



**Crashworthiness- Survival Factors Investigation Attachment
Emergency Responder Interviews**

Joplin, Montana

RRD21MR017

(69 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL AMTRAK DERAILMENT *

NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA * Accident No.: RRD21MR017

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021 *

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Interview of: NICK ERICKSON, Sheriff
Liberty County Sheriff's Office

KYLE HEPPNER, Undersheriff
Liberty County Sheriff's Office

Chester, Montana

Wednesday,
September 29, 2021

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Nick Erickson and Kyle Heppner:

By Ms. Harley

4

I N T E R V I E W

(12:27 p.m.)

1
2
3 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So my name is Sheryl Harley, I'm an
4 investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board and I
5 am here at the Liberty County Sheriff's Office, and the address is
6 --

7 MR. HEPPNER: 111 East Adams Avenue.

8 MS. HARLEY: -- 111 East Adams Avenue. And this is Chester,
9 correct?

10 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

11 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. And today's date is the 29th
12 of September 2021, and it is approximately 12:27 p.m. local time.
13 This is in reference to a fatal rail accident investigation in
14 Joplin, Montana, Case Number RRD21MR017.

15 With me in the interview is -- can you please identify
16 yourself, gentlemen?

17 MR. HEPPNER: Undersheriff Heppner.

18 MR. ERICKSON: Sheriff Nick Erickson.

INTERVIEW OF NICK ERICKSON & KYLE HOPPNER

19
20 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So as we spoke before this is in regards
21 to the Amtrak derailment in Joplin on the 25th of September,
22 around, I guess, around 3:55 p.m., is that about the right time?

23 MR. HEPPNER: I think our first 911 call came in at 4:00
24 p.m., 1600.

25 MS. HARLEY: 4 p.m., okay. All right. All right. So what

1 I'm just going to -- as I said before, what I'm going to do is I'm
2 just going to ask you to just start from when you got the, got the
3 call and just, just walk me through it, okay?

4 MR. ERICKSON: Kyle, he was informed before me so I'll let
5 him start what, what he did first anyways.

6 MR. HEPPNER: Okay.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. And, I'm sorry, just for the
8 tape, Undersheriff Heppner, your first name is Kyle?

9 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

10 MS. HARLEY: And, Sheriff Erickson, your first name is Nick?

11 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay, just for the tape. Go ahead, go ahead.

13 MR. HEPPNER: When we first got the call it was between
14 Shelby and Chester is what was reported to us, so I immediately
15 headed west looking for the incident. It wasn't until 1601 we got
16 our second 911 call from a local PA I believe it was that --

17 MR. ERICKSON: It was the Blairs.

18 MR. HEPPNER: I believe it was the Blairs.

19 MR. ERICKSON: Tim and Chantel Blair.

20 MR. HEPPNER: They identified that it was actually east of
21 town near Joplin so I turned around and headed that direction. I
22 followed one ambulance out from town, they went to the north side
23 of the tracks and I immediately went south to the detached three
24 cars.

25 One gentleman who I believe was riding on the train

1 identified himself as a Glacier County deputy so I grabbed my two
2 med kits and threw them to him and asked him what we had -- where
3 people were that needed help. He identified the crew member with
4 a broken arm and another gal with a possible neck injury in the
5 middle car of the three detached.

6 So I crawled down in there and looked to see what we had. We
7 had two passengers who looked, appeared to be ambulatory and then
8 my two that were injured. At some point EMS dropped me down a Sam
9 split for the injured crew member and I ended up with EMT James
10 Dolan to help me with the neck injury.

11 He C collared the individual. The Sheriff then crawled in
12 the car and him and I went to or attempted to cut a hole in the
13 wall so that fire would be able to figure out where we were to cut
14 a hole with the Jaws of Life or a quickie saw.

15 And then we -- after we got her collared up we decided to go
16 out the window that was directly above her that was open. Myself,
17 Sheriff Erickson, James and several other people who I didn't
18 know, helped us lift her out and then I evacuated the two
19 ambulatory people after I had evacuated the crew member, I was the
20 last one to leave that car.

21 And then we went -- the Sheriff informed me that we had three
22 dead bodies I think it was at the time, we had identified that we
23 had three, one woman and two males. We then went through the
24 observation car to make sure we didn't tell other bodies or
25 individuals trapped, I guess, would be the best way to word that.

1 I crawled through the bottom of the car and identified two
2 positions where we could possibly have bodies.

3 (Background noise)

4 MS. HARLEY: Do you need me to stop this?

5 MR. ERICKSON: No.

6 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. Okay. So you actually got into the
7 bottom of the observational lounge chair?

8 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, I went --

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

10 MR. HEPPNER: Every time I ever got in the car I went as far
11 as I could physically fit myself or a door was blocking or some
12 sort of metal was obstructing me from getting any further.

13 Sometimes it was just doors that I couldn't get open without
14 prying them up and blocking them, most of the time though it was
15 just the fact that there was gravel in all this, the one on the
16 observation car, that bottom door which I would assume to be the
17 entrance to come into the train car from like a platform of some
18 sort, that door was open and filled full of gravel, so I
19 identified that as a spot where if somebody was down there that
20 was a good possibility to have a body.

21 I also found one other spot in that car at the bottom that
22 would have been -- was full of gravel but would have been a
23 possibility for a body and when we lifted the train car to remove
24 one of our decedents at that point we had discovered that it was
25 all gravel and there was, in fact, nobody in there.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

2 MR. HEPPNER: After that we secured the scene after we had
3 moved the three decedents, we secured the scene and the railway
4 decided to call, I guess get in contact with you and they moved as
5 much of the wreckage as they possibly could before you guys got
6 here and did your safety investigation.

7 I then had Cascade County or Sheriff Erickson actually called
8 Cascade County and got them coming with a set of detectives. They
9 took pictures, scene photography and then did a FARO scan on all
10 that was available to them at that point. They did just the first
11 half of the train which would be the observation car and forward,
12 where we had deceased people.

13 We asked them to photograph all the way down to where they
14 stopped seeing damage on the rail. We then cleared the last three
15 detached cars again. We checked showers the next morning, I
16 believe, and checked other cars again just to make sure that we
17 had no more deceased individuals.

18 It was -- just continually cleared the cars. The initial
19 clearing was pretty quick, if we didn't hear anybody screaming or
20 see anything, we marked that car good to go to make sure that we
21 had all of our passengers or people that needed help got help.

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right. So how long do you think it
23 took for you to get to the scene once you, once you realized, once
24 they corrected the location?

25 MR. HEPPNER: Oh, five, 10 minutes.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

2 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, at the most (indiscernible).

3 MR. HEPPNER: I was, I was almost to the other end of the
4 county when I realized, when I was corrected.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right. And you said that an ambulance
6 came with you or you saw an ambulance coming through town?

7 MR. HEPPNER: So the ambulance was dispatched at the same
8 time I was or shortly after and they had made it to the ambulance
9 barn and from the barn just to Highway 2 before I was back in town
10 at the office over there.

11 MS. HARLEY: So which fire department is that?

12 MR. HEPPNER: That's Liberty County EMS.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Is Liberty County EMS, is that like a
14 separate EMS service or is it part of the fire department?

15 MR. HEPPNER: It's kind of all -- as far as I know the two
16 entities are separate but in the same building.

17 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

18 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay, all right. Is that the same as
19 Liberty, as Chester West Liberty Fire Department or is that a
20 different agency?

21 MR. ERICKSON: There's the Joplin Fire Department and, yeah,
22 they are separate.

23 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. So the Liberty County EMS is in the
24 same, is in the same building as the Liberty Fire Department?

25 MR. ERICKSON: Yes.

1 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

2 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right. And where are they located?

3 MR. ERICKSON: The end of Monroe Avenue.

4 MS. HARLEY: On Monroe?

5 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

6 MS. HARLEY: I can look them up.

7 MR. HEPPNER: I think they're actually Airport Road and
8 Monroe is what their address is --

9 MR. ERICKSON: Probably, yeah.

10 MR. HEPPNER: -- something to that effect.

11 MR. ERICKSON: Right at the corner there.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Airport and Monroe, okay, all right. In
13 addition to the ambulance what other fire department services were
14 on the scene that came to the scene, do you remember?

15 MR. HEPPNER: All of the --

16 MR. ERICKSON: Joplin that I know for fire. I don't know if
17 Ruddyard Fire came. They had ambulance come.

18 MR. HEPPNER: Maybe not fire. Toole County's ambulance came.

19 MS. HARLEY: I'm sorry, which county?

20 MR. HEPPNER: Toole County, T-O-O-L-E.

21 MS. HARLEY: T-O-O-L-E, Toole County, okay. Ambulance.

22 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah. I think they had two out there, didn't
23 they?

