

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX

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CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,

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ON JANUARY 26, 2020

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Interview of: PHILLIP DiFIORE, President
 Island Express Helicopters

Island Express Helicopters
 Long Beach, California

Saturday,
 February 1, 2020

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

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National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:00 p.m.)

DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. On the record. It's 2 o'clock p.m.

Good afternoon, Phil. My name is Dajuan Sevillian. I'm a human performance investigator for the NTSB. I appreciate you coming and talking with us today.

We, at the NTSB, are focused heavily on safety, making recommendations and approving overall safety record for the industry. You're here today because you are an expert and we want to hear from you.

What you're seeing around the table are folks that are going to be interviewing you. It's part of our party system at the NTSB, and the party system is used to help us throughout the investigation. So all party members have something to provide the NTSB and that's why they're here. So you'll hear from everyone at the table here in a moment.

All of your -- this is being recorded. The transcript will be part of the public docket in the future, so just keep that in mind. If there -- at any time that we're going through the interview, you have a -- you want to know a little more clarification, let us know. If there's a time to take a break, that's fine as well. And if there's something that you don't know, just say you don't know.

MR. DiFIORE: Okay.

DR. SEVILLIAN: You're allowed one representative, and so for

1 the record, could you please state who you'd like to represent
2 you.

3 MR. DiFIORE: That would be Don.

4 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thank you. So with that being said, I
5 would like to go around the room so you can meet who's going to be
6 interviewing you.

7 MR. DiFIORE: Okay.

8 DR. SEVILLIAN: Sathya.

9 DR. SILVA: I'm Sathya Silva. I'm a human performance
10 investigator with the NTSB.

11 MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar, Operations.

12 MR. DALTON: Garret Dalton. I represent Island Express
13 Helicopters, the operations and the aircraft.

14 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Are there any questions before we get
15 started?

16 MR. DiFIORE: Not so far.

17 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay.

18 INTERVIEW OF PHILLIP DiFIORE

19 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

20 Q. So for the record, Phil, could you please state your first
21 and last name with spelling?

22 A. Phillip, P-h-i-l-l-i-p, DiFioire, D-i-F-i-o-r-e.

23 Q. And what's your job title?

24 A. I'm president of Island Express.

25 Q. Can you give me a brief overview of your roles and

1 responsibilities?

2 A. Yeah. My role is president, so at the end of the day it all
3 stops with me. But for my -- most of my background, I deal with
4 maintenance. I'm involved with purchasing, bills, reviewing
5 procedures. I'm not in the day-to-day operation at Island. In a
6 nutshell, that's what it is.

7 Q. How long have you been president?

8 A. I believe that was purchased in 2011.

9 Q. What previous jobs have you had? In aviation.

10 A. Do you want from recent to --

11 Q. Recent.

12 A. So I also own Guardian Helicopters, which we started in 2001.
13 It's a utility firefighting company. I'm president and director
14 of maintenance for that company. I also own part of Redding Air
15 Service, which was purchased in 2006. I'm president there. And
16 then Rotorcraft Support, which is my maintenance company, since
17 1986. And I believe I started in the industry around 1980 as a
18 mechanic.

19 Q. And what licenses or authorizations do you have?

20 A. So I'm an A&P, an IA, and a DAR.

21 Q. Any flight ratings? Any flight experiences?

22 A. I am not rated, but I probably about 400 hours in a
23 helicopter over the years.

24 Q. Okay. Which helicopter?

25 A. I've flown many as we were doing test flights and ferry

1 flights, and I thought I wanted to learn how to fly and then I
2 just got too busy and never went back to it.

3 Q. So the -- you were speaking about your roles and
4 responsibilities as president. How do you interface with the
5 management at Island Express? For example, operations, how do you
6 -- what are your expectations from the director of operations?

7 A. Well the director of operations runs the day-to-day flight
8 operations. We interface either with phone calls, emails, some
9 meetings throughout the year. I was more heavily involved in the
10 beginning when we purchased Island Express. As we've gone through
11 different personnel to kind of get the right fit and having the
12 operation where it kind of is today, it doesn't require me to be
13 involved in every detail or decision.

