambulance corps. It has nothing to do with the fire department. So, I knew that they were inbound at Valhalla, plus we were going to get all the additional ambulances, which was probably at least a dozen. The county dispatch asked me who was going to be handling it, but we definitely -- the fire department had their hands full, which is fire suppression and evacuation, so I told them that, obviously, this is Valhalla Ambulance Corps' district, get a hold of them on the radio, switch them to the alternate channel that they can speak on, and turn it over to the Valhalla Ambulance to be EMS command. I believe that they continued that role, but -- yeah. It was just too much for me to worry about --

Q. Right.

A. -- EMS command at that point. It's not my specialty and --

OC: They did have EMS Battalion 11 there because he did meet with meet with me at one point on the train to make sure everybody was evacuated. I think he's -- he was the in charge for all of the --

INTERVIEWER 1: For the EMS?

OC: Coordination, yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: Um-hum. Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What about the police? What kind of interaction did you have with -- was there an incident commander set up for them?

IC: Yeah, the police did come. I had Metro-North Police at the command post, as well as Mount Pleasant was there. They were a little -- Mt. Pleasant really, was really involved in the evacuation and things like that. They didn't immediately come to the command post. I went up with county police there. There were so many groups represented at the command post.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Did law enforcement have a designated point of contact?

A. One -- well, Metro-North had one guy that constantly stayed there with us. County police had a couple that stayed with us the whole time. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. Eventually, Mount Pleasant brought in a large command vehicle, probably 15 by 15. It was huge, like this room on wheels.

Q. Yeah, MERV.

A. Yeah. And we had briefings in there. I was impressed how big that thing from --

OC: It works.

IC: A road vehicle folded out, but -- so we did hourly --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Like an RV?

OC: It works.

IC: -- in the beginning. Yeah, in the beginning, I think it was like hourly we did a briefing just to see where we stood, what was coming in, and then we'd go back out and run the scene. That's the initial --

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay. Do you have any questions?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, I have a couple questions.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. So, the first one is, you know, you, of course, know the guy who's running it. So was there any communication issues within the fire department that --

A. At something like that, even smaller incidents, there's a lot of times where everybody can't be talking on the radio at the same time.

Q. Right.

A. So there was times where I'd have three different units calling command, you know, and you'd just have to, one at a time, try to get to them, process what information they had and, you know -- so, being that we were at the command post, at that point we -- I'd turn it over to ----- from the county or -----, the battalion chief, to follow through on it. I just heard, what I said, processed it, made a decision, passed it on to the next guy to get on a radio, and -- but, yeah, there's a lot of talking at the same time. It's kind of unavoidable. When we get a really bad storm or something like that and -- there's four different departments that operate on the same channel as us. Luckily nobody else was having an incident or else it would have been even worse. The county does have the capability of switching, say go to an alternate frequency. So it wasn't any interference from outside, but just the amount of equipment that was coming in, it was a lot to talk to in the very beginning.

Q. And everybody's on the channel and has access to the same --

A. Correct.

Q. -- (indiscernible)?

A. Yeah, the whole county -- we can go anywhere in the county and be able to switch over to -- there's 9 or 10 different channels that we operate on.

Q. Okay. And what about with the other --

OC: Why don't you just clarify between --

IC: Yeah. When we operate on a scene -- well, first of all, we get dispatched on one low-band channel, and then when we're responding, the vehicles actually talk to 60 control on another trunk channel, and then we go to operations for fire ground, as we call it, is on a different radio. So actually, as chief, I sit there with two different radios: one to talk to, you know, 60 control and one to talk to the guys actually doing the work. So --

In the very beginning, I'm like, okay, there was -- you know, it's like that. So at that point this radio goes, all right---, car 1, you handle that. And so, it gets a little confusing. But once the command post got set up, I didn't have to worry about one of the two channels for the most part.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. Well, you know, honestly, that sounds pretty efficient, it seems.

A. Yeah.

Q. There's -- I'm not sure that there's a better alternative. What about any sense of issues for the --

A. I think the hardest thing, as far as from what I can see with the EMS, is just the access. I mean, it's a couple hundred yards up the railroad tracks, so, you know, we brought in, like, backboards and almost used them as sleds to pull the injured back, because we had to get them back to the intersection by the crossing, which is where they were able to get put on the ambulances. So, just the location where it happened to be, you know, one side is a cemetery, so there's no road next to it. The other side was the highway, but, yet --

Q. There's a creek.

A. Then you have to have that little brook or what becomes the Bronx River eventually. We even had to put ladders across it just to go over it. So the hard -- as far as EMS, I think, you know, the hardest thing is getting the patient from the point of injury all the way to the end of the track to the crossing, and then on to the ambulance.

