

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT
IN ELLISTON, VIRGINIA
ON JULY 6, 2023

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Accident No.: RRD23FR013

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Interview of: JOSHUA D. GAMMONS, Engineer
Norfolk Southern Railroad

Roanoke, Virginia

Friday,
July 7, 2023

APPEARANCES:

JOHN RANSCHAERT, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

TIM LYNCH, Investigator in Charge
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:25 p.m.)

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2
3 MR. RANSCHAERT: My name is John Ranschaert, I'm an FRA
4 inspector, Operating Practices, out of Richmond, Virginia. I'm
5 here with FRA inspector, Motor Power and Equipment, Tim Lynch, and
6 locomotive engineer for Norfolk Southern, Joshua Daniel Gammons,
7 engineer on Train 814V04 on the 4th (sic) of July. We're here to
8 discuss the derailment that happened on July 6th, 2023 in
9 Elliston, Virginia.

INTERVIEW OF JOSHUA D. GAMMONS

BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

10
11
12 Q. Mr. Gammons, if you can tell us about your day from the time
13 that you were called for your assignment to going on duty, to what
14 you did to -- and you can break it up into segments, if you wish,
15 leading us up to the point of derailment and what happened during
16 your day.

17 A. Typical railroad day, I get up and try to wake up a little
18 bit.

19 Q. About what time did you do that?

20 A. I woke up at, probably 7:15-ish, I guess, somewhere in there
21 that morning. The phone rang at 8:15 for 10:15. I got up and got
22 some caffeine and I took a shower, and me and Michael rode over to
23 the yard office, got our paperwork together. Let's see.

24 Q. So you were on duty at 10:15 or 10 o'clock?

25 A. Ten fifteen.

1 Q. Ten fifteen.

2 A. Yeah. Is that what I said, I suppose, anyway.

3 MR. LYNCH: You recall the time, right?

4 MR. GAMMONS: Ten fifteen.

5 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay.

6 MR. LYNCH: Yeah.

7 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

8 Q. Yeah, I'm just making sure.

9 A. Got our paperwork together, got on the PTI, rode over to
10 (indiscernible), got on the train. Let's see, we did a brake test
11 and we were ready to go. I don't remember what time we pulled.

12 MR. LYNCH: Did you take it from another crew --

13 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

14 MR. LYNCH: -- by chance? Okay.

15 MR. GAMMONS: Yes, sir. So we were pulling at 2:30 in the
16 afternoon.

17 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

18 Q. Do you recall where the train originated from?

19 A. I don't know where they come from over there.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Some mine somewhere, I don't know.

22 Q. Okay. So you began pulling at 2:30 and that's from
23 Milepost --

24 A. Two six two -- three, excuse me, N362.8, I believe it is.

25 Q. Two sixty three dot eight?

- 1 A. Three sixty two dot eight.
- 2 Q. Oh, oh, 362. I'm sorry.
- 3 MR. LYNCH: That right in Bluefield yard?
- 4 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum, yes.
- 5 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:
- 6 Q. Three sixty two, okay.
- 7 A. Um-hum.
- 8 Q. Once you began pulling, do you know what type of territory,
9 is that dark territory or signal territory?
- 10 A. It's signal. My flag (ph.) was at 261, both -- because
11 that's the signal by direction.
- 12 Q. Okay, 261?
- 13 A. Um-hum. I believe it is, I don't know.
- 14 Q. Okay. All right. And then you got a clear and you took off?
- 15 A. Yeah. We have to talk to the dispatcher to get a line out
16 before you can leave Bluefield there.
- 17 Q. Okay.
- 18 A. So they indicated we were on Main 1, so he has to tell us
19 Main -- indicates Main 1, to Main 1 (indiscernible), okay, leave.
- 20 Q. Okay.
- 21 A. There was an 18W on the Main 2 and he watched us leave and he
22 said everything looked good leaving.
- 23 Q. Okay.
- 24 A. He confirmed on the radio.
- 25 Q. Was he eastbound or westbound?

1 A. That is an eastbound.

2 Q. Eastbound. So did he follow you?

3 A. I'm not sure what time they left.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. They were sitting there as we were leaving.

6 Q. Okay.

7 MR. LYNCH: Did you say 18W or 18N?

8 MR. GAMMONS: I'm pretty sure it was the 18W. Um-hum.

9 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

10 Q. Okay. Did you have any -- so did you have clear indication
11 all the way up to the hot box detectors, did you stop anywhere en
12 route?

