

ORIGINAL

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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EMBRAER AIRPLANE ACCIDENT WHILE

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PARKED AT THE MONTGOMERY REGIONAL

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AIRPORT IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

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ON DECEMBER 31, 2022

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Interview of: JOEL PICKERING, Customer Service Supervisor

Piedmont Airlines

Montgomery Regional Airport (MGM)

Montgomery, Alabama

via Microsoft Teams

Friday,

December 15, 2023

APPEARANCES:

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National Transportation Safety Board

BRICE BANNING, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JULIE SCHELL, Vice President
Safety & Regulation Compliance
Piedmont Airlines

CAPT. ED DELEHANT III, Director, Flight Safety
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DACHANTA BATEMAN, General Manager
Piedmont Airlines
Advisor to Mr. Pickering

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Joel Pickering:	
By Dr. Wilson	5
By Mr. Banning	29
By Dr. Wilson	31
By Mr. Banning	33

I N T E R V I E W

(12:33 p.m.)

DR. WILSON: Good afternoon, Joel. Thank you much for taking the time to talk to us today.

I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a senior human performance investigator with the NTSB. As Brice mentioned, I'll be leading the interview today.

Before we begin and have everyone introduce themselves, I just want to go over a few of our regulations so that you're aware and that you understand what we're doing today.

Our investigation is strictly from the safety side. We don't place blame or fault for accidents and incidents that we investigate. We're strictly here to understand what happened the day of the event and to try to prevent something like from happening again. And because you were there on the day, we're hoping to be able to ask you some questions, and you can shed some insights into the events that occurred.

As Brice mentioned before, we will be recording this interview and having it transcribed. Only the transcript will become a part of our public docket. Is that something you're okay with?

MR. PICKERING: Yes, ma'am.

DR. WILSON: And, you are entitled to have a representative with you. I believe you've got somebody. If you could just for the record state who your representative will be today.

1 MR. PICKERING: My representative is Dachanta Bateman,
2 general manager, MGM, Piedmont.

3 DR. WILSON: So we'll go around the phone and everyone can
4 introduce themselves. We'll start with Brice.

5 MR. BANNING: Brice Banning with the National Transportation
6 Safety Board, and I'm the investigator-in-charge for this event.

7 DR. WILSON: Julie.

8 MS. SCHELL: Good afternoon. I'm Julie Schell. I'm the vice
9 president of safety and regulatory compliance for Piedmont
10 Airlines.

11 DR. WILSON: Ed.

12 CAPT. DELEHANT: Good afternoon. My name is Captain Ed
13 Delehant. I'm the director of flight safety for Envoy Air.

14 DR. WILSON: Okay. Joel, before we get started, do you
15 have any questions for us?

16 MR. PICKERING: No, ma'am. I'm ready to go.

17 DR. WILSON: Okay. If I ask you a question and you don't
18 understand, please ask me to clarify. If you don't know the
19 answer to question, I don't know is also okay. We're just looking
20 for, you know, your candidness. We're going to have a
21 conversation, and we want this to be as, like I said,
22 conversational as possible because again, you're the expert. You
23 were the one there and can shed those insights for us.

24 INTERVIEW OF JOEL PICKERING

25 BY DR. WILSON:

1 Q. I did have an opportunity to read your statement after the
2 event occurred, and so I understand that you were working that
3 day. What was your role or position on the day of the event?

4 A. I was a supervisor for that flight. There was a co-
5 supervisor, Ryan Reese (ph.). He's no longer with the company.
6 So I was the supervisor on the ground. At the time, Ryan was
7 upstairs at the gate dealing with something. So I would have been
8 the ramp supervisor at the moment.

9 Q. Okay. As the ramp supervisor, what were your duties and
10 responsibilities?

11 A. Before the plane landed, one of our responsibilities is to
12 perform the safety huddle, to make sure that everybody's aware of
13 their duties for that flight, and any special circumstances that
14 may be coming up with this flight. And then, of course, making
15 sure that the ramp is properly set up, that everything is outside
16 the safety envelope and ready to go for the flight.

17 Q. And, Joel, I realize that at the beginning of this, I
18 neglected to have you introduce yourself and give us your title
19 and the company that you work for.

20 A. Okay. My name is Joel Pickering. I'm a customer service
21 supervisor, but we're a cross-trained station. So it's above the
22 wing and below the wing. And I work for Piedmont Airlines in
23 Montgomery, Alabama.

24 Q. Thanks, Joel. And how long have you been in that position?

25 A. Just over 4 years. At the time, it would have been just over

1 3.

2 Q. Have you held any other positions with Piedmont?

3 A. I started as a general agent and then worked up.

4 Q. Okay. When was that?

5 A. I started I believe in August of 2019.

6 Q. So on the day of the event, if you could just walk me through
7 the day, starting with when your shift began if that's okay, and
8 until let's just say the time when you found out that this flight
9 was inbound.

10 A. Okay. I was the opening supervisor. I don't remember the
11 exact time now, but our shift changes depending on the flight
12 schedule. I would have gotten here anywhere between 4 and 5 in
13 the morning. I would have been preparing the day's flights'
14 paperwork, that kind of thing. We worked the couple of morning
15 flights that we had, and then probably about noon-ish I guess we
16 would have had a Charlotte turn. And then we would have had the
17 Dallas turn that came in a little after 3, I guess 3:15, 3:20.
18 Leading up to that, air portal would have shown us that there was
19 an inop APU close. I believe the dispatcher called us to let us
20 know so that we were prepared. And, of course, they usually make
21 sure that we've got a working air start so that they can send this
22 plane, and we did. So then at that time, I went around, as my
23 practice, and let everybody know that this plane had a problem,
24 and what we were going to do about it as far as who is going to
25 perform what. And so that's leading up to when we found out about

1 it.

2 Q. How common is this type of event, inop APU?

3 A. Not very. We might have one, maybe two a month, if that.

4 Q. So you know this airplane's coming in. You said you let
5 everybody know in a huddle who would be performing what. Walk me
6 through the events now.

7 A. Yes, ma'am. So when the plane would be on approach,
8 typically 10 to 15 minutes out, we're out on the ramp, making sure
9 everybody's in position. We're all huddled up around the pushback
10 unit just waiting for the plane because it's a little bit chilly,
11 December 31st. So we had our initial huddle to discuss general
12 safety procedures. And then also we went over again that this
13 plane had this APU issues, that the engines would be running until
14 it's on ground power, and to stay away from it until the engines
15 were spooled down and that the warning beacons had been shut off.
16 And then we just waited for the plane to arrive.

17 Q. When you say stay away from the aircraft, so that -- what
18 does that exactly entail? I know you put cones out. You wing
19 walk. What exactly should have been done? So now the airplane's
20 coming in. What's the expectations for your crew?

21 A. Well, the cones are placed outside where the aircraft would
22 be at the time. This airport did not have a safety envelope
23 painted on the ramp. So we stationed the cones well outside where
24 the aircraft would be. That's the way it had been for years. It
25 had never had painted safety envelopes as far as I know. Now, we

1 do. So everybody's expected to just stay away, stay in position,
2 don't move at all, except for the person chocking the aircraft.
3 That's the only person that needs to approach the aircraft before
4 the engines are shut down.

5 Q. About how long is the expected time from when that airplane
6 arrived to when people could approach the airplane? Is that 5
7 minutes? Is it 10 minutes, 3 minutes?

8 A. I would say probably 3 because first I would chock the
9 aircraft, and then the person would let the cockpit know that it
10 was chocked. And then we would have had to have brought the jet
11 bridge over because that's got to be in position before we can
12 connect the ground power. So we have to wait for the jet bridge
13 to be moved over. And then we have to connect the ground power
14 and as soon as flight -- the flight deck sees the power, that's
15 when they'll shut the engines off. So that could be -- a good
16 estimate would be 3 minutes.

17 Q. Okay. Would there be a signal to your crew that it's okay to
18 approach or it's just waiting for the engines to spool down I
19 think you said, the beacons were turned on or off, I'm sorry.
20 What did you say?

21 A. Yeah. That is our signal. You'll hear the engines shut
22 down, and you'll see the warning beacons on the top and the bottom
23 of the aircraft shut off. That's the general signal that it is
24 safe to approach the aircraft, whether it's a 175, CRJs or the
25 145s.

1 Q. And is that something that's trained?

2 A. Yes, that's in our manual and it's trained in the ramp and
3 it's also briefed on throughout the year and the company does send
4 out weekly training messages, and that is one that's sent out I
5 would say once or twice a year because it's fairly important.

6 Q. I believe in your statement you said there were two huddles
7 for this inbound airplane.

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. Did you lead both of those huddles?

10 A. The first one, Ryan Reese and I were both there, and we did
11 it, and at the pushback unit with everybody. And then Ryan was
12 called up to the gate, and the plane ended up, it was coming from
13 Dallas, but it ended up circling around to land from the east. So
14 we had extra time. So we went ahead and did a second one just to
15 make sure everybody understood their positions and what was
16 expected and what was going to happen.

17 Q. And what was Courtney's position on that day for that
18 airplane?

19 A. She was going to wing walk the number 1 side, and her duties
20 would entail setting the cone on the number 1 side which is the
21 captain's side, and then she would also set the cone at the tail.
22 And then follow around and everybody would then start unloading
23 bags.

24 Q. And was the expectation that the cones would be set after the
25 engines were shut down and the beacons were off?

1 A. Absolutely. Yeah, nobody approaches the aircraft before the
2 warning beacons are off and definitely before the engines are shut
3 off.

4 Q. Did you have a chance to review the security footage?

5 A. I have not, and to be honest, I'd rather not.

6 Q. So, in obviously not going into detail of the event that
7 happened, but I'm telling you about what happened before. So the
8 airplane approaches and we can see Ms. Edwards, she is walking
9 towards -- you chock the airplane. We see her walking with the
10 cone towards the back of the airplane. Did you witness that?

11 A. I did. That's the first time I noticed because I was kneeled
12 down at the nose looking backwards because that's kind of the
13 position you have to be to chock the aircraft. And that's when I
14 noticed that she was at the tail, and I yelled. I'm sure she
15 didn't hear me because the engine was running, but I also motioned
16 as vigorously as I could for her to get out of the way. And
17 that's the last I saw of her. I saw her move out of the way and
18 then I turned around to get the power off the jet bridge.

