

Interviewee: Michael Fleming, American Airlines 757 First Officer
Representative: Ray Duke
Date / Time: September 11, 2018 / 1100 CDT
Location: via telephone
Present: David Lawrence, Bill Bramble– NTSB; Robert Hendrickson – FAA; Randy Davenport, APA; Mike Boynton – American Airlines

During the interview, First Officer Fleming stated the following:

His name was Michael Sean Fleming, and he was 55 years old. His title at American Airlines was First Officer [FO] on the 757/767. He said his roles and responsibilities included flying the airplane or acting as pilot monitoring [PM], and sometimes acting as the FB on international flights. His role also included backing up the captain, to say something if there was something that was not right, and to conduct walk-arounds of the airplane.

His background included flying for USAirways in 2004 until they merged with American Airlines. He came to American Airlines in June of 2017 and trained for the 757/767, having previously flown the Airbus A319/320/321. He held an ATP certificate with type ratings on the 757/767, Airbus A319 series, E-170, Dash-8 and B-737. Held a “First Class medical certificate with a limitation for corrective lens for near and intermediate vision. He stated that he was wearing them on the accident flight.

He estimated his total flight time at 17,500 hours. He had about 550 hours in the 757/767, none of which were PIC [pilot in command] time. His current base for American Airlines was LGA/EWR/JFK, and most of his trips originated from JFK. His date of hire with American Airlines was the same as his date of hire with USAirways, which was July 2004.

He said the trip was the 4th time he had flown with the captain, and the first time with the FB. When asked if he was drug or alcohol tested after they arrived into JFK, he said no. He did not know why, and said he talked to an American Airlines chief pilot before leaving JFK, and was told he could go home. He had never failed a drug or alcohol screening before never been treated for drug abuse, never been fired, terminated or asked to resign from any employment, and had never failed a check ride.

When asked to describe the event, he said he was the pilot monitoring [PM] for the flight, and was the last of the 3 pilots to take a break during the flight. He returned to the cockpit about 20-30 minutes prior to arrival into JFK, and the FB then took a bathroom break. He then got up to let the FB back in, and the captain then began to brief the approach. They had descended to cross Calverton [CCC] at 12,000 feet [mean sea level] at 250 knots, had checked in with New York approach control, and the captain then asked for a specific approach into JFK, followed by a clearance to turn 280 degrees out of ROBER.

They briefed the approach while level at 12,000 feet, and shortly after that, the FB yelled “speed” and they looked up. Prior to that, they had received a clearance to descend to 7,000 feet, expediate through 9,000 feet, which all occurred prior to the event. He heard the FB say “speed,” then “speed” again followed by “push it over.” The captain then pushed the airplane over, and he [FO] dropped his iPad. They got the speed back up, and then the FA called the cockpit to tell them there were injuries in the back of the airplane. The captain then hand-flew the airplane after receiving vectors to the airport. The FB helped handle the calls to ATC, and also called the company requesting an ambulance meet the aircraft on arrival. They landed on runway 22R and then taxied to the terminal.

When asked who was flying the airplane during the event, he said the captain was the pilot flying [PF]. When asked if there was a transfer of control during the briefing, he said no, the captain was the PF and was briefing the approach. They briefed the Parch 3 arrival into JFK with the Kennebunkport transition. The event occurred when they were between Calverton and ROBER.

He did not remember if there were any deferred maintenance items in the maintenance log, and said there were no maintenance problems with the airplane on the inbound leg. When asked if there were any aural or visual annunciations or warnings before, during, or after the event, he said no, and everything seemed to be working the way it should.

When asked to describe the weather, he said they were VFR conditions. It was a little hazy, with good visibility, and JFK was also reporting VFR conditions. There was no turbulence more than light chop. He did not recall if they had a headwind or tailwind at the time of the event.

When asked if they were doing vectoring or maneuvering prior to the event, he said on the arrival, they were given vectors after the next fix. They had a clearance to 7,000 at the time of the event, and believe they should have been descending, but was not sure why they were not. When asked what the captain's actions were to descend to 7,000, he said the captain had been using FLCH mode, but could not remember if that was used for the descent down to 7,000 feet. He said he could not remember if either he or the captain had set 7,000 feet, and did not think the captain manually reduced the thrust. He [FO] was reading from his iPad for the approach briefing, thought they were in FLCH, and then he put his head down to look at the approach.

