UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
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FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR *
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 * Accident No.: WPR24FA238
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Interview of: DANIEL P. CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

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APPEARANCES:

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. NIXON: All righty, good afternoon. We're going to do the -- our final interview for the day, welcome everybody. I know it's a long day but hang in there and we'll get this one done. So I think you've heard, because you've been the rep there, kind of the guidelines, our ROE for the interviews, but I'll go through them one more time to be official. You're allowed a representative, if you'd like. You choose anyone and -- okay. Could you say it a little louder just to make sure --

MR. CARROLL: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And then you're aware we are recording, correct?

MR. CARROLL: Correct.

MR. NIXON: And no objection?

MR. CARROLL: No objection.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you. And remember, the recordings are not used against you or anything, they're used to make an accurate transcript for -- obviously, you want that and obviously, that's what I want, so the bottom line is there -- to ensure we have transcripts of what's being talked about, you will have a chance at some point to weigh in with the draft and make sure we captured -- sometimes they hear it and they're not sure, they put some word that may not be what you said, type things, so at some point you'll get that and you'll have like a couple weeks to get it back to us, you know, with your corrections, if any, and then

from there we'll make a final transcript and that will be the final product. The tapes don't go anywhere, but the transcripts will be part of the docket. So with that, I think you heard me say before, it's an NTSB-led investigation, you know, by law we are termed to be the lead investigation when we take, you know, investigations. The main goal for us is to determine the probable cause of the accident and then along the way take safety mitigations as appropriate to prevent another one.

We are independent, you heard me say that and the reason we are, that gives us the most latitude when we make these investigations, you know, we don't have -- we don't have any bias for anyone directing us or putting pressure on us, we can, you know, do what we need to do and that's -- that's why we're independent. With that, even though, I think -- you've been here before, just to make it official on the recording, thought, let's -- we'll go through introductions one more time. I'm Albert Nixon, I'm with the NTSB and I'm the operational group chairman.

MR. WEAVER: Jess Weaver, Chief Pilot, Director of Operations, Dauntless Air.

MR. MERRILL: Kevin Merrill, Aviation Safety Officer with the U.S. Forest Service.

MS. WEINKAUF: Lea Weinkauf, Air Safety Investigator, Forest Service.

MR. SAVAGE: Michael Savage, national standardization, pilot standardization and instructor and -- U.S. Forest Service.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And we're -- as you know, if we go long, we'll take a break about every hour, if we go that long, and if you need a break before that, just let me know and we can always take a quick break, if you need to get a drink of water, use the facilities or something, so just let us know. So with that, any questions before we get started, Dan?

MR. CARROLL: No questions.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great.

INTERVIEW OF DANIEL PATRICK CARROLL

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Could you state your full name, please?

A. Daniel Patrick Carroll.

Q. Okay. And then you go by Dan, I'm assuming?

A. Go by Dan, yeah.

Q. Okay, great. And Dan, tell us a little bit about your background, aviation, education, all that good stuff.

A. Yeah. Education-wise, I went -- I'm a forester by trade --

Q. Okay.

A. -- I went through a two-year tech school in northern Minnesota and then transferred to a four-year school, Michigan Tech, in the UP of Michigan. From there I worked seasonally for the Forest Service as a wild land firefighter. Employment after that was full time with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a fire management officer, FMO, running a large-scale initial attack program. Also worked in training and instruction

with anything from chainsaws to dozers to helicopters and eventually, I got into aerial firefighting via air attack training and air attack certification. So I had three seasons with the Forest Service seasonally going through college and then just over 16 years with the DNR in Minnesota, that was my agency career. After that, I did some AD air attack work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and then I've helped Dauntless with some business development and training help since then.

Q. Okay. Are you full time with Dauntless now?

A. Yeah, recently hired full time with Dauntless as of the 16th of August, I believe Friday. So just under a month ago.

Q. Okay, so pretty recent, then, obviously.

A. Pretty recent, yeah.

Q. Okay. And then what's your current position with the company?

A. Current position is director of safety.

Q. Okay. And that includes being in charge of the SMS, is that correct, as director of safety?

A. That's correct. In charge of that, Mike Daigle (ph.) is still involved as the safety officer. Mike and I have been transitioning this year --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- and I'll formally take that over in January and keep Mike on as help.

Q. Okay, great. Have you had any involvement with SMS in your

previous position?
A. With the agency? My agency career?
Q. Yeah, yeah.
A. Yeah, certainly, you know, working for the Forest Service and the state, there were individual safety programs related to anything from a safe COMM system --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- related to aviation to a safe net system related to ground firefighting operations, and then internal safety documentation related to accidents, injuries, while working for the state.
Q. Okay. And then I know you're full time since August with the company, Dauntless, did you do anything part time before that?
A. As a contractor, I worked for them as a business development advisor.
Q. How long was that, again, I'm sorry, the time frame for that?
A. That's off and on, so --
Q. I mean, off and on, when did you start, I guess, for doing that?
A. I started that -- I don't even -- let's see, 2024, we're -- it would've been roughly January of 2023.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And then what -- I don't need to know all the details, but what are some of your major -- in your part-time job, what were some of your major responsibilities in the past?

A. As a contractor for Dauntless?
Q. Yeah, yeah.
A. So I worked with, again, business development, which included anything from attending trade shows --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and representing the company to assisting with contract oversight. As a part of those duties I was also on the training committee and was also -- I helped with training and development --
Q. Okay, I see.
A. -- of pilots.
Q. So in your current position now, are you still involved with the training committee?
A. I am, yes.
Q. Okay. And then what's some other responsibilities in your current position as director of safety?
A. Overall, it's to promote a safety culture within Dauntless, facilitate and manage, again, that SMS --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- program. Currently updating policies and procedures within the company. Lead training related to the SMS system, lead training related to whether it would be the emergency response plan familiarization or crew chief familiarization with trailers --
Q. Um-hum.

A. -- and some of that, of course, is in process as we -- as we continue.
Q. Okay. I know you're new to the position, but that being said, besides SMS, what other safety programs do you have?
A. Well, I would have -- oversight's not the right word. So I would have responsibility for, again, the emergency response plan, make sure --
Q. Okay.
A. -- people have not only access to it, but are familiar with it and are capable to use that emergency response plan when needed -- people have access to an account and are able to log in to the SMS system, which we call Vortex -- comfortable with filing a report --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- comfortable with the anonymous reporting --
Q. Okay.
A. -- and then they understand the process of, you know, generating the report, providing a narrative, understanding the timeliness of getting feedback back and then how to see that, read the report or -- and collectively, the report is filed within the company.
Q. Okay. Like I said, caveat again, you're new to the position, but you mentioned you're going to, you know -- are you planning to make any major changes or have you got that far yet for safety, anything new on the horizon?

A. I don't have specific intent to change, have any major changes. My job --
Q. Just trying to learn the --
A. -- as I see it currently is to, you know, familiarize myself more with the current operations --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- update the policies and procedures related to, again, the emergency response plan and the SMS manual, get that out to the agencies that require it, make sure our folks at Dauntless are also familiar with it. We have discussions on, you know, weekly related to any needs related to safety, whether they be equipment, future training or people that may have missed something in the past.
Q. Is that a management level meeting or is that --
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. All right. And I forgot what the guy -- I think it was topic of the day --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- they mentioned earlier, is that -- you know, sometimes there's safety involved in that, but is that something, you know, you're aware of that uses the safety --
A. And I would consider that topic of the day specifically a safety item.

Q. Okay.
A. I would relate that to something like a "six minutes for safety" that's provided in my previous agency career --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- so John Thomas leads those topic of the day e-mails and they range from, as recently as a short accident report on an IFR flight --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- out west in what we call "get-home-itis," and being that we're transitioning out of fire season, hopefully, in the next couple months we want to remind people that, you know, don't have "get-home-itis," do your checklist, do your procedures.
Q. Okay. So you're kind of catering it to, you know, with -- appropriate to what's going on to operate --
A. And we do multiple other things, so there's a Maintenance Monday e-mail that's sent out by the assistant director of maintenance related to all things Air Tractor and/or Wipaire float systems.
Q. Okay.
A. There's a Safety Saturday e-mail that I send out, we used to do ForeFlight Fridays, we're going to plan to bring that back out, so there's almost a daily and certainly every couple days' safety related e-mail across the company.
Q. Are your maintenance personnel -- do they have their own accounts in SMS, as well, just like the pilots do?

A. They do. Every contractor and/or full-time employee or part-time employee that works at Dauntless, including management, staff have an SMS account.
Q. Access, okay.
A. Yeah, a Vortex account.
Q. All right, great. And then getting back to your -- you know, some of your -- you mentioned one earlier, you had the one with some certificates, but what type of certificates do you have for your background there?
A. So no aviation-related certificates.
Q. Um-hum.
A. All firefighting-based --
Q. Okay.
A. -- certificates. Red card quals, would that be something you're interested in?
Q. Just tell me what you have, yeah.
A. Yeah. So previous -- related to aerial firefighting or --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- aviation, it would've been HLCO --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- which is helicopter coordinator/air tactical group supervisor --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and prior to that I was a helicopter crew member.
Q. Okay, great. So do you have a crew member -- what did you do

in the helicopter experience, what was your role?
A. I was a back-seater, so my job was all things safety, situational awareness, and then removing doors off of helicopters so the pilot can do bucket work, hooking up the bucket and then evaluating and directing bucket drops.
Q. Okay. And how many hours did you have in -- did you track that, how many hours you have in the helicopter?
A. Yeah, not very much in the helicopter, most of my aviation background is fixed wing specific to the air attack job.
Q. How many do you have in that?
A. Just short of a thousand hours.
Q. Oh, okay. As you're safety, director of safety, who do you report to?
A. I report directly to the CEO.
Q. Okay. How often do you talk to him?
A. Seven or eight times daily.
Q. Okay. And as you review -- have you had a chance to review SMS yet, all the write-ups and what's in the queue?
A. Yeah, so we -- specific to me, yes, I have.
Q. Okay. Because the last time I was here about a month and a half ago, you know, we had the issue where your predecessor, we had a meeting, a talk with him and he went through the SMS, you know, he gave us a brief and we went through some of the -- I kind of spot-checked some of the write-ups. At the time they had an open write-up that was high risk, is that still open?

A. Do you know the number?
Q. I'd have to go dig it up, but I think at the time, because I asked him for a high risk and there was only one that was open, that was red, you know, but --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- you don't remember when you did your review if that's still open?
A. So just to clarify, so since -- prior to taking the full-time position, one of the last things I did as a contractor for Dauntless --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- was ran, initiated, and completed an SMS review related to open reports that were deemed -- not -- closed reports that were deemed high risk.
Q. Okay.
A. As part of that process, that was -- John Thomas and I worked on, Richard Simpson, who was the director of maintenance, Nate Judge (ph.), who was the assistant director of maintenance, Mike Daigle, who was the assistant director of ground ops, we all worked on that collectively. That was specifically to address multiple things, one of which was if it's deemed high risk, how was it accounted for --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then where it was accounted for, in other words was it verbally accounted for in a debrief, was it written into policy,

was it -- was a policy amended or other things --
Q. Okay.
A. -- you know, when was it identified, at a company training debrief, at a debrief at a base, was it addressed in an e-mail topic of the day or other things. So the -- my understanding is when you spoke with Mike related to those open reports, some of those that you looked at that were high risk have been closed, I'm not -- I don't know for sure --
Q. Okay.
A. -- which one you referenced.
Q. I'll tell you what, high risks are pretty, I wouldn't say rare, but hopefully they're not too common, so I don't need them today but take a look next week or whatever, see if there's anything open on the -- you know, the high risk category, the red --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- and if there is, just send me, you know, an e-mail through Jesse or, you know, follow up through him, just to show me what write-up currently is open and what the status is, you know, where it is at, you know, in the corrective action type thing.
A. Will do.
Q. If there's any or "hey, we looked at them, there's nothing," --
A. Okay.
Q. -- you know, they're all closed, whatever the case may be.

Okay.
A. Yeah. We do have open high risks, I know that for a fact.
Q. Okay, okay. Yeah, just give me -- I don't need the report, just give me a -- you know, executive version, you know, the title, what date it happened, where it's at currently, you know, like we're waiting, whatever, you know.
A. Got it.
Q. You know, we changed the -- you know, wherever procedure, you know, blah-blah-blah, whatever, you know, the planned corrective action is and why it's not closed, that type of thing.
A. Sure.
Q. Okay. Status report. Okay, let's see here. You said you're involved in training and you're on the training committee, correct?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And you were part of that even in your part-time role as a contractor, as well.
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. So I'm not going to, you know, go through company training and all that stuff, I'm going to specifically go now to interaction with the accident pilot with the training committee, you know, anything that got elevated to that level or any discussions. So was there anything that was talked about at your -- you know, on the training committee that you're a part of during the whole time she was here at the company?

A. I did not specifically hear her name brought up at the -- during the training committee call at all.
Q. Okay. So you never -- there was no -- nothing was ever brought up about her training or anything at the time.
A. Not that I recall.
Q. Okay. And then you mentioned earlier, I believe, in your Texas facility that they were doing her check ride, did you have any other involvement either observing her or being there when she was doing something in training besides that?
A. I did, yes, I spent -- had a few interactions with [redacted] related to company training.
Q. Okay, tell us about that, please.
A. So one -- my primary role during the tactical part of company training, the tactical flight training, is to perform as an air attack overhead.
Q. Sure. You got that experience, obviously.
A. So [redacted] was obviously a part of some of those flights.
Q. Um-hum.
A. So I would've interacted with her as -- her in a suppression aircraft, me as the air attack.
Q. Um-hum.
A. She also rode in the air attack platform with me and the pilot for roughly an hour, and I don't remember which day, to gain more situational awareness, listen to the COMMs and, you know, observe, you know, drops and be more familiar with what the air

attack job is.
Q. From your observation from the air attack, are you actually out there in one of your King Airs or something doing that or is it simulated?
A. Yeah. This particular day we were in a 182.
Q. One eighty-two.
A. But the King Air's the primary platform.
Q. Okay. So you're actually in an airplane out there orbiting above and directing them, like they would in --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- a simulated --
A. Simulated fire traffic area with --
Q. Simulated fire, okay.
A. -- targets and --
Q. Okay, so you're getting all the radio and all the drills for altitudes and what calls they have to make when they enter. Anything to note of particularly the -- [redacted] anything to note of her situation during the -- any of that training?
A. I know the familiarization flight that she had with me in the air attack platform she mentioned was very beneficial --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- related to target terminology, related to things like a roll-up --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- which is a call to -- you know, how the drop lays in to

tie into another drop, not something she had heard of before. It was good and again, we talked about this after we landed, I wanted to get her feedback on what she thought. She liked the ability to watch the circuit from above, watch --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- how they pick up water, watch the angles back to target, watch how they fly within that circuit multiple times in that tactical environment. She also liked the interaction with the actual -- my counterpart, the other air attack, was on the ground at a different target area acting as a ground firefighter with smoke bombs and she got to hear all the air-to-ground traffic between the aircraft and the incident commander.

Q. I see, yeah.

A. And again, some of the target description and the drop calls.

Q. Okay. So just give us, you know -- obviously, when she's riding along with you, it's kind of a -- you know, it's just to help her out, there's nothing, no pressure on her for anything, but how did she take the flight and everything, was she excited and good attitude about everything?

A. She was, yeah, and I -- you know, it came -- was not necessarily planned in the morning, we always have a pre-ops briefing and then the large briefing and that was not something that was in the plan for the day, so there was an adjustment made, I think it was early afternoon. I had come back to the base and Jacob said we'd like her to fly with you if you're okay with that

and of course we were, so that's how that came to be.
Q. I see. And then when you were, you know, obviously doing the simulations where she was one of the seats, anything to note of that, when she was training?
A. No. She performed as she should, the -- I was the air attack on scene when, as has been previously mentioned, she was -- I don't know what the term is, but I received a call from Jacob, who was in the backseat of the airplane she was in --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and said we're going up to the northwest, we'll be past the bridge, scooping, and just information. So it was no longer a flight of four, it was a flight of three, I maintained COMMs with them --
Q. Is that where he disengaged from the flight and did his own solo scooping, is that the -- is that the flight?
A. With her, yeah.
Q. Yeah, with her, okay.
A. In the two-seater.
Q. And he was in the two-seater, obviously, okay. Anything else of note from any training you saw from your perspective up there, you know, simulated?
A. No, not in that case.
Q. Supervisor up there. Okay. And then you mentioned, you know, I don't know whether you heard it, but I guess you were present during her -- when she was doing her check ride or

pre-check, I don't know which, but you were there at the Texas facility, right, when they were doing their -- getting ready for that, like the mock check and then --

A. Yeah, so when I -- I think it -- it would be the -- she was -- I was actually in the boat with the two OAS inspectors --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- John Thomas, Rick Thompson, the other air attack, and myself, during the check rides --

Q. At the check rides?

A. -- that would be after the mock check, right?

Q. Okay.

A. So she was in the boat with us during the check rides to observe again, listen to the radio traffic, understand that process. I was not -- I was not in the air during the mock check ride nor out on the boat during the mock check ride.

Q. Okay. And were you there when, you know, there was some discussion, I don't know what, it was on the -- earlier before the check rides, you know, with Jacob, there was some -- I don't know what word I want to use, but there was disagreement or whatever you want to call it, could you kind of go into that a little bit with us --

A. Sure.

Q. -- what you observed? Or were you part of that, I don't know.

A. I was not there. I came, I think I had landed and was

walking into the hangar and was made aware by another -- one of the Dauntless pilots about that there had been a -- you know, whatever term you want to -- there had been a bit of dust-up --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and there'd been, you know, some emotion shown and that, I believe, Jacob had left the facility at that time, I did not see him again or talk to him until the following morning.
Q. Okay. Did he mention anything about whatever the situation was, the incident, did he say anything that morning?
A. The next morning, because I had talked with other Dauntless pilots --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- the previous afternoon, I had tried to get a sense myself as to what had happened and I did not talk to him that night, I took an opportunity the next morning to talk to him about it, yes.
Q. And what was discussed?
A. There was a disagreement and confusion related to what the mock check was, depending on what had been planned and what actually happened, that's how it was presented to me, because I was not part of the planning process for the mock check and was not going to be a part of the check ride as far as the flights go, you know, I had stayed out of the planning related to either.
Q. Okay. And I realize you just walked into it after the fact and you got, you know, secondhand or maybe firsthand, but you're getting it secondhand because they're relaying it to you, but what

was the incident over, between who and -- it's over that subject, but who was it between, besides Jacob?
A. My understanding of what actually happened was related to basically an emotional outburst with clipboards thrown and -- you know, and curse words used related to his, Jacob's, you know, disagreement with Jesse and J.T. as to how the mock check ride went, you know, Jacob's input was that what occurred was not what had been planned, that was the major disagreement.
Q. Okay, so it wasn't as planned, but do you know if he -- what the outcome was, did he approve it or did he -- you know, it didn't go as planned or you don't know what, exactly, the argument got over. I understand it didn't go as planned --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- but you don't know what the stipulations and stuff are from there.
A. I have scant details of that, I talked to J.T. and Jesse to get, you know, their side of what had occurred --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and, you know, there were -- there were different opinions as to what was correct.
Q. Okay. Is there anything else to add about that whole situation? You know, you said --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- some line pilots talked to you, as well, besides supervisors.

A. There were multiple people that were concerned with and disturbed as to what had occurred and that's primarily why I took the ability the next morning to talk with Jacob directly to try to understand his side and look for a resolution.
Q. Okay. And was that the -- was that the -- was that the time about that he was, at some point, terminated by the company or was that -- you know, did the timeline fit that day or was it a little bit like --
A. It was not, I don't believe it was that day, it would've been soon after.
Q. Soon after, okay, so it was -- okay, that's all I need right now. Anything else dealing with training with the accident pilot or any other previous run-ins or incidents that you know about with Jacob that you want to mention?
A. I think it's worth mentioning that there was -- you know, there was an underlying tone and concurrent path that, you know, Jacob routinely took that did not fall in line with the direction of Jesse --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- nor J.T. related to, you know, how things should be done and how things are done.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Okay, I think that's enough, initially, for me, so I'm going to open it up to the rest of the table, so we'll start with Mike.
BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q. So you said you have -- Rick Thompson, is he full time with the company, too, or is it just some -- you just bring in some outside help?
A. Yeah, for specific to company training, Rick and I were brought in to --
Q. Okay.
A. -- serve as air attacks.
Q. But you guys, do you guys do an air attack role at all during the evaluations portion?
A. No, not during the check ride portion, right, is that what you mean?
MR. SAVAGE: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's really all I have, I think Albert asked the other two questions that I had, so that's it.
MR. NIXON: Lea, Forest Service.
BY MS. WEINKAUF:
Q. So have you ever had another new Fire Boss pilot ride with you as air attack for familiarization?
A. As an agency pilot, an agency employee or --
Q. When you're working for Dauntless as a contractor.
A. Yes, and I'm trying to remember who it was. Let's see.
Q. That's okay if you can't think of it.
A. Yeah.
Q. Maybe it will pop into your head --
A. We might have to come back to it.

Q. Yeah, maybe it will pop into your head when we start talking about something else. What about a pilot who wasn't allowed to do their check ride sitting in on the boat with the OAS inspectors? Is that frequent? Like you said, you went with [redacted] with the OAS inspectors on the boat.

A. So I've been involved with being on the boat during check rides for two years, the first year that did not occur with any pilot.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. The second year she was in the boat with us, that would be the only pilot --

Q. Okay.

A. -- so I have two years' experience with that.

Q. Okay. You said you had done an SMS audit, one of your last things as a contractor, was that just on the hazard reports or was that a full SMS audit?

A. The specific tasking was related to what would be deemed high risk, which would be yellow colored or red colored.

Q. Hazard reports.

A. They're not hazard reports, they're just -- maybe I can go back. There was interest in, from John Thomas, there was interest in going back to determine again where, how, when high risk reports were, I don't want to say dealt with. Solved, loops closed --

Q. Completed.

A. Completed, yeah. That's the right word. And so again, the group was myself; Mike Daigle, who's the assistant director of ground ops; John Thomas, the assistant director of operations; Richard Simpson, the director of maintenance; Nate Judge, the assistant director of maintenance. So we went through "high risk" based on the yellow and red color that was assigned in the matrix, the risk matrix --

Q. Um-hum, um-hum.

A. -- that's what we focused on and I don't remember the exact number of reports, but they were the high risk reports.

Q. That were submitted in your SMS system?

A. Yes, from its beginning.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah, the entirety.

Q. Cool. I think the last question I have is if you have any training, specifically for SMS or aviation safety, like from an accredited school?

A. Do not.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. I think that's all I have.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you, Lea.

Jesse?

MR. CARROLL: I do remember the --

MS. WEINKAUF: Oh.

MR. NIXON: Oh, you got it? Go ahead.

MR. CARROLL: He was not in the same airplane I was in,

related to the additional Fire Boss pilot --

MS. WEINKAUF: Um-hum.

MR. CARROLL: -- it was in another airplane in the same fire traffic area observing. In other words, there were the suppression aircraft, scooping, dropping, there was another aircraft observing them --

MS. WEINKAUF: Um-hum.

MR. CARROLL: -- below me in the stack above the suppression aircraft this time.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. Awesome, thank you.

MR. CARROLL: Um-hum.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks. Jesse?

BY MR. WEAVER:

Q. No, I just want to do a -- you know, what -- your role in company training, obviously, was as an air attack. Were we clear on the focus of what our -- or what was the focus of our ground-based scenarios, what were we trying to achieve?

A. So the -- that's part of the other role I -- being on the training committee, one of the things that I was tasked with was to lead and coordinate the sand table exercises and then some actual lecture training during the ground school. So the priority for this year was, basically, you know, air attack-specific things like COMMs in the FTA, hitting your target, appropriate spacing in a flight, towards target, and that's what we focused on for 2024.

MR. NIXON: Anything else, Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: No. Nothing else, thanks.

MR. NIXON: Thanks. Kevin?

MR. MERRILL: Nothing further for me, thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Just a couple follow-up questions, I mean, she took my thunder on the SMS training, but that means that I cross it out. The other part of it, did you receive any formal, besides OJT for the DOS position, did you receive any training externally for that?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. No.

Q. Okay. And then do you teach any of the ground school, like the air attack or anything, for the initial or the company training, do you teach any of the sessions for that area in your role, air attack?

A. Not at initial training, but -- it would not be specific to the air attack role, but all things related to fire traffic area, sequencing.

Q. Okay, so do you give a class on ground school, shall we say?

A. Yeah. Multiple classes --

Q. Okay.

A. -- in ground school.

Q. Okay. And then this air attack thing, I think it's great,

you simulate it and then, you know, you're going up there during company training, is that something new or do you know, you know, when you took over was that something you established or was it already going on?

A. It was already going on.

Q. Okay.

A. Rick Thompson had been established at least one year prior, perhaps more.

Q. Okay. So you just took over and hopefully improved it, but that -- it was established already.

A. I'd be an addition to -- yeah, I didn't -- Rick is still a part of it.

Q. Okay. And then, I know once again you came in new, but since you did the audit you might have a working knowledge of it, what's the breakdown, roughly, in SMS between operational side and maintenance side reporting?

A. I would actually say it's about a third including ground operations, there is a crew chief, trucks, and trailers, so roughly, a third ground ops --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- a third maintenance and a third flight ops.

Q. Really? Okay. So flight ops is --

A. Yeah. And I'm guessing --

Q. Yeah.

A. -- because I don't know those numbers specifically, but

having done the review and having seen and read through all of the existing reports, I'd say it's a third.

Q. All right. Well, when you do that, we talked about giving me some feedback on the high risk open items, if there is any, just give me a rough estimate of the breakdown of the last year's reports or whatever, you know, like you just talked about, what categories they're in, I'd appreciate it.

A. Will do.

MR. NIXON: Okay. I think that's all I have. One last time for final chance, Jesse, anything else?

MR. WEAVER: I'm good.

MR. NIXON: Mike?

MR. SAVAGE: No, sir.

MR. NIXON: Lea?

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. Just one quick one and you might not know the answer because you're new still, but do you know about how many reports on average are getting submitted a year or --

A. I would say it's over 30, yeah. Yeah.

MS. WEINKAUF: That's all.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you.

MS. WEINKAUF: Thanks.

MR. NIXON: Kevin, last chance.

MR. MERRILL: No, sir.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Well, once again, Dan, thanks. I know you've been here, not just yours, but the rep for the other ones so thanks for hanging in there and your time, nice meeting you, appreciate your testimony today. You know, as you know, the standard question at the end is, is there anything our team didn't ask you or you expected to be asked or there's something you want us to make sure we know about?

A. Nothing to add.

Q. Okay. And then, turn it over to you, any questions for my team?

A. No questions.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks again and that concludes our interview.

(Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of Daniel P. Carroll
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
ACCIDENT INVOLVING	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
AIR TRACTOR AT-802A,	)	
N10122, NEAR HELENA,	)	
MONTANA ON JULY 10,	)	
2024	)	

Interview of: JACOB PATRICK, Former Flight Instructor, Dauntless Air

Pages: 1 through 206

Date: September 4, 2024

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
ACCIDENT INVOLVING AIR TRACTOR AT-802A, N10122, NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238

Wednesday,
September 4, 2024

Interview of: JACOB PATRICK, Former Flight Instructor, Dauntless Air

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
United States Forest Service

MICHAEL SAVAGE, National Chief Lead Plane Pilot, National Fixed-Wing Inspector Pilot, Evaluator
United States Forest Service

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot/Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

TEALEYE CORNEJO, Lead Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. NIXON: -- what it's designed to do is ensure the accuracy with transcripts. That's what it's used for. So I think after a certain point we get the transcripts. I will email them to everyone and then you can weigh in if there's inaccuracies or corrections that need to be made. And that's pretty much what recordings are for, so they're not for anyone's personal purpose. They're to ensure the transcript's accurate and -- one other thing I want to point out is all these interviews are sensitive, so there is no other recordings or personal-type, you know, recording allowed. So just make sure you're abiding by that.

So with that, just real quick I want to talk about the NTSB. I think all of you are aware of us, but we are pretty much the lead investigative party in these accidents. We try to determine the probable cause, and basically that's, you know, what we think probably happened in the accident. We're independent and also, as we determine what happened in the accident, we try to take safety mitigations, as necessary, to prevent another one. That's pretty much our charter. So with that, is there any questions or this might go a few hours, so I will be taking breaks

every hour, so if I don't, raise your hand or something or remind me.

We'll definitely take breaks every hour to make sure everyone has time to get a cup of coffee, use the facilities or, in some cases, grab a quick bite for lunch or something. So with that, before we get to introductions, does anyone have any questions on the rules, just kind of guidelines I put out there?

MS. WEINKAUF: No, I'm good.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Once again -- welcome, good morning. I'm Albert Nixon. I think, you know, my team knows me, but just for you, Jacob, we've talked a few times. I'm the Ops group chairman, and I'm running that, and that's what this team is that we're interviewing as we speak. So I'll go around and please introduce yourself. We can just start going through the top. I think, Lea, you're next. Muted.

MS. WEINKAUF: I'm muted?

MR. NIXON: Yep.

MS. WEINKAUF: I turned my camera on. Lea Weinkauf, Forest Service Air Safety Investigator.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Michael?

MR. SAVAGE: Good morning, everybody. Michael Savage. I serve in a lot of roles, the National Chief Lead Plane Pilot, National Fixed-Wing Inspector Pilot,

Evaluator, basically on the operations side of aerial firefighting.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: Yeah, Jess Weaver, Chief Pilot, Director of Operations for Dauntless Air.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great, and then Tealeye's came to join us, and she's going to have a little cameo here. So Tealeye, please?

MS. CORNEJO: Good morning, everyone. It's nice to see you, Lea and Michael. Thank you, Jacob, for being here. Jesse, at some point I look forward to meeting you. I really appreciate your time, Jacob. I know it was a little bit to get this scheduled.

I'm Tealeye Cornejo. I'm the lead investigator for this accident, and yeah, I just really appreciate your time. I am going to listen in but I'm going to close off my camera. I have followup work that I need to do on some accidents and stuff, so if I have any questions, I'll just text you, Albert --

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MS. CORNEJO: -- if something comes up.

MR. NIXON: Sure.

MS. CORNEJO: Other than that, thank you, guys.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Tealeye. Once again, good morning. For everyone on my team, I appreciate

your time and Tealeye taking time this morning, and for -- Jacob, I know you got in other employment and all, but we kind of worked this in finally. So I appreciate your time as well, and pretty much this is set up for you, so I'll start with a few basic questions, but as we get to the broader subjects, feel free to press, and I know you had some things you wanted to talk about.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q So with that, just to confirm, can we get your full name, Jacob?

A Yeah, Jacob Patrick.

Q Okay. And that's pretty standard spelling?

A Standard spelling for both.

Q Okay. Great, and I know -- I've seen some emails and seen your background, but can you give us kind of an executive version of your aviation background? And then when we get to the Air Tractor Fire Boss stuff, you can go into more detail, you know what I'm saying, as appropriate.

A Yeah, I've been flying for about 18 years. I'm 38 years old, started flying in college, worked my way up through an FBO, got my CFI, -II, flew a Cessna Caravan single pilot, went in the Navy. I flew F-18s, single-seat Super Hornets in the Navy. I have combat

experience operating off aircraft carriers into Iraq and Syria. I've also flown -- done a little bit of ag in order to get qualified for the Fire Boss position.

I've owned multiple flight schools including the 135. I've flown in 135, piston and jets, fractional, corporate. I've been a flight instructor also for 17 years, 4,000 hours of dual given. I have about 9,000 total hours in over a hundred aircraft. I currently instruct in anywhere between 40 and 50 aircraft a year from piston single all the way up to jet multi-engine, seaplane, tail wheel, in between. The last five years I was a pilot in the Fire Boss for Dauntless Air starting in 2019 until the end of company training of 2024. I'm also a current instructor at the National Aerial Firefighting Academy and I've provided -- also been a guest instructor at leadplane refresher and some other events in the aerial firefighting community.

Q Okay. Quite a bit of flying there. Just a few questions. When you were in the Navy, were you an instructor in the F-18 or any other airplane?

A I was the subject matter expert for the aerial refueling. We flew aerial refueling missions, but no, I was not a designated instructor.

Q Okay. Were you flight lead?

A Yes.
Q Okay. And then this fire academy you mentioned you're instructor with. How many, approximately -- I know it changes, but about how many instructors are there in that organization or authorized to --
A Yeah, it's a -- it's a hybrid or a combination of both agency and industry representatives. There's typically about 15 or 20 total industry representatives, meaning they're pilots that are flying for different operators, and I'm one of two currently for the Fire Boss.
Q Okay. So the Fire Boss only has two and you're one of them currently?
A Correct, an Ensign myself right now.
Q Okay. And tell me a little bit about what that you know, obviously you get a certificate if you go there, but tell me a little bit about that. You're currently an instructor there, correct?
A Yes.
Q Okay. Tell me a little bit about what that rating does or what it's for.
A It's a contractually-required course. There's multiple levels that the academy offers. NAFA I, II and III. NAFA I is the entry-level course that all incoming fixed-wing aerial firefighting pilots have to

attend in order to be eligible for a card -- or an interagency card, and the instructor cadre provides baseline, doctrinal, and policy training, ground training, regarding the aerial firefighting community. It's about five days for the initial course and then two days for the recurrent courses.

Q Okay. And then about how many flights for -- let's say someone gets initially checked out. How many flights approximately?

A For the Fire Boss? Is that what you're saying?

Q Yes.

A That's something that we need to talk about a little more in detail, but it is a -- the syllabus that Dauntless uses is approximately a 10-flight syllabus for the initial training to be soloed.

Q Okay. And I think you mentioned earlier you were -- I think you answered some of my questions. Make sure I got them accurately. You were at Dauntless from 2019 until 2024. When did you quit employment there this year? What month?

A I was terminated by Jess Weaver on March 14, three days after the checkrides in 2024.

Q Okay. So March 14. Okay. And then what position? Obviously, I'm not sure. I know you were an instructor, but go through your positions with the

company as you got hired and you were with them five years or so. Give us a rundown of all the positions you had in that company, Dauntless, please.

A Yeah. Yeah, so to give you some background there, up until 2021, Dauntless Air had a director of training. His name was Steve Bailey. He left the company around 2021, I believe. Following that, Dauntless Air abolished that position and created a training committee. I was then appointed or selected to be on that training committee. It was myself, Jess Weaver, Steve Helinski, and John Thomas. There was no official or written roles and responsibilities, but the overall focus of the training committee, which was by default chaired by Jess Weaver, was designed to prepare and work toward company training and to put on company training, so I was a designated training committee member.

In around 2022, maybe '21 -- I maybe started right in the backseat, I became -- well, if you want to call it that, I was an undesignated instructor, and the reason I want to say that is Dauntless Air has never had actual designated instructors. They've had no call -- no actual letter, even though their training manual states that there is actual -- there's an actual record for training for an instructor

qualification, so starting in 2021 and definitely in 2022, I started riding the backseat during company training to observe the pilots and provide feedback during the training events, during the company training event in March.

I also -- during the season, I was a relief pilot, so with 2024, by the time I left, I was the most experienced relief pilot. Nobody else had flown any of the other -- as many of the other aircraft or been a relief pilot in the company because traditionally the role or the structure at Dauntless Air is to be a relief pilot as a new pilot, which I would like to touch upon later, and then to move into a primary position. I recognize because the company was so large and had gotten so large so quickly that somebody had to go around and observe what was being -- basically what was going on with training and how was it being related or translated into the field. So I was a relief pilot in the field and then, as I said, I was an instructor.

Starting in 2024, I was invited to be an instructor for initial training as well, along with Jess Weaver and Steve Helinski for the initial training class of 2024. That included [redacted] Turchetti, which is the reason we're here, obviously

today, and my -- as far as my -- would you like me to expand on the instructor training?

Q Yeah, what I got, Jacob, just to kind of like what you asked for. First, we're talking a little bit about specifics of the Air Boss, you know, in general.

A Yeah, yeah.

Q Then we're going to do Dauntless and then we're going --

A Yeah.

Q -- to your role and then, you know, obviously with [redacted], you know, and the training, so that's kind of the big picture map we're taking. But yeah, if you want to go ahead and, you know, if you have to -- I know all of it's not going to overlap perfectly, so --

A Yeah.

Q -- you know what I'm saying? So --

A Exactly, thank you, so I'll get to that, but yeah, I was an instructor for the initial training class. I personally flew with [redacted] as an instructor both at initial training and then company training. In terms of my role in the training committee, I was primarily responsible for flight training and the scenarios, meaning -- and then what that ultimately ended up being was I drafted the

schedules and I helped to basically run the daily training schedule for company training, starting in rough -- yeah, basically 2021 when I put out my first schedule and then all the way through 2024, so that basically meant I briefed the entire company, managed the daily flight schedule and also instructed at the same time.

Q Okay. So quite a few hats there. Did you have anyone working for you directly when you did all those?

A No.

Q Okay. So you were -- you were doing the scheduling and everything just on your own, it sounds like.

A Yes.

Q Okay. And then this committee you were on, the training committee, in 2024 how many initial students approximately were there when you were there?

A For the initial training class?

Q Yes.

A The training class was six individuals.

Q Six.

A Or six pilots.

Q Okay. And then going back, you were there since 2021 and I know, I think, you went to committee later,

but is that kind of appropriate? Was it expanding student-wise for initial training?

A The 2024 was the largest initial training class in the history of Dauntless.

Q Okay. So I think that answers my question.

A To my -- to my recollection from what I know about the history of Dauntless.

Q Okay. And then one thing, I know you mentioned some general hours earlier. Your total time, I think 9,000 and all, but as far as the Air Tractor goes, can you be give us specifics like in the Air Boss and all that stuff for that airplane place on the hour?

A Yeah, Fire Boss I have just over 500 hours, close to 100 hours of instruction, and then I have a little over 100 in 402/502, so over about 600-something hours in an ag aircraft or Air Tractor.

Q Okay. And then in your last position there, you know, in the committee and as an instructor and everything, I guess, scheduling, you know, whatever you want to call it, who did you report to?

A Jess Weaver.

Q Jess Weaver. Okay. And you mentioned in your email you wanted to -- before we got into specifics, you kind of wanted to discuss the firefighting community and, you know, the Air Boss operations in

general, and so please feel free to mention a little bit of that you wanted to discuss.

A Yeah, so the Fire Boss is a converted agriculture aircraft. They took an 802, put it on amphibious floats that Wipaire holds the STC for. It is a single-engine air tanker that's on an amphib, so it's considered a single-engine scooping aircraft. There's only basically two other -- one other aircraft that does that, which is the CL-215/415s. It is unique in the sense that this aircraft other -- the only other aircraft that does this is our single-engine air tankers or the wheeled version of it. They're operated in -- in flights.