14 Q. And you mentioned meetings. What sorts of meetings with the
15 director of ops?

16 A. We'll get together and talk about stuff, just general
17 operations, some of the things we wanted to do, some pilots we
18 wanted to hire. I would interface with the director of
19 maintenance on maintenance practices, things that we need to
20 accomplish, day-to-day meetings. Well, not meetings, but
21 day-to-day stuff that we would have to work through on a regular
22 basis.

23 Q. You mentioned looking at pilots you'd like to hire. What are
24 you looking for when you bring a pilot on to Island Express?

25 A. I think we're looking for a good, credible pilot;

1 qualifications, experience. That's kind of a different question
2 depending on what position we're hiring for.

3 Q. Okay, what positions do you normally hire for?

4 A. Well, it would've been a normal line pilot or when we hire a
5 chief pilot or when we hire the director of operations, those
6 qualifications are all different. We're looking for different
7 aspects, strengths.

8 Q. So can you give me an example on what you'd be looking for in
9 a line pilot?

10 A. We would probably be looking for -- if we're looking for the
11 AStar, probably around a couple thousand hours give or take. Does
12 he have experience in the model that we're operating? Do we have
13 to train him in the model we're operating? Turbine time; the
14 right attitude. So those are some of the different things we
15 would probably -- I generally look at.

16 Q. And how about the chief pilot role?

17 A. Well, the chief pilot role, in my mind, is somebody that's
18 familiar with that type of operations, familiar with the area, has
19 the strengths to deal with the line pilots, able -- can conduct
20 training and check rides if that is in that qualifications. Some
21 of my companies, the DO is a check airman. Some of the chief
22 pilots are check airmen. It depends on the individuals that we
23 hire at which company.

24 Q. You're talking about being familiar with the area for the
25 chief pilot. What do you mean by area?

1 A. The area of operation on somewhat of a regular basis, or the
2 type of mission. In the case we're talking about, the chief
3 pilots are familiar with Southern California. He was familiar
4 with Island Express as being a line pilot before. He had the
5 credentials that we needed. Good fit with the staff and the crew
6 in training of pilots.

7 Q. How often do you get pilots that don't have the credentials
8 you're looking for or apply for the position and don't have the
9 credentials?

10 A. Well, through the industry you get that a lot. You put out
11 an ad, you ask for certain things, but you get a lot of pilots
12 trying to climb the ladder and apply for jobs just trying to get
13 their foot in the door. So --

14 Q. But for Island Express, can you give me sort of a number or
15 so, that you see as far as pilots that may submit their
16 credentials and you look at it and you say yay or nay?

17 A. I can't give you a number. It depends on when we're hiring,
18 what's available. I mean, typically, me and the director of ops
19 or me and the chiefpilot, depending on the company we're talking
20 about, have discussions, we'll look at the qualifications, we have
21 interviews, a check flight to see how they handle the machine,
22 their knowledge base.

23 Q. Are you involved with the safety management system by any
24 means?

25 A. I wouldn't say I'm involved. I'm aware of it and how it's

1 structured. It's similar to all our other companies with PRISM
2 SMS.

3 Q. And how does that work as far as PRISM? What's their
4 interaction with Island Express? How does that look?

5 A. Well, PRISM is a general audit. They work with individual
6 companies to build, I want to say, a template -- maybe that's not
7 the right word -- of questions for an evaluation, so if -- figure
8 out your risk level for the day depending on what you're doing and
9 what mission you have. We also use it in maintenance. We also
10 use it here in our fuel truck drivers. They're allowed to go to a
11 certain point based on a score. If that, they have to go up to
12 management for approval past that.

13 Q. Have you ever been involved in any cases where the scores
14 have got to a certain level high that need management approval?

15 A. I can't say I have at Island.

16 Q. Are you present in the safety meetings at Island Express?

17 A. I can't say I have been recently.

18 Q. Do other members of management at Island Express, such as the
19 director of safety, director of ops, communicate with you about
20 any safety-related issues?

