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FATAL ACCIDENT AT TOPAZ

by

RUSSELL A. BANKSON

PROJECT REPORTS DIVISION
Historical Section

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

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FATAL ACCIDENT AT TOPAZ

At 10:10 AM on September 17, 1943, Kenji Yokoro, age 3, son of Mr. and Mrs. Masuri Yokoro, residing at block 12, barrack 11, apartment A in Topaz, was struck and run over by WRA truck No. 32, operated by Sueki Nakahara, age 18 of 14-10-E, Topaz, an employee of the Motor Pool.

The accident occurred in front of Dining Hall 8, between blocks 8 and 1. The right front wheel of the truck passed over the child's chest and the rear right wheel passed over his legs. The child was taken to the hospital, where he died of his injury at 11:54 AM.

When the accident victim reached the hospital, he was in a shocked condition and breathing with considerable difficulty, according to the report of Dr. J. A. Simpson, Principal Medical Officer. He was treated immediately with artificial respiration, coromine, carbogen and hot blankets, to which he responded sufficiently to recognize his parents, and his pulse became much stronger. However, about ten minutes later he again went into shock from which he did not respond, despite injections of caffeine and coromine.

The findings of the medical officer were that he died of crushing injuries about the chest, left shoulder and head.

Masuri Yokoro, father of Kenji, had crossed the street from Dining Hall 8 to Dining Hall 1 in the company of a still younger son, Masao, leaving Kenji playing in front of Dining Hall 8.

Mr. Yokoro reported that he saw the truck coming in a westerly direction at a moderate rate of speed but he did not dare call to Kenji for fear of having him run out into the street. Kenji, however, did dash out into the street almost in front of the truck, which had stopped, then started again.

A police car, driven by Lt. S. Antoku of the Internal Security, was parked in front of Dining Hall 1. Captain T. Nakayama of the Internal Security commandeered this car and hurried the stricken child to the hospital.

At about 10:25 AM, Mr. Theodore Lewis, chief of the Internal Security, appeared at the scene. He located WRA

truck No. 32 parked in the Motor Pool yard. Mr. Lewis, then, went to the hospital where he located Sueki Nakahara, driver of the truck, who had followed the injured boy to the hospital.

In the company of Mr. Lewis the driver went to the Internal Security office, where a board of inquiry was organized composed of Mr. Lewis, Mr. Sam Owen, project safety engineer; Mr. Roy Potter, chief of transportation, and Mr. Ralph Barnhart, Project Attorney.

Nakahara was questioned by members of the board. A copy of the transcription of this interview is attached as Exhibit A. During the hearing the testimony of Frank Iga, an eye witness to the accident, was transcribed and a copy is attached as Exhibit B. Lieutenant Antoku, who arrived at the scene shortly after the accident, also made a statement which is attached as Exhibit C. Shunichi Tanaka, a rider on WRA truck No. 32 at the time of the accident, was also interviewed, a transcription being attached as Exhibit D.

Following these interviews Sheriff Forester of Millard County, Utah, in which Topaz is located, and County Attorney Melville were notified of the accident and came to the project on that afternoon. They reviewed the circumstances of the accident as transcribed, and pronounced the accident as unavoidable, thus clearing the driver of the truck of any negligence.

The records in the case were turned over to the Project Safety committee consisting of G. L. Niesse, T. R. E. Lewis, R. C. Barnhart and H. R. Watson, with Roy Potter as chairman, and Samuel B. Owen as Safety Engineer. This committee reviewed all the circumstances and on September 28, 1943 reported to the Project Director that its findings concurred with the findings of the investigating county officers that the accident was unavoidable and that the driver of the truck, Sueki Nakahara, be cleared of any charge of negligence.

September 17, 1943
11:30 AM.

