



SURVIVAL FACTORS ATTACHMENT

Injured Occupants/Resident Interview Transcripts

Teutopolis, IL

HWY23MH017

(69 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH *

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS *

Accident No.: HWY23MH017

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 *

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Interview of: WESTON HEMMERLING, Accident Victim

Effingham, Illinois

Wednesday,
October 4, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Survival Factors Highway Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STACIE EIGHMEY
Mother of Mr. Hemmerling

I N D E X

ITEM

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Interview of Weston Hemmerling:

By Mr. Kaminski

5

I N T E R V I E W

(12:26 p.m.)

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3 MR. KAMINSKI: Today is October 4th. My name is
4 Ronald Kaminski with the National Transportation Safety Board.
5 I'm here at the St. Anthony's Hospital ICU here in Effingham,
6 Illinois and I'm going to be talking to Weston Hemmerling, and he
7 will spell his name, and Stacie Eighmey, who is his mother, and if
8 we can start off with each of you -- Stacie, if you can spell your
9 first and last name, please?

10 MS. EIGHMEY: Yes. Stacie, S-t-a-c-i-e. Eighmey,
11 E-i-g-h-m-e-y.

12 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And Weston.

13 MR. HEMMERLING: My name is Weston, W-e-s-t-o-n. Last name,
14 H-e-m-m-e-r-l-i-n-g, Hemmerling.

15 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And you don't have a problem with me
16 recording this conversation here?

17 MR. HEMMERLING: No, sir.

18 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And as I said, I will give you a
19 transcript when that is completed in 3 to 4 weeks.

20 MR. HEMMERLING: Okay.

21 MR. KAMINSKI: So what is a good phone number for you?

22 MR. HEMMERLING: For me?

23 MR. KAMINSKI: Yes, sir.

24 MR. HEMMERLING: [REDACTED]

1 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. You want to finish eating first and
2 then we can --

3 MR. HEMMERLING: No, no, that's okay. We're good.

4 MR. KAMINSKI: Oh, okay.

5 INTERVIEW OF WESTON HEMMERLING

6 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

7 Q. So I guess, what vehicle were you in?

8 A. Mom, do you know what it was? It was a white --

9 Q. Was it a VW Passat?

10 A. I was car pooling with other people and I'm not entirely sure
11 of the make and the model of the car.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That's my fault, I just -- it's a white --

14 MS. EIGHMEY: It belonged to a teammate.

15 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. Yeah, I think that was a Passat. I
16 believe I saw that.

17 MR. HEMMERLING: Yeah, that sounds about right, a white
18 Passat.

19 MR. KAMINSKI: Yes.

20 MR. HEMMERLING: Yeah, that's it.

21 MS. EIGHMEY: Yeah.

22 MR. KAMINSKI: Yeah.

23 MR. HEMMERLING: It's new.

24 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

25 Q. Where were you seated?

1 A. I was in the passenger seat.

2 Q. Front?

3 A. Front, front passenger.

4 Q. And why don't you just give me a description of -- and take
5 your time, description of, you know, you guys are driving and what
6 all happened.

7 A. Okay. So we had stopped to eat dinner at Steak 'N Shake and
8 we were wrapping up there and getting back on the road and about
9 the eighth time that the road map had changed on us and told us to
10 go a different way because something closed down or whatnot very
11 close to Indianapolis, I think. We were getting ready to get up
12 on the highway to get there. And it had an exit off on, I think,
13 Highway 40 because of a detour because of another lane or road
14 closure.

15 And we were driving down that way, passed a few gas stations
16 and stores and stuff, and we're coming up to this curve and I'm
17 working on my homework for one of my high school, or one of my
18 college classes and Sara points out in front of us and says what
19 is that, as is Anja, and they were both freaking out and then I
20 finally had closed my computer at last to see it and everybody
21 else is seeing it and everything, and John had -- John or Sara had
22 told Anja to pull over really fast so that we got on the grass out
23 of the way so we didn't run in, because it looked like the semi
24 truck was rolling and we couldn't tell if it was rolling towards
25 or away from us in the distance and we didn't want to be caught in

1 any of that debris or the dust.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. And we were -- we pulled over, Anja had said call 9-1-1, so I
4 think Sara and I were getting on the phone with 9-1-1 because we
5 were calling because -- we were calling not for us but because of
6 the driver of the semi, because we wanted to see if we could help
7 them if we could, because we could only -- I could only see at
8 least one of the semi trucks, I didn't know how many were
9 involved, but I wanted to get immediate support to him, if
10 possible.

11 And then, as we're getting ready and all this is happening,
12 within maybe half a second of that, this giant thick cloud of
13 smoke starts coming towards us and entering the car and everybody,
14 we're all like get out, get out, get out. And I told everybody
15 let's run, we got to run, and we all start running and I'm
16 thinking that they're behind me because I figured they all had run
17 to the right with me, because to the right would've been away and
18 -- they were in the ditch, essentially pulled over, and so to the
19 right would've been away from the cloud.

20 And I am on the phone with 9-1-1 and I am just telling them
21 that I can't breathe, it's burning my eyes, it's hard -- it's
22 getting really hard to breathe, I can't think, I can't do
23 anything, I feel like I'm going to die, like it's burning so bad
24 and I told her, on the line, I was like I got to keep running, I
25 can't stop and she had told me to stop and so I had slowed down a

1 little bit and turned around and I couldn't see any of my friends
2 and I was getting really, really worried, but I knew instinctually
3 that I had to keep going because it was getting bad and I know it
4 was something I couldn't breathe in. So I yelled out for my
5 friends a couple times and I couldn't hear them and I kept going
6 and kept running until I was out of the cloud and I found myself
7 out in the middle of the woods and I tripped and fell a couple
8 times on my elbow and my ankles.

9 And before I was able to get myself up, at this point I was
10 breathing so -- it was burning in the inside of my lungs and I
11 couldn't -- I couldn't breathe very well but I knew I was outside
12 of the smoke, so it couldn't be getting worse, it was just
13 whatever the gas was going to do, it was going to do inside of
14 me --

15 Q. Um-hum.

16 A. -- and I was trying to find somebody to help me and I found a
17 side road. Of course, at this point I'm blind or very close to
18 it, so I can't see very well, I could see some headlights and I'm
19 trying to flag some people down and I'm on the phone with 9-1-1 at
20 this point and they're trying to get me found because I am a -- I
21 had my phone on me, they had no idea I existed at the time. So
22 9-1-1, the lady on 9-1-1 was trying to get an ambulance to me and
23 I couldn't describe the road because I couldn't see.

24 Q. Um-hum.

25 A. So she sent a whole bunch of ambulances around to try to get

1 to me. And a couple people passed by me and one guy rolled down
2 the window and he's like call 9-1-1 and I'm telling him I am and I
3 just need help and he just keeps driving and doesn't help me at
4 all and a couple other people were the same way, they'd only roll
5 down their window and they'd just keep driving. And I'm in a
6 giant -- I'm in a bright yellow shirt, so I'm very visible, I know
7 that for sure, reflective.

8 And so she gets me to the tracks where I slip and fall on the
9 tracks a little bit, but I get to the railroad tracks that lead me
10 to a side road and some lady in a Jeep hops out of her Jeep, she
11 asked me what's going on and I told her I don't know and I'm
12 really confused and I feel like I'm going to die, and she walks me
13 to the ambulance that immediately turns around and takes me to
14 this hospital where they strip me down, all my clothes, wash me
15 down, nice guy, a 19-year-old guy, sprayed me down like three or
16 four times in my eyes and my face and my body.

