

DCA23LA096

OPERATIONAL FACTORS

Attachment 2 Dispatcher Interview

January 26, 2024

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of:

*
*
*
*
*
*

HAWAIIAN AIRLINES AIRBUS A330
ACCIDENT NEAR KAHULUI, HAWAII
ON DECEMBER 18, 2022

Accident No.: DCA23LA096

* * * * *

Interview of: ROBERT THOMPSON, Dispatcher
Hawaiian Airlines Airbus 330

Tuesday,
January 10, 2023

APPEARANCES:

WARREN ABRAMS, Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

EDDIE MILLER, Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

KENT FUJIMOTO, Director
Airbus Standards, Hawaiian Airlines

BRETT ECKELBERG, Labor Relations Counsel
Air Line Pilots Association

CHRISTINA GORNAIL, General Counsel
Transport Workers Union

JOHN CRABBE,
Air Line Pilots Association

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>I N D E X</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Robert Thompson:		
By Mr. Abrams		6
By Mr. Miller		15
By Mr. Fujimoto		18
By Mr. Crabbe		18
By Mr. Abrams		20
By Mr. Miller		21

I N T E R V I E W

(1:04 p.m.)

MR. ABRAMS: I'm Warren Abrams, I'm an air safety investigator with the NTSB. And, we're just here today to try to figure out what happened and you are part of the process, since you were the dispatcher on duty at the time of the turbulence.

We don't assign blame, point fingers. We're gathering information for our safety report. And that's all it is. There's nothing punitive. If we ask a question and you don't understand it, ask for clarification and we'll certainly repeat it.

I don't know, is a perfectly legitimate answer if you don't know the answer to the question. So, don't feel you're under the gun and just go with it as we do.

As part of the investigation, we have team set up, and we're here at the table today. And, we'll introduce ourselves to you again. Eddie, if you'll take the floor.

MR. MILLER: Robert, I'm Eddie Miller, from the FAA, the headquarters in Washington, D.C. I'm a member of AVP 100 which is the accident investigation division and accident prevention division. I'm an aviation accident investigator. But, I just wanted to reassure you here that this is a safety investigation and not an enforcement action, and anything that you say here cannot be used against you in any enforcement action at all. All right? It's pure safety. We're trying to find out, you know, it's a wide array of all different things that we're looking at,

1 and you have a small part in this. And, we just want to hear your
2 story so that if there's any lessons that we can learn from any of
3 this whole event that can prevent this from happening ever, ever
4 again, you know, that's what we want to do. You know, I have a
5 lot of cabin safety inspectors at headquarters that are trying to
6 always be progressive in safety. And, we also have dispatcher
7 inspectors that are there also. And they're looking at how can we
8 prevent things from happening. We're not in the business of
9 swinging heavy hammers at people all day long. That's not the way
10 we should be doing business.

11 We just want to get to -- find out what happened. Just want
12 to hear your story and go from there. And I'll introduce you to
13 Kent, here.

14 MR. FUJIMOTO: Kent Fujimoto, officially director of airbus
15 standards, the company rep for this.

16 MR. THOMPSON: Okay.

17 MR. CRABBE: John Crabbe. I'm the ALPA Ops team member.

18 MR. ABRAMS: Can you speak up please, John?

19 MR. CRABBE: Yeah. John Crabbe. I'm with the Alpa Ops team.

20 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you. So, Robert, yesterday we had some
21 issues with recording interviews. And, since we haven't gotten
22 started yet, we don't have you on record, but, do you have any
23 objection to the recording of this interview.

24 MR. THOMPSON: As long as I have the ability to review, as we
25 were discussing earlier, I'm okay with going forward.

1 MR. ABRAMS: All right. That is your opinion, or, decision?

2 MR. THOMPSON: Yes.

3 MR. ABRAMS: I'm going to move these recorders a little bit
4 closer to you and just ask everyone to speak up, please.

5 You ready to get started? All right.

6 BY MR. ABRAMS:

7 Q. Just some general questions here at first. Robert, if you
8 would, state your full, legal name and spell your last name.

