UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:	*	
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US AVIATION GROUP	*	
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	*	Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*	

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Interview of: DERIAN VERDECIA

Flight Standards District Office
Orlando, Florida

Thursday,
September 17, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:20 p.m. EDT)

DR. WILSON: We're going to get started, so thank you for being with us, Derian, joining Courtney and myself. As I'm sure that you know, Courtney Liedler, she's the investigator in charge on this investigation. As I explained to you before, I'm Katherine Wilson, and I'm a human performance investigator, assisting Courtney in this investigation.

We're here strictly from the safety side. The NTSB does not have any enforcement action, either against the pilot or the company. We're strictly here trying to understand why the accident occurred and how do we prevent something like this from happening again.

MR. VERDECIA: Me, too.

DR. WILSON: Great. We will be transcribing the interview, so if it's okay with you, I'd like to record this so that we can have a transcription made of the conversation that we have today.

MR. VERDECIA: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. VERDECIA: No problem.

DR. WILSON: And just so that it's helpful for the transcription, as often as at least you can say yes or no, versus --

MR. VERDECIA: Right.

DR. WILSON: -- a nodding of the head, that way that will

help her or him as he's transcribing this. And then, as a part of this, the transcription will become a part of the public docket, eventually, when we do release the factual information from this investigation.

I'll start off by asking you questions, and then Courtney will have a chance to ask you questions. We might have some follow ups --

MR. VERDECIA: Right.

DR. WILSON: -- if there's anything that we feel like we missed. If you don't understand a question, please ask me to clarify, or if you don't know the answer, saying I don't know is perfectly fine, as well. Do you have any questions for myself or Courtney before we get started?

MR. VERDECIA: Nope.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF DERIAN VERDECIA

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. If you could state your full name, please.

A. Full name is Derian Verdecia.

Q. Could you spell your name?

A. Delta-Echo-Romeo-India-Alpha-November, Victor-Echo-Romeo-Delta-Echo-Charlie-India-Alpha.

Q. And what do you do?

A. I am currently a flight instructor at L3Harris in Sanford, Florida.

Q. Not too far from where I live.
A. Nope.
Q. I live in [redacted].
A. Yeah, it's a drive for me.
Q. Is it?
A. Thirty minutes.
Q. Oh.
A. $7 in tolls, yeah.
Q. Yep. Okay. If you could describe your aviation background for me.
A. My aviation background started in middle school, it was eighth grade. I spent 3, approximately 3½ years building my own flight simulator before I ever got into flight school. That's kind of what drew me to it, you know, I learned everything basically on my own, with the help of YouTube and different tutorials, etcetera, and just practicing and studying and studying.

And then in high school, I finished high school. I was part of the ROTC program. My physics instructor always told me, you know, to go to the Air Force, join this program, it'd be great, they'll pay for it. I thought about it, didn't want to do the 10-year commitment. So, I did 2 years of college, and then about halfway through, more than halfway through my fiber optics degree, I was like, I'm going to go to flight school. So, I called up what was, at the time -- what was it called -- Harrelson (ph.)

Flight Academy. And, asked them about it, got the loan approval, and then did that for a year.

Once I finished that, I stubbornly didn't study for my interview that I thought I was going to ace, because I was the first one to finish in my group, and took that as a toll and went over to US Aviation in Denton. And that was a pretty good experience, my first time living on my own. Stayed there for a little bit over a year, it was like a year and 3 days, and then went back to L3Harris, which the -- my best friend in the program is now one of the managers there. I was like, hey, you guys offering the bonus still, is it good? He's like, everything's great, come on down, we're hiring.

So, down I went, back to Orlando. And then now I'm about 2-ish months away, give or take, depending on how long I stay there, till I decide the next step, either which airline or cargo or, I don't know. We'll see where life takes you.

Q. How much total time do you have?

A. That would be about 1,310 hours.

Q. Okay, great. What are you flying?

A. So, right now it's the Cirrus SR20, Generation 2, Cessna 172P model, Cessna 172DP model, and that's about it.

Q. All right. And when you were with US Aviation Group, what was your position there?

A. So, at US Aviation, I wasn't a CFII. At US Aviation, I'm just a CFI, never finished the rest of the, whatever program they

had. It was like 50% off the cost. I never did it. So, I was just teaching private international side, completely Chinese. I think it was a total of 32 students, I want to say.

Q. You worked with 32 students?

A. Total.

Q. Okay.

A. It was around there.

Q. Yeah, over the course of a year, you said.

A. Yeah.

Q. About a year. Okay. So, as a CFI, what were your -- what would be considered your duties and responsibilities in that position?

A. Duties and responsibilities as the CFI only were to maintain the pass rate of the program, obviously to the school can maintain certification. So, maintaining 80% pass rate, keeping proper documentation, log books, etcetera, endorsements, and, of course, teaching, and making sure that, you know, to the extent that you were able to teach, that they can learn. So, that's what I would sum up.

Q. Okay.

A. You know, and, of course, making a good environment for people.

Q. When you say maintain the pass rate of 80%, what does that mean?

A. Ensure that, as an individual, that you care to learn the

material and information that you're teaching in a way that you can present it, even with language barriers, for them to be able to, you know, understand and conceptualize it, and then apply it, like, you know, functionally use what you're learning, right.

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. Instead of just like, okay, this is why -- or no, we do this because it's the procedure. Instead of just that, okay, why is that the procedure? What are we learning from it? What, you know -- in that sort of sense.

Q. And who did you report to?

A. Directly over me is Daniel Bryson. And he was the Chinese International Program curriculum manager.

Q. Was he a pilot?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. I sure hope so. I guess you're right, it could be. You never know.

Q. Okay. Was Mr. Bryson employed by US Aviation or was he employed by somebody affiliated with the Chinese students that came?

A. No, he was directly employed by US Aviation.

Q. Okay.

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. He was just the manager of the curriculum.

A. Right.

Q. For the Chinese students.
A. Right.
Q. And what made you leave US Aviation?
A. Well, US Aviation, I actually left, not by my own free will -- I mean, it was my free will, but it was basically an ultimatum. We had -- with one of my students, we had an issue where on one cross-country, he got too close to another aircraft. On the second cross-country, he landed without a clearance.

So, after review of his navigation logs, we had a meeting, sit-down with Daniel Bryson, the curriculum manager, the flight operations manager and myself, and one of the other managers from, I forgot which program. They decided that my thorough preparation and sort of, like finalizing and verifying that everything was suitable for that day, for both of those flights, was inadequate.
Q. Okay.
A. I did disagree. I felt I was one of the best instructors at the Academy, and kind of took it to heart that was pretty rough, because I take pride in what I do, and I love it. But, that opened up the next door, so.
Q. Okay. I don't think I asked you, what certificates do you have?
A. Currently, I have my instrument rating, commercial multi and single-engine land on both, CFI and CFII.
Q. So we brought you in today because you were an instructor for the accident pilot. Do you recall the accident pilot?

A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Mr. Qui?
A. Qui.
Q. Qui.
MS. LIEDLER: Katherine and -- let me interrupt one second before you move on.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. I'm not sure I quite understood when you said maintain 80% pass rate and you were saying that, it was more of your ability to present and maintain the skills to teach the students to, so basically garner that 80% pass rate, or could you just repeat what that meant when you said that so that I have a little bit better understanding?
A. Yeah. So, typically, the 80% pass rate is, from my understanding, used for 141 schools to maintain their designation as a 141 school. And also, as an instructor, 80% to become a check airman. So, if I was to become a check airman for them, it would have been, to my understanding, the requirement was to have an 80% pass rate of your students at the time of the end-of-course exam.
So, I used that as a general guideline, reference point, you know, to where -- of course, there's students that have issues and there's some that don't progress as quickly as others. But, in general, to be able to maintain 80% of your students to be able to pass that exam on the first time. Does that make more sense?

Q. Yes.
A. Cool.
Q. So, to me what I'm hearing is, and correct me if I'm wrong, but, is it's an FAA requirement that you use -- you maintain as your own requirement to move forward, 80% pass rate, is that right? So, it's an FAA standard, but you --
A. As an individual, I do not believe so, no. But, I mean, as a general reference point that I use is, at least 80% of my students should be passing the first attempt. Because, from my understanding, a 141 school should maintain an 80% pass rate. And, if otherwise they don't, they lose that designation, and they go through a period, like a warning period, to where if they don't get that percentage back up, they lose the designation as a 141 academy. Does that make sense? That's just my understanding. I haven't verified that.
Q. Okay, thanks for clarifying that.
A. Yeah, of course.
MS. LIEDLER: No more questions over at this end.
DR. WILSON: Okay, thanks, Courtney.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Okay. So, Mr. Qui, walk me through what it was like to have him as a student, what you remember, what your interactions were, your experiences with him.
A. Yeah, so, with Mr. Qui, I think he was part -- he was part of the China 100 group. Out of that group, I had 11 or 12. It was

somewhere around there, 9 through 12 of them. It was so many, it was just, you know, you learn them and you learn who they are and, you know, how they interact with you and others, and it's like the super specific ones will have a lasting impression on you depending on how long you worked with them.

Unfortunately, I remember only working with him, it was a couple lessons. I mean, it was like, three or four lessons, from what I remember. He had failed his -- I'm pretty sure he failed his end-of-course exam, and then his instructor had left. And then I picked him up, flew with him, I think I did two flights with him, and then recertified him with the endorsements. I have the endorsements, that's why I remember, because it's been a year and a couple months now, I mean.

And I flew with him, resubmitted him, and he passed, and that was really it. Other than, you know, going to their apartment, to their dorm and them cooking us dinner. Specifically, the instructors, they liked -- you know, they'd be like, you know, of course, come on over, we'll cook dinner for you. And I've been a chef for 3½ years, Chinese food, ironically. And, learning the improper Mandarin and, you know, different phrases and things that bring cultures together, brought me -- attracted me to them. So, that's why I -- I mean, I'm still teaching Chinese students, to this day.

So, but as far as personality, he was always very joyous. You know, the videos, pictures I have with him, of course, smiling

and happy, ready to, you know, like everyone else, finish the program, go home to their families and start their new life.

Q. Okay. Lots of questions. Backing up, you said he failed his end-of-course exam. Do you know -- do you recall what portion or what aspect he failed?

A. No.

Q. Okay. If that happens and then you pick up a student, what information are you given so that you know how to work with that student?

A. So, you're given -- at the time I was given a debrief on him and, you know, whatever tendencies, whatever they were. Most of the information came from the record-keeping source I used at the time was MyFlightTrain. So you could review all of the past performance, past lessons, you could see everything that they did satisfactorily, unsatisfactorily, mediocre, or what issues they had. So, you would just review it, see where they needed help, do a couple flights with them, and then determine that, okay, they are ready for the practical test. They'd take it, and either pass or fail at that point.

Q. How common was that, that a -- at the private pilot, this was at the private pilot level, correct?

A. Right, mm-hmm.

Q. How common is that for a pilot to not pass?

A. Pass the end-of-course exam, or any --

Q. Yeah, the end-of-course exam.

A. End-of-course? I would say around 20%, or less.
Q. Okay.
A. Typically, even with the program I'm working now, you know, at that point, they should be at a point where they're proficient enough, of course because they've already soloed, so if they're going to solo, you know, as a prerequisite safety is number one, right. So, considering the solo isn't the end of course, solo is before the end of course, they should be at a level of safety that ensures they're not going to harm themselves or others, right. So, by the end of course, they should be pretty well prepared, right?
Q. And what does the end-of-course exam entail?
A. The end-of-course exam entails preflighting the aircraft, making sure everything on the aircraft is safe, ready for flight. Nothing that is out of standards or, you know, required for that flight to be broken. You know, you get in and do a run-up, verify the engine is working, all gauges, systems are working properly. You go out and do basic maneuvers, stalls, low flights, steep turns, cross-country procedures, VFR navigation, pilotage, dead reckoning.

You verify that, you know -- as the instructor, you're verifying that, well, the student understands where he is, where he's going, what to do if he gets lost, and everything that would entail, under the Airman Certification Standards that of a private pilot. Right?

So, at the very least, a level of safety that allows the transportation of himself and others if he chooses to bring them with him, that they can, you know, not cause harm to them or other people, property, too.

Q. And who is performing the end-of-course exam? Is it the same flight instructor that they've been training with, or is it a check airman? What -- who's doing that?

A. So, the end-of-course exam, and all stage checks in between, are done by a check airman. That check airman has been, under their guidelines, been shown to maintain an 80% pass rate with their students. I'm not -- I don't recall exactly what the course is, but they go through it and they get, you know, the FAA recognizes them, gives them a letter, and now they become a check airman for that school.

Q. Okay. And after the end-of-course exam, what happens with the pilot? Do they get a pilot's certificate, or then they go to the FAA to get their ride? How does that -- what's going on?

A. So, under US Aviation, the private pilot -- there was no FAA practical test outside of the program within the school, right?

Q. Okay.

A. So, as far as certification goes at that level, at the private pilot level, it was all inhouse.

Q. Okay.

A. With the check instructors, sorry.

Q. So, would the end-of-course exam mean that then they have a

private pilot certificate?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. From my understanding, that's how I remember it. It's been a while, but I'm sure it's still the same.
Q. Okay. You mentioned that Mr. Qui was a part of the China 100 group?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. What does that mean?
A. So, we had a specific -- they had different contractual agreements with different airlines from China. Obviously, China is growing at a very, very fast rate. So, they send their students throughout different flight academies in the United States, I'm sure other places, as well. So, we would divide them up into groups as they came in, right, so different -- maybe China 100 would be Shenzhen Airlines, maybe China 101 would be China Southern, and then China Eastern, China Hainon, and that sort. So, just a way to, you know, classify different groups.
Q. Okay. And how did you get assigned to work China 100 versus a different group of students? Was there a difference between the students, or --
A. The only difference would be as far as the minor cultural differences, and the variance of Mandarin that they would speak. Obviously, from Eastern China, Northern China, Western, Southern, I mean, we're talking hundreds and hundreds of miles. So, there

were some cultural differences, but for the most part, typically the learning curves were about the same.

The difficulties in English came mainly from how hard they worked at their universities prior, from my understanding they were all 4-year graduates. So they, you know, they came with a decent level of understanding of the language and, you know, enough to get them through the English portion of the ground school.

Q. So, how difficult was it to communicate with the pilots?

A. To communicate with the students?

Q. Yeah, the students.

A. There was some -- for example, some conceptual understandings of aerodynamics would be rather easier to visualize than to explain. So, I would use training methods, you know, including everything, visual, hearing, touching, you know, writing it, everything you can, plus the feeling of the airplane, and making mistakes while recognizing them, you know.

When you're dealing with language barriers, it's most important to be able to appeal to all the learning senses of individuals, because some people might learn by seeing more than touching, some more by hearing than writing. So, I thought it was important to include every single one of those, and then individually tailor them to where I see someone needs specific focus. Make sense?

Q. Mm-hmm. And you said that you had 11 to 12 students, you

thought, over the course of the year? How many students would you have had at one time?
A. Actually, throughout the year, total was, I believe, right around 30. From that group, I had --
Q. From the group.
A. Yeah, 9 through 12.
Q. You would have 9 to 12 students at a time?
A. No, from that group I had a total of 9 through 12 in different phases. So, some instructors would leave, and I would pick up their students, while mine were already at the end-of-course, or X, Y and Z, you know, waiting for a check or whatever.
Q. Okay. And then, how many students would you have about any given time?
A. At any given time, I'd have an average of about five. And that was a pretty manageable workload. I would -- I love working and I love teaching, so I'd be there 6 days a week.
Q. And, so you had 11 to 12, originally you had said maybe 9 to 12, from the China 100 group, and another 20 or so other students --
A. Throughout.
Q. -- throughout the course of the year.
A. Right.
Q. Where -- who were those students?
A. So, that was ranging from my first class being China 97, and there were typically 20 to 30 students per class. And I think at

the time we had about 40 to 50 instructors. So, throughout the year, they would be divided upon experience and how well you could handle Chinese versus maybe you were better at teaching domestic, because your interpersonal skills weren't that great with different cultures, so it just depended.

So, at any given point I'd have, you know, five students, and at some points, when people were closer to the end-of-course and the workload was minimum, I'd go up to nine, you know, and just managing that schedule. But a lot of it depended on experience with the program, the curriculum. We just started getting much more traction for them.

Q. Okay. You mentioned that Mr. Qui failed his end-of-course exam, and then you said then his instructor left. Was his instructor asked to leave, or was it coincidental with the failing of the end-of-course exam?

A. I believe his previous instructor went to the airlines.

Q. Okay.

A. And so they just handed him over to me.

Q. Okay. And you thought you had two flights with Mr. Qui before he went back for his end-of-course exam?

A. Yeah, two or three, from what I remember.

Q. And you don't remember what specific areas you might've focused on?

A. Cross country.

Q. Okay.

A. From -- it's just been so long. I wish I could pull up the records and still -- I mean, I'm sure I could still sign in to that website. They switched domains from the original training server to a more, you know, diverse one, I guess.
Q. Mm-hmm. So, how common was it -- you said that you -- the instructors would invite the students over for dinner and cook for them, was that pretty common?
A. It was common to the extent that they like you, you know, as an individual, as a person, besides just being a good instructor. But it's like, having good morals and understanding and appreciating cultural differences, right. So, as far as common goes, I wouldn't say common, because, from my experience, many people lack the ability to, you know, understand and appreciate other people, because they're only -- they're raised in one culture and one understanding and one way of life -- that anything else may seem strange, right. So, most people won't eat chicken feet or, you know, whatever it may be. But, for me, it was -- it just kind of came naturally.
Q. Okay. And you said you had some pictures and videos of Mr. Qui. Is that from training, or is that from when you all would be enjoying dinner?
A. No, just personal, personal life, eating dinner.
Q. Okay.
A. Pictures on Instagram and --
Q. Got it.

A. -- they're on WeChat and --
Q. Did you keep in contact with him after you left US Aviation?
A. I would -- I still have all the chats, so I would have to check that. But I -- maybe a couple of times, you know. I always check from 97, we still have our group and I, you know, after the accident, of course, obviously I would, you know, make sure everyone's doing okay, and obviously they weren't. But, I still try to keep in contact, you know, every now and then with all of -- some of them are back in China now, which is good. They're doing their own thing.
Q. Yeah. Did Mr. Qui ever have any concerns about the training, or the aircraft, that you're aware of?
A. Not specifically that he would mention.
Q. Okay.
A. But, it's apparent, of course, with almost every flight academy that airplanes are relatively of age. Some of those Seneca's, you know, conversations throughout every now and then, oh, they're old, you know, pieces of crap, whatever. Like, the unprofessional talk, just people complaining about, you know, whatever there is to complain about, something to talk about.
Q. From those two to three flights that you had with Mr. Qui, did you have any concerns about his piloting abilities, or concerns about him becoming a private pilot?
A. Not at all.
Q. Okay. Any concerns at him potentially flying multi-engine

aircraft?
A. Nope.
Q. Okay.
A. Not at that level. Not that became apparent to me. Not that I could even visualize in the future.
Q. Right. How did he compare, do you think, to other students at that level? So, coming up on their end-of-course exam, how did you think he compared?
A. At that level, the most critical thing for those contract students is the English comprehension and understanding. So, flying skills, they typically at the end they understand. So, in that level, he was fine. The English was also at par, if not above, which is what usually holds those guys back, unfortunately, is the comprehension and understanding of what's being asked of them and, you know, how can they do it, right?
Q. And when you say what's being asked of them, are you referring to, so they're in the aircraft and being asked to perform a maneuver and not understanding that, or --
A. Sometimes. And, also to the extent with communications with air traffic control, if in that situation maybe air traffic control were to ask you to do something substandard, you know, different from the norm, and they'd be -- they'd look at you and be like, whoa, what's going on, what are they saying, right? But those instances, typically by the time they're end of course, are few and far between.

Q. Did you feel that when you did those flights with Mr. Qui, that he was prepared for the lessons?
A. Yes, for sure.
Q. Any -- were there any maneuvers that you recall maybe had to be performed multiple times, or you had to work on more than others?
A. Not to my knowledge that I remember.
Q. Okay. Were you ever in a situation with him where you had to take controls of the aircraft from him?
A. Not to my knowledge, or that I can remember.
Q. Okay. The flights that you did with him, you said you thought maybe you worked a little bit more on cross-country flying. Was that the only thing that you worked on, or did you cover what would be covered in the whole end-of-course exam?
A. No, because when they fail the end-of-course exam, the review consists only of those topics that were unsatisfactory.
Q. Okay.
A. So, to what I remember, and for some reason I remember distinctly cross-country navigation.
Q. Okay.
A. As far as picking your landmarks, visual navigation, calculations and performance, etcetera.
Q. Okay. Do you recall what he might have done well during the flights? Anything that stood out?
A. Not stood out. It's very rare for me to find, at the private

level. Most of the Chinese students will use each other as reference, so their level of performance is typically around the same. There may be some that are better in English than others, some that are, you know, a little better at landings than others. But as far as standing out, enough to pass the curriculum, right, and each lesson performance was at least at the standards. So there wasn't specifically anything that would stand out.

Q. Okay. Any areas where you thought he could've done better?

A. The specific one would be English.

Q. Okay.

A. That's --

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean, throughout -- I'd never noticed any problems with landings, radio calls. You know, most of the work up there is done at untowered airports. You know, considering you're in the northern outskirts of Northwest Dallas when you're doing training, a lot of those airports, like Gainesville, are uncontrolled.

So, task management and being able to conduct the radio calls, while at the same time flying the airplane, looking for traffic, scanning, making sure all the engine gauges are green. So it does get a little, you know, more hectic. But definitely at the single-engine private pilot level, there was no specific issues.

Q. Okay. Do you recall if he took significantly longer than other pilots to complete his training?

A. Not that I remember.
Q. Okay.
A. I did have, I think it was 9 other -- 10 other students from that group, and they all -- they were all pretty much on par, you know, they were all great students, for the most part that entire group.
Q. As an instructor, what documentation were you required to keep on your students?
A. As an instructor, I'm required to keep any endorsements given for practical tests, solos. Specifically, yeah, any endorsements given to the student.
Q. Okay. And then -- so when you would do an endorsement, is that something that's handwritten, or that's something on the computer?
A. So, we would either print the endorsement from the index of different 61-65, just -- now you can print them, cut them, or you can just write them all in the book, scan them, take a picture of them, whichever way you want to keep them.
Q. Okay. What documentations, from a specific lesson, let's say, would you be required to document any information?
A. Any non-standard performance, any unsatisfactory performance on any items throughout the curriculum. So, if anything is -- you know, typically different flight schools will have different approved curriculums that you follow, and based on that curriculum and that lesson at that stage of the rating, you know, you'd say,

okay, well, he's definitely not up to the standards listed in the lesson performance notes, right. So, just any non-standard, any -- as a -- specifically any traits that you'd notice as a pilot and as a person that may, you know, at some point in the future, cause risk or harm to others, you know, anything weird, I guess you could say.

Q. So, if a lesson was satisfactory, would you just document then as satisfactory?

A. So, we'd select satisfactory under tasks. So, we would have to type out each and every single little thing. But, throughout every lesson there's usually at least something that could be remarked as to say, maybe you could work on this, remember to correct for this, this and this, checklist usage, scanning, that type of stuff.

Q. And that was the type of documentation that you would also include --

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. -- in the training records.

A. In the comments, right.

Q. Okay. How difficult is that to pick up a student, you know, at the end of course, when they just need a few extra lessons. Is that -- did you feel prepared to do that, given the documentation that you were able to read online?

A. Yes, I would say so, because, for me, I tend to take patterns and habits and recognize them initially. For me, just sitting,

they're not saying anything. At that point, at the end-of-course level, even the end of Stage 2, as an instructor, you should be able to jump onboard, verify everything that they're doing, and tell them next to nothing. The instructional guidance should be next to nothing, right? So, I don't see any problems picking someone up in the end of course, you know, judging them, critiquing them and determining, okay, they're ready or they're not.

Q. Okay. Did you ever hear any other instructors have any concerns about Mr. Qui?

A. No.

Q How about after his time as a student with you, did you ever hear any concerns about him?

A. Nope. When I spoke to Katie, she had nothing but great things to say about him. I believe you guys spoke to Katie prior to me, and, of course, I had been in communication with her and just both just as confused. Like, you know, but, I wasn't there, so, I don't know. But, to think what could've happened is just --

DR. WILSON: Courtney, that's all the questions that I have about Mr. Qui, did you want to ask some questions about any follow-ups about that, or did you want me to move on?

MS. LIEDLER: I don't think I have any other questions for Mr. Qui, but I'm just looking over my notes real quick to make sure I didn't ask anything --

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Do you know, who was the instructor prior to you who left?
A. I've no idea on that one.
Q. Okay.
A. That could definitely be obtained, though, in the -- the portal was called MyFlightTrain, that was our previous record-keeping, essentially, service.
MS. LIEDLER: No, I don't think I have any more questions.
MR. VERDECIA: And maybe I talked a little too much, too many things --
DR. WILSON: No, you were very helpful.
MS. LIEDLER: No, that's -- I think you're doing great to make sure that I understand it all.
MR. VERDECIA: Wonderful. Makes me feel like I'm teaching, you know, being able to teach, at least.
DR. WILSON: Do you need to take a break, or are you doing okay?
MR. VERDECIA: We're good.
DR. WILSON: All right.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. So, when you were at US Aviation, did you know Ms. Norris, the flight instructor?
A. No, unfortunately not.
Q. Okay.
A. I've heard of her, seen pictures of her, of course, and heard that she was a great instructor. But, as far as personally

knowing, unfortunately not.
Q. Okay.
A. Actually, one of the -- one of my prior students that was there, Allen (ph.), was his English name, from China group 105, when I spoke to him about it, he said that she -- he did have the privilege of flying with her and said she was one of the few instructors, like me, that actually cared to, you know, go deeper than what's required, than to -- to create a different level of connection, and just have that genuine, you know what I mean? Difficult to explain, I suppose.
MS. LIEDLER: Give me just one second, sorry. I did find a little asterisk mark here.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So, you were talking about the end-of-course exam, and that the -- so you were not a check airman for the company, right?
A. No, ma'am.
Q. Okay. So, you didn't complete the end-of-course exam, so you were -- the purpose of you flying with Mr. Qui was to get him up to speed and practice deficiencies so that you could -- so he could then go attempt his end-of-course exam again. Is that right?
A. That is correct.
Q. Okay. So, having said all of that, your understanding of the end-of-course exam, if I have it right here, is that the end-of-course exam is completed, that check, that flight is completed by

a USAG check airman. And after that, is that is then submitted to the FAA to issue their private pilot certificate. So, there's no private pilot -- FAA private pilot check ride that comes after that end-of-course exam.

A. To my knowledge, yeah, that is correct.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay, just wanted to clarify that. Okay, thank you.

MR. VERDECIA: Cool.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. So, you were at the company a little over a year, you said. What would be a typical amount of time that an instructor would stay at USAG?

A. Typically, at USAG, and you could say at any flight school, the typical time is the time to reach 1,500 hours.

Q. Okay.

A. So, that really goes for almost every school. From what I remember at the time, you know, just starting there, it was always in and out, guys in and out, meeting new people, meeting new people, because everyone would come in, float through, get their hours and continue their journey.

Q. Right. And I realize that I didn't ask you this at the beginning, but what was the timeframe that you were at USAG?

A. It was a year and 3 days, or 2 days.

Q. But, September 2017 to --

A. Oh, December 4th of 2016, to December 5th, I believe, of

2018. Yeah.
Q. So almost 2 years, then.
A. Of '16 to the beginning of -- to '17? December 4th to December 5th?
Q. Oh --
A. '16 to '17.
Q. '17, I thought you said 2018.
A. Oh, no, it was '17 to '18. Yeah, December 4th, 2017, to December 5th, 2018.
Q. Okay.
A. That's -- yeah, that's right.
Q. Okay.
A. Because the years just keep going. You're just like here, here we are.
Q. Time flies. So, how often -- you thought it was about 20% of the time that students didn't pass the end-of-course exam?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. During your time, do you ever recall a student being asked to leave the program?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Specifically, there would be students, of course, that would break the Chinese and the US guidelines, course guidelines, and living conditions, essentially, that they would break one of the policies of taking an Uber somewhere, or leaving the grounds of

what USAG could monitor, right. That's one of the international policies that most of the flight schools have, including the one I work for now.

And then, I had one student out of all of them from China 97, Anthony, he exited the program at the Stage 2 part of training because upon a review of myself and other instructors, he couldn't pass the Stage 2 check. I think it was multiple failures, he had four total, or three total. And he was the only one sent back.

Q. Okay.

A. Specifically from mine.

Q. And that was when he was getting his private pilot's license?

A. Right, Stage 2.

Q. Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: So, one -- you know of two, one was due to infractions to the agreement for training, and one was due to flight performance.

MR. VERDECIA: Right. So, one of those was mine, Anthony from China 97. And, I mean, there were a couple of students here and there that would, you know, break academy policy and get kicked out and sent back home. But, specific names, I don't remember.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. How difficult was that, you know, that review process that you would go through for a student that wasn't making the cut? I mean, is that something that was accepted, or were you really

encouraged to work with the student and to try to get them to pass? Explain how that process goes?

A. Oh, the process of picking someone up that has deficiencies?

Q. Well, I mean, you know, so you've got a student, so this student that you had that you said couldn't pass the Stage 2 check. I mean, how do you determine, like, okay, this student shouldn't be in the program anymore, versus continuing to work with the student?

A. I see. So, a lot of the -- for me, and typically in general, being able to recognize those insufficiencies come with basic principles of safety, whether they be understanding aerodynamics in the recovery of the stall, in the recovery of, you know, any inadvertent spin entry or basic understandings of landing, how to -- for the principals of flying an airplane.

So, when those principles are taught continuously and you're getting closer to 40, 50, 60, then 70 hours, and you still see those same problems with different instructors and different opinions, that's when, you know, the thinking becomes, okay, yeah, this guy, he's just not going to learn it. So, then, it would go to the airline to make a decision if they're going to, either make the student pay for it, to continue training, or they would pay for it themselves, depending on a variety of variables.

But, with the one student, Anthony, I can say for sure, he -- the irony behind it at the end of it all, he said he wanted to be an English teacher. He never even wanted to be a pilot. So, I

was like, well, then go home, man. You know, if this isn't what you want to do, don't chase it. Because later on you're going to have 180, 400 people's lives behind you, and this isn't what you wanted to do. So, don't do it.

Q. Explain to me a little bit more what you said that it goes -- the decision goes to the airline, and then the student can pay for it, or the airline will pay for it. How does that work?

A. Yeah, so, when a student would fail their second attempt, they would be typically put -- obviously we would let the -- inform the airlines of their progress, right, through a progress review, like a report saying okay, this student has failed this exam first time, second time, upon -- we reviewed with him, we let another instructor fly with him, whatever they decide to do based on, you know, being tailored specifically to the student. They would inform the airline. The airline would either put the student on self-pay, or the airline would offer to pay for the further training of the student. Right?

Q. So, what did you think, working for USAG? What was it like working there?

A. My time, I really enjoyed it. Not the, specifically because of the, you know, furnishings of wonderful equipment, or, you know, wonderful management, or specifically anything, but my passion for teaching and for people. So, for me, you can put me almost in any environment, and as long as it's safe, right, and I don't have any serious issues, I love teaching. So, if I can, you

know, if I can take something I know and share it with someone else and now they know it, to me, that's pretty rewarding. So, as a, you know, in general, I had a pretty good time.

Q. So, I don't want to make assumptions, but you said, as long as it's safe, I love teaching and I want to be there.

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. How did you feel the safety aspect of USAG was?

A. During my time there, I never had any serious problems with any of the airplanes that I flew. And, unfortunately that was only limited to the Cessna 152s. I wish I had more data, but from my time there, the one year, and I would fly a lot, more than a lot of people, I didn't have any specific safety issues.

Q. Did you ever feel pressure from USAG to, either take a flight that you didn't want to take, let's say because of weather, or to continue a student that you didn't feel should be continuing in the program?

A. Never, not once.

Q. Okay. Did you ever hear of other instructors feeling that way?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Okay. How about the maintenance? Did you feel that the maintenance was adequate on the airplanes?

A. Yeah. I would speak to a couple of the -- I don't remember their names anymore -- I'd speak to them, ask them about the overhaul program, you know, what happens to the engines, what do

they do with them, and I remember them saying, at least for the 152s, that they would send them out to get overhauled and they'd get the new motors and put them back in. But the engines were all done, everything was officially done by licensed groups, so I never saw any problems with it.

Q. Okay. Did you ever have to down an airplane for maintenance?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And, any pushback from, either the maintenance department, or the company in general, for downing an aircraft?

A. No.

Q. How did you feel the number of aircraft were relative to the number of pilots, student pilots and instructors? Is there enough airplanes to be flying?

A. Definitely not. But, that is typically, you know, a typical complaint in the industry in general, is available equipment. When you have an older fleet, in general, or those parts you have a, you know, they're starting to increase more and more and more students, we have more and more instructors, as well, and the maintenance side of the department is, you know, suffering a lot of work, you know, it's endless.

The repairs, there was times when available aircraft were nowhere near close to fill the requirements of a day's total hours, right. So, let's say there was 200 hours of training to be done in this aircraft in total for all the students that day. There were days when, you know, weather, specifically maintenance,

couldn't keep up with the inspections, X, Y and Z. There was too many variables, right. So, there were days when people, you know, you'd have the schedule and you'd have to cancel the whole thing.

Q. Did the company ever talk about their safety culture?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. During our meetings, we would have monthly meetings, and we'd, you know, discuss, you know, our performance, specifically to our campus, different involvements in other, you know, attempting to reach other networks to increase the, you know, the size of the school and the productivity.

As far as, you know, safety, it was more of a thing that was recognized as far as a record. I believe the last accident was many, many, many years -- the last fatal accident was -- in relating -- in relation to that school was early -- or later 2000s. So, at least in my time there, I never saw any specific indications that there were safety issues.

Q. Yeah. So, what do you think that could be attributed to, the lack of accidents, you know, that it had been 10 plus years?

A. Yeah, I remember the last accident because I talked to the tower controllers and it happened on the field. It was in IFR conditions, and that was specifically student and pilot related, the instructor, as well. But to attribute specifically -- so what safety amounts to, and it amounts to all the variables coming together, whether you have a good maintenance team and a good

management team, and the risk assessment of the student and the instructor, right. So, you have the instructor, who should be asking the student, what do you think?

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. Does everything look good? And then verifying everything associated with that, right, whether it be the weather, the aircraft, the day, you know, are you tired, are you sleepy. How does he look, how do you look, right?

Q. Were there ever any -- I know you said in general you didn't have any safety concerns, but did you ever feel like there was some sort of safety concern that you needed to report to the company?

A. During my time there, not that I can remember.

Q. Okay. If you did have a safety concern, how would you have done that?

A. You can go through the SMS. We had a little program where the reports that you would file would be sent through a system, and then the chief would review it and the director of flight operations would review it. And then it'd be discussed one on one. From my understanding.

Q. Okay. Do you think that people, in general, felt comfortable reporting concerns that they had?

A. I think so.

Q. Would you have felt comfortable reporting a concern if you had one?

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Where did you get your CFI from?
A. At what was formerly Aerosim, the school I work for now, L3Harris.
Q. Okay. And did you feel that, as an instructor, that you were adequately trained to handle any emergency that might've come up --
A. For sure.
Q. -- in the aircraft? Okay.
A. One hundred percent.
Q. Do you think that the instructors feel that way at USAG, that they're capable of handling any emergency that they're faced with?
A. I think so. At the same time, I always like talking to people to recognize who they are as a person. Are they someone that has the competence to tackle things head on, right, no matter what happens, we're going to figure it out, we're going to get it done. So, I -- you know, most people, in general, there's always times no one can be prepared for everything. So, even as much as you imagine and think what you would do in this situation, all the variables that happen in real life may not present themselves in the way that you would have handled it, right?
Q. Right.
A. But I think so, overall, yes.
Q. Do you still keep in contact with anyone at USAG?
A. Just Katie.

Q. Okay.
A. Really, and we talk every now and then.
Q. Any -- have you heard through watercooler talk, or has anybody shared any concerns about either Ms. Norris or Mr. Qui since the accident, any concerns that they had with either of them as a pilot?
A. Not with either of them as a pilot. But, somewhere there I heard that she had written up that same airplane that she did fly for engine problems.
Q. Okay.
A. That's the only thing that I had ever seen that made me a little questionable. But as far as them specifically, no.
Q. Mm-hmm. And questionable in what way?
A. Well, then, if I wrote something up and I see the maintenance department has signed off on it, so we have the log, the discrepancy log, here is the discrepancy, here is the correction, here's the signature, it'd be good to think, at least, that the problem was fixed. So, it is normal in the industry, especially with a flight school with many, many, many operations, to see something be written up, and it be corrected, and then something else that could be related, but it wasn't distinctly that problem, cause another issue.
Q. Okay.
A. So, you know, it does bring up somewhat of a flag. It's curiosity. You're like, well, what is it? What happened? So,

that's the only thing the whole time that I've thought, you know -- you know, you're thinking, what is it?

Q. Yep.

A. What -- something. And it's like, to get to the bottom of it, I just like --

Q. I understand. So, are you aware -- I know you said, you know, you would talk to maintenance occasionally about the overhaul of the 152 engines and things like that. Were you ever made aware of, or did you know if it happened, so if there was a major maintenance item fixed, were there test flights that were done on an aircraft before it was returned to service?

A. Yes. And I had done one of those.

Q. Okay.

A. When a engine is new, you do the engine break-in. It's a 2½-hour flight, flight at different -- you know, as recommended per the manufacturer, flight at different power settings, 75%, 70%, you know, to stay in flight, break the engine in, let the cylinder linings properly mold to the cylinders, I guess. And, yeah, for the most part, that was about it.

Q. Okay. How was it determined who would do those flights?

A. Instructors qualified for that airplane.

Q. Okay.

A. As determined by them being standardized in that plane by a check instructor at the school.

Q. Okay.

A. So, for example, I was standardized in the 172 or the 152 there, so I flew, if required, the 152 maintenance flights.
Q. Okay.
A. So, like first come, first serve.
DR. WILSON: All right. I think that's all I have for this minute.
MR. VERDECIA: Okay.
DR. WILSON: Courtney?
MS. LIEDLER: Yeah, I think I have a couple of questions for you, Derian.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So were you ever part of -- or you mentioned it one, since you trained, had failed a stage check, and were you ever a part of a review board or is that -- or do they have review boards at a private level?
A. Yes, they do. Review boards are typically with the management and/or group leaders to come to a -- essentially the review boards are to have evidence and verification that there are other people present during the discussion of whatever unsatisfactory performance, so that at some point, if that trend of unsatisfactory performance continues, the airlines know that there was more than one person present so that there is no injustice, essentially. That was typically with the group leaders and managers of the academy.
Q. Okay, so instructors wouldn't be -- would not be a part of a

review board typically. Is that correct?
A. Right. It was typically the group leaders and managers that would conduct a review board.
Q. Okay.
A. And then the instructor would be given a summary sheet of the discussion items.
Q. Okay. And so, if you had a student that was not meeting standards or didn't seem to pick up a flight instructor -- a skill or whatever that was required, you would then -- explain to me what would you do -- what was your process?
A. Sure. So, depending on the confidence level and the understanding of the instructor, one might notice an issue on, say, for example the sixth or seventh flight, notice that issue and see it occurring a couple times. Some people may initially right away report it to a manager, say, hey, he's having these issues.

Whereas, another instructor with more experience might understand that that specific issue is common for that level of training and might continue to expect the progression down the road, which would then or not come. And then at that point, you may report it to the group manager. Of course, it's already noted in the comments of each particular lesson. Then you'd report it to the manager.

They would typically get to that stage check, be submitted for the stage check, before having any specific correction

measures, right. So, if they took the stage check, they would take it, and then if they failed then we're now going to review and start placing more emphasis on that specific portion.

Q. Okay, so you -- and maybe you mentioned to the manager that, you know, that there's a skill the pilot is struggling with, but there was no corrective measure done until that stage check part. So, like, let's say someone's having trouble with turns around a point. You would express to your manager, hey, this student is having trouble with turns around a point, but they got to the first stage check and they couldn't do turns around a point, nothing was done with that deficiency until such time as the stage check came back around?

A. Depending on if that was a factor of critical safety or not. So, if it was, you know, something that was critically important, like, hey, this guy has no understanding of basic attitude flying. He cannot interpret the instruments, he doesn't know how to make that mind-muscle connection. Then, okay, then we're going to continue reviewing with him, and then place him with a senior instructor who will then determine if he's sufficient enough in his skills to continue training.

So, if it was something that was, you know, a very critical factor, critical component, related to safety, then we would stop and say, hey, this kid just isn't getting it, and this isn't okay. Then we would, of course, you know, stop him and determine if he's apt to continue or not.

Q. All right, okay. (Indiscernible) that you had mentioned that, in the beginning when we first started speaking with you, you mentioned that you -- it was you left US Aviation because of a situation with at student that had failed -- one time failed separation issues with his -- during his cross-country, and lag time, failed to have adequate planning for his cross-country. Was that -- how much difference in time was that between the time they requested you train with Mr. Qui during -- for his -- to get him back up to speed with part of his training needs cross-country, versus when you would've been going through this process of your student not meeting the cross-country, you know, requirements for training?

A. That was about 5½ months.

Q. About 5½ months between you training with Mr. Qui, to when you were let go for -- or when you were requested to leave for the cross-country failures of your student?

A. Right.

Q. All right. And, how did they choose you to train with Mr. Qui? So, his instructor left, he needed some help with his flying to get through his stage check, or do his end-of-course check. How did they choose you to fly with? Is it -- like, was there -- did you -- did they tell you that they were selecting you for a certain reason?

A. Not for a specific reason, but I would always try to, you know, maintain communication with the group manager for the

Chinese program. So, I'd always be in touch, stop by and say, hey, this student is having this problem. So we'd always be -- I'd always attempt to, you know, keep people informed of the progress that people were making, so I suppose that they assumed that I could -- I would be a good candidate to help him get through whatever issues.

Q. Okay. Okay, and then for each stage check that you mentioned for a pilot, you know, at the end-of-course completion check specifically, what are the standards that you use to check a pilot for, you know, like all of that that you said, you know, whether -- short field (indiscernible), and, you know, basic navigation, or -- what are the standards that US Aviation uses for that, do you know?

A. Right, the standards --

Q. What standards are you training them to?

A. Right. So the standards would come from the course outline for the program, and those standards would ultimately come from the, at the time would be the Airman Certification Standards for private pilot.

Q. So are they geared to what the FAA standards are for airmen?

A. Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. Okay, those were the questions I had, Katherine.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Quick question going back to the cross-country planning and the student that Courtney asked you about, where you were asked to leave.
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. What was your involvement in his cross-country planning and then the flight? So these were solo cross-country --
A. Yes.
Q. -- that he did? And then, were you to review the planning --
A. Right.
Q. -- prior to his departure?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Okay.
A. So, the winds -- specifically from that meeting, the winds aloft he had used were from the night before, so that's Zulu time for a 6-hour period he had used the winds that were valid from the period before.
Q. Okay.
A. Now, where that would cause -- is beyond because any -- you know, landing without a clearance, I mean, we're talking apples and oranges, so.
Q. Okay.
A. I had no choice but to swallow my pride and move on with life.
Q. Okay. I was just trying to understand the interaction that the instructors having with the student planning.

A. Mm-hmm.
Q. It's been so long since I got my private, I --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- don't remember what I did when I had an instructor.
A. But, I mean, those are, you know, you're driving a car down the street and you see, oh, this guy's getting a little close. Well, then they tell you, if you had someone telling you, hey, maybe you should scoot over a little bit, maintain visual separation. Okay, I'm maintaining visual separation, and you slowly get closer. I mean, where do you -- at what point can you control someone? So, I wish I was there, I mean.

DR. WILSON: Right. Okay. I don't think I have any specific questions, but is there anything that we didn't ask you about that you were hoping we would ask you about?

MR. VERDECIA: Well, I think we got a good bit. I was actually -- that was pretty good, pretty impressive.

DR. WILSON: Anything else that you can think of to share that would help us with our investigation?

MR. VERDECIA: My only question would be -- the one thing I would, really, after talking, you know, asking and, you know, with so many people who were very, very, very experienced pilots, to decently experienced, to new, to whatever, people that don't even fly anymore, is what the specific guidelines are for conducting single-engine approaches, in the Seneca, what is -- because I know at our school, we bring the power to idle, but that's it. There

is no feathering, we're not shutting anything down, because in the case that other engine does fail, what the heck are you supposed to do?

So, that's the other thing. I would like to see what -- do we shut it down, do we feather it and cut the mixture, do we turn the mags off, what do we do? So, if that's not the case, then at least if that engine did fail, you have the other engine. So, then that leads you to think, did they VMC in the turn and cause what happened. So, that's the main thing I get from that.

DR. WILSON: Right. Okay. I actually do have one more question.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Watercooler talk when you were at USAG. Any concerns that, you know -- I guess what were sort of the common complaints that people had, not necessarily like, oh, we don't have enough aircraft, but safety concerns? Anything that's related to safety that people used to voice concerns about?

MS. LIEDLER: I'll tack on one more thing. Any comment or concerns with students, that people would complain about, that students were doing that weren't safe?

MR. VERDECIA: Things that students were doing that weren't safe. Well, you know, the thing is, at the private level, initially, especially international students, you know, next to all of them are doing everything that isn't safe. So, I suppose it's your responsibility to, you know, teach them and help them

understand that what they're doing is -- because a lot of these guys have never driven cars, they've never ridden motorcycles. You know, some of them -- you would hope they've ridden bikes, but they have so few mechanical skills, even though their book smarts are amazing, right, so they made it to this point, so clearly they're very smart people. But, there are certain mechanical insufficiencies that are generality throughout. So, there is no, you know, specific unsafe things.

Maybe one student -- I had one student one time, his recovery, he put me into a spin, and his recovery was to let go and scream. So, you see everything, right? And then when you get more and more experienced, you see that most of them will kill you if you let them, right? So you need -- it's your job, that's your job to not have them do that.

As far as specific safety issues, for -- you know, tailored to the academy and aircraft, as far as conditions go, besides it being incredibly hot, I don't recall anything, you know, to my degree that I flew the Cessna 152, even other people talking about the Seneca's, besides that they were old. They were old as hell, which they are. And, you know, every academy attempts -- how else are you going to make money? You have to cut down costs. So, that's a generality in business.

So, I don't see any specific measure that wasn't taken as far as safety goes, to my knowledge, besides what I mentioned earlier about the fact that that engine was written up from the same

person the day prior, or whatever it was. That's the main thing that causes a red flag in my head. And that's something I felt I should bring up, right?

DR. WILSON: Right, yep.

MR. VERDECIA: So, other than that, no real specific issues. It's a very thoroughly written and understood program.

DR. WILSON: Okay, great. Thank you. Really appreciate it.

MR. VERDECIA: Of course.

DR. WILSON: Any last questions for us before we wrap up? I know we talked a little bit before.

MR. VERDECIA: Yeah. No, I guess you guys already made the preliminary report, or not yet? Prelim? I don't think I've seen that, yet.

MS. LIEDLER: Yeah, so the preliminary report has been released. It is online. It's very -- just so that you don't look and think, well, that's it, -- it's very basic. It's just the kind of the who, what, when, where and why. Not -- just who, what, when and where, not even why, obviously.

MR. VERDECIA: Mm-hmm.

MS. LIEDLER: So, date, location, instructional flight, you know, it was operated under Part 91. So, it's very basic, and we do that because we don't want to release information that we can't verify as factual at the time, but we want to at least put something out there showing that we are investigating the accident.

So, the information that's contained there is very general, it's very basic, until such time as we sort through the, you know, all the facts and we can release a more, obviously more detailed final report.

MR. VERDECIA: Mm-hmm.

MS. LIEDLER: So, it is out there. You can certainly look at it. And, just search in the database, just search Gainesville, Texas.

MR. VERDECIA: Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: And put in the month of July to August and it will pop it up in there --

MR. VERDECIA: One more. Did you guys get any video footage from any CCTV or anything?

MS. LIEDLER: We did not. We have -- we do have video footage of the airplane taxiing out for departure from Denton, but we don't have any video footage from Gainesville.

MR. VERDECIA: Okay, well, that's all I got.

DR. WILSON: All right, thank you very much.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Derian Verdecia
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Orlando, Florida
DATE:	September 17, 2019

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.



Elizabeth Davis
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: NATHANIEL BOYD

Via Telephone

Wednesday,
September 18, 2019

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

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Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

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Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:30 p.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: Is there anybody else that you would like to link in? Is there anyone that you -- for support purposes that you would like to include in this interview for your -- on your side or are you comfortable with just chatting with us without anyone else? It's totally up to you.

MR. BOYD: I mean that I'm comfortable chatting with you by myself. I mean, I don't, I don't see why I need anyone else.

DR. WILSON: Okay, that's fine. We always just want to -- and I apologize I didn't extend that offer prior, but we just want to make sure that whoever we're talking to obviously feels comfortable and if they need someone else, you know, in the room, we always want to let them know that that's an option.

So if you're fine with it, that's totally fine with us.

MR. BOYD: Yeah, I'm fine with it, fine.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Okay. So I want to just for the record go around the room and have everybody introduce themselves one more time so that their names are on the recording.

As I mentioned, I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MR. GOOD: Thomas Good with the FAA, flight operations inspector.

MS. LIEDLER: Courtney Liedler with the NTSB. I'm the investigator in charge for this accident.

DR. WILSON: Okay. And Darren stepped out for a moment but we'll have him -- okay, here he is.

MR. PITTACORA: Sorry.

DR. WILSON: Can you just state your name and affiliation, please?

MR. PITTACORA: Yes. This is Dan Pittacora with the FAA. I'm a principal maintenance inspector and aviation safety inspector.

DR. WILSON: So, Nathaniel, the purpose of this interview is to understand your interactions that you had with the accident student pilot. We're all here from the safety side, even those from the FAA. We're not here to do any enforcement action or to place blame but strictly to understand how the accident happened and how we can prevent it from happening again.

So we just want to hear from you, hear about your interactions. We'll have you go through sort of your interactions with the pilot and then we'll have some more specific follow-up questions for you.

If you don't understand a question that we've asked you, please ask us to clarify or if you don't know the answer to a question, saying I don't know if perfectly fine.

So I'll start asking you questions and then everyone in the room will have a chance to ask you questions as well.

Before we get started, do you have any questions for us?

MR. BOYD: No.

INTERVIEW OF NATHANIEL BOYD

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. If you could start by stating your name for the record?

A. Nathaniel Boyd.

Q. And what is your current job title?

A. Right now I'm working for CommutAir as a first officer.

Q. Okay. And if you could provide a brief description of your aviation background?

A. Well, I learned -- got all my certifications, ATP out of Fort Lauderdale, shortly after getting my CFI, CFII and MEI. I then got a job with US Aviation. I worked for them almost 2 years and I just currently got a job with the airlines where I am currently just finishing up training.

Q. Okay. And about how much total time do you have?

A. About 1540.

Q. Okay.

A. So about 1,540 hours.

Q. Great. And prior to working for CommutAir you were an instructor at the US Aviation Group?

A. That is correct.

Q. Okay. And what was your position at US Aviation?

A. I was an instructor. I did -- I instructed the instrument curriculum and the multi-engine curriculum, commercial.

Q. And as an instrument and MEL instructor, what were your

duties and responsibilities?
A. To provide safe instruction to my students and make sure that they got the knowledge and preparation to help them do their duties as a pilot, if it's from navigating the aircraft to flying the aircraft safely, also get the duties and skills needed to be a great pilot and hopefully acquire their commercial or instrument ratings down the road.
Q. Okay. And, USAG, who did you report to?
A. David Coons was my -- was usually the main person and David Cruz over him.
Q. Okay. And what was the time frame that you were an instructor pilot at USAG?
A. If I can think of -- I started July of 2017 and then, and then June, it was the end of June 2019.
Q. Okay. So just to clarify, you were there for 2 years from July 2017 until June 2019?
A. Just about, yeah.
Q. Okay. And why did you --
A. It was a little under that, I guess.
Q. Right, about a month shy. Sure.
A. Yeah.
Q. And your reason for leaving USAG?
A. I got a job with CommutAir at that point and got my -- I reached my 1,500 hours to move on --
Q. Great.

A. -- to move on with the airlines.
Q. Did you hold any other positions at USAG? Were you a check airman or anything?
A. No, I never, never held any of their positions. Kind of just CFII and MEI, really, for them.
Q. Okay. Do you remember the accident student pilot, Mr. Qui?
A. I do.
Q. So explain to me your interactions that you had with him, like what was he like as a student, what -- you know, what sort of flights did you have with him?
A. I mean, unfortunately I don't remember a lot. From, you know, from what I remember, he was (indiscernible) student. I don't remember anything -- I think I remember him struggling a little bit with the curriculum.

I don't -- unfortunately I don't really remember too much with interactions from what I can -- I kind of recall he was a hard worker, always wanted to kind of -- working hard, and I offered as much instruction as I can and I always tried to help him as much as I could as well, but nothing out of the ordinary or anything.

Q. How long were you his instructor?
A. I'd have to check my records but I would say I believe it was through Stage 1, so about -- I'd say about 2 to 3 weeks.
Q. Okay. And when you say Stage 1, are you talking about Stage 1 for instruments or are you talking Stage 1 for commercial?

A. Stage 1 for multi-engine and commercial.
Q. So you only instructed, if I'm correct, you only instructed with him through multi-engine and commercial, even though you were an instrument instructor too, he had a different instrument?
A. He did.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah. At that point I was -- about ever since October on to when I left US Aviation, I was only instructing just multi-engine at that point.
Q. So October of '18 until you left in June of '19?
A. Yes. I'm not sure if it was October of '18, but it was somewhere around that I started doing solely multi-engine.
Q. Was that by choice or how is it determined what you -- who you will be instructing?
A. It was by choice and the school asked it as well. I have my MEI. I like the multi-engine aircraft, the Cessna. It's kind of a little bit more of a challenge. At that point I was doing instrument a lot, so -- I did instrument for about a year and a half. I was ready to kind of move on to the next more challenging, challenging aspect in aviation, so I thought that the multi-engine was the way to go and at that point go into aviation after that.
Q. Okay. And you mentioned that you were his instructor for about 2 to 3 weeks. Why such a short time period?
A. Well, I just got him as a student at that point. He was -- I'm trying to think. He was about 2 to 3 weeks, so -- the first

part of the training was about 10 hours of multi-engine training so it wasn't a huge amount of time. He unfortunately failed his first stage check. I did retrain with him and then he failed his second one. And at that point he went back to a review board, and that was right at the time I was leaving for the airlines so I didn't get to see (indiscernible) he was training with (indiscernible).

Q. Do you recall what areas of the first stage check he failed?

A. Honestly I don't recall what he failed in the stage check or the retraining unfortunately.

Q. Okay. You mentioned that he struggled a bit with the curriculum. Any recollection of what he struggled with?

A. I kind of forget. Unfortunately I don't have any, any access to any of my notes or anything like that, so -- that I left with the school, so I kind of forget unfortunately at this point what he was struggling with or what problems he had.

Q. Okay. And about how many students did you typically have at one time?

A. Usually around three.

Q. Three. And did you feel like that was a manageable workload?

A. I did, yeah. I thought it was a pretty good workload. Usually they were all at different stages and trying -- we have -- flew with two of them a day, and then the other one kind of had a little bit of time (indiscernible) and hopefully reflective of what (indiscernible) did before and kind of rotate them.

Q. Okay. Just to clarify, are you saying that two students would fly together, one would be a passenger and one would be piloting?
A. Usually, usually not.
Q. Oh.
A. I mean, usually it would be just me and the student.
Q. Okay.
A. There would be a few occasions where there would be another student observing but most of the time that wasn't, that wasn't the normal.
Q. Okay. Okay. Was there ever a time when you had to take control from the student?
A. In general or for him?
Q. For him.
A. I mean, not that I can recall. Everything's been just kind of making sure the aircraft itself was always stable and always monitor it. But no, I can't, I can't recollect an actual issue for him where he put us in an unsafe situation where I had to take control.
Q. Okay. Did you practice engine-out procedures with him?
A. (Indiscernible), yes.
Q. Okay. Do you recall any difficulties doing engine-out procedures?
A. Once again, I can't really recall the particular student on how well he did or not. I mean, Stage 1, those students take a

little bit of time and struggle with it. You really have to work with them. Unfortunately it's been a while and I don't recall him particularly.

Q. That's okay. Do you recall --

A. I'm sorry.

Q. That's okay. Do you recall in general what students struggled with the most in the Stage 1, not specifically him but just in general?

A. Well, one thing we definitely had to work on was them getting -- well, engine-out procedures, the flow with the engine-out procedures was always something usually your students have to work on. Also another, another area that we usually worked on pretty heavily was landings, getting used to multi-engine, the heavier aircraft, really kind of thinking, (indiscernible) the landing down was also another thing that I tended to work on pretty heavily with my students.

Q. Okay.

A. But, yeah, there's definitely -- I mean, engine-out procedures and especially the engine-out was always something that I found that students need a lot of work with.

Q. Okay. When you perform engine-out procedures was there a particular engine that you would typically simulate the engine out or --

A. I always tried to come and switch them up. I felt like kind of getting them out of a routine and kind of -- but especially the

student can't predict what's going to happen or even try to read into that the better. I mean, if you get complacent on a certain engine, then it really -- it's kind of -- I mean, you're not doing any good for their training at that point.

Q. Okay. And when you were doing these, these simulated engine out, would you take it to almost to landing or -- you know, so what would be the process of when you would put power back into the engine that was simulated out?

A. It would have -- engine out (indiscernible) kind of depend. I mean, if you're talking about a single engine, like ILS approach landing, we would never take it out completely. I mean, once they, in the simulation (indiscernible) always bump up a little bit of power to simulate that that aircraft, that engine was feathered, when we were up in altitude the engine, the engine, we would usually make sure that they never dropped below a certain airspeed.

I mean, you're heavily monitoring the aircraft, especially when they're going through the flow to make sure one of the engines, they didn't pull the wrong engine. I mean, it was -- I (indiscernible) I know so everything you had to look for there. I mean, anytime that we had -- they were doing an ILS or coming in to land, I mean, you're making sure they don't drop below the blue line or anything like that. And, of course, I mean, you want to make sure the aircraft never drops below any safety standards.

Q. Okay. Do you recall anything from this pilot, anything that

he did well or better than other students that you flew with?
A. Unfortunately, once again, I don't remember, don't recall. The only thing honestly I really remember about him is that he was struggling with the check rides and -- or the stage check and that's about all. I can't really recall what he actually was failing at this point.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. Okay. I have a couple questions. So when you flew with him during that time were you always in the airplane or were you -- did you guys do some sim time, too? How -- what was the split there when you guys were flying together or when you were instructing him?
A. Airplane and sim time, yes. There's a lot of sim time with the multi-engine curriculum. So with the first, the first stage, I mean, you're in the sim a good amount. If I can recall, I believe it was about 10 hours of sim time that we do and we try to get all that done in the first stage. Usually leave maybe an hour or two for them for their actual check ride if they want some more. But I really try to get them comfortable in the air in the simulator first before they even take their first flight.
Q. Okay. And what were typical training tools? Like you were talking about the flow of like an engine out, what were typical training tools that you would use or that students would use during those, during those procedures?
A. Can you clarify about that, by training tools?

Q. Yeah. So for engine out, you know, you said that that's a standard hurdle for students in the program and is it -- you know, it is, you know, emergency checklist, is it engine-out checklist they're using, is it notes that they're using? What are they -- what is typical for them to use?

A. Well, it's a checklist. They're using -- most of the time they'll always use checklists. I mean, anything with importance or like coming in to land or anything like that, they're not using notes or anything like that, they'll be using the aircraft checklists.

And engine out, we always track because the flow and verify it with a checklist until they get -- or they memorize like the engine out flow, then verify it with the checklist after they're done, and then kind of go through those checklists (indiscernible) or in stage of flight for that matter.

For the (indiscernible) and stuff like that, I mean, most of that will come from memory that we -- that they had posted, that the school had posted and profiles for them as well.

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. Nathan, when they're practicing that do you know if they are sitting in the FTDs and the controls in there, in the aircraft, are they sitting in front of a cardboard cutout chair flying, do you know?

A. Well, I'm being a little bit involved, but they're definitely not -- they're not allowed to sit in front of the controls on the

aircraft on the ground, multi-engine. Now, with the Cessnas and like for private and instrument they would, but the multi-engine aircrafts they were never allowed to be inside the actual aircraft when it was on the ground, going through flow or anything. They would have to do that in front of a cardboard cutout.

They also did have simulators that were upstairs in the facility that we didn't use. When we did simulators we had the (indiscernible) over in the simulator building -- it's across the parking lot, if you know the one I'm talking about -- that we would always do our simulators there.

And then they also had a kind of a simulator upstairs (indiscernible) that were a lot less complex that they would practice flying, and they should have had paper gliders to actually practice the flows, flows for the multi-engine aircraft.

Q. Was there a reason why they weren't allowed to sit in the aircraft? Because I know I've seen them out there sitting in the 152s and 172s practicing their flows?

A. Like I said, they were allowed to do it in any of the single engine aircrafts, but the multi-engine aircrafts are -- were, at least when I was there, were off limits to do any practicing in.

Q. Yeah. Do you know why that was?

A. Well, from what I've heard and what I can understand is, I mean, for one, they're afraid that somebody might press the gear up. Also the Piper aircrafts didn't require a key, so if somebody accidently turned them on or flipped the switch that shouldn't

have switched, someone turned the power on, those were accidently turned on by somebody that was in it and (indiscernible) the Pipers compared to the Cessnas, was the biggest, was the biggest reason why. I believe that was one of the reasons I was told and, I mean, I understood that as well. So I'd say it was more of a safety issue.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. I think you mentioned that students struggled somewhat with the Stage 1. Would you say that he struggled any more than other students or was he -- you know, was his performance at the same level as other student pilots?

A. I would say he struggled for -- the only -- unfortunately I don't remember what areas, but he was -- I only had two students that ever failed a stage check, the same stage check twice. He was one of them, unfortunately, and then I had another student fail a check or a stage check in instrument twice, but out of all my students they were the only two.

Q. Okay. In that roughly 2-year period that you were with USAG, how many students do you think you had?

A. Kind of hard to estimate, but I'd probably have to say around 30, 35 students.

Q. Okay. And were they all from the Chinese program or did you have other students as well?

A. All except, all except one. I had one American student.

Q. Did you get to choose to work under that program or was that

just what you were assigned to?
A. That's what I was assigned to.
Q. Okay. Were there challenges because of language barriers?
A. Yeah, I mean, absolutely there was. There's some, for lack of a better word, slang; there's some words that we say like you're coming in hot or something like that, students would look at their teacher and think that maybe the engine's hot or something like that.

A few things like that, that you have to learn, that you have to learn to pronounce, pronunciate or say actually more literal verbiage. So there's definitely that challenge. Fortunately, once they got to me in the instrument and multi-engine program, if there was any English -- a lot of the English proficiency issues or if any of them were having trouble with English, it was weeded out by the time they got to instrument or especially multi-engine.

MR. PITTACORA: When you say weeded out, do you mean they were sent back home?

MR. BOYD: Not necessarily. A lot of times they would come out of the English program and, if the instructor didn't think that they were proficient enough in English, they would be sent back in for further training for -- to get them up to standards or up to English proficiency. So there is a few cases that I heard of where the students couldn't get it or learn English and they were eventually sent back, but I think most of them were, or as far as I know about most of them ended up kind of continuing.

But like I said, most of the private instructors kind of had those issues more. I didn't really have really any of my students having English proficiency problems.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. Did you ever feel any pressure to, you know, push your students through from the company?

A. I would say that with a school like that you always have a timeline with everything. So, I mean, yes, I would say they do have a little bit of those pressures. I never had -- I never thought that it really affected it. I think you always have or need more time and stuff like that. So I do think that there's certain times when, and because they only have a certain amount of time that they, that they have before they have to go to a check or something, that there is sometimes they would get signed off maybe a little bit before that you're ready to sign them off.

But at the most -- which is part of those pressure, but most of the flight schools and stuff I have felt that there was a lot of -- there is that pressure for it. And so I would say, yes, to that, but I didn't get more than anyone else that I've kind of heard from, including my own flight school that I learned at as well.

Q. And, just to clarify -- I don't want to put words into your mouth, but you said that you didn't think that it affected safety, the pressure to -- or, you said --

A. Um.

Q. Oh, go ahead.
A. I wouldn't say that at any time that I felt someone was unsafe, I would definitely say anything. It was more of perfecting it to the actual standards that they needed to reach by either the FAA or the school. But if there's any, if there's any major safety concerns, and that's definitely was another -- was a red flag to me that I would definitely turn in to a supervisor, especially if we were running out of time.

Usually what we have is maybe somebody that had trouble holding altitude or something like that, which we couldn't get them to standards, it was a usually little bit more along those lines. But for any major safety issues the school would definitely look at those, those in particular cases.

Q. So did you ever have to do that, report a student that you thought was unsafe?
A. I mean, I definitely had a few. I had -- yes, I did.
Q. And how did you feel that -- did you -- sorry, let me back up. Who did you report those to?
A. Usually Coons.
Q. Okay.
A. My -- usually my supervisor, I asked what to do about a certain situation. I've got -- I mean, had a student kind of come down a little too hard on landings and I thought it seemed kind of routine, so I would either kind of go to Coons and ask him and he may have a fly with himself or another instructors who they'd say

-- get their own opinion on it, see if we can find other (indiscernible) to focus on what the problem is.

But, yeah. I mean, yeah, I mean, for those, those issues, that's usually what we always did.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. You mentioned that you had one student that was not in the Chinese National Program?

A. Yes.

Q. Comparatively was the training you did with the U.S. student similarly paced to the Chinese National Program or was there a difference in competence that you felt from one versus another at a certain stage?

A. No, I didn't really find that there was any difference. I mean, we -- the curriculum was slightly different. The U.S. program used an Jeppesen curriculum, so there was a little difference. The Chinese was pretty much a branch off of the Jeppesen, so it didn't really -- so there's a little bit of different timing on the training, but there wasn't really any difference in competency. I would say the only difference would be just culture.

