

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE

FATALITY NEAR DECATUR, ALABAMA

ON JANUARY 31, 2024

Accident No.: RRD24FR007

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Interview of: JIM ELLISON, Trainmaster
Norfolk Southern

Marriott Courtyard
Decatur, Alabama

Saturday,
February 3, 2024

APPEARANCES:

BEN STROT, Rail Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MATT THOMPSON, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN JENNER, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

RANDY HUNT, Senior Director of Bridge and Safety
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SHAUN McCOY, Gulf Division Superintendent,
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STEPHEN YOUNG, Operating Practices Inspector
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DAVID WYATT, Investigator, Safety Task Force
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CHRIS CHRISTIANSON, Investigator, National Safety Team
SMART-Transportation Division

JOHN GRAHAM, Representative
(On behalf of Mr. Ellison)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. STROT: All right. Good afternoon. My name is Ben Strot, and I'm an investigator for the NTSB. Today is February 3rd, 2024, and we're meeting at the Marriott Courtyard, Decatur, Alabama. This interview is being conducted in reference to NTSB Accident Number RRD24FR007, an employee fatality near Decatur, Alabama, on the Norfolk Southern that occurred on January 31st, 2024.

The NTSB is an independent federal agency charged with determining the probable cause of transportation accidents and promoting transportation safety. It is not part of DOT, FRA or any other regulatory agency. The NTSB has no regulatory powers or enforcement powers, but we'll publish recommendations to any party that we believe can act on those recommendations to prevent accidents from happening in the future.

There are several phases in the process. We're currently in the fact finding phase. It will be followed by analysis, probable cause finding and finally any recommendations that we see necessary.

Today, we're here to speak with Jim Ellison, trainmaster.

Before we begin, we'll go around the table and introduce ourselves to the transcriptionist. Please be sure to speak up, speak clearly and spell your last name as we go around. My name is Ben Strot, S-t-r-o-t, with the NTSB.

MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, with the NTSB.

1 MR. HUNT: Randy Hunt, H-u-n-t, Norfolk Southern, Safety.

2 MR. McCOY: Shaun McCoy, M-c-C-o-y, Norfolk Southern,
3 Transportation Division Superintendent.

4 MR. YOUNG: Steve Young, Y-o-u-n-g, FRA.

5 MR. B. McCOY: Byrl McCoy, M-c-C-o-y, FRA.

6 MR. CHRISTIAN: Chris Christianson, C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n-s-o-n,
7 SMART TD, investigator.

8 MR. WYATT: David Wyatt, BLET, safety taskforce,
9 investigator.

10 MR. ELLISON: Jim Ellison, Ellison, trainmaster, Memphis,
11 Decatur.

12 MR. GRAHAM: John Graham, G-r-a-h-a-m, representative here
13 for Mr. Ellison.

14 DR. JENNER: I'm Stephen Jenner, J-e-n-n-e-r, with the NTSB.

15 MR. STROT: All right. Thank you all. I'm just going to ask
16 as we go around asking questions, just restate your last name for
17 the transcriptionist.

18 And, Mr. Ellison, do you mind if we go by Jim today?

19 MR. ELLISON: No, sir, I do not.

20 MR. STROT: All right. Thank you, sir. As we spoke
21 beforehand, you understand this interview will be recorded, and
22 you're okay with that?

23 MR. ELLISON: Yes, sir.

24 MR. STROT: And as such, it will be made part of the public
25 docket. We cannot promise any confidentiality. You understand

1 that?

2 MR. ELLISON: Yes, sir.

3 MR. STROT: Okay. During this interview, you're allowed to
4 have one representative, and Mr. Graham is here as your
5 representative. Mr. Graham, we just only that, you know, you
6 cannot testify for Mr. Ellison or object to any questions, but if
7 you all have to confer, just let me know and we'll take a break.

8 MR. GRAHAM: Understood.

9 MR. STROT: Okay. Thank you.

10 Please answer all the questions today to the best of your
11 recollection. If you do not understand something, always ask to
12 have it rephrased or re-explained so we make sure that you
13 understand what's being asked. If you realize you misstated
14 something or need to modify a previous answer, feel free to do so.

