

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: RICHARD "RICK" STEWART WEBB, Founder/Owner
OC Helicopters

Virtual

Wednesday,
February 26, 2020

APPEARANCES:

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

FABIAN SALAZAR, Operational Factors Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(2:01 p.m.)

DR. SEVILLIAN: On the record, 2:01 p.m.

Rick, this is Dujuan Sevillian. I'm with the National Transportation Safety Board. I'm a Human Performance Investigator. Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with us.

The NTSB mission overall is to investigate aircraft accidents and come up with reputable safety recommendations for the industry. You're here today because you're an expert. We want to hear from you on your interface with OC Helicopters.

And on the phone we have parties to our investigation. The parties to the investigation help us with gathering the facts, processing the data, so that we understand each piece of evidence. So we have a representative from the NTSB and an FAA individual that will be on soon, but he is not from the enforcement side, he's just from the safety side. And then we'll have a company representative introduce himself as well.

You're allowed one representative. Who would you like to represent you today?

MR. WEBB: I'll be representing myself.

DR. SEVILLIAN: All right. As I said before, we're recording the conversation, so we cannot offer any confidentiality. The transcript -- from the recording a transcript will be developed, which will be part of the public docket in the future.

1 So how the interview will work is we'll have two rounds. The
2 folks on the phone will ask you some questions. And if at any
3 time there's a question that you do not know, just say you don't
4 know. And if there's a question that needs to be restated, let us
5 know. We'll restate it. If you need a break, let us know, and
6 we'll take a break.

7 So with that being said, let's go ahead and start with
8 introductions on the phone. Fabian?

9 MR. SALAZAR: Hello again, Rick. It's Fabian. I'm with the
10 NTSB. I'm investigating the operations side of the accident.

11 DR. SEVILLIAN: And Garret?

12 MR. DALTON: Hi, Rick. It's Garret Dalton here, Director of
13 Operations with Island Express Helicopters, representing Island
14 Express.

15 DR. SEVILLIAN: And as I stated before, Rick, someone else
16 might be chiming in, and that should be Matt Rigsby from the
17 Office of Accident Investigation, but he is not from the
18 enforcement side. So just in case you hear a chime.

19 And with that being said, any questions before we get
20 started, Rick?

21 MR. WEBB: No. Go right ahead.

22 INTERVIEW OF RICHARD "RICK" STEWART WEBB

23 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

24 Q. So, Rick, for the record, could you please provide us with
25 your first and last name with spelling?

1 A. Richard Stewart, S-t-e-w-a-r-t, Richard Stewart Webb,
2 W-e-b-b.

3 Q. Okay. And what is your position at OC Helicopters?

4 A. Founder/owner.

5 Q. And how long have you been with OC Helicopters?

6 A. Say that again?

7 Q. How long have you been with OC Helicopters?

8 A. This is our 13th year.

9 Q. Okay. Before OC Helicopters, any prior experience in
10 aviation?

11 A. I'll give you about a 4-minute breakdown. I'm a 25-year
12 military man. I started off in the Navy with the helicopter
13 swimmers. Completed two deployments in the 3 years prior to my
14 21st birthday. Switched to the Army. I switched to the Coast
15 Guard, search and rescue. Went back to the Army National Guard
16 with the Blackhawk 15 Tango. 2008, I switched over to the Air
17 Force, received my Air Force Space Wings, 1 Charlie 6.
18 Accomplished my first solo, fixed-wing in 1982, first solo
19 helicopter in '96.

20 Presently a commercial rotocraft pilot with instrument that
21 was issued in 2008. 135 pilot with (indiscernible) 4 years ago.
22 I have 4,100 hours in that. I have over 8,500 commercial flights.
23 As I said, I started OC Helicopters 13 years ago. In 2015, I
24 became a test pilot for electric -- AV-12 aircraft. I presently
25 hold three Guinness World Records for electric aircraft. Just

1 awarded a contract to start selling the first electric
2 helicopters.

3 OC Helicopters has accomplished over -- we've been involved
4 directly or indirectly with over 500 plus 135 charter flights with
5 V or VVIP clients. That's about it.

