

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,

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ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020

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Interview of: LAURA MALVICH, Flight Coordinator
Yute Commuter Service

Yute Commuter Service
Bethel, Alaska

Saturday,
February 8, 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 8th, 2020. We're at Yute Commuter Services in Bethel, Alaska, conducting NTSB investigation ANC20FA017. This is Noreen Price. I'm an Aviation Accident Investigator at the NTSB and the Investigator in Charge.

We're going to go around the room and introduce ourselves now.

MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm Myron Angstman. I'm the attorney for Yute Commuter Service. I am also appearing here as a representative of the witness, although she is not my client, and I've never met her until tonight, I don't believe. Is that right?

MS. MALVICH: That is correct.

MR. ANGSTMAN: Okay.

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

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

MS. MALVICH: Laura Malvich, flight coordinator.

MS. PRICE: Thank you, Laura, for being here today.

The NTSB is an independent agency that's charged with investigating accidents. The purpose of the investigation is solely safety. We have nothing to do with court cases, criminal, liability cases. It's just a safety investigation. The FAA is working with us as well.

We'll be determining probable cause and hopefully making recommendations so this doesn't happen again in the future. And you play a crucial role in the investigation, so thank you very

1 much.

2 You can have one person represent you today during the
3 interview. Who would that be?

4 MS. MALVICH: I'm sorry. What was your name again?

5 MR. ANGSTMAN: Myron.

6 MS. MALVICH: Myron.

7 MS. PRICE: Okay. Thanks.

8 Thank you, Myron.

9 So to get started -- do you have any questions before we get
10 started?

11 MS. MALVICH: No.

12 INTERVIEW OF LAURA MALVICH

13 BY MS. PRICE:

14 Q. If you would spell your name for the record.

15 A. First name Laura, L-a-u-r-a, last name Malvich,
16 M-a-l-v-i-c-h.

17 Q. Okay. Thank you. So what's your title here at the company?

18 A. Flight coordinator.

19 Q. And how many years have you worked for the company?

20 A. A little over a year.

21 Q. All right. Prior to that if you could give me a general idea
22 of your aviation experience. Have you worked in aviation for
23 other companies? And kind of what you did.

24 A. My first time working in aviation I worked for Ravn as a CSA.
25 Then second time, here, started up as a CSA and did that for a

1 couple of months. Then I started flight following for about 6
2 months, and then moved from flight following to flight
3 coordinator.

4 Q. And how do you like it?

5 A. I love what I do.

6 Q. Is it --

7 A. I enjoy my job.

8 Q. Is it hard? Is it difficult, challenging?

9 A. Some days, but most of the time, it's smooth.

10 Q. Uh-huh. Are your duties written anywhere?

11 A. In the operational control.

12 Q. So how were you trained to do your duties as a dispatcher and
13 flight follower when you started?

14 A. So flight following, I had somebody who I shadowed for a
15 little bit, and then she shadowed me as I started flight
16 following. And then from flight following to flight coordinating,
17 I was just told to observe and learn and ask questions, and then I
18 had somebody observe me as I was flight coordinating.

19 Q. So how long to -- how much time as a flight follower did you
20 shadow somebody before you --

21 A. I was flight following for about 6 months before I started
22 flight coordinating.

23 Q. Okay. And as part of that process did you -- were you
24 required to read the GOM, the general operating manual?

25 A. Yes. Yes, I've read it.

1 Q. And were you -- was operational control, that term ever
2 explained to you and what that means?

3 A. What do you mean?

4 Q. Have you ever heard the term operational control?

5 A. Yes. Yes, I have.

6 Q. And do you understand what it is?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Or if you could describe it as simply as you can, like in
9 your own --

10 A. The person in operational control has full understanding of
11 everything that's going on.

12 Q. And who usually has operational control here?

13 A. Wade Renfro or Tony Spangler.

14 Q. And how do you know, when you're a dispatcher, like, who has
15 operational control?

16 A. So first thing we do in the morning before we start planning
17 any flights is we call and get a report of somebody who is going
18 to be in operational control.

19 Q. Okay. So when you come in the morning as a dispatcher, if
20 you would kind of describe your day, what you start out doing, the
21 pilots come in and how you interact with them. And then the risk
22 assessment process, the weather process, and then all the way to a
23 release of a flight. How do you -- what do you do there?

