

Appendix K

Interview Transcript, Officer Samuel Hong and Deputy Probation Officer Percy Sanders

Survival Factors Group Chairman's Factual Report

Metrolink train 111
Union Pacific train LOF 65-12
Los Angeles, California
September 12, 2008
DCA-08-MR-009

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGES

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Investigation of: *
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HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK *
COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION *
PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN, * Docket No.: DCA-08-MR-009
September 12, 2008 *
Los Angeles, California *
* * * * *

Interview of: OFFICER SAMUEL HONG
DPO PERCY SANDERS

Los Angeles, California

Wednesday,
September 17, 2008

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to
notice.

BEFORE: DANA SANZO

APPEARANCES:

DANA SANZO, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C.
(202) 314-6534

JOHN QUINTANAR, Battalion Chief
Los Angeles Fire Department
Liaison with Metro Rail

JESUS OJEDA, Security Coordinator
Metrolink Safety and Security Division

CARLOS TAPIA, Mechanical Equipment Inspector
California Public Utilities Commission
Railroad Operations Safety Branch

SGT. NINA SUTTER
Sheriff's Department
County of Los Angeles

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I N T E R V I E W

1
2 MS. SANZO: My name is Dana Sanzo. I am an Accident
3 Investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board, and
4 we're conducting an interview for Accident Number DCA-08-MR-
5 009, the collision of Metrolink train and UP freight train in
6 Los Angeles, California.

7 And if we can start by going around the table and if
8 everyone can state their names and their organization.

9 MR. TAPIA: My name is Carlos Tapia. I'm a Motor
10 Power and Equipment Inspector in the Railroad Operations Safety
11 Branch of the California Public Utilities Commission.

12 SGT. SUTTER: My name is Nina Sutter. I'm a Sergeant
13 with the LA County Sheriff's Department, assigned to Metrolink
14 Bureau.

15 DPO SANDERS: My name is Percy Sanders, Los Angeles
16 County Probation Department, Deputy Probation Officer.

17 OFFICER HONG: My name is Samuel Hong, with the Los
18 Angeles Police Department and I'm currently assigned to
19 Devonshire Gang Enforcement Detail.

20 MR. OJEDA: My name is Jesus Ojeda. I'm the Security
21 Coordinator for Metrolink and also assisting the NTSB in the
22 investigation process.

23 CHIEF QUINTANAR: John Quintanar, Battalion Chief, LA
24 Fire, Metro Rail coordinator, assisting NTSB in the
25 investigation of the crash.

1 MS. SANZO: Thank you for being here today to help us
2 out with our investigation.

3 INTERVIEW OF OFFICER SAMUEL HONG and DPO PERCY SANDERS

4 MS. SANZO: And really we've been asking people if
5 they can tell us about how they were first notified and when
6 they arrived on scene and tell us about that afternoon and I
7 guess just take it away.

8 OFFICER HONG: Okay. We came to know about the
9 accident because there was a radio call that was generated.
10 One of the units went Code 6 at the location, and they said
11 that it was a good accident. We started heading out there.
12 When we got there, I think we were probably like the third unit
13 there, we got our bolt cutters out. We cut out the chain link
14 fence and started -- well, we actually saw a bunch of smoke,
15 fire, people laying everywhere. It was pretty gruesome. I
16 remember seeing a lot of blood. Once we cleared the way, we
17 were part of a bigger group that actually formed rescue teams
18 to go inside the trains to pull people out if we could.

19 DPO SANDERS: That was pretty much it. We got the
20 radio call, we got there. We got the bolt cutters, and then we
21 formed search teams and started searching all the trains and
22 the people that were able to walk, we assisted them to a safety
23 area, and then the others that couldn't walk, we put them on
24 boards and took them off the train.

25 MS. SANZO: And the fence you're describing, what

1 location was that at?

2 OFFICER HONG: There was a fence that was located
3 just I guess south of the school and the park. When we got to
4 the location, that fence was actually in between us and the
5 train. So we had to cut around it.

