

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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CESSNA 185 CRASH, BERING LAND

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BRIDGE NATIONAL PRESERVE, ALASKA

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APRIL 15, 2019

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Interview of: RICK DOLAN
PilotWednesday,
April 17, 2019

APPEARANCES:

NOREEN PRICE, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JEFF BABCOCK, Regional Aviation Manager
National Park Service

JOHN MILLS, Air Safety Investigator
Office of Aviation Services
Department of the Interior

ERIC BENSON
(Representative on behalf of Mr. Dolan)

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I N T E R V I E W

MS. PRICE: Okay. It's April 17th. We're here interviewing a pilot in accident ANC19TA017.

And if you would, Rick, could you spell your name and give me your date of birth?

MR. DOLAN: R-i-c-h-a-r-d, P-a-t-r-i-c-k, D-o-l-a-n; Richard Patrick Dolan. December 17, 1958.

MS. PRICE: Okay. Great. Thank you.

And you have the opportunity to have somebody present with you today. Who did you choose to have present at the interview?

MR. DOLAN: I chose to have Eric Benson present.

MS. PRICE: Great. And Eric, can you spell your first and last name?

MR. BENSON: It is E-r-i-c, B-e-n-s-o-n.

MS. PRICE: Okay. Great. Thank you.

And present as well is myself, Noreen Price, investigator in charge, Jeff Babcock -- what's your title and position?

MR. BABCOCK: The regional aviation manager, National Park Service.

MS. PRICE: And John, can you introduce yourself and say your position?

MR. MILLS: Yes. This is John Mills with Office of Aviation Services, air safety investigator for DOI.

MS. PRICE: Great. Thank you.

Okay. We're going to start with the accident itself. I just

1 want you to relax and give us as much detail as you can. What I'd
2 like you to do is first state the purpose of the flight, and then
3 just take me from takeoff through rescue in as much detail as you
4 can remember. You'd be surprised at what kind of details we like
5 to hear about an event of a flight.

6 After we talk about that, we're going to go back and we'll
7 fill in some of the administrative blanks and other details
8 regarding pre-flight, training, and questions like that, and I'll
9 also allow you guys to ask questions as well. So every now and
10 then we'll take a break and pass questions along. So, Jeff,
11 you'll be second and, John, you'll be third to ask questions. If
12 you need a break just say so.

13 INTERVIEW OF RICK DOLAN

14 MS. PRICE:

15 Q. So let's start by saying the purpose and then tell me about
16 the flight.

17 A. The purpose of the flight was to fly from Kotzebue to Nome to
18 pick up two passengers: Jeanette Koelsch, the superintendent of
19 the Bering Land Bridge National Park and Preserve, and Leddy
20 Hughes, and transport them to Shishmaref for a town meeting. The
21 meeting was to be at 1300, and then I would remain there and take
22 them back to Nome, and then I was intending to remain overnight at
23 Nome. That was the purpose of that flight.

24 Q. Okay. And then what time did you take off?

25 A. I took off right at 8 o'clock. I believe that I pushed the

1 throttle forward on runway 1-8 at Kotzebue at 8:03.

2 Q. Okay. Go ahead and continue with as much as you can
3 remember.

4 A. Well, I had a right quartering tailwind at takeoff. The wind
5 was reported out of 3-3-0 at, I believe it was 10 knots or
6 something like that, and departed directly south. I climbed to
7 about 1500 feet and saw that I had ice in the bay still, and so I
8 contoured the ice, meaning that I stayed where I could make it to
9 what I knew was land-able ice rather than staying over the
10 peninsula, which was hard to make out anyway. Well, I could have
11 with my GPS, but I was trying to cut some time off because I was
12 pushing the time to get there and be able to do the mission.

13 I ended up crossing ice and then crossing about 6 or 7 miles
14 of water, which was more than I was really comfortable with, but I
15 was more than halfway across it before I became uncomfortable and
16 realized it was more water than I thought was going to be there.
17 I think I made landfall again somewhere around the Sullivan
18 Cliffs, I think they're called. And I checked -- I had been asked
19 earlier to try and overfly Serpentine Hot Springs and Kort's (ph.)
20 Creek to evaluate those places because there were projects that
21 were open to base out of there. And also our law enforcement
22 ranger needed to get into Serpentine Hot Springs because there had
23 been a report of violations out there involving sales of drugs.

24 I just intended to overfly and evaluate it. So I checked my
25 GPS to see how much it was going to add to my flight to deviate to

1 the west a little bit. It ended up being 4 minutes. And so I put
2 intersection CIVED into the main navigation GPS in the aircraft,
3 and I have Serpentine Hot Springs marked in my Garmin 296 and I
4 put that in there. Those are almost co-located. They just happen
5 to be. And I made a turn to there, and I had familiar landmarks.
6 I had been flying at about 17- or 1800 MSL and I was -- got to a
7 ridgeline that's north of the Serpentine bowl, the TORS area and
8 felt that I was pretty well oriented and the -- I made a scan and
9 saw that I was about 8.3 miles from Serpentine Hot Springs.

10 And then I saw that there was weather to the north and my
11 ridgeline was going away, and I looked down to make that -- make
12 sure that I had in fact put CIVED in my main navigation unit. And
13 I was thinking the last 2 minutes before I reached that point that
14 -- I was thinking about, you know, I'm going to just turn around
15 and go back to Kotzebue or maybe just Deering or something because
16 the weather was deteriorating rapidly. And when I looked back up
17 from making sure that CIVED was in the big Garmin in the airplane,
18 it was white and I was in the cloud. And I was disoriented
19 because I wasn't -- I did not really believe I was that close to
20 penetrating when I looked down or I would not have looked down.

21 And I quickly looked at my gauges. I was wings level. And I
22 started a right-hand turn, and as soon as I started that right-
23 hand turn I thought, no, you don't want to turn right; that's the
24 rising terrain. There's lower terrain to the left. And then I
25 impacted and I don't remember what happened after that until I

1 came to, and it had -- I don't know how long it was because it
2 ended up being quite a while before I checked my watch.

3 But I was upside down in the aircraft hanging in the shoulder
4 strap and I was bleeding from the face and -- so I thought, well,
5 I got to get out of this aircraft. And I reached for my buckle
6 and I stopped, because I remembered in a couple of training
7 sessions that I was told, you know, if you're upside down and you
8 release, that you're going to hurt yourself if you fall on your
9 head. So I stopped and, I don't -- I didn't count 1, 2, 3, but I
10 stopped and said, okay, just a second. And then I put my hand up
11 to where I could touch the overhead panel, and then I released it.
12 And sure enough, it was a lot of force when I got out of the seat
13 but I didn't get hurt.

14 So I'm sitting on the ceiling in front of the back of the
15 seat and was just kind of dazed, and I thought, I got to make sure
16 the aircraft is turned off. So I had to move the seat, look back,
17 and I reached up and I pulled the firewall fuel valve knob out,
18 and then I reached forward and turned the master power off. And I
19 stopped there and I thought, you probably didn't need to turn the
20 fuel valve off because the airplane's upside down and it's mostly
21 gravity fed. But I just stopped and thought about that, and then
22 I went across and turned the ignition off and turned -- so then I
23 -- it was some time I was just sitting there. I don't know how
24 long. But then I started getting out of the aircraft.

