



SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT

NTSB Interviews of VSP

Williamsburg, VA

HWY23MH004

(48 pages)

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK
COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA
ON DECEMBER 16, 2022

Accident No.: HWY23MH004

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Interview of: TROOPER GASPARYAN
Virginia State Police

Williamsburg, Virginia

Saturday,
December 17, 2022

APPEARANCES:

TOM BARTH, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JASON ZEITLER, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JOHN HUMM, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:00 a.m.)

1
2
3 MR. BARTH: All right. This is Williamsburg. And we are
4 with -- you're Trooper, or --

5 TROOPER GASPARYAN: Yes.

6 MR. BARTH: Trooper --

7 TROOPER GASPARYAN: Gasparyan.

8 MR. BARTH: G-A-S-P-A-R-Y --

9 TROOPER GASPARYAN: A-M

10 MR. BARTH: -- A-N

11 TROOPER GASPARYAN: N, as in Nancy.

12 MR. BARTH: And, from NTSB we have Tom Barth, Jason Zeitler,
13 and John Humm.

INTERVIEW OF TROOPER GASPARYAN

14
15 BY MR. BARTH:

16 Q. And so, why don't you go ahead and just -- you were the first
17 on scene. So, just kind of run down what happened, piece by piece
18 through the response.

19 A. So, when I arrived on scene, I saw the first body lying on
20 the ground. So when I got out of the car, there's people
21 everywhere, distraught, asking for help, asking for an ambulance.
22 As I walking through the scene, to see who needs what, I saw a
23 second body at that time. Back it up.

24 Q. You arrived from which direction?

25 A. I arrived, I was going westbound. Because originally they

1 said it was at the 242 mile marker, so I didn't see nothing there
2 so I kept driving, and that's when I saw the semi-truck.

3 So, I had to go, flip around to go eastbound to where the bus
4 was and where everybody else was. But, after I saw the first
5 body, I called our dispatch to let her know it is a confirmed
6 fatal. Let reconstruction know. Let the supervisor know. And
7 the paramedics were already on their way prior to me getting
8 there, so they were already called.

9 As I'm walking through the scene to see what I could do and
10 who needs what type of help, that's where I saw the second body on
11 the ground, underneath the guard rail. And then, I saw the third
12 body a little further from there.

13 Everybody's screaming that they need an ambulance and then
14 once the paramedics first came, the first set of paramedics
15 stopped westbound where the tractor trailer was and they helped
16 him get out of the tractor trailer.

17 The second set of paramedics came. At that point, my shift
18 partner was there. SmartTraffic was there too. So they blocked
19 the lane. The paramedics came, they started assessing everybody
20 that was there. The ones that are more critical injuries, they
21 ended up going with the ambulance to which designated hospital
22 they went to.

23 After that, they called a bus and they're the ones that took
24 everybody else to whichever hospital they went to. After that, I
25 think their fire captain came out. The fire chief eventually came

1 out that day. At that point, I was first taking pictures, trying
2 to document and then, once my shift partner came, I gave him the
3 camera to take the pictures. I gathered the information. The bus
4 driver -- my shift partner got the license both from the tractor
5 trailer driver to get his information, and then, at that point,
6 Sergeant Gillespie showed up on scene. He was, I guess, working
7 on the email, trying to figure out what was going on.

8 Reconstruction finally came out. Our IMC came out, because
9 he's part of our reconstruction team. So, they did their rough
10 sketch, took the vehicle exams as much as possible. And then they
11 used the GNSS to mark the points, the roadway, where the vehicles
12 were, where the bodies were.

13 After that, I called the ME to see if it was alright to move
14 the bodies around to try to find IDs, and then we did that.
15 Called the body removal. They came out eventually, took all three
16 of them to the medical examiners to confirm the ID because we only
17 found one ID on the individual. The female had an ID on her, but
18 when we compared her to the ID it didn't look like her. Later on,
19 it ended up being that that was fake ID that she used. The second
20 gentleman, we couldn't find the ID on him.

21 Q. Were there any -- are any of the passengers minors? Or, do
22 you know?

23 A. No. I think when I ran, because I ran all of their
24 information to see there were any gang members since they found
25 the guns. I guess somebody spoke with the Governor, or said

1 something that everybody on that bus were gang members. So, I
2 ended up running all their -- by name and date of birth -- the
3 ones that came back to Virginia, they weren't gang members. There
4 was a handful that either didn't have a Virginia ID or they're out
5 of state, so nothing came back.

6 As far as I know, nobody was under the age of eighteen.

7 Q. And so if we go just to the very initial scene, can you
8 describe -- so, you were in a squad car --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- and so you arrived, and then, what's the order of -- as
11 you can remember -- what are the order, and about how many law
12 enforcement vehicles or fire department vehicles? Like, what
13 order did they arrive and how many?

14 A. Okay. So we had, after me getting there, my shift partner
15 came, so that was one law enforcement. Right with him, our VDOT
16 guy came to block the traffic lane. I believe there's two on the
17 eastbound side and one on the westbound side to block the lane.

18 After that, I want to say there's at least two or three
19 ambulances and fire trucks that came on scene. The first one went
20 to the westbound side and then the other two came to the eastbound
21 side.

22 Q. And did they arrive kind of, all together, or just maybe you
23 weren't aware --

24 A. So the westbound side arrived first. And then, I want to
25 say, maybe a minute or even less that the other two or three

1 arrived on my side. And that's when they started assessing the
2 individuals.

3 Q. And these were rescue trucks or ambulances?

4 A. Both. Rescue trucks and ambulances. So, fire trucks and
5 ambulances both came out.

6 Q. And are the ambulances, they're labeled as fire department
7 ambulances, or --

8 A. Yes. Yes. They were part of James City and York County's
9 fire department.

10 Q. And these ambulances, they're like obviously, just a pure
11 ambulance rig.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Do you know if they're BLS or ALS units?