Exhibit A

Testimony of Sueki Nakahara
Driver of Truck #32

Barnhart: Will you state your name?
Nakahara: Sueki Nakahara.
Barnhart: Your address?
Nakahara: 14-10-E.
Barnhart: How old are you?
Nakahara: 19.
Barnhart: Now will you tell us what truck you were driving?
Nakahara: I was driving truck #32, GM stake truck.
Barnhart: What direction were going?
Nakahara: I was going west.
Barnhart: On what road?
Nakahara: Between Block 8 and 1.
Barnhart: Where did the accident occur?
Nakahara: About the middle of the road.
Barnhart: At what point, in relation to location?
Nakahara: Pretty close to the plumbers' truck.
Barnhart: Where was it, with reference to the mess hall? Was it exactly between them or where?
Nakahara: Not quite between them. I hadn't passed them.
Barnhart: Tell us what happened.
Nakahara: I was going 4 or 5 miles an hour, and there was a bunch of kids. One of the fathers said "Look Out!" to the boy, but I guess he didn't hear him, and he ran in front of the truck.
Barnhart: How do you know he ran in front of the truck?
Nakahara: I thought I heard something, and people were yelling that I had run over somebody, and the man sitting in front with me told me I ran over somebody.
Barnhart: How long did it take you to stop?
Nakahara: I stopped right away.
Barnhart: Did you see the boy run in front of the truck?
Nakahara: No, I don't think I did.
Barnhart: Which side did the boy come from?
Nakahara: He came from the right hand side of the truck.
Barnhart: Where was the boy when the truck stopped?
Nakahara: He was in the back; I guess his leg was caught.
Barnhart: Under the rear wheel?
Nakahara: He was caught by the rear wheel.
Barnhart: Did you see the boy when he was pulled out from under the truck? Who else was there?
Nakahara: Well, there was an Internal Security Lieutenant, and then they took the boy to the hospital in a Dodge sedan. I drove the car.
Barnhart: How long did it take you to get to the hospital?
Nakahara: It didn't take very long.

Testimony of Sueki Nakahara
Driver of Truck #32

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Barnhart: Did you see the boy taken out .
Did you stop immediately?
Nakahara: Yes, I stopped right off.
Barnhart: Who helped him out?
Nakahara: The father got there before I did.
Barnhart: Where was the boy?
Nakahara: He was under the rear wheel.
Barnhart: Where was his leg?
Nakahara: I just glanced over and his father had already
led him out.
Barnhart: Did the back of the wheel or the front of the wheel
hit him?
Nakahara: The front of the back wheel.
Barnhart: Who are you employed for?
Nakahara: M. & O. (Maintenance and Operations)
Barnhart: Do you drive for M. & O.?
Nakahara: It is not exactly my regular job. I worked for
the garbage crew before, then quit there and went
to work in the mess hall, then they told me they
were short of help so I went to work there again.
Barnhart: Did you drive before?
Nakahara: A little bit at home.
Owen: How long had you been driving for WRA?
Nakahara: I drove for about one week during the 7 months I
worked before, and I've driven from the 6th of
September till now.
Barnhart: And you have been driving since then...this same
truck?
Nakahara: No, the other truck was 39.
Barnhart: How long have you been driving 32?
Nakahara: I can't remember.
Barnhart: About how long--one week--two weeks?
Nakahara: Maybe a little over a week.
Barnhart: Do you have a WRA drivers' license or permit?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: Are you the regular driver of this truck?
Nakahara: From the 6th I was until I quit the 22nd, when this
man comes back.
Barnhart: Who is the regular driver of this truck?
Nakahara: Tomatsu Kono.
Barnhart: Was he on duty today? Was he with you?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: Was anybody riding with you in the truck?
Nakahara: Yes, Tanaka. I don't know his first name.
Barnhart: Where does he live?
Nakahara: 42-12-B.
Barnhart: You don't know his first name?
Nakahara: No.
Potter: How is your vision--do you have trouble seeing?
Nakahara: I don't see good without glasses.
Potter: You had your glasses on this morning?
Nakahara: yes.

