

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Agency: U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Title: INTERVIEW OF: DONNIE WILLHITE

Docket No.

LOCATION: WAYNESBORO, GEORGIA

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U. S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

INTERVIEW OF:

DONNIE WILLHITE

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Conference Room
Administration Building
Vogtle Electric Generating Plant
Waynesboro, Georgia

Wednesday, March 28, 1990

The interview commenced at 2:17 p.m.

APPEARANCES:

On behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission:

WILLIAM LAZARUS
GARMON WEST, JR.

Also present:

WYNDELL POOLE
Job Steward, Local 474

PROCEEDINGS

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MR. WEST: This is the MIT at Plant Vogtle. The date is March 28, 1990, and the time is 2:17, and we are here with the driver of the truck that was involved in the subject event, and we will have him introduce himself and also to introduce his guest that's with him.

MR. WILLHITE: My name is Donnie Willhite. I am an operator at 474 Local and this is my job steward, Wyndell Poole.

MR. WEST: Just clarify for the record, if you will, that your guest, who you identified, is in fact someone that you invited and it was your choice rather than being someone that was imposed of you.

MR. WILLHITE: Yes, sir. He was the one I chose to sit in with me.

MR. WEST: Fine. Could we just have for the record, if you will, just a brief introduction of yourself, please? Your name and your position.

MR. POOLE: Yes. I'm Wyndell Poole. I'm operator steward for the operators at Plant Vogtle.

MR. WEST: Again, we thank you for coming back to talk to us about the event.

Whereupon,

DONNIE WILLHITE

1
2 appeared as a witness herein and was examined and testified
3 as follows:

4 EXAMINATION

5 BY MR. WEST:

6 Q Will you just in your own words, just give us an
7 account of what happened.

8 (Pause)

9 BY MR. LAZARUS:

10 Q I guess to start, our understanding is that you
11 were coming in to do a routine refueling of various things -
12 - I guess from the time you entered the protected area, just
13 describe the process. Is this something you do routinely?
14 What sort of -- How frequently it's done.

15 A I had been in a schedule of running about the PA
16 checking all the welders and air compressors that belong to
17 DNCD or the ones that had been in -- most of the equipment
18 out there to check it to see if they had oil, fuel, water or
19 what have you, in order for it to be ready to run it in case
20 they did want to run it. It didn't specially have to be
21 running. I just checked it to see that it was ready
22 whenever they was ready to run this piece of equipment. And
23 I pulled through the gate down there -- I don't know -- in
24 the morning, approximately -- I say 15 or 20 minutes after
25 9:00 -- 25 after nine, something like that. And I go

1 directly to the turbine building. They was a small gas
2 welder setting there at the door, north door to the number 1
3 -- Unit 1, turbine building, and I pulled up there and I
4 hadn't refueled it all that many times since it had been
5 sitting there, a week or ten days, something or other, but I
6 had to check it just to make sure that it was ready to go.
7 I had two air compressor there the week before. They had
8 already movod them, but the welder was still left there. So
9 I pulled up there and I checked the fuel and it was full so
10 automatically I didn't even check the oil or anything. It
11 was still full of fuel. I'm the only fuel man. It hadn't
12 been run. Goes back and gets into my truck and started
13 backing up and the position I had stopped my truck in had
14 left this pole sort of in a blind spot and I couldn't see
15 it in my mirror. I backing up slow. I don't get in too big
16 a hurry nohow on account of the truck gets a little bunky,
17 and I backed into the pole. I had a security guard with me.
18 He escorted the truck because it was a non-designated
19 vehicle.

20 Q I'm sorry. You are backing up after you'd already
21 checked the welder?

22 A Uh-huh (affirmative).

23 Q You were just going to turn around?

24 A Yes, more or less back near about completely out
25 of that area. And I pulled up to it, and just got out of

1 it. That put me on the side with the welder when I pulled
2 in there. I got out and went over there and checked it.
3 Come back, got in my truck and started backing up. You
4 know, automatically you look at both your mirrors, but I
5 didn't see the pole, and I backed up, and I must have
6 backed, maybe a length and a half of this room. What's
7 that? Thirty foot?

8 BY MR. WEST:

9 Q Here's a picture that was taken, and you can help
10 me to confirm that these were in fact after the event. I
11 believe they were, and apparently this is where the truck
12 was situated after you had eventually gotten out of the
13 truck at the end of the event. Could you give us some
14 indication of where you stopped the truck when -- this is
15 the turbine building here (indicating) -- and I am assuming
16 that the welder is somewhere over in this area; is that
17 correct?

