

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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 IN RE: :  
 :  
 THE HEAD-ON COLLISION : NTSB Accident No.  
 THAT OCCURRED NEAR : DCA16FR008  
 PANHANDLE, TEXAS ON :  
 JUNE 28, 2016 :  
 :  
 :  
 ----- :

Interview of: Darrell Harvill

Wednesday,  
June 29, 2016

Panhandle, Texas

BEFORE:

TOMAS TORRES, NTSB

This transcript was produced from audio  
provided by the National Transportation Safety Board.

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 (TIME NOT GIVEN)

3 MR. TORRES: Okay. Today is June 29, 2016,  
4 Panhandle, Texas. And we are interviewing a witness by  
5 the name of Darrell Harvill in connection with the  
6 accident here at the, head on collision near Panhandle,  
7 Texas. The NTSB accident number is DCA16FR008.

8 The purpose of the investigation is to  
9 increase the safety, not to assign blame, fault, or  
10 liability. NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of  
11 confidentiality or immunity from illegal certificate  
12 actions that pertains to the railroad employees.

13 A transcript or a summary of the interview  
14 will go into the public docket. The interviewee can  
15 have one representative of the interviewee's choice.  
16 Is there anybody there present with you? Mr. Darrell  
17 Harvill, would you please state your name and spell it  
18 out?

19 MR. HARVILL: My name is Darrell Harvill, D-  
20 A-R-R-E-L-L. Last name H-A-R-V-I-L-L.

21 MR. TORRES: And I'm Tomas Torres, Accident  
22 Investigator with the NTSB. First name Tomas, T-O-M-A-  
23 S. Last name Torres, T-O-R-R-E-S. Okay. Mr. Harvill,  
24 can you tell us what you witnessed? And you know, just  
25 give us a description of what you saw. And you know,

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1 what actions you took.

2 MR. HARVILL: I was pouring my second cup of  
3 coffee early in the morning yesterday when we heard a  
4 loud explosion outside. My girlfriend opened the door  
5 and said there's been an explosion, let's leave. I  
6 didn't think that was quite right. So I ran to the end  
7 of the trailer because I can't see from my trailer to  
8 where the explosion was. And I noticed that the two  
9 trains had collided.

10 So I came back, gathered my girlfriend. She  
11 is an EMS and she is required by law to respond. And  
12 we both ran towards the scene. I ran into where the  
13 wreck was. I ran over as close to the tracks as I  
14 could get within probably just 15 or 20 feet.

15 And I yelled up at the cars to see if there  
16 was anybody alive. And I looked around the tracks to  
17 see if there was anybody killed, wounded, or alive that  
18 I could help along the edge of the tracks. There was  
19 not. Nobody responded.

20 The explosions started just mostly small. I  
21 could see fluids leaking out of other cars. And the  
22 fire got so hot it drove me back and I moved back to a  
23 safe area.

24 In my opinion, the things that should have  
25 been done were, some were eventually done. But they

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1 were done way, way too late. And this includes the  
2 highway department, the local law enforcement, the DOT,  
3 the railroad. A lot of things that should have been  
4 done immediately, some weren't done at all and some  
5 were just done eventually, hours and hours later, and  
6 some pretty half heartedly.

7           In my opinion, as soon as this wreck  
8 happened, there's a way to go around this whole trailer  
9 part and this whole accident and it only takes about  
10 two minutes. They could have blocked off this end of  
11 the highway and stopped all traffic here. Because you  
12 don't know what is on those box cars. Nobody did at  
13 that time. The wreck is still fresh. Nobody's  
14 standing there with a manifest knowing what's going on.

15           And they can see, clearly see that there's a  
16 fire. Had one of those box cars been loaded with  
17 explosives or ammunition, especially if you'd have had,  
18 you know, a box car full of 30-06 ammunition in there,  
19 that'd have been a real game changer.

20           Everybody should have been evacuated out of  
21 this area within just minutes, as fast as you could  
22 have. This highway should have been blocked off as  
23 fast as possible. Instead, it took anywhere from two  
24 to three hours just to reroute traffic six blocks  
25 around this thing which could have easily been done by

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1 anybody.

2           And that, to me, was just, that's just  
3 almost inexcusable. And then they did a half hearted,  
4 well voluntary evacuation. You know, with this fire  
5 over here -- and maybe after they've pulled up the  
6 manifest and they realized what was on the train and  
7 stuff they said, well okay.

