

**ATTACHMENT #3**

**LONNY SALSBUURY INTERVIEW**

**(19 Pages)**



**NTSB**

**National Transportation Safety Board**

490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20594-0001  
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## TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

**HWY-05-MH-035 — Wilmer, TX**

**DATE:** Sunday, September 25, 2005

**LOCATION:** Alongside I-45 frontage road, near Rice, TX

**PRESENT:** Lonny Saulsbury (Witness); NTSB Investigators Larry Yohe and Paula Sind-Prunier

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Sir, your name is?

WITNESS: Lonny Saulsbury. L-O-N-N-Y S-A-U-L-S-B-U-R-Y

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: And you work for W.W. Webber?

WITNESS: Yes, ma'am.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: And you are the construction contractors that are working on the roadway here.

WITNESS: Yes, ma'am.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: How old are you, Lonny?

WITNESS: I'm 48.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: About 48.

WITNESS: No, I am 48.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay, are you on a temporary construction assignment here, do you move all around—?

WITNESS: No, I'm based right here, right now. I live in [REDACTED] and I'm based right here.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay. What is your address?

WITNESS: It's [REDACTED]

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: What's your job?

WITNESS: I'm a dozer operator—and I also haul the heavy equipment.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Do you help out with signs, and that, too?

WITNESS: Well—I'm just helping the state right now, and that's what I'm here for, to help the state boys, with traffic and stuff.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay.

WITNESS: That's what I was doing the night—that bus was over here, at 240.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: What were you doing that night?

WITNESS: I was doing the same thing I am, just patrolling the roads, making sure people ain't off in our construction road and site, and helping out where I could—this, that and the other—And that, basically, I found out that that bus had a flat, and it was on the right rear floater axle, and I set there and called K&S

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: I mean, did you pull up to the bus?

WITNESS: Yeah, yeah, I—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did somebody call you? Or—

WITNESS: Who would have called me was—I think it was one of the Rice policemen. Asking me if I could get a hold of a wrecker, or a tire company that could come up and change a tire.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yeah? Why would he call you? Just curious—

WITNESS: Well, I was the one designated to have that number, and to call them—to call the wrecker service.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You were going around, seeing if there were problems—

WITNESS: That's right.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: —anywhere, and so you had the number for the wrecker service?

WITNESS: Yes, sir. That's what I had. That's what I was doing. And setting up barrels that had been knocked down, and cones, and what have you—got to keep traffic moving.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yes. So you came up on—did they call you first, or you came up on the bus?

WITNESS: No, they called—they called me. I was sitting down at 1603, and diverting traffic down there—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: What's 1603?

WITNESS: 1603 was a—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Is that a farm road?

WITNESS: It's a county road, yeah, a farm road.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: And they called you, the police called you?

WITNESS: Yeah, they wanted to know if I could get hold of a tire service—which I had right there in the truck with me, and I just got Kenny down here, of K&S, and of course—called, to have him send a service truck up here to change a tire.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay. So you pulled up to the bus, right?

WITNESS: Oh yeah, yeah—I was within, oh—here to half the distance to them barrels, away from them. I imagine 50 foot, maybe.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Were you there before the police got there?

WITNESS: No.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: They were already there.

WITNESS: The deputy was already up behind him—diverting traffic, and stuff.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: And then—And then was the tire changer already there from  
K&S?

WITNESS: No, we had to wait for him. He had to come up through traffic—from south  
of Corsicana up, and that night there—it was packed. It was a nightmare. It took  
him a while to get there.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did you talk to the driver at all—the bus driver?

WITNESS: All I told him, and that, that the tire service was on its way, and then, let's  
get the spare tire out and have it ready, and that, so that we could get going. So  
we went to the front of the bus there, and in the nose—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: And did he know it was there, do you think?

WITNESS: The spare tire?

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yes.

WITNESS: Yeah, he went right to it.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay.

