

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN *

WALBRIDGE, OHIO * Accident No.: RRD23FR017

ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023 *

* * * * *

Interview of: GEORGE OLIGER III, Carmen
CSX Transportation - Walbridge

CSX Walbridge Yard
Walbridge, Ohio

Monday,
September 18, 2023

APPEARANCES:

RICHARD SKOLNEKOVICH, Operations Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MATT THOMPSON, Investigator-in-Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

BRIAN BENDEL, Track Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

STEVE AMMONS, Senior Director of Train Handling Rules
and Practices
CSX Transportation

ROBERT CRAWFORD, Operating Practices
Federal Railroad Administration

JASON GURZYNSKI, Motor Power and Equipment Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

JASON COX, National Representative
Brotherhood of Railway Carmen

HARLEY BARTIN, Local Chairman
Brotherhood of Railway Carmen

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of George Oliger III:	
By Mr. Skolnekovich	5
By Mr. Ammons	19
By Mr. Crawford	30
By Mr. Gurzynski	32
By Mr. Thompson	38
By Mr. Cox	38
By Mr. Skolnekovich	56
By Mr. Ammons	66
By Mr. Crawford	74
By Mr. Skolnekovich	77

I N T E R V I E W

(9:08 a.m.)

1
2
3 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: All right. Good morning. My name is Rich
4 Skolnekovich, and I am the NTSB operations group chairman of this
5 accident. We're conducting an interview today on 18 September
6 2023 with George Olinger who works for CSX. This interview is in
7 conjunction with the NTSB investigation of the accident that
8 occurred on 17 September 2023 at 3:24 a.m. The NTSB Accident
9 Reference Number is RRD23FR017.

10 The purpose of this investigation is to improve safety, not
11 to assign fault, blame or liability.

12 Before we begin our interview and questions, we'll go around
13 and introduce ourselves. Please spell out your last name and your
14 title. I'll start off and then pass it to my right.

15 Again, my name is Richard Skolnekovich, S-k-o-l-n-e-k-o-v-i-
16 c-h, NTSB operations investigator.

17 MR. BENDEL: Brian Bendel, B-e-n-d-e-l, FRA, track inspector.

18 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, A-m-m-o-n-s, CSX Transportation,
19 senior director of train handling rules and practices.

20 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford, C-r-a-w-f-o-r-d, FRA, OP.

21 MR. GURZYNSKI: Jason Gurzynski. It's G-u-r-z-y-n-s-k-i,
22 FRA, motor power and equipment inspector.

23 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, NTSB, IIC for
24 this accident.

25 MR. COX: Jason Cox, national representative with the

1 Brotherhood of Railway Carmen.

2 MR. BARTIN: Harley Bartin, B-a-r-t-i-n, local chairman, BRC.

3 MR. OLIGER: George Oliger, O-l-i-g-e-r, carmen, CSX
4 Walbridge.

5 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Good morning, George. First and foremost,
6 condolences. We really appreciate you taking the time to come in
7 here especially after the stuff you witnessed.

8 INTERVIEW OF GEORGE OLIGER III

9 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

10 Q. I'd like to start off with just getting a little bit of
11 background of your railroad history. How long have you worked for
12 the railroad and your craft, that kind of stuff.

13 A. Yes, sir. This October, it will be 19 years.

14 Q. Okay. Did you come in as a carman or --

15 A. Yes, I cam in as a carman. I'm still a carman in the yard.

16 Q. Okay. Did you start off in this yard or did you start
17 somewhere else?

18 A. Between here and the Stanley Yard, sir.

19 Q. Stanley Yard?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. Okay. Can you give me kind of an idea of what carmen do on a
22 day-to-day basis?

23 A. Inspect, repair train cars, do minor repairs, find bad orders
24 in cars that need to go out, you know, to make sure nothing bad
25 gets out of the yard. That's pretty much it.

1 Q. Okay. Do you work in shifts?

2 A. Yes, sir, I do.

3 Q. What shift do you currently work now?

4 A. Third shift, sir.

5 Q. Can you give me the hours of that?

6 A. 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

7 Q. And what's your current schedule like now? Like days that
8 you work, days that you're off.

9 A. I work Tuesday through Friday or -- I'm sorry. Tuesday
10 through Saturday. I have Sunday night and Monday night off.

11 Q. Okay. All right. Do you get any overtime or is it just that
12 schedule that you told us?

13 A. I don't get overtime unless I get forced to work another 8
14 hour shift.

15 Q. Okay. Do you get forced ever very often?

16 A. Not too often. It happened this summer maybe about five
17 times, six times.

18 Q. When you do get forced, what type of work are you doing
19 typically?

20 A. Inspecting train cars, about inspections, minor repairs if
21 need be.

22 Q. Can you give me kind of an idea of what some of those
23 inspections and minor repairs are like, just generally?

24 A. We inspect brake systems to make sure the brake systems work,
25 check safety appliances just to make the train safe for not only

1 us, for the people in the industry and the switchmen in the yard,
2 make sure there's no brake rigging dragging, again make sure the
3 air brake system works before it leaves the yard.

4 Q. Okay. Now, how many carmen would you estimate work per shift
5 during your shift?

6 A. Between six and seven, depending on the day.

7 Q. Okay. Are you guys specialized in anything or do you just
8 all generally do the same type of work?

9 A. We all do the same type of work, sir. We have one guy that's
10 a lead guide. He signs all the work out to everybody, takes the
11 calls from the yardmaster.

12 Q. Okay. Now, how many of them were working the shift the night
13 of the incident if you --

14 A. I believe there's five inspectors and one lead carman.

15 Q. Okay. Is that pretty typical for a typical night?

16 A. Usually we like to have six people because of the flow of
17 traffic because sometimes it's busier than others and sometimes
18 it's slower on other days. So they -- we like to have at least
19 six inspectors and a leadman.

20 Q. Okay. Now, typically like on -- like on a typical night, you
21 know, you've done a lot of inspections. How much, you know, how
22 many hours throughout the night do you think you're actually out
23 on equipment inspecting equipment just generally?

24 A. Six and a half, seven. Well, 6 1/2 hours, 7 hours possibly.

25 Q. All right. And is it --

1 A. Some days it's different. Some days they're different.
2 We've got to wait for trains to be built. It depends on what the
3 switch crews up there's -- if a switch crew's called off or if
4 they have a switch crew at the north end or the south end, things
5 might be slower, but --

6 Q. Okay. Now, do you work at various different locations in the
7 yard like both ends, north and south?

8 A. Yes, sir. We work arrival yard, the receiving yard and the
9 eastbound yard. And no, no carmen is assigned to either of the
10 yards. We just go wherever the, wherever the work takes us.

11 Q. Okay. Now, how are you notified about the work as it comes
12 in?

13 A. The leadman lets us know what's going on.

14 Q. Does he do it by radio or telephone?

15 A. Usually we're in the office. We're -- when we get done with
16 our track, and we go in and he has like an interslip (ph.) on the
17 desk or we call it a little dinger (ph.), like a little paper,
18 like inspection slip, inbound inspection that we have to bleed and
19 inspect. So.

20 Q. Okay. So he has an inbound/outbound list, and then --

21 A. Yes, sir. It's a MTI. They call it the carman's worksheet I
22 believe.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. It has like the times and like what train, the departure
25 time, what time the train was spotted, stuff like that.

1 Q. Okay. Now, is this paper document or do you have like an
2 electronic device that displays this stuff?

3 A. The paper is -- when the trains are turned over to the yard
4 or to the lead carman, that isn't -- I don't think that's
5 documented because it's wrote down on a piece of paper. Sometimes
6 the yardmasters will create the inspection in the MTI device that
7 we use, and sometimes they don't. So -- but 9 1/2 times out of
8 10, we get our work from the leadman directly.

9 Q. Okay. And you go back to that -- what did you call it, a
10 crew room or --

11 A. The shanty, the crew room.

12 Q. Shanty?

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. Okay. So you go back there to get all your work?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay. Can you talk to me a little bit about the MTI? Like
17 what does it display?

18 A. We basically put our times in when the track was spotted.
19 Usually like say if the train -- if the yardmaster puts it in the
20 device, he creates an inspection in the device. The time, the
21 spot time is in there but if not, we will put the spot time in,
22 the time we started the train, the time we ended the train, if we
23 have to do repairs, if we have any placards missing, we have to
24 replace a placard, stuff like that. If we look have to look up a
25 placard, there is a -- I'm drawing a blink right now, where we can

1 look up the placards --

2 Q. For the hazmat?

3 A. Yeah, hazmat, yes, sir. If there is a hazmat app or we fill
4 it out hazmat, to where we can look up hazmat information, and we
5 can also look that up in the inspection, like if there's a certain
6 car, you click on that and I think it tells us -- I'm pretty sure
7 it tells us, like a picture of the placard and what's in it, if
8 it's a dangerous load or dangerous empty.

9 Q. Okay. Now, so the lead carman, is everything -- going back
10 to the shanty or the MTI device, do you talk on the radio or cell
11 phones at all?

12 A. We talk on the cell phones every once in a while, and not too
13 often but the radios are once in a while, not too often. Most of
14 the communication with the leadman is in the shanty.

15 Q. Okay. So it's face-to-face in shanty?

16 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Because that's the best job briefing because, you know,
19 there's a lot of traffic going on in the yard. Even when we ask
20 for permissions, live tracks up or whatever, we have to wait for
21 movement to finish or to continue to -- so it's better to get the
22 information from the leadman.

23 Q. Okay. So let me ask you this. So the day of the accident,
24 when you report in, do you report to the shanty or do you report
25 to crew room?

1 A. To the shanty. The crew room and the shanty is pretty much
2 the same.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Just a different -- I guess the crew room is like the
5 technical term or we just call it the shanty.

6 Q. Okay. All right. And then the lead carman gives a job
7 brief?

8 A. Yes, sir. Yep.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And during the job brief, we talk to each other saying, you
11 know, we're going to lock up this end first. We're going to lock
12 up this end. The leadman, if it needs an ETD, end of train
13 device, if it does not an end of train device, just that pertinent
14 information that we need.

15 Q. Okay. The day of the actual accident, so you signed up and
16 you had a job brief and then what was there? Follow-on job briefs
17 just as you get additional work?

18 A. Yes, sir. Yep. Every time. Yep. We job brief several
19 times throughout the night.

20 Q. Okay. So the initial job brief, just a little bit more
21 detail. Do you -- besides like some of the work you're going to
22 do, was there any safety bulletins talked about or any, you know,
23 any changes in rules or anything like that?

24 A. At the beginning of the shift, yes. The general car foreman
25 comes down, lets us know updates about all of the like safety

1 concerns that we have in the yard, that we bring up to him. He
2 passes on information like follow ups of what's getting done,
3 what's not getting done, updates on the trucks, you know, the
4 condition of the trucks and the trucks in the shop, he'll tell us
5 what the condition of a truck is and when it's going to get back,
6 lets us know what the weather is, you know, hey, it's going to be
7 raining tonight, you know, stuff like that.

8 Q. Okay. All right. So --

9 A. Let me take a drink. I'm sorry.

10 Q. No, by all means. So can you recall any specifics from the
11 initial job brief the night of the accident? Can you recall
12 anything specific or is it just what you just said?

13 A. We talked about some -- I know I brought up about some close
14 clearances in the yard that we were concerned about, and they were
15 going to pass that up. We talked about some scrap metal that was
16 in the yard that -- because walking conditions aren't that good,
17 and we talked about getting some scrap metal cleaned up in between
18 a couple of the tracks and a lot of the weeds that are in the
19 walking conditions and stuff. That's usually what we talk about,
20 like safety concerns that we have. And our foreman will send up
21 an email to -- I don't know if he sends it to his boss or if he
22 sends it right to the track department or maintenance, to try to
23 get these concerns taken care of for us.