19 Q. And I believe in -- I believe it was in your statement as
20 well, that you also -- there was also a second person who was
21 approaching the cargo door area.

22 A. Yes, ma'am. He's no longer with us. He violated policy
23 also. He didn't have any -- we didn't feel he had a strong safety
24 mindset and didn't take things seriously enough. So, yeah, he
25 was, he was lucky he didn't get killed, too. Courtney had never

1 demonstrated that kind of thing to us. So it was a real shock. I
2 was, I was always happy to have her on our schedule and happy to
3 have her working with us. And I did see him when I kneeled down
4 approaching the main cargo bin, forward cargo bin, and yelled at
5 him, motioned for him to get away also I believe, and I believe
6 some of the agents on the other side were also telling him to get
7 away.

8 Q. Were both engines running or was it just one engine running?

9 A. I don't remember that for sure. I know number 1 was. So I'm
10 not sure on the number 2.

11 Q. In your experience, I know you said that it was very loud, so
12 when you tried to yell to Ms. Edwards she likely didn't hear you.
13 So in your opinion, it's very obvious that the engines are
14 running.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Anybody whose been around airplanes would know that. What
17 about if you're on the other side of the airplane, if the number 1
18 was the only one running, would that still be obvious that that
19 engine's running?

20 A. You mean number 1 or number 2?

21 Q. Well, if number 1's running and somebody's approaching from
22 the opposite side, would it still in your opinion be obvious that
23 the number 1 engine is running?

24 A. Yes, it's extremely loud plus the warning beacons are still
25 on.

1 Q. Okay. Are the warning beacons ever difficult to see
2 depending upon the time of day, lighting, anything like that, that
3 would obstruct somebody from being able to see those beacons?

4 A. No, I don't believe so. There's one at the top, one at the
5 bottom. They're bright red, and that's where they're supposed to
6 be focused. You know, it's their release point aside from the
7 engines.

8 Q. After Ms. Edwards -- let's assume the engines were shut down,
9 and so your expectation would have been she would set the cone at
10 the left wing, and then walk to the back and set the cone at the
11 tail and then what would the expectation be for her to do?

12 A. She would follow it around the other side of the aircraft and
13 then depending on what had been done already from the agents that
14 were already over there, probably start offloading the bags as far
15 as grabbing them off the belt loader and loading them into the bag
16 cart, depending at what stage they were at.

17 Q. And the cargo door is on the first officer's side of the
18 airplane like if you're facing it?

19 A. That is correct, in front of the engine.

20 Q. Were there any positions that day that would have placed
21 somebody in front of the number 1 engine? Was there any duties
22 that would have required somebody to do that?

23 A. Just me. I was the one chocking the aircraft, and I think
24 that measures out to about 20 feet in front of it. So I had
25 somebody marshal it in and we had enough people. So I chocked the

1 aircraft. Otherwise, the marshaller usually chocks it, but we had
2 enough. So I did it. I'm the only one that should have been
3 anywhere near the aircraft.

4 Q. Had you seen that happen before with people approaching the
5 aircraft before it's time?

6 A. Occasionally. Never one where they're running but if they're
7 not paying attention, sure. Then we'll correct them on it with
8 the warning beacons just to make sure that they know to wait.
9 When the engines are shut off, sometimes the pilots will forget to
10 turn them off, and it can be a minute, but we're just supposed to
11 stand there and wait. So, yeah, we have seen it. Not very often
12 because that would be a training issue, and we're -- I'd like to
13 think that we're pretty good here. And then we'll coach them
14 afterwards just to draw it to their attention, that they made a
15 mistake.

16 Q. Is that just a verbal exchange or is it something that gets
17 documented?

18 A. To be honest, usually it's verbal unless there's a pattern.
19 Then, yes, we're going to document it.

20 Q. Okay. Do you ever see -- have you ever seen somebody, you
21 know, maybe instead of walking around, I'm thinking, you know, Ms.
22 Edwards, she's at the, you know, facing the airplane on the right
23 side, walking to the tail. Have you ever seen somebody come, you
24 know, back towards, the wing, and then cross under the fuselage or
25 is it typically they go around the tail?

1 A. No, you go around the tail. We're trained we're not supposed
2 to walk under the aircraft or under the wings unless there's a
3 reason to do it. Like at night, we'll chock the main landing gear
4 also, but on the turn, there's absolutely no reason to walk under
5 a wing or under the fuselage or to walk where she did. I don't
6 know why she did it. I've had a year to think about it, and I
7 can't, I can't figure it out.

8 Q. Do you know what time her shift started that day?

9 A. I believe she came in at 2. It was either 2 or 2:30 p.m. I
10 believe she worked at the ticket counter, and then came outside a
11 little before the plane was scheduled to land. So she was fairly
12 fresh.

13 Q. Is that a normal shift for her?

14 A. It varies. I think that was the shift that she had been on
15 for a little bit. I don't think it was new schedule or a new bid
16 as we call it. So, yeah, it should have been her normal time.

17 Q. And besides the huddles before that airplane arrived, did you
18 have any other interactions with her during that day?

19 A. Nothing other than, you know, just personal conversation.
20 She had talked about how her daughter's birthday was the next day,
21 and a little bit about that, just after the huddles. That was
22 about it. She seemed happy. She seemed happy, you know, seemed
23 in a good mood, but that's usually the way Courtney was. She was
24 definitely one that left her troubles at the door or at least
25 seemed to. You know, she could come in and be in a good mood and

1 I know she did have some things going on in her life but she
2 always seemed to leave them at the door.

3 Q. What sort of things was she having going on in her life?

4 A. Just overhearing some other people, other people would help
5 her. I think she had had some boyfriend issues, you know, the
6 father of her children, and I think other people had helped her
7 try and take better care of herself. I think they'd take her to
8 get her nails done and her hair done, and I had bought her some
9 uniforms to try and, you know, help her, that kind of thing. Just
10 that kind of thing.

11 Q. Okay. I just want to clarify in the conversations that you
12 had with her, she didn't say anything to you that was out of the
13 norm or anything that gave you any concern about how she was
14 feeling that day?

15 A. Absolutely none.

16 Q. How often did you work a shift with her?

17 A. I think at that time, she was on weekends. So I'd probably
18 work with her 3 days a week. I worked 4, and I think she was full
19 time if I'm not mistaken. So I think she worked 4 as well. So I
20 worked 3 to 4 times.

21 Q. And how long is a typical shift?

22 A. Full time would be about 10 hours. She would have been
23 closing I believe that day which would have put her there until
24 midnight, maybe a little after.

25 Q. In your manuals, are there duty times and restrictions?

1 A. I believe so, but I couldn't tell you what they are.

2 Q. Okay. Do people work overtime? Is there the opportunity to
3 work overtime?

4 A. Yes. Yes. If there's open shifts, they can pick them up.
5 They're not allowed to work more than 6 days in row. They're
6 required to take at least 1 day, you know, even if it splits
7 weeks, you know, 3 one day, 3 the next. They're not allowed to
8 work 7 in a row. As far as hours in the day, I don't believe
9 there's any restrictions.

10 Q. Would Ms. Edwards pick up extra shifts?

11 A. Yes, she would. She wasn't one to tell anybody no. So if
12 people asked her to work for and she was able to, she typically
13 did.

14 Q. On the flip side of that, what if somebody was to call in
15 sick, like on that day. How does that work?

16 A. It would depend on the scheduling. Some days, some shifts
17 we've got enough people that we can cover that. It wouldn't
18 really be noticed. And, we pretty much know how to adjust for the
19 number of people we've got. So it's normally not an issue. If it
20 is, and it's enough time ahead, we may make some phone calls to
21 see if somebody's willing to come in, possibly have somebody stay
22 later if they're able to or come in early. It just kind of
23 depends on the situation and the number of agents scheduled right
24 then.

25 Q. Did Ms. Edwards ever call in sick that you're aware of?

1 A. If she did, not very many times. She was pretty dependable.

2 Q. Okay. Is there on-the-job training?

3 A. Yes, there is.

4 Q. I guess walk me through what -- so you've got a new hire.
5 What training would they receive?

6 A. Well, to start with, they're going to go off either to ramp
7 training which is a week's training or off to CSA which teaches
8 above the wing, like ticket counter and gate, do 2 weeks of that.
9 And then when they get back, we will schedule them with the
10 appropriate training supervisors and we will do on-the-job
11 training, aircraft familiarization, interior, exterior searching
12 and cleaning, and then the different levels. We'll train on all
13 the equipment, hands-on training with belt loaders and driving
14 tugs and supervision. We don't allow anybody to work on anything
15 they haven't been trained on.

16 Q. Did you do any training for Ms. Edwards, any on-the-job
17 training?

18 A. I'm sure I did. She had been there about -- a little over a
19 year, but I couldn't tell you what.

20 Q. And nothing stands out as either good or bad in the training
21 that you did with her?

22 A. Sometimes she needed a little extra guidance to stay focused
23 on certain tasks at hand, but I had never had any issue to doubt
24 anything that she did. I loved having her on my shift.

25 Q. Were you a part of any disciplinary actions against her?

1 A. Not that I remember.

2 Q. Okay. When you said that she had a hard time focusing on
3 tasks, can you give me an example?

4 A. No. Kind of just in general. Sometimes it's hard I guess to
5 focus on what -- not just what you've been told to do but the
6 bigger picture on hand. In this situation, possibly she was maybe
7 focused on setting the cones, didn't see the picture. I don't
8 know, but that would be an example, you know, or setting, making
9 sure the brakes are set and the chocks are set, not going onto one
10 thing before you finish another. We just watched -- we watch all
11 the agents for that kind of thing.

12 Q. Does Piedmont have a drug and alcohol use or abuse policy?

13 A. Yeah, you're tested before you're hired, and then there is
14 also alcohol training throughout the year that I believe if you're
15 involved in an accident with Piedmont, you're tested. And if you
16 blow anything other than a 0, I believe you're fired. So, yeah,
17 we've got a zero tolerance for drug and alcohol. And then there's
18 other testings for other positions that have more security
19 functions as far as the general agents and then I believe there's
20 also some random testing that goes on. Somebody sends it down and
21 then they get randomly tested.