The multi-engine scoopers do slightly, but the Fire Boss specifically is strategically put on contract in flights of two to four aircraft, and they're tactically ordered to an incident in flight, so they operate in formation, and so the main -- one of the main -- not concerns, but one of the main things to consider is that this aircraft is a single-seat platform that is inherently unstable.

It is a -- one of the most challenging aircraft that I've ever flown, and I've flown over a hundred different aircraft to include off of aircraft carriers and in combat. It requires and demands a very high

level of skill, and in the absence of that skill, you have to have a proper training program that makes up for that.

Q Okay.

A So it's a very challenging aircraft.

Q Now help me out, Jacob. I'm a career pilot, so give me details.

A Yep.

Q You know, obviously I haven't flown this airplane, but what makes it so challenging? Give me some direct details, not just generalities. You know, is the landing tough? Is it, you know, the P-factor? Help me out here, give me specifics why it's so challenging.

A Yeah, it's a high-powered aircraft, so it does have a lot of left turning tendencies. It is unstable in the sense that you cannot really trim this hands off. It demands your attention pretty much the whole time you're flying it. With the operation that this aircraft operates in or the environment, we're talking a system or structure by which the aircraft goes out, establishes on a fire, and then goes to a scoop site and then stays in that location or on station for about three hours.

One of the biggest challenges is the scooping

aspect in the fact that this is a very unique operation. There really isn't anything else that prepares you for scooping. Multi-engine scoopers, yes, they scoop, but they're two-crew aircraft with a much larger aircraft. This is a smaller single-engine aircraft, so every single scoop is different. It is much more impacted by wake turbulence, boat wake. Every single scoop, as I said, is different, and it is impacted or affected by every environmental change, wind density, altitude, other aircraft, the wake, the water itself, so it is very challenging.

Then, you have to -- then you add in the fact that you then have to take that whatever, however much you scooped, and you typically, if you're in the Pacific Northwest, you have to climb that load of water up to a drop site or a target area and, in typically turbulent conditions due to the wind, you have to then manually drop that water onto a target following typically other aircraft, unless you're the lead, which creates all kinds of different challenges based on the type of target, the fire behavior, the fire anatomy, and then the entry and exit.

Q Okay. I didn't realize this -- so even crews on this airplane, like you said, sporty. You don't have trim, so you've got to be heads up the whole time,

huh? No --
A It trims.
Q Yeah.
A It has -- it has trim, but it is an unstable aircraft, so it's (inaudible).
Q Gets out of trim quick. Okay. And then you kind of mentioned some of the -- I'm assuming like the scoop operations is probably, you know -- what's your top three most challenging though? Is it probably scooping, probably the first or --
A Yes.
Q -- help me out here in the other top challenging events.
A Scooping would be the first, especially out in the Pacific Northwest or higher-elevation scoop sites. The second would be dropping or operating in mountainous terrain.
Q Okay.
A And then the third one would be operating in lower visibility or a congested airspace environment where you're low altitude and operating in close proximity to other aircraft like helicopters and large air tankers.
Q Okay. As far as the scooping goes, Jacob, you know, I realize it's a condensed period. You got

checklists to run and you know, obviously you have, you know, you're going to be on the water, which is challenging. But you know, not coming from your community, walk me through why it's so challenging.

A The scoop?

Q Yes.

A Every single one is different, so depending on where you're at in the flight, if you're in a flight, which typically almost 90 plus percent of the time you are. It can -- every single scoop, no matter if you touch down in the exact same spot 10 times in a row, every scoop can be different because of how the water goes into the aircraft, the trim of the aircraft, the flaps, so when you go on to the water, you're typically anywhere around 80, around 80 knots. You're scooping around 60 knots ground speed, depending on the water conditions.

You're on the water for approximately 10 to 15 seconds and then hopefully you're airborne shortly thereafter, but you go from about 11,500 pounds to 16,000 pounds in as many as -- or as little as 10 seconds. You're max performing the aircraft at that point, so you are typically operating on fairly small margins in terms of angle of attack or energy available from the wing, and then you've also got to

climb out of sometimes confined areas or mountainous terrain, which requires a very high level of judgment, skill, situational awareness.

Q I see because you're putting on all that weight, like you said, so you're getting close to -- like you said, your margin's very thin. You better know what you're doing on takeoff, correct, on the scoops?

A Correct.

Q And then as far as that kind of ties into your second difficult situation, you mentioned the high terrain, mountainous terrain I think is what you said earlier, but I think it's pretty obvious because of what you just said. But do you have anything else to add, why it's challenging given the mountainous terrain?

A In the mountainous terrain or you mean other than that?

Q Other factors. I think we kind of got it, but is there anything else we need to be aware of in the mountainous terrain that affects the scoop, besides the performance?

A So you're talking about the scoop in the mountainous terrain because it's all combined, but which one do you want me to talk about? I'm sorry.

Q Well, I'm just going through the challenges. You

mentioned scooping and then, you know --
A Yep.
Q -- and then you mentioned mountainous terrain, which, you know, so this tied into the mountainous terrain, what, you know, obviously it's --
A Yeah, so that's --
Q Yeah.
A -- it's all combined typically, especially when the aircraft are operated out in the Pacific Northwest. So the first thing is that's your higher-density altitude, so when you are in higher-density altitude, the aircraft's not going to perform the same. That's basic aeronautical knowledge that we all understand from early on in our piloting careers.

The challenge is is that, unless you're exposed to that, it can be very challenging especially if you haven't been trained to operate in that environment because, as I said, you are going from a lighter aircraft to a very fairly heavy aircraft all at the same time while dealing with boat wake, wake turbulence from the aircraft in front of you potentially, and then also potentially terrain or other obstacles that are in or surrounding the scoop site.
Q So how's that work? Sometimes you're not aware

of your scoop site until you get airborne, correct? Or are you? Sometimes it's ad lib, right? They just give you one live and you see one visually?

A Well, no -- it can be one or the other, but a lot -- oftentimes we won't know or you won't know where the scoop site is until you get the dispatch. Depending on whoever's leading the flight, there may be varying degrees of preparation prior to getting airborne, as to what the scoop site or predicted or projected scoop site might, be based on the condition. And then once you arrive, then you're expected to do some sort of recon, just like a seaplane pilot would do to assess all the hazards that accompany that particular scoop site.

Q So if you get -- you know, you find a scoop site you think is appropriate that wasn't pre-planned, what type of performance check do you do? Does lead do it or does each airplane do it separately? Or how do you work that, I guess, is my question?

A It is a -- at Dauntless it's a complete spectrum, so some flight leads will brief more, some will brief very little at all, or they just say hey, is this good? What do you think? From my standpoint, it's extremely critical to make sure everybody's on the same page, so you need to look at what -- the

performance you have, so that you could do a performance check while going over the water to see how much. For instance, what is your limitation whether it be NG or ITT, you want to assess both the entry and exit for hazards, how long the water source is, what's the depth, any obstacles above or below the water.

And then more -- most importantly, not just that you can do it, but your entire flight can do it. So just because one or maybe three out of the four can do a scoop site doesn't mean that the fourth can, so it's incredibly critical that a flight lead understands whether the entire flight can success -- safely, effectively, and then efficiently, but more importantly safely get onto and off of a water source.

One of the techniques that I've used in the past but was never adopted as a standard operating system procedure, it was discussed at Dauntless, was actually going on the water as a single aircraft. We fly single-seat airplanes, so I can't fly my wingman's aircraft. What I can do is prevent them from getting on the water, so on my -- for example, on my flight -- one of my fires this year, it was somewhat of a confined area, so anything I have something that's different like confined, choppy, or anything that

might be considered challenging, I oftentimes will elect to actually go on to the water just myself, so I can assess it and then make a determination from that based on all the strengths and more importantly, the limitations of the wingmen, and that goes for the target area as well.

Q Okay. Just I don't want to jump too much in because we talked about this at Dauntless training, but flight lead, in general, you've been with several different organizations, including the military.

A Yeah. Yep.

Q How thorough is your training for Dauntless for flight lead, for doing this air tanker stuff? Is that pretty typical what you see around the industry, or is there differences?

A There's a huge difference. So in general, the industry is very averse to formation flying, so the other two operators, they don't have any kind of training, so to speak, so they typically try to stay close -- a quarter mile away from each other, which in my opinion is just as dangerous because if you don't understand pursuit angles, then don't do it because you are flying formation. Dauntless has always touted themselves as a very tight-flying formation organization.

When it comes to flight leadership, I've brought that concern up multiple times because of my background and being professionally trained in formation flying. There is no flight leadership course. There is no flight leadership qualification, both at Dauntless or the industry. I voiced my concerns about that multiple times. It is basically the fact -- the -- the fact of the matter my -- my experience, both in industry, but specifically at Dauntless was you went through a season as a level two pilot, and then after that, if you got to level one, then they start putting you in the lead position.

There would be times where pilots would be put into lead positions in certain scenarios, but there was absolutely no -- there seemed to be no real structure to that. During company training, a lot of the level twos and the upcoming level ones would be put specifically into flight lead positions, but as far as in the field, I normally noticed a bit -- not much of a rotation of that, of the flight leads. In general, though, there is no flight leadership. There is -- or sorry. There is no flight lead position or qualification. There is no wingman qualification both at Dauntless or at -- in the industry, so it's an industry issue, but also is a Dauntless issue.

Q Oh. So when you were scheduling -- back to Dauntless specifically, I'm sure you tried to put the qualified people or more, you know, veterans or whatever you want to call it, you know, more experienced people in the flight lead, but there was no qualification or anything that you had to, though? That was just probably, you know, just from your -- is that a true statement when you did scheduling?

A In training, personally, I would attempt, and Jess was -- he did want to focus on the newer pilots getting more experience, and especially in the lead position I would schedule the -- the junior pilots often in the lead positions and either put them in a two-seater or have somebody like myself or one of the other instructors as the wingman for -- for observation.

Q I see. And then help me out as a whole in the industry because you've been, you know, you currently cover a lot of areas, and also with Dauntless. You're my lead, I'm number two. You know, we get tasked with, you know, so we head out to do a scoop, but for whatever reason you have a maintenance issue on the ground so you're going to be delayed or you end up canceling. Can I go solo if I'm qualified or do I have to have you, to hold hands with a lead if I'm

number two?

A Yeah, that's a good question. There's two parts to that. One is going to be the standards of aerial supervision or the requirements to operate in a fire traffic area without -- with a certain qualification, and then there's the -- or element integrity mindset, so realistically I've had multiple times where I've had maintenance issues and I've left in the other aircraft to stay on station as a single or departed.

In terms of the industry, typically you cannot operate in the fire traffic area without aerial supervision unless you're a level one or you have what's called a level one pilot trainer in the flight unless there is a very minimal amount of aircraft, meaning no more than one other aircraft, so you can operate with basically a flight of two in a helicopter. After that, you cannot operate in a fire traffic area, which is defined by PMS 505 as a five-mile -- notional five-mile diameter.

Q Okay. And obviously you're level one, so you could press solo given those other restrictions. But same question now with, you know, you're lead and we're in a four ship and you cancel, can I boogie and go with that -- with, you know, with the other formation, making it three ship or is that -- it's

always an element two ship or is it always like two, four or solo?

A No, the element integrity doesn't really exist in the industry too -- very, very well in my opinion. If one drops out, it's basically a conga line. Two just kind of takes over, so most of the time, yeah, it'll be a three ship because there's three. Three loads of water is better than two even though there might be some contingencies that cause some challenges there if they were to arise. So yeah, if the lead goes out then typically it just goes to whoever's next.

Q And not to belabor the point but -- so let's go back to our original two ship. We're out in the area, this time your maintenance -- you have to RTB from -- let's say that, you know, our target area, you got one scoop in. You had to leave. Do I have to leave with you now? I'm only -- I'm level two because -- let's say we're the only ones there. Do I have to leave now or can I stay until my --

A No, if there is nobody else on scene, even a level two Fire Boss is what's called initial attack qualified meaning they can operate on a fire by themselves, provided, again, that it's just them. So yeah, no -- they do not have to. Is that the right thing to do? I would argue that not necessarily,

especially if that is a junior wingman or a junior pilot.

Q Okay.

A In fact my first fire was a single aircraft --

Q I see.

A -- out in Minnesota, and having done my first fire as a single aircraft, which basically creates or comes from that scenario essentially even though I didn't have a wingman, it was just me that day, it can be challenging if you don't have somebody else there. That's why it's so important that when we operate as a flight, that there's a lot of -- that there needs to be structure, collaboration, standardization in training.

Q And then going back to all your instruction, you know, at the academy and as instructor at the Dauntless, all that stuff, just in general you mentioned the critical of the scoop, you know, for performance, and you mentioned as flight lead you're really checking things out pretty thoroughly, you know, probably more so potentially than some other flight leads because there's nothing written what you have to exactly do, but what are some of your concerns as a flight lead for the scoop with the formation and yourself?

A Yeah, so Dauntless does have an SOP and I believe it does reference some items to discuss. There's a standardized pre-scoop checklist that each individual pilot accomplishes, but yes, in terms of items that I'm going to be taking care of, it's going to be like I mentioned before. I'm going to -- one, I'm going to brief prior to we go flying what kind of formation I want the flight to be in for the recon, so that way there's lateral vertical separation, so that way they can have what's called mission cross-check time and be able to look both at the scoop site and maintain separation from their wingmen. And then I'm going to take however long it takes to identify all the hazards and make the assessment before I put my flight and my wingmen on the water to -- that it is suitable.

There -- the sea states, the wind sea state, the water conditions are obviously one of the first things you look at. Then there's the entry, there's the exit, how long the water source is, how wide the water source is, the obstacles, any kind of issues or hazards either in the exit or the entry and then anything else that could be of attention, meaning is there boat traffic? Or is there a bend in this body of water? Basically, anything that could potentially be a hazard for the flight is what I will assess and

then I will do -- most of the pilots will do at least one lap. I've done multiple.

I've actually had multiple times and other pilots have too, where they've gone to multiple scoop sites and even not executed scooping operations, but there is no real -- there hasn't really been much aid in terms of training and standardization as far as reconning a scoop site at a higher level that helps to primarily accommodate the weaknesses of newer pilots or lesser experienced pilots.

Q Got it. And then as far as performance, you know, everyone has different terms for them but you know, do you have some type of condensed checklist with emergencies and like this performance thing gives you a real generality where you could just check it real quick with the temp and pressure altitude, and say yeah, we're good or -- because you're not going to be able to whip out the manual and getting the charts or anything obviously in flight, but do you have something like that, like -- I call it plastic brains, but something like that where you have a reference that you can do that real-time or is it you have to just -- you have some kind of crutch that you rely on to tell you you have the performance to do that. You know, what load, the max load you could take, that

kind of thing, the scoop.

A Yeah, so it's -- that's a kind of a two-parted answer there. So there are standard checklists in all the aircraft, both normal and emergency procedure checklists, that we could reference. Primarily, though, being a single seat platform, a lot of that's got to be committed to memory. But in terms of performance and especially when it comes to like, for example, density altitude, we have load charts in the aircraft. Typically they're -- at Dauntless, they're located up above the windshield, and it just basically gives you based on the type of liquid, whether it's foam, water, retardant, how much -- what the maximum gallon amount of liquid you can scoop based on the fuel weight or fuel quantity on board.

So you use that, but then you also have to take into account density altitude --

Q Density altitude, yeah.

A So that's one of the things where you -- that would be a pre-flight planning consideration, so when we go to the briefing that morning, if there's a flight lead, or if I'm the flight lead, I'm going to brief density altitude and how that could be -- how that's going to impact. I'll go one step further, and actually I just did this on my fire this year and I've

done that in the past, where I've actually briefed how much water I intend to scoop, so that way other pilots can understand.

So I'll brief what my expected is and then I'll brief also how much I got out of that scoop source or body of water, so that way as other aircraft go onto the water, they have an idea of what actual performance I'm getting or that -- that at least somebody's getting.

Q Okay, great. Jacob, we talked a little bit about the firefighting community as a whole. Is there anything else, you know, the culture, safety, or whatever, anything else -- this is in general -- that you want to discuss or mention?

A So the culture's interesting. There was good intent, in my opinion, as to how this program was stood up. As it's gotten larger, specifically at Dauntless, you've got a lot of different pilots and from all different kinds of backgrounds, so nobody comes from the same pipeline. As that occurs, it becomes incredibly challenging to work with each other safely, effectively, efficiently, especially directly during the season.

As a result, there is a -- as the season basically occurs, there are the bases that -- where

the specific pilots and aircraft go and they all end up basically developing their own little SOPs that they don't really either talk about, are written or unwritten. Most of them are unwritten. Some of them are spoken about. Most of them are not spoken about, and it creates a lot of challenges for the new pilots, and I saw that year after year.

It's one of the reasons why I was a relief pilot because I wanted to see what they were exposed to. This is not just a Dauntless problem. Agency-wise and industry-wise, this -- the Fire Boss is not treated properly. I don't think the checkrides are done properly. There's not proper evaluations. I can probably get into that a little bit more in a little bit because I have my notes, but the overall -- the fact is, from best of my recollection, all the fatalities in the fixed-wing community of the aerial firefighting in the U.S. are 802 platforms in the last five or seven years, so there's -- I mean, I don't know what else to say other than something. There -- there are challenges there, so.

Q Well, just kind of tied to that, and this is not specific to, you know, Dauntless, but in general --

A No.

Q -- because you see the whole industry, how's the

oversight from, you know, whether it's -- tell us a little about what you think of oversight.

A Yeah, so the oversight's done by the Department of Interior Office of Aviation Services. There are inspectors that are designated or they are -- they are responsible for issuing the qualifications and maintaining the qualifications for the pilots there. The programs managed by the BLM, primarily it's a Department of -- I'm sorry. It's an interagency qualification that you receive, but the Office of Aviation Services are the ones that are the individual or -- the office that has inspectors that come to observe a training event, but specifically they're there to conduct a checkride similar what you'd have for the FAA.

However, it's different because this is not the FAA, it's the office -- it's the interagency, so it's aerial firefighting community. From my research the last couple years being in the training committee, there really isn't a practical test standard that applies to the single-engine scooper or the Fire Boss. The Office of Aviation Services, having worked with four inspectors now, they all have different ways about conducting a checkride. Ultimately though, most of the inspectors are minimally qualified in terms of

aviation experience or, more importantly, aerial firefighting and scooping experience, so they're relying upon the operators to ensure that their applicants are qualified, safe, and proficient to operate in the aerial firefighting industry.

For the checkrides themselves, it typically is very much a part task trainer, meaning you just basically go out and do specific tasks that have a varying degree of reflection on how you're going to actually operate. Most of the checkrides are conducted during the springtime in low-elevation locations with fairly large scoop sites, so it's -- it's challenging at that point to really assess whether somebody's going to have a challenge when it comes to confined or high-elevation scooping.

And then the qualifications -- again, as I said before, the industry nor Dauntless has formation qualifications even though it's very clear that these aircraft are operated in formation. The current qualification or -- that the industry has is a level two and a level one, and just primarily corresponds to aerial supervision and not necessarily a wingman or a flight lead. The industry uses -- basically a level two is like a wingman. A level one is a flight lead. My personal experience is that's not necessarily

always the case. I've flown with many level ones that are not really flight leads, to put it nicely. And it's not necessarily their fault. They just have never been trained to be a proper professional flight lead.

Q Okay, interesting. And then -- I think that's the community as a whole and I think it covers the Fire Boss as well. Is there anything more detail on the Fire Boss you want to mention? Operations? Besides that -- you mentioned the accident rate there, unfortunately, earlier, about the -- I think you said the last several years they were the ones that experienced the fatal accidents, but anything else to mention on the first --

A On the Fire Boss?

Q Yes.

A I'm going to go through my notes again. I'll see if that brings some stuff up. It -- there's only three operators. The other three operators -- or the other two operators because Dauntless absorbed one of the previously total four operators. Dauntless is larger than the other two operators combined. They're the oldest and the largest in the country and in the world, essentially. And the challenge is, when you have a company that grows and almost basically doubles

in size over only just a short period of time, how do you go about making sure that everybody that is brought on board that company, whether they are coming from a different company or they're getting into the Fire Boss for the first time through Dauntless, that they're trained and standardized properly because in the environment with the Fire Boss, as I've kind of already touched on before, there are so many hazards that are applicable and that are constantly there when you're flying. I can't understate the critical nature of training and standardization. Another thing that I'd like to mention is the fact that the --

Q Oh, we lost you, Jacob.

A How about now?

Q Okay. Gotcha now. Sorry.

A I don't know if we want to touch about this -- on this later, but one of the issues that I see -- and I don't have too much reference to the other operators, I know primarily from obviously from Dauntless -- is that there's a lot -- there's training that occurs in the spring and both initial and then a company training. And then after that there really isn't a -- there isn't really any structure designed to provide proficiency, tactical proficiency, so one of the common methods to meet qualifications or contractual

requirements, both in the industry and at Dauntless, is to simply ferry an aircraft. Having flown this aircraft for five seasons and front and back seat, I can say that ferrying an aircraft provides fairly minimal experience in terms of quality versus quantity, specifically when it is associated with tactical proficiency.

Q So there is no tactical currency basically, correct? Nothing tactical?

A There -- there is. Contractually, you have to have one flight in the preceding 14 days. If you don't, then you -- the government can pay for what's called a Mission Currency Training Flight or MCTF, and you're required to show up, quote, proficient. However, most of the time pilots will train in March and then they'll go sometime weeks and some of the part-timers will go even months before they go on a contract, and then it comes down to what the operator and the base or the contract, essentially, what they want to do.

I will say Dauntless has -- it used to be you kind of get current on the fire. That did change while I was there. Jess was very -- he was very vocal about anybody getting proficient. The challenge was there was no real standard around that in the sense

that it was get proficient if you feel like it. And the challenge is if you're new to something, especially something as hazardous as this operation, you don't necessarily know when that is. So that was one of the things that I had suggested, but it had never been adopted, so -- we'll get into [redacted] specific situation, I do believe that was a very specific factor.

But yeah, in general, most pilots don't fly much. For example, my first season I went out in July and I did very minimal. I did one proficiency, I had one fire, and then very minimal flying that year, and then the next time I flew was several months later at training. So most of the operators, they fly a decent amount during the season and essentially none at all during the off-season.

Q Okay. I'm going to ask you one more question, and then what we're going to do, Jacob, is we kind of like we talked about, we're kind of dividing this in blocks. Yeah, there is some overlap, like we said, that's going to happen, but we're trying to keep it that way. So what I'm going to do is ask you one more question myself and then I'm going to open up to the others for comments, and remember we're keeping it -- trying to keep it toward the firefighting community

and Fire Boss operations in general right now. It's kind of our topic.

So with that, you mentioned flight lead quite a bit and you also said Dauntless has a program. I went through the SOPs. There is a little bit there, you know, there's a little bit there if they lose sight, you know. There's some written stuff there, documentation, but you're saying the other two operators of the three that operate this have nothing, correct, as far as you know? Is that a correct statement?

A As far as I know, minimal to nothing.

Q Minimal, and you kind of harped on this flight lead training quite a bit. Could you be a little more detailed on what you think would happen in the flight lead? Whether it's a, you know, checkout or -- you know, there's no qualifications, is what you're telling me. I'm assuming that's part of your -- what you would like to see, but could you kind of tell me some of the improvements you like to see in that area?

A Yeah, so it should be obviously a documented structured process by which you are -- first you meet a certain level of experience and are -- you basically earn the privilege of being a flight lead, whether that's a certain amount of missions or whatever

experience metric you want to use. I think missions is a good one, but even with missions it depends, everybody's are different. Then it comes down to a curriculum or a syllabus, so there should be certain -- one, make sure you're good as a wingman first, so I think first and foremost there needs to be a proper wingman qualification and then that leads up into a flight lead.

More importantly, because these planes operate in flights of two and four, there really needs to be a two-ship and a four-ship qualification for the flight leads because those are different roles, they have different spans of control, different -- different contingencies based on the number of aircraft in the flight, and then it -- basically you go through that and with a -- through flying with standardized and qualified instructors, you are -- an applicant is then able to be evaluated and then also trained to be able to operate as a professional flight lead, meaning that they understand all the different aspects of flight leadership.

Q Okay. No, that sounds good, and then I got to ask this question just from my own past, but on your four-ship departures, I think if I read right, it's -- at least at Dauntless it's 10 seconds spacing, you

know, for takeoff and somewhere in that ball game, but everyone else is probably similar. Have you seen some sporty join-ups, rejoins on four-ships.

A Just about every time.

Q That's what I figured, yeah. Okay. Yeah.

A The challenge there is there's no real formation. There's very minimal formation training. I will say at Dauntless I did participate in a couple formation flights to include in 2024 training, where we put some of the Air Spray pilots as well as the new class into basically an intro or demo flight of flying formation.

Having flown formation for over 15 years and instructed in it, I also fly a decent amount in civilian. I just -- I fly with a group of RV pilots, classic jet L-39, S-211, and in NATA. All are kinds of civilian and -- obviously in the military there are standards, so the formation safety team has standards, but -- and while Dauntless does refer to some of those aspects in their SOP, it falls significantly short of actually what's required to train a group, especially as large as Dauntless is, to fly formation safely, effectively, then efficiently, in that order.

So it's -- to answer your previous -- your question about what I've seen, I've seen all kinds of things, and the challenge is it's not their fault.

They just haven't been trained. Just like anything else, nobody just comes off the street and understands how to do a rejoin automatically. Yes, some are going to be better than others, but unless you train to a standard then and you hold those pilots to a standard, it's not going to matter, so you're going to get all different flavors of takeoff rejoins.

And that is not just my opinion, I don't think, but a lot -- some of the other -- the pains of some of the other instructors or the very few other pilots that have military backgrounds in the community, the industry at large, because we do fly formation, but yet a lot of the industry leadership or agency leadership is very hesitant to use that because of -- in my opinion, it's just a misunderstanding or ignorance.

Q Okay, I appreciate that. Okay. I'm going to open up to other players here, Jacob, so bear with us and then we'll take a break, then we're going to round two. So Lea, do you have any questions for Jacob?

MS. WEINKAUF: Yep, I have a couple, and correct me if I'm wrong, Albert, but you said kind of stick to the Fire Boss and firefighting specifically?

MR. NIXON: Yeah, right now. I mean, like we talked about earlier, there's going to be some overlap

in every subject, but right now that's our topic, yes.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. If I get off task, just feel free to say we'll save that for later or whatever.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q So, Jacob, the first question I had was if you could talk a little bit about underwater egress training and HEEDS, if Dauntless flies with them, what are the SOPs for that? That kind of stuff.

A Yes, so as far as underwater egress from a qualification standpoint, you have to do that every three years where you go underwater egress training in a dunker, essentially, both with and without HEEDS bottles.

In terms of the HEEDS bottles, yes, all the aircraft at Dauntless are equipped with HEEDS bottles. They're normally carried by each pilot on a holster. I have seen, as a relief pilot, varying variances of that. I have seen other pilots fly without them because pilots bringing them -- like they're if doing relief, a primary pilot maybe grabbed, you know, kept it with them in their vest.

There -- but for the most part, everybody flies with them on their person. There is no -- other than the underwater egress training that we get every three

years, it's been discussed lightly, but really not much during any kind of initial or company training. It's kind of up to each individual pilot to kind of maintain their sufficiency as far as the underwater egress and the use of the HEEDS bottles themselves. Does that answer your question? Okay.

Q Yeah, it does. Thanks. Next question I had was you said you flew relief a lot. How different are the cockpit setups across the fleet?

A Yeah, good question. I have mentioned that challenge several times to Dauntless, specifically Jess. The fact is as of right now, Dauntless has, I think, 22 or 23 aircraft, depending on if you take into account 203, which is Wipaire's that they use on lease. None of the aircraft are truly standardized, meaning not all -- there are some aircraft that came out in back. Like I say, they got two in one year that are similar or almost -- pretty much standardized.

But across the fleet there are, I think, three different throttle quadrants. There are multiple different GPS systems. There are two different hardware versions of the heads-up display, and the FLIRs are mostly on the nose, but I think maybe some of them are still on the wing, but that's not really

much of a factor. The radios are mostly standardized, but there are a couple variances, and then the -- this year was different because Dauntless acquired five aircraft, I believe, from Air Spray. And they have differing avionics, and then more importantly, they have a gate. So one thing that Dauntless did do that I completely agree with is that up until this year, they standardized the gate systems, meaning there's two gate systems, an FRDS system by Trotter and then Kevin Vondran's HydraMax system.

All of the Dauntless aircraft, with the exception of a couple over the years, have these HydraMax gates, with the exception of 203, which Dauntless doesn't have the ability to change because that's not their owned aircraft. However, the new aircraft from Air Spray were equipped with different gates. They're FRDS Gen II, and it was originally discussed that only the Air Spray, or at least -- it was at least discussed that only -- potentially a mitigating factor would be that only Air Spray pilots were going to fly those aircraft because they were familiar with them. It is my understanding that that was not the case and that there were other pilots, including the brand-new pilots, flying the Air Spray aircraft.

In terms of systems themselves this year, I

advocated for it and it was the first time we actually discussed all the different tactical systems on the aircraft, but it's a lot. There's FlareAssists on the aircraft, but -- to answer your question, there is a variety of cockpit layouts. Not a large -- not a significant amount of them, but there are enough that it makes it, in my opinion, extremely challenging for a new pilot to get into, which I'll get into a little bit more as far as that relief role.

Q Right. And then so for a new pilot, if they were showing up and the airplane ended up having different gates or different throttle setup, how are they trained on that?

A Yeah, so it depends on the primary, so I -- and I'll provide the team this, but I provided and created a standardized kind of what's called a turnover checklist to provide the pilots with a template or at least a guide to use when a new pilot comes in, and it covers basically all different aspects, fuel level, any kind of known squawks.

I mean, what -- who's your crew chief? What's the gate code to get in? All the different things that can potentially be a Swiss cheese hole for a mishap. I've seen -- I do have some notes on that, on one of documents I'm going to provide. I saw a

complete spectrum of that. Some pilots are very good about doing a turnover. Others are "all right, here's the plane, got any questions? Okay, got it." It's a very wide spectrum with that group.

Q Sure.

A I don't think that's much different than the whole industry, so I don't think Dauntless is much different than the industry, but because they're so large and have such a large fleet of aircraft, that becomes a unique aspect.

Q Right. Okay, thanks.

My next question was about experience level. You kind of touched on this a little bit, but I don't know [redacted] experience level. I haven't heard that much about that, but sort of what is the typical level of experience coming into an initial training class, and if you're aware of [redacted] experience, where was she on that spectrum?

A Yes -- so yeah, a couple parts there. In terms of my time in the industry, specifically at Dauntless, historically, the pilots that were hired were very -- were highly experienced ag or wheeled SEAT operators, so they had a lot of time in the 802 platform. They're typically a little bit older in age and they have a decent -- significant amount of flight time.

There were a couple pilots that came from different backgrounds, but for the most part, the largest percentage of pilots in the aerial firefighting, specifically Fire Boss and wheeled SEAT community are ag pilots, so they come from that background.

Over time, over the last -- specifically the last three years, because of the growth of Dauntless, but also the changes in the industry and how just the pilot shortage and a lot of different factors, the experience level of the pilots brought into Dauntless has become less and less, which is one of the reasons why I started voicing my concerns around 2022 about training standardization and safety.

When it came to [redacted] I never -- I had many conversations with her. I never actually saw her resume or qualifications. I was never made privy to that, but I did have enough conversations with her to know that she had somewhat of a diverse background. It was primarily from flying in Brazil, I believe. But in terms of Air Tractor, she had no Air Tractor experience. She did have some ag time -- a decent amount of ag time in Thrushes, I believe.

So on the scale of things, I think she was probably a fairly average, on paper, experienced pilot in coming to the program, but that's where the program

has to really shine because it's not -- as I said before, the Fire Boss is a very unique platform. There is no pipeline, there's no "hey, let's go fly this mini scooper over here." Even if you came from the multi-engine scooper community, it's not the same. This is a single-seat, single-pilot platform. That's much different than a flying boat with two pilots, basically.

Q Yep, gotcha. Okay. I have a question about obstacles.

A Yes.

Q Is there an SOP or limitation on how far you're supposed to be from obstacles on a scoop?

A No.

Q Okay. And I guess my last question is -- so I'm a pilot, but I'm a helicopter pilot, so I've never scooped.

A Yep.

Q If you could, walk through a scoop.

A Yep, so --

Q Like, what are you thinking about? What are you looking at? I mean, you don't have to go ad nauseam, but just like a walkthrough.

A Yep, so you've got -- you get to the scoop site, whether you're in a flight or by yourself, I'll just

do it from a flight lead's perspective, but I'm looking at the overall what is the scoop site, how long is it, what the wind conditions are, fairly standard seaplane pilot mindset in that I'm looking for the length, the width, the depth. We do have what's called avionics or applications to get some kind of an idea, at least from a planning perspective, on the depth.

However, it's always verified during the recon itself, and then it's once that's -- once basically a high recon is accomplished, then I'm going to typically do a low recon so I kind of get an idea of, without necessarily taking on water, potentially maybe even going on the water, seeing what it's like to be on the scoop line, what's the sun angle like, exit, entry, things like that, and be able to identify all the hazards.

My wingmen, they're going to be in certain positions both on left and right of me so that they're up and down sun so they can identify hazards, because it is a collaborative effort to execute a recon and then once that's done, different leads -- but I'm very specific about what kind of pattern I'm going to fly, what formation I -- where I want my wingmen to be in terms of how far behind me, beside me, how many lanes,

things like that.

And then the scoop itself, you're typically, you're just flying a pattern. You come out, you come down to the water and you're typically about 80 knots. You get over the water and you're touching down in between 70 and 80 knots. You establish yourself on a step, bring up the power and then it's kind of a -- for lack of better term it's a dance. But there is a -- there's multiple things that occur all at once where the scoops come out, you have to -- you add power and then you check all those factors with the stick as well. The water conditions, the -- your attitude, the trim, the flap position, all count for that. And so as you extend the scoops which are on the floats, the water starts to basically go up through the floats into the hopper.

There is an ideal wind condition, anywhere between like 12 and 18 or so knots, that allows you to basically have a higher chance of basically getting on -- staying on rails where it's fairly minimal in terms of the inputs that are required to keep it fairly smooth on the water. If it's outside of that, then it can be very challenging in the sense that the water -- because you are taking on thousands of pounds of water even though they're on baffles, that starts to slosh,

and so you have natural porpoising tendencies. Doesn't necessarily have to happen, but tendencies as you're accelerating and going down the body of water.

Once you're done scooping, you're -- there are two ways to scoop. You can do manual scoop or automatic scoop. Automatic scoop has a -- there's like a float sensor. They have varying degrees of accuracy, some are good and some are not as good. Or you can do it manually based on timing. I will say from a training perspective, all pilots are trained to scoop in an auto mode, which means once that set quantity of water is reached, or at least the system thinks it's been reached, the scoops retract regardless of what your finger is doing on the stick, at which point you're going to accelerate and then get airborne.

The traditional takeoff technique is to roll a float, specifically the right float, up or roll to the left and either cross-control or continue a left turn, and that takes advantage of the left turning tendencies. Once you're airborne, you're accelerating, typically in water or ground effect to maintain energy. It's a very shallow climb out with the mindset of building all the way backwards to where am I going to touch down, where am I going to board

at, where do I need to be airborne at? So that way your visualized flight path, which equates to climb gradient, is going to be met.

Q Okay. I think that's all I have.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Lea. Michael, you're up.

MR. SAVAGE: You answered a ton of my questions, Jacob, but I ended up coming up with about 15 more here. So I guess my quick request is, Albert, can we take a quick break before we get going so I can get rid of some water?

MR. NIXON: Yeah, it looks like between you and Jesse, it's going a little longer than I thought. So why don't we take -- it's, I think it's 10:32. Why don't we take a 10-minute break? So let's come back at 10:42 Mountain Standard Time, so we'll see you in about 10 minutes.

MR. PATRICK: Okay. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a short recess was taken.)

MR. NIXON: Okay. Apologies. I'm good. If you could restart please?

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q Yeah, no problem. So we talked about when you brought up NAFA, what happened to the SEAT/Fire Boss academy. Is that not happening anymore?

A Yeah, to best of my knowledge there was some kind of academy that involved in-aircraft training. I don't know when it stopped, but as far as I know -- I don't know the structure or what kind of program it was, but what I was told was that there was a fatality that triggered the, basically, dismantling of that program. But I don't know how true that is.

Q Oh, okay. I guess I need to research that then. I just -- I was thinking about that and I was wondering. I had heard that that had come to an end and I remember it when they used to do it and then I don't know why that stopped. I never did get the word on that. All right.

Can you kind of tell me about the company's -- because you were a training officer there, their PTS standards, certification standards in general?

A For?

Q For Dauntless or any of the other companies. I'd assume that's a requirement.

A For what? Sorry, to what specifically? So the training?

Q Yeah, regarding training, there has to be PTS-specific standards and certification standards before somebody could even go to a carding event and, you know, and I'd also like to talk about the forms, you

know, because we're going to get into another comment you made about the inspectors but, me being one for a very long time, I'd like to talk about that too, but I would like to start with the PTS --

A Yeah.

Q -- for the Fire Bosses and the certification standards.

A Yeah. Yeah, so starting from the beginning, Dauntless has a syllabus. I'm not sure if they've made it available to you, but I have a copy of it. It is a 10-flight syllabus. The entire intent of the initial training syllabus is to get a pilot to scoop safely as a single aircraft, so all initial training is focused solely around safely operating the 802F on floats or Fire Boss just as a single aircraft to scoop in a fairly permissive environment, so which makes sense.

You want to crawl, walk, run, so that typically involves operating in lower-elevation areas. Typically it's in Florida or Texas in cooler temperatures with larger bodies of water, and the standards are -- there are some objectives or there are some details in the syllabus itself, but it's really up to the instructor specifically. Everybody that goes through Dauntless is not going to solo

unless Jess Weaver says you're going to solo, so it's more of a -- there's not necessarily, I would say, like, you shall scoop this many times or scoop -- have a certain, you know, a specific standard because -- and I will say that the ability to scoop, there are a lot of variables that are involved, but there are certain metrics that could be put in that to better evaluate. So that is the initial training syllabus.

After that, there's company training. That's an annual contractual requirement that typically precedes the carding process or the checkrides. The company training has changed wildly or significantly over the last several years since I've been there and I'd admit in some ways, in a good way. I'd like to say a significant amount of that was from the work of the training committee, including myself. It was originally my impression that the -- when I first started out that it was we're going to go fly a little bit and then we'll do checkrides and that's kind of company training.

Starting in 2021 they started to adopt a little bit more of a scenario-based training, but having run, I will say then having -- but when it comes to -- as far as standards, it's more of let's get them through this phase and then at the end of it we're going to do

a carding process. There weren't mock checkrides. There were no mock checkrides that were provided leading up to the checkrides until I personally started instituting them three years ago, and then the mock -- you have the checkride themselves.