14 A. I don't know.

15 Q. Okay. So they have, if they have -- do you know if the
16 paramedics were from the fire trucks or from the ambulances? If
17 you don't know, that's fine.

18 A. I want to say it was part of the ambulance, but I'm not 100
19 percent sure on that.

20 Q. Okay. So, when you arrived on scene, you saw -- ended up
21 seeing all three of the bodies.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Can you describe in relation to the other things where they
24 were?

25 A. Sure. So, the first body was basically at the, I want to

1 say, it was on the left shoulder close to where initially the
2 guard rail was damaged. The second one I want to say maybe they
3 were 5, 10 feet from the first body. And his head was compressed
4 underneath the guard rail. Because they had to cut the guard rail
5 more to get him out. And then the third one was maybe 3 feet from
6 the second one.

7 Q. So they were all in fairly close proximity?

8 A. Pretty close, yeah. The furthest one was from the first to
9 the second one. They were the farthest. But then the other 2,
10 the second and third one were pretty close together.

11 Q. Okay. And how is that in relation to where the vehicle, the
12 bus ended up?

13 A. So the bus ended up in the embankment, right behind them. I
14 guess towards the back end of the bus was near the second
15 gentleman. The debris were kind of scattered everywhere. But the
16 main portion of the bus was in embankment, and there was one
17 person that was entrapped underneath the bus. So they had to get
18 him out of there. I don't know how he survived, but he did.

19 Q. When you say he was entrapped under the bus, was it under
20 the, like, the chassis? Because I understand that the chassis of
21 the bus separated from the shell.

22 A. I think it was like, the shell of the bus that got separated
23 what he was stuck underneath. Because the chassis and everything
24 were further up from where that was.

25 Q. So, when you were describing that they were near, like, that

1 the second person was near the back of the bus, he was near the
2 back of the separated shell of the bus --

3 A. The back of the chassis. The second person was near the back
4 end of the chassis of the bus.

5 Q. And the chassis of the bus was further down field?

6 A. No. The shell of the bus was further down field.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And that's what the guy was trapped underneath.

9 Q. Got you. Okay. And then where was the semi in relation?

10 A. Semi was against the guard rail and partially in the left
11 shoulder on the westbound side.

12 Q. And then, so your duties on scene, what were your duties on
13 scene?

14 A. My duties was basically work the crash because I was the
15 primary unit on the -- so gather the information of the drivers,
16 their insurances. Try to figure out what happened, get statements
17 from them.

18 Q. So did you have much interface with the fire, rescue, folks?

19 A. No. I didn't really talk with them a whole lot. They were
20 mainly there, once everybody got transported to the hospitals,
21 they were basically, they're blocking the lanes and trying to keep
22 the other vehicles like, seeing the bodies until we figure out
23 what was going on.

24 But, towards the end, they all left but one stayed because
25 they had the big spotlight on them and it's for the

1 reconstructionists.

2 Q. And then the passenger -- so, all the people on scene, were
3 the police taking statements or getting their names and stuff
4 before they got transported?

5 A. No. That all happened after they got transported. We had,
6 well, a sergeant and my shift partner went to one hospital to try
7 to get everybody's names and birthdays. The other sergeant was
8 the individual that spoke with the bus driver and he got the
9 statement from him. I think they recorded it. And then, he
10 agreed for a blood draw to check his alcohol level, so they did
11 that while they were there.

12 And then the other two troopers that came out early for
13 dayshift, they went to, I believe, Riverside Doctors and Santara
14 to try to get everybody's names and birthdays on who was on that
15 bus. But I don't think they had a whole lot of luck trying to,
16 getting statements from them, because they were all trying to
17 cover for the driver, from what I'm guessing.

18 Q. And so the law enforcement didn't get names and contact
19 information directly on scene.

20 A. No.

21 Q. Do you know, did you see who was -- when they were saying
22 that they -- did you see the fire rescue guy putting actual triage
23 tags on different people?

24 A. Huh-uh. No.

25 Q. Okay. Do you guys have any questions?

1 MR. ZEITLER: Did the medical examiner respond to the scene?

2 A. No, they didn't. I was just speaking with them over the
3 phone and then gave them the names and what not. But, they didn't
4 come. Our Commonwealth attorney eventually came out towards the
5 end of it, I guess.

6 Q. And about how long -- so you saw -- did you recognize when
7 people were transported and in what, like, were the first ones
8 taken out in ambulances, did the buses come? Can you just kind of
9 describe the order of how people were taken from the scene? And,
10 if you can, estimate approximate amount of time it took for people
11 to get transported.

12 A. So, I know the driver of the semi-truck got transported. I
13 want to say he, him and two of the passengers were the first ones
14 to get transported by the ambulance. And then --

15 Q. All in the same ambulance?

16 A. No. Separate ambulances because they went to separate
17 locations.

18 Q. So, all three separate ambulances?

19 A. I believe so. And then, right after that, I want to say
20 maybe 5, 10 minutes, if that, is when I noticed the bus coming.
21 And then the medics were having everybody go stand in front of the
22 bus. And then, I guess that's when they were telling them what's
23 going to happen and they got on the bus and left. I didn't really
24 see how long it took them once the bus got there --

25 Q. Right.

1 A. -- when they left. I do remember seeing the bus coming, I
2 don't know if they came twice or once. That, I couldn't tell you.

3 Q. Okay. And so how far into the whole scene time was that,
4 approximately?

5 A. Maybe 15, 20 minutes, 25.

6 Q. Okay. So pretty quick.

7 A. Yeah. It wasn't a whole lot.

8 Q. Okay. And so then, then did you see other ambulances
9 transport any other people? Or --

10 A. At that point I didn't really see who else. I think after
11 the -- once the buses were done, everybody was basically
12 transported so I think the ambulances left and just the fire
13 trucks basically stayed on the scene until they were give the okay
14 to leave.

