



**Survival Factors Attachment-
Emergency Responder
Interviews**

Pala Mesa, California

HWY20FH003

(67 pages)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
NEAR PALA MESA, CALIFORNIA,
ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020

Accident No.: HWY20FH003

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Interview of: CAPT. TOM HARRINGTON
North County Fire Protection District

Via telephone

Friday,
February 28, 2020

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Capt. Harrington:

By Ms. Harley

4

I N T E R V I E W

(9:10 a.m.)

1
2
3 MS. HARLEY: Great. Okay, so I'm just going to start with
4 the basics here, so -- by saying that today is the -- 28th of
5 February, 2020?

6 CAPT. HARRINGTON: Correct.

7 MS. HARLEY: Okay, I wanted to make sure I got that right.
8 And it's 2:23 p.m., and I'm talking to Captain Tom Harrington.
9 And you're of the North County Fire Protection District?

10 CAPT. HARRINGTON: Yes, ma'am. North County Fire Protection
11 District.

12 MS. HARLEY: Great. And my understanding is, is that you
13 were the first of -- you were actually the commanding officer --
14 initial commanding officer for the crash involving the bus
15 rollover in Pala Mesa. I got that right?

16 CAPT. HARRINGTON: Yes, ma'am. Yes, ma'am, first company
17 officer at scene, established incident command, and then grew the
18 incident from that. And I transferred command later on to Barry
19 Krumwiede, which you're in contact with as well. But yeah, that's
20 all correct.

21 MS. HARLEY: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF CAPT. TOM HARRINGTON

22
23 BY MS. HARLEY:

24 Q. So I guess what I'm going to do is, can you walk me through
25 it, starting from when you got the call and what you got the call

1 for, and just walk me through the emergency response?

2 A. Yes, ma'am. So, initially the response came in -- or the
3 call note came in as a vehicle onto the side. As my crew was
4 getting dressed for the response at Station Four -- which, at
5 Station Four, I have an engine company -- it's an all-risk engine
6 company, so it has all extrication equipment, medical equipment,
7 triage equipment -- it's set up for these types of incidents --
8 stabilization equipment, and then my -- an ambulance at my station
9 as well that was with me. And they are non-safety personnel.

10 But as everyone was getting in their protective equipment and
11 getting ready to go, then notes popped up on the screen that it
12 was a tour bus of some sort that had rolled several times and had
13 ejections, and parties were trapped still. So I upgraded the
14 response from the initial two engines, an ambulance, and a
15 battalion chief to the -- what we call a major medical response,
16 and then I added a couple more pieces of equipment for the
17 over-the-side aspect.

18 But I upgraded it from the initial response to five more
19 engine companies, one of which being a truck company, five
20 additional ambulance companies on top of my one that come in, and
21 then on top of that, a couple more battalion chiefs were added
22 because of that. So initially that -- with the notes that
23 dispatch gave us, we were able to upgrade that response, which is
24 standard in our zone.

25 As we approached the scene from 395, approaching the freeway

1 -- we're north of the incident, so we're now heading south -- we
2 had eyes on the bus, over the side, and no less than about 20
3 vehicles were stopped on the side of the roadway rendering care.
4 Visible from about a mile away with the rains that were coming
5 through. At that time, we were having spout -- downpours, but
6 they weren't excessive in nature. They were -- a cell had moved
7 through the area, but it didn't stay for long. It was a thin band
8 of water that pushed through the area at that time, and then it
9 was a light sprinkle at the time of our activation for 911.

10 We got to scene, positioned the apparatus in a -- what we
11 call a command location, so we have a good windshield view of the
12 incident. And when I arrived to scene, I was able to -- first of
13 all, I determined a staging location for all resources coming in,
14 because I didn't want resources to just come into my scene, so
15 that was done prior to my arrival as well. But as I got on scene,
16 I established command.

17 I identified that we had about ten patients on the deck that
18 looked like -- the deck was on the shoulder of the freeway, on
19 that area -- and then what looked like multiple patients were off
20 on the embankment. And then I got reports from the sheriff
21 officer who was on scene that we had five victims trapped in the
22 bus still.

23 So what I immediately did is have my firefighter become med
24 com and communicate with the area hospitals to get bed counts, and
25 my engineer immediately become a triage (indiscernible). I had my

1 ambulance support the triaging of all patients, so we understand
2 how severe and categorize them in order of severity.

3 I had my next-in engine company that arrived to scene take a
4 rescue profile for over the side and identify needs for
5 extrication of those five patients I talked about, and then also
6 victim retrieval on that slope, because it was a decent slope, see
7 what he needs to remove those patients from the slope and get them
8 up on the deck.

9 And then, when I had my next-in engine company, which was
10 engine 114 -- excuse me. 115 came in next, and they were assigned
11 by me to a rescue group supervisor position because of the extent
12 of the extrication that was going to be needed for the victims
13 that were inside still.

14 Subsequent arriving units were assigned to support the triage
15 and treatment of patients, and then we -- gosh darn it -- right
16 around at that point, Battalion 111 got to scene, who is the IC2,
17 Barry Krumwiede. I gave him a face-to-face turnover of -- we had
18 a rough count from the driver of the bus, said he a manifest of 15
19 patients -- or 15 people on board, which found to be quite low
20 compared to the numbers that we found at scene.

21 So we got the numbers; I rounded the ambulances up to account
22 for possibly 20 patients, because these scenes, you know, you
23 always need more ambulances. So I gave all that information to
24 the IC2 coming in, and he assigned me the transportation
25 (indiscernible), so I was in charge of getting everyone off the

1 scene and to the hospitals that they were assigned to.

2 What we were presented with, though, was a bus that had
3 rolled several times on the deck of the freeway -- or not on the
4 freeway, but on the shoulder of the freeway, and then slid off the
5 side of the road and rested on its roof. The roof structure was
6 smashed in and offset towards the driver's side in such a way that
7 the bus was then resting on the headrests of all seats, not on the
8 roof structure, because it had given away -- had broken away.

9 The rear bathroom component, the rear corner of it -- and I
10 want to say that's probably the driver's side was where the
11 restroom was -- that piece was intact still and kind of
12 triangulating how it was sitting on the ground. So as you moved
13 further aft in the bus, it elevated off the ground slightly, but
14 not much.

15 And then, what we were dealing with is the front of the bus
16 was actually facing uphill, and the rear of the bus was facing
17 downhill. To make access to several of the patients inside, we
18 had to cut away the headrests of several of the seats to make
19 access to retrieve the victims from inside the bus that were still
20 trapped in the bus.

21 And we had -- the roof structure, at no point was it
22 sustaining the weight of the bus, is what I'm trying to get at.
23 It made it in an area and in a way that was very difficult to
24 stabilize and actually get in there and extricate the many victims
25 inside. You know, the bus itself, with its structure decaying the

1 way it did, unfortunately caused us to have two engine companies
2 assigned just to the rescue portion of that versus getting all the
3 patients out like we normally would on a normal scene.

4 And I can keep going from there, but we moved all the
5 patients out of the bus, moved all the patients off the hillside,
6 and got them into a collection area, which we call the treatment
7 area. And then from that point on, we moved them off the scene
8 into each ambulance, and we loaded -- it took five ambulances to
9 transport the 18 patients that were transported.

10 And then we had three patients that were 1144, or classified
11 as black, on the triage category that were at scene. One was --
12 which -- still underneath the bus for quite some time until we did
13 recovery -- until the scene turned from rescue to recovery.

14 Q. So I wanted to talk to you about that.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. So explain to me how the female was actually trapped
17 underneath the bus, and kind of walk me through, number one, the
18 patient assessment and then, ultimately, how the victim was
19 actually extricated.

20 A. So the patient was trapped underneath the bus -- underneath
21 the roof. So the patient was about mid-bus as far as the -- from
22 front to back, so about midpoint. And then she was underneath the
23 bus' roof, between the ground and the roof, obviously, but it was
24 about to her torso of where she was trapped in there.

25 And when we made access -- well, it wasn't particularly me,

1 but when -- I was told by engine 115, when they made access to
2 that patient, she had no life, life signs. They hooked her up to
3 an EKG, and she had no signs of life. At that time, she had been
4 -- and the EKG itself was added at a very later -- very late time.
5 But during the triage aspect, no peripheral movement -- now, we
6 use an RPM: no respirations, no pulse, and obviously we couldn't
7 extricate her to check her airway, but she was categorized as a
8 black, as immediate.