13 A. I'm thinking we got, we -- so I don't get my trips mixed up
14 here, we got -- we did get an approach at 304.2.

15 Q. Do you recall if you used dynamic or --

16 A. I'm sorry.

17 Q. Sure.

18 A. I got the wrong milepost. We had an approach at 311.0, I was
19 getting ahead of myself. So we come around and prepared to stop
20 at Narcross. There is a detector at 312 that gave us no defects.
21 Came around at Narcross, prepared to stop. Once inside of the
22 signal, we had the clear, so we -- I did not stop, I probably got
23 down to five or six, maybe.

24 Q. Is this PTC territory?

25 A. Not there, no.

1 Q. Okay. How about Trip Optimizer?

2 A. It had the energy management, but it doesn't work because the
3 PTC was disengaged, they're linked together.

4 Q. Okay. So no PTC and you said energy management?

5 A. Not at that point, no. No.

6 Q. Okay, sorry about that.

7 A. That's okay.

8 Q. So you got the -- prepared to stop at Narcross, you come
9 around to the signal and it's clear and you were doing about 5
10 miles an hour, roughly?

11 A. Yeah, four or five, somewhere in there.

12 Q. Okay, okay.

13 A. I don't --

14 Q. And then --

15 A. -- remember exactly, but --

16 Q. And then from there?

17 A. Just started pulling on again --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- and let's see, a pretty uneventful trip, so I don't recall
20 anything really standing out between there and Yellow Sulphur. We
21 did get a no defects at the 293.4 detector.

22 MR. LYNCH: Two ninety one?

23 MR. MONTGOMERY: Two nine three dot four.

24 MR. LYNCH: Got you, thank you.

25 MR. MONTGOMERY: Um-hum.

1 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

2 Q. So can you tell us what happened at Yellow Sulphur?

3 A. So we got the critical alarm sound, I immediately put on, I
4 think it was 1 or 2 pounds, maybe, because I already had the brake
5 on. I had the first minimum service on already, to begin with --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- for descending grade.

8 Q. Speed?

9 A. About 25-ish when it went off, 26.

10 Q. So you added a couple more pounds?

11 A. Um-hum. Yeah, I think it was one or two, I don't remember
12 exactly, but that was enough to go ahead and slow us down and
13 stop.

14 MR. LYNCH: From the time the detector got you at the 293,
15 how long -- how far did you go to get stopped? You were running
16 roughly around 25 miles --

17 MR. RANSCHAERT: Well, 293.4 is no defects --

18 MR. LYNCH: Okay, got you.

19 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- and then Yellow Sulphur is what milepost?

20 MR. GAMMONS: Two seventy-six point three, I believe it says.

21 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

22 Q. Two seventy-six dot three?

23 A. Um-hum.

24 Q. Okay. So it went from no defects to 20 miles, a little less
25 than 20 miles, 17 miles, to a critical alarm?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Is there any defect detectors between 294.4 and Yellow
5 Sulphur?

6 A. Uh-uh, no.

7 Q. No detectors?

8 A. No, not between there. No, sir.

9 Q. Okay.

10 MR. LYNCH: Do you recall any detectors being between the
11 yard in Bluefield and the detector at the Yellow Sulphur 276 that
12 would be hot box detector?

13 MR. GAMMONS: We went over two more. Leaving Bluefield you
14 have 349.9, I believe it is, and then you have one at Glen Lyn
15 which would be 340.4, I think it says. And then there's a
16 detector at -- the one at 311, also. I think I missed that.

17 MR. LYNCH: Yes, you did.

18 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

19 Q. So you go from 340 to 311?

20 A. Right.

21 Q. Three forty to 311 and then 293.4?

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. And then 276.3?

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. Okay. So up to that point, you went over four previous

1 detectors with no issues?

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Yeah, that would be correct.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. All right. And then, so you got your critical alarm, you had
8 minimum service set because you were slowing down.

9 A. Descending grade, yeah.

10 Q. Descending grade.

11 (Crosstalk)

12 MR. GAMMONS: -- train speed.

13 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

14 Q. And then you added a couple more pounds and it brought it to
15 a stop.

16 A. Um-hum.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. And then can you -- after you come to a stop, can you pick us
20 up from there?

21 A. So we toned up the New River dispatcher to tell him that we
22 did have a critical alarm, so I think he said let me know what you
23 find out and then we talked to wayside help desk and the wayside
24 gave us -- confirmed the axle number and he looked up the car
25 number so we could double check.

