

CEN24MA111

OPERATIONS/HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Interview Summaries

March 14, 2024

Interviewee: Rylee Krowpman, PIC's fiancé
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 4, 2024 / 1304 PST
Location: Private residence, Simi Valley, CA
Present: Katherine Wilson, Fabian Salazar - NTSB

During the interview Ms. Krowpman stated the following:

She met Mr. Pettingill in 2017 at a joint place of employment in Thousand Oaks, California. They dated for a short time but then broke things off. About that time, Mr. Pettingill was moving to Pompano Beach, Florida, in October 2018 to pursue his flying career. In Florida, Mr. Pettingill received his private, instrument, CFI and CFII certificates and he began flight instructing at the same flight school.

They met up again in December 2020 in California, but he went back to Florida after the holidays. She visited him in Florida in January 2021, and they again met up in California in February 2021. At that time, she was dealing with the death of a close family member, and she and Mr. Pettingill got close. They did not want to continue a relationship long distance and because work was slow for him in Florida, he visited local airports in California looking for work. He visited Orbic Air and when talking with the president, they discovered that Orbic had recently bought an R22 in Pompano Beach, Florida. Mr. Pettingill asked how they planned to get the helicopter to California but Orbic did not have a plan yet so they discussed Mr. Pettingill flying the helicopter from Florida to California. Orbic flew Mr. Pettingill and another student to Florida to fly the helicopter back. He hoped he would have a job if that flight went well and it did and he was hired by Orbic; she thought that flight was the second week of March 2021 and he started working for Orbic shortly after flying back to California.

He did not typically fly outside of work but did a few times for special occasions like his brother's birthday and when he proposed. He flew Orbic helicopters on his personal time. He was an instructor for Orbic but began at Orbic in an office position then moved to instruction then tours then charters. He became the lead instructor and was in charge of the students and check rides in about the last 6 months.

He really enjoyed working for Orbic. Prior to working for Orbic, he really wanted to fly EMS but after working with Orbic, 2 years into it, he thought he wanted to fly with them long term and move up to the chief pilot position. There was workplace bantering but he really liked working for Orbic. He did not have safety concerns and he felt comfortable turning down a flight, for example for weather. She felt comfortable with him flying for Orbic as well and had known him to turn down flights for weather. She felt they had good safety planning.

On the day of the accident, that AM, she had to work at 0730. He had a night flight so did not have to work to that morning. He made her lunch and they spent some time together. He was in a great mood. She went to work and he was home most of the day. He told her he went back to bed from about 0730 and woke up around 0900. He brought her coffee on her lunch break and then helped her mom with some car issues. Around 1130-1200pm, he picked up her mom in Moorepark and took her to the tire shop in Simi Valley and then came back home. At that time, he wasn't anticipating leaving Orbic for the flight until about 2030. He was planning to join her family for dinner that evening and was planning to leave around 1900. However, he had to leave significantly earlier because the EC130 was in Camarillo, so he had to go in early and did not make it to dinner. He went to Burbank then took a train to Camarillo and flew the helicopter to Burbank before departing for Palm Springs.

At 1405 he texted to her to say he was ready and heading to Orbic from their home in Simi Valley. She did not know what he did while in Burbank before going to Camarillo. He texted her again at 1639 saying he was arriving in Camarillo. At 1721, he texted to say he was departing Camarillo; he texted at 1800 to say he landed in Burbank. Then almost immediately after he texted to say he was departing Burbank for Palm Springs. He did not share any information about the helicopter or any maintenance done on it. He texted at 1914 to say he landed safely in Palm Springs and thought they would be departing in about 30 minutes. She did not know the reasoning but she was anxious about the flight, maybe because it was a night flight. She did not express that too much with him but at 1930 they exchanged a couple of texts about being safe; he had also left her a note before departing for Orbic and everything was very reassuring that all would be okay. She believed he was very comfortable with the flight. He texted again at 1943 to say the passengers should be arriving any minute and 1948 texted to say they landed and were clearing customers and would text her when he landed. His mom received a "butt dial" from Mr. Pettingill at 2032 for 35 seconds but there was nothing discernible from the call. Her mom thought she heard him say "window of opportunity" but there was no context with it to understand what it was referring to.

A day or two prior to the flight when the flight was confirmed, he told her he would be following "the 15" like when they had flown to Vegas. He did not mention anything about weather or issues with the helicopter. After the accident she asked what maintenance had been done on the aircraft, and was told "just lights" and it was nothing mechanical; she thought it was the president that told her that.

She was not aware of any pressure on him to take the flight. He had never expressed any pressure he felt to take a flight in the past. He did not mention anything about having a safety pilot on the flight but she knew the safety pilot and said on some flights they would have a second pilot on board.

Mr. Pettingill was planning to drop the passengers in Vegas and then flying directly back to Burbank. He was expecting to land in Vegas around 2230 and home by 0130-0200. He was planning to sleep most of the day. He had Saturday off and thought he was flying again on Sunday.