9 The next thing was, is as she was trapped underneath there,
10 the bus' roof actually had a bend to where she -- her body was, so
11 that's how malleable the roof was in that area. It wasn't
12 something where it had, had completely squished her. She was
13 trapped in there, but it was actually moved in, like, a moon-like
14 arc in that area. To remove her from there, we were unable to get
15 in there and stabilize the bus in such a way to actually do
16 recovery.

17 We had to have two large, heavy-wrecker tow truckers do an
18 operation with their large booms to roll the bus away from her and
19 roll the bus over to its side -- off its roof and onto its side.
20 And even when the bus was onto its side, the tow truck operators
21 had done their operation, and they were ready to drag the bus up,
22 I was still the commanding officer at that time, and I said, we're
23 not going to go in there because that bus is so unstable.

24 So we had them roll it all the way over to their feet -- all
25 the way over to their wheels and then drag the bus up onto the

1 deck before we went in there, because that bus' movement was so --
2 because that roof was more of a -- what appeared at that time,
3 because it was side -- it wasn't directly over the bus anymore.
4 It had slipped completely over to the side, and it was more of
5 a -- what you would see on, like, a golf cart cover is what it
6 seemed like rather than more metal holding it up.

7 I'm just getting a bunch of text messages on the phone from
8 work. Just want to make sure that everything's okay.

9 Q. No problem. Take your time.

10 A. All right. All right, I'm back. It was -- a whole bunch of
11 units were moving around.

12 Okay, so when it got over to the -- to its wheels, you could
13 see it was not stable, so, you know, it was a good move not to let
14 us get in there and work in that impact area because of that. So
15 that's -- then we retrieved the body at that time with a Stokes
16 basket, with rope gear, and what we call an arst (ph.), which is a
17 winch system that one of our units has that pulls us all the way
18 up the hill.

19 Q. Okay. The other two fatalities, were they still in the bus?

20 A. That's a good question. So one of the fatalities was at the
21 front of the bus, that was already extricated, either by
22 self-extricate or -- not self-extricate, but by being thrown or
23 ejected, or was pulled out by a bystander, and then subsequent CPR
24 was being done.

25 So, at the front of the bus, a patient was having CPR done by

1 a physician when we arrived to scene, and that patient -- and with
2 our triage category, was not something that we could resuscitate
3 with all the other patients we had there, so she was confirmed as
4 -- triaged out as black, immediately with the physicians doing CPR
5 there. But undetermined whether she was ejected or extricated by
6 a bystander.

7 The other patient that was 1144 was extricated by engine 115
8 as rescue group and their crew, brought up to our gurney, and
9 coded as they got towards our gurney. She was a non-breather in
10 the actual bus herself. We opened the airway; she started
11 breathing, dropped an oral airway. She maintained her airway
12 while we got her up to the top to render care to her and started
13 putting her in a -- started getting her towards an ambulance, and
14 before we could get her in an ambulance or get on our gurney, she
15 coded, and she then was placed -- and then re-triaged again as
16 black. So that's for the other 1144, but she was in the bus.

17 Q. She was in the bus. Do you have some sense of where she was,
18 either in the front or in the back?

19 A. No, I do not. I do not, but I can get that information for
20 you. That would be engine 115 who handled that rescue operation.

21 Q. Okay. So can you -- in addition to the North County Fire
22 Protection District, what other units were on the scene?

23 A. So North County Fire Protection District had several units on
24 scene. However, the other agencies that came to our aid were
25 Vista Fire and their fire department. You had Oceanside Fire come

1 to our aid. Camp Pendleton came to our aid; they sent an
2 ambulance. We had San Diego Fire, who has a Cal Fire rig, came to
3 our aid, so Cal Fire came to our aid. Pala Fire Department came
4 to our aid. And I don't think I'm missing anyone else.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I think that's everyone. Yep.

7 Q. And I just want to make sure, that is Paula, as in P-a-u-l-a?

8 A. Oh, P-a-l-a.

9 Q. P -- oh, Pala. Pala. Okay, got you. Got it.

10 A. Yep. (Indiscernible).

11 Q. All right. So the, the female that was pinned under the
12 truck was the last one to get extricated. Do you --

13 A. Yes, ma'am.

14 Q. Do you have a sense of what time she was extricated or how
15 long it took to finally get her up onto the -- off the embankment?

16 A. I do. We stayed for the incident -- we -- so the CHP and
17 Omega were in charge of the investigation at the time, and they
18 did not want us to have the heavy wreckers move the bus off the
19 patient quite yet. During that time, the investigation was taking
20 place, so it took quite some time for us to even have access due
21 to their investigation.

22 Q. Oh, got it. Okay.

23 A. With that being said, 5 o'clock-ish, we were identified as a
24 go time for us to now start the recovery operation for the last
25 victim, and we had that operation go. We just had to wait for the

1 coroner to come in, to confirm that they're okay with moving the
2 body. They moved the bus, and we helped the coroner retrieve the
3 body, and that was at -- right around 6 o'clock, the last patient
4 was removed from the wreckage underneath the bus and moved to the
5 deck and placed at -- and with Omega.

6 Q. Got it. Okay. All right, great. Good. So, so as I
7 understand it, that one of the issues that you had with this was
8 the instability of the structure of the bus as you were trying to
9 do the rescue and extrication operations. Is that correct?

10 A. Yes, ma'am.

11 Q. Okay, great.

12 A. So we have a category, though, that we -- you know, I think
13 it's pretty much nationwide with firefighters, you know,
14 where -- risk a lot to save a lot, or risk a little to save what's
15 already -- you know, save something that's, you know, within
16 reason. But that risk a lot, save a lot was the slide we were
17 operating in because of the bus being the way it was.

18 So we had to risk the instability and stabilization, and we
19 were trying to shore that up with other means, with cribbing and
20 the rescue 40 teams. But the structure was so flimsy, it proved
21 to be almost not doable, so we had to risk a lot to get in there
22 and get those viable patients out.

23 Q. I understand. So, as I said before, one of the other things
24 I wanted to talk to you about is that section of the roadway and
25 prior incidents that you've had there, especially with vehicle

1 rollovers. Is that something that is -- number one, is that area
2 known for that kind of incident? Is it prone to that?

3 A. That's a good question. So our freeway stretch is unique,
4 because it's a big bowl we sit into. But with, you know, cars, if
5 they're heading southbound like this bus was, you're leaving
6 Riverside County, you climb up a huge hill in Riverside, and then
7 when you hit San Diego County, you're a downhill section all the
8 way down to our location, of high speeds, and then it climbs a big
9 grade coming back up towards the Lilac bridge, which is -- as the
10 grade started is where this bus had its problem.

11 We have a high number of vehicles over the side, we have a
12 high number of vehicle rollovers, we have a high number of traffic
13 collisions because of this freeway speed here is so fast; it's
14 kind of like a big old speedway that everyone just gets on it
15 before they climb the grade. And we've had a tour bus, a
16 full-sized tour bus, flip on its side just up the road on the
17 right hand side, probably about less than a football field up.
18 We've had vehicles over the side right where this tour bus went
19 over. In my short time since moving here in January, we've had a
20 vehicle over the side there already.

21 Throughout my -- I've been here since 15 years old. I've
22 been over that hill for vehicles all the time; I mean, I can't
23 even count how many times I've been over the side. But vehicle
24 rollovers specifically in that area, this is the first vehicle
25 rollover in this particular area that I've been on. We've had the

1 bus turn on its side up above that I'm aware of; vehicle rollovers
2 happen all the time on the other side of the grades. Vehicles
3 over the side on the other side, as well, heading southbound -- or
4 heading northbound.

5 Speed is an issue, and this -- you know, I was the
6 unfortunate company officer of being on scene when my ambulance
7 was struck on Thanksgiving morning because of the traffic speed
8 being so fast. You know, this is a dangerous section of freeway.
9 It seems as though we get more freeway accidents -- and I talked
10 to my chief about this a little bit. You know, it seems as though
11 we get a little bit more freeway accidents per capita than
12 anywhere else that I -- in our zone for sure, in our area -- in
13 that North San Diego area, and it's dangerous. It's super
14 dangerous, you know, to work on the freeway.

