

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD TRAIN
DERAILMENT, HAZARDOUS MATERIAL
RELEASE, AND FIRE IN TEMPE,
ARIZONA, ON JULY 29, 2020

Accident No.: RRD20LR005

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Interview of: MARK WALLS, Engineer
Union Pacific Railroad Company

Union Pacific Yard Office
Tucson, Arizona

Friday,
July 31, 2020

APPEARANCES:

RICHARD HIPSKIND, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

WAYNE BURRIS, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

JOE PINKERMAN, Railroad Safety Inspector
Arizona Corporation Commission

SCOTT JONES, Inspector
International Association of Sheet Metal, Air,
Rail and Transportation Workers (SMART)

JIM MAYNARD, Safety Task Force Investigator
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

JOHN ALLBERRY, Operating Practices General Director
Union Pacific Railroad Company

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. HIPSKIND: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Richard
3 Hipskind. I am the investigator in charge and the track and
4 engineering group chairman for NTSB for this accident.

5 We are here today, on July 31st, 2020, in a conference room
6 setting at Union Pacific's Tucson yard office to conduct an
7 interview with Mr. Mark Walls, who is an engineer, one of the
8 crewmembers, and who works for the Union Pacific Railroad Company.

9 So I want to stop. Am I coming across? Is the soundcheck
10 okay?

11 (No audible response.)

12 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay, they're nodding in the affirmative.

13 This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of
14 a train derailment, hazardous material release, and fire that
15 occurred in Tempe, Arizona, on July 29, 2020. The NTSB accident
16 reference number is RRD20LR005.

17 Before we begin our interview and questions, let's go around
18 the table and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name,
19 and please identify who you are representing and your title. I
20 would remind everyone to speak clearly so we can get an accurate
21 recording. I'll lead off, and then I will pass off to the two
22 gentlemen in the conference room.

23 Again, my name is Richard Hipskind. The spelling of my last
24 name is H-i-p-s-k-i-n-d. I am the investigator in charge and the
25 track and engineering group chairman for NTSB on this accident.

1 MR. BURRIS: Wayne Burris, FRA Operating Practices Inspector
2 for Arizona. Last name is spelled B-u-r-r-i-s.

3 MR. PINKERMAN: Joe Pinkerman. Last name spelled
4 P-i-n-k-e-r-m-a-n. Operating Practices Inspector, State of
5 Arizona.

6 MR. WALLS: Mark Walls, W-a-l-l-s. Union Pacific engineer,
7 Tucson, Arizona.

8 MR. HIPSKIND: Mark, hold on just a second. We've got two or
9 three more people to get on the record, and I'll come back to you
10 later.

11 All right, Scott?

12 MR. JONES: Yes, sir. Scott Jones, J-o-n-e-s, SMART Union
13 State Legislative Director and National Safety Team member.

14 MR. HIPSKIND: And Jim?

15 MR. MAYNARD: Jim Maynard, M-a-y-n-a-r-d. BLET Safety Task
16 Force.

17 MR. HIPSKIND: And John?

18 MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry, A-l-l-b-e-r-r-y, Union Pacific,
19 General Director, Operating Practices for the South, and group
20 chairman on the operating practices side, too.

21 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay, Mark, now if you'll introduce yourself?

22 MR. WALLS: Mark Walls, Union Pacific engineer, Tucson,
23 Arizona.

24 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. Thanks. I kind of want to check with
25 you, Mark; is it okay if we proceed on a first-name basis?

1 MR. WALLS: Sure.

2 MR. HIPSKIND: You're good with that?

3 MR. WALLS: Yeah.

4 MR. HIPSKIND: So refer to me as Dick, and everybody else you
5 got introduced to. So do you wish to have a representative with
6 you at this interview?

7 MR. WALLS: No.

8 MR. HIPSKIND: And do we have your permission to proceed with
9 recording the interview?

10 MR. WALLS: Yes.

11 INTERVIEW OF MARK WALLS

12 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

13 Q. Okay. So, Mark, how about just give us a little synopsis of
14 your work experience, how long you've been railroading, and take
15 us up to your present job, and let us know how long you've been in
16 that position.

