

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: TONY SPANGLER, Director of Operations
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

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(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 for NTSB investigation ANC20FA017 in Bethel, Alaska. It's February 21st, 2020. I'm Noreen Price, Aviation Accident Investigator for the NTSB. I'm the Investigator in Charge of this accident investigation.

We'll go around the room and introduce ourselves. First with --

MR. ANGSTMAN: I'm Myron Angstman. I'm Mr. Renfro's attorney, and I'm here to sit with the witness, although I am not his personal attorney.

MR. SPANGLER: And I'm Tony Spangler, Director of Operations at Yute Commuter Service.

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

MS. PRICE: And then on the phone we have?

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

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

The NTSB is an independent federal agency that investigates accidents to determine probable cause and make recommendations into the future so these things don't happen again. And this interview today is a critical part of the investigative process, so thank you for being here, Tony.

If you would say and spell your full name for me please?

MR. SPANGLER: T-o-n-y, Tony. Spangler, S-p-a-n-g-l-e-r.

1 MS. PRICE: Great, thank you. So this interview today is
2 going to be recorded, and that recording will be sent away and
3 transcribed by our professional service, and that transcription
4 will be part of the public docket when the final report is
5 released.

6 You are permitted to have one person here today to help
7 represent you. Who would that be?

8 MR. SPANGLER: Myron Angstman.

9 MS. PRICE: Great. So if you need to consult with him, we'll
10 take a break from the interview, and --

11 MR. SPANGLER: Okay.

12 MS. PRICE: -- you can do that. But Myron can't answer any
13 questions today.

14 MR. SPANGLER: Yeah.

15 MS. PRICE: Before we get started, do you have any questions?

16 MR. SPANGLER: No.

17 MS. PRICE: All right, great. Thank you.

18 INTERVIEW OF TONY SPANGLER

19 BY MS. PRICE:

20 Q. So what is your title with the company?

21 A. Director of Operations.

22 Q. And how many years have you worked for Yute Commuter Service?

23 A. It would be about 2½, or a little over. Yeah, 2 years and 7
24 months I guess.

25 Q. So as long as the company --

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- has been operating?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. And if you wouldn't mind providing kind of a background as to
5 what your aviation experience is?

6 A. Okay. I started flying here in Bethel, 1990. I flew pretty
7 much every year, no real long breaks. Through the years for -- I
8 flew for Cusco Aviation initially, Era -- the Twin Otter at Era
9 after that, and then went to Hageland Aviation. And then I flew
10 for Grant Aviation, and then I flew for Yute Air, and now -- and
11 then I flew for Renfro's also. And then Yute Commuter Service.
12 So that's kind of my, in a quick --

13 Q. That's quite a background. Did you have any 119 positions
14 with the other companies?

15 A. I had chief pilot at Renfro's.

16 Q. Okay. And about how many flight hours do you have?

17 A. 35,000 plus.

18 Q. I often wonder what -- how many hours do people stop
19 counting? Is it -- I don't hear over 35 very often. That must be
20 the magic number.

21 A. Well, I'm --

22 Q. You hit 35, you throw your logbook away and hope for the
23 best.

24 A. Well, actually it was a while ago, but I, you know, I know
25 about what I fly every year.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. So --

3 Q. Okay. Thank you. And do you own any part of the business?

4 A. No.

5 Q. How about Renfro's? Do you own any part of that business?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay. How many -- and how many pilots do you have here
8 about?

9 A. I think we currently have about a dozen. I'd have to look at
10 the board to see the exact number.

11 Q. How about flight coordinators?

12 A. We have four. Now -- actually, we have -- yeah, probably
13 four including Andrew and J.J.

14 Q. Okay. Would you describe your duties as the DO?

15 A. So, I mean, basically all parts of the operation. Now,
16 maintenance, while it's -- you know, I'm -- also have some
17 jurisdiction over that, but the way the company breakdown is, is
18 the Director of Maintenance is equal to me, so -- but I do have
19 input into the maintenance side of things also. So pretty much
20 all of that. Ops is what I normally do more of.

21 Q. Okay. Do you -- are you part of the pilot hiring process?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And what are some of the challenges recently within the past
24 couple of years -- well, since the company started -- have you had
25 in regard to pilot hiring?

1 A. It's -- the main thing is that when I first started out here
2 in Bethel, most pilots that were hired were not fairly low on
3 time. Lately here, there has been a problem finding qualified
4 pilots with more than 1,000, 1,500 hours. So that's definitely
5 been a -- something that has been difficult.

6 Q. How about pilots with Alaska time? Are you able to hire
7 Alaska time pilots?

8 A. We have. We actually have several that are high Alaska time
9 pilots, but the pool is not as big as it used to be, you know,
10 with people moving on to other places and airlines and the like.

11 Q. How about -- and why is it important to hire Alaska -- people
12 with Alaska flight experience?

13 A. There are unique weather situations, what have you, with --
14 in Alaska. All parts of Alaska. Definitely out here has its
15 unique weather criteria and stuff. So it's definitely desirable
16 that you have somebody who has experience doing that.

17 Q. Okay. And if you're getting pilots that don't have that
18 experience, what steps is the company taking to mitigate that
19 issue?

