

Factual Report – Attachment 2

Records of Conversation

OPERATIONAL FACTORS

DCA19MA086

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1.0 Christian Hutchcroft, Atlas Air Captain (via telephone)

Date: 4/2/2019 (0940 EDT)

Person Contacted: Christian Hutchcroft, Atlas Air Captain (via telephone)

NTSB Accident Number: DCA19MA086

Narrative:¹

- His name was Christian Lon Hutchcroft, and he was 33 years old.
- He was an Atlas air 767 captain, and had been at Atlas since September 2015.
- When asked about his experience with Conrad Aska, he said he was an FTD (flight training device) cockpit procedures trainer at Air Wisconsin, and he encountered Conrad after his (Conrad's) completion of indoctrination training. Conrad and his simulator partner were in a 4-day FTD cycle for the CRJ (CL-65), either in Toronto or more likely Charlotte. He and his partner were well prepared, and they did fine with the normal checklist, immediate action items, and emergency checklist items. Toward one of the later sessions, either FTD 3 or 4, they were able to utilize the simulator as a fixed base sim without motion.
- He had demonstrated the engine failure to practice the cadence for his students, and taught them to go slow and methodical, which was a good heads up for the simulator since that first session is typically "shock and awe," first sim is shock and awe for new students.
- They were conducting the emergency procedure cabin altitude drill where they are at FL350 or so, and he gives the students a cabin altitude message requiring an emergency descent to 10,000 feet. His driver as an instructor was to watch the immediate action items. They were taught to conduct the maneuver on autopilot, descend down to 10,000 in speed mode depending on if there was structural damage, reduce thrust, extend the speedbrakes, and hold current speed.
- He said that was what he was expecting to see. Conrad was flying from the left seat, and he and his simulator partner performed the memory items correctly. Conrad then chose to descend the simulator. He was not sure of Conrad's background, but instead of descending on the autopilot, Conrad disengaged the autopilot and abruptly pitched down well below horizon. They got the stick shaker and overspeed alert together. He was not sure if it was an extreme nose down, but remembered that it was abrupt input on the controls.

¹ Captain Hutchcroft was provided a copy of these notes for edits and clarifications. This Record of Conversation incorporates those edits and clarifications, received by the NTSB via email on Tuesday, April 2, 2019 12:15 PM.

- Conrad immediately knew something was wrong, but was not sure why he got there. Conrad turned back at him as instructor with O2 mask still on and just look at him. At that time, the simulator with all the warnings was still “angry.”
- He stopped and paused the simulator and repositioned back up to FL350, and they talked about it. He reminded Conrad that it was acceptable to conduct the descent with the autopilot off, but told him it was best to let the automation to do it. After that, they retrained the items.
- For him, since he was not a simulator instructor, he only checked procedures and flows and memory items. He later learned that Conrad had trouble in the simulator sessions and was not successful. He had since talked to other instructors, and was told he was not signed off due to a lack of progression, and also told Conrad resigned prior to his check ride.
- He had since talked to the chief pilot at Air Wisconsin who conducted his systems ground school, and was told Conrad received an 82-84 grade on systems knowledge, and was also told that Conrad was unremarkable in ground school and nothing stood out.
- He believed for Conrad it was the flying aspect of the jet that was challenging, and it was possibly his first jet experience.
- He knew of no life issues Conrad was going through at the time he was at Air Wisconsin, and he had never flown with Conrad at Atlas on the 767.
- Five days before the accident, he was in BWI at 3am and he saw Conrad on the crew van. Conrad told him he was living in Florida, grew organic berries, and there was nothing in that conversation that would cause him any second thought about Conrad. He had very little interaction with Conrad.
- Conrad had no other struggles in the FTD that he saw, and there were not any real issues to wonder what the heck was going on, which is why that episode on the rapid descent stuck out to him.
- When asked if he had heard other Atlas pilots comment about Conrad, he said yes. When he did his initial captain upgrade on 767, another pilot friend who was an instructor was talking about things he had seen in the training environment. At that time, he had no idea Conrad was at Atlas. When he told his friend about that Air Wisconsin training episode without naming Conrad, the other instructor said “oh, that’s Conrad”. The response was meant as “watch out for Conrad.” He obviously had a background with Conrad and was aware of him. He was not sure about details of their history, but he had heard from other captains that Conrad was sometimes fine, and sometimes not, and to treat Conrad as an FO that you just had to watch and be aware of.
- In that BWI van, Christian obviously didn’t want to bring up the Air Wisconsin stuff in front of others. Conrad remembered him, smiled, seemed a little nervous, and did acknowledge it working at Air Wisconsin. He did not know if Conrad ever disclosed his time at Air Wisconsin to Atlas Air.