Q. Yeah. Well, a little bit easier than (indiscernible).

A. Yeah. And at the same time, you know, luckily, the evacuation was going down one side of the car and the firefighters and EMS were coming up the other side. If we were crossing paths, nothing would have gotten done. There was very little room to work with. You're working in 8 inches of snow. There's a grade there that you would easily slide off and right down into that little river bed, so --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So, where was the EMS approaching from?

A. They wound up at that intersection of Commerce, at the traffic light right near the crossing and --

Q. So they were coming from -- you said they were coming from a different direction?

INTERVIEWER 2: No, the --

IC: No. I mean alongside the train.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. I gotcha.

A. People were evacuating down one side and fire and EMS were trying to get up the other side.

Q. Okay. I gotcha.

A. But eventually we had to bring in -- so, while we did have incoming guys, once we started moving patients, then we would have to criss-cross with our own guys. But I don't

think it really was that big of a deal because most of the firefighters were there and they obviously helped with the -- moving the patients.

OC: What also happens is a lot of them coming across -- setting at the ladders and coming across the river.

IC: Right.

OC: You know.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Do you remember, there was an MTA fire chief, an off-duty fire chief that was the first -- he was on scene, I think --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: MTA Chief [sic]?

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. -- MTA Chief -- yes.

A. -----, yeah.

Q. -----, Yeah, -----, Do you remember, what were your actions with -- what do you remember -- like at what point did you see him in the mix and --

A. Prior to going on the command post, I did interact with him a little bit. I was relying on him to confirm the rail was de-energized, because anytime you're on the tracks that's the biggest hazard we've got at that point. So once he was able to confirm from Metro-North that the train -- the rail was de-energized, that's really what I wanted him there for. I'm sure ---- probably interacted with him beyond that, but --

OC: Most of the night, I interacted with him.

IC: -- that was the interaction I had with him. I needed to know that rail was shut down, and once it was and [REDACTED] was taking care of operations, I was able to walk away from him and go to the command post.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay. I think --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: One of the issues that can sometimes come up in a whole bunch of volunteer organizations, a big event (indiscernible) did you see that happening?

IC: Dan, that would be more --

OC: On my side of the tracks where I was located, we were able to -- when we first had -- we set up our hose lines and we had a crew for -- we had three lines stretched, two in operation, and then we eventually put the third in. We made sure -- we said, if you're not doing anything, you're going to be staging, but -- and then a lot of the guys were assisting with the evacuation of the numerous commuters. So, as getting boggled up in there, it was, guys, stay away, out of each other's way, you know. It didn't -- there was no butting of heads. So --

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay, so are we ready to switch over?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, I think so.

INTERVIEW OF OC

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. So, yeah, why don't we just go to you then and just describe your --

A. Right.

Q. -- you know, what you remember about what happened.

A. Okay. I'm not sure how long I pulled up after IC. I came in on Rescue 9. I came, likewise, northbound up the parkway, and then, you know, turned south of the incident. The rig parked at the Commerce intersection, and from there, I grabbed -- I was still -- I wasn't in my turnout gear at that point because I had just come off duty from my other job. I grab a radio and I ran it up to where the battalion chief was already setting up kind of an IC point, where the incident command post was set up eventually.

Parkway southbound, there were still cars coming at us in the left-hand lane at a slow rate of speed, but then, eventually, maybe 30 seconds later, that would -- it was shut down.

As I was looking at the train, I saw that it was -- when I was there, it was heavy fire in the front end with the vehicles on fire and rolling into the -- where the engineer was stationed and there was heavy smoke throughout the first train car. As I was coming across, I watched the train car kind of light up, in a fashion, where the back end caught on fire where the rest of the commuters were. At that point a commuter was yelling out to me from the woods in the cemetery side that there were injured people on the cemetery side of the train and nobody was with them. And I realized everybody was concentrated on one side of the train.

That's when I ran across and decided to just go down the culvert, across the river, and across the tracks to assess what we had at that side, where I found at least two injured parties there. And it was -- the commuters were helping each other out. I didn't get -- I didn't ask them exactly what train car they came out of, but I found out later they came out of the first -- they were jumping out of the windows of the first train car.

I then had another chief in North White Plains meet up with me and I had him stay there as I ran back to get EMS equipment for these people to get them out of there. We ended up -- I went down the cemetery side of the train, and that was when people are evacuating out on the cemetery side as well, and I got hung up in there because there was a bridge and people were walking along the bridge and there was no -- you couldn't get -- pass to the other side because it was just a deep ravine.

Q. Just to clarify, so I thought you had said that you had already gone to the cemetery side when you -- to see the two injured and the people that had jumped out?

A. Yes.

INTERVIEWER 2: He came back for EMS equipment.

OC: I was going back to get --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Then you came back for EMS equipment, got the EMS equipment, and then went back over to the cemetery side?

