

ERA25MA171

OPERATIONS

Group Chair's Factual Report - ATTACHMENT 6
Director of Operations and Chief Pilot Interview
May 2, 2025

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Investigation of:)
)
OPERATIONS INTERVIEWS,) Accident No.: ERA25MA171
NEW YORK HELICOPTER)
CHARTER, INC.)

Interview of: JASON COSTELLO, Former Director of Operations

Pages: 1 through 27

Date: May 2, 2025

HERITAGE REPORTING CORPORATION

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Washington, D.C. 20036

Friday,
May 2, 2025

Heritage Reporting Corporation

APPEARANCES:

AARON McCARTER, Aviation Accident Investigator,
National Transportation Safety Board

BRYAN DAVID, ESQ., Interviewee's Counsel,
Cunningham Swaim, LLP

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Jason Costello:

By Mr. McCarter

6

P R O C E E D I N G S

(11:08 a.m.)

MR. McCARTER: Let me just go through the spiel first here, and then we'll go ahead and officially start, if you don't mind.

MR. COSTELLO: No. Go ahead.

MR. McCARTER: Okay. I'm Aaron McCarter, NTSB accident investigator with the NTSB. I'm the Ops group chairman on the accident that occurred on April 10th in Jersey City, New Jersey, with ship November 216 Mike Hotel.

Your status as removed from New York Helicopters has no bearing on the interview, as your knowledge and relationship with the operation, mechanics, the pilots, the ownership is material and paramount to the investigation.

Per NTSB protocols, you have elected to have attorney Bryan David here representing. You could have picked anyone, but Bryan seems like a perfectly good choice. I've come to know him over the past hour or so.

The purpose of this investigation, Jason, it's only to increase safety. It's not designed to assign fault, blame, or any kind of liability. We just want to try to find out what happened. This is a small

1 part of a much larger holistic process. The on-scene
2 portion is done, but we've got a lot more work to do
3 with the airworthiness and operations over the next
4 several months.

5 So the NTSB cannot offer any guidance, guarantee
6 of confidentiality, or immunity from legal or
7 certificate actions. I have to say it. It sounds
8 scary, but it's really not that bad.

9 A transcript or summary of the interview will go
10 into the public docket. The interviewee can have one
11 representative. We've already talked about that. The
12 representative may be an attorney. We've already
13 discussed that.

14 The representative may not testify for the
15 interviewee, and he or she will try to refrain from
16 making direct comments. The comments should be
17 limited. Legal evidentiary objections are not grounds
18 for the NTSB, myself, to refrain from asking
19 questions, but it's -- I don't think it's going to be
20 an issue at all.

21 So that being said, if everyone is in agreement,
22 I'll go ahead and start the formal interview. We
23 good?

24 MR. COSTELLO: Yeah. Go ahead.

25 MR. McCARTER: Okay.

1 INTERVIEW OF JASON COSTELLO

2 Q For the record, please tell us your full name and
3 title.

4 A Jason Joseph Costello, Director of Operations.

5 Q Okay. And what is your role and responsibility
6 at -- or was your role and responsibility at New York
7 Helicopters?

8 A To be the Director of Operations, and oversee the
9 operations of the company.

10 Q Okay. What does that really entail? You can
11 give me a high-level view of what being the Director
12 of Ops is.

13 A Making sure that the aircraft are -- what
14 aircrafts are available, what aircraft is -- you know,
15 when we have maintenance, what gets done. Make sure
16 pilots know what their job is. Do the checkrides for
17 the pilots when they needed their checkrides done.

18 Basically handle all the FAA side of the company.
19 You know, I was always involved with the FAA to do the
20 -- anything to do with the Ops specs or something
21 else, the GOM, et cetera.

22 Q Okay. Very good. Can you tell us, how was your
23 relationship with these -- the FAA office that you
24 worked with?

25 A I thought I had a very good relationship, you

1 know. I went to them many times for help if I had
2 questions, and they were always very good to answer
3 for me.

4 Q Okay. Who was your POI?

5 A Matt Hertl.

6 Q Okay. Thank you. Are you a helicopter pilot,
7 I'm assuming?

8 A Yes.

9 Q Okay. Can you briefly, not super detailed, just
10 kind of give me a rough estimate of your total time,
11 your time in the helicopters, license ratings, et
12 cetera?

13 A Commercial multi-engine and instrument airplane,
14 ATP helicopter, CFI, CFII helicopter. Some -- a
15 little over 11,000 hours of flight time total.

16 Q That's a lot of hours. How long have you worked
17 for New York Helicopters, and in what capacity from
18 when you started up until when the operation ceased?

19 A I started with -- as chief pilot, and then I
20 moved up to DO when the former DO resigned. I think
21 I've been there for seven years.

22 Q Okay. Do you know why the former DO resigned?

23 A It was during COVID, and he couldn't get paid.
24 So we had no money to pay him, and, you know, well,
25 he's not going to get paid, he doesn't want to stay.

1 Q Yeah, well, who can blame him for that. Can you
2 describe the new hire training program? Like, what
3 did it consist of for a new hire pilot or anyone to
4 come on board?

5 A The pilot would interview -- would send in a
6 resume. I usually let Octave conduct the interviews.
7 They would come in. They would do an interview flight
8 with us if we determined we -- we generally had
9 several people come in at once, and we'd see how many
10 people we needed to hire. We would have them do an
11 interview flight, and then we would choose the best
12 pilots that we wanted.

13 Q Okay. For new pilots, how many hours of training
14 were required before you were allowed to operate for
15 revenue with passengers?

16 A I don't have the training manual on me, so I
17 can't tell you the -- what the minimum amount they
18 needed to have in order to fly for 135 purposes, and
19 training purposes.

20 Q Understood.

21 A But I know that we generally always gave them at
22 least five hours of training before they were allowed
23 to even fly.

24 Q Okay. And what were the pilot hire
25 qualifications for getting hired? Like, basically,

1 what kind of pilot were you guys looking for in terms
2 of their background, their hours, experience? Was
3 there a specific type?

4 A Well, obviously, you want the more hours, the
5 better, the more experience, the better, but we always
6 had the minimum for our 135 experience, which I can't
7 repeat -- I can't remember off the top of my head.
8 But I know it's 500 hours total time with a hundred
9 hours cross-country, 25 at night. But I'd have to
10 look at what the 135 minimums are to answer that.

11 Q Okay. Thank you. No. That's fine. The
12 published routes for New York Helicopter Company that
13 you guys operated under, what -- I know you guys had
14 the 135 cert where you would do some charter
15 operations, but it sounds like the lion's share of
16 your work was for tour operations. Can you describe,
17 like, what routes and what packages were available to
18 the customers?

19 A As far as I know, since I really never -- I
20 didn't really do any of the tour training for them.
21 We would always do that. But we had an Alpha, Bravo,
22 and Charlie tour, and if I remember, they were
23 somewhere 15 to -- 15 minutes, 20, 25 minutes long.

24 Q Okay. Your staffing for New York Helicopters for
25 both pilots, mechanics, and admin -- you know, being

1 the DO, I'm sure you pretty much knew a little bit
2 about everything. In your opinion, was New York
3 Helicopters adequately staffed with pilots and
4 mechanics?

5 A Yes. Absolutely.

6 Q Okay. The mechanics as well, in terms --

7 A Yes.

8 Q -- of staffing? Okay. How many mechanics did
9 New York Helicopter have?

10 A At the time of the accident we had two mechanics.
11 We had three for a while, but our lead mechanic died
12 last year, so we were down to two.

13 Q Yeah. I heard about that. I'm very sorry. Were
14 there plans on getting another mechanic to replace the
15 gentleman who passed away?

16 A Not at the moment since we weren't that busy and
17 pressing for a mechanic at the time.

18 Q Okay. And the mechanics at New York Helicopter,
19 what was their primary responsibility? I know they
20 did maintenance, but from what I understand, the
21 helicopter operation Meridian, down in Louisiana,
22 provided all of the -- basically critical components,
23 time-limited components, and things of that nature,
24 and your mechanics basically did the day-to-day
25 maintenance operations, 5,100-hour, 300-hour

1 inspections, et cetera, et cetera; is that correct?