15 So, I mean, things that we've identified as company officers
16 as helping things is, you know, even just signs, you know. Or
17 Caltrans down there in San Diego has the trucks with the big signs
18 out. It'd be nice to have signs out there saying slow down, you
19 know, or whatever it is. Or the rain, you know, collects in this
20 area; say flooding, or whatever it is, that could be turned on by
21 Caltrans or the fire departments down here to slow people down.
22 Because everyone's coming out of Temecula, Riverside area, coming
23 into San Diego, and it's just, like, gas pedal is being squeezed
24 hard.

25 MS. HARLEY: Hang on one quick second. Just a moment.

1 (Background conversation.)

2 BY MS. HARLEY:

3 Q. So, I guess, let me ask you a question: Do you see a lot
4 more of this because of the road becomes wet, or is it just simply
5 the road and the speed is the biggest culprit?

6 A. That's a really good question. So we see a lot more of this
7 consistently than -- more consistently in the zone because of the
8 speed here, to answer your question first.

9 But when you add wet to this, we know that this fire station,
10 this particular station that I'm at, is never in quarters because
11 it's always running from one call to the next call to the next
12 call: over-the-side, spin-outs, you know. It's the speed that
13 they have -- even though it's raining, it's the speed that they
14 have -- even though -- it's -- everyone's trying to get up that
15 hill as fast as they can to get a momentum going, and it's --

16 Yeah, we see the calls blow up when it's wet, but we also see
17 a consistent amount of traffic collisions on that freeway. We see
18 it all the time because of the speed, on a normal basis.

19 Q. So if you -- if there was something that you could suggest,
20 and that we could suggest, to help you deal with that section of
21 the highway, what do you think the best mitigating -- safety
22 mitigation device you think would help in those -- in that
23 situation? You understand what I'm saying is --

24 A. I hear you loud and clear. I hear it loud and clear. I
25 think it would be a combination of a couple different things, and

1 it has to be re-enforced. Some sort of illuminated signage along
2 the corridor, identifying: slow down, incident ahead, slow down.
3 Because that would have prevented the Thanksgiving day incident
4 where my ambulance was struck.

5 You know, and we have -- you know, you go to any other state,
6 the slow and move over is enforced. Our state, California, it's
7 speed up as fast as you can because I want to get ahead of the
8 next person during these incidents. So that, that slow and move
9 over, that slow -- the signage: hey, flooding ahead. Or: slow
10 down, it's wet. I think that would be the first, beautiful thing.

11 Then two would be some sort of guardrail along that corridor
12 south of Highway 76, running up that first bend as it kind of
13 comes up towards Lilac bridge, because we have a fair share of
14 vehicles over the side there. And then you take it back just a
15 little bit further towards Mission up north, along that corridor
16 heading south there, there's a couple other opportunities for
17 guardrails to come in along that corridor, too, because we've had
18 really nasty over-the-sides and vehicles into hillsides up there
19 as well.

20 So south of Mission to, like, Lilac bridge, some sort of
21 guardrail would be -- it would save lives; there's no doubt about
22 it. And the signage would save first responders' lives as well.
23 There's no doubt about that.

24 Q. So let me ask you a question: Have you guys ever had a
25 conversation with Caltrans about this?

1 A. So that's a really fantastic question. So, after
2 Thanksgiving's incident, where we were hit, we have a whole
3 working group working with Caltrans to get them added to our
4 responses. I mean, if we have this incident going on, on the
5 freeway, could we get you to come out and drop cones? Could we
6 get you guys to come out, put your big signs up, saying: move over
7 a lane? Could we get you guys to reflex?

8 The problem is, is they can't respond in a fast enough manner
9 to get out there in a consistent manner, because they're not
10 always there. The incident at 2 o'clock in the morning isn't
11 going to be feasible for them to get out there --

12 Q. Right.

13 A. -- is what we're finding. So there's no way for them to get
14 us signage or anything on a consistent basis and reflex with us.
15 Now, we have had dialogue with, what can you guys do to help us
16 out with these things? Because we're now being hit.

17 And across the United States, first responders are getting --
18 you see it on the news where a sheriff officer is sitting there,
19 getting hit. It's not an isolated case. It's just this freeway on
20 the 15 corridor, all the way through the state, is just -- it's
21 just dangerous with how fast people are going, and Caltrans is
22 just not able to fill that need.

23 Q. Right. Just a moment. I'm taking notes here, I'm sorry.

24 A. Hey, no problem.

25 Q. So is there something that you think that I should have asked

1 you, but I failed to ask you, either about the incident or about
2 that roadway?

3 A. I don't think so. I think I tried to tell you everything I
4 know. I'd like to tell you a little bit more about where those
5 patients were, but I -- I don't -- it wasn't in my job description
6 at that day to figure that -- I assigned that rescue group
7 supervisor to identify all needs, and he communicated to me that
8 he was able to get all patients out.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. I would like to tell you where they were, but I don't have
11 that information. I can make sure that Krumwiede -- Barry, when
12 you speak to him, he'll have that information for you, if that
13 would be helpful.

14 Q. I certainly do appreciate that. I know that CHP was supposed
15 to be organizing -- was supposed to organize the collection of the
16 information and the run sheets from the various agencies, and we
17 could probably get the information that way as well.

18 So one of the things that I always like to tell people is, is
19 that, number one, we certainly do want you to kind of keep our
20 number in the back -- on file, and if you think of something
21 that's important, please let us know. What happens is, an
22 investigation like this usually takes about a year, because we're
23 going to investigate everything.

24 And as I said before, one of the biggest things we're looking
25 at is those medium-sized buses and the issues with them. But

1 we're also going to be looking at the roadway, and we certainly
2 want to deal with first responder safety, has got to be something
3 we're going to look at. So what happens from here --

4 A. I appreciate that a lot.

5 Q. So what happens from here is, is that one of the things that
6 we do is we -- as we go through, we always come back, and we check
7 in on you to find out if there's anything different, if things
8 have changed, if things have gotten worse.

9 We are certainly, right now, looking at the roadway with
10 Caltrans, and I'm very interested in the idea that you guys had
11 formed a working group, that there had been kind of some movement
12 to try and do something about that.

13 A. Awesome.

14 Q. So what we're going to do is, again, we'll come back to you,
15 and we'll see if there's been any improvement or not. Because one
16 of the things that we can do is that we can make recommendations
17 to the state to work more closely with you guys and come up with
18 some idea. I understand that Caltrans can't be everywhere, but
19 maybe they have a better sense of, or better idea of, how to do
20 this.

21 And especially we'll be looking at the issue about the
22 guardrails, and I think I've got at least a good sense of where
23 you're talking about, but we'll go out and do that. So, outside
24 of that, do you have any other questions for me?

25 A. No. I appreciate you guys looking into this; I appreciate

1 what you're doing. And if there's anything I can do to help you
2 out, you have my phone number, and I'm a phone call away. That's
3 cool, what you guys are doing.

4 MS. HARLEY: Well, you know what, I absolutely appreciate you
5 talking to me. And again, it's very important to us to kind of
6 get the input from you guys, because you were there, and you had
7 to deal with it. So, again, thank you very much, and please keep
8 my number, and feel free to call me any time.

9 CAPT. HARRINGTON: Will do. All right, thank you very much
10 for your time. All right, have a good day.

11 MS. HARLEY: All right. Bye-bye.

12 CAPT. HARRINGTON: Bye.

13 MS. HARLEY: Okay, and interview is concluded at 2:55 p.m.

14 (Whereupon, at 2.55 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

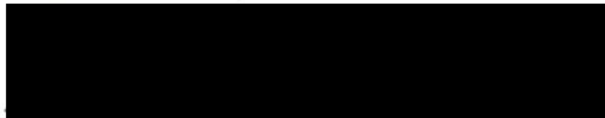
IN THE MATTER OF: CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
 NEAR PALA MESA, CALIFORNIA,
 ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020
 Interview of Capt. Tom Harrington

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY20FH003

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: February 28, 2020

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.



Milton Ordakowski III
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
NEAR FALLBROOK, CALIFORNIA,
ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020

Accident No.: HWY20FH003

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Interview of: BATTALION CHIEF BARRY KRUMWIEDE
North County Fire Protection District

315 Ivy Street
Fallbrook, California

Sunday,
March 1, 2020

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Battalion Chief Barry Krumwiede:

By Ms. Harley

4

I N T E R V I E W

(1:22 p.m.)