So as far as the checkride is concerned, the standards that really applied, at least from my perspective at Dauntless, is you have to meet the requirements, the contractual requirements, that are in Bravo 10 of the BLM on-call contract and then you've got to go through all the different training phases or the different qualifications. NAFA, underwater egress, you have to do some of the IAT courses, and then you go and then you submit an OAS-64 form that shows your experience specific to the requirements in the contract, and then you conduct the checkride itself.

So in terms of the standards, when we've had the mock checkrides themselves, it's more of a "let's just look at them, see how they're doing" in terms of scooping, a split drop, salvo drop, emergency dump, and that's about it.

The industry -- the agency really hasn't been concerned with any kind of flight organization, essentially, but the checkrides the last couple of

years have been flown in flights. Is that --
Q Yeah, no. Okay. So you talked about the scooping part of it.
A Yes.
Q What about the FTA part of it?
A The FTA part typically just consists of making a check-in, getting established on scene, getting a talk on and then executing certain -- several, so probably two or three drops depending on the type of drops they want.
Q So is that like a 12-mile call, a 7-mile call, an entry altitude with the brief that you would typically get, like, 4500, 29.92 air tax at 5500, coverage level 4 or 2, hazards, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, orbit altitude --
A Yeah.
Q -- maneuvering altitude.
A Yeah, great question. It is not nearly as standard as you just mentioned it in terms of what we should see in the field. The inspectors typically, they've done it over -- I've seen it both on FM and VHF radios. You typically make the call in, you say come on in. They some -- sometimes they'll provide the altimeter, they'll give some of those elements that you provided, Mike, but not to that specificity

or standard.

They'll get you a target that typically is briefed a little bit beforehand and then they just give you more for -- they'll give you a target and they'll basically give you what they want to see as far as the scoop or what kind of drop, but not necessarily that specificity that you mentioned.

Q So let me ask you this. Honestly, Jacob, do you guys have the ability to train how you fight?

A They -- yes, we have the opportunity to do that. Whether the group is receptive to doing that? I don't think so. Whether they want to improve their craft? I think there's the opportunity there, and I think ultimately, regardless of what the agency requires, it's the -- we are the experts, so we are that -- especially in the single-seat platform where the inspectors can't -- don't go on the aircraft. We the operators need to be the ultimate experts in determining whether somebody is truly qualified to operate in this hazardous environment.

Q We'll get to the inspectors in a minute.

A Yeah. Okay.

Q You brought up section B of the contract. One of the notes in there that I saw when I went through the contract says that new single-engine amphibious water

scooping air tanker pilots, prior to initial carding, pilots must provide evidence of 100 scooping cycles, scooping and dropping water in typical terrain. Typical terrain. That's one cycle, okay? So one scoop, one drop. That's one cycle.

A Yeah.

Q What is being defined as typical terrain?

A In reality, typical terrain in terms of -- for training, and this probably applies to all the operators, not just Dauntless -- is going to be in the lower elevations, probably a thousand feet, fifteen hundred feet and below, in cooler temperatures of the spring.

Q But is -- that's not the typical terrain to do the mission at.

A Hundred percent, so --

Q So if you have the contract for the Northwest --

A Yep.

Q -- so because it says that, how do you get around? Like, where do you guys do your checkrides and training there when you're at Dauntless?

A Yeah, it's in Texas for the company training. That's where the checkrides have been. A couple of them have been in Florida, but the majority have been in Texas.

Q And you said that's done in spring, so cooler, low-density altitude.

A Yeah, March and --

Q So how do you get around the typical terrain part if that's not what you're really operating in for the contract?

A Yeah. I don't want to go as far as saying it's an oversight because that's that's not my role, but to answer your question -- yeah, that's not the typical terrain if we were operating because we operate in mountainous environments, higher elevations and hotter temperatures, higher-density altitudes, and specifically in the Pacific Northwest, which is typically July all the way through the end of the season, that would not really -- that would not meet that typical requirement.

Q So a pilot who comes to these companies, I don't care, SEAT, Fire Boss, whatever, often their first -- we're focusing on Fire Boss here. Their first scoops ever in a high-density altitude, hot, performance limited to some degree is going to be solo by themselves the very first time they do it.

A (inaudible) Yes. Now, we'll say -- I have a couple comments on that. One is that I noticed that challenge and the necessity for that, and there have

been -- there are a couple examples where I tried to mitigate that. One example being in '21 or '22, I can't remember, it was we had a pilot that was first year, had an incident in the Midwest, so still low altitude, and there was no additional training that was really conducted, and then after that he was sent out to the Pacific Northwest to one of our more challenging bases.

It was a higher-operations tempo at that point. I recognized there was a decent chance that he was going to get a dispatch, so I essentially had to fight to get him a proficiency flight where I led him and we briefed to fly before basically before shift to go out and practice some scoops, climbing up, downhill drops, emergency dumps. That was not the norm. Additionally, I recognized this though, that hazard, because I experienced it myself. Dauntless did execute one year either in 2020, I believe, where they went out -- I don't know if it was in the two seater or not, where they took a pilot or a couple pilots out at Coeur d'Alene.

That was the only year that it was ever accomplished. I recognized -- as I said, I recognize that hazard and it was -- it's such a big part of what needs to go into the training, so in 2021, and I'm

going to provide this to everybody, I created a -- or I drafted a training program designed to meet, not just meet but exceed, the requirements of the contract, so that way we -- so that way safe Fire Boss pilots are produced. It took into account every different background and one of the items, one of the phases that was provided in that document, which Jess received and the rest of the management team received in 2021, was a one-week minimum five-hour mountain course.

And it was supposed to be in Coeur d'Alene, and it specifically -- when you read it, you'll see it -- it specifically talked about ridgeline crossings, dealing with wind, higher-density altitude, and it -- and the main bullet was prepare new pilots fully for the West, and that was -- that was it. Other than the one instance that I mentioned about in, I think, approximately in 2020, that was never accomplished.

Q So --

A I advocated for specifically utilizing the two-seater 212, 1-2 Delta Alpha, for that mission as the operations moved to the Pacific Northwest, but that plane was used for operations mostly, especially once the season started, and it just didn't seem like that was a priority.

Q Well, you know, I don't know how you can get around that not being a priority if -- Section B10.2.7.1, there's that, you know, the PIC qualification with low-level dispensing, and it talks about subpart F the 200 hours in mountainous terrain or 100 hours after successfully graduating from a recognized mountain flying school, and then it says see the exhibit for recognized schools. Mountainous terrain experience is defined as experience in operating airplanes in mountainous terrain as identified in 14 CFR 95 Subpart B, Designated Mountainous Area, and it says "operating includes maneuvering near terrain, crossing ridgelines, and evaluating conditions such as wind, temperature and density altitude."

I guess the intent on the form and I think it's the 64, the 64-Alpha, and you probably do that in the 69 on the OAS forms, so those are requirements.

A Yes.

Q So how do you get around that? Because if you don't, you wouldn't you be in violation of the contract?

A Yeah, so I was -- to answer that question, I don't know. To answer your specific question, how do you get around that? I was not -- my role was not to

review personnel or pilot qualifications. That was Steve Helinski's role. He's the one that was responsible for tracking all of the qualifications as well as the -- specifically the OAS-64s for this -- for the 2024, at least specifically, so I don't, I don't know how to answer that. You may have -- you're going to have to ask them for that.

Q Okay.

A My goal, my role was to -- well, I don't know if it was really my role or not, but I wanted to create as safe of pilots as possible, and I recognized those challenges, which is why I suggested doing a full week course in Coeur d'Alene as it warmed up, since we had -- obviously since we had a two seater specifically to be able to accomplish that. Regardless -- honestly, regardless of what the contract requires because, as I said, the training program I drafted exceeded the contract requirements because again, we're the operators, we should be the experts of how to operate this aircraft safely in that environment.

Q Okay. So you had made a comment that the inspectors weren't necessarily qualified. Is that what kind of you were talking about? They don't really know what they're looking at or was it that they've just never flown or done the mission?

A It's a -- I would say, in my opinion, a combination thereof. The four that I have interacted with had varying degrees of backgrounds in aviation. Some of them were pilots, but fairly minimally in terms of the operation itself of the Fire Boss. Pretty minimal in terms of knowing what to look for. I don't think a single one of them had ever been in the aircraft.

It was my impression that they didn't necessarily have a full understanding of what the hazards were or what the -- what is scoop and how we operate in the fire traffic area specifically was because it was basically a -- all the checkrides were, as I said, part task trainers. They were, let's do just a couple of specific tasks and that was it.

Q So how can they truly vet you guys, then, to ensure that you're actually safe to operate with other aircraft and helicopters and all this stuff in an FTA if all they're looking at is still, you can put the water where it goes.

A Absolutely. This is -- again, it's a challenge because we fly a single-seat platform, and I don't know if there are restrictions for inspectors riding. I think you can ride in the multi-engine, the lot larger tankers. They ride along for their calls,

correct?
Q Yeah.
A Okay. So --
Q So when I go out and inspect it --
A Yep.
Q -- a tanker pilot --
A Yep.
Q I go and I look at all their paperwork, and I make sure that they're -- because we use the same forms, the 69-Alpha, the 64, all the carding process is -- the ground part is the same, plus there's an annual safety brief.
A Yep.
Q And there's a lot of that stuff, but then it's the flying part --
A Yep.
Q -- that concerns me, so they don't even have an airplane above you to clear you in and watch everything, and a guy on the ground, a guy in an airplane above you, vetting you guys?
A No.
Q Making sure that you're exiting at the right exit out to make sure that you're -- if I clear you for a right-hand pattern, you descend down to maneuvering altitude out of orbit altitude before you do anything

like that?
A No, there's never been an aircraft overhead. There's never -- Dauntless has had an air attack platform that we've utilized in the flight scenarios, but in the checkride themselves it has been somebody typically either on a dock or a boat with either a VHF or an FM radio and they are controlling this scenario for the checkride.
Q So the FM radio, is that going to be an air-to-air simulated frequency or an air to ground?
A Air to ground.
Q Okay. But then they would still have to do all the calls on air to air, right? Call their positions in the pattern? Those are all contract requirements.
A Not necessarily. It's mostly just talking to that -- the person on the ground and what they're requiring. It's been a spectrum from the checkrides that I've done.
Q Okay. How many high-density altitude scoops do you guys get in training or do you not get any?
A We do not. As I said before, there was one time in 2020 that I believe Jess and maybe one of the other instructors took out on a flight. I don't know if it was a two-seater or not. That was the only time that ever happened, so there -- in terms of training, in my

opinion, high altitude -- high-density altitude training cycles, in my opinion, that is very specific to the Fire Boss, meaning that, in my opinion, is only defined by -- in the two-seat aircraft to be able to identify all the different challenges that go on in the cockpit in a flight at higher elevation airport or scoop site with a higher-density altitude, i.e., higher temperatures.

Q Okay. Another thing I've got to know the answer to, I guess I don't understand the process of having somebody fly relief first instead of flying the line to get the experience, getting that guarantee, getting those reps consistently and staying in the same airplane till you get really comfortable where you can have the experience to move around in other airplanes. Why does the company have somebody be a relief pilot without that solid foundation?

A Yeah, you're going to interview Jess obviously and he can answer that himself. My -- from my perspective, that was the culture that was already -- has already been -- always been established. One of the answers that was given to me was that the way the structure, specifically the compensation structure, they put in place because I think that's one of the ways to incentivize people to do pilot relief.

Because some pilots don't like to move around, they like to be in one place at one time.

The coveted position is a primary role. So the more senior pilots, they would want to do a primary role where they are on one airplane and one contract, which left the company with the relief role as the traditional entry-level role, unless pilots were actually assigned to be in a relief role, which didn't happen, so it was more of a what do you want to do? And most of them wanted to do primary.

They wanted to be on specific contracts for specific aircraft specifically, and so everybody, for the entire five years that I was there at Dauntless, they did a -- they performed a relief role bouncing around to different bases, and I -- but I completely agree, that is a -- having done that for five years and being the only pilot at that point when I left having experienced every single year doing relief, that is a significant, significant challenge for somebody that's brand new to the aircraft, considering that the airplanes are not standardized.

I mean, the little things like you got to change hotels. You got the logistics to change bases. I mean, you've got different base managers, different pilots, different flight leads, you've got different

areas of operations and then you've got different -- the airport itself, things like that, so --

Q Would you say the culture as a whole has a core value of safety first or no?

A I think they want to have safety first. I think in practice, though, that that's not the case because if it was, then I don't think we would have this many mishaps in the community, 802 at large. I think there is the intent to be safe, but in practice those are two different things. One thing -- if you're doing one thing in training versus what actually happens in the field, and whether standards are upheld or actually -- not necessarily enforced, but encouraged with such a large group, that creates additional hazards in and of itself. So I guess to answer your question, there is the intent that they want to be safe. It's not.

Q Okay. Let's talk about SMS for a second.

A Yep.

Q Do all the pilots, from your recollection -- or do you guys have them, in training, go through everything that's ever happened, spend a significant amount of time studying the SMS, you know, all the write-ups, everything? Has everybody been really good about bringing up any issues in the past or close

calls or doing SAFECOMs or, you know, any of that stuff?

A So yeah -- so that's multifaceted, but yeah, there is an SMS at Dauntless. It's called Vortex. It's been around for several years now, and when it comes to participation, they do track all that. Pilots are sent notifications. There's a safety and compliance committee that, I believe, oversees that. I was never on that committee, but in terms of the culture, there are SMSs that are submitted every season.

From my perspective, there are many others that go unreported because of whether it's -- not necessarily fear of repercussion, but more of potentially egos getting hurt or not necessarily even understanding the hazards that came from a specific event. And in terms of integrating it with other pilots, the company -- Dauntless does talk to that, they go over SMSs during one session in ground training briefly.

I have had, though, a varying degree of understanding of the SMS for the new pilots over the years. For example, in 2023 when I was on base with one of the new pilots, I personally developed like a checklist to kind of make sure everything was taken

care of because we do -- there are a lot of systems or a lot of -- yeah, just systems at Dauntless, given the size, and so I make sure to go over the SMS, and one of the things I do every -- did with that pilot was go over the SMS and I found out that he didn't even have a login for the SMS and this is on contract, in the field.

So I made sure he got a login and went over all the flight ops SMSs, but whether that's an exception I don't know, but it did seem like pilots, they kind of care about -- the varying degree of caring about the SMS or whether that's something that they want to take on board or not.

One thing I never understood was -- so the SMS is one mechanism in an organization, the other one is standards and procedures. So what I never understood was we had SMSs. We had -- not we. Dauntless had SMSs. Dauntless had mishaps, but to my recollection, unless they've changed it within the last couple months, they have never once updated their training manual or their standard operating procedure.

Q Okay. Thank you. I guess I just have one last thing here, so when you were talking about the scooping, you do a high-low recon where you go in kind of the same thing as exactly as what you would do if

you were doing an IA, an initial attack, on a fire. You guys kind of treat it the same way. Is that a correct statement, assessment?

A Yes.

Q All right. You know, I guess just for me to understand what's going to be the difference between dropping, scooping, and -- where is that you guys are in Texas? Somewhere -- Cleburne or something?

A Cleburne, yeah.

Q Cleburne. Okay. Yeah, let's say that I go up to, you know, a high-density altitude, 7, 8, 9,000 feet and scoop. I do that for the very first time. What can I expect? What's it going to be like for me? What's going to be the differences?

A It can be -- depending on your comfort level can be a spectrum of surprise because the plane is just not going to perform the same depending on how many gallons you pick up or scoop. That's going to drastically change how much -- how long your scoop's going to be, but the main thing is this. The engine is going to produce less power. You're going to be NG limited most likely, and it's just -- it's going to take a lot longer to get even just a little bit amount of water.

And unless you're prepared for that and have --

you can -- you can talk about it, but unless you personally experienced that, in my opinion, and trained to that with an instructor on board in a controlled environment, it can be very hazardous because not only you've got the going onto the water and then you've got the whole aspect of getting off the water and getting that -- getting that load or flying that load to a target which most likely requires another series of minutes --

(Missing audio.)

MR. PATRICK: The person that has always been responsible and always taken authority for hiring and recruiting is Jess Weaver, so typically he would find pilots somewhere during the off season. We discussed generically, during the training committee calls, a number of them. Several of them didn't end up training with us but would go to NAFA. but once that number was narrowed down, in this case it was six for class of 2024, they would attend an initial training.

Initial training consists of about 10 flights. There is a syllabus that Dauntless uses and it is designed, as I mentioned earlier, to get a pilot from zero to operating the Fire Boss safely as a single aircraft on/off the runway, but -- as well as on and off the water. Minimal tactical training. This is

basically the learning the mechanics of scooping the aircraft, so that is initial training.

Having the largest class in Dauntless history, that poses certain challenges, so I was fortunate to be asked by Jess to be one of the instructors for initial training this year and help to run or manage the daily schedule essentially. The training consisted of multiple -- sometimes as many as two flights a day for each pilot. Backing up a little bit, there were three instructors that were there. Jess Weaver, Steve Helinski and myself.

As I said before, there was no instructor standardization, so there were four total instructors at Dauntless while I was there, David Fennen being the other one. He did some training or backseat flying during the company training. One of the things I suggested was standardizing how we do and how we are as a cadre for instructors, instructor designations, as well as getting together prior to training, so make sure we're all on the same page. When it came to -- as I may have mentioned before, when it came to my specific training as an instructor, I essentially -- I had asked for a flight at the beginning of initial training, since I hadn't flown in a while.

I wanted to preferably do a front seat

proficiency followed by backseat qualification. The most I got was one backseat flight with Jess. There was essentially no brief, and we went out, scooped and then came back, and then I was -- then I started flying with students at that point. I had accomplished or I had flown in the back seat a couple times in 2022 with both Steve and Jess, but it had been -- that was the extent of that, so as far as the training concerned for initial, as I said 10 flights.

It is a priority, or the main objective is to scoop the aircraft as a single aircraft, single pilot by them -- by his or herself. You start off by doing a demo flight. Then there's a -- that's in the back seat. Then there's a front seat transition. You go to -- you execute several flights where it's just you get on the water on the very first flight, you do some runway landings, you do some kind of like seaplane operations, and then it goes straight into the scooping, so the meat of that syllabus is flights like basically two or three through seven, and that is heavily go out, establish -- not necessarily a circuit, but get set up for a scoop and practice multiple scoops.

In terms of tactical flying, meaning setting up a circuit, operating in proximity or in formation with

another aircraft and with targets, there was a limited amount of that during that phase. As students progressed, they would -- we picked targets for them, but that was fairly minimal because, again, we're -- they're single aircraft at that point, with the emphasis being can they get on the water, have a minimal amount of porpoising, or at least mitigate or manage the porpoise, and then get off the water without stalling the aircraft and then bring that water to a target, so that's approximately 10 flights.

Around the seventh, eighth or ninth flight, they started soloing. The students would start to solo. They'd go out, do a couple scoops on their own, and then they'd come back. After that, it kind of varied. I can provide more details on that if you have specific questions, but some because the pilots in this class specifically soloed at different times during the initial training, they did different -- they got more or less experience, so the first pilots to solo got a little bit more extra solo time or they got maybe an introduction to tactical flying, but [redacted], I believe, was the last to solo, so she got basically the majority of her time was spent getting ready to solo.

That -- at the end of that evolution, that's when

pilots kind of dispersed and then get ready for company training. I'm trying to think. Albert, anything else specific? That's kind of like high level. (Inaudible).

BY MR. NIXON:

Q Yeah, you mentioned, you know a little bit about the ground score. Everything's done in-house, correct?

A You're on mute.

Q Sorry. Sorry about that. Everything's done in house for the initial training, correct?

A That's correct. So technically Wipaire, I believe has the -- so there's two aspects. One is the Air Tractor. The 802 is technically 16,000 pounds max gross weight, so it would require type rating per the definition of a large aircraft. However, I think it's 5161, Air Tractor received a type rating exemption for the Air Tractor 802, so it can be done by qualified instructors to at least be -- allow you to act as pilot in command of an 802.

Then when it comes to the Fire Boss -- the Fire Boss is trademarked by Wipaire. Wipaire owns the STC and technically they also, as a result of owning the STC, they own -- they're responsible for the training. In the past they have done some training with their

aircraft and contract instructors for the other operators. Every -- the entire time I was at Dauntless, Dauntless had a two-seat aircraft and that -- basically that responsibility was delegated to in-house, like you said, to Dauntless itself and Dauntless instructors.

Q And just curious, on the two-seaters, I think you mentioned earlier, you know, their fleet size in the 20s, whatever, but how many two-seaters were present? I know it might vary, but when you were around doing the instruction with Dauntless, about how many two-seaters do they have?

A There's one.

Q There's just one? Okay.

A So it -- it had access to two, but there is 1-2 Delta Alpha, or Fire Boss 212 came on board, I believe, in 2018 or maybe '19, that was utilized both for training as well as it was a contractor operational aircraft. During the season and then also during company training in 2024, Fire Boss 203, November 8-1-5-2 Lima was also utilized as a secondary, a second two-seater at company training, given the size of pilots to fly with.

Q And as far as the two-seater, just, you know because I'm sure you used it in training mostly, but

I'm assuming it has a full set of flight controls and everything in the back seat, rear seat, wherever you call it there. Is that correct?

A Correct. Fully controlled, dual control.

Q So you could actually, from the back, you could demo a scoop, for instance? It has all that stuff?

A Yeah, correct, and that's what oftentimes we would do (inaudible).

Q Okay. So it's a fully functional rear cup, everything. I mean, everything you can --

A Yes.

Q Okay.

A There is -- between 203 and 212, there are -- they have varying back seats in terms of instrumentation, but in terms of basic mechanics of being able to fly the aircraft, scoop the aircraft, you can do everything from the back.

Q Okay. And just to make sure I understand it, I got the 10 flight thing, but approximately how long is the ground school or is it intertwined with flights? Like, you do ground school and you go fly in the afternoon or something?

A There is -- so there's a ground training syllabus. I -- let's see. It varied. I provided in 2022, the ground training, or at least the systems

training for that, and then this -- in 2024, a Wipaire mechanic provided the systems training. In terms of hours, it was several hours long. It was primarily focused on -- yeah, the systems and then over and -- and interlaced throughout the rest of the training, I would also -- I or other instructors would provide some training on the other systems.

Q Okay. So basically all the systems, whether it was you or another instructor or this maintenance person, it was all in person, not like computer aid or anything like that, right? All the training?

A Correct.

Q Okay. For ground training?

A For initial.

Q Yeah, the ground training, I should say.

A For initial, yes.

Q Yes. Okay. And approximately how long does the ground training take? The schooling part for initial?

A I'd say total in terms of all the different subjects? About six to 10 hours.

Q Okay.

A Total (inaudible) we have.

Q I may be jumping the gun a little bit because I know [redacted] did a little bit of this, but when you were there, was a sim part of any of your formal

training or was it just talked about?
A It was discussed only. She was the first to go through Turbine Training Center as part of any kind of Dauntless-specific training.
Q Okay. Going back to your -- I think it was your draft training program you were talking about earlier --
A Yes. Yep.
Q -- did that include sim training? Did you want that?
A It did. Yeah, so I had a -- and you'll see that. It included that training. Now, simulator training, especially when it comes to this operation, is very specific or limited in its scope, so we probably can get into that a little bit later, but that does need to be addressed as far as its effectiveness because simulator training, whether it is a cockpit procedure trainer or virtual reality, has its place. The challenge is because of the -- this aircraft and its -- the dynamics that are involved with the operation, it becomes very challenging to supplement or -- not even supplement, substitute in aircraft in the two-seat aircraft training with anything else in a specific scope.
Q Okay. Did you get a chance to go do much sim

flying in this airplane?

A No. I have personally visited Turbine Training Center in Manhattan, Kansas. The owner asked me to consult on their Fireball simulator that they were working on. This was several years ago, so I went out there to see it. I didn't actually fly because it wasn't operational. It is my impression and professional opinion that that simulator is purely just a cockpit procedures trainer. It does not provide formation training. It doesn't provide scoop training. It doesn't provide realistic tactical training because they can't add extra aircraft.

So the other simulator training, though, that I was involved in was at NAFA II in McClellan, California. There are -- the Forest Service has a training center there and they have a simulator room that are representative of different platforms in the industry. A couple of them are SEAT, there's no scooping simulator though. It's -- for those that go to NAFA II, they typically fly in one of two wheeled SEAT simulators to practice the protocols that Mike had mentioned earlier of FTA entry, exit, orbit, and then execution by drop.

Q Does that have, you know, where you can add it from other aircraft in formation, the one you just

mentioned, the last sim?
A Oh, yes, so I did fly a little bit in that sim in formation. It doesn't -- the dynamics are not very good for that, to be quite honest. They are linked and you do fly in relationship to other aircraft, but in terms of formation flying, it's about as minimally capable as possible, without a doubt.
Q Okay. How's the visual in that thing, just curious, the one that Forest Service is using?
A Yeah, it's -- and I believe they are in the process of updating the simulators. So, I mean, being a part of the cadre as instructor, they are actively trying to update them in terms of the current capability of the simulators at NAFA II or, sorry, McClellan, that training facility. It's at least a decade or so behind in terms of current flight simulation software and graphics.
Q Okay. But that being said, you still have obviously something in your proposed program there for the sim training nevertheless, correct?
A Yeah, 2021 I proposed, I think, it was a week long, I believe, and it was in there to ensure that everybody -- it was kind of a baseline because, as I said -- as I mentioned, Turbine Training Center is a cockpit procedure trainer, so it was designed to

baseline everybody in terms of procedures, emergency procedure, start procedures, and then potentially some other very limited emergency procedures, inadvertent IMC, things like that, but in terms of tactical training it wasn't, so it was more of a -- it was absolutely in the training plan that I provided but it was not. It was very specific in its scope.

Q Okay. You mentioned tactical is limited. I'm trying to think. Is the program kind of designed that when you get checked out with the basics, you can fly the airplane, you can scoop and then you're kind of still -- you know, do they still have restrictions on you as a level two when you're brand new with tactical because you're still kind of learning or is it just you're good to go now, have fun?

A I was -- yeah, so in the intent, I think that that is the case is to maybe put some safeguards in place. In reality, it was more of this is industry-wide, not just Dauntless, but having done it and seen it for the last five years. It was a get out there and you'll figure it out kind of a mindset. The training -- we'll get into the company training there in a little bit if you want, but yeah, it was -- once you finished company training, it was you -- there wasn't really much proficiency built in or like

opportunities for pilots to come back other than ferrying aircraft to maintain tactical proficiency until you got onto contract and maybe got a proficiency with another pilot or something.

Q I looked at your form, but it was pretty basic, you know? It had an area of notes, decide the flights that were -- like you couldn't even fit a sentence in there, I would say, you know? You might be able to put a few words, but was there -- I didn't memorize it, but is there a tactical block in there or anything about tactical?

A There is a tactical.

Q Initial training now? Yeah.

A Yes. Yes, so there is an advanced tactical training syllabus that the previous director of training, Steve Bailey, came up with. I tried to take that on and -- and help to carry that on. In reality, the reality was you get to initial training and then you basically went into company training. Pilots got a varying degree, a number of flights in two-ship and four-ship in March, and then it was off to the races at that point.

Q Okay. So on this syllabus you mentioned, was it implemented or just like a test trial, pilot trial when you were there?

A No, it was -- I sent it out and it was basically ignored.

Q Okay. So it was proposed. It never really got put into action.

A (Inaudible.)

Q Okay.

A Yeah, I know Jess -- he definitely received it. I think he sent an email back saying thank you. I received it. There was never a followup discussion. I will say one of the elements of that training program was a seaplane element, whereby a seaplane was acquired, so I think the following year after I proposed the program, a seaplane, a 185 on amphibs was acquired for pilots that were low on the required -- contractual required seaplane time, which has since changed to gain that experience.

However, there was -- to the best of my knowledge, I've never seen it, any kind of structure around that aircraft. It was basically everybody's a professional pilot, just go take the plane and go get some hours so you can meet the contract.

Q Okay. And I know you're hired for your, you know -- even though you're relief, you're hired for your instructor, you know, obviously they only had a handful, so I'm sure -- and your other duties, like

you mentioned earlier, flight scheduling, all that other stuff. But did you actually fly the line on occasion, too, even though you had instructor -- when there were classes were graduated or anything like that, did you actually fly the line a little bit in 2024, much at all?

A In 2024, no. I was terminated. Jess terminated me directly after training.

Q Okay. How about the year before? Did you fly much just, you know, like a line pilot, like these tactical flights? Did you fly a few of those on occasion?

A Yeah, so -- yeah, so a line versus a relief, you're still going to fly, you're still going to be on contract. It's just one stays on one airplane, and one moves around, so I get training every single year, and then I would still also go out for approximately 100 days or so on contract (inaudible).

Q Okay. So you got a little bit of both. Okay.

A (Inaudible.)

Q So my question is you mentioned the tactical was minimally trained, I guess, and most likely given your experience, maybe not always, but a lot of times you probably would be flight lead, I'm assuming, when you did tactical flights, missions, wherever you call

them. Did you spend some time debriefing the newer pilots that just got checked out because you were saying that that's a -- I wouldn't call it a weak area, but an area for improvement.

A Yeah, so that's a -- oh, multiple aspects with that, so in terms of the new pilots, I would on my specific flights would always brief and debrief using a briefing guide and try to get as much out of it out of every single flight. When it came to company training, when those new pilots were integrated with the more senior pilots, I would say that's where the receptiveness for more professional formation and training occurred where -- and by that I mean some pilots would brief a little bit more than others.

But when it came to debriefing, I would typically -- I actually started holding mass debriefs because the goal is it's not just about you, it's about how do we get -- how do you get better as a group, and those debriefs were typically described by very minimal, like, participation. It got to the point where I had -- we or I allowed the flight leads or -- not allowed, but asked the flight leads to basically lead the debrief for their flight, and it was just very challenging because it -- proper professional briefing and debriefing is a skill that's practiced and trained

and you have to be receptive to that.

So I would say I was personally critiqued on the thoroughness of briefing and debriefing that I had for the -- in comparison to the rest of the group because apparently I debriefed or briefed too much. My take on that was well, if we don't have proper amount -- proper level and scope of standards, then I've got to cover it. Otherwise, there's too many questions that occur in the flight, but when it came to briefing and debriefing with the new pilots, I tried to do as much as I could and I believe all of them -- and you can -- I encourage the team to talk to them about the differences in briefing and debriefing, both what they saw at initial and at company training as well as in the field. Because that's one of the biggest differences I noticed, was there were plenty of times that I saw briefing and there was some debriefing that occurred during company training.

However, when I got into the field being relief and bouncing around at different bases, there will be plenty of times where we -- there would be a three-, four-, five-, six-hour flight day, dozens of scoops, and at the end of that, it was -- the average debrief was you got anything? No. Let's go.

Q Oh, the standard.

A Standard mindset, so some talked about it. I tried to be collaborative with that, and I think some pilots did maybe a little bit more with that, but as a whole, that was the mindset for debriefing. Briefing-wise before operations, that was also a challenge especially because I recognized the significance of standardization and the lack thereof. There needed to be briefing, and when you had new pilots and in, I -- I'd keep up with the pilots and one of the feedback items that I would receive is just an inconsistency with how much they're getting briefed, what is, what is not, from one base to the next.

Q Okay. I know it's situational because your mission's different, your formation experience is different, and then what happened. A lot of times circumstances are different. You know, if you had a close call, you're going to have to have a really tough meeting. If it's everything went well, you know, it could be a quick debrief, but generally speaking, you know, I know it could be two-ship or four-ship, but generally speaking now, how long were your debriefs, how many minutes?

A Five minutes or less.

Q Five minutes? Okay. So it's still technically a quick debrief even if it was five minutes in your

case. Thorough but quick. Okay. I just want to get --

A Oh, for -- for mine?

Q Yeah.

A Oh, you're talking about for mine?

Q Yeah, when you were in the field. When you're in the field now.

A If I was in the field and I led the debrief or you mean -- what do you mean?

Q Yes, you're flight lead.

A Oh, mine were typically like an hour or so or more.

Q Okay. What's the five minute thing from, the debrief?

A Oh, that was if I was not leading the debrief and I was there as a member of the flight or from talking and seeing and just keeping up with the other pilots.

Q Okay. And once again in the field, what did you see the average debrief -- I know it varies, but roughly what would you say the average is? What would you --

A Yes, what's the average? Average debrief was about 10 minutes or less. I mean, five is pretty average, too, but I would say it was less than 10 minutes --

Q Okay.
A -- as far as what to discuss.
Q All right. And then we kind of touched upon the formation training. You mentioned it could be better, and I'm assuming your draft had some proposals in there to improve it. Is that correct for the training program?
A Yeah, so it goes even more than that, so it discussed the significant or -- the necessity for formation training or structured discipline, professional formation training, so it did call for that. Every single pipeline that I identified that were pilots coming into the company, it went through that, and then on top of that I created a specifically tailored Fire Boss formation guide and that had multiple versions. I think the first one I came out with was around 2020 or 2021 as well, and then it expanded to a fairly comprehensive version by 2023.
Q Okay. Well, I'd like to -- if you don't mind, would you show or share that with our observations team here. I'd like to look at that in detail if you don't mind sharing it with us.
A Yeah, there's two versions of it.
Q Okay. You have my email, so send it to me and I'll distribute to my team. I appreciate it, and then

I'm assuming the same thing goes for tactical. You address that in that as well I'm assuming. Is that correct?

A Yep.

Q Could you just give us an executive version what your proposal was on the tactical?

A Yeah. Yeah, let me -- so typically I think I called for as many as -- let's see, I refer to it as fire traffic area, but it's anywhere between about 35, 40 hours of tactical training, and basically what it comprised of was at least two aircraft operating on a simulated dispatch, so attack in a simulated fire traffic area, operating in formation with specific objectives and operating at the flank. That's tactical training.

Q Okay.

A (Inaudible.) Yep.

Q All right. Yeah, I like to take a look at what you propose there, so I look forward to seeing your proposals there. You know, scoop training, we kind of talked about quite a bit in different areas today, but did you have any improvements in that as well for the scoop training initial?

A Yeah, so what I would typically propose and I've had before is briefing guides. I had, and I'll

provide, is amendments or updates to the SOP to provide more of a framework on how to go about scoop recon, how to assess water, what are some procedures to go about as a flight lead to ensure that the water's correct for not just yourself but the whole flight, so that it was more, not necessarily in the training -- it would have been encompassed in that training program, but specifically in terms of improvements to scooping.

It was more from my standpoint, it was more presented in training briefs. I believe I was -- I presented a brief every single year from 2021 to 2024 on different topics, and my big thing was I was always trying to improve how do we go about scooping? Because I was actually involved in an incident where I hit a submerged stump with my right float, and so one of the things I pushed very hard on having dealt with that scenario and in a different scenario where I was not the damaged aircraft, was integrity or damage checks and adopting standard protocol for damage checks of the floats airborne. And so yeah, I pushed for a lot of that stuff. It was discussed at most and was basically not really adopted.

Q Okay. Was any portion adopted or was it all or nothing in your case on the proposals you presented?

A Well, so the training program was basically ignored. Again, as I said, they bought a seaplane, Dauntless bought a seaplane and then let people go get hours in it, but in terms of the -- you'll see. You'll see it when I send it, but no.

Q Okay.

A No.

Q And then were you involved? You know, they made, I believe the SMS manual -- if memory serves me right, it was I think 2022 or somewhere in that, and like you mentioned before, the SOP was 2019. I don't know if you had overlap, but were you involved in any of those manuals, drafting or any of the SOPs or the SMS at all?

A Not involved with the SMS. I got to meet the person who runs that software. I was -- the SMS was run by the safety and compliance committee, I believe. There was an SMS manager which was originally up until I believe this year was a crew chief or a non-pilot, so I wasn't really involved with the SMS. There was no director of safety at Dauntless until, I believe, recently, which just was named, who's also non-pilot, I believe. And then there, as far as drafting, yeah, I drafted a lot of things, which you're going to receive a lot of those documents.

Q Okay.
A I drafted a lot of things to try to improve the standards, protocols, training standardization and safety, but as I mentioned before, you have it. There's been no -- there was no updates to SOP. Some of the stuff, was it discussed either in a training committee meeting? Yes, sometimes. Was it discussed at company training sometimes? Yes, but there was not anything formally adopted for a company that large. That's the only way to really improve upon your protocols.
Q Okay. You know, we're kind of concentrating on the, you know, the initial or new-hire training, but were you involved with the company training as well in some aspect with all those improvements you mentioned?
A Yeah, so in terms of company training, starting in 2021, I essentially led company training. There -- I was not given that duty. Initially, company training, as far as the flight portion, was the predecessor or -- the previous director of training was, for lack of better terms, in handcuffs when it came to how training was going to be accomplished. So before I started assisting or helping with the company training, there was a general flight schedule that was presented at the very beginning of training for

multiple days, and then obviously things happen where -- weather or pilots or aircraft, whatever, they occur.

Prior to that, there was essentially hey, we're done with training, ground training for the day. Who wants to go out and fly? Originally, there weren't even pilots assigned to aircraft, so people -- there's potential that people didn't even know who was in which aircraft for during training. That's when in 2021, as the previous director of training, as he moved out. Not saying that he didn't push for that because I believe he did, for much more of a structured training program. I started to create a flight schedule for each day.

So essentially I drafted the scenarios. I created all the products, like a kneeboard card, which is a document that is used in the field to identify the fire and pertinent information, so I would draft those based on scenarios. I would create the schedules themselves, and I would also fly -- I would fly in the aircraft and then I would also lead the day. I would manage the day in terms of briefing all the fires in the morning, briefing all the pilots in the morning, and then leading the debriefing.

Q Okay.

A So yes, I would probably say I had a little involvement.
Q Deeply involved, and then you mentioned, you know, obviously we knew the chief pilot we talked about earlier, and I think he has an assistant as well. And then, you know, I think he's doing the DO duties as well, but you mentioned the director of training while you were there. Give us some more rundown of his responsibilities and what he had interaction with you, he or she.
A Yeah, so that was up until 2021, and he kind of did what I ended up doing as far as the different types of roles, but that -- as I said, that was abolished.
Q Okay.
A So for the majority of my time at Dauntless, there wasn't director of training.
Q I see. Okay. It was --
A It was a training committee that was chaired by -- defacto chaired by Jess Weaver. He added -- there was a deputy director of operations. I've not seen actual -- I never saw any actual documentation or any discussion of an assistant chief pilot. Everything in terms of training went through Jess.
Q Okay. So is there any other positions that you

had interplay with we need to know about when you were doing the scheduling and working as an instructor at the company?