15 If anybody needs a break during this interview, just please
16 give me the sign, and we will take a break as we go through this.
17 Any breaks, no problem. We can take as many as we need.

18 INTERVIEW OF JIM ELLISON

19 BY MR. STROT:

20 Q. So, Jim, we'll just start off, if you can kind of just walk
21 me through your career with Norfolk Southern, any other railroad
22 experience you've had and what you do here today?

23 A. I hired on with Norfolk Southern 8 February, and I can't
24 remember if it was '92 or '93. It was one or the other, and I
25 hired on as a carman, and I got cut back to a service attendant,

1 and then more cuts and I wound up in transportation. I was a
2 switchman, a conductor, an engineer on the Georgia Division, on
3 the north end of the Georgia Division. I ran train probably 10
4 years out of Atlanta. I took a road foreman position in Roanoke,
5 Virginia. I worked the Shenandoah and then the Bradford District.
6 I was transferred to Sheffield, Alabama in 2005, October I think
7 it was. I was a road foreman between Memphis and Chattanooga in
8 Southampton Parish for I don't know, 5 years maybe. And then I
9 was made the trainmaster on the Memphis East and I stayed here
10 until 2013, and I was transferred to Mobile, Alabama as a
11 trainmaster on 3B South. In 2000 like, 14, 15, 16, it's almost 3
12 years, and then I was transferred back to Decatur, Alabama. Well
13 -- yeah, Decatur, Alabama. I spent only 2 or 3 years -- 2 years
14 in Decatur and was moved to Sheffield Main Tower. I spent a year
15 in the tower at Sheffield, and transferred back to Decatur,
16 Alabama, and I've been there ever since. I think that was in -- I
17 went back to Decatur right at the end of COVID, maybe 2019. I
18 don't remember. I was basically still here, but I was assigned --
19 I was in the tower. I would come here to help whenever they would
20 tell me to.

21 Q. Gotcha. Okay. Thank you.

22 MR. STROT: Does anybody have any questions on experience?

23 (No response.)

24 BY MR. STROT:

25 Q. Okay. Well, Jim, I guess the next thing I wanted to ask you

1 is just, if you could explain operations in Decatur. Really what
2 I'm looking for is, you know, how many jobs you got coming on and,
3 you know, industry work, stuff like that, just a high overview.

4 A. Okay. I've got -- well, from the beginning end, the first
5 local 804, 4 a.m., and then I've got 881 comes on duty at 6 a.m.
6 808 comes on duty at 7 a.m. 875, 7 a.m. 885 -- no, 880 at 3
7 p.m., 885 at 4 p.m., 810 at 5 p.m. and then 888 at 2200 or --
8 yeah, 2200.

9 Q. So eight jobs?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Working around the clock basically.

12 A. Yes, sir, around the clock operations. We service all the
13 industries on the Memphis East, especially around Decatur. It's
14 42 to 48 customers that I believe are active. A lot of them are
15 on A lead, and we have A lead and M lead and the Dembo (ph.) lead
16 there right off the main line in Decatur. Dembo leads to one
17 customer. The M leads to two big customers (indiscernible), and
18 then the rest of them are on the A lead except for the
19 International Paper that's right east -- I mean west of the yard
20 lead. We interchange with the CSX. They even go up river to the
21 Bunkie (ph.), the Coop and then -- or down river Bunkie and Coop,
22 and then up river to a lumber yard that we haven't been to in a
23 long time, but it's still active, but we haven't been there in a
24 while. The (indiscernible) got a long barrel local that goes
25 east, Hollywood, Alabama, just the other side Scottsboro in turns

