



Human Performance Attachment – Witness Interview

Teutopolis, IL

HWY23MH017

(18 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL CARGO TANK COMBINATION *

VEHICLE CRASH & SUBSEQUENT *

RELEASE OF ANHYDROUS AMMONIA * Accident No.: HWY23MH017

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS *

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 *

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Interview of: BRANDON LAKEY, Witness

via Microsoft Teams

Thursday,
November 9, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RAFAEL MARSHALL

National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Brandon Lakey:

By Mr. Marshall

4

I N T E R V I E W

(10:52 a.m.)

1
2
3 MR. MARSHALL: Okay, there's a few things I need to go
4 through first. First, this an interview with Brandon Lakey and
5 we're doing it through Teams and it is 10:52 a.m. Eastern Standard
6 Time.

7 Mr. Lakey, I'm going to -- I'm going to ask you to just spell
8 your name out and then I'll give you some background on why we're
9 doing this.

10 MR. LAKEY: Okay. B-r-a-n-d-o-n and then L-a-k-e-y.

INTERVIEW OF BRANDON LAKEY

11
12 BY MR. MARSHALL:

13 Q. Okay. And this is with regards to the Teutopolis
14 investigation, investigation number HWY23MH017. Mr. Lakey, thank
15 you for taking part in this interview. The reason why we wanted
16 to interview you is we're trying to interview everybody who was a
17 witness to the crash and also the post-crash occurrences.

18 Would it be possible for you to, let's say, go back about --
19 well, one of the things that the truck driver had mentioned is
20 that a vehicle had passed you and we believe that that might be
21 the same vehicle that passed the driver, also, prior to the crash.
22 And so could you go back to that and then just like step us
23 through the events prior to and post-crash, please?

24 A. Absolutely. So we had obviously been diverted out from 70
25 down to 40, there was tons of traffic and we had come through --

1 what's the town before? Montrose, I believe. Is that the town to
2 the east of --

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. -- Teutopolis, correct? So we came through there, there's a
5 four-way stop and I know we came through that stop light or the
6 four-way stop and there was somebody directing traffic there.
7 There was tons of traffic, obviously, so we were headed back to
8 Missouri, we'd been on vacation up in Ohio and were headed back
9 home and I was pulling a 35-foot camper and there was probably, I
10 don't know, a hundred yards or more between me and the semi in
11 front of me.

12 Then there was a car that came up behind us, don't know the
13 make, the model or anything, but it passed us and nearly had a
14 head-on when it passed us, passing, I mean, it was a passing zone,
15 I think, where we were, but there was vehicles coming. So I made
16 the comment, me and the wife, you know, "an idiot." Went on,
17 didn't think a lot about it and then somewhere down the road there
18 a little bit, the same vehicle went to pass the semi in front of
19 us.

20 And we saw traffic, kind of, we could see the lights and it's
21 kind of like there seemed like there was maybe a corner right
22 there and we were hollering to the vehicle to get back in, get
23 back in behind the truck, we were hoping, but about that time we
24 could see where it -- we really weren't sure if he hit anything or
25 if it just cut the driver off, weren't close enough to exactly

1 tell that, but we saw the semi swerve to the right there, tires
2 went off and it rolled. Of course, we immediately tried to come
3 to a stop and we were probably, I don't know exactly how far the
4 distance was behind him there when we got stopped and we
5 immediately saw the gas coming out of the vehicle, out the semi
6 trailer, didn't know what it was. Somebody, I think, my boy,
7 started calling 9-1-1, I had my wife and my two boys in the
8 vehicle with me and somebody said, you know, that's a tanker.

9 We didn't know if it was going to explode or what. So I
10 backed up just a little bit, as far as I could and then about that
11 time we saw -- because it was getting on dark, but it was just
12 enough light you could still kind of see, it seemed like. Maybe
13 it was from the headlights or what. We saw a young man, what
14 appeared to be a young man, jump from the cab, we could see he
15 kind of came out all of a sudden and then jumped onto the ground
16 and started running toward our direction.

17 And so we all got out and he was just running down the ditch
18 toward us and we stopped him and, you know, asked are you okay,
19 are you okay, and he said yeah, and he started -- he was frantic
20 and started shouting about, you know, it's anhydrous ammonia and I
21 had no idea what that meant. I asked him is it flammable and he
22 said no, but he said we have to evacuate, you can't breathe that,
23 you can't breathe that. And he appeared to be okay, I mean, as
24 far as there was no external injuries that we could see. But
25 anyway, he was like we got to evacuate, we got to get everybody

1 out of here, we got to evacuate. And so we started -- my wife
2 started telling the traffic on our side what was going on, and
3 Jacob, I believe, was the young man's name, he was scared and
4 wanted to know if he could stay with her, so he walked with her
5 and I think at some point my boys got him water, he was
6 complaining of his not being able to breathe real well. We kind
7 of had him sit down for a little bit, but he was scared and wanted
8 to stay with her, so they kind of walked down trying to get
9 everybody turned around.

