

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: LORENZO LAMAS, Pilot

Island Express Helicopters

Island Express Helicopters
Long Beach, CaliforniaMonday,
February 3, 2020

APPEARANCES:

DUJUAN SEVILLIAN, Ph.D., Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operational Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

GARRET DALTON, Director of Operations
Island Express Helicopters

DON SWAIM, Attorney
Cunningham Swaim, LLP
(On behalf of Mr. Lamas)

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I N T E R V I E W

DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Lorenzo, my name is Dujuan Sevillian. I'm a human performance investigator for the NTSB. Thanks for taking time out and speaking with us today.

The NTSB is here for not only just to investigate the accident, but provide safety recommendations. You're here because you're an expert and we want to hear from you. So what you're seeing around the table is part of our party system; so the folks that are going be interviewing you today, company representative, NTSB investigators.

How this will work is we'll go around the table once and the folks will have interview questions, and then we'll do that process again. Anytime you need clarification on something, just let us know, and if there is something that you don't know, just say you don't know. As I said before, the recording is being used here today, but the transcript will be part of a public docket later on in the future.

MR. LAMAS: All right.

DR. SEVILLIAN: You're allowed one representative, so for the record could you state who you would like to represent you?

MR. LAMAS: That'd be Mr. Don Swaim.

DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. So what I'd like to do is go around the table so you get a chance to understand who you're going to be talking with, and then we'll go from there.

Fabian?

1 MR. SALAZAR: Fabian Salazar with the NTSB, looking into
2 operations.

3 MR. DALTON: I'm Garret Dalton, director of operations,
4 Island Express Helicopters. I know our operation and the
5 aircraft.

6 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. Thank you.

7 INTERVIEW OF LORENZO LAMAS

8 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

9 Q. So, for the record, could you please state your first and
10 last name with spelling?

11 A. I'm Lorenzo Lamas, L-o-r-e-n-z-o, L-a-m-a-s.

12 Q. And could you tell us your position with Island Express?

13 A. I'm a pilot for the company.

14 Q. Okay. Which aircraft do you fly?

15 A. I fly the AStar AS350, BA and B2.

16 Q. How many hours do you have in the model?

17 A. About 1,000 hours.

18 Q. And could you give us a brief aviation background sketch?

19 A. Sure. I started flying a fixed-wing in 1997. I was able to
20 achieve commercial IFR multi-engine certificate for a fixed-wing.
21 I also have a type rating for a C500, business jet.

22 My helicopter background began in 2001. I had training at
23 Group 3 Aviation in Van Nuys. I was in the 300CB, and then
24 transitioned to the R22, then the R44. And in 2014, I got my CFI,
25 my commercial flight instructor rating, for rotorcraft and my

1 instrument rating as well for rotorcraft. So I'm an instrument
2 pilot for both fixed-wing and rotorcraft helicopter.

3 Q. And how long have you been Island Express?

4 A. I've been with Island since April of 2018. It'll be 2 years
5 this coming April.

6 Q. And as far as training at Island Express, what sorts of
7 training do you receive from Island?

8 A. Well, we get a recurrency training every year from
9 EuroSafety. They're a renowned company that does exceptional
10 training and recurrency throughout the world. Glen White has been
11 my instructor for that.

12 Q. So what's covered in recurrent training from EuroSafety?

13 A. Aircraft systems, all the systems of the aircraft. It's a
14 refresher course that basically goes from nose to tail about the
15 aircraft, and then we have from 2 to 3 hours of emergency
16 procedure training in the aircraft, flying it and duplicating
17 scenarios that would simulate engine failures, systems failures,
18 hydraulics, engine. We also -- you know, they pretty much go over
19 every emergency procedure that we would face as a pilot. You
20 know, IMC, we're trained. We do hood time with the instructors
21 too. So we are forced to fly by the instruments every year for
22 recurrency.

23 Q. Is -- any simulator training?

24 A. No, it's all in the aircraft.

25 Q. So your thought process, what's better, simulator training or

1 on the aircraft?

2 A. It's better to -- I mean, you can -- simulators don't really
3 reflect the real dynamics and aircraft control. That's the
4 challenge that they've had for years in simulators, is that they
5 really don't simulate the actual feel of the helicopter.

6 Q. Right.

7 A. There's a delay or things are -- they happen faster than your
8 cues on the controls. So it's always better to fly in the actual
9 aircraft whenever possible. I mean, you could cheat up there too.
10 I mean, the hoods that are used are fairly efficient, but many
11 could cheat if you want to. We don't. You know, we try not to,
12 because you're just cheating yourself, right? But I would prefer
13 to be in the aircraft under a hood than in a simulator.

14 Q. And where is EuroSafety located?

15 A. They're all -- they're global. They travel everywhere.

16 Q. Okay, so they come --

17 A. I think they're based in Camarillo, California.

18 Q. Okay. All right. So they come --

19 A. But they come here.

20 Q. Come here, okay.

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. The -- so what airports -- what's a typical training mission
23 that they have you fly?

24 A. Well, somewhere where we could do some run-on landings, you
25 know, to simulate hydraulic failure and stuff like that. So last

1 year we went up to San Bernardino to do the training out there.
2 It's a nice long runway and it's relatively low traffic as well,
3 so we can stay in a pattern and not be disrupted too much during
4 that -- whatever period of time.

5 Q. And does EuroSafety have any training on inadvertent IMC as
6 far as what to do if you're in inadvertent IMC?

7 A. Yeah, like I mentioned before, we do -- we are asked to put
8 the limiting device on, and he simulates unusual attitude and we
9 recover from unusual attitude. We also will fly an instrument
10 approach into here at Long Beach. So it's pretty, you know,
11 pretty extensive.