2 A Yeah, so Meridian provided all the parts and we
3 would do the maintenance. We did phase inspections --
4 every 50 hours, we'd do phase inspections on the
5 aircraft.

6 Q Okay. Thank you.

7 A But yes.

8 Q All right. Were you aware of any unusual or
9 mechanical irregularity or anomaly with parts that
10 came from Meridian that you guys acquired that had to
11 be sent back or that caused an issue?

12 A No. We had -- we've had parts that they sent,
13 and we had occasionally that we would find that, you
14 know, didn't work. So we would send them back and
15 they would send us a new one. But generally, almost
16 99 percent of the time, the parts were exactly what we
17 needed.

18 Q Okay. And some of these questions are going to
19 get kind of deep into the maintenance side, but if you
20 don't know, that's fine. I'll be talking to the
21 Director of Maintenance here sometime next week. So I
22 apologize if I'm kind of going in all directions. The
23 Director of Operations typically, in my experience
24 because I have experience with that, is everyone kind
25 of goes to him. They're kind of a jack-of-all-trades,

1 and they know a little bit about everything. But if I
2 start getting too deep, you know, please let me know.

3 A Yeah.

4 Q Regarding maintenance of the helicopter, are you
5 aware of any damage or anomaly that happened with the
6 accident helicopter, 216 Mike Hotel, in the months
7 leading up to the accident?

8 A The only thing that I was ever aware of is
9 occasionally they felt a hop on the aircraft; however,
10 our mechanic that had passed away, he had done track
11 and balance. He had tracked that thing so many times,
12 it was always in -- well within limits. So the track
13 and balance, and we attributed it to the Van Horn
14 rotor blades because we've known that Van Horn rides a
15 little bit rougher compared to the other aircraft.

16 Me, personally, I didn't feel a hop in the
17 aircraft ever, and that was my checkride helicopter.

18 Q Now, when you're talking about hop, are you
19 talking about while the aircraft is parked and under
20 power, or are you talking about when the aircraft is
21 light and in flight?

22 A In flight and light. They all said there was a
23 little bit of a hop.

24 Q Okay. So a collective hop, or just the entire
25 air frame?

1 A I don't know. They just said there was some kind
2 of hop occasionally, and it wasn't all the time. They
3 said it was on the occasion.

4 Q Okay.

5 A And we tracked and balanced it. We looked at
6 that thing a million times, and we just know that that
7 type of rotor system runs rough.

8 But me, I can't verify it because -- that was
9 really the main aircraft I flew when I was there,
10 because I did all my training in that helicopter and
11 did all my checkrides in the helicopter. I never felt
12 the hop.

13 Q Okay. Why was that helicopter so popular?
14 You're not the only one to say that it was kind of the
15 workhorse where a lot of people flew this. Was there
16 a particular reason why you flew this one more than
17 the others?

18 A It was the Ford pick-up truck, you know. It was
19 Mr. Reliable. It never broke down. It was -- you
20 know, it just seemed to produce the best, the most
21 amount of power, and it was just a solid overall great
22 machine.

23 Q Okay. Thank you. All right. So you've
24 obviously, flown -- actually, let me go back one.
25 Sean, Seankese, did you know him well? Have you ever

1 flown with him?

2 A No. I hadn't got a chance to meet him yet.

3 Q Okay. So I guess, his flying skills, attitude,
4 and personality, you probably wouldn't have --
5 wouldn't have gotten to know him at all. Because I
6 know he hadn't been with you very long.

7 A I only talked with him. He was Mr. Polite. He
8 just seemed like a great guy.

9 Q Understood.

10 A Very humble.

11 Q Thank you. So had you flown 216 Mike Hotel in
12 the previous three months leading up to the accident?

13 A No.

14 Q Okay. From what you know of 216 Mike Hotel, any
15 unique characteristics with that particular helicopter
16 compared to the other helicopters that may be
17 indigenous to that helicopter? You mentioned the hop,
18 but were there any other reports aside from the hop
19 that you can recall?

20 A No.

21 Q Okay.

22 A That thing was great.

23 Q But you did mention the Van Horn blades. And you
24 never experienced hop -- and I know the hop you're
25 talking about with the Van Horn. You never

1 experienced it, but you had heard from other pilots,
2 correct? Can you elaborate on what they actually
3 said? Can you paraphrase their quotes?

4 A They didn't tell me. They told the mechanic that
5 there was a hop. I didn't talk with them about it.
6 They would -- Harry looked at that thing three ways to
7 Sunday to address it.

8 And we tracked and balanced it, and he told them,
9 every one of them, this hop, we've tracked it, and you
10 -- generally, in a 206 you raise the collective a
11 little bit on the ground to get rid of the hop, but I
12 don't even know if the hop was on the ground or if it
13 was in flight, since I never felt it.

14 Q Okay. Okay. Do you have access -- I know you
15 don't work for the company anymore -- well, I'm
16 assuming. I'm making an assumption.

17 A No. I don't.

18 Q You don't work for the company anymore.

19 MR. McCARTER: Hey, Bryan, I'm going to go ahead
20 and skip those questions about the Google Drive and
21 getting -- getting the schedules and everything.
22 There's no sense in getting into that anymore.

23 Unless, of course, you have -- Jason, if you
24 happen to have them in your back pocket, schedules and
25 pilots and times, who flew what, when, that would be

1 great. But if not, Bryan David will track those down
2 for us.

3 MR. COSTELLO: Yeah. I don't have that --

4 MR. McCARTER: Okay.

5 MR. COSTELLO: -- I should say.

6 MR. McCARTER: No. That's fine.

7 BY MR. McCARTER:

8 Q Have you had -- has there been any pressure to
9 fly on the pilots when conditions were outside of
10 personal or company minimums, including maintenance
11 issues, like, I don't want to fly that helicopter
12 because of X, Y, Z, or the weather is too bad?

13 Basically, what I'm looking at is a culture of,
14 like, pressure to fly.

15 A Absolutely not.

16 Q Not -- and is --

17 A And I told the pilots straight up, we're not
18 flying if you don't feel comfortable.

19 Q Okay. So if I -- hypothetically, if I were to
20 say, you know what, I don't feel comfortable, it's 795
21 feet overcast, and I just -- I don't want to fly
22 today, and even though you have a -- I know we have a
23 hundred people who want to go up on flights, what --
24 is there any punitive action that would come back
25 towards me, even passive-aggressive, anything like

1 that, or am I good to go?

2 A Absolutely not. No. If a pilot didn't feel
3 comfortable, we wouldn't fly. And I even told pilots
4 when it would get windy that we're not flying when
5 they felt like they wanted to fly.

6 Q Okay. Describe your relationship with the owner,
7 Michael Roth, and his temperament, personality.

8 A It was a good relationship. Obviously, he has --
9 he has a very big personality, but generally, it was a
10 good relationship, you know. I would just tell him
11 what needed to be done, and that was it.

12 Q Okay. Did you experience, and can you describe,
13 any repercussions that may have come out of any kind
14 of financial strain or stress that the New York
15 Helicopter was under? Were there any kind of monetary
16 issues and did that affect the rest of the operation?

17 A As far as monetary issues, I can't really answer
18 that because I didn't know what we -- what the balance
19 of the checkbook was. Mike is well-known to always be
20 cheap, and say he has no money when he does have
21 money. But I didn't know that.

22 But when it came to doing stuff, it was always
23 done. There was never -- I would tell Mike this needs
24 to be purchased, he would purchase it. So there was
25 never any issue on that.

1 As far as the company's financials, I couldn't
2 say anything about it just because I didn't see what
3 they were. I just -- you know, Mike said, oh, you
4 know, we don't have money. I'd say, all right, well,
5 you know, we're still flying the helicopters, still
6 making sure they're maintained. And I just figured
7 Mike was just being cheap.

8 Q Right. Understood. Any paychecks missed? Any
9 historic -- history of paychecks bouncing or anything
10 like that?

11 A Not bouncing. Occasionally they'd be late, and
12 it was all -- occasionally a paycheck might be a day
13 late or something. And that was mainly because Mike
14 wouldn't deposit the money into the paycheck account
15 usually, or Mike would say they messed up -- or would
16 tell me, oh, someone messed up. And I'd just roll my
17 eyes and say this is what Mike told me when it
18 happened.