1 MR. LYNCH: Do you by chance remember?

2 MR. GAMMONS: I may have wrote it down. I'll check.

3 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

4 Q. Did he happen to give you a temperature reading?

5 A. Not then, but once Michael got back to the head end, we
6 asked.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And he said it was about 200, I think, if I remember
9 correctly.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. So I do not have the car number.

12 MR. LYNCH: That's okay.

13 MR. GAMMONS: It was the 299th axle --

14 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

15 MR. GAMMONS: -- on the north rail. I do remember it was a
16 CR, a Conrail car.

17 MR. LYNCH: Okay, good.

18 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

19 Q. Not being familiar with this territory, being from outside
20 the area, the New River dispatcher, what radio channel is that?

21 A. Oh-seven-two, zero-seven-two, it's a big channel, we call it
22 Channel 1.

23 Q. Channel 1. And it's zero-seventy-two, zero-seventy-two?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Okay. Is the wayside detector on the same channel?

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. So they're both on 72?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. So all the conversations occur on 72?

5 A. Um-hum.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yes, sir. The first -- and Bluefield, we're on Channel 76.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. So we talked, actually talked to (indiscernible) on that
10 channel before leaving, but after that, it was all Channel 1.

11 Q. Okay. Is that considered -- 76, is that Channel 1, 2, 3?

12 A. That would be Channel 2, if I remember correctly.

13 Q. Channel 2?

14 A. Um-hum.

15 MR. LYNCH: Channel 1 is the 072, 072, and then when you have
16 issues or you need to the talk to the dispatcher, you refer -- you
17 go to Channel 2 to get off the --

18 MR. GAMMONS: No.

19 MR. LYNCH: You talk to them?

20 MR. GAMMONS: Right.

21 MR. LYNCH: Yeah.

22 MR. GAMMONS: Stay on that same channel.

23 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay. The reason I ask is CSX, sometimes
24 they'll switch over to a different channel to talk to the
25 dispatcher and so it's a one-way conversation without any

1 interference --

2 MR. GAMMONS: Oh, okay.

3 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- which is kind of nice for --

4 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

5 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- you know, when you have problems going
6 on.

7 MR. LYNCH: I think, plus, if you had other things going
8 on --

9 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

10 MR. LYNCH: -- on other trains, it's running.

11 MR. GAMMONS: Yeah, that makes sense.

12 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

13 Q. All right, going back to this. So 299th axle, north rail,
14 your conductor did what then?

15 A. He got his temp stick and gloves and glasses, and I think he
16 took his brake stick, but I can't swear by it.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. And we talked about it and he walked on back to the car and
19 checked it out and once he got back to the head end, he told me
20 what he found, that it just barely melted the stick, is what he
21 said and --

22 Q. Okay. What were your thoughts when he mentioned that?

23 A. Just barely melting the stick, I wasn't very concerned about
24 it because it's -- it seemed like it's pretty typical, I mean,
25 just with the new sticks, just --

1 MR. LYNCH: Do you know what the temperature is on your new
2 ones?

3 MR. GAMMONS: Hundred and sixty-three or nine, is that right?

4 MR. LYNCH: I think it's 170.

5 MR. GAMMONS: I don't know. I couldn't -- I'm pretty sure
6 that's the 169, but I don't know. I couldn't tell you.

7 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

8 Q. Okay. So no cause for alarm?

9 A. Uh-uh. No, I didn't feel so, because we've had hotter, you
10 know, we've heard of hotter before, so --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- I felt good with that. We talked to the dispatcher and
13 wayside and told them what was going on and they said stand by, so
14 I guess they talked, I don't know who they talked to, of course,
15 that was all in the background.

16 Q. Sure.

17 A. But they said it's okay to bring it on.

18 Q. So with the new temperature Tempilstiks at 169, I know you
19 mentioned earlier, I believe, that you asked the dispatcher or the
20 wayside detector the temperature reading and he said around 200.

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Did that -- and that didn't cause any alarm in your head?

23 A. Not particularly.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Because it cooled down, you know, and --

1 Q. Sure.

2 A. -- I don't know how long it took time-wise to get back there,
3 what would that be, 30 minutes, 20 minutes or something to walk
4 back and they'd cool down --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- just barely.

