

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE *

FATALITY NEAR DECATUR, ALABAMA * Accident No.: RRD24FR007

ON JANUARY 31, 2024 *

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Interview of: JAY PARKER, Utility Man (U-Man)
Norfolk Southern

Marriott Courtyard
Decatur, Alabama

Friday,
February 2, 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
Norfolk Southern

SHAUN McCOY, Gulf Division Superintendent,
Transportation
Norfolk Southern

STEPHEN YOUNG, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

DAVID WYATT, Investigator, Safety Task Force
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)

CHRIS CHRISTIANSON, Investigator, National Safety Team
SMART-Transportation Division

TODD SIZEMORE, Local Chairman, Division 423
Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET)
(On behalf of Mr. Parker)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. STROT: Good afternoon. My name is Ben Strot. I'm an investigator for the NTSB. Today is February 2nd, 2024. We're meeting at the Marriott Courtyard in 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 a part of the DOT, FRA, or any other regulatory agency. NTSB has no regulatory or enforcement powers. We will 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 are currently in the fact-finding phase, that we will follow up with analysis, probable cause finding, and finally any recommendations we see necessary.

Today we're here to speak with Jay Parker. Before we begin, we'll go around the table, introduce ourselves for the transcriptionist. Please speak up, speak clearly, and spell your last name as we go around. I'll start off.

Ben Strot, S-t-r-o-t, rail accident investigator, NTSB.

MR. THOMPSON: Matt Thompson, T-h-o-m-p-s-o-n, IIC, rail accident investigator.

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

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

2 MR. McCOY: Shaun McCoy, M-c-C-o-y, Norfolk Southern division
3 superintendent.

4 MR. PARKER: Jay Parker, U-Man, Decatur. P-a-r-k-e-r.

5 MR. SIZEMORE: Todd Sizemore, S-i-z-e-m-o-r-e, with BLET
6 Division 423, local chairman.

7 MR. WYATT: David Wyatt, W-y-a-t-t, BLET Safety Task Force
8 investigator.

9 MR. CHRISTIANSON: Chris Christianson, C-h-r-i-s-t-i-a-n-s-o-
10 n, SMART-TD safety team.

11 DR. JENNER: Stephen Jenner, J-e-n-n-e-r, human performance
12 investigator with the NTSB.

13 MR. STROT: All right. Thank you.

14 And just to remind everybody, when we're asking questions
15 please re-state your name for the transcriptionist so they know
16 who is asking questions.

17 Mr. Parker, as we spoke beforehand, this interview is being
18 recorded. Are you okay with that?

19 MR. PARKER: Yes, sir.

20 MR. STROT: Okay. And as such, it will be made part of the
21 public docket and we cannot promise confidentiality. Do you
22 understand that?

23 MR. PARKER: Yes, sir.

24 MR. STROT: Okay. And during this interview, you're allowed
25 to have one representative, which your representative, I would

1 surmise, is Mr. Sizemore?

2 MR. PARKER: Yes, sir.

3 MR. STROT: And Mr. Sizemore cannot answer questions for you,
4 testify for you, object to questions, but if you need to confirm
5 with him, again, just give me the symbol for timeout and we'll
6 take a break for you all to go outside and confer on, you know, a
7 question that's being answered, something along those lines.

8 Please answer all the questions today to the best of your
9 recollection. If you don't understand a question, just ask for it
10 to be repeated or explained. If you realize you misstated
11 something just, you know, let us know and you can go back and
12 correct anything you said.

13 And just for anybody, if anybody needs to take a break, just
14 remember give a timeout sign and we'll go off the record and take
15 a break.

16 INTERVIEW OF JAY PARKER

17 BY MR. STROT:

18 Q. So let's get started. Jay, if you'll just run us through
19 your experience with NS, with any railroad, what you've done,
20 different positions you worked, what your position is now?

21 A. I've been with Norfolk Southern for 24 years. Qualified
22 engineer in '05, and currently working the U-Man in Decatur.

23 Q. You've been in train service your whole career?

24 A. Yes, sir.

25 Q. Okay. And U-Man Decatur, what -- is that day shift, swing

1 shift, night shift?

2 A. Day shift U-Man.

3 Q. What time do you come on duty for that one?

4 A. Six a.m. Off days Thursday/Friday.

5 Q. Okay. And those 24 years that you've had with NS, most of it
6 here in Decatur or --

7 A. Well, just all on Decatur, Sheffield. Started out in
8 Memphis, on the ground in Memphis.

9 Q. Okay. How much have you worked in Decatur Yard? Like what's
10 your experience in the actual yard there?

11 A. I've worked -- as far as years, I don't know exactly how many
12 years, but I've worked in Decatur Yard quite a bit.