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3 MS. HARLEY: Okay, today is March the 1st of 2020, and it's
4 1:22 p.m. I am investigator Sheryl Harley with the National
5 Transportation Safety Board, and I'm located at 315 East Ivy
6 Street in Fallbrook, California, and I'm speaking to Battalion
7 Chief --

8 MR. KRUMWEIDE: Barry Krumwiede. Last name spelling,
9 K-r-u-m-w-i-e-d-e.

INTERVIEW OF BATTALION CHIEF BARRY KRUMWIEDE

BY MS. HARLEY:

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12 Q. Okay, and Chief, as we spoke earlier, this is in regards to
13 the bus crash that occurred on the 22nd. And what I'd like to do,
14 if you can, is just kind of walk me through your response. One of
15 the things I'm looking at is your operation and any issues that
16 you encountered as you were going through the rescue operation
17 there.

18 A. Okay, I'll try to best recollect the event. We had a
19 dispatch for a traffic accident and/or rescue TC that morning, and
20 it evolved into a rescue and/or expanded TC. Each one's
21 different; we have a traffic collision, a rescue TC, and then an
22 expanded, and each requires a different response.

23 So I was responding to the event, and the first in company
24 officer on engine 114, Tom Harrington, who I believe you have
25 spoken to, had upgraded the response based on the NBC computer

1 notes from our dispatch center. The updated notes showed a
2 possible bus with involvement of a pediatric with some sort of
3 traumatic injury, and the notes will tend to populate on the
4 computer as we respond.

5 So it was upgraded from an expanded to a major medical, which
6 you have your original response, which I believe was two type-one
7 engines, an ambulance, and that evolved into two type-one engines,
8 an ambulance, and a battalion chief. Then, it evolved into
9 adding, in addition to that, four type-one engines, a truck, two
10 battalion chiefs, and five ambulances. Then, to further that,
11 once he did arrive on scene, he ordered up an additional five
12 ambulances to make a total of 11 ambulances. And I'd have to go
13 over the total amount of type-ones.

14 So, when he arrived, he did a report on conditions of what he
15 had found, and it was, in fact, a medium-sized bus that was rolled
16 over; it was on its top. And he had ordered all those resources
17 and started delegating his positions. I came into the scene
18 afterwards -- after he was on scene approximately, maybe, 15
19 minutes. His station is right there near the accident scene,
20 maybe a mile and a half, and I'm here at 315 East Ivy, which is
21 about a 15-minute plus response; because it was raining, I was
22 driving a little slower.

23 Once I arrived on scene, I did a face-to-face with Tom
24 Harrington, the captain on engine 114. He told me what he had,
25 and I reassigned him, and I started assigning positions based on

1 an MCI, a mass casualty incident. In that mass casualty incident,
2 some of the lead positions are a triage unit leader, a treatment
3 unit leader, a transportation group supervisor, a ground ambulance
4 coordinator, litter teams, and then everybody supporting those
5 positions coming in behind them.

6 There was extrication involved for one or two people; most
7 were self-extricated from the bus. There was some extrication
8 involved to get one or two out of the bus. There was three
9 deceased at the scene, and there was 18 transported by a total of
10 five or six ambulances to local hospitals, those being Palomar
11 Medical Center in Escondido, Temecula Valley Hospital in Temecula,
12 Inland Valley Hospital in Murrieta, and -- I'm drawing a blank on
13 the other one; I'd have to look that up.

14 So, once I became the incident commander, like I said, I took
15 over the scene and delegated all the positions. Fortunately,
16 because of our response configuration, we have plenty of
17 resources, and the resources were staged and ready to go for
18 transport without delay. We did effectively get all the people
19 off the scene in a timely manner.

20 Q. Okay, so I'm going to go back. So, just to make sure that
21 everyone is clear, explain to me what a type-one engine is.

22 A. A type-one engine is -- engines are typed based on their
23 capability, their water tank, the pump that's in them, and how
24 they're configured with all the tools and equipment. So a
25 type-one is what you normally would see at most fire stations for

1 structural fire fighting.

2 Q. Okay. So you also said that you had a truck company on the
3 scene; are your engine companies set up to do, like, rescue as far
4 as having, like, rescue tools and all that on board?

5 A. Yes, they are. It's not common for some departments to have
6 them on the engines; mostly trucks do. But because we're tucked
7 up in the north in the county, and we don't cross the county line
8 very often, we're kind of in a cul-de-sac. We have a marine -- a
9 naval base to our west, and we have a very rural area to the east,
10 and for us, it makes sense to carry extrication equipment and a
11 lot of other type of equipment that you normally wouldn't carry on
12 a type-one, but we do that.

13 Q. So, originally, there was a report that the pediatric trauma
14 patient was flown by medevac helicopter. Was he actually flown
15 from the scene, or was he transported to a hospital?

16 A. The pediatric was transported to Inland Valley via ground
17 ambulance; there were no medical transports via air ambulance on
18 that day.

19 Q. Okay. So I realize, of course, that you had one of the
20 trapped victims was actually underneath the overturned bus. So
21 let's put that victim aside for a moment. Do you have some sense
22 of how long it took to remove the other victims from the scene?
23 And I'm not -- I'm also disregarding the other deceased victims;
24 I'm talking about all of the surviving victims that were
25 transported.

1 A. The ones that were transported from the scene, to get them --
2 from the time of the call until we had them transported off scene,
3 I believe it was 28 minutes.

4 Q. Okay. Of the -- now I want to talk about the deceased
5 victims. So the two deceased victims that were -- the two
6 deceased victims, were they still inside of the bus, or were they
7 ejected out of the bus? Do you know?

8 A. I do not know.

9 Q. Okay. Going back to the victim that was actually trapped
10 underneath the bus, can you give me a sense of the challenges you
11 faced as far as stabilizing that bus and ultimately trying to
12 recover the body underneath the bus?

13 A. With the single deceased trapped person, I was not there
14 prior. There was a timeframe where there was somebody that was
15 extricated and pulled out. I was not part of that extrication; I
16 did not have a good vantage point. I would have to go back and
17 talk to the individuals that did the extrication.

18 There was no stabilization that was done. The equipment that
19 we have and the position of the bus, where it was, there's nothing
20 that we had that would have stabilized it or kept it from moving
21 any further. It seemed to be settled fairly well on the
22 two-to-one slope. There was some risk involved in extricating and
23 putting people inside of there, but there was plenty to gain.
24 There was viable life, so they put themselves in that short
25 timeframe of risk for some gain.

1 Once that one or two people were removed from there, after
2 that point, I did not want to put the firefighters in any danger
3 of doing any sort of extrication to get the deceased out of there
4 until the bus was stabilized with a heavy wrecker.

5 At that point, it became a CHP investigation. It was
6 prolonged, and it was approximately 8 hours after the accident
7 until the heavy wreckers were ready to move that and -- with the
8 green light from the CHP.

9 Q. Did you or any of your officers talk to the driver of the
10 bus?

11 A. I did not. I know that some of our firefighters did, in
12 fact, ask the total count of people on the bus, and I do recall
13 them saying that he gave variable answers, plus or minus one or
14 two of the original.

15 Q. Did the driver provide the count verbally, or did he have a
16 passenger manifest? Did he have, like, a piece of paper that he
17 handed, do you know?

18 A. I don't believe a manifest was produced. I believe it was
19 all verbal.

20 Q. Did any representative from the company contact the command
21 post or anyone on the scene to provide a manifest or any
22 assistance in accurately identifying the number of victims on the
23 bus?

24 A. Not to my knowledge, no.

25 Q. So now I want to turn to the roadway. And we spoke about

1 this earlier, but first, let's talk about this incident in the
2 roadway. What were the challenges that you faced as you were
3 working out on the scene at that location with the operation going
4 on as far as the roadway was concerned?

5 A. As far as the roadway, any accident on freeways/highways is
6 got to be the most dangerous part of our job. Fortunately, there
7 was space between the accident scene and the traffic. The traffic
8 had come to a stand-still, and anytime it comes to a stand-still
9 it's advantageous for us, because everybody wants the view, and
10 everybody goes really slow as opposed to freeway speeds. So, in
11 this case, we weren't at a disadvantage because of the freeway and
12 the traffic.

