

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: BYRON PAUL, Chief Pilot
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

WADE RENFRO, General Manager
Yute Commuter Service

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 at NTSB investigation ANC20FA017. I'm Noreen Price, NTSB Accident Investigator and Investigator in Charge here.

We're going to go around the room and introduce everybody here.

MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm Myron Angstman. I'm the attorney for Yute Commuter Service, and I'm here to sit with the witness, who I just met for the first time today.

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

MS. PRICE: Go ahead.

MR. PAUL: I'm Byron Paul, chief pilot for Yute Commuter Service.

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

MS. PRICE: Great. Thank you, Byron, for being here today.

The NTSB is an independent federal organization that investigates accidents to determine probable cause and make recommendations so these don't happen again in the future.

We're going to be recording the interview today. It's going to be transcribed, and that transcription is going to be put in the public docket at the end of the investigation.

You're allowed to have one person present today. Who would you like that to be?

MR. PAUL: Myron.

1 MS. PRICE: Myron.

2 MR. PAUL: Myron Angstman.

3 MS. PRICE: Okay, fantastic. If you need to take a break,
4 we'll take a break. And before we get started, do you have any
5 questions or concerns?

6 MR. PAUL: (No audible response.)

7 MS. PRICE: Okay.

8 INTERVIEW OF BYRON PAUL

9 BY MS. PRICE:

10 Q. So if you wouldn't mind spelling your name for the record?

11 A. Byron, B-y-r-o-n, Paul, P-a-u-l.

12 Q. Thank you. So, Byron, what's your title at the company here?

13 A. I'm chief pilot.

14 Q. And how long have you been in that role?

15 A. Since October.

16 Q. So about 4 months; does that sound right?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. And then before you were the chief pilot, what position did
19 you have here?

20 A. I was a regular line pilot.

21 Q. Okay. On what airplane?

22 A. The 207.

23 Q. And how long have you worked for the company?

24 A. Well, it's going on 3 years in August.

25 Q. So about how many total flight hours do you have?

1 A. I want to say I should be coming up on 3,000.

2 Q. And could you give me a brief overview of your aviation
3 background, like who you worked for before? I don't need a lot of
4 details, but --

5 A. Well I went to flight school down here at the Yuut Yaqungviat
6 school for 3 years -- well, almost 3 years. Then I flew for Grant
7 Air after that for 7 months -- 6 months actually. Then I went
8 over to Renfro's; then I -- we became Yute Commuter Service.

9 Q. Okay. So now that you're the chief pilot, did you request to
10 be the chief pilot? Is that a position that you sought out? Or
11 did somebody ask you to fulfill that position?

12 A. I was asked, but I gladly accepted it.

13 Q. Okay. And can you explain what your duties are as the chief
14 pilot?

15 A. Well, with recruiting pilots, going through training, record
16 keeping, sometimes I take over operational control.

17 Q. And how many pilots do you have?

18 A. Like right now, we've got six online, and I want to say four
19 more that are on break right now.

20 Q. So six full time, four part time that are not on now?

21 A. No, not part time. They are just on their break.

22 Q. Oh, they're on their break?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Yeah. So how many pilots are working for the company full
25 time even though they take, you know, breaks?

1 A. I have to look. I can't name them all.

2 Q. Yeah, that's -- yeah, okay. That's all right. Is it ten
3 roughly? Twelve maybe?

4 A. I want to say 13.

5 Q. Okay. And do you have seasonal pilots that only come for the
6 summer? Or are all of the pilots all year with their breaks that
7 they take?

8 A. We have seasonal pilots. Just like two or three of them that
9 are doing their own thing right now.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. They come in after they -- like, Renfro's does their Moose, I
12 think. We've got pilots down in -- a pilot down in Mekoryuk doing
13 a guiding thing right now, so he should be back in a couple of
14 months.