A. Yeah. As I did that --

Q. Got it.

A. -- the Taconic side and went through the second car with the EMS equipment to get to those people, and then I turned the scene over to other qualified EMS personnel to evacuate those persons, and that's when I came back and took over as the operational chief and to do the fire suppression.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. So, some of you guys were using the train as the conduit rather than trying to go around the whole (indiscernible)?

A. Exactly, yeah. Because when I realized -- I was also looking for alternate means of egress for these people. If there was a road in the cemetery, we could get the ambulances to them, which was -- it was impossible because we were trudging through a foot, foot and a half of snow and jumping over headstones and it was -- but, I'm not sure, positive, how they brought those people back across with EMS, so -- because I had turned it over to them.

But as I was -- before when I -- backtrack -- before when I was crossing the tracks to get to the people that were on the other side of the train, I did ask -- I shouted across at personnel that were at the fire car if it was de-energized, and someone said yes so I proceeded across. And as I proceeded across -- I want to say it was magnesium block in a car, you know, it looked like a magnesium explosion had come out of the car. And then in --

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. Can you just describe what you mean by magnesium --

A. It was like white sparks.

Q. Which part of the car was that?

A. It was the SUV.

Q. Oh, okay. Out of the (indiscernible).

A. SUV. Yeah, not the train.

Q. You had the train car and the parked car.

A. Yeah, it was the SUV.

Q. Okay.

A. I would, in my years of profession, I -- I don't know, it looked like a magnesium explosion. And then the tires went. But I was probably -- I could feel the heat. That's how close I was to the car. And then that was my trip across.

INTERVIEWER 1: And when that happened, how -- at that point, at the time that you saw that, the rest of the car go up with the tires and stuff, that -- and the magnesium, or potentially magnesium, how engulfed was the train at that point?

OC: The train was already engulfed. Because I was still on Taconic when I saw the train light up.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. I'm interested in how quickly the fire spread --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- and so, like, where it started, what the sources are.

A. I -- honestly, I couldn't tell you why, but it -- when I witnessed it, when I saw the fire, it was really quick. I had never seen something take off that quick. Because it was -- like IC said, it was -- the front part of the car was fully involved. The SUV was fully involved and, you know, going into the thing, and then all of sudden, it just -- like a flashover, the car lit up -- the train car lit up.

Q. The train car lit up. It's actually the whole length --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: That's something I can comment on because that was the first piece of apparatus on the parkway.

I wasn't on the train side; I was on the parkway. So we were the first one to pull up when the engine pulled up, and I saw that explosion that he's talking about, and there was a fire on the front of the car, the train car.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The train car. So, that's on fire?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: While that was on fire, we were pulling the 4-inch. I've never -- and I've been in the department almost 30 years. I've never seen a fire move so fast. I mean, it was in the front of that car, and I'm talking minutes, that whole car was up and gone.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And it just basically (indiscernible).

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Basically, I was like -- we were all like -- I was like -

-

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) cabin, then it flashed through --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: I was saying to ----, I was like, I've never seen a fire move so fast. And I'm on the parkway, so I could see -- you know, I'm in the back. I'm not on the tracks like these guys, but I was just amazed how fast that fire went. It was like, it was -- in the front of that car, where the car was, like, he has said, the explosion -- I saw that too. And then --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It just --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: -- it ripped right through that train car like -- I've never seen a fire move that fast. That was devastating how fast that fire went.

INTERVIEWER 1: And what stage was the -- this was when the other apparatus were just arriving or --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Yeah, I was the first -- our utility rescue was the first one, the front -- like I said, we -- I pulled up to put the light towers up, because I said I'm going to go down where there is because they're going to need lights over at that scene on the parkway, and that's -- because we don't have water on that rescue.

INTERVIEWER 2: So, you pulled up to the --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Front, where the fire was.

INTERVIEWER 2: -- to the front of the train on the --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Yes, on the parkway.

INTERVIEWER 2: -- on the parkway.

Let me ask all of you this question. And this is a -- did anybody notice, and obviously if you're at the back of the train, you have kind of an angled view to the front car, but if you're directly across, you have kind a view a little more sort of in to the car. And at this point we know that the doors had been opened because people had evacuated, I think that was used. Was it sort of smoke and then the whole thing is on fire, or was there a sense that there were two -- fire at the front where the motor vehicle was and then there was another fire further back in the -- in a train car? Do you know?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: From what I saw, because I was -- like I said, I was on the parkway, and while we were pulling the engine - now, mind you, I looked at this thing, I see the fire on the front. I'm like, it's not that bad. Yes, I saw smoke. It was banked down in that car. You could tell that that car had smoke in it.

But when we pulled that 4-inch line off and we -- they were running it across, I'm turning around looking, and I just could see this fire moving. And it just -- it moved through the car. You know, there on the tracks, it's a little different. From what I saw, I'm looking straight across at it and I could see the fire move right through the car. And the guys I was with -- with Mikey, we were both like, that fire is just moving so fast. I mean, I was just amazed. I'm talking minutes it went through that car, really fast.