7 MR. LYNCH: When you get a critical alarm, what is your
8 guidance and your instructions at that point other than -- do you
9 have anything specifically set that -- the process that you're
10 supposed to follow? Say that detector went off, the critical
11 alarm --

12 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

13 MR. LYNCH: -- you go to inspect and then if you find it hot
14 to the Tempilstik, is there any kind of thing that you guys are --

15 MR. GAMMONS: Not that I can recall.

16 MR. LYNCH: Okay. Follow what the dispatcher or the wayside
17 desk instructed you after that point?

18 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

19 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

20 MR. GAMMONS: Yes, sir.

21 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

22 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

23 Q. So you're not familiar with any special instructions?
24 Correct?

25 A. Um-hum.

1 Q. Okay. All right. So when he got back on the engine, you
2 guys called the wayside or the dispatcher?

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Okay. And then what?

5 A. They had, I guess, a meeting of the minds and they said we
6 were going to -- okay to bring it on track speed, we will set the
7 car off at the -- between North Fork and Fagg, but I was concerned
8 that we would not be able to shove back because it would be on the
9 descending grade, I'm not sure what the percentage is, but -- at,
10 because we'd have to pull down to get east of the signal at Fagg
11 and then shove back and that's pretty steep right there, so I
12 wasn't sure that we could shove, it would've been almost probably
13 10,000 tons going back up the hill.

14 BY MR. LYNCH:

15 Q. They wanted you to come down toward Fagg and then you would
16 go back to where the 71st car was, cut it, pull down and then
17 shove it back up into --

18 A. Into the siding.

19 Q. -- into the siding there, set it off --

20 A. Um-hum.

21 Q. -- and then --

22 A. Then we would have to --

23 Q. -- continue going east --

24 A. Yeah, we'd --

25 Q. -- when you got your train back together?

1 A. Right.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Um-hum.

4 Q. Okay. But because of the --

5 A. The grade and the --

6 Q. -- the power that you had on the head end --

7 A. Um-hum.

8 Q. -- it was going to be a difficult task to shove backwards up
9 that grade?

10 A. Correct, um-hum.

11 Q. All right.

12 A. So then they said it would be okay to take it to Riverside to
13 set out and they originally said to put it in -- we'd go down the
14 main and just leave the car in the siding, and then I guess they
15 changed their mind, so we were actually going to go into the
16 siding and then there's a house track off of the siding, they were
17 -- that's where it was the final destination for it, I guess.

18 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

19 MR. RANSCHAERT: You said the house track?

20 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum. On the siding between Kumis and
21 Riverside.

22 BY MR. LYNCH:

23 Q. So you got to go through into the siding at Riverside to get
24 to that house track?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Pull through and then cut loose and shove back one car to get
2 it into that track and then come back to your train with the
3 remaining cars?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

6 Q. Was there ever a concern about the amount of time that you
7 had left to work, was that ever a part of your discussion?

8 A. A concern. I mean, we were -- I know we were getting pretty
9 close as far as -- as we're going down the rail or while we were
10 -- after the fact, this happened or --

11 Q. With the dispatcher, did the dispatcher ever address your
12 hours of service timeline?

13 A. I don't -- I don't think so. No, I don't think --

14 Q. Not with you, then?

15 A. Right.

16 Q. Okay.

17 MR. LYNCH: At that time that you had -- and you were stopped
18 and found the bearing to be hot at this point, what was remaining
19 in your hours of service?

20 MR. GAMMONS: Let's think a minute here.

21 MR. LYNCH: Just an estimate.

22 MR. GAMMONS: Yeah, I'm thinking it was about 3 hours, maybe.

23 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

24 Q. Three hours left to work?

25 A. Somewhere abouts. Three hours, a little more, I -- it may

1 have been a little more. I don't know exact, I didn't write it
2 down, but --

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. -- it was somewhere in there.

5 Q. Okay. I'm just trying to figure out to cover, to see if
6 decision-making process, if your hours of service and the amount
7 of time that you had left to work --

8 A. Um-hum.

9 Q. -- if that affected the decision-making process to run you
10 from your location at the hot box detector to -- to where you
11 ended up.

12 A. Right.

13 Q. So if they didn't discuss it with you, then that answers that
14 question.

15 A. Um-hum.

16 BY MR. LYNCH:

17 Q. Have you ever hit a hot box detector before like this, Josh?

18 A. Let me think.

19 Q. Have you hit a critical alarm detector and stopped and then
20 had to go through the same process before?

21 A. I'm trying to remember.

22 Q. Or was this all completely new and unfamiliar with you?

23 A. Seemed like -- I mean, it's been a long time ago, but --

24 Q. I just wanted to see if you had any --

25 A. Right. Another reason.

1 Q. -- prior -- any prior experience that went to what you were
2 transferring to be able to do as a critical stop on your hot box
3 detector and see if you went through the same scenario at another
4 time and if the outcome was any different.

