

Group Chairman's Factual Report – Attachment 1
Interview Summaries

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

ANC21FA069

Interviewee: Larry Trottni
Representative: Not Requested

Date / Time: September 28, 2021 / 1730
Location: Ketchikan AK
Present: Paul Suffern, Brandon Johnson, Michael Helwig
Investigator: Charles Olvis

During the interview Mr. Trottni stated the following:

Mr. Trottni started working for the FAA in February 2002 when he reported to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Academy in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (OKC). His training at the academy included the FAA Meteorological Course and FAA Flight Service course. Around May of 2002, he graduated the FAA academy and reported to Kankakee IL (IKK) Flight Service Station (FSS), and then transferred to Fairbanks AK (FAI) in September 2003. In 2008 He was transferred to Palmer AK, when the FAA created a centralized rotation for FSS specialists. After moving to Palmer, Mr. Trottni certified multiple FSSs in AK to include Kotzebue FSS, Talkeetna FSS, Palmer FSS, and others. He stated that if he keeps currency in one FSS, all the other FSSs he was previously certified in are current as well. He stated that he spends around 95% of his time at the Nome AK FSS and will work other FSSs as needed. His Schedule consists of 8 days on and then 6 days off.

Prior to the FAA Mr. Trottni was a United States Air Force (USAF) tower and Radar controller at Elmendorf AFB AK from 1989 to 1996. After separating from the USAF until he got hired by the FAA, Mr. Trottni worked for Midwest Services as an Air Traffic Controller at Chicago Meigs (CGX), Kenosha WI (ENW), and then Gary/Chicago Airport (GYY).

When asked how FSS Specialists get their weather, Mr. Trottni explained how all FSS Specialists in the satellite facilities are certified weather observers and augment the ASOS/AWOS readings from the locations that they are at. They all have their Limited Aviation Weather Reporting Stations (LAWRS) certification, and to get that certification the specialists must take a written test from the NWS, then conduct at least one observation in a 60-day period and take annual refresher training to keep their certification. When the FSS specialist needs weather from a different location they can retrieve weather from the Operational and Supportability Implementation System (OASIS). OASIS is the FSS's central hub for storing and disseminating all the information specialists use in their job. It is a computer system that FSS uses to store and disseminate weather, aircraft flight plans, airport and airspace information, charts, and publications, AIRMETS, or SIGMETS; anything you can get from ForeFlight or Jeppesen, an FSS specialist can get from OASIS.

Mr. Trottni explained how he uses the FAA Weather Cameras in OASIS. If the airport has a Terminal Area Forecast (TAF), he can pull it up with the Meteorological Aerodrome Reports (METARs), then pull up the weather cameras in the area and see if they concur with the weather reports or don't match what is being reported. He went on to say that the FAA Weather Cameras currently used by the FSS only offered a snapshot of the current conditions and how a new experimental system is in works to allow the camera to loop and be rewound. This would give the

FSS specialists a better understanding of the trends in an area instead of the snapshot they currently have. He stated that he has seen the new system and been fortunate enough to see some of the presentations. He thinks the system is “really cool” and can’t wait to use it, but it is not yet certified.

Mr. Trottini discussed the new Alaska Aviation Weather Unit (AAWU) and stated that he likes the graphical representation that it is migrating to but did share his concerns that the written portion is going away and would like to keep both the graphical representation and the written interpretation.

Mr. Trottini discussed some of the emerging technology that FSSs are looking at getting. He stated that the FAA is moving the FSSs to an electronic flight strip system, and that some facilities already have them, and the others are just waiting for the equipment to be installed. Mr. Trottini described how antiquated the FSSs voice switch system is (many of the systems are from the 1950s) and that there is a replacement on the horizon with the “Alaska Flight Service Initiative” (AFSI). He described the Harris 2-way datacom system where the pilots can use their SPOT/Spidertracks account to open and close flight plans, and eventually be able to do 2-way weather requests from FSSs. The Pilots will be able to request the weather along their route, and FSSs can send them a digital package with that weather to download in flight. It does require a subscription or for them to register for the program. He also shared how part of the AFSI is expected to include a system like ‘FlightRadar 24’¹, or an ADSB display, to give the specialists better situational awareness of traffic.