15 Q. Okay. Do any of your pilots also fly on the Renfro
16 certificate?

17 A. Not right now.

18 MS. PRICE: Okay.

19 Did you have something, Wade?

20 MR. RENFRO: I just wanted to clarify, he's not actually
21 guiding for me, which would be probably what I would assume if I
22 was you. He --

23 MS. PRICE: No, I --

24 MR. RENFRO: He's a guide -- he does his own thing. He's not
25 one of my guides.

1 MR. PAUL: Yeah, that's Nate --

2 MS. PRICE: Okay, yeah.

3 MR. PAUL: Nate Amott (ph.). So --

4 MS. PRICE: That's fine, yeah. Okay.

5 BY MS. PRICE:

6 Q. And how many -- do you know roughly how many new pilots you
7 have? Like, new hires in the last 6 months?

8 A. Well, we have two that made it so far. Hunter and Tony.

9 We've got Alex, Wayne, and Brendan (ph.) that are waiting for
10 their checkrides. So --

11 Q. So five roughly?

12 A. Four.

13 Q. Four, okay.

14 A. Yeah. But like I said, Hunter and Tony were the only ones to
15 get their checkrides done and IOE.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. So we've got three more sitting down waiting.

18 Q. Did they all go through the same ground school? Is it one
19 group of --

20 A. No, they didn't.

21 Q. Oh, okay.

22 A. Like 2 months ago, we had three people come in, and only one
23 made it. And this last crew we had, we had five, and only one of
24 them made it so far, which is Tony. And we had to let go of --

25 Q. Wow.

1 A. -- one of them, so three more are waiting.

2 Q. Are they not making it for academic purposes? Or evaluation,
3 or for the actual --

4 A. The checkride.

5 Q. The checkride.

6 A. We just haven't had weather or training time for the
7 checkride. Like, we've got Alex sitting down waiting for a
8 checkride and --

9 Q. Oh, well you said they didn't make it. You have folks that
10 didn't make it. You mean that they're waiting or that you had to
11 fire them because they weren't good enough?

12 A. Well, we had one that we had to let go of because he wasn't
13 safe under --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- under us, so -- but three more that are waiting for their
16 checkrides.

17 Q. Oh, okay. And how many check airmen do you have?

18 A. So far, we only have Jackson so far as I know, unless Tony's
19 still a check airman.

20 Q. Are you a check airman?

21 A. Not yet, no.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I was going to be one in 207.

24 MS. PRICE: All right.

25 MR. RENFRO: Can I ask a question? I didn't -- I couldn't

1 actually hear what Byron said. I think he said Jackson, and
2 Tony's a check airman, but did -- I was just curious. I didn't
3 know.

4 MS. PRICE: He -- what Byron said is that Jackson, and he
5 wasn't sure if Tony was still --

6 MR. RENFRO: Oh, okay.

7 MS. PRICE: -- a check airman.

8 MR. RENFRO: All right. Good.

9 MS. PRICE: So if you want to move closer Wayne -- Wade.

10 MR. ANGSTMAN: Maybe we should get him a little closer, too,
11 to the recording --

12 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

13 MR. ANGSTMAN: -- because he has a very soft voice, and I
14 have hearing aids.

15 (Laughter.)

16 MR. ANGSTMAN: Old pilots all do.

17 MS. PRICE: Yeah. Yeah. Okay.

18 MR. RENFRO: Sorry.

19 MS. PRICE: No, that's okay.

20 BY MS. PRICE:

21 Q. Have you had any direction or training or guidance on how to
22 be a chief pilot?

23 A. Well, I've watched Ernie do it for 3 years, so --

24 Q. Okay. Was Ernie --

25 A. If Ernie or --

1 Q. Was Ernie a good chief pilot?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Yeah. I've been watching him, and he's been helping me off
5 and on with the position.

6 Q. All right. Do you have enough time to perform your duties as
7 a chief pilot?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Do you also fly the lines?

