

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: ALBERT AZOUZ, Pilot
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Monday,
February 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. SALAZAR: -- of investigating or looking into the operations-related items, we also look at safety, okay. This is Mark Ward. Mark is air safety investigator from the Alaska Region, and he's assisting. You know Steve.

MR. AZOUZ: Yes.

MR. SALAZAR: Steve's a party member, in the investigation. And you have John with you. Okay. What we're going to do to start this out is, Mark's going to read to you some information. If you got any questions, just ask. And as we ask questions, just know that I don't know is a perfectly good answer.

MR. AZOUZ: Right, right.

MR. SALAZAR: If you don't. All right, Mark.

MR. WARD: Okay. The purpose of our investigation is just to increase safety. We don't assign fault, we don't assign blame, we don't assign liability. We just try and find, you know, the cause. The NTSB cannot offer or guarantee any kind of confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate actions. We don't do any of that, but that's for the FAA.

Transcripts of this will be made in the public docket, and you're allowed to have one representative any time you ask questions. And that's all I got.

MR. AZOUZ: Thank you.

MR. SALAZAR: All right, so we'll go ahead and get started. What we're going to do is I'm going to ask you questions, Mark

1 will ask some questions. If Steve has questions, he'll ask those.
2 And then at the end, if you have any questions, we'll entertain
3 those questions, okay?

4 MR. AZOUZ: Thank you.

5 INTERVIEW OF ALBERT AZOUZ

6 BY MR. SALAZAR:

7 Q. So Albert, if you would, would you tell us your full name and
8 spell it out, please?

9 A. Sure. It's Albert Azouz, and it's A-l-b-e-r-t, and the last
10 name is A-z-o-u-z.

11 Q. And Albert, what do you do with the company?

12 A. I am a charter pilot. I'm an instructor and, you know, also
13 a tour pilot.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And, you know, any film stuff that comes in, I'll look at
16 that too.

17 Q. Okay. What aircraft do you fly with the company?

18 A. All of the aircraft we currently have flying, I fly all of
19 them.

20 Q. Okay. And your history, what -- tell us about your flying
21 history.

22 A. Well, I actually did all of my training with Orbic Air. I
23 started in 2016 and, you know, went through my ratings, the
24 private pilot to commercial, flight instructor. And after
25 achieving the flight instructor, I was hired with the company, and

1 took on a few students, and I've seen some students go from zero
2 to, you know, private pilot, about four, three or four students.
3 And, you know, from there I've started doing tours with the
4 company. And once I achieved the, you know, the required hours to
5 become a charter pilot, I went on with the charter pilot -- sorry,
6 I went on the certificate to fly the R-44s.

7 And from there, you know, once I built the appropriate amount
8 of time required by the company and insurance to go on the Airbus
9 products, I started with the EC130, and was doing the same tours
10 and charters with that. And that's pretty much where we are. And
11 then the A-Star, I've been on that for a year and a half, doing
12 the same things.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Since we got it on.

15 Q. What are the missions you do with the EC130?

16 A. It's primarily tours and charters.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. I've done a couple of movie things with it, but 99 percent of
19 the flying is tours and charters.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. All right. How do you receive information on a tour -- or
23 correction, on a charter?

24 A. It comes from the front desk. When they receive a booking,
25 and they accept it, it typically will go straight on to me, unless

1 there is anything that's out of the ordinary. Then they will ask
2 my opinion on, can we do this, and they'll ask the, you know, the
3 owners' opinions and everybody else involved of whether it can be
4 done. And then typically it will come to me, and then I will make
5 the same assessment myself and -- you know, the best way to do it.
6 And that's pretty much how it comes to me.

7 Q. Okay. Now, you came in this morning. Initially, we're going
8 to talk about safety.

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. Okay, so tell us about your duties that deal with safety,
11 with the company.

12 MR. GOULD: I mean, quick, so he's not the safety manager.

13 MR. SALAZAR: Oh, I thought he was.

14 MR. GOULD: Tommy is the safety manager.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Okay, okay. Well, I'll tell you what. We
16 certainly want to talk to you. We'll want to talk to you after
17 safety. So, let's do this. Let's --

18 MR. GOULD: Okay.

19 MR. SALAZAR: Let's call a time out, because I did ask --

20 MR. GOULD: Oh, okay.

21 MR. SALAZAR: I thought --

22 MR. GOULD: Sorry.

23 MR. SALAZAR: No problem.

24 MR. GOULD: I didn't get that.

25 MR. SALAZAR: Let's go ahead and shut this down.

1 (Off the record.)

2 (On the record.)

3 MR. AZOUZ: Obviously, I want to contribute personally,
4 because the --

5 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

6 MR. AZOUZ: I know, it's --

7 MR. SALAZAR: You are one of the pilots employed.

8 MR. AZOUZ: Correct.

9 MR. SALAZAR: And you have no secondary duties?

10 MR. AZOUZ: No secondary duties. I'm still --

11 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Let's go back on, and continue.

12 MR. AZOUZ: Yeah, thank you. I feel a duty to these pilots
13 and all the other pilots flying around to properly assess what
14 happened and then maybe, you know, communicate that so that other
15 pilots can avoid ending up in this situation. I know that's what
16 you're doing as well.

17 BY MR. SALAZAR:

18 Q. Absolutely. We're doing -- that's exactly where we're
19 headed. All right. Are we back on? Okay. So it looks --
20 apologies for the confusion. I was thinking safety, all along.
21 So, tell us again, you are a pilot with the --

22 A. Pilot with the company, primarily towards charters and
23 instruction in all of the airframes.

24 Q. Very good. So, focusing back on the EC130, when you get a
25 charter, you receive it from?

1 A. From the office.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And then if there are any questions or irregularities with
4 the flight, you know, if weather comes up, then we assess further,
5 but typically the flight comes in, and it's booked for a certain
6 day in the future. And, you know, if it's a clear operation,
7 going from one airport to another, it's pretty standard, there's
8 no, nothing abnormal with it, we'll accept it.

9 And then, you know, as the days get closer, we'll pay
10 attention to obviously, the weather and how everything looks, and
11 make a go, no-go call within an appropriate amount of time before
12 the flight.

13 Q. Okay. Tell us about how you get weather, and what the
14 company expects of you when you get your weather briefing.

15 A. Right. Primarily, I pull it from ForeFlight, the app, which
16 I know has various sources, and then government sources as well.
17 So I am confident in its reports, especially, you know, based off
18 a particular airport of where that is. You know, we'll be reading
19 the weather information directly from the weather reporting
20 systems at the airport, so that's about as real-time as it gets,
21 for airports.

22 And then it also has, you know, weather radars for satellite
23 for you know, rain cells and the like, so -- you know, and icing
24 conditions, and I'm paying attention to those as well, primarily
25 through the app, ForeFlight. If I want a closer look, there is a,

1 on aviationweather.gov, there is a few different tools for
2 helicopters and, you know, low-level flying, which will show you
3 clouds as they sit, via satellite, and there are other -- if
4 that's ever a question, we can use -- there are some mountain
5 cameras that are posted all around the valley and the base, and if
6 you, this is where you're flying and where that flight is going,
7 and they will, you know, give you a live view of what it looks
8 like from any particular altitude, whatever that, wherever that
9 camera is based.

10 So, if you wanted a -- if there are no weather reporting
11 stations via an airport or similar, you can use those as an
12 additional supportive --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- source. But primarily, from online, aviationweather.gov.

15 Q. All right. How do you set up your cockpit? You use
16 ForeFlight. Do you have an iPad, do you -- tell us about that.

17 A. So, I have an iPad that is with, coupled with an ADSB
18 receiver, the brand is Century, and it does feed into -- via GPS,
19 pulls weather from the airport reporting systems. So, that gives
20 you -- you know, whether you lose service in the air or not, it is
21 pulling via GPS. So I'll have that mounted in the front left. In
22 the EC130, it's in the front left. It doesn't obscure my view, so
23 I can see through it. That's fine. And then the ADSB receiver
24 just goes right below it. But before flight's up --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- I got, you know, people I'm talking -- you know, I know
2 the valley, and these routes from Palm Springs to Santa Barbara,
3 San Diego. I know all the frequencies from all the airports. I
4 don't have to really, you know, zoom in to find frequencies very
5 often. But it's an accessible tool and doesn't really obstruct --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- what I need to do.

8 Q. Navigation wise, what does the EC130 have for navigation?

9 A. Well, it's got the -- it was just upgraded to a Garmin 650,
10 which is, it's, you know, pretty up to date, as far as navigation
11 goes. And if you just want terrain, and you can plug in your
12 waypoints either at, you know, an easily searchable location like
13 an airport identifier, which would just put a pink line from A to
14 B. And you can adjust that line as you need. But I use
15 ForeFlight, because it's more -- maybe I know how to navigate it
16 very well, so I just -- you can easily draw my route.

17 And along the route, you can easily see -- you know, via
18 ForeFlight, you can see alternate airport options if, you know,
19 something changes along your route, that you can just deviate and
20 set down anywhere.

21 Q. In your time flying with the company, have you done the Palm
22 Springs to Boulder Airport flight?

23 A. I have done -- I don't know that I've done exactly Palm
24 Springs to Boulder, but I have flown from Burbank to Boulder and
25 Burbank to Palm Springs. And essentially, the route they took,

1 they came back this way and then went up, following the highways
2 like any, you know, maybe some light reference, if you don't have
3 a clear night with a solid moon. You know, I would do the same
4 thing that they did, is follow the highway and maintain a good
5 altitude above the highway. And as long as you're -- you know,
6 there are always cars on the highway and, you know, so --

7 Q. I flew by roads for many years as well.

8 A. Right. Then, you know, altitude at night is very important.
9 I would never be low. I double my altitude at night.

10 Q. Let's talk about the altitude. What is the company policy
11 for altitudes?

12 A. For night flight on a charter, I believe it's, you need 500
13 foot -- the minimum is 500-foot ceilings. And you can go no lower
14 than 300 feet over congested areas. But visibility at night is 2
15 miles, minimum, for a charter flight.

16 Q. Okay. That's all the questions I have right now.

17 MR. SALAZAR: Mark?

18 BY MR. WARD:

19 Q. Mark Ward, Alaska region, I've got a few questions.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. Any issues with the EC130?

22 A. Not that I've noticed. It flies well and all the systems
23 work, so -- and you know, if ever a light goes out, like a
24 position light goes out, we mention it to them and they fix it.
25 And then, it had -- you know, that's it.

1 Q. Did you get any new equipment training with the new GPS they
2 got installed here (indiscernible)?

3 A. I never saw the helicopter after it was installed. So I
4 never flew it after it was installed. But I'm sure I would have,
5 and I think we have the same equipment in one of the other
6 helicopters that we have, so I'm familiar with it.

7 Q. Is that a dash-mounted? Is it --

8 A. It is. It's not -- it's -- I think it -- I didn't see where
9 it was in that one --

10 Q. You're not --

11 A. -- in the EC130, but in one of the other helicopters, it did
12 sit in the dash, yeah.

13 Q. How hard would it be to be flying that route in the
14 location -- you're kind of familiar with the location that they
15 were at. How hard would it be to make a turnaround in poor
16 weather, turning away from the road?

17 A. As difficult as a half centimeter to the right on the cyclic,
18 and you start to turn. Is that your question?

19 Q. Well, if you've got half a mile or a mile away from that
20 road, looking away from that road, is there -- overcast, is there
21 enough contrast to be able to see, if you're 1,000 feet, be able
22 to make a turn safely away from the road?

23 A. Difficult to assess, because I don't know what kind of
24 lighting was in the area and what kind of visibility they had. If
25 there, you know, are lights in the distance, illuminating some

1 sort of ridgeline, I'm comfortable with that. If I can see the
2 lights in the distance, I know that there's nothing in between me
3 and the lights, because I have line of sight. But I don't know,
4 as per, you know, where they were and what they had to work with.

5 Q. How bright were the lights on the EC130? Is the landing
6 light, searchlight bright enough to like illuminate a large area
7 and use?

8 A. It depends on, you know, especially it depends on the height
9 you're at. I'm sure -- obviously, you know, they're less
10 effective the further they are away, if they are away. It's not a
11 Nightsun, you know, that would be used in the movies or something,
12 that they'll use to like search, like the police searchlight.
13 It's definitely not that. It's only -- the primary use is to
14 illuminate, you know, the ground as you are 40, 50 feet above it,
15 you know, if you need to search, as you're flying along a taxiway
16 or something at an airport.

17 And I'm assuming, based on the information that we have, that
18 the weather wasn't good in that area. So, actually using your
19 lights -- and I know you're aware of this, but would make it
20 worse. You'd be bouncing light off of any visible moisture and it
21 would just obliterate any, you know, possibility you had of seeing
22 what's outside.

23 Q. So, on your -- is that a typical setup for all the pilots, to
24 have kind of an iPad with ForeFlight on it?

25 A. It's a -- yeah.

1 Q. Does it have like XM? Does it have weather updating on the
2 app?

3 A. Via the app itself, no. If you have service, cell service,
4 and if your iPad is equipped with, you know, with a service chip
5 and has service, then it will pull and update weather.

6 Q. Does yours? Does yours have service?

7 A. Mine does have service. And if I did have service, it would
8 be active via that. However, I think most of our pilots have the
9 Century window-mounted ADSB receiver. And via GPS, I believe it
10 does, and it links to the iPad and links to the ForeFlight, and I
11 believe it does pull GPS weather from airports and weather
12 reporting stations. I'm not sure if it pulls satellite imagery.

13 Q. How accurate is your weather reports in this area? Where I'm
14 from, they're not very accurate at all. They're horrible.

15 A. Well --

16 Q. From here, what --

17 A. From my experience, a forecast is, you know, educated
18 guesses, obviously, and most of the time they're accurate, but
19 they can be wrong. When I'm looking at my weather, I'm pulling
20 from the weather reporting systems that are at the airports,
21 because I believe those to be in real time, you know, the ceiling
22 above the field itself.

23 You may not know what's happening down the road, not far off,
24 but at least you know that above that airport or weather reporting
25 system, that is what is being reported as far as visibility and

1 height, and then, you know, and whether it's raining or if
2 something's going on. So, I believe those to be pretty accurate.
3 They, you know, they can be updated more frequently or less
4 frequently, typically about an hour, they get updated. But I've
5 seen them get updated more frequently as more, you know, variable
6 weather is rolling through.

7 If it -- you know, if the weather, the visibility was
8 terrible and then, you know, 20 minutes later it's better,
9 sometimes they'll let whoever is in the area know, and update it
10 sooner, but accurate, I believe.

11 Q. What, if any, that -- you said they got terrain following.
12 Is there a terrain warning, that provides any warning in the
13 cockpit for you, as far as you're getting close to terrain on
14 your --

15 A. In that machine, with the updated 650, I believe it does have
16 terrain warning.

17 Q. Is it audio, visual?

18 A. I'm not sure if they had it updated for audio, but it is
19 visual. In the other airframe, in the AS350 that we have, it's
20 both. It's audio and visual. So it'll tell you, it'll yell at
21 you, terrain, and then it will blink on the screen as well.

22 Q. What altitudes does that kick in?

23 MR. GOULD: 500.

24 MR. AZOUZ: Yeah, 500 feet, about.

25 BY MR. WARD:

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I'd imagine.

3 Q. What about your radar altimeter? Is there a low bug or
4 something you can set on the radar altimeter to give a warning?

5 A. In the 130, I haven't had it yell at me. In the 350, it
6 yells at you. You can bug it and set it to whatever altitude you
7 want to be alerted to.

8 Q. What are the duties that are assigned to your safety pilots
9 that go with you? Are there duties assigned? What is their role,
10 as you see them?

11 A. If I'm bringing a safety pilot, and it's at nighttime, I will
12 have -- I will, myself as the pilot-in-command, be flying the
13 machine, and I won't be adjust -- I will communicate on the
14 radios, but I won't be changing frequencies or looking for
15 frequencies. I'll have them do that. I will, myself, reference
16 my iPad for navigation. If there are any questions that I have
17 about a deviation that might be necessary, of an alternate
18 airport, that guy sitting next to me is looking it up and telling
19 me which way to turn.

20 So, you know, they're -- in the majority of situations that I
21 can only imagine that I would say that two heads are better than
22 one, you know. So, yeah. I would, as the pilot-in-command, be
23 flying the ship, and have the person next to me doing secondary
24 duties like adjusting radios or deviation as necessary or, you
25 know, if the visibility outside is getting lower, I'll have them,

1 you know, give -- chime in with their opinion, you know, and make
2 a decision together.

3 Q. Do the crews ever make like a set, if I get below 500 feet, I
4 need you to tell me?

5 A. I have not personally done that. But I'm very verbal, and I
6 have been, in the cockpit. And I'm -- you know, I have no --
7 there's no sense of pride or anything. I would -- if I -- and the
8 same thing, I would hope from my safety pilot. And I brief them
9 as well, and I tell them as well, if you say -- if you see
10 something, or notice something, you tell me immediately, and we
11 work on it. So.

12 Q. On a mission like this, what is the backup plan? Or what --
13 is there urgency to make sure that -- is there a fallback plan?
14 So, you have to turn around halfway. Is there already a plan in
15 place that you're supposed to bring those passenger to for
16 alternate transportation? I mean, what's -- is there a backup
17 plan?

18 A. There is always a backup plan. If -- it's not a preset plan,
19 I would say. But I have no problem landing the helicopter,
20 either, you know, turning around if the weather is getting worse
21 and I'm not comfortable to continue going forward. And we will
22 land at any available airport, or if necessary, on the side of the
23 road if, you know, God forbid, something happens like that, that
24 requires it. But to your question, not a preset plan. But, you
25 know -- yeah, that's it.

1 Q. Has there ever been pressure?

2 A. Actually, no.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. No. And as unfortunate -- you know, Brady himself comes from
5 a helicopter-flying history and, you know, over time, you will see
6 things happen, not in your own company maybe, but in other
7 companies around, and you have friends. It's a small community of
8 helicopter pilots. And, you know, unfortunately accidents do
9 happen. And he's -- from the beginning of taking over this
10 company a few years ago, I've just noticed that he is extremely
11 risk averse.

12 He says no to random ideas and flights all the time. he's
13 not afraid of saying no, and I respect him for that. So there
14 isn't pressure, because he knows the risk involved with it. On a
15 clear day, flying any good helicopter, there is risk involved.
16 And he's vocal about no, not putting pressure. You know, if the
17 pilot says he wasn't want to do it, it's not -- there's no
18 repercussions from that. He's clear about that, you know. He
19 would rather you spoke up and said something than us being sitting
20 in this situation today.

21 Q. When's the last time you shot an instrument approach, just to
22 shoot it, for practice?

23 A. Under six months ago, might have been with Ben. I'd have to
24 look.

25 Q. Is it ever -- I mean, that's on your own, or is it -- is it

1 on your own, or is it company driven, that you should do so many
2 instrument approaches, just as --

3 A. It's so that I myself maintain currency.

4 Q. How hard is it to go inadvertent and recover instruments in
5 the EC130, at night?

6 A. Difficult to say. I haven't encountered inadvertent IMC and
7 have, and be forced into that situation. There's a human factor,
8 obviously of, you know, how quickly your brain can commit to, this
9 is actually happening and, you know, things happen in those
10 situations very quickly.

11 But, you know, I would assume that I would do the same as any
12 other pilot, I'm sure as, you know, trying to understand what has
13 happened immediately and go straight to the instruments and, you
14 know, make sure that we're level and we're not doing anything
15 abnormal like climbing, descending or speeding up, or -- you know,
16 my eyes would go straight to the terrain map, and after leveling
17 the ship and trying, you know, if needed to double -- try and turn
18 if I needed to only, really.

19 Q. Is there a VOR, ILS, any of that kind of instruments in the
20 130?

21 A. There are. I believe so, yeah.

22 Q. Are you guys with flight following on a route like that? Are
23 you with ATC at all?

24 A. If -- I will accept it on a trip like that, yes. Now,
25 whether they did or not, I'm not sure, but --

1 Q. Do you guys have a recovery plan, as far as an IMC recovery
2 plan, so in the area, that particular area, what altitude you need
3 to fly to and what airport they expect you to go to, to try and
4 recover, if you do go into the clouds?

5 A. If I'm going into the clouds, I'm maintaining control of the
6 ship, and climbing, if necessary. And I'm communicating
7 immediately with a controlling agency, if that'll happen, on a
8 backup frequency, and be deviating away from terrain, to clear it,
9 at any means necessary. But, you know, my personal minimums in
10 the day and the night, I -- you know, nighttime, I double my
11 altitude if -- where available. So --

12 Q. Do you keep approach plates in the aircraft, available, and a
13 strap to put on?

14 A. Via ForeFlight, it's --

15 Q. Through ForeFlight?

16 A. You just touch the airport and you can pull up a plate in ten
17 seconds, if you needed it.

18 MR. WARD: So, (indiscernible)?

19 MR. AZOUZ: I appreciate your time.

20 MR. GOULD: No questions.

21 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

22 MR. WARD: I do have one more question.

23 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

24 BY MR. WARD:

25 Q. (Indiscernible), what questions have I not asked you that you

1 think I should ask you?

2 A. I think my mind's been a bit blank. It's a --

3 Q. I don't mean to beat you up. I'm not pressuring --

4 A. No, no. No, no.

5 Q. I understand --

6 A. If I -- I don't know of anything off the top of my head, but
7 if I think of something I'll relay it and make sure that you get
8 it.

9 Q. That's appreciated.

10 A. We can be all on the same page.

11 MR. WARD: Okay.

12 BY MR. SALAZAR:

13 Q. All right. Let me just ask you a few. How well did you know
14 the crew?

15 A. Very well. Yeah.

16 Q. Did you fly with Ben?

17 A. Both of them.

18 Q. Oh both, okay.

19 A. In that machine.

20 Q. Let's start with Ben. What can you tell me about Ben and his
21 flying?

22 A. I think that Ben was -- Ben was the lead instructor here, for
23 at least a year or so. And he was a walking encyclopedia, you
24 know, as far as -- you ask him any question, he knows 99 percent
25 of the regs off the top of his head. And he just, you know, he is

1 very by-the-books, not a risk taker, at all. He was just a very
2 diligent and very good pilot. And, you know, he had -- being one
3 of the lead flight instructors, he had students consistently, so
4 consistently training, you know, all the procedures, emergency
5 procedures, especially in the Robinson helicopters.

6 And I've said it before, I don't know if I said it to either
7 of you, but if I'm going on a flight at night, and there is a
8 second -- you know, I'm taking a safety pilot with me, he's my
9 first choice, just because of how diligent he is. And, you know,
10 he just would know what to do, and being the instrument instructor
11 as well. I did my instrument training with him. And yeah, and
12 again he -- good pilot.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. He -- no, yeah. Anyway, I think I said it.

15 Q. What about, is it Blake?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. What about Blake?

18 A. And I would say the same for Blake. He also not -- that --
19 none of the symptoms that he would, you know, like the hazardous
20 attitudes that are in the textbook, he displayed none of those.
21 He was, you know, modest, by-the-books as well, less experienced
22 than Ben, but also a good pilot, not exceeding any -- you know, I
23 shoot a lot of photos and videos with the company because that's a
24 company that I have as well.

25 And so I get the opportunity to fly with all of the pilots on

1 a decently regular basis whenever anybody books a photo or video
2 package or whatever it is. And unlike the other, the pilots in
3 the company, I bounce around, and I fly with all of them. And I
4 give my two cents.

5 Like, if I see somebody is, you know, lower than they should
6 be, I say something. I say hey, let's go higher. Or if any
7 situation like that, so -- and I didn't, I haven't given him --
8 you know, I didn't notice things that needed to be corrected, in
9 my eyes, at least. So, I would say also a great pilot, and
10 definitely aware and paying attention.

11 Q. Was he checked out in the 130?

12 A. No, but he had been -- he was up to speed. He was just shy
13 of his check ride. So he had been reading the textbooks of the
14 helicopter for weeks and weeks.

15 Q. Did -- okay, so he had previous time in the aircraft as well?

16 A. He's maybe on -- he's flown it with me, but on empty legs,
17 you know, just to get a feel for the machine, and intimate, as
18 every pilot wants to fly the, you know --

19 Q. Sure.

20 A. -- turbine helicopters. And so, I'm not sure exactly how
21 many hours he had, maybe 15 or 20 hours in the machine, you know.
22 All helicopters do, the controls do the same things.

23 Q. Yeah.

24 A. So, if you're in an emergency situation, can I land that
25 helicopter, if I've never flown it? I'm sure I could land the

1 helicopter.

2 Q. It's got a cyclic and a collective and two pedals, right?

3 A. Exactly. So, whether it's slightly different and more
4 sensitive in what case, I'm making an approach down to the ground
5 and I'm landing the helicopter, whether it's a bumpy landing or
6 not. It doesn't matter to me.

7 Q. Yeah. Both Mark and I are former military helicopter pilots.

8 A. Thank you for your service.

9 Q. Yeah. Yeah, then you're welcome. Let's talk about the
10 safety pilot program. Are you free? If you're going to go out on
11 a cross country and it's at night, so you're going to take a
12 safety pilot, is that mandatory that you take a safety pilot at
13 night?

14 A. Typically, if Brady sees that there's a flight and it's a
15 long distance and it's an -- you know, it's not a normal, well-lit
16 route like Burbank to Palm Springs, or Burbank to a city, you
17 know, John Wayne or similar, then he will mandate that you take a
18 safety pilot with you. So you're -- this is a -- you're taking
19 Blake, or you're taking Ben, or you're taking Tommy or whoever.

20 Q. Yeah, so -- yeah, let me ask you that. Can you just call up
21 anybody, or does he tell you who to take?

22 A. Typically, he will assign --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- somebody. But if you, for whatever reason, want to put
25 your foot down, he'll hear you. You know, he'll listen to you.

1 Q. Is there any predictability about who he's going to assign?
2 Does he bring in high-time guys, low-time guys, new guys?

3 A. He would -- without predictability, he will bring in a
4 competent, you know, pilot, somebody who's not green --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- and fresh off the --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. -- you know, fresh off the ticket or whatever you want to
9 call it. He's going to assign somebody who's been an instructor
10 or who's somebody he knows --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- is, will be useful in the seat, if needed.

13 Q. Okay. Are there any tasks that that safety pilot is mandated
14 to perform?

15 A. Mandatory, no.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Not -- no, but they will do whatever you want them to do.
18 So, it would be silly to not delegate tasks to this person.

19 Q. What do you ask your safety pilot to help you out with?

20 A. Like I mentioned, I would have them look up frequencies, look
21 up, you know, altitudes, or if I need them to, as far as what the
22 elevation of an altitude that we're going to, and look up weather,
23 if we need to. Yeah, change the frequencies, like I said, and if
24 need be, help navigate us in any facet, or any (indiscernible).

25 Q. So, it sounds -- tell me if I'm correct. It sounds like you

1 would task them to do typical, nonflying crewmember duties.

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Okay. Do you give them any guidance on if you have spatial
4 disorientation, that they take the flight controls? Do you have
5 that, any type of discussion like that?

6 A. There has not been, but I would be okay having them chime in,
7 like hey, I can't -- I don't know if we're in a turn or not. And
8 then I would have them chime in and say hey, it looks like this is
9 turning --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- this way, so let's correct it.

12 Q. Are you familiar with the two-challenge rule?

13 A. No. What is the two-challenge rule?

14 Q. The two-challenge rule is an agreement between two pilots
15 that if one pilot makes a statement, hey you're turning, and
16 there's no response, and he says it again, hey you're turning, and
17 there, if there's not a response, then that pilot would then
18 assume the controls.

19 A. Okay.

20 Q. Okay. It's a good program. The Army got -- I don't know
21 where the Army got it, but it's a good program, maybe something
22 to --

23 A. If I'm asking that question, and if I'm not -- if we're in a
24 marginal situation, and I'm asking the pilot-in-command that
25 question and I don't get a response, I'm on the controls before

1 the second time. And I'm not going to fight somebody on it, but
2 I'll be --

3 Q. Sure, sure.

4 A. -- communicating at the same time, and I will nudge it in the
5 correct direction --

6 Q. Sure.

7 A. -- or at least what I think it is.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. And, you know, but we'll be communicating. Communication is
10 number one. You know, I want to know why you're not correcting.

11 Q. Sure. Communication is key, isn't it?

12 A. Absolutely.

13 Q. All right. So, Ben was the PIC. Did he use ForeFlight as
14 well, and did he use an iPad?

15 A. ForeFlight and an iPad, yeah.

16 Q. Okay. Mounted the same way as yours?

17 A. Yeah, everybody mounted just about the same exact way. Yeah.

18 Q. Everybody pretty much using a common system of ForeFlight
19 with an iPad?

20 A. It is, yes.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I have been -- yeah.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I don't know of any of our pilots that didn't.

25 Q. Okay. And it's -- does it sit in a similar spot with the

1 350?

2 A. It is window mounted, on the side.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So, (indiscernible).

5 Q. Let me ask you this question. Is the 350 here?

6 MR. GOULD: It is. So there -- the pilot drives from
7 different sides, from the 132. So that's why his would be on the
8 opposite side if he was the flying the 350.

9 BY MR. SALAZAR:

10 Q. Okay. Well, maybe we'll just do it on a white board or
11 something.

12 A. Sure.

13 Q. But I'd like to see how the pilots typically set up the 130.

14 A. I might --

15 Q. And I'll work with Steve on that.

16 MR. GOULD: (Indiscernible).

17 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

18 MR. AZOUZ: Yeah, I might have a photo.

19 BY MR. SALAZAR:

20 Q. Oh, cool. That'd be great.

21 A. Would that be better?

22 Q. Yeah, it would be.

23 A. So, bear with me.

24 (Simultaneous speaking.)

25 MR. GOULD: You got it?

1 MR. AZOUZ: Yeah.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Perfect.

3 MR. AZOUZ: So --

4 BY MR. SALAZAR:

5 Q. Very cool. And this is the 130?

6 A. This is the 130.

7 Q. Would you mind texting me that photo?

8 A. Sure.

9 Q. Thank you much.

10 MR. SALAZAR: Do you see that, Mark?

11 BY MR. SALAZAR:

12 Q. And that bracket is where the height of that --

13 A. Yeah, that sits --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And then if there were -- which typically there were an ADSB

16 receiver, it would go right under it. It attached to the window

17 and it was much, much smaller than that.

18 Q. Okay. Thank you for sending that.

19 A. Do you have an iPhone?

20 Q. I do. What are we going to do? Are you going to --

21 A. If you just unlock it, I can send it to you easily.

22 Q. It's unlocked. There you go.

23 A. Thanks.

24 Q. There you go.

25 A. Thanks.

1 Q. And while you're doing that, let's talk a little bit about
2 visibility out of the EC130 when you are looking from your left
3 seat to the right. So you want to turn right. How's the
4 visibility?

5 A. Somewhat obscured, via the dash. It's -- obviously you're
6 sitting on the left side, and if you're turning right, you have a
7 few things in your way, as per the --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. You do -- the windows are obviously large, however you're
10 sitting here, and anything in this area will be, you know, not
11 visible unless you continue to turn the nose of the helicopter.

12 Q. Okay. And there is no center screen in this? It's just,
13 it's two windshields, correct?

14 A. Two windshields, right.

15 Q. Yeah, so your windshield, you got that center post right
16 there --

17 A. Right.

18 Q. And then that's the second windshield?

19 A. Correct.

20 Q. Okay, very good. Three seats across in the front seat?

21 A. Yeah, the front seat, three seats.

22 Q. And I think Mark asked you this question, so forgive me for
23 duplication of effort. Do you guys do flight following with ATC
24 on these flights?

25 A. I will take ATC if it's, you know, one of these types of

1 flights, because I like to be speaking to someone. And if
2 something happens, I want it to be recorded.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And I want to key it in, or get vectored into, you know,
5 better weather or --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Absolutely. And I believe he would, too. Do we know if
8 they -- if he was in contact? Do we know if he had --

9 Q. Oh, I don't know.

10 A. Okay.

11 Q. I don't know yet, at this point.

12 A. He would be the one to accept flight following, absolutely.

13 Q. To request it?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Okay. All right. Do you guys have any requirement on these
16 night flights, to set a low bug on the radar altimeter?

17 A. We do not.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So, yeah. A lot of our helicopters don't have the option.

20 So --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. It would make it difficult.

23 Q. Let's talk a little bit about IMC. This is what you're
24 training with the company, okay. Did you undergo any type of IMC
25 avoidance, unusual attitude recovery and IMC recovery?

1 A. We do.

2 Q. Okay. Could you talk a little bit about that?

3 A. Every year when you do your 135 check ride in the machines
4 that are, each different airframe, so I do three a year, one in
5 the 44, one in the EC130 and one in the A-Star. Each of them, in
6 the training, do have upset attitude and recovery. So, you will
7 put, you know, vision limiters on, like Foggles. And your safety
8 pilot or instructor who's sitting next to you will put the
9 aircraft in an unusual attitude, and you will have to recover
10 based off of your instruments alone.

11 And at the same time, you'll be -- well after you've
12 recovered the aircraft to stable flight, you are expected to tune
13 your GPS in to a terrain map, to show the terrain map. And you
14 would navigate away from any terrain on the map. And if you
15 couldn't do that, you wouldn't pass, so.

16 Q. Okay. And from looking at the photo, you've got a basic
17 instrument package. There's no -- other than your iPad --

18 A. Right.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. It is --

21 Q. What is the procedure that you use to keep the aircraft
22 right? So, you go -- let me rewind, and then I'll ask the
23 question a better way. What did they train you on IMC avoidance?

24 A. Well, if you are inadvertent, you would --

25 Q. This is before -- so, you're in VMC conditions.

1 A. Right.

2 Q. Life's okay. Weather's no so great in front of you, okay.
3 Weather's getting a little bit crappier as I continue. It doesn't
4 look like I'm going to be able to continue.

5 A. If I'm getting into that situation, I'm turning around.
6 I'm -- just because I know the weather that I just flew with
7 hopefully has not changed. And I will, you know, will deviate to
8 an airport close by, or wherever you need to, to safely land if
9 you are surprised by something that was not forecasted or you did
10 not see. And we will land safely and, you know, and put them in a
11 car, and drive them to wherever -- you know, have them driven to
12 wherever they need to go. But --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- that's how I would approach and avoid it.

15 Q. Okay. Is going lower and slower an option?

16 A. Only to your minimums.

17 Q. Personal minimums?

18 A. Personal minimums and company minimums.

19 Q. Does the company have minimums about altitude and airspeeds,
20 in a --

21 A. Yes, 300 feet over congested areas, and 1 mile visibility
22 during the day, 2 at night.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So, uncongested, where they were, and nighttime flying. But,
25 you know --

1 Q. Any guidance on slowing down? If I slow down below a certain
2 airspeed I'm going to turn around?

3 A. Those are personal minimums, I think.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Very good. All right.

7 A. But, you know, with two pilots on board, you have two sets of
8 personal minimums, and these particular pilots and everybody that
9 I know here at the company are not risk takers. There's -- we
10 know that there are consequences involved if, with accidents like
11 this.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. And we're not, you know, transporting a heart or somebody
14 who's dying in the back and if they don't make it to their
15 hospital. So there's no operational pressure from the higher ups
16 or further that we feel, personally.

17 Q. Okay. So let me put that to you in the form of a question --

18 A. Okay, go ahead.

19 Q. -- that Mark may have already asked. Have you ever felt
20 pressure from the leadership to take a mission?

21 A. No. No.

22 Q. Or to launch off in adverse weather?

23 A. No, absolutely not.

24 Q. Okay, okay.

25 A. Absolutely not. And Brady is just the most risk adverse

1 operator I've ever encountered.

2 Q. All right. So let's get back to that scenario I was talking
3 about.

4 A. Oh sure.

5 Q. And despite your best intentions --

6 A. It happens.

7 Q. -- you've found yourself in IMC conditions.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. What is the process that you use to make things right?

10 A. Well, that first thing is aircraft control, and to slow down,
11 and to climb, if you are unsure of the terrain around you, and if
12 you haven't looked at your terrain map. So aircraft control is
13 number one, because if you lose that, there's -- nothing else on
14 the list matters.

15 And then you have to communicate after that. After you've
16 got your control, you've successfully, hopefully navigated away
17 from, you know, any terrain that you might be -- you're climbing
18 and you're communicating. And you're -- I mean, they're all the
19 Cs, right. And you're confessing that you have gone inadvertently
20 IMC and you --

21 Q. Control, climb, confess?

22 A. Right. And you're asking for vectors into better weather
23 and, you know, trying -- just controlling the aircraft is number
24 one.

25 Q. Have you ever been advised on the pros and cons of, after

1 going into inadvertent IMC conditions, so in this scenario you're
2 actually in IMC conditions, making a 180 degree turn to
3 immediately exit it?

4 A. We've been advised to not do that, because that, in that 180-
5 degree turn is where most of the accidents happen.

6 Q. Yeah. That's sound advice.

7 A. Right.

8 Q. Did that company --

9 A. Company trains that.

10 MR. SALAZAR: Very good. And let's see. That is it for me.

11 Mark, do you have any other questions?

12 MR. WARD: No. Steve?

13 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Well Albert, thanks for coming in.

14 MR. GOULD: Thanks for your time.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Stephen, would you hold --

16 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

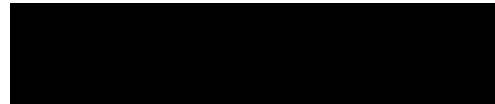
IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Albert Azouz

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Burbank, California

DATE: February 12, 2024

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.



Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: BRADY BOWERS, President, Co-Owner
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Monday,
February 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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By Mr. Salazar		6

I N T E R V I E W

MR. SALAZAR: On behalf of the NTSB, our deepest condolences for you all's loss. We know it's -- well we just know these were close employees, and somewhat friends. So, we're sorry that this happened. We're sorry to meet under these circumstances. But now that we're here, our charge is to find out what happened, why it happened, and how we can make recommendations. They may come as safety suggestions to the company. Or we may recognize something that is of industry concern. If there was something that was bigger, we would work with the FAA, so that they had a part in it.

And what we're going to do now is go through -- we're going to read something to you. We'll have a little discussion to make sure everybody understands what they can and cannot do. And then we'll just get through an interview. The way we're going to do the interview is, I'll start the interview. When I'm done with my questions, I'll hand it over to Mark. When he's done with his questions, he'll hand it over to Steve. And if there are any follow-up questions, we'll start in that same order.

We'll plan on going through it twice. And again, just know that the FAA is not present, and Human Performance is not present, so we may have future questions. We'll try to do those maybe via Teams, if that's possible, so that we can all be present.

MR. BOWERS: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: All right? So Mark, would you mind reading the statement?

1 MR. BOWERS: And this is recording?

2 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

3 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

4 MR. WARD: And again, any time, we can always go back. So, I
5 mean we're not -- I mean, if you remember something different, or
6 something's not -- at any time.

7 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

8 MR. WARD: And always ask questions if -- I mean, we're
9 not -- but the four statements I got to go over is the purpose of
10 the investigation is to increase safety and not to assign fault,
11 blame or liability. NTSB cannot offer or guarantee any
12 confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate actions.

13 A transcript of this interview will go into the public
14 docket. The interviewer -- you may have one representative
15 present, of your choice. In this case, you've already got your
16 attorney. That's it. You have any questions?

17 MR. BOWERS: No. I don't think so.

18 MR. SALAZAR: All right, Brady, we are going to record this
19 so that we can send it away for transcripts. The transcripts will
20 be part of the public docket.

21 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

22 MR. SALAZAR: You are allowed to have one person with you,
23 and would you tell us who you have with you?

24 MR. BOWERS: This is Jonathan --

25 MR. HEMBREE: Hembree.

1 MR. BOWERS: -- Hembree, which is appointed counsel from our
2 insurer.

3 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. And so that we can get this all on
4 recording, my name is Fabian Salazar. I'm the operations group
5 chairman for the accident investigation. I work for the IIC, and
6 I'm in charge of gathering the operational factual data for the
7 investigation.

8 MR. WARD: Mark Ward. I'm a regional investigator out of
9 Alaska, just assisting with the investigation.

10 MR. GOULD: And Steve Gould, director of operations for Orbic
11 Air.

12 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

13 INTERVIEW OF BRADY BOWERS

14 BY MR. SALAZAR:

15 Q. And sir, would you tell us your full name and spell it,
16 please?

17 A. Brady Bowers, B-r-a-d-y, B-o-w-e-r-s.

18 Q. Thank you. And Brady, what do you do with the company?

19 A. I'm the president and co-owner of the company.

20 Q. Okay. I understand there are two presidents. Is that so, or
21 is there --

22 A. No, there's just one.

23 Q. Is there a co-owner?

24 A. There's a co-owner, but there's only me as the president.

25 Q. Okay, excellent. That helps me out. So Brady, tell us a

1 little bit about you, your aviation background, and how you came
2 to be the president of Orbic Air.

3 A. I started out as a pilot, did flight training in Los Angeles.
4 I really started in 2009, and was a flight instructor, and then
5 did tourism. And with the tourism, I kind of set up some of the
6 marketing, and started getting kind of familiar with the business
7 side of things. After I built enough time, I went out to the
8 Grand Canyon, to Papillon, where I was a line pilot, and then a
9 lead pilot after that, so line pilot flying tours and then the
10 lead pilot role, conduct some training and oversight of the pilot
11 pool.

12 From there, there was an incident in 2013, I believe, where a
13 colleague of mine -- it was a fatal accident there. And that kind
14 of started me on a path of not flying but being involved in
15 aviation. So I worked for a few years. I left aviation and came
16 back in a role as a charter manager at another company. And
17 that's actually where I met a lot of the guys we have involved
18 here, and got even more into the, you know, marketing and business
19 development side of the business. But, you know, I still -- as
20 with a pilot background I, you know, had a decent idea of what was
21 going on.

22 And then, I left Helinet, and a friend of mine, Stephen,
23 who's my partner in the business, he's a -- by everyone's account,
24 a genius of a mechanic, and he and I decided to start our own
25 operation, which took a few years, well, a year or so to get

1 going. And then ultimately we purchased Orbic Air, as a, you
2 know, a flight school and a basic 135 operation.

3 Aside from like the business side, you know, I think the
4 safety aspect of aviation has always been very huge to me. And
5 then in 2021, my best friend was killed in another accident in
6 Leesburg, Florida in a UH-60. And that again took a pretty heavy
7 toll on me. And kind of the only justification I have to keep in
8 this business is to make it as good of an operation and as safe as
9 I can for these young guys.

10 And I have -- you know, I was somewhat limited on what I can
11 do myself, but even from the beginning, when we took over Orbic
12 Air, I immediately started changing a lot of the procedures, and
13 implemented like minimum flight altitudes along -- over land and
14 along the coastline, you know, to get these guys up in the air, so
15 they can perform a successful autorotation if, you know, the need
16 arises. Really like cleaned up, even things, everything from
17 taxiing on the ramp.

18 You know, I just really hold it to a standard where
19 everyone's flying the same way, in the same way, like absolutely
20 no, quote/unquote, cowboy anything. Like, I really wanted to
21 emphasize that, you know, let's get these guys ready to join, you
22 know, the -- either move on from here, or stay here, but in a
23 professional manner, whereas, you know, might be some flight
24 schools are -- I mean, there's some great ones, but there seem to
25 be some that are just kind of fly-by-night.

1 So, I was able to bring on Mr. Gould, who I have, you know,
2 worked with, and have an incredible respect for, as a director of
3 operations. More recently, we were able to bring on Brian
4 Petschower as a chief pilot, and he's amazing, fantastic. You
5 know, I've worked with him. I actually have known Brian since my
6 training days, and -- yeah, just as, you know, anything I could do
7 to improve the operation, to make it -- to avoid why we're sitting
8 here right now, basically, has been my goal. And this is pretty
9 devastating.

10 Q. I can understand that. You've got friends that you've lost
11 in the past, and now you've got an accident that you're dealing
12 with now. Please know this. If at any time during this interview
13 you need to take a break, just let us know. We'll give you the
14 time that you need.

15 A. I appreciate it. I've -- it's been a long couple of days,
16 but I'm --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- you know, I'm okay. Yeah.

19 Q. We'll try to keep it as --

20 A. Yeah. I understand.

21 Q. -- as sterile as possible.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. And sir, for you, I forgot to say this at the in-briefing.
24 If there's ever a time where you two gentlemen need to talk, take
25 the time that you need to talk. Let me know. We'll give you the

1 room, whatever it takes.

2 A. Okay.

3 Q. And we certainly haven't had this, but he has to answer the
4 question. So, no answering the question. That's really the only
5 ground rule we have.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Excellent. Okay, well thank you for the information about
8 you, and about how you come to purchase Orbic Air. So it was
9 already an established Part 135 school?

10 A. Yeah, it was established in 2006.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. By a gentleman named Dave Child. I think he -- I assume he
13 started it as a single pilot, 135, and then I'm not exactly sure
14 when he got the basic status, but --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- it was basic when we took over. It's now full.

17 Q. Okay. Tell us about the employees. How many employees do
18 you have and how do you have them staffed?

19 A. We have -- I believe there's 14 at the moment. We have --
20 there's myself, Steve Gould, Brian Petschower, Stephen Cranswick,
21 so that's the management positions. And then, pilots, we have
22 Tommy Stefanski, who's also safety manager, there's Albert Azouz,
23 both of those two --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. -- you'll speak with today. We had Benjamin and Blake, the

1 pilots involved in the accident. And we have Christian Zanner
2 (ph.), who is a flight instructor.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And then, in the front office we have three salespeople, Ted
5 Silvas (ph.), Stephanie Reichman (ph.), and Trevor Perrin (ph.).
6 And they've all been with us a few years now.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And I mean, that's -- yeah. It's -- I mean, it's a very --
9 it's like a perfect team. We have -- you know, everyone cares a
10 lot for each other and, you know, it's a just really -- makes it
11 even more difficult because, you know, we --

12 Q. Yeah, it's a small outfit.

13 A. We are a small outfit.

14 Q. Everybody knows everybody.

15 A. We're like a family, and --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- you know, it's --

18 (Knock on door.)

19 MR. SALAZAR: Hey, Steve.

20 MR. CRANSWICK: Should I come in?

21 (Simultaneous speaking.)

22 MR. SALAZAR: It's Steve Cranswick.

23 (Simultaneous speaking.)

24 MR. CRANSWICK: And director of maintenance.

25 MR. SALAZAR: Oh, not yet. No. Thanks, Stephen, though.

1 Thanks for coming in.

2 (Mr. Cranswick left the room.)

3 BY MR. SALAZAR:

4 Q. Number of aircraft, what is -- what do you have?

5 A. We have one R-22, trainer. We have three R-44s, a total of
6 four, but we cycle one through maintenance --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- overhaul. The EC130, and the AS350, and then on our 133
9 we have a UH-60.

10 Q. All right. Is -- your pilots that you have on staff, tell me
11 how -- what aircraft they fly. It doesn't have to be individual,
12 but like, do your instructors fly the 22, the 44, the 350 and the
13 130?

14 A. So typically, we'll either train up from, you know, start to
15 finish, a guy that'll do all his ratings with us, and they'll
16 become an instructor here, and flying the 22 and the 44. After
17 they get anywhere from 500 to 1,000 hours experience and, you
18 know, just based on their merit and their performance, we'll
19 transition them onto the 135 program. Or -- well, initially we'll
20 start doing tours after instructing.

21 And then once they've kind of built the time and understand
22 the tours, then we'll get them on the 135 program. And then from
23 that, they'll again build time, getting familiar with like the 135
24 operations. And then once they get anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000
25 hours, we'll put them on a turbine machine, which is -- typically

1 the EC130 would be first. And then, you know, if they're -- if
2 some time passes and more experience gained, then on to the AS350.

3 Q. Okay. The missions -- tell us about the tours that are
4 conducted in the Robinsons.

5 A. So, basic sightseeing tours, anywhere from ten minutes to an
6 hour-long tour. And then, with the addition, where the charter
7 comes in, the bulk of the charter program, we have two landing
8 sites in Los Angeles, so it's similar to like the Alaska tours or
9 the Grand Canyon tours, where you go to a destination, land, have
10 some sort of a picnic, and then return.

11 Seem to be popular and, you know, controlled, safe
12 environments, and just like a way to kind of gain that experience.
13 And so all around, it was -- it is a really good program for all
14 in all, really.

15 Q. You mentioned being employed with Papillon when they had
16 their accident. Were you speaking of the Grand Canyon accident in
17 Quartermaster?

18 A. Yes, the -- well --

19 Q. The Quartermaster?

20 A. No, not the most recent. I did know that pilot as well. The
21 incident that I'm speaking of was, an aircraft lifted under its
22 own power, with the pilot outside.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. And it was -- I actually was in the office that day, and
25 enacted the ERP, and it was honestly, a pretty traumatic

1 experience for me.

2 Q. Okay. All right.

3 A. Yeah, that more or less put an end to my flying days, at the
4 end of the story.

5 Q. Okay. Well, I will tell you, I've got a helicopter accident
6 under my belt, and it affected me greatly. That it did. Going on
7 to the EC130, what are the missions that you do with the EC130?

8 A. We will use it for tours, and that happens for, you know,
9 larger parties. It's great, because the 44 obviously holds three
10 passenger, or two passengers with two pilots. The EC130 is
11 typically, it does tours, it'll do some movie production work, and
12 charter work.

13 Q. Okay. The accident flight, was that a charter flight?

14 A. That was a charter flight.

15 Q. Okay. Let's see if it's time to move on. Before we get into
16 the accident flight, from operations specifications, what are the
17 conditions in, that the aircraft are allowed to operate in,
18 daytime, nighttime, VFR, IFR?

19 A. Kind of case dependent.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But, I mean, obviously the -- with the established
22 limitations. And then nighttime, if it was over any kind of unlit
23 area, first of all it had to be somewhere where there was a road.
24 And we typically would use two pilots, just for a second set of
25 eyes, in this, like a dark situation like that.

1 Q. Understand.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Let me just get some clarification, though, before we move
4 away from this. So your op specs authorizes your company to
5 conduct daytime and nighttime VFR, all right?

6 A. Correct, yeah.

7 Q. Okay. Is it on demand?

8 MR. GOULD: Yes.

9 MR. BOWERS: Yes.

10 BY MR. SALAZAR:

11 Q. Okay. All right. Do your pilots do any IRF flying?

12 A. No, other than training.

13 Q. Okay. Are they required to hold an instrument certificate
14 for employment?

15 A. We did put that recently into, as a requirement.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And most of them do, I believe. There's only one, at this
18 point, that doesn't, and he's working on the training.

19 Q. Okay. Before we get into the accident mission, I'm going to
20 turn it over to Mark to ask some questions, and then to Steve, and
21 then we'll get into the accident.

22 A. Sure.

23 MR. GOULD: No questions from Steve. Steve --

24 MR. WARD: I don't have any questions.

25 BY MR. SALAZAR:

1 Q. Okay. So let's talk about the mission. I'd like to know,
2 from the very beginning when whoever received the first phone
3 call, walk us please through the events that came to accepting the
4 flight.

5 A. So, typically the calls and emails are fielded by the
6 salespeople. They'll come to myself or if we need, you know,
7 anything to do with -- ask any regulation questions, they'll ask
8 Steve about. But they'll field the calls, and essentially look at
9 the request. It's typically pretty straightforward, one airport
10 to another airport. We have a coding platform that we've built
11 that, you know, kind of prices the flight out.

12 They'll -- you know, they know the general terms of what we
13 can and can't do, and what information we need, passenger names
14 and weights and baggage and all that kind of information is
15 gathered. And then they are responsible for payment, and then we
16 schedule the flight.

17 Q. Okay, so once you've accepted the flight, and everybody's
18 happy with the requirements, if you will, do you pass that down to
19 the director of operations as an approved flight to go out and do?

20 A. No, it would be, get put on the schedule, and then if
21 there's, you know, anything that's not routine, we'd obviously,
22 you know, look into it a little further, but --

23 Q. Okay. The accident flight, where did you -- was it a VIP
24 flight? Were there any special things that the pilot needed to
25 know about this flight?

1 A. No, just a -- I mean, from our standpoint, it was another
2 charter.

3 Q. Okay. We understand the individuals were Nigerian nationals.
4 Was that -- were you aware of that at the time that you accepted
5 the mission? What did you know about the passengers?

6 A. That -- I didn't have too much involvement in that side of
7 it, but yeah, later we came to find out that they were Nigerian
8 nationals.

9 Q. Okay. Did you have any knowledge of the wealth that they
10 had?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Did -- was the -- I want to be very understanding of what the
13 crew knew about the passengers. Did they just know they were
14 carrying four people to Boulder City?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And we -- you know, there are instances we've carried a lot
18 of celebrities, (indiscernible), it just comes with the territory,
19 but we also carry people you've never heard of, that -- you know,
20 who knows why they're doing the flight. And it just, it becomes
21 fairly standard, at a point, you know, so.

22 Q. When you are transporting a celebrity, how do you prep the
23 crew for that?

24 A. They -- just basic, you know, etiquette. It's like, only
25 speak to them as they speak to you, be friendly, make sure you,

1 you know, are doing the briefings and -- yeah, just pretty
2 straightforward.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. And, I mean, a lot of our guys do have great personalities,
5 and we're doing the tours. I think that develops a little bit.
6 You know how to interact and speak to people.

7 Q. Yeah. In the tour industry, the pilots are authorized to
8 accept tips, right?

9 A. They are.

10 Q. So if they're, develop a nice rapport, it reflects in their
11 tips?

12 A. Yeah, exactly.

13 Q. Very good.

14 A. I mean, you get familiar, you maybe tell the same joke over
15 too many times, but --

16 Q. Oh yeah. Without a doubt.

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Without a doubt. Okay, so how did Ben and Blake come to be
19 the pilots on the flight?

20 A. A matter of being scheduled that day.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. So you have --

23 Q. For scheduling, what are your pilots, what are their
24 schedules?

25 A. Typically, they're all kind of different, but they all --

1 like Albert, for example, he's -- his is the only one that's a
2 little looser, but most of the time they'll fly either four or
3 five days a week. And then, we have kind of an a.m./p.m.
4 breakdown. In the slower season now, it's kind of slowed up.

5 But, you know, during the busy -- during the summer months,
6 we have more of an a.m./p.m. schedule. And night flights are -- I
7 mean, they happen, but we make a special arrangement for that.
8 The majority of everything we do is -- I mean, even our outfits, a
9 normal military outfit is 24/7 and we're just 9 to 7 like a normal
10 business, and basically do just daytime type VFR.

11 And we have -- we do some, one tour we'll do nighttime. And
12 then, you know, when we do have a nighttime charter, we'll just
13 make arrangements for the duty time ahead of time so the pilots
14 aren't coming in, in the morning and, you know, have maximum time
15 to -- or whatever time is required for --

16 Q. Okay. This mission, did it originate, was it requested as a
17 night mission?

18 A. I'm not a hundred percent familiar with the entire booking
19 process on this one.

20 Q. Is -- would that come from the person that took the phone
21 call, the original phone call?

22 A. Yeah, exactly.

23 Q. Okay. Very good. I understand that. And I understand the
24 flight originated here in Burbank?

25 A. Correct.

1 Q. And they arrived in Palm Springs, picked up their party. Did
2 anybody have any communication with the crew when they were in
3 Palm Springs?

4 A. Not that I -- I mean, aside from myself, I was flight
5 following them, and in contact with them. And they were on the
6 ground, they let me know when the passengers' jet arrived. Then
7 they were clearing customs. And then it turned out that one of
8 the passengers had lost their passport. And so, that put us on, I
9 believe, about a 50-minute delay.

10 So I contacted Boulder City, because of the Super Bowl.
11 There was -- you know, it was difficult getting planning
12 permission, so -- and they said, you know, it was okay to arrive
13 later. And I got the notification from Ben when they were taking
14 off, and as far as who they talked to, I imagine some rampers or
15 maybe some people at the FBO there.

16 Q. Do you guys have an office at Palm Springs?

17 A. No, we do not.

18 Q. So did they land at the FBO?

19 A. Yeah, there --

20 Q. And went inside the FBO and waited for the party?

21 A. Yeah, and that's -- I mean, that's how we do all the
22 charters. It's typically whatever FBO is where we'll --

23 Q. Do you know where the -- I'm just curious at this point,
24 where that, their jet flight originated from.

25 A. I do not know.

1 Q. Yeah. It has no bearing. Do you know what FBO they were at?

2 A. I'm not certain. I've been told it in the last couple of
3 days, but it's either Signature or Atlantic, in Palm Springs, but
4 I can find that out for you.

5 Q. Yeah. Yeah, and I can do some calls as well, but I'd like to
6 know. So it's a 50-minute delay. And these delays, do they get
7 in -- is it the pilot's responsibility from the beginning of the
8 flight to -- and in the situation where there's a delay, is it his
9 responsibility to gather the weather and get updates for the
10 weather?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay. All right. What's the company's policy on weather?

13 As far as -- where are they authorized to obtain weather from?

14 A. More of an ops --

15 MR. GOULD: Yeah. Just, so the standard FAA-approved sites,
16 that's usually where we get it from. On occasion, they'll
17 actually call the 1-800 weather brief, if there's anything that's
18 a little bit different than normal, but normally they just do it
19 from the standard FAA-approved --

20 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

21 MR. GOULD: -- weather sites.

22 BY MR. SALAZAR:

23 Q. One last bit of data for all the interviews, I don't know is
24 a perfectly acceptable answer.

25 A. Okay.

1 Q. Yeah. All right. But you mentioned that the crew, Ben
2 notified you when he was departing?

3 A. He did, yes.

4 Q. Was that via text?

5 A. Text.

6 Q. Would you mind giving me a copy of that text?

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. And any communication that you had with Ben.

9 A. Sure.

10 Q. Just for the mission.

11 A. Absolutely.

12 Q. Thank you. Were there -- did he have any concerns, at that
13 point, when he --

14 A. No.

15 Q. -- communicated with you?

16 A. I mean, prior to them leaving here, and talked to Blake even
17 before that, asked him if he had checked weather. He said yes.
18 And these two particular guys were so thorough with weather and,
19 you know, very in tune with it. They were good at it. They were
20 conscious of it, you know. They -- so, I asked Blake. And he
21 said he'd looked at it in general, but he was going to take a
22 deeper dive. And, you know, that was earlier on in the day.