Barnhart: You hadn't had any alcoholic beverages of any kind?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: Where was your last stop?
Nakahara: At block 10.
Barnhart: What had you done there?
Nakahara: I picked up the grease and loaded it on the truck with 5 men.
Barnhart: You were driving then? Where to?
Nakahara: I was going out the road between blocks one and eight west of the block, out the west gate.
Barnhart: Who has assigned you to this truck? Who told you to drive it?
Nakahara: His first name is Shu.
Barnhart: Who is he?
Nakahara: I think he is a dispatcher.
Barnhart: When did he tell you to drive this truck?
Nakahara: When I first came in - the 6th.
Barnhart: That was your regular job?
Nakahara: Yes.
Barnhart: Nobody else was supposed to drive it but you?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: What shape were the brakes in on this truck?
Nakahara: Not very good. No foot brake, just a hand brake.
Barnhart: How long had they been that way?
Nakahara: Since I got the car. Then there was just a little bit foot brake, and I used the hand brake because it was more safe. I was going to try to get it fixed but there were no mechanics at the garage.
Barnhart: Did you report this condition of the brakes to anyone?
Nakahara: I told it to one of the secretaries, and I told Shiro too.
Barnhart: When was that?
Nakahara: Last Saturday.
Barnhart: What did they say?
Nakahara: They didn't say anything.
Barnhart: What was the condition of the truck otherwise?
Nakahara: I seemed to be alright, but no horn.
Barnhart: Is there anything more that you could tell us what we haven't asked you?
Nakahara: I don't know.
Potter: You spoke of these kids at the side of the road.
Nakahara: When did you see that?
Nakahara: They were off on the side.
Potter: How close?
Nakahara: This boy I ran over was a couple of feet from my truck on the right hand side.
Barnhart: What were they doing there?
Nakahara: I don't know, I guess playing or watching the plumbers.
Barnhart: What were the plumbers doing?
Nakahara: Working, I guess. I saw a few of them standing there.

Barnhart: Where was this truck sitting?
Nakahara: A little back of the plumbers' truck, about the middle of it.
Barnhart: And the plumbers' truck was parked where?
Nakahara: Part-way on the road.
Barnhart: How far on the road--how far?
Nakahara: About half and half on the pavement, a little off the side.
Barnhart: Which side of the road were you on when you hit the boy?
Nakahara: The plumbers' truck was there on the left.
Barnhart: Were you on the right side of the pavement?
Nakahara: I think I might have been a little to the right.
Barnhart: Of what? Of the center?
Nakahara: Yes.
Barnhart: Your truck was going down the center on the road?
Nakahara: Yes, then I saw the plumbers' truck and I moved a little to the right.
Barnhart: How much space was there between the plumbers' truck and yours when you stopped?
Lewis: Which side of the road did the boy run out from?
Nakahara: From the right. I saw him run then I saw him run toward the truck again.
Barnhart: Toward the truck?
Nakahara: I didn't see him exactly toward the truck, but I saw him run.
Barnhart: You didn't make any attempt to stop the truck until after you had hit him?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: You didn't know you were going to hit anyone?
Nakahara: No.
Barnhart: And when you did stop the truck, you used the hand brake?
Nakahara: Yes.
Barnhart: The hand brake was in good condition then?
Nakahara: Yes. I knew there were kids playing there, but not on the street. I was ready to use the brake.
Barnhart: Was the father there near the child when the accident occurred?
Nakahara: Yes.
Barnhart: Who picked the child up?
Nakahara: The father, he was right by the road.
Potter: What was the weather like, was it windy?
Nakahara: No, it was calm, the sun was shining.
Barnhart: There was no obstructions to keep you from seeing what was on the side from which the boy ran?
Nakahara: No, I looked both ways.
Barnhart: The child was taken to the hospital in what car?
Nakahara: A Dodge sedan.

Lewis: Did any caucasians accompany you to the hospital in the car?

Nakahara: No, just me and the boy's father.

Barnhart: You were in charge of the truck?

Nakahara: Yes, I was in charge now.

Barnhart: Who directed the crew as to where they were to go?