17 A. I've been with the Union Pacific for 17 years, and I've held
18 an engineer's license for about 12, and I've been working as an
19 engineer for the last 5 years.

20 Q. Okay. Mark, fair to say that you're familiar with the
21 territory that your train was traversing the other day?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. So listen, I want to get right into the storytelling
24 part of this, Mark. So allow me to sit back, and I'll open it up
25 to you. Mark, if you would, just tell us how you came to work on

1 Wednesday, where did you report to, what time, and just take us
2 through the events up to and including when the train stopped
3 after going across the bridge.

4 A. So the whole day, huh?

5 Q. Well, you can give us the CliffsNotes.

6 A. Okay. Okay, I'll try. I think we went on duty around 2015,
7 8:15 p.m., out of Tucson; left Tucson within a few hours later.
8 We had work at Randolph, stopped at Magma. It was, you know,
9 no -- a uneventful evening, and the sun was just coming up. It
10 was probably around 6:00 in the morning as we -- you come around
11 the corner into Tempe, and the speed changes from 40 to 25. There
12 was an approach signal right there before the bridge, so my
13 conductor called that out. Called the Phoenix yard master, he
14 said we could come on in, and head over the bridge.

15 I had my window open because it was -- the AC was either too
16 cold or too humid, so it was nice, and kind of looking out, down,
17 and didn't see many people. You know, it was a beautiful morning.
18 And the engine crossed the track -- or the bridge, you make a left
19 turn there. And about 20 or 30 cars passed the end of that bridge
20 after the corner, and we went in emergency.

21 I looked at the screen, and the airflow went down to zero,
22 and I bailed immediately and came to a pretty easy stop, you know.
23 It maybe just barely jerked but no harder than normal. I mean,
24 you know, you come apart with a knuckle here and there, and it
25 felt just like normal. I looked at the conductor and said, I

1 think we might have come apart; we just went in emergency.

2 And he got his stuff together and started walking back, and
3 he says over the radio look out your conductor's -- look out the
4 conductor's side window. And I look, and there's this big smoke
5 cloud. And I thought he was just telling me to check that out,
6 you know, some business is on fire or something. I say, yeah, I
7 see, something's on fire, some business. And he goes, no, I think
8 it's us. And immediately after that, the dispatcher called and
9 said -- NC -- was it NCSS or NS -- whoever the emergency calls
10 that notify the dispatcher, and he said, yeah, they just called
11 and they said your train is on fire.

12 And both of those guys, the brakeman and the conductor, walk
13 back. And at some point, I think the brakeman told the conductor
14 to go ahead up to the front, and he got just to where the corner
15 was, and he could see the fire, I believe he said, and he wasn't
16 going to go any further. And as soon as we talked to some
17 manager, I don't remember who he was talking to, but told us take
18 hold, take hold and don't go -- don't get any closer. They told
19 us just to sit there.

20 Nobody ever came out to the unit, but a manager came over to
21 the corner, which I guess was the easiest place for him to access.
22 The brakeman met him there, and he cut us off where it seemed to
23 be safe to do so, so we could pull the rest of the cars out of the
24 way. And then we just pulled them up to 48th Street, a mile or
25 so. And that was the whole 12 hours in about 2 minutes there.

1 But yeah, that's the biggest things I remember from the day.

2 Q. Okay. And that's fine. And once you got up to 48th Street,
3 am I to understand that the hours of service, that you weren't
4 going to operate anymore, you tied the train down or --

5 A. Yeah, we were just starting our 12th hour when that happened.
6 And when we found out that they were wanting us to take it into
7 town, I didn't want to do that because I was shaken up just once I
8 realized what we possibly had done or, you know, been part of.
9 But then the brakeman says, well, we're almost dead anyway, so if
10 we did anything, it would just be cutting it apart. So I was
11 like, okay, I can do that; I can pull it up. So yeah, we barely
12 got it a mile up, just to the next road crossing where we could be
13 relieved, and then we died right there, 12 hours.