23 And then, with Ben, he said the ceilings are all high, it's
24 like looking really good. I took a look briefly and didn't see
25 anything otherwise, that I could tell. And, you know, off they

1 went with smiles on their faces and I never thought in a million
2 years that things would ever turn out this way.

3 Q. Okay. When you -- were you aware of any type of adverse
4 weather, rain, snow?

5 A. Nothing, no.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Everything that we had, or everything that I looked at, it
8 was just high top -- or decently high ceilings and VFR everywhere.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Let's get into what you initially started to talk to me
12 about, under nighttime operations. So, when your -- when the
13 company's pilots are flying nighttime operations, what is your
14 guidance for them, or what is in the GOM?

15 A. I'm not current on --

16 MR. GOULD: No. We just have the basic VFR weather
17 minimums --

18 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

19 MR. GOULD: -- on the GOM, so it reflects the FARs.

20 BY MR. SALAZAR:

21 Q. Okay. But did you -- as far as navigating from Point A to
22 Point B, was there guidance in any way on using the roadways to,
23 for reference?

24 A. Yeah. There's -- I mean, we -- outside of, you know, like
25 the minimums, we also -- like obviously, following an interstate

1 with -- that's well lit with cars on a Friday night from Los
2 Angeles to Vegas, as opposed to going over a dark mountain, it's a
3 pretty obvious decision, what is the safest route there, so. And
4 then, like I said, two pilots is basic, like -- not under a sense,
5 there are no -- we haven't written it as a requirement, but it is
6 like a company --

7 Q. Okay.

8 (Crosstalk)

9 Q. I think though, the questions that I have remaining are
10 starting to sound more appropriate for your staff.

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. So I'm going to hand it over to Mark, if he has any
13 questions.

14 MR. SALAZAR: Mark?

15 MR. WARD: I think I'm in the same boat.

16 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

17 MR. GOULD: Yeah.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Steve?

19 MR. GOULD: No questions.

20 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Let's conclude the interview,
21 and --

22 MR. BOWERS: Did you want to do the flight following
23 separately?

24 BY MR. SALAZAR:

25 Q. You want to know something? I appreciate you reminding me of

1 that thing.

2 A. Right.

3 Q. Because I do. And then I would like to, if you don't mind,
4 give us a guide, and show us the actual physical tools --

5 A. Okay.

6 Q. -- that you use. So, you also were flight following on this
7 flight?

8 A. Correct.

9 Q. So would you tell us about that process, and then the
10 specifics to that mission?

11 A. Right. So, for flight following, it's mostly done via our
12 Iridium satellite SpiderTracks, trackers. Occasionally we'll also
13 use like FlightAware and things like that. But checking in,
14 watching the -- from the time it departs, checking in on it at
15 least every ten minutes or so, and when they arrive, we'll get a
16 confirmation that they arrived, but nine times out of ten, we're
17 sitting there watching it and, you know, we know where they are.
18 Do you want the details of --

19 Q. The details of the accident, yeah.

20 A. Yeah, okay. So, I was watching the tracker, and at 10:06, I
21 don't know if it was 10:07 or 10:08, when I looked at it. It was,
22 you know, it was somewhere right in there. And there's a refresh
23 function that, you know, typically -- or it will get -- it's a
24 little indication of a helicopter icon. And sometimes it, for
25 whatever reason it takes a few minutes to refresh it.

1 And there's been a number of times where I've been sitting
2 there, hitting refresh, and then it refreshes. On this particular
3 occasion, I noticed, you know, it was, I think it was around,
4 what's the name of that, is it Halloran Springs?

5 Q. Halloran Springs.

6 A. Yeah, so that, kind of the road, maybe is what caught my eye
7 there, that it had been right over that point for a minute. So, I
8 kept trying to refresh, and it didn't seem to be doing anything.
9 And so I contacted Stephen and Tommy and asked them to take a look
10 at their SpiderTracks. They kind of were seeing the same thing
11 that I saw. So, we all kind of, you know, chatted about it for a
12 few minutes. And then I made the decision to contact the
13 California Highway Patrol, and kind of implement the ERP.

14 So, contacted the Highway Patrol. And I have, I do have a
15 log of these times and calls that I can provide you.

16 Q. Yes, sir.

17 A. Okay. Contacted Highway Patrol. They said they had had
18 reports of an incident similar to what I was describing. They
19 were not hugely forthcoming with information, and that was kind of
20 the case all the way that, through now. And we had been -- after
21 the fact, we were continuously calling them and just not getting
22 any information.

23 Q. Pulling information as you're supposed to.

24 A. We were just trying to, we were just trying to get any sort
25 of confirmation on the condition of the aircraft, the condition of

1 all the occupants. And I don't know that we ever got that
2 directly from them. But anyways, so contacted CHP. They kind of
3 confirmed that they had had reports of that. So, I believe at
4 that point, I called an FAA contact of mine. And he, I believe,
5 you know, took it up the chain. I'm not exactly sure where, but
6 he came back and told me to call, sorry, Oakland Center, which I
7 did.

8 The lady I spoke to there, I believe, was a supervisor. And
9 she, it turned out, was not actually looking for the aircraft, 130
10 Charlie Zulu. In the meantime, Stephen and Steve were talking,
11 and notified our POI. And then -- I probably need my log to
12 remember the rest of --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. If you'd like me to go grab it, it's available.

15 Q. Do you mind?

16 A. I'll go get it now.

17 Q. Yeah, I think -- yeah, this is important.

18 A. Sorry.

19 (Mr. Bowers exits the room.)

20 MR. WARD: Brady's last name?

21 MR. GOULD: Bowers, B-o-w-e-r-s.

22 (Mr. Bowers returns.)

23 MR. BOWERS: So, our ERP, I think as most are, is kind of
24 structured so that you're receiving a call, a report. In this
25 case, we were following the flight and we were the ones making the

1 calls, so it wasn't able to be followed, you know, that precisely,
2 but I think the important functions worked, and I was very glad to
3 have it. And I've always been a big proponent of it since the
4 event I mentioned before, where there was a very clear and easy-
5 to-use ERP when I was in, at Papillon. And I was -- you know,
6 that was always important to me, that that resource was there, so
7 we've tried to have something like that.

8 BY MR. SALAZAR:

9 Q. Yeah. And as an Army guy who was running a safety program,
10 we had an emergency response plan as well. And we conducted
11 practice runs with it. And after the practice runs, we would
12 update it. So, certainly take a look at your ERP after this and
13 see if there's any need to update it. Because now you know that
14 sometimes you're pulling information, as opposed to people
15 providing it. And it may warrant something.

16 A. Right.

17 Q. So what does your timeline show?

18 A. Okay, so this is the flight following checklist. I also have
19 a president checklist. We can go over those separately, and
20 they're actually kind of (indiscernible). So, I first noted,
21 10:12, SpiderTracks track's not refreshing. 10:20, contact
22 director of maintenance, ask about SpiderTracks. Same time,
23 contact safety manager, also ask to look at their SpiderTracks.
24 10:27, called back director of maintenance, discussed tracking,
25 and decision made to activate the ERP. 10:28, attempt to call

1 PIC, direct to voicemail. 10:30, attempt to call safety pilot,
2 direct to voice mail.

3 10:30 again attempt to call PIC, direct to voicemail. 10:30,
4 call director of maintenance, attempt to locate aircraft. 10:33,
5 safety manager also still attempting to locate aircraft. 10:40,
6 call to CHP, ask for any reports. I don't have the person that I
7 spoke to, but I do have the phone number if that's handy for you.

8 Q. I'll get a copy of what you have there.

9 A. Okay, cool.

10 Q. Thank you.

11 A. Yeah. 11:01, called director of maintenance. 11:05, called
12 an FAA contact, a gentleman named Tim Lerma, and advised that we
13 had lost OA communication with an aircraft. And he was very quick
14 and, you know, he said okay, I'll call you back and, you know,
15 it'll be escalated to whatever department he may have escalated it
16 to.

17 Then I was with, talking to the DOM and director of
18 operations. At 11:12, the FAA contact, Tim Lerma advised to call
19 Oakland Center at 501-745-3331. 11:18, called Oakland Center,
20 report the missing aircraft and discuss with them. 11:26, back
21 with director of ops and director of maintenance. 11:27, I spoke
22 to Tim Lerma at the FAA again.

23 I don't have a note of what was said. At 11:29, talked to
24 Oakland Center again. 11:38, I called the CHP again, and they --
25 I can't remember exactly what they said, but something along the

1 lines of, there is an incident, and it doesn't look good, or
2 something to that effect. So that was like a bad moment.

3 So at that time, I called Tommy, the safety manager, and I
4 headed here, just to kind of put together a little bit of a
5 command center and be able to work our way through the rest of the
6 checklist and just handle whatever we could, from here, together.
7 So we were here through the night.

8 That kind of consisted of, we had to contact the insurance
9 company and make sure that we had notified everyone that we're
10 responsible to, on the, you know, on the FAA and NTSB side, ensure
11 that all the management had necessary resources to complete their
12 task duties.

13 Contact the families of the involved, so that was a little
14 hard because we were advised, you know, we still didn't have any
15 confirmation from, you know, any authority of any kind. So, but
16 we thought, you know, at a certain point, we got to -- you know,
17 these guys are going to be expected home, we really need to get
18 their loved ones notified now that --

19 So, at that time, we just told them that the aircraft --
20 there's an incident that has just taken place. We don't know any
21 status. We're trying to figure out exactly what's happening, and
22 we will -- you'll be the first to know, you know. We'll update
23 you as soon as we have any kind of information. And then, so that
24 took place at 2:39 on the 10th. Tommy actually made those calls.
25 I was not able to compose myself at that time.

1 Q. So you guys got word of the final outcome, and then Tommy
2 made the notifications to the family members?

3 A. Got this call at 10:38 from the CHP guy. I don't know if he
4 was just -- I got one of the more --

5 Q. That vague notification he gave you, the one that said, it
6 doesn't look good?

7 A. Yeah, exactly. But that's when -- I mean, that's when I
8 really thought like, this is a bad situation, you know. Because
9 at that point, we didn't know, did they make, you know, a
10 precautionary landing on the desert right there. Like, from the
11 data we had, it would have made sense, so then what we were seeing
12 indicated from the trackers is like the last ping was still 120
13 knots at, you know, a decent altitude.

14 It just -- you know, something didn't seem right with the
15 reports. And then this guy's saying, you know, I'm sure they had
16 some sort of protocol to not release details, even though --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- you know, I did tell them I was the operator and that was,
19 you know, that was our aircraft, and the pilots, and they still
20 wouldn't tell me anything. But the one guy finally said, you
21 know, it doesn't look good, or something to that effect.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. Or I don't think there's any reason to think someone survived
24 that, or just something. I can't remember exactly what he said,
25 but --

1 Q. Enough to conclude that --

2 A. Enough to like -- yeah. So those calls to notify the
3 emergency contact that we have on file were at 2:39 and 2:42. At
4 4:06, we contacted our 133 chief pilot, who lives in Las Vegas,
5 and dispatched him out to the scene, just to be of any assistance.
6 And I believe he gave his business cards to some sheriffs there.
7 And --

8 Q. His name?

9 A. Greg Heuchert.

10 Q. How would you spell his last name?

11 A. H-e-u-c-h-e-r-t.

12 Q. Got it.

13 A. But he wasn't there for very long. It was pretty clear they
14 weren't letting anyone past that, and I don't know that that was
15 even his -- his intention was basically just to be a
16 representative for us there, because that's kind of in one of our
17 steps of the ERP. So he left his cards there, and I believe told
18 them, you know, something along the lines of, I can be back here
19 within an hour, if there's anything needed from our end please
20 give me a call, some -- you know, something to that effect, and
21 then I think he returned to Vegas. And that is kind of the end of
22 the ERP notes that I --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. That I have in -- oh, do we need like these scanned in,
25 digital, or hard copies?

1 Q. Yes, please. Yes, please.

2 MR. BOWERS: I'll give that to you guys.

3 MR. SALAZAR: All right, well thank you. That -- I did have
4 flight following, it was just down on my page, so thanks for the
5 reminder.

6 And Mark, do you have any questions? Steve?

7 MR. GOULD: No.

8 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Let's go off the record at 11:13.

9 (Whereupon, at 11:13 a.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

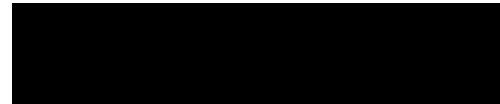
IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Brady Bowers

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Burbank, California

DATE: February 12, 2024

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.

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Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: STEPHEN CRANSWICK, Maintenance
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Monday,
February 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. SALAZAR: During the interview, which shouldn't take too long, if you feel like you need a break, it's too much, just let us know.

MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: Okay?

MR. CRANSWICK: Thank you.

MR. SALAZAR: During some of the questions -- they're all going to be maintenance related, an acceptable answer is, I don't know. Okay?

MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: So if that pops up and that's the correct answer, just throw it out there. You have the right to have one person with you. It could be anybody, and I see you have this gentleman here. Is that the person you want with you?

MR. CRANSWICK: Uh-huh.

MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Yeah.

MR. HEMBREE: It's Jonathan Hembree, for the record.

MR. SALAZAR: There you go. And Jonathan knows that if at any time, you two need to talk, you got the room. We'll give you the time. Whatever you guys talk about is -- amongst yourselves, but you -- whatever the question is, you got to answer the question. Okay?

MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah.

MR. SALAZAR: Excellent. We would like to record this, and

1 from the recording, we'll have transcripts made. And then the
2 transcripts will be part of the public docket.

3 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

4 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Is that all right that we record this?

5 MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah.

6 MR. SALAZAR: Okay, very good. Mark is going to read
7 something to you, and then after he reads it to you, we'll make
8 sure you know who everybody is, and then we'll get started.

9 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

10 MR. WARD: Okay. The purpose of the examination or --
11 examination, the investigation is to increase safety, and not --
12 it's not our job to assign fault, blame, or liability. NTSB
13 cannot offer or guarantee confidentiality or immunity from legal
14 or certificate actions. A transcript summary will be part of the
15 public docket. You can have -- we have talked about, you have one
16 representative, and that's it. That's all the mandatory.

17 MR. SALAZAR: All right. So, my name's Fabian Salazar. I'm
18 the operations group chairman for the accident. I'm looking into
19 operations. There's a gentleman by the name of Van McKenny.

20 MR. CRANSWICK: Yes, I expect -- I mean -- yeah.

21 MR. SALAZAR: Van is in charge of airworthiness, so that's
22 why he's talking to you.

23 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

24 MR. SALAZAR: Now Van's still out in Barstow, so he asked me
25 to conduct a quick interview.

1 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

2 MR. SALAZAR: This is Mark.

3 Go ahead.

4 MR. WARD: Mark Ward, Alaska regional investigator, just down
5 helping out.

6 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

7 MR. SALAZAR: And Stephen, I'm sure that you know. He's a
8 party member.

9 MR. CRANSWICK: Yes.

10 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. He's from the company, and he's helping
11 us gather factual data, and he gives -- he's that interim guy that
12 helps us get to everybody that we need to talk to.

13 MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah.

14 MR. SALAZAR: So he's also allowed to ask questions as well.

15 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

16 INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN CRANSWICK

17 BY MR. SALAZAR:

18 Q. So, would you mind telling us your full name and then
19 spelling it out?

20 A. Stephen Owen Cranswick, S-t-e-p-h-e-n, O-w-e-n, Cranswick, C-
21 r-a-n-s-w-i-c-k.

22 Q. And Stephen, what do you do?

23 A. So I'm the director of maintenance for Orbic Air, and I
24 maintain the helicopters.

25 Q. Okay. How long have you been employed with Orbic Air?

- 1 A. October 2019.
- 2 Q. Okay. Do you have a staff that assists you?
- 3 A. I do, yes. Yeah.
- 4 Q. How many mechanics do you have?
- 5 A. Maybe ranging between 10 to 15 to 20.
- 6 Q. Okay.
- 7 A. Depending on what I've got going on.
- 8 Q. With the aircraft that you have and the maintenance that's
9 required for each aircraft and the staffing that you have, how are
10 you doing?
- 11 A. So, we have sort of two sides. We have refurbishment side,
12 which we do, you know, a certain group does that mainly, and the
13 100-hours and the inspections, we have really two or three that do
14 that.
- 15 Q. Okay. Is the company staffed adequately, in your opinion?
- 16 A. Yes, I do believe so. Yes.
- 17 Q. Okay.
- 18 A. Yeah.
- 19 Q. All right. Do you -- what is your staff -- what staff do you
20 have that works on the EC130?
- 21 A. So, probably -- not probably, myself, Aaron Hosking, Mike
22 Villa and a guy, Bruno, his last name is Pettier (ph.), I think,
23 and Ivan Ramos (ph.), who really is the --
- 24 Q. Okay. And the company just has the one -- as far as EC130s
25 go, it's just the one, correct?

1 A. Correct, yeah.

2 Q. All right. So there is not a second aircraft that we could
3 go look at?

4 A. In terms of an EC130? No.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. That's a no. We have a A350 out there, that we lease, but --

7 Q. We were hoping to look at a sister ship that may have had the
8 same instrument cluster --

9 A. Okay.

10 Q. -- as the accident aircraft.

11 A. It was a fairly basic instrument cluster.

12 Q. Do you happen to have photos of the inside of the aircraft?

13 A. I do not, but I know we have it for marketing.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. I know we have --

16 Q. We would like to get a look at that, to see what the cockpit
17 looked like.

18 A. Okay.

19 Q. All right.

20 A. And recently, it had -- yeah, it would have changed from
21 that.

22 MR. GOULD: Yeah. I don't know if we're going to have a
23 picture of that.

24 MR. CRANSWICK: No. The day -- the Friday, it would have it
25 in -- because of that bad weather that came through, we used that

1 opportunity to put a Garmin 650 TXI, just with the increasing
2 traffic around the area. I wanted to have -- you have to be able
3 to see, for other aircraft up on the screen. So we upgraded that,
4 (indiscernible) position lights, and then we fixed an oil line and
5 we put new cones in the swash plate.

6 Q. And that was last Friday?

7 A. Yes, yeah. So it left --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- last Friday.

10 Q. Tell us about the maintenance program for the aircraft.

11 A. So it just follows the manufacturer's maintenance program.
12 So we follow the airworthiness limitation sections in Chapter 4
13 for the life components, and then in Chapter 5 for all the
14 scheduled inspections. We have it on an internet-based system, so
15 pilots, at the end of their day, they go in there and close out,
16 so every day it was updated. And then I have live tracking, and
17 it changes colors when things are due, and things like that, so.

18 Q. All right. The hangar that the aircraft is maintained in, is
19 it right here?

20 A. No, it's in Camarillo Airport.

21 Q. Camarillo.

22 A. We have -- we do small stuff right here, but largely just
23 Burbank Airport, surrounded by private planes, it's a bit hard to
24 do the maintenance here.

25 Q. Okay. All right. When was the last time that -- about when

1 was the last time the aircraft went through a 100-hour?

2 A. It was -- I gave that to Van, but --

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. -- it was --

5 Q. If it's not off the top of your head.

6 A. It was 07. It was end of last year, of like Q3, Q4 of last
7 year.

8 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. All right. That's all the questions I
9 had. What I'm going to do is pass it over to Mark.

10 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

11 BY MR. WARD:

12 Q. Yeah, I'm Mark Ward. Any issues that were, I guess it might
13 be the wrong word, plaguing that particular aircraft?

14 A. We had fixed everything that was playing out with it, when it
15 left.

16 Q. Any issues with flight controls?

17 A. No. It was all -- like obviously, the uniball was a little
18 loose, which was still well within limits but we just like to --
19 because otherwise it digs into the stovepipe underneath, so we
20 just put new cones in it. And yeah, one of the oil lines, because
21 you -- again, hot-cold, hot-cold, it just gets brittle, and starts
22 to seep a little bit, so we replaced that, coming up to the oil
23 cooler, and --

24 Q. Sergeant Weros (ph.)?

25 A. Yeah.

1 MR. WARD: I don't have any other questions.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Steve?

3 MR. GOULD: No questions.

4 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Thanks for coming in. Thanks for your
5 time. Again, sorry for having to meet you under these
6 circumstances.

7 MR. CRANSWICK: Of course, thank you. And anything, you
8 reach out to us. Yeah.

9 MR. SALAZAR: We may have one or two questions here and
10 there, and I'm sure Van will continue to coordinate with you.

11 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

12 MR. SALAZAR: But thanks for the interview and we'll go off
13 the record at 11:35.

14 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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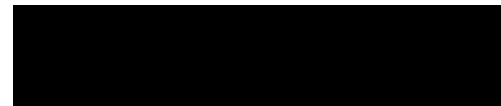
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Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Sunday,
February 11, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Senior Accident Investigator
FAA Office of Accident Investigation

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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I N T E R V I E W

INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN GOULD

BY MR. SALAZAR:

Q. Okay, so it's basically 8 o'clock, and Steve, tell us your full name and spell it, please.

A. Stephen Roger Gould, it's S-t-e-p-h-e-n, R-o-g-e-r, G-o-u-l-d.

Q. And what's your duty position?

A. I'm the director of operations for Orbic Air, LLC.

Q. How long have you had that job?

A. October 20th, 24th -- 2-1/2 years.

Q. Okay. Before that, what did you do?

A. I was a line guy over a different company, at Helinet. I did mostly (indiscernible) of Los Angeles, hospital flights, so medical flights.

Q. Okay.

A. And I was also the instructor pilot and the check airman on a couple of airframes.

Q. What were the other aircraft that you flew?

A. So I flew the 76, the A109, and the TwinStar, and also the A-Star there, but it was not in the 135.

Q. Okay. Tell us about when you got your start in flying, from about the time you got your private, on forward.

A. Okay. Started flying helicopters in Long Beach, way back in the, I guess it would have been the mid-80s somewhere. And ended

1 up getting the commercial and instructor license over in Orange
2 County, because the company in Long Beach has closed down. So,
3 got my instructor license there, then went back to teach a little
4 bit in Long Beach with a company there. Then a few months after,
5 I went to Puerto Rico, spent a few months there, and then came
6 back to L.A., then a bunch of training.

7 And then eventually, three years, four years after that, I
8 moved to Hawaii, then did a bunch of time over there, before
9 coming back to L.A.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Also did, you know, a lot of EMS stuff between mostly
12 Arizona, but I traveled all over the -- yeah, quite a few states
13 around the country, just doing overtime stuff for bigger companies
14 that had different bases everywhere.

15 Q. Okay, very good. It sounds like you've got a lot of
16 experience. About how many hours do you have?

17 A. Last time I checked, it was around 14,800.

18 Q. Impressive, impressive. Fixed wing time?

19 A. Only like 150 hours single-engine, private.

20 Q. All right. So, let's talk about your job that you have with
21 Orbic Air. Tell me about all the different facets of what you do.

22 A. Mostly, you know, they got me on board to try to -- there are
23 two owners that purchased the company a couple of years before I
24 was hired. And the company just did tours and training, and then
25 they wanted to expand it a little more. So, for that -- and

1 particularly they wanted to get into the organ transplant stuff,
2 so they needed to change things in the manual. They also needed,
3 wanted to do a 133.

4 Anyways, they hired me mostly for that, so operationally, to
5 be somebody -- because they have -- most of their employees are
6 younger, because they're -- you know, it's kind of a younger
7 company, and where the helicopter people get through, in their
8 beginning stages, you know, being an instructor, and then doing
9 some tours and stuff.

10 And so that's kind of where they were at, and they were
11 trying to graduate to a little bit more than that. So, long story
12 short, yes, just mostly doing manuals and organizational stuff and
13 procedures, and then of course as a voice to safety. The owners
14 always check with me before they do anything that's out of their
15 normal routine. So, I'm there to kind of give also advice on
16 operations.

17 Q. Okay. Do you guys have a chief pilot?

18 A. We do. Actually, his name is Brian Petschower, which we just
19 spoke about a little while ago.

20 Q. You got to be kidding me.

21 A. No. So he left Helinet about a year after I did, and -- but
22 he's a part-time chief pilot, because he live -- he works right
23 next door at Reach, so the hangar right next door. And he works
24 week-on, week-off, so --

25 Q. All right.

1 A. -- while he's at work he can still check and do stuff at
2 Orbic, and then he has got his week off that he can do that.

3 Q. I know Brian because of the accident that we were discussing
4 before, a great guy. Pass along a hello to him.

5 A. I will.

6 Q. All right. So, let's talk about the fleet that Orbic Air
7 uses for their missions.

8 A. So, right now -- well, we had two R-22s, but I think we're
9 letting go of one. We've just had too many issues with that one,
10 so we're trying to scale down the training side of it. So, one
11 R-22, we have three R-44s, with the backup one that we usually
12 have going through overhaul. So, we use the fourth one as a
13 buffer, as we do those overhauls. So, one R-22, three R-44s, then
14 we had the EC130B4, and then also an A-Star, and AS350B3e, and we
15 just acquired but we're not operating yet an EC135. But we're not
16 operating that one as of now.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And then, on our 133, we have actually four Black Hawks, that
19 we operate between Australia and here in the U.S., and I think
20 we're maybe getting something in the Philippines too. I'm not a
21 hundred percent, you know, involved in the 133 operations. I am
22 the, you know, the person that, I forget what the FAA calls us,
23 that we deal with all the manual stuff and the person of, the
24 agent in charge or something like that, whatever it is.

25 So, we do have a chief pilot that -- because I don't have a

1 lot of external load experience, or Black Hawk experience, so we
2 have a different chief pilot for the 133, 137, that does that. I
3 just deal with the, you know, the documentation side of the house
4 of that.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. And I think, as far as their aircraft, that's what we have.
7 And we have our operations a little bit split. Our main base,
8 operations base is in Burbank. And we have our maintenance base
9 in Camarillo, which is a 15-minute flight from Burbank. And then
10 there is a, almost a separate business there, because the other
11 owner -- there's two owners, Stephen Cranswick is the maintenance
12 guy, he's the director of maintenance. And so he's got a separate
13 shop called Seaview Aviation.

14 And so they actually do the refurbishing of the Black Hawks.
15 So, we've done these conversions, you know, buying from the
16 military and then converting them to firefighting machines,
17 basically.

18 Q. Okay. Okay, so let's get into the EC130, and then into the
19 mission that the accident pilots had. Tell me about this portion
20 that led to this type, this flight.

21 A. Yeah, so the EC130 and the R-44 and the A-Star, we use for
22 tours and VIP transport, and we're also getting into the organ
23 transplant. But for now, we are only using the A-Star, is the
24 only one we have configured for that mission. So, for the EC130
25 in this case, it's a pretty typical flight for us, going back and

1 forth to Vegas many times, Palm Springs. That's just what people
2 do around L.A., they go from L.A., Palm Springs, San Diego, Santa
3 Barbara, and this is what they do with helicopters. Still a
4 little -- I'm not sure why they don't choose airplanes for some of
5 these, but they don't.

6 So, in this case, I think because of the restrictions of
7 Vegas, because of the Super Bowl, some people are parking it a
8 little bit farther out, and then helicoptering in, and that was
9 the case here, I believe. So, these folks decided to go to Palm
10 Springs and charter a helicopter from there to Vegas. And that's
11 what we were doing. So what we do -- I can't remember an
12 instance, other than if it was just the flight through the middle
13 of the desert at night, because we don't -- back in the old days,
14 we used to do this all the time, right, without any, really
15 (indiscernible).

16 But we live in a different world, trying to make things
17 safer, so to that end that we have, at Orbic Air, generally a
18 little bit less experienced pilots. So, to try to make up for
19 that and the safety aspects of it, we always -- when we're flying
20 over the desert at night, we always have a safety pilot go along.
21 We don't charge extra for it, just decided that yeah, you know,
22 these flights, we're not going to do them unless we have two guys
23 up there. That's mostly to try to prevent one guy from making a
24 bad decision, you know.

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. The idea is that maybe with two guys, they can bounce off the
2 information and they can make a better choice. That's the general
3 idea.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. If it works or not, I'm not sure, but it's -- our goal is to
6 try to have a safer flight over these areas. Between Palm Springs
7 and L.A. itself, we usually, we're not that sticky about that,
8 because it's pretty much lit most of the way, along the 10. So,
9 we don't make too much of a beef about that. But Vegas or
10 anywhere over these hills, from L.A. north, we do that. So that's
11 kind of what that was, and it was -- yeah, okay.

12 Q. I'm not sure if these --

13 (Crosstalk)

14 A. -- any other.

15 Q. I think, I understand it as a VIP transport flight --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. -- from Palm Springs to Boulder City, Colorado.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. On these trips, is the nighttime operations common?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. Yeah? Okay. Do you -- have you instituted a minimum
22 altitude on these flights?

23 A. Not exactly for these flights, but for different weather
24 conditions and environments, yes we do.

25 Q. Okay. Was the flight a VFR flight?

1 A. It was a VFR flight, yeah.

2 Q. Okay. Were they operating on any type of a flight plan?

3 A. Yes. So we have a company that, with a 135. We have a
4 company flight plan. They -- we have an app called Gyronimo.
5 They put all the information in, do the weight and balance through
6 Gyronimo, including the risk assessment. That was all done. I
7 have a copy of that, and it looks like they did a pretty thorough
8 job, and accurate.

9 And so, they went through all of that. And -- yeah, so a
10 flight plan gets filed with the company. They text us when
11 they're taking off, and how much fuel they have onboard, and how
12 long the flight is. So, we can compute from that, and plus, we
13 have the SpiderTracks that we track them on. So, we're always
14 watching, and -- yeah, so all of that was done.

15 Q. Do you recall what the risk assessment value was?

16 A. I don't recall the number exactly, but I do remember that it
17 was not in the yellow range.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. It was not in the caution range. There was a couple of
20 things that they mentioned about, some possible precipitation and
21 some potential freezing stuff, but not in the route that they're
22 taking.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. So, they would be able to avoid that stuff, was my
25 understanding.

1 Q. With the SpiderTracks, do you guys use the communication
2 feature?

3 A. No. I'm not even aware of that communication feature.

4 Q. Yeah. Apparently the SpiderTracks has got some method, if
5 you get -- so it's something that you have to purchase.

6 A. Oh.

7 Q. It's been a while since I've read up on it, but the point is,
8 whatever it is, you guys don't use it to communicate.

9 A. No.

10 Q. Do you guys -- I say you guys, does the company communicate
11 via cell phone communication with the crew?

12 A. No. We do text, but obviously we only do that on the ground
13 before we take off and when we land.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. After we land.

16 Q. Do you have any texts --

17 A. No. Let me correct that. If we do have a situation like
18 this, like a second, the safety pilot, they will try to
19 communicate with him. Usually it's a group text, but the safety
20 guy will be the one interacting.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. If it needs to be, though.

23 Q. Were there any communications with this --

24 A. No, other than the attempts after we found out that we lost
25 the tracking on the SpiderTracks.

1 Q. Okay. So let's talk about that. Tell us how you became
2 aware of an issue which led to the discovery of the accident.

3 A. Well, personally, how I became aware is I got a call from
4 Brady Bowers, who is the president of the company, who was the one
5 flight following at the time. So, by the time I got the call, it
6 was already 10-something. I don't remember the exact time at the
7 moment, but I have a whole time breakdown. So that's how I found
8 out about it. But he found out about it because he was tracking
9 them, and then he noticed that the SpiderTracks stopped.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And then he started our ERP procedures shortly after that,
12 after checking, you know, trying to call and trying to text the
13 pilot and the safety pilot and all of that, and no response. Then
14 we escalated things after that.

15 Q. Okay. And then, how did you become aware that they found the
16 aircraft?

17 A. The -- Brady Bowers, the president of the company was in
18 contact. He'd called the sheriffs here in San Bernadino,
19 somewhere, and initially there was no report of anything. But
20 then, well within, I don't know, half hour, 45 minutes, I think
21 the sheriffs called him back again, and then said that there were
22 some reports of an incident of some kind.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Then there was a mention of a power line, something like
25 that, but obviously the information, at that point, was very

1 vague, and not very specific, but at that point it was fairly
2 apparent that there was something going on.

3 Q. Okay. Now, tying it all together, do you guys -- were you
4 all informed by the sheriff's department that the aircraft had
5 been found?

6 A. Yeah, so eventually Brady was notified by the sheriffs that
7 they found the wreck.

8 Q. Right.

9 A. And then eventually Brady contacted the -- so this went on
10 throughout the night, you know.

11 MR. SALAZAR: I'm going to take a break from asking
12 questions.

13 Dave, would you please introduce yourself, and if you have
14 some questions, it's your time.

15 MR. GERLACH: Thank you very much.

16 BY MR. GERLACH:

17 Q. My name is Dave Gerlach, and I'm with the FAA, Office of
18 Accident Investigation. I'm a senior accident investigator. So
19 Steve, can you talk a little bit about what your roles and
20 responsibilities are as a DO?

21 A. Yeah. I'm the director of ops for Orbic Air. I'm the one
22 who is responsible for implementing the procedural stuff, flight
23 procedures, the training program, the -- anything related to the
24 safety of flight. That all pretty much falls on my shoulders.

25 Q. You talked about training. Is there any additional training

1 that your company does with your pilots, annually, periodically?

2 A. Yeah. So for our typical pilots at Orbic, we usually do --
3 so there's a couple of things. Most of them are instructors, so
4 they're actually teaching, you know, new students themselves, on a
5 routinely, basis. So, they're instructors, all of them. There
6 may be one exception.

7 And, but I mean, in addition to that, we have at least two
8 different airframes that they typically fly, not all of them. But
9 most of the ones that fly the A-Star or the EC130 will also fly
10 the R-44 and the R-22. Therefore, they actually get training
11 twice a year, be it a different machine, but they're going through
12 emergency procedures on two different machines at least once a
13 year.

14 So, once every 12 calendar months, we have to do training.
15 This is a 135 requirement, if they're on the 135. Not all our
16 pilots are on the 135, but so they don't fly, obviously, 135
17 missions. But they are in the transitional phase. So they do all
18 get at least yearly training in each of the machines that they
19 fly.

20 And then additionally, we will -- or, and sometimes
21 concurrently with that, if they're flying the R-44, there is a
22 specific requirement for the Robinson product that the flight
23 review that they do must be in that particular ship, so that
24 there's certain maneuvers and certain training that they have to
25 go through every year, just because of that particular model, that

1 we also do. And that's all, obviously all recorded in our
2 training records.

3 Q. Does your company have a safety management system?

4 A. Yes, we do. So, the safety manager's name is Tommy
5 Stefanski. Yes, we do. And, you know, it is a fairly -- even
6 though it's not a completely new thing, we've had it for a couple
7 of years, we've been trying to be better about implementing it and
8 actually using more of it the last year or so. So, it's a
9 learning process, to try to massage the company into using it more
10 so, but we are. We do have it.

11 Q. Have you all placed any types of restrictions on nighttime
12 flying, weather?

13 A. Yes. I don't remember off the top of my head what the
14 requirements, the company minimums are, but we do -- it's always
15 above the minimum as per the FARs. But even more than that, it's
16 just, we look at each case. It's always going to be no less than
17 the minimum, but in situations -- yeah, and we have turned flights
18 down, unquestionably about, just because we just don't feel it's
19 the safe thing to do, given certain types of weather, depending on
20 the area that they go.

21 Q. Yeah. And how about night vision goggles?

22 A. We don't have those.

23 Q. You don't carry them at all?

24 A. No, we don't have those. None of our equipment, aircraft is
25 equipped for that.

1 Q. Okay. You mentioned your safety pilot. What are your
2 expectations of the safety pilot?

3 A. The biggest one is the -- as I mentioned before, is to have a
4 second set of eyes and second head, thinking about the choice
5 making, and just an extra set of, a mechanism to try to -- yeah,
6 try to help them be more responsible, you know, making the right
7 choices.

8 And an additional side thing that they will do is, obviously
9 they'll help with passenger loading, or briefing, and then
10 changing radios, and then looking at weather ahead. This is what
11 the safety pilot's position typically does. As the one guy is
12 driving the machine, the other guy is looking up frequencies,
13 changing frequencies for him, looking up weather, any information
14 that is relevant to the flight.

15 Q. Your safety pilot on this mission, was he equally as
16 qualified? Could he have been the pilot-in-command?

17 A. Not exactly.

18 Q. No?

19 A. So he was fairly new in our 135, so he is one of the ones
20 that was moving up. He's qualified in the R-44 as a Part 135, but
21 not in the 130. And this is actually an additional thing that the
22 company tries to leverage on a little is that, you know, as these
23 guys are progressing along, we try to -- as they're getting to the
24 certain phase in their experience, trying to expose them a little
25 bit into the bigger machines, to the turbine machines, as a part

1 of the training.

2 Even though it's not qualified, and we don't make it as a
3 training, it is helpful to those guys to be experienced with new
4 things and new processes, new machines, as they kind of go on.
5 And eventually, they get it to the experience level that they can
6 transition over, and then that transition is a little bit less of
7 a jump for them.

8 Q. The safety pilot, would he have been a student with your
9 company?

10 A. No, he wasn't a student of -- typically, most of them would
11 have been. This particular pilot, safety pilot, we hired him
12 after he had already completed all of his training over in, I
13 think it was at Nulton (ph.). So he had weather experience,
14 mountain experience, as far as, you know, you can have as you're
15 going through training, getting your licenses.

16 Q. So there's a -- the process then is, a new student comes in,
17 you teach him how to fly in the 22. You continue to bring him up
18 in the larger helicopters, 44s?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. And then into the turbines. And then, at some point, he
21 might become a line pilot, capable of doing --

22 A. Correct.

23 Q. -- 135 ops --

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. -- for your company?

1 A. Well no, it always -- you know, it doesn't always play out
2 exactly like that, but that's the goal we try to do.

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. Because we prefer to have people, you know, in-house, and
5 because then we can observe and see how their, you know, decision-
6 making abilities are from early on. We prefer that, but in
7 today's environment, it's not always that easy. We have done
8 that, and then some of them moved on quicker than we would have
9 liked them to. But that's the environment that we live in.

10 Q. Switching gears a little bit back to flying the helicopter,
11 do your flight crews have real-time weather available to them when
12 they're flying?

13 A. Yeah, most of them will use the ForeFlight app. So, and it's
14 pretty much what most people use, unless it's banned by the
15 company for some reason, which we don't. But they do use that.
16 But we don't have -- on that one. Actually, on that one, it was a
17 recent thing that we added the, I think it was the Garmin 650 on
18 there, that -- I didn't fly it since it was added on, but my
19 director of maintenance says that it did have the terrain built in
20 there. But it, I don't think, had the weather feature for the
21 Garmin. But it does have the terrain.

22 Q. Does your company have any specific classroom training or
23 flight training with respect to inadvertent IMC encounters?

24 A. Yeah. So in every initial and recurrent thereafter, that's
25 kind of a thing that, it's one of the requirements, actually, for

1 the FAA, for a 293 check, to have that included as part of the
2 training and checking. So, we do that.

3 Q. And what is the expectation of a pilot when he inadvertently
4 encounters IMC?

5 A. So, first to fly the machine, level the ship, and this is --
6 we do this all the time. Level the ship, no turns unless they
7 think that they're heading for the ground or the mountain. And
8 turn to the terrain page, so -- on the GPS, if it's not already on
9 there. And call for help, to the last communication source that
10 they were in, if it was either the tower, or SoCal or whoever it
11 might be.

12 And if not, then they're -- and these Garmin machines,
13 they're very easy. You push the volume button and hold down, and
14 it'll automatically go to 121.5, and then you verbalize your
15 situation, that you're in the IMC situation with a VFR ship, and
16 then ask for direction to either -- whatever, depending on the
17 helicopter that they're flying. Every one of them's going to have
18 a little bit different capability.

19 So it's either to do an ILS or some sort of an instrument
20 approach to the closest airport, or to the closest VFR weather
21 location that the controller or tower, somebody can provide.

22 Q. So, is there any expectation for the pilot to climb, descend?

23 A. Yeah, so there is that. Sorry I missed that. Once you level
24 the ship and turn to the terrain page, climb to avoid any terrain,
25 but not to do it unnecessarily. So if you are already at 5,000

1 feet, there's no sense to climb any more. So, that would kind of
2 depend on the situation, where they're at. On the situations that
3 we do the training, they are told to climb, because we purposely
4 get them around hills, so that they will have that experience. No
5 sense in doing it at 10,000 feet. You just, they can even descend
6 if you want them to, but --

7 Q. The helicopter they were flying, would it have been capable
8 of flying on instruments?

9 A. No. It's a VFR ship. So, it's limited what they can do. So
10 this is -- like I said, depending which ship that we're doing the
11 training and the checking in, there's going to be a different
12 expectation. The pilots have to know how to operate everything
13 that's in whatever machine they're flying in, because they're
14 going to get, potentially, in a situation like that, in whatever
15 machine. So, he doesn't get to choose, right. So he's going to
16 be in the one he's got, so he has to make do with what he has.

17 So that's the expectation when we're doing training and
18 checking. Whatever instrumentation he has, he's welcome to use
19 it, and he's encouraged to use it. But not all of them are
20 instrument capable.

21 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Fabian, that's all the questions I have
22 right now. Thank you very much. I'll turn it back to Fabian.

23 MR. SALAZAR: Thank you.

24 Mark, would you please introduce yourself, and if you have
25 any questions, it's your time.

1 MR. WARD: Yeah.

2 BY MR. WARD:

3 Q. Mark Ward, NTSB. Does that aircraft have a radar altimeter?

4 A. Yes. And I'm not sure, like I said, I haven't flown the
5 machine, actually even seen the machine since -- this is a new
6 thing, that they put the 650 in. I would imagine 650 also has a
7 radar readout in there somewhere, but we do have a separate radar
8 altimeter, by itself.

9 Q. Does it have the capability to do a GPS approach?

10 A. Well, the Garmin can do that but, you know, the machine won't
11 do it for you. So, you'd have to plug it in, and do that. But
12 it's not -- we're not certified to do that, as I was saying. So
13 you can do it, you can dial it in and follow the pink line, but
14 the aircraft's not approved to do that in IFR conditions.

15 Q. So the expectation with that aircraft, you would try and get
16 radar vectors to an area of VFR conditions?

17 A. In that aircraft, we train them to do both. So, we train
18 them to use the GPS to actually do an IFR approach, because in
19 that situation, even though the ship is not rated for it, it can
20 do it. We're in an emergency situation, so therefore that's how
21 we can train them. So we train them to do both, because there may
22 not be that option to just go to a VFR place, right. So, the only
23 option that may be available is to somehow get through that to the
24 ground. So, we have to train them to do that.

25 Q. The aircraft's not certified, but it has the tools to allow

1 the pilot to --

2 A. Yes, correct.

3 Q. Okay. All right. Do you know the working relationship
4 between the safety pilot and the other pilot? Did they know each
5 other? How long did they kind of know each other, and were there
6 any kind of conflicts?

7 A. Yes. So, as far as I know, no. Orbic Air is a pretty, I
8 think, very mellow company. You know, there's not a lot of head-
9 butting that goes on there. The pilots seem to all get along
10 pretty well. And the safety pilot was hired about, I think about
11 a year ago or so. And the -- yeah, I think that they have a good
12 working relationship.

13 And if there was anything that -- if they didn't have a good
14 working relationship, somehow we would have known about it, which
15 has happened in the past, here and there, very rarely. And we
16 just don't put those guys together, you know. But that's not the
17 case here. These guys were easygoing. They're very mellow, and
18 they're very thorough, you know. Always -- these two particular
19 ones always are -- if they're going to err on any side, they would
20 be, err on the safe side, you know, so they're very safety
21 conscious.

22 Q. Was this the proposed time to actually launch?

23 A. Yes. It was pretty close to it.

24 Q. Requested.

25 A. Yeah. Normally these flights are always going to be a little

1 bit late. You know, the passengers are always arriving a little
2 bit later. That's just typical. We already know that, going into
3 it. We already buffer that out.

4 Q. Was there a backup plan if weather was bad for them, to get
5 them into Las Vegas?

6 A. The backup plan is to go to a, you know, a field that's
7 closer, and then get them a limo from there. That's always the
8 backup plan, or go back to the origin destination, depending how
9 far you are from the airport.

10 Q. Do you know how often this particular had flown this route?

11 A. A few. He's one of our instructors, so I don't know exactly
12 how many, especially since, you know, this was, this is not that
13 popular, from Palm Springs to Vegas, and Boulder City only because
14 of restrictions of (indiscernible). But normally it would be
15 going out of either Santa Monica, Burbank, and then to Vegas,
16 Orange County. To go from Palm Springs to Vegas was unusual. I
17 don't think I've ever actually done it myself, maybe once. But,
18 you know, not all the time, but I've flown around.

19 So it's not that popular, but this particular situation here,
20 so to kind of address that a little bit more, in part of the
21 safety thing that we implemented, in the making sure that --
22 because from Palm Springs, look at the map, to go to Vegas, you're
23 going directly over those mountains, right. So, we don't allow
24 that at night. They have to go through the pass, and then follow
25 the freeways. That's why they were following the freeway.

1 Because Palm Springs is over here, Vegas is here, they have
2 to go all the way west and then come up this way, which is, right,
3 another 20 minutes on the flight. But that's from the safety side
4 of it. We don't want them flying over the mountains, pitch
5 darkness, over hills, you know, height, terrain, so that was part
6 of it.

7 Q. Is there any requirement for the pilots to do an instrument
8 approach, to try to get instrument approaches for, a certain
9 number per month, or on certain flights, to do any kind of
10 instruments?

11 A. No. No, because -- well, with Ben, the PIC, he does, but
12 it's not a requirement of the company. It's just a requirement
13 because he keeps his instrument ticket current. So, he did his
14 six approaches six months ago, or a little less than that, over in
15 the simulator, somewhere in Van Nuys. So, he keeps that up, but
16 it's not a requirement of the company, because we're a VFR
17 company.

18 We do instrument stuff. We require everybody to be
19 instrument rated, just as a company policy, because we also do the
20 medical transplant team. So, we want them to all graduate to
21 that, and that's a requirement. But we don't do any IFR flights,
22 so the only instrument that we require them to do is what we will
23 do in the training, and that's to meet, you know, depending on
24 what's equipped in the aircraft, either the GPS approach or the
25 ILS approach, depending on what we have in the equipment.

1 So, we will require them to do that, but it's not a
2 requirement to keep current as an instrument pilot. For one, like
3 I have my instrument rating, I want to say late 80s, maybe early
4 90s, and from that moment on, I have never been recent, and
5 current in my instrument, my entire life. So -- and I've flown
6 for a lot of companies.

7 MR. SALAZAR: Let's go ahead and take a break --

8 MR. GOULD: Okay.

9 MR. SALAZAR: -- since we're here. We'll pick it up on the
10 drive home.

11 (Off the record.)

12 (On the record.)

13 MR. SALAZAR: Okay, we're back on the record at 12:06,
14 talking with Steve Gould, director of operations for Orbic Air.

15 BY MR. SALAZAR:

16 Q. Steve, this is Fabian Salazar, operations group chairman.
17 You mentioned Euro -- what is it, EuroAir? Who's the company that
18 was using the aircraft?

19 A. EuroSafety.

20 Q. Say it again, I apologize.

21 A. EuroSafety.

22 Q. Okay. Now, does EuroSafety do any of the flight training or
23 evaluations for Orbic Air?

24 A. Yes, and no. So, our chief pilot actually is, he works for
25 EuroSafety, so he does quite a number of their training --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- for both the EC130 and the AS350, the A-Star. So, you
3 know, so he does the training for other companies, and they'll
4 come and use our aircraft. And then occasionally, they will get
5 one of our guys to be in the class with them, and then, so he
6 would train them. The only trick is, not always does he give them
7 a certificate of completion, just depending on how things go.

8 So, that's if they go through the actual class that's put out
9 by EuroSafety, right. So somebody booked it, and this is the
10 official class, and at the end they get the certificate. Well, so
11 he is the, you know, instructor for EuroSafety, so he does some of
12 our training and also checking, but because that's an in-house
13 thing, it doesn't come really together with the certificate,
14 right, because he's doing that, getting paid for by Orbic Air, not
15 by EuroSafety.

16 Q. I get it.

17 A. Hopefully I didn't confuse you too much on that, but that's
18 kind of the answer. So, they get the training, but not always
19 does it come with a certificate.

20 Q. Okay. During the training, do they cover -- and forgive me
21 if Mark already covered this, do they go over inadvertent IMC,
22 inadvertent IMC avoidance and inadvertent IMC recovery?

23 A. So, I can't speak for EuroSafety and how they do it. So,
24 when he's doing EuroSafety stuff, I believe they don't do that --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- if it's done as a class for EuroSafety. However, for our
2 training, it's part of -- it's in our syllabus, and we cover it
3 every time, because it is required. It is in the 8410 form that
4 we have to fill out for the 135. So, it is a thing that we do,
5 every single time.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. For the training and for the checking.

8 Q. Okay. Do you guys cover IMC avoidance?

9 A. IMC avoidance procedures, and there's another term that they
10 use for that, but --

11 Q. Yeah, well the whiteout, brownouts?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. Do you guys train and evaluate unusual attitude
14 recoveries?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. It's all-inclusive in that training and checking.

18 Q. And then for inadvertent IMC recovery as part of it as well?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay. Is that in your training, your --

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. -- maneuvers manual? Okay. We'll get a look at that.

23 MR. SALAZAR: For right now, that's all I have.

24 Dave?

25 MR. GERLACH: No, I don't think I have any more questions

1 either.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Okay. Mark?

3 BY MR. WARD:

4 Q. I've got one question. You've got the Blade logo on the tail
5 rotor?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. What is that program?

8 A. So Blade, I don't know if you guys know who Blade is.
9 They're a booking company. So, they book mostly -- or it's
10 actually back east somewhere. So, we have an agreement with Blade
11 that they will send us passengers, so usually VIP or groups, that
12 we'll fly them, and then occasionally, depending on what's going
13 on, they'll request that we put the Blade logo on the ship.

14 And so, I'm -- don't think that this was a Blade that
15 chartered. This might have been through the fact that we'd
16 had -- you know, our maintenance guys are located at a different
17 airport so, you know, sometimes the timing, if they're busy with
18 so much stuff, they're not going to come and rip that off
19 immediately after the flight. So it might stay there for a few
20 days after the flight that was involved with the Blade, which
21 might the case here. So, that's who they are, and we do quite a
22 bit of work for them.

23 Q. When would the pilot have come on duty that day, to fly that
24 night mission?

25 A. Typically, he would come in only a couple of hours prior.

1 But I think he -- one of them, the pilot, the PIC, I think, came
2 in a little bit earlier that day because I think he shuttled a
3 helicopter from Camarillo to Burbank. We have those details, but
4 I don't have the hour exact right now.

5 MR. WARD: That's all I have.

6 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Dave?

7 BY MR. GERLACH:

8 Q. Do you have a dispatch?

9 A. We don't have a dispatch, but we do have a flight follower.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. So, we don't dispatch. FAA has that name specified for
12 people that have dispatch training, and a license and all that.
13 So, but we do sometimes commonly refer to our flight follower as a
14 dispatch, but it's not a dispatch. So it's just a person that
15 does the flight following.

16 Q. Are they located at your office --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- facility?

19 A. Yes. So, typically it'll be the president, Brady Bowers, or
20 somebody that's going to be in the office. And we have a
21 dedicated one, but obviously, she has some days off. So, she's
22 not there seven days a week, so times that our designated flight
23 follower is not available, we have other people that are trained
24 as flight followers.

25 Q. And your flight follower, they have a desk, and computers,

1 and --

2 A. Yes, screens --

3 Q. -- access to that stuff?

4 A. Well, typically we will actually have our sky track on a big
5 screen, going constantly, so it's always going. So, but they
6 can -- yeah, on their own, at their own little desk, have a
7 computer where they can track everything.

8 Q. And for this particular flight, would there be some
9 historical information from the flight follower?

10 A. On that one, it would be through texts, because that was
11 after --

12 Q. After hours? Okay.

13 A. So we don't have somebody at their desk at the office. So,
14 we usually do that through texting.

15 Q. And would the pilot have got weather information from the
16 flight follower?

17 A. No, no. So, the pilots do that on their own. So, they do
18 all of that on their own. The flight followers, they're obviously
19 familiar with the weather stuff and what's going on, but they're
20 not a dispatch, so they don't go through that rigorous training
21 about learning about weather, even though they are very familiar.

22 Q. And what is their role, the flight follower?

23 A. The flight followers? Well they have other roles in the
24 company, but when flight following is going on, that's their
25 primary goal, to flight follow.

1 Q. I don't want to put words in your mouth, so their job is just
2 to watch the aircraft go from Point A to Point B. Is that the --

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Yeah?

5 A. Yes. But like I said, you know, this is one of their job,
6 but it is their primary one.

7 Q. Sure.

8 A. But they're doing other duties, concurrently.

9 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Fabian, that's all I have on following.

10 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Okay. Mark, anything else? All right,
11 I don't have anything else, so we're going to conclude the
12 interview at 12:15. You can go ahead and shut that down.

13 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

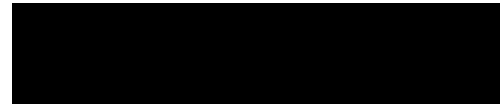
IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
Interview of Stephen Gould

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Burbank, California

DATE: February 11, 2024

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.



Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: Brian Petschower, Chief Pilot
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Monday,
February 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. SALAZAR: All right. Man, I don't know where to start. First thing, condolences. I'm sure you know the crew well, of this small company.

MR. PETSCHOWER: Yeah.

MR. SALAZAR: If there's time that you need to take a break, just let us know.

MR. PETSCHOWER: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: Okay. If there's a question that you need to talk over with John before you answer the question, just let us know that. We'll give you the room, and when we come back, we'll make whatever adjustments need to be made. It's just that you have to answer the question, and not John.

MR. PETSCHOWER: Yeah.

MR. SALAZAR: Okay. So that's the only ground rule there.

MR. PETSCHOWER: And if John wants to interrupt, then he can --

MR. SALAZAR: He absolutely can. He knows the rules well, probably better than any of us in the room.

MR. PETSCHOWER: And he has been doing his homework.

MR. SALAZAR: Mark's going to read you a statement, we're going to introduce ourselves, and then we'll get going.

MR. PETSCHOWER: Okay.

MR. WARD: Okay. The purpose of the investigation is to increase safety. We do not assign fault, blame, or liability.

1 The NTSB, I can't offer you any kind of confidentiality or
2 immunity from legal or certificate action. Transcripts will be
3 made and put into the public docket, and then you're allowed one
4 representative, which is your attorney. That's it.

5 MR. SALAZAR: All right, so you know me, but I'm going to
6 introduce myself. Fabian Salazar, I'm the operations group
7 chairman for the accident investigation that involved November 130
8 Charlie Zulu. This is Mark Ward. He is a air safety
9 investigator, assisting with operations. He's from the Alaska
10 region, and you know Steve. Steve's a party member. You know,
11 he's -- he'll be -- if he has questions, he'll be asking
12 questions. All right?

13 INTERVIEW OF BRIAN PETSCHOWER

14 BY MR. SALAZAR:

15 Q. So Brian, tell us a little bit about yourself. What's your
16 history?

17 A. At Orbic, or just --

18 Q. No.

19 A. -- in general?

20 Q. Generally, aviation history, but you don't have to go --

21 A. Yeah. I started out as an airline -- airplane pilot, back in
22 like 2004, 2005, started flying. And then I acquired my private
23 pilot's license in airplane, and then I went over and started
24 doing my helicopter rating. And after that, I was just chugging
25 along and I ended up getting my commercial license, and then my

1 CFI in helicopter. And then I went over and I finished my
2 airplane instrument rating, and then I did a helicopter add-on
3 instrument rating. So, I'm dual qualified, and I have a ATP,
4 rotorcraft, and a CFII now. And then I also have an airplane
5 commercial with an instrument rating.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I instructed for many years in the area, out of Van Nuys, and
8 ran a small like flight school that was quite similar to this.
9 And then I moved over to Helinet in 2013, flew there for nine
10 years. I was their chief pilot for four years. And then I left
11 Helinet. I came over here, because I worked with Steve over at
12 Helinet. And I liked this operation. I also (indiscernible) over
13 at Helinet as well. And so, I started working with that, and then
14 after about maybe like, I can't remember the exact time line, but
15 five months, six months, I became the chief pilot up here. And
16 I've been the chief pilot since.

17 Q. Okay, so help me out with that, about five months ago?

18 A. No, about five months after I started here. I started in
19 June or July of 2022.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Okay. And --

23 A. I think it was 2023, like maybe -- do you remember correctly,
24 is it February or March? Sort of.

25 MR. GOULD: I can't remember exactly. It was right around

1 that time.

2 MR. SALAZAR: All right.

3 MR. GOULD: Yeah.

4 MR. PETSCHOWER: February or March (indiscernible).

5 BY MR. SALAZAR:

6 Q. About how many hours of helicopter time?

7 A. I have about 6,000 and change of total time, about 5,700,
8 5,800 helicopter time.

9 Q. Okay. Tell us a little bit about your duties as a chief
10 pilot.

11 A. So I'm responsible for the, overseeing all the pilots on the
12 135 side. This operation also has a 91 side, because we do 91
13 tours, and they also do flight instruction. I don't really cover
14 that part of it. But I manage the pilots, you know, and
15 responsible with Steve to -- I'm also a check airman, so I do the
16 training and the checkrides in the turbine aircraft, not the
17 piston aircraft.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. All right. Do you have any part to play in hiring pilots?

21 A. Yes. That's -- we have like a, not a primary role, but I do
22 consult with Steve and Brady on a pilot, and we'll talk over that.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. But usually, at Orbic, a pilot will come in, on the, maybe
25 like the lower end, and then work their way up to a 135 status.