22 Q. Did you ever see Ms. Edwards get randomly tested?

23 A. No, ma'am.

24 Q. Have you ever seen any of your coworkers use alcohol or drugs
25 on the job?

1 A. No. That would be unacceptable. We're not going to put
2 anybody at risk including myself.

3 Q. When turning Envoy's airplanes, what manuals are you using
4 for, you know, to know what procedure to follow? Are they
5 Piedmont? Are they Envoy?

6 A. No, it's EGOM, the Eagle Ground Operations Manual. I believe
7 it's put out by -- I don't know if it's put out by American but
8 there's one manual that covers all regional aircraft. So
9 Piedmont, Envoy, SkyWest, different ones, we've got the same
10 manual that covers ground handling. The EGOM is what it's short
11 for with us.

12 Q. Okay. And is there a physical copy out there with you or
13 it's something you're just required to know what the procedures
14 are?

15 A. No, it's online, regionaltraining.aa.com. It's like 270, 280
16 pages. So we don't print them out. As the changes come along,
17 you'd -- for everybody, you would have to reprint the thing. But
18 it's online, and everybody knows where to go to get it. That's
19 all part of the new hire training, where to go, where to find it,
20 and then, of course, they can always ask if they want to look
21 something up.

22 Q. You brought up an interesting point about changes to the
23 manual. Is that something that you're made aware of via email or
24 how would you know that there's been an update?

25 A. Yeah. They'll typically send out an email covering what

1 updates they make to the EGOM, and it'll detail what sections and
2 what the actual changes were for the most part. Mainly, it's just
3 changing a word or something like that. In the past, they took
4 out the CRJ 200 because we didn't fly them any more. So that was
5 updated, and then they brought them back. So it got changed again
6 to include the CRJ 200s. Those are the kind of things but, yes,
7 they'll send out an email saying in a month or whatever the
8 timeframe is, the new one will be coming out so that we've time to
9 review it and cover it with agents.

10 Q. And is it required that you log into a system and review
11 those changes?

12 A. No, ma'am. You do have to login to review it. It's not
13 available to the general public, but there's nothing saying that
14 you've done that.

15 Q. What about recurrent training? We talked about initial
16 training? Is there any kind of recurrent training that you go
17 through?

18 A. Yes, ma'am. Every quarter they drop what's called learning
19 hubs. It's online learning, web courses that everybody has to
20 take. Depending on the quarter, January is typically the
21 heaviest. They'll drop the recurring training for ramp and for
22 dangerous goods and it's probably going to be between 25 and 30
23 different learning hubs that people have to complete. And it can
24 be anywhere from 5 minutes to an hour that it takes depending on
25 the learning hub. And then that'll -- they'll do that typically

1 every quarter. You'll get a new section when a new hub is
2 dropped.

3 Q. Is there any specific training that you receive for an
4 aircraft with an inoperable APU?

5 A. Nothing besides the EGOM does describe the proper steps to
6 take for an air start but there's nothing necessarily 100 percent
7 specific, but it does describe the steps to take. Everybody's got
8 slightly different units. So it can't be specific as far as push
9 this button, push that button. It just describes where to hook it
10 up, keep it more than 5 feet away from the aircraft, you know,
11 what side to be on, that kind of thing. So it details how to in
12 general do an air start.

13 Q. Do you recall what the turn time for this airplane was?

14 A. If I'm not mistaken, it came in early. I don't remember the
15 specific times, but we had plenty of time plus we had plenty of
16 help. I think I had like five people on the ground and three
17 people upstairs with two supervisors. So there was plenty of
18 time, and there were plenty of agents. So we didn't have to
19 hustle with this one. We just had to do it right.

20 Q. Are there any time requirements so to speak when turning an
21 airplane? You know, you have to get your work done in 30 minutes,
22 20 minutes?

23 A. Yeah. If a plane comes in late, this aircraft, we would have
24 a minimum of 30 minutes to turn it from the time the brakes are
25 set until the time the brakes are released. A lot of times it's

1 -- the flights are scheduled where there's more than that amount
2 of time. But, if it comes in, you know, it comes in early, you
3 have extra time. If it comes in later, you might have less time,
4 but this one I believe was early.

5 Q. What happens if you don't meet that 30 minutes?

6 A. Nothing much. If it becomes standard, yeah, then they're
7 going to want to know why. Safety is mainly the thing that
8 they're looking for. Did you turn this thing safely? All sorts
9 of different factors. As long as you can answer why and even if
10 it's a performance issue, then you just answer what have you done
11 to make sure that it doesn't happen again or to try and, you know,
12 fix the problem, whether it was somebody at the gate or we had
13 issues with the equipment or whatever. We're not harshly dealt
14 with if we have a delay. They just want to know why.

15 Q. Is there anything documented in like someone's performance
16 review or something if the airplanes aren't turned in a timely
17 manner?

18 A. No, I don't believe. I'm not aware of any. Generally we do
19 a pretty good job here, but maybe some place they do. And like I
20 said, if you continually take delays, then it would be first on
21 the supervisor because we're in charge of placing them and overall
22 operation. And then if it's a gate agent or something like that,
23 that's continually causing problems then, yeah, we would counsel.

24 Q. You talked about the overall turn time. But what about is
25 there a time for getting the bags out of the airplane?

1 A. I believe they want our first baggage claims scanned at 20
2 minutes, within 20 minutes of aircraft arrival, but it's usually
3 pretty doable. It's not an issue.

4 Q. You mentioned when you were chocking the airplane, that you
5 have I think you said about 20 feet between you and the engine.
6 Is there a safety zone around the engine that you're required to
7 follow, some sort of a distance to stay away from the engine?

8 A. We train the ingestion zone as 15 feet for all engines.
9 There isn't a line painted, and when you chock the aircraft at
10 that point, I have never felt any pull from the running engine.
11 So, no, there's nothing painted on the ramp, and as of right now,
12 there still is nothing painted on the ramp. It would change with
13 every aircraft I guess because if a 737 or, you know, whatever
14 other kind, there would be probably lines all over the place.

15 Q. Right. That 15 feet, is that something that's documented in
16 a manual or in your training?

17 A. Yes, ma'am. That's in the EGOM. The ingestion zone is 15
18 feet plus it's also -- that's one of the weekly things that's out
19 every year, if not once, twice.

20 Q. And do you feel that everybody working on the ground
21 understands that?

22 A. Yes, and that's briefed on as well, mentioned, and everybody
23 knows the consequences especially now.

24 Q. I apologize if I asked you this before, but have you ever
25 seen or previously seen a ground handler approach an airplane when

1 an engine's running?

2 A. No. Well, placing a cone maybe. I've never seen anyone come
3 close to an engine. They're not even supposed to place the cones
4 at the tip of the wing. They're not supposed to do anything.

5 Q. Where are they supposed to stand? Like how far away from the
6 airplane are you talking that they're standing when they're
7 waiting for this?

8 A. It's 15 to 20 feet away from the tip of the wing. So you're
9 probably talking 80 feet from the fuselage.

10 Q. Are ground handlers allowed to have cell phones, personal
11 cell phones when they're on the ramp?

12 A. No, they're not.

13 Q. Did you notice Ms. Edwards using her cell phone that day?

14 A. No, I don't believe I did.

15 Q. Okay. Any distractions during any of the briefings, any
16 interruptions?

17 A. No. No. It was just the ground people working outside
18 standing around in a circle basically discussing what was going
19 on.

20 Q. Did you feel that -- I'll rephrase. Is there any sort of
21 verbal acknowledgement that is expected from those in that huddle
22 to let you know, the person handling that briefing, that they've
23 heard and understand what's being discussed?

24 A. No, ma'am, not currently.

25 Q. Did you know -- did you get any sort of feedback from

1 Ms. Edwards, acknowledgement that she understood or, you know, had
2 not or anything that gave you an idea that she, you know, heard
3 what you were saying?

4 A. I don't remember anything specifically.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. She was standing right in front of me though. I'll tell you
7 that. So she wasn't 20 feet away. I know she was 3, 4 feet away
8 from me possibly.

9 Q. Um-hum. Has there ever been a time in one of these huddles
10 where maybe somebody's not paying attention and you have to, you
11 know, pause and say, focus on what we're discussing?

12 A. Yep, there's a time. They're all humans. They're all
13 people. It may be time for the huddle, and they're still talking
14 about football or something, and you just say, hey, come on, bring
15 it in. Let's focus on what we've got.

16 Q. Did that happen on that day do you recall?

17 A. No, ma'am, I don't remember that. Not during the huddle.

18 Q. Does any of your training cover or discuss engine running
19 procedures in staying away from the airplane? Does it cover
20 anything like that?

21 A. Well, I guess the spool down pretty much defines that, that
22 we have to wait to see individual air -- fan blades before we
23 approach. So that pretty much covers stay away until you see the
24 fan blades.

25 Q. Okay. How would somebody -- depending upon their position,

1 you would have to be in front of the wing to see that. So how
2 would -- is there anybody ever who's behind the wing where they
3 wouldn't be able to see that?

4 A. That doesn't cover them. It covers the person doing the walk
5 around because they're going to get the closest to the engines.
6 They have to wait until they see it. Otherwise, we can set the
7 cones and we can set the tail once the engines are shut down and
8 the warning beacons turned off.

9 Q. How would you describe Piedmont's safety culture?

10 A. I think I'd give it an A+. Everybody I've dealt with has
11 been very professional. They've got meetings they hold quarterly
12 and they don't allow supervisors into it so that the agents and
13 representatives for the stations are free to speak freely.
14 They've got three or four different ways that agents can report
15 things if they don't feel anything is safe. Most of them are
16 available to be done anonymously. They can leave their names and
17 phone numbers and stuff if they would like, but they don't have
18 to. So there's no fear of repercussions to anything that they
19 report. Like I said, they send out safety things weekly for us to
20 cover. Quite a few of the learning hubs are safety related, and a
21 good portion of training is related to safety.

22 Q. Is there a way -- does Piedmont have a hazard reporting
23 system?

24 A. Yeah, I believe it's referred to the SMS system. I couldn't
25 give you give you too many details at the moment but, yes, there

1 is a way and there's the poster that should be hanging up in most
2 stations or all stations.