WITNESS: Yeah, he went right to the spare tire, and that—and then it's got a front  
elevated door that falls down, and that, and it's on a little trolley that you pull out,  
and then I took the tire back there.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: So you helped him?

WITNESS: Yeah, I took the tire back there and laid it up against the duals.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did you notice if the tire was—the spare tire—did you notice  
if—

WITNESS: Ah, it had—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: —Did it seem like it had enough air in?

WITNESS: Yeah, oh yeah. But what I think—it was about 50 percent rubber on it. It wasn't a new spare.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: But you feel there was enough air in the tire?

WITNESS: I feel that there was, yeah, being—driving heavy vehicles and that, it was—it bounced pretty good.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It bounced pretty good. Okay. Now, the tire that was—the tire that went flat—

WITNESS: It looked like the sidewall failed on it. It did. It looked like the sidewall was blown out on it. And the way it—it had an aluminum rim. That floater axle had an aluminum rim and—of course, the rim had been destroyed. It had it the ground and sat there—it don't take much to heat up an aluminum rim. And the tire—if you can imagine—if you're looking at it this way, the tire was wrapped in there behind—the rim and the brake assembly—on it, okay? And that when he took—when the guy took the tire off, it come right off, and that.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: With the wheel? Did he take the tire off with the wheel?

WITNESS: Yes, yes.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: He just put an impact wrench on it and—

WITNESS: Yep, and it took him a little bit to get—on a bus, and with that forward axle—air adjustable, and that—he had to take one jack and get up underneath and lift it, and then get another one and, you know, and kind of see-saw it up to where he could get it up high enough to where he could get the wheel—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: He got up under there?

WITNESS: Yeah, he was up underneath it.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did—did you notice anything leaking anywhere?

WITNESS: Yeah, I'm not sure what it was—it was clear liquid.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Clear liquid?

WITNESS: Yes.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It was a clear liquid. You're sure it wasn't any kind of oil?

WITNESS: Well, I mean, that there—well, diesel fuel in the night with all them lights would look clear, and that—to me, it looked like water condensation. That's what it looked like.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: From the A/C?

WITNESS: Uh-huh (affirmative). That's what it looked like. But it was just a little pool—Like this big, it wasn't nothing, you know—getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Do you think it's possible you couldn't see the true color of it because of the darkness?

WITNESS: Oh, that's true. Sure. Yeah, it was glowing, you know, how the little glare—with liquid, it'll—if the light hits it just right, it'll glare? But I couldn't tell what it—what it really was.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: So to you, it looked clear?

WITNESS: Yes.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Now, where was that, do you have any recall, at all?

WITNESS: Yeah, it was—on the right rear of the bus, inboard about—oh, I would say, 18 inches from the outside of the bus. And, probably—from the axle back was probably, maybe, 2-1/2 feet.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: From which axle?

WITNESS: From the floater axle that he was changing the tire on.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It was behind it about 2-1/2 feet?

WITNESS: Yeah, I want to say about that far, about—about two foot.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay, so this fluid—where's that diagram—of that bus—do you have it or do I have it?

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: I think I have it—still have it.

WITNESS: That made me sick. I sat there and—I'd went to sleep, and then I seen it on the news, and I thought, boy that bus looks familiar, and then it panned—the television company panned—

[WITNESS'S PHONE RINGS; INTERRUPTION AT 0:00:38; RESUMED AT 0:01:03]

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: So anyhow—you know how buses have got the tag axle in the back, and then the two wheels here, the dual axle, and then the steer axle—so it was back of this a couple feet, and then inboard about 18 inches?

WITNESS: (indicating on diagram) Right in here starts the motor compartment, okay—comes across here. See, and right back in here—

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: So, you're saying it's beneath the motor?

WITNESS: Yeah.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Okay. Alright.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: And, behind—behind the tag axle—

W. Right.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: We could be talking about two separate things, you know?

WITNESS: But that's where I seen the liquid coming from—And like I said, it wasn't a constant flow or anything, it was just like a drip—and then a drip—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Were you there when he took the wheel off?