5 A. Um-hum. I can't -- I can't swear to it, so --

6 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

7 Q. Can you give us an indication, when you were moving, as far
8 as throttle position, speed, dynamic braking, automatic braking,
9 independent brake, what positions those handles were in?

10 A. During the emergency --

11 Q. Yes.

12 A. So we were about 20 -- well, I knew we were running 21,
13 dynamic brake was about -- it was either a 6 or a 7.

14 Q. So 21 miles per hour, 6 or 7 dynamic.

15 A. Yeah. That would be -- I don't recall the amps.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. We were --

18 Q. Descending speed?

19 A. Descending, yeah. Descending grade, preparing to enter the
20 siding at Kumis. I felt the little tug and --

21 Q. Like a little lurch, like --

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. -- slack pulled out?

24 A. Um-hum, yeah.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. It was very minor, just --

2 Q. Like a knuckle?

3 A. Well, not really, it was very slight to begin with.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- but that was the first feeling and then -- so immediately,
6 I think I went ahead and went to full dynamic --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- because I had a feeling what was coming. So once the
9 first initial slight tug, it dropped like a rock, basically, like
10 an anchor --

11 Q. Sure.

12 A. -- it started dragging me down and I remember seeing the
13 speed drop very quickly and I think it may have been 17 or so, 16
14 or 17 when it actually went into emergency.

15 MR. LYNCH: So you were running 21 miles an hour, give or
16 take, and you were putting 6 or 7 on the dynamic brake, you had
17 air pulling on the train, braking, correct?

18 MR. GAMMONS: No air.

19 MR. RANSCHAERT: There was no air, he was in dynamic --

20 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

21 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- and he went to full dynamic and then --

22 MR. GAMMONS: Correct.

23 MR. LYNCH: There's no brake application on the cars,
24 whatsoever.

25 MR. GAMMONS: No, not right then and there.

1 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

2 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum, no. And it may have been 15 when it
3 went into emergency, it happened so quickly, I don't know, but
4 somewhere in that neighborhood.

5 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

6 Q. Okay. Did you have, in your mind, what -- what did you think
7 happened?

8 A. I figured something had happened, I didn't know exactly what,
9 but I just had that gut feeling that something had happened.

10 Q. Like "ohhhhhh" (ph.).

11 A. Um-hum.

12 (Laughter.)

13 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

14 Q. Have you ever been involved in a derailment like this before?

15 A. Uh-uh.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. No, sir.

18 Q. First one?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. So in guesstimate of time, from the time you felt the tug to
21 the time the train went in emergency, would you think 5 seconds,
22 30 seconds, a minute?

23 A. It was pretty quick.

24 Q. Pretty quick.

25 A. I'd say five, yeah.

1 Q. Five seconds.

2 A. Sure.

3 MR. LYNCH: The train went into emergency --

4 MR. RANSCHAERT: After the tug.

5 MR. LYNCH: -- after the tug and you were running roughly 15
6 to 16 miles an hour, how far would you estimate that you traveled
7 and how long did it take for you to come to a complete stop?

8 MR. GAMMONS: Once it went into emergency, so there's a road
9 right crossing there that you blow, I began blowing the whistle
10 board, so -- and was actually stopped short of the crossing, so
11 once it went into emergency, we probably went, what, 10 or 12, 15
12 cars, somewhere in there, maybe.

13 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

14 Q. Okay. I'm going to check my list here real quick to -- just
15 to confirm, we had a hundred and five loads, zero empties, 14,158
16 tons, 5,561 feet, does that sound familiar?

17 A. That's correct.

18 Q. That's what you have?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Three engines on the head end.

22 Q. Okay. So that's what I have. Can you tell me about those
23 engines?

24 A. The third locomotive, the 1141 --

25 Q. Can you give me all three numbers, do you have --

1 A. I can. We were on 1019 NS.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And our second unit was an NS 7616.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And the third one was an NS 1141.

6 Q. Okay. And you started to mention something about the third
7 unit.

8 A. Yeah, it was an attempt to tow and then it wasn't running. I
9 tried starting it in Bluefield, but it ran for about 3 minutes --

10 BY MR. LYNCH:

11 Q. Was it tagged or -- was there anything on the locomotive
12 showing it was in defective condition leaving Bluefield?