8           But still, the smoke and the fumes and the  
9 way the Texas wind changes around here, there still  
10 should have been everybody evacuated at least within a  
11 half a mile if not within a mile. Just because of,  
12 like I say, the ammunition thing to me. You know, and  
13 that's just my opinion. But it seems to me that would  
14 be the sensible thing to do first rattle out of the  
15 box.

16           The problem is, it looked like in these  
17 situations, that there's nobody really in charge that  
18 comes up and says hey, I need this highway blocked off  
19 here. I need you to do this. You know, you have the  
20 Sheriff's Department, you have the Highway Patrol, you  
21 have the railroad, you've got the local police, you've  
22 got the fire department.

23           You know, you've got everybody out here, all  
24 these different agencies and everybody responding at  
25 the same time. I get that. But you've got to have one

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1 guy in charge who's going to take charge and tell  
2 everybody what they need to be doing and what needs to  
3 be done for the safety of the public which, to me, was  
4 never even -- that looks like that was one of the last  
5 things thought about. Or it was thought about several  
6 hours later when that should have been the first thing  
7 they thought about.

8 MR. TORRES: So an incident commander maybe  
9 should have been placed quicker?

10 MR. HARVILL: Exact -- well we've got a  
11 really good Sheriff here. I know him personally. His  
12 name is Loren Brand, super good guy. I would have  
13 liked to have seen it be him. And like I said, I don't  
14 know -- and I believe that he was here. I just would  
15 have liked to have seen somebody been in charge over  
16 the whole deal, you know, I mean from the get go.  
17 Somebody has to take charge.

18 And like I say, get the highways blocked  
19 off, get people evacuated, get all the lookers off the  
20 road off up here. You know, you've got everybody  
21 stopping and looking and taking pictures and filming  
22 and stuff. They don't need any of that because you'll  
23 get people run over.

24 Then they had the DOT standing out here with  
25 their little old signs and stuff. And they're standing

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1 in the traffic. Half of them almost got run over.  
2 Everything, it was just, it wasn't professional, it  
3 wasn't what needed to be done. You know, everything  
4 was either like half ass or half hearted. I don't know  
5 what was going on. But it just, it was terrible.  
6 That's the only way I can describe it.

7 MR. TORRES: Okay. Where were you at when  
8 the train crashed? Were you outside?

9 MR. HARVILL: No I was in here.

10 MR. TORRES: In here?

11 MR. HARVILL: Yes. I just poured a cup of  
12 coffee.

13 MR. TORRES: And you, so you heard it?

14 MR. HARVILL: I heard an explosion first.  
15 When the two trains collided, it set off an explosion.  
16 And there was still pieces of smoking shrapnel landing  
17 all around me. As we were running over there, that  
18 stuff was still landing out here in the pasture, over  
19 here by the trailer park. Because it was blowing back  
20 behind us, just only about 100 feet back behind our  
21 houses.

22 MR. TORRES: So you mean like debris, like -  
23 -

24 MR. HARVILL: I'm talking mostly --

25 MR. TORRES: Ashes or like --

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1 MR. HARVILL: Embers and stuff but some of  
2 it was pretty big.

3 MR. TORRES: Yes.

4 MR. HARVILL: You know, some of it was like  
5 a foot across. And off the explosion, when it shot it  
6 into the air, well the wind blew it this direction and  
7 it's all landing over here.

8 MR. TORRES: Oh I see.

9 MR. HARVILL: Some of it was still on fire,  
10 some of it was just smoldering, some of it's just  
11 smoking. You know, there was just different degrees of  
12 stuff. I was just kind of noticing. And as I was  
13 running through making sure, you know, I'm not fixing  
14 to walk up on something or, you know, run into  
15 something that I shouldn't have as I was running  
16 through the pasture there.

17 MR. TORRES: So as soon as you walked out  
18 and you saw it, it was already in flames?

19 MR. HARVILL: Right. But the flames weren't  
20 that big then. It was -- yes, it had caught fire.  
21 When they smashed, the flames started there, you know,  
22 at the explosion there.

23 MR. TORRES: I mean, did you hear an  
24 explosion? Or you just --

25 MR. HARVILL: It sounded like it was an

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1 explosion at first, is what we heard. And then when  
2 she opened the door, I could see the big cloud of  
3 smoke. And you could still hear the crushing and the  
4 grinding of the cars.

5           So when I run to the end, I said no it's a  
6 wreck. And I told her. And then we both, she grabbed  
7 her stuff and we both took off over there. The last of  
8 the cards were still piling into the pile as we were  
9 headed over there. And the man and the woman over  
10 there on the highway were filming it.