- The Air Wisconsin training was on the CRJ. He knew Conrad had been flying heavily in the Caribbean previously, with possibly a lot of VFR flying.
- According to his notes, Conrad had a start date at Air Wisconsin of 4/23/2012, and completed systems training on 5/4/2012. His FTD training was probably in May of 2012.
- He said he got hired by Air Wisconsin in November 2010, then flew Part for Sunoco, then to TranStates in July 2014 on the EMB145, and then to Atlas.
- The thing that really stuck out to him about that training event was when it happened, instead of staying engaged and fixing the problem, Conrad just turned around and looked at him like he as the instructor was going to fix it. It was a weird situation. Conrad's subsequent retraining went fine.
- At Atlas, he has since talked to a couple of guys who flew weeks or a month prior to the accident with Conrad, and was told that he was fine in the cockpit and nothing apparent stuck out. Their flying at Atlas is pretty normal; fly on autopilot, shoot an ILS on autopilot, and nothing outside the realm of anything crazy. The majority of their flying was routine.
- He had no real interaction with Ricky Blakely, and Ricky was not someone he knew well.

2.0 Captain Leigh Lawless, Mesa Air Check Airman

Date: May 9, 2019 (via telephone)

Person Contacted: Captain Leigh Lawless, Mesa Air Check Airman

Attendees: David Lawrence, Bill Bramble – NTSB; Captain Leigh Lawless

NTSB Accident Number: DCA19MA086

Narrative:

- Captain Lawless declined representation.
- Leigh Lawless had been in the training department on the EMB175 at Mesa as a simulator instructor and APD (Aircrew Program Designee) but had stepped down and was currently a line captain on the EMB175.
- She had been at Mesa Air for 22 years.
- She was doing an upgrade training for Conrad Aska on the EMB175 in May 2017. He had previously failed simulator lesson 2 with different instructor, and he had requested a different instructor. She was conducting his retraining for lesson 2. She said his performance was a “train wreck” and he performed very poorly in this lesson.
- In briefing room he did well, and explained things well. However, in the simulator and something he wasn’t expecting happened he got extremely flustered and could not respond appropriately to the situation.
- According to her notes, lesson 2 involved rejected takeoffs, elevator jam, engine fires and failures in flight.
- When asked what compelled her to write these notes and who were they intended for, she said when a student fails a lesson the instructor had to complete a debrief form and on the first page of the form the student had to sign it and say whether they agreed or disagreed. Those notes were appended to his training record for the chief flight instructor’s review. After a second failure the pilot had to go to a training review board. She did not know if Conrad went before a training board, but assumed that he did.
- When asked why he had requested a different instructor, she said she thought he had a previous encounter with the other instructor and she intimidated him, but that was just her personal opinion.
- When asked about her comment in her notes about Conrad’s “lack of understanding of how unsafe he was,” she said he was making very frantic mistakes, lots and lots of mistakes, and did a lot of things wrong but did not recognize this was a problem. He thought he was a good pilot never had any problems and thought that he should be a captain. He could not evaluate himself and see that he did not have the right stuff.
- When asked if she ever had seen anyone with a similar lack of proficiency, and felt compelled to write this kind of detail notes on this kind of upgrade training, she said it was rare, but she had probably seen one or two others like this.

- She had no interactions with Conrad after this training.
- She could not recall if he provided any reasons for his poor performance. She had met him a few times prior, but did not know him well. She had not flown with him since she was not flying when she was in the training department.
- She thought the previous instructor had provided her a brief about Conrad's prior simulator session, but did not recall the details.
- When asked if this particular training session with Conrad had left an impression on her as an instructor, she said yes.
- She said she had seen one or two others with similar performances in her 3.5 years in the training department.
- When asked if the nature of his difficulty was lack of knowledge or skill, or just elevated stress and anxiety, she said she thought it was mostly anxiety, but it was hard to say, and probably both. There were a few things that he did well, but they were things that he was expecting. Like for a single engine ILS he did good, but he also knew he was going to have to do that on pretty much every check in the simulator. For things he was unfamiliar with, it was a combination of the two (lack of knowledge or skill, or stress). When he did not know what to do, he became extremely anxious. She did not know if frantic was the right word, but he would start pushing a lot of buttons without thinking about what he was pushing, just to do something.
- When asked if there were any particular buttons he pressed out of anxiety rather than focused intention, she said the only thing in her notes was when he had the dual engine failure, when one of the aural warnings for the autothrottle came on, in trying to turn it off, he was pushing the wrong button multiple times. He was pushing AT on the panel instead of pushing the buttons on the thrust lever to silence and disengage. The one on the panel just turns the AT on or off but does not silence the warning. He was pushing the one on the panel.
- She did not know how long he had been flying the EMB175.
- When asked how familiar he seemed with the logic of the autoflight system, she said there were several times in that session where he did not arm the appropriate function. When asked if that was a knowledge issue or stress issue, she thought it would have to be a combination because it seemed to her in the briefing room he could explain how to fly single engine ILS or single engine approach, but in simulator he messed it up because he could not arm the proper function or set it up correctly.
- She said in briefing room they did get into a fine level of detail, like for the nonprecision approaches, which they would usually go over it in pretty good detail. She did not remember specifically, but she imagined they would have discussed it in detail if nothing else. She said that would also include what to do with the autoflight system.
- When asked if Conrad's bigger issue was more confusion about the autoflight system, she said she was that he was confused about the automation and the autopilot in general – how to make it do what he wanted, but his stick and rudder skills were weak as well.