25 I went out the pilot's door. I had a pretty hard time

1 getting to the handle to get the door open because this -- I fly
2 with the seat almost all the way forward. I'm not a very tall
3 person. I had to climb underneath the seatback to get to where I
4 could get the handle because the seatback was right against the
5 handle. But I got the door open. Had to push a little bit
6 because the snow was stacked up beside it, but it opened
7 relatively easy compared to what I thought it would, but I did
8 have to push on it. I got in the back before I went out and I
9 grabbed the tent. First thing on my mind was to get shelter
10 because I crashed because I was in a snowstorm and made poor
11 decisions to get there, but --

12 So I got the tent out and I put it out the door and -- I'm
13 trying to remember what else I pulled out. I untied -- I had a
14 Honda E-2000 generator, and I untied that from the back and
15 brought it out and set it outside the door. And then I was
16 holding the tent and -- I don't know what the wind was but it was
17 15 miles per hour or more, and I thought, well, I'm not going to
18 be able to set a tent up in this. So I put the tent and the
19 generator back inside and then I just sat down on the overhead in
20 the back and was just kind of thinking for a while.

21 I -- before I put the generator and stuff -- before I went up
22 and I turned the master -- I pulled the circuit breakers. I
23 wanted to see if the sat phone would work. So I pulled the
24 circuit breakers that I thought I needed to for it to -- it's
25 permanently installed in the aircraft, so I needed the audio panel

1 and I needed the PTA-12. And I pulled other things and I turned
2 it on, and something came on that I didn't want on. The Garmin
3 nav came on, and I just went ahead and I tried to call and I got
4 through to Denali dispatch.

5 I think what I heard come back was Jessica and I tried to --
6 I just told her, "Hey, I have crashed the airplane and the
7 airplane is destroyed and I think I'm okay but I'm bleeding and
8 I've got some injuries to my face." And it worked pretty good for
9 20, 30 seconds, and then she started having trouble hearing me and
10 I her. So then I put the generator and the tent back and I got in
11 and sat down. So I had done that. I called Denali dispatch
12 before I put the generator back in the aircraft and the tent.

13 And then after sitting there for a while, I was thinking
14 about -- okay, looking out at the wing, it's all white, and I
15 thought, you know, if a search does start they're going to have a
16 really hard time seeing this. So I took the -- I had been keeping
17 the engine cowling cover in the pod in the belly of the aircraft,
18 and part of the pod was ripped off and the door was gone. But I
19 had seen it getting back in and I just thought, you know, that
20 orange side of that thing would be visible.

21 So I climbed out and I took the tent -- I opened the tent up
22 while I was in the aircraft and I took the fly which seemed like
23 the most visible thing. It's yellow, bright yellow. So I took
24 that tent fly and set it by the door. And then I took the engine
25 cover and looked for a place to set it out. And there was -- the

1 left wing was upside down about 30 yards behind the aircraft with
2 the strut sticking straight up in the air and I thought that looks
3 like a flagpole sticking up. So I went and tied it to that strut
4 and turned it so that the orange side was out, and then I went
5 back and I got the tent fly and I tied it to the tailwheel, which
6 was now sticking up in the air. And then I got back in and I got
7 into my -- I travel around with down bibs and jacket, and I got
8 into my polar gear and then I warmed up.

9 It was then, after I had my polar gear on, that I looked at
10 my watch and it was about 10:30, I think, or 10 o'clock. I don't
11 remember it, but I knew that, you know, at least an hour had
12 passed. And then I just sat there and thought about how bad of a
13 thing I just done for another while. And then I -- that wasn't a
14 long while, though, maybe -- it was before 11 o'clock because I
15 looked and then I got up and then, okay, inventory. What do you
16 have? And I pulled the net of the first aid kit out of the back
17 and I pulled the camping emergency supply kit out of the back. I
18 opened the first aid kit and I didn't see anything that would
19 obviously help me. I had my own bandages and stuff in my kit that
20 I keep in my pocket. I ended up finding a Canopy wipe, a clean
21 one, and I tore it, and I had to stick it up in this area. And I
22 taped it with tape that I usually use on my foot for my bunions,
23 but it kept it on there and stopped blood from spilling all over.
24 It wasn't a huge amount of blood. It was just kind of constant
25 and irritating, but --

1 So I inventoried the kit. I thought about at that time that
2 I probably had -- could have a concussion and so I'm going to try
3 and stay awake if I can at all. And I got -- I have -- because I
4 was going to Nome and I was going to spend the night in the
5 bunkhouse, I had an old Coleman sleeping bag that I use instead of
6 using people's sheets and stuff, and so I pulled that out with my
7 parachute bag. I also had a down pillow in my parachute bag, just
8 very comfortable while I was thinking about things. But I laid my
9 Coleman bag down and -- am I going into far too much detail or
10 should I just go on --

11 Q. No, it's okay. No, you should not, you're good. No. It's
12 all right.

13 A. And I --

14 Q. The survival aspects of the accident are very important, too.

15 A. Yeah, but I don't want to get off track if I am.

16 Q. No, you're fine.

17 A. So I had two Wiggy's that were vacuum sealed that I was
18 taking because I was going to be taking passengers, and I opened
19 one of those and I climbed inside that and warmed up. And that
20 worked well because I was thinking more clearly then. And then I
21 got -- in my helmet bag I had a handheld Sporty's SP-400. And I
22 heard an airplane go over and I thought, oh, you've got a VHF
23 handheld, you know, if you hear an airplane, got to try and
24 contact. So then I had it out and the next airplane I heard go
25 over happened to be a Bering Air Caravan, and I just tried on

1 122.9 and he came right back and apparently they had asked him to
2 deviate just a little to see if he could overfly the site. And he
3 did, and he said, no way nobody's going to get down there right
4 now; nasty weather. And I said, yeah, I know, but -- I didn't say
5 this but it was really good to hear his voice and confirm that
6 somebody knew I was still there. Yeah.

7 And he said -- it was a few seconds and I thought, okay,
8 that's over, and I was going to turn the radio off but a few
9 seconds later he said, hey, they're getting people moving to come
10 and get you. If all else fails, they've got a crew from
11 Shishmaref that are going to come out there in snow machines if
12 they have to, if the weather doesn't clear enough to get in there.

13 And so then I turned the radio off and I rummaged through
14 stuff again, and I actually opened up the bag and the survival
15 equipment that had the signaling devices in it and I read the
16 flare procedures and I checked the flashlight to find out that the
17 batteries didn't work, in my bag that I put together. So after a
18 year, the batteries got to come out and be replaced. The strobe
19 light did work, and I thought, well, you know, typical weather
20 around here it gets better at night and a strobe light would be
21 nice to have.

22 I got back in the sleeping bag. I got out once to use the
23 restroom, and while I was out there I kind of saw the debris field
24 that I left. And then later on when I was back in the airplane, I
25 put together in my mind what I most likely had done when I

1 impacted. I'll let experts tell me what really did later but I
2 have an idea.

3 I was trying to stay awake but, you know, I was probably
4 resting, but I don't know. But I was trying hard to count the
5 inspection covers from the back of the pilot and co-pilot seat
6 back to the baggage area, and there are 17 of them. And it kind
7 of brought me out, but I thought, okay, I hear big turbines and
8 props and it was gone.

9 And when it was really -- because that woke me up; I looked
10 at my watch. I think it was about 12-ish, and then I heard a P-3
11 go overhead and I said, wow, okay, the only reason a P-3 would be
12 out here is because of you, you dummy. So I got the radio out and
13 I tried them and they came back. They were an Air Force rescue
14 unit and they told me that they knew exactly where -- we know
15 exactly where you are but we cannot get to you. The helo has been
16 in and out of there a couple of times and it's just too bad.

17 They got -- the helos -- they said the helos going back, and
18 my transmission started breaking up, and the lady at the radio in
19 the P-3 said they got to go back and refuel. I want you to turn
20 your radio off and try to conserve your battery and we'll come
21 back on. It wasn't 12 when we did that; it was later. I don't
22 remember. But she said turn your radio back on at 1600, so maybe
23 it was 1500, not 12.

