

Interviewee: Robert Pagoni, American Airlines 757 Captain
Representative: Ray Duke
Date / Time: September 11, 2018 / 1300 CDT
Location: via telephone
Present: David Lawrence, Bill Bramble– NTSB; Robert Hendrickson – FAA; Randy Davenport, APA; Mike Boynton – American Airlines

During the interview, Captain Pagoni stated the following:

His name was Robert Paul Pagoni, and he was 62 years old. His title at American Airlines was captain on the 757/767. His roles and responsibilities included safely operating an airplane from point A to point B, the passengers' and crew safety, effectively operating the airplane and not wasting resources, interacting with the passengers and ensuring they had a rewarding experience.

His background included being a 3rd generation pilot, having joined the Air Force during the winddown of the Vietnam war, flying as a navigator which turned into a position on the F-111 for 5 years. He received pilot training with the Guard and flew A-10's for about 20 years. He was hired by American Airlines in July 1987. He spent several years as an engineer, several years as a co-pilot, and spent 11 years as a 767 co-pilot before moving directly to the left seat in 2002.

He held an ATP certificate with type ratings on the 757/767 since 1991. He held a First-Class medical certificate with a limitation to have glasses for near vision, and had two pairs of the glasses. He estimated his total flight time at 18,000 hours, with 13,600 hours in the 757/767 and about 8,350 hours as PIC on the 757/767. He was based in LGA, which also covered JFK and EWR. He had never been a check pilot for American Airlines.

He said he had flown with the FO a hand full of times, and with the FB a long time ago. When asked if he was drug tested following the accident, he said no. He had checked with the chief pilot, asked if there was anything they needed the crew to do, and was told to go home. He had never failed a drug or alcohol screening and had never been treated for drug or alcohol abuse. He had never been fired, terminated or asked to resign from any employment. When asked if he had ever failed a check ride, he said yes, as a co-pilot, and his first check ride as captain early on in the simulator for recurrent training.

When asked to describe the event, he said he set 12,000 feet [mean sea level] and 250 knots to cross Calverton per their ATC instructions. As they came down through 18,000, he set 30.13 on the altimeter and then set it in the back-up altimeter. It took about 3 times to get the button to flip over. He called everyone to the cockpit about 20 minutes ahead of landing, and the weather was VFR. They leveled off at 12,000, and the airspeed was about 253-255 knots. He dialed it back to 250 knots after they leveled off, and saw that they were at about 12,100 feet. He then saw that the altimeter was back to standard again. He said he had referred to the primary altimeter for the 30.13 setting during his third attempt at the standby altimeter. He told the FO he was going to use FLCH to get them down to 12,000, and the FO said they were a little high, so they went back down to 12,000 feet. They then started their briefing.

ATC then gave them a clearance to descend to 7,000 feet, expedite through 9,000, after ROBER fly heading 280. He hit FLCH and they started the descent. He said their briefings on a VFR day typically took about 45 seconds to a minute to go over everything. He had previously told the FB to back them up, be directive, and not let them do anything bad. About the time they were briefing the missed approach altitudes and directions, the FB said "Speed." Then, again, he said "Speed." He then said, "push it over, push over" and the FB said it really loudly. When the FB said that, he almost leaped out of his seat. He looked down and saw a speed of about 190 knots, looked for a box blinking around it to indicate if they were near a stall but there was no box, then pushed over on the airplane, being careful since there were passengers onboard. He pushed it over, and when he pushed up the power, and the nose really wanted to come up since they were light, so he really pushed on the nose to arrest it from coming up. They then recovered the airplane.

They flew the approach to landing. They received a call from the back prior to landing, and he gave the phone to the FB to take care of it. He was advised that there were people and flight attendants down and injured and in need of an ambulance, and the FB then called the ramp control. They landed uneventfully, set down softly, and taxied at a reasonable rate.

When asked who the pilot flying was, he said he was. When asked who briefed the approach, he said he did. He said he was briefing the approach and acting as PF, and there was no mandatory

requirement to exchange control of the airplane for an approach briefing. They were on the Parch 3 arrival when he briefed the approach.

He did not believe there were any deferred maintenance items in the maintenance log, and there was nothing in the logbook that dealt with them and it was a clean logbook. There were no maintenance problems with the airplane on the inbound leg, and it was a normal everyday flight.

When asked if there were any aural or visual annunciations or warnings before, during, or after the event, he said no. He said the weather was severe VFR, and they could see the airport. They had gone around some weather earlier, the seat belt sign was on from the higher bumps, and had been on for an extended time, well before they got to JFK. He would set a timer every time he turned the sign on so that, if the turbulence was still encountered for 15-20 minutes, he had a reference point of where the turbulence had started so that he could cite the time in any report he might need to write as a result of an injury.