13 Because there was a close onramp nearby, our ambulances were
14 able to stage, and we were able to get them from the staging area
15 in a timely manner to the scene to load up the patients. So there
16 wasn't anything that was a disadvantage in my mind, other than the
17 fact -- the air ambulance and the ability for them to fly.

18 Q. So they were actually grounded because of the weather?

19 A. I believe so, yeah. Um-hmm.

20 Q. Was Caltrans out there?

21 A. Caltrans? I couldn't tell you definitively if they were or
22 not. There were a lot of CHP and their investigation team, and I
23 couldn't tell you if the CHP -- or Caltrans was out there.

24 Q. So, question: Does Caltrans respond out to these kind of
25 incidents to assist with traffic control or trying to divert

1 traffic away from you guys as you're working on the scene?

2 A. Normally, no. Normally, if you were to request them, they
3 would respond, but not in a timely manner that would be
4 advantageous for us. I know in other instances, cable barrier
5 systems where they have the knowledge about those, they have
6 responded on request, but the response time is just not
7 appropriate to our operations at our scene.

8 Q. In that area, is it typical to see vehicles going over the
9 side or rollovers?

10 A. In that area, both sides of the freeway, over the years that
11 I've worked here, I've seen many accidents occur on that stretch
12 of freeway. Particularly in that same area, as we spoke before,
13 there was another medium-sized bus traveling southbound,
14 interstate 15, south of highway 76 in that same exact spot.

15 The bus lost control, rolled over, and there were 21
16 patients: one deceased, so 20 transported. It was, I believe,
17 traveling in the slow lane when it was raining and lost control in
18 that same stretch and came to rest within maybe 25 yards as this
19 most recent bus crash.

20 Q. I understand that you guys had an incident back in
21 Thanksgiving of last year where one of your ambulances on the
22 scene was struck, and I understand that your agency had formed
23 some kind of a working group with Caltrans. Is that still a work
24 in progress? Was there some kind of consensus of what to do to
25 help you guys when you're out there on the scene?

1 A. There is an individual that I'm aware of that was doing some
2 research and talking with Caltrans and trying to figure out what
3 is the best size cone to use, spacing of a cone pattern, total
4 length of that cone pattern, and anything else that we could do to
5 provide better safety for our individuals, in addition to wearing
6 the safety vests, being visible, using our lights, appropriately
7 spacing our parking, and using our engines to block the scene --
8 to block in our personnel from oncoming traffic.

9 Q. Am I correct that you also send additional engines now to
10 provide additional safety for your personnel?

11 A. Yeah, we've been doing that for a while now where our
12 response configuration -- we added a type-one engine, like we
13 discussed. It's the larger of the engines; it's the bigger ones
14 that you normally see on TV because it's heavy, and you can use it
15 to block your scene.

16 In the case of the ambulance accident that you spoke of near
17 Thanksgiving -- around Thanksgiving, that was, in fact, happening.
18 The engine was blocking, but unfortunately a car hydroplaned
19 several lanes away and came across all lanes at almost a right
20 angle and impacted the ambulance that was protected by that
21 type-one blocking engine.

22 Q. So if there was something that you would like to see as far
23 as a safety improvement, talking about that roadway, what would it
24 be?

25 A. Guardrails or cable barriers would definitely help the

1 stretch that is south of the highway 76, and then if you even take
2 it further and -- well, if you just want to drive the entire --
3 our fire district.

4 I've been on many accidents in the past. In that entire
5 stretch, there's a lot of two-to-one slope that goes for a long
6 distance, and over the years I've seen a lot of cars -- vehicles
7 go over the side several hundred feet down. So some sort of
8 guardrail or cable barrier system would be really advantageous to
9 keep those vehicles from going all the way over the side and
10 rolling over.

11 Q. So if there was any suggestion that you have in regards to
12 dealing with these operations involving these type of buses,
13 specifically, kind of a lessons learned thing with the way the bus
14 was on its top and the deformation, all that. Do you have some
15 sense of -- let me put it to you at this way: So you have this
16 bus, and certainly you have a lot of things working at the same
17 time: You've got the weather, you certainly have a bus that's on
18 a slope, you have a bus that has a lot of deformation.

19 If there was something that you would say in lessons learned
20 when you deal with these buses, is there anything that you would
21 want to add to that? I mean, is there any lessons learned -- any
22 takeaway you've taken from this kind of crash?

23 A. I guess, starting from the beginning, prevention would be
24 great -- preventing the buses from going off in the first place.
25 So, you know, making sure they're regulated, making sure that

1 they're being checked out. Our fire engines are checked out
2 daily, in depth, and gone through, and it takes roughly 45 minutes
3 to an hour to go through a fire engine. So I don't know if that's
4 regulated; I don't know if that's being done to make sure that
5 those are roadworthy. So a prevention standpoint would be great.

6 Taking the guardrails and the cable barriers into
7 consideration from keeping those things from -- once they do leave
8 the roadway, from going over the side down the two-to-one slope
9 would be very helpful in dealing with a -- some sort of accident
10 in the future.

11 This particular bus, the way it was laying on the two-to-one
12 slope and the -- what it appeared, the whole side of it gone, I
13 don't know how that happens. It just seems like it's not
14 manufactured to withstand any type of accident. I don't know how
15 many times it rolled, but for an entire side of a bus to be gone
16 and to have that look like it did -- and if you're going to be
17 carrying that many people, you would think that something like
18 that would be much more sturdy and hold up in a crash or roll.

19 Q. So is there anything you think that I didn't ask you that I
20 should've asked you about this incident?

21 A. No.

22 Q. So what I always tell people, and I'm going to give you one
23 of my cards, is if you think of something later on, please feel
24 free to give me a call. If there's someone else that you think
25 may have some suggestions or some more input, please feel free to

1 give my number to them.

2 Ultimately, again, this is -- we're interested in safety, and
3 we certainly need to hear from you guys because you guys are the
4 ones that are there immediately, and you see it. And kind of give
5 us a sense of what changes or what safety issues actually do
6 exist.

7 I just want to verify that one thing that the -- that casino
8 tour bus, the medium bus crash that you said happened in 2013 --
9 you said December the 19th?

10 A. December 19th, 2013, and the reason I know that is because I
11 just looked it up in preparation for the interview.

12 Q. Terrific. Thank you very much for that.

13 So, again, I know that I spoke to Chief Mahr -- forgive me if
14 I mispronounce his name -- and he's also looking up some
15 additional data in regards to the number of times you guys run for
16 vehicles either rolled over or over the side, especially in that
17 area.

18 We are looking at trying to get some information from
19 Caltrans, but we -- as you say, local knowledge goes a long way,
20 and they may or may not have accurate data. So that's one of the
21 reasons why we're both asking for the information from you and
22 also from Caltrans.

23 So, that said, do you have any questions for me?

24 A. No, I know that there -- no questions, just a comment, that I
25 know there could be things done to the stretch of freeway in our

1 fire district that would prevent people from going over the side.
2 Like I said, in that stretch of freeway that runs both north and
3 south, there is quite a bit of it that goes over the side
4 two-to-one for a long ways -- 2-, 300 feet in some cases, and I
5 have been on a lot of them in the past.

6 MS. HARLEY: Thank you. So it is 1:48 p.m., and I'm going to
7 conclude the interview here. Thank you very much, Chief.

8 (Whereupon, at 1:48 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

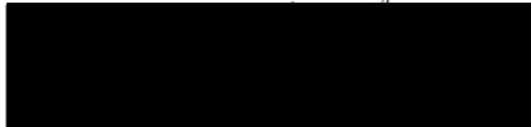
IN THE MATTER OF: CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
 NEAR FALLBROOK, CALIFORNIA,
 ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020
 Interview of Chief Krumwiede

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY20FH003

PLACE: Fallbrook, California

DATE: March 1, 2020

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.



Maliq Singleton
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
NEAR PALA MESA, CALIFORNIA,
ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020

Accident No.: HWY20FH003

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Interview of: CAPT. BENOIT
North County Fire Protection District

Via telephone

Wednesday,
April 15, 2020

APPEARANCES:

SHERYL HARLEY, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Capt. Benoit:

By Ms. Harley

6

I N T E R V I E W

(1:53 p.m.)

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3 MS. HARLEY: So today's date is Wednesday, April the 15th of
4 2020. It's 1:53 p.m., and I am calling Capt. Benoit of the North
5 County Fire Protection District, Station 3 in regards to the Pala
6 Mesa, California, investigation HWY20FH003. The number is [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED].