3 Q. Have you ever reported something through that system?

4 A. No. Anything I've ever had to address has always been taken
5 care of to my satisfaction.

6 Q. Do you think people feel comfortable reporting things?

7 A. I would hope so. You know, we want it to be safe. So if
8 something's not getting taken care of, then, yeah. I may not be
9 aware of everything, you know. Maybe it's days I'm off. So,
10 yeah, things need to be addressed. Things need to be taken care.
11 If equipment's unsafe, it needs to be taken out of service, and if
12 it's not being done, then, yes, corporate probably needs to be
13 involved.

14 Q. I believe you were a part of Ms. Edwards' pre-employment
15 interview. Was there any sort of doubt with her? Anything that
16 you recall about that interview?

17 A. Nothing negatively. I remember I couldn't get her to shut
18 up. It took forever. Every question she went on and on and on in
19 a very friendly way. So, yeah, it was just a long interview.

20 Q. Okay. How did she compare to other people that you've
21 interviewed? Is she pretty typical? Did she seem above average?

22 A. I'd put her at above average with her personality because we
23 need that. We needed somebody with that kind of personality
24 especially facing public. She was -- she looked big and strong
25 enough to be able to handle the other stuff, but at the same time,

1 someone bubbly to face the public. She was somebody I wanted.

2 Q. We talked a little bit before about sick leave. Do employees
3 get sick -- paid sick time off?

4 A. Yes, ma'am. Yeah, I think it's 4 hours a month that they'll
5 build up, and then they're able to use it as needed.

6 Q. Are trained on -- I believe you said this. But you're
7 trained on multiple types of aircraft, not just a single aircraft?

8 A. Yes, ma'am. We took training on the CRJ 200, 700, 900 and
9 the Embraer 145 and 175. And then a couple other variations of
10 those aircraft.

11 Q. Okay. Thanks, Joel. I think that's all the questions that I
12 have for now. I'm going to see if anyone else on the call has any
13 questions. Are you doing okay? Do you need a break for anything?

14 A. No, I'm good. I'm good. Thank you.

15 DR. WILSON: Brice.

16 MR. BANNING: Yeah. Thank you.

17 BY MR. BANNING:

18 Q. And thank you, Joel. I really appreciate you taking the time
19 to visit with us today. I just -- I think I just have a couple
20 follow-up questions and they may be redundant. So I apologize for
21 that. But you mentioned two huddles. Are two huddles common or
22 are two huddles required?

23 A. No, this one, it just felt necessary. Normally one huddle's
24 going to work to cover your basic operations. This just had
25 something special going on, and with the 175 having below the wing

1 mounted engines, we wanted extra safety. It's not as big a deal
2 on say 145 where the engines are 10 feet in the air, but this one,
3 it's right in your face. So we had extra time. We took the time
4 and did two. Typically it's one.

5 Q. Okay. And is one required per your operating procedures?

6 A. Yes, sir. We're required to have a prearrival huddle with
7 everybody.

8 Q. Okay. Thank you. And then a question about the warning
9 beacon. Do you recall if you physically saw yourself the warning
10 beacon on, on the bottom of the aircraft?

11 A. I don't at the moment. I would assume it was. I guess the
12 engine was on right in my ear. So I knew it was still not safe.
13 You know, while that's running, that overrides everything. When
14 it's off, like on a normal flight, that's what you're focused on
15 to watch before you approach. I'm sorry. I don't remember if
16 that one was one.

17 Q. Yeah. No problem. I appreciate it. And, you talked about
18 being trained to watch for individual fan blades, too. Where is
19 that training? Is that ground training? Is that on-the-job
20 training? Where would that training occur at?

21 A. I would imagine ramp class. It's been a while since I went,
22 but I would think that that would be something they would cover
23 there. They should be covering ground operations, discussing
24 ingestion zones and jet blast zones. That should all be discussed
25 I believe in ramp. And then, of course, once we do get on-the-job

1 training, it's something that we'll cover again.

2 Q. Okay. Thank you very much. I appreciate it. I think that's
3 all the questions I had.

4 A. Thank you, sir.

5 DR. WILSON: Thanks, Brice. Julie, do you have any
6 questions?

7 MS. SCHELL: I don't. Thank you very much, Joel.

8 MR. PICKERING: Thank you.

9 DR. WILSON: Ed.

10 CAPT. DELEHANT: No, ma'am. I don't have any questions.
11 Thank you.

12 BY DR. WILSON:

13 Q. Joel, I have just a couple more that came up as Brice was
14 asking you some questions. When you're on the ramp, do you wear
15 earplugs? Do you wear headset?

16 A. We're required to wear hearing protection, and whether that's
17 over the ear or in ear. It basically just knocks the decibels
18 down between like 27 to 30 decibels. You can still hear. You can
19 still hear shouting, instructions. I wear a radio being a
20 supervisor. I can still hear the radio set, you know, right here.
21 So, yeah, you can still hear but, yes, we do require hearing
22 protection on the ramp.

23 Q. And did Ms. Edwards have hearing protection in that you
24 recall?

25 A. I didn't notice specifically but I believe she wore over the

1 ear if I remember right.

2 Q. Okay. And, I'm peeking back to the video and I feel I know
3 where you were, but you were -- were you wearing a yellow safety
4 vest?

5 A. Yes. Yes.

6 Q. And being the supervisor, did Ms. Edwards report to you or
7 did she have a separate supervisor? Who did she report to?

8 A. It would have been any supervisor. Like I said, Ryan and I
9 were both there. So it -- and normally Ryan would have been on
10 the ramp, too, but he -- there was some question at the gate with
11 a passenger. So he chose to go upstairs and deal with that while
12 I stayed on the ramp.

13 Q. So there is like an on-shift supervisor and then what about,
14 you know, if there was a disciplinary action, who handles that?

15 A. It would have been the supervisor on duty. At that time,
16 Ryan had come in for the afternoon, and that flight was considered
17 the afternoon flight. So I would guess technically Ryan would
18 probably have dealt with any supervisor, any disciplinary actions.
19 Now, if he didn't see it, then, yes, it would be on me. But
20 typically that would have been his shift, his flight.

21 Q. I guess I'm thinking even like beyond this shift itself. Is
22 there, you know, a supervisor above you that -- let's say that you
23 recorded a disciplinary action, you wrote her -- someone up for
24 something. In terms of like writing a letter to them or having a
25 meeting with them, does that stay with you or is there a

1 supervisor above you that handles those type of actions?

2 A. Montgomery is a small station. We've got the four
3 supervisors, and then we've got Dachanta. So it's the four
4 supervisor and a general manager. That's all we've got. So it's
5 just pretty much I would say the two levels of supervision here.
6 So we would write them up, and that would go in their employee
7 file, and Dachanta has those. So she would definitely know about
8 them. We would put them on her desk, and she would be the one
9 filing them.

10 Q. And to clarify, did you ever write up Ms. Edwards for any
11 disciplinary actions?

12 A. I don't remember any.

13 Q. Okay. I think that's all the questions that I have.

14 DR. WILSON: Around the room one more time. Brice?

15 MR. BANNING: Yeah.

16 BY MR. BANNING:

17 Q. I think, Joel, the only thing, is there anything that you
18 think we needed to ask that you want to share with us?

19 A. Not really. I guess I just want to tell you a little bit
20 about Montgomery. Today we're at 2,013 damage free days, and if
21 it wouldn't have been for Courtney, I think we would have been at
22 12 or 1300 as far as OJI free days. I think we operate a fairly
23 safe station. Safety is number one. That's one of the reasons
24 that this is kind of hard to grasp because we don't know why it
25 happened. What, you know, you want to try and figure out what you

1 could have done different but I'm not really sure. And, to be
2 honest, we haven't really changed too much since then. We're
3 still doing our safety huddles. We're still briefing everybody.
4 We're still keeping everybody out of the safety envelope. We're
5 doing what we've always have because it's worked well for us for
6 years and years. So, yes, it has brought everything to the
7 forefront in our minds. It's never gone, but we're always a safe
8 station, and I believe we currently still are. I guess that's all
9 I've got.

10 Q. Well, once again, I really thank you for taking the time to
11 visit with us. I know these things are never comfortable, and it
12 really helps shed light and provide insights for us. So we're
13 very grateful. Thank you.

14 A. Thank you, sir.

15 DR. WILSON: Julie, any last questions?

16 MS. SCHELL: No, thank you.

17 DR. WILSON: Ed?

18 CAPT. DELEHANT: No. Thank you very much.

19 DR. WILSON: Okay, Joel. Well, I just want to echo like
20 Brice said, we really thank you for taking the time to talk to us
21 today, and you have my condolences for losing a colleague and for
22 even having to be there on that day. I'm sure it was hard for
23 you, and I appreciate you helping shed these insights. I know
24 it's been some time that's passed, but it might be easier, but
25 it's still, you know, hard to do. So thank you very much for

1 doing that.

2 We will go off the record at 1:25.

3 (Whereupon, at 1:25 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: EMBRAER AIRPLANE ACCIDENT WHILE
 PARKED AT THE MONTGOMERY REGIONAL
 AIRPORT IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
 ON DECEMBER 31, 2022
 Interview of Joel Pickering

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23LA109

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: December 15, 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.



Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber

p

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * *

Investigation of: *

*

EMBRAER AIRPLANE ACCIDENT WHILE *

PARKED AT THE MONTGOMERY REGIONAL * Accident No.: DCA23LA109

AIRPORT IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA *

ON DECEMBER 31, 2022 *

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Interview of: CRAIG KNOTTS, Ramp Duty Manager
Piedmont Airlines
Charlotte, North Carolina

via Microsoft Teams

Friday,
December 15, 2023

APPEARANCES:

DR. KATHERINE WILSON
Senior Human Performance Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

BRICE BANNING, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

JULIE SCHELL, Vice President
Safety & Regulation Compliance
Piedmont Airlines

CAPT. ED DELEHANT III, Director, Flight Safety
Envoy Air Inc.

CHIP SMITH, Senior Duty Manger
Piedmont Airlines
Boss of Mr. Knotts

I N D E X

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Interview of Craig Knotts:	
By Dr. Wilson	6
By Mr. Banning	31
By Dr. Wilson	35

I N T E R V I E W

(2:02 p.m.)