10 A. Yeah, I do.

11 Q. About how many hours are you getting a month?

12 A. Not as much as I want. I'd rather be up there flying than in
13 an office, so --

14 Q. I understand. I, too, would rather be flying than in an
15 office.

16 A. Yeah. I'd say, jeez, 20 to 30 hours since I took the
17 position. But I want to be up there, so --

18 Q. Okay. And do you live here in Bethel?

19 A. No, I don't. I live in Kipnuk.

20 Q. Okay. So how do you get here to perform your duties?

21 A. I do a 20 on and 10 off.

22 Q. Oh, okay. All right. And do you hold operational control?

23 A. Yes, I do.

24 Q. How often do you do that?

25 A. It's not very often, but when I do, it's -- I can probably

1 count like seven times since I got the position.

2 Q. Okay. Who usually has operational control?

3 A. It's either Wade or Tony.

4 Q. Does Wade or Tony, one of them have it more than the other?

5 A. I couldn't tell you. I'm not around when they have it, so --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Usually it's Tony when he's around and Wade's --

8 Q. How often do you get -- how often do you talk to Tony?

9 A. So just about every day.

10 Q. How about Wade? How often do you talk to Wade?

11 A. About every day too.

12 Q. Does the company have an internal audit program at all? Is
13 anybody looking at your training documents to see if you're doing
14 things correctly?

15 A. Well, we have Ernie coming in once in a while looking at --
16 making sure I'm gathering all of the right documents. And he's --
17 I don't know if he's an -- he's not an auditor, but he comes in
18 and helps me with that stuff.

19 Q. He's taking good care of you. He just --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Yeah. But the company doesn't have any type of formal,
22 internal checklist to check the processes, make sure things are
23 going right?

24 A. No. Not that I know of.

25 Q. Okay. Back to the pilots. How are they compensated? How

1 are pilots paid in the company?

2 A. It's every 2 weeks.

3 Q. Is it by the hour -- flight hour? Is it a salary? How does
4 it work?

5 A. Some, some of them are paid by the hour, and myself and Ernie
6 and the others are paid on a daily rate.

7 Q. So if a -- so you have pilots that are paid by the hour and
8 pilots that are paid a daily rate. So the daily rate, they get
9 paid regardless of whether they fly or not?

10 A. Um-hmm.

11 Q. Okay. Why is there a difference?

12 A. I'm not sure.

13 Q. That's a --

14 A. But I come in, and I give my plane away to whoever doesn't
15 have a plane, like every other line pilot. And I don't fly --
16 like I said, I don't fly as much as I used to.

17 Q. How about the accident pilot? Do you know what his
18 compensation -- was he by the hour, or daily, or --

19 A. I believe he was by the hour.

20 Q. So if he canceled a flight, he wouldn't be paid? Or does he
21 have a minimum rate?

22 A. He's got a minimum rate.

23 Q. Do you know what that is?

24 A. 3.5 minimum.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. The hours.

2 Q. So he gets paid for 3.5 hours even if he cancels and doesn't
3 fly at all?

4 A. Um-hmm.

5 MS. PRICE: All right.

6 Did you -- Wade, did you want to say something about that?

7 MR. RENFRO: Yeah. The reason some employees are paid on a
8 day rate and some are paid by the hour is the flight line pilots
9 that fly daily are paid by the hour with the minimum that Byron
10 discussed.

11 MS. PRICE: Okay.

12 MR. RENFRO: The other pilots have other duties that
13 sometimes prevent them from being able to fly all day, so instead
14 of them only getting three hours or four hours of flight time,
15 they're compensated at a rate where it would be seven hours or six
16 hours, six hours a day, something like that, six and a half, so
17 that the -- they don't become penalized for -- we want to
18 encourage them to do those other duties, not to be in the
19 airplane.

20 MS. PRICE: I understand. Thank you for clarifying that.

21 BY MS. PRICE:

22 Q. Do all of the new hires have Alaska time, do you know?

23 A. Not the last two groups that I -- oh, wait, wait. I'm sorry.
24 Tony and Alex, they do have Alaska time. They're CFIs over in
25 Palmer right now. But the other guys, they come from down states,

1 so they don't have Alaska time.

2 Q. Okay. Is it hard to find folks with Alaska time?

3 A. Um-hmm.

4 Q. And why is Alaska time, do you think, important?

5 A. Well, the weather.

6 Q. Well, what about the weather here --

7 MS. PRICE: I'll tell you what. I'm going to take a quick
8 break. Hold on.

9 (Off the record.)

10 (On the record.)

11 BY MS. PRICE:

12 Q. Okay, again, and why is it important to have Alaska time?

13 A. Well, the weather can change in a second out here, and we
14 want pilots that are -- that know what the weather can do to you.
15 I mean, it's a lot different from down states.

16 Q. Have you ever flown in -- down in the states at all?

17 A. No.

18 Q. So when you have new pilots come in, do you tell them about
19 this?

20 A. Yes, we do.

21 Q. And what type of guidance do you give them in regard to the
22 weather? Meaning what should they do different here than they did
23 in the lower 48 when they go flying?

24 A. Well, I always stick them with the mentor pilots down there
25 and have them ask questions -- a lot of questions. Like we've got

1 George, Jerry, and Henry, and they know a lot about flying out
2 here.

3 Q. Okay. So I noticed on the risk assessments that the pilot
4 did not -- he said he had more than 250 hours of Alaska time. So
5 does that sound right to you? Did he have that much -- over 250
6 hours of Alaska time?

7 A. No. I didn't see that.

8 Q. Okay. Who manages the pilot training program here?

9 A. Myself and Tony.

10 Q. Okay. Do you also teach any classes or train in the
11 airplane?

12 A. Not the airplanes. Not yet, no.

13 Q. Okay. You're not -- that's right. You're not a check
14 airman.

15 A. No.

16 Q. How about classroom? Do you provide training in the
17 classroom?

18 A. Um-hmm.

19 Q. So are you familiar with the training manual, then, that you
20 guys have?

21 A. Not entirely. I mean, I still have to go look it over, I
22 mean, from time to time. So --

23 Q. Is it currently approved by the FAA? Your training manual is
24 approved?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. As of December 9th or 19th, I believe.

3 Q. Do you know, is there anything in the manual that you can
4 recall that refers to CFIT avoidance, diminishing visibility, VMC
5 into IMC scenarios? Is that anything that's covered in training,
6 either ground or air?

7 A. I'd have to look it up.

8 Q. That's okay. Since you've been chief pilot, have you had any
9 pilot -- all-pilot meetings? This is prior to the accident --

10 A. Yeah, we --

11 Q. -- where you talk --

12 A. -- safety meetings.

13 Q. -- to all of the pilots?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. And what sort of things are discussed at the safety meetings?

16 A. Weather, airports, wind covers, some of the runways,
17 communication. Just important stuff like that.

18 Q. What -- so what's one of the biggest challenges you have?

19 A. Weather.

20 Q. The weather?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. As pilots, the weather is the biggest challenge, and so
23 weather is a pretty broad term. What specifically about the -- I
24 think we talked about it changes quickly, but changes from what to
25 what? Like, is it an icing that you're worried about? Is it --

1 A. Fog.

2 Q. Fog is one of the biggest worries, okay.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Is that a wintertime, a summertime, a --

5 A. It's a right now time.

6 Q. A right now --

7 A. With the weather we've been having, you know, it goes from
8 really cold to just really warm, and you've got that fog coming
9 out of nowhere.

10 Q. And so are there any discussions at your pilot safety
11 meetings or in training regarding flat light conditions out there
12 in fog, or low visibility with all of the white snow on the
13 ground?

14 A. Um-hmm.

15 Q. And does the company have any maneuvers listed in the
16 training manual or the GOM regarding what to do if you get into
17 that sort of scenario that you can recall?

18 A. I'd have to look it up, but 90 -- 100 percent of the time,
19 all of the veteran pilots will tell you, you should just turn
20 around. So -- during our safety meetings especially.

21 Q. So when you're training, do you ever cover the TAWS systems
22 in the airplane? I don't know, do you have terrain avoidance
23 warning systems in the airplanes at all? I'm not sure.

24 A. No, we do not.

25 Q. None of them have any --

1 A. Not on the 207 that I know.

2 Q. Oh, you fly the 207, yeah. Do you happen to know about
3 the --

4 MR. RENFRO: We don't have any.

5 MS. PRICE: No TAWS warnings whatsoever?

6 MR. RENFRO: No.

7 MS. PRICE: Okay.

8 MR. RENFRO: Only the -- depending on what screen you're on,
9 on a GPS, can show you.

10 MS. PRICE: The GPS will show --

11 MR. RENFRO: Yeah, red.

12 MS. PRICE: -- red?

13 MR. RENFRO: Yeah.

14 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

15 MR. RENFRO: Or yellow if you're within 500 feet.

16 MR. PAUL: Um-hmm.

17 MS. PRICE: Do you know if there's any oral (ph.) warnings on
18 the --

19 MR. RENFRO: No.

20 MR. PAUL: No.

21 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

22 BY MS. PRICE:

23 Q. How about instrument training? Are all of the pilots -- do
24 they all conduct instrument training on a regular basis and get an
25 instrument check?

1 A. What we've got is, like, we just do the hood training for all
2 the pilots out there who are --

3 Q. You do, do simulated instrument training under the hood?

4 A. Um-hmm.

5 Q. How often?

6 A. It's normally during the training portion and the checkride.

7 Q. For initial hires?

8 A. Um-hmm.

9 Q. How about recurrent?

10 A. Yeah, do it during recurrent also.

11 Q. So every year?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Is there any instrument training outside of that?

14 A. Huh-uh.

15 Q. So once a year they get under the hood. How much -- is it
16 just during the checkride that they get the training --

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. -- they do the instrument approaches and the tracking?

19 A. Um-hmm.

20 Q. Just that -- just for the checkride?

21 A. Um-hmm.

22 Q. Okay. So maybe one hour a year? Does that sound --

23 A. Two hours.

24 Q. Two hours of instrument time and approaches every year?

25 A. Um-hmm.

1 Q. So the pilots don't get any practice because it's a VFR
2 operation, correct?

3 A. (No audible response.)

4 Q. During a year -- there's no instrument practice during the
5 year because it's all VFR, correct?

6 A. Um-hmm.

7 Q. Have you ever flown with the accident pilot?

8 A. An accident pilot?

9 Q. The -- Tony Matthews?

10 A. Only on the evaluation flight, yes.

11 Q. On the -- I thought he had an evaluation flight by Ernie.

12 A. I was with them.

13 Q. Oh, okay.

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. And how do you think he did? Were you in the backseat or --

16 A. Yeah. I was in the backseat watching everything.

17 Q. Oh, all right. How did he do?

18 A. He did really great. Out of all five of them, he was the
19 best one. I mean, he handled the plane really good, and I didn't
20 see no rush or anything. I mean, his landings were really great.

21 Q. And this was in the 172 before he started training, correct?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Yeah, okay. And how about on the ground? Do -- were you
24 with him at all during ground training? Or --

25 A. What kind of ground training?

1 Q. The systems training. The initial training -- company
2 training that's required.

3 A. We went to the -- through the, the Lance training together,
4 and he's the one who talked the most. I mean, he talked about the
5 airspeeds like he knew it already.

6 Q. Yeah. So it sounds like he was a good student. Is that a --

7 A. Yeah, every time we'd give the wrong answer, he'd always
8 correct us, so -- he was a CFI.

9 Q. Um-hmm.

10 MS. PRICE: Yeah?

11 MR. RENFRO: Can I ask a question? This is Wade.

12 MS. PRICE: Yep.

13 MR. RENFRO: Were you -- did you sit in the ground school
14 with him, or did you teach it?

15 MR. PAUL: Ernie was teaching the last ground school.

16 MS. PRICE: Yeah, I understood that. Yeah. Okay.

17 MR. RENFRO: I wasn't 100 percent on that. Okay.

18 MS. PRICE: All right.

19 BY MS. PRICE:

20 Q. How about -- how often is the -- your POI here from the FAA?
21 Who is your POI?

22 A. I believe that's James Howery. It seems like I see him every
23 other week.

24 Q. Every other week? He must like you.

25 A. No, he's not here every other week. But it seems like every

1 time I turn around he's here. He's either giving checkrides or --
2 but yeah, I see him.

3 Q. Do you have a good relationship with him?

4 A. We talk every time we see each other.

5 Q. Okay. Have you ever been called for a risk assessment that
6 required a DO delegate to approve of a flight? You know, in a --
7 in the daily operations, it's --

8 A. Yeah, I know. I understand, but I'm trying to remember if
9 they've ever called me. Because whenever I had operational
10 control, all of the veteran pilots or experienced pilots were
11 always flying, and I've never had to give -- talk to them about it
12 because they were veterans and they knew what they were doing.

13 Q. So on the days that you did have operational control, could
14 you explain to me what you do? Like what do -- what you do
15 different on those days. You're not -- are you flying a line at
16 all when you have --

17 A. No, I am not.

18 Q. Okay. So you're not flying. So what do you do to fulfill
19 your operational control duty?

20 A. Well, I walk -- when I'm in the office there, I check the
21 weather, which pilot's going where, what their load is, what their
22 route is, and how they feel about it. And if they're okay with
23 it, then I sign them off.

24 Q. And what do you mean by "I sign them off"?

25 A. If they're okay to go, then I approve of it.

1 Q. Okay. By signing the risk assessment?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Or by --

4 A. The dispatch signs the risk assessments. I just give them
5 verbal approval.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. But I've never had a call because all of the veteran pilots
8 were always flying when I was having operational control.

9 Q. So in regards to looking at the weather and who goes where,
10 do new pilots have any restrictions on where they can go or what
11 weather they can fly in?

12 A. Yeah. We normally put a 15 knot crosswind on the new pilots,
13 and, like, VFR minimums on them.

14 Q. What are those VFR minimums?

15 A. 1,000 and 2.

16 Q. 1,000 and 2?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. We never send them out when we have special VFRs unless we --
20 myself or Tony goes and flies with them. And Tony's usually the
21 one who goes flying with them for the specials and the crosswind
22 to upgrade them to a 20 knot restriction for their crosswind.

23 Q. Oh, so before they get upgraded, there's a check on them? Is
24 that what you said? Tony checks them out before they --

25 A. I mean, not check them out, but higher their restrictions.

1 Q. How do you know when someone's ready? Or how do you think he
2 knows when someone's ready to get, you know, higher --

3 A. After they've flown the line for a while, like --

4 Q. For a while?

5 A. -- a couple -- two shifts.

6 Q. How about the weather restriction? You said that -- what'd
7 you say, 1,000 and 2 is when pilots -- the new pilots, that's
8 their minimums that they get released on. When does that change?

9 A. Well, when Tony approves of it. When we have like IFR 500
10 and 2, Tony goes out and flies with them. And then if he likes
11 it -- or if he likes how they fly, then he gives them their
12 specials -- I mean removes their special restrictions.

13 Q. And how are those special -- those restrictions communicated
14 to the dispatch folks? Like, how does James know, oh, this is a
15 new pilot and not supposed to go if the weather's below 1,000 and
16 2?

17 A. I'm sure Tony goes over there and talks to them. And I
18 think --

19 Q. Tony's in Las Vegas and --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- he doesn't have operational control.

22 A. When -- after he flies with him. Like, we took off -- he
23 took off Hunter's specials restrictions after he went out and flew
24 with him.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. So --

2 Q. So it's a standard restriction until Tony says otherwise it
3 sounds like?

4 A. Um-hmm.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah, I was supposed to go fly with Hunter to see if he's
7 qualified to get his restrictions taken off, but we've always had
8 good weather.

9 Q. Okay. So are the flight followers and dispatch folks, are
10 they -- do they have operational control? Are they delegates of
11 operational control, do you know? Do they have any authorities?

12 A. Huh-uh.

13 Q. No?

14 A. No.

15 Q. When it comes time to release a flight, is it the pilot that
16 decides to release the flight if it -- the risk assessment is low?
17 Or is it both the pilot and the dispatcher that have to -- or
18 flight follower? I'm not sure who --

19 A. No. It's the pilot and --

20 Q. The flight --

21 A. -- whoever has operational control.

22 Q. Okay. So who signs the risk assessment form?

23 A. That's dispatch. Dispatch talks to whoever's got operational
24 control, and they sign it off after they get the blessing from
25 whoever has operational control.

1 Q. Even if it's a low one? Like, it comes out to five or a ten,
2 they call and get the blessing to sign off operational control?

3 A. No. It's either 16 or more.

4 Q. Okay. So other than -- so if it's below that, then it's the
5 flight follower?

6 A. Dispatch, yeah.

7 Q. The dispatcher that does it?

8 A. Um-hmm.

9 MS. PRICE: Okay. I'm going to take a break. I'm almost
10 done though. Thanks.

11 Hugh, do you have any questions for --

12 MR. YOUNGERS: I had a couple questions.

13 MS. PRICE: -- Byron? Yeah.

14 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

15 Q. So, Byron, are you -- you're a company flight instructor?

16 A. No, I'm not.

17 Q. No?

18 A. Not yet.

19 Q. Not yet? Okay. And so the normal restrictions placed on a
20 new company pilot is 15 knot crosswind and 1,000 foot ceiling, 2
21 miles visibility?

22 A. Um-hmm.

23 Q. Just wanted to confirm that. And then since you've been
24 flying here, have you ever had a risk assessment go over 16?

25 A. For myself flying?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Yes, I did.

3 Q. Does it happen very often? Or --

4 A. No.

5 Q. No.

6 A. Are you talking about me flying --

7 Q. Yes.

8 A. -- and I had to have -- talk to Tony?

9 Q. Um-hmm.

10 A. Yes, I did. I want to say three times.

11 Q. Okay. Is it very often that people get into the --

12 MR. YOUNGERS: Isn't there like four sections?

13 MS. PRICE: For what?

14 MR. YOUNGERS: Low, moderate --

15 MS. PRICE: Yeah, we're looking at it right here. Yeah. The

16 fourth one is cancel if it's above a 40. So there is a low, which

17 is zero to 15; medium, which is 16 to 30; 31 to 40 is caution; and

18 then the next one's cancel. So above 40's cancel.

19 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

20 Q. Do many people get to medium very often?

21 A. Not when I have operational control, no.

22 Q. I mean just in general. In -- since you've been flying here,

23 with the risk assessment, do many people get above a 16?

24 A. I'd have to say a handful.

25 Q. A handful?

1 A. Yeah.

2 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay. Thank you.

3 MS. PRICE: Anything else? Hugh, do you have any other
4 questions, or are you --

5 MR. YOUNGERS: I don't.

6 MS. PRICE: Okay.

7 Wade, do you have any questions you want to ask or clarify
8 or --

9 MR. RENFRO: I guess probably not. I have additional
10 information, but I don't know if this is the time to say it.

11 MS. PRICE: Is it in regard to chief pilot duties?

12 MR. RENFRO: No.

13 MS. PRICE: Okay. Then we'll talk about it after.

14 MR. RENFRO: Okay.

15 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

16 MR. RENFRO: At least not directly. So, no.

17 MS. PRICE: Yeah, okay. All right.

18 BY MS. PRICE:

19 Q. Do you -- Byron, do you have any idea of what may have
20 happened in this accident? What --

21 A. With Tony?

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. I believe it was flat light.

24 Q. Have you ever experienced flat light yourself out there?

25 A. Yes, I did.

1 Q. Is it pretty common this time of year?

2 A. Uh-huh.

3 Q. It is?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. And how do you manage a flat light?

6 A. Stay on the instruments. Don't look out.

7 Q. And then what?

8 A. I just stay on the instruments and turn around.

9 Q. And turn around? And is the flat light typically when the
10 ceilings are low? A low visibility when there's snow out? Or is
11 it the fog here that causes the flat light?

12 A. Say that again.

13 Q. It -- what phenomenon is it that causes the flat light here
14 in the wintertime? Is it low visibility, low ceilings and the
15 snow --

16 A. The low visibility and -- with the snow. I mean, it looks
17 like the sky's the -- the ground's the sky and the sky's the
18 ground is the only way I can tell you.

19 Q. And do you get that at -- I mean, your weather minimums are
20 what? What can you go flying in? What's your VFR weather
21 minimums?

22 A. My minimums are 500 and 2.

23 Q. Right. So you can be out there flying at 500 and 2 and get
24 flat light?

25 A. Um-hmm.

1 Q. It's not a lot of altitude to keep you safe in those
2 conditions, is it? It's pretty low.

3 A. Um-hmm.

4 Q. Is there any way to predict flat light if it's a common thing
5 out here? You can say, well, the conditions today look like flat
6 light is a possibility? Because the snow is always there in the
7 winter, right? I mean, sometimes it's thicker than others and the
8 bushes show, but most of the winter the snow is white.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. So that's going to be there, right? All winter?

11 A. It seems like the further you go towards the coast, the worse
12 it gets. Like Kipnuk, Chefornak, Toksook, Nightmute, Newtok.
13 It's just flat, nothing but snow up there.

14 Q. Oh, okay. Not much terrain?

15 A. You've got no trees.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. No nothing. Just looks like sky. I mean --

18 Q. So that's a known hazard then, right? In Alaska, in that
19 specific area particularly, has a lot of flat light conditions?

20 A. Um-hmm.

21 Q. Is there any way to avoid that? So if you know that, that
22 area has got a lot of flat light conditions, should you be
23 dispatching new pilots there when the weather is below 1,000 or
24 below 2,000 even? Or --

25 A. Huh-uh.

1 Q. Is there any training for flat light recognition or IMC into
2 VMC? I think we talked about this already. No, right? Do you --
3 is there any training in the program for that sort of scenario?

4 A. We got a lot of hood work out there.

5 Q. A lot of what?

6 A. Hood work.

7 Q. The hood work.

8 A. Yeah.

9 MS. PRICE: Okay, yeah. All right. If no one else has
10 anything, I --

11 MR. RENFRO: I do have one.

12 MS. PRICE: Okay.

13 MR. RENFRO: So is the flat light every year, Byron? Is it
14 always like that, I mean, as far as the snow? Do we have tons of
15 snow out there every year?

16 MR. PAUL: Yes. Well, yes. It seems like it, it's like that
17 every year out there just on the coast and the island mostly -- on
18 the way to the island. So --

19 MR. RENFRO: Okay.

20 MR. PAUL: We've got no bushes out there at all. So nothing,
21 no kind of ground reference or anything.

22 MS. PRICE: Okay. Anything else?

23 Anything else you want to share, Byron, you think might help
24 the investigation?

25 MR. PAUL: No.

1 MS. PRICE: All right. Thank you very much. I appreciate
2 your help. And good luck with all of the improvements you guys
3 are going to do in the company, and your chief pilot career. That
4 concludes.

5 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

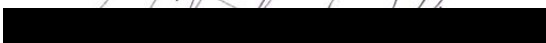
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH OF A YUTE COMMUTER
SERVICE PIPER PA-32R-300 AIRCRAFT
NEAR TUNTUTULIAK, ALASKA,
ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020
Interview of Byron Paul

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