24 Q. Okay. So that's what they discussed that night?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. And we also talked about that night about bringing our safety
3 committee back because we haven't had a safety committee. We used
4 to have a safety committee. I was on it for probably about 8 or 9
5 years, where we would meet once a month, and then we would usually
6 have one guy go to the -- to an over meeting and bring back
7 information along with (indiscernible), and I know back in the day
8 like 15 years ago, I went to a couple of the divisional overnight
9 meetings in Chicago. So I'm very concerned about safety. I have
10 been on the safety committee. I'm very conscious about safety.
11 So I've been on the safety committee on and off for a few years
12 now. And we haven't had one, you know, in a few years. So that's
13 why we're trying to bring that back, and we just discussed that
14 that night about bringing the safety committee back.

15 Q. Was there anything that was about that or a specific event or
16 was it just the conditions you were just talking about?

17 A. Just conditions because we, you know, we talked about wanting
18 to get -- start getting some of the safety concerns documented on
19 minutes because it seems like they'll email like the track
20 department or the maintenance-of-way or whoever fixes it, and it
21 seems like emails might get lost. And I suggested, I said, hey,
22 we need to get a safety team back because we have minutes that are
23 documented, that are posted, and if we have -- we can actually see
24 updates on those safety minutes. If someone were to get hurt or
25 if someone were to, you know, anything happened or whatever, we

1 could actually fall back and say, look, we documented this on this
2 date, this date and this date, to get this taken care of and it
3 wasn't taken care of. So that's why we like to document -- we
4 wanted everything documented.

5 Q. Now the --

6 A. Like I said, our safety team, our safety -- not to cut you
7 off, I'm sorry, sir.

8 Q. You're good.

9 A. I apologize. Because our safety briefings aren't -- at the
10 beginning of the shift are not documented. So that's why -- like
11 I said, when we have our safety meetings, everything is documented
12 and there's, you know, documents that we can fall back on.

13 Q. The question I have for you, you said the safety minute or
14 the safety -- do you get them on a MTI or do you get that through
15 the company webpage?

16 A. No, sir. In the safety meetings in the past, we had one guy
17 that would make notes of everything that was taken care of, you
18 know, kind of like said with union meetings, we would get like
19 what is going ton, ongoing business, things that we've taken care
20 of, things that we want to get taken care of, updates on certain
21 projects that are going on in the yard. So everything like that
22 is documented. I wish I would have known. We could have probably
23 pulled one up from the past, from the years past and brought and
24 shown but, yeah, we do have safety, you know, like I said, the
25 safety briefings are documented in the minutes.

1 Q. Okay. Now, let me ask you this. With the -- how much, how
2 much interaction do you have with the yardmaster when you're out
3 working?

4 A. Quite a bit actually.

5 Q. Can you kind of elaborate on that?

6 A. Yeah, like the other night, we had a train that was not
7 spotted to the air (ph.), and I called the yardmaster on the phone
8 and said, hey, look, this train isn't spotted to the air. Can you
9 pull it up? You know, have the crew pull it up and bring it up to
10 the yard, and he did. He had the crew come out and a two brand
11 new guys, too. One guy was here less than a year. One guy was
12 like two weeks. They came on the remote job, and they, they -- in
13 fact, they had an issue pulling it up because they had -- neither
14 one of them kind of knew how to put the air to the train from the
15 remote. So they pulled it up and the yardmaster called me and
16 said, hey, we have everything spotted to the air. And that's
17 pretty much it.

18 Q. Okay. Are you, are you all briefed very much on, you know,
19 what yard crews are working where and when in the yard by the
20 yardmaster?

21 A. As far as our crews or --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- the switch crews?

24 Q. Your crews.

25 A. No, we know that from the leadman. We, you know, we -- he

1 goes around by seniority and asks, you know, like who wants what
2 train to work and then we look at the MTI sheet and we know, we
3 know who's where from the MTI sheet or the sheet that the
4 workmen's -- the carman's worksheet that I mentioned earlier --

5 Q. Yep.

6 A. -- with all the work that's on it. We can go back and refer
7 to that to see who's where or --

8 Q. Okay. What about with the remote crews? Do you know where
9 the remote crews -- like when you're out conducting your work out
10 in the yard, do you know where the various different remote crews
11 are at?

12 A. Yes, sir. Like we'll ask the 397 and the 395, they work
13 eastbound. The 395 is on the eastbound west end. 397 is on the
14 eastbound east end. And we have to ask permission, you know, get
15 into their zone.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But the other crews, we don't have to because there's no
18 remote control. There's no remote control zone. So we don't have
19 to ask permission in the receiving yard or arrival yard.

20 Q. Okay. Do you -- are you pretty familiar with what remote
21 zones can establish?

22 A. Yeah, yes. Yes, sir. Yep.

23 Q. All right. Can you give me kind of just a general
24 description of where the remote control zones are at?

25 A. Well, the remote control zone in the eastbound yard I believe

1 is just past the road crossing at the east end, and if I memory --
2 again, I've gone through lots of -- if I remember, it's -- the
3 remote control zone for the west end is just beyond the road
4 crossing at the west end of the eastbound yard, just north of the
5 -- north of the carman's shanty.

6 Q. Okay. Now, you guys carry handheld radios --

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. -- when you're out working.

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. What channel are you on?

11 A. We used to be on 786 but we just recently asked, you know,
12 got permission of the crews, we got it on channel 20, the road
13 crew. It used to be 25, but for some reason, they did away with
14 channel 25, and we go right to the road channel to ask permission,
15 talk to the crews. But, the channels are different. I believe --
16 I can't -- again, I have it on my radio where I just turn the
17 button, like if I've got to talk to 393 and the 394 crew, like in
18 the arrival yard, we have a different channel that we have to go
19 to because it's a different, it's a different channel. They don't
20 -- all the switch crews don't talk on the same channel.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Just because all of the movement, and I think when the road
23 crew's coming in, it would just be -- there's too much traffic on
24 the radio if everyone was on the same channel.

25 Q. So do you know offhand how many different channels remote

1 crews use?

2 A. I'd be speculating. I know of two. I know channel 20, but
3 I'm --

4 Q. No, that's fine.

5 A. I can't remember. Yeah. That I know of, I know there's two.

6 Q. Okay. Do you, do you ever listen then to see where the crews
7 are at any given point in time or --

8 A. Yes, on occasion sometimes we'll turn our radio on the -- I
9 can't -- where -- well, scan, you know what I'm saying, so it'll
10 scan through the different channels.

11 Q. Yep.

12 A. So we'll know if we're in the eastbound yard, we'll hear the
13 eastbound channel. If we're in the arrival yard, we'll hear the
14 arrival yard channel. So we'll have it on scan and that way we
15 kind of know what's going on.

16 Q. Okay. So you just kind of scan whole yard and just mentally
17 keep in track of where the crews are?

18 A. Not all the time, most of the time but, yeah, there are times
19 that we put it on scan.

20 Q. All right. Now, if your lead carman was to try to call you
21 on the radio, would he be about to? Would you be able to pick it
22 up on the scanner or not?

23 A. That's on -- yeah, that's 786. So when we ask permission, we
24 go to channel 20, but if we get -- for the leadman to call us, we
25 go on I think it's 786 is the carman channel.

1 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. That's all the questions I have for
2 right now. Just -- Brian, you got questions?

3 MR. BENDEL: I have no questions.

4 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay.

5 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, CSX.

6 BY MR. AMMONS:

7 Q. George, thank you for being here. I'm sorry that you have to
8 be here, but I appreciate it. We're going to learn a lot from
9 this and hopefully we'll be able to prevent it again from your
10 help.

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. So thank you. I've got several questions here. I just want
13 to kind of take my time and go through this. Can you talk a
14 little bit about -- I know you discussed earlier Richard there,
15 you know, what you guys typically inspect for. Can you talk about
16 what a typical defect is that you guys find on a regular, you
17 know, just every night kind of --

18 A. Safety defects, like a handheld being smashed in or an
19 operating lever being bent or missing. We get some issues where
20 there's a -- I'm drawing a blank, where they -- when they switch
21 in, they cross -- I didn't sleep last night. So please bear with
22 me.

23 Q. That's fine. Cross draw bars?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Bypass.

1 A. Bypass.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. Thank you. We find bypass. You know, in Stanley Yard we
4 used to find -- give to give a little bit of background, at
5 Stanley Yard, we used to find a bunch of damage like that because
6 the hump but now we don't find a lot of like -- we find crossings,
7 like knuckles broke or knuckle pins missing, brake shoes missing,
8 ladder treads bent in, broke, crossover bars that might be -- we
9 found that were upside down when they -- whoever repaired the
10 train, they put the -- because there's treads on one side, and
11 it's flat on the one side. Maybe they did a quick repair out on
12 the road somewhere and they put the crossover bar on upside down.
13 Mostly safety appliances, brakes that don't set up on the train.
14 So we've got to throw them out. Cotter pins missing, broken.
15 There's so many. I could go on and on and on. There's several,
16 several parts of the inspection that we have to -- several parts
17 of the train that we inspect.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. What about safety training? Have you received any safety
21 training this year?

22 A. Yes, sir, I have.

23 Q. Can you just discuss a little bit about what that is, what
24 type of training you received and maybe when you received it.
25 Just -- you don't have to be specific to the day, but --

1 A. Well, I was on medical leave from August to January, and I
2 came back, and I did 3 days of safety training before I came back.
3 We did blue flag, power brake training, hazmat training. I can't
4 think of every single one right now, but that's -- in a nutshell,
5 that's, you know, I had 3 days of training before I come back to
6 work. And they, you know, they -- if you need more time, you
7 know, take -- Harley said, hey, if you need more time, let me know
8 because he's our trainer. Let me make that -- Harley Bartin is
9 our trainer. And if I -- he mentioned if I need more training,
10 you know, to let him know, that the bosses won't have no problem,
11 you know, giving me additional training if I needed it.

12 Q. So you felt comfortable as far as if you need more time --

13 A. Absolutely.

14 Q. -- you could ask for it?

15 A. I've been here 20 years, and a lot of the stuff is -- there's
16 some new content in the safety training but, you know, I've been
17 here like I said almost 20 -- well, almost 19 years. So a lot of
18 the stuff is, you know, the same, but when they do add stuff to it
19 but, yeah, I've had three days of training before I came back to
20 work, and we have quarterly training. In fact, they have
21 quarterly training a sign up now for quarterly training. I'm not
22 sure what it is because I already have it done, but there is -- I
23 think it's power brake training. They have that up, posted now
24 for people to sign up for training for that.

25 Q. Do you feel the safety training that you receive annually is

1 adequate for the job that you --

2 A. Absolutely, yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yep. In fact, they added
3 what we have to do like a walkthrough, like a virtual type
4 inspection on a computer. We've got to look at all -- the thing,
5 and if we miss something, we've got to go back and we've got to
6 find what we missed.

7 Q. Yeah, I'm familiar with that, that new simulator they have
8 for that.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. That's pretty --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. That's pretty cool.

13 A. And, you know, one year they did a thing where they actually
14 had three or four cars in the yard. It was a few years ago, at
15 Stanley, they had like four, maybe four or five cars set up in the
16 yard, and at that time, the foreman would walk with us and, you
17 know, we had to show how to do a proper class 1. He did that with
18 us, and I think that was after somebody -- something happened. I
19 don't know exactly what happened but we had -- we did that one
20 time, but with this virtual thing, it's pretty much the same
21 thing, but it's computerized.

22 Q. Any safety training or briefings that are specific to kind of
23 the awareness, you know, of your surroundings and moving
24 equipment?

