

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Highway Safety

Washington, DC 20594



HWY24MH005

SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT

Witness Interview Transcripts

(25 Pages)

INTERVIEW CLARIFICATION

The NTSB Office of Highway Safety returned a copy of the transcript to the interviewee for review. If the interviewee has noted any clarifications or additions, they will be included immediately following the unaltered transcript.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL SEMI-TRUCK & SCHOOL BUS *

COLLISION AND SUBSEQUENT FIRE *

Accident No.: HWY24MH005

IN RUSHVILLE, ILLINOIS ON *

MARCH 11, 2024 *

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Interview of: TANNER CARSON, Accident Witness/Firefighter
Rushville Fire Department

Rushville, Illinois

Thursday,
March 14, 2024

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Senior Survival Factors Highway
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ERIC GREGSON, Investigator/Technical Reconstructionist
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:00 p.m.)

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3 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is March 14th, 2024, my name is
4 Ronald Kaminski, K-a-m-i-n-s-k-i, and we're going to be
5 interviewing a firefighter and witness to the crash, HWY24MH005,
6 here in Rushville, Illinois and we're at the Rushville Fire
7 Department here in Rushville, Illinois.

8 And also with me is going to be Eric Gregson. Eric, can you
9 spell your first and last name?

10 MR. GREGSON: E-r-i-c G-r-e-g-s-o-n.

11 MR. KAMINSKI: And you're --

12 MR. GREGSON: Technical reconstructionist with the NTSB.

13 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And we're going to be talking to
14 Mr. Tanner Carson, and could you spell your first and last name,
15 please?

16 MR. CARSON: T-a-n-n-e-r C-a-r-s-o-n.

17 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And what's a good phone number for you?

18 MR. CARSON: [REDACTED]

19 MR. KAMINSKI: And how about an e-mail?

20 MR. CARSON: [REDACTED]

21 [REDACTED]
22 MR. KAMINSKI: Great. Thank you very much. And do you mind
23 if we record our conversation here?

24 MR. CARSON: No.

25 INTERVIEW OF TANNER CARSON

1 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

2 Q. Okay. So why don't we start off with -- that was -- the
3 accident date was the 12th (sic), so why don't you give us an idea
4 of where you were when the crash occurred and what you saw and
5 what you did.

6 A. I was traveling eastbound on U.S. 24 outside of Rushville,
7 Illinois. I was approximately half to three-quarter's mile behind
8 the school bus in question, witnessed the school bus move into the
9 -- they were also traveling eastbound, witnessed them move into
10 the westbound lane, eventually off the roadway and making contact
11 with a semi truck and trailer. Pulled up to the accident, pulled
12 my radio, put it out on air that we had a two-vehicle 10-50 on
13 U.S. 24 approximately a mile outside of Rushville on the west
14 side.

15 Both vehicles were on fire and it was a school bus verse
16 (sic) semi, got out of my vehicle, went in between the two of
17 them, yelled to see if I could hear any survivors, no response.
18 Next thing for me to do was go to the rear of the school bus where
19 the emergency door is, tried to open the emergency door, when I
20 pulled the latch, the top of the door came loose and sprung, the
21 bottom of the door was stuck, I could not pull it open, pulled my
22 glass breaker off my side, busted the rear windows on the
23 emergency door so I could gain access inside the bus.

24 Q. Which windows was it?

25 A. The two windows on the emergency door.

1 Q. Right, the top or bottom, which ones did you break?

2 A. Both.

3 Q. Oh, you broke them.

4 A. Top was to ventilate smoke when I opened the bottom, that way
5 I could hopefully -- and in my mind, I was thinking I could do
6 that to gain more of a clear path of sight down the alleyway of
7 the school bus. Got down and put my head in and/or near the
8 bottom window of the emergency door, yelled numerous times that if
9 anybody was inside or could hear my voice, to make themselves
10 known, did that until I was out of volume, I could not force any
11 noise out of my mouth at that time, knew that I had nothing inside
12 of the bus that was responding.