8 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hello, Fire Station 3, Engineer
9 (indiscernible) speaking. How can I help you?

10 MS. HARLEY: How are you today, sir? Can I speak to Capt.
11 Benoit if he's available?

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Oh, sure. Hold on and I'll get Capt.
13 Benoit for you.

14 MS. HARLEY: Thank you.

15 (Background conversation.)

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He'll be right with you.

17 MS. HARLEY: Thank you.

18 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: You're welcome.

19 CAPT. BENOIT: Capt. Benoit speaking. How can I help you?

20 MS. HARLEY: Yes, sir. How you doing? My name is Sheryl
21 Harley. I'm an investigator with the National Transportation
22 Safety Board, and I was told by Battalion Chief Krumwiede that
23 there's a Capt. Benoit that's supposed to be working today in
24 Station 3; is that correct?

25 CAPT. BENOIT: You are talking to him.

1 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay. I'm sorry, then I'm having a problem
2 with my phone. So, I didn't know if the battalion chief kind of
3 explained why I needed to talk to you. So if you don't --

4 CAPT. BENOIT: He sure did.

5 MS. HARLEY: Oh, okay. Great. So as you know, the NTSB was
6 investigating the bus crash out on I-15, and we are -- as part of
7 the investigation, one of the things that we do is we look at the
8 crashworthiness of the bus, and we also look at the injuries to
9 the victims, what caused the injuries, and if there's some kind of
10 safety recommendation we can do to prevent this from happening in
11 the future.

12 So I just wanted to ask some questions. I understand that
13 you were part of the extrication team that went inside the bus.
14 So I guess my first --

15 CAPT. BENOIT: Yes.

16 MS. HARLEY: Okay. So my first question to you is, do you
17 have any problem with me recording this interview?

18 CAPT. BENOIT: What purpose would that be for? Just for your
19 own reference or --

20 MS. HARLEY: Yeah --

21 CAPT. BENOIT: -- is this going to go to court?

22 MS. HARLEY: Oh, no, no, no. There is nothing to do with
23 court. This is about our reference, and one of the things that we
24 do is we actually take what you say, and we put it in a report --
25 in our factual report from the first responders that were on the

1 scene and actually observed some of the situations that were
2 there.

3 And so we can record it; if you don't want to record it,
4 that's fine. It doesn't matter. I can take notes either way.
5 Whichever makes you comfortable.

6 CAPT. BENOIT: Yeah, whatever's easier for you. It doesn't
7 matter to me. We're used to doing depositions for court where
8 everything is brought up two years later that we say. So I just
9 want to make sure.

10 MS. HARLEY: Well, to make it clear, this isn't about court.
11 And what we do is we do release a transcript of an interview. But
12 what I'm asking you is just going to be factual information. I'm
13 not going to ask you to speculate or go beyond what you saw and
14 what you know. So --

15 CAPT. BENOIT: Sounds good.

16 MS. HARLEY: Great. Okay.

17 INTERVIEW OF CAPT. BENOIT

18 BY MS. HARLEY:

19 Q. So I guess, if you don't mind, can you just walk me through
20 from the time that you received the call? Kind of walk me through
21 your process, what you saw, and what you did. And then there are
22 a couple of passengers I want to focus on, but let's start from
23 the beginning.

24 A. We were the second engine company on scene. It was myself
25 and two other individuals on that engine, so we had a total of

1 three as far as our working company. The engine that was first on
2 scene assigned us to do basically a rescue assessment on the bus,
3 so determining number of victims, how many are trapped, and what
4 type of tools we're going to need. So that's the first thing.

5 We got out, we set up a safe area around our engine because
6 we're working on the freeway in the rain, and the engineer and I
7 did basically a walk around, I guess you could call it, of the bus
8 to see what was going to be required to get the number of victims
9 out.

10 We got there, we had a pretty good civilian population that
11 had already pulled off, so there was a lot of trying to
12 distinguish between actual passengers and then passerbys that had
13 stopped to provide assistance as far as civilians. There was, I
14 believe it was a doctor that had stopped -- a doctor of some sort
15 was doing what appeared to be compressions on one of the victims.
16 We had two other, looked like military, off duty civilians who had
17 stopped, and they were trying to dig a hole under the bus to free
18 up one of the trapped passengers from the side of the bus.

19 And after we did the walk around, we determined initially
20 that there was only one person trapped. Once we figured that out,
21 we decided what we were going to use, so we just focused more on
22 her, and as we got in there we realized there was a second victim
23 kind of deeper to the center of the bus underneath the original
24 one we saw. So we actually had a total of two victims that were
25 going to need to be extricated.

1 We then got our tools out. We tried initially our spreaders
2 and cutters, but the way the bus was positioned and the way she
3 was positioned in between the seats, we ended up having to cut --
4 saw one of the seats in half to kind of release her from it. And
5 then we were able to get her out that same direction of the bus,
6 on the side there.

7 Then we made access to the second victim, and we'd determined
8 that she had already deceased, so she was left for the entirety of
9 the incident under the bus until the bus was removed. I'm not
10 sure -- I wasn't there for the bus removal, but I think it was a
11 heavy tow truck.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That was about my initial actions. I mean, from there we did
14 other stuff, got reassigned to patient treatment and stuff like
15 that. But that was the extrication portion of it.

16 Q. Great. So, I'm going to kind of walk back a little bit and
17 start -- when you arrived on the scene, was it actively raining or
18 had it been raining before?

19 A. I couldn't say with certainty; I want to say it was -- kind
20 of had stopped because I remember putting my gear on and it not be
21 raining. So I'm not sure if there was, you know, a light sprinkle
22 or haze of rain. It wasn't, like, a downpour like it was earlier
23 in the day.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. But everything still felt really wet. But I can't -- I don't

1 recall if actual sprinkles were falling on us the entire time or
2 not.

3 Q. Okay. When you arrived on the scene, did you see any water
4 on the roadway?

5 A. Water?

6 Q. Yeah, like water pooling or anything like that.

7 A. I couldn't say either way. I don't recall. I'm not saying
8 that there wasn't, but I don't remember.

9 Q. So, at this particular point, you arrived on the scene. The
10 bus, of course, is partially over that embankment. Tell me about
11 -- were you able to stabilize the bus? Or tell me about the
12 securement of the bus over the embankment.

13 A. So, initially we -- to do the -- to determine the victims, we
14 did a quick, you know, size up of the bus and stabilization. And
15 off of that, just to do the walk around, we determined we couldn't
16 stabilize the bus completely to allow ourselves to enter the bus.
17 So we did everything from the exterior of the bus.

18 And the way the bus was positioned, we felt that it was
19 secure enough buried in the dirt the way that it was to do
20 exterior work. We never entered the bus because we were unable to
21 meet our standards for stabilization, I guess you would say,
22 before we start cutting on a car and get inside it.

23 Q. Okay. So, at that particular point, you determined that
24 there were two people trapped. You said there was a female
25 victim, and then you located the second female underneath her.

1 And the one underneath her ended up being the victim that was
2 actually pinned underneath the bus. Is that correct?

3 A. Yeah, initially on the walk around, just peeking in the
4 windows and broken areas, we saw the one. And then once we got in
5 there, behind her, kind of deeper in the bus was the second one.
6 And, yeah, she was the one who was not extricated until the actual
7 bus was removed.

8 Q. Okay. So the one victim that you were able to extricate, do
9 you have some sense, looking -- starting from the front of the
10 bus, how far back she was inside the bus when you saw her?

11 A. Yeah. She was almost dead center on the bus on the south
12 side. I'm trying to remember which way the bus was, nose down or
13 -- do you remember if the bus was nose down or nose up? Because I
14 know the bathroom was the back side -- I think the bus was nose
15 up. Yeah. So she would have been on the -- what would that be,
16 the passenger side, dead center of the bus, like middle row of
17 seats.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. But she was no longer in a seat. She was positioned, like,
20 wedged between two seats.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So I don't know what actual seat, because I didn't extricate
23 her from. like, a seated position. She was laying horizontal to
24 the seats, wedged between two of them.

25 Q. Got it. Was this the passenger that was ultimately black

1 tagged?

2 A. Yes. She was extricated and then taken to the treatment area
3 and then pronounced in the treatment area.

4 Q. Okay. So, I want to talk about the second passenger, the one
5 that was pinned underneath the bus. Were you able to get access
6 to her -- what, you said from the exterior; you never went into
7 the interior of the bus?