Mr. Trottini stated the working relationships with the pilots and FSS Specialist is very good and is a very close-knit community in Alaska, offering that he knows many of them personally and recognizes their voices and where they are from. He explained how he has been giving a lot more abbreviated clearances than in the past. He stated that since the internet is getting better, pilots can self-brief on the ground and then contact a FSS to get updates and/or make changes to their flight plans once they are airborne. Mr. Trottini explained that a lot of the local knowledge new specialists receive comes from the training they receive during On-the-Job Training (OJT). He stated that normally new FSS Specialists spend 3-6 months at the Hub FSS getting general FSS training then go to the satellite FSSs and receive a packet of local area information they are expected to learn. The packets include VFR reporting points, common weather patterns in the area, distances to the ASOS/AWOS, every runway and every frequency and remote communication outlet (RCO), nav aids, lakes and streams, runway lengths, etc.

Mr. Trottini stated that the FAA is moving the FSSs to an electronic flight strip system, and that some facilities already have them, and the others are just waiting for the equipment to be installed.

Interview concluded at 1845

¹ Commercially available web-based product used for airplane tracking via ADS-B and FAA radar systems.

Interviewee: Lucas Harrington (LH)

Representative: Larry Trottini

Date / Time: September 29, 2021 / 1000

Location: Ketchikan AK

Present: Paul Suffern, David Lawrence, Brandon Johnson, Michael Helwig

Investigator: Charles Olvis

During the interview Mr. Harrington stated the following:

Mr. Harrington entered on duty with the FAA in March 2002 and attended the FAA training facility in Oklahoma City Oklahoma. He attended the basic flight service training course and graduated in July of 2002. He then transferred to Ketchikan FSS (KTN) for duty. In September 2006, Mr. Harrington resigned from the FAA and did non-aviation activities. In February 2009, Mr. Harrington was hired back into the FAA and attended the Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) course at the FAA training facility. He graduated in June 2009 and reported to Guam ARTCC (ZUA). In September 2014, Mr. Harrington left ZUA and reported to KTN for duty as a flight service specialist.

Mr. Harrington was fully qualified on all operating positions at KTN and was designated a controller in charge (CIC). He maintained a current FAA medical certificate with no restrictions and did not hold any other aeronautical licenses. Mr. Harrington did not have any prior military experience.

Mr. Harrington said there were two primary positions, inflight 1 and inflight 2. Inflight 1 did in-flight advisories and traffic for the KTN terminal area and inflight 2 did the inflight advisories around the KTN area and all-weather briefings. He said when staffing and traffic permitted, a third position would be open called pre-flight. When pre-flight was open they would handle weather briefings, weather observations, NOTAMS, and preflight briefings. He said that pre-flight was never open in the summer due to staffing and during off season months would open generally during the middle of the day.

Mr. Harrington characterized staffing at KTN as slightly low, however they were getting developmental controllers into the facility. Current staffing was 7 CPC's 1 OS, and 1 developmental controller. Full staffing was 9 CPS's and 1 OS. He felt that 9 CPCs was sufficient manning.

Mr. Harrington was asked to describe the FSS process for a typical VFR flight to the Misty Fjords area. He said the pilot would contact in-flight 2 on 122.2 and file their flight plan; usually a 2-2.5-hour VFR flight. The pilot would listen to the ATIS and then contact in-flight 1 on 123.6 for a departure from the KTN Class E area. He said based on the length of the flight they would have an ETA to monitor for overdue aircraft. If the pilot was past the ETA, they would usually call the company for an update.

Mr. Harrington said they have a good relationship with all the operators at KTN. He indicated that he was familiar with Southeast Aviation and could recognize the accident pilots voice, however, he could not recognize them in person. He indicated that it was his experience that the accident pilot never called KTN FSS for a weather brief.

Mr. Harrington said that they did not provide weather briefs very often and that the weather briefs were usually a 50-50 mix between commercial operators and Part 91 airplanes. He said that with the improvement in internet service most pilots brief themselves. He added that most air tour companies brief themselves or have dispatchers that do it.

Mr. Harrington said the issues with the KTN Airport ASOS not transmitting the METAR via the service A had started some time ago and that the KTN ASOS would just stop transmitting. He said that KTN FSS had the ability to input a METAR if they saw that it had not transmitted. They would not usually look at OASIS to see if the METAR had gone out.

Mr. Harrington said the harbor wind is used for the float planes. When the ASOS would update they would put in a manual update in the remarks section and include the harbor wind. He added there was a roof top wind indicator and when the wind is sustained above 25 knots, they would add that to the METAR as well.

Mr. Harrington said they would use OASIS to input PIREPs into the national airspace system (NAS). Usually, they would obtain low level wind shear or turbulence on final or bases and input into OASIS. He said that the air tours would sometimes provide PIREPs but that they were usually low level and came from runway traffic. He added that they usually did not get a lot of PIREPs in the summer as the weather is good. When the weather is marginal, they would get a lot of PIREPs; if the weather was bad there would be few since there would not be a lot of flying.

