



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

David B Banning
Senior Aircraft Accident Investigator
Alaskan Region

Date: July 11, 2018

Person Contacted: Mr. Mike Hudgins

Telephonic Interview: George Curtis, DO Taquan Air, Mike O'Conner, CP Taquan Air, Lana Boler, FAA, Marc Wilhelm, Attorney at Law pilot's representative.

NTSB Accident Number: ANC18FA053

Narrative:

During a telephone conversation conducted on July 11, Mr. Hudgins stated the following:

He was a former U.S. Navy pilot that completed training in 1971 and entered the jet pipeline earning his wings in April of 1973. He served 10 years on active duty and flew the A-3 in the reserves. He had about 5,000 flight hours with commuter airlines in Hawaii and had flown for Orion, Hawaiian, and Japan Air Charter. In addition, he had flown a float equipped de Havilland Beaver and Cessna 206 in Hawaii.

He held an airline transport pilot certificate with ratings for multi-engine land and multi-engine sea and held type ratings for the [Douglas] DC-8 and [Boeing] 747. Additionally, he held commercial pilot privileges for airplane single-engine land and single engine-sea. He also held a certified flight instructor certificate. He had accumulated about 27,000 total flight hours and about 306.8 hours in the de Havilland Otter.

This was his 4th year with Taquan Air. Prior to that, he had been with Promech for about 3 years. His duties as a Senior Pilot included the authority to perform some aspects of operational control; however, he had not been called on to perform those duties in his tenure with Taquan Air.

He said that on the day of the accident, he departed Steamboat Bay with 10 passengers and 2 suitcases. Everything seemed normal and the weather had improved a bit. He proceeded direct to Klawock and looked up the Big Salt Lake but determined that it was raining. He then looked up Harris River but couldn't see past the dogleg, so he continued south past Craig. The weather was

poor around [Port] St. Nick, so he continued around Waterfall Resort and south towards Hydaburg. The weather improved and Hydaburg was visible. He continued to Hydaburg and up the Hydaburg river; he encountered rain again west of Hetta Inlet. Knowing he wanted to be at 1,100 feet msl through Sulzer passage and the west arm of Chomly, he initiated a climb. Immediately after reaching the strait at 1,100 feet msl he encountered heavy rain and was unable to see past Sulzer passage. He turned right and initiated a climb. During the turn, he saw what he believed to be as water, and was momentarily disoriented and leveled the wings. Realizing it was snow and not water, he applied full power and initiated a climb. The airplane impacted Jumbo Mountain in a stalled condition.

He stated that after the impact, he and the passenger seated in the right front seat were uninjured and began to help the remaining passengers out of the aircraft. They congregated under the wings of the airplane, and he retrieved the first aid kit from the airplane. First aid was administered to those in need (one passenger with an injured foot) and emergency blankets were distributed to the passengers. He believed the emergency locator transmitter (ELT) was activated during the impact but he activated it again, in addition to activating his personal locator beacon (PLB). Two of the passengers had cell phones and were in contact with the Coast Guard and relayed the location of the accident (latitude and longitude). He chose not to turn on the airplane's master switch, due to the ruptured fuel tanks and his fear of igniting a fire. About 1 hour passed before he could hear the Coast Guard helicopter in the area. While they waited they were in and out of the clouds as the Coast Guard pinpointed their position. A Coast Guard crewman was lowered and walked to the accident scene and established a basket hoist location. One by one passengers were moved to this location and hoisted into the Coast Guard helicopter. He stated that he and the crewman were the last individuals to leave the accident scene.

When asked about the inflight visibility right before the accident, Mr. Hudgins stated that the inflight visibility rapidly decreased from 3-5 miles to almost nothing in about 2 to 3 seconds.

When asked about rest and fatigue, he stated that he was well rested had gone to bed about 2100 the night before the accident and awoke the next morning (day of the accident) about 0415, he was not suffering from a cold or illness and felt fine.

When asked about the Terrain Awareness and Warning System (TAWS), he stated that it was in the inhibit mode.

When asked about his fuel load he indicated that he left Steamboat Bay with about 90 gallons of fuel in the center tank and about 60 -70 gallons in the front tank. The rear tank was at or near empty. He recalled that he had about 120 gallons of fuel onboard when he passed Hydaburg.

He reported no mechanical issues or anomalies that would have precluded normal operation.

