

December 18, 2015

Statement of First Officer Douglas B. Vance

Date of Accident: December 15, 2015

Southwest Airlines Flight 31

HOU – BNA

Aircraft S/N: N649

NTSB File Number:

Pilot Background

Pilot Certificate Number: [REDACTED]

Type Ratings: B-727, B-737, B-757, B-767, CL-30, DC-9

SWA Employee Number: [REDACTED]

I am 61 years old and have been a pilot for Southwest Airlines for approximately 9 years. Prior to flying at Southwest I was a pilot at Delta Airlines for 18 years. I retired early from Delta as the airline approached bankruptcy in 2005 and started a small business. I started flying with FlexJet in February 2006, assigned to the Challenger 300 aircraft. In November of 2006, I was hired by Southwest. I sold the small business in July 2008, and since that time Southwest has been my only occupation.

I flew approximately 8200 hours at Delta including 2785 as Captain and 473 as a Captain on the 737. I received my type rating on the 737 at Delta. I flew 290 hours at FlexJet in the Challenger 300. My flying time at Southwest is approximately 5,000 hours, all on the 737 as a First Officer.

Prior to my airline career, I was a pilot in the United States Air Force and have 1700 hours in the F-4/F-16. I achieved the rank of Captain and separated from the Air Force in 1987 after 9 years of service.

My total flying time is approximately 15,000 hours.

[REDACTED]

I have had no previous incidents or accidents and no enforcement actions in my aviation career. I have never failed a check ride nor had any difficulties in training. I am in good health and hold a First Class medical certificate requiring corrective lenses. There are no outside distractions or issues in my personal life that impacted my performance on the flight.

Events Prior to Flight 31

In the days prior to the accident I was in Nashville attending a family gathering [REDACTED] from Friday, December 11th thru Monday, December 14th. I traveled home on American Airlines to DFW, arriving DFW around 1430 CST on the 14th. I had a good

night's sleep the night before the accident and woke at 0630 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Later that morning, I took a one hour nap before heading to the airport.

On the day of the accident I was well rested and signed in for the trip at DAL at 1300 CST. I met Captain Steve Sague at the aircraft. I had the aircraft ready when Captain Sague arrived and we departed approximately five minutes late due to a last minute passenger issue. We arrived early in HOU. We had flown one trip together before, and I enjoyed flying with him. The accident occurred on the second leg of the first day of a three day sequence.

Events of December 15, 2015

The first leg of the trip from DAL to HOU (also Flight 31) was uneventful. The weather was VMC and there were no issues to report regarding the conduct of the flight or the condition of the aircraft.

Flight 31 HOU - BNA

The weather for the leg was predicted to be good and the forecast for BNA was VMC. We did not require an alternate.

ATIS information for our arrival was calling for visual approaches to runway 20 L/C/R as expected. We briefed the arrival followed by a visual approach to runway 20R with the ILS tuned as a back up. We also reviewed the BNA airport pages and discussed the expected taxi route from 20R to the ramp/gate. (I.e., B2 – B – T3 then as cleared by the controller.)

We completed the required checklists in accordance with SWA procedures.

I was the pilot flying this leg. We flew a visual approach and landed normally on runway 20R at KBNA and exited left onto taxiway B2. We were instructed by ground control to taxi via B, T3, cross runway 31, T4 to the ramp. I completed my after landing flows, started the APU and confirmed our gate with SWA Operations while on taxiway B. As we crossed runway 31, it became increasingly difficult to see the taxiways with the glare of the terminal lights in our face and no taxiway lighting in front of us. I did not immediately realize the taxi lights on T3 and T4 were inoperative.

We taxied downhill on T3, looking for our left turn onto T4, and never saw it. Just as I was getting uncomfortable about continuing straight ahead and reflexively went for the brakes as the grass appeared in front of us and we departed the taxiway near the intersection of taxiways J and T4. We rolled down a slight embankment, then partially up the other side and came to a stop with the right wing low approximately 10-15 degrees.

The captain shut down the engines and I called ground control and advised them we were in the grass and requested the emergency equipment be sent.

We started the evacuation checklist. When we lowered the flaps to 40, as called for in the checklist, the configuration warning horn sounded. Upon reflection I think the warning horn sounded because the nose gear had failed and the aircraft thought the gear was up with flaps extended to 40. The only way to silence a configuration horn is to properly configure the aircraft which was not possible. The horn continued loudly interfering with our communication with each other, the passengers and flight attendants, and ATC.

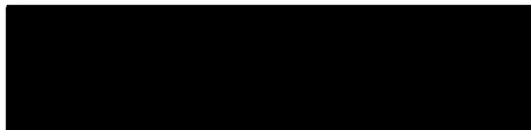
The flight attendants were trying to contact us and the captain tried to respond on the PA - advising everyone to remain seated - but was drowned out by the configuration horn which we could not silence. The flight attendants, unable to contact us, initiated an emergency evacuation. The evacuation was very calm and orderly.

The captain and I completed the evacuation checklist and checked to make sure all passengers had exited the aircraft safely. By this time, emergency responders were on the scene and were escorting the passengers up the hill and onto the ramp. It was at this time that I realized the taxiway lights were inoperative.

As I was outside checking on the passengers, I was surprised to notice the taxiway lights were now illuminated. I mentioned the fact that they were off previously to a BNA airport operations representative, Greg Patterson. He told me he also noticed they were off when he responded to the scene and queried tower as to their status. He told me the controllers responded that the lighting control switch was in the off position. Mr. Patterson then asked them to turn them on, and they worked normally. Mr. Patterson also commented "That was your bugaboo right there!"

I feel very confident we would not have departed the taxiway if the lights had been on.

We secured the aircraft, handed it off to SWA maintenance and proceeded to SWA Operations.



Douglas B. Vance
First Officer