

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

*

DERAILMENT OF UNION PACIFIC *

RAILROAD TRAIN UEBLTG 20 WITH * Accident No.: RRD19FR007

SUBSEQUENT FIRE AND HAZARDOUS *

MATERIALS RELEASE, FORT WORTH, *

TEXAS, APRIL 24, 2019 *

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Interview of: VINCENT DECKARD
Engineer

Homewood Suites
Fort Worth, Texas

Thursday,
April 25, 2019

APPEARANCES:

RYAN FRIGO, Rail Accident Investigator
Operations and System Safety
National Transportation Safety Board

DANIEL MEYER, Safety Inspector
Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

ADAM GIOVANDO, Deputy Regional Administrator
FRA, Region 5
(Posting)

NOEL IGNACIO, Safety Inspector
Operating Practices
FRA
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JOHN ALLBERRY, General Director, Operating Practices
Union Pacific

KAMRON SAUNDERS, National Safety Team
SMART Transportation Division

STEVE FACKLAN, Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen (BLET)

JOHN PROKOP, Safety Task Force
BLET
(Posting)

FERNANDO PAZ, Union Representative
BLET
(On behalf of Mr. Deckard)

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. FRIGO: Good afternoon. My name is Ryan Frigo. I am an
3 operations and system safety investigator for the National
4 Transportation Safety Board. Today is April 25, and we are in
5 Fort Worth, Texas at the Homewood Suites. We're here to speak
6 with Mr. Vincent Deckard regarding a UP train derailment with fire
7 occurring in south Fort Worth, Texas on April 24 at approximately
8 12:23 in the a.m. The NTSB accident reference number is
9 RRD19FR007.

10 I will begin by spelling my name, and then I will pass to my
11 right to introduce the parties that are present with us here
12 today.

13 Once again, Ryan Frigo, F-R-I-G-O, NTSB operations and system
14 safety.

15 MR. SAUNDERS: Kamron Saunders, K-A-M-R-O-N, S-A-U-N-D-E-R-S
16 with SMART TD.

17 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, F-A-C-K-L-A-N, BLET Safety Task
18 Force.

19 MR. PROKOP: John Prokop, P-R-O-K-O-P, BLE Safety Task Force,
20 posting.

21 MR. IGNACIO: Noel Ignacio, I-G-N-A-C-I-O, FRA, posting.

22 MR. GIOVANDO: Adam Giovando, G-I-O-V-A-N-D-O, FRA, posting.

23 MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry, Union Pacific, general director
24 operating practices.

25 MR. MEYER: Daniel Meyer, FRA; M-E-Y-E-R, operating

1 practices.

2 MR. DECKARD: Vincent Deckard, engineer. Last name D-E-C-K-
3 A-R-D.

4 MR. FRIGO: And, Mr. Deckard, do you wish to have a
5 representative here with you today?

6 MR. DECKARD: Yes.

7 MR. PAZ: Fernando Paz, BLET, P-A-Z.

8 MR. FRIGO: Okay, great. And, Mr. Deckard, do we have your
9 permission to record this conversation with you here today?

10 MR. DECKARD: Yes.

11 MR. FRIGO: Great. And do you mind if we go on a first-name
12 basis?

13 MR. DECKARD: No, I don't mind.

14 MR. FRIGO: Okay, great, Vincent. Thank you.

15 INTERVIEW OF VINCENT DECKARD

16 BY MR. FRIGO:

17 Q. So Vincent, let's just start out here by telling us about
18 your career on the railroad.

19 A. I've been working 17, 18 yeas. And my first derail.

20 Q. You been with the UP the entire time?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Did you start out as an engineer trainee?

23 A. I started off as a conductor.

24 Q. As a conductor. So how long were you a conductor?

25 A. Three years.

1 Q. Okay. So the start date's roughly around 2000?

2 A. 2000. Yes, sir.

3 Q. Okay. So you were a conductor first for about 3 years and
4 then engine school, and then -- how long was your training? Can
5 you recall?

6 A. Training for the conductor?

7 Q. For engineer.

8 A. That's been 15 years ago. Six months, I think.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. And have you been in the Dallas-Fort Worth area the entire
12 time of your career?

