

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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BNSF EMPLOYEE FATALITY *

IN LOUISIANA, MISSOURI * Accident No.: RRD21LR009

ON APRIL 7, 2021 *

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Interview of: ERIC SCHUTTE, Brakeman
BNSF Locomotive Engineering

Via Telephone

Thursday,
June 17, 2021

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

ZACHARY ZAGATA, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

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By Mr. Zagata:

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By Ms. Harley:

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. ZAGATA: I'm going to read that little disclosure that I
3 had before. I don't know if you remember that paragraph. So just
4 give me one sec here. And you pronounce your last name Schutte?
5 Is that right?

6 MR. SCHUTTE: That is correct.

7 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Just wanted to make sure. All right.

8 All right, Sheryl, I'm ready whenever you want to start
9 recording.

10 MS. HARLEY: Ready to go. Go ahead.

11 MR. ZAGATA: My name is Zach Zagata, and I am the NTSB IIC
12 for this accident. We are conducting a follow-up interview via
13 phone on June 17th, 2021, with Eric Schutte, who works for the
14 BNSF.

15 This interview is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of
16 the source of the accident in Louisiana, Missouri. The NTSB
17 Accident Reference Number is RRD21LR009. The purpose of this
18 investigation is to increase safety and not assign fault, blame,
19 or liability.

20 Before we begin our interview and questions let's go ahead
21 and introduce ourselves. Please spell your last name and your
22 title. I'll start off, pass it to Sheryl, and she'll pass it to
23 Eric.

24 Again, my name is Zach Zagata. The spelling of my last name
25 is Z-A-G-A-T-A, and I'm the NTSB investigator in charge for this

1 accident.

2 MR. HARLEY: And my name is Sheryl Harley, last name H
3 H-A-R-L-E-Y, and I'm the survival factors investigator for this
4 accident.

5 MR. SCHUTTE: My name is Eric Schutte. I was the brakeman on
6 the 837 Job at BNSF out of West Quincy, Missouri at the time of
7 the incident. And that's Schutte, S-C-H-U-T-T-E.

8 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. Thank you. And then, once again, do we
9 have your permission to record this discussion today?

10 MR. SCHUTTE: Yes, sir. You do.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. And do you understand the
12 transcripts will be part of the public docket and as such, we
13 cannot guarantee any confidentiality?

14 MR. SCHUTTE: That is correct.

15 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you.

16 MR. SCHUTTE: I understand.

17 INTERVIEW OF ERIC SCHUTTE

18 BY MR. ZAGATA:

19 Q. So, just a few follow-up questions for you. So, you hadn't
20 been working that local very long before the accident, had you?
21 You weren't holding a permit that time?

22 A. No. I had been -- at the time, I believe, I was actually on
23 a -- oh, I did win a bid to the job. I had been on it,
24 maybe -- oh, maybe a week. I -- it wasn't very long. But I had
25 worked it previously over the years a lot of weeks at a time, so I

1 was familiar with the job.

2 Q. Okay. And then do you -- I mean, as far as talking with
3 Buddy, did you talk to Buddy very much the day of the accident?

4 A. No. Not too much. You know, it's one of those things where
5 you know what you're doing. I mean, we had -- what I would
6 consider a moderate day. We didn't have much more than
7 maybe -- I want to say I think we had maybe 19 cars or something
8 to that effect.

9 So, it wasn't too terribly heavy of a day so there wasn't a
10 whole lot of discussion. I mean, I'm the -- I was the brakeman on
11 the job so, you know, I'm kind of just -- you know. Buddy was
12 always just pretty good about just saying hey, you know what? I'm
13 going to put you here at this switch, you send it down to me, I'll
14 make a cut, and then, you know what, we'll go up to the next -- he
15 would just basically feed me out the instructions as we were going
16 about it.

17 Q. Okay. But was there any conversation that wasn't work
18 related at all? Did he say anything about being stressed about
19 anything?

20 A. No.

21 Q. No? Okay. And then did you see him eating or drinking
22 anything prior to the accident?

23 A. No. Due to COVID restrictions I was always on the second
24 unit away from the engineering conductor. So, I mean, I didn't
25 see him drink or eat anything that day. So I couldn't speak on

1 that.

2 Q. Okay. And then when you guys were out working, you didn't
3 see him taking any kind of over-the-counter meds like Pepto, or
4 Tums, or anything like that?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. Did you happen to see who took his bag after the
7 accident?

8 A. No. I did not. I was assuming it was up on the -- well it
9 would've ended up being the second unit going east. But, no, I do
10 not recall anyone taking his possessions.