24 MR. ERICKSON: I am not positive how many ambulances they
25 sent probably.

1 MR. HEPPNER: I think they sent two. I thought I saw two of
2 them and then Big Sandy sent an ambulance. Chouteau County sent
3 one out of Fort Benton.

4 MS. HARLEY: What county is that out of Fort Benton?

5 MR. HEPPNER: Chouteau.

6 MR. ERICKSON: Chouteau.

7 MS. HARLEY: Chouteau, spell that.

8 MR. ERICKSON: C-H-O-T-E-A-U [sic].

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay, got it. Thank you, Choteau, Choteau,
10 okay. Okay, all right. So was it, was it Liberty Fire Department
11 or was it Joplin that tried to come through the -- basically the
12 roof of that -- of the railcar, do you remember?

13 MR. HEPPNER: It would have been Liberty County; it was Jason
14 Walken that I was talking to.

15 MR. ERICKSON: Uh-huh.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

17 MR. HEPPNER: And he was using the Jaws of Life, wasn't he?

18 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I don't know what they want to call that
19 but it was me and Kyle that were using the axe on the inside to
20 punch a hole through it.

21 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. All right, okay. So how is -- so
22 where is your main emergency dispatch?

23 MR. ERICKSON: It's right here.

24 MR. HEPPNER: Directly out front.

25 MS. HARLEY: It's right here, okay. So the sheriff's office

1 dispatches both fire and EMS and police?

2 MR. ERICKSON: Correct.

3 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. All right. And I can just go
4 through you to get a copy of the EMS, the CAD report, okay, great.

5 MR. ERICKSON: We don't have CAD system here --

6 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

7 MR. ERICKSON: -- so it will be just written so yeah.

8 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, whatever you got.

9 MR. ERICKSON: And they, and they said that every call was
10 not recorded, written down and recorded because we have four
11 dispatchers come in using their cell phones, it was going crazy.

12 MS. HARLEY: Truthfully we just need the first couple that's
13 --

14 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

15 MS. HARLEY: -- that will work. Okay. So let's see, I want
16 to go back. So at one of the -- let me go back and talk about,
17 okay. So you arrived on the scene and you immediately went to the
18 three most southern cars, which were the three detached cars?

19 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

20 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right.

21 MR. HEPPNER: Those would be the three most eastern cars.

22 MS. HARLEY: I'm sorry, east, yeah because this is west.

23 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

24 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

25 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

1 MS. HARLEY: Eastern cars, okay.

2 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, I saw an ambulance on the first side so
3 instead of getting in their way I went to see what else I could --
4 who else needed help.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So the ambulance was on the west side of
6 the --

7 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, it would have been --

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

9 MR. HEPPNER: -- they went around the locomotives on the
10 north side of the tracks and I took the first turn on the south
11 side of the tracks, that first access road and took it back as far
12 as I could, thought I could at the time and grabbed my first aid
13 kit and my IFAK and jumped out.

14 MS. HARLEY: When you got on the scene how many passengers
15 had self-extricated, do you know?

16 MR. HEPPNER: They, they were everywhere. There would have
17 been a good portion of them had self-extricated.

18 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

19 MR. HEPPNER: I would imagine or with help that was already
20 on scene from somebody in the train.

21 MS. HARLEY: So how many passengers were still trapped on or
22 left on the train for one reason or the other, do you --

23 MR. HEPPNER: I had two. There was at least two more on the
24 car west of mine, on the first car of the detached three; I want
25 to say there was two in there and I don't know what about the

1 front half of the train.

2 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And on the -- in the back car, do you
3 know if anybody --

4 MR. HEPPNER: I never went into the back car.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay.

6 MR. HEPPNER: Initially I had my two patients, individuals,
7 whatever you want to give them for a title, but the two people I
8 was trying to help, I never left them --

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

10 MR. HEPPNER: -- unless it was to run to my pickup to grab
11 something to splint her arm. I tried to use my door wedges but
12 they were not long enough.

13 MS. HARLEY: So the two people that were in that middle car
14 that you helped was the crew member with the broken arm and a
15 female that had a head injury, is that correct?

16 MR. HEPPNER: Yep.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And they were both ambulatory?

18 MR. HEPPNER: The lady with the neck injury was laying on the
19 floor. I told her not to move in case, she was braced up to a
20 point and if she moved it would cause more damage. The lady, the
21 crew member that was with the broken arm was laying on the ground,
22 she didn't move until I told her she had to move to get out of the
23 train car. I says, "You have to get out of here, you're not
24 staying."

25 MS. HARLEY: Where were they in that middle car? So were

1 they closer to the eastern end of the car, in the middle of the
2 car, the western end of the car?

3 MR. HEPPNER: I had my neck injury was on the west end and my
4 broken arm was on the east end so towards the rear of the train.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. All right.

6 MR. HEPPNER: I think the neck injury was only two or three
7 seats from what would be the front of it, if I remember correctly.

8 MS. HARLEY: All right. And there was no one else in that,
9 in that train?

10 MR. HEPPNER: Just two ambulatory individuals, one was
11 staying with the crew member with the broken arm trying to calm
12 her down and the other individual was, I would assume, just in
13 shock, he was standing on his phone scrolling next to the lady
14 with the neck injury, but apparently he wasn't leaving his bags or
15 something to that effect, I don't know.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay. He said he wasn't leaving his bag?

17 MR. HEPPNER: He never said anything to me, he just looked at
18 me.

19 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, he didn't, okay. Okay, all right.

20 MR. HEPPNER: But he -- when I told him it was time to go he
21 brought two armloads of junk with him.

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Let's see, alrighty. You said that you
23 encountered a Glacier County deputy?

24 MR. HEPPNER: I believe so.

25 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Where did he go once, once you got on the

1 scene? I mean, once you handed him some, some equipment do you
2 know where he went?

3 MR. HEPPNER: He showed me to the first window that they had
4 pulled out and he stayed right up on top of the train and got me -
5 - started being my communication link to people that were on
6 scene.

7 MS. HARLEY: So he actually -- they actually pulled out the
8 first window on top of the train?

9 MR. HEPPNER: Somebody had to do it, yeah --

10 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

11 MR. HEPPNER: -- because there was one open when I got there
12 and that's how I went in.

13 MS. HARLEY: Right.

14 MR. HEPPNER: So I would assume that's how they self-
15 extricated was coming out that one window that was open.

16 MS. HARLEY: Was that in the front of the car on the west
17 side or was it that on the rear side of the car?

18 MR. HEPPNER: Rear side of the car on the east side.

19 MS. HARLEY: It was rear, okay.

20 MR. HEPPNER: On the east end of it.

21 MR. HARLEY: Okay.

22 MR. HEPPNER: And then I -- I don't know if -- did you or
23 Justin pull another window open? Because there was three open by
24 the time it was all said and done, somebody had to have pulled
25 them open because I didn't.

1 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I remember moving a window, I think it
2 was kind of a team effort us grabbing them and moving it out of
3 there.

4 MR. HEPPNER: Okay.

5 MS. HARLEY: So, so to your knowledge when you were up on top
6 of the train car there was actually only one open window?

7 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, there was only one open window --

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

9 MR. HEPPNER: -- when I first showed up.

10 MR. HARLEY: Okay.

11 MR. HEPPNER: And at some point somebody must have opened two
12 more.

13 MR. HARLEY: Two more. Got it, okay.

14 MR. HEPPNER: I know we -- I don't remember if I helped open
15 the second, the third window for the lady with the neck injury or
16 if I just stood over her in case it fell in that I would block
17 that.

18 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Let's see, so when you entered the lounge
19 car and you went in the bottom, does that actually mean you were
20 crawling on the ceiling which would have been the top of the --
21 which would have been that top upper part of the observation?

22 MR. HEPPNER: No, I'm sorry. So when I, when I went in I
23 accessed through the top of the observation car so where --

24 MS. HARLEY: Yeah.

25 MR. HEPPNER: -- where you would be sitting.

1 MS. HARLEY: Yeah.

2 MR. HEPPNER: When I went to the bottom, I'm talking I would
3 have got -- crawled on the side of the car. I went down the
4 stairs.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

6 MR. HEPPNER: So I lifted myself up and through the
7 stairwell.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So out of curiosity did you step on any
9 of those seats climbing up onto the stairs since the stairs
10 weren't --

11 MR. HEPPNER: Yes.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

13 MR. HEPPNER: Absolutely.

14 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right.