21 A. Probably at times, yes.

22 Q. Have you ever had anybody, a pilot, talk with you about how
23 things are going at Island Express?

24 A. I have regular communication with Ara and Garret, both. And
25 before that, it was the past director of operations.

1 Q. Who was the past director?

2 A. That would be Gordy Cox.

3 Q. Gordy Cox, okay.

4 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. Those are the questions I have
5 for right now. Fabian?

6 MR. SALAZAR: Yes, thank you.

7 BY MR. SALAZAR:

8 Q. I just need to make sure I'm not going to ask you the same
9 questions. So just give me a second.

10 As far as flying hours go, does Island Helicopters report up
11 to you the number of hours flown for any given month?

12 A. The director of maintenance, present and in the past, would
13 come out with some numbers in the month. I also see -- how do I
14 explain that? I have a pretty good idea because most of the
15 maintenance signoffs flow through here so we can be a second set
16 of eyes checking -- just to keep on top of things, you know?

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. So all of it goes through my girls here in my records
19 department. They review it. We keep our own time sheet here just
20 to try to crosscheck everything, and then it usually flows past my
21 desk after that.

22 Q. So the Island's helicopters come here for heavy maintenance
23 or, other than just routine services, they come here?

24 A. Heavy maintenance or overflow sometimes.

25 Q. Okay. So do you -- are you directly involved with the

1 director of maintenance with this flowchart so -- in managing his
2 hours or the flying hours so that they come in here at a
3 predictable time?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. No. I think that answer is no, because depending on flying,
7 their manpower, their workload, what aircraft are up or down at
8 the time. There's no set procedure when they would come here or
9 for what maintenance.

10 Q. So for maintenance and the flying hours that are flown, you
11 leave that to the director of operations and the director of
12 maintenance to work out?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. All right. So as far as being the president goes, you're
15 their leader. Do you pass down any leadership philosophy to the
16 director of operations that he passes down to his followers?

17 A. We've talked about culture and safety, and there's never a
18 push from my end. I kind of look at it a little bit differently
19 than most typical operators. I come more from the maintenance
20 side because that's my background, so when we buy Island Express,
21 that's -- was the first focus to get the aircraft where they
22 needed to be. And then over the years with change, you know,
23 personnel, policies, procedures, recurrent training, facilities.
24 I mean, it's -- that's been my focus since we've gotten there.

25 Q. Okay. With regard to the charter flights, do you get

1 involved at all with those flights?

2 A. Not so much. In the early days, yes, I was. But again, once
3 I had some stronger people in place -- when we purchased Island
4 Express, the old owner stayed on as well as director of ops. I
5 was heavily -- more heavily involved than I have been. With all
6 the right figureheads, my participation has been less.

7 Q. And was that just a product of it's a new company that you
8 took on and you're making sure it's --

9 A. Yeah, and trying to --

10 Q. -- (indiscernible) success?

11 A. -- instill how we wanted to run things, getting familiar with
12 the operation, changing the operation for where we felt it needed
13 to go. So as time went on and the right people are in place, I
14 don't have to spend as much time with it.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. I mean, we do talk. I mean, my phone's open to the staff
17 24/7. Garret and I talk a lot at night after things quiet down
18 about what we need to do, potential projects coming up. We're
19 probably more involved when we've looked at certain projects; I
20 mean, when we're looking at bidding contracts or things like that.

21 Q. Okay. In the developing years, was it ever foreseen by you
22 that you would take on the VIP clientele for these charters? Was
23 that part of your business model?

24 A. After the first few years, yes. Trying to bring that
25 business -- I primarily started in the maintenance industry years

1 ago and some of my clients were in that area, so I was somewhat
2 familiar with the potential there. So we decided to add that on,
3 and that was part of the reason for the 76s coming on in addition
4 to move more people back and forth to the island faster; it's a
5 better aircraft for it. So that all kind of went hand-in-hand.