1 So, we will know that pilot on a 91 status, like they're doing
2 flight training for us, and tours for us, and then they work their
3 way up to being a 135 pilot. But it could be possible that we
4 would hire somebody straight to a 135.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. Talk to us about the company's training program, from a guy
8 walking through the front door saying, I want to learn how to fly
9 helicopters, to the end, where he may become an employee. So,
10 with regards to the training program and all the doctrine that the
11 company has, enlighten us about the entire program.

12 A. So, if a pilot were to come in the way that you suggested,
13 that they started training as like a, they're getting, acquiring
14 licenses, well then they would be assigned a CFI, or they may swap
15 around with a CFI till they find someone that suits them with the
16 company. They would go through all the training required for a
17 private pilot's license, commercial pilot's license, and then do
18 checkrides with the FAA, accordingly, for those said positions.

19 And then eventually, obviously an instrument rating as well.
20 It's not required at the time, but we really prefer an instrument
21 rating. And then, if they were to work here, then they would
22 operate as a CFI first, and then after they get a certain period
23 of experience doing that, then they would start being able to do
24 tours in a R-44, and then after that, building time, getting up to
25 maybe like a thousand hours or more. Then they can jump over to a

1 turbine, start flying the turbine process. So, there's a -- how
2 do I say it? Like natural progression, working their way up, with
3 experience.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. There's a company, EuroSafety. How do they come into the
7 picture, if at all?

8 A. So, EuroSafety is a separate company. They do have alliances
9 with Orbic, because EuroSafety does training. They specialize in
10 airframe-specific training, for emergency procedures, and systems.
11 And they're usually acknowledged and recognized by the insurance
12 companies as a factory equivalent course, like if you were to go
13 to the factory and get training. So, Ben didn't do any
14 EuroSafety, or these pilots didn't do any EuroSafety.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. So they have seen EuroSafety material, but they haven't done
17 an official class, because I'm a EuroSafety instructor in the
18 EC130 and the A-Star. So I do do that training, out of this room,
19 actually.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. So, when you do your training, is it always EuroSafety, a
23 syllabus?

24 A. For the 135? No. No. It's Orbic's 135 training program.

25 Q. Okay. All right.

1 A. Anything that would be peppered in as EuroSafety would be
2 ancillary, and in addition to, you know --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. No. EuroSafety has really good presentations, for like the
5 systems and the wiring schematics and the diagrams and that, like
6 just in a closer system, and then all their EPs, they focused on
7 EPs, like specifically engine failures and doing full touchdown
8 autorotations.

9 Q. I was just going to ask you, do you guys do touchdown autos?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Yeah we do.

13 Q. Here at --

14 A. So, at EuroSafety we do, and also at Orbic, we do.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Yeah. They're all required to do a full -- demonstrate a
17 full touchdown auto for a 135.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. To be on the 135, yeah.

20 Q. Let's talk about IMC, double IMC avoidance, unusual attitude
21 recoveries, and IIMC recovery. Do you teach that at any point
22 during the, a pilot's training?

23 A. Of course, yeah.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Yeah, it's required.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yeah, so multiple types. So every airframe that they're
3 checked out in, they would be required to -- we would train on
4 inadvertent IMC and unusual attitude recovery. And then on the
5 check ride, they would be demonstrated to -- they would be held to
6 a standard to perform appropriately.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Are those standards identified in your training syllabus?

10 A. They are, yeah.

11 Q. Okay, excellent. Excellent. Can you just go over those with
12 us? Let's say -- let's talk about IIMC avoidance.

13 A. Yeah, so first of all, avoidance is key. I always describe
14 it to them as that, you know, flying in an instrument condition is
15 taxing on the body, in general. It takes an experienced pilot to
16 succeed in something like that. But inadvertent IMC is like
17 getting sucker punched in a bar, and you get knocked down, and
18 then you have to get up, and you got to get yourself orientated,
19 right. And then you got to fight. And that's what it's like.
20 You know, it's really difficult to get out of those situations.

21 So, avoidance is the best scenario. However, if you do get
22 yourself into inadvertent IMC, you need to maintain control, and
23 establish control within the first 15, 30 seconds, and then
24 maintain that control until the panic subdues, and it goes away.
25 And then you need to check and verify that you have control of the

1 aircraft every five to ten seconds after that.

2 And then once you have control of the aircraft, then you need
3 to start a climb, generally speaking. Not all situations call for
4 a climb, but generally speaking, you want to start a climb, 300 to
5 500-feet a minute climb, and get your terrain page up on your GPS,
6 so that you can turn away from any known terrain, right. And then
7 try -- if you know where there are VMC conditions, then you would
8 try to navigate yourself to said VMC conditions.

9 And you're going to communicate. You got to talk to ATC.
10 Now, in their situation, it was probably nowhere -- no one to
11 communicate out there at that altitude. But, you know, get an
12 immediate call out, and maybe ATC can help you get to VMC
13 conditions.

14 Q. Okay. Getting back to IIMC avoidance, is there anything in
15 the company's GOM that gives guidance on how they can avoid IIMC
16 conditions?

17 A. So that question, I'm not a hundred percent sure on right
18 now, off the top of my head. But we do cover, you know,
19 especially like at night, black clouds being embedded behind black
20 terrain is definitely something to be very aware of. During the
21 day, usually you can see a cloud. So, the whole national airspace
22 system is based on see-and-avoid concept, so if you can see it,
23 you can avoid it. But if you can't, then you got a problem.

24 So, at night, it's definitely hard to determine if you're
25 going to punch into a cloud or not, especially out there in the

1 desert, you know. So.

2 Q. Okay. Segueing, or transitioning away from IIMC for a bit,
3 and talking about night flying, the aircraft had a radar
4 altimeter, yes?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. It was required for 135 operations, yes.

8 Q. Okay. Does the company have any policies on the usage of the
9 radar altimeter? Any guidance on setting it up for nighttime
10 operations, anything like that?

11 A. I'm not sure on that one.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. No.

14 Q. Do you recall if it has a low bug? Low bug?

15 A. Oh yeah, it did. I think it -- I didn't fly the aircraft
16 that much, but I believe it did. Yeah, a --

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. You can set it to like 300 feet, maybe 500 feet.

19 Q. Yeah, yeah. And then you get some sort of alarm, maybe an
20 audio alarm that --

21 A. Yeah, a tone. That's -- yeah.

22 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have for right now. I'm
23 going to hand it over to Mark.

24 MR. WARD: Thanks, Fabian.

25 MR. SALAZAR: Yes, sir.

1 BY MR. WARD:

2 Q. Yeah, Mark Ward. This aircraft just had a new piece of -- a
3 GPS installed in it?

4 A. Yeah, I heard about that the other day. I didn't -- I was
5 unaware of that, at first. Yeah.

6 Q. Do you know if there was any new equipment training for that
7 piece of equipment?

8 A. No.

9 Q. You mentioned the terrain mapping page, and it hasn't worked.
10 Is that terrain mapping, is that their iPad, their -- each one
11 with their iPads that they use, and the ForeFlight?

12 A. I am not familiar with their iPads. I am familiar with
13 ForeFlight. I can make an assumption that they were using that.
14 I used to see them carry around their iPads all the time, but
15 during training and checking events, we didn't cover ForeFlight, I
16 didn't cover using ForeFlight. We used the equipment in the
17 aircraft.

18 Q. What is -- if these -- is there any training, like a recovery
19 location if they go IMC? Is there a recovery airport that they
20 shoot this approach?

21 A. Yes, so in this aircraft, I didn't usually shoot an approach.
22 In the A-Star, when we do that training, I do shoot an approach.
23 In this aircraft, I would go out over Simi Valley, the Pyree Wash
24 (ph.) area, and then we would -- I would take the controls and
25 have them put the Foggles on, and then tell you we're inadvertent

1 IMC. You know, first thing they're going to do is maintain
2 control of the aircraft. I'm talking about training and checking
3 at the same time but, you know, maintain control of the aircraft,
4 and then, you know, get their terrain page up, would be the first
5 one.

6 So on the 430, they would do two clicks on the knob, and then
7 that would -- two clicks to the right on the knob would then bring
8 up the terrain page, and then navigate themselves away from any
9 known terrain, if there was any issues. And then they would get
10 the call out, communicate, simulate a mayday, mayday, mayday call.
11 And we would do the last know frequency that they had talked to
12 somebody, or 121.5.

13 So, usually we'd go with the last communicated frequency, so
14 in this case it would be, they had just been talking to Van Nuys
15 Tower, so they could talk to Van Nuys, or they can get a call out
16 on 121.5. Also, we would talk about, on the 435 -- 30 that if you
17 hold the flip-flop button down, the frequency flip-flop button,
18 that it'll automatically put in the 121.5 for them. So, there's a
19 little bit of crew resource management equipment that help them
20 out there.

21 And then, after that, they got control of the aircraft, I
22 would give them a heading to fly, because now I'm simulating that
23 I'm ATC. And I would give them a left turn and a right turn, so I
24 can establish that they're able to control the aircraft in a left
25 turn, right turn, no more than 15 degree bank, standard rate of

1 turn. And then I would have them do a climb up 500 feet and level
2 off, and then descend 500 feet, level off.

3 And then, in some cases, depending on how the performance is
4 going, I might have them do a descending right turn or a
5 descending left turn and then a climbing right turn or a climbing
6 left turn, not -- I would cover left and right, up and down, and
7 then a combo, with down left or down right, then up left, up
8 right.

9 And then after that, I would navigate ourselves over to the
10 Pyree Wash, and then that's where we do the unusual attitude
11 recovery. I would always do four. The first one is just a mock-
12 up one, that is a dummy one. I'd have them close their eyes, put
13 their head -- their right ear on their right shoulder, and I would
14 just fly straight and level. And I would just hold that for about
15 30 seconds to a minute. And then I'd ask them, you know, what
16 sensations they're feeling. And they would usually say that we
17 were like a descending right turn, or a climbing right turn or
18 something.

19 And I would ask them, are you sure? And then, you know, they
20 might question themselves a little bit, with their eyes closed,
21 and they can't tell. Eventually I'd have them look up, and the
22 aircraft's just straight and level. So I'd establish that you
23 can't rely on your senses, you know, so they were getting
24 sensations that they were in a turn and a dive, and stuff like
25 that, and we're completely straight and level. That's the first

1 one. That's a dummy one, to establish how important this is.

2 And then we would do, I would do like a right descending
3 turn, and then have them get out of that, and then a climbing turn
4 as well, and have them recover from the unusual attitude from
5 there, and then a spiral. So. And that was for training and then
6 also the testing side of it. That would demonstrate that.

7 And then after that, I would, I'd usually do an emergency
8 descent into the Pyree Wash, and then test on brownout, flat light
9 and whiteout conditions. Going into the Pyree Wash is usually
10 pretty dusty in there, and we can get a good simulation on that
11 stuff. So, and they'd have to -- you know, we were up at, you
12 know, 3,500, 4,000 feet, doing that unusual attitude recovery, and
13 then after they were done with that, they'd have to descend down
14 and find a spot to land, land into the wind and also, you know,
15 have -- usually a slope landing, combined with the brownout and
16 flat light conditions.

17 Q. Pretty thorough.

18 A. I actually pride myself on being very thorough, on all this
19 stuff. Yeah. So I was looking at the training records. I flew
20 with him for three hours in this aircraft and I did a one-hour
21 check ride.

22 Q. This is with Ben?

23 A. Yeah, with Ben.

24 Q. What -- you guys use safety pilots in cases with -- which is
25 amazing, and it's -- are there any defined duties a safety pilot

1 needs to do?

2 A. The second of eyes, and really the primary purpose is if
3 anyone gets incapacitated or for whatever reason, this pilot could
4 take over, but they're just really, just a second set of eyes.
5 Yeah.

6 Q. Are there approach plates kept in the aircraft, in case of --

7 A. No, I don't believe so.

8 Q. -- inadvertent IMC?

9 A. Huh-uh. They should have access to that stuff on their iPad
10 or ForeFlight, but again, I never looked at their ForeFlight.

11 Q. Can you help me understand? I mean, if you got two safety
12 pilots, he's flying on the left side of the aircraft, would there
13 be a reason that he would be, you know, a mile or so off to the
14 right side, with his view away from the lights, at night, overcast
15 or precipitation?

16 A. You know, I don't -- I just have a speculation. I'm not
17 really sure why, but usually pilots, in the U.S., travel on the
18 right side of the highways like we drive, right. And every pilot
19 kind of interprets that general rule of thumb a little bit
20 differently. But you want to make sure that if there was somebody
21 coming down the freeway, and somebody was coming up the freeway,
22 or the highway, that there's enough separation that you guys
23 wouldn't collide with each other, right. So, we -- and it's just
24 pilot technique. I don't know how far off to the right you're
25 talking about.

1 Q. Well, he's following, like you said, I think, along the
2 highway, and at some point he starts to deviate and just starts
3 moving off the right, away from the lights of the road. I'm
4 trying to -- and we're trying to wrap our head, why would he do --

5 A. Did it look like -- well I have more questions, I guess. Did
6 it look like he made a right turn or did it look like he was
7 drifting off to the right?

8 Q. It could be interpreted either way. It's a --

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. It's a turn and descend into rising terrain, and a continuing
11 increased airspeed.

12 Q. That sounds like they may have flown into a cloud, gone
13 inadvertent IMC, and maybe was trying to sort out, you know, what
14 happened, and the aircraft started descending, turning off to the
15 right, you know, or he lost visual reference with the ground,
16 because it was an overcast night, so they had -- and it didn't --
17 there's -- to my recollection, there was no moon that night,
18 right?

19 Q. Right.

20 A. It was like, a really, really dark night.

21 Q. Have you flown that area before?

22 A. Yeah, (indiscernible).

23 Q. Is there any -- is there really any light out there? Is it
24 the roads, what --

25 A. In that area, no. Usually, when I -- it depends on what

1 equipment I have on how I'm going to fly out to Vegas, but if I
2 was in their scenario where I didn't have any NVGs, and it was
3 nighttime, I would be following the 15 freeway. And I would be as
4 high as I could, legally, with the cloud layer, you know, so that
5 I have a lot of view.

6 But I have flown to Vegas once, where I was following the 15
7 freeway and then there was like a gap in the cars. And so, there
8 was a little area that was pretty dark, you know. So, but I was
9 able to see cars off in the distance, so I think, if you're low to
10 the ground, then that area that you could see would be less. You
11 know, the higher you are, the more of the 15 freeway you can see.

12 Q. How well is the backlighting on the instrument gauges in the
13 130, for night?

14 A. You know, I haven't flown that aircraft at night.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Yeah, I couldn't answer that question.

17 MR. WARD: That's all the questions I got.

18 BY MR. SALAZAR:

19 Q. Okay. Let's stick with the EC130 for right now. You flew it
20 in the daytime. About how many hours you have in it?

21 A. Maybe 50.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. I could give you a more exact answer if you want to --

24 Q. No, no. No. About 50?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. Yeah, it's very similar to the A-Star in many ways, but it's
3 a different airframe. Yeah.

4 Q. Yeah. Visibility wise, you're operating it from the left
5 seat. And if you're making a right-hand turn, you're looking
6 across the cockpit.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. How's the visibility with that aircraft?

9 A. So, the EC130 actually has a lot of visibility. It's
10 designed for visibility, for the tour industry, in New York,
11 Vegas, you know, to the Grand Canyon, and also Hawaii. That's why
12 Eurocopter designed that aircraft, just so you can see in the
13 back, for visibility for the passengers, but the pilot has great
14 visibility too. Those windows in the front are huge. They got a
15 lot of visibility for outside. And the instrument panel is
16 relatively small, compared to the windshield.

17 It's got probably the best visibility aircraft, other than
18 like a Robinson R-22, R-44, because they have really small
19 instrument clusters. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay. Just talk about training facilities for a little
21 while. For ground school training, is that done here in this
22 building?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. Your opinion on the training facility, is it adequate
25 room, inadequate room, what are your thoughts?

1 A. I think there's plenty of adequate room, because --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- we use this room. And I used to have a TV, and then
4 there's -- the instructors use that white board a lot, because
5 they like to draw with their markers. And then, we have -- Ben
6 actually had his own room, next one down. I don't know if you've
7 seen his office, but --

8 Q. No, we haven't.

9 A. -- he had his own office.

10 Q. No, I'd like to.

11 A. Yeah. We just ask -- the owner of the company made a promise
12 that we wouldn't move anything, and --

13 Q. I won't touch a thing.

14 A. Yeah, but you're more than welcome to step in and check it
15 out. He had his own little office. I would quite regularly see
16 him do training in that room, across the desk with his students.
17 And then the next room down is another instructor room, where --
18 it's more of a communal instructor room. They do training there,
19 so.

20 Q. Did Blake have a room?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No?

23 A. No.

24 Q. He was just a pilot?

25 A. Yes.

1 MR. GOULD: He was an instructor --

2 MR. PETSCHOWER: Ben was --

3 MR. GOULD: -- but not for the 135.

4 MR. PETSCHOWER: Ben was one of our more experienced CFI, and
5 we -- he was like the lead CFI. He didn't have like an official
6 title, but he was the guy running all the 91 training operations
7 and stuff like that.

8 BY MR. SALAZAR:

9 Q. Okay. All right. And you -- did you fly with both of them,
10 other than --

11 A. I've never flown with Blake.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. I need to cough a little bit. You want me to --

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. -- exit?

16 Q. Take a break. Let's take five.

17 (Off the record.)

18 (On the record.)

19 MR. SALAZAR: -- get a clearer understanding, Blake is a Part
20 91 versus Ben, Part 135?

21 MR. GOULD: Yeah. Let me qualify that one more step. So,
22 Blake did get to the point where he's a Part 135 pilot in the
23 R-44, even though he's not an instructor for the Part 135. It can
24 get kind of --

25 MR. SALAZAR: I get it.

1 MR. GOULD: So he was on the 135, but he was not checked out
2 in the 135 in the EC130.

3 MR. PETSCHOWER: He's not an instructor on the 135 sides,
4 though. It's a different set of rules.

5 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

6 MR. PETSCHOWER: And so they start out 91, and work their way
7 up to 135.

8 BY MR. SALAZAR:

9 Q. Do you guys have a written or unwritten policy to encourage
10 pilots to practice instrument approaches as part of their everyday
11 flying?

12 A. We don't have a -- I don't believe we have a written policy
13 on that.

14 Q. Okay. Do your guys, on occasion, do that?

15 A. Ben does, yeah, because Ben's a CFII. He's the primary
16 instrument instructor at the company. Yeah.

17 Q. Has any of the pilots reported to you, or to you, anything
18 derogatory, or made any complaints about either one of the crew
19 members?

20 A. No.

21 MR. GOULD: No.

22 BY MR. SALAZAR:

23 Q. That'd be a no? Okay. You gave Ben a check ride?

24 A. Uh-huh.

25 Q. Tell us about the check ride.

1 A. The training event went real smooth. I found him to be a
2 very capable pilot. And then, he handled the aircraft really
3 well. The only negative I could come up with was landing on the
4 dolly. He seemed to get a little, you know, one of those -- he
5 wasn't super comfortable landing on the dolly. But we did a
6 little, you know, a couple extra of those, and then after he
7 completed the check ride, we had him, you know, with a safety
8 pilot that was checked out in the EC130.

9 He did a couple of flights, you know, dual, with two pilots,
10 just to make sure he got some extra time where he was checked and
11 balanced, you know, other people were checking my work. But other
12 than that, you know, he's really good. He was really good with
13 instrument procedures, he was really good with the inadvertent IMC
14 stuff. He's really, really good at autorotations, especially like
15 energy management of the aircraft -- advanced autorotations, not
16 just a 180-degree --

17 Q. Surely not a --

18 A. -- or a straight-in or 90-degree auto. He could slow it down
19 to a zero-speed auto and then accelerate, and then complete a full
20 down auto.

21 Q. And this is in the EC130?

22 A. Yeah. Yeah, the training in the EC130. Yeah.

23 MR. SALAZAR: Very good. Let me see here, real quick. We
24 may be at the end.

25 Mark, you have any other questions?

1 BY MR. WARD:

2 Q. You may or may not be aware, I guess, did he have any family
3 issues, anything like a death in the family anywhere or anything
4 that was stressing him outside of work?

5 A. No, I have no knowledge of any negative stuff outside of
6 work. He had recently bought a car from one of the other pilots
7 here, Volkswagen Golf down there. He was excited about that. His
8 girlfriend was here. She dropped him off -- or a fiance, I
9 believe, sorry.

10 MR. GOULD: I think his fiance.

11 BY MR. WARD:

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. Yeah, fiance. Fiance dropped him off, so I had met her for
14 like the second or third time. They seemed to get along really
15 well. They went on a cruise prior to that day. They'd been
16 getting back from a cruise. They had got back into the Port of
17 Long Beach, I think it was, or Port of L.A. And then she drove
18 him up here. They bought the car from the other pilot, and then
19 he drove it home, and he's been driving that car.

20 He always seemed really happy, up until this incident.
21 He's -- he was really excited about getting some like animations
22 done of the R-44 and the EC130 and then having stickers made. So,
23 those pilots, they really like their stickers and stuff, so.

24 MR. WARD: That's all the questions I've got.

25 MR. PETSCHOWER: Yeah, that's the last communications I had

1 with him, you know, was about stickers and stuff like that.

2 BY MR. SALAZAR:

3 Q. When was that?

4 A. That was probably like two, three days before this happened.
5 Yeah.

6 Q. About -- this is the last question I have, so getting back
7 into controlling a -- the helicopter control during inadvertent
8 IMC. Okay. Can we put a -- can you describe a little bit more to
9 me what you would expect the pilots to do with control of the
10 helicopter if they encounter inadvertent IMC conditions?

11 A. Yeah. So you have aircraft level. You're going to maneuver
12 ourselves to Vy, which is 70 knots minus 1 per thousand feet, so
13 the vicinity of 70 knots plus or minus 5 knots. And I would call
14 that -- after they have their wings level, and they've maneuvered
15 themselves to Vy, that they have established control of the
16 aircraft. And then after that, we want to start a climb, around
17 300 to 500, nothing aggressive, just gentle climb, generally
18 speaking.

19 Now, if that -- if you have icing above you -- we do cover
20 that. If you have icing above you, you don't want to climb. And
21 then you're going to get the terrain page up.

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. So that you can avoid any known issues at the time. You need
24 to get this sorted. And then communicate.

25 Q. Yeah. So you said -- you communicated to me what I was

1 listening for, but you didn't say the word that I was expecting
2 you to say. So, thumbs up to you. So let me hand it to you this
3 way. What should they do with their heading?

4 A. Oh yeah, maintain their heading, at first, yeah.

5 Q. And you implied that because they're wings level.

6 A. Yes. Yeah, yeah, wings level. I -- yeah, you're right.

7 Well when I start assigning them headings, then you got to be
8 within -- for testing purposes, they need to be within 5 degrees
9 left or right of the assigned heading.

10 Q. Okay. And what's your guidance on after encountering
11 inadvertent conditions, turning around, doing a 180-degree turn to
12 escape?

13 A. That's not the first thing that we're going to do. The first
14 thing we're going to do is maintain control of the aircraft, and
15 make sure you have control of the aircraft. Then your terrain
16 page up and all that stuff. That -- in my opinion, that knee-jerk
17 reaction of a 180-degree turn is why a lot of pilots are crashing
18 when they go into an inadvertent IMC, because that's when they
19 ball it up in that right or left turn.

20 So you need to -- when you go inadvertent IMC, there's this
21 moment of time where you got to let the fear subdue and
22 everything, and you have to confess to yourself, like what's
23 happened. And you don't want to be in a turn, desperately trying
24 to get back around to where you came from, right away. That is
25 totally acceptable. After you get control of the aircraft and you

1 are established, and the fear's gone away, that you're IMC, then a
2 180-degree turn is not outside the realm of what you can do.

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. It's just not the primary --

5 Q. Right.

6 A. -- thing.

7 Q. Once you contact air traffic control, eventually they're
8 going to make you turn. Sooner or later, you're going to have to
9 turn.

10 A. Yeah, yeah. You're going to turn, but -- yeah. But doing
11 that, a turn right off the bat, right when you first -- it'd be
12 like, you know, you get knocked down. Like we were talking
13 about --

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. -- the metaphor in the bar, you get punched out of nowhere,
16 sucker punched, now you're on the floor, and then you just start
17 swinging for no reason, you haven't figured out where you are.
18 It's similar.

19 Q. Yeah, so that analogy that you use, is that something that
20 you use during the training and --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- discussion, you use --

23 A. The exact analogy --

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. -- we use during the training, yeah.

1 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah. All right, that's the last question I
2 have.

3 Mark? Steve?

4 MR. GOULD: No more.

5 MR. SALAZAR: All right, Brian, thank you. We'll shut the
6 recorder off.

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

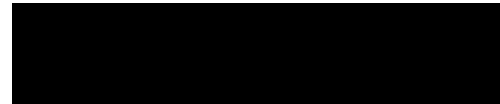
IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
Interview of Brian Petschower

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Burbank, California

DATE: February 12, 2024

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.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the transcriber.

Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: THOMAS STEFANSKI, Safety Manager
Orbic Air, LLC

Burbank, California

Monday,
February 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

MARK WARD, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

STEPHEN GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air, LLC

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Attorney
(On behalf of Orbic Air)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. SALAZAR: The first thing we'd like to do is extend our condolences to you, for your loss. We understand, with these small companies, everybody knows everybody.

MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

MR. SALAZAR: So, if things get too heavy, and you need to take a break, let us know, okay?

MR. STEFANSKI: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: We'll be happy to take a break. My name is Fabian Salazar. I'm the operations group chairman for the accident. This is Mark Ward. He's an air safety investigator who's assisting me. And of course, you know Steve. Steve's a party member. He's helping us like arrange these interviews and gather data for the investigation. Okay.

MR. STEFANSKI: Yes.

MR. SALAZAR: What we'd like to do is record this. And what we'll do is get a transcript made of the recording, and that'll be a part of the public docket. Would that be okay?

MR. STEFANSKI: That's okay.

MR. SALAZAR: All right. And we -- you -- oh, you're going to cover this, the extra person. Mark's going to read to you some information. We'll introduce ourselves, and then we'll get -- in regard to -- and then we'll get started on the interview.

MR. STEFANSKI: Okay.

MR. SALAZAR: All right, Mark?

1 MR. WARD: So, the purpose of this is for safety. We're not
2 looking to place blame on anybody.

3 MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

4 MR. WARD: We just want to find out what happened. I can't
5 promise you any kind of confidentiality or immunity, because it
6 will become part of the public docket, so we can't -- immunity, I
7 mean, for certificate, or legal actions and such.

8 MR. STEFANSKI: Understood.

9 MR. WARD: And then you're welcome to have one
10 representative, which is the attorney.

11 MR. STEFANSKI: Okay.

12 MR. WARD: If that works for you.

13 MR. STEFANSKI: Yes.

14 MR. WARD: That's all I got.

15 MR. SALAZAR: All right, very good.

16 INTERVIEW OF THOMAS STEFANSKI

17 BY MR. SALAZAR:

18 Q. For starters, please us your full name and spell it, please.

19 A. It's Thomas Joseph Stefanski, spelled T-h-o-m-a-s, middle
20 name Joseph, J-o-s-e-p-h, last name Stefanski, S-t-e-f-a-n-s-k-i.

21 Q. And do you go by Tom?

22 A. Tommy, around here.

23 Q. Okay, Tommy.

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Tell us what you do.

1 A. I am one of the line pilots for Orbic Air, also the safety
2 manager here. I do fly all the ships that we have on the fleet,
3 and have been appointed to be the safety manager as of, I believe
4 that was early this last year.

5 Q. Okay. Does the company have a safety management system?

6 A. We do. We use PRISM for our safety management system.

7 Q. Okay. I'm familiar with PRISM.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. But I haven't seen it in a while. Would you mind telling us
10 about it and some of the features that you use?

11 A. PRISM does have everything from training records to flight
12 risk analysis tools, incident reporting, and it basically has like
13 a, what we call safety locker. It has all of our, you know, S&S
14 documents stored on there. Every employee will have a log-in for
15 that, so they can access it. And then, as far as any kind of risk
16 analysis, those go through and pilots complete them before
17 flights. And then if there's an elevated risk, it does go to a
18 management for approval.

19 Q. Does that elevated risk, does it notify you via your phone,
20 or how do you come up with that?

21 A. It comes through on emails as a urgent message to be
22 addressed.

23 Q. Okay. And are there risk mitigation factors that are input
24 into there, to bring the risk down?

25 A. Correct, yes.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. This particular flight did not come up with reading an
3 elevated risk level.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So, it was not addressed to us. It was just below the
6 margins.

7 Q. Okay. Can you provide us with a hard copy of that?

8 A. We do have it, yes.

9 Q. Excellent, thank you. What are -- you're the safety manager?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. So, share with us some of your duties, as safety manager.

12 A. As safety manager is some basically, lately been just setting
13 up our S&S. It is a fairly new system to us in the last year.
14 We, or I, I should say, go through and review any incident or
15 hazard reports that come through. I address them. I do a root
16 cause analysis. Also, any elevated flight risks, I can address
17 those as well, as well as just approaching everyone for training,
18 making sure all of our employees are trained on both S&S and other
19 necessary training within the company, and just, and promoting the
20 general safety culture around the staff.

21 Q. Okay. Are you familiar with just culture?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Does the company, in your opinion, have a just culture?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Do your pilots feel like they can confess to any of their,

1 call them non-compliances, without fear of recrimination?

2 A. That's correct, yes. We are -- we have been very
3 straightforward with all of our employees and, you know, anybody
4 can come forward about anything without reprimand. And if anybody
5 ever felt uncomfortable about taking a flight, they were more than
6 welcome to say so. They would not be told they had to fly it in
7 any way, shape or form.

8 If anybody had any incidents in flight that they did anything
9 within the aircraft, you know, overspeed or something in a flight,
10 training flight or something like that, they can tell us. They
11 would not implicated -- or they wouldn't be reprimanded for it in
12 any way, shape or form.

13 Q. Okay. Okay. You mentioned hazard reporting. Have you ever
14 received a hazard report from a pilot about any flying
15 observations?

16 A. Not anything from like a in-flight, flying observation, no.

17 Q. Anything from any pilot?

18 A. We have received hazard reports before, I mean, stuff for FOD
19 on the ramp, kind of more miniscule stuff along those lines.
20 Nothing that would be towards anything of this nature with this
21 incident.

22 Q. Sure.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Yeah, small-scale stuff, I guess.

25 A. Yeah, yeah.

1 Q. Yeah. What about if a pilot sees something that concerns
2 him, does he know, or is he encouraged to talk to the boss, or
3 does he come to you?

4 A. We have multiple options. They can talk to anyone here.
5 They can talk to myself. They can talk to the boss, Brady.
6 They -- we also have anonymous hazard reporting. If anybody
7 doesn't want to come forward, and they don't want their name out
8 there, they can -- they are aware how to submit an anonymous
9 report, if that is needed. So, there are numerous ways that they
10 can reach out to someone, you know, either in person or
11 anonymously.

12 Q. Okay, very good. The company has an emergency response plan,
13 right?

14 A. That's correct.

15 Q. Do you have any involvement with that?

16 A. I do. So, the ERP that we have basically includes myself,
17 Brady, Steve, and Stephen. And that is -- that, you know, the --
18 between all of us, we pull out our manual and take the following
19 steps to approach any kind of incident, based on, you know, what
20 it is. In this particular instance, we were kind of past the
21 reporting stage when we implemented our ERP in the sense that we
22 didn't get a call saying hey, I think one of your aircrafts may
23 have been at issue.

24 It was, we noticed it dropped off the tracker. I think,
25 within ten minutes of that, Brady was on the phone with CHP,

1 trying to see if there was any reports of anything. And that's
2 when we had received news, and then we continued further with the
3 ERP.

4 Q. Okay. I mentioned it to somebody else, I don't remember if
5 it was the boss or not, but after the execution of the ERP,
6 there's a lot of things that the company learns, you know, what
7 worked good, what didn't work good.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. So I would just offer the suggestion, go through your ERP and
10 find out the things that you want to keep, and update it --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- to help you out. You know. All right. I'm going to not
13 go into your flying.

14 A. All right.

15 MR. SALAZAR: I'm going to hand it over to you, Mark, and
16 then let's focus on the safety program. And then we'll dip into
17 the flying, if that's okay.

18 BY MR. WARD:

19 Q. I guess as far as the safety program, the only question I've
20 got is the status of your NVG program.

21 A. We do not have NVGs set up yet.

22 Q. Is that something you guys are working towards?

23 A. Not at the moment.

24 MR. GOULD: Not at the moment.

25 MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

1 MR. GOULD: We were -- it's a further-down consideration, if
2 we get a little bit more into the medevac type of flights, but
3 which we don't have right now. Right now, we only do the inter-
4 facility organ transplant stuff. So, and it's usually all within
5 the city. We don't really go, like to Vegas, for instance. It's
6 just too far for these guys, for that type of program. So, yeah.
7 So we don't have any near-future plans on the NVGs.

8 BY MR. WARD:

9 Q. As far as the safety program, how do you define the duties
10 for your safety pilots, that go?

11 A. The safety pilots are there, basically as an extra set of
12 eyes. When they are onboard a 135 operation, as a safety pilot,
13 they're not manipulating controls. They are there to help look
14 outside, handle pulling up radio frequencies, checking weather,
15 things along those lines, just -- and then, additionally there in
16 the incidence that there was any kind of medical emergency with a
17 pilot-in-command, they can essentially, you know, in that
18 situation they can put the aircraft on the ground if they needed
19 to. But otherwise, they would not be manipulating controls while
20 in the flight.

21 Q. Other than text messaging, is there any flight following
22 requirements for the pilots to maintain with ATC?

23 A. No. We send messages on departures and arrivals, and then we
24 have the GPS tracking that we use as a supplement for ourselves,
25 to monitor aircrafts.

1 MR. WARD: That's all the questions I got.

2 BY MR. SALAZAR:

3 Q. Okay. Getting back to that safety pilot, I just thought of
4 something. An extra set of eyes is fantastic. Is there a reason
5 that the company has the pilot-in-command as the sole manipulator
6 of the flight controls and the safety pilot just as an extra set
7 of eyes?

8 A. Well, I'm looking at it in the aspect of safety pilot being a
9 separate terminology from like a second-in-command type of deal,
10 where basically with a safety pilot, it can be a pilot that is
11 familiar with the aircraft and not, per se, checked out on the
12 aircraft to, for 135 operations. So, that way they're -- you
13 know, if 135, they're actually not allowed to manipulate the
14 controls if they're not signed off on that aircraft. So that's
15 why it's the -- you know, pilot-in-command's the sole manipulator
16 in those instances.

17 MR. GOULD: I can elaborate a little bit on that.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Please.

19 MR. GOULD: So, in the small aircraft, and all the aircraft
20 that we have, certainly, there is no SIC, right, so there is no
21 such designation as SIC. So the PIC has to be, by regulation,
22 assigned as the PIC from beginning to end. So, there is no way
23 that we can allow the other guy to fly it, other than an emergency
24 which, you know, takes those regulations out the window anyway.

25 So, that's kind of the biggest reason, is that we have to

1 have one assigned as PIC from the beginning and ending. Now, it
2 can be switched somewhere after the landing. It can't be switched
3 in the middle of the flight.

4 MR. SALAZAR: Got it.

5 MR. GOULD: So if they have like multiple legs, so -- not
6 that we've ever done this, I don't think we have, but we could,
7 theoretically, have two pilots that are qualified as PIC in that
8 aircraft, but one have PIC from, you know, A to B, and then they
9 switch, okay, now you're --

10 MR. SALAZAR: Sure.

11 MR. GOULD: -- PIC from B to C, but we have a --

12 MR. SALAZAR: They switch seats?

13 MR. GOULD: Yes, but never in the middle of the flight.

14 MR. SALAZAR: Right.

15 MR. GOULD: There's always only one.

16 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

17 MR. GOULD: So the other guy is just, we've assigned that
18 specifically for that, because we can't assign SIC to a ship that
19 doesn't have that.

20 MR. SALAZAR: So it's to, it's just to remain in compliance
21 with Part 135?

22 MR. GOULD: Yes.

23 MR. SALAZAR: Got it.

24 MR. GOULD: And then so the main reason the SIC, well the
25 safety guys is for the safety aspects of it. But we don't assign

1 an SIC, to be compliant with 135.

2 MR. SALAZAR: And then, following those, I'll ask you, but if
3 you don't know, I don't know is a perfectly acceptable answer.

4 MR. GOULD: Okay.

5 MR. SALAZAR: But Steve, if you know -- with that, what you
6 just explained, that would not prohibit the safety pilot from
7 making adjustments, making -- changing radio frequencies, or --

8 MR. GOULD: No, no.

9 MR. SALAZAR: -- doing the other --

10 MR. GOULD: It's just the flight controls.

11 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

12 MR. GOULD: Flight controls.

13 MR. SALAZAR: It's just the manipulation of the flight
14 controls --

15 MR. GOULD: Yes.

16 MR. SALAZAR: -- that is not going to happen?

17 MR. GOULD: Correct.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Unless an emergency occurs?

19 MR. GOULD: Yes.

20 MR. STEFANSKI: Correct, yes.

21 MR. SALAZAR: And in that case, you're going to do what's
22 necessary to rectify the emergency?

23 MR. GOULD: Yes.

24 MR. STEFANSKI: Yes, correct. And thank you, Steve.

25 MR. GOULD: I understand.

1 MR. STEFANSKI: Put my thoughts into words --

2 MR. SALAZAR: All right.

3 MR. STEFANSKI: -- much better.

4 BY MR. SALAZAR:

5 Q. All right. So, I don't have any more safety questions.

6 A. Okay.

7 Q. Okay? So we'll set safety aside, unless -- is there anything
8 you would like to tell us, safety wise, for your safety duties?

9 A. I can't think of anything at the moment that I could add.

10 Q. Okay. Okay. Well let's transition to flying the EC130.

11 A. Okay.

12 Q. How long -- how many hours do you have in the EC130?

13 A. Probably, I want to say 250, 300, somewhere in there.

14 Q. Okay. And you may have already covered it, but I forgot your
15 ratings.

16 A. Commercial rated.

17 Q. Okay. Instrument rated?

18 A. No, sir.

19 Q. No?

20 A. No, sir.

21 Q. Okay.

22 MR. GOULD: He is the only exception. He's, you know, been
23 working on that for the last few months.

24 MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

25 BY MR. SALAZAR:

1 Q. You'll wonder why you never -- you know, never mind. Have
2 you made charter flights with the company?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Okay. When you receive a charter flight, what information do
5 you receive about the people that you're transporting?

6 A. We get their names, body weights, any luggage and weights
7 associated with that. And I want to say that's pretty much it
8 for --

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. -- passengers, yeah, and we get their --

11 Q. Have you ever --

12 A. -- yeah, we get what we need for a manifest.

13 Q. Have you ever flown a charter flight with somebody like a
14 celebrity?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. When you flew with that person, were you made aware of
17 who that person was?

18 A. Before the flight, yes.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. A lot of times it may be right up to the last minute before
21 the flight, but before we leave here, we have names and weights so
22 that we can complete an appropriate flight manifest for the
23 charter.

24 Q. Okay. Any additional instructions when flying a celebrity or
25 somebody of importance?

1 A. Not any special instructions other than, you know, sometimes
2 being discreet about who your passenger is, don't, you know, go
3 around telling everybody at the FBO and everything, oh I'm flying
4 so-and-so, but that's --

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. -- like the only thing special for celebrities.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. It's -- you know.

9 Q. Any pressure from the boss or anybody else about, got to get
10 these guys to some, you know, some place at a certain time?

11 A. It's a -- not at all. Doesn't matter who they are. It could
12 be someone we've never heard of, or biggest name celebrity we
13 have, it's the same rules. It's --

14 Q. Very good.

15 A. If you're comfortable with it.

16 Q. All right. Does the company encourage -- well, I mean, let
17 me put it to you this way. What is the understood action if
18 you're transporting somebody on a charter, it doesn't matter who
19 it is, when you run into adverse weather?

20 A. Well, we train for this and, you know, as far as different
21 conditions, ideally, if you are able to divert prior to entering
22 any kind of IMC conditions, that's encouraged. You know, one
23 thing that we've always tried to stress is, you're in a
24 helicopter, you can land if you need to. It's -- you know, it
25 doesn't matter if you're landing on the side of the road, that is

1 an option for you, if you need it.

2 As far as entering IMC conditions, if you do get into it
3 not -- unknowingly, and you're there, we're taught the Cs, you
4 know, control, climb, course and communicate. We have terrain
5 programs on the units in the helicopters, so part of our training
6 is to turn to the terrain awareness screen, and that way there you
7 can, you know, set a course to head to an area that's clear of any
8 terrain. And that's all been deeply embedded in our heads from
9 day one.

10 Q. Okay. Let's dig a little bit deeper into control, and your
11 Cs.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Be as detailed as you can. Tell me all the things that
14 you're going to do to maintain control.

15 A. Oh, it starts by just looking at your instruments. You want
16 to level the aircraft, look at your attitude indicator, monitor
17 your vertical airspeed, your altitude, make sure that everything
18 is matching up, attitude indicator showing you're flying level,
19 okay, is your vertical airspeed also zeroed out? Is your altitude
20 staying level? And your airspeed's not increasing, decreasing.
21 And just basically stabilize the aircraft. First thing is fly.
22 Just focus on making that aircraft go straight and level, and then
23 start to do what you need to do to get out of it.

24 Q. Okay. All right. Well speaking of flying, the EC130, I've
25 never flown one. I'm a 20-year helicopter pilot with the Army.

- 1 How is it to fly?
- 2 A. It's a -- I always used to joke, it's like driving a boat.
- 3 Q. Is that so?
- 4 A. It floats, and it's very, very easy to fly. It doesn't want
5 to get away from you. Straight and level is pretty easy in it.
6 Now I can't say myself that I've flown into IMC conditions in that
7 aircraft, or any aircraft for that matter. I'm -- that's why it's
8 hard to speak on that, but yeah. The aircraft itself was easy to
9 fly.
- 10 Q. Daytime VFR, no wind, it's a sweetheart to fly?
- 11 A. It's a sweetheart, yeah.
- 12 Q. Is it forgiving?
- 13 A. It is, yeah. It's -- you know, it's like flying a boat.
- 14 Q. Yeah, yeah. So if you put in a control input and it's a
15 little bit too much, is it easy like to just take it out, and it's
16 not going to --
- 17 A. Yeah.
- 18 Q. -- react?
- 19 A. Yeah. It doesn't jolt around on you. It's --
- 20 Q. It's not like an MD 500?
- 21 A. Yeah. It's -- it'll move, don't get me wrong.
- 22 Q. Yeah.
- 23 A. But it's a stable aircraft.
- 24 Q. Power wise?
- 25 A. It's very good on power.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. I mean, for carrying six passengers, sometimes with luggage,
3 it did well.

4 Q. Yeah, all right. All right. Visibility, what are your
5 thoughts on the visibility?

6 A. It's probably got the biggest windows of any aircraft I've
7 flown in.

8 Q. Yeah?

9 A. And it's --

10 Q. So if you're looking across cockpit for a right-hand turn,
11 any restrictions to looking out to the right?

12 A. The only thing less than -- I'll plainly say has less than
13 that, will say is a Robinson, but that's because you're
14 practically sitting on both sides at the same time.

15 Q. Isn't that something?

16 A. The -- yeah. It is very clear, easy to see out both sides of
17 the aircraft. Had -- even in a hard bank, you had the roof
18 windows that you could look out of.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. See above you. Yes. It was good visibility.

21 Q. Now, what about the instrument package on it? Does the
22 attitude indicator, did it precess? Would it -- when you glanced
23 down at it, was it ever off?

24 A. No. It was, I mean, within very little margin. I mean,
25 they -- I have seen plenty of attitude indicators that have a

1 little bit of wobble, but this one was, it was pretty dialed in.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I wouldn't say I ever saw it get anything where it was, you
4 know, off by more than a degree or two.

5 Q. Okay. So when you did find yourself in training or
6 evaluation where you're doing unusual attitude recoveries --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- or maybe basic instruments --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- how was it to fly?

11 A. It was easy. I mean, I am not instrument rated, but I have
12 had my share of instrument training throughout the years. I just
13 never took that last step yet. So, as far as that goes, you know,
14 getting it leveled out and, you know, flying straight and level,
15 starting to do this moderate climb and then figuring out which way
16 you wanted to go was, you know, second nature.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. It was pretty easy to do.

19 Q. Okay. So I'm gathering that it's a pretty easy aircraft to
20 fly, had plenty of power?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Instruments, there were no -- nothing really bad to say about
23 the instruments?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Okay, very good. All right. Well that's all I have for

1 right now.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Mark?

3 BY MR. WARD:

4 Q. How do you guys set -- has anyone actually had to land and
5 get alternate transportation for their passengers since you've
6 been here?

7 A. Not for any weather-related thing. And when I say this,
8 there was one instance, and this was a very long time ago. I'm
9 going to start by saying I've been working here close to ten years
10 now, when it was under previous ownership and everything too. We
11 had aircraft that had to land on the side of the road for a, well,
12 warning lamp. I can't even tell you what it was at this point, it
13 was so long ago. But that was the only time that anything like
14 that's happened. And then -- but nothing for weather yet.

15 We've been very diligent about watching weather and, you
16 know, making that decision before you're in that circumstance.
17 And by me saying that, you know, that is an option for you,
18 it's -- that's the last-moment option. You know, like -- you
19 know, if you have to, don't be afraid to, but if -- not saying
20 that, you know, we use that as a frequent thing. It's -- you want
21 to make that far before you get to that stage.

22 Q. Who would you guys call at 10 o'clock at night, to transport
23 people if --

24 A. Brady, myself, Steve, any one of the, you know -- what we --
25 I refer to as basically our safety committee too is, you know, any

1 one of these guys. We're all on -- have our phones readily
2 available, any time of the day.

3 Q. So if someone called you and said hey, I'm on the side of the
4 road, my pax are here, who are you calling? What are your steps
5 to make sure they get picked up?

6 A. My first call would be to call Brady, president of the
7 company, and then together with him, develop a plan for, okay,
8 what do we need to do? I mean, our first step would be making
9 sure, obviously, everybody's okay. If there's any emergency
10 services that are needed for anything along those lines, make sure
11 that, you know, it's okay, safe landing, everyone's good to go.

12 Following that, I suppose would be just contacting some kind
13 of car service or something to go, you know, pick people up. If
14 there's nothing available, I mean, I'll just hop in a car myself
15 and start driving, for that matter. But yeah, and then if there's
16 any -- you know, if there's -- just kind of talking out loud, you
17 know. If somebody lands on the side of the side of the road, you
18 might want to contact Highway Patrol, say hey, we know this has
19 happened, this was a weather landing, you know, for safety, and
20 stuff along those lines.

21 And I can't say we have an exact procedure implemented for
22 that. Like I said, it hasn't been something that's come up, other
23 than -- you know. It's an option that's there, and then worry
24 about those details later.

25 Q. So that the aircraft had some new GPS just installed on it?

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. Any new equipment training set up for that, for the pilots?

3 A. So, it was new to the aircraft, but it wasn't new to our
4 fleet. Our A-Star helicopter has the same equipment in there, so
5 we are familiar with it. We've used it before. So, for this
6 particular addition to this aircraft, it was no change, but again,
7 we've -- we were familiar with the equipment.

8 Q. So Benjamin -- they were used to --

9 A. Yeah. They had both, you know, flown with me on numerous
10 occasions in both aircrafts, and including the A-Star, which has
11 that equipment, and they've used it with me, and had had -- been
12 familiarized with it.

13 Q. In this aircraft, the radar altimeter, does it have a low
14 bug, where you can actually set an altitude, if it gets down to
15 it, it gives you an audible warning?

16 A. It does, yeah.

17 Q. Is there anything in place that it's set at?

18 A. I don't believe so, no.

19 Q. You mentioned it has terrain warning capabilities. Was that
20 part of the ForeFlight, or part of the aircraft?

21 A. So, the new -- well actually, any of the Garmins, they have a
22 terrain map on there, that you can go to, even the old one. The
23 new one's a little bit more detailed than the older ones. Well, I
24 flew with the older model ones, but also ForeFlight has terrain on
25 it as well. But, you know, the -- we are taught, in our training,

1 using what's in the aircraft, not what you have, supplementally.

2 Q. So the aircraft had an alarm. Is that something that you set
3 up, or is it already -- is it something the pilot has to set up on
4 each flight, or is it like preprogrammed at a certain altitude?

5 A. There is a dial that you can turn into (indiscernible), you
6 know, a pilot would -- if they had an altitude they wanted to set
7 that for, they could set it. They're wouldn't be able to
8 preprogram.

9 Q. So if you were flying this aircraft and you came in to land,
10 you would never hear an audio for terrain warning?

11 A. Correct, yeah.

12 MR. WARD: Okay. No more questions.

13 MR. SALAZAR: Steve?

14 MR. GOULD: No.

15 BY MR. SALAZAR:

16 Q. Okay. You mentioned you were here when the company was owned
17 by the previous owner.

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. What did you see when the ownership changed hands?

20 A. I couldn't have imagined a better couple of guys to take over
21 for the previous owner. They stand up, you know. The safety
22 warning, I'd say they were very diligent how everything from, you
23 know, maintenance on the aircrafts to operations. And there was a
24 lot of changes that took place when we went from a small, single-
25 owner company to having multiple owners and larger aircrafts, more

1 fleet, in the sense that these guys came in and they really
2 implemented a structure for the company.

3 Not to talk bad about the previous owner or anything, and by
4 all means, I don't think he did anything wrong. I'm not saying
5 that at all. But the new owners really kind of increased that
6 safety culture and that just culture that we were talking about.
7 And they were -- when they took over, they were, you know, kept
8 everything the same, as far as employees. You know, nothing
9 changed there. There was nobody in fear of losing jobs or
10 anything like that.

11 And they just said, you know, we're here, we're just going to
12 gradually switch things over, and hope to grow this company in
13 good ways. And then, that's what I have seen so far.

14 Q. Okay. Did you fly with both Ben and Blake?

15 A. I did, yes.

16 Q. Would you mind telling me a little bit about your flights
17 with Ben?

18 A. He was a stand-up pilot. He was very diligent about
19 everything that he did. He always wanted to know how every little
20 thing worked. So, for example, like flying in our A-Star and, you
21 know, when we were talking about the radios, he was in there, you
22 know, playing with them and, you know, when we're flying around
23 and just, you know, seeing how they all work on the first time
24 that I flew with him that one. And, you know, it's -- if you
25 asked him a question about an aircraft, he knew it.

1 He was our lead instructor here, and he -- for a good reason.
2 He was good at it. And I would say that he flew calmly, kept a
3 straight head on his shoulders. Yeah, the whole thing is kind of
4 just disbelief and puzzling to me because knowing both those two
5 guys, it's hard to see that this happened.

6 Q. What about Blake?

7 A. I mean, all the same. He was young, he was motivated and
8 he -- you know, but never motivated to the point where he would
9 push any boundaries or anything. He -- I can confirm that Blake
10 has turned down a flight before because of weather. And he's come
11 to me and said hey, I don't like the weather outside, I don't want
12 to fly. And we said, no problem. So, it's not that they were
13 ones to, you know, want to push flights to try to make a map. And
14 it's -- there's no reason for it.

15 Blake -- same thing. He was, I mean he was very, you know,
16 motivated to be in the books, learning about these aircrafts. I'm
17 trying to think what else to say about him, but he was a good
18 pilot. None of these guys were ones that I ever saw taking risks,
19 or doing anything, you know, that I didn't agree with, in that
20 manner.

21 Q. So, as the safety guy, did anybody ever once come to you with
22 a complaint about either one of these two pilots?

23 A. No. No, not once.

24 Q. Okay.

25 MR. GOULD: Well, that's all the questions I had. Steve?

1 MR. WARD: I've got one alibi.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Okay, please.

3 BY MR. WARD:

4 Q. Have you flown this route, this particular area before, that
5 they flew in?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Have you flown it at night?

8 A. I have.

9 Q. How difficult is it to fly that at night, without the lights
10 of the road? With no moonlight.

11 A. No lights on the road, no moonlight, it would be difficult.
12 The aspect of this flight was that, you know, the 15, from when I
13 have flown it, is lit up, especially on busy weekends.

14 Q. If those lights were to go away as you're flying up that
15 road, just turned off --

16 A. Yeah. It would be --

17 Q. How would you describe that flight, or how hard it would be?

18 A. No different than IMC.

19 MR. WARD: That's all I have.

20 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Well Tommy, thanks for coming in.
21 We'll shut the recorder off and terminate the interview.

22 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

23

24

25

CERTIFICATE

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

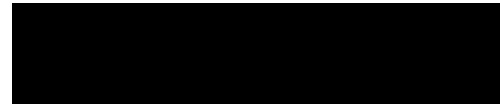
IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Thomas Stefanski

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Burbank, California

DATE: February 12, 2024

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.



Pamela C. Jacobson
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

Tuesday,
March 5, 2024

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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I N T E R V I E W

(7:51 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: Okay. Good morning. It is March 5th, 2024. The time is 7:51 Pacific Standard Time. We're at Orbic Air conducting interviews with Steve Gould today. I'm Katherine Wilson, I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. We'll go around the table and have everyone introduce themselves for the record. Fabian?

MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar, operations.

MR. GERLACH: David Gerlach, FAA IIC.

MR. HEMBREE: And I'm Jonathan Hembree. I'm an attorney for Orbic Air.

MR. GOULD: I'm Steve Gould, director of operations, Orbic Air.

DR. WILSON: Great. So as we told you the first time we were here and interviewed you, we're here just from the safety side of things. We don't assign blame as a part of our investigations. We just really want to prevent something like this from happening again. And you, with your position at the company, can help, you know, shed some light on the operation and fill in some of the gaps that we have. We'll each take a turn asking questions one at a time. We'll probably do two rounds of questions. The second round will be much quicker. Other than that, if you need to take a break or confer with your attorney, that's okay as well. Just let us know. If I ask you a question that you don't understand --

1 MR. GOULD: Okay.

2 DR. WILSON: -- ask me to clarify, or if you need to get back
3 to us with an answer, that's okay, too. We're not conducting an
4 oral here or anything. Do you have any questions for us before we
5 get started?

6 MR. GOULD: No.

7 DR. WILSON: Okay. With that, as the -- and so I know that
8 I've interviewed you before. I did review that interview, so I'm
9 going to try to not ask duplicate questions, but some of these
10 questions may seem like I'm jumping around some also, but I just
11 have some clarifying things based on the first interview that we
12 did with you.

13 MR. GOULD: Sure.

14 INTERVIEW OF STEVE GOULD

15 BY DR. WILSON:

16 Q. So if you could just give me an overview, as the director of
17 the operations, what your duties and responsibilities are?

18 A. Well, you know, the Thursday, the FAA specifications were,
19 you know, we have it lined up of all my duties. But, essentially,
20 I -- just as the title says, I'm director of operations. I set
21 the policies, I write the manuals. And then I make sure that, as
22 much as I can, that everybody is following the policies and the
23 rules. And also the -- one of the check airmens and instructor
24 pilots of the company.

25 Q. Okay. Thanks. And, Steve -- is it okay if I call you Steve?

1 A. Sure.

2 Q. I should have also gotten this for the record. We are going
3 to be recording and transcribing the interview, and the transcript
4 will be a part of our public docket. Is that okay with you?

5 A. Yep.

6 Q. Perfect. And how long have you been the DO here?

7 A. A little less than three years.

8 Q. Were you hired to be the DO, or did you --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- come in as a different position? Okay. You mentioned
11 making sure that pilots are following the rules. How do you do
12 that?

13 A. Well, really just by talking to them, and then listening to
14 other pilots saying whatever, and then also when I fly with them.
15 So I have to observe everything that they do, and, yeah. And then
16 chitchatting, not necessarily interviews, but by talking with the
17 airmen.

18 Q. Orbic Air, do they have a flight data monitoring program?

19 A. No. We do have the Spidertracks. Not sure if you call that
20 that specifically, but that basically aids us in locating the
21 aircraft and keeping tabs on it, which also helps with observing
22 and seeing if they're breaking rules or not.

23 Q. Do you serve in that role ever as a flight follower?

24 A. I'm part of the group that -- so we do most of the stuff
25 through texts. So, yeah, so if somebody's not watching and they

1 see that there's a not a response, then I jump in and do that as
2 well. And then, you know, I used to be here more, and now I'm off
3 and on from the office to here. But we have our screen over in my
4 office there, so I would always be constantly watching it. But
5 lately, but a little bit less so.

6 Q. When you said that you -- and I don't -- help me recall what
7 you said about, you mostly communicate with texts -- via texts.

8 A. Yep.

9 Q. Who are you communicating with?

10 A. Well, with the pilots that are doing charters. So if it's a
11 135 flight, not so much on the other flights, we usually let
12 somebody here in the office observe that. Like I said, we have
13 the screen over there that we're always watching where the
14 aircraft are. But whenever there's a 135 flight, then mostly the
15 way we'll communicate is between me, Brady, and the chief pilot,
16 and the -- whoever may be extra as a flight follower. So we all
17 gets those texts. When the pilot takes off, you know, how much
18 fuel, how many souls, and data, et cetera.

19 Q. Any communication with the pilots once they're airborne?

20 A. Not unless there's two pilots. So if there's two pilots,
21 then the other person -- if there's something critical, then we'll
22 communicate that way.

23 Q. And do they communicate via Spidertracks? Do they --

24 A. No. Through a text.

25 Q. -- they text if they're -- okay. February 9th, the day of

1 the accident, can you walk me through your day, your interaction
2 with the pilots, anything that you had, you know, your knowledge
3 of the flight and how it progressed until you found out about the
4 accident?

5 A. Well, I wasn't here on Friday, that day. And then it was a
6 little bit later in the afternoon when they took off from here to
7 Burbank. I mean to Palm Springs. So my first knowledge of it was
8 the text, the flight following texts that I was included on. So I
9 was aware the flight was going, but didn't interact with the
10 pilots until -- I can't remember now if it was Brady or Steven
11 that called me at night when it was already happening.