15 MR. HEPPNER: I stood on the seat.

16 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, the seats were one of the easiest things
17 for us to climb in and out of those things.

18 MS. HARLEY: Right. Yeah, we had to do the same thing but we
19 noticed that someone had stepped on them before and we were just
20 trying to figure out if it was a passenger or somebody else, okay.

21 MR. HEPPNER: I know I stepped on the one, it would have been
22 the first seat east of the stairwell, I put my foot right on the
23 armrest and then on the back of it.

24 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay.

25 MR. HEPPNER: And then would have crawled south through the

1 stairwell to what would be the bottom of the car.

2 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

3 MR. HEPPNER: And I went east through -- that had to be some
4 sort of kitchen or something back there because it had drink, beer
5 bottles, cans, pop cans, wine bottles, all of that. I crawled
6 through that and then was stopped by the end of the -- I would
7 assume the end of the car there.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

9 MR. HEPPNER: And then I turned and headed west and that's
10 when I found the gravel pit basically that had come through the
11 door and continued on. There was, was there luggage down there?
12 I think there might have been some bags in this -- in that as
13 well.

14 And then was stopped by a door that I couldn't get through
15 and identified the two spots where there would have been bodies
16 and left the car.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. But you didn't -- there was nobody in
18 that lower, in that lower section?

19 MR. HEPPNER: Not, not that I found.

20 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Let's see, how did they lift the car up
21 initially to get the deceased male out?

22 MR. HEPPNER: There's a lift point on the door or like where
23 they couple together that would be the hallway I guess that
24 adjoins the two cars and then --

25 MR. ERICKSON: They put those two cranes on both sides of it

1 on the east side of the car.

2 MR. HEPPNER: I'm trying to think of what, what they hook on
3 on the south side, is there a lift point there that they used?

4 MR. ERICKSON: I don't remember if they hooked onto like the
5 wheels assembly.

6 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

7 MR. ERICKSON: I'm not, I'm not sure.

8 MR. HEPPNER: I don't remember.

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So they -- did they just lift up one end
10 of the car or did they lift the entire car up?

11 MR. ERICKSON: The whole car.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay, lifted the whole car up.

13 MR. HEPPNER: But they only used the one end to lift it all
14 the way. They used that to stand, lifted it up until we could get
15 excavator buckets underneath it to safety it.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

17 MR. HEPPNER: And then that's when we moved Donald out of
18 there.

19 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. All right. So you said that at
20 that particular point you secured the scene and the railroad. You
21 said they, they moved the wreckage?

22 MR. HEPPNER: They moved -- what did they upright two cars,
23 but they had clearance through NTSB to move what they moved they
24 told me?

25 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, the lead car. Yeah, and when I talked

1 to Jim Southworth he said he was concerned about the integrity of
2 the tracks and nothing was moved on the tracks at all.

3 MS. HARLEY: Right, okay. All right. Okay, let's see. So
4 the Cascade County detectives came out and they did the scene
5 photos and the FARO scan.

6 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

7 MS. HARLEY: But out of curiosity, where is Cascade County
8 from here?

9 MR. ERICKSON: Great Falls.

10 MS. HARLEY: Great Falls, okay. Okay. I'll get their number
11 after I talk to you, okay. Let me see.

12 MR. ERICKSON: Their card is on one of those disks of the
13 falls that we gave you.

14 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay.

15 MR. HEPPNER: Sergeant Kadner, he's the one that's in charge
16 of the team that came up.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay, great, then I've, then I've got it, okay.
18 So the emergency response from fire and EMS included Liberty
19 County EMS, Liberty County Fire Department, Joplin Fire Department
20 --

21 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

22 MS. HARLEY: Rudger, what was it?

23 MR. HEPPNER: Rudyard.

24 MS. HARLEY: Rudyard, okay, Rudyard. Is that, is that a fire
25 department that the ambulance runs out it?

1 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, it would be -- that's how always little
2 communities would be.

3 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

4 MR. ERICKSON: It's an altogether type of thing.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Now, let's see, Toole County, Big Sandy
6 and then Fort Benton?

7 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, and that's Chouteau County.

8 MR. HEPPNER: I think Great Falls Fire Rescue sent a truck up
9 too. I want to say somebody told me that they were on the
10 highway. They were on 2 at some point. I think Great Falls Fire
11 Rescue sent somebody up too.

12 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I didn't notice any of their guys but,
13 you know, they could have been out there on the highway.

14 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, I didn't.

15 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So inside you and another individual used
16 an axe to try to cut a hole on the -- towards the outside, is that
17 correct?

18 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

19 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right.

20 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, I was -- you and I did that, right?

21 MR. ERICKSON: Uh-huh.

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right, the two of you. Let me see,
23 and just verifying the victim, so you had the neck injury was two
24 or three seats from the front of the car which was the west end of
25 the car?

1 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

2 MS. HARLEY: Then you had the crew member with the broken arm
3 was in the rear, the east end of the car?

4 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

5 MS. HARLEY: And then there were two other individuals. Did
6 they appear to be hurt?

7 MR. HEPPNER: No, they were fine.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

9 MR. HEPPNER: The one lady was standing; she helped me wrap
10 the arm actually.

11 MS. HARLEY: There was a female there?

12 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, one.

13 MS. HARLEY: One was a female, one was a male?

14 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

15 MS. HARLEY: Did she give you her name; did she tell you she
16 was a passenger?

17 MR. HEPPNER: She may have given me her name but I don't
18 know.

19 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

20 MR. HEPPNER: I guarantee I can't tell you what it is.

21 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. And to your knowledge when
22 you got on the scene only one window was out on that middle car
23 and then two others were moved sometime later?

24 MR. HEPPNER: Yes, ma'am.

25 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. And so to your knowledge has

1 the railroad ever offered, either Amtrak or even BNSF offered
2 either you or the fire department any of the emergency responders
3 training on train emergencies and how to respond to them?

4 MR. ERICKSON: Nope.

5 MR. HEPPNER: No.

6 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Is this the first time you've ever had to
7 deal with this kind of train -- this kind of rail accident?

8 MR. ERICKSON: Absolutely.

9 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

10 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay, okay. If training was to be
11 offered, for example, locally, how would they do that, who would
12 they go through, would they go through you or is there an EMA, I
13 mean, how does that work here?

14 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I suppose they'd maybe reach out to the
15 fire ambulance team, to EMS.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay. They'd reach out to the individual fire
17 departments or is there a county oversight basically for emergency
18 management or anything like that?

19 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I don't know if there's any county
20 oversight but I think each one would be its own entity.

21 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

22 MR. ERICKSON: It's so big everybody kind of communicates
23 with each other around here, you'd know it if they got in touch
24 with Hill County or Toole County.

25 MS. HARLEY: Right. So all the, all the fire departments

1 that actually responded and sent assistance, would it be accurate
2 to say that they're all fairly close to here?

3 MR. HEPPNER: Yes.

4 MS. HARLEY: Okay. What's the, what's the farthest one away,
5 approximate distance?

6 MR. HEPPNER: Well, if Cascade County came that would be 90
7 miles and Chouteau County out of Fort Benton they're about 55
8 miles from Chester so it would have been close to 60, 65 miles if
9 they would have come.

10 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

11 MR. HEPPNER: Hill County would be about 60 miles.

12 MR. ERICKSON: Yep. If Glacier or Cut Bank came so, so that
13 would have been 60, 65 miles.

14 MS. HARLEY: So the -- but with between Liberty, Joplin,
15 Rudyard, all of those are within what 10 miles or something?

16 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, it's 10 miles to Joplin from here, it's
17 17 miles from Chester to Rudyard from here.

18 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right.

19 MR. HEPPNER: Rudyard (indiscernible).

20 MS. HARLEY: And how far away -- Big Sandy is on the other
21 side of that is that correct?

22 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, you go to Rudyard and south.

23 MS. HARLEY: South, okay.

24 MR. ERICKSON: And that's 50 miles there I suppose.

25 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, (indiscernible).

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right. Okay.

2 MR. ERICKSON: You can see how our roads are; you can get on
3 a road and go pretty fast around here.

4 MS. HARLEY: Yeah. Okay. Let's see. When you arrived on
5 the scene were you approached by any member of the crew?

6 MR. ERICKSON: No.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. At any time were you provided any
8 kind of like a passenger manifest for that train?

9 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

10 MR. HEPPNER: That was fairly late in the game.

11 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, that was, that was pretty late that
12 night.

13 MR. HEPPNER: I saw the -- was it the brakeman, right before
14 dark the brakeman and the --

15 MR. ERICKSON: And the conductor were --

16 MR. HEPPNER: -- conductor had one and we were talking with
17 him but that was -- it was late that day, it was pretty much dark.