Inspector statement of Interview
Of N3952B Passenger Bob Price on
7/13/2018 at 11:45a

I asked Bob if he could relay his account of the flight beginning from waiting at the dock at Steamboat. Following is his statement:

He said he was out on the dock waiting for the plane and the fog was rolling in. I was concerned about getting out to catch our jet. I did take some pictures at the dock of the weather conditions at the time.

He was sitting on the pilots side of the airplane in front of the exit door. He pretty much saw fog most every time he looked out the window. Then I saw Waterfall Resort. He wondered what was going on. He said he looked down and saw a floatplane parked below just sitting on the water and he wondered why they weren't also parked on the water. He then got out his Iphone map and remember he thought he saw they were at or near Hetta inlet. He said then they went into a cloud, then I saw nothing but rock...very vibrant colors of rock. We hit within one second after I saw rock. I thought that he powered up the engine to over and we just hit. Then I flew up and hit my head and thought I broke my back. He wasn't sure how he could have hit his head because he had his seatbelt on, but that was his perception of what happened. He then said everyone was yelling and screaming. I asked everyone to please calm down and to get out because he smelled fuel...to get out even if they were hurt. I got Jack out, with help. Jeff [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I called 911. I asked the pilot where we were at...the pilot said at 2100 feet, but my phone said more like 2500'. He didn't know where we were so I could relay it to 911.

When I asked about the severity if his injuries, he said [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I thanked him for his time, and asked for an email, which he provided and wished him a full and speedy recovery.

Lana M. Boler

Aviation Safety Inspector

Interview of
Tom and Bette Hulbert – Passengers, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 1:00p

I had called on July 10 at 1:23p and got Tom Hulbert on the phone but he stated he had just gotten out of the hospital and was driving home so he said he would call back.

On July 11 at 1:30p, Mr. Hulbert called back and also had his wife Bette on speaker phone. He stated that he had [REDACTED] but would recover and was very thankful. He also disclosed he was a private pilot with a single engine airplane rating, but hadn't flown in several years.

I asked them to tell me everything about that flight beginning with waiting for the plane at Steamboat:

He stated everything at Steamboat was very well organized and coordinated with Waterfall Resort (Waterfall owns both lodges). He said they usually have 3 planes come in in 15 minute intervals to drop off new guests and pick up other guests to take back to Ketchikan to catch jets home. He said that on their flight there were two local women from Ketchikan, and the rest he thought were guests from out of town. He said they were advised the aircraft would be late into Steamboat due to weather issues. He said they eventually left at around 7:45a he thought. (They were supposed to leave at 6:30a). While at the dock, there was low fog, and he thought the weather was very marginal, but were told the weather in Ketchikan was clear at the time. The ceiling in the harbor at Steamboat he thought was low, but after they took off, he thought the ceilings went up to 1100' roughly.

He stated that his wife was seated behind the copilot seat on the right side, and he was seated behind her. This afforded him a good view of the pilots instrument panel. He said when they sat down in their seats, his wife noticed one of the fuel gages read empty so she questioned him. He looked and advised her he saw that two tanks were reading a little under full; roughly 50gal/100gal, and he thought the airplane consumed about 50 gal/hr so he figured they had plenty of gas for the 45 min flight back to Ketchikan. They both confirmed the pilot did give them a safety briefing, but thought the briefing was disjointed and out of sequence...not in an orderly manner. They said the pilot spoke very rapidly during the briefing.

He said once airborne, the visibility was barely VFR. He said they were flying below the ceiling, mostly at 1200 ft. He thought about halfway into the flight, the pilot did an interesting maneuver by turning around. He thought they would take the same route back to Ketchikan that they took to Steamboat, but now they were establishing a new flight path. At this point, both Mr. and Mrs. Hulbert felt that the pilot seemed disorientated. They both relayed that they thought something was going on with the pilot that he was disorientated. Mr. Hulbert said he could see water mostly below them, when they then

Interview of
Tom and Bette Hulbert – Passengers, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 1:00p

made a right turn...he didn't know to what heading. He said at that time the pilot throttled back. He figured they would then drop down near the water. Then they turned right again and he saw the mountain.

They both stated that the pilot was gripping the wheel and his knuckles were white, and he almost got up out of his seat to check on him. He decided not to because he didn't want to be out of his seat in case something should happen he didn't want to be without a seatbelt. He said then the pilot pulled the nose of the airplane up and added more power; as much as possible and then he felt that the pilot entered a power-on stall, flying upward in a parallel fashion with the mountain at about 20 ft. off the deck. He said the floats hit first, and the crevasse they hit helped lessen the blow, where the plane got lodged.