13 A. Uh-uh, no.

14 Q. Did the crew have any issues with it when you took over the
15 train?

16 A. Let me think a minute. The crew that we got it from,
17 relieved, I guess the original crew, and he said that it had shut
18 down on the original crew --

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. -- and that's all he knew. He said he didn't even go back to
21 try to start it, so --

22 Q. So you already knew you was two less or one less locomotive
23 in your three-unit consist when you was leaving Bluefield?

24 A. Um-hum.

25 Q. Okay. Nobody else was notified, mechanical or anything, that

1 the locomotive -- okay.

2 A. Uh-uh. No, sir.

3 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

4 Q. Is there a procedure, when you take over locomotives, to
5 contact anybody about a defective locomotive?

6 A. Unless you absolutely have to have it, no, not really.

7 Q. Okay. So there was no cause for concern on your part as far
8 as having a third --

9 A. We had two working locomotives, so it was plenty.

10 MR. LYNCH: So you're good for tonnage with the AC and the DC
11 engine coming out of Bluefield to run up with two units?

12 MR. GAMMONS: Um-hum.

13 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

14 Q. Okay. Do you recall any information about a Class 1 brake
15 test? Like maybe where it was performed, what time it was
16 performed, who did it?

17 A. Uh-uh, no, sir.

18 Q. Okay. Did you look at the cab cards on the locomotive?

19 A. Um-hum.

20 Q. And they were dated for --

21 A. The 6th at 10:00 a.m., if I remember correctly.

22 Q. Okay. So they had only been a couple hours --

23 A. They'd already been signed, yes.

24 Q. A couple hours --

25 MR. LYNCH: For all three?

1 MR. GAMMONS: I did not look at the third one, but I know the
2 new two were.

3 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

4 Q. Okay. Do you recall the inspection point, where it was
5 inspected at?

6 A. No, sir, I don't.

7 Q. Okay. And signal indication, other than that one location
8 with the approach, all signals were clear?

9 A. We had an approach diverging at Bradshaw, to be prepared to
10 go into the siding at Kumis --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- but they were all -- nothing, approaches.

13 Q. So no cause for using the brakes in any location, the
14 automatic brakes?

15 A. Other than descending the mountain.

16 Q. Okay, so you did use the brakes descending the mountain?

17 A. Um-hum.

18 Q. Okay. Along with the dynamic or just --

19 A. Um-hum, yes.

20 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay.

21 MR. LYNCH: With you knowing the territory, I have a
22 question. When you come down and you got the hot box detector and
23 you stopped and determined that you had a problem with the bearing
24 on the 71st car, the game plan was to continue east down toward
25 Fagg, then set the car over, but because you would have to shove

1 back up into that track, the tonnage wouldn't allow you to do so,
2 so then --

3 MR. GAMMONS: Yeah, I wasn't confident that we'd be able to.
4 I mean, it could have, but I --

5 MR. LYNCH: Fagg would've been the first location that you
6 could've set the car at after the critical detector?

7 MR. GAMMONS: That is correct, yes.

8 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

9 Q. Had your third engine been working, do you think you would've
10 had enough horsepower to shove 71 cars up into Fagg?

11 A. Maybe, but you can only shove with 18 power axles.

12 Q. So you would've had to --

13 A. You'd have to isolate a unit.

14 Q. Okay. So even if it was running, you would have had to
15 isolate anyways because it's an 18 powered axle shove.

16 A. Um-hum.

17 Q. Okay.

18 MR. LYNCH: So the shove backward at Fagg, the two AC
19 engines, the first and the third, if it was running, would not be
20 enough horsepower to shove back?

21 MR. GAMMONS: I don't --

22 MR. LYNCH: That's fine.

23 MR. GAMMONS: I've never had to do it, so I don't -- I've
24 talked to them --

25 MR. RANSCHAERT: We're just trying to --

1 MR. GAMMONS: Right.

2 MR. RANSCHAERT: -- figure out, had you had a third engine
3 would it have been able to -- you know, would you have been able
4 to set it out at that location.

5 BY MR. LYNCH:

6 Q. Was that something that the dispatcher and them had brought
7 up about setting it out there or was that something that you
8 brought up to -- that you couldn't do it or who was aware that
9 power was going to be an issue in shoving backwards into Fagg?

10 A. I mentioned that to them, yeah.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. So they didn't say anything at all about it because that's
14 where they intended for you to be able to set the car out was at
15 Fagg?