24 A. So first thing in the morning we come in we get traffic to
25 pick up from the villages, their weather, their runway conditions,

1 and we just go through all that and see where we can and cannot go
2 depending on weather or runway conditions. And as soon as that's
3 all done, we talk to the person in operational control, say
4 weather is good here, and we can't go here this morning, so that's
5 going on weather hold.

6 Q. Uh-huh. How about assigning a pilot to a scheduled flight?
7 Does that happen the morning -- that morning in the morning as
8 well, or does it happen the night before?

9 A. No. It happens in the morning after we figure out traffic
10 and weather and runway reports.

11 Q. Okay. And how do you pick a pilot for a specific scheduled
12 flight?

13 A. Just as planes are available and what's best suited for the
14 flight.

15 Q. So does anybody get to, like, approve of who you've assigned?
16 You are actually assigning a pilot to a scheduled flight in an
17 airplane, right?

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. It's your job to put those together?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. And the load and manifest, right?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. That is you?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Okay. All right. And does anyone have to approve that?

1 A. It's just, you know, we make the play as it goes and they
2 fill out a flight risk assessment and it's -- we talk about that
3 with the person in operational control.

4 Q. So the person in operational control gets to review the
5 pilot -- the schedule before they get released to go? Or only if
6 there's a problem?

7 A. Only if there's, you know, high risk from the flight risk
8 assessment.

9 Q. Oh, I see. So if there's no -- if the number on the flight
10 risk assessment is low, it's whatever you as the dispatch person
11 has assigned to the pilot, the airplane?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. And then the risk assessment process if you would
14 describe how you get weather for that process?

15 A. So most of our weather comes from the FAA weather cameras.

16 Q. Okay. It's a nice site, isn't it?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. It is, yeah. The FAA does some things very good.

19 And then are there any other things that you look at? On the
20 FAA website, what specifically are you looking at? Because there
21 is a lot of information available depending on what you're looking
22 for on it.

23 A. So on the FAA weather site we look at the ceiling, the winds,
24 what direction, the visibility.

25 Q. Okay. So the current observations, the METARs?

1 A. Yeah, and the TAF for the day.

2 Q. How about any PIREPs or NOTAMs? Do you check those?

3 A. NOTAM is opened on a separate tab.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And we also look at Kusko.net.

6 Q. All right. And the areas that don't have weather
7 observations, you look at the cameras if it's light out?

8 A. The cameras, and we also have our agents give us the weather
9 conditions. They tell us how far they can see and how the wind
10 is blowing.

11 Q. And are their reports to you pretty reliable?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Do you feel like they are good weather reports of the
14 conditions of the field?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. So once you get the weather, do you document it anywhere?

17 A. Yes. We have a weather and traffic sheet that we use for the
18 morning and for the evening.

19 Q. Okay. So then you have a risk assessment form, the pilot
20 fills it out and initials it, and then you look at it, correct?

21 A. And then the flight follower.

22 Q. Oh, the flight follower?

23 A. The flight follower or I look at it.

24 Q. Oh, either one of you. Okay. And when you look at it, do
25 you ever look at it to see if the pilot has filled it out properly

1 or maybe the pilot missed a spot? Is that something you look at,
2 or are you concerned with your own knowledge of the weather and
3 the runways and whatnot?

4 A. So with the weather and everything, we look at, and then once
5 they're done filling out the flight risk assessment, we go through
6 all the numbers and where they marked it.

7 Q. Okay. So would you notice if the pilot didn't put down
8 something that they were supposed to, do you think?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Okay. And by initialing the bottom of the risk assessment
11 form, are you authorizing the flight to go? You're releasing the
12 flight?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Okay. So is it the pilot and your responsibility? Is it
15 a -- do you co-share that authority, responsibility to release the
16 flight?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. All right. After that process is done, what happens to the
19 risk assessment form?

20 A. At the end of the day they get filed in our filing cabinet.

21 Q. And who collects them and files them?

22 A. They get put in a binder by a 3-month period.

23 Q. Okay. And who -- where is that? Is it in the dispatch
24 office?

25 A. The files are in the dispatch office, and then the binder

1 will be kept here in this office.

2 Q. Okay. The way it was described to us is that the pilots up
3 in dispatch have a -- there's a binder of all the forms?

