

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL CRASH OF A YUTE COMMUTER

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SERVICE PIPER PA-32R-300 AIRCRAFT

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NEAR TUNTUTULIAK, ALASKA,

*

ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020

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Interview of: WADE RENFRO, General Manager
Yute Commuter Service

Yute Commuter Service
Bethel, Alaska

Monday,
February 9, 2020

APPEARANCES:

NOREEN PRICE, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

HUGH YOUNGERS, Investigator in Charge
Federal Aviation Administration

MYRON ANGSTMAN, Attorney
(On behalf of Yute Commuter Service)

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I N T E R V I E W

MS. PRICE: Okay, it's February 9th, 2020. We're here investigating NTSB accident ANC20FA017. I'm Noreen Price, Accident Investigator and Investigator in Charge of this accident.

We'll go around the room and introduce ourselves.

MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm Myron Angstman. I'm the attorney for Yute.

MR. YOUNGERS: Hugh Youngers, IIC for the FAA.

MR. RENFRO: Wade Renfro, General Manager of Yute.

MS. PRICE: Great. Thank you, Wade. Appreciate it.

So this is a safety investigation. The NTSB is charged with determining probable cause. We're not involved in liability, legal matters. Strictly trying to determine the probable cause and make recommendations so these accidents don't happen in the future.

The interview is being recorded today, and that recording will be transcribed into a written document that gets put in the public docket with the final report. If you want to take a break today, we'll take a break. If you have any questions, just ask. Or if you need any clarity, go ahead and do so.

INTERVIEW OF WADE RENFRO

BY MS. PRICE:

Q. Would you please spell your full name for us for the record?
Thank you.

A. Michael Wade Renfro, M-i-c-h-a-e-l, W-a-d-e, R-e-n-f-r-o.

1 Q. Thanks. And what's your official title with the company?

2 A. General Manager.

3 Q. You're not the owner?

4 A. I am also the owner.

5 Q. Owner? Do you use the title "President"?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. If you -- about how many flight hours do you have as a
8 pilot?

9 A. I'm not really certain.

10 Q. It's all right. Just --

11 A. I quit keeping a logbook maybe 10 years ago. I keep my
12 currency through my 135 flight and duties and my checkrides. But
13 I would say it's over 15,000, but I'm not sure exactly where.

14 Q. Okay. And then if you could give me a brief description of
15 your background?

16 A. Okay. I've been flying within the region here for a little
17 over 20 years and worked for several other airlines during that
18 time. Worked for Craig Air, worked for Ptarmigan Air, and I
19 worked for Era Aviation flying Twin Otters out of Bethel here, and
20 was doing my own thing on the side for most of that.

21 And then I got busy enough that I -- with my guide service
22 for Renfro's Alaskan Adventures that I started doing more air taxi
23 survey work along the way, kind of a natural progression that
24 helped pay for airplanes and, you know, keep everything going. I
25 have ATP, CFI, single/multi-engine land, EASA single-engine SET,

1 and Instrument Air --

2 Q. It's hard to remember when you're --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. -- that experienced. Thank you. And you own another flight
5 business, correct?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. All right. And how large is that operation?

8 A. It was larger in the past than it is now. I think we're only
9 running six planes on the certificate and five pilots -- six
10 pilots. Not all at the same time though.

11 Q. And that's a 135 operation --

12 A. It is a 135. It's an operating certificate.

13 Q. Okay. And do you have 119 authority on that certificate?

14 A. Yes. I'm D0.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And check airman.

17 Q. And the check airman? Okay, thank you.

18 A. And we also have an additional check airman, but I've been
19 check airman, I think, since about 2006 or 2007 maybe. I'd have
20 to look though; I can't remember for sure.

21 Q. Okay. So tell me a little bit about this company, Yute
22 Commuter Service. When you purchased it and why you purchased it
23 and how many airplanes you guys have, what size of an operation
24 you're operating out of Bethel. Just an overview of the company.

25 A. Okay. The company was purchased in 2017, in May, I believe

1 is when -- or June. And it was previously operated out of Kodiak.
2 It was a larger operation that they had scaled way back down to
3 just a handful of airplanes.

4 And we purchased that operation, brought it to Bethel, and
5 we -- when we purchased it, they had just received their 401 MEL
6 certificate. They got their economic authority approved. We went
7 through the process, had economic process changed over to new
8 owners, and in the meantime, we just flew a couple of planes for a
9 few months until we got all of the paperwork sorted out. And then
10 once we had all of that finished, we went through the process --

11 (Background conversation.)

12 MS. PRICE: Go ahead.

13 MR. RENFRO: Sorry about that.

14 Oh, yeah, so once we got their economic authority transferred
15 over and approved as new owners, then we started to schedule, and
16 we've been running the schedule since.

17 BY MS. PRICE:

18 Q. So when -- so how long had you been running the schedule?

19 The --

20 A. I think July is when we actually got -- July 10th or 15th --

21 Q. Of '18?

22 A. Of 2017.

23 Q. '17, yeah. Okay.

24 A. Yeah. We had started the process months earlier.

25 Q. Yeah. Okay.

1 A. But I had actually -- we got it done in 3 months. Pretty
2 quick. And currently we run the schedule -- we have 22 villages,
3 I believe, we service. Most of them twice a day, 6 days a week,
4 and one day a week we do one flight, usually, to most all of them.

5 Q. So you operate 7 days a week?

6 A. We are 7 days a week, yeah.

7 Q. You are. Yeah.

8 A. Yeah. But our published schedule is for 6 days, so --

9 Q. Okay. So do you do charter flights as well?

10 A. We do. We do charter flights also. When we are in our
11 busier phases in times, we just tell our customers that, you know,
12 we can't book charter flights until, you know, January 1st or
13 whatever it is. And then when we know we're in our slower times,
14 when there's not going to be, you know, as much stuff, the MEL
15 slows way down -- when we know we're in our slow times, then we
16 start booking charters for at least our good customers.

17 Q. Okay. And when you purchased the company, did any of the
18 employees follow you to the certificate -- I mean to this
19 business?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Any key players? Pilots?

22 A. Yeah. So when we were purchasing Paklook Air certificate,
23 Yute Air had shut down -- or it had been purchased. And Yute Air
24 number three, I think -- that's variation of that. When they were
25 purchased, they shut down and -- unexpectedly to their employees

1 and quickly, so there was some people left without employment.

2 So we hired some of them, brought them over to Renfro's while
3 we were in the interim transition to get -- for a few months until
4 we could get Yute up. And they were employees for both at the
5 time. Currently we don't have any. There are no pilots that are,
6 you know, on both certificates. We try to keep a very clean
7 separation on that.