9 A. Robert Louis Thompson. And spell Thompson with T-h-o-m-p-s-
10 o-n.

11 Q. Robert, how old are you?

12 A. Thirty-six.

13 Q. And what is your job title here at Hawaiian?

14 A. Aircraft dispatcher.

15 Q. And, when did you get hired? What's your date of hire here
16 at Hawaiian?

17 A. February 29, 2016.

18 Q. So, did you have your dispatcher's license when you got
19 hired?

20 A. Yes. I did.

21 Q. How long have you been a dispatcher -- let me back up, I'll
22 just say it this way, when did you get your dispatcher's license?

23 A. In early 2011.

24 Q. Approximately how many other airlines did you work for prior
25 to Hawaiian?

- 1 A. Two other carriers.
- 2 Q. Was that role a dispatcher role?
- 3 A. Yes.
- 4 Q. Do you have a pilot's certificate?
- 5 A. Yes.
- 6 Q. Do you fly much?
- 7 A. Not as of late, because I have family duties. But, before I
- 8 did.
- 9 Q. What kind of ratings do you have?
- 10 A. I have my commercial multi instrument, CFI, AA.
- 11 Q. Prior to this and the family, were you actively working your
- 12 CFI certificate?
- 13 A. I was, before becoming a dispatcher.
- 14 Q. Do you miss it?
- 15 A. I do it, on occasion, like, just flying in a smaller plane.
- 16 Q. Do you still maintain a current medical certificate?
- 17 A. Yes.
- 18 Q. Do you have any limitations on it?
- 19 A. No.
- 20 Q. Good. You're not wearing glasses, do you wear contact
- 21 lenses?
- 22 A. Um-hmm.
- 23 Q. Continuing, how many dispatchers would you estimate you have
- 24 here at Hawaiian?
- 25 A. I think it's changing all the time -- I would say

1 approximately 55 to 60.

2 Q. Staffed 24 hours a day?

3 A. Yes. For the transpac operations.

4 Q. Inter-island, it's not staffed 24 hours?

5 A. Yeah. Because they don't operate 24 hours so they don't do
6 that.

7 Q. What's your shift time? When do you start and when do you go
8 home these days?

9 A. Right now I start at 1400, which is 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.
10 which is 2200.

11 Q. Does that change? I mean, do you bid this shift, or --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. And, how often does the bid come out so you could possibly
14 change shifts if you wanted to?

15 A. They have an annual bid process that we go through.

16 Q. Always get your first choice?

17 A. Not when you don't have seniority.

18 Q. So, how is your seniority?

19 A. It's mid-grade.

20 Q. Are there different levels in dispatch here at Hawaiian?
21 When I say that, can you dispatch any and everything?

22 A. No. We have transpac operations which go ETOPS into other
23 regions, like, outside of Hawaii. Then, we have inter-island
24 operations which is just in the -- between here and the other
25 islands of Hawaii. That's a different operation. I don't touch.

1 Q. Do you interact very much with the other transpac
2 dispatchers?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Do you interact with maintenance very much?

5 A. Yeah. We have a maintenance controller, which we go to from
6 time to time, depending on whatever issue may arise.

7 Q. How is the -- if a crew calls, has a maintenance issue, how
8 do you get notified that the crew wants to talk to the
9 maintenance?

10 A. The pilots most times, calls me. And then, I'll conference
11 him in with the maintenance control.

12 Q. Is that the ACAR, SATCOM? How do you communicate with the
13 crew? How is the link established between the crew and
14 maintenance?

15 A. Well, it depends on where they are. If they're at the gate,
16 they'll use their phone. If they're out of the blocks, they have
17 a VHF radio they can tune in to call me. If they're outside of
18 Hawaii's radio reception, they'll use SATCOM or ACARS. So,
19 there's multiple avenues, just depending on where they are, then
20 we use different avenues.

21 Q. Does the 330 have a SATCOM to communicate with you if they
22 needed to?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Robert, tell us about the event. And, let me kind of tee it
25 up here a little bit.

1 Tell us about your first contact with the crew advising them
2 there was some weather in the area, their route of flight, and
3 tell us what kind of weather you were telling them they may
4 anticipate.