17 And then a couple of nurses walk me down to the eyewash
18 station for 20 minutes, brought me back to the room, did
19 evaluations, walked me back to do some eye drop stuff or I mean
20 some eyewash stuff again for 20 minutes, got me to the room, did
21 more evals, did a chest X-ray, and then they had realized there
22 wasn't enough room for me on the floor, so they had to move me out
23 in the hallway and Rhianna (ph.) had gotten the IV and calmed me
24 down a little bit by getting some steroids to relieve some pain.

25 Q. Okay. So then you -- you got in the Jeep and she took you to

1 the -- there was an ambulance that was already coming?

2 A. No, she hopped out of her Jeep --

3 Q. Right.

4 A. -- and walked me to the ambulance.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. She had pulled over.

7 MS. EIGHMEY: She could see the ambulance, he could not.

8 MR. KAMINSKI: Oh, the ambulance was already --

9 MS. EIGHMEY: That was approaching, yeah.

10 MR. KAMINSKI: It was already coming, okay.

11 MR. HEMMERLING: And I couldn't see her very well or anybody,

12 so --

13 MS. EIGHMEY: I talked with the ambulance paramedics and they
14 said he was the first one they could find so far, so we know that
15 they had just arrived.

16 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

17 MR. HEMMERLING: But there were other ambulances, I could
18 hear and see around me --

19 MR. KAMINSKI: Um-hum.

20 MR. HEMMERLING: -- and there were a couple of fire trucks in
21 the distance I couldn't get to because they were just so far away
22 and I could see the siren and the yellow of the -- of the fire
23 truck, but I couldn't get to it.

24 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

25 Q. Okay, so were you able to see the crash itself when the

1 tanker or the semi --

2 A. I saw a hole, I saw a giant hole in it, a big hole in the
3 semi, that's what I could see. But it all happened so fast and I
4 was -- my head wasn't really focused on it because I was -- I was
5 doing homework and my head was down, I wasn't focused on the
6 accident.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. So I had only looked up when they had said something and
9 that's all I really saw and I was -- I was focused on making sure
10 everybody was pulling over to the side, we were going to call
11 9-1-1 and make sure this person was okay and wait for the police
12 to get here so we could make sure that that guy was okay. And I
13 think we all realized that it was oh, no, we have to leave now
14 because of the gas.

15 Q. Right, okay. And it sounds like the -- after you called,
16 when you called 9-1-1 that the emergency responders, they got
17 there fairly quick, then.

18 MS. EIGHMEY: He was on the phone with them for 20 minutes.

19 MR. KAMINSKI: For 20 minutes.

20 MS. EIGHMEY: Yeah.

21 MR. HEMMERLING: Running around and --

22 MS. EIGHMEY: So initially, they had --

23 MR. HEMMERLING: -- I couldn't breathe or anything.

24 MS. EIGHMEY: -- they had reports of the accident occurred at
25 9:25 p.m., however, we know it was 8:41 p.m. because he was one of

1 the first, he was the first call to 9-1-1 and they told him and he
2 was on the phone with them trying to locate an ambulance
3 apparently for 20 minutes because he didn't hang up until the
4 paramedics got there.

5 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

6 MR. HEMMERLING: She told me to sit multiple times but I
7 didn't listen to her because I couldn't --

8 MR. KAMINSKI: Sure, sure. I understand that.

9 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

10 Q. So you saw that the 9-1-1 call was at 8:41, okay, and you
11 estimate or -- so by the -- when you got off the phone, were you
12 in the ambulance at that point, within 20 minutes?

13 A. Me? Okay, so I had talked to the lady on -- the lady on the
14 phone that was on 9-1-1 --

15 Q. The operator. Um-hum.

16 A. -- and she had talked to the ambulance guy and said we got
17 him, this is the first one we've seen, and then -- and then they
18 had talked, exchanged something and they hung up and I asked to
19 call my mom.

20 Q. Okay. And then they brought you directly here?

21 A. Directly here, yes.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. To do the wash-off and everything.

24 Q. Right, right.

25 A. They tried to give me oxygen in the ambulance but it burned

1 my throat, I couldn't breathe.

2 Q. Okay. And what types of injuries did the doctor say that you
3 sustained, then?

4 A. I rolled my ankle and my foot, with severe burns --

5 Q. Which foot?

6 MS. EIGHMEY: Right foot.

7 MR. HEMMERLING: Right foot.

8 MR. KAMINSKI: Right foot.

9 MR. HEMMERLING: Severe burns on my throat and lungs and
10 mouth and burns on my lips, blisters on my lips, according to my
11 mom.

12 MR. KAMINSKI: Chemical burns, you're saying.

13 MS. EIGHMEY: Yes, chemical burns.

14 MR. HEMMERLING: Chemical burns in my eyes, my nose is
15 burned, buildup of burns in my nose, a few cuts and bruises,
16 scrape of the knee, my elbow hurts pretty bad, things like that.

17 MR. KAMINSKI: Sure.

18 MS. EIGHMEY: And burns around -- where his shirt wasn't, his
19 skin was -- clearly looked like a sunburn.

20 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. So the skin that was not covered by a
21 shirt or pants or whatever.

22 MS. EIGHMEY: Correct, when he took his shirt off, it looked
23 like he had been --

24 MR. HEMMERLING: I had contemplated taking my shirt off, to
25 wave it around so people could see me, but I didn't.

1 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

2 Q. Right, right. So you said you ended up in a field by
3 railroad tracks and the road?

4 A. Yeah, I was all over the place. I was constantly -- so I had
5 taken off and when I had gotten out of the car and realized that I
6 needed to go, I had just turned off everything else that was like
7 in my head and I was like okay, we got to bolt, and I tripped and
8 fell on my way but I just kept running straight and straight until
9 I got to the point where there was less smoke to see because it
10 was so thick, I couldn't see past it anyways, even if I -- even it
11 wasn't burning my eyes, I couldn't see past it.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. So I kept running until I got to the point where I was like
14 oh, okay, now I can see what's going on and when I could do that,
15 I finally was able to move left or right depending on where I
16 needed or where I thought that I was going to get the most help.

17 Q. Sure.

18 A. And I was listening to the lady on the phone, her telling me
19 where to go, do you see light, do you see police officers, do you
20 see this, that, do you see the accident, and she was kind of
21 guiding me in the right direction.

22 Q. That's good, yeah, it sounds like she helped you out that
23 way, yeah.

24 A. But I was on the phone with her for more than 20 minutes and
25 there was a 10-minute stretch where she didn't talk to me at all,

1 she just kept asking me if I was running, asking me if I was
2 keeping moving, and she was working because I think Sara was on
3 the phone with -- on the phone with another person on the line.

4 Q. Sure.

5 MS. EIGHMEY: Sara was another passenger.

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Right, yeah.

7 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

8 Q. And so initially, she told you to stop running, did she tell
9 you --

10 A. She told me to sit still because they wanted to be able to
11 find me.

12 Q. Oh, okay.

13 A. But I couldn't because I would die.

14 Q. You wanted to get out of the smoke, yeah.

15 A. I would've died, yes.

16 Q. Yeah, sure. Yeah.

17 MS. EIGHMEY: And since he was one of the early callers, I
18 don't think they knew what was transpiring at the time.

19 MR. HEMMERLING: About 15, about 10 -- I think about 12
20 minutes into my call is when the lady said that's anhydrous
21 ammonia gas and she had turned to me and she said are you anywhere
22 near the smoke cloud and I said yes, and she said I need you to
23 keep running until you're away from it.

24 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, all right. Yeah.

25 MR. HEMMERLING: That's when they figured it out, like that

1 it was something that I needed to be away from.

2 MR. KAMINSKI: Right. Oh, yeah.

3 MR. HEMMERLING: Another iced tea.

4 MS. EIGHMEY: Yeah.

5 MR. KAMINSKI: I think that will be good, you've given me a
6 real good description. You're the first one I've been able to
7 talk to, we've all been busy, you know, looking at the vehicles
8 and, you know, doing some other things, so I'm just now just
9 getting -- and that's why I know several people have already been
10 discharged and that, so -- and I guess you're going to be able to
11 get out tomorrow, too, huh?

