

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR NEW CASTLE, * Accident No.: RRD23FR011
PENNSYLVANIA ON MAY 10, 2023 *

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Interview of: ZACH MUCCI, Conductor on the NS 14M
Norfolk Southern Railway

Saturday,
May 13, 2023

APPEARANCES:

ZACH ZAGATA, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

RICHARD SKOLNEKOVICH
National Transportation Safety Board

ANNA KAUFFMAN, Local Chairman, Local 421
SMART Transportation Division

BRIAN FRANSEN, Coordinator, Safety Task Force
Brotherhood Of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen

DON CRAINE, Superintendent, Keystone Division
Norfolk Southern Railway

ERVIN WHITE, Motive Power and Equipment Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

PAUL HULBURT, Road Foreman, Keystone Division
Norfolk Southern Railway

JARED CASSITY, Alternate National Legislative
Director/Chief of Safety
SMART Transportation Division

LARRY ROSS, Operating Practices Inspector
Federal Railroad Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MR. ZAGATA: Good morning. My name is Zach Zagata and I am
3 the NTSB IIC for this accident. We're conducting an interview on
4 May 13th, 2023, with Zach Mucci, who works for NS. This interview
5 is in conjunction with NTSB's investigation of the accident in New
6 Castle. The NTSB accident reference number is RRD23FR011. The
7 purpose of the investigation is to increase safety and not assign
8 fault, blame, or liability. Before we begin our interview and
9 questions, we'll go around and introduce ourselves. Please spell
10 your last name and your title, and I'll start off and then pass it
11 to my right. Again, my last name is Zagata, Z-a-g-a-t-a, and I'm
12 the NTSB IIC.

13 MR. MUCCI: Zach Mucci, M-u-c-c-i, conductor.

14 MS. KAUFFMAN: Anna Kauffman, K-a-u-f-f-m-a-n, local
15 chairman, 421.

16 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Richard Skolnekovich.
17 S-k-o-l-n-e-k-o-v-i-c-h, NTSB operations.

18 MR. FRANSEN: Brian Fransen, F-r-a-n-s-e-n, BLET Safety Task
19 Force.

20 MR. CRAINE: Don Craine, C-r-a-i-n-e, NS Keystone Division
21 superintendent.

22 MR. WHITE: Ervin White, W-h-i-t-e, FRA MP&E inspector, IIC.

23 MR. HULBURT: Paul Hulburt, H-u-l-b-u-r-t, NS Keystone
24 Division road foreman, observer.

25 MR. CASSITY: Jared Cassity, C-a-s-s-i-t-y, alternate

1 national legislative director and chief of safety for SMART
2 Transportation Division.

3 MR. ROSS: Larry Ross, FRA OP inspector, R-o-s-s. That's an
4 easy one.

5 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Do we have your permission to record
6 our discussion with you today?

7 MR. MUCCI: Yes.

8 MR. ZAGATA: Thank you. Do you understand that the
9 transcripts will be part of the public docket and as such, we
10 cannot guarantee any confidentiality?

11 MR. MUCCI: Yes.

12 INTERVIEW OF ZACH MUCCI

13 BY MR. ZAGATA:

14 Q. To start off with, if you could, give us an overview of your
15 railroad career.

16 A. Yes. I hired in 2014, been a conductor eight and a half
17 years, hired out of Ashtabula, Ohio.

18 Q. Okay. Is this your regular assignment?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. How long have you been on this assignment?

21 A. I've been on the Conneaut to Conway pool for 3 months now,
22 before that I was working Conneaut to Buffalo for a couple years.

23 Q. A couple years, okay. All right. Now, if you could, walk us
24 through like from the time you went on duty to the point of
25 derailment.

1 A. Okay. How detailed does it have to be or is it just --

2 Q. As much as you can give us.

3 A. Okay. Called for Train 14MC7 on the 10th at 3:50 p.m. I
4 arrived at Conway yard, did the work norm, printed out the
5 paperwork, went over the bulletins with the engineer. With the
6 size of the train we were given for the day, we're going over
7 extensively how we're doing to do the set-off work in Youngstown,
8 Ohio. After all that was done, we got into a Hallcon vehicle to
9 head out to our head-end power, which was tied on to a set of cars
10 that we were taking for the day, which was on 906 track in Conway
11 yard.

12 We arrived there, relief crew got off, we had a job briefing
13 with them. Boarded the train, the engineer started doing his PTC
14 to get logged in. After that, we contacted the yardmaster, which
15 he gave us the instructions that we were to pull 906 down 701
16 track, leave the two DP units and the rear end of the train on 701
17 and take our head unit over to 904 track.