25 A. I mean that's, that's brought up to us in the meeting. I

1 mean -- in the safety meetings that, you know, hey, you know, be
2 aware. Our leadman tells us that in the safety briefings. I
3 don't really recall offhand because it was back in January I did
4 my training. The (indiscernible), I just -- I don't remember at
5 this time if there's anything about awareness of -- I know, you
6 know, they do tell us that we've got to look both ways before we
7 cross the track. They tell us that we have to, you know, make
8 sure we're in good communications, good job safe briefings. As
9 conditions change, we have to change our job briefing, stuff like
10 that. I know that is definitely in our training where we, you
11 know, about safe job procedures, safe, you know, job briefings.

12 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any operational testing that's ever
13 been performed on you by a manager of CSX?

14 A. Yes, sir. I was just -- in fact, last week, general car
15 foreman, Brandon Eck, E-c-k, he let me know that me and Fred both
16 passed our blue flag O (ph.) test. He did the O test and said
17 that we passed our O test on blue flag. So. And they walk around
18 on occasion and check our -- make sure we're zip-tying or marking
19 the couplers with the yellow chalk and stuff like that. So they
20 do come out and --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. In fact, if I can add something, and I don't really think
23 this is off subject but as far as O testing and operations
24 testing, I do know that they, you know, they do with drones now.
25 They don't do it on third shift but to me, I think that is more of

1 a distraction than anything because if we in the middle of the
2 track and we hear something above us, you know, we're looking up
3 wondering what the hell's going on, and I really think that that's
4 more of a distraction than anything.

5 Q. Okay. Was Fred your regular partner? Did you work with him
6 on a regular basis or did you kind of swap?

7 A. Three days week, sir, I would work with him because our off
8 days -- we used to have the same days off, and we used to work
9 together 5 days a week. And, I got bumped to Sunday, Monday. He
10 had Thursday, Friday. So him and I would work together on
11 Saturday night, Tuesday and Wednesday night.

12 Q. So in the past, you worked with him up to 5 days a week?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay. So you were quite familiar working with Fred?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. We had a really good, really good work relationship inside
18 work and outside of work.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. We were friends outside of work, and that's why this is
21 making it so hard on me.

22 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Do you need to take a pause? You want to
23 take a break?

24 MR. OLIGER: Yes, please.

25 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: The time is 9:41, and we'll take a quick

1 pause.

2 (Off the record at 9:41 a.m.)

3 (On the record.)

4 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. The time is now 9:42 (ph.), and
5 we're resuming the interview with George Oliger.

6 BY MR. AMMONS:

7 Q. George, you mentioned earlier to Richard I believe when he
8 was asking you about radios and the channels and things like
9 that.

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. So did both you and whoever your were working with, whether
12 it be Fred or someone else, did both of you guys carry radios on
13 your person?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Outside the truck?

16 A. Yeah, yeah.

17 Q. Is there also a radio inside the truck?

18 A. Yeah, but the radios inside the trucks don't work, and that's
19 another issue that we talked about, about a month on the -- in the
20 safety meetings, that our radios have been very, very horrible as
21 far as reception. In fact, at night when I call the 397 to ask
22 for permission, the night of the incident, I couldn't hear the
23 crew talking back to us. I called the yardmaster and said, can
24 you let me know what's going on? Can I have the permission from
25 the 397? He talked to the 397, and he can hear them. He said,

1 yes, 397 gave you permission to get into the yard or get into the
2 track, and then, and then eventually the 397 and I think the road
3 crew coming in, because there's a train coming in and a Jeep (ph.)
4 lead coming into (indiscernible) I believe. He even said, yes, he
5 said that you have permission to go into the yard. But I did hear
6 after all -- after the fact, because the 397 was down -- we were
7 at the east end of the yard, and he was down by 795 coming --
8 heading south. So I know around 795 bridge, there's a lot of
9 static, but our radios definitely need to be updated. I brought
10 that up in a meeting about 2 months ago about fixing the radios in
11 the trucks. And, you know, every year back when we first got
12 these Kenwood radios, they used to update on them every year. We
13 would go to the radio shop, and we'd have to get our radios
14 updated. We haven't had an update in our radios in probably 10
15 years. So the radio communications and the radios are in pretty
16 bad shape, where I think that's something that we can improve
17 upon.

18 Q. So when you called -- initially called the 397, was it you or
19 Fred that called them?

20 A. Myself.

21 Q. Yourself. So did you try to call from your handheld or --

22 A. I was on the handheld inside the truck.

23 Q. Inside the truck.

24 A. Because the truck -- the radio in the truck does not work.

25 Q. It just doesn't work at all.

1 A. No, it doesn't. The wires were pulled out and --

2 Q. Okay. And so you were requesting -- can you tell us about
3 that? What type of permission you were requesting from the 397?

4 A. Permission -- I believe I said, key 397, the car department
5 looking to lock up on eastbound 3 and eastbound 5. That's, that's
6 how we do it and he didn't respond. I said it again. I might
7 have said it two or three times possibly. Eventually I asked the
8 yardmaster, I said, car department to Walbridge, can you relay
9 message to 397, and let us know what's going on, and he said, yes.
10 And then like I said, eventually the 397 came on and said, yes,
11 you do have permission, you know, to enter the zone.

12 Q. Okay. So you're requesting permission to enter the zone to
13 lock up two different tracks --

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. -- 3 and 5?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. And the 397 doesn't respond or can't hear you or they respond
18 but you can't hear them?

19 A. I'm not sure if they didn't hear us. I don't know what the
20 breakup in the communication was, but I didn't hear him. I don't
21 know if he didn't hear me.

22 Q. You didn't hear him.

23 A. But the trainmaster heard me or the yardmaster heard me and
24 the incoming crew heard me.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Because the crew was here, you know, he was coming in, in
2 Jeep lead and so he heard me, but I don't know if the 397 heard me
3 or not. I don't know. But eventually like I said, he did, say,
4 yeah, you're okay 3 and 5.

5 Q. That's what the yardmaster relayed to you?

6 A. That's -- I heard that from the yardmaster and from the crew.
7 I eventually heard him. After the yardmaster -- well, I think
8 once he got away from 795 bridge, that's when he responded to,
9 yes, car department, you have permission to get into 3 and 5.

10 Q. So you did actually hear the 397 --

11 A. Yes, sir. I did actually hear the 397 --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- eventually. I mean it took a few minutes but, yes, it did
14 take us a few minutes.

15 Q. So when he gives you permission for 3 and 5, what does that
16 mean in your world as far as what you're able to do now inside
17 that remote zone?

18 A. We are able to go and lock up the track.

19 Q. 3 track and 5 track.

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. Okay. All right. Just prior to the accident, had you guys
22 had a lunch break yet?

23 A. Yes, we did. Yes.

24 Q. About how long was that lunch break?

25 A. Half hour, maybe --

1 Q. Is that typical --

2 A. -- 20 minutes. It's about 20 minutes to a half an hour
3 depending on -- it could be up to an hour, not the lunch break per
4 se, but we go and eat our lunch, and we might not get a train for
5 20 minutes to a half an hour after we eat our lunch. So I don't
6 remember how long we were in the shanty that day after our lunch,
7 but I didn't eat because I have hypoglycemia and I've been trying
8 to fast certain times, you know, certain times of the day. So I
9 watch what I eat. I think I might have had a handful of peanuts
10 but our lunch break was probably about 20 minutes, 25 minutes.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And it could have lasted longer. I don't know, like I said,
13 because we were waiting to get our next move. We had to wait for
14 the lead carman to give us our next move.

15 Q. All right. Thank you, George. That's all I've got for now.

16 A. Yes, sir. And I would actually like to add something to
17 that. It is very important that we have the leadman in the
18 position that we have him in, that's at the desk, because at one
19 time they were trying to get the leadman to go out and work this
20 train and work this train but, you know, that's just -- to me,
21 that's -- that is very important for him because if I were in
22 there to take a call and I wrote something down, and the leadman
23 didn't know what was going on, you know, then he can't pass that
24 message on to someone else that isn't in the shanty. It's very
25 important that we have that leadman just for our communication and

1 so that is very --

2 Q. So Saturday night, Sunday morning, during the shift, was the
3 leadman --

4 A. Yes, sir, the leadman was.

5 Q. -- where he needed to be?

6 A. Yes, sir. Yes, absolutely. He was in the shanty where he
7 should have been.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yep.

10 Q. All right. Thank you.

11 A. Yep.

12 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford.

13 BY MR. CRAWFORD:

14 Q. Continuing with the question on the remote control zone, is
15 all -- any of the other carmen, do they request the same
16 permission --

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. -- into those remote control zones?

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. I was curious if they --

21 A. We have to. It's -- I mean it's like the law. We have to
22 ask permission to get in the remote control zone. We cannot, you
23 know, there's sometimes that we wait 20 minutes because a lot of
24 times the 390 -- well, there's times when like -- because the 397
25 doesn't go on duty until midnight.

1 Q. Oh, okay.

2 A. And then the 297 are in the shanty with the briefing, job
3 briefing. So there are times that I went into the shanty over
4 there at the eastbound, eastbound east end shanty, and said, hey,
5 we need to lock up eastbound 4 or eastbound 5, can we have
6 permission, and they'll say, yeah, go ahead and do it.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. So, yeah, we have to. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it.
9 We have to ask permission.

10 Q. So that -- like, for example, a new carman coming in, is that
11 something that they're trained for --

12 A. Yes, sir. Yes, absolutely. Yes.

13 Q. -- for that remote control zone?

14 A. Yes, sir. Yep.

15 Q. Okay. Earlier too, I heard that -- of course, you had radio
16 communications with either the yardmaster or other crews. Are
17 there instances where you all use cell phones also or --

18 A. Very rarely. I mean we do on occasion but it's -- if the
19 radios aren't working, we might have -- if we're in the truck, we
20 might have to call the trainmaster or the yardmaster or the lead
21 carman and say, hey, you know, this train isn't spotted to the
22 air, you know, we need to pull it up to the air. So -- but we've
23 got to make sure we're in the vehicle and we're not, you know,
24 close to the tracks.

25 Q. Right. And also, are those cell phones your all's personal

1 phones or are they the company phones?

2 A. Personal. We have, we have company cell phones that I wish
3 -- they're not -- they're cell phones but they're turned into MTI
4 devices. We can't make calls out of them, and it's an actual cell
5 phone but it's -- the cell phone part and the texting part and
6 everything is out of that. It's like blocked. We cannot use that
7 for anything.

8 Q. Oh, okay.

9 A. Yeah. And I think if we had -- because of the radio
10 communications, if we have that MTI device to where we could --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. -- use it as a means of communication if our radio is
13 failing, because the radios aren't that good, that would be, that
14 would be okay if we could be able to use that.