12 MS. EIGHMEY: Yes, we hope to get out real soon.

13 MR. KAMINSKI: Great, okay. Well, that will conclude -- and
14 you don't have any problems if I have any follow-up questions,
15 maybe call you up?

16 MR. HEMMERLING: Am I in trouble?

17 MS. EIGHMEY: No.

18 MR. KAMINSKI: No, no, absolutely not. No. Why would you be
19 in trouble? No.

20 MR. HEMMERLING: Okay.

21 MR. KAMINSKI: No, just that there's a couple things that I
22 want to clarify or -- and no, you're not in any trouble, believe
23 me. So we'll just -- but I just wanted to -- that's something we
24 always say if we have any follow-up questions, if we might, if I
25 call you back. Yeah.

1 MR. HEMMERLING: Yes, you can.

2 MR. KAMINSKI: Because I plan on going back home tomorrow,
3 myself.

4 MS. EIGHMEY: Oh, good.

5 MR. KAMINSKI: So that concludes our interview here, it's
6 approximately 12:40.

7 (Whereupon, at 12:40 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 TRUCK SEMI-CRASH
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023
Interview of Weston Hemmerling

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: Effingham, Illinois

DATE: October 4, 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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH *

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS *

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 *

Accident No.: HWY23MH017

* * * * *

Interview of: CHARLIE L. WHITT, Accident Victim

via telephone

Wednesday,
October 4, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Survival Factors Highway Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Charlie L. Whitt:

By Mr. Kaminski

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:17 p.m.)

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3 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is October 4th, 2023. My name is
4 Ronald Kaminski, I'm with the National Transportation Safety
5 Board, I'm a survival factors investigator, and I'm going to be --
6 I'm going to be talking with -- is it Charles or Charlie?

7 MR. WHITT: Charlie with an i-e.

8 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, Charlie Whitt. And you spell your last
9 name --

10 MR. WHITT: Middle initial L. My last name, W-h-i-t-t.

11 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And your wife's going to be there with
12 you and her first name is Teresa?

13 MR. WHITT: Yes, sir.

14 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And how do you spell her first name?

15 MR. WHITT: T-e-r-e-s-a.

16 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. So, Mr. Whitt, why don't we just start
17 -- oh, let me just say it's approximately 2:17 Central time, and
18 are you okay with me recording our conversation?

19 MR. WHITT: Yes, sir.

20 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, great.

INTERVIEW OF CHARLIE L. WHITT

21 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

22 Q. So why don't we start, sir, and tell me what vehicle you were
23 in and what you remember and what happened.

24 A. I was in the Old Dominion truck right behind the tanker. I
25

1 come upon it evidently just after he ruptured his tank and I
2 didn't know what was going on. I thought the traffic was just
3 backed up from Montrose to there, so I wasn't going to try and
4 pass him or nothing and in a minute, I seen that cloud go over to
5 the south a little bit and then a gust of wind come up and started
6 blowing it my way and I sat there for a minute, it looked liked it
7 went up the truck and I told myself I have to get out of here or
8 I'm going to die.

9 I knew I had to keep my feet on the blacktop to walk myself
10 out of that cloud and I walked a little bit and go on the side of
11 another truck and I didn't want to pass away, but I said I need
12 help and they rolled their windows up and I kept going. There was
13 a man in a pickup truck in the intersection, I asked him for a
14 ride and he gave me a ride, he took me down the road for a mile or
15 two over to Effingham to the EMTs and we went in there for an
16 ambulance.

17 Q. And you got picked up by a person, was it in a van, you said?

18 A. A pickup truck.

19 Q. A pickup truck, okay.

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. And then he took you to the -- an ambulance?

22 A. He took me to where the EMTs were standing and they said the
23 ambulance will be here in a minute and when the ambulance got
24 there, they put me in, then they said we have to take you out
25 because you're stable right now, we might just have someone that

1 just possibly died or is dying. So we had to wait there for
2 another ambulance.

3 Q. Okay. And so how far were you behind the tanker?

4 A. Oh, 50 feet.

5 Q. Okay, so did you see him go off the road?

6 A. No, sir, I did not.

7 Q. Okay. So you didn't see him go off the road but you saw what
8 -- the first thing you saw of him was the big cloud of smoke?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Big cloud of gas, okay. And you said the big cloud kind of
11 went southbound initially, but then the wind blowed it back
12 towards your way because you were heading westbound, correct?

13 A. No, sir. I was headed east, just like him.

14 Q. Okay. Okay, I'm just writing this down, okay. And where
15 were you heading to?

16 A. Back to my terminal in Indianapolis. The reason we decided
17 to go across 40, I had a buddy about 40 minutes ahead of me, he
18 showed a 440-minute (ph.) backup because 70 was closed, we chose
19 to go across 40. (Indiscernible), we chose to go across 40
20 because of that and I guess they had westbound traffic going
21 across 40, also.

22 Q. Okay. So you said you were westbound or eastbound?

23 A. Eastbound.

24 Q. Okay. Yeah, that would make sense, you're going towards
25 Indianapolis, correct. Okay. And did you see -- was there other

1 vehicles stopped in front of you, do you recall?

2 A. No, sir. I was directly behind the tank and like I said, I
3 come awful close to going around him and I thought well, westbound
4 traffic, if I get out there and meet westbound traffic, I had twin
5 trailers, I can't back up and get out of the way, I had no choice
6 but to sit there because I thought the traffic was backed up from
7 Montrose to there.

8 Q. Yeah, right. Okay. And you were at St. Anthony's and you
9 finally were discharged yesterday, October 3rd?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. That's good. Are you feeling better, sir?

12 A. I'm recovering a little bit every day.

13 Q. Good, good. And what types of injuries did you -- did the
14 doctor tell you you sustained?

15 A. Well, the eye doctor, Dr. Kay, he told me yesterday looks
16 like my right eye will recover a hundred percent the next few
17 days, he's worried about the left eye, I might have to go to a
18 specialist. And, of course, you know about my voice, how I didn't
19 have a rasping voice before.

20 Q. Right. So did you have any like chemical burns on your skin
21 or anywhere else?

22 A. No, sir.

23 Q. No?

24 A. No, sir.

25 Q. So other than your eyes and your voice, anything to your

1 lungs or your throat, mouth?

2 A. Well, yes, my throat. For 2 or 3 days it hurt so bad to eat
3 and swallow and, of course, I'm on oxygen now and a nebulizer
4 and --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- of different medicines.

7 Q. Okay. And so you said that you got out of your truck, was it
8 before the cloud hit you or was it after the cloud hit you?

9 A. No, it was after. I should have made that decision a couple
10 minutes sooner.

11 Q. Right. And so when you got out, you started -- you said you
12 wanted to stay on the blacktop, so you stayed on the blacktop and
13 started running the opposite way of where your truck was parked?
14 Headed?

15 A. Yes, sir, I knew I needed to get away from that cloud.

16 Q. Right, okay. Did you see anybody else running, any other
17 people?

18 A. At the time, no. But like I said, I feel like the young
19 people were in the car right behind me and they almost waited too
20 late to leave.

21 Q. Okay. Okay. Well, I'll let you go. Is this a good phone
22 number, this number I'm calling on you now, [REDACTED]

24 A. Yes, it's my wife's phone.

25 Q. Okay. Do you have a phone number?

1 A. Yes, sir. It's ([REDACTED]).

2 Q. [REDACTED] ?

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Okay. And I forgot to ask, what's your date of birth?

5 A. [REDACTED] .

6 MR. KAMINSKI: [REDACTED] , okay. Okay,
7 Mr. Whitt, I'll let you go and I appreciate your help, you have my
8 -- this is my phone number and I have your wife's e-mail and I
9 will e-mail the transcripts when they are completed.