20 A. We put limits on some of the pilots that we bring in with the
21 lower time as far as wind and -- mostly wind, because that's kind
22 of the main thing that we, you know, are looking at.

23 Q. Do you hire folks with less than 500 hours?

24 A. No, no. We -- they have to meet certain criteria.

25 Q. Well, I wasn't sure if you were getting pilots with less and

1 then flying them at --

2 A. No, no.

3 Q. Okay. So how is your relationship with your POI and the
4 certificate management team at the FAA?

5 A. I feel we have a pretty good relationship. I can call the
6 POI at any point in time, and of course he's -- he started at --
7 back in the end of August is when he became our POI. We had a
8 different one before that. But both of them, I felt I had a
9 really good relationship with and could easily communicate with
10 them.

11 Q. Who was the POI before?

12 A. Bradford Sipperley.

13 Q. And how often do you see the POI? How often is he here?

14 A. The -- Brad was here -- oh, he was probably here every couple
15 of months back prior. And then James Howery is our POI now. And
16 he has been here, I would say, probably better than 40 percent of
17 the time in the last 3 or 4 months.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So I've just kind of -- that's just -- you know, I would say
20 it's, you know, it's probably not 50 percent, but I'd say better
21 than 40 percent.

22 Q. So prior to the accident, what was the largest -- the main
23 improvement you were working on with him and the FAA for the
24 company?

25 A. The training manual.

1 Q. And had it been approved at the time --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- of the accident? What -- and what were the obstacles with
4 the manual that you were working on?

5 A. We -- it had been approved at the beginning of August, and --
6 along with a GOM that we had redone. And when James came into it,
7 he went through the training manual and found some stuff that he
8 didn't -- just some -- you know, mostly it was talking about
9 stalls and stuff like that, that he didn't like the wording on,
10 and he -- and so he wanted us to go through and fix all of that.

11 Which it took about a month of going -- because we had -- Ken
12 Acton is the one that wrote the training manual, and so it took
13 about a month of working with -- between Ken and James and us.

14 Q. Okay. So if you would describe operational control here at
15 Yute, how it is achieved here?

16 A. It's -- we -- as far as operational control, you -- it's the
17 initialization, the continuation, and the finalization of the --
18 of any flight. And, you know, of course we're limited to the
19 people that can have operational control.

20 Q. So who is that in the company?

21 A. That would be myself; Wade; Byron Paul, who is the chief
22 pilot; and Ernie Turrentine, who is a senior pilot.

23 Q. So are they delegates in the operational control?

24 A. Yes. They are delegates.

25 Q. Delegates.

1 A. I'm --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And yeah, I am responsible for all of that at all times.

4 Q. Okay. So on any day of the week, who is putting -- who's
5 assigning pilots to a route, an aircraft, and releasing those
6 flights?

7 A. The person in operational control assigns the aircraft, and
8 through the flight followers there is some assigning of routes and
9 stuff. You know, assigning routes for the airplanes.

10 Q. And who's assigning a pilot to a route?

11 A. The person that -- the flight coordinator is figuring out
12 what route they have and putting a pilot on it. If there's any
13 questions to that, that always goes to the person who's in
14 operational control. So either me, if I'm in operational control,
15 or a delegate.

16 Q. Okay. So when you have operational control, are you always
17 here? Or do you hold it from Las Vegas, your other home, or --

18 A. I am usually here, because I'm here a lot. I have taken it
19 when I've been out of state when I need to, as far as if
20 somebody's traveling or doing something over the phone. When that
21 happens, I am very -- I'm on the phone a lot with the flight
22 coordinators and all.

23 Q. So how does that work? The start of a day there's a number
24 of scheduled flights; you're at your home in Las Vegas. What do
25 you do to --

1 A. I --

2 Q. -- make sure the operational control is exercised?

3 A. The flight coordinator's in at about 7:00, and usually by
4 about 7:20, 7:25 I call them and talk to them about weather and
5 everything. And I can see weather. I have a computer that, you
6 know, I can pull up all of the weather and everything. But they
7 actually talk to the agents and stuff and get detailed weather in
8 those places, so we have a discussion about weather. I can see
9 the forecast, so we usually don't -- I usually don't waste the,
10 you know, the communication time there. So -- but I do -- if I
11 see something on the forecast, I will mention it to them. I will
12 say, you guys, okay, so you see the TAF? Yep, I see that.

13 So that's the initial thing before anybody -- before the
14 pilots even show up. The pilots usually show up at 7:30, and then
15 if -- as far as when we're in the dark part of the year here,
16 we -- a lot of times -- you know, marginal weather, we don't fly
17 in the dark. We, you know, we're not allowed to, and we don't.
18 So a lot of times, we'll be on hold until it's civil, which has
19 been -- you know, up until recently has been pretty late in the
20 morning.

21 And then -- and so when I talk to the -- you know, I -- so I
22 talk to them at around 7:20, 7:25, and then I call them back at
23 around 7:40 to make sure everybody showed up like they were
24 supposed to and are getting ready and, you know, getting their
25 airplanes, checking their airplanes for everything. And then at

1 that point, we decide if we're on hold or not. If we're not on
2 hold, I find out who's doing what and whether I approve that or
3 not. If we are on hold, then I just -- I tell them, okay, we'll
4 contact -- you know, we'll call again.