15 Q. So, other than the person that was trapped under the bus
16 shell, and the person, and the fatality that was entangled with
17 the guard rail, was there any other rescue efforts that you saw?

18 A. No. And getting the driver of the tractor trailer out.
19 Because he was entrapped in there. Getting him out, cutting up
20 the guard rail to get that gentleman out and then transporting the
21 other one or two passengers from the bus through the ambulance.
22 That was basically all I.

23 Q. Did you hear anything from the passengers on the bus? Were
24 they describing how they were -- if they were ejected, or how they
25 got out of the bus? Did any of them kind of describing?

1 A. No. Everybody was just screaming that they need help and
2 they need an ambulance. When I spoke with the driver of the bus,
3 on scene he stated that he saw the tractor trailer behind him
4 really close and he's like, he tried -- started to change lanes
5 and then that's when the tractor trailer and then they went off.
6 But, he couldn't say if how they got ejected or they all got
7 ejected or some got ejected.

8 Q. And was it that driver that it was his account that indicated
9 that there were no tail lights on the, or that he didn't see tail
10 lights on the bus?

11 A. No. It was the driver of the tractor trailer. Yeah. So I
12 spoke with him just real briefly before he got transported and
13 he's like, I didn't see him and I just drove up on him basically
14 striking him. But, he's like, I didn't see no tail lights or any
15 lights on when I was on scene. The bus had headlights on, but the
16 whole back end was so destroyed you couldn't tell if they were on
17 at one point or not.

18 Q. I'm sorry. Maybe I got confused there. So, the first
19 account was when you'd spoke to the van driver?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. And he was the one that said that he didn't know if people
22 got ejected or what.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. And then when you spoke to the truck driver, he was also able
25 to speak --

1 A. Yeah. He's like, I don't know what happened, I didn't see no
2 lights and then drove up on him.

3 Q. Right. Okay. Oh. What's your contact number?

4 A. I'll give you my personal number. [REDACTED].

5 Q. Okay. And what time is it?

6 A. 9:33.

7 MR. BARTH: 9:33. Okay.

8 BY MR. ZEITLER:

9 Q. About how long would you estimate from the initial call that
10 came in to when you arrived on scene?

11 A. I want to say -- around 1:39. I was there around 1:42, 1:43.

12 And I could pull up my unit history and it will give the actual
13 time that I was on scene and everything.

14 Q. So just a few minutes?

15 A. Yeah. I was like about a mile away from --

16 Q. I'm so sorry. For dispatch, so you guys were dispatched by
17 who?

18 A. So, we have our dispatchers. But, apparently, York County
19 dispatchers -- somebody called 911 to York County and then they
20 relayed the dispatch to our dispatcher, so that our dispatcher's
21 the one that called me out.

22 Q. And that's the Virginia State Police dispatch?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. So, the local peace app -- was there other law enforcement
25 agencies that responded?

1 A. No. No.

2 MR. ZEITLER: Okay.

3 TROOPER GASPARYAN: Just us.

4 BY MR. HUMM:

5 Q. Who is the incident commander for you guys?

6 A. That was out there?

7 Q. Yeah. Who was the supervisor?

8 A. Oh. Sergeant Gillespie was the one that.

9 Q. Did any of you guys like any type of debrief for the
10 passengers, or over here, anything with regards to if the
11 passengers were seated or standing?

12 TROOPER GASPARYAN: No.

13 MR. HUMM: That's all I have.

14 BY MR. BARTH: Did the driver or anything, did they say
15 anything? Did they remember what happened to the vehicle, did it
16 spin?

17 TROOPER GASPARYAN: No. He didn't remember. Because we even
18 asked him, you know, how many people were on the bus, and he's
19 like, I don't know because they didn't do a head count. So we
20 were trying to just count on how many people were getting on the
21 bus, how many got transported. And apparently, there was a
22 gentleman that was in the bus that when he got out, he started
23 walking on the shoulder, flagged a car down and that car took him
24 to the hospital. And then I got a call yesterday saying that
25 there is another person that came -- went to Riverside Doctors

1 saying that he was part of this crash, but I can't really verify.
2 I don't know if anybody went and spoke with that person or not.

3 Because it was like a day later.

4 MR. ZEITLER: So was there a passenger manifest?

5 TROOPER GASPARYAN: No.

6 MR. ZEITLER: So the bus company -- we know that there were
7 22 people on the bus just by the bus company saying that's how
8 many people were on the bus.

9 TROOPER GASPARYAN: So, we didn't -- they couldn't even tell
10 us how many people were on the bus, so we were trying to count the
11 people that got on the bus, that got transported to the hospital.

12 So we spoke with James City and York County, because they
13 were both there and they were the ones that were putting them on
14 the bus. So, we got the numbers that way. Originally it was 24
15 with the driver, three deceased, and 21 injured. But, then as of
16 yesterday, it's 25 now, because there's another gentleman that
17 claim that they were on the bus that went to the hospital on their
18 own.

19 BY MR. BARTH:

20 Q. So just to be clear. So, in the truck, we have the driver
21 and there was no co-driver. Is that right? Or was there a co-
22 driver?

23 A. No. There was no co-driver.

24 Q. So, the truck has one person.

25 A. Yep.

1 Q. And then, the best of our knowledge right now for the bus --

2 A. Is 25.

3 Q. So the driver and plus 24 passengers?

4 A. Yep.

5 Q. And of those 24 passengers, we have one account of a private
6 vehicle taking one to the hospital --

7 A. Um-hmm.

8 Q. We have --

9 A. Another one that walked in.

10 Q. Riverside stating that someone walked in.

11 A. Yep.

12 Q. And then was there another account of somebody who said that
13 they were in the --

14 A. No. It was just those two.

15 MR. BARTH: Okay.

16 Do you have any -- I can't think of any other questions right
17 now.

18 TROOPER GASPARYAN: So, I took a picture with the phone just
19 kind of like the general scene, so I can show you if you want to
20 see the pictures in relationship kind of where some of the bodies
21 were.