WITNESS: No, I was help—putting the spare back, in the compartment.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did he—did the tow driver saying anything about the nuts being hot, or anything like that?

WITNESS: No—matter of fact, I felt the hub and that before he took it off there, and, it was—nothing was real hot, anything about it—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Nothing you couldn't put your hands on?

WITNESS: No, you could put your hands on it, fine. The tire was hot, naturally, because it—it had blown out, but as far as the hub and the rim itself, and that—you could put your hand on it.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did you notice that the rim was actually dragging? There was part of it—like if this is the rim (gesturing)—did you realize that there was a flat spot—?

WITNESS: Oh yeah, oh yeah—there was a flat spot on that aluminum rim. No doubt about it. There sure was.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Wouldn't that tell you the wheel wasn't turning?

WITNESS: It was also telling that—that when it set there and blew out, and that he might have done some brake damage on it—because the way that tire was wrapped up in behind there, and that he could have got a spring, and that, or

something that holds them brakes open—of course, when you push the brake pedal it actuates the brakes—and spreads and pulls them back. And when you lock the brakes, the spring brakes, the pressure—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Right—

WITNESS: the spring breaks lock up again with the drum—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You bring up a good point—because—I'm going to have to take a closer look at that tire, I mean—I know it's flat, I know there's a flat part—but do you think it blew out, like the side—you don't think the original blow out was where it was flat?

WITNESS: Umm—it spun on the rim. I know that tire had spun on that rim, and that, when it blew. And I couldn't really tell exactly where the position was that tire, where that rim was at. But, you can see where it had—just take the tire out, I'm not sure what shape that tire's in, it's probably burned to a crisp—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It's actually not—it was up in that compartment—

WITNESS: Take a close look at that sidewall, and you can see where the sidewall started breaking down on that tire—where it started getting hot—take a real close look at it. And there's an indentation—where that flat spot was at, you look up around the tire there just a little bit, there's like a little rectangle—and that's where that fatigue started—I'd be willing to bet it did. And you could see, and that, where the—the side wall core—if you look at the side wall core, it's—it's smooth cut—where it blew out. It's not ragged—or jagged, like around the regular tread.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It's smooth cut where it blew out? We never turned that tire over—

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Yeah, we didn't look at that. Now, do you remember anything about the tread, on that—

WITNESS: The one that blew out looked like it had pretty decent tread on it—it looked like it had about 60 or 70 percent of rubber on it—and then the spare, I was getting ready to say, the spare had probably 50 percent rubber on it. I wouldn't have been scared to run that spare.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Now the one that did blow out, did you notice any flat spots in the tread?

WITNESS: No. I was more worried about cutting my hand on that stainless steel they got in them tires—No, I hadn't seen anything like that at all.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You hadn't seen any flat spots on the tread?

WITNESS: No.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well, I can tell you right now, that if you took the tire, the whole bottom of the tire is just like this—like it drug and it actually wore through. All the way through.

WITNESS: I didn't get to see that.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Right.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Well, but if it wasn't jacked—it wasn't jacked up when you were looking at it?

WITNESS: No, it was on the ground.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Okay, so you can't see the bottom anyway.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Based on what you're saying—I'm wondering—if it could have blown out at another place, and then the way the tire got jammed up in the rim—that it was able to lock the rim and—

WITNESS: Sure it would have—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: —could have locked the rim and the tire also, because—I don't know if you noticed, but—you didn't notice the tire mark coming up to the bus, did you?

WITNESS: There was a—I seen a little bit of it, but I didn't see how long it was.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well, I'll tell you how long it was—almost two miles.

WITNESS: Well then something tells me that that tire was blown out and then got locked up in there and locked that—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well, you know, that's a possibility—it could have blown out with such force that it damaged the brake assembly on it—the brake assembly, you know, it's possible.

