

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: MIKE LAUGHLIN

Anchorage, Alaska

Friday,

August 11, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:37 a.m.)

MR. HODGES: We're here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska at Regal Air. Today is Friday, August 11, 2017 and the time is 10:37 a.m. local. I'm Mike Hodges with the NTSB.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with the FAA.

MR. LAUGHLIN: Mike Laughlin with Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Okay. Does anybody have any objections to recording this interview?

MR. YOUNGERS: I do not.

MR. LAUGHLIN: I do not.

INTERVIEW OF MIKE LAUGHLIN

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. Okay. Today we're going to be interviewing Mike. And so, Mike, how long have you been working here at Regal Air for?

A. My first year here was in 1999.

Q. Okay. And then can you kind of give me your background with kind of how you started at the company to where you're at right now with your position?

A. I started as a dock boy. I took over in 2005 as the owner and started -- I mean, I was flying privately at that time, but I didn't have a commercial. I got my commercial rating in 2006 and started flying as a line pilot in '06. Then director of ops and a line pilot since then.

Q. Okay.

A. Well, I think director of ops probably since '08-ish. I'm

1 not sure when exactly that transfer happened, but --

2 Q. Okay. And then what was your prior aviation experience prior
3 to Regal Air?

4 A. None. This is it. I was 22 when I took over, so --

5 Q. Okay. Okay.

6 A. There wasn't much --

7 MR. YOUNGERS: Time before that happened.

8 MR. LAUGHLIN: Time before that happened, yeah.

9 (Laughter.)

10 MR. LAUGHLIN: I mean, just -- I had been flying since I was
11 16, but that's it. I had no -- being a dock boy at Regal Air was
12 my prior aviation experience.

13 BY MR. HODGES:

14 Q. Okay. So then your duties here, you work as the president
15 and then you work as the director of ops and you're also a check
16 airman then, correct?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Okay. And then what type of airplanes do you fly here for
19 Regal?

20 A. All the aircraft.

21 Q. All the -- okay.

22 A. Cessna, Beaver, wheels, skis, floats and the Navajo
23 Chieftain.

24 Q. And then, so outside of president, director of ops, check
25 airman, do you do anything else here? Like do you turn wrenches

1 at all or anything of that nature?

2 A. Not officially.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I'll go help out Billy and Kennedy. If they're short-handed,
5 I'll run over there and help them.

6 Q. Sure.

7 A. But I'm not an A&P and I try to not get mixed up in that.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. First of all, because I don't want to jump in and out of it.
10 And second of all, I want them to run that department without me.

11 Q. Yeah. Okay.

12 A. But I'm pretty involved with Billy as far as parts ordering
13 and, you know, squawks on the docket and things like that. I
14 mean, I'm pretty involved in what he's working on and what's
15 happening over there, but not on the actual working on it.

16 Q. Do you work part-time anywhere else? Any other companies or
17 anything of that nature?

18 A. At home with three children. It's a full-time, all the time.
19 Hence, my hair is starting to go gray already.

20 MR. YOUNGERS: Been there, done that. See what happens?

21 MR. LAUGHLIN: I'm coming right after you.

22 BY MR. HODGES:

23 Q. How long have you known Joel for?

24 A. Joel started as a dock boy for me in -- it would've been
25 2015. So probably started knowing -- getting to know him via

1 phone calls. I think Keith and I started interviewing him
2 probably December/January of 2014/2015, the winter before his 2015
3 season with us on the dock.

4 Q. Okay.

5 MR. YOUNGERS: But he didn't fly that year?

6 MR. LAUGHLIN: He did not fly that year.

7 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah.

8 MR. LAUGHLIN: He was just a dock boy. He had -- he actually
9 had a commercial, but he had like, you know, less than 500 hours.
10 He had -- he was going to school at Bowling Green State University
11 in their aviation program and was working towards his something at
12 the time -- a multi-commercial or multi-instructor or something
13 like that.

14 MR. YOUNGERS: Does your insurance require 500 hours or so
15 many hours in Alaska or is there any restriction like that with
16 the insurance company?

17 MR. LAUGHLIN: No.

18 MR. YOUNGERS: No?

19 MR. LAUGHLIN: No.

20 BY MR. HODGES:

21 Q. And then, you know, kind of with him working that first
22 season as a dock boy and then this current season right now as a
23 pilot, what was your overall impression of him in the cockpit?

24 A. Phenomenal, absolutely phenomenal. Yeah. He was -- as a
25 dock boy, he was probably one of the best kids that we've ever

1 hired. His attitude was fantastic. His work ethic was fantastic.
2 His demeanor with customers and fellow employees -- everybody
3 loved Joel. Everybody loved working with Joel. Everybody loved
4 it when Joel was the dock lead that year. I mean, it just -- he
5 just was a very capable human being. And that is why we decided
6 to bring him back as a pilot with such little flight time.

7 Q. Okay.

8 (Interruption at the door.)

9 MR. LAUGHLIN: So that was why we decided to bring Joel back.
10 Our kind of company policy, you know, not a firm company policy --
11 when people call me and say, hey, what do you look for in a pilot?
12 We say 1500 hours if you want to fly floats, 500 hours floats. If
13 you want to fly -- or 500 hours floats and we would like 500 hours
14 in Alaska. That's sort of the benchmark that we're aiming for.

15 And if it falls below that, we want to ask ourselves why
16 we're letting it fall below that. Does this person have -- come
17 with exceptional references? Does this person seem to have great
18 abilities or a great personality? Why would we make an exception
19 to this rule? And so, that's kind of what we go with.

20 BY MR. HODGES:

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. But he was a -- you know, his presence in the cockpit was
23 excellent. He was calm. He was -- his coordination, his hands
24 and his feet were incredible. He was a great pilot. Learned
25 fast. His judgment in the cockpit was great. He --

1 I have a thing that I do on my check ride. There's a small
2 lake that's just north of Figure Eight Lake. And on the check
3 ride, I always have the pilots, especially the new guys, I -- you
4 know, I don't tell them beforehand, and they've never gone in -- I
5 make sure Dave doesn't take them in there, and I -- and then I, on
6 the check ride I say, okay, we're going to land in this lake. And
7 it is a really small, kind of funny-shaped lake. It always has a
8 crosswind and there's power lines right along the side of it.

9 And so, it's just a -- it's not particularly difficult. I
10 mean, you can get the 206 in and out of there without a step turn.
11 You can take off and land just about any direction. But the
12 proximity of the power lines and the shape of the lake and how
13 there are trees on one particular side, just have a lot of -- you
14 really have to kind of think through your approach, your landing,
15 how you're going to take off, if you can take off again out of
16 there.

17 And so typically when I tell a new pilot, hey, take me into
18 that lake and let's land there, they kind of -- can we get back
19 out of there again? I say, yeah, we can. Do you think we can? I
20 think so. Okay, here we go. And then I just kind of watch their
21 decision making from there.

22 I told Joel, I said, we're going to go onto that lake. He
23 said, I don't -- can I get back out of there? And I said, well,
24 what do you think? And he says, well, if it was me, on my own, I
25 wouldn't go in there until I've done it with somebody. I said,

1 okay. Well, do you want to go in there and land? He's like, not
2 particularly. I said, okay, what if I go in there and do it
3 first? So I took the controls and I went and landed. I showed
4 him the step turn to get out of there, and he said okay. And he
5 took the controls and went and did it. Never had another pilot
6 not just do it because I told them to.

7 Q. Right.

8 A. He was the one that questioned me. I was like, all right,
9 good. Good, good answer. So his judgment, I felt, was very --
10 for a young guy, was very good.

11 Q. And then just with your interactions with him as a dock boy
12 and as a pilot here, did he ever express any concerns to you about
13 flying up here at all in the state? Anything at all?

14 A. He's been dreaming about this, I think, since the day he was
15 born. Yeah.

16 Q. And then, you know, being that he was a younger guy and this
17 was his first full season flying up here, was he involved in any
18 sort of like mentoring program at all, like with any of the senior
19 pilots? Like did you team him up with Doug and Doug kind of take
20 him underneath his wing? Did you guys have anything kind of like
21 that in place for him at all, or --

22 A. I mean, I felt like we all took Joel and Marie-Sophie and
23 Jeff under our wing. You know, Dave and I had multiple
24 conversations this winter about both Joel and Marie-Sophie. Not
25 as much Jeff, because Jeff had Alaska experience and western

1 Alaska experience. We knew that he knew how to fly the 207. We
2 knew that he had operated successfully for a season. And that
3 previous 135 experience goes a long way. Just having to show up
4 on a ramp and interact with customers and deal with the pressures
5 of general day-to-day work, you know, that any job comes with.

6 And so, Marie-Sophie and Joel, we knew were very green. And
7 Dave and I had multiple conversations this spring about how it was
8 our season to make sure that we spent a lot of time in that back
9 office with them in the pilot room, checking weather cameras with
10 them, helping them flight plan, you know, doing all those things
11 with them and taking them under our wing. And I felt like we had
12 done that with Joel.

13 We've never spent so much time with a pilot as we did with
14 Joel and Marie-Sophie. I mean, you know, training -- Dave spent a
15 ton of time with them. We'd take them on intro flights all the
16 time when there was space available. You know, just take them on
17 a flight before they had to do it first. And so I feel like we
18 all did. Did they have a specific formal program? No, they
19 didn't.

20 Q. So back in July when the accident occurred, then, you were --
21 physically, you were out of town on vacation; is that correct?

22 A. I was on an island in Canada.

23 Q. Okay. And how long were you gone for prior to that?

24 A. Twelves hours. Twenty-four hours.

25 Q. Oh, so you just left prior -- just recently.

1 A. Just -- yeah.

2 Q. How long were you planning to be gone for?

3 A. Four days.

4 Q. Four day? Okay. And then --

5 A. Three days; 3 or 4 days. I can't remember now.

6 Q. So when you were gone, you basically, I guess, delegated all
7 control functions to Tony then; is that correct?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. Okay. When you've left in the past, is he usually the go-to
10 guy that you delegate that stuff to when you're out of town?

11 A. If there are flights happening, it's only Tony and I that
12 dispatch.

13 Q. Tony? Okay.

14 A. Yeah. It's been that way for -- Tony's been with me since
15 2009, maybe. He was a -- Tony was a dock crew for me my first
16 season, 2005. When I was the owner, he was our dock guy. And he
17 came back and started working in the office in '09 or '10. I
18 can't remember now.

19 Q. Has he flown for you guys before, or --

20 A. No. No. Tony's just a private pilot. He's not a commercial
21 pilot.

22 Q. Okay. And then can you kind of walk me through like, you
23 know, the pilot's planning process? Like if I come in at 10:00 in
24 the morning to do a flight or whatever, can you kind of walk me
25 through like what I would normally do as a pilot?

1 A. If you were the pilot?

2 Q. Yeah. With preflight, weather, all that kind of stuff.

3 A. Well, typically we text you the night before with your
4 proposed flight. Like, hey, you know, you've got a -- we don't
5 have -- like our duty day is from 7 to 9, but we don't expect the
6 pilots to be here at 7 if they don't have a flight till 10. So
7 we'll say, your show time is -- you know, or your flight time is
8 this time and you need to show up an hour before that.

9 MR. YOUNGERS: But the duty time doesn't change?

10 MR. LAUGHLIN: Their duty time does not change.

11 MR. YOUNGERS: It's the same every day, no matter what?
12 Yeah.

13 MR. LAUGHLIN: And so, you know, for Joel's case, for
14 example, on the 27th he had an 8 a.m. departure for Cobham Lodge.
15 And so he would've shown up and he would've gotten a little flight
16 dispatch that says, hey, you're flying out to Cobham Lodge.
17 You're going to take lumber out and you're picking up three
18 people. And so that would be the information that we gave to
19 Joel: Here's your people that you're taking out; here's the
20 weight of the stuff that you are flying, and this is your proposed
21 departure time or pickup time. You know, like hey, these people
22 have a -- really there was no departure time. It was more of a
23 pickup time because it's just lumber outbound, so --

24 And then it's the pilot's responsibility to get on the
25 computer, check the weather, figure out their weight and balance,

1 and load the plane with the assistance of the dock crew, manage
2 their fuel.

3 BY MR. HODGES:

4 Q. Okay. Now I think I talked about this before briefly, but
5 with the weather itself, the pilot goes and looks at all of his
6 available resources, whether it's weather cameras or PIREPs or
7 calling different operators out there; hey, what are you guys
8 seeing? And then when they collect that information, is that --
9 do they take that and go to you or Tony, and you guys sit down and
10 have a mutual conversation about, hey, I saw this; I heard this,
11 and you guys --

12 A. Every flight? Definitely not. Some flights? Absolutely.

13 Q. Okay. And then with, you know, here at the company you have
14 some people that are very younger, less experienced and you have
15 some guys that are very senior, experienced guys. And I guess
16 with the weather minimums, are they the same for all the pilots
17 or, you know, can someone like Dave -- do you send Dave out on
18 more challenging weather situations as opposed to someone like
19 Jeff, for example?

20 A. Oh, certainly.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Yeah. Certainly. Absolutely.

23 Q. Okay.

24 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

25 Q. Who has the final say in the flight, on dispatching?

1 A. Well, the PIC has the final say on whether or not they're
2 going to go. The dispatcher has the final say on who we will
3 assign to the line. You know, like that's -- in ground training,
4 we sit down with everybody and just like, you guys are it, you
5 know.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. You guys are the last stopgap. You say no to anything you're
8 not comfortable with. You say no to any weather you're not
9 comfortable with. But who gets to do the flights, that's up to
10 the dispatcher.

11 Q. What if Tony thinks the weather's not good enough and the
12 pilot wants to go? Will he play a trump card and say --

13 A. Absolutely. I can't imagine a scenario where Tony thought
14 the weather was too bad to go and a pilot still wanted to go. I
15 just --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. That kind of culture doesn't exist around here. I mean, it's
18 possible that it's happened, but I just don't see it. I just
19 don't see it.

20 BY MR. HODGES:

21 Q. And then are pilots required to get like an official weather
22 brief prior to taking off? Are they required to call, you know,
23 flight service or how is that --

24 A. Just per our ops specs, they're required to check all
25 available weather. I mean, no, they're required to do what our

1 ops specs tell us, which is get their weather for -- all
2 applicable weather for their flight from the National Weather
3 Service.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So however they want to do that. For us, it's the aviation
6 weather cams and it's Alaska Aviation Weather Unit. And then it's
7 PIREPs based on phone calls with lodges or other pilots and things
8 like that. And whoever's sitting at the dispatch station is
9 usually a pretty integral part of that throughout the day on a
10 weather day because, you know, these guys are out -- they're out
11 flying. He comes back and they've got another flight in 30
12 minutes. Well, Tony's been at that desk for the last 2 hours.
13 He's the one that's been fielding calls; here's the weather.

14 So we'll give them -- if there's a weather report that we
15 feel is best for the pilot to hear directly, we'll just say, hey,
16 call James at Silver Salmon Creek Lodge. He called and he said
17 the weather was 3 miles, misty towards the mountains, but it would
18 be easier if he explained that to you. You know what I mean?

19 Or if it was, hey, it's south wind at 10 knots, 5,000 feet, 5
20 miles, that's what it is. You know, it's not one of those where
21 you're going to get a lot of gray area in a phone call. If it's a
22 very straightforward weather, here's what the weather report was
23 at Silver Salmon Creek.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. You know what I mean?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. So some of the weather incoming to the dispatch station
3 happens through the dispatcher, either Tony or myself. Some of
4 it, we'll just give it straight to the pilot. And if the pilot's
5 standing there, sort of the rule of thumb is just to let the pilot
6 pick up the phone, because they're the ones that'll be flying.
7 And then it frees up Tony or myself to take another line if the
8 phone rings, you know.

9 Q. Okay. Now I know on the -- you know, with -- I think we've
10 talked about this before, but do you guys utilize any sort of like
11 a either written or electronic flight risk assessment tool here
12 for flights or anything of that nature?

13 A. Absolutely not. I can't stand them.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. They're a complete waste of time.

16 Q. And then with -- this is with the dispatch system again. So
17 you guys just have basically the duty officer who does all of the
18 flight following activities, right? That's how it's structured,
19 right?

20 A. Yeah.

21 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

22 Q. Do you have anything -- a way to train a pilot when to turn
23 around? As far as like in training, is there a scenario that --

24 A. We do train. And we do a 180-degree left bank steep turn,
25 turnaround in training. We do it on the check ride.

1 As far as when to make that call?

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. Don't ever let yourself get into a point where you can't turn
4 around. You know? And we beat that into their heads versus
5 weather, versus wind. You know, if you feel like going down that
6 valley is -- you have to go through it, then don't go through it.
7 You know, find another way. Always leave yourself an out. Always
8 leave yourself an out. But in this situation, it didn't -- didn't
9 work.

10 So do we train for it? Absolutely. Do we have like a
11 specific, okay, once the weather is 500 and 2, you turn around? I
12 mean, we don't have a hard number that says -- you know, because
13 there are no two scenarios that are the same. Well, what if it's
14 500 and 2, but you're going uphill into a valley? That's not a
15 good idea. But if it's 500 and 2 and you're out over, you know,
16 the coastline and you've got beaches to land on, well, okay, you
17 can still turn around at that point, you know. So it's kind of --

18 Q. It looked like his left brake was locked up or something
19 there for a second.

20 A. It's kind of -- that's a difficult thing to quantify.

21 Q. Yeah. It is.

22 A. You know what I mean?

23 Q. It is.

24 A. I mean, that's one of the things with small aviation in
25 Alaska that we struggle with is how do you quantify that kind of

1 knowledge and that kind of experience to a new guy?

2 Q. Right.

3 A. How do you quantify what size lake you can get off of? How
4 do you quantify what size airstrip you can get off of? Well, it
5 depends on the day. It depends on the wind. It depends on the
6 plane. It depends on the pilot. It depends on the skill level
7 and their technique. It depends on the consistency of the runway.
8 It depends on the consistency of the beach.

9 Q. Sure.

10 A. It's just a -- it's a difficult thing. So what we tell our
11 new guys is you start small and then you go big. You start -- you
12 don't come off of an airstrip for the first time with three people
13 on board because you know that Dave did it. You start with one.
14 You know that comfort level. Do it a couple of times. Then you
15 do it again. You build into it, you know.

16 Don't go out on the first flight of the day and go fly into,
17 you know, a 700-foot ceiling and 2-mile visibility or the first
18 flight of, you know, the first flight of your career.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. You know? Start big. Start with good visibility. Get your
21 comfort level up. Don't just start working into, you know,
22 mediocre conditions, mediocre strips. Don't require step turns to
23 get out of bigger lakes initially, you know. So, I mean, that's
24 really -- that's what training is about right there, is how you
25 quantify these things that can kill you, you know. And it's

1 difficult. It's really difficult.

2 BY MR. HODGES:

3 Q. And then flying around the Lake Clark National Park and
4 Preserve areas, all those various passes out there, you know, in
5 that specific area out there, the weather conditions, you know,
6 based on what you've seen in other areas in this state, would you
7 consider that a very dynamic system with weather where it could
8 change very quick or --

9 A. I don't think Lake Clark tends to be a rapidly changing
10 place. I don't think it does rapidly change. I think the coastal
11 area changes rapidly, like the beaches at Silver Salmon Creek can
12 build fog and dissipate fog within minutes. I mean, we can go
13 from blue sky to 0-0 in 10 minutes or visa versa. But the Lake
14 Clark Pass doesn't do that, in my experience.

15 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

16 Q. I know Joel hadn't flown here very long, but had he, like,
17 turned around on any flights or turned down a flight because he
18 didn't feel comfortable?

19 A. Absolutely. I can you show you a Spidertracks that Joel did
20 a Katmai. We launched Joel on a Katmai. This was probably, I'd
21 say, mid-July. Probably around the 15th. He was in the 206 on
22 floats.

23 Q. King Salmon or something?

24 A. What's that?

25 Q. He was going to King Salmon?

1 A. He was going to Brooks Falls.

2 Q. Brooks Falls?

3 A. Right to Naknek Lake. So he was in the 206, four people, and
4 made it within -- made it to the south edge of Iliamna Lake.
5 Turned around. Came all the way home. I mean, he was right
6 there, you know. And that's a tough thing for pilot to do, get
7 almost there on a frickin' 3-hour flight and then turn around 2½
8 hours into it. Because, you know -- I mean, we pay our pilots
9 regardless. It doesn't matter if you turn around.

10 Q. Right.

11 A. You're getting paid for the flight; just come home. We
12 refund the passengers 100 percent.

13 Q. Right.

14 A. We -- I eat all that.

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. And so these guys understand that that's not ideal. But
17 that's just the way it works sometimes. And Joel turned around.
18 He said he hit the south beach of Iliamna, picked up the shoreline
19 and started going. And he said, about a mile off, he said it just
20 looked white; you just couldn't see anything. So he turned around
21 and came on home.

22 Q. Well, that's good.

23 A. So, I mean -- you know, like I said, you -- I think in this
24 particular instance, the downhill is what -- first of all, I think
25 it was the transition from blue sky to marginal conditions. And I

1 think it was uphill to downhill. I think those are the two things
2 that really sealed his fate. Because descending into it, you've
3 got all that speed, you got all that momentum. You've got -- you
4 know, you're just -- it's just a different, different deal.