15 MR. CRAWFORD: I have no other questions.

16 MR. GURZYNSKI: Jason Gurzynski.

17 BY MR. GURZYNSKI:

18 Q. Good morning, George.

19 A. Good morning.

20 Q. Sorry you had to be here under these circumstances. Just a
21 follow-up question regarding the communication when the work is
22 assigned. So the yardmaster, if I understand it correctly, and
23 you can explain it a little more thoroughly, the yardmaster will
24 contact the leadman on duty --

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. -- and will assign the work --

2 A. Yep.

3 Q. -- whether it's an inbound inspection or an outbound airbrake
4 test?

5 A. That's correct.

6 Q. And then if you can just make it a little more clear what
7 happens after that.

8 A. Okay. The yardmaster, and I think I touched on it a little
9 bit in the beginning, but the yardmaster will call the leadman.
10 He gets a turnover. He'll ask him what trains are you building
11 right now? What trains are you going to build? What do we have
12 coming in on the inbound? Once that's established, the lead
13 carman comes out and says, okay, we got this train, this train and
14 this train. This train is -- the crew's here. We got to, you
15 know, we got to get this train done first because the crew's here.
16 You know, who wants this train. He goes by seniority. And then
17 the senior guy will pick what train he wants to work, and then it
18 goes down the line. The least senior person gets, you know, the
19 last pick of the trains, but -- so he makes out the air slips for
20 us. He just puts in -- he doesn't put -- he puts like the ID
21 numbers, the class 1, the train symbol. On the top left corner,
22 he'll put what track it is, like eastbound 4 or eastbound 17. So
23 he assigns the work out to us. He's kind of like a foreman but
24 he's not. He assigns all the work out to us because there are
25 occasions where -- because we've gotten so busy and we have -- we

1 run shorthanded with the leadman would have to go out and work a
2 train, do an outbound train, do an inbound inspection. So in the
3 instance, that communication between -- well, I guess -- okay.
4 The company did provide the lead carman with cell phone. It's a
5 company applied cell phone I guess. I don't -- I never seen it.
6 I was told that that's -- so if they're out doing something, they
7 can call them on the phone but again, if these guys are walking
8 the track, you know, walking the track or doing an inspection, and
9 the lead -- and the yardmaster wants to communicate with the
10 leadman, he can't answer that phone while he's walking the track.
11 So -- and sometimes they'll call on the radio but, you know, most
12 of the time -- that's why earlier I said it's pertinent that we
13 have the leadman in the office to be able to convey, you know, job
14 briefings. You know, there's times when a train -- it happened
15 the other night. We were given eastbound 6 as the CN. We went
16 out to lock up the CN. Got permission from the crew, and we
17 noticed that the train was four cars away from the switch -- the
18 ground line. We went back into the office, told the leadman, this
19 train isn't spotted to the air. Well, the yardmaster gave me the
20 wrong information. Your train is in eastbound 7. It's not in
21 eastbound 6. So we had to go back out, unlock eastbound 6, ask
22 permission to lock up eastbound 7. So if that leadman wasn't in
23 there, we would have to get on our personal phone and call the
24 yardmaster or the radio and a lot of times they won't answer
25 because these yardmasters are sometimes overwhelmed, you know.

1 They're running this yard. They're running the docks. So, you
2 know, on a busy night, sometimes they're overwhelmed, and they,
3 you know, they get wrong information like the CN was in the
4 eastbound 6 and not eastbound 7. I'm not blaming the yardmaster.
5 I'm blaming the fact that sometimes they are overwhelmed. You
6 know, we used to have three yardmasters. We used to have one at
7 Stanley, I believe one at eastbound. We used to have a Walbridge
8 yardmaster, and we had a yardmaster of the docks. Now, we're got
9 a yardmaster here that controls everything here, not that there's
10 a lot of movement at Stanley, but we do work trains in Stanley
11 every once in a while. So the yardmaster here has to control the
12 yard here, has the control the yard at Stanley and control the
13 yard at the docks. So that leadman being in there is very
14 pertinent to convey information to us.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. And to get the proper information.

17 Q. So when you receive, I think you called it a dinger or an air
18 slip --

19 A. Right.

20 Q. -- to do work for the night, it's not automatically perceived
21 that the track is ready to work because you still have to contact
22 the remote zone?

23 A. Okay.

24 Q. Are there times -- I guess was that the instance the night of
25 the accident? Was the work ready?

1 A. Yes, the work was ready, but there have been several, several
2 occasions where the yardmaster would give us a train -- give us a
3 track. Hey, eastbound 8 is yours.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. We go, we ask permission from the 395, lock up the north end.
6 We go to the south end, hey, 395, can we get permission to lock
7 this track or 397, I'm sorry, go to the east end, as the 397 for
8 permission, and they say, you can't have that track. We've got,
9 we've got four more cars to put in that track. So we've got to
10 wait 15, 20 minutes, maybe a half hour for them to continue to put
11 more cars in that track before we can lock it up. And then once
12 they're done with them cars, then they'll go back on the radio and
13 say, 397 to car department. We'll say car department, go ahead.
14 They'll say, okay. The cars I had to put in, in eastbound 8 are
15 in there. The track is all yours. You have permission to lock it
16 up. There are several occasions where like I said, the yardmaster
17 will give us a train, give us a track, and say it's ours to work,
18 and we go out there, and the switch crew at the west end or the
19 east end, it's mostly the east end. Usually the west end doesn't
20 give us any issues, but when we go to the south end and 397,
21 they'll say, hey, I can't. I've got four more cars on that list
22 that I've to put in that track. So you've got to wait.

23 Q. I understand. So your communicating with both ends.

24 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

25 Q. The north and the -- or the east and the west.

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. And south. Two different crews.

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. That could potentially --

5 A. 395 and the 397, yeah.

6 Q. And that night, was the south end the first (indiscernible)?

7 A. No, we actually locked up the north end, the west end first,
8 because there was an inbound train because they're very notorious
9 for putting trains -- I don't know if you guys are familiar with
10 the yard, but on the scale track, MO2, and when they do that, it
11 blocks all of the switches going down the north end of the
12 eastbound yard. So we literally have to walk in 300 yards
13 sometimes to get to the switch to lock up the switch at the north
14 end because the other night, we did, we did a mechanical
15 inspection, and inbound mechanical inspection. There was 115 cars
16 in the scale track, and we left that track locked up so they would
17 have access -- so the crews would have access to get across that
18 track, and so we would have access to get to our switches.
19 Otherwise, we would have to walk in 300 yards from either 19 road
20 or the one end of the west end of the yard to walk all the way in
21 to lock a track up.

22 Q. All right. So, I think I'm, I think I'm good. Okay. Thank
23 you, George.

24 A. Yep.

25 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, NTSB.

1 BY MR. THOMPSON:

2 Q. I really don't have much. Everybody asked my questions. But
3 I may have missed it, but how often do you do that safety training
4 with the blue flag, power brake and --

5 A. I know we do the blue flag, again I'm drawing a blank right
6 here. I'm pretty sure the blue flag is once a year, and I think
7 the power brake is once a year, maybe twice a year. I can't
8 remember offhand.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I don't -- honestly I don't remember offhand what -- how
11 often it is, but --

12 Q. Okay. That's all I have right now.

13 MR. COX: Jason Cox with the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen.

14 BY MR. COX:

15 Q. I've got a few questions. The night you were working, did
16 the power, the locomotives, go by you at any particular point that
17 you recall?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. Okay. Did you make any notation of their position or their
20 speed?

21 A. Yes, my notation is on my brain, like mentally or --

22 Q. Yeah, what --

23 A. I didn't make anything on paper or on the MTI because it
24 didn't get to that point to where --

25 Q. I mean what do you recall?

1 A. Okay. Mentally. Okay. What I recall is when we were
2 locking up the track, our truck was pointing in the north
3 direction, okay. We were parked between the 5 switch and the 6
4 switch. We saw the 397 crew down, I don't know how far down, but
5 as he come up, Mr. Anderson, the deceased, walked -- was going to
6 put the -- because this is what we usually do. He'll go put the
7 lock on. I got put the flag on. I put the blue light on, and I
8 -- because again, I'm very safety conscious and so is Fred. We're
9 very passionate about safety. Once I put my blue flag up and my
10 blue light up, I looked back at the lineup to make sure that he
11 has, he has the track lined away from us because, you know, we all
12 got stuff going on in our minds and all the time, you know, we've
13 got stuff happening at home and there might be sometimes when
14 people -- I've never done it, but there might be times when
15 someone might line a switch the wrong way. So for that reason, I
16 -- we always make sure we check each other, and that's why it's
17 important to have a two man crew, and we do have one man crews a
18 lot, and I don't think that's safe, but if we have a two man crew,
19 we can, we can check each other. You know, I might go put the
20 blue flag up, and put the blue light on the opposite side of the,
21 on the opposite side of the movement. You know, they'll see the
22 flag. I'm not saying I did that or not that night because you can
23 see in the camera that I put the flag up, I put the blue light up,
24 but as -- to get back to your question, I'm sorry, I'm just
25 rambling off.

1 Yes, the engine went by me, and to me it was a very high rate
2 of speed. I can't tell because obviously I don't -- I'm not a
3 professional. I don't know what -- I can't determine speed, but I
4 -- being around the railroad 20 years, I can pretty much tell what
5 10 miles an hour is because we have to drive 10 miles an hour in
6 the yard in our trucks. So I know what 10 miles an hour is, and
7 to me it seemed like when he went by me, he was on the north end,
8 the northeast corner of the engine on the ladder heading south,
9 and I, and I don't recall any kind of bells going off. I know
10 they don't have to blow the whistle within the zone, but I'm not
11 sure if when -- if it's protocol that they have to -- when we're
12 walking in the middle of the yard, say if we're walking eastbound
13 5, and there's a crew coming down 6, they'll ring the bells and
14 let us know we're there so we can cross over or get in between the
15 cars until they pass so we don't get hit because there are a lot
16 of close clearances. So -- and I know they always ring the bell
17 when they go by us, hey, we're here, you know, because sometimes
18 you can't hear them. And, to me again I said, my opinion, I think
19 they were going pretty fast and I even yelled at the guy when he
20 went by. I said, man, you're going pretty fast or I don't
21 remember exactly what I said, but I did say, I said, you're going
22 pretty fast. And then he went by and that's when I, I proceeded
23 to go put my flag up after he went by me, put the blue light up
24 and I looked back, and I didn't see my partner. I'm like, what
25 the hell happened? I walked back, and I looked around, didn't see

1 him. So.

2 Q. So you thought -- so was this, was this a train or was this
3 light power?

4 A. It was light power, sir. Two remote engines.

5 Q. And the operator or RCO foreman as he's called was riding the
6 rear of it I believe you said.

7 A. Yes, sir. The units were heading south. He was on the north
8 -- northeast corner. So he would have been on the road side, not
9 track side. He would have been on the road side. So he's on the
10 north, yeah, the northeast corner of the power going by me. I
11 remember like it was like -- it just happened.

12 Q. Okay. So he was not positioned on the lead of the move. He
13 was positioned --

14 A. Absolutely not. No, he was not. And I even thought --
15 because I -- correct me if I'm wrong, but I -- there used to be a
16 two man crew on the 397. I know the 397 called off that night,
17 and the guy that was working the 397 doesn't usually work the 397
18 I don't believe because I've never seen him there before. And I
19 don't know if they usually have a two man crew, but I know the guy
20 was by himself that night, and after the incident, he didn't even
21 know that it happened. He continued to go south and he stopped at
22 a little kiosk there to get his orders, and I yelled at him, and
23 excuse me for my profanity, but I said you just fucking ran
24 somebody over. You just ran somebody over. I got on the radio
25 and I said, all stop, all stop, all stop, you know, someone got

1 hit. All stop. And who knows if that radio transmission went
2 through, sir, because I'm sure -- I hope it did because -- I think
3 it did because the yardmaster came and I'm pretty sure the
4 yardmaster said something. But the guy that did it, didn't even
5 know that he hit him. He just kept going.

6 Q. Do you think from what you were telling about the radios,
7 that the yardmaster heard you relay the all stop?

8 A. I'm thinking he did. I don't know.

9 Q. Did you hear the yardmaster --

10 A. I was, I was in shock. I'm telling you right now, after I
11 saw my partner there with his guts hanging out, I was in shock. I
12 can't get that out of my head.

13 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: George, you need to take a break.

14 MR. OLIGER: Let's continue please. I just want to get it
15 over.

16 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. Are you sure?

17 MR. OLIGER: Yes.

18 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay.