OC: Okay. My -- to be honest, my point of view, I was still in the parkway when I saw the car light up, the train car light up. And like Andy said, it was full of smoke from the -- you know, the front doors, you go -- if you go in the front doors, to the right is the engineer's quarters and then there's a couple of seats there? That was on fire. Then all of the sudden, just the rest of the car lit up right -- you know, just moments after I looked at it. And then that's when I just proceeded across.

INTERVIEWER 1: Just to clarify for my notes, Andy, your last name is Oudheusden?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: FIRE COMMISSIONER 1. Close.

INTERVIEWER 1: FIRE COMMISSIONER 1. Okay.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Not bad.

INTERVIEWER 1: I've got the card.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Some people destroy it, so I'm not going to complain.

INTERVIEWER 1: At what unit did you arrive in on, what apparatus?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: I drove Utility 59. I was the chauffeur.

INTERVIEWER 1: U-59, okay. And that -- what is that utility vehicle? That's like a --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: It's basically -- it's a mini rescue. We have a Rescue 9 -- a rescue -- we have a full rescue truck --

INTERVIEWER 1: A U-rescue?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: -- and this is a -- this is mini-rescue truck.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So it's got lights and hose, but no water?

INTERVIEWER 1: So, it's like --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: No, it doesn't have any hoses. It's basically extrication. We do -- I mean, there's --

INTERVIEWER 1: So it's like a van?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: It's your vac team stuff.

INTERVIEWER 1: Is it like a box van?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: No, we do -- what's that?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is it here? Can he see it?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: No, it's down -- it's at the other fire house.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Light tower has a -- you know, we had --

OC: It's like a utility truck.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Is it a box?

OC: Yeah, Yeah. It's got a box --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So, it's --

OC: -- International front.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It's a smaller box than the giant one?

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Yeah.

OC: Right. But it has a large light tower on it.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. And were you alone on that vehicle?

A. No, I had, I had a crew with me.

Q. How many were on the crew?

A. There was five of us.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And is -- I guess this is a question that we might have wanted to clarify earlier. Is it pretty common in this environment you have folks at the station that are driving to the scene and you have other guys at home?

OC: We don't -- our department doesn't do that.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Doesn't do that. Okay. So, everybody comes from the fire department?

OC: Yeah.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Unless all piece of apparatus -- like a big event and all of the piece of apparatus are gone, some -- you know, the stragglers will. But everybody migrates to the firehouse and gets on a fire truck.

OC: We have -- we all have our tags. So you tag in when you get in the truck, and then when you tag in at the operation, so they know who's on the apparatus and who's on the fire ground.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Excellent. Okay.

INTERVIEWER 1: So, I'm going to --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Sorry. Did you have, do you have --

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah, do you guys have --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do you have more questions?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes. I have a couple more questions on -- well, my interest -- do you mind?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. Okay. That's really helpful on the fire, but I'm also interested in evacuation and also access to the train. So, in terms of getting people off, were there any issues?

A. Like I said, when I first was there, I was more concentrating on getting those injured parties taken care of.

Q. Right.

A. I -- what I can tell, it was very calm, very orderly as I was going down. Commuters were helping commuters get off the train. I heard the conductor make an announcement to let the people know what was going on and started telling people to migrate to the back cars. The only problem that I saw -- I mean, and it was a disaster, and it's not like an airplane where there's no accountability; you know, who's on that train and where they sat. There were people walking up here on Columbus Avenue. They made their way up this way. They walked all up -- you know. But that was -- you know, you have no control over that; they just walked away. But as to them getting off the train, it was pretty -- from my point of view, it was a calm -- because people didn't even know what happened. Because the engine -- the conductor got on the PA and said that we struck a car, and so everybody remain calm and --

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So, he was moving them to the back of the train --

A. Yes.

Q. -- to try to keep them on the train instead of going outside?

A. He tried to move them to the back, and then had them -- I guess, evacuate them off the back end of the train. But the people were still getting off the train. They were -- doors were open and they were getting off. Because they were -- I remember seeing people with canes walking along the culverts and I was like, oh. But the commuters were helping each other out.

BY INTERVIEWER 3:

Q. I was going to ask about that. Was there any sense of issue -- obviously, there's no platform they're climbing down through all this, right?

A. No, they were -- we gave -- some of them, by the time we brought our little giant ladders up and so we could get them down, the -- before we got there, though, there was those stepladders people were climbing down on that were hooked onto the train there.

Q. Yeah, yeah, the built-in ones.

A. And they were coming down off of that. But they were helping each other out. Then we did -- we had our crews do a sweep of the train from the second car back, multiple times, to make sure there was nobody in there, nobody hiding, nobody hurt that needed assistance. But from the second car back, there --

Q. So, it sounds like there were some people with diminished mobility, but nobody who was getting carried, who was just handicapped or (indiscernible)?