When asked if he recalled what the indicated airspeed was, he said when he looked up, he thought he saw 187 knots. The airplane was in the clean configuration with no flaps at the time of the event.

He said he took the last crew break on the flight from EDI, and returned to the cockpit about 25 minutes prior to landing while they were descending through the upper 20's [in 1,000 feet altitude increments] and at 290 knots. The altitude was set for 12,000 feet with a speed of 250 to cross Calverton. He [FO] was sitting in the right seat. Their clearance was to cross Calverton at 12,000 feet and they were in vertical speed mode at 290 knots. The level off was with the autopilot, and when he looked up from his approach plate, he saw they had leveled off at about 12,150, and his impression was that it was still slowly descending. When he looked up a second time, he saw they were level at 12100 with a speed of 250 knots. When asked if he noticed the thrust coming up, he said he did not remember noticing that. During the event, he said the autopilot and flight directors and autothrust were on, but did not recall what the pitch mode was. He was "pretty sure" the roll mode was in LNAV.

He believed the captain was using FLCH and not VNAV for their descent. When asked if there was any movement in the thrust levers, he said he did not notice that. When asked if there were any indications the airplane was getting slow, he said no, and he thought they had gotten down to about 187 knots. the slowest speed he saw, he said about 187 knots.

When asked to describe the captain's recovery, he said the captain pushed yolk forward and added power at same time. When asked if it was an aggressive push over, he said that it did not seem that aggressive to him to hurt anyone. He thought the airplane may have already started descending when the pushover occurred. He did not remember what pitch the airplane had gotten up to. When asked if he recalled if the stabilizer trim was operating prior to the event, he said he believed it was operating, and did not notice any issue with the stabilizer during the flight, even after the incident.

He did not look at the pitch trim, and the captain did not mention anything unordinary. The captain had added thrust at the same time he did the pushover. He also disconnected the autopilot and autothrottles, and may have reengaged them after the event and when they were on vectors or the approach and everything was normal. There was no transfer of controls, and there were no callouts made other than what the FB said regarding the speed. The stick shaker never fired during the event.

When asked if an emergency had been declared, he said no, the captain decided it was better not to, and to get the airplane on the ground with no added distractions from ATC questions. He said they were overloaded at the time, and they had the FB call operations. Dispatch was also not notified while they were in flight, but he was not sure if they were contacted after they got to the gate. He said the captain submitted an American Airlines Pilot Pipeline Report (P2) report.

When asked if he ever experienced anything similar to the accident event in an airplane, he said no he had not.

When asked to describe his interaction with the other crewmember(s) and how effective their communication was, he said it was good, and a friendly cockpit with good conversation regarding the procedures. He said it was a very enjoyable trip up to that point.

When asked who typically briefed the approach, he said the PF did and the PM monitored the approach. The FB would also pay attention to the airplane.

When asked to describe the workload in the cockpit prior to the event, he said he was pretty busy since he was not familiar with the approach they were briefing, and he followed along with the briefing. He said he should have been paying attention to the airplane at the same time, and it seemed very busy.

When asked if he had received any training, either ground or simulator, to prepare him for this type of encounter, he said yes. They received stall training and how to recover from a stall every time they attended training, every 9 months. The last time he saw that training was in May. They also received upset recovery training every check ride, and he saw that in May also. When asked how effective he thought that training was, he said he believed it was effective since it was the only time they saw it. If they had not done that training, it would be hard to recognize the situation, and thought it was as effective as could be.

When asked about his schedule on the day of the accident, he said he woke at 0700 local time since they were 5 hours earlier in EDI than JFK time. He and the FB met for breakfast and then got on an 0800 van for the airport. They went through security about 0840-0845 local time, and were at the airplane about 5 minutes before 0900. He conducted his preflight duties, they departed about 1015 and took off about 15 minutes later.