19 MR. OLIGER: I think, to me, if that guy was on the head of
20 that engine, on the south end of that engine watching where he was
21 going, we wouldn't be sitting here today, and Fred would still be
22 alive. And if there was a conventional crew, a guy on the engine
23 and a switchman, conventional crew like it was when I first
24 started, that would have never happened because the engineer would
25 have seen what happened. He would have saw the guy. He would

1 have rang his bell. You know what I'm saying? He, he would have
2 been aware of the surroundings and saw someone because a lot of
3 times the crew will see us, and they'll stop. They'll stop, you
4 know, 50 feet, 100 feet back and they'll say, go ahead and throw
5 your flag up, you know, and -- because they'll see us trying to
6 lock the track up. We'll go lock it up and then, you know,
7 they'll -- we'll wave, and we'll say thank you. You know, a lot
8 of times we have a good working relationship with these crews
9 because we all want to stay safe. We all want to get home to our
10 families. I pray every night before I come into work that
11 everyone that works is going to be safe, that's going to make it
12 home to their families, and that night it didn't happen. What can
13 we do to change it? Have a two man crew. Have a conventional
14 crew to watch that train. These trains are that important to get
15 out, and it's going to have to take somebody's life.

16 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: George, do you want to take a break?

17 MR. OLIGER: Yes, I'd like to.

18 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: All right. We're going to pause at this
19 time. It is now 10:08.

20 (Off the record at 10:08 a.m.)

21 (On the record at 10:12 a.m.)

22 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. The time is now 10:12, and we're
23 resuming the interview with George Oliger.

24 MR. OLIGER: Okay. I'd like to, you know, reiterate
25 something I said before I left that -- about two man crews, you

1 know. What does it cost for an engineer for the night? \$350. If
2 we had two guys on every crew, to spend \$350 to save someone's
3 life or to make our yard a little bit safer, I think that's what
4 we need to do, you know. Like I said if there had been a two man
5 crew on that crew that night, we wouldn't be talking. I just
6 wanted to finish what I was getting at, the point I was getting at
7 earlier. You know, saving \$350, you know, on a crew, on a road
8 crew, or on a switch crew, just to have one guy that -- I don't
9 know how many years he's been on here, but he's newer because I
10 haven't seen him. I've been on here 19 years. I've never seen
11 the guy. I don't know how many years of service he had, and --
12 but again, to have -- and I'm not saying he's inexperienced, but
13 the night -- well, on Wednesday night when we had the two
14 inexperienced guys, one guy was here less than a year, and the
15 other guy -- and he was training a guy with 2 weeks. A disaster
16 could have happened that night. That shouldn't be happening.

17 We just had a death in Pennsylvania I think or Maryland or
18 something, just a month ago. We had someone killed. You know, we
19 need to rethink of how we're running this operation. We need to
20 think about our safety.

21 BY MR. COX:

22 Q. A couple things you mentioned that I wanted to ask you
23 questions about. You say that there's less yardmasters now?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. When there were more yardmasters, was there communication --

1 more communication with the groundmen about train movements?

2 A. Yes. You know, actually some of the crew -- well, yes, there
3 was. But I will mention, some of the crews, like when we, we ask
4 the 395 for permission to lock up say eastbound 5, some of the
5 crews, and I think this should be mandatory. Some of the crews
6 will say okay, you know, you guys are working eastbound 5,
7 eastbound 4 is going to be hot. We're going to be switching cars
8 in right next to you. And that happens a lot. I'm walking
9 eastbound 5, and the CN doubles up the eastbound 6 and all of a
10 sudden that train starts moving next to me. And we were -- this
11 is one of things that we were just talking about last week and
12 this week, saying that we should be able to get covered tracks.
13 If we're walking -- if we're working eastbound 5, those
14 yardmasters should know not to put something in -- not to be
15 throwing cars in blindly into a track next to us on either side of
16 us. You know, they know we're working eastbound 5. They
17 shouldn't be able to put cars in 5 or 4 as we're working these
18 trains.

19 The yard -- and if there was more yardmasters, you know, if
20 there was three yardmasters or whatever, you know, he might be
21 able to convey this information a little bit better. You know,
22 like I said, some of the crews are good and they'll say, hey, you
23 know, we ask permission to lock up 5. Hey, car windows (ph.),
24 there can be some movement into 4. It can be hot. Just watch
25 your back, you know. But that doesn't happen a lot. I mean it

1 does happen with some of the more experienced guys that were hired
2 out with me. Some of them say that, but not all of them. And one
3 time, we used to have -- at Stanley, we used to have a big orange
4 light with a beeping noise. When they were backing trains in next
5 to us, or on the track next to us or two tracks away from us, we'd
6 be able to look over, and we would hear and see because those auto
7 racks and some of the cars, you can't hear at night. During the
8 day, you can see them but at night, our vision is what our
9 headlamp shows us and what our flashlight shows us. And if we
10 could hear like a beacon, some kind of light going on or a beeping
11 noise when these -- when they're putting these cars next to us, or
12 have the yardmaster say, hey, you know what? Carman Oliger, I
13 know you're working eastbound 5. The CN is doubling up from
14 eastbound 7 to eastbound 6, you know, it's going to be hot. It
15 doesn't happen because he's overwhelmed up there. He don't have
16 time to take out -- take time out of his day to tell -- to know
17 where everyone is, know where every carman is because he's got his
18 own crews to worry about as well.

19 Q. You said at some times the yardmaster will notify you that a
20 track is ready but they still have cars to put in there from the
21 other end?

22 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Okay. When that happens, does that yardmaster put the set
24 time as if the track was ready?

25 A. We change it on our MTI, and we convey that message to the

1 leadman. I don't know if they change it on their end of the spot
2 time, but I know we change it on our MTI device. So if the train
3 -- if the yardmaster does put it in his MTI device that the train
4 was spotted at 2345, and we get out there at 2355, and the crew
5 tells us, hey, it's going to be a few minutes. I've got four more
6 cars to put in, we'll change the spot time, and we usually put
7 notes because there's a little thing on our MTI device where we
8 can put notes in, and we can say, hey, yardmaster gave us this
9 train at 2345. 395 did not give us permission to get into the
10 track because they had four cars to put in. And a lot of times we
11 convey that message to the leadman, and the leadman will call the
12 yardmaster and the yardmaster will say, hey, just put them car
13 into another track. But, it's those lines of communication that
14 we shouldn't have to deal with, you know, like I've got to call
15 the leadman. The leadman's got to call to yardmaster. The
16 yardmaster's got to call the crews. Hey, put them in another
17 track. You know, we're wasting 20 minutes, half an hour, but yet
18 the crew's here waiting to be tied onto this train and we might
19 have to hurry up and get it done because the crew's sitting here
20 waiting to tie onto the train.

21 Q. Does any --

22 A. That doesn't happen a lot, but it does happen.

23 Q. Does anyone in transportation or otherwise notify you of the
24 movements of trains in the yard?

25 A. As far as ones that are next to us?

1 Q. Yeah, ones that may be coming -- for instance, if you get
2 permission to enter a zone, does anyone notify you of something
3 that's going to come through that zone?

4 A. Not all the time. The yardmaster on third, his last name is
5 Schmidt. I can't remember his first name. I know of it, but I
6 just can't think of it right now. A lot of times he will tell us
7 if we're working a scale track or doing an inspection, an inbound
8 inspection on the scale track, he will tell us, hey, you got, you
9 got Q201 coming into the MO2, watch your back. But they don't
10 always do that because it's not required that they do that. And
11 sometimes -- that's why we try to get a good working relationship
12 with the crews. We try to get a good working relationship with
13 the yardmasters because that way we get to know each other and
14 they care for -- not that they don't care for our safety, but when
15 we get to know them on a personal level and get to know them, you
16 know, by a name basis, they care a little bit more about us, and
17 they're going to say, hey, you know, you're working the scale
18 track. I'm bringing something in on MO2, watch your back but that
19 doesn't always happen. And I think that should be something that
20 should be required.

21 Q. Did that happen the night of the incident? Did anyone notify
22 you?

23 A. Of?

24 Q. Train movement.

25 A. I -- we actually saw the train coming in because he was, he

1 was in a Jeep lead. So we actually saw him coming in. We knew,
2 but no, we didn't, we didn't hear -- actually we -- I did hear the
3 yardmaster talk to the crew because he was asking the 397 for
4 permission to come into the yard, and I don't exactly remember
5 what but I could have swore I heard him, it might have been the
6 201, I don't, you know, I'm drawing a blank, but he did say come
7 in Jeep lead into -- I can't remember, MO2, I can't remember what
8 track it was, but I think I do recall him telling the crew to go
9 come in the Jeep lead, blah, blah, blah, but nothing was conveyed
10 to us because it wasn't really in the area where we were working.
11 Okay. So, we were over here and 100 yards away or more, the crew
12 was coming in on the lead. So his movement really didn't affect
13 what we were doing. So I don't think it was pertinent information
14 to give us at the time because it didn't directly affect us and
15 the work that we were going to do.

16 Q. What are the -- when you work the rail yard, do you have to
17 pay attention to your walking conditions?

18 A. Absolutely. We have to. I mean, yeah, it's -- yeah, because
19 we're walking in weeds 3 foot tall. We're walking in water that's
20 8 inches deep at some points. Eight inches deep in water, and we
21 don't know what's under them walking conditions. You know, I'm
22 going to admit, I know that Harley's here. I might have missed
23 some handhold that was smashed in or something or I might have
24 missed something because, you know, my main, my main safety, I
25 know I have a job to do. My main job is my safety and to get home

1 to my family like Fred wasn't able to do because my job is more
2 important to me or my life is more important to me than my job.
3 So, you know, if I get, if I get wrote up because I missed
4 something because I'm trying to be safe walking in 8 inches of
5 water or 10 inches of water or walking through weeds up to my
6 chest, and we come out, and we have ticks on our arms from the
7 weeds being so tall, if I've got to miss something, I'm going to
8 miss it. I don't care. I'm going to miss something. I don't
9 want to and I'm going to do to the best of my ability to inspect
10 that train the best that I can, because that's my job, that's what
11 I get paid well to do, but if I'm walking in 8 inches or water or
12 10 inches of water or walking through weeds up to my chest, you
13 know, there's no way we can, you know, do our job properly with
14 the weeds and the walking conditions.

15 Metal, there's metal tracks or metal in between the tracks.
16 I just sent pictures to our car foreman the other night that
17 there's scrap metal that's been in the yard for 2 years. We had a
18 magnet that was supposed to take it out, but they couldn't because
19 the trainsman wouldn't give him track time to take a magnet on the
20 track. So, yes, our walking conditions are absolutely horrible.

21 Q. What type of stone is placed in the areas of tracks 3 and 5?

22 A. Well, it's different. I mean there's -- I can't specifically
23 recall but I know there are a lot of yards -- or a lot of the
24 walking conditions where there's road ballasts.

25 Q. Mainline ballasts.

1 A. Mainline ballasts, yes, real big rock ballasts and there's
2 tie buds all over the place. I know in the arrival yard, I don't
3 know how long -- again, I've been here 19 years. So the arrival
4 yard used to be a diamond, but then they made the tracks go all
5 the way through, but where they put that -- where the diamond was
6 and they put the new tracks in, there are gullies of stone that
7 are going up like this deep, and it's road ballasts. It's not
8 walking ballast, it's road ballast. So here I am 5'6" tall, and I
9 have an auto rack next to me and I'm down in that low gulley
10 trying to reach up and grab that -- a hand brake on a car on the
11 side of an auto rack. It's almost impossible because we've been
12 on that -- we asked before to fill that stone in and they said it
13 would be too much stone to put in that area because there's like
14 six or seven tracks that need to have that filled in.