Mr. Harrington was asked to describe the weather cameras and the quality of the picture. He said there was a latency issue loading the image up while conducting a weather brief. He said it could take up to 5 minutes to load. When the image did finally come up, the latency from the image time stamp was not too bad. He said that the OASIS system had the ability to loop images but that he did not usually do that. He said the system could loop several images but not loop by time.

Mr. Harrington said that if he were training someone to provide weather briefings for the Misty Fjords area, he would show them the 1-2 cameras in the area and that would be about it, there was no weather observations in the Misty Fjords area. He said there was no "local area" weather documentation for the KTN area.

Mr. Harrington would use VFR Not Recommended (VNR) if there was an AIRMET for IFR along the intended route of flight. He said that KTN doesn't do a lot of weather briefings as most pilots get their weather from commercial vendors or themselves. He said that all the KTN FSS controllers were certified weather observers under the LAWRS program. He was not sure when he received his original LAWRS certification however, he did retest and certify when he came back to KTN. He said that he was not sure about the LAWRS currency requirement or what the refresher training was but was certain there was something.

Mr. Harrington said that the summer season was a lot busier and that a lot of pilots would come up from the lower 48 states to work the busy months. He said that a lot more flying occurs in the summer.

Mr. Harrington said the air tour operators had a lot of destinations but that the Misty Fjords was the most popular for the cruise line passengers. He said there was an RCO in the Misty Fjords area but that it wasn't used much and that it was mainly used to update the flight plan or extend their ETA. Mr. Harrington felt the RCO would probably not have been helpful during the accident as the airplane was probably too low and that the RCO was out of service on the date of the accident. Mr. Harrington said that he had been to the Misty Fjords area by boat but not by airplane. He indicated seeing the area by plane would be helpful.

Mr. Harrington felt that having a surveillance system slave or ADSB data would be beneficial to maintain awareness of aircraft locations. He said that transient airplanes would often call and report bad positions.

Mr. Harrington said that KTN FSS was invited to the pre, and post season meetings hosted by the FSDO; however, he usually did not attend. He added there usually wasn't much for the FSS at these meetings.

Mr. Harrington felt that a Flight Deck Familiarization (FAM) program would be beneficial to the controllers at KTN FSS.

Interview concluded at 1120

Interviewee: Maurice Gamble (MG)

Representative: Cindy Hoggard

Date / Time: September 29, 2021 / 1205

Location: Ketchikan AK

Present: Paul Suffern, David Lawrence, Brandon Johnson, Michael Helwig

Investigator: Charles Olvis

During the interview Mr. Gamble stated the following:

Mr. Gamble entered on duty (EOD) with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in May 1991 as a GS 2154 flight data specialist in Anchorage Center (ZAN). In April 1995 he reported to the FAA training facility in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to attend training for the Flight Service Station (FSS). He graduated in September 1995 and reported to Kenai FSS, Kenai AK (ENA) for duty as an FSS specialist. He became fully certified and was designated as a controller in charge (CIC). He was later promoted to operations manager (OM) and departed ENA in May 2014 to assume the duties as Air Traffic Manager (ATM) in Juneau FSS (JNU) in Juneau AK. Mr. Gamble was not certified on any operating positions nor was he required to be. JNU is the hub FSS facility that included the satellite FSSs in Sitka AK (SIT) and Ketchikan (KTN).

Mr. Gamble did not maintain a current medical nor was he required to and did not have any other aeronautical licenses. He did not have any prior military or civilian aviation experience.

Mr. Gamble said that the KTN FSS participated in various outreach programs with the community and that they would usually assign the Operations Supervisor (OS) Cindy Hoggard to participate. KTN was also invited to the KTN local pre and post season safety meetings hosted by the Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) however they usually just went to answer questions and did not conduct presentations. Mr. Gamble said the pre and post seasonal meetings were usually well attended. There were no pre and post season meetings held in Sitka.

Mr. Gamble was familiar with the midair accident near Ketchikan about two years ago and the accident involving N1249K. He said that KTN did not participate in any other aviation group meetings because of past accidents in the Ketchikan vicinity.

When asked about Letters of Agreements (LOA's) with local operators in the KTN area, Mr. Gamble said there was only one LOA and that was with Island Air Express to address "canned" instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plans. There were no other LOA's with any other companies.

When Mr. Gamble was asked about potential weather resources that he would like to have available he indicated that they have access to weather cameras. He said they do have access to weather cameras in the vicinity of the Misty Fjords area. He added that Mr. Walter Combs who oversees the weather camera program would develop surveys soliciting suggestions for locations to place the weather cameras. Mr. Gamble said that Mr. Combs did his best to place the cameras where they are needed most. The FSS has provided some feedback to Mr. Combs when it was solicited.