11 MR. ZAGATA: Got you. Okay. That's all I've got for now.
12 Sheryl, I'll turn it over to you.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

14 BY MS. HARLEY:

15 Q. Okay. Thanks, Eric. So, a couple of things, who is your
16 immediate supervisor?

17 A. My immediate supervise would be Train Master Darrell McCoy,
18 and Road Foreman Justin Pollard in West Quincy, Missouri.

19 Q. Okay. All right. The day before the accident, did you work
20 with Buddy?

21 A. To the best of my recollection, yes.

22 Q. Okay. And would you say that that was a pretty normal day?
23 There was nothing unusual occurred?

24 A. No, ma'am. I -- you know, I know it was just your pretty
25 run-of-the-mill day.

1 Q. Okay. So, I'm going to ask you a question, to the best of
2 your ability, can you remember when you left Quincy on the day of
3 the accident?

4 A. On that day, I think we actually did do fairly well getting
5 out of the yard because I believe we were pretty much all together
6 and all we would've had to do is air test the train. So, if I'm
7 not mistaken, I think we probably departed the yard not much after
8 noon or 12:30. Because, if my recollection's serves me
9 correctly, it seemed like we made it down to Cosgrove in pretty
10 decent time, or, at least, fairly early in the afternoon.

11 Q. Okay. And where -- when did you guys make your first stop or
12 layover with the train?

13 A. If you're considering the first time we stopped and actually
14 had to get off the train and do work, it would've been in
15 Louisiana, Missouri, where we have to cut the power off and run
16 through the siding and get the power on the other end. And then
17 we ride the shove platform up into Cosgrove. So, Louisiana,
18 Missouri would be the first place where we actually stopped and
19 performed services to get our train ready to service a customer.

20 Q. Okay. So, I was just wondering, so you left Quincy and where
21 did you go from Quincy?

22 A. From Quincy we were heading west, which, I mean,
23 geographically is south.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. We made that stop in Louisiana, Missouri to run around the

1 train, and then we headed further south to Cosgrove which is where
2 the Dyno Global Chemical Plant is.

3 Q. Okay. So, that point in Louisiana, do you know what time you
4 got there?

5 A. If I had to place a rough guess, being that, you know, it
6 didn't seem like there was much traffic that day, so if we left at
7 12:30 we were probably there around -- oh, I'd say probably 2:00
8 in the afternoon. Not much later than that.

9 Q. Okay. So, just to refresh my memory, how long have you
10 worked with Buddy?

11 A. I was permanent party on that job for, I believe, like, a
12 week-and-a-half to two weeks. But I have worked vacancies on that
13 job over the course of the past eight years. So, I've work
14 that -- I've worked with Buddy, oh, I'd say at least over a
15 hundred times over the past eight or nine years.

16 Q. Okay. Was there anything unusual about his demeanor or
17 anything that struck you as being a little odd or off the day of
18 the accident?

19 A. Not to my knowledge. You know, I'm not a mental health
20 professional and, you know what, it seems like, especially over
21 the past year-and-a-half, people have just been a little stressed.
22 A lot of people, they don't want to wear masks and all this
23 other -- all these other things. So -- and it seems like
24 everybody I've worked with over the past year, we'll just say you
25 know what? Everyone just seems to be, I don't know, not normally

1 as cheery and everything that they usually are. But he was normal
2 as far as giving instructions, telling me what the game plan was.
3 So, that was not out of the ordinary.

4 Q. Okay. And the other thing is, did you ever see Buddy with
5 his cell phone?

6 A. No.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay. All right. Let me see.

8 I think that's all I have, Zach.

9 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. That's all I got too.

10 Once again, thanks for taking the time and helping us out
11 with this, sir. I appreciate it.

12 MR. SCHUTTE: Not a problem. You guys have any more
13 questions, concerns just send me a text and we'll go from there.

14 MR. ZAGATA: All right. Do you have anything to want to add
15 today, Eric?

16 MR. SCHUTTE: No, sir. I do not.

17 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. All right. I appreciate it and with that
18 we'll conclude the interview.

19 MS. HARLEY: Thank you, Eric.

20 MR. SCHUTTE: All right. Bye.

21 MS. HARLEY: Bye-bye.

22 MR. ZAGATA: All right. Bye.

23 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

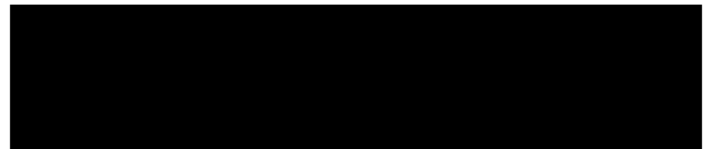
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PLACE: Via Telephone

DATE: June 17, 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.



CAROLYN HANNA
Transcriber