

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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Interviews of: ROBERT "BOB" OLIVER, Chief Executive Officer
Air7, LLC - Camarillo Airport

CHERIE HECKER, Chief Operating Officer
Air7, LLC - Camarillo Airport

Virtual

Wednesday,
February 19, 2020

APPEARANCES:

DUJUAN SEVILLIAN, PhD, Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operational Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

GARRET DALTON, Director of Operations
Island Express Helicopters

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I N T E R V I E W

DR. SEVILLIAN: On the record. Again, my name is Dajuan Sevillian. I'm a Human Performance Investigator for the NTSB. Thank you for agreeing to interview with us today.

The NTSB's mission, we investigate airplane accidents, come up with safety recommendations, and we do that to prevent future occurrences of accidents. Both of you are here today because you're experts, and we want to hear from you. As I said before, this will be recorded. However, the transcript will be available in a public docket in the future.

Who -- you're allowed one representative. Who would you like to represent you, Bob?

MR. OLIVER: Yeah, I'm Bob Oliver. I'll be representing Air7, and Cherie -- I'm the CEO, and Cherie Hecker is the COO. She'll be sitting in witness.

DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thank you.

The interview will be -- we'll do two rounds of questions. The questions will come from parties to our investigation. On today's call it will be a Island Express representative. He'll introduce himself here in a moment. But the parties essentially provide us with data and help us with understanding processes as well. So they're a very important part of our investigative process.

At any time during the interview, if there is a need for us to clarify a question, let us know. And if there's something that

1 you don't know, just say you don't know. If you need a break for
2 the interview, let us know, and we'll take a break.

3 So with that being said, let's go around the virtual phone,
4 and we'll start with Fabian for introduction.

5 MR. SALAZAR: Hello, Bob and Cherie. My name is Fabian
6 Salazar. I am conducting the operations portion of the accident
7 investigation for the NTSB.

8 DR. SEVILLIAN: Garret?

9 MR. DALTON: Hi, Bob and Cherie. My name is Garret Dalton,
10 Director of Operations with Island Express Helicopters
11 representing Island Express Operations, and the -- we have
12 expertise operating the Sikorsky S-76.

13 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thank you.

14 So, Bob and Cherie, is there anything you'd like to discuss
15 before we get started?

16 MR. OLIVER: No. I'm fine. Thank you.

17 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay.

18 INTERVIEW OF ROBERT "BOB" OLIVER AND CHERIE HECKER

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: So, Bob, please state for the record your
20 first and last name with spelling.

21 MR. OLIVER: My name is Robert, R-o-b-e-r-t, Oliver,
22 O-l-i-v-e-r. I go by Bob Oliver.

23 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. And what is your position?

24 MR. OLIVER: I'm the CEO of Air7, LLC, on the Camarillo
25 Airport in Camarillo, California.

1 DR. SEVILLIAN: And, Cherie, could you please state your
2 first and last name with spelling?

3 MS. HECKER: Sure. It's Cherie Hecker, and it's spelled
4 C-h-e-r-i-e, H-e-c-k-e-r. And I'm the Chief Operating Officer at
5 Air7.

6 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thank you. All right. So the way
7 we'll do the questioning today, and the -- we'll sort of have a
8 line of questions. We'll start with Bob, and then go from there.

9 So, Bob, could you tell us a little bit about your
10 responsibilities as Chief Executive Officer of Air7?

11 MR. OLIVER: Yes. I'm responsible for the overall financial
12 welfare of the organization. My primary job is to handle all the
13 contracts, all of the vendor negotiations. I sit on the employee
14 hiring board. I have all the traditional banking responsibilities
15 that a CEO would have, to set the direction the company will go
16 in, to set the annual business plan, growth plan, and all the
17 other financial activities of the company go through my office.
18 And then I turn over all the daily operations to Cherie, who is
19 our Operations Officer that runs all the daily operations.

20 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. And you mentioned contracts. What
21 source of contracts are you working with?

22 MR. OLIVER: Well, we also have -- we're a full-service FBO.
23 We also hold a Part 119 Air Carrier Certificate. So as we bring
24 on new aircraft to manage, or to put on our D085, then I work with
25 those contracts with our attorney team to make sure everything is

1 where it needs to be. Our fuel contracts, our training contracts
2 with our training vendors, our banks for the contracts whenever we
3 purchase new aircraft or new acquisitions of any type, that sort
4 of type. That's my primary responsibilities.

5 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. That's the questions I -- so how long
6 have you been doing this, Bob, for this position?

7 MR. OLIVER: Well, in this position with A7 I've been here 3½
8 years, but I've been in this position for over 40 years, including
9 owning my own company in the past.

10 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. And a question for Cherie. Did I say
11 that right?

12 MS. HECKER: Yes.

13 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Can you describe your
14 responsibilities?

15 MS. HECKER: Sure. So like Bob, I've been here for 3½
16 years. I'm responsible for the day-to-day operations of the
17 charter certificate we have, the Part 135 Charter Certificate, as
18 well as the aircraft management part of our business, as well as
19 the FBO. I handle the Human Resources, the HR for the company, as
20 well as the hiring and compliance with FAA.