Nakahara: Shiro.

Barnhart: I mean who on the truck.

Nakahara: Well, Shiro told menand then I told Tanaka.

Barnhart: He (Shiro) gave you the orders?

Nakahara: Yes.

Barnhart: What did the father say to you.

Nakahara: He didn't say anything.

Barnhart: Did the father say anything at all during the time?

Nakahara: No. He kept mumbling saying: "It was my fault, it was my fault." And I told him it was min too.

Barnhart: How old a man is the father?

Nakahara: I don't know, about middle age.

Barnhart: When he was mumbling that it was his fault, what did you tell him?

Nakahara: I told him it was my fault too.

Barnhart: What did the father say when you were driving to the hospital?

Nakahara: I don't know, he was kind of quiet.

Barnhart: Did the child say anything?

Nakahara: No, I don't think so. He cried a little bit in the car then he quieted down.

Barnhart: Did anybody else say anything to you?

Nakahara: No.

Barnhart: Did you say anything to anybody else?

Nakahara: No.

Barnhart: Did a crowd gather at the scene of the accident?

Nakahara: I don't remember.

Barnhart: Do you know who took the truck to the garage?

Nakahara: No.

Barnhart: Did you ask anybody if you could use the car that you took the child to the hospital in?

Nakahara: I asked whose car it was, I don't know exactly what the lieutenant said.

Barnhart: But you didn't get permission to take the car?

Nakahara: No.

Lewis: Was the car taken back?

Nakahara: The lieutenant took it back.

Lewis: Did he accompany you to the hospital?

Nakahara: No.

Lewis: Did he come back in his car?

Nakahara: Yes, I went to get the mother and sister of the boy, the Dr. told me to.

Lewis: Was the lieutenant with you when you went to get them?

Nakahara: No, he stopped me just before I got there.

Lewis: What did you tell the mother and sister when you went
after them?
Nakahara: I told them to come to the hospital right away.
Barnhart: Did you tell them why?
Nakahara: I said their little boy had gotten hurt.
Barnhart: Did you tell them how it had happened?
Nakahara: I don't remember, I think I did.

September 17, 1943
1:00 PM.

EXHIBIT B

Testimony of Frank Iga
Foreman of Plumbers' Crew

BARNHART: You saw the accident?
IGA: Yes.
BARNHART: What is your name and address?
IGA: Frank Iga, 3-3-C.
BARNHART: Will you tell us where you were on September 17 at 10 o'clock?
IGA: We were working the 3" service line to dining hall 8. This garbage truck came around and stopped right in front of us where we were working and they watched us while we pumped out the water.
LEWIS: How long would you say they were stopped there?
IGA: About 5 minutes. And the boys and girls, the men and everybody was looking at us where we were working, the kid happened to be right in front of the truck, because the truck wasn't moving. Then all of a sudden the truck started moving, and the driver apparently didn't see small kid was right in front of the car, you know how big the truck is, and apparently he didn't see the kid. He was right in front of the bumper. I think he was standing like that (demonstrating position) looking at us work and suddenly the car started moving and hit the kid and he fell down, and I think when the car moved, the front tire caught his arm or someplace, but not the whole body, the car went over and the little kid's feet caught on the back tire. We had a hard time to pull the kid out.
BARNHART: Where on the boy did the truck run over him?
IGA: I didn't see the front tire run over him.
BARNHART: Close to the body?
IGA: No, I don't think so, I think he was in the center but towards the right and when the car moved on, he wasn't under the tire. I couldn't see, because I was on the other side, then the wheel went over and he was under the car, I don't think he was under the tire.
BARNHART: Did you say the truck hit him and knocked him down?
IGA: He was knocked down like this, that is why he was hurt right here.