12 Q. Yeah. And as far as -- let's just say you had to --

13 A. And that includes the check ride also that we do every year
14 for the company, right? So our check ride in the AStar is done by
15 Mr. Dalton, and he always has us shoot an approach and simulate
16 unusual attitude -- you know, recover from unusual attitudes and
17 fly around, talk to SoCal, talk to the controlling authority
18 about, you know, getting an approach into an airport. So it's
19 fairly extensive.

20 Q. Will he ever give any feedback to you after any flights?

21 A. Always, yeah.

22 Q. And what sorts of feedback?

23 A. Well, we go through the flight from beginning to the end,
24 and, you know, what is discussed is things that were done, in my
25 case, good and excellent. We just really go through the flight

1 and we talk about what -- you know, the things that we covered,
2 and I'm always asked if there are any questions on my end about
3 what was accomplished in the check ride or in the training
4 environment.

5 Q. How do you interface with the safety management system here
6 at the company?

7 A. It's so easy, you know? I mean, it's all on our phones. We
8 have PRISM. I have an app on my phone. It's PRISM. It's
9 basically a flight risk assessment, and we have to do a flight
10 risk before every flight. It's like, if we miss a, you know, a
11 flight risk assessment, I'll always get a text from somebody.
12 Like, hey, you forgot to do your flight risk. So yeah, we're
13 pretty used to doing that.

14 Q. And as far as if you see a hazard, how do you report a
15 hazard? Is there a process?

16 A. I would go directly to my superior, which was Ara, for the
17 most -- but if Ara was unavailable, then I would go to Garret with
18 it.

19 Q. So you mentioned Ara. How was that interface with Ara when
20 you knew him?

21 A. I felt very comfortable talking to him about anything, you
22 know, aircraft related. Ara did the schedule for all of us
23 pilots. So, you know, he was always very helpful in making time
24 available for us if we needed it for whatever reason, for family
25 or medical, you know, whatever the case may be.

1 The company in general is just very open to pilots coming up
2 and being free to talk about anything. We had a safety meeting
3 every month where it was a conference call. Even pilots that
4 weren't flying that day would kind of get on the phone and, you
5 know -- usually it was Garret that would run the conference call,
6 and we would discuss items that had come up recently or items that
7 we're going to adjust or change looking towards the future. Just
8 very, very proactive, I would say.

9 Q. If things changed such as policies or procedures, how is that
10 communicated?

11 A. We were all basically sent an email with all the topics that
12 were covered during that safety meeting. So it was basically a
13 printout of everything we discussed and the options of how we were
14 going to deal with those topics moving into the future. It's
15 pretty thorough.

16 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. All right. Those are the questions I
17 have for right now.

18 Fabian?

19 MR. SALAZAR: Let me catch up. I'll be right with you.

20 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay.

21 BY MR. SALAZAR:

22 Q. All right, Lorenzo, were you and Ara close friends?

23 A. We were.

24 Q. My condolences to your loss or for your loss. What I need to
25 do is I need to know Ara a little bit better. We talked to a lot

1 of people here, and you're actually the last person I'm going talk
2 to. So if I don't ask the questions and there's a little bit of
3 information I need to know, please let me know.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. Some of the questions are going to be a little -- it might be
6 a little tough. If you need a break, let me know, but I just need
7 to know this guy a little better.

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. We've pretty much talked about training, ground school,
10 flight training. Did Ara provide you the ground school and the
11 flight training that you needed to get to the point where they
12 signed you off to go fly the aircraft for the company?

13 A. No, that was done by Glen White. When I -- when they hired
14 me, when IEX hired me 2 years ago, it was just before the
15 EuroSafety program. So basically Josh Bagge said, okay, Lorenzo,
16 well, you're going be flying with Glen next week; if Glen signs
17 you off, you're good to go.

18 Q. Okay. Very good.

19 A. Basically I went right into the EuroSafety training
20 environment.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. My previous experience in the AStar was at Sundance
23 Helicopters in Las Vegas. So I came here to the company with
24 about 300 hours in type.

25 Q. Okay, very good. The check ride, was that with Glen as well?

1 A. Yes, um-hum. And then I did a company check ride with
2 Gordy Cox. So I had two check rides within, I think, 2 weeks of
3 each other, maybe less.

4 Q. Okay. Let's rewind a little bit. You just reminded me.
5 When you were with Group 3, did you take any training flights or
6 any flights with Ara at Group 3?

7 A. I did not. Ara was not my flight instructor for Group 3, for
8 either my commercial rating or for my flight instructor rating.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. But I did have time with Ara in a helicopter, in a Robinson
11 44, prior to coming here at Island.

12 Q. Okay. Tell me about those flights.

13 A. All right. So, aside from aviation as a career, I had
14 another career prior to that. And there was one instance where,
15 in my other career as an actor, the ABC network wanted to do a
16 flight with me for a program I was shooting, and the flight was me
17 flying an individual to a local airport. And I wasn't current in
18 the 44 at that time. I didn't have the SFAR. So Group 3 was the
19 company I went to, to -- for ABC to rent the aircraft from, and
20 they assigned Ara to fly that aircraft with me. So it was a
21 copilot kind of deal. So that was 2011 or 2012; it was one of
22 them.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. But Ara and I had -- we'd run into each other occasionally
25 over the years. We were friendly. When I went to New York to fly

1 for an operator, he called me on the phone and congratulated me.
2 He had been following my career, because even though I wasn't his
3 student, he was at Group 3. We did see each other there, you
4 know, when he was preparing to instruct. We'd run into each other
5 and so we kind of stayed -- you know, we stayed in touch. So I
6 could say that we really had a -- we've had a friendship for at
7 least 15 years.