18 MR. ERICKSON: Uh-huh.

19 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So the crew didn't provide any assistance
20 about, information about the trains, the number of passengers
21 onboard or how to access the train at all?

22 MR. ERICKSON: I had one crew member when I first got there;
23 I talked to him a little bit just for a second there. Most
24 passengers that very first car I got to that was right in front of
25 the viewing car and nobody was in there. Yeah, everybody was

1 pretty much out.

2 MS. HARLEY: Is that the car that's tilted, that was tilting
3 a little bit?

4 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. Go ahead, I'm sorry.

6 MR. ERICKSON: I just made sure there was nobody in there. I
7 went around and that's when I first seen, which turned out to be
8 Mr. Barnardo to start with.

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. And your conversation with the crew
10 member, did he say anything?

11 MR. ERICKSON: I can't remember a whole lot of what he said,
12 I guess, and there was another crew member that was back at the
13 three cars at the east end that was laid down and he was, he was
14 also helping, he was on the outside looking -- you know, just kind
15 of helping passengers out and stuff.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

17 MR. ERICKSON: But then I just went in the cars and was
18 searching for people.

19 MS. HARLEY: All right. Out of curiosity who provided you
20 the manifest finally?

21 MR. ERICKSON: Was it the conductor gave it to our Deputy
22 Steve Cameron?

23 MR. HEPPNER: I would --

24 MR. ERICKSON: And then I think we got it from him.

25 MR. HEPPNER: I think so. I don't know, I never came back to

1 the office until 4:30 that morning, 4, 4:30, somewhere in there.
2 I stayed out there all night.

3 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, and we got ahold of so our county
4 attorney and our victim's advocate. We gave them the manifest and
5 we were trying to coordinate that with people that we were getting
6 checked into the hospital and the senior center and the school.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So what action -- so let's talk about the
8 disposition of the victims here. So you had victims that were
9 transported to the various hospitals. What about the walk-in
10 wounded or those people who weren't injured, where did they go?

11 MR. ERICKSON: They went to the senior center or into the
12 school.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Senior center?

14 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

15 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay. All right.

16 MR. ERICKSON: And the gym at the school.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Who was responsible for the disposition
18 of those people to take them out, to take them to these locations?

19 MR. ERICKSON: We had nurses and EMS trying to triage people
20 to see where they needed to go, whether it was to the hospital or
21 --

22 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And those people who went to -- who were
23 eventually released, was somebody checking, checking off who they
24 were as far as on the list of people?

25 MR. ERICKSON: Uh-huh.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. How many passengers in your recollection
2 were -- ultimately had to be transported from the scene?

3 MR. ERICKSON: You know, I was told the number that night. I
4 had so many numbers thrown at me because we were trying to track
5 down where everybody was. I don't -- it was like --

6 MR. HEPPNER: Was it like 20, 23 something like that?

7 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, it seems like there's 20. I think it
8 might have been 23.

9 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

10 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

11 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And so let's see, so they went to the
12 hospital in Fort Benning, Fort Benton, excuse me. They went to --
13 was that North Montana?

14 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh, in Havre.

15 MS. HARLEY: In North Montana. Let's see, they also went to
16 Pondera?

17 MR. HEPPNER: Pondera.

18 MS. HARLEY: Pondera.

19 MR. HEPPNER: Didn't we have people in Pondera County, did we
20 send people there?

21 MR. ERICKSON: I don't know if they went to the clinic in
22 Pondera County or not. Shelby.

23 MR. HEPPNER: I know we sent them to Shelby, we sent them for
24 sure I know Great Falls have or Shelby, Kalispell and here.

25 MS. HARLEY: Here, okay.

1 MR. ERICKSON: I don't think anybody went to Pondera County.

2 MR. HEPPNER: (Indiscernible).

3 MS. HARLEY: I think that may have been a crew member or
4 something else.

5 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

6 MS. HARLEY: So you said Shelby, Great Falls, Havre and --

7 MR. HEPPNER: Kalispell.

8 MS. HARLEY: Kalispell, that's right. Okay. All right. Did
9 any of the passengers provide you with statements about what
10 happened?

11 MR. ERICKSON: No, not really. We were more concerned about
12 --

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

14 MR. ERICKSON: -- the welfare of the passengers.

15 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right.

16 MR. ERICKSON: I didn't ask what happened.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And none of the crew members offered any
18 statements either?

19 MR. ERICKSON: No.

20 MS. HARLEY: Did you ever see the engineer of the train?

21 MR. ERICKSON: Dennis Richter.

22 MR. HEPPNER: Is that who that is?

23 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah. Him and J.B. Johnson, J.B. Johnson,
24 he's the one that said he was the assistant to the brakeman.

25 MR. HEPPNER: Assistant engineer, yeah. Okay. So, yeah, we

1 did talk to the engineer briefly.

2 MS. HARLEY: I'm sorry, Dennis last name again is?

3 MR. ERICKSON: Richter.

4 MS. HARLEY: Richter, okay. Okay. And, I'm sorry, did you,
5 did you actually speak with him?

6 MR. ERICKSON: Just briefly just to find out who -- if he was
7 the conductor or not. I was trying to get that information.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So just to identify who was, in fact, the
9 crew?

10 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

11 MS. HARLEY: Do you remember if there were any other people
12 on the scene who were not either associated with the emergency
13 response or actually passengers on the train? Were there like
14 bystanders on the scene?

15 MR. ERICKSON: There was people from around this community
16 that were just -- that just showed up to help.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

18 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, nobody stood around and just starred
19 though that I ever saw.

20 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

21 MR. ERICKSON: No.

22 MR. HEPPNER: I probably wouldn't have tolerated that either
23 though.

24 MR. ERICKSON: No.

25 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. And then you provided me the thumb

1 drive from the farmer from his --

2 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

3 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Thank you by the way. And, you know, and
4 any other information that comes through we certainly appreciate
5 that. So I guess at this particular point if I wanted to speak to
6 -- who was the incident commander?

7 MR. ERICKSON: That would have been me, I guess.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And then who was the commander for the
9 fire, for the fire operation, for the rescue operation?

10 MR. ERICKSON: I guess you could say Dave Ghekiere, he's the
11 fire chief.

12 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

14 MR. HEPPNER: Do you want me to spell it?

15 MS. HARLEY: And he's the Liberty Fire Chief?

16 MR. ERICKSON: Yes.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And, yes, please, Dave --

18 MR. HEPPNER: Hold on, I've got to find it in my contacts
19 here real quick.

20 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

21 MR. HEPPNER: It is G-H-E-K-I-R-E [sic].

22 MS. HARLEY: I-R-E, okay. And, let's see, so in addition to
23 your, your office and the Cascade officers were there any other
24 law enforcement agencies here?

25 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, there was a deputy from Chouteau County.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right.

2 MR. HEPPNER: Hill County sent two. Blaine County, I think
3 their Sheriff came out, right?

4 MR. ERICKSON: I don't know about their sheriff. I know
5 there was two of them. Two Blaine County guys. There was one
6 game warden. Somebody said a border patrol, I never seen a border
7 patrol but --

8 MR. HEPPNER: I saw it, multiple highway patrol officers, MHP
9 sent several.

10 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

11 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

12 MR. HEPPNER: Toole County sent several throughout the course
13 of the incident.

14 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Toole, okay.

15 MR. HEPPNER: Game warden Chouteau County.

16 MR. ERICKSON: Four detectives from Cascade County that did
17 all the photography and the FARO scan.

18 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh. Is J.J. affiliated with --

19 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, so we had a mutual aid guy, Jason
20 Jarrett, he showed up from Gallatin County.

21 MS. HARLEY: Jason Jarrett?

22 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

23 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And he showed up from where?

24 MR. ERICKSON: Gallatin County.

25 MS. HARLEY: Gallatin, okay. And is he law enforcement or

1 what is he?

2 MR. ERICKSON: So he's retired so, you know, especially all
3 the big fires that happened in Montana, he goes to a lot of those
4 just to help coordinate things and help people out --

5 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

6 MR. ERICKSON: -- basically with anything they need.

7 MS. HARLEY: Got it. And you were talking about the Red
8 Cross, you notified the Red Cross?

9 MR. HEPPNER: Dispatch did at some point.

10 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right. And did anybody respond out
11 from the Red Cross?

12 MR. HEPPNER: No.

13 MS. HARLEY: Did the Red Cross provide any services?

14 MR. HEPPNER: Nope.

15 MR. ERICKSON: Not that we seen here. I don't know if they
16 went to Shelby or anything else but not here.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. All right. Okay. So let's see.
18 By the way, for communications when you have all these people, do
19 you have a central radio zone for everyone to be on or is everyone
20 on a different zone?