19 Q Understood. It sounds like it's part of his
20 personality.

21 A It is.

22 Q Okay. Squawks and irregularities. This is kind
23 of a -- this is more of a maintenance question, but
24 you would know this. How are squawks or
25 irregularities about the helicopter, how are they

1 documented and passed on? Like, you know, so if a
2 pilot or someone else notices something, what's the
3 formal process for getting that information to
4 maintenance so they can look at it and rectify it?

5 A They would message the maintenance crew and --
6 they would message them and whoever is the -- well,
7 Harry at first and then Eric afterwards, and in a
8 group, and say hey, we found this on pre-flight, and
9 what's going on? And Harry would respond to it.

10 And if it was something that -- a lot of times
11 Harry knew what these things were and he would tell
12 them, I know what this is. Like, they might just have
13 a question about something. And "oh, no, I know what
14 that is," and respond to it.

15 If there was anything about anything that he
16 thought that we didn't know, that it was something,
17 we'd ground the aircraft until it was repaired, until
18 Harry or Eric would be able to fix it.

19 Q Okay. The maintenance irregularity sheet that's
20 kept in the waterproof bag on the helicopter, was that
21 used for that kind of --

22 A Yes. If they found something that was broken,
23 they were supposed to write it up. They would tell
24 the mechanic, and they're supposed to write it up and
25 say what it was, and then the mechanic would sign it

1 off.

2 Q Okay. And you mentioned it was communicated to
3 the mechanics. How was it communicated? Email, phone
4 call, apps?

5 A Phone call and apps, yes. Chat.

6 Q Okay. What was the appropriate that was used?

7 A WhatsApp.

8 Q WhatsApp? Okay. Do you happen to know if the
9 WhatsApp was set for automatic deletion of messages?

10 A No.

11 Q Okay. What's your personal opinion about the
12 maintenance of the helicopters at New York?

13 A I thought they were very well maintained. We
14 were -- I was proud to say how well those helicopters
15 were maintained. I was very proud of that, and we
16 didn't take chances.

17 Q Right. Okay. No concerns about the performance
18 of maintenance? You know, was there anything that you
19 discovered, like, whoa, something was missed?

20 A No. Never.

21 Q Okay. Thank you. If a pilot was informed of a
22 concern from a passenger, a mechanic, or other agent
23 regarding any anomaly or irregularity with a flight --
24 and I'm actually going to lead you a little bit with
25 this one because we do have reports -- from a pilot,

1 from a passenger, and from an agent that was not
2 associated with the operation -- of a vibration with
3 the tail rotor assembly, which -- actually, it was the
4 entire helicopter, but it manifested in the tail boom
5 when the helicopter was parked but running under
6 power.

7 Had you heard about any vibration or moving back
8 and forth like this?

9 A No.

10 Q You're unaware of any of that, especially with
11 the November 216 Mike Hotel?

12 A I never heard a word about that.

13 Q Okay. Does New York Helicopter have an SMS
14 program, and if so, who administers that?

15 A Yes, we do. And our safety officer, Tristan
16 Bell, administered it.

17 Q Okay. And is he full-time, part-time? Is he a
18 pilot? What's his --

19 A He was a pilot, but then he became -- he left our
20 company about a year ago, and was part-time as the
21 SMS.

22 Q Okay. Thank you. That's Tristan Bell?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Okay. The Director of Maintenance, is he a full-
25 time or part-time position?

1 A He was just like me. Part-time, you know, but we
2 handled everything.

3 Q Okay. Did you have another job full-time or,
4 like, in addition to?

5 A Yes. I had a full-time job.

6 Q Okay. And as far as you know, is that the same
7 for the Director of Maintenance?

8 A Yes.

9 Q How much of your time do you think you spent
10 between the two jobs at New York Helicopter versus
11 your other operation?

12 A I spent a lot at New York Helicopter making sure
13 things were done right.

14 Q Okay.

15 A I mean, it was very smoothly ran, so it was
16 actually pretty easy to run.

17 Q Bear with me one second. Okay. So just
18 reiterating -- and I know I'm repeating myself -- did
19 you ever feel any anomalous or different vibrations on
20 216 Mike Hotel compared to the other helicopters in
21 the fleet?

22 A No.

23 Q Okay. In your professional opinion, and knowing
24 the operation, was there anything unique or different
25 about 216 Mike Hotel compared to the other

1 helicopters?

2 I mean, you mentioned there was the -- it was the
3 flying dirt bike. It was tough, it was your
4 workhorse. Was that the only indigenous feature of
5 216 compared to your other two helicopters?

6 A Yes.

7 Q Did all of the helicopters, all three of them,
8 have the Van Horn blades?

9 A I believe they all did.

10 Q Okay. And as far as you know, did anyone reach
11 out to Meridian Helicopters about the "hop" that was
12 reported?

13 A I believe that we actually talked with Van Horn
14 about it, about the track and balance on it.

15 Q Okay.

16 A I can't say for sure.

17 Q Okay. And the -- do you happen to know by name
18 who the pilot or pilots were that described this hop
19 in flight?

20 A No.

21 Q Okay.

22 A And I barely -- you know, I didn't hear about it
23 much, but I know that they said they felt it, but I
24 didn't know anything about it really.

25 Q Okay. All right. Thank you. Any notable

1 concerns with the other helicopters that were leased
2 from Meridian with parts?

3 A No.

4 Q Nothing like that?

5 A No.

6 Q Is it safe to say that you felt comfortable with
7 Meridian Helicopters providing the --

8 A Absolutely.

9 Q -- the tools and equipment and the parts?

10 A Absolutely.

11 Q Okay. That will do it. Do you have any
12 questions for me?

13 A No. That's all.

14 Q That's it? Okay.

15 A Yeah.

16 MR. McCARTER: Let me -- I'll tell you briefly
17 where we are with the investigation. I can't divulge
18 too much, but I can tell you this, that the on-scene
19 portion has pretty much wrapped up up there in New
20 Jersey.

21 The helicopter, we've removed everything and put
22 it in the Army Corps of Engineers. We sent
23 components, and correct me -- I may be wrong about
24 this, but I do know we have several components that
25 are going to the lab, and other components are going

1 to Bell Helicopters in Dallas, where we'll have a team
2 there.

3 Those teams are going to be conducting an exam to
4 look at the transmission, the rotor mast, the main
5 rotor head assembly, and the blades a little more
6 closely. That's going on, I believe, next week. But
7 I could be mistaken from a logistics standpoint.

8 No real findings yet in terms of, you know, where
9 we are, but the prelim report is going to be out
10 likely next week. It took about a week, a week and a
11 half longer than we normally do, just because it's
12 such a high-profile accident, and there was a lot of
13 moving parts. It's a very complicated accident.

14 So the prelim report will be out that next week.
15 Don't hold me to that. It could take a little bit
16 longer, but I'll try to -- I'll try to make you aware
17 when it is out, so you can have it and read it at your
18 leisure. Okay?

19 MR. COSTELLO: All right.

20 MR. McCARTER: If there are no other questions,
21 Bryan, did you have any questions?

22 MR. DAVID: No, sir. Thank you.

23 MR. McCARTER: I appreciate it, guys. Thank you
24 both very much.

25 MR. DAVID: Yes, sir.

1 MR. McCARTER: Bryan, just to let you know, I'll
2 probably reach out to the Director of Maintenance
3 next. If you want to go ahead and reach out to him
4 before me, that's fine. I talked to him briefly
5 yesterday or the day before.

6 MR. DAVID: Yes. He -- right.

7 MR. McCARTER: Yeah.

8 MR. DAVID: Okay. Cool. That sounds great.

9 MR. McCARTER: Yeah. I'll set something up. It
10 will be very similar to this except it will be more
11 maintenance-centric.

12 MR. DAVID: Sounds great.

13 MR. COSTELLO: Thank you.

14 MR. McCARTER: Thank you, gentlemen.

15 MR. DAVID: Thank you.

16 MR. McCARTER: Thank you very much.

17 MR. DAVID: Take care.

18 MR. COSTELLO: Have a great day.

19 MR. McCARTER: Take care. You too.

20 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled
21 matter was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: Operations Interviews, New York
Helicopter Charter Inc.