21 DR. SEVILLIAN: What does the FBO consist of as far as
22 primary things for the FBO? I think someone mentioned fuel --
23 fueling services at first.

24 MR. OLIVER: Yeah. We have a full-service FBO. So,
25 obviously, we're open to the general public. And we have hangar

1 facilities that we have regular tenants that occupy the hangars
2 and transient aircraft that come through that might need ramp
3 space or hangar storage overnight. And we have jet A available as
4 well as have gas for the light aircraft. So we're a full-service
5 FBO in that we rent hangar spaces, we provide fueling services,
6 lav services, potable water, catering services, some light
7 maintenance, and that's about it. That's the FBO side of it.

8 And then, of course, we have the air charter certificate side
9 of it where we do the full-service aircraft management and
10 aircraft chartering.

11 DR. SEVILLIAN: Now, as part of 135 air charter, do you have
12 any interface with the FAA FSDO?

13 MR. OLIVER: Yes, we do. We have -- as most operators would
14 have, we have a primary avionics inspector, a primary maintenance
15 inspector, and a primary operations inspector. So, yes, we have
16 continuous interface with the Van Nuys FSDO.

17 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. So those are the questions I have for
18 now. Thanks, Bob. Thanks, Cherie.

19 Fabian?

20 MR. SALAZAR: Thank you, Dujuan.

21 We're going to get into the actual support for companies like
22 Island Express. Bob, as far as I understand it, Island Express
23 uses Air7 FBO in Camarillo periodically when transporting VIP
24 clients. These few questions I have regard that scenario, and
25 then we'll move on to the next topic. With regards to Island

1 Express and their visits, does anyone contact you prior to Island
2 Express's arrival with their VIP clients?

3 MR. OLIVER: We generally get a call from the pilots when
4 they're coming in, usually about 30 minutes out. We don't
5 regularly know when they're coming. Sometimes, I think on an
6 occasion or two, we might get a call from their dispatch saying
7 they're coming this way. But traditionally when I talk to our
8 folks, they say they usually just get a radio call from the
9 aircraft, says be in about 20, 30 minutes, and he'll be on the
10 ramp for X amount of number of hours and might need some light
11 fueling, and that's about it.

12 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Do they call you on the telephone
13 before, like, the day before, to let you know that they're coming
14 in?

15 MR. OLIVER: I'm not downstairs; I'd have to ask the CSRs.
16 But when I spoke to line service, they said generally it's just a
17 radio call.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Just one second. Other than fuel, are
19 there any other services that you provide to the helicopter or the
20 pilot?

21 MR. OLIVER: No. We have a designated landing spot on the
22 ramp, a 60-foot circle diameter, 60-foot from the center out all
23 the way around, with a big H. They usually come in and either
24 land on the parallel taxiway and then taxi on over to the helipad,
25 or sometimes they just land directly on the helipad. And then

1 they -- the pilot usually waits in the pilot lounge for several
2 hours, and then he watches TV or hangs out, whatever he does. And
3 then they go, and occasionally they'll pick up fuel, but not all
4 the time.

5 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. As far as the customers that he
6 transports through your FBO, do you guys provide the passengers
7 any type of service?

8 MR. OLIVER: If it's requested. Sometimes they'll want us to
9 have a Uber called for or a taxi or they want a rental car. The
10 rental car may be dropped off here by Hertz, and they'll come in,
11 and they'll sign for the rental car and go on. But most of the
12 time, we do have on this airport ramp-site service. So if it's a
13 limo service or something like that, it's allowed on the airport
14 to meet the aircraft ramp site. And so a lot of times we never
15 even see the passengers. They just get out, get in their limo,
16 and they disappear.

17 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the pilot
18 support. Does Air7 have a mission planning room or a room where
19 they have Internet access for the pilots to plan their flights?

20 MR. OLIVER: Yes. We have a full-service flight planning
21 room. We have a crew waiting area where they can get in the
22 recliners, watch TV. We even have a sleep room upstairs, if
23 they're going to be here for any long period of time, where they
24 can sleep and shower up.

25 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. This may sound a little bit redundant,

1 but on a typical mission when the Island Express comes through, is
2 it -- is the only time that you become aware that they're arriving
3 is when they make that 30-minute call?

4 MR. OLIVER: Generally that's correct, yes.

5 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. When they make that call, do they ever
6 call -- say they have 30 minutes out. Do they ever ask about
7 weather in these calls? Do you guys ever provide any type of
8 weather service?

9 MR. OLIVER: No. I don't recall that we do. I don't think
10 too many people ask us that. Even the fixed-wing, when they come
11 in, they generally already have their weather before they get
12 here.