- When he struggled with the automation, he would kick it off and hand fly, but he did not do it well. When he selected the flight director back on, he ignored it, and continued on a heading somewhat parallel to final approach course. During the elevator jam scenario when hand-flying, he could not follow a localizer needle.
- When asked if Conrad was a pilot who was not confident in his stick and rudder skills, she said she did not think he thought he was a bad pilot. Every indication when she talked to him was that he was pretty confident in his skills, even though he had just proven otherwise in the simulator.
- When asked if he accepted his substandard performance grade during the debrief, she said he had reluctantly agreed with it.
- When asked if she had anything else that she could think of that might be relevant to the investigation, she said she did not think so.

3.0 Captain Paul Allred, Mesa Air Check Airman

Date: 7/25/2019 (1100 EDT)

Person Contacted: Captain Paul Allred, Mesa Air Check Airman (via telephone)

NTSB Accident Number: DCA19MA086

Narrative:²

- His name was Paul Edward Allred, and he was 50 years old. He was a check airman for Mesa Air on the E170. He was part of the initial cadre on the E170 when it first came online at Mesa about 6 years ago. He had been with Mesa for about 23 years.
- He first met Conrad Aska during a recurrent checking event in March 2016. That session went ok and nothing stood out. He did have some trouble with the stall series. The problems were with his attitude control, and he had a hard time getting the airplane back to level flight.
- He said he was Conrad's instructor for his E170 upgrade training, and Conrad "washed out" of the training program.
- He said when Conrad would make a mistake in training he had an excuse for everything.
- He said Conrad did not make it through upgrade twice at Mesa twice.
- During his upgrade training, his seat support was another regular simulator [partner (not and instructor)].
- He said Conrad was returned to the FO position after he failed to upgrade to captain, and he almost failed out of that requalification program to return him to FO in May 2017.
- He was not sure if Conrad elected to remove himself out of training or was asked to leave.
- Lida Swan was the instructor for one of his first attempts to upgrade.
- When asked to describe Conrad's difficulties in the simulator for his May 2017 requalification following his failure to upgrade, he said that Conrad's stick and rudder skills were his biggest problems. His grades during that requalification training were marginal at best.
- He said that he did not understand why Conrad's skills were so weak. For instance, during stall recoveries, he'd lose control coming out of the stall.
- He said that Conrad tended have an excuse for all of his faults or poor performance, and blamed his partner, his instructor, the hotel, anything else but himself.
 - Training was MV, and LOE, and then a line check.

² Captain Allred was provided an opportunity to review the notes of this Record of Conversation. His edits and corrections received via email on Tuesday, July 30, 2019 at 4:00 PM CDT are incorporated in this final version.