ACCIDENT NO.: ERA25MA171

DATE: May 2, 2025

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the National Transportation Safety Board 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.

Date: January 7, 2026

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Friday,
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APPEARANCES:

AARON McCARTER, Aviation Accident Investigator,
National Transportation Safety Board

BRYAN DAVID, ESQ., Interviewee's Counsel,
Cunningham Swaim, LLP

I N D E XITEMPAGE

Interview of Octave Kuhn:

By Mr. McCarter

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. McCARTER: All right. So this is regarding
3 Echo Romeo Alpha 2-5 Mike Alpha 171, the accident that
4 occurred on April 10th, 2025 in Jersey City, New
5 Jersey, involving Bell Helicopter November 2-1-6 Mike
6 Hotel. The fact that you're no longer with the
7 company doesn't have a bearing on the interview, as
8 your knowledge and experience and expertise with the
9 operation, pilots, mechanics, and ownership is
10 material and paramount to the investigation.

11 Per NTSB protocols, you're allowed to have one
12 individual. We have Mr. David here as your
13 representative, and I'll put your name in the record
14 here -- that is Bryan S. David, attorney. And now,
15 are you representing all of New York Helicopters,
16 Inc., or just Octave and specific individuals?

17 MR. DAVID: All of New York Helicopters, Inc.,
18 and Mr. Kuhn for this purpose.

19 MR. McCARTER: Oh, okay. Very good. Some of the
20 guidelines here -- and know this, the purpose of this
21 investigation is to increase safety. It's not to find
22 fault or affix blame or anything like that. We have
23 the benefit of living in the United States. If you go
24 to other countries, other countries aren't so -- you
25 know, they're a lot stricter. They're criminalized in

1 some places. Here in the United States, it is not.
2 So we really just want to get to the bottom of what
3 actually occurred, and we think that your insight
4 could probably help us. The NTSB can't offer any
5 guidance of confidentiality or immunity from legal or
6 certificate action.

7 A transcript or summary, as we discussed, will go
8 with the public docket, minus some of the extra stuff
9 that we added on into the beginning. It'll only be
10 the stuff that actually matters. The interviewee can
11 have one representative -- we've already talked about
12 that. The representative may be an attorney, but is
13 not required to be an attorney. The representative
14 may not testify for the interviewee, and then the
15 representative's comments should be limited. I'll
16 take comments, you know, just try to keep them
17 concise. Evidentiary objections are not grounds for
18 NTSB to refrain from asking questions. So, you know,
19 it's not a court of law. It's basically just to offer
20 you some guidance and support.

21 So that being said, if you're ready, I'll just go
22 ahead and jump into it. It'll probably take one hour.
23 I don't imagine it'll take any longer. It may even
24 take less than that, so.

25 All right. So I'm Aaron McCarter, NTSB accident

1 investigator and the Ops Group Chairman for the
2 referenced accident.

3 INTERVIEW OF OCTAVE KUHN

4 BY MR. McCARTER:

5 Q I'd like to ask you, Octave, for the record,
6 please tell us your full name and former title.

7 A My name is Octave Kuhn, and I am the former chief
8 pilot at New York Helicopter Charter, Inc.

9 Q Okay. What was your role and responsibility?

10 A My roles and responsibilities are that of a chief
11 pilot.

12 Q Okay. What does a chief pilot do?

13 A A chief pilot -- at least for what I've been
14 doing, was to oversee everyday operations, handle
15 pilots to the best of my ability, to ensure that the
16 smooth running of the company happens.

17 Q Okay. Very good. And, again, if you need me to
18 slow down, let me know. I'm going to go through these
19 pretty quick, but, I mean, it seems like you have a
20 good handle on it.

21 You don't need to be super detailed with the next
22 question. This is just to kind of get a baseline.
23 What's your total time and type -- total time in the
24 Bell? General breakdown and license ratings, et
25 cetera. And you can kind of keep it high-level.

1 A So yeah. I've got a commercial CFI in
2 rotorcraft. I've got about 1850 hours in rotorcraft,
3 and that is also total time.

4 I have about 600 hours in the R22, 50 hours in
5 the 44, two hours in the 66, 1200 hours-ish in the
6 206, and about 40 hours in the Bell 407.

7 Q Okay. Thank you. And how long have you worked
8 for New York Helicopters in total, and what was your
9 capacity from the day you got hired until the day you,
10 you know, terminated your services?

11 A I got hired about three and a half years ago.
12 November '21 that would be. I started off as a line
13 pilot. Kept on with the company into a more
14 leadership role, so a lead pilot role, and then
15 transitioned over to chief pilot as of --

16 MR. McCARTER: Okay. We'll let it get -- we'll
17 let it catch up here in a second.

18 Okay, Bryan, did he freeze for you too?

19 MR. DAVID: I felt a little cutout for a second,
20 yes.

21 MR. McCARTER: Yeah. See, he cut out.

22 MR. DAVID: It looks like we're frozen, yeah.
23 Give it a moment.

24 MR. McCARTER: Yeah. We'll give it a moment. I
25 can see you just fine.

1 MR. DAVID: Yeah. It looks like it's working
2 okay on my end.

3 MR. McCARTER: Okay. What I'll do, I don't want
4 to get too far ahead, but here's what I will do. If
5 we continue to have issues with technology, which
6 we've all been faced with, it happens to all of us,
7 what I'll do is I'll send you and Octave a list of the
8 questions.

9 MR. DAVID: Okay.

10 MR. McCARTER: And if you could just have him
11 answer those questions, that would be great. That's
12 if we can't continue this due to technology.

13 MR. DAVID: Understood.

14 MR. McCARTER: Yeah. Okay. He's --

15 MR. DAVID: I think he's going to try back on.
16 Yeah. He just said his link froze, so I think he's
17 going to come back on.

18 MR. McCARTER: Okay. I'll tell him to get rid of
19 all of his additional apps that he has open. I have
20 to do the same thing. I got to get rid of my Word, my
21 internet, I have to get rid of everything to make
22 Teams work smoothly.

23 MR. DAVID: Oh, yeah. Sometimes you have to have
24 a fresh start.

25 MR. McCARTER: Yes, you do. Well, while we're

1 waiting for him, do you specialize in aviation,
2 aviation business?

3 MR. DAVID: Yes, sir.

4 MR. McCARTER: Very good.

5 MR. DAVID: It's about a hundred -- about 99
6 percent I would say.

7 MR. McCARTER: Okay. Good. Good.

8 MR. DAVID: Yeah. He just said that his internet
9 has crashed. He apologized. I'll ask him if he's
10 coming back on.

11 MR. McCARTER: What he could do also is he can --
12 I think he can cease video input, so it'll just be the
13 voices, and that's the most important thing. And then
14 we'll try -- if that doesn't work, then we'll just try
15 a three-way phone call.

16 MR. DAVID: Okay. That sounds great. I'm
17 telling him that he could stop video and just do voice
18 if necessary.

19 MR. McCARTER: Yes.

20 MR. DAVID: He says he's working on it.

21 MR. McCARTER: Okay. We're good.

22 MR. DAVID: Cool.

23 MR. McCARTER: And I don't think it's going to
24 take an hour, but we'll go through --

25 MR. DAVID: Yeah.

1 MR. McCARTER: There's only 25 questions.

2 MR. DAVID: We've got Jason Costello here at 12,
3 I think, or my time at least.

4 MR. McCARTER: Where are you? Are you in
5 Central?

6 MR. DAVID: Yeah. I'm in Central.

7 MR. McCARTER: Okay. Yeah. We have him at 1:00
8 Eastern, 12 Central.

9 MR. DAVID: Okay.

10 MR. McCARTER: And, basically, because he's the
11 DO, it'll pretty much be the same type of questions.

12 MR. DAVID: Sure. I'll be there too.

13 MR. McCARTER: Okay. Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. No,
14 I'm aware. I'm aware.

15 MR. DAVID: Let's see. Oh, he's back.

16 MR. KUHN: I apologize, gentlemen. Sorry about
17 that.

18 MR. McCARTER: No, it's -- it happens. Don't
19 worry about it. And feel free to turn off your
20 incoming video. There is a way to do it. I can't
21 talk you though it. You'll have to play around with
22 it, but that'll help with the bandwidth.