A. The only people I saw getting carried were the severely injured.

Q. Injured. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. The other thing of interest is access.

A. Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Q. Okay, so --

A. The big thing, you know, you had the -- that brook. There was a stream right there in that -- the big culvert, so you had to either come from -- access from Commerce Street and go all the way up -- and I didn't realize how far it was until when I was on the cemetery side trudging through that snow. I was like, this is a distance. And that's why we decided to send the injured parties that were in the cemetery through the train car onto the track side, because it was

more smoother on the track side, more -- the snow was kind of trampled down through the other previous commuters getting out. Because the other side was just --

INTERVIEWER 1: So when you say moved through the train car, you mean just traversing over the -- from one side of the train car to the other -- to the other side.

OC: Right, through the --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: To get back and over --

INTERVIEWER 1: Not using the train car as a -- not moving down the length of the train car, but just across the train car?

OC: Through -- yeah, across the train car. Correct.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

OC: Yep. It was either the second or -- I think it was the second car we sent -- second or third car.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. Now, I understand while the fire was going on, there was an attempt to go from the second car into the first car through (indiscernible)?

A. Yes. That was later on. That was just to put the fire out basically. And they couldn't -- nobody could open that door. It was just --

Q. Was it completely jammed or would it open a little bit, or --

A. What happened with it, the whole door -- I'm sure you guys saw in the pictures, it was just -- from the bottom, was bulged out. So the only thing to gain access was the window. And unfortunately we saw one of the seats sitting in the -- directly by that door and -- but our basic wish is just to -- a different way of trying to put the fire out, and then ventilate the train car.

INTERVIEWER 1: And what -- just to clarify, what door did --

INTERVIEWER 3: The barrel door from the second car.

INTERVIEWER 1: Barrel door at the -- which end of the second car? The --

OC: The north end of the car. It had opened. The second car opened, the first one.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The one into the first, yeah.

INTERVIEWER 3: The rear car --

OC: Right.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. You could get out of the second car, but not into the first?

A. Exactly.

INTERVIEWER 3: The rear --

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. But, that door was bulged, like maybe one of the rails was pushing it or something?

A. Something hit it.

Q. Something hit it?

A. Something hit it.

INTERVIEWER 1: So, barrel door at the --

INTERVIEWER 3: At the rear of the first car?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: First car, rear door.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah, we've heard this a couple of times, that multiple people tried to get into that and the --

OC: Yeah, there's no way. It --

INTERVIEWER 3: -- the frame was twisted. It was no longer --

OC: Yeah, that door was not opening.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

Q. Now, some of the windows, the side windows near the end of the second car, near that door that won't open, have some marks on them like people were trying to take them out or (indiscernible)?

A. Yeah, I think that was on our end. I think they were trying to help -- I think smoke got into that and they were trying to ventilate that a little bit too. That was only taken out by firefighters, not the commuters trying to --

Q. Right, but I'm -- that's the question. Was that causing you a problem? Would I have better if those windows came out?

A. I mean, well, they did get one of them out, so if -- I mean, if there was fire in there, it would have been better to get it out, but I don't think it was too much of an urgency to get those windows out.

Q. Okay.

INTERVIEWER 1: Can you -- you described where you saw one of the deceased. Can you describe any of the other locations of any of the deceased or --

OC: After we extinguished the fire? A lot of this, we --

INTERVIEWER 1: Well, just -- I'm just trying to establish as best I can --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: We have the death investigator scene diagrams coming.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

OC: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 3: So, yeah. I don't --

OC: Okay.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

INTERVIEWER 3: Because there's three original diagrams for that, as well as the after-event photos from that.

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Do -- can I ask a question?

INTERVIEWER 3: Sure.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: How much rail is in the -- was in the car, do you know?

INTERVIEWER 3: Yeah, it's a lot.

OC: A lot.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I was amazed that --

INTERVIEWER 3: Twelve full 39-foot stretches. The leading piece is about 6 feet long.

OC: They got the -- I guess another thing went up to --

INTERVIEWER 1: Twelve 39-foot sections?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Of the 39 --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Almost 480 feet (indiscernible).

INTERVIEWER 1: How much?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Almost 480 feet.

OC: (Indiscernible) take out that link going up to the top of the second car. Because if it went through any other level, that would have been --

INTERVIEWER 1: They broke apart, I assume, right?

(Simultaneous conversation.)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, (indiscernible) inches every (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, okay. They're stacked up on (indiscernible).

INTERVIEWER 3: So in 39-foot sections; each 39-foot section was (indiscernible)?

OC: Yeah --

IC: So it just went over the wheel and the wheel just kept feeding it like? Or is that how --

INTERVIEWER 3: It went through the car.

IC: Right.

INTERVIEWER 3: It went through the automobile and got kind of directed and then just kept feeding.

IC: Right.

INTERVIEWER 3: And the way it was connected --

IC: Because the rail is one of the continuous link, right?