5 And going from, oh, it's blue sky in Anchorage and it's blue
6 sky at Cobham, free and easy, going straight there over the top,
7 beautiful. And then midflight change in that in an instant to
8 saying, okay, I'm going to get underneath it. You need a game
9 plan at that point. You need to know your route. He shouldn't
10 have gone that way. He should've gone through Lake Clark where
11 he's got a bigger pass, you know.

12 Q. That comes with experience though.

13 A. That comes with experience.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. You know?

16 Q. And it probably looked very inviting to go down there.

17 A. I'm sure it did. I'm sure it did.

18 Q. I'm sure it was scattered and you can see the ground, and
19 you're thinking, oh, I can just get down there.

20 A. But the reality is -- you know, I'm sure that he saw
21 something really that looked inviting or who knows what he was
22 dealing with. I mean, I don't know.

23 BY MR. HODGES:

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. Maybe there was something else going on. I don't know.

1 Q. If you found a safety issue there at the company, whether
2 it's with maintenance or, you know, ops stuff whatever, do you
3 feel that you could bring it up to everybody here and people would
4 receptive to, hey, we found this issue; we're going to change this
5 or do this differently? Do you think folks would be receptive to
6 that at the various levels?

7 A. Yeah. Absolutely. Especially if I bring it up.

8 Q. And then since the accident occurred here, has there been
9 anything with how you've changed personally how you fly or how you
10 do your duties here at all?

11 A. Personally how I fly? I would say no. I mean, obviously,
12 after an accident we're all more on edge. You know, you're more
13 cognizant of how fragile you are as a human being. And so I would
14 like to think that I am pretty cautious. I've got three small
15 kids that I want to come home to every night. And I'm pretty
16 diligent. I do a checklist every single flight -- takeoff, runup,
17 takeoff, landing. Every -- I've got an acronym that works in all
18 three planes. I give it to every new guy. I beat it into their
19 head. Use a checklist. Use a checklist. Use a checklist.

20 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

21 Q. What's your acronym?

22 A. It's CIGARS for my runup. It's BC-CRAFT for my pre-takeoff.
23 And then, it's BC-GUMPS -- BCCC-GUMPS for my pre-landing. And
24 that works in a Navajo. It works in a Beaver on floats. It works
25 in a Beaver on skis. It works for anything, any single engine or,

1 you know, smaller aircraft.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. And so, I have definitely pulled guys aside since this
4 accident that I've seen them do things where they obviously
5 weren't using a checklist and just said, you know, you've got to
6 slow down; you've got to use your checklist. It might seem small.
7 It might seem like your lights aren't a big deal or your
8 transponder's not a big deal, but what else are you forgetting?

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. If you'd use that checklist --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. I've had too many times, you know -- because like a lot of
13 pilots, I -- you know, you get to a certain experience level and
14 you get complacent and you do something and you think to yourself,
15 well, that could've killed me. And so at that point, I said to
16 myself, I'm never taking off again without a checklist. I forgot
17 my flaps one time in the Beaver and I'm taking off. I mean --

18 Q. That's not -- yeah. Huge.

19 A. Thank God, I was light and I was by myself.

20 Q. We just had that accident in Dillingham with a guy that had a
21 lot of time in a Beaver. But he was giving some instruction or
22 something and he didn't put the flaps down, and he went screaming
23 against -- you know, it wasn't a big lake. He ended up, you know,
24 going off into the terrain, totally destroying the Beaver. And
25 everybody survived, but, I mean --

1 A. I see so many accidents that are checklist avoidable.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. And it's just one of those things, it just makes you a
4 cleaner pilot all in all.

5 Q. Right.

6 A. You know, it's just so sloppy not to do it. And especially
7 if you can come up with an acronym. Like, I agree, pulling out a
8 checklist in front of customers and -- it does look like you don't
9 know what you're doing. We have customers that fly with people
10 all over this lake, all over Alaska.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. And they're trained to think that bush pilots have a certain
13 -- don't use checklists, have a certain style about them. And
14 that's a tough thing to combat against in this industry. They
15 think that they can overload the planes every time. They think
16 that oh, it's good; come on in here; you know, the last guy made
17 it in. So trying to retrain the consumer is a difficult thing in
18 this industry.

19 MR. HODGES: Yeah. Yeah. With -- here at the company, has
20 there ever been any, you know, safety improvements you'd like to
21 see implemented that maybe you haven't been able to do because of
22 funding or personnel or anything of that nature?

23 MR. LAUGHLIN: I don't think so.

24 MR. HODGES: Okay. Do you have any more questions for Mike
25 at all or --

1 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

2 Q. Is there anything you can think of you could've -- would've
3 done different with Joel on his training or --

4 A. No, not on Joel's training. I honestly, you know, have had a
5 lot of sleepless nights trying to think about what we need to do
6 differently. And with Joel, I don't. I mean, I think that that
7 kid was a phenomenal pilot. I think we spent a ton of time with
8 him.

9 The thread that I see in our accidents is we've had three
10 accidents now in 7 years. They have all been with first-year
11 guys, and it's all pilot error probably. Our first one was very
12 weird. But if you really -- I mean, if we had to take a, if we
13 had to take a gamble at what it was, it was pilot error.

14 And so my -- you know, personally, how I walk away from this,
15 and there'll be time to reflect this winter, is what are we doing
16 wrong with these new guys? I mean, the first guy was a frickin'
17 Top Gun naval aviator, astronaut. I mean, the guy was like a
18 robot. You could program him.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. And flying with him was the most incredible thing I've ever
21 seen. You know, you fly with him and it was like, hey, Bill, that
22 was pretty good, but let's do it this way. "Copy that." I mean,
23 it was like programming a robot. It would -- and you could be
24 like, well, you landed at 87 knots, let's land at 86 knots next
25 time. He'd never land at 87 knots again; it would be 86 knots.

1 Never flown with another pilot like him.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. It was absolutely amazing. I mean, you could tell from the
4 way he handled a Beaver why he was a Top Gun instructor. Just an
5 amazing, an amazing aviator.

6 Q. Were any of those other ones fatal or just --

7 A. No. Joel was the single fatal. Every other one, everybody
8 walked away from and was fine. You know, and that --

9 Q. So what was his accident?

10 A. It was a -- it was an engine failure after takeoff. Just
11 crested the lake. And, I mean, it's like, well, he was on the
12 wrong tank, right? He selected the wrong tank. He did a step
13 turn takeoff and --

14 Q. Oh, he ran out of fuel?

15 A. Well, that's -- from the outside, how could it not be? The
16 engine quit exactly that moment in flight.

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. The header tank in the 206 runs out, the engine quits just as
19 you crest the lake, and that's it.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. But Bill swears to me up and down that he was on the correct
22 tank. I was the first one to the scene. It was on the correct
23 tank. Of course, he could've switched that afterwards. But, I
24 really -- I don't think Billy isn't telling me the truth, but I
25 don't know what to learn from that, you know. And, of course, we

1 learned to really train the hell out of our guys. I mean, we do
2 endless step turn, trying to get them -- I look what tank it's on.
3 Okay, give me a landing step the other way. Making sure they're
4 selecting the correct tank. I mean, we train for that constantly
5 now.

6 So, I don't know. I mean, my, you know, my takeaway from
7 this is still yet to come. I don't know. You know, it's going to
8 take a lot of thought and figure out. You know, I don't -- I
9 don't know what -- if I was here that morning in the office, I
10 don't know if I would've told Joel to do anything differently. I
11 would -- obviously, if I was in that plane with him, I wouldn't
12 have told him to descend into that stuff. At that point I
13 would've said, if you don't like what you see ahead and there is a
14 blanket of white in front of you and you don't think that you can
15 safely fly over it to the destination that's in the blue sky, then
16 turn around and go home or go find a bigger pass underneath.
17 Don't just pick the first hole you see and dive into it, you know.
18 Or maybe orbit for a minute and come up with a game plan, you
19 know. Look at your map -- pulling out a map.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. That's something that's difficult for the younger generation
22 to do too.

23 Q. Some of this can be scenario-based training that you use in
24 ground school, though. You don't have to say who it was and that
25 it was --

1 A. Oh, absolutely. We do accident, we do accident review every
2 year in ground school. And we always start with our first -- our
3 two, now three, are always the first ones we do.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. And we go through them step by step.

6 Q. Well, you have one definitive thing that you've identified is
7 that they were all first-year pilots.

8 A. They were all first-year pilots.

9 Q. I mean, that -- where you start, that's your starting point
10 right there.

11 A. No doubt. You know, and I -- you know, are we pushing our
12 first-year pilots too hard? Are we giving them too long a leash?
13 Again, that morning in the office with Joel, I don't know if I
14 would've shortened his leash, you know. I don't know. It was a
15 tough -- that was a tough morning.

16 Q. There's a lot of human factors that play into things like
17 this too. Because when you find somebody that you really like and
18 you respect them, even though they're 22, but they're a damn good
19 pilot, and right out of college and he's smart and he's -- you
20 know, all those factors make all of us tend to relax around them
21 and have a lot of confidence in their ability to go do something.

22 A. Right.

23 Q. But the reality is, he's an 800-hour pilot with no
24 mountainous experience and no Alaska experience.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. And it just -- you know, things transition from there. The
2 swiss cheese lines up. Unfortunately, a lot of us were in those
3 positions when we were younger, and we luckily survived.

4 A. We got lucky. We made it through.

5 Q. You know, and --

6 A. I don't think there's a 10,000-hour pilot around that hasn't
7 put themselves in a scenario that could've ended very differently.

8 Q. Yes.

9 A. With just the slightest twist of fate, gust of wind,
10 (indiscernible) difference, whatever it was.

11 Q. Whatever it was.

12 A. And yeah. It's a tragic deal.

13 Q. But it's a challenge that Alaska is going to face for the
14 next several years because of the shortage of pilots. And
15 everybody's going to have to be looking at how can we mentor these
16 pilots into making -- because it's not, it's not their ability.
17 It's the knowledge and experience to be able to know. Because
18 here's the deal, you know, you get into a pass, and a young pilot
19 doesn't know every corner and rock and, oh, there's Billy's cabin
20 and I know exactly where I am. And so, when the weather gets bad,
21 you're confident because you know there's Billy's cabin and I know
22 what comes next and I can make it. Other guys don't have a visual
23 picture.

24 And, you know, so how do we develop that is the big thing.
25 And it's going to be a challenge for everybody. And on-demand

1 charter is much more challenging than a 135 scheduled operation.
2 Because you're going to airports and you're going to the same
3 airports every day.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. On demand, we go everywhere in the state. And we're laying
6 down on gravel bars and beaches and all that stuff. And so,
7 there's a big challenge for us ahead.

8 A. Yeah. There is. There is. And, you know, that -- we've
9 seen a lot of operators have success in hiring young guys. You
10 know, Trail Ridge has had a number of young pilots. Sportsman's
11 has had a number of young pilots. And, you know, this was our
12 first real go at saying, you know what, first of all, this is the
13 future. This is -- we need to figure out how to do this because
14 this is the future of Alaska aviation. And that was one of the
15 reasons that we went forward with hiring Joel and Marie-Sophie.
16 Not just because -- I mean, we didn't do it because -- we could've
17 hired guys with more time. We had -- I don't know how many
18 resumes we get every year, hundreds. But, we felt that they were
19 such great candidates to start down this path for us, you know
20 what I mean? Like if there was ever a time to find a new young
21 pilot to train, it's these two.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Incredible ability. Incredible responsibility. And --

24 Q. Well, I know Marie-Sophie and I would hire her.

25 A. Oh, she's phenomenal.

1 Q. I would've hired her. Yeah.

2 A. And Joel was --

3 Q. Same way?

4 A. Yeah. Just phenomenal. She -- they're both. I mean,
5 they're just --

6 Q. Well, it's kind of nice to get -- one reason to get young
7 pilots is that you can -- before they've learned all the bad
8 habits, you can train them your company's way and the way that you
9 want your pilots to fly instead of somebody that's been scud
10 running for a couple years with whatever company somewhere and has
11 got a bunch of bad habits.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. You can train them your way. And so, there is that side of
14 it.

15 A. Yeah. I don't know. It's -- I don't know what to -- exactly
16 what in the future we'll do differently. I don't know. You know,
17 I mean, obviously something with our first-year guys, we need to.
18 But, again, what if we had said, you know what, we're not going to
19 send a first-year guy across the mountains until they've done it
20 with somebody else a number of times or they've gone through Lake
21 Clark Pass a number of times. I mean, Joel's probably been
22 through Lake Clark Pass now --

23 Q. Fifteen times.

24 A. Fifteen times.

25 Q. That's what Tony said.

1 A. So, what -- again, I sit here and a say, okay, this is what I
2 can do differently next year. This is what I can do differently
3 from now on. This is the company policy that we'll instate that
4 will do better. It wouldn't have worked this time. Nothing I've
5 thought of would've had a different outcome on that day. I mean,
6 obviously, now I would've said, don't launch him; it was shitty on
7 the other side of the pass and he's going to get over the top and
8 get nervous and try to get under it. You can't make those
9 decisions retrospectively.

10 Q. Right. Right.

11 A. It doesn't work, you know. And I can't think of a way that I
12 can solve this problem yet. But we will eventually.

13 MR. HODGES: Did you have any more questions for us at all?

14 MR. LAUGHLIN: Negative.

15 MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. We'll go ahead and stop
16 recording.

17 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
Interview of Mike Laughlin

ACCIDENT NUMBER: ANC17FA021

PLACE: Anchorage, AK

DATE: August 11, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Teresa C. Sumpter
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: DAVID OBERG

Anchorage, Alaska

Thursday,

August 10, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

BILL BREEDIN, Director of Maintenance
Regal Air

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I N T E R V I E W

(5:55 p.m.)

MR. HODGES: We're here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska, at Regal Air. Today is Thursday, August 10, 2017, and it is 1755 local. I'm Mike Hodges with the NTSB.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with FAA.

MR. OBERG: Dave Oberg with Regal Air.

MR. BREEDIN: Bill Breedin with Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Okay. Does anybody have any objections to recording this interview?

MR. YOUNGERS: I do not.

MR. OBERG: No.

MR. BREEDIN: No.

MR. HODGES: Okay. All right, and today we're going to be interviewing Dave.

INTERVIEW OF DAVE OBERG

BY MS. HODGES:

Q. All right, Dave, how long have you worked for Regal Air for?

A. This is my 16th season.

Q. Okay. And then what did you do prior to Regal Air?

A. I worked for Ketchum Air down at the other end of the finger.

Q. Okay.

A. For 10 years.

Q. Cool, cool. And then so your position here is chief pilot then?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Okay. And what are your kind of day-to-day duties here as a
3 chief pilot?

4 A. Well, I'm primarily responsible for maintaining all the
5 records -- training records, flight and duty time records; making
6 sure that, you know, all the crews have all the equipment they
7 need to do their job; you know, maintaining the manuals and charts
8 and so forth, making sure that they're all up-to-date and in the
9 aircraft that we have to have.

10 I'm also primarily responsible for training pilots. I do
11 most of -- you know, we kind of share that a little bit. But I
12 kind of organize the ground school, the recurrent and annual, you
13 know, initial ground school, and conduct it. We kind of share
14 duties a little bit. I'll pass -- you know, like Billy does stuff
15 that's more maintenance; Mike a little bit more on company manual
16 and that sort of thing; and I'll do -- Devon does a lot of the
17 aircraft-specific stuff, but I kind of coordinate and put all that
18 together. And then I do most of the flight training. So we've
19 kind of got it now to where I do the training, Mike does the check
20 rides, and that seems to work out really well.

21 Q. Okay. And then what type of airplanes do you fly for Regal
22 Air?

23 A. I fly them all. So I fly the 206s, the Beavers, and
24 occasionally the Navajo.

25 Q. Okay, cool. And then do you have any other like duties or

1 functions outside of chief pilot? Do you -- ground safety or do
2 you turn wrenches or anything like that, or you just --

3 A. Nope.

4 Q. -- do chief pilot duties?

5 A. Nope. I'm just a -- you know, chief pilot, and then this
6 time of year it's mostly just line pilot. I mean, most -- once
7 things get going at this point, other than maintaining, making
8 sure manuals and that sort of thing, it's -- you know, I'm just
9 one of the pilots.

10 Q. Do you work part-time at any other companies?

11 A. Nope.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. This keeps me plenty busy.

14 Q. And then how long have you known Joel for?

15 A. Little over 2 years. He worked the ramp for us here two
16 summers ago, and then it he came early June, I believe. I'm not
17 -- can't remember exactly when he showed up, but -- and worked
18 that summer for us kind of as an intern thing through the school
19 he was going to down there in Ohio. And so he worked -- was here
20 about 2½ months, I guess.

21 MR. YOUNGERS: That was in 2015?

22 MR. OBERG: Yeah.

23 MR. YOUNGERS: And he didn't fly at all during that time?

24 MR. OBERG: No.

25 MR. YOUNGERS: Just on the dock?

1 MR. OBERG: Yep.

2 BY MR. HODGES:

3 Q. And then kind of fast-forward to this year. He came in,
4 what, May?

5 A. Yeah, end of May.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yeah, he showed up and, you know, we put him through the
8 training. And we actually contacted him back earlier in the
9 spring about whether he -- see if he wanted to work here. And
10 mainly because of his -- you know, what he'd done for us 2 years
11 ago. He was such a conscientious worker, just always on top of
12 things, real meticulous about what he did, and we kind of figured
13 if he transferred that to his flying, and all indications were
14 that was so, that he'd be a real asset for us here too.

15 MR. YOUNGERS: So you were looking for another line pilot?

16 MR. OBERG: Yeah.

17 MR. YOUNGERS: Basically? Has it been hard to find more
18 pilots?

19 MR. OBERG: Yes, it is. It's getting increasingly difficult
20 to find especially float pilots. Not too hard to find guys with,
21 you know, 2- to 500 hours that want to fly, you know, wheels.
22 They're all over the place. But to get guys that want to fly
23 floats and want to spend the time to learn, that's becoming
24 increasingly difficulty.

25 BY MR. HODGES:

1 Q. And then with -- you know, starting back in May with Joel
2 going through the training program here and then once he's
3 completed the training program going through as a line pilot, did
4 you ever have any concerns of him at all with anything with --
5 either in and out of the cockpit, with him at all?

6 A. No. In fact, he was -- for a guy with as little flight time
7 as he had when he got here, he was one of the more competent
8 pilots. I mean, even -- you know, I've flown with guys that had
9 several thousand hours that weren't as good a stick as he was.

10 He was not intimidated by the airplane. A lot of times guys
11 that are instructing in 172s and smaller aircraft, you know, when
12 they move into a 206 or an aircraft with more horsepower and
13 whatnot, they're a little shaky, a little intimidated, and he
14 never acted that way with me. He acted like he was in full
15 control of the airplane all the time.

16 He took training well. If I -- if we were like doing short
17 field approaches, you know, I have a -- the technique that I use
18 is a little bit different than a lot of the bush fly it. I don't
19 like to slow drag them in, plop it on approach. I think you can
20 make a high approach to where if your engine quits you're still
21 going to make the runway, and still get it on just as short as
22 those dragging it in plopping it on. I showed him one time how to
23 do it. Never had to show him again.

24 You know, he took instruction well, and that was one of the
25 real things I loved about Joel was that you only had to show him

1 once. And if he, you know, thought -- if I corrected him or did
2 something, that was the last time I'd have to say anything about
3 it.

4 MR. YOUNGERS: Did he have any restrictions on him as a pilot
5 as far as like where he could go, where he couldn't go?

6 MR. OBERG: Well, with all the new pilots, even Jeff and --
7 well, and Dale, who is a retired United guy, there are some places
8 that we don't let them go until we go with them. And then there's
9 some places that we probably wouldn't let them go even after we go
10 with them. Especially the wheel stuff at hunting season. You
11 know, we've got some pretty short strips that when the wind gets,
12 can be pretty -- you know, you've got to be on your toes, and have
13 the judgment and the experience to know, okay, this is not a good
14 thing. So, yeah, there are places that we don't let the new guys
15 go.

16 BY MR. HODGES:

17 Q. Specifically with the accident route, that area he was going
18 onto there, were there any restrictions with him out there? I
19 mean had you --

20 A. No.

21 Q. -- flown with him before out there?

22 A. He went out there -- in fact, the people that he was going
23 out to pick up, Joel and I took out there.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. And that was his first time out to that airstrip. So I -- we

1 both went. You know, I was in -- I think I was in 4-9 and he was
2 in 4-8. And he had a relatively light load, I think three guys
3 and a little bit of gear. So it wasn't -- I was a little heavily,
4 more heavily loaded. And, you know, I just -- we went over it
5 before we left. We have aerial pictures of the -- of it. I
6 explained the layout and what we were probably going to do when we
7 got there.

8 Then I landed first, got the airplane out of the way, and he
9 came in and just nailed it. I mean, he came in, hit right on the
10 end of the runway and actually had to -- you know, it's only about
11 a 1200-foot strip, but he had to add power to get to the parking
12 spot. So he was, I mean -- and he seemed real comfortable with
13 it. And I asked him, how was that? Oh, that was okay. You know,
14 he was -- like, oh, well, good, because it is a -- for a lot of
15 guys it's kind of intimidating. So I was impressed with how he
16 had done.

17 And, yeah, we had no -- you know, he was going out there with
18 a really light load to pick up a relatively light load coming back
19 so we had no reservations at all about him doing that.