6 Q. Okay. Thank you. So as far as Island Express is concerned,
7 can you give us kind of a high level understanding on how you work
8 with Island Express as far as getting helicopters and
9 coordination?

10 A. Okay. Well, back up to the beginning. Island Express was
11 brought in to be introduced to Kobe, Inc. because Kobe, Inc. --
12 basically Mr. Bryant loved our work ethic. He would see us
13 working prior to his flight from another operator to go to
14 practice and would see us working in the evenings after his games.
15 He approached us. We told him we did not have a 135 certificate
16 at the time. Approached us the second year, still did not have a
17 135 certificate. The third year we said, look, we'll go find
18 someone that can make this work.

19 And we chose Island Express because their ethics were similar
20 to ours; parallel. Island Express was vetted out, and we started
21 working with Island Express. OC Helicopters acts similar to a
22 flight operation for the company of Kobe, Inc. And when any
23 third-party companies other than Island Express came in to
24 compete, Kobe, Inc. had us vet them out, and we still came back to
25 Island Express.

1 If Island -- if Kobe, Inc. needed an aircraft for Mr. Bryant
2 or anyone else, they would call Patti Taylor. She was in charge
3 of organizing and getting everything put together. She would
4 organize the ground transportation, if needed, from Newport Beach
5 to the airport and ground transportation needed on the opposite
6 end of where the helicopter was going. Occasionally, she would
7 also provide information to Kobe's security detail, and the flight
8 would work flawlessly. There was always texts within the drivers,
9 within Patti, and within the pilots and within the owner of Island
10 Express.

11 All aircraft and ground movement was continuously monitored
12 so that Patti could inform Kobe, Inc's people and make it work
13 seamlessly with the security details if needed to be. Most of the
14 time, Mr. Bryant didn't even know what airport he was going to.
15 He was just kind of hop up in the helicopter and be driven to his
16 destination and returned back. That's it.

17 Q. Okay. As far as OC Helicopters is concerned, do you provide
18 weather updates to any of the VIPs, or in this case to the pilots
19 of Island Express?

20 A. We would discuss weather prior to, the day of, as the days
21 are happening, and we would discuss alternative routes or better
22 routes to go to. I personally would text the pilot and give my
23 opinion. Or when they were in flight, as you know, it can get
24 quite busy in the helicopter, we would -- I would personally, as a
25 courtesy, give the report from either the driver on the ground or

1 the latest ADDS hit.

2 Q. Okay. Did you have any communication and conversation with
3 Ara the day prior to the accident and/or the day of the accident?

4 A. Absolutely.

5 Q. Okay. What was your conversation the day prior to the
6 accident?

7 A. There was the text floating around generated by Patti with
8 everyone involved, driver, pilot -- I'm not sure if Garret was on
9 that one -- and Whitney, asking if the weather was going to be
10 okay. Morning of, weather reports were going back and forth
11 between Ara and me. It may have been outside of the normal text.
12 I had conferred that the flight to John Wayne was doable, and that
13 if he waited 15 minutes, I would actually be on the ground and
14 could give him an update from my point of view.

15 The last communication that I gave regarding weather was 15
16 minutes after -- 20 minutes after the accident because the latest
17 ADDS came up for Camarillo.

18 Q. Okay. And when you talk about, is the mission doable based
19 on the weather, what source of information are you basing that off
20 of?

21 A. Boots on the ground. Drivers, myself. He would actually --
22 you know, the pilot, Ara, had -- he uses ForeFlight. I also use
23 ForeFlight. And with communication for that, we had agreed that
24 it was blue.

25 Q. And the day prior to the accident, what was the decision on

1 the weather on the day prior?

2 A. I know the weather was reported worse. On that day, he told
3 me the weather was blue.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. I say -- when I say blue, I mean blue by the reference to the
6 ForeFlight, not blue like a blue sky.