10 In the meantime, I kind of sensed the danger, still didn't
11 understand it to the fullest, so I got back in my vehicle and went
12 through the ditch and turned, turned it around, pointed in the
13 other direction, and then really had no idea what was going on, on
14 the other side, I -- and I still don't understand, I didn't
15 understand the danger and -- anyway, the -- finally, the first
16 responder, or whoever it was that responded first on our side of
17 the accident, came driving up with his loudspeakers on, everybody
18 evacuate, you know.

19 And so everybody, my family, I got them back to the vehicle
20 and I stayed there and made sure that the police officer, I
21 believe it was, knew that Jacob was the driver and wanted him to
22 be with him to make sure he was okay. So then we went back toward
23 Montrose, stopped at the fire department and asked where we should
24 wait to talk to the highway patrol and they actually put us just
25 east of the four-way stop, at some grain silos, we waited there

1 until the highway patrol came and we gave our statement to him.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And that's about it.

4 Q. So I had a few questions while you were speaking. One was
5 would you -- do you remember how fast you were going when the
6 vehicle passed you?

7 A. I was doing the speed limit, I do know I was doing the speed
8 limit. Maybe just a few over.

9 Q. Okay. What was the speed limit out there?

10 A. Well, 55 is what I think.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I'd say I was doing about 58 mile an hour is where I would
13 guess that I was doing.

14 Q. How quickly was the other vehicle passing you, was it a slow
15 pass, was it a --

16 A. No, it was a -- it was a hurried pass.

17 Q. Yeah, okay. And --

18 A. I have --

19 Q. Go ahead.

20 A. I was going to say I have Life360 on my phone, that could
21 probably tell us that, but I don't know that for sure. I know it
22 can tell me where my kids are when they're driving, how fast
23 they're going and all that good stuff, so --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I mean, if you needed that.

1 Q. Yeah, we might, because we're still trying to figure out a
2 little bit about the other vehicle. I haven't had a chance to
3 interview that driver yet, so that would kind of give -- maybe
4 give us an idea of how fast she was going. Were you like -- how
5 you were positioned prior to the crash, were you right behind
6 Jacob's vehicle?

7 A. No, there was -- the vehicle between me and Jacob was that
8 car that passed, the one that passed me, right?

9 Q. Okay. So prior to that, you were right behind Jacob's --

10 A. Prior to that, I was right behind him, yes.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I would say I was a good hundred or more yards behind that
13 semi, there was a distance between us.

14 Q. How long was the other vehicle behind Jacob's vehicle?

15 A. How what?

16 Q. How long was the passing vehicle behind Jacob's vehicle prior
17 to her passing Jacob's vehicle?

18 A. I don't know. I mean, I couldn't tell you. I don't even
19 know how far it is between Montrose and Teutopolis.

20 Q. Okay. Like --

21 A. You know what I saying? I wasn't -- once it passed me, I
22 wasn't cognizant of really paying attention to him, you know what
23 I'm --

24 Q. I see.

25 A. -- saying? I don't know how long they were behind him.

1 Q. But it was -- could you tell me whether it was like more than
2 5 minutes or less than 5 minutes?

3 A. I'd say more.

4 Q. More, okay.

5 A. I honestly don't know, though.

6 Q. Okay. When the other vehicle started passing Jacob's
7 vehicle, you mentioned that Jacob's vehicle started to move
8 towards the right, towards the shoulder.

9 A. Not until -- so it was like when that car got towards almost
10 done passing him --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. -- and almost met another one head on, it's like it jerked in
13 front of him, is what it looked like to me and he jerked to the
14 right in order to avoid a collision with him, is what it appeared
15 to me.

16 Q. I see. So --

17 A. You know what I'm saying?

18 Q. Yeah. So you saw Jacob's vehicle steering to the right only
19 at the very end --

20 A. Correct.

21 Q. -- correct? Do you recall whether Jacob used his brakes
22 prior to --

23 A. Oh, boy. I don't recall that.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. I don't know.

1 Q. You don't know, okay.

2 A. No.

3 Q. Okay, so once -- so once there was a -- once Jacob's vehicle
4 left the roadway and the anhydrous ammonia was -- was being
5 released, how far away were you from his vehicle at that point?

6 A. Oh. Oh, I don't -- maybe 50 yards, something like that. I
7 mean --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- like I said, I backed up a little bit. Not far enough, I
10 didn't think, but I'm not -- I'd say 50 yards.

11 Q. Fifty yards. Did you notice any of the anhydrous ammonia
12 going towards you?

13 A. No. No, it's like the wind, there was the wind, like it just
14 -- I didn't smell any ammonia, I didn't smell anything. So yeah,
15 that was really odd to us, I didn't -- I don't know if the wind
16 was just in our favor --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- that night or what.