8 A. No. Yeah, it was all from the exterior. So from that side
9 area, the way the bus was actually -- you know, the roof of the
10 bus is actually on the ground. So she basically fell from her
11 seat, wherever that was, and there's like a metal -- you know, a
12 steel member, whatever it was made of, supporting member of the
13 bus that runs down, like, the center of it on the roof.

14 Q. Yes.

15 A. And she was, like, underneath that. So, like, the complete
16 weight of the bus was on her.

17 Q. Okay. All right. Okay, so would it be fair to say that one
18 of the issues that you had to -- that you encountered would be the
19 slope of the embankment? Especially with the fact that it was
20 also wet?

21 A. That was an obstacle because of the size of the bus, the
22 position on the slope, the wet conditions. It made it challenging
23 to provide full stabilization. And even if we were able to
24 stabilize the bus and work freely inside of it, I don't know if
25 that would have helped us tremendously. It was still very

1 difficult because, you know, it's a bus.

2 Q. Okay. So, there was the -- so we had the victim that was
3 pinned underneath the bus was the black tag, the victim that you
4 extricated out of the bus was also a black tag, and then where was
5 the victim that the doctor was doing CPR on? Do you know where
6 she was relative -- I mean, the position on the bus?

7 A. No, because she was outside the bus at that point.

8 Q. Okay. Was she near the front -- she was near the front of
9 the bus at the top of the hill?

10 A. Yeah, near the front of the bus at the top of the hill. Just
11 started it -- you know, I was assigned extrication, so I wasn't in
12 the initial triage. But I think she was also pronounced pretty
13 quickly.

14 Q. All right. So --

15 A. But yeah, she was outside the bus. I have no idea how she
16 even got where she was at that point.

17 Q. Okay. And, outside of the victims that we talked about, when
18 you got on the scene, there were no other victims that were
19 trapped inside of the bus. Is that correct?

20 A. Not trapped, no.

21 Q. Okay. Were there people still in the bus when you arrived?

22 A. I don't think so. I think everyone was out. By the time we
23 walked the full bus, those two were the only ones that we had.

24 Q. Do you have any idea how long it took you, from the time you
25 received the call, to arrive on the scene? I haven't gotten your

1 CAD printout yet for the fire department.

2 A. Time of call till we got on scene, I'm going to say less than
3 five minutes. But I would have to look at the report too.

4 Because we were already on the road returning from another call,
5 so our response time was even quicker.

6 Q. Okay. All right, great. So now I want to kind of turn your
7 attention to something else. I want to talk about some concerns
8 that were actually raised in regards to emergency operations that
9 are conducted adjacent to, like, these interstates, these high
10 speed roadways.

11 And, so my question is, have you ever experienced any
12 difficulties trying to, well, basically do your job and dealing
13 with the roadway and/or vehicles being off the roadway and trying
14 to conduct operations where you have a vehicle that's run off the
15 road or over an embankment?

16 A. I think I understand. So is there anything in particular
17 that I've found challenging? Is that what you're saying? Or --

18 Q. Well, I --

19 A. -- what are the challenges that I face in the roadways in
20 general?

21 Q. Well, I guess I'm trying to get a sense of, number one, the -
22 - well, let's start from the beginning. Do you see a lot of
23 vehicles that actually run off the roadway?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. Like lose control and exit the lanes of traffic, off the
2 roadway?

3 Q. Yes.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Especially during the rain.

7 Q. Especially when it rains? In that area?

8 A. Yeah, I've worked both our stations that cover this stretch
9 of the 15, which runs from the Riverside County border basically
10 to the 395. And for that little stretch we run a lot of over-the-
11 side calls and cars that run off the roadway either up or down an
12 embankment.

13 Q. Okay. So, I actually received the paperwork for the incident
14 that occurred on Thanksgiving Day involving one of your ambulances
15 that was struck by a vehicle that had actually gone out of
16 control. And --

17 A. I was on that call too.

18 Q. Oh, you were? Okay. So I tell you what, can you walk me
19 through exactly what happened as far as -- the original incident,
20 was that vehicle on -- I have the report, and I haven't gone
21 through it yet. The original call that got you out there, was
22 that vehicle still on the roadway, or is that vehicle off the
23 roadway?

24 A. I wasn't the first engine on that call. It was in the fast
25 lane, so I think that it was in the fast lane and maybe kind of

1 off the -- you know, towards the center median. But there is no
2 really off the roadway when you're on that side because it just
3 goes to the center divide and then the other side of the freeway.

4 Q. Got it, okay. So then --

5 A. So completely, like, off the roadway, down in the embankment?

6 No. But it was in the fast lane and positioned, you know, kind of
7 off that fast lane, into that little buffer area between the
8 center divide and the lane.

9 Q. Great, okay. So now tell me about the crash that ultimately
10 involved your apparatus.

11 A. So, it was our ambulance.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. The ambulance CHP was there. There was two fire engines
14 positioned in that fast lane just to try to create that safe
15 working area for us and, you know, detour traffic around basically
16 the incident scene.

17 And as far as I know -- I wasn't -- like I say, I didn't
18 actually witness it -- that, that car came around the roadblocks
19 that were created by the fire apparatus and actually kind of spun
20 out and veered into our ambulance that had basically the patients
21 from the initial accident in the back of the ambulance with the
22 CHP officer doing his interview. And it hit the rear of the
23 ambulance while they were inside.

24 Q. All right.

25 A. And that ambulance was off the roadway.

1 Q. Was off the roadway. Okay.

2 A. But, and like I said, in that fast lane side.

3 Q. Got you.

4 A. Which is still really off over there.

5 Q. Right, I understand. So I guess my next question is I was
6 talking, actually, to your Chief Marr (ph.). And what we were
7 talking about was the -- I guess there was a working safety group
8 that was established to actually kind of look into these
9 incidents.

10 And I guess my question to you is, are you aware of anything
11 that has come out of this as far as, for example, safety
12 improvements that have been made by either Caltrans or any
13 recommendations for safety improvements to Caltrans?

14 A. I have heard nothing about Caltrans. I mean, obviously we're
15 constantly adjusting and improving our safety standards. So, I
16 mean, changes came for us --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- as far as kind of, you know, daily things that we do. But
19 I have not heard of anything from Caltrans or any safety bulletin
20 based off these accidents that change is coming down the pipe.
21 I'm not saying they're not out there; I just haven't heard about
22 them yet.

23 Q. Okay. And just to make sure that I'm correct on this,
24 Caltrans was actually supposedly part of the safety group? Is
25 that correct?

1 A. I couldn't -- I cannot confirm. I don't know.

2 Q. Okay. All right.

3 A. I wasn't part of the safety group, so I don't know exactly
4 who's in it.

5 Q. All right. So, this next question may be a little strange,
6 but as far as the emergency response is concerned and operations
7 conducted on roadways such as I-15, what would you like to see as
8 far as safety improvements for the fire department and how the
9 fire department operates when they have to operate on these high
10 speed highways?

11 A. Wow, that's a great question. I mean, I truly believe that
12 it is the most dangerous part of our job. More dangerous than
13 structure fires and wild land fires sometimes, I think. We do it
14 more often, and I don't know how to say -- I'd like to see people
15 slow down when we're out on the freeway. It's -- that's the
16 simplest answer I have.

17 I'd have to put more thought into it with actual ideas to
18 improve the safety and think about what it is that Caltrans and
19 everyone does. Like I said, we improve our safety standards. Now
20 we require two engines -- two fire engines on every single traffic
21 accident, whether it's major or minor, just so we can protect our
22 employees when they're out there doing what we do.

23 But off the top of my head, I don't know what improvements
24 exactly I'd want to see from the safety side outside the fire
25 department.

1 Q. So --

2 A. That make sense?

3 Q. Yes, it does.

4 A. I would like to see something, but I don't know what the
5 answer -- you know, it's like one of those -- I don't know how to
6 stop the rain; I don't know how to, you know, have people slow
7 down. I know there was a new law implemented where -- after the
8 CHP officers were getting hit all the time, where if you see the
9 lights, you're supposed to veer over.

10 Q. Right.

11 A. But, making the rule doesn't automatically imply adherence to
12 the rule, so I haven't seen a lot of that yet. I would like to
13 see it, but I just -- I haven't really seen any changes from any
14 of this except on our end as far as our operations.