8 Q. Okay. So he flies in the R44 with you prior to -- you came
9 -- you come over to Island Express, you get trained up with
10 EuroSafety, now you're flying the line. Any flights with Ara
11 then?

12 A. I think we may have done some familiarization flights. I
13 think I flew with him a couple of times from the heliport at
14 Queen Mary to the heliport at Pebbly Beach on Catalina. We did
15 some familiarization flights to John Wayne from Long Beach, just
16 to show me the routes. So, yes, in answer to your question, yes.
17 We probably did half a dozen training flights together just to
18 show me the routes that the company takes.

19 Q. So lumping those flights together, give me a statement about
20 Ara's demeanor as a pilot and his skills.

21 A. He was a very encouraging instructor. So I think the best
22 thing I could say about Ara in terms of that would be that he was
23 patient, encouraging. He would let you explore the envelope a
24 little bit, and you did that knowing that he would be able to
25 basically take the controls if he ever felt or you ever felt you

1 weren't up to the task. So, I mean, there weren't very many
2 instances at that point because I had already about 300 hours, so
3 I was pretty comfortable in the aircraft, but -- he just was a guy
4 that really encouraged the pilot, you know? He really gave you --
5 he made you feel really happy that you were flying an aircraft.
6 There was always a sense of look what we can do.

7 Q. Would you say he instilled confidence in his students?

8 A. Yeah, definitely.

9 Q. Or the people he was flying with?

10 A. I would definitely say that.

11 Q. Okay. And even -- have you ever gone on a flight with Ara
12 where you were flying simulated or actual IFR?

13 A. I believe so. I believe we had done some simulation flights
14 in preparation for the last check ride that I did. It was also
15 with Garret, but I think I flew with Ara maybe once.

16 Q. Anything unusual about those flights?

17 A. Nothing unusual, no. It was just a -- basically a safety
18 flight. We did -- I -- Ara, I did fly with Ara where there
19 weren't two -- there weren't dual controls in the helicopter. I
20 was PIC, and it was to basically show me how to -- how the company
21 wants to do a power check. Right? So he did that once with me, I
22 believe.

23 Q. Power checks for when you're fixing to take off with a load
24 to determine that you had sufficient power?

25 A. This is power check in cruise. Right?

1 Q. Oh, okay.

2 A. So we're at 5,000 feet in a B2, and 2500 in the BA.

3 Q. Let's get -- let's talk just a little bit about the -- we'll
4 get off Ara for a second and getting back into EuroSafety and
5 their evaluations for IMC/unusual attitude recoveries. How would
6 you transition from VFR flight to IMC flight during these
7 EuroSafety either training or evaluation flights?

8 A. So we would be finishing up with one particular regimen of
9 flight simulation, whether -- you know, whatever it was, whether
10 it was an autorotation or whether it was a hydraulic failure, we'd
11 finish up with that exercise and then we'd maintain a cruise.
12 We'd get up to -- well, less than cruise, probably like 100 knots,
13 and then the instructor would ask me to put on the view-limiting
14 device. I had glasses at this point, so view-limiting glasses.
15 So, I mean, those are pretty good because you really can only see
16 like the bottom half of the panel. So I put those on and there
17 would be about 30 seconds of just standard right turns and
18 maintaining airspeed and altitude, and then he would -- he'd say,
19 okay, close your eyes. And he would get the aircraft in an
20 unusual attitude and he'd say, okay, now you have control. And
21 then I'd take the controls back and look at the panel and figure
22 out what's going on.

23 Q. Still under --

24 A. Limiting device.

25 Q. You said, under the --

1 A. Um-hum, under the view-limiting glasses. Yeah. He also
2 asked me to hold my head back too. I think Ara --

3 Q. That's pretty challenging.

4 A. I think Garret did that. Garret did that too.

5 Q. I have to admit, that's pretty challenging.

6 A. Garret would ask me to hold my head back.

7 Q. As an IFE, I would do one or the other. I would make a
8 guy -- I would take a guy IMC, and then after that I would put --
9 I would do unusual attitude and I wouldn't use the foggles. That
10 was a challenge.

11 A. Well, if you don't have a view-limiting device on, how are
12 you going recover, you know, on instruments? So --

13 Q. Um-hum. Okay, let's get into flying the company here or
14 flying with Island Express. You fly the AStar. Do you fly the
15 offshore or the oil support missions?

16 A. I do.

17 Q. And you fly the charter flights?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. All right. What does -- tell me what your visibility and
20 ceiling limitations are for your flights from Queensway.

21 A. It's 300 and 2 miles.

22 Q. 300 and 2 miles.

23 A. 300 feet and 2 miles.

24 Q. Have you ever had to depart -- let's say visibility is
25 unlimited, have you made the departure with a 300-foot ceiling?

1 A. I have.

2 Q. Do you have personal minimums?

3 A. I do.

4 Q. Share it with me.

5 A. They're about the same.

6 Q. About the same?

7 A. Yeah, I would say. Well, we can't legally fly anybody below
8 300 feet, so -- and I've never taken a helicopter for a spin on my
9 own so to speak. We do weather checks though. You know, pilots
10 are encouraged to do a weather check.

11 Q. Okay. We talked about that a little bit with Angel. So you
12 coordinate with Angel and --

13 A. Correct.

14 Q. What are the -- those landmarks that you're using to
15 determine your visibility?

16 A. I'll call Angel in the morning when I'm here getting ready to
17 depart for the day, and if it looks sketchy -- if I can't see the
18 top of the tower here at Signal Hill -- I mean, because that's 300
19 feet basically.