Q. When you say culture, can you -- what do you mean by that?

A. Well, I guess a couple things actually. One is the culture in the Chinese program was they were there, they were summoned there just to become pilots, so if you asked them to be there for

a lesson, they would be there kind of right on schedule. Where my U.S. student, he kind of came as he had the money to come. So a lot of times I'd have to review a lot of subjects and kind of go over things, and unfortunately he's in a period where there's about a month between lessons so we were kind of -- especially since he kind of ran out of money at the end. So we kind of -- so there's a little -- kind of, you know, kind of a culture and different way to go about the lessons still.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay, thanks.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you ever feel -- I know I asked you if there was pressure to get students through and you mentioned, you know, the time frame for them to get through, but did you feel pressure that if your student didn't pass that your job was in jeopardy?

A. I never got that feeling. I always felt that I was a good instructor, so I never felt that my job was really in jeopardy. I thought the school was (indiscernible). Yeah, I never -- no, I never really felt that my job was in jeopardy as an employee.

Q. Okay. This student being brought to the review board, Mr. Qui, he had failed his Stage 1 check ride twice. Is that what triggered the review board or did you mention something to Mr. Coons about him where, you know, you thought he needed to go to a review board?

A. I know it was just him failing twice.

Q. Okay.

A. Like I said, I mean, one of the reasons it's kind of hard to recall any (indiscernible) is I didn't -- there wasn't anything that really stood out that he did. I mean, I hate to say it like that, but like usually the things you remember are the things if he did something like maybe go to pull the wrong lever or was coming super quick on an approach, something that would have been extremely unsafe that I would have went to Coons for. But unfortunately he struggled with the standards a lot and we worked with him on it, but I -- unfortunately I can't remember anything more than that.

Q. Okay. And I thought I heard you say this but I don't want to again put words into your mouth; did you say that you never reported any concerns about him prior to him failing the check rides?

A. Yeah. No, I never reported any concerns about him.

Q. Okay. Up until the time that you left, how did you like working for USAG?

A. I liked it. I had very little complaints. Everybody was very nice there. Every (indiscernible) maintenance issues that I had they came out and looked at. Had to explain to them what was wrong. Yeah, I didn't have any issues with them.

Q. Did you ever have any maintenance issues flying the Seneca?

A. Yes, I had, I had a few maintenance issues flying the Seneca. I think probably the biggest one that I probably had -- well, right up to -- I can't really recall -- well, I think it was 1-

Juliet-Delta, I had the landing gear wouldn't retract, which is better than it won't extend. But I (indiscernible) called and had to return for that issue. Told it was a squat switch. Probably one of the biggest ones.

I had a few times we had to return from runoff because we had -- the oil pressure was (indiscernible). And then I've had -- they had a few maintenance issues that I had to return and have maintenance go over or look over it.

Q. Did you ever feel pressured to fly in an aircraft that you didn't think was safe?

A. No. No, we -- anytime that we didn't feel comfortable with an aircraft, I mean, if you usually wrote it up, returned it and there wasn't really any -- I mean, maintenance would ask you what the problem is and what's going on. I never -- but I never felt any pressure to continue flying it or anything like that. They usually would take a look at it.

Q. Did you ever return an aircraft -- you know, return because of a maintenance issue that maintenance looked over, you know, triaged, and then they told you it was fine and you went ahead and flew it?

A. Now, not fly it, no. We just had one that we did return, triaged, took a look at it, couldn't find an issue with it and said that it was fine. And me and my student, we talked it over with safety concerns and didn't end up flying the aircraft.

Q. I'm sorry, did you say you did end up flying the aircraft or

you did not?
A. We did not.
Q. Okay.
A. We reviewed the aircraft, and it wasn't an issue but I don't think -- well, like I said, maintenance said that they found nothing wrong with it.
BY MR. PITTACORA:
Q. So you guys squawked it, maintenance said there was nothing wrong, and then you guys -- you still didn't take the airplane; is that correct?
A. That is correct.
Q. What was the reason for not taking the aircraft after they told you they didn't find anything?
A. Well, we had -- when we went out to the run-up area we were testing the -- how long the -- you know, the feathering test, and it took it -- I'm trying to think of what aircraft that was, but -- I can't remember the aircraft number. But anyway, when we did the feathering test it took way over, I believe, seconds, it took around 12 seconds for it to feather, and so we both turned it out. They brought it back and they did it real quick and they could get it feathered. We still thought that -- I asked the student what he thought of like -- we took it out there, we tried it multiple times, couldn't get it to work. So I kind of talked to the student, if he felt comfortable, we'll try it again. The student didn't feel comfortable with it. Told triage and -- told triage

again that we weren't comfortable. Triage then said they would take it into maintenance, but I never heard either way what happened to it at that point.

Q. And you don't recall the registration on that aircraft?

A. Unfortunately I don't.

Q. Okay.

A. I'm sorry.

MR. PITTACORA: That's okay.

(Interruption at the door.)

DR. WILSON: Sorry, Nathaniel, just one second.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you have any safety concerns working for the company?

A. I can't say that I ever had any safety concerns, no. Every -- I mean, most of the time the maintenance triage was pretty good. They seemed to fix everything. And, I mean, for the most -- I mean, I had a -- there was always a few training mishaps where like students would kind of get a little (indiscernible), like I kind of expressed earlier, then I would bring it to my supervisor. But I want to say that there wasn't any safety concerns due to maintenance or anything like that.

Q. Okay. If you had a safety concern and you didn't want to go to your supervisor, how would you have done that?

A. I mean, I guess it would have to be -- depending on what the safety concern was, I mean -- I mean, if it was something I didn't want to get -- mention to my supervisor because I trust, I mean,

if there's anybody that got in an argument with maintenance, I'd probably go to the chief pilot. And if for some reason that would be an issue, then I would have to look at it further, going to the FAA or FSDO, if I really had to, if there -- if the issue was a safety concern and I thought nobody was dealing with it correctly for my life or a student's life.

Q. Okay.

A. But fortunately I never had to deal with any issue like that.

Q. Okay. I guess I'm thinking also, like was there an online system where you could report a safety concern or a hotline that you could call?

A. Oh, there was a -- there is a reporting system that you could do that, yes.

Q. Okay.

A. You can put in an anonymous report if you saw something or putting -- if you made a mistake, you could also report yourself and stuff like that. They were very big on that system.

Q. Okay. Did you ever have to submit any reports?

A. The only -- I had to submit two reports, and one I submitted a report, I got into the aircraft and the (indiscernible) were left on. Usually that would be a safety concern. And then also I had a landing with a student and had a tire blow. I mean, I got off to the side of the runway off of the taxiway, maintenance had to come out and put a new tire on and tow us back in. Those are the only two safety reports I think I ever put on there.

Q. Okay. Do you recall if you actually flew the specific accident airplane, 456-Alpha-Golf?
A. I'm sorry, what was the number?
Q. 456-Alpha-Golf?
A. I flew that plane many times.
Q. Yeah. Any maintenance issues with that that you might recall?
A. That particular one, not particularly. There's a few that I was -- that had more maintenance issues, but -- Alpha Mike was the one that we usually had to (indiscernible) the most for different issues. But that one, that one, though, if I can recall, was usually okay.
Q. Okay. Ever have an engine out, like an engine failure on any of your flights?
A. No.
Q. No.
A. Knock on wood.
DR. WILSON: Okay. Okay. Thanks, Nathaniel. I think that's all the questions that I have for now. I'm going to go around the room and see if anybody else has any questions but I wanted to see, are you doing okay, do you need to take a break or anything?
MR. BOYD: No, I'm fine.
DR. WILSON: Okay. All righty.
MS. LIEDLER: I don't think I have any other questions. I've been jumping in here, so I'm not sure I have any questions. Let

me go through my notes and see what I've got asterisked here. Give me a second.

MR. BOYD: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: Nope, I don't think I have any other questions.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Thomas?

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. Yeah. Nat, this is Thomas. I've got a few questions here for you. What is the program that you all use for the safety reporting?

A. I believe -- I'm trying to think of the actual name of it; it was on their website, if there's a link to it. I kind of forget the actual name of it. I know there was kind of a ticket, you could either put a name on it yourself or you can leave a message anonymously. Of course, for like the tire blow situation, I reported, I reported that since it was a safety concern that happened on my flight, so I reported that as an incident that happened on my flight.

If it was something like the magnetos or I saw something maybe on the ramp that wasn't safe, you'd go and report it. You'd go report something like that, miscellaneous. I wish I could remember the actual program or what they were calling it. Unfortunately I don't recall.

Q. And you said that you go through the website, is that like the US Aviation Group primary website or is that the instructor portal where you log your lessons?

A. It was on National US Aviation website. Now there was a link through the portal where we log on a lesson to get to that link. It was under the instructor -- you click on the instructor documents and there was a link to that reporting site from there.
Q. As far as crew conflicts go, did you all ever have any occur at the Denton facility and, if so, how did you all resolve those?
A. As crew conflicts go, do you mean like different --
Q. Like student and --
A. Student and instructor?
Q. Like student and instructor crew conflict?
A. I never really dealt with too many crew conflicts at all. I mean, for the most part, everybody kind of got along that I saw. Now, I'm not -- I wasn't really one to get into other people's business with any of that stuff, so, I mean, I don't really -- unfortunately I don't really know what -- if there were -- what crew conflicts there was, besides maybe time restraints or stuff like that. Yeah.
Q. And then the last one I've got is, would you categorize -- I forget his actual name, but Howard is the English name that he goes by, as a person that has check rideitis, like where he gets nervous before a check ride or during, abnormally so, more than he does during a normal flight lesson?
A. I believe he, I believe he did somewhat. He definitely had a little bit of the check rideitis as you call it. But I didn't see it any more than any student that I've had. You know, I think

everybody gets a little nervous, but I didn't see him get more over-nervous than any other student I had.

I mean, there's definitely -- I had a few students that get it, even had it where it's really bad. I had -- I thought they were great, great flying, and then they would get on the check ride and fail. I wouldn't say that Howard had that, if I could recall it. I do remember that we really had to work on some standards because he had some issues with that and he was always kind of borderline on those standards.

MR. GOOD: I think that's all I've got.

Darren?

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah, I was going to get the maintenance stuff but she had it already.

MR. BOYD: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. I do have a couple of follow-ups. This is Katherine again. After Mr. Qui went through the review board, did you work with him at all again, either like in the sim or have any discussions with him after the review board?

A. I didn't. Unfortunately at that point I was already at CommutAir, my job now.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah, I had been -- I knew I kind of -- when I was leaving US Aviation I knew Francesca was going to take both of my students. I kind of briefed her on what was going on with all them, but

besides that, no, I never, I never ended up talking to him alone after that again.

Q. Okay. Do you recall anything --

A. And that was even, and that was even before the review board. I didn't even know what -- unfortunately I didn't even know that he -- what happened at the review board or anything after that.

Q. Okay. So when you briefed her, he had failed the check ride twice but he hadn't gotten to the review board, just so that I'm clear on the timeline?

A. Yeah, exactly.

Q. Okay. And then --

A. I didn't really know, I didn't really know what was going to happen with him at that point, but kind of just at some -- I'm trying to think even if I really briefed her on him in particular, I think I briefed her more on the current students that I had just finished up Stage 1 and that were going on to Stage 3. I had one -- or Stage 2, I'm sorry. I had one student that was right in the middle of Stage 2 that I had briefed her on the most and (indiscernible) was brought back that time then.

Q. Okay. Did you have that ever happen to you where you would like pick up a student that was having difficulties?

A. I did, yes. Like I said, the only other student that had failed a stage check twice, he was already a troubled student. And the reason that I got him was because I guess they thought I was a good instructor. So they -- so I ended up getting him.

That was when I was in instrument. So I worked with him in instrument, I got him kind of halfway through. And also I've gotten some students before that were halfway through a program or something or might have even, might have even -- in fact, might have left some airline or was having trouble with a certain student.

Q. Okay. So when you would pick up these students, particularly the ones that were more on the troubled side, how would you prepare to fly with them?

A. Well, I mean, I would first talk to them, find out what they, what they believe they need the most help with. Also if the instructor was around, hopefully they had notes in there; read the notes in their (indiscernible) lessons. And then I would also then kind of run them through -- we would go up and do a simulator and kind of go through the maneuvers and check -- depending on what stage they were in, the maneuvers for that stage to see how they did. Did they -- and then kind of, I would evaluate them from that point and decide how to move on.

Some of the students did fine. It would be as simple as maybe just the instruction style. And one thing that I think that helped me was I was a teacher -- I went to West Virginia University to be a physical education teacher. So I was kind of -- some students really respond well to positive reinforcement and sometimes that was just -- just that easy to teach them, just teaching up just kind of that style of teaching and kind of

approach kind of helped them. And sometimes, sometimes they need more practice, they need more practice or at least focus there, and sometimes it's just trying to pick up where they're making their mistakes. It really varies from student to student.

Q. Okay. Did you feel though that you had enough access to information about the student so that you could, you know, adequately understand the difficulties they were having before you instructed them?

A. Yeah, I believe so. I mean, the problem is, as always, like they may kind of (indiscernible) any of those things, probably with you guys was investigating and everything is a different perspective, so different people have different perspectives on how they're doing and what they're doing wrong. And I think sometimes that's a good -- that's why it's good to have maybe a higher instructor or somebody else that instructs that kind of goes through it in a different approach or even a different perspective go through it.

And so I never -- I feel like most of the time we would always have enough information. I mean, sometimes it does take that one flight or one simulator to kind of to see it yourself or figure out what really the issue is.

Q. Okay. And you mentioned Francesca. So how well did you know her?

A. I knew her at work. I mean, that was about the most I knew her ever. I never hung out with her or anything outside of work.

But she was always friendly. We talked pretty much, I mean, pretty much just, you know, friendly business relationship, if you will.

Q. Okay. Did you hear anything about her either before or after the accident about the type of instructor that she was?

A. Yeah, I've heard. Yeah, I heard most of the students responded very well to her. I even had, when she broke her arm off the aircraft, I got a few of her old students and picked them up, and they all had -- she seemed like a good instructor. They did very well with the maneuvers, picking up all -- since I picked them up usually -- I'm trying to think, once then I picked up when that happened and fixed them all for the last 6 hours, I believe it was. And he was solid, he did his maneuvers and everything, and set up the aircraft very well, flew very well. So she seemed like a good instructor to me.

Q. Okay. When she broke her arm, she -- do you know about how long she stopped flying for?

A. She was -- I want to say about 2 months.

Q. Okay. Do you recall her mentioning any difficulties she had when she got back to flying, either like, you know, I don't know, limited mobility of her arm or anything like that?

A. Unfortunately, she didn't get back to flying until probably about, I think it was about a week -- she -- after I left US Aviation. She was kind of, she was kind of getting ready to come back right as I was leaving.

Q. Okay.
A. I mean, she was (indiscernible) hopefully getting more students, and that was kind of the reason why I'm like, well, I'll talk to Coons and see if you can get mine because I'm about to leave for the airlines, so -- and she was excited about that. So that was kind of one of the reasons we made that transition. But I didn't really, I didn't really hear anything about her flying or anything too much after that, once I left, because at that point it I focused on getting my ATP and getting my type rating.
Q. Yeah, okay.
A. And then kind of into the second part of your question, most of those -- a few of those instructors (indiscernible) accident, but nobody knew really or knows what really happened (indiscernible), but --
Q. You said no one really knows what happened? Is that what you said? I'm sorry.
A. Yeah, at least that's what kind of (indiscernible) kind of told me. I mean, I think a lot of people have speculation but there wasn't -- nobody really knows.
Q. All right. Is there speculation about anything involving either Francesca or Mr. Qui or is it about what the airplane did leading to the accident?
A. More what the airplane did.
Q. Okay.
A. I didn't get any speculation about her and the student --

Q. Okay.
A. -- on what happened. I mean, and kind of just whatever may cause instability of the aircraft, kind of where it went down and kind of (indiscernible) where it went down.
Q. Right. What -- can you share what the speculation is? I mean, what do, what do other instructors think happened?
A. I mean, like -- as I said, it's been a while since I talked to them, but, yeah, all I've kind of heard is that the aircraft -- and I might even be (indiscernible) so I haven't even checked the data myself, but I've kind of heard that the aircraft almost made like an (indiscernible) descent just out of Gainesville, kind did a -- kind of spiraled down and then eventually hit the ground. People thought it might -- from what I'm thinking, might be that one of the engines possibly caught on fire. That's kind of what I've heard.
Q. Okay.
A. I don't know more than that.
Q. All right, okay. Just curious, you know, what's out there and maybe a flight instructor has an idea that can help us, so appreciate you sharing that. Any follow-up?
A. Yeah, unfortunately I don't -- it was kind of one of my friends from US Aviation that he also moved on to (indiscernible) was kind of telling me, kind of keeping me in the loop a little bit --
Q. Got it.

A. -- and with all that stuff. So I (indiscernible) so there's a lot -- that was kind of just the edge of the speculations, if you will.

DR. WILSON: Right. Okay. Thanks, Nathaniel.

Courtney, do you have any follow-ups?

MS. LIEDLER: I don't. Thanks so much for your time, Nathaniel, I really do appreciate it. It's been very helpful to speak with you as a pilot and instructor who has flown with the student as well as just flown, you know, within the programs of US Aviation, so thanks for your time.

MR. BOYD: You're welcome.

DR. WILSON: Thomas, anything?

MR. GOOD: No, I'm all good.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Yeah, Nathaniel, thank you again for talking to us. Is there anything that you were hoping we would ask you about that we didn't ask you about or something that you want to share that you think might help with the investigation?

MR. BOYD: No. I'm not -- I kind of told you everything I know. I wish I kind of knew more or even recalled a little bit more to help you guys, but unfortunately you kind of picked my brain a little more than I thought you would.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Well, wasn't an oral or anything, but thanks for your help. It was really informative what you were able to share.

MR. BOYD: Okay. I appreciate to help as much as I can.

DR. WILSON: Yeah. Do you have any questions for us?

MR. BOYD: I mean, I guess, probably most of my questions are stuff that you're trying to -- still trying to figure out now and what exactly happened. I mean, that's -- I mean, I guess, that's kind of the big question. I don't know if you guys have any information that you could share or know what actually happened besides the speculation?

DR. WILSON: Yeah. You know, we're obviously in the initial part of the investigation doing a lot of the fact finding. The preliminary report is out, it's on the website that you're welcome to, you know, look at on the NTSB website, which shares the initial information that's been gathered. But, yeah, I think we're still in a -- we have a lot of questions to ask and have answered to help us understand what happened.

MR. BOYD: Okay. Absolutely. All right, yeah. Really no other questions besides that. I just wish you guys well.

DR. WILSON: All right. Thanks so much, Nathaniel, we really appreciate it. And if you think of anything else you've got Courtney's contact information so you can always reach out to her.

MR. BOYD: Absolutely.

DR. WILSON: Thank you.

MR. BOYD: Thank you.

DR. WILSON: Bye.

MR. BOYD: Bye.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Nathaniel Boyd
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Via Telephone
DATE:	September 18, 2019

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.

Cheryl Farner Donovan

Cheryl Farner Donovan
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: DAVID MICHAEL COONS

Embassy Suites
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 18, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(6:30 p.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: Thank you, David, for joining us today. For the transcript, I'm Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: I'm Courtney Liedler. I'm the Investigator-in-Charge with the NTSB for this accident.

INTERVIEW OF DAVID MICHAEL COONS

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. If you could state your full name, please?

A. David Michael Coons.

Q. And what is your current title, position, company that you work for?

A. Pilot in Command, Citation XL.

Q. Great. And if you could give us just a brief description of your aviation background.

A. Trained at Oklahoma State University. Went to US Aviation, started as a private instructor as a CFI only. Moved on to instruct instrument, multi-engine, finished out my time there as the multi-engine group manager, and King Air instructor.

Q. And at US Aviation was your title instructor or did you have another?

A. I guess, Group Manager.

Q. Group Manager. Okay.

A. Would have been my title.

Q. All right. And then before you were Group Manager, you were an instructor?
A. Yes.
Q. How long were you the Group Manager?
A. For multi-engine, I think, I went into the position probably beginning within the first few months of 2018. So about a year and a half.
Q. So early 2018?
A. Yes.
Q. And then when did you leave?
A. I left -- when was my last day? Early August. So I could get that exact date if you guys --
Q. 2019?
A. Yes, 2019.
Q. And when did you get hired by US Aviation?
A. That would have been the very end of 2015.
Q. Okay. And were you flying out of what base?
A. Denton.
Q. Okay. As the group lead, were all of the instructors that you ever saw in Denton or were they at other bases also?
A. No. I was just group lead over Denton.
Q. And as the group lead, what would you say your duties and responsibilities were?
A. Mainly student performance and progress, ensuring the schedule, instructor progress, that sort of thing.

Q. Ensuring the schedule, is that for the students? Is that for the instructors?
A. For both. I mean, they kind of go side-and-side.
Q. Okay.
A. Side-by-side since there's always an instructor paired with a student. So --
Q. Okay.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. And you said entering the schedule?
A. No. Just kind of ensuring the schedule, making sure instructors were getting the schedules that they needed. We had a Scheduling Department that actually physically put things on the schedule.
Q. Okay. And who did you report to?
A. Tyson Walker, director of operations, and David Cruz, who was the chief flight instructor.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. So you were at US Aviation for a pretty long time?
A. Yeah.
Q. Close to 4 years. What made you leave US Aviation?
A. It was time for me to -- I had kind of gotten to the point where there wasn't a whole lot of growth there anymore. I was ready to move on. I had two children during that time. So that's kind of why the ability to be home every night, and flexibility with the schedule was one of the things that kept me there for

awhile. I actually got the offer letter for this job the day before the accident.

Q. Okay.

A. So I believe it was Sunday the 28th. The offer letter came in that Saturday.

Q. And about how much total time do you have?

A. About 2500.

Q. Okay. And you -- did you fly the Seneca?

A. Yes.

Q. About how much time do you think you have on that?

A. I haven't totaled it up. My guess is somewhere in the 300, maybe a little over, range.

Q. Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. And I'm sorry, what did you say your total was?

A. Total time or Seneca?

Q. Total.

A. About 25.

Q. Okay. Thanks.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And did you know Mr. Qui, the accident student pilot?

A. Yes. I'd had limited interaction with him. I really first interacted with him -- well, I guess, actually, he mentioned this to me. I guess long before that I had done, I think, an instrument Stage 1 check with him. However, I don't recall the

check or I don't really -- I've done so many of those that I really don't remember anything, which isn't always a bad thing because usually the ones you remember the students that are bad. So really the first interaction I had with him was after he failed his Stage 1 check twice. And I conducted a review board.

Q. Okay. So you've mentioned Stage 1. You said you did a Stage 1 check with him, but you didn't remember much. But then he --

A. Back in instrument, I believe.

Q. Okay. Back in instrument.

A. When he was in instrument.

Q. Okay. And the failures for Stage 1 for multi-engine.

A. For, yeah, multi-engine commercial.

Q. And then explain your interactions regarding the Review Board process.

A. Really, the Review Board is just to kind of evaluate what's going on with the student, what's the best course of action to proceed from there with getting them to succeed and overcome the difficulties they're having. As I -- it's been awhile. I don't have the Review Board in front of me. As I recall, it was mainly procedural as well as it seemed like he had a tendency to get overwhelmed and maybe freeze up during things like engine failures.

Q. How common was it for a student to get to this Review Board stage?

A. In commercial it wasn't that common. I mean, it did happen,

but it wasn't that common. Usually the students that struggled would either get weeded out or get it together in one of the generally in private, if not in private their fuel and instrument. It happened, but it wasn't that common that I did review boards for students at commercial. Usually, they'd have a failure, and they'd correct whatever the deficiency was, pass on the second time.

Q. Okay.

A. So --

Q. And at the point of this Review Board or when somebody is going through this Stage 1, the multi-engine commercial, about how long have they been in training at that point? Do you recall?

A. Well, under good circumstances generally about 12 months.

Q. Okay.

A. However, we were currently backlogged pretty significantly, and I don't know off the top of my head how long he had been in country. My guess would be a year and a half at that point. Again, I don't have that. That's just my kind of off the top of my head estimation.

Q. And we have his records. So I was just sort of curious about in general how long would it take a student, should it take a student to get to that --

A. Again, when --

Q. -- phase? Yeah.

A. -- everything was running the way it was supposed to, they --

we tried to finish them up in 12 to 14 months. Actually, he was China Southern, so he would have been a 14-month program. So at that point, he should have been about 13 months for a China Southern student.

Q. Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. You said you were backlogged. What does that mean?

A. Just that we had a number of students that had -- were waiting for multi due to -- mainly due to a lack of instructors, and a -- and it kind of started in instrument. It got to a point where instrument got kind of backlogged, and then there was this big dump of students really rapidly into the multi-engine program, which normally we try to keep a pretty metered flow out of instrument into multi so we could start them. But this big, I guess, you could describe it as a bubble in instrument occurred, and then that all moved into multi really rapidly. So --

Q. A bunch of students all at the same time?

A. Yes. Which kind of overwhelmed the resources available to do them all.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. About how many instructors did you oversee?

A. It fluctuated. I'd say on average six or seven. Sometimes a little more; sometimes a little less.

Q. And typically how many students would there be waiting for -- in the program at a time?

A. Well, at a - at one point there weren't very many. It was pretty quick, week or two. I think that this time to the best of my recollection we probably had 15 to 20 in line waiting to get into multi.
Q. Okay. And how many students would an instructor have at the time?
A. I tried to keep them relegated to three students at a time.
Q. Okay.
A. There were a couple guys, because another compounding factor to getting backed up was we had a big group of check instructors leave. So the check -- the wait for checks got fairly long. There were a couple instructors that were well performing, self-motivated that I allowed to start another group of students while their students were waiting on check. But for the most part I didn't -- I tried to keep them 3:1 ratio.
Q. So when there was that lag between the curriculum, how did the students maintain proficiency?
A. Tried to get them into the sim. That was mainly what we tried to use to keep them somewhat proficient as they awaiting. Just give them some sim sessions, and hopefully that way they didn't lose. And then if it became to a point where it had been a very long time, put them on for a flight before that.
Q. And when you say you put them into the sim, would that be with an instructor?
A. Yes.

Q. Did a shortage of aircraft contribute to the backlog or was it a shortage of instructors only?
A. Sometimes aircraft. Again, that was kind of a -- something that ebbed and flowed. Sometimes there would be a shortage of aircraft; sometimes there was abundant aircraft. It just seemed like it kind of went in waves.
Q. Okay. When you're short on check airmen is there anything that can be done from the company side? Can they go to the FAA to see if somebody -- how does that get managed where --
A. That was kind of outside of my purview. However, I know that they were putting a lot of, lot of phone calls and letters to the FSDO to try to speed that process up with getting check letters. It was to a point where the FSDO was so slow at getting check letters that we would run check instructor stands. The instructor that we had ran through the stands class got the 400 hours or so he needed, and had moved onto the airlines by the time the letters came or they didn't come and we just removed them from the list because at one point it was, it was months from the time we submitted to actually getting a letter.
Q. Okay. As the group lead, were still flying --
A. Yes.
Q. -- or doing any instructing? Okay. How many students would you have?
A. For the most part I was almost exclusively flying the King Air. There was a lot of that time where I was the only person

flying the King Air. So the King Air flights were mostly left up to me to get done. So --

Q. And with the Asian -- with the Chinese groups, China groups, would they fly the King Air?

A. It was a introduction to crew resource management, and turbine engine high performance aircraft. So for the most part they were acting as FO in the aircraft, and they would be pilot flying in the simulator. It was kind of split. It was eight lessons total; four of them in the aircraft, four of them in the simulator. In the aircraft, other than having them shoot a couple approaches and do a few landings, they were pilot monitoring.

Q. Okay. And this would have been after they completed the multi-engine --

A. Yes.

Q. -- program? Okay. Going back to the Review Board, from what you recall, what was the outcome of the Review Board?

A. As I recall, I think we set about 5 additional hours of training in the airplane. So a couple more flights, and I think that was the recommendation but, again, it's been awhile since I looked at it. So --

Q. We appreciate any information you can give. So I know we're taxing your brain a little bit. And when you say we decided five flights, who is involved in the Review Board --

A. Well, I guess, that would have been me.

Q. Okay.

A. I generally, unless it's a student that is on a multiple -- multiple review boards usually we try to get the instructor. However, his first instructor had recently departed for another job. So as he got to Stage 1, failed the stage check for the second time, his instructor had just left.
Q. Okay.
A. So usually I try to get the instructor in there, and then they have group leaders kind of the leader of their class try to help the person as well.
Q. And by their class, you mean the Chinese class?
A. The Chinese class, yes.
Q. Okay. And who -- what is the role of that?
A. The group leader really just to facilitate any issues that the class is having, any problems. That's really their role is to just kind of be a voice for the students within their group as well as communicate. I mean, I, again, this was not something that I ever did, but I know they did have a little bit of -- they would communicate with the company to an extent what was going on. We also did. But, again, I never -- that was never in my purview to have any communication back to China.
Q. Okay. And I think I made a mistake. You were a group manager, not a group lead?
A. Yes. I'm sorry.
Q. I think at one point I asked about you being a group lead.
A. Yes.

Q. I just wanted to make sure. The group lead was he or she a pilot also?
A. I did not have one.
Q. You did not have a group lead?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Why was that?
A. I guess because we didn't really -- the original plan was to move multi -- the management of multi-engine to somebody else, and there weren't really any good candidates over the time. So what was supposed to be a month or two of me kind of doing double duty of running the King Air Program, flying the King Air, and managing multi turned into 8 months.
Q. Okay.
A. And during that time, we just never really got a group leader in there mainly due to just turnover and lack of somebody that was -- that was kind of on my list of things to advocate for but --
Q. And in the broad sense, what would be the qualifications for somebody to be a group lead?
A. Good knowledge of the curriculum, having worked in the curriculum and performed fairly well, and just an overall demonstration of instructor ability.
Q. How did the instructors moving -- many of the instructors desire to move on to the commercial side impact that ability to find a qualified candidate? Was there any impact?
A. I don't --

Q. So in other words with many of the instructors wanting to move on to the carriers, was it hard to find someone who wanted to stay on to be in that role or --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- was it -- okay.
A. Yeah. I mean, I --
Q. So --
A. -- think that was always one of the issues.
Q. Okay.
A. And I think probably at any flight school of finding really good qualified people to do it as most of the people that you would want to put in those roles hit their ATP time, and they move on. So the window for having somebody that has enough experience that they can now help the instructors beneath them, and understand the curriculum, that window to when they hit that point, and when they leave can be fairly small.
Q. Does US Aviation have any agreements with airlines to guarantee interviews for instructors when they hit their time?
A. You mean like regional --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- regional airlines? Well, I know they have a cadet agreement with Envoy. So and I don't really know the -- I mean, there were a lot of instructors that were Envoy pipeline, I believe is what they called it.
Q. Okay.

A. A lot of instructors that participated not -- and from my understanding essentially they were already employed by Envoy. So Envoy gave them -- they have things like health benefits and travel privileges through Envoy. And --
Q. The flight instructors do?
A. Yes. The flight instructors did.
Q. Okay.
A. And then as soon as they -- and they had already been through the interview process so as soon as they hit their ATP minimums or I think it's 1460 because they get the rest of the time in training to meet the 1500 requirement or 960 if they're reduced. As soon as they hit that point, Envoy scheduled the class date, and they were gone.
Q. How do you determine with the Review Board that a pilot should get 5 extra flights, 5 extra flight hours versus --
A. Yeah. I think that was hours as opposed to flights.
Q. Hours. How do you determine that they get 5 extra flight hours versus recommending that they not continue in a program?
A. Generally, on the first review board we give them some extra training time. In his case and, again, I don't have the stuff right in front of me, it looked like it was mainly at least from looking at the check instructor notes that it was mainly a procedural problem with reactions to engine failures as well as maybe a little bit of apprehensive nervousness that was causing him to just kind of stop, freeze up a little bit. But which,

again, they're not that common in multi, but as far as student problems, that can be a fairly common struggle for students in multi-engine. It's just that reaction to an engine failure especially when the instructor surprises them with it. So --

Q. Okay. Do you know in terms of when they're simulating the engine failure is there a typical engine that US Aviation encourages that they simulate or is it random based on the instructor's discretion?

A. Generally, it's left up to the instructor's discretion.

Q. And do you recall from the time the Review Board concluded until the amount of time that Mr. Qui started flying again?

A. There was a delay. And I'm trying to -- and I don't -- I'm trying to recall what the -- I know the -- I'm trying to recall what the delay was, and I don't want -- I don't really want to speculate. So, honestly, I'm not -- there was a set of -- I think it was like 3 weeks.

Q. Okay.

A. There was -- part of it was his instructor departing, and then just trying to find somebody else that had been fairly -- showed that they had -- I had a fairly new green batch of instructors. The guy that I normally used for problem students was on vacation at this point in time, which is why I ended up asking Francesca if she would do it.

Q. Okay. And I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but I'm getting the impression that you're -- if there's a troubled

student that you're looking for a more experienced instructor --
A. Yes.
Q. -- to take them over? Okay.
A. There was a point in time where I tried to do them, but just with everything else that I had going on, mainly being booked up with the King Air, I had to -- I had -- at that point I really had one guy that I kind of leaned on to do that and --
Q. Who was that?
A. That was Chad Berking (ph.). He was doing a lot of the --
Q. Chad. What's his last name?
A. Berking. He had been doing some of them fairly recently. Hadn't been -- he hadn't -- I hadn't been giving them to him for that long, but over the past month or so prior to that. And he had shown that he was pretty good at helping those students out. So I did have one or two here and there. He was kind of the one I was asking to take the harder students. So --
Q. And did Chad have a pretty good success rate with getting those students up to the level?
A. Yeah. He had, he had good -- there was, there was one that didn't make it, and we were aware, but unfortunately it was a request from the airline that we give him a couple extra flight hours to sink in, and so Chad did that, and we were aware that he probably wasn't going to make it.
Q. Yeah. So that's interesting. I want to go back to -- I think you said you didn't communicate with the airline directly.

A. No, I did not.
Q. So somebody goes to a review board. Does the company get -- or the airline gets to weigh in at all as to whether that student continues or whether they're terminated?
A. Yes. Every review board is sent to the airline.
Q. Sent to them. And then how would -- how do they respond to that or what?
A. Generally, again, on the first review board they're always going to request additional training time. It's not until the second one that when generally we request termination on the second review board, and that's really when they have to respond. Because we've had some that were just that bad that we requested -- and, again, I can't recall any in commercial. This is kind of -- there's a point in private when you know we can't let this kid go solo in an airplane, and we're requesting termination, and that's when that real back and forth with the airline begins.
Q. Okay. Francesca, did she report to you?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And what made you think that she would be a good person to take on this student?
A. Out of the group, I mean, and she was, she was really smart. She was motivated. She seemed to have been doing well with her students, students that had prior to that had seemed to be performing well. So --
Q. It's my understanding that she had been out for a couple of

months because she had broken her arm.
A. Yes.
Q. Are you aware of anything that the company did, US Aviation did to ensure that she was qualified and ready to get back to flight instructing?
A. Unfortunately no.
Q. Okay. I don't want to assume anything. You don't know what the company did or the company didn't give her a check ride or anything to ensure --
A. I don't -- no, we didn't give her a check ride. I don't -- she never requested one with me either. She requested a couple cross-country flights to kind of not have to do maneuvers, which she did, and that was, that was really it.
Q. What do you mean she requested cross-country flights so she didn't have to do maneuvers?
A. Well, her concern wasn't proficiency. Her concern was just the -- whether because the Seneca is a little bit heavier especially for her, whether it was going to hurt her arm. She just wanted a couple flights that were go up, do one landing, and come back before she went into a flight with engine failures and touch-and-goes, and that sort of thing.
Q. Okay. And did she report back any difficulties with her arm?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Did anyone ask her about that or was she expected --
A. I asked her several times.

Q. Okay.
A. I mean, I generally tried to ask them how when I saw them how everything was going.
Q. And so everything seemed fine when talked to her?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
DR. WILSON: Did you have something?
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. How -- so do you have an idea of -- Francesca came on board, and then she was out for a period of time for her arm. What was the period of time when she came on board that she flew regularly before she broke her arm? Do you have any idea what that was?
A. I don't know.
Q. Okay. Do you have any idea how long she was out prior to returning?
A. I think about 6 weeks.
Q. Six weeks. Okay. And how much did -- any idea off of, you know, from your recollection, how much she flew prior to flying with Mr. Qui with other students --
A. I really don't. I know she had taken a couple through -- a couple batches through, but I don't, I don't really know as far as hours are kind of concerned.
Q. So she had flown one flight with a student pilot as I recall before the accident flight?
A. I believe so, yes.

Q. Did you talk to her, by chance, after that flight, and find out how that flight went?
A. No. Actually, I -- the Thursday prior to the accident is when I talked to her, asked her if she would be able to do his retraining flights. I also talked to him that day, and that was the last time.
Q. Okay. Anything of significance from the conversations that you had?
A. No. She seemed -- she was very bubbly outgoing personality. She seemed completely normal. He seemed just motivated to correct what he had wrong, and --
Q. Okay.
A. -- pass his check. And they're really close to going home at that point. So --
Q. Were you aware of the maintenance problems with the accident airplane?
A. Not really.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, I -- after the fact, I had heard about some of them, but, no. The airplane had recently come back online. It had had two new engines put on it. But, no, I hadn't really been informed at that time of any issues with that particular aircraft.
Q. If an instructor had to squawk an airplane, would you be told about that?
A. No, not generally.

Q. Okay. What if it led to, like, the cancellation of a flight?
A. I mean, I would see cancellations, but I would -- sometimes I'd read the write-ups on them. Generally, I mean, if the needed to squawk an airplane, then it happens. So I really -- cancellations for a discrepancy with the aircraft, just kind of one of the, one of the things that happens in flight school with airplanes and they're flying all the time. So really wasn't anything that I ever was concerned with or pursued because I never felt like it was something that was an issue.
Q. Did instructors ever come to you were responsible for, did they ever come to you and complain about maintenance, any kind of maintenance on the airplanes or --
A. Mostly about things like cosmetics with the aircraft. I mean, I flew the Seneca for awhile, and I never had any -- and, again, maintenance, management changed over, and I really didn't fly the Seneca much after that change over. However, at least from a couple meetings, the new manager seemed very, very interested in what he could do to improve things. So my interaction with him seemed -- was overall very positive. Most of it was things like the overhead vents not working, which can be very annoying, especially in the summertime. You're very uncomfortable when you're down at low altitude. But I never got any complaints about any safety of flight item that was not resolved.
Q. Was there ever any pressure that you're aware of from the

company to -- for instructors to take flights in an airplane that maybe they didn't feel was safe?
A. No.
Q. How about to push a student through that was maybe marginal?
A. No. Not that. I mean, we -- unfortunately, sometimes it involved multiple retraining flights before the airline would finally agree to terminate them. However, if they didn't meet the standards, they didn't meet the standards. And, I mean, in my program it was all dual so it was always an instructor on board, and in private is where I think it got a lot more maybe contentious with the companies, the airlines themselves because of the fact that we wouldn't allow them to go solo in the aircraft. So --
Q. If you had to say, would you say it was easy to terminate a student, not so easy?
A. Generally, depending on the -- what was going on. For normal training issues, it was generally a process.
Q. Okay.
A. It was generally the first one would be denied. We'd have to go back. We'd have to do retraining, document it, document all the problems that they're still having, and send it back to the company, and it was generally a process like that.
Q. Okay. Sort of danced around safety and safety concerns, but how would you rate the safety culture at US Aviation?
A. Overall it was -- I mean, I never -- I worked there for

almost 4 years. I worked through every curriculum. I never felt particularly unsafe beyond the normal mitigated risks that every pilot takes any time you get in an airplane.

Q. Okay.

A. I've never felt pressured to go on a flight, be that for mechanical or weather concerns, that I didn't feel comfortable with. Over my time there, I cancelled probably for every reason from instructor fatigue to weather to -- never got any negative reper or even asked about it really.

Q. If a pilot, an instructor pilot wanted to report some kind of safety concern, how would he or she do that?

A. We had an SMS system set up. So it was an online -- could go online, create a ticket. There was the option to even do it anonymously. So they could either put their name or they couldn't. But they could go on there, create a ticket, and report any safety concern that they have.

Q. Do you know who looked at those?

A. Rick Sanchez.

Q. Okay. Would there be reports from Rick to the pilot group about --

A. Yep.

Q. -- safety issues?

A. Every month Rick did a newsletter that he sent out as well as a presentation at the instructor meeting of trends he was seeing, trends that we weren't seeing anymore. So things that had been

reported in the past that were -- appeared to be improving based on SMS tickets.

Q. The instructor meeting, how often does that happen?

A. Once a month.

Q. Okay. And the safety newsletter, did that go to the whole pilot group?

A. Yes. He'd type up a whole newsletter, and send it out via the company e-mail to all the instructors.

Q. Okay. And what about to the students? Was there any safety communication to the students?

A. You know, I -- there were weekly meetings with the student leaders, at which they disseminated all sorts of information. That wasn't something I was involved with. So I'm not sure what content of information they were given.

Q. When you say student leaders, is that the group lead that we talked about that was sort of a facilitator --

A. Yes. Yeah.

Q. -- company? Okay.

A. So they pretty much disseminated down to the students in their class.

Q. Were you involved in the hiring of Francesca?

A. I was not.

Q. Are you ever involved in the hiring of instructors?

A. There was a point in time where I did do interviews. Generally panel interviews. So I was one person of two or three

in the room. But I hadn't been doing that in 6 to 8 months just due to having no time. So --

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you know who did that? Who did do the hiring and flew with Francesca before she was hired on?

A. I don't.

Q. So did you typically have interactions or -- from a management side with maintenance to talk about aircraft status or --

A. Generally, that was not -- that was something that I would run up the chain to Tyson Walker or David Cruz, and they would kind of interact with maintenance.

Q. Okay.

A. So, no. My direct interaction with maintenance was fairly limited.

Q. Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. What were the sorts of maintenance concerns that you would run up the chain?

A. Again, generally just small things. Things like overhead vents was always the big one, cooling, cooling that they'd come at 100 hours, and the vents wouldn't work. You had one where the ballast weights were -- we generally had ballast weights in the rear seat station and then in the aft cargo station. Both were in the rear seat station, which was fine. It was well within CG. It

had just made the nose a little bit heavier for students during the flare. I'd flown the airplane a bunch of times. I didn't have any issue with it, but that's one I remember, like, hey, can we, can we get tie -- because there weren't tie-downs in that particular aircraft. Hey, can we get tie-downs, and get this scooted back just because the students are asking for it? Again, it was never -- it was more of a student comfort thing. It was well within CG. I never had any issues with it. But, yeah, again, I never really, I never heard a whole lot of complaints about safety of, you know, safety of flight-related items, and maintenance not correcting them.

Q. Anything with like repetitive issues on aircraft?

A. No, not really. Again, other than the stuff I've mentioned that seemed like it was always repetitive. No. Not -- I never was made aware of, like, I think one of the things with 6 Alpha Gulf shortly before the accident was people saying that one of the engines would die when it was pulled to idle. I was -- I never heard anything about that or that that was continuing to be an issue. So --

Q. Do you know if that was one engine or which engine that was?

A. No. I don't know which. Again, it was something that happened after the fact, and they kind of -- and I know they quarantined everything after the accident to give to you guys. And at that point in time, I didn't really see -- it's pretty rough weeks at US Aviation. As I said, I got the offer letter for

my new job just prior to that. So it wasn't something that I really spent a whole lot of time trying to investigate. It was -- speculation, of course, is rampant. And it wasn't going to tell me what happened. So rather --

Q. What do you think the -- can you describe the camaraderie, if you will, amongst the instructor pilots? Did you feel like they were supportive of each other or did you feel that there was pressure on instructor pilots to not down aircraft for maintenance because their flights would get cancelled?

A. For the most part, I think they were pretty supportive of each other. I never heard of an instructor -- I never heard an instructor pressure someone else not to down an aircraft. I can't say that I ever -- I never witnessed that occurring. So --

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. You didn't witness it, but did you hear of that happening?

A. No. No, I can't say I really did.

Q. Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So, David, you had mentioned that you report to Tyson and Walker and David Cruz. What would be -- when you say report to, what would be your reporting? Did you have monthly meetings, weekly meetings? What kind of meetings did you --

A. We had weekly meetings, and when I had issues I needed to bring up, I'd generally just walk over there to their office.

Q. And what would your weekly meetings cover? Like, what kind

of topics would you discuss regularly?
A. Oh, we'd discuss all kinds of things. Everything from aircraft issues to company changes, procedural changes.
Q. Okay. And then for -- you said you were short on check airmen, and you know you need to hire some more. Were you involved in the check airmen process or did, you know, did the instructor, the -- would report to you, would you have a input into who became check airman next or was that all decided upon between David Cruz and Tyson Walker?
A. I could recommend people. Generally, for the most part that was kind of -- that was handled by them. And I'd -- sometimes they would ask for my opinion on a particular instructor to be a check airman, but -- and I was free to -- I was always free to recommend somebody for the next class.
Q. Okay. And do you know how -- maybe I missed it, but how was that generally done then? Do you have any idea how they selected? You said it was someone who was performing well, good students. But was it like they had to train so many students, and have a pass rate or --
A. Yeah. Generally, it was a minimum of 400 hours dual given with the company, and then I know, I know chief looked at their pass rate too. I don't recall exactly what the, what the standards were there.
Q. How was the overall pass rate? You said you had a few that went to review boards at that stage, but how was the overall pass

rate for the students and through the multi-engine commercial?
A. Overall it was fairly well. It was pretty good. I don't -- again, without looking at everything, I don't want to just throw a number out there, and be wrong. The majority of them passed without issue. But, again, I don't want to throw a number out there, and be way off. So --
Q. Were the students being backlogged waiting to get through multi-engine or waiting to get into a -- for a check airman? Did you feel any pressure on your end to hurry along the process or to move through that at a quicker rate to keep students moving?
A. Well, I mean, there was definitely -- we definitely wanted to try to maximize the time that, you know, any available flight time during the day. So trying to just get as many students scheduled as possible within a reasonable workload for the instructors and aircraft availability, and that sort of thing.
Q. Were you ever questioned from management as to why students weren't progressing quicker or any pressure from the management side that when they saw students being backlogged for months or weeks on end?
A. I mean, yes. I was -- I would get asked for updates, but I never felt that the -- that they viewed the explanations as illegitimate. Every time if they would ask about something, and I'd lay out the reasons why this is happening, that was pretty much it, and I never felt like they thought that the reasons for it were not legitimate or that we could somehow push it along

faster.
Q. Okay. You mentioned often times these -- the multi-engine instructors that you oversaw were with you for only a short period of time, and then they moved on to their positions for commercial training. Did you see any impact in the students having to change instructors?
A. Generally, we were able -- because the -- when everything is running smoothly, I mean, even when it was backlogged when we got them in the airplane the commercial curriculum was fairly short. It generally took about a month, 5 weeks, give or take a little bit for weather and things like that, to run a student through. So the times that an instructor would leave mid-training was less common. Usually we'd be able to work it out where they would kind of finish up their students as they were moving out. So usually it worked out. I mean, there were still times like with Howard that it didn't work that way. But because they generally kept me pretty well informed of, hey, I'm 100 hours out, hey, I've got a class date, those sorts of things. So I tried to work around that.
Q. Okay. So you would conduct the Review Board. Anyone else from management in the Review Boards with you? And were the students part of the Review Boards?
A. Yes. Students were part of the Review Boards. I would try to get the instructor in there. If it was a second Review Board, then I would try to get somebody else from management involved.

Usually on the first one I tried to do it with myself, their instructor, the student, and then their leader from their group.
Q. Okay. So how would you say when you're conducting these Review Boards with the students and other -- we've heard some common threads of language barriers being a common problem or issue area. With this other -- when you're conducting these Review Boards, and the students are involved, how was the language barrier? Was it -- was there a problem with the language barrier with the students understanding English to understand where their deficiency were or were they all pretty aware of what the -- what the deficiencies were, what the process going forward would be?
A. They were all pretty aware. I mean, recently before that, there was one student that we ended terminating, and language was a big issue for him. But most of the time they were well aware. Their comprehension was just fine. They understood the process, and they would understand the recommendations, and how -- what was going to happen going forward.
Q. So the student that you said had the language barrier, and led to termination, what phase was he in of training?
A. He was -- I'm trying to remember. I don’t recall if he was Stage 1 or EOC. I want to say he never, he never got to the check flight. He --
Q. In multi-engine?
A. In multi-engine. He --
Q. So he --

(Simultaneous comments.)
Q. -- made it to --
A. He failed --
Q. -- multi-engine but then --
A. He -- yeah, he failed on the orals. And sometimes with very few students it wasn't at all common, but every once in awhile we'd get one like him where they come in because they really study English to meet the ICAO standards to qualify for training, and then they get over here, and they really don't -- they don't practice English enough. We try to make it as immersive as possible, but they have -- they do live at their apartments with all their -- the other students, and sometimes we will notice a regression. And, again, it's not -- this particular student was a pretty extreme example of that where he just had this big regression in his English mainly due to talking, not speaking it enough except when he was at the Academy doing training. Not at all common, but every once in awhile we would see that.
Q. Did you ever fly with Francesca personally?
A. I did not.
Q. Okay. Anyone ever report any negative feedback regarding Francesca?
A. No.
Q. In your time at USAG was Francesca the -- did you have more than one occasion where an instructor pilot was injured and had to stop flying for a period of time or was Francesca your first, the

first?
A. At least to my -- you mean as far as like --
Q. When you were -- for an instructor to get injured, and have to take time out of flying.
A. To my knowledge, she was the first one but, again, there are a lot of instructors. So I don't know that for a fact.
Q. But so she was the only one that you had managed --
A. Yes.
Q. -- or had flown with in your time at US Aviation or then employed at US Aviation same time you've been. So since '15 through '19.
A. Yes.
Q. She was the only instructor --
A. As far as having to take time off for an injury, as far as I know, yes.
Q. So you said Thursday prior to the accident you had spoken to Francesca, and asked her to work with Howard. What was the briefing that took place with Francesca on Howard's needs?
A. I briefed her on the -- we reviewed both the subsequent instructor notes as well as the notes from his two previous check failures, and I briefed her on the fact that he had been sitting for about 3 weeks. And then just gave her the basis of go do a couple flights. Try to keep it about 5 hours, and then come back, and if you think he's ready to go at that point we sign him off, and if not, we'll revisit how to proceed from there.

Q. So you asked her to brief you after the 5 hours were completed?
A. Yes. I, well, yes. Either if he was ready to go, resubmit him because we had an electronic submission form for checks. Either resubmit him and just let me know or if there were issues that weren't being resolved, then come brief me, and we would determine what the best course of action was going forward.
Q. During your time as a instructor or King Air pilot, did you have to submit squawks for aircraft that were -- had issues?
A. Yeah. I mean, I squawked a number of airplanes.
Q. And so the squawks that you -- sorry. The aircraft that you had squawked, were you -- were they sufficiently addressed so -- or did you have to squawk sometimes repeatedly before the issue was addressed?
A. No. Every squawk that I did was fixed.
MS. LIEDLER: I don't think I have anything else.
You have anything?
DR. WILSON: I don't.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Is there anything that we missed that you think would be helpful to share this with them or this could be improved, and like to tell them about it? Anything like that, that you -- related to the investigation of this accident or any other concerns that you have?
A. I don't. Nothing comes to mind right now at least.

DR. WILSON: Okay. I think you have Courtney's and my contact information. So if you think of anything else, be in a month, 3 months, don't hesitate to send us an e-mail or give us a call.

MR. COONS: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Happy to talk.

MR. COONS: All right.

DR. WILSON: Thank you very much. We really appreciate you taking the time to come down here, and share the information.

MR. COONS: Of course.

DR. WILSON: Will be very helpful to our investigation.

MR. COONS: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: Yeah. Thank you for taking time from your --

MR. COONS: No problem.

MS. LIEDLER: -- training. Do you have any other questions for us regarding anything else, investigation or anything else before we leave?

MR. COONS: I don't think so. I mean, I don't think -- nothing I'm sure you guys can answer, of course. Just some -- look forward to kind of understanding what happened, but I know you guys are still in the process. So just for closure's sake, to kind of understand what -- hopefully, or at least have a little bit better insight would be good.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Understood.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

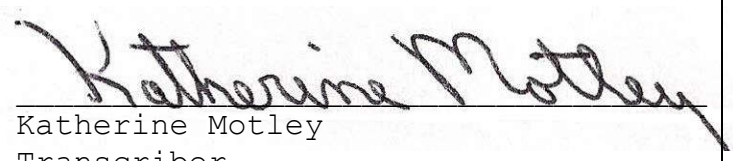
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of David Michael Coons
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 18, 2019

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.



Katherine Motley
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA038
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: CATHERINE FILIOS

North Texas FSDO
Irving, Texas

Wednesday,
September 18, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:00 p.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: Okay. You sure? Do you have any questions for us before we get started? No? Okay. All right.

INTERVIEW OF CATHERINE FILIOS

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. If you could state your full name please?

A. Catherine Marie Filios.

Q. And could you spell your last name?

A. F-I-L-I-O-S.

Q. Okay. And what is your current job title and company that you work for?

A. I'm a first officer at Envoy Air.

Q. Okay. And a brief description of your aviation background?

A. I was a flight instructor at a few different flight schools, most recently US Aviation Academy. Before that, I worked for Downtown Aviation in Memphis teaching primarily 61 students. And then before that, I taught Vietnamese students at another 141 program, Air Venture Flight School in Mississippi.

Q. And at US Aviation, what was your job title there?

A. I was a flight instructor.

Q. Okay. And what instruction did you give?

A. I gave instruction to both domestic and international students. I was part of the Chinese instrument curriculum as my primary role. I did have a private student that was a domestic

student, an American student. And I taught all three curriculums. So I taught multi, instrument, and private. But my main source -- my main role there was in instrument.

Q. Okay. And what timeframe did you work for US Aviation?

A. I started US Aviation in May of 2017, and I worked there until February of this year.

Q. Okay. And who did you report to there?

A. I reported to a number of different managers. I think I got the year right, I worked there for about a year. Maybe it was '18, sorry. I was there for about a year.

Q. Okay.

A. I reported to my instrument leaders, and those were peers of mine. I also reported to an instrument manager, he was overseeing the leaders, and kind of was in charge of the instrument program. And then I also reported to the upper-level management as well, so that would be people like Tyson Walker, Chief David Cruz.

Q. Okay. And what made you leave US Aviation?

A. I got hired at Envoy.

Q. Okay. About how much total time do you have?

A. I'm at approximately 1,750 hours. Maybe a little more.

Q. Okay. Do you remember Mr. Qui?

A. Of course.

Q. Okay. Just walk us through what your interactions were with him, as his instructor.

A. Okay. Well I taught Howard for approximately six months. I

flew with him multiple days a week for hours a day. Not only did I teach him his instrument, but I also taught him his instrument ground school, his commercial ground school, like a whole class of 30 kids that he was in, and then I did ground lessons with him as well.

I also did his single engine commercial cross country time building with him, aside from his like, solo time. So they have a certain amount of cross country time with an instructor of single engine commercial work they do, so I did that as well.

Q. Okay. And do you recall the timeframe from when you were working -- when you were hired until you were working with him?

A. Yes, actually. I wrote it down. Okay. I started with Howard on October 2nd, 2018, and my last lesson with him was February 24th, 2019. So approximately six months.

Q. Okay. And during that time, did he have any difficulties in training?

A. Very, very normal student difficulties. Language barrier, being able to speak up to ATC, reading back instruction. He did not struggle any more than any of my students, and he was a fast learner. I would say he was probably one of the smartest students I ever taught.

Q. When you say you also did ground lessons with him, was that a one-on-one --

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. -- ground lessons? Okay.

A. And simulator training as well.
Q. Okay.
A. In fact, even after I left US Aviation Academy, I continued to coach him over the phone on almost a daily basis. He would, you know, he trusted me, and of course he didn't have a regular instruction after I left. So he would call me, and I'd coach him over the phone, and ask him what he was up to, and, you know, a lot of it was him sitting around waiting.
Q. What -- explain that a little bit more. What was -- why didn't he have regular instruction?
A. Well, he waited -- actually I have the actual dates as well. From when I left him, he didn't fly again for nearly two months. Let me find the exact dates.

Well, I can get back with you with the exact dates, but I know that he waited approximately two months before he was assigned a multi-engine instructor from when I signed him off for instrument and then finished his commercial single engine stuff.

When I left US Aviation, he didn't fly for months. So he spent every day chair flying, you know, just practicing on the computer screen simulator.
Q. Okay. And was he practicing in preparation, if you know, for the multiengine? Or was he just trying to maintain his skills that he had learned until that point?
A. He would maintain his skills, but he would try to chair fly for the multiengine. However, the students are not allowed to sit

in the Senecas and chair fly. There's also only one multiengine sim in that entire facility.

Q. Okay.

A. And they're not allowed in it unless they're with an instructor.

Q. Okay.

A. So there's no way for him to really self-teach in multi in that time, you know?

Q. So you said he was just in front of a computer? Was it like an FTD? Or was it a flight simulator? Or --

A. FTD.

Q. Okay.

MR. GOOD: Are you talking about the little Redbird --

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MR. GOOD: -- the standard desktop --

MS. FILIOS: A small desktop Redbird with one VOR that he could use. And that's available for the students to, you know, stay after school and practice. And --

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: It's a low-sim, they call it.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. During your time there, was it common for students to wait multiple months to get assigned an instructor?

A. I would say it wasn't uncommon.

Q. Okay. What -- do you have any idea as to why there was the

delay in getting an instructor?
A. We don't have a -- we as in US Aviation because I was part of them -- there were not very many multi-engine instructors, mainly because once you got to the point that you were a multi-engine instructor, you almost had all of your flight hours anyway. US Aviation offers assistance to a lot of the instructors that come on just as a CFI, and they will help pay for part of your training to CFII, and then MEI, but it takes time.

So a lot of the instructors that they would bring on were just CFIs. They offered me a sign on bonus of $5,000 to come down because I was already an MEI. Now, they don't have a whole lot of multi-engine aircraft anyway, and it's kind of a privilege to be an MEI there. So I didn't teach -- I didn't use my MEI there for months. It was just one of the, kind of prestigious roles there.

Well, that being said, the people who were teaching in multi, they were out of there within a few months. So they just didn't have the staffing or the aircraft to accommodate all of those students.
Q. And over the course of time that you were there, about how many students did you have total?
A. I would have up to between four and five at a time.
Q. Okay.
A. I was never terribly overloaded with students, but as soon as you finish with one set of students, they hand you more students. So there's a constant turnover in students. I send one off to

multi, I get another one. Or I am teaching one in multi, he leaves, another one comes. So you're constantly juggling.

Some new instructors, they're given a lighter load, maybe three students. We're encouraged to fly them as much as we can, get them done as quickly as possible. But, you know, there were some students that they -- if you had too many students, say you have a workload of five students, depending on how you managed your schedule and how scheduling helped you manage your schedule, you might not fly a student but like twice a week.

Q. Did you think that inability to fly with the student hurt them as students?

A. Oh, of course. If you're unable to fly consistently, and not even necessarily at the fault of the scheduler, it's because of the plane availability -- if you go days and days without practicing something, you regress a bit, and you don't go through as quickly as you could.

Some students, you can power through if you get the planes, or if you happen to have the perfect timeslot, you can get a student done super quick. But, you know, if you're always flying in the middle of the day when all of the other students want to fly, and the planes breakdown, you now, halfway through the day, and then you're kind of stuck, your student might go days without flying.

And then, you know -- or for example, you might complete a student's lesson, and they're only allotted a certain amount of

hours in the aircraft in a curriculum, you know, before the check ride has to happen. Well, you know, you could wait days and days before the check ride happens, such as the example of Howard. He was signed off for that check ride -- bless you.

Q. Thank you.

A. Then he had to wait for a check airman. I know personally that if I had to take a check ride after waiting two weeks for -- after I had my warmup flight, I'd do terrible. But they, you know, they wait for the airplanes, and then they wait for the signoff, and then they have to get in a list that's a mile long for a check airman.

Q. Do you know about how many check airmen they had?

A. Not many at all.

Q. Yeah.

A. In fact, at the time that Howard had the accident with Francesca, they had one check airman and hundreds of students at that location just waiting for a check ride from one guy.

Q. Do you recall in your time flying with Howard if he -- if you had to do any extra lessons with him, or, you know, maybe he didn't pass any of the flights that you did with him?

A. He didn't pass the first time through his instrument check ride because he -- and this, I say this is partially my fault, because there was a question as to in certain types of the 172, and the Mike model versus the R model, we'd either use, you know, flaps early or later.

And the problem is, his descent rate coming in was a little bit quicker with me because I would have him use flaps, and the check airman, you know, he had heard from a different -- from a brother pilot, that this check airman doesn't like flaps early, so, you know, don't get configured early. So he didn't.

So his descent rate was later, and he didn't get to the MDA before the missed approach point. So he passed it. So that's kind of an automatic failure. But everything else he did in the entire check, it was a very, very simple, brief go up with him one more time, have him do a couple, and he was -- he passed the next time.

So a very simple, common thing that a student would fail for. Nothing dangerous.

Q. Okay. Did you feel that he was prepared for lessons when you would fly with him?

A. Every time.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. He would show up early, he'd be there with the weight and balance filled out, ready, the flight plan together, and, you know, usually it was a VFR day when we'd go up. Occasionally it was IFR, and he'd even do the whole briefing and stuff, and I think that it gets hard to ask the students to do a full flight plan every time you know you're literally going to go up, do a procedure, and come back down.

And I was told by one of the check airmen that failed him

that he wasn't organized for the flight. That was why he failed the second time on his multi-engine. And, you know, when I asked Matt about it. I was like, well, you know, tell me about what happened. He said, well he was disorganized, he didn't come with a flight plan.

Well, I mean, it's a little bit understandable in, you know, he came ready to go every single time before that, and he didn't think that they were going to be doing the same full flight plan for the check ride. So it might have been a miscommunication. Could have been a number of reasons. But he was always prepared for mine.

Q. What do you think he did really well as a student?

A. The student was -- he was organized when it came to like, listening to instruction, taking instruction, making a correction. I never felt unsafe with this student. I felt, in fact, that he took care of flying, and he took responsibility of the entire aircraft as if he was the PIC.

You know, I felt like he protected me in a way too. You know, he was always concerned about me. Like he'd have snacks in the plane waiting for me knowing that I had 15 minutes in between lessons. I had -- barely had time to use the bathroom. I'd be running out trying to get to the next lesson in time, and he knew I didn't have time to eat. So he'd bring snacks to the plane and just be there, you know?

It just -- oh, he always carried my bag for me. Every single

time we went to the plane, I'd be carrying it. Oh no, ma'am. I'm a man, I'll carry the bag. Just, he was always just light-hearted, receptive.

If he did something wrong, he didn't argue it. He didn't try to say that, no, I did it right. Okay, ma'am. I fix it. And he would say to me, I'm glad when you yell at me. I'm glad when you are angry or upset with something that I did and you correct me. I want you to discipline me because I want to be better. Like, it's good. It makes me a better pilot.

So he was just really receptive to instruction. And I didn't freak out or yell at him really, but like, on the times when I would be like, no, this needs to be like this. He -- okay, ma'am. Tell me so I can be better.

Q. What were areas that you thought he could improve on?

A. I mean, just like any student, I felt one of his biggest weaknesses was his radio communications. It was kind of hard to understand him, and I really harped on him for his radio calls. Especially in instrument, you know, when you're accepting a clearance.

And he would sometimes mumble, and I would, hey, speak up. Talk louder. I mean, this was kind of a consistent thing I was telling him. So -- but I mean, his comprehensive understanding of the instrument approaches were -- it was on par with any other student.

MR. GOOD: To clarify for the comms, would you say it was a

lack of communication -- or not communicate -- lack of confidence and volume was his biggest issue?

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MR. GOOD: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: Yeah. And, you know, just his accent was sometimes difficult to understand.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you ever -- flying with him, did you ever have to take aircraft control from him?

A. No. He was actually very good about exchanging controls. He was very -- you know, there was one time I did take control of the aircraft, but it wasn't because of something he was doing. It was because we encountered turbulence, and I decided that I think I should take it. You know, I'm going to land it because it's getting bumpy out. Weather built really quickly, and I wanted -- and he was, okay, ma'am. He threw his hands up, all yours. I never had any issues with that.

Q. Okay. Did the training that he went through with you, did it seem to be taking longer than other pilots?

A. No.

Q. No? Okay.

A. No. He and my other student, Kyle, were right ear to ear as far as when their training was happening, and I had two students in front of him. So basically I'd have two students in Stage 3, students in Stage 2, you know, and I'd be working, and then I had

my private students. So I had -- I mean, I rotated a lot of students. But they were all progressing together.

And I kind of let them build together in buddy systems. So I'd be like, okay, you know, you've got to keep George at your level. You know, if he's falling behind, you guys got to, you know, build, you know, a system where you help each other. That way both of you can celebrate your two bars together. And it worked.

You know, and so he was alongside Kyle. And they progressed, and they got their instrument rating within a week of each other, two weeks maybe. And then, you know, he was right with him in commercial too up to the end. So --

Q. When you say that they were kind of paired together like that, did they do observation flights? Or did you typically just fly yourself and the student?

A. No. I -- actually it wasn't Kyle that would come on the flights so much, because I would fly two hours with Kyle. But then they would help each other in the sim. I remember having -- I was doing an instrument sim. And, you know, instead of sitting like right there, you know, and just closing the door, I had Kyle come in. And I would let Kyle kind of sit and look at the simulator screen and be like, okay, you know, what do you think he's doing wrong? What does he need to improve on?

And, you know, he's not getting credit for it, but I gave each of them a chance of kind of being in the instructor's role to

see what I'm seeing, and they kind of developed a partnership together to be like -- like it's amazing how much better of a pilot you become when you can kind of sit back on the other side and be like, oh.

Like, when you're not being asked to multitask, and you kind of take a new compartment of your brain and free it up, all of the sudden you can see, oh, yeah, well it's easy. All you have to do is get to the left a little bit. And then it just makes you a better pilot.