1 3 days a week. I have a short barrel local, AL4, and he goes east
2 also and in the morning, and they work the International Paper,
3 Dembo. Well, the SA Recycling and then they go east to the
4 Jetplex (ph.) and shove pigs in Huntsville out to the jet place,
5 and then they go to Toyota, and they get the Sheffield Auto racks
6 and bring back to Decatur which is the head end of A10 and they go
7 into Sheffield every day. At night, 88 works the -- I forgot, 08.
8 08 comes on at 3. They work the M lead and upriver. They go to
9 the Interchange, Dembo and the Coop. And then in the evening,
10 I've got the evening local 885 that works Matts (ph.) and works
11 the Jetplex and paper house in Madison, and they deliver and pull
12 pigs and bring them back to the main line for all main line trains
13 to pick up. 804 just shoves out in the morning, you know, he's
14 just cleaning up space so we can drop more cars. And then at
15 night, 888 comes on and they work this end of the A lead and
16 basically that's the operations. That's quick, but --

17 Q. That was a lot of detail. Appreciate it.

18 A. -- 808 though, that's the morning switcher, and they'll
19 switch and classify probably 200 to 300 cars a day into that yard.

20 Q. And they come on duty at 6?

21 A. 7.

22 Q. 7. And they stay in the yard all day?

23 A. Yes, sir, all day. Unless I have something that needs
24 special attention but, no, they usually don't have time to leave.
25 Usually they stay in the yard all day.

1 Q. Gotcha. Okay. Can you explain to me or talk to me about
2 securement in Decatur Yard and where it's located in your rules
3 and what, you know, how you apply it in the yard there?

4 A. Yes, sir. In Decatur, it's a three handbrake rule on the
5 east end of the yard, and on all tracks, there's no C-102
6 required. There's no air on most of the cars anyway, you know,
7 it's a classification yard.

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. And --

10 Q. Where's that found at, that three handbrake requirement?

11 A. In our time table.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Time table instructions.

14 Q. All right. Operations testing-wise, what kind of
15 requirements do you have every month for operations testing
16 specifically around securement?

17 A. It's part of my job. The RP1 has changed recently. I've got
18 four checks that I do, and I'm saying it's kind of a ride with the
19 crew and a ride with the job, and I get out there, and I'm very
20 active with them, and where I used to, I was not active. I would
21 be in a position to observe sometimes seen, sometimes unseen. But
22 now, I'm out there with them. Now, I have two checks a month that
23 are unannounced. The other four are announced. And they're a lot
24 longer checks than we had before, more in depth. I think it's a
25 good thing. So that's my requirements now, but I go through that

1 yard during the day when I first come on duty and ride and check
2 and make sure there's nothing afoul on the other end. I ride
3 around the yard, see where all my engines are and I come back and
4 I start my day. That's my -- that's kind of my normal routine,
5 and I know my A08, they ride around the yard every morning when
6 they come on duty also they do. They drive the -- everybody's
7 looking for their motors when they pull through, and some of them
8 go to the other end and turn around and some ride around. Then I
9 pull up to the office and get my morning paperwork.

10 Q. Gotcha. What time do you normally start every day?

11 A. I try to, I try to get to work at 5 a.m., sometimes a little
12 earlier. My partner, Jeff Costa, has been off and so my hours, I
13 cover his territory by myself and so our hours are according to
14 how long I have to stay at night because it's very important to
15 get my -- I build one train a day in that yard, and it's important
16 to get that train out and on time and correctly built. So I've
17 been staying a little later and trying to sleep what I can in the
18 morning.

19 Q. Gotcha. Okay. What is that one train a day that you all
20 build out there?

21 A. 364 is the through freight. I build the locals, a couple of
22 locals in the morning, but that's my only train.

23 Q. Okay. That's all the questions I have for the moment.

24 MR. STROT: We'll go around.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

1 MR. YOUNG: Steve Young, FRA.

2 BY MR. YOUNG:

3 Q. So, three handbrakes on the east end?

4 A. Yes, sir.

5 Q. Is there a reason behind only having them on the east end?

6 A. Yes, sir. It's always been that way but, you know, they
7 don't roll. I haven't had occasion -- they don't roll uphill on
8 -- from that -- on the east end -- of the west end of the yard,
9 it's uphill.