- He had an instructor in the left seat for his requalification to the right seat, which was always helpful to the student since the instructor would tend to “help” the student.
- When asked if Conrad would get startled in the simulator, he said during one stall recovery, Conrad pitched down about 40 degrees for recovery, then a pitch up about 20 degrees. His flight path was all over the place. He did that on the first attempt, then got it worked out. Once Conrad knows what he’s doing wrong he can fix it, but the first attempts are what he had problems with them. He said Conrad was briefed ahead of time for the stall training, and still had problems.
- This occurred during his second AQP event he had with Conrad. His first AQP event in 2016 was uneventful.
- His instructor really helped him out by saying “pitch” and “roll,” and “watch your pitch and roll.”
- Conrad’s single engine ILS was “all over the place,” and was the reason for getting graded substandard. His V1 cut and single engine landing was “was all over the place.”
- He said when they did maneuvers validation (MV), Conrad had the whole simulator time to himself (4 hours) since he was the only student. They were working with him, with an instructor in left seat, and he had a lot of help but still did not receive very good scores.
- Maneuvers training was the issue on the first day, he wasn’t stellar on his MV, but he did eventually pass.
- When asked if he voiced concerns about Conrad’s performance to his leadership, he said he did. In his notes in the AQP event, he did not call anyone over it. They would see this occasionally, and the notes on the Conrad’s AQP records were pretty strong.
- He did remember how bad the training for both his upgrade and requal were both bad.
- When asked how he would rate Conrad’s overall performance as a pilot, he said Conrad was “one of the worst he’d ever seen, probably a 2.”
- When asked if there was a process at Mesa to review a pilot after a poor performance, he said he could talk to his chief flight instructor, but most of it was done by word of mouth. He said he did talk to the Ejet chief instructor, who was aware of Conrad.
- He said he got a call from the flight safety director at Atlas several months after the accident. They wanted to know about my experience with Conrad.
- When you have a problem, the tendency is to keep training them until they can eventually pass.
- Back when Conrad was at Mesa, he was maybe one of maybe 20 guys having problems, but they were trying to pump students out as fast as they could. He said the only decision made was to give him additional training. Conrad may have gone before a training review board, but he was not sure.
- When asked if Conrad had difficulty with other maneuvers, he said the single engine work was worse than the stall recoveries.
- He said Conrad also had difficulty with basic FMS work. He could not intercept a radial using the FMS, and the FMS was a struggle for him.

4.0 Captain Lida Swan, Former Mesa Air Check Airman

Date: July 30, 2019 (via telephone); 1526 CDT

Person Contacted: Captain Lida Swan, Former Mesa Air Check Airman

Attendees: David Lawrence– NTSB; Captain Lida Swan

NTSB Accident Number: DCA19MA086

Narrative:³

- She had provided the evaluation on Conrad Aska during his captain upgrade attempt at Mesa, and she said Conrad was not a strong candidate at all.
- It was hard to explain to him that he was not ready to upgrade to captain, and he needed more flying to do.
- He wasn't ready to upgrade. He then decided to leave the company and go somewhere else.
- She said she was not going to pass someone, especially for captain, who was not prepared and skilled.
- His failure was a combination of a lot of things. As an examiner she observed that if he was introduced something unusual or out of the normal routine in the cockpit, his performance would deteriorate.
- His situational awareness was weak, and things he should have known being on the airplane so long he struggled with. She was not sure if it was nerves, but it added up.
- He did not realize what was going on with the airplane at times. If she pointed something out with the airplane, he was oblivious about it and had difficulty staying ahead of the airplane.
- Asked if Mesa aware of his weakness, she assumed yes, since documentation for lack of progress was sent to the company.
- They had a training review board, and she assumed he went before the board. She failed him on his upgrade, and then he was trained by Leigh Lawless, followed by Paul Allred, and we all agreed.
- Asked if she knew if Conrad was having personal issues during the training, she said no, he did not say anything about issues in his personal life. He had some family issue when he was going through recurrent FO training, but not while he was going through upgrade. That recurrent FO training she conducted for Conrad was also weak.
- He was extremely unhappy with her for failing him.

³ Captain Swan was provided an opportunity to review the notes of this Record of Conversation. Her edits and corrections received via email on Wednesday, July 31, 2019 at 5:02 PM CDT are incorporated in this final version.

- He tried to find excuses for his performance. He was completely unaware of his lack of skills. If everything was perfect, he had no issues. Given something he did not expect, he was overloaded and did not know how to handle the situation. It was like he did fine with a script, but anything else he struggled.
- He was not willing to take feedback at all. She was aware that he contacted the union following his training difficulties.
- She reminded him she was not there to be his friend, she was here to make sure he was safe
- Asked if Conrad had any tendency to overcontrol the airplane, she said she did not recall. She just observed him in the simulator and had not been in the airplane with him. After 2 years on the airplane, he did not have the knowledge to upgrade, and that was sad.
- At Mesa, they were required to do manual weight and balance calculations in case ACARS didn't work, and it took him 45 minutes to do and he still got it wrong.
- He was not ready for the upgrade, and did not take it the right way.
- When asked if anyone else had contacted her about her experience with Conrad, she said no, not before the accident. After the accident, the Atlas Air safety department contacted her to talk about Conrad.
- She knew he had difficulty in training at Atlas since this is a small industry and people share things. She never got contacted by any other airline other than Atlas following the accident.