8 So -- but in the beginning, yes. We had Renfro -- some of
9 the Renfro's people came over. And previously, Tony Spangler had
10 worked for me before, and also Miles France (ph.), my Director of
11 Maintenance, had worked with me for many years also.

12 Q. How about the base manager? Did he ever work for the Yute
13 Air?

14 A. He -- yes, so --

15 Q. Andrew.

16 A. Our station manager, Andrew --

17 Q. Andrew.

18 A. -- worked here until Yute shut down, and -- or was purchased
19 rather, sorry. And -- Yute Air. And he went to work for YKHC and
20 came to work for us on the weekends because he loves -- he just
21 loves the airport. He loves the business.

22 And I couldn't afford to -- I didn't have a need to have him
23 full time for that position. We just worked that large -- we flew
24 five planes, usually, daily. Four to five year-round, and charter
25 only. So Andrew came over part time, and once we came back over

1 here, we purchased this building, got everything in place, then
2 Andrew took a full time position as resuming --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- the role of station manager of this same space basically.

5 Q. So did Yute Air have safety issues? I'm not fully aware
6 of --

7 A. No. I mean, they, like a lot of operators in bush Alaska,
8 had a few, you know, like had prop strikes, and I mean, you know,
9 slid off a runway or two. But to the best of my knowledge, the
10 only really bad accident they ever had was one -- was actually a
11 pilot on the test flight. And they think, from what I understand
12 -- I didn't read the accident report -- you'll probably remember.
13 I think that they found carbon monoxide in his system.

14 Q. Oh, okay. Yeah.

15 A. And he ended up flying into the river out here. And I -- not
16 here, but over at the base of the mountains, you know, 35, 40
17 miles out of town. But I didn't hear what -- if they ever
18 concluded what the cause was.

19 Q. Okay. Thanks. Has the -- have you expanded since you
20 purchased the companies?

21 A. Yeah, because it -- when I purchased it, I bought it with two
22 aircrafts. So I transferred some of the Renfro's planes
23 over to this certificate -- the Yute certificate, and we added on
24 some aircraft.

25 Q. So how many do you have now?

1 A. We're currently running nine -- well, I guess eight now. So
2 we have 12 listed on our ops specs, but we're typically -- I mean,
3 I think the most we've run at one time at this point is ten.

4 Q. And do you have enough resources, spaces, pilots, employees
5 to support that -- the program now?

6 A. We do. The only thing that I really want to expand on is I
7 want to put another hangar on the side of this building to park
8 airplanes in for keeping -- so that it eliminates the need for
9 wing covers, all of that. Just put them inside. We'll probably
10 still plug them in, but I mean --

11 Q. So how many total employees do you have? Do you know right
12 now, roughly?

13 A. Roughly I think 60. Yeah, I think Yute has probably 60, 65
14 employees.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. It takes a lot of people to run that many airplanes
17 apparently, which is funny, because we ran charters for years with
18 five, but this has a lot more moving parts. So --

19 Q. Right. So any outstanding -- or challenges that you've had
20 here that, you know, you've been working on?

21 A. I've been working very, very hard the last 4 months on trying
22 to put as much structure in place -- I mean, I've been working
23 hard at it since the day we started, but I've been working very,
24 very hard the last 4 or 5 months at trying to put a lot of systems
25 and procedures in place that I feel like will make this place, you

1 know, everywhere we increase efficiency. The place runs better,
2 it's less distractions. So I feel like we've made some huge
3 gains. I feel like we've made massive gains in our maintenance
4 department. I feel like, you know, just our billing overall, you
5 know, customer service. I think everything has seen a big
6 improvement.

7 Sometimes it doesn't feel like it because it doesn't change
8 that day, but over the last, you know, 6 months especially, I
9 think we've seen lots of really positive improvements. Like I
10 said, we changed our training manual. I didn't like the old one.
11 That was a tremendous amount of work, but we got everything to
12 where I think now, hopefully -- you know, we'll pick up whatever
13 we can from what happened here and, you know, just make a few
14 changes, trying to ensure, you know, something like this doesn't
15 ever happen again.

16 Q. Right. Thank you. Do you -- where do you reside?

17 A. Bethel 7 months a year or so. The rest of the --

18 Q. Do you have a house here?

19 A. Yeah. Well, I mean, it's -- I stay longer at Reynolds.

20 Q. Okay. And are you in the state of Alaska the other months?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Or --

23 A. Yeah. I'm in Soldotna the other approximately 5 months.

24 Q. Okay. Can you describe how operational control is achieved
25 in the operations here? If you could, just describe how

1 operational control works here.

2 A. All right. Well, the initiation, continuation, or
3 termination of a flight.

4 But yeah, so the pilots are trained, they're put into the
5 appropriate airplanes, they go through their IOE. We determine,
6 you know, what limitations, basically, they need to have. And
7 then they're usually reassessed after several months, and at that
8 point, they're good to go.

9 So we assign a pilot -- obviously you assign him to duty when
10 he passes his checkride. But operational control, you assign a
11 pilot to an airplane, and -- or multiple airplanes if he's dual
12 qualified. And then as the process continues, you will -- after
13 that person's assigned to a flight, they will be given flight
14 duties for a day.

15 They can go fly on the assigned duties that they have, and if
16 there's -- the person in operational control always has to be
17 available within 10 minutes is what our company manual says. I
18 don't think any of us would ever wait 10 minutes to call back if
19 we got a call from the office, because otherwise they'll -- just
20 from a functional standpoint, it means somebody's standing in
21 there waiting to go fly. But also, you know, I'd say if there's
22 an issue, that's the time to discuss it.

23 In our operation, we have it listed that, you know, the
24 operational control can be delegated to another qualified
25 employee. I think we currently have four, so if the DO elects to

1 do so, he can transfer operational control over. Otherwise, it
2 resides with the DO.

3 Q. Okay. So does the operational control duty officer, I'll
4 say, do they have to be here and present --

5 A. No, they don't.

6 Q. -- at Bethel?

7 A. And I'm revisiting that too. But no.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It is not a requirement that we are here. Just reachable
10 within 10 minutes on the phone.

11 Q. My understanding is the DO does not reside here for part of
12 the year. How long is he gone from the area?

13 A. I'm not -- I -- I'm not 100 percent certain on the number of
14 days, but it equates to probably he leaves for 2 to 3 weeks at
15 least three times a year.

16 Q. Okay. So are you --

17 A. I'll say three times at least. Yeah, three times probably.

18 Q. Okay. Are you familiar with all of the pilots here? Do you
19 get to meet them when they're new hires or at any time get to know
20 them while you're not here in Bethel?

21 A. While I'm in -- present at Bethel, yes. I try to talk to
22 everybody that comes through, new guys, and most of these guys, I
23 know fairly well. The batch of new hires we just ran through
24 training, unfortunately I don't know those guys. I've met them,
25 but I didn't have the opportunity to spend time with them.