21 MR. ERICKSON: Most people are -- like all these agencies are
22 on their own. Like there's a few like Toole County, we would be
23 able to maybe talk to them but, yeah, we don't have --

24 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

25 MR. ERICKSON: -- a radio station for everybody.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Are fire and police on the same channel
2 here?

3 MR. ERICKSON: No.

4 MS. HARLEY: No, okay. All right. So you have two different
5 dispatchers, one for the fire and one for the police here?

6 MR. ERICKSON: No, it's the same dispatcher.

7 MS. HARLEY: Same dispatcher, just two different zones?

8 MR. HEPPNER: We can --

9 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, but we can talk to him.

10 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay.

11 MR. HEPPNER: We just have one.

12 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. All right. Let's see, I think
13 that's all we talked about. When did the first representative
14 from the railroad show up?

15 MR. HEPPNER: I don't know when that guy showed up.

16 MR. ERICKSON: I suppose BNSF would have definitely been
17 there to start with.

18 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh and I think he was there like I want to
19 say 5, 6, 7:00, somewhere in that three hour window.

20 MR. ERICKSON: Was it after the sun went down before we seen
21 them or not?

22 MR. HEPPNER: No, the sun was still up.

23 MR. ERICKSON: Was it before?

24 MR. HEPPNER: So it would be no later than 7:30ish.

25 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. And did they provide you with all the
2 information that you needed?

3 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, I guess so. That kind of information, I
4 mean, we were still concerned about passengers --

5 MS. HARLEY: Right.

6 MR. ERICKSON: -- through the whole thing to start with.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay, all right.

8 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, because they were getting the
9 construction outfits there to help pickup cars and look for any
10 people. They showed up pretty fast.

11 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

12 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, we had construction outfits there before,
13 it was before 6:30 and we -- that I saw the first side boom roll
14 up and excavator. They had them there pretty darn quick.

15 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. All right. Is there anything that
16 you think I should have asked you and I failed to ask you about
17 this incident?

18 MR. HEPPNER: Not that I can think of.

19 MR. ERICKSON: You said something about the conductor. He,
20 the train realized there was a problem before he did, I guess, so
21 they have the train as its own protocol had its own equipment on
22 there to sense those types of things.

23 MS. HARLEY: So, yeah. So what happens is is that if there's
24 some kind of malfunction like, for example, when the train cars
25 decouple the train will automatically throw itself into an

1 emergency and that's something, that's something that's, that's
2 actually designed into the system to work to kind of give the crew
3 a heads-up.

4 Because considering sometimes the length of trains, you know
5 --

6 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

7 MS. HARLEY: -- you know, the engineer can't see all the way
8 back.

9 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah.

10 MS. HARLEY: And so that's what, that's what that is. So
11 outside of the extrication attempt at the -- through the, through
12 basically the ceiling it is or should I say the roof of the, of
13 the train car, do you know if any other locations where
14 extrication or egress was attempted and there were any issues with
15 egress?

16 MR. HEPPNER: Which car did they try to cut with the demo saw
17 and there's a perfect line going straight down one of those cars
18 but they obviously gave up on that attempt because it was too slow
19 and they weren't getting through it because I know or maybe it was
20 just that same car that had a line down it where they tried the
21 quickie saw?

22 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, and I don't remember if it was just
23 actually the passenger, where passengers walk to and from each car
24 that they got the one lady out. There was about 10 EMS with her
25 and that's when I kept on searching through the rest of the car,

1 crawling through there looking for people.

2 Every time they got enough EMS people with somebody I just
3 kept on with my search through each car.

4 MS. HARLEY: So you said that at one particular point they
5 pulled somebody through, through the door, through that door?

6 MR. ERICKSON: I'm not sure if that's how they got that lady
7 out or not.

8 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

9 MR. ERICKSON: Because, yeah, there was about 10 people with
10 her and so I just kept on searching.

11 MS. HARLEY: Do you know what car she was in?

12 MR. HEPPNER: I think I was still inside (indiscernible).

13 MR. ERICKSON: Was the furthest west one of the three that
14 was, was back separate from the rest of it. I think that's the
15 one that she was in.

16 MR. HEPPNER: Probably because it seemed like as soon as she
17 got -- as soon as I got James in with me it sounded like there was
18 a bunch of people trying to help her get out of there. Thinking
19 maybe it was the first car they tried to cut because that was why
20 Jason, I'm sure, went with, whatever tool he uses opposed to a
21 quickie saw, because that's what I figured they were going to use.

22 MR. ERICKSON: Uh-huh.

23 MR. HEPPNER: I thought that would be the fastest route in
24 there. Just cut a big hole in the door or in the top of it and
25 make it a door/ramp so we could all get out easier.

1 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah. Yeah, there was one guy that was having
2 troubles with his collar bone and his arm and he couldn't grab a
3 whole lot and he was on the very furthest west car and he was
4 sitting on top of it and he did not want to get off because he was
5 looking for his friend's urn, his ashes. So I had to try to
6 (indiscernible).

7 MS. HARLEY: Oh, where was he?

8 MR. ERICKSON: He was -- well, it was laid over on its side
9 and he was on the top and I climbed up there and I was with him
10 trying to --

11 MS. HARLEY: And which car was that?

12 MR. ERICKSON: The furthest west.

13 MS. HARLEY: The furthest, so the first west car?

14 MR. ERICKSON: Yep.

15 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay.

16 MR. ERICKSON: And he was just sitting down on top of and
17 very upset and I had to -- I was trying to convince him that he
18 needed -- it was time to get off the top of it but he was worried
19 about his friend with his ashes.

20 MS. HARLEY: Was he worried about his friend's ashes or was
21 there a friend with someone else's ashes?

22 MR. ERICKSON: His friend's ashes.

23 MS. HARLEY: His friend's ashes, okay.

24 MR. ERICKSON: He said it was the only thing left, he had
25 left of him and he was very concerned about it.

1 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. And do you remember, I guess, so
2 he don't have any idea how many people actually came out of that
3 car, do you?

4 MR. ERICKSON: No.

5 MS. HARLEY: No, okay, okay. Okay. Is there anything else
6 you can think of?

7 MR. HEPPNER: I know the doors were hard to get in and out
8 of, namely the shower doors when they were on their side those
9 were next to impossible to get in and clear. I think I ended up
10 using two bars and a wedge to clear them that night.

11 MS. HARLEY: The shower doors, are you talking about in the
12 sleeper berth?

13 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

14 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

15 MR. HEPPNER: Once, there's nothing to hold onto to open them
16 to roll them back.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

18 MR. HEPPNER: I had to use a wedge to get my fingers
19 underneath them and then to open them because the handles just a
20 like lock deal.

21 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay. Okay.

22 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah, you were asking about climbing on those
23 seats, I mean, that's what we use for ladders.

24 MR. HEPPNER: Uh-huh.

25 MR. ERICKSON: I mean, we climbed in and out of those

1 searching for people.

2 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, the seats were the best, like the armrest
3 and on the sleepers there's one of them, a table or something that
4 folds funny because I put my foot on that and it was wedged and
5 then the next time I went to put my foot on it, it fell out from
6 underneath me.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay. Okay. And let's see. So did anybody try
8 to go in and out of the train cars from the indoors, you know, the
9 doors on either end?

10 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah.

11 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

12 MR. HEPPNER: And they were -- there was a couple of them
13 wedged shut that we couldn't get open. That was what limited me,
14 I think, on some of it was just the fact I couldn't get the end
15 doors open, whether they were locked and needed to be wedged
16 vertically which would have been their normal operation.

17 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

18 MR. HEPPNER: Some of them fell straight down like as soon as
19 you undid them they'd fall down.

20 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

21 MR. HEPPNER: The handicapped bathrooms in the bottom of the
22 sleeper berth were a nightmare to get into.

23 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

24 MR. HEPPNER: The hallways definitely were narrow and by the
25 time you get doors open or something to that effect near

1 impossible to crawl through and I'm not a big boy.

2 MS. HARLEY: Yeah, so I can tell you that the -- that as far
3 as the doors, the doors are gravity so gravity will keep -- will
4 force the weight of the door downward so, okay.

5 MR. HEPPNER: Yeah, I found that out several times.

6 MS. HARLEY: So it's not -- we've seen that before where the
7 end doors just aren't viable, okay. All right. Okay. Okay, and
8 I think, as before, you got my information, please feel free to
9 give us a call. I will, yeah, be in touch and kind of keeping you
10 up-to-date on what's going on.