22 MR. BARTH: Okay. So, I think we could stop the recorded
23 interview.

24 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK
COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA
ON DECEMBER 16, 2022
Interview of Virginia State Police
Trooper Gasparyan

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH004

PLACE: Williamsburg, Virginia

DATE: December 17, 2022

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.



Angela Allen
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK

COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA

ON DECEMBER 16, 2022

Accident No.: HWY23MH004

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Interview of: MATTHEW GILLESPIE, Sergeant
Virginia State Police

via telephone

Thursday,
March 16, 2023

APPEARANCES:

JOHN HUMM, Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

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Interview of Matthew Gillespie:

By Mr. Humm

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:05 a.m.)

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3 MR. HUMM: Today is March 16, 2023. It is 9:05 by my watch.
4 This interview is being conducted for NTSB Case Number
5 HWY23MH004, a Williamsburg, Virginia, party bus crash that
6 occurred on December 16, 2022. My name is John Humm, H-u-m-m.
7 I'm a survival factors investigator for NTSB, and I am
8 interviewing Sergeant Matthew Gillespie.

INTERVIEW OF MATTHEW GILLESPIE

BY MR. WILLIAMS:

10
11 Q. Sergeant, thank you very much for your time. Just real quick
12 as we discussed before we started, can I get your consent that
13 it's okay to record this?

14 A. Yes, that's fine.

15 Q. Okay. And then, Sergeant, can you please say and spell your
16 name?

17 A. Matthew Gillespie. M-a-t-t-h-e-w G-i-l-l-e-s-p-i-e.

18 Q. Thank you, sir. And the contact information I have for you
19 is 330-719-4077, and matthew.gillespie@vsp.virginia.gov. Is that
20 correct?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. All right, thank you. And, if you could confirm your rank?

23 A. Yeah. I'm a sergeant.

24 Q. All right. And how long have you held this position?

25 A. I was promoted in August, August 25th of last year.

1 Q. Okay. Thank you. And how long have you served in law
2 enforcement?

3 A. I've been on the Department with 13 years.

4 Q. Excellent. And can you describe, previous job titles, length
5 of service, and description of prior duties as it relates to law
6 enforcement.

7 A. Yeah. I've been with VSP the whole entire time I've been a
8 trooper. I came out of the Academy as a trooper. I worked --
9 this is my third area, area office that I've been assigned to, and
10 I worked the road working accidents and writing traffic summonses
11 for, like, 12 years, 11 or 12 years. And I've progressed in the
12 rankings to senior trooper in 2020, and I held that for two years
13 before I promoted to sergeant. And senior trooper is no different
14 than trooper, just writing tickets and working crashes, responding
15 to incidents. And then the sergeant's duties are, obviously, the
16 same supervisor, and directing people to accomplish tasks that
17 needed to be done, make sure everything is completed, and done in
18 a timely manner so that the outcome is what we, what we want it to
19 be.

20 Q. Thank you. And then now we're going to talk a little bit -
21 - shift a little bit, and talk about your agency or your
22 department. Can you estimate how many employees you have, the
23 sworn versus non-sworn component to it?

24 A. We probably have -- this is probably -- this is a ballpark
25 guess. We probably have around 3,000 sworn between BFO, which is

1 the Field Operations Division. That's the uniform side. So
2 that's what you see on the road out here. And then BCI which is
3 the special agents, those are the ones that do the investigations,
4 detectives, stuff like that. There's probably 3,000 between us
5 two, and then, and the BASS of course, which is the third -- which
6 is this admin support update. But I would, I'd probably have to
7 say we have maybe a couple hundred civilians, but that would --
8 that's really a guess.

9 Q. Okay. No, that great. Thank you. I appreciate that. I
10 know it's -- you're a big department. And then as far as you know
11 are all your agents or all your employees full-time or do you have
12 any volunteers or reservists?

13 A. No. If there's volunteers or part-time employees, they are
14 civilians. They're not sworn. There's no part-time sworn.

15 Q. Okay. Thank you.

16 A. -- like full-time.

17 Q. All right. And then now you specifically, how many people do
18 you oversee?

19 A. I oversee 14 troopers.

20 Q. Okay. Thank you.

21 A. And they're assigned to the Williamsburg office.

22 Q. And then can you describe to me the typical current shift
23 setup? So how many officers might be on a shift versus sergeants,
24 and maybe anybody working higher than you?

25 A. Yeah. So the basic field office for the State Police here in

1 Virginia is pretty much they're all, they're all the same. They
2 have an area commander, which is the first sergeant. He's the
3 head of the -- of each field office. Below him is the buck
4 sergeants which is what I am. Usually areas have three to four.
5 We have two because we're, we're considered a smaller office. And
6 then below that is the senior troopers, master troopers, and
7 regular troopers. So but the normal shift at Williamsburg runs is
8 normally -- it's supposed to be eight on six off. We usually have
9 three troopers working dayshift, and then three working evening
10 shift. so then there will be an overlap from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.,
11 where there will be six troopers working, and at least one
12 sergeant will be working day and evenings. There's no sergeant
13 working on midnights. It's just on-call. So that would be an on-
14 call status.

15 Q. Perfect. Thank you. And then so how often do you -- do the
16 officers attend a lineup or a briefing? Is that something you do
17 daily or at all?

18 A. No. So we're -- we don't as an agency don't do roll call.
19 We don't do that like the locals do. So it's basically, like, for
20 example, today on dayshift they started, they started the troopers
21 that are working today started at 7 a.m. So when it's 7 a.m. they
22 have to be logged onto their computer and on duty in the on-duty
23 status, and they have to be monitoring their radio wherever they
24 are. So if they get a call, they can respond. But they don't
25 have to show up at the office to -- we don't do daily briefs or

1 anything like that. If there's anything that we need it might go
2 directly to them from phone calls or stuff like that.