1 Q. Okay. So you never met the accident pilot?

2 A. I just met him. I don't -- I did --

3 Q. You -- oh, you met him, but you don't know him?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay. So on cases like that where you, or it could be Tony
6 as well, have not been here for a new class to be hired -- or new
7 hires, but you're the operational control delegate for the day,
8 and you don't know a pilot. When they call you and ask you -- you
9 know, they would say, our risk -- looking at the risk assessment
10 process, it looks pretty high today; what do you think?

11 A. I would say, no, do not send a new pilot out.

12 Q. Okay. All right.

13 A. For sure.

14 Q. And how about in general? If -- you have pilots with
15 limitations right?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. You have new hires, there are some limitations, correct?

18 A. Set by the DO --

19 Q. The DO --

20 A. -- or the chief pilot.

21 Q. Okay. So the DO and chief pilot have limitations for new
22 pilots -- specific pilots sometimes, right?

23 A. Right.

24 Q. Or -- okay.

25 A. Correct, yeah. And it's -- you know, the person who does the

1 training with that pilot is the one that, you know, usually
2 sets the limitation. Not the -- you know, it -- if Tony, the DO,
3 did no training with that person, then he's not going to be the
4 one that -- you know, he can still set a limitation on him, but it
5 doesn't -- it's not as effective if -- you know, we just put
6 limitations mostly on new guys just in general. But if we've
7 flown with them, then we know, hey, that guy may need a little
8 more, you know, work in an area. So --

9 Q. And how -- and you may not know -- how would that be
10 communicated to the dispatch folks? Because they're the ones --

11 A. They would verbally communicate it, which we are definitely
12 going to change.

13 Q. On a long-term basis like, hey, don't fly this guy for -- you
14 know, until I tell you otherwise? Or --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- is it, hey, today, don't fly this person?

17 A. No. They tell them, you know, that they want to keep them
18 inside their -- you know, a close area, or --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. You know, I mean, they want whatever the limitation is until
21 they tell them otherwise. And that is not -- I didn't realize
22 that those weren't being written down for them. But we will
23 definitely make sure that, as we go forward, that it's -- I mean,
24 to verbally tell them is, I mean, it's still telling, you know?
25 It's still passing the information along. But because we have

1 different crews, there's a potential for the transfer of
2 information to be lost or misconstrued.

3 Q. Right. And what is your understanding of what the standard
4 limitations are on new hires? Are there any standards?

5 A. No. There are no standard items for limitations. It's, you
6 know, per individual.

7 Q. It is per? Okay, thank you. So do you have operational
8 control over your -- the other company? Obviously you're the DO,
9 so you always have operational --

10 A. I do. I delegate it to the chief pilot frequently.

11 Q. All right. Are you ever in a position where you have
12 operational control of both companies?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And how do you manage that? Is that -- I imagine it's
15 challenging.

16 A. Well, we're only flying a couple of planes at Renfro's, so --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. If it was an operation running like this, then yes, I would
19 find that very difficult. I try not to carry them at the same
20 time though. I try to delegate it to the chief pilot.

21 Q. When you do have the operational control duty, and you're not
22 here -- or even if you are here, you're just in town, you're not
23 at the -- what do you do during the day? Are you checking in with
24 dispatch? Are you looking at things on your phone? How do you
25 know that the flight is going according to the schedule?

1 A. I talk to dispatch on the phone.

2 Q. Throughout the day?

3 A. Yeah. And they'll text me sometimes, too, just to let me
4 know. You know, usually they always call and say, all planes are
5 in. But occasionally they will text and say, all planes are in.
6 I'll hit confirm, yes, I got it.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But, you know, it's just -- you know, 95 percent of all of
9 the communication is verbal.

10 Q. And how about weather? Do you look at weather when you have
11 the operational control duties? That's something you're looking
12 at? Or do you rely on the dispatch office to --

13 A. I rely on the dispatch office solely when it comes to all of
14 the runway reports, as far as, you know, talking to all of our
15 village agents and getting runway conditions. But the actual
16 weather, they look it up, and I look it up at wherever I'm at. I
17 always look in my computer and see what the weather's going to be
18 for the day.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And then they call or I call them. Typically I try and call
21 in about 7:25 or 7:30; that's just about the time the pilots get
22 here. But the dispatchers already have 30 minutes to collect the
23 village weather, so that way, we can have an educated conversation
24 about, you know, where's -- you know, weather's down here, here,
25 and here, you know, runways are not plowed. Okay, let's hold

1 until daylight, and whatever it is. And then we make the
2 decision, you know, as to -- and I always ask how many planes and
3 pilots do we have, who do we have on duty, and we go from there.

4 Q. Do you approve -- when you have operational control duty, are
5 you approving the schedule in the morning? Do they send it to
6 you, show it to you, or is it verbal? Because the dispatch
7 agents, my understanding from talking to them, actually are the
8 ones that are assigning pilots to aircraft and schedules.

9 A. They're not assigning them to aircrafts. They're assigning
10 them to that flight.

11 Q. The flight, okay.

12 A. Yeah. They don't assign a pilot to any airplanes.

13 Q. Who assigns the airplanes to the flight?

14 A. The DO assigns the -- not to a flight, to an airplane. So
15 they -- the dispatch never assigns a pilot to an airplane. They
16 just -- they assign them to a flight duty as far as a specific
17 flight.

18 Q. A specific flight, okay. And do you get to approve that at
19 any point in the process? Or do they assign a pilot to a flight,
20 do the risk assessment, sign off, and it goes without contacting
21 you?

22 A. They don't contact me for every schedule that we run because
23 it -- we run set schedules. That is, you know, most of what we
24 do. If they have something out of the ordinary, then they let me
25 know. Or if there's additional concern.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I mean, in addition to obviously the risk assessment. But if
3 they have any concern or anything else, they call me and say, hey,
4 what do you think about this? Or usually, are you okay with
5 sending this pilot there?

6 Q. If they have a concern.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. But normally --

9 A. Even -- with or without the form, yeah.

10 Q. -- they assign it to the flight, the flight goes. Provided
11 the risk assessment is normal, you probably wouldn't hear from
12 them?

13 A. No, I don't -- when I call in, it's like we find out where
14 the weather's good, where it's bad.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And then the qualified pilots that we have no restrictions on
17 fly those routes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Because they are assigned routes. I mean, they're the same
20 routes over and over and over.

21 Q. Right. Does the --

22 A. And they've been trained on the routes.

23 Q. Okay. Do the dispatch agent and the flight follower have
24 sufficient training, in your opinion, to understand weather and
25 weather hazards, and what is good and what is bad in the -- for a

1 flight?