20 Q. And then did he ever express any concerns to you about
21 anything at all about flying at all --

22 A. No.

23 Q. -- with the company or --

24 A. You know, he -- one of the nice things was if he was going to
25 some place new or if he had a question, he'd ask, which,

1 especially with guys, sometimes it's a problem. Guys have a
2 problem about asking and getting -- you know, picking somebody's
3 brain, and he didn't -- that wasn't Joel. If he thought, well,
4 what do you think about the water at Lake Creek or what do you
5 think about -- you know, he'd ask. And he'd get me or Devon or
6 Billy or somebody, and say, hey, is there anything I should do
7 different? And so he was really good about that.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Yeah, he never -- I never heard him say, yeah, I really don't
10 think -- you know, I really don't want to do that or I don't think
11 I should do that. He was pretty confident about his abilities.

12 Q. Okay. Now being that he was a younger pilot and this was his
13 first full season here, was he ever involved in any sort of, I
14 guess, any formal mentoring program here at the company where like
15 Joel's paired up with Billy, for example, and he kind of takes him
16 underneath his wing after he come out of training? Was anything
17 like that set up for him at all?

18 A. We didn't have any formal thing, but all of us that had been
19 around for a while -- me and Billy and Devon, in particular; Kyle
20 -- you know, we kind of early in the season we got together with
21 Mike and we said, okay, you know, we've got these three in
22 particular -- Jeff, Marie-Sophie, and Joel -- they're relatively
23 inexperienced, especially around Lake Hood. You know, pay
24 attention and look after them as much as you can. So we were all
25 -- all of us kind of trying to keep track of them.

1 MR. OBERG: Yes?

2 (Interruption at the door.)

3 MR. OBERG: But we didn't have any formal one-on-one, okay,
4 you're in charge of Jeff and you're in charge of Joel and you're
5 in charge of Marie-Sophie. We didn't do that.

6 BY MR. HODGES:

7 Q. And then kind of going through the pilot planning process,
8 like if I'm a line pilot and I come in for the day to do my --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. -- flight at 11:00, can you kind of walk me through that
11 process of what I would go through as a line pilot here?

12 A. Well, normally you -- either Mike gets here -- you know, Mike
13 gets here earlier than most of us do. Or I would get here, and
14 I'd kind of take a quick glance at the schedule and see generally
15 where we're going. And then I'll usually get on and check
16 weather. And if there's any concerns with weather, then we start
17 briefing pilots as they come in.

18 Like, okay, you're going to Lake Creek, and it's looking a
19 little low that way; we're going to -- you know, we might hold off
20 for a while or drag our heels or whatnot. But as a line pilot, if
21 you're -- if I'm just coming in, first thing I'll do is find out
22 where I'm going. And we do this with -- we call them stickies,
23 but they're just little Post-it notes that give us our mission,
24 basically what airplane we're flying, where we're going, what our
25 load is, and what our next expected time mission is going to be.

1 So then we know where we're going to go, and then we, okay,
2 what's the weather doing? You know, and if it's -- you know,
3 we'll check -- usually we'll use the AAWU, the website and the
4 weather cams. Those are the two we use primarily. Things like
5 Lake Creek, we usually talk to the lodge owners like Lake Creek
6 Lodge or if we're going up to the Tal. You know, if there's any
7 questions about it, we'll try and pick -- you know, get a hold of
8 somebody up there and get weather.

9 And the boys, I'll be -- you know, when the customer shows
10 up, we weigh the customers, weigh all their stuff. They figure
11 out the load. We have a system of tallying up what the load is
12 and making sure that, you know, we got -- we're not overloading
13 the aircraft. And the pilot usually will ask them, okay, what's
14 the load; what have we got? Okay, we're good; nope, we're going
15 to have to -- you know, we got to shed some weight.

16 So it's kind of a -- it's kind of fluid usually in the
17 morning, especially if it's a busy morning with lots of folks here
18 going to Lake Creek and going to, you know, the Tal or wherever
19 they're going. And but it's pretty well organized. We've got
20 things -- you know, with the -- using the platform scales and
21 whatnot really worked well. We just -- we throw all the people on
22 whatever airplane they're going so we don't embarrass anybody. We
23 say, okay, you four guys get on the scales. So -- and make sure
24 that we've got a decent load.

25 Q. With the weather planning, when you do that segment of that

1 process --

2 A. Right.

3 Q. -- is it the person who is doing dispatch or duty officer
4 duties, are they involved with kind of, I guess --

5 A. Well, yeah, because Tony is primarily -- I mean, except for
6 the day when Tony's not here, which is today, but Tony will be
7 looking at the weather too because that affects what he's being
8 able -- you know, is able to do, how he's going to dispatch the
9 aircraft and what he's going to have available when. So he's
10 pretty tuned to the weather. A lot of times he'll be checking it
11 before we are just to see, okay, is this going to work? And so,
12 yeah, he's involved with it too.

13 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

14 Q. Is there a formal dispatch, you're okay to go, or a pilot
15 checks everything and gets his load and then he just goes out the
16 door? Or does he talk with Tony, they agree on something, or
17 just --

18 A. There's not a, I mean --

19 Q. Nothing written like that?

20 A. No.

21 Q. It's just --

22 A. No, we don't have a checklist like some of the --

23 Q. Risk assessment?

24 A. -- larger, yeah, larger outfits have done. It's pretty much
25 up to the pilot to make the decision whether to go or not to go.

1 And we've really emphasized in training, especially with the new
2 folks, that it's their decision whether they go or not, and
3 there's no -- if they don't like the load, if they don't like the
4 weather, to let us know, and there's no repercussions. You know,
5 don't -- we tell them, you know, let -- some of us have been
6 flying out of here for -- you know, I've been flying out of Lake
7 Hood now for over 25 years. I don't expect them to go places and
8 in weather that I would go. And I don't want them to feel like
9 they're letting us down because they're not going.

10 So I don't -- you know, we try to emphasize that if they
11 don't feel comfortable with it, it's -- you know, that's fine.
12 It's going to go -- the trip is going to go most of the time.
13 It's not like it's going to go away. So if it's bad weather, it
14 will be better tomorrow or the next day. I flew for 11 years on
15 Kodiak. I learned that the first year. And you can't do anything
16 about it, so --

17 Q. Does Tony influence that in any way? Because you say he's
18 normally looking at the weather with everybody else.

19 A. Right.

20 Q. If you walk in, he might say, hey, I think the weather is
21 pretty marginal going to so and so; what do you think, you know?

22 A. Yeah. Yeah, I mean, he'll put his two cents in, you know,
23 and he'll say, well, yeah, Dave, I don't know; maybe you should go
24 take a look at it. We'll hold Joel or we'll hold -- you know,
25 we'll wait and why don't you go see.

1 Q. Does he ever just say the flight is cancelled, the weather's
2 bad?

3 A. Oh, yeah.

4 Q. Yeah?

5 A. Yeah. Yeah, if it's -- I mean, if he says -- yeah, Jeff says
6 he can't see across the river, go over and take a nap because --
7 we'll call you when it's good. So, yeah, occasionally Tony will
8 just say, guys, we're just -- because it's not going to help his
9 schedule any, and all it's going to do is burn gas and get people
10 frustrated. So, yeah.

11 BY MR. HODGES:

12 Q. And then with all the pilots' different experience levels and
13 age groups, and I think you kind of talked about this before
14 briefly, but are there different weather minimums for all the
15 folks in the company, like the weather minimums for him will be
16 different than someone --

17 A. Not officially.

18 Q. -- Sophie, for example --

19 A. I mean, it's kind of what the pilot's comfort, personal
20 comfort level is.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I mean, basically we them, you know, it's -- as far as Part
23 135, it's 500 and 2; that's it. If you're below 500 feet, then
24 you need to turn around. If it's below 2 miles, below 1,000 feet,
25 then you need to turn around. And if you feel uncomfortable with

1 weather that's better than that, turn around. And sometimes
2 there's -- you know, there are just places like in a narrow pass
3 or something where weather that's perfectly comfortable between
4 here and Lake Creek, I'm not comfortable with. If I'm like a
5 place I haven't been or a place I'm not comfortable with, then --
6 Q. Sure.

7 A. So I think we all have kind of our personal minimums. Some
8 are higher than others. But, again, there was nothing set. It
9 wasn't like, okay, you don't fly if it's below 2000 and 5. We had
10 -- we didn't do that.

11 Q. And then are pilots required to get official weather briefs
12 before heading out on their flights?

13 A. Well, they have to get all the available information so, you
14 know, they're -- they need to know what the weather is. So, yeah,
15 they are required to -- you know, if they don't get it directly
16 from the -- we use computer-based sources, which I think everybody
17 is doing now too -- then through somebody that did. You know,
18 that said, hey, I've looked it over; it looks fine. Or I think we
19 need to look at -- and a lot of times if it's iffy, then we'll go
20 over it together or they'll say, well, I want to look. If you
21 say, hey, you know it's a little bit marginal, they're going to go
22 look. They're going to -- for themselves. At least I do.
23 Because what's marginal for me is -- it might be no problem for
24 somebody else.

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. But I want to know personally. So --

2 Q. Okay. And I think we kind of talked about this before
3 briefly, but is there any sort of like formal like risk assessment
4 you use?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Like a computer written one?

7 A. No.

8 Q. No. Okay. And then doing operations in and around the Lake
9 Clark National Park and Preserve area, going through those various
10 mountain passes, how would you describe the weather conditions out
11 there? Is it a very like dynamic system out there, changes very
12 quickly or --

13 A. I don't -- well, this is relative, I guess. For a guy that
14 flew 11 years on Kodiak where everything changes, the saying there
15 was if you don't like the weather, wait 5 minutes or go 5 miles
16 because of -- I think that the weather here is very predictable.
17 I mean, in fact, I've got a friend of mine who is a chief pilot
18 for Dean Andrew down in Kodiak that's thinking of taking a
19 position up here. And I was telling him, I said, you're not going
20 to believe how easy this is. And after flying on Kodiak, this is
21 a piece of cake. It's generally pretty darn predictable, I think.
22 I don't think that we get unpredictable weather changes.

23 Once you understand, you know, you really look at how the
24 weather patterns develop here, I can pretty well predict what's
25 going to happen in the pass, both -- at both ends of the pass,

1 just by looking at the weather map. You know, sometimes it'll,
2 sometimes it'll trick you. Sometimes it will surprise you. But
3 most of the time, I think, the weather here in the valley and in
4 that Lake Clark Pass area, and the northern part of Bristol Bay --
5 we don't really fly that much coastal stuff, but between here and,
6 say, Iliamna and Brooks Falls -- we do quite a bit of that -- I
7 don't think it presents very many surprises. Most of the time,
8 you know, I -- it is what I think it's going to be. So --

9 Q. And then since you've been working here have you ever seen
10 members of management ever exert pressure on individuals to fly in
11 maybe less than stellar weather conditions at all?

12 A. No. I think we put more pressure on ourselves than Mike, and
13 I try really hard not to pressure the rest of the guys. You know,
14 especially since I know that they're looking at me and what I'm
15 doing, I don't want them -- and I've come back or I've just not
16 gone on days when, if I didn't have the rest of these guys
17 thinking that they needed to follow me, I probably would have
18 gone.

19 Back in the Ketchum days -- in fact, I took off once, but
20 three guys following me at Ketchum, got across the inlet and said,
21 wait a minute, this is just stupid. You know, I know I can get to
22 Lake Creek, but I'm going to feel like shit if one of those guys
23 that just got sucked in behind me dumped. And I just turned
24 around and came back. I said, guys, let's just -- let's go back
25 and wait for a while. And so I'm really cognizant of the effect

1 that what I do, how it affects these guys. And so I don't -- I
2 tell them right off the bat, you know, there's -- I'll go, I might
3 go in weather to places that you shouldn't go to because I've been
4 doing this for a long time.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. You haven't. So don't feel bad; don't feel like you have to
7 -- you know, I really don't want to pressure them into thinking
8 that just because I go or, you know, Dan at Rust's or Jimmy over
9 here at Trail Ridge, because we're going or Chuck or whatnot, that
10 you have to go. You know, there's -- but there is pressure, you
11 know. Pilots have big egos, most of them. And so there's that --
12 you know, I think they have more pressure from themselves than
13 from us. I've never seen Mike say, you need to get out there. In
14 fact, it's usually the other way around: Hey, you know what, I'm
15 going to take this; why don't you just sit this one out. And I've
16 never -- I haven't had Tony badger a pilot or anybody for weather
17 or a load or whatever. It's pretty much up to the pilot.

18 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

19 Q. By chance, were you here when Joel got dispatched on that
20 flight?

21 A. I was.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. In fact --

24 Q. Were you able to look at the weather before he left or --

25 A. Um-hum, yep. I looked at it, and it was, there was -- you

1 know, we knew there were some low patches out towards Port
2 Alsworth, but the report from the lodge owner said that he had
3 patches of blue sky and a good decent ceiling. Had decent ceiling
4 on this end. The reports from -- well, we already had some guys
5 out to -- up to Lake Creak said that this layer ended at Beluga,
6 and it was blue skies over the mountains, and it was -- where he
7 was going.

8 Tony did -- you know, it was a part of a two-ship mission.
9 Devon was going out with the Beaver, and he had an external load
10 of plywood. So he was going to be a lot slower. And Tony told
11 Joel -- I was sitting in the back. In fact, I was looking at
12 weather. And told Joel, you know, he says, why don't you drag
13 your heels because there's no sense in you getting out there ahead
14 of the Beaver very much because you both need to come back at the
15 same time so that you know that you got the -- everything that
16 needs to come out --

17 Q. Right.

18 A. -- comes out. And so Joel said, okay.

19 And so then I came back over here, and was working on some --
20 working on the schedule for the next month. And the next thing I
21 heard, 206, fire up. And I poked my head out, and that was 4-9,
22 was taxiing out. I thought, well, must have changed his mind.
23 You know, something else is going on. And I didn't even give it a
24 second thought. From what I looked at the weather and what we
25 discussed, there was nothing that he -- I didn't feel he could

1 handle.

2 BY MR. HODGES:

3 Q. Nothing with the METARs then down at Port Alsworth area at
4 all or anything of that nature?

5 A. Well, Port Alsworth, I can't remember what the reports were
6 there, but there were some reports of some lower weather there,
7 but we knew that it was kind of layered, and the fog lays on the
8 lake a lot there. So there's a lot of times -- I mean, I've flow
9 it when, yeah, you couldn't get to Port Alsworth. You could get
10 to Iliamna just fine. You could get to King Salmon. You could
11 get to everywhere else, but you couldn't get to Port Alsworth
12 because the fog was laying on the lake.

13 So, and he was going with, you know, with freight, so he
14 could go high and just go out and over the top, which he had done
15 before. So, again, like I said, when I saw him taxiing out, I
16 never gave it a second thought. It never -- you know, nothing
17 went through my head like, oh, he really should have waited. In
18 hindsight, yeah, maybe he should have waited, but at the time,
19 never entered my mind.

20 Q. And then how would you rate the overall safety culture here?

21 A. I'd say it's as good as any place on the lake. I'd say it's
22 pretty high. I mean, we're the -- as far as I know, we're the
23 only operator on the lake that has Spidertracks on all the
24 aircraft, and we've had it for a while. Other than Johnny
25 Ellison, we're the only operator that has ADS-B in the aircraft,

1 in all of them, and we use it. We trained everybody on how to use
2 the ADS-B, how to connect their, you know, whatever device they're
3 using to the Bluetooth, to the transponder so they could get the
4 traffic and weather.

5 The aircraft are maintained as well as any place I've ever
6 worked, I think. We have a really good system of relaying
7 maintenance issues to Mike and Billy and me through, you know, the
8 three of -- all of us that are -- and Tony.

9 So, you know, we have usually periodic safety meetings,
10 usually two or three a summer, where we just get together and say,
11 okay, guys, what are your concerns? Anybody see anything out
12 there that we should be looking at? Is things not getting fixed
13 that shouldn't be or what do you think? And everybody is pretty
14 open about sharing what they think is going on. They're really
15 good about discussing stuff.

16 I suppose -- could it be better? I suppose it could. If we
17 had a formal risk assessment thing. But I'm not sure -- frankly,
18 I look at the companies that have those risk assessment things,
19 and guess who's having the accidents? The companies that have
20 those risk assessment forms. The ones that have gone through the
21 Medallion -- you know, you look at the members of Medallion
22 Foundation, who's having the accidents? The ones that are -- you
23 know, everybody's saying, well, I wouldn't fly if they're not
24 Medallion, and I wouldn't fly if they were. They have the worst
25 record in the state.

1 So I'm not a big fan of those formal risk assessment things.
2 I don't think they work. I think they make people feel good about
3 themselves and I think they make them feel good about safety, but
4 I don't think they work.

5 MR. YOUNGERS: Well, they only work if you use them the way
6 they're supposed to be used.

7 MR. OBERG: Yes, but that's the thing, see.

8 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah.

9 MR. OBERG: It's a crutch, that people say, yeah, we do that,
10 on paper.

11 MR. YOUNGERS: But it's the company culture.

12 MR. OBERG: Yeah, and so, you know, I -- and I got to tell
13 you, I mean, Mike and I and -- you know, we've all been beating
14 ourselves up for the last 2 weeks about what we could -- I think
15 we do as good a job as anybody in the business. And I just think
16 sometimes bad things happen to good people. This is one, you
17 know.

18 I've lost some friends that were the, I thought, the best
19 pilots in the business. And sometimes God just deals you a hand
20 you can't deal with; so -- I don't know what happened in this
21 case, but I have to look back on it, you know what? I don't think
22 I'd have done a thing different. So I feel pretty good about it.
23 I mean, I feel bad about losing Joel. I feel really bad about
24 losing Joel, but I feel good about what we did before we did that,
25 before that happened. I don't think that what we did contributed

1 to Joe's death. And I feel good about that.

2 BY MR. HODGES:

3 Q. Okay. Has there been anything differently -- since the
4 accident occurred, has there been anything different with how you
5 conduct business as chief pilot? Have you changed anything at all
6 since the accident occurred at all?

7 A. I don't -- I mean, Mike and I have discussed -- we've pulled
8 back a little bit with Joel and -- or with Jeff and Marie-Sophie.
9 I was -- in fact, I was right -- getting ready to start putting
10 them in the Beaver, and we decided to -- not to. We decided, you
11 know what? We've got -- with what's happened and everything
12 that's going on, let's let them get through a season in the 206s,
13 and if they come back next season, then we'll address it.

14 Q. That's probably a good idea.

15 A. I think there's a little more on the plate. There's a little
16 -- there's going to be that, in the back of their mind, you know,
17 what's going on? Second guessing. We're going to be second
18 guessing, that -- you know what? We've got enough to deal with,
19 so let's just hold off.

20 And other than that, I think we're being a little more
21 cautious with Jeff and Marie-Sophie as far as really looking at
22 where they're going and what the weather is. And just -- and then
23 what their state of mind is too. I think Jeff is taking it really
24 well. Marie-Sophie got -- she was hit pretty hard. So we're kind
25 of really watching.

1 Q. And then you come from a very extensive background with
2 flying here in the state. And are there any like safety
3 improvements that you would like to see here at Regal, whether
4 it's with maintenance or operations, or anything that you've seen
5 from previous companies or positions you held that you would like
6 to see incorporated here?

7 A. Well, I can't think of them, because if I'd have thought of
8 them, we'd be doing them. That's the -- you know, if I thought
9 there was something we could do -- you know, I suppose if it were
10 economically feasible, it would be great to have each new pilot
11 get 25 hours of right seat time with the experienced pilots before
12 we turn them loose, but that isn't going to happen. It's just not
13 economically possible.

14 We do as much as we can. You know, we try like going to
15 places like Lake Creek and Skwentna Canyon and with floats. You
16 know, they all come here with float ratings. You know, so
17 supposedly they're all -- you know, but they all know that they're
18 learning, that that float rating is just the merest tip of the
19 iceberg as far as learning how to fly a float. So trying to get
20 them on like on rivers because most of them learn on lakes. Very
21 few guys with a float rating -- you know, they get it at Jack
22 Brown's down in Florida or wherever, and it's on a lake. They've
23 never been on a river with currents.

24 So we'll have them fly with one of us, one of us in the right
25 seat, and up to Lake Creek and into the canyon and Bulchitna Lake,

1 doing step turns. We've found that new float pilots, we've
2 discovered, aren't getting very good step turn training. They're
3 really weak at step turns. And they're scared of them. And even
4 some seasoned pilots I've flown with are, I realize -- you know,
5 they've got a couple thousand hours in floats, and they're scared
6 to death to step turn. And they have no idea how hard you can
7 step turn an airplane. They think if you do like a mile radius
8 step turn, that that's about it. Not really. You know, you can
9 crank it around pretty dang hard. And that's the whole reason a
10 lot of times you need the step turns because you've got to turn --
11 crank it around hard.

12 So I guess if there was one thing, you know, if we could do
13 it, that would be it. But I don't see that happening. I think we
14 do a pretty darn good job of getting them out. Like right now,
15 hunting season, Jeff rode along with --

16 MR. BREEDIN: Kyle.

17 MR. OBERG: Kyle yesterday, yeah, to three of our hunting
18 strips. So we don't let them go into the hunting strips without
19 having seen it first, because some of them can be a little
20 intimidating. They're all at least 1200 feet long, but they're
21 narrow and they're gravel bars, and they're different than what
22 they've been doing. So we -- usually one of us, usually me or
23 Devon, last couple years, will load them up in a 206, and we'll
24 take a tour of all the hunting strips. And so that they don't see
25 them for the first time with a client in the right seat. We don't

1 want them to look at it and say, hell no, I'm not landing there.