10 Q. Okay. And do crews typically -- do you have a crew switching
11 on the east end and west end at the same time? Is that --

12 A. It does happen, yes, sir.

13 Q. Is it daily? Is it --

14 A. Yeah, it'll be -- I would say it's daily. I try, you know,
15 A08 comes in at a time when we're hoping they get done by the time
16 80 comes on. And I'm hoping if the inbound trains are in, and the
17 outbound trains are out.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. But, yes, I've got -- that little yard does a lot of work
20 every day.

21 Q. Okay. And as far as roll outs, does stuff roll out of, roll
22 out of those tracks on the east or west end while they're kicking
23 cars and moving equipment?

24 A. No, no, they don't. Okay. I've had roll outs on the -- I've
25 had roll out on the west -- on the, excuse me, on the east end but

1 that was when we were dropping cars and knuckles failed up on the
2 hill and cars rolled. Even those don't roll. I've never had them
3 get out of the yard. Now, they might go through a switch, but
4 once they get down there at the bottom and they start up the grade
5 down there on the east end of the yard, they're slow I've seen.
6 We caught 35 (ph.) on track 1, and track 1 happened to be clear
7 when a knuckle failed and this has been a while back, but those
8 cars rolled into 1, and they didn't even get out to the other end.

9 Q. Okay. And so how many trainmasters are there in Decatur?

10 A. Me and Jeff Costa, two.

11 Q. There's two. Okay. That's it. I don't have any further
12 questions. Thank you.

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 MR. B. McCOY: Byrl McCoy with the FRA.

15 BY MR. B. McCoy:

16 Q. Thank you, Mr. Ellison, for coming in --

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 Q. -- and discussing your operations with us today. You said
19 you build a train, 364?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. What time is that train due out?

22 A. 12:01 a.m. and I only build it during the dayshift.

23 Q. Okay. All right. Are you there when the train leaves or
24 anything or --

25 A. I have been but usually Jeff works nights and I work days and

1 he's there most of the time. The two days that I cover, his off
2 days, sometimes I'm there. I hope not to be because it's going to
3 be a bad morning if I am. So.

4 Q. Right. I got you. And, you said you're a trainmaster at
5 Decatur. Do you cover Sheffield to Chattanooga or --

6 A. Sheffield, Chattanooga.

7 Q. Sheffield, Chattanooga. About how many trains operate a day
8 on that subdivision?

9 A. Twenty or so plus my locals.

10 Q. That's a busy subdivision.

11 A. Yes, it is.

12 Q. And how long has Mr. Costa been off?

13 A. I had been off the first half of this month. I had surgery
14 on my eye. And, then I came back right before the ice storm, and
15 I was there by myself that week. And then Jeff came back from
16 California and covered my off days, and then he's gone back to
17 California now. So he hasn't been here for like 3 days. They
18 sent him back actually.

19 Q. Okay. What would you -- last year, 2023, do you roughly how
20 many human factor incidents you've had in Decatur?

21 A. Two RBDs -- two or three RBDs. I didn't have any injury.
22 That was December of the year before. Oh, that would be last
23 year. So I had one injury. One injury.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. That was a conductor of mine. A utility man stepping across

1 the tracks slipped and fell and hurt her left wrist. That was in
2 December. It might have been the year before, but it was in
3 December. I can't remember if it was -- I don't remember. I
4 don't remember, sir.

5 Q. Okay. That's fine. That's fine. Run through switches?

6 A. Two or three maybe. We don't have many run through switches
7 and we don't have many derailments. We just don't. I mean those
8 guys, they do a good job.

9 Q. Pretty experienced then?

10 A. Yes, well run crews, especially the dayshift crews are all
11 very experienced. They have a lot of years of service.

12 Q. Okay. I'm not -- you have to excuse me. I'm not familiar
13 with Norfolk Southern.

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. Not any more any way. Is there a safety committee, like a
16 subdivision safety committee.