14 Q. Okay. And, Mark, I appreciate the detail. And so, let's
15 talk like we talked before. You've given us that part of that
16 story. Tell us about the next phase, when you leave the railroad
17 property. And did you go provide a statement? Were you
18 interviewed? Take us through that part.

19 A. We went back to the office, and the first thing they wanted
20 to do was blood-test us. And so, we went with Phil Rodriguez,
21 manager, and he took us down to -- I forget what the place is
22 called. Concentra, I think. And we did the blood and urine test
23 and then went back to the office. He got us some food because we
24 hadn't ate in who knows how long.

25 And then we really wanted to go back to the hotel and get

1 some sleep, but he says, no, you can't because the FBI wants to
2 interview you. And we had to wait for a ride. And then it seemed
3 like -- it must have been 4 hours after we were -- after our 12
4 just to that point and -- before we even headed downtown. Is that
5 what you wanted to know, or the whole after that, too?

6 Q. You're doing fine. Take us through what was next and after
7 that.

8 A. Yeah, so we got in the truck with the UP cop and he took us
9 downtown. And then we, one at a time, went in and interviewed
10 with the FBI agent and a local, I think it was a Tempe police
11 officer. And then we had to go back to the office again and get
12 another ride to the hotel.

13 Q. Okay. And is that where you ended your day, then, at the
14 hotel?

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. Okay. I think the last thing that I want to know is, in that
17 time between when you guys had identified that the train had
18 separated, you're in emergency, and that time when the guy went
19 back and cut the cars and then you pulled ahead, what I'm curious
20 about, Mark, is did anybody, like emergency responders or fire
21 department or anybody, reach out to you and ask you about
22 paperwork? And that might not be a fair question for you. Maybe
23 I should be asking that to the conductor.

24 A. Yeah. Yeah, he will remember a lot better. But I know that
25 somebody did, because both of us were looking at our paperwork

1 trying to determine -- because we had a car number -- because the
2 news people were zooming in on, so we knew the car right next to
3 the one on fire -- so we could determine which cars were actually
4 on fire, whether they were hazardous. And so, that manager that
5 contacted the brakeman that -- and he'll be able to tell you
6 better -- the one that went back to the corner and made the cut
7 with him, he's the one, I think, that he gave the paperwork to.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. We've covered all the big stuff, right?

11 A. The only other thing is, like, I specifically remember, when
12 I was turning that corner right after the bridge, it's a little
13 uphill. And I just remember transitioning from one throttle to
14 another, because I was -- as I said, my speedometer, I was down to
15 22 or 23. So I was a few mile an hour under, but I was just -- I
16 just remember specifically that there was nothing like, you know,
17 safety or pulling. It was just very smooth, a smooth transition
18 around the corner. And that's what was just so peculiar about
19 going in emergency, because you didn't, you just didn't expect it.
20 It didn't make sense to me.

21 Q. All right, Mark, before I pass it on to Wayne in the room
22 there, I just want to be clear. You have to understand, I've kind
23 of read some of the statements, but I want to get your comment
24 here on the interview. So how would you characterize when the
25 head-end locomotives came across that south end of the bridge, did

1 you see anything, did you feel anything?

2 A. No. Yeah, those FBI guys said the same thing, and I do not
3 remember feeling anything or seeing anything. And I was looking
4 out the window to the side, as well as forward, so -- but no. And
5 I mean, we knew that there had been a -- the time before that,
6 that I went over that bridge, they still had a slow order from the
7 previous derailment right in that exact -- almost the exact
8 location. And yeah, that was the only thing that kind of struck
9 me as, you know, as a possibility, but who am I to guess. I know
10 I didn't feel anything. I didn't see anything.

11 Q. And do you recall what the speed limit was on the slow order
12 before it was lifted?

13 A. I think it was 10 or 15.

14 Q. Okay. All right. So, Mark, do you have any questions for me
15 right now?

16 A. No.

17 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. Let's invite Wayne in. And, Wayne, if
18 you want to pick it up and fill in any blanks that you need to
19 address?