20 Q. Yeah.

21 A. I'll call Angel and I'll ask Angel if he sees the white
22 cranes. The white cranes are the ones that are just south of
23 Queensway. If he's got white cranes -- you know, if he has the
24 tops of the white cranes, I'll do a weather check. You know, I'll
25 proceed past Queensway and I'll go out over the breakwater and,

1 you know, see what kind of -- high above the water I can get. If
2 I can't get 300 feet, I'll turn around and come back.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I've never had to turn around carrying passengers.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. So -- because of the weather checks.

7 Q. So let's ask this. There's two questions. Have you ever had
8 a weather cancel?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Because of the weather or due to weather?

11 A. Um-hum.

12 Q. And have you ever had to terminate a flight because of
13 weather and brought them back?

14 A. I have not.

15 Q. All right. Let's move back into flights with Ara, okay?
16 Even on the ground or in the area while you guys were just having
17 conversations, did he ever tell you about his charter flights with
18 the VIPs that he flew around?

19 A. Occasionally.

20 Q. Yeah?

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. Can you share some of the stories that he would tell you with
23 us?

24 A. Well, there's one story that stands out about one year where
25 Kobe asked him to fly him to San Bernardino for Thanksgiving. And

1 so he tells me that he loads -- and it's just Kobe. So he tells
2 me he loads Kobe up and they're flying out there to San Bernardino
3 because I guess Kobe's wife has family who lives out there
4 somewhere in Riverside. And, you know, he lands at San Bernardino
5 and Kobe gets out of the helicopter -- Ara shuts down, Kobe gets
6 out of the helicopter, and Ara thinks he's going to be staying
7 there for an indeterminate amount of time. You know, it's
8 Thanksgiving night, this could be hours. But -- and he said the
9 limo usually met Kobe on the ramp, right?

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. Of the air -- of the terminal -- of the FBO. So he sees Kobe
12 get into the limo and then starts to go out towards the gate and
13 it turns around. And Kobe gets out of the car and comes up to Ara
14 and goes, we got to go back. And Ara goes, what's wrong? He
15 goes, I forgot the stuffing.

16 Q. Nice.

17 A. So he puts Kobe in the aircraft and they fly him back to John
18 Wayne. Kobe gets in his car there, goes and gets the stuffing
19 that he forgot, and gets back in the helicopter at John Wayne and
20 flies back to San Bernardino with a tin of stuffing. That's
21 probably the most expensive --

22 Q. No doubt about it.

23 A. -- serving of stuffing that anybody's ever heard about.

24 Q. Yeah, two trips and back. Nice. Very --

25 A. Oh, man. To be Kobe Bryant, right? We're going back to get

1 some stuffing because he doesn't want to probably -- he fears the
2 wrath of Vanessa if he shows up --

3 Q. Yeah. Oh, yeah, that part --

4 A. -- without the stuffing.

5 Q. That part is the same to everybody's life. No doubt about
6 it. All right. I appreciate that. It tells me that Ara talked
7 to somebody. Now, I didn't -- I don't think I asked Garret about
8 tell me did he tell you those stories, but I asked everybody else
9 and nobody could tell me a story. So clearly Ara talks to you or
10 confided in you in some degree and had trust in you. So I
11 appreciate that.

12 The reason I appreciate that is because I'm going to dig a
13 little bit deeper, okay? Did he ever talk to you about the
14 challenges that he's had with other pilots in the company?

15 A. No. He never really talked -- he was probably one of the
16 most positive people I've ever met in my life. You know, he -- I
17 never remember him saying a bad word about anybody or, you know,
18 criticizing somebody that wasn't there to defend themselves, you
19 know?

20 Q. So would you say, did he keep his business to himself from
21 you?

22 A. It's not a matter of keeping anything from anybody. I just
23 think that he was the kind of person that had just a joy for
24 people. He loved people. He loved flying.

25 Q. He had a challenge with one of the pilots. He never talked

1 to you about it?

2 A. I don't recall, uh-uh.

3 Q. He never talked to you about Dave Harvey?

4 A. No.

5 Q. Did he ever tell you about any problem that he had with air
6 traffic control and air traffic control giving some guidance to
7 make a turn and he almost had a mid-air with somebody? Did he
8 ever tell you that story?

9 A. Ara?

10 Q. Um-hum.

11 A. No, I didn't hear that story.

12 Q. Did he ever tell you about a flight he took on -- a charter
13 flight pulling some -- or taking a client out of Coachella and
14 having issues on that flight?

15 A. No.

16 Q. A flight where he had to deal with low fuel and weather
17 minimums?

18 A. We're talking about Ara?

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. No. I never heard about that. It's possible that was before
21 I came to the company, because we really talked about everything,
22 you know?

23 Q. And I know. I wrote it down. I mean, it's a small company.

24 A. And the pilots -- I mean, there's only like six pilots, you
25 know?

1 Q. Well one of the reasons I'm asking about it is certainly to
2 find out what more I can learn.

3 A. So I came to the company in spring of 2018 -- April of 2018.
4 So from that point -- this point, I don't remember talking to him
5 about anything like that.

6 Q. Well, there's a couple of different reasons why I'm looking
7 into this. One of them is I'm curious if those stories were part
8 of the safety culture and the ability to speak freely as in a just
9 culture --

10 A. Sure.

11 Q. -- where you can feel free to talk about mistakes that you've
12 made without fear of reprisal.

13 A. Yeah.

14 Q. One of the ways that leaders can make that happen is by
15 fessing up themselves. So if you're a new employee and I've been
16 here for 10 years but I want you to be able to feel free, you
17 know, I'm going to tell you one of my screw-ups.