6 Q. You bring up an interesting topic that we haven't talked
7 about. Does the S-76 go to the island occasionally?

8 MR. DALTON: I can answer that.

9 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah.

10 MR. DALTON: During the summer, it -- usually we have
11 Thursday, Friday, Saturday, there's a Sikorsky on.

12 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Yeah, we hadn't talked about that. If
13 we did, I didn't recall it.

14 MR. DiFIORE: Yeah. That was kind of our plan originally on
15 is to -- plus the twin-engine reliability that everybody pushes.
16 It took us a while to really get that concept to move forward the
17 way we hoped, but it finally did the last few years.

18 BY MR. SALAZAR:

19 Q. So now that things are blossoming and you're picking up the
20 -- we'll call it the VIP clientele for your charter service, what
21 are some of the conversations that you had with Island Express to
22 foster that growing part of the business?

23 A. Well, part of that is marketing and just marketing to that
24 clientele. We have a marketing staff there that does that. I
25 know most of my conversation has either been with Whitney, which

1 kind of runs the day-to-day operations, Garret or Gordy Cox in the
2 past. As far as direct with the marketing department, I see
3 what's going on in emails and some notifications, but it's not a
4 regular communication.

5 Q. Any type of philosophies that -- or have any type of
6 philosophies been thrown out, such as get the client to their
7 destination?

8 A. Never, never. I mean, my philosophy in all three operations
9 companies is if we end up somewhere and we can't get back because
10 of weather or we have some mechanical and we have to bring motor
11 transportation, that's fine, and if we don't get paid to come
12 home, that's fine. There's never been a pressure like that from
13 myself.

14 Q. Okay. Getting into the manning structure of Island
15 Helicopters. We have the director of operations, and the director
16 maintenance works for the director of operations, and the chief
17 pilot works for the director of operations. Have you ever had to
18 come in or talk to these two entities to dispute -- or to resolve
19 any disputes dealing with flying hours versus maintenance time or
20 any type of conflicts of that nature?

21 A. No, I don't believe I have. Not as far as pushing to get
22 flights, if that's what you're asking me.

23 Q. No. Just in the day-to-day operations for flying aircraft,
24 they have periodic maintenance, so we don't want to overfly the
25 aircrafts so maintenance needs their time with the aircraft, but

1 operations may need that same aircraft to go out on a flight. So
2 there's this competition --

3 A. Juggling act yeah.

4 Q. -- between I need the aircraft but I've got to work on the
5 aircraft.

6 A. No. I mean, I get calls from Garret trying to respond to our
7 schedule, and usually the answer is when it's done, it's done.

8 Q. Okay. It's -- we have seen businesses where the director of
9 operations and the director of operations sit at the same tier and
10 they both answer to the president. This is just a little bit
11 different. Would you say that it's different because of the
12 desire for you to let this organization be a standalone without as
13 much involvement from the president?

14 A. It is a standalone, and the org chart may be designed that
15 way, but any one of my management or employees can come to me at
16 any time. They have my cell phone number. My door is always
17 open. I work with Adam probably the most, and I know Adam
18 probably the most because I trained Adam. He used to work for one
19 of my other -- well, two of my other companies. He decided he did
20 not want to go on the road anymore, so that opportunity opened up
21 there as a mechanic and it gave me a good comfort level because I
22 knew his skill level. When the direct of maintenance spot opened
23 up, he was a natural and I know I can work with him freely and
24 he'll take -- if I ask for an order to do something, it's going to
25 get done as far as, you know, maintenance or -- I don't have to

1 argue about it and I usually don't have to follow up on anything.
2 He knows how I run my system.

3 Q. Okay. Did they provide you any type of -- this may be
4 redundant, forgive me, but did they provide you with any type of
5 daily, weekly or monthly reports other than maintenance?

6 A. There's a weekly -- they have staff meeting and they usually
7 send out minutes of the meeting every week on an email. I review
8 those.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. For me, phone calls work easier most of the time because
11 that'll spark a question to me and that'll spark a question back
12 and forth. Plus, trying to go back and forth on email is like --
13 I like the personal contact myself.