20 BY MR. BURRIS:

21 Q. Oh, just, I guess, the feeling right there at the bridge.
22 How's it been in the past? Was it similar to that or --

23 A. I think when the slow order was there, I think you felt
24 something.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. I don't remember if it was a dip, but I just remember --
2 usually, you want to know where the problem is. Why is there a
3 slow order? Oh, because of that. And so, I knew that there was a
4 good reason, not just because I heard what happened, but because
5 you could normally feel it. But this time, I don't remember
6 feeling it.

7 Q. Yeah. Was the TCC engaged or --

8 A. Well, we don't have TCC on the (indiscernible) but it would
9 not come on when I left Tucson. And I called -- they called to
10 try to get me to reboot, and we still couldn't get it to go, so I
11 got permission to run without it.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Which happens a lot.

14 Q. Yeah, yeah.

15 MR. BURRIS: I think we covered everything that I had. Joe,
16 do you have anything?

17 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay, thank you, Wayne.

18 And, Joe, you're in the room. Anything on your mind?

19 MR. PINKERMAN: No, I believe he did a very good job covering
20 everything.

21 MR. HIPSKIND: See, Mark, I told you.

22 (Laughter.)

23 MR. HIPSKIND: Scott, let's hear from you.

24 MR. JONES: No, I actually have no questions at this time.

25 Thank you very much.

1 MR. HIPSKIND: John, you're our cleanup guy.

2 (Laughter.)

3 MR. ALLBERRY: No, I don't have anything. Mark, you did a
4 great job. And I'm just glad that all three of you guys are okay.
5 You know, we can repair things and figure out what happened here,
6 but I'm glad that you guys are okay.

7 MR. WALLS: Thank you. I'm glad that the engines were --
8 made it over.

9 BY MR. HIPSKIND:

10 Q. I want to echo those same sentiments. So listen, Mark, you
11 did a great job. Is there anything -- let me ask you those
12 questions that I was talking about earlier and see if we have
13 anything else. So is there anything that you want to add or
14 change about what we've talked about here briefly?

15 A. No. I mean, yeah, no, there's -- that's pretty much it. It
16 was pretty easy to explain because there just wasn't a lot to it
17 for me.

18 Q. Okay. And, Mark, are there any questions we should have
19 asked you but we didn't? Is there anything else that you feel
20 like you want to relate to us?

21 A. No, but I would like to know, just for my peace of mind, when
22 they do find out, whether it's the FBI or you guys or UP, a lot of
23 times you never hear what came of anything. And being that I was
24 involved, it might help me with closure if I know what caused it.
25 And, you know, I just hope that they will keep me in the loop to

1 that extent because I just -- I think I would need to know that.

2 Q. You know, that is a very reasonable request. And I've done
3 hundreds of these interviews, and you're the first person to ask
4 me to do that.

5 A. Really?

6 Q. Well, really. And I have no problem with that. Maybe one
7 thing that would help me out is -- in that piece of paper where
8 you signed and gave me the contact information?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. If you would like -- we can do it one of two ways. I can
11 either mail you a copy, if you want to give your address, and if
12 you don't, I have your email address; I will email you an
13 electronic copy of the report after we're done.

14 A. Oh, yeah. So I'll give you my address.

15 Q. Okay. Okay, put that on the piece of paper. I need to be
16 honest with you; it's going to be a while before we --

17 A. Sure.

18 Q. -- finalize that report, okay? But yeah. Okay, so let me go
19 on to the next question. Do you have any suggestions for
20 preventing a reoccurrence?

21 A. Well, I have suggestions that may not have anything to do
22 with this accident. I mean, who knows, but they just don't
23 maintain the engines anymore. Everything -- PSR or PSI?