18 After waiting for a couple yard moves, we proceeded to take a
19 light unit over to 904; we contacted the yardmaster again to get
20 further permission. We pulled using 702 track as head room, in
21 which we had to pull high to clear room for another yard, to help
22 to make a move. When counting down, the engineer on the initial
23 move, radio communication got a little fuzzy. After I had given
24 them a 40-car count, I had to reiterate it was 40 cars, he
25 believed I had said 20. And to stop the move, we actually had to

1 use the five-yard yardmaster to relay that the train had gone far
2 enough. After the yard got cleared, we were given permission to
3 tie on to our train. Again, the five-yard yardmaster helped relay
4 the information to make a successful tie, acquired me three steps
5 so I could put the train together. After the train was put
6 together, boarded the Hallcon vehicle again, got on the head end
7 at the Beaver Valley bowling alley, contacted the dispatcher, let
8 her know we're on the head end, getting permission to pull down
9 and advance to the signal there at West Conway.

10 She told us we were holding at CP Bright for the C36 that was
11 traveling south on the Youngstown line. I believe we sat at
12 Bright for an extended period of time, I believe it to be around 2
13 hours. After the C36 cleared, we were given the signal, to which
14 we toned up the dispatcher just to double-check and make sure it
15 was okay to accept the signal and to reiterate when we got to
16 Youngstown that we would not clear while doing our work and that
17 we had extensive work in Youngstown compared to the norm we
18 usually have.

19 She said yes, proceed to the location, to which we proceeded
20 north. The marker after we had pulled by CP Bright had gone FR
21 NOCOM, restricting us to 30 mile an hour. After that, it seemed
22 to be a smooth-sailing trip until about Milepost 75, give or take,
23 when the train was placed in emergency, to which I did call the
24 emergency broadcast over the radio, after which I had pulled my
25 company device out to double-check the rules on emergency brake

1 applications, just to -- if the air did restore, to see if I still
2 had to do an inspection of the train, at which point we discovered
3 that the air was not coming up on the rear end. So I geared up,
4 began walking the train. About 40 to 50 cars back, the dispatcher
5 had called and alerted us of a possible derailment with cars
6 hanging off of a bridge. I continued to walk, about 72 cars back
7 there was a train separation where one knuckle had opened up, the
8 other one had remained closed.

9 And around that time the MTO had called over the radio,
10 asking if we had any further information of the derailment, I
11 responded to him and told him no, but I did find a train
12 separation and continued to walk. Made it to the DP power
13 walking, which was around a hundred and 25 cars deep and that is
14 when trainmaster James Wade had arrived in his vehicle, waited for
15 him to give me a ride at the DP power, boarded his vehicle,
16 proceeded to travel along the right-of-way.

17 And that is when we found the cars derailed north on the
18 bridge and south of the bridge, at which time we then had to find
19 a way to the other side of the bridge so I can inspect the rear
20 end of the train that was not accessible from that point. Took
21 his vehicle around, him and I both walked the rest of the train.
22 Upon walking the rear end of the train, you could see that the
23 ties were damaged far beyond the rear end of the train. After
24 that, we grabbed the marker, proceeded back to the cars that were
25 still on the rail north of the bridge, which was about a hundred

1 and 63 cars, put the train back together where that separation was
2 70 deep, re-hung the marker and then proceeded to tie the train
3 down.

4 Q. Appreciate it. So when you left the yard you went to Channel
5 89, is that correct?

6 A. That's correct. Prior, when I boarded the engine at the
7 Beaver Valley bowling alley, that is when we're on Channel 89.

8 Q. Channel 89, okay. As far as detectors, after you left the
9 yard did you hear any detectors? What all did you hear there?

10 A. The detector at 91.9, I believe I heard a no defects message.

11 Q. Did you hear any other detectors in your trip at all?

12 A. No, that is the only detector we go over. Now, there is a
13 detector on the Fort Wayne line located at 30.5 that we can also
14 hear on our radio channel.

15 Q. Okay. What about CSX detectors, do you ever hear those?

16 A. No.

17 Q. No, okay. Did you notice anything with the radio, as far as
18 issues with it?

19 A. Negative. Just the yard move, which I attributed to the fact
20 that the portable radios sometimes do not work properly when you
21 have that length of train.

22 Q. Okay. If you could talk to us a little bit about
23 communication you had with the fire department and that kind of
24 stuff, how did that go?

25 A. Just minimal conversation with them, to be honest. I talked

1 to NS police and the first responders that were there. Their main
2 concern was if it was -- if there was anything hazardous that was
3 located on the bridge with the tank cars being there.

4 MR. ZAGATA: That's all I've got for questions. Now I'll
5 pass it around.

6 BY MR. SKOLNEKOVICH:

7 Q. Richard Skolnekovich, just a couple questions. So when you
8 guys were down at Conway yard and you called up to get permission
9 up to the signal, did you use the engine radio or did you use your
10 handheld?