5 A. It's basically like what I had on my report. I was letting
6 them know about the update on the SIGMET because the previous
7 dispatcher had let them know about the SIGMET for the severe
8 thunderstorms. And then I was updating them on that update on
9 those thunderstorms. But, I also thought, because there was the
10 turbulence out there, as far as moderate for the 717 and 737, I
11 put that also in the ACARS message that I disseminated to them.
12 But, other than that, I'd just been monitoring the progress.

13 Q. How many planes were you working that day in addition to
14 Hawaiian 35?

15 A. I don't know exactly off the top of my head, but I'd say
16 approximately five to seven.

17 Q. I know you didn't create the flight plan for this particular
18 flight. Approximately how many flight plans do you generate
19 during your shift?

20 A. It depends what region I'm working. Sometimes, longer
21 flights to like, Australia, have fewer flights because the task
22 load is higher. The West coast flights, like Bay area, have a
23 higher amount of flights. So, it just depends on what region.

24 Q. Let's put you for the sake of discussion, in the Bay region.
25 So, how many would you generate?

1 A. It'd be, I'd say about seven to nine, depending on the day.

2 Q. Is seven to nine considered a high level? Or, about average?
3 What's the -- how does that break down, just about normal?

4 A. It's normal. I mean, it could be busy on a bad weather day.
5 But, on a good day, it's pretty good.

6 Q. How is the track selected? In other words, you're generating
7 the flight plan, let's -- I know you didn't generate 35, but --
8 how do they pick the track for flight 35 on the day of the event?

9 A. In our process, I would select a track based off of what
10 weather is out there. And then, time and route. Like, if there's
11 not much for weather, I'll just base off time and route and fuel
12 savings. But, if it's -- if there's weather, obviously, I'll try
13 to see what I can do to steer around it or whatnot.

14 Q. Did anything stand out to you about the weather that you were
15 sending the crew? I realize there was a SIGMET out there, and,
16 was it anything special? Just kind of routine SIGMET, or --

17 A. There was a thunderstorm SIGMET, which we do get from time to
18 time, but I saw the airplanes flying in and out of the airspace in
19 that area, so I didn't have concern.

20 Q. How do you track the flights that you're tracking. I mean,
21 you have a computer screen, I mean, is a big monitor up on the
22 wall? How do you track your flights?

23 A. We have a system on our A10 OPS SPEC that allows us to use in
24 tracking. And, that's our way to visually see where they are. We
25 also monitor their fuels through position reports that we get.

1 Q. Do the position reports come automatically via SATCOM or,
2 it's not ACARS, automatically via SATCOM?

3 A. Yeah. It goes through some channels into a OPS COM which is
4 where we get all ACARS messages.

5 Q. It comes that way. Okay. How did you -- how were you
6 notified that the aircraft had a significant turbulence event?

7 A. First I heard about it was when they called me directly on
8 SATCOM.

9 Q. And, what do you recall about that conversation?

10 A. He called me and he said he encountered significant
11 turbulence and that there was three flight attendants that were
12 injured and that they'll be on the ground -- as I had in my
13 report -- I think it was 2049 zulu, so there's going to be -- he
14 kept it pretty short because he had other things going on. And
15 then I concluded the conversation.

16 Q. You mentioned he encountered significant turbulence. Was
17 that his words, or --

18 A. That's his words.

19 Q. -- that was his words. Okay. Did you do anything at that
20 point in time?

21 A. Yes, I did. I went to the manager on duty, which SOC MOD,
22 and they're the ones that disseminate that they, or they're the
23 ones that would let the medical -- or they are the ones that
24 called the medical office to get the medical personnel to meet the
25 airplane.

1 Q. Are you advised on how many medical personnel met the
2 airplane?

3 A. I don't get advised on that.

4 Q. Do you have any idea about the response time when they call
5 for medical assistance, about how long does it take them to get to
6 the airport? Do you have any idea?

7 A. I don't have that information.

8 Q. How often do you go through recurrent training as a
9 dispatcher?

10 A. Every year.

11 Q. Every year, every twelve months?

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. When is your month for training?