13 The next thing that I could do for them was to get back into
14 my truck and come to the fire department, got here, got gear on
15 and I was in Truck Number 10, that left here as the second truck,
16 pulled up as second truck on scene, donned my protective gear, as
17 was the driver, pulled hose. Once I got my gear on and we got the
18 line charged, I immediately started attacking the fuel tank on the
19 semi, as well as the rear duals on the tractor itself, as to keep
20 risk off of us and our truck. Another firefighter was already
21 attacking the school bus, so I felt it necessary to go after those
22 to mitigate risk of those tires exploding. After this, after the
23 fire was extinguished, we were put on standby awaiting Illinois
24 State Police.

25 Q. Okay. And how fast were you traveling, you said you were

1 about a half a mile to three-quarters of a mile behind the bus,
2 how fast were you traveling?

3 A. Fifty-five to sixty. I don't have a certified speedometer in
4 my vehicle to know, I can only give an approximation.

5 Q. So you think the -- how about the bus, were you gaining on
6 the bus or was the bus --

7 A. We were staying about an equal distance apart.

8 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. Anything, Eric?

9 BY MR. GREGSON:

10 Q. How long had you been riding behind the bus?

11 A. I would say -- I pulled off of Scotts Mill Road onto U.S. 24.
12 At that point, when I pulled off, I couldn't see them, once I got
13 up to speed, because I went a little over speed and then realized
14 that I was over speed, came back down or what I believed to be
15 over speed, I guess, because that speedometer runs a little low.
16 That's when I got my first visual of the bus quite a ways ahead of
17 me there. So I would say -- my mileage there is a little weird.
18 I'd say it probably took me a mile, maybe, to catch up with them,
19 a little bit more, a little less, somewhere in that ballpark.

20 Q. Okay. During your time behind the bus, before the bus
21 crosses the center line --

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. -- did you -- at any other time was it hitting the center
24 line or the shoulder or anything like that or was it --

25 A. No.

1 Q. -- maintaining itself --

2 A. It was --

3 Q. -- the whole time you were behind it?

4 A. -- maintaining itself, there was nothing out of the ordinary
5 on the bus.

6 Q. Okay. When the bus started to cross the double yellow line,
7 the center line, there's that intersection right there, I guess
8 that's Old Route 24?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. But wherever that intersection is prior to --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- where the crash occurred.

13 A. Yeah, on Scripps.

14 Q. How far past that intersection would you say it was when the
15 bus started to cross over into the other lane?

16 A. I couldn't tell you accurately, just because I wasn't really
17 paying attention to them when they got over that. It was a normal
18 day at work, I was hauling rock back and forth and I was just kind
19 of in my zone in the truck.

20 Q. Okay. When the bus crossed, was it a gradual crossing, like
21 -- so there's the curve, right?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. So the bus is traveling around the curve, so when it crossed
24 over the line did it seem like it was steered over or did it just
25 kind of just stay straight on a path?

1 A. It seemed rather slow to get all the way over there, but I
2 can't speak accurately to that because in a situation like that,
3 everything slows down a lot, that couple of seconds that it took,
4 looking back on it now, it seemed like it took a year from the
5 time that they started to cross that line until there was impact.

6 Q. Did you see any brake lights on the bus?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did it seem as though the bus was slowing down, were you
9 catching up to the bus at any point or did it seem like you were
10 maintaining distance or --

11 A. No, it was maintaining a distance.

12 Q. Maintaining a distance.

13 A. Yeah.

14 MR. GREGSON: I can't think of any other questions.

15 MR. KAMINSKI: Yeah, so we have your number and e-mail, I'll
16 send you back the transcript and then -- but if we do have any
17 follow-up questions, do you have any problem with us giving you a
18 call?

19 MR. CARSON: No, feel free to get a hold of me.

20 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

21 Q. Okay. Yeah, I think he asked a question about the braking
22 and of course, you didn't see or hear any kind of avoidance
23 maneuvers at the last minute or anything like that from the bus?

24 A. No. The main avoidance maneuver that I witnessed was the
25 semi.

1 Q. And what did you see the semi do?

2 A. He was all the way in the ditch. He was actually starting to
3 roll when they made contact.

4 Q. So they were that far off to the --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- shoulder, then?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. He did -- it appeared that he was willing to eat that ditch
10 and eat it hard to not have that accident.