A There were -- so John -- so there's several, so Steve Helinski was one of the other instructors. In fact, I believe on the certificates for initial training, he's listed as the lead instructor. He's one of the instructors, and he also manages all the qualifications or at least the documentation, recording, record keeping.

Another one's going to be John Thomas, who's the deputy director of operations. I believe he's in the process of transitioning out of that role. He was -- while he held the position of deputy director of operations in terms of actual roles, he was responsible for the coordination of the ground events at company training, and then for a very short portion he did manage the schedule, but that was essentially it for that.

Q Okay.

A Another role would be, I think, as of this year, maybe last year, I think this year, is Dan Carroll. He is an air attack -- so a non-pilot, but he is, and Mike can elaborate more on his role, but he's air attack group supervisor, so he is the controlling

entity up above during an incident or fire, and he came on board on the training committee to help with the training scenarios and just specifically his role as an air attack during those scenarios.

Q Okay. And then just help me out a little bit, you know, in general for the training. You mentioned the 10 flights, approximately, you know, and they concentrate on the scoops, I guess.

A Yeah.

Q Did you ever make any comments, and I think it's called notes over to the right for flights, so let's say someone had a, you know, whatever. They forgot their checklist or missed an item, you know, checklist compliance you might put it because you don't have much room, but did you ever put comments when you flew with people in there?

A So I didn't use that sheet actually. I created an entirely different grade sheet that was an entire page which I'll provide all the different grade -- all the grade sheets for every pilot I flew with during initial training.

Q Okay. So that was just your own personal though? The company one's the one like I mentioned previously, correct?

A I also modified the company one to have a little

more space but in an effort to -- again, I didn't really have a role to -- I couldn't just push that and just say do this because I'm not the director of ops.

Q No, I got it. Yeah.

A I knew -- I knew the significance of that. In fact, I do have -- they did a screenshots of the discussion between me and the deputy director of ops about the importance of training documentation, so that's why when I was brought on board or when I was offered the opportunity to do initial training, I created a separate document that was much more expansive that allowed for those types of comments.

Q Okay. And then you don't mind sharing that -- whatever form you're using with us. I wouldn't say it's typical, but what -- was it not unusual for you to put some comments on there during the flight with people, with your students?

A All the time.

Q All the time. Okay.

A Yeah, one was to provide comments.

Q Yeah.

A There was two parts to that. One was the debrief itself, which is some of those items could be just addressed there, and then anything that was safety or potential trend, I would try to put them in the

comments.
Q Try to put them in there.
A I did have a conversation at one point during initial training with Steve Helinski where he -- I wouldn't say question, but he was not -- he somewhat questioned my putting of -- being so thorough about the grade sheets in terms of putting potentially negative comments in there, and I just said the goal is to create a trend so that way they know where to go from, and this is more of a -- both a liability issue, but also I see it from a training standpoint how do you improve upon somebody (inaudible).
Q Okay. Were you the only one, as far as you know, using your grade sheet --
A I offered it, yes.
Q -- in the company? Okay.
A Correct.
Q And then did your grade sheet have a grade, actual grade for the flight? Like a pass, fail, or unsat or, you know, excellent.
A No, no. It's a good question. At the time, I thought about creating some criteria for that. Instead, just because it was so busy, I decided to just be as thorough as possible with discussing the location of the scoops, location where we scooped, how

many scoops, water conditions, what was briefed and then -- and notes, so you'll be able to see that.

Q Okay.

A So no actual grading.

Q Right. Okay. Just a --

A Pass, fail or anything like that (inaudible).

Q Okay. You're just talking about what they did and then your comments basically. Okay. I believe that's the same with the company form right there. I don't believe I saw a grade on there. Is that correct on the company form?

A Right.

Q Okay.

A Correct. Yeah, both the -- the original or the expanded one that I (inaudible).

Q Use both forms. Okay. And then going back, I know you spent I think five years at least there. About how many initial students did you train there, Jacob?

A Just those. This was my first year.

Q Oh, this was your first class with initial.

A (Inaudible).

Q Okay. I gotcha, so this was your first class.

Q So I did attend 2022's initial training as somewhat of an instructor under training. I did one

flight. I did a couple flights, but they were not -- yeah, I did I think one flight prior to solo, and then other than that, I provided -- my main role there was to help manage the daily schedule as well as provide the ground training.

Q Okay.

A So 2024 was essentially the first time I primarily taught heavily initial training.

Q Okay. And not to get any specific student, you know, or there -- but generally speaking, most places initial, they fly, you know, a few flights with the same instructor just for continuity, and then at some point, they start branching out to get different techniques. So in that class about -- I know, obviously, you flew with [redacted], but did you fly with other students in that class of the six?

A Mm-hmm, so I flew with every single pilot in that class.

Q Okay. Gotcha, so --

A And that was the case for all three of us, of the instructors there.

Q Okay. And is that statement I just mentioned, is that kind of -- tell me a little about initial training. Do they keep a certain pool of instructors? They can fly with anyone, anytime?

A So we just had the -- there's just the three initial training in 2024. In the past, there's really only been two, at most three, but mostly two. Jess Weaver and Steve Helinski. Oftentimes, there was an intent to do the first couple flights with one instructor, but -- we call that an on-wing, but that was it was more of at least in 2024, more was a fly with one instructor, then rotate.

Q Okay. Gotcha. You know, just in general, you were there, you know, several years. I know you can't speak directly for people, but overall, I'm not talking instructor force, but generally speaking, you know, you flew a bit in the field, like, you mentioned, all that good stuff. Was there much attrition from the pilots in general, or was it pretty steady?

A In terms of, like, training or are you talking retention?

Q No, I'm talking field people now. Yeah, this is, you know, you're going tactical in the field. Yeah.

A There were in my -- I don't want to consider my termination as attrition, but there were two pilots that I know of that were released mid-season. One was not necessarily for flight specific items, and then one was for flight -- flight-related to items.

Q Okay.
A So to answer your question, not really.
Q Not really. Okay. So two out of the whole group there. Okay. And then I'm assuming this class, initial class, it started with six students. There was no attrition. Is that correct?
A So there was because -- well, there were six to start with. Of those six, one of them, Nate Judge, was not even qualified for the checkride. He was absolutely deserving of it and is a good pilot, but he just didn't meet the requirements. I know I believe Jess did or attempted to receive an alternate means of compliance for his carding, but that didn't work, so -- he did go through initial training, he did fly company training up until the mock checkrides, and then he stopped. So that was one, and the other, the second one would be [redacted], who wasn't able to take her checkride the first time within -- and proceeded on. So in terms of total numbers, it was one of the six, but that was 2024.
Q One in six. Okay.
A In the past, previous years, there have been multiple times where pilots would have showed up for training and they changed their mind to -- there have been a couple times they've come in and done like an

intro or demo flight and they've realized it's not for them or -- just decided that's not for them, but in terms of actual attrition, in terms of like, you're not -- you've gone through training, you're not going to make it, it's occurred one time.

Q One time. Okay. And then once again, executive level here, not in detail --

A Yeah.

Q -- once you get ground school out of the way and you're pretty much in the airplane, roughly how many flights do you get a day in a week working your way to initial? I understand weather and there's some limitations, but generally speaking again?

A For -- you said at initial training?

Q Yes, all initial.

A Yeah, so you -- they'd fly typically once or twice a day. That's typically the max. I think at one time maybe we had a pilot that had to -- had a gap, not a gap, but had to go home for a little bit that he did as many as three. That's the most I've ever seen. Typically, most pilots would fly one to two a day, depending on the number of aircraft, weather, and instructors available, and that got them up to 10. I would have to look back at my notes, but typically it would end up being about 10 flights.

Some got as many as, I think, 12 or 13.
Q Okay. And then what's the duration, usually, of a training flight for initial? What's the average duration?
A Anywhere between 35 minutes and about an hour and 15 minutes or an hour and 20 minutes.
Q Okay. And then, you know, you do a mock checkride at the end and then obviously their checkride, correct, to get them all squared away?
A No, no, no. You would think potentially -- that's not how it's done. It's been done that way, I think, once, but no, it's typically you go to initial training, you get signed off to solo by Jess and then you solo some. You maybe ferry the airplanes back to wherever they -- to Texas or around wherever they need to be, and then you had company training, and then at the end of company training was when the checkrides typically took place.
Q Oh, I see. Okay. Got it, and we talked about initial now. How long is typically flights-wise, and I don't know if there's any more ground school involved, but how much longer is that training that you just --
A Company training, you mean?
Q Yeah.

A Company training is about 9 days in total, three days ground, 4 days flight. The ground -- up until 2024, ground training was done after flight -- flight training, which doesn't -- didn't -- I didn't really understand why that was, which because it's not how the rest of the industry or aviation in general does it, but typically it was four days. Oftentimes we had pilots show up a little early for some flying, which was the case in 2024 as well, so total fly days maybe six, and pilots flew anywhere between just two times or as many as like seven or nine -- nine times. There was the emphasis that Jess put out for me as scheduler in running the flight scenarios that the junior pilots get to, need to fly more, which I agree with. The challenge was some of the senior pilots honestly needed some extra -- extra reps because it is a perishable skill, and some of them just needed some extra practice.

Q And roughly, maybe it varies, but how many flights are involved with that company training part?

A How many flights? So every year changed. I've got the last three years. That -- that quantifies total number of scoops, but also individually by pilots, it varies, so most on an individual level, they fly as little as two flights. Like, some of the

senior pilots would fly two flights if they weren't doing a checkride, and then the junior pilots would fly as many as seven, nine, ten times in those days because they were flying typically once or at least or maybe sometimes twice a day.

2024 was different, and the reason I say that is we had weather -- a weather event that basically took out a full day and a half almost of training, and then we had some maintenance issues as a result of the weather that caused a couple flights to get incompleted essentially, so in terms of -- in terms of comparison of training between the class of 2024 initial training and the -- the other new hire classes, 2024 training class received the fewest amount or the smallest amount of training at company training --

Q Okay.

A -- due to multiple wipes (phonetic).

Q And then for the initial people doing that company training, they get done. I'm assuming they get kind of a checkout or a mock before they go to the checkride. Is that correct?

A Not in the past. I started doing that and scheduling that myself in 2021 or two, and I would personally lead that flight and -- and observe it from

overhead as well, so I lead -- lead the fight and observe it, and give them the opportunity to basically just prior to the day -- prior to feel comfortable and confident going into the checkride based on the current requirements that are -- that are established in the industry for what -- what a Fire Boss checkride consists of.

Q Okay. And who's given that checkride? Or who --

A Checkride is OAS.

Q OAS. Okay. So --

A Yeah, checkride is -- the Office of Aviation Services which is under the Department of Interior and provide pilot inspectors that come in. They have different regions that come in. 2024 was different for -- in the sense that that was the first time that a western region group of inspectors came in to do the -- to do the checkride.

Q Okay. And when they give the checkride, I know you mentioned earlier, there were some people that were watching, observing. Is it usually in the airplane or is it usually outside watching them do the scoop?

A So it's either on -- on a dock or on a boat.

Q Okay. So 100 percent is external. They're not in the two seat or anything, the person giving the

checkride. Is that correct?
A Correct. Correct.
Q Okay. And that's what you mentioned. I know we talked about it earlier where you thought there were some limitations there. Okay. I think I got it now, and then assuming everything goes well in that then they're totally -- now they got initial, they got company trained and they're qualified according to the, you know, OAS, so they're good to go now, right, for line?
A Yeah, so then there's the -- there's the documentation process that took varying degrees of time to receive that card, which is a PS30 form, I believe 30-Alpha. The -- the 64 is the application. The 69, I believe, is the actual evaluation itself, which looks very similar to, I think it's an 8410, FAA 8410 form, and then the OAS 30 is the actual interagency pilot card.
Q Okay.
A And it states what type of aircraft that they're -- they're qualified in, and in our -- in the Fire Boss case or single-engine scooper case, what level or, and also the additional qualification will be a level 1 pilot trainer.
Q Okay. And I know we talked about this earlier

about the checkride, but given what they do, do you get feedback or was there any people that didn't pass initially on this group that you trained?

A Nope, not in 2024. I will say though, I -- I was probably the only private person in Dauntless that I know that did not pass a checkride in 2020.

Q Okay. Okay. Do you get feedback even if they pass saying, hey, this was a little bit sporty or weak from the evaluators at all? Do you get any feedback?

A No.

Q You don't?

A No.

Q Not even in paper form?

A In the past it was somewhat of a challenge just to even know if there were -- if everybody passed or not, and in terms of feedback, well specifically in 2024, I don't think I did checkride in '23. There was little to no feedback on -- on the -- on the checkrides. Maybe one time that I remember but most of the time it was checkrides happen. Everybody kind of wants to go home. Did everybody pass? Yep, everybody passed. No feedback. See you later.

Q Okay. Just want to see. Okay. I think I touched upon the kind of the general training. I may have some more questions at the end there but I'm

going to open up again, Jacob, and then if doesn't go too long, we'll take a break afterwards and then we'll come back for the final round with, like we talked about, specifics on [redacted]'s training. All right. So with that, Lea, any questions for Jacob?

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q Yeah, I have a couple. Most of my questions were pretty much answered with Albert's questions, but I do have a couple going back to the FRAT. Is there any procedure for elevation of high risk on a FRAT? I mean, I have an assumption based on what you said about people not really doing them, but --

A There is when -- when you fill out the FRAT in my fire plane, it gives you a quantity. If it gets, I believe, 16 then it's recommended that you talk to the chief pilot DO about it, but that there's -- again there's no -- there's no real criteria built into that, so you -- and -- and I don't know how many people honestly did that day to day, whether they did individually. We didn't really do them as a group. Sometimes there was, but it was very inconsistent.

In terms of an elevation of risk, there -- there would be sometimes discussions, but in terms of like a true flight risk assessment tool, the one that Dauntless currently utilizes is, I think, five

different categories with the numbers 1 through 5, and it spits out a number at the end, but there's no -- there's no actual criteria, so it's completely subjective, so like you have a 10-year -- 10-year pilot filling out for one day. But if you've got a brand new pilot, they're going to -- they should have similar FRAT for certain like objective criteria, i.e., weather conditions, but because there's -- that's not a assigned, it -- it's completely subjective, so you could have an 18 for one and a 3 for another, and they're both at the same base.

Q Yeah. Gotcha. Okay. Thanks. I had a question about briefing and debriefing. You talked quite a bit about that and sort of the inconsistencies there. Is there an actual requirement for that?

A There is. In the SOP it does discuss assigning flight positions and that flight loop being assigned and then kind of discussing, but that -- it was fairly -- it's fairly -- if you read SOP that Dauntless has, it's fairly generic. I did draft and create a briefing guide that I -- I personally used and then I've -- I've suggested. One of many of the documents described is a tool because the operation is fairly dynamic. There's a lot of aspects to -- to a mission, especially in the -- in the Fire Boss. There is a

minimal require -- there's a pretty -- there is a requirement in the SOP, but because of it being fairly -- not open-ended but ambiguous as a result. I've seen people brief it fairly well, and I've seen this as little as let's, who's -- who's -- what number. I'll see you out in the -- I'll see you out at the airplane.

Q Thanks. I haven't seen the pilot training program, but in your experience how close is reality to the pilot training program?

A So which one?

Q Dauntless' pilot training program.

A How -- how is it in what do you mean? Like, into the field?

Q Like you have a -- or Dauntless has a pilot training program. It might not be called that, and it lists what all is going to be completed. How close is what is listed to reality in your time there?

A Oh, I see. Yeah, in the -- on the initial side it's, I think, for that initial training syllabus it -- it is followed somewhat closely to get them to scoop safely. After that, the only -- there really hasn't been any update to like the training manual, so it's been a -- it's been a -- it's more been a role of the training committee which I was a part of to do

that, so yeah, there -- there is -- there is that the syllabus that -- that's followed. I think my biggest concern is not the -- not the training program in terms of reality for the training itself, but in the field and how it's translated into the field. That's one of the biggest things I saw was, yes, the initial training, yes company training. There's a lot of flight flying, a lot of jet A burned. Some things were discussed, a lot of things weren't, but then getting into the field, that's where a lot of inconsistencies -- it was almost -- it was almost we're going to do all this stuff in training and then I'd get out and relieve him. Like I thought we talked about this or why -- why isn't this being adopted? And a lot of that just came from the fact that all of these different pilots are spread out and they basically establish their own little mini -- mini -- mini groups --

Q Okay.

A -- which is -- which is -- becomes extremely challenging for a new pilot because now they don't know what to expect and a lot of times they have to be able guess on the fly almost when in flight because of the inconsistencies with briefing.

Q Okay. How many pilots does Dauntless have?

A Yeah, so it's probably close to 30 as far as what was the -- what was the number or the roster for initial -- sorry, for company training. It's always varied for the last probably three years when I was helping with the company training, between 23 and 30, so about that, but every year the challenge is, even though the roster might say it'd be up to like 26, in reality there are probably -- in the past, there have been three to four, I'd like to call them paper part timers. They come to training, they maintain their card, but they go on contract maybe once, if not ever,

Q Yep.

A -- so it's a -- it's a -- it's a --variable number, so on -- on paper, maybe it looks like Dauntless a lot of times was maybe fully staffed to begin the season. However, once this season got into place, people's availability or the reality of who was actually applying varied -- changed, and that resulted in pretty much every year since 2021, or at least 2022 of being understaffed for -- for the company.

Q Okay. I had a couple clarifications, so the training committee you mentioned, is that only Dauntless employees on that training committee because you had said an air attack was on it. I just wanted to clarify that.

A Yeah, so he's -- I don't know how to describe him, so he was a Minnesota air -- Department of Natural Resources air attack. I believe he was an AD in the summer. He may have completely switched out of that role and is now, I believe, he's the director of Safety, but he -- yeah, he was not a state employee or federal employee when he came on board as, I think, business development, also manager or consultant or whatever you want to call it. To answer your question, as far as the training committee though, everybody else was a pilot. Dauntless does not have any employed pilots, though. Every pilot at Dauntless is an independent contractor.

Q Okay.

A So that's a little bit of a distinction that needs to be made because there are times that pilots were treated like independent contractors or they wanted to be treated like contractors, and there are times when management wanted to treat them like employees, so it's very -- it was a very murky structure given the -- given the operation.

Q Okay. That's good to know. I had another clarification. Oh yeah. I just wanted to qualify there's never a company checkride, only the OAS carding event.

A So there is -- correct, so there is a safe for solo that for the entire time that I was at Dauntless was the -- Jess Weaver was the ultimate authority on that, and then there was a, as of 2024, there were observation flights that were starting to be documented for which I created that document for that, but there was no company checkride. There was a mock checkride that was more of a preparatory, but no, there's no internal here's your evaluation or here's a -- here's a checkride that we're doing in house.

Q Okay. And then speaking of solos, when they're in the initial training and you said usually around 7 or 8 they start to solo, then what is their training in the initial like after they solo?

A Most of the time -- so there's two parts to that. One is there were times where, and specifically it happened in 2024 where we needed the -- the planes need to be moved from Texas to Florida. One of the initial class pilots who was an 802 pilot but not a Fire Boss pilot, he was -- he was brought to -- to Texas, given I believe one flight or a couple -- couple flights that was last -- that was going to -- like -- or sorry, no. One flight, a couple landings, and then he was basically cleared solo to operate off the runway, and then they brought him and another

student in the two-seater with Steve Helinski brought the two seat -- the -- the two aircraft to training.

After solo though typically what happened was they continued to solo to gain some experience, and then in 2024 there was one flight where we did maybe a couple of the pilots because they had soloed so early, we did an intro to -- to two-ship tactics, but it was very, very, very, very straightforward. Other than that it was the focus went on to them just so we had a secondary aircraft, so basically it went from you solo on the two seater first and then you transition to the single seater because the two different aircraft do -- do have different, slightly different characteristics on the water and in the air, and so that was kind of the other -- other priority was transition from the two-seater to the single-seater while the other pilots that were still working toward the solo were flying in the two-seater mode.

Q Okay.

A So -- and I've got -- and I've got that in the initial training record as well as there, so the operation summary, how much -- because I've got the actual schedules themselves to show how many solo flights they did. You can kind of see that from the operations summary because I -- I -- I quantified the

hours that the instructors flew the same as the students so that you can kind of match those the flight times up, but other than that, it'd be the schedules.

Q Okay. The last question I have I think is, when you were talking about the training forms and getting sort of negative comments based on the amount of feedback you were including or negative feedback you were including when you gave them, the company, an explanation to that, what was their response?

A To the company?

Q To you. So you said you were documenting the training forms.

A Yep. Yes.

Q Someone in the company reacted somewhat negatively and you explained to them, I want to give them feedback, note any trends, that kind of stuff, so what was their response?

A Yeah, it was more of a okay, you -- you're kind of -- you're -- you do you. Like Jacob, you -- you're kind of like a different type of person.

Q Okay.

A Yeah, for lack of a better term and to move it forward, yeah.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. I think that's all I have.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. We're going to live up to our -- when we talked about earlier we're going to take breaks every hour, so we're at the one-hour point, so let's take 10, and we'll come back. We'll start with questions from Michael. Thank you.

MR. SAVAGE: Perfect. Thank you.

MR. PATRICK: Thank you.

(Whereupon, a short break was taken.)

MR. NIXON: Lea, you up yet? Back from a break?

MS. WEINKAUF: I'm back.

MR. NIXON: Perfect. Jesse, you back in?

MR. WEAVER: We are back.

MR. NIXON: Perfect. Tealeye texted me. She's in and out, but just check real quick if she's up. If not, I know she's out. Tealeye, you on?

MS. CORNEJO: I am. I just got off the phone. Thanks.

MR. NIXON: Oh, perfect. Okay. I just saw one of your texts. I don't know if it was sent a while back, but okay. Ready for, I guess, it's round four, and Michael, we're at the questions with Dauntless in general and training, so I'll let you take it from here.

MR. SAVAGE: All right. Thank you.

//

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q All right. I guess I'll start with the hiring. Do you happen to remember or know if the company requires everybody to be essentially vetted and qualified to be able to do this mission before they get picked up, or is the company typically willing to invest a bunch of time and money to get people up to speed to be able to do this type of mission?

A That's a good question. The hiring and recruiting, as I mentioned before, everything goes through Jess Weaver, so I --

Q Okay.

A -- personally never vetted anybody. I don't think I ever even saw a resume. Maybe one time, I believe you may have sent resumes to Steve Helinski. As far as vetting is concerned, there was no committee. It was one person that -- that -- that had authority for -- for deciding whether somebody went through training or not. In the past, up until about 2021 maybe, everybody that came on board met all the requirements.

After that we started or I started to see a couple pilots that were brought on board that didn't necessarily have all the requirements, and one of the main ones was seaplane time because up until recently

it was -- there was 100-hour seaplane requirement. That was one of the reasons why in 2021 or 2020 Dauntless leased an aircraft, a seaplane, for one of the pilots to gain experience in and then 2021 or '22, they actually acquired an airplane.

In terms of investing time, the -- the -- the real thing, the main investment I saw was the initial training, the company training and then after that it was ferrying aircraft to meet the requirement. That was it. Additional training after that was essentially nonexistent.

Q Would you say that ferrying aircraft is quality time to get comfortable with the airplane?

A No, not for -- not for flying this aircraft tactically. I've flown across the country in this aircraft probably six or probably ten times maybe, and while it may give you an understanding of the normal flight characteristics, that's not the -- almost like your question about typical terrain. Yeah, does it -- are you getting experience in the aircraft which counts towards time in type? Yes, but getting established in a scoop circuit, almost like the difference between a Fire Boss and a wheel seat are completely different operations. Going to and from a reload base versus getting established in a -- in a

circuit, water to fire for three hours, is definitely different.

Q Yeah. Okay. Before training started, does the company make sure everybody has a copy of the contract that they're going to be operating on and says know it and live it, be familiar, intimate with it.

A There was some training. I -- I provided a couple briefs, I think '22 when I was doing some of the ground training. I did some also in '24 to at least give them exposure to it so they understood it. In terms of meeting their requirements, though that was out of my purview as far as that's concerned. I did -- I did provide training on, for instance, we had a -- I think we got a -- I did a -- not mock hold, but a group study session the morning of the checkride. We came in -- like, the whole class came in two hours early so we could discuss the contract and make sure everybody was good to go.

Q Okay. Now, who does the -- probably the most important form during the carding process or checkride is the accuracy and validity of the 64-Alpha form. Do you remember that one?

A Oh, yeah.

Q It's got all your flight times, and you make sure -- who at the company does the vetting for those and

looks at every single one of those pilots, all their requirements comparing it with -- with the B10 section of the contract to make sure that everything meets the standards and before the checkrides begin? Who does that?

A Yeah, that would be Jess Weaver, and I think Steve Helinski assisted with that a little bit, but Jess Weaver.

Q Okay. Okay. Has anybody ever washed out of training at the company?

A One person in 2022 went through a decent amount of training and then was told that it just wasn't going to be, and for him, yeah, was told that he was not going to be -- his training was not going to be continued.

Q Okay.

A That -- that I know of, and since 2019.

Q Okay. Was that very objective or subjective?

A Subjective.

Q Okay. And I guess in the training, you guys go back to your standards for both scooping and FTA and you guys have standards to compare that to -- to make those decisions?

A So say that -- yes, so --

Q So in other words, I'll give you an example, the

PTS.

A Yes, yes.

Q I'm doing a checkride, and we're on downwind. I'm going to give you 100 feet plus or minus in correcting. If you go outside that 100 you busted the ride, and if you get faster or slower than 10 knots of the target airspeed for the drop on final, if you, if you get anything outside of that, checkride's over, you busted. Do you guys do that internally? Do you do all that stuff with the scooping portion of it? Does the company do that with the flying in and of itself with everything, or do you guys have a way to do that?

A No, it's all subjective, so it's almost a cumulative subjective approach to, is this person maintaining their energy state on the water? Are they -- what is their angle of attack as they come off of the water? What's their energy management approach approaching the drop, but Dauntless doesn't have -- there's a standard drop, air speed of 105 knots, but Dauntless doesn't use like you shall maintain or you should maintain the 105 plus or minus 3 knots to be able to be say ready for a checkride. It's more of a are you safe on the water during initial and then in the company's training, some of the -- some of the --

[redacted] was an exception. She did basically every fight except for one in a two-seater. All the other pilots, with the exception of for one or two flights in the very beginning when we exposed them -- when they were exposed to some formation and tactics, were in single-seat airplanes, so it's up to them basically to hold themselves to a standard of did I, you know, was my airspeed good? And that comes back to initial which is again it's a cumulative subjective approach of can you maintain energy level coming on, getting onto the water, getting off of the water and then flying around with the load?

Q I guess I just don't understand how the company or even the people who are administering the evaluations, how do they know?

A Yep.

Q I can't wrap my head around that. Okay. Okay. Does company push SAFECOM usage and says hey, be honest, tell the truth, fill them out. It's not going to fall back on us. It's not going to hurt us. It does help and it helps trends and, I mean, of all the, the missions that I know of, I think this is probably one of the most important ones were and one of the best methods to widely distribute, share things that could, you know, come up and it's not really

punishable. It's a system of, hey, let's get this info out there because if you can help somebody else not do the same thing or prevent it from happening to somebody else. Is it presented like that or no?

A I would say it's presented like that in training, in the field kind of going to my comments about how flights are debriefed and briefed. If you have a five-minute debrief that talks about very minimal things, oftentimes those items never even get brought up.

Q Okay.

A So it's just -- that culture is if it's established that there really isn't much of a debrief culture of let's be hard on ourselves and more of a, oh, you know, we didn't ding anything up. Everything all right? Yeah, we're good kind of a mindset which was -- I'd say is more of the average debrief. Then those things just aren't going to be brought up, so it's -- it's specific. Like, at training, there's a lot of rhetoric that goes on. In the field that's not necessarily the case, and that was one of my biggest concerns at Dauntless was what was done and said in training and what was actually done in the field.

Q So you don't train like your flight then, essentially. Okay. The 69-Alpha form --

A Yep.
Q -- who does that for the company? Is that what you did for, you know, before you sent somebody to their carding ride when you were there? Is that something that the instructors do with --
A Yes.
Q -- or you do this from another airplane or how do you even do that?
A The eval form, most of the time, for example, in 2024 wasn't even -- it's actually not even a public document. You can't even see it on a public library on the government's website. It's --
Q It's not on the NWCG website.
A No, you can look at it. The 69, you can maybe look at it now. Last I checked when I was at training this year in '24, it was not available. I tried to look back at my old documents for that. It was -- it was conveyed to me at the checkride by the inspectors that they -- they -- that was their responsibility to provide that document and that, so I didn't have anything to do or the other instructors didn't really do anything with those 69s. In the previous years, I don't remember that. It's more the instructors filled them out. At most the -- what I've done is I pre-filled out the administrative portion of it, but after

that the inspectors take all of that, and then I guess the other question, like how are they doing? Are they accomplishing the tasks, right?

Q Yeah, how can they do that?

A Yeah, so they're -- they're in a stationary location, anywhere between 500 and 2,000 yards or, you know, the -- the planes are scooping relatively close, but not -- they're outside the aircraft, so they're watching them scoop and then they're taking down, they're -- they're filling out the 69 form. I haven't reviewed it recently a lot, but I would say that the 69 form in general doesn't reflect the scooper community very well on how to evaluate too, so it's -- it's a two-part problem, a two-part issue, but yeah, as far as the inspectors, they're watching.

They fill out -- they do the ground portion, they fill that out, they go to the flight portion and then they fill that out. For example, also in 2024, the inspectors required an emergency dump and an FM radio check. In the past that's been done in flight, this was the first time that it was actually done on the ground, so pilots open the gate manually with emergency dump on the ground as well as did a radio check, which was interesting to say the least.

Q So are they actually having you program a radio,

a frequency or what are they looking at for the FM radio or is each pilot demonstrating that they actually are confident with it and know how to use it?

A It's supposed to be. I will say in the past what I've noticed is if you have the aircraft program the radio programmed in already, the inspectors typically have one FM radio that's already pre-programmed and a lot of times inspectors don't know how to reprogram them, so essentially once you have one frequency, the other pilots are typically going to be in that aircraft for the checkride and they don't necessarily have to, so it's yes, the intent is you should be able to program a radio. In fact, that's one of the reasons why I was there early with the class to make sure that they -- they knew how to do that because I knew that was one of the priorities on the checkride.

In reality, they didn't -- they never walked upon a wing. They never -- they just basically got out and walked down on the ramp, had -- had a hand -- had an FM radio in their hand, and then pilots just started checking in randomly, basically randomly, so it was --

Q Do you guys have the 136B or A?

A They have both, so Dauntless has both the NAT and the Technisonic, which --

Q Okay.
A -- again goes back to the standardization.
Q So you guys all -- everybody learns how to use both?
A They're supposed to. I know plenty of pilots that don't like one or the other, and because they fly certain aircraft, some only have one type. Yes, the -- the intent is to know how to use both. In reality, do -- does everybody? Not necessarily, at least proficiently.
Q So going back to that, that 69-Alpha, how does the company ensure -- because clearly the inspectors are totally -- unlike with us and the larger tankers --
A Yeah.
Q -- they're at the mercy of having faith in the company and being able to trust the company to do --
A Yep.
Q -- all that is required and to be competent in every single one of those items, and how does that get confirmed?
A Yeah, for the 64, I think, for the application for the hours?
Q Not only the hours and logbooks and stuff but, but the, the 69-Alpha for -- you go out, you fly.

There's a series of things that need to be checked. I mean, I could be more specific. I can pull one up.

A Yeah, that -- that gets covered during the training, the 69, as far as the tasks --

Q Right.

A -- and the tasks themselves, they're -- it's only a couple different things. It's literally -- it's a -- they see a scoop. They see you scoop, they see aborted scoop, aborted, sorry -- emergency dump, split load and salvo. I think that's basically it. If you look at 69, it doesn't necessarily have all of those features, I believe, on there or these items potentially.

Now, in terms of vetting that, I would personally do that when I would lead the mock checkrides to make sure that they accomplish all those tasks and I would personally watch them. Other than that, that was one of the reasons I didn't pass one of my checkrides because in 2019 or 2020 because it was very much a go get a couple flights in. Nobody observed my drops and it wasn't for safety of flight issues. It was simply for accuracy. It was my second, or second season -- I had like barely 30 hours in the airplane. I learned a lot from it, and that's one of the reasons why I put so much emphasis on mock checkrides after that when I

became part of the training committee, but that's probably, hopefully to answer that question.

And as far as the vetting of the experience on the 64s, I -- I do not know. That all went through Jess Weaver and potentially Steve Helinski, but Jess Weaver.

Q So did the inspectors go through -- ever since you've been there, do they go through the knowledge, the oral, the written stuff? You know, I know records and certificates, documents, regulations of policy, the contract, airworthiness requirements, performance and limitations, weight and balance, weather, flight information, National Airspace System, the ICS organization. I mean, there's a whole bunch of stuff that needs to be covered, but you guys just do that all in training, and they don't really -- do they just talk about it and then that's it?

A So it's discussed --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

A It's discussed through NAFA. It's discussed through initial -- to some extent initial and then company training. Company training has some of that covered during the ground portion, whether -- yeah, it's mostly covered during the ground portion of company training. When it comes to the actual

checkride itself, the -- the orals were fairly inconsistent, but in terms of -- of ensuring that everybody was prepared in terms of the ground portion, it typically was covered between the online training leading up to company training, which occurred starting in 2022 or three, and then NAFA as well, but other than that, it was mostly the focus on different types of briefs on different types of subjects, and then also the flight portion.

MR. SAVAGE: Okay. Okay. I think that's all I got for now. Regarding that, Jacob, thank you for your help there. I'll turn it back over to Albert.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Michael. Appreciate it. Jesse, your turn there. Any questions for Jacob?

MR. WEAVER: No, I don't have any at this time.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. Tealeye, if you're still with us, any questions for Jacob?

MS. CORNEJO: Not at this time. Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thank you. Okay. With that, we're going to the final round. I don't know if we'll make it before we have to take a break here in about half an hour, but we're at least get started.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q So this is now specific training with the accident pilot, [redacted] obviously, so what I'd like

you to do, Jacob, is take us, you know, your involvement with her and training, and then take us to, you know, the training and what issues you had and what came about from that, please.

A Yep, so obviously, this is the reason we're here, which is -- is very frustrating because, obviously I -- I flew with her, provided some training, and I do not believe this should have happened, so I met [redacted] at NAFA because I was an instructor or am an instructor there. She attended NAFA I. I did not know she was sponsored by Dauntless in the past.

I've never -- I was never really made privy to who was being sponsored or who's going to NAFA. They just kind of showed up and I recognized from their name tags that they were Dauntless, but she was extremely attentive. She was very much passionate about aerial firefighting and the Fire Boss specifically. She typically sat in the front of the room. She asked very good questions. She is, as you all probably know, she's Brazilian, so she does have a little bit of an accent. I think there was a little bit of a language barrier at times for certain technical issues or technical questions, but other than that, she was very communicative and very much deserving of being -- being there.

After NAFA, she attended initial training where -- I think I'd have to go back to my records, but I think in total, in terms of flying, I flew with her 10 different times, which I think is more than anybody else in the company. I flew with her probably five times or six times, actually four -- maybe four times at initial -- at initial training. It was -- she could fly the plane. I think she was average in terms of flying the aircraft in the air.

When it came to operating on the water or especially tactically, it was discussed by Jess Weaver, Steve Helinski and myself early on that she was probably the weaker in terms of tactical -- in terms of adapting to the tactical environment. Meaning, other than just scooping as a single aircraft, incorporating all the different aspects of fire traffic area communications, so all the avian communication parts of the fire -- fire environment.

I have, at least I believe on one of my grade sheets, I noticed and I annotated it, but I noticed on one of the early flights with her that she lost situational awareness on the return back to the airport, which was a little bit interesting, and we debriefed it. I believe she may have had some of those issues in terms of situational awareness when

she ferried the 185 with Nate Judge to go down to, I think, Fort Lauderdale to drop off one of the pilots, but she could fly the airplane, but what I noticed from flying with her was that, when it -- when it got more than just one specific item, i.e., scoop this body of water and then drop it on this tree or whatever this notional target is, she would get overwhelmed fairly easily.

So I will say she was always the first one there and one of the last ones basically to leave. She wanted to be there. She was constantly studying, so she had absolutely the right attitude. She was just weaker than the rest of the class, and it was well known by not just myself, but Jess and Steve.

She was the last solo. I have the documentation, which you might have as well for when she soloed, but she was the last pilot to solo. During one of her solo flights, she did, I wouldn't say scare herself, but she did get a little concerned because the water was a little glassy, after which point I actually went up with her in the two-seater to help with that because we had varying weather conditions during initial training and so we couldn't always have the perfect conditions of a little bit of wind.

So one of the days, which happened to be one

of her solo days, it started out a little glassy, so there was that. She got through that through initial training, which again, as I kind of already explained, the goal of initial training is to operate that aircraft as a single aircraft on a fairly permissible body of water, meaning fairly large and wide, in -- in flat terrain, cooler temperatures, so it's -- it's a good building block, but it is, for somebody like [redacted] who struggled, which she would be -- she would tell you, and I -- I had discussions with this about her, especially later on, which I'll get to.

She always wanted to be there and wanted to work to improve. Her attitude was fantastic in that regard, so that was -- that was initial training. After initial training, she came to company training. She actually came in a little early. I asked for her to come in a little early because other pilots were having to do underwater egress training. She had already completed it, so I had -- I provided her with another formation brief, and that was something that was very new to her and very foreign to her, having not had any experience, and that was the case for pretty much the rest of the class too, as well as most of the pilots that came into the community.

The -- so she received that. During company

training, she -- we did an initial flight. I believe Flight 1 was an introduction to formation flying. That was just one flight. She did get a second one. She was one of the only pilots that got a second intro to formation. There was no scooping involved. It was simply an introduction to basic formation flying, which was barely a building block for most of these pilots. It was more of a demo. Here's to get exposure to it. No water operations.

The next day, on the 3rd of March, she did two flights and six scoops on the first one, that was her first tactical flight. The challenge with that flight was that it was led by Steve Helinski and Dave Finnan (phonetic). I was briefing some other pilots on -- on -- on formation that morning, so I only got a very brief discussion with the initial pilots. The challenge with that day and that flight specifically was that was the very first time that all the pilots essentially, other than one or two, that got an intro or demo in initial training, that's where they received a tactical introduction, meaning two airplanes go out as a flight, establish a circuit as a flight, and then -- and then drop on a target.

The challenge with that day was the circuit that was set up was -- while it was highly efficient, it

was not structured in the sense that it didn't prioritize the training objectives that were for that flight, which were being able to maneuver as well, maneuver with a load, not just as a single aircraft, but in relationship to another aircraft, so I had a discussion with Steve Helinski after that because I was part of the last group of pilots that flew that flight and discussed how that was essentially negative training.