16 A. Right.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Um-hum. Yeah, I just -- I don't remember my exact words but
19 I said that I wasn't sure if we'd be able to shove back up the
20 hill into the siding there at Fagg.

21 Q. And you placed it on the table for them to help make a
22 decision?

23 A. Yeah, right. Um-hum.

24 Q. Okay. Very good.

25 A. Michael --

1 MR. RANSCHAERT: I'm sorry?

2 MR. GAMMONS: He may have -- I don't remember, one of us were
3 telling them, I don't remember if it was me or Michael, but --

4 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay.

5 BY MR. LYNCH:

6 Q. But theoretically, my point was, is once the critical alarm
7 went off at that detector, the next viable point or location for
8 that car to be set out would've been at that track or siding at
9 Fagg, continuing east.

10 A. Um-hum.

11 Q. The only thing, it would have to have a reverse shove to get
12 it into that track.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. So is that track a dead-end track?

15 A. No, it's a siding, but there's some -- there's some cars in
16 that siding --

17 Q. Blocked.

18 A. -- so we couldn't -- we couldn't pull through at all.

19 Q. Okay. You answered it. So you couldn't have pulled down and
20 tied the cars down below that one and pull it through the side and
21 dropped it and then went back to your other cars because there's
22 other cars in that track.

23 A. Well, if we were going to do that, so either way we'd be
24 shoving back up the hill.

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. If we were going to leave that car, we'd have to leave it --

2 Q. Shove it back.

3 A. -- and everything behind --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- to be able to go.

6 MR. LYNCH: Okay, got you now.

7 MR. GAMMONS: Does that make any --

8 MR. LYNCH: Yes, it does.

9 MR. GAMMONS: Okay.

10 MR. LYNCH: Very good.

11 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

12 Q. Toxicology test, were you ever tested by the company for
13 drugs or alcohol?

14 A. Uh-uh.

15 Q. No. So after you announced your derailment, about how many
16 hours of service did you have left?

17 A. Maybe an hour and a half-ish, somewhere in there.

18 Q. Okay. How long before a manager arrived on the scene?

19 A. Oh, there was Mr. Hodge (ph.) or Hodges (ph.), he was -- he's
20 a maintenance fellow, he arrived fairly quickly. I couldn't tell
21 you a time frame, but I felt like it was pretty quick.

22 Q. Okay. What about a road foreman or a trainmaster or
23 superintendent or --

24 A. Don't remember what time trainmaster Poletti was bringing a
25 crew from Radford to relieve us, they got there about between --

1 it was right at 10:00, 10:15, maybe somewhere in there, about the
2 time that we -- our hours of service.

3 Q. Okay. So you had already expired for time by the time
4 somebody showed up?

5 A. We were right at it, I don't know exactly, it was 10:05 or
6 somewhere in there about.

7 MR. LYNCH: But the game plan was the whole -- that the train
8 had not derailed at this point and you made into the siding, you
9 would've set the car out and then they -- you would've been
10 re-crewed there.

11 MR. GAMMONS: Yes. I think we didn't discuss it, but that
12 was -- we were assigned --

13 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

14 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

15 Q. Okay. All right, so no testing was done. Was it even
16 mentioned?

17 A. When we talked to the superintendent, he said we didn't have
18 to worry about taking that.

19 Q. Okay. And when was that?

20 A. I don't remember what time, it was probably midnight-ish,
21 maybe.

22 Q. Midnight, okay.

23 A. Maybe it might've been 11:00. No, I told you wrong, because
24 we put -- let me see what time we put off. So actually put off at
25 12:38 is when we got back in to Roanoke to put off.

1 Q. What time?

2 A. Twelve thirty-eight a.m.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So I guess we talked to him at about 11:30, maybe.

5 MR. LYNCH: Who did you talk to?

6 MR. RANSCHAERT: Superintendent.

7 MR. GAMMONS: The superintendent. Lewis?

8 MR. RANSCHAERT: Miller?

9 MR. GAMMONS: Lewis.

10 MR. LYNCH: Lewis? That's the superintendent in the yard
11 that run up?

12 MR. GAMMONS: Robert Lewis. We talked for about 15 minutes,
13 maybe, so that -- I don't think that makes a difference, but --

14 MR. LYNCH: Is that the first one you was talking to about
15 the derailment, though, Mr. Lewis?

16 MR. GAMMONS: No. Well, we talked with trainmaster Poletti
17 when they got the relief crew there for a few minutes. Um-hum.