18 A It's probably directly behind the truck here.
19 It's under the catwalk or these cable trays.

20 Q Is it close to the building itself?

21 A Yes, sir. It's right at the door.

22 Q To the right of the door or the left of the door?

23 A I was walking to the turbine building and it was
24 sort of behind the door. I'd say it's to the right of
25 facing the turbine building.

1 Q Fine. Could you describe for us where you stopped
2 the truck and what angle it was at when you got out to check
3 the welder?

4 A Well, primarily is right where it's at now is
5 where I stopped at originally. It could have been just a
6 little bit further to the front.

7 Q I see.

8 A In order for me to miss this pole here, you know,
9 I just jumped out and walked straight over there to the
10 welder.

11 Q But at least it was in this general direction
12 pointed out, running sort of parallel with the turbine
13 building?

14 A Yes, sir.

15 Q Fine.

16 A Like I said, it's just about the same place.
17 After I hit the pole, I pulled it back up and stopped it
18 probably -- might have been 5 or 10 feet short of where I
19 had it to start with.

20 MR. WEST: I'll just leave these here in case we
21 have to refer to it. It'll give us a good reference point.

22 BY MR. WEST:

23 Q I would like to for a moment to go back to when
24 you entered the protected area. Could you just give us some
25 of the details of what happens -- what you have to go

1 through to get into the protected area?

2 A Well, first off you have to get a sheet for non-
3 designated vehicles, authorization sheet. And you put all
4 the information on it. It wants to know the truck, what
5 company you work for, your name, your badge number, general
6 information about the truck and company.

7 Q Sure.

8 A Then I take it to the guard up there. You can get
9 it pre-signed, or pre-authorized, in advance, but like I was
10 coming in in the morning like that, I'd just get an officer
11 there at the desk to call or beep some of the people that
12 can authorize it. There are five or six that would
13 authorize it. I don't particularly remember who authorized
14 it that morning. It could have been Handfinger, or I don't
15 even know, but it was one of them. They authorized it, and
16 then they get you a security escort.

17 Q Do you know if there's anyone that has to be
18 notified that you are on-site? For example, do they call
19 the control room to let them know that you are on-site and
20 that you are going to be doing whatever you do on that day?

21

22 A No, sir. That day I would probably come under
23 these people -- There's just a few people who can authorize
24 a vehicle to come into PA.

25 Q I didn't mean to get you off target. You

1 mentioned that you got your authorization and you were
2 provided an escort?

3 A I was provided an escort. Well, he takes the
4 sheet to the guard gate out there so they can log you in and
5 out. Then you -- Most of the time I just left my truck
6 sitting back out of the way until I got all this here -- so
7 it wouldn't be right there in the way of everybody else
8 trying to come in and out that's already got authorization.
9 So I pulled my truck up there. They run a search of it, all
10 over it, under it, in it. They search it pretty good. Then
11 after the guard gets through searching it, I go through it,
12 get my badge and come around and me and a security guard
13 walks through the gate and gets my truck and drives through.
14 Both load up on the outside of the gate -- as a rule we do.
15 I don't know if they do it every time or not, but when they
16 ride with me, they've always come outside the gate with me
17 and they get in the truck outside. Then I drove straight
18 down that road and took a left and went into the turbine
19 building.

20 Q You took the left and then you stopped the truck
21 there at this -- pretty close to this area in here
22 (indicating)?

23 A Right along in there somewhere. Just so I could
24 get out of the door and miss that pole there probably.

25 Q Now how long have you been performing this

1 activity? You come in on some frequency on certain days and
2 you go through your activities? How long had you been doing
3 that here at the plant?

4 A Oh, I've been doing it for about a year. Right
5 aft- I got my badge. I come to work in February and it was
6 a few weeks till I got my badge, and then I would come in
7 here on different intervals and fill up the equipment, but
8 since the outages started, I had to come in everyday, twice
9 a day, on account of they didn't have anybody to run the
10 truck at night. So I'd have to fill it up at the first of
11 the shift and make sure it was full at the last of the
12 shift.