I -- I actually apologized to -- to -- to one of the pilots during one of the flights that I was in the backseat with because it was just -- it was way too aggressive for that, and [redacted] was part of that. I don't -- I wasn't in her flight, but after discussing it with her, it didn't seem like it went any differently, so there was very minimal, basically positive training as far as that. After that -- after that flight, she did get a second formation flight, so no scooping again, so again, it was just an introduction or demo of doctrinal formation flying, and it was shared. The flight was shared with another wingman, so part of the time you're flying lead as a platform, part of the time you're flying as a wingman.

Then, we had the ground training. When it came to came to the first day of flying, one of the issues,

and as I mentioned before, with this class as a whole, they received the least amount of training, company training than all the other classes previously, partly because of two things. One, that they're the largest class that the Dauntless has ever had. Secondly was because of a weather event, and the weather event essentially knocked out two days of flying, so on the 7th of March, they was no flying, initially scheduled, but canceled due to weather.

The next day there was two flights. One was flown with a different instructor. It was a proficiency flight. Total of five scoops between the two flights. I did not get much information on the first one. The second one was actually discontinued. That was with John Thomas. That was the only single seat flight that she ever flew in training, and the reason it was discontinued was -- was from my debrief with John Thomas was because there were some challenges that occurred, whether it was, I think the water conditions and/or the ability to maintain situational awareness.

So that brings us to 9th of March, when I personally flew with her at that point, so this was the important day, so on the 9th of March, I flew with her. She had one flight in the morning because at

that point it was identified that she -- she -- she was still struggling, so I having flown with her in the past and having the passion to make sure that she continued to get the training that she needed, I took the personal responsibility to -- to fly with her, so I put her in a -- she was in a tactical training flight, meaning she was in a flight of other aircraft, and we had to actually discontinue.

So it was only a point seven, I don't believe -- let me see. There was one scoop total, and then after that it was very, very clear by that point, about 15, 20 minutes into the flight that it was just too much for her and overwhelmed. At that point we discontinued the flight. We came back to the airport. We landed and I immediately went to -- I -- I went immediately to Jess Weaver and Steve Helinski and told her that something -- we need to -- we need to discontinue her training at this point.

We need to reevaluate how we're going to do this because everybody else in the class was progressing in a pretty standard, pretty standard deviation or metric. She was still struggling pretty heavily in terms of the tactical environment, meaning fire traffic area calm, maneuvering off of other aircraft. That's when there was a conference between Jess

Weaver, Steve Helinski and myself in the conference room at the training at the hangar, where Jess notified her that she wasn't ready for fire.

The decision was made that she was not going to fly the rest of the flight schedule. Instead, ride in the back of the air attack observation platform, which was -- was very beneficial. At that point though, it was also determined there wasn't really -- there was discussion on what to -- how to move forward. I had suggested let's just get her ready for the checkride because obviously we discussed for the last several hours the checkride is very specific in what the tasks are required compared to the actual tactical environment. That was somewhat of the -- basically the decision that was made or at least the understanding that I had.

So then the next day I scheduled myself again with her and flew eventually total of three flights. The first flight was a dedicated single airplane, non-tactical mock checkride, meaning go out and just scoop water, drop on a notional target, a tree line in a very benign setting to basically accomplish all of the tasks required on the checkride. She had a -- she did okay. She did a satisfactory job enough that it was -- that it was -- I felt like it was going to be --

she was going to be safe on the checkride at least and pass the checkride based on all the different metrics that we discussed in terms of how the checkride is accomplished and administered.

At lunch, it was discussed as what -- there was a discussion as to what to do for her second flight. My -- my suggestion was to bring her in as a single aircraft and basically use a building block approach to let her come in almost like a single-engine air tanker and progressively work herself into a flight to -- to not overload her so that there was positive training that was accomplished. Steve Helinski suggested that, just to put her straight into the flight. I -- I acknowledged, went along with that. I should have pushed back, but I didn't. I take responsibility for that, and she was put into a dash three, I believe, of a flight of three in a tactical training scenario.

Again, we -- we started that flight. The -- she got overwhelmed almost immediately again, at which point I discontinued and -- and terminated our aircraft from the flight in the tactical environment. I deconflicted from the rest of the scenario, went to a different part of the lake and we went back to a -- okay, we need to figure out -- we need to go back to

the building blocks because not only was she overwhelmed, but she started to regress in terms of her scooping mechanics, so she was -- there was some porpoising that she was not managing as well as her takeoff technique was -- there was regression, meaning she was approaching potentially stalling off the water, so I brought her during that -- I did not -- we didn't land. We went to a different part of the lake and flew, I think 10 or so more scoops to get her -- get her confidence level back up. It took multiple scoops to get it back by -- with -- with some coaching, but we were able to accomplish that. At which point that was now, I think, almost three hours of total flight time for her for that day in her second flight. She had never flown three flights in a single day, so the challenge with that is that was the day before the checkride.

At this point, the only remaining flight on the schedule was the mock checkride which she was originally scheduled for. I did not think it was prudent given how much -- given fatigue and -- and how much she had flown that day already, as well as the potential for her to regress for her to go off in a single-seat aircraft for the mock checkride. I adjusted the schedule and I wanted her to still get

exposure to the mock checkride, so I put her in the back seat with me.

The issue at this point, and I don't know if we want to get -- not diverge, but this is all part of it, the -- all the training events at company training, they have multiple opportunities for coordination and briefing, so every -- every night there's a schedule that comes out that's a template. Then there was a whiteboard that was created that was a living schedule for the day, and then throughout the day that whiteboard became, as I said, the living schedule, so that became the schedule based on weather, maintenance, air -- air crew, whatever it might be.

In the mornings there was a scheduled coordination brief for all the main -- basically the managers of which I think Jess went to maybe one of them that entire training, which was not necessarily uncommon, but I had no feedback as far as anything different that -- that he wanted for that day. I had done two, as I said, two mock checkrides the previous two seasons, the exact same, so -- then also during lunch, it was noted to me that -- to take one of the pilots, the one that I mentioned earlier, Nate Judge, off of the schedule because he wasn't going to be able

to take a checkride in the meantime

At that point, Jess and John Thomas went to a -- went down to the -- to the lake to put the boat in the water so they could observe. I was -- at no point during lunch nor before that was there any discussion of how that -- how it -- how Jess wanted it to be different than the previous two that I had done in the previous two years. In order to verify that everything was ready to go in terms of the boat was literally on station, I called Jess from the wing of the aircraft after having briefed the entire flight on how it was going to go, and the way I briefed it was to lead every single one of the wing of the new pilots, considering nobody has minimal formation training, and then to go down to the lake, identify the scoop site and accomplish the mock checkride at that point.

During the phone call, it was made known to me by Jess that he wanted to run the checkride from the boat, but again, we had -- nothing had been coordinated, so obviously he's the chief pilot, so I said, okay, that's fine. We started to execute the -- the mock checkride, and I'm happy to write up -- make a write-up on this, but for lack of a better term there were safety of flights that were created by Jess

Weaver that day due to lack of communication, coordination and briefing.

I remained overhead with [redacted] in my backseat to make sure that she provided or experienced some exposure to the mock checkride without having to be in a single-seater. Jess may or may not know this, but I actually was coordinating from a safety of flight standpoint the ingress of all the aircraft, the egress of all the aircraft because the handheld radio that Jess had that day had a very minimal operational radius, so the students -- sorry. The new pilots, per Jess' direction, instead of me bringing them in one at a time as a flight lead, they were all supposed to stream in by themselves, which digressed very quickly because they weren't able to contact him at 12 miles, which is the -- the standard call, so I had to relay that, and then -- and then that also evolved into them not understanding necessarily where the scoop line's supposed to be because they've never really scooped in close proximity to another boat.

That's kind of something we've stayed away from, which makes sense, but needless to say, it was a very challenging mock checkride that, to me, highlighted a lot of different issues that we've kind of discussed already in terms of do one thing, say another and

training, standardization and safety. It was a safety issue. When I got back from that, that was the last flight that she had, I believe. I don't know this for certain because I haven't seen the training records from post-company training. That was the last dual flight that she -- that day was the last dual flight that I -- that I know of that she received.

We came back from that, from that flight, so she had flown three times that day, and we debriefed, at which point I apologized to the group and I told them I was very much over this type of -- this type of structure, where it is, for lack of a better term, shooting from the hip, and I simply just said the AG shit's got to stop because a lot of the times it seems like there's the intent for proper structure, but at the end of the day, it's we'll just kind of make it happen.

I voiced my frustration over the -- the culture, the structure, the safety, the training and standardization to the class, as well as to -- to the other instructors, and then -- then we had the checkride the next day. During the checkride the next day, there was very little information provided to the class regarding the checkride. I showed up at 7. The checkride was supposed to start at 9. I showed up at

7 to -- to help the class get ready, to go over the -- the ground portion practice program, radios and GPSs if they needed any help with that.

The inspector showed up, and -- and apparently they wanted actually -- they wanted to see actually the paperwork physically printed out. The checkride was unique compared to previous checkrides in the sense that it was disorganized. It was a little bit embarrassing to see basically the lack of paperwork and having to basically do it all at one time last minute. That took for a while -- that took a while, and then we did the oral portion. That was a group session, which was -- that was consistent with previous checkrides whereby the inspectors had the group of the checkride pilots in a -- in the room and just asked around the room questions from the contract, essentially.

After that point, there was a very -- there was a discussion on how the flight was going to go. At that point, there were already several different changes that were made that I was made aware of by Jess that he could have communicated earlier, and it just -- basically my frustration level rose to the level where I just basically backed away and let him brief the flight for the checkride. You can ask the other

checkride pilots. I asked several of them, including the class -- the new class, as well as some of the other airspace pilots, and it was confusing to say the least.

If there's any indication of how the checkride went, there were about three different circuits that were flown by the different airplanes that went down there that day, so three different patterns when it could have been the exact same pattern for everybody, for consistency because at this point, it's not about the -- trying to trick anybody. It's like let's -- let's set up the checkride so that way everybody understands what the expectations are and to demonstrate the tasks that are required. I -- I was on the -- I was in the checkride, obviously. I executed -- I believe the last one or one of the last aircraft to fly, finished up the flight and then I left the next day.

There was no discussion by myself -- actually backing that up. Prior to the beginning of the checkride in the morning, Dan Carroll, who is Air Tack, I mentioned before, brought me and Jess together and we had a discussion. Dan realized how frustrated I was. Richard Simpson, the director of maintenance, realized how frustrated I was. So Dan Carroll took us

to the side between Jess and I to discuss the challenges of the mock checkride and why I was so frustrated. One of the things I had voiced was it was incredibly confusing. There was a lack -- there was just -- there was a lack of communication and it was just not safe to put those pilots in the position that they were in on the mock checkride, to include basically originally telling them, well, you're going to be in a flight, then you're going to come down as a single, and then the last one was, well, now we want them to join up, all these new pilots to join up and fly their own flights together, having barely even been as exposed as a wingman, which was challenging.

One of the -- one of the comments that I made at that point was we cannot keep training at this level. We have to train to a lower level to ensure that everybody is safe going into the field, and Jess' response was, we've never done it that way, and that was one of the consistent responses I received from Jess Weaver for the five years that I was there, was when I would push for increased standardization, increased training protocols, it was we've been doing this for a while. Why do you have any issues with this? I don't see it that way. Things of that nature.

The checkride occurred. [redacted] -- during the checkride, [redacted] -- at some point, the inspectors identified that [redacted] did not meet the requirement, contractual requirement for the checkride, and that wasn't really -- it kind of got communicated to us, I would say officially, but we, the group of us flying, realized that she wasn't going to be able to take the checkride. She was in the oral, but she did not take the flight -- do the flight portion, so she -- she actually sat on the boat and observed the checkrides.

After the checkride was complete, I was in the lobby of the hotel and Jess approached [redacted] and told her that he apologized and said, we're going to get you ready, basically, and his comments were essentially that this has never happened. They've never had an issue with putting people up that aren't necessarily fully qualified and then being able to get their requirements met post-checkride. After that, I departed, left.

That was, I think, Tuesday, I guess the 12th maybe, and then I continued to mentor both [redacted] and the rest of the class from a distance. We had a group text. I communicated with her as late as July 6, which was just a several couple days before her -- before her mishap and accident. On March 14 -- I

believe March 11 was the checkride. On March 14, so just a couple days later, I was asked by Jess via text if I was available for a conference call. I said yes.

The conference call lasted seven minutes long, and it was due to my behavior or events that occurred on Sunday and Monday, so the mock checkride day -- checkride day. My services were no longer needed, and that was it. That was it. No discussion on how do we go about training or any questions or comments or any advice or any -- any discussion whatsoever on any of the pilots' training, and so as far as I was concerned, I was completely removed at that point.

I kept in touch with all the pilots, including [redacted]. I probably talked to her about once a month on the phone and then multiple times a month via text message. From my -- from talking to her, she ferried some airplanes. One of the things that was a little bit concerning was, directly preceding company training, she was -- she ferried an aircraft with two other pilots up to Minnesota. During the landing phase in Minnesota there was a safety of flight issue that occurred which caused the two other pilots to get into a little bit of an argument. The fact of the matter was that her limitations in terms of being overwhelmed, especially when in formation or any kind

of complex scenario was never briefed, so that was a challenge.

She also ferried airplanes out west, meaning from Midwest out to Coeur d'Alene that I'm aware of on at least one occasion, which she told me herself on the phone, she went IMC inadvertently, so we had a discussion about why -- how dangerous, obviously that is. She recognized that and how to prevent that. There's never been any kind of structure or anything provided in the SOP in terms of ferrying aircraft, in terms of weather minimums or anything like that, so she ferried aircraft about exactly a month following her initial checkride.

She posted or she texted a picture in the aircraft on the group text that -- that I am on, that I'm on with the new class or the new hire class of 2024 and basically saying -- stating that she had passed her checkride. She stated that I was in -- it was in Cleburne. I later found out it was a different inspector than the -- the two that conducted the first checkride. At no time during any of our discussions did she mention doing any additional tactical training or any training in the two-seater aircraft.

On April 19, she -- she sent a picture of the simulator -- presenting the simulator at Turbine

Training Center in Kansas, which I've already discussed. The challenge there, and I did talk to her about that experience specifically, with both John Thomas and Jess Weaver that were at that event. The events were briefed and debriefed. The training though was focused primarily on communications and emergency procedures. There was no way -- I really wasn't capable to add or include two different aircraft or a tactical scenario. It was very much a cockpit procedure trainer, and having been there myself, that is my impression as well.

In May she communicated, I believe it was May, she communicated that she went to Gaylord, Michigan, for relief tour, to do relief on the aircraft. I believe she did a -- a proficiency flight during that period. I don't know of other proficiency flights that she received following that. I know she went home at some point and then she eventually moved out west, so she was supposed to be Coeur d'Alene in Deer Park is what she had told me and this how it was relayed to her.

However, on July 4th she was actually tasked with going to Omak, Washington, so Omak, Washington is one of the more challenging bases. It normally requires a level 1 in relief in previous contracts. That may not

be the case with the new contract that came out in '24. That's where she received or that's where she experienced her first two fires. One of the fires was directly right next to the airport and the other one, I don't necessarily know where it was.

From -- from my understanding from training her all the way from initial to company training, one thing that I -- that is -- that was concerning looking back was, as I said, she basically got that introduction to tactical flying just prior basically on March 2nd or 3rd. Other than that, she received no -- she had no tactical training in the two-seat aircraft because of both weather and her -- her signs of difficulty. I was not -- she was -- it was never communicated to me that she received any two-seat training, not just in general, but also when the operations moved out west.

So it was my understanding that when July 10th came around and she had her -- when the crash occurred, that was her fourth ever tactical flight and third time ever scooping in a high-density environment, so as far as training is concerned, in general, Dauntless does a good job of getting pilots ready for scooping an airplane as an individual pilot, individual aircraft. After that, most of the pilots

in the past have been in a standard deviation in the sense that they all progress at a pretty similar level through company training and need minimal oversight.

[redacted] was the first that I -- that I noticed that was allowed to continue to train, which I still think that she could have done this, but she was -- but needed significant more additional training and structure in order to be put into the field safely. The training -- after company, as I said, I don't -- all I have information about that is from her specific or for her directly and the class the other pilots that were with her on the contract.

The -- the interesting thing is the scoops and the information that you have as far as the total number of scoops that she has -- again, none of the -- the time -- at the moment of her -- of her crash, that was the third time scooping in high altitude and probably only the fourth or fifth time at most she had flown in a tactical environment, meaning multiple aircraft on the scoop in -- in -- in a fire traffic area with aerial supervision.

She needed more structure basically. I -- basically, that's the reason I brought her -- pulled her out of training. That's the reason we sat her down.

I do not understand how she was put into the field. I do not understand why she was put into the west, especially in Omak. I do not understand why she was in her -- in that flight that day having basically minimal training that she really needed essentially.

Q Okay. We're going to go around the, I guess online here. I'll start, but I think we're at a close one hour point, so let's take a quick break. Five, ten minutes, we'll come back and we'll do the final round, so thank you very much there, Jacob. Appreciate it.

(Whereupon, a short recess was taken.)

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q -- the inspectors showed up, but you indicated there were multiple inspectors it sounded like?

A There are two inspectors, and it was conveyed early on that they wanted to see all the paperwork printed out. I don't understand why that was not understood ahead of time by Dauntless, and so it was a mad rush or it was a -- it was a function of Steve Helinski trying to print out the 64s for not just the checkride pilots, but for all the pilots because all the pilots are getting recarded every year, which resulted in some more technical difficulties because Steve couldn't print -- find a way to print for some

reason, and so it just, it looked very disorganized from the beginning in terms of the paperwork. Does that make sense?

Q Yeah, but the paperwork was all good once you guys got it printed out?

A I believe so. Again, there wasn't a lot of communication on the checkride. I had very little interaction. I've had fairly minimal interaction with the -- with the inspectors prior to, during or after the checkride.

Q Okay. And are these two inspectors two guys who normally come and do your checkrides every year?

A No, it's the first time they've ever done a checkride for us, for Dauntless.

Q Okay. So it was different than the past?

A Correct.

Q And --

A It was different in terms of the paperwork requirement, the paperwork and how they wanted it. It was different from the tasks that they wanted, specifically the emergency dump and the comm check on the ground, and it was -- it was fairly similar to previous checkrides in terms of the tasks. However, there wasn't a split load that was required.

Q Okay. So who determines how the mock checkrides

go? That's in preparation to that checkride, right?
A Yeah, I took that -- I took that personal responsibility the last couple years to do it because it was never really directed. There was no SOP or standard for that, and because I've had challenges in a previous checkride and I felt like I could have -- could have had more of a structure for that, I did not want that to ever happen to anybody else, so I led those mock checkrides based on the previous experiences with the previous inspectors and the OAS to make sure that they -- that all the -- the pilots had on the day prior to the checkride at least executed the tasks that were normally required by the inspectors.
Q Okay. And then the guys you're not familiar with, they come in and they asked for something totally nonstandard from what you guys are used to. Was there much more than just the two items you mentioned or was like everything different?
A No, it was different in the sense of the paperwork, and then the oral was fairly straightforward. It was a group setting. As mentioned before, it was covering the same -- the same topic, which is primarily the BLM on-call Fire Boss contract, and then deviation occurred again when they

required -- they wanted to do the emergency dump and the comm check on the ground, and then the flight itself was fairly standard.

However, there wasn't a requirement for obviously the eDump (phonetic) in the air as well as a split load, so it was very short, meaning it was basically two scoops in your out -- you're out of there.

Q Okay. And so it was then determined she wasn't ready to take that checkride, so she didn't, and she was going to do that at a later date that happened, right?

A Correct.

Q And then -- you made a comment that kind of concerns me, so I want to follow up on this, but post checkride, were people allowed to get all their requirements? In other words, has there been in the past a person who did not meet the requirements of the contract to take a checkride, but took a checkride and then were allowed to do that at a later date? Did I understand that correctly?

A Yes, and in some cases there were times because I think the requirement was 25 hours in the aircraft, I think was 50 or 25 if you had a program basically, and oftentimes you got close to that but weren't quite to 25, and you get the hours posted post-training. I

don't know who did that specifically. I believe even myself would have been part of that because I got, I -- I did my training after company training, so yeah, I believe I did my checkride and I had maybe 10 or 15 hours and I still had to ferry a little bit, so I don't know the specifics. That'd be a good question for Jess and -- and then the inspectors, but it does seem that there were, in previous instances, especially considering Jess is comments after that first checkride that people were allowed to take the checkride and then -- and then gain or build -- quote, build time to then get the card afterward.

Q Okay. So when those inspectors showed up, she didn't take the checkride because you decided -- you guys decided she wasn't ready. It had nothing to do with -- did she meet all the qualifications?

A I do not know that answer. I was -- that -- that is a good question. All I know was she texted the group after the oral was complete. There was a discussion on the paperwork side of specifically her qualifications, and then it was, at least from my perspective, it was mentioned that she wasn't going to do the checkride because she didn't -- she didn't have -- I think there was a discussion on her mountain time and then there was discussion on her seaplane time.

It was not conveyed at any time that she was not going to do the checkride at the request of Dauntless. It was an inspector. Given that that was my -- that was the -- that was the impression I got from the communications that I was given.

Q Okay.

A And then it was a different inspector when she did her second checkride. I believe it's just a single aircraft by herself.

Q I was about to ask. Did the different inspector -- was that more of a normal inspector that you would see?

A That other inspector? Yes, he's the one that had done multiple checkrides for us in the past.

Q Was that the same one that let you -- gave you a card, essentially, and then said go and get this time?

A That's not so -- so like he didn't give me that specific information, but I was -- when I did my training, I did -- I did the checkride. I ferried a little bit. Eventually, I got my card. He was the -- that inspector was the primary inspector that we'd used, with the exception of one other, between '19 and '24 and '23. Sorry, because '24 was the -- the other group. It was never -- it was never discussed specifically to me whether I was in the

training committee or as an individual pilot about, get the time -- basically, what you mentioned.

This was discussed, if it was, it was discussed between Jess and the inspectors or Steve Helinski. I never had any of those conversations, but based on the conversation that he had with [redacted] in the -- the lobby, he claimed that it had never been that way. They've always been able -- they've always been able to take the checkride and then build time after.

Q That's illegal. Okay. Can't do that. I think that's all I've got for right now. I might come back to something, but I'm done.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MR. SAVAGE: Thanks.

MR. NIXON: Thank you, Michael. Jesse, any questions for Jacob?

MR. WEAVER: No, sir, I don't have any.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thank you. Tealeye, if you're still on, do you have any questions for Jacob?

MS. CORNEJO: I do not. Thank you, Jacob, for your time today and thank everybody else as well. It's been a long day, so it's a lot of information. Again, I appreciate it.

MR. NIXON: Great, thank you. All right, as promised, we'll go around one more time, and then I'll

end it, and then Jacob, before we let you go though, we'll turn it over to you for any questions, so with that, Lea, one favor. I started to tape a little late. Can you kind of go through your original questions, please, one more time? I'm sorry.

MS. WEINKAUF: The ones that I just asked last round?

MR. NIXON: Yes, you had like two or three I think it was. Yes, last round only.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q All right. Let's see. Let's see. What were those, so I had asked about being overwhelmed looked like for her and how many times she had froze up. Is he going to answer them again?

A Again?

MR. NIXON: Yeah, please, if you don't mind, Jacob?

MR. PATRICK: Yeah, so between initial and company training, personally it happened probably two or three times -- two or three times, at least, where she became overwhelmed, meaning she -- because there's -- there's a difference between regression, getting overwhelmed, and then -- and then freezing up, so there was at least one time where she regressed. She regressed probably maybe once or so, which was not

necessarily uncommon during initial training. When it came to being overwhelmed, the first indicator was during initial training when she lost situational awareness to where we were in the airport.

I think there was maybe one other time, I'd have to go back to my notes that I can provide with the grade sheets, during initial, during company training, the -- we -- she was basically overwhelmed the -- the entirety of the demo, if you want to call it that, or the introductory to formation flying, but really that was more of a here's a show and tell how formation -- how formation occurs. On the tactical side, I didn't fly with her in that first tactical flight, but when I flew with her, I think it was on March 8th, that's when I pulled her out of training.

That was the first time I had flown with her in a tactical environment, so that was -- again, that was the first time in company training that she exhibited being overwhelmed, and she -- that was when we pulled her out of training. That's when she froze on the -- on the controls, meaning we were joining up on an aircraft and just kind of froze on the controls, allowed the closure to collapse to the point where there should have been an overshoot. I had to take the controls for a moment. She had a startled

response.

The safety of flight was mitigated with me as an instructor action, and then it was -- and then very shortly thereafter, it was -- this is -- that's where this flight was discontinued and then we came back and that's where all the discussion was about her training progression.

Q Okay.

A When it came to getting overwhelmed, it happened again the second day on the next day, on the next flight of the three flights, basically the mock checkride day where after that single aircraft, single flight where she -- we went out, her and I, and did a single aircraft just like almost initial training, go to the this one place, scoop and drop for the check, for getting ready for the checkride.

After that it was -- she was -- we put her in a flight again or a tactical scenario, and then again it was one scoop. There were several things where she -- it was clear that she was getting overwhelmed, situational awareness, maintaining position from the other aircraft, and then finally when we got onto this scoop, she showed a regression in her scoop mechanics. That, at that point, indicated to me that there was going to be -- there was going to be negative training

that was going to occur if that flight was allowed to continue in that format.

And that's when I discontinued, did the other flight where it was again, it was not the other flight, but the second half of that flight which was compartmentalized just like the previous flight earlier in the morning, same exact location, just one airplane, no FTA, just me and her in the aircraft and doing the scoop, drop on this, scoop, drop on that, to make sure the mechanics -- the mechanics were -- she understood -- she progressed again to making sure the mechanics were sound again.

Q And then I had asked about her response when you guys debriefed that. If she was aware of it, what her thoughts about it were?

A Yes, she was -- she was upset, concerned obviously, a little bit emotional because she -- she wants to -- she wanted to do well. In the conversation though, that was one of the first things that was brought up is, do you understand that you are struggling? And her response was yes. There was no denial about that. She understood that, and -- and that's when the same conversation was when it was discussed that -- and communicated by Jess that it was, she was not ready for fire at that point.

Her response was she received everything, she understood during that conversation about trying to change up how we're going to approach it. That's when we discussed put her in putting her in the air attack platform to get some, some exposure, and then after that she was again, she was still a little bit emotional about it. I tried to convey to her that, based on what Jess had told her and what the three of us had told her, was that she just -- she needs more time. She's not ready for fire, but there -- there's going to be -- hopefully there was a path and that she just continue to focus on what -- on -- on progressing, and that's when we -- that's when led to the next day's schedule being structured as such.

Q Okay. I think the other question I had was about losing SA on the way back to the airport after the training flight that you had mentioned before, what that had looked like.

A Yep. That was early on initial training. I think I have it in my grade sheet, but it was after we completed our scooping operations, we're proceeding back to the airport. It's class Delta airport, so there's obviously some comm involved and some sequencing, and she had lost situational awareness or got confused as to where we were located in

relationship to the airport even though we had -- we have a GPS system in the aircraft. Her and I briefed that beforehand, which body of water we were going to, so that -- that's where that situational awareness was probably the first time I noticed that.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. I think that's all of the questions I had had earlier. Albert, do you want me to ask my last question for the last round now?

MR. NIXON: Yeah, this is final round, so get it out, please.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q Okay. So my last, I think, question is, I guess, based on your conversations with her and your experiences with her, I'm curious if she ever gave any indication about her ability or propensity to say no or turn something down that she wasn't comfortable with.

A So she -- and there's at least one time in the group text to the other people in that text as well where she had written that she feels comfortable turning something down in scenarios because we were discussing at least one of the other mishaps or fatalities for the season because there was a fatality, I think, right before hers, so she -- she -- she -- I would say she never -- she -- she understood

her -- her challenges, and we'd already discussed it previously. She never -- she didn't in our conversations post-training on the phone indicate a -- that she was unsure of her ability. She recognized that she was -- she had some challenges, and that's why she asked a lot of questions, so it wasn't like, oh, I don't think I can do this. It was because she wanted to be there. She -- she had a passion to do this. It was more of a how can I -- how can I -- how can I do this, Jacob, or how can -- how do I prevent from happening over at like the IMC situation where she went into -- into the clouds. Like, how does that happen, or how do I mitigate that or what do you do in that instance, and that was -- that was -- so I think that -- that's kind of, I'd say, that would be the context of that.

Q Okay. Sort of along the same lines, and you might not know the answer to this, but do you know what -- like I don't know what her status was like in the country, if she had been released, was she able to stay in the United States or it's okay if you don't know --

A Yeah.

Q -- but I don't know if you have anything on that.

A Yeah, I don't know the exact status of her being

in the country. I do know that she lived at least part time in Illinois. I believe she had a coffee shop there. She would go back -- she went back and forth between the U.S. and Brazil, between the company training and -- and her accident at least once. She had mentioned previously when we were discussing the season and her not, having some uncertainty as far as when she's going to go out and -- and -- and get on contract as to -- that she had the opportunity to do -- to do some AG flying in the U.S. I think it was in Nebraska or somewhere in the Midwest, so as far as -- as far as that information that was communicated to me, that -- that's what I was given.

Q Okay.

A I don't know her exact status as far as like visa or things like that.

Q Yeah, that's okay.

A Yep.

MS. WEINKAUF: I think that's all I have. Thanks.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Lea. Michael, final round. Any other questions for Jacob?

MR. SAVAGE: All right. Not too much.

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q I guess, I'm wondering, you know, with the things

I'm hearing, the situational awareness and especially, but being overwhelmed, training, situational awareness to me sounds like she needed to be in the environment a lot more. She needed time, more, a lot more, so did anybody by chance suggest that maybe she needed to go out and get some form formal formation training so she could anticipate overruns and understand closure rates and cross-track angles and you know, all the things, the lead and lag, you know, pure pursuit, all that stuff. Did you ever bring that up to her, Jacob, or --

A Yeah. Yeah, that's a two-part answer because in general the entire industry, specifically Dauntless, needs to be -- needed to be better standardized and there was never --

Q Yeah.

A -- a formal training program. When it came to her specifically, the formation was an aspect to was, but it's more than just that. It was she needed more tactical training. The formation or flying in proximity to other aircraft was definitely a significant part of it, but it was all of it. Meaning in a flight in a fire traffic area with all the different aspects that come along with it, establishing a circuit, the calm response, roles,

responsibilities, maintaining -- and primarily maintaining position.

The doctrinal formation would have been beneficial. She had two of those flights, but I will be the first to say that a lot of the pilots in the industry don't understand that --

Q Yeah.

A -- better -- more than they think they do, and that's just because of my experience and -- and -- and watching and observing for the last five years. When it came to her, it wasn't necessarily that she needed a formal formation program. She needed a tailored, specific training program if she was going to be put in the field in order to give her a chance of success because it was clear that she was struggling with the tactical environment, so yeah, formation was part of it, but it's more than just that. That's the entire part of --

(Simultaneous speaking.)

Q And I understand that, you know, as dynamic and fluid as the tactical environment is both on fires and scooping, you know, how would you have recommended for her to be able to proceed? What did you think it was going to take for you to be willing to sign her off and let her go out and do this mission? Like how much

more do you think it would have required for her to actually be safely ready to go out there in this environment and be competent and safe and predictable and consistent?

A Yeah, I think it would have required a significant amount more time, starting with flying in the two seat again, continuing to fly in the two seat to -- to ensure that the -- all those issues that we've discussed for the last several hours were addressed and properly trained and an improvement was made and documented, so that needs -- that's how it would have been -- I -- I couldn't put an hour number to it because it would be progressive, but I would say probably in the area of 10 to 20 more hours of training in a two-seat airplane.

After that, that could progress to a single-seat platform where she had a -- if she had a proper flight lead or instructor that could go around the circuit to -- to ensure that she understood that properly and execute everything properly in a single-seat aircraft, so it would have been progressive.

The last thing I probably would have done is, and I believe the contract allows it, is to put her in the two-seat in the actual fire environment which is permissible to give her that exposure to the fire

environment.

She may not necessarily be able to actually fly that mission, but she'll be again, she'll be exposed to just kind of like the other instances that she was given in -- in company training, which were valuable both having experienced that myself being in the aircraft with her on the mock checkride as well as discussing those experiences with her one on one. There had to -- main thing is there had to have been something documented, something structured that gave her the opportunity to -- to get trained and then also to maintain that level because again she -- there was the potential for regression.

There's potential for regression for all the pilots, so that was a -- an issue that I see -- I saw consistently throughout the years of getting trained and then this gap of -- of not flying and then it kind of, you kind of get into -- you hit the ground running, so to speak, in the single-seat platform.

Q All right. So at the end of the day, not for nothing, but at the end of the day you just pretty much would say she just really wasn't ready to go out on her own and do this.

A Correct, she was not ready.

Q Okay.

A She was not ready at the end of company training, and then from the discussions I had with her, having not flown with her, but the information I gathered as far as what she received post, she was still not ready when she went to the field, especially when she went to the Pacific Northwest, and for that matter the rest of the class to an extent, too, because none of the -- as I mentioned before, 2024 was the -- the time where it was the largest class and they had the least amount of tactical training due to multiple variables, but I think if you were to -- if you were to talk to them, they would all would have appreciated additional training as well.

Q Yeah. Okay.

A Specifically after company training in terms of maintaining the proficiency in the tactical environment, not just ferrying a plane to and from an airport.

Q Okay. And then my very last question, I promise --

A Yep.

Q -- can you tell me about what's it like? I know you guys are pretty earth-based out probably 1500 feet at the least when you're scooping in formation and everybody's on that single -- you're all in the same

lane, safest thing for objects and everything. Lead can pass stuff on if he needs to. How does the prop wash or is it even a factor? I know I've flown behind you guys fairly close and when I hit your prop wash, it's significant even in a 200, but how does that affect you guys on the ground or on the water when you're, you know, the airplanes in front of you are in full power or even one airplane in front of you is at full power.

A Yeah.

Q And how does that effect the scoop?

A Right.

Q Does it have any effect on it at all?

A Yeah, I think it can absolutely affect your aircraft and -- and make it more challenging to -- to maintain control of the airplane. That's why oftentimes we aren't in the same lane. If you're in the same lane, typically it requires even more distance because of exactly that reason. You've got the spiraling slipstream essentially from the prop itself. You've got the wingtip vortices being created because the aircraft's still in steps. Primarily, the -- the of the aircraft is aerodynamic, not hydrodynamic, and then you've got the wake of the floats themselves, which depending on the width of the

scoop lane, that could have a bathtub effect and be rebounding, or you have other boats as well that are basically joining or interacting with the floats, the float wake, so multiple variables when it comes to that.

But yeah, it absolutely impacts, so it -- that's why I say a tactical training environment is only defined by, in this aircraft, two or more airplanes on a scoop site, over a target area to be able to maintain position both on the scoop and the drop because you just don't have those variables if you're a single airplane, period.

Q Understand. Is it worse as you go back like, you know, for two, three, four or is it about the same if you're in two or four?

A Nope, it can absolutely get worse depending on the scoop site itself. Yep. It can get more challenging. Absolutely.

Q And I'm sure winds effect it as well, correct?

A Correct. Yep, wind, sea state and then all the aircraft and other variables that I just mentioned.

Q Okay. Okay. And does everybody typically put in full right rudder trim as well when you're scooping in formation or no, or is that kind of just the individual?

A It's the individual. Everybody's a little bit different depending on all those variables. Sometimes it does require full -- full rudder -- for full rudder trim. Some like to have less. Some like to have full rudder trim. It just -- it just depends. I would say there's, I think, there are plenty of times where I've used full rudder trim. Other times I've just used takeoff trim and had to just use input of the rudder, so it is not uncommon to use full -- full rudder trim, especially with the left-turning tendencies of the (inaudible).

Q Right. Okay. And if you didn't have that full trim in, could you give me just a guesstimation on about how many pounds of force you would be pushing that rudder with your right leg?

A It'd be probably maybe 20ish pounds, 15 to 20 pounds.

Q Not much.

A No, the -- the controls on the -- on the Fire Boss they're rigged -- most of them are rigged pretty tight in terms of there's no dead zones, but in terms of balancing, they are pretty well balanced. It's -- there's not -- sometimes with the rudder there can be more -- additional force required, but it's not -- it's not to the point where like, for example, it is a

single-engine VMC type scenario, it might approach that, but again, it's all based on those variables.

Yeah, it will -- it will -- of all the -- of all the control inputs, the rudder's going to be the most demanding in terms of maintaining directional control, but as well as the amount of force required to -- to -- to maintain a line, but it's not to the point where it's incapable of doing it. Does that -- does that answer your question?

MR. SAVAGE: Yeah. No. Yeah, absolutely. All right. That's all I got. Thanks, Jacob.

MR. NIXON: All right. Thank you, Michael. Jesse, any questions for Jacob, final round?

MR. WEAVER: I have none.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thank you. Tealeye, if you're still on, any questions for Jacob?

MS. CORNEJO: Yeah, just kind of going back to what you guys were just talking about, and it's not really -- maybe a well-formed question, so you might have to help me a little bit here, Jacob.

BY MS. CORNEJO:

A When she was freezing up or having difficulties, when she finally would snap out of it, what was she doing as far as the recovery of the aircraft was going? Like, was she inputting maybe an incorrect

rudder correction or a flight control correction?
A So on that specific instance, when I -- when I -- when we discontinued training, when she froze on the join up, she'd only seen a couple of joins, so she didn't -- from a baseline understanding, she didn't -- I could -- I knew that there was a high likelihood when that happens even with the other pilots on what the proper control input is, even though we briefed it because it is a -- formation flying is a very -- it's -- it's -- it's a very learned skill. When it came to that specifically, she kind of just held the controls and so she -- the plane continued to fly.

We did not lose control by any means. It just continued to fly, and then when she had the startled response, there was some input into the aircraft. It was a little bit erratic, but it wasn't like an incorrect input. It was just more of a okay, I need to do something with the aircraft at this point because she now realizes it, maybe obviously a little bit late, and by that point, it was to the point where I was probably, in that instance, had provided some input to assist her, so she had the correct input eventually, but that was also because of the assistance of the instructor. Does that answer your question?

MS. CORNEJO: Yep. Thank you. That's it for me.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Great.
BY MR. NIXON:
Q I just had a few points of clarification, Jacob. Then like I said at the end, we'll turn over to you for any questions. Speaking of the SA issues, once again, the only time that materialized was during tactical-type missions, correct? Her low SA?
A Well, it was first indicator -- it was first indicator at least the -- the -- the potential for getting overwhelmed was an initial training as a single aircraft when she lost situational awareness to the -- the airport, so -- and I think there might have been one other time, but it was minimal, but it was to the point where somebody at her experience level that -- that that wasn't. They didn't quite. That that was a little bit of note, essentially, that was debriefed essentially. In terms of getting overwhelmed and specifically freezing up, that was -- yes, that was (inaudible).
Q Related to tactical. Okay.
A We had multiple aircrafts operating in flight and (inaudible).
Q And comms and the ball game going on. You guys (inaudible). Gotcha, and what about speaking of the

first instance there where you're talking about she lost SA going into the pattern or whatever.