10 MR. WHITT: Okay.

11 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, sir, you take care.

12 MR. WHITT: All right, thank you, now.

13 MR. KAMINSKI: Thank you very much.

14 MR. WHITT: Good-bye.

15 MR. KAMINSKI: Bye-bye now. That concludes our interview
16 with Mr. Whitt at approximately 2:28.

17 (Whereupon, at 2:28 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 TRUCK SEMI-CRASH
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023
Interview of Charlie L. Whitt

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: October 4, 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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

*

FATAL TRUCK SEMI-CRASH *

NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS *

Accident No.: HWY23MH017

ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 *

*

* * * * *

Interview of: JERALD AND ROBIN MISNER, Witnesses

via telephone

Tuesday,
October 3, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Survival Factors Highway Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is October 3rd. My name is
3 Ronald Kaminski with the National Transportation Safety Board. I
4 am talking over the telephone with Mr. Jerald Misner (ph.).

5 MR. MISNER: Misener (ph.).

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Misner. And Mr. Misner, are you okay with me
7 recording this conversation?

8 MR. MISNER: Yes.

9 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And I guess if you could start off
10 spelling your name and giving me your good phone number.

11 MR. MISNER: Okay. It's J-e-r-a-l-d M-i-s-n-e-r.

12 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

13 MR. MISNER: [REDACTED].

14 Now, do you want my wife's now?

15 MR. KAMINSKI: No, we'll wait. I'll just -- I'll talk with
16 you first and then we can -- and we can switch over and I'll talk
17 to her, how's that?

18 MR. MISNER: Okay. That's fine, that's fine.

INTERVIEW OF JERALD MISNER

19
20 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

21 Q. So why don't you start off, tell me where you were that day
22 and when you approached the scene and what you saw and what
23 happened.

24 A. Okay. Are you familiar with the layout?

25 Q. Yes, sir.

1 A. Okay. We went to supper in Effingham and was coming back
2 through Teutopolis from the west. When we got through -- we were
3 almost through Teutopolis, the ambulances and the police and
4 whatever had the road blocked there and we sat there a while and
5 -- until we were -- we needed to make a U-turn, that the road was
6 closed and that's all that was said. So we made our U-turn and I
7 just assumed that they had a couple blocks blocked off for some
8 kind of accident or whatever.

9 So we went back west, took the first road out north, then
10 went back east until we hit a T-road and then we went back south
11 towards State Road 40. It just so happened, when we come out, we
12 were just a few yards from the crash scene. There was two semis
13 setting in the eastbound lane. We couldn't see the tanker, we did
14 smell the anhydrous, which I knew it was anhydrous, I'd been a
15 farmer --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- and I'm familiar with that smell. But my wife was
18 driving, I had her pull out around the two semis, that's when we
19 saw the tanker. I knew immediately what was wrong but by then,
20 our car was full, we were -- honestly, we panicked. We pulled in
21 to the drive of the house right there and just wanted to get some
22 air, we both got out of the car and in just a little bit we
23 realized that we had to get out of there. So we got back in the
24 car, my wife's eyes was burning terrible, but she managed to drive
25 us out the west towards Teutopolis but, making a bad decision,

1 instead of going on into Teutopolis, where there was help, we
2 turned south because we just had to get to some clean air. Well,
3 then down the road, I don't know, it might've been a mile, I don't
4 know about this, but there was two men there had the road blocked.
5 I rolled the window down and asked him, I said what is it and this
6 guy told me chlorine and I said is it going to kill us and he said
7 yes, if we don't get out of there. He never recognized that we
8 needed help and we didn't think to tell him, I mean, we just
9 weren't thinking right. So we drove on south and we had to stop,
10 we couldn't go no farther, and we got out and we were physically
11 sick and coughing and spitting and carrying on something terrible.

12 Q. Sure.

13 A. And anyhow -- and then we finally decided well, we got to go
14 get some help, so we got back in the car, my wife was still
15 driving, she dialed up our daughter and got her and finally
16 explained to her and they were going to meet us in a small town to
17 the east called Hazel Dell. So I typed that in my phone and we
18 started that way because we was out in the country there where I
19 hadn't been, I didn't know how to get through there.

20 Q. Sure.

21 A. So anyhow, we started that way and they were ahead of us, so
22 they come on up to Greenup on Route 40 and we met them there. We
23 got -- our daughter got in with us and drove us, we decided we
24 didn't want to go to Effingham, so my daughter is from Robinson,
25 so we went to Robinson in Illinois to the hospital, she took us.

1 We were there just not too long, a couple of hours, maybe. Well,
2 longer than that, Robin says, so maybe three or four. And then
3 they transferred us on to Vincennes in Indiana and we spent a
4 couple days there.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And that's about it.

7 Q. Okay. And what time -- do you recall what time that you met
8 up with the first roadblock? Do you have any idea?

9 A. No. No, I don't. I don't know what time we left the
10 restaurant, we were having dinner with -- dinner with our whole
11 family, celebrating a birthday, and honestly, I don't know when it
12 was --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- when we got there.

15 Q. Well, how about -- and so the first call after you -- you
16 turned off, you went north, and then you turned back going east --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- and then you turned back, you hit a "T" and then you came
19 back going south and then you hit I-4 -- or U.S. 40 again --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- and then you -- and that's when you saw a couple of the
22 semis that were --

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. -- off the side of the road and then you recognized that you
25 smelled the anhydrous.

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 MS. MISNER: It wasn't just the smell.

4 MR. MISNER: And it wasn't just the smell, like she said, it
5 was overwhelming.

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Sure.

7 MR. MISNER: You could see it like a low fog.

8 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

9 Q. Okay. So at that point you could still see it, it was on the
10 ground, a couple feet off the ground or what?

11 A. Yeah, probably. I don't know, 3 or 4 feet high, maybe.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Maybe even more, but I don't think so.

14 Q. Okay. So then you turned back and you went back west,
15 correct?

16 A. Right, but I mean (indiscernible) here. We turned around in
17 the drive where the man and the two children lost their lives. My
18 wife saw the man laying in the yard, but we could not help. We
19 were so incapacitated that we --

20 MS. MISNER: We got out of there.

21 MR. MISNER: That's where we got out of the car, to try and
22 get some air, and by the time we realized what was going on, we
23 could not help them.

24 MS. MISNER: Well, because we didn't know about the kids.

25 MR. MISNER: Yeah, we didn't know about the kids there, of

1 course.

2 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

3 Q. Sure. So you saw the man, was he -- was he -- did he appear
4 to be in distress or could it have been one of the truck drivers?

5 A. Well, we assumed it was the man from the house. My wife says
6 he was --

7 MS. MISNER: He was already gone.

8 MR. MISNER: He was dead. I mean, he was -- there wasn't no
9 movement or nothing, he wasn't in distress like we were.

10 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

11 Q. And was he like in the ditch or where was he -- where was he
12 located?

13 MS. MISNER: Grass area.

14 MR. MISNER: The grass area in front of the house.

15 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

16 Q. Grass in front of the house, okay.

17 A. The way I understood it, they had it on the door bell cam --

18 Q. Yes.

19 A. -- that he sent the two kids, he sent the two kids to the
20 car, they made it and he didn't.

21 Q. Okay. And how did you -- how did you find that out?

22 A. On the Internet somehow.

23 Q. Okay, okay. So then you got -- you all got back in your car
24 and then you headed back towards Effingham or T-town, correct?

25 A. Right, that's true.

1 Q. And then you hit another roadblock and they steered you, you
2 wanted to go south instead of going further east? Or west?