On the day before the accident, he said they landed in Scotland around 0630 local time, got through immigration, and were at the hotel at 0800. They went to their rooms, he took a nap, and at 1300 met the captain downstairs and went to a local exhibit. They were there about an hour, then had lunch around 1500, and then they went to a hill for a hike and returned to the hotel, and went back to meet the FB around 1800 or 1815. They walked to restaurant that was closed, then to another, and were at that restaurant by 1900. They got back to the hotel around 2135, went to their rooms, and he saw the guys the next morning. He said he got to sleep around midnight, and got up around

0700. He characterized his sleep as good, having gotten at least 6-7 hours of sleep. He typically slept about 7 hours at night.

On Tuesday, he woke up around 0600 since he had to commute to New York. He left his home around 0630, caught a bus around 0700 from Logan Airport [BOS] and got to New York about 1330. He had some lunch in Boston so he just grabbed a bite in JFK for a planned departure from JFK 2130. His quality of sleep was good, and he made sure to exercise the day before so he would sleep, having gone to bed the night before around 2130.

He considered his overall health as “pretty healthy” for someone that was 55, and he took no prescription or nonprescription drugs. He tried to stay away from medications, and might take ibuprofen when he needed it, but not for this trip.

He had not had any changes in the state of his health, good or bad, in the past year. When asked if he had any changes financially, either good or bad, in the past year, he said no but had a son in college, there was not a lot of extra money, but they were paying the bills. When asked if he had any changes in his personal life, either good or bad, in the past year, he said no, and he had been married for 26 years, had a daughter in France, and there were no kids at home. When asked if he had been involved in any accidents or incidents in the past, he said 20 years ago, in 1995, he was flying in Alaska in a Cessna 206 in a little village in December. On a short runway during the takeoff roll, just prior to rotation, a passenger door was not secure. He tried to stop the airplane and turn onto another runway but slid off the side of the runway. He damaged a wingtip and propeller.

When asked he if had ever been involved in an emergency or abnormal situation, he said no. He had never been disciplined for performance as pilot.

When asked if he had any issues with his hearing or vision, he said no, but had started using reading glasses as he started getting older. He did not use tobacco, and the last time he had alcohol was the night before the accident flight, having 2 glasses of beer.

When asked about the workload in the cockpit prior to the event, and if the captain was busy with the brief and flying the airplane, he said the captain was briefing, and also making changes in the automation modes they were in. They were getting calls responding to clearance. He made the radio calls to the company following the event.

When asked if the airspeed was flashing or yellow, he said it was not flashing, and he did not see the hook.

When he returned to the cockpit from his break and the airplane was descending to 12,000 feet, he thought they were descending in vertical speed mode. For the descent down to 7,000, they were in FLCH.

When asked to recall again the modes the autopilot was in when he returned to the cockpit, he said it was vertical speed with about 2,600 fpm down, and they were descending through 30,000 and 25,000 feet, having been cleared down to 12,000 feet. He was not sure if they went to VNAV mode while descending to 12,000, and thought they went to FLCH just prior to the event, which he thought occurred while they were still level at 12,000.

When asked to clarify if they received stall training every time they went back for training, he said it was approach to stall training, and they did not actually stall the airplane.

When asked who the PF was during the approach briefing, by company policy, he said he did not believe there was a policy to transfer control. Technically, when he was briefing the approach, he was also the pilot flying.

They were in vertical speed mode when he returned to the cockpit from his break. He did not remember the thrust come up once the airplane made the crossing altitude at Calverton, and did not recall seeing the captain reduce the thrust manually to make the 7,000 foot crossing altitude. When asked if, at the time they got a clearance to descend to 7,000 if the captain was still briefing the approach, he said yes.

When asked if briefing a Parch 3 with an approach to runway 22 was pretty standard, he said yes, but they were doing the RNP approach to 22L, which he had never done before, even though the ATIS said the VOR/DME approach to 22L, which was what he was used to doing. He thought he made the point that VOR/DME was the one on the ATIS.

When asked what he thought would be a good procedure for crews to follow if they find themselves in similar circumstances, he said he could not think of anything. When asked what he would have done differently, he said personally he would have monitored a little more.

When asked if he had anything additional to assist the investigation, he said no.

Interview concluded at 1215.