17 A. We do have a safety committee, yes, sir.

18 Q. And do you all meet on a regular basis?

19 A. Monthly, once a month.

20 Q. Once a month. And is that with the local chairmen and safety
21 committee members?

22 A. No, the safety committee members -- the committees have
23 changed throughout the years, but I have a yard, I have a yard
24 safety committee member, and I have a road safety committee
25 member. And they meet on I'm saying the third Wednesday or

1 Thursday of the month. I think it's the third Thursday of every
2 month. I'm almost positive.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Do you need their names?

5 Q. No, no. No, thank you, though.

6 MR. MCCOY: I don't have no further questions at this time.

7 MR. STROT: Chris.

8 MR. CHRISTIANSON: Chris Christianson, SMART TD. I have no
9 questions.

10 MR. WYATT: David Wyatt, BLET.

11 MR. ELLISON: Yes, sir.

12 MR. WYATT: No questions, but thank you for coming in and
13 sharing with us.

14 MR. ELLISON: Yes, sir.

15 DR. JENNER: Yeah, Steve Jenner with the NTSB.

16 BY DR. JENNER:

17 Q. Thanks for being here. Are there -- so you're out observing
18 crews during their operations.

19 A. Yes, sir.

20 Q. Are there quarterly reports or annual evaluations that you're
21 responsible for making?

22 A. Quarterly or annual evaluations. No, sir, mine is done
23 monthly.

24 Q. Monthly.

25 A. Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Those checks that I

1 make, those are my monthly requirements on my RP1, if I'm
2 understanding your question right.

3 Q. I'm interested in their performance evaluation.

4 A. On my people?

5 Q. Yes.

6 A. No, sir, I don't, I don't think so, but I feel that I'm
7 something -- on Costa, my assistant trainmaster, as the
8 trainmaster, I did his annual review if that's what you're asking
9 but --

10 Q. You've got a bunch of crews out there.

11 A. Yes, sir.

12 Q. Doing their jobs. How do we know if they're doing their jobs
13 very well or --

14 A. I let them know personally. I check them and I go talk to
15 them every day. I have job -- preshift meetings and a lot of
16 times, mid shift meetings with these crews and I see first and
17 second shift. I get there before first shift starts. I see those
18 crews, and I'm there when second shift, 3, 4, 5 and 6, when
19 they're on. I usually don't leave until 7 or 8 at night. The
20 only job that I would see in the shift is the preshift which would
21 be 888 that comes on at 10. So hopefully I'm in bed at 10 p.m.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. But I see them end of shift. Maybe they'll call me but, you
24 know, I don't -- I guess that's it. I don't do an annual. I mean
25 I've got certain checks that I have to make on the engineer, stop

1 signal checks, you know, or speed check, regular railroad
2 switches, yes, sir, but that would be in -- considered in my -- my
3 mind is just fading -- exception report.

4 Q. Okay. So it sounds like your feedback about their
5 performance is sort of real time.

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. Okay. We talked to four members of the east crew yesterday,
8 Caleb, Jeff.

9 A. Yes, sir.

10 Q. Yes. You know the people who I'm referring to. Can you talk
11 about each one and your take on how -- the type of employee they
12 are.

13 A. Engineer Jeff Hayes, I've known -- what can I say. I've
14 known Jeff Hayes, the engineer on that job since I got here. When
15 I was a road foreman, there was a cross accident in Cherokee that
16 I had to go investigate, and I got -- that was one of the ones I
17 got there before the ambulance even got there. I was there with
18 the state trooper. And a woman had been struck at a crossing, by
19 herself, you know, in I want to say it was an Explorer and had
20 been killed. And we were trying to -- I was trying to help the
21 state trooper as best I could and they pulled the purse out, and
22 he got the identification and he did his calling in, and he came
23 over to me and asked me if I had an engineer on my -- that worked
24 out -- in Sheffield named Jeff Hayes. So I had to get through the
25 handling the incident, and then I drove to Chattanooga and got

1 Jeff and carried him home to his two daughters. Jeff had a hard
2 time working after that as an engineer, not that he couldn't do
3 the job, he just didn't want to get on the road and a lot of guys
4 helped him to where he wouldn't get rode off a job in Decatur. So
5 I've known Jeff for a very long time, ever since his wife passed.
6 He's always been a conscious employee. I've never had an issue
7 with Jeff Hayes.