13 MR. SALAZAR: I'm just giving this its due diligence. I
14 would expect them to tune in to ADDS.

15 MR. OLIVER: Sure.

16 MR. SALAZAR: But you never know unless you ask.

17 MR. OLIVER: That's correct.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Let's talk a little bit about the flights on
19 the 25th and the 26th. Did you receive any type of coordination
20 phone calls with regards to those two flights?

21 MR. OLIVER: No. As I recall on the first flight on -- I
22 think that was the 25th.

23 MR. SALAZAR: Yes, sir.

24 MR. OLIVER: I think the first notification they had was a
25 couple -- a limo showed up at the gate, said they were here to

1 meet the helicopter, and that's pretty normal. So they opened the
2 gate, and they let the limos go out on a ramp and wait. And then
3 they got the call from the helicopter. They were several minutes
4 out. And then they came in and landed, and the passengers
5 disembarked and disappeared.

6 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Just one second.

7 On the day of the accident, which was the 26th, the
8 helicopter was originally reported missing. About that time when
9 it was reported missing, the Director of Operations for Island
10 Express, Garret Dalton, called Air7 to check on the helicopter.
11 Bob, did you take that call?

12 MR. OLIVER: No. On the weekend I would have not been here,
13 so it would have been taken by the CSR on duty.

14 MR. SALAZAR: Do you happen to know who that person was?

15 MR. OLIVER: I believe that was Janell Gonzales (ph.).

16 MS. HECKER: Garcia.

17 MR. OLIVER: Garcia. I'm sorry. Janell Garcia.

18 MR. SALAZAR: Thank you. On the day of the accident, were
19 there any activities that you took care of that had anything to do
20 with the aircraft's estimated arrival, or was it a surprise to you
21 that the aircraft was overdue?

22 MR. OLIVER: No. I got a call about 10 o'clock from my
23 General Manager, Tom Magglos, and that's M-a-g-g-l-o-s. He called
24 me at home and said that he had got a call from the CSR that there
25 were a couple limos here waiting for some passengers, and that the

1 helicopter that was due in was overdue, and then they had heard on
2 the news there might have been an accident in Calabasas. And he
3 said, do you think that can be our inbound helicopter? I said,
4 well, what you all tracking as inbound? And then he told me the
5 S-76. I said, well, I hope not, but keep me advised.

6 And then he called me back about 30 minutes later and said
7 that the limos left, and that the helicopter still didn't arrive,
8 and he was gravely concerned. And then I think we all heard it on
9 the news about that time.

10 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. Now these last two questions are only
11 for me to put the issue to bed. There's been no reports or no
12 questions about this, but your fuel that you provide to customers,
13 at any time before the 26th or after the 26th, have any of your
14 customers complained about fuel?

15 MR. OLIVER: No. No. When we heard about the incident --
16 accident, we did exactly as we were instructed to do by our fuel
17 suppliers. We pulled samples out of all the fuel and kept them
18 onsite for their review to make sure the fuel was okay.

19 MR. SALAZAR: Did you guys do any type of testings with that
20 fuel?

21 MR. OLIVER: No. They just told us to pull the samples, and
22 they would take them if they needed them, and they never requested
23 them.

24 MR. SALAZAR: Please hang on to them, if you still do. I
25 doubt that we'll have an interest in them, but if you don't mind

1 hanging on to them for at least a week -- another week, I'll make
2 sure that issue is put to bed.

3 MR. OLIVER: Okay. Thank you.

4 MR. SALAZAR: All right. Dujuan, that's all the questions I
5 have.

6 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right, thanks, Fabian.

7 Garret?

8 MR. DALTON: I've got no questions at this time.

9 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Thank you. So this is the second
10 round of questioning. I don't have any questions. So, Fabian, do
11 you have any questions?

12 MR. SALAZAR: No, I do not. Bob and Cherie, thank you both
13 for agreeing to talk with us.

14 Back to you Dujuan.

15 DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. Garret, nothing else?

16 MR. DALTON: No. I'm good. Thank you so much, Bob and
17 Cherie. I really appreciate it.

18 MR. OLIVER: Thank you. Thank you very much.

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: Yeah. Thanks a lot, Bob, Cherie. And is
20 there anything you have for us before we depart? Any questions
21 that you have?

22 MR. OLIVER: No, not really. I think we're all still in
23 shock.

24 DR. SEVILLIAN: Absolutely. Well, if you have any questions
25 that come up or any things that are still on your mind, let us

1 know. Again, we appreciate it. And we are off the record. Thank
2 you.

3 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

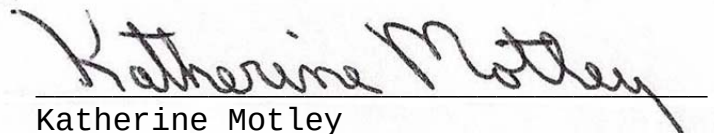
IN THE MATTER OF: SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX
 CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,
 ON JANUARY 26, 2020
 Interviews of Robert "Bob" Oliver
 and Cherie Hecker

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20MA059

PLACE: Virtual

DATE: February 19, 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Katherine Motley", written over a horizontal line.

Katherine Motley
Transcriber