3 Q. Okay. Great. Thanks. All right, and now so this part of
4 the interview we're going to shift to kind of the -- I would say
5 like a general response. We're not going to talk specifically
6 about the incident just yet, but just some general response
7 characteristics of your department.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. So does your agency use plain English or 10 codes?

10 A. Yeah. We stopped doing 10 codes probably like a decade ago.

11 Q. Thanks. And then what's your typical radio channel setup?
12 Like, do you have the -- several -- like a main channel, and then
13 do you have the ability to divide that at all or do you know?

14 A. Yeah. So we, so we, so in Fifth Division which is where our
15 office is located, so there's seven divisions in the State Police
16 so that -- we're the Hampton Roads Division. So we start in
17 Williamsburg, and we go east all the way to Chesapeake and
18 Virginia Beach. So we cover all of that. There's two radio
19 channels for the whole division and our division. So that's
20 normally the same setup for each division. You usually have half
21 the area's on one, and half the area's on the other. And so we
22 have, like, we're on Channel 1. So we have our office, the
23 Williamsburg office. The Newport News, and Hampton office is on
24 there as well. The Gloucester office, and the Eastern Shore
25 office. So we're hearing radio traffic from all across Hampton

1 Roads that really doesn't pertain to us a lot. And then the other
2 half is on the second channel. And then we do have a Tac channel
3 that's monitored by dispatch. So if you wanted to have, like, a
4 talk-around channel, you could switch to Tac 1 or Tac 2, and then
5 that way you could go directly without having to interact with the
6 actual dispatch.

7 Q. Okay. Right. So if you have like a big response you can
8 switch people over to, like, one of those Tac channels?

9 A. Yeah. Yeah, we do have several of those. I'm not just --
10 I'm just throwing out Tac as a sample. But we have like VSP blue.
11 They are channels that we can move entire special assignments to.
12 The only issue is we're short on dispatchers. So that's the only,
13 the holdup with that is that you need a dispatcher on those
14 channels unless you're just, like, if they're on a special
15 assignment like the -- blue line that's going on right now, it's
16 basically like a flood the streets, and try to, try to apprehend
17 fugitives and stuff like that. They don't need -- they don't
18 necessary do the dispatcher because they're using the locals for
19 the dispatch. So they can just be on a talk-around channel; just
20 be like, hey, we're over here if you need -- just so that they
21 know where everybody's at and stuff. So --

22 Q. Okay. And then so specifically your dispatch center is that
23 -- where is that based out of, and is that shared with the fire
24 department or any other agencies?

25 A. No. So I know first the Richmond Division and Northern

1 Virginia, I know they have -- they're at the VDOT buildings. So
2 they're in there with everybody. But our division, the Fifth
3 Division radio room is over at the Annex Chesapeake. It's in the
4 BCI Field Office. It's just, you know, on the -- just on one end
5 of the building, and it's not a -- it's just ours. It's just our
6 dispatchers in there. So it's -- nobody's in there but, but our
7 dispatchers. So --

8 Q. Great.

9 A. So we are separate from the locals. So, like, if we have to
10 -- we have -- if I need to talk to the fire department or the
11 sheriff's office, I need to go through our dispatch, and they have
12 to relay it to their dispatch. So --

13 Q. Okay. And then how -- how often would you guys say that you
14 respond with other agencies to larger calls?

15 A. Very frequently.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Williamsburg is small. So and there's 1, 2, 3 about 5, 4 or
18 5 agencies, and if there's something going on in Williamsburg,
19 everybody's going to go.

20 Q. Okay. Got you. And so when you do, when you guys do respond
21 with other agencies, do you have the ability to share a common
22 radio frequency or with other departments?

23 A. Yes. We have, we have about seven or eight radios in here
24 that are -- that have the local, the sheriff's office and the PDs
25 they have their frequency on there. So, like, when our troopers

1 are driving around responding to our dispatch, they can actually
2 take the radio, the portable radio in their car with them, and
3 they can go directly to the locals. But they -- if they wanted to
4 use it, our dispatch, it takes a little while. There's that --
5 that lapse. So yeah, we can definitely talk to them using their
6 radio that they, that they provided to us.

7 Q. Okay. Thank you. And then what's -- did your agency have a
8 mass casualty incident plan?

9 A. Yeah. Every area office has a, has a plan in place, but, you
10 know, it's required as far as our inspection to be accredited.
11 Yeah, you have to have a plan of action. It's a big thick binder.
12 I couldn't tell you what's in it, but it's in place so that if
13 something does happen they can, they can take it over, and assign
14 it to the, the -- because it -- we definitely have the command
15 center bus out there as well, and then they can direct the assets
16 or whatever they need from that plan. To be honest, I don't
17 really know. I don't really look at it very often. We haven't
18 had anything like this since I've been here. So --

19 Q. Understood. Do -- have you guys had any kind of mass
20 casualty training, like mock simulations?

21 A. Yeah. In the Academy they do, and we've been sent -- I know
22 over the course about last 10 years I've been sent back to do
23 active shooter training. We do a lot of that. So but not like --
24 we don't have training like that, like, for example for the bus
25 crash, no.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. You got your -- every trooper is qualified to do your basic
3 AED and CPR, and we have the trauma bags for Narcan, and they do
4 have like chest seals and gauze, stuff like that. So they can do,
5 like, your, your minor things. But, no, I don't -- we don't
6 really have training on responding to a bus crash with 23 people
7 ejected, no.

8 Q. I think given the current climate it seems like from what
9 I've seen or the people I've interviewed it seems like for police
10 the mass shooter or the shooting is probably the most common right
11 now.