So they would take turns kind of helping each other. I'm like, okay, Kyle. Tell Howard what he's doing wrong. And then vice versa. Howard, what do you think Kyle should do? And so, you know, in turn, they're actually learning like twice as much. But they'd help each other a lot like that. So --

Q. You mentioned -- I believe, and I don't want to put words in your mouth, but there was some time pressure to get students through the program?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. Well, it was more of in hours, in allocated hours that they have a contract with the Chinese airlines, and they give them a certain block of money. And with that money, that pays for a certain amount of hours. After those hours are done, US Aviation has to pay for the extra training if they're kept. So there's a whole lot of pressure to keep the students within the curriculum

exactly.
Q. And was there any repercussions to the instructor if a student exceeded the hours?
A. Well, here's the thing. The instructors -- if you have a student that's not keeping up and failing, you're supposed to send the student to a manager or a leader for a check flight, okay? So they're not going to blame the instructor. If all of your other students are passing, but one student's failing, they're going to blame the student.

However, if an instructor has three students that are failing, then it's clearly an instructor issue. So, I mean, there was kind of a way to fish out the bad instruction. But then again, if a student -- or if an instructor really doesn't like a student, you can kind of make sure that he goes to the managers, and the managers know he's a trouble -- you know, I saw a lot of students get sent to management for check flights, and the instructors walk out and be, I'm done with that kid. I hope he goes back to China. You know, that kind of thing.
Q. Did you ever have to send a student for a ride with the manager?
A. I only sent one student to the manager's office one time. And it was the lack of respect. It wasn't for the fact that he wasn't trainable. And I ended up -- I remember going and telling him that the attitude is changed anyway, because he knew I was going to send him to the manager for an attitude adjustment. And

he showed up that day with a Gatorade. Here you go, ma'am. Like, just trying to sweet talk me.

But a manager talked to him about having an attitude adjustment. And I said, look, if he doesn't want to fly with me, if it's like a cultural thing that he doesn't want to fly with a woman, that's fine. Send him to someone else. But he had an attitude adjustment, and, you know, and I -- and after that, he just apologized, and, it won't happen again. And never had an issue with the student again.

Q. Okay.

A. So --

DR. WILSON: Did you have a question that you want to jump in?

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

DR. WILSON: And now I just lost my train of thought. Sorry about that.

MS. FILIOS: No, it's okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you ever have to report a student for some kind of safety concern that you had?

A. Let me think. I don't think so. Not me personally. There was some people I was on an observation flight with where I'm like, whoa. Like, they're not a pilot. But usually it was a debrief with the instructor, and kind of like it was handled from there. Actually, I only had one like, really bad student, and it

was just a warmup flight with another CFI. But no, I never had any major safety issues.

In fact, they tended to give me the trouble students. The American that I did the single engine work with, she -- man, she was probably at 80 hours and no one had soloed her. Or maybe it was 40. It -- either way, it was a high number of hours, maybe 50 hours or so. And this is kind of like, going back to all of my flight instruction that I've given.

I've had a lot of students that were high hour, like everyone gave up on, and kind of gave them to me because I was known as the more patient one that would, you know, give them a chance, and role play with them a little bit. And eventually they all got up there. But, you now, she was a struggle. She ended up getting kicked out of the flight school after I left, but she did finish her rating with me. So I don't know.

Q. Was the curriculum for the US student different for the curriculum for the Chinese students?

A. They had multiple curriculums. I used the Chinese curriculum for everybody because I thought it was good. But, you know, with the Part 61 students, you have a little more flexibility for sure. You can repeat a lesson multiple times, and kind of like, put notes in there and be like, hey, repeating this lesson because she just didn't get it, you know? She needs more time performing this, this, or this.

And there's less pressure with them. You can kind of give

them four lessons, and no one's going to be like, hey, I noticed you repeated this lesson four times. You know, why didn't you repeat lesson one, two, and three twice? You know? But you can get to the point with the student where you have no issue, no issue, no issue, and you get to a certain lesson and there's a block. Sometimes you need more time on that lesson.

And what they'll do, is they'll allow you to use some of their commercial time as additional lessons if you need more time. So, you know, you have a certain amount of time that you can use in a curriculum. Well, to get around that and stay within the curriculum and be able to keep the student flying, and working on these things, sometimes instead of just doing a commercial cross-country that they just needed to build time, we would use that time to work on holds again, you know?

So we were allowed to use so many commercial lessons towards instrument work. And then after that, it had to be commercial lessons.

MR. GOOD: And was that allowed for both 141 and 61?

MS. FILIOS: Well, I think it was more primarily targeted at 141. The 61, they didn't have the same kind of pressure, because there weren't the stringent checks along the way. So yes, we would be using a commercial lesson. I mean, yes it was allowed, but it wasn't frowned upon to repeat a lesson in the curriculum so much because they're out of pocket. They're just -- they're paying, you know?

MS. LIEDLER: Do you feel that there was a competency difference between like the Asian National program versus like the US because you didn't have to just keep pushing them through, so you didn't have to, or, you know, you didn't have to keep pushing them through versus you could take your time with the US student?

MS. FILIOS: I would actually say that there was a difference in attitude. The United -- or the domestic students, you know, they're spending their own money. Typically they're there -- sometimes Part 61 they're there on a bucket list item. They're there because they want to be there, it's fun for them.

If they are making a career out of it, it's going -- you know, this is just mom and dad are paying, and it's okay. They'll take their time to their comfort level. And this is what I've kind of found with all of my Part 61 students. They're more laid back.

They -- they're there, they don't want you to waste their time, because, you know, especially if it's a professional with, you know, this has always been a bucket list item for me, they demand more attention as far as like, you know, your time. And they want you to respect their time, but they'll take their time where they feel necessary.

Whereas the Chinese, they're under this very stringent, you know, curriculum where they -- if -- they're ruled by the fear of being terminated, about being sent back to China. In fact, one of the last conversations I had with Howard, I had -- not the last

conversation. One of the conversations I had Howard was about the Chinese student who killed himself.

And, you know, I said, is anyone else, you know, feeling stressed out or sad? You can have them WeChat me, because that's how we communicate, through WeChat. And he goes, you know, everyone's stressed. Two more commercial students were sent, you know, to the review board, and, you know, it was all about like, I'm so worried about the review board.

I said, Howard, is anyone stressed out like Evan was? He goes, people who get to review board are stressed. And I said, well, if they need anyone to talk to, they can send me a WeChat. He goes, okay. So, just little things.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And did he talk to you about his own review board?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. He said there was really nothing to it. There wasn't -- it wasn't even -- he said, you know, they didn't have a problem sending him on. You know, he had a good track record, and he was never known as a not safe student. So they didn't -- I don't think they even thought twice to give him another chance.

Q. Did he discuss with you the reasons that he went to the review board?

A. Well he told me it was because of the second failure. Basically, you fail twice, you're automatically given a review

board.
Q. Right. Did he -- I -- so did he discuss any, like, details of the areas that he might of -- he felt he was having difficulties in?
A. Yeah. I can pull up our exact conversation. I wonder if I can -- I can probably pull it up exactly, but we talked on the phone quite a bit too. He was telling me that, you know, mostly, I'm sorry I disappointed you. He says, I got too slow, or he says, I did this, or I came unorganized, and I will work on it, and I don't want to fail. I don't want to go back to China. That kind of thing.

And he was scared. He told me he was very scared, and he told me what he was working on. Chair flying a lot, and he goes, you know, I work every day to chair fly. And I really got on his case about his air speed, so much so that, you know, just days prior, I was talking to him, and I was just like, okay. So you had one instance where you got to like, 90 knots on climbout. And I was like, you know, are we having issues? He goes, no. I am completely focused on keeping my airspeed up.

And, you know, it's one of those things where he had that issue one time. And I know this kid was dedicated to fixing it, so that's what makes me just -- there's no way that that was the issue. Because that was something he had specifically been like, I'm going to fix this. And I know that student. And when that attitude happens, he's not going to -- I mean, that's going to be

primary in his head, like I'm going to fix this.

So I just don't think that he would have put them into a VMC. You know, and even if he did get slow, Francesca's a qualified MEI, you know? He wouldn't have kept pulling up when she's pushing down. I mean, he was telling me how Francesca reminded him of me. And I know that, you know, when it comes to a struggle in the cockpit, I mean, he would have never done that to me.

And I mean, I flew with him almost every day, and I never had an issue. So it couldn't really be the difference in instructor. It's not like it was a big bulky guy that he felt like he had to wrestle with. She was as small as me, if not smaller. So I don't see him treating her differently than I was.

MS. LIEDLER: So what did you know about Francesca as a flight instructor?

MS. FILIOS: She was a good pilot. When she first came, I was sitting in a sim, and she was sitting in the sim next to me. And they were just the Redbird sims, it wasn't like the full motion that's not really full motion. Anyway, but we're sitting there, and I was kind of listening to her teach. And I was more senior, I had been there a lot longer.

And I got done, and I kind of got up, and before I left, I was like, what's your name? And she's like, hi, I'm Francesca. I'm new here. And I was like, I like you, you teach like me. And she goes, thank you, I've heard good things about you. She was so excited to have that.

And so like, all the way through working with her, and even after -- like on the day that I was leaving for example, she like, made a call over UNICOM. She was just like, bye, I'm going to take over your spot. I was known as kind of like, the bitter old lady on UNICOM. If someone did something wrong, I'd be like, hey, stop it. And she's -- she was just like me. She was very kind to the students, she was very patient with the students, but she didn't tolerate crap, you know?

She wasn't someone to get stepped on. She was a good and competent pilot. And, you know, I would have trusted her with any of my students more than most of those instructors.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. After you left, did you have any contact with her?

A. Yeah. I asked her to fly with him.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. I said, you know, I care about this student. I heard you're going to be able to take him on. I really want you to work with him and treat him like he's your own. I really want him to succeed. He's had some struggles with these people, make sure you get him through.

And she goes, yeah, I'll fly with him, and I'll treat him like my own. And you know I fly just like you anyway, and I'll take care of it.

Q. Okay. Did she have any concerns about flying with him?

A. No.

Q. No?
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. Not at all. And I even talked to Howard after the -- they only flew twice, one successfully. And I talked to Howard after they had the first flight, and he was over the moon. He had had such a great flight. Man, Francesca's a great instructor, she teaches just like you. I had so much fun. I can't wait, I'm going to be signed off again. I'm finally going to get back to China. I'm going to make you proud. Francesca's wonderful. Great flight.
Q. Yeah.
A. And he was so excited to get back in the plane with her.
Q. Yeah.
A. They had a conversation over WeChat that morning, and the girlfriend of Howard from back in China, she was able to log into his WeChat, and showed me the messages between them from that morning. And I can show it to you. They didn't want to fly that plane. And this was Francesca's message to him that morning. It was translated to English.
Q. It says, I don't mind, as long as they fixed it. It might be the only one available. And that's her saying that to him?
A. To him.
Q. Okay.
A. Because he had asked for a different aircraft at dispatch,

and they said that's the only one. And he didn't want to fly that one because it was squawked multiple times. This is from a student who --

Q. Right.

A. -- had screenshotted it before they quarantined it. So as you can see, the squawks.

Q. I'm imagining that's what we already have, but --

A. I know it's not in the system anymore there.

Q. Right. We can typically get access to those even when they, you know, protect them when there's an accident. So I would just want to make sure that --

A. Yeah, just make sure that you have that.

MS. LIEDLER: Yeah. We have that.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you.

MS. FILIOS: Yeah. No defects noted.

DR. WILSON: How typical do you think that was, switching to the maintenance side of things where, you know, you might squawk something, and maintenance comes back and says, eh, nothing's wrong?

MS. FILIOS: I would say 80 to 90 percent of the time that we would have repeat issues with planes. Now, we were always encouraged to squawk the planes. However, there was always this stigma involved in it, and I would say, you know, that the pressure came from the other instructors more than anything else -- more than management. And the pressure -- and, well, I mean

everyone's got a family to feed, you know?

Everyone has -- you know, they have these policies on, you're not allowed to cancel your flight now unless you show up to the airport to cancel it in person. Well, if there's no planes available? I can't tell you how many times I drove into work, spent money to get there, and you don't get paid until the engine is running.

So I show up to work, and, sorry, there's no planes available. There's no planes available. Okay. Well what am I going to do for the next three hours? Well, nothing. Go get another job, but be here. So it's like, you know, how are we going to make our money, you know?

And if a plane gets squawked, I mean, you might have the motivation for example to like, well it looks like the strobes out on this plane. Well I'm going to be flying it all day, you know? I'm going to be in before sunset or something. And I'm going to get my hours in, and then I'll squawk it later. Well, now you're screwing over the next person that had a, you know, a two hour, three hour block in it after that. Now they showed up to work, and they don't have a plane to fly.

Well, you know, they say squawk the plane, squawk the planes, but then they also don't want you to squawk the planes too. But it's not management that doesn't want you to squawk the planes, it's the pressure from the other instructors. And then there's also this kind of like, mocking that goes on.

For example, one instructor had a prop strike. They brought the prop into the instructor meeting, and proceeded to like, make fun of this student right in front of him, you know, about what kind of idiot would fly a plane after striking it like this? And look at the prop. And he didn't notice this.

And so it's like, they make fun of you for doing something you're not comfortable with.

MS. LIEDLER: You say they. Are you talking about other instructors? Maintenance?

MS. FILIOS: I'm talking about the culture in general. Everyone. I'm saying like, management would pull the prop up in front of the instructors and be like, this, you know, let's not be silly. Well, and even if it is silly, you know, we had one instructor that was fired for writing up the carbon monoxide indicators.

DR. WILSON: Tell me more about that.

MS. FILIOS: Oh, let's see. So Kelly (ph.) said, management and the instructors made fun of me for writing airplanes up when I was poisoned. The management forced me to resign when I continued to write up airplanes for carbon monoxide poisoning. It was clear that writing planes up would get me made fun of. However, I keep writing planes up, and ultimately they force me to resign. See the emails I forward to you from management. And she sent me some emails.

And it was a carbon monoxide squawk, and it was recognized by

management. She had said, your carbon monoxide squawk, it hasn't been unnoticed. And then this one, there was an email sent to the instructors here, and pretty much she talked about general stuff, and then it got into squawks and advice on how to squawk. And then at the end, after they're, you know, explaining hey, the parts per million, this is the allotted way for workers, and explaining why she was wrong to squawk it.

And then basically the end, it says like, we will be having some events in the future to bring the flight team closer to management. What did it say? Oh, there will be better communication and understanding between the two groups of management and flight instructors in the future. In addition, significant action has been taken by high levels of management to address the ongoing repetitive issues. I can contest to you that work is being done to address the aircraft problems, feel optimistic we have reached a point where we can become more proactive rather than reactive. And that was --

MS. LIEDLER: And who sent that?

MS. FILIOS: A manager to a group of instructors. She sent it to me, this was after I left.

DR. WILSON: Is that something that -- would you mind asking her if that's an email that you can forward to us?

MS. FILIOS: Yeah. She sent it to me to give to you.

DR. WILSON: Oh, okay.

MS. FILIOS: So -- and --

DR. WILSON: Well if you want to forward it to Courtney?

MS. FILIOS: Yeah. Sure.

MS. LIEDLER: You can do it later. Yeah. We don't --

MS. FILIOS: Okay. Yeah. I'll do it later.

MS. LIEDLER: And any other -- just anything that you think would be helpful to our investigation.

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: Screenshots of conversations --

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: -- that -- Howard about not wanting to fly the airplane, or some of the other things that you've shared with us. If you're comfortable with it, feel free to send it to us.

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: If you'd like to share.

MS. FILIOS: Yeah. I mean, like, I don't want to throw US Aviation under the bus. They -- for the most part, I enjoyed my time there. And I know you guys have heard all of the good things about them, and they create all of these professional pilots, and they have a culture of safety, which they, you know, they say they have the culture of safety.

But in my personal opinion, the biggest problem that needs to be fixed is there's maintenance, and then there's the flight school. And maintenance is a 15 minute walk -- ten to 15 minutes to walk over to the maintenance hangar. Like, if I want to look at logbooks for example, I have to walk out the opposite side of

the flight school over here, cross the parking lot, cross another parking lot, cross across another hangar, go into the maintenance hangar, go across the hangar, and go up the stairs, go to some lockers, unlock the lockers, take the logbook out, go through it, leave the logbook back there.

By the time I did all of that and came back, I've -- I'm late for my next flight. I don't even have 15 minutes by the time I debrief. I mean, the -- you have to get out on time, or else, you know, you're in trouble for not getting the plane out on time. So there's no feasible way for me to go and look at the details on what was written up.

And you can see the notes that we see. Noted and fixed. What does noted and fixed mean? Because it says that it was, you know, noted and fixed, right? Well then why does it say in the notes that it wasn't replicated? Like what are the real details? What did you do to fix it? And there's no communication between maintenance and flight staff. And so there's like this angry atmosphere.

And, you know, I got to know a lot of the maintenance guys, and they're good guys. But I'll tell you, when I first got there, there was a complete turnaround in the maintenance staff. They're getting guys right out of AMP school that, you know, barely have the experience to be there.

And I don't know what the program is to train them. But I know that, I mean, for the amount of work that they have, there's

got to be pressure on them to get planes back out. And even if they're doing everything right and signing off, I think that the triage guy, which triage is a nice thing to have, because you can kind of call someone up and be like, hey, is this a minor issue or is this a major issue? You know, can you come take a look?

Well, all the guys that are on triage are the brand new guys, so maybe they don't know. I think there needs to be a dedicated maintenance manager that's in our -- in the flight school building, where you can go and say, hey, what's going on with this plane? Or maybe the manager can oversee the signoff, what did you do to fix this plane? Because that way there's two eyes on it.

It's not just sending us out as the guinea pigs to see if it replicates itself. You know, they're not risking their lives by getting in this plane, and we're just trusting that maintenance had fixed it. So if they had this better collaboration and maybe more notes, and maybe a system where the instructors could talk to each other about -- you know, I don't know if triage came out to the last plane, and the instructor was like, hey, this is acting quirky. And they're like, well, you know, we'll keep an eye on it.

Well, does the next guy even know to keep an eye on it? No. So there's no form of communication like that. And so we're being told to squawk the airplanes, maintenance is getting them back as quick as they can, but they're like, man, they squawk it over everything. You know, right now, only 25 percent of US Aviation's

planes are even up and going. How do you run 200 and some students on 12 planes?

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you've worked at a couple of other flight schools?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. How does -- so I'm curious, from the op side and the maintenance side, so you can answer them separately, but how does US Aviation compare to those other flight schools that you worked at?

A. The attitude between flight staff and maintenance is night and day at US Aviation versus the other flight schools. I mean, I might have not gotten along with every mechanic, and maybe not agreed with them every single time. But I'll tell you what, I could call any of those guys up at 3:00 in the morning, and they would talk me through it.

They -- you know, I could call them from the airplane, be like, this is doing this weird thing, what do I do? And they would walk me through it, and they would be there for me. I mean, they always answered the phone. They were always there. They always came in. You know, if one -- I had some maintenance guys rescue me from Helena because I lost a fuel cap, you know?

Just little things like that, just they're there for you.

Q. And you're saying they being at US Aviation? Or at another flight school?

A. At another flight school.

Q. Okay.
A. They were always there for me.
Q. Got you.
A. Now, I kind of make sure that I have a good relationship with the mechanics. I used to go and bring them candy, and I had a good relationship. And some of these guys are my friends. And I don't think they're unsafe mechanics, the ones that I know. But I do know there's a lot of them that I don't know.

And I kind of maybe got told a few times, hey, you know, this is the person on triage tonight. Call him. Well, I've got your number, and I've got this guy's number, so I'm going to call somebody if I have an issue. So a few times, I called the maintenance managers in the middle of the night, and, you know, they'd answer, and -- but I think it was different because I would make myself known over there. I'd walk over there when I had time and be like, hey, you know, what's going on with this?

But there was just this attitude. I mean, you walk into the manager's -- the maintenance manager's office. If you close the door, there's the student of the month on the wall with a basketball hoop so they could hit the face, you know, and shoot hoops at it. It's like they just don't like each other.

And it might be a joke, and it might all be in fun. But, you know, I would be surprised if I were to walk up to any of the instructors at US Aviation right now, and ask them to name three maintenance guys by name. I don't think they could do it.

Especially if they had been there less than six months.
Q. Is there a big turnover in maintenance workers?
A. Huge. I mean, they're offering $5,000 bonuses for people straight out of AMP school to go to Piedmont right now. Why would they go to US Aviation? They don't pay them well, they don't have good benefits, they work them all the time to the bone. They're running an operation like an airline. What would you pick? You know? I think it's really hard to find mechanics right now, and I think that's part of the problem.
Q. So, maintenance-wise, you feel that there's an issue with -- between maintenance and instructors?
A. There's a communication barrier.
Q. How do you feel about the culture -- the safety culture? You said there is a -- there is -- you know, you had kind of air quoted, safety culture within US Aviation. How do you feel about the safety culture that -- this -- explain to us what that culture is or isn't in your mind.
A. Well, I feel like the maintenance is a completely separate business, even though we're all supposed to be part of the same team. I feel like it's separate from the flight school. We're in two different buildings, we don't really communicate with each other. You know, we are told as instructors to write it up as much as we can. Write up the planes as much as you feel necessary.
But there's this underlying humiliation in repeating issues

again and again. And I mean, so many times the planes have come out of maintenance and had the exact same problem. So what I didn't understand, was, you know, you send something to maintenance, and it may be squawked for three days. Now people aren't flying, and people aren't getting paid. And, you know, then it comes back online, and the same thing is wrong with it.

So we don't know, what did you fix? You know, when? And, you know, if you couldn't duplicate it, I don't know, maybe look at the internal wiring. Look at something else. I mean, like, there has to be a better communication like that. And I think the safety aspect that I'm talking about, that culture stems from we are being told, be safe, be safe, be safe. Squawk the planes.

Well, okay. But behind that, what you're going to find is, work, work, work. Student -- instructor of the month flew 120 hours this month. Good job. Keep going. Fly as much as you can. Okay, well I'm trying to. You know, you try to fly as much as you can, but then you show up, and if you squawk a plane, well, guess I'm not getting instructor of the month. Guess I'm not going to make a lot of money this week.

Q. So it -- do you feel there's an underlying pressure to fly the planes, to overlook squawked items? Or to overlook items that are issues with the planes so that you can keep flying and not squawk them?

A. Yeah. I would say that that could be true. There is an underlying pressure. I'm not saying that everyone did that, but

there is a pressure among other instructors because you don't want to screw over your friend, you know? And you want to get out on time, and you want your student to succeed, and, you know, hey, your student has a check ride tomorrow.

You really want to give them a warmup flight. And this plane -- for example, like let's say, I don't know, the attitude indicator is upside down. Well, what if you're doing a, you know, a VFR flight, and you're going to fail that instrument anyway? What's the pressure to, you know, to take it up anyway and be like, I don't even need that instrument? Or let me look to see what's the bare minimum of what's legal, you know? And if I don't need it legally, then I don't have to squawk it.

Q. Did you ever take up -- did you ever fly with an aircraft that had a problem that you thought, well, I'm -- I'd rather fly and get the flight in than squawk at this plane?

A. There was one plane in particular that I wrote up. I believe that it was written up for this issue on more than one occasion, but I wrote it up. And it was the alternator. And it would just tick, tick, tick, tick. And, you know --

Q. The amp --

A. Or the amp --

Q. -- meter?

A. Yeah. I'm sorry.

Q. Okay.

A. The amp meter would just tick, and instead of being

stabilized at zero. And when I'd pull the beacon, it would stabilize at zero. And I, you know, so you just turn on the strobe, right? Well when you're in IMC, you don't want to have an amp going like this, right?

Well I took it out one day, and it was an instrument flight, it was IMC, and I had pulled up to the hold short line, and I ended up canceling my clearance because the whole plane, total electrical failure right before I took off into IMC.

And I'm just like, this -- and I had videotaped the thing just going back and forth, and back and forth, and I squawked it for the -- and I had noticed this before, called triage, oh it should be fine. It should be fine. And I'm like, well, none of the other planes do it. Well, low and behold, the thing comes back, does the same thing.

I had got to the point where I'd flip on the strobes, pull the beacon, and fly it because they were never going to fix it. And it could have been an internal wiring thing, you know? And it was just like, I thought -- you know, and people left it on ticking, ticking, ticking. And I'm like, in the daytime, you know, you're looking around, you have (indiscernible), you look all around.

Sometimes, yeah, I'd rather just pull that thing and know I'm not going to have a total electrical failure than have the beacon on, which I'm supposed to have on, and be worried about something going wrong. So it's like, you know, it's the PIC's discretion in

flight to turn off whatever lights you feel necessary. But is it my discretion every single time I fly this plane?

I would avoid that plane like the plague because I, you know, they just never fixed it. I bet you it still does it.

MR. GOOD: Do you know the N-number by chance?

MS. FILIOS: It started with a seven -- I will find out.

MR. GOOD: We'll --

MS. FILIOS: There was a seven. There was two sevens in the tail number. I'll remember.

MR. GOOD: All right. If you remember it --

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MR. GOOD: -- let us know.

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

MR. GOOD: We'll double-check, make sure --

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

MR. GOOD: -- it's still not out there being an issue.

MS. FILIOS: Oh I'm sure it is. I mean, that thing was an issue the whole time I worked there. And, you know, the Senecas, they'd have just pools of oil, and you'd -- you know, you'd come out and send it -- squawk it out. And then the next thing you knew, it had the same issue. It was just pooling oil. It was just old planes. And I understand old planes, they have problems.

And this is flight school everywhere, you know? All of them are older planes. All of them get worked on, kind of patched back together, and sent back out. But at what point can we, you know -

- there needs to be some kind of accountability on maybe multiple eyes that see the repairs on these planes because of how much they're getting flown, you know?

And how even though, like, you know, they say that there's not pressure, and they say squawk the planes, but there is an underlying pressure. And the pressure is to help each other. You know, to -- we're all trying to get to the airlines, we're all trying to help each other out. We all want to see each other succeed. We all want to get paid. We all want to go out on Friday night and just enjoy the fact that we go through another week, you know?

DR. WILSON: So you have mentioned that a few times, of the underlying pressure, and, you know, you want to help your colleagues out --

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

DR. WILSON: -- and your friends. What -- did you feel though like there was pressure from management to take flights if you didn't feel comfortable taking them?

MS. FILIOS: I never particularly felt pressured by management to take a flight that I didn't want to take. Well, you know, maybe weather-wise. Because I mean -- but it just comes down to personal standards. They would be like, if it's legal to fly, you need to fly.

And some of these instructors are, you know, they're fresh out of their double I. Maybe they don't have any business flying

IMC with their student's single engine. But some people are more comfortable doing it. It was kind of more of a, look, if it's legal to fly, you need to be up there, even if you're not super comfortable with it. But never to the extent, you know, of being like, get in that plane and fly. Like we never had to do that.

DR. WILSON: Right.

MS. FILIOS: It was really just, look, if you're not going to fly, you're not going to get paid. And they had a guaranteed minimum, and the minimum was 18 hours for two weeks. Who can live on that? You can't. I mean, not comfortably, especially if you have a family. The minimum was not enough to not push yourself to fly more.

MS. LIEDLER: What about a pressure to fly -- did you ever feel that there was a pressure to fly for students who were, like, in Howard's situation, where he was now behind schedule, and he was going to need to kind of catch up after not, you know, flying for a period of time, waiting for a check ride or waiting for an aircraft to be fixed, or not having enough aircraft, or whatever? Do you feel pressures to fly because of those types of --

MS. FILIOS: Not in my circumstance, because he was a -- I mean, he was always a priority to me, and I had my schedule. Like, I never had him fall really behind. And I flew with him as my student, he was my primary student. Well, he didn't really have a primary student -- or a primary instructor when I left. He flew with Nat Boyd, and Nat Boyd was on his way into the airlines.

He signed him off and he peaced out.

And then he had one flight with Nick, I think, and, you know, Nick is, you know, he didn't have a bunch of primaries because he was a lead. So he'd fly with a bunch of different people, and he'd make a very quick opinion about them as like a retrain check airman. He didn't really get -- you know, he didn't have the chance to get to know this student at all.

And then, you know, of course the check airman, Matt flew with him I believe one time, one or two times then. So -- and, you know, none of them really -- no one had any kind of sense of urgency to fly with this student again. And I think that's part of the reason why he failed twice. It wasn't a lack of skills. It's just he wasn't fresh, and no one really cared to get him back in the plane.

MS. LIEDLER: From a -- but from the scheduling standpoint, and lack of airplanes, and that you had mentioned prior, there wasn't a pressure due to that? It was -- it wasn't student based? It was more of instructor based pressures to --

MS. FILIOS: Well, if I had a student that had a check coming up, yes I felt pressured to fly him. But it wasn't necessarily from the flight school. It was because you wanted him to succeed, and you wanted to give him every opportunity as a pilot to warm up first. I mean, you know, dress rehearsal should be the day before, not two weeks before. You know?

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did US Aviation have an SMS program?
A. Yes. Is that like the triage program? Or --
Q. Well, like a safety management system. Did they have, you know, like the four tiers? Did they discuss that that you recall?
A. I -- yeah, they did.
Q. Okay.
A. They had, you know, the safety manager, Rick Sanchez was the safety manager. I sent him a few emails, never got -- yeah, I felt like it kind of went in one ear out the other. Then again, the safety thing that I sent him had nothing to do with flying.
I told him that after the student died, I sent an email to him and said, look, you need a Chinese counselor on, you know, on the property or somewhere for them to go to without fear of termination. And they were like, thanks for your input.
Q. We talked a little bit about safety culture, but I don't think that I have a good understanding of how you felt the safety culture was at US Aviation. And I -- I'm curious, you sort of talked about the flight ups and maintenance communications, but -- so I'm interested, like from the flight side. Let's take the maintenance side out of it. How do you think the culture -- the safety culture was in the ops department?
A. I think it's -- I'm trying to see how to word it. We didn't feel pressured to fly aircrafts that didn't work, because we were going to get in trouble for not flying them.
Q. Okay.

A. We felt pressured to fly because we're there for our own need, and just like every flight school ever.
Q. All right. Okay.
A. But as far as like, I think there were just underlying issues with, you know, how everything was run, and kind of the bigger picture of such a huge operation that made it difficult for us to be 100 percent safe all the time.
Q. And how do you think -- how did that compare to the other flight schools that you worked at?
A. Well, I mean, the first flight school that I flew at, Air Venture, I trusted those mechanics to fix anything. Now, were the planes crap? Yeah. Did they break all the time? Yeah. It felt like they were duct taped together sometimes. And I feel like that's very common to fly junky planes and -- when you first start out. Every flight school has got that 1967 172 that will not die completely.

And things go wrong with these planes. And we know that. And it's kind of like, you know, when you get into the jets, it's like, I made it. I'm going to live, you know? But I think every flight school has those junky planes, but I felt safer at my other flight schools.

I felt like the maintenance staff cared about my life more at the other flight schools. They cared about me as a person, and not just getting through the day and going home. It was so much more like we were face to face. We knew each other. And this is

just completely disconnected, you know?

MS. LIEDLER: And how did you feel about management being concerned for the safety of you and the safety of your life comparatively?

MS. FILIOS: I feel like management at US Aviation is oblivious of the concerns we have with the maintenance. They feel that they're doing the right things. They feel that they're being safe. They promote safety at every meeting. They talk about how they care, but there are issues that they don't address.

And so I think with all of the, we care about safety, we want everyone safe, we don't want you guys to feel pressured, we want you to squawk the planes. It's like all of this talking about safety, but I feel like they don't, themselves, understand what's going on on the other side too. So -- and like you said, it's just two different operations, you know?

And they truly believe -- like I feel like, to the core, they believe that nothing is wrong and that they are promoting the safest possible atmosphere they possibly can. I don't think they realize that there is an underlying pressure.

DR. WILSON: Do you think any of that's been communicated to management?

MS. FILIOS: Well yeah. Because, I mean, even in that email that I'll forward, we have a manager saying we're working on the communication between these two. But that was months ago.

DR. WILSON: Anything else?

MS. FILIOS: Can I tell you about the culture of the students?

DR. WILSON: Sure.

MS. FILIOS: How they feel?

DR. WILSON: That'd be great.

MS. FILIOS: The Chinese students are terrified. They are terrified, because they signed a lifelong contract with their airline, and if they're returned to China as a failure, this is a cultural no-no. I mean, so much that one would kill himself not to go back. And it's very easy to get terminated from that school.

They had a very strict program for the Chinese students especially. I feel like sometimes it was a double standard. And they did eventually kind of come down on one of my American students for her dress attire. They wouldn't even allow her to wear leggings because it was distracting, which I think is crazy. But they -- you know, they were very strict about the attire. You dress this way every single day. You show up early every single day. You stay until late every single day.

The student lifestyle was very, very poor for a long time, and the students really were afraid. Not just of termination, but of the instructors, because the instructors held so much power in their ability to succeed. And some of the instructors, which are gone now, I feel like the instructors there now are pretty good, but I know a few instructors that -- when I first started there,

that were very mean to their students.

And management didn't do anything about it. Maybe it would -- they were blind to it, maybe they didn't see it. But under no circumstance do I think making your student wash planes, or do pushups, or scream at them in the hallway is appropriate. I only saw one time where an owner actually stopped an instructor from screaming at a student.

And, you know -- but that's thing. It's like, the owners don't always see what goes on behind the scenes. And when you're walking by, and it's late, and no one else is there, and you hear an instructor just screaming at their student. I'm like, this is a Chinese student. He came all the way from China. He learned a new language, now he's learning aviation, give him a break.

And, you know, I feel like it's more of a number game. You see these kids as numbers and not people. And there was a lot of that. There was a lot of -- I mean, I felt like it was just abusive. But, you know, I might be a little more sensitive to that than other people are. And I think that that's improved. They let them go to the store now.

But I mean, my opinion was they needed a counselor there. They needed someone they could talk to, because they were afraid of going to anyone for fear of termination. If your instructor doesn't like you, he's going to find a reason to get you to the manager's office, and the instructor and the manager are going to talk about you. And the instructor really wants you to be

terminated, they're going to find a way.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you mentioned it's easy to get terminated from the flight school. Like, explain. Like, if -- do you have any --

A. Yeah. One of my students got terminated for something I felt -- I mean, yeah, it was something bad, but it wasn't really his fault. He -- and I tried to stick up for him, and I kind of understand why they terminated him, but he was on a solo cross-country. And he went over to -- I think it was like Eastland Airport. I can't remember the name of it. Went over to this airport that was having an air show at the time.

He landed, nice landing, taxied, he was a new instrument student of mine, good smart student, and he was following the line. And he was marshalled over to this -- one of -- the manager at the airport was marshalling him over to go into this small area instead of over to the big lot where he would have gone to turn around to takeoff again. He was just going to come, turn back around, and go back.

Well, they marshalled him into this little area, and there was no way to turn a plane around in there. So I don't even know why they pushed him that way, but as he was going, they were like, go that way, go that way. He started following this line. It had kind of been scrubbed up, but he was just like -- he'd never been there before.

And he was just following the taxi line that's still apparent

on the ground, and his wings hits -- clips the side of the fuel tank of jet fuel, and it turns the plane and smashes the spinner. Well the plane's totaled. The jet fuel tank's fine, because he was going like, you know, four miles an hour, you know? But smashes the plane, it was a complete accident. He was looking at the line, he was told to go over there. They terminated the kid.

And, you know, yeah, that's pretty bad that you totaled a plane, I get that. It was pretty stupid not to look to where your wing tip is going, but at the same time, like I flew over and I went to pick him up. So I saw the plane, and I took a 152 in, and then, you know, I turned into the same little alley. Of course I knew where my wings were, so of course I didn't follow that line.

So I pulled in, and I have clearance on both sides, but it's not a whole lot. And he's like, I followed the line, ma'am. I followed the line. And I was just like, I know. But, you know, I guess it just comes with time and experience kind of like getting a new car.

You know, you're parking, you don't necessarily know where the nose is when you have like, a brand new car. You know? You're a student at one point where you have to kind of figure out where everything is around you, and he just wasn't quite there yet. And now, you know, he works in a factory in China, and, you know, for the company. He owes them the next 100 years of his life.

It's just kind of sad that, you know, these kids -- you know,

they show up late or something, or if they're kind of sloppy, they go in for a review board and sent back to China. You've failed twice. Well, if your instructor doesn't like you or says something bad, you fail twice, your review board could go one way or the other.

If you have a good history, they don't care. You know, we don't want to -- we want to turn out students. We want to give, like, students back to China Air, you know, Southern -- a professional pilot. But as a private student, if you screw up two times in private, three times in private, you're much more likely to get terminated than someone who is in commercial.

But then, you know, you could get terminated in commercial too. I mean, these kids are going home.

Q. Do you feel like there's a -- out of the student base, do you have an idea of how many kids, like percentage-wise, get terminated versus --

A. I mean, not a huge percentage. But what I mean is it's easy for it to happen. I don't know that there's a big -- there's a lot of students. And I mean, in the time that I worked there, I don't know, maybe ten students got terminated that I know, or that I heard of.

I mean, only one of my personal students -- and that was for the reason -- I mean, others were terminated for bigger things, some for smaller things like showing up with a wrinkled shirt too many times, or not doing, you know -- not doing well on an exam or

something. And, you know, they don't want to give them the extra time, because then US Aviation has to pay.

Now, I do believe that certain students need to be terminated. Not everybody's a pilot. But that being said, given how easy it is to get terminated, when they have a review board and they're not terminated, the airline is saying, you are safe to continue. They are agreeing that this pilot, by letting them back into their aircraft, they're saying you are a good enough pilot to continue our program.

Because I know that if the student is unsafe, they will send him back. And they didn't send Howard back.

Q. Did -- how does the review board process work? I guess -- so the review board happens, and then US Aviation decides who's going back? Or does the airline decide?

A. What they'll do is, let's say you go in for review board. You'll have a few leaders and a few managers there, and they'll pretty much just interrogate you in a room, and, you know, ask you questions. And then they'll decide among themselves if they feel that they're going to let you continue, or if they're going to -- what they'll do, is they'll send a recommendation for termination.

So they send that to the airlines and say, this is what this student did, A, B, and C. We feel that this student should be -- we're recommending this student be terminated. And typically the airlines will either say, well, give them another chance. Or, you know, and he'll look at the -- the students will be able to like,

share their side of the story too. And so the airline will be like, yeah, give them another chance, or okay, you know, he's done.

So, I mean, they want their students that they send over there -- obviously they're paying for them to be there. They want them to succeed, but if they get a recommendation for termination -- now I don't know the exact percentage, but I believe most of them are honored and the kids are terminated.

And they did not do a recommendation for termination for him.

Q. And when you said student lifestyle is poor, what --

A. They weren't allowed in an Uber, they weren't allowed to do anything. Like, you could easily -- if you showed up late for a lesson and your instructor got mad at you and, you know, sent -- like for example, when my student had an attitude problem with me, he was put on the "no fun list," I quotation -- that's what it was actually called, the no fun list.

That meant no extracurricular activities, you know, no extra trips to, you know, the grocery store, the Asian market, anything like that. Like, you were basically on -- you were grounded. Once you were off the no fun list, you could continue to like, go to the gym, go to basketball, go to church. They still let the students on the no fun go to church I believe, chapel on Sunday.

But basically anything fun that was encompassed in the student lifestyle at all, which was not much at all, they weren't allowed to do. And even for students who were not on the no fun

list, they limited their -- they were only letting them go to the Asian market once every two weeks. They'd have to go grocery shopping for two weeks at a time.

They did improve that after the suicide. Now they're allowed to go, and they approved an Uber. They're allowed to go within 25 miles in an Uber, which that was a huge win for the kids, because, I mean, they weren't allowed to do anything.

I couldn't drive my student anywhere. We'd get to an FBO somewhere, and if we wanted to go run and grab barbeque for 15 minutes, forget it. I would have to leave my student at the FBO, take the crew car myself, go get the food, come back if we had time. But usually you didn't have time because there's another instructor that has a, you know, a blocked time right behind you. So you just, you didn't have time. It was very there, back, fuel, and go.

DR. WILSON: How do you think the student culture impacted the operation, like their ability to learn, and be successful in the program?

MS. FILIOS: It encouraged cheating. And even though the management discouraged cheating -- if you're caught cheating, you're in trouble, you'll get terminated. But it -- the reliance on the brother pilot says, you know, was heavy. And even though -- even management tried to discourage this. This was something that happened.

You know, maybe it was also because there was like -- it was

kind of frowned upon for the check airmen to explain to the new instructors what they were exactly checking. Now, I'm not saying that I need a gouge on your, you know, on your check ride. But I would like to know, how do you teach this? Or how do you expect this student to know that?

Because there are certain ways and techniques that each instructor has learned over the course of their training. And, you know, it's the same thing as, do you put in the ten degrees of flaps before the final approach fix or after? You know?

It just really is an interpretation of what the flyer is, and an interpretation of what you feel is the right way to teach. Everybody has their own style of teaching, and when you go from Part 61 to 141, you really have to change all -- it takes all of the creativity out of teaching, and it really forces you into this box. And you have to teach exactly the way that the check airmen are going to test.

And after you have so many students, you know what the check airmen want. So the students that would get, maybe the instructors that had been there a little longer, those were the really lucky students, because they knew, okay, I know that this check airman takes you out to this fix, they make you hold, they go over here, they make you do this.

And it wasn't even the check airman, because the check airman wouldn't necessarily share this with the instructors. There wasn't really any support among the instructors like that, which

would have been helpful, because then I would have reworked it and made him learn certain things, you know, outside of that.

So he would have still had a fair check ride of course, but at the same time, like, it would just help if we knew exactly what you wanted to see, and the techniques that you were going to fail him on if, you know, if I didn't have that right. So as a new CFI, you're coming in, and your students are more likely to fail when you're a new CFI, because you don't really know what they're looking for.

Well that encourages the Chinese students to talk to each other. Hey, you just had your check ride. Tell me all about it, tell me everything, write down notes. Tell me all, you know -- and so they would say, okay, this person takes you out to this fix, you do a hold here, and then you go and do this over here. And so it encourages them to help each other.

And, you know, everybody helps each other of course. But this was like, sometimes it became actually distracting to teaching because you'd be like, okay, no. I want to teach you. This is the way you do it. And your student would be like, well no, my brother pilot says that the check airman does this. My brother pilot told me this, or the, you know, pilot ahead of me.

So it really is the culture of like, cheating, and helping each other. And as much as you try and discourage it, when you have a program that's so strict, and there's really not a lot of communication between the instructors, there -- you're going to

have that.

MS. LIEDLER: How do you think that they did with the pace of the program? Do you think they were stressed on the pace of it? Or was it a good pace for them learning-wise?

MS. FILIOS: They're incredibly smart, and they can memorize anything. I don't think they had a problem with the pace, so long as they could keep up with the flying. The only thing that truly held -- and it was a fast-paced program. But I mean, I got all the way through my commercial in a year. So I know that, you know, you can -- if you're willing to study, and if you have nothing else to do, and you have no job, you can absolutely keep up.

The problem is when you -- you're doing well, work, work, work, and then all of the sudden, all of the planes are squawked, and you can't fly for two weeks. Or the weather's been bad. Some of these things are uncontrollable. If there's no plane to fly because they're all in maintenance, that's what it is. If you can't fly because the weather's junk, that's what it is.

So it's like, because the pace is so fast, when these, you know, conditions exist where you really have no control over it, that does make it more difficult to catch back up again because you're, you know, on a roll, and then you're halted. And then you're expected to pick right back up where you were at the same pace. So that's difficult.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you feel a pressure because of the pressure that the students are feeling? Did you feel the pressure as an instructor to want to push them through?
A. Oh yeah, definitely. You want them to succeed. I mean, anyone who cared about their student wants them to go back to China --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- and succeed.
Q. Do you think that -- I can't recall if you specifically said this, so I'll ask two questions. One, did you ever feel pressure to push through a student who maybe wasn't the best pilot because you wanted them to succeed will be the first question.
A. Yeah.
Q. Yeah?
A. Yeah. I had a student. My student, Kyle, he was just -- at first he was just terrible. And I just was thinking to myself, this is -- you know, you hate to crush someone's dream. And eventually, you know, if he's really not a pilot, he's not going to succeed.

But you give him a chance, and you work on him, and you do everything you can as an instructor to help the ones that are struggling, even if you don't feel like it's their God given talent. You know, they -- as long as they're showing trainability, I felt the need to push them forward.
Q. Do you think that there were students that should not be

flying that were pushed through the program that were pushed through by other instructors?

A. I can't think of a specific student that truly was bad enough to have been terminated that made it through. Most of them, they're weeded out.

Q. Okay.

A. So I think the best example was my Kyle, because he, you know, the private instructor, it was Nick actually, he had him before me. And he was like, oh my gosh, it's a miracle he got through private. And then I had him in instrument, and he was just like this the whole time. And I was like, this is a nightmare. And Kyle turned it around.

I don't know how he did it. I don't know when his ah-ha moment happened, but it happened. And it also teaches you as an instructor not to give up so quickly on people. You know, I mean, yes, there are people that it just is not your thing. But, you know, also it's just -- it's kind of sad how strict the program is, because I feel like, you know, if I was in such a strict program, there are certain things -- perhaps I wouldn't be a pilot today if no one gave me a chance, you know?

DR. WILSON: Anything else, Courtney?

MS. LIEDLER: Not that I can think of.

DR. WILSON: Thomas?

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. So, I know a lot of flight schools that I've taught at that

the management would have put together a standard procedures for doing maneuvers. Does US Aviation do that? Like, you, to do slow flights, you go power back 1,500 RPM, flaps at 10?

A. Yeah.

Q. So --

A. They do have --

Q. So if --

A. -- standards for that.

Q. -- that's something that you all have, why were the check airmen not holding everybody to that standard on a procedure, how to do it?

A. Well, I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that when you're first introduced in indoc at US Aviation, you are given a binder that thick of new procedures. And, you know, you just got your CFI. You've got -- you know how to teach. It's really hard to like, force yourself to be disciplined enough to be like, okay, I have to hold them exactly to this, you know, this much power at this pitch.

I mean, when you feel like you're an instructor, you're a licensed professional, you know how to teach a certain -- like, for example, pattern work. You know, I don't necessarily teach on RPM. You know, I'll teach on pitch and power, and I'll teach a certain flap setting at a given airspeed, but I have them look at their airspeed indicator, and make judgements based on -- because it's a visual approach. You know, and I want to teach them

airmanship with visuals.

Well, it's kind of hard, because US Aviation, they want to standardize everybody, right? Well, then you're held to these specific standards that may not be in, you know, someone who's straight out of Part 61, the best way to teach it. You're teaching them more like a robot, and less of the stick and rudder airmanship that maybe they ought to teach.

So a lot of times, like I said, how you lose the artistry is as an instructor. You come in as a new CFI, if you have any experience anywhere else, you're not going to have the exact same standards. And although it might be, you know, check ride quality for a DPE anywhere, and anyone would say, yeah, that was perfect, if it's not exactly the way -- exactly the standard that is given to you when you're first hired, yeah, it'd difficult to pass.

So you learn those standards. I mean, yes, you're given that book when you first get on, but it's hard to implement that into your teaching after you've been teaching a certain way for months, or, I mean, that's how you were trained. So it's just hard to conform from one flight school to another, especially if you were taught a certain way, and you know that that's a great way to teach, and they're going to do well if you just teach them this way.

You have to transform everything into the US Aviation standard, you know? So it just takes time to convert your teaching style. And --

Q. Yeah. And I understand that. But I guess where I was going with that question, was -- is do you feel that any of the check airmen aren't abiding by that standard procedures?
A. No. I think they're probably abiding strictly to those --
Q. Oh.
A. -- procedures. And I think it's the new CFIs that struggle. And I think maybe they're abiding by that so strictly that they're more strict than a DPE would be.
Q. Okay. And then, we've heard mention that occasionally a student will sit in the backseat of an aircraft to observe a fellow student. What's the procedure for doing that as far as ensuring that it's safe to go out and do so?
A. I mean, if we had -- if we wanted an observer, we'd just add them into the weight and balance.
Q. Okay. You don't have to get approval from management or anything?
A. No.
Q. No? All right.
A. No. We weren't allowed more than one, he had to be a current student in the program.
Q. All right.
A. Yeah, I think the private could come along with instrument. Well, I mean, obviously we couldn't go with private because they were 152s, but we would bring observation students all of the time. I thought it was a great thing to have a student be able to

come and observe, and, you know, really, most of the students are too tired by the time they get done. They're exhausted. They just want to go home.

But if they have a buddy, I have actually a great picture with Howard and his buddy, Max, who was in the back. Let's see. I know you guys probably aren't interested in this, but there it is. This was -- that was Howard, and there's Max in the back. And this was just kind of like -- that was the, you know, typical attitude for the students when we'd fly together. Just have a good old -- good time, and learn, and it was just fun. Yeah, I had good kids.

MR. GOOD: Well, that's all I had.

DR. WILSON: Anything else?

MS. LIEDLER: Anything else that we should be asking about that we haven't?

MS. FILIOS: I took a few notes. That's pretty much it, the things that I wanted to show you, and just changes that I wanted to see made. And, you know, I just -- I care about the flight school. You know, they were there for me when I got investigated by the FAA over a medical issue. I had a letter of investigation out, and it took forever for me to get my first class medical.

And, you know, they were there for me. And they were like, she's a good instructor, and we want to see her continue to be here. And after that was all cleared out, it was like, I understand the stress and pressure of having something go wrong

that maybe you didn't have any control over, or maybe was unexpected.

And, you know, they were there for me, and I don't want to -- I'm not sitting here to try to tell you that they're not a good flight school, or they're not safe. You know, I feel like they try. But also, two good pilots died, and I want you guys to find out why. Like I really want you guys to find out why.

But, you know, yeah, I know that as far as my opinion goes, if I could send ten emails to Rick Sanchez, and it just falls on deaf ears. I can't make them change the maintenance, you know, collaboration. I can't force the maintenance and the flight staff to get closer, but you guys could. So that's about it.

DR. WILSON: I do have one question that just popped up in my head. When you talked to Howard after he flew with Francesca, did he mention anything about her arm?

MS. FILIOS: She had just gotten out of a cast.

DR. WILSON: Right.

MS. FILIOS: But no. He didn't say anything.

DR. WILSON: He didn't say she had any difficulties with the controls? Or shutting --

MS. FILIOS: No.

DR. WILSON: -- the door to the airplane or anything like that?

MS. FILIOS: He did not mention that.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: No. But I know that he wouldn't have overpowered her on the plane. Knowing that student, that's not something he would have done. He would have trusted her to fix it. And I do believe like, if it was a dangerous situation, he would have put his hands back and let her take care of it.

DR. WILSON: Well we really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today. What you shared was very helpful to our investigation, and I'm very sorry for the loss of your friend.

MS. FILIOS: Thank you.

DR. WILSON: And if you think of anything, you've got Courtney's and my contact information. So please --

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

DR. WILSON: -- don't hesitate to reach out to us. It could be a month from now, six months from now. We would, you know, welcome any additional input that you have to our investigation.

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Because that is our goal, to prevent something like this from happening again.

MS. FILIOS: Okay. And I know you said it before, but like, you know, the things that I tell you about the planes and stuff, like you asked if I had ever flown a plane that had a maintenance issue, is -- do I have to like, be concerned about --

DR. WILSON: No.

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

DR. WILSON: No.

MS. FILIOS: Okay. I'm just like --

DR. WILSON: No. And we're trying to understand. You know, again, we don't -- we're not looking to place blame or do anything from the enforcement side. We're kind of -- we're trying to understand the bigger picture of how -- what is the operation like? What are the pilots feeling? What are the students feeling?

MS. FILIOS: Yeah.

DR. WILSON: In order to understand any contribution that could -- made to the accident.

MS. FILIOS: Right. Sure. All right. Well I'll give you Kelly's phone number too, the instructor that got fired for writing up the carbon monoxide detectors.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: I think you'll find her attitude is a little more aggressive than mine towards them.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: She might fall into the category of a disgruntled employee, which I am not. I had a great experience there for the most part. But I'll give you her information because at least she can tell you her story.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MS. FILIOS: I'll write it down.

DR. WILSON: Thank you.

MS. LIEDLER: Yeah, if you could -- like I said, forward

anything that you think would be helpful to us.

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: And it -- you can it include in the email, her contact information --

MS. FILIOS: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: -- as well, and we'll reach out.

MS. FILIOS: Okay. Great.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you.

MS. FILIOS: Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

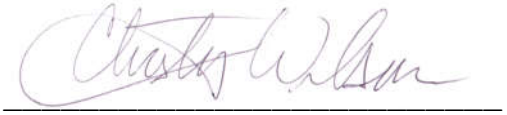
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Catherine Filios
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Irving, Texas
DATE:	September 18, 2019

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

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA038
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: SHANE ALLEY

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(4:25 p.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: My name is Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: My name is Courtney Liedler. I am the investigator in charge for this accident for the NTSB.

MR. PITTACORA: My name is Darren Pittacora, FAA, maintenance inspector.

MR. GOOD: Thomas Good, FAA, FAA ops inspector.

INTERVIEW OF SHANE ALLEY

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And if you could please state your name as well?

A. Yes. I am Shane Alley, and I'm the -- I guess, it's just the manager of Denton.

Q. Manager of maintenance?

A. I believe, I believe, yes, of maintenance.

Q. Okay.

A. Repair station manager is what I believe my title is.

Q. Okay, great. And as the repair station manager what are your duties and responsibilities?

A. My duties are to manage the people, the mechanics, and we do have some admin, a couple admin women that I kind of guide them on what we need done paperwork wise. So my job is to make sure that everyone is doing what they're supposed to be doing and working on the airplanes they're supposed to be working on to make sure they

have whatever they need to do it, give them guidance if they have questions, you know, technical questions or when it comes to time off I'm the one they come to if they want time off, that kind of stuff.

MS. LIEDLER: Are you a direct employee of USAG?

MR. ALLEY: Yes.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. How long have you been a repair station manager?

A. I started about 2½ months ago; it was about the same time when they made all the other changes. I'm sure you're aware of the other changes they made. Dave Anderson, they made him the director of maintenance. I was just a mechanic and they just moved me up, they needed somebody, you know, to take over in the changes and I stepped up to the job and so that's how I got there.

MR. PITTACORA: You spent 2½ months, is that just as a manager or as an employee?

MR. ALLEY: As a manager.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MR. ALLEY: I've been an employee since August 8th of last year so one year.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And give us a brief description of your aviation maintenance history until today?

A. Okay. Well, I got my A&P license in 1990 and right out of

school I started working for Delta Airlines. I worked in Atlanta, Georgia, overhaul, aircraft overhaul. I did that. I also did line maintenance for Delta.

Q. Okay.

A. And so I've worked on all the big ones. Then after Delta filed for bankruptcy back in mid-2000s I left and went into other avenues, I started working on construction equipment, found out I could do just as well working on other things and so I did that for a while, aerial equipment, working on boom lifts and scissor lifts, that kind of stuff, construction equipment basically.

And then my wife got a job out in Texas and I decided I wanted to get -- because I do have a pilot license, I have two airplanes of my own, and I thought, well, I want to get back into just something to do to work on airplanes again because I always enjoyed it when I was at Delta. I thought, well, I'll get back into it where it's, you know, something smaller, it's something more like what I do, which is, you know, work on my small airplanes at home, so that's how I got back into it when we moved out here a year ago.

And started out as a mechanic and just, you know, a couple months ago opportunity arised to, you know, to get into management and that's how I got where I'm at.

MS. LIEDLER: How do you like working for USAG?

MR. ALLEY: Well, I like it. We, I have a good group of people; my team is doing really well. They all get along really

well; they're a great group of people. I like the owners, they all -- they seem like they want to make things well here and they treat me right so --

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. How many direct reports do you have if you recall the matter, how many -- does anyone --

A. Mechanics?

Q. Yeah.

A. There's 15, I believe there's 15.

Q. Okay.

A. There are two leads, there's 10 between them, there's two leads so I'm the manager and we do have two leads.

Q. Okay. Are the two leads a part of that 15 or --

A. No, I'd say there are probably 17 includes them.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. And do the leads do maintenance work as well?

A. Yes, they do.

Q. Okay. Do you still do maintenance work or are you just --

A. No, I mainly just assist --

Q. Okay.

A. -- with my experience with Delta as long as I've had it. I just -- a lot of things that they're not sure how to do something, I can get in there and explain to them.

Q. Okay.

A. You know, how, you know, as far as, you know, they've got to question on guidance, I just kind of help them out with the right way or, you know, if they're not sure about a troubleshooting issue I explain to them. You know, if they have -- if they've got a question with the manual on what it's saying I kind of point it out, here's what they're wanting you to do, this is how.
Q. Okay.
A. You know, especially with troubleshooting with electrical, a lot of them right out of school, they just don't really have it yet and I explain the steps and what the manual shows and will say, here's what you're actually looking for and this is why it wants you to do it this way. I just kind of interpret for them so they're a little bit more efficient.
Q. Okay. Is the guidance, is it -- do you have it on an iPad or something or do you have a manual?
A. Oh, they have the manual.
Q. Okay.
A. And if they're not -- they don't understand what they're reading then I go out there and I point out what it is --
Q. Okay.
A. -- that they're -- what they're doing.
Q. But they're looking at a paper copy?
A. Yes.
Q. All right. What's the turnover like of your group?
A. When I started a year ago it was pretty high. I mean, it

was, it was really high and I heard that it was like really, really high before I started. And after -- it seems like it kind of settled down after Dave Anderson kind of took over because everybody could tell that he, that he has the right vision for what the place needs to do and then people kind of decided they were going to start staying after that.

But it was a pretty high turnover and I've only got a year here and I saw a high turnover rate.

Q. Okay.

A. But I -- there hasn't really been one since, you know, the changes in management.

DR. WILSON: Do you want to jump in?

MS. LIEDLER: Do you -- what was the high turnover due to, do you know?

MR. ALLEY: The previous management it was just they kind of -- they didn't really -- they just didn't get along with some of -- you know, the mechanics and the one manager that they had just kind of -- he would kind of fly off the handle and yell at people for things that he didn't like, and a lot of people said, well, I'm not sticking around here and I'm moving on.

MR. PITTACORA: And who was that?

MR. ALLEY: That would have been Fred Moore.

MR. PITTACORA: I thought so. Well, no, not because I've witnessed anything. Just things (indiscernible).

MR. ALLEY: Well, I mean, it's a well-known thing for a lot

of years that he's ran off people. I mean, it's no secret that -- and that was the reason why they made changes to management to -- just so people wouldn't get run off anymore.

MS. LIEDLER: Did you work under Fred Moore for any period of time while you were here?

MR. ALLEY: I did.

MS. LIEDLER: Was his -- so was the culture of management prior, under him, was it just the tone which he used or was it the culture for maintenance practices?

MR. ALLEY: No, it was just, it was just him personally would have bad days it seemed like and something would just set him off and he would come across the hangar yelling about any little thing that he saw or didn't like and it could have been something different each time.

It could have been some, you know, somebody didn't put an engine towel on the rack right or something and all of a sudden it was a firing offense, that kind of thing. It was just minor little things that people were like, what, what's the big deal, I don't see it. You know, it was just little things and, anyway and a lot of the mechanics were like, I'm not going to do this, I'm going to go somewhere else where I don't have to listen to that.

But it was, it was all like just little things that would just set him off. I mean, he was fine if you'd go over there and ask him a question about something but he'd come over and see you doing something and you didn't ask him beforehand then he would

just get all mad about whatever it was. I mean, it could have been anything.

MS. LIEDLER: But there was never any unsafe maintenance practices that he would do?

MR. ALLEY: No, nothing like that, it was just if it wasn't done the way he thought it should have been done then he would, you know, he would make a big deal about it.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. So we're here to talk about 6 Alpha Gulf obviously. So tell me about your interaction with the airplane and the mechanics that worked on that airplane?

A. Yeah. Well, I know it was in about a month before for engine changes and so I do that it had engine changes done on it, had new propellers, new engines. And other than that it had gone out and it was flying fine. I don't know a lot about right before then because I was out for surgery that whole week before that weekend so I was gone that whole week.

I did come in for about 3 hours that Friday and I was told by my one lead, John Tano (ph.), and he said, hey, this airplane, it was just squawked for an engine dying. I said, okay. He said, but it was squawked for that a couple days ago and I took it out and ran it and I didn't find nothing wrong, everything was right. And he said, what do you think? And I said, well, all I know is it doesn't go back out until we find -- we've got to find

something. I said, let's figure out what's going on. I said, even if it's as small as turning up the idle, but we've got to find something. Something's going on; we've got to find out what it is.

And then after that I left because I still wasn't feeling good after my surgery, and that was the extent of my interaction with that airplane is, I was told what they -- you know, what had -- what they had done. And I said, well, let's make sure we find something. Something's going on, we need to find out what's going on, you know. And I said it could be as little as turning up the idle, but, you know, we need to find out what's up, but we don't let it go out without doing something to it. We need to find out what it is.

And that was, that was pretty much it for that. I don't think we'd had any other issues with that, with that airplane.

Q. Do you recall which engine he was talking about?

A. It was the left.

Q. Left engine, okay. And did he tell you what he did prior to taking it out and running it or he just ran it to see if he could replicate?

A. I don't know the details. He did tell me that it was already in.

Q. Okay.

A. And he said that he went out and ran it and could not duplicate anything. He said it ran fine. Couldn't, he did all

the normal -- all the steps that we do to check the operation of an engine and he said he couldn't -- he said it ran fine for him on the ground. I said, well, since they've wrote it up again, I said, this time we've got, we've got to find something. I said, we can't-- you know, that won't work this time, we've got to find something.

Q. So you said he did all the steps that you would do to check for the operation of an engine?

A. Well, yeah, I mean, he went out and he ran, he ran the engine, did a mag drop check like the book tells you to do and checked the mag drop, checked the idle, checked the mixturize, checked the static rpm. He made sure that the engine performed per the parameters of the manual is what he did.

He never could duplicate the engine dying on him; it idled at the rpm they're specified to idle at.

Q. Okay. And that is he's looking at a checklist when he's doing that?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Is there something that gets signed off that says I did this check or --

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. And then what happens with that documentation?

A. It gets entered into the logbooks.

Q. Okay. And after the accident did you see -- did you look at the maintenance logbooks and see that that --
A. No, I did not see them.
Q. Okay.
A. Like I said, I was only here for a brief time that one day because of my surgery and so I wasn't here over that weekend. I've been told that it was, that it was and there were some other things, I think, maybe a gear pump or something like that that it was also -- you know, there was a couple items that needed addressed and I know that they had worked on it over the weekend.
Q. Okay.
A. There was a weekend -- we had a weekend crew that also works through the weekend.
Q. But you didn't since the accident look at -- go back and look at any of the logbooks to see (indiscernible)?
A. No, I didn't have any access to the logbooks.
Q. Okay.
A. No.
Q. Have you talked to anybody about what maintenance was performed on it over the weekend prior to releasing it back to service?
A. I heard people talk about what they -- you know, what they did but, I mean, I don't remember who was doing what. I know that there was a gear pump that was changed.
Q. All right.

A. A power pack that was changed. I don't even know who did -- I'm not sure who it was that did that.
Q. Okay.
A. Like I said, I didn't see the logbook so I don't, I don't know who signed it off or did it.
Q. Yeah, okay. I didn't know whether you talked to Tano or any of the other mechanics that might have said, oh, this is what I did to the engine before releasing it back?
A. Well, he didn't, he didn't give me like exactly what he did.
Q. Okay.
A. You know, he just, he just said it had been looked at.
Q. Okay. How was it determined who will do what maintenance on an aircraft? How is it -- how is the worked divided up?
A. Just whoever's -- whoever is next in line for -- you know, you finish an airplane and we have another one ready to be worked on and that's who goes and gets the next airplane. Now we also -- you know, if we have people with more experience, if it's a troubleshooting issue, I'll put somebody that -- with more experience just because they have more -- you know, they're going to be a little bit better at a troubleshooting problem when you have a problem that you're not really sure what it is and it takes a little while to, you know, troubleshoot what the issue is.
Q. Okay. So as an A&P, you know, you've got an engine that comes in a second time reported for quitting, what things are going through your mind, what would go through your mind as

possible reasons that an engine might do this?
A. Well, it could be a lot of things so there's no way, I mean, until you --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- until you actually, you know, open it up and run the engine and listen and feel what it's doing --
Q. Okay.
A. -- there's no way that -- there's no way to make a guess, oh, it could be this, you know.
Q. Okay.
A. It could be a lot of things.
Q. Well, are you looking at electrical, fuel, I mean, what are sort of the systems that you're looking at that -- what would you think to look at? Is there something you would think to look at first and then go do it?
A. No, not really.
Q. Okay.
A. I would go out and do a run and see, and see where -- what seems not right. I mean, if you're doing a mag drop check and you do have a high drop on one then, okay, then you know you've got an issue with maybe a mag or a sparkplug, something like that.
Q. Right.
A. But until you run it you just don't know.
Q. Yeah.
A. I mean, there's no way you could guess until you go out and

run it.
Q. Sure. So he runs it and then let's say you ran it and everything's fine, what -- in your -- so you're telling Tano that, you know, we need to find out what's going on?
A. Well, yeah.
Q. So what would you expect the next steps to be?
A. The next steps to be is let's start, let's start figuring out why it's dying.
Q. Right.
A. I mean, is the idle rpm too low, would be my question is, maybe, maybe it's a little bit too low. That's really the main reason why an engine would die at idle is maybe the idle is too low.
Q. Okay.
A. If it's running smooth then it's just idling too low, it can die.
Q. Okay. And if that is adjusted then what are the steps, would you do another engine run-up?
A. Oh, yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. You would run it again after you make an adjustment.
Q. Okay. Would you stop there?
A. Would you --
Q. I mean, you adjust the idle rpm and you run it again and still have issues?