23 MR. KUHN: I think, honestly, my entire internet
24 crashed. It's not the bandwidth. Everything was off.
25 I apologize.

1 MR. McCARTER: No, no. We're good. Okay. In
2 that case, we'll go ahead and resume the questions.

3 MR. KUHN: Yeah.

4 BY MR. McCARTER:

5 Q We started off with how long have you worked for
6 New York Helicopters, in what capacity.

7 The next question is describe the new hire
8 training program. What does it consist of for a new
9 pilot?

10 A So, for a new pilot, once we decide to hire
11 someone on, we do send them a CTS online training,
12 which is some ground training that covers quite a lot
13 of subjects. They're split into different modules.

14 Once they have a start date, the first day of
15 training is straight into the 135 training. So we do
16 ground, as well as flight portions, to get them
17 acclimated to the aircraft into a 135 type of
18 standard.

19 Q Okay. Very good. Thank you. And all pilots are
20 trained to the 135 standard even though the lion's
21 share of your operation is 91, correct?

22 A All pilots are trained to the 135 standard before
23 they even get onto the line.

24 Q Okay. For new pilots, how many hours of training
25 typically are required before operating with

1 passengers, and is it all considered dual training?
2 You mentioned there's some online training or some
3 structured, like, computer training. Can you
4 describe, like, how kind of the training is divided
5 up?

6 A So there is structured online training that takes
7 quite a bit of time, usually around 50 hours to
8 complete all the modules. And then, after that, there
9 are some ground training. We cover everything from
10 the GOM to ground school for the aircraft itself to
11 doing pre-flights. And after that, we also do -- so
12 it's four hours of training, plus an extra hour for a
13 mock check ride, and then afterwards we do more dual
14 training with all the pilots in the company to get
15 them familiarized with the tour routes, altitudes,
16 radios, and that is all with someone having dual
17 controls, whether it is right or left seat, depending
18 on each pilot.

19 Q Okay. Thank you. What are the typical pilot
20 hire qualifications for getting hired? Like,
21 basically, what type of pilots was New York
22 Helicopters looking for? Background, experience,
23 hours, things like that. It's pretty much an open-
24 ended question.

25 A Hours-wise we're looking at 135 minimums. We

1 always want a little bit more, but 135 minimums were
2 the minimum we can hire at. And afterwards it's based
3 on knowledge base, so we do ask them quite a bit of
4 questions during the interview process to figure out
5 where their knowledge base is at, and overall
6 personality, if they are going to fit within the mold
7 of the company.

8 Q Okay. Just for the record, what are 135
9 minimums?

10 A One-thirty-five minimums are 500 hours of total
11 time, a hundred hours of cross-country, 25 of which
12 are at night.

13 Q Thank you. Your opinion, was staffing sufficient
14 for New York Helicopters both from the pilot,
15 mechanics, and admin standpoint? Was it adequately
16 staffed, and if it wasn't, what were you guys lacking?
17 You know, what was -- from a personnel standpoint? I
18 know that was kind of a clumsy question.

19 MR. McCARTER: Oh, we lost him again.

20 MR. DAVID: Okay. Let's see. I wonder if he can
21 join with his phone?

22 MR. McCARTER: Yeah. Let's just get -- let's
23 give that a try. That's fine. He can, absolutely.

24 MR. DAVID: I'll suggest that.

25 MR. McCARTER: All right. This is just for me.

1 For transcription, go ahead and cease. It's 1600, 16
2 minutes and 00 seconds, and we'll resume here shortly.

3 MR. DAVID: Okay. I sent a message over that he
4 can join by phone, that we don't necessarily need
5 video, and so we'll see.

6 MR. McCARTER: Oh, yeah, yeah. We don't need
7 video.

8 MR. DAVID: He's back.

9 MR. KUHN: Okay. I will take out the camera.
10 How does this work? Sorry about that, gentlemen.
11 I've put myself on a hotspot on my phone. This should
12 work for the foreseeable.

13 MR. McCARTER: Okay.

14 MR. KUHN: I don't know how to turn off the
15 camera. There.

16 MR. McCARTER: All right. There we go.

17 MR. KUHN: Sorry about that, gentlemen.

18 MR. McCARTER: No, no, you're good. I don't need
19 to see your face, Octave. We're fine.

20 BY MR. McCARTER:

21 Q Okay. We talked about the staffing. In your
22 opinion, was New York Helicopter adequately staffed?

23 A For the general part, yes, I do think it was
24 adequately staffed. We were going through a period of
25 renewal in pilots, so it did have quite a bit of

1 interviews lined up to refresh the pilot roster, but,
2 overall, it was adequately staffed.

3 Q Okay. Did you fly with Sean, with Seanese?

4 A I did fly with Sean. I'm the one who did his
5 training, so the first initial five hours of 135
6 training were done with me. I also did a couple hours
7 of tour training with him after that.

8 Q Okay. Describe his flying skills, attitude,
9 personality.

10 A Sean overall showed the skills to be able to fly
11 in this area, as well as the tours and in the future
12 the charters. I will say that sometimes his
13 confidence was low. He was a perfectionist, and when
14 the maneuver wasn't quite right, his confidence could
15 take a hit. But, when he was confident, I would like
16 to say that he was a great pilot, and I had no qualms
17 about him being part of the operation.

18 Q Okay. Have you flown or had you flown November
19 2-1-6 Mike Hotel in the past three months leading up
20 to the accident?

21 A Yes. I did fly 2-1-6 Mike Hotel in the last
22 three months.

23 Q Any unique characteristics of that helicopter
24 versus the others in your fleet?

25 A No. It's a helicopter that I trusted

1 wholeheartedly.

2 Q Can you describe any irregularity at all or
3 individual helicopter problems that were unique to
4 2-1-6?

5 A Not that I know of. It had an outdated radio
6 console that was annoying but nothing dangerous. I
7 know some people have said there was a shake in it,
8 not more than I've seen in other helicopters in the
9 past.

10 Q Okay. Issues or concerns. How are issues or
11 concerns brought up in the company? For instance,
12 like, if you have a safety concern or a route concern
13 or any kind of irregular safety issue, how is that
14 typically brought up in the company?

15 A Typically, it is brought up directly to me, and
16 then I bring it back up to Jason for further stuff.
17 If I can handle it on my own, as in a small concern,
18 then I will. If it's bigger, then I bring it up to
19 Jason. If it's a safety issue, we can always get the
20 ASO involved, and usually that's how we resolve
21 everything. It was a pretty open conversation kind of
22 company where we are all quite in contact with each
23 other.

24 Q Okay. Are issues or concerns, are those
25 documented anywhere, or was it tribal knowledge, like,

1 hey, just call me if you need something, or is it
2 actually a procedure or a process?

3 A There was no real procedure or process. Just
4 call me if you need it, and I will do what I can to
5 help you out, fix this concern.

6 Q Okay. All right. We have reports from several
7 pilots, a witness, and another individual, about
8 "significant," and I'm putting significant in quotes,
9 shaking vibration with the helicopter 2-1-6 Mike Hotel
10 over a period of days if not weeks.

11 A Okay.

12 Q Enough so that it was reportedly brought to the
13 attention of the pilot flying at that time.

14 A Mm-hmm.

15 Q Can you describe how that information gets
16 reported and what the procedure is for doing so?

17 A So the shake that was noticed is something that
18 we knew at the company. It is something that we had
19 brought up to mechanics via conversation. It is
20 something that they looked into and did track and
21 balance to figure out what was going on with the
22 aircraft, and every time it passed a track-and-balance
23 check. Yeah, it's a helicopter. It shakes. We know
24 that sometimes that one shook a little bit more on the
25 ground, but in flight, it was completely fine.

1 Q Okay. All right. So you were made aware of this
2 shake with the helicopter?

3 A Yeah.

4 Q Okay.

5 A Yes.

6 Q And, again, I don't want to put words in your
7 mouth, but I want to make sure I understand. So the
8 shake got reported and it was reported to maintenance?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Okay. Was it -- do you -- can you tell me how it
11 was reported to maintenance?

12 A So, like I said --

13 Q Like the venue.

14 A -- we had an open conversation. It's usually a
15 phone call to maintenance or seeing them in person and
16 telling them, hey, we've noticed this, can you look
17 into it.

18 Q Okay. Is that the kind of thing that would go in
19 the squawk sheet or the irregularity maintenance
20 reporting log that was in the helicopter?

21 A So that is something that, when we bring
22 something up to a mechanic, they handle and put in the
23 squawk sheet themselves. We usually did not. We let
24 them do that themselves.

25 Q The pilots?

1 A The pilots let the mechanics do that because we
2 trusted the mechanics to do whatever is needed to fix
3 the aircraft if there was fixing to be done.

4 Q Okay. Thank you. I'm looking for full pilot
5 schedules and their times and ship number. How can
6 the investigative team acquire this information?

7 A So that probably would be best to ask Bryan
8 David. He has access to all those. As you know, I'm
9 no longer the chief pilot, but -- so I don't have
10 access to those anymore.

11 Q Okay. So no access. You don't have any computer
12 access, no ability to go into any files or anything
13 like that? It's pretty much -- it's out of your
14 hands. You don't have -- there's nothing on your
15 phone with schedules or anything like that that we can
16 have?

17 A So I have access, but since I do not work with
18 that company, I do not want to access it as per -- I
19 don't work there anymore, if that makes sense.

20 Q No, no, no, I understand.

21 MR. McCARTER: Hey, Bryan --

22 MR. KUHN: No one has removed access from me, but
23 I do not want to access it myself.

24 MR. McCARTER: Bryan, can you do me a favor?
25 That's something that's kind of critical to the

1 investigation. I don't want to put Octave in an odd
2 position having to, you know, access something that
3 could come back and bite him. You know, I don't --
4 you know, we're looking for full pilot schedules,
5 their times, and their ship number, basically, from
6 March 26 all the way through -- no. Actually, what
7 was it, February? Yeah, March 26 until the day of the
8 accident, you know, so if you wouldn't mind working
9 with Mike or Joe or whoever else is left because I
10 know the operation is C-ceased.

11 MR. DAVID: Yeah. Maybe if I could just ask a
12 clarifying question since we're on this topic.

13 Octave, is there a title of the document that I
14 need to look for?

15 MR. KUHN: So they will be under pilot logs.
16 It's all the duty logs under pilots. They are sorted
17 by name, and then, if you go into those files, they
18 will be sorted by year, and in that file, on the Excel
19 sheet, at the bottom, you will find January, February,
20 March, April.

21 MR. DAVID: Got it.

22 MR. KUHN: And each pilot has them.

23 MR. DAVID: I'm making a note.

24 MR. McCARTER: Okay.

25 MR. DAVID: Okay. We'll follow up.

1 MR. McCARTER: I appreciate that, Bryan. Thank
2 you.

3 BY MR. McCARTER:

4 Q Octave, what's a pilot's typical schedule? What
5 time does he wake up, report to work, first flight,
6 and when does he, you know, hang up his helicopter
7 keys?

8 A Typical schedule, wake-up is a little different
9 based on personality and what they do for their own
10 schedule, but for me at least, wake-up was 7 a.m.
11 Show time is 8. First flight can be as early at 10
12 a.m. depending on what you are doing for the day.
13 Typically, you are done by 6, 6:30, 7. It's depending
14 on seasonal work, if that makes sense.

15 Q Yeah, yeah. It totally does. So, in the
16 summertime, about 7, 7:00, you guys would wrap up the
17 tour ops?

18 A Yeah. Give or take, 7:00.

19 Q Yeah.

20 A And that also includes doing paperwork, bringing
21 the ships back in, making sure the ships are in order
22 for the next day, and leaving base.

23 Q Okay. Thank you. What are the company weather
24 minimums to operate tours and is this documented and
25 where would it be located?

1 A So, on the drive, you will find a sheet that
2 indicates the company minimum. It is what -- it was
3 800-foot ceilings, three nautical miles per statute
4 mile visibility, and then the wind limitations were up
5 to 35 sustained or a 15-knot gust spread.

6 Q Okay. You mentioned on the drive. What do you
7 mean by that? Is that something --

8 A So most of our documents are stored on the Google
9 Drive, including as well, if you look into the SMS,
10 the SMS had also stipulations about weather minimums.

11 Q Okay. Would that information at all be in your
12 operations manual, or are those amendments or
13 appendices?

14 A So those were not put in the GOM or off spec.
15 Those were company standards, SOPs that were amended,
16 and it was common knowledge that anything above 35
17 knots, let's say, we do not go.

18 Q Okay. That's a good segue to another question.
19 Have you ever had any concerns about the operations at
20 New York Helicopters?

21 A I mean, I'd been there for three and a half
22 years. That's a pretty broad spectrum. Of course,
23 there's always concerns and a part of any company.

24 Q Yeah. It's not a very properly worded question.
25 I mean, from a holistic standpoint, was there any

1 driving force that kind of caused you to, you know, we
2 have to change a procedure or a policy because it's
3 unsafe or it's inefficient?

4 A Yeah. I mean, there's always been concerns,
5 whether it was just the basic communication of the
6 company that needed to be implemented or just making
7 sure that we do things the right way. One of the
8 bigger concerns has always been where the company was
9 headed, and money issues were a big thing. Losing the
10 407 is definitely a concern. The loss of our mechanic
11 at some point was a pretty big concern. So there are
12 concerns that definitely came through.

13 Q In your opinion, from the financial aspect of New
14 York Helicopters, when money got tight, did you see a
15 corresponding change in maintenance negatively or
16 flight ops based on money issues, financial problems?

17 A So no, I did not see a change in the operation
18 when it came to that. It's more of a personal concern
19 as in where is the company headed, but I did not see a
20 change in any maintenance or operational changes, if
21 that makes sense.

22 Q Yes. That makes sense. Thank you.

23 Have you ever been pressured or know anyone else
24 who was pressured to fly when conditions were outside
25 of personal or company minimums, including maintenance

1 issues?

2 A It has happened before. There has been pressure
3 to fly. I mean, it is a business. Most of the
4 pressure does come from business and revenue, and I
5 understand that. I will say that once the pilot has
6 said no, it stuck to that, and there was no further
7 retaliatory action taken on that side.

8 Q Is there a corresponding policy where that would
9 be documented?

10 A Any pressure to fly or --

11 Q No. Like, for instance, once a pilot says no,
12 does the buck stop there, or is it tribal knowledge,
13 or is that a documented policy?

14 A No. That's more tribal knowledge. If a pilot
15 says no, it's a no, and that's about it.

16 Q Okay. Have you ever -- describe -- excuse me.
17 Describe your relationship with the owner, Michael
18 Roth. And, again, I'm not asking you to, you know --
19 what's the word I'm looking for? I know you two have
20 a relationship. I don't want you to throw him under
21 the bus per se. But, as the owner of a company, I
22 think it's important that we talk about the
23 relationship that he has with yourself, the DO, the
24 mechanic, and all of the employees. Can you describe
25 his temperament, personality, et cetera?

1 A Okay. I'd like to say my relationship with Mr.
2 Roth in the last couple years has been minimal, if
3 that makes sense. We had the key people to run a
4 business without him being around as much, and that's
5 what we were striving to do, was run the company for
6 him. And I would like to say sometimes it was better
7 that he stayed away. Mr. Roth does have a
8 temperament. He can be a little bit impulsive.

9 But, overall, I mean, I stayed there for three
10 and a half years. It is all well within manageable
11 range, and we were striving to make the company better
12 on his behalf.

13 Q Thank you. I know we've already touched on this,
14 but I'm going to ask you a repeating question just for
15 clarification. How are squawks irregularities,
16 maintenance issues, about the aircraft documented and
17 passed on? Where are these kept?

18 And I know we talked about this about 10
19 questions ago, but if you could repeat that process.
20 If I'm a helicopter pilot and I'm noticing a vibration
21 or I'm noticing a chip detector or I'm noticing any
22 kind of irregularity, what is my job as a pilot to
23 report that, and how is it done?

24 Q Well, anything that is reportable gets reported
25 directly to the maintenance. We were a pretty small

1 organization. That means we also know each other,
2 spend a lot of time with each other. And we went
3 directly to maintenance to tell them, hey, this is
4 what we're seeing, can you look at it. And then they
5 would do their job to look at it. They would write
6 the squawks that they needed to, sign off the squawks
7 that they needed to, and that's pretty much it.

8 Q Okay. And do those squawks, they stay with the
9 helicopter?

10 A So those squawks will be put on the daily
11 maintenance sheet. The daily maintenance sheet we in
12 the helicopter keep the previous day's sheet, as well
13 as the next day's. Everything else was stored in the
14 office on that bookshelf at the back of the office.

15 Q Okay. Were those irregularities documented?
16 When you said they were on the helicopter, were they
17 in a separate binder, or were they in that aluminum
18 can?

19 A They were in a binder that was put in that
20 waterproof bag.

21 Q Okay.

22 A That was our daily maintenance binder.

23 Q This wasn't on the list of questions, but I am
24 curious. The aluminum can, you know, that holds the
25 paper and basically the measuring triangle, was that

1 for weight and balance? What was the purpose of that
2 can?

3 A So the purpose of that can was a backup. Inside,
4 like you said, you had the triangle, the measuring
5 triangle, you had some sheets in there for weight and
6 balance. You also had some sheets in there for
7 manifest. All that was a backup in case the iPad were
8 to fail, we could still operate on a paper basis.

9 Q Okay. All right. That explains it. I was kind
10 of curious about that can because I saw it with the
11 helicopter over at the hangar.

12 So the weight and balance, was that done by the
13 pilots, or was that done by the staff inside?

14 A Weight and balance is always done by the pilots.

15 Q Okay. So can you describe how that weight and
16 balance is done and how the information about the
17 weights of the passengers is passed on?

18 A So the pilots would come in for a flight. They
19 would tell him what his next flight was, so duration
20 of the flight and as well as how many passengers are
21 coming on, as well as the total flight weight.

22 And after that, the pilot puts in total flight
23 weight. Usually, because we do not get individual
24 weights, we average about the weight, so take the
25 flight weight, divide that by number of passengers,

1 input it in. It gives you a general idea.

2 We also do mental calculations of what is an
3 acceptable weight, what is not an acceptable weight,
4 and that also comes with just basic knowledge of the
5 aircraft as you fly.

6 Q Certainly. Certainly. I understand. And that
7 information is kept -- again, is that something that's
8 on the Google drive? I made a request to -- and
9 forgive me, I forget her name, the admin who works --
10 she's the niece of Joe. I put a request in for the
11 weight and balance for that flight, and she provided
12 the actual weights of the passengers but not the
13 actual documentation. Is that something that I have
14 to request from Mr. Bryan to get for us as well?

15 A So, normally, the daily manifest that shows all
16 that weight and balance would be uploaded at the end
17 of the day. Now, since the crash happened, we do not
18 have the iPad to be able to upload a daily manifest,
19 so there is no physical copy of that uploaded to the
20 drive because we never had a time to do that.

21 Q Would you say that it's possible, if I were to
22 provide the weights to -- even though there's no one
23 really -- do you still have access? Do you have an
24 iPad where you could actually run those weights for us
25 so we could have an exemplar copy?

1 A I do not, no. I do not have access to anything
2 that is company-related.

3 Q Okay.

4 A If you go onto the Google drive, you will see
5 exemplar copies from the last two years, though.

6 Q Okay.

7 A Of just regular day operations of that.

8 Q Right. Well, if we have that, then we can run
9 our own weight and balance for sure because I do have
10 the -- I have the weights of the passengers.

11 A I can tell you for a fact that the weight and
12 balance worked for that flight.

13 Q Oh, I have no doubt, but, again, we have to close
14 that door. I have to be able to back it up.

15 A Of course.

16 Q I mean, I imagine with the family -- it's not a
17 very large family, you know, three children. You
18 know, Sean, the pilot, you know, was of average size.
19 And they were coming back with -- I did the
20 calculation. They had about 28 gallons of fuel when
21 he made the call for more fuel that the media, of
22 course, ran away with even though it had nothing to do
23 with the accident. But does 28 gallons sound about
24 right when he would make that call, hey, I'm going to
25 need some more gas, or was I way off?

1 A Yeah, completely fine. Twenty-eight gallons
2 gives you about 200 pounds fuel. That is more than
3 accurate on what the operation looked like.

4 Q Oh, yeah. But, I mean, you think that's about
5 what he had when he made that call when he was coming
6 in, saying he was going to need to pick up some more
7 gas? Does that sound -- I'm asking you for a little
8 bit of conjecture theory here. Is that -- you think
9 that's about what he had?

10 A So I have not looked at what -- when he fueled,
11 how much he fueled prior. I have not looked at that.

12 Q Okay. All right. I don't --

13 A I'm really going by the definition of we train
14 pilots to tell them land with more fuel than you need.
15 Fuel if you need it. And that's --

16 Q Okay. All right. So -- all right. Good.

17 A -- exactly what he did.

18 Q All right. Good. So 28 gallons is -- that's a
19 fair assessment?

20 A Mm-hmm.

21 Q Okay. Thank you. Yeah, I'm sorry, it was a very
22 kind of clumsy way to present that question.

23 Anyone at downtown Sky Port JRB ever express any
24 concerns about the operation of the helicopters,
25 specifically 2-1-6 Mike Hotel?

1 A Not to my knowledge, no.

2 Q Okay. It's been reported by a pilot that
3 WhatsApp has been used to communicate issues. Can you
4 agree or disagree with that or describe the process?

5 A Yeah. I can agree. We definitely had multiple
6 WhatsApp chats to talk about stuff. It depends on the
7 chat. We did have an ASO chat, a pilot-only chat. We
8 had one with the DO. Yes, we did have chats to
9 involve everyone in the company so that everyone knew
10 what was going on at any point.

11 Q As far as you know, the WhatsApp, was it set to
12 delete messages once the conversation was over?

13 A I do not know, no.

14 Q Okay. Does New York Helicopters have an SMS
15 program, and, if so, again, where can I find the
16 documentation?

17 A We do have an SMS program. It was developed by
18 the ASO, Tristan Bell, and you can find a online copy
19 or a digital copy on the Google drive.

20 Q Okay.

21 A And I'm pretty sure I also gave you a copy
22 myself.

23 Q I think you did. I think you did.

24 Were there any pre-designated landing areas along
25 the route if an emergency came up?

1 A Pre-designated?

2 Q Yeah, yeah.

3 A Not particularly.

4 Q Okay.

5 A We all talk as pilots. It's a helicopter. You
6 can land anywhere, you go wherever you can, and that's
7 part of training as we've all done that.

8 Q Okay. Walk me through a normal tour flight
9 similar to the accident flight from a customer order
10 through the end of the flight.

11 A From a customer order?

12 Q Yeah. So, for instance, if I'm getting ready to
13 come to New York City, and, you know, I go to a
14 website or call you up or something like that, just
15 basically, you know, how does that work? How do I
16 place an order for a flight?

17 A So I'm not going to lie to you, I'm more on the
18 pilot side more than the reservation side.

19 Q That's fine.

20 A And from my understanding, there are multiple
21 websites to book a flight. Then I'm assuming --
22 actually, I'm not going to say anything because I
23 don't fully know, but once you've booked your flight,
24 you come to a location at a certain time. You are
25 checked in, they weigh you, they take any payments

1 that you are still owed or still due. They give you a
2 safety briefing. That safety briefing is a video that
3 you have seen and have access to because I know we
4 gave that to you.

5 Q Right. Yes, you did.

6 A They are briefed again by the ground crew. They
7 are outfitted with life vests, and then they are
8 walked out to the aircraft.

9 Once at the aircraft, usually a couple photos are
10 taken that they can purchase. They are loaded by our
11 loading staff, who have been trained to load an
12 aircraft properly as to weight and balance. And then
13 the pilot gives a supplementary briefing because
14 that's what they are taught. You take off. So far so
15 good?

16 Q So far so good.

17 A Okay. The flight that day was out of the JRB
18 Helipad. Once you take off, you go through the
19 buttermilk, making recording calls as you go.