13 Q. Okay. All positions, conductor, U-Man, engineer, or --

14 A. All positions.

15 Q. Okay. All right.

16 MR. STROT: Anybody got any questions on experience?

17 DR. JENNER: If I can a question?

18 MR. STROT: Yeah. Go right ahead.

19 DR. JENNER: Just what is your -- what does a U-Man do? What
20 are your duties and responsibilities?

21 MR. PARKER: To assist other jobs. If I have to take a crew
22 somewhere, I take crew somewhere, and that's pretty much --
23 basically I'm a floating brakeman, since we don't have those
24 anymore.

25 DR. JENNER: Okay. Thank you. This was Steve Jenner.

1 BY MR. STROT:

2 Q. All right. Jay, we'll just move into the day this incident
3 occurred. If you can start us off when you came on duty, all the
4 way up till -- through the incident and when you tied up, what was
5 going on, where you were at, and --

6 A. Come on duty at 6 a.m. I'm trying to think of which job I
7 went with first. I believe it was 04, helped them out first,
8 switched their cars out, and then I started bleeding track 5, 8,
9 10, 11. And then I will assist 08, the job switching the yard, I
10 assist them when I'm not assisting any other crews. And then I
11 went out to "A" lead to pick up 75 and help them build their train
12 together. Then we come back into the yard, put their train away
13 in the siding. Dropped 75 back off at the -- it's a shack. And
14 then I went to ask 08 where they needed me. They needed me to
15 make a long coupling in CT1.

16 I went around, picked up -- I picked up 80, when I done it,
17 took them down to the east end of the yard so they can get on
18 their motors. I went and made the coupling in 1. And I -- after
19 I made the coupling, I started going back down, making the air
20 hoses on 1. And that's when I heard on the radio what was going
21 on.

22 Q. Okay. So when the incident occurred, you were in 1 track
23 lacing up air hoses?

24 A. About 10 cars from the east end of CT1, 10 to 15 cars.

25 Q. Okay. Going back to you said you were bleeding tracks in the

1 yard, walking bleeding 8 track. When you were walking that track,
2 do you remember if 7 was all together or if there were gaps in it?
3 Do you happen to recollect that?

4 A. No. I really don't know that. No, sir.

5 Q. Okay. In your time working in the yard there in Decatur,
6 what's your experience with the grade of the yard, and if you kick
7 cars in the yard or cut cars off, what -- how does that yard roll
8 grade-wise?

9 A. Well, your hill is on the west end of the yard, you know,
10 flat back out. The tracks are made into a bowl.

11 Q. Okay. All right. Long shot here, but again, as you were
12 bleeding 8, do you remember if 7 was all the way up at the east
13 end of the yard?

14 A. That was first thing in the morning when I was doing that, so
15 that would've been maybe 7:30, 8 o'clock when I was coming through
16 there.

17 Q. Gotcha. So you don't remember if it was pulled down to the
18 east end or not?

19 A. No, sir.

20 Q. Okay. All right. Gotcha.

21 MR. STROT: Okay. I don't have any other questions.

22 BY MR. THOMPSON:

23 Q. Just a quick one. Matt Thompson, NTSB. So what were your
24 hours today, 6 a.m. to what?

25 A. I got off that day?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. I think around 2:30, something like that, 2:20 in the
3 morning.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. By the time we went to the hospital and --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. -- we talked with everybody.

8 Q. What would your normal shift be?

9 A. Normal shift is anywhere from 11 to 12 hours, maybe, usually
10 on the U-Man jobs.

11 MR. THOMPSON: Okay. I just wanted to clarify that. Thank
12 you.

13 MR. PARKER: Yes, sir.

14 BY MR. YOUNG:

15 Q. Steve Young, FRA. Just some general questions about working
16 in the yard. How many handbrakes are required?

17 A. Three handbrakes on the east end of the yard after you're
18 done switching in the track.

19 Q. And as far as butted knuckles or I think you guys call them
20 jams, is that pretty common?

21 A. Yes, sir.

22 Q. Do you find those in the middle of the tracks?

23 A. Yes, sir. You will find that from time to time.

24 Q. Okay. And what -- if you find one, what happens typically if
25 one is found or it's -- is it just --

1 A. If it's on a train going out, then we will make those back
2 up, like 365, A10, "A" lead train that leads up row 7, he'll make
3 those back up. If they're in what we call jump tracks, a lot of
4 times he won't make those back up. They'll get made up when
5 people switch cars back out.

6 Q. Yeah. So like if you're bleeding -- say, for example, you're
7 bleeding off a track and you find -- you happen to notice some
8 butted knuckles or something, it's not really that big of a deal,
9 just whenever they pull on the track, they'll fix it then?