INTERVIEWER 3: Well, it's in pieces that are coupled together --

IC: Together, right.

INTERVIEWER 3: -- and they're designed to decouple.

IC: Right.

INTERVIEWER 3: So eventually at those joints they decouple. But as the train was stopping, the --

IC: It was like a system. It just feed the rail right into it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, the automobile kind of lined up at the rail and it fed into -- it was exactly -- it fit really well in between the structure of the car body and the structure of the suspension. It --

INTERVIEWER 3: Of the train, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Of the train, yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible) was all there.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So, it -- basically the automobile was pushing it up at an angle, and just the way the rail car is was keeping it aligned, so it just fed into the car. It's really, when I think about it, an astonishing --

IC: Freak. I mean, a -- I mean, the --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. I mean, if the automobile had been 3 or 4 inches either way, the rail might have gone outside or it would have hit -- like directly hit the suspension of the train and broke it apart (indiscernible).

IC: And that was energized the whole time, probably.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: It, it was going on and off for about the first 25 (indiscernible).

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah. It shuts --

INTERVIEWER 3: Right. It's designed to eventually shut itself off when it's overloaded, but obviously if there's some minor thing, you want the train to keep going. Right?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

INTERVIEWER 3: It's part of the investigation --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 3: -- on ongoing part of the investigation. But there's -- the third rail is about 150 (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's a lot.

INTERVIEWER 1: How rare is it that the third rail actually winds up inside of a train in a typical train wreck?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: This is pretty unusual.

INTERVIEWER 3: It's pretty unusual and it -- I don't think we've ever seen this amount of it.

INTERVIEWER 1: I would assume it's got to be unusual for the train itself to catch fire like that also. I mean --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: -- that's one of the things I never imagine would happen.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. Well, the material itself is supposed to be fire resistant.

OC: Because we was always informed when we trained with you guys that -- I mean, it's going to be smoky, but it's --

INTERVIEWER 3: Not typically going to be flames.

OC: Yeah, intensity of that magnitude.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah. So --

INTERVIEWER 1: [REDACTED] did you have a question?

BY [REDACTED]:

Q. Yeah, two quick questions. You mentioned that you heard the conductor or one of the train crew make an announcement. You could actually hear it over the PA? You heard it over the speakers?

A. It was over the speakers, yes.

Q. Okay. And --

A. And I was outside the train and I heard them. I heard it come over the PA system.

Q. Did you hear one announcement, more --

A. I just hear the one.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. The second point. When you said in the second car, the firefighters I guess tried to remove the windows?

A. Yeah.

Q. Was it all by hand or were there any hand tools used or --

A. I'll be honest with you. I can't confirm what they did there. I know at one point they were trying to use hand tools and I told them this is -- hand tools are not going to work on these windows, you're going to have to take the gaskets out.

Q. But this was hand tools on the inside of the car?

A. I don't know. I don't know how they did that.

Q. Okay.

A. But -- all I know is they were trying -- they were telling me they were going to try and they were going to take hand tools, and I didn't witness anything, so --

IC: I did also -- the conductor who was at the back of the train, as I left and ----- started to take over operations, as I'm making my way to the end of the train to go to the command post, I actually spoke with him and I informed him at this point we're going to evacuate everybody and send the people across the street. He wanted another location, I guess, so he could forward it on to MTA and tell them where the evacuation area was going to be. So, I had a brief conversation with him and informed him that at this point, I'm ordering the evacuation of the train. I'll throw that in for you.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. Okay. Were there other firefighter rescue units that you think would be really valuable for us to speak to? And what I'm interested in is the, you know, evacuation of the injured, of the more -- you know, not necessarily the -- like the later -- a lot people go off themselves and the later operations --

A. (Indiscernible).

Q. -- not that important with, but the -- yeah, the --

A. The initial getting the injured parties, there are a few firefighters that -- like especially the ones that took out the severely injured.

Q. Um-hum. Do you know which units they're from or who they are?

IC: The first two, Engine -- whatever it -- I think it was 82.

OC: Probably -----, maybe.

IC: Yeah, ----- and ----- and ----- were all on it.

OC: Yeah.

IC: So the first engine would have been involved, the rescue would have been involved --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And -----.

OC: Yeah, (indiscernible).

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's 84?

IC: I think 84 was the first one on the scene. It's either 84 or 82; I'm not sure. Whichever one was on the earlier call.

INTERVIEWER 1: So, -----, and what was the other name?

IC: Captain -----, -----, who's a lieutenant, was on the engine also for his crew.

OC: Yeah, because they were definitely the first ones up there, I mean, after you.

IC: Yeah, they ran up the track shortly after me. At the point where I started turning around, they were already doing things --

OC: And then --

IC: -- attending to the injured.

OC: -- who was on --

INTERVIEWER 1: So maybe we can get the contact information to contact those guys to see if they can -- we can interview them?