14 Q. Okay. Getting into safety, they do periodic safety training
15 and you work up here. Do they provide you minutes of their safety
16 meetings?

17 A. Not on a regular basis.

18 Q. Do they make you aware of any safety hazards?

19 A. Yeah, I get communication from Josh in the past about certain
20 things. I mean, we haven't had major safety ones that I'm aware
21 of. It's day-to-day stuff. You know, hey, we need to do this in
22 this quarter and this -- stuff like that.

23 Q. Has Josh ever asked you to be an action officer on any one of
24 his safety hazards?

25 A. No.

1 Q. There was just a couple that I think I need to --

2 MR. SALAZAR: That was it. Thank you.

3 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Fabian. Sathya?

4 BY DR. SILVA:

5 Q. Can you give us an idea of how many operations you run per
6 month between busy season and off season?

7 A. Off the top of my head, I can't answer that. We're probably
8 averaging 3- to 500 hours per machine, I think, the last time I
9 looked at them sometime last year.

10 Q. 3- to 500 per month? Machine?

11 A. Per machine.

12 Q. Per machine --

13 A. A year. Sorry.

14 Q. A year, okay.

15 A. As far a number of evolutions, I don't track that that
16 closely myself. There is some -- I believe Whitney keeps track of
17 passenger counts and from what what location to what location. I
18 look at that a few times throughout the year.

19 Q. When you purchased the company, was the SMS in place?

20 A. Yes, they had one. I believe it was Argus at the time. It
21 was a little bit more cumbersome than PRISM, and we had PRISM in
22 place for the other ones so it was kind of a natural progression
23 trying to keep them all the same.

24 Q. So you're still president at these other companies that you
25 mentioned. You're working all four?

1 A. Yes, ma'am.

2 Q. In terms of your background, can you run through when you
3 started in aviation to what got you to where you are.

4 A. So, I was a young lad, probably about 14. Some guys that
5 lived around the corner were in the tuna boat business with Bell
6 47s. I got to know them working on cars, and weekends and
7 holidays I'd go over and learn how to chip paint and paint and
8 weld and cut. I believe they started their company in 1980 and
9 they were running more tuna boat operations for other companies.

10 I got my A&P somewhere in that time frame, worked for them,
11 learned how to component overhaul and inspect and just do the
12 whole thing. In 1985, they got some sales tax issues and decided
13 to close the doors. It was four brothers that owned the company.
14 The brothers didn't want to go to work for anybody else. We said,
15 hey, why don't you give us your equipment and your inventory and
16 we'll sell off the excess instead of having an auction. You'll
17 get more money. It gave us a working shop.

18 We had two aircraft we were maintaining at the time and did
19 some component overhauls, and here I am 34 years later.

20 Q. You mentioned that the old owner stayed on as DO. Was that
21 Gordy or --

22 A. That was John Moore.

23 Q. When did the switch happen to Gordy? Do you remember?

24 A. When John left. I don't think he was there more than 2
25 years, so sometime around probably 2013.

1 Q. What led you to purchase Island Express?

2 A. Back in that time frame, I think the market was a little flat
3 for what we were doing, and we were actually looking at an
4 operation in Las Vegas for tours and then the Island Express thing
5 just came around and we talked about it. It wasn't as big of an
6 operation. It was close to home to manage, as opposed to 300 and
7 some miles. It was only -- well, when I was in Van Nuys it was
8 only 40 miles. That was part of it.

9 Q. How would you say the company has evolved since you purchased
10 it?

11 A. It's a complete turnaround.

12 Q. What are the main differences would you say?

13 A. Policies, procedures, training, maintenance. We've rebuilt
14 that whole company since 2011. It was pretty well-known back in
15 the day that Island Express not have great equipment.

16 Q. Has there been any accidents since you took ownership of
17 Island Express Helicopters?

18 A. No accidents.

19 Q. How often do you interact with Garret?

20 A. Probably a few emails and maybe a conversation or two every
21 week, sometimes more, sometimes less.

22 Q. What about with Ara?

23 A. It wasn't as much. We would interact once in a while. I
24 would probably see Ara at our facility more moving aircraft back
25 and forth for maintenance, so we'd get into some conversation

1 about things and how things were going and just general dynamics
2 of the business and what we were doing.