13 Q So you were doing it for almost a year, but you've
14 been doing it more often since the outages started?

15 A Uh-huh (affirmative). Since the outages started
16 -- five weeks or something or other.

17 Q Now, you work for -- Who do you work for?

18 A I work for ENCD Engineering Construction.

19 Q Is that a part of the -- Is that Georgia Power
20 Company or --

21 A It's a subsidiary of Georgia Power. It's a new
22 company I think. I believe it's new. It's relatively new
23 here, that they have formed in order to do these outside
24 activities, you know. We had to clean up the rock. One
25 thing and another.

1 Q You mentioned that you drove into the area. Is
2 that the way you normally come into the area?

3 A Not -- Not as a rule. I usually have some air
4 compreszors, two air compressors in there, and I knew that I
5 would always have to put fuel in them.

6 Q Now, the air compressors -- I'm reminded that you
7 mentioned that. Over in this area there's a turbine door
8 and over to the right of it is the welder that you checked
9 for refueling.

10 A Uh-huh (affirmative).

11 Q Where were the air compressors situated? Where
12 were they situated before they were removed with respect to
13 the door, if you will? Was it to the left of the --

14 A No, it would probably be right here in the edge of
15 this picture.

16 Q It would be to the left of the door, but more down
17 to this part of the building (indicating).

18 A It'd probably be right in there behind the truck,
19 if they were still sitting there, but they're not. And I
20 would back up there to them.

21 Q When you were backing in when the air compressors
22 were there, you would come through the main gate. You'd make
23 your left turn. You'd come on down. Where would you start
24 your backing in?

25 A I don't know hardly how to tell you. But just as

1 you are to the turbine building there --

2 Q This is a picture that gives you a view over to
3 this direction and this was the effected pole down here and
4 this is the driveway down here (indicating). Would you
5 start your backing in down here, or do you pull on in here
6 even when the compressors were there and then start backing
7 up?

8 A There's a trailer sitting back out here. The door
9 of the turbine here. The asphalt come right beside that
10 trailer, and I'd pull on down there this a way, and start
11 and back around this pole back up here (indicating).

12 Q Back around this pole, the second one over from
13 the pole that was backed into?

14 A Well, there's three there. This is first pole.

15 Q Okay. The first one that you get to when you pull
16 in the driveway?

17 A Uh-huh (affirmative). There is something back out
18 here, a pull box or something or other, and I would back in
19 between this pole and a pull box and back up there beside
20 the turbine building -- right along side the turbine
21 building, something or other -- I don't remember, but it's
22 some kind of concrete.

23 BY MR. LAZARUS:

24 Q Now, why did you back in when the air compressors
25 were there?

1 A Well, my hoses and all were on the back of the
2 truck and I would just back in there and pull my hose off
3 and fill up both air compressors with the same stop, you
4 see. Fill up both of them. In the meantime I would check
5 the welder that had been sitting there and just see if it
6 needed fueling. Like I say, I don't think I fueled it up
7 maybe but one time, but you have to check. That was a rule
8 that I had made on my own.

9 BY MR. WEST:

10 Q Sure. You'd fill it up once in what period of
11 time?

12 A The welder?

13 Q Uh-huh (affirmative).

14 A Once -- I'd say 10 days. It'd been sitting there,
15 I don't really remember how many days it'd been sitting
16 there, you know, but I'd say ten working days.

17 Q So the air compressors have been removed and you
18 are stopping to check the welder. Did you think the welder
19 may not have had gas in it? What was your thinking at the
20 time? Do you remember?

21 A In my mind I hadn't put no fuel in it in, like I
22 say, it was very little fuel in it. I figured it wasn't. I
23 said, well, it didn't hold but four or five gallons. It had
24 a small tank on it. And if it had have been low, I could
25 have just gotten a five gallon can there, and I wouldn't

1 had to have pull my hose all the way to it over there. I
2 said, "Well, if it is low, I can just fill it up with a
3 can."

4 Q Has the plant here at Plant Vogtle, have they
5 given you any training or do you get any training on driving
6 within the protected area?

7 A Just the speed limit and they've got stop signs
8 out there.

9 BY MR. LAZARUS:

10 Q There's never been any policy of providing a
11 ground guide to go with trucks in the protected area to help
12 you back up?

13 A Not that I am aware of there's not. In fact, when
14 we were here with construction, they used to put two people
15 in the truck because -- Well, all day long you were having
16 to back in to tight places and first one thing and another,
17 and they had put two people on the truck in order to help
18 you back up and help you do the work, but since I've come
19 back this time, there's just been one person on the truck,
20 and like I say, the only rules I know of is stop signs and
21 be careful, the speed limit.