A. Well, you would have to go through the whole check again --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- and see what, see what you get and go from there.
Q. I guess what I'm getting at is we obviously had all that happen and then we still had an engine failure. So do you think that they went far enough or should they have gone farther? I'm trying to understand what the thought process should be for (indiscernible)?
A. Well, that's -- I can't, I can't answer that because I don't know exactly what they did. I mean, if -- and if you're asking if I would have done something different, I don't, I don't know if I would have. I mean, I would have gone by what the manual tells me to do and what I have in front of me to go by.
Q. Okay.
A. And then also my past experiences to -- by feel. I mean, a lot of it's just by feel and sound. If you feel or sound that something, you know, you could do something different by what you hear and, you know, and feel on the engine to know if there's something else, but other than that you have to just go by what documentation you have in front of you for doing your engine run and what numbers you're looking for.
Q. How common would you say it was for, you know, a maintenance item to be marked as, you know, cannot replicate, is that pretty common when things --
A. No.

Q. No?
A. It's not common.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, it would happen every once in a while. Sometimes we just couldn't replicate what the pilot had wrote down that they -- what they saw or thought they saw or felt and we couldn't duplicate it.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, I wouldn't say it never happens but it's not real common.
Q. Okay.
A. It's not something that happened on a regular basis.
Q. What, when would you do an acceptance flight after maintenance work is done?
A. When would we do an acceptance flight?
Q. Yeah.
A. Whenever the manual tells you that you need to do a flight.
Q. Okay. So it's based on the manual?
A. Yeah.
Q. Is it related to the issue that this airplane was having was -- do you know if the flight was required?
A. I do not believe so, I didn't -- I don't believe so, I don't believe it was for this.
Q. Okay. After maintenance work is done so if something like this, does the supervisor sign off on the work or does the

mechanic --
A. No, it's --
Q. -- just sign it off then it's done?
A. -- the mechanic just signs it off and then it just gets entered, we have a QA person that just makes sure all the paperwork is right and then they just transfer the information over to the logbook.
Q. Okay. Is there any guidance that you had, let's go before the accident, for repetitive issues, if an item continues to get swapped and was there any guidance from the company of additional testing that you should do?
A. No, there really wasn't it's just, you know, just what -- we just knew that there was something that had, you know, we had to keep digging until we find, you know, find the problem.
Q. What about since the accident is there any additional guidance that's been given on repetitive maintenance issues?
A. If it's repetitive we do have a setup to where a manager and/or the inspector needs to look at the paperwork before it gets closed out to make sure that what is put down is -- you know, make sure that everything was done that could have been done.
Q. Do you -- did you ever feel like there was pressure on the mechanics to get an airplane back out on the line?
A. No, they didn't really pressure us too much. I mean, they would let us know that, you know, that they were short airplanes but there was no undue pressure to tell us, you know, that we have

to work faster or we have to do anything like that. They would just let us know, you know, when they were low on airplanes but not really by pressure it was more of an informational, hey we're, you know, we're short this -- these particular airplanes, you know, maybe concentrate on these over others.

Q. Was that usually communicated just to the supervisor level or the lead or do you think that filtered down to the mechanics also?

A. It would filter down to the mechanics, yeah.

Q. Would you ever be told like, hey, we've got a flight at 1:00, you've got this airplane do you think we can get that back in time for, you know, a 1:00 flight or a flight at some certain time?

A. Yeah, they would ask if it would be ready.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Did you -- was that you?

MR. GOOD. Yeah. I was going to ask who was they would ask?

MR. ALLEY: It would be the scheduler, schedulers here would call and ask if we'd have airplanes ready and I would just tell them it could be possibly but I don't know or if it -- if there's no way it was going to be ready I would so, no, it won't be ready.

MR. GOOD: I was just curious, I didn't know if it was CFIs coming over there or --

MR. ALLEY: No, they weren't -- they never would, they never did go over there.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you feel that, you know, in those instances whenever they would take an airplane out for a flight, did you ever feel there

was repercussions for not getting maintenance completed or, you know --

A. No, I never have personally anyways.

Q. Okay. Besides the schedulers calling you about airplanes did you ever get phone calls from other management about what's going on with airplanes being worked on?

A. No, I mean my boss would ask me but, I mean, that's kind of his job to know --

Q. Right.

A. -- you know, where things are at so --

Q. But not somebody from flight ups going like, hey, where are these airplanes, what's going on?

A. No.

DR. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. Who is your boss?

MR. ALLEY: Dave Anderson.

MS. LIEDLER: You report directly to Dave?

MR. ALLEY: Yes.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. You mentioned that, you know, maybe some of the mechanics on your team might have less experience, all required to have A&Ps?

A. All -- yes.

Q. For some of them would this be their first job?

A. Right.

Q. Were they all qualified to work on all your planes?

A. No, you would always be put with someone else and go under training before you --
Q. Okay. So when they get hired?
A. Yeah, yeah.
Q. Right.
A. When they were hired they would be in training process until --
Q. Like an on-the-job training?
A. Yes.
MR. PITTACORA:
Q. How long does that typically take?
A. It's different for different people it just depends on how well they -- you know, how much past experience they've had.
Q. Is the training make and model specific or --
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Yep.
Q. So you'll get training for 172s and Seneca, whatever?
A. 152s, Seneca, yeah.
MR. PITTACORA: Okay.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. How many mechanics are qualified to work on the Seneca?
A. Well, at this point all of them. We have probably three guys now that have not worked on them, the rest of them are qualified.
Q. Okay. So 17, 14ish range?

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Are you qualified to work on the Seneca?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And for the training is it -- what does a new hire training entail, is there a ground school?
A. It's OJT so they --
Q. They hold the OJT?
A. -- they work with another mechanic and they -- we have OJT forms that we fill out whenever they've done anything new then the mechanic will fill out the form that this person has done, you know, he watches him or helps him do a certain task and then we put it into their training forms.
Q. Okay. I don't want to make an assumption so I'll just ask, so there's no ground school or classroom training where they go over aircraft systems?
A. No, we haven't done anything like that.
Q. Okay. Do you think that OJT is enough to get the mechanics where they need to be to work on the aircraft?
A. It seems to be because most -- I mean, when you go to school for your A&P, I mean, you're getting enough classroom training their and so when you come out to work at, you know, at a place like this or anywhere else, just the one-on-one OJT with somebody that knows more about it, in my opinion, is enough to get them up to speed, you know, because it's one-on-one training which is better than classroom training anyway, that's what I think.

DR. WILSON: Okay. I probably have more questions but I'm going to see if Courtney has any while I look over my notes.

MR. ALLEY: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Thanks.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you said all of the mechanics out there have A&P so everyone signs off under their own A&P certificate?

A. No, well, we are a repair station so they sign the work off in corridor and then we have a QA person that transfers over to the logbook which I believe is under the repair station certificate at that point.

Q. Okay. But you don't have any apprentice that are -- you don't have anyone who's working on their A&P and who's working to get, you know, apprentice? They all have -- they all come to you with their certificate in hand, they've already done it, and they have their A&P certificate that they can sign off paperwork with?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. We do have one apprentice that does not have an A&P but he's never works on anything by himself, he's always with a mechanic. So he's -- since we are a repair station we do -- we can have apprentices that are non-A&P and we do have them.

Q. Okay, yeah, right. Okay. I think you may have answered this but you mentioned that when John Tano had spoken to you while you were here for a brief period of time, on that Friday before the

accident, he had mentioned the engine dying prior and it returns for 6:00 and you said, you know, hey, well, you've got to find something even if it's idle adjustment, what led you to say even if it's an idle adjustment? What to that -- what led you down that thought?

A. Just from past experiences that an engine that dies typically is idling too low rpm and that's why it would die at idle.

Q. Okay. When did you return back after you said you returned back to work but it wasn't -- was it after the accident you said?

A. Yes.

Q. While you were gone who becomes the manager, who was the manager while you were gone?

A. John Tano was the next in line so he was here as the lead.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. I don't have anything else right now, Darren?

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah, I've got some questions.

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. When you guys get new mechanics is there any kind of paperwork training or read training or anything along those lines, here's how you fill out our paperwork when returning an aircraft?

A. Yes, we, the first day he goes with -- our chief inspector does go through them with how to do all that stuff, corridor, ATP, all the sign offs and show them where the manuals are, how to go through the manuals. Yeah, that's a sign off on the first day they do that.

Q. What, and I know you're not going to know this exactly, but if you had to take a ballpark stab at it, what do you think the average experience level is of the mechanics that you guys have?
A. Right now --
Q. Like I said it doesn't have to be exact just get close.
A. Yeah, I'd say probably average would be 2 years --
Q. Okay.
A. -- maybe.
Q. And when it comes to piston engine aircraft how much experience do you personally have and how much -- I guess the 2 years probably answer that question as well, because you guys are working on the engines. You guys don't run any kind of specialty guys where, hey, it's an engine problem go see him?
A. No, we don't have any, right, there are no specialists.
Q. Okay. And then piston engines for you is it since you've been here?
A. No, well it's --
Q. Rough piston stuff doesn't count, I'm talking, you know, 520s whatever --
A. I would say since I've been here, yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, if you're not -- If you're only going to count the Lycoming then that's going --
Q. Lycoming and Continentals?
A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.
A. But I have no experience in Rotax either.
Q. Oh, okay, when you said support --
A. I don't have it.
Q. -- so I thought.
A. Yeah, but they're not Rotax.
Q. Oh, okay, great.
A. They're Jabiru, so --
MR. GOOD: I've never touched one of them.
MR. ALLEY: It's more like a Lycoming.
BY MR. PITTACORA:
Q. Oh, I do know what that is. Okay, yeah, yeah.
A. Yeah.
Q. All right. So when we go back to, prior to the accident, and we were -- there was the write-up for the gear. I'm sorry. There was a left engine that died on landing on the 24th and Mr. Tano, that was the write-up that he went, ran the engine --
A. Right.
Q. -- couldn't duplicate it and returned it to service, did -- when you guys discussed the problem with the engine and the gear, was he referring to -- when you told him, we're not going to send it out unless we find a problem and fix it --
A. Right.
Q. -- was that for the first write-up or the second time that it got written, was that the gear write-up?

A. No, it was the first write-up.
Q. It was the first write-up?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Were you aware that it had failed the second time?
A. No, I was not even aware.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm sorry; I was -- when he told me it had gotten wrote up for the second time. So, yes, I was aware that it got wrote up again.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, so but that's when -- that was on, I think, on a Friday when I was made aware and that was when I said, that was when I said all right you --
Q. Yeah, that all was wrote down, correct?
A. Yeah, right, that's when I said, okay, so you've said that you didn't find nothing and now we got it wrote up again. I said, something's going on we need to find something, there's something going on.
Q. And did you follow up with that after, when you returned? How --
A. Well, that was, that was that Friday.
Q. And then you went in for surgery or --
A. And the accident, the accident -- no.
Q. Did --
A. I was gone for surgery for 4 days and then so that happened

while I was gone, the first one.
Q. Okay.
A. The first write-up. So I come in for Friday morning just because I was starting to feel a little bit better and I thought, well, I'll come in for a couple hours just to kind of, you know, see how things are going and he kind of told me -- he told me about that and that's when I said, all right, well, we've got -- you know, let's figure something out, there's something going on here we need to find out. You know, we can't, we can't just say, you know, can't duplicate we've got to -- something's going on it's done it twice now.
Q. Did, so when it got written up the second time and signed off did -- well, it didn't get signed off, that was part of the -- anyway --
A. Well, yeah, so that was -- so I was there for a little bit that Friday and then I was gone all weekend. So then what happened after that I don't even know. I don't know -- even know what happened.
Q. Did you follow up?
A. Because I haven't seen --
Q. Did Mr. Tano give you an update or did you ask for a follow-up, hey --
A. Well --
Q. -- what did you guys ever find with this?
A. No, because he was -- Friday was his last day too so he

wasn't here over the weekend either.
Q. Okay.
A. So I don't know that he would have known what they did. So this was all on Friday and the accident was on Sunday. So that same week.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So John Tano was not here, you were not here, how did it -- what's the process for it to get released back into service after?
A. All right, well, there's a weekend crew.
Q. Okay.
A. So that's Augusta Guerrero is the weekend lead and then we have weekend guys that work during the weekend.
Q. Okay. So Augusta is another -- so Tano and Augusta are the two leads?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So Augusta would have been the person to release it back into -- how --
A. Yes.
Q. -- actually tell me how -- so an airplane comes in with a squawk. Who is able to release it back to service?
A. So I can release one, John Tano can release one, Brian Connor can release one and Augusta can release one.
Q. And who's Brian Connor?
A. He's our QA, he's our QA. He just does paperwork. He does the final inspections on 100 hour inspections and then he's the

one that goes through the paperwork. He's the one that transfers everything from corridor to the logbook is what he's doing and then he closes out the work order.

Q. So he's the mechanic as well?

A. No, yes, he is but he doesn't -- he's strictly in the office. He's just the -- he's our QA.

Q. Okay. So give that list to me again, you can sign off?

A. Yes.

Q. Tano?

A. Brian Connor.

Q. Connor and Augusta?

A. Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay, thank you. Okay, Darren?

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. Okay. So we talked about the repetitive write-ups?

A. Yes.

Q. And the process that you guys have, is that the -- is that a new process since the accident?

A. Well, see, I just started as a manager so I don't know what if there, you know, I was a mechanic before then so I'm not going to -- I can't really say what the process was, if there was, I just know what we're doing right now.

Q. Okay.

A. You know, so it's -- I don't know that there was. I do -- I know what our process is now that if it's something that's been

wrote up before in the last 50 hours they consider it an elevated squawk and that means not just anybody can do the work, that has to -- you know, anybody can do the work but it has to be one of us to actually do the -- you know, make sure that what they did is sufficient and not just, you know, we have to look it over.

Q. Okay.

A. We're just a second set of eyes just going to look it over to say does this make sense, is that going to solve the problem of what is -- you know, what they've been finding is that, is that going to --

Q. When an airplane gets squawked -- I don't know if it's still the process but it looks like the pilots call dispatch, dispatch at that point makes a squawk?

A. They put it in Flight Schedule Pro right. They put it in.

Q. How is that delivered to you all on the floor?

A. All right. So we have access to Flight Schedule Pro so when we see it that would be me or the leads or Brian would see that there, we have a work order, a work package made for that squawk.

Q. Okay.

A. So that way we have a work order opened up on that and that's what -- that the work package is what we hand out to the mechanic to work, work that out.

Q. Is there anything to alert or highlight that this is a repetitive problem or this is a problem that's a little deeper than what you guys normally see?

A. Well, there is, there is now. We now go through, on Flight Schedule Pro you can see the history, you can look at the past squawks and so we're looking through to see if.
Q. Was that in place prior to the accident?
A. I don't, I don't know, because like I said, I just -- you know, I just started as a manager not too long before that.
Q. That's --
A. I personally wasn't but then I wasn't really -- you know, I wasn't. I don't think there was. I don't, I don't know for sure that there was. I mean, others might have done it.
Q. Okay.
A. But I'm not sure. I can't say for sure but I do know what we're doing now.
Q. So you could have gotten a repetitive in and without looking at --
A. Flight Schedule Pro.
Q. Yeah. You really --
A. You wouldn't know if it was.
Q. -- unless you worked the prior --
A. Unless you knew, right.
Q. Okay.
A. Unless you knew before. I mean, it probably was not common practice to look through to see, we just open a work order and take care of it.
Q. Okay.

A. I know now that, you know, we do go through it and see if it is, you know, related to anything in the last 50 hours to see if there's something that, you know, that it's like had a problem before.

MR. PITTACORA: Come back to me.

DR. WILSON: Thomas?

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. Is there or are you aware of any way for instructors or other personnel to send you all photos or videos of abnormalities that are going on with the aircraft?

A. Is there a way for that? We don't have.

Q. Like if in flight only --

A. We have a flip phone but --

Q. -- the (indiscernible) that are flaring, but you get another round and it stops, is there a way for them to like take a photo of it and send it to you all or do they have to take their phone and show you?

A. They would take their phone. They would have to take their phone and show us.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. We have a phone that they, you know, that they call out, you know, if they, you know, have got a question about something, they need fuel removed because of overweight or something like that, then we have a flip phone. But I don't think it; I don't think it's got any pictures. They don't send pictures

or nothing like that to that phone.
Q. Okay. Is there like a general maintenance email like maintenance at USAG.com, is there a general email like that where they could send it?
A. Not that I'm aware of.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, not on the maintenance side there's not.
Q. Okay.
MR. PITTACORA: Were you done, Thomas?
MR. GOOD: Yeah, that's it. That's all I've got so far.
MR. PITTACORA: Okay.
BY MR. PITTACORA:
Q. So I know at this point the triage program or however you guys did it has been stopped?
A. Yes.
Q. Prior to the accident regarding the triage system, when a pilot would call you guys with a triage issue, whose responsibility is it to make sure that that item gets written up, is it the pilot, is it the mechanic, is it the manager?
A. It was the mechanic that was put on triage for that week. We would put a different person each week so it wasn't the same person every week because for the most part they don't like doing it just because they get calls, you know, throughout the day and kind of get pulled off on what they were working on.
So it's the mechanic's responsibility to go out and whatever

they do they come back and at the time we had a triage, logbook sheet that would get filled out that was with the logbook but it wasn't into the logbook it was a sheet.
Q. Did the information on the triage sheet get transferred to the logbook at some point?
A. No, it stayed on the sheet.
Q. Where did those sheets go when you filled one out?
A. It stayed in the logbook in the whole packet.
Q. Okay, okay.
A. It wasn't in the logbook but it was with the logbook. It was a folder.
Q. Was there anybody, was there anybody responsible, like you said a second set of eyes or just a secondary check to make sure that when they're returning this aircraft to service via the triage program that somebody at least comes and checks to make sure it was, in fact, written up however it's required?
A. No, there wasn't, there was not a second set of eyes on that particular.
Q. So I could pick up the phone and say, hey, my engine just quit on me or (indiscernible), it doesn't matter what it is?
A. Right.
Q. And they call you guys; you guys run out there, look at whatever the problem is and then act accordingly?
A. Right.
Q. Did, you already answered that. So, there was no

(indiscernible)?
A. There was no, right. So and that was -- that's the main reason why we did away with it because we know there's a problem. There's no way to -- there's no second set of eyes to make sure it got entered.
Q. Now talking about Mr. Connor.
A. Yes.
Q. On the write-up where they had two discrepancies in the same write-up, they had the gear problem and then they had the engine problem.
A. Right.
Q. Does anybody go through the paperwork after it's been signed prior to the aircraft going back into service to make sure that everything that was written up was signed off?
A. Well, that's whoever closes the work order is supposed to do that.
Q. Okay. Okay. I don't think I know who closed that work order out. But nobody checks to make sure that gets done prior?
A. Not prior to the flight.
Q. So you guys don't fly off with an open discrepancy and nobody knows?
A. Well, yeah, it's supposed to be, you know, the mechanic's supposed to do the work and then it gets the inspection from one, you know, from one of the four and then one of the four closes the work order out.

Q. But the aircraft may be gone by that point, is that correct?
A. It should not. We close it out because we don't remove it from Flight Schedule Pro until we've closed the work order out, that's the last thing you do is remove it there. So it's not available to be flown until it gets removed from Flight Schedule Pro which is the last step for closing the work order.
Q. Okay. So it's kind of like a dispatch lock until you guys --
A. Yes, yes.
MR. PITTACORA: Okay. That's all I have right now. Come back to me again.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. I'm trying to understand how the progression of information flowed. You were there on Friday for a few hours, talked to Tano, said, we've got to figure out what's going on?
A. Yeah.
Q. That was also Tano's last day in the hangar?
A. Right, it was, yeah, because he was there all week that was his Friday.
Q. Right. So how would the information that you shared with him then get shared to the weekend crew?
A. He would have had to tell them.
Q. Okay. And how would he have done that? Would he have like written it down, would he have checked in with them the next morning?
A. He could have, I don't know how he did it. I mean, he could

have written it or he could have just told them.

MR. PITTACORA: Do you guys have any kind of pass-down procedure, like you're going off for your days off --

MR. ALLEY: Right.

MR. PITTACORA: -- and you have these projects in work and maybe three or four guys are all going off and a new crew is coming to work on whichever --

MR. ALLEY: Well, what we do is in our corridor system we have a resolution area and -- (Phone trilling.) Let me shut this off here, sorry about that. So whenever somebody's done working on a plane for the day they're supposed to put in there everything they've done and where they're at and then that would be the turnover.

So if for some reason they don't come in the next day someone else could open up that work order and look in that resolution and see where they're at on that job.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you talk to Tano after the accident?

A. Have I talked to him?

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. Yeah.

A. I mean, he's been at work.

Q. About the work that was done on the aircraft?

A. No, not really I didn't. I mean, he had already told me that day what he did.
Q. Okay, right.
A. So, I mean, there was really nothing more to say.
Q. He didn't share any information that he might have passed along to --
A. No.
Q. If the work hadn't been started though, so I'm talking about the pass-down procedures, then where -- I mean, is there any place to write that down like what you all talked about as things to do on the airplane the next day? I mean --
A. You mean what I would talk about?
Q. Yeah. So, I guess the pass-down procedures, is that something that had Tano started the work and so would there have been a pass-down procedure?
A. Well, he didn't start the work --
Q. Right, okay.
A. -- on the next time.
Q. So that's what I'm asking.
A. But he was the lead there and so he told me what happened and I'm like, okay, let's figure something out here. And that was per -- you know, that was the end of it for me as I informed him that we've got to --
Q. Right.
A. -- we've got to look deeper into this. Something's obviously

going on here that it did it again.
Q. Was there any -- because he hadn't started the work there was no then requirement for him to write down anything about what he had done already so that the (indiscernible).
A. Well, what he had done already he had already wrote down on his.
Q. Okay. So that was already done?
A. That was already done.
Q. Okay.
A. So when there's a new squawk then it's up to whoever's work takes that job, which he didn't start -- as far as I know he didn't start that. I don't think he did. Like I said, I left; I left midday that Friday so I don't know when that, I don't know when that job started. I don't know if it was on Saturday or Friday.
Q. So --
A. Like I said, I didn't have access to the logbooks so I don't know the timeline of what happened after that. I don't think they had started it when I left on Friday, I don't believe.
Q. So the run-up then was -- so you're saying they didn't start the work but he did a run-up, so I'm confused as to what the process would have been?
A. No, this is the first time. The first time that there was a squawk --
Q. I was thinking that would be the second time.

A. -- he did a run-up.
Q. Okay, right.
A. He documented. He made a logbook entry that he did all the checks for the manual --
Q. Yes.
A. -- as far as I know and he -- there's a logbook entry that he could not duplicate the problem that everything checked out per the manual.
Q. Okay.
A. That was -- I don't know what day that was. That was while I was out.
Q. Right.
A. I was out.
Q. Okay. And then it got squawked again?
A. I'm coming -- then it got squawked again.
Q. Right.
A. And I come in. He says, hey, this was already squawked once, it's in again. And he said, I ran it, I did all the stuff. I wasn't able to find a problem. And I just simply said, well, we've got to find something, there's something -- obviously a second time there's something going on, we need to find something.
Q. So when you say he said he ran it, it's because he's talking about the prior time?
A. The prior time, yes.
Q. Yes, okay. That's where I'm going.

A. I don't, I don't believe that he ran a second time. I don't believe but I don't know.
Q. Okay.
A. Like I said, I left that Friday and all of a sudden Sunday what happened and, you know, it's been kind of hectic since then. I didn't get access to the logbooks so I don't know who did what before --
Q. Okay. I think that's where I was getting confused --
A. -- or after.
Q. -- was the run-up that he discussed with you --
A. Was the first time.
Q. -- was the first squawk.
A. Yeah.
Q. He was just mentioning it, now that --
A. He was just mentioning that it was back and that's when --
Q. Okay.
A. -- and I just mentioned, okay, now we have a repeat write-up, you know. And I'm like, all right, you're telling me that you couldn't find anything, well it did it again. Something's going on, we've got, we've got to find something. There's something wrong here. And I said, it may be as simple as just turning up the idle --
Q. Yes, okay.
A. -- but we've got to find something. I just, you know, said, It could be something simple like turning up the idle but we've

got to do -- we've got to find -- if something's going on we've got to find something.
Q. And because no work had been started there was no --
A. No work had been started it was just squawked but nobody had started the job yet.
Q. Right. So there was no --
A. He was just talking to me about it and said, hey, I -- you know, I had this the other day, you know, it's back. I'm like, okay, well, now we know that there's -- we for sure know there's something going on because, you know, it's back.
Q. And because no work had been started there was no requirement per the pass-down procedure for him to write about --
A. Well, there wasn't really nothing to --
Q. -- the conversation that you had?
A. Right. There was nothing to pass down.
Q. Right.
A. Whoever started the job would have had to do whatever the manual told them to do.
Q. Right. Do you see where my concern is coming in though --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- that you all had a conversation about it?
A. Yes.
Q. And then how does that get passed on to the weekend crew --
A. Right.
Q. -- to know, we need to do a little bit more than just

digging, digging, you know, or just --
A. Right.
Q. -- I'm sorry, doing a run-up, we need to dig into it more.
A. Yeah.
Q. And I'm saying there's a disconnect between --
A. I see what you're saying there, yeah.
Q. -- your conversation and maybe that didn't get passed down and so --
A. Right. And I think that's another thing that's the reason now it's on Flight Schedule Pro it's typed in elevated squawk, that way it's out there that, hey, this is a repeat so, you know, somebody may not have been able to duplicate before but here it is back again, you know, so now we know.

I mean, yeah, before there wasn't really anything for a repeat write-up and this was my first, you know, time that I had dealt with one and that's -- and then my thing was, okay, you didn't find nothing before but now it's done it again so, you know, we need to do something about it and that's what I had told him.

Q. Right. Okay. The weekend shift --
A. Yes.
Q. -- do you all work rotating shifts where everybody will cover weekends at some point, I'm insinuating?
A. No. We have a crew that just -- they work Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

Q. Okay. Is that typically the newer mechanics or --
A. No, that's the ones that's been here the whole -- or that's all the old timers are on that.
Q. Okay. They like the weekend shift?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So the experience level should be --
A. Yeah, that's the highest experience there. Yeah, I don't know what the number is but it's considerably higher on the weekends.
Q. Okay. The apprentice that you mentioned working, do you know, does he work --
A. He works Monday through Thursday.
Q. Okay. So he wouldn't have been on the weekend shift?
A. No.
DR. WILSON: Okay, thanks. Courtney, do you have any follow-ups?
MR. ALLEY: And he doesn't -- the apprentice we never put on. He just does 100 hour inspections. We never put him on like non-routine type work.
DR. WILSON: Okay.
MR. PITTACORA: He does -- sorry, go ahead.
MR. ALLEY: He's always with another mechanic on 100 hour inspections so we put two people on 100 hour so he's working with another mechanic on 100 hour inspections.
MR. PITTACORA: Do you guys ever run up against part

shortages or delays in parts or you've identified a component that you needed to change, you don't have one in stock, do you run into those situations very often shortage of parts?

MR. ALLEY: Oh, yeah. I mean, I wouldn't say often but, yeah, there's times that we don't have a part in stock.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Do you have anything, Courtney?

MS. LIEDLER: I don't think so.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Thomas?

(No verbal response.)

DR. WILSON: Darren, do you have anything else?

MR. PITTACORA: I think I'm good for now.

DR. WILSON: We've asked you a lot of questions.

MR. ALLEY: That's okay. I mean, hopefully I was able to answer, you know, help you out.

DR. WILSON: Yeah, thank you. Is there anything else that you think you would want to share that would be helpful to our investigation?

MR. ALLEY: I don't really have anything else I could -- that I can think of.

DR. WILSON: Okay. If you do think of anything you've got Courtney and myself, our contact information.

MR. ALLEY: I've got cards, yeah.

DR. WILSON: Don't hesitate to reach out if it's a month from now, 2 months from now.

MR. ALLEY: Okay. All right.

DR. WILSON: We'd be interested in hearing whatever information you have.

MR. ALLEY: All right.

DR. WILSON: Thank you, Shane.

MR. ALLEY: All right.

MR. PITTACORA: Thank you.

MR. GOOD: Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Shane Alley
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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.

Wade Donovan

Wade Donovan
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: CHEN "BRIAN" ZHAOSONG

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:42 p.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: I'm Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: I am Courtney Liedler. I am the investigator in charge for this accident for the NTSB.

MR. PITTACORA: I am Darren Pittacora, an FAA inspector of maintenance.

MR. GOOD: Thomas Good, FAA inspector of GA ops.

DR. WILSON: And if you could state your name as well?

MR. ZHAOSONG: My name is Brian, and Chinese name is Chen Zhaosong. I is a student pilot from China 100, of the US Aviation Academy.

DR. WILSON: Brian, could you spell your Chinese name for us?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Okay. Maybe you can see my badge.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: Let me spell it for -- first name, C-H-E-N, last name, Z-H-A-O-S-O-N-G.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Thank you. And is it okay if I call you Brian?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF CHEN "BRIAN" ZHAOSONG

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And how long, Brian, have you been at US Aviation?

A. We are China 100, and the first day we came the US Aviation is January 26th, 2018. Now it is about more than 19 months.
Q. Okay. That's a long time --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- for you.
A. I miss home.
Q. I'm sure you do. And you were roommates with Howard, who was involved in the accident --
A. Yes.
Q. -- a few weeks ago?
A. Yes.
Q. Had you been a roommate with him the whole time that you were here?
A. Yes. We are roommate about --in our apartment there are two living rooms, and I live in the number one living room with another roommate, Max (ph.), but he has gone to China. And the living room number 2 is Howard and Sky (ph.).
Q. Okay.
A. And also Sky has gone to China last week.
Q. So, were there separate bedrooms, and then you shared a living room and a kitchen? How did that work? How is the apartment set up?
A. The -- in our apartment, there is only one kitchen, and four of us share the same kitchen. And the bathroom, only one bathroom, so four of us use the same bathroom.

Q. Okay. So did you get to know your roommates pretty well?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And did you get to know Howard?
A. Yes.
Q. Yeah? Did you all talk about flying?
A. Sometimes.
Q. Yeah.
A. Sometimes before, we have a role chair, a flight chair we will discuss the flight plan or the question together. And sometimes we will share the flight experience after we finish every flight.
Q. Did he recently share his flight experience with you since starting the multi-engine course?
A. Yes, sometimes.
Q. Okay.
A. For our multi-engine training, at first, I, Brian, and Howard is the same -- we have the same multi-engine instructor. His name is Nathaniel Boyds. But he has leave the US Academy 3 months ago.

And then for the first flight for the multi-engine, because we are -- because that's the first time, so we did a bad job on flight -- on the flight. So after the -- I finish the flight, I will talk with Howard and tell him never make the same mistake as me when he did his first flight. So for -- and then maybe we use only one week to finish our stage one training, and then we submit to the stage one check ride.

Q. Okay.
A. For the stage check ride, I passed the oral check on my first try. For the flight check, I failed the flight check at the -- on my first try, failed the single engine pattern and the soft landing. And -- but after I fail it, my instructor, Mr. Boyds give me a recheck and resubmit to the stage one flight check, and then I retried the flight check again, and I passed it.

But for Howard, he's taking his first oral -- he's taking his stage one oral check maybe one week after me, and he passed the oral check at his first try. But for his flight check, at his first try, he failed the ILS approach, and the single -- no, for the engine failure in flight, and also failed the soft landings. And after he failed that, my instructor, Mr. Boyd, get him rechecked again, and resubmit to the stage one flight check.

Maybe a few days later, he get his second chance for the multi-engine stage one flight check, but he failed again because maybe he made the same mistakes. And then he's -- because for our student -- for us, we only have two chance to fail the flight check, and then he get in trouble, waiting for the for the, further -- maybe extra training time from our company. So he's curating about one month, and then he get the -- 5 more hour for the extra flight training time in the multi-engine.

And then before he get his -- the flight, Howard is training, my instructor, Mr. Boyd has left the US Academy. And then our school getting a new instructor, that's the -- main instructor,

Ms. Francesca Norris.

And then for the 5 hour extra training, maybe a day Howard and Ms. Norris, they has two flights. The first flight, it is about 2.1 hours maybe. I don't remember. And then after he finish the first flight, Howard tells me, he say, I feel better on the flights, but I also still made some small mistakes.

And then after that flight 2 days later, it is about July 28, and then he do his second flight with Ms. Norris, but the accident has happened at that flight. So for every flight after, Howard finished all, every -- his training, he would talk with me and tell me what mistake he made, and what -- and something he did good only, so he will share some of experience with me. And me too, I will share my flight experience with him too.

Q. Did he discuss with you the day before the accident, or the day of the accident, any concerns about flying 6AG?

A. Let me think. Okay, can you speak -- say the question again please?

Q. Sure. So 6AG is the accident airplane.

A. Yes.

Q. Did he mention any concerns about flying that airplane because of its maintenance problems?

A. Let me think. Yes. But he told me a little thing about it. He said this airplane has some -- have some trouble on the landing gear of the engine -- but I don't remember. It was a long time. He just told me of little things.

Q. Okay. Did he mention anything about not wanting to fly it, if you recall?
A. I don't remember, sorry.
Q. Okay. That's okay. Did he mention anything about his instructor? What he liked and didn't like about flying with her?
A. Not too much. Just a little. He -- because the -- his -- he fly with the instructor, Ms. Norris for just the first flight. So he told me the instructor is beautiful, and very patient to teach anything. And if -- when Howard makes a mistake, and the instructor will notice it, and tell him, Howard, the handling and the altitude, and just very nice, very patient for -- about the train -- doing the training.
Q. Okay. It was a long time between the review board that he had and then getting assigned to Ms. Norris.
A. Yes.
Q. Did he -- what did he do during that time? Do you know?
A. Yes. I know something about it. After he get the review board, he go to the simulator room. It is on the -- another building. He flied the multi-engine solo seat just to practice the maneuvers, the approach, and the engine failure procedures.

Sometimes he always, I remember him doing that time. He always fly the solo seat from about 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. It is about 2, 3 hours. Sometimes he will take the solo seat by himself, and also sometimes he will do the solo seat with another brother pilots.

He's from China 99. They will fly the solo seat at the same time. Sometimes Howard is -- fly the solo seat and another student from China 99 is watching how to do the maneuver of the procedures. Or sometimes they will just simulator on the computer about the engine how (ph.) or come off the (indiscernible) ladder. So they will do it together.

Or sometimes the -- another student is flying the solo seat, and Howard is sitting next to him and watching how to fly, and also do the same thing, simulator engine failure on the computer just like this. And also, after he finished the solo seat, he will stay at the simulator room and get some self-study, study the POH, or the POH of the PHAK, the Pilot's Aeronautical Knowledge Handbook.

Yeah, they -- he always keep studying and get ready for the coming flight or oral check. He's very hardworking.

Q. Okay. Do you remember who the China 99 student was?

A. He's -- the China 99 student is Joker (ph.). He's on the -- at that time, when Howard flying the solo sim, he always fly with Howard.

Q. Okay.

A. Joker, spell is J-O-K-E-R.

Q. Okay.

A. China 99.

Q. Joker?

A. Yes.

Q. Is he still here?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. He's also waiting for the multi-engine EOC flight check. He's also -- two pass.
Q. Okay. When you started the multi-engine program, did you have any maintenance issues with the aircraft?
A. Maintenance?
Q. Yeah. Did you ever have to squawk an aircraft?
A. Squawk for the aircraft? Just for multi-engine?
Q. Mm-hmm.
A. No. I didn't squawk the multi-engine aircraft. But my instructor will squawk the aircraft sometimes.
Q. Okay. For -- what were the reasons?
A. Let me think. I don't remember too much. Give me a second. When I fly with my second instructor, because my first instructor is Mr. Boyd, he has left the academy, so I fly -- my second instructor for multi-engine is Michael Evans (ph.), and he also leave USAA last month.

And when I fly with him, maybe last month, about July, 2 months ago, July, when we go to the East (indiscernible) and do the preflight for the Seneca, and when we check the right cowling of the right engine, we found this small -- there is a small click (sic) on the right cowling. It just nest (ph.) by the buckle, and my instructor found it's unsafe to fly. And then we just canceled

the flight, and called the dispatch, and squawked the airplane.
Q. Okay. And what was it? A nest? Is that what you said?
A. No. Maybe I could show you a picture?
Q. Sure.
A. Can I?
Q. Yes, please.
A. Can I use my cell?
MR. GOOD: I think what he's trying to say is --
MS. LIEDLER: The buckle.
MR. GOOD: -- a small crack.
MR. ZHAOSONG: Yeah, a small crack just like --
DR. WILSON: Okay.
MR. ZHAOSONG: Because I don't know how to say this.
DR. WILSON: That's okay.
MR. ZHAOSONG: I could show you a picture.
MS. LIEDLER: Near the buckle?
MR. GOOD: Yeah.
DR. WILSON: We'll look at the picture --
MR. GOOD: (Indiscernible).
DR. WILSON: -- and --
MS. LIEDLER: Yeah.
MR. GOOD: Just --
MS. LIEDLER: Near (indiscernible) buckles.
MR. PITTACORA: And there's cam locks.
DR. WILSON: Oh.

MR. PITTACORA: I think like a Model A (ph.) kind of like have a, you know --

MS. LIEDLER: Yeah.

MR. PITTACORA: -- it comes up.

DR. WILSON: Yeah.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Give me a second.

DR. WILSON: No problem.

MR. GOOD: We appreciate it.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Sorry about that. Oh here. This one. The little buckle on the right cowling of the right engine is crack.

DR. WILSON: Oh yep. Mm-hmm, yeah you can see it.

MR. GOOD: Yeah.

MR. ZHAOSONG: That's called click (sic)?

MR. GOOD: Cam lock.

DR. WILSON: Crack.

MS. LIEDLER: A crack

MR. ZHAOSONG: Crack, yeah. And then my instructor say it's unsafe, and then we canceled that flight. And my instructor squawked that airplane.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yeah. That's the only one flight experience we squawked the plane.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. GOOD: That's a good one. Oh yeah, that's (indiscernible).

DR. WILSON: Did you see Howard the morning of the accident? Before the flight?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Can you say again?

DR. WILSON: Did you see Howard the morning of the accident?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes. That morning, it is the morning of Sunday, July 28, and then it is about 11:00 a.m. that morning. And after I get up, and Howard is eating breakfast at the -- at our -- how do you say -- the table, and then he -- I talk with him, and he say, today the flight will be my last flight before resubmit to the stage one flight check. And he say he feel stressed -- stressful and nervous about that flight.

He say he want to do a better job on the last flight before the flight check. And so that -- he say he try his best not to make the same mistake. And then he -- and he also told me that, I will -- after I submit to the stage one flight check, I -- he will pass the flight check at the first time. And then just as -- he just told me about his -- he was nervous, but he -- he's very confident about the, that flight.

DR. WILSON: He was confident about the flight? Is that what you said?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: About the flight on that day or the -- his re-flight check?

MR. ZHAOSONG: That day, and also his check recheck.

DR. WILSON: So besides being nervous --

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yeah.

DR. WILSON: -- how did he seem? Okay? Did he seem normal?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Normal?

DR. WILSON: The way he normally would act? Did he seem like himself?

MR. GOOD: What -- was --

DR. WILSON: So --

MR. GOOD: -- he standard? Was it -- was his behavior --

MR. ZHAOSONG: The --

MR. GOOD: -- normal?

MR. ZHAOSONG: -- emotion?

MR. GOOD: Yeah.

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes. It's normal. Just like the -- on our normal everyday daily life. He's very normal, and said, oh, I feel nervous. I --

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: -- feel nervous about the flight.

DR. WILSON: Okay. He didn't seem tired? Or --

MR. ZHAOSONG: No.

DR. WILSON: -- anything?

MR. ZHAOSONG: No.

DR. WILSON: No? Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: No. It's just normal. Normal, nervous.

DR. WILSON: Just normal? Okay. Courtney, you have some questions?

MS. LIEDLER: I do.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So, Brian, you had mentioned that after every flight, you and Howard would discuss the flights, what mistakes were made, what you did well, what the flight went over?

A. Yes.

Q. When you guys were discussing, was there something that consistently Howard had troubles with? Like, when he was talking about the troubles he had in flights, were they consistently on one -- in one area? Or were they just kind of dependent on the flight?

A. On -- maybe on different -- sometimes he -- for us, we always -- we did -- sometimes we will -- cannot maintain the handling or altitude within standard -- sometimes about 100 feet above the altitude or 100 feet below. That is normal for our training. Sometimes we are just -- the -- when we're doing maneuver or approach, we just make mistake by holding the altitude of the handlings (ph.).

Or sometimes we will -- when we feel nervous, or feel nervous, we -- also we will make some small mistake on the GPS, it is about how to load the procedure correctly on -- into the GPS,

just like this.
Q. Okay. So you flew with Mr. Boyd prior, and so did Howard?
A. Yes.
Q. How did you feel his instruction was? Was he a good instructor, or was he -- did you feel -- because you said that you both failed your stage one checks, flight checks --
A. Yes.
Q. -- did you feel that Mr. Boyd was a good instructor? Or did he -- did you have concerns with his instruction?
A. In my opinion, the -- my first instructor, Mr. Boyd is a good instructor, because he's really patient and nice to teach us how to do the maneuvers, or approach, or landings. Sometimes when we do a maneuver just like the altitude or the handling, without standard, and Mr. Boyd will take the flight control (ph.), and he will do the same maneuver, and show me how to made the -- make this maneuver handling or altitude within the limits. Because he will show us how to do it correctly. And he's also very patient, and he's very nice. Never yell at us.

But for the -- for why we failed the stage one flight check, maybe -- I think, because before I did my stage one flight check, I didn't fly about more than 2 weeks. So before the flight check, we also -- we don't have another flight for refresh, for review. So I think it's my problem to fail the flight check, because a long time no fly.

And for -- I failed the stage one flight check, I failed on

the landings because to make a perfect landing, I need to practice more. But because I didn't fly for more than 2 weeks, so I fail it. So I think I'm better on the landing, and fail it.

MS. LIEDLER: No more questions.

DR. WILSON: Do you, Darren? Thomas?

MR. GOOD: Did Howard ever mention that he had to help Ms. Francesca close the door?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Close which door?

MR. GOOD: The Seneca? The --

MR. ZHAOSONG: The right door?

MR. GOOD: Yeah.

MR. ZHAOSONG: No. Howard didn't told me anything about this.

MR. GOOD: Okay. And the last one is, did Howard ever mention that he was having trouble with engine failures? Like in the pattern?

MR. ZHAOSONG: In the pattern?

DR. WILSON: A simulated --

MR. GOOD: Simulated engine failure?

MR. ZHAOSONG: No. He didn't told me about this.

MR. GOOD: Okay. I think that's all I've got.

DR. WILSON: Did Howard mention anything during his check rides where the instructor had to take control of the aircraft from him?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes. I remember one time when he did his

second try for the stage one flight check, and the check instructor maybe just bring the right engine or left engine, just only one engine throttle to about idle, just simulated the engine failure. And then Howard do the engine failure procedure, but he forget to -- but he pitched too much, and the air speed is dropped -- drop down below 105, because 105 is the (indiscernible) for Seneca, it's the minimal speed for practice the single engine failure safely.

So he -- I remember he told me, he pitched too much, and the airspeed dropped down about 98, and then he -- the check instructor just bring that throttle to full power, and help him to build airspeed and also to made the airplane fly normally, getting multi-engine back.

DR. WILSON: Okay. But he didn't take the controls, say my controls?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Yeah, no. He just --

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. ZHAOSONG: -- pulled the throttle back.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Anything else, Courtney?

MS. LIEDLER: I don't think so.

DR. WILSON: Tom? Darren? Anything else that you think is important that we know that might help us with the investigation?

MR. ZHAOSONG: Maybe no. I have told everything I know.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Great. Well thank you very much. We really appreciate your time, it was helpful what you did share.

MS. LIEDLER: Thank you, Brian.
MR. ZHAOSONG: Yes.
MS. LIEDLER: We appreciate it.
MR. ZHAOSONG: You're welcome.
MS. LIEDLER: If you think of anything else you want to share, you've got our contact, and --
MR. ZHAOSONG: Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: -- we welcome you to reach out to us.
MR. ZHAOSONG: Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: Okay?
MR. ZHAOSONG: I got.
MS. LIEDLER: Thank you.
MR. PITTACORA: Thanks, Brian.
MR. ZHAOSONG: You too. Thank you, ma'am.
MS. LIEDLER: Thank you, Brian. We appreciate your time.
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

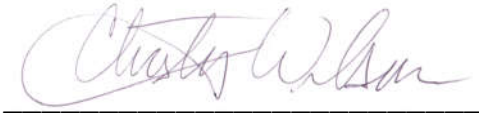
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Chen "Brian" Zhaosong
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: DAVID CRUZ

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(12:45 p.m.)

DR. WILSON: All right. So for the transcript, we'll have everybody introduce themselves.

MR. CRUZ: Okay.

DR. WILSON: And then we'll get started with the questioning.

I am Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: I am Courtney Liedler. I am the investigator in charge for this accident with the NTSB.

MR. CRUZ: Okay.

MR. PITTACORA: Darren Pittacora, FAA maintenance.

MR. GOOD: Thomas Good, FAA, GA ops.

INTERVIEW OF DAVID CRUZ

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And if you can state your name, as well?

A. David Cruz.

Q. Is it okay if I call you David?

A. Absolutely.

Q. And what is your current position and organization?

A. Okay. I work for U.S. Aviation Group. I am the director of training for the company and a chief flight instructor for one of the certificates that we hold, Part 141 certificate.

Q. And a brief CliffsNotes version of your aviation background?

A. Okay. Father was a pilot, so I started flying at, you know,

an early age in the airplane, you know, flying airplanes at my teenaged years. Flew through all the way up to solo while I was 15 and soloed when I was 16, and then took a gap because my father said if you want to get your private license, get a job. I was, like, well, okay, find out how expensive flying really is when you're making 65 cents an hour at a grocery store.

Anyway, got my private in '77 and then just flying. My father owned a Cessna 150 and then just flying as I could. Then I made a decision to go ahead to -- well, before that, I was employed as a Houston police officer from 1973 to 1997. But in and around '77, I got my private and then started working for my instrument, and then went on to CFI and II commercial in 1987, in, yeah, '87.

I was assigned to the police helicopter division in 1984. I was there as an observer and then eventually became -- I was trained as a rotorcraft pilot and flew MD-500s for the department. And then after I got my CFI in '89, I was flying, you know, Cessna 150s, doing instruction at David Wayne Hooks Airport, which was near where I lived down in Houston, and just did part-time flight instruction, you know, private, instrument, commercial.

Got my multiengine I don't remember when, but it was flying multiengine. Okay. But primarily, the bulk of my flying career then was with the police department, flying patrol. We also bought an airplane. Previous to 1991, we did not have an airplane, so we were using helicopters for narcotics surveillance-

type activities, which were just way too obvious. So we bought an airplane. And me being one of the only airplane pilots in the division, I took up that assignment flying surveillance flights, which were usually long and boring.

And so I amassed about almost 2,000 of rotorcraft time, and in that time was building up -- again, flying on the weekends, because we work four 10s, so 3 days a week, I was basically at the local airport doing the flight instruction. And then I retired from the department in 1997, took a job with Flare Systems, and then subsequently with Bell Helicopter, Bell Helicopter in 2005. So from '97 to 2005, I really didn't fly hardly at all. My job just -- the job I had just didn't do it.

When I started working for Bell in 2005, I moved up here to Fort Worth and was in sales for law enforcement, and because I had rotorcraft training, I was ferrying helicopters from the plant up in Montreal to completion centers and also doing customer demonstrations for law enforcement in some Bell helicopters.

And then in 2010, left Bell and -- or I should say Bell left me because -- anyway, then I began working here in 2011, August 2011. Started here as just a line instructor, but because of my background and ratings, and everything, became a chief flight instructor in May of 2012 and hold that position to today.

Q. Are you still flying?

A. Oh, yes.

Q. Okay. About how much total time do you have?

A. About 61-, 6200 hours, somewhere in there.
Q. What are you flying?
A. Primarily, I fly the King Air right now.
Q. Do you have time in the Seneca?
A. Oh, yes.
Q. Okay. Roughly?
A. Probably about couple hundred hours, 2-, 300, somewhere in there.
Q. Okay. Any other positions at USAG?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Are you still the director of training there?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So as the director of training, what are your duties and responsibilities?
A. Basically, for director of training, it's just to, number one, make sure the TCOs, the training course outlines, are uniform throughout the company, because we have a certificate here, and we also have another certificate up in Grayson County, separate certificate, but we want to use the same training, you know, throughout the company.

I just also ensure that the instructors are all on the same page, go through a standardization course, you know, just one, one standardization, you know, so there's no difference between the certificates, right? It's just all uniform. Any new things, kind of keep abreast of any new regulations or things that would affect

our training courses, and that's primarily what I do as director of training.

Q. Okay. When did you become the director of training?

A. Let's see. When was that? Want to say about 2 years ago, I think.

Q. Okay. Do you have anybody as the director of training that directly reports to you?

A. No.

Q. And then as the chief flight instructor, what are your duties and responsibilities?

A. Well, primarily, all the administrative stuff connected with Part 141, you know, graduation enrollments, you know, make sure the instructors are checked out and qualified. I do check instructor training both for the ground portion, going over the stuff like that, and also their initial proficiency checks. And also do some of the King Air flying for some of the multiengine add-on courses. Our course that we have recently had some contract with the Department of Justice to do training for their commercial add-on ratings.

Q. Okay. And as a chief flight instructor, do you consider anyone to be a direct report to you?

A. Ultimately, the instructors are.

Q. Okay.

A. But we kind of filter that. In other words, we have -- you know, company-wide there's, I don't know, 90, 90 instructors.

Can't have 90 direct reports, so -- but as far as direct reports, it's -- I have currently one assistant chief. Given the status of the industry now, they're hard to keep, so you know, he reports directly to me. Others we have, have left and moved on. And that's about it as far as direct reports.

Q. So who do the instructors report to?

A. The instructors report to their group leaders, you know, to kind of -- in the respective curriculum in which they're teaching, so they have more direct contact on a day-to-day basis as far as training progress, difficulties, any stumbling blocks they run across.

Q. And then who do the group leads report to?

A. They report to the curriculum managers, which they kind of -- you know, you may have -- say, like, in a private, you know, may have two or three group leaders, and they report to the manager, who's kind of responsible for the overall progress of students in that particular curriculum.

Q. All right. And then who do the managers report to?

A. The managers report to actually kind of concurrently me and Tyson Walker, who's the director of operations. And kind of direct reports would also be the check instructors. They kind of report directly to me.

Q. Okay. Are you involved in the hiring of instructors?

A. Not directly. I mean, we have interviews. When the applicant, you know, comes in, we put together, you know, really

whoever is available as far as interviewing the instructor to -- you know, like, we ask them to give us, you know, how they would present a lesson, in which we're looking for their aeronautical knowledge, you know, the way they present, the way they interact, and just kind of get a general feel for, you know, are they qualified to be an instructor other than just, you know, here's my certificate.

Q. Okay. So who would you say is responsible for the hiring of instructors?

A. Well, we have Erica Mahan, who's really recruiting, so she's the one that actually takes the application, sets up the interviews, and then based on the report from the interview, whether we should hire the person or it's, like, maybe pass. If we hire them, then she goes ahead with all of the administrative paperwork and doc type stuff, sets them up for the standardization class.

Q. So who gives the yes/no from the interview then?

A. Basically, whoever is doing the interview. It's usually two, two instructors. Sometimes it's myself and another instructor, or again, it's just one of the senior instructors. Again, whoever we can kind of -- not busy at the time, you know, that we can also kind of spread it around so that, you know, one person is not -- I hate to say burdened, but yeah.

Q. Do you know what the qualifications are that the company is looking for, for instructors?

A. At a minimum, we really would like a CFII. Recently, let's say within the past year and a half, we've not hired that many IIs. Most of them -- a lot of them come in with just a CFI only, which for our purposes doesn't really do us any good and actually doesn't do the instructor any good, because, you know, he's kind of limited to only the private pilot curriculum.

The students move through that and then go on to, you know, instrument and commercial ratings, and if you have a CFI only, then you're kind of stuck. So -- but we do offer a program, where we help the instructor through financial assistance or a discounted rate, basically, get their II.

So really at a minimal, we want IIs, and we've kind of gone back to that standard here recently simply because it's like, you know, if you have a CFI only, it just really doesn't -- it doesn't do us any good. But yeah, that's kind of the minimum qualifications we're looking for.

As far as time, we get a lot of brand-new instructors, you know? And we get some that have a couple hundred hours. So it really just runs the gamut there.

Q. And what do you think is a -- what do you think about USAG draws instructors to this company?

A. Based on, you know, interviewing the instructors, you know, we kind of like to -- that's kind of, actually, my first question, you know, is, like, why do you want to work here. Just it's a way to acquire the number of hours that's required to move on to the

airlines at a pretty fast pace.

You know, quite frankly, this is the paradigm we're in, is this is a means to an end. Some instructors get involved and do an excellent job of instruction, and some, and it becomes quite apparent sometimes, they're just here to build hours, and they don't really care about student progress. And those are easy to actually kind of ferret out, and just like, no, that's not what we're about.

You know, I try to stress during the standardization course, it's like, you know, you're here as an instructor. This is your job. Really, one, I expect you just to do your job. This is about student progress. This is about student instruction. Yes, you're going to build your hours to go on to your, you know, dream job, if that's what you want to do, but you know, like I said, this is a means to an end. And we fully understand that. You know, that's just the way it is.

There are some that just -- we actually have some that have gone to the airline and with families, like, you know, I don't like being away, I don't like, you know, being on stand -- like, on reserve, and actually one or two have come back, because it's, like, you're home every night. You know what the schedule is. You're not stuck in Detroit overnight somewhere, you know, so, yeah.

Q. Yeah. Does the company have any ties with an airline, like a pipeline to --

A. Yes. With Envoy.
Q. Okay.
A. That's the primary pipeline we have. I think recently we just signed something with Southwest. But I haven't seen any of those guys yet. But primarily Envoy.
Q. Is it a guaranteed interview, or what's the pipeline?
A. What the pipeline is, is actually the instructor goes and interviews, and depending on the outcome of the interview, they're actually hired by Envoy. So a brand-new CFI could go get interviewed with Envoy, get hired, and then they are actually sent here or a flight school that Envoy has a partnership with to actually build the hours toward their 1500 so that they can get a class date for the ATP course.

So they're actually working -- they actually receive benefits, as far as travel. They don't get a seniority number. They get travel benefits, and everything, through Envoy, because they're actually employed by Envoy, but they're actually working here. So sometimes it works good. Sometimes it doesn't.
Q. What is the breakdown, do you think, of instructors that work for Envoy versus --
A. Percentage? I'd say probably about 20, maybe 25 percent of the instructors here are in the Envoy pipeline.
Q. How is it determined whether they'll go for the interview or not? Or did they all go for the interview with Envoy?
A. No, no, they don't. Just, you know, some people, it's like I

don't want to work for Envoy -- Republic or, you know, wherever.
Q. Okay.
A. So it's not, you know, it's not a mandatory thing.
Q. Got it. And so if you had an issue with an instructor that was technically a part of that 20 to 25 percent who works for Envoy, how do you deal with that? Do you have authority to --
A. Oh, yeah. No, we have complete authority as far as their work schedule, you know, if we assign them students. If it turns out that the person is a problem, you know, we have a direct line to Envoy, say, hey, look, this guy is just not cutting it, you know? His flight abilities are suspect or just -- he's just not doing the job, you know, because they want an employee that, you know, does the job that they're assigned to do.

And you know, so if we have a problem with them, you know, we can take that up with Envoy. And they're actually fairly responsive, you know? They're sensitive to, you know, what we need and ultimately what they need.
Q. You mentioned that some instructors, you know, they really get involved and, you know, care about the progress of the students, and others are just interested in the hours?
A. Um-hum.
Q. So if an instructor makes it through the interview process, gets hired, and then it turns out that they just care about the hours, how does the company follow-up with them to ensure that they're -- I mean, I get that it's a means to an end --

A. Sure.
Q. But you want to see the success of the students, as well.
A. Absolutely.
Q. So how does that company ensure that that's happening?
A. Well, and that's actually kind of what the group leaders and the curriculum managers kind of look at, because they interact with the students more on -- I mean the instructors more on a day-to-day basis, you know, directly. If it becomes apparent, you know, like, just hypothetically, if we had an instructor in the private pilot program and the student hadn't soloed, and he's already accumulated 10 hours of cross-country time, like, well, wait a minute; what's going on here, you know?

And actually, we've had, you know, one instructor in particular, you know, in the breakroom they all, you know, sit and (indiscernible) back and forth. And it kind of became known, just like, yeah, I'm not, I'm really not here for the students. I'm just here for my logbook. And when we get that kind of comment, it's like, oh, you know, this doesn't work for us. Because in the standardization class, I make it quite clear to the instructors, just says, look, you know, your job now is as an instructor.

U.S. Aviation is in business to train people to become professional pilots, and that's the core of our business even if it's the Chinese airlines or students that come here -- they're mostly all on a professional pilot track. And that's what we're in business for. We're not in business to make sure that

instructors get hours to go onto the airline, you know? So I make that pretty clear up front that, you know, if the student isn't progressing, if they're not getting the quality of training that we think that they should have, it's like, you know what, this isn't working for us, so I suggest you, you know, part ways.

Q. Okay. The curriculum. There's obviously FAA regulations that need to be met for the curriculum?

A. Sure.

Q. How does it work? Are there additional items that are put in based on the contract with, like, the Asian program?

A. Not specifically. You know, every 2 years, the CAAC comes for renewal for our certificate, and one of the things that they're -- it's in the curriculum, but it's not really focused so much as NDB navigation simply because in the U.S., NDBs are being decommissioned all the time. And we just don't have that many. But in China, that's still a large form of their approach procedure is in NDB navigation.

So if there's one area where the students are really kind of weak is NDB navigation. And come to find out, so are the instructors. I've actually conducted classes in NDB navigation and approaches because, you know, a lot of instructors now, they just -- they don't have it. It's not even required in the certification for instrument anymore. It just makes reference to ground-based or GPS-based navigation.

So that's, you know, as far as an additional thing, that's

one of the requirements. Our TCO for the private is 65 hours. Now, under Part 141, it's only a 35-hour course, but the Chinese requirement is for 65 hours. So they have a special -- I won't say special, but a separate training course outline just to encompass that many hours.

Another one of our airline customers wanted it to be 72 hours. It's like, well -- you know, actually, they wanted their own separate TCO. It's like, no, that's -- you know, TCO prescribes the minimum requirements. If you want to fly more, then we'll just, you know, double up on lessons, or something, to get to your requirement of that 72 hours, you know? But we're not going to create a special -- so one airline, I think, was China Southern. They just wanted more hours. It's like, okay, yeah, we can do that. But as far as additional, you know, special curriculum plans, no.

Q. Okay. Do you interact directly with CAAC or do they interact with somebody in the company?

A. The answer to that is yes and no. When they come here for their inspection, then obviously I, you know, interact with the inspection team when they're here. But as on a day-to-day basis, we usually don't interact with the CAAC. Them being a regulatory agency, they don't really get involved in the school operations per se.

Now, if we have a major incident, such as this, you know, then, yes, we report to (indiscernible) the airline to the CAAC,

you know, that, you know, there's been an accident.
Q. Okay. Do you interact with the airlines?
A. I used to. I was -- kind of as a director of training, we kind of restructured, you know? When I first got here, we actually had a Chinese program manager, who was actually Tyson Walker. He was the manager. And that's all he did. He complied their reports and their daily training, you know, reports, and everything. Then he actually left and to Tarrant County College, and it just kind of -- I got them by default.

But recently, the airlines have wanted a more detailed training report that -- you know, they each have their own, you know? We want it on this form; well, this airline wants it on another form; and oh, we want something else. And it just -- it became just physically impossible for me to do that and keep, you know, the administration of just the normal 141 stuff here.

So we actually hired -- actually, Scott Sykes is now the Chinese program manager, and that was effective as, like, last week. So I used to interact with the company representatives, you know, sending them monthly training reports and a little process we have call review boards that we bring to their attention a student that's, you know, having trouble training or personal life, or whatever. So --
Q. In your positions, who do you report to?
A. Tyson Walker.
Q. For both positions?

A. Well, as director -- yeah, for both positions, yeah. So it's kind of, kind of a parallel report. You know, really kind of report to the CEO, but on a more direct line, it's Tyson.
Q. If you know this, how does the pay for instructors here compare to other flight instruction schools?
A. Actually, from my understanding, it's actually quite good. That has been a -- you know, when I started 8 years ago here, it was kind of like, you know, $15 an hour. Now instructors are making, you know, upwards of 25, 26, $27 an hour depending on, you know, their ratings, and stuff. So that's gone up over the years simply because, you know, it's every flight school in the country is competing for a limited number of instructors. So whoever offers the best benefits, you know? Yeah, so pay has gone up.

So as far as pay, it's, from what I understand, is maybe not the top of the scale, but you know it's work (indiscernible). You know, we had some instructors, you know, quit and go somewhere else, you know? Hate to call it, you know, a smaller flight school. You know, it's like, well, you make $65 an hour. Oh, great. Well, I'm only flying 3 hours a week. Okay. Well, that's not so great. So if you can, you know, put in, you know 20 hours, 30 hours here, yeah, it kind of -- you can do the math.

MR. GOOD: Is there a pay increase if they reach a certain number of hours?

MR. CRUZ: No, no, it's based on the certificates, yeah, MEI actually being the highest.

MR. GOOD: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you know Francesca Norris?

A. Yes. Actually, I flew with her the week before the accident.

Q. Okay. Tell me about that.

A. That was -- I had -- was putting her up for a consideration for a check instructor. So was doing the check instructor proficiency flight. And we accomplished that. I think it was the week before, maybe a week and a half before.

Q. Okay.

A. And because she was also an MEI, we were -- I was waiting to fly with her again to do the proficiency check for a multiengine, which we never got to, but there was some scheduling delays and, you know, scheduling conflicts. So we never got to the MEI portion, but we did accomplish the, you know, the flight proficiency and instrument proficiency for that check.

Q. And what airplane was that in --

A. That was in a 172.

Q. So we know that she had broken her arm?

A. Yup.

Q. And was not flying for --

A. About 3 months.

Q. About 3 months?

A. Yeah, I think about 3 months.

Q. Coming back on duty, did she receive any sort of training

ride to ensure that she hadn't lost any proficiency over the 3 months?
A. Not that I'm aware of, no.
Q. Okay. Who would make that decision?
A. It's really not a company policy, you know? I mean, we knew she was a good instructor, you know, and it was just a delay. So it was like whenever you get back and you think you're ready to go. It'd really be -- quite honestly, I don't know if she requested a flight just to get the feel of things again or not. I would need to go check the records, but I don't think so.
Q. What about ensuring that, you know, she was fit for duty because of the arm?
A. We didn't have any requirement for that or a test for that.
Q. Okay. Do you know if she provided any documentation, like, from a doctor saying that she was okay to fly?
A. No.
Q. And I believe you said this, but during that check ride that you did with her, there were no issues?
A. Uh-uh, no.
Q. Did you notice her having any difficulties getting either in or out of the airplane, shutting doors?
A. No. She conducted the preflight, which means, you know, climbing up on the wing, so didn't notice any deficiencies in operating the aircraft, and you know, she's flying the aircraft the whole time during the proficiency check. Didn't notice

anything at all.

Q. What are the requirements for an instructor to become a check, check --

A. Check instructor, you mean?

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, I'd like to have them at least, you know, 4- to 500 hours of dual given in our program before going on to a check instructor. So if they have, you know, say, 500 hours, that means they've really gotten about 700 to 800 hours total time, which is, you know, that's enough to be familiar, to, you know, be comfortable in the aircraft.

And the reason I like that number is because as a check instructor, you're really there as an evaluator. I think one of the primary problems a new instructor has is they can teach, but they're not really attuned to evaluate. In other words, the evaluation process has to include feedback on, you know, what the student did well, what they didn't do well, and usually the critique usually goes with what they didn't do well, you know?

But that -- well, your landings were bad. Well, that doesn't really say anything, you know? You got to break it down. What are the components that go into a landing? It's like, well, your landing was bad because your approach speed wasn't stable, you didn't use this, that, and you flare too high or flare too low, or you carried power. So you got to be able to analyze and evaluate.

And new instructors, you know, I've seen it a couple times in

interviews of students. It's like, well, I asked my instructor what I'm doing wrong, and he says, like, I don't know, let's try it again. Well, that doesn't work.

And I think that's true for most new instructors is they know how to fly and they basically know how to teach. But when it comes to the evaluation and breaking it down, breaking a maneuver down into its respective components, sometimes it's a little -- I won't say overwhelming, but they just -- you know, you got to acquire that experience, you know? Just like anything else, you know, the more you do something, then you're able to analyze it better.

So that's kind of my minimum requirements. Used to be 500 hours, but then, you know, we were kind of needing check instructors. It's like, okay, they've got 400 hours, they've been a good instructor, haven't had any bad reports on their instruction, they're getting their students done, so then we'll go through -- actually, I hold a 2-day class for prospective check instructors, going over, you know, how to teach and the regulations in our curriculum, and everything.

And then based on that, which, you know, they have a test at the end of the class, and they have to make an 80 percent. There's a couple that actually surprised me that did not make it. And it's not, you know, a hard test as far as I'm concerned. But based on that, then we'll do a proficiency flight. And then we'll send the letter to the FSDO for approval.

Q. Was Francesca, was she one of those lower-time check airmen or did she meet that --

A. No, no, she -- I think she had about 400 hours of dual (indiscernible) air, if I recall correctly, somewhere in there, 4-, 450, something like that.

Q. How is it determined what students an instructor will fly with?

A. That assignment is usually -- it's usually made by scheduling. In other words, you know, we assign the instructor to the curriculum managers, the group leaders, you know? It's really just based on the needs. When we get standardization class finished, and let's say we have five instructor, and then we, you know, go to the group managers and leaders, say, like, do you need any instructors now? Like, yes, I need one. Well, private may need one, instrument may need two, and we'll kind of divvy them up there.

And as far as how they're assigned the students, it really is like, you know, my present instructors already have three or four students, so, you know, you get the new ones, or if an instructor left and you needed to place his students with somebody. So it's really not -- it's not scientific by any means. It's just based on needs.

Q. Are you involved at all in the decision for students who've maybe had multiple failures on a stage check and who they'll be paired with?

A. Well, when they fail that many times, we go through a review board process, kind of in the loop on that. And so what's your recommendation. Say, well, we want to fly with the group leaders. Like, oh, okay, get one of your leaders, you know, put them with that. So it's not -- you know, I don't get involved in, you know, specifically who it goes to.