DR. WILSON: So we'll go on the record at 2:02. All right. Craig, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us today.

I'm Katherine Wilson. I'm a senior human performance investigator with the NTSB.

I do appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today. You're an expert in ground handling operations. We're not. So we're looking to just get some insights from you. And so if we can just be kind of that fly on your shoulder and you can walk us through, you know, what it's like to be in your position.

We'll go ahead and introduce everybody that's on the call. We work under the party system. So we get representatives from the involved operators of an event, and they can have somebody sit on the call. We don't do anything with enforcement or we don't assign blame to accidents. We really just want to understand what happened and we want to prevent this from happening again.

So this will be conversational. So please relax.

MR. KNOTTS: Okay.

DR. WILSON: Again, you're the expert. You're going to inform us. So if we could get your name and title and the company you work for.

MR. KNOTTS: Yes. It's Craig Knotts. That's C-r-a-i-g. Last name is K-n-o-t-t-s. I'm a ramp duty manager in Charlotte, North Carolina, for Piedmont Airlines.

1 DR. WILSON: Okay. And, Brice, if you could introduce
2 yourself.

3 MR. BANNING: Yeah, Brice Banning with the National
4 Transportation Safety Board, and I'm the investigator-in-charge
5 for the event that happened there at Montgomery, Alabama. Thank
6 you for visiting with us, Craig.

7 DR. WILSON: Julie.

8 MS. SCHELL: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm Julie Schell. I'm the
9 VP of safety and regulatory compliance for Piedmont Airlines.

10 DR. WILSON: Ed.

11 CAPT. DELEHANT: Yeah. Good afternoon. Captain Ed Delehant,
12 director of flight safety, Envoy Air.

13 DR. WILSON: Okay. We do have a court reporter on the call
14 today. He is going to be recording this interview, and then will
15 create a transcript of that. Only the transcript will become a
16 part of our public docket. Is that okay that we are recording
17 today?

18 MR. KNOTTS: Yes, ma'am. That's fine.

19 DR. WILSON: And, I believe you've got someone in the room
20 with you, if you could just let us know who you've got with you.

21 MR. KNOTTS: Yes, ma'am. It's Chip Smith. He's senior duty
22 manager here in Charlotte. He's my direct boss.

23 DR. WILSON: Okay. All right. And if I ask you a question
24 and you don't understand it, please just ask me to clarify. If I
25 ask you a question you don't know the answer to, I don't know is

1 perfectly okay as well.

2 MR. KNOTTS: Okay.

3 DR. WILSON: Do you have any questions before we get started?

4 MR. KNOTTS: No, ma'am.

5 INTERVIEW OF CRAIG KNOTTS

6 BY DR. WILSON:

7 Q. Craig, if you could let me know, how long have you been in
8 your current position?

9 A. Current position since 2018 or 19. With the company, since
10 2003.

11 Q. What other positions have you held?

12 A. I was ramp agent from 2003 to 2006, ramp supervisor from 2006
13 to 2010. Then we kind of reorganized and changed it to unit
14 manager. So I reapplied for unit manager in 2010. So I was a
15 unit manager 2010 to 2018 or 19, and then up to duty manager after
16 that since.

17 Q. And have you always been at the Charlotte base?

18 A. Yes, ma'am.

19 Q. And in your current position, what are your duties and
20 responsibilities?

21 A. Really just to oversee the entire operation on a day-to-day
22 basis, just everything really, from opening to closing, working
23 with unit managers that run certain gates and certain sections,
24 but mainly just being the outside portions, but over baggage, lavs
25 (ph.), aircraft gate areas, pretty much everything outside.

1 Q. And your position is just responsible for Charlotte, no other
2 bases?

3 A. Yes, ma'am, just Charlotte.

4 Q. And for the position that you have, what -- did you have to
5 go through some kind of training? Tell me about how you got to
6 where you are.

7 A. Lots of time, lots of -- a whole lot of training, yeah. It's
8 been a culmination of a lot of things over many years and working
9 with different people throughout time and learning and growing and
10 just learning as much as I could along the way. And it finally
11 just kind of was time to either move up or figure something else
12 out. And so I figured I would try to grow up a little bit.

13 Q. I like that. When a ramp agent is hired, is there initial
14 training that they go through?

15 A. Oh, yeah. There's a lot of -- corporate training is first
16 for a couple weeks, classroom training. When they come out, when
17 they come out on the ramp, they have some additional training with
18 our crew. In total, it's roughly, between corporate and ramp
19 training, it's 1 to 3 weeks, but it's 3 weeks total basically
20 between the two. They do a lot of bookwork at first which, you
21 know, only gets you so much. And then you actually get outside
22 and into the actual working operation and learn hands on from
23 other people, with some classroom mixed in as well, but --

24 Q. So on-the-job training so to speak?

25 A. Yes, ma'am.

1 Q. The hands on. Okay. Do you get involved in that? Do you do
2 the hands-on training?

3 A. I have in the past. When I was a unit manager, I was
4 actually -- we done some training with -- after the classroom
5 training just because we were trying to increase our staffing, and
6 we decided we wanted to help just with some extra training, and
7 it's something we've done before. So I have done it. I'm also
8 involved with some push training. They're kind of under my
9 umbrella helping out. So I am involved in a lot of training for a
10 lot of different things really. But it's not my department per
11 se, but the push training is definitely my -- one of my things
12 basically.

13 Q. Do you work the ramp still in your position or are you in an
14 office?

15 A. A little of both. I'm still outside helping doing a little
16 bit of everything. I'm jumping in a bin even though I might get
17 in trouble, helping out loading planes, parking planes, auditing,
18 watching, just pretty much everywhere wherever we're needed.

19 Q. In your experience working with ramp agents, what do you
20 think is the biggest challenge so to speak with them? Like what
21 do you think is -- yeah, what's the biggest challenge?

22 A. Time management. The first few days is getting used to the
23 aircraft itself. So first, it's just being around an aircraft but
24 overall it's really just a time management job and learning how
25 much time you have to do each task and how much time it takes to

1 do each task is probably the hardest thing to learn. And knowing
2 how long you have to do something and just trying to put it
3 altogether. But, at first, it's just being out there and just
4 kind of getting used to your environment and everything else and
5 then the elements of the weather and the heat and the cold and
6 everything else kind of combined with all that as well.

7 Q. When you talk about time management, are there certain times
8 that, you know, you have to like turn an airplane, get baggage
9 off?

10 A. Yeah, I mean we -- yeah, we just, you know, just knowing that
11 if I'm on the plane basically do I have enough time to go get some
12 water and take a break or do we need to go ahead and continue the
13 outbound, just based off, is it a quick turn or is it a normal
14 hour and 20 minute turn or something else or is it a planned quick
15 turn and just kind of knowing when you have time to do what piece
16 of the work.

17 Q. Um-hum. Are there certain requirements that you have to turn
18 an airplane within a certain amount of time?

19 A. Yeah, only if they're late or scheduled to be at a certain
20 time. The minimum turn time for our aircraft is 35 minutes.
21 That's for anything that's under 50 seats. For anything that's --
22 the bigger aircraft, it's 45 but, you know, there's still some
23 breakdowns, how they code delays and how you monitor about 10
24 minutes to get the carry ons to the jet way and so much time to
25 unload and you just kind of leave yourself enough time to load and

1 get the aircraft out. So turning on paperwork.

2 Q. Do you usually feel like you've got adequate time?

3 A. Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's -- I've been there for so many years.
4 I feel like I could do it with my eyes closed half the time.

5 Q. Do people ever get disciplined for not meeting those times?

6 A. It can happen, yeah. It's definitely something that we
7 watch. It's definitely a metric that is watched. We try to focus
8 on making sure we're hitting certain timeframes and that's what
9 the manager's there for. And we do a lot of coaching with that
10 type situation, if someone's not meeting those timeframes and just
11 work with them and teach them.

12 Q. Is there like a stopwatch that you use or is it just sort of
13 like, it see that it's this time on my watch, and you kind of
14 gauge the 30 minutes or the 10 minutes from that?

15 A. No, not really. We don't sit out there with stopwatch or
16 anything, but we just kind of know. When I was a unit manager, I
17 would know, all right. I'm clocked in at this time. I know I
18 have 40 minutes from this point. So I'm going to monitor where
19 we're at, as well as the rest of the gates, just to see where
20 we're going. Are things hitting the right timeline? Are we still
21 loading bags? Are we still unloading the bags? And just going
22 from step to step. I just walk, monitor each section that you're
23 working.

24 Q. Um-hum. And when you've got people out working the ramp, are
25 they trained to do every position, you know, like wing walker,

1 baggage?

2 A. Well, the basic training covers rampside portions. There is
3 separate training for like bag runners, lav agents, but they are
4 still part of the initial training. They will cover some of that
5 stuff, but if they go into one of the other specialized groups,
6 they start another initial training. Just because if they drove a
7 tug in training, they might not have driven a truck -- tug in -- I
8 don't know how long it ever takes them to get enough seniority to
9 be out there, but if they go out to that situation, they would be
10 taken and a whole new -- or start training would start for another
11 week, maybe 2, depending on the person, to try to go through
12 everything and make them more comfortable and make sure they're
13 good. And they have their own manuals as well. Just our company
14 in Charlotte at least, we have our manuals for those sections to
15 go over.

16 Q. Okay. And are you trained on multiple aircraft or just one
17 type of aircraft?

18 A. No, everybody's trained on everything before they come out.
19 We did have, you know, the 175s were introduced -- well,
20 reintroduced for some of us. So we had to go back to retrain
21 everybody on those again because most of the people that were
22 there now weren't there the first time they were here. And even
23 if they were, we did it again. We had to go through out our
24 training form even though I've worked them before. Then I
25 actually became a trainer for it. So then I could assign people

1 to it as well and do the classroom portion, the hands-on training
2 at the gate. And then we had a way to designate who's been
3 trained and who's not, and we just track that through our systems
4 and everything, to keep up with it.