18 A. That makes sense, yeah.

19 Q. That way, you know, if they can tell a story to that
20 magnitude, then I know I can. And then that gets the flow going.
21 So that wasn't part --

22 A. Well, that's what our pilot conference meetings were supposed
23 to address every month. I remember last summer I had an issue
24 that I brought up in one of our safety meetings which was
25 regarding passengers, you know, getting off the aircraft. My

1 particular instance was I landed at Pebbly. I was on the ground
2 spinning and our ramper came up to open the sliding door on the
3 left side of the aircraft. It was hot that day. I opened my door
4 just to get air, and I was watching the passengers depart on the
5 left side. And out of the corner of my eye, I saw a passenger
6 climb out of my side and go around. Thankfully, they went around
7 the nose of the aircraft, but the ramper was occupied with the
8 passengers that they were helping to get out of the aircraft.
9 There was nobody over on the right side.

10 So we decided as a rule from that point forward that the
11 pilot would never open his own door on his side until all the
12 passengers had departed the aircraft. That's just one example of,
13 like, you know, did I make a mistake in opening my door? I didn't
14 think so at the time because I really didn't feel like, you
15 know -- and we also --

16 Q. Right, I get it.

17 A. -- we also put in place that the pilot would say upon
18 landing, you know, please stay in your seats until the ramp agent
19 opens your door. So that was one of the best examples of how we
20 can address a situation before something happens and mitigate that
21 risk, right? Because it's all about mitigation.

22 Q. I agree. Exactly. All right. You're flying the AStar.
23 Have you talked to -- or did you talk to Garret or Ara about
24 moving up to the S-76 one day? Was that part of your plan?

25 A. It was left up to the company executives as to whether or not

1 they were going to bump me up. It was always a desire in my mind.
2 I got a text from Whitney probably 3 months ago regarding that.
3 She just texted me and she said, hey, would you be interested in
4 moving up in the S-76? I texted, absolutely.

5 But yeah, it was -- and I did talk to Ara about it. I
6 possibly talked to Garret I think maybe once about it, whether
7 there were plans for me to do that this spring.

8 Q. Cool. What were some of the things that Ara told you? Did
9 he give you any guidance?

10 A. Sure. He encouraged me to spend as much time around the
11 aircraft, around the S-76 as I could on my free time because he
12 said that it's a different platform. It's a much more
13 sophisticated aircraft, and the more you know about the systems,
14 the more comfortable you'll be in the initial training of the
15 aircraft. So I tried to hang around, you know, when they had
16 cowlings as much as possible when I wasn't flying.

17 Yeah, he was always mindful of -- always very encouraging to
18 all the pilots about, you know, if you're sitting around and
19 you're waiting for a flight, crack open a POH. Just go through
20 the aircraft, even the one that you're familiar with. Just keep
21 yourself in the aircraft as far as training and recurrency and
22 limitations just to make sure you know them.

23 Q. That's good advice. Did he ever talk to you about the
24 corporate culture? I mean, if you're going to -- well, let me
25 rephrase that question. Did he ever talk to you about the

1 challenges of carrying the people in the back that he carries?

2 Did he ever talk to you about that?

3 A. In terms of --

4 Q. I'll put it to you this way.

5 A. -- just keeping them safe or --

6 Q. No, I'll put it to you this way. If we're going to move you
7 up into the S-76, you're going to be doing the next level of
8 charter flights, you're going to be doing the flights that OC
9 Helicopters asks us to do. You're going to have some VIP in the
10 back. We need you to be prepared for it and then dah, dah, dah.
11 Did he ever talk to you about any of that?

12 A. Well, no, because I wasn't getting trained up in the S-76
13 yet. But I did go on flights with him in the S-76 as a second
14 pilot. I did also with Garret. So whenever we were together in
15 the S-76, he was always, you know, mindful to basically instruct
16 the platform, you know? When we weren't carrying passengers, I
17 was allowed to fly the aircraft, with both Garret and Ara. So it
18 was great to be able to have that kind of time on some of the dead
19 legs.

20 Q. I agree.

21 A. We tried some approaches. We even did -- I think I shot an
22 instrument approach with Garret where I had the controls when we
23 weren't carrying passengers. That was pretty cool.

24 Q. All right. Let me see what else I got. What about your
25 interaction with David?

1 A. Very good.

2 Q. Yeah?

3 A. We're friends.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. We've been talking to each other fairly regularly this last
6 week, and he's a great pilot, good guy, very, very conscientious.
7 I mean, I do look up to David quite a bit in terms of his
8 awareness of the aircraft, and he would be very particular about
9 airworthiness. He would check to make sure that maintenance
10 records -- as we all do, but I notice that about him. He's super,
11 super aware of, you know, doing a thorough pre-flight and making
12 sure that all the maintenance items are current.

13 Q. And he's got a lot of experience in the S-76 so he can
14 certainly help you out when it comes time --

15 A. As I understand it, yeah.

16 Q. -- with systems and limitations.

17 A. He does.

18 Q. What about David and Ara? Did he talk to -- did David talk
19 to you about the challenges that he had with Ara?

20 A. He never did.

21 Q. Really?

22 A. No, I never got that conversation about -- I never -- I
23 wasn't -- I'm not aware that they had an issue.

24 Q. He never talked to you about his frustrations of being on the
25 charter flights in the S-76 and then being pulled off of the

1 flights, and then slowly working his way back up and trying to get
2 back in Ara's good side to get back where he was at one point?

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

4 Q. Did he ever tell you about him landing in the wrong spot at
5 one of his charter -- with one of his charter flights?