4 A. Yeah. They have their own names in them, and they keep that
5 in there for the day, but at the end of the day, the flight risk
6 assessments get taken out and put into a different file with their
7 name on it.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And get put into the filing cabinet.

10 Q. And is it one of you folks that do that?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Takes them out and files them all?

13 A. Yeah, either the flight follower or I take them out and file
14 them by pilot name.

15 Q. Okay. Do you remember -- was it you that initialed the risk
16 assessment from the accident flight, or do you remember what
17 happened there?

18 A. It was James who signed off on it.

19 Q. Okay. And then after the flight is released, what happens
20 then in dispatch?

21 A. Then the plane gets loaded and the pilot takes off. We call
22 the village agent with the ETA when the plane is supposed to be
23 there.

24 Q. Okay. And then how much time do you give a flight to get
25 there if you don't hear from them? When is a plane considered

1 overdue?

2 A. Thirty minutes.

3 Q. So if they had a 20 minute flight, you would give them 50
4 minutes; does that sound right? So another 30 on top of that?

5 A. Yeah.

6 MS. PRICE: Hugh, do you have any questions for Laura?

7 MR. YOUNGERS: I only had one question.

8 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

9 Q. Are you aware of the flight limitations that a company pilot
10 might have?

11 A. Flight limitations?

12 Q. Like restricted runways, crosswinds, things of that nature,
13 being a new pilot.

14 A. So that gets talked about before the pilot leaves, and we get
15 talked to about when they can and cannot fly.

16 Q. Who does that? Who talks --

17 A. Operational control.

18 Q. Whoever is in operational control? Okay.

19 MR. ANGSTMAN: Could we take short break before he's asked --
20 asks his questions?

21 MS. PRICE: You're representing her right now, so no.

22 MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm his lawyer though too, I might add. If
23 not, that's okay.

24 MS. PRICE: No, I'm sorry. Yeah. Wade is a party to the
25 investigation. His questions shouldn't need any help.

1 Anything else, Hugh?

2 MR. YOUNGERS: That's it, thank you.

3 MS. PRICE: Wade, do you have any questions for Laura?

4 MR. RENFRO: I don't think so.

5 BY MR. RENFRO:

6 Q. Do you know where the flight log is? If he did the risk
7 assessment, do you know if he -- you said you thought he did do
8 one. Do you know if it's around? We looked; we couldn't see it.
9 So I didn't know if you guys put it somewhere special because of
10 circumstances or --

11 A. It's always in the binder.

12 Q. It's in the binder?

13 A. At the end of the day it gets taken out and filed.

14 MR. RENFRO: Okay.

15 BY MS. PRICE:

16 Q. And did you actually see it? Did you see them working on it?
17 Did you see James initial it or do you just --

18 A. Every now and then I glance at him. I'm also busy on my
19 side.

20 Q. Okay. Yeah.

21 A. Which is why we have a flight follower as well.

22 Q. Oh, yes, I know. It's a lot of work. On the day of the
23 accident, do you recall though actually seeing them signing a risk
24 assessment together?

25 A. I was really busy that morning running other flights and

1 getting --

2 Q. So no, you didn't.

3 A. No.

4 MS. PRICE: And that's okay. I just wanted to know if you
5 physically saw -- like Wade said, we can't find it, so we just
6 wanted to know if it existed somewhere.

7 MR. RENFRO: And actually -- can I?

8 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

9 MR. RENFRO: And if it didn't then that's -- I mean, it's
10 okay. Whatever, you know, she's asking, just --

11 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

12 MR. RENFRO: If you didn't recall it, you didn't see it, then
13 it's --

14 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

15 MS. MALVICH: Yeah, I don't. I don't remember seeing it.

16 MR. RENFRO: I mean, just -- yeah, I just want you to feel
17 comfortable though. I mean, just -- I know this isn't something
18 you do every day; neither does myself. But just, you know, just
19 let her know, whatever it was.

20 MS. MALVICH: Yeah. I don't remember seeing it. I was busy
21 making flights up until 11:00 or 12:00.

22 MS. PRICE: I understand; that's a very hard job. Yeah.
23 Very busy. I do understand that.

24 BY MS. PRICE:

25 Q. The weather board from the day of the accident has weather

1 logged just for the morning, like, between about 7:30, 8 o'clock.