2 Most, especially new pilots, don't really have a good idea of
3 what these airplanes can do. They're used to at least 2,000 feet,
4 and then they don't understand that every takeoff they made in the
5 206 even at gross weight, they were off in under 1,000 feet, if
6 they thought about it, unless they were taking off downwind. You
7 know, they're always off by the windsock here, and that's mid-
8 field. So, you know, they look at these 1200-foot strips, and I
9 say, you do know that you've been taking off in less room than
10 that every time at Lake Hood? And so it takes going out there and
11 actually seeing that to say, oh, yeah.

12 MR. YOUNGERS: It's just the perception.

13 MR. OBERG: It's the perception, right. It's like when they
14 see that end of the runway coming up and they only have 400 feet
15 left, you realize that, yeah, but it's always taken off in 800
16 feet before; why isn't it -- you know, it's going to do it this
17 time. And so it's that confidence, you know, building the
18 confidence. And once they see -- usually once they see it done
19 once, oh, yeah, it will do it. And it takes going out there with
20 somebody that's done it before to get that feeling and that
21 knowledge that, yeah, it is -- we can do it. We can do it safely.

22 And then also -- and then you've got to start putting all the
23 nuances. Well, what if you've got a -- it's a downhill slope but
24 you got a tail wind going downhill, so now what do you do? Do you
25 go upwind uphill or downwind downhill? And so, okay, well, if you

1 got a doubt, don't come out with a full load. You know, just --
2 you've got to -- you know, it's all these things that takes
3 experience to do. And we try to tell them, okay, if you have any
4 doubt about it, almost all these small places there's a big place
5 within 20 minutes to shuttle to. Don't be afraid to shuttle. You
6 know, that's --

7 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah.

8 MR. OBERG: And we've -- I mean, there have been so many
9 accidents around the state. We had one few years ago that he had
10 a -- you know, had taken off of a really short strip with three
11 guys and a bunch of stuff, and there was -- 5 minutes away was a
12 2,000-foot strip. It's like what are you doing?

13 You know, don't get in a hurry. I've found in my experience
14 that those times when I've done something that got my blood
15 pressure up it's because I was in a hurry. So any time anymore
16 when I start thinking, okay, I got -- wait a minute, slow down.
17 You don't have to hurry. Saving 3 minutes is not worth, you know,
18 doing an intersection take off at the end of the island. Taxi
19 down to the (indiscernible), turn around, you know.

20 But trying to get everybody into that slow down, take your
21 time, things don't -- if things don't feel right, back off. Back
22 off, take a look at it. Get somebody else's input. Take some
23 stuff out, take off. If nothing else, reduce the load. Take off
24 and you realize, oh, crap, yeah, I got off -- hell, I had 500 feet
25 left; go back and get some more. It's learning what you and the

1 airplane can do. And that just takes experience.

2 MR. HODGES: Does anybody else have any questions for Dave?

3 MR. BREEDIN: Uh-uh.

4 MR. YOUNGERS: Nope.

5 MR. HODGES: Do you have any questions for any of us?

6 MR. OBERG: No, I don't. I mean, I'm curious. I'm -- you
7 know, everybody is asking, well, what do you think happened?
8 Well, I have sort of an idea because I took a bunch of pictures,
9 and Billy and I got out there, and then I looked at those pictures
10 really closely, and I have a fair idea. But I don't -- you know,
11 I said, you know, I'm going to let you guys, I'm going to let the
12 pros come up with what they think happened, and then we'll discuss
13 it.

14 Because I don't want someone -- well, Dave said it was -- no.
15 I'm just going to -- you know, Billy and I have discussed it. He
16 saw it firsthand, and he's seen the pictures, and we've looked at
17 them and we've examined them. And we knew what the weather was
18 when we got out there, and we kind of extrapolated backwards to
19 what it probably was when -- what we think it was when he got
20 there. And I have a pretty good idea what he did, I think. But,
21 you know, I don't know if -- I don't know if we'll ever know
22 unless there's something really definitive in the, you know, the
23 accident investigation and the way that airplane impacted.

24 But, you know, I came really close here -- oh, it's been --
25 well, a little longer than -- right after I started teaching. So

1 that had to have been mid '90s. There was a position open at
2 NTSB, and, boy, I came so close to applying for it. You know,
3 that -- it's always intrigued me, accident investigation, and why
4 people have accidents, why people crash. And so I've kind of made
5 it a little hobby trying to look at things and seeing what I --
6 and what I tell these guys and everybody else that, look, reading
7 over accident reports and whatnot almost every time, if you can
8 put that aircraft down under control, you'll survive. So whether
9 it's in trees or whether it's in water, whether it's in rocks, if
10 you are controlling the airplane, you'll probably survive. But if
11 you let that thing get away from you, stall, if you quit flying
12 it, then things are not good. And of course there's just when the
13 airplanes break and you're just along for the ride.

14 MR. HODGES: Cool. Well, I'll stop recording then.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
Interview of Dave Oberg

ACCIDENT NUMBER: ANC17FA039

PLACE: Anchorage, Alaska

DATE: August 10, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.


Katherine Motley
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: BILL BREEDIN

Anchorage, Alaska

Thursday,

August 10, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:12 p.m.)

MR. HODGES: All right. We are here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska at Regal Air. Today is Thursday, August 10, 2017, and it's 1612 local. I'm Mike Hodges with the National Transportation Safety Board.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with the FAA.

MR. BREEDIN: Bill Breedin with Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Okay. And does anybody have any objections to recording this interview?

MR. YOUNGERS: No.

MR. BREEDIN: No.

MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. Today we'll be interviewing Bill Breedin, who is the director of maintenance for Regal Air. And we'll go ahead and start.

INTERVIEW OF BILL BREEDIN

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. How long have you worked for Regal Air?

A. I've worked for 2 years.

Q. Two years? Okay.

A. Consecutively.

Q. Okay. And then what did you do prior to Regal Air?

A. I've worked for -- I currently still work for Northern Air Cargo as a line pilot there. And I worked for Ravn Alaska before that.

Q. Okay. And then, with your day-to-day duties here with -- as

1 the director of maintenance, can you walk me through what your
2 day-to-day duties and functions are?

3 A. Day-to-day, I usually try and swing by early in the morning
4 and at least see the fleet off, make sure everything's going good.
5 Most mornings, if we've had a late night maintenance-wise -- we
6 try and do all our maintenance during the evenings and, obviously,
7 if there's a lot of maintenance to be done during the day, we do
8 the maintenance out here.

9 But 7 a.m., I'll be here watching the fleet, everyone getting
10 ready. If there's squawks, try and take care of the small stuff.
11 If there's stuff throughout the day, I rely on the other A&P as
12 well. We've got an A&P. He comes in about 10:00. So I'll just
13 try and get here in the morning and then possibly go back to doing
14 paperwork or whatever I need to be doing task-wise, working on our
15 next project.

16 And then, as the day progresses, usually small squawks,
17 whatnot, helping out with that. And as well, I do have my other
18 full-time job as Northern Air Cargo, but it -- in the summer, I
19 usually bid back on a fairly relaxed schedule. I'm able to do
20 that so I can focus on Regal Air a little bit more than Northern
21 Air Cargo, and they're very comfortable with that.

22 Evening comes around, fleet comes back, I get a list of
23 squawks from pilots, usually mostly minor stuff. Just push the
24 TOC switches and leaky floats. Occasional -- we had a cylinder a
25 couple weeks ago. And then we progress into 100-hour inspections,

1 so -- or engine overhaul -- or engine changes. I'm sorry. So
2 that's -- we've been doing a few of those this season, so -- but
3 usually done about 11:00, midnight.

4 Q. Okay. And then do you also perform flight duties for Regal
5 Air, too?

6 A. I do, but it's very relaxed this year. It's been more of an
7 on-call basis.

8 Q. Okay. And then what type of airplanes do you fly for Regal
9 Air?

10 A. I fly the de Havilland Beaver and the Cessna 206.

11 Q. Okay. And then outside of your director of maintenance
12 functions here and the occasional flying, is there any other jobs
13 or duties you do here at all, any additional --

14 A. Nothing really. I just -- I'll occasionally answer a phone
15 or whatnot, but --

16 Q. Okay. And then so you mentioned you also work part-time at
17 Northern Air Cargo, then?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. And you work as a line pilot there or --

20 A. Correct. I'm a first officer for Northern Air Cargo.

21 Q. Okay. And then when did you start working here at Regal Air
22 as the director of maintenance?

23 A. I started October of last fall. In 2016.

24 Q. And then in your position as the director of maintenance are
25 you allowed to exercise operational control?

1 A. Yes. That's --

2 Q. Okay. And then kind of talking about the accident now, how
3 long have you known the accident pilot, Joel Black, for?

4 A. I knew him when he was a dock boy, just briefly, just more
5 through passing, coming through here. I would just kind of come
6 by Regal Air. I've known Mike since he bought the company. I
7 used to work on airplanes a long time ago then, as just a mechanic
8 for a different company.

9 But I met Joel the summer he was up here as a dock boy, and
10 then I was told this spring that he would be coming back as a
11 pilot. And I thought that would be rather unique, really cool.
12 It's kind of a -- he showed that he was above and beyond when he
13 was here, and that's -- I think that was really nice of Mike to
14 give him a chance. You know, it's --

15 MR. YOUNGERS: Did he fly any last year when he was working
16 on the dock?

17 MR. BREEDIN: No. He wasn't on the dock last year at all.
18 So he went back to school. I believe it was 2015 when he was on
19 the dock. And then 2016, he was finishing up school, CFI work,
20 and then this season he came here as a pilot.

21 BY MR. HODGES:

22 Q. And then have you ever flown with Joel at all before?

23 A. I flew with him in the 206. I was the pilot in command. I
24 was flying the airplane. But it was more or less we took him out
25 in the 206. And not really showing him the check ride, just

1 showing him water work. I believe Mike was -- his intent there
2 was just to, rather than throw him right to the coals, you know,
3 just we'll give him a little bit -- he seemed to learn visually.
4 And then go out, and I did kind of a mock check ride. I was
5 current myself in the airplane. But just went out and performed,
6 kind of showed him what a check ride might look like in a
7 floatplane.

8 Q. Okay, cool. And what was your overall impression of him as a
9 pilot in the cockpit?

10 A. Very attentive. He paid attention very good, and that's --
11 you know, he asked very, very intelligent questions, which for a
12 fairly young pilot, I was very impressed. You know, it's -- the
13 one that comes to mind is step turn downwind. You know, it just
14 was one of those things that, like, I got a little sloppy and got
15 a little slappy on it a little bit, and he says, well, that's not
16 normal, is it? And nope, it wasn't normal. Thanks.

17 But yeah, he was cognizant of what was really going on in the
18 airplane.

19 Q. Okay. And did --

20 MR. HODGES: I'm sorry, go ahead.

21 MR. YOUNGERS: So he had his float rating before he came
22 here?

23 MR. BREEDIN: Correct. From what I understand, he got it the
24 season before in Michigan.

25 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay.

1 BY MR. HODGES:

2 Q. And then kind of going off what you said before, did you ever
3 have any concerns with his ability as a pilot? Anything with
4 decision-making or planning or anything of that nature at all
5 or --

6 A. Nothing -- if he had a question, he would ask. He wasn't
7 afraid to not ask a question. You know, hey, I don't know -- I'm
8 not familiar with this area; can you show me what's going on here?
9 Can you talk me through on the river here? And one other time I
10 did take him up to Lake Creek and showed him kind of the
11 operations at Lake Creek, what to look for, watch rivers here,
12 whatnot.

13 Yeah, he -- I had no question that he could operate the
14 airplane. And if he didn't, he would ask a question.

15 Q. Okay. And then kind of just walk me through -- if I'm like a
16 line pilot here, can you kind of walk me through the pilot's
17 planning process? I come in at 9:00 in the morning to go do a
18 flight --

19 A. Come in -- I'm sorry. You come in and you'll go into
20 operations over there. And there'll be a sticky on the -- above
21 the pilot's computer. Essentially, that's kind of our pilot's
22 work desk. And you'll grab your sticky. My first thing is I get
23 on the computer. I'll look at the weather, current weather in the
24 area. And I'll ask the dock boys for a load. They're in charge
25 of weighing everything. And we obviously have the final say on

1 everything, which is nice, but other operators sometimes,
2 different stuff.

3 But the next thing I do is I'll go out and preflight the
4 aircraft, make sure the aircraft is airworthy. Come back in.
5 I'll grab my personal equipment, add my personal equipment to the
6 aircraft. And then I'll give the boys a fuel load and I'll get a
7 final weight of what they've got, figure out weight and balance
8 wise what -- if this is going to work or what won't work, what
9 will work. And then final say, I'll put fuel. We've got a fuel
10 board over there. Put my fuel, what I've been planned for fuel.
11 And then on the way out of here, when we call back to dispatch,
12 we're off with six people for Lake Creek and I've got 3 hours of
13 fuel. And then they'll verify with the board.

14 And that's -- other than that, everything else is fairly --
15 like in flight, we're pretty well -- we can communicate with each
16 other. If we're too far out, we relay between airplanes. You
17 know, like if the weather's bad, usually you'll get a pilot report
18 from another pilot: Hey, guys, the cams are showing it's
19 degrading; you know, let's think about coming back.

20 MR. YOUNGERS: Does anybody else check the weather in
21 dispatch?

22 MR. BREEDIN: Tony's -- usually the -- we call it the hot
23 chair. Usually the person sitting in the hot chair is pretty good
24 about checking. The dispatcher is pretty good about checking
25 weather, too. If there's a cam, they check the cam. And if

1 there's not a cam, they'll call. Even in between, like, for
2 instance, like a rainy pass, you know, there's a, there's a lot of
3 different terrain in between here and there, or different
4 connections. We've got different lodges we outfit with. And
5 they'll give them a shout up there to, you know, Finger Lake Lodge
6 or Winter Lake Lodge. And hey, how's the weather with you guys
7 there? It looks a little low until -- so it's -- we're pretty
8 cognizant on communication and taking care of each other. You
9 know, it's -- obviously, as you know, weather's a big factor in
10 Alaska.

11 MR. HODGES: Definitely.

12 MR. YOUNGERS: Certainly. Yeah.

13 BY MR. HODGES:

14 Q. Now with all the pilots there, I know there's different age
15 levels and experiences of the line pilots. And kind of with that
16 in mind, did they all have the same weather minimums for going out
17 and doing flights? Or is it --

18 A. With the younger crew this year -- we have three that are
19 fairly newer. We've been fairly tight on keeping weather -- I
20 wouldn't say we have higher minimums for them, but I would say
21 we've been watching them and -- it sounds bad, but keeping them on
22 a leash a little bit more.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. And like, I always remind them, is like remember your
25 personal minimums. Don't be ever forced to get out of the door.

1 You know, it's something that -- I personally have higher minimums
2 than other people, but that's just because of the nature of my
3 background, so --

4 I've never had a dispute here with management -- or being a
5 line pilot and taking off my management hat, I've never had a
6 problem when I tell dispatch or the owner I'm not going. And they
7 -- I've never had them scream, yell; nothing like that, so --

8 Q. Now for all the types of flights here, are pilots required to
9 get an official weather brief when doing that?

10 A. I would call it an unofficial weather brief. We don't call
11 flight service. We just use our cams, use our local knowledge. I
12 have used flight service in the past, especially, you know, RCOs
13 and whatnot. But I would say preflight, we don't call as much as
14 we probably should.

15 Q. Okay.

16 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

17 Q. Mostly just look up like National Weather Service and --

18 A. Yeah, we get on and we'll get --

19 Q. -- Aviation Weather Unit --

20 A. -- PIREPs and Aviation Weather Unit. Essentially, we take
21 the -- this sounds bad, but we'll take the 15, 20-minute brief and
22 we'll do it ourselves. And it's -- I've realized that it would be
23 nice to have a transcript of having them -- you know, yeah, we
24 have called them and we've got official weather, but I feel our
25 weather brief throughout our company is sufficient enough that we

1 don't have to contact Kenai Flight Service. So --

2 Q. But a lot of times -- so there's not two people verifying and
3 dispatching; there's just one person normally --

4 A. It's usually pilot and a dispatcher will kind of -- if you
5 feel, okay, well, you check the weather. You know, what is --
6 what do you think? And a lot of times it will be like another
7 pilot as well. Because our dispatcher is a pilot, but he's not a
8 commercial pilot. And I don't feel he ever would force us out the
9 door if we're uncomfortable, but I think he doesn't have the blue
10 water experience. He's never been out there and had to make a,
11 you know, a real call where it's, you know, okay, this is my
12 revenue trip; this is money. I have to make money, you know. And
13 he's a private pilot, so --

14 Q. Right.

15 A. He understands weather, but his job is also --

16 Q. Right. Yeah.

17 A. -- to generate revenue. So in that factor, I would say that
18 sometimes his -- I wouldn't say it's bad decision-making, but he
19 definitely like, oh, here's what I got on the weather. You know,
20 he doesn't give you an opinion. So you have to make the opinion.
21 And a lot of times -- with the younger crew I've noticed this
22 year, too, that the younger crew will ask questions, which I think
23 are really good, about weather. Hey, would you go? No, I
24 wouldn't go. So but --

25 Q. Definite. Are there times during the -- because I know how

1 busy it gets, that you walk in and they just go, hey, you got a
2 flight to Lake Creek. And it's all kind of, you know, you go
3 check the weather and do everything and then you're out the door
4 and --

5 A. There are some times like that. I feel like if you felt
6 rushed and you told them, hey, I want a minute to check weather,
7 they would let you have the minute to check weather. They're not
8 going to say, get out there and go.

9 Q. Right.

10 BY MR. HODGES:

11 Q. Okay. Does Regal Air use any sort of, I guess, like flight
12 risk assessment process, either on the computer or on paper,
13 before folks go out and do their flying?

14 A. Not that I'm aware of as a pilot. I think, amongst the
15 dispatch and Mike themselves -- you know, I think between Tony and
16 Mike, they feel, okay, should I send this pilot on this mission or
17 should I send this pilot on this mission? I think there's no real
18 formal flight risk assessment like I was familiar with, like with
19 Hageland and whatnot.

20 Q. Okay. And back to the dispatch system. So you guys have --
21 you'll have a dispatcher on duty.

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. And then you also have the duty officer above that; is that
24 correct?

25 A. Correct. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay. So during that whole, you know, planning process, the
2 pilot, he only interacts with the dispatcher, not the duty officer
3 then? Is that --

4 A. He can interact with the duty officer, you know, like, at the
5 ultimate -- if there is a dispute between a pilot and the
6 dispatcher, say, and the pilot wants to go -- or pilot does not
7 want to go and the dispatcher says, but there's everything to go;
8 you should go. Both of you may -- you go talk to Mike. And I
9 don't think -- I've never seen Mike say -- if a pilot says I do
10 not want to go, I've never seen Mike say, well, just go anyway.
11 I've never seen him say that yet.

12 And in Mike's absence, there is -- you know, the chief pilot
13 is usually the final say, which is Dave. And Dave is kind of the
14 same way. I've only seen him say one time, go. And it was a
15 clear day and it was more of turbulence, not really -- like, hey,
16 it's turbulent. I understand it's turbulent, but it's a clear day
17 and these customers -- they were going to Flat Horn Lake, so it's
18 not terribly far. But I understood what the pilot was saying for
19 his concern, but at the same time, I probably would have took the
20 flight. It wasn't terribly turbulent.

21 Q. Does a duty officer ever, I guess, interact with the pilot
22 during that planning process and go over the weather with them
23 or --

24 A. I've seen it a few times.

25 Q. Couples times?

1 A. Yep. You know, especially with -- if the weather -- you
2 know, say we're leaving in the morning, we're going across -- for
3 instance, the same trip that just happened. The weather across
4 range is okay, but it's -- you know, that the TAF says for
5 Dillingham or Iliamna says it's going to get to be crappy, you
6 know, do we really want to go?

7 Q. And then kind of flying out in that area like where the
8 accident area was, you know, Lake Clark National Park and
9 Preserve, going over the mountain ranges, with your experience,
10 what have you seen with weather out there? Is it very prone to
11 change quickly, very dynamic weather system out there in your
12 opinion or --

13 A. It's unique in its own way. Obviously, it's coming up to the
14 tail end of Bristol Bay there and, you know, the weather generally
15 in the summer comes either from the southeast or the southwest,
16 and it's coming towards us here. Have I seen weather in that area
17 change quite a bit? Yes. I worked at Iliamna for a couple years,
18 just helping out a friend with a fishing lodge. And it's unique.
19 It very -- is unique. Is it anything that -- you know, I think
20 every pilot has got a -- we've got a bag of tools now, and I think
21 we've done really good with weather cams and getting weather
22 stations out there. I think you've got a lot of tools you can use
23 to say yea or nay.

24 Q. I think we talked about this before, but since you've worked
25 here, you've never felt any pressure from management to go out and

1 do missions?

2 A. I had a little pressure once, but I told them no, I'm not
3 going to do it, and they stood down. I just said no, I do not
4 feel comfortable with this flight. And they said okay. And
5 that's where they left it.

6 So I've never had anyone -- you have to do this. You know,
7 it's -- unfortunately, I look at it as I have another job,
8 Northern Air Cargo. And I have to protect that, you know, as -- I
9 don't feel like the other pilots have that pressure. You know
10 what I mean? I don't think they're -- well, I think they're
11 thinking the same thing I'm thinking; I'm not going to go. But I
12 think of it differently. I have another job. You know, sorry,
13 guys, I got to protect that job as well, you know. And if I get
14 in trouble for something I do here, busting weather minimums or
15 trying to fly VFR in IFR weather, you know, it affects both jobs.
16 So --

17 Q. Okay. And then, you know, you sound like you've got a very
18 thorough aviation background with flying and turning wrenches and
19 such. And based upon your experience, how would you rate the
20 safety culture here at Regal Air?