8 Kevin Pigg's (ph.) father works for me. I've with Kevin
9 Pigg's father for a long time. He's an engineer on the Memphis
10 East. He's a very good man. I hired Kevin. Kevin's a hard
11 worker. He gets works done that -- he gets a lot done on his job,
12 and I've had -- I mean he's a good young man. That's it.

13 Q. I'm not asking about -- thank you for that. So the next
14 question is not about anyone in particular. But are there times
15 when you're out in the field making observations that you do
16 identify some type of violation?

17 A. Sure.

18 Q. Sure. Can you tell me what are some of the more common type
19 of violations?

20 A. Common type of violations could be safety equipment would be
21 extremely common, if it's someone's safety glasses or earplugs,
22 stuff -- handling switches. Those are common.

23 Q. How about more things with safety of the train, applying
24 handbrakes?

25 A. Yes, there's been instances where I've have employees not

1 properly securing the -- they're trying to putting one handbrake
2 or no handbrakes or not doing the C-102. That's my job, to find
3 that when it happens and correct that behavior.

4 Q. And what is the process for correcting the behavior?

5 A. Either through start handling discipline or even removal from
6 service -- up to removal from service. Sometimes, you know, it's
7 just -- I don't know how to say it. Knowing your people's
8 important on how you want to handle it because somebody that's
9 been violation a lot of rules, you know, you handle them more
10 severely than somebody that done. This is the first time you ever
11 caught them doing something, you know.

12 Q. Right. Do you recall -- now, getting back to particular
13 people, do you recall having to make any corrections for Caleb?

14 A. I don't recall, no, sir, not off the top of my head.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Knowing Jeff, as a matter of fact, he's -- I just -- I
17 probably have over the last 20 years, but I just don't remember if
18 I have and especially what the details were.

19 Q. Okay. In terms of you've worked at other yards in the same
20 capacity as you are now, as a trainmaster.

21 A. Yes, sir. Mobile, Virginia, Bradford, Roanoke, Shenandoah,
22 yes.

23 Q. In terms --

24 A. As a road foreman.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Just as a trainmaster would be Sheffield, Decatur and Mobile
2 and then 3B South.

3 Q. Right. I'm interested in if you can compare or contrast
4 those other yards to this one in terms of challenges and
5 difficulty and things like that.

6 A. The size of this yard and the congestion in this yard is more
7 than the others combined really I mean. Mobile had a bigger yard
8 but they had two yards, a north yard and a south yard in the
9 Mobile area, and when you had room, in the north yard, to shove
10 stuff back across the interchange there into the north yard and
11 store and hold it. I don't have that, I don't have that ability
12 in Decatur. I've got to move those cars every day, every day.
13 They've got to come in, they've got to come out and they've got to
14 go. I've got to make space for the next stuff coming to get out
15 to the customers.

16 Q. Do you think as a result, there's a higher percentage of
17 violations in this yard than other yards you worked?

18 A. No, sir, I think it's less.

19 Q. Less? Because of the experience of the people or why might
20 that be?

21 A. The experience of the people plays a lot into it, and the way
22 they were trained by myself and the other supervisors on this
23 district and the fact that their local chairman and that, and
24 their trainers are so involved in training these young men. They
25 are, and they take pride. And in Sheffield, I can't remember.

1 There was a -- we went 10, I can't remember how many years it was
2 without even a reportable injury on this. I mean it's very
3 uncommon. It's a good district, safe people. They care.

4 Q. All right. I appreciate your answers, sir. Thank you.

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 MR. STROT: Ben Strot, NTSB

7 BY MR. STROT:

8 Q. The only follow-up question I have for you is we talked out
9 securing the three handbrakes on the east end.

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 Q. Do you require crews to go -- as they're finishing up for a
12 shift to check for butted knuckles, to put the track back
13 together, to, you know, secure any extra cuts or is it just on the
14 east end, three handbrakes?