6 MS. SANZO: And were you working then in the second
7 and third cars, the upright cars?

8 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

9 MS. SANZO: Could you tell us your observations of
10 what you saw in those cars?

11 OFFICER HONG: The second car, when I went inside, I
12 think pretty much everybody that was able to make it out on
13 their own had already come out. They were being assisted by I
14 guess people that were riding the train. What I saw was I
15 think a total of six or seven people that were still within
16 that were unable to move, went through, identified people. At
17 the same time, that's when LA County Fire Department had
18 arrived, and they were tagging people for severity of the
19 injuries. Most of the people that were inside the train needed
20 backboards to be carried out. The first train or the third
21 train I should say, from what I recollect, it had about four or
22 five people, same situation.

23 DPO SANDERS: We were on the same search teams. So
24 pretty much what he saw was the same thing that I saw.

25 MS. SANZO: Okay. During the course of searching

1 through the second and third cars, did you come across the
2 Metrolink conductor?

3 OFFICER HONG: No, I did not.

4 DPO SANDERS: No.

5 MS. SANZO: And we'll start around the table and let
6 the group members ask some questions.

7 MR. TAPIA: I want to say right now thank you for all
8 the work that you did, but I've been attending other interviews
9 and the question was who cut that fence? It has been very
10 helpful, and you guys are the ones who did that, to provide
11 access back and forth. That's pretty good. So you went to the
12 second car and you saw about six or seven people unable to
13 move?

14 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

15 MR. TAPIA: Was that in the top and the bottom or
16 just one level?

17 OFFICER HONG: I think it was three up on the top of
18 the second car and then three on the bottom.

19 MR. TAPIA: Okay.

20 OFFICER HONG: On the first car -- the third car, I
21 think it was at least one person up on top. I don't remember
22 how many people were on the bottom.

23 MR. TAPIA: That was unable to move?

24 OFFICER HONG: Yeah.

25 DPO SANDERS: I think I saw two ladies on the bottom

1 of the third car that couldn't move.

2 MR. TAPIA: What about the seats and the tables and
3 (indiscernible)? Were they all broken to pieces?

4 OFFICER HONG: For the most part, the seats were
5 intact. The seat cushions, I remember seeing some were
6 scattered everywhere because we were using some as pillow to
7 assist the people. The tables themselves and everything I
8 think were pretty much intact.

9 MR. TAPIA: And when you went in, the doors were wide
10 open? Do you remember anything with the windows?

11 OFFICER HONG: The windows were closed. There was
12 one window that we had to -- an emergency window that we had to
13 actually pull up to get some ventilation. The exit doors of
14 the second car, they were closed. Actually, we had to, of
15 course, crack one of the emergency windows and then bust it
16 open. But most of the windows were intact.

17 MR. TAPIA: Okay. Thanks. That's all I have right
18 now.

19 SGT. SUTTER: Did you enter off of Rinaldi then or
20 did you enter off of --

21 OFFICER HONG: Rinaldi, yes.

22 SGT. SUTTER: Rinaldi?

23 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

24 SGT. SUTTER: And did you see any deputy sheriffs who
25 were there before you were?

1 OFFICER HONG: Not before we arrived, but they
2 arrived soon after we did.

3 SGT. SUTTER: And did you see the injured deputy on
4 scene?

5 OFFICER HONG: No.

6 SGT. SUTTER: Okay.

7 MR. OJEDA: Going back to the window, the window was
8 on the lower level, the one that you removed?

9 OFFICER HONG: It was on the upper level.

10 MR. OJEDA: On the upper level.

11 OFFICER HONG: On the second car.

12 MR. OJEDA: Okay. On the second car. How difficult
13 or how easy was it to remove that window from your
14 recollection?

15 OFFICER HONG: I think once we figured it out, how it
16 was supposed to work, it became pretty easy, but initially we
17 didn't know if popped it, if it was going to drop straight down
18 or not, but it ended up actually pulling in. So it was easy.

19 MR. OJEDA: And when you -- after you grabbed the
20 window, you pulled it. You have to pull it in, right?

21 OFFICER HONG: Right.

22 MR. OJEDA: What did you do after that?

23 OFFICER HONG: Pulled it off the seal and then put it
24 on the side.

25 MR. OJEDA: Okay. You didn't throw it outside?

1 OFFICER HONG: No.

2 MR. OJEDA: Did the window have, on the seal, did it
3 have two handles or did it have one ring?

4 OFFICER HONG: It had two handles.

5 MR. OJEDA: Two handles. Was it only one person that
6 removed the window, or did you have assistance?

7 OFFICER HONG: I had assistance from another motor
8 LAPD officer.

9 MR. OJEDA: Okay. So between both of you, you
10 removed the window?

11 OFFICER HONG: Yeah. Because our concern at the time
12 was we didn't know if we popped the thing, if the window was
13 just going to fall out because there were people underneath and
14 we didn't want that to happen. So --

15 MR. OJEDA: Okay. Thank you.

16 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Where did you guys get your bolt
17 cutters? Do you carry that?