15 So just a little story about the walking conditions, our main
16 priority is, you know, not breaking an ankle or not breaking a leg
17 or falling and hitting our head. There's a -- they put these new
18 automatic switches in. There's conduit running from the light to
19 the switch, and it's exposed right where we have to walk, 4 foot
20 away from where we've got to walk. And, you know, it's 70 degrees
21 during the day now, 75, getting down to 48. What does that
22 create? That creates condensation. When we're walking on that
23 conduit, there's a chance I could trip. I could fall and hit my
24 head on the track, and I could have my head, you know, you could
25 have your cut off.

1 Q. How's the lighting in the yard?

2 A. It's -- where the switch -- the switching leads, there's
3 adequate light for the, for the switching leads. The roads are
4 partially illuminated in some, you know, in some spots. But
5 mostly the switching leads are what's, are what's, you know,
6 what's lit up mostly. And there are some like lights down on 19
7 row but they stop. I think -- I believe they stop at some point.
8 I don't think they go all the way down 19. I could be wrong, but
9 I don't know if there's lights all the way down.

10 Q. Okay. One follow-up question to something you said earlier
11 about your inspection process. You said you could go on and on
12 about what you're looking at, but does that, does that include
13 wheels and bearings?

14 A. Wheels, bearings, I mean, yeah, I didn't -- like I said, I
15 could have went on and on, yeah.

16 Q. Engagement of the trunk to the car body?

17 A. Wheel -- yes. Wheels, bearings. You name it, we've got to
18 look for side bearing cages missing because if the side bearing
19 falls out, the train's wobbling and it could derail. There's, you
20 know --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- make sure the brake rigging is not dragging to cause a
23 derailment, you know, if there's a cotter -- I mentioned cotter
24 pins. There's a cotter pin or cotter key missing, the brake
25 rigging can come undone, cause a derailment.

1 Q. Okay. And my last question, and again I'm not, not trying to
2 take you there, okay. We're not going there but how much time do
3 you believe passed from the time you request permission to enter
4 the remote control zone to the time that you actually entered the
5 remote control zone?

6 A. This is just a guess, 5 to 10 minutes maybe, if that.

7 Q. If that?

8 A. Five to ten minutes. I mean from when the process started, I
9 really couldn't tell you because like I said, I called a few
10 times. I talked to the yardmaster, talked to crew eventually but,
11 yeah, a few minutes, probably 5, 10 minutes maybe if I had to
12 guess. I don't know exactly the timeframe because everything just
13 went by so fast. I mean once it happened, everything --

14 Q. It's all right.

15 A. -- I'm going to be totally honest with you. I forgot where I
16 was at, at one point when -- after I saw him. I just stood there
17 and I forgot where I was at. I was in shock. I was literally in
18 shock.

19 Q. Yeah, I'm not going there. I'm not going that far but, yeah,
20 I was just curious how much time had passed from the time that
21 transportation received notification you were going to be there
22 until the power entered the zone.

23 A. Right.

24 Q. So in other words, if it could be deduced that you guys were
25 going to be in the vicinity still to the RCO operator?

1 A. Right. Yeah, he should have known. He -- when he gives us
2 permission, he knows we're locking 3 and 5. And for him to go
3 fast like he was going, again I don't know how fast he was going,
4 but to me it seemed a littler faster than what he should have been
5 going. He should have known, hey, these guys are between 3 and 5.
6 I'm going through there. I'm going to ring my bell. I'm going to
7 -- I'm going to stop 100 feet back if I see these guys. I know
8 they're going to lock these tracks up.

9 Nothing's so important that it's going to take away safety.
10 If I see these guys, maybe I should stop and let them cross, let
11 them lock their track up and once they're back across, then
12 proceed with his movement. And that's just a -- that's what I --
13 if you wanted to ask my opinion of what can make things safer,
14 maybe something like that. If they see us coming, and a lot of
15 the crews will. Some of the crews will stop. When they see us,
16 they will stop. And I mentioned that earlier, but not all the
17 crews do it.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And most of the ones that do it are the ones that we know,
20 that we've been working with for the past 19 years, you know.
21 They're -- they know us and they -- you know, a lot of the newer
22 guys, I don't know, you know. We're a brotherhood, man. We've
23 got to watch out for each other, you know, and that's what we do.
24 But not everyone is on board when it comes to, like I said, he
25 knew he was back here. He knew we were locking up 3 and 5. Why

1 couldn't he have waited 5 minutes for us to get across to lock
2 that track up? Why didn't he ring his bell? I don't know if he
3 did or not. I don't remember the bell ringing. Why didn't he
4 ring his bell to let us know? I mean, yeah, of course, we knew he
5 was coming but why not ring the bell and let us know because it
6 happens a lot when we're in the middle of the yard. I mentioned
7 that earlier. We're working in the middle of the yard, they see
8 us, they start ringing their bell to let us know that they're
9 there.

10 Q. You said, you said earlier, you didn't recognize the remote
11 control foreman?

12 A. I did not. No, I did not recognize the control foreman, no.

13 Q. And you normally do recognize them.

14 A. I normally -- the guys -- when I call and ask for permission,
15 a lot of the guys will say, 397, can I have permission to go into
16 eastbound 8. Yeah, George, go ahead. You're clear for eastbound
17 8. A lot of the guys know me because I get that good working
18 relationship with them, and they know me. They know that I'm all
19 about safety. And they will tell me that. A lot of the guys
20 will. It happened a couple of nights ago. They -- we were in the
21 arrival yard. They guy stopped. Oh, no, it was the receiving
22 yard. Jason, the utility guy, he was going to double up a train,
23 and he says, hey, I'm going to stop this train right now. He was
24 like 150 feet back. He was not even up the hill yet. We were
25 locking up receiving 8, and he goes, you guys go ahead and lock up

1 your track. He goes, I'm not in a hurry. I'm not going to, you
2 know, I don't want to get someone hurt. He goes, I'll do anything
3 for you, George. That's exactly what he told me. He didn't have
4 to stop. He could have kept going or he could have locked us in
5 there but, you know, we've got this good working relationship with
6 each other and, you know, we care for each other a little bit more
7 and we had that. We had that friendship, and he let us go and do
8 our job and then he proceeded with his movement.

9 Q. Thank you.

10 A. I might be getting off -- so, you know, but I'm just speaking
11 of experience as I'm showing you that, you know, we do have a good
12 working relationship with some of the crews.

13 Q. Thank you, George.

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. I appreciate you answering my questions, and I'm sorry you're
16 going through this.

17 MR. COX: I have no further questions.

18 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Rich Skolnekovich, NTSB.

19 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

20 Q. George, I do appreciate your time, and I'm sorry it's taking
21 as long as it's taking. If you're good, we'd like to do a few
22 more follow-up questions.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Are you up for it?

25 A. Yeah. I -- at some point, I would like to take a break. My

1 wife is out waiting for me because I'd like to maybe just let her
2 go home or something because I didn't know how long it was going
3 to take.

4 Q. Okay. If you want to, we can pause so you can let her know.
5 We're probably going to wrap up probably in the next 20 minutes.

6 A. We'll wait then. We'll wait.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah, she's be fine because obviously I couldn't drive
9 because of the medication I'm on. So.

10 Q. Okay. But you're good to continue?

11 A. Yeah, let's get it over with.

12 Q. Okay. All right. So then I just have a few follow-up
13 questions. Just kind of walk me through and -- just your
14 understanding of the remote control zone, like what it is and how
15 it's set up, just to the best of your knowledge.

16 A. I know what a remote control zone is. I know that we've got
17 to ask permission to get into it. I know that it's -- I guess
18 from -- and this isn't technical. It's like you could say a safe
19 zone for the remote control people to be able to go do the
20 movement that they got to go through. That's my personal take on
21 it. I mean, yeah, it's where they like -- so they don't have to
22 -- like when they're in a protected zone like that, if they're
23 going over a crossing, and I don't know if they have to blow a
24 horn when they're in that zone or not or if they still have to
25 blow a horn when they go through the zone, I don't know. But

1 that's something that I know what the remote control zone is, but
2 for me to just sit here and explain to you everything about it, I,
3 you know --

4 Q. No, it's -- I just wanted your --

5 A. Yeah, yeah.

6 Q. -- your interpretation just what a remote control zone was.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. So along that line, when you talk about, you know, calling
9 the crew and getting permission to go into their zone, are you
10 actually going into their zone to conduct work or are you just
11 passing through their zone to another location to do work?

12 A. Both.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. We have to, we have to get their permission to lock the track
15 up because we don't know if they're -- because again, they're not
16 -- you know, there might not be a guy say, for example, say
17 eastbound 15. There might not be a guy in there when they're
18 taking cars and, you know, kicking them into a track. So in that
19 remote control zone, I guess that kind of protects them to where
20 they know that they can do that and I don't know if they have to
21 protect shoves or protect -- because I know back in the day, again
22 they used to protect shoves all the time because I don't if in the
23 zone they've got to actually have someone back there protecting
24 the movement back there or not. I'm not sure.

25 Q. Did they -- in this particular area, did they used to protect

1 the movements when there were established zones when they're
2 working the zones?

3 A. Yeah, when there's a two man crew. One guy -- I don't know
4 what -- I know there's a foreman and a switchman. I'm not sure
5 which one is back but one guy will be back making the couple,
6 making, you know, hey, we've got 20 cars to a tie, blah, blah,
7 blah, and then they would pitch -- toss and pitch their pass and
8 whatever they call it, pass the remote control or control of
9 control units because the other guy, once they're tied up, there
10 would be one guy back here making the tie, making that, you know,
11 making sure there's a good couple, and then another guy at the
12 point. And in this case, you know, there's a one man crew where,
13 of course, he wasn't making a move at that moment as far as he
14 didn't have cars on his. He probably just got done making a move,
15 but again if there's a two man crew, maybe there would have been
16 someone on each end. There would have been a guy, there would
17 have been a guy up north of the switch seeing that, hey, look,
18 there's a carman that, you know, they just got permission to lock
19 this track. Take some caution when you're going through there.
20 Don't go faster than what you normally do. Make sure you ring the
21 bell, you know what I mean. That if there's a two man crew, maybe
22 that would have happened.

23 Q. I understand. So let me ask you this. When you call and get
24 permission from the yard crew, to enter a zone, what's your
25 expectation include? Do you -- are they supposed to just know

1 where you're working at, if you're working in their zone? Do you
2 like report into them and clear them when you're in and out of the
3 zone?

4 A. No, we don't, we don't control it, no, because they'll see
5 the flag down.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I mean we do ask permission and, yes, they do. I mean it's
8 obviously that they know where we're at because we're asking
9 permission to get into that track and lock that track out, and
10 they see the blue flags up and the blue box on, and our -- the
11 little signal on the electronic switches is a white light. So
12 when that track is occupied, the white light comes on and they
13 know that we're in that track. So it's obviously they do know
14 where we're at. And that's why I said, when some of the crews
15 come down, some of the crews will ding their horn. If we're
16 walking 5, and they're coming down 6, they'll ding their horn at
17 us or not their horn, but their bell to let us know, hey, we're
18 coming down, man, watch your back. We'll get in between the cars
19 until the movement is done or may have to get on the tank car,
20 cross over, go to the other side, work the other side, and then
21 when movement stops, get back over, cross over and finish our
22 inspection on the other side.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Nine times out of ten, we'll just sit there and wait, but if
25 it's a long train coming in, or if they're moving 100 cars, you

1 know, we would go back and then we would come back and pick up,
2 check them cars out on the way back down on the other side.

3 Q. Okay. So now the night of the incident, the crew came down.
4 What was the name? Was it the new yard lead or was it the Jeep
5 lead that they came down?