3 Q. How do you feel it was -- he was able to manage the line
4 pilots with the chief pilot roles?

5 A. I think okay. I mean, I don't recall him ever telling me in
6 our conversations that it was a problem or too much or -- Ara
7 loved that company. He worked really hard for us and he's just a
8 super nice guy. I mean, I knew him before when he was instructing
9 flight from Group 3 Aviation. They were right upstairs from us in
10 the past.

11 Q. Do you know when he joined the company?

12 A. When Ara joined the company?

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. '14 maybe. I'd have to look. I'm sorry.

15 Q. That's okay. When did he become chief pilot?

16 A. Three, 4 years ago, I believe.

17 Q. When you purchased the company, did you update the
18 organizational chart? Was that something you had input into?

19 A. I can't recall. I'm sure we probably did some, but I can't
20 tell you 100 percent.

21 Q. You mentioned earlier that the concept of taking the
22 Sikorskys over to the island, it took a while to adopt. What was
23 challenging about that?

24 A. It was more how to change how they did business with AStars
25 more than anything. It was just they were used to booking three,

1 four people, so we had -- with the reservation, it took a while to
2 figure out how to take a smaller load to a bigger load of people.
3 More of a booking thing. I mean, in the beginning we had a lot of
4 deadhead flights, whether it was an AStar or 206 or 76. So it
5 took a while to really fill that, and with the passenger counts
6 coming up, that I think helped that progression with being able to
7 sell the Sikorsky as the number one aircraft, opposed to the AStar
8 as the number one aircraft, to move more people.

9 Q. How would you describe the financial situation of the
10 company?

11 A. It's stable. We spent a lot of money the last 9 years trying
12 to fix everything to the standards that we're used to working
13 with. It was -- there was a lot that needed to be done, and every
14 year we've either been adding aircraft -- and that was part of the
15 marketing plan anyway for us to -- we have to have a stable
16 foundation to work with.

17 Q. Do you feel like your current staffing is adequate?

18 A. They probably could use another mechanic. We had a recent
19 mechanic, but the dynamic on the maintenance side is that we can
20 always fill the gaps here with my staff if they're overloaded or
21 can't handle it. Pilot-wise, during the summertime it's -- we
22 probably could use another pilot, but winter we're overstaffed, so
23 it's a little bit of a juggling act sometimes.

24 Q. So how many Island Express mechanics do you have here?

25 A. Here?

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. None here, but Rotorcraft is a full maintenance shop, so I
3 think we have 30-some maintenance technicians for my customers,
4 Guardian's customers -- whoever they are, some of our clientele.
5 So we work that -- the schedule accordingly as we can. I mean,
6 some aircraft sit sometime till we get to them.

7 Q. Okay. So --

8 MR. SWAIN: So I think you're communicating, they're separate
9 corporations, so --

10 DR. SILVA: Yeah, right.

11 BY DR. SILVA:

12 Q. So, just to clarify, the -- when you mentioned you'll support
13 Island Express's mechanics with your staff, is that the staff in
14 Long Beach or -- I'm having trouble understanding.

15 A. So if Island had heavy maintenance, as well as -- I'm going
16 to give you an example -- L.A. County Fire, we support their
17 overflow work too when they're busy or big projects come up. So
18 that would be the same -- Adam and I would communicate or Garret,
19 we have this coming up; here's the flight schedule. In the past,
20 we would try to say, okay, well, we're going to do some
21 maintenance early so we can meet that flight schedule or we have a
22 3, 4-day window to do this; the Island staff may be too busy. Or
23 we'd say, slide the AStar over to the side, do the Sikorsky. I
24 think that's what I mean. So if they couldn't handle the workload
25 that they were able to produce, then Rotorcraft would step in and

1 help with inspections, help with transmission changes, whatever
2 that may be.