It's really kind of depending on the workload, you know, who's available, who's -- it's usually the curriculum manager, but you know, they interact with the students also. And you know, quite frequently -- that's the word I'm looking for -- you know, they'll know, you know, if this student would be best with this particular leader or maybe somebody else.

Q. Would you say that there is an adequate number of instructors, or is there a shortage in any areas?

A. Well, right now, we're short MEIs, you know? That's actually kind of critical right now. It varies throughout the year. We've had times where we had an overabundance of instructors. And when we have a new standardization class, all the instructors would get kind of miffed and say, well, wait a minute. I only got two students now. Why are you hiring more? It's like, well, because now you've got a group of instructors that are getting close to that 1200 or 1500-hour time where they move on. So, you know, we've got to -- we can't wait until they leave to hire somebody, you know? So, you know, we hire instructors and keep them coming in all the time.

And again, sometimes, they're overburdened, and sometimes they don't have enough. We try to kind of even it out, but it's hard to predict sometimes. You know, we've had instructors, you know, they get an offer to be first officer on a Lear somewhere, you know? It's like, okay, they're gone, you know? So, you know, not all of them go to the airlines. Some of them get, you know, some lucrative positions and -- yeah, so it's hard to predict that, you know, just because we hired an instructor he's going to be here till the full 1500 hours, you know? Sometimes they go.

Q. What about check instructors? Are you adequately staffed for check instructors?

A. We are getting near staff for that now. Quite honestly, check instructors is a chokepoint as far as the flow of students. You know, classes come in, 25, 20 at a time, and they tend to progress about the same pace, but then when you get to a stage check, or end of course check, the number of check instructors is, you know, far less than the number of regular instructors. So that becomes, like I said, that becomes a chokepoint.

So if I'm not adequately staffed, then sometimes we have a backlog of, you know, sometimes it had run as high as 120 students on a check waiting to get a check. And this is why, you know, getting approval for check instructor, you know, is so critical for us, is we need adequate staff so the students can progress through it, because if a student gets to a point, to a stage check, and then has to wait 2 or 3 weeks, well, that doesn't do

the student any good.

And when we see something like that, you know, we tell the instructors, and said, look, you know, check and see what the backlog is, or how long is it going to be before the student is actually able to accomplish a flight check. And if it's going to be more -- let's say for private pilots -- if it's going to be more than about 3 or 4 days, then go ahead and do a refresher flight with them just, you know, to keep them touching the controls so they don't lose that control feel, basically, you know?

Q. Is that common to do those refresher flights?

A. Again, just depends on how many check instructors I have. There was a time when we were adequately staffed, when the student was recommended for a check, usually they were on that check within a day or two. So in that case, no, it wasn't.

Q. I guess I mean if students are waiting 2 to 3 weeks. I mean, how --

A. Oh.

Q. Will every student get a refresher check?

A. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q. They'll get a refresher ride before their check ride?

A. Sure.

Q. And who determines that?

A. Usually an instructor comes and asks either the curriculum manager -- if I'm in the office, they'll ask me. Say, hey, my

student is waiting for a check. It's been in 4 days, and it's going to be another couple. It's like, yeah, go ahead.

Q. So it's up to the instructor to request it?

A. Yeah.

Q. Do the instructors --

A. Well, sometimes the students ask their instructors, say, hey, you know, it's been a while. Gee, I'd really like to, you know, be up-to-par when I -- you know, say, oh, okay, so I'll go ask the chief we can have a flight.

Q. Who pays for that?

A. In the Chinese program, that's a fixed contract. We just absorb the cost of that, you know?

Q. Okay.

A. Because when you look at it, it's far more costly for a student to fail than it is to get them one hour in the airplane, because if he fails, then they go back to the end of the queue for retraining or may get retraining immediately, but then he gets put back at the end of the line to come up to the check again. You know, we try to expedite that on a recheck, but sometimes it doesn't happen.

So, you know, in terms of cost, it's really more cost-effective for us to go ahead and allow the student and the instructor to go for another flight than it would -- you know, just like, well, you know, I'm sorry, we can't flight, you're on check, and yeah, go ahead and fail. No, it doesn't work. And it

doesn't do the student any good, too. You know, the students are under a lot of pressure to succeed.

And quite honestly, especially with the Asian students, they're more afraid of failure than they are of success, you know? The fear of failure just really drives them. And that tends to lead to shortcuts, you know, try to shortcut the system, try to -- "I only need to know what I need to know" type attitude.

And this is also why, you know, what really baffles me -- doesn't baffle me anymore, but when I first got here, you know, the ground school classes, the Chinese ground school classes, these students score very high on the FAA written. And when I look for a comparison, like TCC, which is a more, you know, westernized group of students, you know, their scores range all the way from, you know, barely passing to maybe mid-90s at best. We've had classes of Chinese students where the whole class scored, you know, the low score was a 98.

So they're very good at rope learning, you know? And that's what we tend to ferret out on the stage checks is, yes, they're good at rope learning, and that's why we try to pose the questions and structure the stage check to test their aeronautical decisionmaking skills. In other words, yes, you know the answer to the question, but if you rephrase the question or restructure it to try to get the same thing and get deeper into their, you know, total knowledge of a subject, then it's apparent it becomes lacking.

DR. WILSON: Go ahead.

MS. LIEDLER: So you mentioned that before check rides, if it has been some period of time, then they get a refresher course. How about for students who are between -- just finished instrument and now they're waiting for an instructor to get into the more commercial phase, other training courses? And so if a student has been waiting 2 months, let's say, for an instructor, to be assigned an instructor, do they also get -- is it pretty standard for them to also get a refresher or do they just go?

MR. CRUZ: No, no, they just, just wait for that course to begin.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. What's available to the students who either are in between courses or waiting for a check ride? What's available to them to be able to maintain their proficiency aside from taking another flight with their instructor?

A. If it's an instrument student, we have simulators, desktop simulators, which they can -- they're free to use. It's of no cost to them, and they can use it as much as they want to make sure their instrument skills, you know, don't deteriorate.

As far as private, really is not a lot. We try to -- in some instances, we had a -- what was it called -- wasn't exactly a ground school, but it was just kind of here's an instructor available if you want to have more information about -- we called

it something. I can't remember what we called it now. Wasn't a ground school, but it was a course where people could come in or, you know, students could come in and go over areas that, you know, that maybe have further questions or maybe a weekend, and it's mostly on the ground side. As far as flying, not so much.

Now, that kind of differs with the non-contract students, you know? They pay their own way, you know? If they want to come in and, hey, I'd like to come in twice a week, well, okay, fine, you know? That's fine with us.

Q. Going back to getting check instructors, the paperwork gets submitted to the FAA?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Is there a bottleneck there in getting the paperwork back --

A. Yeah, I would say so, yeah. I've had instances where I send in a letter and didn't get a return for 85 days, you know? That's like almost 3 months, you know? I've had instances where I send in a letter, and by the time the letter came back, the student -- I mean the instructor was gone, you know?

So we've had meetings with both the FSDO manager and our POI, and you know, quite honestly, expressed that concern. And it's just like, you know, once I send you the letter, you know, I mean, everything is where it should be, meets the qualifications, you've checked your files, he doesn't have a history of accidents somewhere else, you know, what should be the turnaround time, you know? And I got the answer. This was back in November of last

year. They said we should be able to turn it around in 2 weeks. I said I can live with 2 weeks. I can't live with 3 months.

And I have some letters in now, and some of them are approaching, you know, a month, 6 weeks. So, you know, I understand that, you know, from POIs, previous POIs and our current POI, you know, they're tasked pretty heavily, you know? Somebody that's a general aviation inspector, who's got the full range of stuff, you know? It's not just us. It's Part 135 and whatever else they do. I don't know totally what you do, but so --

Q. So the POI assigned to you is not dedicated just to your group? It has other certificates --

A. Oh, no. He's got -- I know he's got 135 operators. He's got other 141 schools. And like I said, whatever else comes up, so yeah.

Q. Are you in direct contact with the POI or does somebody else reach out?

A. Oh, no. I -- yeah, I've got his personal cell phone. So --

Q. How often are you in communication with the POI?

A. Usually I don't bother him unless I really need something or if something is critical. And that's when I, you know, like I said, you know, usually I use e-mail or call the office and leave a message. If it's a real emergency or it becomes really dire, then, you know, as a last resort, then I'll use his personal cell phone. But you know, usually by that time it's at a critical

phase, like, you know, I hate to bother you, I know you got stuff to do, but here we are.

Q. Is there an assistant POI or just a POI?

A. Not that I'm aware of, no.

MR. GOOD: Not at this time.

MR. PITTACORA: No.

DR. WILSON: Just checking.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you feel like you've got a pretty good working relationship with the POI?

A. Yeah, I think so.

Q. Okay. You mentioned that sometimes you're involved in review boards?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Were you involved in the review board for Howard?

A. No.

Q. Are you aware of his training failures?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you involved in anything related to that?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Do you think that -- have you looked at the review board notes?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. Do you think that the recommendations that came out of that were adequate?

A. As I recall, the request for, I think, for 5 hours of additional training, and the -- at the time, it seemed like that may be -- the problem with this particular case was -- is that there was a delay in getting the review board to the airline for the request, which subsequently -- sometimes we'll send a request to the airline, and it might be weeks before we get a response back from them, you know? So there was a delay in actually getting it to them, and then, you know, whatever time it took for them to get back to us.

Sometimes, not this time, but you know, sometimes, like, when they have a national holiday, which seems to encompass weeks, you know, there's no response at all. Actually, they'll give us a warning, say, hey, it's spring festival, we'll see you in 2 weeks, you know? But then some other airlines actually have training committees, you know, say, oh, yeah, we got it, but committee meets at this time, and then we'll decide then, you know?

And it's not, it's not, you know, not -- every airline operates differently. So China Southern, they actually have -- I think they actually have a committee, because the e-mail address that they use is kind of an umbrella. You send it to this e-mail, and it goes redistributed to, well, four or five people within the organization.

Q. You mentioned that there was a delay in the review board getting the request to the airline. Do you know what the cause of that delay was?

A. It was -- the review board was originated by David Coons, because he was the curriculum manager for the multiengine portion, you know? Then he went on vacation. And at that time, I was thinking China Southern had -- I have to refresh my memory. I think they had their own special form, you know, where it has to be on their form. So I think it was a delay in getting in that. But I think the primary one was vacation. And then when he got back, it was just he was, you know, booked up flying students. So it was one of those things that just, just kind of fell between the cracks, I guess.

Q. Since the accident, have there been any requests from the CAAC to USAG of things to do?

A. The CAAC sent an inspector within, I think, 2 weeks after the accident, which they came, both a operations inspector and a maintenance inspector, which looked at our operations and procedures and manuals. The feedback we got was just, like, well, okay, there was nothing really unusual, nothing that, you know, really was a showstopper, you know?

But from what we understand, there was quite a lot of political pressure. In April of this year, we had one of our students commit suicide, and the Chinese press went ballistic over it. I actually got -- I actually had to get our Chinese consular from Houston involved in it to meet with the students, and everything. That was, that was quite -- actually, for everybody, that was quite a shock, you know? And it actually sent a lot of

students into kind of turmoil, which is understandable. You know, that's not a natural thing to do, you know?

But so that, there was some pressure there, and that kind of died down. But then after the accident, you know, it's just like, you know, parents obviously, you know, the parents get involved in all these situations, became quite -- like I said, from what we understand in the Chinese press, it became a very hot issue, you know? We're sending students abroad and the Americans are killing them. It's like, well, okay, that's not what happened, you know?

So in that, again, so they sent inspectors from the CAAC, which I don't know if you guys know this, but the people that are employed by the CAAC also work for the airline. So the inspector that came over here on the operations side is actually a 777 captain, or a line captain.

MR. PITTACORA: That seems odd.

MR. CRUZ: Well, you know, that's -- you know, when we first found -- you know, when I first got onboard here, it's like, you know, the CAAC, like, okay. And then he gives his card, and it's Captain So-and-So from whatever airline. It's like, well, I thought you were the CAAC. Well, I am. Oh, but I'm also a line captain with Air China, you know? So in our way of thinking, we would look at that as a conflict of interest.

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah.

MR. CRUZ: You know? Their way of thinking, it's just natural, you know? But anyway, so like I said, there was quite a

lot of political pressure. They came over here to inspect it. The only outcome that has really -- and it's kind of symbolic really -- is because the CAAC puts a cap on the number of students that we can have at any one time.

And prior to the accident, we had a 200-student cap. And that's usually the cap they put on any large flight school was 200 students. And what we understand recently that they're -- I don't think we've got the official word, but they're going to reduce that to 100 students, which is kind of normal. That's kind of their normal. You know, we've got to show that we're disciplining you in some way.

Back in 2011, December of 2011, we had a fatality involving a 172 that crashed right here just west of the runway. And it was actually a student was killed, the instructor was critically injured, and another student was injured. Took them -- they were flying, you know, 3:00 in the morning coming back, and trying to do an approach. And they got low, and then the fog was there, and then they just -- they ended up crashing, you know?

But -- and at that time, you know, at that time, I was just a line instructor. But again, one of the corrective actions that -- from the CAAC was, oh, we're going to reduce the number of students that you get. So it seems to be pretty much pro forma for them, you know? So but as far as, you know, like I said, they inspected the records and maintenance, went over the maintenance procedures, and stuff. And we haven't heard back on anything like

that.
Q. Okay. Has USAG done anything related to maintenance that you're aware of?
A. Oh, yeah, yeah.
Q. Yeah?
A. Of course they're a 145 repair station, you know, so there were, as I understand it, a lot of documentation deficiencies.
Q. Okay.
A. And you know, we had our inspection in April to renew our certificate, and we had some documentation issues also, you know? So some of that for our side was changing computer systems, and stuff, and it just, you know, it never goes smoothly. But we think we've ironed all that out now as far as the documentation.

And in maintenance, one of the issues we -- the instructors usually have with maintenance is that, you know, why aren't these airplanes available. That's really all they're concerned about is they're scheduled with a student, you know? They want to be able to be assured when I come here, I've got an aircraft available. There have been, you know, even as recently as, you know, a week ago, there was, like, maybe one or two 172s available. And 152s, the same thing.

The problem is, is because of the students that we have, when there's good days to fly, they fly. So, you know, every 100 hours, well, the plane has got to go in for an inspection, and you know, 152 usually takes about a day; 172 usually takes about a day

and a half, 2 days. One of the problems has been keeping maintenance personnel. You know, at one time, I'm going to say, like, maybe a year and a half ago, we were down to, like, five mechanics on duty during the day, and that's just --

MR. PITTACORA: I was here for one of those days.

MR. CRUZ: Yeah, yeah. It's like we can't, we can't keep up. If we're flying, you know, 8,000 hours a month, how many, how many 100-hour inspections is that? You know, that's 80 times the man hours. You do the math, it's like you don't have enough guys, you know? So they've ramped up the staff, but it's kind of like they're in the same position we are in as far as flight instructors. It's hard to keep, number one, to acquire maintenance personnel, and number two, keep them.

You know, the airlines, you know, obviously, we can't compete with the airlines as far as benefits. And that's really when you talk to some of the maintenance guys, that's what it boils down to. It's like, yeah, it pays okay, but hospitalization, 401(k), all the benefits that go over into the overall compensation package, we just can't compete that way. So --

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. Regarding the aircraft availability, did you notice, compared to before the accident, has there been a decline in available aircraft, and if so, what is the reason that you guys --

A. I would say it's about the same, quite honestly, because it really depends on the weather and the students. I mean, even when

things were going smoothly and, you know, everything was banging right along, you know, we have, you know, a week of good weather, and they're just flying the wings off -- that's not really true --

Q. We get it.

A. Yeah. Flying the wings off these things, you know, and maintenance just couldn't keep up.

After the accident, I have noticed more write-ups on -- and when you look at them, seem pretty trivial.

Q. Across the fleet or --

A. Across the fleet, yeah, yeah, pretty much.

Q. What's an example of trivial?

A. The, let's say one was the cracked plastic around the instrument panel fuel gauge, so plastic cracked. Well, okay, it's a discrepancy. Doesn't affect anything. You know, we can't, you know, run out and put new, you know, plastic on these things, you know -- timeframe, you know, so stuff like that. And I'm not saying it's a bad thing to be really, you know, critical, but we have to use some degree of reasonableness.

The Senecas, for instance, you know, we put in place a program where to return an aircraft to service takes me, a lead mechanic or the chief of maintenance, and an instructor to go on that flight, put the airplane through its paces and say, okay, this is operational, this will work. Okay.

Q. So just so I'm clear, you guys implemented a test flight?

A. Basically.

Q. Prior to maintenance?
A. More of an acceptance flight, I guess.
Q. Okay. Is that a constant, or depending on what kind of work they did to the aircraft before --
A. No, it's across the -- because, basically, we took the senior instructors, and we went to every Seneca and was like I want you to inspect this aircraft, look at it, tell me what needs to be done to make this thing operational.

You know, prior to the accident, we had a meeting with Dave Anderson, and we sat here in this room with some of the instructors, and you know, I pointed out to Dave, said, yes, the aircraft are airworthy from a strict interpretation of that word. But a lot of them are not operational, operational meaning the air vents, all right, because we -- summertime, you shut the door on a Seneca, and you're sitting there waiting to take off, you're going to lose 10 pounds just sweating it out. May not be a bad idea, but anyway --
Q. How do I get on that program?
A. Yeah, so, you know, little things like that. The knobs that adjust the air registers come off, so you just got the metal shaft there. Well, it's just a little flat blade, you know? If you're not careful, you could cut yourself on that thing.
Q. Um-hum.
A. So things that, little things like that, okay, it's airworthy, but it's not operational. Maybe the cowl flaps were a

little stiff to move. Well, you know, when you're flying and you're sitting there trying to force the cowl flaps, now what's happening? Okay. I'm pulling back, and I'm banking, okay? Those things should move smoothly. The alternate air, there were some planes where the alternate air went from the off position, and it didn't lock in that position, you know? You could just touch it like that, and it came off. You're going to lose power that way.

So little things like that, that, you know, we've gone through the planes with what we hope is a fine-toothed comb, done by the instructors.

Q. So that was going to be my next question. When you mentioned that the instructors are out doing these inspections, are the maintenance personnel doing the same kind of inspections?

A. Well, the maintenance personnel are right there alongside of them.

Q. They're with them? Okay.

A. Yeah. And even on these acceptance flights, you know, I had Dave say, okay, so, all right, so -- and one of them, just an example, went on a flight, and we were doing a whole series of, you know, stalls, steep turns, engine outs, and you know, put the plane like we use it, okay? I was executing the stall, and as I got to, you know, almost full travel on the yoke, it was binding, okay?

Now, the instructor side was not, but the student side was. I was like, well, you see, here's binding, so here and out here.

I said, Dave, you got to look at this. In just normal flying, you don't go to that extreme. You probably wouldn't find it, you know? But in putting the plane through its paces, like, okay, this is a problem, you know? So he said, oh, yeah, I see it, yeah, we'll correct that.

MS. LIEDLER: So did you after the accident, did you take out every aircraft in your fleet?

MR. CRUZ: Yes. We grounded every -- well, not all the aircraft, just the Senecas. We grounded every Seneca, because, quite honestly, that was the worst-case scenarios, I guess, as far as aircraft simply because they are -- you know, you got two of everything, you know? And you know, they quit making the Seneca 1 in what, 1974?

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. It's been a long time.

A. Yeah. I can remember when the Seneca 1's came out brand-new, so, you know, it's 50 years ago.

Q. Is the fleet of Senecas flying currently? Are they back in the air?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. No. I think we've only got, I think, three online now that we've gone through. So what we did is after we went through a comprehensive preflight inspection of the airplanes, you know, the first one that came out had the least number of squawks. The

second one that came out had the second least number. So they're kind of backed up working through.

Now, they've gone through everything like, you know, the sidewalls coming in, you know? That needs to be replaced, because now that can interfere with rudder pedals. Okay. We'll replace that. Some of the things that, you know, well, the door, the rear door panel was coming off. Well, okay, we'll resecure it, but we're not going to change it right now because that really didn't affect the flight that much, or not, not at all, you know?

So but we did ground every Seneca. We went through a comprehensive list of -- to bring these things up to an operational status. And like I said, you know, we started this process before the accident. Now, we didn't ground everything before then, but we had the discussion about the operational effectiveness of the aircraft. Now, this has just kind of accelerated that process.

Q. How many total -- so three are operating now?

A. Um-hum.

Q. How many others do you have? I can't remember?

A. Here, I think we've got another seven, seven or eight, something like that. I think we had 11 based here.

Q. Gotcha.

MS. LIEDLER: So the Seneca, is there plans for the same type of checks to be occurring in your private and instrument aircraft?

MR. CRUZ: Yes, but not to the formalized degree. In other

words, we've had the discussion with maintenance. It's like, all right, so when you release an airplane from maintenance for 100-hour or annual, you know, you need to develop an acceptance form to not just do the things that are required by maintenance, but sit in the airplane, make sure, like, the seatbelt is installed correctly, not backwards. Make sure the things function, you know? It's not just, well, we inspected it per whatever --

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. Right.

A. You know, and returned it to service. Like, no. Sit in the airplane. If there's a sidewall, you know, that's interfering with the rudder panel, well, yeah, it's not on the -- I don't guess it's on the inspection. I have no idea, you know, but --

Q. There are sections for trim pieces --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- interior stuff like that.

A. Yeah.

Q. But the limitations on older, smaller aircraft are very, very light.

A. Yeah.

Q. There is, I mean, the hail damage that is allowed on some of those -- like, the Cessna products, you can pretty much drop a bucket of ball bearings on it, and as long as it's not on a leading edge or touching a frame or a stringer --

A. Yup.

Q. Good to go.
A. Oh, we've had some that looks like golf balls.
Q. I've seen a lot of them.
A. It's like --
Q. We're like, whoa.
A. But yeah, but like you said, well, it didn't touch a rim, it's not on a leading edge, so, you know, it's good to go. It's like, well, okay. You know, the dimples on a golf ball make it fly better. I guess the same thing for an airplane. I don't know.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So going back to the acceptance flight after maintenance, we asked -- I think we asked you, but I'm not sure if we -- if I heard the answer.
A. Okay.
Q. Is it after only certain maintenance that an acceptance flight is complete or is it --
A. Right now, the formalized acceptance is limited to the Senecas. As far as the 152s and the 172s, those really haven't been a problem. But maintenance just overall is kind of taken the same critical eye with those aircraft.
Q. So for the Senecas, is it -- let's ask for the Senecas, since they're in this acceptance flight process, is it all maintenance done on a Seneca they have to do an acceptance flight or is it --
A. No, no, no. This is kind of the initial return-to-service

since we grounded everything.
Q. Okay.
A. Because honestly, this accident affected the multiengine instructors quite, quite hard. You know, they were friends with Francesca, and some of them just refused. It's like, you know what, I'm not flying the airplane anymore. You know what, I don't really -- yeah, I've looked at it. I don't think I need to fly light twins.

And quite honestly, the airlines are not requiring the multiengine time that they used to. You used to go to the airlines, and they wanted, you know, 250, 300 hours multiengine airplane. And now they're kind of looking at it like, well, you know what, they're going to come in, they're going to get a type rating, and yeah, we're good with -- you got a multiengine? Fine. You know how much time you got? Twenty hours? Yeah, we're good with that.

MR. PITTACORA: Going back to -- were you, were you done with your questions?

MS. LIEDLER: I can be.

MR. PITTACORA: No, go ahead, finish, please. Go ahead.

MS. LIEDLER: I've got a lot of questions, so go ahead and pop in.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay. So when we were talking about the CAAC, and you said they identified some documentation issues, what kind of issues are we -- what kind of documentation?

MR. CRUZ: They were -- did primarily as far as student records, training records. It was the -- again, we went through changing over systems, and we're just like, oh, okay, I've seen the records here, but they're in a different format from the records here, so how can I reconcile that. And I says, well, it's not an easy process, you know? So they're just like, well, okay, I understand the past, you know, this is kind of hard to do. But right now, from what we're seeing with the new system that you've got, and everything, everything looks good, you know?

So it was -- I hate to say that, you know, they were tasked to come here to find something, but they had to find something to report back.

MR. PITTACORA: So that wasn't so much regarding the maintenance activities?

MR. CRUZ: Well, they -- you know, I didn't -- Dave Anderson actually stayed with the inspector for the maintenance. I was here with the operations guy.

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah, I'll talk to Dave.

MR. CRUZ: Yeah, yeah.

MR. PITTACORA: When we --

MR. CRUZ: He can tell you more about that --

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MR. CRUZ: Yeah.

MR. PITTACORA: Sorry, Courtney.

MS. LIEDLER: You're fine.

MR. PITTACORA: Is the limitation for 100 student threshold been implemented yet?

MR. CRUZ: I don't think so. I don't think it's official yet, but we kind of heard through the grapevine if you will, that's kind of what it's going to do.

MR. PITTACORA: So if you have students, would that grandfather in?

MR. CRUZ: Yeah, the students that are here are here.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MR. CRUZ: Okay. So basically what it means is that, you know, usually we get classes at the rate of every 6 weeks or so. So we've been told we probably won't get any more classes from any Chinese customer until spring of next year.

MR. PITTACORA: Gotcha.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. How often do you interact with maintenance? Just not necessarily since the accident, but just normally?

A. Almost every day, you know? I go over maintenance just see, you k now, see what, you know, what the status of everything is, and if you know, we're really -- it's like you know what -- you know, talk with Dave and say, you know, we're really kind of short on 152s right now, so could you kind of focus a little more on that rather than, you know, another 172 or Seneca?

So our needs as far as demand on aircraft kind of vary by student load. You know, obviously, when we get a lot of the

brand-new students, 152s are an issue, you know? So but just on a general, general basis, I go over there almost every day just to find out, you know, how things are going.

Part of it is my own curiosity because, you know, my father was a aircraft mechanic, you know, so I just like to -- you know, it's like right now our King Air is undergoing a phase inspection, and it's in, you know, a state of disassembly. And I'll go over there and talk to John. It's like, okay, what is that? How does that function with that? Oh, so that's -- you know, it's my own curiosity.

But as far as operational status for the academy, I have a very good relationship with them, just like, you know, what do you all need, you know, what do you need, what I need for them to produce. And I do a lot of the test flights, you know? Say, hey, we're having a problem with this, you know, do you have time to go fly, you know, make sure this is working like it should? It's like, yeah, sure.

Q. So do you see the squawk sheets?

A. I get a maintenance report every day and kind of look over, review, and you know, see what's extraordinary. One process we did implement after this was a multiple squawk. In other words, if we have what we -- we kind of determined if the aircraft has the same problem twice within a 50-hour period, we call it the elevated squawk, okay. In other words, starter -- let's just make up something -- engine starter, all right? We see the same thing.

Maintenance cleared it. It's good. Well, what did they do to it? I don't know, cleaned the magnetos, or whatever. Whatever.

And so if we had the same squawk within a 50-hour period for the same thing, then we've implemented a process where, okay, so now this comes to the attention to the chief of maintenance, Dave. It's like, all right, Dave, we've had this same problem. You can't -- one of the other things we've done is, you know, one of the problems with documentation in the flight schedule system is when an airplane was returned to service, all the pilots saw was inspected and returned to service, or inspected and whatever --

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah, it's -- it should be verified --

MR. CRUZ: Yeah, something like that. Well, now what they're doing is they're copy and pasting the corrected procedure that's entered in the logbook that goes in the corridor into our system so that the pilot can see exactly what was done, what was wrong.

So that's -- it's no longer -- and one of the other things, what we say is that on the second squawk -- let's say the first squawk is an issue -- or could not duplicate on the ground, okay? Everybody has heard that one, right? If we have the same issue, it's like for the second time, you cannot clear this just "cannot duplicate." We're going to find out why, all right? So we have implemented that process of an elevated squawk.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. And you said the squawk, the corrective action is pasted into what program for you guys now?

A. Our flight scheduling program.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, because that's the program that the instructors see.
Q. All right. Okay. Kind of linked to that, when an aircraft is dispatched, what paperwork or what information regarding maintenance is offered?
A. Okay. So the dispatch sheet contains the Hobbs and the tachometer times, and it actually has a list of the required inspections that are going to be due in so many hours or days. As far as past squawks, it doesn't contain that information. But it's online, so if the, you know, if the instructor sees -- is like, well, I know this plane went into maintenance for whatever, you know, then he can go in and look at all the closed squawks and see what the corrective action was.

As far as the dispatch, all it contains is what are the next inspections coming due, 50-hour, 100-hour, or 80 or whatever it is, so that the pilot has the information, is like, well, okay, this is kind of due in 2.3 hours. I have to be back on the ground in 2.3 hours. In other words, I'm not going to overfly this particular inspection.

And actually, it comes up -- there's a warning that comes up on the screen when it's within, I think, 10 hours of that required inspection. So the dispatch knows and the pilots know, it's like, okay, this is getting close. And then when it gets within, I think, 5 hours, then it's like -- then it becomes -- I think it

turns red on the dispatch screen. It's like this inspection is imminent. And then the pilot is made aware. It's like, hey, you know you only got 5 hours till this 100. Yeah, yeah, we'll be back in 2. Okay. Great. And we're back in 3.

Now, when it gets less to an hour, it's like, we're not dispatching that aircraft.

MR. PITTACORA: Yeah.

MR. CRUZ: You can't do anything in less than an hour, right?

MR. GOOD: Dave, do you know if there is any functionality or way to add onto the dispatch sheet, like, the past 5 or 10 write-ups?

MR. CRUZ: I'm sure there probably is, you know? We -- I think we've approached the developers with that, you know, and it's just a matter of -- they're always upgrading the program, and everything. So I think it's been mentioned, but it hasn't been implemented.

MR. GOOD: All right.

MR. CRUZ: Okay. But currently, there is not.

MR. GOOD: Right.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Okay. Real quick. This is an easy one. You mentioned an assistant chief?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Who's that?

A. Dan Bryson.

Q. Bryce?
A. Bryson, B-r-y-s-o-n.
Q. Okay. Moving to -- we talked about time that -- availability of sim use between instruments and MEs, going through your ME and commercial?
A. Um-hum.
Q. And that they are able to fly the sims here as much -- talk to me a little bit about the delay in the times between going from private to instrument or instrument to multiengine.
A. Okay.
Q. You know, what's a standard period of time that is expected for a student to wait between those?
A. Well, in an ideal world, there should be no delay, because once they finish private, they're concurrently enrolled in instrument and commercial. So what happens is after they get their private certificate, they're enrolled in instrument and commercial. They focus on their instrument, but at the same time they're doing the time-building portion of the commercial.

All right. So sometimes there may not be any delay. Within the past year, this year, we had actually pretty good weather during the spring and summer, early summer. So a lot of the students that were in instrument were doing a lot of the time-building for commercial, just knocking it out of the park. So actually, they finished their instrument, they finished all their time-building, which they do about 50 hours of, you know, solo

cross-country-type work in the commercial curriculum.

And then there's like, well, okay, I've finished all the single-engine portion of the commercial. Now I have to wait to get into the multiengine, and that's where a bottleneck occurs. And it's multifaceted in the fact that it's usually availability of aircraft, availability of instructors. We just don't have as many MEIs. That's actually a problem for us. There's just not as many MEIs coming into the pipeline as there used to be.

But ideally, there should be not any delay. As soon as they finish private, they get instrument, commercial, they're focusing on their instrument, they're concurrently doing commercial, they're building their time so that by the time they've gotten to the -- is it 190 or 170 -- 165 hours of the commercial curriculum, the last 25 are right there in multiengine, because they do 25 hours of multiengine time, which brings them up to the 190. So --

Q. So have any changes been made or planned to be made for when you see this bottleneck of available aircraft or MEIs? Is there any, I mean, is there any plan for how to address that? Understandably, it's hard to --

A. Well, right now I've got -- I will actually be conducting a class next week for seven MEIs. Now, traditionally, for an MEI, before I put a guy in MEI, again, I want them to have at least 500 hours of dual instruction here before I put them in a multiengine airplane.

Number one, what we're looking for is: Are they a good

instructor? Do they get their students done in a timely fashion? Has there been any problems? We've actually had some that, you know, his training really wasn't that great. I'm not going to put him in a multiengine, number one, because it's -- we really want to keep that to 25 hours. We don't want a lot of -- any, actually, overages in that particular portion of the curriculum, because simply, to fly a multiengine airplane costs a lot more than it costs to fly a 152, you know?

So we're looking for instructors that can get a student trained correctly through the curriculum, pushing them through in a timely manner, and we kind of focus that on the instructors when they do get to multiengines, just like you got 25 hours, you know? We don't want to see less than 25 hours, and we don't want to see more than 25 hours. So, you know, now if they go 26, okay, 27, all right, we can live with that. It's not, it's not a deal breaker, you know? But we're really looking for somebody that can push them through the curriculum in that amount of time.

Q. So if I heard you right, you said you've got a class of seven MEIs coming in, but you want them to have about 400 hours of dual in single-engine before they'd be coming in?

A. Correct.

Q. Okay.

A. Correct. So -- and just in addition to that, you know, I'm conducting a class. It's -- actually, we have an MEI standardization class, where we review -- because a lot of these

guys haven't done multiengine stuff since they got their commercial, you know? So we're going to review VNC and single-engine operations and the profiles that we use, just, you know, how we implement the curriculum, you know, on a cross country flight you combine it with this, and you know, just kind of go over things to make it more efficient in their training.

Q. Okay. So you mentioned that there was a limitation right now from CAAC coming down the pike for reduction of students from 200 to 100?

A. Correct.

Q. When it happened last time, is that just (indiscernible) is that just for a period of time until they like --

A. Yeah, usually after a period of time, they'll increase it back.

MR. PITTACORA: Do they provide a reason why they're limited?

MR. CRUZ: No, no, it's just described as, like, well, you had this fatality and, you know, just to, just to -- you know, we think you should slow down, or whatever. They just --

MR. PITTACORA: And is it just you guys or --

MR. CRUZ: No, it's just us.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MR. CRUZ: Yeah, because our certificate at Grayson is not affected by that. They look at it as two separate entities.

MR. PITTACORA: Gotcha.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. You mentioned the political pressure after the suicide and then following the accident, two events. And you said something about parents' involvement?
A. Yeah, as far as the political pressure, you know, the -- obviously, anything tragic like that, you know, the parents are going to get -- come over here, you know? Usually the consulate gets involved, too. But as a normal course, you know, parents don't come over here to check up on their student training.
Q. But they did after this event?
A. Oh, yeah. Actually, we paid for them to come over, I think.
Q. For all of their parents?
A. No, just the accident --
Q. Okay.
A. What do you mean by all of the parents? Just like, you know, the parents of every student or --
Q. Right. So when you say parents' involvement, it was just the parents' involvement from the accident pilot, Howard's parents?
A. Yes, yes, yes.
Q. Okay. I think I'm caught up now.
A. Okay.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. The pilots that are sitting for 2 to 3 weeks now that the Senecas have been grounded, what's going to be done once they start flying again? Is there going to be a refresher flight?
A. Yes.

Q. Okay.
A. Yes, that's part of the plan. Number one, as far as the acceptance flight, but also -- in fact, 2 weeks ago, we did a refresher with all the multiengine instructors, kind of going over, you know, all the procedures, the airplane, the systems to make sure everybody, you know, didn't forget. But that's also a plan that we, you know, told the CAAC as far as corrective action that we're going to be doing.

So during the acceptance flight, like I said, we put the plane through all of the paces like it would be, say, like, for a commercial check ride, do all the multiengine stuff for that. So it does kind of two things. It makes sure that the plane is operational. And number two, the instructor is there. It's like, okay, let's see how you perform, you know? It gets them back into the flow of things, if you will.

With the new multiengine instructor class we're doing next week, after we do the class, then I'll be flying with every instructor to make sure they're proficient in everything before we put them on the line.

Q. And that's for the new, the new MEIs?
A. Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: The new MEIs or the --

MR. CRUZ: Well, both, both new and the old. The thing is, right now, we really only got three existing MEIs, which I've flown with all those guys.

BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Since the accident?
A. Since the accident.
Q. All right.
A. There's been -- we've had, like I said, four or five dropouts, like, yeah, I'm not flying them anymore. I don't need to fly light twins anymore.
Q. And what about for the students?
A. The students, we are -- actually, we've done -- I think we did last week a refresher class, got all the multiengine students to refresh them in multiengine operations. And once the instructors and the planes were back online, then each student will be going through kind of a refresher flight or two to get back on track with the curriculum.

In other words, let's put it this way. Let's say if the student was waiting for his end-of-course test. Okay. Well, we're going to say, oh, okay, you're end-of course? No, no, let's do a couple flights, make sure you're proficient in everything. Then we can go on.
Q. Okay. Any other changes to training since the accident?
A. As far as multi, multiengine, yes, there has been, you know? In other words, we're doing the extra training with the instructors. We'll be doing it with the students. The return-to-service flights for the aircraft themselves, we're making sure they're operational, functional, work like they should. As far as

the other curriculums, instrument and private, really nothing has changed there.

Q. The instrument training with the students and instructors, is that what we just talked about, the refresher training?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. What about guidance to instructors and students about squawking aircraft?

A. Oh, that's been an issue we've gone from one extreme, where, you know, the wingtip had a crack. Well, okay, a crack, you know? It's something that will be addressed in the future. Right now it doesn't prevent it from being dispatched, you know?

One of the things I think during the inspection, you know, the whole concept of triage of records that were being kept, that's done away with. You know, it's -- actually, we call it line maintenance like you do in the airlines, and it'll be fully documented.

In other words, and instructor goes out and says, oh, hey, the position light is out. Oh, okay. Getting ready to go on a night flight. Instead of calling -- you know, we'll call line maintenance, and that way they open a work order, they do the logbook, make sure everything is done correctly instead of just, you know, going out and changing the lightbulb and not documenting it.

So we're kind of getting -- we've put some new aircraft, or not new, but we've refurbed them with electronic instruments. So

now there's some training issues involved, and it's just like, well, this airplane doesn't do this. It's like, well, it's not supposed to do that, you know? It's familiarization with the new electronic instruments. We're putting G5s in the, in the -- so they're expecting them to work --

MR. PITTACORA: Do you provide any kind of differences?

MR. CRUZ: Well, we're going from analog to the G5s, and it's like, well, no, you know, guys, number one, it's fairly simple to use, but number two, you know, you've got the -- all the manuals are online, every instructor site. You know, if you're assigned to this airplane, you know, you need to know everything about it. It's not a real mystery.

Now, we hold an instructor meeting every first Wednesday of the month, and since this has come up recently -- we just put the airplane online 2 days ago. Now, they're, well, it doesn't do this. Okay. So we're having a training class, kind of a general, like, okay, here's the system, here's how it works.

We've got two airplanes. They have G500s with G5s. One has an autopilot and one does not. Well, based on the installation, the G500 interaction with the G5 is a little different when you have the autopilot installed. It's configured a little different. So they're expecting when they in either one of these aircraft for them to function the same. It's like, well, no, it doesn't function exactly the same.

So we are having that little differences between the two.

Because now they're writing up squawks -- it's like, hey, when I set the barrel pressure on the G5, it didn't go to the G5. Well, wait a minute. It doesn't work that way in this airplane, because it doesn't have the autopilot. Now, the one that has the autopilot, when you do it here, yeah, it does slave to that or talk to it.

MR. PITTACORA: Right.

MS. LIEDLER: So the G5 is installed on which aircraft?

MR. CRUZ: We've got two 172s where the G5 is the standby instrument, and we just put a 172 online with two G5s that take the place of the attitude and the directional gyro. And actually, we've got all electronic -- we actually took the vacuum system out of the airplane. It's actually, when that airplane came online, they weighed it, and it's 60 pounds lighter.

MR. PITTACORA: Oh, you'd be amazed how much you add up a bunch of small parts --

MR. CRUZ: Oh, yeah.

MR. PITTACORA: -- what it comes out to.

MR. CRUZ: Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: So the differences training wasn't offered initially, but it's going to be offered?

MR. CRUZ: Yes, yes. Initially, I thought, it's like, well, okay, it's not -- you know, you read the manual, and it's fairly intuitive actually. But now since these squawks have come up, where it's like, okay, so this is a misunderstanding of how this

thing works. Obviously, we need to do some differences training in it.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you know who Howard was before the accident?

A. No, no, I never had any personal interaction with him.

Q. Had you heard of him as a student?

A. Only I was familiar with the name in that it comes across -- you know, I saw in the 8710s for issuance of certificate, and just kind of generally in the monthly reports I used to send to the airlines, you know, here's where he is. He's a little behind in the class or ahead of the class, or you know, but as far as personal interaction, no.

Q. Right.

A. I did not.

Q. Do you remember anything from his records that stood out?

A. No.

Q. No?

A. No, not from -- really.

Q. Okay. If an instructor had a concern, who would they report that to. Not just about -- so let me clarify because it might differentiate who they talk to. So I don't mean, like, with a student, but with, you know, I've squawked an airplane five times, and it keeps coming back; I witnessed another instructor doing something that I thought wasn't right. Who would they talk to

about that?

A. Well, we've implemented a safety management system that's been in place now for I'm going to say almost a year, I think, in its current form. So it has the ability to -- and we have gotten reports. It's like, hey, I saw an instructor do this. I want to report it. They can report it anonymously or they can sign their name to it.

Prior to that, you know, people were reluctant to -- hey, I don't want to be a snitch, but I saw -- you know, it's like, no, is this a safety concern? Well, it could be. Well, then it is a safety concern, you know? And try to stress that in the instructor meetings, like, you know, safety is always number one. If we can't do it safely, then we're not going to do it.

So things like I saw an instructor taxiing on the ropes for parking. It's like, well, okay, that's not our procedure. Our procedure is to pull up perpendicular to the parking space, stop the aircraft and then push it back into place. So, you know, some things like that, where people were reluctant to report it, first, because they didn't want to be the snitch.

Okay. Now we are getting reports like that, you know, because if they want to do it anonymously, that's fine, you know? So it depends on what it is. You know, if somebody saw something that could be a safety concern, now they're getting more comfortable with reporting it so that we can, you know, address it in a group-type format, or if it's egregious, you know, hey, so-

and-so did this, it's like, okay, then we need to counsel the instructor on a one-on-one basis.

If they feel like actually personally coming to somebody, it would really be up to them, you know?

Q. Right.

A. How their level of comfort would be. So like I said, prior to implementation of the SMS, you know, there would be a lot of talk in the breakroom, oh, I've squawked this airplane five times, and nobody is doing anything about it. Well, did you tell anybody? Well, no. Well, okay, so how, how are you expecting anything to be corrected if you, you just bitch about it in the breakroom, but you're not actually talking to somebody that could actually do something about it. So --

Q. Why do you think that they were afraid to report? I know you said they don't want to be a snitch?

A. Um-hum.

Q. But there's -- only if there's going to be repercussions?

A. Yeah. It's -- instructors -- it's like any other organization. You develop a peer group, all right? You feel comfortable talking to that peer group. Being careful in that peer group is kind of like, you know, the unwritten code, is like, oh, yeah, I'm not going to snitch on my peer group, okay? Don't want to go outside of that, yeah, we can, we can talk about this stuff internally, but you know, we don't want to really go outside the group to express our concerns. And you know, things that were

really, you know, really concerning, yes, they would talk about it, you know, if it was -- but I think there was a reluctance, you know, to go outside the group and talk about it simply because that's just the way people are.

But like I said, with the implementation of the SMS system, it's like, yeah, I can report this anonymously, and yes, I'm going to bring it to the attention, so that way, I can do without being ferreted out, I guess, you know? So --

Q. Is that available to students also?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Is it truly anonymous?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. It really is.

Q. So is it online or is there a hotline?

A. We have a link to our scheduling system, which you can click on the link, and it takes you to the SMS reporting system. And then once they enter this, you know, like I said, they can enter it, they can log on with their ID or whatever, or if they want to report something anonymously, then it just goes to Rick Sanchez, who's the safety manager. And he gets a report. And it's just like, okay, I don't know who it came from, but here's the report.

Q. And pilots can go into that system without logging in?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Have you ever done that?

A. No. I have not.
Q. Have you had a safety concern that you've talked to somebody about?
A. Usually if I have a safety concern, I go right to maintenance and talk to them about it. You know, I don't -- I haven't really had a safety concern. Usually it comes up to me, not -- you know, I'm not out there every day seeing stuff.
Q. So something that I find interesting about the interviews that we've been doing is -- so I said if you had a safety concern that you want to report. And you said, well, if I had an issue, I'd go to maintenance?
A. Yup.
Q. And a lot of things that we've been talking to people, they seem to -- everything ties back to maintenance.
A. Um-hum.
Q. So that seems to be a prevalent --
A. Theme, yeah.
Q. Topic that we have brought up. What about non-maintenance safety things?
A. Ah, because I have witnessed things, and I'll go right to the instructor and say, hey, I was sitting in the car, and you didn't see me, but you pulled into this parking space. This plane is not properly secured. You got out, and you walked away. The student just did a half job of doing it, and he walked away. So that's when I stopped them right then and there and said, wait a minute

guys, you know?

It's -- even doing some of the instructor proficiency flights, you know, some of the 172s don't have the step on the side of the cowl to step up to, you know, and they were stepping on the juncture of the wing, you know, where the fairing is, and it's (indiscernible) right there, no step. And I'll go, like, so I told you this isn't a check ride. It's an instrument proficiency -- I mean a instructor proficiency flight. Why did you do that? Oh, well, I just -- I said, no, no, no, no. The ladder is over there. I know it's out of the way, but this is the way you do.

One of the things, you know, I try to when I address the instructors in the standardization class is not only are we trying to teach people to be pilots, but we're trying to teach people to be professional pilots. So how do you teach somebody to be professional? Number one, you have to act like a professional, because to me, you know, there's different styles of leadership, and instructors are leaders. And the only effective -- to me, in my mind, the only effective way to demonstrate leadership is to act it. In other words, you have you to do it. You have to instill integrity, and that's what it really boils down to.

If the instructor is doing something wrong, and he knows it's wrong, then he lacks integrity. Well, that's a bad example to the students, because if they see an instructor do something, well, you know, he told me to do it this way, but now he's doing it this

way. Well, number one, you've lost credibility, and number two, you're a hypocrite, all right.

So what have you done, you know? You've destroyed your credibility. You really haven't instilled professionalism in the pilot. So that kind of concerned me, and I pointed it out. So you knew this wasn't the right procedure, but you did it anyway, even though I'm standing right here? No, that doesn't work. You know, so it's like, well, okay, yeah, I --

One of the things I used to do when I had time -- wish I had time -- is actually just kind of sit on the ramp, you know, just kind of out of the way and just kind of observe things going on, because you know, it's one thing to talk procedures, to talk polices, but if you don't actually follow up on it and observe and correct, then it just becomes so many words on paper, you know?

But knowing that, you know, people are looking, okay, well, that's, you know what, I've got to do it the right way. But then I can get -- tell them -- it's like, but that's what integrity is. Integrity is doing things the right way because it is the right way even when nobody is looking. Pure and simple.

DR. WILSON: Did you have a question you wanted to ask?

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. I got a couple questions --

A. Sure.

Q. What program or what (indiscernible) are you guys using for --

A. The?
Q. SMS or safety reporting --
A. Oh, the safety reporting? It's called -- I think it's Fresh Desk or something like that. It's -- I can get you, I can get you the exact.
Q. All right. And have you all ever done or do you do training for instructors or students on how to utilize this?
A. I know Rick put out a bulletin or something on how, you know, how to access it, you know, and then as far as the new classes, students coming in, I'm not sure. I'm not sure.
Q. And do you know if that bulletin, does it give, like, step-by-step instructions on how to do an anonymous report versus a --
A. Yeah, I think so.
Q. Okay.
A. But that's Rick's department, so -- Rick Sanchez.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So for when something is -- if a student were to come to you or -- via SMS, knock on your door and say, hey, I'd like to talk to you about something, not just maintenance, but if it's an instructor that they're struggling with or something within the program or otherwise, how is that carried forward? How is --
A. Okay. Actually, have a situation right now where a student sent an e-mail to me and I think Tyson, where he says, like, my instructor just doesn't seem to know what he's doing, you know? So now I've gotten with the curriculum manager, I've looked at

some records, and it's like, you know what, his students do -- he has not trained them, trained them well. So we're actually kind of in the middle of getting with the instructor and said, look, your instruction has come into question, you know? We need to reevaluate you. And he's an instrument instructor right now.

And you know, so when a student comes and says, you know, I don't think he's teaching me the right things, not from what I've read, that's a real concern, you know? So, you know, we are going to be -- this just happened the other day. We're going to be calling in the instructor, say, look, you know, we need to reevaluate you. Yeah, so either A, you know, during the evaluation, if we determine that -- and by "we," I mean me -- determine that, you know, you're not doing the right things. You can either, you know, receive some training to do the right things or, you know, maybe it's just time you go somewhere else, you know? You know, we can't have that.

Q. Have you had any feedback on the program itself from students?

A. Not usually, no.

MR. GOOD: Do you all do any type of exit interview with the students or give a selection like pick five random out of a class of 100 as they --

MR. CRUZ: No, no, because usually Tyson usually the last one to talk to them before they, you know, leave, and everything. He'll kind of ask them generally, but it's not consistent with

every student, you know? Obviously, we like to receive feedback, but you know, quite honestly, they're in the mindset, it's like, yeah, I just want to get out of here, just want to go home, because they've been here over a year, so -- but he does sit down with them, you know, say what was good, what was bad, what would you change, but it's not really in a formalized type of document.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Do you encourage the students to speak up and -- for any reason whether it's something going on, problems with their roommates, or problems in the programs or problems in the airplane? Do you encourage them to speak up directly to --

A. I haven't really gone out, you know, and gathered the students together and say if you have any concerns or anything you need to address, you know, come to me with them. That kind of goes through the curriculum managers, because he meets with the students.

It's, like, you know, if you have problems, you know, come to me, come to whoever you feel comfortable with. We don't say -- it's like, you know, if you have a problem, you know, don't, don't bring it to light. Just, you know -- now, as far as the Chinese students and their living conditions, and everything, they have apartment managers they go directly to.

We also have a meeting once -- I think it's every 2 weeks with the student leaders of the groups with Tyson, and if they have concerns, that's where they express them, you know, have

concerns about schedules, flying, apartments, transportation, whatever, you know? The leaders will bring it to the attention. And usually the leaders aren't shy about -- you know, because they're in that position of a student leader to act as a representative for their group. You know, so he advocates for them.

Q. A student leader is a student?

A. Yes.

Q. And you said once a month?

A. I think it's every 2 weeks now.

Q. Okay. And you said they talk to Tyson Walker?

A. Yes.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. You mentioned that you used to do observations on the ramp?

A. Um-hum.

Q. And --

A. I don't have time.

Q. All right. So do you feel like you have enough time to do your job properly?

A. Oh, wow, that's a loaded question. Quite honestly, no. You know, there's -- I tell people, it's like, you know, this job is enough to keep me busy 25 hours a day, you know? But you know, it's -- I'm looking at it as -- I don't look at it just as a job, but I have learned, it's like I'm here at work, work ends at home. It didn't used to be that way. I think men are just hardwired,

you know, to work, taking care of a family by working.

Taking care of the emotional needs, I mean, you know, except -- police officer for 25 years -- 24 years. That occupation has one of the higher divorce rates of any occupation, and a lot of it, and I, quite honestly, got caught myself, I was bringing work home. You know, when you're dealing with trash on the streets 8 hours a day, you come home, and you still reflect that attitude. Well, that's not good for the family.

So, I mean, we went through that period of time and learned. It's like -- and I, you know, I tell Tyson just, like, you know, I have -- being a police officer, I have worked birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, every holiday you can name, you know, for the sake of, you know, duty, you know, because that's what I was assigned to do.

Even though I'm still passionate about aviation and this job, come 5 or 6:00, or whenever I leave here, put it that way, the job goes behind, you know? It's time to focus on the family and take time off, and whatever. If you don't take time off, you're going to burn out. You know, so even though we (indiscernible) here, you know, I'm very passionate about aviation. That's all I ever wanted to be growing up. All I wanted to be was a pilot. All I wanted to be was a P-51 Air Force pilot. They got rid of those, so -- but you know, but when I leave here, I tend to put it behind.

And that's simply just working through it, you know, so --

MS. LIEDLER: So during your hours here, whether it's 8 hours, 9 hours, 10 hours, do you -- I think I'm going echo Katherine's question is during that time, do you feel that you have the resources and personal time during that time, like, time to do your job properly or to get assistance to do your job adequately?

MR. CRUZ: The short answer is no, I don't.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Have you requested assistance, more personnel?

A. Well, yeah, I have, but the problem becomes is, you know, you sign on a task, and then I have found it's harder to review the work than it would be to do it myself, when I would be considering it right the first time. And as far as assistance, I have, you know, I asked for assistant instructors. Well, one person has stepped up and says, yeah, I would consider doing that.

The problem is, is the requirements for an assistant instructor for, basically, unlimited courses, you know, you have to have 1,000 hours PIC. Well, you know, by the time they get to that 1,000 hours PIC, and we go through the process to get them as an assistant chief, they may be only looking at another 400, you know, 500 hours until they go to the airline if they're going to the airline. They wouldn't be here long. So it's like, well, why are we going through this process if you're only going to be here another couple months. That just doesn't make sense.

One that has stepped up, he's a little short of the 1,000-

hour PIC requirement. He can still do the instrument and commercial -- I mean instrument and private, but he doesn't really qualify for commercial. So finding somebody that meets the requirements per 141 is really hard to get.

The other side of that is we've actually had some older, even older than me, gentlemen come, and their concept of instructing is, well, I'd like to do it part-time, you know, just come in, maybe a flight or two. It's like, well, that doesn't work for us, you know? The students are here full-time, you know, sometimes 6 days a week doing stuff, you know? They just don't -- it's not that they don't have the stamina to do it. They're just not committed to do it. You know, they're retired, you know?

I read an article not too long ago, where somebody had the bright idea -- and admittedly, it was an idea -- you know, it's like, you know, we shouldn't have a shortage of flight instructors. We got retired captains with experience of multi-10,000, 20,000 hours. They'd be well-qualified to teach students. It's like, well, let's look at the reality of the situation. I'm going to come from a 747 captain to a 172, where it's hot, it's cold, it's drafty. I don't think there's many people that are really interested in doing that.

Now, we did get a lot of people, you know, it's like, hey, you got a King Air? Yeah, I'll come fly the King Air for you. It's like I've already got enough King Air instructors, you know? I really need 172 Seneca instructors. Well, I'm not interested in

that, and I didn't want to do it full-time, you know?

So it sounds great, you know? That's actually what we need. You know, our whole training thing is backwards. But that's true all over the world, you know? And I equate it to college, okay? If you go to college to, let's say, engineering, okay? Do you want to really learn from the guy that just graduated from engineering school? Is he the professor? No, he's not, okay? The professor is the guy that's got the experience, the background, the knowledge. That's who I want to be paying for.

Well, we're doing that, you know? We're taking brand-new instructors, teaching brand-new students, and he's just -- he's passed, you know, the qualifications, and everything, but does he really have the experience, the wealth of knowledge? You know, there's more to flying than just what's in the book, right? And to find the people with that kind of experience and put them in this training environment, they're just not there. They really aren't.

Q. So I have two more questions before I ask you if you want to take a break --

A. Okay.

Q. Because we've been going for a little bit over 2 hours right now, so --

A. Really? Okay. Wow.

Q. But I just want to kind of close out this topic.

A. Sure.

Q. You can decide whether you'll tell me on a daily basis, weekly, monthly basis, but what percentage of your time is devoted to director of training and what percentage of your time is devoted to the chief flight instructor?
A. You know, they almost work in conjunction with each other, you know? As really everything I do as far as training situation I see as chief really kind of rolls over to that. So it's not like it's compartmentalized, like, okay, I'm director of training today, I'm -- well, no. Quite honestly, as the chief flight instructor is the full-time job, and the director of training is kind of like, we're going to disseminate this information throughout the company on an as-needed basis.
Q. Okay. Do you think that the limited time that you have to do your job, limited resources, do you think that that jeopardizes safety?
A. I really don't think so.
Q. Okay.
A. I don't, because the things that I do, if I find things, you know, I'll, you know, either send out an e-mail or during the instructor meetings, bring this up. So I think really being out there doing things like that, finding things, you know, that could possibly be a safety concern, I'm not going to keep it to myself. You know, I mean, the instructor meetings, you know, we bring up things, and it's like, okay, so this is what we're seeing here, this is what we're seeing here.

And I really hate for it to be a beat-down session. That's not the purpose, you know? The purpose is to disseminate information through the group and getting feedback. You know, it's like, well, what are you guys seeing? What problems are you having with the aircraft, ATC, students, you know, whatever, you know, so -- would be an exchange of ideas. But quite frequently, it ends up being like, okay, stupid item of the day is.

Q. Okay. Do you need to take a break?

A. Yeah, I wouldn't mind --

Q. Stretch your legs --

A. Yeah, a couple minutes, 5 minutes?

Q. All right. We'll plan to come back in 5 or so minutes.

A. All right.

DR. WILSON: You can stop it.

(Off the record.)

(On the record.)

DR. WILSON: All right. We're back.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you develop the curriculum for the classes?

A. No. Actually, that was -- I mean, I've modified it over times --

Q. Okay.

A. But it was already in place when I took over as chief. So we've made provisions, but as far as developing new ones, no.

Q. So how do revisions work? What's the process for that?

A. Basically, you know, through, you know, it comes to our attention that -- well, so, like, a revision like when they switched from PTS to ACS or switched from requiring complex time to using a technically advanced aircraft with commercial. So when new things are implemented, you know, we have to make the corrections, and then make the correction -- or go to the TCO, make revisions, send it to the FSDO, comes back, and you know?

Q. Okay. Do you ever sit through ground school just to observe the instructors?

A. If it's a new instructor, I'll sit through a portion of it, but not the entire thing just to see, you know, how they're presenting, if there's anything that, you know, is glaring, you know, like, oh, no, that's not right. But you know, not, not as a matter of course, I don't.

Q. Right. So I know you said there was a standardization course, but how do you ensure that the instructors are maintaining that standardization?

A. Ah, well, that's the tricky part. And you know, really the only way you can maintain -- or ensure that standardization is being met is if you have supervision over it. So really, you know, we don't have people that are tasked with, you know, enforcing standards or policies. Really, you know, kind of depends on the instructors themselves.

I said, look, we spent a whole week going over policies and procedures, and stuff, you know, this is what you're supposed to

do and not do. So I'm really, you know, relying on you. It's kind of my last words to the instructors before, you know, the class is over. Like, you know, what are my expectations? Really they're really quite simple. I just expect you to do your job the way we expect it to be done. Now, that's, you know, whether people actually carry through with that or not is dependent on the character of the person.

Q. Okay. I can't recall if we talked about this already. If a student had an issue with an instructor, who would they go to for that?

A. That's kind of when we got into the SMS system --

Q. Right.

A. You know, they could either report it through there or they could --

Q. So the same thing --

A. They could report it to their -- sometimes it may go to their student class leader, you know, say, hey -- sometimes they'll go right to the curriculum manager, you know? Actually, that's really their first line. You know, try to instill in both the instructors and students, like, you know, there is -- we kind of have a chain of command, you know? I can't have, you know, 300 students and 60 instructors reporting directly to me for stuff, you know? It just doesn't work. So your group leaders, you know, if you have an issue with your instructor, you know, say something. And that's really how this kind of came about, too.

Q. Are there any repercussions to students if they put in a concern about an instructor?
A. No, not -- you know, that is one of their concerns. In fact, you know, we have interviewed some students, you know, where they said, yeah, I stuck with my instructor because I didn't want to say anything because then he would be harder on me. You know, it's like, well, no, that's not the way this works, you know?
But you know, the short answer would be, no, there's no repercussions unless it was just obviously vindictive or, you know, orchestrated to, you know, hurt without cause, you know? And in that case, that's really never happened, you know? But if somebody had a legitimate concern, it's like, yeah, we'll listen to it --
MS. LIEDLER: How about -- sorry -- how about the flip side of that? How about an instructor who has reported issues with a student that appear to be without just cause or, like you said, orchestrated? Has that ever occurred that you've seen, where an instructor has just --
MR. CRUZ: No, I haven't really, hadn't really seen that.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. When you were mentioning that there were no repercussions or that, you know, a student felt that maybe their instructor would be harder on them, you said that's now how it works. How do you know that's not how it works?
A. Well, in my world, that's not the way it works. In other

words, if it's -- has a legitimate concern, it's like, okay, then, you know, we'll address it, you know, either get them another instructor or counsel the instructor, but you know, as a group, really, students are really kind of reluctant to come forward with that kind of information. A lot of them just, you know, gut it out, like, you know, I just got to get through this course, and then I'll be done with this guy. You know, and I think that's just kind of a natural.

You know, it's, it's really hard especially with the Asian students, you know, to complain about what they perceive as being superiors or teachers or leaders, you know? It's really hard for them. And they'll talk about it among themselves, and they may or may not come forward, you know, so -- even with the student leader. He may not come forward.

MR. PITTACORA: Has there been any effort to communicate to the student body about not being any repercussions that if they have issues, to come forward? Have you guys put that out there to them to maybe alleviate some of the --

MR. CRUZ: Well, in the -- when the students are first here -- and I'm talking primarily with the Chinese students, okay, because that is the largest part. You know, domestic students, they don't have a problem expressing concerns. You know, hey, I'm paying you guys X amount of dollars for my training, and I'm not getting it. Okay, I hear you, okay? Chinese students, not so much.

But when they get here, they're going through 4 weeks of what we call ESL, okay?

MR. PITTACORA: Um-hum.

MR. CRUZ: And that's really where Sue, she handles that, you know, kind of lays down, you know, the policies, procedures, if you have problems with life in general. You know, because they're acclimating to a foreign country, foreign ways, just different ways of looking at things, you know?

So she tries to acclimate them to that and tries to tell them, like, okay, so if you have problems, this is how you should address it or how you should express it, you know? So in other words, they don't come and it's like, well, you're here for training so just, you know, shut up and, you know, carry on. It's like, no, if you have a problem, you go to this person. If you have a problem with the instructor, you should go here, you know? So, yes, that is, you know, expressed to them.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you think that there's pressure for instructors to take flights that they might not be comfortable taking?

A. In what regard?

Q. So I'm asking --

A. That's a general question.

Q. Well, I mean, you know, there's -- you know, you get in an aircraft that maybe you are iffy on whether it's safe to fly --

A. Yeah.
Q. -- but you know, you're not going to get paid if you don't fly, you've got a student who's on a time schedule, you squawk an aircraft, and the next guys is not going to be able to fly --
A. Yeah. No, if I was going to say there was no pressure, that'd be incorrect. There obviously is pressure, you know, to produce, to give to the student training. Some of that is -- some of the factor of that would be I've only got three aircraft available. If I don't use this aircraft, then I'm not going to get my flight in.

So this is some of the, quite honestly, the frustration. You know, the instructors get frustrated. I've been there, too, where I come to here, you know, it's like, okay, I've got this student at 12:00. Where's my airplane? I don't know when it's coming out of maintenance, you know, maybe there'll be an airplane available.

We used to have what we called standby blocks. So if you were scheduled, you know, that was your schedule. You're in a standby C. Well, it's pretty obvious that's probably not going to happen, you know? So there's -- I wouldn't characterize it as pressure other than internal pressure that they are putting on themselves, you know, to get something done. It really comes out in the form of frustration, you know?
Q. Yeah. I mean, that's interesting. The word that comes to mind isn't fairness, but I mean, is it fair to say that it's an internal pressure if the company isn't providing enough aircraft

for pilots to be able to squawk aircraft and still get their time and still get their students through?

A. I mean, it's a concern to us, and obviously, it's a pressure and concern for them. You know, we can't say as a company, well, you were scheduled to be here at this time. Why didn't you fly? Well, you didn't have aircraft. Well, we know that, you know? I mean, we run flights that are on the schedule that don't happen, actually get -- pop up on the screen. It's like, are we going to cancel this flight? Are we going to reschedule this flight? What are we doing here, you know?

So -- and then there's a report run is how many flights were canceled. And you know, the owners look at it, management looks at it. It's like, well, we canceled, you know, 56 hours of flights. Well, why? Well, maintenance. There wasn't availability of aircraft. It's like, well, okay. If the aircraft weren't available, then obviously the instructor can't fly, you know, so we're not going to ping them, you know?

Now, we did run a -- just kind of -- I know I'm going off on probably a tangent here. I ran a report -- because there's one category of cancelation called student fatigue. It's like, okay. I mean, when we go to the IMSAFE checklist, I mean, that's one of the items on the checklist, you know? Are you well to fly? Are there external pressures here? You know, are you in a mindset to fly and carry out this mission?

I ran a report, and there was since the beginning of the

year, we lost over 600 and something hours of scheduled flight time to student fatigue. Really? And it's okay, but when one name pops up 48 times, it's like, okay, something else is going on here.

In the same timeframe, when I ran the instructor fatigue report, we lost 50 hours. Okay. That's legitimate, you know? Some guys just they had enough flights in the day; it was, you know, whatever. You know, that's not out of the norm, you know? But when I got one student cancelling 48 times -- and by the way, he's the last guy in his class, so obviously he's not putting forth the effort to do this, you know?

But as far as the instructor is concerned, you know, pressure to fly, I think a lot of it is internal. I mean, when I was a line instructor, yeah, I put a lot of pressure on myself, number one, to move the students along and move them along in the time allocated for that curriculum. You know, I considered it a challenge, actually, when I found out the curriculum is 65 hours, I'm like, great, what am I going to do with the other 20? You know, well, I kind of found out. Yes, I kind of strove toward that point. And when I looked at the records later, it's like (indiscernible) 65 hours.

And there's a lot of instructors like that. It's like, you know, this is what -- this is the metric by which you're judged. You know, did you do it in a timely fashion? Did you do it within the time allotted? So -- but I wouldn't say that there's

pressure -- it's like, oh, you know, this -- you've spent 65 hours, and this guy is only at Stage 2. Well, we already know why, you know?

When we look at the training reports and we look at -- and that's -- again, that's what the group managers and curriculum managers are for is to be more proactive, you know, one-to-one basis with (indiscernible). He's just not getting the job done. He's not learning. For some reason, he's not learning.