3 A. We were on 40 headed back towards T-town --

4 Q. Right.

5 A. -- and we got turned around, but instead of going into
6 T-town, we took the first road to the south, trying to get away
7 from it.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And then that's when we met the roadblock, the two men.

10 Q. And then when they hit the -- when you hit the initial
11 roadblock, what did those -- what did those police officers or
12 deputies tell you?

13 A. There in town?

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. In T-town, up on 40?

16 Q. Yeah, that's when you hit the first roadblock, when you were
17 heading back and before -- when you turned south.

18 MS. MISNER: He says we're going back. Are you talking about
19 after we turned around?

20 MR. KAMINSKI: Yes, after you turned around, you headed back
21 towards T-town, you headed back east and then you said you hit
22 another -- was it the road closed, it was blocked, so you had to
23 turn south or --

24 A. No, no. We turned south and then we hit this -- they were
25 blocking the road, I mean, we could still get through to one side,

1 but they wasn't letting anybody through, these two men was.

2 Q. So you couldn't go farther east into T-town, you had to turn
3 south?

4 A. No, no. I'm sorry, but --

5 MS. MISNER: Our minds just were not functioning.

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Sure, I understand.

7 MR. MISNER: We were headed west back into T-town after we'd
8 been exposed. But instead of going on into T-town, we turned
9 south, which would've been left off of Route 40 and then about a
10 mile down is where we met this roadblock and the two men.

11 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

12 Q. Okay, so it was your decision to turn south instead of --

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. -- continuing west?

15 A. Yes.

16 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

17 MS. MISNER: There was no one around.

18 MR. MISNER: No, I mean --

19 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

20 MR. MISNER: -- they had already cleared -- I mean, the area
21 had been cleared.

22 MR. KAMINSKI: I understand.

23 MR. MISNER: We saw nobody alive.

24 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

25 Q. Right, I understand. Okay. And so then -- so then you

1 called your daughter and she came and -- or you met her?

2 A. Yes. We met her at Greenup.

3 Q. And then what hospital did you guys initially go to?

4 A. Robinson, it would be Crawford Memorial.

5 Q. Okay. And then they transferred you into the Vincennes
6 hospital in Indiana?

7 A. Yes. Good Samaritan.

8 Q. Good Samaritan, okay. And what types of injuries did they
9 tell you guys sustained?

10 A. Well, I mean, we had -- our lungs and our throat was burnt
11 and we were having a hard time breathing and the pain was pretty
12 bad and --

13 MS. MISNER: They put us on oxygen in Robinson.

14 MR. MISNER: And basically, how they treated us was with
15 breathing --

16 MS. MISNER: Treatment.

17 MR. MISNER: -- treatments.

18 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

19 MS. MISNER: And so --

20 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

21 Q. And so how many days that would happen, that was late Friday
22 night, how many days did you spend at the hospital, then, in
23 Vincennes?

24 A. We got released on Sunday about noon.

25 Q. Okay. And your wife, as well, both of you were admitted and

1 released at the same time?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. And if you don't mind, Mr. Misner, I forgot, need to
4 get your date of birth.

5 A. Okay, [REDACTED]

6 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And why don't we -- why don't I talk to
7 your wife here for a minute and get her information.

8 MR. MISNER: Okay. I got a question for you.

9 MR. KAMINSKI: Yes, sir.

10 MR. MISNER: Where's this information going to get sent to?

11 MR. KAMINSKI: This is just part of our investigation, there
12 won't be any -- any identifiable information on -- in our docket
13 regarding your name, phone number, none of that will be included,
14 sir.

15 MR. MISNER: Okay, that's what I was wondering about, thank
16 you. Okay, here she is.

17 MR. KAMINSKI: And if you give me an e-mail, once I get this
18 transcribed, I can send it to you, if you'd like.

19 MR. MISNER: That would be great.

20 MS. MISNER: Yes, yes.

21 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. What's a good e-mail for you guys?

22 MS. MISNER: Mine is robin -- and that's with an "i" --

23 [REDACTED]

24 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay.

25 MR. MISNER: Mine is [REDACTED]

1 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, same thing, okay. Okay.

2 INTERVIEW OF ROBIN MISNER

3 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

4 Q. And Mrs. Misner, what is your date of birth?

5 A. [REDACTED].

6 Q. Okay. And I think I -- is a good phone number for you [REDACTED])

7 [REDACTED]

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. And was there anything else you'd like to add that
10 your husband didn't add regarding or would you like to tell me
11 anything different regarding what you experienced and what you
12 saw?

13 A. No, because it was about all the same. When we did get out
14 of the car there at that driveway, we were both out of it and
15 inhaling that and I hollered at my husband and told him we got to
16 get in the car and get out of here because, honestly, I knew we
17 were -- we were going to die there.

18 Q. Sure.

19 A. I mean, it didn't move.

20 Q. Wow. Yeah.

21 A. Now, I also -- my voice is starting to come back, but I
22 pretty well totally lost my voice.

23 Q. I'm sure, yes. Yeah.

24 A. But everything else is the same.

25 Q. Well, I'd be interested in finding out if you could look at

1 your phone and see what time you called your daughter back on
2 Friday night.

3 A. Okay.

4 MR. MISNER: She's looking.

5 MR. KAMINSKI: Just trying to figure out a timeline when you
6 guys were there because the crash happened about quarter to 9:00
7 Friday.

8 MR. MISNER: Okay. Well, she's going to be able to give you
9 a time, I think.

10 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay, take your time.

11 MS. MISNER: It looks like 9:26 p.m.

12 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

13 Q. Nine twenty-six p.m., you called her?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And then we stayed on the line with her the whole time.

17 Q. Oh, from the whole time until you met her?

18 MR. MISNER: Yes.

19 MS. MISNER: Yes.

20 MR. KAMINSKI: That was probably smart, yeah, in case you
21 guys would be overcome or whatever.

22 MS. MISNER: Yes.

23 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. Well, this is my phone number, I've got
24 both your e-mails and it will be at least 3 to 4 weeks before I
25 get the -- we get these transcripts back and I will mail them to

1 you.

2 MS. MISNER: Okay.

3 MR. MISNER: Can I ask you a question?

4 MR. KAMINSKI: Yes, sir.

5 MR. MISNER: I don't know whether you know or not, but I'm
6 extremely curious how the five people that they helicopter-ed out,
7 how they got to them, how they got them.

8 MR. KAMINSKI: I believe the firefighters went in with their
9 air backpacks and things like that, so they were able to go in and
10 pull them out or, you know, there's -- we're still very early in
11 this investigation, there's people, like yourself, that drove out
12 and that were stopped in traffic there, drove out, because --

13 MR. MISNER: Okay.

14 MR. KAMINSKI: -- I'm sure you saw some other trucks and cars
15 that were around there that were stopped and pulled over to the
16 side of the road, correct?

17 MR. MISNER: Okay, I understand that, that makes sense.

18 MR. KAMINSKI: Yeah.

19 MR. MISNER: Can you tell me if any others was overcome as
20 much as we were?

21 MR. KAMINSKI: Oh, yeah. There were some other people, as
22 well as you guys.

23 MR. MISNER: Okay, all right. I was just curious.

24 MR. KAMINSKI: You guys were very lucky to get out of there.

25 MS. MISNER: Yes.

1 MR. MISNER: Yes, we were.

2 MR. KAMINSKI: I'd go buy a lottery ticket maybe, you never
3 know.

4 MR. MISNER: We're going to tonight.

5 MR. KAMINSKI: There you go.

6 (Laughter.)

7 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. Well, I appreciate you guys very much
8 for taking the time to talk with me and give me all this
9 information. And like I said, you have my phone number, if
10 there's anything else you want to call, give me a call and I'll
11 try to help you out.