18 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

19 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Okay.

20 OFFICER HONG: Well, we work a specialized unit. So
21 it's part of our thing, we call all the breaching equipment --

22 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Uh-huh.

23 OFFICER HONG: -- one of which was bolt cutters that
24 our sergeant had in the back of his car.

25 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Uh-huh. So when you responded, the

1 officer before you mentioned that he came down from Topanga.
2 How did you guys get to the scene? Did you guys park your car
3 close and run in or how did --

4 OFFICER HONG: We headed westbound on Rinaldi from
5 Canoga into the little, I guess, driveway for the school right
6 there.

7 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Yeah.

8 OFFICER HONG: Once we got there, we parked the car
9 there and ran up to the scene. That's when we realized that we
10 needed the bolt cutters. We ran back, got the car, and
11 actually drove the car to the scene and then got the bolt
12 cutters.

13 CHIEF QUINTANAR: In that grassy area?

14 DPO SANDERS: No, it was a dirt road, like a dirt
15 road, and it was like grassy on the side.

16 OFFICER HONG: I'm not sure if you're familiar with
17 the fence that ran along the track.

18 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Yes.

19 OFFICER HONG: Yeah, it was that dirt road that ran
20 along there.

21 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Okay. You mentioned that -- how
22 much, how much treatment of patients did you do? Did you --
23 were you triaging them, moving some, taking care of others?
24 What exactly did you do as far as patient care?

25 OFFICER HONG: What I did was initially I went up to

1 the second train, up on the top, and there was a gentleman that
2 was down, he was suffering from chest pains and had a big gash
3 on his leg. I tended to him for a little bit. It seemed like
4 he was actually going to pass out. Once we got him out of the
5 train, we went through and -- from there, it was just all
6 carrying people out.

7 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Physically moving people.

8 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

9 CHIEF QUINTANAR: And did you --

10 DPO SANDERS: And there was this one lady who said
11 her leg was broken but she couldn't move. So we assisted her
12 down to the floor and elevated her leg, and then there was
13 another lady similar to that with a broken leg, and we did the
14 same thing, and other than that, we were just moving bodies.

15 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Was that -- the officer before you
16 mentioned a black lady that had something wrong with her leg.
17 Was that the same one?

18 DPO SANDERS: No, it was a Caucasian lady, both of
19 them were.

20 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Where did you get your training as
21 far as medical, medical care or EMT, first aid?

22 OFFICER HONG: Just from the Los Angeles Police
23 Department Academy. That's pretty much the only medical
24 training I had.

25 DPO SANDERS: In the Probation Department, our

1 academy, the same thing.

2 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Uh-huh.

3 DPO SANDERS: We get ongoing training, first aid.

4 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Uh-huh. CPR, too, and all that?

5 DPO SANDERS: Correct.

6 CHIEF QUINTANAR: You do the same?

7 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

8 CHIEF QUINTANAR: That's all I have. Thank you,
9 guys.

10 MR. OJEDA: I have one other follow-up. At any
11 point, I know -- I think somebody brought this up. You didn't
12 see a Metrolink conductor. Did you see any other crew members
13 from the UP train?

14 DPO SANDERS: I didn't see any.

15 OFFICER HONG: We saw a bunch of people there. I
16 wouldn't know how to recognize the conductor.

17 MR. OJEDA: Understood. Fair enough.

18 MR. TAPIA: Did you go by the locomotives?

19 OFFICER HONG: No.

20 MR. TAPIA: Or just on the Metrolink passengers?

21 OFFICER HONG: Yeah, initially it was Metrolink and
22 then afterwards, we were tasked with (indiscernible). So --

23 MR. TAPIA: Okay. How about the fire?

24 OFFICER HONG: The fire was in progress when we
25 arrived, and the fire department had arrived and they were in

1 the process of putting out the fire.