When asked if they were doing any vectoring or maneuvering prior to the event, he said that when they were to get to ROBER, the FO said they had a heading out of ROBER to 280 degrees. They were still in LNAV mode when the event occurred, and they were close to ROBER in FLCH mode. He said he believed he saw an indicated speed of about 192-193 knots when he looked up, but did not recall what the pitch of the airplane was. The airplane configuration was clean.

He said he had taken the middle break on the flight from EDI to JFK, around 1415-1420. The FO came to the cockpit from his break about 20 minutes prior to landing. When asked what the policy was for the pilots to be in the cockpit prior to arrival, he said he would pass on that question.

For the event, the autopilot and flight directors were on, and they were in FLCH mode and LNAV mode, but they may have been on a heading. The autothrottles were on.

He said that when he set the altimeter from standard to barometric from their cruise altitude and descent, the airplane leveled at 12,000 high. He thought he had previously set the altimeter to barometric. He did not recall seeing if the airplane was in ALT hold, but the airplane leveled off at 12,100. He had 250 knots set in the speed window.

To get to 12,000 feet, he set FLCH to 12,000 feet. He reset the altimeter and they slid down to 12,000. He was wondering why the airplane leveled off at 12,100, selected 30.13 on the altimeter and then hit FLCH. When asked if after he selected 12,000 feet and hit FLCH, if he looked at the FMA [flight mode annunciator], he said he usually did, but knew that the FLCH light on the mode control panel [MCP] lit up, but could not remember what was illuminated in the primary display. When asked if the 7,000-foot descent clearance occurred prior to the event, he said he believed so, and thought they had brought them down a little late for the 12,000-foot crossing, and the 7,000-foot clearance. He believed the 7,000-foot clearance was received prior to the event. When asked if the event occurred while they were briefing the approach, he said he thought they had left 12,000 feet with that 7,000-foot clearance and the event started as they started the briefing. He thought they started the briefing first, then followed by the descent clearance to 7,000 feet. He did not

remember who set the 7,000-foot altitude, but he remembered that he saw 7,000 feet set on the altimeter. Typically, it would be the PF who set the altitude, but it was not mandatory, and he remembered hearing the FO make the radio call to go to 7,000 feet. He did not remember if he saw ALT hold prior to setting 7,000 feet, and he used FLCH to descend to 7,000 feet.

He did not remember if the thrust levers moved after they stated the descent to 7,000 feet. He did not remember manually adjusting the thrust levers, and said he would not do that and would leave everything automated.

When asked if he recalled if the stabilizer trim was operating prior to the event, he said on the 757, you would have to look at that dial, and you would not notice it unless you were looking at it.

When asked how aggressive the pitch over was, he said he remembered thinking “don’t dump the nose, you have passengers and you can’t hurt them.” He pushed once, and then he said push over a second time. When asked if he pushed over with thrust, he said he turned off all the automation, and when he pushed over he advance the thrust up nearly simultaneous, also disconnecting the automation. He did not remember having any problems fighting the trim of the airplane, and he had no problem pushing over and there was no need for trim. He manually did what he needed to do, and entered manual trim later. He did not remember losing much altitude, and they were already in the descent to 7,000 feet. The airplane did not enter a dive. The airplane physically had entered the descent down to 7,000 prior to the event.

When asked about the pitch change during the event when he added thrust, he said he thought they broke about even with him pushing the nose down and the airplane wanting to pitch up. He felt the nose coming up, and he pushed more to counter act it. He thought it was a was between the two, not a significant difference between the two.

There was no transfer of control of the airplane, and he flew it in for landing. When asked if there were any callouts made during the event, he said other than the FB saying what he said, they busy initiating the recovery, and nothing else was said. When asked if the FO made any airspeed callouts during the recovery, he said he did not remember that, and he was looking at the airspeed. The stick shaker did not fire during the event.

When asked if an emergency was declared, he said no. When asked if ATC was advised of the situation, he said no. When asked why not, he said he felt their plate was full, and he went back to aviate, navigate, communicate, and it was “show time” and he needed everyone focused to land the airplane. He did not want to lose what support he had then by declaring an emergency, trying to get in, trying to explain what happened with injuries, fuel, etc., and he felt it was more important to get the airplane down safely, and let the dust settle. After the 3rd call that they needed ambulance, he felt comfortable to let the FB handle all that and he did not want any further distractions. Nothing was going to happen any quicker or faster than what they were doing at that point, he did not want any additional distractions since they were busy enough at that point. When asked if dispatch was notified, he said no, they never an opportunity to talk to them, and it all happened with in a small period of time. When asked if an American Airlines Pilot Pipeline Report (P2) was submitted, he said yes.

When asked if he had ever experienced anything similar to the accident event in an airplane, he said no, never in any airplane in 41 years.