5 Q. Okay. Do you feel that the training that the ramp agents get
6 is adequate?

7 A. Yeah. Yeah, I really think it is. I think sometimes it's a
8 little too much, but at least with us, I really, I really do have
9 -- I really feel like it's a lot of good information. It doesn't
10 mean that everybody receives it the same way. I know growing up I
11 learned differently than a lot of people, and so some people you
12 just have to take out there and show them the little different
13 things and a different way to do something. So people are more
14 hands-on than they are books. Some people need to read every
15 single sentence to learn it, memorize it and know it without even
16 seeing anything, and they've got a mix of all of that I guess. I
17 don't know. It's just kind of how I learned and growing up that
18 way, that's how I like to teach as well.

19 Q. Um-hum.

20 A. Maybe if this person doesn't show it the way they see it,
21 take them to somebody else and let's try a different route and see
22 how it, you know, they interact with somebody else and maybe it
23 comes along different, different ways, getting up to speed a
24 little bit more.

25 Q. The training, the initial training, is that done like at the

1 base that they're hired at or do they travel somewhere to get that
2 training?

3 A. I know for Charlotte, our training is done here. I know in
4 the past, we have had some out stations come to Charlotte for
5 training, but there's also training that is in Dallas for some
6 certain things as well that we don't have in Charlotte. So for us
7 in Charlotte, it would probably be Charlotte or Dallas, but for
8 some out stations, they might come here or Dallas. I mean you
9 wouldn't want to send somebody from Louisiana to here if they're
10 just closer to there. It just depends on their location and
11 availability of classes. So they could go to either one for
12 training.

13 Q. And is there recurrent training?

14 A. Yes. Everything with the learning of us and everything goes
15 through every year and recycles. Some of it is quarterly. Some
16 of it is twice a year. Some of it is just yearly, but there is a
17 lot of recurrent learning of training and it's constant to be
18 honest. Every quarter there's tons of stuff that's loaded and you
19 kind of get used to the cycle after you've been here for a while.

20 Q. And it's all online training?

21 A. Yes, ma'am.

22 Q. Is there a drug or alcohol use policy that's covered in
23 training?

24 A. Yes, ma'am. That's covered in the initial, the classroom
25 portion I believe, but it's definitely there.

1 Q. Do you know what the policy is? This isn't an oral exam, but
2 I was just curious.

3 A. It's a zero tolerance policy.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Yeah, it's -- any kind of -- I believe the alcohol one is
6 .02, if you or happen to take a breathalyzer test that's above at
7 .02 or above, it'll be considered a fail, and anything else that
8 triggers it would be a fail automatically.

9 Q. Okay. So zero tolerance for drugs and a low tolerance for so
10 to speak alcohol?

11 A. Yes, ma'am.

12 Q. Got it. And are there random drug testing, drug and alcohol
13 testing?

14 A. Not for the agents, no. For those who are GSCs, there can be
15 or there are for GSC people. That's ground security coordinators.
16 Basically a lot of management members.

17 Q. Okay. Have you seen that happen?

18 A. Oh, yeah.

19 Q. Yeah.

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. Have you ever seen any of your coworkers or any of the ground
22 handlers use any like drugs or alcohol on the job?

23 A. Thankfully, no, I've never seen it. I mean, yeah, it can
24 guess all you want, wherever you want, but I've never seen
25 anything thankfully. I definitely wouldn't -- I definitely would

1 take care of it, but it would be --

2 Q. Yeah.

3 A. -- disturbing to see that for sure.

4 Q. Are there different procedures that you follow, you know, if
5 it's like -- depending upon the operator there, you know, the
6 operator of the airplane, if it's Envoy versus, you know, Piedmont
7 or a different operator? Are the procedures different or are the
8 procedures that the ground handlers follow the same?

9 A. Well, we follow the EGOM. It's the Express Ground Operation
10 Manual, and that covers everything we're supposed to follow. They
11 may have a different program of their own, but we do stick to the
12 EGOM. All of our training and all of our processes are in the
13 EGOM for us to follow, and they are pretty much standard for every
14 type of aircraft.

15 Q. Okay. And your, how many ever years you've been doing this,
16 since 2008 I think you said.

17 A. 2003, but yeah.

18 Q. 2003. I cut off the first portion. Have you ever had an
19 airplane come in with an inoperative APU?

20 A. Oh, yeah. That's --

21 Q. Yeah. Is that common?

22 A. I mean it's probably -- they're in the system at least.
23 There's probably one or two every day that are down. It doesn't
24 necessarily come to Charlotte but --

25 Q. Um-hum.

1 A. -- it's a normal thing for us to have.

2 Q. Okay. Is there training on how to handle an airplane with
3 that situation?

4 A. Yeah. I mean it's -- the first part of the aircraft,
5 receiving the aircraft is the same no matter what. In Charlotte,
6 we have two wing walker systems. So we have always two wing
7 walkers no matter what and the guide person. And the only person
8 to be able to approach the aircraft after it's actually parked is
9 someone that's at the nose of the aircraft, which would usually be
10 the marshaller or someone standing close by. And they would put
11 in the chocks and on the other side, they would hit the nose gear
12 steering if there was on, depending on the type of aircraft and
13 possibly hook up a GPU. Well, they don't have to for non-APUs.
14 They'd have to wait for the jetway to approach and once the jetway
15 is connected in place, then we can hook up the GPU. We just can't
16 hook up the GPU beforehand because the jetway won't be able to
17 move. But that's all done at the nose gear and above, forward of
18 the aircraft. No one else approaches the aircraft until after the
19 engines are shut down and the beacon's off. If one of those two
20 doesn't happen, no one else approaches any part of the aircraft.

21 Q. And in your experience, have you seen anyone approach an
22 airplane before they're supposed to?

23 A. I've seen it happen, but usually the person next to them
24 grabs them and is like the beacon's still on. And it's something
25 that we're very aware of and sometimes it can happen where someone

1 gets complacent, but not the norm, we pretty much stay away. We
2 know to steer clear and stay away from everything. Just stay at
3 the wing or stay at the front.

4 Q. And, this may seem an obvious question, but I mean is it
5 pretty obvious that the engines are running when they're
6 running --

7 A. Oh, yeah.

8 Q. -- even at an idle?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. Yeah. Even if the beacon's turned off, you can still tell.
12 It's a different type of sound than an APU just running, and it's
13 also spinning. So you can actually do a visual check and just
14 look at the engine to see if it's full (indiscernible) or if it's
15 actually spinning full tilt.

16 Q. Um-hum. Is it required that you check to see if it full
17 down --

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. -- before you approach?

20 A. Yeah, you always have to check. You can't depend on one item
21 to be working. If they cut the engine off and they leave the
22 beacon on, we still don't move. But if they turn the beacon off,
23 and you think the engine's running, you don't approach. You give
24 it a visual check. And if it is, then you just alert the crew,
25 and if you have to, you get on the headset with them on the comm

1 and just say, hey, you've got your beacon off but the engine's
2 still running. We can't approach yet, just to make them aware of
3 what we're doing.

4 Q. And there's two beacons?

5 A. Yeah, there's one on the top and one on the bottom.

6 Q. Okay. Which one are you looking at?

7 A. Whichever one I'm in position to see to be honest. If I'm at
8 the wing, sometimes it's easier to see the top on. If I'm at the
9 front, sometimes it's easier to see the bottom on. It kind of
10 depends on your position.

11 Q. Gotcha. And is it pretty obvious when those are on?

12 A. Yes, ma'am. Yeah, it's -- no matter day or night. Night,
13 it's obviously easier but day, it's just as obvious. You can see
14 it.

15 Q. Is there ever a time of day, you know, maybe the sun's
16 setting? Does it ever -- is it ever difficult to see?

17 A. No, they're extremely bright. I don't know what they use for
18 it, but they are extremely bright. You can definitely see them.

19 Q. And is there training on like ingestion zones around engines?

20 A. Yes, ma'am. Yeah, it's -- I believe it's somewhere around 8
21 -- what is it? Fifteen. I think it's 15 feet to stay away, but
22 like I said, we just, we just go by the nose gear of the aircraft.
23 We stay nowhere beyond the nose or the cabin door the catering
24 door which are much further than that. Those are the only things
25 we would touch in the aircraft if it was running. We'd have to

1 let down the arms of the stairs or put the chocks in or hook up
2 the GPU. All that is positioned forward of the door and forward
3 of the front most gear steering.

4 Q. And with your ear protection that you wear, any difficulties
5 in hearing if an engine's running still?

6 A. No, no. I actually used to wear the ones in the ear and over
7 the ear just because it was so loud. You can still hear it. It's
8 just a different type of sound. You can tell whether it's
9 running.

10 Q. Um-hum. Okay. Your ground handlers, do they get paid sick
11 time?

12 A. I believe they all do. I know the full timers do. The part
13 timers might not right away, but they all get paid sick time, yes,
14 ma'am.

15 Q. Okay. Do you feel that working for Piedmont, that it's, you
16 know, somebody calls in sick. Does anybody give you a hard time
17 about it?

18 A. I mean it's part of the system. I mean it's just how it
19 works. We all understand. Those who have been there forever, you
20 just kind of -- that's why the staffing is built the way it is, so
21 it kind of protects for situations like that. We'll have kind of
22 like extra staffing around that we can move from a different area
23 to come help, and if we have a mass call out in a certain section,
24 especially going through COVID and everything else, we did have a
25 lot of that, and we would just move our staffing to somewhere

1 else, and we can make it work.

2 Q. Okay. Does Piedmont have a hazard reporting system for
3 ground handlers to report a safety concern?

4 A. Yeah, there's a hotline number and they can actually go onto
5 mypiedmont (ph.) as well and report any kind of problem they want
6 to report on there. There's multiple ways to access it.

7 Q. Okay. Are any of them anonymous?

8 A. Yeah, I believe they are actually. I think that's -- I know
9 that the way we receive them, if we have one, there's no
10 information on where it came from, when it came from, who is came
11 from. It's just, hey, this was reported. Can you look into it?
12 It's something that we don't want to ever -- shouldn't basically
13 -- same way we just spoke earlier. It shouldn't involve
14 discipline and the actual looking into it, especially for the
15 person that reports it. It should just be something that's
16 reported. Let's check it out. And the review the process is to
17 see if it's something we need to update or if it's just a one off
18 situation. So, yeah, it's designed really well actually.

19 Q. Okay. So when you once we receive it, you're part of the
20 process for receiving safety concerns that are submitted?