Mr. Gamble was asked what was on his wish list for weather equipment and he responded that he has a "typical wish list", but that they rely on the National Weather Service (NWS) for providing good information. He added that the infrastructure is old and that the weather impacts equipment. He believed updated equipment would assist with processing information a lot quicker.

Mr. Gamble was asked about the FAM program to assist KTN FSS controllers familiar with the local flying area. He said there has not been an active FAM program since September 11, 2001, and that the FSS controllers follow the national guidelines. He believed it could be a valuable tool to assist controllers with understanding weather in and around Ketchikan. He did feel as if the companies would be reluctant to allow FAM flights because of the cost and loss of revenue for a seat. Additionally, he said there was no formal program for getting pilots and controllers in the same room to discuss local area issues. They used to provide tours of the FSS before COVID, however, that has since stopped.

When asked about LAWRS recurrent certifications, he said that a controller would only need to re-certify if they had not made an observation in the last 60 days. He said that observations were made daily so that was not an issue. He said they would undergo refresher training annually through a read and initial however there was no tests required.

Mr. Gamble stated that when developmental controllers showed up at the facility, they were provided with an “Area Knowledge Packet” which included weather information in the Ketchikan area.

Mr. Gamble was asked about the ASOS not transmitting METARS and he indicated that there were problems with the equipment, that the infrastructure was old and there was always funding problems. He said when controllers notice the ASOS not transmitting METARS they would input them in manually. He added that when KTN was closed or not transmitting, both JNU FSS and pilots could call the ASOS via a telephone to obtain the METAR. However, a special (SPECI) observation would not be available.

Mr. Gamble indicated they usually would learn that the METAR was not automatically transmitting either from someone calling about the METAR, or if the METAR was absent from OASIS. He said that their mitigation for getting the METAR out to the national airspace system (NAS) was to manually input the METAR when it was found not transmitting. When asked why they didn’t do it automatically to ensure there was no missing METARS, he said it was a “priority of duty” and that they were sometimes too busy. He added that it was more important to talk to pilots then check to ensure the METAR was transmitting. Mr. Gamble said the ASOS was designed to transmit the weather and it was either in service or it was not.

Mr. Gamble said that certain remote communications outlets (RCOs) were more problematic than others. He said the equipment was very old and that technical operations (TechOps) did their best to keep them working. They would usually just have to wait to get the RCOs fixed if they went down. He said the radios in the FSS office were reliable as of today.

Mr. Gamble said he was responsible for the daily operations and administration of the JNU hub and the KTN and SIT satellite facilities. He felt like he had a “full plate” and that he did not have the staff needed to efficiently handle business. His administrative officer was shared with ANC, and he did not have an operations manager for the JNU hub to assist him with daily operations. Before COVID, he would make visits to KTN once a quarter, however since COVID that has been reduced. When he did visit KTN, he would meet the OS at the facility and get a face-to-face briefing and observe the operation. Additionally, he would provide recurrent training while on site.

Mr. Gamble indicated he was familiar with the daily operations at KTN. He said that during peak summer (April to September) the air tour operations was about 80% of the traffic. He said there was a traffic count conducted every night and that data was transmitted to headquarters in Washington DC nightly. The counts include the number of weather briefs conducted and the number of VFR flight plans filed.

Mr. Gamble said that the weather in the Ketchikan area and most of Alaska was subject to change rapidly. He indicated the forecasters do a pretty good job but that sometimes they were wrong. He indicated they would get a lot of rain with mountain obscurations and reductions in visibility along with low level windshear and turbulence. This weather pattern included the Misty Fjords area as well.

Mr. Gamble was asked if after reviewing the accident was there anything that the FSS could do to assist pilots in trouble in the Misty Fjords area. He indicated that the FSS controllers focus their efforts on the Class E surface area and that anything outside of that was advisory in nature only. There was no requirement for pilots to contact the FSS for assistance.

Mr. Gamble would conduct operational skills assessments (OSAs) to check for PIREPs and that it was part of a national initiative. He would also listen to controllers on position. He said that KTN did good with PIREPs and that he used to get a report indicating the number of PIREPs solicited, however, those reports stopped after the person compiling the data retired. He added that wherever pilots are flying they wanted the PIREP information.

Mr. Gamble indicated that he had an open-door policy for controllers and supervisors and that the supervisors had an open-door policy for their controllers. He would always reiterate that he was just a phone call away and that they could contact him without fear of reprisal.

Mr. Gamble said he was not familiar with Southeast Aviation and did not know the pilot involved in the accident.

Interview concluded at 1305