

FBI offers \$310,000 reward in 1995 Amtrak derailment

Craig Harris , The Republic | azcentral.com 8:01 p.m. MST April 10, 2015

The FBI is seeking the public's help in cracking a cold case. The reward is \$310,000 for information about a 1995 Arizona train derailment.

(Photo: Nick Oza/The Republic)

Story Highlights

- The FBI is offering a \$310,000 reward for information regarding a 1995 train derailment in Hyder.
- The Amtrak train wreck occurred early in the morning with 258 passengers on board.
- The accident, which occurred 70 miles southwest of Phoenix, left an Amtrak employee dead.

Those responsible for the derailment of the Sunset Limited, an Amtrak passenger train, in the remote desert southwest of Phoenix have eluded the FBI for two decades.

But now, Mark J. Cwynar, assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's Phoenix office, is asking the public to help the FBI with leads that could help solve the 20-year-old cold case.

The feds are offering a \$310,000 reward for information that leads to an arrest and conviction.

Cwynar and Amtrak Police Department Chief Polly Hanson on Friday held a news conference in Phoenix asking anyone with information to e-mail aztrainderailment@ic.fbi.gov or call 800-225-5324 (800-CALL-FBI).

"We will continue to pursue this," Cwynar said. "We want to send a message to those responsible for this senseless act of sabotage. That message is simple: We are very close. We are watching. And we will bring you to justice."

The Sunset Limited was derailed around 1:35 a.m. Oct. 9, 1995, about 70 miles southwest of Phoenix in the ghost town of Hyder. Authorities believe someone deliberately tampered with the tracks, causing the wreck.

The train was carrying 258 passengers. The incident caused the death of one Amtrak employee, Mitchell Bates, a sleeping-car attendant.

Rescue workers, according to media reports, found letters that railed against the FBI and were signed "Sons of the Gestapo." Yet, the letters didn't claim total responsibility.

Cwynar declined to answer a question about the Sons of the Gestapo theory, but he said the person or people responsible likely had a detailed knowledge of the area where the derailment occurred.

He said the FBI was bringing the case to the public's attention because agents are close to cracking it, yet need some assistance.

"The time is now, mainly, because we feel there are people out there who know," Cwynar said. "The investigation has revealed certain events, people know exactly what happened. We reintroduced the \$310,000 reward because we feel



that money will help our investigative efforts."

Perryn Collier, a FBI spokesman, said the agency also hopes someone who has been quiet for a generation may be enticed by the reward and come forward.

Collier added that secret pacts made nearly 20 years ago may have eroded if those who agreed not to talk had a falling out.

An original reward of \$120,000 was set shortly after the incident. It was bumped up to more than \$300,000 in 1998.

The most recent \$310,000 reward is coming from three sources: the FBI (\$250,000), Amtrak (\$50,000) and the Maricopa County Attorney's Office (\$10,000).

Amtrak's Hanson said she hoped promoting the reward would bring in new information "so that justice will be served." She added the derailment was a "sophisticated" act.

"If you think back to 1995, the kind of information someone might have had to possess to do a derailment in the manner that they did might suggest a familiarity with railroads," she said, noting there was not an Internet to look up such information.

The news conference also included Daniel Comesano, a conductor on the 1995 train that was traveling across country to Los Angeles. Comesano declined to answer questions. Attempts to reach him by phone were unsuccessful.



One person was killed and more than 100 were injured in 1995 when the Amtrak Sunset Limited derailed southwest of Phoenix. (Photo: JEFF ROBBINS, Associated Press)