12 MR. MISNER: Okay, thank you very much.

13 MR. KAMINSKI: You take care, thank you very much.

14 MS. MISNER: Thank you, good-bye.

15 MR. KAMINSKI: Bye-bye.

16 (Whereupon, 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 TRUCK SEMI-CRASH
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023
Interview of Jerald and Robin Misner

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MH017

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: October 3, 2023

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Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

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 *

Accident No.: HWY23MR017

ANHYDROUS AMMONIA NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, *

ILLINOIS ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023 *

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Interview of: MELINDA BLOEMER
Resident

via telephone

Tuesday,
October 10, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RONALD KAMINSKI, Survival Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. KAMINSKI: Today's date is October 10th, 2023. My name
3 is Ronald Kaminski, K-a-m-i-n-s-k-i. I'm with the National
4 Transportation Safety Board. I'm a survival factors investigator,
5 and we're going to be talking to Melinda Bloemer, and she will --
6 and she was involved in the incident in Teutopolis back on the
7 29th of September. And, she'll give a description of what she saw
8 and what happened on the day of that incident.

9 So could you spell your first and last name please.

10 MS. BLOEMER: Yeah, Melinda, M-e-l-i-n-d-a, Bloemer, B-l-o-e-
11 m-e-r.

12 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And a good phone number for you is?

13 MS. BLOEMER: [REDACTED].

14 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. And do you have any problem with me
15 recording our conversation?

16 MS. BLOEMER: No.

17 MR. KAMINSKI: Okay. Great.

INTERVIEW OF MELINDA BLOEMER

19 BY MR. KAMINSKI:

20 Q. So why don't you tell me what your experience was, where you
21 were headed, what vehicle you were in, and what all happened.

22 A. Well, at 8:30 on -- gosh, I can't even remember what the date
23 is. September 29th.

24 Q. September 29th, yeah.

25 A. Okay. Yeah. I was in bed, and my daughter -- or my husband

1 came in because there was police cars going down our road, and he
2 was trying to see what was going on. And then there was an
3 ambulance, and then my daughter, Jennie, was getting -- she was on
4 the phone and occupied with one of her friends, because her
5 friend's dad is a fireman. So she was -- he was telling them --
6 telling us that there was an accident, and -- close to where we
7 were in that area, and they said something about a chlorine leak.
8 So my husband was like, okay, so we saw the lights and stuff down
9 the road, and a lot of commotion, and then an ambulance went by.

10 And then we were like, okay, was it actually chlorine. So
11 we're like -- okay. So we're just waiting to see for a little
12 bit, and then one of her -- or then my husband got a phone call
13 from our neighbor. He works for Ameren. And he said that we
14 probably need to leave because something about a bad accident and
15 stuff. So he was like -- or Mark was like, okay, I'll see what's
16 going on.

17 And then he went outside just to check and see if he could
18 smell the chlorine, and then when he came back from outside, he's
19 like, no, because it took his breath away. Because we're about --
20 we're only probably less than a mile from the accident. And he
21 said, no, that's anhydrous. We need to leave.

22 So it took us probably another 10 minutes just to get
23 everything rounded up. We didn't go home with any -- or leave
24 with anything because our neighbor thought it wasn't going to take
25 that long. So we were headed towards Green Creek area which is

1 where his mom lives. So we got in the truck. It was in the
2 garage, and we pulled out. We were heading west, and we can kind
3 of smell -- we had the windows up, and we could kind of smell it.
4 You know, it wasn't as strong and stuff. So once we head to town,
5 we were stopped by the 4-way stop where Russell was, and we had a
6 couple of firemen got a -- got ahold of us and talked to us and
7 stuff and asked us where we were going, telling them that, yeah,
8 we're going to need to evacuate. It's anhydrous.

9 So he goes, well, there's people along the streets that were
10 getting in their cars because they were in the bars and Russell's
11 and stuff, and they were telling them that they had to leave and
12 evacuate. And some of them I seen people -- when we were leaving
13 to head north, there was someone on the ground getting -- given --
14 getting CPR. So it must have hit them too hard, and they weren't
15 able to take it I guess.

16 So we got up -- we got to his mom's safely, and we didn't
17 hear much of anything for a while. And then we just decided to go
18 to bed. We got up the next morning, about 5:30, and we have
19 livestock. So we have goats and -- about 35 goats, 3 cows, 3 cats
20 and a dog. So we were like, oh, great. My nephew was on the --
21 volunteer for Sigel and Montrose, and he was texting my husband
22 and saying that, hey, I hope you guys evacuated because the wind
23 shifted and it's -- all the fumes and everything are heading
24 toward your house. And then I got on there I texted him, and I
25 said, hey, what about our animals? And he never really texted me

1 back until later. And about a couple of hours later, he texted me
2 back. He goes, I don't know, Melinda. It doesn't look good with
3 your animals because the smell is real strong.

4 Q. Right.

5 A. And went great. I'm like now what are we going to be up
6 against? So about 6 o'clock we decided to head back to town to
7 see if we can get to our livestock to see whether, you know, our
8 animals are still alive. And when we got to the 4-way again, they
9 stopped us and they told us we couldn't, we couldn't go. We
10 couldn't go. We couldn't go in there. It was still too strong.
11 We had a neighbor that lived probably just about not even -- I
12 don't know. I don't know my yardage, probably maybe a quarter of
13 a mile, not even that far, and he tried to go home this morning,
14 the same time we were, and he couldn't go back because the smell
15 was still strong. So --

16 Q. Is he further, is he further west --

17 A. Yes, he's further west.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Which is probably not more than -- I mean walking distance,
20 probably 500 steps, I don't know. I mean it's not very far.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. There's our house and then a neighbor's across the street and
23 then we have neighbors to the west, two neighbors on the west.
24 We're the closest ones to the accident towards the east. We're a
25 mile east out of T-Town.

1 Q. Okay. What, what -- let me just --

2 A. The anhydrous --

3 Q. Yeah. What's your address there?

4 A. [REDACTED] in Teutopolis.

5 Q. [REDACTED]?

6 A. [REDACTED], yes.

7 Q. Avenue, okay. In T-Town.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay. So you're not on 40. You're just --

10 A. No.

11 Q. -- on one of the side streets. Okay.

12 A. Yeah, we're just right -- like 40 and then there's a railroad
13 track. We're right there.

14 Q. Okay. Yeah.

15 A. And then -- yeah. So they told us we couldn't go, and we
16 were like okay. What do we do? We have livestock. We feed
17 those. We -- we're not allowed to send anybody. So we're like,
18 great. So my daughter had to go to work somehow. So we had to
19 find some clothes for her. We just went shopping and stuff. And
20 so we just -- we haven't heard much about anything. Oh, no, I'm
21 sorry. When the firemen were talking to us, they said they tried
22 to -- they patched it, and about -- at 3 o'clock, they tried to
23 turn the tanker over, but it was still leaking and that's why we
24 still smell the smell.

25 Q. Right.

1 A. But that's why they couldn't -- that's why we were still
2 evacuated. And I'm like, okay. So, I asked -- I know that one of
3 the firefighters, and then we got back to his mom's. So we really
4 didn't do much until -- hear anything until about -- we talked to
5 some of the neighbors and Trent Schmitt (ph.) and I ended up
6 calling Paula, was his wife, and asked them what -- if she heard
7 anything. And she said, actually -- because I said -- we need to
8 get to our animals. And she's like, actually, if you go where
9 Alice Palmer's house was, which is Doug Palmer's mom, she passed
10 away but the house is on the corner on -- I don't know the -- I
11 know it's on the corner of our street, but I can't remember what
12 their address is.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Their address is north and south of our 1500th which goes
15 east and west.