You know, so a lot of the pressure is internal. I never told anybody, like, you know, I don't care what you say or think, you get in that airplane and fly. It's never happened.

Q. Is there an SMS manual?

A. I don't know.

Q. Or where --

A. I know we had one at one time. I haven't seen it in quite a while, but I do remember seeing a safety management manual.

Q. Okay.

A. How it's distributed, I don't know.

Q. Okay. But you said the program has only been in place a year?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. The IMSAFE checklist, is that something that students are supposed to consider before every flight?

A. Um-hum. Absolutely.

Q. Okay. Do they actually, like, sign anything or it's just --

A. It's on our combination sheet, it's a weight and balance form, it's a flight plan form, and it's also a risk assessment form. And one of the things on there -- and actually, the student and the instructor have to fill out the risk assessment matrix, you know? It adds up to a certain number that is to actually do the flight would require approval from a higher authority. So --

Q. Are they trained on that?

A. Yes.

Q. Like, in initial ground school, or something?

A. Well, during the standardization, the instructors, and then on the ground for the students, yes.

Q. Yeah.

A. They go through that.

Q. How were you informed about the accident?

A. I got a phone call from Tyson.

Q. Okay.

A. I actually had spent the weekend in Norman, Oklahoma. That's where the grandkids are and had just gotten home when I got the call, and so then I, you know, just turned right around, because I live just south of the Alliance Airport, which is 23 miles south of here, where my home is.

Q. Okay.

A. Then I drove right up to Gainesville to --

Q. Did you have a designated role in the emergency response?

A. Yes.

Q. What is that?
A. It's kind of the hierarchy is when dispatch is notified of something, an event, then they call Tyson, who's the director of operations, and then he immediately called me because of the nature of it, didn't wait for dispatch, although I did get a call from dispatch and said already know, already en route. And then the ownership is notified. So we did have a process when there's a significant event that, you know, upper management is notified and then if need -- you know, if -- whatever we need to call into place, we make those calls.
Q. Okay. Do you have a responsibility to secure training records or do anything like --
A. I'm sorry. Say again?
Q. Do you have a responsibility as a part of that plan to secure training records or gather documentation?
A. Not --
Q. Do you have any specific roles?
A. Yeah, not enumerated, but we did.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, when we got on scene, then I called Jake Seibert (ph.), who's actually over scheduling and that. I says, okay -- he actually has more of an administrative position over the scheduling system that we have, you know, permissions, and stuff, you know, as far as changing things. And that's why told him, you know, lock down those records. In other words, take this airplane

offline so that nobody can make entries. The student, well, the student, the only way you can make an entry is if you have a reservation for it, you know? So -- but --

Q. Does USAG have an emergency response plan?

A. Yes.

Q. Oh, a manual that you all follow?

A. Yes, it's in the procedures manual.

Q. Right.

A. Or SOP. Sorry.

Q. Okay. And do you have any designated responsibilities in that?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Do you know what those are?

A. Yes.

Q. What? You --

A. Notify, yeah, notify management, you know, notify the FAA, but I was informed they had already been notified, you know? In other words, kind of go through the list of who needs to know if it was -- like, yesterday, we had an airplane that had a hard landing, hit the nose, disabled the runway. Of course, I saw it before the tower called us, and then, you know, so it was like, okay, is the student okay, get maintenance out there to clear the thing, and you know, FAA was already notified because of the tower, you know? So, yeah, there's a list of things to make sure things are covered, get the proper people in place.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Courtney, anything else?

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. You had mentioned a couple times that the hours for multiengine -- or I'm sorry -- for instrument and sometimes it seemed like there was too many hours for private for what the standard is. Do you shift or can you shift -- like, so, you know, let's say you've got extra hours that this student didn't -- he finished a private in less hours. What do you do with the hours before moving them forward?

A. Per the TCO, they have to have that many hours. And that's the minimum. So usually, you know, if everything went, like, perfect, you know, we would just repeat some lessons just to make sure we have the minimum number of hours required for that particular curriculum.

Q. So there's not an opportunity to take hours from one curriculum -- or one stage and place them elsewhere? They all have to be used in that stage?

A. Correct. Typically, they go over rather than under, but yeah.

Q. So, like, if a student goes -- needs additional hours for instrument, you don't take it from the commercial part?

A. No.

Q. I mean from -- commercial, you don't take it from the multiengine part?

A. No, no.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. I don't think I have anything more.
Darren, do you have anything?
MR. PITTACORA: No.
MS. LIEDLER: Thomas?
BY MR. GOOD:
Q. I don't know if this is going to be your (indiscernible) ballpark, but when it comes to scheduling, how do you all have the slots set up for the flights? Is it, like, every 2 hours there's another?
A. It depends on the lesson, because some lessons -- like, a cross-country would actually require more time than -- so scheduling has, you know, the lessons, where the student is. It's like -- so let's say he finished lesson 15, and the next lesson was a cross-country. Well, they know the next lesson for this guy is 16 or 17, or whatever it is, and they know it needs that long block. So that's how they schedule it.
Q. Do you know if they build any buffers in there for weather delays, minutes --
A. No.
Q. No?
A. Those aren't built in.
Q. So would you all ever consider building in a 15, 20-minute buffer to allow for -- let's say there's one went up there, then they just (indiscernible) coming back, but they're a little late, where it doesn't create that rush of, oh, crap, I got to catch up

and get going or a person has to run to --

A. Yeah. In building a schedule, you know, I look at it and have looked at it in the past where an instructor is scheduled back to back to back, you know, 10 hours straight. And I go where is the lunch break? You can't expect somebody just to go from one lesson to another, to another, to another with no break in between.

But we actually had gone to the instructor, so it's like should there be a mandatory break between these things? He's like, well, no, sometimes I finish early, and so now what am I going to do between this next time? So we actually presented it to the instructor, and he's like, you know, the way it is fine. Sometimes I'll finish early. Sometimes I'll run a little bit late, and then it just goes over to the next one, and I can handle it, you know?

And again, there is -- and it is -- it's an external pressure, you know? I have to get this many flights in because, number one, my pay is based on flight hours or instruction hours, and you know, I want to get my hours, too, you know, for building up in my logbook. So, yeah, we have, you know, like I said, I've gone to scheduling and say I want there to be a 15-minute break. Said, well, the guy doesn't want it. I was like okay. Well, yeah.

But now, as far as aircraft availability, in our ideal world, which we try to do -- let's say we had -- we have 22 152s, okay?

We may only schedule 18 of them, keep those four in reserve that area actually available, you know, in an ideal world. So that way if somebody comes back late, they're not waiting on that airplane. They'll just reassign that -- or one of those reserve airplanes is coming, and that plane that was supposed to be scheduled goes into a reserve block, so that there's always -- in other words, we don't want to cancel a flight because the plane was late, you know? Here's some airplanes on reserve. We'll just use it, you know?

So as far as weather delays, you know, weather is weather, you know? You can't predict that, so, you know, there are some days where you come to work, and it's like, oh, we're not flying today. So --

Q. And let's say, like, earlier in the spring, we had the month-long where it never stopped raining.

A. Yeah, yeah --

Q. Were the CFIs allowed to cancel their flights remotely or did they still have to come up here?

A. The policy is they have to be here to cancel the flight. Now, if because of that system that was sitting, so it's like, you know, we can see that this thing is sitting here, it's never going to go away, yeah, you can cancel.

But the policy is, for weather, you know, you got to come here, students got to be here, you got to agree that, yeah, we're not going to fly, you know? But in a unique situation like that,

where it's really obvious, you know, that nothing is going to happen, it's like, okay, yeah, you can call in. And also, the student is notified. In fact, when any time there's a cancelation of their reservation, then it's automatically sent to the student and the instructor via e-mail.

MR. GOOD: That's all I've got.

MR. PITTACORA: I'm good.

MR. CRUZ: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Anything else that you want to share that you think would be helpful to the investigation?

MR. CRUZ: Not offhand that I can think of. I mean, if we could go off record a second?

DR. WILSON: We can in just a minute.

MR. CRUZ: Okay.

DR. WILSON: All right. Well, thank you very much, David. We appreciate all that you've shared.

MR. CRUZ: Okay. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of David Cruz
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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.

_____
Danielle VanRiper
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:	*	
	*	
US AVIATION GROUP	*	
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	*	Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*	
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Interview of: FANYUAN "JAMES" LI

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:17 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: If you could state for us your name, please?

MR. LI: It's Fanyuan Li.

DR. WILSON: And could you spell that?

MR. LI: F-A-N-Y-U-A-N, L-I.

DR. WILSON: Okay. And you go by James?

MR. LI: Yeah.

INTERVIEW OF FANYUAN "JAMES" LI

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. And, James, you are a student pilot at U.S. Aviation right now?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Where are you in your training -- in the curriculum?

A. I'm in commercial stage. Multi-engine commercial Stage 1.

Q. And how long have you been in the program?

A. Been here in April 2018.

Q. And it's understanding that Francesca Norris was your instructor?

A. Yeah. She was my instructor since December of last year for my instrument and also -- and for my first stage on my commercial.

Q. Okay. Tell us about Francesca as an instructor.

DR. WILSON: This is Thomas Good. He's also with the FAA.

MR. LI: Nice to meet you, Thomas. I'm James.

MR. GOOD: Hi.

MR. LI: Francesca was a very careful, thorough instructor. So, I remember on our -- every flight, she's the one recording everything, like, the weather, the wind direction, everything else. She's the one recording everything, write it on (indiscernible). And she doesn't like to go out when the weather's bad. Like, not -- like on the limit, if it's like today, she won't do like instrument flight or like maneuvers and everything else.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you have any concerns about her as an instructor?

A. No. Not at all.

Q. And when did you start your multi-engine stage one?

A. In July 15th, I think.

Q. And how many flights did you have with Francesca for the multi-engine?

A. I have three actual flight with her. But there should be five because -- there was five of them, but in the first two flight, something is wrong with the plane. And one of them is 456-Alpha-Golf, the one that crashed. So it should be five, but the first two was not logged.

Q. Okay. What were the problems that you had with the aircraft?

A. You mean the -- that aircraft? Or --

Q. Interested in both. What was the reason that you didn't fly the two times?

A. So, for the first time, it was the 456-Alpha-Golf. When we

started the engine, the RPM goes swinging all around from maximum to zero, like, from like, between 10 -- like 10,000-something. And she recorded it and call in maintenance, and we quit the flight.

And for the second time, we were -- I don't remember the plane. Should be -- I don't remember the call number, but we were running up and we were doing the feather test. So when I feathered it, after it dropped below 10,000 and I tried to un-feather it, but then it just stalled. And we tried to restart the engine for, like, 15 times, 10 times, something, but it just won't start, so we did a single-engine taxi back to the ramp.

MR. PITTACORA: Was that on a Seneca as well?

MR. LI: Yep.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. And you said you don't recall what number that was?

A. It's 1-7 -- I can check on my log. It's November-1972-Bravo.

Q. And for the problem that was on 456-Alpha-Golf, you said you'd started the engine and the RPMs went swinging?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. What was it? Was it maximum to minimum RPMs?

A. Yeah. Something like that. Like, 2,000-something to 10, and it kept swinging.

Q. And there was no -- you weren't touching the throttle or anything? It was just swinging on its own?

A. Yeah. Yeah. I would put it on 1,000, but it started, like, swinging.

Q. Okay.

MR. GOOD: Was the engine reacting the same or just the gauge?

MR. LI: Just the gauge, but the engine sounds weird. It goes -- I don't know how to say it, but it's like a weird sound.

MR. PITTACORA: Wasn't normal.

MR. LI: It wasn't normal, yeah. But if you adjust the propeller, it would be nicer to listen to. But if you don't adjust it, put it to maximum, it's weird.

MR. PITTACORA: Hmm. Wa, wa, wa.

MR. LI: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Something like that.

MR. GOOD: So the cross (indiscernible).

MR. PITTACORA: Right.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you recall which engine it was?

A. I think I have a log of hers on my flight. It's the right side.

Q. Okay. And when you squawked the aircraft, was -- do you recall what maintenance said? Was there any discussion with maintenance, or did you just -- it was just written up and --

A. No. She just send the video of the tach to the maintenance.

Q. Okay.

A. And that's it. And we went back.

Q. Did you fly that aircraft again after that?
A. No. It's like couple days before the crash. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. I don't know if you guys have seen the squawk history of the plane.
MR. PITTACORA: I'm pulling it right now.
MR. LI: Yeah.
DR. WILSON: Me too.
MR. LI: So it should be the -- on July 17th. That one was mine. Yep.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Okay. If an airplane has been squawked and looked at by maintenance, do you feel like there's adequate information provided back to the pilots to understand what maintenance was done to correct the issue?
A. I never, like, got the information.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Do you look at the logbooks -- the maintenance logbooks before taking an aircraft, or what are you looking at?
A. I take out a sheet before the flight, so what has been done, everything, if the time's good, which everything's okay.
Q. Okay. And if an aircraft has been worked on, is there any details provided about what work was done or just that the problem was corrected?

A. Yeah. Just the problem's corrected.
Q. When you flew with Francesca, how did she seem in July?
A. She seemed very happy because her arm broke, like, for 3 months and she can't fly. And she seems very happy, and she was actually -- she actually asked of me to be her student from the chief, so she was very happy that she can fly again.
Q. Did you notice any difficulties that she had with her arm?
A. No. Not at all.
Q. Okay.
A. She went to the doctor after she took the thing off, like, a month after that. Yeah. She seems perfectly okay with flying because she did most of the flight on our first flight, yeah.
Q. Was that to show you maneuvers, or why did she do most of the flying?
A. Because it was the first time I on the Seneca.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. So she was demonstrating how to fly it? Did you all practice engine-out procedures?
A. Yeah, we did. We did engine out, VMC, and single-engine panel, single-engine approach, both on sims and actual flight.
Q. And was it always the same engine that was simulated out, or did she change --
A. No. We did left or right.
Q. Okay.

A. Depends on left panel or right panel.
Q. Would she tell you which engine she was going to simulate being out?
A. No.
Q. No?
A. Sometimes on, like, if we're doing a takeoff engine out. But she will usually let me figure out which engine is wrong.
Q. And that was even on doing, like, a single-engine approach?
A. Yeah. She would fail the engine before we even get into the approach.
Q. Right. Okay. And then -- but she wouldn't tell you which engine?
A. Yeah, she wouldn't.
Q. Okay. And --
MR. GOOD: Sorry. How did she fail the engine?
MR. LI: She pull back the throttle when we're on approach.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. And when you were doing the single-engine approach, at what -- would you do a touch-and-go? Would it be to a full stop? What would you -- how would it continue?
A. Think I did two or three single-engine. Usually it's touch-and-go.
Q. Okay.
A. But I think -- I don't remember very clearly, but I think only one touch-and-go and the other two is full stop. It's

usually when we get done with all the maneuvers and we get back to single-engine approach and then landing.

Q. For the touch-and-go, what is the recovery for putting power back in the simulated-out engine?

A. In the simulated-out engine? It's actually a stop-and-go.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. She will help us pull the flaps down and then like -- not immediately touch-and-go. So like, we'd roll for a while and then went full power, and then let both engines power and then take off.

Q. Would she put the power back in or would you put the power back in?

A. It was normally she usually help me get the flaps down in case I forgot.

Q. Did she ever have to take control for a safety of flight issue?

A. Not that I recall, no.

Q. Okay.

A. No.

Q. If she did want to take the controls to show you a maneuver, is there a standard callout that she would use?

A. Yeah. She will say "My controls," then I say "Your controls."

Q. Okay.

A. She say that.

Q. Did you feel that you could communicate easily with her? You were able to understand her --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and what her requests were?
A. Very easy. Yeah. She was very capable of talking to foreign students because she's been -- she has been in Thailand teaching for a year.
Q. Okay.
A. So she's good to like communicate with all the Chinese student here.
MR. PITTACORA: I have to make a phone. I need to call my wife. I think my kid has strep.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Sorry for that. When you said that she could communicate well, what do you mean by that?
A. Because, like, most of us doesn't speak, like, good English, so some of the instructor has trouble communicating with students, especially on the airplane. But she's, like -- she know what you're trying to say, even though you not speaking it right, not using the right letter, But she knows what you're trying to, like, tell her. And she can, like, explain to you clearly.
Q. Okay. Did you ever have any concerns about flying with her?
A. Nope.
Q. Okay. Any concerns about flying the Seneca?
A. Yeah. At the beginning because I knew the Seneca can have

some problems. Because she had a flight in March, I think, the gear, something's wrong with the gear. It's not -- it came down, but the lights is not showing, so that's the -- I think it's the first -- it's one of the first of my friend, so it was in March. I don't know if you can see a record.

Q. And she shared that story with you or was it a friend --

A. No. My friend, yeah.

Q. -- had shared it?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Was Francesca the pilot, the instructor pilot on that or no? It was just --

A. She was.

Q. Okay.

A. She was instructor pilot. Yeah. Actually, she told me that because I was there when they landed. And then she took the plane right to maintenance and then he walked back all the way.

Q. Okay.

A. Yep.

MS. LIEDLER: And what was the problem with the gear?

MR. LI: The gear came down, but they can't see. And they do a low approach maneuvers to make sure the gear is down. And then she landed the plane. It was fine, but the landing gear light is not showing they're all locked and down.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you ever try to squawk an airplane that maintenance said,

no, it's fine; go ahead and fly it?
A. I tried to squawk a Cessna when I doing my (indiscernible), so -- and, like, I squawked here at dispatch and I went on another flight. And when I got back, one of my friend told me the plane had just -- he squawked it again because there's something wrong with it during (indiscernible). So they -- I don't know now, but when I was doing my (indiscernible) they don't care about students squawking.
Q. Do you remember what the problem was?
A. Engine was shaking really bad when I'm doing the mag test. When I switch it to left mag, it like shake really hard and really loud.
Q. You have any training in ground school on how to handle any conflicts in the cockpit? Like if you didn't agree with your instructor? Is there anything you get trained on, on how to deal with that?
A. We have, like, training to obey our instructor if they are taking the control, we just let them.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Did you know Howard?
A. I met him a few times, but not -- I don't know him very well.
Q. Okay. Did you ever talk to him about flying, what he liked, what he didn't like about flying?
A. We chat for a little bit, but not about flying. Just normal

stuff.
Q. Okay. Did you ever talk to him about flying with Francesca, what he thought about her as a instructor?
A. No.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. James, when you experienced the squawk and reported it, and then another student had squawked the same problem, after that, did you mention it to anyone else, like, your -- anyone here? Your team lead or any other students or anything that there was a problem with the aircraft?
A. No. That was like at, I think probably at 10 at night, 10 p.m. at night. So the dispatch was the only one that was here, so I tell them that, then I go on another flight. But when I get back, like an hour or something later, one of my friend told me he had the same issue with that same plane because they took it out again after I squawked it.
Q. Okay. So you went out on a flight with another plane?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Okay. And who do you report to? Who is your direct supervisor while you're in training here?
A. Like, report, you mean something's wrong with the plane, or?
Q. No. Like, from day-to-day, who is your manager that you would talk to if you have a concern about anything with the program, a concern with studying or training, or -- I don't know, the dorm rooms or your apartments, who do you work with on that?

A. So, they got several. They got a lady only for apartment problems. And they got curriculum manager, I think, (indiscernible) but I never talk to him before. Some of us try -- because we've been waiting too long for a instructor, but some of us talk to him before. And for training, I don't -- we usually report our, like, training status to our leaders, and our leaders will, like, make it up on (indiscernible) complete. That should be it.

Q. And your leaders are here?

A. Yep.

Q. Okay. So a group leader?

A. That was the guy that was just here, Caesar. We had two, but one of them is done here; he's graduated.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Explain that. So, Caesar, who we spoke with, is considered a group lead?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. What does that entail?

A. So he -- they got like a leader meeting every week, so the -- I don't know, the manager here tell them about how we doing in trainings, what we going to do, when we going to start flying. And we also go to report how many hours we got this month, how many check we pass or fail this month, and tell the group leader. And the group leader get all the information from everyone in this group and send it to the company.

Q. And the group leads are always students?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. How do they get selected; do you know?
A. I don't know how he get selected, but he was a leader.
Q. Okay.
A. (Indiscernible). Yeah.
Q. And are the group leads specific to the curriculum? So there's a multi-engine group lead, or is it for your class?
A. Yeah. It's only for my class.
Q. Okay. And when you say that the information is collected and then sent to the company, is that to the airline and --
A. Yeah. To the airline, yep.
Q. Okay. Shenzhen?
A. Shenzhen, yeah.
Q. So, if you had a safety concern -- let's say you had an issue with your instructor or you were really concerned about the aircraft that you were flying, who would you tell that to?
A. Like, everyone we talk about how the Seneca's not very reliable. I've talk about it to some of the instructors and some of the classmates. Yeah.
Q. Is there any anonymous way that you could report something, some kind of hotline you can call or anything that you're aware of?
A. For these airplanes, or?
Q. Anything that you were concerned about with the operation.

Some way to report it.
A. I don't think so.
Q. Okay.
A. They say there's a thing on our system to kind of, like, file something anonymously.
Q. Okay.
A. But I think they will know who you are because you logged in.
Q. Have you ever reported anything through that system?
A. No.
Q. No? Would you feel comfortable doing so?
A. No.
Q. Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: What makes you feel -- well, when you say, no, you wouldn't feel comfortable, how come?
MR. LI: Because you have to log in to report something. But after you log in, I think they will know who send the message.
MS. LIEDLER: Okay. Sorry, I'm thinking about how to ask this question. So do you feel like you have the opportunity to speak up about the problems in the program, concerns you have? Or do you feel that that's -- that you don't have that, that you would be reprimanded or there would be negative repercussions to that?
MR. LI: I mean, I try -- I don't have, really -- I don't really have, like, lots of problem in flying. Like the most problem I have is waiting. I tried to talk to -- when I was

waiting for instruments, I tried to talk to the manager of instruments, it doesn't work, so I stopped trying because I still waited for 2 months for instructor, so I stopped trying.

But in training, I don't really have much of the problems. But for someone in our class, they don't have anyone to talk to once they, like, go to talk to the manager (indiscernible) for everything they -- like most of the thing they haven't done. I don't know if you guys aware of one of the suicide person here, because he represent a lot of like, I don't know, how we cannot, like, express ourself. If you're trying to tell someone this instructor is not very good here, you'll get in trouble.

MR. PITTACORA: Is that pretty -- are there a lot of students that feel the same way?

MR. LI: Yeah. Because before the suicide, there's, like, couple of student got terminated every month. But after that, I think only one; that's it.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you think U.S. Aviation puts safety first?

A. I don't think so.

Q. No? Is that because of the maintenance issues, or --

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Okay.

A. The airplanes, I don't trust them a lot because we -- I witness lots of, like, accidents and everything here. Like I been on like some planes the brakes doesn't work very well. It only

brakes one side.

MS. LIEDLER: Do you think -- do you feel pressured to fly when you're not comfortable flying for any reason?

MR. LI: I'm sorry?

MS. LIEDLER: So do you feel that U.S. Aviation pressures a pilot, or you, to fly if, you know, there's not -- you have a concern with the airplane and the maintenance, you're too tired, you don't feel well? For any reason, do you feel that you're still pressured to fly?

MR. LI: Yeah. That was before the suicide, we have to do time buildings all at night. So we probably have class from 6 to 11, and after that we'd have time building, fly from 11 to 2. So, of course, you can cancel it but if you cancel too much you will have to talk to your manager about it, probably get some report or everything.

And we have to finish all of -- that was before, like -- when I was doing my trainings in instrument, you have to finish all 54 hours of your time building, then you can be sent to EOC check for instrument. So we have to do all the time buildings, like, very fast, in like a month or something, in order to get done with instrument faster.

MR. PITTACORA: Is the review board viewed as some kind of discipline?

MR. LI: For us, it's some kind of, like, warning. If you got like -- if you got like two or three, you probably got

terminated. So if -- for a Chinese student, if you got terminated, you got -- you can never step in the civil aviation ever again, so you got not chance of flying these big jets. Yep.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. I just wanted to clarify that you said classes from 6 to 11, and then you fly from 11 to 2. You're just saying 6 to 11 p.m. p.m.?

A. 6 p.m., yeah, to 11 p.m.

Q. Okay. If a pilot gets terminated, is there an obligation to still work for the airline after they return to China? Do they find another position at the airline? Do they have to pay the money back?

A. Yeah.

Q. What happens?

A. Depends on how you get terminated. And if, like, you are just not good enough to fly, they probably can -- yeah. Because one of my friends sit there for, like, half a year. They give him another job that is, like, a very normal job that pays not very good. So most of us won't take it, but some of them, like, they will take it. Yeah.

Q. Okay. So you have the option?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. When you return, can you go back to school to get another degree, or what --

A. It works differently, because some of us already graduated.

So, for me, I already graduated from college and I was hired by the company, so I'm an employee. So some of them, they're still in college so they, like, get something, work with the college and send them here. After they graduated here, everything in their college, they will sign with the company.

Q. Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: So if you failed the training here, what would happened -- for you, specifically, what would happen with the airlines?

MR. LI: You mean I failed the training and got terminated?

MS. LIEDLER: If you were terminated.

MR. LI: It depends. If it, like, I really don't want to fly, I probably have to pay them back. If I, like, crash a plane or something, I probably have to. But if I just not going to -- I fail, like, three times, got terminated, I'd probably just go back and they will probably offer me another job in 6 months something. So we get 6-month period to get another job or you can stay with the airline to get a not very good job.

MS. LIEDLER: Bruce, who's sitting outside, what is his role?

MR. LI: I have no idea.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you just meet him for the first time today?

A. No. I met him several times because I was there to translate for the suicide person's parents, like --

Q You were there for them? Okay.
A. I was there for them for a couple of days. And he obvious don't like us being there, so we have to switch to (indiscernible) last person who just -- of Caesar, because I think we told him too much about how things works here.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Do you know whether -- does Bruce work for U.S. Aviation or is he somehow tied to the airlines?
A. So, back in April when the suicide happen, he told me he don't work for U.S. Aviation.
Q. Okay.
A. But he obviously works here now because he had a badge, he have office, everything.
Q. Okay. Assuming all goes as planned, how much more time do you have here?
A. I have no idea because, if I start flying, will be quick, like, 1 or 2 months. But we've been stuck here for 2 month.
Q. Oh, you haven't flown for 2 months?
A. Yeah. Since the crash happened.
Q. Oh, since the accident?
A. Mm-hmm.
MS. LIEDLER: Why is that?
MR. LI: I don't know. Probably they are like -- they saying they, like, inspecting all the aircrafts. But some of them, it's

done. Some of the domestic students flying. But all the Chinese students start flying, I think yesterday -- like, there's, like, a month and half after the -- yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: So yesterday was the first day that the China students started flying again?

MR. LI: Yeah. Yesterday. Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: So all Chinese programs were --

MR. LI: No, not all Chinese. All the Chinese commercial program are stopped.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. LI: Yeah. Because I am done with my instrument training in April and I only flew for 7 hours till today.

MS. LIEDLER: Wow. You flew today?

MR. LI: No.

MS. LIEDLER: Up to today.

MR. LI: I flew 7 hours in July, and that's it. That's all the time I got from April to today.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And that was the three flights that you had with Francesca?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Are you getting into the sim or doing anything in the sim since?

A. Not after the accident.

Q. No?

MS. LIEDLER: Are they allowing you to get into sim and you

haven't, or are you not allowed to -- are the students not allowed to be in the sim right now?

MR. LI: We're not allowed to be in the nicer sim, the (indiscernible). We only get, like, computer with screen with the foot pedals and (indiscernible) or something. But I think mine's better than that. I already got myself a stick. I think even my (indiscernible) sim is better than these little computer.

MS. LIEDLER: When you say your sim, is it a Microsoft Flight sim kind of program?

MR. LI: No. It's a X-Wing with a -- I bought a stick.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. LI: That one's -- even that one is nicer than the one here.

DR. WILSON: Is that something that you have in your room?

MR. LI: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

MR. LI: So, I don't do sims here at all.

MS. LIEDLER: So, you been flying your own personal SIM in the meantime?

MR. LI: Mm-hmm.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Are you still required to come here during the day, or do you just stay at your apartment?

A. We got ground school.

Q. Okay.

A. Like, starting Monday this week. It's only a 3-day ground school, and that's it.
Q. What did you --
A. Not required to come here, we just stay in our apartment. Got nothing to do for a long time.
Q. What is the -- what was the ground school for?
A. For Senecas. For commercial, multi-engine operations Senecas.
Q. Okay. Was it about systems? I mean --
A. They cover all of it. Yeah.
Q. Cover all --
A. Systems and emergency procedures, something --
Q. Okay. Had you already had that? Was this a refresher or is it --
A. It's a refresher.
Q. It's a refresher.
A. Because the actual commercial ground school we had is last year in December something. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. So we had commercial ground school, multi-engine ground school in December, and we started flying at July this year.
Q. Is it -- was it as refresher because of the time lapse since December or is this just part of the curriculum that you would have this refresher ground school?
A. It's a refresher because the accident happened.

Q. Okay.
A. And CAC required to have a refresher.
Q. Okay. Has anything else been required since the accident?
A. Require to check plane thoroughly with the check pilot, everyone -- check pilot and check maintenance to check a plane. I think that's it.
Q. Okay. And that's part of the contract from, you said, CAC to U.S. Aviation?
A. They required them -- no. It's part of their emergency respond to the accident.
Q. Okay. And when you say part of their emergency response, U.S. Aviation --
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. -- emergency response? Okay.
MR. PITTACORA: Were there other things that were started as part of the response?
MR. LI: So all I know is we doing the refreshing ground schools. Some of the instructors doing that. And they checking the plane, and that's it.
DR. WILSON: Anything else?
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q So, James, how do you feel about the pace of the curriculum?
A. It's, like, super slow.
Q. Super slow?
A. I should be done in March or April, so basically, like, half

of my time here I'm doing nothing. I waited 2 month for instrument, and I spent 5 month in instrument training, which should be, like, 2-month long. And then I waited for another 3 months for multi-engine trainings. And then the accident happened, I waited for another 2 month.

Q. When you're flying -- when you're not waiting, but when you're flying and moving forward through the curriculum with your course, with your flight course, how's the pace of the program then?

A. It depends. In my private, it's okay. We got, like, three or four flights a week. But in instruments, I remember it was like five times I was here at 6 a.m. and there's no airplane for the entire day. So it was very slow.

MR. PITTACORA: What's the longest time you've had nothing to do?

MR. LI: Like 3 month.

MR. PITTACORA: Three months? How many times has these delays occurred?

MR. LI: So 2 months, when I done with my private waiting for instrument instructor. And it's in the -- inside my instrument training, there's like 2 month I can't fly, or I got another instructor because Francesca was teaching me and she got switched to teaching multi-engine and I got to wait for another instructor. And that's, like, 2 month something. And then after instrument, it's like 2 months for multi-engine. And after, like, almost 3

months of not flying, we have to be sended to check after 7 hours of Seneca training. Yeah. I don't think that's --

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Explain that to me again.

A. So, I haven't been flying for almost 3 month, and I started flying Senecas, like, one sim and three actual flights. We have to be sent to Stage 1 check for a Seneca.

Q. So you didn't fly for 2 months, then you got into your multi-engine, you had an instructor, you did 7 -- so after 7 hours, that's your Stage 1 check?

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Okay. So, in the event that you don't fly -- like if there was a time you didn't fly for 2 or 3 months, were you given any flight time to refresh your skills prior to jumping back into the course?

A. Nope.

Q. Okay. What are your overall feelings -- you had mentioned -- you mentioned the concern with maintenance. What are overall feelings about safety at USAG and the program? What do you like? What do you dislike?

A. I actually choosed not to come here the first time because we got three interviews for flight schools. So I passed the first time, but I choose not to come here. But the second time they came again, so I have to. And I think it was fast, like, 2 or 3 years ago, it was fast here at training; it took only 11 or 12

month. But I don't know what happened. Probably too many students. I don't know what happened because it got, like, slow.

And the planes, I don't trust them very much because, if you squawk it, you can see the plane like 10 minutes after that being sended out. I don't think that's a very clever idea. And the Senecas, I can hear everyone's -- ever since I got here, I knew the person was flying Senecas, they all know that it's not very good plane to fly. It's not very reliable for trainings and stuff.

Q. Was there any discussion back in China -- is there discussion amongst other pilots amongst your groups about this school versus the other schools?

A. Yeah. We got a rating for schools in our CAC school system. It's the lowest score.

Q. This is the lowest score?

A. Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: Is that why you said you chose not to come here the first time?

MR. LI: Yeah.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Do you know why there's a low score? Like, do they give a -- like, what was --

A. Yeah. You know, at first, we cannot even take Uber. We're not allowed to get out of the Denton area even though you (indiscernible). And not allowed to discuss anything in Chinese

here. You know, it would be a lot easier you can explain something in your mother tongue to a friend. And then there's you can't say nothing about instructors because if you tell the manager or someone about instructor, they will just get you in trouble. But it -- this, it's getting a little better after the suicide, but it's -- overall, it's the same.

Q. So if you were -- let's say that you and Francesca, you didn't have a good, cohesive student-instructor relationship as far as you weren't -- she wasn't instructing in a way that you could learn, you weren't able to voice that without getting in trouble? Is that what I'm -- do I hear that correct? I don't want to put words in your mouth.

A. No. I mean, it's easy to get in trouble if your instructor is not, like, very patient, because I knew someone who flew for 5 hours and (indiscernible) got sent to something called Leader Flight (ph.) and he never gets out of it. So for his 13 month here, he only did 30 hours in a 152. He just keep getting reports, reports. But after the suicide, they cannot, like, terminate him, so they kept him here for giving another 10 hours.

And there is another guy who's in commercial EOC. So he fail. He's on track for two times, I think. That was in February, so -- and they kept him here, giving another chance all the way to July or August. So he had another check, but he fail. But that's, like, 6 months' period between that time, and they send him home. It was last month, I think.

MR. GOOD: So, James, if you feel like you've got a bad instructor, that -- is there a way for you to get a new instructor without getting in trouble?

MR. LI: I don't think so. But they -- I knew some of them can right now. But that was after the suicide happened. Yeah.

MR. PITTACORA: So there was a lot of changes after the suicide?

MR. LI: There's not a lot. You can, like, report your instructor without getting in trouble after that. But before that, even, like, the five of you have the same instructor, all five of you think the instructor is not good enough and all five of you go report him, it won't work. You just get five reports.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. You said that now you can report it. How would you report that?

A. If like -- I don't know for myself, but someone I knew reported their instructor for, like, being -- yelling at them all the way through the flight.

Q. Who did they report that to?

A. I think the curriculum manager.

Q. Okay.

Q. Which you said that person is gone now for the multi-engine?

A. It's not for the multi-engine. It's one of the instrument instructors.

Q. Okay. But you did say there was a curriculum manager, but he

was gone? Is that the --

A. Yeah. That's the commercial, multi-engine curriculum manager.

Q. Got it.

A. I don't actually know who is the manager now.

MS. LIEDLER: Do you know who it was then?

MR. LI: It was Coons. David Coons. Yeah.

DR. WILSON: Anything else?

MR. GOOD: I got a couple of other questions, if you (indiscernible).

DR. WILSON: No, go ahead.

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. So, you're in your commercial phase, correct?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Do you know where to find your training course outline?

A. Yeah. It was on the website of USAG.

Q. All right. Do you understand where the standards and requirements of that come from?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Where do they come from?

A. From the ACS.

Q. All right. So when you go for your check ride, do you feel that you're being held to the ACS, to where -- like let's say for your instrument check it says that you have to be able to maintain -- you're doing an ILS and you got to maintain your

course to a certain degree. Do you feel like that's what they're grading you to, is just what it says in the ACS?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. That's usually ACS.

Q. Okay. All right.

DR. WILSON: Anything else?

MR. GOOD: No. That's it.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Anything else that you think would be important to share with us?

MR. LI: No. Can I ask -- do you, like, do you have the result came out what happened that day, or --

DR. WILSON: For the accident?

MR. LI: Uh-huh.

DR. WILSON: No, unfortunately. So this is a part of our fact-finding phase, where we're talking to people, reviewing manuals, reviewing documentation. And then all of that information will be released to the public docket when we are finalized with it.

MR. LI: Okay.

DR. WILSON: And that will be available to anyone to go to the NTSB website and you can pull it up.

MR. LI: Yeah.

DR. WILSON: And then, after that, we will do an analysis and put out the final report and probable cause of what we think

happened.

MR. LI: Okay.

DR. WILSON: All right. Well, thank you very much, James.

MR. LI: Thank you.

MS. LIEDLER: Thank you.

DR. WILSON: We really appreciate your time.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

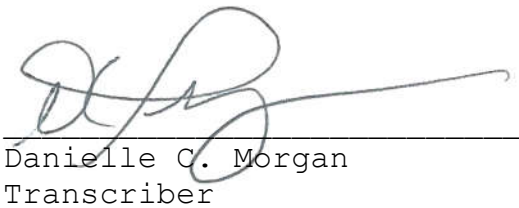
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Fanyuan "James" Li
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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.



Danielle C. Morgan
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:	*	
	*	
US AVIATION GROUP	*	
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	*	Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*	
	*	
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Interview of: JIANGHAO "CAESAR" LIU

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(8:15 a.m.)

INTERVIEW OF JIANGHAO "CAESAR" LIU

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. If you could start by telling us your name.

A. My name is Liu, Jianghao is called Chinese name, and English name is Caesar.

Q. Could you spell your --

A. English name?

Q. Your official name.

A. Official name is called L-i-u, the last name, and first name is J-i-a-n-g-h-a-o.

Q. And you go by Caesar?

A. Yeah, Caesar, C-a-e-s-a-r.

Q. And you are a student pilot?

A. Yeah. Actually, I'm taking the multi-engine training course right now.

Q. How long have you been in the program at US Aviation?

A. I have been here 1 year and 5 months.

Q. Okay. Where are you in the course of the multi-engine training course?

A. I'm in the Stage 1, Lesson 3 -- Lesson 4, Lesson 4.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. And who is your -- who do you report to? Who do you consider

your supervisor when you're here in the training?
A. That could be -- you mean the vice president or --
Q. Like if you had a concern, who would you talk to about it or who do you -- do you -- is there somebody that's tracking your progress that you have to tell them how you're doing in training?
A. I mean, the main responsible is by Tyson Walker.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah. They organize Chinese program.
Q. Okay. And we're talking to you today because it's our understanding that Francesca Norris was your flight instructor?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. When was that?
A. Actually he -- I mean, she -- she taught me the instrument course as well, and that start from the December last year. And after that, she taught me the multi-engine training. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Until July.
Q. When Francesca broke her arm, did you get a new flight instructor during that time?
A. During that time, I'm waiting for instructor because I'm done my instrument rating, and in our school we don't have too much instructor. So if you done a, like a segment, a stage, you have to wait. I'm -- I have to wait 3 months. So in that period she just broke an arm, so I have not effect.
Q. So what did you do during those 3 months?

A. Three months, I'm just rest and -- or study sometime, you know, and travel in local or watch (indiscernible) something.
Q. Are you able to get into a simulator during that time? How do you maintain your proficiency as a pilot if you're not flying for 3 months?
A. Actually, no way. The most effective thing may be just try to get in, try like the Microware [sic] flight simulator or something, because the school doesn't supply any like simulator or the course for our guys for maintaining the proficiency if we are on the list for waiting instructor.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So I understand, Caesar -- I'm not sure I follow all that completely. So when Francesca had broken her arm, you said you were waiting for 3 months for an instructor. At what phase were you? You were completed with your instrument and waiting for an instructor for your multi-engine, or --
A. In the (indiscernible) pro -- I mean, that's our pro, like pro fourth or pro third, I done my instrument rating. And so Francesca is no longer to be my instructor, right. She going teach another students in that period. So, and in that time she just broken her arm, so I'm waiting for another instructor tell me multi-engine.
Q. Okay. So you were waiting for an instructor for your multi-engine -- to begin your multi-engine course?
A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, that's why.
Q. And then Francesca wounded up being your instructor for multi-engine?
A. Actually, I have been assigned by another instructor. His name is Brendan White, and he's kind of lazy. He don't want to fly that much. Actually, he didn't fly with me. So then Francesca maybe she was thinking about I'm the old student from her, I know her (indiscernible) some things, so she just pick me and, yeah, we fly together.
Q. So Ms. Norris -- so Brendan White was assigned initially, but didn't fly; you never flew with him?
A. I never flew with him.
Q. Okay. So then Francesca decided that, hey, I'll fly with you. She picked you up for a student?
A. Yeah. Because we -- you know, we (indiscernible) excessive period. We have to -- we used to be done the course like 12 months or 13 or something, but this took so long time. So we hurry a little bit.
Q. When you said hurry, did you hurry in training?
A. We hurry for waiting because we are not ready. If we can take the course normal, we will be done ready on time or something. But we spend a lot of time in waiting, that's why, yeah.
BY DR. WILSON:

Q. How many flights did you have with Francesca prior to the accident?
A. I think it could be 20, 20 times --
Q. Twenty times total or 20 times for the -- in your multi-engine course?
A. The multi-engine we just have three.
Q. Okay.
A. Three actually fly and two simulator.
Q. And how did those flights go?
A. I'm student, but I can try to remember the detail. The Francesca, Ms. Norris, she is very gentle and is very careful try to record anything flight, and I feel really safe when I flew with her. And try to remember some detail. Like, you want times? We have watch for everything, a bird in front of us, and that's normal in the time. Francesca, she is very clear, and she just took the flight control, and turn the aircraft better way. So I'm really -- I think that Francesca is really safety and fly every time the trip. She's smart, and she's very good at it.
Q. Um-hum. Do you recall when she took control from you what she said?
A. I have flight control.
Q. I have flight control?
A. Yeah.
Q. And was that clear to you that she was going to take over the controls?

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Is clear.
Q. And what did you do? Do you just -- do you say anything back to her? Do you just move your hands away? What do you do?
A. Actually in that time I just move my hands away, yeah, because, you know, that's -- used to be when you call, let's say acknowledge, let's say, you have flight control or something. But in the time, I just be scared or something. Yeah, because we have the sky hawk or the eagle or something in front of us that's really big.
Q. A big bird?
A. Yeah. While doing the instrument rating, and I wear the foggle, so that's why.
Q. Right. And that was during your instrument rating when she had to take control or in the multi-engine?
A. She had take control in the multi-engines sometimes. Sometimes she did because she need perform or give me example on the landings or something, like manual -- yeah, she did.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. Was the bird issue the only time that she had to take control for a safety of flight issue?
A. I think about -- actually, she took the flight control several times. You know, that's the responsible by instructor. Yeah, we have to consider about some safety issues when the

student pilot is not very clear the situational awareness, so the instructor have to take the control. That's our rules in our school. Yeah. This happen often. It's not unnormal. And sometimes in the (indiscernible) work or the approach or something, she will, like (indiscernible) for control, like, you know, for the flight director or the localizer or something, she will just touch her yoke, but very slightly to help out guys checking the course or something.

Q. And so when you say she took controls, that was more of just -- was it to show a student what the procedure was for demonstration purposes or was it because there was a concern with the flight itself, meaning there was a dangerous situation?

A. Actually, my instruments -- you know, the instrument it's just for other procedures. So it's not clear we have any like dangerous situation, so I cannot experience on that. And in the multi-engine she perform and demonstrate some maneuvers for me so she took flight control on that. That's fine. That's different, you know. If I am the instructor, I want to demonstrate some maneuver for students, I will say before I took the flight control. Like, I can show you some maneuvers, the procedure have to go through, like what -- and if in the emergency situation I will just took it first and say I have flight control. So that's different way.

Q. After she broke her arm, and you were flying with her in the multi-engine, did she complain about having any pain in her arm?

A. After her broken her arm, she broke her arm, and I remember she got a period for recovery, like, 2 months. Yeah. Because I saw her on the school, and I just ask her how her arm is going, and she just say, I cannot fly right now, I need time to recover. So when I was, when I was -- flew with her on the July, I ask her how is about like, you know, like how her arm is doing. And she's just fine. She said just fine. Yeah, we can do a lot of procedures normal. And she also show me the maneuvers and the pattern works and landings. Yeah, and just normal.

So I didn't feel any experience on it. I didn't feel any uncomfortable her arm is broke. Yeah, I believe her arm is recovery.

Q. Okay. Great. Did you have any -- did she have any problem getting in and out of the airplane or closing the airplane door or anything like that? Do you recall?

A. Get into, open, no, no. But the Seneca is really heavy. So when we try to parking the Seneca, we just work together. Yeah, we working together and she (indiscernible) that time, but it's normal. Even the male instructor, even the male instructor, he will need help as well because the Seneca is really heavy. So we push together. But I believe this normal.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. In those three flights that you had with her, did you all practice engine-out procedures?

A. Yeah. We practice before.

Q. Okay. And was that in the pattern or was that in cruise flight? Where did you do that?
A. We do that either.
Q. In either one?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And do you recall which engine she would simulate as failed?
A. Both with that.
Q. Both. So it would -- would she surprise you and --
A. Yeah, yeah. But in the pattern work she will tell me, like, your left engine going out or your right engine going out before he reduce the engine power.
Q. Okay.
A. Also in the left engine we not going to, like, use the fuel (indiscernible) mixture for simulate engine out. We just use the (indiscernible).
Q. So I just want to be clear, when you were in the pattern, she would tell you which engine she was going to simulate would be out?
A. Yeah.
Q. Why do you think that was?
A. Just consider about the aircraft safety. Because the Seneca is not really new aircraft. Is really old one to me. I believe that, as I'm from China, and we use the really new aircraft are for training. But in here, we use the Seneca. That's very old

type. And the engine performance could be really bad on the hot day. If the instructor just surprise a student for lose engine, a student did something wrong, that could be -- even could be very hard to maintain altitude, you know, because engine performance is really bad.

Q. Did you ever feel unsafe flying the Seneca because of maintenance issues?

A. Yeah. When I flew with the Francesca third time after takeoff, we try to retract the landing gear. The landing gear just got stuck, and we raised that -- or put the landing gear down again and retract again. The landing gear retracted in that time. So that's why if the -- if the happens normal, like if the landing gear just gets stuck all the time, then we'll be like thinking about this is safety issues. So and this happen too many times in our school, which I just squawk that, and the dispatch said the aircraft is -- the situation is normal.

MS. LIEDLER: So you couldn't get the landing gear down or you couldn't get it up?

MR. LIU: Couldn't get it up after takeoff. And we try it again. We try it again and this work. So this maybe something wrong landing gear, but we don't know.

MS. LIEDLER: I mean, you had squawked that before?

MR. LIU: We try to squawk that after, yeah, and we discuss that -- Francesca, and so we -- then Francesca, like, we checked the, like, maintenance record something. That's normal in our

school, you know. It's a lot that Seneca -- or that Seneca shows a lot of safety issues and that fly like -- that's like more issues. Definitely is not so more, but if that happen so many times, that could be some more, you know.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you ever have any engine problems flying the Seneca?

A. To me the (indiscernible) engine problem could be something wrong inside of engine when I flew the -- it's called aircraft. Check my logbook.

The aircraft 1542, yeah, November-1542, when the Francesca demonstrate engine-out procedure on the base in the (indiscernible), and we smell where she just reduce the power and the -- I try to recall which side, but I forgot. And we smell really terrible in the cockpit. Yeah.

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. What did it smell like? Was it --

A. Like something burning.

Q. Burning. Okay.

A. Yeah. Something burning. And once we recognize that, we just get engine up -- get engine power back and fly back to Denton. So we don't do any engine-out procedure anymore after that terrible smell. And after landings we -- I believe she may squawk or report a issue (indiscernible) but I didn't check the system.

MS. LIEDLER: Where were you flying when this was -- were you

at altitude in cruise or were you doing touch-and-goes at an airport?

MR. LIU: We doing touch-and-go in Gainesville.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. LIU: (Indiscernible), so we used to go to Gainesville or (indiscernible) Bridgeport airport for touch-and-go, try to practice our landing skill.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. That was November-1542?

MR. LIU: 15412.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. At any time during the course of your training, did you ever feel like you were forced to fly in an airplane that you didn't think was safe or pressured to fly in an airplane you didn't think was safe?

A. Definitely yes sometimes, but it's not really, not really push our guys for fly, but like you don't have choice, and we just know we have to go on if you going to fly -- if you want to fly, you fly that worst aircraft. We all know we have like two aircraft is very hard for fly, that's very worst performance and they're really heavy on the yoke.

The tail number is what -- Alpha-Mike or something, and -- but sometimes when we, when I took the aircrafts out, the instructor say, okay, you don't have any -- another aircraft available; you just only have one. And the instructor didn't want to cancel because why they need to make money. And the school

didn't want to cancel because why they have to, they have to (indiscernible) as soon as possible. Maybe I think they think that as well. But, and so we don't have any -- another choice, so we just to fly. Even we don't have any chance for changing aircraft. But if we -- if I want to change the aircraft, the instructor always said no, you don't have another aircraft. So --

Q. What is the pressure like on you as a pilot to complete the course?

A. Personally, I'm -- we have different carrier. I'm the -- I'm a student right now. When I graduated from my high school and it was (indiscernible) from the high school and go to the aviation university for training, and the company maybe some airlines choose me, choose us for the training and to be airlines pilots. So we have to graduate on time. It's really -- if we didn't graduate on time, there will be -- you have to, like, spend 1 more year for waiting that like your license, and your graduation certificate or the chance for taking exam or something.

So but I'm already excess of the time. That school in China, our universities used to be 4 years, and I've done my -- the aviation course in China, the 2 years, and then go to America. If I spend a lot of time in America, I will, like, excess the period. Yeah. So I cannot -- I couldn't be graduated on time. That's first reason.

And also guys feel like some like stressful over here sometimes because we don't have free to go anywhere, and we don't

have car because the school didn't want our guys driving -- drive or something. So the school have rules about our guys. Like we don't have right for take over or right insurance something before. After some students, is my friend, as well, he took his life in the pro, and the rules was changed. So now we can take the Uber, but is still not free, the freedoms, and we just can stay in the apartment if we don't fly. And all day it will be you know -- I mean, there is much common knowledge is not really (indiscernible) for study. We can just prepare that. Assuming we can pass the exam. Is not spend a lot of time like some domestic student can do part-time for training as well, they can't do that very well. We can do as well. So --

And like -- so we have some (indiscernible) yeah, because with the hair is very long, and our family is not going to go to America for visiting us. And we have lot of, a lot of people behind us and waiting for our guys back and be successful. That's the -- I mean, press for that.

Q. Did you ever fail or -- like a check ride, have you failed a check ride?

A. I just fail only once before several days ago in commercial Stage 1, stage check (indiscernible).

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. Because that's why I'm one complain. In the -- I was, I was (indiscernible) in July or -- yeah, 3 months ago or 2 months ago, and the Ms. Norris made me go to a stage check 4 and 5. But

they, you know, the school part of the (indiscernible) and they didn't give us like a review or something and just go, just go for check. But to me I'm (indiscernible) make perfect and prepare, so --

Q. Okay. And what happens if you don't pass a check ride?

A. That depends on what check ride. Like, I just know about Chinese student. Chinese student, if we fail three times check ride over -- let's say you fail three times check rides, we're facing terminate. Yeah. We cannot be airline pilots in China any more. We have the regulation of China to prohibit some -- like, if we have the best score of the student fly the big aircraft. Yeah. So if we -- some of us got terminated in America, we cannot be airlines pilot anymore in China.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. And then you would be assigned a different job at the airline?

A. What?

Q. Would you then when you go back to China, would you have a different job at the airline?

A. To me, no. But some of the guys have -- they are not student anymore. They are the like worker something. Because they are employed from the airlines and they just taking a training course in America. But to me, I have to go back to, I have to go back to senior at my university and study again for another major.

Q. Okay.
A. Yeah. This can taking so long time. This another times pressure more as well, yeah.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So if you fail here, you don't -- who do you -- what program are you in, with which -- what airline?
A. Shenzhen.
Q. Okay. So if you don't pass, when you go back, you don't keep working for the airline? You have to change your major?
A. Yeah. The airlines will give up our guys and our contract is terminate. So I have to -- it's some -- like they made (indiscernible) regulations you have to change your majors for another, another majors, and continue go through the university course, and we cannot be pilot anymore actually.
Q. Did you know Howard?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Did he ever talk to you about having concerns flying either with Francesca or flying the Seneca?
A. I meet with him in the simulator room, actually recall that, and he didn't complain with Francesca, flew with Francesca. But he just failed two times the check -- Stage 1 flight check, and he complain with his last instructor. His last instructor was spend time for Delta airlines in America. So his last flight instructor didn't teach that much for the flight school or the, like, aeronautical knowledge or something. And to me, I think is not

responsible for teach a student and he just want to spend time (indiscernible) work, and he just submit (indiscernible) and go to airlines and Howard (indiscernible) training more.

And after, like, so long time, he didn't fly, I remember that. And he go to training -- I mean, he go through exam, failed. And Richard was another instructor. I don't know who was. And failed again. So he has so a long time he didn't fly, like, 2 months maybe 1 month, more than 1 month or something. You can go back to the record, his training record.

And the Francesca just, she asked -- she asked for help Howard get out, and she help Howard and fly two times or something. And Howard also told me that Francesca is really nice, really gentle. And he later lost his former instructor. The Francesca -- I mean, no, the Howard, I mean he's very (indiscernible), a lot of hard work. He practice the simulator in the simulator room, like 2 hours every day. That's too much to me, I mean. Actually, I didn't do any extra work, any extra simulate if I don't fly. So I think that is very, very good.

Q. So did you say that instructor -- Howard's prior instructor, you said he left?

A. Yeah.

Q. Prior to the -- prior to Howard getting his check ride or the stage check; is that what you're saying?

A. Yeah. I remember that. Because Howard just, you know, before check rides you think how many hours we have fly, 7 hours

on the multi-engine. I don't complain this not too enough, but if we can keep our flight school proficiency after we done the instrument, I mean, that time is good, I mean. But actually on the -- in fact, when we get into Seneca all three guys, I mean, all of us, like, we didn't fly 3 months, and we try to use the 7 hours for, like, recall our procedure. And a lot of things going on, and we have to learn a lot of new things on the multi-engine. This hard. I think this hard. And in that 7 hours we have one cross-country flight, that spends like 3.5 hours for cruise. So, I mean, the course setting is terrible, as far as my personal situation.

Q. The course is -- the course what?

A. Is terrible. The first 7 hours --

Q. The schedule?

A. No. I mean the lesson.

Q. The lesson?

A. Yeah, the lesson 2 is cross-country or the lesson 1. I forgot what actually lesson number. And it's called cross-country fly, and we have to spend, like, to me, let's say 3.3 -- I spend 3.3 hours on the -- on that cross-country flight. So actually in the -- we got initially, for the Seneca, I think we need more practice on landings, flight control maneuvers or some practice more. But the courses just give us cross-country flight, and we go cross-country and spend a lot of time on the cruise. And even the time is really vary, you know.

DR. WILSON: I don't think I have any more questions.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Caesar, how do you feel about the pace of the program, of the actual flying, the course schedule for the flying part? Not -- I understand that the 3 months of waiting is not ideal, is what you're saying. But how do you feel about the course of the flights, the schedule of the flights?

A. In my -- you know what's time of duty, right? That could be -- shows up here on the -- I'm not sure it's only Chinese student want take it because the school for the civil aviation regulations of China as well, we have to spend time on the solo, like, build time on the solo to, like, account -- get hours, and accounting for our experience. The school give us like three times flight every day, just schedule for us. And sometimes I flew to the 2 a.m. in the night, in the midnight, 2 a.m.

After I go back to apartment and I'm like shower and then go to bed, the time could be 3 a.m. And I have another, maybe another flight in the -- in tomorrow. So in the 9 a.m. we have to take the 8 a.m., 8 o'clock bus, and we have to -- we have, like 7½ or something.

So in that period we don't have really enough time for rest, and we try to cancel it, right? We try to cancel my solo flight. Could you? Definitely we can. We can, like, let's say I'm sick and I'm fatigued and I don't want to fly because personal concern. But the school, they don't want guys cancel because they think,

oh, you guys (indiscernible) from the time building period, so if you don't fly, you just, like, spend a lot of -- you know, waste the time, waste the scheduling aircraft.

So I think that if somebody cancel, the aircraft just rest. And this was the school thing. So we get -- we guys must push, push for solo flight. And even me, I feel very tired on the cruise, and sometimes a little bit zoom out something because I'm flying very late in the evening, in midnight or something. And so that's why, that's why I think the schedule is (indiscernible.) They can make some schedule like if somebody want to go fly, they just take the aircraft, something like this. But I suggest that from (indiscernible) school that they need be thinking about that, I mean.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Who did you make that suggestion to?

A. At the leader meeting.

Q. Your team lead?

A. Yeah. And, you know, this can happen even now. Even now you can try to catch some student he want to go through solo flying, you just say, could you cancel flights by fatigue? Yeah, he may answer, no. Because (indiscernible), if the school don't want, they just tell you, no, no cannot cancel by fatigue anymore or something. But, I mean, that's -- because I'm the only one pilot on board. If I think I'm not really good for the flights, and you just push me because there are flights, that could put me into a

dangerous situation. That's why I'm concern on the schedule.

Yeah. And that's -- and the school they -- the letter we got and they told us you have to done, you have to done the time building. The time building have 54 -- no, 56 hours on the solo fly within -- like before we submit to the instrument check. We guys also check the FAR, just FAA didn't give any regulations of it. So that's why we think it's pretty (indiscernible).

But now something got changed. Now we guys can keep waiting on the multi-engine instructor and do the time building in same time, but before we cannot. If we, like, three times in one day the workload could be very heavy, and specific, and then during the night or we keep fly with the instructor or something, because if we fly with the instructor that's called study, the study, the workload where we could be higher than if we solo -- if we go the solo fly.

And another pressure is from if we guys fail the stage check, we have to still pay the training fee, and the -- for extra hours practice, you know, the flight school again. That could be really expensive for the multi-engine. Even the single engine is expensive. Some of us fail two times the check in primary stage, and -- because we ask by like $2,000 for a re-train, and goes through like 10 hours flights for the practice. And so that's another pressure for we have to, we have to pass the check ride or something. It's better once -- yeah, if we try to like second attempt, there will be much higher workload on the flight.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you mentioned that you just failed your Stage 1 multi?

A. Yeah. Or just several days ago.

Q. So is it -- so you have to pay to take it again?

A. In the first attempt, we don't have to pay. If we fail the second attempt, we have to pay by myself. The company will pay if we first attempt fail, yeah. But I don't have experience on that. Before the test failed, I didn't fail any check rides before.

DR. WILSON: Anything else?

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. Caesar, do you have -- is there anything else that we did not ask you that you feel you want to share with us?

A. About like that they -- that thing about -- I was, you know, I was visiting the maintenance work before, and the maintenance chief is really he's good friend. He's really nice man. And we ask some question before, because I have engine failure, the experience on my solo flight. But that's a single engine, the single engine aircraft during the night. And I try to talk with maintenance chief, and he told me sometimes, I mean, the school they didn't do like, you know -- what's the aircraft that crash? The crash is Alpha-Golf, the tail number. When they completes their maintenance work, they didn't make, like test the flight. So this what we was thinking about.

Even the Cessna 152, the single-engine, right, but the 152 has really good glide speed and glide performance, but the Seneca

doesn't have one. The Seneca is heavy, and the wingspan is short. So the Seneca doesn't have really good glide performance. Whatever the Seneca or Cessna, the school, if they done the change engine or the -- some engine big issues, some engine big issues was fix completely, and they didn't make test flight.

That's why I'm thinking about, even the Alpha-Golf, the Alpha-Golf, it show some problems before on engine, more times, like two times before. I believe they fix it, and I believe they check on the, maybe on the ground or something, but they didn't make the flight, because why -- we can check the (indiscernible) real careful for that, always student can, because that's resource is open, and we can check that. We figure out the aircraft, after they fix the aircraft, maybe I believe they fixed and they checked, they don't do any fly before they let us go.

So this what I was thinking about this big issue (indiscernible) test some aircraft, some Cessna. Even they do, they fix the engine, and they just get it -- aircraft to the ramp and let us go. So how can I make sure the aircraft is really safe or is not, is not something going to happen during the flights, we're not sure.

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. So is that your feeling, with the maintenance and all the stuff you described, is that kind of a common feeling throughout the pilots, throughout the students?

A. I mean, the maintenance maybe did very good work, but the

school, if you don't -- if you do the test flight, like take the aircraft out, demonstrate some maneuvers for like check the aircraft performance or the something, make sure the aircraft is really good on flights after engine change or after fix some engine problems, you'll -- like you will lose money, the school will lose money. They will cost a lot of money on the flights. The maintenance, maybe they did very good work on that, but about the testing flights that's a school reason.

Yeah. The maintenance just mentioned that maybe sometimes after we fix some aircraft, the aircraft just back in service, back online, and we can check out the aircraft. But before we check out the aircraft, they don't really do a test flight.

Q. And did you bring this up to the people here at the school about test -- why do they do a test flight or why don't they do a test flight?

A. Actually, we -- is from a lot of comments, you know, the school is not like a charity organization. They want to make money. They need to save money as well. If you do test flight, it's expensive, and the aircraft will spend time on that. That's main reason, I believe.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

MS. LIEDLER: I don't have any more questions for you, Caesar.

DR. WILSON: I don't either. Thank you very much for taking

the time to talk to us. It was really informative. Thank you.

MR. PITTACORA: Thank you.

MR. LIU: Thank you. Okay. I'm done?

DR. WILSON: Yes, we're done. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

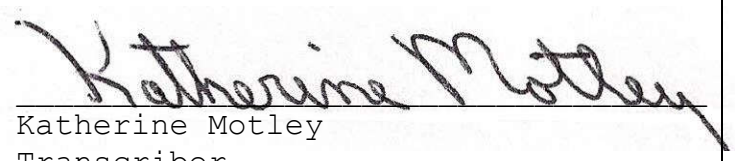
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Jianghao "Caesar" Liu
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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.



Katherine Motley
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
	*	
US AVIATION GROUP	*	
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	*	Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*	
	*	

Interview of: QI "SUNNY" PANG

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Thursday,
September 19, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

THOMAS GOOD, Flight Operations Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

BRUCE JONES, Student Liaison
US Aviation Group

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:25 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: If you could start by telling us your name, please? Your full name.

MR. PANG: My full name. My first name is Qi, Q-I. My last name is Pang, P-A-N-G. Pang Qi is my Chinese name. My English name is Sunny.

DR. WILSON: Okay. S-O-N-N-Y?

MR. PANG: S-U-N-N-Y.

DR. WILSON: S-U-N-N-Y? And for the purpose of the transcript, let's go around and we'll have everybody introduce themselves in case you didn't meet everyone. So, I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MR. PANG: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: I'm Courtney Liedler. I'm the investigator in charge with NTSB for this accident.

MR. PITTACORA: Darren Pittacora, FAA maintenance.

MR. GOOD: Thomas Good, FAA. I'm a pilot.

DR. WILSON: And then, Bruce, if you could Bruce, if you could introduce yourself as well?

MR. JONES: Okay. I'm sorry. I'm Bruce Jones. Student liaison.

DR. WILSON: Okay. And it's my understanding that you would like Bruce to sit in the interview with you, correct?

MR. PANG: Yes.

DR. WILSON: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF QI "SUNNY" PANG

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Sunny, you are currently a student at U.S. Aviation. Is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Where are you in your training curriculum?

A. Commercial Stage 1.

Q. And is that multi-engine?

A. Yes. Multi-engine.

Q. Okay. How long have you been in the program?

A. For commercial pilot or for all --

Q. Both. All and then commercial.

A. I have one through here about 2 years, and for commercial, I have flown from July to now.

Q. Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. And July 2019?

A. Yeah.

Q. And in July, who were you assigned to -- what instructor were you assigned to?

A. Francesca.

Q. Okay. And tell me about your experiences with her as an instructor.

A. The experience? Yeah. We flew always happy. Yeah. And she

finishes very responsible every flight. We do preflight very careful and -- yes. And inflight she taught me many things. And, yes, I learn many things from her, so -- and she is very nice.

Q. Sunny, was she just your multi-engine or did she instruct other --

A. No. Just Francesca.

Q. Did she do your instrument as well?

A. For instrument, just two times or three times.

Q. Two or three times?

A. Yeah. It's a USA stage for instrument.

Q. And when you started flying with her in July, did you notice any difficulties she had because of her recent injury to her arm?

A. Yes, I know. But she has got well. But she has got well, so --

Q. She has gotten well?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. So, you didn't notice her experiencing any pain or difficulty on the controls?

A. No, no.

Q. Okay.

MR. GOOD: Any trouble closing the door?

MR. PANG: No.

MR. GOOD: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay.

A. She's very well.
Q. In any of the times that you flew with her, did she have to take control of the aircraft from you for a safety reason?
A. No. Just to touch me just when we practice a maneuver, she will control the airplane, yes.
Q. To demonstrate a maneuver?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. Okay. And did you all practice engine-out procedures?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Okay. Was it always the same engine that she would simulate as failing, or did she change which engine?
A. When we fly, we always left engine. We always, yeah, practice left engine.
Q. Left engine out?
A. Yes.
MR. GOOD: So never the right?
MR. PANG: We just fly three, four times --
MR. GOOD: Okay.
MR. PANG: -- so we practice emergency engine out two times or three times. Yeah.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Two to three times in the same flight, or two to three times two to three different flights?
A. Different flight.
Q. Okay. And each time you recalled it being the left engine?

A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Do you know why that was?
A. Because left engine is in my side, this side is left engine, so we practice left engine. And also we do a single-engine approach, we also idle left engine.
Q. And on those approaches, would it be to a full stop or would it be a touch-and-go?
A. If it we do single engine, it will be at full stop.
Q. Okay.
A. If two engine, sometimes we did touch-and-go at (indiscernible) airport.
Q. Okay. But not single engine?
A. Yes.
Q. Oh. So, the touch-and-goes that you did were not single engine?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
MR. GOOD: (Indiscernible).
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Did you notice any handling difficulties of the aircraft when you we redoing the single-engine procedures?
A. Sorry. Can you say that?
Q. When you were practicing the single engine -- or, the single-engine-out procedures, did you notice any difficulties in handling the aircraft, or was it easy to fly?

