

Group Chairman's Factual Report – Attachment 1
Interview Summaries

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

ANC19LA031

Interviewee: Alexander Nurdning (AW)
Representative: David McCann; Serco NA Director of Aviation

Date / Time: July 31, 2019 / 0815 AKDT
Location: Bethel ATCT; Telephonically
Present: Noreen Price, Jason Kufta
Investigator: Charles Olvis

During the interview Mr. Nurdning stated the following:

Mr. Alexander Nurdning began working for Serco NA reporting to Bethel ATCT in December 2018. He had received his air traffic control training at Advanced Air Traffic Control (AATC) located at Wiregrass Georgia Technical College in Valdosta, Georgia. After successfully completing the control tower training course in August 2018, Mr. Nurdning received a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Control Towers Operators (CTO) certificate for Valdosta Regional Airport (VLD) VLD. After obtaining his CTO, Mr. Nurdning maintained proficiency at VLD, by working 16 hours per month. He maintained proficiency at VLD until October 2018 when he was notified that he would be hired by Serco NA. While working on his proficiency at VLD, Mr. Nurdning was hired as a remote pilot operator (RPO) at the FAA's Southern California TRACON for air traffic control simulations.

Mr. Nurdning was qualified on all operating positions at BET; however, he was not designated as a Controller in Charge (CIC). He held no other current aeronautical certifications, and his ATC medical was current with a restriction for eyeglasses which he reported to be wearing on the date of the accident.

Mr. Nurdning's regular days off (RDOs) were Sunday and Wednesday. On Mondays he would work a 0900 to 1900 shift, on Tuesdays he would work a 0900 to 1700, on Thursdays he would work a 0900 to 1700 shift, on Fridays he would work a 0900 to 1900 shift, and on Saturdays he would work a 0900 to 1900 shift. Mr. Nurdning reported that his overtime was routine and scheduled. The accident occurred on Monday July 8, 2019 during a regularly scheduled 0900 to 1900 shift.

On Saturday July 6, 2019, Mr. Nurdning reported that he had worked a 10-hour shift from 0900 to 1900 and then went home. He reported that he did not remember particulars of that day, but that he would routinely go home after work and make some dinner. Since Sundays were a day off, he would spend the evening playing video games or watching television until 1 to 2 a.m. and would then go to bed.

On Sunday July 7, 2019, Mr. Nurdning remembered that he and his roommates were moving, and he spent the day taking things to his new house. He said that he finished moving and went to bed about 2300.

On Monday July 8, 2019, he woke up at about 0730 and ate breakfast. He remembered arriving to work and that it was very hazy and very hot; he believed it was one of the hottest days on record. He thought the haze was associated with fires on the tundra but was not certain and

added it was not particularly easy to see aircraft. He arrived in the tower cab at about 0900 and relieved another controller. Mr. Nurdning said they usually worked position for one hour before getting relief. After assuming the LC position and before the accident, Mr. Nurdning said that N7AV had called from the southwest and was ahead of all the inbound aircraft. It was most expeditious to take N7AV to runway 1L.

Mr. Nurdning said there was another aircraft inbound from the southeast and that because of a possible tie runway 1L with N617AV, he sequenced the trailing aircraft to runway 1R. He remembered another aircraft inbound behind N617AV from the southwest, so he sequenced that aircraft to follow N7AV to runway 1L.

Mr. Nurdning remembered that when N9448B contacted him for landing, he wanted to land the aircraft on runway 1L. However, the pilot advised he could accept runway 12, and the second aircraft behind N7AV was close in trail so he issued the pilot of N9448B runway 12.

Instead of flying straight to the runway, Mr. Nurdning remembered N617AV was flying eastbound toward Bethel. He had originally thought N617AV would be first in the sequence to the airport, however, he changed the sequence and would be landing N9448B first on runway 12. Following N9448B would be N617AV on runway 1L followed by another C208 on runway 1L. Mr. Nurdning issued the pilot of N9448B the wind and cleared the pilot to land on runway 12. When the pilot of N9448B was about 1 mile from the runway, he called Bethel ATCT and verified that he was cleared to land on runway 12.