He would always bring a lunch to work but they did not discuss what he had that day. If he went to work later in the day, he would typically eat at home.

She thought they awoke about 0620 on Friday (the day of the accident). The night prior she thought they got in to bed 2030-2100. He was a great sleeper and he would typically fall asleep while they watched TV. She did not recall him waking up in the night.

On Tuesday, she had to work at 0600. She texted him at 0555 to let him know she arrived at work and he texted her back. He did not text her again until 0717 and she thought he had gone back to sleep. He was off that day. At 0730 he drove to Camarillo to visit his family and was home by 1430. They went back to Camarillo that night for a family dinner. She thought they were home by 2000. She did not recall when they went to bed but thought he slept well. She had to work at 0600 on Wednesday and texted him to say she arrived at work and he did not text her back until 0700 because he had fallen back to sleep. He also told her he was headed to work. They texted throughout the day when he departed and landed for his flights. At 1754, he texted to say he was off work and headed home. She was home by 2000 and she thought they went to bed shortly after that. On Thursday, she worked at 0700 so thought they would have woken up about 0620. On days she had to work at 0600, he would wake up about 0525 to make her lunch and would almost always go back to sleep. He had not sleep issues and had never been diagnosed with a sleep disorder; he was not a napper.

His regular days off were Tuesday and Saturday. His work hours were usually between 0700 and 2000. The night flight he was doing was a one off. He had never had a flight this late like the accident flight; the latest he had been home was 2200 so she thought that would mean landing in Burbank by 2045, putting the helicopter away then driving home. He never expressed any concern about flying at night except that he did not like to get home late. Nothing seemed unusual in the days preceding the accident. He would be groggy when he would wake up in the AM and would have coffee when he was up to start his day. They were usually good about getting 8 hours of sleep per night.

She recalled him being involved in an incident when practicing autorotations with a student who was at the controls; this was at Orbic. He had never been disciplined for his performance. He was praised pretty regularly by the president and moved up in his roles. They created the lead instructor role for him and looked up to him and spoke highly of him.

He had no major changes, good or bad, in his health, financial situation, or personal life that would have affected his performance. He made more money and she thought things had changed for the better. They had a lot of positive things going on in their life and preparing for their wedding. His health was good. He took good care of himself and worked out regularly. He wore glasses and he would wear them when flying; the limitation was on his FAA medical. He had no issues with color vision or hearing. He did not take any prescription or nonprescription medication, vitamins nor illegal drugs. He did not have any recent illness. He drank alcohol and they had shared a glass of wine on Tuesday before the accident. He did not use any tobacco products. He drank caffeine and probably would have had a cup of coffee before the flight. He did not take any medications, prescription or nonprescription, in the 72 hours before the accident that would have affected his performance. There were no pressures in his personal life.

He flew with his iPad. He had an electronic logbook. She did not see him doing any preflight planning before the flight but she had not seen him since early the morning of the accident at their home. For long charter flights like the accident flight, he would do preflight planning at home. He would typically use his iPad to do that.

She would consider Mr. Pettingill and the safety pilot to be friends. At one point they had carpooled to Burbank together; they were pretty close.

Mr. Pettingill would get his shifts a month in advance and would know his schedule about a week in advance. He learned about the accident trip and was on again off again and then was confirmed a couple days before the flight. And on the day of the flight, she thought he departed to pick up the passengers about 2 hours earlier than originally scheduled.

Mr. Pettingill also flew the AS350; he did not fly it often, but he enjoyed flying it. He used ForeFlight often to check weather and would also use Flight Radar. She did not recall him mentioning whether he preferred to fly charters versus tours. His pay was a set flight pay and it did not vary based on the type of flight. He never mentioned being on a visual flight and getting into instrument conditions.

The night of the accident, she had texted Mr. Pettingill at 2159 to say she was on her way home and that text was delivered. She texted him again when she was home at 2213 which did not get delivered. She had checked his location which had last updated at 2205 or 2207; she did not think much of it because he would lose service sometimes when flying. She went to bed and woke up at 0230 and he was not home. She saw that the last message she sent had not been delivered and his location had not updated. She tried to reach someone at Orbic 0232 but there was no answer; she received a callback from a pilot at Orbic at 0237 informing her there was an incident

and could not contact the helicopter. She did not receive any additional information until about 1200 later that day.

Interview concluded at 1414.

Interviewee: Jason and Nicole Hansen, Safety Pilot's parents
Representative: None
Date/Time: March 4, 2024 / 1453 PST
Location: Private residence, Moorpark, CA
Present: Katherine Wilson, Fabian Salazar - NTSB

During the interview Mr. and Mrs. Hansen stated the following:

Mr. Hansen (safety pilot) wanted to be a pilot from an early age. He took his first flight when he was 14. After high school, he started taking classes and flying lessons at Glendale Community College. Although he wanted to fly helicopters, he started flying in fixed wing aircraft because it was less expensive. The program shut down during the pandemic and he looked at other options. Southern Utah University had a good program with a focus on rotor wing and he enrolled there. He received an Associate of Applied Science degree in Aerospace/Aviation Sciences with a focus on rotor wing. He graduated in summer 2022. He had all the ratings and certificates to fly commercially and be an instructor. He worked as an instructor for SUU for 3 months after graduation. They had a family friend that worked for Orbic Air who connected him with the company when they had a job opening. He was offered a job with Orbic in October 2022. He moved back to California and began working at Orbic in late October 2022.