10 A. Yes, sir.

11 MR. YOUNG: Okay. I believe that's all I got. Thanks.

12 BY MR. McCOY:

13 Q. Shaun McCoy, NS. Jay, you bled quite a few tracks that day.
14 When you're bleeding cars are you just releasing air or are
15 looking for the jams or handbrakes, anything like that normally?

16 A. The trains I'll normally bleed will be the trains that come
17 in for overnight that the day shift job will switch. So it will
18 be like 365, A07's train, A10's train, 80's train, the
19 interchange. So those trains are -- the tracks that I bleed will
20 be the tracks they want to switch that day.

21 Q. So when you're bleeding are looking for handbrakes or
22 anything as well as you go along generally, or --

23 A. You will some, but, I mean, what you'll check on -- before I
24 do anything every day, I check on the east end of the yard and
25 make sure the tracks are tied down before 08 starts switching. So

1 that's where I'm concerned with the handbrakes, will be on the
2 east end of the yard.

3 Q. And that day, did every track that you bled have handbrakes
4 on the east end?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 MR. McCOY: Okay. That's all the questions I have.

7 BY MR. HUNT:

8 Q. And you may have mentioned this but I missed it. Did you do
9 any work in track 7 that day, help the 8 job make any shoves or
10 put any cars in there?

11 A. I don't really recall if I made a joint in that track. I did
12 in a couple tracks for them, but I don't really recall if I did
13 on that one or not.

14 Q. Okay. And you --

15 A. If I did, it would have been earlier in my shift.

16 Q. And I think maybe he asked this, but I didn't catch that
17 either. Did you say you didn't notice any handbrakes or anything
18 in 7 when you were checking the 8 -- when you were working in 8?

19 A. Seven, when I started, I don't think it had as many cars in
20 it by the end of the day. There was cars. It was tied down on
21 the east end of it. And I am sure like most of our tracks,
22 especially what we call the jump tracks, if somebody makes a cut a
23 lot of times, I mean, it'll be numerous brakes in through the cut
24 other than just on the east end of the tracks.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. That's not uncommon to find that at all.

2 MR. HUNT: That was Randy Hunt with NS. I don't have
3 anything else.

4 MR. WYATT: David Wyatt, BLET. I don't really have any
5 questions for you. I just want to thank you for being here.

6 MR. PARKER: Thank you, sir.

7 MR. CHRISTIANSON: Chris Christianson from SMART-TD. I don't
8 have any questions. Thank you for being here. I know, you know,
9 how hard it can be. Thank you.

10 MR. PARKER: Thank you, sir.

11 BY DR. JENNER:

12 Q. This is Steve Jenner with the NTSB. Just a couple questions.
13 Have you in your experience there in any capacity, have you seen
14 cars -- an incident like this where cars rolled the way --

15 A. No, sir.

16 Q. -- it occurred?

17 A. No, sir.

18 Q. Okay. No one's asked you yet, do you have any thoughts about
19 what happened this day?

20 A. I don't really, I don't really know, sir.

21 DR. JENNER: Okay. Great. Thank you.

22 MR. STROT: All right. Going around for any follow-up
23 questions. I don't have any follow-up questions, so --

24 MR. THOMPSON: I don't either.

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No.

2 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, sir.

3 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No, sir.

4 MR. STROT: All right. Well, Jay, we really appreciate you
5 coming in and talking with us. The last couple of questions I ask
6 everybody, is there anything -- any question we didn't ask,
7 anything you want to add?

8 MR. PARKER: No, sir.

9 MR. STROT: Anybody else we should talk to that was not on
10 this crew or the 08 that you can think of?

11 MR. PARKER: No, sir.

12 MR. STROT: Okay. Do you mind, if we have any follow-up
13 questions, if we contact you at the phone number you gave me?

14 MR. PARKER: That'll be fine.

15 MR. STROT: Okay. Well, on behalf of the NTSB, I do
16 appreciate your cooperation and your detail and the information
17 you gave us really helps out. Thank you, 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

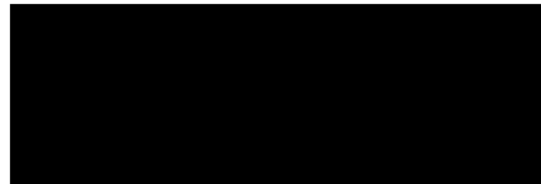
IN THE MATTER OF: NORFOLK SOUTHERN EMPLOYEE
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ON JANUARY 31, 2024
Interview of Jay Parker

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD24FR007

PLACE: Decatur, Alabama

DATE: February 2, 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.



Transcriber