6 A. Concerning Ara flying or --

7 Q. No.

8 A. -- David flying?

9 Q. This is David.

10 A. David, yeah. I heard that -- I heard from Ara once that
11 David had landed because he was short on fuel, which, by the way,
12 can happen to anybody, right?

13 Q. Oh, I've been there.

14 A. So it's always safer to land than push it and try to get to
15 your destination if you have a fuel concern. So --

16 Q. Yeah. I'm a 20-year army helicopter pilot and I've been out
17 in some pretty sparse areas with that same situation. I have to
18 land; I don't have the fuel. I mean, we've got to call the truck
19 and just wait. Good thing we brought some food.

20 A. That was the only flight that I was aware of that I think
21 David had an issue with, and then I believe Ara took over from
22 David in terms of flying that individual.

23 Q. But he didn't -- Ara shared with you that story?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Okay. Did he tell you -- never mind.

1 MR. SALAZAR: Lorenzo, I think that's all I have, sir.

2 MR. LAMAS: Okay.

3 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Fabian. Garret?

4 MR. DALTON: I've got a few questions.

5 BY MR. DALTON:

6 Q. Does the company provide any ground training, Lorenzo?

7 A. Yes, of course.

8 Q. Can you discuss what kind?

9 A. Sure.

10 Q. Is it online training?

11 A. We -- the company, does a training both for the aircraft and
12 for the flight prior to their -- our check rides. I mean, like I
13 mentioned before, usually the check ride is in conjunction with
14 the training from EuroSafety, but the company check airman also
15 will do a review flight and review questions. So we'll sit and
16 we'll do basically an oral check ride too.

17 Q. Let's say -- you mentioned that we do pilot meetings. Let's
18 say you weren't available to be at the pilot meeting or you were
19 on your day off and you had activities with your family, how would
20 you receive communication?

21 A. Well, they would do a full printout or an email of all the
22 subjects that were covered on the pilot meeting and then we would
23 get a copy of that.

24 Q. Okay. You mentioned that Ara flew with you on the rig
25 flights. Did he do your rig training?

1 A. He did.

2 Q. Can you discuss how that training went with him?

3 A. Sure. So the rig training consisted of shooting approaches
4 in -- onto the platform with respect to everything that goes into
5 a confined approach basically. So it's determining wind,
6 determining whether the platform or the area was clear. It was
7 very thorough, and we were also briefed on landing at Huntington
8 Beach at that heliport. We were instructed on having a key to the
9 facility in case we had to shut down there. We were also trained
10 in basically keeping a manifest for all the rig flights because
11 they're very frequent and we could do 20 landings a day. So it's
12 a very thorough manifest and keeping the manifest is up to the
13 pilot, as well as the ramp agent that goes along with us. We have
14 a ramp agent that comes with us on every flight to help load down
15 the passengers. So, yeah, it's very, very thorough and the
16 company --

17 Q. How was Ara's demeanor on those flights?

18 A. Typical of him. You know, very encouraging, very
19 informative. He never wanted to leave anything out and he always
20 asked if I had any questions prior -- or after the flight. We'd
21 have a debrief. He kept going over a lot stuff. Like, he wanted
22 to make sure that I was really confident and ready to do those
23 flights.

24 Q. So if you made an approach to the rig and he didn't like it
25 or -- would he provide additional training?

1 A. I would think so. Yeah, I would think he would do that.

2 Q. Okay. Sometimes you would do -- you mentioned you would be a
3 copilot in the S-76. Did you feel that he was a competent pilot?

4 A. I felt very, very -- how can I say it? Yeah, he was an
5 exceptional pilot. In all the times that I flew with Ara, I've
6 never felt like he didn't know what he was talking about or -- I
7 always felt like he was in command of the helicopter.

8 Q. Have you ever turned down a flight for weather?

9 A. I have not, but that's not to say that I didn't delay a
10 flight.

11 Q. Okay. So on occasion you've delayed a flight because of
12 weather?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Do you feel the company supported your decisions?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. Can you recall a flight last year to Coachella where
17 another pilot terminated the flight because of weather?

18 A. I don't recall.

19 Q. Did you have to drive to Banning to pick up an aircraft?

20 A. Oh, that's right. Yes.

21 Q. Can you discuss what you know of that occasion?

22 A. Yeah, let me think about that. Yeah, there was a flight last
23 year to Coachella that I believe Garret was the PIC, and my
24 recollection is that Garret had to terminate the flight because of
25 weather. Going through the Banning pass, the visibility was very

1 poor. It was in 355-Echo-X-ray. He had to land at Banning, and
2 then I drove from Long Beach to Banning in my pickup truck -- or
3 in my vehicle. Garret took the vehicle back, I believe, to here,
4 Long Beach, and I flew the aircraft from Banning to Coachella to
5 pick up the individuals and transport them, I believe, back to
6 Hawthorne. It's kind of a little hazy, but I believe that's the
7 crux of what it was. The flight gets terminated because of
8 weather and I went to retrieve the aircraft the next morning.

9 MR. DALTON: Okay. That's all I've got. Thank you.

10 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay, thanks Garret.

11 So we'll start our second round of questions. I'll start.

12 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

13 Q. So how were you informed of the accident?

14 A. Well, I was on duty that day. I had a charter scheduled from
15 Hawthorne to Palm Springs that morning. So I was on the -- up in
16 the pilot lounge. I was on the computer. I was looking at the
17 weather and I was in a group text with our media coordinator, Ben
18 Villalobos, and Garret. I believe Garret was on that.