When asked to describe his interaction with the other crewmembers, he said he thought they were both capable individuals. He knew the FO well, and felt their interaction was good. The FB's call was good. He just wished the FB had said it softer since "it scared the snot out of me," but the FB did what he had briefed him to do. He thought they [FO and FB] both did a good job.

When asked to describe the workload prior to the event, he said it was a standard workload, with nothing unusual going on.

When asked if he received any training, ground or simulator, to prepare him for this type of encounter, he said numerous times he had slow speed event training. It would involve 2-3 scenarios including high altitude with the autopilot on where the instructor would pull throttle back, and they would have the student recover at stick shaker. They might see a secondary stall if there was an aggressive in pull out of stall. They also received upset recovery training, and the last time he saw that was back in April.

On the day of the accident, he woke up at 0700, with a van pick up at 0800 and a scheduled departure at 1010. It was the only leg of the day. He had breakfast that morning at 0730 prior to the van pick up.

On Wednesday when they got in from JFK around 0700, he went to bed at 0830-0900 and got up around 1300. He met the FO, went to a museum, left there around 1325, and then had a bite to eat

before hiking up a up a mountain. At 1740 they hiked to meet the FB at 1810, walked to a place to eat, and then headed to back to the hotel and arrived at 2136. He went to bed around midnight to 0100, which helped him to get ready for the flight. He felt really rested, and had a good night. It helped him for his beak to rest and go to sleep, and felt that pattern worked well for him. He generally needed 4-6 hours of sleep at home. What worked for him ideally was to go to sleep around 2200-midnight and get up around 0730-0900. Five hours of sleep was no the money for him.

On Tuesday, he got up around 1000 to 1100 and slept in, worked out, and then went to work. His routine the day he leaves for a trip was to sleep in so when the break in flight comes, he could get some sleep.

He described his overall state of health as damn good shape for a 62-year-old. He did not take any prescription or nonprescription drugs, had no changes in the state of health, either good or bad, in the past year, no changes financially, good or bad, in the past year, and said life was good. He had no changes in his life during the past year, and said he had a vanilla life, a good wife, and was blessed.

When asked what approach they flew to JFK, he said the RNAV RNP 22L.

When asked how he thought the company came to the conclusion it was a turbulence event, he said the police officers asked, and he did not want to get into details with them. They asked a direct question if it was due to turbulence, so it may have come from them. He did not want take time explaining anything to the port authority.

When asked what he thought had happened, he said he did not know, and would say something if he knew. He had been on the airplane for 27 years, and he and the crew discussed the event, but he was at a loss for why it happened.

When asked when he went to sleep on Tuesday, he said he would have had the last 1:50 of flight, so got my break about 30 prior to EDI arrival, around close to midnight plus 30 or around 0415.

When asked how much sleep he got during the 1:15 break, he said that after checking on passengers and flight attendants, he covered up and was gone until he woke up. He woke up right away, would call 2 minutes before show time, went to bathroom, and got there to be in cockpit 30 minutes prior to arrival.

When asked to clarify what was the autothrottle mode prior to the event, he said he could not recall what active mode was displayed, just that the autothrottle lights on MCP were on. When asked what mode he would expect them to be in, he said FLCH. When asked what pitch mode he would have expected it to be in, he said he would defer to the check airman.

He said the altitude the event occurred at was just under 12,000, between there and 10,000 feet, possibly around 11,000. After they eventually got to 7,000, they did level off there after the event.

To the best of his knowledge they had FLCH for pitch and LNAV for roll modes since they were still going to ROBER. He said he always used FLCH below 10,000 feet. When asked if there was an altitude below which he could not use FLCH, he said no, and that would be the norm until turning onto an ILS final. He said he could use VNAV, but used FLCH 90% of the time.

When asked if he was aware of a mode called THR hold, he said yes, and he thought that occurred when you pull the throttles back with when the airplane was trying to give you thrust on its own, but would be a question more appropriate for an avionics expert. He said he typically did not move the throttle until on final approach. He did not recall manually moving the throttles on this flight, and could not think of a reason he would do that since he had the autothrottles doing it for him. They were in VNAV down to the Calverton VOR. He did not recall if the autothrottles were in a hold mode for the arrival, and did not remember if he saw that.

When asked if he reengaged the autopilot prior to 7,000, he said he thought he did, but then turned it off and hand flew the airplane since he did not know what had happened.

When asked what he thought would be a good procedure for crews to follow if they found themselves in similar circumstances, he said he had wracked his brain what and why this happened.

He said he was not complacent, and if he had an idea he would pass it on. He added that once they get a chance to know more they could learn from it, and hopefully it was related to a system.

When asked if he had any final thoughts that would help with this investigation, he said no.

Interview concluded at 1430.