After setting the sequence to land, Mr. Nurdning had been intently watching N9448B landing on Runway 12 due to traffic taxiing on Taxiway "Charlie" southbound. Mr. Nurdning and the Ground Controller were trying to decide if they needed to hold the taxiing aircraft on "Charlie" short of runway 12 should N9448B not exit runway 12 on taxiway "Echo". Mr. Nurdning said it appeared N9448B was coming in "very quick" and he was worried the aircraft would not exit the runway by taxiway "Echo"

N9448B touched down on Runway 12 briefly about one third to one half of the way down the runway before becoming airborne again. Mr. Nurdning said that the pilot did not appear to be in control of the aircraft. As N9448B became airborne, the airplane banked to the right. He believed N9448B was initiating a go-around and was turning right to go head on with N617AV landing runway 1L. As the aircraft had banked right, Mr. Nurdning instructed the pilot of N9448B to turn left immediately. After N9448B had started the go around maneuver, Mr. Nurdning believed that he had observed the aircraft settle back down onto runway 1L and then start a climbing right turn again. Mr. Nurdning started to yell "turn left" on the frequency and then stopped when he observed the aircraft crashing on the right side of runway 1L. Mr. Nurdning said that N617AV landed on runway 1L because he did not have time to issue the go-around. The other aircraft sequenced for Runway 1L and 1R were instructed to exit the Bethel Class D airspace, and the airport closed to deal with the accident.

Mr. Nurdning said the facility had experienced issues with the "crash phone" all day and that when dialing out it just kept ringing with no answer. However, crash fire and rescue did respond to the accident.

At the beginning of the go around maneuver, when the pilot of N9448B had keyed the transmitter and began talking, Mr. Nurdning had “stepped” on the frequency in a rush to stop the pilot from turning right. Mr. Nurdning said that he was now aware that the pilot could not hear his transmissions if the pilot were still keyed up on the frequency. Mr. Nurdning said that while he did not hear specifically who said they were going around, he felt it most likely the pilot of N9448B.

Mr. Nurdning said there were no standard go around procedures outlined in the SOP, but noted a left turn is not a normal go-around procedure for Runway 12; however, he reiterated that he issued a left turn because it appeared the N9448B was turning right. He added that he had only seen two general aviation aircraft go around on runway 12, both in the winter and due to icy conditions, and that he had never seen an air taxi go around.

The Bethel ATCT is equipped with a Certified Tower Display that displays ADSB targets for the controller to use for situational awareness. He added that he had not undergone radar training. Mr. Nurdning said that all the aircraft involved during the accident sequence had ADSB displayed.

The local control position faces due east, and that controller would need to turn about 135 degrees to the left to see the approach end of Runway 12. To see runway 1L, controllers would look to the right.

Mr. Nurdning said he enjoys being at BET and likes the community. He said he has a good living environment and enjoys his roommates.

Interview concluded at 0920 AKDT.

Interviewee: John Thatcher (WT)

Representative: David McCann; Serco NA Director of Aviation

Date / Time: July 31, 2019 / 1000 AKDT

Location: Bethel ATCT; Telephonically

Present: Noreen Price, Jason Kufta

Investigator: Charles Olvis

During the interview Mr. Thatcher stated the following:

Mr. John Thatcher began working for Serco NA reporting to Bethel ATCT in April 2003. In June of 2006 Mr. Thatcher transferred to Kodiak Airport, Kodiak, Alaska (ADQ). In April 2014, Mr. Thatcher transferred back to Bethel Alaska where he has remained. He had received his air traffic control training with the United States Navy. He joined the Navy in April 1998 and was stationed at Corpus Christi Naval Air Station/Truax Field (NGP). In December 2001, he was transferred to Naval Air Station Diego Garcia until he left the Navy in April 2003. He has received three CTO's, NGP, Waldron Field NOLF (NWL), and Cabaniss Field Naval Outlying Field (NGW).

Mr. Thatcher was qualified on all operating positions at BET, was designated as a CIC, and was the Air Traffic Manager. His medical was current with a restriction to wear eyeglasses and he reported that he was wearing them during the accident. He held a commercial pilots license and was a certified flight instructor and certified instrument instructor. His pilot's license was current although he reported that he did not fly often.