22 BY MR. WEST:

23 Q Now, on this particular day, was this your first
24 stop or --

25 A The very first one in the PA.

1 Q So how many did you have to make before you would
2 eventually leave and go out into the protected area?

3 A There was one there and one down there on the
4 steam tunnel. There was one over there at the door, the
5 containment building -- there was a small welder there, and
6 I would always go over yonder, to the other side, on the
7 west side, and check with SIMCO's people to see if any of
8 them needed any fuel in their air compressor or their cherry
9 pickers. And there was one air compressor on the other end
10 of the turbine building that I would have to fill up.

11 Q So you'd make those stops and then you'd leave?

12 A Yeah. I go on about my normal duties to changing
13 oil or what have you.

14 Q But you would leave out of the protected area at
15 that point?

16 A Yes.

17 Q How long would that take you full time?

18 A Most of the time it would take me around a little
19 over an hour to make all my stops and check with the SIMCO
20 people and to check everything. It would usually run into
21 an hour, something of that nature.

22 Q Now, for this first stop, you explained why on
23 this particular day you pulled in rather than backing in.
24 Would that, whether you back in or you pull in, would that
25 also be the case for some of these other stops or are you

1 doing something that's consistent with those?

2 A No. It would be a policy, probably, with some of
3 the rest of them. Some of them I would park in a different
4 place, you know.

5 Q Why would that be?

6 A Well, like the one there at the door of the
7 turbine or the one that's on the steam tunnel, I couldn't
8 get to them.

9 Q With the truck?

10 A Uh-huh (affirmative). With the truck. I would
11 just stop wherever, you know, is safe and just go to them
12 and check them and if they needed fuel, I would see about
13 getting it to them one way or the other, or either carrying
14 it in a can or have them to move that particular welder
15 where I could get to it, or something of that nature. No,
16 you know, there wasn't no set policy. It was just more or
17 less you use your own judgment. If it needed a bunch of fuel
18 in it, and I'd have to make me a bunch of trips, and I
19 couldn't get to it, we'd try to get it moved, but if I could
20 just carry one can of fuel to it, or gas, whatever, I would
21 do it to, you know, bother about trying to find a cherry
22 picker and getting it moved and them running extra leads
23 and stuff like that there. It might not sit there for one
24 day and the next day it might not be there. It might be
25 somewhere else.

1 Q At this first stop that you made the day of the
2 event, do you have any idea why the welder was sitting there
3 near the turbine door?

4 A No, I have no idea.

5 Q Let's go back just a little bit in terms of you
6 got back into the truck. You've checked the welder. It
7 doesn't need any gas, and you are backing up. Would you
8 step us through the details of the time that you got into
9 the truck until the time that you actually hit the pole what
10 went on?

11 A I don't know. I might have said something to the
12 security guard as to the effect, "It didn't need any fuel.
13 I didn't figure it did," or something or other of that
14 nature, and that was about all because I mostly didn't back
15 but just a short ways until I hit the pole. Didn't have
16 time to say much.

17 Q I see.

18 A I just backed up and I felt it bump, like that
19 there, and the truck went dead, and I just left it sitting
20 right there.

21 BY MR. LAZARUS:

22 Q Did you have a rear view mirror?

23 A I have one on each side of the truck.

24 Q I was really trying to ask, did you have one in
25 the center like a car? A center mirror that lets you see in

1 the back?

2 A There's not one in the center. It's got big tanks
3 there in the back glass of the truck and you couldn't use
4 one anyhow.

5 BY MR. WEST:

6 Q When you back the truck up, does the truck have
7 any kind of sounding system? Like some trucks when you back
8 them up they just automatically give you a big loud noise.
9 Does it have that kind of feature?

10 A No.

11 MR. LAZARUS: So the pole could have got out of
12 the way?

13 WITNESS WILLHITE: No, it don't. It might have,
14 but it don't work, nadn't worked with me because I'd pull in
15 the alley down there to the steam tunnel and have to be real
16 careful as to people walking down through there not to back
17 over them.

18 BY MR. WEST:

19 Q Could you just step us through, what happened
20 after you hit the pole? What happened from that point
21 forward?

22 A I can't really say I seen a ball of fire or
23 anything. It bumped. The truck went dead. Seemed to me
24 like maybe a flash in the mirror went back in my face or
25 something or other -- like lightning, a little ball of fire.