12 Q. And what was your role once you found out that something was
13 happening?

14 A. To call the NTSB and start our flight-locating procedures.

15 Q. And are those flight-locating procedures detailed in the EP?

16 A. Yeah. And it was already halfway going anyways because Brady
17 had already done some of it.

18 Q. The text that you received from the crew when they were in
19 Palm Springs, who sent that?

20 A. I can look it up and see. I don't remember exactly. Could
21 have been any one of those two because that's what typically, you
22 know, when we have the two-pilot situation, depending on who is
23 doing what and the -- how the situation is progressing, it's
24 sometimes the PIC might be interacting with the customer, so then
25 usually defer back to the safety guy to do the texting back and

1 forth. So let's see if I can find that. Yes, it was Ben.

2 Q. Thank you. And anything unusual about the text?

3 A. Absolutely nothing. Very, very typical.

4 Q. You mentioned the second pilot I think in the interviews
5 before, they were -- he was referred to as a safety pilot. What
6 does that mean?

7 A. Well, it's really a second set of eyes, a second head to
8 making sure that the flight's going according to plan. We use it
9 as a -- there's a couple of different things that happen. So
10 mostly for the safety, just having another guy there to interact
11 and check conditions, and in some cases, it can help for looking
12 up frequencies, checking the weather and that type of stuff. So
13 we -- there are two situations that we would have a safety pilot
14 or a second pilot on there. One of them, which is a little bit
15 more on the rare side, is if the customer requests. Sometimes
16 there is that. But in most cases, we do that on our own,
17 depending on the flight, and this definitely is one of them, this
18 type of flight going at night to the desert, we usually almost
19 always -- the only exception that we would normally make for that
20 is if somebody much more experienced and that had already done
21 those kinds of flight, they would go. But typically, that's what
22 we do.

23 Q. Is that position of a safety pilot, is that documented in a
24 manual or anything?

25 A. No.

- 1 Q. Okay.
- 2 A. It's just an internal thing that we do because we think we
3 should.
- 4 Q. You mentioned that they might be checking weather in-flight.
5 How would they do that?
- 6 A. On ForeFlight.
- 7 Q. And --
- 8 A. And also --
- 9 Q. -- they have an iPad?
- 10 A. Yeah. Just ForeFlight.
- 11 Q. Okay.
- 12 A. Seeing it.
- 13 Q. On a personal iPad?
- 14 A. Yes.
- 15 Q. Does Orbic issue iPads, or they have their own iPads?
- 16 A. No, they have their own.
- 17 Q. Okay. And so then they would have to have some kind of
18 service in order --
- 19 A. Yes.
- 20 Q. -- to be able to. What about -- so flying, you know, night,
21 through the desert. It's my understanding they were supposed to
22 be following the highways. Do they have something -- is there
23 something in the aircraft like a moving map to --
- 24 A. Oh, yeah.
- 25 Q. -- so they're --

1 A. Yeah. And then that one just got -- just before the flight,
2 had a brand new Garmin 650 installed which has the terrain page
3 and all that stuff on there.

4 Q. Does it have weather on it?

5 A. That I'm not sure. I didn't fly it since it was installed.

6 Q. How similar or different -- well, let me back up. What was
7 on the airplane -- or the helicopter before?

8 A. Just a Garmin 430.

9 Q. Okay. Is this system pretty similar so the pilots --

10 A. Oh, yeah.

11 Q. -- should have an easy time using it?

12 A. Yes. And the A-Stars got one as well. So Ben had definitely
13 been in the A-Star a few times as a second pilot or a safety
14 pilot. And he's our -- was our instrument instructor, so he was
15 very familiar with all the avionics that we have in all our
16 aircraft.

17 Q. The accident helicopter was VFR only?

18 A. Yes. All of them are.

19 Q. Did the pilot -- Ben did a risk assessment prior to -- or
20 earlier in the day. For what flights do they need to do a risk
21 assessment?

22 A. We require them to do it for all flights. It's not required
23 by the regulations as you know, but it is a standard procedure
24 that we do for all flights. All flights, excuse me, all 135
25 flights, all charter flights. We don't do them for our training

1 flights. We don't do them for the Part 91 stuff. But for all
2 charter flights, 135 flights, the -- and the HAA flights are
3 specifically required by the regs.

4 Q. Is there guidance on when the risk assessment should be
5 completed?

6 A. Like the timing of it?

7 Q. Yes.

8 A. Other than before flights, no.

9 Q. Okay. What is the expectation of when perhaps a risk
10 assessment should be updated?

11 A. Whenever there's significant change in the weather or any
12 other conditions like an aircraft or duty times, and that type of
13 stuff. And that's usually only -- it's not documented or it's
14 covered in training.

15 Q. And in terms of getting updated weather, what is the
16 expectation for pilots to be receiving that?

17 A. Again, on that one, I don't think there's anything
18 specifically written in our manuals. But we obviously, look at it
19 before takeoff one more time, you know? So -- especially if we
20 know that there is some weather. You know, me personally, you
21 know, not the best at it as far as looking at the weather as much
22 as these guys do, and I always love it that they do that because I
23 think there's been on one or two occasions that they asked me
24 about when I was taking off on a flight and they're always looking
25 at the weather. And I'm not as good as they were.

1 Q. The risk assessment, it's done on a computer or an iPad?

2 A. Yes. So we kind of went through a little transition where we
3 had from -- but they're both the same. We have a risk assessment
4 that we do on a program called Gyronimo, which is easier to do
5 because it allows you to save some specific settings. And then we
6 have the other one from -- through this website called PRISM, and
7 that's the one that they did it on. And that one is quite not so
8 easy to use. Well, easy -- they're all easy, but it doesn't save
9 any of your previous, so -- which means that they would have had
10 to physically click on whatever information they want. To where,
11 me, I have, you know, the Gyronimo saved, and I have one for day
12 and one for night with everything good, and I just know that,
13 okay, everything -- if everything is good, that a risk assessment
14 is good, and I'm just going to sign it go. But if I know, okay,
15 the weather is less than good, or the aircraft's less than good,
16 or whatever it is and they can just go to that section, click
17 that, and then send it. But the one that they completed that
18 night is the other one, so. But the questions are exactly the
19 same. We made a copy of both of those, so there's no differences
20 in numbers or anything like that.

21 Q. And then once the risk assessment's completed, they would
22 submit it online?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. And does anybody receive that?

25 A. No. We only receive it if the risk assessment is elevated.

1 So once it gets to the yellow range, then I'll get an email.
2 Brady gets an email, and I think Brian Petschauer, the chief pilot
3 gets an email. And then it's one of us has to approve it before
4 the flight goes.

5 Q. And that didn't happen for this flight?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Is the risk assessment -- I know you said you might not
8 always do the flight following, but is the risk assessment
9 something that would be discussed with the flight follower, if
10 you're good to go, it's just the pilot says we're good to go
11 and --

12 A. Yeah. It would only -- if there was something that was, you
13 know, because, yeah, if you're familiar with the risk assessment,
14 so there's numbers one through five I believe, and if there was
15 one particular area that was elevated, even if -- even though the
16 total risk doesn't, you know, trigger the emails and all that,
17 then that we typically be discussed. Yes.

18 Q. Okay. And just to clarify, you said that risk assessments
19 are done for all 135 flights. Multiple legs would be
20 considered -- is it for each leg? It's for the --

21 A. Yeah. It's --

22 Q. -- total charter flight which might have multiple legs.

23 A. Yes. It really is for the flight for the 135 legs. So in
24 other words, it wouldn't be for the flight that they did from
25 Burbank to Palm Springs. It would be from -- just the 135 from

1 Palm Springs to Vegas.

2 Q. Have you reviewed the risk assessment that they did?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Any issues that you had?

5 A. No. I think it was -- from what I think the forecast called
6 for, I think they were fairly accurate.

7 Q. Do they file a flight plan for the 135 flight?

8 A. Yes. So the -- well, it is a flight plan, but it's a company
9 flight plan.

10 Q. In company. What are pilots told to do if they encounter
11 unexpected weather along the route?

12 A. Well, and depends on what kind of weather we're talking
13 about. So there's always a variety, right? So some weather -- so
14 we have our minimums, right? Once you start getting close to our
15 minimums, then obviously, that's time to turn around or put it on
16 the ground. This is discussed in training. You know, the weather
17 is a very, very fluid thing. But to try to answer your question
18 in a very simple way, if they're encountering weather that doesn't
19 allow them to go safely and legally to the destination, then they
20 turn around.

21 Q. Let's say inadvertent IMC.

22 A. Yeah. We do that training on and on and on, and this Ben did
23 at least twice or, you know, maybe more than that, but at least
24 twice because he's checked out on two airplanes. And that's a
25 requirement that we do the training and the checking, including

1 inadvertent IMC, and CFIT, and all of that stuff. And our
2 training is standard with all of it. If you, you know, I always
3 on the training, my biggest emphasis is just not to get there,
4 but, obviously, sometimes it seems that it happens anyways even
5 though we stress that. So, yeah, the stress is in not getting
6 into it in the first place, and then if you do find yourself in
7 that during our training, which we do ground training, we do the
8 flight training with the foggles on and all of that stuff, it's
9 pretty straight forward. If you find yourself in that situation,
10 it's fly the aircraft and nothing else, wings level, and watch
11 power and air speed, and only turn -- if you're headed for
12 terrain, you turn to the terrain page if it's not already on, and
13 climb. And confess. And that's the training. And we do that
14 over and over again. And we do the unusual attitudes with the
15 foggles on. So in the case of Ben, he did it at least twice in
16 the last calendar year.

17 Q. If a pilot were to encounter -- have an inadvertent IMC, is
18 that something that they need to report to you, you got the
19 confessing while you're in flight, but now they're back on --
20 they're safely on the ground?

21 A. Yes. Absolutely. So anything that goes contrary to the
22 regulations, they have to -- either to me or to the chief pilot,
23 and that's -- absolutely. And we go over that stuff in training.
24 Yeah. And that's part of the 135 regs actually.

25 Q. Is there a form they have to complete, or just coming to you

1 and telling you?

2 A. No, there's no specific form.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. They just have to come to me, and I have not had one of those
5 reports here. And we're usually pretty conservative with weather,
6 and so are those guys, so that makes this a little difficult
7 because they are always very, very thorough and cautious.

8 Q. You mentioned your minimums, what are they?

9 A. Minimums weather? There are different minimums, but for 135,
10 I think -- and our manuals have during the days, 500 and 1/2 mile,
11 and 500 and -- at night -- 500 and 1/2 miles. And 500 and 2 at
12 night. So 500 and 1/2 during the day, 500 and 2 at night, which
13 is very low as far as weather minimums. But the regs are even
14 lower.

15 Q. How was this -- how are these minimums determined? Do you
16 know?

17 A. No. Actually, the -- when I arrived, those minimums were
18 already in there, and I tried to when I -- or I'm dealing with
19 manuals, I look at two things, you know, safety and then not to
20 change it as much as possible, to keep things the way they are
21 because, you know, yeah, the more changes you have, it's just
22 not -- unless it's for a very -- for a good reason, I try to leave
23 it alone.

24 Q. I believe in your interview, you mentioned that there was a
25 time breakdown from the night of the accident. Did you say that?

1 A. Yeah. And Brady has the breakdowns of --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. I don't have it.

4 Q. All right. And I know that we've got a log from him that
5 shows, you know, when he called different people. Is that the
6 timeline that you --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- were referring to? Blake, was he authorized to fly 135
9 operations?

10 A. Not in the EC130, but he was Part 135 checked out in the R44.

11 Q. How does flying the R44 versus the EC130, how does it differ?

12 A. Different in a variety of ways. I mean it's a turbine shift
13 versus a piston shift, so I, you know, I don't know, again, you
14 know, some of these questions are kind of open-ended, I am not
15 sure how to exactly answer that. But the cyclic does the same
16 thing in both, and then collective does the same thing, and the
17 pedals do the same thing.

18 Q. More challenging to fly the EC130?

19 A. Probably less.

20 Q. Less challenging. Okay. Are there certain areas when pilots
21 are transitioning from one to the other that maybe they struggle
22 with training?

23 A. I can't think of anything.

24 Q. You also mentioned in your previous interview that the route
25 from Palm Springs to Boulder City was not that -- you said, "Not

1 that popular, and that there were some restrictions." Can you
2 elaborate?

3 A. Yeah. Not that popular because most of the flights that we
4 do to Vegas are usually from Burbank or Santa Monica, you know,
5 because this is where we're located. So not that popular because
6 of that even though we have done some, but not as many as from
7 here. And what was the other side of that question?

8 Q. That there's some restrictions.

9 A. Yeah. So the restrictions are that they don't fly direct.
10 You know, that we don't go over the mountains with the darkness.
11 That we follow the highways.

12 Q. The flight late at night, it's my understanding the pilots
13 were flying back that same evening?

14 A. Mm-hmm.

15 Q. Does the company have a fatigue risk management program or a
16 fatigue policy?

17 A. We were working on that. We don't have a fatigue policy per
18 say, but we just go by the FARs as far as duty time and those
19 limits.

20 Q. Okay. Is there a plan B of let's say the pilots were in
21 Boulder City and they said we're just -- we're too tired, we can't
22 fly back.

23 A. Yeah. We get a hotel and then we figure it out from there.

24 Q. Is that discussed prior to flights, or --

25 A. No, that's just a -- well, sometimes it is. When we think

1 that it's going to kind of get close, then we have that
2 discussion, you know, this is what we do. But in this case, it
3 didn't look like it was going to be an issue at first, so I
4 don't -- at least I didn't discuss it with him. I'm not sure if
5 Brady did or not.

6 Q. Pay for flights. Pilots get a base salary, and then get
7 flight pay?

8 A. I don't know exactly how they get paid. That's a Brady
9 question.

10 Q. I saw in the flight training records that you did training
11 with Blake.

12 A. I did.

13 Q. Do you recall what training you did? Did anything stand out?

14 A. Yeah. He was a very sharp pilot, nothing stood out. And
15 that's about it.

16 Q. What was his -- what would you say -- what stood out about
17 him?

18 A. He just got it, and I didn't have to really give him much
19 pointers or anything. He just knew what he was doing.

20 Q. Are you a part of hiring pilots?

21 A. I get -- Brady gets my input, but I'm not like -- I don't do
22 necessarily interviews. That's the chief pilot and Brady. But
23 they ask me before they hire them.

24 Q. Do you interact at all with the FAA, the POI?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. Are you the main point of contact?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Or who would that -- okay. How often are you interacting
4 with the POI?

5 A. Well, it varies, you know, it varies depending on the --
6 what's going on with the company and then the what they've got
7 going on because, obviously, they have their agenda, and I know we
8 have ours. How often, probably every couple of weeks or three, or
9 a month.

10 Q. Do they ever do surprise visits?

11 A. I think there's been at least one that I can remember, but
12 not that frequent. There's -- usually are kind of a planned.

13 Q. This might be a question for Brady, too. But does Orbic Air,
14 do they fall under any sort of third-party safety audit, WYVERN or
15 ARGUS?

16 A. Yeah. We have -- we don't have anything that necessarily
17 that we have done on our own. But we have had, at least the time
18 that I've been here, two or three. Not WYVERN, but it's similar
19 from a company called BLADE, which is -- you're probably familiar
20 with them. They do charters across the country. So we do some
21 work for them, so they do conduct their own audits.

22 Q. Do you know when the last time they had their audit, did an
23 audit?

24 A. I think maybe I would say somewhere around three months ago.
25 It wasn't that long at all.

1 Q. Anything of note on the audit?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Were you involved at all with the booking of this flight?

4 A. Not at all.

5 Q. Do you know if it came through BLADE or was it direct through
6 the company?

7 A. I'm not sure. That would be a Brady one. I don't think it
8 came through Blade.

9 Q. The SMS program, can you talk about that? Or is that better
10 for someone else?

11 A. That would be better for Tommy Stefanski.

12 DR. WILSON: Okay. All right. Thanks, Steve. I will
13 probably have some more questions in the next round, but I'll --

14 MR. GOULD: Okay.

15 DR. WILSON: -- pass it on to Fabian. Do you need a break?
16 You doing okay?

17 MR. GOULD: No. I'm good.

18 BY MR. SALAZAR:

19 Q. Okay. Steve, were you on duty at all on Friday, the day of
20 the accident?

21 A. Not on duty as a pilot, no.

22 Q. Okay. As the DO?

23 A. Always.

24 Q. Okay. So are you -- you were present at the office?

25 A. No, I was not at the office on Friday.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. No.

3 Q. All right. Tell us what you know about the flight that -- I
4 understand the PIC took a train to Camarillo to bring the
5 helicopter back. So what do you know about that flight?

6 A. I don't know too much because that -- usually they don't
7 include me on because it wasn't a 135 flight. So I know that did
8 happen. I'm not sure exactly what the timing of it, or any of
9 that. But I know that he had gone down to pick up because the
10 EC130 had just gone through some maintenance.

11 Q. Okay. Was the safety pilot with the pilot in command on that
12 flight on the flight back from Camarillo?

13 A. I'm not sure. That would be Brady who was here that would
14 have known that.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. I don't think he was.

17 Q. All right. Are you privy to any of the conversations that
18 the PIC had -- Ben had with maintenance after he got back from
19 that flight?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Specifically about the radar altimeter?

22 A. No.

23 Q. So you weren't part of any of the conversations about that?

24 A. No. I heard some about that after the fact.

25 Q. Okay. All right. So nobody came to you to discuss the radar

1 altimeter?

2 A. No.

3 Q. All right. Let's move on into weather. So help me
4 understand for the -- let's start off big. For all the flights,
5 what are the products that the PIC is responsible for weather-wise
6 before he goes off on a flight?

7 A. Well, for 135 flights, you know, specifically because that's
8 the only one that we have really the -- a little bit tougher
9 requirements, we're allowed to use anything that's -- not NTSB,
10 but --

11 Q. NWS?

12 A. Yes. Thank you. Approved. So -- which includes ForeFlight,
13 SkyVector, and a variety of other sites. But for the bulk of it
14 all, you know, there is some other things that they will look at,
15 but normally is ForeFlight and SkyVector.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. And mostly ForeFlight.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. There's some other stuff that we are always constantly
20 looking. And I think I mentioned this in the last time that have
21 the -- all these cameras all over the place for the fire stuff
22 that they also use. But are not that useful at night, especially
23 in the areas that they were going. So those are the things that
24 they look at.

25 Q. Okay. So focusing in on the 135 where the weather

1 requirements are a little bit more stringent, a guy going out
2 on -- a pilot going out on a 135 flight, he's got a requirement to
3 get a weather briefing. From that weather briefing, does he need
4 to show you any proof that he's gotten that weather briefing?

5 A. No, there's no requirement of any proof.

6 Q. Okay. Okay. And, certainly, he would take that information
7 and put it on the risk assessment because the risk assessment has
8 got an area for --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- weather.

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. Okay. So if he doesn't have to show you that he's physically
13 with the physical paper to show you that he's got a weather brief,
14 do you -- are you looking at that risk assessment and know that
15 he's giving -- he's received a weather brief?

16 A. Yeah. Definitely.

17 Q. Okay. All right. Is there anything else that the pilot
18 needs to produce prior, whether electronic or hard copy, prior to
19 departing?

20 A. So the -- what we call the -- I don't recall it now. I
21 forget the name of it right now, but basically the sheet that has
22 the departure point, the landing point, the times, and the
23 passengers, and the weight and balance.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. So those things plus the risk assessment, those are really

1 the three things that they need to complete before they go on a
2 flight.

3 Q. Okay. And that form that you're talking about, is it the
4 form that's going to explain each leg as whether it's a Part 91 or
5 a Part 135?

6 A. Yes. Exactly.

7 Q. Exactly. Okay. Let me double check my notes here. And just
8 to confirm, the safety pilot is -- for this discussion, let's just
9 call it a program, just to have a word.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. But is it identified in the training manual, or the GOM, or
12 the OpSpecs?

13 A. Not identified in anything at all.

14 Q. Do you guys use a Stratus to get Wi-Fi to the system so that
15 you can get weather?

16 A. So some pilots have that, and I'm not sure if they had it or
17 not. But it's my experience when I fly with them, they always
18 have it and I don't.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. So I would imagine one of those two guys probably had it.

21 Q. Okay. But it would be a personal possession?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Okay. Now Gyronimo, I saw -- or I read that Gyronimo, does
24 it have anything to do with the EC130, or is it just for the --

25 A. What --

1 Q. -- brief?

2 A. I don't know if it has anything to do with it, but it is
3 included. So that's where we do our -- well, we used to do our
4 risk assessment on there with our weight and balance using that
5 and on our flight sheet that --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- I can't remember the name of where we have all the
8 information (indiscernible).

9 Q. Okay. That comes from Gyronimo.

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. All right. So before PRISM, Gyronimo was the source.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And then when you got PRISM as part of the safety management
14 system, you started doing risk assessment out of it?

15 A. Correct.

16 Q. Okay. And check me if I'm wrong, in the risk assessment, it
17 doesn't say safety pilot, but it does have a minus one feature for
18 a second pilot?

19 A. Yes. I think you're correct on that.

20 Q. In the EC130, the left seat is the PIC station?

21 A. Correct.

22 Q. Okay. Center seat, is that the seat with the second set of
23 flight controls?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. And then the right seat is just a passenger seat.

- 1 A. Mm-hmm.
- 2 Q. And where does the safety pilot sit?
- 3 A. In the what would normally be called an instructor seat, in
4 the middle.
- 5 Q. In the middle. So he's in that center seat.
- 6 A. Yes.
- 7 Q. Okay. And as -- to be in compliance with Part 135, is this a
8 true statement, he's not expected to manipulate the flight
9 controls?
- 10 A. Correct. The only thing that they are allowed to do is maybe
11 change radios if the PIC asks him to or something like that.
- 12 Q. Non-flying --
- 13 A. Non-flight controls, yeah. He doesn't --
- 14 Q. Okay.
- 15 A. -- touch those controls.
- 16 Q. Has there ever been a discussion that if there is an
17 emergency, the safety pilot could or would take the controls?
- 18 A. No, I don't believe so unless the two pilots, you know,
19 discussed that on their own.
- 20 Q. Okay. All right.
- 21 A. But the safety pilot is not there to take over or anything
22 like that because they're not the PIC, so there is no expectation
23 of them intervening in that sense. It's more as a second set of
24 eyes, a second head to discuss things, and have a dialogue.
- 25 Q. There's another aviator --

- 1 A. Yeah.
- 2 Q. -- on board that they can have --
- 3 A. Look at weather or whatever.
- 4 Q. Yeah.
- 5 A. Interact with passengers.-
- 6 Q. Aviator to aviator discussions.
- 7 A. Yes.
- 8 Q. All that. It's a form of cockpit resource management, you
- 9 got another pilot there to discuss things with, right?
- 10 A. Yes. But he's not expected to touch the controls at all.
- 11 Q. Let's talk just a little bit about the MEL. You and I had a
- 12 phone conversation, so would you just repeat to me to these guys,
- 13 let them know about the MEL for the EC130?
- 14 A. Sure. So we applied for the -- I mean I applied for meaning
- 15 we as Orbic, for an MEL for the EC130. I can't remember the date,
- 16 but it was definitely a few months ago. We're still waiting on
- 17 final approval from the FAA. So we got all that done, so,
- 18 obviously, it wasn't implemented. We didn't have it in the
- 19 aircraft, so -- and they were not allowed to use it because it has
- 20 not been approved.
- 21 Q. Okay.
- 22 A. But it does exist. I gave you a copy of that. But we
- 23 haven't implemented it because we haven't had the blessing from
- 24 the FAA yet.
- 25 Q. Okay. In absence of an MEL, what is Orbic Air using?

1 A. Well, we just have to fix it.

2 Q. Okay. What's your understanding of the requirement for a
3 radar altimeter for a Part 135 flight?

4 A. It's required for -- and I don't remember the weight, but I
5 think maybe around 3,000 pounds or higher. I can't remember the
6 required. There's a size or a weight requirement for the radar
7 altimeter for helicopters. I do believe that the EC130 qualifies
8 for that requirement. But it is an item that can be MEL'd if we
9 have the MEL.

10 Q. Okay. But you weren't a part of any conversation about that?

11 A. I was not.

12 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have. Thank you.

13 DR. WILSON: Dave.

14 BY MR. GERLACH:

15 Q. I'd like to talk about iPad and ForeFlight for a second. If
16 you hire me, is that a requirement that I go out and buy an iPad?

17 A. No, it's not really a requirement.

18 Q. Could I do a flight without an iPad?

19 A. Yeah. We have everything in the aircraft that allows you to
20 do what we pilots do. So it's not a requirement. It is just
21 something that most pilots have accustomed to use, and a lot of
22 them will have it on their own. And I suppose that if somebody
23 didn't have it -- I mean we have a couple iPads here that we have
24 considered issuing. But everybody's had their own, so it hasn't
25 been like an issue for Orbic yet. But I mean it's not a

1 requirement.

2 Q. And that would apply to ForeFlight as well?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. How would I get my weather for a flight if I didn't have my
5 iPad and ForeFlight?

6 A. 1-800-weather brief. We teach that in the course, and
7 then -- in the training course. And also SkyVector, which is
8 free. That's what I use as well.

9 Q. Okay. And the use of the iPad and ForeFlight in the aircraft
10 is approved by the company as a --

11 A. I don't know if there's like a method of approving any of
12 that. Yeah. Ther's not like an approval process or anything like
13 that.

14 Q. So it's an acceptable --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- tool in the cockpit. Nobody says, hey, you can't use an
17 electronic flight bag in the cockpit --

18 A. Nobody's --

19 Q. -- without any kind of approval or anything?

20 A. No, there hasn't been that.

21 Q. Okay. And for charts?

22 A. So for -- we have the standard paper charts that every
23 aircraft is issued. We have a subscription to that. And that's
24 what the -- or legally you're allowed to use, and that's what in
25 our process. The fact is that today's age with the -- ForeFlight

1 is much more useful and friendly than those charts are, and that's
2 what the younger crowd is used to, so that's usually what they
3 use. But we have the standard charts, a subscription, in all the
4 aircraft. And, you know, standard subscription, we go through it,
5 we replace them. And the next subscription, when they arrive, I
6 go through it and I replace them, and it looks like nobody's ever
7 cracked open one of those maps ever.

8 Q. You're talking VFR sectional charts?

9 A. Yes. Yeah. Yeah, because we don't go that far so it's only
10 just a VFR sectional for the areas here, and then Vegas where we
11 normally go to, and that's the ones we have.

12 Q. And walk me through the process of a pilot using ForeFlight
13 in route. How would they use that tool?

14 A. Well, you go on the app, and then you put in your starting
15 point, in this case, PSB, and then your arrival. And if there's
16 any deviations from the route, which in this case there would have
17 been, all you got to do is you put your finger on there and then
18 drag over the lines to where your path is going to be. And it'll
19 actually show you, and again, much better than the typical
20 sectional chart, it also will show you the 3D picture of how close
21 you are to the ground, if you're going to clear any obstacles,
22 depending on your altitude that you have set in there. And they
23 know a lot more tricks than I know, but that's one of them.

24 Q. Okay. Would you expect them to set waypoints in the --with
25 using ForeFlight?

1 A. I don't know if I would expect them to do it. I would do it.
2 But being these guys, how they were, I'd guess, you know, I can
3 conclude from that that they would because they're more thorough
4 than I am in those regards.

5 Q. Is there -- in the use of ForeFlight, is there a tendency to
6 rely on ForeFlight over the Garmin 650 for navigation?

7 A. That's a good question. Maybe. I'm not sure. I'm not sure
8 of that if there's an over tendency to rely on ForeFlight than the
9 actual maps in the aircraft. But it's an interesting question.

10 Q. Yeah. And do you use ForeFlight when you fly --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- as well? Is it pretty accurate while you're flying?

13 A. It's very accurate.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Yeah. And the difference with, you know, you can zoom in and
16 zoom out much easier than -- so in that sense, you almost think
17 that, yeah, maybe there is a little bit more of a reliance on
18 ForeFlight than the actual installed stuff because it's just
19 easier to interact with.

20 Q. Yeah. And do you hold these iPads in your hand while you're
21 flying, or how do you --

22 A. I either, you know, normally -- so the guys are kind of
23 similar to me in that sense where we have a phone that has the
24 ForeFlight, and then -- but they'll have also the iPad. Right?
25 And that kind of goes back to the question if you're expected to

1 have an iPad or not, everybody's got a phone, so a subscription to
2 ForeFlight is fairly easy to get. So most of the time, you know,
3 depending on the guy -- but these guys, to answer your question is
4 they use the iPad and they use these suction mounts that are
5 actually pretty good, and there's two suction cups. And I learned
6 this actually after flying with one of them, not these two guys,
7 but another guy, is I had a suction cup that I used, and the thing
8 was always vibrating like that and it was useless. So I just have
9 it on my -- a knee board. And then I flew with one of the guys
10 and he's got these suction cups that are two of them and the thing
11 is like rock solid, you know, so it doesn't vibrate at all because
12 of the two things. But they all have that, and they all use it.

13 Q. Yeah. And really strictly speaking, as a pilot using it, if
14 you were flying down a road, how would you use ForeFlight as a
15 tool while you're flying?

16 A. These questions are strange because you can go in such
17 different --

18 Q. Yeah.

19 A. -- ways.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. But how I would use it? I'm trying to figure out how to
22 answer that question how I'd use it. I mean it's a very simple,
23 very easy thing to use, extremely, and then -- but to explain how
24 I'd use it, maybe that's not so easy. Well, just to -- because I
25 don't know how to go on that one. Let's say I'm using my iPad,

1 it's on my left leg strapped down. I would just, you know,
2 constantly zoom in and zoom out so I can see the road. If you're
3 not -- you should be able to see it physically outside. If you
4 can't see the road outside, that's a different problem already.
5 So you're just cross-referencing that what you're seeing there is
6 the same thing you're seeing here. I don't know how else to
7 answer that question.

8 Q. Okay. And would you use ForeFlight in an inadvertent IMC
9 encounter? Would that be a tool?

10 A. Oh, absolutely.

11 Q. And how would you use it if you went into IMC?

12 A. Well, you -- so like I said before, you know, level the ship,
13 use your maximum continuous power. Climb and no turns unless you
14 know that you're going for terrain. That's not the first thing
15 that you're going to do is that.

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. That's going to be in addition to what you're supposed to
18 which is aircraft related. So an iPad is not the first thing you
19 go to if you go into IMC. The aircraft is the thing. So wings
20 level, set your power settings, your airspeed, climb rate, and
21 then the terrain page. From there, as a backup or as a second
22 additional source of information, and you can look at your iPad
23 and see if you're doing what you're supposed to be doing as far as
24 terrain or direction, or whatever.

25 Q. And in that situation, would that be your primary tool for

1 navigation at that point?

2 A. No. No. Navigation, when you go into IMC, it's your
3 heading.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Like I said, no turns unless you're heading for -- so at that
6 point, you're not really navigating at all. So in that sense,
7 like I said, the iPad is just a secondary thing. It's a backup of
8 information for you to check on what you're supposed to be doing
9 which is heading, altitude, air speed, power, and then terrain
10 page. And then communicate. After that, and if the iPad is used,
11 then use it. But that's where the focus is.

12 Q. Thank you. One last question. You mentioned no MEL for the
13 aircraft with the company. And if I understood you correctly, did
14 you say that if anything was broken, it had to be fixed prior to
15 flight?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. That's the way it works.

18 A. (Indiscernible).

19 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Those are all the questions I have.

20 DR. WILSON: Thanks. Second round will go much quicker.

21 MR. GOULD: Okay.

22 DR. WILSON: Need a break?

23 MR. GOULD: I'm okay.

24 DR. WILSON: Okay. My questions will be jumping around a
25 little bit. Just filling in some of the gaps that I have.

1 BY DR. WILSON:

2 Q. Do you know why this specific helicopter was chosen for this
3 flight?

4 A. Other than --

5 Q. Or maybe a better way to say, how is it determined which
6 helicopter is going to take a charter flight, will be used?

7 A. Yeah. That I'm not so sure. That would be, you know, the
8 people that were taking the reservations, if the client had a
9 specific request or not. Yeah.

10 Q. How about assigning pilots for the flight? Do you do that?
11 Who does that?

12 A. No. That's usually either Brady or Tommy.

13 Q. Weighing passengers, is that done, or is it just -- are they
14 asked to submit --

15 A. So --

16 Q. -- weights, or are --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- they actually weighed?

19 A. We ask their weight, and we have the -- for if they bring
20 bags, we have a little weight scale with a handle thing to check
21 the bags. So we ask the weight, then we add 10 pounds.

22 Q. And is that handled during the booking of a flight?

23 A. Yes. And it is double checked by the pilots when they
24 actually check the passengers in.

25 Q. The flight coming home would have been Part 91 coming back --

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. -- from Boulder City. Could Blake have flown that flight
3 home?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Was there any discussion about him flying?

6 A. Well, let me correct that. So that was Ben, which is one of
7 our instructors, so, yeah, he could have potentially flown it
8 back. And we do that occasionally to help our younger guys start
9 slowly transitioning to the turbine shifts. So I mean there was
10 not a discussion, and I was not aware of any of that going on.
11 But we could have allowed that somehow.

12 Q. In your opinion, as a pilot, how critical is the radar
13 altimeter?

14 A. Well, that to me, and I'm not a new guy, as you can tell, but
15 I would like to have a radar altimeter if I am in the darkness
16 there, and other situations, obviously, I never think about it.
17 You put it on zero just so it doesn't annoy you, me as a pilot
18 you're asking. But it would be helpful only in a situation where
19 you have something going on with the aircraft mechanically or some
20 other thing that you have to bring this thing to the ground. And
21 if you're in the darkness, that would help you know when the
22 ground is coming. I don't think it would do much in the situation
23 where -- what we're discussing, but flat I would like to have it,
24 you know, so if I have to land in the desert, and so I don't hit
25 wires or whatever, I would like to know my AGL and altitude as I

1 get close to the ground.

2 Q. Are pilots trained to set the bugs?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. High and low?

5 A. Not high.

6 Q. No?

7 A. Just low.

8 Q. Just low. But what is the low that you're usually told to
9 set it at?

10 A. Usually 200 feet during the day, 500 feet at night.

11 Q. Is there a computer here that pilots can check weather?

12 A. Oh, yeah. We have the pilot lounge right there.

13 Q. Okay. And so if they were to go into that, is ForeFlight on
14 that?

15 A. ForeFlight is a subscription, so --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- unless they have a subscription, then they can't. They
18 have, you know, SkyVector and all that stuff. And so do the FBOs,
19 they all have computers. They use them and check.

20 Q. So there's no ForeFlight, like the company doesn't have a
21 ForeFlight subscription that might be open on that where they
22 could check weather?

23 A. No.

24 Q. We talked about the training. You did say it covers IMC.
25 Anyht about spatial disorientation or unusual attitudes?

1 A. Yeah. We do that. It's all part of the inadvertent
2 training.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. So that's -- as I mentioned earlier, we give them the foggles
5 and put the aircraft in different, unusual attitudes, and then
6 they have to fix it.

7 Q. Okay. How was -- did you fly with Ben?

8 A. I'm sure I have flown with Ben. I don't remember ever doing
9 any training with Ben. But I have -- he has flown with me as a
10 safety pilot on at least a couple of occasions.

11 Q. What was he like as a pilot?

12 A. Very procedural, and he didn't fly it, so I don't know -- I
13 don't have too much information.

14 Q. Okay. Any concerns with either of the pilots?

15 A. No.

16 Q. This aircraft, did it have any recurring maintenance issues
17 that you're aware of?

18 A. No. There's a couple of ADs that we have to check. Other
19 than that, recurring things, no. It's a pretty reliable aircraft.

20 Q. Pilot interactions with the passengers once they're in
21 flight. Everybody wears a headset?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. Is there a toggle switch they can turn off that --

24 A. Yeah. So we can isolate the pilot and the -- what would be
25 an instructor seat where the safety pilot is sitting. So they can

1 be isolated and have communications without the passengers
2 listening. And it was standard that we would -- for most of the
3 flight, have that -- the isolation going on.

4 Q. And what if the passengers needed to talk to one of the
5 pilots? They --

6 A. Yeah. We usually in the briefing would tell them that if
7 they're talking to us and we don't respond, just tap our shoulders
8 if they have a question or anything like that. And it's just that
9 easy, it's so close. So, yeah, that's part of the briefing that
10 we do in every flight.

11 Q. Is it ever a distraction to -- have passengers ever caused a
12 distraction?

13 A. Oh, yeah. Passengers are passengers, you know? So sometimes
14 that happens.

15 Q. There were enough seats in this helicopter, there should not
16 have been a passenger sitting in the front right seat.

17 A. Typically there would be somebody there just because it's
18 more -- there's plenty of space in the front, and four people in
19 the back gets a little bit squeezed. So normally we would put
20 somebody in the front to alleviate that. Now if there's only two
21 or three maybe, maybe not. But with four passengers, almost
22 always we'll put somebody in the front unless nobody wanted to go
23 there.

24 Q. Okay. How is it determined who will go there? Is weight and
25 balance considered, or do you just let --

1 A. Well, if --

2 Q. -- whoever wants to sit there?

3 A. -- there's any weight and -- usually with this aircraft, you
4 know, the configuration we have it in, unless like it's an extreme
5 thing, it won't be affected, so we usually give the option to the
6 passengers.

7 Q. Are the pilots told anything about who the passengers will be
8 on a flight?

9 A. Like, you know, I don't think that's routine. I mean we get
10 their names, and then -- yeah. I don't think it's like a process
11 of telling them who or anything like that. We do know that, as
12 part of the basic indoctrination type of stuff, we have that
13 discussion about that when we do have some people of high
14 visibility, VIPs and et cetera, that we're not supposed to be
15 interacting as much, you know, asking them questions, asking for
16 autographs and pictures, and that kind of stuff. And that's the
17 extent of it. So we do know that that's part of the job.

18 Q. Was there any -- is there any pressure on pilots to take a
19 flight given, you know, Super Bowl weekend, we've got passengers
20 coming in. We need to get them to their destination. Do you
21 think that factors into decision making?

22 A. No. You know, this company here is a little bit unusual in
23 that sense because of Brady mostly and his experience. So he
24 doesn't put that pressure on anybody. And I think, you know, as
25 you speak to people here, hope that you find that that's the case.

1 I know what you're saying that, you know, that's the case in most
2 places, but it's not so here.

3 DR. WILSON: Thanks. Fabian.

4 MR. SALAZAR: Just a few.

5 BY MR. SALAZAR:

6 Q. We talked about the VFR sectionals. SkyVector, do you need
7 an account?

8 A. Nope.

9 Q. Okay. Do you -- as far as the pilots' use of ForeFlight, do
10 you or anybody else, say the check airman, evaluate the pilot's
11 ability to use ForeFlight?

12 A. That's not part of the evaluation because that's, you know,
13 it's like I said before, that's just an additional tool just like,
14 you know, hey, this is extreme, but sunglasses or a pen and paper.
15 It's just an additional tool in the cockpit that is extremely
16 useful. More useful than almost anything else in that cockpit.
17 So that being the case, we don't teach people how to use
18 sunglasses or a pen and paper.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And we don't teach that either.

21 Q. Do you evaluate their ability to use the navigational tools
22 that are installed in the aircraft like the Garmins?

23 A. Absolutely, and that's part of training and checking. That's
24 part of what we do.

25 Q. Okay. So when you let a PIC take off in the aircraft, you

1 have confidence that he can least use the navigational systems in
2 the aircraft.

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. And then if he chooses to use ForeFlight, that's --

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. -- his decision?

7 A. Yes. In training and checking, we normally say, okay, you
8 know, we do the maneuvers training. And then we have the
9 navigation training. So in the navigation training, tell them,
10 okay, get me to this point or that point, and this point, and do a
11 (indiscernible) part of the -- even though we're not an instrument
12 or IFR program, that is used as an emergency situation, so we do
13 do all of that which includes them not using ForeFlight, but the
14 aircraft systems.

15 Q. Okay. And now it's been years since I've used ForeFlight,
16 and in order for us to use it in a King Air, which we're flying at
17 higher altitudes, we had to use the Stratus. But at the lower
18 altitudes in a helicopter, can they get reception and Stratus is
19 not always needed?

20 A. I don't have Stratus and I get everything.

21 Q. Okay. Getting into the different aircraft and does the A-
22 Star, is it used for charter flights as well?

23 A. You talking about the AS350?

24 Q. AS350.

25 A. Yes, it is.

1 Q. Okay. So if there's a charter flight, the EC130 is scheduled
2 to go out on that charter flight, and the EC130 becomes grounded,
3 is that an option to consider using the A-Star?

4 A. Absolutely.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I mean that's happened before.

7 Q. Okay. It's happened before.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. The seating on the EC130, was it four across the back?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. So there were no seats facing aft --

12 A. No.

13 Q. -- in the back? The radar altimeter in the EC130, did it
14 have an audio alarm?

15 A. I think you had a little ding once you set the minimum which
16 are usually set, like I said, during the day 200, night 500.

17 Q. Okay. But it would give you an audio?

18 A. Yeah. Otherwise there's no sense in having that number
19 there.

20 Q. Are you aware of any maintenance that was required on the
21 EC130 for lights? Was there a light issue?

22 A. No. There's always light issues, you know? Well, not
23 always. But, you know, that seems to be a kind of thing with all
24 aircraft, you know, they go -- because they turn -- when they do
25 their pre-flight inspection, they turn all the lights on and even

1 though they're going to fly during the day, they turn them on all.
2 They go and -- so that to me more than anything else I see is, you
3 know, back to your question about the recurring stuff, I guess the
4 recurring thing -- and I don't -- not that in tune as to, okay,
5 this aircraft again with the lights or anything like that. But
6 lights is one of those that's always, okay, this light is out.

7 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That is it. Dave?

8 MR. GERLACH: Just one last question.

9 BY MR. GERLACH:

10 Q. You mentioned that you like to put the radar altimeter at
11 zero so it doesn't annoy you.

12 A. Yep.

13 Q. Can you talk a little bit about interaction with the radar
14 altimeter in normal day and night flights? You mentioned setting
15 lows and highs. Talk about what bothers you about it, and talk a
16 little bit about what you like about using it.

17 A. All right. You got about a half an hour?

18 Q. I know, right?

19 A. So, yeah. During the day, you know, and these things now
20 days, they've gone a little extreme with all the -- you talk about
21 the high. We're flying helicopters, there is no high, you know,
22 I've never seen one that says, okay, set this to a high point.
23 I've only seen the lower ones. Maybe that thing exists. I would
24 imagine so.

25 Q. It does.

1 A. But I've never seen it and never used a high. So I only know
2 about the low stuff. So the low stuff, like I said, you know, 500
3 feet is what I set it at night. If I'm going to go over the
4 mountains, I'm going to put it at 1,000 feet. I don't want to be
5 lower than that. And I'm not talking about flying the highways.
6 I'm talking about, you know, so -- which I normally don't do in
7 these single engines. But my experience flying over the mountains
8 is with twin engine stuff, so I will set it to 1,000.

9 And I want to know that if I'm getting lower than 1,000 for
10 whatever reason. But during the day, flying around here and I can
11 see the ground, I think it's a little bit annoying to have
12 something tell me that I'm X amount of feet over the ground when I
13 can see it. To me those noises are nonsense and it distracts the
14 pilot from other potential noises, and confusing, okay, do I need
15 to pay attention to this noise? Is there an aircraft-related
16 thing or not? And it takes your attention from it when it
17 shouldn't because I can see the ground.

18 So if me, as a pilot, can't see the ground visually and I hit
19 it, then I shouldn't have been flying. So the annoyance is what
20 the -- with the sounds are that they're distracting, they take
21 away the pilot attention, and even more so, we have the standard
22 radar altimeters, and then have the new ones like that 650 that
23 was installed in there and the 750s and this all this new Garmin
24 stuff that not only annoys you with the bugs that you set, but on
25 its own, it already has the built in thing that it starts telling

1 you 500, 500, you know, and then the thing turn red, and terrain,
2 terrain. It just goes a little nuts with that. There is a time
3 and place where that's probably useful. But in the typical
4 situation that you're flying around, and helicopters fly close to
5 the ground sometimes, and to that concept and beyond, and
6 sometimes it's loud and there's not an easy way to turn it down.
7 There's like multiple steps in order for you to quiet that sound.
8 So to me, that's -- I'm an old guy, so it is extremely annoying.

9 Q. That radar altimeter in the helicopter, it has an audible.
10 Does it have a light that flashes at you, too?

11 A. I'm not sure about the light. I'm not 100 percent sure on
12 the light.

13 Q. Okay. And what would your expectation be for the settings
14 for that pilot on that night?

15 A. I would expect him to put in at least 500 feet --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- on the radar altimeter.

18 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Very good. Thank you. That's all the
19 questions I have.

20 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Well, let's --

21 DR. WILSON: Just -- I just want to make sure, you don't have
22 any more questions?

23 MR. SALAZAR: Oh, no more questions.

24 DR. WILSON: Thanks, Steve. That's all that we have. We've
25 asked you a lot of questions. Is there anything we didn't ask you

1 or anything that you think is relevant that we need to know about?

2 MR. GOULD: I don't think so.

3 DR. WILSON: All right. Well, we will conclude at 9:02 a.m.

4 (Whereupon, at 9:02 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
Interview of Steve Gould

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

DATE: March 5, 2024

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.



Jami McNear
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: BRADY BOWERS, President
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

VAN MCKENNY, Airworthiness
National Transportation Safety Board

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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I N T E R V I E W

(9:18 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: Okay. All right. Good morning, Brady. It's 9:18 a.m. Pacific Standard Time. We are conducting interviews as a part of the accident that occurred near Halloran Springs on February 9th. I'm Katherine Wilson, I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. I'm going to lead the interview today. As the same process as when Fabian was here before, we'll each take a turn asking you questions, and we'll probably have two rounds because we'll have some follow ups after the first round. The second round will go a lot quicker. We are here strictly from the safety side, so we're not looking to place blame. We just really want to prevent something like this from happening again. What we'd like to do is record the interview, and we're going to have it transcribed, and it will eventually become a part of our public docket. Is that okay?

MR. BOWERS: Yes.

DR. WILSON: For the record, Fabian, you want to start?

MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar, Operations.

MR. GERLACH: David Gerlach, FAA IIC on the Ops group.

DR. WILSON: You can --

MR. GOULD: Steve Gould, director of Ops, Orbic Air.

MR. BOWERS: Brady Bowers, president, Orbic Air.

DR. WILSON: And do you have a representative with you today?

MR. HEMBREE: Yes. Jonathan Hembree.

1 DR. WILSON: And this is who you would like representing you?

2 MR. BOWERS: I --

3 DR. WILSON: I need to hear you say yes.

4 MR. BOWERS: Yes.

5 DR. WILSON: Okay. Because it is your choosing to have
6 someone here.

7 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

8 DR. WILSON: Do you have any questions for us before we get
9 started?

10 MR. BOWERS: I don't believe so.

11 DR. WILSON: Okay. And, I apologize, I didn't say it to you,
12 Steve, but really, our condolences for the loss of your
13 colleagues. I know, you know, these interviews are routine for
14 us, but I understand they're not routine for you, so we appreciate
15 you being candid with us and honest in your answers. If you need
16 to take a break at any time, just let us know. If we ask a
17 question, you don't understand it, please ask us to clarify. And
18 if you don't know the answer to a question, I don't know or I'll
19 get back to you is also okay.

20 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

21 INTERVIEW OF BRADY BOWERS

22 BY DR. WILSON:

23 Q. As the president, could you give me an overview of your roles
24 and responsibilities?

25 A. Yeah. Kind of a little bit of everything really. Mainly

1 overseeing the sales department, but from everything from
2 designing t-shirts, paying bills, yeah, really kind of a wide
3 range of everything here.

4 Q. And you also sometimes take on the responsibility of doing
5 flight following?

6 A. I do. Yeah.

7 Q. And what does that entail?

8 A. Just keeping track of the flights, making sure that the
9 aircraft don't go overdue, or go off course or anything along
10 those lines.

11 Q. Are you doing continuous monitoring, or are you really doing
12 flight locating? Sort of tell me what level of following are you
13 doing.

14 A. We use Spidertracks, which is a satellite tracking program.
15 And then the pilots will communicate to a text with a group of us
16 on it, you know, when they're departing, their fuel load, how many
17 souls on board, estimated time of arrival. And from then we just
18 monitor the Spidertracks. And it is -- it's on a large TV in the
19 sales office. It's in the kind of operations office. It's on all
20 of our mobile phones. And we, you know, that's a lot of eyes on
21 it.

22 Q. And you're also the co-owner of Orbic.

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. How long have you been the owner?

25 A. Since 2019.

1 Q. And who is the co-owner?

2 A. Stephen Cranswick.

3 Q. Do you still fly?

4 A. I don't, no.

5 Q. I know that you talked about this in the previous interview,
6 but it would be really helpful just to set the stage for me. Can
7 you walk me through February 9th? Walk me through your day, and
8 then your interactions with the crew, the flight following until
9 you realized something was wrong.

10 A. Yeah. It was -- I don't recall a lot about the beginning of
11 the day. We had, you know, other flights going on, and with this
12 flight, the first thing I remember, I checked in with Blake
13 earlier on in the day and just asked him how the weather was
14 looking, and he said so far so good, but he was going to take a
15 deep dive. And then Ben -- I believe Ben was picking up 130
16 Charlie Zulu in Camarillo. They flew it back.

17 And then I remember checking in with Blake again, and he said
18 that the weather was looking good. He said high ceilings, which
19 is typically what -- when I do a, you know, a little overview of
20 weather, I typically check ceilings and visibility along the route
21 and destination. See if there's any, you know, red flags, which I
22 didn't see any. Then they departed. I got a text and I believe a
23 phone call from Ben when they reached Palm Springs. He told me
24 that -- that was just kind of checking in on the timing, and he,
25 obviously, sent his landing confirmation. And so they were on the

1 ground for a while. I think I called him and asked him what was
2 going on, and he told me that one of the passengers had lost a
3 passport. And I believe that kind of put them on about -- I want
4 to say around a 50-minute delay.

5 And then they took off again, tracked the freeways to the
6 west a little bit, and then northeast towards Las Vegas over the
7 freeway. I checked, you know, I continuously checked
8 Spidertracks, and I think it was somewhere around three to five
9 minutes I noticed that it wasn't refreshing, the aircraft was just
10 stuck in place on the display. I sat there trying to refresh for
11 another few minutes, at which point I called -- or I texted
12 Stephen and asked him if he could see anything different than I
13 could. And I also texted Tommy, and same thing. And then after
14 refreshing for a while, the little icon of the helicopter went
15 from color to being gray, which I had never seen before, so I
16 started to get pretty concerned. Spoke to Tommy and Stephen for -
17 - there was just a barrage of phone calls, and I decided I --

18 DR. WILSON: Is that Van?

19 MR. BOWERS: -- would --

20 MR. SALAZAR: Time out, guys.

21 DR. WILSON: Yeah. Just pause for one second.

22 (Off the record.)

23 MR. SALAZAR: Van, we're interviewing Brady Bowers, the
24 president of the company and flight follower. He was explaining
25 to us the circumstances of the day of the accident. And just

1 please just continue on. We'll bring him back up to speed.

2 MR. BOWERS: Okay. So I believe we were where the icon went
3 dark. A few conversations, I think very brief conversations on
4 the phone. And I decided that we need to contact the California
5 Highway Patrol to see if they had any reports of anything. At
6 that point, they said they had some reports, but didn't provide
7 much information. So we didn't really know what was happening.
8 And then I believe I spoke to Stephen again, and we started to
9 activate the ERP. And from there, I contacted Tim Lerma (ph.) who
10 is an acquaintance that's also with the FAA trying to, you know,
11 see if he had any resources or any ideas. And just trying to
12 gather information at that point. And then at some point, Tommy
13 and I both drove into the office and we're just trying to figure
14 out what was happening. It wasn't easy to get information, law
15 enforcement wasn't really forthcoming with information. I think
16 the one I called -- I kept calling the CHP and they gave us a
17 contact for San Bernadino Sheriff I believe, and someone that I
18 spoke to on the phone said that they didn't expect there was any
19 survivors. So --

20 BY DR. WILSON:

21 Q. Thanks for that. Backing up to Ben picking up the aircraft
22 in Camarillo, you said they flew it back. Were both pilots on it,
23 or was it just Ben? Do you know?

24 A. I don't. I think -- I know it was Ben. I'm not certain if
25 he was with someone. I think -- I want to say Luke maybe was with

1 him.

2 Q. Okay. You talked about checking the weather. What do you
3 use to check weather, or what did you use that day?

4 A. Typically I have an app on my phone. I'm not certain what
5 it's called. I could check if you'd like.

6 Q. Yeah. That'd be great.

7 A. Sure. It is AeroWeather.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. That's typically what I use. It has METARs and TAFs. It's
10 not a deep dive, but it's kind of a general. I don't always, you
11 know, for every flight, I just like to kind of have an
12 understanding of if there's anything I can see that someone
13 didn't, you know? But they were probably better equipped to check
14 the weather anyhow.

15 Q. Do you check the weather after takeoff also to see if
16 anything's updating?

17 A. Yeah. I think depending on the circumstances, I'll keep an
18 eye on.

19 Q. Do you recall if you did that for this flight?

20 A. I don't, no.

21 Q. You don't recall if you did it, or you don't -- you didn't do
22 it?

23 A. I don't recall if I did or not.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Sorry.

1 Q. I didn't want to assume what that meant. Were you in the
2 office that day?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. And so when you checked in with Blake asking about the
5 weather, was that face to face?

6 A. Yeah. I had walked by the -- he was in our CFI office there
7 and was -- yeah.

8 Q. Do you recall what time he got into the office?

9 A. I don't. I want to say probably around 12:00 or 1:00 maybe.

10 Q. Okay. And did you see Ben that day?

11 A. I did.

12 Q. Okay. Around what time did you see him?

13 A. I think I saw him periodically throughout the day.

14 Q. And did you have conversations with him during the day?

15 A. Yeah. I'm sure I probably had a few.

16 Q. There was a conversation that you had with him after he flew
17 from Camarillo to Burbank about the radar altimeter.

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Can you walk me through that conversation?

20 A. He said that they were having issues with the radar
21 altimeter, and I told him that I'm not very familiar with radar
22 altimeters. I believe they came around after I had stopped
23 flying, and it's just something that I'm not too familiar with.
24 And I told him that if it's working, I think he's okay. But if
25 it's not working, don't take the flight.

1 Q. And at this point, was Luke troubleshooting? What was
2 happening with --

3 A. I believe so.

4 Q. -- the helicopter?

5 A. I'm not sure exactly when --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- that conversation took place, at what stage
8 (indiscernible).

9 Q. Was there any confirmation from Ben whether it was working or
10 not?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Was there any follow up conversation after that?

13 A. No. That was it.

14 Q. Did you have any assumptions given that Ben took the flight?

15 A. I guess I would assume that it worked, and that's my
16 understanding from before that we had some issues with the radar
17 altimeter, but overall, there was certain ways to make it work
18 whether when it started up after the engine was started, or just
19 something along -- I had never dealt with it directly, and I am
20 not familiar with radar altimeters as much as other.

21 Q. How did the pilot seem when you did interact with them?

22 A. They seemed -- yeah, just like --

23 Q. Normal?

24 A. -- happy and normal. Yeah. Yeah.

25 Q. Did you talk about any risks about this flight?

1 A. No. Well, other than the -- I guess the route was over the
2 freeways on the Friday of Super Bowl weekend, so in our estimation
3 it would have been pretty well lit the entire way. That freeway
4 between Las Angeles and Las Vegas, even on a normal Friday is --
5 always has considerable traffic. So that was one thing we
6 discussed is even though it's going to take a little longer and
7 instead of going over a dark mountain range, we track the freeway
8 and thought that was a safer alternative.

9 Q. Were you here when Ben departed for Palm Springs?

10 A. I believe so, yes. Yeah.

11 Q. And did he send you a text and said he was leaving Palm
12 Springs, or is that only for the 135 flights that you need to send
13 you those texts?

14 A. They do for positioning flights typically, too.

15 Q. And that occurred --

16 A. I think --

17 Q. -- as expected?

18 A. -- check on that.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. (Indiscernible).

21 Q. I apologize, did you talk to Ben when he was in Palm Springs?

22 A. I did.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. I spoke to him on the phone, and I believe he had sent a text
25 as well.

1 Q. Okay. And I know you said you discussed that there was a
2 delay because a passenger had lost his passport. Any other
3 relevant conversation?

4 A. No. It was just seemed pretty normal, I think. Just kind of
5 that put a delay on us, and I think at Boulder City was -- there
6 was a guy staying there late to marshal them in and, yeah, with
7 the Super Bowl, it was very difficult with all the airports. Oh,
8 and I had -- there was a NOTAM that I had asked Ben to get
9 familiar with and let me know if there was any -- if he saw any
10 issues with us going into Vegas because it was -- I don't recall
11 the specifics, but, yeah, something to do with being on flight
12 plans and -- but that apparently we were exempt as VFR.

13 Q. Going back to the conversation that you had with Ben about
14 the radar altimeter, did you feel that he understood what you were
15 saying? Did he acknowledge that if it's not working, I can't go,
16 but if it is, you should be good?

17 A. I think so.

18 Q. So they depart for Palm Springs. When did you go home? Or
19 were you here the whole time? Did you go home?

20 A. No, I had gone home. I would estimate I think 30 minutes, an
21 hour after they took off.

22 Q. And you were tracking Spidertracks on your phone or on a
23 computer?

24 A. On my phone, yeah.

25 Q. Do you know what the refresh rate or the reporting rate is

1 for the Spidertracks?

2 A. I believe ours is set to the highest setting, so it's about
3 every minute I believe.

4 Q. Okay. Do you ever use the watch mode?

5 A. I do not.

6 Q. Okay. With Spidertracks, can you get any data for excessive
7 climb or excessive descent rates?

8 A. It gets acceleration, deceleration, and there's also a SOS
9 function that will alert everyone.

10 Q. Did that SOS function --

11 A. I do not know.

12 Q. That's a pilot --

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. -- initiated, right?