11 MR. KAMINSKI: Sure, okay. Okay. That concludes our
12 interview here with Tanner Carson at 10 after 2:00.

13 Go ahead.

14 BY MR. GREGSON:

15 Q. One more question for you, Tanner. At impact, the fire, when
16 it started, was it right as the vehicle, say like, almost
17 instantaneous or did it take some time for the fire to start?

18 A. It seemed like the second that they made impact, it was a
19 fireball. It was probably one of the biggest fireballs I have
20 witnessed in my fire career.

21 Q. And when you say when you got there with the fire department
22 and you were attacking the gas tank and the tractor tandems, that
23 was the driver side of the truck that you were attacking?

24 A. Yes, yes. That was the road side, we didn't -- our truck was
25 set up almost parallel to where the semi was sitting at, so I've

1 been involved in a lot of tractor trailer fires and know that a
2 big risk towards the firefighters on scene is those semi tractor
3 tires exploding and I knew they were getting hot, you could hear
4 the hiss that they'll omit prior, so I wanted to mitigate that
5 risk.

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, that concludes our interview.

7 (Whereupon, at 2:11 p.m., the interview concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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


IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL SEMI-TRUCK & SCHOOL BUS
COLLISION AND SUBSEQUENT FIRE
IN RUSHVILLE, ILLINOIS
ON MARCH 11, 2024
Interview of Tanner Carson

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY24MH005

PLACE: Rushville, Illinois

DATE: March 14, 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

INVESTIGATION OF:

Multi-Vehicle Crash in Rushville, IL, on March 11, 2024 Accident No.: HWY24MH005_

ERRATA SHEET

For

NTSB Interview of Tanner Carson on March 14, 2024

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Date: _____

10/21/2024

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL SEMI-TRUCK & SCHOOL BUS *

COLLISION AND SUBSEQUENT FIRE *

Accident No.: HWY24MH005

IN RUSHVILLE, ILLINOIS ON *

MARCH 11, 2024 *

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Interview of: LEEANN EIFERT, Accident Witness

Rushville, Illinois

Saturday,
March 16, 2024

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Senior Survival Factors Highway
Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of LeeAnn Eifert:

By Mr. Kaminski

4

I N T E R V I E W

(9:07 a.m.)

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3 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is March 16th, 2024, my name is
4 Ronald Kaminski, K-a-m-i-n-s-k-i, with the National Transportation
5 Safety Board. I'm going to be talking to a witness, LeeAnn
6 Eifert, regarding the crash in Rushville on March 11th, Highway
7 Number HWY24MH005. And if we can start with -- are you okay with
8 us recording this conversation?

9 MS. EIFERT: Yes, I am.

10 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And can you spell your first and last
11 name?

12 MS. EIFERT: My first name is L-e-e-A-n-n, with a capital A.
13 And my last name is E-i-f-e-r-t.

INTERVIEW OF LEEANN EIFERT

14
15 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

16 Q. Okay. And I understand you were a witness and can -- where
17 were you at the time of the crash?

18 A. I was the vehicle right behind the semi truck.

19 Q. Okay. And about how far were you behind the --

20 A. I was probably 60, 70 yards behind him.

21 Q. Okay. And -- well, why don't you just tell me your story and
22 then I'll have some follow-up questions.

23 A. Okay. So I was following the semi going westbound on Route
24 24 and as we left the city limits and started to go around the
25 curve, I noticed that the school bus had been in the lane we were

1 in for probably three or four seconds, definitely felt longer at
2 the time, but it was probably only about that long, and I watched
3 the semi slam on his brakes and try and veer off the side of the
4 road like you would if you assumed that the bus driver would, you
5 know, pull themselves back into their lane and then I saw both
6 vehicles collide.

7 They came off of the ground, probably at least three feet off
8 the ground, instant fire, and then when they fell back to the
9 ground, the semi truck fell on its side and by the time I could
10 get my car stopped, it was already on fire, both vehicles, and I
11 immediately called the sheriff's office and reported it and
12 watched.