12 A. Yeah. Actually this week the other sergeant in this office
13 he's going to do a table talk with the locals at the hospital
14 about a hospital active shooter. So everybody wants to get an
15 active shooter training and plan in for because of how prevalent
16 these shootings, especially hospitals now a days. If you just go
17 to the news, you'll see it everywhere. So --

18 Q. Thank you. And then so now we'll actually get to the
19 incident, the bus crash on that day. So I know it's been a few
20 months, but if you can do your best to recall it, appreciate it.
21 Regarding this case do you remember how you first received
22 notification about it?

23 A. Yeah. Like I said earlier, when each -- so each sergeant --
24 so me and Sergeant Backing (ph.), we rotate every week. So one
25 week I'm on call. Next week, I'm not. Obviously, that week I was

1 on call, and so that means I work during the day, and whether it's
2 during the day or eves, and then I go home, and at night I'm
3 sleeping, but I'm on call. So that particular night I got a call
4 from dispatch at I want to say -- what time did I get there? I
5 want to say that -- on scene at somewhere around 2. So, like, I
6 want to say 1:30 maybe, on scene at 2:16. So I got the call
7 around 1:30 a.m. Yeah. So the two troopers that were on
8 midnights they responded, and then of course when they realized
9 what it was they contacted dispatch to have a supervisor notified,
10 and that was me. So now I was enroute, and I immediately notified
11 Sergeant Bickling who was actually working an overtime assignment
12 overnight, and he left that assignment, and responded to the scene
13 as well.

14 Q. Okay. Great. And now so this is kind of more of just --
15 this kind of gets to the heart of actually the whole interview.
16 From the time you received the call if you can just talk about
17 your response. And I know you're the IC. And so, and then maybe
18 describe your agency's response --

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. -- just throughout the whole time you were on scene. So I'll
21 leave it to you to your best recollection of it.

22 A. Okay. Yeah. When I arrived on scene actually so Trooper
23 Gasberian (ph.), he's a, he's the primary trooper that got
24 immediately notified about this. He was there along with the
25 other trooper working midnights which was Trooper Fuentes. And I

1 know Gasberian is on crash team. So he has level three. He has
2 the highest certifications on that. So he's pretty good with
3 knowing what to do as far as working crashes and what's needed,
4 but not with this. This is a little different. So that's why I
5 called on Sergeant Bickling to get enroute as well. And then,
6 obviously, we needed more people so we called out the dayshift
7 units which actually for that time was only two. So I got two
8 more people enroute. So then you're looking at four troopers and
9 two sergeants that were on the scene relatively quickly. By the
10 time I got, by the time I got dressed and out there, along with
11 Sergeant Bickling the scene was pretty much cleared up. I mean,
12 not, not the vehicles, but the people. I did not see anybody. I
13 did not see any passengers nor did I see any drivers the entire
14 time. I didn't see them.

15 When I arrived, obviously, you had the two vehicles in the
16 median, and the roadways were shut down, but I didn't see anybody.
17 I saw a bus. The bus -- we had a 75-car accident in 2019 on the
18 bridge, and that's when the local hospital brings out their bus to
19 ship people off the Interstate. We had about I think 150 or 200
20 people that needed to be removed. So they did that as well for
21 this crash, and that's what I was able to observe. I could tell
22 there were people on it, but I couldn't -- I never made any
23 interactions with them.

24 So the only person I spoke to when I first got there was,
25 obviously, Trooper Gasberian to give me an update about what, what

1 was going on, and what they had done so far. And, obviously, with
2 the situation the first thing we do is always contact a
3 supervisor. So of course they did that. And then when I get
4 there I'm required to determine what we need as far as other,
5 other specialties. And, obviously, the Fifth Division Crash Recon
6 Team I had to call out. So I notified their supervisor, and then
7 they sent multiple people enroute to actually do the recon report,
8 which was a full recon, full reconstruction. And so then at that
9 point we probably had 10, 10 troopers there. So they do their
10 part, and kind of separate from what we do. So they're doing the
11 recon, the measurements, and the -- everything they need to do.
12 They need to shoot the scene. But we have a little bit different,
13 different job while we're there. So we called recon, and then
14 obviously it was involving a commercial motor vehicle, so we
15 called out the recon -- not the recon, excuse me -- the motor
16 carrier unit that we have and, obviously, they're not as good as
17 the federal side, but they can do things as far as logbooks and
18 inspection. So they came out too. Was a sergeant and one
19 trooper. And so they're kind of doing their thing. And that was
20 the last, the last thing that we would call out for there. The
21 only, the only other assets we normally do would be whether we did
22 a K9, so a state police K9 would show up. That's one of the
23 things that -- that's one of the other things we can do.
24 Obviously, we didn't need that in this circumstance. And or we
25 call out BCI which we didn't need that in this circumstance either

1 because it was just a -- was a large crash, but there was nothing
2 that the agents -- we didn't need anything like evidence or
3 anything like that collected, collection or forensics or anything
4 like that. So the only thing I had to do after that was contact
5 the medical examiner, which I had trooper Gasberian do so that we
6 could start moving the bodies, and cleaning up the scene. So he
7 would contact the medical examiner, and we tried to do, tried to
8 do the identification which was unsuccessful. And then the next
9 thing was contact the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, which
10 responded to the scene, so he could see what he's looking at, and
11 get a feel for the charging decision later on down the road which
12 still hasn't been made.

13 And so we did that. The medical examiner gave us the go to
14 move the three bodies, and we called, contacted the body removal
15 service which responded to the scene and collected the bodies.
16 And then as far as the cleanup went, the fire department was
17 there. There was a large, a large cleanup. So the wrecker
18 service we had to contact to come out, and they started the
19 cleanup process shortly after. And I don't really recall much
20 after that. I know my first sergeant showed up because of the
21 nature of the incident, and we had traffic control from the
22 dayshift units that were called out early. And we still have VDOT
23 there. They were blocking the lanes, and their incident command
24 unit was there as well. And then of course the fire department
25 fire chief showed up. And we had several engines there, and

1 multiple, multiple ambulances that were there prior to my arrival
2 that had left the scene when I got there. And then the bus of
3 course.