21 A. I would say it's fairly safe. I would give it about an 85
22 percent. You know, it's -- I think we're -- you know, it's why we
23 call the red team -- Rust's red team across the lake. I think
24 we're very comparable in equipment. I think we've got -- we give
25 pilots tools that -- I mean, like every airplane is ADS-B-

1 equipped. I think that in itself is huge. I thought it was
2 rather, at that first -- you know, this is funny, especially
3 coming from maintenance. I said, well, this is a lot of money for
4 something we don't really need.

5 And then flying on a line and when it calls traffic and you
6 can't see it, that was -- that's the first time I remember, like,
7 okay, that unit is worth -- and growing up with Hageland and
8 flying at Hageland, it was interesting seeing that. This is a
9 different version and, like, I just recently bought an iPad that I
10 can connect to it. And actually, the day before the whole
11 incident or the accident, I bought it, and I'm learning how to use
12 it now. And it's interesting. It's amazing, the technology.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. Like, we've got other carriers on the lake here that are
15 googling over it. You know, we show them, hey, look at this?
16 This is what we've got in these airplanes. And, you know, it's --
17 it can update weather, you know, and --

18 I think we're a topnotch organization. I really do. And
19 that's not being biased. I've wrenched around the lake since I
20 was a kid. I've flown around here. These are some of the nicer,
21 you know, equipped airplanes for pilots.

22 MR. YOUNGERS: Did the 206 have the --

23 MR. BREEDIN: It did.

24 MR. YOUNGERS: -- ADS-B and the GPS with -- what kind of GPS
25 was it?

1 MR. HODGES: I'm drawing a blank right now.

2 MR. BREEDIN: Garmin 496 was in that -- it was either 396 or
3 496. Now that GPS itself wasn't interconnected with the ADS-B.
4 But the ADS-B has a Bluetooth, and I'll be honest with you, I'm
5 the last pilot to have an iPad, which everyone called me old
6 school, you know, and then --

7 MR. YOUNGERS: I don't have one either.

8 MR. BREEDIN: But everyone else has an iPad, and they use it
9 as a display, kind of --

10 MR. YOUNGERS: Right. Yeah.

11 MR. BREEDIN: -- as a GPS. We have the 496 in there as a
12 hard back-up. It's hardwired into the airplane, so turn on the
13 avionics master, it does come on with everything else. But the
14 only airplane we were testing with it is one of our Beavers.
15 We've got the new Garmin aera 660 touchscreen, and it is
16 interconnected with -- it shows traffic on the screen. It's
17 amazing.

18 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah. Nice.

19 MR. BREEDIN: It's kind of the poor man's MX20 is what we
20 call it. So for like what they're using in Bethel.

21 BY MR. HODGES:

22 Q. And then if you ever felt that you'd found some sort of
23 safety issue here, whether it's during maintenance, operational
24 procedures, you name it, you feel that you could bring that up to
25 folks here and it would get addressed and --

1 A. No problem. Yeah. I've had that happen as the director of
2 maintenance already and I've -- you know, it's, hey, you're not
3 going to have an airplane today. Okay. And that's -- they don't
4 -- if you're bold with them -- you know, if you say, well, I could
5 probably have it in 2 hours. Okay, 2 hours sounds good. You
6 know, and they're going to plan on 2 hours.

7 But if I tell them, you're not going to have an airplane --
8 even as a pilot, if I said, you know, like, hey -- for instance,
9 like last season I wasn't wrenching at all. I just said, hey, we
10 have an airplane that, to my personal opinion, is running kind of
11 sick and I don't want to fly it anymore. Okay, great. So it went
12 to maintenance, and it wasn't -- there's very little question
13 about the equipment here, you know, other than myself. You know,
14 I ask myself sometimes, like, well, I could probably do this a lot
15 better, you know, but it's going to take a while, or something
16 like that. And, you know, we don't put Band-Aids on stuff. The
17 thing is it's 100 percent or it's zero, so --

18 Q. Okay. And then since the accident occurred, have you changed
19 anything personally with how you fly and do your duties here at
20 the company?

21 A. I've definitely -- I have changed, but not anything that --
22 it's kind of like one of those "check yourself before you wreck
23 yourself" things. It's just slow down. I find myself sometimes
24 in a hurry. And I don't feel like I'm endangering anyone at all,
25 but it's just, if you slow down a little bit and just absorb the

1 big picture. You know, do we really have to get these guys up to
2 Lake Creek at 7:30 in the morning or, say, 8:00 in the morning?
3 No. If you're there at 8:10, so they lost 10 minutes of fishing.

4 You know, or if I want to double-check weather real quick; it
5 seems like it's rolling in rather quick here. You know, I'll --
6 that's the one thing I will say. I've been checking weather a
7 little bit more. I'm pretty good about checking weather. I have
8 had an incident in the past with weather, so -- but it just slowed
9 me down quite a bit for weather. You know, if I feel I need to
10 double-check a weather thing, I'll stop. Sorry.

11 MR. YOUNGERS: Certainly.

12 BY MR. HODGES:

13 Q. And then kind of based off of -- like you said, you got a lot
14 of experience. And has there been any things here you think could
15 be improved safety-wise within the company with, you know,
16 maintenance or operational control or safety? Anything of that
17 nature that you've seen that you would like to see implemented
18 here?

19 A. The maintenance program, we're fairly fresh doing it in
20 house. We've always had outside maintenance. So I'm always
21 incorporating new ideas and running them past, and like -- for
22 instance, they laugh at me, but I've got, you know, a 100-hour
23 checklist that's 11 pages long for a 206, and 12 pages long for a
24 -- yeah, Beaver. And the Navajo is just as long and -- as it
25 should be. It should be that long.

1 But I've got a fairly new A&P working underneath me and I
2 want to give him every tool that he can have. That way there's no
3 doubt in his mind, you know, like a -- we both kind of agree that
4 this airplane is -- the plane involved in the accident is probably
5 the best it's been since it left the factory. You know, and we
6 did a lot of work to it this winter and constantly updating it and
7 -- maintenance-wise, yes.

8 Flying-wise, I think we're doing really good. I do. I think
9 it's one of the safer 135s. You know, it's unfortunate. We've
10 all had incidents and accidents around the lake. But I would say
11 the only thing I can think of is I wish we could figure out a way
12 to teach these younger guys, you know, obviously greener guys a
13 little bit more experience without -- what I'm kind of getting at
14 is that it's -- maybe a pilot ride along with them for 20, 30
15 hours, you know, and teach them a little bit more of the ropes and
16 maybe keep them a little bit tighter -- closer to home.

17 I think this -- my personal opinion, not as Regal Air, I
18 think this was a pretty far stretch for a fairly young kid. I
19 think -- I don't think there -- I don't think it was out of his
20 realm, but I think if -- at 900 hours, you know, that's -- the way
21 I look at that, if I were based in Bethel, that's like going to
22 practically up by Galena. That's a long ways and a lot of fresh
23 country through a lot of different weather systems and terrain and
24 whatnot.

25 So it's -- we learn each area as we go, and that's -- it's

1 kind of like a Lego effect. That's what I always kind of joke, is
2 that eventually you'll build the whole state, but build it block
3 by block. And I think -- I don't think we were stretching him. I
4 know for a fact they asked him, are you comfortable with the trip?
5 He had been down there before previously with another pilot.

6 Q. Just once or --

7 A. I believe -- I don't know exactly how many times, but I know
8 at least once, so -- and I know he'd been through Lake Clark Pass
9 multiple times in good weather. We'd been doing our Brooks Camp
10 trips down there. And I'd seen him exercise good judgment there.
11 You know, it's a -- I was in a Beaver behind him, and he was quite
12 a ways ahead, and he turned around.

13 And I said, what do you see up there? And he says, I don't
14 like what I see, so I'm heading home. Okay. I'll follow you.
15 And it's, you know -- I'm not going to -- if he sees something
16 that he doesn't like, I'm fairly close behind, I can tell you
17 that. You know, at 7,000 hours, I've seen a lot of stuff, and if
18 it scares a 900, 800-hour pilot, I'm sure I don't want to see it
19 either, so --

20 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

21 Q. Do you guys have like weekly pilot meetings or safety
22 meetings or --

23 A. We try --

24 Q. It doesn't have to be called a safety meeting, but, you know,
25 where you kind of come together and go, hey, this happened or that

1 happened and, you know --

2 A. We at least do it once a month.

3 Q. Once a month.

4 A. Once a month, sit down and have a formal meeting. I would
5 say we do a fairly good job of communicating amongst us. We do
6 have like a text thread that we --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. You know, if we see something that we don't like -- hey, you
9 know, Lake Creek is getting a little; the water level's coming
10 down -- we send a mass text to each other, you know, and it's
11 very, very helpful. It's kind of a, I would call, a modern-day
12 pilot meeting. It's shorter. But there is a lot of conversation
13 in the text thread, you know, amongst us. So, okay, so what would
14 you recommend?

15 Q. You mean like something's identified in the middle of the
16 day --

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. -- and you text it out to everybody and go --

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. -- hey, beware, the Big Lake VORs down or whatever.

21 A. Yeah, exactly. Yep. Yeah, exactly. It'll be something like
22 that. And we have the same kind of deal with maintenance as well.
23 And just because it's -- as you know, it's 135 that everyone's
24 going a different direction and whatnot. And you might get this
25 text, okay; oh, okay, I got to go to Lake Creek next and the water

1 level's dropped, so I'll stay to the deeper channel there. But I
2 wouldn't call it a formal pilot --

3 Q. Yeah. Is there an official safety program for the company
4 or --

5 A. We don't have a program but we definitely do have like a
6 safety meeting. Once a month, we gather. We sit down. We'll go
7 to breakfast early or something like that and we'll talk, you
8 know --

9 Q. I'm sure a variety of things. Yeah.

10 A. -- questions, comments and concerns.

11 Q. Sure.

12 A. And it's great. You know, it's kind of an amnesty hour. You
13 can say, hey, you know, like, I'm not really comfortable with this
14 206 because the seat's getting -- you know, one of the guys was
15 writing up the seat, saying it was a little loose. Okay, great.
16 I'll pull the seat out and rebuild the seat. You know, I'm not
17 going to get -- that's what we've said, is you can't yell and
18 scream at each other during this match, so -- but it's not really
19 a formal -- I would like to see, you know, like a safety culture,
20 but I feel like we're fairly safe. I don't -- it's a smaller
21 pilot group than I'm used to like with NAC or --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. There are -- you know, we do have formal meetings.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. And then we do have -- you know, with Hageland it was formal

1 meetings and --

2 Q. Right.

3 A. -- much bigger pilot groups. So it is --

4 Q. Sure.

5 A. -- tough as a young, smaller pilot group to get the other --

6 Q. Yeah. Sounds like, more like tribal knowledge more than a
7 written --

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. More like a, you know --

10 A. Yeah, it's -- we are pretty good about -- you know, like, for
11 instance, we do have certain areas where we do check people out.
12 Like river work, and then like up in the Skwentna Canyon. The one
13 that I would like to see -- and this is just a personal opinion,
14 especially for people from the lower 48, let's get them some
15 mountain flying experience.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. I don't know, I don't know how much experience he had flying
18 through mountains.

19 Q. Right, right.

20 A. Other than maybe what he learned this summer. And I think --
21 you know, I was in the military for 10 years and I went to the
22 aero club to get my ratings. And they had a specific mountain
23 flying course, get you checked out in the mountains, and I believe
24 that was a huge benefit as a pilot. You know, it's -- growing up
25 around here, I've learned flying in the mountains, but not really

1 the -- you got like the advanced course, and then -- but the
2 beginners, you're missing the ground -- you need the foundation.
3 Flying an airplane under power in the hills.

4 Q. Do you find -- so you flew with Hageland, which is 135
5 scheduled operations.

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. And this is 135 on demand. So do you find that scheduled
8 operations is a little easier as far as the challenge of flying
9 because you're going to particular villages every day versus on
10 demand, where you could go anywhere?

11 A. At Hageland, you still didn't have your schedule pretty much
12 laid out. It was kind of as you go throughout the day. It's
13 gotten much better now, it sounds like.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. But there are some challenges, and -- but I do, I do think
16 they weigh fairly heavily on experience and level of experience.
17 I don't know if they have like a formal -- you know, like, okay,
18 well, this guy is really good at water work or this guy is really
19 good at land stuff.

20 Q. Right.

21 A. You know what I mean? Or small strips. But they do take
22 into consideration the pilot's ability and capability, and --

23 Q. But do you find this type of flying more challenging for a
24 pilot and his experience versus --

25 A. I do. I think you're --

1 Q. -- the scheduled 135?

2 A. I think there's a lot of checks and balances within the
3 Hageland scheme. Even back in, we'll say, 2011, 2012, there was a
4 lot there, where this is a little bit tougher. This is -- it's
5 bush flying.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. You're not going to a runway with an identifier.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. You're going to a -- or a weather station.

10 Q. A lodge on a beach.

11 A. You're going to a lodge, you know, or you're going to a
12 gravel bar, or you're going into a small creek or small lake. So
13 it requires a little bit higher level skill.

14 MR. HODGES: Do you have any additional questions for him?

15 MR. YOUNGERS: I don't. I don't. Not at this time. Yeah.

16 MR. HODGES: Did you have any questions for us on anything
17 or --

18 MR. BREEDIN: No. I think I'm -- no. No questions.

19 MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. We'll go ahead and stop
20 recording then.

21 MR. BREEDIN: Okay.

22 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

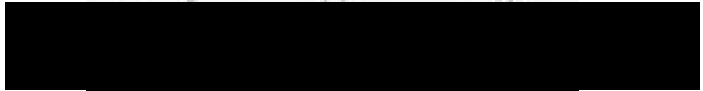
IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
Interview of Bill Breedin

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC17FA039

PLACE: Anchorage, Alaska

DATE: August 10, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Eileen Gonzalez
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: TONY BANNOCK

Anchorage, Alaska

Friday,

August 11, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:38 a.m.)

MR. HODGES: We're here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska at Regal Air. Today is Friday, August 11, 2017. It is 9:38 local. I'm Mike Hodges with the NTSB.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with the FAA.

MR. BANNOCK: Tony Bannock for Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Okay. Does anybody have any objections to recording this interview?

MR. YOUNGERS: I do not.

MR. BANNOCK: No.

MR. HODGES: Okay. All right, today we're going to be interviewing Tony.

INTERVIEW OF TONY BANNOCK

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. And so, Tony, how long have you worked for Regal Air for?

A. Since 2008. Or 2009.

Q. Okay. And then what did you do prior to Regal Air?

A. I worked for PenAir, and then I worked for Regal Air as a dock boy before that.

Q. And then so your position here is the director of operations. And then what are your --

A. No, my position is the office manager.

Q. Office manager.

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Office manager. Excuse me. So what are your, you

1 know, day-to-day duties here with your position as office manager?

2 A. Mostly running the schedule, making sure that the planes are
3 out on time, where they're going to go, who's going to do the
4 flights, how they're going to go, the loads in and out of the
5 places. And then on top of that, every -- I mean, run -- make
6 sure the dock boys are keeping busy and, you know, just general
7 manager stuff.

8 Q. Okay.

9 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

10 Q. Are you a certificated dispatcher or --

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. Okay. And then is there a hierarchy on your dispatching as
13 far as how you do the flights?

14 A. As far as who gets to do what?

15 Q. Seniority type stuff, (indiscernible) --

16 A. More or less. I mean, like, for instance, like Dave's old.
17 So I send Dave on like the easy flights and like the -- you know?

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A And then Devon, he'll do the lumber loads or something like
20 that because he's a little younger. So Dave and Devon are
21 -- their capabilities are about the same. And then, you know, for
22 something -- like some of the newer guys, well, they're not going
23 to go into a spot that's a little more technical or something and
24 then -- you know, or maybe that's a better Dave job or something.

25 So it just depends. And I mean, and there are -- you know,

1 like if there's a sweet trip that came up, like, you know what,
2 Dave, guess what? You've been here for 15 years; you get to --
3 the moneymaking trip or something. You know what I mean?

4 But each day is different and some -- you win some, you lose
5 some. Sometimes Dave gets screwed and has to go to the duck flats
6 because that's kind of a tough spot to go to, and then the new guy
7 gets to go to Tikchik or something like that. So it just depends
8 on the day.

9 Q. Okay. And so --

10 A. And they're all cool about, you know what I mean? Nobody
11 squawks over it. They all know that we're doing the best we can
12 to keep -- it's pretty tough to keep 13 pilots happy, I'll tell
13 you that right now.

14 Q. Yeah.

15 BY MR. HODGES:

16 Q. All right. So do you do any flying duties here for Regal
17 Air?

18 A. Uh-uh.

19 Q. No? Okay. Do you -- outside of your duties here as office
20 manager, do you do anything else? Like, do you turn wrenches or
21 anything?

22 A. I'll go help out in the hangar a little bit in the
23 wintertime.

24 Q. Okay. And then I think you talked about this before, but do
25 you work part-time at another company at all?

1 A. No.

2 Q. No? Okay.

3 A. No. Well, so I was in high school when I was a dock boy
4 here. And then when I graduated high school, I went to work in
5 King Salmon, Cold Bay, and Dutch Harbor for PenAir. And then
6 after that -- and then when I was 21, I came back to work here
7 full-time after I got my pilot's license.

8 Q. Okay.

9 MR. YOUNGERS: So 13 pilots. How many of those are part-
10 time? Probably 10?

11 MR. BANNOCK: Three? Three of them.

12 MR. YOUNGERS: Three of them are part-time?

13 MR. BANNOCK: Yeah.

14 MR. YOUNGERS: And so you had some younger pilots this year.
15 Joel, Jeff and Marie-Sophie were the younger pilots?

16 MR. BANNOCK: Well, Jeff's older. Jeff's 32, I think. But
17 yeah, Joel and Marie-Sophie are the younger ones.

18 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay.

19 BY MR. HODGES:

20 Q. Now, you're flying background, is it commercial ATP or --

21 A. No. I just have a private license.

22 Q. Private. Okay. Okay. And then with Joel Black, how long
23 have you known Joel for?

24 A. He started here -- what's this, '17? So he worked here as a
25 dock boy in May of 2015.

1 Q. Okay.

2 MR. YOUNGERS: He didn't do any flying that year?

3 MR. BANNOCK: Uh-uh. No. He had his commercial multi and I
4 think he was finishing up his CFIs at Bowling Green State
5 University.

6 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay.

7 BY MR. HODGES:

8 Q. And then, you know, kind of going back to that first season
9 here as a dock boy and then this season as flying, what was your
10 overall impression of him as an employee?

11 A. Fantastic. We wouldn't have hired him if he wasn't so great.
12 Like, because that's what I told him, Mike, he doesn't -- he
13 didn't look that great on paper, but he was such a fast learner
14 and such a smart kid. Like, and once we got him in the airplane,
15 it was, like, he's a natural.

16 And he knew the business. You know what I mean? Even though
17 he was just on the dock, there's something to be said for knowing
18 what a float trip is and where you take somebody. You know, like,
19 one of his colleagues or something from Bowling Green State
20 University that's never seen a floatplane before, you know what I
21 mean?

22 Q. Right.

23 A. So it's -- that says a lot for somebody that's just worked on
24 the dock for a year. And like I said, he's a fast learner. He's
25 very, very intelligent and sharp, and he takes constructive

1 criticism very well. So --

2 Q. Did you ever have any concerns with him at all as -- either
3 as a pilot or as an employee here?

4 A. Absolutely not.

5 Q. Okay. Okay. Have you ever flown with him in an airplane
6 before or --

7 A. I think that summer -- yeah, I think we went to Talkeetna
8 when he was here, and I let him fly my airplane. We just went to
9 Talkeetna for dinner, I think, one time.

10 Q. Okay. And then, you know, with your interactions with him
11 here at the company, did he ever express any concerns to you about
12 flying in Alaska or flying for the company or anything of that
13 nature?

14 A. No, he loved it.

15 (Interruption at the door.)

16 BY MR. HODGES:

17 Q. You know, being that Joel was a younger pilot and this was
18 his first full season flying up here in Alaska, was he ever, to
19 your knowledge, paired up with any sort of senior pilot, kind of
20 like with a mentoring program, at all? Was that ever done or --

21 A. Oh, yeah. Like, he did quite a few ride-alongs. Or like
22 what we would do is, you know, like going into Lake Creek for the
23 first time, like, Devon would fly along with him, or Dave or Mike
24 or somebody. And then, you know, as that -- like in May, that's
25 pretty -- he probably had a co-pilot almost all of his flights.

1 Except for the tours. You know, those are pretty self-
2 explanatory. No big huge lakes and things like that.

3 But all the beach stuff, all the bear viewing, you know,
4 anything like that, we'd always send somebody with him. You know,
5 once he -- until he got the hang of it, you know, that he was --
6 you know, until you get checked out in that spot or something.
7 But he got quite a bit of dual.

8 Q. Okay. And then -- so just so I'm clear on this then, the way
9 you guys have like the pilot planning process here, they -- the
10 day of the accident, then, you were functioning as the duty
11 officer then; is that correct?