24 But the first instruction was turn your radio back on at
25 1600. They'll be back with a load of fuel. I did that, and I was

1 having trouble -- and incidentally, I had put fresh batteries in
2 this radio which is here with me, but they're alkaline batteries
3 and they were cold, and so I started putting the radio in the
4 jacket after I realized my next mistake. And I saw -- this is
5 much earlier, but I saw that my water was freezing, which was
6 actually water with Crystal Light in it, but -- so I put that in
7 my jacket, too.

8 So the next thing was -- so it was quite a while, at 1600
9 radio on, trouble with them receiving me but I was receiving them
10 fine. It had just -- it takes more power to transmit. I know
11 that. Said, okay, they had been on station again for a while and
12 they got to go back for fuel again, turn it on again at 1630. I
13 turned it on again at 1630 and I heard the helo in the area. I
14 don't know exactly what time, but I heard it so close that I
15 thought, oh, I hope they're not coming up here. And I leaned
16 forward and to the left, which had me looking out the right side
17 of the aircraft looking up, and I saw the helo go by. Of course,
18 they're doing 70 knots or something like that. I don't know
19 exactly, but they had their lights on and eyes out the windows and
20 I saw them. The Cessna is like this and they went back along like
21 that, and I just thought there's no way they couldn't see me; I
22 just saw them, but -- yeah, exactly.

23 But they had seen me. And then they went down and it was a
24 few minutes, not very long, but maybe half hour, but I heard the
25 helo just working the south side of the hill. And I was in my bag

1 and I thought, well, you know, maybe they're just going to shut
2 down and conserve fuel; they know where I am, and the weather
3 clears and then they get me. But what they did was the PJ hiked
4 up the hill, and I heard a voice and it was something like, "Sir,
5 you up there?" So I opened the door and sure enough there's a PJ
6 in a yellow vest.

7 And I probably left out a lot of things, but I don't
8 remember.

9 Q. And they were -- you were able to walk to the helicopter?

10 A. I did. I walked down to the helo, which it was kind of weird
11 because we went down for quite a ways. He said we got about 300
12 in this direction and then we got to go over here, and we went
13 300. All I saw was cloud, and it looked to me like 50 meters of
14 visibility. And walking along, and then all of a sudden I saw a
15 helo down there and he says, yep, that's it. And then we walked
16 into the cloud again and it just -- not only did the helo go away
17 but the sound of the helo went away.

18 And then he said, okay, we got to make a right here, and then
19 I saw the helo there. Of course, I'm disoriented. That's what
20 caused this. But I thought we went 45 degrees, because we were
21 going downhill and then we were traversing and sliding to
22 traverse. But then the helo was over there, but -- we got to it
23 and it was on the most incredible precipice that I've seen a helo
24 land on, and I've landed on some myself.

25 But can I ask him to -- can we pause it for a second?

1 MS. PRICE: Sure.

2 (Off the record.)

3 (On the record.)

4 MS. PRICE: Okay. The recording is back on so thank you,
5 Rick. That was an amazing story.

6 MS. PRICE:

7 Q. I have some follow-up questions about the flight. One of
8 those is you mentioned you heard a P-3 overhead. Are you sure?

9 A. That was not a P-3. That was an Air Force C-130.

10 Q. Okay. Great. Yep. They do a great job.

11 So regarding navigating in the plane, you mentioned a Garmin
12 296. Is that your personal Garmin 296 that you carry?

13 A. It belongs to the Park.

14 Q. The Park Service.

15 A. And I was going to give it to someone. I brought it.

16 Q. Okay. All right. And does the plane itself have a Garmin,
17 an integral Garmin unit that you navigate on, as well?

18 A. It does.

19 Q. Okay. So when you're navigating you use both of them, one of
20 them? Can you just explain why both and how you --

21 A. I use all available assets.

22 Q. Okay. So when you looked down were you looking at the
23 integral GNS system or --

24 A. I was looking -- it's a 750.

25 MR. BABCOCK: Should be a 750. Garmin 750.

1 MR. DOLAN: It's a 750.

2 MS. PRICE:

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And I actually know how to use it pretty well. I've used the
5 DVD study thing. It's in here somewhere.

6 Q. That's okay. No, that's all right. I was just curious as to
7 the interface, and does the 750 have any TAWS alert system in it
8 so that you have a warning available on the display of terrain?

9 A. On the display it does --

10 Q. Yes.

11 A. -- yes.

12 Q. And did you see --

13 A. And I was getting 500-foot warnings before that time.

14 Q. For how long were you --

15 A. And so does this.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Two minutes. Two minutes, I was getting 500-foot warnings on
18 the right side and I knew that turning right was the worst
19 possible thing to do.

20 Q. So you're getting warnings from the right side because
21 terrain on the right side. Do you know where you were in space?
22 Did you know what hills you were up against?

23 A. I did.

24 Q. You did.

25 A. I knew that range, I thought, very well. I'd been in there

1 many times last season.

2 Q. Okay. So you were aware of all that terrain. And what's the
3 highest point in that terrain?

4 A. I believe it's right at 1900 feet. Pretty close to there.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I would have to look.

7 Q. Yeah, just your knowledge. Have you flown that area?

8 A. I'm pretty sure it said 1900 feet MSL, about.

9 Q. Okay. And when you looked down and you looked up, did you
10 have any spatial D at all, or you --

11 A. I think I probably did.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Because when I looked up, I deliberately looked at the
14 attitude gyro, because are you wings level?

15 Q. Uh-huh.

16 A. I saw white and I thought you got a blue wings level, and I
17 looked down and started the turn. I want to get out of this cloud
18 and I went, oh, I don't want to come right, that's where the
19 terrain is, and then I hit.

20 Q. Okay. All right. So you turned to get out of the clouds.

21 A. I was planning to do a standard rate 180-degree turn and
22 hopefully fly out. And I thought, no, you know, it's on the right
23 side; you've got more clearance on the left.

24 Q. Okay. All right. Well, let's go back to before the flight.
25 Prior to this flight, when was your last flight? Was it the night

1 before, the day before, a week before, just generally?

2 A. No, it was the week -- it was in the previous week.

3 Q. The previous week. As in like 2 days prior or a week prior
4 or --

5 A. Let me think.

6 Q. Uh-huh.

7 A. I did all the preps for two flights. I was -- I needed to do
8 this flight on Sunday. I needed to get down there Sunday, so I
9 prepped the aircraft on Friday. I fueled it and did an exhaustive
10 pre-flight on Friday, and then I -- while I had it out I pulled
11 the Cub, 419-Charlie-Charlie, out the hangar and I filled it and
12 pre-flighted it and I put it back in the hangar. So I did the
13 pre-flights in the hangar in the warm.

14 But they -- the 185 was prepared to go to Nome, Shishmaref-
15 Nome, back to Kotzebue. And maybe if the weather had been good, I
16 was going to take Leddy Hughes and do some survey work looking for
17 musk oxen down there. And then when I got back, I was planning on
18 a day in Kotzebue and then I was going to start trying to move the
19 Super Cub to Anchorage so that another Park pilot could use it for
20 an off-airport clinic.

21 So I came in on Sunday, pre-flighted just the 185. I had
22 nothing to do on Friday. It needed a quart of oil. I topped it
23 up to 12 because it had the potential for being a pretty full day
24 on Monday.

25 Q. How about fuel? Do you remember the fuel load?

1 A. Full.

2 Q. Full. Okay, which would be --

3 A. So full wings, which is 74 usable in the wings, and 26 in the
4 belly pod.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Which is 80 and 17.5, totals.