14 A. I'm actually doing recurrent right now.

15 Q. Did I get you out of recurrent?

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. I'll try to be brief, but, I know you're anxious to get back
18 into class, so. Do they cover a weather topic in recurrent?

19 A. Yep.

20 Q. And, tell us what they discuss about the weather topics in
21 recurrent.

22 A. It's kind of open, so, like, we can offer, like, encounters
23 we've had throughout the year to kind of like -- just
24 clarifications and how things are done now, whatnot, so. But
25 then, we go over some of the bigger policies like the severe

1 turbulence policies and that kind of stuff.

2 Q. What is your severe weather turbulence policy?

3 A. It's to, if there's any known severe turbulence, to avoid it.
4 Or don't go through it at all. But, if there's forecasted severe
5 turbulence, it's between me and the pilot to see if there's other
6 things out there that says that that is no, not indeed the case.
7 So, let's say if there's a severe forecasted turbulence and
8 there's only -- of light turbulence from a 172 and that's it, then
9 it's very much so that would probably not have any issues with
10 turbulence, because they're just port reports but they're not
11 jiving with severe that SIGMET has.

12 Q. You think it looks pretty good? If a flight is deviating
13 around weather, can you tell it on your screen?

14 A. Yeah. I mean, it's more granular, because it's looking over
15 such a wide area, but, I can, for the most part, see them and the
16 breadcrumbs from the situation display.

17 Q. So, you're display displays weather?

18 A. It displays weather and you can see the airplane and its
19 route.

20 Q. And, can I presume you can increase and decrease the scale?

21 A. Yeah.

22 Q. Robert, we've got three other guys sitting here at the table
23 that are anxiously awaiting to ask some questions there.

24 I'm going to turn it over to Eddie, let him ask some
25 questions.

1 We do usually go around the table twice with questions, so
2 we'll start, and if you need to take a break, just let us know and
3 we'll take a break.

4 BY MR. MILLER:

5 Q. I would like to just, you know, one, thank you for giving us
6 this information. And, the other thing is one of my questions I'm
7 going to ask, is I kind of want you to tell me the story from when
8 you got the message from them, and then, like, what -- just, you
9 know, a quick synopsis about what was going on. Just, what were
10 your duties and who were you calling, and things like that. I
11 just want to hear the sequential about that, you know.

12 A. Okay.

13 Q. Play it back for me.

14 A. Um-hmm. So, I -- from the time the incident occurred?

15 Q. Correct.

16 A. So, when the incident occurred, shortly thereafter, he called
17 me on SATCOM, and advised me about the incident. And I was
18 receiving the information, copying it, writing it down, all the
19 information. See where they are, like at moment in time, on that
20 situation display on then tracking. And then also, once I got the
21 information, asked him if he had any other things he needed, and
22 then he was good. So, then I completed the SATCOM call. I let
23 the MOD know about the incident. That there was three injured
24 flight attendants and that they need medical personnel upon
25 arrival. That's all the information the pilot had at the time,

1 so. I left at that. I was watching the progress and then four
2 minutes later, he called me again on SATCOM to update me with the
3 count of the injured personnel, and there was, he said, about ten
4 to twelve. He didn't have an exact number. So, I was just
5 getting whatever information he gave me, and I just gave that
6 information to the MOD once I got off the call.

7 He did tell me that he declared emergency and that he had
8 forwarded the PIREP about the severes to ATC, so that way they can
9 help others steer clear of that.

10 After that, I let the MODs know about the updated count of
11 injured personnel, and then I had a couple of flights that I was
12 planning to go out shortly thereafter, so, because of that I
13 wanted to focus on that flight. So, I disseminated my flights I
14 had at the time to a fellow colleague that didn't have as much --
15 didn't have much flights to worry about, so then given those
16 flights to her. Then, after that, I was monitoring the progress
17 of the flight as it was going in.

18 Once it got on the ground, I ACARS the pilot to say can you
19 let me know more details once she gets in the gate. And then, he
20 called me after that just to give me a synopsis of what happened
21 on his -- of what he had happened. From there, I was trying to
22 copy down, you know, things that I was doing at the time and
23 trying to fill out a report. While things were fresh memory, get
24 it on paper, so that way, because I know things get lost in time.