11           But like I say, when I got over there I ran  
12 and tried to find if anybody was alive or --

13           MR. TORRES: And your girlfriend was inside  
14 here too or she was outside?

15           MR. HARVILL: No she went with me.

16           MR. TORRES: No, no but when it first --

17           MR. HARVILL: When it first hit she was in  
18 here with me. Yes. She's the one that opened the door  
19 and said it's an explosion over there, let's get out of  
20 here. She thought because we've got a big grain  
21 elevator over here across the highway and there's a  
22 bunch of anhydrous ammonia tanks over there which are  
23 extremely -- as we all know, anhydrous ammonia is, you  
24 know, that stuff gets loose. And they have thousands  
25 and thousands of gallons over there. It's what they

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1 supply their farmers with, with this grain elevator.

2 MR. TORRES: It's over here?

3 MR. HARVILL: It's just right across the  
4 street, right. So not knowing exactly what's blown up  
5 over there or what it's going to get on or what it's  
6 going to cause to dump where -- you know what I mean?  
7 Yes, had this piled up further back it could have  
8 really been bad. You know, had that anhydrous over  
9 there -- they've probably got 25 500-gallon tanks. And  
10 they've got at least two 10,000-gallon tanks of  
11 anhydrous over there.

12 MR. TORRES: So they're like 55-gallon  
13 tanks?

14 MR. HARVILL: No, they're 500-gallon. These  
15 are tube tanks that are on trailers.

16 MR. TORRES: Oh I see.

17 MR. HARVILL: There's like 20 of those. And  
18 then they've got the big ones that are mounted on the  
19 ground that are like 10,000-gallon tanks. They're  
20 huge. And had all of that stuff over there got loose,  
21 this situation could have went south in a hurry. And  
22 the wind was blowing right at us.

23 MR. TORRES: And what's your girlfriend's  
24 name?

25 MR. HARVILL: Her last name is going to be

1 fun to spell. Her first name is Catherine with a C.  
2 She goes by Cat. And her last name is Regiski  
3 (phonetic) and it takes almost half the letters in the  
4 alphabet to spell it. I'll let her to give it to you.

5 MR. TORRES: Okay. Would she be willing to  
6 talk to us?

7 MR. HARVILL: I'm sure she will.

8 MR. TORRES: Yes. I mean, I know you say  
9 you're leaving.

10 MR. HARVILL: Yes. And actually I don't  
11 know when I'm leaving, whenever they get my truck done.

12 MR. TORRES: Right.

13 MR. HARVILL: You know, he could call right  
14 now and he could call at 1:00 this afternoon.

15 MR. TORRES: But it'll be sometime today?

16 MR. HARVILL: Sometime today. And I may not  
17 -- he may just have me go unload what's already on the  
18 trailer and leave in the morning. He may have me do  
19 something this afternoon. I don't know. My boss -- it  
20 just depends on what time my truck gets done and who  
21 needs what. We deliver used oil to burner plants.

22 MR. TORRES: Oh I see.

23 MR. HARVILL: That heat up the asphalt, make  
24 asphalt. That's what we do.

25 MR. TORRES: And you said somebody was also

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1 video recording it?

2 MR. HARVILL: Right.

3 MR. TORRES: Who was that? Was that your  
4 neighbor here?

5 MR. HARVILL: No. It was a lady out on the  
6 highway, a lady and her husband. I believe her husband  
7 actually recorded it because I seen her walk in front  
8 of the camera.

9 MR. TORRES: Oh I see.

10 MR. HARVILL: And I talked to both of them.  
11 And they went and gave their name to the Sheriff or the  
12 Sheriff's Department over there somebody and said hey  
13 we -- and when you're watching the news and you see the  
14 video of the train crashing in, that's his video.

15 MR. TORRES: Oh really? Okay.

16 MR. HARVILL: And I didn't get their names.  
17 I didn't have time for that. I was running across the  
18 highway. And I came back and I talked to them for a  
19 minute. And I told him, I said what you probably need  
20 to do since you witnessed this and everything and you  
21 all were first hand witnesses, I didn't actually see  
22 the crash and you all did. I said you probably need to  
23 go over and talk to the Sheriff. And when I seen him  
24 come back to his pickup he said I gave my name and  
25 address to them and my phone number and told them if

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1 they needed anything to call me.

2 MR. TORRES: To the Sheriff?

3 MR. HARVILL: To the Sheriff, right.

4 MR. TORRES: Okay. Sounds good. So when  
5 you went out there to take a look, you know, see if you  
6 can be of assistance to anybody, you say it was like  
7 really burning hot?