He said then everyone got out. They assessed everyone's injuries. One passenger, Mike Wallace, he thought [REDACTED] He said someone dialed 911. Tom said he asked Dave (Price) if he saw the pilot push the ELT button and he replied no. He said he mentioned it to the pilot who looked blank. About 45 min. after the crash the pilot told them he thought he was landing in water. He said that [REDACTED] [REDACTED] by the time the coast guard arrived. Dave Price and Bob manned the two local phones they had between them and they waited for the Coast Guard. He said the visibility on the mountain was zero/zero. They both were emphatic that the Coast Guard were really pro's—AMAZING!

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hulbert questioned if the pilot had had a stroke.

When questioned, Mr. Hulbert confirmed there was no question at times the pilot was flying in clouds/fog. He had to be south of the perceived straight line route between Steamboat and Ketchikan. He said the first turn they did was about 180 degrees, and the pilot was in/out of the weather. Sometimes he said he could only see clouds/fog, sometimes he could see water/land out his window.

Mr. Hulbert was amazed at the lack of instruments on the plane and no copilot. When questioned about whether the pilot had the Chelton screens (glass screens) on, he said the pilot did have the MFD's on and was constantly switching the range definition between 1 mile and 4 mile out on the screens during the flight.

I thanked them both and asked them if either of them had taken any pictures during their flight. They didn't know for sure, so they provided me an email and said they would send anything that they found. The interview then concluded.

Interview of
Tom and Bette Hulbert – Passengers, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 1:00p

Lana Boler

Aviation Safety Inspector

Interview of
Christine Newbill – Passenger, N3952B
July 12, 2018 at 12:15p

I attempted to contact Ms. Newbill, however, the number listed on the passenger manifest was not accepting messages and there was no answer. Through mutual friends, I was able to get her phone number and called and left a message.

Ms. Newbill (Chris) stated she was really stiff, but not as sore as the day before. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], but otherwise ok.

I asked her to recount the flight that day starting with waiting at the lodge, and the following is her statement:

She woke up at 5a. They needed to have their bags outside by 5:30a. At breakfast, the staff at Steamboat announced the planes would be delayed and they would provide updates. She said the weather at Steamboat that morning was coming/going. She said she had seen it worse, but it wasn't too bad. Then the planes arrived, but it was pretty foggy by then. The first plane took the luggage and a few passengers. Then her plane came to the dock. They loaded. It was still pretty foggy. She was a little bit concerned, but I felt they wouldn't be flying if it wasn't safe.

She said she took a photo during takeoff and another photo when they were over Klawock. The weather was not super great, and she thought the clouds in that area was low. She said then they flew from Klawock to Craig. Then she said they flew over Waterfall Resort, and she was concerned at that point. she tapped Ginny on her shoulder because I was sitting right behind her and gave her a look of concern. They exchanged looks of concern. Because she was looking at Ginny at that point, she didn't see what may have been out the window. She remembered looking at the guy seated across from her. At some point past Waterfall Resort, she saw some trees, so she knew they weren't over water anymore. They had probably been in the air about 35 minutes at that point. She said not long after that they hit the mountain. The mountain came out of the clouds and was just right there. I saw the pilot was pulling up and he may have revved the engine. There wasn't any time to brace, nothing was said from the pilot (no warning) and then we hit.

I also ended up taking two audio clips after the crash, while my phone was in my pocket. I didn't know I had done that. She said after they were on the mountain, the pilot said he had called 911. The "brothers" as they referred to two of the male passengers, said they could smell fuel, so they all got out of the airplane; they needed to get out.

She said she had taken photos over the communities they flew over and could email them to me. She provided me an email address so I could respond with mine.

Interview of
Christine Newbill – Passenger, N3952B
July 12, 2018 at 12:15p

I thanked her, and the interview concluded.

Lana Boler

Aviation Safety Inspector

Inspector statement of Interview
Of N3952B Passenger David Price on
7/13/2018 at 11:30a

I had left two messages for David Price to call me...the last one on July 13 at 9:30a. Both David and Bob called back on a conference call. They asked which one I would like to talk first, and I left it up to them. So David started and provided the following statement:

He said the night before the lodge updated them that the weather forecast for their departure the next morning could cause a departure delay but that they would be kept updated as time progressed. They said possibly wind and rain clouds. That morning he said it was raining and cloudy.