7 Q. Were there any other -- were there any hazardous items on the
8 airplane? I don't know what you were carrying other than survival
9 gear, but --

10 A. I took standard survival gear, the Wiggy's bags for the
11 passengers. I had a EU-2000 generator to warm the engine up,
12 because down in Nome and in Shishmaref, I might not -- Nome, I
13 might be able to get service. Shishmaref, no service so to keep
14 the aircraft warm.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And an extension cord, my own gear that I always travel with,
17 which is like my polar gear that I had.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I have some of my own survival equipment that I --

20 Q. Anything hazard -- any weapons --

21 A. No, no weapons.

22 Q. -- ammunition, chemicals other than your standard oil --

23 A. None.

24 Q. Okay. Did you have any extra tanks of fuel on board --

25 A. No.

1 Q. -- you know, jerry cans or anything like that? Okay.

2 So your takeoff weight would have been what? Do you -- what
3 is full fuel and -- do you remember, roughly, your takeoff weight?
4 Is it in there? Fantastic.

5 A. Well, it's off. I had -- all the way in the back I had
6 everything that I could stick in compartment Charlie, because it
7 had skis on and it has a naturally forward MTCG. Let's see.

8 Q. As part of the dispatch process, would they have that, your
9 takeoff weight? Is that something MPS records would have?

10 A. They would have what -- no, they would just have my endurance
11 fuel.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. That's what they would know.

14 Q. So you said the plane was configured with skis, right? I
15 just want to --

16 A. Uh-huh.

17 Q. -- confirm that. Okay.

18 A. 3132. Make sure I got -- no wait, wait, wait, wait. 3288.

19 Q. On your phone, those are your own notes or is that a form
20 that MPS uses for weight and balance, or is it a Cessna weight and
21 balance form, or what are you looking at?

22 A. Weight and Balance Pro.

23 Q. Okay. All right. Can you provide that to Bill -- I mean,
24 John for the --

25 A. Absolutely.

1 Q. -- investigative purposes? Thanks.

2 Okay. Would you describe the dispatch process? I'm not that
3 familiar on how you fly within the Park and do -- perform flights
4 for them. So your show time that day was what? What time did you
5 show for your flight?

6 A. Seven, 07.

7 Q. Okay. And you didn't fly the day before but did you have a
8 duty day? Were you working till midnight or --

9 A. I did not. It was a complete day off.

10 Q. Okay. So, yeah, if you would just describe from there how
11 does the dispatch process work with the Park Service?

12 A. On Sunday, which was the day that I had intended to leave --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- I did check weather but it was not really a duty day. I
15 did that from home, and I texted and said I would not -- there was
16 no way I was going to make it because of the observed and forecast
17 weather was just not going to support flying anywhere.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. So the dispatch process is flight request goes to the hub
20 aviation manager in Fairbanks. I sent him an email and the
21 addressees on that email from me are always Maya Luken (ph.), the
22 Park superintendent, who is my real approving authority, and the
23 hub aviation manager, both of whom I have to have approval from to
24 do the flight. That's my own interpretation. The letter of the
25 law allows me to self-release on low risk missions, which this was

1 the -- so the things I provide are an ORM form, the ORM for the
2 mission. Using the observed and the forecast weather was 17
3 points.

4 Q. And how does that relate to --

5 A. A threshold of -- I think it's 70 before you move to medium.
6 I have to --

7 Q. So you would call it low, it's a low threat?

8 A. Yeah, based on the form it's quite low.

9 Q. Yes.

10 A. And then I do a flight plan to Denali dispatch.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And I wait until I get an email in return from both the
13 superintendent and the hub aviation manager, and both had approved
14 the flight on Friday. Then I call -- when I know I'm going to go
15 to the aircraft and attempt a move, I call Denali dispatch and I
16 give them the details of fuel load and where I'm going and that
17 I'm about to start up, and --

18 Q. And this was on Monday?

19 A. This was Monday morning.

20 Q. Monday, yeah. Okay.

21 A. Yeah, this is actually walking to go fly, I call dispatch
22 while I have a landline so --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- to get a good connection. And I did that from the Park
25 Service office.

1 Q. Okay. And is the ORM form redone? Is there a risk
2 management process before the actual flight, or is it -- the risk
3 process done to approve a flight?

4 A. It's done with the current conditions, the updated weather.

5 Q. Okay. So was there another ORM form submitted with the
6 updated weather and risk level?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. For Monday's flight?

9 A. No. No.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And the only thing that had changed on it was that the
12 weather got better.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. So -- and the 17 is with the better weather on Monday.

15 Q. Oh, 17 is the Monday.

16 A. Is the Monday.

17 Q. Oh, I got you. Okay. Okay, but you just said that you did
18 not submit an updated ORM?

19 A. No, but I did one.

20 Q. You did one but it wasn't submitted?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. Okay. So what was the forecast and current conditions before
23 you went flying weather-wise?

24 A. The Kotzebue observation was 1900. I think it was broken; it
25 might have been overcast, and 10 miles.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. The Nome was better than that but I don't remember exactly.

3 Q. Uh-huh.

4 A. Buckland, I think was 1900 and 5, and Shishmaref was 14- or
5 1600 and 5. And then I looked at the cameras for Buckland, I
6 looked at the camera for Nome, and I think that's it.

7 Q. And did the camera pictures match what the current
8 observations were?

9 A. They did. They actually -- the Nome looked way better than
10 what they were observing and the Buckland was what -- you know,
11 I've been down in the Buckland area a little bit more than Nome
12 area, and it looked just like it would if it was 1900.

13 Q. Okay. And then what about forecast products? What forecast
14 products --

15 A. It was supposed to get better until about 3 o'clock and then
16 deteriorate. I don't really remember the specifics of it.

17 Q. Okay. And how do you get your weather? Where do you go to
18 get weather?

19 A. I start with the NOAA Weather Service.

20 Q. Uh-huh. Via computer, mobile phone or --

21 A. Via computer.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Computer.

24 Q. And do you remember what the geographic forecast charts were
25 saying for VFR marginal or IFR, for the area you were flying in

1 that day? Do you remember?

2 A. They were saying marginal.

3 Q. Okay. And then once you were flying, the weather conditions
4 were okay when you started out.

5 A. They were all -- until about 8 miles northeast of Serpentine
6 Hot Springs or -- which is pretty closely located with CIVED
7 intersection. It was exactly what they said it should look like,
8 and then they're -- it -- out where I was seeing, it looked like
9 there was a wall. And I -- at that point, I thought you're
10 probably going to have to turn around; you're just not going to go
11 there today. And I was continuing and I was thinking about that
12 decision and I didn't make it soon enough. It really was -- it
13 was blowing snow in cloud pretty much down to the ground level
14 where I was.

15 Q. Okay. And the point again, just because I'm not sure, the
16 point that you were trying to figure out on the GPS while your
17 head was down, what was that point for again? Was that Serpentine
18 or was that the other point that you were concerned --

19 A. It -- well, CIVED is an intersection on there --

20 Q. Oh, CIVED right. Okay.

21 A. It's an intersection on the airway which is almost co-located
22 with my geographic Serpentine Hot Springs point.

23 Q. So why did you need to -- I'm unclear as to exactly what you
24 were trying to do on the GPS. Were you trying to go to that
25 position, make sure it was in there, check where it was, or find a

1 way out of this weather and turning around?