6 A. We call it a Jeep lead and I think they call it a Jeep lead,
7 but I think it's something -- they have another term for it. I
8 don't know but it's generally called the Jeep lead because that's
9 where they used to load all the Jeeps in that area. So I'm pretty
10 sure -- I'm like 99.9 percent sure that the yardmaster even calls
11 it the Jeep lead.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Yeah. Because they come in and stop in the yard, they go --
14 instead of coming into the yard directly, they go through like a
15 fenced in area where they used to load all the Jeeps into the auto
16 racks, and then they come back out of the Jeep, and then they come
17 up the lead to get into MO1, MO2 or the scale because I don't
18 think you can get to like -- I think you can get into 1 maybe from
19 that but other than that, you've got to go through the actual
20 yard, come in and not use the Jeep lead. There's only like three,
21 three or four tracks that you can get into using that Jeep lead.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And I think the reason they use that is because if they were
24 to come into the yard, they would have to stop all switching
25 operations while the train is being yarded. So that way when they

1 come into the Jeep lead, they continue switching cars, you know,
2 in the regular part of the yard at the east end.

3 Q. Okay. Another question. So when you're going out, okay, so
4 you've got permission from the crews to enter the zone. You're
5 going to go out and you're going to start walking out switches for
6 your work, and kind of walk me through the process between -- I
7 know you kind of already hit it, you know, one of you will put in
8 the blue flag, one of you will put in the locks.

9 A. Um-hum.

10 Q. But can you kind of walk me through, you know, okay, say
11 you've got some equipment that you've got to inspect.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Kind of walk me through. Do you -- like who do you talk to,
14 anything you do with the MTI, just kind of like step-by-step.

15 A. Well, with the MTI, we've got to put our inspection in the
16 MTI. We've got to put in our start times, our stop time. Like
17 the time we have the track locked up, the track we commenced work
18 or the time that we commenced work. We're got to put leakage if
19 it's outbound inspection. We've got to put the leakage on the
20 MTI. We've got to put the end time. The work, the work end time
21 and the unlock time on the MTI. And then once -- and on the MTI
22 device, there's a blue flag. When that track is locked up and it
23 is showing that it's locked in the MTI device, there's like a
24 little blue flag like icon, it will show the yardmaster and
25 whoever that there is -- that that track is locked up.

1 Q. Now, is this something you can see on your MTI?

2 A. Yes, sir.

3 Q. So once you've locked -- once you lock out a track, you can
4 see it on your MTI?

5 A. Yes, sir. We can see it. There's like a blue icon in the
6 right corner I believe it is. There's like a little blue flag,
7 like down.

8 Q. Is this done in real time or is it a relay from --

9 A. I don't know.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I don't know what the delay -- if there's a delay in it. I
12 don't know. I'm not sure.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. I'm not that, you know, like technical with everything. All
15 I know is that I know -- I do know that I've seen when the track
16 is locked up, you can see a blue flag on the MTI device.

17 Q. Okay. Next question I got for you is, is there any specific
18 rules about as far as crossing tracks with equipment? So is there
19 a distance or a time by rule for you to cross tracks? So when I
20 see a piece of equipment, is there a certain distance or is there
21 a certain time before I cross that track?

22 A. I'm not totally understanding your question, sir. Can you --

23 Q. Okay. So if I'm going to walk across the track, is there a
24 rule that says, okay, if it's 5 seconds away from me or 50 feet
25 away from me, I can't cross?

1 A. Well, 50 -- we use 100 feet, yeah.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Yeah, we definitely don't want to, you know, within 100 feet.

4 Q. And that's -- whether it's moving or stationary?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. Okay, 100 feet. Okay.

7 A. Again, my numbers, I'm not with it right now.

8 Q. George, you're okay.

9 A. It could be 100. I, I -- it's a general --

10 Q. Yeah, George --

11 A. -- number.

12 Q. -- I just want to know what you know. So it's not a problem.

13 And then the last question I've got for you is you talked about
14 the drone testing, and it being kind of a distraction. The height
15 of the drone, is about how high above you, just your estimate,
16 while they're contests?

17 A. I do not know that personally. I spoke on it because I know
18 they do it. There's a couple of our carmen on second shift,
19 because they can't fly the drone at night. I mean they can, but
20 our car foreman that has drone access, I don't think he has --
21 you've got to get a special license. You've got to get like a
22 pilot's license actually --

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. -- to be able to fly these drones. And to be able to fly at
25 night, I don't think he has access to be able to fly at night, and

1 I don't know how high they are but the one night we did -- I was
2 -- it might have been in the morning. The trainmaster was parked
3 kind of behind the shanty by the salt road we call it. I did see
4 him and you can hear, you can hear the drone going up, and I don't
5 know high they fly over us, but I know there's an airport right
6 next to the yard. So I'm not sure what the restrictions are as
7 far as how high they can, when they can go, have access to be able
8 to fly the drone.

9 Q. Yeah, just any personal knowledge you have. So you haven't
10 really seen it on your shift?

11 A. I did see it one time on my shift.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. But it was early in the morning like.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. But I don't -- but when I saw it, it was coming down. I
16 don't know -- I can't speak on how high they go or how high they
17 fly above us. He was parked back in the weeds in the trees and he
18 had the drone. I could see the drone coming down.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. But again, I don't know how high because if I told you, I'd
21 be lying. I'd be speculating what -- how high they fly.

22 Q. George, you're good.

23 A. I've had a personal drone. So -- but I don't know how they
24 fly them.

25 Q. Okay. All right.

1 A. But I know they are noisy, and you can hear them.

2 Q. Yeah. Okay. George, I really appreciate it. That's all the
3 questions I have.

4 A. Okay.

5 MR. BENDEL: No questions.

6 MR. AMMONS: Steve Ammons, CSX.

7 BY MR. AMMONS:

8 Q. I have a couple of follow-up questions here, George. Just
9 one more question about your knowledge of a remote control zone
10 and what it means. Are you aware that in a remote control, an
11 active remote control zone, that it could mean that there is not a
12 man on the leading end of the --

13 A. Yes, sir. I do know, I do know that, yep, yep.

14 Q. And --

15 A. Well, I know that, I know that there -- it could be -- I'm
16 aware that they could be no one on there.

17 Q. Well, that's when I mean. When I say a man, a person on the
18 lead end of the --

19 A. No, I don't know that, no. I did not, I did not know -- I do
20 not know that they don't have any -- I kind of speculate, you
21 know. I can say, well, I may have thought, but when I saw it, it
22 looked out of place. When I saw him on the rear on the engine, he
23 was heading south, it just -- to me, it looked out of place.

24 Q. Have you ever noticed any signs in the yard stating that
25 equipment may be unoccupied?

1 A. Yes, yes, that's why I said. I do know that it could be
2 unoccupied, yeah, throughout the yard, yeah.

3 Q. Okay. All right.

4 A. Yep.

5 Q. The switches that you and Fred were in the process of locking
6 out --

7 A. Um-hum.

8 Q. -- those were electronic switches?

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Is there a process or is it possible to lock those switches
11 out without actually going to the switches or a box that you can
12 lock those switches out from?

13 A. Some tracks there are. Some of them don't work. In fact,
14 some of the switches that we're supposed to use, we can't use the
15 electronic switch because we have to use like a box outside of
16 that particular switch. Like one switch, they have -- there was a
17 derailment, and they switched the buttons around on us to where --
18 because we've got to be -- there's one switch on the left-hand
19 side that controls the movement of the switch, and then on the
20 right side, you can turn it on and off. You disable it, close the
21 door, put the lock on there and it disables everything. And
22 there's one -- I can't remember which switch it is offhand, but
23 the one switch is flipped around which can kind of confuse a new
24 guy.

25 Q. Sure.

1 A. And we mentioned that, and they said -- I don't know if it
2 was signals said that there's nothing they can do about it pretty
3 much. I don't know why but -- but, yeah, I am -- I do know that,
4 yeah.

5 Q. I mean so part of these -- a lot -- a big part of these
6 questions we're asking is just to try to figure out how can we
7 prevent another incident, right.

8 A. Right.

9 Q. So that's what I'm trying to do here is there a way to
10 prevent putting a man in the foul of equipment.

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. That's why I'm asking that.

13 A. Getting back to the yardmaster shortage, if we had another
14 yardmaster -- or we could have, we could have one guy dedicated --

15 Q. Well, let me stop. I think the NTSB is going to probably
16 give you an opportunity to talk about any other suggestions you
17 might have.

18 A. Oh, okay.

19 Q. But I just want to stick specific to the switch for now on my
20 questions --

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. -- if that's fair.

23 A. Okay. That's fine.

24 Q. Okay. Did you or Fred that night, did you guys have any
25 distractions that were kind of out of the ordinary?

1 A. No, none at all, no.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. No.

4 Q. Can you talk about any discussions you and Fred had just
5 prior to that, any plans, any updated job briefings leading up
6 this event?

7 A. No, we just -- it's crazy because we always tell each other
8 to be careful, and even when we go locking the track, or if we go
9 to start the track, we'll say, hey, man, be careful. He said,
10 okay, bother, be careful, you, too. No, he pretty much -- we
11 pulled up to the switch. He said I'm going to go get the lock,
12 you go get the flag. And then we would meet back at the truck.

13 Q. In the industry, it's pretty, pretty common to warn one
14 another of an approaching train or your rail's hot, things like
15 that. I even heard you talk about it, you know, as far as like
16 some of the crews are better than others.

17 A. Yeah, yeah.

18 Q. Did either one of you discuss the approaching train as you
19 pulled the truck -- as he pulled the truck up into a stop there?

20 A. We both saw it. I mentioned this earlier. We saw it, but it
21 was down at a distance. We didn't know, we didn't know it was
22 coming down at first, okay. And we both -- if we would have said
23 something, we'd say, yeah, there's -- the 397 crew's down there,
24 and I think I made mention to him that that's probably why
25 couldn't hear on the radio because they're 795 because they

1 probably couldn't hear, you know, because -- even when we arm
2 EOTs, at times you can't arm an EOT because the -- like I say, the
3 distraction, but the interference from the bridge or whatever,
4 sometimes you can't hear if the crews are over at that end. Yeah,
5 we knew, we knew they were coming out and they were down at a
6 distance, but at the speed that they were coming, I mean -- and
7 I'm -- and I can't speak for the deceased, okay, but when we see
8 this train 200 yards away, you know, we're, okay, well, we have
9 time to get over. We have time to lock this track up and get
10 back, but if this guy -- and I'm not blaming, I'm just saying, if
11 this guy was going faster than what he should have come, because
12 they give them 10 miles an hour, we kind of -- we can kind of
13 judge, you know, like, hey, with 10 miles an hour, this guy's way
14 back there. We'll have plenty of time to go lock this track up.
15 Okay. So we saw it back at a distance. We was coming by. I
16 walked up. Fred started -- I saw Fred starting to walk this way.
17 I walked this way, and then I went and put the flag up, put the
18 blue light up. I looked back to make sure the line up was there,
19 and this was after the train went by me, and I didn't see Fred
20 anywhere. I didn't see him.

21 Q. So when that -- Fred was driving, correct?

22 A. Yes, yes.

23 Q. So when Fred pulled up to a stop, both of you disembarked the
24 vehicle?

25 A. Yes, sir. Yep.

1 Q. You from the passenger's side and Fred from the driver's
2 side.

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 Q. Did you guys do that simultaneously? Just to the best of
5 your memory.

6 A. Probably. I mean I don't know for sure. I mean I kind of
7 moved back and grabbed my blue light or something or -- I don't
8 know.