2 And there's not -- the flight left at 10:48.

3 A. Um-hmm.

4 Q. Do you have an explanation for why there's no weather
5 documented or --

6 A. For the evening?

7 Q. For the morning.

8 A. For the morning?

9 Q. So the morning of the accident --

10 A. It's because we only had our morning flights go out.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And then once, you know, he was overdue, we focused only on
13 that.

14 Q. Um-hmm. So on that morning, you have a number of scheduled
15 flights that you're trying to get out.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. And then you check the weather for all the destinations.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. And then you log -- all that weather is logged. Is
20 that the flight follower or you that puts the weather on the
21 weather board?

22 A. So the flight follower fills out the traffic to pick up, the
23 weather, and he gets the runway conditions. Our agents go up to
24 the runway and get the conditions of the runway.

25 Q. Okay. So James filled out the weather that morning?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. So I'll ask him then. He would probably --

3 After -- I can't -- I don't know when this flight was
4 scheduled to depart. Do you recall? I know when he did leave,
5 but I think it was supposed to be an earlier flight, and it got
6 delayed. Do you have any idea?

7 A. So flights were delayed until twilight [sic]. It was
8 scheduled to leave a little after 9:00.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. By 9:00 -- somewhere around there.

11 Q. But he left at 10:48.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Do you know why he was that late?

14 A. Other planes were getting loaded, so his was just a little
15 delayed due to other planes getting loaded.

16 Q. Oh, okay. All right. That makes sense. And the weather
17 though -- there was no weather given to him at that time. There
18 was one at 7:30.

19 A. No, I had called the agent to check on the weather again
20 before he left, and --

21 Q. Oh, you did? Okay.

22 A. -- the weather was --

23 Q. The Kipnuk agent, the destination agent?

24 A. Yeah. Yes.

25 Q. So do you recall what the agent said?

1 A. It was 800. He said the visibility was eight. I don't
2 remember what the winds were, but they were fairly calm.

3 Q. And what are the weather minimums for pilots to -- for a
4 flight to go? Do you know?

5 A. So during daylight it's 500.

6 Q. How about visibility?

7 A. Three. (Indiscernible).

8 Q. But there are no -- like, if you have a new pilot, there are
9 no restrictions that you know of? Other than what the DO tells
10 you, maybe, like don't put that pilot on this flight?

11 A. Other than what's talked to me about that day --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- from operational control.

14 MS. PRICE: Okay. All right.

15 Anything else? Anybody have a follow-up?

16 MR. RENFRO: I was just going to elaborate. She said waiting
17 until daylight. That's a pretty standard thing we do.

18 MS. MALVICH: Yeah.

19 MS. PRICE: Okay.

20 MR. RENFRO: We -- if there's any concerns of -- you know, if
21 it's not just a really nice day, we just hold until it's light,
22 and then we launch.

23 MS. MALVICH: Yeah.

24 MS. PRICE: That sounds like a good idea.

25 MR. RENFRO: And around here that means we hold a lot until

1 daylight. But, you know, come --

2 MS. MALVICH: Yeah.

3 MR. RENFRO: -- a little -- a few more months we'll have tons
4 of daylight, and that won't be an issue.

5 MS. PRICE: Right. Okay.

6 MR. RENFRO: But that's pretty standard. That's a thing. So
7 I just wanted to make sure. And this is Wade.

8 MS. PRICE: Yeah. All right, great. Super.

9 Anything else you think might help the investigation, or if
10 you have any questions, you know, feel free to reach out to me.
11 Thank you very much, Laura. I really appreciate it. Again, we're
12 not investigating you; we're just trying to get information about
13 how the flight went out that day.

14 MS. MALVICH: Yeah.

15 MS. PRICE: Thank you. Thank you so much.

16 MS. MALVICH: Thank you.

17 MS. PRICE: And I'm sorry about this accident. I know it's
18 tough for the company and everybody who works here.

19 MS. MALVICH: Thank you. It means a lot.

20 MS. PRICE: That concludes.

21 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

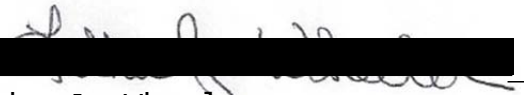
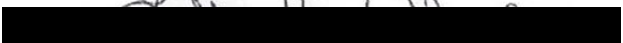
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PLACE: Bethel, Alaska

DATE: February 8, 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.



Letha J. Wheeler
Transcriber