15 A. Yes, exactly.

16 Q. The conversation about the radar altimeter happened here?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. Okay. Was there any discussion that you were involved in
19 about if it doesn't get resolved, what the backup plan is?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Would that have been a conversation that you would have been
22 a part of, or would someone else had had that conversation?

23 A. I would have been a part of it.

24 Q. What would have happened if it didn't get working?

25 A. We would have probably cancelled the flight. And I'm not --

1 I mean I've cancelled hundreds of flights. That's something that
2 I'm not too worried about doing.

3 Q. Is there a backup like you can use a different helicopter, or
4 it's just the flight's canceled?

5 A. Yeah, if we had another helicopter available, I think that
6 would be an option.

7 Q. Was there another helicopter available?

8 A. I don't recall. I think the A-Star was here.

9 Q. Okay. Did you feel that there was any added pressure on this
10 flight given that it was Super Bowl weekend and --

11 A. No. Absolutely not.

12 Q. No? Okay. Did you feel any -- do you think the pilots felt
13 any pressure?

14 A. I don't think so.

15 Q. If I recall from the Spidertracks data there was maybe 50
16 miles or so where you weren't receiving pings?

17 A. The ADS-B, like on FlightAware, that's what went out. Our
18 Spidertracks was consistent (indiscernible).

19 Q. Oh, Spidertracks was working the whole time.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. It was just ADS-B. Were you involved in the scheduling of
22 this flight, or the booking maybe would be a better --

23 A. The booking, not so -- I mean a little bit. Yeah.

24 Q. Who was in charge or that, or who was arranging that?

25 A. I think that was Trevor (ph.).

1 Q. Okay. And when we were talking to the next of kin yesterday
2 for both the pilots, there was -- they were mentioning that
3 possibly there was some -- what's the right word that I'm looking
4 for? Kind of some back and forth, and, you know, maybe this
5 flight was going to get scheduled, maybe it wasn't going to get
6 scheduled. That it was a little bit unclear whether this flight
7 was going to happen in the days leading up to it.

8 A. I think --

9 Q. Do you recall anything about that?

10 A. I do recall that initially Trevor, who booked it, thought
11 that it was fraud. We get a lot of fraud being that it was from
12 out of the country and so there was some discussion along those
13 lines.

14 Q. Okay. Other than that, I mean there's always something, you
15 know, things that can go back and forth and you never really know
16 until the flight's completely booked, and so that's not --

17 Q. Who assigns the pilots to the flight?

18 A. It basically goes by schedule. So there's pilots on the
19 schedule and then depending on what aircraft they're qualified in,
20 that would be what their -- their flight that they would be
21 assigned to.

22 Q. And do pilots get paid like a base salary, and then they get
23 paid additional flight pay?

24 A. Yes. Correct.

25 Q. Okay. Does the flight pay vary based on whether it's a tour

1 or charter, or is it just a standard flight pay?

2 A. It -- yeah, like you said, they have a standard base pay, and
3 then for every tour, there is an additional, and for charter, it's
4 like an additional hourly pay.

5 Q. Are charter flights, do they pay more than tour flights?

6 A. They do.

7 Q. And can pilots get tips from charter flights?

8 A. From tours and charters.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. What time was the flight scheduled to arrive in Boulder City?
12 Do you recall?

13 A. I don't. I'd have to look. I believe -- I think initially
14 it was around 9:30 p.m. I'd like to say. I think they were
15 supposed to depart 7:30 from Palm Springs. So, yeah, somewhere
16 around 9:30.

17 Q. Is there some kind of flight plan that was filed with the
18 company? Do you have something that, you know, says this is the
19 departure time and when the estimated arrival time is, or --

20 A. No.

21 Q. Where would that be? No?

22 A. Just basically the scheduling. It is, you know, it's on our
23 flight schedule that says, you know, the pickup time. And I don't
24 know that it says the estimated time of arrival.

25 Q. Okay. You were doing the flight following that night. Is

1 that common? Do you do that pretty typically?

2 A. Yes. Even -- I watch it like a hawk basically all the time,
3 no matter if I'm the flight follower or not.

4 Q. Is there dedicated flight follower for during the daytime or
5 is that role shared amongst the people?

6 A. It's shared, and we do have -- more recently, we have someone
7 watching fulltime.

8 Q. What is the schedule of that person?

9 A. It's like a 9:00 to 5:00 typically. And then she'll watch I
10 think also from home as well.

11 Q. In the GOM, it has you listed as having operational control.
12 What's your perspective on what that means, and what does that
13 entail?

14 A. Basically the ability to approve flights. Yeah. I guess,
15 yeah, just general information to oversee things.

16 Q. Do you partner with any third parties, outside agency to do
17 safety audits of Orbic?

18 A. We have an SMS through PRISM, and then we've had various desk
19 audits from different companies.

20 Q. Do you recall when the last time one of those audits was?

21 A. I believe we had a quarterly audit from Fly BLADE, and that
22 was just in the last few months, maybe January or February
23 sometime.

24 Q. Anything of note in that audit?

25 A. No.

1 Q. Okay. Have you ever had an audit come back where there is
2 something that's been flagged?

3 A. I don't believe so.

4 Q. As a part of the flight following duties, do you see the risk
5 assessment before the flight?

6 A. Not unless it's elevated.

7 Q. Have you looked at the risk assessment since the accident?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Did you have any concerns about it?

10 A. I did. The -- I was not aware that there was the icing
11 (indiscernible).

12 Q. The risk assessment was just for the flight from Palm Springs
13 to Boulder City because that was the 135 portion, or was the risk
14 assessment for all the legs of the trip? Do you know?

15 A. It would have just been for the 135 leg I believe.

16 Q. Okay. And then the pilots were scheduled to fly back that
17 evening. Is that correct?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Would you have still been doing flight following for that
20 flight?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Was there any discussion with the pilots, they would have
23 been flying back pretty late at night, any discussion with them
24 about fatigue?

25 A. No.

1 Q. Does Orbic have any sort of fatigue policy?

2 A. Other than what's, you know, in the risk assessment, I am not
3 aware that we do, no.

4 Q. Okay. If the pilots were in Boulder City and were like we're
5 just too tired to fly back, what would have happened?

6 A. I'd say get a hotel. Absolutely.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah. Or if any like circumstances, that's something that --
9 it wouldn't be an issue at all.

10 Q. Has that ever happened before?

11 A. I believe it has. And even the opposite's happened where
12 we've offered hotels, and the pilot has chosen that they would
13 like to come back.

14 Q. Who determines if there's going to be two pilots on the
15 flight? Is that something that you do, or someone else?

16 A. When it's an option, I think it's not a bad thing if we have,
17 you know, a second set of eyes. Typically it's -- from a customer
18 request standpoint.

19 Q. Was it requested on this flight?

20 A. Yes, it was.

21 Q. How do they know that's an option to request that? That if
22 like --

23 A. I think it's just kind of an industry standard thing. Some
24 people want twin engine, two pilots. Some people just say two
25 pilots. It's not something that I think we really offer, you

1 know, unless it's kind of brought up. But I'm sure there's
2 circumstances where it could be mentioned that we can have a
3 second pilot.

4 Q. Is that something that's just included, or does that up
5 the -- what the charter pays?

6 A. It would cost additional.

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. I mean if we're just putting someone else on as a second set
9 of eyes, it wouldn't cost anything else. But if, you know, if
10 it's something that is requested and we need to bring a pilot in
11 for or whatever, it's an additional cost.

12 Q. Do you know when the pilots were notified that they were
13 having this flight?

14 A. I'm not certain, no.

15 Q. Okay. In your previous interview, you had mentioned about,
16 you know, with Orbic really wanting to increase the safety
17 standards, and I was curious, what do you do to ensure that? How
18 do you do that? How do you put that into practice?

19 A. Right. I've made quite a few changes since we've been here.
20 Everything from taxiing to flying, so it used to be come in and
21 land as quick as you can, take off as fast as you can to save like
22 ops time and money. I have always been very strict on the ramp.
23 I want them at a 5-foot hover, speed of a brisk walk. And we've
24 even stopped doing pedal turns on the ramp. I don't know that
25 that's a safety concern to me, but that's just -- with the other

1 tenants here, it is a pretty congested ramp if you've seen it. We
2 implemented company minimum altitudes for tours, which is 800 feet
3 minimum over the ground, 500 feet over the coastline. We stopped
4 doing doors off flights.

5 And then I actually even tried to get all the other operators
6 around on board with that, which most of them continue to do it,
7 but I just saw it as, you know, having an open door is one less
8 element of control, and things falling out or things falling in
9 tail area, I just (indiscernible). And that was a very popular
10 thing, so it was -- so the only doors off flights we would do is
11 with professional photographers with tethered equipment. Trying
12 to think of some other examples. Yeah. Mainly just, whatever,
13 you know, I can do that, you know, I thought would make a
14 difference safety wise. And sometimes I think I've come up with
15 things, and after discussion with the rest of, you know,
16 management, they're like they don't know if we can do that or not.
17 But just general I guess flying better were the obvious things to
18 improve safety.

19 Q. For things like the flight -- or the minimums, altitude
20 minimums, how do you ensure that the pilots are following that?

21 A. On Spidertracks typically. Yeah. And then -- yeah. But we
22 have seen it before where they gotten below and I'll mention that
23 to them of course. Another thing, it's more on the flight
24 instruction side, but we stopped allowing student rentals because
25 there was an incident where my wife was actually on the beach and

1 saw one of our aircraft fly by at like 50 feet off the deck, so
2 that student was suspended and kind of ultimately led to the
3 judgment that we wouldn't rent aircraft to private pilots. It's
4 just -- if they want to continue their training, they can do it
5 with a CFI and kind of trying to not train weekend warriors but
6 people that want to take it seriously.

7 Q. Who is the main point of contact with the FAA here?

8 A. Steve Cirigliano.

9 Q. That's your contact at the FAA, or that's your --

10 A. Oh.

11 Q. Who here is -- like who at Orbic is in contact with --

12 A. Oh, Steve.

13 Q. Okay. Do you ever communicate with the FAA or interact with
14 them?

15 A. On audits or typically no.

16 Q. Do you recall the last time the FAA came and did an audit?

17 A. I don't.

18 DR. WILSON: I'm going to save my questions for the next
19 round. Fabian.

20 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

21 BY MR. SALAZAR:

22 Q. Brady, just a little bit of admin cleanup. I know I asked
23 you this question before, but I don't recall. What's the number
24 of employees that you have, and the number of pilots?

25 A. I believe we have 15 employees, and at the moment, we have

1 three pilots.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. But typically around six or seven.

4 Q. Okay. So are you a standard 135 -- a standard Part 135, or
5 basic?

6 A. Standard.

7 Q. Okay. There was one other clean up. Okay. There's a form
8 that the company has that identifies what leg is Part 91 and what
9 leg is Part 135. And neither Steve or I can recall the name of
10 the form. It's part of the packet that the pilot would have for a
11 charter flight. Do you recall that form, what it's called?

12 A. I do not.

13 Q. Yeah. But the company does have a form where it's going to
14 identify the -- whether the leg from say Burbank to Palm Springs
15 is Part 91, and from Palm Springs to Boulder City is Part 135,
16 right?

17 A. I am not familiar with that.

18 Q. Okay. All right. I'm probably confusing things. We'll talk
19 about it after the interview.

20 A. Okay.

21 Q. All right. So help me complete the understanding of the
22 conversations and the actions from when the helicopter came from
23 Camarillo. So let's start at Camarillo. Why was the aircraft in
24 maintenance at Camarillo?

25 A. I believe it was getting LED position lights, avionics

1 upgrade, and the radar altimeter.

2 Q. Okay. The radar altimeter had been written up a couple of
3 times prior, too.

4 A. I believe so.

5 Q. Okay. Was there a write-up about the lights, any lights
6 being inoperative?

7 A. I don't think so.

8 Q. Okay. It was just getting an upgrade to LED lights?

9 A. I believe so.

10 Q. Okay. And then on the flight back, you may have already
11 answered this. Do we know if Luke was on board with Ben on that
12 return flight?

13 A. I think so, but I'm not certain.

14 Q. Okay. Okay. We'll ask Steve.

15 A. Okay.

16 Q. All right. And during that flight, there was some
17 communication with Steve, who -- Steve's office is in Camarillo?

18 A. Correct.

19 Q. Okay. So there was some text messaging about the radar
20 altimeter being in-op. Are you up to speed on that?

21 A. Now I am. I'm not certain that I was at the time.

22 Q. Okay. And then when the aircraft landed here at Burbank, did
23 Ben come up and talk to you about the radar altimeter being in-op?

24 A. Not right away I don't think. At some point he asked my
25 thoughts on that they were having trouble with it.

1 Q. Okay. So it was Ben's concern, he approached you about it
2 and you responded to him, if I got it right, if the rad alt is
3 working, you can take the mission. If it's not, you cannot.

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. Okay. And did you -- you didn't have any other conversation
6 with him?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Did you have any conversation with maintenance reference the
9 radar altimeter?

10 A. I don't believe so.

11 Q. Okay. So any conversation about the MEL or the MMEL?

12 A. No.

13 Q. Okay. Are you familiar with -- well, this is an obvious
14 question, but let me ask it. Were you familiar with the company
15 not having an approved MEL for the EC130?

16 A. I knew it was in the process. I didn't know what stage it
17 was in the process.

18 Q. Okay. And in the absence of an MEL, do you know what the
19 company should use?

20 A. The MMEL.

21 Q. Okay. That's what I --

22 A. I think.

23 Q. That's what I understand.

24 A. Okay.

25 Q. And are you familiar with what the MMEL says about the radar

1 altimeter?

2 A. I'm not.

3 Q. All right. And you shared with us that you're not really
4 familiar with the radar altimeter, but do you know if that radar
5 altimeter had an audio alarm?

6 A. I don't.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. (Indiscernible).

9 Q. Let's talk just a little bit about the safety pilot. Is
10 there an operation specification restriction that keeps Orbic Air
11 from using a second pilot that is expected to manipulate the
12 flight controls?

13 A. Could you say that again?

14 Q. Sure. If you had -- if you the opportunity to put two pilots
15 who are employed by the certificate holder, you, and that are both
16 rated to fly the EC130, could you not put two pilots in that
17 aircraft instead of a safety pilot?

18 A. I believe we could.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. I'm not certain.

21 Q. Okay. And the operations specification gives you a laundry
22 list of things that the company cannot do. So what I was asking
23 was is there a restriction in the operation specifications that
24 tell you you cannot do that?

25 A. I'm not aware --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- if there is or isn't.

3 Q. So is it -- is the company finance that -- would it cost you
4 anymore money to put in a second pilot?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. And Blake had some training on the aircraft, but he wasn't
8 qualified on 135 --

9 Q. Right.

10 A. -- (indiscernible).

11 Q. And because of that, he's not expected to manipulate the
12 flight controls. And so he can't share the duties of flying.

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. That's how I understand.

15 A. Yeah. I understand that he could help with navigating,
16 changing radios, but not like manipulate the flight controls.

17 Q. And has there ever been any discussion with the safety pilot
18 concept that you as a safety pilot who is rated to fly the
19 aircraft, if there's ever a scenario where an emergency takes
20 place, you can take the flight controls?

21 A. Yeah, I think that was the general idea that, you know, if
22 there's a medical emergency with the pilot, that the safety pilot
23 could act to meet the needs of the emergency.

24 Q. Okay. And is your understanding that that safety pilot sits
25 in the center seat or the right seat.

1 A. Center seat.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. PIC would be the left seat.

4 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have.

5 DR. WILSON: Dave.

6 BY MR. GERLACH:

7 Q. Have you ever held any other positions with the company?

8 A. Here, no.

9 Q. And in previous companies, what kind of positions?

10 A. I was a line pilot and a lead pilot for Papillon, but that
11 was in 2012 to 2014.

12 Q. Okay. Any chief pilot or DO positions --

13 A. No.

14 MR. GERLACH: -- with a company? Okay. Those are the
15 questions I have.

16 DR. WILSON: Steve?

17 MR. GOULD: Nope.

18 DR. WILSON: Van?

19 MR. MCKENNY: No.

20 DR. WILSON: Okay. I wasn't expecting it to come back to me
21 so quick.

22 BY DR. WILSON:

23 Q. Are you involved in the hiring of pilots?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Were you involved in hiring Ben or Blake?

1 A. I was, both of them. Yeah.

2 Q. Let's talk with Ben first, you know, was there something
3 that -- tell me what you thought was a strength of his when you
4 were -- during the hiring process?

5 A. He had actually come in to introduce himself, seemed, you
6 know, well spoken. He had his resume. I took a look at that. He
7 just seemed like a pretty squared away kid. And, um, if I would
8 have had some questions, I assume he would have answered them to
9 my liking. And he was looking for a CFI position, and we had one
10 open, and there was actually, oddly enough, where he was doing his
11 flight training, the gentleman we lease our aircraft for had just
12 purchased an aircraft at that exact airport. So kind of seemed
13 serendipitous a little bit. And he flew for a while with us, and
14 went and picked up the helicopter and flew it across country back
15 to here, and did a great job with that. He was a very thorough
16 guy and a good pilot. He had kind of worked his way into being a
17 -- kind of heading up our training department. He seemed to be
18 very thorough with that. He was a CFII. I think he had passed a
19 few students with that. So I think he was instrument proficient.
20 Yeah.

21 Q. And how about Blake?

22 A. Blake was an acquaintance of another one of our mechanics,
23 Aaron (ph.). Same thing, he came in. He had trained at -- I
24 think it's called Southern Utah University now, which the pilots
25 that we've had come out of there have always been really good, so

1 I have a lot of respect for that program. He was, again, well
2 spoken, knew his -- seemed to know his stuff. And, you know, I
3 never saw anything that made me think he was -- I think he was a
4 great pilot.

5 Q. I believe from the first interview to -- Orbic either has an
6 SMS program, or they're in the process of developing an SMS
7 program.

8 A. We had an SMS that was just kind of we created ourselves, and
9 then we switched over to PRISM which is from ARGUS I want to say
10 about a year ago or more. And now that's their platform online
11 has changed, so we're transitioning from the old platform over to
12 the new like dashboard website.

13 Q. Is the program changing or just this platform that's --

14 A. No. It's just kind of the -- they've just updated their
15 website. I mean the program's changed a little bit, but all the
16 fundamentals are the same.

17 Q. And is the program a part of the FAA voluntary program?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. When did that -- when did you join the voluntary program?

20 A. Like as an official capacity?

21 Q. Yeah. So Orbic could voluntarily, you know, submit to the
22 FAA that they have an SMS program.

23 A. I am not certain that we've done that.

24 Q. Okay. Does Orbic have a flight data monitoring program?

25 A. (Indiscernible).

1 Q. Like where you can check for various data on aircraft, you
2 know, to ensure that safety standards are being met. Do you have
3 any way of basically getting data so that you can ensure that, you
4 know, flights are going safely?

5 A. Not that I'm aware of, no.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. But don't think so.

8 Q. How are safety issues communicated with pilots?

9 A. We have safety meetings. We try to have them monthly, but
10 they were getting a little less frequent. If there's an issue
11 with an aircraft, typically there will be texts sent out to all
12 the pilots so everyone's aware. And then if an aircraft's
13 grounded, we'll take the 10 and kind of separate it into my
14 office.

15 Q. Are there any morning safety briefings or daily briefings
16 when all the pilots come in?

17 A. No.

18 Q. And if a pilot, or really anybody, had a safety concern, how
19 would they go about reporting that?

20 A. They could come to one of us or they can do an anonymous
21 hazard report on the SMS system. And we had just kind of a letter
22 box that you could also put an anonymous report in.

23 Q. Do you ever get any of those reports?

24 A. I think we've had very few.

25 Q. Do you think people feel comfortable coming to talk to you

1 about them?

2 A. I would think so. I'm pretty approachable. But I know that
3 the dynamic for an employee can be, you know, different.

4 Q. Have you had anyone come report anything, safety concerns?

5 A. (No audible response.)

6 Q. I don't want to make assumptions, but the Calabasas accident
7 that happened several years ago, are you familiar with -- have you
8 read that report?

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Are you familiar with the recommendations that the NTSB made
11 as a part of that?

12 A. I have read them, but I don't recall them.

13 Q. Okay. I'm just curious if Orbic talked about making any
14 changes since that accident, and some of the circumstances that
15 came out of it. Did you all do anything differently?

16 A. I mean I've always been very conservative with weather and
17 probably more so after that. There has been days where I'll
18 cancel the whole day of flights, and then the sun comes out and I
19 kind of kick myself, but at the same time, you know, we're very,
20 very conservative with weather. For example -- and on that day,
21 we had canceled flights as well the day of the Calabasas accident,
22 we had cancelled our flights for that day.

23 Q. Do you ever go flying just to kind of observe what the pilots
24 are doing, or --

25 A. Maybe once or twice a year.

1 Q. How about your flight follower, the woman who you said does
2 like 9:00 to 5:00 flight following. Does she ever do ride-a-longs
3 so that she has an appreciation for the operation and the
4 different things you have done?

5 A. She has done -- we do gender reveals which is blowing colored
6 corn starch over, you know, like a party or whatever. And she had
7 done some of those. And she was -- I think she had done a tour
8 with her husband as well.

9 Q. Since the accident, have you been in contact with the FAA at
10 all, like the operation?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. Have you seen them come by?

13 A. No.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. Actually, I think -- I haven't seen them, but I think they've
16 been going to Stephen's office in Camarillo.

17 DR. WILSON: Okay. Fabian?

18 MR. SALAZAR: No questions on this round.

19 MR. BOWERS: Okay.

20 DR. WILSON: Dave?

21 MR. GERLACH: No questions.

22 DR. WILSON: Steve? Van? All right. Brady, we've asked you
23 a lot of questions. Is there anything we didn't ask you that you
24 think we should have asked you about, or any information that
25 would be -- that you think would be helpful?

1 MR. BOWERS: Nothing comes to mind at the moment, but I'll
2 think about that.

3 DR. WILSON: Okay. Well, yes, definitely, I'll give you one
4 of my cards, too. I hope that we exchanged emails. We'll go off
5 the record at 10:11 a.m.

6 (Whereupon, at 10:11 a.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Brady Bowers

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.


Jami McNear
Transcriber

In an email, from the Orbic Air director of operations, dated April 8, 2024, Mr. Bowers had the following addition to his second interview, page 23 [page 250 of Attachment 4], beginning on line 12:

Additional emergency procedure flight training more frequently than required. Factory equivalent flight training when able. Close supervision of student solos with radio and Spidertracks, and preflight. Limitations on training flights and maneuvers. Turning down any requests that pushed any safety boundaries.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: BRIAN PETSCHAUER, Chief Pilot
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:31 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: Okay. We are on the record at 10:31 conducting interviews as a part of the accident that occurred on February 9th, 2024 near Halloran Springs, California. I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. We'll have everybody introduce themselves for the record. Fabian?

MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar, operations.

MR. GERLACH: David Gerlach, FAA IIC on the operations crew.

MR. GOULD: Steve Gould, director of operations, Orbic Air.

MR. PETSCHAUER: Brian Petschauer, chief pilot with Orbic Air.

DR. WILSON: Okay. And you have a representative that you'd like to have in here with you today?

MR. PETSCHAUER: Yes.

DR. WILSON: Okay. And your name?

MR. HEMBREE: Jonathan Hembree.

DR. WILSON: Thank you. As we mentioned to you before, we're here just strictly from the safety side. We don't have any enforcement action. We don't place blame. It's a part of our investigation. We really just want to prevent something like this from happening again. So we appreciate you taking the time to talk to us, and we want to extend our condolences for the loss of one of your colleagues. I know that having to repeat this information and talk about it isn't easy, but we really appreciate

1 you shedding some insights into it and helping us get the complete
2 picture of the operation and what these pilots were like. So
3 thank you for that in advance. We'll do same thing as before,
4 each one of us will take a turn asking questions one at a time.
5 We'll probably do two rounds of questions to catch any follow ups.
6 What we'd like to do is record the interview and we'll have a
7 transcript created as a part of that. Is that okay with you?

8 MR. PETSCHAUER: Yeah.

9 DR. WILSON: Okay. It will eventually become a part of our
10 public docket. If we ask you a question that you don't
11 understand, please ask us to clarify, or if you don't know the
12 answer to it, I don't know or I'll get back to you is okay. I
13 think that's it. All right. We'll go ahead and get started. And
14 I did review your interview that you did before, so I'll try to
15 minimize duplicate questions, but sometimes it might be helpful to
16 hear it again in your own words things that will help me with
17 follow-up questions. So appreciate you bearing with us.

18 INTERVIEW OF BRIAN PETSCHAUER

19 BY DR. WILSON:

20 Q. As the chief pilot, could you tell me what your duties and
21 responsibilities are?

22 A. Yep. I oversee the pilots for Orbic Air, and I manage the
23 training records and scheduling stuff like that.

24 Q. And how long have you been in that position?

25 A. About a year.

1 Q. Was that when you were hired with Orbic Air, or have you held
2 other positions?

3 A. No. I was first hired as like an assistant DO. And then the
4 chief pilot ended up leaving, so then I just assumed the role of
5 the chief pilot position here.

6 Q. Is there currently an assistant DO position?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Okay. And are you currently flying?

9 A. For Orbic?

10 Q. Mm-hmm.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Okay. What aircraft do you fly?

13 A. I used to fly the EC130 and the AS350.

14 Q. And do you do any check rides?

15 A. I do.

16 Q. Instructing?

17 A. Yeah. The instruction and then the check rides in both of
18 those aircraft.

19 Q. Do you do any flying outside of work?

20 A. Yeah. I have another job over at REACH Air Medical Services.

21 Q. How does that work? How do you split your time between the
22 two?

23 A. Well, when I work -- when I'm working at REACH, I'm on duty
24 over there and see -- as soon as my duties over here. And then
25 when I'm off, I work here. I don't really do any revenue-

1 generating flights for Orbic. I just do the check airman training
2 and chief pilot duties. Yeah.

3 Q. Do you have a set schedule of like when you're here versus
4 when you're there, or it varies?

5 A. It varies.

6 Q. Had you flown with either Blake or Ben?

7 A. I have never flown with Blake to my recollection. But I have
8 flown with Ben.

9 Q. Okay. Tell me about Ben as a pilot.

10 A. He was a very knowledge pilot. He was always seeking out
11 information. I recall like multiple times I'd be doing a
12 EuroSafety class in this room, and he'd always ask to sit in. And
13 he would jump in and sit in for like a couple hours just to like
14 gather the information on the aircraft. He was very keen to learn
15 about the systems of the aircraft and how they work and stuff. He
16 was always chipper. He always had like a smile on his face. He
17 always had like a -- he was always like in a good mood. Yeah.

18 Q. In any of the training that you did with him, did that
19 include inadvertent IMC, unusual attitudes?

20 A. It did. Yeah.

21 Q. Okay. Walk me through what that training looks like.

22 A. So like typically what we'd do is I'd go out over like Simi
23 Valley, and then I'd have them put the foggles on to simulate
24 inadvertent IMC. And then I would ask him to just simulate that
25 they're, you know, declaring an emergency, you know, maintain

1 control of the aircraft. And then I would give him some headings
2 to fly left and right, and then I would couple a climb and a
3 descent. So climb and level off to 4,000, and then a descent back
4 down to 3,500 and have them level off. And then I would do a
5 climbing left turn and then a descending right turn, something
6 like that. Or maybe vice versa, you know, just to establish that
7 they can climb and maintain altitude, descend and maintain
8 altitude, and they could fly a heading with a turn to the left and
9 a turn to the right. And then couple those two together.

10 Then after that, I would end up over like in the Piru area up
11 on the other side of mountain from Simi Valley and we'd do unusual
12 attitude recoveries. The first one that I always do, everybody
13 that does check rides with me always knows I'm going to do this at
14 this point because it's always the same thing. It's I just have
15 them put their right ear on their right shoulder and close their
16 eyes and put their head down, and then I just fly straight level.
17 I don't do anything to the aircraft. And then over the period of
18 15 to 30 seconds, I'll ask them like what they're feeling. Some
19 pilots will say, I don't know, this feels straight level. Some
20 pilots will be like I'm in a little bit of descending right turn
21 or I'm in climbing right turn or something like that.

22 Then eventually, you know, as the time progresses, they're
23 going to get more disorientated and they'll start telling me that
24 they're in a descending right turn or a climbing left turn, or
25 something. And then I ask them to look up, and there it has been

1 straight level the whole time. So I always do that as the first
2 one just to establish that we can't rely on our senses, you know?
3 Then after that, I would put them in an unusual attitude of like
4 nose high right, and then maybe nose low left, or, you know, a
5 combination of, you know, unusual attitude leaning to the right
6 and then nose high, and then also to the left.

7 And then the third one I do is like a little like spiral like
8 really like kind of out of control like to see how they respond.
9 To my recollection, Ben responded very well to all of those, and
10 he -- and it was the first time that we were flying together doing
11 the training and the check ride, he liked the fact that I showed
12 him the straight level you can't rely on, you know, your senses.

13 Q. What was he like compared to other pilots you've flown with?

14 A. He was probably like a little bit above average, especially
15 with like -- because he was like our primary like flight
16 instructor around here, he was like -- he was our lead flight
17 instructor, so he liked handle us. He was above average as well,
18 so I was really impressed with his autos, and training was very
19 easy. He had a lot of stamina for like a long duration of
20 training. Some pilots, you know, can do like maybe 45 minutes to
21 an hour of, you know, training to, you know, of EPs like all the
22 time. And then Ben could just keep going because he was such a
23 strong instructor, you know, so. But he's very talented with the
24 autos for sure. He was definitely way above.

25 Q. In any of the training, does it -- was there any discussion

1 about relying on the radar altimeter and when you should rely on
2 the radar altimeter?

3 A. Yeah. If you're flying over a mountainous terrain at night
4 or you're doing your landing at LZ and the conditions are not
5 conducive to like seeing the ground, then you would definitely
6 rely on your altimeter. Yeah.

7 Q. Is it just a discussion or is it --

8 A. It's --

9 Q. Is there actually any scenario where they're --

10 A. No, I didn't do any scenarios --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- where you need the radar altimeter at that point. The
13 training that I did was during the day. Yeah.

14 Q. And are pilots trained to set the bugs at least below the
15 low, if not the low, then the high bug?

16 A. No, I didn't do that.

17 Q. Do you think that's common? Do they use it?

18 A. You know, I'm not really sure. I usually set the --
19 depending on what operation I'm doing the 300 -- 300 during the
20 day, 500 at night, that's what I set the bug to.

21 Q. And is that the company policy, or is that just your
22 technique?

23 A. It's just my technique. Yeah.

24 Q. So as the chief pilot, how often are you interacting with the
25 pilots?

1 A. It varies. Sometimes I'll see them multiple times a week,
2 and then sometimes I might not be around for like a week. And --
3 yeah.

4 Q. Were you here on February 9th?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Did you have any conversations with Ben or Blake that day?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Any conversations with them in a couple of days -- once they
9 got assigned, once they knew that they were taking this flight,
10 did you have any conversations with them?

11 A. Not to my recollection, no.

12 Q. Do you ever serve in the flight follower role?

13 A. No.

14 Q. No. If a pilot had a safety concern, would you expect them
15 to come to you? Would you expect them to go talk to someone else?

16 A. That varies. Yeah. They can -- I always like would be
17 available if they had a concern, they could call me or talk to me.
18 Yeah. They could talk to Steve, or Brady, or Tommy, or, you know,
19 whoever else was around.

20 Q. Has anyone ever come to you with a safety concern?

21 A. Yeah. I just can't think of it. I know your next question's
22 going to be like which one. I can't think of one right now.

23 Q. Okay. How did you find out about the accident?

24 A. I woke up the next morning and Brady had sent me a text
25 message requesting him to -- requesting me to call him I think

1 ASAP, so. He sent that message at 4:00 a.m., and then I woke
2 up -- I think I woke up like around 6:00, and then I didn't see
3 the message until maybe like 6:30, 7:00. So I called him and then
4 that's when I found out.

5 Q. Did you have any duties or responsibility as part of the
6 emergency response plan at that point?

7 A. (No audible response).

8 Q. Who was in charge of assigning pilots to a flight or creating
9 pilot schedules? Let's just start there.

10 A. So like in the 135 manual, I would be responsible for
11 scheduling. And then -- but usually Tommy (ph.) takes care of the
12 scheduling and Brittney (ph.) takes care of the scheduling for the
13 company. I don't really do it.

14 Q. Okay. Were you aware that these two pilots were assigned for
15 this flight? Did you have any like insights on the flight? Were
16 you a part of any of the planning for it?

17 A. No, I wasn't. But I did receive a text message the night
18 before. The pilots send text messages to Steve, Brady, and myself
19 when they're lifting and landing. And so just track that stuff in
20 the background, and I would -- like I didn't really see the text
21 messages before I went to bed. And then they like -- it's in my
22 phone, like he -- Ben sent me a text message that he was lifting
23 for Vegas that night.

24 Q. Any communication from the pilots that there was a concern
25 about helicopter or the route?

1 A. No.

2 Q. If a pilot was to encounter or have an inadvertent IMC
3 encounter, what would you expect them to do?

4 A. Maintain control of the aircraft, wings level, and then
5 continue to maintain control of the aircraft until the onset of
6 the panic was subdued in a small way. And then I'd expect them to
7 start a climb. And then start -- get a terrain page up and start
8 navigating away from any known terrain. And then communicate.

9 Q. Is that something that would be reportable when they land to
10 let someone at Orbic know that they had an IMC?

11 A. That's a good question. That should be recorded. Yeah.

12 Q. Is there anything in the manuals, like how would they know
13 that?

14 A. That's a good question. I don't know the answer right now.
15 I'll have to get back to you.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Do you know what it is? Is there a --

18 MR. GOULD: Yeah.

19 MR. PETSCHAUER: Yeah. I just -- I think it's there, but I
20 just want to be 100 percent sure. Yeah.

21 DR. WILSON: It's in the GOM?

22 MR. GOULD: Yes. And it's -- I think -- yeah,
23 (indiscernible).

24 BY DR. WILSON:

25 Q. Have you flown this route from either Burbank or Palm Springs

1 to Boulder City or to Vegas?

2 A. Mm-hmm.

3 Q. Do you follow the road?

4 A. Depends on which aircraft I'm in and what operation I'm
5 doing. So, yeah.

6 Q. Have you followed the road at --

7 A. Have I followed the 15?

8 Q. Mm-hmm.

9 A. At night?

10 Q. Yes.

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. What was that like?

13 A. It's really dark out there. I had a clear night, so I've
14 done it a couple times. It's actually -- in hindsight, it seems
15 like (indiscernible), but it's pretty regular for people in this
16 area to transition to Vegas following the 15 and back. Yeah.
17 It's really dark out there, and then you just have the 15, the
18 highway lights, you know, cars driving on the highway at night,
19 so. And I usually try to stay really high, and I like a long
20 visual range the 15. Yeah.

21 Q. When you say you try to stay really high, what does -- what's
22 really high mean to you?

23 A. Probably like 3,000 feet AGL or higher.

24 Q. Do you find that flying that route, is it more fatiguing? Is
25 it -- does it require more concentration or more effort on a

1 pilot?

2 A. No. It can be -- it can actually be like the opposite of
3 requiring a lot more attention. It's more like you may zone out
4 and -- because there's long periods of quietness of, you know,
5 see, we usually fly around here in L.A. and all the airspace butts
6 up against each other. There's small pockets of air space where
7 you don't have to talk to anybody. But then usually you'll end up
8 talking to other helicopters. So there's a lot going on, so your
9 brain's like swelled up and, you know, you're navigating,
10 communicating, and doing your thing. And then when you're on a
11 long route like that, you know, out over the desert and there's no
12 one really to talk to, it can be really quiet for long periods of
13 time. So I find it to be more like relaxing. Yeah.

14 Q. What is the expectation for pilots in terms of completing a
15 risk assessment? Like when should they be doing that?

16 A. They have to do it for an HAA flight. We expect them to do
17 it for all flights.

18 Q. Okay. And in terms of timing, like an hour before, four
19 hours before? What would be a reasonable time to do a risk
20 assessment?

21 A. Within a couple hours of doing the flight. But, you know,
22 flight conditions can change, then the risk value would change, so
23 needs to be done prior to the flight, within a couple hours.

24 Q. Is it expected that a pilot wouldn't check the weather again
25 prior, you know, closer to the flight in case something does

1 change?

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Have you ever had to update a risk assessment because weather
4 changed or some condition changed?

5 A. Yeah. Yeah, I've had multiple flights that the weather's
6 changed, or if I have -- I did a risk assessment for the daytime,
7 and then the flight got delayed for whatever reason, and then it
8 pushed me into night, so then the value goes up because night
9 increases the value.

10 Q. So a risk assessment is expected for all flights, but it's
11 only required for the 135?

12 A. No. I'm sorry. Let me clarify it. It's expected for all
13 135 flights. It's required for HAA flights, all the 600, anything
14 that falls into 135 or 600 regs.

15 Q. Okay. Have you ever taken a flight and you were out
16 somewhere and too tired to fly back?

17 A. No. No, I haven't experienced that. We would mitigate
18 something like that ahead of time. I have had flights where I
19 wasn't -- it wasn't that I was too tired to fly back, just the
20 conditions weren't that conducive, so I got a hotel room, and then
21 the next morning we would leave.

22 Q. And the company pays for that?

23 A. Yeah, of course.

24 Q. When you're checking weather, what app do you use? How do
25 you get your weather?

1 A. I would start just sourcing on ForeFlight, looking and poking
2 around. But then I would go to the Weather.gov site and look at
3 the GFA tool. And I used to live on the HEMS tool, but that's
4 gone now. And it's kind of bummed because I don't think the GFA
5 tool is as good as the HEMS tool was, so. But most of the pilots
6 that I'm connected with in the industry in this area, we all used
7 to live on the HEMS tool. That was such a great tool, and the GFA
8 tool has now replaced that. And it does some of what the HEMS
9 tool, but it doesn't put it all together in like one spot for a
10 pilot like it used to. I find myself still poking around and
11 looking at the GFA tool and not happy with it.

12 Q. I feel like we've kind of danced around this next question,
13 but my understanding from what you said, the radar altimeter seems
14 to be more critical for night flying than for daytime flying.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. The EC130, did it have any recurring maintenance issues that
17 you were aware of?

18 A. Not at the time of the event.

19 Q. Have you ever felt pressured by the company to take a flight
20 that you weren't comfortable taking?

21 A. No.

22 Q. No. Have you ever taken a flight when something was --
23 should have been MEL'd, but you ignored it?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Heard anybody doing that?

1 A. No.

2 Q. And the radar altimeter, it has like an oral alert if you set
3 the bug.

4 A. Mm-hmm.

5 Q. Yeah? Does it have a light?

6 A. I don't remember. I believe so, yes. Not 100 percent sure
7 on my recollection on that one.

8 Q. Okay. How does that work with you splitting your time? Do
9 you -- is it reasonable? Do you feel like you can accomplish your
10 job with the split time?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. Yeah. Are you involved at all in the safety meetings? Do
13 you either -- do you attend them? Do you host them? What's your
14 role in them?

15 A. I don't host them, but I do attend them. Yeah.

16 Q. Who would be in charge of hosting them?

17 A. Usually Tommy (indiscernible) have a safety meeting once a
18 month.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. So.

21 Q. Do you think they're beneficial?

22 A. Absolutely.

23 Q. What are some of the things that are discussed?

24 A. Talk about like safety concerns on landing on a ramp because
25 there's a lot of operations here with the jets and helicopters,

1 and the mix, you know, the whole thing on the ramp, so usually
2 like talking about, you know, operations on the ramp. And then
3 noise concerns in the area. And then any other operational safety
4 concerns that pilots may have, you know, like maybe a, you know,
5 maybe got a stuck mic on one of their tours or, you know, can't
6 think of other stuff, but. Then we talk about scheduling and --
7 so it's like a safety meeting and a company meeting all combined
8 together.

9 DR. WILSON: Okay. All right. Brian, that's all that I have
10 for right now. Thank you. Fabian?

11 BY MR. SALAZAR:

12 Q. Yeah. How long did you say you knew Ben? About a year?

13 A. No, I knew Ben a little bit more than a year. Probably since
14 June or July of 2022.

15 Q. And do you -- during that time you got a pretty good or did
16 you get a pretty good understanding of his character and his
17 aviation knowledge and discipline?

18 A. Yeah. Yeah. He seemed very -- like a very safe pilot,
19 especially like with weather concerns. You know, I was surprised,
20 you know, with this one because, you know, he's always been on a
21 little -- he's a conservative guy. You know, he like looks out
22 for stuff like this, you know?

23 Q. Would you say that he loved to fly?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. How do I want to ask this question?

- 1 A. He loved flying.
- 2 Q. He loved flying. Would he bend any rules to fly?
- 3 A. No, I don't think so.
- 4 Q. Yeah. All right. Did you say you were not working on
- 5 Friday, the Friday the day of the accident?
- 6 A. Yeah. I wasn't working. I had a -- I had a -- let me look
- 7 at my schedule.
- 8 Q. Okay.
- 9 A. I don't remember. I wasn't --
- 10 Q. Because my next question is going to be were you in the
- 11 office here?
- 12 A. No, I wasn't.
- 13 Q. Okay.
- 14 A. I know I wasn't in the office.
- 15 Q. Okay.
- 16 A. I had gotten back from doing a EuroSafety class in Vegas.
- 17 Q. So as we understand it, prior to departing from Burbank to
- 18 Palm Springs, Ben took a train to Camarillo and picked up the EC
- 19 130 and brought it back. And we don't know if he had anybody with
- 20 him yet. Do you have any idea, or do you have any information on
- 21 that flight?
- 22 A. I don't.
- 23 Q. Okay.
- 24 A. No.
- 25 Q. You don't have any information on the conversation he had

1 with Steve the mechanic about the radar altimeter on that flight?

2 A. No. I was -- as I looked at schedule, I was on -- Thursday I
3 had traveled back. Yeah, I had traveled back from Vegas on
4 Thursday, the 8th from doing a EuroSafety class out in Vegas, and
5 then I was sick.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. All right. So when you got back and landed, you weren't in
9 the building?

10 A. Mm-mm.

11 Q. And then you weren't part of any conversation you had with
12 anybody after he got done with that flight. He didn't reach out
13 and call you?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. All right. We don't know the circumstances of the
16 radar altimeter. We don't know the maintenance, whether it was
17 working or not. But we do know that Ben approached the boss,
18 Brady, and had a conversation about it, and Brady told him if it's
19 working, you can go on the flight, but if it's not working, you
20 can't.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. So we're trying to figure out the --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- specifics about that. So is there anything that you know
25 about that circumstance that you can share with us?

1 A. No. I had no knowledge of any of that at that time. About
2 three to six months ago we were having problems with that radar
3 altimeter, and then my recollection is it got swapped out with a
4 new one, and it's -- it was working.

5 Q. All right. All right. What's your understanding as far as
6 Part 135 and requirements for a radar altimeter?

7 A. They're required for a 135 flight.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. 91 flights you don't have to have the radar altimeter
10 working, but for a 135 flight, you need to have a radar altimeter.

11 Q. Okay. So let's talk a little bit about the MELs. As we
12 understand it, the EC130's MEL was not approved by the FAA yet.

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. So what's your understanding -- what would I go to in the
15 absence of an MEL?

16 A. The aircraft's grounded. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. So an MEL would allow deferral of said equipment to continue
19 operations for a said period of time, 3, 10 days, 90 days,
20 something like that. But if you don't have an approved MEL, then
21 you can't -- you're not granted that deferral of that item. So it
22 would have to be working.

23 Q. Okay. All right. That's all I have.

24 MR. GERLACH: All right.

25 DR. WILSON: Dave.

1 BY MR. GERLACH:

2 Q. Just a few questions. So if you're flying a flight, what
3 would be the lowest altitude that you would go on this particular
4 route, night under those same conditions?

5 A. Let me look real quick because I don't have -- because I
6 haven't done the route from Palm Springs to Vegas. I usually come
7 from this area to Vegas. So you want to know Palm Springs to
8 Vegas?

9 Q. Yeah. AGL along the way.

10 A. They were going to go to Boulder City, right?

11 Q. Mm-hmm.

12 A. So on a direct route, the highest obstacle is 6,711 feet. So
13 I would be going -- so probably try and shoot 95 because I'd be
14 odd -- I'd have to pick an odd altitude, 75 would be too low for
15 me. So I'd try and shoot for 95.

16 Q. 9,500 feet --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- would be your target altitude in route?

19 A. Yeah.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And try and -- now because I -- because that's that high, I
22 would -- I'd obviously be able to be in contact with L.A. Center
23 or Las Vegas Approach. If I was lower, then you wouldn't be able
24 to talk to anybody. But I would have like calling services along
25 the route.

1 Q. Okay. Before you left, how would you assess the in-route
2 weather before your departure?

3 A. So I would glance at ForeFlight, and then I would look at the
4 GFA tool at FAAWeather.gov (ph.). And again, I'm not happy with
5 that. I'd really like -- I really miss the HEMS tool, so if
6 anybody in the room that can revert us back to the HEMS tool.

7 Q. We agree with you.

8 A. You're aware of it?

9 Q. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I agree. So now you're in route. What are
10 you using to assess your in-route weather?

11 A. I don't have anything official, but I would have ForeFlight
12 up. I usually glance at ForeFlight along the route. And if I
13 had -- if I'm low enough, I would get a cellular signal, and then
14 in the top left corner, I have a timestamp of when it was last
15 updated. Sometimes it could be a little bit of a gotcha if you're
16 looking at weather and it's historical and it hasn't updated.

17 Q. And when you say weather, you're referring to what
18 specifically?

19 A. I like looking at METARs, just the current weather that's
20 going to be the visibility and the ceiling in the area. And then
21 I like looking at the -- if there's any weather as in storms going
22 through the desert, in that area. I would get that from the GFA
23 tool.

24 Q. And that's pre-flight, right? That's what you're referring
25 to?

1 A. Yeah. Pre-flight. Yeah, pre-flight. But in route,
2 ForeFlight has layers that you could add so you can get like a
3 radar on the route.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Tell you where a cell is.

6 Q. And on this kind of flight, you would put radar as an overlay
7 before (indiscernible)?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. Anything else you might look at in route?

10 A. The highest obstacle, obviously, is a huge concern, and my
11 terrain, especially being out over the desert at night. So having
12 a terrain page would be very helpful. And then because it was so
13 cold, I would be looking at icing levels to see what the freezing
14 level was at, and usually try to stay 3 degrees C or more --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- to avoid icing conditions.

17 Q. So speaking of conditions, what visibility would lead you to
18 begin a turnaround?

19 A. At night. And so like based on my pre-flight or I'm in
20 flight and --

21 Q. You're in flight, where do you draw the line in visibility?

22 A. So we're required to have a, you know, 3 miles visibility. I
23 would probably turn around a little bit before that because -- to
24 give myself a buffer zone.

25 Q. Okay. So based on that, how do you decide you've reached 3

1 miles, or 4 miles, or 5 miles flying at night?

2 A. Yes. Well, so that's why I was saying earlier that I like to
3 fly high because then -- so as a pilot, the higher you fly, on a
4 clear night or clear day, the more visibility you have to see the
5 ground. And since you're flying over the desert, you're relying
6 on obstacles on the ground, the higher you are, the more you're
7 going to be able to see out in front of you. If you're low to the
8 ground, then you're not going to have a lot of visibility ahead of
9 you. So at night, I would look and see 3 statute, 4 statute miles
10 ahead of me.

11 Q. Okay. So talked a little bit about the 3 degrees C line in
12 the sand for you. If you start to see weather conditions
13 suggesting that you're seeing freezing precipitation, sleet, snow,
14 what do you do?

15 A. I'm going to turn around to come back -- because I know where
16 I came from, I'm not really sure what I'm going into at that
17 point. So I would do 180 degree turn to turn around to go back
18 where I came from where I knew I didn't have those conditions.
19 But if that wasn't an option, then I would just land the aircraft.

20 Q. Can the aircraft fly in sleet?

21 A. That's a good question. I'm not engineer. We're not allowed
22 to fly in known icy conditions. I can answer that question.
23 You're a test pilot if you're doing that.

24 Q. So your expectation of any pilot flying that helicopter is
25 to -- when they enter --

- 1 A. Known -- like icing conditions?
- 2 Q. -- icing conditions, is -- and in a sleet considered icing
- 3 conditions?
- 4 A. Yeah.
- 5 Q. Okay. Your expectation would be for them to --
- 6 A. Turn around.
- 7 Q. -- turn around.
- 8 A. Would be option A, and then land if you don't have that.
- 9 Q. Okay. Got you.
- 10 A. Yeah.
- 11 Q. Let's see, changing questions. Do you own an iPad?
- 12 A. I do.
- 13 Q. And do you use ForeFlight?
- 14 A. Mm-hmm.
- 15 Q. And is that what you use for weather and navigation when you
- 16 fly the company's helicopters?
- 17 A. No. I usually use the equipment that's installed in the
- 18 aircraft for my navigation purposes.
- 19 Q. Okay. How do you use ForeFlight while you're flying?
- 20 A. I have just it on my knee, on (indiscernible) knee.
- 21 Q. Okay. And does your other company use electronic flight bags
- 22 as well?
- 23 A. Yeah.
- 24 Q. Do they issue those or are they your personal?
- 25 A. They issue them.

1 MR. GERLACH: They do? Okay. That's all the questions I
2 have.

3 MR. PETSCHAUER: Yeah.

4 MR. GERLACH: Thank you very much.

5 MR. PETSCHAUER: Thank you. (Indiscernible).

6 BY DR. WILSON:

7 Q. Just a few follow ups. Are you doing okay? Do you need a
8 break?

9 A. No. I'm fine.

10 Q. Have you flown with a safety pilot before?

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. What do you think of that, you know, policy to have a safety
13 pilot in certain situations?

14 A. You know, I usually just do most of the work myself, but it's
15 nice to have them help like deal with the passengers, and I can
16 look at the route or look at the weather one last time before we
17 depart. And then when I'm in route, you know, they can dial in a
18 frequency for me when I'm flying, and they're an extra set of eyes
19 to look for traffic.

20 Q. Do you brief the safety pilot on what the expectations are
21 for them during a flight, or is it just known?

22 A. When I fly with a safety pilot, I do. Yeah. I would talk
23 about the rules of, you know, what I'm doing and what they're
24 doing. But really for me, like when you have a safety pilot,
25 they're just like an extra set of eyes to look for traffic and --

1 Q. Have you served as a safety pilot before, or acted in that
2 role?

3 A. Yeah.

4 Q. In the EC130?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Have you flown the EC130 with a safety pilot?

7 A. No.

8 Q. Do you have any idea -- does the safety pilot sit in the
9 center seat?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. Describe the safety culture here at Orbic.

12 A. I would say it's like pretty good. It's definitely above the
13 FAA level of requirements as close to if not matching industry
14 standards for safety. I have a -- it's not required right now, I
15 know you guys are having a safety program -- safety management
16 system going to be required for 135 operators coming down the
17 pipeline, but we do have a safety management system, and Tommy's
18 the safety manager for that. So it's kind of in line with
19 industry standards above the required levels.

20 Q. Do you think pilots, and I apologize if I asked you this
21 before, do you think pilots put pressure on themselves to complete
22 a flight?

23 A. Yeah, I do. A self-imposed pressures, the whole thing. It's
24 a big deal, you know? And sometimes, you know, you're thinking
25 about what the company's going to think or what other pilots are

1 going to think if you don't do this flight, or if it doesn't turn
2 out the way it's supposed to. Yeah, so self-imposed pressure is
3 huge. It's really big (indiscernible).

4 Q. Does the company talk to pilots about that?

5 A. You know, I've had discussions with pilots about self-imposed
6 pressure for a long time now because I have -- I've seen that down
7 the pipeline through my experience. And perceived pressure when
8 it's, you know, maybe that pressure is not actually there, but
9 you're perceiving it that way. So your perception on it is that
10 reality of it. So it does count, you know, even if it doesn't
11 exist. I can't remember if I've had a conversation with Ben about
12 it, but I have talked to other pilots at Orbic about, you know,
13 perceived pressure. Yeah.

14 Q. Do you think there's anything that can be done about that?

15 A. Yeah. You have to have an open, trusting culture where, you
16 know, people can talk freely about stuff. And even then, you
17 know, we're, you know, most men are pretty macho. You know, like
18 they don't want to seem vulnerable, you know? So they're going to
19 internalize a lot of stuff, you know? But, yeah, no, it's --
20 pressure's a big thing.

21 Q. Do you think there's that openness, so to speak, at Orbic?

22 A. Yeah. I think there is a certain level of openness and
23 discussion about pressure to some degrees. But then, you know,
24 I'm in management and, you know, to be honest, you know, other
25 pilots -- you'd have to talk to them to see because it's like

1 self-evaluating yourself. You don't really know, you know, how
2 other people view you. You view yourself as a certain way, but
3 then other people view you completely differently. And pressure
4 can be the same way, like, you know, one pilot can be totally be
5 perceiving pressure or feeling pressure or internalizing pressure,
6 and then that's either actually there or not there. And then it's
7 hard to determine, you know, what's going on in somebody else's
8 head, you know?

9 Q. Have you ever had pressure from a passenger?

10 A. Yes. Absolutely.

11 Q. Yeah. Does that happen often or is that pretty rare?

12 A. Yeah. No. It's probably like 50/50. I mean you have
13 passengers that you pick up that are very nice and kind, and you
14 know, they treat the pilot with like a lot of respect because they
15 feel like their lives are in your hands, and then you have other
16 passengers that, you know, are cold and they just have deadlines
17 that they want to me, and they, you know, they want to get going
18 and. I don't know. So it's kind of like a mix. It's kind of
19 interesting. But there are definitely like pressure from the
20 passengers, you know, they're paying a lot of money to go from
21 Point A to Point B as expeditiously as possible in a reasonably
22 safe -- safety wise, but, you know, taking a car is going to take
23 a lot longer, so taking a helicopter can go a lot quicker for
24 them, you know?

25 Q. Do you think that Orbic supports the pilot's decision to, you

1 know, not take a flight if it's --

2 A. Yeah. I've seen --

3 Q. -- for some safety reason?

4 A. I've seen it multiple times. I've actually seen Brady shut
5 down operations because there's a weather event coming, or other
6 company who would stay in service and see what they could, you
7 know, try to do. But I've seen Brady like shut down the whole
8 company and just say, hey, we're going to -- there's a weather
9 event, you know, either be a wind event for turbulence, or just,
10 you know, if there's a storm coming, we're going to shut down
11 operations today and, you know, we're done. We'll just start --
12 you'll hear from me tomorrow if it's gone or not. So he would
13 definitely be supportive of that.

14 Q. Has there been any communication from the company to pilots
15 since the accident about anything -- changes to procedures or
16 things to be mindful of?

17 A. Nothing on like an official level, but I have met with all
18 the pilots that we still have, and I talked to -- I was talking to
19 them after the accident. There was like a period of time where
20 there wasn't any communication, and then we started getting
21 ourselves back on our feet. And then I started communicating with
22 them with every -- every night I was giving all of them a call and
23 talking to them, asking how they're doing and seeing what they're
24 doing. And that was before we restarted operations, like I
25 started talking to them and seeing how they were doing and making

1 sure that they feel comfortable.

2 And, you know, grief is like a process and it can hit at any
3 point, so like if you're, you know, getting ready for a flight and
4 you think everything's great, then all of a sudden like, yeah, you
5 don't feel like your head's right for this flight or you don't,
6 you know, like all of a sudden like you're starting to feel like
7 emotions and stuff like that, you know, then just turn down the
8 flight, no harm, no foul, and we'll just figure it out like
9 another time, we'll reschedule for a later date or we can refund
10 them the money. And then I also advised them to watch each other.

11 We all have to check ourselves because, again, like we were
12 talking about, it's hard to like evaluate yourself sometimes. You
13 need other people to tell you, hey, you're raising your voice,
14 you're getting upset. You know? Like you might not even realize
15 you're doing that. And then you are, you're totally, you know,
16 getting wound up, you know, and you don't realize it. Then
17 somebody else says something and you're like, oh, yeah, I am.

18 But, yeah, I started communicating with them every night.
19 But we didn't do any like official like meeting or anything like
20 that because we lost two pilots and it hit really close to home,
21 and we kind of chatted about it a little bit, but I thought, you
22 know, kind of -- this whole time, like we get everybody together,
23 we start talking about this, I think it's just going to be a room
24 with everybody just crying. So it's not really like -- I don't
25 think that's going to be conducive to anything right now, so.

1 Q. Okay. And I don't want to assume anything. Again, there's
2 been no communication about, you know, if you're unsure about the
3 weather, don't take a flight or don't --

4 A. There has -- for me, there has been communication.

5 Q. On that --

6 A. I've been talking to each pilot. Yeah.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. I knew you were talking about kind of the emotional side of
10 things from losing a colleague.

11 A. Yeah. Emotions or anything.

12 Q. But -- okay.

13 A. Anything doesn't feel right, you know, (indiscernible).

14 DR. WILSON: All right. Thank you. Fabian.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Just a few.

16 BY MR. SALAZAR:

17 Q. Brian, I appreciate you just going through your quick method
18 of determining a minimum altitude that you would fly from point A
19 to point B. You came up with about 9,500 feet, and that was based
20 on a highest obstacle --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- that was in the general area.

23 A. That's the highest obstacle in the general area, then I was
24 picking an altitude that supports, you know, the, you know, flying
25 odd northeast altitudes plus 500, and then -- for VFR flights.

1 And then even for Southwest.

2 Q. Okay. From the ADS-B data that we were able to look at, for
3 the most part, it looked like Ben was maintaining about 4,500
4 feet. Sometimes 4,200. But, you know, it's dark. The
5 airplane -- or the helicopter, did it have an autopilot?

