

Freight train hits Texas veterans parade; 4 dead



[Train slams into vets parade](#)

MIDLAND, Texas — Cheered by a flag-waving crowd, the parade float carrying wounded military veterans was inching across the railroad tracks when the crossing gates started coming down. And then, seemingly out of nowhere, a freight train came bearing down, its horn blaring.

Four veterans died in the Thursday collision, and sixteen other people were hurt. For some of the war heroes who managed to jump off the flatbed truck just in time, training and instinct kicked in: They rushed to aid their injured comrades.

“They are trained for tragedy,” said Pam Shoemaker of Monroe, La., who was with her husband, a special operations veteran, on the float ahead of the one that was struck.

Shoemaker said there was no warning; she hadn't seen or heard the train until it was upon them. The couple jumped from their truck and ran toward the other one, knowing it would be hit in a matter of seconds because it was unable to move due to other floats in the parade.

The crossing barriers had just started to come down, she said.

“We saw people jumping from the other trailer and then there was the impact,” Shoemaker said.

Sudip Bose, who was a front-line physician in Iraq, said Friday that the immediate aftermath reminded him of a combat triage situation. Veterans already were tending to the wounded when he reached the crash site. Bystanders tried to help with the limited medical supplies available.

“They were applying tourniquets, holding pressure to the wounds,” said Bose, who served in Fallujah and Baghdad and was volunteering at the parade.

“It was a scene of total chaos,” he said.

Spectators described horror and helplessness as the train hurtled toward the flatbed tractor-trailer.

“The train honked its horn, but the 18-wheeler could not go anywhere because of the other one being right in front of it,” said Daniel Quinonez, who was waiting in his vehicle as the parade went by. “It was a horrible accident to watch happen right in front of me. I just saw the people on the semi-truck’s trailer panic, and many started to jump off the trailer. But it was too late for many of them.”

Marine Corps Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gary Stouffer, 37, and Army Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Boivin, 47, were pronounced dead at the scene, Midland police spokesman Ryan Stout said. Army Sgt. Joshua Michael, 34, and Army Sgt. Maj. William Lubbers, 43, died later at Midland Memorial Hospital.

Of those hurt, four remained in stable condition and one is critical, Stout said. Ten others were treated and released from the hospital in Midland, about 320 miles west of Dallas.

At a prayer vigil Friday morning, Mayor Wes Parry’s voice cracked as he described how he had met Boivin and his wife a day earlier.

“It’s hard to believe today that he’s not here anymore,” Parry said.

National Transportation Safety Board officials arrived Friday in Midland to investigate. NTSB board member Mark Rosekind said the agency is conducting a thorough investigation, but didn’t offer any details. Another news conference was scheduled for later in the day.

On NBC’s “Today” show Friday, NTSB chairwoman Deborah Hersman said the train was equipped with a forward-facing camera.

“That will give us some video images if it survived the crash and we can download it, as well as recorders on the train,” Hersman said. “We’re going to be looking at the signals ... and making sure that the gates and lights were coming down.”

Late Thursday, Union Pacific spokesman Tom Lange said a preliminary investigation indicated the crossing gate and lights were working. He did not know if the train crew saw the float. The black box from the train will determine its speed at the time of impact.

Federal Railroad Administration records reviewed by The Associated Press show there have been 10 previous collisions — five cars and five trucks — at the same railroad crossing since 1979. Six drivers were injured in those accidents, but there were no fatalities. The trains involved were moving slowly at the time of the previous accidents, between 15 and 25 miles per hour.

The parade had been scheduled to end at a "Hunt for Heroes" banquet honoring the veterans. The wounded service members were then going to be treated to a deer-hunting trip this weekend. The events were canceled.

The events were organized by Show Of Support, a local veterans group that says its mission is to "lift the spirits of our U.S. troops and disable veterans" through hunting and fishing. The group's president, Terry Johnson, has not responded to emails seeking comment and his phone number was unlisted; the phone rang unanswered at the group's offices.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta was saddened by the news of the accident, Pentagon spokesman George Little said in a statement, adding that Panetta's "thoughts and prayers" are with the victims and the community.

EARLIER STORY: MIDLAND, Texas — Four veterans were killed and 16 other people were injured when a train slammed into a parade float carrying the returning heroes to a banquet to honor them in West Texas, officials said Friday.

The float took the full force of the train at a railroad crossing Thursday afternoon. Some people managed to jump clear as the train, with its horn blasting, bore down on the float decorated with American flags. Horrified spectators at the parade could only watch as the carnage unfolded.

"The train honked its horn, but the 18-wheeler could not go anywhere because of the other one (truck) being right in front of it," said Daniel Quinonez, who was waiting in his vehicle as the parade went by. "It was a horrible accident to watch happen right in front of me. I just saw the people on the semi-truck's trailer panic, and many started to jump off the trailer. But it was too late for many of them."

Sudip Bose, a front-line physician in Iraq who had been volunteering at the parade, said Friday that the immediate aftermath of the collision reminded him of the war.