He said 6:30a came and went, so it obviously became a waiting game. Then we knew 3 different planes were coming. We were in group 2. We watched the plane in front of us take off after loading a few passengers and the baggage. We left roughly about 7:30a. I don't know exactly because my phone got left up on the mountain. He thought that they wouldn't take off if it was dangerous. We loaded up with very little baggage...a few fish boxes at 53# each and a few bags and backpacks. I took the co-pilots seat. After everybody was onboard, the pilot turned around in his seat and gave everyone a quick safety briefing, then we taxied out and took off looking to be heading the same direction that they came earlier.

He said sometimes the clouds were very thick. We went over the town of Klawock (unsure of pronunciation) and then he thought we did a 180 degree turn to the left and started going in a different direction, and not toward Ketchikan. It was at that point I pulled up my Apple map and started looking at it. We were making several twists and turns. I'm looking at the pilot and then at his gages. I could see that one of the fuel gages says that tank is empty, but another one had about ½ tank and another one was about ¾ full, so I thought fuel was not the issue. Now we are up and down and around the clouds. At this point I thought we were going either north or south following the coastline...looking for good air. I was getting uncomfortable, thinking they should just land on the water. I texted my friend (Jeff Chiero) and told him he wasn't sure what the pilots plan was. He then thought he was really glad they had a senior pilot, as indicated on his name tag. I honestly thought our pilot was in his 60's not 72 as I found out later. We were cruising along a few minutes later, and I see a huge mountain in front of us. He thought there was no way we had enough distance to climb up and over it...we needed a lot more miles to climb that much. Now I thought the pilot must have a passage through somewhere. The mountain was getting closer. Then we flew into a cloud, he pulls up on the power and pulls back on the yoke but we slammed into the mountain. Obviously he didn't have a valley or path he was planning to go through. If we had been 10 or 20 ft lower, we would be dead. We jammed into some boulders so we didn't go anywhere.

Inspector statement of Interview
Of N3952B Passenger David Price on
7/13/2018 at 11:30a

He then turned to the pilot and asked if he was ok...he said yes, and the pilot asked him the same...he said, yet. We looked back at everyone...announced it was time to get out. I looked out my door and it was a 6-7 ft. drop.

I sked David if he had talked to the pilot either before or during the flight? If he thought the pilot was acting normally. He stated he didn't think the pilot was acting abnormally like he was on drugs or alcohol or anything.

David then said that during about the last 15 minutes of the flight he purposely folded his arms up so he wouldn't act on any temptation to take over from the pilot (he had taken a few flight lessons in the past). He was frustrated that he didn't have a mic to talk to the pilot, nor did he ever see the pilots lips move like he was talking on the radio to anyone like ATC. He said he never saw the pilot select any radio buttons. He said the only time the pilot ever said anything was when they were passing over Waterfall Resort, he had looked over to him and mouthed "that's waterfall"...what he was expecting the pilot to say was "we are going to land there"...he kept thinking that the pilot must have a plan. At one point either just before or just after Waterfall Resort, I looked down and saw an airplane sitting on the water between two islands and I thought it was odd to be just sitting there. I figured they had landed to wait out the weather.

When I asked David to tell me if they flew into any other clouds during the flight, and to estimate the approximate amount of time he could not look down and see either land or water beneath him...just clouds/fog. He said there was definitely a small percentage of time when he couldn't see land or water out the front. He said the first 10-15 minutes of the flight was fine, after the 180 degree turn is when they started seeing more clouds/fog.

He said he was looking at the cockpit and wondering where the instruments were for instrument flying. He only recognized the small screen, maybe 4 inches in diameter, that didn't show our location but just the aircraft situation (attitude, etc).

He stated he saw the mountain at least a few minutes before they hit. He took a picture of the mountain right before they hit and a photo seconds before they went through the cloud followed by hitting the mountain. He didn't see the cloud before because he was looking out the side window. Then he looked forward, saw the cloud, then saw the mountain, then saw the pilot pulled up/added power, then they hit.