4 And then I'm trying to think about what else we did. It's
5 kind of blurry. Just as far as our stuff goes it's getting stuff
6 in the crash report, and then I had to notify our division command
7 via e-mail. So and to get all the facts, all the people, all the
8 drivers' information, all the vehicles information, and then try
9 and identify the passengers. And then I sent Sergeant Bickling to
10 the hospitals because we had 25 people set to -- or 20, maybe 22
11 people sent to three different hospitals. So that was the biggest
12 headache of the whole thing was trying to figure out where people
13 went, and identify, identify them, and also try and get a
14 statement from them as to what happened. A lot of them were
15 asleep when this happened due to the time. So we weren't able to
16 get much from the, from the passengers. And then the biggest
17 issue was where they were going. They would go to one hospital,
18 and then they would realize that they had more severe injuries
19 than they believed. So then they would transfer them to other
20 hospitals. So at the end we had multiple troopers at multiple
21 hospitals, but I was not there. I stayed on scene at the, at the
22 crash site for the entire time.

23 And then after we got the recorded statements from both
24 drivers they came back, we ended up collecting evidence from the
25 ditch. And the scene was, I think, it was probably late evening,

1 late afternoon -- still there cleaning up, and had lane closures.
2 And I believe we had you guys come out the next day for cleanup,
3 and for you guys to do the, to do your part of the investigation.

4 But the only other thing I remember from afterwards was the
5 next of kin. So I stayed up all, all night and all day after that
6 where we had to work on trying to identify the deceased via the
7 help with the medical examiner's office. And once we were able to
8 do that, with the help of the families calling in, we were able to
9 do the next of kin notifications for the deceased. We did that
10 around I think six or seven that evening. And that's pretty much
11 for the day that was all the things that we had to do. It's
12 normally show up, see what we got, call up the resources we need,
13 which we did, motor carrier and crash recon, and of course the
14 Commonwealth Attorney. And then we would go do our investigation,
15 statements, photographs, the crash report, and anything -- any of
16 the calling witnesses, calling 911 callers. There's a lot of
17 stuff that we do while we're there. And then -- the body removal,
18 and then of course after that we would have to do the next of kin
19 which was pretty much the last thing we do. And then of course
20 all the follow-up that went involved with that which was sending
21 BCI agents to Chesapeake and Virginia Beach to try and locate
22 these passengers. Because they were released from the hospital,
23 and then immediately went home. So we weren't able to get
24 statements until weeks after due to the -- all of them going to
25 their houses back all the way over there, and being far away from

1 us. So we had to track them down, and see if we could get any
2 relevant information.

3 And then came the search warrants which we did the search
4 warrant on the drivers for blood and all the search warrants for
5 the phone, and for the trucks, I mean the vehicles. So and then
6 the search warrants on the, the hospitals and on the, the
7 inspection stations. So there was quite a bit of follow-up for
8 this one. It's the biggest (indiscernible) case I've ever seen.
9 We have four pages now of stuff between NTSB, crash recon, motor
10 carrier, and our stuff.

11 So but pretty much in a nutshell that's where we're at other
12 than the follow-up with the NABS which has been kind of lengthy,
13 but -- still on hold. They're waiting on, I guess, your guys'
14 report. But most of the evidence that we're going to have has
15 been presented to the Commonwealth Attorney's Office. And I know,
16 I know the charging decision is coming, but we're waiting on I
17 guess your guys' side, and I guess a few more witnesses to come
18 forward to see a completed, completed packet for them to view
19 before they make a decision. Because the decision that they make
20 is going to be, you know, going to very public, and they're going
21 to have a lot of people questioning them and what they're doing.
22 So as far as that goes, that's pretty much all I can recall.
23 We've had probably I know four or five fatal accidents since then.
24 So it's kind of getting blurry but --

25 Q. Yeah. No, that was -- you answered the majority of the

1 follow-up questions. That was excellent. Thank you very much.
2 Yeah, I know it's tough because you guys got the next thing and
3 the next thing and the next thing. So I understand.

4 A. Yeah, yeah.

5 Q. I get it.

6 A. We got hit pretty hard. This is normally a sleepy little
7 area, but for some reason late 2022 and early 2023 was ridiculous.
8 So, yeah, we had a lot to do. So --

9 Q. Understood, sir. Thank you. To your recollection did you
10 guys institute a mass casualty or kind of mass casualty plan for
11 this case? Do you remember?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. No. So no. The only thing that we do is we take -- because
15 I don't know if this is what you're referring to. What we do do,
16 like, we, we have a -- like, everything that we did for this
17 report will go into a binder for unusual occurrences, and that's
18 basically an inspection item. So anything big like that 75-car
19 pileup that would be in there as well so that we can reference it.
20 But we wouldn't have made, like, we didn't make a report when we
21 were there, no.

22 Q. All right. And then do you remember did you establish a
23 command post at all?

24 A. No. No. Once -- so when I get there as a supervisor, I --
25 my main duty as far as I go is to -- I have to send an e-mail

1 which is -- kind of sounds like not that much, not that big a
2 deal, but it has to have everything in it, like, that, like, all
3 the information that we have so far. And then you're required to
4 do like follow-up, updated e-mails, and it goes to everybody in
5 the division that's somebody. So it goes to all the captains,
6 lieutenants, goes to everything. And then so actually our, our
7 lieutenant called me on scene, and was asking where the e-mail
8 was, and I said, you know, I said, I apologize but we've got a lot
9 on our hands out here. So but once I got the e-mail out that
10 would be decision time for them to decide what they would do, and
11 if they needed to get the command center post moving, and they did
12 not. So normally when BCI is involved that's when they get the
13 command center going, but not, not for motor vehicle crashes. Not
14 something the VSP typically does.