12 A. Um-hum.

13 Q. Okay. And so can you kind of walk me through, I guess, what
14 the normal pilot planning process is? Like if I come in at 10:00
15 in the morning and I have a flight scheduled, can you walk me
16 through kind of what they normally do?

17 A. So generally speaking, we have the yellow sticky notes, and
18 those usually get -- for the first flight of the day, those will
19 get done the night before. So the night before, Joel knew where
20 he was going. And that way, you at least know like what time to
21 show up, you know, where to check weather that morning or
22 whatever, things like that.

23 So what'll happen is he'll come in, then he'll grab his
24 sticky note to make sure that that's still the game plan for the
25 day. And then you start getting your airplane ready, tell the

1 boys what fuel load you want, have them start loading your
2 airplane. And then, you know, obviously we got a computer next
3 door that can check weather, things like that. And grab your
4 lunch and you're gone.

5 Q. Okay. Now with the -- here at the company, there's different
6 levels of pilots. I mean, there's some guys that are more older
7 and more experienced; there's guys that are younger, less
8 experienced. Do they all have the same weather minimums for all
9 the pilots or how is that handled here at the company?

10 A. Well, I mean, it's -- we very rarely go to an airport. So as
11 far as like getting a minimum -- you know what I mean, like you're
12 talking to a hunting guide. Like he doesn't know what -- I mean,
13 he'll be like, oh, yeah, I can see the ridge. You know what I
14 mean? It's not like a published, okay, it's 1,000 and 3 or
15 whatever.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 MR. YOUNGERS: It doesn't have official weather reporting
18 like ASOS or something like that?

19 MR. BANNOCK: Right, yeah. You're talking to, just to a
20 hunting guide that hopefully he's actually looking out of his tent
21 or -- you know, I've had that before, where they're like, oh, let
22 me look out the window.

23 But as far as that goes, yeah, pretty much. I mean, now it's
24 whatever they're comfortable with, basically. You know, and then
25 there's some days where it's like, you know, I don't think it's

1 worth going because I don't think we're going to make it, where --
2 you know, like Dave, for instance, whenever we have a Kodiak
3 flight, I'll send Dave because that's his old stomping grounds,
4 where if it does get a little drizzly and cloudy or something,
5 he's going to be a lot more comfortable down there. And then --
6 but going to Lake Creek, back and forth, you know, those guys know
7 every rock and stump between here and there because we go there 50
8 times a day.

9 MR. YOUNGERS: Were you -- did you look at the weather for
10 Joel as well that day that he left, and it looked pretty good?

11 MR. BANNOCK: Um-hum.

12 MR. YOUNGERS: Do you remember what it was when he was
13 leaving, what the weather --

14 MR. BANNOCK: Yeah, he was blue skies here and there and in
15 Port Alsworth. I looked at the Port Alsworth camera on top of the
16 church, and it was bright blue sky. The Lake Clark west camera
17 had some fog, but just -- it looked like it was just fog right
18 over the camera because everywhere else was blue sky.

19 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah.

20 BY MR. HODGES:

21 Q. Did you guys assess the METAR that morning at all? There was
22 one -- no?

23 A. We just looked at the cameras.

24 Q. Okay. You looked -- okay.

25 A. And we got a good report from them out at the lodge. They

1 said it was great flying weather.

2 Q. Okay. Are pilots required to get like official weather
3 briefs prior to taking off here at the company, or is that
4 required?

5 A. I mean, it's -- more or less. I mean, we're not going to go
6 without looking at the weather. But it's not like, oh, did you do
7 your weather briefing? It's like, oh, let's take a gander at the
8 cameras and make sure everything looks good before we go.

9 Or, and a lot of -- I mean, in a lot of the places it's like,
10 okay, so we did a Denali tour; well, I just -- you know, I could
11 see Rainy Pass from there, so I'm going to come back and go to
12 Rainy Pass. I don't need to look at the camera; I just came from
13 there. You know? So as far as looking at it each time, I mean,
14 it just depends on the time.

15 Q. Okay.

16 MR. YOUNGERS: Now do you get here before most of the pilots
17 do?

18 MR. BANNOCK: Um-hum.

19 MR. YOUNGERS: You're here early in the morning? You're
20 pretty much checking the weather?

21 MR. BANNOCK: That's the first thing I do.

22 MR. YOUNGERS: And where everybody's going? So if the
23 weather looks okay, you usually don't have to say anything to the
24 pilot?

25 MR. BANNOCK: Right. They just -- I tell everybody assume

1 that it's good and come in. Because if you don't hear from me --
2 because if you start doing that, then they won't show up. Then
3 it's like, well, okay, it's bad at Rainy Pass, but now I need to
4 send you to Lake Creek. So I'd just as soon they just show up
5 anyways, because I'm going to switch it around. You know what I
6 mean? If we can't go there, I'm going to bump up the next flight
7 so we can still get something done.

8 MR. HODGES: Sure.

9 MR. YOUNGERS: Right.

10 MR. BANNOCK: So -- because that's the last thing you want
11 is, oh, weather's bad; I'm going back to bed. Like no, no, no,
12 no, no, no, no. Come here. We're going to go somewhere else
13 then.

14 BY MR. HODGES:

15 Q. And then does the company -- do you guys use any sort of,
16 like, a flight risk assessment tool at all for the flights, like
17 either a paper one or electronic? Is that done here?

18 A. No. We don't have a -- nothing written or official like
19 that. But we will have pow wows about it and be like, well, let's
20 think about the risk and reward for this. Like okay, you know, is
21 it something that we should go take a look at? Or, I mean, if
22 it's a no-brainer, we've got nothing to do tomorrow, then screw
23 it; let's move it to tomorrow. But if it's like, well, we're
24 going to run out of time, this and that, well, maybe it is worth
25 taking a look at.

1 And then, you know, obviously we never want to get in a
2 situation where we can't turn around or anything like that. But
3 as long as it's good in Anchorage, you know, you can always flip
4 it around and come home. Because, I mean, think about how they
5 did it back in the days before the cameras. You know what I mean?
6 You just had to go look at it.

7 MR. YOUNGERS: Right.

8 MR. BANNOCK: And, I mean, it's a helpful tool. But at the
9 same time, it only helps you so much, and there's some days where
10 it's like, well, if we don't go take a look at it, then we might
11 not get it done.

12 Now with -- I know that kind of sounds bad, but I mean at
13 some point we still have a job to do. And we're, you know -- as
14 long as it's safe, like, I think -- you know, and we'll have a pow
15 wow about that, you know? If it's a two-person bear viewer, I'll
16 nix that right off the get-go. But if it's a five-person or
17 something, and we talk to the pilot and we look at the cameras,
18 okay, well, maybe it is just a cloud right over the camera or
19 something. Well, maybe it's worth going to look at. Okay.
20 Worst-case scenario, you come home and we're out a few gallons of
21 gas. Big deal.

22 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

23 Q. Who has the final say on the flight?

24 A. The driver.

25 Q. Can you trump the driver if you --

1 A. Heck no.

2 Q. -- think the weather is too bad?

3 A. No. I would never do that in a million years. I've been in
4 crappy weather in my little airplane, and it sucks. I hate it.
5 And I would never -- if they don't want to go, I don't want them
6 to go. For this situation, because it sucks and it's the worst
7 thing in the entire world.

8 Q. Right. But what if they want to go but you don't think it's
9 worth going? Can you say, no, I'm going to nix you on that one?

10 A. I don't think that -- I can't think of a situation where
11 that's ever been an issue.

12 Q. That's good.

13 A. I think -- yeah, I mean, I think --

14 Q. So the pilots are pretty conservative?

15 A. Exactly. And I think, you know, I think we're a small enough
16 company to where we all work together pretty well, and it's just
17 like, well, let's talk about it and let's see. And then we're --
18 you know, it's not -- we're not -- you know, like, I remember over
19 at PenAir when I worked there, like a lot of guys didn't like
20 Danny and they'd just want to stick it to him and fly down to
21 Dutch just to turn around just because they wanted to waste the
22 gas. And I know the guys over at Rust's do that too, because they
23 don't like Todd. And it's like -- but we're not like that over
24 here, you know? It's like, well, let's talk about it and let's
25 see. Okay, well, do you think you want to sit it out or you want

1 to wait? Like, okay, well, I think it looks -- you know what I
2 mean, we have a lot of communication on that as far as me and the
3 pilot.

4 And then if it does look like something, like, why don't you
5 go talk to Mike next door and let's see what he thinks about it,
6 or see what -- let's call Dave and see -- have him take a look at
7 it, you know, when it comes to stuff like that. We're all about
8 group texting, communication on what's going on. And there's
9 never been a situation that I can think of where, you know, it's
10 been -- it hasn't all been agreed upon.

11 Q. Do you guys communicate that to -- I'm just curious -- to
12 other operators? Like let's say you try to go through Lake Clark
13 and it's -- you think it's good, but you get there and, man, we
14 had to turn around. Do you guys share that with --

15 A. Just about every day.

16 Q. -- Sportsman or --

17 A. Just about every day.

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. Yep, with -- yeah, because we -- I mean, and that's the
20 thing, like I know Trail Ridge, they go to Redoubt Bay every
21 morning. Rust's goes to Redoubt -- or Trail Ridge goes to Redoubt
22 Mountain Lodge. Rust's goes to Redoubt Bay Lodge. Sportsman's
23 goes to Judd Lake. We go to Lake Creek. So I mean, everybody
24 knows where we're going.

25 So if we have a (indiscernible) float job at Judd Lake, I'm

1 going to call -- and it's the kind of day like today, I'm going to
2 call Joe over at Sportsman's and see what Judd's like. Yeah, we
3 all work pretty well together.

4 BY MR. HODGES:

5 Q. Now going back to the dispatch system here, that's basically
6 between you and Mike. You guys kind of rotate between that
7 function then?

8 A. Right.

9 Q. Okay. And then the day of the accident you were the one that
10 was doing the dispatch duties then. Now with your position here
11 as office manager, is that considered like an operational control
12 position?

13 A. Um-hum.

14 Q. It is? Okay. Let's see. Now that morning of the accident,
15 I know you guys, you said, you went over like the weather cameras
16 and you looked at all that kind of stuff, and you said that there
17 was no conversations at all, or -- there was no concerns expressed
18 by either you or Joel about anything you guys saw that morning.

19 A. Yeah. It all looked pretty good. Like I said, the east
20 camera was good. Port Alsworth was great. The Mulchatna Lodge,
21 they gave us a good report. And Koliganek camera looked really
22 nice. And then you had a -- they had a ground report at
23 Koliganek, which is, I don't know, 30 miles from there or
24 something. But that west camera had some fog over the top of it,
25 which, you know, again, it's like, well, it's probably just

1 setting right on the camera.

2 Q. Now can you kind of walk me through the process that morning?
3 So the -- I guess, Joel comes up with the company flight plan and
4 he gives that to you, and then you put it in Spidertracks; is that
5 correct? Or how does that --

6 A. Well, the -- it's just a tracking unit. I mean, it just --
7 once you turn the master switch on, it turns the unit on. And
8 then it just -- I mean, it just goes right there --

9 Q. So the pilot doesn't submit anything to you, then? It's
10 just -- you go off of what's shown on Spidertracks, then?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. All right. Now this is just kind of like a
13 hypothetical question. Like if you guys had information that, you
14 know, a certain pass was closed in the route out there, would that
15 be a concern for you at all if you guys saw that information like
16 from a METAR, for example? If they said, hey, that "estimate pass
17 closed," would that be a concern for you on your end at all or --

18 A. Well, in that particular situation, no. Because I don't
19 think -- I mean, we would have gotten -- I mean, you could see the
20 tops of the mountains and it was bright blue sky. Like, he could
21 have gone over at 40,000 feet. Like, and we didn't really care if
22 the pass was closed or not because we were going to go over the --
23 go hit "Direct To" on the GPS and go straight there, and that's
24 what he was doing.

25 I mean, now a day like today, yeah, that would be really

1 helpful because we're going to probably have to go down through
2 the mountains and pick your way through it or, you know, have a --
3 but, I mean, at that point it's like, well, you can get right
4 above the peaks and, so --

5 Q. Okay. Okay. And then that specific route that Joel was
6 flying that day, has he flown that route before?

7 A. Oh, yeah.

8 Q. He has? Do you know how many times? Just a rough estimate.

9 A. Well, that was his second time to the Mulchatna Lodge, but he
10 had been to Brooks, which is the same route. You know, you just
11 hang a left once you get out of Lake Clark instead of hanging a
12 right. But as far as the mountain area where he was, he had
13 probably flown over that 15, 20 times, something like that.

14 Q. Okay. And then just the general weather conditions in and
15 around Lake Clark area, you know, the pass area out there, is that
16 a very, you know, dynamic weather situation out there where it can
17 change very quickly compared to other areas you've seen in the
18 state?

19 A. I mean, more or less, I suppose, because it's got that big
20 lake right there. But like on that day, I mean, like I said, it
21 was 75 degrees and bright sunshine, you know, except for that one
22 spot where it happened to be foggy, which wasn't that surprising
23 where the -- maybe it was coming off the lake or something. I
24 don't know. But again, Port Alsworth, like I said, the one on top
25 of the church there was bright sunshine. You could see the top of

1 Tanalian Mountain.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. So, I mean, again, on a day -- I mean, it's just on a day-to-
4 day basis. Like a day like today, like, phew, yeah, let's see --
5 like right now, we're going to cancel this Denali tour. It was
6 really nice up there this morning, and then I checked the cameras
7 20 minutes later and it's socked in. So a day like today, heck
8 yeah. But on a day of -- on July 27th, not too concerned about a
9 thunderstorm coming in there because where the hell would it come
10 from? You know what I mean? Like it was bright sunshine, like --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. But like today, yeah, okay, let's keep an eye on it and see
13 what's happening, if things are moving in and out.

14 Q. And then, with your experience working here at the company
15 since day 1, have you ever felt or seen pressure applied to people
16 to fly at all --

17 A. No.

18 Q. -- regardless if it's taking a (indiscernible) --

19 A. I'm very paranoid about that. Because I've worked at -- when
20 I worked at PenAir, there was a lot of guns held to people's heads
21 to get in the airplane and go. And I'm -- that's when bad things
22 happen. Like, nothing -- like, unfortunately, this is the third
23 time that I've had to go through something like this. And never a
24 fatality, but that's the worst thing in the entire world. I would
25 much rather just cancel the flight and have the airplane and the

1 pilot than have to deal with any of this. Like this is -- I mean,
2 it's the --

3 Q. Yeah, yeah.

4 A. I mean, you guys do it for a living, you know what I mean?
5 Like it sucks. There's nothing good about it, but -- so, like I
6 said, I'm very paranoid about that. So --

7 Q. And then you come from a pretty solid background with working
8 at different companies. And how would you rate the safety culture
9 here compared to other places you worked at in the past?

10 A. Really, really well. Like I said, we have a great
11 maintenance program. You know, we had Starr at White Wings
12 before, who did a fantastic job. And now we have Billy and
13 Kennedy, who are both extremely knowledgeable and do a fantastic
14 job. Mike is probably one of the smartest people I've ever met in
15 my entire life. And when it comes to making sure the guys are
16 trained, they know what they're doing, where they're going. You
17 know, he did a good job of raising me as far as -- and sitting in
18 the hot seat and sending people out.

19 So, I mean, and that's the frustrating thing is like you look
20 at some of the other air taxis and they're kind of knuckleheads
21 sometimes. It's like what are we doing wrong? You know what I
22 mean? Like it's -- anyways, yeah, I don't -- well, because that
23 is by far our number one concern, is pilot and passenger safety
24 and -- yeah. So I think -- I mean, you know, like I said, when I
25 worked at PenAir, there was a lot of -- some pushiness out in the

1 bush a little bit when there shouldn't have been, especially
2 because they get a lot of guys from -- fresh off flight schools.
3 You know, flight instructing that are stuck in a Saratoga going
4 into King Cove when it's blowing 95 miles an hour, but --

5 Q. And then, you know, with here in the company, do you feel
6 that if you ever found a safety issue, whether it's with
7 maintenance or operational stuff, do you feel that could be
8 brought up to Mike and the rest of the team --

9 A. Absolutely.

10 Q. -- and then it would get addressed?

11 A. Absolutely. Without a doubt.

12 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

13 Q. What do you do in the middle of the day if there's a safety
14 issue that comes up? Like the river's down at Lake Clark or --
15 not Lake Clark, but Lake Creek? How do you guys handle something
16 like that?

17 A. Like the -- well, I mean, like the river's down; like you
18 can't land there?

19 Q. Just some sort of hazardous condition that you might need
20 to --

21 A. Adapt and overcome. Find a new spot. Don't go. Switch it
22 to wheels. I mean, we go to Mud Lake then, and then they'll come
23 pick them up in a boat. I mean, in that sort of situation. Every
24 situation's different, but that's the biggest thing with that,
25 working in the hot seat, is being a problem solver and --

1 Q. Do you post things on the board or anything like that?

2 A. We're all about the group text. Everybody's on a group text.
3 For that -- yeah. Water's low at Lake Creek, or we're using
4 Magic's beach now, or there's a stump grew up at Pontillo, or
5 somebody put a stake in the lake right there next to the -- you
6 know, all things that are just -- not only safety issues, but just
7 don't beat the shit out of the airplane, either. You know what I
8 mean? Like here's -- watch out for this thing here because it'll
9 scrape the float, or something like that.

10 Q. Yeah. Right.

11 MR. HODGES: And then, since the accident has occurred, has
12 there been anything that you have changed personally with how you
13 conduct business here, you know, with doing management duties and
14 interacting with team members? Anything that you've changed at
15 all or --

16 MR. BANNOCK: No. I mean, I wish -- no.

17 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

18 Q. Is there anything you can think of that maybe the company
19 could have done different with Joel's training or --

20 A. I can't, and that's one of the frustrating things about that,
21 is I can't think of anything. Like I don't know -- like, no. I
22 don't -- everything was -- I mean, he was well -- he'd been to
23 that place before. He'd been over that route, like I said, 15, 20
24 times. He knew the airplane really well. That's the frustrating
25 thing. It's like I don't know what we could have done to change

1 it. You know, it's not like the -- it's not like we just assumed,
2 like, well, that was dumb; like, we probably should have trained
3 him up a little better on this or that. Like that wasn't the case
4 at all. He spent a lot of time in that airplane flying that
5 route.

6 MR. HODGES: Kind of going back to -- we talked about this
7 before, but with other companies you've worked at in your career,
8 is there anything else safety improvement-wise you'd like to see
9 here at Regal based off your previous experiences? Whether it's
10 maintenance, operations, you name it, is there anything you'd like
11 to see implemented here that you've seen done in the past?

12 MR. BANNOCK: You know, again, I don't know -- like,
13 that's -- I can't think of anything. Like I think we do a really,
14 really good job at it, and I just think -- you know, like, one of
15 the tour directors from -- they said, you know, sometimes bad
16 things happen to good people. And I think that's what -- I mean,
17 I don't know what we could have done different or how we could do
18 anything different. We spend a lot of time and money training.
19 We make sure that everybody's checked out where they're going and
20 then some. We do a lot of ride-alongs with the senior guys to go
21 along with the younger guys. So I don't know what else we could
22 do to make it better. I'm sure there is something, but off the
23 top of my head, I can't think of anything. I know we go above and
24 beyond to make sure that the guys know what they're doing.

25 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay.

1 MR. HODGES: Do you have any additional questions for Tony at
2 all or --

3 MR. YOUNGERS: I don't.

4 MR. HODGES: Do you have any questions for us at all or --

5 MR. BANNOCK: Uh-uh.

6 MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. We'll go ahead and stop
7 recording, then.

8 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
 ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
 Interview of Tony Bannock

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC17FA039

PLACE: Anchorage, Alaska

DATE: August 11, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Eileen Gonzalez
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: BRUCE SCHULTE

Anchorage, Alaska

Thursday,

August 10, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

BILL BREEDIN, Director of Maintenance
Regal Air

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I N T E R V I E W

(7:12 p.m.)

MR. HODGES: We are here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska at Regal Air. Today is Thursday, August 10, 2017. It's 1912 local. I'm Mike Hodges with NTSB.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with the FAA.

MR. SCHULTE: Bruce Schulte with Regal Air.

MR. BREEDIN: Bill Breedin with Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Does anybody have any objections to recording this interview today?

MR. YOUNGERS: I do not.

MR. BREEDIN: Nope.

MR. SCHULTE: Nope.

MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. Today we're going to be interviewing Bruce.

INTERVIEW OF BRUCE SCHULTE

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. All right, Bruce, how long have you worked for Regal Air for?

MR. BREEDIN: Too long.

MR. SCHULTE: I believe this is my 12th season with Regal Air. I started in 2005 or '06.

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. Okay. And then what did you do prior to working for Regal Air?

A. I was flying part-time for another air taxi up at Lake Hood.

Q. Okay. And then so your position is basically a line pilot;

1 is that correct?

2 A. Yes. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay. And then what airplanes do you fly for Regal Air?

4 A. Beavers and 206.

5 Q. Do you have any other additional duties besides line pilot?
6 Do you do ground safety or turning wrenches or anything of that
7 nature?

8 A. Not in -- nothing in any official capacity. I help out with
9 IT stuff just because that's what I do in my other life.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. That's not an official role.

12 Q. Okay. And then so you work at another company then?

13 A. I have my own business.

14 Q. Oh, okay.

15 A. I have my own IT business. That pays the bills year round
16 and allows me to indulge my aviation habit in the summer.