A Yes.

Q Was there special circumstances? Was there some weather in the area or limited visibility? Was there any other circumstances to that or was it just a simple --

A No, just a simple -- simple (inaudible)

Q Tension. Yeah.

A A simple loss of situational awareness which we were, we were scooping and (inaudible).

Q Was it single ship or two ship or four ship or what was it?

A It was all single ships (inaudible).

Q All single ship. Okay. Wow. Okay. Okay.

A (inaudible), so we were -- we went to one area, we scooped that one area. We didn't change the location, and we were coming back from that -- that one area, and her initial understanding was just. She got a little confused as to where we were and her interpretation of the GPS and then kind of visually because it was a new -- it was a new, obviously, environment to most of them, but that was -- that was evident that she just basically lost situational awareness (inaudible).

Q Okay. So that was the first sign. Okay. And then you mentioned she flew some other instructors, and they kind of flagged it as well. Did you notice that they made any write-ups to that effect as well?
A Not that I know of. The documentation, as we kind of already discussed is more what kind of -- at most what -- what occurred and not necessarily negative trends.
Q Okay. All right. You mentioned one write-up you made on the SA, but on the, I guess, the flight, you know, you had three flights and the last flight she was in the --
A Yep.
Q -- back rear seat, whatever. Did you make write ups for that or it was too busy and then, you know, you didn't have much time after that type thing?
A Nope. That was a 14 or something-hour day for me. Yeah, I wish I should have. I absolutely should have (inaudible).
Q Okay. So there's no write-ups on those. Just your verbal you're telling us basically, right?
A Correct, because it was basically I ran that flight schedule that day and I flew three times and I went from one flight to the next. I mean, in fact, I had to actually leave early from the debrief of the

second flight in order to brief the mock checkride.
Q Okay. Got it.
A Yeah.
Q And then back in the earlier conversation, you mentioned potential safety of flight. I think it was during scooping when she lost SA. I think if I remember right you said something -- it was during the takeoff. You know, obviously I don't know what you took on, you know, water-wise or whatever, and you said I'm taking it you had to intervene or give us a little more detail on that one, the safety of flight during the scoop.
A The scoop, that was on the second one where we basically discontinued. It's where she regressed, so like we -- she got on the water, we were pretty far away from the other aircraft, so those variables shouldn't have been a factor, but it -- it became clear that she -- when we were going to accelerate, the plane was porpoising more than it had in the past, and then she wanted to essentially get it out of the water a lot more aggressively than just the -- everything else we'd done in the past, which was rolling a float, very shallow angle attack to climb out, so it was -- and -- and it just showed to me that there was a regression and that there needed to be

some remedial training because it wasn't going to -- it wasn't going to get any better from that. Does that make sense?

Q Yeah. Did you have to verbally intervene or did you take the aircraft temporarily or anything on that one? Do you remember?

A That was -- that was definitely a verbal.

Q Okay.

A I might have rode the controls a little bit for her in maybe one moment, but other than that it was definitely a hey, we need to, you know, we need to go back and we need to reset how we do this because you're, you know, kind of forgot how to scoop for a little bit. We need to go back in and -- and focus on the -- the fundamentals here again --

Q Okay.

A -- and make sure you understand them.

Q And did she give you any feedback why she was trying to get off a little premature on the, on the rotate, whatever? She didn't?

A No, not really. She had some comments during. During the flights, but most of it -- it was she was pretty focused on -- on the flight itself. There was some questions concerning debriefs, but for the most part she was first pretty focused.

Q Okay. And understand the scooping's kind of like a touch and go, you know, you just get in the water and you're airborne again, but what, what if you had like an engine failure on the water? Is an abort on the water now? Is that a big deal on the Fire Boss?
A If you are like an engine failure while you're already on the water? While you're still on the water? The main thing is you have to get rid of the load because you're -- it is a -- it is a seaplane, so it has floats, so it's more of a you just need to get rid of the water because those floats, the floats cannot handle a load in the hopper and then come to -- basically come off of the step.
Q But I'm assuming it digs in pretty good once you pull the power right in the water. I mean, it would start slowing pretty quick I'm assuming. I don't know. That's what, I'm just asking.
A (inaudible)
Q Yeah.
A Air Boss included will decelerate pretty rapidly (inaudible).
Q Pretty rapidly. Okay. But the control and floating is not usually a big deal like tipping one way or then we pull power balance or anything? It's pretty stable when you abort high speed?

A Well, again, it depends. Like if you're just -- just prior to rotation speed and -- and you have positive angle of attack and you get rid of your load, you become several thousand pounds lighter, so you can absolutely get airborne again potentially, so there are a lot of variables, so it takes it -- it -- still it's not -- it's much more than just an aborted takeoff of a seaplane because of all the variables, specifically with the weight. It really depends, but primarily it takes a disciplined approach to get the airplane, get the load off, adjust angle of attack as required, reduce the power, get off the step, maintain directional control. It's all the variables all at once and it really -- so it really depends when -- if, in your scenario, and it's an engine failure, it depends on that.

Q Okay. No, I'm just trying to get a little more learning because I figured that might be something -- obviously something new to me, so I get all the tactical and I get all the thing. I'm still one clarification on this checkride, you know, with the --

A Yep.

Q -- OAS, I guess it is, so she was in the oral, but you think she got -- and I know you didn't get direct feedback, but you think they took her out

because of a paperwork issue, not from the oral. Is that correct? I just want to make sure we correct that.

A Yeah, I was -- I did not get indication she -- she was asked several questions just like every -- all the other pilots. I think she stumbled through at least one of those questions. She wasn't the only one that didn't know the exact answer right away, but yeah, I got no indication that she had, quote, failed the oral. It was more of a -- it was communicated to me, it was my impression based on other discussions because there really wasn't any much communication given about that, that she wasn't going to do the checkride because she wasn't going to fly because of her -- because of her paperwork and her, and her qualifications, and I have that -- there was, I believe in -- there was a -- one of the group texts that kind of basically mentions that, both around that time when she told the class that she wasn't going to fly, but primarily when -- when she took her second checkride because she stated that there's a new requirement. All of a sudden that's no longer 100 hours of seaplane, it's 100 scoops and it's like this (inaudible).

Q So you're assuming that's what the issue was, but

we're not 100 percent correct, this --
A Correct. Correct.
Q Okay. And I would assume though the training department or whoever's, you know, I know you're limited in time, but I would assume that's part of the checkride, to get someone ready for a checkride is to look at the paperwork, make sure, you know, they're qualified correctly?
A Absolutely.
Q Okay. And when you checked hers, you don't remember anything on her qualification at the time for the (inaudible)?
A Never saw her resume nor her 64. I was never part of that.
Q Okay. So that's --
A Never saw any (inaudible).
Q -- that goes more in the training group. Okay. I just want to make sure. Okay. So I think I got it. Bottom line is tactical, you know, yeah, there's a little bit of rearing up earlier, but the SA was the main problem and it really snowballed and tactical, where it started affecting regressing and potentially affecting your safety of flight, basically, in your opinion?
A Yes.

Q Okay. Okay. All right. well, I think that covers it for me. I want to thank you on behalf of the team, the operations team and Tealeye for the long debrief, a lot of information, Jacob, and I know in some cases I wouldn't say we scratched the surface, but we could, we could have kept digging, you know, so we may have some follow-up either through email or if it gets big, we'll have another quick -- we won't go this long, but if you don't mind a quick session with you, but I think for now we got enough to kind of brew on and we're going to follow up with some, you know, we're going to keep pressing along in some interviews, but we definitely wanted to cover you. Sorry we couldn't do it in person, but we told you what we were up against when I talked to you, I guess, it was several weeks ago, but that being said, I know it's late where you're at. Is there anything my team didn't ask you that you think we should have or you think about it now you have a concern you want us to know about?

A Yeah, so we're here because [redacted] died. I do not think she should have died, which was a preventable mishap. We've been on this call for quite some time. There's been a lot of things that have been discussed. One thing that I don't think was

discussed is the fact that my concerns for training standards and safety wasn't just confined to my head and starting as early as 2022, I voiced my concerns to not just Jess, but to management, Brett L'Esperance, Brian Murphy, John Thomas, Steve Helinski.

There are multiple that -- that I communicated that there were -- there were gaps and there were -- there were things in the company's training and culture that were -- that were aligning such that as the company continued to grow, there was going to be not just a -- not just a mishap, but I specifically stated there was most likely going to be a fatality, and that was only -- the reason I felt that way was because of everything that I have -- I have -- all my experience being a career instructor, military aviator in this industry for -- for five years, six years now, and that something needed -- we needed -- needed to change. Jess knew this specifically.

As I mentioned before, his response was, we -- we've made it -- done it this far, never had any issues. Don't see it that way. Different -- different -- different answers or responses like that, so they were well aware of my -- of my concerns. I was not the only pilot. There was at least one other pilot that has -- when he quit at the beginning of the

2023 season, that during -- when he quit, notified Jess that if quote, we were going to continue down that path, we're going to get somebody killed.

So, however, during 2023 season, I was communicated by management that I was -- they were trying to -- they were trying to understand why I was quote, the only lone voice in the company in terms of training, standardization and safety. One of the reasons I -- and I still say that today is I was a relief pilot. I was a training committee member, so I saw a very specific and different perspective than all the other -- a lot of other pilots, pretty much all the other pilots at the company because I flew with a lot of the other pilots, I went to a lot of the different bases and I helped with training.

I've always wanted to -- to improve both myself and everybody around me in terms of training and safety. It was not about my way. It was about a professional way to adapt and improve as a company that has -- that it expanded very rapidly without really changing how they conducted business. It's kind of been mentioned throughout this conference call about who was responsible for what. There should be no discussion or no argument. Everything went through Jess Weaver. The recruiting, the hiring, the

training, the scheduling. Everything went through the Chief Pilot, Director of Operations.

He was the reason that she was brought to NAFA. He was the reason that she was cleared to solo. His name is on every single training document that either -- whether it's the typewriting exemption, the statement of confidence for part 137, his certificates of completion for training, everything, so with that being said, he -- and he -- and on top of that, he knew that she was struggling. He was very, very well aware. We had this discussion. I -- I voiced my concerns about not just her, but about the -- the culture in general.

That's why he -- that's why he released me, fired me, terminated me, whatever you want, how you want to call it right after training, and then four months later, Dauntless had a fatality. My concern is that if there's going to be responsibility, it is clear. Jess Weaver is responsible for her death, and it's very frustrating because she didn't have to die. It was preventable.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Well, we appreciate your comments and your opinions. We talked about the drafts, a training -- I think it's a syllabus or program, whatever it's called. Any other

documentation you're willing to share with us, you have my email. Please send it my way.

MR. PATRICK: Will do.

MR. NIXON: Okay. It's been a long day, so thank everyone for their time and, Jacob, appreciate your time and we'll be in touch if we have, like we said, if we have any follow-ups, and same thing goes your way, so thanks again and I thank everyone on the team, so everyone, have a good day. Thank you.

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

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: Accident Involving Air Tractor AT-802A, N10122, near Helena, Montana on July 10, 2024

ACCIDENT NO.: WPR24FA238

DATE: September 4, 2024

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 19, 2026

[redacted]

Lori Sherman
Official Transcriber
Heritage Reporting Corporation

[redacted]

Washington, D.C. 20036

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
*
FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR *
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 * Accident No.: WPR24FA238
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Interview of: JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot/Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Friday,
September 13, 2024

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL SAVAGE, Standardizations and Safety
U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
U.S. Forest Service

KEVIN MERRILL, Aviation Safety Officer
U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

DANIEL CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air
(On behalf of Mr. Weaver)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. NIXON: Okay. Good afternoon, everybody. We're here to do the chief pilot interview for Dauntless. We talked about the rules of the interview previously but just want to go over it one more time. You have an option to have a representative if you'd like there, Jesse, and did you choose to take that option?

MR. WEAVER: I did.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And who did you choose to be your representative?

MR. WEAVER: Dan Carroll.

MR. NIXON: Dan Carroll, and he's with us obviously. We talked about we're going to record the interview and the recording is used only for the transcript and the reason for that is we're going to ensure an accurate transcript and with that being said, when I finally turned all these into the service, I only want to do it one time so it will be at the end, at some point you'll get back a draft and you'll review that and make any corrections for this interview.

Sometimes the wording may not transfer correctly or whatever it may be, and so you'll have a chance to weigh in and, you know, make corrections, so with the transcript that is. So, and that goes for all of us here. Any questions on that and do we have your consent?

MR. WEAVER: Yes.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MR. WEAVER: No questions and yes, you have my consent.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. As you know this is an NTSB led investigation with support from other parties. You know our tasking once again is to try to determine the probable cause and along the way to that if we find safety mitigations that either require immediate attention or attention at some later point to hopefully prevent another accident like this, we'll make those.

And we're independent so we don't work for the FAA. We don't work for DOT. A lot of, you know, people sometimes don't understand that. We're a totally independent agency. So, we can, and part of that gives us the, we could, you know, for a thorough investigation we could, you know, we've got the 360 because we're independent, you know.

And no one's given us bias or anything of that point there. So, is there any questions about our role as NTSB?

MR. WEAVER: No, sir.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. So, with that let's go around the room. I'll introduce myself first and then we'll go around. And I'm Albert Nixon. I'm with the NTSB and I'm the group chairman of the operations group. Please?

MR. WEAVER: Jesse Weaver, chief pilot, director of operations, Dauntless Air.

MR. CARROLL: Dan Carroll, director of safety, Dauntless Air.

MS. MCBRIDE: Kevin Merrill, aviation safety officer, Forest Service, Region 2.

MS. WEINKAUF: Lea Weinkauf, Forest Service, air safety investigator.

MR. SAVAGE: Michael Savage, U.S. Forest Service, lead plane, chief pilot and any other titles working with safety.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. Welcome. We'll get started. Jesse, could you give us your full name and also spell it for the recording, please?

MR. WEAVER: It's Jesse Weaver, W-E-A-V-E-R.

INTERVIEW OF JESSE WEAVER

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Thank you. And Jesse, can you give us your, I know it's pretty thorough there but aviation background please?

A. I'm a, I have an ATP, probably over 15,000 hours of total flying time. And I'm probably getting close to 4,000 in a Fire Boss and probably well over 10,000 in Air Tractors of various types.

Q. Could you give us a little bit of some of the companies you've worked for besides Dauntless and positions?

A. Okay. So, I've been Dauntless or its predecessor before we changed, well Aero Spray and technically we still are Aero Spray, Inc. I've been with this company for 20 years. This is my 21st fire season.

My first one was spent with another company flying wheeled seats, Pierce Aviation out of Buckeye, Arizona. I'd still be there but the owner passed away after my first season and I got

offered a job here and here I am.
Q. Okay.
A. Before that I was flying Air Tractors doing ag work, mainly a lot of fertilizer work on pine trees and prior to that I was flying corporate airplanes and warbirds and prior to that it was ag planes.
Q. Ag planes, great. Okay. Great. And then as far as hours go could give, you mentioned your total time, what do you have a break down in both, you know, the 802 Air Tractors and also the Fire Boss.
A. I don't have that clearly.
Q. Roughly?
A. Roughly I'd say 3,500 plus, maybe close to 4,000 in the Fire Boss and then another 1,500 maybe to 1,000 somewhere in there in wheeled 802s and then of course a lot of experience in all the different other types of Air Tractors.
Q. Okay. You're currently the chief pilot with Dauntless and, you mentioned, you know, it merged with, earlier with the other company. Did, what other positions have you had with this company, or the previously?
A. I've been --
Q. -- or the previous company?
A. -- the chief pilot, DO for probably at least now for 19 years. I guess I didn't get the chief pilot title, and then that morphed into chief pilot, DO as we got bigger. The same job

though.
Q. Okay. About when did the DO title come in there?
A. Probably around 2017, somewhere in there.
Q. Okay.
A. I'm just thinking about the time we got bought out, just to a lot of -- the reason I have both titles is typically chief pilot, DO, those are part 135 positions. I was supervising the whole thing. We're not a 135 operator.
I kept the chief pilot title as because that's who the government would go to at the time for sure. They, the chief pilot was the guy in charge in a larger company the airline 135 not necessarily so.
Q. And DO is more. Okay. Got it. Okay. You mentioned your ATP, what other pilots, or training certificates do you have?
A. I have an Air Tractor instructor certificate. I have a CFI, multi engine, instrument.
Q. Any other ratings like seaplane?
A. Oh, a seaplane, yes, obviously seaplane.
Q. Okay. And any other schools or anything else, certificates for --
A. All and that, all the required NAFA schools. I'm trying to think of anything else pertinent. I can't think of anything else other than that. If I think of something I'll bring it up.
Q. Okay. Let's kind of divide these out. I know you have both titles now but let's start with the DO, your current

responsibilities and give us kind of a, I know they're in your SOP.

A. Yes, they're in our operations manual.

Q. Yes, but give me the --

A. But they've --

Q. Give me the in real life the top, you know, three to five responsibilities you have.

A. Well I supervise the day to day operations of the company. You know, we're in, when we're out in the field during the fire seasons I'm overseeing the day to day operation, you know. I'm getting calls from the government, dispatch, you know, dispatching airplanes to all the appropriate places, making sure they're crewed, scheduling of all the pilots.

I'm responsible for, I oversee the training. I coordinate with the, you know, maintenance and our director of ground operations on a daily basis to ensure that we're operating cohesively, keeping them informed of where they need to have their people.

Q. And then let's start when the chief pilot responsibility happens?

A. Like I said, that's all --

Q. I know they're kind of and it overlaps.

A. That's all intermingled.

Q. The chief pilot has a little bit more on the, I'm assuming the pilot side of it, but what else do you have besides that?

A. Yes. I'm, as chief pilot, I'm responsible for mentoring the pilots. Ultimately, you know, keeping pilot records although I have an assistant chief pilot that is responsible for that. I oversee that, you know. I'm making sure that goes correctly. But I take the role of, you know, trying to make sure that the right people are in the right places and try to, you know, try to make this as safe as possible.

Q. Are you the main person for hiring or do you have someone else that looks at that?

A. I am, I am the main person. I am the ultimate authority on hiring pilots. I stay out of the mechanic driver side of it.

Q. Okay. So, it's you --

A. But I'm not --

Q. -- that hires the pilots.

A. I hire the pilots but what I do try to do is make it a collective effort. I try to have new candidates meet as many of the pilot core as possible.

For example I hired one this year, had him come to Lafayette for an interview, invited other pilots to come, paid their way to come and be there to hang out with this individual for a couple of days and vetting this as good as we can.

In the past that we've always invited potential candidates to come to our company training. We invite them down to our, you know, to our initial training to, they can, we usually don't fly with them at that point but we let them hang out to come see the

airplane, see if it's something they want to do. We invite them to our end of season events so they can, you know, in a social setting, hangout with as many people as possible and our group can get a good feel as to whether or not this individual is going to fit in or not.

So, we try to the best we can to, I try the best I can not to be the sole person making the decision. I like, I take recommendations from everybody.

Q. Okay. And any other, as the chief pilot again, any other responsibilities like your top five in that you.

A. I mean other than all the stuff I just said off the top of my head, no. I mean I'm certainly something, there's certainly a lot of stuff I'm responsible for an take care of every day.

Q. Okay. And then like your SOP, who authors that? Is that the DO, do you use the DO or is that come from chief pilot or is that the whole company?

A. That was, that was a -- SOPs were written by, originally written by a group of us. Our former director of training had a big input in it. He actually penned the most of it. But it was a, it was a group effort to actually reflect how we operate in the field.

Q. Okay. And you mentioned, since you mentioned your former director of training, I know that position's no longer presence or at least it's not filled. When did you lose that position?

A. When was that? Was it 2019, 2020? They're all starting to

run together for me. That individual left because he had a young baby and wanted a better schedule, benefits that we couldn't offer, a job closer to home and --

Q. You know, okay, so for personal reasons obviously. Did you ever, is there talk of ever refilling that or who's picked up those duties?

A. No, we elected to change that from a director of training to a training committee. The company was getting bigger and the role, the training responsibilities, had certainly outgrown the ability for one person to take care of all of it.

Q. Okay. Does your training committee, you know, help me out here from ground level, who's the personnel in that, member of that?

A. This year it was it was Dan Carroll who's sitting, even though he was part-time with us or more of a consultant, he was on our training committee. Our assistant director of operations, John Thomas, our assistant chief pilot, chief flight instructor, Steve Helinski, Jacob Patrick was on there and myself.

Q. Okay. And then I'm assuming you led the --

A. I was chair of that committee, yes.

Q. And as far as, how long has that been in operation now? You said since 2019 approximately?

A. Yes, I think so. I can't remember the exact date.

Q. How often does that training committee meet?

A. We try to, during the, it's different throughout the year.

During the summer it's once a month give or take. I mean we're supposed to have a meeting this week and we have so much other stuff going on we didn't. Once the season's over we start meeting, having calls once a month and that quickly, as we get closer, that quickly goes down to once every two weeks and then as we closer to annual company training, that's down to at least once a week if not more. So, it varies on the workload that we're, what we're trying to accomplish.

Q. Obviously your seasons, summertime is a busy season?

A. Right.

Q. And then your training people up to prior to that, so that's leading up to your busy season.

A. Correct.

Q. But when that meets, like when there's new people in initial training I should say does that committee, is that when they meet you said weekly pretty much?

A. Now say that again?

Q. When you have initial trainees, does that committee meet like weekly or more often?

A. By that time we're starting to meet, by that time we probably have already been meeting weekly just because of the, all the logistics involved with getting the whole company at company training, setting an agenda, you know, inviting guest speakers, getting, you know, hotel rooms lined up.

Q. So, it's always done in person then for the most part, the

meetings?
A. No, no, no. They're done via conference calls, them call type things.
Q. Okay.
A. We'll meet up, we start meeting on a regular basis probably in the December, early December time frame. It starts to get pretty regular.
Q. Okay. Does, you mentioned the members what, I mean I know, you know, I know it varies a little bit during the year but generally speaking what's some of the bigger topics you discuss?
A. It's making sure we're complying with all the government required, requirements of us at training. There's a whole list of them in our contract, so making sure that every presentation we're putting on it covers those things and we're also discussing, you know, the flight schedule and how many people, how many new people, what, how many airplanes we're going to have, just on and on.

I mean it's a, it's a, getting to be almost a two week deal now so it's a, there's a, there's a lot of moving pieces involved in putting that all together.
Q. Is it like when you have initial trainees, is there discussion of actual, each trainee?
A. Not so much with the, with the training committee. That's more handled with the flight instructors that do initial training.
Q. Okay. So, the committee's a little bit bigger picture than

that?
A. Bigger picture than that.
Q. And the general training --
A. That, yes.
Q. I see because the specifics, it's more of the people actually getting the, actually doing it.
A. Right.
Q. Okay. And then does the training committee, do they have any type of documentation of what they covered during that meeting, guest speaker, whoever it may be?
A. We have kept notes. I mean I've had notes on what we've talked about, what we've assigned people to do, what people said they were going to do but it's all, and everybody takes notes but it's all, it's all right here, this kind of stuff.
Q. Okay. Since let's say July, how many meetings have you had, the training that --
A. One.
Q. Okay. Any chance I could, you could share your notes with me?
A. Let me see if I -- and it might not have been July. It might have been early. It could have been July. Let me, let me see what. I have one here on 2/5, February 5th, that would have been, if I can go to, find one past that post training debrief here.
I'm not finding the one, the last one I did. And maybe I didn't write anything down. But I'm sure I did wrote something at

least acknowledge I had a meeting. Pretty sure we were in Alaska and had it.

Q. Okay. Well I get it from you later. If you find it let me know the date. If not, I think the last one was what, February 15th, you said something like that?

A. Yes.

Q. Give you your last.

A. Or before that, yes, I have, yes. Okay.

Q. If you can't find one later give me what you have on that one then.

A. Okay.

Q. And thought that, yes, I don't need that after this brief, in the next few weeks.

A. Okay. Just curious where I put it.

Q. Okay. No worries. So, we covered the responsibilities. Who'd you report to there?

A. I report to the CEO.

Q. Okay. And speaking of the CEO, does he have any interplay in the training committee at all?

A. Not much other than if he wants to, he might provide his input on things that may be a concern of his that he thinks we might want to cover. You know he's always focusing safety and but he's not, keep in mind he's not a pilot so he's not a truck driver, he's not, so he relies on us to put it all together.

But he does have, he does have input as to, you know, where

he'd like to see, you know, the emphasis, you know, going which is usually just be careful. He'll, he provides a lot of input as to who our guest speakers are going to be, make, he wants to make sure it's, you know, they're expensive some times. He want's to make sure it's of value.

Q. But he's not, he's not a member technically of the committee.

A. No.

Q. He just gives input and then --

A. Correct.

Q. -- whatever it maybe and then as far as, let's say you have a guest speaker, does he actually listen in to the guest speaker or does he attend?

A. Oh yes, he attends, he attends most of it. He does, he'll attend the ground school. He'll be there for the ground school for the whole time. He won't be there though, he's never there for the whole, whatever, some of us are there for over two weeks.

He'll come for some of the flying, watch, observe some of it. We've actually had him, I've had him in the backseat when we're doing our scenario based training so he could get an idea of what we're doing.

Q. Okay. How often do you have, you know, as a DO and chief pilot, how often do you have discussion with the CEO?

A. At least once a week.

Q. Okay. How often do you meet in person during the year?

A. Once a month maybe, it varies.

Q. Okay.
A. He's pretty good about making base tours a couple times a year, a season and I see him probably more in the off season just because we do marketing, and stuff, and schools and trainings and just endless number of in sense of development stuff.
Q. Before we get more into company specifics, you know, you've been in the firefighting community, you know, obviously a long time and Fire Boss as well, is there any comments you want to make for our awareness just to make sure we're aware of of any of that, you know, flying the airplane or the firefighting community in general before we get into the specifics?
A. Not that I can think of off hand. You know, I can answer any questions.
Q. No, no. Like I just said at the time do you want to point out something, you know, like the airplane's difficult, or, whatever it may be.
A. Yes. I won't call it difficult. Well for me it's not. I've been doing it for long but it's got its challenges. The industry, the fire, when I, when I first flew a Fire Boss in the U.S. there was one in the whole country. I was the first guy to get carded in it.
Q. No kidding, well.
A. And now there's -- shoot, we started the season with 22 of them just ourselves plus the other vendors. So, there's well over 30 plus airplanes out there and it's supposed to have been, even

though it's been since 2007, it's been a, it's been a, it's been a well accepted platform and but it's also had a lot of growth. So, and they do, I guess the platform, too.

As far as we move a lot of water, let's put it that way. And a lot of loads compared to if you want to compare us to a wheeled seat in a season. A Fire Boss can go out there and drop as many loads in one day as the wheeled seat my drop in a whole season.

Q. Okay. You kind of mentioned earlier so let's cover it, your fleet size and I believe I heard before that you're the largest operator of the Fire Boss, correct, in the country?

A. We're definitely the larges in the country and more than likely the largest in the world.

Q. Okay. And go into your fleet size and particulars like how many two seaters and all that stuff.

A. We own one two seater and we lease another one from Wipaire. We've been leasing that particular airplane for probably as least ten years, every, you know, lease it in the summer and then we also have a separate.

We used to, before we bought our own we would lease it for our initial training and then now we also lease it for our annual company training so that we have access to two seaters, so we can do more evaluations and, you know, we try to, try our best, even the veterans, we try to get them, it's not written in stone but I do my best to make sure that everybody is observed at least every other year, you know, in a two seater.

Q. Okay. And is all your fleet, you know, the Fire Boss, or do you have different kinds of airplanes?
A. That's all we have.
Q. That's all you have. Okay.
A. Other than the chase planes which --
Q. Chase planes. Right. And then your pilots, you know, they have all different terms whether it's called part-time, full-time or in your case I think you call them, you know, like relief?
A. Yes.
Q. But give us a break down of your pilot course, please?
A. I have a, a full-time pilot here is somebody that commits to the season from the basically March 1 or from the end of our annual, after annual company trainings over, all the way to September 31st or September 30th. Those are full-time pilots.

We offer those pilots a guarantee depending on their experience and time with the company, it starts out their first, you know, as of now it starts out they've been with us two years, it's $100,000 whether they fly or not or, and then it goes up to a senior.

A senior guy here is going to get, be guaranteed $160,000. And that's just so if we have a bust season, there's no work for us, you know, nobody flies, like this season has been somewhat slow. If they, they know that they are not going to sit there and not make any money. They're going to get something.
Q. I see.

A. I have part-timers that to varying degrees some of them will come and give two months and then they go on to other things or that's all they want to do. I have other part-timers that for lack of a better term they keep their card current. They do enough training to keep their card and may or may not use them.
Q. They could be a stand-by type situation.
A. Yes, and if I do put one of those people in, you know, they usually get some additional, they get to do some additional training before they go out in the field. So, and I have two right now that are, that work for us in the early part of the season doing relief, whatnot, both of them went off to spray in July and part of August and then now they're available again.
Q. I see. So, if you're a full-time pilot, you're guaranteed? It doesn't matter how much you fly or a --
A. Correct. You have --
(Crosstalk)
Q. -- (indiscernible) pilot?
(Crosstalk)
A. You have guarantees.
Q. It's only the part-time that probably get paid by the hour?
A. Part-timers don't have a guarantee.
Q. They're (indiscernible) --
(Crosstalk)
A. You know if they -- yes.
Q. Okay. And then what's the breakdown roughly? What's the

total number and then the breakdown between the full-time and the others?

A. I think I have 24 full-time pilots on the roster, and as of right now there's three part-timers, maybe.

Q. Oh, because --

A. Very active.

Q. -- it's really mostly full-time?

A. It's mostly full-timers.

Q. Okay. Okay. And then what about attrition in your line pilots, do you have much?

A. Not a whole lot.

Q. The last five years about how many?

A. Not a whole lot but more than I like, but no, not a whole lot. The core group of veterans has been here a long time and I have, I have lost some to, some of them have stayed in the industry and flying heavy tankers now. But as a whole it's not terrible, I guess.

Q. Now what's, give me a rough percentage, is it five percent, one percent? You know, over the last five years, how much is it?

A. It's probably more like ten percent --

Q. Ten percent, roughly?

A. -- which is I would, I think, if I'm guessing that's a lot lower than the industry average I would say in the aviation industry doing government contracting or firefighting. I'd be willing to be a lot of companies are closer to 25 percent. So,

and I'm guessing these, I'm guessing at those.
Q. Yes. But so in other words it hasn't been a major factor though nevertheless?
A. Not too bad, no.
Q. And you're saying ten percent, let's just make sure from your starting point and I know you've grown and everything but you're talking about ten percent overall pilots in the past five years, right, roughly is what you're saying?
A. Yes. Maybe --
Q. Not ten percent a year, you're talking about ten percent of the total?
A. Right. Well it could be ten percent a year.
Q. Ten percent a year?
A. Yes. I usually lose somebody every year to retirement or, you know, if I have 20 pilots it's usually no more than two.
Q. Okay. All right. And then as far as you mentioned you have an assistant chief pilot or a DO as well, and do the same thing.
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Who else do you have working for you? I mean technically all the pilots for you but I mean --
A. All the pilots, yes.
Q. -- management-wise, who do you have working for you?
A. Those two and then I, of course I have a, there's a secretary in the office that's dedicated to pilot needs, I guess. There's one that dedicates herself to all the DOT stuff and the driving,

the truck, we're running a trucking company behind the scenes, so there's one that does that. There's one that helps with all the pilot issues.

Q. This ground training manager is that under your umbrella --

A. Ground training manager?

Q. -- as the DO? You said someone on the ground and that was making --

A. Oh no, no, no. Okay. Our assistant, our assistant director of operations, John Thomas at, for our annual training he is responsible, his responsibility is to organize the academic part of annual company training which is three, four days of class work, guest speakers.

Q. Yes.

A. The schedule of all when that happens.

Q. Okay. So, he works for you that when he does that stuff?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. And then do you have like the SMS manager under your umbrella as well?

A. He's not, no, he falls under the CEO's umbrella.

Q. Okay.

A. And the CEO, yes, more so. That's not, no, and that's intentional so that I'm not, you know, they're, SMS safety manager does not report to me.

Q. Great. Okay. And then what about, do you guys do your, you know, kind of explain to us in a ground level, I know it may be

situational but obviously you had your facility here and this is one of your main base. Where are you guys located across the U.S. or is it situational where you get your contract?

A. It's situational. I mean we have three maintenance facilities, one in South Saint Paul, Minnesota, right next door to Wipaire, which is handy, one in Cleburne, Texas that's our biggest facility I guess as far as hangars space and one right here in Coeur d'Alene. That's where all of our heavy maintenance, winter maintenance, inspections.

Q. So, do you all the, everything in house? All the --

A. Everything's done in house.

Q. -- things, even heavy maintenance?

A. I mean we contract a few things out here and there but for the most part it's --

Q. It's all in --

A. It's all in house. As far as our contracts go, we've got, you know, where the airplanes may be based, they could be South Carolina, Ontario, Minnesota, Michigan, Texas, Alaska, of course here in Idaho and Washington State. Those are --

Q. Is there any, does it -- I kind of browsed through the contract but is it all states or is limited to certain states, your contract, where you could go?

A. No, we can go, we can go anywhere.

Q. Anywhere? Okay.

A. Yes.

Q. I just double check. Okay. And then besides what we already mentioned so those are the main people that work for you besides the line pilots?
A. Correct.
Q. Anybody else that we missed?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Let's go into, you know, obviously you mentioned, you have oversight training, you're on the committee and all that good stuff, what about line pilots that have already been checked out, you know, they've been flying the line for like, for instance we have the guy earlier, you know, he's been here about a little less than a year. What kind of oversight do you have of your line pilots as a chief pilot?
A. I try to, I try to talk to each and every one of them at least once a week and --
Q. Now is this in-person or -
A. No, this, well it's in person if I can. But more, keep in mind, I'm actually, I'm also holding the line flying an airplane as is our assistant DO, as is our assistant chief pilot.
Q. So, all your, all your instructors are on the line too?
A. All our instructors are on the line. All of our, all of management even on the ground operations side, all of the key players, all the managers hold the line and we actually have that written in our manuals because we, it's been a very successful formula for us, the company's managed from the field and you're

out there in the field, you see what's going on instead of trying to sit in an office somewhere, you know, 100 miles away and trying to guess what's happen. You're seeing it.

Q. So, you're, just by your experience flying the line that's where you're getting your oversight?

A. Yes, yes.

Q. Feedback I should say.

A. I'm, yes, I'm part of the squirrel network.

Q. Okay.

A. So, I --

Q. Okay. And then, you know, you have your three bases you mentioned, you know, in Texas and but how often do you go around -- now that you're here in Coeur d'Alene right now, how often do you make it to the other two places?

A. Well it depends on the time of year. You know this one, of course this is an active base where we do flying from so I get opportunities in my schedule to take a break, or, you know, I get days off and I'll usually add some more of that and I'll try to do my best to come to where we have airplanes working and make personal visits with pilots as many times as I can.

Q. When's the last time you were in Texas, was it Cleburne, I think?

A. Cleburne. Now I haven't, I haven't actually been in Cleburne since I picked my airplane up there to come out this spring, but in, nobody's been there. Nobody's been there, that, we moved, you

know, the, once the season started, the airplanes moved away. There's been nobody there.

Q. Okay. So, it's kind of seasonal?

A. Yes. And now if we start working a lot in Texas that base will ramp up and we'll have maintenance personnel there, or more of them.

Q. Okay. And then, I'm sorry, I missed your other, your other bases besides here?

A. South Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Q. Okay. Minnesota. Have you been up there recently?

A. Not since this spring.

Q. The spring, okay.

A. When we had airplanes working there and if I, and I go there occasionally because Wipaire is there and that's where we get our float, that's where they, that's who builds the float conversion for the airplanes.

Q. Okay. And when you fly the line do you fly lead all the time or is it, do you take any position you can get?

A. I can take any position I get but I typically when I'm in the flight I'm usually leading.

Q. Lead?

A. And there, and I don't doing it the other way but the particular group I fly with they're all, they're all very experienced and they all, they prefer it when I lead and we've actually had Air Attack that when they hear me in a flight they've

asked, they're like, hey we want to hear your voice.
Q. I see.
A. You know, and but I, no, I can. Now the exceptions to that are when we join a circuit where there's other airplanes working and we join that, I'll join right in there wherever I happen to fall. You know, it could be number 7.
Q. Okay. Is there any other oversight or inspection programs you have as chief pilot and DO, that we haven't mentioned or don't know about? Like do you do anything else? Like do you go around and, you know, besides you're fine, you know, the line to get feedback, anything else you do to get oversight or feedback?
A. No. I can't think of right now, no. You know, I do have my deputies doing the same thing, you know, and making, you know, having them make regular calls to the pilot core to see if they get a different feel for what's going on then I do because I've been told sometimes, I don't necessarily get the whole truth.

So, I try to make sure that that's mitigated by other folks and then I have my relief pilots going around different bases and they're a, they're a, two of them in particular are very talented and, hell they're going to be the future of this company so they, they're a good source of information.
Q. So, they give you informal feedback?
A. Yes, yes.
Q. To their whim but they do use them, I guess.
A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Okay. Let's see here, the company, you kind of highlighted earlier you had, you know, a recent significant growth but kind of highlight the significant changes and/or growth the last five years with the company?
A. Well even before we acquired all of Air Spray's airplanes which was this year, that was five additional planes, we were typically adding one to two a year for the last, geez, ten years.
Q. For growth then, okay. So, when you first started, just give us a rough idea, how any airplanes did the company have then?
A. When I first started with the company, they only had wheeled seats. They had two of them.
Q. Two of them?
A. Went down to one and we came back to what we have today.
Q. Okay. So, quite a bit of change in other words?
A. Yes. It's --
Q. And, you know, from previous, you know, interviews we've learned that and I believe correct me if I'm wrong, but this recent initial class was the biggest on record for your company?
A. No.
Q. It wasn't?
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. It was one of the bigger ones. It definitely not the biggest.
Q. So, what was the biggest?

A. The biggest one was probably seven in the initial class but that particular for the instructors anyway we also brought in ten students from Northern Territories, Canadian pilots that were flying our, flying the Fire Boss and we did a pretty elaborate recurrent training for ten of them, and we also trained Aero Spray's pilots that year because they were leasing Wipaire's two seater. It was out of service.

They were going to go back to old school, like I learned, you know, the instructor's sitting in a boat because that was their only option and I went to my CEO and said, we can't let them do that. Accidents, they will have an accident. It will be bad for the industry. I got him to agree to, you know, to train those guys. So, we trained them.

Intermingled them right within our training, you know, they trained side-by-side with our guys.

Q. Okay. Go into a little more detail of why the guy in the boat with the radio is dangerous? Is it just --

A. Well it's obvious, I mean there is, he can't see what's going on in the cockpit. He doesn't know your actual skill level in the airplane. There's just a ton of things. I mean I got through it as did quite a few others because there no other options.

But I taught myself some, obviously learned to scoop water, get a load of water in the airplane safely, but I taught myself a lot of bad habits that I kept for a long time, you know, we can mitigate that right away in training in a two seater.

Q. Okay. I mean I know you can't predict the future but is there, is the trend probably more to growth, your company? Is there anything big?
A. I don't see, I don't think so. I think we're, I mean the company may grow. Who knows? I can't, you know, I didn't expect to have these five air sprayer planes. It could grow if the demand is there. But we don't have any orders for any new airplanes and you've got --
Q. Okay. That was my next question.
A. Yes. No.
Q. Nothing new coming in though now, right?
A. Nothing new. We want to sit right where we are for a while. I do, so, you know if we get opportunities overseas we may. I'm not going to say we're not going to grow but I am --
Q. Okay. But as far as --
A. I'm opposed to, I'll opposed to it.
Q. At your level, yes, at your level you're content. Right. Okay. Got it. The SOP the company has I went through it, you know, it had formation stuff in there, it had a lot of different things. But I liked some of the things, but the only thing that was drafted I believe was 2019, right, no revisions, is that correct?
A. That's correct. We have reviewed it multiple times since then, elected not to update it just because it fit what we were doing. It was a reasonable expectation to have the whole pilot

core follow it and not have an elaborate, ten, you know, a book this thick that was not going to be written, you know, read or adhered to.

There are some things in there that need to change and the last review kind of caught that some of the government documents that we refer to have, are no longer in existence, you know, that our bible basically, for example it used to be called the ISOG or the seat operations guide. I think it refers to that.

That guide is no longer in publication. We have two more publications, one is aerial supervision guide, they call it PMS-505. And the water scooper standards which is PMS-518. So, we need to change our SOPs to reference those documents and that's ultimately at the end of the day that's the standard we have to operate to is what's in those two documents.

Q. Okay. Got it. We have may have some input into that later too as we, the operations group talking about it together.

A. Okay.

Q. But okay. And then I think I covered this, you know, besides the three places you mentioned around the country everything else is situation where you have --

A. Yes.

Q. -- people go temporarily. Okay.

A. We have exclusive use contracts that pretty much, you know, we've had for a long time that we, you know, Fairbanks, Alaska is one of them, Minnesota's one.

Q. I see.
A. We go to those places every year.
Q. Okay. So, you know, you're part of it even though, you know, like we talked about the SS manager and I guess, your direct, safety guy kind of which makes sense. I worked, you know, for the CEO.

But that being said your, you know, as the line guy and more into the operations you're definitely intimately involved with that person, even though they report the CEO. But tell us a little bit about the safety culture in the company here?
A. Well I think, you know, we do our best to have a safety culture. You know, we don't encourage anybody to do anything that they're not comfortable with. I would think you could interview just about anybody in the company and they would tell you that that we, you know, safety first, provide for safety, then, you know, make sure you're safe and then go do your mission.
Q. Anything you want to mention? We kind of, I know we've been to very few of these with SMS, but anything you want to mention? Are you part of that committee with SMS?
A. No. They safety and compliance committee?
Q. Yes.
A. No. And I am, I don't want to have any influence on that committee. Of course I want them to have influence on us as more so than the other way.
Q. Okay. Do you get regular feedback from the SMS?

A. Yes, yes.
Q. Reports and --
A. Yes.
Q. -- and the meetings?
A. Yes, yes. I got one today I think for the last minutes of their meeting.
Q. Okay.
A. I haven't read it yet but --
Q. Okay.
A. You know the safety and compliance committee is the CEO is always on it, director of safety, the SMS manager is always on it and then other people flow through it on two year assignments. So, it's never the same. It's always, there's always new blood coming into it.
Q. Okay. And then what about, you know, is there, you know, I know you've got SMS, and you supposedly report non-SMS and all that stuff, but besides me calling you, is there any other type of anonymous, let's say I had an issue with another pilot but I'm kind of scared to identify myself?
A. They can do that on the SMS.
Q. You can do that on the SMS?
A. I won't even see it. It'll, if it's got the --
Q. In a small company sometimes --
A. Yes, well --
Q. -- they could, you know, I don't know what they'd ask for but

sometimes they could track it down, even by the system.
A. The whole industry is like that, you know, on the SAFECOM system. You know, my first season I flew, they go Tanker XXX, so I flew Tanker XXX all season. You know, and everybody knows, well the incident happened in, you know, North of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.
Q. Yes, yes. It's a small, there --
A. Well who's there? Yes, so that could happen but something that's truly elevated to an anonymous, the CEO and the safety manager are going to be the only ones that have access to that.
Q. Okay. And when it goes to the safety culture you mentioned, you know, the CEO's involved with SMS, but he's also involved with your training committee and all that stuff. Not directly but --
A. Right.
Q. -- you know through, I guess my question is, is that complementing your safety culture, your CEO or is it the other way around?
A. Is he complementing us?
Q. Yes.
A. Yes. I think so. He's --
Q. The safety culture?
A. He's full on board, you know.
Q. Okay. So, if I'm a young pilot and I don't like something I forward, you're not going to --
A. You go, and he --
Q. You're not going to chastise me or he's not going to --

A. No. And he's got --
Q. -- call me up?
A. And all the pilots have my full permission to go directly to him. He even asked when he first took over as CEO what's the protocol here? Can I talked to these guys? Is it acceptable? And I was like, absolutely.
He said, well I don't want that to be a regular practice. I said, well it doesn't have to be but I want you to know it's encouraged. If they have an issue, if they have an issue with me, they can go straight to you.
Q. Okay. And I know you've grown recently so, you know, it's, you're bigger now then you were but in the last five years have you had any disciplinary type action taken on any of your pilots you had to take?
A. Yes.
Q. I don't need to know about it. I'm just saying --
A. Yes. Yes.
Q. You've had some where you had to document it in the --
A. I've had to cut some loose, yes.
Q. Cut some, the worst-case would be that obviously.
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Okay. So, you have had some incidents where your involved as chief pilot, DO and had to make some tough decisions?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. And then when you make those decisions is that something you

make and then run it through the CEO or is he involved in that decision making?

A. I usually let him know. Well it could be both. I mean there's been a particular instance where he, instances where he was concerned about the actions of somebody and recommended be terminated and then vice versa. You know if I've got an issue that he's not aware of, then I bring it to him. I usually before I terminate anybody, he's in the loop.

Q. Okay. And obviously it's not too much because it goes back to your attrition figure.

A. Yes. It's not a lot.

Q. Yes, okay, but it does happen and it has happened. Okay. What about since you've been with the company, I know you've been here a long time but let's go back to last five years, this recent history. Have you had any other NTSB incidents or accidents in your last five years that you're aware?

A. No, none that, no.

Q. Okay.

A. We've had, well let me take that back. We have had, yes. Back up. Yes. We had an airplane wreck in Alaska that NTSB was technically in charge of. They did not show up. Nobody was hurt. Aircraft had an asymmetric scoop issue on a narrow body of water, ended up taking, and that's a whole other story but taking a hard right turn into the, onto the shoreline.

I was involved in the investigation of it as a subject matter

expert but it, the NTSB never showed up. I never talked to anybody NTSB. It was all handled through the BLM and --

Q. OAS?

A. -- OAS.

Q. Okay. All right.

A. Yes.

Q. You know, like, if I understand, you're right, we're going to kind of run into training now unless you have anything to add to your safety or company in general?

A. Not at this time.

Q. Okay. Management type stuff. Kind of walk us through a ground level, you know, we had a few interviews, we got a working understanding but, someone's that's not familiar with your operation, runs through a ground, a new pilot training, you know, they got an initial and they go --

A. Brand new --

Q. -- to company training. Kind of run us through that real quick, please?

A. Okay. Once we've hired somebody or identified them as a potential candidate and we agree to, you know, to train them, our initial training usually starts in -- well it depends on the size of the class.

More often than not if there's more than three, three or more we'll take the, we'll take airplanes down to Leesburg, Florida and do it there. Wipaire has a hanger there that they open us up to.

The weather is usually good in the wintertime, you know, January, February time frame and there's water everywhere. Whatever runway you take up on, gear up and you are in your training environment. You're not wasting time. So, we get a lot of value there.

So, go to Leesburg, Florida, typically starts with a backseat ride in the two-seater with myself, you know, to just show people what the airplane is capable of and that it can be flown -- mastering scooping water in that airplane and dropping it can be done and this is, you know, this is what you can achieve.

It's possible because if you throw somebody in that first flight, you know, put them in the airplane without doing that they just, they don't see the end goal. So, having said that that's where it starts. And then we start through our syllabus which you've seen of, there's like ten lessons on there that we just try to build up to being read to go scoop water safely.

It has to do, you know, it first starts off with just air work, runway landings, builds up to just landing on the water, step taxi, landing on the water stopping, taking off from the water, we do ramping and the we get into the scooping water and just, and just goes from there.

Q. You know, you've seen from the most air to be done with the line pilots, you know, that they all agreed, or appears to be agreed that they're saying the most difficult task of the flying is the scooping. Is that, would you agree with that?

A. Having not done it before and learning to do it and yes,

that's the, that's something that's totally, totally new. I mean it's, we're not doing regular seaplane stuff, it's nothing they saw anywhere else, it's not -- the ones that came from the fire environment that, it's nothing they've seen so yes, it would be consider the most difficult thing and it takes time.

You know, it's fairly easy to get somebody to scoop water safely. It takes a lot longer to get them to really master it so because every, you know, through the course of our training, you know, we see a lot. We see a lot of different types of water conditions. But they haven't seen everything.

Q. And then I don't need the details necessarily but I think it was in an earlier interview we found out that, you know, someone else was treated in training, this is initial training not --

A. Oh we've washed out several over the years.

Q. And it's for flying deficiencies, not -- I believe. Is there any, were most of those flying deficiencies or other?

A. No, they'd be just flying deficiencies just not --

Q. Any trend item there in initial training? Just curious, is all, is it scooping or is it tactical or is formation, or is it --

A. It's --

Q. -- just basic?

A. It's just usually not even -- not being able to master the scoop or show good decision making.

Q. Okay. So, it's usually between those two?

A. Yes, it's usually --

Q. It's usually an item?
A. It's usually not, can't handle the airplane, can't scoop and yes.
Q. Okay. And so we kind of covered the initial part and so you get checked out. I can't remember the minimum scoops but you're qualified to get your check ride, right, with the, at that point?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. You do a mock check in-house?
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Is that usually the -- now is a mock check additional and those ten flights or is it part that's using the ten flights?
A. It could happen either way. It's changed over the years. Lately, the last couple years or so we've doing it at annual company training after they've gone through that portion and then we do the mock check ride at the end because that's when they're given check rides. In previous years up until maybe the last two or three, OAS would show up in Florida and card new pilots right there.
Q. Right after the initial?
A. Right after initial.
Q. I see. But in this last class they do initial and then the company training, then they did mock check then, and then --
A. Correct.
Q. -- the OAS check then, correct? Because that was it.
A. Correct.

Q. Okay. And then so I get, you know, basic flying skills of the Fire Boss now. Now I've got my ten flights. It's wherever it took me. It maybe took me to Leavenworth gates maybe. But now I get in the company training. What additional do you do in the company training?
A. That's when we introduce them to scenario based training. We actually have ground firefighters on the ground, Texas Forest Service, they bring their engines and their dozers and they actually, our new students actually get to, well everybody --
Q. So, it's a mock fire but it's --
A. Mock fire.
Q. I see. You're simulating this.
A. We also bring in air --
Q. Tactical.
A. -- attacks. Put our King Air up in there air.
Q. Okay. So, it's --
A. They're riding around and they're also there. So, it's a, it's as realistic a simulation as we can do in a training environment.
Q. So, you actually do scoop and do drops just like in a real fire?
A. We scoops and drops just like it's a real fire. We've got smoke bombs on the ground trying, you know, without lighting a real fire it's as about as close as we can make it.
Q. I see. And, you know, since we talked to, we kind of talked

about it depth about this scooping being difficult. You know, it's a specialized task obviously for your operations. So, give a non, even in kind of like ground level, and someone is not even a pilot. Give us kind of a feel why it's so difficult.

A. Well imagine you're in an airplane that weighs 8,000 pounds plus the fuel in it, whatever it is, another 2,000 pounds say. And you pick up 6,000 pounds of water in 15 seconds or 14. You know so that's a lot of, there's a lot of weight shift in the airplane.

You know, it's getting heavier just going across the water. If that water, even though there's baffle in the hopper you've, if that water starts to slosh even a little bit that affects --

Q. Porpoising.

A. -- the airplane. As what the hardest thing for people to do there and what makes it so difficult is by the time they feel that porpoise or they feel that motion say the nose is coming down, they want to pull back but by the time they feel it it's already moving the other way.

Q. Yes, you've getting PIO that's --

A. And if they get 180 degrees out of synch with it, and that's the, and if I'll back up. When I learned to fly the airplane that porpoising we were told was just indicative of the airframe. Nobody knew what was causing it.

The engineers would speculate that the floats needed to be ten inches forward or ten inches further back or, you know, ten

inches further forward and that we were just taught to check back, hold it, let it porpoise. And that was, and you'll see a lot of old videos of Fire Bosses doing exactly that.

I remember the day I was actually teaching in the airplane when I figure out what it actually was and then once we knew what was causing it it was easy to fix. So, that's the hardest thing is, and then of course the water conditions can, you know, knowing how to, knowing the attitude that you want the aircraft in for any given, any given sea state.

Q. Well I mean I know it's situational because it depends on, you know, everything winds, load, everything. But how much does your nose go down when you start taking it? I mean could you give us a --

A. No. That -- well --

Q. It should go down.

A. Most scoops, most scoops it doesn't go down really at all. I mean it'll have a, if you did nothing you would have a tendency, probes come out, a lot of drag pushing those down.

Q. So, if you're holding the aft pressure, it should --

A. You check that back and you --

Q. Yes. It shouldn't really --

A. -- keep it from doing that.

Q. -- do that.

A. Yes.

Q. Kind of cushion.

A. And if you've got wind and waves it touch down and not go back at all.

Q. Okay. And then, you know, specifically I know scoops, there's a lot of things going on but, you know, the pacing, there's check lists, all this stuff. When you say people have trouble with it, is it actually the flying skills on the water or it is -- help me out here with the UCC with the initial student. You claim that could be --

A. Usually the initial student that we select doesn't have much trouble handling the airplane. It's all learning the water.

Q. The water. When you say learning the water can you be a little more specific?

A. Learning how to, learning how to of course tame that porpoise and learning how different water conditions affect the aircraft, you know, glassy water versus chopped up sea state of two foot seas.

Q. Enlighten us on that please? So, like what, let's go with glassy water.

A. Glassy water is worst-case scenario for a seaplane. That's probably the most dangerous part of seaplane flying is landing on glassy water for multiple reasons. It creates a suction on the aircraft. It holds it to the, holds it to the water. That creates drag.

It, you know, you have a hard time telling, judging your height above the water when you're coming into land. So, you do

not want to be nose, you know, if you're too far nose down and you touch water on glassy water, you'd flip over. So, there's that risk.

That almost would never happen in a chopped up sea state. One, you can tell how high above it you are and then two, even if you did land nose low in those conditions it's not going to grab you ask hard.

Q. Okay. Is that a, that let's say I'm a new pilot and you're an experienced guy. You're probably pressed, but would you, would you have any harm if I say hey, it looks too, you know, the water looks too calm to me. I'm going to call it a day. Is that, is that --

A. Actually I, we tried to take advantage of those glassy water days. And we have quite a few of them --

Q. To get that effect?

A. -- to train in because that's, that's a really critical --

Q. That's a worst-case scenario?

A. That's worst-case scenario.

Q. Got it. So, in other words if you can handle that --

A. Yes, we --

Q. -- you probably can handle --

A. We've also installed what we call, well the first one version we have is called flare assist. There's a for lack of a better term, there's a laser in the airplane that tells you how high above the water you are and that's all for, you know, being in

glassy water conditions so you, it starts counting down at 120 feet. We turn --

Q. Is there, is it audio?

A. It's audio. It's all audio. You can turn it off because most missions we don't need it. But sometimes we're in glassy water and smokey conditions. There's no, not only is there, you can tell how high above the water you are. There's no horizon either. So, that comes in really handy there to just get a count down.

Q. Is that in all your airplanes?

A. It's in all of them.

Q. Okay. Okay. We're coming up on the one hour mark. So, I'm almost done but let's, because I know we had coffee too. Let's take a break. And we're, ten you and then we're, I have a few more and then we'll go around the table here and with you. So, hang on one second. Let me get these things off and take a break.

(Off the record.)

(On the record.)

MR. NIXON: Okay. We're live. All right. Round 2 on the chief pilot interview.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Okay. Jesse, I think we kind of dropped off when we were talking about training, initial training and the last class we talked about initial training then had company training then did their mod check and check ride, correct?

A. Mm-hmm.
Q. All of the, all the students in that, or trainees, whatever you call them and that section did that?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And then talk to us, we kind of went through initial, you know, your ten flights and all that stuff, your scooping and everything. Talk to us a little about what they accomplished. You kind of, I think we just got into it, you know, in the company training, you introduce them to, you said, formation, tactical, you know, simulations of the, of the actual FTA and stuff like that.
Anything else to add? I think we covered some of that. I don't know if we finished it but anything else to add on the -- about how many flights do they get normally when it comes to that?
A. It depends. You know, the newer the, the less experienced the pilots are the more flights they get. The senior veterans of course get less. We try to --
Q. So, it's kind of catered to your experience level?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And especially in the tactical environment.
A. Correct.
Q. So, like when we go to someone that doesn't have experience, what's kind of the average flights do you expect to have?
A. They'd probably end up with ten hours probably in the initial

training, I mean the annual company training, I'd say seven to ten.

Q. Okay.

A. Somewhere in there.

Q. Then I know you had two seaters, two two-seater aircraft. How do you incorporate that in training? Is it more initial or is it in company training or just --

A. It's definitely initial. There's one of them down there, the one we own and all the, all the initial training flights are done in a two-seater with the, with the exception we do bring single seater down there and as students start to solo, once they've soloed, we'll let them solo in the airplane they've been flying and after they've done that maybe a time or two we'll transition them to a single seater and let them just go out and work on their own.

Q. Okay. And then what's the, I mean I know it varies again, but for a new initial person to Fire Boss what's about the average expected sorties before they solo?

A. Eight to ten.

Q. Eight to ten?

A. And sometimes more. I'd say 8 to 12.

Q. Eight to twelve, it varies a little?

A. Yes. It's a --

Q. And then so those, before they've got cleared to solo, so they got cleared on their eighth mission, the first seven would be

in the, in the --
A. At least the first one for sure and them more than likely the second one also.
Q. Okay. So, every student usually gets at least one or maybe to at least rides initial in the two seater?
A. Yes. Solo rides in the two seater, correct.
Q. And what about during company training, is that just --
A. The two seaters utilize, our two seaters go, they're up, they're up all day, ever sortie. It's just as much as much as we can fly them and we're trying to of course, you know, with our instructor pilots, our level one pilot trainers are, we're always taking advantage of that back seat to observe somebody.
Q. Okay. So, in other words if any airplane's up, it's always going to be the two-seaters, correct?
A. It's always going to be the two-seater.
Q. Okay. So, they're pretty much used in company training as well?
A. Correct.
Q. For the and in both of them?
A. Both of them. That, we'll lease, we'll lease one at great expense the one from Wipaire, so we'll have two two-seaters going all the time.
Q. Okay. And then when they're done, you know, kind of like the season, you know, for initial and everything, when they're all checked out does your two-seaters go fly the line now, both of

them?
A. One of them did this year. It's, you know because we leased, we've traditionally leased it for the summer. It went to Ontario this summer. You know, of course with one pilot in it but it did go fly the other one. The one we own, we've kind of elected to, it's become so valuable to us that we've elected to keep the time off of it.
Keep the risk exposure to that two-seater down so that, you know, we don't have a mishap with it or need it and now have access to it. It's just too -- so we didn't bring it out at all this year.
Q. Okay. Talking about your company manuals, obviously we've reviewed the SOP. We talked about that earlier. I think the SMS has, you know, a manual obviously. Is there any other training or any other syllabus or anything for company training or, you know, daily operations you guys keep?
A. Other than our risk assessments and there's no, no other manuals that --
Q. All right. Or SOPs?
A. We have our operations manual, SOPs.
Q. What's true about your SOP the main, is the main manual?
A. That, yes.
Q. And then like you mentioned, risk assessments. Do you collect those or get those when they file them?
A. I can. I have access to get them when they file them. I

think I was talking to Mike about this earlier. When they first started using them when the SMS first started being required and even to this day, I have a lot of, they didn't trust that system.

They didn't want to be honest with it because they didn't want to have a high score and then be questioned on it or feel like they had exposed themselves and then where somebody would come back on them and say, you shouldn't have done, you shouldn't have flown.

So, what I've moved to is if you'll do them and you'll use them an honest assessment of yourself, I won't be checking them, you know, I mean I just want it to be as a tool for you to use to honestly assess yourself and your condition and for that day.

Q. And at some point, they get either a moderate or high, I think they mentioned earlier it was over 16, I could have quote that wrong, but whatever it is to make it high, do you get notification then to have to prove it?

A. They're supposed to, they would by our SOPs, they would be required to call me if it's in the yellow and get permission from myself and if I can't be found it could be my assistant DO or my chief pilot, but assistant chief. But if it goes in the red there's just no questions asked, they don't fly.

Q. Oh so red is a showstopper?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Have you had any in the last five years?

A. No.

Q. How many yellow do you get, is it --
A. No. I haven't had any yellows either.
Q. Oh so it's been pretty much straightforward then?
A. Straightforward. And I, you know, and participating in all the government sponsored or tanker-base sponsored infracts, I haven't seen a yellow there either. So, it's, I've seen, you know, things. Theirs are set up a little different.

There's things you should look for but I haven't seen any time that we've done an infract to say we're not flying today, not once.

Q. Question, and we talked about this earlier in the first interview. So, we're doing a four ship and you're lead, so are you risk assessing for the flight and you expect, you reassess their flight and except me to do my own as well as two, three and four respectively?
A. That's a good question because we don't have a formal risk assessment for a flight. We expect you to do your own based on, you know, are we a four ship today? You know, we have four airplanes on the ramp.

Could we be a four ship? Yes, you never know, they might just call for two. That should be part of your mission environment assess as like am I in two ship versus a four ship? That's --
Q. When you do the risk assessment are you already dispatched, you know that you're doing or is it --

A. No. It's usually the risk assessment's done at the beginning of the day.
Q. Okay.
A. Even the ones we do and the ones --
Q. So, how can you, let's say you're dispatched. I mean depending on where you're at you kind of got a rough idea of where you might be, but not necessarily.
A. We don't know.
Q. Yes.
A. Yes.
Q. You could go the opposite direction. It could be, for instance a lesser altitude --
A. It could be 500 miles away.
Q. Yes. So, you're making it just in general then when you do the risk assessment?
A. Right. And when we do that --
Q. Is that correct?
A. Correct.
Q. And you don't know if it's two or four ship. You don't know exactly where you're going so the obstacles or altitude whatever the case maybe, you don't necessarily know that.
A. We don't know a lot of that, no.
Q. Okay. I see. Okay. And then there's no relook, like let's say you get dispatched now and it's --
A. There will be most of the time, you know, we'll get a

dispatch, we'll plot the coordinates on an iPad and look at the, where we're going, how far away it is, what's the weather there, what's the potential scoop sites, what's the elevation and that'll, that'll generally be discussed in our little brief as we're walking out to the airplanes.

Q. Okay. And then speaking of, you know, your airplane, you know, get dispatched, do you guys, does the company give them like an iPad so they can get like, do you give them a Foreflight? Do they have any active --

A. No. We require everybody to have their Foreflight or Garmin Pilot with them, I mean with the current charts. But then every one of our airplanes has 796 GPS in it and most of, well almost all of them, probably the most of them have two GPSs in that are company provided with either, our goal is to have XM weather and TSB weather, two different sources of the weather.

Q. Okay. So, I think that covers, I think that pretty much covers the, you mentioned the flights could be varying, I think it was between 8 to 12, I think that your company training. How long is it generally speaking?

A. That's no --

Q. Your company training length?

A. It's --

Q. I know if varies but what's it kind of --

A. Well it does vary but --

Q. Kind of a rough estimate?

A. What it's evolved into the last couple of years is bringing in the less experienced students first prior to our ground school getting some flying in, then having three days of ground school and then having the, you know, the every, you know, the every, the whole company is required to be at, and then having of course the newer students stay and all the veterans start flying in the second week, you know, after ground school and that --

Q. So, what --

A. -- it could last 7 to 12 days or more, you know.

Q. Okay. So, between initial and company training is there any gap or is it, you get done with initial and you go right into company training basically.

A. There is a little bit of a gap. Usually we try to plan one in so we don't keep these people out away from home for so long. A lot of times in between that gap though we have underwater regress that needs to be done for a lot of folks want to travel to underwater egress and then go straight to annual company training because they don't, they want to do it all in one trip.

We try to get the, all the new students though, the potential new students underwater egress before they start initial training.

Q. Okay. And I know I saw that in your SOP but what's the requirement for that? How often do you have to do it?

A. Once every three years.

Q. Once you get then you've got to have it obviously.

A. Yes.

Q. All right. Okay.
A. And we do heeds, we, it's not required though. The underwater egress is but the HEEDS is not.
Q. Okay. And so for instance on this current last class, and I know it all varies but for the new hires that have no background. You know, they might be wheeled background but not, you know, any background in scooping. From the start date to the time they have their check ride what's the elapsed time approximately?
A. Total?
Q. Yes. I know it varies by a few days.
A. About a month and a half, you know, maybe a month to a month and a half depending.
Q. Okay. Is roughly the time period?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And then you said this class it varies but in this class they went initial, then company training, and then they got their mock check ride and then they got the actual check ride by OAS, correct?
A. Correct, with the exception of [redacted] didn't get a mock check ride and now we can discuss that in a little bit.
Q. Okay. We'll get to that.
A. But she got one from me after she came back.
Q. Okay. And then so let's say I'm in that class, you know, I go through both sets of training, mock check goes good, and my check went good so I'm good to go now. I'm carded, officially.

A. If you're carded, good to go it's --
Q. So, what do you do with me from there, a new pilot in your company? What's the, what's the norm? I mean do I get some time off?
A. Just wait for fire season. Yes. You usually get some time off right after that, then we wait for, you know, fire season to start and use, if a brand new pilot --
Q. So, like go back to this last class, when was the time approximately they all got done? I know it varies a few days.
A. We finished mid-March and fire season started April-ish.
Q. So, they got a couple of weeks off before?
A. Yes. And then they, and then we started sending airplanes out.
Q. Okay. So, two, yes, whatever it is. So, they're good for the line right away then basically?
A. They are. They theoretically.
Q. Theoretically.
A. I mean they're not, they're not ready for everything. They still got a lot of learning to do but if they're --
Q. but legally they're --
A. Legally they're good to go.
Q. Okay. And then I think I heard from your other --
A. As soon as they pass their check ride and receive their card, they're good to go.
Q. And I heard from other interviews that obviously they're not

going to be flight lead or anything like that but they're technically otherwise good to go in any position if you had a four ship?

A. Yes. Not --

Q. They could be three?

A. Well theoretically could happen that they could be, how do I say it, by the way our aircraft are contracted, you know -- let me back up. They could be, a new pilot is not going to be lead on a fire at our company, at least not right away.

Having, you know, once they get a little experience, you know, in a flight fighting real fires, if we get one that's not too complicated, we may say hey, why don't you try the lead for a little bit, you know, and supervise.

Q. Yes, supervise.

A. Being led to supervise. The system though, the way the system could work theoretically though they need to be ready to either take the lead, if they, for example if they could, they could end up in a call, we need an airplane for example. And that airplane is sitting there at a base with other call we need an airplanes, maybe people more experienced.

But then you get, you know, then the government comes in and throws the dispatch and say this airplane can go over here, go fight fire with these. You're technically qualified to go do that and what if there's another level 2 that came from another company there? So, you might have two level 2s. You could easily have

two level-2s together. I mean it could happen.
Q. So, you can tasked --
A. You could get tasked.
Q. -- it's a single ship?
A. What we would, what we -- yes, you can get tasked single ship. And it doesn't happen very often anymore, but it used to on a regular basis. Your first fire you could be out there by yourself. And theoretically that could still happen.

We try not to, we try not to let that happen here but it could so they'd have to be ready for that or ready to say no, you know, just, I'm not up to this and that's 100 percent acceptable.
Q. You know, different, as you know everything's situational, but different, you know, water scoops and different areas could be more challenging then others but high terrain for instance or smaller, you know, margins are shorter in some places than the big old what, you know, you could have limitations that are tougher but at high altitude, is there anything you watch over when someone is new?
A. Everything.
Q. Now who watches over it though?
A. Well they're peers. You know, that this widely discussed in the company that, you know, watch out for the newbies. We all do.
Q. And it's so small I'm assuming that everyone knows --
A. Yes, everyone knows everybody --
Q. -- the newbies. They're looking --

A. Yes.
Q. -- for those that just got --
A. Everyone knows everybody.
Q. -- checked out.
A. And it's --
Q. But that being said there's no formal restrictions per say on anybody.
A. No formal --
Q. They could, they could --
A. -- restrictions.
Q. They can legally be a lead. I know you said --
A. They legally can be a lead. They can legally be out there by themselves. In the seat world, every seat pilot is what they call IA carded. They're go out initial attack of fire by themselves.
Q. Okay. And before we get kind of talking about the accident, has the company made any formal changes since the accident?
A. Not formal. We're waiting to, waiting to really try to figure out what exactly happened before we, you know, we don't want to start making changes that -- we want to make changes that really make a difference.
Q. Okay. But that being said, nothing's, you're still on standby basically?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. I mean we've got, we've talked about a lot, there's going to

be a lot of, when we come to our next year's initial training, I mean not initial, annual company training, there's definitely changes going to be made.

Q. Okay. Okay. So, I could buy that. So, everything's on standby until we get a little more information and then we'll go from there. Okay. All right. With that let's get started to kind of the meat of the, what we want to talk about obviously, you know, the accident pilot and her training.

So, why don't you before we get started in the details, give us a general sense, I mean obviously you said you hire people, you do all that stuff. So, give us, kind of work us back to how she got hired and a little bit of her background and what you, you know, take us from right before you got, she got in the airplane.

A. I don't remember the exact way she contacted us. I think it came through our website, you know, our info, info@dauntlessair.com, she submitted a resume. Those get screened by the girls in the office for usually for minimum qualifications and then it's sent to me. I remember getting her resume and reading it and not paying attention to the name and thinking I've got really good candidate here.

And then I read the name and realized it was a female pilot and so I brought it to Steve Helinski our chief flight instruction and held my hand over the name and let him read it. And I said, what do you think about this one? He said, you better grab that one.

So, she had all of the qualifications we're looking for and then some. So, 6,000-plus hour pilot, ag, all the ag time, lots of ag time. She had airline time, first officer Boeing 737, 727, a Brazilian pilot's license. Well she had a U.S., although a U.S. required licenses and she was a flight instructor, so her, she had an outstanding resume, you know, and for me I'm always, I'm not looking for just ag pilots.

I'm not looking for just ag pilots. I'm not looking for just military. I'm looking for well rounded pilots who have done a little bit of everything. They tend to fit into this environment very well.

Q. Okay. When she first got to the company did you give them like an introduction class or do you meet them personally when the new hires show up?

A. Oh yes.

Q. Okay. So, --

A. Like I said, I personally hire everyone of them.

Q. So, tell us a little bit about [redacted] when she came her for her introduction when you first met her.

A. I realized she was not a, she was, my first impressions were she's well dressed, all girl, you know, just not a girl trying to act like a boy playing in a boy's world. She was a, she was, she was a female and she was proud of it and wanted to present herself very well. She was also very, very enthusiastic about doing this job.

Q. Okay. And let's go into her training now. You know, initial training were you involved in that at all?
A. Every bit of it.
Q. You were? You were hands on it that?
A. I am one of the three, was one of the three flight instructors that flew with those students every day.
Q. Okay. So, initial training and the ground school before that did you teach any of the ground school?
A. I was there an observed a lot of it. I didn't personally teach the ground school classes. But I was, you know, they were, they were small a group sitting around the table pretty informal. I was, I sat in on most of it. And certainly put my input in when I thought the instructor might be missing something.
Q. Okay. Who taught most the ground school?
A. Jacob taught a lot of it and Jacob and Steve.
Q. Steve. Okay. So, ground school passed and you started initial training. How any lights approximately did you have with her initial.
A. Well you can break down into 10, 12 hours of flying. We, I flew with her probably every third time she flew. So, at least four flights, maybe, I think it was more than that. But --
Q. Okay. And then how many initial, about how any instructors did she have without looking at your info?
A. Initial she had three.
Q. Three?

A. Three instructors.
Q. It was you, obviously Jacob --
A. Steve Helinski and Jacob.
Q. Okay Jacob. And you did, you said the minimum before, is that correct?
A. It'd be a minimum of four.
Q. Four, okay.
A. You know, we tried to, you know, six students. You know, every time I got in the airplane it was with a different student usually. Just to, we rotated them through, you know. And we found over the years that that -- we've tried sticking with one instructor until you solo and then, you know, we did it the way do it now initially and then we switched to one instructor until you solo and we went back to --
Q. Switching out.
A. -- switching out.
Q. Did, you know, as far as the initial training went did your training committee, you know, you said met pretty often during that period, was there anything mentioned about her in any of that initial training portion? She had --
A. To the training committee?
Q. Yes. Was there any --
A. Not really a topic of discussion in --
Q. Nothing, well what about your lower other committee with the -- I don't know what you call it, but the instructors meeting?

A. Well the instructors, we certainly discussed her and we certainly discussed all the students, you know, --
Q. Okay. What --
A. -- on a daily basis.
Q. Compared to the other students, what was anything discussed in the initial different or --
A. She, well she --
Q. -- when it came to her?
A. She had had some issues. You know she was definitely lagging behind her class but having said that she was improving every lesson that we flew with her and there's always somebody lagging, you know, there's always the best student in the class and there's always -- but she, was she showing improvement every time we flew with her? Absolutely.
Q. Okay. What, just give us some idea of what she was lagging in?
A. It was more of the, sometimes the scooping stuff was not coming to her as quickly as some of the others. Her stick and rudder skills were above and beyond what we've seen in the past with at some classes.

This class was pretty good at that. She was certainly right in there with them. She had a little bit of a, as they all do, I'm trying to remember the SA problems just after going out and doing 10, 15 scoops in a short period of time, hey take me back to the airport.

And I was like where is the airport, but that wasn't, that wasn't, she wasn't the only one doing that. That's pretty common. A lot of it was just getting the airplane down on the water at a, you know, quickly, you know where like coming up over the trees and putting it right on the water, it was a long floats which we broke her of that habit. But that, she had that. I'm trying to think of what else?

Like I said, we had daily discussions on all the students and who was doing the best and was having taking more time then, you know, where they need to be and she'd come up from time to time, is a struggle today in this lesson. And that's common too. Sometimes you have a really good less and think you're about ready to solo and the next day they come out and they don't remember how to fly anymore. And then you fly with them again and it's all fixed itself.

So, we had some of that. And you always talked about well okay she struggled today, you know. But like, is she getting better? Every time the answer was yes. We all agreed as a group to keep moving forward.

Q. So, obviously she had some issues on initial but nothing out of the ordinary?

A. Nothing, no.

Q. Is that correct to say?

A. I would say we had, we had previous -- yes, nothing out of the ordinary and nothing we hadn't seen before in previous classes

Q. And obviously with improvement --
A. And then -- yes.
Q. -- the judgment we could correct this?
A. Right, right. And keep in mind the classes she was with too also was some very experienced pilots, guys who had seen fire before or had lots of experience in an Air Tractor.
Q. Okay. So, basic discussion were trying to fix discrepancy.
A. Yes.
Q. They weren't, they weren't --
A. There was nothing --
Q. They weren't further --
A. Nothing there that we were concerned it would --
(Crosstalk)
Q. -- rejected that and take a picture of it?
A. Yes. Nothing.
Q. And then that kind of ties to my next question, you know, where were the challenges but also was the difference if it was other, you know, trainees, and I think you kind of answered that. There were, most pilots with --
A. Yes.
Q. -- more experienced?
A. And I'll, if I had to compare it to the class of 2020, you know, where would she have fit in in that class, stick and rudder skills, at the top of the class. Everything else probably right down the middle. And those guys nobody failed in that class.

They all went on to be successful Fire Boss pilots.
Q. Okay. And I forgot to ask but in ground school --
A. She excelled.
Q. She excelled, okay.
A. Yes.
Q. So, that's initial. Did she have to, you know, you said the flights kind of varied. Did she go on the far side like take the longer more flights or was she right in the middle?
A. If I remember right, she was probably closer to 12 flights.
Q. Twelve, okay. And say way with the scoop, she got a little bit more than normal or about average?
A. Probably average.
Q. Average. Okay. And --
A. We've got all that.
Q. Okay. So, she got her initial done. In some cases you could go get your mock check and, you know, go from there but --
A. In the past that's exactly --
Q. That's what you did?
A. -- the way it was done.
Q. Okay.
A. You passed your check.
Q. Okay. But in this case we decided to do more in the company training.
A. Correct.
Q. And what was the reason, just because it was convenient and

lined up?
A. We've -- of course development over time just more and more people, more people needing check rides. So, we tried to get the OAS. They're short handed. Trying to get them to show up once.
Q. I see. A little bit to do with their scheduling, too?
A. Yes.
Q. So, let's go onto company training now. Same question, give us a run down of her training in the, you know, she's out of initial now. She's in company training. I'm assuming you're involved, if not you were supervising. Give us a rundown of her training.
A. Supervising a lot of it. I did not, I don't remember flying with her. I did not fly with her at initial company training. Or not initial. I flew with her all through her initial. I didn't do any flying with her in annual company training.
Q. Okay.
A. But that just starts off, you know, right into the scenario based training.
Q. Yes, I see that earlier, yes.
A. We start out on flights of two go to build up to flights of four. I know she did spend a lot of her time with Jacob and then, but we did formation rides with them. I know she had one ride that was talked about by the whole cadre and it wasn't, they went out to Possum Kingdom to get a little experience in different terrain.