9 Q. But when you got out of the vehicle, when the locomotives
10 passed you, you had not crossed the track yet.

11 A. No.

12 Q. All right. So how soon after you got out of the vehicle do
13 you remember the locomotives passing you?

14 A. I don't remember.

15 Q. That's fair.

16 A. Yeah, I honestly don't remember. All I know is he was at a
17 safe distance away from me to where I know it and he was heading
18 in that direction. I know he was at a safe distance, and I walked
19 across --

20 Q. Um-hum.

21 A. -- this way.

22 Q. Okay. So you saw, you saw the locomotives. Did you notice
23 the strobe light on the locomotive?

24 A. Probably, yeah. I mean I -- like I said, I probably saw the
25 strobe light because I'm so used to seeing it, but like I said, I

1 -- again, I'm not saying he didn't have it on but I don't remember
2 hearing a bell or anything like that. No, I don't.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And like I say, he might have had it on. I just don't
5 remember.

6 Q. One more, one more question here. You mentioned the shanty.
7 How far is your shanty that you were talking about walking in and
8 out of from this location?

9 A. I don't know. If I had to guess, maybe 2 miles.

10 Q. Okay. That's the only -- and that's only location that the
11 carmen work out of --

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. -- as far as a building?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Does that shanty have like a bay station radio in it?

16 A. Yes, sir. Yep.

17 Q. Okay. And do you ever have any issues communicating to that
18 radio, to the yardmaster or to the crews if you need to?

19 A. Not really, no. No. I think it's just mostly the handheld
20 set because like I said, when I was speaking on the radio, the
21 yardmaster could hear me, the incoming train, I'm pretty sure he
22 said something. So I'm -- my belief it's the handheld radio.
23 Like I said, we used to get them updated all the time, and we
24 haven't them updated like, you know, now with technology the way
25 it is, you know, our phones are updating all the time on us.

1 Laptops are updating, and we have had no updates on our radios at
2 all, and I don't know if they need them, but I know back in the
3 day, they used to do them. Back when we were at Stanley, they
4 used to update the radios quite often, maybe once a year.

5 Q. Okay. And then the last question. I'm sorry. I had one
6 more. The switches that you said that you guys were lining, that
7 was number 3 and number 5 switch?

8 A. Yes, sir. We already had 3 locked and lined.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And then we went up to 5.

11 Q. And that was -- is that on the actual ladder inside the
12 remote control zone?

13 A. I'm not sure what the ladder is. I'm not -- I know I've been
14 out there 19 years. I don't keep track of --

15 Q. The switching ladder.

16 A. The lead you mean?

17 Q. The lead, yes.

18 A. The lead. I think -- again, I'm not 100 percent sure. I
19 would have to -- I can maybe refer to the yard map, but I know the
20 lead goes like this and then at 3 -- the leads here, and then
21 there's like a 2, 3 switch right here. There might be a 4 switch
22 but when we lock up 4, that 4 switch goes into 4 and 5, but when
23 we lock out 5, we have to lock the 4, 5 switch.

24 Q. Do you have to physically change any of -- the direction of
25 any of the switches that were inside the remote control zone?

1 A. I didn't personally because I wasn't -- that's what Fred was
2 going to do. I --

3 Q. I'm not saying you. I mean the crew. You and Fred together,
4 did you have to physically change the direction of a switch that
5 was lined in the remote control zone?

6 A. I don't know if he did or not. I didn't personally --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- on that end because he was lining the switch. Like I
9 said, he lines the switch. I put the flag up. When I put the
10 flag up, I look back and I check our line up to make sure that the
11 track is lined away from us just as a secondary precaution.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Because again like I said, I'm very safety conscious. So
14 when I look back, I look to make sure that, you know, it's lined
15 away from us.

16 Q. And when you request permission, do you request permission to
17 line switches or just to enter the zone?

18 A. We just ask permission to enter the zone. Like we'll say,
19 (indiscernible), we're requesting to lock up eastbound 5,
20 eastbound 4 or eastbound 3 or eastbound 5. They say, okay, you
21 got permission to lock it up.

22 Q. Okay. That's all I have.

23 A. Yep.

24 MR. CRAWFORD: Robert Crawford.

25 BY MR. CRAWFORD:

1 Q. I've just got a couple here. When you guys were
2 communicating prior to the accident, normally you guys communicate
3 with your handheld radios because the radios in the trucks don't
4 work?

5 A. No, they do not.

6 Q. When you guys were communicating prior to the accident, were
7 you just using the handhelds or were you using any of the cell
8 phones to communicate?

9 A. Handheld. We used the handheld to call the yardmaster.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. You guys didn't use any of the cell phone, just the radios?

13 A. Just the radio, yeah.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. And the only other question I had was, you've
15 been here for quite a while, you said 19 years and so forth. Was
16 there a time prior to the period that I'm aware of here, were
17 there every two yardmasters used?

18 A. Was there ever two yardmasters used?

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. We had -- you're probably familiar with the yard. I'm not
23 sure, but on the receiving hill, there used to be a big tower.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. We had a Walbridge yardmaster. The Walbridge yardmaster --

1 no, I'm sorry. That was the eastbound yardmaster. He would
2 control all the eastbound traffic. We had a -- let's see. Yeah,
3 the eastbound yardmaster was up in the tower. The Walbridge
4 yardmaster was up in the brick.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And I know, I'm pretty sure, that the controlled -- I'm not
7 -- don't quote me on this. This is just from my recollection
8 because it's been a while since we had that many, but I'm pretty
9 sure that the Walbridge yardmaster would control, like if the 201
10 or 311 was coming in the yard, he would tell them which way to go
11 to get into the yard, and then once he got to a certain point, the
12 eastbound yardmaster might tell him, okay, you're okay to go into
13 eastbound 15.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. About how long -- can you give me an idea about how long ago
17 they had the two yardmasters? I'd be curious. Has it been a
18 while or --

19 A. Maybe 10 years --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. -- I believe, maybe.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Because even, even after they closed -- well, at one point
24 they -- we were working Stanley Yard and Walbridge Yard but then
25 they had us working out of Walbridge Yard going back and forth,

1 okay. And even when we had the Walbridge yardmaster here, he was
2 still controlling movement at Stanley and at the docks. And at
3 that time, they were controlling movement at -- I'm pretty sure it
4 was the Finley Yard. So they had control of the Finley Yard as
5 well.

6 Q. Okay. I was just curious. I have no other questions.

7 A. Okay.

8 MR. GURZYNSKI: I'm good.

9 MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson. I'm good.

10 MR. COX: Jason Cox, BRC, I have no further questions.

11 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

12 Q. Okay. George, once again, I really want to thank you for
13 taking time. I know it's kind of a rough time for you, and I do
14 appreciate you coming here to kind of push through it and give us
15 the information that we're looking for.

16 I want to start off with, you know, is there anything that
17 you'd like to add that might help, you know, prevent something,
18 this type of accident from happening again here in this yard?

19 A. Again, this might be overboard but, you know, it might not be
20 bad. I know electronic switches are out here. Maybe have the
21 yardmaster, I know, but again, he's overwhelmed with what he's
22 doing now, but have one guy, one yardmaster or whatever you want
23 to call him, one guy control the switches. So if we -- if we're
24 on the radio, we can call, hey, switch control guy, whatever you
25 want to call him, we need to lock out eastbound 5. Can you

1 electronically lock that track out for us. Because I know that's
2 -- my friend worked at Willard, and I believe at Willard -- did
3 you ever work at Willard? Okay. In Willard, I believe they would
4 call the yardmaster and they would put a block on that track so
5 the guy wouldn't physically have to go put a lock on that track?
6 Was that correct or is that not correct?

7 MR. COX: Jason Cox, BRC. That is correct.

8 MR. OLIGER: Okay. So if we had a guy, one guy that we could
9 call on to say, hey, can we have eastbound 5 at the east end or
10 eastbound 5 at the west end. Okay. Here we go. He throws that
11 switch just like -- oh, I don't know what they're called. Again,
12 I'm sorry, but my mind is absolutely blank today. The guys, when
13 they call -- the dispatcher, like the dispatcher will throw
14 switches on the main track, the mainline. If we had a local
15 dispatcher or even a dispatcher in Jacksonville or wherever, if we
16 could call the guy and say, hey, look, we need to lock up this
17 track, can you lock it up? So we wouldn't even have to go in and
18 lock that track up. You know, if they can electronically be
19 controlled by a certain point, we wouldn't have to go in because
20 at that point, the blue light or the blue flag would come out. We
21 wouldn't even have to go and put the blue flag up. Is that
22 correct? Or does --

23 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

24 Q. It's your statement, not his.

25 A. Okay. Well, I'm just speaking from experience -- his

1 experience of working at a yard where they didn't have to ask, you
2 know, they didn't have to physically go and put a lock on. So I
3 don't know if you would still have to put a flag on the track, but
4 I know if you called the yardmaster, you wouldn't have to put a
5 lock on because, you know, especially on a track like that because
6 there's a few tracks in the yard -- or a few switches in the yard
7 where there's tracks both ways and when you're standing at that 5
8 switch, if this -- just for the record, I got a chair standing in
9 front of me, I'm a foot away from it, a foot behind me is the
10 track. I think it's like 3 track. So if I'm sitting down here
11 and I'm putting a lock on this electronic switch, even though I
12 look, I looked, there's nobody coming, you know, if there's
13 someone coming at a high rate of speed or -- you never know what
14 could happen. This guy could be kicking the car or you don't know
15 what's happening. I'm sitting here like this trying to put a lock
16 on this, and my butt is sticking out. My body's sticking out 3
17 foot or maybe a foot past a live track, and it's right in the
18 middle of the yard, and I can do -- I can show you a diagram maybe
19 of that on the map, but I mean --

20 Q. That's okay. You don't have to.

21 A. -- if there was a centrally located maybe dispatcher locally
22 or something that we could possibly have someone that could throw
23 the switches and lock them out so we don't have to go in and lock
24 them like that, that might help.

25 Q. Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

1 A. Just -- I'd like to get some of the locking conditions taken
2 care of, that is, you know, and I don't know what happened to Mr.
3 Anderson. I didn't see the video. I don't know what happened. I
4 didn't see it happen. I mean for all I know, he could have had a
5 heart attack. He could have fell. He could have tripped on
6 something. I don't know. I'm not, I'm not speculating. I'm just
7 saying that we don't know what happened, you know. He could have
8 had a heart attack. Something could have happened where he could
9 have fell but -- he could have tripped on something. Again, we
10 wouldn't have had to put ourselves in that position to walk over
11 them tracks to get to the switch, and maybe that could have saved
12 a life.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. You know, to pay one guy \$250 a night or \$300 a night to
15 throw switches for us to save a life, I think it would be well
16 worth it.

17 Q. Okay. All right. Another question I got. If we have any
18 additional questions, do you mind if we contact you in the future?

19 A. No, definitely not. You can call me.

20 Q. Okay. I really appreciate that. Well, on behalf of the
21 NTSB, I really do appreciate your time and your cooperation in
22 helping us to look at this accident and, you know, work towards
23 ways to, you know, prevent this from happening again.

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. So thank you very much.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

2 MR. OLIGER: Thank you.

3 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: The time is now 11:03, and that will
4 conclude the interview.

5 (Whereupon, at 11:03 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

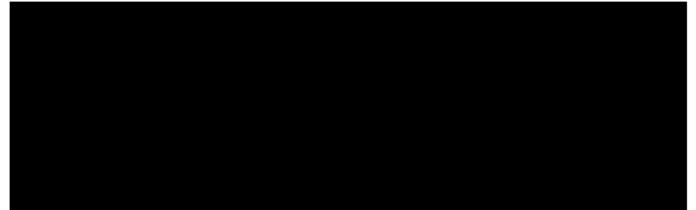
IN THE MATTER OF: CSX EMPLOYEE FATALITY IN
WALBRIDGE, OHIO
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 2023
Interview of George Oliger III

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR017

PLACE: Walbridge, Ohio

DATE: September 18, 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.



Transcriber