2 A. I was not trying to find a way out of the weather. I just
3 was -- wanted to make sure that I had the -- both GPSs going to a
4 same or similar --

5 Q. Point.

6 A. -- location.

7 Q. To do an overflight like you described, that's what you were
8 interested in at that time. Okay.

9 A. Right.

10 Q. But the wall of weather that you saw was after that, when you
11 looked up, or was this wall of weather there before you put the --

12 A. I -- if I put an estimate on it, I felt like -- using the
13 ridge, and I had scrub vegetation in sight, and I thought that's a
14 mile and a half away.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And -- but you're going to need, probably, to turn around.
17 And I looked down to make sure that I had that intersection in and
18 when I looked out it was not a mile and half away. It could not
19 have been. It was the time of a single scan away.

20 Q. Okay. So my understanding is that there was this moment in
21 time where weather was getting worse but you had a mile and a half
22 visibility. You were thinking I need to turn around; it's not
23 looking good, let me just check this point.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And then you looked up and it was white. Correct?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. All right. And the right turn was just instinctual. You
3 wanted to turn around and get out of your IMC conditions.

4 A. I did.

5 Q. Okay. All right.

6 A. I can't tell you exactly why I chose right, because as soon
7 as I made the input I knew that it was the wrong input, and I said
8 this in my head, you don't want to come right; that's the rising
9 terrain.

10 Q. Well, let me ask you this. You have procedures, OAS have
11 procedures for what to do for inadvertent entry into IMC
12 conditions?

13 A. They do.

14 Q. What are they?

15 A. It's transition to an instrument scan, make a 180-degree
16 level turn and --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- fly back out of it.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. If that doesn't work, next choice is climb and declare an
21 emergency and get with ATC.

22 Q. Have you ever had to do that before on other flights?

23 A. I have never had to do that before. I've either been on a
24 VFR flight plan or an IFR flight plan. And I've spent -- well, I
25 don't know, I'll have to -- more of my time has been spent on a

1 mandatory IFR flight plan.

2 Q. Uh-huh. Any other training -- have you had to do that
3 scenario like go through currency --

4 A. Well, I've done it in training.

5 Q. Yeah. Okay.

6 A. With Foggles on.

7 Q. But not for real flights.

8 A. Yeah, Paul's -- every time he takes me flying he puts the
9 foggles on me. So yes. And I did it in the Navy. I flew for 10
10 years for the Army Test Command, and every check ride something
11 gets covered up and you practice that kind of thing.

12 Q. Okay. And in regards to weather, does the Park Service
13 provide you weather or care about the weather, or are they just
14 looking at your ORM and your risk and you are approving your own
15 flight, that actual flight when it goes? Or do they check the
16 weather too and go, you know, we don't think the weather's good
17 today, maybe you shouldn't go? Does that ever take place?

18 A. I believe it does, but I believe there's a threshold when
19 that gets involved. And that -- based on the weather that was
20 being observed and forecast for my flight, I don't think that they
21 would have been involved if it was -- it was all un-forecast en
22 route weather. And marginal is marginal. Marginal is not IFR.
23 And that was -- that's why I'm there is to make the right decision
24 when you reach it.

25 Q. Do you remember what heading and altitude you were at when

1 you hit?

2 A. When I hit?

3 Q. Yeah, roughly. I mean, I know you don't know exactly because
4 it was a surprise but --

5 A. I did -- much later, after the impact much later when I was
6 thinking, I asked the lady in the C-130 if she could estimate what
7 the surface wind was, and I asked her that because I wanted to
8 know the direction. And she said, well, the altitude wind is
9 330.25. And so I thought, okay, well, the wind when I left
10 Kotzebue was 330 and so I thought, okay, it appeared to be a
11 little to the west of the aircraft. So the aircraft's upside
12 down, I'm looking towards the engine sitting on the ceiling, and
13 the wind seemed to be maybe 10 or 15 degrees left. So I think the
14 aircraft came to rest approximately on a heading of north or
15 pretty close to it.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. The fuselage of the airplane.

18 Q. All right. And in regards to the survival aspects, meaning
19 communication, survival items you used -- well, first let me ask
20 you this question. If they couldn't pick you up that evening
21 because of weather, would you have been okay for the night, do you
22 think?

23 A. I'd like to think so.

24 Q. Did you have enough --

25 A. That's clean. I haven't --

1 Q. I usually bring a drawing board for these sort of things but
2 I have paper if you -- it's okay.

3 A. I am pretty sure I would have made it through the night but I
4 was not 60 percent sure.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I was about 50 percent sure that I would make it through the
7 night.

8 Q. And the evening before -- I left this out earlier. I
9 apologize. Did you get a good night's sleep before the flight?

10 A. Very good.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I got 9 hours of sleep the previous night.

13 Q. And how was your health the morning of the accident? Any
14 issues? Any --

15 A. None. Excellent.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. I did -- I only had a large glass of whole milk for
18 breakfast. I normally don't eat till 10 o'clock. It's just my
19 habit. And I had some Pop-Tarts and some -- I did. Brown sugar
20 and cinnamon Pop-Tarts and -- I'm a Navy guy. It used to be a
21 cigarette and a Snickers back in the '70s.

22 Q. That's before my time. I'm sorry.

23 A. But for breakfast I really -- I had some she fish salad that
24 I was going to have but I didn't get to my breakfast. It's in the
25 aircraft somewhere.

1 Q. Okay. But your health is still good. You had
2 (indiscernible) --

3 A. My health is excellent.

4 Q. Yes. Okay. Fantastic.

5 And in regard to the survival piece of the accident, do you
6 have any recommendations for improvements to the gear? You know,
7 once you had time to think about the survival piece of the
8 accident, did you feel well equipped, was all the equipment
9 working properly? I know you mentioned the flashlights and that's
10 an important point. Anything else that you would tell your
11 friends, like --

12 A. I don't think what I have to -- I do have something to offer
13 but first I want to say the flashlight batteries being dead, they
14 may not be dead, it just may be not working right. But it worked
15 when we put it into the kit, but I'm the one that put it in there
16 and I'm responsible for it so not working is all on me.

17 And I was thinking I needed to get those vacuum sealed
18 pouches open. I had trouble just with my hands, so I had to dig
19 deeper. I have my own Leatherman in my personal survival
20 equipment but it was buried and I was -- it ended up being there
21 but I searched for it in my helmet bag a couple times and it
22 didn't come up. So I went to the survival kit and there was in
23 fact this -- which I want to give back to the Park Service now.
24 But I was able to get those pouches open by cutting them, but
25 while I was doing the first one I was shaking and I thought -- I

1 just put it down and I thought, if you cut yourself you're going
2 to make it worse, and so I just slowed down and looked at it. It
3 was laying on the upper sill of the right back window and it was
4 laying there with the blade out and I was kind of just shaking,
5 and I really would like to get this pouch open so that I can get
6 the flares and that stuff out. And I just slowed down. And
7 that's the only thing that somebody didn't already tell me is that
8 you -- that's sharp enough to cut to the quick pretty quick.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And then I settled down and I got the pouches open.

11 What was the question?

12 Q. I just wanted to know if you had any recommendations for
13 better survival equipment or different survival equipment or
14 anything that could have helped you, because when you're sitting
15 there in that situation is really the only time you have a real
16 opportunity to evaluate --

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. -- what you have available.

19 A. I want to take this opportunity to say that the training
20 works. Pay attention. It was all excellent.

21 Q. And then the ELT. I heard a report that it stopped recording
22 after a couple hours. Do you know anything about the ELT and why
23 it stopped recording after a couple hours?

24 A. I do not know why.

25 Q. But it was in the armed position? Did you check that after

1 the accident?

2 A. I did check that. I got the stuff out of the back. I went
3 back to make sure that the light was flashing, and it was. And we
4 -- the PJ turned it off and brought it. This is it.

5 Q. Oh, okay. So he turned it off. Interesting. I need a
6 picture of that before I go just so -- you know, for the
7 investigation.

8 MS. PRICE: All right. I'm going to take a question break
9 now. That's all I have for the actual flight. The rest of my
10 questions are sort of administrative training and that sort of
11 thing. So I'm going to pass it around the room.

12 Do you need a break? Are you okay for now?

13 MR. DOLAN: I'm fine.

14 MS. PRICE: Okay. Jeff, you have any questions for Rick?

15 MR. BABCOCK: Just a couple.

16 MR. BABCOCK:

17 Q. Your gear configuration, you said you were on skis. Do you
18 think that --

19 A. I was on skis. Skis were pumped up. The tires were down.

20 Q. Okay. You think that was helpful for you or give you a
21 little confidence that you were in the -- flying over ice and all
22 that other stuff?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. That was pretty good. Your gear storage, you've mentioned
25 numerous different parts of your gear. It sounds like your gear

1 came through appropriately, so apparently you had it secured with
2 cargo net or rope or --

3 A. I had the Wiggy's in my personal bag. I -- incidentally,
4 there's a little travel guitar back in the cargo section, the aft
5 area. It's fine, and I didn't want to put a lot of weight back
6 there, but I wanted to put as much as I could because in the ski
7 configuration with just a pilot it has a very forward
8 (indiscernible). So I also put the generator just forward of the
9 bulkhead of the aft and there was a net. I have a net that I put
10 over that area, and that's -- I take it down so I can get to it.
11 And then I had a rope secured -- the generator I secured to its
12 own rope and to the two lower tiedown points for baggage, and then
13 the rest of the stuff was -- the soft stuff, like my parachute bag
14 with a pillow and the other sleeping bag, in front of that and
15 then crisscross tied down. And the seats, the passenger seats
16 were in the far back.

17 Q. The Atlee Dodge passenger seats?

18 A. Those are still in the far back.

19 Q. And that has Atlee Dodge jump seats or does it have the
20 Cessna jump seats?

21 A. I think they're Cessna jump seats.

22 Q. So just the two little screws that go into the side of the --

23 A. The rails.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. They're rails.

1 Q. Atlee Dodge.

2 A. Those are Atlee Dodge.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. Okay. Had you seen any weather above this -- your flight
6 zone when you were approaching?

7 A. Yeah, there were several broken areas that -- and I could see
8 the tops were not very far above. I saw that. I couldn't see
9 Deering; I was too far to the west. But looking over just before
10 I made landfall, again I looked over and I could see above -- blue
11 above.

12 Q. So, I mean, so really it -- you know, it wasn't terrible
13 weather there other than the stuff that you got into.

14 A. Right.

15 Q. Because I know our --

16 A. But it was overcast in Nome --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- and I don't do on top.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. So --

21 Q. Did you have any other equipment with the generator,
22 extension cord?

23 A. Extension cord. Incidentally, the generator is my own and
24 the extension cord is my own because I -- Monday morning, at the
25 time I left, I didn't have access so I just took my own.

1 Q. Did you have a portable heater with that at all?

2 A. No. I do have my own stove, propane stove, and there's --
3 will be a 1-pound cylinder sitting outside the pilot's door
4 forward towards the engine just sitting in the snow.

5 Q. I was just --

6 A. I forgot that in hazmat.

7 MS. PRICE: Yeah. Right. Okay.

8 MR. DOLAN: I'm sorry.

9 MR. BABCOCK:

10 Q. I was just picturing you -- you know, the guys showing up and
11 you got the generator running and your extension cord running into
12 the cabin with the heater on and --

13 A. Only if there was an airplane that you could take off in
14 again would I do that.

15 Q. Yeah. Let me see here. So you sent the email -- your hub
16 manager apparently had approved the mission before his departure.

17 A. Before he left on Friday.

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. (Indiscernible) --

20 Q. Because he was -- he left I think Sunday morning for Lower 48
21 because he's got a new job, so --

22 A. Yeah, I knew that.

23 Q. He set it up. So --

24 A. I'm not saying that's exactly how it is. That's my
25 perception of how it was. I think I made one statement to

1 somebody that the tail got separated. Did I tell somebody? The
2 tail is not separated.

3 MS. PRICE: That's what the PJ is telling me.

4 MR. DOLAN: The PJ --

5 MS. PRICE: No, they said the nose was separated. The plane
6 was split in half. That's what they told me.

7 MR. DOLAN: That makes me feel better because their
8 perception is no better than mine.

9 MS. PRICE: Okay.

10 MR. DOLAN: The tail is intact, the engine is intact, the
11 prop is not on. Prop went somewhere. I didn't want to leave the
12 aircraft because I wasn't feeling very good, but I thought maybe I
13 should go look for the prop. And I immediately thought, no you
14 should not go look for the prop; it's not going to help you, so --

15 But the engine is intact with the airframe. The tail was
16 intact with the airframe. The left horizontal stabilizer is
17 broken about a third of the way in.

18 MS. PRICE: And the left wing was separated.

19 MR. DOLAN: And the --

20 MS. PRICE: Or the right wing.

21 MR. DOLAN: The left wing is gone. The right wing is intact
22 and it's over here.

23 MS. PRICE: Okay.

24 MR. DOLAN: So like that.

25 MR. BABCOCK:

1 Q. You mentioned about your health being good. What were your
2 plans after you picked up your superintendent and you went to
3 Shishmaref? What were you going to do while you were at --

4 A. I was planning to go for a run. I was -- I had my running
5 gear on underneath my polar gear.

6 Q. So you were going to do a little jog around --

7 A. I left --

8 Q. -- Shishmaref.

9 A. I left \$140 pair of Nike Minimus shoes in my parachute bag.
10 They're out there. I have nothing to wear on my feet except for
11 clodhoppers, but my wife's going to fix that. My wife is here
12 now.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Sorry.

15 Q. And your use of the sat phone afterwards. So you got back
16 in. Were you -- did you have to take the headset off each time
17 and put it back on and whatnot to hear the radio traffic, make
18 those calls?

19 A. The -- to use the sat phone, of course, I had my -- I have a
20 Dave Clark headset. It was still plugged in. The headset was in
21 up under the rudder controls and sitting on the electronic wiring
22 area.

23 Q. Oh, okay.

24 A. Dug them out of there. But they were still plugged in. I
25 think that part of -- it was working good and, I don't know, part

1 of why it started being hard for Jessica to hear me on the sat
2 phone is because I caked the mike with blood and it froze. I
3 later found that out.

4 I tried it again much later but it didn't -- you know, hours
5 later I said I'm going to try the sat phone again and see if I get
6 somebody. I pulled the muff off the mike and the muff was frozen
7 and had quite a bit of blood around it. I think that might have
8 been part of the transmission problem that she couldn't hear me.
9 But then the sat phone wouldn't link up again when I tried it
10 later. It came on; it said, okay, and I pressed it and it never
11 gave a dial tone.

12 Q. And do you know where the antenna is for your ELT or the --
13 for the sat phone on the airplane?

14 A. Top, which was now on the bottom.

15 Q. Yeah. Okay. Survival pouches, I think that was a good point
16 that you made. The -- were all the ones that you accessed, were
17 they all requiring you to cut into them or did any of them have
18 the little notch where you peel them apart?

19 A. No, once I got into the vacuum seal, the larger bags that --
20 one of the bags that I opened had boot and glove warmers in it,
21 and those have notches and serrations and they -- those open
22 fairly easily. But the big pouch that we put our stuff in to just
23 maintain security so we know if somebody's gotten at something,
24 those are hard to open.

25 Q. What about the compressed Wiggy's bag? That was in plastic,

1 too.

2 A. You know what? That -- I used the knife on that, too, and I
3 put it over against the bulkhead and I went like this and it
4 didn't -- I didn't know what it was going to do. I've never
5 opened one but it didn't pop. It was actually quite hard to get
6 out of the black nylon case that we keep it in. I had to push
7 with my knee and pull and it was kind of hard to access, but I did
8 it.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. It'd be easy for a team if you had two people. I'm never
11 flying one solo again.

12 Q. Those are good points. Because as far as, I mean --

13 A. It was kind of hard to get out.

14 Q. -- if you're less mobile than you were -- I mean, you were --

15 A. If you had only one hand, you wouldn't get at any of those
16 things. That's what I was thinking, you know, thank God these are
17 working.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. You wouldn't open any of that stuff.

20 MR. BABCOCK: Okay. Well, that's all I had. I just had, you
21 know, clarification points that I wanted to --

22 MS. PRICE: Okay. John, do you have any questions for Rick?

23 MR. MILLS: Yeah, just a couple if I might. I know Jeff just
24 (indiscernible) on the top for the weather. A couple things.

25 MR. MILLS:

1 Q. The inadvertent IFR, the procedure that you were describing,
2 now you do have a EZRA card; is that correct?

3 A. I do.

4 Q. Okay. The procedure you're describing pretty straightforward
5 and I think those have been for quite a while. Because of your
6 familiarity with the terrain and where you were at, at least on
7 your altitude at the time, did you ever give any thought that
8 maybe it would be better if you climbed up a little bit before you
9 started your turn instead of just immediately going ahead and
10 going into the turn?

11 A. After the fact only. My previous protocol in that situation
12 would be immediate climb with full power.

13 Q. Okay. And sometimes negative training takes place and we
14 fall back on what's been ingrained into you, and sometimes that
15 could be the wrong thing to do.

16 Who is the hub aviation manager?

17 A. Dave Throsser (ph.).

18 Q. Oh, okay. There was one other you said that you sent the
19 information to. I missed that. Who was the other person?

20 A. Maya Luken.

21 Q. So Maya. Okay. Now, did you get any feedback from Dave or
22 Maya on the information that you sent them about the plan of the
23 mission and the weather that you were going to do?

24 A. No. Other than an email saying flight approved and it's --
25 that's the normal, is that --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- I just get approved.

3 Q. Yeah. I mean, like this is just a passenger transfer, kind
4 of like a point to point type mission. Was there any requirements
5 to do like a project aviation safety plan?

6 A. There was not -- if I had made it to Nome, completed the
7 passenger transfer, there was an intent for a project on Tuesday
8 to take Leddy Hughes that would have required a PASP.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And I think she had one in place already for that project.

11 Q. Okay. I just wanted to be clear on that.

12 A. That also -- that would have put a completely different
13 complexion on the conduct of the flight. We would likely have
14 needed helmets and --

15 Q. Right.

16 A. -- other gear.

17 Q. Okay. Okay, so that's a different project that you were
18 going to do. Okay.

19 The altitude -- you were flying over the water and then prior
20 to the land, that looks like it was a pretty good trip across
21 there. The tops -- or actually I guess the ceilings were about,
22 still about 1900 feet going across there?

23 A. Yes.

24 MR. MILLS: Okay. I want to make sure on that. That's all
25 I've got right now, Rick.

1 MS. PRICE: Okay. You doing all right? You need a break?

2 MR. DOLAN: I'm good.

3 MS. PRICE: Okay. So I have some administrative questions
4 for you.

5 MS. PRICE:

6 Q. How long have you worked for the National Park Service?

7 A. Two years.

8 Q. Okay. About how many total flight hours do you have?

9 A. Approximately 6,300.

10 Q. Do you know about how many in the 185?

11 A. About 300.

12 Q. Okay. And could you give a general description of your
13 aviation background, where you were before NPS, just real big
14 picture? How long have you been flying? Who have you flown for?
15 What type of airplanes?

16 A. I got my -- I was winged in the Navy, 1983. I mostly was in
17 operational units and I did one 2-year disassociated on a -- an
18 air boss on an amphibious ship. I was flying Huey's, but only
19 about a couple hours a month for those 2 years. Then they sent me
20 to the Pentagon and then I retired.

21 And then I was trying to get a job in any capacity with the
22 Park Service, but while doing that I was a occupational safety and
23 health specialist at several bases, and I ended up being the
24 occupational safety and health manager at NAS Fallon. And then I
25 put in for positions with the Army CERDEC, which is electronic

1 warfare testing in Lakehurst, New Jersey. They tried to offer me
2 a job but I was in a GS-12 position and they had a GS-14 position
3 and they couldn't bring me in.

4 They sent my resume to another Army unit that was having
5 trouble hiring. The Airborne Special Operations test directors at
6 Fort Bragg needed a pilot that had experience in T-34s, and I
7 actually had flown T-28s in initial training, but I did a tour in
8 recruiting and I was flying T-34 Bravos. But I got the job. It's
9 a different model of airplane.

10 So I flew a Navy T-34 with the Army Operational Testing at
11 Fort Bragg -- Pope Air Force Base; it's now Pope Army Field -- for
12 10 years. And then they had to close that unit due to budget
13 constraints and they gave me a management-directed reassignment to
14 Army Air at Holloman Air Force Base, and I flew there for about 2
15 years. I was fling Black Hawks and C-12s mostly for electronic
16 warfare and missile chasing. We -- you know, they would fire
17 something downrange and then in the helo we would go take test
18 officers down to retrieve it.

19 And I was getting in my airplane -- I had been offered an Air
20 Force test officer job at Griffith's Air Force Base, and I was
21 getting into my Cessna 170 down at Holloman Air Force Base at
22 Alamogordo (indiscernible) Field to take our airplane to
23 Arlington, Washington, near where my mother lives, and I got a
24 phone call from Mr. Babcock. I had interviewed November time
25 frame for a job in King Salmon with the Park Service, and I think

1 one of the members of the panel said if you don't hear from us
2 within a week then, you know, thanks for the interview but it
3 wasn't you.

4 It was January, wasn't it? I think it was January when Jeff
5 called. And I was getting in the door and I was running from a --
6 an ice storm that was coming up through Northern California in the
7 Nevadas, and he asked me to -- if I'd be willing to interview for
8 another job. And a few minutes later Maya Luken, the
9 superintendent, called and then I -- later I was offered a job
10 flying for the Park Service, which was kind of a dream thing for
11 my wife and I.

12 Q. That's great.

13 A. And I've been flying here for -- since then.

14 Q. Okay. Thank you. So during any of your indoc or recurrent
15 or training with OAS, was CFIT, Controlled Flight Into Terrain,
16 avoidance ever covered in any of that training?

17 A. Absolutely.

18 Q. And I think we already touched on procedures for VMC into IMC
19 on a VFR flight, procedures. Okay.

20 Does the National Park Service or OAS have any guidance for
21 route or altitude selection in mountainous terrain, or is it up to
22 you to figure it out? Is there any guidance regarding minimum
23 altitudes off of the deck or from mountain peaks or --

24 A. Well there's, I mean, guidance in training and example. I
25 went on flights with mentors that showed me examples of good

1 process, bad process, and this -- you know, incremental decision
2 making. People talk about the -- I imagine -- in writing? No,
3 it's the FAA rules.

4 Q. Uh-huh. Okay. How about the VFR weather minimums for VFR
5 flight? Are there any separate weather standards for National
6 Park Service flights?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. Obey the standards.

10 Q. Is there any pressure on you as a Park Service pilot to fly
11 in, you know, marginal or worse conditions to get a flight done?

12 A. I'm glad you asked that. There is pressure to not do that.
13 There is regular statements of no flight is important to them, and
14 consistent support for making the right decision.