15 A. On the east end, three handbrakes.

16 Q. Okay. Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

17 A. Now, the trains, the solid trains that are built, now they'll
18 go 364, 807 and those, the things that are fixing to leave, we'll
19 go out there and get them together and make sure all the air's
20 coupled on 364 to leave and be brake tested. And engines,
21 outbound engines put on by 875 and DOT, everything done so when
22 that job, that train does come on duty at 10 o'clock, 10:30 at
23 night, the only delay they have is getting the CSX bulletins and
24 paperwork and getting out.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Because like I said, I'm not going to be there and I don't
2 want them to have any excuse. I need them gone by midnight.

3 Q. Gotcha. Okay. That's all the questions I had.

4 MR. THOMPSON: I have no questions.

5 MR. YOUNG: Just one follow-up question. Steve Young, FRA.

6 BY MR. YOUNG:

7 Q. So you said you do a drive around the yard when you get to
8 work in the morning.

9 A. Yeah, making sure nothing's afoul, yes, sir.

10 Q. Did you happen to notice anything that morning or --

11 A. I drove out that morning, and I had a train that broke down
12 that night on 885 at Madison, and I had to -- I got -- I took and
13 it was tied down. That was (indiscernible) and it's important
14 that they make connection with 286 especially since I've got -- I
15 also have the work train out there working on Madison Branch line,
16 and I've got M&W wanting to get in the yard. But anyway, that
17 train broke down on the Branch line. The M&W wanted to get out
18 and work. And I went up there with 899 to Madison that morning
19 and I had a brand new conductor on the 885 that night, and they
20 were -- and him and his engineer, they was thinking it was
21 something wrong with the engine. So I got out there with -- and
22 checked that engine and blocked the air right behind the engine
23 and pumped the compressor up and made sure everything worked fine.
24 We cut air loose through three or four cars, and the overall train
25 was about 3,000 feet. And anyway, in the inspection, we found a

1 bad order, 5 back car. We had set it out.

2 But anyway, to answer your question, yes, I drove out to that
3 end of the yard with that crew, and as I went out to that end of
4 the yard I looked that morning to make sure everything -- there's
5 a road that split out down there on the east end of the yard that
6 we cross over to get to the BDO (ph.), the north paved road over
7 there that runs up the north side of the yard. And if I've got
8 cars that are hung over that, I need to check because we're
9 getting close to getting afoul in the middle of the yard. And
10 then on the 10 and 11 stuff, I can see as I drive out, 9, 8, so,
11 you know, around the side. And then I check (indiscernible) and
12 make sure nothing's on that crossing. And then I go -- and then I
13 went to Madison.

14 Q. Okay. But nothing appeared --

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. Thank you.

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I have no questions.

19 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No questions.

20 MR. WYATT: David Wyatt, BLET.

21 BY MR. WYATT:

22 Q. As far as any sort of observation you've seen in the past,
23 have you had any dealings with the FRA before as far as Decatur
24 goes or anything like that?

25 A. Oh, yeah. Yes, sir, I have. The FRA comes in and inspects

1 right regular.

2 Q. Okay. Thank you.

3 A. Yes, sir.

4 DR. JENNER: I have no questions.

5 BY MR. STROT:

6 Q. The last thing -- all right, Jim. Thank you so much for your
7 detailed, cooperation. The last thing I always ask people is do
8 you have anything to add, anything we didn't ask you that you want
9 to add to the record?

10 A. Nothing that pertains to the questions you asked me.

11 Q. That's perfect. And if we have any follow-up questions for
12 you, can I contact you?

13 A. Absolutely, yes, sir.

14 Q. Okay. Appreciate that. On behalf of the NTSB, we appreciate
15 your -- as I said before, you're completeness, detail and just
16 coming and talking to us. Thank you so much.

17 A. Yes, sir.

18 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE
 FATALITY NEAR DECATUR, ALABAMA
 ON JANUARY 31, 2024
 Interview of Jim Ellison

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD24FR007

PLACE: Decatur, Alabama

DATE: February 3, 2024

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.



K
Transcriber