25 After that, I let my superior know about the incident. So,

1 then the proper authorities could be addressed.

2 Q. And how long were you on duty until that happened?

3 A. I was on duty at 0600, which is 6:00 a.m., and then incident
4 occurred shortly after 10:00, so it was four hours.

5 Q. So you came on at 6:00 and the event happened at 10:00 a.m.
6 your time.

7 A. Yeah.

8 Q. How many days prior had you been working?

9 A. I don't know off the top of my head. Our days rotate so I
10 have to look at it to know.

11 Q. Were you tired?

12 A. No. I had a good eight hours rest.

13 Q. From the time that you were notified that they were having
14 this problem, until the time that they landed, about how much time
15 was that?

16 A. Approximately, I would say half an hour.

17 Q. In relative position from here, from Honolulu, were they,
18 like, how far away were they east of here?

19 A. I'd say west of DENNS

20 -- so they did their last report at the far boundary of Honolulu,
21 so they were in contact with probably Honolulu at the time, so it
22 would be west of DENNS

23
24 , is what I remember.

25 Q. Do you know how far that is? I'm not familiar. 400 miles?
300 miles?

A. Yeah, about that.

1 Q. I think I'm good with the questions. Kent?

2 BY MR. FUJIMOTO:

3 Q. Robert, was there any PIREPs for turbulence on that route or
4 in that area?

5 A. In the area that they encountered? No. I only remembered
6 seeing moderate PIREPs of, from a 717 and a 737 that was just east
7 of Oahu, about -- like around Molokai. That was the only area
8 that I saw turbulence, moderate. And that's what I disseminated
9 to the crew. I just wanted to let them know, hey, there's some
10 turbulence out there. That's all I had at the time. That's the
11 only one, that's on the National Weather Service.

12 Q. Okay. Great. Thank you.

13 BY MR. CRABBE:

14 Q. Regarding the first SATCOM report, you said you reported
15 significant turbulence. What did you take that as -- we have
16 significant turbulence, what was that?

17 A. I know it's not really a word that would be definitive as far
18 as like, moderate and severe, or light, that we normally go by.
19 But, with inter personnel, I was going on the assumption that it
20 would be significant -- enough that people were getting injured,
21 probably wouldn't be severe in that there's going to be things
22 that have to be looked at.

23 Q. Who were you speaking to on the SATCOM? Was that captain or
24 was that the first officer?

25 A. I'm not sure exactly who. They didn't say exactly who was on

1 the call.

2 Q. How was their, I guess, demeanor? Was it -- could he tell it
3 was a bad situation, were they --

4 A. They seemed, I mean, for a situation like that, you know,
5 concerned. But, professional and they were calm. They weren't
6 agitated.

7 Q. Sure. As Warren mentioned, I guess you weren't the first
8 dispatcher, you were second.

9 A. From the plane purpose, yeah.

10 Q. During the, I guess, you turnover, was that, was the briefing
11 discussed, that one was briefed, or how do you -- I'm not sure of
12 your, I guess, your procedures when you guys switch dispatchers.
13 Is there, like a turnover?

14 A. Yeah. We have a turnover in-person that we --

15 Q. Got it. Okay. And then, they just jumped in and continued
16 on?

17 A. Yeah. Once we get briefed on all of the important,
18 significant stuff, then, once I feel knowledgeable of everything
19 that I think would be met to the same standards as he had when he
20 was on duty, then that's when I would take the desk.

21 Q. I know Kent asked if there's any PIREPs in that area. How
22 about later that day or evening? Did we get any PIREPs or events
23 that occurred?

24 A. I was off duty shortly after the shift, or, after the
25 incident, so, at the time, I only saw that Pilot Report that our

1 plane flight 35 had that had severe. But, other than that, I
2 didn't see any other severe.