A. For me or for Francesca or for us?
Q. For you.
A. For you? It's not difficult.
Q. Okay.
A. Yes. Because I remember procedure in course and flow, yes.
Q. Okay. And so, that's for you remembering to do the procedures and the flows, but in terms of were the controls heavy, did you have to put in a lot of rudder, what -- how did you think the handling of the aircraft was, actual flying?
A. Maintain directional control.
MR. GOOD: In comparison to the 172, is the Seneca easier or harder?
MR. PANG: Seneca harder.
MR. GOOD: Okay. How?
MR. PANG: Because we have twin engine. If one engine is out, we must use counteract action to fly the one engine. Yes.
DR. WILSON: Okay.
MR. GOOD: So when both engines are going, no troubles as far as controls?
MR. PANG: Is it hard?
MR. GOOD: Yeah. Is there a difference between the 172 and the Seneca?
MR. PANG: Yes.
MR. GOOD: How so?
MR. PANG: Because the Seneca is heavy and also we need to

check many instrument, and also we have more handle to control the airplane. So I think it's more difficult than Cessna.

MR. GOOD: Did that help clarify what you wanted, Katherine?

DR. WILSON: Yeah. Thanks.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did you fly accident airplane 6-Alpha-Golf?

A. No.

Q. No? Prior to the accident, had you heard about problems with that aircraft?

A. I heard many times engine out.

Q. Okay. On the accident airplane?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. This is my heard.

Q. From other students? From instructors? Who did you hear that from?

A. I see the picture, the squawk record, squawk (indiscernible).

Q. Okay.

A. Okay.

Q. And was that before or after the accident that you saw that picture?

A. From my -- from application?

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. Our application, our school application.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. FlightPro.
Q. FlightPro?
A. Yes. FlightPro.
Q. So when you saw that picture of the squawk sheet, had the accident already occurred, or did you see that squawk sheet prior to the accident?
A. Yes. I saw this prior accident.
Q. Prior? Okay.
A. Because I --
MR. PITTACORA: Go ahead. Continue. Sorry.
MR. PANG: Because everyone can see it.
MR. PITTACORA: Was it a picture, like, on a phone or a iPad?
MR. PANG: No, no. We can see in my phone. It's not a picture.
MR. PITTACORA: Oh, I see. Yeah, yeah. Through the application. I gotcha.
MR. PANG: Yeah.
MR. PITTACORA: What made you decide to pull up that aircraft and look at the FlightPro history?
MR. PANG: Because I every flight before the flight, we need to check the aircraft letter, and so -- yeah.
MR. PITTACORA: Got you.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Did you feel comfortable flying with Francesca?
A. Yes. Very comfortable.

Q. Any concerns that you had about flying with her?
A. No.
Q. And how about any concerns about flying the Seneca?
A. It concerns me.
MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.)
MR. PANG: Because our plane is old.
MR. JONES: Right.
MR. PANG: It's built at 1972.
MR. JONES: Yes.
MR. PANG: So sometimes you can see the instrument pointer is shaking, but -- yeah. We can squawk this airplane. But so we flown there's times our flight it's great, and we don't -- we didn't (indiscernible) the -- that airplane, so we don't -- we didn't squawk airplane for our flight at that time.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So the instrument pointer was shaking, you said?
A. Yes. Sometimes.
Q. Which instrument pointer?
A. Oil.
Q. Oil?
A. You can sometimes oil --
Q. Pressure?
A. Oil pressure, yes.
Q. But you said you did not squawk it?
A. But then it's fine. It's okay.

Q. Oh, if it --
A. Yeah.
Q. It corrected?
A. Yeah. We let engine run sometimes, then it's -- that's fine. It's not shaking again.
MR. PITTACORA: Was there a certain aircraft registrations or tail numbers that you guys talked about more than others? Like, hey, that airplane's not -- that one's -- this is a great airplane; this is not a great airplane? Were there certain airplanes that the community of students would talk about?
MR. PANG: Yes, sometimes. Sometimes we talk about that. Blah, blah, this aircraft is good; that aircraft is bad.
MS. LIEDLER: Which ones were you speaking of?
MR. PANG: Which one?
MS. LIEDLER: What is an aircraft -- what aircraft is it that you think is not a good aircraft?
MR. PANG: Before Seneca?
MS. LIEDLER: Yeah.
MR. PANG: I don't remember because we just fly a few times.
MS. LIEDLER: Okay.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Did you ever feel pressured to fly in an airplane that you did not think was safe?
A. Yes. We were all pressure.
Q. There's pressure? And who does that pressure come from?

A. It's comes from (indiscernible) and also the airplane.

MS. LIEDLER: You said supervisor?

MR. PANG: Sorry?

MS. LIEDLER: I'm sorry. I --

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Yeah. Explain again what you mean. So I want -- I'm wanting to know if you ever didn't feel comfortable flying, but did someone make you feel like you had to fly, like an instructor or management or another student pilot? Is there a time that somebody wanted you to fly when you didn't want to?

A. No. That's not from my instructor, not from student, not from -- no.

Q. Okay.

A. Not from management.

Q. Had you ever squawked an airplane? No?

A. No.

MR. PITTACORA: Are you encouraged -- when I say, you, I mean the students. Are the students told that if they have a problem with an airplane to document it or to squawk it?

MR. PANG: Yes.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Who encouraged you to squawk an airplane? Where would you -- who would tell you? Is it management, your instructor? Who tells you, if you don't feel safe, squawk an airplane?

A. Who told us?

MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.)

MR. PANG: That's my instructor task to squawk the airplane.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. The instructor does it?

A. Yes. Because for Seneca we always fly dual, not solo. So if the Seneca has some problem, my instructor will squawk.

Q. Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. What about if you were flying solo and there was a problem, would you squawk -- you would squawk the airplane?

A. (No verbal response.)

Q. Did you ever have to do that?

A. No.

Q. Did you feel comfortable doing that? If you saw something, would you squawk it?

A. Yes. I will squawk it if I (indiscernible) something.

Q. Okay.

A. If I say something.

Q. Did you feel that maintenance did a good maintaining the aircraft?

A. Yes. I think they good for us, yes.

Q. Okay. If you had a concern about your instructor -- let's say your instructor -- you didn't get along, is there someone you would talk to about that? Who would you tell?

A. My instructor --

Q. If you and your instructor didn't get along. The instructor yelled at you a lot or you didn't feel safe, could you ask to get a new instructor?
A. Because instructor -- we don't have many instructor, so if we lost the one instructor, we may wait many time.
Q. Did you have a long waiting period from finishing your instrument until --
A. Yes.
Q. -- starting the commercial?
A. I waiting 3 months.
Q. Three months?
A. Yes.
Q. What did you do during that 3-month period?
A. Stay at home or to saw some event, special event.
Q. Did you -- were you able to get into the sim or did you get to hand-fly a computer sim program? How did you stay proficient?
A. Stay proficient. To study, study, all (indiscernible) study the system.
Q. Okay.
A. Study the POH. Yes.
MS. LIEDLER: Okay. Did you fly -- during that time, did you fly the simulator?
MR. PANG: Yes. We fly two times. Two times simulator.
MS. LIEDLER: During that 3-month, you flew simulator twice?
MR. PANG: You mean at -- waiting 3 months?

MS. LIEDLER: Right.

MR. PANG: No. From beginning July with Francesca, we flew in the simulator two times.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. PANG: At the beginning.

MS. LIEDLER: After the 3 -- so you waited 3 months from instrument to multi-engine?

MR. PANG: Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: Were you given any refresher flight prior to starting multi-engine?

MR. PANG: No.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Have you been assigned a new instructor for the commercial?

A. For the -- no.

Q. No?

A. I have waiting 2 months.

Q. You've been waiting 2 months?

A. For 2 months, yes. From July to now.

Q. Have all of the flights been grounded or just you because you don't have an instructor?

A. Yes. Now we have a ground school for review the Seneca -- for reviewing the Seneca.

Q. When was that?

A. On this week.

Q. This week?

A. Yeah. Tomorrow will be last class.
Q. Okay. And what did the ground school cover?
A. Cover in the -- covers multi-engine system, multi-engine, for example, EOC, and -- yes. So EOC and also twin-engine system, some principle, aerodynamic principle multi-engine, yes. We reviewed that. And also a procedure, emergency procedure.
Q. Okay. Have you been given any time frame of when you should be getting an instructor?
A. No.
Q. No? Did you know Howard?
A. Howard? We are different group. I am China 99. He is China 100.
Q. Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: You were China what?
MR. PANG: Ninety-nine.
MS. LIEDLER: Ninety-nine?
MR. PANG: Ninety-nine, yes, (indiscernible).
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. How do you like flying as a student here?
A. I mean, I like do as student?
Q. Yeah. Do you like flying here?
A. Yes. I like flying out here.
Q. Yeah? Okay. Do you feel safe flying here?
A. For now. If I continue flying Seneca?
Q. Yeah. Do you feel comfortable flying there?

A. Yes. I think I feel comfortable to fly this if I will met some problem before we flight (indiscernible). Yes.
Q. Okay. Do you think that safety is important to U.S. Aviation?
A. Safety problem, do you mean?
Q. Do you think it's important to the company? Do you think that they put safety first?
A. Safety first? Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Safety first, I think.
Q. What makes you feel that way, that they put safety first?
A. You know, we have many Seneca. But for now, the Seneca can fly just the one or two, so I think now the school is safety for us.
Q. Okay. Do you think the instructors care about the students or are they just trying to get their hours to go on to the airline?
A. I think both.
Q. Okay.
A. But my instructor from prior to now always very responsible.
Q. Okay.
A. Yes.
MR. GOOD: Who was that?
MR. PANG: Who was that?
MR. GOOD: Yeah. Who was your instructor?

MR. PANG: From previous?

MR. GOOD: Yeah.

MR. PANG: Chris Pennington. Yeah. He is at Envoy Airline. And my instrument is -- I forgot his name. He's also at Envoy Airline. My second instructor, Francesca.

DR. WILSON: I think that's all the questions that I have for now. I might -- I'm going to review my notes a little bit. So, Courtney, do you have some follow-ups?

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So, what do you think is good about the student program here, and what is bad about the student program?

A. For Chinese student, it's about daily life and -- it's about daily life. Anything, right?

Q. Anything.

A. First, for all our flight, I think -- give me just one second. I want to think about it.

MR. GOOD: Would you like a piece of paper to write stuff down?

MR. PANG: I think everything is good for now, yes.

MR. GOOD: What about the bad?

MR. PANG: What a bad?

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. The things you can -- you think could be improved. It doesn't have to be bad, but --

A. I understand.

Q. We're interested in getting your take on things here.
A. First, instructor, the instructor is lacks for us, yes. And --
Q. Your instructor what?
A. Instructor is lacks --
MR. PITTACORA: They're lacking instructors. Not enough? Not enough?
MR. PANG: Yes. It's not enough. Lack of, yes. Lack of instructor. And the airplane. And the airplane also it's old, but now some airplane is good. And what else?
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So, if I understand, the things that are -- that you feel need improvement, need to be better, are the airplanes are old and the -- there're not enough instructors.
A. Yes.
Q. Yes?
MR. JONES: Would you feel more comfortable talking about this with me out of the room, or -- you want me out?
MR. PANG: No, no, no.
MR. JONES: Okay. You know, whatever -- you know, I don't want to -- you know, I'm here for you.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. Did you see a change in -- after the suicide, for students to be able to be more -- voice their thoughts more easily?
A. Voice?

MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.) Yes?

MR. PANG: Yes.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. I may need your help with this, too, Bruce. I'm trying to find out how comfortable he is with -- how comfortable are you to express a concern or -- whether it's a personal concern or a concern in the flight school within your training, how comfortable are you to express that? Or do you just -- do you feel like you would get in trouble if you did?

MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.)

MR. PANG: We can tell you.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. PANG: And also, we can tell our airline -- our company.

MS. LIEDLER: If you did not like your instructor --

DR. WILSON: (Indiscernible).

MS. LIEDLER: Yes. But then he said you have to wait a long time if you requested (indiscernible).

BY MR. GOOD:

Q. If you had a bad instructor, is there a way to notify management?

A. If I had bad instructor?

Q. Yeah.

A. I think it's difficult to change another good instructor because instructor is not enough, first. And second, I think it's difficult for us to change.

Q. Do you feel that if you report a bad instructor that

the -- they'll come after you?
A. I think -- sorry. Can you (indiscernible)?
Q. If you report a bad instructor, are you worried that they will send you to review board?
A. Maybe.
Q. Would that fear keep you from reporting a bad instructor?
A. Fear?
MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.)
MR. PANG: When we report this thing (indiscernible) it will be not good for us.
MR. GOOD: Okay. Okay.
MR. PANG: Because, first, we can't change another instructor. Yeah. And it -- so if we report, yeah, it will be bad for us, I think. But I didn't (indiscernible) those things. Yeah. My instructor is very good.
BY MR. GOOD:
Q. Okay. Why would it be bad for you?
A. Because you may catch review board. I just listen from other guys that you may catch a review board. Because --
Q. The review board?
A. The review board.
Q. Okay.
A. Because sometimes if you fly not good, yes, that's a reason your instructor may be angry. Yeah. So it will -- he will be a bad guy. So I think most of instructor is good.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So, Sunny, you had mentioned before each flight, you have to check certain things in the system. Like you already mentioned you look in for weather and at the airplane maintenance. Can you tell me what are the items that you check like that prior to every flight?

A. Item?

Q. What things do you check before every flight?

A. First, the weather. I think it was (indiscernible) NOTAM and the weather, and also our airplane, the condition, and where we will fly to, which airport. And if weather is not good, the alternate airport. And also to calculate the aircraft performance. And I will check myself, I'M SAFE checklist. And also -- yes, to make sure we are good to fly. Everything's good to fly.

Q. And when you said aircraft condition, what specifically does that mean?

A. First, I can check the record. Yes. The record.

Q. The record?

A. Our record. And also, when we do preflight, we can check the details.

Q. And what records are you looking at?

A. Record?

Q. What records are you checking at? When you say, check the records?

A. Yeah. Before flight, just the squawker record.
Q. Squawk record?
A. Yes. Which has the (indiscernible) squawk record.
Q. Okay.
A. And also we will check hours inspection, hours, yes.
Q. Okay. If you saw something in the course of your preflight, would you make the decision not to fly or would your instructor make the decision not to fly?
A. Which (indiscernible)?
Q. Yeah, if it's --
A. We will check it double. Yeah, (indiscernible).
Q. If you encountered a problem during your preflight, would you make the decision or would you rely on your instructor to make the decision not to fly?
A. If we encounter that first, we will check it again or we can call the maintenance guy to check it again. If the maintenance say it's okay and we are comfortable, we can continue to fly. If we are not comfortable, no go. So we made this instruction together with my instructor, yeah. Of if they, if (indiscernible) check, our airplane's not good.
BY MR. GOOD:
Q. What would you do if you disagreed with your instructor?
A. Disagree?
Q. You've found something wrong with the plane. He says it's good to go fly; you don't want to go fly. What do you do?

A. If I continue to -- because I didn't encounter this condition, if -- I think I will continue to hold my -- I will not go.
Q. Just wanted to know if the instructors would get you in trouble if you decided you didn't want to go.
A. No.
Q. No? Okay. That's good.
A. We can talk about that, yes.
DR. WILSON: (Indiscernible), anything else?
BY MR. GOOD:
Q. Do you know where to find the TCO?
A. TCO?
Q. Training Course Outline?
A. You mean TCO?
Q. Yes.
A. Training course -- where I can find?
Q. So let's say you're going to go do your end of course for commercial and you wanted to know what was going to be on it, where would you find --
A. TCO meanings training --
Q. Training Course Outline, or syllabus.
A. Ah, from the website, FAA website, I can type TCO and for the commercial TCO or private TCO.
Q. Not the Airman Certification Standards. U.S. Aviation syllabus. Where would you find that?

A. I don't know. If I will find them -- first, I will search them from the FAA website.
Q. Have you ever logged into Flight Schedule Pro and seen your progression of the lessons?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. S, have you clicked on one of those before?
A. Can you say which one clicked on?
Q. On Flight Schedule Pro, your lessons?
A. Mm-hmm.
DR. WILSON: What does he mean by (indiscernible)?
MR. JONES: Okay. I'm not even sure about the system that you're talking about. That's why I'm having --
MR. GOOD: It's (indiscernible).
MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.) Can you find on there what your instructor said about your last flight?
MR. PANG: Yes. Yes.
MR. JONES: And you know where to go?
MR. PANG: I can find the notes.
MR. JONES: You know where to go and how to find it?
MR. GOOD: Not the notes. So online, they're supposed to have all their -- it's basically like a syllabus.
MR. JONES: Right.
MR. GOOD: So you know how you had -- when you were teaching here, you had your lesson plans of what you had to teach?
MR. JONES: Right, right. Yeah.

MR. GOOD: That's now online. I want to make sure that he knows where that is.

MR. JONES: Do you know how to find that?

(Speaking Chinese.)

Okay. Does that work for ground school or for flight lessons?

MR. GOOD: They're both on there.

MR. JONES: (Speaking Chinese.) Yeah. We used to use books, is my problem. So --

Do you know where to find what your instructor wants you to do today in this guide?

MR. PANG: So you mean the flight plan? Today's flight plan?

MR. JONES: Yes.

MR. PANG: The flight plan, yes, I can track -- I can say it's from this application, because every lesson, it has a plan. And also --

DR. WILSON: He's answering your question?

MR. PANG: And also, I can use the WeChat for Chinese -- WeChat to ask my instructor what's the plan today, yes, so I can prepare.

MR. JONES: Did that answer your question? The lesson plan was what we called it in my day, I think, is what you're asking for?

MR. GOOD: Yes. It's similar to the lesson plan. It's not -- so for, like, the whole commercial program, you have a

breakdown of each lesson.

MR. JONES: Right.

MR. GOOD: What they'd be doing. So, I wanted to know if he knows where to find that whole --

MR. JONES: We have it. It's available. I don't know if he knows where to find it.

MR. GOOD: Okay.

MR. JONES: I know I don't know where to find it. That's why it's a little confusing here.

MR. GOOD: All right. So, as long as he knows how to find what he's doing on the lesson and going back to review his notes, that's part of it, so --

MR. JONES: Okay.

MR. GOOD: Do you have anything (indiscernible)?

DR. WILSON: Anything else that you want to share with us that you think would be helpful to our investigation?

MR. PANG: No.

DR. WILSON: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us. It was very helpful.

MR. PANG: Okay. Yes, thank you.

MS. LIEDLER: Thank you, Sunny.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

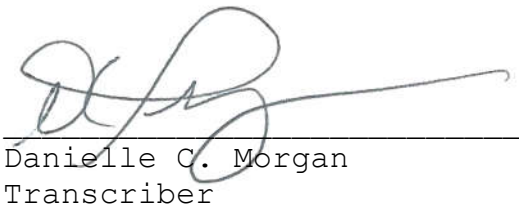
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Qi "Sunny" Pang
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 19, 2019

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.



Danielle C. Morgan
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: DAVID MIKOLAJEWSKI

North Texas FSDO
Irving, Texas

Friday,
September 20, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:50 a.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: So, as I mentioned, I'm Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: I'm Courtney Liedler. I'm the investigator in charge for this accident for the NTSB.

DR. WILSON: And if you could state your name, please?

MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: David Mikolajewski, POI.

DR. WILSON: Could you spell your last name, please?

MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: M-i-k-o-l-a-j-e-w-s-k-i.

INTERVIEW OF DAVID MIKOLAJEWSKI

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And you are POI with the FAA. And how long have you been a POI?

A. Oh. 2015.

Q. Okay. Have you -- when were you hired by the FAA?

A. 2014.

Q. What other positions have you held?

A. Just under training (indiscernible) first year, then POI.

Q. Okay. A brief description of your background and how you got to be a POI at the FAA.

A. General aviation all over, 91, 135, 141, 140.

Q. Are you a pilot?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Okay. About how much time do you have?

A. 3500.
Q. Okay. What type of airplanes --
A. Best guess.
Q. -- do you fly?
A. GA. So that's pretty -- that's a lot.
Q. Oh, you fly a bunch of different types?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Got it. Are you still flying?
A. Well, I mean, just for FAA check ride-wise, but not on my own.
Q. Okay. Yeah. So, as a POI, what are your duties and responsibilities?
A. There's a lot there but, mostly, continuing operational safety, oversight surveillance of certificate holders, stakeholders. A lot of certificate work.
Q. And are you the POI for US Aviation?
A. I am.
Q. Do you also cover other certificates?
A. I do.
Q. I don't need to know the names, but about how many other certificates are you a POI for?
A. Ten.
Q. Ten in addition to US Aviation?
A. Yeah. And that goes from 141, 135, 137, 133.
Q. Is that pretty common to have 11 certificates?

A. In this office, yes. A lot of volume here.
Q. Okay.
A. I can't speak for any other place.
Q. No assistant POI?
A. I used to for maybe 6 months.
Q. Yeah? What happened there?
A. He got promoted.
Q. Is there something in the works to get you an assistant?
A. Yeah. So management's been really great in trying to figure out ways to make it easier, and when it seems as if we get close to meeting that point or that goal, then somebody else leaves and we go right back to square one. So the plan is there, we just haven't been able to implement it.
Q. Right. So, walk me through your activities for US Aviation. What do you do as the POI for them?
A. So US Aviation is very high volume as far as personnel goes, personnel changes, right? So there's a lot of certificate work dealing with personnel changes on a regular basis. And when I say personnel, meaning check instructors and guys that are completing end-of-course check rides for their students that are enrolled in a course.

Most recently, they're trying to add another satellite location down in Conroe, Houston, Texas. So that is kind of taking higher priority, you know, over, you know, more of the on demand stuff. Adding aircraft and surveillance, of course. We've

got required items we have to do annually, as well as, you know, regulatory compliance, of course.

Q. Are you just the POI for the Denton base?

A. No.

Q. Okay, so for all --

A. Yeah.

Q. They've got three bases total?

A. Well, it's two with the satellite.

Q. Okay.

A. So two and then plus a satellite. Their Denton location, Alliance is the satellite to Denton, and then their Denison location.

Q. Okay.

A. Then if we open up that other one down in Houston, that'll be another additional satellite to Denton.

Q. So, how do you divide your workload across the 11 certificates?

A. Yeah, so that's very cumbersome at times. Prioritization is huge, which with this amount of volume, it's based on risk, risk based. So, depending on what the operator's size and scope is depends on the risks of that size and scope, right? So continual operational safety that they bring to the national airspace is going to depend on what kind of work is going to be out first versus last. So that's how I prioritize.

If I've got a 135 operator that needs something extremely

quickly for safety reasons or what their goals are, that kind of takes precedent, then, over a check instructor for a 141 school, in this case US Aviation, for example. So that would be more of a risk-based decision to get that done for the 135 over the 141 check instructor. So it gets difficult at times.

Q. If you have to say, you know, whether it's in a given week or a given month, what percentage of your time is working on US Aviation versus all your other certificates?

A. Percentage of time. They are going to be one of the operators that's an everyday deal.

Q. Okay.

A. It's, I would say, maybe good 10 percent of my time would be dedicated to them on a, maybe an every-other-day basis, right? So there's a lot of time there, and there's a lot of background for that, you know, reason. There's a lot of issues that we've had regulatory-wise that we're trying to, that we've been trying to correct for quite some time.

Q. What type of regulatory issues are you looking at?

A. So, well, that gets back to the surveillance side of things. So, like I said, we have our required items that we're supposed to do on an annual basis, and those items extend from, all the way from a facility inspection through records and personnel, record keeping and that kind of thing.

So, as far as the regulatory side of things, when we go out there and we do those, those required items, I found a bunch of

stuff, right? And those things were outlined, we needed to have fixed. It took some time for that to happen. We're actually still going through some of that, some of those issues.

For example, training course outline, TCOs, were never -- they were submitted and approved, but we were -- when I officially got the certificate as POI, they should -- you know, we had to get those fixed because they shouldn't have been approved, right? There were a lot of issues that didn't meet the current regulatory requirements that TCOs are required to meet. So that was a big one.

We had personnel issues, personnel on the US Aviation side that weren't qualified to be in the airplane as an instructor, teaching under 141. That was another big one. I had -- I found applicants that had graduated -- well, I should say had applicants who had received a pilot certificate but never graduated from a course, which is massive, right? Because now he never went through the course, how does he have a certificate? So that was a big one.

And that just gets back to the culture side of things. US Aviation is very, from the surface, very, very elegant, looks great, does a great job, but when you dive into root cause and understanding culture, right, I understand it's a huge endeavor, but the lack of -- paying attention is not there, the lack of a want, the want to be better is not there. It's just a very surface-level, oh, we'll do what we can, you know.

MS. LIEDLER: How long have you been the POI for US Aviation?

MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: That's a good question. So that must be -- let's see. It was 2017 time frame when I took over.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Why did you take over that certificate?

A. I got promoted.

Q. I mean, what does that mean? Because you've been a POI since, you know, '15?

A. Yeah, so I got promoted as far as pay scale goes, and I can hold more complexity at that point. So that was one of the certificates I inherited from a previous POI in 2017.

Q. And had that POI retired or left the FAA?

A. He went across the hall. So he went to another 142, actually.

Q. Got it.

MS. LIEDLER: Who do you report to?

MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: Direct supervisor is Calvin Cleveland.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. How often -- and you said you're working on US Aviation stuff almost daily. How often are you actually in contact with someone from US Aviation?

A. Almost daily.

Q. Okay.

A. For example, this morning I called David Cruz. We were on the phone talking about it because we needed a copy of the agency

certificate. And we were discussing on what needs to be either added or taken away for verbiage on there that we're looking into. For examining authority, because they have examining authority.

Q. And are you typically in contact with David Cruz, or anyone else?

A. David Cruz is the main contact. I have dealt with Mike Sykes, president and CEO, but that's a very rare occasion. When we -- well, story-wise, when I first met Michael is when we were doing a renewal for their 141 certificate. There was a lot of, like I said, regulatory issues that I couldn't get there, I couldn't renew them. So, when I sent that letter, Mike Sykes was then, hey, I'm Mike Sykes, and that's kind of how that relationship took over.

Q. Okay. So the renewal of the certificate happened after you took over as POI, or was it in progress when you took over?

A. So I was already POI when we renewed them.

Q. Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. What are the types of things you're looking at for the renewal?

A. Well, for example, those required items like I said before, we call the R items. For example, the facilities, the personnel requirements, personnel record keeping, student records, and aircraft maintenance, that kind of thing. The whole operation, the entire -- so, in their particular case, it's a good -- we're

out there, this last one that I did, I was out there for at least a week, the first time, when they asked to be renewed. And then it just -- we progressed, we kept going. We were out there quite a bit, at least 3 weeks, probably, all in total.

MS. LIEDLER: How often do they renew the certificate?

MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: So let's see. Twenty-four months.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. So you've done two renewals for them, then, or just --

A. Nope, this is my first one for them.

Q. First one, okay. And when was that? Do you know when that --

A. That was -- so they were up for renewal at the end of -- let's see, April, April. So their certificate expired, or their air agency certificate expires at the end of April, and we didn't process the renewal until May 3rd.

Q. Is that a typical time?

A. No. No. It was -- we had -- like I said, the regulatory side of things, I couldn't bridge the gaps to make the renewal happen within the April time frame just because of safety concerns that I had. And by the time we were able to get there, that was May. So they had already kind of reached that point.

Q. You mentioned something like the paperwork and the documentation. Were those the safety concerns you had, or were there additional safety concerns?

A. Additional safety concerns. I had flight instructors in the airplane given, dual given that weren't qualified and never had a checkout, check ride, if you will, from the chief flight instructor. Yeah.
Q. And all of those safety concerns had to be addressed before they were given the renewal?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And so, were all of those done satisfactorily?
A. I'm not going to say all because we're still working to get there. We acknowledged the ones that demonstrated high risk to the national airspace. Those were resolved. But on the approval side of manuals, like the training course outline, that's still an ongoing. They have an approved training course outline, right, so they have approved courses. That was approved prior to me. So we're still working to get those into compliance, if you will. They have submitted, they submitted a bunch of revisions for me. So those have been since approved, but they were -- it wasn't exactly -- I guess they met the minimum, let's say that.
Q. Okay. And when you say April and May when you're talking about the dates, 2019?
A. Yes. Correct.
Q. Okay. Since the accident, what have you done in terms of your surveillance of US Aviation?
A. Since the accident, we've been out there quite a bit, more for -- not necessarily regulatory side but procedure side of

things. How are certain things done in a certain way. We've observed kind of like an end-of-course lesson, if you will. In fact, that was one of the lessons that the accident aircraft was on. And we went out there to observe a couple of those.

I talked to Cruz about kind of where he saw the gaps or where this could have been an issue as far as a safety issue, safety related. Didn't get into too much detail as far as, you know, why was the instructor flying that airplane prior with an issue, you know, an engine issue, before, and nothing was said or nothing was done or documented. I didn't have any communication, nobody told me about it. So that kind of communication was kind of what was taking place, you know.

Q. Explain to me what you mean about the pilot flying the aircraft with previous issues and you not being made aware about it.

A. Yeah, so from my understanding, it was, from Baker Nase, we have maintenance write-ups on that aircraft that -- I don't know the exact days, but a couple says prior to the accident. There was some sort of engine issue with the either left or right engine. I don't know which one, but there was a write-up from that same instructor, I believe out of Gainesville. And she had made the decision after realizing that the engine had either failed or had major issues, she elected to fly it back to Denton, fly back home.

So that was kind of where my head, my head was like, well,

why did that happen in the first place? Why is the instructor thinking she needs to come back in that airplane if she's got that big of an issue, right? And I don't know the extent of the emergency or if there was an emergency or whatnot, I just know that there was a maintenance issue, period.

Q. And so your expectation would have been that the aircraft remained in Gainesville?

A. Yeah, wherever the location was.

Q. And not returned to Denton. And should that have been communicated to you?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. Why is that? Explain to me why that's something that would be reported to you.

A. So anytime there is like a, there is a safety concern, not only with the operational side of things but also from the maintenance side of things, so if there's an issue from US Aviation in how -- you know, in this particular instance, with the aircraft, we have an open line of communication to whereas if this does happen, they're supposed to reach out to me and let me know, hey, this is a potential issue, potential problem, right? It may not be at the time, but it could be later. And that communication never happened.

And I don't know for sure, but from instructors that I've

talked to, there's been several other issues with especially the multi-engines, the Senecas, with landing gear, gear-up landings, and I'm not notified and that kind of thing, you know. So this is all hearsay. Obviously, I can't -- I have nothing to substantiate any of that, but this is what I'm being told. So it just kind of, it just creates a bad taste in my mouth for -- obviously, I don't have that open communication with the operator, which is what I was always trying to establish in the first place.

Q. And did you say when you talked to David Cruz that you asked him why the engine issue wasn't reported to you?

A. No, I never asked him that. It was more of me trying to figure out how we got there without me actually asking the direct question.

Q. Okay. How do you go about trying to understand that without asking the direct questions?

A. Kind of figure out where -- so a hypothetical would be, if I'm the student and the applicant, or if I'm the student or the instructor and I'm flying to a remote location and I have a maintenance issue, how do I report to you, my chief flight instructor, and let you know, and then from there, where does that process go, right? I've got nothing on paper on how that works. In fact, he told me, basically, that it's more of, well, we just pick up the phone and we have that conversation and, you know, we can either leave it there and go get it or you figure it out. So, that's kind of what -- that's why.

Q. Got it.
A. So I really didn't need to ask the specific question because he kind of gave me the answer, right?
Q. And should that be documented, what a pilot or --
A. Sure. Absolutely.
Q. Okay. Where should that be documented?
A. They can do a company manual, right, a company policy procedure manual. They can do a safety practices and procedures. That's the regulatory side of things, safety practices and procedures. There is a bunch of different ways that they can go about doing that.
Q. You said that we spent a total of 3 weeks at the facility after the accident. Who's the we?
A. Oh, there's a bunch of us. So we have a -- let's see, one -- at the time, we had 1, 2, 3, had 4 other inspectors with me. One of those other inspectors had just got out of his first year, so he was no longer in training status, but he was there for support. And the other two gentlemen were under training. We were doing OJT, on-the-job training with them at the same time.
Q. I probably typed wrong. My math isn't working out. You said there were four other inspectors with you, two were in training, one was just out of training.
A. Oh, and the other one was brand-new, so --
Q. Oh, okay.
A. So I guess, yes. Steve Moody, Thomas Good, Fernando, Wisdom.

Yeah, so Steve Moody was very, very new. He was within only a couple months of being here, hired. Thomas Good just passed his first year. And Steven Wisdom was almost at his year. And Fernando, who's no longer with the FAA, he was almost past his first year.

Q. Okay. So, going back before the accident, how often would you visit the facility, facilities?

A. Yeah, so before -- well, like I said, before the accident was the renewal, renewal time. Renewal time, I was there every day for, like I said, a total of probably, it probably totaled up being around 3 weeks. Prior to that was for either doing check rides or observing check rides, and then going to the other locations as well, right? And the other location has a different renewal date, so I can't remember that exact time frame for the other renewal, but that was prior to Denton.

So I was dealing with their renewal December '18, I want to say, December, January of '19. It's got to be somewhere in there, off the top of my head. Like I said, I can go get exact dates if you want. But that was right before the renewal of Denton, so maybe 5, 6 months prior to.

Q. And when you say you were doing check rides, is that for check instructors, or what check rides are you doing?

A. So there is either CFI rides, right? So if they submitted a CFI request back when we did CFIs, we would be out there for those. Or there was, I believe, an assistant chief ride somewhere

in there that we did. And an observation of an instructor giving another -- you know, a lesson or an end-of-course to a student. So it was more of that. It was more operational side of things than manual and compliance side of things.

Q. Okay. Is there -- the observations that you do, is that required that you're doing those observations, or is that just something that you like to do?

A. They are -- so that is -- they are not required. However, it's very unique. These guys are very unique, US Aviation, because they have examining authority. So they check within themselves, right? So exposure to me is I kind of want to see how that is doing. Because when they just submit for their renewal package and they give me a list of guys who have graduated and they've got to have 80 percent, well, do they actually have 80 percent? And the only way I actually know that is if I go out there and observe a few, right?

Q. What is the process for -- I don't know if certifying is the right word but, you know, getting someone so that they can be a check instructor at US Aviation? So if they say, I've got this new instructor, you know --

A. Yeah. So, unfortunately, the requirements for a check instructor are very small. There's no check ride that I have to give, it's all paperwork.

Q. Okay.

A. So as far as -- as long as he meets 61 and the requirements

for currency, currency flying, right, to BPIC and he actually holds a certificate for what US Aviation is applying for him to be a check instructor of that course, then that's it. But, unfortunately, there is no check ride that I can go give on that particular check instructor, but I can go observe, you know.

Q. Okay. And so, then, US Aviation picks this person and then they send you paperwork and say we think that this person is qualified?

A. Correct.

Q. And then what do you do?

A. I review it based on qualifications and under the regulatory requirements, and then process it, add him as a check instructor to US Aviation's file that we have in the system, and then send him a letter saying either yes or no.

Which, for the longest time, that was another issue, was when they would submit, US Aviation would submit the request, they would just submit a name and their recommendation saying that he meets the requirements, and that was it. So we had a lot of issues there because I needed to be able to confirm, you know, see that he meets those requirements, right? And the only way to do that is via logbooks or some sort of sign-off, and I wasn't getting that in the beginning. So, when I first took over, it was kind of a major issue. And it's gotten better since, but every now and then --

Q. So, what is about the time frame from when, you know, US

Aviation submits a paper saying we want this person till they get the letter back saying yes or no?

A. Yeah. So it's funny you ask that, because we had -- they had submitted an exemption to ASF 250 for doing their own check instructors, proving their own check instructors without our intervention. And their claim was that it takes me, or the North Texas FSDO, 5 to 6 months for the turnaround time.

So I had help from one of my front-lines here in the office, Matthew Green. Him and I sat down and we ran a 2-year look-back on when the actual -- when they submitted the request and by the time I actually got it out of the office, and that equaled 43 days exactly. And the only reason it was 43 days is because of all the renewals and everything that was taking higher priority than check instructors. But so, obviously, the 5 to 6 months was not accurate at all.

Q. So were they granted that exemption?

A. So I had a gentleman contact me. I can't remember his name off the top of my head. He sent me an email and a voicemail inquiring if this was true and accurate. And I simply just replied to his email, saying no, and here's the data to support it. And he wrote back and said, okay, thanks, I appreciate the help. So I don't know where we're at with that. I have no idea.

Q. Got it.

A. But that was, I was told that that was kind of confidential at the time, right? Meaning they don't need, US Aviation doesn't

need to know that that's what we were talking about.
Q. Got it. And how long ago was that?
A. Maybe 2 weeks ago, 3 weeks ago.
Q. So recently.
A. Very recently, yes.
Q. What do you think about that?
A. About the --
Q. Exemption.
A. I think that is not a very good idea.
Q. Yeah. Do you think that specific for US Aviation or in general, at other 141 schools, also?
A. Sorry, say again?
Q. You thinking that's not a good idea to have an exemption for that, is that specific to US Aviation, or would you say that for your other certificates as well?
A. Oh. Well, like I said, US Aviation is very unique because they have examining authority. Which that's a higher level, right? So that's a higher level of safety and standards there. The answer is no for that particular reason. I don't know of any other school that has examining authority except for my previous school. But as far as I know, US Aviation would be the first ones to pioneer that exemption if it did happen, because it's just not a good idea, right? I mean, you're kind of giving them full range to approve their own checks.
Q. Right. Prior to the accident, had you, separate from the

renewal, had you increased surveillance at all in the last, you know, 2 to 3 years of the company? I guess since 2017 --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- is when you started. So let me rephrase. I'm sorry. At any point since you took over the certificate in 2017, did you increase surveillance?

A. Yes. Yeah, absolutely. Just because of the amount of exposure that US Aviation has and how much volume they put out, I had to. It was just a matter of I have to figure out how big these guys really are and how much work they actually are doing. And I can only do that if I was going out there. And I may not be necessarily doing a required inspection, but I'm definitely going out there to talk to the chief flight instructor and get acquainted and try to just dive into culture side of things.

So, yes, I think as far as us being out there since I took over the certificate, they've seen a lot of us, a lot of me since then.

Q. Yeah. Were there any triggering events that also increased surveillance?

A. Yeah. So like I said, TCOs were huge. I had TCOs that were approved back in 2012 that weren't even close to meeting the standards of today's regulatory requirements. So that was an automatic trigger: Okay, we've got to get out there, got to get exposure to these guys as soon as possible.

Q. I guess I'm thinking even beyond. Like, were there other

incidents that maybe they had that made you increase surveillance?
A. I don't know about particular incidents. It was more of just maybe concern on my side of things because of hearsay from instructors and just talking to the people that worked there was kind of -- was always a driving force, you know. But as far as particular incidents, I don't think so, that sparked that, no, other than the regulatory side of things.
Q. When you say, you know, talking to instructors and people who work there, how do you do that? When are you doing that?
A. Yeah, so it's funny. Sometimes they'll come in here, so we'll have what's called Circle T. So we take on people coming in for appointments for certification, adding a particular rating, or Mil Comps, or -- and in some cases, you'll have an instructor from US Aviation show up for something, right, a flight instructor renewal or an added rating or something. And if I'm working that day, then obviously he's sitting here and I'm having a conversation with him.
Q. Okay.
A. That, or if I'm out there and I'm meeting crews for whatever reason and I see an instructor walking down the hall, then, hey, how's it going, what's -- how do you like it here? Or, actually, the best part is when you're going out to do a ramp inspection on an airplane and you've get an instructor out there with a student. Perfect because now he's going to talk to you.
Q. Okay. And do you feel like the instructors are pretty open

and candid with you?
A. No. It depends, actually, I should say. Because if they're here, yes. If I'm there, no, they're very guarded.
Q. Why do you think that is?
A. I'm not sure. I don't know. Obviously, it's their job, too, right, so they don't want to jeopardize anything that's putting food on the table.
Q. Yes. What about any anonymous tips, or do you have a hotline where somebody could call and report something about the company?
A. Yeah. Well, FAA-wise, you mean?
Q. Mm-hmm.
A. Yes, we do. We have -- that's well known. If you go on our FAA homepage, you can do it right then and there. You can call a number. You can do it via email. There's a bunch of ways of doing it, and it can be all anonymous.
Q. Yeah. Ever receive --
A. Have I received --
Q. -- tips on US Aviation?
A. I know we have. Office-wise, we have, in the past. I don't know any -- I can't recall anything specific, unfortunately. But I know there has been issues in the past, and that was prior to me being POI.
Q. When you took over as POI, did you talk to the outgoing POI?
A. In regards to just any --
Q. Just about --

A. US Aviation?
Q. Yeah, the POI and his experiences.
A. If I did, it was very, very minimal just because of how -- by the time he was accepted to go across to another place, that time frame was very short. So, when that all happened, it wasn't -- when he leaves and they put me in the position, there was a good couple months in between there. So I didn't even know if I was going to hold them as a POI or not. So if I did talk to him, it was very minimal. And I'd go over there every now and then and see him and say hi and, you know, talk about things, but, you know, nothing substantial that would -- you know, it was more of just, hey, these guys are, they're high profile.
Q. How difficult is that? I mean, taking over of a (indiscernible).
A. Extremely difficult. Yes, it's extremely difficult, because what I had to work with is just manuals, right, and letters that we sent, and approvals and denials. And it's a matter of going back and researching and just reading what their operation is all about. You have that, and then you have the other side of the coin where you actually go the operator and talk to them. Which, obviously, I did. So it takes a lot time to actually get acquainted with somebody of this size.
Q. In general, how would you characterize your workload with having the 11 certificates?
A. Workload is -- we have a lot of volume here, so it's a high

demand, high workload.
Q. Do you feel, you know, even with the high workload, you can adequately do surveillance of certificates?
A. Surveillance, yes. Surveillance, yes. Yeah, no issues on the surveillance side. It gets complicated when you get to more of the procedure side of things where this operator needs this, this operator needs this, this operator needs this, and it's all, like, a manual function, right? So it's based on a manual or something. So that's where it gets difficult, because you've got six of them at the same time and everybody's saying that we need it now. So it's like, well, how do I prioritize that, you know. But as far as operational safety and that kind of thing, no, that's always first. I have no issues with that at all.
Q. Okay. Since your time as POI, have you approved any changes to manuals or procedures?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah. So that gets back to the training course outline I was talking about.
Q. Right.
A. Huge, huge changes on those. They're implementing what they call a policy and procedures manual that will kind of outline some of the things that we're discussing, actually, on an instructor communication standpoint: If I've got an airplane that has an issue, how do I fix it, who do I talk to, that kind of thing. Who

do I write it up to, how do I write it up. That's being -- they have developed something that resembles that, but we're not there yet. And that's not a regulatory thing unless we can attach it to a TCO somehow, or standards, practices and procedures, safety practices and procedures.

Q. And I think you had said that they -- the TCOs just recently got approved, or are you still working on that?

A. No. So the TCOs are approved. We had those approved very -- maybe right after renewal or right at the day of renewal. It was something in that time frame. Yeah.

Q. Okay. So, then, are those new TCOs, they are being used now by the company, or how does that work?

A. Sorry, let me back up. So they've always had approved TCOs.

Q. Right.

A. Yeah. So, when I got them, there was a huge change to those approved TCOs already based on regulatory requirements that were not being met. And then what was your question after that, after renewal?

Q. So the modified TCOs to meet the regulations, those are currently being used, then, by US Aviation?

A. Yes, they should be.

Q. Right.

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. They better be.

Q. There's none that are out of compliance that you know, they've all been corrected?
A. No. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
DR. WILSON: Do you have some questions while I'm reading my notes?
MS. LIEDLER: I do.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. Let me find where they are. So you had mentioned that there was a lapse. So they renewed (indiscernible) and then, in April, their current certificate had expired and they didn't renew till May. What happens if there's a lapse in certificate?
A. I'm not sure. This was the very first time I've ever had to deal with that. I don't have an answer for you. We had a bunch of meetings with Louis, the office manager, and people above him, that week that we were talking about discussing best course of action. So as far as what happens, I have no idea.
Q. What was decided upon as the best course of action?
A. To renew.
Q. To renew. Okay. So, was the renewal -- at that point, were you comfortable with where they were with the certificate to renew, or was it more of a we need to get this done, let's renew and keep working with them?
A. So I don't have to answer, right? Can we skip that one?
Q. Sure. Okay. Yeah. Okay. So talk to me a little bit about

the whole end-of-course that they've got check authority. Do they, at the end of the course, do they complete (indiscernible) pilot, instruments, commercial, do they complete the check rides in house for all of those? Like, does the FAA give them authority to do that?

A. Yes, in house.

Q. So they never fly with an FAA examiner?

A. No.

Q. And is that only for the China program, or is that for any student?

A. That is for all courses. I take that back, except for CFI, flight instructor.

Q. Is that that USAG is the anomaly there, or is that a common practice?

A. They're very unique just on the simple fact that they have examining authority. There's not a lot of flight schools, 141, that have examining authority, and definitely not Part 61. 141 is their -- they are allowed to apply for examining authority. And they were granted that sometime ago, way before I took over, so I can't give you an exact date on that. But that's why I keep saying they're very unique.

Q. What do they -- how do you verify, how does the FAA verify that they are -- what standards they're using to examine and how they're implementing that examination?

A. TCOs. So TCOs outline the standard, they outline what is

required on the end of course, at stage check or end of course, and that gives the standard for what that check instructor or assistant chief or chief is held to, to give that student for the check ride, right? So that standard is supposed to be upheld for that student sitting left seat just as if we were to do a normal check ride on our own, if the FAA were to do it.

Q. So any pilot within US Aviation that is a check instructor can complete these examinations?

A. Correct. As long as it's an approved check instructor.

Q. So you were talking about hearsay of the instructors and the people that work there. Talk to me a little bit about what that hearsay was that you've heard, like what people have talked to you about, that you've heard.

A. Yeah, so maintenance. Maintenance is a huge one. I've had -- they've told me that the assistant chief would walk across to the maintenance hangar where an airplane was supposedly down for whatever reason, the assistant chief would tell the maintenance guy release that airplane today, put it back on the line, we need it. Instances like that.

You have issues where there is gear-up landings that were never reported to the FAA. And it's not uncommon to have some sort of equipment malfunction, radios, loss of communication in the airplane while giving instruction, coming back into the airport. The tower treats it as a normal issue, they give them the normal light gun signals and, you know, they taxi back in to

the ramp, they shutdown and walk in like it's an everyday occurrence, like it's no issue. Those aren't being reported.

You know, it's just more of a lack of communication between US Aviation and us, FAA, or me in particular.

Q. Okay. So you mentioned during the renewal in April there was a lot of TCO changes that needed to take place. Can you talk a little bit about what TCO changes were needed? You said that they were -- I understand that you said they were -- didn't align with current requirements, but what specifically, what changes?

A. Yeah, so I'll give you it off the top of my head, if that's okay?

Q. Mm-hmm.

A. We went from practical test standards to ACS, certification standards, airman certification standards. That was a huge change. So the TCOs needed to reflect using the ACS. You were asking earlier about standards and what they're held to. That's why the TCOs were so important, because that was the new standard, right? That is the standard, is the ACS, or PTS. CFI, we're still under PTS. So that was a huge one because they're out there checking without using the actual applicable standards.

And there was hour requirement difference, SEM time, FTD time. There was changes that we had a long time ago that were not in there, from what I recall. I know they weren't in there, but I can't remember the exact number. Basically, it was an allowance on how many -- how much time a student can use FTD versus airplane

and that kind of thing. What else.

I think there were some personnel issues as far as assistant chief and chief, who was designated, who wasn't designated as being for that particular course. I can't remember any more. There was other minor things that were included, but I can't remember off the top of my head. But the standards was the big one. That was the get ya.

Q. The test standards?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. So you talked briefly about an event where the aircraft had an issue in Gainesville and was flown back with an engine issue, and you said it should have been reported. It should have been reported to USAG or to FAA, both? How is the reporting supposed to take place?

A. Yeah, kind of both, really. The instructor should have picked up the phone, right, called the chief and asked what do I do. A lack of procedures in place for that, or the instructor knowing those procedures. A lack of the instructor knowing those procedures, are not aware of. So then what happens --

The other location, for example, I'll give you this. Jose Ortega at the other location, very forthcoming, gives me everything that happens. He'll text me on the weekend with he had an incident where the student landed and, I think, either taxied off the taxiway, was in the grass, or something very, very minor. And he sent me photos that weekend, you know, told me this is what

happened, right? It was just more of an open line of communication. I don't get that from the Denton location. I don't get anything from the Denton location.

So that instructor should have had the conversation with the chief. The chief should have gave guidance, and then, in turn, informed me, let me know kind of what's happening. Because on the maintenance side of things, we have to make sure the airplane has actually been taken care of, right, it's been fixed before they release it back on the line. And if I don't get -- if I don't know that any of this happens, I can't verify that the airplane was actually fixed before I have another student and instructor in there. So that's kind of another big reason why that communication should happen. But like I said, I don't get that from Denton.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay, I think I'm done with questions for the moment.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Okay. When you hear the chatter about things like the assistant chief walking over to maintenance and saying you need to release this aircraft, we need it, what, as a POI, do you do about that kind of information that comes in?

A. I document it to the best I can. I make a -- the latest one, I did a record of interview. I typed up the information. But it only gives me insight to kind of what -- more of like a culture side of things, which that's not my job, right? I'm more of

regulatory compliance and safety to the NAS. So it kind of, it just shows me more of, like, company standpoint on what their thought processes are, if it actually is true or not, you know. So maybe it kind of gets me more cautious, if you will. Because I have nothing to substantiate it, you know what I mean?

Q. Do you communicate those type of things with the PMI?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Okay. How often are you in contact with the PMI?

A. As of recent, quite a bit. Baker's had some issues with airplanes, AD compliance and that kind of thing. So we've been in constant communication about that. So very, very frequently within the last, probably, 4 months.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. When you do your surveillance, is it of both the Chinese curriculum and the U.S. student curriculum? Are they the same, are they different?

A. Totally different. Which is another reason why they're so unique, right? So we have the Chinese, then we have the standard TCOs. We have the Chinese TCOs and the standard TCOs. The Chinese TCOs have more hours, right? They've got more airplane time than a standard TCO. And that's partially because of the contract and that's what is allowed. And then your standard TCOs are maybe -- well, are less hours required for an applicant to complete. So they are very different. So, when they submit a

revision -- and when I say TCOs, there's at least, for a private pilot course, I'm going to have a private pilot standard TCO, I'm going to have a private pilot Chinese TCO. Oh, and they also do rotorcrafts, so then I have a rotorcraft TCO, you know. So I have fixed wing, rotorcraft, and that kind of thing. So it's very cumbersome.

Q. Okay. And how do you know with the Chinese TCO what -- that they're meeting the regulations? So they have to meet the same as the U.S. standard?

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. And then it's a little bit extra on top of that?

A. Yeah. So, for the Chinese TCO, they are exceeding the appendices of 141, right? So all of the TCO requirements are outlined in the alpha through delta. And the Chinese far exceed those hours. I mean, they're not even close to looking at the minimum. But the standard TCO is a little bit different. You pay more attention because they're very close to the hours, the bare minimum hours as required. So those get looked at a little bit more heavy just because of how close it is.

Q. Right. And do you monitor the pass/fail rates of the students?

A. Yeah. That one's a little bit more tricky. And the reason it's tricky is because you have, inside the TCO, the end of course or their check ride. It's considered a lesson, okay? So that lesson is either passed or it's failed, okay? If it's a failed

lesson, we go -- if it's a failed check ride, we consider it a lesson. We go back, we do another previous lesson for training, re-training, and then we go back again to repeat that same end-of-course check ride.

However, when we go to run reports, IACRA, when we submit paperwork for the check ride, IACRA doesn't capture that because it's a lesson. So, what's only documented is actually -- if you pulled up US Aviation's pass/fail history online through IACRA, through our system, they have a hundred percent. The only thing I have to substantiate what the actual real numbers are is based of the chief flight instructor's ability to maintain records on his students' pass/fail rate.

So if the student fails, it's supposed to be documented from the chief flight instructor on his Excel spreadsheet that he uses, saying that this applicant failed, and that goes against them, right, for renewal purposes. However, if he messes up, the only failsafe I have is if I go out there more often and do observations of these check rides, right, and I verify that those are being documented appropriately. That's the only thing I can do. Other than that, it's his word when he sends me the renewal package for their pass/fail rate.

Q. That seems -- is that, having the end-of-course be documented as a lesson, is that common?

A. That is 100 percent, across the board common. Those are always considered lessons. For whatever reason, they're

considered lessons. Now, I do know that there is some verbiage from chief counsel that I have that I'm still trying, I'm in the process of trying to work with that states that end of course should be considered as a practical test.

If that is the case, and if I can get there -- which I haven't discussed with management yet, but that's the next part of this -- if it is considered a practical test, now that means I have to submit an IACRA 8710, and that application is either going to say pass or fail through IACRA. If we can get there. We're not -- I haven't, we haven't been able to get to that point yet.

My previous school that I actually was a student at, that was always documented. Even though it was a lesson, it was still documented as a practical test.

Q. Okay. You mentioned doing some observation flights. Do you ever monitor the ground school, or SEM training?

A. I've monitored SEM. I have not monitored ground training.

Q. Why is that?

A. Probably more so availability, when I get out there and when they have actually ground lessons scheduled.

Q. Okay.

A. In fact, my last meeting with David Cruz was regarding ground training with his instructors, because I haven't -- there was something with logbooks. An applicant was sent to me for something and the logbook wasn't filled out appropriately and I was trying to figure out do they actually do ground training for

their instructors on writing logbooks or endorsing logbooks.
Q. If there is an end-of check -- or I shouldn't just say that, any check ride failure, are you to be notified of that?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. No.
A. Unfortunately.
Q. Okay.
A. Like I said, that's -- David Cruz, he -- the chief handles when that handles.
Q. And you only see the pass/fail rate when it comes time for renewal?
A. Correct. Unless I ask for it at any time, when I'm there or something.
Q. Right.
A. But now, as of recent, I am able to look at students on -- they're using an electronic system for lessons, right? So I can -- they gave me access to their log on for US Aviation, so I can pull up students and look at their progress and where they're at. So I can actually see end-of-course failures, I can see end-of-course satisfactory, but there's no way for me to run a report on how many have failed, how many have passed up until this point. So, unfortunately, I don't have that, but --
Q. Okay. Have you heard from any instructors that there's a pressure to take a flight that they don't feel comfortable taking?
A. Yeah.

Q. Like a lot of instructors, a couple instructors?
A. Yeah, I mean, I would say that the idea that all these instructors have is if I don't do it, there's consequences.
Q. So the fear of consequences or the concern about consequences versus have you talked to anybody who's refused a flight and there were consequences?
A. Unfortunately not. I know that -- you're not going to get a lot of that because for obvious reasons, right? They're young, they're still working up to their goal and they don't want to jeopardize that. So I was told from the most recent, from this accident, one of the instructors, in fact I just flew with for my currency -- he's over at 60 -- or -- yeah, it used to be FS-60. I don't know what ATO now, but where we go for our EBC air currency.

He is an instructor over there now. And it just so happens I was flying with him and I said, hey, where did you do your training, where are you coming from, and he told me. And he knew -- in fact, I gave Darren Pittacora his information yesterday. And he knew her. And he told me had supporting either text message or email from Francesca saying that she really didn't want to do this but it's more of she's kind of forced to do it because she was the only MEI at the time, I believe, and if she didn't do it, then that was going to be kind of bad for her. On multiple flights, not just one.
Q. Did he have any additional details as to like what would be bad for her?

A. Termination.
Q. From any of the folks that you talked to where they felt like there would be consequences, was that always the consequence of termination, do you know?
A. Not necessarily. I wouldn't say always. I would say there was other pressures there that were maybe not necessarily termination but something else. I don't know (indiscernible).
Q. Did they mention any particular person that they felt the consequence would come from?
A. There were names, yes.
Q. Okay. I'm assuming you do not want to give those names?
A. This is going to be on record, correct? So I don't want to --
Q. Yeah. Okay. When you started as POI, did you -- you said you were in training for a year?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. What sort of training did you receive?
A. So training is very, very, very, very fast. We go through Oklahoma, formal training. Okay, we're there -- I think, for mine, it was 6 months, I think, all in total, encompassing. You go for a certain amount of time, then you come back for a month, then you go back again, that kind of thing. So I think all in total it was 6 months.
(Interruption at the door.)
BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Time flies when you're having fun. All right.
A. I can't remember -- I'm sorry.
Q. Okay, we were talking about training. You were saying you go to OKC.
A. Oh, yes, yes. Yeah, so Oklahoma City, and then we come back here for a certain amount of time, and then we go back up. So we get the formal training up in Oklahoma City, and then we come back and we kind of put practical application to that in the field while we're here. So it's just, it's very fast-paced.
Q. Okay.
A. It's a lot of stuff to do in a year.
Q. Yeah. All right. How were you informed of the accident?
A. How was I informed? I can't exactly remember the very -- who told me first. I think it may have been Louis, but I don't know. I can't remember a hundred percent. There was five or six different people that communicated that, so --
Q. Okay.
A. I think it was Louis, because we -- the ROC called and the process started from there and Darren got assigned and that kind of thing. So I was there to support Darren.
Q. Okay. And then I'm sorry, who's Darren?
A. Pittacora.
Q. Oh, Darren that we've just been talking to. Sorry.
A. Yeah.
Q. And did you -- what did you do once you found out about the

accident? Did you have any responsibilities that you do as a part of that?
A. Not necessarily responsibility for -- involving the accident at all. It was more of a support role for Darren, whatever he needs. If he had any questions on anything US Aviation related, then I would support that. Other than that, there was no other role that took place accident-wise other than the fact that, you know, the reaction of holy cow.
Q. Yeah, I didn't know whether you, you know, started securing records or doing anything like that as a sort of, like, normal process for when, you know, one of your certificate holders has an accident.
A. Yeah, so the only thing I did do immediately was grab the records online. Like I said, I have access to their student records and their personnel records. So I was able to log on there and print those off. And I think I even gave it to Darren, so he should have those, as well.
Q. Okay.
A. Just to see kind of where they were at in the lesson, right? And background on the student.
Q. Okay. Anything stand out from the records that you pulled?
A. Yes. There were several failures at the end of course and last lesson. So that was -- that stood out.
Q. Did you know Francesca, by chance?
A. No.

Q. Had you ever met her?
A. Never met her.
Q. Heard anything about her since the accident, either good or bad?
A. Yeah. The instructors that have talked to me about her, they all loved her.
Q. Since the accident, have you requested any changes to either the company's procedures or --
A. Since the accident?
Q. Something since the accident.
A. Well, we were already trying to do that prior to the accident, so we were already going down that path. Like I said, the policy manual that they were trying to implement, or we are implementing, or they are implementing. So that was already in the works. The standards for the TCO was already in the works. And that policy and the safety practices and procedures, like I said, that was -- we were already trying to put those two together.
Q. Okay. So nothing in addition?
A. Nothing in addition, no.
Q. Okay. I don't want to make the assumption. I know you said all the instructors you talked to loved Francesca, but did anybody mention any concerns that they might have had about her as an instructor?
A. No, not that I'm aware of. No.

Q. Okay. Did anybody mention anything about her injury to her arm?
A. No.
Q. Okay.
DR. WILSON: Do you have some follow-ups, Courtney?
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: Had six pages, huh?
MS. LIEDLER: I don't think so. I don't have any at this time.
DR. WILSON: So we've asked you a lot of questions. Is there anything else that you think would be beneficial to our investigation that we didn't ask you about?
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: No, not that I can think of.
DR. WILSON: Okay. Well, you have both of our contact information. So if anything comes up --
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: All right.
DR. WILSON: -- please don't hesitate to reach out.
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: Okay.
DR. WILSON: All right.
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: Will do.
DR. WILSON: Thanks.
MR. MIKOLAJEWSKI: Thanks.
(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

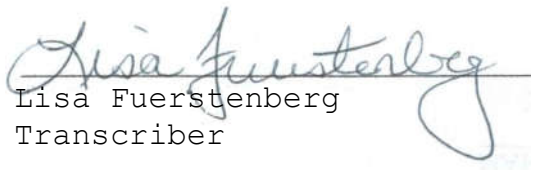
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of David Mikolajewski
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Irving, Texas
DATE:	September 20, 2019

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.



Lisa Fuerstenberg
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: BAKER NASE

Flight Standards District Office
Irving, Texas

Friday,
September 20, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:40 a.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: As I mentioned, I'm Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: I'm Courtney Liedler. I am the investigator in charge for the accident at Denton, NTSB.

DR. WILSON: And if you could state your name?

MR. NASE: Baker Nase.

DR. WILSON: And spell your last name, please.

MR. NASE: N, as in November, Alpha, Sierra, Echo.

DR. WILSON: Thank you.

INTERVIEW OF BAKER NASE

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. And what is your current position?

A. I'm a principal maintenance inspector at the North Texas Flight Standards District Office.

Q. How long have you been a PMI?

A. Four years.

Q. Okay. When were you hired by the FAA?

A. In September of 2014.

Q. Okay. What else have you done for the FAA?

A. This is it.

Q. Oh, I guess four years. You're right.

A. Uh-huh.

Q. Math's hard.

A. And, you know, I was in training for a year.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. All right. And you are currently the PMI for US Aviation.
A. Yes.
Q. When did you become a PMI for US Aviation?
A. March of this year.
Q. Okay, 2019. And how many other certificates do you oversee?
A. I have 16 repair stations, two are -- well, so US Aviation is a 141. They have three locations. Then I have Monarch is two locations of 141s. That's the bulk of my work.
Q. Okay.
A. And we have 91 stuff and 133s, you know, the eyeball stuff but --
Q. Okay. So what percentage of your time do you think you devote to US Aviation?
A. Well, we do them on a schedule. You know, every year you have required items. Once we do those. So in March when I got them I didn't really even notice required items until late in the year, you know, so I started doing those required items which are rank inspections, forms inspections, you know, spot inspections, stuff like that. I've got the 145 repair stations. I recently did the inspection on that per the schedule so my inspections for them started later in the year.
Q. Do you visit US Aviation outside of doing the required items?

A. When we find problems, yes.
Q. Um-hum. How do you find those problems?
A. By doing the inspections.
Q. Okay.
A. You know, the regular inspections. So if we, you know, like, I mean, I've got some issues with them now so I contact them on the phone, we do email, go out and lately it's -- I've been over there quite a bit.
Q. And you say you've got some issues now. Is that since the accident or were these issues that were occurring before the accident?
A. Well I had -- I think I had one for training for the 145 before the accident and then after the accident I went over there and started deep inspecting so I found a lot of other stuff.
Q. Who do you report to?
A. My supervisor?
Q. Uh-huh.
A. David Sheppard (ph.).
Q. And who's your main point of contact at US Aviation?
A. Dave Anderson for the 145.
Q. Okay. Why did you become the PMI of US Aviation?
A. Well, so I got a temporary 14 position and so I think that was part of the extra complexity that I got.
Q. Okay. So are you only the PMI for a limited period of time or --

A. That's not up to me.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean, I just got a permanent 14 so --
Q. Oh, okay.
A. -- I don't know if it changes or not. I don't know.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. When you said the temp 14 position I didn't know whether that was going to revert back and then --
A. Well, I've already reverted back to a 13 when I checked them so as far as I know --
Q. Okay.
A. -- I'm there, you know.
Q. Got you. And do you know why, though, USAG was switched to you? Did the previous PMI leave? Was it a workload issue?
A. I really don't. I don't know. It might of -- you know, I think before, I might have had the -- it seemed like before maybe I had the 145 and somebody else had all the 141s stuff, you know. I really -- I think it was to consolidate all the principals to one person.
Q. Okay. Who was the previous PMI?
A. Mmm, it could have, well, I don't know, it could have been Pittacora (ph.) or it could have been Kevin Taylor. I'm really not sure. I mean, it's --
Q. Okay.

A. -- obvious supervisor question.
Q. Okay. So when there's a transfer of a certificate, you don't communicate with the outgoing PMI to get a sense of what's going on at the organization?
A. I mean, it depends on the certificate, you know, and it seems like we had some communication but it's been a while.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. So when you take over a new certificate, what do you do to get familiar with that?
A. You talking about a 141 or 145?
Q. Well --
A. I mean, what certificate --
Q. -- let's just go with --
A. -- are we talking about?
Q. -- USAG?
A. Usually, when you get a new certificate you review their manual --
Q. Okay.
A. -- get familiar with them. You know?
Q. Uh-huh.
A. You look at their op specs and make sure you know what they have there and, I mean, you just review all the data that goes when we have a file, you know, it has their certificate and their op specs and the type and capabilities list, you know, you just

get familiar with what they do. And then I usually go out and introduce myself.

Q. When you first took over, was Dave Anderson there or has that change in management --

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. When I first took over it was Tom Haddon (ph.) was the accountable manager and I think I'd -- when I got there he had just gotten there.

Q. Okay.

A. So the management changed.

Q. Okay. So we're obviously here because of the accident with 6-Alpha-Golf. Since the accident, have you increased surveillance on US Aviation?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. What have you found?

A. Well, I got -- I've got a few things here. So I started some compliance actions because, you know, things that I've found have been regulatory so are you familiar with our compliance actions (indiscernible)? Surely you are.

Q. Well, I like to always hear it from you, though.

A. So I did nine aircraft inspections. It was part of -- it was really, kind of, part of my 141-R items but when I went I did three locations. I did Denison, TCC, and Denton. And so I looked at nine aircraft and all nine aircraft had write-ups that would

keep them from flying and they were on their ready line, you know, with those stats of ready to fly. So I wrote all those down and I sent letters out for those. So I have two folders for that. And then another inspection I found some AD stuff, some AD compliance not being documented.

This is the most recent one here. (Indiscernible). This is the AD compliance one. So we inspected two aircraft for AD compliance and the reason was we had one of our pilots go out and I think they were going to look at an aircraft to do some training in and he noticed it. There was a discrepancy with their AD. So I went out there specifically to look at AD files and the two aircraft I looked at they had two ADs that were not documented correctly. So I started a compliance action for that. And then on my most recently -- recent inspection, which was the 145 inspection, I noted four discrepancies. And there was a documentation discrepancy. They had -- the aircraft was painted but no one signed off the paint, you know, and they were contracting maintenance to a non-certificated paint company. They were using a return to service form that was not in their manual. And I reviewed four of their training program records and found that no one had been doing their current training.