6 A. No.

7 Q. Okay. So he's hand-flying the whole thing, so a little bit
8 of variance is certainly understandable. But 4,500 feet is about
9 half of yours. Anything that I don't know about 4,500 feet in
10 that area of why they would -- why they would be at 4,500 feet?

11 A. Looking back at the flight, there was an overcast layer that
12 developed, and I'm not really sure, maybe he was trying to stay
13 underneath that overcast layer just through the flight.

14 Q. Okay. But --

15 A. And then I mean, obviously, there was some weather moving
16 through that area as well.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. So he probably modified his altitude. He also -- like I
19 chose a direct route. And he -- like looking back on the flight
20 tracker, he didn't go direct. He went through the Cajon Pass --

21 Q. Cajon.

22 A. -- and then up through Victorville just following the
23 freeway. So I could look at the altitude if --

24 Q. No. No.

25 A. -- (indiscernible).

1 Q. I just wanted to make sure that there wasn't anything
2 specific to 4,500 feet like as an example. That's what we
3 typically fly at because --

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. -- we're following the roads, and that gives us plenty of
6 altitude. Or, you know, that's what I was looking for to see if
7 there's anything that I didn't know.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Flight release is the form that I believe that you and I are
10 both referencing without having the name. So if you don't mind
11 passing that back to Brady, Steve.

12 MR. GOULD: I will, thank you.

13 MR. SALAZAR: Because it's the flight release that I believe
14 tells you what legs is going to be part 91 and part 135.

15 BY MR. SALAZAR:

16 Q. With regards to a safety pilot, why not install a fully
17 qualified pilot who can also fly the aircraft?

18 A. We do that sometimes, but I don't know the exact details of
19 why it ended up that way.

20 Q. Because I understand -- as I understand it, the safety pilot
21 is ready to fly the helicopter, but he's not part -- 135. So he's
22 not to fly the aircraft because it wouldn't be legal --

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. -- to share that PIC time. Is that correct?

25 A. Yeah. He can't touch the controls --

- 1 Q. Right.
- 2 A. -- on a 91 flight.
- 3 Q. Right. And do you know if --
- 4 A. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. On a 135.
- 5 Q. On a 135 flight.
- 6 A. (Indiscernible) he can't touch the --
- 7 Q. Do you know if there's any restrictions in the OpSpec for a
- 8 second pilot?
- 9 A. No, I don't.
- 10 Q. Okay.
- 11 A. Yeah.
- 12 Q. I'm just scratching my head and looking for an answer. If
- 13 I've got an option between a safety pilot who cannot touch the
- 14 flight controls with the exception of an emergency.
- 15 A. Yeah.
- 16 Q. And a fully qualified --
- 17 A. Qualified --
- 18 Q. -- pilot to sit in that very same seat.
- 19 A. Yeah.
- 20 Q. Why that's not an option?
- 21 A. It is an option. We do do that.
- 22 Q. Okay.
- 23 A. I don't know what the events were and how it ended up with
- 24 Blake and Ben on that flight.
- 25 Q. Okay.

- 1 A. But we were targeting Blake to be next in line to check on
2 EC130s, so --
- 3 Q. Yeah.
- 4 A. The 91 legs he could have flown and had a chance to get
5 familiar with the aircraft --
- 6 Q. Yeah.
- 7 A. -- a little bit more and get him some exposure.
- 8 Q. Sure. From Burbank to Palm Springs, and then from --
- 9 A. All the way to --
- 10 Q. -- Boulder all the way back.
- 11 A. Yeah. He would -- like that would have been a nice flight
12 for him to pick up to get him more comfortable and used to that
13 machine before he goes through the official training and the check
14 ride, and then --
- 15 Q. Yeah.
- 16 A. -- after that, he would continue to do some more dual, and
17 then --
- 18 Q. Well, there's some advantage I see in that.
- 19 A. Yeah.
- 20 Q. Okay. So --
- 21 A. From the company standpoint.
- 22 Q. Yeah.
- 23 A. Not in this case.
- 24 Q. Exactly.
- 25 A. But --

1 Q. How do you or how does the company provide any quality
2 control for the pilots who are getting their weather? I mean as
3 I'm seeing it, you tell Pilot A you're going to be on this flight.
4 You're the PIC, and all of his responsibilities are implied.
5 Okay? So he gets his own weather, he gets his own weather
6 briefing. He fills out the risk assessment. And if the risk
7 assessment isn't elevated, nobody even sees a risk assessment.

8 A. That's correct.

9 Q. So how does the company know that the pilot, the PIC has done
10 his job?

11 A. They wouldn't at that point.

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. It's part of their duties and responsibilities to --

14 Q. It's just expected of that PIC?

15 A. It's part of their duties and responsibilities, yeah. It's
16 expected of them.

17 Q. But they don't have to show you a product. They don't have
18 to give you a physical paper that says I got this standard weather
19 briefing, and I got all of this information?

20 A. No.

21 Q. And as a consequence, with that in place, you don't know what
22 they've done?

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. I'm looking at Ben's record of training. He's got one
25 for the EC -- I think it's one for the EC130 and one for the R44,

1 and this is the one for the R44.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. And when you look at the curriculum, what does that say,
4 curriculum segments, this piece right here doesn't match. Does it
5 look like it's been copied with signatures, and then when you --

6 A. (Indiscernible) a couple times (indiscernible).

7 Q. Let's see. Why is it like that? Do you see where the dotted
8 lines go into the solid lines?

9 A. Yes. These signatures you're asking about?

10 Q. Yeah. So what I'm seeing is basically indoctrination, dotted
11 lines go over to this piece, and this piece doesn't match up with
12 the dotted lines. And it's the same way with the next record
13 training for the -- and I'm just looking to understand why that
14 is. Do you see how that doesn't match up?

15 A. You mean the line doesn't match up with the --

16 Q. Uh-huh.

17 A. Well, that's a good question. I don't know.

18 Q. Is that --

19 A. I think that's just a product of Word. Can I go back up
20 again?

21 Q. Yeah. It's -- yeah.

22 A. I think Microsoft Word because --

23 Q. That's just a -- that's just a form? There's --

24 A. Yeah. That's a form. Those are -- I think those are
25 underscores for the person to fill out who the instructor was.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. So it's not an overlay and a copy?

4 A. No.

5 MR. GOULD: Can I say something?

6 Q. Yes, sir.

7 A. Yeah. So I am normally the guy that did the forms, so that's
8 exactly what I was doing, what he said. You put in those dots and
9 then there's an underscore, so that's why it looks -- it's a
10 little bit lower --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- than the dots.

13 Q. Okay. That's all I needed to know. Just -- it was just a
14 question.

15 A. Yeah.

16 Q. And I'm glad to hear that.

17 A. Yeah.

18 MR. SALAZAR: That's all I had.

19 MR. PETSCHAUER: Thanks.

20 DR. WILSON: Dave?

21 MR. GERLACH: No more questions for me.

22 DR. WILSON: All right. Brian, thank you. You've answered a
23 lot of our questions. It's been really helpful. Is there
24 anything that we didn't ask you about that you think we should
25 have asked you about, or other --

1 MR. PETSCHAUER: No. I --

2 DR. WILSON: -- information that's relevant?

3 MR. PETSCHAUER: -- appreciate you guys taking your time to
4 investigate this, and I know I'm, you know, you guys go through
5 this a lot, so, yeah, sorry to be part of you guys' job.

6 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah. Yeah.

7 MR. PETSCHAUER: I was hoping -- I've met Fabian before in
8 2019, so -- on a different accident.

9 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

10 MR. PETSCHAUER: But --

11 MR. SALAZAR: And --

12 MR. PETSCHAUER: That one was a lot easier to deal with than
13 this one because everybody was alive.

14 DR. WILSON: All right. We will go off the record at -- oh,
15 gosh, 11:24.

16 (Whereupon, at 11:24 a.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Brian Petschauer

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.



Jami McNear
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: ANTON IMMLER, Check Airman
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

VAN MCKENNY, Airworthiness
National Transportation Safety Board

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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By Mr. Gerlach		25

I N T E R V I E W

(11:39 a.m.)

DR. WILSON: Okay, we're going on the record at 11:39 Pacific Standard Time, we're at Orbic Air conducting interviews as a part of the accident that occurred on February 9th near Halloran Springs, California. I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us today and we always want to extend our condolences for the loss of one of your colleagues.

MR. IMMLER: Thank you.

DR. WILSON: So, I appreciate you offering us some insights into the operation, you know, you all are the experts.

MR. IMMLER: Yeah.

DR. WILSON: So, you're helping us learn about how you all do things around here. So, we haven't done an interview with you yet.

MR. IMMLER: No.

DR. WILSON: So, if you didn't know, I mean, we're here strictly from the safety side.

MR. IMMLER: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: We don't have any enforcement action. We don't put blame on a company or a pilot for something. We just really want to prevent something like this from happening again. And so, as a part of that, we're conducting interviews with Orbic Air staff today. I would like to record the interview and we'll

1 create a transcript.

2 MR. IMMLER: That's fine.

3 DR. WILSON: Okay. It will eventually become a part of our
4 public docket.

5 MR. IMMLER: Okay.

6 DR. WILSON: We work under the party system, so we've got FAA
7 here, and also a representative from Orbic Air. Everyone will
8 introduce themselves for the record.

9 MR. IMMLER: Mm-hmm.

10 DR. WILSON: We'll each take a turn asking questions. If we
11 ask you a question that you don't understand, please ask us to
12 clarify, or if you don't know the answer to a question saying, I
13 don't know, or I'll get back to you is also okay. Let's go around
14 the room and have everyone introduce themselves.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Anton, I'm Fabian Salazar. I am the operations
16 group chairman, so I'm looking into operations.

17 MR. IMMLER: Mm-hmm.

18 MR. GERLACH: I'm the FAA IIC on the operations group.

19 MR. GOULD: I'm Steve Gould, Director of Operations for Orbic
20 Air. If you don't mind, I'm going to switch seats. This seat's
21 really uncomfortable.

22 DR. WILSON: Sure. And, Anton, if you could state your name.

23 MR. IMMLER: My name is Anton Immler, so I'm a former chief
24 pilot at Orbic Air, and I currently serve as a check airman on a
25 need basis.

1 DR. WILSON: Okay. And you are entitled to have one person
2 here representing you. Do you have someone you would like to --

3 MR. IMMLER: No.

4 DR. WILSON: -- join you?

5 MR. IMMLER: Or you, I guess.

6 MR. GOULD: May I suggest Jon?

7 DR. WILSON: You have to tell us you want Jon. All right.
8 So, Jon.

9 MR. HEMBREE: Okay, Jonathan Hembree.

10 DR. WILSON: All right. And you are okay having him here
11 representing you?

12 MR. IMMLER: Yes.

13 DR. WILSON: Okay. Do you have any questions for us before
14 we get started?

15 MR. IMMLER: I don't believe so, no. Not at this time.

16 MR. SALAZAR: Let me ask you this, please, would you mind
17 spelling your first name and last name?

18 MR. IMMLER: Yes, so first name, Anton, A-n-t-o-n, last name
19 is Immer, I-m-m-l-e-r.

20 INTERVIEW OF ANTON IMMLER

21 BY DR. WILSON:

22 Q. Okay. All right. And so, as you said, you're a flight
23 instructor or a check airman?

24 A. Yes, check airman.

25 Q. Check airman. And so, as a check airman, what are your

1 duties and responsibilities?

2 A. Some of my duties and responsibilities would be to, you know,
3 evaluate and check out new pilots for our 135 operation to make
4 sure that they conform to the standards that are set forth, you
5 know, legally and also to our own satisfaction to make sure that
6 they can safely operate the aircraft.

7 Q. And how long have you been a check airman?

8 A. I believe, I don't have the papers in front of me right now,
9 but at the top of my head, I believe I became check airman in
10 2019, the fall of.

11 Q. And you mentioned you were a former chief pilot.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Have you held any other positions with the company?

14 A. No.

15 Q. So, you were hired in as a check airman?

16 A. No, so I was hired in, sorry, as a flight instructor,
17 originally and then moved on to, you know, a tour pilot, and then
18 a 135, you know, line pilot. And then, eventually check airman,
19 and after that, chief pilot. And I was chief pilot until December
20 of 2023, and that's when Brian took over the chief pilot role and
21 I stepped down to doing minimal work and part-time mostly because
22 of family reasons, small kids.

23 Q. I can understand that. So, do you also do instructing or do
24 you just do check airmen right now?

25 A. Right now, I only do check airman.

1 Q. Okay. All right. Can you still help us by answering some
2 questions about the training from your time as a flight
3 instructor?

4 A. Yes, up until, yeah, you know, when I did it last.

5 Q. Okay. When was the last time you did it?

6 A. The last check ride, I'd have to ask Steve about that, but I
7 believe it was in the fall of last year, November, I believe I
8 did, Albert?

9 MR. GOULD: Yep, sounds about right.

10 MR. IMMLER: Yeah, I think that was the latest one, that
11 would have been in R44. I cannot at the top of my head recall the
12 last time I did a check ride in the EC130.

13 BY DR. WILSON:

14 Q. Okay. But you could do a check ride --

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. -- in both aircraft?

17 A. Yes, I believe I am expired now.

18 Q. Okay.

19 MR. GOULD: You're expired as a 135, but --

20 MR. IMMLER: Yes, oh, but not as the check airman --

21 MR. GOULD: Yes.

22 MR. IMMLER: -- responsibilities. I gotcha.

23 BY DR. WILSON:

24 Q. How much total flight time do you have?

25 A. So, right now, I'm sitting around 3,500 hours.

1 Q. Okay. And about how many hours do you think you have in the
2 EC130?

3 A. I'd say around 400.

4 Q. Okay. And is all of that with your time at Orbic Air, or did
5 you have some --

6 A. Yes, that is all from two hours that's on that specific
7 aircraft as well.

8 Q. Okay. So, how often are you doing check rides?

9 A So, I would say, what's it, three or four times a year will
10 be on average, because we have more than one check airman. So,
11 you know, it's more up to Steve, you know, which one I take and do
12 not take on.

13 Q. Mm-hmm.

14 A. But, yeah, anytime, you know, we have a pilot that's due for
15 an initial or a recurrent either on the R44 or the EC130 --

16 Q. Mm-hmm.

17 A. I've done, I'd say most of them and then you and Brian have
18 done, you know, to answer that question of, you know, the exact
19 numbers.

20 Q. And so, how do you maintain your currency?

21 A. So, I come in here to, you know, to receive a check ride from
22 them when I'm due so I can still give out check rides, you know,
23 to the rest of them when they are due.

24 Q. Mm-hmm.

25 A. And then, you know, every two years we do it with the FAA as

1 well. I believe Steve Cirigliano was the last FAA inspector that
2 I did a check ride with, with you, I believe --

3 MR. GOULD: The EC130.

4 MR. IMMLER: -- in the EC130 and then for the R 44, it will
5 be a Roy Peters, that's with the Riverside FSDO.

6 BY DR. WILSON:

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. And that one is still current as well.

9 Q. So, the paperwork that we got for the flight crew, we saw
10 that you did a check ride for Ben in October of 2023. Have you,
11 have you looked at that document by chance?

12 A. Not recently.

13 Q. No? Does anything stick out to you? Do you remember
14 anything about the check ride?

15 A. That was on the EC130 or on the R44?

16 Q. It was on the R44.

17 A. Okay. I don't think anything, not off the top of my head,
18 that would stick out from it. Ben was pretty on top of his game
19 for the most part. So, you know, it wasn't a, it wasn't iffy by
20 any means.

21 Q. Mm-hmm.

22 A. You know, it was a pretty clear cut for a check ride --

23 Q. Mm-hmm.

24 A. -- from what I can remember of doing check rides with him.

25 Q. Do these check rides, do they include inadvertent IMCs?

1 A. Yes, they do.

2 Q. Okay. Walk me through what you do on a check ride for that.

3 A. So, for a check ride, we do, so I like to use what we call
4 the four Cs, so control, climb, course, and communicate and that's
5 what the book says, but, you know, in reality I like to be a
6 little more realistic.

7 Q. Mm-hmm.

8 A. So, the way I would train it and test it would be once you
9 first go on inadvertent IMC, you know, focus on the control
10 because control is what's, you know, gonna get you at the end of
11 the day.

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. It's gonna be the most heavy workload to maintain throughout
14 being inadvertent IMC. I'd advise them to maintain control and do
15 that for at least 30 seconds so you get over their initial sense
16 of, you know, panic, I would say. Because it would be, I would
17 imagine, a scary situation to end up inadvertent IMC because if
18 you start working on the other three Cs too soon, I would expect
19 that it's likely that they would, you know, do that at the expense
20 of control, which, you know, in my mind anyways, would be the most
21 important aspect of being inadvertent IMC.

22 Q. Mm-hmm.

23 A. The second tier, the climb and course, I don't want to say
24 that they're interchangeable in the terrain that we're climbing
25 right now, because I think where I originally learned about the

1 four Cs, climb was before course, but there's a lot of very high
2 terrain right here and you could be on a course where your nearest
3 terrain is at 10,000 feet as far as if you change heading by 30
4 degrees, you could have no terrain whatsoever. So, I'd always
5 say, depending on terrain, that would, those two would be
6 interchangeable. But once you've done one, set the course, then,
7 you know, by all means, start a climb as well and always, in
8 between that, go back to control. So, first C is for control,
9 course, control, climb, control, you know, once you have
10 everything set up and you know you can maintain straight and level
11 heading, and if you do that, there's no terrain for a hundred
12 miles that you're going to hit, only then start working on the
13 communication. Because they can only help you as much and you can
14 have to help yourself before you help anyone else. So, that's
15 kind of the standard I wanted to test them to and that's something
16 I did put quite a lot of focus on on every check ride.
17 particularly after the accident with Kobe Bryant, I started
18 putting more emphasis on the inadvertent IMC training and testing
19 and that's how I conducted it.

20 Q. So, what is the scenario that you use? Like, walk me through
21 what you would do with a pilot to get them --

22 A. So, I would have them wear foggles or a view limiting device
23 and I would originally just give them some vectors and I would
24 usually do it, I'd say about 10 miles east, northeast of Burbank
25 Airport where the terrain is relatively mountainous. I think the

1 tallest mountains out there are somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000
2 feet. So, I put them in a situation where, you know, they do have
3 higher terrain on at least two sides and we were flying up a
4 valley or a canyon. And then, I'll take controls from them. I'd
5 ask them to put their heads down and tilt their head to the side
6 and close their eyes, even with the view limiting device on and I
7 would put him in an unusual attitude, whether you're in a banking
8 turn, a climb, or descent, put the pedals out of frame. So,
9 something very unusual for normal flight.

10 I'd then hand over the controls to them again, so I'd say,
11 okay, you have the controls back. I'd then expect them to, only
12 using the instruments, get back in control, as is the first C,
13 establish straight and level flight, and then maintain that for at
14 least 30 seconds. After that, I would expect them to turn the GPS
15 onto terrain mode where they can see any terrain in the vicinity
16 and alter their course depending on what they see on the terrain
17 map. And after that, I would ask them to, okay, so find us in a
18 comfortable position where you can fly straight and level and you
19 know for a fact there's no terrain in front of you. And then, I'd
20 have them do a mock radio call to ask them, who are you going to
21 call in the first place.

22 Q. Mm-hmm.

23 A. So, I'd wait for them to find, you know, a tower or a
24 controller that they can call and declare an emergency and ask for
25 assistance. But then still, you know, make one call, go back to

1 control, make the second call, go back to control, and figure out
2 if they can vector you to better weather, which will be preferable
3 and that's an absolute, absolute recipe for if the aircraft is
4 equipped with, you know, a GPS and instruments to do an instrument
5 approach. I would then have them do that in practice --

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. -- but I would make it very clear that in reality, under that
8 workload, it's unlikely that it can perform a successful
9 instrument approach with the instruments aboard that particular
10 aircraft. So, that would be an absolute last resort if there's no
11 other way to get vector to out of bad weather.

12 Q. And you said you don't recall any issues with the flight with
13 Ben.

14 A. No, and I'm sure you're aware already that Ben was primarily
15 the instrument instructor here at Orbic. So, out of any pilots
16 here, probably second to me, because I was the instrument
17 instructor or the main one prior to Ben starting to work here, and
18 after he started to work here, he started taking more and more of
19 the instrument students that I originally trained and he kind of
20 kept that going. As far as I know, you know, still training
21 instrument students right now.

22 Q. Mm-hmm.

23 A. So he, I would say was more fluent on instrument procedures
24 than anyone else that worked here at that time. And, you know,
25 doing instrument instruction, even though he's not wearing goggles

1 or a view limiting device himself, you know, you're still going
2 through the procedures, you're going through the routines, you're
3 looking at the instruments. So, I'd say he was more than
4 capable --

5 Q. Mm-hmm.

6 A. -- for that particular procedure.

7 Q. In any of the training do you discuss using the radar
8 altimeter with pilots?

9 A. We do you use it, primarily when it comes to whiteout and
10 brownout conditions, but, you know, also flying at night to make
11 sure that you have, you know, adequate terrain clearance.

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A And also recommend then throughout any type of daily
14 operation and training that, you know, keep an eye on it because,
15 you know, to maintain the terrain clearance that we like to keep.
16 So, the way I would say to most of the pilots that I trained is
17 that when you fly anywhere over the city or a terrain, if it ever
18 dips below 800 feet and then start climbing a little bit higher,
19 or if you're flying up and down the coast and you have, you know,
20 a beach to follow and good options for landing, then, you know,
21 you can take it down to 500 feet. But any lower than that, you
22 know, usually that's a little reminder that, oh, okay, it's time
23 to climb up a little bit, and I'll reset again.

24 Q. And do, in your experience, do you notice, do pilots
25 typically use the bugs? Like, the lower, the lower limit bug?

- 1 A. I would say no.
- 2 Q. Okay. Why is that?
- 3 A. I don't know actually.
- 4 Q. Do you use the bugs?
- 5 A. I have not used one in a long time.
- 6 Q. Why not?
- 7 A. I can't answer that. I don't know.
- 8 Q. No. Okay. Do you know, did the EC130 with the radar
- 9 altimeter, do you know, did it have the aural tone if you set the
- 10 bug, the lower level bug?
- 11 A. Not that I recall, no.
- 12 Q. Okay. Have you ever heard any pilot say it's a nuisance?
- 13 A. Not in my experience, no.
- 14 Q. Okay. All right. How would you describe the safety culture
- 15 here?
- 16 A. I would describe it as very good. Now, my first job was with
- 17 Orbic Air, so I don't have a whole lot of other operators to
- 18 compare it to, but I would say that I was always very satisfied
- 19 with, you know, how the safety culture worked here.
- 20 Q. Mm-hmm.
- 21 A. There was never any pressure to do anything. They leave a
- 22 lot of decisions up to the pilot, and if the pilot is not
- 23 comfortable with something then, you know, we cancel the flight
- 24 absolutely. And same, if anyone else, you know, under Steve or
- 25 anyone else from the management, anyone with operational control,

1 if they were not comfortable with the flight, even though the
2 pilot would be comfortable with it, they just cancel it on their
3 behalf, which, you know, is pretty happy with, especially with a
4 small operator that uses a lot of pilots that, you know, for a lot
5 of people, this are their first job. So, I was impressed and
6 happy with the safety culture and I don't think there was ever any
7 pressure to complete a task.

8 Q. Okay. Have you ever canceled a flight?

9 A. Yes, many times.

10 Q. What are the typical reasons?

11 A. Typically weather.

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. I would say 99.9 percent of the time.

14 Q. Have you ever had to cancel a flight for an item being MEL'd?

15 A. Not that I recall, no.

16 Q. Mm-hmm. Have you ever, and I think you said this, but I
17 don't want to assume you did, ever felt pressured to take a flight
18 that you didn't feel comfortable taking or heard that another
19 pilot feels pressured?

20 A. No.

21 Q. No?

22 A. I'd be on the opposite. I think when I was still chief pilot
23 and it happened once or twice that I would cancel a flight on
24 someone else's behalf because I wasn't comfortable with it. So,
25 from my end anyways, I never put any pressure on anyone to

1 complete a flight, and I don't recall any instance when it's
2 happened from anyone else to anyone else within the company.

3 Q. Do you think pilots put pressure on themselves to take
4 flights?

5 A. I'd say sometimes --

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. -- yes, partly because, you know, they're still new and maybe
8 they want their flight hour, maybe they I love flying, that's why
9 we all start with this, so I'd say it could happen that, you know,
10 pilots believe they can complete a task and put a little bit more
11 pressure on themselves --

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. -- to complete a flight when, you know, in reality, the
14 easier option would be to cancel it.

15 Q. Are you aware of any recurring maintenance issues on the
16 EC130?

17 A. Not that I recall. Not that I recall on this one, no.

18 Q. Were you working by chance on the day of the accident?

19 A. No.

20 Q. How did you hear about the accident?

21 A. Well, I work for a news station flying a news helicopter and
22 I heard it from there on the app. I got a news alert and, you
23 know, I immediately recognized the tail number at which point I
24 called Brian, the chief pilot here, and he informed me of what had
25 happened. And that was on a Saturday, so I believe I was already

1 sleeping on Friday by the time it happened.

2 Q. Mm-hmm. Okay. What kind of helicopter do you fly for the
3 news station?

4 A. A Star an AS350.

5 Q. Okay. As a pilot, just how often are you checking weather?

6 A. A few times an hour, I would say.

7 Q. Yeah, and how do you do that?

8 A. So, usually by METARs and TAFs as the primary source. I know
9 it's sometimes difficult in an operator like this, you know,
10 because you have your schedule and you have your set number of
11 flights, and, you know, when you see your flights that you're
12 going to conduct, then, you know, you check the weather on, you
13 know, the area where those flights are being conducted. But, you
14 know, as an on demand 135 operator, you know, it does happen that
15 a flight pops up in short notice that's to somewhere completely
16 different and then, you know, of course, we would check the
17 weather by the same means of going, you know, where they're going,
18 you know, from just flying flight instruction around Burbank
19 airport and then all of a sudden, a flight pops up to San Diego, I
20 would not prior have checked the weather in San Diego.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. But, you know, we would do it still primarily by TAFs and
23 METARs before going down there. And if the weather's good and no
24 question about it, you know, we'd accept the flight and keep
25 going. And outside of that, I'm a fan of using, there's a website

1 called Alert, Wildfire Alert California, which has web cameras. I
2 don't know if you're familiar with it, but it has web cameras to
3 spot fires all around California. But it's proven a good resource
4 for me as a pilot as well to get a live look at what --

5 Q. Mm-hmm.

6 A. -- weather is doing in a particular location. It's nothing I
7 included in any official training that we did, but I'd always
8 bring it up --

9 Q. Mm-hmm.

10 A. -- and show it as a courtesy to any pilots that I would train
11 as an additional tool to use when they're making, you know,
12 weather decisions. Because, you know, TAFs and METARs are only
13 where there's a reporting station and what I find is there's a lot
14 more of those cameras around than, you know, what the stations are
15 reporting, as an extra resource.

16 Q. And to get your weather, are you, what app are you using or
17 what site do you go to?

18 A. So, I've used ForeFlight or there's an Aero weather app that
19 I use as well and you can load, you know, a pre-select of, you
20 know, your favorite airports and reporting stations to give, you
21 know, a quick and updated glance at what the current weather is.

22 Q. And are you able to use it pretty well in flight too to get
23 updated weather?

24 A. Really depends on where you are and your altitude. And I'm
25 sure you're aware of this as well, but pretty frequently, even

1 being, you know, above a thousand feet in the middle of the city,
2 you have no cell reception.

3 Q. Mm-hmm.

4 A. So, if that's the case, then you would not be able to get on
5 the phone updated weather, so your option would be to simply ask a
6 tower or a controller or a flight service station.

7 Q. Okay. I think that's all that I have for right now.

8 A. Okay.

9 DR. WILSON: Fabian?

10 BY MR. SALAZAR:

11 Q. Anton, Ben, was he the only instrument instructor that Orbic
12 Air uses?

13 A. I don't believe so.

14 MR. GOULD: Well, yeah, I don't remember. So, for the 135,
15 Ben was not an instructor yet for the 135, just for the Part 91
16 stuff.

17 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. And the R44?

18 MR. GOULD: Yeah.

19 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

20 MR. GOULD: So, we didn't, so we're not an instrument 135, so
21 we don't have an instrument training program for the 135.

22 BY MR. SALAZAR:

23 Q. Okay. Getting into the 135, how is it for a basic instrument
24 platform for just flying the gauges?

25 A. For 135?

1 Q. No, no, part 91.

2 A. Part 91.

3 Q. Just getting in that helicopter and doing basic instruments,
4 is it a stable platform? Is it --

5 A. In the EC130?

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. I would say that 99.9 percent of all the instrument
8 instruction that we do is in an R44, primarily because it is
9 significantly cheaper to operate --

10 Q. Mm-hmm.

11 A. -- than the EC130.

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. I don't know for Ben, but speaking for myself, I don't
14 believe I ever conducted any instrument training on the EC130, but
15 it was primarily or only on the R44s.

16 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's a question I'd like to bring back
17 to you, Steve. Just give me one question for Steve. Is there any
18 instrument training conducted at all in the EC130?

19 MR. GOULD: Not, so the only instrument training we do is in
20 concurrence with the inadvertent IMC stuff.

21 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

22 MR. GOULD: So, we teach them, if the aircraft is equipped,
23 which the EC130 is and the A star having an ILS or a GPS, then we
24 do the inadvertent IMC, all of that and, of course, this is
25 depending on the instructor pilot for the 135, but we train them

1 into do an ILS or a GPS to an airport.

2 MR. SALAZAR: Right.

3 MR. GOULD: So, that's the only instrument training that we
4 do, but it's just as an emergency procedure.

5 MR. SALAZAR: Okay.

6 MR. GOULD: Not part of an instrument training.

7 BY MR. SALAZAR:

8 Q. So, getting back to that, as a check airman, when you walk,
9 when you walk the guys into this inadvertent IMC --

10 A. Mm-hmm.

11 Q. -- let's start from the beginning. With the EC130 --

12 A. Yep.

13 Q. -- okay, so do you do anything with IIMC avoidance?

14 A. Not more than, you know, you staying away from bad weather
15 and, you know, using the normal VFR weather limitations and the
16 135 weather limitations. And as far as that comes to, you know,
17 staying out of bad weather.

18 Q. Okay. Okay. So, now we'll go into unusual altitudes, like
19 you described.

20 A. Mm-hmm.

21 Q. We don't need to revisit that, but in the EC130, after you go
22 through that portion and the applicant, if you will, is flying the
23 helicopter and he's gotten past his jitters and his panic --

24 A. Mm-hmm.

25 Q. -- how is a helicopter to fly basic instruments? Is it a

1 stable platform?

2 A. This one, I would say so.

3 Q. Yeah?

4 A. I don't recall having any issues with, you know, the
5 instruments that are in there.

6 Q. Okay. And what do you have them accomplish as far as an
7 instrument approach? So, let's say they ask you for vector to VFR
8 conditions and you tell them there's not VFR for 100 miles.

9 A. Yeah.

10 Q. Okay. What can they do in a helicopter for approach?

11 A. So, it is equipped to do both GPS and ILS approaches. If I'm
12 not mistaken, it did receive an upgrade to a new GPS --

13 MR. GOULD: Yep.

14 MR. IMMLER: -- after the last time I flew the aircraft, so I
15 can't say what it was capable of doing after --

16 BY MR. SALAZAR:

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. -- the new GPS was installed. But the last time I flew it
19 during a check ride, if I'm not mistaken, we did a practice GPS
20 approach into El Monte, and I have them call up an air traffic
21 controller, get vectored to final approach, of course, for a
22 practice approach, and then follow that approach down to the
23 minimums. And at the minimums, I would ask them to take their
24 foggles off and verify they can see the runway and they can safely
25 land on it, and if they can, I would be satisfied with that.

1 Q. Okay. Do you also add a precision approach to the ILS in
2 your evaluation?

3 A. So, I use the most, the most applicable approach at the
4 airports that's closest to them. So, once I've put them in
5 inadvertent IMC, I want to leave it up to me to pick an, you know,
6 an approach or an airport, I would leave it up to them to say,
7 hey, if we're going to do an approach, what are nearby, you know,
8 which approach do you want to do?

9 Q. Okay. Very good. And we know you flew with Ben. Did you
10 ever fly with Blake? I missed that answer.

11 A. I don't think I ever did a flight with Blake, no.

12 Q. Okay. In flying with Ben, did you ever, did you notice any
13 of the, did you notice any anti-authority traits about him at all?

14 A. I wouldn't say no.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have. Thank you. And I'm
16 gonna pass it back to you, Kat.

17 DR. WILSON: And Dave?

18 BY MR. GERLACH:

19 Q. Do you use the iPad for flight when you fly?

20 A. Yes.

21 Q. And what exactly do you use it for?

22 A. Flying around LA, I primarily use it for seeing other
23 traffic, getting alerted when I'm approaching airspace, on top of,
24 you know, using the GPS that's equipped in the aircraft, and as
25 well as finding appropriate frequencies to whoever I'm gonna talk

1 to.

2 Q. Where do you put it in the airplane when you're flying in the
3 helicopter?

4 A. So, I personally have a little suction cup mount that I'll
5 put in the window right next to the pilot seat. So, in the EC130,
6 it would be up against the left window. I would say, about half
7 an inch in front of the panel that splits the door and the glass
8 panel.

9 Q. Mm-hmm. And when you do check rides, how do you use the
10 iPads? Do both pilots have an iPad? Do you each have one?

11 A Yes, yes, so during check rides in the EC130, I would sit in
12 the middle seat, so in the copilot seat, and then I'd have, you
13 know, my subject sit in the main pilot seat on the left side, and
14 they would always bring their iPad with them.

15 Q. Yeah, and do they put them in different places?

16 A. I think, if I recall correctly, for the most part, people had
17 suction cups on the window. I'm trying to remember what Ben's
18 preference was. I know, I can't recall who, but I know someone
19 likes to use a knee board with an iPad on the knee board. Is that
20 you? Yeah, I couldn't recall if that was Ben or if that was
21 someone else. But I've seen both, but for the majority it's on
22 suction cup maps on the side of the aircraft.

23 Q. You mentioned in your IIMC, selecting terrain.

24 A. Mm-hmm.

25 Q. Do you not have terrain up all the time? Is that not a

1 feature that you use?

2 A. So, I believe that all, so the, for the most part, in most of
3 the aircrafts that were here when I was flying them regularly, had
4 the Garmin 430.

5 Q. Mm-hmm.

6 A. So, on that one, you would have to toggle between the terrain
7 map and the airspace map where you see airspace boundaries.

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. So, for the majority of the time the GPS, or I think it's
10 actually programmed to bring up the regular map or the navigation
11 map on startup, because for the most time you're more curious of
12 where airspace is because we're a VFR operator, so, you know, you
13 can see the terrain around you, but you can't see where airspace
14 starts or ends and that's a pretty difficult one to memorize by
15 heart around here, because there's a lot of airspace. So, that
16 would be the page that would be open for most of the time --

17 Q. Mm-hmm.

18 A. -- unless there's a reason to keep the terrain page on.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. But I would go through, it was in training and testing on the
21 check rides, of how to toggle between the two pages.

22 Q. Mm-hmm. The iPad with ForeFlight is a primary tool,
23 secondary tool?

24 A. It would be a secondary tool.

25 Q. Yeah. With the helicopter flight management system being

1 your primary tool?

2 A. Yes. Mm-hmm.

3 MR. GERLACH: Okay. That's all I have.

4 DR. WILSON: Okay. I don't think I have anything else. Do
5 you?

6 BY MR. SALAZAR:

7 Q. Yeah, just one last question.

8 A. Mm-hmm.

9 Q. How is the EC130 to fly basic instruments from that co-pilot
10 position, that center seat?

11 A. From the co-pilot position, you would be looking, you know,
12 sideways for the --

13 Q. Yeah, then would be parallax.

14 A. Yeah, exactly. You can still see all the instruments and
15 observe it. I do know during check rides, I would do that every
16 now and then --

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. -- just to verify, you know, that we're exactly on the course
19 that we want to be on. But, they are visible. I'd say at night
20 they're probably more visible from the co-pilot's seat as you get
21 less glare off the glass looking at it, you know, from a parallax
22 point of view.

23 Q. Mm-hmm. Okay.

24 A. But they're definitely visible. You can see them.

25 MR. SALAZAR: That's all I have.

1 MR. GERLACH: Can I ask one more question?

2 DR. WILSON: Mm-hmm.

3 MR. IMMLER: Yes.

4 BY MR. GERLACH:

5 Q. Okay. With your pilots, when you give them the inadvertent
6 IMC --

7 A. Mm-hmm.

8 Q. -- they're on the foggles, head sideways, and now you give
9 them control again, is there something that you see more
10 frequently when they have to regain control of a helicopter?
11 Roll, pitch, yaw, speed, what kind of things are common?

12 A. I'd say the most common thing, the pilots that I've trained
13 and tested, they're all very good at regaining control again.

14 Q. Mm-hmm.

15 A. What I saw very often was that regain control in three
16 seconds and then start moving on to step two. So, I'd always
17 advise them to slow down.

18 Q. Mm-hmm.

19 A. You're not going to complete these four C's in five seconds
20 and then have it be done with, but you're going to have to let
21 this take its time. So, regain control and then regain your
22 composure and, you know, stay there for a while before you start
23 moving on to other tasks.

24 Q. Gotcha. And is there any kind of mnemonics that you use like
25 pitch for airspeed, power, cyclic, collective?

1 A. No, the only difference I would say is I would teach them a
2 different procedure from the R44 compared to the EC130. So, let
3 me just think for a second so I make sure I get this right. So,
4 on the R44, it being, you know, a two bladed system and you do
5 have the risks of, you know, mass bumping. I always taught them
6 to correct pitch before roll because if they're in an unusual
7 altitude and they're in a low G situation and a roll is on and
8 they start correcting roll, they increase their risk of, you know,
9 mass bumping rather than, you know, reloading their rotors before
10 getting back in control.

11 Q. Mm-hmm.

12 A. So, that's the only difference between the two aircrafts I
13 teach them is to pitch then roll on the R44. But on the EC130,
14 it'll be a roll, and then pitch, then they'd correct.

15 MR. GERLACH: Okay. All right. And that's all I have.
16 Thank you.

17 BY MR. SALAZAR:

18 Q. I did have one last one. I promise you this is the last one.
19 But he reminded me of it. When you're putting these, your guys
20 into the inadvertent IMC and the recovery, do you have any
21 discussion about the concept of just turning 180 degrees around?

22 A. Yes, and I caution them initially --

23 Q. Mm-hmm.

24 A. -- because what I've seen a lot of people do is, you know,
25 regain control and then start a steep banking turn right away.

1 So, I would ask them, you know, same thing, gain control, maintain
2 it for at least 30 seconds until you're sure that you can maintain
3 that straight and level flight, and, you know, if your best option
4 is to do a 180 turn around, make sure you have the space before
5 you make the turn. If you're in, you know, if you're, you know,
6 following bad weather through a valley and then you go inadvertent
7 IMC, then, you know, depending on the terrain, doing a 180 turn
8 may be the last thing in that situation that you want to do. So,
9 but after they have control, they have some sort of a situational
10 awareness of the terrain that's around them, if, you know, if they
11 just came from better weather, then, you know, I'd ask them to
12 start a very gentle banking turn to get back to, you know, where
13 the weather was good enough where you're at.

14 Q. Okay. Your thoughts as a check airman, is it a good thing to
15 do a turnaround?

16 A. The 180? Yes, but not right away. I've seen, you know, in
17 training that doing a 180 turn right after going inadvertent IMC
18 is a good way to lose control again, which is why I trained and
19 advised them to be absolutely sure they're fully in control of the
20 aircraft and they're aware of the terrain that's around them
21 before making a 180 turn.

22 MR. SALAZAR: That's it.

23 MR. GERLACH: One more question.

24 MR. SALAZAR: And I promise you I will not have a follow up
25 question.

1 MR. IMMLER: That's fine if you do.

2 BY MR. GERLACH:

3 Q. And I've almost forgot what it is now. With respect to
4 speed --

5 A. Mm-hmm.

6 Q. -- as the visibility decreases, as the ceilings come down, do
7 you teach change in speed or --

8 A. Yes, so if visibility and weather gets bad, then I think the
9 natural tendency is to slow down. It's something that, it's not
10 an official procedure on training --

11 Q. Mm-hmm.

12 A. -- but it's something that I've said that, you know, if, you
13 know, if you can't see very well, then start slowing down. And
14 for myself as well, I can't recall who I've told this or not, but,
15 for me personally, you know, once the speed reaches a certain
16 limit, so for me, it would be around 50 knots. So, if you have to
17 slow it down slower than 50 knots because the weather's too bad,
18 then that's a good rule of thumb for, you know, making a 180, or
19 just landing, or aborting a flight. Yeah, whatever you do, it
20 just means don't keep going forward.

21 MR. GERLACH: Great. Perfect. That's all I have.

22 MR. SALAZAR: Wait. I don't have anything.

23 BY DR. WILSON:

24 Q. Do you think the training that the pilots here, do you think
25 they're all adequately trained?

1 A. Yes, having done most of the training when I was here
2 myself --

3 Q. Yeah.

4 A. -- I would say so. I'd always try to go beyond the scope of
5 what the actual syllabus says to take it up an extra notch, but
6 I'd say, you know, with the time and the resources that we have,
7 we've maximized the training and efficiency to, you know, a
8 standard where I felt comfortable at any given time with the
9 pilots that we have here.

10 Q. Is there anything that you think they needed more training
11 on? Or more training added? Something added?

12 A. I mean, as, you know, an instructor, I always want to, I
13 mean, if I could train them for a hundred hours a year, I would.
14 But with the time and allocation that we have set aside, I don't
15 think there's anything initial that, you know, was absolutely
16 necessary.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. So, it would just be, you know, fine tuning after the
19 training that we did.

20 Q. We've asked you a lot of questions. Thank you so much for --

21 A. Uh-huh. You're welcome.

22 Q. -- providing the answers to us. Is there anything that we
23 didn't ask you about that you think we should have asked you
24 about?

25 A. Nothing I can think of right now.

1 Q. Okay. Anything else to share that you think might help our
2 investigation?

3 A. I don't think so. I did read the initial report that you
4 published and I'd be as eager as you to find any other answers out
5 there.

6 Q. Yeah, well, that's what our goal is. Here's my contact
7 information.

8 A. Thank you.

9 Q. If you think of anything else, you know, please don't
10 hesitate to reach out to us.

11 A. Mm-hmm. Absolutely.

12 DR. WILSON: And with that, we'll go off the record at 12:20.

13 (Whereupon, at 12:20 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Anton Immler

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.



Sonya Terry
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: STEPHEN CRANSWICK, Director of Maintenance
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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I N T E R V I E W

(1:21 p.m.)

1
2
3 DR. WILSON: Okay. We are on the record at 1:21 Pacific
4 time. We're at Orbic Air conducting interviews related to the
5 accident that occurred on February 9th, 2024 near Halloran
6 Springs, California. I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human
7 performance investigator with the NTSB out of headquarters in D.C.
8 I know we went through a lot of this or Fabian and Mark went
9 through the intro items, but I'm just going to go over them again
10 for consistency on the record.

11 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

12 DR. WILSON: We are here just from the safety side. We don't
13 have any enforcement authority or we don't place blame as a part
14 of our probable cause. We just really want to prevent something
15 like this from happening again.

16 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

17 DR. WILSON: So, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to
18 us today.

19 MR. CRANSWICK: Of course.

20 DR. WILSON: And let me extend my condolences for the loss of
21 one of your colleagues.

22 MR. CRANSWICK: Thank you.

23 DR. WILSON: You know, these interviews are routine for us,
24 but I understand they're not routine for you. So, if you need to
25 take a break or anything, just let us know.

1 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

2 DR. WILSON: If we ask you a question that you don't
3 understand, please ask us to clarify. And if you don't know the
4 answer to a question saying, I don't know, or I'll get back to you
5 is also okay.

6 MR. CRANSWICK: Yep.

7 DR. WILSON: I would like to record the interview and we're
8 going to have our conversation transcribed. Is that okay with
9 you?

10 MR. CRANSWICK: Mm-hmm.

11 DR. WILSON: Great. And, eventually, the transcript will
12 become a part of our public docket, which will be released later
13 on in the investigation. For the record, I'll have everybody in
14 the room introduce themselves and then we'll get started.

15 MR. MCKENNY: Don McKenny, I'm NTSB Airworthiness Group
16 Chairman.

17 MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar, NTSB Operations.

18 MR. GERLACH: David Gerlach, FAA.

19 MR. GOULD: Steve Gould, Director of Operations, Orbic Air.

20 DR. WILSON: Okay. And you?

21 MR. CRANSWICK: Stephen Cranswick, Director of Maintenance,
22 Orbic Air.

23 DR. WILSON: Okay. And you're entitled to have somebody with
24 you as a representative. Is there somebody you'd like to have
25 with you today?

1 MR. HEMBREE: Yeah, Jonathan Hembree here.

2 DR. WILSON: I need to, you need to say yes for the record.

3 MR. CRANSWICK: Yes.

4 INTERVIEW OF STEPHEN CRANSWICK

5 BY DR. WILSON:

6 Q. Okay. All right. So, as the Director of Maintenance, could
7 you just give me an overview of your duties and responsibilities?

8 A. Basically, it boils down to making sure the aircraft are
9 airworthiness, well, airworthy, and up to a, you know, 135
10 standard.

11 Q. Okay. And you're also a co-owner of Orbic Air?

12 A. I am. Yes.

13 Q. Okay. Have you held any other roles at the company besides
14 Director of Maintenance?

15 A. No.

16 Q. Okay. And are you actually doing maintenance work, or are
17 you just a, in management?

18 A. Nope. Nope, I'm active on the tools.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Less, less now, but yeah, still pretty active.

21 Q. And you're also a pilot?

22 A. I am, yes.

23 Q. Okay. What certificates and ratings do you have?

24 A. So A&P, IA, and a commercial helicopter pilot's license.

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

1 A. About 1,500 hours.

2 Q. And time in the EC 130?

3 A. 50 to 60.

4 Q. Okay. And I did have an opportunity to review the first
5 interview that you did, so I'm going to try to prevent asking
6 duplicate questions. But if I do, I apologize and I appreciate
7 you just giving me, again, your responses. I believe in your
8 other interview you also have another company that you --

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. -- own?

11 A. Seaview Aviation that we conduct all the maintenance under.
12 So, that's --

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. -- yeah, so the maintenance company.

15 Q. So, the day of the accident, let's just get right into it, if
16 you could walk us through your interaction, so to speak, with the
17 accident airplane, helicopter, excuse me, and then walk me through
18 the day until you find out that the accident occurred.

19 A. Okay. So, as you guys know, the aircraft was in on
20 maintenance. So, we had had it in for a week and a half, I think
21 it was, we were putting a Garmin GTN 650 install into it and
22 upgraded the transponder to the GTX 345 that have ADS-B in.
23 During that time, we obviously always look over it, and we noticed
24 the uniball on the swashplate was a little loose and one of the
25 oil lines for the engine going up to the oil cooler, they're just

1 rubber hoses, and they get hot, cold, hot, cold, so they get a bit
2 brittle, so we changed one of those. And really, that's what it
3 was in for. On Friday, we were finishing, finishing install and
4 everything. So, we pushed it outside, I test flew it and, with
5 another colleague of mine from Seaview, verified everything worked
6 and it, and then Ben arrived on the train, one of the guys went
7 and picked up Ben and Luke at the train station and they came in,
8 did their preflight and they took the aircraft.

9 Q. So, Luke was also on the flight --

10 A. From --

11 Q. -- from Camarillo back to Burbank?

12 A. Correct, yeah.

13 Q. Is that normal?

14 A. Luke is a helicopter pilot also too, so he's, you know, as a
15 young pilot building time, I guess, any chance he can. So, yeah,
16 I mean, not normal, but when there's an opportunity that presents
17 itself, we try and help.

18 Q. Do you know, was Ben the pilot?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And then, obviously, during that flight back, Ben texted me
22 saying radar altimeter's not working. So, I asked to have Luke
23 look at it when they landed and then, yeah, then I got a call from
24 Brady at 10:00 to say that Charlie Zulu's gone off tracking. So,
25 around that 10:00 time.

1 Q. And the maintenance work that was being done, was it
2 considered just routine maintenance or it was in for an issue?

3 A. It was, it was when that weather was coming through, so we
4 were just using that opportunity to upgrade. It wasn't, there was
5 no, obviously, the radar was, it was giving erroneous readings I
6 guess you could say, so we wanted to, we wanted to fix that. And
7 then, we used that time to upgrade the aircraft, yeah.

8 Q. So, the radar altimeter was giving --

9 A. What we suspected was, yeah, like, erroneous readings.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. Or wasn't, yeah, wasn't really doing what it should. So,
12 that's why it came in for that, and we wanted to upgrade it.

13 Q. And, I know Dan will go through all the maintenance records,
14 but were some of those erroneous things documented in, like, the
15 logbook? Were these things that were written up, or was this just
16 verbally communicated that there were some issues happening?

17 A. Just verbally, because it wasn't really, yeah, yeah, it was
18 verbally --

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. -- told to me that it was.

21 Q. And do you know how far along into the flight it was when you
22 got the text from Ben?

23 A. It would have been 15 minutes, I'd say. Because I know they
24 didn't have it turned on, they didn't turn it on right away until
25 they got, yeah.

1 Q. Is that normal?

2 A. We have a switch on it, so, because it's, when you start the
3 aircraft, the altimeter just drops down, and it was we previously
4 had a problem with if you turned the, powered on the aircraft and
5 the battery voltage dropped down to say 16 volts, the radar
6 altimeter would flash at you and then sort of, you know, it would
7 nuke it. So, we had them turn it off during start and then turn
8 it back on once the generator had come online and everything was
9 at 28 volts.

10 Q. So, they land in Burbank and you get a call from Luke?

11 A. Yep, I just said, just check, you know, breakers and make
12 sure the plug to the back of it is on correctly and, yeah.

13 Q. Did you talk to him again after the troubleshooting?

14 A. He rang three times, I think it was, and he was like, I've
15 done this, I've done that. And I was like, check this, check that
16 and yeah, that was kind of where we left off, really, yeah.

17 Q. Did you have an understanding of whether it was working or
18 not working?

19 A. I didn't at the end of it, no.

20 Q. And in terms of, did he give you an indication of what was
21 happening? Was it operational but erroneous or not coming on at
22 all?

23 A. It sounded like it wasn't coming on at all, but then when he
24 was flicking the switch, he said it's kind of flashing, kind of
25 not. Yeah, and so, and it was sort of late on a Friday when I was

1 doing it, yeah.

2 Q. And so, who -- it's our understanding that if the radar
3 altimeter was inoped, then it was an MEL item and that flight
4 should not have gone. Is that your understanding?

5 A. If there's no MEL for the --

6 Q. That there would have been.

7 A. Do we have an MEL for the 130?

8 MR. HEMBREE: Not approved.

9 BY DR. WILSON:

10 Q. Which goes back to the maintenance or the manufacturer, I'm
11 sorry, MEL?

12 A. Yeah, yes, the MEL, yeah. So, yeah, yeah, basically it
13 shouldn't have gone.

14 Q. Is that something that you check? I mean, how would, how
15 would you know that? The pilot know that?

16 A. I don't know. I think it's just a general, you want
17 everything working, I guess --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- for the flight.

20 Q. So, I don't, I don't mean to continue to kind of dig into
21 this, but who would be responsible for looking at that and
22 determining whether, you know, you could go or not go?

23 A. Go or not? Assume the PIC.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. All right. So, you said you did the test flight. How long
2 was the maintenance test flight?

3 A. It was probably, we just took off and did a circuit.

4 Q. Mm-hmm.

5 A. Basically, just one circuit. So, we extended, extended
6 downwind, so probably five minutes.

7 Q. So, at what point did you turn the radar altimeter on?

8 A. As soon as we started.

9 Q. So, when you were still on the ground?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. Okay. But for the normal operation, it wouldn't be turned on
12 until you're in the air?

13 A. No, normal operations, once your generator's on and your
14 battery's, your voltage is at 28 volts, then everything,
15 everything's on. Everything's on because you don't want to take
16 your hands off the controls to turn things on and off.

17 Q. But your assumption is that Ben didn't turn it on until they
18 were in flight?

19 A. Well, that's, he told me that, he goes, so we're just halfway
20 there, can I turn on the radar altimeter --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- and it didn't come on.

23 Q. Okay. And this aircraft does not have an autopilot, correct?

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Did you talk about the radar altimeter with anyone else

1 besides Luke?

2 A. No.

3 Q. No? About what time were you conversing with Luke about
4 this?

5 A. Chase, 5:00, I think somewhere around there. Because I know
6 it was getting dark for that time. So, it would be around, when
7 they landed back here is when he called.

8 Q. Mm-hmm. So, if the aircraft had to be grounded, so to speak,
9 for the MEL, what would happen?

10 A. At that time of night, I would have just come out the next
11 morning and fixed it.

12 Q. All right. Who would have been the one to, you know, make
13 decisions about the flight, the charter flight that was later?

14 A. Whether it --

15 Q. I mean, if there's no helicopter, then what happens? Are you
16 involved in that at all?

17 A. No, no, not that.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. But it would have been cancelled, I'm sure.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. I didn't know, like, if you, you know, would have been
23 involved in the decision to say, hey, we've got another
24 helicopter, why don't you take that one?

25 A. Yeah, no, no, it's maintenance side of it.

1 Q. Only.

2 A. Yeah.

3 Q. Okay. I didn't know as co-owner if you shared any of those
4 discussions.

5 A. Not typically, no, no. I'm just more involved in the
6 maintenance side of it all.

7 Q Okay. And just to clarify, there was no plan B sort of
8 discussed if this radar altimeter didn't become operational that
9 you had with Luke or Ben?

10 A. No, no.

11 Q. Like, oh, we'll do the maintenance tomorrow or nothing, there
12 was no discussion about that?

13 A. With the, well, the conversation we had with, yeah, with Luke
14 was try these things.

15 Q. And that was it?

16 A. That was it.

17 Q. Okay. Seeing as you've flown this helicopter, what other
18 helicopters have you flown?

19 A. Robinsons, obviously, Hughes 500s, sort of lots really being
20 involved in maintenance, you're always out on test flights and
21 things.

22 Q. How do you think this, the EC 130 compares to other
23 helicopters you've flown?

24 A. Good, yeah.

25 Q. Better?

1 A. Oh, it's just a big old bus, yeah. So, you --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- point it in the direction you want to go and away it goes.

4 Q. Mm hmm. Are you instrument rated?

5 A. I'm not, no.

6 Q. Is this helicopter, from the maintenance side, does it have,
7 you know, kind of known issues that brings it into the shop more
8 than?

9 A. No, it was a good, reliable helicopter.

10 Q. Mm-hmm.

11 A. Yeah, no, we had, you know, when you go from, especially in
12 LA here for some reason, from the cold to the hot, you might have
13 the odd electrical little thing pop up, but --

14 Q. Mm-hmm.

15 A. -- that was really all about it. For some reason, every time
16 we're in Coachella they would have this data generator go bad, but
17 that's about it.

18 DR. WILSON: Okay. I might have a few more questions later.
19 Fabian?

20 BY MR. SALAZAR:

21 Q. Let's, to help me get a complete picture of the radar
22 altimeter issue --

23 A. Mm-hmm.

24 Q. -- and so, let's go back to the beginning. The helicopter
25 went to Camarillo about a week and a half prior to the, to the

1 accident and it had an existing or already written up altimeter
2 issue, right?

3 A. Mm-hmm.

4 Q. I read through it and there was some components did, removed
5 and reinstalled and I believe there was a cable. Do you
6 remHembree the exact maintenance that was done to it?

7 A. Yeah, it was, basically, I think one of the coaxes had like,
8 internally had like, broken or something so they fixed that.
9 Because, you know, there's the receive and the, there's two
10 antennas to the radar altimeter, so one of it was, I guess,
11 playing up a little bit.

12 Q. And during your operational check, it checked out fine?

13 A. Checked out perfect, yeah. We were, you know, because it
14 wasn't easy to find it, so we were pretty pumped that it had fixed
15 it.

16 Q. Okay. So, we know that on the way back, was it Ben texting
17 you?

18 A. Ben text, yeah.

19 Q. Would that suggest that Luke was flying back?

20 A. I assume so, yeah.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. That's what I got gathered from that too.

23 Q. Yeah. And then, you had, you passed on a text message that
24 told Ben to have Luke give you a call.

25 A. Yes.

- 1 Q. And during those calls, you gave him some suggestions to
2 bring the --
- 3 A. To Luke.
- 4 Q. -- radar altimeter back online?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. Circuit breakers --
- 7 A. The plug at the back of it.
- 8 Q. Plug in the back. Anything else?
- 9 A. The switch, there's a little plug for the switch when you
10 have to remove the whole thing, things like that.
- 11 Q. All right. And did you talk to Luke after those were tried?
- 12 A. We'd spoke multiple times --
- 13 Q. Yeah.
- 14 A. -- through it all and the last time he was still working on
15 it, I believe.
- 16 Q. Okay.
- 17 A. It was, it was late but I'm pretty sure --
- 18 Q. Yeah.
- 19 A. -- we didn't, we didn't confirm.
- 20 Q. Yeah, so at the end of, at the end of the day, did you get
21 word on the condition of the radar altimeter?
- 22 A. I cannot confirm because it's hazy, but I do not believe so.
- 23 Q. Okay. I recall in the information that you sent me that you
24 hadn't gotten a word, that you got it afterwards.
- 25 A. Yes.