2 A. I think they have enough knowledge to identify hazards. And
3 the pilot himself makes, typically, the determination. You know,
4 they look to make sure it's legal, the flight followers do, and
5 they look to make sure that they -- there are no big hazards that
6 they know of that they can identify. And, you know, if they do,
7 then obviously they don't send a flight.

8 The pilot ultimately checks his own weather, also, and makes
9 sure it's good. It doesn't matter what he's handed. He is still
10 to check the weather for himself and make sure the flight is good,
11 because he is the final authority as to whether the flight goes.

12 Q. Right.

13 A. And can I elaborate a little on the operational control?

14 Q. Sure.

15 A. So we talked about the operational control part, just me
16 talking about mine. We always have it where -- you know,
17 officially we have it written down to where -- all the way through
18 the pilot, and he can terminate a flight. But if there's anyone
19 in our organization that's not comfortable with a flight, we just
20 shut it down.

21 So whether it's written or not, that's, you know, that's the
22 rule. And that's the way I always operated the other air taxi
23 that we have, and I wanted that same system here. If anyone's
24 uncomfortable with it, shut it down until you figure out what's
25 going on.

1 Q. So let's see. On the day of the accident, the chief pilot
2 was here. Do you know why he didn't have operational control?

3 A. He was taking a flight.

4 Q. Does the chief pilot ever hold operational control duty?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. So on the day of the accident, were you here?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Where were you?

9 A. In Soldotna.

10 Q. Okay. Did you have a conversation that morning with the
11 dispatch folks about anything regarding the flights that day?

12 A. Yes. I spoke to Laura at about 7:25 or 7:30 our time.

13 Q. And what did she say to you?

14 A. That -- I believe, if I remember correct, that we were down
15 to the southeast, and they were going to wait. That we talked
16 about the weather here, and that the -- we talked about the
17 ceiling and vis and decided to wait until daylight to do anything.

18 Q. Okay. Do you remember what the -- if you looked at weather
19 yourself or she told you what the general forecast in Bethel was
20 for the day? Or what --

21 A. No, I looked it up on my computer.

22 Q. And do you remember what it said? What was expected for the
23 rest of the day here?

24 A. If -- I don't remember exactly what it called for, but I do
25 recall looking at it later and seeing it changed. But it was

1 supposed to be, in general, I believe from the area forecast --
2 just trying to do it by memory, so I didn't --

3 Q. And that's okay. Yeah, that's fine.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Just your -- to the best of your recollection, yeah.

6 A. Yeah. I mean, I think if I remember right, it was supposed
7 to be VFR marginal, VFR pretty much throughout the Delta.

8 Q. Okay. So no IMC conditions were expected?

9 A. No. But we had -- there was one area that it was down in the
10 morning, I remember. I don't remember if it was Goodnews,
11 Platinum, or where it was. But we had one area that, you know,
12 currently wasn't good. It was still dark too. I mean, we had to
13 wait for -- once it gets light, you can look at the cameras. You
14 get a lot better feel for what it actually really looks like.

15 Q. Right. So you are an experienced pilot, and you run through
16 operations. I'm just curious for weather, what websites and
17 products are you looking at to determine what the weather is and
18 what it will be?

19 A. I'll look at some of the other stuff occasionally, but for
20 the most part I pretty much solely use the Alaska Aviation Weather
21 Unite site. I find it to be the most reliable, and obviously it's
22 a prudent source. But I mean, I -- you know, we use everything
23 available to us, I mean, as pilots in general. But that is the
24 site that I use the most.

25 Q. And what products on the site are you looking for

1 specifically?

2 (Background conversation.)

3 MR. RENFRO: I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

4 (Pause.)

5 MR. YOUNGERS: Which products?

6 BY MS. PRICE:

7 Q. Oh, what products are you -- you'll go to the website,
8 there's a lot available there. What products do you like to look
9 at to get a good feel for what the day is going to look like?

10 A. Right. So for general overview, not including NOTAMS and
11 stuff, just a general overview of what I do, I'll start out by
12 checking the Bethel TAF. And then I go to the area forecast, and
13 then after their area forecast, I go to -- it's kind of hard to
14 find. I went to the bottom there at the hourly weather reports
15 from all of the sites, which tells you the wind, ceiling, vis,
16 temp dew point. And that's always -- for me, that paints a very
17 clear picture.

18 Then I look at the surface map, and then I'll pull up the 24
19 through 60 hour forecast to see what's coming in behind that. And
20 I'll look at the Doppler radar thing on there just to see if we
21 have any cells out there floating around.

22 Q. Do you find the graphical forecast for flying weather useful?
23 Turbulence, icing, you know, their --

24 A. I find --

25 Q. -- the forecasts?

1 A. Oh, yeah.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. That's one of the pages.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. But yes, I find it very useful. And on the front side there
6 also, where you can click -- you know, at the top there, it's TAF,
7 observations -- I don't know, something else in that area
8 forecast. But that's pretty good. I use that quite a bit just
9 for a general overview of what it looks like out there. It gets a
10 little cluttered if you don't scroll in it, but --

11 Q. Do you find the forecast in this area is suitable? Do you
12 feel comfortable with the forecasting products that are issued?

13 A. Yeah. I have to agree with Ernie a little bit. I think
14 certain phases have been out here over the years I think sometimes
15 are a little better than others. And, you know, maybe that's just
16 because of the changes in weather patterns. You know, sometimes
17 it's harder to predict a lot of bad weather than the 20 day time
18 that's sitting here.

19 In general, I find them to be obviously very helpful. The
20 TAF sometimes -- for the most part, I believe it to be pretty darn
21 accurate. But sometimes they do miss that, you know, and we get
22 unforecasted fog or whatever in here. But in general, I feel
23 like, yeah, the weather's as good as it can be in a broad region
24 like this near the coast with all of the influences we get.

25 So I find that maps, I use those probably more than anything

1 else, the 24 through 60 hour, to see what's coming. That's always
2 -- I don't bother looking more than 60 hours out because I don't
3 believe they can accurately forecast that, particularly around
4 here. So I mean, I will look further sometimes, but for the most
5 part, that 24 through 60 gives me a very good idea of what we have
6 coming here today.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And I believe that to be very, very accurate actually.
9 Usually.

10 Q. Okay. Now to the day of the accident. If you could describe
11 -- we talked about the morning and that you weren't here. And now
12 if you would talk about how you were notified and the timeline and
13 who you talked to, to the best of your memory?