Q. So when you get -- see these things, these compliance actions (indiscernible) compliance actions, you know, what is the timeframe that they have to comply?

A. Well, I mean, it depends on the discrepancy.

Q. Uh-huh.
A. Obviously, the Ads, I mean, I want some immediate action for that, you know. So -- and they've been, you know, very cooperative with me, obviously, you know, so I asked them to do a one-time inspection of all their aircraft for all their ADs to make sure that they all were in compliance and then I asked them to come up with a root cause corrective action and a root cause analysis following the program and, you know, they came up with a checklist that they were adding. You know, they come up with checklist for their discrepancies and it's been, you know, fairly quick. I mean there's not really a timeframe that I have them go by.
Q. Okay.
A. Because of how complex it is to get it fixed.
Q. Uh-huh. For any of these compliance actions, were any of them on the Seneca?
A. I don't think so. But the aircraft that I had and, you know, I went really random on the nine airplanes that I looked at, you know. It was just let me see your list of aircraft that are ready to go and I said we're looking at that one, that one and that one.
Q. Uh-huh.
A. You know. Everything I looked at was not good.
Q. Uh-huh. Does that make you want to look at more aircraft?
A. Absolutely. Absolutely.
Q. So what's the plan for doing that?

A. Well, I plan, you know, a weekly -- and so the last time I went out there, what were we doing, I went out there to get something and I said, let's go look at some of your airplanes. I mean, it's a routine. We're routinely not ready. And this one I -- there was a crew on board. There was a pilot that, you know, there was an instructor and a student. And so I checked their documentation. It was an Asian student so I checked his language capabilities because, you know, we'd had some reports that these guys don't speak very good English. So I did that and then, you know, I said -- because I looked at the aircraft as I was talking to him and I noticed that one of the tires were bald, you know, so I said, hey, let me know if you guys find anything on this aircraft before you fly. Just give them a chance and, of course, the instructor said, hey, we're not going to take this aircraft because that tire's bad. I said, okay. He said, but I'm going to let my student see if he can find it. The student said, let's go. So he failed his walk-around check.

Q. Did you get --

A. It has become more routine to go out there than it was because of the increased risk that we discovered.

Q. And the increased risk you discovered being?

A. Well, the risk of them having airplanes on the line that are --

Q. Okay.

A. -- showing ready but not ready.

Q. Right. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. I don't want to make assumptions.
A. Sure. And so they just had another incident. I'm sure you guys are aware of the one that bounced, right, and so I got the work order from the guy that's looking into it and there's some discrepancies on that that I have to go out and ask them about and I mean, it's, you know -- some blocks that hadn't been filled.
Q. Um-hum. So at what point -- is there a certain number of discrepancies and when does it become a concern for National Airspace safety when you're finding these multiple compliance issues?
A. That's a good question. When does it become a concern for National Airspace safety? Well, I think that's something that has to be discussed with the supervisor. I mean, we talk about this a lot, you know. I had to go through my process.
Q. Um-hum.
A. And each individual thing, you know, the things that I find are more documentation stuff, you know.
Q. Um-hum.
A. Aside from the aircraft having discrepancies, it's a good question. I have to ask the supervisor because they kind of direct me on which way to go, you know.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.

Q. Are you aware that US Aviation has grounded their Seneca fleet?
A. No.
Q. Would that be something that should be communicated to you?
A. I don't know about should be, necessarily. I have to, you know, find out why. Why did you do it? What was the problem? You know?
Q. Uh-huh.
A. I'm certainly going to be looking now.
Q. Okay.
A. You know.
Q. You mentioned that none of their mechanics have had recurrent training. What is the recurrent training that you would have expected them to have?
A. Well, you know, the -- in the rule it just says they have to have recurrent training.
Q. Okay.
A. It doesn't specify what. They have to specify what. So when I went and looked they have some recurrent training listed, not -- I don't recall what the individual stuff was but it said recurrent and nobody had that signed off.
Q. Okay. Are they required to have any ground school training for new mechanics or is it just on-the-job training?
A. So, you know, I mean, I have to look in their book.
Q. Okay.

A. You know, they have a list. They have an OJT list. They have initial training, you know, and I look at each one of their JTAs, if you will, so --
Q. Uh-huh. Okay. When you say in the book, what book do you mean?
A. In their training book.
Q. Do you ever -- have you, since March, gone and observed their on-the-job training to see how they do it?
A. No.
Q. Was that something that you might do or you have done at other certificates?
A. So the inspection, you know, it's kind of a management type of inspection so I would look at their training program. I would look at their documentation. And I mean, everybody does that kind of a different way, so when I first looked at them, that was one of my first write-ups, was their training program. So they've been making corrections since I got on there.
Q. Um-hum. Right.
A. You know, it's kind of an opportunity kind of a thing, you know, training. People have, you know, they can have a lot of latitude to say, no, we're not doing anything right now or, you know, I'll let you know.
Q. Okay.
A. Our guidance doesn't really call for me to go out there and watch somebody do training.

Q. Uh-huh.
A. It's more of an oversight of the program.
Q. Right. I guess I was thinking that it might -- I didn't know whether it would be helpful for you -- you know, you see what's written down. Are they actually doing what they have written down?
A. Right.
Q. Since the accident, have you had an opportunity to look at any of the maintenance records on the accident airplane?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Is that because they got locked down or that's not something that would typically happen --
A. No, it was just another accident investigator was on it already so I was focused elsewhere.
Q. Okay. Has anybody talked to you about the maintenance issues on the accident airplane?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. In part.
Q. Okay. Are -- what do you think when you have heard what you've heard?
A. What do you mean what do I think?
Q. Well, I don't know. Does it concern you?
A. Well, yeah. It does. I mean, I haven't investigated any part of it so --

Q. Yeah.
A. What I've heard, you know, it sounds like there could be some issues.
Q. Yeah. Okay. So as a PMI, what would you do with that information?
A. Well, if you want to give me the information I could tell you better what I would do with it.
Q. Okay. That's fair.
A. You know, if you tell me that somebody has broken the law or not followed a rule, you know, I'm going to run that down. I'm going to go ask the question and follow the process that I'm supposed to follow.
Q. Sure. Okay. What about what would you expect the facility to do when they have repeat, repetitive items coming in for maintenance? I mean, if you heard that there was an aircraft that was having repetitive issues, would you expect them to do something different or anything different?
A. Are you asking me for my opinion on how maintenance should be done or are you asking me how do they do it according to their manual because I would expect they would follow the manual --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- whatever that says.
Q. Does their -- do you know if their manual has anything about repetitive --
A. I don't know that.

Q. -- items?
A. I don't know that.
Q. Should it?
A. It may be something they need to think about adding --
Q. Okay.
A. -- if it's not in there
Q. Okay. Is that a requirement?
A. So when I looked into their forms, right, I looked at -- when I was looking at the logbooks for the aircraft --
Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- I noticed that none of the aircraft logbooks contained discrepancies. This was one thing that I mentioned to them.
Q. Uh-huh.
A. So when you looked at a logbook it says change starter, change tire, change the engine. It doesn't say why.
Q. Okay.
A. So that was one of the things that I mentioned that they did change.
Q. Okay.
A. (Indiscernible.)
Q. What -- hmm. So what other things since the accident have you recommended that they do?
A. So I went out there and, of course, we did the AD compliance. I mean, it's -- I haven't recommended anything that was a result of the accident. It was just things that I've found since I've

been going out there.
Q. Okay. I want to change topics just for a minute. I didn't ask you your background that led you to being a PMI at the FAA.
A. My background?
Q. Yeah.
A. So I was in the Air Force for 22 years as a maintenance mechanic and then when I got out and went to work at the Defense Contract Management Agency, well excuse me. Before that I worked for Eagle Aviation in Abilene, as a mechanic. And then I started working at the DCMA (ph.), and then I came here.
Q. Okay. How would you characterize your workload?
A. You mean as far as heavy or light or are you talking about diverse? I mean, what characteristic are we talking about?
Q. You have -- I'm trying to get at whether you think you have an adequate amount of workload, too much, too little.
A. I think it's adequate.
Q. Yeah.
A. I'm able to complete my suspenses and everything, you know.
Q. Great.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. All right. Thanks, Baker. I think I'm going to review my notes and see if I have some additional questions and I'll see if Courtney has any questions in the meantime.
A. Okay.
BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you said it's one issue from prior you were working on training. Was this recurrent training you're referring to?
A. It was just their training program so when I went and did my initial 145 inspection, I found that they weren't really following their training program manual at all. So --
Q. Okay. And then you said you found -- after the accident, you took a little bit more (indiscernible) and you found more issues. What were they?
A. It was the recurrent training I mentioned.
Q. Recurrent.
A. You talking about for the training program? You talking about all the way around?
Q. So I don't know so we were just talking about since the accident what's been done with -- before the accident and post-accident and you said before the accident the main thing was the training program. And then after the accident you did a deeper dive and you said you found some more issues. So my questions were -- my question to that was what were the other issues?
A. Those issues. Yeah, so the issues that I mentioned --
Q. Okay.
A. -- right. For these, I think there's five here and so, you know, a little more specific on whenever I started looking at ADs and I looked at some of their documentation they explained to me that they had a -- what did they call it -- the way they do their -- triage. Did you learn about the triage program?

Q. Yeah, we did.
A. So they told me about that triage and I noticed some discrepancies that the triage data didn't get into the logbooks or their, you know, or their work orders and things were not getting documented. So I strongly suggested that they do away with that triage system and they have since told me that they did discontinue it.
Q. Okay. So you mentioned their maintenance manual. What is a maintenance manual supposed to cover? What -- I'm not a mechanic so I (indiscernible) --
A. So, you know, when I talk about the manual, we're -- I'm talking about the RSM, which is a Repair Station Manual, and their QCM which, is a Quality Control Manual. That's for their 145 repair station. And between those two manuals they have -- the way that they do business, you know, they run the aspects of the 145. And then their quality manual outlines the process all the way from receiving the inspection to return to service.
Q. And in these manuals when you read them after you became the PMI did you see any deficiency in the manuals themselves?
A. Well, so I see things that can be better, you know, but to meet the minimums, they would meet the minimums. Understand what I'm saying? So things could be clearly -- more clearly stated or, you know, something like that but as far as meeting the minimum rule, you know, they meet that. Now, I did note, when I was out there after the accident and I was asking them about the process

and, you know, they said, well, if we go out of the hangar, you know, our A&Ps go out there and they use their A&P, their license number. I said, weren't they part of your 145? They said, yeah, but if we leave the hangar, we're not in our 145. So I don't know how they became under that impression, that they couldn't use their 145 certificate out on the line that you can walk to and I've since corrected that, as well. So everything that they do for maintenance should be under their 145 certificate, whereas before there was a lot of just A&P mechanic sign-offs. Which --

Q. What's the difference?

A. -- to me, for that, the difference is the process that you follow.

Q. Okay.

A. If you follow a 145 process there's a lot more rules to adhere to and then you have to follow the work order process, the documentation. The A&P goes out there and does what an A&P does, it's a lot less --

Q. Okay.

A. -- restrictions.

Q. So looking into -- have you spoken to USAG about their workflow process?

A. Which workflow process are we talking about?

Q. The process to -- a mechanic taking a squawk or a maintenance item and working through it and then how they document passing that on to another mechanic or document the completion of it to a

supervisor or document how that is -- how that issue was addressed within USAG's maintenance department?

A. So the 145, you know, they have a system. They have a process that you have to follow and it involves a work order process, right. So when the -- if -- when they're on the line and it's not time for a 100-hour annual, the people that inspect that are the pilots. So from that beginning I realized that sometimes the pilots are, you know, not reporting it. Sometimes the dispatchers are not, you know, sometimes the process is not followed the way that it should and that triage system had a lot to do with that. So the way it should go is the pilot reports it to their dispatcher, they call the maintenance guys, get the work order and the maintenance guys goes and fixes it, signs it off and everything's documented and that's the way it should go. You know, just -- it hadn't happened that way routinely, let's put it that way.

Q. So you had mentioned the baseline schedule, certificate management, you take care of ramp inspections, which is similar to what you did with the (indiscernible) aircraft, is what I'm gathering.

A. Take care of what now?

Q. Ramp inspections.

A. Yes.

Q. And you said form inspections. What does a form inspection entail?

A. So logbook inspections. Aircraft records.
Q. Okay. And then spot inspections.
A. Um-hum.
Q. What do those entail?
A. Spot inspections, like looking at mechanics, seeing what they're doing if they're following the tech down there, if they have their licensing on them and I can rate the aircraft while I'm doing that, look at the logbooks to see if they make the correct entries, stuff like that.
Q. Okay. What's a capabilities list?
A. A capabilities list for a 145 repair station is it has to do with what they're authorized to repair or do maintenance on. So it's an option to the op specs, so instead of listing every part or aircraft that you list on or that you work and what you're allowed to do on it, they have a capabilities list so they can adjust that according to the tools, tech data, training, people that they have. So it would list aircraft or propellers or engines, whatever it is that they're working on that they're qualified to do.
Q. So if a mechanic works on -- has done -- never worked on a Seneca and it's in task with working on a Seneca, is he supposed to be qualified on a Seneca prior to working on a Seneca?
A. He's supposed to be properly trained. Yes, ma'am. Sure is.
Q. And how does that -- is it preparation? What does that mean?
A. Well, typically it would be on-the-job training, you know,

whatever he's been asked to work on he should have worked on and gotten trained so he's --

Q. So it's not just the familiarization of the aircraft, it's -- is what I'm gathering.

A. Correct. I mean, we're talking about 145 standards, you know.

Q. Right.

A. So, yes, for the 145, they should not be --

Q. So what is --

A. -- so the way that theirs is listed, they have a training document and it has a list of all the tasks that they have to do and so each one of those tasks has an instructor on it or a trainer that signs them off saying, yes, he can do that.

Q. So let's take an example of a mechanic who was signed off on the Seneca but had never done the -- never worked on a power failure on a Seneca engine or a Seneca aircraft. So how -- if he's received basic training on a Seneca but not that, does he still meet the qualifications of properly trained?

A. So we're asking about the accident, right?

Q. Right.

A. The engine power. You're asking if he was familiarized with the aircraft and they had, you know, I think it would go towards more about the engine, you know, is the same engine that he worked on, on a different aircraft and can you be more specific?

Q. So it would be he would be properly trained if he had

experience with that engine on that aircraft.
A. Could be. It depends on what the repair station sets as properly trained. What does their documentation say?
Q. Okay. So how often would you expect to see in a logbook or in data entries, could not duplicate?
A. Would I expect to see it?
Q. If you're looking through a logbook and you saw could not duplicate, how often -- I mean, is that a common occurrence?
A. Humph. That's kind of a -- it's kind of a subjective question. Could not duplicate, it depends on, you know, how many hours does an aircraft have and how many, you know, how many flights does it take, who's flying it and what is the standard that that company has for could not duplicates. You know what I mean? I've worked with different companies that have different standards for that. In my military career we would let a could not duplicate go one time and then as I got out into the civilian world I find that that standard is less, right? You can go one or two or three and then if they do anything to it then it's not a could not duplicate, it's a perform maintenance action. And the write-up that you're talking about, could not duplicate, that's why I went and looked at the logbooks and I found that they weren't putting discrepancies in there. So it's very hard to see could not duplicate when you don't have a discrepancy in the logbook. All you have is adjusted engine idle or ran engine, op spec good. You know, nobody can see, oh, well it's had an idle

problem three times. It's hard to see a could not duplicate, you know?

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. What maintenance, if any, is the company required to report to you? Is there anything that would be thinking, you know, this airplane had a prop strike which led to the engines being replaced? Is that something that should be reported to the FAA?

A. For a prop strike? No. Usually when we get -- when we find out about prop strikes it's because of an occurrence or an incident, something like that, when we're investigating.

Q. Okay.

A. Typically, if they have a prop strike and nobody reports the incident then we won't hear about it.

Q. Right. I guess my question is should that be? If the prop strike resulted in needing to replace both of the engines, is that something that would be reportable? Would that be considered an incident that should be reported?

A. So I mean I'm not familiar with how it took on the prop strike but usually when we get that it's a result of, hey, we ran off the runway or we landed hard or it was the angle that permitted the prop strike and we hear about it that way. I don't -- in my four years I've been here I've never had anybody call me and say, hey, we just had a prop strike.

Q. Yeah.

A. You know, without an incident attached to it.
Q. Okay. Is all the maintenance done in Denton or do they have --
A. No. They have A&Ps in Denison and at TCC.
Q. Okay. And have you visited all of those facilities?
A. I have.
Q. Okay. Was that before the accident or have you been there since the accident?
A. I only went to the one in Denton, let's see, yeah -- I went to the one in Denton before the accident and then after I went to all of them.
Q. You've been to all of them since the accident.
A. All three since the accident.
Q. Okay. Thanks. Thinking back to prior to the accident, you've taken on the certificate, done your reviews, what do you think that they did well?
A. Let me think about that for a second. Let me look back. You mean more maintenance-wise, right? That's what we're talking about.
Q. Uh-huh.
A. We're talking about the whole program, just the maintenance part?
Q. I'm happy to hear about other stuff, too, but I am interested in your take on the maintenance side.
A. I think they communicated in a way with me that was

compliant. It was an attitude that they had with me, like, hey, you know, you found something that is wrong and I'm going to fix it, type of an attitude. I didn't get anything that was standoffish or, you know, they never said, screw you, Nase, I don't care what you say. You know, it was -- they were very cordial in their attitude and willing to fix what I found.

Q. What were your biggest areas of concern with them?

A. It was -- initially it was that training program. I'm really big on the training program and it was extremely lacking.

Q. Okay. Anything about how they maintained aircraft?

A. So they have a lot of aircraft there that they have a large workload.

Q. Um-hum.

A. I noticed that and I noted it and afterwards, I know -- you know, I could see like, TCC -- the TCC division over there has a lot less and they seem to be a lot more organized than the Denton people. And, you know, their turnover in management was a concern to me.

Q. Um-hum.

A. Because there's a rise in risk level for that.

Q. Have you talked to any of the mechanics since the turnover in management to see how they feel? Do they think that things have improved or --

A. They do. There was apparently somebody there that was really hateful to people when he trained them.

Q. Uh-huh.
A. And the new management has apparently addressed that and so they -- I guess they think it's getting better in that regard.
Q. Okay. Do you think that they put safety first?
A. No, I think they put money first.
Q. Have you heard from mechanics that there's pressure to get airplanes back out on the line?
A. No, I heard that from a pilot. There was discussion about their lead person came over there and informed them to put an aircraft back out there and I asked that question when I heard about it and I was told that, in fact, they didn't have any pressure with that and if they did, they would have some words with the top management about it. That's what Dave Anderson, the accountable manager, told me.
Q. You heard from a pilot --
A. It was (indiscernible).
Q. -- that there was pressure from within the maintenance group to get airplanes back out.
A. Yep.
Q. Or was that coming from someone from the ops side?
A. Well, pilots are ops side.
Q. What I'm asking is was there a management person from the ops side who came over to maintenance and said, you need to get airplanes back out?
A. That was the allegation.

Q. From the pilot.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And you went to Dave Anderson --
A. Uh-huh.
Q. -- about that.
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and he said that he was not aware of that.
A. Yep.
Q. Okay. Just wanted to make sure that I was understanding the timeline. Okay. How do you think that USAG compares to other similar operations?
A. For their 141s?
Q. Uh-huh.
A. Is that what we're talking about? So I have two 141s. My other one has a lot less incidences. They're probably smaller but they have a lot less incidences.
Q. Uh-huh. Why do you think -- I understand the relative number to the size of the operation, but why do you think that USAG has so many incidents?
A. Just my own opinion?
Q. Uh-huh.
A. Is that what we're looking at here? I think that USAG has a contract with the Chinese that they really want to keep and it probably pressurizes them into doing whatever they have to do to keep that contract.

Q. Have you been made aware of any changes to the contract since the accident?
A. No. I was aware that the Chinese came and did their own line inspection.
Q. Right. I didn't know whether any of the findings from that inspection ended --
A. No.
Q. -- up being shared with the FAA. Is USAG required to provide any reports to you on a regular basis?
A. What kind of reports? Any reports?
Q. Any reports. I don't know --
A. (Indiscernible) --
Q. -- records of something, safety reports --
A. Like a VDRP or a NASAP or something like that?
Q. Yeah. Any -- yeah. Any information like that that if you're not there doing your work --
A. I wouldn't say they're required.
Q. Okay.
A. You know, they can. They're not required to report, you know, if they mess something up -- what we're talking about.
Q. I'm just thinking, you know, are they required to report, I don't know just any, you know, monthly stats on their operation --
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. They're required -- so the capabilities list, they're

required to keep me, you know, give me an up-to-date version of that.
Q. Uh-huh.
A. They're required to, if they want to change their repair station manuals, they're supposed to submit that to me. If there's any change to their training program they have to submit that to me.
Q. Okay. So if everything's going as planned there's no changes needed and you're not doing an inspection you may not --
A. Then I won't --
Q. -- hear from them.
A. -- hear from them. No.
Q. Okay. How often do you communicate with Dave Anderson?
A. Currently, it's weekly.
Q. Yeah. How about before the accident?
A. You know, he took over in July so right around July --
Q. Okay.
A. -- so it's, you know --
Q. How about --
A. -- since he's taken over --
Q. Um-hum.
A. I've been talking to him quite a bit.
Q. Okay. What about with --
A. Thomas Haddon.
Q. -- Haddon.

A. So I spoke to him, you know, the first time I spoke to him was on my first inspection out there and for the findings I spoke to him I think three or four times after that for the corrections to the findings that I had.
Q. How do you feel your relationship with Dave Anderson is?
A. I think it's a -- it's not hostile. You know, I think it's a workable relationship so --
Q. Okay.
A. -- we get things corrected.
Q. Did we talk about how you heard about the accident?
A. Nope.
Q. Okay. How did you hear about the accident?
A. I was not on accident duty so I think Monday when I came in I heard about it.
Q. Okay.
A. That day.
Q. Okay.
A. The Monday after -- I forget which day it was on but I heard about it the next business day.
Q. Do you have any responsibilities when there's an accident with any of your certificate holders?
A. It really -- it -- so -- you know, we have the accident duty we have for a week at a time and it really comes down to that duty if we're on duty for that week.
Q. Okay.

A. Now if Monday, you know, you come in and somebody says here this is your guy. There's an accident. Take it over then that's what you do.

Q. Okay. I don't think I asked you, at the beginning, as a PMI what your duties and responsibilities are. Did I ask you that?

A. Nope. So for the FSDO, you know, for principal inspectors, you're the principal for an operation it's a 145 or a 135, you're the person that operation looks to for their needs. So if they have aircraft add, aircraft removal, some sort of documentation issue that they need from us, if there's -- so for aircraft adding, if there were any (indiscernible) or any type of documentation need, it would be -- come to me because I'm their principal. And then for the 135s and 135s their schedule, you know, they have a schedule of inspection, a minimal schedule of inspection depending on their operation and if you find issues then that schedule is adjusted accordingly depending on how many times you need to be out there. So we do a lot of different things.

Q. Okay.

A. Just depending on what their needs are.

DR. WILSON: All right. Got anything else?

MS. LIEDLER: A question for additional clarification.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. You said that you think USAG puts money first. What gives you that impression as opposed to putting safety first?

A. Well, so it has to do with just how I see them doing their business, you know, it's from what I've heard from other people, you know, the contract, the part about the contract they have where, you know, they train the Chinese people. And so I think the standards for getting those guys qualified is perhaps stretched out a little bit to meet the needs and to make sure that they keep that contract.

Q. Okay.

A. I heard they want to open up a place in Conroe to further that contract. So I think money's a big driver for them.

MS. LIEDLER: I don't think I have anything else.

DR. WILSON: Okay. We've asked you a lot of questions. Anything that we didn't ask you about that you think we should have and would be relevant to our investigation?

MR. NASE: Not as far as I know. I, you know, I think we went over a lot.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Well if you do think of anything you have our contact info.

MR. NASE: Yep.

DR. WILSON: So don't hesitate to reach out to us.

MR. NASE: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Well, thanks so much.

MR. NASE: All right. Thank you all.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of Baker Nase
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Irving, Texas
DATE:	September 20, 2019

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.



Beverly A. Lano
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*
	*
US AVIATION GROUP	*
GAINESVILLE, TEXAS	* Accident No.: CEN19FA238
JULY 28, 2019	*
	*

Interview of: JOHN SCHAFFER

US Aviation Academy
Denton, Texas

Friday,
September 20, 2019

APPEARANCES:

KATHERINE WILSON, Ph.D., Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

COURTNEY LIEDLER, Investigator in Charge
National Transportation Safety Board

DARREN PITTACORA, Principal Maintenance Inspector and Aviation Safety Inspector
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(7:40 a.m. CDT)

DR. WILSON: We have our contact information on our cards. My name is Katherine Wilson. I am a human performance investigator with the NTSB.

MS. LIEDLER: My name is Courtney Liedler. I am the investigator in charge for this accident for the NTSB.

MR. PITTACORA: My name is Darren Pittacora. I'm FAA maintenance.

DR. WILSON: And just like the NTSB, when we're working with an FAA on the investigation, they're also here strictly from the safety side.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN SCHAFFER

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. So, if you could please state for us your full name?

A. My name is John Schaffer.

Q. And what is your position and company you work for?

A. I am an aircraft mechanic.

Q. And who do you work for?

A. US Aviation.

Q. How long have you been an aircraft mechanic at US Aviation?

A. Today will be my year anniversary.

Q. Congratulations.

A. Thank you.

Q. Have you held any other positions at US Aviation?

A. No, ma'am.
Q. And can you give us a brief description of your aviation background and how you got to US Aviation?
A. I went to school back in, I believe it was 2015, at AIM in Irving, Aviation Institute of Maintenance. I went there for about 3 years, and then my first job was with Boutique. And they were actually stationed here in Denton, and that's how I heard about US Aviation. I worked with them for almost -- about a year and a half with them. I did about 4 months worth of shop time with them, and then they started up an AOG program, which I got sent out to fix planes across the U.S., and did that for about a half a year. And then they closed down the program, and then I spent the last 4 or 5 months light maintenance in DFW. And then after that, I left them and came here.
Q. And do you have an A&P license?
A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. Okay. When did you get that?
A. Well, I got it -- well, I went through the test, I think it was 2016 when I got it, but they kind of messed up on my temp license, so I had to get reissued my temp license. And I think it was back in 2017, in July, is when I officially got it.
Q. Okay. So, we're here today to talk about 6 Alpha Golf. So, can you walk us through what your interactions were with the work that was done on 6 Alpha Golf in the days preceding the accident?
A. Friday, I was instructed to work on Alpha Golf with a

hydraulic pump issue. And I pretty much, I took the work order and then went to the library and got all the reference I needed to pull that off. Because I really haven't done that before, so I needed all the reference I needed.

So, when I did that and I started doing my procedures and everything, I was going to -- there was four mounting bolts on the hydraulic pump that I needed to take off. And I got off three of them, but one of them was stripped, so I couldn't take that one off. So I messed with it until I basically went home. And I ordered the part for it and I left it on the table because I was going to come on Saturday morning to finish it up.

And then Saturday morning, I came back to work and I saw Wilkie (ph.) working on it, and he had already taken the stripped bolt out and he was working and asked me if I wanted to finish it. But since he already had it, you know, and was putting -- I'm like, you can finish that then. But I also was told that one of the engines needed to be -- I think it was either the idle measure needed to be adjusted. I actually can't remember, but I passed it down to Wilkie about it. And that's pretty much all I did.

Q. Okay. What is your normal work schedule?

A. My normal work schedule is from Monday through Friday, from 1 o'clock to 10.

Q. 1 p.m. to 10 p.m.?

A. 1 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Q. Okay. And so, why were you coming in on Saturday?

A. I took overtime.
Q. Okay. Is that pretty common?
A. During the summers, as far as on -- not, this is actually my first full summer, so it's -- because they fly a lot during the summertime, so they -- yeah, and we got pretty backed up pretty bad, so they said that overtime was authorized, so I told them I was coming in.
Q. Okay. So you started the work for the hydraulic issue, the hydraulic pump issue. What is -- what documentation do you do when you -- what are your stop work procedures seeing as you had started it on Friday and then you were going to be continuing it on Saturday?
A. If I knew somebody was going to be touching it, I would normally put a post on it and write what I removed, the part number, and then if it had a seal number, I'd put it on there, and then tell them what I did in accordance with, and then tell them what else needs to be done with it. But since I was assuming I was going to come in and finish it, I didn't do that.
Q. Okay.
A. But then I came in that morning and I found out that he did it, and I was like, oh. So I briefly told him what I did and this is what needed else to be done with it, so -- and then he took over it.
Q. Okay. You said you ordered the part. What part did you order?

A. It was the hydraulic pump assembly, or the actual pump itself.
Q. So you had the part and you left the part on the table?
A. Yes, ma'am. It was still in its package and everything.
Q. How long did it take to get that part?
A. Not too long. Maybe 5 minutes, 6 minutes.
Q. Okay. So, when you say you ordered the part, where are you ordering it from?
A. From the parts department.
Q. Oh, okay. Okay. It's not like you had to order it --
A. Oh, no, no, no.
Q. -- and it had to be shipped?
A. No, no, I actually -- I say that because most of the stuff I get is through the parts department.
Q. Okay. And you ordered the part on Friday?
A. Yes, ma'am.
Q. And that's -- and you couldn't -- you didn't finish the work because the bolt was stripped, and you planned to come in on Saturday to finish it. Okay. You said you were told that the engine needed to -- you thought you were told the engine idle needed to be adjusted. Who did you hear that from?
A. John Tano (ph.).
Q. Okay. Walk me through the conversation that you had with John as you remember it.
A. It was pretty much a brief. It was just really brief. I

mean, he told me the squawk I needed, and then he also told me that the engine idle was, I think it was a little too low or something and it needed to be adjusted. And I was like, okay, so I'll do that, you know, when I get done with the hydraulic pump. But I never got to it because that took a lot longer than I anticipated.

Q. Did Tano tell you anything else about why he thought the idle, engine idle needed to be adjusted?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. All I know is I just heard from other mechanics that they were having issues with the engine. But as far as I know, yeah, that's the only thing I really know about it, just that it needed to be adjusted.

Q. What kind of issues did the other mechanics say were happening with the engines?

A. I guess it was just they were having a hard time with the idling and something with the, I think something with the power.

Q. Did they say whether it was a specific engine or both engines?

A. No, I don't remember that specifically.

Q. Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: Was this -- the other mechanics, you said, that they had issues, was it before the accident or after the accident?

MR. SCHAFFER: Before. Yeah, this was like a Friday.

MR. PITTACORA: What were some of the things they were discussing? I mean, was it one mechanic, two, three? Was it --

MR. SCHAFFER: It was just a couple mechanics, I think, when they were working on it, that they were having issues with -- the engine needed -- with the idle, that it was either too low or too high or something like that, and they were trying to adjust it.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. Who's your supervisor?

MR. SCHAFFER: My supervisor? Like as my team lead or the actual, like, hangar supervisor?

MS. LIEDLER: Your team lead? Who would be telling you --

MR. SCHAFFER: My team lead?

MS. LIEDLER: -- yeah, what to work on?

MR. SCHAFFER: John Tano would be --

MS. LIEDLER: All right.

MR. SCHAFFER: -- my team lead. He's usually the one that actually tells us what to do.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. What time did you come in on Saturday?

A. A little -- I think it was -- I can't remember, actually. I think it was, like, around 9 o'clock-ish, or something like that.

Q. Okay. For Wilkie, was Saturday his normal schedule?

A. Yes, ma'am.

Q. Okay. Any idea what time he normally gets in?

A. I think they get in around 7.

Q. Okay. Have you adjusted the idle on an engine before?

A. Not on a Seneca.
Q. Okay. Are you familiar with what you would do or how you would do it?
A. On the 152s, 72s, yes.
Q. Okay.
A. I've done it a couple of times, with the manual, and I have a pretty good idea.
Q. Okay.
A. Most of the time, I've usually had somebody with me just to verify like, hey, you know, I read this, am I doing this right. But other than that --
Q. So, if you had been -- if you had done the work that day on the Seneca to adjust the idle, what would you have done? You would have followed the manual?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And is that a -- are you looking at that on a hard copy, are you looking at something on an iPad?
A. Actually, what I do is I actually go to the library and then find the reference and then print it out.
Q. Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: Is your library electronic or is it actual hard copy?
MR. SCHAFFER: I'm sorry, what?
MS. LIEDLER: Is your library electronic or hard copies?
MR. SCHAFFER: Electronic software on the computer.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Do you know after the idle would be adjusted whether there would be any testing done of the engine?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. Oh yeah. That's pretty much a procedure for us. If we actually -- anything that has to do with an operational check, we usually go and test it out before we actually -- or have somebody verify that yes, it works.

Q. Okay. And who would be the somebody that's verifying that it works?

A. Usually, somebody that has an inspection -- I think what we have is like a certain classes of inspection where someone can actually look at it and look at the work and sign it off and say yes, it's -- like we could have, I can have Tano look at it, Brian, Matt, and certain other people that actually are authorized to actually sign off those, the paperwork.

Q. So, if you had heard that -- if you hadn't have had the conversation with Tano -- so, I'm not a mechanic. But you get a write-up, you get a squawk that, you know, an engine is cutting out, what is your thought process? How do you go about determining what work you're going to do on that engine?

A. My thought process, usually, like I said, I would just go through the manual, and then they normally will have a

troubleshooting guide. And from my experience of doing AOGs, I always start troubleshooting that system and just do that process of elimination. Just work on one system, test that out, then test another group until I can isolate something.

Q. Do you try to replicate an issue before you perform any work on it?

A. If I can, yes.

Q. Okay. What if you tried to replicate it and could not replicate it, what would you do then?

A. I would actually go and talk to my supervisors and tell them whether or not -- because I've had problems like that, where you couldn't replicate something on the ground, and most of the times you'd be like, hey, we might need a test flight, you know, to test something out, to find out what it was.

Q. That's interesting that you said a test flight. Who would make that determination that there is a test flight needed?

A. Oh, from way above my head.

Q. Okay.

A. I just recommend things. I mean, that, I don't know who makes those. If anything, I think it would be Dave or Shane that make those kind of decisions.

Q. Okay.

A. I mean, if I can actually justify why we need to have it, then yeah, then I'm pretty sure they would authorize one. But they only reason why they will allow me this, like I said, if I

did other procedures and then I literally tried to do everything on the ground and found nothing wrong with it and I couldn't duplicate that, that problem, then it would have to be done, something, either an error or something.

Q. Okay. I lost my train of thought. I'll come back to it. You mentioned there's a lot more flying in the summertime. So, do you ever feel pressured to get the airplanes worked on and back out on the line, flying?

A. To be honest with you, no. I think I'm more -- for me, I'm actually more pressured of just making sure that the planes are actually in good working order, if anything.

Q. Has anyone ever come to you and said like, hey, we need to get this airplane out by a certain time because it's got a flight scheduled?

A. A couple times.

Q. Yeah?

A. Yeah, I've had a couple squawks where, you know, like, hey, that plane needs to be out by maybe this afternoon or something like that, or this plane has a test flight tomorrow, we'd like to be able to get it out by this time. But there wasn't any where, hey, if this doesn't get done, you're in trouble.

Q. Okay.

A. But it was just more, it would be like, hey, we would like to get this done. If it is, great, if not, we'll try to work around that.

Q. So, do you ever feel like you need to cut corners to get an airplane out quickly?
A. No. No. I've seen that way too many times on my last job and I'm really not a believer of that because I've -- even here, there's -- I've noticed that, like, some of the senior mechanics who knew -- who've done this plane for so many times that they've created a system where they can still do the procedures but they can do all this and try to teach these new guys. And it's like, well, they kind of need to know the procedures first, through the manual. And then once, if they actually -- once they get familiar with that system, maybe then can try to, like, you know, figure out a different way of doing it but still do the procedures right.
Q. And was that at your previous job or here, at US Aviation?
A. Both.
Q. Both? Okay. Did you ever see Wilkie doing that?
A. No.
Q. Bypassing the main procedure or anything?
A. Not that I know of, no.
Q. Okay. So, after you would adjust the idle on an engine and you would do some kind of operational test, how -- any idea about how long those operational tests might take?
A. They can, sometimes they can be either pretty -- maybe like 10 minutes to who knows. I mean, I've had operational tests that last for hours because it was just like, well, you don't know, you know, why this is doing that and you're still trying to

troubleshoot things while everything's running. And so, I mean, it varies.

Q. Okay. Do you know when the work on 6 Alpha Golf was completed?

A. No, I do not.

Q. Okay.

A. No, once Wilkie took over that job, I literally just said okay, and I just backed off from that plane and went to another one.

Q. Okay. And are you a lead?

A. No, I'm just a grunt.

Q. Okay. And when you do the operational tests -- so, if you were to do an operational test after you adjust the idle on an engine, do you let the engine warm up, or do you start it from cold? How does that work?

A. Mostly, from -- if it's running from, like, a cold start, you normally would -- you'd let the oil warm up a little bit and just check the oil temp and just check pretty much the whole system and make sure that everything's working within normal parameters, and then just -- and after it warms up a little, then you start your procedures.

Q. Okay. The electronic library that you have, do you always feel like you can get all the references you need to complete the work that you're doing?

A. Sometimes.

Q. Okay.
A. There are some -- I've had some issues where, even in some of the simple stuff, you can't really find it. So, usually, if I can't find it, I usually ask, you know, like, hey, where do I find this on this manual? And if we really can't find it, then we go to the 43-13 and try to find something that will reference to that.
Q. Okay. When you were hired by US Aviation, what training did you get?
A. What training did I get?
Q. Mm-hmm.
A. As in, like, on-the-job training?
Q. Mm-hmm.
A. I pretty much got trained on how to start the 152s and 72s and Senecas. I pretty much got a lot of training just on how to do the inspection, how to do the steps on the inspection, what to look for. And just recently, I've been assembling, like, a lot of different parts of the engine on the plane itself.
Q. When you say how to do the inspection, is that like 100-hour inspections?
A. Fifty-hour, 100 inspection, annual, and then just certain squawks and stuff.
Q. Okay.
A. Like, even doing, like, the flat track installation, I had no idea how to do that. I mean, I used to do it on a PC-12, which is

a lot different than on these. So, yeah, I got on-the-job training for that.
Q. And who -- were you paired with a supervisor, another mechanic?
A. Just another mechanic, like somebody who's been there, like, maybe 3 years plus.
Q. Okay. And did you feel that on-the-job training was adequate to get you --
A. Oh yeah.
Q. -- up to speed? How long did the on-the-job training last?
A. Well, for me, it only took maybe a few months. Because I know when I was working day shift and I was recommended to come to night crew to help Tano because he knew that I actually knew what I was doing and I actually could work and didn't need anybody to, like, look over me and just be like, hey, are you done with this, or can you do this, you know.
Q. Okay. Did you say that you started working on the Senecas from when you were hired?
A. I didn't start working on them until, like, maybe -- I learned how to start them up when I first got here, but I really didn't touch a whole lot of them until maybe 4 months into the job.
Q. Okay.
A. Because I'd been normally just working on 52s and 72s.
Q. Okay. And you said you had not adjusted the idle on a Seneca

engine, correct?
A. No, ma'am.
Q. Okay. Do you ever get out and, like, get to fly as an observer in any of the airplanes just to kind of see how the operations side works?
A. Once.
Q. Once? Was that by choice or --
A. Yes. I wanted to go on a test flight because -- it was a 172 that we went on, and I wanted to go on a test flight to check it out. Because for me, I'm just so accustomed of just going -- if there's a certain problem on a plane -- and if they were going to test fly, I want to be there because I actually, for me, I actually get a better idea of what the pilot's talking about. Because some of these pilots, it's just they tell you something and it's just like, what? You know, and then I'd literally have to pull out the box of crayons and paper for them and be like, here, draw me something or show me something, you know, so I can understand what you're talking about.
Q. Is that because of, like, with the Chinese nationals, is that like a language barrier or even --
A. Oh, with them, yes. But it's mostly the instructors, too.
Q. Okay.
A. And it's just sometimes they try to explain something, even through the work order, what they write, and it's just like, what are they talking about?

Q. Do you feel like you can -- when there's a pencil and paper, do you feel like you can always finally understand, though, what the issue is that's occurring so that you know what to do on the airplane?
A. I will usually have an idea. But if it gets to the point where I don't understand, I'll call them right back and I'm like, hey man, I need you to tell me exactly what happened, like every sound, everything that you touched, I need to know what you did.
Q. Yeah. How often does that happen?
A. For me? A few times.
Q. Yeah.
A. I hardly -- every time I usually would do the line maintenance, I usually end up calling the pilot because it's something that's just I'm so used to because I just -- I don't even try to -- like, I'll read it, but then I'm just -- and if I don't get it, I just call them and go, hey man, what happened?
Q. Okay. Do you ever work triage?
A. What do mean, line maintenance?
Q. Is that -- that's what you call it now, right?
A. Yeah. Yeah, I used to call it line -- I don't know why they call it triage.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm not even going to say it. It's stupid.
Q. Okay. All right. So line maintenance or the triage, how did that work? How does that system work?

A. How they did it is that they, if they had -- if they get a call, they would send a mechanic with the cart and they would go over there and look at it, see what was wrong with it. And if it was something that was maybe like, say, a missing screw or something, they would have that in their cart and they would just put it on, and then they'd take a piece of paper and write down what they did to what plane, what day, and what reference they used, and that was it, and they put it into the logbook.

Q. Okay. And is it a separate sheet in the logbook, or would anybody -- who would see what was done via triage?

A. I think it would be Brian, the one who handles all the logbooks. Because there was a separate manila folder for all the triage calls and stuff like that. And then I think you would -- as far as I think, he would put it, log it in or put it in the logbook or something.

Q. Do you know if that work was ever something that, like, a pilot would see, what was done?

A. That I do not know. I know, like, I was -- I've only done triage maybe, I think maybe 13 times the whole time I've been here. But how they did it, it was just a lot different than what I'm used to. Because I know, like, how we did it in my last job is that they would -- if they would squawk something, they would write something down on a little -- it was an MEL for us, but we would have a binder there, and they would write the squawk down. And then we would write next to it what we did, just a brief thing

of what we did, and then sign it. But then we would go into our records and I would put my work in, what I did and what I replaced or whatever, and then I'd sign it, but then maintenance control would look at it and verify, yeah, it's good. And then once all the paperwork was done, the plane could go. But yeah, I'm not very -- wasn't too familiar with how they did this.

Q. Okay.

A. I know I didn't care for it, but --

MR. PITTACORA: What didn't you like about it?

MR. SCHAFFER: I just didn't like how it was just -- because of how I was doing it, it was just more of how they did the paperwork and everything. And I never really was told whether or not if the plane was -- like if it was -- whether or not if whether the plane was good to go or anything like that. It was just sign the paper and then off you go. It wasn't where they went from me to somebody who looked at it, and then tell the pilot, and then they would tell me okay, everything's good, the plane is, you know, is ready to fly.

So I guess it's just the communication part. It was just -- like, for me, it almost felt like it was just an assumption, yeah, okay, the plane is fine, and that was it.

MS. LIEDLER: So I have a question for you, John. You said they would go out and they'd look at their, you know, that reference paper. How would they -- so if they got a call for triage, they get a call, they hop in the cart and they go, how did

they bring -- would you guys stop and print off -- like, how would they know what to bring with them for a reference for --

MR. SCHAFFER: Well, normally, like say a nav light was out. Well, normally, what I would do is that I would go to the library, print out the section that had anything to do with that nav light, which that will also entail, like, whatever is inside the plane itself to the electrical schematic of the system in case, say, it wasn't a light bulb. Say if it was a wire, then I would have my reference for the troubleshooting guide. Then I can actually start troubleshooting and making sure that it's just -- it wasn't just a light bulb.

Because I've had that happen to me a couple of times and I've had a ballast that was out and it wasn't a light bulb. And I mean, I literally turned it on, okay, and then I go to my reference and check out the light bulb and nothing happened. So I was like, okay. So then I'd go to my troubleshooting and then I started -- I'd take the light bulb and then just go from there all the way through the wires, the ballasts, through all the wires that run through there into the switch. And that's when I found out that the ballast was out and I was like, hey, I need to get a new ballast in, and had to go run back in there, go to the parts department and then order a new one and install it.

MS. LIEDLER: So, when they -- what would be an example of a triage call? Like, what information was passed to you when you got a triage call? So, if you're on triage, what would a pilot

tell you?

MR. SCHAFFER: He'd literally, like, he would just tell me, hey, this is plane number whatever and I've got -- my nav light isn't working. And that's all he would tell me. He wouldn't tell me I did this or this or that. They would just, yeah, this is my problem, can you fix it? So, basically, from that point, you have to literally think, okay, so what goes -- what is this entangled with that's going to affect that part. So then you have to -- what I do is I print out whatever I think is going to be part of that. And if I can't get that plane fixed within 15 minutes, then I just say, you know what, just squawk it and just bring it into the hangar.

MR. PITTACORA: From where you guys are working in the hangar, where is -- when you get a triage call, where are the airplanes located? Like out here or --

MR. SCHAFFER: Oh man, I can't even get my bearings. So I think -- so if the hangar's over here, yeah, the 52s are over there, and the 172s and Senecas are over there.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: I'm going to hit you with another question here, John. So you had mentioned that when you came on board you hadn't done an idle adjustment for the Senecas, but you had done them on 152s and 172s, correct?

MR. SCHAFFER: (No audible response.)

MS. LIEDLER: Okay. So my question is, what was that

procedure? For an idle adjustment, what was the procedure to change the idle and check after the idle was adjusted? Do you recall?

MR. SCHAFFER: I normally go off the manual. So as for when you adjust it, you -- basically, I mean, like I said, I just read it off the manual, so I don't know off the top of my head. That's why I have it.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. SCHAFFER: But, mainly, what you do is you follow the procedures and you adjust it to what it tells you to adjust it to. And then once you do that, then you do the run-up procedures, as well.

MR. PITTACORA: Is that pretty -- I know you're just kind of going from memory. Is the run-up a pretty thorough run-up going from different power settings, full power for a certain amount of time?

MR. SCHAFFER: (No audible response.)

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MS. LIEDLER: So, does it -- the run-up is -- just if you don't mind, from memory -- I mean, I know you're not going to get it, you know, perfectly, item by item, but can you tell me a little bit about the run-up? What is it? You know, pull the throttle out, put it back in and we're good to go, or is it a little bit more encompassing than that?

MR. SCHAFFER: There's a little bit more. I mean, you have

this -- if I can remember correctly, it's that you're pulling the idle at certain RPMs, and then you're also checking the mixture, the lean-out mixture, through different settings.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. So let's say you've got work to do in the hangar, not triage, so how do you get assigned what work you're going to do for the day?

A. That's usually Tano, my supervisor. We'll come in and he'll just tell us, okay, you work on this plane, you work on that plane. Usually, it kind of depends on how busy we are and what we can get out or what planes we desperately need that day.

Q. What does that mean, like what planes you desperately need?

A. It's just -- because it depends on what the students are using the most. Some days we'll be using a lot of 152s, some days we'll be using 172. So it just depends on what -- we'll kind of like focus on a certain set of planes to, you know, get the 100-hours and just to be able to bring those planes back out to service.

Q. Okay. How often are you having to do the pass-down paperwork? Is that pretty common?

A. Yeah. Yeah, normally, if I am doing a project on a certain plane, if I don't finish it, I will literally write what I did, what I installed or removed, and then I'll have the part number and all that, and then my reference, and then I'll tell them --

then I'll give a description of what else needs to be done, and then I put my name under it just to let them know who did it.

Q. Does that get checked by anybody or just you?

A. I hope so.

Q. Well, I don't mean -- hopefully, the mechanic, the next day, is looking at it, but you don't have, like, a supervisor that looks at it, or a lead, after you complete the pass-down paperwork?

A. Oh, that night?

Q. Yes.

A. Yeah.

Q. Oh, somebody does look at it?

A. Yeah, I'll have -- like, I'll even tell them like, this is what I wrote down and everything, but then he'll also write his turnover on what plane, and then he'll tell me -- he asks me what -- my work order, what plane, and what I did, and is it done or not. And I'll say no, and I tell him I wrote a short sign-in in the actual work order. So then, hopefully, they actually read it and know what I did.

Q. Going back to the conversation that you had with Tano about adjusting the idle, did he mention --

(Coughing.)

MR. PITTACORA: Sorry. Coffee went down the wrong pipe.

BY DR. WILSON:

Q. Did he mention any conversations he had with anybody else

about why he thought the idle needed to be adjusted? Did he say that he talked to Shane or anybody else?
A. I don't remember who he had a conversation with about that, but I think he did. But other than that, I really don't know.
Q. Okay. How common is it to say when you're doing maintenance work cannot duplicate?
A. Not often.
Q. No? Okay.
A. No.
Q. All right. If you had something -- and I think we talked about this a little bit before, so I appreciate you telling me again. If you could not duplicate something, what would be your next steps?
A. If I couldn't duplicate it, I would just go to my supervisor and ask him like, hey man. But I normally, like I said, I normally will not go to my supervisor unless if I actually did everything that the manual had told me. Because if I haven't done it, then normally they will say, well, just go back and so what the manual says.
Q. Okay. Do you ever feel like some of the squawks are for really minor items on the airplane that shouldn't be squawked?
A. A couple things.
Q. What are common, like, minor --
A. Well, recently, I've been watching -- or I've been noticing pilots have been literally squawking for those vent tubes, the

fuel coming out of those vent tubes. And the reason, we found out, was because the fuelers fill those things up all the way to the brim on that thing and you're only supposed to, like -- you're supposed to have 2 inches of space in the actual tank. Because right next to it up there where the rim is, that vent tube, is to keep that fuel from overfilling. That's why it's there.

And pilots literally squawk for that. And it's kind of frustrating because then you're literally, because of everything that's happened now, you have to go and do the full inspection of that. You have to make sure that there's nothing leaking in the tank or inside the lines or anything just so you can -- just so that we can't say cannot duplicate that, or something like that. Even though we know what the problem is, but it's, you know, I guess it's just we have the -- it's more at the point right now, it's just to give the pilots peace of mind that, hey, we actually looked into this.

Q. Mm-hmm. And when you say recently, is that since the accident or just even before that?

A. Well, I think after this accident it's just a lot of pilots have been squawking a lot of things like [finger snapping sound] left and right because of just what happened now. And it's just some of it was just like, really?

Q. Yeah. What communication -- I know that you said you'll call a pilot if you don't understand the squawk. Like, what's the relationship like between the pilot group and the maintenance

group? Do you all ever, I don't know, talk about things or --
A. Like, for me, I really don't. I try to not talk to them.
Q. Okay. Do any of the pilots ever, like, come over just to see how things work or, I don't know, ask some more questions about something?
A. Sometimes. I mean, I normally work on the nights, so I don't really get to see it. But I know, like, in the mornings they'll maybe have a couple pilots who will come in. I know there's one female pilot that comes in and she actually will, like, want to know, like, wants to know what I'm doing and how that works and how it affects if something -- you know, what would affect it, stuff like that, which, I mean, it's -- I mean, that's pretty cool that they want to know. Because, I mean, me personally, I think if you're going to fly one of these planes, you've got to know how something works, at least, you know. Because, I mean, I've seen -- it's the same thing with people that drive cars. Like, if you really don't understand what's going on, you know, how are you going to take care of it if something were to happen on the side of the road?

Because that's just -- sometimes they'll -- like, if they see -- like, say a pilot sees a little oil on the side or something and then they'll squawk it for that, whereas it was just a little residual fuel on the edge of something and it got wet and it just pushed it out because of the air or something. I mean, then we literally, we're like, hey man, that wasn't an oil leak,

it was just because of this and it got wet and it's pushing all that stuff on the side. You know, it's just little things, you know, like that. I mean, it's just -- I think we try to educate the pilots as much as we can. At least that's what I try to do.
Q. Okay.
A. But if I don't know something, I'll straight tell them like, yeah, I need to look into this.
Q. Yeah. Do you ever feel pressure from the pilots to maybe triage something versus taking it into the hangar and, you know, having to down the airplane?
A. Oh no. I will not let a pilot do that to me. I've worked on the airlines already and I had pilots do that to me and, ooh, that did not end well.
Q. Okay.
A. That does not end well with me.
Q. Okay. Have they tried it and you just, you don't listen?
A. Not here, no.
Q. Okay.
A. They haven't tried it here.
Q. Okay. Do you think, in general, at US Aviation that safety is the priority?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. What makes you feel that way or believe that?
A. Oh, it's just -- well, at least for me, I mean, I feel safe working there because, I mean, everything that I need safety-wise,

it's there. And say like if we don't have something, they'll get it. They will not question you why do you need this. If it's hey, I need this, they'll do whatever they can to keep you safe.
Q. Okay. If you did have a concern about safety, what would you do?
A. Just talk to -- I would bring it up to Tano, and if he didn't do nothing about it, take it up to Shane. I'd just work the chain of command, basically.
Q. Have you ever had to do that?
A. (No audible response.)
Q. No? Is there any way that you could report something anonymously?
A. I think so. Never had to.
Q. Okay. Would you feel comfortable if you did have some kind of concern, though, to bring it up to your supervisors?
A. Oh yeah.
Q. All right.
DR. WILSON: Courtney?
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. So, John, we were just talking about if safety's a priority and you said that you feel that safety is because you have everything you need to keep you safe. How about safety of the aircraft and the operation?
A. Yes.
Q. And same question that Katherine asked you about that: What

makes you feel that the safety of maintenance in aircraft and operations are -- that it's safe? What makes you feel that way?
A. It's just what I observe. And, I mean, we do try to take care of our planes. And even when it comes to, like, even moving the planes in and out of the hangar, I mean, we have guys, you know, we have wing watchers, people watching the back. I mean, we literally baby those planes because it's just -- I mean, those planes are expensive, and I know my paycheck is not going to cover any of those damages if something were to happen.
Q. Okay, I've got a couple more here. And speaking about the squawks and the triage system, you said because of everything that has happened now, basically, with the fuel events, that you have to go through everything downstream. If you get a small squawk, you've got to troubleshoot it all the way downstream.

So, my question to you is, when you said because of everything that has happened, again kind of piggybacking on Katherine's question, is it because of everything that has happened with changes in management, because of everything that's happened with -- since the accident? What do you mean by --
A. The accident.
Q. Okay. And you said you try not to talk to the pilots. How come?
A. I just don't. Me, I don't unless they -- if they actually have a question, I'll talk to them But for me, I really have no business, you know, really talking to them at all. I mean, I'll

be courteous and say hi to them and stuff like that, but other than that, I mean, unless they have a question, you know, I'll just stay out of their way and just, you know, just do whatever I need to do.

Q. So there's monthly meetings with the instructors. And my understanding is that maintenance is often involved in those meetings. Have you ever been to any of those meetings?

A. No. That's usually for either management or people higher up than me.

Q. Do you think it would be helpful to attend meetings with the pilots?

A. I think so. I think for me, I really think if we were able to bring the pilots and mechanics in the same room at the same time they'd be able to talk about what had happened instead of doing that just pilots and maintenance here. I guess the -- because I think when that happened, I think there was some tensions.

Q. Since the accident?

A. Yes, the accident. And I think there was a lot of tension and there was a whole lot of blame going on. And I know for a fact there was a lot of fingers being pointed at maintenance.

MR. PITTACORA: How did you hear about a lot of finger pointing and all that going on?

MR. SCHAFFER: It's just people talk. I mean, I try not to get involved in it, but when I walk by, I hear things, you know,

and it's just like, oh boy.

MR. PITTACORA: A lot of nervous maintenance guys?

MR. SCHAFFER: Yeah. I was.

MR. PITTACORA: Okay.

MR. SCHAFFER: I mean, I literally almost had a heart attack that day. I was just like, what? That's not the greatest feeling in the world.

DR. WILSON: Do you have anything else? No?

MS. LIEDLER: Not right at the moment.

DR. WILSON: Darren?

BY MR. PITTACORA:

Q. So, when we talked about the work orders and you guys being able to look at a computer and see what the discrepancy is, you guys print your work package. Do you ever go back, or is it encouraged for you guys to go look at the previous history to see if you're -- we're talking prior to the accident -- to see if there was anything repetitive or if this has been written up again? Is that common knowledge or you do it?

A. I do it because that's just my experience.

Q. Do you think most of the guys do it, all of the guys do it, some of them don't do it?

A. I couldn't tell you.

Q. Okay. Does it seem like a common thing that --

A. I know, like, when Tano and I -- because I normally talk to Tano about what goes on. Yeah, he actually will look back in the

history and just check to see, like, oh, well, like, okay, well, when was the last time this was done, or, you know, what they did to this, you know.

Q. Okay.

A. For the most part, I think the guys who have been there longer will do that.

Q. It's nothing you guys are instructed to do or --

A. No.

Q. Nothing like, hey, before you work on this snag, go out and look in the -- or go look at the history to make sure you're not duplicating someone else's work or changing a part that's been changed already?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

BY MS. LIEDLER:

Q. So you've mentioned that you worked -- on Friday night, you had spoken to Tano and briefed him on -- or he briefed you on what was done. Did he mention the prior work that he had done on the aircraft?

A. I don't remember.

Q. That this was a second squawk?

A. Uh-uh.

Q. Okay. So then he didn't mention that he tried to duplicate this one other time and didn't? Okay.

A. Not that I remember.

Q. And then, so, Tano left and you worked on it until you left that day, as well. And then you came back the next day and Wilkie was working on it. Who gave you your next work order that day? Who was --
A. I believe it was Augie.
Q. Augie? Okay. And did you brief Augie on, hey, this is where I was, but now Wilkie's working on this, or did he have any --
A. I told Wilkie about it. I think I might have told Augie about it. I think I did tell him that I was working on it the night before and what I did. But I know for a fact that I told Wilkie what had happened.
Q. All right. And I'm not sure if Darren just asked you this question because I was scribbling. So if he did, just maybe repeat the answer for me. How do you -- so, how do you know if you're working a squawk, how do you know if that squawk is a repeat squawk or if it's the first time it's coming in, to know what has been done prior if it was a repeat versus --
A. What I do is I look on Corridor and check the recent, like, work orders that were done on it.
Q. And what is Corridor?
A. That's where we actually type our discrepancies and our resolutions and stuff like that. It'll also tell you, like, what items we used for that particular task.
Q. So, do you do that for every squawk that comes in? Do you pull up that plane in Corridor and see?

A. (No audible response.)
Q. Okay. Is that a common practice, do you think, or is that something that you do but it's not as common for the other maintenance mechanics to do?
A. Yeah, I couldn't tell you. Because I'm pretty sure most of the senior mechanics will do that. With the newer ones, I'm pretty sure they're just getting taught that they need to do that.
MR. PITTACORA: Sorry, I've got to go out and call the office.
MR. SCHAFFER: I only get to work with the newer guys, like maybe from 1 till 5, so I really don't know, like, the whole day, what they're taught or what they do.
BY MS. LIEDLER:
Q. And can you tell me who -- how do you -- so Wilkie finished the work on this one, but how would you -- what's the process to closeout a work order and return it to service?
A. So, what I do is, once the part was installed and I had the inspector look and check the operations check to verify that everything was installed right and the part was actually working the way it's supposed to, I go in the Corridor and I type in my resolution. And I write down what I did and what parts I used and what reference I used, and then write down whether or not the operations check passed or failed. And then I sign it, and then the one inspected it signs it off. And after that, that's -- then whoever does the logbook entries will take care of the rest.

Q. So you don't -- do you, once your work is done and you fill out the Corridor worksheet, whatever, do you then, do you release it back to service, the aircraft?
A. (No audible response.)
Q. Okay.
A. I just sign the work.
MR. PITTACORA: Who does the final release back into service?
MR. SCHAFFER: It would be either -- whoever's in charge of the logbooks, who has access to actually doing the logbook entries.
MR. PITTACORA: Okay. So the airplane doesn't get put back out into service until he's done his thing. Okay. Is that Brian Connor?
MR. SCHAFFER: (No audible response.)
MR. PITTACORA: Okay.
DR. WILSON: Do you know who does it if Brian's not there?
MR. SCHAFFER: I believe John Tano, as well. Other than those two, I don't know who else can do the logbook entries.
MR. PITTACORA: All right. Okay.
MR. SCHAFFER: Shane might be able to do it too, as well.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Do you ever see the PMI, the FAA PMI at the facility?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. Okay. Does the maintenance group hold weekly or monthly meetings? So, do all the mechanics get together and have

meetings?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. When is that?
A. Usually, it's, like, Mondays.
Q. Okay. What types of things are discussed?
A. Just updates on how we're doing. Sometimes we have issues that we need to address or, you know, just typical -- well, just announcements about things. But that's about it.
Q. Anything, like, related to safety?
A. Sometimes. I mean, if we have -- well, like, if we're -- there was, like, something, like something that needed to be addressed, they would tell us. Like, hey, you guys need to do this or do that, or make sure you guys have your, you know, your bottles all labeled and don't have any junk lying around or anything like that.
Q. Are you encouraged to speak up if you have a safety concern?
A. Yes.
Q. How do they encourage you to do that?
A. I mean, they tell us that they have an open-door policy about it. I mean, they literally told us, you know, if there's something that you think that we need to address safety-wise, let us know. If they have something right now, let us now.
Q. There's been a change of management recently in the maintenance department, right?
A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Was that since you were hired?
A. Yes. I was here when that happened.
Q. Did you notice anything change?
A. Yeah. Morale went up.
Q. Yeah? Okay. Why do you think that was?
A. Oh god. I think a lot of it had to do with the change in management. Ever since Dave came in here, we literally actually -- I don't know how to say it. It's just that we just got better and it's just the way how he ran things and everything. Like, literally, it just turned. It did a 180 and everybody wanted to work harder, you know. There was just more productivity going on. And it was -- now we didn't have to worry about, you know, being screamed at or harassed, you know, by, you know, certain people that used to be there. I think it's when we all -- when we actually got a new director of maintenance and the new director of the hangar, I mean, it just literally, it literally changed.
Q. Great.
MS. LIEDLER: Who is the director of the hangar?
MR. SCHAFFER: Right now? Dave -- Shane.
BY DR. WILSON:
Q. Do you all have any kind of recurrent training?
A. Not that I know of yet. Well, I know I had my drug and alcohol recurrent not too long ago.
Q. Okay.

A. That was brutal.
Q. What about since the accident, have you noticed any improvements in safety?
A. I think we're a lot more double-checking our work more now and just having a couple more set of eyes just checking things over and just making sure that, hey, this is, you know, done right.
Q. Are you a part of the checks that are being done on the Senecas right now?
A. No.
Q. Why is that? Who did they assign to do that work?
A. I think it's just mostly because of the morning guys. I mean, when I work in the nights, I'm usually either, A, taking care of squawks at nights or trying to do 100-hour inspections. We only have a crew of maybe four guys at night, so it's really hard to pull somebody off and do that Seneca project because, I mean, we're so short-handed at night that it's kind of impossible for us to do.
Q. Okay.
MS. LIEDLER: How do you feel about the number of mechanics? Do you feel like you guys are over tasked or do you feel like there's enough mechanics to do the work that you guys are needed to do?
MR. SCHAFFER: I can't really speak for mornings, because they got, like, way more mechanics than the four guys that we have

at night. I'd like to be able to see more mechanics at night because I think me, speaking for myself, working Mondays through Fridays is -- it gets long. And if I work on the weekends too, that just, you know, it just puts more, just more strain on you.

Whereas, like, the days, they have -- they work, what is that, four on and three off. And we were trying to get something like that for us, but again, we don't have that kind of manpower to do that. And I think -- I know for me, I kind of feel like we're kind of being neglected because there's -- we don't get that option at all. And it would be kind of nice if we did, but like I said, it's just that we don't have the kind of manpower they do in the mornings.

And I think I'd feel better if we did, just to be able to get the same hours options, because I don't really like working nights, to be honest with you. I'm not really a night guy.

MS. LIEDLER: So you said that -- are you requested to work on weekends or do you work on weekends --

MR. SCHAFFER: Because I choose to.

MS. LIEDLER: Okay.

MR. SCHAFFER: That's the only time I really -- and those two days off is -- or Saturday and Sunday are my only two days off.

MS. LIEDLER: So, why do you choose to work on weekends, out of curiosity?

MR. SCHAFFER: Money. I've got bills to pay.

MS. LIEDLER: Mm-hmm. Okay.

DR. WILSON: Well, you've shared a lot of really good information with us, so thank you. Is there anything else that you think is important that we should know about that might help us with the investigation?

MR. SCHAFFER: Not that I know of. No.

DR. WILSON: Well, thank you. You've got our contact information.

MR. SCHAFFER: Yes, I do.

DR. WILSON: If you think of anything else, don't hesitate to reach out to Courtney or myself.

MR. SCHAFFER: Okay.

DR. WILSON: And we'd be happy to listen to what you have to say.

MR. SCHAFFER: All right.

DR. WILSON: All right. Thank you, John.

MR. SCHAFFER: Thank you so much.

MS. LIEDLER: Thanks for coming in early in the morning.

MR. SCHAFFER: No problem.

DR. WILSON: Appreciate it.

MR. SCHAFFER: Long day yesterday.

MR. PITTACORA: What time do you guys get off at night, 10?

MR. SCHAFFER: 10.

MR. PITTACORA: Oh, that's not too bad.

DR. WILSON: Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

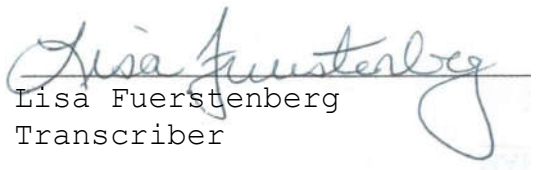
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	US AVIATION GROUP GAINESVILLE, TEXAS JULY 28, 2019 Interview of John Schaffer
ACCIDENT NO.:	CEN19FA238
PLACE:	Denton, Texas
DATE:	September 20, 2019

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.



Lisa Fuerstenberg
Transcriber