5 Q. When you say on hold, who's putting the operation on hold?

6 A. Me.

7 Q. You. Okay.

8 A. Yeah. That's why we have the communication with the
9 dispatch, or -- and, you know, and they're not dispatchers.
10 They're flight followers, flight coordinators. So that's why we
11 have that conversation, is so that I can decide if somebody should
12 be out there flying or not.

13 Q. And what weather minimums are you using to make that
14 decision? What --

15 A. We use 1,500 in the dark for the ceiling. It has to be 1,500
16 or higher. We, of course, don't do specials in and out in the
17 dark; we're not allowed to do that. And then the visibility is --
18 would have to be over 3. Now, a lot of times in the dark here, if
19 it's down 4 or 5, a lot of times we'll go on hold just for safety.

20 Q. What about in the daylight? What are you using for
21 weather minimums?

22 A. In the daylight the weather minimums was 500 and 2.

23 Q. Okay. So as long as the weather's reported and forecasted to
24 be 500 and 2, it's a go? Is that --

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. And --

2 A. And that's also at the destination and any recording points
3 in between.

4 Q. So in regard to the destinations, are all of the destinations
5 -- have automatic weather observations?

6 A. No. But we get weather from the agents.

7 Q. About -- just estimate how many of your scheduled
8 destinations have reportable weather? Just an estimate.

9 A. As far as actual weather reporting --

10 Q. Observations, right. AWOS or ASOS. I mean --

11 A. Yeah, right. Is -- so Kipnuk, Toksook, and there's cameras
12 in some of the others that you can actually see the -- you know,
13 see what you're looking at.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. But Kipnuk, Chefornak, Quinhagak, Platinum, Kwethluk, Nunap
16 for the close ones. Napakiak for another close one.

17 Q. So the majority of them have automatic weather? Or half? Or
18 what do you think? Just estimates.

19 A. It's a little under half probably actually have weather
20 reporting equipment that --

21 Q. And then do the remainders all have cameras? Or are there
22 still some that have nothing?

23 A. No. There is still some that have nothing.

24 Q. What about Kipnuk?

25 A. Kipnuk has weather reporting and cameras.

1 Q. Okay. So in the places that don't have weather and do have
2 weather, you still -- the company still contacts a village
3 agent there for weather?

4 A. Yes. Yeah, because sometimes weather machines don't work
5 right. Sometimes they're out of service. Some -- which that's
6 real easy, but sometimes they report wind off the wrong direction
7 and stuff like that. So we like to get a backup on even the
8 places with the weather reporting.

9 Q. Right. So do they also report runway condition? There's
10 weather, and runway condition.

11 A. The agents?

12 Q. The village agents, yeah.

13 A. Yes, absolutely. Yeah, in the wintertime, we are very --
14 that is something, if we don't have runway conditions, we don't
15 go.

16 Q. Right. And are they trained to -- how to observe and what
17 the runway hazards are?

18 A. We don't have a, like, a class setup, but generally the
19 people that you have as a -- as the agents are people that have
20 been doing this for other people. I mean, you know, they
21 typically have experience. If they don't, we know it, and we do
22 help them try to give us accurate weather if we feel they need
23 help to make sure that we know what the weather is.

24 Q. So are the village agents able to give you good weather
25 reporting as far as ceiling and visibilities go at the --

1 A. Most of them are.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Some of the villages -- and we are familiar with the ones
4 that have problems with not being able to tell the ceiling. Like
5 there's no hills, there's no -- nothing around --

6 Q. To look at?

7 A. -- you know, that would actually give them an idea of what
8 the ceiling is.

9 Q. So in regard to the flight coordinators, which -- I know
10 they're dispatch agents. I -- we understand that. Your GOM calls
11 them flight coordinators, they call themselves a flight follower
12 and a dispatch agent. So I'll use the term flight coordinator for
13 both positions.

14 A. Okay.

15 Q. But what type of -- first of all, who supervises them? Who
16 do they report to?

17 A. Well, they report to me as the DO, but they also report to
18 Andrew for, like, their scheduling and stuff like that. They
19 don't -- you know, I don't have to set up their schedules and
20 everything there. So they report -- but they are directly under
21 me according to --

22 Q. So they administratively report to Andrew, the base manager?

23 A. Yeah. But Andrew isn't a pilot, and he does not have
24 operational control.

25 Q. Okay. And they report to you for operations?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. So what kind of training do they get at the company?

3 A. They get on the job type training. I mean, what we tend to
4 do is, is we have a more senior flight coordinator that sits
5 where -- that would get most of our information and talking to and
6 everything, and then we have a more junior person that's actually
7 writing down times and stuff and making a lot of phone calls and
8 everything. So there's a, you know, kind of a chain of learning.

9 But one thing about out here is sometimes it's hard to find
10 people to do that job. Now, both Andrew and J.J., who are both
11 managers -- station managers, can sit in either position there.
12 So, you know, we have a backup that is fairly knowledgeable that
13 can sit in there if we can't -- if we don't have a position filled
14 at some point. You know?