Mr. Thatcher's regular days off (RDOs) were Saturday and Sunday. On Mondays he would work a 1215 to 2215 shift, on Tuesdays he would work a 0900 to 1900 shift, on Wednesdays he would work a 0900 to 1700 shift, Thursdays he would work a 0645 to 1645 shift, and on Fridays he would work a 0645 to 1445 shift. Mr. Thatcher reported that his overtime was routine and scheduled and that he would sometimes work an overtime shift on Sunday's. The accident occurred on Monday July 8, 2019 during a regularly scheduled 1215 to 2215 shift.

Mr. Thatcher said that on July 8, 2019, the weather was hazy in the area but did not impact visibility. He said it was a good visual flight rules (VFR) day and that traffic had been busy, characterizing it as a "busy push". Mr. Nurdning had been on position for about 15 minutes and Mr. Thatcher reported Ground Control (GC) had been busy as well.

Mr. Thatcher said that he had seen the whole accident sequence from "start to finish". Mr. Thatcher said that he had an aircraft taxiing out to runway 1L via taxiway Charlie. He knew N9448B was sequenced to land runway 12 and was worried about a possible issue with the taxiing aircraft if N9448B did not exit by taxiway Echo. Mr. Thatcher prompted Mr. Nurdning to plan on N9448B exiting at Echo since that is what usually happened on that runway.

Mr. Thatcher was watching N9448B land on runway 12 to ensure the aircraft could exit on Echo. He stated N9448B was high and unusually fast over the landing threshold for runway 12. He said he thought the pilot may try and force the aircraft down on the runway. The aircraft touched down halfway down runway 12, and it became evident that the aircraft would not be able to make taxiway Echo. The aircraft "appeared" to try and stop but was going too fast and it became obvious the pilot was going around. He observed the nose gear come down and then the pilot pulled it off the ground. Mr. Thatcher said the aircraft had bled off a lot of airspeed during the attempted landing. Mr. Thatcher stated N617AV landing on runway 1L was never a conflict with N9448B going around and that there was plenty of room.

N9448B was not climbing fast and exhibited a flat climb out profile. Mr. Thatcher reported that he did not hear the engine power up. He said the high temperatures had forced them to have the hatch in the tower cab open which enabled them to hear aircraft engines very well; he said that he never heard the engine power advance during the go around maneuver. Mr. Thatcher said he knew something was happening; the aircraft was over the departure end chevrons for runway 12 very low. He said it appeared the pilot "touched down" on runway 1L briefly and then started climbing in a nose high attitude. As the aircraft started turning right in a climb, Mr. Thatcher could see the entire surface of the wing. The aircraft banked right, and Mr. Nurdning responded with instruction to turn left. Mr. Thatcher heard Mr. Nurdning again start to instruct the pilot to turn left when Mr. Thatcher told him to stop that the plane was crashing. Mr. Thatcher knew the aircraft was stalling and did not think Mr. Nurdning knew that. Mr. Thatcher picked up the crash phone and immediately called for another controller to come to the tower cab.

During the transmission to instruct the pilot to turn left there was audible gasp on the recording. Mr. Thatcher felt like it was him making the gasp. He reported that he did not hear the initial attempt by the pilot to advise he was going around. Mr. Thatcher did state that the aircraft was already past runway 1L when he heard Mr. Nurdin first instruct the pilot to turn left.

Mr. Thatcher said go around on runway 12 are very rare. He said that even with the hot temperatures, there had not been any performance issues from other aircraft.

Mr. Thatcher was responsible for training at BET. He stated new hires go through an indoctrination where they review company processes, obtain all their passwords, and other administrative tasks. Before any controller begins on the job training (OJT), they complete position tests and then conduct familiarization time before beginning actual training. The allotted time to train on LC at BET is 72 hours.

Mr. Nurdin followed established training processes with Mr. Thatcher as the primary instructor. There would be other controllers who trained Mr. Nurdin from time to time though. Mr. Thatcher said that Mr. Nurdin had used all the allotted training time on the LC position and characterized him as "average" for his experience level. Once Mr. Nurdin had completed training on LC, an FAA CTO examiner from Anchorage was requested. Mr. Thatcher said he never knew who it would be until they showed up. He stated Mr. Nurdin qualified to work the LC position under general supervision and obtained his CTO.

Mr. Thatcher said that BET has staffing issues. Turnover is high with a lot of the younger controllers applying to the FAA and leaving. Most of the new hires at BET are younger controllers.

Interview concluded at 1044 AKDT