11 If anybody has any information they think is worthwhile, my
12 email and my cell is there. Also they can go -- I also put our
13 main website. There is -- just there's an email address there for
14 people just to send statements to or if they want to provide us
15 any information.

16 MR. ERICKSON: Yeah. So (indiscernible) Jason
17 (indiscernible) he texted me here just a little bit ago that he
18 landed in Cut Back and he's headed here now.

19 MS. HARLEY: Okay, okay, great. All right, just in time.
20 Well, thank you very much for your time and I'm going to end the
21 interview at 1:23 p.m.

22 (Whereupon, at 1:23 p.m. EDT, the interview was concluded.)
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL AMTRAK DERAILMENT
NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA
ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021
Interview of Nick Erickson & Kyle Heppner

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD21MR017

PLACE: Chester, Montana

DATE: September 20, 2021

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.


Cheryl Farnier Donovan
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

*

FATAL AMTRAK DERAILMENT *

NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA. * Accident No.: RRD21MR017

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021 *

*

* * * * *

Interview of: DAVE GHEKIERE, Fire Chief
Liberty Volunteer Fire Department

Via telephone

Thursday,
September 30, 2021

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Dave Ghekiere:

By Ms. Harley

4

I N T E R V I E W

(3:32 p.m.)

1
2
3 MS. HARLEY: Okay. My name is Sheryl Harley. I'm an
4 Investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board. This
5 is in regards to the Amtrack derailment in Joplin, Montana, NTSB
6 Case Number RRD21MR017, and today's date is September the 30th of
7 2021, and it is now 3:32 p.m. local time, and I am on the phone
8 with -- can identify yourself, sir?

9 MR. GHEKIERE: Yep. Dave Ghekiere, Liberty County Fire
10 Chief.

INTERVIEW OF DAVE GHEKIERE

BY MS. HARLEY:

11
12
13 Q. Can you spell your last name for me?

14 A. G-H-E-K-I-E-R-E.

15 Q. I-E-R-E. Thank you, and, Chief, you were working the day of
16 the derailment, which was Saturday, September 25th of 2021 at
17 approximately, I guess, 3:47 p.m. was actually when the -- the
18 derailment occurred. So if you could just go ahead and just ahead
19 and just kind of walk me through the events of the day, I
20 appreciate it.

21 A. All righty. So, yeah, we got the page about I think it was
22 3:57ish. I'd have to look exactly, but, yeah, we're all volunteer
23 service here. So everybody's got to leave their houses and jobs,
24 whatever they're doing, mowing their lawns, whatever they're doing
25 that day and respond and we got to the Fire Hall and started

1 rolling our rescue truck and a couple fire trucks or ambulances,
2 and we were probably on scene guessing within 10 minutes of being
3 paged out.

4 When got there, I would say, probably 99 percent of the
5 people were out of the cars by then walking around. One ambulance
6 beat me to the scene and they were dealing with a patient and so
7 pretty much kind of took a quick inventory of what I was looking
8 at, what I had going.

9 Starting pretty much into rescue operations, did a lot of
10 looking around for unsafe things to ground, if there's any unsafe
11 things that could possibly, you know, stand out right away. My
12 guys pretty much went into the cars and started helping the people
13 that were trapped.

14 There also other bystanders out helping too. Joplin Fire
15 showed up. We -- some of them we had ladders against the cars
16 getting them out the top windows. Some of them we'd take them out
17 the doors of the cars themselves. We -- I know we had one lady
18 for sure that was trapped under, like, a seat and they cut it out
19 with the Jaws of Life.

20 They tried to cut one of the roofs open with the K12 saw. It
21 never -- that barely didn't work very well. I made a lot of phone
22 calls that day. I had a lot of phone calls that day trying to get
23 busses together and get all the -- the people that were walking
24 around, I guess.

25 The people that weren't hurt bad enough that they had to have

1 hospital help, you know, EMS help right then and there. Got them
2 on busses and we got them to the Senior Center in Chester and the
3 high school in Chester. Once we got all those people away from
4 the scene, things were settling down quite a bit for us.

5 We had Patrick Construction (ph.) and Ryan Reilly's (ph.)
6 crew, they finally showed up and they tied onto the observation
7 car so we could get a couple deceased people out from underneath
8 of that car.

9 You know, they set it -- and then they set that one back down
10 and then they went back over to the three cars that were laying on
11 their side and they rolled those over for us so we could walk
12 through and go through the piles of dirt and everything else to
13 make sure that we weren't missing somebody else that could've been
14 under those cars.

15 Guess I should back up too, and I talked to, you know, the
16 Amtrak employee too and got the -- tried to get the manifest
17 number as far as how many people were onboard that train. I had
18 people working on getting people's names, if we could get a number
19 so that we knew that everybody was accounted for.

20 It's just I guess there's -- I'm sure I'm missing details --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. But --

23 A. No problem.

24 A. Some of the nights are blurred too. So --

25 Q. I'm absolutely -- I'm certain of that. So I'll tell --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. -- you what. Let's start from the beginning. When you
3 arrived on the scene, you said that there was an ambulance there.
4 Was there any other emergency responders there when you got there?

5 A. Oh, there was people everywhere. Yeah. We had one ambulance
6 on scene and I know we had at least three, maybe four EMTs on that
7 ambulance and then, yeah, I don't know who else was there at that
8 exact point though.

9 Q. Oh.

10 A. No, I do not know that.

11 Q. Okay, and you said that you think you arrived within, what,
12 10 minutes or so of the page out?

13 A. I'm guessing, yeah.

14 Q. Okay. That's fine. So in addition to Liberty, and you said
15 that Joplin Fire Department what other fire or ambulance services
16 were there that you know of?

17 A. Okay. So I know we had Joplin, Chester, this is -- I'm going
18 to go through fire departments first here.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Joplin -- Joplin and Chester and we had Shelby. I seen Wild
21 Horse and Great Falls Fire and Rescue come up, and then on
22 ambulances, I know we had Liberty County. We had Rudyard. We had
23 Shelby. I think we had Pondera County, Blaine County, Big Sandy,
24 Great Falls Fire and Rescue and I do not know for sure if Glacier
25 County showed up or not. I can't remember for sure.

1 Q. Okay. All right. When you arrived on the scene, how many
2 passengers, approximately, do you think were still on the train or
3 within the train cars?

4 A. I'm going to say probably 10 plus or minus.

5 Q. Okay. All right, and of those, you said you had to extricate
6 one, a woman that was trapped?

7 A. Yep.

8 Q. Okay. Do you remember approximately where the car was? Was
9 that in the front of the train, was that in the luggage -- the
10 lounge or was that the three detached cars?

11 A. It was the far west car on the three detached.

12 Q. Okay, and you said she was pinned between the seats?

13 A. Yeah. Just, like, between the floor and the seat. Yep.

14 Q. Okay, and do we have some sense of what her injuries were?

15 A. I do not know exactly.

16 Q. All right.

17 A. I just -- I know my guys cut her -- cut the seat out and they
18 got her extricated from there and it think she went on an
19 ambulance from there. So --

20 Q. Okay. Approximately how many victims you think were actually
21 transported from the scene?

22 A. Oh, probably 25, 30.

23 Q. Twenty-five or 30? Okay.

24 A. Yep.

25 Q. And do you have some sense of how many hospitals were used

1 or --

2 A. Three, four -- five, I think.

3 Q. Okay. All right, and I know Tara (ph.) was working on the --
4 on kind of lining up all of that, so I'm not get it --

5 A. Okay.

6 Q. -- get really in deep with that. The --

7 A. Yeah. She's the ambulance director (indiscernible).

8 Q. Yeah. So when you arrived on the scene, what was the
9 lighting like inside the cars?

10 A. You know, I never actually went in the car.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. So I just -- as chief, I stayed outside the car and I pretty
13 much just, you know, keep just making sure that my guys are safe
14 and doing what we needed to get done to get these people out.
15 They're the ones that did most of the heavy lifting per se.