8 MR. HARVILL: Right.

9 MR. TORRES: You didn't see anybody?

10 MR. HARVILL: I did not. I did not. And I  
11 hollered up at the locomotive. I could see another  
12 broke off. It was the first one to hit. There was, it  
13 seemed to me like there was probably two, probably at  
14 least three of them on this train that was westbound,  
15 that was coming out of the east.

16 And I could see the back of one, you know,  
17 up underneath the debris. And there's fire there. And  
18 I had kind of hoped at the time that maybe the people  
19 that were in that first --

20 MR. TORRES: Locomotive?

21 MR. HARVILL: -- first locomotive got to run  
22 through that locomotive and maybe got back to the  
23 second one. Because the second one was still out in  
24 the open there. And the third one was completely in  
25 the open.

1 MR. TORRES: Right.

2 MR. HARVILL: And I was, that's where I was  
3 hollering up at hoping maybe that they had time and  
4 presence of mind to move to the back. Or maybe even  
5 get into the second one before they hit. Because I  
6 didn't see where anybody had jumped. Like I said, I  
7 looked all on the tracks and all along the debris there  
8 as much as I could. And there wasn't anybody on my  
9 side. There was no bodies, there was no nothing.

10 MR. TORRES: Did you hear anything before  
11 impact? You know, like --

12 MR. HARVILL: I did not. It was the impact  
13 that got my attention and, you know, the explosion.

14 MR. TORRES: So you didn't hear brakes or  
15 anything like that?

16 MR. HARVILL: Well she heard the screeching.  
17 You know, she heard the brakes screech. But there's  
18 screeching going on over there all the time. When  
19 they're moving stuff around, they're constantly, you  
20 know --

21 MR. TORRES: When they --

22 MR. HARVILL: Right, right. Yes, it's  
23 nothing major. You don't even think about that. So  
24 you know, we're so close we hear it constantly. But  
25 yes, she heard the screeching. And like I said, I

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1 didn't. I wasn't paying attention. I might have been  
2 talking or listening to the radio or whatever. We  
3 normally listen to the radio shows in the morning.

4 MR. TORRES: All right. So do you have  
5 anything else to add? I mean, seems like you gave us a  
6 good description, you know, of what you saw and what  
7 you did.

8 MR. HARVILL: Yes, that's pretty much all I  
9 saw. We were here for the, you know, we stayed and  
10 hung around for a couple of hours. And then they, the  
11 landlord come over and said Darrell, they're saying  
12 everybody needs to evacuate, they're afraid of a bigger  
13 explosion.

14 MR. TORRES: Right.

15 MR. HARVILL: Well, they should have done  
16 that, they should have done that within 15 minutes of  
17 the wreck. This was two and a half hours later. You  
18 know, so anyway --

19 MR. TORRES: All right. Well thank you,  
20 appreciate it. And we can --

21 MR. HARVILL: If you'd like to interview  
22 her, I'll give her your card and your number and let  
23 you talk to her. And you know, if you want to  
24 interview her over the phone or you want to come back  
25 or whatever. She just text me, she is on her way back

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1 from Amarillo. And probably about the time you drive  
2 off -- let me see what time. It takes her about 40  
3 minutes to get here. And she left at 10:48. Yes,  
4 she's only been headed this way 14 minutes. So about  
5 another 30 minutes or so, she'll be here.

6 MR. TORRES: Okay. So this will conclude  
7 the interview. And thank you very much, appreciate it.

8 MR. HARVILL: No problem.

9 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went  
10 off the record at TIME NOT GIVEN.)

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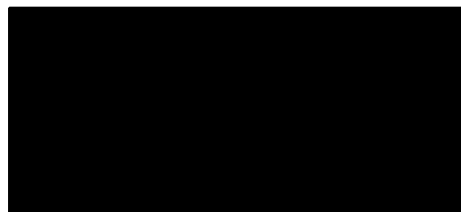


C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: Head-on Collision that Occurred  
Near Panhandle, TX on June 28, 2016  
Accident No. DCA16FR008  
Interview of Darrell Harvill

DATE: June 29, 2016

I hereby certify that the attached transcription of page 1 to 17 inclusive are to the best of my professional ability a true, accurate, and complete record of the above referenced proceedings as contained on the provided audio recording; further that I am neither counsel for, nor related to, nor employed by any of the parties to this action in which this proceeding has taken place; and further that I am not financially nor otherwise interested in the outcome of the action.



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