21 A. Yes, ma'am. I mean I'm one of the higher managers onsite.
22 So we are definitely involved in any kind of situations that get
23 brought up. I believe they come directly to us. It's not --
24 sometimes they go to just our bosses, and then they let us know
25 what's going on so we can look into it as well, but I'm pretty

1 sure we get the same ones that they do.

2 Q. What do you think are -- in your experience, what are the
3 most common safety concerns that are reported?

4 A. There's different things. People not being outside ready for
5 their flights from other agents. Some people -- there's some
6 people there that like to let us know every little detail, like so
7 and so is not wearing their ear protection. I saw a person who
8 ran through a stop sign. I saw somebody that didn't have a
9 seatbelt on. It's stuff that's important. I mean it's all -- all
10 those rules are there for a reason, to protect people, and it's
11 good that we get tips from people to help us out to look into
12 situations.

13 Q. Um-hum. As a manager, is there a certain timeframe that you
14 have to respond to a safety concern or safety report?

15 A. It's definitely as soon as we can, and it's usually pretty
16 quick. It's not something you want to sit there and wait 2 weeks
17 to give an answer to. I don't think my boss would let me do that
18 to be honest. But, yeah, you kind of want to get those as quickly
19 as possible because as big as an operation we are in Charlotte,
20 there could be five more sitting there waiting to happen as far as
21 that email that we're just waiting to receive. So if you start
22 waiting, you're going to get something piled up just in case. So
23 you just kind of want to take care of them as soon as you get
24 them.

25 Q. And the person who reported -- this is hard if it's

1 anonymous, but assuming that there's a non-anonymous report, do
2 they get some kind of response, you know, saying what action was
3 taken or, you know, feedback on the safety concern that they
4 reported?

5 A. We do have a lot of in person things that come in the office
6 as well. And if there is some sort of follow up with another
7 person, we wouldn't give them that information but we would let
8 them know we did look into something. This is what we found out.
9 We ended up fixing this or tagging this out. And we'll let them
10 know. I mean if they're going to have, you know, if they're going
11 to come in there and tell us. If they had the ability to do that,
12 then we need to have the ability of letting them know, hey, we
13 took care of it, and thank them honestly for letting us know
14 something's wrong.

15 Q. Um-hum. And light of that, how would you describe the safety
16 culture at Piedmont?

17 A. Honestly, being there as long as I have, I think it's pretty
18 good. The fact that we do have people that do speak up and say
19 something when they see something is pretty impressive because a
20 lot of people wouldn't do it. And a lot of places I've been 20
21 years ago, that people would just turn a blind eye to something.
22 But I think our agents, at least in Charlotte for sure, are very
23 aware of what our safety rules and regulations are, and they
24 follow them pretty well and let us know what's wrong and right
25 pretty often I would say.

1 Q. Did you have -- you obviously have heard about the incident
2 that we're investigating that occurred. How did you find out
3 about that?

4 A. Actually somebody at work told me they saw it on social
5 media. I think I was off. I believe I wasn't at work and
6 somebody from work called me and told me about it.

7 Q. Being a larger base in Charlotte, do you have any role in
8 safety issues that occur at other bases or are you just strictly
9 Charlotte?

10 A. No. I mean the only other thing we have at other bases is we
11 would hear about events like this. So if something happens
12 somewhere else we could know that this is what happened, maybe
13 change a briefing or put out a briefing about the event, but not
14 necessarily the event itself, but something that could happen.
15 But we're not really involved per se with anything with them.

16 Q. Did Piedmont issue any like safety alerts or anything after
17 the event warning about the dangers of ingestion or engines
18 running?

19 A. Yeah. There were a lot of safety alerts that came out
20 shortly after. I don't know that I can repeat all of them
21 verbatim, but there were lots of things about ingestion zones,
22 beacons and just safety with engines or with the 175 that came out
23 shortly after that as well.

24 Q. Um-hum. Is there a requirement that you read those when they
25 come out? Like do you have to login to mypiedmont and it somehow

1 shows read?

2 A. When we get them -- I know for me, I get an email and I
3 review everything every day, and we get a lot of stuff in, safety
4 alerts from safety as well. They send out alerts that we get.

5 Q. Okay. When you've been working the ramp, are agents allowed
6 to walk under a wing or under a fuselage?

7 A. No, not for us. No matter the type of aircraft, they're not
8 supposed to cross under the wing or the fuselage for any reason.
9 The only reason they would go under the wing, maybe at any point,
10 was if they were hooking up the air. So I believe the rule
11 technically states if your job requires it, but it's only to pull
12 an air hose underneath. That's the only one I can really think of
13 off the top of my head, but that's the only time really, or a
14 water hose as well for the 175, it has to be parked on one side
15 and pulled to the other. They do have to cross under there but
16 those are really the only two times that it happens.

17 Q. Have you ever seen anyone do that?

18 A. With the air and the water, yeah, that's every day.

19 Q. I mean that's not -- if their job did not require it?

20 A. I've seen people make a mistake, yes, and I can't say that I
21 haven't. I definitely have seen someone just turn left, not
22 thinking about the 175, and just go, whoa, and stop and look and
23 they're looking at what they just did. So, yeah, I've seen it.
24 It's not a normal -- definitely not a normal thing. It's just
25 usually somebody trying to hurry and then they realize, I didn't

1 pass the wing, I just -- I thought I was all the way to the end
2 and I cut the corner.

3 Q. Yeah. So what would the expectation be -- all right. Say an
4 airplane's coming in, inoperative APU. What happens on the
5 ground?

6 A. The first thing we do is we get with our -- if I was the unit
7 manager, I would get with my group and just say, hey, heads up, an
8 APU coming in. Stay away from the aircraft until the beacon's
9 off, engines stopped running. If you're in doubt at all, just
10 stay away. In fact, if you have to, just come up to the front and
11 wait for everything to shut down and then you can go, but like I
12 said, the initial thing you'll have to do is you need to chock it.
13 We would keep somebody up at the front of the aircraft with the
14 crew to let them know, to hang on, we're, you know, putting the
15 chocks in. We have to wait. Now, if we had a portable GPU, we
16 could hook up the GPU straightaway, but if it's one of ours that
17 on the jetway, if we actually plug it up and turn it on, it will
18 stop the jetway movement because it shares a power system. But if
19 we have a portable there, then it's not an issue. We would go
20 ahead and hook up, give the signal for the crew, the chocks are in
21 and the power's in and just wait for them shut down.

22 Q. Okay. And there's a prearrival briefing before every flight
23 that comes in?

24 A. Yes, ma'am. There's -- sometimes we get a little busy if
25 there's five to six gates per manager. They might not get to

1 everyone but they brief everyone at the beginning of every shift,
2 and then they brief throughout every -- almost every flight if
3 they can get to it. There might be one that's missed, but if
4 there's an air start one or a non-APU, there's definitely a huddle
5 before every one of them for us.

6 Q. Um-hum.

7 A. They are -- our unit managers are required to be there for
8 those flights just to make sure and oversee everything.

9 Q. Um-hum. So you've got wing walkers. You said sometimes
10 there will be two. Is there sometimes only one?

11 A. The EGOM states you only need unless there's a 10 foot or --
12 I think it's 10 foot obstruction but in Charlotte, we actually
13 designate two for every aircraft. We did that, I don't know, 4 or
14 5 years ago I believe. It's really just a Charlotte rule, but
15 it's just because we operate in tight spaces. So we usually have
16 -- we always have two people. Even at 2 o'clock in the morning,
17 I've still got two wing walkers out there on the ramp. It's just
18 no matter what. That's just how we do it.

19 Q. If there is only one wing walker, is there one side that they
20 have to be on versus another? Where would they be positioned?

21 A. I think in my old training, they -- I believe the old
22 training is that most obstructed side. So if there's a fuel truck
23 on your right and nothing on your left, you don't want to be on
24 the left, but I don't know that there's a designated spot if both
25 sides are clear. I think in the past most people went to the

1 captain's side but again in Charlotte, we have our chocks on the
2 left-hand side. So I would think they would probably go to the
3 left, but there's not an actual designated, you have to be on the
4 left or you have to be on the right. It's only really the most
5 obstructed side. So if there's an obstruction, if there's only
6 one person, you have to be on that side specifically.

7 Q. Who usually sets the cones?

8 A. Everybody pretty much. The marshaller will set the front
9 cone by the nose gear. Each wing walker will do the side cones
10 and then one of the wing walkers on the left or right, depending
11 on the aircraft, will put out the tail cone. And then after the
12 belt loader's in place, the other two cones are placed.

13 Q. Okay. So in a scenario where you've got a wing walker on the
14 captain's side, that person would set the cone at that wing. And
15 now they're setting the tail cone. They'd walk back, set it, and
16 then where would you expect this person to walk? What would be
17 the next duty for this person after they set the cones?

18 A. They'd come up front on a 175 because that's where most of
19 our bags are loaded, and on everything but the Embraer 145, they
20 would come up toward the pods to get the carry ons out, but that
21 would be the last portion that we would handle on pretty much any
22 aircraft except for the Embraer 145.

23 Q. And the cargo on the 175 is on the first officer's side
24 towards the front?

25 A. Yes, ma'am. And it's -- there are two compartments. Most of

1 the time, it's all in the front. Occasionally there will be a
2 couple of items in the back.

3 Q. Um-hum. And so the person who's at the tail, would they come
4 back on the captain's side and walk around or would you expect to
5 kind of keep walking to the first officer's side and then walk to
6 the front?

7 A. It kind of depends, but they usually would probably just walk
8 around to the other side because the other person who parked the
9 plane is actually doing the physical walk around, to do
10 everything, the checks. So they would do a full 360 walk around
11 to check the aircraft for any kind of problems. But, yeah, they
12 would put it out and go to the side where we're going to be
13 offloading something.

14 Q. Um-hum. Would there --

15 A. But they usually just circle back.

16 Q. Yeah. Would there ever be a time when they would come back
17 on the side that they just came from, back on the captain's side?

18 A. I don't know why they really would to be honest. It's kind
19 of like a waste of motion to come back towards something that
20 doesn't have any work to be done, when you're already three-
21 quarters of the way around. You might as well just keep going to
22 the other side.

23 Q. And there's no duties that would put somebody kind of forward
24 of the engine on the captain's side, for a 175, no tasking that
25 would require somebody to be there?