18 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

19 Q. Where did you make your statements at?

20 A. On the locomotive.

21 Q. You wrote those on the locomotive?

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. With Mr. Poletti?

24 A. He was not in the cab.

25 Q. Okay. Was there any manager or -- or did you just do it out

1 of your --

2 A. Um-hum.

3 Q. Did somebody instruct you to do that?

4 A. He asked us if we would go ahead and fill it out and then he
5 was -- I guess he was making calls or something.

6 Q. Okay. So he got off the locomotive and -- okay, all right.
7 So that was right, right as you're getting ready to expire?

8 A. Um-hum.

9 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay, all right.

10 BY MR. LYNCH:

11 Q. When you was notified that -- to go ahead and take it on to
12 the siding, on down to the siding to set this car and stuff out,
13 what -- I may have already asked you this, but what was the track
14 speed from the time that you stopped with the detector to -- down
15 to the siding?

16 A. The maximum authorized speed?

17 Q. Um-hum.

18 A. Yes. So part of the area was 30 miles per hour and then you
19 have a little section of 35 and then 40 miles per hour up to the
20 siding switch, which would be 25.

21 Q. Okay. So between 30 to 40 miles an hour, depending on where
22 you're at on that section of track, cleared, that that would be
23 your track speed?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. What speed would you say that you was running on average from

1 the time that you got stopped to the time that you went in
2 emergency?

3 A. So there were some 20 -- I ran 25, a little bit. Top speed
4 was probably in the 40-mile-an-hour section, 33 --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- 34-ish, something. Somewhere in there.

7 Q. So you went anywhere from 35 miles an hour, from 23 to 35
8 miles an hour until you got down to the siding depending on where
9 you were at on the track?

10 A. Um-hum.

11 MR. LYNCH: Okay.

12 BY MR. RANSCHAERT:

13 Q. You probably already answered this and I apologize, after you
14 were given the okay to go and take it to the siding, you had --
15 did you have any concern about running at the speed that you ran
16 the train for that particular car?

17 A. Uh-uh, no. No, I didn't feel that it was anything to be that
18 concerned about, uh-uh.

19 Q. Okay. Was there any discussion between you and the conductor
20 as about what train speed you should run?

21 A. No, just -- I do remember saying that I'm not going to run
22 track speed, you know, so --

23 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay.

24 BY MR. LYNCH:

25 Q. Now seeing this, just seeing the outcome of this, would you

1 change any difference in those decisions from the time you were
2 stopped to the time that you got to the siding or is this a normal
3 -- that was a normal given routine that you would do again?

4 A. I'm not sure how to answer that.

5 MR. RANSCHAERT: Okay.

6 MR. LYNCH: That's fine.

7 MR. RANSCHAERT: That's fine.

8 BY MR. LYNCH:

9 Q. There's no right or wrong, I'm just asking, seeing how this
10 one would've panned out, do you feel that the speed or anything
11 affected the outcome of this derailment?

12 A. I mean, no, I don't think so.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Hindsight's 20/20, as they say, but --

15 Q. Okay. Did you have -- there is nothing that you're -- you
16 were noted of or whatever, if there was a hot box detector that
17 goes off in a gauge and the wheel gets hot and you Tempilstik it
18 and it shows indications of being overheated by the melting of the
19 stick, any guidelines or any regulations that you guys have in
20 your operations bulletin of what you're supposed to do at this
21 point other than just notify?

22 A. After checking it and notifying them, I'd have to go back and
23 reference, but no, I don't --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Nothing I can recall, no.

1 MR. RANSCHAERT: Tim, that's all I have.

2 MR. LYNCH: That's all I have, too.

3 MR. RANSCHAERT: Mr. Gammons, I appreciate your time in
4 speaking with us today about the incident or accident, derailment
5 yesterday. Do you have anything further you might want to add
6 that we didn't ask that sticks out with you that may be valuable
7 for this investigation?

8 MR. GAMMONS: Uh-uh, no, not that I can think of.

9 MR. RANSCHAERT: All right, the time is 5:08 p.m. on Friday,
10 7 July, this concludes our interview with Mr. Gammons, engineer,
11 on Train 814V0404.

12 (Whereupon, at 5:08 p.m., the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT
 IN ELLISTON, VIRGINIA
 ON JULY 6, 2023
 Interview of Joshua D. Gammons

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR013

PLACE: Roanoke, Virginia

DATE: July 7, 2023

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber