



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Date: February 20, 2020
Persons Contacted: Scott Wilburn, prior Yute pilot
NTSB Accident Number: ANC20FA017, Yute Commuter Service

Narrative: Mr. Wilburn contacted the NTSB via the witness email system in regard to his knowledge of operations with Yute Commuter Service as a previous line pilot there. This is a summary of his statements.

Mr. Wilburn has aviation experience in the US Coast Guard, Georgia Forestry Service, Grant Aviation and Yute Commuter Services. He has about 3,000 total flight hours. He flew for Grant Aviation until the summer of 2018 when he and other pilots were laid off. He then started working for Yute Commuter Service in Bethel, Alaska, in August of 2018. He flew Cessna 207 and Piper PA-32R-300 (Cherokee Lance) as a line pilot. He has about 500 hours of Lance time.

Mr. Wilburn felt compelled to contact the NTSB because he left Yute in April of 2019 due to safety concerns and wanted to provide any insight that would be helpful to the investigation of N7632C that crashed on February 6, 2020. He did not know the accident pilot, but he felt if his training was anything like the training that Mr. Wilburn received, it was not safe. He loved the flying and the people but felt it was unsafe and would like to help to improve the situation.

When asked how initial training was, he stated that it was very uninformative and unprofessional. They sat around in a classroom for a couple of days and talked about standard 135 topics and were provided a GOM to take home and read. Mostly, the training pilots told stories of their flight experience. The pilots were provided the answers to all test questions. They were told to do all paperwork in pencil, in case it will need to be changed after the flight. Mr. Wilburn thought that was very suspect. It was nothing like Grant Aviation training, which was very good. Flight training was good, but he had a frightening experience regarding fuel, weather and CRM during his check ride with the chief pilot (CP). He recalled that they were scheduled for a 4 leg trip and the weather was not very good. Mr. Wilburn did not think they had enough fuel and requested more, but the CP said "no", we need to go. Dispatch questioned them when they reported outbound with only 2 hours of fuel. The weather was low, 600 ft and below the

whole trip. At one airport it was 400 ft and less than 1 mile. The CP took the controls and made the landing. The weather decreased to 200 ft and less than 1 mile and the CP asked Mr. Wilburn what to do now, and he replied, "wait for the weather to improve," and the CP responded with "no, we have to go," and he performed the takeoff in IMC. He handed the controls to Mr. Wilburn, who was uncomfortable because he wasn't instrument current. He asked "don't we need to get out of this?" The CP responded with "no, I know this area like the back of my hand." He asked Mr. Wilburn to descend over Toksook Bay for a landing, and the airplane broke out at 150 ft. The airplane was getting very low on fuel on the next leg, and he asked the CP to return to Bethel instead of continuing, but the CP insisted they go to the last stop. The airplane had 10 gallons of fuel after departing and they flew through clouds to VMC on top and ran the engine lean of peak to conserve fuel. They received a SVFR arrival back to Bethel. Mr. Wilburn was very uncomfortable during the entire flight and very surprised when the CP told him that he passed the "check ride."

Mr. Wilburn stated that there was no guidance or restrictions for new pilots, other than a 20 knot crosswind limit. When asked what he did as a new pilot to survive, he said he used the advice of a native pilot who knew the area and told Mr. Wilburn to "fly low and learn the rivers, the rocks, the creeks and the land" so he can navigate in low visibility at low altitude when the weather unexpectedly diminishes. Mr. Wilburn also stated that it was particularly challenging in the winter with snow covering the tundra and the coastal fog that was almost always at Tuntutuliak to the coast. It was always essentially instrument conditions. Yute provided no training for flat light or VMC into IMC. The company put pressure on pilots to go always when the weather was 500 ft and 2 miles visibility. Pilots were encouraged to wait at the hold short for the weather to improve for special VFR (SVFR) clearance out of Bethel, regardless of the low weather at the village airports, particularly Tuntutuliak and the coastal communities to the south and west. "They want you to get there no matter what." The problem is that the weather changes so rapidly. He recalled a time when he went to Kipnuk in low weather, and the fog enveloped the airplane very quickly and he had to perform a 180 degree turn but could not get out of the weather until descending very low and landing.

When asked about other significant flight hazards, he stated that night flights were very challenging due to no ground lights and insufficient reliable weather reporting, at the end of a long crew day. It is pitch black outside of many airports, and definitely instrument procedures are required. The company did not provide instrument proficiency flights outside of initial training and competency checks.

Mr. Wilburn stated that weather reporting was often unreliable, especially from village agents. The agents want their people, cargo and mail to be transported, and they often under report hazardous weather and runway conditions.

He stated that he flew within his own personal minimums, but he was not always compliant and sometimes did what he had to do to survive and complete missions. He said that many of the pilots were cowboys, who fly as low as 50 ft when no passengers were onboard. They were used to flying at low altitudes in low weather conditions and did not think much of it (even senior pilots.) It was encouraged at Yute.

Mr. Wilburn discussed the poor safety culture at the company. There was no formal reporting method, particularly an anonymous one. He was called by three management personnel regarding a complaint that a pilot made to the FAA and they wanted to know if it was him and they were upset. He had a complete electrical failure during a flight on a very cold day, and submitted a report to management, but never heard that an investigation was done. He was told that they were having issues with that airplane in cold weather, but that was not relayed to him before the flight. He felt that was a serious incident that should have been investigated and probably wasn't. He recalled that one of the airplanes was the first to be equipped with ADSB in and out, but the circuit breaker was always pulled when he got the airplane. The CP told him that they fly with it that way (even though it was not placarded.) Mr. Wilburn always pushed it in. The tower controller asked Mr. Wilburn one day why he was the only pilot flying that airplane with ADSB working. Mr. Wilburn suspected that the company pilots did not want anyone watching what they were doing so the ADSB equipment was not powered. He also stated that the company lost 7 airframes in accidents the year that he worked there, and he didn't believe that most of them were reported to the NTSB or FAA.