After we hit, my brother and I and the pilot handled taking care of folks. I was talking to 911, USCG, who was asking me where we were. I didn't know, so I kept asking the pilot, and he kept saying he didn't know. He didn't know the name of the mountain we were on. He also didn't seem to know how to use the flare. 911 asked me if anyone had

Inspector statement of Interview
Of N3952B Passenger David Price on
7/13/2018 at 11:30a

a personal locating beacon they could activate or if the planes beacon was activated...the pilot had a personal epiirb so when I asked (had been on the mountain about 30 min or so by that time), he activated it, but it only put off one ping after they confirmed his signal number. The pilot didn't know what direction we were facing so I couldn't tell 911. So he climbed up higher and could see a lake below. So he got out his Apple map and identified the lake as Lake Josephine...which is what he told 911/USCG. He also gave them the coordinates from his compass on his phone. Eventually the pilot got into the airplane and started talking on the radio, which he was talking to the USCG on his phone. He yelled at the pilot multiple times questioning who he was talking to, but the pilot did not respond. Finally the USCG asked him to ask the pilot what frequency he was talking on...the pilot did respond with that, so the USCG was able to tune to that frequency. He noted the pilot fell several times while on the mountain because it was so slippery...but each time he got up and kept checking on everyone.

I then asked him to provide an email so I could send him a follow up email. I also asked him what injuries he had incurred...he said thankfully [REDACTED]

I thanked him for his valuable information, and told him I hoped he felt better soon, and ended our conversation.

Lana M. Boler

Aviation Safety Inspector

Interview of
Ginny Eiseman – Passenger, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 2:15p

I attempted to contact Ginny Eiseman via phone at 1:00p and left a message and sent a follow up text. At 2:15p, she returned my call. Below is my account of that conversation:

I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my call. She confirmed she was on the Taquan flight on Tuesday morning from SteamBoat Bay that was involved in the accident. She stated she was seated directly behind the pilot on the flight.

She stated the plane was delayed they were told due to weather. They were supposed to leave at 6:30a. After the plane arrived, they loaded onto the airplane at Steamboat, she stated they did receive a safety briefing from the pilot who talked about the emergency exits, fire extinguisher locations, etc. She stated the pilot seemed fine. The takeoff was good, the engine sounded good, and there were no unusual vibrations. She said she then saw Klawock and then what she thought was Craig. She texted her husband in the air where she thought they were going. She then saw Waterfall Resort below them, even though there was a ton of fog. At that point she wanted to land, but did not know how to tell the pilot. She then saw what she thought was Hydaburg. Then she saw trees, but really couldn't see out the front well because she was right behind the pilot. Then she saw the mountain and green, and the engine got really loud...with only a few seconds before they crashed. When asked, she said land or water below them, but there was fog around the whole flight.

She was aware that she [REDACTED] [REDACTED] from hitting the bulkhead in front of her. She got out of the aircraft with everyone else. She sent a text to her husband to call the troopers that they had crashed. After some time, she said they could hear the rescue helicopter, but then she got a text saying the helicopter couldn't find them. She asked the pilot if the ELT was activated. He went back to the plane and pushed a button on the panel. Shortly after she got another text saying they picked up their signal and the helicopter arrived.

Visibility on the mountain was not much more than 60 ft.

She stated the pilot didn't say anything before we crashed, and afterwards she heard him say something but she couldn't remember what...she believed he stated he thought he saw water.

I asked her if she had taken any photos before or during the flight and requested she email them. She gave me her email address to send her a follow up email to request any information she had from that flight.

Interview of
Ginny Eiseman – Passenger, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 2:15p

Lana Boler

Aviation Safety Inspector

Interview of
Jeff Chiero – Passenger, N3952B
July 11, 2018 at 1:45p

I attempted to contact Jeff Chiero via phone at 1:20p and left a message. At 1:45p, he returned my call. Below is my account of that conversation:

I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my call. He confirmed he was on the Taquan flight on Tuesday morning from SteamBoat Bay that was involved in the accident. He stated he was seated in the back on the right side, second to the last seat. He buddy, David Price, was seated in the front co-pilot seat.

After they loaded onto the airplane at Steamboat, he stated he did not believe they received a safety briefing from the pilot. He said the weather at Steamboat was rain and low ceilings and admitted he was concerned. During the flight he said he could look down and occasionally see land or water, but sometimes he couldn't. He stated there was consistent fog serious fog all around. He stated he recognized they were over Waterfall Resort and got very concerned they were going the wrong way (not toward Ketchikan) so he texted his buddy, David, and asked him to ask the pilot to land and wait it out. He then said he didn't see the mountain until we were right on it. He said he saw the pilot add quick throttle, and do something else which he couldn't see, and then they hit.

Ultimately, he said he didn't like the prospects of the flight when they left.

I requested an email address, which he provided, so I could provide a follow up email back to him on our conversation, and requested a written statement of his experiences, along with any photographs he may have taken while at the dock or on the flight.

Lana Boler
Aviation Safety Inspector