13 A. No, not the entire time.

14 Q. Okay. What other territories have you worked on?

15 A. I've worked on -- in Shreveport, Landry (ph.) and Dallas.

16 Q. Okay. All right. Anything else you want to share about that
17 work history? It's a long time. Lot of experience.

18 A. No, no. Nothing else to share.

19 Q. Okay. So on the 23rd, that's when you went on duty; is that
20 accurate?

21 A. The 23rd, yes.

22 Q. Okay. About what time?

23 A. 2230 on duty.

24 Q. 2230. Okay. And where was that at?

25 A. In the yard.

1 Q. Okay. And who did you -- when you showed up at the yard,
2 what's the process that -- do you talk to anybody? You just get
3 on the engine and go, or --

4 A. No, introduce yourself to your conductor if you never worked
5 with him before. You go get paperwork.

6 Q. Okay. And do you -- the conductor that was with you this
7 evening of the event, have you worked with him before?

8 A. No.

9 Q. So it was a first time?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. And what is -- you mentioned paperwork.

12 A. You know, track warrant bulletins and how heavy the train is,
13 the -- just, you know. Train list.

14 Q. Okay. Anything abnormal about the paperwork that evening?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Routine?

17 A. Routine.

18 Q. Okay. Nothing stood out to you?

19 A. Nothing.

20 Q. Okay. And when --

21 A. Oh, yeah -- well, we was a key train.

22 Q. What does that mean?

23 A. Well, you know, it was highly flammable. We're carrying
24 chemicals.

25 Q. So are there any special precautions that you would follow as

1 the engineer for a key train?

2 A. Yeah, you know, make sure my speed is right and correct for
3 the territory. Yeah.

4 Q. So some of the usual operating stuff, but you know you're
5 carrying --

6 A. And I'm carrying --

7 Q. -- something special.

8 A. Yeah. That's correct.

9 Q. Okay. So working -- 2230, so it's a night shift.

10 A. That's correct.

11 Q. All right, how -- is that your usual schedule?

12 A. I work on call. That's not my usual schedule, but, you know,
13 I just happened to go to work that night.

14 Q. Okay. And when was the previous time that you had worked
15 before --

16 A. I got off on the 22nd at 6:30 that evening.

17 Q. On the --

18 A. 1830.

19 Q. Yep. Okay. And on the 22nd when you got off, if you can
20 recall, what did you do?

21 A. I went home, ate and got in bed.

22 Q. Okay. Can you remember what time you woke up?

23 A. About 7, 8 o'clock that morning --

24 Q. Good for you.

25 A. -- on the 23rd.

1 Q. Good for you. Okay. All right, are you taking any
2 medication? Anything prescribed?

3 A. I take high blood pressure pills.

4 Q. Okay. Anything over the counter?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Allergy season going on.

7 A. No.

8 Q. Anything like that?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay. Okay. All right, great. So if you could walk me
11 through from 2230 when you meet with your conductor and you go
12 over your paperwork, you guys get on the engine, and you guys --
13 who do -- do you call anybody? Do you just start going?

14 A. No, no, no, we call. When we got on the engine, we pull it
15 out to the signal. We got a track warrant. Call TTD, he gave us
16 a signal. And we left.

17 Q. And TTD, is that -- that's the dispatcher?

18 A. Time and train dispatcher. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. So is that a local dispatcher, or is that someone --

20 A. I don't know if he -- I don't know.

21 Q. You don't know.

22 A. I don't know. Yeah.

23 Q. So it's TTD. And is this -- this subdivision, then, is track
24 warrant territory?

25 A. Midlothian sub is track warrant territory.

1 Q. Okay. So you were given the -- and how does that process
2 work?

3 A. Well, I'm not a conductor. I don't take the track warrant,
4 so --

5 Q. But you listen, right?

6 A. I listen, yeah.

7 Q. You listen. Do you --

8 A. Yeah, and he gave us a -- from milepost 50.3 to milepost 28.
9 And then my conductor, we had a job briefing. I said, well, I'm
10 going to stop at the golf course, which is milepost 31.

11 Q. Okay. And how do you know that the golf course is MP 31?

12 A. Because that's my neighborhood.

13 Q. Okay. So and that's just, you know, familiarization with the
14 territory?

15 A. And that's where we always stop.

16 Q. That's one of your landmarks?

17 A. Yeah, that's it.

18 Q. That's what you know to look for --

19 A. Right.

20 Q. -- as being a qualified, professional engineer?

21 A. Engineer, yeah. That's correct.

22 Q. Excellent. Okay, Vincent. So when you guys got the track
23 warrant and the conductor told you go ahead, what happened?

