

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: JACKSON JUDGE, Assistant Chief Pilot
Yute Commuter Service

Yute Commuter Service
Bethel, Alaska

Friday,
February 21, 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. We're here in Bethel, Alaska, today. It's February 21st, 2020. I'm Noreen Price, Aviation Accident Investigator with the NTSB. We're working on accident investigation ANC20FA017.

We'll go around the room and introduce everybody that's here.

MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm Myron Angstman, Wade Renfro's attorney, and I will be sitting with the witness who is not my client at this moment.

MS. PRICE: Okay.

MR. JACKSON: Jackson Judge, pilot for Yute Commuter Service and company flight instructor and check airman.

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

MS. PRICE: And Hugh?

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

MS. PRICE: And Hugh is attending via phone, so thank you for being here today.

You're allowed to have one person represent you. He cannot answer any questions. If you need to consult with him, we'll take a break and you can do so. Who will that be?

MR. JACKSON: Myron.

MS. PRICE: Great, thank you. So the NTSB is an independent federal agency who's charged with accident investigations to determine probable cause and make recommendations so these things

1 don't happen in the future, and this interview process is all part
2 of the investigation. Thank you for being here.

3 We're going to be recording the interview today, then it's
4 going to be professionally transcribed and become part of the
5 public docket. Before we get started, do you have any questions
6 or concerns?

7 MR. JACKSON: No. I'm ready.

8 MS. PRICE: Great.

9 INTERVIEW OF JACKSON JUDGE

10 BY MS. PRICE:

11 Q. If you would spell your full name out for the record?

12 A. Jackson Gregory Judge. J-a-c-k-s-o-n, middle name is
13 G-r-e-g-g-o-r-y, Judge, J-u-d-g-e.

14 Q. Thank you very much. So what is your title here at Yute
15 Commuter Service?

16 A. Am I the assistant chief pilot? Assistant chief pilot. I
17 know it's not in the manual, so --

18 Q. That's okay. Okay, assistant chief pilot. And what are some
19 of your other -- your duties as the assistant chief pilot or other
20 duties that you have in the company?

21 A. Line pilot, flight instructor, and check airman for the
22 Lance.

23 Q. How long have you worked here?

24 A. For about a year and a half.

25 Q. Could you give me a broad idea of your aviation background,

1 where you worked prior to this, and how many total flight hours
2 you have?

3 A. Of course. The only job I've had flying before here was
4 banner towing in San Diego. So I have about 2,600 or 2,700 hours
5 total.

6 Q. Banner towing in San Diego? I want that job.

7 A. It's different, yeah.

8 Q. I used to live in San Diego when I was --

9 A. Oh, nice.

10 Q. -- in the Navy. I loved it.

11 A. Yeah, beautiful.

12 Q. So did you know the accident pilot?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. And would you describe what his personality was like and his
15 flying capabilities?

16 A. Yeah. He had a flight instructor background. That showed
17 prevalently. He was always talking, and while he was practicing
18 maneuvers, he was -- sounded -- it sounded as if he was teaching
19 them to me. So he was very disciplined, and definitely the CFI
20 background definitely showed.

21 Q. You did his checkride, correct?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. So I'm not a check airman, so I'm just going to ask you some
24 questions about some of the maneuvers and see if you can recall
25 what he -- how he performed on some of these -- no, not that. So

1 you do -- how many approaches did you do on the checkride?

2 A. One instrument approach.

3 Q. And how did he perform on the instrument approach?

4 A. He performed pretty well. Yeah, it was -- there was --
5 everything was well within standards. We did an ILS for 19 right
6 and -- with a circle the land for 1 left. And his -- it was never
7 more than 3/4 scale deflection, but it was a lot closer than that.

8 Q. And how about the unusual attitude recovery? Can you
9 describe -- did you perform that --

10 A. Um-hmm.

11 Q. -- during the checkride? How do you set that up?

12 A. I -- so he was wearing goggles, and I asked him to look down
13 at his lap, and then we -- I said, my flight controls. He said --
14 we did the positive exchange of flight controls, and then I --
15 while he was looking down, I said, I'm going to upset our
16 attitude. When I say your flight controls, then you recover
17 solely by reference to the instruments.