7 Q. Okay. From the ForeFlight. Is that -- that's a system, an
8 app system that you can access from any device? Such as a --

9 A. Blue in that -- when I mean blue not in blue skies, I mean
10 blue as in marginal VFR.

11 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. All right. So those are the questions
12 I have for now.

13 Fabian?

14 MR. SALAZAR: Yes.

15 Hey, Rick. Number one, congratulations on those records.
16 That sounds pretty cool.

17 MR. WEBB: Yeah. They're trying to electrocute me. Thank
18 you for that.

19 MR. SALAZAR: Yes.

20 BY MR. SALAZAR:

21 Q. Hey, just so we can be very clear, I'm not going to ask you
22 questions. I'm going to ask you just to share with me your
23 conversations, and I'd like you to go back to -- there were two
24 flights: Ara flew a flight on the 25th from John Wayne to
25 Camarillo and back, and then the next day was the accident flight.

1 So would you please, from beginning to end, share with us, in
2 as much detail as you can, the conversations you had with Ara for
3 the weather and anything else about the flights, like takeoff
4 times or whatever, on the 25th. And then, then tell us about the
5 26th. So let's start with the 25th. And I'm going to be quiet
6 now. Just let us know what you can tell us.

7 A. So the 25th, I wasn't involved that much in the weather
8 because he said it was not a problem. On the 26th, I personally
9 was watching on the hour every hour about 5 minutes after. That's
10 when the ADDS report comes out. Was monitoring it.

11 And I'm not sure what time the first text went out in the
12 morning, but it was looking to clear around 10 o'clock. And I
13 told Ara that I agreed with the weather in referring to John Wayne
14 and that I would be there shortly, 15, 20 minutes out. And I --
15 he knows I do that because I come from the south, Orange County,
16 and I come over the top of the hill that's east of the airport,
17 and you could see out. And I texted it to him that it was a do --
18 it was a good flight plan.

19 While we were waiting for Mr. Bryant to show up, we always
20 say hi to the rest of the guests. And while we were at the
21 counter, we were looking at the latest ADDS. You must know that
22 we joke around a lot because of the power performance of aircraft.
23 I will always give him my point of view to go, and he always will
24 give me his point of view to go. And sometimes they're the same,
25 and sometimes they're not.

1 While we were waiting for Mr. Bryant to show up, I suggested
2 a blue flight. He said that blue flight was John Wayne,
3 (indiscernible), Long Beach, Santa Monica, Malibu Pass, and then
4 just about where that accident -- that was the route that I
5 suggested. He said he was going to go up and around. And he
6 waved his finger across the map on his phone and indicated that he
7 was going to Dodger Stadium, around Burbank, and was going to take
8 the 118 around.

9 On ForeFlight you can have a color image, and it shows where
10 the clouds are at. And he indicated that he was going to be above
11 and around those clouds.

12 And when time had gone by, in the office I found out from
13 Patti that he was on a hold prior to Burbank. And I don't wear a
14 watch, so I didn't know really what time it was. Patti was
15 extremely concerned and calling her -- the drivers saying, is the
16 helicopter there? Where is the helicopter?

17 A little after 10, I looked at the ADDS at Camarillo, and I
18 gave whatever it was, 1700. I'm not sure what it was. I'd have
19 to look it up. 1700, whatever it was. I texted it to him. I
20 thought that he would have wanted that information so that he can
21 continue flying up and around what he indicated. And that was the
22 last weather that was involved.

23 Q. Thank you, Rick. So you did a phone text to him of that last
24 weather that you got from CMA?

25 A. I did. It was a few minutes after the top of the hour.

1 Q. With regards to phone texts, is he -- if you send him a text,
2 does he usually send a reply back even if he's in the air?

3 A. Not always.

4 Q. Okay. Not always. So do you -- I mean, on any given flight,
5 text messaging with him, does it occur often, rarely? How would
6 you describe it?

7 A. No. It wouldn't -- he text messages when he's landing. He
8 would say he's landing, and the passengers are in the -- there's
9 passengers in the car. And so there's a series of texts that
10 everyone gets involved. Usually he will --

11 Q. Right. Right.

12 A. The first text is, 3 minutes till takeoff -- or the actual
13 term would always be, 3 minutes till wheels up. And then the next
14 text you would normally get would be, I'm on the ground.