16 Q. Okay. So you don't know if there was difficulty with people
17 being able to see, either the passengers to get out or your fire
18 firefighters --

19 A. No.

20 Q. -- to -- and your personnel to get in?

21 A. Not for sure, no.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I know when I stuck my head in the windows, the back doors or
24 whatever --

25 Q. Uh-huh.

- 1 A. -- I mean I could see pretty decent. But --
- 2 Q. Okay.
- 3 A. -- it was daylight out too, so that helps.
- 4 Q. Okay. So you said the -- you had approached an Amtrak
5 employee about the manifest. Did you ever get a manifest?
- 6 A. He never handed me one, but we -- he went over the numbers
7 with me.
- 8 Q. Okay.
- 9 A. So --
- 10 Q. Okay.
- 11 A. -- but I did -- but before it was all said and done, we had,
12 like, three different numbers before we came to a precise
13 conclusion of a number and I had another guy working on that too
14 at that point where he -- I think he was in touch with Amtrak too
15 and got the exact number of how many were on that train.
- 16 Q. Okay.
- 17 A. So --
- 18 Q. So you reached out and actually called Amtrak from the scene
19 then?
- 20 A. As far as I know, that's what he did, yes.
- 21 Q. Okay. All right, and who was that?
- 22 A. That would've been James Dallin (ph.) that took care of
23 making sure everybody was count -- was accounted for.
- 24 Q. Okay. All right. James Dallin. Okay. Accountability.
25 Okay. So outside of the one issue that you had with trying to

1 enter the car by way of the roof using the saw were there any
2 other problems that you encountered trying to access individuals
3 in the cars?

4 A. You know, we had one lady that was in the bottom of the car
5 laying against I guess it had been the side that was on the
6 ground, and she was hurting pretty good, and I think that's
7 another challenge is just figuring out how we're going to get
8 these people out of the cars because there's no roof access at all
9 on these things.

10 So it's either out the side door or the -- I guess the doors
11 between the cars or it's out the windows on the top side, and I
12 know we had one that we backboarded. We put her in a stokes
13 basket and lifted her up through the window on the top side of the
14 car and then had to come back down to ground level with her.

15 Q. Oh.

16 A. But as far as access itself, you can't -- it's tough to get
17 in these things. So --

18 Q. Yeah. Okay. Let's see. Hold on a second. We talked about
19 the manifest, number of patient. Let me see. So let's see. As
20 far as I -- well, I guess what we already figured out that there
21 were 10 victims that could not self-extricate, or approximately 10
22 that could not self-extricate.

23 A. Yeah, roughly.

24 Q. Roughly. Okay. Do you have some sense of how long it took
25 to you to get the last patient off the scene?

1 A. Time disappears so fast out there. I would -- I would
2 roughly say 45 minutes plus or minutes.

3 Q. Okay, and did you have assistance from, like, a county EMA or
4 did you coordinate everything as far as the busses and where to
5 stage the uninjured passengers?

6 A. Well, we kind of -- the county kind of has a plan already set
7 up for that and it was just getting all the wheels turning to get
8 it done.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. As far as, you know, I called Dispatch and we -- when we got
11 the busses rolling and we were on the phone, on the radios,
12 whatever we could do to make sure that these places were getting
13 opened up. It -- that whole deal was a big group effort. I
14 wasn't the only one there to do it, because I never left the scene
15 once I was on scene until I went home that night and so there was
16 a lot of groundwork being done by other individuals in this town
17 too. So --

18 Q. Okay. Did you get any assistance from Amtrak EMA or from
19 BNSF?

20 A. The only person that I actually talked to on the phone was
21 Stacey Weller (ph.), and he was trying to get information as far
22 as where we were at. Kind of the same questions that you're kind
23 of asking me too were how many passengers do you think you have
24 hurt? How many went to the hospital? Where are they going? That
25 kind of stuff.

1 But as far as that, the only other kind of help I really got
2 was from the employees of Amtrak that were on the train, you
3 know, as far as trying to get me a number of how many people were
4 on it, crew and passengers, and that kind of stuff, you know?

5 Q. Gotcha, and, I'm sorry, Mr. Weller works for who now?

6 A. Amtrak.

7 Q. He works for Amtrak. Okay.

8 A. Yep.

9 Q. Did any of the Amtrak employees tell you how they thought the
10 accident occurred?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay, and when did Amtrak or BNSF, I'll say, supervisors but
13 I mean representatives show up on the scene?

14 A. I would say that B -- I think it was BNSF, but don't quote
15 me, for sure. But they had a helicopter land on scene probably
16 roughly, it was dark out, so I'm going to say 8:30.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And I'm thinking it was BNSF guys, but I'm not positive. I
19 never actually talked to any of them. So --

20 Q. Okay. So they didn't come over and tell you who they were or
21 assist you?

22 A. No, but they may have talked to my assistant chief. They may
23 have talked to (indiscernible).

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. So yeah.

1 Q. Okay, and your assistant chief, where was he? Was he
2 involved in the interior operations?

3 A. Yes, he was.

4 Q. Okay, and just for the record can you give me his name?

5 A. Jason Wanken.

6 Q. Okay, and can you spell his last name just so I make sure I
7 spell it correctly?

8 A. Yep. W-A-N-K-E-N.

9 Q. Thank you. Okay. All right. Your communications, does the
10 Sheriff's Department also dispatch Liberty County?

11 A. Yep.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yep.

14 Q. Are you on -- you're on different radio channels? The law --

15 A. The Sheriff's --

16 Q. -- the Sheriff --

17 A. Yeah. Sheriff's Office has a repeater and we have our
18 repeater.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah, but we all have each other's channels --

21 Q. Got it.

22 A. -- to be able to talk to each other on any channel, so yeah.

23 Q. Okay. Were you guys on a common fire ground channel?

24 A. Most of us were running EMS repeater.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. So yeah.

2 Q. Are the various other counties, do they actually have access
3 to your radio zone?

4 A. Some do and some don't.

5 Q. Okay. Has anyone in your organization or anyone in the
6 county that you've been aware of taken part in any kind of
7 training involving railroad emergencies? Has that -- has the
8 railroad ever reached out to you to provide that to the emergency
9 responders?

10 A. Yeah. It's been awhile. I know I have a couple -- a few
11 guys on the Department that have actually went to a train car, an
12 Amtrak train car. I -- me and I think four or five other guys, we
13 went down, must've been two -- it might've been eight years ago
14 now.

15 We went down and had Amtrak training, but we never went
16 through any cars. It was just an in class deal.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. But, yeah.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay. Okay, and that was about eight years ago?

22 A. Yeah, around (indiscernible) again --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- just kind of, yeah.

25 Q. All right. Let me see. Anything else? The -- all right.

1 Do you know if anyone else on the scene may have taken any kind of
2 photographs where we can actually get copies of it of basically
3 what the scene looked like at that time when you guys were on the
4 scene?

5 A. Oh, boy. I do not know for sure.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I kind of preach to my guys not to do that. So --

8 Q. Okay. If so -- what I would say is, is, like, no harm no
9 foul. If they did --

10 A. Uh-huh.

11 Q. -- I gave Tara my email address. Just ask them just to --

12 A. Okay.

13 Q. -- email the images. We just wanted to see what the scene
14 looked like, you know, pristine --

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. -- when you arrived on the scene.

17 A. Okay. Yeah, and you -- no, I got -- I might have one or two
18 that I clicked real quick, but that would be about it.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. So I can look.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. But -- but as far as anybody else, I do not know if they do
23 or not, but I can --

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. -- check on it.

1 Q. Okay. All right, and the other thing I wanted to ask you
2 real quick is that you said your guys had entered through the
3 doors at the end of the cars. Did they actually have to -- did
4 they -- I mean did they actually have to do extraction or were
5 there car -- were the end car doors already open?

6 A. They were already open when I got there, but I think that
7 that's how a lot of the people that were already out when we got
8 there got out.

9 Q. Okay. All right.

10 A. I'm just speculating that. That's not --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- you know, but yeah.

13 Q. All right. Did any of your guys have to try to go through
14 the windows, remove any of the windows?

15 A. I think they did.

16 Q. Okay, and were these on the cars that were basically on their
17 side?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. All right. So I guess, Chief, my last question to you
20 is, is there anything you think I should've asked you and didn't?

21 A. Not off the top of my head I can't think of anything. Uh,
22 yeah. No, I don't.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Nothing right away anyway.

25 Q. Okay. Is there anything else you want to add to this

1 interview?

2 A. I just think that everybody -- you know, for coming from a
3 small community where we don't do this stuff for a living, we
4 don't get -- none of us get paid for it. None of us, you know --
5 it's all volunteer for the most part. I think everybody did a
6 phenomenal job in my opinion.

7 But, you know, we got dealt a bad hand and tried to make a
8 good one of it by the end of the day, you know, so -- but that's
9 about all I got to add to it, I guess.

10 Q. Well, I think --

11 A. So --

12 Q. I think that's important. By the way, how many volunteers
13 does Liberty have?

14 A. I don't know what Joplin has on their department for sure,
15 but -- and I don't know exactly what Tara has for numbers on the
16 ambulance, but I've got 23 volunteers on my department, including
17 myself.