WITNESS: Because I was telling Duffie, you know, I said, I've had tires blow out, Duffie, on big trucks—on the inside duals, and that—and of course they've got a protective barrier there, and it tore the barrier off and it tore the springs off it, and then the brakes just go like this and they heat up the hub, and stop.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Lonny, if I need to talk to you again, do you have a phone number I can reach you at?

WITNESS: [REDACTED]

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: And that's your cell phone?

WITNESS: Yes.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: When do you eat and sleep?

WITNESS: My normal hours, is from 6:30 in the morning until 6:00 at night.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: But you've been working—

WITNESS: I've been working since Thursday night.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Now, just so I'd never wake you up, do you shut your cell  
phone off when you go to sleep?

WITNESS: No, never. It's always on. It's always on. I never shut it off.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: So, people wake you up when you're—

WITNESS: All the time. Usually my horse trainer—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Your horse trainer?

WITNESS: Yeah.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: You own horses?

WITNESS: Oh, yeah. Forty.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Forty?

WITNESS: Forty. Forty five years now, been showing horses.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: What kind?

WITNESS: Quarterhorses. (inaudible).

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yeah? So you make your living here and that's your hobby,  
or—vice versa?

WITNESS: No, I make my living doing this, and then that's my long-time hobby.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well listen, I tell you what, we need to get out of here within  
ten minutes, because we've got a meeting to get back to, if you have jumpers—

WITNESS: Ah, we'll get her going. I was just going to walk over there anyway.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did the—the driver—what do you think you can tell me about it—could he speak English pretty good?

WITNESS: That—that has always gotten me, and that—When I went and took my CDL, and it's a few years back, and that, and I had to speak English, and that—And he didn't speak hardly a word of English.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You feel pretty sure he didn't—?

WITNESS: I felt that he didn't speak very good English—but then I didn't talk to him that much, four or five words, and then that was it.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Did he say things to you? What made you think maybe he didn't speak good English?

WITNESS: Well, for one thing, when I was telling him, let's get the tire, he hesitated a minute or two—and then I pointed, you know, let's get the tire, and then it dawned on him, let's go get the tire. Other than that, I don't know if he could speak English or not. But—

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: So you were gesturing, and he seemed to respond to the gesturing?

WITNESS: The gestures, let's go get the tire.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: If you had an opinion—if you were just simply asked an opinion, is it fair to say you'd say his English was limited?

WITNESS: I'd say his English was limited, yes. He was—I was kind of wishing Dimus was there, and that, to translate—but he'd already went off shift. He was fixing to come back on shift. This is like—I don't know—3:00, 3:30 in the morning. Something like that—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: What kind of guy did he seem like? Did anything strike you about the driver, one way or another?

WITNESS: Well, he was—Yeah, he—he walked to the back of the bus, stand there, looked at traffic, and then when the guy came, and that, changed the tire—except for when he helped me put the tire back in the nose, the blown out tire, put it back in the nose, and that, he stood right there and watched—watched where he put them jacks. I mean, he was real attentive about that.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: He wanted to learn?

WITNESS: Learn, or just—he was very concerned about where he was going to put—or not to crimp a fuel line, or something—you know, I don't know how them lines or systems go through there—and, but he was right there like a little bird dog. That's the way it was—I mean, he was watching. But he didn't see him put the tire back on either.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: Now, do you know, at some point did he go back into the bus?

WITNESS: I believe he—no, he stayed outside the bus until everything was finished. And then when everything was finished, then they pulled up here by the little old feed store. That little—at Calhoun Street.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You weren't actually there—I mean, you couldn't actually say for sure he didn't go back in the bus and sit in the seat—you think he was outside the whole time?

WITNESS: The only—I know he was outside the whole time. When I—when we got to leave, and that's—that's when he—and went to talk to him—to the tire changer,

and that—and the tire changer said, well, just pull over right up here, and he got in his bus, and he drove off—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Was the policeman still there?

WITNESS: Yeah, Duffie was still there—he waited until they got back on the freeway—the interstate, until they got off to safe harbor—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Were you ever thinking—when did you find out—when did you—when did it dawn on you that this—that this was the same bus that was involved in the fire?