13 An oncoming truck driver had pulled up and got out with his
14 fire extinguisher, tried to run up on the window. While I was on
15 the phone with the sheriff's office, another semi from behind me
16 stopped and tried to run up and do the same thing, but the fire
17 overtook it quicker than they could even get in there.

18 Q. All right. And -- go ahead.

19 A. No, that's pretty much it. I just --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. I waited until emergency personnel got there and spoke to
22 Rick Wright and told him the same thing that happened.

23 Q. Okay. So before he hit the brakes, how fast -- how fast were
24 you traveling?

25 A. So we were out of town. I hadn't hit 55 yet, so we had just

1 gotten to the point where we could start going 55, so I'm not sure
2 how fast he was going, I was only going about 45, 50, so I assume
3 he was probably closer to 55 at the time, but like we had just
4 left the city limits to like get to that point where you're
5 accelerating up to your highway speed.

6 Q. Okay. And how about -- when did you start following him?

7 A. I started following him at the 67/24 junction. I was coming
8 from 67, like I was going south, and so I hit the red light and
9 they had a green light and so I was turning behind him --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- so after he passed, that's when I turned and got behind
12 him.

13 Q. Okay. Did you happen to see, when you were -- when the bus
14 was coming over, did it look like it -- was it a gradual going off
15 to the -- the bus would've been going off to its left, would it
16 have been a gradual or would it -- do you think she straightened
17 out the curve, was it an abrupt --

18 A. It was not abrupt. It looked like to me that the bus was
19 following the trajectory of the straightaway before the curve.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. So I did not see the bus driver try to correct or anything
22 and it was my thought, and I guess my hope, that the bus driver
23 was experiencing some kind of medical emergency that would cause
24 her not to try and correct.

25 Q. Okay. And you didn't happen to see the bus driver, did you?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. And speed, where you got -- so was it an abrupt stop,
3 stopping maneuver by the semi?

4 A. Yes, it was. He --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. He tried to do everything he could to avoid that accident, I
7 can tell, from what I remember seeing, he -- as soon as he
8 realized they were in the lane, he slammed on his brakes, he tried
9 to slow down, he -- like I said, he tried to veer off the road out
10 of their path and he couldn't avoid it.

11 Q. Right. And then after the crash, did you just pull over
12 behind or did you go past or --

13 A. No, I immediately stopped as -- I tried to stay back because
14 I knew it was on fire and I didn't want it to explode and then me
15 go out, too, so I -- I tried to stay back, I was about -- I was
16 still probably about 60 yards away where I parked my car and I --
17 I will be honest, I didn't even turn on my hazard lights because
18 that was not the first thing on my mind, the first thing on my
19 mind was calling 9-1-1 and so I stopped right -- I don't even
20 think I was fully off the road, but I was right behind it, I
21 didn't try and pass it or anything, I stopped, called 9-1-1,
22 stayed there until everybody got there and I spoke to the police.

23 Q. Okay. And the 9-1-1, that's in McDonough, correct?

24 A. So I didn't actually call 9-1-1, I called Schuyler County
25 sheriff's office.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I have the number programmed in my phone, so it was -- I have
3 it saved as a favorite, it was quicker for me to just click that
4 than it was to dial 9-1-1.

5 Q. Sure, okay. Okay. Let me get your -- your phone number.

6 A. Okay. My phone number is [REDACTED].

7 Q. And what's a good e-mail so I can e-mail this back to you?

8 A. So my e-mail is [REDACTED] --

9 Q. [REDACTED]?

10 A. [REDACTED] as in --

11 Q. [REDACTED].

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. [REDACTED] --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- [REDACTED] com.

17 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. It is approximately 13 minutes after
18 9:00 and this concludes our interview.

19 (Whereupon, at 9:13 a.m., the interview concluded.)
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Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

INVESTIGATION OF:

Multi-Vehicle Crash in Rushville, IL, on March 11, 2024 Accident No.: HWY24MH005_

ERRATA SHEET

For

NTSB Interview of Witness Lee Ann Eifert on March 16, 2024

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Signature:

Lee Ann Eifert

Date:

10-9-24