15 Q. Okay. So they get on the job training from the senior person
16 there, or Andrew? Is that what you said? Or --

17 A. And me.

18 Q. And you.

19 A. And me.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And also other management people that can have operational
22 control also sit in there with them. You know, definitely if
23 there's somebody new sitting in there, we sit in there and make
24 sure that they're doing what they're supposed to do.

25 Q. So your GOM refers to qualified flight coordinators releasing

1 flights. What is a qualified -- is there a -- do you guys
2 actually say, you're qualified now, and you have a form that would
3 say you have been trained and qualified in this position?

4 A. We haven't in the past, but we are going to go to that.
5 That's one of the changes that we are instituting, that we show
6 that -- and usually only one position in there needs to be that,
7 you know? Because the reality of hiring people here in Bethel
8 requires us to kind of always have somebody training, you know?
9 If you follow that. I mean, it's not -- you know, I mean that is
10 a problem. I mean, that's -- one of our other business managers
11 made the comment that he's seen, like, ten people go through that
12 position -- those positions in the last year, year and a half. So
13 I mean, it --

14 Q. The flight coordinator positions just don't stay around
15 for --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. Yeah. And I mean, it's just -- it's kind of -- you know,
19 they had the same problems with ground crew; they have the same
20 problems with -- so just, you know, it's just kind of a problem
21 with getting qualified people in there.

22 Q. Okay. And so there is no classroom training for them,
23 correct? Flight coordinators at this time?

24 A. We are going to -- right. At this time there isn't. We are
25 putting that in, and we're going to have a full curriculum for

1 them.

2 Q. So the GOM states that the flight coordinator duties are to
3 determine aircraft pilot routing based on schedule demand,
4 environmental conditions, and cost effective operations. But they
5 do not exercise operational control?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. So they assign -- well, according to this, they assign
8 aircraft, they assign the pilot to the route, and they release
9 the -- so how are they not exercising operational control when
10 they're doing all of these things?

11 A. Well, because they're doing it at the direction of whoever is
12 in operational control with the start of the call in the morning.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. When they're getting weather and everything, that's all --
15 you know, everything that you can't get off a computer is related
16 back and forth. You know? So I mean, we work very close with
17 them even when we're not sitting right there.

18 Q. Okay. And during the hands-on, OJT training that they get,
19 do they -- are they taught about weather? What --

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. -- weather minimums the company is supposed to --

22 A. Yes. It's -- you know, that's why I say, we -- they're
23 typically paired with somebody who knows this stuff already. They
24 are observed. I've sat in that office many hours observing what's
25 going on. And if there's any -- if I see something that they --

1 you know, some behavior that I don't like, I will immediately say
2 something. Wade has done that, Ernie has done that, Byron has
3 done that.

4 So we -- you know, we're -- it's kind of a continuous thing.
5 It's not something that is just left open for long periods of time
6 or anything. I mean, there might be occasionally, but one thing
7 that I stress very -- you know, I stress to them is that, if
8 there's any question, any question at all, they should call
9 whoever is in operational control. And they also have the option
10 of calling me at any point in time.

11 Q. Okay. But would it surprise you to know that the flight
12 follower who obtained the weather, talked to the pilot, and would
13 have been the one to release the flight that day, did not know
14 what weather minimums were for the company when I asked him during
15 an interview?

16 A. I'm -- I think I know who we're talking about, and we have --
17 I have talked to him many times about that stuff. He should have
18 known what they were.

19 Q. So the two positions, you have a senior flight coordinator
20 and a junior flight coordinator. On the day of the accident, the
21 junior flight coordinator told me that he is the one that gets the
22 weather, talks to the pilot, and checks the risk assessment and
23 releases the flight. Is that your understanding of the way that
24 the junior person should be doing that?

25 And I was told the senior person does the manifest and the

1 load figurations.

2 A. The -- while -- yes. I would have to say how we had it set
3 up, yes. We're going to change that since then, but --

4 Q. Okay. So the flight weather board, from the day of the
5 accident, have you seen it? Let me pull it out. My --

6 A. Yeah, I've seen it.

7 Q. So it only had weather reported for about 7:30 in the morning
8 written down?

9 A. Yeah. But they -- while we -- they always recheck the
10 weather. Now, as far as recording it on the sheet when they
11 recheck it, they weren't typically doing that. We're -- we, once
12 again, set up a different way of doing this now.

13 Q. Okay. So at the time of the accident, they would come in,
14 check the weather, write it on a form. And then everything from
15 there, they would check the weather before they released a flight,
16 but they didn't document anything.

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Does that sound about right?

19 A. That sounds about right, yes.

20 Q. Okay. Do you know what this -- there's a note up here, and
21 it says -- I don't -- I forget what airport this is.

22 A. Kwigillingok.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. As far as the note on the runway, the runway manager down
25 there -- because all of the runways have state DOT-approved people

1 that use the graders and stuff.

2 Q. Right.

3 A. And that's -- which we use as runway reports, and then dense
4 fog. Yeah, they -- that probably didn't come from the runway
5 manager. That probably came from the agent, could probably see it
6 out over the water.