19 MR. DALTON: I wasn't on that.

20 MR. LAMAS: Okay, okay. So it was with Ben. And the client
21 was also on that group text, and after I saw that the weather
22 wasn't VFR going eastbound through Riverside, Ontario, I got on
23 the text and I said, hey, let's give this a little more time. So
24 I knew that Ara had a flight scheduled from John Wayne and I heard
25 him start up on the ramp, and I went -- I walked down the stairs

1 and out and I watched Ara take off eastbound. And I watched him
2 until he went out of sight.

3 Alec Capitano was there with me. We were watching -- we
4 watched him take off. Then I got on the phone with Angel at
5 Queensway and I just said, hey, you know, do you have Ara on
6 Spidertracks, and he said he did, and I said good. And then I
7 hung up the phone and came back upstairs to the pilot lounge and
8 just sat there.

9 And then when I thought Ara's -- I thought he would be
10 departing John Wayne at about 9:15 or so. I called Angel back and
11 I said, do you have Ara? And he goes, yeah, I've got him. He's
12 on his way. I go, okay, cool. And then I hung up with Angel and
13 I let about a half hour or 20 minutes go by, and meanwhile I'm
14 still on the group text and I'm getting a text saying, you know,
15 can we depart at 10? I looked at the weather again. Riverside,
16 Ontario, Chino, they were all like 300 feet vertical visibility
17 and like a mile and a half. I said, no, we're -- let's push this
18 until noon, 12:30. It was supposed to clear up at 12:30.

19 And that was Inland Empire. That was towards Palm Springs.
20 The weather towards Burbank and Van Nuys was better. So when I
21 called Angel back after I finished doing that group text, it'd
22 been about 20 minutes since I talked to him before, and I said,
23 Angel, it's about this flight; I don't know if we're going to make
24 it. He goes, operations have been suspended. And I said, what?
25 He goes, yeah, we can't contact Ara. And I said, oh, shit. I

1 said, oh, no.

2 Q. If you need to take some time, that's fine. We can take a
3 break if you need to.

4 A. It's okay. So that was my day. I found out basically when
5 Angel told me that he couldn't -- he didn't have contact with Ara.

6 Q. You were saying that you were watching the aircraft go
7 eastbound at the time?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Can you remember --

10 A. We were IFR here, so he got Special VFR for his departure.

11 Q. Tell me a little bit about this Special VFR. Is that typical
12 around this?

13 A. It is for us, because a lot of times, you know, it will be
14 IFR here at the airport but it'll be clear down at Queensway. Or
15 clearer, better weather, you know, down there towards the island.
16 So we would request Special IFR [sic] pretty regularly during the
17 wintertime to get out of here to do our first flight. First
18 flight is usually at 8 o'clock in the morning.

19 MR. SWAIM: Special VFR. You --

20 MR. SALAZAR: He said special IFR but --

21 MR. LAMAS: Special VFR, thank you.

22 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

23 Q. Does the company provide any information in any of the
24 manuals about Special VFR?

25 A. It's all in the FARs.

1 Q. Okay. What does the company provide in regards to pilot
2 fatigue training?

3 A. Pilot fatigue training?

4 Q. Yeah. If you were fatigued, could you call fatigue and just
5 say I'm not fit to fly?

6 A. Sure.

7 Q. And how does that -- is that written anywhere?

8 A. It is. It's in the flight risk management -- in our SMS. So
9 one of the subjects that a pilot has to check the box on is
10 whether or not they feel healthy enough to fly. What is their
11 physical condition? Are, you know -- do you feel sick, do you
12 feel a little sick, a lot sick? You know, and if you feel sick
13 and -- or tired, you're supposed to check the box that you have
14 talked to your chief pilot or the director of operations. So it's
15 right in our flight risk management.

16 So it's really up to the pilot to determine whether they're
17 fit to fly, as we're all supposed to, but there is a --
18 absolutely. So if you don't feel right, if you're tired or sick,
19 you've got to talk to your chain of -- you've got to talk to the
20 chain of command, you know? And at that point, they would
21 probably get a pilot to cover for you. So I never felt I was
22 forced to fly or if I wasn't feeling up to it.

23 Q. Other than Kobe, have there been any other pilots at Island
24 Express that discussed with you transporting VIPs? Their
25 experience transporting VIPs?

1 A. Not that I recall.

2 Q. And as far as the conversation that you had about the
3 passenger getting off the aircraft when the ramper opened the
4 door, that was brought up in the safety meeting?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Did you submit any hazard report prior to this safety meeting
7 on that?

8 A. I did not.

9 Q. So the communication was just in the safety meeting about the
10 issue?

11 A. Correct.

12 Q. And what sorts of feedback did you get from company
13 management about that issue?

14 A. We made a company policy change regarding a pilot not opening
15 his door upon landing from that period forward.

16 Q. And there -- to your knowledge, has there been any instances
17 where that policy has been broken?

18 A. No.

19 Q. Okay. You talked about personal minimums. Do pilots --
20 obviously pilots may have different personal minimums. Is there
21 ever a discussion between pilots about their personal minimums?

22 A. Oh, sure, like in passing. You know, when I comment on
23 visibility being an issue for us. I'm trying to recall if I
24 remember anything. I think generally speaking our minimums are
25 fairly the same. You know, I mean, we really have a

1 responsibility to the public in flying safe, and we're never
2 taking an aircraft out unless -- carrying passengers unless it's a
3 maintenance flight or something like that. And we don't do
4 maintenance flights if the visibility is poor. So I can't think
5 of a pilot that would fly in less than the visibility minimums for
6 the charter unless, you know, they felt they could do so in a very
7 safe manner.

8 Q. So you say a very safe manner; what do you mean?

9 A. Like, I haven't flown passengers out of an airport under a
10 Special VFR, and it's just because the circumstances have never
11 presented themselves. But would I if I thought that I was in a --
12 you know, I could do it safely? Yeah, sure. It's legal.