18 And then I do a few turns and climbs and descents and put the
19 airplane out of trim. I did one in a nose up right turn -- or
20 left turn, but a nose up turning attitude and the -- with the trim
21 back. And then I did a second one, nose low, also in a bank, trim
22 forward. And he recovered from both of those well. There was
23 really no red flags there.

24 Q. Okay. Anything else about his performance or personality
25 that struck you as interesting? Or --

1 A. He -- in never having -- had flown the plane, he nailed all
2 of the maneuvers well within standards our very first time he ever
3 was doing them in that airplane. And then we were mostly focused
4 on landings. We did all of the maneuvers several times, but he
5 was doing really well with them. I didn't -- we all thought he
6 was pretty sharp.

7 Q. And he had -- I looked at his training record. He had three
8 flights prior to the check flight. Is that pretty typical for
9 other pilots that you've checked as well? Standard three flight?

10 A. I believe it's right about typical. With the first checkride
11 I gave, we probably did three or four flights. I would have to
12 look. And then the second one I gave, there was one or two
13 training flights, because he had already been flying the plane for
14 a year. And then -- yeah, I think that was about typical. There
15 wasn't necessarily anything we -- there were no, like, big gaps
16 that I was trying to work out with him. I think that was normal.

17 Q. Okay. Have you ever failed anybody on their checkride?

18 A. Yes. I've failed -- I've only given three checkrides, and I
19 failed one of them.

20 Q. How long have you been a check airman?

21 A. Only a few months. The -- I've never done a checkride that
22 wasn't observed by the FAA still.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So he -- the first three were all observed.

25 Q. Okay. So you're still a relatively new pilot to flying in

1 Alaska. You've been here a year and a half flying --

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. -- and under these conditions out of Bethel. What are the
4 greatest weather concerns for you as a pilot flying out of here?

5 A. Some of the biggest, I mean, the -- here the winds pick up,
6 but that's -- it's typically easier to be a known situation. So
7 that's a little easier to avoid. Beyond that, I guess, would be
8 fog that forms quickly that maybe you -- wouldn't have been a
9 known when you took off for a longer flight. You know, definitely
10 snow, and especially snow at night.

11 Q. Why snow at night?

12 A. It just can be disorienting.

13 Q. So were you surprised when you heard about the accident?

14 A. I was very surprised, yeah.

15 Q. Why were you surprised?

16 A. Mostly because I've never -- I've lost two former flight
17 instructors in crashes, and so mostly it was just personally
18 shocked. It was very abnormal, you know, situation. And I
19 thought Tony did really well with flying, so I definitely never
20 would have expected that.

21 Q. And the route that he was scheduled for that day, have you
22 flown that route, you know, to Kipnuk on -- before? Have you done
23 that route?

24 A. Yes. Many times.

25 Q. Many times? So can you describe the route to me? The

1 terrain and the weather concerns going to Kipnuk?

2 A. There's no terrain whatsoever, so very flat. And you start
3 out -- you pass a bend at the Kuskokwim River to the right, and
4 then from there it's a pretty blank and bland flight. Maybe 80 or
5 90 miles straight line with small lakes and tundra.

6 Q. How about weather? Anything particular about the weather
7 headed to those coastal villages that would be of a concern?

8 A. I mean, it obviously depends on the day and season, but right
9 now would -- obviously it -- whiteout conditions. If there's less
10 definition, bushes don't poke out through the snow so much in that
11 area as they do on the other side of the river. It's on the
12 coast, so they get just weather changes on the coast. The fog
13 rolls in there when it doesn't here. It really would depend on
14 the day.

15 Q. So does -- so as you're flying that route, how do you -- are
16 you using a -- are you dialing up the observation in Kipnuk and
17 Tuntutuliak on your way to see what the conditions are? Or are
18 you talking to a village agent? How do you determine in-flight
19 that you should continue to a destination that may have
20 deteriorating weather? You really don't know what the weather is
21 until you get there --

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Or how do you do that?

24 A. So everything beyond preflight planning?

25 Q. Right. So you're in the air now.

1 A. So additional to everything you do preflight planning, in the
2 air, Tuntutuliak does not have an AWOS, so you won't get any
3 reading from there. You'll pick up the AWOS from Kipnuk. It
4 depends on your altitude, but maybe 20 miles out or so if I think
5 right. So that would really -- basically your -- mostly your
6 preflight planning, but then everything you have out the window
7 until you get the Kipnuk AWOS tuned in.