15 Q. Okay. So you -- your purpose of sending him that text was
16 for him to get it after he landed?

17 A. No. That last text was because it was, it was -- the weather
18 had gotten even better at Camarillo than it was earlier.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. And I thought, I thought it would be good for him to know.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. The crash had already happened 20 minutes prior.

23 Q. Where -- just one second. I'm a little bit -- there I am.

24 Okay. When you -- when Ara showed up and -- at John Wayne,
25 he shut the aircraft down and came inside and chatted with you,

1 right?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. Okay. And that's where you talked about the flight route and
4 the direction he said he was going to go with his iPad?

5 A. Correct.

6 Q. Okay. What was his demeanor like then?

7 A. He was fine. He was fine. He was just regular Ara. He was
8 doing his -- he'd made his decision on which way he was going to
9 go, and we were just waiting for him. The rest of the passengers
10 were there. Standard, everyday flight.

11 MR. SALAZAR: Okay. That's all I have right now, Rick.
12 Thank you.

13 MR. WEBB: Okay.

14 DR. SEVILLIAN: Thanks, Fabian.

15 Garret?

16 MR. DALTON: Hi, Rick. I don't have any questions right now.
17 Thank you.

18 MR. WEBB: Okay, Garret.

19 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Let's start out second line of
20 questionings.

21 BY DR. SEVILLIAN:

22 Q. I'm just trying to verify this, Rick. You were talking
23 about -- you used the phrase "up and around the clouds." Is that
24 correct?

25 A. That's correct. So it was blue from John Wayne to Camarillo,

1 and it was red downtown Burbank, Van Nuys. If you had the app up
2 and running and had the color on, it shows where the clouds are
3 at. And he swiped his finger that he was going to go east and
4 north of the clouds. At no time did he imply or show that he was
5 going to go in the clouds. He was going the east -- the safest
6 route was east and north of the clouds.

7 Q. All right. So on the app, on the ForeFlight, it was blue
8 from John Wayne to Camarillo, and then it was --

9 A. Right.

10 Q. Then it was red from John Wayne -- Burbank to Van Nuys?

11 A. Incorrect.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. It was red, it was red downtown L.A., Burbank, and Van Nuys.

14 Q. Okay. Got you.

15 A. It was blue or green at John Wayne. I wasn't even -- I
16 didn't really look at John Wayne because we could see it was fine.
17 It was beautiful there.

18 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. That's the questions I had for right
19 now.

20 Fabian, anything else?

21 MR. SALAZAR: No.

22 Rick, thanks for your time, and I have no more questions.

23 MR. WEBB: Okay.

24 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay. Garret, anything to ask?

25 MR. DALTON: No. I've got no questions.

1 Thank you so much for your time, Rick.

2 MR. WEBB: Okay. No worries.

3 DR. SEVILLIAN: Okay.

4 MR. WEBB: You guys know how to reach me.

5 DR. SEVILLIAN: Yes. Thanks, Rick.

6 MR. WEBB: Yes, sir.

7 DR. SEVILLIAN: Appreciate it. Thanks. And that will
8 conclude the interview. Off the record at 2:24 p.m. Eastern.
9 Thank you.

10 (Whereupon, at 2:24 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

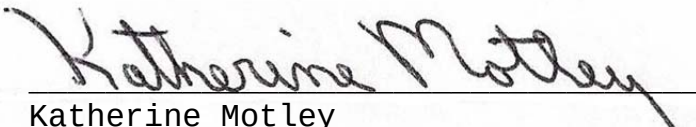
IN THE MATTER OF: SIKORSKY S76B HELICOPTER N72EX
 CRASH NEAR CALABASAS, CALIFORNIA,
 ON JANUARY 26, 2020
 Interview of Richard "Rick" Stewart Webb

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA20MA059

PLACE: Virtual

DATE: February 26, 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.


Katherine Motley
Transcriber