15 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you. Did you guys conduct any type of
16 debriefing at any point after this accident?

17 A. We sent -- no, we -- VDOT does. VDOT does an after action
18 report meeting, and we sent, I think we sent Trooper Gasberian to
19 that meeting. They always do like a debrief, like, maybe a month
20 later, and they -- because they -- I know we sent, I know we sent
21 everybody for the 75-car pileup to it. So VDOT did it, but like
22 the State Police as an agency doesn't typically do a debriefing
23 unless it's -- the only time we do that is when there -- if it's
24 like an officer-involved shooting, when we knew like a CISM event
25 then we would do like a, like we're required to do, like, a --

1 interviews with, with the troopers to, to check on their mental
2 status as far as what they saw, what they're feeling afterwards.
3 But that's normally typically just for when, when there's
4 shootings, and they -- either they're shot, shot at someone, or
5 killed somebody, then that's normally when they do that, but not
6 for, not for that. We didn't do that for this.

7 Q. Okay. Would you say there were any difficulties or
8 challenges that you can remember when responding to this incident?

9 A. No. Because when I got there it was -- the road was, the
10 road was shut down by VDOT and the fire department, and they had
11 transported everybody. The troopers did a good job of locating
12 everybody to make sure we weren't missing anybody as far as the
13 passengers go, but no, nothing for me really because it -- the
14 scene was -- when I get there the scene is kind of like cold.
15 It's not active. So I know that they, they had some issues with
16 because the, the COB went up through there and hit the guardrail
17 and came on the other side. So I know that, I know there's, like,
18 lane closure issues, but I don't know if that's what you're
19 referring to.

20 Q. No. Yeah, just anything that stood out in your mind, like,
21 oh, that's just tough or this is hard?

22 A. No, no. Just the main problem was that the -- we couldn't
23 identify -- we didn't identify -- normally when you have a two-
24 vehicle crash, three-vehicle crash, it's pretty simple. Even if
25 they go to the hospital for follow-up you can send a trooper down

1 there to get their information, and get a statement from them.
2 But his was incredible because there were so many people, and we
3 tried to ask the bus driver, hey, did you do like roll call? Do
4 you have a roster of who, who was on this bus before you left? Of
5 course they didn't do that. They didn't have a head count. They
6 didn't know how many people were on it. They didn't know who was
7 on it. And so that was, like, I know the three different
8 hospitals, and then them moving, like, you know, we had a list of
9 where the ambulances took them, but once they were there they were
10 being evaluated, they were like being sent by ambulance from that
11 hospital to more severe trauma hospitals. So, like, I know that
12 was the biggest thing. We had two here, two hospitals here in
13 Williamsburg, and one in Riverside, one in Newport News, and so
14 that was the biggest -- of all trying to identify the passengers
15 because we needed to identify them for one for their interviews,
16 but two, for the crash report. Because anybody that gets
17 transported to the hospital for injuries sustained in the accident
18 you got to -- you have to associate them with the report. So that
19 was, that was the biggest headache, I think in my, in my opinion.
20 And then when they left I know BCI had a heck of a time trying to
21 get down there to figure out where they are. Because none of
22 their addresses were current. So we were trying to go through the
23 bus owner to see, hey, where does this person live, and where does
24 this person live? We had to reach out to the fusion center, I
25 think, to figure out some, some information that normally we do

1 that for suspects, but we did it for the people too here because
2 we needed to locate them to interview them. That was -- that's
3 the only thing I think in my opinion that stood out other than the
4 boatload of search warrants that we had to write. But luckily
5 Sergeant Bickling is an expert in the, in the search writing area.
6 So he, he pretty much handled most of those.

7 Q. Yeah, I definitely can share your, your -- the difficulty of
8 the identifying the patients. Because --

9 A. Yeah, I --

10 Q. -- kind of similar experience. Maybe not as bad as you guys
11 because you had it kind of organized for us, but even so it's been
12 a challenge.

13 A. I know you guys -- well, I don't know. I think you guys
14 helped us more than we helped you.

15 Q. . I think the best thing is that I think by now we've got a
16 pretty good handle on the occupants probably probably where
17 they're seated. I think we have a pretty good idea of that. And
18 then where they went. I'm still trying -- we're still trying to
19 track down a few medical records, but I think I got a good handle
20 on it finally.

21 A. You guys -- did you guys go after the medical records on the
22 passengers too?

23 Q. Oh, yeah, yeah, that's what we're -- I've got 8 of the 19
24 uploaded to our, our site, and then I just issued some updated
25 requests because some of ours didn't make it to the person that

1 needed to get the information in order to release the records. So
2 I updated that.

3 A. But you're just subpoenaing then, right?

4 Q. No. We're doing, just doing requests because we can do a
5 subpoena, but so far they seem to be acceptable, amenable to
6 taking just a request because we don't have to follow -- we're not
7 subjected to --

8 A. Yeah. This is the first time working with you guys. I've
9 never seen anything like it. And it's just like it's crazy how
10 much information that you guys can get. Like we get, we get -- we
11 hit roadblocks everywhere we go.

12 Q. I don't really have any other questions other than is there
13 anything you want to add to this or something that I missed that
14 we haven't discussed?

15 A. Not that I can remember. I think -- if there's anything that
16 you recall that you didn't ask me, you can always just give me a
17 call back, and we can do this -- do a follow-up interview if you
18 want.

19 Q. Thank you, sir. I appreciate it. And then do you have any
20 questions for me at all?

21 A. No, sir.

22 MR. HUMM: Okay. I'm going to go ahead and stop the
23 recording. It is 9:43 by my watch.

24 Thank you very much.

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(Whereupon, at 9:43 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL TWO-VEHICLE CRASH IN YORK
COUNTY NEAR NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA
ON DECEMBER 16, 2022
Interview of Matthew Gillespie

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH004

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: March 16, 2023

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.



Katherine Motley
Transcriber