15 Q. Okay. So California does have a move over law?

16 A. Yeah, I'm aware of the law. And, you know, we hope and cross
17 our fingers, but we don't count on people actually adhering to it.

18 Q. So the question is, how quickly -- so, if you needed
19 Caltrans, for example, because you need more traffic control, more
20 traffic attenuation, and -- how easy is it to call Caltrans to
21 come out to help you guys while you're doing an operation on the
22 scene?

23 A. Currently, right now, that would never -- I mean, unless
24 we're at a major, major incident, you know, something like that
25 bus accident where we got a lot of stuff going on, and it was

1 going to be extended time on scene, I have never even heard of
2 anybody calling Caltrans to assist with traffic control or traffic
3 safety during a management of incident. That's just me
4 personally. I know in this organization it's not the norm.

5 We have a good working relationship with CHP, and they
6 do -- pretty much, you know, we do what they ask, and they do what
7 we ask to try and keep both of us safe. So that is usually the
8 direction that we go if we feel like we need roads shut down or
9 things like that.

10 Q. Okay. All right.

11 A. We've had CHP do traffic breaks on the freeway, you know,
12 when we're managing incidents. You know, they set up their CHP
13 cars to protect the incident for us. They allow us to move cars
14 off the roadway if they're not there yet. So those are the type
15 of things that we do to try to increase our safety factor.

16 Q. Okay. So --

17 A. But Caltrans has never been an option I've heard of anybody
18 using.

19 Q. Okay. All right. So, I guess what I'm going to -- towards
20 the end here, what I'm going to say to you is, is there something
21 you think I should have asked you and I failed to ask you about
22 this incident? Or about safety concerns?

23 A. No, I don't think so. I mean, I understand kind of what
24 you're doing and what your job is. From our aspect, you know it
25 happens -- it's our daily grind and sometimes it's just accidents.

1 You know, the weather aligns with the bus, aligns with the
2 conditions, and it's going to happen regardless how much safety is
3 thought about in the forefront of it.

4 Q. So would you say that most of these runoff roadways and these
5 over the side incidents occur during wet weather?

6 A. I would say that the accidents increase in general during wet
7 weather, but we have people crash their car all year long.

8 Q. All right. So what I always tell people is, is that -- and
9 your chief does have my number -- if you think of anything later
10 on that you think it's important that needs to be brought up,
11 please feel free to call me. One of the things --

12 A. Okay. --

13 Q. -- that we actually do is we talk to first responders because
14 you guys are the first ones on the scene and you see things. But
15 we also are concerned about your safety as well and any safety
16 improvements you think that need to be done. We certainly have no
17 problem adding our voice to yours saying that there's something
18 that needs to be done.

19 So if you think about it later on and you think you've come
20 up with some suggestions, just please feel free to give me a call.
21 And I will -- I can certainly give you my cell number now if you
22 want it. Or you can get it from the chief.

23 A. Yeah, I'll get it from the chief.

24 Q. Okay, great. And again, like I said, I appreciate you
25 talking to me and everything else. Ultimately, what we usually do

1 in this situation is, number one, we're going to look at the
2 crashworthiness of the bus. How well the bus held up in a crash.

3 There is some question about whether or not this bus actually
4 is or is not in the regulation. There are some issues that we're
5 trying to work out as far as this bus is concerned. And, but we
6 have noticed that there is a group of buses usually between about
7 15,000 pounds and actually anything over 10,001 pounds all the way
8 up to 26,000 pounds that there's no safety regulation on. And
9 it's one of the things that we're looking to kind of address. And
10 especially when it deals with you guys trying to do extrication on
11 a bus that has no safety standard or crashworthiness kind of
12 thing.

13 A. Right.

14 Q. So that's one of the things we're looking at. The other
15 things that we look at, of course, is whether or not the
16 passengers were wearing their seatbelts, but also whether or
17 not -- basically whether the vehicle folded in on the passenger,
18 seatbelt or no, it caused them injury and severity of the injury,
19 and of course certainly we're looking at the fatal injuries.

20 And then lastly of course we look at the emergency
21 responders. We look at any difficulties you had and any safety
22 recommendations you want to make as well.

23 So that said, thank you very much for your time. Again, you
24 can get my number from the chief. Please feel free to call me.
25 If there are other people in your agency that have suggestions, I

1 don't care who they are, give them my number. I am absolutely
2 willing to listen to anybody who's got an idea. Okay?

3 A. Appreciate it.

4 Q. Do you have any questions for me?

5 A. I do actually. I don't even know if you can tell me or not.
6 Where was that bus coming from and where was it going?

7 Q. So, this is a -- basically it's kind of -- it's a bus
8 service that runs from Los Angeles to San Ysidro. It goes to the
9 Mexican border. It -- they run -- this company runs multiple
10 buses during the day back and forth through that route.

11 And it has, like, about six pickup stops along the way. Like
12 in Temecula, in Baldwin Park, and a couple other places. And then
13 ultimately it was supposed to be heading down to San Ysidro, and
14 that was actually where it was heading. It had just made the last
15 pickup, and it was supposed to be heading to -- basically to the
16 border.

17 A. And then, so it's like international travelers. They go on
18 foot across the border, take the bus, go to LA, and then go back?

19 Q. Yes.

20 A. That kind of a --

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. Okay.

23 Q. So --

24 A. I see.

25 Q. Yeah. So, and again, one of the other things we're looking

1 at is we look at the buses they have in the fleet. We look at
2 their drivers and their driver training. We also look at their
3 maintenance on their buses. And we look at whether or not the
4 seatbelts were on the bus and whether or not the seatbelts were
5 actually functional.

6 And, you know, one of the biggest questions is, of course,
7 did the passengers know the seatbelts were actually there? You
8 know, a lot of passengers get on buses and sit down and don't even
9 know they have a seatbelt, so --

10 A. Right.

11 Q. But that's basically what my part of the investigation is.
12 We're also looking at the roadway to see if there's something we
13 can do to improve the roadway. Especially keeping vehicles from
14 going over the side, which may or may not be able to make your
15 life a little bit easier.

16 And one of the things that we look at, if there is an
17 engineering issue with the roadway where the water does not funnel
18 or drain off the roadway quick enough and leaves areas where water
19 pools, and then speeding vehicles lose control during those kind
20 of weather conditions. So that was why I was asking you about the
21 roadway.

22 So we kind of --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- look at all of that, and then we try to decide whether or
25 not there's something that we can do. And we certainly ask

1 the -- we're certainly going to ask CHP, Caltrans; we ask you guys
2 what you think we can do to make this better. And certainly these
3 kind of crashes where the vehicle goes off the road and over the
4 side --

5 And it was interesting, I was driving somewhere in California
6 -- truthfully I don't really know where I was on this crash -- and
7 apparently a motorcyclist went over the side. And it was
8 interesting, I saw him briefly as he was traveling -- he was
9 straddling the double yellow line in the center between traffic.
10 And I lost sight of him because he was way ahead of me, but
11 apparently he went over the side. And I didn't realize how easy
12 it is to go over the side and the absolute distance you actually
13 fall once you go over the side. So --

14 A. Yeah, we have some 2-, 300 foot, you know, drops in some of
15 these areas on our stretch of the 15.

16 Q. Yeah. So I guess the good news is we were fairly lucky the
17 bus ended up where it was. It certainly could have gone --

18 A. Yeah, and it was right there just as the onramp, so that kind
19 of gave us a little traffic buffer. You know, because the onramp
20 is right there, and people tend to slow down right there anyways.

21 Q. Well, that's good. All right, thank you very much, sir. I
22 appreciate all of your help. You guys be safe out there.

23 A. Thank you.

24 Q. All right.

25 A. Appreciate it.

1 Q. Have a good day. Bye-bye.

2 A. You too.

3 MS. HARLEY: Interview concluded at 2:26 p.m.

4 (Whereupon, at 2:26 p.m., 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: CRASH OF A MEDIUM-SIZED BUS
 NEAR PALA MESA, CALIFORNIA,
 ON FEBRUARY 22, 2020
 Interview of Capt. Benoit

ACCIDENT NO.: HWY20FH003

PLACE: Via telephone

DATE: April 15, 2020

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.



Jacqueline Bryant
Transcriber