19 Q. Okay. And then did you speak to anybody else when you were
20 out there besides Jacob?

21 A. Jacob used my phone to call his father.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And then whenever I took my phone back, his father was still
24 on there and I explained to his father I was leaving him with the
25 first responder and I think I told him I thought Jacob was going

1 to be okay, I was trying to calm him, you know what I mean?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. But no, I don't -- well, I mean, the truck driver, so there
4 was a truck driver that I talked to and then my wife was telling
5 the other vehicles to go, but that's the only people we talked to.

6 Q. Okay. Could you tell me a little bit about the truck driver?

7 A. So he was behind me in traffic and I know I climbed up on his
8 step, he rolled down the window, I think I told him hey, this
9 thing's got anhydrous ammonia, I said I don't understand what it
10 is, but they're saying we need to evacuate.

11 I think he said something about they use it for fertilizer
12 and he said I don't know how I'm going to get turned around. And
13 that was it and then I just went on and I think that's about the
14 time the police officer started coming.

15 Q. Okay. How long until the police, do you think, arrived?

16 A. Oh, boy, it felt like forever.

17 Q. Really?

18 A. Yeah. Well, because we warned them on the 9-1-1 call that --
19 what it was, we wanted them to make sure they knew --

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. -- Jacob wanted to make sure they knew it was anhydrous
22 ammonia and so it seemed like a long time, but I don't know, it
23 was long enough for him to run up to us, us to make sure he was
24 okay, my wife and him just kind of started warning traffic --

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. -- and me to turn around my vehicle. I had to put it on
2 four-wheel drive to get through the ditch with that trailer on.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. And then I know we got water for Jacob. I'm going to say
5 maybe 10 minutes.

6 Q. Okay, 10 minutes.

7 A. Maybe. I don't know.

8 Q. Yeah. Are there any other things that you noticed prior to
9 or during the crash that we haven't discussed yet, that you'd like
10 to mention?

11 A. Well, I do know he -- Jacob was overly adamant and concerned
12 about the farmhouse, he kept hollering that you can only last 30
13 seconds if you breathe that. And then he was just very concerned
14 if there was anybody in that farmhouse.

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. Other than that, it seems like there was a semi that came
17 through, maybe like the first one that was in the other direction
18 and traffic came through and went on, but I can't -- everything
19 was just chaotic and I was freaking out, but it almost seems like
20 there was one that came on through traffic and went on toward
21 Montrose, but I'm not a hundred percent sure of that.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Like the lead one, you know what I mean?

24 Q. Right, the one that --

25 A. I think we --

1 Q. -- the one the other vehicle almost collided with?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Is that the one you're talking about?

4 A. Yes, that's what I thought. Me and my wife discussed this
5 and I can't say for a hundred percent sure if that's true or not.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. But -- yeah. I do remember someone coming through. Now, I
8 don't know. And then I do remember another vehicle that my boy
9 said it was like a white vehicle that came like they were going to
10 pass us up to the scene, but then they turned around, they said,
11 and they thought they went back the other way.

12 But like I said, I had so much going on, I was trying to
13 focus on him, Jacob, trying to focus on getting us out of there, I
14 was scared to death my kids were going to breathe this in and --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. -- it was just -- it was chaotic, so -- yeah. I wish I could
17 remember more.

18 Q. So, just so that I have everything clear, so you entered U.S.
19 40 from I-70 at Montrose, correct?

20 A. Negative.

21 Q. Oh, I'm sorry.

22 A. I entered before that.

23 Q. Before that.

24 A. Yeah, the name of the town, I gave it to the state police
25 when they called me. Holy cow. I looked it up on my Life360,

1 actually, that's how I know that because --

2 Q. Oh, okay.

3 A. -- my GPS must've knew there was an accident already on 70
4 and they diverted us off prior to --

5 Q. Like maybe at Greenup?

6 A. What was it?

7 Q. Greenup.

8 A. Greenup?

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Yes, that's it.

11 Q. Okay. So you were on 40, but then the lady, the lady in the
12 other vehicle didn't pass you until after Montrose.

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. Did anyone else pass you besides her?

15 A. Not that I'm aware of. No, sir, just the one vehicle.

16 MR. MARSHALL: Okay. All right. I can't think of anything
17 else to ask you, but I'm sure something else will come up. Would
18 you mind if I call you later on if something --

19 MR. LAKEY: Absolutely, that's fine. Yes, sir.

20 MR. MARSHALL: Wonderful.

21 MR. LAKEY: Any time you need me.

22 MR. MARSHALL: Thank you so much. At this time, then, I'm
23 going to conclude the interview, it is 11:10 a.m., November 9,
24 2023. Thank you again for your time. Okay, I'm going to turn
25 this off.

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MR. LAKEY: Absolutely, thank you.

(Whereupon, at 11:10 a.m., the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

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

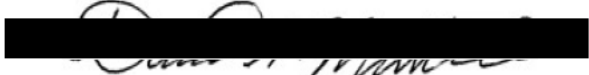
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CARGO TANK COMBINATION VEHICLE
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Interview of Brandon Lakey

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: November 9, 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.



David A. Martini
Transcriber