7 Q. Reported at --

8 A. 10:33, yeah.

9 Q. So at 10:33, the flight follower wrote a note about dense fog
10 coming. And this airport is a coastal airport, as well as to the
11 southwest --

12 A. Right, yeah.

13 Q. -- of the accident site, correct?

14 A. Yeah. Well, to the south.

15 Q. South, yeah. All right.

16 A. Yeah, which I mean, a lot of times weather patterns in the
17 winter, they're -- you can look out over the water and see fog. I
18 mean, even as a pilot when we fly around out here, you can fly,
19 and sometimes it comes in, sometimes it doesn't, you know? This
20 is something that definitely the pilot has the control over when
21 he goes out. And if he runs into something like that, we
22 definitely tell him turn around. You know, come back. Do not,
23 you know --

24 Q. How about the village agents? Do they call in during the day
25 and say, oh, you know, I know we're expecting a flight, but it

1 looks like fog is coming in?

2 A. They do.

3 Q. Okay. And then what would the flight coordinators do if they
4 got that phone call?

5 A. They can use the phone. There's a pretty good phone service.
6 Send texts or call the pilot. Some of the pilots have Bluetooth
7 headsets, so they can take calls while they're flying. They can
8 try the radio. If the pilot's more than probably 20 miles away at
9 less than 1,000 feet, they probably aren't going to be able to
10 hear the -- hear them on the radio. But one thing that we do at
11 times do is call other pilots that are closer to relay that
12 information. You know, so we have different ways of making
13 contact.

14 Q. Okay. On the -- do you audit any of the flight documents on
15 a routine basis at all to see if the manifest and the risk
16 assessment forms are being done properly?

17 A. Yeah. I -- the GOM was brought in fairly late in this. You
18 know, last year it was brought in, in August, and then we had a
19 check going on. There was a lot of stuff going on, and I didn't
20 do any audits last year. But yes, we have an audit program set
21 up, and we -- and at the same time, a lot of the stuff is being
22 looked at, you know, all -- that was a lot of the stuff that they
23 were looking at. So we knew that it was being checked and
24 everything, it's just I didn't do any actual audits.

25 Q. All right. How are you doing? Do you need a break? Are you

1 okay?

2 A. I'm fine.

3 Q. All right. So the chief pilot was here on the day of the
4 accident, but he didn't have operational control. Would you
5 describe how the operational control delegates get assigned duty
6 for that day? Like why --

7 A. We have it written out as far as if -- because we're not
8 allowed to have operational control if we're flying, and Byron was
9 going to be flying.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. That's why he was not delegated the operational control. So
12 Wade had it. And if, like, if Wade -- if for some reason Wade
13 couldn't have it, they probably would have shifted it over to me.
14 And we do that with phone calls before. You know, it's not just
15 something thought up down there. We have to -- this has to be
16 done. Wade would have to call me and let me know. And it's laid
17 out in the -- in a memo that we have about shifting operational
18 control.

19 Q. Okay. Thank you. So the flight risk assessment process, the
20 company has a flight risk assessment form. Could you describe how
21 it's filled out, who fills it out, and the signatures at the
22 bottom, what they mean?

23 A. So the pilot, of course, puts his name and dates it, and then
24 he just runs through all of the different categories here. Some
25 of them just check it as being -- you know, because it has numbers

1 over here. And then they come up with a, you know, an aircraft
2 equipment for the no-GPS flight assignment, weather, airport, and
3 then flight crew. So they would put those numbers here, and then
4 they get to the total, and if it's zero to 15, the flight
5 coordinator or D0 delegate could send the flight. If it was
6 higher than 15, it has to be the D0 delegate with ops control
7 that --

8 Q. Okay. Yeah, how often do you get calls when it's over 15?
9 Or is it? How often is it over -- or 15 or over for --

10 A. When -- of course when it's clear -- and like I said, we go
11 over in the morning who's doing what so that we know, you know,
12 basically what we're dealing with and everything. And then,
13 through the day, if the weather's good -- because of course, like,
14 you've got the first flight of duty day, so after the first
15 flight, that one isn't -- it is not ever marked. So they continue
16 on. If the weather is good and the runways are pretty good and
17 the wind's not blowing too hard, we don't get a lot of calls on
18 it.

19 Q. So how often -- I'm just curious as to how often it comes up
20 above the --

21 A. If the weather's bad --

22 Q. How often? Like maybe only 5 percent of the time? One day a
23 month you get a call saying --

24 A. No.

25 Q. -- that we have a risk assessment over 15? One day a week we

1 get a risk assessment that comes in --

2 A. No.

3 Q. -- over 15?

4 A. Probably every day.

5 Q. Every day you get a risk assessment --

6 A. Over 15.

7 Q. -- over 15?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Yeah. And while this is, you know, this is set up like this,
11 and it has the numbering system and everything, if there's any
12 other question -- because we have a couple of runways that we
13 don't send the Lances to. There is one runway that I get a call
14 no matter what. It's Mertarvik out there, which I set up because
15 it's a shorter runway, and it's not a DOT-approved runway. And we
16 only do charters to it. And so no matter who the pilot is, I've
17 set up a system where they call me no matter what before they send
18 that airplane out. But that -- so --

19 Q. Okay. So on the risk assessment there is a, in the weather
20 section, landing conditions marginal VFR. What weather conditions
21 are marginal VFR?