1 Then the next thing that comes to my mind is the guard
2 there. His radio was on. I think first off they said they
3 lost all power to the turbine building and then it come
4 right back on and they said they lost all power to the
5 containment building, and I told him, I said, "Well, tell
6 them we've knocked down a line out here, or hit a pole on a
7 low voltage switch," just in case they could convert the
8 power. I don't know whether they could have or not. So they
9 wouldn't be running around looking for it anyhow. And he
10 told them, and he said something to the effect of, "Can we
11 get out," or "Let's get out," or something or other like
12 that. I told him, I said, "Wait just a minute. See if any
13 wires or hanging on the truck." So I opened the door, stood
14 up on the edge of the truck and looked back over my truck
15 without touching the ground. Looked back over my truck and
16 didn't see any wires on the truck. I seen one laying on the
17 ground out there. I started the truck up and went and
18 pulled up a few feet, and then I told him we could get out.
19 So at that time his boss man, or whatever, was coming back
20 to him on the radio, and they were talking back and forth
21 and they were telling him to secure the truck and don't let
22 anyone come where the wire was at, don't let anybody come
23 from that end. It couldn't have been -- By the time we got
24 out of the truck, there was somebody down at the end of the
25 turbine building keeping people from going up from that way,

1 getting into the wire that was laying on the ground. I
2 didn't know whether it was live or whether it was dead, but
3 you know, I didn't see no fire or anything, but they still
4 said don't let nobody get close to that wire. The security
5 truck -- He locked his door when he got out, and he asked me
6 did I lock my door, and I said, "No, I didn't lock my door.
7 We don't have a key to the doors." I said, "If we lock the
8 door, we can't get back in it." So he said okay. I had the
9 key in my hand. I had switched the truck off when I got out
10 and got the key in my hand. So I handed him the key. We
11 stood there a few minutes, and I don't know, they done some
12 kind of talking. I don't know what all the conversation
13 was, but in a minute they said -- told him to bring me to
14 PESB. So we walked through the turbine building down the
15 alley over there, across the steam tunnel back up to the
16 security building up there with the security officer to go
17 back in the back where their office is back there. And he
18 left me then and they give me a piece of paper there to
19 write out in my own words the accident. There was another
20 one standing there with me to help me, they said, to help me
21 if I needed any help. Then I wrote it out and they was
22 saying something about who was my supervisor. I had talked
23 to him. I had a radio, a Georgia Power radio, and I had
24 called my master mechanic, which he had already come in and
25 got into the PA and he was there, and he turned around and

1 come back up there where I was at. I called him. I said,
2 "They might want to talk to you." Then this officer come
3 back and said they wanted me at safety. He wanted to take me
4 to safety. So me and my master mechanic, we walked across
5 over there to safety where the nurse's station was. It was
6 locked. She was gone somewhere or something. Anyway wasn't
7 nobody there. The door was locked. We come back to the
8 security headquarters and then they said they would escort
9 me outside the PA, and so I went on out, dropped my badge
10 and there was a telephone there in the lobby. We went into
11 the lobby. There's two of them down there -- to use one of
12 them and one of them was vacant so we went into the vacant
13 one, and about that time is when they come over the PA
14 system and it was a site alert, or something of that nature.
15 He made a phone call and he told me to go over in front of
16 this building here with the rest of the folks and he would
17 get in touch with me later.

18 So my master mechanic, he got in his truck and started
19 to drive off. I walked on over this way, and then they was
20 another person that called him and told him to back up just
21 a minute and he'd go with him. So when he backed up, I got
22 in the truck with him and the other person to our shop.
23 That's it.

24 MR. WEST: I want to thank you for all the
25 information you've provided us.

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(Whereupon, the interview was concluded at 2:50 p.m.)

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This is to certify that the attached proceedings before the
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the matter of:

Name: Investigative interview of

DONNIE WILLHITE

Docket Number:

Place: Vogtle Nuclear Generating Plant, Waynesboro, GA

Date: March 28, 1990

were held as herein appears, and that this is the original
transcript thereof for the file of the United States Nuclear
Regulatory Commission taken stenographically by me and,
thereafter reduced to typewriting by me or under my
direction, and that the transcript is a true and accurate
record of the foregoing proceedings.

SUSAN M. BREEDLOVE
Official Reporter

Ann Riley & Associates