IC: Yeah, we can do that. --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, absolutely.

IC: One of the other commissioners was on the rescue with the first responders when he came, so --

OC: Yeah.

IC: -- and they did --

OC: He -- actually assisted with the passengers that were coming out onto Commerce and guiding them into The Cliffs over there. I know ----- was up there.

IC: He walked the train too, he said, so --

OC: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: And that's -- ----- is a commissioner?

IC: Yeah.

OC: Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What's his last name?

OC: -----.

IC: ----- Can I take a 2-minute break? Four cups of coffee is killing me.

INTERVIEWER 1: I think -- okay, okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, go for it.
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
 CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
 FEBRUARY 3, 2015
 Interview of IC and OC

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-15-MR-006
PLACE: North White Plains, New York
DATE: February 6, 2015

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.

Transcriber

**Transcript of Interview with the Valhalla Fire Department Fire Commissioner 1.
February 6, 2015**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of: *
METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN *
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK * Docket No.: DCA-15-MR-006
FEBRUARY 3, 2015 *

Interview of: FIRE COMMISSIONER 1
Valhalla, New York
Friday,
February 6, 2015

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: INTERVIEWER 1, Ph.D.
Survival Factors Investigator

APPEARANCES:

INTERVIEWER 1, Ph.D., Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

INTERVIEWER 2, M.D., Chief Medical Officer
National Transportation Safety Board

INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW OF FIRE COMMISSIONER 1

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. Meaning that your primary job is also in the area?

A. I'm also a -- yeah, in the town of Greenburg.

I was -- I just got out of turn as chief here, so that's why I was established as chief -- operations chief at the scene. I have -- Fire Fighter I National, Fire Fighter II National, the ICSes, you name it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He's got more certificates than me.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: I'm an arson investigator, code enforcement officer. I've been to many of the Metro-North training drills. I actually did the MCI drill you guys had in North White Plains, like -- I think it was 1990 or something like that. Even that was hectic. That was -- I was a rookie then, and I -- you know, it was insane. But the Fire Officer I, Fire Officer II, National. Like I said, I told the news this morning, I says any amount of training, something like that is just going to -- nothing prepares you for that.

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. And what kind of follow-up or, you know, debriefing, or follow-up briefing is available for anybody who might --

A. We -- last night IC just set up -- we had -- it's a peer counseling program the county fire control coordinates, and they came and brought counselors in for the guys last night. The Valhalla Ambulance Corps brought people in the other night.

INTERVIEWER 1: Wednesday night.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: And then our insurance companies are offering us counselors, but -- I'm sure IC has -- I've been receiving multiple calls from other chiefs around offering different counselors, from FDNY, from Yonkers Fire, so -- and then we're watching our guys, and if they come to us, we're making sure --

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. Making sure they get help?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay, cool.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And the District's also -- our insurance company's called us and is willing to go the extra mile of whatever needs to be done besides this. So whatever they need.

BY INTERVIEWER 2:

Q. I mean, in terms of getting back to the team, I mean, I think that we -- we obviously in the beginning of this investigation, other than the starting of the fire and how fast it was, which we've heard from a number people (indiscernible) concerns with any of the response. Especially given the conditions, the location, the configuration and topography.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: It was tough. I mean, you know, how far the train travelled down those tracks and --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That's like a quarter of a mile, right?

INTERVIEWER 2: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER 1: Nah, a couple hundred yards, right?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't know. I guess --

INTERVIEWER 2: I think we're -- our first guesstimate is 1,000 feet.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Yeah, if the last train car was at Commerce and everything else was past it, you know, that's a good length.

INTERVIEWER 2: Right. Unfortunately you know when you -- even when you hit the emergency brakes --

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Oh, yeah, you know, stopping that train --

INTERVIEWER 2: -- it doesn't stop very quickly.

INTERVIEWER 1: Yeah, I got quoted saying that in TV or newspapers. It doesn't stop on a dime; no, no doubt about it.

INTERVIEWER 2: No, but it still stops faster than a giant tanker on an ocean, but --

INTERVIEWER 1: Freight, a freight train, right.

FIRE COMMISSIONER 1: Much less.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Pretty low bar.

BY INTERVIEWER 1:

Q. So we asked him number of years of experience, basic rundown of experience and training. Do you guys want to say -- so how many years you've been a fire fighter or what?