16 Q. Right.

17 A. So they're on the corner, and actually that's where the
18 firemen were stationed at right there because that place there was
19 free of the odor. It was clear there. So there were just pockets
20 and pockets of different areas that were getting the smell. So
21 she said that her daughter needed to get her car. So they went to
22 that house, and the firemen actually escorted her daughter and so
23 the fireman had his mask and everything on, and he said that we
24 can -- I can go get your car, but you're just going to have to
25 hurry up and get out.

1 So, they said I guess you can try to do that if you want, see
2 if they can let Mark go out and do the feeding and see if
3 everything's okay. And then maybe they'll let you go in after
4 that to see if I can get some clothes for everybody. We have no
5 medicine, nothing. We didn't take nothing with us. So we
6 decided, okay, we'll try that.

7 Well, apparently everything was clear because no one was
8 there at the stop. We went through. We got to our road easily.
9 We didn't smell anything. That was probably about 2:30 on that
10 Saturday, on the 30th.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And, we decided we were just going to go ahead and go for it
13 because we didn't smell anything. We didn't hear anything. And
14 we just needed to get some stuff because we did hear that it could
15 take maybe 3 to 4 days if they burn it. And we need the stuff.
16 So we got, we got there and we pulled in and stuff, and when we
17 noticed everything was fine. Our animals were okay. They were
18 just starving.

19 Q. Oh, thank God.

20 A. Yeah. Everybody looked good. They ate fine and stuff. So
21 we were like thankful for that. And then we got out within
22 probably 20 minutes. And then we went back to his mom's in Green
23 Creek, and we were just waiting to see what was going to happen.

24 So then we get a phone call or we get -- I got a phone call
25 from Paula Schmitt again saying that we can go back home now, and

1 that was about 8:30.

2 Q. Everything was clear.

3 A. Everything was clear Saturday night.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. The only thing they want you to do is open your windows and
6 let the air out and if you smell anything, you're supposed to call
7 the fire department. So we did that and stuff, and we didn't
8 smell anything. We just thought, okay, no big deal. And then the
9 next day, I got up to go to work, get up and go clean the line
10 shop, and probably right after I got done. I was fine. I didn't
11 have nothing before. I don't think I really inhaled anything or
12 anything like that. I think it was just more all the stress and
13 worrying and --

14 Q. Oh, sure.

15 A. -- what we're going to do with all the animals if they died.

16 Q. Sure.

17 A. I don't know. I was just -- maybe I was so uptight. I have
18 no idea, but I broke out Sunday with a -- like a sunburn rash.
19 And, it was like real red. But I was breathing fine and
20 everything, and I'm like, what the heck is this? And I thought,
21 well, maybe it's in my house, like it's -- I didn't know what the
22 stuff is. I didn't know if it can get on your bed sheets. I
23 didn't know if it could just cling to anything. I had no idea.
24 And I thought, well, great. I'm going to have an allergic
25 reaction to that thing. So I took a Benadryl, and I got to where

1 I was working.

2 And then I thought, I better call the state or the city
3 police and see if there's anything that we were supposed to do
4 more because I didn't really hear anything from anybody about
5 anything else we were supposed to do. And I was telling the
6 dispatcher about what was going on, and what my symptoms were. He
7 wanted an ambulance. And I'm like, no, I don't want to an
8 ambulance. I'm fine. I'm not breathing -- I took a Benadryl.
9 And he said he just wanted to monitor me just to see, you know,
10 just to make sure. And since it tried to Urgent or Convenient
11 Care, and they were closed. And he thought just go.

12 So I had the ambulance come, and they noticed that I had --
13 that I was real red and everything. And I told them what the
14 situation was, and they're not really familiar with it either, and
15 neither was I. So he -- they checked my vitals. Everything was
16 fine, and I told them I took a Benadryl and it started to go away.
17 And then after about an hour and a half, I really didn't look like
18 had any symptoms. So, I decided I would just work, and they
19 really wanted me to go.

20 So I ended up going back to -- I went in the ER and told them
21 what's going on and told them what I experienced. And, of course,
22 they were -- the doctor there was on duty all weekend, and they
23 were having people coming in with some symptoms of
24 (indiscernible), but they probably were the ones that were in town
25 that they had to evacuate from the bars or something.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So I really didn't know nothing about the stuff. So they
3 just gave me a steroid shot and (indiscernible). Well, I still
4 kept on breaking out every morning. So every morning I'd break
5 out, and as soon as I took a Benadryl, I'm fine. So I didn't know
6 what it really was. I don't know whether it was really caused by
7 this accident or this stuff. I have no idea. But I did go to my
8 doctor on Friday. So that would be October -- let me look.
9 October 6th.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And he told me, Dr. Heisman (ph.), he said that he really
12 doesn't think it had anything to do with the smell, but it
13 probably had to do with the fact that I went through a lot of
14 stress. And I basically -- my immune system is like -- is very
15 pissed off. And, I'm kind of breaking out in hives, once in the
16 morning and stuff. So he's like probably from all the, you know,
17 me seeing someone getting CPR, between not knowing what's going on
18 and your animals, and not having any, you know, clothing and what
19 to do. So he figures it could be like stress related.

20 Q. Well, did you change your bed sheets and all that?

21 A. Yes, I rewashed everything and, you know, I tried everything.
22 And I told him I was monitoring. I have not changed any
23 detergent. I haven't changed any -- nothing. Everything was
24 complete like I woke up Sunday thinking everything's cool, and
25 then I wake up with this.

1 Q. Yeah. Well, we did -- I mean this is kind of new to me. I'm
2 not normally in hazmat. I'm in what they do -- I'm more of a
3 highway investigator doing crashes, but we did have the hazmat
4 guys out. We have a hazmat team that came out with us, and they
5 were saying it's anything that's porous, the gas will get into and
6 it needed to be washed. So I would imagine the first couple days,
7 if you didn't take -- if you didn't have your bedding and your
8 couches, anything you were sitting on that's contacted the skin --

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. -- it's got residue on there.

11 A. Yeah, that's what I thought, too, and I wiped everything
12 down, counters. Nobody in my family is having any symptoms, any
13 problems.

14 Q. Yeah, it's just, you know, some people are --

15 A. It's just me.

16 Q. Sure. And --

17 A. So that's why my doctor just thinks that -- he's like I don't
18 think it has anything to do with like the chemical, he don't know,
19 but it's just kind of a coincidence that it just happened at the
20 same time.

21 Q. Yeah. I'm not a doctor either, but I'd say it's probably a
22 combination of the residue --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- and the stress, yes.

25 A. Yeah. So -- and I'm still -- he told me I was supposed to

1 take two allergy medicines a day and then if I have to take
2 Benadryl and -- if I start feeling it.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So -- which within about a couple hours after I started -- I
5 get up and take my shower and everything, then it hits me. And
6 then I have to take a Benadryl.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And then it'll finally go away.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. He said it could take more than like 6 months so my -- basic
11 my immune system to be -- quit being pissed off.

12 Q. Oh, sure.

13 A. Yeah. So he said this probably mostly like your system -- I
14 guess everybody has senseinine (ph.) or something like that.
15 That's how your body reacts to anything that you're allergic to.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And then once you -- once you're allergic to something, then
18 it goes through your cells and then it comes out in your blood,
19 and then that's how you get your allergic reactions.

20 Q. Oh, okay. Got it.

21 A. So what -- normally what's happening is that my immune system
22 is still upset and it's still -- even though the allergy medicine
23 may calm it down a little bit, which is has, it's not so severe
24 any more, that it still -- it's going to take a while before it's
25 -- to actually calm down.