8 Q. At what altitude would you typically fly that route?
9 Provided -- let's say the weather's nice.

10 A. I'll usually go up to maybe 3,000 feet. Depends on winds
11 obviously, weather.

12 Q. So on the day of the accident, Tony left with 600 and 2 here.
13 What altitude would you expect him to be flying at?

14 A. Probably just below 600.

15 Q. And you think he would have anticipated flat light conditions
16 on the way? Or --

17 A. From what I'm told, I think he would have anticipated that.
18 But he's -- I think he had maybe 200-ish hours in Alaska and
19 some -- a previous winter of experience. So I would assume that,
20 that would have been a known for him.

21 MS. PRICE: Okay. I'm going to pass the questions to Hugh,
22 who is on the phone.

23 Hugh, are you there?

24 MR. YOUNGERS: Yep. I sure am.

25 MS. PRICE: Do you have any questions?

1 MR. YOUNGERS: I have a couple.

2 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

3 Q. So, Jackson, when you started flying with the company, did
4 you have any flight restrictions such as ceiling and visibility
5 when you first started flying?

6 A. Had no ceiling or visibility restrictions initially, but had
7 a crosswind limitation while I was flying the 172.

8 Q. Okay. And did you ever receive any training for flat light
9 or whiteout conditions?

10 A. Ground -- I received ground instruction about it, and then
11 the flight training was just normal. I guess IMC training would
12 have been for that.

13 Q. So when was the first time you experienced flat light?

14 A. I've had experiences where there was definition on the
15 ground, but not far enough out in front of you to really define
16 the horizon. So I could see where the ground was, but looking out
17 straight ahead, it was the -- having a sense of what was straight
18 up, visually, was just a little disorienting. But we -- last year
19 we had not nearly this much snow.

20 Q. Right. And so did you know to go onto your instruments when
21 you experienced or encountered something like that?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. And last question. Have you ever had a risk assessment over

1 15?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. And how many do you think you've had?

4 A. Not very many. I'd say less than five.

5 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay. Thank you.

6 MR. JACKSON: Thanks.

7 MS. PRICE: Wade, do you have any questions?

8 MR. RENFRO: I don't have any questions.

9 BY MS. PRICE:

10 Q. I've got a question about the ADS-B on the -- did you fly the
11 accident airplane?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Great. Were you aware that ADS-B was installed on it?

14 A. I was told it was -- there was some wingtips thing that would
15 give you ADS-B out, but not in.

16 Q. Correct. Did you ever see a supplement for that system on
17 the -- in the airplane?

18 A. I can't recall seeing one.

19 Q. How about, do you know how it was powered on? How the system
20 worked?

21 A. The -- either the nav lights or the strobe lights was
22 connected somehow to those.

23 Q. Yeah. The nav light switch was what powered the system. Do
24 you remember ever -- did you turn on the nav lights to activate
25 the ADS-B? Do you have any knowledge of whether the system worked

1 while you were flying it? Or --

2 A. No. I'm not sure.

3 Q. Okay. How about any other -- do you fly the 207s as well?

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Do any of those have ADS-B?

6 A. I know 190 does. I've used the ADS-B in 190 before.

7 Q. Have you ever noted the ADS-B circuit breaker pulled out so
8 it was not functional?

9 A. No.

10 MS. PRICE: Okay. Those are all of the questions I have. Do
11 you have anything that you think might help the investigation?
12 Or --

13 MR. JACKSON: I don't think so.

14 MS. PRICE: Okay. All right.

15 MR. JACKSON: Any questions, I'm happy to answer, but it's --

16 MS. PRICE: Yeah.

17 MR. JACKSON: -- been very, very surprising to me.

18 MS. PRICE: Okay, thank you. Okay. That concludes the
19 interview. Thank you.

20 MR. JACKSON: Okay.

21 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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23
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25

CERTIFICATE

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

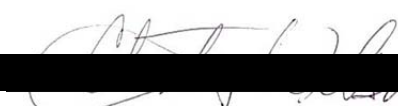
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH OF A YUTE COMMUTER
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NEAR TUNTUTULIAK, ALASKA,
ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020
Interview of Jackson Judge

ACCIDENT NO.: ANC20FA017

PLACE: Bethel, Alaska

DATE: February 21, 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