17 Q. Okay, cool, cool. So with the accident that occurred, how
18 long have you known Joel for?

19 A. Really just this summer.

20 Q. Just this summer?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Just met him, you know, early early summer when he came on
24 board.

25 Q. Okay. Have you flown with Joel before or --

1 A. No.

2 Q. No. Okay. What was your overall impression of him here as
3 an employee, just kind of seeing him -- you know, you're doing the
4 same -- what was your overall impression of him?

5 A. Very professional, very diligent, super nice, friendly guy.
6 Seemed very excited to be here and, you know, kind of living the
7 -- you know, living this dream pilot gig that we all so enjoy.
8 So, yeah, it was all positive.

9 Q. Cool. And then, just with your interactions with him, did he
10 ever express any concerns to you about flying at all here in
11 Alaska or for the company at all or --

12 A. No. Not at all.

13 Q. Okay. Would you kind of like mind walking me through like
14 the pilot's planning process here? Like if I'm a line pilot, I
15 come in for the day to do my flight at 9:00 in the morning, can
16 you kind of walk me through kind of what a line pilot does with,
17 you know, preflight, weather, and weight and balance and all that
18 kind of stuff?

19 A. Sure. Well, there's a lot of components there so I may not
20 take them in a linear manner.

21 Q. Sure.

22 A. But usually the first thing I do is find out, you know, what
23 plane am I in and where am I going. That's kind of a starting
24 point. For my own part, the next thing that I will do -- unless
25 it's a completely blue sky day, is I'll start gathering weather

1 information. And I'll start with the FAA webcams that are around
2 the state, you know, along my route. See if we got any
3 information from our destination. If it's a lodge or a hunting
4 camp or something, have they called in? What kind of weather are
5 they reporting, that kind of thing.

6 And then if there's any question about it I may ask, you
7 know, okay, has Trail Ridge gone that way this morning or has
8 Rust's gone that way this morning? What have we heard from them?
9 So just, you know, gathering as much information I can about
10 weather along the route. Then when it comes to loading the plane,
11 all the stuff that shows up here is weighed out here on the dock.
12 Or I guess on the grass there. We got two scales. And the dock
13 guys will typically have total weight, you know, passengers and
14 baggage, for us to do our weight and balance with.

15 Q. Okay. And then specifically with the weather, you know, with
16 doing that, is that something you interact with whoever's doing
17 dispatch or duty officer? Do you guys sit down and kind of go
18 over the weather together?

19 A. It depends. It depends on the circumstances. If the weather
20 is at all marginal, then oftentimes, yes. And I think the main
21 value there is that very often the dispatcher has already been in
22 communication with the other end, with our destination, if it is a
23 lodge or a camp or something. So oftentimes, my first question,
24 again, if the weather's marginal, my first question will be have
25 we heard from them? In this case, it would be Chet; you know,

1 have we heard from Chet? What's he seeing out there at the camp?
2 And then, I'll back up and I'll start to fill in what I don't know
3 along the route with webcams.

4 Q. Okay. And then with the weather minimums here for the
5 pilots, is it kind of the same for everybody? Like does a
6 younger, newer guy have the same --

7 A. No.

8 Q. -- minimums as you or --

9 A. No. Definitely not. No, there's definitely a -- you know,
10 when the weather's marginal or if the conditions are challenging,
11 either for weather or the destination, you know, a short strip,
12 rough terrain, whatever, they'll usually try to put one of the
13 more experienced pilots on. Actually, it's not usually. They
14 will always put one of the more experienced pilots on it until
15 they feel the new person, whether it's, you know, first year,
16 second or third, has been to that destination, and is -- you know,
17 everybody's comfortable, including the pilot, with them going to
18 that spot.

19 Q. Okay. And then are official weather briefs required here for
20 your flights? You know, doing the whole weather briefing?

21 A. Like an FAA standard briefing?

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. To my knowledge they're not.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. We do get -- I mean, well, obviously, you know, Part 61

1 applies. You know, have to gather pertinent information for our
2 route. And so, you know, I, for my own part, it tends to be sort
3 of a collage of information: webcams, PIREPS, you know, weather
4 observations and so forth.

5 Q. And then is any sort of like flight risk assessment process
6 used here at all, either electronic or paper, used for any of the
7 flights?

8 A. There -- in my case it's -- okay, companywide it's not --
9 there's not a formalized process where look at -- I've heard this
10 concept discussed with other carriers, where they look at a
11 certain flight and assess the various risks and give them a
12 weighted value and so forth. It's not that formalized.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. It's more -- my approach is more, okay, what are the unknowns
15 for this route? If it's a sunny, blue sky day, then it's a simple
16 matter of weight and balance and fuel load. And, you know, what
17 time do I have to be back? How many seats do I need to bring?
18 That kind of thing. If the weather is questionable, then I look
19 at it a little more strategically.

20 And so, one of my strategies is often to carry more fuel, as
21 much as I can within, you know, weight limits, so that if I get
22 halfway to my destination and I have to turn around, you know, I
23 can do that. Or if I need to divert to another location, I can do
24 that.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. So it's somewhat informal.

2 Q. Okay. And then, with the weather conditions in and around
3 Lake Clark National Park and Preserve area, with the various
4 passes and such, can you like kind of describe what the weather is
5 like out there? Is it a very dynamic, changing situation out
6 there?

7 A. It's definitely dynamic. I mean, you know, the whole state
8 is kind of known for that, certainly in the mountains, even more
9 so going through from the Cook Inlet side of the mountain to the
10 Bristol Bay side is notoriously fickle because, you know, you can
11 have sunny, blue skies on one side and just fog out of the trees
12 on the other side. We've been wrestling with that all summer. So
13 yeah, fickle and dynamic is probably the best adjectives I can
14 come up with.

15 MR. YOUNGERS: Best weather terms.

16 MR. SCHULTE: Yeah.

17 BY MR. HODGES:

18 Q. And then since you've worked here have you ever felt any
19 pressure from any leadership in the company about, you know,
20 having to fly in less than stellar weather conditions at all? You
21 ever --

22 A. Never.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Never. I've actually been really fortunate that way. I've
25 been up here for 21 years and I really lucked out. I've never

1 flown for anybody who fought to pressure me like that. Tony is
2 actually -- he's very forthright when we're dispatching the
3 planes. He'll say, okay, here's what I know about your route, and
4 here I think is where it's really crummy. And we'll look at that
5 and we'll agree, okay, yeah, that's going to be challenging
6 part, whether it's, you know, getting across a specific valley or
7 getting through the mountains.

8 And very often, you know, the agreement is, okay, well, go
9 out and take a look at, see if it's -- see if you can -- see if
10 there's a safe route to get through, and if you can't, come back.
11 And that's -- that agreement is hugely important to me as a pilot
12 because I know that they're okay with me going out and putting
13 some time in the plane, you know, burning some avgas. And if I
14 turn around, there's never a question. They all -- they just want
15 -- okay, what did you see? How bad was it? And, you know, if one
16 of the senior guys like myself does turn around, we're usually
17 grounded for the next few hours. You know, we're not going to
18 launch another plane that same way. There's no point.

19 Q. And then, you know, kind of, you come from a very solid
20 aviation background and worked in different companies and
21 positions. And working here now, how would you rate the safety
22 culture here?

23 A. I'd rate it very high. Yeah, I mean, I think there's a real
24 -- there's a frugal concern both for, you know, the mechanical
25 state of the aircraft and just for launching into -- you know,

1 conducting the flight safely, really. Yeah, I mean, I've always
2 been really comfortable with that. In fact, I probably wouldn't
3 stick around if I felt otherwise because I'm -- I have a very
4 powerful sense of self-preservation. And it's a discussion I
5 would never want to have, like if I felt I had to have that
6 discussion with management, like, you know, them second guessing
7 my decisions as a pilot. I'd probably just go elsewhere.

8 Q. Okay.

9 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

10 Q. How does the company address a safety issue that comes up
11 like in the middle of the day? Everybody's out flying, but
12 there's a safety -- something that they want to, you know --

13 A. It depends. And it happens every now and then. The more run
14 of the mill thing is, hey, the water's low on the end of the
15 river, which is a huge safety issue, you know.

16 Q. Sure.

17 A. If we land there and, you know, if not everybody knows that
18 -- you know, maybe I'm coming back after 2 days off and the
19 river's dropped 24 inches, which it did today. You know, very
20 often that'll be a text message or an email or something posted in
21 the back room so that everybody is aware, okay, the conditions are
22 changed.

23 Q. Do they put that somewhere in the dispatch area, the
24 whatever --

25 A. There's a whiteboard in the back room --

1 Q. They write that up?

2 A. -- that the pilots all see. So it may be something like,
3 hey, you know, this plane just had a cylinder change, so we're
4 running mineral oil on it. Or, you know, if you're going to Big
5 River Lake, you know, watch out, there's a rock there that's only
6 partially submerged; you know, that kind of thing.

7 And if it's that later case, there might actually be a map.
8 There's a pilot's reference book where there'll be like little
9 charts of places that we have to go and, you know, it might flag
10 that location and circle the big rock that they found with a float
11 some years ago.

12 Q. Do you guys have safety meeting?

13 A. Um-hum. Yeah.

14 Q. How often do you think you do that?

15 A. It varies. The last couple years, previous to this year we
16 were doing them roughly once a month. On average, probably every
17 6 weeks. This year we've had two, I believe. They're slightly
18 less frequent. I think it's just because everybody was busy. But
19 typically we would gather for breakfast over at Gwennie's or the
20 other chain that's not Denny's -- Village Inn.

21 Q. Village Inn.

22 A. And, yeah, and just go over stuff. And it was kind of -- it
23 was kind of a -- it's formalized to the extent that, you know,
24 Dave has an agenda. And then it tends to sort of spin off into
25 related areas like, hey, I noticed this, or has anybody else

1 encountered that?

2 Q. Right. It's all well received?

3 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah, it's all very constructive.

4 BY MR. HODGES:

5 Q. Since the accident occurred has there been anything with how
6 you changed personally how you fly here at all?

7 A. Honestly, no. Not that I can think of because I'm pretty
8 conservative anyway. And I've given it some thought. I mean,
9 obviously, you know, every -- I'm sure everyone of us has dwelled
10 on this quite a bit. I certainly have. I mean it's a big loss.

11 And whenever something like that happens, I look at it and
12 go, wow, am I doing anything that I should change? And I don't
13 think I am. So I just keep doing, you know, what I'm doing.
14 Because, I mean, I do have strategy to it. I've got my own
15 weather minimums. Yeah, I'm known for flying a little higher than
16 some of the guys do. I'm known for carrying all of the fuel I
17 possibly can. And that works for me so that's what I keep doing.

18 Q. And then, you know, working with previous companies and
19 previous positions, are there any safety improvements you'd like
20 to see here at Regal? You know, it could be with operations,
21 maintenance, you name it. Anything that you've seen from previous
22 jobs and positions that you'd like to see implemented here from a
23 safety aspect?

24 A. You know, if I give it enough thought, I'm sure I could come
25 up with something, but nothing really stands out.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Like I -- because, I mean, there really is -- I've always
3 felt like there -- I've always felt that there is a safety culture
4 already, you know, with the safety meetings and with the
5 communication. And again, you know, not -- you know, having flown
6 up here for roughly 20 years now, I really appreciate the fact
7 that the newcomers, like I was 20 years ago, are not expected to
8 do the same thing, are not being asked to do the same things at
9 the same -- you know, with the same weather and so forth.

10 You know, to me those are all positives. And, you know, like
11 I said, I could probably come up with a suggestion, but I don't --
12 I'm not -- there's not like a big gap that I could think of, like,
13 oh, my gosh, we should never do that or we should always do that.
14 Nothing really comes to mind.

15 MR. HODGES: Okay. Does anybody else have any questions for
16 Bruce at all, or anything or --

17 MR. YOUNGER: I don't.

18 MR. HODGES: Do you have any questions for any of us or --

19 MR. SCHULTE: Not really. I mean, I'm just curious to know
20 what you guys come up with ultimately. I don't know that we're
21 ever really going to know what Joel was facing that day, but it's
22 -- you know, the one comment that I made that day was, you know,
23 this is a dangerous business. It's sometimes -- we don't lose
24 sight of it, the pilots don't lose sight of it, but I think, you
25 know, other people don't really appreciate how challenging this

1 can be.

2 MR. HODGES: Yeah.

3 MR. SCHULTE: It's unfortunate.

4 MR. HODGES: Okay. All right, we'll go ahead and stop
5 recording then.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
 ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
 Interview of Bruce Schulte

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC17FA039

PLACE: Anchorage, Alaska

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was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Romona Phillips
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT

* Accident No.: ANC17FA039

ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017

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Interview of: JEFF CHENG

Anchorage, Alaska

Thursday,

August 10, 2017

APPEARANCES:

MICHAEL HODGES, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB)

HUGH YOUNGERS, Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

BILL BREEDIN, Director of Maintenance
Regal Air

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I N T E R V I E W

(5:12 p.m.)

MR. HODGES: All right. We are recording. All right. We are here for the ANC17FA039 interviews in Anchorage, Alaska at Regal Air. Today is Thursday, August 10, 2017, and it's 1712 local. I'm Mike Hodges with the NTSB.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers with the FAA.

MR. CHENG: Jeff Cheng with Regal.

MR. BREEDIN: Bill Breedin with Regal Air.

MR. HODGES: Okay. And does anybody have any objections to recording this interview?

MR. YOUNGERS: I do not.

MR. CHENG: I don't.

MR. BREEDIN: Nope.

MR. HODGES: Okay. All right. Today we're going to be interviewing Jeff, who is a pilot here with Regal Air.

INTERVIEW OF MR. CHENG

BY MR. HODGES:

Q. So, Jeff, how long have you worked for Regal Air for?

A. I got hired in May of '17.

Q. Okay. And then what did you do prior to Regal Air?

A. I flew for Hageland before this. I was there for 13 months, 14 months, something like that. I was flying 207s out of Antioch. That's where I ended up. I started out caravans out of Kotzebue for two shifts and then went right into the 207 then.

1 MR. HODGES: Cool.

2 MR. YOUNGERS: I did Antioch and Kotzebue myself.

3 MR. CHENG: Yeah? Antioch's a good spoke.

4 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah. I mean, it's --

5 MR. CHENG: I felt lucky having gotten that spot. It was a
6 good place.

7 BY MR. HODGES:

8 Q. And so your position here, you're basically just like what we
9 call a line pilot then; is that correct?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. Okay. And then what type of airplanes do you fly here for
12 Regal Air?

13 A. Here I fly the 206. I fly it both on wheels and on floats.

14 Q. Okay, cool. And then do you have any additional duties here
15 at the company besides just doing flying? Do you do like, you
16 know, ground safety or maintenance, or do you do anything else
17 outside of line pilot duties?

18 A. No. I mean, I think all of those things kind of fall under
19 -- but specifically, no I have no other job titles.

20 Q. And then do you hold employment at any other companies part-
21 time?

22 A. I am a substitute route setter at Alaska Rock Gym, but not as
23 a -- I mean, obviously, not as an aviator.

24 Q. Okay. Okay.

25 A. But that's super random pick-up work. Just when their other

1 setters take vacations.

2 Q. Okay. And then how long have you known Joel for?

3 A. I met Joel in, I guess, in May when -- I guess, I would have
4 gotten hired in April, right, because we had ground school in
5 April. And then May would have been my first training flights and
6 check ride with Mike, and it was at point that I met Joel because
7 Joel wasn't able to make it to the ground school. So I met Joel
8 in May of '16.

9 Q. Okay. And then have you ever flown with Joel before at all
10 or --

11 A. No, and -- actually I never flew with Joel.

12 Q. Never. Okay.

13 A. Yeah, we did a ride-along with Devon. I think that was the
14 only time me and Joel were in a plane together.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And it was -- so Devon flew me, Marie-Sophie, and Joel, and
17 we did just a -- he was, you know, he was doing a revenue run to
18 go take some supplies, groceries up to Skwentna Canyon. The Tal
19 Lodge, I think is who operates the -- Talvista. So we were
20 running loads of groceries up to them, and then on the way Devon
21 pointed out some place and we stopped at Trail Lake at the
22 EagleSong. That was the only time I've been in a plane with Joel,
23 but we weren't flying; just sitting.

24 Q. And what was -- just based off your interactions with him,
25 what was your overall impression with him kind of here as an

1 employee at the company?

2 A. With regard to his work?

3 Q. Yeah, like, you know, work, piloting duties, and, you know,
4 acting as a team member and all of those things?

5 A. I mean pretty much like exactly what you'd look for in a
6 pilot and employee. He always seemed like he was out here on
7 time. I mean, you know, I assume -- I wasn't watching the clock
8 with regard to his schedule, but felt like he always showed up on
9 time ready to work. Never seemed to compromise. You know, it's
10 not like he would come in hung over or anything. Relatively
11 soft-spoken guy. I don't think I ever heard him complain. He
12 seemed to do everything, you know, by the book the way, you know,
13 we all do things here.

14 Actually, you know what, I can think of -- I would have
15 witnessed his flying when we did bear views. We went on two bear
16 view trips the other day. And there would have -- they're two
17 ship trips. So we'd have two 206s fly down together, land on the
18 beach together, walk people around, hop back in the plane and fly
19 to another spot to have lunch. And I think we probably did that
20 twice together. So that was, I guess, kind of a close interaction
21 with him with regard to us, you know, working alongside him.

22 Yeah, I mean, it was all super professional. You know, we'd
23 come in, we'd do the bear briefing together. And one time he led
24 and did the discussion and I did the discussion. You know, and in
25 that regard, if that was any sort of mirror to how he treats the

1 passengers on the plane, it was all -- you know, hit every part of
2 it. Went back -- we have a little checklist that we go through
3 and make sure we talked about everything, and just kind of going
4 off of that and double-checking it as he went and finished.

5 I remember we flew in to Chinitna, and this was -- he was in
6 4-9 and I was in 4-8. And this was when the prop was still really
7 new, so we, we're told not -- because it was a brand-new prop, any
8 nick that it picked up would have been super obvious. And so
9 there was a challenge to us that if the first person who put a
10 nick in the prop had to buy a case of beer for maintenance. And
11 so we were all super paranoid anytime we got that plane.

12 Anyway, I remember going into Chinitna and, I mean, he may
13 have been flying it particularly cautiously or that's always how
14 he flew it. But I remember watching him make his landing and it
15 was perfect, you know, because he was just -- you know, landed on
16 the beach, the uphill wheel first, held the nose, the other wheel
17 came down, held the nose, nose came down, and wasn't like
18 overpowering as he was coming around the turn to park.

19 And then me in -- I was flying 4-8 and it was kind of, oh,
20 there's a big rock, whatever, and I didn't have as good of a
21 landing. But so, I mean, that's -- I guess that's the extent that
22 I can speak to his flying.

23 Q. Okay. Okay.

24 A. But, I mean, he seemed pretty much like -- yeah, I don't
25 know. I don't know how to say that, but like what you would look

1 for.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. What you would want to see.

4 Q. And then with your interactions with him since you've been
5 here, did he ever express any concerns to you about flying in
6 Alaska or anything of that nature to you at all, or --

7 A. Not at all.

8 Q. No. Okay.

9 A. No.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. We went and grabbed -- I'm trying to think how many times
12 we'd hung out outside of work. I think probably just one, we went
13 and grabbed beers after. No, it's not like -- no. In that
14 instance or any instances around here, I can't think of a time
15 that he would have mentioned something like that.

16 Q. Okay. If you could kind of walk me through like the pilot's
17 planning process here, like if I'm a line pilot and I come in at,
18 you know, 10:00 in the morning to kind of do my duties, can you
19 kind of walk me through like what a line pilot would normally do
20 coming -- interacting with dispatch and doing all the preflight
21 stuff?

22 A. Sure. So the day before, the night before you either get a
23 text or there's a Post-it note sticky that hangs out in the -- I
24 don't know what you call the area. It's not the dispatch area.
25 It's a little bit behind it.

1 MR. BREEDIN: Pilot lounge?

2 MR. CHENG: It's like a pilot lounge space.

3 MR. BREEDIN: Sorry.

4 MR. YOUNGERS: No, that's fine, sir.

5 MR. CHENG: It's helpful. I was searching for the words.

6 And so you get your, you know, whatever your first flight is
7 for the day, so you know what your show time is. So far as
8 planning at that point, you just know what to look for in the
9 morning. So, you know, am I going to go in and end up sitting
10 around because the weather's crap, or am I be like go as soon as I
11 get there. That's usually what I'm looking at, anyway. So when I
12 wake up I can look at the radar and I've got that Garmin Pilot
13 app; there's an overlay for that, you know.

14 Then you come in -- I come in and I sort of move into my
15 plane because I move out of my plane every day, every night. So I
16 move into it: headset, flight bag; you know, if I'm going bear
17 viewing, the kit for the bear viewing; if I'm going on the
18 floatplane, kit for being on the floatplane. And then pre-flight
19 it, which, you know, pretty standard pre-flight. Big things for
20 me are oil and fuel. So that's something, the system, checking
21 the oil and then, you know, everything else. I do a pretty
22 thorough preflight, at least I think so.

23 And then as you're getting closer to the time of the flight,
24 it depends on, you know, what you're -- where you're going, what
25 you're loading. You know, if it's stuff, the dock boys pull over

1 stuff and kind of set up a little pile in front of the plane.
2 Sometimes they'll load it, sometimes they'll wait for you. It
3 kind of depends on what it is. It also depends on how active you
4 want to be a participant in it. If you just go sit inside,
5 they'll load the plane for you. If it's kind of an awkward load,
6 they might ask for help. But typically I'm out helping them load
7 the plane because I like to see where stuff is.