3 Q. So do the mechanics that are employed by Island also do heavy
4 maintenance or is that contracted out to --

5 A. They may do some heavy maintenance depending on what time of
6 year it is and what they have. I mean, there's sometimes weeks
7 that have gone by and they're just doing dailies and they could do
8 more. There's time that they're busy and due to the workload,
9 they might get stacked up with a few hundred hours at close to one
10 time, so we may help out with that and do a couple of those. It's
11 trying to balance the load.

12 Q. So how often would you say that Rotorcraft Support is taking
13 on maintenance for Island Express?

14 MR. SWAIM: So you -- I'm not trying to get in your way, but
15 so we understand, I think Island Express hires Rotorcraft -- okay.

16 DR. SILVA: I understand that.

17 MR. SWAIM: Okay.

18 MR. DiFIORE: I can't give you exact counts. I mean, off the
19 top of my head, I can't. I mean, I have a lot of customers and a
20 lot of aircraft moving in and out; I have my Guardian aircraft
21 moving in and out; I've got three Redding aircraft down here right
22 now. It depends on the job. We do a lot of avionics also for
23 numerous customers. So I wouldn't say it'd be every month. I'd
24 probably say we'd normally handle the Sikorsky heavier maintenance
25 because it's more time-consuming. We just had the AStars in here

1 for ADS-B. There's no set trend.

2 BY DR. SILVA:

3 Q. So it's not like you have an aircraft here pretty much all
4 the time?

5 A. No. No, there's times when we don't see them for months.

6 DR. SILVA: Okay. Those were the questions I had. Thank
7 you.

8 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thank you, Sathya. So we'll do our second
9 round of questioning. Oh, sorry. Go ahead, Garret.

10 MR. DALTON: I just have one or two questions.

11 BY MR. DALTON:

12 Q. You talked about -- there was a question about how often you
13 communicate with the staff. The question was daily, weekly,
14 monthly. You mentioned that you kind of -- sometimes we speak on
15 the phone and/or emails. Does the DOO send you a weekly update as
16 to the operations?

17 A. Are you asking me that?

18 Q. Yes.

19 A. Yes, I believe you do.

20 Q. Okay. Give me an idea of what's in the email, examples of
21 stuff you've seen in those emails.

22 A. Any upcoming work or we're busy this week, we have flights
23 scheduled coming up. You'd be working with Adam on certain
24 projects, coordinating certain projects, working with Ben in
25 reservations. I mean, it's about the day-to-day operations that

1 you would communicate with me.

2 Q. Would I give you a list of upcoming charters and known
3 charters?

4 A. Some of those I believe are in there, Garret. I mean, I
5 can't say every charter is in there listed.

6 Q. And we talked about the PRISM. If someone submitted a hazard
7 report, would you see that hazard report? Would you get an email
8 notification?

9 A. Yes, I believe I do.

10 MR. DALTON: Okay, no more questions.

11 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. Thank you, Garret. And we'll
12 start our second round of questioning.

13 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

14 Q. What would you say Island Express' greatest strength is as a
15 company?

16 A. Their greatest strength? I think we have a really strong
17 staff that is there now that supports the company. I think we've
18 had a good reputation in the industry leading up to this point. I
19 think we have good equipment compared to most people out there.

20 Q. And what would you change as far as Island Express if you
21 could?

22 A. At this point today, I don't know that I have an answer for
23 that.

24 Q. Are there any policies or procedures that are being updated
25 or changed since the accident?

1 A. No, not that I'm aware of.

2 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Those are the questions I had for
3 right now. Fabian?

4 MR. SALAZAR: I just wanted to comment -- let me give you a
5 comment first. As you guys talk amongst yourself and you come up
6 with those policies that you'll want to change to improve your
7 company, those are known in our world as safety results, and we
8 would like to be -- we'd like to know about those so that we can
9 document those. It would appear on the public docket and other
10 people can read and see that those are the changes that you made
11 for yourself.