24 A. Well, we got a diversion clear and, you know, we took off.
25 We go -- it's all downhill once we leave. And look at my speed;

1 we're going 16. Got up to 20. I usually try to be in dynamics at
2 the crossing at the park. Went into dynamics and got up to 26.
3 And came around the corner, saw the water standing on the rail.
4 And there was a pallet on the rail, and we went over it and we
5 started back over the bridge, and we went into emergency. And I
6 bailed it off and I told the conductor, I said, I think we got air
7 hose. And I said, and we're a key train; you have to walk it,
8 just like that. And I looked in the mirror and I said, no, we're
9 in a derail; we're on fire.

10 Q. Okay. So when you say -- I'm just -- I just want to ask you
11 a few clarifying questions, because you gave us a lot of good
12 information right there. So you're coming around a curve
13 downhill.

14 A. Downhill.

15 Q. And you're just -- you got your blended brake, your dynamic.

16 A. Oh, okay. Dynamic. Yes.

17 Q. Dynamic. I'm a commuter rail guy, so some of the terminology
18 -- please correct me. And it's actually good for the folks
19 that'll be reading the transcript as well. It's not, you know,
20 it's not always experts that read it. So you're coming around the
21 curve and you see water on the rail.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. What did -- I mean, how much water, do you think?

24 A. I can't estimate how much water, but it's a lake right there
25 beside the tracks. So I feel that the water was more south with

1 the tracks and the train. And at the bottom of the hill, I guess
2 that's where it all settled and -- I don't know.

3 Q. Did you see the water moving? Could you recall?

4 A. I can't recall that.

5 Q. Okay. And again, you, you know, you said, I saw it on the
6 tracks.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Above the ball of the rail?

9 A. No, I can't remember if it was above the rail.

10 Q. Okay. Nighttime also.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Can you remember if you could see the ties and the ballast?

13 A. No, I can't remember. I don't think I could see the ties,
14 but, you know, I -- after we went over it, I hit my counter and we
15 was getting ready to report it to the dispatcher. But it happened
16 so fast, you know, so --

17 Q. And did you plug it or did it --

18 A. No, no. It went in emergency.

19 Q. It went in emergency. Okay. And what was your reaction when
20 it went into emergency?

21 A. When it went into emergency, like I said, I thought I had got
22 an air hose, so I just bailed it off like I was doing, you know.
23 And then when I looked in the mirror, I seen it was on fire, and I
24 told my conductor, go back there and pull the pin on the engines.
25 And we pulled up.

1 Q. Okay. So, and if you could just describe that for the
2 layperson, what did he -- for someone who might not know -- be a
3 railroader, who hears pull the pin --

4 A. He separated the engines from the cars.

5 Q. Okay, great. And then what were you able to do at that
6 point?

7 A. What do you mean able to do?

8 Q. Were you able to move the locomotive?

9 A. I had to reset the PCS, and then I was able to move the
10 locomotive.

11 Q. And about how far, approximately, if you can recall, did you
12 move the locomotive?

13 A. If I'd guess -- it was over 1,000 feet. Because I know
14 that's the rules, you got to move it over 1,000 feet.

15 Q. So you were using your -- the rules?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Excellent. Okay, great. And so you moved the engines --
18 two?

19 A. Three. We moved --

20 Q. Three engines?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Conductor is with you?

23 A. Conductor's on the engine.

24 Q. Okay. So you both -- the engines are moved about 1,000 feet
25 away. What do you do next?

1 A. We had already called 911. I gave the conductor my -- what's
2 that response book, the orange one? Gave him that and the
3 paperwork, and he went to the crossing for the manager of the
4 company came up, gave it to the firefighters.

5 Q. Okay. And can you recall approximately how long it took for
6 the first emergency responders, from the time that you called 911?

7 A. I can't recall that.

8 Q. Okay. All right.

9 MR. FRIGO: Okay, Vincent. I don't have any further
10 questions about that night. I do have some other questions about
11 your 17, 18 years' experience that I'll ask on the next round. So
12 I'm going to pass over to my right. And if you could just
13 introduce yourself for the transcriptionist?

14 MR. SAUNDERS: All right. Kamron Saunders, SMART TD.

15 BY MR. SAUNDERS:

16 Q. I have a few questions about the weather. Had it been
17 raining -- when did it, when -- was it already raining when you
18 came to work or did it start after?

19 A. It was raining on my way to work. It was -- had been raining
20 all day. I guess it started around about 6 o'clock, if I
21 guesstimated, you know, and it rained all the way in.

22 Q. Okay. Was there -- and I'm sure there are multiple routes to
23 -- I guess you all were going to Hearne?

24 A. Yes, that's correct.

25 Q. There are multiple routes to go, and that's -- they run

1 directional, I'm assuming?

2 A. That's correct.

3 MR. SAUNDERS: Okay. That's all I have for right now.

4 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, BLET Safety Task Force.