8 Ian does calculate out a little sheet. I don't always get
9 them, but I do usually ask how much I'm getting weight-wise, if
10 it's stuff. I'll definitely ask about stuff.

11 MR. YOUNGERS: Is that the weight and balance? Who does the
12 weight and balance?

13 MR. CHENG: That's not the balance component of it.

14 MR. YOUNGERS: Just the weight?

15 MR. CHENG: Just the weight. Yeah, so they -- Ian weighs the
16 people and weighs the stuff. Or whoever is at the dock, it's not
17 always Ian.

18 BY MR. HODGES:

19 Q. Ian is the dispatcher, correct?

20 A. Ian is head dock boy. Yeah, Tony's dispatcher.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So Ian -- I'm using Ian sort of to describe any dock boy.
23 The dock boys, one of them weighs it. I assume they're writing it
24 down every time. I actually don't see that piece of paper every
25 time, but they are always able to give me that number when I ask

1 for it.

2 We load the plane. Fuel is on us, so then they'll ask us how
3 much fuel we want and, based on where I'm going, you know, I build
4 in -- I like having an hour buffer, but, you know, minimum half an
5 hour, or whatever. So fuel for the load. Load up the plane. Get
6 the people. And then actually out and go.

7 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

8 Q. So are you making the decision on the weather and all the
9 planning and --

10 A. Sure.

11 Q. -- and you go and --

12 A. Yeah, I'm sorry. I guess I'm kind of glazing over that.
13 Yeah, beforehand, Tony is actually very good at being preemptive
14 on the weather, I think because he's trying to predict how the day
15 is going to go. So he is looking at the weather before I even get
16 here usually, unless it's a super early flight and we're getting
17 here around the same time. But he's got a good sense of like,
18 yeah, this is a flight that will probably go today; this is a
19 flight that's looking pretty iffy. If it's iffy, he'll be like,
20 hey, Jeff, this is what I'm seeing out there, you know, take a
21 look.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. But I'm thinking, you know, this is probably not going to go,
24 or, you know, that's (indiscernible) --

25 Q. So if the weather's nice, Tony's, he's probably not going to

1 say anything to you about the weather?

2 A. Right. Exactly.

3 Q. If it's marginal, then you guys will probably have a
4 discussion or he'll be going, what do you think about this?

5 A. Exactly. Exactly. That's exactly what it's like. You know,
6 and then there's the tools that I really lean on pretty heavily:
7 Garmin Pilot with the overlays for radar and satellite imagery;
8 the cameras are huge, and then we also call around to different
9 locations.

10 I know like we were going -- I was going into Chinitna Bay,
11 oh, when was that -- last week or maybe a week before that, and
12 the camera app was that the San Juan Fishery was out. So we were
13 calling in to Chinitna Bay to try to get a report from somebody
14 there. So you have some tools like that to make the go. You
15 know, that is huge.

16 Q. Do you file a company flight plan or with flight service?

17 A. It's company. So that part of it is Tony. He's putting
18 together the flight plan, at least I'm assuming. When I take off
19 and I get out to -- soon as I switch off tower and I can call into
20 base on our company frequency that I'm off and how much fuel I've
21 got and passengers. That's a -- like, you know, that's kind of
22 moving gears on the other side of the radio, so I'm not really
23 sure, but I'm assuming that's opening my company flight plan. And
24 then when I come back in, I call. I try to do 15 or 10 minutes
25 out, kind of depending on when my memory hits me, that I'm coming

1 in.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 BY MR. HODGES:

4 Q. Now do you guys also do FAA flight plans, too? Are those
5 done?

6 A. I don't believe we do, but again, that's on the other side of
7 that radio.

8 Q. Okay. And so when you submit your company flight plan, you
9 turn that into Tony and then he takes it from there?

10 A. It's more like he's giving me the flight plan.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. He's telling me where I'm going, how much weight, number of
13 passengers, and then I'm kind of handing back fuel.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yeah. I mean, so far as routing, you know, I guess he's just
16 giving me destination and then they're following me on
17 Spidertracks. You know, if I'm using various waypoints, I don't
18 know if that's being communicated. You know, beforehand --
19 actually, that's not entirely true. Like when we go to Lake
20 Clark, we'll talk about beforehand, like, hey, you know, it's
21 looking great; we're probably just going to shoot through Bruin
22 Bay. "Cool, right on." I don't know if they're writing that
23 down, you know. And then come back through Lake Clark because
24 that's always a really better -- it's better to do kind of a loop.
25 The people appreciate having the view.

1 So it's like, okay, talk about that, that's the plan or,
2 yeah, it's looking pretty skuzzy; Bruin Bay is not going. We've
3 talked to some people; that's definitely not the way it's going to
4 be. Lake Clark down, Lake Clark back. Right on. Okay.

5 But that's -- I mean, so far as routing, I don't know if --
6 again, I don't know if it's written, but --

7 Q. Okay. And then with, you know, with the weather minimums for
8 all the pilots here, are they the same weather minimums or do the
9 more senior guys have different weather minimums than the more
10 junior guys, you know, or --

11 A. I guess I don't know.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Let me think about that, if I can come up with like an
14 anecdote. I guess I can't think of a time where I've been asked
15 to sit on the ground while someone with more experience has been
16 told to go or has made the decision to go.

17 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

18 Q. Did Joel have restrictions on him or he was limited to
19 certain flights or anything like that because of his limited
20 experience?

21 A. I don't believe so. We're limited to the plane that we fly.
22 You know, we haven't been upgraded -- any of the first years
23 haven't been upgraded to the Beavers. I know that -- this is more
24 a discussion than in -- well, maybe that's not true. Well, that's
25 not true. I'm sure -- I mean, I know that I'm getting the easier

1 flights in the floatplane, the easier lakes and the easier loads.

2 And then I know when we're going out to the hunter's trips.

3 Q. And Tony makes those decisions? He's got to put people with
4 the plane and --

5 A. Right. He sees --

6 Q. He's the --

7 A. He sees the big picture and he making those calls about
8 putting the more junior pilots on easier lines with, you know,
9 less stops and to staying to the bigger lakes.

10 Q. Would there be a problem if you turned a flight down because
11 of weather or just not comfortable with it, or --

12 A. No. No. I'm not -- I've definitely -- I don't know if I've
13 turned down a flight, but I've definitely been like, I don't feel
14 comfortable with this; can we watch it? You know, I'm going to
15 watch it. Great; we'll do that.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. I've definitely turned back for weather with, you know, zero
18 pushback. That's not the culture here.

19 Q. Yeah, you never felt pushed out the door and --

20 A. Never felt pushed out the door and never felt like, I don't
21 know, disappointment. That's not really the right word. But any
22 sort of -- never felt like if I did have to turn back or had made
23 the call to turn back, that there would be any repercussion or any
24 hazing. That's not the right word either, but --

25 MR. HODGES: I see what you're getting at. I see what you're

1 getting at, yeah.

2 MR. CHENG: I hate to use a word that was fed to me but --

3 MR. YOUNGERS: No, no, no.

4 MR. CHENG: -- repercussion is the perfect word. That there
5 was never any repercussion for making the call to turn back. And
6 that has happened on definitely one occasion -- two occasions. I
7 can think of two times where that's happened for sure. There's
8 probably more.

9 So far as getting loads out, you know, sometimes customers
10 can be pushy. I was at Lake Creek just 3 days ago and I had a guy
11 who was trying to put fish on the boat, or on the -- out of his
12 boat onto the plane. And I had already had to pick up -- was
13 coming out of Bulchitna and I had to go into Lake Creek to pick up
14 three, and they had bags and some bags that were bumped off the
15 Beaver. And he was giving me a hard time at the dock about fish.
16 But he was being such a jerk about it, that I was like, I don't
17 need to help you at all because you're being an asshole. So --
18 but that's a different source of pressure, I suppose. That's not
19 necessarily the company. That's just clients.

20 MR. HODGES: Yeah.

21 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah, which is common in Alaska.

22 MR. CHENG: Yeah.

23 BY MR. HODGES:

24 Q. Do you guys utilize any sort of like formal, like flight risk
25 assess program here at Regal Air, like either an electronic one or

1 paper one, before you guys fly out on your missions?

2 A. No. Not like -- I know Hageland had something like that. I
3 don't know if you guys are familiar with their system. Not like
4 that.

5 Q. Okay. Okay.

6 A. Getting into the weeds.

7 Q. Okay. And then back to the dispatch system here. So you
8 guys, you'll have a dispatcher on duty, then, correct?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. And then you also had the duty officer then? Is that --

11 A. Duty officer?

12 Q. A duty officer, yeah.

13 A. I guess, I --

14 Q. It would be --

15 MR. YOUNGERS: It might be a be different terminology.

16 MR. BREEDIN: Like our director of operations. Essentially
17 Mike or the chief pilot. I don't mean to interact, but one of the
18 two is essentially --

19 MR. CHENG: Yeah. Yeah, but yes, so the dispatcher is either
20 Tony or Mike. It's pretty much just those two. And then chief
21 pilot is Dave.

22 BY MR. HODGES:

23 Q. So you don't have like a separate, full-time dispatcher here,
24 then? It's either Tony or Mike exercising those duties then?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. And then, you know, flying out towards like the Lake
2 Clark National Park Preserve area, you know, going out in the
3 mountain ranges out there, based off of your experience, you know,
4 would you say that's more of like a very dynamic weather system
5 out there, like things are prone to change quickly and -- you
6 know, just based off of your experience?

7 A. Yeah. I mean, I guess as much as weather changes anywhere.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. Yeah. But it's so very different down there, and it's really
10 regional, but like really -- like a tight, like tight regions.
11 Like today -- yesterday, I went down to Chinitsna on a bear view.
12 And it was -- well, you guys were here yesterday. The morning was
13 quite nice, high clouds, lots of patches of blue. And then we got
14 down there and it rained the entire time. My passengers were
15 soaked, myself included. I forgot a rain jacket. I was wearing
16 that soft-shell that the Company gave us, and it worked kind of,
17 sort of, anyway. So like there's that element, which is that it
18 can be vastly different down in the inlet than it can be up here.

19 And then even within the region -- today, for example, I went
20 down and we were in Chinitsna Bay and it was kind off and on
21 showers and rain. And then we went to the mouth of the Red River,
22 which is like a, I don't know, 8-minute -- 5-minute, 8-minute
23 flight just out to the end of the Bay. And it was sunny and we
24 were taking off our jackets and that's where we had lunch.

25 And then, you know, I think about like when I went back

1 yesterday, it was nice and high ceilings with pretty good
2 visibility. I think we -- if I had to guess, probably like 8
3 miles to 10 miles of visibility. Coming around the corner, and
4 then once you got to like Izik (ph.), the ceilings were still
5 pretty good, but the visibility got pretty tight, I don't know,
6 maybe 5 miles. You know, like I was coming around the corner just
7 past Johnson (ph.), and you know, couldn't see the end of Chignik.
8 Could see the near end but couldn't see the far end, you know.
9 And then as soon as you got towards like Harriette (ph.), it
10 opened up again. I mean, so I don't know. Does that answer your
11 question?

12 It's dynamic, as weather is always, and it can be very site-
13 specific, where it's very different just 3 miles away from where
14 you a bit ago. Yeah, but that's on the coastline. Yeah, and it's
15 just the same down there, you know.

16 Q. Okay. You sound like you come from a pretty solid aviation
17 background. And kind of, you know, with that in mind, like how
18 would you rate the safety culture here at this company?

19 A. I guess I'm not struggling with like how to answer it, I'm
20 just -- or I'm struggling with how to, like what unit to put it
21 in.

22 Q. Sure. Sure.

23 A. It's good. I never feel any pressure, which I think is one
24 -- which I think is like probably one of the more dangerous things
25 that you could possibly have in an airline would be pushing people

1 out the door, and I don't think there's any of that kind of
2 pressure here.

3 So far as like oversight or the process, there's a lot of
4 support. Any senior pilot here has been nothing but helpful.
5 I've never gotten -- that's something that I love about this
6 airline is the staff here and the more senior pilots are
7 incredibly supportive and there's not a whole lot of arrogance.
8 That's something that I really struggled with at Hageland. They
9 were all -- not all of them, but there were a number of pilots
10 that interacted there that just seemed to look down their nose at
11 you, and if you went to them for help they just weren't -- I don't
12 mean to bash Hageland on here. But that's something that coming
13 from there -- coming here was just like, oh, these guys are all
14 super cool; they're all super helpful and there isn't any of that
15 arrogance. And I don't feel like some -- you know, John going
16 over and jack-off-newbie-gaper, going over and like asking
17 somebody for help or support in making, you know, a go/no-go
18 decision. What do think about this place? I've never been in
19 there or, you know, I've not really familiar there.

20 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They're very inclusive here is what
21 you're saying.

22 MR. CHENG: They are. Yeah, and I think that, that is really
23 helpful in safety. You know, because I don't have as much
24 experience flying in this area, flying these planes, flying these
25 sorts of trips, getting insight from them is huge.

1 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

2 Q. Do you find that flying these types of flights compared to
3 135 scheduled more challenging?

4 A. I do. Definitely. I think the most challenging thing here
5 -- well, that's different, anyway, is just the places we're going.
6 When I was flying out of Antioch, you know, you were going from a
7 3,000-plus --

8 Q. Upriver, or --

9 A. -- to 3,000-plus, or, you know, a 6,000 to a 3,000 and --
10 yeah, I mean, maybe upriver was probably the spookiest, you know,
11 and even that wasn't as -- you know, it wasn't that bad. But
12 here, you're kind of going in and they're -- the locations we're
13 going into aren't as supported and the terrain's also a more
14 heads-up in this area.

15 Out of Antioch, you know, where I did almost of my Alaska
16 time, you know, what, 4,000 feet for the Horns and the Russians,
17 and they're kind of these little nubs. Uprivers can be a little
18 bit much because it is a little bit of a valley you're shooting
19 up. But if you go up the Yukon Delta, you can't hit anything as
20 long as you're in the middle of it. And the same with going down
21 the Delta. So the flying here is definitely a little more heads-
22 up because of the terrain and because of the places we're going.

23 You know, just yesterday, me and Kyle went on sort of a tour
24 of the hunter strips in the Marine Pass area. And, you know,
25 they're -- some of them are pretty short and -- like nothing that

1 I don't feel confident that I can get into, but definitely more
2 just like, I've got to be turned on and like ready for this and
3 flying well to make this work. You know, it's -- you know, you
4 screw up your approach or your configuration flying into Anvic or
5 something, and you've got 2,000 feet of really good runway to make
6 up all that time.

7 Q. Sure.

8 BY MR. HODGES:

9 Q. And then here at the company, do you ever feel that, you
10 know, if you were -- came across some sort of safety issue,
11 whether it's with maintenance or operational control or, you know,
12 you name it, do you feel that if you were to bring it up to
13 management that it would get addressed and you wouldn't feel any
14 sort of repercussions because of that?

15 A. Yes, I would feel comfortable to bring up any safety concern.
16 No, I don't feel there would be any repercussion. I probably
17 bring up more maintenance stuff. I feel like I'm always bringing
18 up maintenance stuff. I feel like I'm always breaking up the
19 planes. I don't know if it's --

20 MR. BREEDIN: It's my pocket, buddy. I like it.

21 MR. CHENG: No, I've -- I don't feel like there's any,
22 especially with -- I mean, especially with maintenance or
23 specifically with maintenance, but -- especially with anywhere
24 else in the company. I mean, any pressure that I feel I think is
25 probably brought on myself. You know, I -- you know, it -- this

1 is just my own personal feeling. I don't mean to project anything
2 on Joel, but for me, you know, it's my first year. This is a
3 really cool group of people that I have a lot of respect for and I
4 want to put forward and be taken seriously as a pilot and thought
5 of as someone who can fly safely, confidently, and get the job
6 done.

7 You know, so like when I screw up and I hit the log coming
8 out of Lake Creek, I feel like shit, or, you know, I forget to
9 bring the water rudders up. And that is a self-pressure that I
10 feel really bad about, but I don't feel anything -- if anything, I
11 feel support from the guys around me. They're like, yeah, well,
12 water rudders didn't come up. Yeah, you know, that's not great;
13 work on that. And, you know, when I did that, Mike sat down with
14 me and he was like, yeah, well, you know, you need to slow down;
15 let's talk about checklists and flows. You need to incorporating
16 that and the fact that you're forgetting water rudders, not a big
17 deal, but what if you forgot something bigger?

18 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

19 Q. Sure.

20 A. You know -- anyway.

21 Q. That's a good quality to have, high standards.

22 A. Yep.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. If there was a safety issue that came up during the day,

1 like, you know, something happened, does the company have -- like
2 Hageland has like a safety bulletin or something, or do they have
3 some way to notify everybody be aware that, you know, there's
4 alligators in Lake Creek today or something?

5 A. Yeah, it's much less formal. It's in the form of group
6 texts. But that was happening especially early on when like Lake
7 Creek, for example, was super low. You know, we'd get a text and
8 you'd see a whole group chain that was, you know: Hey, Kyle was
9 coming out of Lake Creek today and hit something; watch out for
10 the logs. They're bad right now because the lake's low. Make
11 sure you stay to the side. You know, and then --

12 Q. Are all the operators talking to everybody on a common
13 frequency, pretty much? Like if Rust's goes out and goes, man,
14 this is bad, they'll tell everybody?

15 MR. BREEDIN: We've gotten pretty good. And this is just
16 from a company aspect. You know, we're all competition around the
17 lake, yes. But at the same time, we all help each other out. You
18 know, if the weather's bad, you'll see a scout go out in the
19 mornings sometimes and go check everything out. And they'll come
20 back and they'll give a good PIREP or a bad PIREP.

21 I mean, I don't want to speak for Jeff at the same time, but
22 that's how I've always felt. It's like, okay, well, who's going
23 to scout this time? And so he'll send -- we'll send Dave out some
24 days. Sometimes myself or Mike or, you know, like Trail Ridge
25 will do the same. But I feel like we -- amongst everyone on the

1 lake, we talk fairly well. And, I mean, if you see the Red Team
2 sitting there, a lot of times we'll get a questions, like, well --
3 at least I ask myself, well, if they're all sitting there, they're
4 usually going the same place, why are we thinking about kicking
5 off the dock? So I'll call over there. I don't want to speak for
6 Jeff, but I'll definitely have Tony call over and say why is
7 Rust's not going?

8 MR. CHENG: Yeah, I think -- I can think of a time when we
9 were supposed to go down to bear view and I was sitting -- we were
10 sitting there watching the cameras at Trading Bay, and, you know,
11 talking to the various lodges down there. And I don't know where
12 the information came from but we -- you know, that was just a
13 piece of the, piece of the puzzle. You know, we heard that Rust's
14 had cancelled their bear views for the day because of the winds,
15 that they were having winds. So that was just like another, you
16 know, nail on the coffin of, yeah, we're cancelling it today. You
17 know, I mean, so that's shared information.

18 In the air, I do that all the time, especially going around
19 corners, you know, corners or in the passes or something. You
20 know, we were going up -- today, going down to -- or the other day
21 when we were going into the range for the bear, or for the hunting
22 strips, has anyone gone through -- you know, has anyone gone past,
23 you know, Chignik Bay, or, how was, you know, if someone was
24 coming down Portage, how was Rainy Pass today? Oh, I haven't been
25 there in 30 minutes, but when I went through it was like this. I

1 mean, there's a lot of information sharing on the radio.

2 MR. BREEDIN: And we've all got each other's company
3 frequencies, too. I'm not trying to speak for Jeff at all,
4 either. I'm sorry to add, but I'll get on other companies'
5 frequencies and, say "Hey, where'd you guys just come from?" if I
6 pass someone.

7 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah, sure.

8 MR. BREEDIN: If they don't want to talk about it on 229, I
9 understand. You know, I don't want to have them tell the whole
10 world that they were maybe doing something marginal, or why they
11 turned around.

12 MR. YOUNGERS: Right. Right.

13 MR. BREEDIN: So, I mean, we're all given a fairly decent
14 amount of tools.

15 BY MR. HODGES:

16 Q. Then since the accident occurred, has there been anything
17 that you have kind of personally changed with how you fly and how
18 you do your duties here at the company?

19 A. No. I don't, I don't -- I can't think of anything.

20 Q. Okay. And then, you know, based off of your prior aviation
21 experience and then coming here to this company, are there any
22 safety improvements that you would like to see implemented here,
23 whether it's with operations or maintenance, the safety program
24 itself, anything that you've seen that you'd like to be
25 incorporated?

1 A. I can't think of anything.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Not that I can think of.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I should be able to think of something, but I -- I don't know
6 -- can't think of anything.

7 MR. HODGES: Does anyone else have any questions for Jeff at
8 all or --

9 MR. YOUNGERS: No.

10 MR. HODGES: Okay. Do you have any questions for us at all
11 or --

12 MR. CHENG: I don't.

13 MR. HODGES: Okay. All right, cool. We're good. We'll go
14 ahead and stop recording then.

15 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: REGAL AIR ACCIDENT NEAR PORT
ALSWORTH, ALASKA ON JULY 27, 2017
Interview of Jeff Cheng

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC17FA039

PLACE: Anchorage, Alaska

DATE: August 10, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Romona Phillips
Transcriber