12 BY MR. SALAZAR:

13 Q. The last question I have, sir, getting to Ara and some of
14 your conversations that you've had with him, have you -- can you
15 recall a time where he either talked to you or was looking for
16 guidance or telling you what he would like to do with regards to
17 an employee in the company that he's having problems with?

18 A. As far as changes, I can't say I recall that. I know
19 sometimes things don't go as well as we'd always like, or problems
20 with employees, and that's throughout all my companies; hey this
21 guy's not performing to this level or here's what this guy
22 should've done. I think it was more conversations like that as
23 far as this guy's not good or he's not safe. I don't recall any
24 of those, if that's what you're looking for.

25 Q. I'll put a finer edge on it. Has he ever called you and

1 talked to you about a pilot that he's had issues with?

2 A. Well, if you're going to name a name -- one of our current
3 pilots?

4 Q. Yes.

5 A. Yeah, he wasn't always the happiest with David, if that's
6 where you're going with it.

7 Q. Um-hum.

8 A. You know, I think -- and Garret can chime in here if he needs
9 to. I think David's probably a safe pilot. David's not always
10 great with the customers or he's not always great with how he
11 comes out with things and, you know, there's been a few, not
12 incidents, but minor things with David just not -- well, going to
13 Del Mar racetrack once, he was supposed to have a picture of where
14 he was supposed to land, landed in the wrong spot, tore up some
15 flowers. So it was little things like that. Not that he was
16 unsafe or -- just not as fine of a charter pilot as some of them
17 are, as far as flying and -- probably offshore world, that was
18 David's strength when we hired him.

19 MR. DALTON: I'd like to concur with everything that was
20 stated.

21 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Thank you.

22 MR. DiFIORE: You bet.

23 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Fabian. Sathya?

24 BY DR. SILVA:

25 Q. I just wanted to clarify just one thing. So who does the

1 director of maintenance report to?

2 A. Well, he works -- he's worked with Garret and Ara, I believe,
3 and then at the end of the day, we have a lot of conversations and
4 emails about stuff going on and where to get parts and, you know,
5 what do I think about this, making recommendations. I mean,
6 Adam's a very good mechanic, a very bright young lad. So, I've
7 also -- you know, I'm trying to help mentor him a little bit since
8 he's taken the DOM position. I've a DOM for a lot of years doing
9 a lot of things. So it's that type of stuff.

10 Q. How often do you talk to Adam?

11 A. Not every day, but numerous times a week, and it's not that
12 it's anything bad, just strategic stuff. And we needed an engine
13 here recently and he did some shopping, and then I went and did
14 some shopping and we compare notes and things like that.

15 Q. So given that Adam reports to Garret, do you -- can you
16 explain why the org chart is laid out that way, from your opinion?

17 A. To be honest, I can't today, because I don't think it's that
18 way with my other companies. I'd have to go back and look at the
19 org chart to -- again, I got four org charts and I'm also a
20 director of maintenance for some of my other charter customers, so
21 it's hard to keep them all in my head.

22 Q. So given that that's what's written in the book, do you feel
23 like your relationship with Adam is different from with your DOMs
24 in your other companies, or do you feel like he's kind of
25 operating in the same way that --

1 A. I think he's operating the same way. I mean, my Redding
2 director of maintenance, we talk regular. It's the same type of
3 thing. I help him with parts and when are we going to do this
4 and, you know, here's some guidance, you need to do that, and --
5 so I'd say it's the same.

6 DR. SILVA: Okay. That was my question, thanks.

7 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Sathya. Garret?

8 MR. DALTON: I don't have any questions.

9 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Any other questions?

10 So that concludes the interview. Are there any questions
11 that we should've asked you that we didn't?

12 MR. DiFIORE: Well, that's a loaded question. I don't
13 believe so.

14 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Anyone else you'd like us to speak
15 with?

16 MR. DiFIORE: Not at this time.

17 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay, thank you. Off the record.

18 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX
 CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,
 ON JANUARY 26, 2020
 Interview of Phillip DiFiore

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20MA059

PLACE: Long Beach, California

DATE: February 1, 2020

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Shelby Marshall
Transcriber