3 Q. Did you hear anything later that day or evening --

4 A. Of what? Sorry?

5 Q. -- of any type of turbulence after that event?

6 A. I mean, there was those Pilot Reports of moderate that I saw,
7 but, that was --

8 Q. Was that later in the day? After the incident?

9 A. There was just -- all I can recall is the ones I saw.

10 Q. I see. Okay. Thanks, appreciate it.

11 That's all I've got.

12 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you, John.

13 BY MR. ABRAMS:

14 Q. Robert, you mentioned the initials MOD. I'm not familiar
15 with who the MOD is down there in dispatch. Can you tell me who
16 that is please?

17 A. Manager On Duty. They're basically the ones that coordinate
18 like, the airplane swaps and they do a lot more calls to the
19 stations and to medical personnel, or stuff like that. So, that's
20 something that I have to personally do. I don't know all their
21 job description 100 percent, but, they're the go-to person for a
22 lot of the station related stuff.

23 Q. How many MODs are on duty at the time -- at one time?

24 A. I don't remember how many they had on duty at that time, but
25 I think there was about two.

1 Q. Would you consider that a normal compliment?

2 A. I don't know -- that would be something that you would have
3 to ask them, because I don't know.

4 Q. Okay. That's fine. Approximately how many dispatchers are
5 on duty at any given time? And I realize time of day, but, what
6 are the highs and lows?

7 A. Average, we usually staff to seven desks.

8 Q. And that is transpac?

9 A. Yeah. That's transpac only.

10 Q. Yes. Okay. Good. In your recurrent, do they give you any
11 training on what the pilots are looking at on their iPads?

12 A. I -- we don't have iPads in our office, so, we don't -- I
13 think there's one iPad that we could access, but we don't have it
14 usually.

15 Q. When you send them an ACARS message, it strictly goes to the
16 airplane, it does not go the iPad in addition to the airplane. Is
17 that correct?

18 A. That's correct. It just goes to the airplane's system.

19 MR. ABRAMS: Robert, that's all the questions I have right
20 now. Eddie?

21 BY MR. MILLER:

22 Q. In your past, would you say that, is this the worst day that
23 you've ever had with an incident, or have you had other bad days
24 that, you know, -- and you don't have to elaborate on those, but,
25 you know, I know this is a significant event, but, just wondering.

1 A. Yeah. I mean, this has to be part of the more -- I've had
2 IROPS, but not -- that's kind of our -- word, there's significant
3 people that have gotten injured, stuff, you know. I've never had
4 it this scope.

5 Q. You said you became a dispatcher in 2011?

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. That's when you got your license?

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Did you have your pilot's license before, or did you get that
10 after?

11 A. Yeah. I went to college in 2004 to become a pilot. Got my
12 ratings through the University of North Dakota. Graduated. Went
13 to be a flight instructor there. 2008, 2009 was kind of a hard
14 time in the industry to get into the pilot world, so, I tried to
15 stick it out, but at the times, you know, I ended up finding that
16 I needed to find other avenues to support myself, so then I
17 pursued dispatching.

18 Q. Your degree from University North Dakota is --

19 A. Bachelors in Science and Commercial Aviation.

20 Q. Okay.

21 I don't have any more questions. Do you have one Kent?

22 John, up to you.

23 MR. ABRAMS: Is there anything we haven't asked you that you
24 want to tell us?

25 MR. THOMPSON: I can't think of anything.

1 MR. ABRAMS: Okay. I want to thank you for coming in today.
2 You've answered a lot of our questions. I know it's kind of been
3 a stressful and trying time for you, but I do appreciate it more
4 than you know.

5 Once I get the transcripts, I will send them out, and you
6 will be able to review them, just like everybody else at the table
7 is as well.

8 MR. THOMPSON: Okay.

9 MR. ABRAMS: Anyway, I'm going to stop the recordings and we
10 thank you for your time.

11 (Whereupon, at 1:45 p.m., the interview was concluded.)
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

CERTIFICATE

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

IN THE MATTER OF: HAWAIIAN AIRLINES AIRBUS A330
 ACCIDENT NEAR KAHULUI, HAWAII
 ON DECEMBER 18, 2022
 Interview of Robert Thompson

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23LA096

DATE: January 10, 2023

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.



Angela Allen
Transcriber