BARNHART: Did you see the truck drive up before it stopped?
IGA: Yes.
BARNHART: You saw it stop?
IGA: Yes.
BARNHART: Did you see the boy knocked down?
IGA: When the car started moving, everybody started yelling "Look Out!"
BARNHART: Didn't the driver hear them?
IGA: Everybody was yelling at the driver and the kids, and the driver must have been excited too because the car moved quite along way and caught the feet with the back tire.
BARNHART: How big a child was it?
IGA: About 3 years old--small.
BARNHART: You didn't know the child?
IGA: No, I didn't know the kid.
BARNHART: Was there somebody with the child?
IGA: I don't think so. I'm not sure who it was pulled the kid out from the tire, I don't know who he was.
BARNHART: Do you know who was driving the truck?
IGA: Yes, this fellow.
BARNHART: Do you know him?
IGA: Not exactly, he was working in the mess hall before.
BARNHART: Then what happened, do you know who pulled him out?
IGA: A man pulled him out. I told one of the fellows there who had a passenger car to take the kid to the hospital right away.
BARNHART: Do you know whose passenger car it was?
IGA: No, everybody was excited there.
BARNHART: Where on the road did the truck stop?
IGA: On the side.
BARNHART: Which side?
IGA: Left side.
BARNHART: Which way was the truck headed?
IGA: Headed towards Mess 8, headed west, apparently he was driving to Mess 8.
BARNHART: Where was your truck standing?
IGA: Mine was a little off from the road on the south side. Off the highway, that's where we were working. The garbage truck then stopped somewhat on its left side, as though it were going to pull into block 8. Apparently he was going into dining hall 8.
BARNHART: Which side of the truck was the boy standing on?
IGA: On the right side, not exactly in the middle.
BARNHART: And the right wheels ran over him?
IGA: Yes.

Testimony of Frank Iga
Foreman of Plumbers' Crew

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BARNHART: Didn't anybody make any effort to get the child out of the way?

IGA: Yes, but one fellow got there first. The car was standing still and the kid was standing there. He got right in front of the car because it wasn't moving.

POTTER: Could you see him when the car knocked him down?

IGA: Yes, because everybody was yelling at him "Look Out!" They yelled at the driver and the kid - I think the kid tried to run.

BARNHART: The driver got excited?

IGA: I don't say excited, but when the people started yelling at him.....you know.

POTTER: The child fell forward on his face?

IGA: His face hit the ground. The truck hit him from behind.

POTTER: When this driver stopped the garbage truck, was he about even with your truck?

LEWIS: What side of the street did he run out from?

IGA: He was standing right in front of the truck.

BARNHART: Where were you with respect to all this?

IGA: I was on the left side of the car.

LEWIS: How far away?

IGA: About 7 or 8 feet from the front.

BARNHART: You were standing where you could see the front of the car?

IGA: Yes, yes, yes. He (the child) might have been standing exactly in the middle of the car, but when people started yelling, he started to run away, he wasn't fast enough.

BARNHART: Were there any Internal Security men standing there?

IGA: I don't know, I didn't see any of them.

BARNHART: Who drove the truck away?

IGA: Shiro, he came after it. I went over to the office and told him what happened and Shiro went there and took the truck away.

LEWIS: I guess that will be all, thanks Mr. Iga.

September 17, 1943
1:30 PM

Exhibit C

Testimony of Lt. Antoku
Internal Security Officer

Barnhart: What is your name?
Antoku: Sakuye Antoku.
Barnhart: And where do you live?
Antoku: 39-1-B.
Barnhart: Now, tell us where you were this morning at 10 o'clock.
Antoku: I was at Mess 1, at the sandwich shop, and I heard so much noise, by that time, the little boy was laying down under the back wheel, about this much (indicating) of the tire on his feet. I asked a man about it, and he said that he was run over here (chest) and another man said he was run over here (abdomen).
Barnhart: You were in mess one, inside?
Antoku: Inside.
Barnhart: You didn't see the accident?
Antoku: No.
Barnhart: You didn't know the child?
Antoku: No, I didn't.
Barnhart: The parents--did you know them?
Antoku: No.
Barnhart: Do you know if any of his family saw the accident?
Antoku: No, I didn't see anybody.
Barnhart: Do you know anybody who actually did see it?
Antoku: No, I saw a lot of people, but when I went out, it was a little too late.
Barnhart: Where was the truck sitting when you went out?
Antoku: Can you draw a picture?
Barnhart: I have one here. (showed diagram drawn for record if I. B.)
Antoku: It was well on the left side of the road?
Barnhart: Yes, that's right.