- 1 Q. So, after the accident you found out.
- 2 A. Well, when we spoke last hearing, yeah.
- 3 Q. Yeah.
- 4 A. So, I was like, that's a bit of --
- 5 Q. Yeah.
- 6 A. -- better check, follow up on that.
- 7 Q. Yeah.
- 8 A. Yeah.
- 9 Q. And so, is it your recollection that after the accident, when
10 you spoke to Luke --
- 11 A. Where do we end up on that?
- 12 Q. Yeah.
- 13 A. He was like, I didn't get it going.
- 14 Q. Yeah, so he --
- 15 A. Well, he would, yeah, yeah, he didn't get it going, yeah.
- 16 Q. Okay. So, he didn't get it going, he didn't get the radar
17 altimeter corrected?
- 18 A. I believe so, yes.
- 19 Q. All right. And are you, are you, I know this is getting
20 outside of the maintenance wheelhouse --
- 21 A. Mm-hmm.
- 22 Q. -- but are you familiar with the Part 135 operations and the
23 requirement --
- 24 A. Yes.
- 25 Q. -- for the radar altimeter?

1 A. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. And I would have, you know, I would have fixed it if I could.

4 Q. Yeah, had you known.

5 A. Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, if I, yeah, I would've stayed late
6 to get it done, so --

7 Q. All right. And after talking to, talking to Luke, did you
8 have any conversation with the, with the owner, who was working as
9 the flight follower about the ride out?

10 A. It was Brady.

11 Q. Brady.

12 A. He, I believe he said if it works, go, if it doesn't work,
13 don't go.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. So, there was --

16 Q. Do we, I didn't ask Brady and I am, so I guess I'm asking the
17 group, do we know if Brady was on the phone with the pilot or was
18 an actual --

19 A. Oh, I do not know that either.

20 Q. Okay.

21 DR. WILSON: He said it was face to face here.

22 BY MR. SALAZAR:

23 Q. Yeah. Okay. It was a face to face here. Okay. Right. But
24 you, as the DoM, didn't talk to the flight follower about the
25 status of the ride out prior to the launch?

1 A. Not outside of that, what we just said here, yeah.

2 Q. Okay. All right. I think that's it. I may have a question
3 or two in the second round.

4 A. Okay.

5 DR. WILSON: Dan, do you have some questions?

6 BY MR. MCKENNY:

7 Q. Just one follow up question on the radar altimeter.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Beat this one to the death here, yeah. So, when Ben
10 contacted you, said the radar altimeter isn't working, what was
11 your response?

12 A. I said, the circuit breakers popped, and then I think he
13 said, no. And I said, have Luke call me when you land.

14 Q. Mm-hmm. Okay.

15 A. So, then Luke called me, yeah.

16 Q. All right.

17 A. And I sent Fabian the text chain.

18 Q. Yeah. Okay. So, that was all done through text, not through
19 phone?

20 A. The, that initial in there --

21 Q. Mm-hmm.

22 A. -- yeah.

23 Q. And then, when you talked to Luke, that was done over the
24 phone?

25 A. Correct. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

- 1 Q. Was there any talk about bringing it back to the Camarillo?
- 2 A. I said to Luke, I said bring it back. Bring it back, so --
- 3 MR. MCKENNY: That's all the questions I've got.
- 4 DR. WILSON: Dave?
- 5 BY MR. GERLACH:
- 6 Q. Before you made changes to the radar altimeter system --
- 7 A. Mm-hmm.
- 8 Q. -- when you brought on power to the helicopter, radar
- 9 altimeter automatically comes on when you put battery power on?
- 10 A. Depends if the switch for the radar altimeter is turned on or
- 11 off.
- 12 Q. So, you mentioned that you installed a switch though.
- 13 A. Yes, this is probably a year and a bit ago, maybe.
- 14 Q. But before you did that though, when you normally put power
- 15 onto the aircraft's electrical power --
- 16 A. It would come on with the battery.
- 17 Q. -- it would automatically come on.
- 18 A. Yes, and it's meant to have a switch. The switch was
- 19 installed but it wasn't connected, so we connected it.
- 20 Q. So, there's a toggle switch for it?
- 21 A. Correct.
- 22 Q. Why wasn't it connected?
- 23 A. The company in Las Vegas installed it and I guess that was
- 24 left out.
- 25 Q. So, that's an STC then for the switch?

1 A. No, it's part of the installation. If you read the
2 installation for the TRI-40, it has a switch.

3 Q. Okay. So, the helicopter didn't originally come with the
4 radar altimeter?

5 A. No.

6 Q. So, they installed it --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- the company didn't configure the wiring in accordance with
9 the installation procedure?

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. You all connected it, the wiring correctly?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Gotcha.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. And then, I, yeah, asked the guys to have it turned off
19 during start just because it was --

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. -- the box didn't like low voltage and then turn it on once
22 they have started the aircraft.

23 Q. Now, did you guys modify the checklist or was that just kind
24 of the --

25 A. That was just a verbal ask, I guess you could say, yeah.

1 Q. Gotcha. Okay. And then, when you thought you found the
2 problem, you said you installed a new coax cable?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Is that the coax run from the antenna up to --

5 A. It goes to a box on the right hand side there, and then the
6 box would send a signal up to the display.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. And there's, there's two coax cables that run from the box,
10 the avionics box, to the antenna or is there just one?

11 A. I'm not entirely sure. Andy, the avionics --

12 Q. Did the work?

13 A. -- did the work, yeah. And this is what he, I looked at all
14 the repair and the wiring and the, you know, the security of it
15 after we've done it.

16 Q. Yeah, and they pulled a brand new cable and connected it?

17 A. I believe that's what he did, yes.

18 Q. Antenna didn't come off or anything?

19 A. We, not that time, we pulled the antenna to check grounding
20 of it.

21 Q. Right.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. And then, any corrosion or anything?

24 A. There was, but white powder, you know, yeah, and we cleaned
25 it all up.

1 Q. Just the standard stuff?

2 A The standard stuff.

3 Q. You guys buffed it up.

4 A. And then sealed it properly, yeah.

5 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Gotcha. That's all I have.

6 BY DR. WILSON:

7 Q. Okay. When, specifically, was the radar altimeter
8 maintenance done? I know you said it was in with you for about a
9 week and a half.

10 A. I think it was at the beginning of that --

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. -- the duration of it all.

13 Q. And, did you do part of the work also?

14 A. I didn't.

15 Q. Or it was just Andy?

16 A. It was just Andy, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. And is there a procedure that's followed? Like in the
18 maintenance manual of what to do to do these steps?

19 A. To find the problem?

20 Q. Either to find the problem and then what do you do to fix the
21 problem?

22 A. Yeah, there's definitely, so this particular problem, you
23 know, there's always a troubleshooting guide.

24 Q. Mm-hmm.

25 A. Something like this is probably outside of the scope of the

1 troubleshooting guide. Yeah, and then you have general, sort of,
2 procedures or practices --

3 Q. Mm-hmm.

4 A. -- that you use to repair it, yeah.

5 Q. And is it electronic? Is it printed? Where do you get the
6 procedure from?

7 A. There's, I think there's AC43, which has the, whichever
8 electrical one has that one and then you can, yeah, practices out
9 of that for repairing electrical code, wires, and things.

10 Q And then, is there some kind of sign off that needs to
11 happen?

12 A. Yes, so, obviously, I released it after that, and then we
13 went out on a validation flight to confirm that --

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. -- it was working.

16 Q. Is that a part of the procedure, or that's just a little
17 extra that you did?

18 A. It's a little extra, yeah, to make sure everything was
19 working. It was meant to include the new 650 installation --

20 Q. Mm-hmm.

21 A. -- to make sure that it was reading traffic mainly --

22 Q. Mm-hmm.

23 A. -- and things like that.

24 Q. And there were no issues with Garmin?

25 A. No, that all worked great. Yep, traffic was displaying and

1 everything else was good, yep.

2 Q. So, the parts that you used, were those already, like, in
3 storage or you had to order them when you knew it was coming in
4 for maintenance?

5 A. For which?

6 Q. For the radar altimeter.

7 A. For the radar altimeter, we probably had those in stock.
8 Yeah.

9 Q. Okay. And do you have, like, a specific supplier that you
10 usually go through to get parts?

11 A. We do get proper aviation, great stuff. Yeah.

12 Q. And is the, are the parts new or are they refurbished?

13 A. New.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. That's stuff you don't reuse, yeah. All wires and electronic
16 components, yeah.

17 Q. Okay. And so, if something needed to be MEL'd, what's the
18 process for that?

19 A. I would get notified of the MEL and what to do, and then we
20 would fix it.

21 Q. Okay. And then, if it was something that could be MEL'd and
22 deferred and the aircraft was still able to be flown, how is that
23 communicated to the operations side?

24 A. We would probably, we'd tell them that it was, we don't
25 really even, we just don't that, to be honest. We had Robinson's,

1 we have a MEL for the Robinson's but when it's something for our
2 maintenance, we just fix everything.

3 Q. Okay. So, if --

4 A. It needs everything, it's a small helicopter, yeah.

5 Q. -- so has anything been MEL'd per the MMEL for the EC 130?

6 A. No.

7 Q Okay.

8 A. Because I think we have to be FAA approved to use that.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I believe.

11 Q. Well, right, but, I mean, so if something gets MEL'd per the
12 MMEL, can it be deferred and still flown or no?

13 MR. GERLACH: Depends on the guidance that's in the MMEL.

14 DR. WILSON: Right, whether it's a go, kind of go, no item.
15 Okay. So, they could though defer to that manual?

16 MR. GERLACH: Yeah.

17 DR. WILSON: Okay. Just making sure that I understood the
18 conversation we had before. All right.

19 MR. GERLACH: So, that everybody is aware of what we're
20 talking about, in my discussion with the FAA on MELs and MMELs --

21 MR. CRANSWICK: Mm-hmm.

22 MR. GERLACH: -- if the aircraft has got approved MEL, you're
23 going to go by the MEL.

24 MR. CRANSWICK: Mm-hmm.

25 MR. GERLACH: If you don't have an approved MEL, it's my

1 understanding through discussion with the FAA, that you would
2 refer to the MMEL.

3 MR. CRANSWICK: Okay.

4 MR. GERLACH: Okay.

5 MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah, I know there's an MEL --

6 MR. GERLACH: Mm-hmm.

7 MR. CRANSWICK: -- but we had, that was our document that we
8 would then get approved by our local FSDO. Yeah, and then we
9 would, for the Robinson with the MEL, there's a sticker we have,
10 right, that we would put on in the logbook, or in the tin, and
11 then label the item in on. And then, I'd probably verbally get
12 told about it or put it into flight cert under that showdown ban
13 before.

14 DR. WILSON: Okay.

15 BY MR. GERLACH:

16 Q. Did any of that occur?

17 A. For the, in this instance?

18 Q. For this, this write out issue?

19 A. No.

20 MR. GERLACH: Okay.

21 DR. WILSON: Any other questions?

22 MR. GERLACH: No.

23 DR. WILSON: No?

24 MR. GERLACH: Thanks. Steve?

25 BY MR. GOULD:

1 Q. Yes, so in the, in the maintenance records there, part of the
2 maintenance you did was you worked on instrument lights?

3 A. Mm-hmm.

4 Q. Can you tell us about what was going on with those?

5 A. So, they were flickering, so we ordered the new style
6 potentiometers for the dimming and we put them in.

7 Q. And then?

8 A. They worked great.

9 Q. They worked great?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. You checked them yourself?

12 A. Yep, smacked the instrument panel around to make sure the
13 vibration wasn't going to change anything.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. But yeah, they basically just got old and brittle and the
16 little posts had broken off.

17 Q. Okay. All right. When the pilots are getting ready to
18 accept an aircraft, do they review the maintenance records?

19 A. No, they do not. I go over with them what we did, but they
20 do not go over the logbook entry.

21 Q. Okay. And so, how do you go over the maintenance records
22 with them? Is that, you take them to the logbook, you show them
23 what was done, or you just --

24 A. No, we just go, hey, under inspection was completed, we pull
25 pitch links, we pull this, we look here, look here, we changed

1 your oils. And if, you know, if we change filters, how are we
2 going to do a ground run because we're going to want to check, you
3 know, your fluid levels after your filter is filled back up again.
4 We don't, I don't show them the logbook entry because I don't
5 believe they know what they're looking at when it comes to it.
6 I'd rather go over them with them.

7 Q. Okay. So, that's what you do immediately after maintenance
8 is done.

9 A. Mm-hmm.

10 Q. And then, so what happens, you know, a few days later when,
11 you know, the aircraft's been operating and pods have been turning
12 over, do you go over the same stuff with all the pilots that are
13 coming through, or just, how does that work?

14 A. No, so we have an internet based tracking system, so when it
15 leaves maintenance, I print off a status sheet, and I can tailor
16 make that status sheet to whatever I want, I guess you could say.
17 So, I typically do two years, so that incorporates your pitot-
18 static inspections, and then a hundred hours, and a hundred hours
19 on your engine. And then, put that in the aircraft tin so the
20 pilots can see, you know, have that physically with them and then
21 each pilot has their own login to the system and at the end of the
22 day they check the aircraft out. And then, it brings up
23 everything, when they log that out it brings up, it's a live
24 system.

25 Q. That pretty much shows what you have, what you display to

1 them is, like, upcoming in maintenance right?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Not past.

4 A. Yes, correct.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. I see. And then, are there pilots responsible for doing
8 anything during the preflight as far as daily inspections or
9 anything like that?

10 A. Mm-hmm. Mm

11 Q. What do they have to do?

12 A. Preflight, and then there's a daily bulletin on the windows,
13 because they're glued in, so they check, check those. And then,
14 depending on where, if it's a 10 hour or seven day or the airbus
15 have lots of little different inspections, because the Airbus
16 flight, preflight, they don't even want you opening the cowlings
17 and having a look in there. So, we like that, but that falls into
18 the seven day, 10 hour, the seven day, 15 hour on the engine and
19 so we have them sort of do that every time as well. So, they're
20 opening up and actually looking at everything.

21 Q. Okay. And then, do they annotate in the tin or anything?

22 A. Yep, there's a sign off to say what they did, yeah. And then
23 that's, you know, obviously coincides with the sign off and the
24 flight schedule, so.

25 Q. Okay. And in the tin, also what kind of flight records do

1 they record?

2 A. Well, they have their, what flight they're doing, and that's
3 more for their flight log, which they use for billing, and then
4 who did what, and then there's, then there's the maintenance side
5 of it all, with the seven day, the preflight, the service bulletin
6 to look at the windows, and they just initial it the total time of
7 the day and their license number.

8 Q. And when do they do that usually?

9 A. Before they fly.

10 Q. Before they fly they do all that?

11 A. Yep.

12 Q. And then, but the flight log's done --

13 A. Afterwards.

14 Q. -- afterwards.

15 A. Yes, so they close it out there, but certainly the
16 maintenance function should be signed before they fly.

17 Q. All right. Good. I appreciate you explaining that so that
18 when we look at the records we can know who was supposed to do
19 what --

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. -- and what things were supposed to be signed off, and what
22 type of information the pilots get.

23 A. Yeah, and you saw it didn't look like this was signed off.

24 Q. Right, sorry. Is it common for pilots having maybe some sort
25 of instrument problem that doesn't really affect their operation,

1 do they often continue to fly the job? And when would they notify
2 you of a problem? And when would it get written up?

3 A. So, I wouldn't say it's common, but I get, you know, there's,
4 it's a machine, so you're always getting something, a text at the
5 end of each flight, like, hey, I noticed this, or I noticed that.
6 And then, it's, yeah, all right, well, don't fly anymore, or I
7 will fix that tomorrow, or today, or whenever, you know, whatever
8 week.

9 Q. All right. Have you ever experienced any flights being
10 cancelled because of a problem in flight?

11 A. With a problem in flight?

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. Yeah, there's a, like a major, like a generator won't reset
14 and won't come back online, so it'll land and we've done flights
15 out to Palm Springs to repair and all sorts, yeah.

16 Q. I don't, I don't have any more questions. Thank you.

17 A. Yeah, certainly, we do our best to fix everything that is
18 brought to our attention.

19 DR. WILSON: Fabian?

20 BY MR. SALAZAR:

21 Q. Just a couple of follow ups. We talked about your office is
22 in Camarillo --

23 A. Mm-hmm.

24 Q -- and does Luke work out of this building?

25 A. He does. So, Luke is, he only came on sort of at the

1 beginning of this year. He wants to be a pilot, so --

2 Q. And he's an A&P?

3 A. He's an A&P/IA, and, you know, just to have, he's maintenance
4 personnel --

5 Q. Mm-hmm.

6 A. -- here, I guess.

7 Q. Did you have a part in hiring him?

8 A. I knew Luke because we did fire last year. I guess, I guess
9 I did, I didn't directly hire, but I know, you know, I know him,
10 so, yeah.

11 Q. Okay. You've known him for a while?

12 A. Known him for a while, yeah.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yeah, he's a good, he's a good guy.

15 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have.

16 DR. WILSON: Okay. Steve?

17 MR. GOULD: Nothing further.

18 DR. WILSON: All right. Well, we're going to go into more
19 than two rounds, so I apologize. You doing okay?

20 MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah, I'm good.

21 DR. WILSON: We're gonna just keep going round and round.
22 It's like a carousel in here.

23 MR. CRANSWICK: That works.

24 BY DR. WILSON:

25 Q. All right. Going back to Luke, so what does he do? What

1 maintenance work is he doing here?

2 A. So, probably as you know, there's, you know, largely a tour
3 company. You're going to have pilots of sort of 500 hours, a
4 thousand hours and upcoming through, it's a stepping career. So,
5 he's just a good guy to, you know, the pilots to say, hey, look, I
6 noticed this today, what do you think? And then, we have him
7 doing a 50 hour inspections here too, which was an oil change and
8 on the Robinson's and then whatever things arise, basically.

9 Q. Mm-hmm.

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. So, they're kind of just doing like some triaging on the ramp
12 when something comes up?

13 A Yeah, like if position line blows or, you know, look at
14 something at all, tie wraps broken or just keeping a close eye on
15 it all, I guess you can say, yeah.

16 Q. So, who did that before Luke came on?

17 A. No one. Well, we were here in, when did we move to camp?
18 Like 2000, 2001 maybe? Yeah, so we, we moved out there for more,
19 for more space and like it was hard to do maintenance next to jets
20 and things and all that. So, we had, we did move and we sort of,
21 yeah, we'd send someone down here whenever we would get a phone
22 call or a squawk to say to address it.

23 Q. Mm-hmm.

24 A. But then, you know, Luke had come on, so we were utilizing
25 him in that realm, yeah.

1 Q. And just to clarify, you did not talk to Brady about any
2 maintenance issues prior to the accident? Like, you didn't talk
3 to him about the radar altimeter?

4 A. Outside of him talking, because he was --

5 Q. Well, he had talked to Ben.

6 A. Yes, yeah.

7 Q. But did you talk to Brady?

8 A. After he talked to Ben, yes. Brady said if it doesn't work,
9 because I knew about the radar altimeter from talking to Luke, and
10 I spoke to Brady after speaking to Luke --

11 Q. Mm-hmm.

12 A. -- and Brady said, if it doesn't work, don't go. If it
13 works, go. So, I was like, okay, cool.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. And then he asked, do you mind having a look at it tomorrow?
16 Do you mind coming tomorrow? I said, sure, yeah, we'll be there
17 in the morning.

18 Q. Okay. Were you surprised when, did you hear the flight was
19 going?

20 A. No, I did not.

21 Q. Okay. And the maintenance work that's done in Camarillo, is
22 it like a typical 9:00 to 5:00 day?

23 A. Largely we, yeah, 8:00 to 5:30 most days, I guess.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. And work on the weekends when we have to.

1 Q. The instrument lighting that you mentioned, you said you
2 tested it. Was that like in the hangar, or it was tested in
3 flight too?

4 A. It was tested in the hangar at the end of the day, yeah.

5 Q. Okay. If a pilot, so they come in, they've got some kind of
6 maintenance issue --

7 A. Mm-hmm.

8 Q. -- what is the process? What do they do?

9 A Typically, it's on a text or a call, yeah.

10 Q. To you?

11 A. To me, yeah. Or, Tommy or Brady or Steve and then, typically
12 it's all, yeah, on a text, a group text, I guess you could say.

13 Q. So, if there's a recurring issue with, you know, like the
14 instrument lighting flickering --

15 A. Mm-hmm.

16 Q. -- are pilots made aware of that? Like, I mean, how does
17 that word get around or --

18 A. Yeah, I mean, that's -- probably verbally to be honest with
19 you.

20 Q. Mm-hmm.

21 A Yeah.

22 Q. The monthly safety briefings that they hold, do you
23 participate in those?

24 A. Not so much anymore, no.

25 Q. Mm-hmm. Do you ever provide any information? Like, hey,

1 this is a good topic to cover.

2 A. Every now and then when I see somethings --

3 Q. Mm-hmm.

4 A. -- necessary, I guess, yeah.

5 Q. Okay. And are you the one who would interact with the PMI
6 from the FAA?

7 A. Yes, yeah.

8 Q. Okay. How often do you interact with him or her?

9 A. With him? We, outside of their audits and things, and we
10 move aircraft on and off certificates, so maybe once every couple
11 of months.

12 Q. Mm-hmm. Okay. Do they ever do surprise visits?

13 A. No.

14 Q. No? In the audits, do you recall the last time they did an
15 audit?

16 A. I think Q3 of last year, I think.

17 Q. Mm-hmm.

18 A. A guy came through and watched us undergo maintenance and do
19 all that.

20 Q. Any significant findings? Have you ever had any significant
21 findings from the audits?

22 A. No.

23 DR. WILSON: Okay. Okay. That might be it for me. Fabian,
24 anything else?

25 MR. SALAZAR: I'm good.

1 DR. WILSON: Dave?

2 BY MR. GERLACH:

3 Q. Do you recall, was that a Keen radar altimeter install?

4 A. Is it the --

5 Q. A 405?

6 A. -- it's a free flight. Free flight.

7 Q. Free flight? Okay.

8 A. TRI-40.

9 Q. And when they mounted it, did they, if you're in the seat, is
10 it mounted left or is it right up in the middle?

11 A. It was on the far right hand side of the instrument panel.

12 Q. Okay. Gotcha. And when you guys pulled that antenna, was it
13 still seeing chromated underneath there or have they sanded it
14 down to aluminum?

15 A. It was aluminum, yeah.

16 Q. It was?

17 A. Yeah.

18 Q. And when you guys pulled it, you just found aluminum with a
19 little white corrosion powder?

20 A. I think one of them was actually, they hadn't actually taken
21 the paint off of this.

22 Q. They hadn't?

23 A. No, so it wasn't grounding properly, yeah.

24 Q. Yeah, and for that antenna, it just uses the base plate for
25 grounding? Yeah.

1 A. Yes, correct.

2 Q. There's no --

3 A. There's no grounding strip, no.

4 MR. GERLACH: Okay. Gotcha. Okay. Cool. That's all I got.

5 BY DR. WILSON:

6 Q. Do you recall when the maintenance was being done? Was there
7 any time pressure to get things done or you felt like you had
8 plenty of time to do the work on the helicopter?

9 A. No, I felt we had plenty of time. I mean, obviously, on that
10 Friday we were, you know, as you're getting, when you're getting
11 most of the aircraft down, you're putting a lot of attention into
12 it, I guess. No, I didn't think we were, if I said, hey, this is
13 no go, it would have just stayed, yeah. So, when that happens, we
14 do that a bit, yeah. You're not going to have the response time.

15 Q. Are you involved at all, okay, so let's say that there's a
16 tour or a charter flight and the aircraft is down for maintenance.
17 Obviously, it's not taking a --

18 A. Yeah, that's this part here. Yeah, they can deal with that
19 part.

20 Q. Okay. You just --

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. -- you just say, it's not ready to go.

23 A. Yep, we found this and we need to deal with this, yeah.

24 Q. And you feel that on this side, they're supportive of that?

25 A. They are, yep, and I think that's part of being a co-owner, I

1 guess.

2 Q. Mm-hmm.

3 A. I don't care about that side of it, so.

4 Q. The SMS program that --

5 A. Mm-hmm.

6 Q. -- Orbic has does that cover for maintenance side also or is

7 that just for the operations side?

8 A. We'll see, because we conduct maintenance under Seaview --

9 Q. Mm-hmm.

10 A. -- and we're about a month away from, we're just waiting for

11 our scheduled site visit --

12 Q. Mm-hmm.

13 A. -- so it'll all be done under a repair station, so we sort of

14 conduct things under that for when it's down in Camarillo. I

15 guess you go under that.

16 Q. All right. So, because it's a separate business, so it's not

17 under the same --

18 A. Yeah, yeah.

19 Q. -- under the same, like, manuals and operating things here.

20 Gotcha. How many people work?

21 A. I've got about 10 full-time guys with, you know, contractors

22 that come in and out.

23 Q. Mm-hmm. And is there, like, do they do work on all the

24 aircraft that come in or do you have anybody just assigned

25 directly to the Orbic aircraft?

1 A. So, I have three or four guys that are largely do. So, we
2 have two sides of the business, large refurbishments of different
3 aircraft --

4 Q. Mm-hmm.

5 A. -- and then, you know, you hundred alleys and stuff. So, I
6 have the core hundred alley maintenance group that would, yeah,
7 and there's two or three of those that would typically always do
8 the hundred hours on the Orbic aircraft.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. And one of them, before Luke, you asked before, he lives
11 quite close by so he would always just call in on his way home.
12 He'd leave early and call through here.

13 DR. WILSON: Okay.

14 BY MR. MCKENNY:

15 Q. Avionics repair station?

16 A. We have our 145, so everything's just done under A&P/IAs.

17 Q. It is?

18 A. And then 8110s if we did any major mods.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And we're, I'm an IA, Andy's an IA. There's about three or
21 four. We've even got DARs in the shop too, so.

22 Q. Do you have people assigned specifically to a type? This guy
23 only does EC 130 stuff, this guy does Robbie's?

24 A. Yes and no. Like, you obviously have your mechanics that are
25 stronger, so I always have a person who knows the aircraft on

1 those, yeah, assisting with me, you know, there's one apprentice
2 there at the moment, and he'll, you know, have an experienced guy
3 with him working alongside him.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. So, yeah, there's two or three guys --

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. -- they know their aircraft, yeah.

8 MR. MCKENNY: Thank you very much.

9 MR. CRANSWICK: Of course, yeah.

10 BY DR. WILSON:

11 Q. And Andy, you felt was very familiar with the EC 130, no
12 issues?

13 A. Yep, he's, you know, he's probably in his 60s now and been
14 around helicopters his entire life. So, he's, yeah, very familiar
15 with --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. -- helicopters and the EC. So, he would have seen a lot of
18 books at Halloran. He worked at Halloran, so we've seen it a long
19 time.

20 Q. We had the lights flickering --

21 A. Mm-hmm.

22 Q. -- possibly some erroneous radar altimeter.

23 A. Mm-hmm.

24 Q. Anything that could make those connected in some sort of way?

25 A. No, very simple systems. Yeah, I mean, outside of the main

1 circuit breaker panel, but that would have caused lots of other
2 things to go --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- off too. So, the potentiometers were basically you
5 sitting here, they were kind of just above your knee.

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. And they just had a, yeah, like a pot on the back of it that
8 had a bunch of new wires going to it. And the radar altimeter was
9 out over here.

10 DR. WILSON: Okay. All right. Thank you.

11 MR. CRANSWICK: I appreciate it.

12 BY DR. WILSON:

13 Q. Thank you, appreciate it. We'll go off the record at 2:07.

14 Oh, I didn't ask you, I'm sorry. Okay. He turned it off, but we
15 asked you a lot of questions over two interviews. Is there
16 anything we didn't ask you about that you think we should have
17 asked you about or any other information we need to know?

18 A. No, the biggest thing for me was this radar altimeter that I
19 left out of that last one.

20 MR. SALAZAR: I appreciate you reaching out the next day --

21 MR. CRANSWICK: Of course.

22 MR. SALAZAR: -- and sending out that supplement.

23 MR. CRANSWICK: Yeah, like I said, when you ask that
24 question, it's sort of jogged, I was like, hang on.

25 MR. GERLACH: I was still recording.

1 DR. WILSON: Oh, okay, good. All right. Officially off the
2 record now at 2:08. Thanks.

3 (Whereupon, at 2:08 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Stephen Cranswick

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.



Sonya Terry
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: LUKE BALDWIN, Mechanic
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

VAN MCKENNY, Airworthiness
National Transportation Safety Board

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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By Mr. Gerlach		18

I N T E R V I E W

(2:31 p.m.)

DR. WILSON: All right. We'll go on the record at 2:31 Pacific Standard Time. We're at Orbic Air conducting interviews today as a part of the accident that occurred on February 9th, 2024 near Halloran Springs, California. I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. We'll end up going around the room and everyone can introduce themselves for the record. And if you're not familiar with our process, we're here strictly from the safety side. We don't have any enforcement authority, we don't place blame, we just want to find out what happened and our main goal is to prevent something like this from happening again.

MR. BALDWIN: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: I'd like to record the interview and then what happens is we'll do a transcript of the conversation we have today. It will eventually become a part of our public docket that gets open later on in the investigation when we, when we release all the factual information that we've gathered. Is that okay with you?

MR. BALDWIN: Mm-hmm.

DR. WILSON: All right.

MR. SALAZAR: Luke, my name is Fabian Salazar. I'm the operations group chairman for the investigation.

MR. GERLACH: And I'm with the FAA.

1 DR. WILSON: And your name?

2 MR. GERLACH: David Gerlach.

3 MR. GOULD: Steve Gould, director of operations, Orbic Air.

4 DR. WILSON: And if you could introduce yourself.

5 MR. BALDWIN: Luke Baldwin, mechanic and pilot at Orbic.

6 DR. WILSON: Great. And you are entitled to have one person
7 representing you during this interview. Is there somebody that
8 you'd like to have here?

9 MR. BALDWIN: (No audible response)

10 DR. WILSON: If you could say yes for the record.

11 MR. BALDWIN: Yes.

12 MR. HEMBREE: Yeah, and that's me, Jonathan Hembree.

13 DR. WILSON: Okay. We can't transcribe head nods,
14 unfortunately.

15 MR. BALDWIN: Gotcha.

16 DR. WILSON: It'd be really cool if we could, but --

17 MR. GOULD: Some do.

18 DR. WILSON: Okay. We're going to go around, each of us will
19 have the opportunity to ask questions. We might do two rounds,
20 but one of us will just do one person at a time asking questions
21 so it's not getting confusing where we're going back and forth.

22 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

23 DR. WILSON: If we ask you a question that you don't
24 understand, just ask us to clarify, or if you don't know the
25 answer to a question saying, I don't know, or I'll get back to you

1 is also okay. Do you have any questions for us before we get
2 started?

3 MR. BALDWIN: I don't.

4 DR. WILSON: Okay. And, you know, condolences on the loss of
5 one of your colleagues or two of your colleagues, excuse me. You
6 know, as I've said to everybody, this type of interview is
7 obviously very routine for us, but I understand it's not routine
8 for you. So, if you need to take a break or anything, just let us
9 know.

10 MR. BALDWIN: Okay.

11 INTERVIEW OF LUKE BALDWIN

12 BY DR. WILSON:

13 Q. Okay. Luke, is it okay if I call you Luke?

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. Great. If you could state your title again for me, please,
16 one more time.

17 A. Mechanic and pilot.

18 Q. Mechanic and pilot. And how long have you been employed with
19 Orbic?

20 A. Since the end of January.

21 Q. Of 2024?

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Or 2023.

25 Q. Oh, 2023.

1 MR. GOULD: 2024.

2 BY DR. WILSON:

3 Q. We are 2024.

4 A. January '24, yeah, so it's five weeks or less.

5 Q. Okay. And, as a mechanic, what are your duties and
6 responsibilities?

7 A. Here is minor maintenance, day to day, nothing major.

8 Q. What certificates and ratings do you hold?

9 A. AMP, IA, commercial rotor, commercial fixed wing.

10 Q. Okay. Instrument?

11 A. Instrument, fixed wing only.

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

13 A. 430 total time.

14 Q. Okay. Do you have any time in the EC130?

15 A. Just this one, yes. Not a lot. I think twice.

16 Q. Okay. What rotorcraft do you typically fly?

17 A. The R44 here.

18 Q. Okay. And what type of work are you doing in the R44? What
19 type of flights are you taking?

20 A. Right now I'm training to do tours.

21 Q. Okay. So, let's go to February 9th, the day of the accident.

22 If you could walk me through what your day was like, your
23 interactions with the helicopter, your interactions with the
24 pilots --

25 A. Mm-hmm.

1 Q. -- and walk us through the day until you found out about the
2 accident.

3 A. The morning, I rode along some tours, learning tour routes
4 and that sort of thing. In the afternoon I knew I went with Ben
5 to Camarillo on the train where we were going to pick up the EC
6 and fly it back here, which we did. And then -- how specific do
7 you want me to make this?

8 Q. As specific as possible.

9 A. On the train, Ben was doing his flight planning, manifesting,
10 that's what he did the entirety of the train ride, which is over
11 an hour. So, he was prepared on that. We got to Camarillo, I did
12 a preflight on the EC. Ben did a preflight separately than me.
13 We picked up, I picked up some parts that I needed for something
14 else, some supplies, and then me and Ben flew it back to here,
15 Burbank. Yeah, and then, so when we picked it up, it had just
16 been flown. I still do it daily, a good one. Ben, we had all the
17 cowl open, we looked around and everything normal. So, new
18 machine, all maintenance is what I do and Ben did that as well.
19 Picked up out of Camarillo and I took controls, I was fine,
20 straight and level, we were just cruising along. And we didn't
21 turn the radar on yet, so then we did, and it kinda like, lit up
22 and then all turned off, dark. So, on and off did -- So, I was
23 flying, Ben texted Stephen and said it wasn't working. So then,
24 we landed Burbank, they were in a hurry, Blake and, Blake and Ben
25 were, had fuel truck ready, pumping fuel, and Ben told me to call

1 Stephen, so I called Stephen. Got on the phone, did some small
2 troubleshooting, just quick, looking around, me and Stephen on the
3 speakerphone. And then, they were ready to leave, but I kind of
4 said, hold on a second, let me see if it's something silly like a
5 wire, something simple, circuit breaker, something, you know,
6 obvious. Couldn't find anything, so then they, I did a FOD check,
7 packed my tools, the cabin, made sure they were good to go and
8 they left. And then, that was the end of my day, I clocked out,
9 left.

10 Q. Okay. Backing up, on the train, so Ben's doing preflight or
11 doing sort of that preflight planning. Did you happen to see him
12 pulling up weather? Did you see what he was doing?

13 A. He was opposite, like, we're in a train --

14 Q. Mm-hmm.

15 A. -- so facing each other. I didn't see weather, I saw
16 manifest, whatever program they use for that. But as far, he
17 worked the entire time on something.

18 Q. Mm-hmm.

19 A. I don't know the specifics.

20 Q. Okay. He didn't talk about it with you or show you anything
21 to kind of say, hey, this is what I'm doing?

22 A. (No audible response).

23 Q. Okay. So, about how long would you say that you were in
24 Camarillo before you left?

25 A. Maybe 40 minutes.

1 Q. Okay. And the preflight that you did of the aircraft, did
2 you find anything?

3 A. I noticed the engine was hot, all oil levels were good. No,
4 no, no discrepancies.

5 Q. Okay. On the flight, so now you're flying from Camarillo to
6 Burbank.

7 A. Mm-hmm.

8 Q. You've got this, the issue with the radar altimeter, texting
9 Stephen. Were you and Ben having any conversation? What did you
10 talk about during that flight?

11 A. He told me how to transition through Van Nuys really, which
12 is, I don't know how long that flight was, maybe 20 minutes --

13 Q. Mm-hmm.

14 A. -- but, because that would be a trip that I am going to be
15 doing.

16 Q. Mm-hmm.

17 A. So, the transition, working different routes, and pointing
18 out the roads really was what that was.

19 Q. And were you sitting in the left seat and he was in the
20 center seat or vice versa?

21 A. I was in the center and he was in the left.

22 Q. How does that work flying from the center? Did you feel like
23 you could see the instruments okay?

24 A. Yeah, it's pretty, you know, you get 25 percent here and then
25 the rest is still there, yeah.

1 Q. Mm-hmm. Did he mention anything about the upcoming flight
2 with you?

3 A. No, nothing about, like, the night.

4 Q. Mm-hmm.

5 A. I had been to Palm Springs before with him, but he didn't say
6 anything about that.

7 Q. Mm-hmm. When you were in flight, or after you landed in
8 Burbank, did you have any conversation with him about whether it
9 was legal to take the aircraft if the radar altimeter wasn't
10 working?

11 A. No.

12 Q. Okay. So, you land, walk me through the conversation that
13 you had with Stephen. What was he helping you troubleshoot to do?

14 A. Yeah, so, I threw on speakerphone and then I had my toolbox,
15 so I was kind of precariously just investigating. So, I mean, it
16 was simple check to grounds at the fuse box. So, I had my meter
17 out, check to grounds, good. Check power on both sides of the
18 circuit breaker, good. And from there, just looking around, you
19 know, something obvious that was loose wire or something is what
20 he had kind of said, well, it was just working, maybe something
21 was loose and that's what I checked.

22 Q. Mm-hmm. And then, so you checked all those things and how
23 were you confirming that it wasn't working? What were you doing
24 to say, hey, I've tried this stuff, but it's still not working?
25 Were you going back into the helicopter and flipping the switch to

1 see if it would come on? How are you knowing that --

2 A. The power was on and I'm in there with power and the RAD Alt
3 is right there.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And so, I have a meter and I can on off switch, there was no
6 moving around.

7 Q. Okay. So, you could just see it from where you were.

8 A. It was all right there, yeah.

9 Q. Okay. And then, what did you say to Ben?

10 A. They were there in the cockpit with me, both of them and
11 around dealing with the fuel guy a little bit. But then, once the
12 fuel guy was gone and I said, hold on, I'm going to look for
13 something simple. And so, we spent a couple minutes, maybe like
14 15 minutes doing that, and they both knew that it wasn't working
15 and they both were ready to go.

16 Q. Okay. Is the radar altimeter required for that flight? Is
17 that something that you, as the mechanic, would know?

18 A. I know the machine didn't have an MEL, which is different.
19 My last company did, so that's what I asked them or thought about,
20 does it have an MEL? No. I didn't, I didn't know, like, where
21 they were going --

22 Q. Mm-hmm.

23 A. -- or I figured, to move people. I don't know.

24 Q. Mm-hmm. Did you talk about that with Stephen at all?

25 A. No.

1 Q. No? Did anybody know besides the pilots that it was not
2 working?

3 A. Stephen, Brady. I don't know if there were other people on
4 the ramp with me while I was troubleshooting in the speakerphone,
5 I was just focused.

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. I don't know who was, I know Brady was out there. Stephen on
8 the phone, of course. That's as far as I know.

9 Q. So, you were on the phone with them, with Stephen, until the
10 pilot said, hey, I'm going and on the phone, did you tell Stephen,
11 I can't get it to work?

12 A. Yeah.

13 Q. Okay. And then, you let Brady know that as well?

14 A. I don't remember seeing Brady after.

15 Q. Like, after you were done?

16 A. I don't know if I, when I was done for the day, I don't know
17 if I --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- said goodbye to him or anything.

20 Q. Where was, was Brady out on the ramp when the pilots
21 departed?

22 A. I don't know.

23 Q. No? Okay. Did you see Brady talking to the pilots while you
24 were doing this troubleshooting?

25 A. I don't know if they spoke, but he was out there.

1 DR. WILSON: Okay. I need a minute to formulate the other
2 questions that I have. Thank you. Fabian?

3 BY MR. SALAZAR:

4 Q. Just a few. Was Blake waiting here when you guys arrived?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. He was already here?

7 A. Yeah, I think he had been here, I don't know how long he was
8 here, but he was, you know, prepared to go.

9 Q. Yeah, and let's just, let's just break it down and we'll slow
10 the story down a little bit. You guys, you guys being, you and
11 Ben arrived and landed here at Burbank and where did you guys
12 position the aircraft for fuel?

13 A. Kind of like our primary spot here. The oil mark is where,
14 the number one spot here.

15 Q. Is it just outside the hangar?

16 A. Straight out the door, right here.

17 Q. Okay. And who brings over the fuel?

18 A. Atlantic.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. All right. And did you guys, did they top it off?

22 A. I don't know the fuel load.

23 Q. Okay. All right. Your focus was on getting the radar
24 altimeter fixed?

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Okay. During that time that you were working on the radar
2 altimeter, when did you see Brady show up?

3 A. I don't know.

4 Q. Okay. Okay.

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. And you didn't, you didn't happen to see Ben talking to Brady
7 or did you?

8 A. I don't know if they spoke.

9 Q. Okay. Did Ben tell you about the conversation that he had
10 with Brady about the radar altimeter?

11 A. With Brady?

12 Q. Uh-huh.

13 A. No.

14 Q. When you realized that the suggestions that Steve gave you
15 didn't fix it, did you consider putting a write up in the logbook
16 that says, that said the radar altimeter was inop?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Any reason why? Wouldn't that be something that you would
19 normally do? If you got a discrepancy in a, in the aircraft, it
20 gets written up, right?

21 A. Yeah. No, I didn't.

22 Q. Okay. Any reason why? Is this your first job with a part
23 135 operator?

24 A. No.

25 Q. Who'd you work with before?

1 A. Trans Aero Helicopters, Midwest Helicopters, Chicago
2 Helicopters.

3 Q. Were you a mechanic all those times?

4 A. Mechanic only at all those places.

5 Q. Okay. In those operations, those other places that you
6 worked, was that their standard practice that there was a
7 discrepancy with the aircraft that you, that you wrote it up in
8 the maintenance logbook?

9 A. Yeah, with a, with a corrective action.

10 Q. Yeah. And none of that was done in this fly, right?

11 A. No.

12 MR. SALAZAR: Yes, sir?

13 MR. GERLACH: Can we go off record for a second?

14 DR. WILSON: Sure, we're going to go off the record at 2:51
15 p.m.

16 (Off the record at 2:51 p.m.)

17 (On the record at 2:52 p.m.)

18 BY MR. SALAZAR:

19 Q. All right. So, we're back on the record of 14:52. About how
20 much time did you spend working on the aircraft to try to get it
21 fixed?

22 A. Fifteen minutes or less.

23 Q. Okay. And you mentioned, and I'm gonna paraphrase, that the
24 other two, that would be Blake and Ben, were motivated to get
25 going on their flight. Did they appear in a, in a hurry or

1 anxious to leave?

2 A. I just know fuel was preordered and they were, you know, on a
3 schedule to go. They were getting ready to go and I do know, I
4 said, hold on a second, like, how much time do you have? They
5 said, Ben, I think Ben said, you know, I'm ready to go now. And I
6 said, can you give me 10 minutes and I took 10 minutes to look.
7 But, yeah.

8 Q. How much interaction have you had with Ben prior to this day?

9 A. I mean, at that point I worked here for three weeks or less.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. I've ridden along tours with him, learning tours and that's
12 it. I don't know how to quantify that, but --

13 Q. Okay. Well, let's just, maybe another question or two.
14 During those tour flights, how was he as an instructor?

15 A. I mean, I wasn't receiving instruction during the tours.

16 Q. Mm-hmm.

17 A. I was really learning the celebrity houses --

18 Q. Yeah, yeah.

19 A. -- and the routes of what we do. You know, there's five or
20 six different routes, so and I'm not from here, so.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. The locality, the geography, that's really what we went over.

23 Q. Okay. So, on those flights, when he was showing you the tour
24 routes and the houses to point out and everything, how was he as a
25 guide to show you how to do that?

1 A. Good, very good. Everyone here, Blake and Ben, Tommy and
2 everybody, they're good at explaining and, you know, always do a
3 debrief at the end and say, oh, you missed this person's house, or
4 well, you turned into Santa Monica a little too early, or, you
5 know, your time's off, but --

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. -- yeah, it's a good learning environment here for,
8 definitely.

9 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Okay. I'll take a pause right there.
10 Dave?

11 BY MR. GERLACH:

12 Q. Can you talk a little bit about the installation of the RAD
13 ALT, the RAD ALT, how it was wired, what you saw when you
14 troubleshoooted, those kind of things?

15 A. Mm-hmm. Obviously, it's mounted in the dash so I, down in
16 the center left pedal ish, circuit breaker panel, there were two
17 grounds, two grounds and I checked those, two airframe ground,
18 that's what I checked. And then, that came up to circuit breaker,
19 which were center seat, a row of maybe four.

20 Q. You're checking continuity on the ground?

21 A. At this point, I was checking power on the circuit breaker
22 side.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. But the grounds were there and I, the only reason I knew that
25 was from Stephen on the phone.

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. He said check those.

3 Q. And you had power at the CBs?

4 A. On both sides of the circuit breaker.

5 Q. Yeah.

6 A. And then, at this point, just on and off, power on, on, off.

7 It would, like, kind of do this, like --

8 Q. Gotcha.

9 A. -- low glow, regardless if you went on or, off to on or on to

10 off. Either way, it did like a, all lights.

11 Q. All right. Did you connect, disconnect?

12 A. Yeah, so, there's like a USB tray and I could get the H plug.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. I just rewrapped it and --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- that's all you can do there.

17 Q. Yeah. And the conclusion for you was this is --

18 A. I thought, you know, the unit itself --

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. -- just --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. Something in the head units.

23 Q. Gotcha. And you all, you didn't have any new head unit to

24 poke in there?

25 A. Mm-mmm.

1 Q. But the company had one that you all had been troubleshooting
2 with? Is there a couple of them?

3 A. I don't know that.

4 Q. No? Okay.

5 A. As far as I know, there's limited parts here.

6 MR. GERLACH: Gotcha. Okay. Yeah, that's really the only
7 question I got for you.

8 DR. WILSON: Okay.

9 MR. GERLACH: Thank you.

10 DR. WILSON: Steve?

11 MR. GOULD: Nothing for me, thank you.

12 BY DR. WILSON:

13 Q In the few weeks that you were here leading up to February
14 9th, were you aware of any recurring issues that were on this
15 helicopter, recurring maintenance issues?

16 A. No, I probably dailied it on the ground twice in those two
17 weeks.

18 Q. Okay. Okay. Fabian had asked you a question and I wanted to
19 do a follow up on it. Oh, he had asked you about writing it up or
20 not writing it up. But where would you, if you were to write it
21 up, where would you have put that and where was the book located?

22 A. So, I know we have flight cert and that's where you would put
23 a discrepancy in. And then, I think in the logbook 10, there's
24 like a --

25 Q. Mm-hmm.

- 1 A. -- itemized there.
- 2 Q. And you saw that in the helicopter?
- 3 A. I didn't see it.
- 4 Q. Okay. Would it normally be kept there though?
- 5 A. No, it's like if the machine's not out, then it would be in
- 6 the --
- 7 Q. Okay.
- 8 A. -- tray holder.
- 9 Q. Okay. So, you would have had to come inside and gotten it to
- 10 fill that out?
- 11 A. (No audible response)
- 12 Q. Okay.
- 13 A. Assuming they had it already, I guess. Now that I think
- 14 about it, they would have had it at the machine.
- 15 Q. Yeah, I guess I'm asking, would it have been at, where should
- 16 it have been?
- 17 A. Whoever the pilot would be.
- 18 Q. Right, he would have had it and then you would have written
- 19 it in there.
- 20 A. Mm-hmm.
- 21 Q. Okay. But you just didn't see it, whether it was in there or
- 22 not.
- 23 A. (No audible response).
- 24 Q. Okay. So, what brought you to California?
- 25 A. To work here.

1 Q. To work specifically at Orbic?

2 A. Yeah, fly tours in Los Angeles, yep.

3 Q. Okay. Okay. And how did you get to Orbic, though? Did you
4 know about Orbic specifically?

5 A. So, I've worked with Seaview --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- which is, I've worked there for, on the utility on the
8 Hawks for about a year.

9 Q. Gotcha. So, in your, you're going through training right now
10 for the pilot side --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- what do they discuss in training about safety, safety
13 culture?

14 A. Here specifically?

15 Q. Mm-hmm. If anything.

16 A. Yeah, I mean, we talk about the routes and the altitudes,
17 minimum altitudes. Airspace is busy here. Traffic is busy, so
18 really it's just getting used to the busyness.

19 Q. Mm-hmm.

20 A. You know, we're coming out of Charlie here and then most of
21 our tours go down through the Delta of Santa Monica. Obviously, I
22 would just be doing small tours, so I don't need to know the, you
23 know, downtown landings, and I don't even know what that is.

24 Q. Mm-hmm.

25 A. But the other parts of the operation I don't know.

1 Q. Okay. Do they talk to you about the, like, the safety
2 culture at Orbic Air and what the expectation is for pilots in
3 terms of maybe professionalism, speaking up?

4 A. Yeah, I mean, dress code --

5 Q. Mm-hmm.

6 A. -- as far as speaking up, like that, not too much.

7 Q. Yeah. Do they share any information on, with you about,
8 like, what if you're not comfortable taking a flight and when, you
9 know, when you should cancel?

10 A. Not when, but Brady's pretty, don't do it if you don't want
11 to, sort of thing.

12 Q. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

13 A. That's big on weights, you know, because they text you the
14 weights and obviously you don't want to be overweight here, or
15 anywhere. So, that's a thing, like, you get the weights of each
16 flight. I know other tour operators, you just, people show up and
17 get on, but here you get the weights of every flight. You brief
18 them cold, you don't, we don't load hot here. We don't fuel hot
19 here.

20 Q. Mm-hmm.

21 A. So, like, everything from my point of view compared to
22 Chicago or Florida or other places I've been, it's, you know,
23 tours here are never rushed. Like, everything's take your time,
24 you know, you shut down with the passengers in, nobody's running
25 around with, you know, taking photos or anything, running.

1 Q. Talking to other pilots that are here, have they ever talked
2 about any pressures to take flights when they don't feel
3 comfortable doing it?

4 A. No.

5 Q. When you were at Seaview, did you ever feel like there was
6 any, you know, pressure to get airplanes out of maintenance or
7 whatever operator you were doing the maintenance for?

8 A. No, I worked, when I was over there, well, I worked fires in
9 the field, so you're in that environment of forced service and
10 government contract, which, you know, if you have out of service
11 that's fine, but it gets paid either way. But when I worked the
12 hangar in Camarillo, no, I was doing heavy maintenance, so there
13 was no pressure, like, time frame that's for, you know, big
14 projects.

15 Q. Okay. Did you feel at any time over there that there was any
16 corners being cut? Or did people, you know, follow the procedures
17 and do the sign offs as expected?

18 A. Yeah, I think in comparison to other places I've worked,
19 paperwork, checklists, QA, you know, double checking before you
20 close panels is, was never skipped, never, oh, it's good, never,
21 not there.

22 DR. WILSON: That might be all I have. Fabian?

23 BY MR. SALAZAR:

24 Q. Okay. Luke, let's do something just a little bit different.
25 You're a mechanic here and you're a pilot.

- 1 A. Mm-hmm.
- 2 Q. Are you paid as an instructor here at Orbic?
- 3 A. No.
- 4 Q. Okay.
- 5 A. I'm not an instructor.
- 6 Q. Okay. But you're working towards that?
- 7 A. No.
- 8 Q. No? Okay. So, you're just interested in doing the tours?
- 9 A. Yes.
- 10 Q. Okay. Cool, cool. And that's what you're doing for Orbic,
- 11 you're training to do those tours?
- 12 A. Yes.
- 13 Q. Got it. Okay. The thing I want to do different is this,
- 14 let's put you in the pilot's responsibility, in the pilot's seat,
- 15 figuratively speaking. Okay? And you've got a tour that you want
- 16 to, you want to go out and do because you got it, you nailed it,
- 17 you know the tour, and you can do it with the best of them, okay?
- 18 But there's a problem with the aircraft and you want to go on that
- 19 tour. Would you put pressure on the mechanic to get that aircraft
- 20 done so you can do the tour?
- 21 A. Coming from a maintenance background, no.
- 22 Q. Yeah, and you see the, how wrong that would be as a pilot to
- 23 put pressure on the mechanic --
- 24 A. Mm-hmm.
- 25 Q. -- to do something that he, that, as a mechanic, he's

1 obligated, he has his own ethics, he can't release that aircraft
2 if it's not airworthy, right? Did in any way Ben or Blake put
3 pressure on you to not address that radar altimeter prior to them
4 taking off to Palm Springs?

5 A. No.

6 Q. You didn't feel any pressure with those two guys in a hurry
7 wanting to go off and leave?

8 A. No, I've worked fires for years and utility for years and you
9 can be in a aircraft, you know, AOG situation and I can handle
10 pressure pretty well and this situation was not that way.

11 Q. Okay. And did they ask you not to write up the radar
12 altimeter?

13 A. No, it wasn't spoken about, no.

14 Q. Okay. So, was it just an oversight?

15 A. I'm not sure if it was an oversight or acceptance.

16 Q. Okay. Let's talk about that. What do you mean by that?

17 A. That they just accepted it was out and proceeded.

18 Q. Okay. Okay. So, they didn't say anything about whether it
19 should or shouldn't be written up in the logbook?

20 A. No.

21 Q. Okay. Did you have an opinion or was that something that
22 slipped your mind?

23 A. Slipped my mind.

24 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I got.

25 DR. WILSON: Dave?

1 BY MR. GERLACH:

2 Q. Would you normally write up that type of failure or would you
3 just take it into the hangar and fix it and then write up what the
4 repair is?

5 A. The latter, yeah.

6 Q. Yeah. Okay. And this is a system, would you say this is a
7 critical system or not a critical system in an operation of the
8 helicopter?

9 A. I would say not critical.

10 Q. Okay. Would that have been something that you all talked
11 about though?

12 A. I don't know if there was conversation about that.

13 Q. Need it, don't need it, we're good.

14 A. I don't know if they spoke about it.

15 Q. Yeah. Okay. If the helicopter had stayed there longer, say
16 you had four hours to work on it, would you think, based on what
17 you observed, you could have fixed it or there was no fixing?

18 A. No, parts required.

19 MR. GERLACH: Yeah. Okay. And that's all I have. Thank
20 you.

21 BY DR. WILSON:

22 Q. One last question about the conversation that you had with
23 Stephen. Was there any talk about, you know, performing
24 maintenance on this the next day? So, it was just not working and
25 they went and then --

1 A. Yeah.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. Nothing further mentioned.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. No plan.

6 DR. WILSON: Fabian or Dave, anything else?

7 MR. SALAZAR: No.

8 BY DR. WILSON:

9 Q All right. We've asked you a lot of questions. Thanks so
10 much for answering them. You are our last person to speak to to
11 really fill in some of those gaps of what happened when they got
12 back to Burbank, so thank you for that. Is there anything that we
13 didn't ask you about that you think we should have asked you
14 about?

15 A. I don't think so.

16 Q. Anything else that you think would be relevant to the
17 investigation?

18 A. I know they were talking about instrument lights and the new,
19 those were all working. We, me and Ben used the 650, 650?

20 MR. GOULD: Yeah, the GPS.

21 MR. BALDWIN: Yeah, we used it from Camarillo over here,
22 worked fine.

23 BY DR. WILSON:

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. And they checked the instrument lights and those were all,

1 those were working fine. Just the RAD ALT was not.

2 Q. Do you recall what page he had up on the Garmin?

3 A. I'm not familiar with the pages of that 650, but, just like a
4 moving map direct to.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. Yeah, he used it, I didn't.

7 DR. WILSON: Okay.

8 BY MR. SALAZAR:

9 Q. He seemed pretty comfortable using it?

10 A. Oh yeah, I was, you know, I picked up out of Camarillo and he
11 was dialing into --

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. -- direct to Burbank and, yeah. I've flown with Ben only the
14 one time, no, twice in the EC. He's comfortable in that machine.

15 Q. Did you have terrain up and terrain following while you were
16 flying?

17 A. No.

18 Q. No? Just weight points and airspace and --

19 A. Like I said, I'm not familiar with them, all the pages of
20 that.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. But he had it just direct to Burbank --

23 Q. Gotcha.

24 A. -- and whatever, like a normal page.

25 BY DR. WILSON:

1 Q. The previous flights that you had with Ben, were they tours
2 or was it --

3 A. Mostly tours and then I did do, rode along a charter from
4 Palm Springs to Santa Monica.

5 Q. Mm-hmm. During those flights, maybe the tour isn't a good
6 one because I'm assuming he's conducting a tour --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- while you're on those, but on the charter flight, was he
9 coaching you? Is he, was he kind of instructing you and showing
10 you things or what was kind of the cockpit like you and you're
11 your interactions?

12 A. On that one, the way there, I flew it, of course. But really
13 it was just talking about, really verbalizing airspace traffic,
14 what was going on, you know, and then where to park at the FBO.
15 Sort of, you know, he was thinking ahead of destination and that
16 sort of thing. Yeah, he did ISO, isolate, when we had passengers
17 in --

18 Q. Mm-hmm.

19 A. -- which he explained to me how I should, give them their
20 privacy, on charters, not on tours, you know.

21 Q. Right. Okay. Any concerns about flying, when you did fly
22 with him?

23 A. No.

24 Q. Ever hear anybody mention any concerns about flying with him
25 or Blake?

1 A. Neither, I know Blake was studying the EPs of both the A Star
2 and --

3 Q. Mm-hmm.

4 A. -- so he was a hitting the books pretty hard, but no.

5 DR. WILSON: All right. Around the room one more time.
6 Fabian?

7 BY MR. SALAZAR:

8 Q. Did you ever fly with Ben at night?

9 A. I don't think so.

10 MR. SALAZAR: That's it.

11 DR. WILSON: Dave?

12 MR. GERLACH: No, I don't think so.

13 DR. WILSON: Steve?

14 MR. GOULD: That's all right.

15 DR. WILSON: All right. Last chance, anything else?

16 MR. BALDWIN: No.

17 DR. WILSON: All right. Thank you very much. We will go off
18 the record at 3:13.

19 (Whereupon, at 3:13 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
20
21
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Luke Baldwin

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.



Sonya Terry
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH

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NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS,

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Accident No.: CEN24MA111

CALIFORNIA ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024

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Interview of: THOMAS STEFANSKI, Safety Manager
Orbic Air

Los Angeles,
California

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON, Human Performance
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operations
National Transportation Safety Board

DAVID GERLACH, Party Coordinator
Federal Aviation Administration

VAN MCKENNY, Airworthiness
National Transportation Safety Board

STEVE GOULD, Director of Operations
Orbic Air

JONATHAN HEMBREE, Representative

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:28 p.m.)