2 MR. OJEDA: Did the smoke bother you guys at any
3 point?

4 OFFICER HONG: Well, it concerned us because somebody
5 came on the air and told us that it might be hazardous
6 material. So we didn't know what we were dealing with.

7 MR. TAPIA: Was it smoky in the second and third car?

8 DPO SANDERS: Not inside the cars, no.

9 MR. TAPIA: No.

10 OFFICER HONG: I think it's lucky the wind was
11 blowing the other way because there was heavy smoke.

12 MR. TAPIA: Did either of you get a chance to go into
13 the first Metrolink passenger car?

14 OFFICER HONG: No, I saw the first Metrolink car. I
15 never made it inside. It was in pretty bad shape. I remember
16 peeking in. I saw people there, but I didn't go inside.

17 MR. TAPIA: There were already probably firemen and
18 other --

19 OFFICER HONG: Yeah, they were in there.

20 MR. TAPIA: Okay.

21 MS. SANZO: Regarding the possibility of hazmat, do
22 you recall ever getting information on what was on that freight
23 train?

24 OFFICER HONG: The last information I heard over the
25 radio was that the -- I don't know what they call it, I guess

1 the official transcript of what they're supposed to carry, did
2 not match the actual train. That's the only information I got
3 on that, the manifest.

4 MS. SANZO: And something we've been asking of
5 everyone that we've been talking to is if they can offer some
6 thoughts or advice to other departments on planning or
7 responding to this type of incident.

8 OFFICER HONG: It's kind of hard, but for us, with
9 the LAPD, ever since the 9/11, we've been actually getting
10 trained in regard to major incidents. I think that training
11 actually came in very handy because it was a sight to behold
12 when you first got there, so many people.

13 DPO SANDERS: Just keep your composure and handle the
14 task at hand.

15 MS. SANZO: Would anyone like to ask any --

16 MR. TAPIA: One last thing, when you saw the smoke,
17 you were concerned thinking that maybe it was hazardous
18 materials.

19 OFFICER HONG: Yes.

20 MR. TAPIA: When, when did you finally hear that the
21 coast was clear as far as that goes?

22 OFFICER HONG: We actually never understood that the
23 coast was clear. We were under the assumption, as everyone I
24 think in the situation, because two officers came on the radio
25 and said that there might be hazardous materials involved.

1 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Just the last question I have is we
2 were told that the police officers, both deputies and officers,
3 LAPD officers did a heck of a job and worked together very well
4 with the fire service. Do you have any comment on that? Did
5 you feel that the incident went fairly well or can you comment
6 on that?

7 OFFICER HONG: My opinion is that given the
8 situation, that the incident went as best as it could have. I
9 know with the fire department guys, they were great. I mean,
10 they seemed like they were actually very well-trained. They
11 knew exactly what they were doing in terms of medical care and
12 everything. Other than having more resources, I don't know
13 what we could have done any better, you know. I mean, people
14 got to the scene and they jumped in right away. So I thought
15 that was good to see.

16 DPO SANDERS: Yeah, I think everybody worked really
17 well together. It seemed like they just got there and pretty
18 much knew what to do, started the triage, people taking them
19 where they were supposed to go.

20 CHIEF QUINTANAR: Thank you.

21 MR. TAPIA: You know, to hear that you guys were
22 concerned about the smoke and hearing maybe hazmat, that you
23 continued doing what you did, that's very commendable. Thank
24 you for that.

25 MR. OJEDA: And on my behalf, and also on the behalf

1 of Metrolink, I'm sure the Sheriff's as well, we want to thank
2 you guys for putting your own lives out there and helping other
3 folks. Our own family, our passengers, and our own crew
4 members all thank you.

5 MS. SANZO: I'd like to thank you for being here
6 today. This will be very helpful to us as we continue on our
7 investigation. So thank you, and that will conclude the
8 interview.

9 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled
10 matter 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: HEAD-ON COLLISION OF A METROLINK
 COMMUTER TRAIN WITH A UNION
 PACIFIC FREIGHT TRAIN
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 Interview of Officer Samuel Hong and
 DPO Percy Sanders

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PLACE: Los Angeles, California

DATE: September 17, 2008

was held according to the record, and that this is the
original, complete, true and accurate transcript which has been
compared to the recording accomplished at the hearing.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber