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Date: March 21, 2024

Subject: NTSB# ERA24FA136

Contact: Dan Buehner (Former Director of Operations (DO), Skyjet Elite)

The individual noted above provided the following information via telephone conversation. Mr. Buehner was asked several questions about the organizational structure of SkyJet Elite and about the flight crew involved in the accident. The below contents are a summary of what was reported:

Mr. Buehner reported that he worked as the Director of Operations (DO) for Skyjet Elite for about four years. He was no longer employed by SkyJet after November 2023. He explained that it was a "clean break" in his words, and that he never knew that the PIC had transitioned to flying the Astra (from the PA31 assignment), until he learned of the accident.

Mr. Buehner stated that Mr. Colmenares (the accident flight pilot in command - 'PIC') was a "place holder" in the Chief Pilot position at SkyJet. He was a "stop gap" because he "had the [flight] time." He was a "in name only" Chief Pilot for SkyJet.

Mr. Buehner stated that the PIC/ Chief Pilot was not involved in "any daily operations" at SkyJet. He explained that the FAA Principal Operations Inspector (POI) (Mark Landolt) needed someone that met the qualifications in the position.

Mr. Buehner stated that one of his other pilots, 'Rolando' [Merchán], was a great candidate for Chief Pilot, but he did not have the flight time, nor did he meet the waived minimums for the role.

Mr. Buehner stated that he made it "abundantly clear" to the CEO of SkyJet (Mr. Alfredo Diez), that the PIC should never be allowed to sit in a turbine seat.

Mr. Buehner reported that the PIC was hired to fly PA31 'Navajo' twin engine piston airplanes for SkyJet. He confirmed that the PIC was hired sometime in August - November 2022.

Mr. Buehner reported that every time the PIC would get ready to take his Part 135 check ride, the airplane would break. He elaborated that this ended up being a constant issue with the PA31 aircraft at SkyJet, and ultimately from 2022 until November 2023 at his end of time with SkyJet, the PA31 airplanes never flew part 135 and the PIC never took a Part 135 check with the FSDO to get signed off. The reason he stated, was due to maintenance with the PA31.

Mr. Buehner reported that having the PIC serving in the Chief Pilot position for their 135 certificate was keeping the POI happy.

Mr. Buehner reported that the FAA POI asked routinely on when the PIC would be available to complete the Part 135 checks so they could begin 135 flights. Mr. Buehner reported the reason for the PA31 never having entered service, was due to maintenance.

Mr. Buehner reported that he was aware, that at some point, due to the PA31 flying never materializing, the PIC began working for REVA¹. He believed that the PIC may have worked for REVA part-time.

Mr. Buehner reported that he never knew about any training issues that the PIC may have had a REVA.

Mr. Buehner explained further that he made it clear to the CEO of SkyJet (Mr. Diez), that the PIC should not be flying anything turbine. While he was DO at SkyJet, he would never have allowed the PIC to fly anything turbine. He explained that the PIC was hired to fly the PA31 airplanes and only cargo, rather than the Astra (1125 accident airplane).

Mr. Buehner was asked to elaborate on why he had this opinion of the PIC. He explained that the PIC struggled with small tasks, such as completing a form correctly, or providing a form. He had to ask multiple times for something. He expressed a general sense that he did not have an overwhelming confidence in the PIC. Mr. Buehner explained that his view was not based upon any flight experience he had with the PIC, nor did he ever receive any complaints from another operator the PIC had previously worked for.

¹ REVA is a Part 135 operator based in Florida.

Mr. Buehner was asked who made the decision to allow the PIC to start Flight Safety training and be assigned to the PIC role on the Astra 1125. Mr. Buehner stated that he was "almost 100% certain" the CEO (Mr. Diez) made the decision for the PIC to start training for the PIC role on the Astra. Mr. Buehner explained that the CEO was trying to "make his business succeed" and the pilot shortage, or the lack of quality pilots available, was greatly impacting their business.

Mr. Buehner explained that it was his view that the CEO promoted the PIC to the Astra PIC flying out of "sheer desperation" and that he likely had no other options. This was Mr. Buehner's opinion based upon his past relationship with the CEO and his work experience at SkyJet. Mr. Buehner had no knowledge of the PIC being promoted into the PIC Astra role, until after the accident occurred.

Mr. Buehner explained that for four years, practically every day, he was handling business for SkyJet. Mr. Buehner reported that he did not always agree with the CEO's decision making, nor did the CEO agree with his decisions all the time.

Mr. Buehner provided an example, where he would attempt to ensure trips never had "green on green" pilots, even though this was not a regulatory 135 requirement. He explained that the CEO or other airplane owners would not understand or agree with decisions like this, which sometimes would impact SkyJet's ability to complete a trip (due to crew pairings).

Mr. Buehner believed that the PIC received an opportunity that he wasn't sure he would get again at this stage in his career, flying PIC in an Astra. Mr. Buehner reported that it was his impression, that the PIC would want to impress the CEO and his spouse onboard and would want to complete a flight the CEO desired.

Mr. Buehner explained that the CEO's management style was that, when his mind was made up, the decision made and that was the way things were going to be. Mr. Buehner believed based upon his past relationships with the CEO, and the PIC, there would have been a great deal of pressure to complete the accident flight. This was his opinion, and he had no specific knowledge of the accident flight. He believed that the accident flight was preventable.

Mr. Buehner explained that you cannot pay pilot's at the low end of the market, and expect to get quality pilots to fly mid-size jets.

Mr. Buehner stated that from the beginning of his employment at SkyJet, he told the CEO that he would never cut corners while acting as DO. He kept very detailed records and followed the regulations.

Mr. Buehner explained that he would proctor the INDOC training himself. He made an extensive PowerPoint for the new hire pilots. Mr. Buehner explained that during this INDOC training, the PIC had a lot of difficulties with small tasks. He also said that there was a language barrier. He explained that many small tasks seemed like a challenge to him, such as scanning a document and returning it to SkyJet.

Mr. Buehner was asked if he believed that the PIC had over 13,000 hours of flight time, or did he verify that the PIC had this amount of experience that the PIC claimed on a resume. Mr. Buehner stated, "here's the problem. You can't verify their time." He explained that the PIC was from Venezuela, and he could not verify the flight time flown in South America. He stated that he had similar issues with other pilots from South America. They would claim they had over 1,000 hours in the Astra overseas, but then could not complete training.

Mr. Buehner reported that "NATA" was the background check service provided. Mr. Buehner explained that as another example, it was extremely difficult to get the PIC to complete paperwork, like the PRIA paperwork. It was discussed, that a PRIA form was not completed properly by the PIC, and NATA informed SkyJet multiple times of the error, but he was never sure the error was corrected by the pilot. He cannot recall if the background check was ever completed due to this error.

Mr. Buehner reported that he was fairly certain that he received a PRIA/ PRD on the PIC. He was requested to provide this documentation.

Mr. Buehner reported that it was his understanding, that PRD was only as good as what the pilot put into the system. Mr. Buehner explained that it was his knowledge, that PRIA and PRD relied upon the airman to disclose past employers. Mr. Buehner was not aware of any air carriers that the PIC had worked for, that reported anything concerning about the PIC.

Mr. Buehner believed that N90AJ, an Astra, was signed onto the 135 certificate in January 2023. Mr. Buehner explained that the PA31 aircraft were also on the certificate, but they never flew due to maintenance. Mr. Buehner was asked to provide all documentation he had on the PIC in his records.

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