11 A. The engine radio.

12 Q. Engine radio?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Did you have any problems hearing any of the -- any of the
15 communications back and forth?

16 A. No, we heard the dispatcher just fine.

17 Q. Okay. Did you guys talk to the dispatcher at all between
18 that point and up to the derailment site?

19 A. I don't believe so. Just the initial conversation at CP
20 Bright, if it was okay to take the signal.

21 Q. Okay. So that was pretty much the last conversation?

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. Okay. You said you heard the defect detector message, do you
24 know what it said? Like, can you repeat what it said?

25 A. I recall just hearing no defects.

1 Q. Okay. And that was it?

2 A. That was it.

3 Q. Okay. And where was that, was that up near Castle?

4 A. The detector?

5 Q. Yeah. Well, the radio message, where were you at when you
6 heard it in the engine?

7 A. It would've been once the rear end cleared Milepost 91.9.

8 Q. Okay. Is there any channel changes up in that area?

9 A. Yes, there is. At CP Castle, we switch to 65/65.

10 Q. Before, at Castle or after Castle?

11 A. It would be coming north, it would be south of Castle.

12 Q. Okay, south of Castle. And did you hear the engineer tone it
13 up or did you do it or --

14 A. The engineer changed it.

15 Q. Okay, the engineer changed it. And then when you -- when you
16 got off and you started walking, did you have any problem with
17 your contact from the engineer over the handheld?

18 A. Yes. We discussed it before I left the engine and I told him
19 I would check in with him periodically to make sure he could still
20 hear me.

21 Q. Okay. Did you have any issues?

22 A. I want to say about 50 cars back it started getting a little
23 fuzzy for him to hear me.

24 Q. And when the trainmaster showed up, did you guys -- did he
25 just come up to the -- to where you were at or was he contacting

1 you on the radio?

2 A. I heard him over the radio.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Engine radio or handheld?

6 A. My handheld, I could hear him.

7 Q. Okay. You were already on the ground by then?

8 A. That's correct.

9 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Okay. I have no further questions.

10 MR. FRANSEN: Brian Fransen, BLET, no questions at this time,
11 Zach.

12 MR. CRAINE: Don Craine, no questions at this time.

13 BY MR. WHITE:

14 Q. Ervin White, FRA. Have you ever had problems with this
15 detector, 91.9, on previous trips or has it always been --

16 A. Not that I can recall.

17 Q. And you had other situations on other trains where you had
18 detector alerts?

19 A. Correct.

20 MR. WHITE: So you're familiar. Thank you.

21 MR. HULBURT: Paul Hulburt, NS, no questions.

22 BY MR. CASSITY:

23 Q. Jared Cassity with SMART TD. I have a couple questions,

24 Zach. Your handheld, when you worked other jobs, have you

25 experienced communication issues with your handheld on other jobs?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? Do you feel like
3 there may be a problem with your radio or is distance an issue
4 or --

5 A. Usually distance seems to be the issue.

6 Q. This train in particular seemed to be pretty big, do you
7 think it was a large train?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Can I ask you what you -- what your ideal train length would
10 be in car numbers?

11 A. Train length, anything over 8,000 feet it seems it gets to be
12 a little nerve wracking.

13 Q. Okay. I'm going to go back to your radio now. I assume it's
14 a standard issue, you haven't done anything to it, from the
15 railroad, correct?

16 A. Correct.

17 Q. Does it have like the extended antenna or anything, or it
18 does?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. Did you watch this train go by at all coming out of
21 the yard?

22 A. It would've been 904 track, which was the head hundred and 24
23 cars, I did have them pull by me.

24 Q. Okay. But the car that derailed, you never got to see it
25 coming out of the yard?

1 A. The cars that derailed on the line of road would've been in
2 the 906 track.

3 Q. Okay. When you were walking the train back after you all
4 went into emergency, did you see anything other than the train
5 separation? Did you see anything where it stood out to you as
6 abnormal or different?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did you have any thoughts on the train separation, was there
9 any indication of what might've happened there? Ahead of the
10 derailment, I apologize.

11 A. No. Like I said, the only thing I can recall was the south
12 car had the knuckle open and the north car had the knuckle closed.

13 Q. When emergency services arrived, did you have the train's
14 information on you?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Was it paperwork or was it electronic?

17 A. I had the second half of the wheel report in my back pocket
18 and I also had the company provided device with the wheel report.

19 Q. And then you had made mention that you use the MTR or
20 electronic device for clarity on the rules on a defect detector,
21 and I'm going to kind of put you on the spot here and I apologize,
22 but generally speaking, how is the training on the defect detector
23 rules, is that something that's addressed regularly with Norfolk
24 Southern or --

25 MR. ZAGATA: We'll pause the interview.

1 (Off the record.)

2 (On the record.)

3 MR. ZAGATA: And we've resumed the interview.

4 MR. MUCCI: Could you re-ask the question, please?

5 BY MR. CASSITY:

6 Q. On the training for defect detectors, I'm just curious how
7 regularly the carrier addresses that. I mean, is it just
8 something that you see in the recertification process every 3
9 years or is it something that's regularly --

10 A. Just to go back to your question, I checked the MTR for the
11 rule, it was on the emergency brake application, not the detector.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. Just to clarify that. And yes, it's brought up on the rules
14 test. That's about it.

15 Q. Okay. And then the last thing I'm going to ask, radio
16 chatter, was there particularly a lot of radio chatter that you
17 can recall or was it a fairly quiet night?

18 A. There was quite a bit going on around the detector at 91.9.
19 Like I said, the marker, he was trying to get the comm back on the
20 marker. There's a section where PTC goes out between the signal
21 at 92 and CP Bright, which is about a two, two-and-a-half-mile
22 stretch. So the Trip Optimizer was beeping because auto-control
23 was becoming available and I believe there was general chatter on
24 the Fort Wayne line, as well.

25 MR. CASSITY: Okay, thank you. I have no other questions at

1 this time.

2 MR. ROSS: Ross, no questions.

3 BY MR. ZAGATA:

4 Q. Zach Zagata, NTSB. So when the engineer changed channels at
5 Castle there, approximately how many minutes was that before the
6 derailment, do you think?

7 A. Just pure speculation, 15 to 20 minutes.

8 Q. Okay. So how long would you say that is after you went over
9 the detector, if you had to guess?

10 A. Castle is what, Milepost 76-ish, the detector is at 91.9, so
11 it was quite some time.

12 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. That's all I've got for questions. We'll
13 go around one more time.

14 MR. SKOLNEKOVICH: Richard Skolnekovich, no further
15 questions.

16 MR. FRANSEN: Brian Fransen, no further questions. Thanks,
17 Zach.

18 MR. CRAINE: Don Craine, no further questions but one
19 comment. Zach, I just want to thank you and commend you for your
20 professional behavior through this whole event and also through my
21 investigation, a lot of very positive professional things going on
22 in the cab, to include you getting up and getting behind the
23 engineer and proactively learning a little bit about the DP
24 operations, and also being proactive with the briefing, very
25 extensive briefing about your work in Youngstown. So I just want

1 to commend your professionalism and behavior for this.

2 MR. WHITE: Ervin White, no questions.

3 MR. HULBURT: Paul Hulburt, no questions. I do have a
4 comment, though. Zach, we talked about performance. Zach does
5 train our new hires and Zach is very, very in tune with the rules
6 and he's a great employee and great to work with. That's all I
7 have.

8 MR. CASSITY: Jared Cassity, no other questions.

9 MR. ROSS: Larry Ross, no questions.

10 BY MR. ZAGATA:

11 Q. Zach Zagata, NTSB, just one more question for you. So you
12 said you've had notifications from hot box detectors, is that
13 correct?

14 A. From previous trips, correct.

15 Q. Okay. When you got those notifications, how did that go with
16 wayside and dispatch and all of that?

17 A. From past experiences, whenever the detector would alert a
18 critical alarm, we bring the train to a safe stop, I tone up
19 wayside, usually on 128 on the dial tone. There have been a
20 couple times where they've beat me to the punch and actually
21 answered before I had the chance to tone them up.

22 MR. ZAGATA: Okay, I appreciate it. That's all I've got for
23 questions. Is there anything you'd like to add to the interview?

24 MR. MUCCI: No.

25 MR. ZAGATA: Okay. All right, if we have additional

1 questions, is it okay to contact you?

2 MR. MUCCI: Yes.

3 MR. ZAGATA: Great, sounds good. Well, we appreciate it and
4 with that, we'll conclude the interview.

5 (Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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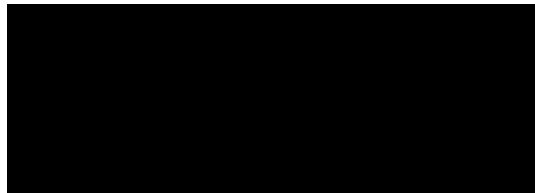
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: TRAIN DERAILMENT NEAR NEW CASTLE,
 PENNSYLVANIA ON MAY 10, 2023
 Interview of Zach Mucci

ACCIDENT NO.: RRD23FR011

DATE: May 13, 2023

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



Transcriber