14 A. Okay. I talked to him twice before -- or three times I think
15 before I got the call regarding overdue aircraft. They called and
16 let me know -- Laura did -- that we have a plane that's overdue.
17 And I asked, you know, who the pilot was, plane, what's the
18 routing, where is he heard from last, and, you know, do you
19 know --

20 Q. And where -- what did she say in regard to where was he heard
21 from last?

22 A. When he -- the last -- she didn't realize he had talked to
23 Jeff.

24 Q. Oh, okay. Yeah.

25 A. But the last was with the office. And then we -- after I

1 found out his routing, everything else, where he was, I said,
2 well, because of the plane he's in, I believe that even if he flew
3 all the way out there and turned around, that, you know, an hour
4 and a half would be the absolute outside.

5 Have we checked with all of the other villages? Yeah, we had
6 all of the agents drive down; he's not at the runway anywhere. I
7 said, okay, try and get -- have you had other planes try calling
8 from the air or anything? They said, yes. I said, have them try
9 it again. They tried. I asked, do we have anybody else over in
10 that direction, you know, that can swing by and check? No.

11 And we didn't at that time. They were -- the other plane was
12 upriver, the other one that was still in the air at the time --
13 I'm sorry, to the northeast.

14 And then at that point, I said, call all of the agents one
15 more time. I called the tower and asked, what time do you have
16 him clearing surface area, just to confirm that maybe he didn't
17 sit out here waiting to leave for 30 minutes. And he actually was
18 on the ground for a little while here, so that gave a little less
19 time than -- you know, as far as when I looked at it. So, you
20 know, so he had actually left the surface area about 10 minutes
21 later than I thought that originally. And -- because they give
22 you the time that he taxied out, and --

23 Q. What time was that, if you know?

24 A. I think they had it around roughly 10:30. I apologize, I
25 have all of that written down, but --

1 Q. It -- oh. Do you have it available written down?

2 MS. PRICE: Going to take a quick break due to the sound.

3 (Off the record.)

4 (On the record.)

5 MS. PRICE: Okay. Let's get back to -- the recording's on
6 again.

7 BY MS. PRICE:

8 Q. What time did he call outbound with dispatch?

9 A. He departed at 10:38, and he cleared the surface area, it
10 sounds like, at 10:41 according to the tower.

11 Q. 10:41 according to the tower. Great. Okay. Thank you. And
12 do you have overdue procedures written in the GOM for an overdue
13 airplane?

14 A. We do.

15 Q. Okay. And the -- was the company following those procedures?

16 A. They were following the procedures. And while they were
17 making local calls here going along with the flight following, I
18 also was ensuring that was being done. And I -- like I said, then
19 I went, you know, called the tower, and I'll call other aircrafts.
20 Still part of the same procedure. And then I'll call the village
21 agents again to make sure he didn't divert, end up landing
22 somewhere else.

23 And I made the determination that -- because tower -- I
24 called tower one more time -- after I had completed going through
25 the whole process again, I called tower one last time and just

1 said, hey, you guys haven't heard anything from 32C, right? And
2 they said no. While I was doing all of that, I had my director of
3 maintenance look up the 406 ELT number for that aircraft, and
4 he'll call RCC and see if there were any ELTs going off, period.
5 But in particular, do you have anything for, you know, this
6 aircraft? And they did not.

7 I asked him if he could look and see if -- the wingtip
8 beacon, if he could see anything on that for the ADS-B out. He
9 said he could not. So at that point I, you know,
10 determined -- that took probably 15 to 20 minutes to accomplish
11 all of that. I don't know the exact timeline, but it was pretty
12 close.

13 I checked again with, you know, my notes from when he
14 departed here and determined that he would have been -- even if he
15 flew out there and diverted a little bit, changed his routing but
16 was too far to call the office and, you know, swapped it up, he
17 was going to go around -- you know, land -- not go to, you know,
18 one village and go to the other. Instead of going to Kipnuk,
19 Chefornak. Come -- maybe he would try to go -- divert a little
20 bit, go to Kipnuk, come back -- that even if he would have done
21 that, that he would have absolutely been within a radio range to
22 be reached.

23 Q. But I was just going to ask that question. All of those
24 places are within radio range?

25 A. No.

1 Q. Oh, they're not? Okay.

2 A. They're not, no. And that's the problem --

3 Q. I see.

4 A. -- is once you get outside the zone here a little ways, the
5 only way to reach a pilot is through communication with someone
6 else in the air typically. Or, you know, they can always try --
7 you know, they tried texting him too, because, you know, you have
8 cell services on both ends. It's the same thing. But in the
9 middle, there's no -- there is no cell service, there is no radio.
10 You know, unless you're up at a super high altitude, there's no
11 radio range.

12 And I knew it was -- you know, with a 1,000 foot ceiling,
13 that his radio range was probably going to be somewhere in that 30
14 to 45 mile range depending on atmospheric conditions. That's
15 typically about how far out, you know, you'll reach someone at
16 that altitude.

17 Q. Okay. You thought he would be about 1,000 feet? Is that
18 what you would expect him to be flying?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Well, judging by, you know, what the weather was --

22 Q. The weather.

23 A. -- on both ends and everything. I figured he would probably
24 be, you know, when I checked here it was 1,000. That's what --
25 because I asked the tower. I said, when he left, what was the --

1 you know, what was it? And he told us it was 1,000. He -- or he
2 said he asked him when he departed, what was the vis and ceiling?
3 And he said, 10 miles. And he said, and the ceiling? And he
4 said, 1,000 feet -- is what the tower told me, John Thatcher.

5 Q. John, yeah. Okay.

6 A. So I assumed he was out of here, and he would be below the
7 cloud layer, you know, flying out. So it's -- I looked at the
8 cams too. It was broken, like, a little further -- you know, part
9 of his route where -- you know, because there are cameras all
10 around.

11 Q. Right.

12 A. Some of the area was broken, you know, some of it was a solid
13 overcast, but I assumed he was going to be low. I mean, all of
14 that was happening fast too. I mean, you know, just everything
15 happened in a short period of time. But once I talked to the
16 tower the last time, they had not heard from him, I, you know, I
17 did all of the math. I'm like, he's sitting in the tundra
18 somewhere. And I called immediately and reported -- I called the
19 FAA site who patched me in.

20 Q. Who'd you call at the FAA? The Operations Center?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And -- who patched me in with Kenai Flight Service, and we
24 talked to them and had them make sure, you know, they didn't have
25 any word or anything else. And the -- they let me know that they

1 would notify the NTSB also.

2 Q. And then what?

3 A. And then I continued to try -- I called back here. And while
4 all of that was going too, we were preparing to get a plane to go
5 look. And they wanted to send some planes. I'm like, only send a
6 couple of planes. And if you send them, different routing, that's
7 fine. Don't send a bunch of planes on the same route. And when
8 you do, make sure that they are calling their altitudes out and
9 their distance, where they're at.