"It was a scene of total chaos," Bose said, of Odessa, about 20 miles to the northeast.

He described how veterans were already tending to the wounded with limited medical supplies when he reached the crash site.

"Instincts kicked in. They were applying tourniquets, holding pressure to the wounds." Bose said.

Early Friday, Midland police spokesman Ryan Stout said 37-year-old Sgt. Maj. Gary Stouffer and 47-year-old Sgt. Maj. Lawrence Boivin were pronounced dead at the scene. Army Sgt. Joshua Michael, 34, and Sgt. Maj. William Lubbers, 43, died later at Midland Memorial Hospital.

Of the 16 others hurt in the crash, four are in stable condition and one is critical. Ten others were treated and released from the hospital in Midland, about 320 miles west of Dallas.

The float was one of two flatbed tractor-trailers carrying veterans and their spouses. Police said the first truck safely crossed the tracks but that the second truck's trailer was still on the crossing as the train approached.

Patricia Howle was waiting in her car at a nearby traffic light as the train approached.

"I just started screaming," she said. "The truck was on the other side of the train, but I did see the panic on the faces of the people and saw some of them jump off."

Deborah Hersman, NTSB chairwoman, said Friday on NBC's "Today" show that the train was equipped with a forward-facing camera whose footage could help in the investigation.

"That will give us some video images if it survived the crash and we can download it, as well as recorders on the train," Hersman said. "We're going to be looking at the signals ... and making sure that the gates and lights were coming down."

Late Thursday, Union Pacific spokesman Tom Lange said a preliminary investigation indicated the crossing gate and lights were working. He did not know if the train crew saw the float. The black box from the train will determine its speed at the time of impact.

The parade had been scheduled to end at a "Hunt for Heroes" banquet honoring the veterans. The wounded service members were then going to be treated to a deer-hunting trip at the weekend. The events were canceled.

The events were organized by Show Of Support, a local veterans group. Its president, Terry Johnson, did not immediately return an email for comment and his phone number was unlisted; the phone rang unanswered at the group's offices.

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta "was deeply saddened by news of the tragic accident involving veterans heroes and their spouses in Midland," Pentagon spokesman George Little said in a statement. "His thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims, with those injured in this incident, and with the entire community."

EARLIER STORY: MIDLAND, Texas — A freight train slammed into a parade float carrying wounded veterans on Thursday, killing four people and injuring 17 others as the float tried to get through a West Texas railroad crossing on its way to an honorary banquet, authorities said.

The train was sounding its horn and people were jumping off the decorated flatbed truck before the collision around 4:40 p.m. in Midland, according to witnesses and Union Pacific spokesman Tom Lange. A preliminary investigation indicates the crossing gate and lights were working, Lange said, though he didn't know if the train crew saw the float approaching.

Two people died at the scene, while two others died at Midland Memorial Hospital, City of Midland spokesman Ryan Stout said. Six people remained hospitalized Thursday night, including at least one in critical condition; the other 11 people injured have been treated and released, hospital officials said.

About two dozen veterans and their spouses had been sitting in chairs on the float, set up on the back of a flatbed tractor-trailer decorated with American flags and signs identifying each veteran. Many seemed to panic as the locomotive's horn sounded, said Patricia Howle, who was waiting in her car at a nearby traffic light as the train approached.

"I was on the phone, and I just started screaming," she told The Associated Press late Thursday night. "The truck was on the other side of the train, but I did see the panic on the faces of the people and saw some of them jump off."

The float was among two flatbed tractor-trailers carrying veterans and their spouses. Police said the first truck safely crossed the railroad tracks, but the second truck's trailer was still on the crossing as the train approached.

"The train honked its horn, but the 18-wheeler could not go anywhere because of the other one being right in front of it," said Daniel Quinonez, who was in traffic that had been stopped by sheriff's deputies to allow the parade to pass.

"It was a horrible accident to watch happen right in front of me. I just saw the people on the semi-truck's trailer panic, and many started to jump off the trailer. But it was too late for many of them because the train impacted the trailer so fast," he told the AP.

Several police vehicles remained at the crash scene late Thursday night. Flood lights illuminated the wreck as investigators in reflective vests and hard hats carefully took measurements of the site, which was cordoned off by yellow police tape.

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Stout, also the police department's spokesman, said he had no information about the individuals who died or the driver of the truck.

Lange said Union Pacific is offering help to the community and victims' families, as well as peer-to-peer counseling for the train crew, who did not sustain any injuries.

"There is going to be a very thorough investigation," Lange said. "It's obviously a very tragic incident."

The National Transportation Safety Board also is investigating, NTSB spokesman Peter Knudson said.

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“His thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victims, with those injured in this incident, and with the entire community.”

Midland is about 320 miles west of Dallas.

Reference: http://qctimes.com/promo/front/freight-train-hits-texas-veterans-parade-dead/article_6887db08-2fe6-11e2-b900-001a4bcf887a.html