5 BY MR. FACKLAN:

6 Q. Following up a little bit on this, when you -- right before
7 you took off, after you had your paperwork, what would you
8 characterize rain at that -- light rain? Heavy rain?

9 A. It was raining hard.

10 Q. Pretty hard?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. And then on the train routing, I understand there's
13 two directions you can go when you take off.

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. And you went Midlothian sub?

16 A. That's correct.

17 Q. Okay. What are different times -- have you traveled this
18 territory often?

19 A. Off and on for 18 years.

20 Q. For 18 years? Okay. Do you know what's -- why they would
21 route you one way versus the other way at different times?

22 A. That's dispatching.

23 Q. Dispatching?

24 A. Dispatching. They control that, whoever's on dispatch.

25 Q. This territory, the Midlothian sub, how would you describe it

1 where the water's at? Is it -- where the lake is at and where the
2 water was going over the rail, is that at the bottom of two
3 different hills on this subdivision?

4 A. Well, it's at the bottom of a hill, but going downhill, then
5 you got to go up in (indiscernible), so --

6 Q. And any previous runs, do you -- did you note -- have you
7 noted anything over your time running on this? Other water issues
8 in that general area? Are there -- is this a problem area for
9 flooding?

10 A. Well, I can't say if it's a flooding area or a problem in the
11 flooding area, you know, because I can't say that.

12 Q. Okay. Are there any timetable special instructions for this
13 area for flash flooding?

14 A. I wouldn't know. I know it's 30 MPH.

15 Q. 30 MPH around there?

16 A. And I think the dispatcher is supposed to give you a flash
17 flood warning if that's the case. Matter of fact, he gave us a
18 flash flood warning at 3:36 after the derail.

19 Q. After the incident?

20 A. After the derailment.

21 Q. Okay. You had mentioned you had called 911. Just to
22 clarify, was that 911 dialing the dispatcher or EMS services?

23 A. 911 on the radio.

24 Q. So toning the dispatcher?

25 A. Dispatcher, yes.

1 Q. Okay. And it was the dispatcher, then, that would call EMS,
2 the emergency --

3 A. I just knew that that was the quickest way to get to --

4 Q. Okay. You notified the dispatcher?

5 A. Yeah.

6 MR. FACKLAN: Okay. That's all I have for right now.

7 MR. ALLBERRY: Just one follow-up. So you --

8 MR. FRIGO: Could you just introduce yourself?

9 MR. ALLBERRY: Oh, John Allberry, A-L-L-B-E-R-R-Y.

10 BY MR. ALLBERRY:

11 Q. One follow-up to your braking. He said something about
12 blended braking. You were just in dynamic brakes?

13 A. That's correct.

14 MR. ALLBERRY: That's all I got.

15 MR. MEYER: All right. Daniel Meyer, FRA, OP.

16 BY MR. MEYER:

17 Q. Follow-up on that. What is dynamic brakes?

18 A. Dynamic brakes slow the train down the tracks, the motor
19 start turning back to slow the train down instead of using the
20 automatic brake.

21 Q. Okay. Is that a normal thing, to use dynamic brakes?

22 A. It's a normal thing for me. That's what I'm using going
23 downhill.

24 Q. Okay. And what's your normal -- your regular job assignment?

25 A. Meaning?

1 Q. Are you on an extra board? You on a regular --

2 A. No, I'm a regular turn.

3 Q. Regular turn?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Is this your normal assignment, then?

6 A. Yes, that's correct.

7 Q. For a normal turn. How familiar are you with the territory,
8 did you say?

9 A. I've been on the territory for 18 years.

10 Q. Okay. Did you have any communication with the dispatcher
11 when you were getting bulletins?

12 A. Did I have what?

13 Q. Any communication, like, with the dispatcher when you were
14 getting bulletins?

15 A. My conductor, he run the bulletins.

16 Q. Conductor?

17 A. Conductor. In that yard, he runs all the bulletins for me
18 and him.

19 Q. Did you sit down with the conductor and go over the
20 bulletins?

21 A. Yes, we did.

22 Q. Did you see anything unusual on them?

23 A. No, we did not.

24 Q. Okay. Anything weather-related?

25 A. No, we did not.

1 Q. All right. Did you notice anything unusual on your trip?

2 A. The (indiscernible) no. On the trip, no, we did not.

3 Q. All right. Did your train seem like it was acting normal?

4 A. The train, it was a smooth ride until the derail.

5 Q. Okay. And have you noticed anything unusual at this location
6 on any previous trips?

7 A. No, not really.

8 Q. Okay. You said you hit your counter when you went over the
9 water. Why did you hit your counter?

10 A. Because when I saw the washout --

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. -- and I wanted to make sure that our whole train was going
13 to make it over that washout, and so I could report that. But we
14 didn't make it.

