

Statement regarding United Airlines Flight 898, IAH-MSY, March 14, 2016

I was the Captain and Pilot Monitoring for Flight 898. In preparation for the flight I went to the flight planning area in Houston to get the paperwork and look at the weather charts. I utilized WSI to look at the weather, specifically radar summary, US national satellite, winds aloft forecast, FPG US, and WSI USA pilot reports. None of these charts showed anything to indicate any turbulence, unfavorable rides, or bad weather. From the dispatcher's paperwork, the 6-9-12 hour planning centered on 03 Zulu 15 March 16 chart showed light turbulence at flight level 290-360 which was above our filed altitude, and this chart is prepared much earlier than the other charts. After arriving at the gate, I confirmed that the First Officer had also reviewed the weather and noted nothing out of the ordinary. We agreed on the ride, weather and fuel. I gave a full briefing to the flight attendants and said it should be a nice ride. The flight crew noted nothing out of the ordinary off the gate, taxi, take off, or climb out. All was very routine and smooth. We commented about how nice of a night for flying it was. We could see the lights on the ground and clear above as the cockpit dome light was off. I turned off the fasten seat belt sign and made the announcement about keeping "your seat belt on in case of unexpected turbulence." I also told the passengers the sign would be off for only a couple of minutes, as we would be starting our descent soon. I told them the latest ATIS weather at MSY and thanked them for flying with us.

We were at flight level 270 in clear air with no convective activity and had a smooth ride. We received a clearance for pilot's discretion to FL240. While putting 240 in the mode control panel, we experienced sudden turbulence. Initially I told ATC we just experienced moderate, borderline, severe turbulence. I asked FO if he was going to start down; just a few seconds later we started to pick up some more turbulence, but not as bad; he said yes. I put the seat belt sign on and made a PA to fasten seat belts. In both instances the turbulence only lasted a couple seconds. It felt like wake turbulence. I looked down at the TCAS to see if we encountered the wake of another aircraft. I believe the only aircraft I saw was at our 5 o'clock position, 1000 feet below us. I heard a PA for a doctor while I was telling ATC that we were starting down. FO stated we have a flight attendant hurt badly in the back. I called the back and was told that one of the flight attendants was severely injured, and I told the FAs to keep us informed of the situation and we would call them back. After hearing what took place in the back, we then told ATC we had severe turbulence, a medical emergency and to standby.

FO and I discussed options briefly to continue to New Orleans or to go to Houston. We then put New Orleans and Houston in the fix pages, noting 105 miles to New Orleans, 160 miles to Houston. I then told Center we were continuing to New Orleans. I told the FO he had the airplane and ATC communication and "I'm off." I called back and told the flight attendants we were going to MSY and would have an ambulance meet us, and asked them if there

were any changes, and none were reported. I communicated with Dispatch via AIRINC and advised them of the medical emergency. I then talked with the FO, and he said we obtained clearance to go straight into runway 11 and he was going to keep the speed up to expedite our arrival, and I concurred. I then called back to find the status of the flight attendant; it was unchanged. I then told them we were landing in eight minutes. Due to the need to keep the flight attendant stationary and lying down they said they could not secure the cart properly, but with my permission they could wedge it, which I authorized. I then helped the FO set up approach, which he had basically finished. He briefed it, and I then ran the checklist. During approach, checklist noted no localizer ID. We then asked tower if it was up, and they said no. We had the papi in sight and we lined up on the runway centerline, and FMC concurred. I called back one last time before short final to make sure everything was secure, and they said yes. We landed runway 11 and taxied to gate D1. While taxiing in, I asked FO to make a PA for the people to remain seated so paramedics could get to the back of the airplane when they boarded. Once at the gate, we called dispatch to make sure they got the message from ARINC. We were also notified that we had possibly three more injuries. The paramedics were at the gate and came on board and tended to the flight attendant and passengers.

Captain William Eby
United Airlines

First Officer's Statement

United 898 (KIAH – KMSY)

Aircraft: B737 (#708)

March 14, 2016

CA: (PM)

FO: (PF)

UA 898 was the second flight of the day. The Captain went to the briefing room, I went to the gate. The plane was on the ground, but not at the gate. I used my IPAD to receive and review the flight papers, reviewed WSI and loaded the flight plan into JeppFD-PRO. The dispatch weather in the flight papers showed no indication of a turbulent ride between KIAH and KMSY, and both airports and the route were actually and forecasted VMC conditions upon planned arrival time. On WSI, after loading UAL 898 and the route, I received the WSI briefing. Then I reviewed the WSI Radar picture, FPGs, Sigmets, Radar Summary and the RPM Forecast Turbulence. The RPM Turbulence forecast showed an area of turbulence at FL270 over the Gulf of Mexico well south of our route. All indications from WSI, DX weather, and the absence of PIREPS along our route of flight indicated to me a nice flight to KMSY.