22 A. Less than 1,000 and 3.

23 Q. Okay. So the -- on the day of the accident, there was no
24 risk assessment flight release form located.

25 A. That is correct.

1 Q. So we have no proof that the flight was properly released.
2 Is that a true statement?

3 A. We realize that, yes.

4 Q. Okay. Do you have any ideas where that risk assessment form
5 might be? Or have you heard --

6 A. I --

7 Q. -- that somebody might have it?

8 A. I have not. I have been looking into that.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And I have not located it or found anybody who has said that
11 they took it or whatever, no.

12 Q. Did the flight coordinators -- there was a senior and a
13 junior one on call -- on duty that day. One had been working at
14 the company for a year, and one for 6 months or so -- 8 months or
15 so. Did the one that was working there a year, should that person
16 have checked? Does that person ever check to see that the risk
17 assessments and flights have been released properly?

18 A. Yeah. I believe that when I've sat in there, that has gone
19 on.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Maybe not every single flight, but definitely there has been
22 discussion, you know, when I've sat in there just watching, there
23 has been discussion between the two of them talking about the risk
24 assessment and all of that.

25 Q. So do you play any role in the training program or manual or

1 any of the duties in regard to training?

2 A. I do, yeah. I'm a check airman, and I've done some of the
3 recurrency training and stuff. I haven't done very much of the --
4 the chief pilot has generally done the initial training.

5 Q. Okay. So it's my understanding from other interviews that
6 the company does not have a CFIT avoidance program or any
7 discussions about IMC -- I mean VMC into IMC, or escape maneuvers.
8 Have you had any discussions in the past regarding instilling that
9 training prior to the accident?

10 A. Yeah. We -- I mean, I do it. It's actually listed in the
11 training.

12 Q. What's listed?

13 A. The whiteout, brownout in the new training manual. Our old
14 training manual didn't really list it out, but it's listed in the
15 ASEL part of the training manual that -- you know, and it calls it
16 whiteout and brownout, which is -- can also be gray. Some places
17 call it gray.

18 Q. Has the company -- have you had any CFIT accidents in the
19 past aside from maybe this one?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay. So the operation is a VFR only operation.

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. How often do pilots get the opportunity to fly instrument
24 approaches on instruments?

25 A. Probably only during the checkride, and some of it's limited

1 because of the equipment in the airplanes.

2 Q. Are the airplanes IFR certified?

3 A. No.

4 Q. They're not. Okay. So if they get stuck in weather out
5 there and fog starts rolling in, the plan is to go lower?

6 A. No. The plan would be to turn around.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And/or wait. Sit on the ground and wait somewhere, which we
9 have had. We've had pilots spend the night -- one pilot spent the
10 night in Goodnews. You know, so we have had that happen.

11 Q. So are you familiar with all of the company pilots and what
12 experience levels they have and whether -- like, when you call in
13 the morning and you have operational control, do you check and see
14 who's assigned to what route, who's going where, and what the
15 conditions are? Are you familiar with each pilot and know what
16 their personal limitations are?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Yeah. Now the 172s, we had some stated minimums on when and
20 stuff. The bigger airplanes, we didn't normally give the same
21 limitations to.

22 Q. Aside from the crosswind limitations that you have?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Were there any -- I know that you had no written limitations
25 that were clear.

1 A. Right.

2 Q. But you checked to see if the pilot assignments are
3 appropriate for the routes?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Did you know the accident pilot?

6 A. I knew him. I had never flown with him because he was in the
7 Lance only. That was what we started him in. And I'm not even
8 checked out in the Lance at this point, so we were leaving that up
9 to Jackson, who has probably -- well, he is the most experienced
10 Lance pilot we have.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. And also, the FAA rode along on his checkride and everything,
13 so -- on that pilot's checkride, so we --

14 Q. So did you have any knowledge of any limitations this pilot
15 should be imposed on him at all?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And of course I wasn't in operational control, so --

19 Q. Right.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. So on the day of the accident, the pilot was dispatched; the
22 weather conditions at the time were 600 feet, 6 miles in mist, and
23 he was dispatched to coastal airports, which we'll talk about in a
24 moment. Then, when he departed, the weather was 600 feet,
25 overcast, 2 miles of visibility, and he left on a special VFR

1 departure. Is that a typical operation? Is that --

2 A. That is.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. So are there -- does the company have any all-pilot meetings
6 where flight safety is discussed, or seasonal hazards, anything of
7 that sort?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. How often are they?

10 A. I know that I gave several when I was here back in January.
11 We were running them usually every 2 or 3 days in the mornings
12 when the pilots would come in. And we had a pilot briefing
13 meeting thing that we wrote some notes down on, and the pilots all
14 had to sign.