15 Q. Right. And you said you bailed it off. What does bailing it
16 off mean?

17 A. Well you know, when you go into emergency like that, the
18 brakes are set up on the engines. And that's -- when you bail
19 off, that releases the brakes on the engines.

20 MR. MEYER: All right. And that's all I have.

21 MR. FRIGO: Okay. Vincent, how you doing? You want to take
22 a break or --

23 MR. DECKARD: Oh, no. I'm good.

24 MR. FRIGO: I think there's just probably a few more follow-
25 up and then -- okay. All right. So this is Ryan Frigo again.

1 BY MR. FRIGO:

2 Q. So Vincent, in your 17, 18 years' experience on the railroad,
3 can you recall any other times where you were given a flash flood
4 warning?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Can you walk me through what kind of response as a train and
7 engine crew that you --

8 A. Well, I can't speak for all the engineers. If they give me a
9 flash flood warning, say, at milepost 50, I'm going to be slow
10 enough and prepared to stop for anything I see water-wise. I'm
11 just talking about me. I can't talk about other engineers.

12 Q. Do you know, is there a specific operating rule that covers
13 operating under that kind of --

14 A. Well, the rule, I think it states that, you know, if you have
15 a flash flood warning, you have to operate the train and be
16 prepared to stop for any flood issues.

17 Q. Okay. And that would be something in your rulebook that you
18 carry with you?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. Your grip. Was your -- did you leave your grip with
21 any railroad officials or did you take that with you?

22 A. I took it home.

23 Q. Okay, that -- and did a railroad official tell you, you could
24 do that?

25 A. I mean, that's normal.

1 Q. They didn't prohibit you from doing that?

2 A. No.

3 MR. FRIGO: Okay. All right, Vincent, thank you.

4 MR. SAUNDERS: Kamron Saunders. I don't have anything
5 further.

6 MR. FACKLAN: Steve Facklan, BLET.

7 BY MR. FACKLAN:

8 Q. Since you've worked on this territory, within the past 6
9 months, had you seen them working on any of the track in this
10 area, maintenance of way --

11 A. Well, I've been back on the territory for 2 months.

12 Q. Two months?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Within that 2 months, have you seen -- noted any work
15 maintenance of way had done out there?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay. The train you were operating, how many engines did you
18 have?

19 A. Three engines.

20 Q. Three engines? And were they all in line?

21 A. That's correct.

22 Q. Okay.

23 MR. FACKLAN: I think that's all I have.

24 MR. ALLBERRY: John Allberry, UP. Just one more, Vincent.

25 BY MR. ALLBERRY:

1 Q. When you went into emergency, how did the train handle as you
2 came to a stop?

3 A. I mean, it was, it was smooth. It was smooth. It was like
4 it just stopped. There wasn't no jerking, wasn't no runnings or
5 nothing like that.

6 MR. ALLBERRY: That's it.

7 MR. MEYER: Daniel Meyer. I don't have any more questions.

8 MR. FRIGO: Okay. Is there anything that you, sir, need to
9 clarify for us or --

10 MR. DECKARD: No, sir.

11 MR. FRIGO: Okay, Vincent. So I usually like to wrap these
12 up by, first of all, saying thank you for talking to us here. Is
13 there -- having gone through this experience, is there anything
14 that you want to share with the group that you think we didn't ask
15 you?

16 MR. DECKARD: No, I have nothing to share.

17 MR. FRIGO: Okay. Is there anybody else that we should be
18 speaking with besides you? We're going to talk to your conductor.

19 MR. DECKARD: I don't know anybody else you could talk to.

20 MR. FRIGO: Okay. Very good. And with that, we'll go off
21 the record. Thank you.

22 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

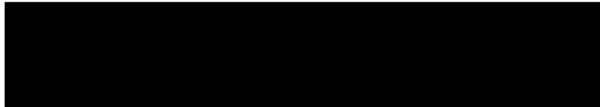
IN THE MATTER OF: DERAILMENT OF UNION PACIFIC
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MATERIALS RELEASE, FORT WORTH,
TEXAS, APRIL 24, 2019
Interview of Vincent Deckard

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD19FR007

PLACE: Fort Worth, Texas

DATE: April 25, 2019

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.


Eileen Gonzalez // //
Transcriber