A. Okay, I've 35 years total.

Q. And then volunteer, career?

A. All volunteer. This is my second time through as chief. We do 4 total years as chief. So I did 5 years, and got a 4-year break while ----- and someone else took over. And now I'm ending my third year of a second 4 years, so -- the break was nice.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I'm just 28 years in. I'm an ex chief, now a commissioner. I don't have all the extensive training he has, but I do have a lot of preliminary stuff, management, operations, and stuff like that, and managing people, managing skills, so --

INTERVIEWER 1: Okay, great.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: And now for the star.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What? ----- got every course there is. I can't say -- you do, brother. I don't know anybody who's got every course you got.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I got to go take more. I got to go back to Montauk.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: All right. Anybody else have any other questions?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't think so. Thanks, guys, we really appreciate it.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: METRO-NORTH RAILROAD FATAL TRAIN
CRASH, VALHALLA, NEW YORK
FEBRUARY 3, 2015
Interview of FIRE COMMISSIONER 1

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-15-MR-006

PLACE: Valhalla, New York

DATE: February 6, 2015

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.

Transcriber

**Interview Notes from Interview with Valhalla Fire Department
 Captain 1, Captain 2, Captain 3, and Fire Commissioner 2.
 February 7, 2015**

These four gentlemen were all involved in the initial scene evaluation; Captain 2 and Fire Commissioner 2 on the rescue, Captain 3 on Tower 49, and Captain 1 on Engine 84. All with years of experience (Captain 1 with and Fire Commissioner 2 with 50 years.)

Notes:

- Injured victims on both sides of the train as well as uninjured passengers.
- Passengers helping one another.
- Rescue complicated by dark, deep snow, the distance to the first car, and the number of passengers
- Those who started on the Parkway side worked initially to keep passengers and rescue personnel from the 3rd rail until they could verify it was de-energized. None had had any specific training about rail accidents or with MTA/MN but knew this anyway.
- None could identify the EMS IC by name or description or name a single EMS provider in their town. Their reasoning is that they are separate services and only really meet each other on serious MVA's; the FD does not respond to regular medical calls and no one on the FD is required to be an EMT or even have CPR training.
- Early on (before water was available), Captain 1 did a sweep of the 2nd car and noted the first at that point was fully engulfed. He could see a person in the aisle seat on the right rear row who was not salvageable based on the amount of flames. He noticed the door was buckled but made no attempt to open it.
- Captain 1 mentioned hearing "things exploding" from the automobile
- Fire Commissioner 2 primarily stayed in the area of the Commerce Street crossing (unable to physically climb into the train or manage the long hike to the first car). He spent his time assisting the passengers down from the end of the train and pointing them to the Cliffs to warm up. He was the only person who noted that "there were lots of people wanting to be in charge" and that at one point it seemed to him that there were too many responders and they were getting in each other's way. In particular he noted that when the ATVs first arrived, they were in the way and it took some time to put them to use.
- Fire Commissioner 2 also responded to the prior fatal crossing accident in 1984 and described that at that time there were no gates, only lights at the crossing. He recalled that the driver lived for a short time after the accident but died in the hospital.
- The only MCI drills the VFD has participated in were run by the NYC DEP for chlorine leaks. They have done none with the County and don't cover the airport so haven't participated in those. There have also been no tabletop exercises.
- These 4 interviewees were unaware of any criteria for opening the County Emergency Operations Center but told us "they come if we ask them".

Interview Notes from Interview with MTAPD Sargent February 8, 2015

NTSB investigator interviewed MTAPD Sargent (7SGT 01A) at the District 7 MTA PD office on February 8, 2015.

Notes:

- He indicated that his designation on the CAD log would be either 7SGT or 01A.
- NTSB Investigator asked about how the MTA PD dispatch works. He said that when there is an emergency, the engineer or conductor calls the MTA PSAP – located in long island C3 Center. They will contact MTA PD. A 911 call will first go to the local PD, then get routed to the MTA PSAP if it is a MTA issue. NTSB Investigator asked when he arrived on scene. He said he drove down from the district 7 office, it took about 43 minutes so he arrived on scene about 7:15pm.
- He said that he went to the IC post, and checked in. He noted that some officers arrive on scene and don't always check in. NTSB investigator asked if he knew about how many units were already on scene. He did not know, but said that there were a few higher ranking officers that he believed had not checked in, because he became the law enforcement IC.
- NTSB investigator asked his activities as IC. He said that he interfaced with the FD IC; coordinated two officers at the cliffs (where the walking passengers were sent), helped to coordinate the city buses that they were arranging for the passengers, and coordinate the location and process of taking statements from eye witnesses, and secure the scene. He also noted that he spoke to FD to consider the preservation of the crime scene - such as avoiding the use of foam if that was possible, because it makes it difficult to investigate the scene.
- NTSB investigator asked about the witness statements, if they were passengers or other witnesses. – and if any were from the front train car. He said that there were mostly passengers and at least 3 from the front car. He said that he was IC for about 10 minutes until a higher ranking officer checked in.
- NTSB investigator asked who that was. He said it was 6CO Denmark.
- NTSB investigator asked who had he relieved as the previous law enforcement IC (before he got there). He said that he was unsure if there was a designated law enforcement IC before he arrived. He noted that early on scene, law enforcement priority was likely to assist with the safety and rescue of the passengers.