1 A. No, ma'am. No further back than the comm area which is where
2 the GPU plugs in, and the headset would be connected to talk to
3 the crew.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. Beyond that, there's no reason for anybody to be behind it.

6 Q. Does Piedmont have, you know, we talked about the sick leave
7 policies, but do they have any sort of like mental health
8 awareness or like an employee assistance program or anything to
9 help people maybe who are interested in that?

10 A. Yeah, the EAP is actually -- we have an EAP number also on
11 our mypiedmont section, and it's all something we're all versed in
12 to -- it's a place to go that's safe to discuss things that they
13 may not want to speak to us about, maybe personal problems they
14 may have that they can go over with someone in a safe place
15 without judgment, and they can get help there. And there's a lot
16 of people that utilize that it. I don't know all the details
17 because we're not supposed to.

18 Q. Right.

19 A. But I do know that it is -- it's very -- used a lot to be
20 honest, and it's a very good tool for help.

21 Q. And do you think that employees are aware that that program
22 exists?

23 A. Yes, ma'am. Absolutely. And it's something we bring up if
24 somebody does come in with a situation. It's one of the first
25 things that we say, and we'll get them in a closed off room and

1 kind of be in just a small group session and just say, you know,
2 this is something. We have these programs set up for something
3 like this. If you'd rather not speak with me about it, just so
4 you can feel more comfortable in being able to speak freely about
5 whatever you need to talk about and get the help that you need.

6 Q. In the years that you've been there since 2003, have you --
7 does EAP ever come in and do any sort of like workshops or like
8 seminars with employees that they can join to, I don't know,
9 become aware of their resources or --

10 A. Yeah. I mean as far as I know, there's been stuff held
11 before. Our HR department does a lot as well. They come in and
12 have a lot of just -- I wouldn't call them classes, but kind of
13 input session type things. And it's brought up in those sessions
14 as well. There's lots of ways to find out, and there's definitely
15 information out there, and it's put out there pretty available for
16 them to have.

17 Q. Okay. All right. I think that's -- I might have a couple of
18 follow ups but I'm going to see if anyone else has any questions
19 for you. Are you doing okay?

20 A. Yes, ma'am.

21 Q. Need a break or anything?

22 A. No, ma'am. I'm good.

23 Q. Okay. All right.

24 DR. WILSON: Brice.

25 MR. BANNING: Yeah.

1 BY MR. BANNING:

2 Q. Craig, thanks once again for visiting with us. We sure
3 appreciate it. I think I just have a few follow-up questions
4 here, and I apologize if they're somewhat redundant. You talked
5 about OJT training and also some ground training or classroom type
6 training I think. How long -- is there a set timeframe for the
7 OJT training?

8 A. I know the classroom portion I believe is 1 week, and then
9 when they're released from that, they come out to the ramp.
10 They're in there for at least 2 -- we have done as many as 3 weeks
11 before. If we're in a slower hiring process, we usually tend to
12 draw it out and make it longer, but if we have another class
13 behind, the minimum is basically 2 weeks.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. But we have given extra just because we wanted to, like let's
16 give another week but usually it is 2 weeks. But then we also
17 have other training later for like I said, for bag room,
18 utilities, pushback training, those are separate from the initial
19 OJT. The initial OJT is actually getting out there and learning
20 the bits and pieces and then you have more specific training
21 throughout after that, if that makes sense.

22 Q. Yeah, for sure. I appreciate that. Is it OJT then kind of
23 performance based or how are you judging graduation for lack of a
24 better word?

25 A. Yeah. I mean it's -- they get out there basically to take

1 them through working an aircraft as a group, and if you see
2 someone that's not catching everything fully, you might say, let's
3 do another week. Let's do another 2 weeks. Let's go redo the
4 whole thing if you have to. And it's even something we've had
5 with our managers, after someone's released from class. That
6 someone comes out, and they're still -- I mean questions are
7 great, don't get me wrong, but you want people to ask questions.
8 It's one of the best things you can do, but when they're not
9 asking questions, they don't seem to understand it. We've
10 actually brought them in, back to training and said, hey, I think
11 we need to revisit this and maybe get some one-on-one. And next
12 time we have a class that's finished and a class that's waiting to
13 start, we'll pair them up with a supervisor and do some extra one-
14 on-one training and that usually is very beneficial.

15 Q. Thank you. And I'm going to jump around a little bit here.

16 A. That's fine.

17 Q. Talking about inoperative APUs, how would a crew be notified
18 that an aircraft is coming in with an inoperative APU?

19 A. As far as our crew, correct?

20 Q. Yeah. So like the ramp --

21 A. Okay.

22 Q. -- the ramp crew, how would they know?

23 A. Just clarifying that.

24 Q. Yeah. No, I appreciate it.

25 A. Our -- at the beginning of each shift, for AM and PM, our

1 tower puts together a MEL list. That's the list of equipment that
2 is known to be broken already for aircraft. It can be anything
3 from broken seats to a lot of things, but we get a list of it, and
4 it's listed out. And we have a certain section for non-APU/GPU
5 air start. And in our briefing in the morning with my managers, I
6 brief, hey, this aircraft, this aircraft, this aircraft. We did
7 use our GET (ph.) application where we have our aircraft listed
8 for our flights, and you actually click on the pucks. A puck is
9 basically -- it's a square that shows the inbound flight, the
10 aircraft, the outbound flight, the times and it has these listed
11 by gates, and you can actually click on it and it has that
12 information in the puck to where if anyone sees it, they see a
13 note on the bottom left, and if they hover over the note, it'll
14 say inop APU air start. But once our managers are aware, they
15 check their shift. All right. We're going to have this aircraft.
16 Okay. Well, it's not on my gate today, but let me make sure I
17 don't get swapped into. So they make a note that if it is, they
18 immediately brief that person at the beginning of the shift, hey,
19 heads up, 7 o'clock, air start aircraft on gate something. I'll
20 be there with you. Just make sure we stay away and follow
21 procedure. Don't approach the aircraft until the beacon's off,
22 engines are stopped. And you would have that again just before
23 the aircraft comes in. You round those guys back up and just say,
24 hey, again this is a non-APU aircraft, make sure we're following
25 procedure. I'll be here with you, and our managers are right

1 there on scene with them to help out.

2 Q. Okay. Yeah. And, if an aircraft came in with an inoperative
3 APU, and I think you've covered this, but would it be acceptable
4 to set the cones for I think the diamond of safety is what it's
5 called before the beacon is shut off?

6 A. Not the back ones or really even the wing ones. The nose one
7 you put out just -- it's right there anyway. And again that is in
8 front of the nose gear. So basically our whole operation is
9 passenger door, catering door, nose gear forward. So that would
10 involve the GPU, the comm. Steering, you would turn off. That's
11 one of our initial parts in doing the chocks. Nothing beyond that
12 would be done. You could have the cone at the wing off to the
13 side, but you would be 6 to 8 feet away from even the end of the
14 wing tip, just kind of standing there waiting, if you were wing
15 walking because you usually take that cone out there with you.
16 And once everything's good, you would set that one and then set
17 your back cone, which you wouldn't want to go behind, and you're
18 not allowed to go behind the engine when it's running.

19 Q. Okay. And, then you mentioned a safety huddle prior to an
20 airplane coming into the gate. Is a safety huddle required for
21 every flight that comes in?

22 A. Yeah, it is. Like I said, they have five aircraft parked at
23 once for a manager that has five gates, he's hopefully gotten to
24 everybody but we do that original safety huddle at the beginning
25 of the day, and he does his best to get to every one which is

1 usually pretty easy. The only time we have where they park all at
2 once like that is in a weather situation where the ramp was closed
3 and everything is open, but again, you would do it while the
4 ramp's closed inside like, hey, we're going to do the huddle now.
5 As soon as it opens, everybody's got to go, make sure you know
6 what we have, everybody's in place.

7 Q. And, one more question here, and I think that'll do it for
8 me. You talked about the ERJ 175, and I believe the event
9 airplane was an ERJ 170. Do you know, are they similar airplanes
10 or can you speak to that a little bit?

11 A. Yeah, they're almost identical. I believe it's a couple of
12 seats different and maybe a layout inside different, but the
13 operation of it from our perspective is the exact same.

14 Q. Okay. Sounds good. Thank you. I sure appreciate it.

15 A. No problem.

16 DR. WILSON: Thanks, Brice. Julie.

17 MS. SCHELL: I don't have anything. Thank you. Thank you,
18 Craig.

19 MR. KNOTTS: No problem.

20 DR. WILSON: Ed?

21 CAPT. DELEHANT: No, I don't have anything. Thank you again,
22 Craig. I appreciate your time.

23 MR. KNOTTS: Yes, sir. No problem at all.

24 BY DR. WILSON:

25 Q. I actually don't have any more questions. We've asked you a

1 lot of questions, but is there anything we didn't ask you about
2 that you think we should have asked you about or you were hoping
3 we'd ask you about?

4 A. No, I don't believe so. I'm a little nervous either way. So
5 I don't think so to be honest. It was a lot of questions for
6 sure, but hopefully I answered them the best I could.

7 Q. Yeah, it was great.

8 DR. WILSON: Before we get off, last chance, Brice, Julie,
9 Ed, anything that you thought of?

10 MR. BANNING: No. Thank you.

11 DR. WILSON: Okay. Craig, if you think of anything that you
12 think would be relevant to our investigation, you can always reach
13 out to Brice through Julie. We've only spent a little bit of time
14 investigating this event. So we'd love to hear anything, you
15 know, you think might be relevant if it comes to you.

16 MR. KNOTTS: Yes, ma'am.

17 DR. WILSON: And if you don't have anything else for us, we
18 will let you get back to your day and go off the record at 2:50.

19 (Whereupon, at 2:50 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: EMBRAER AIRPLANE ACCIDENT WHILE
 PARKED AT THE MONTGOMERY REGIONAL
 AIRPORT IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
 ON DECEMBER 31, 2022
 Interview of Craig Knotts

ACCIDENT NO.: DCA23LA109

PLACE: via Microsoft Teams

DATE: December 15, 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.

A black rectangular redaction box covering a signature.

Kathryn A. Mirfin
Transcriber