24 MR. BURRIS: PSI.

25 MR. WALLS: Yeah, I mean, I understand they're trying to save

1 money in these times and everything, but you can't skimp on carmen
2 and people to take care of our equipment, you know. So that's the
3 most important thing I can say.

4 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay, understood.

5 Anything --

6 MR. WALLS: Considering --

7 MR. HIPSKIND: -- from anyone else?

8 Yeah, go ahead.

9 MR. WALLS: I'm sorry, I said, yeah, because you never know,
10 it could have been a car, you know, who knows.

11 MR. HIPSKIND: Well, yeah. And we still have everything on
12 the table, and we're not that far into the investigation. Point
13 taken. So, Mark, is there anyone else who we should interview?
14 And before we started the interview, I said something about, you
15 know, we're going to interview the conductor and the brakeman, but
16 is there anybody else that you think would add value to our
17 understanding?

18 MR. WALLS: Not that I know of. I hope somebody was in the
19 area and saw what happened though.

20 MR. HIPSKIND: There was one eyewitness, and I think there
21 were some surveillance footage, but a lot of times -- well,
22 anyhow, we are looking into it, and maybe it will help us piece
23 together some of the stuff.

24 So let me ask all the gentlemen assisting me, is there
25 anybody who has a closing thought or question they want to ask

1 Mark?

2 MR. BURRIS: This is Wayne. I'm good.

3 MR. HIPSKIND: And, Joe?

4 MR. PINKERMAN: No, sir, I'm good.

5 MR. HIPSKIND: Scott?

6 MR. JONES: No, sir. Just thanks again, Mark, for coming in
7 under these circumstances. And I know you're trying to get your
8 rest and recoup. Thanks again.

9 MR. WALLS: Yeah, you're welcome.

10 MR. HIPSKIND: Jim, how about you?

11 MR. MAYNARD: No, I just wanted to thank you. We do
12 appreciate you coming in. Thank you very much. You did a great
13 job.

14 MR. WALLS: No problem, sir.

15 MR. HIPSKIND: And, John, you'll have the closing comment,
16 and then --

17 MR. ALLBERRY: Nothing else. Thank you, Mark.

18 MR. WALLS: All right. Thank you.

19 MR. HIPSKIND: All right. Now, Mark, are you okay with
20 everything?

21 MR. WALLS: Yeah.

22 MR. HIPSKIND: Okay. I'm like everybody else, I think you
23 did a great job. And we decided earlier, we're not going to go
24 out on any kind of fishing trips. We greatly appreciate your
25 firsthand characterization. Go ahead.

1 MR. WALLS: One more question: When they finish moving all
2 the cars, if they did, that were on the ground, they didn't find
3 anybody under there, did they? Nobody died?

4 MR. HIPSKIND: I'm fairly sure that's correct.

5 MR. WALLS: Okay.

6 MR. HIPSKIND: And you bring up a good point. I know how
7 there are rumors that get out there and all that, but to the best
8 of my knowledge, Mark, there were no fatalities. And I think, to
9 my understanding, there may have been one emergency responder that
10 got some smoke inhalation, but I believe he was treated and
11 released. On that note, we are on the good side of this, okay?

12 Well, listen, I will email you my contact information, and I
13 may include the other gentlemen that were here at the interview.
14 And if, down the road, if you think of something or you have a
15 thought that might help us with transportation safety or this
16 accident investigation, you are free to reach out to me or anybody
17 else that you feel comfortable talking with.

18 MR. WALLS: Okay.

19 MR. HIPSKIND: So if there isn't anything else, with that,
20 we'll close the interview.

21 MR. WALLS: Okay.

22 MR. HIPSKIND: Thanks again.

23 MR. WALLS: You're welcome.

24 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD


IN THE MATTER OF: UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD TRAIN
 DERAILMENT, HAZARDOUS MATERIAL
 RELEASE, AND FIRE IN TEMPE,
 ARIZONA, ON JULY 29, 2020
 Interview of Mark Walls

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD20LR005

PLACE: Tucson, Arizona

DATE: July 31, 2020

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 Fuerstenberg
Transcriber