His schedule shifted as he was progressing and building flight hours. When he reached 500 flight hours, which was shortly after beginning at Orbic, he moved from doing instruction and tours to also include charters. He more recently reached 1000 flight hours and was transitioning to more turbine training in addition to tours, charters and instruction. His days off were Wednesday and Thursday; on Tuesdays he would typically work the early shift unless he was needed for a later shift.

On the day of the accident, he had 3 flights/legs. He was excited about the flights and flying to Vegas for Super Bowl weekend. He did not have to go in early because of the late flight. Mrs. Hansen sent him a text around 1000 letting him know breakfast was ready. After breakfast, his brother came by the house, and he spent time with family. She thought he left the house around 1400. She assumed he ate at home before leaving for the flight. The departure time for the flight changed multiple times (from 2000 to 2200) during the week preceding the flight but he had told her he would be home late. On the day of the flight, he texted her to let her know the flight time was moved earlier (back to 2000) and he would not be as late getting home.

She received a call at 0240 the next morning from the safety manager at Orbic Air letting her know they could not locate the helicopter. She was told that the helicopter never made it to Vegas. She and Mr. Hansen (father) attempted to gather any information they could about the accident. They were told around 0800 that morning that the helicopter had been found.

Mr. Hansen (safety pilot) did not share any information with his parents about the passengers or details of the flights besides they were flying to Palm Springs to drop the passengers in Vegas and then would be returning to Vegas on Monday to bring them back to Palm Springs. For the leg from Palm Springs to Vegas, Mr. Hansen was not the pilot flying but would likely be for the flight from Vegas to Burbank. He had not acted as a safety pilot often, they thought it was fairly recent that he started doing that.

He checked weather all the time. They were always impressed with his knowledge of the weather. He used an iPad mini but they did not know what apps he used to check weather. He did not mention anything about the weather for the accident flight. He had previously said he did not feel pressured to take a charter flight if the weather was bad. He never mentioned any concerns about maintenance of the helicopters. They were planning to return home the night of the accident. They knew he would be following the major highways to and from Vegas. He found out about the flight in the week prior but they did not recall the specific day.

He was a "creature of habit". He was very focused. He would come home, have dinner with the family, and plan his next day. On his days off, he would run errands and do household activities. He was a homebody and did not do much outside the house; he was family-oriented. He would typically go to his room about 2200-2230. He might watch TV or be on his phone but they did not think he was up late. He was never out late unless he was at work late. On days when he was not working, he would hang out in his room so they did not know exactly when he would wake up. He would sometimes set an alarm if he had to be somewhere early; he was always on time for things. He was usually early to where he needed to be. He never had any difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep and had never been diagnosed with a sleep disorder. He would wake up feeling rested. If he had an early flight, he would go to bed early; he might stay up later if he had a later start time. There was nothing unusual about the week or days preceding the accident.

He had never been involved in any previous accidents or incidents. He was never disciplined for his performance. Regarding any commendations or awards, he was not one to brag about himself but in talking to his coworkers and boss, he was very well respected and kudos on his abilities and where he did. His boss had recently told him that he saw how hard he was working. Students liked flying with him.

He had no major changes in his health or personal life in the previous 12 months. His financial situation had improved; he had moved back home and was paying off his school debts. He worked and saved his money. His health was good; he did not drink alcohol nor use tobacco, medications (prescription or nonprescription), supplements or illegal drugs. He would drink caffeine on occasion. He did not have any issues with his vision or hearing.

He never had any concerns or complaints about working for Orbic. He never mentioned any pressure to take a flight from the company and did not have any pressures in his personal life.

Night flights were rare; he mostly flew in the day. He was fine flying night flights even though it was not the routine. The first charter flight he flew was to Vegas but it was during the day. He did not express any concerns about the hours or amount of flying. If he knew anything about the passengers being flown on the accident flight, he did not share that information with them.

He liked the variety that charter flights offered versus tours; it gave him different things to do. He had flown his parents on a tour flight once. As far as they knew, he received a base pay when he was at work and then got a flight pay; they thought it was a little bit higher for charter flights.

He had flown with the accident PIC before. She thought he recently had flown with the Orbic Air safety manager. He was rated to fly the EC130 but not with passengers yet; he was building experience and had been studying for his checkride. He was excited about flying the EC130 and had no complaints about flying it.

They did not think he flew on the flight from Camarillo to Burbank.

They did not recall him ever mentioning getting into bad weather during a flight. He talked about flying with the chief pilot in the EC130 but nothing specific about the training.

They had nothing additional to add to the interview.

Interview concluded at 1543.