10 And I said, you know, weather has gone down. At that point
11 it had gone down, because it's been a couple of hours since the
12 plane was supposed to depart. By the time we got the planes in
13 the air, they were -- I just said, look, don't go past wherever,
14 you know, the (indiscernible) ring is unless the weather is really
15 good. Because, you know, the weather on the far -- all the way
16 out there on the coast had gone down, like really gone down. They
17 were reporting freezing fog, and it turned into -- I can't
18 remember. It went down half a mile I think and fogged in.

19 So I just told them, don't push it. We don't need two
20 airplanes -- you know, we don't need anybody to have a problem.
21 You know, if the pilot's not clearheaded, don't send them.
22 Otherwise, send them out with somebody else in the airplane to
23 have a look. Fly the routing that he would have flown to Kipnuk,
24 and maybe somebody else on the routing if he went to -- you know,
25 if something else changed, and he went towards Chefnak. I said,

1 but, you know, make sure they're talking to each other. And --

2 Q. So two planes or three planes went?

3 A. Three.

4 Q. Three, okay. And then each one of them had an observer in
5 the plane to look out?

6 A. I believe so, yes.

7 Q. All right.

8 A. Or maybe they only sent two. They were going to send a
9 third. I'll have to ask. I know they sent two for sure.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And they sent -- because Byron departed here with, I believe
12 George and Henry Simon. And as, you know, observers looking, and
13 they located it pretty quick. And also, we had -- one of the
14 Renfro's planes was available. So we had -- we said, just fill
15 the Beamer up and go. And so they filled up, they put -- one of
16 the other Renfro's pilots jumped in as observer to go help look
17 also.

18 Q. So two, maybe three of Yute's planes, and one Renfro plane?

19 A. Yeah. I think two, yeah.

20 Q. Okay. I got you. All right.

21 A. And they went out, and they found him just -- it sounded like
22 they plot -- you know, when they painted the line, it was as soon
23 as they took off Bethel -- or from Bethel ramp. They did it to
24 Kipnuk, and I believe they said he was just almost right on
25 course. If he wasn't, he was just maybe a quarter mile or

1 something. You know, I mean he was -- they found him right on the
2 path they expected to find him on.

3 And they flew out, and the weather was -- it sounded like
4 they found him, the weather wasn't very good. I said, find out if
5 there's any signs of life. And they said that the weather was
6 coming down; it was harder to tell. I told them to come home.
7 And they tried to -- you know, they looked at what they could.
8 They tried -- you know, they snapped a picture, and they said,
9 it's kind -- it's -- you know, the weather, it was starting to fog
10 in down there. And I said, tell them turn around and come home.
11 Because they couldn't get down real low because, you know, it was
12 starting to fog in down there. I'm like, don't risk it. Tell
13 them to come back, because there's nothing they could do at that
14 point.

15 Q. Right.

16 A. And then I called --

17 Q. And who found it? Was it Byron?

18 A. Yeah, Byron and Henry, and I believe George was in there
19 also.

20 Q. In one plane?

21 A. Byron was flying, yeah.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. And Henry was observing from the front passenger seat I
24 believe.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. And I'm not sure where George was sitting.

2 Q. That's all right. Okay.

3 A. And Byron was flying -- concentrating on flying, and Henry
4 was looking, taking the pictures. I'm sure --

5 Q. Did --

6 A. -- Byron was looking too.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. But once they located it, he said, you know, the weather --
9 while they tried to find it, it was starting to -- he said, it was
10 starting going down, and I just said, you know, see what you can
11 see, are there any signs of life, then come home. Don't push it.
12 Don't. Just, you know --

13 Q. How about photographs? Because I would love to have -- who
14 has photographs? The copies of the original, like, photographs?
15 Because that was before anybody or the wind or the snow kind of
16 disturbed the scene a whole lot. Does -- who -- just tell me who
17 has them. Is it you or Henry or who?

18 A. Henry.

19 Q. Okay. I need -- I'll -- I need to get copies of those in the
20 future.

21 A. Okay. But they're not real clear. I mean, it's -- there's a
22 picture.

23 Q. It's all right.

24 A. But -- and you may gain some benefit from it.

25 Q. I probably will.

1 A. But it wasn't -- it was kind of blurry, and it wasn't a
2 real --

3 Q. I might though. Because --

4 A. Sure.

5 Q. -- I suspect that some of the wreckage was blown around in
6 the wind well --

7 A. Got you.

8 Q. -- before we got there.

9 A. Oh, okay.

10 Q. So I'm just kind of -- I'm looking for pieces and the
11 original scar that wasn't covered over in snow. So even if it's
12 blurry, it might be helpful.

13 A. I think you will be able to tell that from the photo then,
14 the -- where the impact site. That's why I --

15 Q. Yeah.

16 A. When I saw it, it looked to me like it was a CFIT accident,
17 so -- and that's where I came to that conclusion.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Which I don't know, but I mean, that appears to me what -- to
20 be what happened.

21 Q. All right. And then what happened? So you had the position
22 of the wreckage. What happened after that?

23 A. I got on the phone immediately, I confirmed the coordinates
24 twice with them, that, that was the correct coordinates. I called
25 back -- RCC had called earlier. I called them back, let them know

1 these are the coordinates, and they relayed them to the troopers.
2 And I, at that point, I think I talked -- I can't remember for
3 sure. I want to say I talked to James Howery, too, and told him
4 they located it. But honestly, I talked to James twice, but I
5 can't remember if it --

6 Q. It's okay. I'm curious about the sequence --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- to getting on scene to evaluate. Because the -- some of
9 the news reports are not --

10 A. The news reports, I didn't read on purpose. So I don't --

11 Q. Are --

12 A. -- can't speak to that. So --

13 Q. They're not quite right. But I have to get the sequence of
14 notification correct, so I'm trying to get as much information
15 about what actually happened.

16 A. Absolutely. I just don't know if any of them that I read,
17 that I could say it would have been accurate, is what I'm saying.

18 Q. No, I know that. So the troopers were notified, and then do
19 you know what happened next? I don't know if you were working on
20 getting stuff -- the helicopter to the scene?

21 A. Absolutely. So I -- one of my pilots, Jerrett (ph.), was
22 trying to get a hold of someone at Tunt to get out there by snow
23 machine. The -- we were told the Blackhawk was going to depart
24 within 15 to 30 minutes when I talked to them, that they were
25 crewed up already, and that they may or may not be taking medics

1 with them depending on how long it took them to get over there.

2 And it took them much longer than 30 minutes to get in the air.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. But they did get in the air, and they launched Search and
5 Rescue out of Tunt was my understanding also.