20 At the south tip of Governor Island, you should
21 be around 500 feet. You cross over to the Statue of
22 Liberty, do a quick loop on the south side of the
23 Statue, showing the Statue of Liberty at around 500
24 feet, 60 to 80 knots.

25 Make a climbing left turn, switch over to Newark

1 Airport, and request whatever tour you are on. They
2 will approve that and make you climb to 1500 feet.
3 And then you head northbound on the Hudson River for
4 your tour.

5 Q Okay. And what altitude typically -- we're
6 talking AGL. What altitude typically do you fly at
7 when you're flying north on the Manhattan side?

8 A Fifteen hundred feet.

9 Q Fifteen hundred? Okay.

10 A Typically, 1500 feet, yes, sir.

11 Q Okay. And in this case, so he goes up, does a
12 left turn, U-turn back. What altitude when you're
13 flying south over the Hudson when you're on the Jersey
14 side are you staying at?

15 A So there are two different altitudes going
16 southbound. You make your way from, let's say, the
17 George Washington Bridge down to about the boat basin
18 area or North Hudson Park area, and that's when you
19 request a descent checkout with LaGuardia.

20 And then you come down back into the Hudson
21 corridor. A thousand to 800 feet is the normal range
22 around there from boat basin area down to the clock or
23 the Colgate clock. Some people go lower, some people
24 higher, but typically around there.

25 Q Okay. The accident flight pilot was at about 650

1 feet at the Ellipse, that beautiful new building.

2 A Okay.

3 Q Is that atypical, or is that appropriate?

4 A That's completely fine.

5 Q Okay.

6 A I mean, he's the pilot in command at that time.
7 He might have been setting himself up for an approach.
8 I don't know. That's completely fine.

9 Q Okay. Thank you.

10 All right. We already talked about that. Bear
11 with me. I'm going through some of these questions.
12 I want to make sure we don't repeat them too much.

13 Do you recall when the first time the vibration
14 in that helicopter, the wobble, occurred?

15 A Not particularly, no.

16 Q Could you give, like, an educated guess time
17 frame, like, when it was first noted or reported?

18 A It's been a while. That's pretty much the best
19 answer. I don't have an actual educated guess, yeah.
20 I mean, it's one of those things that has been brought
21 up. I don't fully remember when exactly.

22 Q Okay. All right. I'm trying to say this
23 without -- okay. Would a month prior to the accident
24 seem like an appropriate answer? And you're not
25 committed. I totally understand. I'm just trying --

1 we're trying to focus in on when the vibration started
2 from an airworthiness standpoint. But, if you don't
3 know, that's fine. We have other people to talk to.

4 A No, I don't, like, actually know when. I
5 couldn't tell you when. I would like to say that I'm
6 maybe not the one to ask as I did not fly these ships
7 as much because of my chief pilot role. Maybe the
8 pilots who flew a little bit more have more of an idea
9 of that because they are the ones flying these ships
10 day in, day out.

11 Q Okay. Okay. And you did provide me a name of a
12 pilot a few days back when I was asking you on, like,
13 who was flying the ship on this particular day. I'll
14 start with -- I don't have his name in front of me. I
15 think it was Jason -- was it Jason?

16 A No. Jason's the Director of Operations.

17 Q Okay. The pilot that you mentioned to me the
18 other day when I --

19 A So I mentioned two, and it is either Drew Taylor
20 or John DeMino.

21 Q Okay. Or John DeMino. Okay.

22 A Yes.

23 Q Okay. Got it. Thank you.

24 Do you happen to know -- this is probably not a
25 question for you but the Director of Ops and the

1 Director of Maintenance. Did anyone reach out to
2 Meridian Helicopters about the vibrations on 2-1-6?
3 Because I know Meridian was pretty much responsible
4 for all of the parts, life-limited parts. New York
5 did most of the routine maintenance. But do you
6 happen to know if anyone reached out to Meridian about
7 this issue?

8 A I do not, no.

9 Q Okay. Any notable concerns with other
10 helicopters that New York Helicopter leased from
11 Meridian Helicopters?

12 A None.

13 Q Okay. Those are all of the questions that I have
14 for you. Do you have any questions for me?

15 A First of all, I know there's some weather coming
16 up. I don't know exactly where you're in the country,
17 but you guys okay over there? I know there's some
18 pretty serious stuff coming.

19 Q Yeah, there certainly is, and it's really a
20 question of whether or not I'm going to get to go
21 down -- go home this weekend because of that. I live
22 outside of Washington, D.C. So, yeah, I saw. It's
23 been insane.

24 A Apart from that, not particularly. If you have
25 anything that you can divulge, we're all pilots

1 waiting to know what's going on. We're all kind of in
2 a hiatus or in a limbo situation. So, if you have any
3 information that you are allowed to share, it would be
4 appreciated, but I completely understand if you don't.

5 Q Well, no, no. I mean, it's totally okay. The
6 preliminary report is going to be out -- it's actually
7 being fine-tuned as we speak. We typically like to
8 get prelim reports out within 10 days. However, this
9 accident is extraordinary circumstances, highly
10 visible. We want to make sure we have it right.

11 So feel free to look for this. I can -- I'll let
12 you know when the report is going to get published.
13 That'll give you a lot of information because it's a
14 fairly robust report.

15 A Okay.

16 Q That being said, there's really -- there's not a
17 lot to tell right now. We have the helicopter, and
18 the various components and parts are pretty much
19 spread throughout the country if I'm correct. I do
20 believe we have some parts of the helicopter that are
21 back at NTSB Headquarters, and I know that we have
22 some significant pieces and parts that are down at
23 Bell Helicopters in Dallas, Texas. Those are going to
24 be looked at this week.

25 And when I say looked at, I'm talking about

1 thoroughly examined because the helicopter, you know,
2 say what you will about, you know, all the trolls and
3 all the armchair quarterbacks, you know, never look at
4 the comments. I'm sure Bryan would agree with that.
5 Never look at the comments. Everyone was so
6 completely wrong, and believe me, it's hard to not
7 look at them. But, you know, there was no mast bump.
8 I mean, there was, but we think it's probably
9 incidental to, you know, what actually happened
10 because the transmission, the mast, the main rotor
11 blade assembly, all came in. You saw the pictures on
12 the news.

13 A Yes, sir.

14 Q It all came down intact, separated from the roof
15 line structure.

16 We have the tail boom, which includes the tail
17 rotor, drive transmission, tail rotor assembly, and
18 the tail rotor drive that's separate of the helicopter
19 bulkhead. We have that that we're looking at as well.

20 So everything right now that we're looking at is
21 from an airworthiness standpoint. So the very smart
22 airworthiness metallurgist experts are going to be
23 looking at that in the next week or so. So,
24 hopefully, we'll have something solid that we can
25 report on for the factual report.

1 But, aside from that, I can't really get into
2 anything else, but, again, it's because we don't know.
3 We don't know. There's a lot of unanswered questions,
4 and that's -- you know, these investigations, they --
5 most of the work actually happens after the fact. You
6 know, the on-scene portion is a very small part of a
7 much larger holistic process. So the answers will be
8 coming over the next 12 months.

9 A Okay.

10 Q Okay?

11 A All right.

12 Q But, when the prelim report comes out, that'll
13 have a lot of information for it.

14 A Okay. I appreciate it. Thank you.

15 MR. McCARTER: You're welcome.

16 Bryan, did you have any additional questions or
17 anything?

18 MR. DAVID: No, sir. No, sir. Thank you.

19 MR. McCARTER: Okay. You bet. And I'll talk to
20 you in about an hour and 15 minutes or so. And thank
21 you both.

22 Octave, thanks a lot for dealing with the
23 technology issues --

24 MR. KUHN: Of course.

25 MR. McCARTER: -- and answering the questions.

1 Believe me, they'll be a big help.

2 MR. KUHN: Yeah.

3 MR. McCARTER: Okay. Thank you, gentlemen.

4 MR. DAVID: Thank you. Have a good day.

5 MR. McCARTER: Thank you. You too. Bye-bye.

6 (Whereupon, the interview in the above-entitled
7 matter was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: Operations Interviews, New York
Helicopter Charter Inc.

ACCIDENT NO.: ERA25MA171

DATE: May 2, 2025

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the National Transportation Safety Board 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.

Date: January 6, 2026

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