18 Q. Okay. Do you know how many of your guys were there?

19 A. I got guys that run both sides too --

20 Q. Oh, okay.

21 A. -- including myself. We've got ambulance and fire. It's the
22 same building --

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. -- and between the two, I probably had 10 or 15 of my guys
25 show up.

- 1 Q. Got it, and I just want to make -- Tara was telling me, I
2 just want to make sure, Liberty is about 40 miles wide. Is that
3 the correct -- about the correct size of the county?
- 4 A. It's -- it's about 20 miles wide and --
- 5 Q. Twenty miles?
- 6 A. -- and 40 miles long. So --
- 7 Q. Okay.
- 8 A. So from east to west, it's, like, 25 miles probably and from
9 north to south, it's probably 35. So, yeah.
- 10 Q. Okay. Okay. Got it, and how big is the -- how is Joplin?
11 Do you have a --
- 12 A. Joplin?
- 13 Q. -- a sense?
- 14 A. I think -- I think there's 200 people in Joplin, but don't
15 quote me for sure. Well --
- 16 Q. So it's only, what, a couple of miles in size?
- 17 A. Yeah. It's probably -- yeah, a mile and a half east to west.
- 18 Q. Okay.
- 19 A. Maybe a mile -- mile north and south. So --
- 20 Q. Okay.
- 21 A. -- it's a very small community.
- 22 Q. All right.
- 23 A. So --
- 24 Q. Okay. I'm just getting some geographical background here.
25 I'm just trying to figure out --

- 1 A. Yeah.
- 2 Q. -- the --
- 3 A. Yeah.
- 4 Q. Okay, and, oh, the -- speaking about geographical background,
5 the -- most of -- I'm assuming that most of these agencies are
6 probably within, what, 10, 20 miles of the scene?
- 7 A. Rudyard was probably within 10 miles of the scene. Great
8 Falls was within 110 miles. Blaine County is 80 miles. Shelby
9 would've been 50 miles. Big Sandy, if they took the cut across,
10 that would be 40ish miles. Trying to think of who else.
- 11 Q. So the closest ones --
- 12 A. It's kind of scattered.
- 13 Q. Yeah. But the closest one would've been Rudyard, Joplin --
- 14 A. Yeah.
- 15 Q. -- Liberty and Chester?
- 16 A. Yeah. Chester and Liberty County are both the same, yes.
- 17 Q. Oh, okay. All right.
- 18 A. Yep.
- 19 Q. All right. Great.
- 20 A. Yeah.
- 21 Q. Well, I think that's all the questions I have and, again,
22 thank you very much, Chief. I certainly appreciate --
- 23 A. Yeah.
- 24 Q. -- you taking time to talk to me.
- 25 A. You're welcome. Thank you for all you guys do too. So --

1 Q. All right, and stay safe and I will be in touch, and
2 certainly you have my number if you have any other questions in,
3 you know -- in the next coming days, weeks or months, please feel
4 free to give me a call.

5 A. All righty. Sounds good.

6 Q. All right. Stay safe and thank your guys. They did a
7 wonderful job.

8 A. All righty.

9 Q. All right.

10 A. Thank you.

11 Q. Bye bye.

12 A. Bye.

13 MS. HARLEY: Interview concluded at 4:01 p.m. local time.

14 (Whereupon, at 4:01 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 AMTRAK DERAILMENT
 NEAR JOPLIN, MONTANA
 ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2021
 Interview of Dave Ghekiere

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD21MR017

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: September 30, 2021

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.



Lisa Smith
Transcriber



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Investigator name: Sheryl Harley, Investigator, Survival Factors Group
Mode: Railroad

Date: October 19, 2021, 12:13 p.m. (EDT)
Assistant Chief of the Liberty County Fire Department: Jason Wanken
NTSB Accident Number: RRD21MR017

Narrative: On Tuesday, October 19, 2021, at about 12:13 p.m., Assistant Chief Jason Wanken called Investigator Harley regarding the extrication of passengers from the three derailed, uncoupled train cars.

Interviewed: Assistant Chief Jason Wanken

The assistant chief advised that he arrived on the first ambulance which pulled up on the north side. Most of the passengers appeared to be out of the train. Upon arrival, they located two victims that required immediate transport. The two victims were backboard and placed in an ambulance which transported them immediately from the scene. Next, he went to the westernmost uncoupled train car to assist with the extrication of a passenger from that car. Upon entering the car, he observed an EMT, a member of the Rudyard Fire Department and a member from the local hospital attending to the victim. The victim needed to be backboard and the seat “below her” was removed to facilitate extrication. The “spreaders” were used to remove the seat which was accomplished easily. The seat was then removed from the car. One of the attendants on the scene prior to the arrival of the chief was Mr. Tim Blair, he was either a physician Assistant (PA) or LPN at the local hospital. *(Upon request, the chief will reach out to Mr. Blair to contact the investigator.)*

After leaving the first car, the assistant chief then responded to the rear most car. He gained access to the interior of the car through the rear door and crawling on what was the right-side hallway. There he encountered a passenger named Hope inside of her bedroom. Upon arrival, Mrs. Kyla Johnson, the wife of a local farmer, was inside of the room and sitting with the victim. The victim was lying on her right side and appeared wedged against the bed. A metal bracket was against her body, and it appeared that she slid underneath it and down into a space or hole in the room with her legs tucked up underneath her. At that time, the Joplin Fire Department was attempting to gain access by cutting a hole in the roof, but the attempt was unsuccessful.



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

The chief felt that this was not particularly safe since both the passenger Hope and Kyla were leaning against what would have been the roof. The attempt to enter through the roof was abandoned. The extrication of the passenger was accomplished by sliding an extrication tarp with handles (called a taco) into position and picking up the victim and placing her inside of the tarp. Assistant Chief Wanken gained access to the room from an adjacent bedroom through the wall. Once he had gained access to the room, they were able to pick Hope up and place her in the tarp to lift her out of the room. When he arrived, the door to the room was open. The chief doesn't remember seeing any Amtrak employees in this car.

The last of the extrication operations occurred in the middle car. A female passenger, identified as middle-aged, (no further description other than that she was not a teenage or as young as 20's or 30's) was in the middle of the train car. She was forward of the interior stairs, mid car, and found sitting cross-legged on the floor. The female complained of general weakness but did not complain of pain. A quick assessment of the passenger found no evidence of bleeding, obvious signs of injury and she could stand unaided. She was being attended to by Mr. Jeremiah Johnson, a local farmer and husband of Kyla Johnson but no other passengers were with her. She was placed in a basket and lifted out of the train car. The basket fit through the opening on the upper side of the car, which was either a door or window, barely.

In all the chief advised that he assisted in the extrication of 5-6 victims. He did not communicate with any Amtrak employee except during the extrication of the female from the first car. While they were cutting away the seat, an unidentified individual came up to them and tried to explain how the seat can be rotated away via the lever on the side. The chief believed that that individual had been an Amtrak employee, but he wasn't certain. He saw another Amtrak employee later, who was covered with dirt and assumed that he had been assisting with extrication of passengers. Two other Amtrak employees were observed on the scene, but the chief had no contact with them. The chief confirmed that at the time of the extrication of the passenger known as Hope from the last car, there were several other on lookers but no Amtrak employees present.

The chief advised that the last rail emergency training he received was approximately 15 years ago and was held by Amtrak in Shelby. The course was an in-classroom type training with no hands-on exercises. No other classes have been offered by the railroads since.



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

The chief advised that some of the difficulties encountered during the rescue operation, in addition to trying to access the interior of the cars through the roof, included the use of the windows. Going through the windows and then having to drop down a distance was problematic. The same was found going through the end car doors with the distance having to descend due to the train car being on its side. It was noted that it would have been handy to have roof hatches for passenger egress and emergency responder access like they have on school buses.

He noted that he observed one passenger for certain and two others, probably, that were ejected from the train through the windows. All three passengers had been in the observation car.

All in all, the chief advised that the emergency response went every well from the responders to the local communities that came out to provide aid and comfort to the passengers. He noted that access to the overturned cars was performed by the use of ladders. There were more ladders on the scene than provided by emergency responders. The chief advised that he didn't want for anything or any piece of equipment. While responding to the incident, he called the sheriff's office and requested school buses for the transportation of uninjured or those with minor injuries from the scene. He knew that there would be a need for transportation for many of the passengers. The sheriff's office immediately arranged for the transportation.

(Note: Chief Wanken will follow up with Mr. Tim Blair regarding information about trapped passengers)

Call terminated at 12:51 p.m.

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End of Summary