September 17, 1943
3:00 PM

Exhibit D

Testimony of Shunichi Tanaka
Rider in Truck #32

Lewis: Mr. Tanaka, will you state for the record, your name?
Tanaka: Shunichi Tanaka.
Lewis: And you live at 31-12-D?
Tanaka: Yes.
Lewis: Were you on truck 32 this morning about 10 o'clock?
Tanaka: Yes.
Lewis: Will you tell us what happened at around 10 o'clock between mess 1 and 8?
Tanaka: First time, the truck was going about 10 miles fast, there was plenty people looking at the water. Lots of time I told him "Go slow" - one machine there, shovels, and everything. I see boy already. I told him go slow, and he go slow, you know, but he come back then. I told him "Stop". He put on brake, but the boy was all smashed. The back wheel came about here on his foot - the right foot.
Lewis: Did you see anybody pull the boy out of the truck?
Tanaka: Yes, but I don't know his name.
Lewis: The man that was driving truck 32 also drove the boy and this man to the hospital? Did anybody else go?
Tanaka: Do you know who the man was that carried the boy?
Tanaka: I don't know what his name is. He came right away.
Lewis: Do you think the driver of 32 saw the boy run in front of the truck?
Tanaka: Yes, he saw.
Lewis: Did he try to stop?
Tanaka: Yes. He stopped and the boy came back and he hit him.
Lewis: In other words, the boy started to run across the street and stopped and ran back, and then the truck hit him?
Tanaka: Yes.
Lewis: Do you think the truck was going about 5 miles an hour?
Tanaka: Yes, very slow.
Lewis: Could you hear the noise when the truck hit the boy?
Tanaka: No.
Lewis: What did they do with the truck?
Tanaka: They left it there, and took the boy to the hospital.
Lewis: Shiro took 32 down to the motor pool?
Tanaka: Yes, Shiro and me.
Lewis: When you came along the street, these men were working on the left side?
Tanaka: Yes, plenty people there, everybody looking.
Lewis: Where was their truck sitting?
Tanaka: About 5 yards I would say this side of the machine, and he passed and stopped about 8 or 10 yards past the pumping crews' truck before he hit the boy. I could see, you know, small boy behind the ----, I look to see, I don't know where he is going--by'm by, under the machine.

Lewis: Where had you stopped to pick up the garbage--the last place?

Tanaka: I think No. 10 -- I told the driver, you go to the easy places first, then we come back.

Lewis: Where were you going then?

Tanaka: To take it way down, a mile outside.

Lewis: Where were you going to pick more garbage?

Tanaka: No more stops. I look at my watch, it 10 minutes to 10, I thought that we had plenty of time.

Lewis: You say it was 10 to 10 when he hit the boy? Did your truck stop to look at the men pumping water, or did you keep on?

Tanaka: Yes.

Lewis: How long did you stay there?

Tanaka: About half an hour--no, we wanted to go.

Lewis: Did you know any of these men around there who were pumping water?

Tanaka: No, I don't know anybody, on Shiro, he came after.

Lewis: What was the condition of that truck--good or bad?

Tanaka: Brake not much good--hand brake only--no foot brake--not much good.

Lewis: Do you think that if the brake had been good, he could have stopped?

Tanaka: Yes, I ask already to change the brake.

Lewis: When did you ask them?

Tanaka: This boy working about two weeks, and one boy before bring truck in and say, "This brake no good" and he quit. Then he get this boy. We ask him to work a little while. This boy going to Tule Lake, and I told him to work for me five or six days. He's a nice boy.

Lewis: Thank you Mr. Tanaka.