DR. WILSON: All right. On the record at 3:28 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. We're here conducting interviews as a part of the accident of the accident that occurred on February 9th, 2024 near Halloran Springs, California. I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a human performance investigator with the NTSB. No. Thanks for taking the time to talk with us again. I know that Fabian and Mark had the opportunity to speak to you closer to the accident date. I'm going to go over the same sort of rules so to speak of what we do for our investigations and our interviews just so that we've got it on the record. We'll also have everyone introduce themselves for it. I'd like to record the interview, and have it transcribed, and it will eventually become a part of our public docket. Is that something that you're okay with?

MR. STEFANSKI: That's okay.

DR. WILSON: Okay. Fabian.

MR. SALAZAR: Tommy, I'm Fabian Salazar. I work in the Operations section of the investigation.

MR. GERLACH: And I'm David Gerlach. I work for the FAA.

MR. GOULD: Sorry. I'm dazing off.

MR. SALAZAR: (Indiscernible).

MR. GOULD: I'm Steve Gould, director of operations, Orbic Air.

DR. WILSON: All right. And if you could state your name and

1 title for the record, also.

2 MR. STEFANSKI: Sure. I'm Thomas Stefanski, safety manager
3 for Orbic Air.

4 DR. WILSON: Could you spell your last name for us please?

5 MR. STEFANSKI: Sure. It's S-T-E, F as in foxtrot, A-N, S as
6 in Sierra, K-I.

7 DR. WILSON: Thank you. And you are entitled to have one
8 representative with you. Is there someone that you would like to
9 have with you during this interview?

10 MR. STEFANSKI: These gentleman are good.

11 DR. WILSON: Okay.

12 MR. HEMBREE: Yeah.

13 DR. WILSON: If you could state your name for the record?

14 MR. HEMBREE: Jonathan Hembree.

15 DR. WILSON: Thanks, Jonathan. So I'm sure as Mark and
16 Fabian told you at the beginning of the last interview, we're here
17 just strictly from the safety side.

18 MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

19 DR. WILSON: We don't have any enforcement authority. We
20 don't place blame. We just really want to prevent something like
21 this from happening again.

22 MR. STEFANSKI: Yes.

23 DR. WILSON: And so also, let me start by just saying, you
24 know, condolences for the loss of your colleagues. We'll go
25 around, each of us will ask questions one at a time so that we're

1 not interrupting each other and disrupting your train of thought.
2 We'll probably do two rounds of questions. We might do a couple
3 follow ups on a couple of additional rounds, but each round will
4 get a little shorter, so.

5 MR. STEFANSKI: No problem.

6 DR. WILSON: I did have an opportunity to read your previous
7 interview transcript. I'll try not to repeat questions. But
8 sometimes it's just helpful to hear it in your words. I was able
9 to read it, but, you know, just to hear you say it again could be
10 helpful. But I'll do my best to minimize that. But I appreciate
11 you just going along with the questions that I have. If I ask you
12 a question that you don't understand, please ask us to clarify.
13 If you don't know the answer to a question, saying I don't know or
14 I'll get back to you is also okay.

15 MR. STEFANSKI: Okay.

16 DR. WILSON: Do you have any questions before we get started?

17 MR. STEFANSKI: I do not.

18 DR. WILSON: Okay. And if you need to take a break at any
19 time, also just let us know.

20 MR. STEFANSKI: Okay.

21 INTERVIEW OF THOMAS STEFANSKI

22 BY DR. WILSON:

23 Q. Okay. If you could give me an overview -- safety manager,
24 I'm sorry.

25 A. Yeah.

1 Q. Is that the correct title?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Versus manager of safety. I just want to make sure. Your
4 duties and responsibilities.

5 A. My duties are basically maintaining our SMS system within the
6 company. It's fairly new to us. But basically just overseeing
7 daily operations in that sense, and, you know, I do review flight
8 risk analysis that come in if they are elevated and just kind of
9 have a general (indiscernible) in maintaining that SMS and, you
10 know, making sure everybody here understands it and how it works,
11 and, you know, maintaining the safety culture within the company.

12 Q. So let's talk a little bit more about that. How do you make
13 sure everyone understands it, the SMS program?

14 A. Well, we do annual training with it. It's through PRISM.
15 They have online video courses for people to do. Also, just
16 making sure that if anybody has any questions, how to use the
17 program as far as being able to pull up any information for the
18 company within PRISM or such as doing the, you know, flight risks
19 (indiscernible), any, you know, hazard reporting or anything like
20 that. You know, and just make sure they all understand how to do
21 that.

22 Q. Okay. And then you said also maintaining a safety culture in
23 the company. How do you do that?

24 A. It's just through promoting it, and encourage people, you
25 know, if they see something, say something type deal. If there's

1 any hazards that they come across, they are welcome to report
2 them. We do have anonymous reporting as well for anybody that is,
3 you know, concerned about that aspect of it. But we do try to
4 tell everyone that, you know, there is no penalties that will be
5 involved for any sort of submission as far as hazard reports or
6 anything along those lines. And just, you know, for me, myself,
7 just kind of talking with everyone and letting them see that, you
8 know, from a face-to-face perspective rather than a, you know,
9 just seeing something written down or take an online test on it.

10 Q. And how would somebody, a pilot, other staff, how would they
11 go about reporting a safety concern?

12 A. Every employee with Orbic Air has a log in for PRISM, and
13 they -- all the tools are available to them on that site.

14 Q. How many reports do you get?

15 A. Not a lot. Most of them are for things like fog on the ramp,
16 you know, oil in the hanger. It's kind of things like along those
17 lines. So not really anything that's been any serious concerns.

18 Q. Okay. And you said your SMS is through PRISM. Were you a
19 part of selecting PRISM as the system you were going to use?

20 A. I was not.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. I was introduced to it.

23 Q. I don't recall whether this was in your previous interview,
24 but how long have you been with Orbic?

25 A. I've been working here going on ten years now.

1 Q. Okay. So you were here when Brady and Steven purchased?

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. Okay. What changes did you notice after they came in?

4 A. Just seeing the company growing in good ways. We're, you
5 know, expanding operations into different fields. One thing I did
6 see, particularly with Brady, is he was very safety-oriented in
7 mind. He was always very cautious, you know, very wanting to make
8 sure every detail, every box was checked. And I think I said this
9 on my previous interview, but not talking down about the previous
10 owner or anything along those lines, but with Brady, we jumped
11 into making sure flight following was done as far as pilots
12 checking in when they're departing and landing. More rules kind
13 of put into place as far as, you know, for example, taxing on the
14 ramp. It was, you know, slow, low, very maintained flight. That
15 was one thing that Brady was very -- emphasized a lot. And, you
16 know, just placed -- I really didn't see a big emphasis on safety
17 coming around in the, you know, PRISM, like I said, it was new for
18 us. That's something that was also set up, you know, within the
19 new ownership. Not something that we had before.

20 Q. Okay. And how long have you been the safety manager?

21 A. Officially, it would be about two years.

22 Q. And you're also a pilot?

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. What aircraft do you fly?

25 A. The Robinson R44s, Robinson R22, A-Star, and the EC130 when

1 we had it.

2 Q. What's your total time?

3 A. Over about 2,100 hours.

4 Q. And about how much do you recall in the EC130?

5 A. I want to say I had about 350 hours in that.

6 Q. If you had to pick one of those helicopters, which one would
7 you choose to fly?

8 A. I want to say our A-Star is pretty nice.

9 Q. Okay. In terms of the flying that you do, you do tours, you
10 do charters. Is there anything you don't do? Or you do all the
11 flights?

12 A. Myself, I'm not an instructor, so I do not do flight
13 instruction. But I do tours, charter, basically any kind of 91
14 operations.

15 Q. Do you have a preference whether you'd rather do tours or
16 charter flights?

17 A. Yes. Depends how many tours I did in the past week. After a
18 while they get a little monotonous. So getting a charter in
19 between is nice to break up the groove of things.

20 Q. For the EC130, you know, thinking about the different type of
21 helicopters you have flown here, how does it compare? Is it
22 easier, harder, same?

23 A. It was a little bit in between. When learning to fly it, it
24 was definitely an adjustment coming from Robinsons. But then
25 hopping into an A-Star, it was easier in my opinion than the A-Star

1 was. Call it a squirrel for a reason, even though they're really
2 not too dissimilar. But, you know, the EC just was -- felt a bit
3 more stable.

4 Q. So the SMS program, give me an overview of it.

5 A. The SMS program, kind of like I said, it has reporting
6 factors for pilots. It's a place where we can store any safety
7 information including our SMS, you know, P -- any other important
8 documents as well as training for pilots. It has a place to store
9 all that. We also have internal evaluations we can do through the
10 SMS. I'm seeing if there's anything else I'm missing on that.
11 But, yeah, it's basically a kind of like online, I don't want to
12 say database, but database and tools to be able to be accessed by
13 all Orbic employees.

14 Q. When you say internal evaluations, like a self-auditing type
15 thing?

16 A. Yeah, self-auditing. Correct.

17 Q. Have you done that?

18 A. We've done a few. It's been a bit of a learning curve for
19 myself as far as how to handle the SMS. I've, again, kind of got
20 put into the position, and I did do training with PRISM, one of
21 their weeklong courses. And then from there, it was figuring out
22 their system, which they have also revamped. So there's -- we've
23 done -- most of the stuff we do is for our 133, the fire
24 operations. So done a lot to do with that. Still kind of working
25 on figuring things out what's here directly. So have not done a

1 whole lot of internal evaluations or audits.

2 Q. Okay. And the audits that you've done, have you had any
3 significant findings?

4 A. Nothing that we've come across. It's kind of like checking
5 off the boxes, and something else that we already do, so.

6 Q. As a part of the SMS, is there any policy or guidance on
7 fatigue?

8 A. There is. There's -- actually even in our FRATs, there are
9 boxes for those, basically how much sleep did you have the night
10 before, are you well rested, how many hours on duty. There's also
11 the Part 135 limitations for, you know, pilot duty times. But
12 besides those, the SMS does include that in our risk analysis for
13 determining if there's an issue there.

14 Q. And are pilots to do a risk assessment for every flight, or
15 is it just 135 flights?

16 A. 135 and 133.

17 Q. Even for a -- maybe like a high-risk Part 191, there wouldn't
18 be a risk assessment?

19 A. If we -- if management sees something that's -- we see like
20 along those lines, then, yes, we would have -- we would instruct
21 the pilots to do one.

22 Q. What might be considered a high-risk flight?

23 A. Poor weather, high winds, the -- anything that's kind of near
24 limits of the aircraft. Yeah. I think that's about it.

25 Q. Anything in regards to -- well, let me just -- let me just

1 ask. I'm thinking this flight crew, these pilots were planning to
2 fly back from Boulder City late at night, dark, would that be
3 considered a high-risk flight?

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. Okay. Do you know if a risk assessment was done for that
6 portion of the flight, or was it -- or was it going to be
7 required?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. It was going to be required?

10 A. Yeah. They fill them out before departure.

11 Q. So they would have -- when they had gotten to Boulder City,
12 they would have --

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. -- conducted another?

15 A. Mm-hmm.

16 Q. Okay. Do you know, was that specifically discussed? Were
17 you a part of that discussion, or --

18 A. I was not. When we look at -- I mean coming from like the
19 pilot perspective here, when we are on 135 flights, yes, the 135
20 definition is that leg. But we have, you know, the empty legs
21 that we still, I don't want to say, treat it as a 135 because
22 we're not doing a flight manifest for two pilots flying back
23 empty. But we still do our check-ins with, you know, flight
24 following and everything along those lines, so.

25 Q. Okay. Were you working on the day of the accident?

1 A. I did. I was flying here out of Burbank that evening.

2 Q. Okay. Did you see Ben or Blake?

3 A. Briefly before they departed, I was on tours, so I was kind
4 of running in and out on flights. They came in late in the day.
5 Since they were having a late evening flight, we had them blocked
6 off for the first half of the day. I don't recall what time
7 specifically they came in, but it was late afternoon. And I
8 briefly saw them as they were about to depart out of Burbank. I
9 had just landed from another flight, walked my passengers in. By
10 the time I went back out, they had departed, so I didn't even
11 speak with them before they went.

12 Q. Okay. Do you hold safety meetings with the pilots or the
13 whole company?

14 A. We do. Our safety committee meets monthly, whether it be in
15 person or through like Zoom calls. And then from that, if there's
16 anything that needs to be alerted to the pilots, we do it with
17 them. Now our SMS does -- say with employees, we have an annual
18 safety meeting. However, if there's anything that we need to
19 address sooner, we will either do that one on one with pilots, or
20 call them in for additional safety meetings if needed.

21 Q. So the safety committee meetings, everyone's invited? Or is
22 that just the safety committees proper?

23 A. That is a safety committee.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. Not that we would tell anyone they couldn't join in. We've

1 actually have told people they could sit in if they wanted to.
2 But it's not something that we kind of broadcast, like, hey, if
3 you wanted to come jump in on this.

4 Q. What type of issues are typically discussed in these
5 meetings?

6 A. Most of the time it's anything that we've come across in the
7 past month that we felt the need to discuss with one another.
8 Could be from, you know, operations around the airport, any
9 restrictions or limitations with flights. Anything we've seen
10 just around the ramp, on the ground. And basically seeing if
11 there's anything that anybody within the committee feels the need
12 to address or wants to bring up.

13 Q. Had you ever flown with Ben or Blake?

14 A. Yes, both of them.

15 Q. In those instances, were you in the left seat? Were you in
16 the center seat?

17 A. With Ben, it would, you know, it would depend on the flight
18 because there is times we had a two-pilot crew where the flight
19 fell on him on the schedule. He would be PIC. At other times,
20 vice versus. Blake had also flown with me on a few times as a
21 safety pilot sitting in the middle seat and I'd be flying left
22 seat.

23 Q. Okay. What was it like flying with Ben?

24 A. He was very intrigued about the aircraft. Any question that
25 you could possibly come up with, I'm sure he's asked it.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. So he was always, you know, from when he was flying just as
3 the safety pilot, flying the aircraft with me, he was very -- or,
4 I don't know if that's the right word, intuitive on the aircraft.
5 And then when I would fly with him as he was a PIC, he was --
6 yeah, he was very focused on flying. And feel he was a very good
7 pilot in the aircraft.

8 Q. When you're flying with a safety pilot, what kind of briefing
9 do you have with them before the flight, if any?

10 A. The briefing would just be, you know, when -- anything that
11 we are maybe watching out for, if we have any obstacles, any
12 weather or anything that we're going to be, you know, watching
13 throughout the flight. Also, as far as safety pilots go, when we
14 are flying on a 135 leg, they know, you know, as we're flying,
15 they're only there to help monitor and in emergency situations.
16 Otherwise, they're not to touch any controls, and basically help
17 with passengers.

18 Q. How was Blake as a safety pilot on the times that you flew
19 with him?

20 A. He was good. He was very professional. He would always, you
21 know, have your next radio frequency right there for you. He'd
22 always be, you know, just monitoring everything with the aircraft.
23 And he, too, was learning the aircraft, so asked a lot of
24 questions as we were flying around, and he made a very good
25 companion to have in flight.

1 Q. As a pilot, have you ever felt pressured to take a flight you
2 didn't feel comfortable taking?

3 A. Not once.

4 Q. Ever taken a flight when something was inoperative?

5 A. No. If there wasn't an -- let me rephrase that. If there
6 wasn't an MEL, I actually have done that with MEL items. But our
7 EC130 did not have an MEL, so if we had issues with that, it was
8 grounded. I also fly the A-Star, so it made it easy to switch if
9 we needed to. Our Robinsons on the other hand, we do have MELs
10 for, so answering that question, if it was an MEL item, then --
11 and permitted flight still, under whatever conditions were listed,
12 potentially I couldn't list a specific occasion, but I think I've
13 used our MEL maybe two, maybe three times max in the entire time
14 I've been here. We also have three of those, so if there's an
15 issue, usually it's switching aircrafts.

16 Q. So if something was inoperative, I guess what would happen?
17 So in the EC130, so something's inoperative, what would you as a
18 pilot do?

19 A. We would contact maintenance as well as we have people that
20 we all message -- chief pilot, director of operation, president,
21 maintenance, let them know there is an issue with this component.
22 If it is something that grounds the aircraft, then we have to
23 terminate the flight.

24 Q. So you would rely on maintenance to let you know if it was
25 something that would ground the flight?

1 A. No. It's a matter of being a pilot in command of an aircraft
2 knowing what makes your aircraft airworthy.

3 Q. Okay. How about an inoperative radar altimeter?

4 A. If it was in-op, then it would have -- should have been
5 grounded.

6 Q. Would you ever feel comfortable flying without it?

7 A. For that flight? No.

8 Q. Why?

9 A. Dark over desert at night, it's not something that should be
10 done without it.

11 Q. Would having a safety pilot change that at all, an extra set
12 of eyes to kind of help watch everything?

13 A. It wouldn't sway me in flying an aircraft that's not
14 airworthy.

15 Q. Yeah. I'm asking.

16 A. No, I would not.

17 Q. Oh, would not.

18 A. Yeah.

19 DR. WILSON: I'm going to read through my questions to see if
20 I have anything else.

21 MR. STEFANSKI: No worries.

22 DR. WILSON: Thanks so much, Tommy. Fabian.

23 MR. SALAZAR: All right, Tommy. Most of the questions I
24 asked you were during the first interview, so I just have a couple
25 follow up.

1 BY MR. SALAZAR:

2 Q. Why did the company switch from GERoMINO to PRISM with
3 regards to the risk assessment?

4 A. Because PRISM, when you would do the risk assessment on their
5 site, it saves it right to our SMS -- the safety locker on there,
6 so it has a record of all our risk assessments versus GERoMINO, if
7 you were to do it on there, it doesn't actually save anywhere to
8 our SMS.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. It would have to be something that would get printed,
11 scanned, filed, copied in, so out of ease for filing it directly
12 to our system.

13 Q. Okay. Okay. And just for review for these folks, I know
14 I've already asked these questions, but these few should be asked
15 again. If a pilot does a risk assessment and the risk is not
16 elevated, does anybody get a notification?

17 A. Does not.

18 Q. Okay. And if a pilot fills out a risk assessment and the
19 risk is elevated, who gets a notification?

20 A. It's going to be our -- basically our safety committee, it's
21 going to go through to chief pilot, director of operations,
22 president, myself, and I'm not sure IF Steven's actually included
23 on that one or not. But I know it does go to chief pilot,
24 director of operations, myself, and the president for certain.
25 And, yeah, the -- and with his last flight, and seeing it was not

1 an elevated report, so we did not see it.

2 Q. Right. Yeah, this is just general, the hypothetical so that
3 everybody knows what's expected when a risk assessment comes up
4 with an elevated risk.

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Decision makers are made aware. Is it through emails?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And it's -- the pilots actually cannot sign the risk
10 assessment and file it. It will not let them do anything further
11 until it is approved.

12 Q. Okay. Okay. So some mitigation has to happen to bring the
13 risk level down so the pilot can sign it and away he goes.

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Okay. You were working here prior to when Ben hired on,
16 correct?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. So when Ben hired on, you basically -- did you know him
19 before he hired on?

20 A. No, I did not.

21 Q. So your association with him, your working association was
22 from as soon as he hired on till the accident?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Okay. During that time, did you ever once know Ben to make a
25 decision that was against the company's policies and GOM?

1 A. I can't say I did. If there was a book with anything written
2 in it regarding our operation, I'm pretty sure he read every page
3 twice.

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. Yeah. I can't say that I've seen him to do that.

6 Q. And on the day of accident, you were working here and you saw
7 the crew, but at any time did you talk with them at all?

8 A. I did not.

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. I, like I said, I was running back and forth between flights.
11 I saw when they were here. I walked back out, and they were gone.

12 Q. Okay. One thing that I want to talk to you about as far as
13 maintenance, another hypothetical scenario.

14 A. Sure.

15 Q. If you're pre-flighting an aircraft and you find a component
16 that is inoperative and you report it to maintenance, and
17 maintenance is going to work on it, at any point does it get
18 written up in a maintenance logbook?

19 A. Stephen handles logbook entries for maintenance issues, so --
20 and that's why (indiscernible) getting written up. Now if there's
21 something that is grounding the aircraft, we pull the aircraft
22 tin. We will mark it on the tin grounded, and put it into my
23 office so that it's in there so a pilot doesn't walk in and grab
24 it to fly.

25 Q. Okay. Let's drill down a little bit deeper. That's begs me

1 one more question.

2 A. Sure.

3 Q. Does the pilot never write into that maintenance logbook? Is
4 he only expected to report the maintenance item?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. Okay. So is that a policy that Steve has because he just
7 wants his logbooks written that specific way?

8 A. I couldn't answer that for him.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. For maintenance logbooks, he has them in with him. And
11 couldn't answer as to --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. -- why.

14 Q. But as far as the maintenance tin goes, or the maintenance
15 can, does a pilot write in that if there's a discrepancy?

16 A. So we have -- when I say the tin, that's what we keep our
17 flight log sheet in, or our hop sheet. It has a printout for
18 maintenance records in there for what's coming due. If the
19 aircraft has a MEL, there's a sheet in there for that. Otherwise,
20 all maintenance issues are just directed to Steven.

21 Q. Okay. So I'm a pilot. I go out and I pre-flight the R44. I
22 see a big dent in the leading edge of the tail rudder like it hit
23 a rock. Okay? What do I do?

24 A. Like I said, we have a procedure where we send out a message,
25 it would be to director of operations, president, director of

1 maintenance, and chief pilot. And goes out to all them, says,
2 hey, I found this issue. I'm grounding the aircraft for this
3 reason until it's looked at.

4 Q. Okay. So is there like a box I check that says grounded, or
5 I wrote -- do I write -- physically write grounded in the
6 maintenance can?

7 A. We haven't -- there's not a spot for that. We'll put a note
8 on top of the tin that says grounded, and like I said, it goes
9 into my office until --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- I make sure that it's closed.

12 Q. So you're running -- you basically have control of that tin,
13 and nobody's going anywhere with the tin, so --

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. -- nobody's flying that aircraft because it's got a sticky on
16 it that says grounded, and it's in your office.

17 A. Yep. And keys are in it, and if it's in my office, it's away
18 from where we keep them normally. So --

19 Q. It's (indiscernible). Yeah.

20 A. -- you'll see it's not there.

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. And say why is it not here.

23 Q. Okay. All right. And prior -- while you're out flying. So
24 you were out flying when they departed and when you came back,
25 they were gone? Or is that wrong?

1 A. I was flying tours. I was coming and going. When they were
2 here, I had just landed as they were getting ready to leave. I
3 walked my passengers --

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. -- inside.

6 Q. Yeah.

7 A. You know?

8 Q. But you were on the ground when they left, but you were
9 tending to your job, you had passengers.

10 A. Correct.

11 Q. You had to escort them inside, and when you back out, they
12 were gone?

13 A. That is correct. I escorted them inside and, you know, kind
14 of sit there and chat with them for a little bit, and send them on
15 their way. And by the time I had done all that, walked back out,
16 get ready for the next one, they had already departed.

17 Q. All right. During the week when the mission was on and off,
18 were you part of any discussion with Ben on the upcoming charter
19 flight that he was going to go on?

20 A. We had talked at times about, you know, and we had a weekend
21 of flights coming up that --

22 Q. Yeah.

23 A. -- you know, just discussing, you know, how flights were
24 going to go. He was going to be doing this flight with Blake the
25 first night. I was going to be flying with -- I think I was

1 supposed to be flying with Blake the next day. And then with Ben
2 the day after that. So we had a series of flights, but mostly
3 that was it. We didn't really discuss anything in detail This is
4 a flight that we've done before, but in much different
5 circumstances, unfortunately. But it was a clear weather day when
6 I had done this flight before. And it has, you know, eaten me up,
7 you know, the past couple weeks trying to figure out how that was
8 not -- seeing that it wasn't clear weather.

9 Q. During that time that you all had that little conversation,
10 did he seem excited about it? Was he happy to be getting another
11 charter flight, even with Ben?

12 A. I think all of us have -- as pilots, you know, we're excited
13 when we get to fly.

14 Q. Yeah. (Indiscernible).

15 A. So -- yeah. I mean it wasn't any -- he didn't -- was not not
16 happy about it.

17 MR. SALAZAR: I'm with you. Yeah. All right. That's all I
18 got. Thanks. Thanks, Tom.

19 DR. WILSON: Dave.

20 BY MR. GERLACH:

21 Q. Yeah. Do you have your own personal iPad?

22 A. Yes.

23 Q. And do you use ForeFlight?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. As the safety manager, do you see any hazards with using that

1 device in the helicopter?

2 A. Personally, I think it's got a lot of features to it that can
3 actually be helpful. There's terrain maps included with it.
4 There's -- you got an additional resource for GPS altitude. If
5 you're having any issues with instruments, you know, you have an
6 additional resource there. Yeah. Personally, I find ForeFlight
7 as a pilot to be a big help. I've flown for close to 15 years
8 now, and I haven't had my commercial that long. I just -- from
9 when I started training till now -- actually, over 15 years, and
10 when I started flying, we had paper charts and looking outside.
11 ForeFlight, giving you traffic alerts, stuff like that is helpful.
12 Now one concern I may see with ForeFlight is people relying on it
13 because it's not something that should be relied on. But it is an
14 additional asset that you can utilize.

15 Q. And when you say rely on it, you're relying on it for what?

16 A. So say air traffic for example. It gives you air traffic.
17 But you also need to remember that that's not necessarily the only
18 air traffic around you. There may be people that don't have a
19 transponder on them, or maybe not in an area that's got Mode-C.
20 So there may be people flying around that don't show up on there.
21 So that's why I mean like don't rely on it because, you know, I
22 can see with newer pilots that have had this technology and they
23 fly in busy areas where Mode-C is required, then it's like, oh,
24 every aircraft has and it shows up on here, and that may not be
25 the case. And then, additionally, it's what I was always told and

1 drilled into my head when I first was in flight training and --
2 batteries die. And you don't want that to be your only source of
3 information if you need it. So you need to know how to do things
4 the old-fashioned way. Hope that kind of explains what I mean by
5 rely on it.

6 Q. Sure. Do you rely on it for weather information?

7 A. We do use it quite a bit for looking at METARs with airports.
8 Now it does tell you when stuff is last updated on there. So,
9 yes, we do use it frequently for that. It also has features for
10 radar. It can be, again, utilized, but I don't want to say rely
11 on it. There should be more in-depth pre-flight procedures for
12 checking the weather, which as a pilot here, you know, we're going
13 through multiple websites, you know, with -- one that we use quite
14 a bit here is the HEMs tool where, you know, it shows you and
15 gives you ideas of the meteorological conditions along our route,
16 whether it's going to be things, maybe IFR, low INF, moderate VFR.
17 You know, it's not our only source, but we do use it quite a bit.

18 Q. Do all the pilots use the same thing and follow the same
19 checklist procedures for checking the weather prior to a flight?

20 A. I wouldn't say we have like a checklist for, you know, saying
21 like which -- go here, here, here, and here. But we, you know,
22 all the pilots have been working together for quite some time and
23 go through the same steps for making sure things are clear to go
24 fly. And, yeah, and that's one thing that's kind of been eating
25 me up with this situation is how that's -- how things got the way

1 they did.

2 Q. Based on the weather that you know now was in route?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. Would you have expected them not to take the flight?

5 A. With the weather that was in route, they never should have
6 even lifted off the ground, and that's coming from me as a pilot
7 here. If we had seen -- if I had seen anything along the lines of
8 radar over dark desert, it would have been a canceled flight for
9 me.

10 Q. What was the major thing that you saw in the in-route weather
11 that you would say don't go?

12 A. Any kind of bad weather in that location. If it wasn't a
13 clear sky, I would have had issues with that flight.

14 Q. Can you be more specific?

15 A. Any kind of radar showing up where -- for precipitation out
16 there. There's also the air map for icing. That was out there.
17 With the lack of illumination over that stretch, in my opinion
18 that flight should have been canceled. And, yeah. I,
19 unfortunately didn't see any of that myself until after --

20 Q. You mentioned there was an air map for icing along the route.

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. That was forecast prior to departure?

23 A. I don't know the specific details on it. This is what
24 I've --

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. -- found out afterwards, and it's -- I can't recall what the
2 specific timeframe on it was for the Pass, but.

3 Q. Was there any other condition that you would have said don't
4 go?

5 A. Low ceilings. Like I said, if it wasn't clear air, that's
6 not a stretch I'd want to fly through.

7 Q. Does your company have a policy for that?

8 A. It goes into our risk analysis where, you know, there's
9 breakdowns for all those different meteorological conditions at
10 points. And, unfortunately, they didn't hit where it would have
11 been an elevated assessment. So the rest of us hadn't looked at
12 it as recently. After this, I've gone through and changed our
13 risk assessment, so if there's any conditions such as icing, night
14 flight with ceilings, basically the stuff we're talking about,
15 it's an automatic -- triggers it for elevated -- an elevated
16 assessment. So that needs to be reviewed.

17 Q. So had they put in the weather correctly into your risk
18 assessment, would it have been elevated or not elevated?

19 A. The way they had put it in, it came up at one point -- I
20 think it was like one point shy of what would have been the target
21 for an elevated report.

22 Q. But what you're saying though is they didn't put in the
23 proper or the correct weather into the risk assessment?

24 A. I believe -- I'd have to -- I'd have to review their actual
25 assessment to see how each one was answered specifically. But I

1 know they had marked, seeing it was like with -- for icing for
2 example, there's three drop downs for it that you can select.
3 Each one's a different point value, zero through three. I don't
4 know off the top of my head if they selected the first one or the
5 second one. If they selected one and not the other, and, you
6 know, I don't remember what the wording was on it, whether it was
7 possible or probable icing. Could that have been the one-point
8 difference? I don't know. But can I -- I don't recall off the
9 top of my head without reviewing the assessment they did, if I had
10 it in front of me.

11 Q. Okay. You had mentioned low ceilings, low visibility, icing,
12 precipitation in route. Those all would have been a no-go --

13 A. I --

14 Q. -- prior to the accident?

15 A. With a flight like this, yes. You know, if you're talking
16 about doing a flight from Burbank to LAX, and there's a 1,200 foot
17 ceiling, you have a fully illuminated city below you, it's a lot
18 different than --

19 Q. Sure.

20 A. -- a 1,200 foot ceiling flying over the desert.

21 Q. Okay. Switch gears real quick. The safety culture survey on
22 PRISM, have you all done that?

23 A. I don't think we've done that yet.

24 Q. Okay. We use the word high-risk pretty frequently. What
25 does that mean?

1 A. High risk would be potential, you know, a high potential for
2 any kind of incident, whether it be a crash or, you know, just
3 having to make a precautionary landing. I would consider anything
4 in between that high risk.

5 Q. Okay. In your company's operation, what's the riskiest thing
6 that you all do?

7 A. Honestly, I think that the flying from here to Vegas at night
8 probably hits that because it's -- it was one of the things that
9 we didn't do very often. Most of the guys here are used to flying
10 in a very illuminated city. I would probably say that that's --
11 that was it.

12 Q. Okay. Now that's in hindsight. Did you consider that being
13 a high-risk operation before the accident?

14 A. High risk, yes, if there's, you know, it needs to be very
15 carefully looked at before we fly, you know, in the sense of if
16 there is -- just basically what happened, it was poor weather
17 there, that would have been -- or should have been detected
18 beforehand. And I don't really know how answer that for you
19 because it's like, yes, that was high risk, but that's why we
20 should have been -- or they should have been, you know, very
21 closely monitoring weather out there. And I don't know if it had
22 anything to do with, you know, a delay in their flight, or any --
23 whatever it may be. I can't answer that, and everything that's
24 been going through my head in the past --

25 Q. Yeah.

1 A. -- three weeks have been all speculation. But, yeah, you
2 know, it's one of those flights I have done. I've done that. But
3 it was, you know, clear sky. It was a busy weekend, real low
4 illuminated and we were in a turbine shift with two pilots.

5 Q. Do you select that road, that highway path for any particular
6 reason besides the automobile light illumination at night? Is
7 there any other --

8 A. Well, ground illumination, and if you were to have any
9 scenario where you had to land, you're not in the middle of the
10 desert.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. Say you got a warning light and you're out there, and
13 there's --

14 Q. Yeah. Could you go direct? Is there anything preventing you
15 from going direct?

16 A. There are restricted airspaces around that area, so you are
17 pretty close to the highway. There are parts though, once you get
18 past those restricteds where you can go direct and it's just
19 desert and mountains. Not something we would do at night.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. But for daytime operations.

22 Q. Is it your job to develop the risk mitigation strategies when
23 you've identified a high-risk operation, or do you tell the chief
24 pilot, hey, that's a high risk, we need to figure out some ways to
25 make it safer.

1 A. Yeah. I would delegate that to the chief pilot. I include
2 everybody, chief pilot, director of operations, and president to
3 review it.

4 Q. Yeah. Okay. Your pilots, do they use checklists?

5 A. For flying the aircraft?

6 Q. Mm-hmm.

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. Is it a do-list and a flow? Or just a checklist that sits in
9 the air?

10 A. It's a checklist in the aircraft.

11 Q. And do they pull it out and go one by one, item by item, and
12 then flip the switch?

13 A. They would go through and -- well, for like starting
14 procedures with the aircraft and anything like that, it's, you
15 know, step by step. So flipping the switch would be one of those
16 steps.

17 Q. Okay. So they literally pull out a checklist and use it?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. They don't have it memorized and just go do, do, do, do, and
20 then look at it, or just know that they did it?

21 A. I can't speak for every pilot, but the procedure is you would
22 pull out a checklist and follow your checklist.

23 Q. How do you as the safety manager interact with maintenance
24 from a safety standpoint?

25 A. Well, they're part of our SMS system. You know, it's -- how

1 do I interact with them? More so coordinating to get maintenance
2 done. If any issues are found, I will talk with the director of
3 maintenance, say, hey we need to get someone out here. We need to
4 get someone to inspect this. Make sure inspections are done.
5 Make sure that's -- and when I say make sure, logbook entries are
6 completed. It's, hey, is this all done. You guys looked at it.
7 You entered it. Okay. It's good to fly. I have not gone through
8 where I'm physically looking at it, so.

9 Q. If there's a repeat item, how many times does it repeat? Do
10 you even know about repeat items?

11 A. I would not.

12 Q. Okay. Would you know if there was any high-risk event on the
13 maintenance side?

14 A. If there was something that was done at the Camarillo
15 facility that I was not around for, I wouldn't know unless someone
16 told me.

17 Q. Okay. Well, do you see pilot duty and rest operations in
18 Part 91 as being your responsibility, or just Part 135?

19 A. Well, obviously, when it comes to fatigue for pilots, it
20 doesn't matter what part it is, it's part of safe flying. So we
21 do want to make sure everybody's, you know, not overdoing it. And
22 even for Part 91, we're basically following the same standards
23 that you have for Part 135. We're not here, like, oh, you're 91,
24 cool. You can work 16 hours today. We don't do that. Do I
25 oversee all of it? Like, yes, I, you know, I make sure that

1 pilots are, you know, getting their rest. And if they come in and
2 they're looking tired, you know, you send them home. Haven't had
3 to do that. Everybody here has been very responsible, you know,
4 in that aspect, you know? So I have had a pilot say, hey, I'm
5 just -- I'm not feeling well today, you know, I want to go home.
6 And no problem.

7 Q. Is it a hazard to have a pilot on duty fly 14 hours, last leg
8 is 135, but to get home, it's a part 91?

9 A. Yes. I would say that's, you know, you're still flying. And
10 that's not something that we push.

11 Q. Does your safety pilot work for you as the safety manager?

12 A. No. I'm not -- maybe you can rephrase that for me. I'm
13 trying to --

14 Q. He's responsible for safety on the airplane or the
15 helicopter, is he working for you as the safety manager to ensure
16 the flight is safe, or is he working for the PIC? Is he working
17 for the chief pilot? How does he fit into the safety manager's
18 world?

19 A. I want -- I'm trying to see how to answer that. He's working
20 for the company. You know, that company involves all of us. He's
21 there to make sure the pilot's got an extra set of eyes, you know,
22 someone else that can monitor. He's there to make sure if -- say
23 the PIC has a heart attack, somebody can still put the aircraft on
24 the ground. There's more than one hat to that. I don't see that
25 being like a -- I get the question because safety, safety.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. But -- yeah.

3 Q. Because it was a high-risk operation, you wanted to mitigate
4 some of the risk by putting a safety pilot on. That was a
5 decision that involved multiple people, with you being a part of
6 that decision? Or not --

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. -- a part?

9 A. Yes. That would be, again, part of myself, director of
10 operation, chief pilot, and president.

11 Q. Okay. I think I just have one last couple questions. All
12 right. So, hypothetically, if a pilot knowingly flies an aircraft
13 with a known discrepancy that would render the aircraft airworthy,
14 what role would you play in assessing that event?

15 A. Well, I would review it, figure out how to -- what we can --
16 what steps can be done to prevent it from happening in the future.

17 Q. Okay. Terminate the pilot?

18 A. That would be a decision for other people within the company.
19 Not so much myself. I can make a recommendation, but I do not --
20 I'm not directly involved with terminating employees.

21 Q. Okay. The very last one for you. You mentioned you
22 specifically said it's been eating me up thinking about this
23 event. What particular part bothers you the most in retrospect
24 thinking about it?

25 A. When I got the call that we lost communication, first thing I

1 did was pull up weather in the area and -- I don't want to say
2 first thing I did. But first thing I did was send a text, hey,
3 call us when you see this. Call this when you see this. When we
4 were getting no responses, I pulled up just weather out there and
5 looked at it. I just saw on the radar map just a cloud of
6 basically what's been described which is a wintry mix, you know,
7 it shows some pink and green. And my first thought was how did
8 we -- how did we get to this point when this is here. That's
9 what's been bugging me --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- because I'm trying to figure out how that was not seen,
12 because with those two pilots, if they had seen that, I -- without
13 a doubt, they would not have flown into it.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. They wouldn't have said, oh, that looks fun, let's try to get
16 through it.

17 MR. GERLACH: Okay. That's all the questions I have. Thank
18 you very much.

19 DR. WILSON: How are you? Do you need a break? I've got
20 some more questions.

21 MR. STEFANSKI: I'm fine.

22 BY DR. WILSON:

23 Q. Okay. All right. Thank you. The SMS program, have you --
24 are you familiar with the FAA's voluntary program for SMS for non-
25 121 operators to --

1 A. I've heard of it, yes.

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. Again, I do apologize, because I'm relatively new to this. I
4 just did this training course for this in March last year, so.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I am still getting familiarized with everything. But, yes, I
7 have heard about it.

8 Q. Yeah. Well, my question was going to be, has there any
9 discussion about, you know, entering into this voluntary program
10 to have it be -- have your SMS program be accepted by the FAA?

11 A. Not that I'm aware of yet. And I don't know if -- perhaps
12 (indiscernible) because he's helped with that.

13 Q. Okay. The Calabasas accident that occurred, have you read
14 that report?

15 A. I don't know that I've seen the latest because I kind of
16 stopped hearing about it. I haven't gone through and actually
17 researched it recently. So I don't know when the latest came out,
18 but I was staying on top of that for a while afterwards.

19 Q. Yeah. And the final report is out if you are interested in
20 reading it, and finding, you know, looking at the findings and --

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. -- recommendations that came out of it. So my question was
23 going to be, you know, whether you're looked at those
24 recommendations and, you know, if there was any discussion about
25 changes that maybe Orbic was looking to do as a result of some of

1 those recommendations. But it doesn't sound like you're as
2 familiar with them, so --

3 A. Yeah. Unfortunately, no.

4 Q. Okay. And I'm not trying to make this an oral. It's okay.

5 A. No. Yeah.

6 Q. I'm just curious. There's no right or wrong to that. Let's
7 switch back to the pilot side of things. Training for inadvertent
8 IMC. What do you think of it here?

9 A. I think we've had pretty substantial training for that. Been
10 put in foggles, told to close my eyes, put my head to the right
11 side. And sit there while all you feel is a bunch of movements,
12 and then, okay, open your eyes and fly it. That's, you know, I
13 think that's a pretty good example because I've had where it's
14 just, okay, put the foggles on and just, you know, we're going to
15 do -- fly this direction, fly this direction. No, now it's -- and
16 this is, again, stuff that's -- I've seen come around since new
17 ownership. But, you know, the whole really trying to disorient
18 you and then have you fly the aircraft, I feel like that's
19 probably not something that you get everywhere, but maybe it is.
20 I have only flown here.

21 Q. That scenario that you described, is that something that one
22 particular instructor does, or do you feel it's something that all
23 the instructors do?

24 A. That is what our two people who check us out on the aircraft
25 are --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- do, so -- for 135 operations.

3 Q. I think you mentioned that you had heard about the radar
4 altimeter not working on this flight. How did you hear about
5 that?

6 A. I heard about that post -- after everything. And it came
7 around in discussions that they were having some issue with it
8 prior, but I didn't know if had gotten resolved, or, you know, if
9 they just turned it off and on, and it started working. So I --
10 and to this point, I don't know if it was -- if they turned it off
11 and on and it started working, and they were having an issue or
12 something to begin with. I just heard about -- after this was all
13 said and done that there was some sort of issue and they said it
14 was in-op, and then they decided to fly. So, in my opinion, that
15 would have meant something was resolved. But I -- again, I wasn't
16 there, so I don't know where that left off.

17 Q. Okay. Are you aware of any recurring maintenance issues that
18 was on that helicopter?

19 A. We've had a position light that's been a pain in the butt,
20 but they actually made those LED, so other than that, not any big
21 recurring issues. I know we had -- because the radar altimeter's
22 been in question, we had replaced it a while back, and that was
23 working. And I know there was an issue. We sent it out to get it
24 fixed. And it came back, and it was working when it came back.
25 And the last I was told was it was working.

1 Q. Are there any -- again, still pilot hat, so you're scheduled
2 to fly tours or a charter for a day, you come in. Are there any
3 like morning safety briefings? Like all the pilots need to be
4 here 15 minutes, you know, early and somebody gives a briefing,
5 weather in the area looks good today. We've got this going on.

6 A. Nothing that's formal. We're not big. There's maybe three
7 pilots here at a time, and that's kind of our daily discussions,
8 what do pilots talk about when they see each other at the
9 beginning of the day. So, like I said, nothing formal. But do we
10 discuss stuff like that such as weather or any issues with
11 aircrafts, or, hey, by the way, watch this, you know, temperature
12 seemed that it was getting a little high on that one, keep an eye
13 on it, you know? We do talk to each other, and that was just an
14 example. I'm not saying that was an issue.

15 Q. Right. Do you all -- are you out -- might all three pilots
16 be out flying tours at the same time?

17 A. Possibly, yes.

18 Q. Is there a company frequency or any way for you to
19 communicate, like if you, I don't know, run into some kind of
20 issue that you think the other pilots need to know about?

21 A. Yes. We do have a company frequency. It's the same one that
22 we use for communicating with our flight following here when we're
23 within range.

24 Q. Do you ever discuss the weather with the flight flower?

25 A. Not -- I mean other than usually when it's bad weather and,

1 hey, we're canceling our flight.

2 Q. What about when, you know, if you're on a charter flight and
3 you've got some distance to go, do they ever reach out to you and
4 say like, hey, I've updated the weather, it looks like you're
5 going to run into something out there?

6 A. No. And on that note, our radios, for like this example,
7 would not --

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. -- reach that. The radio that we have here has about a span
10 of to the Newhall Pass. You're probably not familiar because you
11 don't live here. But, basically, with all the big mountains
12 around us, there is a bit of range restriction.

13 Q. Is there any way to communicate via Spidertracks?

14 A. You would not -- can't like receive messages or anything.
15 And Spidertracks have buttons a pilot can push for like mark,
16 watch, or SOS, but that's the only sort of communications there.

17 Q. And I haven't heard anybody mention this during any of our
18 interviews, but you all don't carry like an in-reach phone or
19 anything like that?

20 A. I particularly carry one. And that's something I started
21 doing on my own in case I came across an issue and had to land in
22 the middle of nowhere and there's no cell reception, and I need to
23 say, hey, I'm on the ground, we're all okay. Someone come out
24 here. But, no, that's -- everybody else. That would be what --
25 we have Spidertracks, and we do have the buttons on top that you

1 can push if you were to have an issue, they can send someone to
2 reach you, you can push a button.

3 Q. Okay. Putting your safety manager hat back on, so pilots
4 have -- or even all personal, they've got multiple ways of
5 reporting safety issues through PRISM. I think you might have
6 said there's an anonymous way --

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. -- that they can report also. Is it a hotline, or --

9 A. It is a report through PRISM that they can fill out. It
10 doesn't log who submitted it. It doesn't ask for a name or
11 anything. And it's, you know, like it goes on there and it will
12 come through on our end as anonymous hazard report.

13 Q. Okay. And then when you get those reports -- have you
14 received reports? I think you said like oil on the ramp or things
15 like that.

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. But is there follow up with the person if the person
18 submitted with their name? Is there some kind of follow up, like,
19 hey, we took a look, and we did X, Y, Z?

20 A. Yes. And that is also something that we will, you know,
21 address with all pilots. And it may not be a group meeting, but
22 it may be, you know, talking to them as they come in throughout
23 the week and say, hey, you know, it was said -- and using the oil
24 on the floor as an example, you know, hey, there was oil in the
25 hanger, and do us a favor, if you guys see anything like that,

1 make sure you wipe it up. Just kind of like that. It may not be
2 a formal, you know, whole staff meeting, everybody come on the
3 same day. More so than just communication.

4 Q. Are there ever staff meetings where everyone comes in on the
5 same day?

6 A. Yes. We do have them. They're not very frequent because
7 it's difficult to get everybody in all at the same time. But, you
8 know, even when we did have them, if we get the majority of people
9 here and then fill in whoever couldn't be there later.

10 Q. Okay. What kind of things are discussed at those meetings?

11 A. Any changes coming up with, you know, company operations. If
12 there's anything such as hazard reports that were received that we
13 need to address with everybody. If there's any upcoming
14 maintenance that's due on aircraft, like, hey, we're going to have
15 to -- this one's coming up for overhaul. It's going to going down
16 for a couple months here. And then, basically, also leave room
17 for if anybody has got anything that they want to bring up
18 themselves within the group for a discussion.

19 Q. I hate when I have a question and then it just disappears.

20 A. It happens.

21 Q. I know. That's what I get for not writing it down. Well,
22 maybe I'll think of it in a minute. Is there any risk to a pilot
23 reporting a safety issue?

24 A. Risk to the pilot? No. They --

25 Q. His job is not in jeopardy?

1 A. They can --

2 Q. Anything like that?

3 A. -- post whatever -- report whatever they want, and there's --
4 and that's one thing that we tell everyone, you put whatever you
5 want down and it's not going to affect you one way or another.

6 Q. Pay of pilots. Do they get paid more for a charter flight
7 versus a tour flight?

8 A. Depends how you look at it. Charter flights are a higher per
9 hour rate. Tour flights, you can have a ten-minute tour and you
10 still get paid for an hour, so.

11 Q. If you do a charter flight and let's say, you know, you fly
12 to -- the flight you were talking about. You flew, you waited a
13 few hours, and then you flew back, are you paid while you're
14 waiting?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. The same charter --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. -- hourly rate?

19 A. Yes, correct.

20 Q. Okay. And you all can accept tips?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Do you know -- so for like a charter flight, are any of
23 these -- is anywhere tip included, you know, and they say, oh,
24 we're going to automatically give, you know?

25 A. From the pilot perspective, I wish. No, it's not.

1 Q. Okay. So it's just up to the passengers to decide if --

2 A. Correct.

3 Q. -- and how much they're going to give?

4 A. Yeah. For tours, we have some signage out in the lobby that
5 says, you know, pilot gratuity is appreciated, but for charters,
6 particularly ones that never even come through here, we don't
7 mention or even say anything about it. It's just 100 percent if
8 they decide to do that, that is on them.

9 Q. Yeah. How often does that happen? Do they usually tip,
10 or --

11 A. Yeah. The charters not -- it's not very common. You get
12 some every now and then, but in the tours you see it a lot more.

13 Q. Are you involved at all with the booking of charters, or
14 scheduling of what pilots are going to fly it?

15 Sorry, I asked you --

16 A. I --

17 Q. -- two questions there.

18 A. As far as scheduling goes, I sometimes review it. I try to
19 go through the schedule and just make sure everything's lined up
20 on who it's supposed to be on. I think we may have talked about
21 this previously, but with our scheduling, we have like an a.m.
22 shift, a p.m. shift, and a second p.m. shift because afternoons
23 tend to be the busier times, so we'll have two pilots then. And
24 basically if something books in the morning, that's going to go to
25 the a.m. pilot. If it books after 2:30 p.m., it goes to the p.m.

1 pilot. And then we, you know, adjust schedules accordingly. One
2 thing I do try to do with scheduling is watching for things such
3 as duty times, making sure pilots are blocked out where they need
4 to be, so flights aren't getting put on and, you know, over doing
5 things such as those. And, I'm sorry, what was the first part of
6 the question again?

7 Q. I was asking if you were involved in the book, you know,
8 anything of the booking of the charter flight?

9 A. Not so much. You know, it's -- sometimes we get asked
10 questions along the lines of, hey, can you guys do this or, you
11 know, will this work? What's going to be the flight time for
12 that. So from like the pilot's standpoint, that happened. And
13 then just from the fact that I've kind of been here forever and
14 have been down that road, a lot of times the office will ask me if
15 they have questions just regarding booking charters and what they
16 need to do or have this, it looks like it's getting charged right.
17 But otherwise we have staff that are just dedicated to that. They
18 book, they assign it to the pilots and --

19 Q. Okay. Since the accident, has there been any discussions
20 about, you know, from a company-wide in terms of guidance or
21 reminders given to pilots about safety issues, that, you know,
22 maybe you've thought about since? Knowing the circumstances that
23 we know about the accident, has anything been shared with pilots?

24 A. Yes. So we don't have a whole lot of people flying here at
25 the moment. One of our other pilots was very close to one of

1 those gentleman, and he recently left here. So there's me and one
2 other pilot that are 135 pilots, and we're in the progress of
3 getting some other pilots in. But there has been discussion
4 about, you know, what steps can be done, what can we do to change
5 this? What can we do to prevent this from happening in the
6 future? And like I said, that's where like a few things that I
7 have talked to Brian, our chief pilot, with, you know, what can we
8 do because the fact the risk assessment came up, you know, one
9 point shy of being elevated, and I personally felt like, okay, if
10 there was any potential or anything that needed to, you know,
11 immediately flagged, where now I've, you know, set up a new
12 process -- or I'm sorry, not new process, new risk assessment,
13 it's in the works and finalizing it, but where certain things such
14 as that will immediately mark it for needing review. And kind of
15 also just changing like the point scale on it. So like a night
16 flight is basically going to require review.

17 You know, if there's a night flight with anything else, it's
18 going to require review. And I've been discussing with him, you
19 know, as far as what looks good and what we think might be more
20 beneficial in the future with the other pilot that we still have
21 doing this with me, talk to him and how, you know, what can we do
22 ourselves to make sure this doesn't happen again. And, again,
23 it's hard because we don't know what happened with them. What
24 process took place and all the steps prior to them departing, so
25 it's -- I mean you want to say how can we prevent this, but you

1 don't know where it went wrong to begin with other than the
2 conclusion and speculation.

3 Q. I agree. And I hope though, you know, I think there's still
4 benefit to having discussions about, you know, inadvertent IMC --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- given what, you know, the precipitation that you saw, and
7 so I mean those are still good discussions to have.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. You know, reminders of things to not take those things for
10 granted, you know, updating weather and things like that. So this
11 risk assessment was completed around 4:15 in the afternoon, so
12 significantly earlier than the flight. Is that pretty common for
13 a risk assessment, you know, that much time to elapse between
14 completion and a flight?

15 A. For me, no. I procrastinate. I get it to them two minutes
16 before I have to leave. No. A lot of times we'll get manifests
17 made earlier on. A lot of times that's like one of the first
18 things we do at the beginning of the day. Risk assessments,
19 myself, I've actually had this kind of circumstance where you're
20 like, okay, well, weather later is forecasted to be like this. If
21 I fill this out now, this may be one thing versus what it actually
22 is. So, you know, complete it closer to. Is there a policy on
23 when, how far in advance they can do it? There's no policy there.
24 Does that sound something that I'm going to implement? Yes.

25 Q. So how easy is it to -- I mean the expectation would be,

1 correct me if I'm wrong, that we check updated weather closer to
2 the flight?

3 A. Correct.

4 Q. So how easy is it to update the risk assessment, you know, if
5 the weather has changed?

6 A. So with PRISM you would have to make a new one. Can't just
7 go in and edit one line because now your ceiling's dropped. So,
8 yeah, it would be making a new risk assessment. I'm trying to
9 think if GERoMINO was the same way after you filed it, but it's
10 been a while since I've used that one, so. Yeah. PRISM, once
11 it's finalized, now you can save it as pending, and then you can
12 go make edits to it. Yeah. If it's finalized, then you'd have to
13 start over.

14 Q. And if you were to do a risk assessment that had an elevated
15 review required, it was elevated and required review, how long
16 does that process take?

17 A. Kind of a tough question to answer because that could be
18 depending on the circumstances. And by circumstances, like why is
19 it elevated. Is there anything that can be mitigated to bring it
20 down? Is there not, you know, if I have an issue and I submit it,
21 and it's elevated, usually before I even call somebody myself, my
22 phone rings saying hey, you submitted an elevated report, what's
23 going on. I've had that with Steve, I forget what the details of
24 that flight were, but, you know, I submitted one, elevated. He
25 called me and said, hey, what's going on. Like let's look at this

1 and see what we can do. And, you know, it's not something that
2 you don't want to rush. You definitely want to make sure you take
3 the time to review it thoroughly. And I would say that, you know,
4 as far as how long does it take, it, again, it's circumstantial.
5 And --

6 Q. And I guess to clarify, I was thinking, you know, how quickly
7 are you getting the phone call and having those discussions? So
8 it sounds like pretty quickly.

9 A. It's pretty quick. Yeah. And if for some reason, I don't
10 get the phone call myself, I can call whoever and I -- everyone's
11 good about answering phones here.

12 Q. Okay. And so if they're not in the office, you can just call
13 them on your cell phone?

14 A. Correct.

15 Q. Or maybe you always call them on their cell phone?

16 A. Yeah. Like I said, if they're not in the office. If they're
17 in the office, it's -- you walk next door.

18 Q. Yeah. Okay. One more question.

19 A. Sure.

20 Q. I know you said you don't get a lot of safety reports, and
21 you don't have a lot of, you know, there's not too many pilots.
22 But since the accident, have you noticed, has anybody been talking
23 about, like, oh, yeah, this -- boy, this thing happened to me or,
24 you know, any additional chatter about safety stuff?

25 A. Nothing that's -- we haven't had any like reports coming in,

1 and again, I'm -- when I say there's two pilots, our other guy has
2 been gone for --

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. -- most of the time on different vacations. So there's been
5 a lot of me here.

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. I have discussed with, you know, whoever I can because it's
8 all trying to make sense of it, so.

9 DR. WILSON: All right. Tommy, thank you. Fabian?

10 MR. SALAZAR: Just one.

11 MR. STEFANSKI: Yeah.

12 BY MR. SALAZAR:

13 Q. Okay. You mentioned you've been on this same flight, Palm
14 Springs to Vegas.

15 A. Not necessarily Palm Springs to Vegas, but Vegas to --

16 Q. Vegas to the high desert area.

17 A. Vegas to L.A., that stretch along the 15.

18 Q. Yeah. Do you remember the weather conditions when you did
19 it?

20 A. It was clear skies.

21 Q. Do you remember the altitude you flew at?

22 A. I want to say we were high. I want to say we were about
23 6,000 feet, and now you got to go a little higher over that point
24 right there past where this happened closer to Vegas. I forget
25 the --

1 Q. There's a pass there.

2 A. Yeah, the pass there. But over that -- after that, it goes
3 down into a really deep valley, and from my understanding of all
4 this, that's about kind of where this was. And I was somewhere
5 probably between 5,000, 6,000 feet --

6 Q. Okay.

7 A. -- I flew through there.

8 MR. SALAZAR: All right. That's it.

9 DR. WILSON: Dave?

10 MR. GERLACH: Just one.

11 MR. STEFANSKI: Sure.

12 BY MR. GERLACH:

13 Q. If you recognize there's something that should stop the
14 flight as the safety manager, can you say no?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. All by yourself?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. No defense? You're not going to get berated for it?

19 A. Understand I can do that.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. And I'm sure I have at a time or two.

22 MR. GERLACH: Okay. That's all I got. Thank you.

23 DR. WILSON: Steve?

24 MR. GOULD: None from me.

25 DR. WILSON: All right. Well, we've asked you a lot of

1 questions. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us
2 a second time. Is there anything we didn't ask you about that you
3 think we should have asked you about?

4 MR. STEFANSKI: Not that I can think of.

5 DR. WILSON: Okay. Any other, you know, information that you
6 think would be relevant to our investigation?

7 MR. STEFANSKI: No.

8 DR. WILSON: All right. Well, thank you, again. You've got
9 my card. And --

10 MR. STEFANSKI: Yes.

11 DR. WILSON: -- you know, if anything comes up, if you think
12 of anything, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

13 MR. STEFANSKI: Of course.

14 DR. WILSON: We'll be working on this for some time. We'll
15 go off the record at 4:51 p.m.

16 MR. STEFANSKI: All right.

17 DR. WILSON: Thanks.

18 MR. STEFANSKI: Thank you.

19 (Whereupon, at 4:51 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
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24
25

CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: AIRBUS EC130 HELICOPTER CRASH
 NEAR HALLORAN SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA
 ON FEBRUARY 9, 2024
 Interview of Thomas Stefanski

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN24MA111

PLACE: Los Angeles, California

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.



Jami McNear
Transcriber