- 1 Q. Okay. And your husband and daughter, they're doing fine?
- 2 A. Yeah, yeah.
- 3 Q. Good.
- 4 A. My son wasn't home at the time. He was in Decatur visiting
5 friends. So he was not home at the time. So it was just me and
6 my husband and my 16 year old.
- 7 Q. Right. Okay. Well, I'm glad everybody's, you know,
8 everybody else is doing okay, and especially your animals as well.
- 9 A. Yeah, yeah, I know. We would have lost about 5 grand.
- 10 Q. Yeah. There's -- I know that home where it occurred at, they
11 lost --
- 12 A. They had livestock, I know.
- 13 Q. Right. And goats and four dogs and cows.
- 14 A. Yeah, yeah.
- 15 Q. It's a tragedy, but -- well, I want to thank you. What's a
16 good email for you. When I get the transcript, if you want, I can
17 send it to you.
- 18 A. Yeah, it's [REDACTED]
- 19 Q. Okay. It's [REDACTED] --
- 20 A. Um-hum.
- 21 Q. -- the number 6?
- 22 A. Yes.
- 23 Q. [REDACTED].
- 24 A. Hof, as in Frank --
- 25 Q. Oh, [REDACTED] --

1 A. [REDACTED].

2 Q. [REDACTED] Okay.

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. Like I said, it'll be about 3 weeks or so.

5 A. Okay.

6 Q. And if anything else comes up, or your animals get sick, let
7 me know about that because our hazmat guys will be interested in
8 that.

9 A. Okay. Another question.

10 Q. Sure.

11 A. Could it be in the water?

12 Q. Yeah, I would have your water tested as well.

13 A. How do you go about getting that? Should we call our water?

14 Q. Yeah, there should EPA, Illinois EPA.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. Or call your water -- yeah, because you have a well.

17 A. We have a well, but that's for our animals. But we have EJ
18 water that's out of Dieterich and --

19 Q. I think your water --

20 A. -- we use that for the house.

21 Q. I think your water would be okay, but you might want to check
22 on your well water for your animals.

23 A. Oh, okay. Okay.

24 Q. So --

25 A. That's another thing I was thinking. I'm like it happens

1 after I take a shower, and I thought, well, maybe it's in the
2 water. I don't know. I really have investigated myself. I
3 thought, okay, maybe I'm starting to get allergic to something
4 else. So like I got -- like I didn't drink orange juice today.
5 No, I still broke out. I mean I just -- like I didn't take the
6 vitamins. Nope, that's not it. I tried using different
7 toothpaste. No, I'm still broke out. So I've been trying
8 everything.

9 Q. Sure.

10 A. And being that, you know, the older you get, you start
11 getting allergic to things and I thought, well, maybe that's what
12 I'm doing.

13 Q. Right.

14 A. But, no anything. I guess it's just stress related.

15 Q. Yep. Yeah. As long as you get checked out.

16 A. With everything happening, and then those people dying and --

17 Q. Yeah, as long your doctor checked you out, that's the main
18 thing, and just like you said, stress related will hopefully clear
19 up here soon for you. But --

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. -- I want to thank you for taking the time to call me back
22 and tell me your story. And, if you have anything else to add,
23 feel free to give me a call.

24 A. Okay. Sounds great.

25 Q. Okay. Thank you very much.

1 A. All right. Thank you.

2 Q. Bye-bye.

3 A. Bye.

4 MR. KAMINSKI: That concluded our interview here at 10
5 minutes after 3.

6 (Whereupon, at 3:10 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

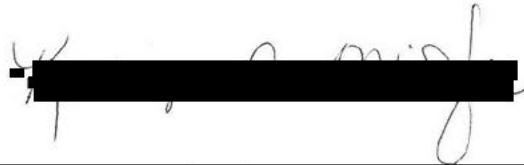
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CARGO TANK COMBINATION
VEHICLE CRASH & SUBSEQUENT
RELEASE OF ANHYDROUS AMMONIA
NEAR TEUTOPOLIS, ILLINOIS,
ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2023
Interview of Melinda Bloemer

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY23MR017

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: October 10, 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.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber

Summary of a witness interview (Teutopolis, IL crash investigation)

Interviewer: Ensar Becic

Witness: Drazenka Todorovic

Date: November 29, 2023

The interview was conducted over the phone and in Bosnian/ Serbian language, as the witness did not speak English.

The witness reported her date of birth as [REDACTED].

The witness described her experiences of the crash event, including those leading up to the event and those that occurred after. The witness stated that:

- She picked up a load in Michigan and was on her way to Texas (San Antonio, she believes) to the deliver the load.
- She was travelling on I-57 when she encountered a detour that took her onto highway 40 west.
 - She was wondering why all these trucks were allowed to travel on such a narrow road.
- Either 2 or 3 vehicles were traveling in front of the witness, behind the cargo-tank combination vehicle (The witness was the 3rd or the 4th vehicle traveling behind the cargo-tank combination vehicle).
- She thought that something must have fallen off, possibly from the cargo-tank vehicle (it could have been a been a piece of steel or a part of a vehicle), which she had run over with her rear right tire.
 - In the moment of the crash/ impact, she experienced a tire blowout, and steered her vehicle over the shoulder and into the field.
 - She didn't know which vehicles were involved in the crash.
- When she stopped, she saw that a crash had occurred, but was unaware that it involved ammonia. She then called her dispatch and her colleague (another driver), asking what to do about the blown tire.
- She was outside and started to smell something noxious.
- She went back into her vehicle and closed the door. She wetted a towel and placed it over her nose and mouth, which she maintained for the entire time that she was in her vehicle.
 - The colleague that she was talking to informed her that according to the news, the crash involved ammonia (the witness stated that occurred within 10 minutes of the crash).
 - She reported feeling burning sensation in her nose and throat, dizziness, and nausea.
- She then started seeing police vehicles. That was approximately around 9 p.m.
- She stated that she turned hazard lights on her vehicle, but that no one had noticed her.
 - The witness and her dispatcher had called the police, fire services and other emergency responders to inform them of the witness' location and request her vehicle be towed.
- She was still in her vehicle around 10:30 p.m. but no one had yet located her.
 - She reported that her vehicle was full of ammonia, that she was not feeling well and was starting to lose consciousness. The witness and her colleague had called police (unclear

which department) and were told by the dispatcher that all officers were on-scene and that the witness should just wait for assistance.

- She reported seeing helicopters above her, but that no one had noticed her vehicle.
- Her dispatcher told her that she can't remain there any longer and to drive elsewhere, even on a blown tire.
- She then reversed the vehicle out off the field, onto the road, and drove toward Effingham, hoping that first responders would see her. The witness stated that she drove to a barricade on the road (created by first responder vehicles). She stated that she stopped her vehicle by an LE vehicle that had emergency lights on, but that no one was inside the LE vehicle.
- She remained at that location, flashing the lights of her vehicle until firefighters saw her (that may have been about 10:50 p.m.)
 - The firefighters placed a gas mask on her and drove her to a fire station where she remained until about 4 a.m. at which point she asked the firefighters to take her to the nearest hotel. She stayed at Days Inn for the next 2 days (2 or 3) until she was able to find someone to fix the blown tire on her vehicle.
- She believes that an hour after the firefighters found her, the police broke the window of her vehicle to get inside, as they thought that someone may be inside. (The witness had locked the door).
- She reported believing that her vehicle was towed the next morning. She retrieved her vehicle 2 days later.

Upon further questioning by the interviewer, the witness also stated:

- The trucks on highway 40 were going above the speed limit, at least 5 mph over.
- At the time of the interview, the witness reported still sensing noxious smell in her mouth, and not being able to taste anything, as well as having a burning sensation in her eyes.
- Several days after the crash, she was unable to breathe, coughing and choking when laying on her back. She also reported drinking milk for 2 days after the crash.
- After she retrieved her vehicle, she continued driving to Texas. However, she was not feeling well and went to a hospital in Luling, Texas.
 - She stated that the doctors conducted extensive check-up and told her that there wasn't much it could be done, but that she should recover in time.
- She reported having an appointment with her doctor in Florida on December 19th. Her doctor's name is Samir Yamil Array.