13 Q. So if you could rate the safety culture here at Island
14 Express, 1 being the worst and 10 being the best, what would you
15 rate it?

16 A. I'd rate it 10.

17 Q. And do you feel supported by management on all decisions that
18 you make as a pilot?

19 A. I do.

20 Q. Have there ever been any conversations that you'd heard of
21 with other pilots about things they've brought up and management
22 hasn't engaged with them?

23 A. I can't recall any.

24 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. That's all the questions I had.
25 Fabian?

1 MR. SALAZAR: Yeah, let me just write one thing down before I
2 forget it.

3 BY MR. SALAZAR:

4 Q. Lorenzo, I gave you a couple of questions about Ara. One
5 being about working with controlled airspace and nearly running
6 into somebody. Another one being him having an issue with low
7 fuel and weather. Were those a surprise?

8 A. Well, I wasn't aware of anything regarding Ara. The only
9 flight that I recall that had a fuel issue was the one with David.

10 Q. Would you ever say that Ara occasionally took risks?

11 A. I would never say that.

12 Q. Getting back to the minimums, I can -- in reading through the
13 GOM, I read that you can go down but no lower than 300 feet. And
14 if you're at 300 feet with visibility unlimited and you're going
15 out to Catalina, do you see any great risk there?

16 A. At 300 feet?

17 Q. Um-hum.

18 A. Well, sure. I mean, there is a risk. I mean, 500 feet is
19 better than 300 feet. But I believe that 300 feet, you know, if
20 you're moving along pretty well, you still have the time you need
21 to successfully rotate if you lose an engine and I think that's
22 why the 300 feet minimum is set there.

23 Q. Okay. The book also gives you that latitude for over land.

24 A. Correct.

25 Q. Do you think -- excuse me. Do you think 300 feet over land

1 with visibility unlimited is --

2 A. Actually, no, it's -- we are supposed to maintain 500 feet.

3 Q. But no lower than 300?

4 A. But no lower than 300, yeah. If I'm at 500, that's about as
5 low as I want to go over a city. I wouldn't feel very comfortable
6 at 300 over the city.

7 Q. You just answered my next question. Cruise speed for the
8 AStar, what is it, or about? It doesn't have to be an exact
9 number.

10 A. Limitation is 155, so --

11 Q. 150? But what does it cruise at when you've got it at
12 maximum (indiscernible)?

13 A. We cruise at about 120 knots.

14 Q. Around 120? All right. I'm going to give you a scenario.
15 You're in uncontrolled airspace, you're in the AStar, you're
16 cruising at 120 knots, and you see weather deteriorating. What
17 are you going to do?

18 A. How -- what's my altitude?

19 Q. Let's give you 1,000 feet.

20 A. 1,000 feet, I'm at cruise and I see --

21 Q. Visibility is starting to drop.

22 A. From -- are we VFR? Are you at 3 miles?

23 Q. We started at 3 miles and now it's down to 2 and it looks
24 like it's going down to 1. Now it's getting down to about a half-
25 mile.

1 A. I'm turning around.

2 Q. Okay. Anything else?

3 A. Looking for an airport to land. Either I can go back to
4 where the departure originated from or, depending on weather, I
5 mean, if --

6 Q. Yeah, it's deteriorating. It's not getting any better.

7 MR. SALAZAR: All right, Lorenzo, thank you for your help. I
8 don't have any more questions.

9 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thanks, Fabian.

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

11 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

12 Q. I have one more question here, and it's regarding -- so you
13 mentioned earlier about you had called Angel in the morning and
14 that the weather looked sketchy. You had asked him if he could
15 see some -- the rain. Is there anything else that you're asking
16 him?

17 A. Yes, if he's heard from Pebbly Beach. Because we'll make a
18 call to Pebbly to see what they see so we have kind of both ends;
19 we've got a good idea of what the weather is at the departure and
20 the destination. So it's up to the pilot to assess whether or not
21 he feels that he can make a successful flight going all the way
22 through. That's why we do the weather checks. I'll go out about
23 a mile, mile and a half, 2 miles maybe sometimes to see if -- you
24 know, what's going on.

25 Q. And is that, to your knowledge, a company policy to utilize

1 those types of -- the crane landmarks, is that spelled out
2 anywhere in the manual?

3 A. No, it isn't. It's what we call, you know -- if you're on a
4 golf course, it's called course knowledge. It comes with
5 experience and playing the course. So, I mean, everything isn't
6 like written on a sheet of paper, but through experience,
7 especially Angel and Pete, the guys that have been with the
8 company for years and years and years, they can -- between the
9 communication with Pebbly and their assessment, I trust that.

10 Q. Have you ever contacted Angel and he wasn't available to get
11 the weather updates?

12 A. It's either going to be Angel or Pete, and if they weren't
13 available, I would wait until I got them on the phone.

14 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. All right. I don't have any other
15 questions. Does anybody else have any last questions?

16 MR. DALTON: No.

17 DR. SEVILLIAN: That concludes the interview.

18 Is there any question that we should've asked you that we
19 didn't?

20 MR. LAMAS: I can't think of any.

21 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Any other pilots you'd like us to
22 speak with?

23 MR. LAMAS: You spoke with David?

24 DR. SEVILLIAN: Yep.

25 MR. LAMAS: I can't think of any.

1 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. I really appreciate it, Lorenzo, and
2 that concludes our conversation. Thank you.

3 MR. LAMAS: Thank you.

4 (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 Lorenzo Lamas

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20MA059

PLACE: Long Beach, California

DATE: February 3, 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