15 Q. And that was how often?

16 A. Every 2 to 3 days.

17 Q. And it would be for the weather?

18 A. It, you know, it wasn't a set thing.

19 Q. Right.

20 A. But it was -- and that was the -- that was a written thing.
21 There was always some discussion between pilots, you know, when
22 they're getting their airplanes ready and -- so I mean, we -- but
23 as far as documented safety meetings, we called them, we try to
24 run them about every 2 or 3 days.

25 Q. And that would be for the pilots that were here working the

1 lines that would be --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. Yeah. Not the ones that weren't, yeah.

5 Q. Is there an all-read board -- a pilot all-read board where
6 information, like maybe changes that have been made since the
7 accident --

8 A. We --

9 Q. -- would be?

10 A. Yes. We have that now.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. At that time --

13 Q. At the time of the accident, was there any type of
14 communication system for pilots to look at every day?

15 A. Yes. There were stuff -- notes and stuff put in the pilot
16 room similar to read boards, but not exactly set up like a
17 must-read thing that they had to sign and everything. But --

18 Q. So no signatures, just a note --

19 A. Right.

20 Q. -- for the folks to read?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Were you aware that ADS-B equipment was installed onto the
23 accident airplane?

24 A. I was aware that it was installed, yes.

25 Q. And was the supplement for that equipment ever put in the

1 airplane, do you know?

2 A. I don't know. I think -- because that was put in -- I think
3 that, while the equipment was installed, the airplane wasn't
4 brought online. I'd have to look, but I don't even know if it
5 was, it was online when I was here. But I'm -- I don't know the
6 answer to that.

7 Q. Okay. Do you know why ADS-B was installed on some of the
8 airplanes?

9 A. Because we would like to put ADS-B on there and be able to
10 track the airplanes. And we actually have Spidertracks, too, on
11 several of the airplanes.

12 Q. Oh, is it installed now?

13 A. On -- it was, I think four -- three or four of them have
14 Spidertracks. At least three of them. But yeah, this is all --
15 you know, we would like to bring our airplanes up to a standard
16 where we're able to track them and see them on a screen and follow
17 what they're doing.

18 Q. But you don't -- you didn't fly -- you don't -- said you
19 didn't fly Lance -- the Lances, right?

20 A. I have flown the Lances --

21 Q. Oh, okay.

22 A. -- in the past. But my currency lapsed, and I wasn't checked
23 out in them at the -- you know, company checked out. I mean,
24 I've -- I have Lance time. I have flown the Lances, but --

25 Q. On this particular air frame, the system -- the ADS-B system

1 is powered through the nav light switch, so I'm wondering if a
2 checklist was ever modified so that pilots would turn on the nav
3 lights during the day to power the system. But you -- do you have
4 any knowledge as to --

5 A. I don't know if it is. I never flew that airplane.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I never actually flew that particular airplane. So --

8 Q. How about other airplanes? Do any of the other airplanes
9 have ADS-B?

10 A. Yes. There were two that -- two of the 207s that had it
11 previously, and -- 190 and 193. And 190 it works fine; the 193
12 has some issues with the transmitting on it. It's difficult to
13 get radio work here in Bethel.

14 Q. Avionics folks to work on your --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. We have brought avionics people from -- a guy named Cedric
18 from, I think Merrill Field Instruments or whatever has been out
19 here working on some of this stuff for us, but it's very
20 difficult. People don't want to come out here and work and, you
21 know, and it -- there just isn't that basis of people out here
22 that can do that kind of stuff.

23 Q. So if a pilot went out to one of those 207s and the ADS-B
24 circuit breaker is out, what would you expect? And it's not
25 placarded. What would you expect the pilot to do?

1 A. Push it back in.

2 Q. Okay. So I should be able then to go and find the ADS-B data
3 off of those two airplanes that have ADS-B installed then,
4 correct?

5 A. You should --

6 Q. Yeah, okay.

7 A. -- be able to, yeah. Like I say, 193 has had a history of
8 not transmitting, but 190 has worked, and -- I've flown it, and
9 it's worked.

10 MS. PRICE: Okay. So I'm going to pass it over to Hugh for
11 any questions.

12 Hugh, you still with us?

13 MR. YOUNGERS: Yes, I am.

14 MS. PRICE: All right. I'm going to turn your volume up a
15 bit.

16 MR. YOUNGERS: Great.

17 MS. PRICE: And do you have any questions for --

18 MR. YOUNGERS: I had a couple.

19 BY MR. YOUNGERS:

20 Q. I believe you covered it but, Tony, did -- are there
21 restrictions -- flight restrictions that the company puts on new
22 pilots?

23 A. We have put flight restrictions on new pilots that were low
24 time in the 172. So I mean, the answer to that is yes, but there
25 wasn't any flight restrictions on Tony Matthews at the time of the

1 accident.

2 Q. Okay. And so only the 172 pilots are put on restriction?

3 A. Typically, yeah. We use the 172s as kind of a training
4 mechanism, and if we feel that they need crosswind restrictions,
5 generally we fly -- you know, it's -- I mean, in the wintertime if
6 you're going to fly out here, you normally have to be able to
7 handle some, you know, instrument type conditions getting in and
8 out of Bethel, usually getting in to the point that you can keep
9 the airplane -- you know, I mean, this has been something for
10 years and years out here is that -- you know, so no. There were
11 no restrictions.