6 Q. Oh, okay.

7 A. Out of Tuntutuliak.

8 Q. So snow machines did go out of -- yeah.

9 A. Snow machines out of Tuntutuliak, yeah.

10 Q. You wouldn't happen to know who would be on the snow
11 machines? Do they have a Search and Rescue group there?

12 A. I've -- they must have, because they sent Search and Rescue
13 out of --

14 Q. They did, okay.

15 A. I'm not familiar with --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- what their support services are there, but --

18 Q. I think that probably Search and Rescue would be -- would
19 work. And then the Blackhawk had -- did it have the Medivac
20 Alaska folks on it? Do you know?

21 A. They didn't elaborately tell me after it launched.

22 Q. Oh, okay.

23 A. They just told me -- because I called back, I'm like, hey, is
24 that helicopter gone yet? And they said that yes, they -- because
25 I hadn't heard back; they were going to tell me when it launched.

1 You know, they were busy too. But I hadn't heard back for the
2 launch, and I was getting concerned it hadn't. And they said,
3 yes, it, it was like 5 minutes out.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And then they said it was 5 minutes out and it turned around
6 because the weather had moved in. And then they called back a
7 little later and said, no, it -- they did land. And that everyone
8 was deceased.

9 Q. Right. Okay. And you mentioned that when you looked at the
10 photographs, it looked like a CFIT accident to you. What about
11 the photographs that you viewed made it appear to be a CFIT
12 accident?

13 A. It appeared, from the photo I looked at, that the airplane
14 impacted the ground at an angle where it had gone into the ground,
15 you know, or -- well, it had hit the ground at an angle as opposed
16 to -- and I have no idea what angle -- but it appeared it had come
17 down at, like, a 45 degree angle or something, hit the ground
18 maybe a little -- I'm assuming a little right wing low, because it
19 sheared the right wing, it appeared, and that the fuselage would
20 have had like --

21 It's kind of hard to tell from the photo because it was white
22 and everything, but it appeared it had gone maybe 75 or 100 yards
23 further and come to rest. And it didn't look like it had skidded
24 across the ground. It looked like it hit the ground, came back
25 up. There was -- I could see there was dirt. It, you know, it

1 was discolored in the front of the airplane, so it obviously had
2 hit very, very hard because not only did it -- was there scattered
3 pieces of wreckage where it had impacted, but it also -- for it to
4 have dirt on it, it would have had to have hit extremely hard with
5 the frozen ground and the snow cover.

6 So that's why I determined -- I thought that it was a
7 high-speed CFIT.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you for that. So one or two more questions
9 about the company itself. Does the company have a safety program?

10 A. As far as for -- we have a safety -- just so I'm clear. We
11 have a safety plan that we use for -- that we've gone through.

12 Q. Is the safety -- I'm not talking about emergency response
13 plan. I'm talking about a company safety policy, plan, program,
14 manual. It might be a section of the GOM, it might be a separate
15 manual, an SMS. Anything along those lines?

16 A. Just our emergency locating procedures is the main thing,
17 yeah.

18 Q. Okay. Are there any safety meetings that the company has?

19 A. We do. We have pilot meetings in the morning and -- just
20 brief, you know, 5 minutes. I mean, it's not a big long thing. I
21 have some other things I want to incorporate into that in the
22 future. But yeah, they have a -- they talk in the morning about,
23 you know -- and that's their chance, also, if anybody's got any
24 concerns or whatever, to bring them up then.

25 And then we do have, you know, company meetings from time to

1 time. And we have manager meetings every Monday where all of the
2 managers are required to be here where we talk about how
3 everything's going in every department, and any concerns, any
4 questions, and the progress we've made and any changes we need to
5 make.

6 Q. How about -- you're not a pilot in this company, right?
7 You're not one of the --

8 A. That is correct. I am not.

9 Q. You're not a pilot, right?

10 A. I am not a pilot.

11 Q. Do you know if there are all-pilot meetings, like, where all
12 of the pilots sit and talk? Other than the morning meetings,
13 because the morning meetings are all of the pilots that are
14 scheduled that day I'm assuming.

15 A. Correct. And because we do have rotational pilots, it's not
16 possible for us to have all of our pilots here at one time. So
17 there again, like the must-read file, the, you know -- and, you
18 know, we make sure that we try and transfer any information that
19 was potentially -- could have -- someone could have missed that
20 way.

21 But also, you know, that they try and have morning safety
22 meetings -- or morning, you know, a morning meeting I guess you
23 could say. You can call it a safety meeting. I mean, it's --
24 that is the purpose of it is, you know, bad weather today, good
25 weather, you know, hazards, and -- yeah.

1 Q. So if a -- say a new pilot had a safety concern -- a flight
2 safety concern. How would you expect them to manage that?

3 A. I would expect them to talk to whoever the senior pilot is
4 there if they had something that was, you know -- usually the DO
5 or a chief pilot. It's -- we have a design that one of the two is
6 always supposed to be in Bethel.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. That they are never to be off at the same time.

9 Q. Are there any hazards --

10 A. It's not written in our GOM. That's just our --

11 Q. Right.

12 A. That's what our company policy. It -- I mean, unwritten
13 verbal company policy is, is that one of the two has to be here.

14 MS. PRICE: Okay. All right.

15 Hugh, do you have questions?

16 MR. YOUNGERS: I have a couple questions.

17 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

18 Q. So you mentioned that a pilot was reassessed after several
19 months. Is that in the training manual? And is -- what does that
20 entail?

21 A. Yeah. Reassessed is -- no, it's not a written guidance that
22 we have. Typically if a pilot -- because it is -- they are
23 individually -- you know, they have different limitations on them.
24 When they get reassessed, it -- usually we let them fly for one or
25 two rotations, and then reassess that hey, you know, how are they

1 doing? I don't know if they always fly with them or if they just,
2 you know, observe them taking off, landing, talking to them,
3 talking to the other pilots about how they're doing.

4 And first and foremost, the pilot himself should be a huge
5 part of the process with, how are you feeling out there? You
6 know? And a lot of times, pilots are more eager than you maybe
7 want them to be and, you know, while it -- you know, sometimes you
8 just have to leave that there a little longer or whatever.

9 Q. Right.

10 A. And --

11 Q. So that's based on -- this is because of their limitations
12 that they're assessed, that maybe we could remove those
13 limitations after a couple of rotations?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And it's, you know, I mean, it's just different people learn
17 at different speeds.

18 Q. Sure. Yeah.

19 A. And as Tony -- or not Tony, I'm sorry -- Ernie pointed out,
20 crosswind is a huge, huge part of what we look at with them,
21 because we do deal with more wind here than most places. And, you
22 know, it's a big, flat, open area, so the wind blows almost
23 everywhere as you know. And if it's not blowing, it's fogged in,
24 so you're not flying anyway.

25 But it -- crosswind is a huge, huge part of what we are

1 focusing on. What -- obviously ceiling and vis also. But I mean,
2 most of the pilots seem to -- my experience over the years, if
3 they're a below 10 guy, frequently their -- a lot of their
4 problems revolve around landing, ground handling, in a wind.

5 Obviously if they have an accident in the air coming in,
6 landing, taking off, whatever, that's far more serious. So I
7 mean, that's the number one concern. But my experience is they're
8 most likely to have a problem on takeoff or landing with brand new
9 guys.

10 Q. Okay. And last question. You mentioned that the DO assigns
11 the pilot to an airplane. Is that an everyday --

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- notion? Or once a shift?

14 A. No. They're -- yeah. They're assigned to that duty in that
15 airplane. When they've had the checkride in it, and they are
16 confident to fly in it, he assigns them to that plane.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And if their plane happens to be down, and they have another
19 airplane available that he's dual qualified in, they'll call
20 usually Tony and say, hey, can he take that? You know, he's good
21 to go.

22 Q. Okay. Thank you.

23 A. And we also, on our -- we finally -- I've been trying to get
24 them to be a little more proactive, but they ran a paper schedule
25 for the schedule for the pilots for the first couple of years. We

1 do have an online Google Calendar like normal, everyone else does
2 now. And on the calendar we have every pilot and what their
3 duties -- you know, where they're scheduled for. Not for a GOM
4 function, for functionality.

5 But it also shows -- we have a tab in there that shows what
6 airplanes the pilot is currently qualified in, so dispatch can
7 always look at that too. And then it helps us know how many Lance
8 pilots we have on shift, how many 207. But, you know, that's just
9 one more place where you can look and see, that guy is definitely
10 qualified. Obviously they have to be assigned to duty in the
11 plane too but, you know, we try and make all of that information
12 as available as we can.

13 But to answer your question, yes, the DO assigns a pilot to
14 the plane.

15 MR. YOUNGERS: Yeah. That's all I had.

16 MS. PRICE: Just a couple of quick follow-ups.

17 BY MS. PRICE:

18 Q. You spent a lot of energy recreating a new training manual,
19 correct?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Are you familiar with what's in the contents of the manual?

22 A. Yes. I'm not as familiar as the guys that trained out of it,
23 but --

24 Q. Yeah, that's why I'm asking.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Do you -- is there a section in the new training manual in
2 regards to CFIT avoidance, deteriorating visibility, VMC into IMC,
3 do you remember?

4 A. They -- there's a section on weather hazards where that is
5 covered, but to the extent, I can't tell you.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. And that is for certain one of my things for proceeding
8 forward that I've got in kind of our action plan, is to maybe do a
9 little -- just make sure that, that becomes a big focus. You
10 know, obviously any company accident history with any company is
11 something that you discuss in those things, but I think that this
12 is something that will be a pretty large focus moving forward.

13 Q. How about instrument experience? Do you have a -- I'm --
14 we're just about done. It's a VFR only operation. He's --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- getting a little antsy. It's a VFR only operation. Do
17 the pilots do any instrument training?

18 A. They do.

19 Q. Okay. When?

20 A. And they have to prove efficiency. They have to prove
21 they're proficient, and they have to, you know, shoot some
22 practice approaches. And they also do tracking, under the hood
23 work, unusual attitudes. And then during their checkride, same
24 thing, they go through under hood --

25 Q. So every 6 months? Every year?

1 A. Annually.

2 Q. Annually, yeah.

3 A. And when they -- excuse me -- when they transition to another
4 plane -- if they go from -- like, say a 172 pilot transitions into
5 another plane, they'll have their training in the aircraft, and
6 they'll go through instrument training in that aircraft again.
7 That's part of our, you know, our single-engine flight log
8 procedures, is that's part of the things you do. And they have to
9 be proficient in it. And then, you know, if they do an actual
10 full checkride in it, they do it again. And --

11 Q. Okay. Last question. What is the safety culture of Yute
12 Commuter Service? Do you feel like there's a good safety culture
13 here?

14 A. I do feel like it's a good safety culture. There's always
15 room for improvement in every safety culture for the most part,
16 but I think that our guys all have a very clear understanding that
17 we do not expect them to fly into bad weather conditions, and we
18 do not want them to fly into bad weather conditions. You know,
19 it's -- and that's something that was said by everyone out here
20 for many years. And it was kind of, don't do that, wink wink, you
21 know, go do that. And that is not what we're trying to do. I
22 don't want those guys flying around in bad conditions.

23 Because of the current pilot situation, we have new pilots
24 come through. We always have a couple of new guys. We have some
25 very, very highly experienced guys. I mean, we have multiple guys

1 with over 30,000 hours. So, you know -- 30,000 hours here. So
2 they're a wealth of knowledge, and I want our guy -- new guys
3 talking to them, them talking to them, trying to help them
4 understand and identify hazards.

5 And yeah, we make it super clear. I don't want you out there
6 pushing it, you know? And Tony, it's the same thing. I mean,
7 we've seen too many airplanes wreck, too many things happen out
8 here over the years working other places, doing other things, and
9 it's just not worth it.

10 Q. Thank you. The weather minimums for your operation are what,
11 500 and 2 for a VFR flight, right?

12 A. That is correct.

13 Q. Do you think going out at 500 and 2 is a safe flight?

14 A. Well, I know we all did it for a whole lot of years out here,
15 and we did it safely. However, we don't launch people at 500 and
16 2 from this business. We don't want you out there flying at 500
17 and 2. Do I want you to be able to come home at 500 and 2 if
18 you're stuck out between villages somewhere? Absolutely. Or get
19 on the ground at the nearest village.

20 But yeah, we don't -- you know, 500 and 2 is not a condition
21 that we want to be flying around in. That is to get safely on the
22 ground from somewhere.

23 Q. Okay. So what would be the -- what would dispatch use to
24 dispatch somebody as a weather minimum for --

25 A. You know, Ernie might get dispatched, you know, with 500 and

1 3 miles or something to go across the river to Napaskiak 6 miles
2 away and come home. But yeah, I don't ever want him dispatching
3 any of our guys out in this stuff.

4 Q. How about 1,000 and 2? Is that a good fit for a new pilot?

5 A. I think for a new pilot, usually 1,000 and 5 or somewhere in
6 that neighborhood would be more appropriate.

7 MS. PRICE: Okay. All right. I don't -- anything else?

8 MR. YOUNGERS: Not from me, no.

9 MS. PRICE: Thank you very much, Wade. I appreciate your
10 time.

11 MR. RENFRO: Thank you.

12 MS. PRICE: That concludes the interview.

13 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH OF A YUTE COMMUTER
SERVICE PIPER PA-32R-300 AIRCRAFT
NEAR TUNTUTULIAK, ALASKA,
ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020
Interview of Wade Renfro

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC20FA017

PLACE: Bethel, Alaska

DATE: February 9, 2020

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.




Christy Wilson
Transcriber