WITNESS: I'd come home—I'd got off at 6 o'clock, and I went in the house and I turned the television on and that, and then all the sudden, they've got breaking news, and I'm looking at the breaking news and—I seen that white bus, and I told my wife, boy, that bus looks awful familiar—and then it panned over, and that—the photographer panned over and that, and I noticed one of the nurses—because I had talked to the nurse—she wanted to know when the tire changer was going to get here—and I remember the clothes she had on. And she was a pretty good-looking colored woman. I think there was three or four attendants—you know, nurses and nurses helpers that was in there, and the bus driver.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: But you didn't actually go in the bus?

WITNESS: No sir. No. Never did. I know the one nurse said that there was—there was a few of them that had oxygen, that had oxygen bottles.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: So that's when, you saw that nurse, you were pretty sure that was the bus—

WITNESS: I knew it was the bus then.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: In the last couple days, I mean, I think you've told us, you know, everything you know, but did you ever stop to think, gee—I wonder if there was any relationship between that tire and—did you ever think about that, or—

WITNESS: We sat there, and I told my wife, I said, you know, I helped change the tire on that—on that bus, and that. And she goes, it's burning pretty bad right now. And I said, yeah, and there was a bus full of old people on there—that couldn't help themselves. And she goes, your kidding. And I said, No—they were elderly people that were being evacuated from Houston. And that—and a few of them were on oxygen. And—but other than that—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: You never thought, like, I wonder if the tire—

WITNESS: The only thing I seen about the spare, and like I said, I think it had about 50 percent rubber and that, it had a little bit of a cut to it, but—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yeah.

WITNESS: —but that wouldn't do anything.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well, we're going to check that—we're going to turn that over—we haven't even turned it over yet.

WITNESS: But you can—you can see where the sidewall was fatigued, and the sidewall was hot—the tread was cool, and the sidewall was hot.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Anything else?

WITNESS: I looked at that rim, also—I got—I got a habit of looking at these rims, and that, for cracks. It's a bad habit of mine—it's a good habit—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Yeah.

WITNESS: —And that, and I really didn't see anything that was cracked on that rim,  
either.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Well, let me tell you something—when you're driving  
through here, and you look and see, you'll see a tire mark leading up to where you  
were—almost two miles long, about—

WITNESS: Yeah, I sat there and seen—but of course, I wasn't looking.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Just your opinion—do you think that maybe that tire got  
caught—caught when it blew out—it got caught in a way that it jammed that  
rim—

WITNESS: That's possible—it could have locked that rim up.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: —because the tag axle, once that goes down a little, that's  
going to take actually less weight off of that tag axle, once it goes down—well,  
no, I mean once it goes flat, it will actually go up a little bit, it's going to take a  
little less weight, so maybe it could have locked—

WITNESS: It does take weight for it to make a turn—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Right.

WITNESS: And the way that tire was wrapped in around there, it very well could have  
been possible brake damage to it—there very well could have been. But take a  
close look at the sidewall.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Hey, you've been a big help.

WITNESS: Thank you.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: I appreciate it.

WITNESS: Well, I kind of figured you guys would hunt me down, you know.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: I'll tell you what, let me give you my card, and—

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: Let me give you my card, too.

INVESTIGATOR SIND-PRUNIER: —if you think of anything else, something that occurs to you, feel free to give me a call—let me, actually, put my cell phone number on here—Larry do you have a pen?

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: But you know when you saw that picture and that same lady, that it was the same bus?

WITNESS: It was the same bus. Yup.

INVESTIGATOR YOHE: It was the same bus. Listen, we need to get up to our group meeting—back up to Dallas, but—We really appreciate your openness, and that's a big help, you've—find some good information. Because we were wondering about this driver, because he acted like he couldn't speak English, and they had an interpreter—

WITNESS: —He couldn't—couldn't speak a lot of English.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Transcribed by P. Sind-Prunier