12 Q. Okay. And are those restrictions written down anywhere, or
13 it's just a verbal?

14 A. It's more of a verbal thing with --

15 Q. Okay. And the last question I had was, the pilot safety
16 meetings, are those recorded?

17 A. As -- you mean verbally recorded?

18 Q. No. Written down.

19 A. Oh, written down. Yeah. We -- the ones that -- yeah, where
20 we -- yeah. We have a file full of safety meeting papers that
21 show those discussions. And there's usually some notes written on
22 those talking about what was discussed and everything.

23 MR. YOUNGERS: Okay. Very good. Thank you, Tony.

24 MR. SPANGLER: Okay.

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

1 MR. RENFRO: I don't believe so.

2 MS. PRICE: All right. Thank you. I just have a couple more
3 regarding the weather in this area.

4 BY MS. PRICE:

5 Q. Could you describe some of the specific weather concerns with
6 the coastal communities of Kipnuk and Chefornak and all of the
7 ones along the water there? Are there any special weather
8 concerns there?

9 A. Parts of the year, there can be white -- you know, the snow
10 could cover all of the -- any definition on the ground enough that
11 if there is a ceiling, you can get -- and this is -- I was talking
12 about earlier where the difference between a whiteout and a
13 grayout, or brownout. And that's generally -- a whiteout, there's
14 generally no horizon. And in a grayout or a brownout, there's
15 usually a little bit of a horizon. But with the low overcast and
16 snow on ground, it could definitely turn into a condition that you
17 may not want to fly into.

18 Q. And are those predictable at all? Can you look --

19 A. No.

20 Q. -- at a dew point spread and tell that --

21 A. Not really.

22 Q. -- that's coming? Or is it like a --

23 A. Not really. It's --

24 Q. -- seasonal -- I know by experience up on the north -- up way
25 up north, like, every day in the summer there's low marine fog,

1 and you pretty much predict it until 1:00 in the afternoon. And
2 there's --

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. Are there any patterns like that around here?

5 A. No. I mean, there are patterns in the fact that we -- like
6 this year we have a lot more snow than what we've had in the last
7 4 or 5 years. So in the last 4 or 5 years, those whiteout
8 conditions have not been very predominant. You know, they're --
9 the coast tends to get a little more snow, and there's a lot less
10 brush and stuff on it to cover, so it doesn't take as much snow to
11 cover up that stuff.

12 But this year has definitely had plenty of snow inland and on
13 the coast. But even with an overcast, a lot of times there -- it
14 isn't whiteout, and there is a definite horizon. Sometimes, you
15 know, I mean -- yeah, it's -- it can be difficult to predict it.
16 They don't even try on the weather stuff, you know, the people
17 that guess the weather.

18 MS. PRICE: Okay. If -- does anyone have anything else?
19 Then -- but how about one more thing. Sorry.

20 MR. SPANGLER: Okay. Oh, it's all right. It's fine.

21 BY MS. PRICE:

22 Q. Have you made changes since the accident?

23 A. Yes, we have.

24 Q. And if you could --

25 A. We are.

1 Q. -- maybe highlight the important changes that you've made
2 since the accident?

3 A. We have put limitations on new pilots with low time coming
4 in. Specifically pilots with 1,000 hours or less, limited Alaska
5 time, and -- you know, so -- and we're not also going to put
6 anybody with less than 1,000 hours into the Lance or the 207.
7 We're going to put them into the 172 only to -- until they get up
8 to that limit. And as I said, that's kind of a training tool that
9 we have used in the past, putting them in the 172.

10 We have a limit on how far out they go. We're keeping them
11 within a 40 mile circle, which keeps them in closer. You tend to
12 not get the whiteouts in that area -- in those areas, 40 miles
13 within, because there's enough brush that there's almost always,
14 you know, some definition.

15 We are going to do more audits -- documented audits on risk
16 assessments. The new GOM, we're -- just put in an update to the
17 GOM, and we're going to -- and James Howery had talked about this
18 in the past, changing the weather criteria to get the higher
19 number with a -- because right now, if it's 900 or 500, there's no
20 difference on the marginal weather thing. And we're going to
21 change that to where if it's less, and -- that, that it would
22 get -- promotes a bigger number so that we do get that -- you
23 know, whoever's in operational control does get that call.

24 So -- and we have about -- we have a 3-page list. I can't
25 quote it. Okay?

1 MS. PRICE: It's all right. Just the big --

2 MR. SPANGLER: Yeah.

3 MS. PRICE: That's good. Great. Thank you very much. I
4 appreciate you being here today. That concludes the interview.
5 Thank you.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

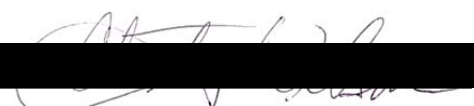
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CRASH OF A YUTE COMMUTER
SERVICE PIPER PA-32R-300 AIRCRAFT
NEAR TUNTUTULIAK, ALASKA,
ON FEBRUARY 6, 2020
Interview of Tony Spangler

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