15 Q. So if you do cancel a flight because the weather is bad, what
16 -- there's no repercussions? Is that what you're saying, that
17 it's --

18 A. There has never been anything even close to that.

19 Q. In your opinion, is the training and the guidance that you've
20 been provided by the National Park Service and OAS sufficient to
21 carry on safe flights?

22 A. It is.

23 Q. You mentioned that you were trying to make up time on this
24 particular flight. Why did you need to make up time?

25 A. In order to get to Nome, which I anticipated being a

1 challenging but VFR flight, in time to make sure that I had time
2 to properly brief two passengers, one that I had only carried once
3 before, Leddy Hughes. I like to do an exhaustive brief, which is
4 the standard. I needed to offload some of the gear to be able to
5 carry them with me back. So I wanted to be there at 10 o'clock,
6 and I could have, and have plenty of time to turn around and not
7 be rushed with passengers.

8 Q. Okay. But then you talked about doing overflights of areas
9 and looking for those. Was that all part of the time --

10 A. The intent was to dip a wing, look at the strip at Serpentine
11 Hot Springs, and fly up the river past the Taylor -- I know the
12 area pretty well, past the mine.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And then fly over Kort's Creek and dip a wing and look at the
15 strip and then continue on.

16 Q. Okay. And back to the -- this is not administrative. This
17 is specific to the flight. I just want to clarify whether you had
18 spatial D or not. When you looked up you said you checked your
19 wings level. Did you feel like your wings were level when you
20 were looking at the attitude indicator? You said it was level.

21 A. When I -- yes, when I looked at the attitude indicator I
22 confirmed that my head was level.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. But I -- when I looked up and was seeing white, and I wasn't
25 -- I didn't have any instrument. I had the V brace and white, but

1 where are my wings? And I looked down.

2 Q. Okay. Did you feel like --

3 A. And I started --

4 Q. -- you were in a different attitude or -- at that time, no?

5 A. I felt like my body agreed with what the attitude indicator
6 was telling me.

7 Q. Okay. Fantastic.

8 A. And then I started --

9 Q. Right.

10 A. What I was trying to do was a standard right turn.

11 Q. Okay. Great. Thanks. That helps a lot.

12 A. On -- I was on the instruments at that point and trying to do
13 a right turn.

14 MS. PRICE: Right. Okay. I have one final question but --
15 I'm going to be the last question, so do you have any more
16 questions, Jeff?

17 MR. BABCOCK: I don't. I think he's been pretty clear on
18 everything.

19 MS. PRICE: Yeah. Great.

20 How about you, John? Do you have any further questions for
21 Rick?

22 MR. MILLS: No I don't. Not right now. Thanks.

23 MS. PRICE: Okay. Actually I have two quick questions and
24 that'll be all. So we'll be out of your hair.

25 MS. PRICE:

1 Q. And I have to ask this question. Were there any mechanical
2 issues with the airplane?

3 A. The airplane was running flawlessly and looked excellent on
4 pre-flight inspection except for dirty undersides of wings and
5 skis from landing on a gravel strip.

6 Q. Okay. And what would you have done differently on this
7 particular flight to have avoided the accident?

8 A. There are a couple points where I -- this wouldn't have
9 happened. I was not extremely concerned, but the amount of water
10 that I overflow ended up being uncomfortable when I got to the
11 other side and I thought, well, you know -- many times when I'm
12 going over big water I zoom; it's got a nice GPS in the airplane.
13 I zoom it in and re-center and I touch the other side to where I
14 think I'm going just based on visual cues, and it tells -- it
15 would have told me that the -- that area of west of the bluffs is
16 actually not 4 miles away, it's 7 miles away.

17 I wish I had done -- I did not do what I normally do. My
18 normally -- I normally would have turned back sooner in that
19 weather. I was not having an on-day processing. I didn't feel
20 like I was behind the airplane, but I normally -- when I am in
21 weather like that I don't just have one contingency plan. I
22 usually have three contingency plans and then when I get to three
23 I go, what are you doing? Turn around.

24 Q. Uh-huh.

25 A. But I didn't. I only had my memory plan to do 180 return. I

1 normally have three. Okay. And I normally have a much better
2 situational awareness of terrain, and I was not on that -- I felt
3 comfortable because I recognized the ridge I was flying by. I
4 should not have felt comfortable. The ceilings were low. The
5 ceilings were thick. And, yeah, they stopped at 5,000 feet, but
6 that's a pretty big ceiling if you have to fly through it all of a
7 sudden and you're not on a IFR clearance.

8 Q. Any explanation? You know, we all have bad days and we're
9 lucky enough not to have bad days happen on circumstances like
10 yours.

11 A. No, every --

12 Q. Any explanation for why you weren't on that day, like why you
13 weren't your normal 100 percent in the decision making?

14 A. Good physical health. No stressors.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. My wife was down at our home in Oklahoma City to sell it and
17 had been gone for a couple of weeks, but it was going well and so
18 I was in a positive mental attitude. But I wasn't thinking ahead
19 like I normally do.

20 MS. PRICE: Okay. Well, thank you very much for -- yes?

21 MR. BABCOCK: I have one, Noreen.

22 MS. PRICE: Sure.

23 BY MR. BABCOCK:

24 Q. One question from me, Rick. So if you had made a successful
25 turn in either direction, when you recognized you were in the soup

1 there, would you have encountered any poor weather from there back
2 to --

3 A. I don't know. I would only know that after I made the turn.
4 But I --

5 Q. But I mean as far as the weather --

6 A. I wasn't --

7 Q. -- where you had come from was good?

8 A. I will say that before that point I -- this is something that
9 I always think about -- turn around may not be the best course of
10 action either. You don't know what the weather's doing behind
11 you. I did think that when I -- just a little while after I made
12 landfall there, I thought you don't know what's happening with the
13 weather. And so I did think, okay, so if I have to turn around I
14 might go to Deering because it's on this side of the water. I
15 didn't want to go across that water again.

16 This is something that I did not know until much later, but
17 the ice is really thin and in our Park we lost some local
18 residents the same day --

19 Q. Had you intended --

20 A. -- to thin ice and --

21 Q. Had you been involved in that --

22 A. I don't know that that --

23 Q. -- at all?

24 A. I don't know that that ice really would have supported our
25 airplane if I had to land on it. So that was just all a bad

1 decision.

2 Q. But you didn't know about that other --

3 A. I didn't know that until --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. -- until I was in the hospital or something. When did I
6 learn that?

7 Q. Yeah. And to be clear, that other incident had involved snow
8 machines, but they were --

9 A. If it -- I mean, I know it was on a river but the temperature
10 is in the whole region, so --

11 Q. Yeah.

12 MS. PRICE: Great. Again, thank you so much for being so
13 forthright with the interview. Do you have any questions for me
14 or anyone else here regarding the investigation or --

15 MR. DOLAN: No.

16 MS. PRICE: -- what now? Okay. The preliminary, like I
17 said, will be out in a week, and that'll have most of the details
18 that we already know, and the final report won't be very different
19 coming from the NTSB. Now the OAS has their own investigative
20 process, as well, but --

21 MR. DOLAN: Right.

22 MS. PRICE: -- that's different. So great. Okay. That
23 concludes the interview. Thank you.

24 MR. BABCOCK: Thanks, Rick.

25 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: CESSNA 185 CRASH, BERING LAND
 BRIDGE NATIONAL PRESERVE, ALASKA
 APRIL 15, 2019
 Interview of Rick Dolan

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC19TA017

PLACE:

DATE: APRIL 17, 2019

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.



Beverly A. Lano
Transcriber