Our preflight briefing in the cockpit corroborated what we both reviewed while apart. Before departure the Captain briefed the flight attendants.

As the Pilot flying, the takeoff out of KIAH was VMC, and the climb all the way to F270 was smooth. We were planned with a CI 155 and above 10000msl we accelerated to 335kts. I was hand flying the aircraft.

Houston Center gave us direct to Jaaye on the Muggs4 RNAV SID. We leveled off at FL270, cruising at Mach .794 with the autopilot off. It was smooth. It was a clear night. After we leveled off, the Captain made his PA announcement to the passengers and turned the Fasten Seat Belt (FSB) off.

Houston Center gave us a "Pilot Discretion" to FL 240. At that moment, we encountered what we presumed to be a momentary pocket of Moderate to Severe turbulence. I believe the aircraft banked approximately 25 – 30 degrees to the right, and the altitude fluctuated from maybe 100' up to between 60 and 160' down. I leveled the wings and was right back at altitude, as it smoothed out as quickly as it came. It was momentary. We both thought instantly that it was a wake of an aircraft. I do not recall seeing anything on TCAS and I saw nothing in the sky. The Captain inquired me if I was going to start down as he went to enter FL240 into the MCP, I stated that it was smooth and that I would wait, and in that moment we encountered another pocket of Moderate turbulence and told him we are starting down. The Captain turned the FSB sign on again and mentioned to check seatbelts. All this happened within 10-15 seconds.

At that same instance, I happened to be monitoring the service interphone and I heard David, a F/A, ask "if there is any doctor onboard to raise their hand because we have a severely injured F/A on board." The Captain was advising Center that we were leaving FL 270 and initially

reported the turbulence as Moderate to Severe. In this same moment, I engaged the “B” Autopilot and “LVL CHG” foreseeing the need for the Captain to focus on addressing the medical emergency and I notified the Captain that we had a severely injured F/A in the back. He assigned me the aircraft and the radios and stated that we will declare an emergency. I suggested we report the turbulence as severe and then declare the emergency which he did to Houston Center.

All of this took place within a minute. It all happened extremely fast and we were back in smooth air out of FL266 on the way down to FL240. I believe present speed was Mach.794 and the aircraft went to CWS Pitch, I believe because we were near the barber pole. I overrode the CWS, causing the Autopilot to disconnect and simultaneously pulled the thrust levers back, targeting for a 280KIAS descent, reengaged the autopilot with a “VS” pitch mode of something greater than 1500ft/min rate of descent.

Houston Center asked for the status of the injured F/A, and our intentions. The Captain and I discussed continuing to KMSY looking at the distance to the airport from the fix page and it was 105NM. Exercising CRM, I entered KIAH into the fix page and we were about 160nm away. I agreed with his decision and stated to Center that we are continuing to KMSY and to have paramedics and ambulance standing by, because we have a severely injured F/A onboard.

The Captain informed me that he was going to call dispatch and that he will be off, and I said to call using “call me MD”.

We were handed off to the next controller, and upon checking in I confirmed with him that he knew we were an emergency aircraft with a severely injured F/A onboard. At some point we did receive an ATC clearance to go direct to KMSY airport. I did let the Captain know that I planned on max speed all the way to KMSY, and he concurred. We were informed by the lead F/A that the injured F/A will need to go to the hospital right away. I relayed this to Houston Center. Because of her injuries and under our emergency authority, we exceeded with the FAR restriction of 250KIAS below 10000MSL. We were cleared to 11000msl then to 4000 msl. With approach control, we were asked if we want straight in to rwy 11. I asked for the winds, “210/6”. I said yes and pulled the runway data for Rwy 11 via ACARS. When the Captain was done with his communications I informed him of being cleared straight in to Rwy 11 and to reference the ACARS printer for the landing data. We briefed for the ILS to Rwy 11, F30 and AB3 and ran the approach descent and approach checklists. The ILS was not operational and was not NOTAMED out, but we used FMC map mode and performed a VMC landing in VMC conditions. Approach lights and PAPI were operational. As a side note, it was a smooth ride all the way to KMSY in the descent to landing from the time we left FL270 so many miles west of the top of descent on our route of flight.

The ambulance and police were standing by D1 upon landing. I believe there were 3 additional passengers who also required medical attention.

First Officer Joseph Tortora
United Airlines