



# ***Death of Caleb Bankston***

June 24, 2014

## **"Survivor" contestant killed in Birmingham was thrown from train when axle derailed**

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By Sarah Killian

<http://www.alabamas13.com/story/25869409/survivor-contestant-killed-in-birmingham-was-thrown-from-train-when-axle-derailed>

BIRMINGHAM, AL -

Today new details were released about the train accident that killed a reality TV contestant at the Alabama Warrior Railway in Birmingham on Tuesday.

Earlier today, the victim was identified as 27-year-old Caleb Bankston. Bankston was once a contestant on the CBS show Survivor.

According to the Jefferson County Coroner's Office, Bankston was a train conductor at the Walter Coke Plant. At the time of the accident, Jefferson County Deputy Coroner Bill Yates says Bankston was riding on the rear of what's called a "hopper car." He and an engineer were backing the train with cars filled with coke down the track in the yard.

As the train was backing up, an axle on one of the cars derailed. However, the train kept moving and Bankston and the engineer were unaware there was a problem. Another axle derailed and shifted the car sideways. When the car tilted, Yates says Bankston was thrown into another car that was stationary in the yard.

The Alabama Warrior Railway is operated by Kansas-based Watco Companies, LLC. After the incident, the company ordered a safety stand-down at the railway to review procedures before employees returned to work. The company is also offering counseling to fellow employees.

"Caleb was a very humble selfless individual that thought of others first." Dan Smith with the Alabama Warrior Railway explained. "He was a guy that probably could be doing other things but chose to be in the Alabama Warrior team. Guys shared nothing but good memories of a very humble human being."

Smith says the railway is bringing in team members from other locations right now to keep their

operations going in north Birmingham.

The Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, as well as the Federal Railroad Administration have been contacted for an investigation.

On Wednesday, a spokesperson with the Federal Railroad Administration released the following statement:

"Safety is our number one priority. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is investigating the June 24 employee fatality that occurred on the Alabama Warrior Railway in Birmingham. Once completed, our investigation will identify the root cause of the accident, and we will take all appropriate enforcement actions."

The Alabama Warrior Railway says they will fully cooperate with this investigation. This was the first fatal accident for the railway.



[http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2014/06/jeffco\\_coroners\\_officials\\_rele.html](http://www.al.com/news/birmingham/index.ssf/2014/06/jeffco_coroners_officials_rele.html)

## **Jeffco coroner's officials release new details in railway death of 'Survivor' contestant Caleb Bankston**

By [Carol Robinson | crobinson@al.com](mailto:crobinson@al.com)

on June 25, 2014 at 10:37 AM, updated June 25, 2014 at 12:05 PM

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama - New details emerged Wednesday in the [railway death of former](#)

"Survivor" contestant Caleb Bankston.

Bankston, a 27-year-old Collinsville man, competed on "Survivor: Blood vs. Water" in 2013 with his fiancé, Colton Cumbie. He died midday Tuesday in an accident at the Alabama Warrior Railway in Birmingham.

Bankston was a train conductor at the Walter Coke Plant in Birmingham. On Tuesday he and an engineer were backing up a loaded train which consisted of two engines and five hopper cars, according to the Jefferson County Coroner's Office.

They were backing the train loaded with coke toward other empty hopper cars, said Deputy Coroner Phillip Russell. Bankston was standing on a small ladder at the right rear of the last hopper car and was in communication with the engineer via a two-way radio.

While they were backing up the train, the hopper car Bankston was on derailed, unbeknownst to Bankston and the engineer. The train continued moving and then the car Bankston was on shifted. He was thrown into the side wall of an empty car, and then fell to the ground between parallel tracks.

Birmingham Fire and Rescue responded to the site and pronounced Bankston dead on the scene. The accident took place between 11:15 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Bankston finished in the top 10 when he competed with Colton on Blood vs. Water.

"Caleb was an amazing man and friend," fellow contestant Aras Baskauskas told PEOPLE magazine. "One of the sweetest and most sincere humans I've ever come across. I am gutted by his loss. My thoughts and prayers are with his family."

According to the Associated Press, Pittsburg, Kansas-based Watco Companies owns the Alabama Warrior Railway and officials say a safety stand-down has been ordered at the railway before workers return.

Watco Companies L.L.C. officials said Tuesday Bankston's team members were being offered counseling, and said the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Federal Railroad Administration have been contacted.