You know there's a lot of steep, that's a big reservoir in the west of Mineral Wells. A lot of rolling, steep terrain, tall cliffs on the side. They went out there to take a mission out there and the weather got up really bad and I don't think they did any scooping but I think Steve was in the airplane with her and he came back.

And he said we learned a lot because she saw, the whole flight got to see things that they got to see different color of water, the water conditions, you know, trying to avoid the weather. Anyway so they did that. I did hear about that one.

Q. Okay. Was there anything else in company training that either you would flag in your, I'm assuming it was flagged in your instructor MEIs, not your training MEIs, but either or, would it be on a flagged?

A. Yes, yes. It was flagged. It was flagged that she was lagging behind the rest of the class in the tactical environment. And we pulled her aside and basically acknowledged that she, made her acknowledge that she was lagging behind. But we assured her though it, we were not going to give up on her.

Q. Okay.

A. And --

Q. Now once again. Tactical is a big field.

A. That's a --

Q. Any specifics you gave her? Like when you said she was lagging behind did you give her specifics on what she was lagging

behind on?
A. I don't remember the exact specifics. It was SA and like a flight of four thing, stuff like that.
Q. And how did she take it?
A. Good. Well. You know, disappointed in herself but took it well. And continued to work with her. I know it was brought up in an interview, previous interview that I had said, told her she wasn't ready for fire and I do not remember saying that. I think, you know, as a group we had agreed that she needed more work and that we would work with her.
Q. Okay. So, in company training, you know, there's a little bit of wiggle room like you mentioned, you know, 8 to 12 flights. I mean was there a same thing in company training? I assume there's --
A. You know what see what we do beyond the initial training that, there's a lot of wiggle room there because there's nothing, none of that's required.
Q. I see. So, what, like what'd she end up flying flights-wise in company training, more than average or --
A. Annual, probably a little more than average all total.
Q. Okay.
A. I have that, I think I have the numbers on her.
Q. Okay.
A. But I know I did. I usually do two. That was sent to you.
Q. Okay. So, let's go back to, from a previous interview I

think, you know, when Jacob flew with her he flagged that at the time he said it was a mock check ride but, you know, I don't know if he didn't count it as that, whatever, but at some point he flew with her, whatever you want to call that ride and said she wasn't ready for tactical or the check ride I guess.

A. What was, I don't know what he was referring to as far as --

Q. I thought he said mock check ride but --

A. Well he said, he said that he was responsible for mock check rides, which he was not.

Q. Okay. And who is responsible?

A. Me.

Q. Okay. So, did she get a mock check ride then?

A. She did but not then. Not at initial. She, after she gained more experience she came back --

Q. So, let's go back to the ride Jacob had where he, you know, he did have a conference with the instructors, right?

A. Yes, well --

Q. The instructor team afterwards?

A. Yes.

Q. And said, what did he, what was that discussion at that meeting?

A. That discussion was that we acknowledged that she was sort of behind the record of her peers, her class. She needed more work. We were going to, I can't remember if what exactly was said but we were probably going to pull her out of some of the scenario, like

the four ship scenario base training and work at a little bit slower pace and get her where she needed to be.

I don't remember the exact conversation we had with her but it was, she was not pulled out of training. It was just acknowledging that she had a, she was lagging behind, needed more, maybe SA. We took it, and we took her in and did a few things. We put her up in the Air Attack platform and let her ride in the King Air with the Air Attack and watch the whole. We did --

Q. Now is this after the right with Jacob, the last ride he had with her?

A. Yes. Yes.

Q. Okay. This is after --

A. Afterwards.

Q. Okay. And then did she get any two ship rides in company training and particularly after the ride that Jacob, I think that was a two ship that flagged the issue real hard.

A. I don't think she, I can't say that she did. I know that Jacob took her under his wing, when out and did quite a bit more flying with her.

Q. Was a two ship available at that time?

A. They were in the two ship.

Q. Okay. But after --

A. Oh well I mean a two ship, they were in the two seater.

Q. Yes, two seater. That's what I meant to say.

A. I don't know exactly what happened. I was off doing other

functions. I can't really --
Q. Okay. That was, that was -- make sure I got that right. That was Jacob's last ride with her was it, the two seater, right, where he flagged --
A. That was Jacob's last right with her in a two seater.
Q. In a two seater. Okay.
A. And of course Jacob was unfortunately was terminated right after all this happened for --
Q. Okay. And, you know, we don't want to go into details but, you know, obviously he was terminated but was it because of that last ride?
A. No, no.
Q. His actions or something else?
A. Well no, it was, it was other things and there's a whole, probably should have happened a lot sooner.
Q. Okay. We don't want to go into details but I'm just saying that nevertheless the timing was such that it was right after this last two seat ride he had with her?
A. Yes. And then unauthorized, well he did take a two seat ride with her where he had her in the back seat and that was, that was, nobody knew that was going on.
Q. And that was the ride after that ride, correct?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. And so the ride he flagged it, though he was actually, I think a two ship but he wasn't a two seater, correct? He was

separate airplanes with her as far as you know?
A. I can't remember.
Q. Okay. Could we, we could reconstruct that from your records?
A. We should be able to via our schedule that's --
Q. Okay. We'll take a look at that.
A. Yes.
Q. And also his interview just to, you know, we need to confirm irregardless, you know, so let's take a look later. So, what was the bottom line? You know, Jacob after that flight, not when he had her in the back seat but the flight before that that's where he flagged, you know, hey time out type, you know, he made it look like a big deal in your training.

What specifically did he, did he talk about and what was the plan going forward?
A. I don't remember making an exact plan going forward. He just felt like she wasn't ready, you know, maybe ready to fly in a tight four-ship tactical environment. Probably wasn't at the time. And that's, we all, we got together.

You know Steve had been flying with her a little bit in company training and they got me aside and we pretty much just said, you know, we understand you're lagging and you may need some more training before we, you know, you're lagging behind the rest of your group and we're not going to hold them back. We're just going to, we're going to work with you some more later. And --
Q. Okay. So, Jacob, the seat, the part of the fix and now it's

you and Steve you left over in the instructor side, right?
A. Yes.
Q. So, what exactly did you guys do for her training after post-Jacob?
A. She went on quite a few ferry flights with other pilots and, you know, moving airplanes across the country, practiced her, you know, her position state, you know, holding --
Q. Formation, you mean?
A. Yes. Formation and again we don't emphasize tight formation flying but just flying as a group. She had according to my conversation with her and the guys she was flying with had become quite comfortable there and was doing well. And it was multiple of those flights. I don't have them logged particularly because it's, they're just logged as ferry flights on her paper documents.
Q. But did she get any more official training particularly in four-ship?
A. Not particularly a four-ship, no. She got, that I can remember, she did come back and do some more flying with me.
Q. So, what did, and you said earlier that your meeting with the instructor was he identified she wasn't ready tactically particularly in the four-ship.
A. Well let me, let me back up. Okay. I don't remember exactly what, exactly what they said had happened and the exact essay that she lost. I have a feeling it just wasn't keeping up. All I can remember is the, having the conversations with them that she was,

she was maybe lost some SA, not keeping up, wasn't ready, didn't think she was ready for the tactical environment.
Q. Okay. So, --
A. Per what we, per what we were doing. We were training pretty hard now. I mean we were doing, we were getting to the point where these going out where they're very, very paced, which looking back was probably too damn fast, you know.
Q. So, getting back to her training, you did some ferry flights but what exactly did you do to to attack or mitigate the tactical or lack of SA in tactical situations?
A. I flew some more with her after letting her do those ferry flights, you know, in groups going to and from, you know, getting her, you know, she never really had the chance to get comfortable doing that. So, these long ferry flights were just hey, sit back here, hover back here, get used to flying next to these airplanes.
Q. It's just the formation comfort?
A. Yes.
Q. Did you, when you said you flew with her, were they, were they the fairy flights or were they --
A. No, I flew with her after she --
Q. -- tactical?
A. -- had, after she had gotten her ferry flights done and she did multiple. I think there was seven or eight if I remember right, moving different airplanes around the country, different. I flew with her again when she came back to Cleburne to take her

check ride.
Q. Was that in the two-seater?
A. It was in a two seater and --
Q. Okay.
A. And then I went out to the lake and did the mock check ride, you know, on the radio just like the OAS does, put her through one of those. The next day the OAS showed up and did the the check ride.
Q. So, when she did the mock check ride you felt obviously she was qualified to --
A. Oh qualified, more than qualified.
Q. Okay. And then I'm assuming her actual check ride went fine? Did you get any feedback?
A. No, nothing wrong. Nothing, absolutely nothing.
Q. Nothing? Okay. And did, were you able to, did you observe that by chance?
A. I was there.
Q. You were there?
A. Yes.
Q. So, everything went as advertised, no issues?
A. No issues, none.
Q. Okay Was she, and your mock check ride was it a two-ship, four-ship or --
A. No, no. I was on the, I did the, the mock check rides are done on the ground most of the time. I'm on the ground or in a

boat talking on the radio doing just like the OAS does.
Q. Okay. So, you're watching.
A. I'm watching it and --
Q. Okay. What profile did she have? Two-ship, four-ship?
A. No. When she did hers she was by herself.
Q. Solo? Okay.
A. She was supposed to show up at the mock check ride we did at company training, the initial training with everybody else and that would have been in a two ship. But she was riding around with Jacob. When I asked where is she? And Jacob got, well she's with me. I was like, why? But --
Q. Okay. And as far as the actual check ride was she solo again or was she two ships?
A. Solo.
Q. Solo. Okay. So, they were both solo.
A. Solo. There was nobody else there, just me and her.
Q. Okay.
A. You know, I went in special, OAS came back special.
Q. All right. And where was the check right at?
A. Cleburne, Texas.
Q. Okay. So, it's down there in Texas?
A. Uh-huh.
Q. Okay. And then so now she's got her check ride, she's officially carded. Did you do any carry on training after that?
A. Oh yes. Yes. I mean we --

Q. Follow on training is probably a better way to put that?
A. Well not so much with myself. The other places she went, you know, based with another aircraft doing relief, you know, they do proficiencies. She did fine in everyone of those. She went out to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, showed up there. When she showed up there we had pilots there, lead pilots doing an orientation flight, doing mountain flying, making steep drops in the mountains, getting familiar with the terrain and all the feedback was she --
Q. So, she went with them, you mean?
A. Yes, she's in another airplane following them.
Q. Yes, okay. So, she's show and tell basically.
A. Show and tell.
Q. They did one and they --
A. And yes, this is, this is what you can expect to see in this area. This is the --
Q. So, she followed and everything was fine?
A. Yes. Everything was fine.
Q. So, by the time she got released for the accident flight from your, from an instructor --
A. She even had those.
Q. Instructor level, you felt she was competent?
A. I did. I 100, if I hadn't felt she was competent, I mean I knew she had stuff to learn. I expected some problems maybe target description, stuff like that. As far as handling, and did

I think she was going to go out and have an accident, absolutely not. If I --

Q. No, I --

A. If I would have thought that I mean I would not have --

Q. No, of course you would. But I'm just saying that, you know, sometimes there might be, hey, and maybe four-ship. Yes you can go, okay, two ship. Now you have some type of mental restriction there.

A. No. No. And she'd already done two fires quite successfully, feedback from both my guys that she was flying with and the Air Attack platform, both the Air Attack pilot, Air Attack were good. She had done --

Q. Where were those at?

A. Those were out of close to Omak, flat scooping water off the Columbia River, which can be very challenging. I mean probably more challenging then the day of the accident. So, and it was all done, it was all done well.

So, I was starting to feel really proud of her and really good that she had learned enough to be successful at this or at least could learn, now she could start learning how to be a really good air pilot.

Q. Because she's at the point where she would, a lot of that would just be getting experience, learning?

A. Correct. Correct.

Q. Is that correct?

A. Yes. And that's --
Q. You guys were -- I mean not to say you always have oversight and the feedback, but that's where she was at, is that correct?
A. And I wasn't anymore worried about her than any other pilot that I put out there to, and I've trained over the years. I think over 60 pilots to do this mission. And nothing that was any more concerning than any of the rest of them, you know that --
Q. You know, we talked about attrition in the initial, I think in another interview, you know, partly and I think it was, if my memory serves me right, 2021, you said you lost initial pilot and I can't remember what it was for, but --
A. That particular individual, yes, we washed him out. We went through the whole ten hour syllabus and never soloed him. Never even thought about it.
Q. So, that guy didn't even get through the initial part?
A. No, never got through initial training.
Q. Okay. So, [redacted] basically even though you flagged some issues you just knew additional time she'd be able to work them out --
A. Yes,
Q. -- in both?
A. Exactly. For, you know, the day I, I can just tell you, the day I decided that she could do this, you know, that she was going to make it was an in a river in Florida, wind, cross wind blowing 20, 25 knots, little bend in the river, you know, we, that's part

of our, you know, advanced part of our initial training was to get, we work up to being able to scoop that river.

It's short, it's confined, and riding with her in this wind, I don't have to make any inputs. She is scooping the river, making the turn, dealing with the wind, hitting targets.

Q. Okay.

A. And like better than, you know I was like, hey, she's got it. She can do this job.

Q. So, going back to her mock check in, and her actual check ride being single ship, were you, were you concerned at all that, you know, I think earlier that the trend identified was SA was lower particular during four-ship tactical and stuff.

A. Yes, and --

Q. Were you concerned about that area?

A. I wasn't concerned about it. I figured that was something that should would adapt to because it's not something we've, we've had troubles with that in the past.

Before we've had, we've had pilots that came to us already level 1 sea pilots training this group and they do not want to fly in a four-ship, or in a, you know, they have to make them lead because they won't follow kind of thing and they don't work here any more. But so have we seen that before? Absolutely. It just takes practice.

Q. And then what, I mean obviously, have you been to that lake where the accident happened, that reservoir?

A. Yes.
Q. Okay. How difficult, I know it's a higher density altitude but barring that how difficult would you rate that? Is it very difficult or average?
A. That should have been easy.
Q. It's just she had --
A. That was a lot of, that was, even though it was high density altitude that was a lot of water. It was a lot of, a lot of room there to --
Q. So, as far as that goes for your normal water scooping things that was pretty --
A. Pretty benign.
Q. Pretty benign besides the density altitude?
A. Yes. And, okay, it's been brought up, you know, that we don't get to do a lot of training in high density altitude situations. It's just that's the nature of when we have time to train it's in the off season but what we do do is reduce power take offs, you know, you're limited.
I'll sit in the back seat and I'll limit them to 4,000 pounds of torque and I was like this is all you get.
Q. When you simulate a high density --
A. This is what you're, this is what you're going to see when you're scooping at 6,000 feet. This is all you're going to get.
Q. Okay. Going back to the accident pilot, did you have any previous disciplinary actions or documented, you know, anything in

training or --
A. Disciplinary actions for her?
Q. Yes, yes.
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. None. She's a stellar.
Q. Okay. And then how'd you, where were you at and how'd you get awareness of the accident?
A. I was in Fairbanks, Alaska. I think either headed out to work or had just gotten to work and I got a text from our CEO. He was boarding an airliner to come to Fairbanks and he said, what's up, he's looking at SpiderTracks, he said, 205 stopped on the water and I just said, I'll check.

On my SpiderTracks it wasn't red. It was just stopped on the water. I tried to send her a text. No response. Tried to send the Spider text, hey I see you're stopped on the water. No response. Started checking into it and that's when I realized she had had a, she had had an accident.

I think, I can't remember who I talked to first. It might have been Stan Good. Called him. He's a tanker base manager in Coeur d'Alene. He just happened to be out at Helena. He said, yes, I heard we had an accident. Piece, aircraft pieces in the water. Sorry, Jesse. And that was it.

And then I, by that time Keaton and Layton Reese (ph.) had landed. Called Keaton. He told me, yes, we had an accident.

They didn't know at that point in time it had been a fatality. But they said it looked pretty, you know, looked --

Q. Didn't look --

A. -- pretty bad.

Q. Okay. And then what were your actions? Did you come here or I mean Helena or where did you go?

A. I didn't come right away. Our CEO got to Fairbanks. He went to Helena right away. I didn't. I stayed in Fairbanks where I was and, you know, while he's dealing with the accident I was running the company, you know, the day to day.

Q. Yes, to take care of stuff.

A. Keep going. I did go there four days later, I guess. Went out to the accident site. Talked to some witnesses. Talked to the sheriff.

Q. Okay. Going back to training, just one other question, according to Jacob he flagged, you know, the SA issue in some documentation. Do you remember seeing that at all?

A. No. I never saw any documentation on that.

Q. Okay. I mean it was discussed apparently but not, you don't remember seeing any documentation you've said?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. No. I did not, we didn't have any, we had no documents for annual company training for the flights we did. If Jacob had a document he never showed it.

Q. Okay.
A. And --
Q. And he never made that last flight with her, not the one in the, where she sat in the back seat, but the last instructional flight with him, the previous flight. He gave, never gave any documentation on that either, correct?
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. No, just a --
Q. Just a verbal?
A. A verbal, you know.
Q. Yes, a debrief.
A. And Steve had flown with her and he'd seen, so we just pulled her aside and, said, hey, you know, you're not keeping up with the class. But you're getting better and we're going to move forward with you.
Q. Okay. And let me make sure, I think I'm clear on it, but let me just make sure. So, the time where Jacob had the discussion with the instructors to the time she got her OAS, you know, check ride and carded, she never got another four-ship tactical flight?
A. No. We didn't have, by that time everything's dispersed. There was no four-ships to --
Q. To be had?
A. Other than a --
Q. A mock one.

A. Other than some three ship ferries.
Q. Okay. All right. So, it didn't happen in other words. You didn't have a four-ship?
A. No.
Q. Okay. I'm getting close to, I think I only got one or two more questions. We're past the hour so let's take a quick break. I'll finish up. We'll go around again and then we're concluded. So, let's take ten.
A. Okay.
(Off the record.)
(On the record.)
MR. NIXON: Okay. We're live. Okay. Welcome back everyone. Round 3 now. We're continuing the interview with the chief pilot, Jesse Weaver and I think we're finishing up on [redacted]'s training and as far as my interview part goes but I know we have an update as well from previous questions.
MR. WEAVER: Okay.
MR. NIXON: Go ahead, Jesse.
MR. NIXON: You had asked me when our last training committee meeting was, it was 8/6/24. Didn't take a whole lot of notes. I had two action items, you know, for myself. One was we have three different types of throttle quadrants in the airplanes.
We were going to address, have a more thorough training, you know, company training the differences and how to operate the ones with the throttle stop. Now they can be adjusted too. And I

wanted to get ahead of getting permission to use the lakes from the Corps of Engineers so that was pretty much it and we agreed to have another meeting, 1st of September, our first week of September which we have not had due to other, you know, just being busy.

Q. Okay. And then just to make sure, this is the training committee?

A. Training committee, you know, starting to plan our, yes, starting to plan next season's annual company training.

Q. And then as far as the making sure the actual instructor discussions, that's just discussions, right? There's no notes with, not the training committee, but the lower level?

A. Instructor, no, not so much notes, discussions. We --

Q. Discussions.

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. There's no formal notes taken though, right? Is that correct?

A. (No audible response.)

Q. Okay.

A. Can I --

Q. Any other clarification you want to make?

A. Yes. I just, you know, you asked a lot of questions about, you know, having to, you know, did [redacted] get a chance to go up in another four-ship, and no, she didn't. I think she did go up in a three ship, but not a four-ship.

Well I know she did on ferry flights and I know she did on the orientation flight to, and, you know, her local orientation, making drops in steep terrain, that was, that was a three ship. It's not required anywhere though to have a four ship. You know, we're not, we're not required by the government, the OAS, anybody to provide four-ship flight training. We try to but it's not required.

Q. Okay. Anything else?

A. No, that's it.

Q. Okay. Getting back to the that's pilots training, you mentioned what was, you know, what you did. You know, you mentioned a few ferry flights and then you flew with her a couple times, did her mock check, and then, you know, she got her real check, what was the time period between the time from the rest of the class that she got checked out, doing the ferry flights, and, you know, the mock check.

A. I wish I had my knee board. Three weeks to a month, somewhere in there.

Q. Okay.

A. She was, she was lacking at the time the required seaplane time so through ferry flights and whatnot she was building that time and then when she had it, when she got it, you know, she was now eligible for a check ride, which is a whole another story. Yes, you probably got a lot of questions on that.

I know you do. So, we might get into that with your

questions. So, she got her 100 hours. At the same time though within a day after her gaining her 100 hours saying that she as now, you know, now had met the requirements we got an amendment to the contract so they no longer required it. And they went to 100 scoops, instead of 100 hours. So, it was no longer required so now she met both requirements.

Q. I see.

A. And then, and then called up the Western Region inspector that we had to say she's ready. And he said, hey, I'm not available and your inspector is back online. So, we went back to the East Region for her check ride.

Q. And one more time just to clarify, where was her check ride or mock check and check ride?

A. Cleburne, Texas.

MR. NIXON: Cleburne. Okay.

MR. WEAVER: On the lake, what is that lake, name of it just sound of Cleburne? Is that Lake Cleburne?

MR. CARROLL: But we're on Whitney probably.

MR. WEAVER: Whitney's the one just -- no, not the big. That's the big one.

MR. CARROLL: Pat Cleburne is right in town, yes.

MR. WEAVER: Pat Cleburne, Lake Pat Cleburne, which is a relatively smaller lake compared to where we were actually conducting most of our training.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Getting back to the last discussion with Jacob, you know, her instructor for it looks like, one of her instructors before, you know, what, did he agree with it? Did they all agree with her corrective action or did you, did he have any different than what you agreed on I guess.

A. We didn't come up with any correction at the time. Just that we would agree to continue to work with her and she wasn't --

Q. Okay.

A. -- washing out. We just want her to be aware that she was behind and we may pull her out of some of the active scenarios because she might no, might not be ready.

Q. So, everyone consented to that though?

A. Yes, we, yes. Yes. Yes, you know, we didn't --

Q. We can work with her. She's not --

A. We didn't want to, we didn't want to --

Q. -- at the stage where we need to look at anything else.

A. At the time we didn't want to degrade the training experience for the people that were excelling, you know. We wanted to, you know, so --

Q. Okay. So, basically there was a consensus after that with that meeting giving her challenges of what the, like you said you're going to work with her and --

A. Yes.

Q. -- it might take additional training.

A. Yes.
Q. There was consensus there with all the instructors?
A. Correct.
Q. What that be -- okay. And that was basically like the same thing, what decision was made on her training with comments. That's basically what you said, we're going to work with her, take some extra rides.
A. Yes.
Q. And so be it. And she ended up taking a little, that's why you gave her --
A. Yes, that's why --
Q. -- the ferry rides?
A. -- I gave her the ferry rides, that's why I got her in flights on ferries because I just, to build her confidence and just long ferries in the airplane just sitting there, a couple reasons, you know, we've, we do have, all of our airplanes are fairly much the same.

The cockpit layouts are as close as we can get them but they all have subtle differences in them and to get her as familiar with it, you know. The ferry flights help to get familiar with as many of the different, slightly different variations we have.
Q. Do you think, you know, we talked about that in some other interviews. Do you want to go over some of the, I know some of it's avionics, some is the switches, but could you kind of give us a quick --

A. It's what --
Q. -- executive rundown of the differences?
A. It's mostly, we have two different types of FM radios, most of our airplanes have the NAT radios. They quit making them. Quit, they don't support them anymore.

So, we started a lot of our new airplanes have Technisonics in them. So, we have two different types of radios. Our two-seater has both radios in it though, a NAT and a Technisonics, so we can train on both of them.

Q. Oh on both, okay.
A. Some of the five -- the airplanes we picked up from Air Spray have a slightly different instrument panel in them, a different instrument panel layout. All the stuff is there but it's slightly different. They all have a 796 GPS in them, every single one of them, so that's common.

Your primary source of navigation on a fire is the same in every single airplane we have. They have different secondary GPSs in them though. Some of them have 635, some have 650, some have a 696. So, there's difference there.

But all the Air Tractor controls, all the switches to start the airplane, all the, you know, the throttle, the flaps, the, all that is the same. Everyone of our airplanes, there maybe some slight differences on some of the buttons on the stick like for the smoker, maybe a slightly different places but the mic buttons and the drop buttons and the scoop buttons are all in the same

spot. That's actually required by contract that our fleet has to be the same on the drop button.

Q. Okay. So, all the major things you would use during the scoop operation, they're all the same?

A. They're all the same. Yes. For anybody that's got any time in Air Tractors at all it should be just so hey this is different. You know, we od have two different kinds of gates. We had all Hydromaxes with the exception of 203 that we lease from Wipaire. It has a Gen 3 Air Tractor gate, which is their newest gate.

All the ones, all five that we brought from Aero Spray have Air Tractor Gen 2 gates on them. So, they're, they do have different gate but we do provide anybody that hasn't flown one we provide training for them. We have an experience pilot that's been flying it and brief them.

We have videos on SharePoint that they can access to, you know, that were produced by the factory to know how to operate that gate and, you know, and I've made sure that everybody knows I want you, you know, if you're not, if you're not damn familiar with it, if you're not comfortable with it, don't go until you are.

Q. Is there a training block or signoff for that down on your spreadsheets for differences anything?

A. Differences, no, we haven't. That --

Q. Do you give a classroom instruction there or is it just as you go?

A. We haven't because as of last company training we didn't even have those airplanes yet.
Q. I see. Okay. Do you think that's a, has that ever been much of a factor for anyone in training --
A. No. It's going to --
Q. -- that they're regressing or having trouble?
A. No.
Q. What do you think anything, did it play any role in [redacted]'s training?
A. No. Her training, no.
Q. Not if she falls behind though?
A. She didn't, she didn't, yes, she didn't train in a, she didn't train with in an Air Tractor gate. She was with the Hydromax gate her whole training.
Q. Okay. Okay. And then a little bit out of order because I have these questions, but going back to that mock check ride you gave, you know, with [redacted], you know, that said she's ready to go to her check ride with OAS, was it, what there, you said everything went fine, nothing was debriefed or anything, you know, to a passing level. Everything was fine?
A. Everything was fine.
Q. Okay. And was there, what do you grade on that? Is that a tactical grading block at all?
A. There's no -- not that I know of. There's a, the OAS has a form they use or are supposed to use. It's got a bunch of stuff

on it.
Q. And I'm sure yours should mimic that obviously right, you --
A. Well we don't have --
Q. -- not yet?
A. We don't have, we don't -- yes, it mimics their check ride to a T. And no, I don't have a grad sheet for it. You know, it's pretty simple. I mean you demonstrate the task or you don't. And it's spelled out what they're, what they're asking for. So, --
Q. And how many scoops do you remember doing on that right, the precheck or mock check, whatever you call it?
A. Okay. I was, well the mock check ride I gave to her was, it consisted of a normal scoop and a drop, a split drop, and abort on the water, and a knee dump in the air. So, that would have been four, which well I can get into that too because that came up differences between Western Region and Eastern Region. Western Region is strict on somethings and less strict on others, and vice -- so they've got, they've got two different policies.
Q. What's, I mean go into a little more detail on that. I'm just curious on the different regions.
A. Okay.
Q. For me seeing that.
A. Okay. We'd never done check rides with the Western Region inspectors before. They showed up they did a much thorough -- I won't say much thorough oral. It was, it was conducted 100 percent by them where as Eastern Region inspectors would say I

want to see how you teach the contract, Jesse.

I want you to get up in front of your group. And I said, I want you to go down to the contract and ask questions and let your guys answer them. And --

Q. So, they observed you answering the questions.

A. They observed me doing oral a lot of times.

Q. And how long -- when you did do that how long was your question session?

A. Oh probably over an hour.

Q. Oh yes. And did you do it a classroom with several people?

A. Similar to this. Yes. It was everybody that was there due for a check ride. And this time Western Region did it for the whole group including the pilots that were doing, were do for their recurrent check rides.

Q. I remember that.

A. Or their, and the new ones, they're all grouped together. [redacted] excelled at that portion, the oral portion. She could answer questions about the contract with the paragraph number, subparagraphs. She excelled. She was stellar student on the academics part of what she was doing.

Q. I see.

A. Western Region comes in to give their difference. Okay. Let me back up. Western Region, their check ride though consisted of two drops -- two scoops and two drops. The required E dump was done on the ramp. He just said I want you to, I want you to

demonstrating, you know, that you know how to do an E dump.

I personally like to see them do it in the air and demonstrate it. I mean we make them do it and demonstrate. I knew they could all do it, but that was one thing to me I found funny that's okay. Well this is just cool. They don't have to go do that in the air but it was different for us.

They didn't do a split drop and I think that was based on a conversation with me which is fine because in a scooper we almost never do split drops. It almost never happens. And if it does it's when you're fighting a grass fire and they never tell you split half of your load here, half over there. That never happens.

What will happen is go from here A, to point A to point B, if you've got any left turn the corner. That's the only time we do it.

Q. Do you use that?

A. Retardant airplanes may do split drops, we don't. So, they didn't ask --

Q. You don't train to that either I'm assuming though right?

A. We don't do, we don't, we do train to do split drops because they've always been required on the check ride, but we don't put a lot of emphasis on them because --

Q. Normally you don't get them in real life?

A. Right.

Q. Okay.

A. After Eastern Region inspector comes over he's of course not as thorough in the oral or let's me do it or observes me give one but their check rides are, the actual what they're asking for in the air is actually harder.
Q. The Eastern side is?
A. The Eastern side is, yes.
Q. Yes. Just give us a general sense of why it's harder. What --
A. Well they're asking them to do more things, instead of two drops, just to salvos, they're asking for split drops, roll up to the last one or tag and extend from your last one. They'll ask for an E dump off the water which Western Region didn't ask for, you know, I call them, you're in the middle of your scoop and they call it abort, abort, abort, punch it off, go.

Western Region doesn't do that, or didn't do that. They might in other, they didn't do it this time.
Q. I see. So, in other words for, I'm assuming Texas is on the Eastern because they're Eastern side?
A. Well it has to do with where our home office is located and that's in Minnesota. Texas is actually, half of Texas is covered by Eastern Region OAS.
Q. But because you main office is --
A. Yes, we fall under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Region OAS.
Q. So, they gave, they asked probably [redacted] and her --

A. Yes.
Q. -- check. So, initially her flying part, the oral is arguable but it was, but definitely the flying part was harder then because there was more items in there --
A. There were more items, correct.
Q. -- than Western.
A. There was more items, correct.
Q. Is that correct?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And like you said earlier she passed with flying colors?
A. Absolutely.
Q. Was there anything else about the accident flight whether it from dispatch, the whole time on, you know, progress anything that you are aware of that you want to make sure we're aware of?
A. No.
Q. Personal issues going on with her? Anything that you're aware of?
A. No, there was nothing, nothing. I'd like to eventually, I'm expecting questions from him on why she was there and I could go into that. I was as a first time ever on that contract that they've gone that far away from Coeur d'Alene. But no, no issues at all. I mean she had, she was starting to fit in like a, you know, doing the drill, like a real firefighting pilot. She had --
Q. So, she was basically you thought everything was good?

A. Yes.
Q. She was going to keep learning and advancing?
A. She as learning and yes, I was, I was --
Q. Yes. It was a capital environment. You felt --
A. She --
Q. You felt comfortable --
A. Felt comfortable --
Q. -- to check her out and send her, you wouldn't obviously.
A. Obviously.
Q. Okay. All right. And then what was your last interaction with her?
A. I don't remember that specifically. I know we talked on the phone on a regular basis, you know, because she was new, so I was checking on her all the time, you know.
Q. And what was the sense of her, you know, it's not the last interactions but give us a sense of her last week or two weeks prior to the --
A. No. It was, it was positive. She was very proud that she had actually gotten, you know, she was no longer just a trainee Fire Boss pilot. She had actually done some missions. She was an aerial firefighter. She was very proud and very serious about becoming, you know, better at it.
Q. Okay. From her check ride time, you know, she got carded from the OAS check. You said she flew I think two other, you know, operational or tactical flights and then the third one was

the accident flight. Is that correct?
A. Correct. She --
Q. And what was timing --
A. -- went on two --
Q. -- from her --
A. She went on two fires and it wasn't, it wasn't very long, probably within a week.
Q. Okay. And then from those two operational fires to her, unfortunately her last one about what was the timing from that, you know, like her last flight from the previous flight?
A. Yes. It was probably a week, she did her, if that.
Q. A week. Okay. So, it was --
A. I couldn't --
Q. -- pretty close to her check ride then?
A. Yes, pretty close. Oh no from her check ride to her, oh, I might have misunderstood your first question. From her check ride to her first operational fire, that was, that was way more than a week. That was, her first fire probably happened in July. Her check ride probably happened in April.
But she did have multiple, she had been on contract in Michigan and she had multiple ferry flights while she was on contract because they would move airplanes during the day to different bases and she had proficiency flights.
Q. So, she got more of those flights in between the time she got, after her check ride?

A. Right. Correct. She got quite a few of them.
Q. Okay.
A. So, some from us, you know, the, you know, she got to Coeur d'Alene as I, you know, go take, go take these, her and Lat both, take them up, put them in a flight, you guys go get oriented. IDL was good for her letting the prime, the pilot planes they were on contract, leave and go do that mission.
Q. Okay. And then the, once again when you're carded in this company you're good for anything, you could, you could be sent anywhere between Alaska, you could be --
A. Theoretically, yes.
Q. You could be a flight lead even --
A. Once you're --
Q. -- though you try --
A. Once you're --
Q. -- not to do that.
A. I know we try not to do it.
Q. But you --
A. We try to mitigate --
Q. -- can be single ship to four-ship.
A. We try to mitigate, you know, where.
Q. And so --
A. Yes.
Q. -- I know you try to informally control it but there's nothing written where they couldn't go solo to let's say Alaska

or --
A. Nothing, there's nothing contractually that says they can't take on any --
Q. Not any?
A. -- mission that comes their way.
Q. Including a high altitude and others?
A. Including that.
Q. And once again we talked about the tactical, what she felt comfortable, you felt she was comfortable and just going to keep learning, you know, like you said. What about the high density altitude, I think you could me the place she went should have been, you know, some of the other challenges she went to were actually more challenging then, right --
A. Correct.
Q. -- that --
A. That should have been, that should have been an easy scoop.
Q. Okay. So, I just wanted to --
A. I think Reese even said that, you know, as, he's recently, you know, he's done this with fourth season now. He said as a beginner for him he said that should have been easy. I would agree. It's a big body of water.
It wasn't, yes, other than a slight tailwind component they saw, but this, nothing we hadn't seen in training either. So, that happens in Florida quite a bit. You'll get a just glassy little wisps out there, you can't tell where the wind's coming

from. It's light and variable is what we call it.
Q. Okay. So, her call any previous classes, you know, you've been here a while, someone had the same issue, a tactical? You said it's not unusual but they don't have the background.
A. Okay. For one we haven't, our tactical scenarios have, we used to not do any. You know we'd train you to scoop water safely and --
Q. You're on your own.
A. Your own. Then you start learning tactical in the real world. And we have gradually built up to where our tactical training is bigger and bigger every year. More and more people involved.
Q. Where you've got mock sessions and --
A. Yes. It's --
Q. When has that really came into fruition? How long has it been that way?
A. I want to say it started somewhere, well the first one we did, I wouldn't say it was tactical but we'd send groups out, flights out. They'd go scoop water and we were doing it out of Deer Park, Washington when we had a base there. They'd go scoop water when we could find water that wasn't frozen and bring it back to the airport and drop in a trailer, in a loose flight.
There was no direction from the ground. No specific targets. It was just, you know, take your flight out, pick up some water, come back, drop it here and then it, then we moved training, we

found it harder and harder to train in Deer Park. We moved our base to Coeur d'Alene. We knew it wasn't impossible here.

It just, the weather that time of year is just hit or miss. More often than not we're sitting in the snow. So, we moved it to Mineral Wells. The first few scenarios there were pretty simple, go out to Possum Kingdom, scoop some water, pick a target. Then we got to where we got Air Attack involved and by then put an airplane up, simulate air attack and that.

And we had also some ground targets, a little airstrip, a private airstrip, pasture, you know, we'd go out there and all right, started with us I think one guy on the ground simulating an IC and that graduated to finally a Texas, we're training with the Texas Forest Service.

Their guys are training to talk to aircraft, getting their little card signed off that they're directed aircraft and we're getting pilots trained to talk to guys on the ground. It's been a great relationship and it's 100 percent more realistic than anything, you know, it's real scenario based training.

Q. No. It sounds good. Yes. You know, you've mentioned the things you've done like your training's improved with that obviously. OAS, the check rides, have they, you've been around a while.

A. They've been the same forever.

Q. The same, nothing's changed there? It's always --

A. Nothing's really changed, no.

Q. Okay. Is that, there's, it's been a flat --
A. Well I say that, that might, let me back up. Nothing's changed in quite a few years. In the, in the early days, when the program was developing I can remember my first check ride they didn't even -- well I take that. My very first check ride they watched me, they were in, the inspector was in a boat and I did my check ride, scooped, made some drops.

I don't -- there wasn't any specific target that I remember and I just remember doing a few of those and he came back and said, congratulations, Mr. Weaver, you're the first carded Fire Boss pilot in America.

The second time we did the check ride the next year they didn't even go out on the water. They just said, if you can bring a load of water back to the airport and drop it here we know you can scoop.

And then that gradually went back to now they wanted to watch you scoop, make sure you're in control. They do want to observe the scoops. They want to make sure that you are in control of the aircraft on the water.

Q. How often, you know, I guess it's OAS office, you know, or how often do you see those folks either here or in your facilities or when they visit?
A. They usually only visit to come do check rides with the exception of the safety teams that float around during the summer. They'll come in and do spot inspections, usually on the, on the

Department of Interior exclusive use contracted airplanes, they will, they will come in and they'll check make sure the pilot has all his documents he's supposed to have, knows how to do his weight and balance.

And those, their biggest hit is as does your company have an SMS system? You wouldn't believe a lot of them say, no, we don't have one. But they want to know --

Q. Does they ever go out on like on scene to watch your drops?

A. No.

Q. Operational or --

A. No.

Q. -- they get in your two seater, anything like that?

A. No. No. But we are required to get one evaluation a year, even veteran pilots from an Air Attack that sent into, not the OAS but the program managers office.

Q. I see. So, that's the amount of oversight you get though, is nothing out. No other organization does anything, right?

A. Not really. No, other than those pop, you know, safety inspections that go out, and of course they go through --

Q. Now you say safety inspections, is that the Forest Service or who?

A. No, that's the OAS. They'll show up, they'll go through the maintenance logbooks on the aircraft. They'll have a maintenance inspector with them. They'll, you'll usually have an oral with them where you'll sit down and --

Q. Now are you both sides where you could switch to, I know this Forest Service you're doing this tasking, but can you switch to BLM, too on your contract or is it just --
A. Well our --
Q. -- is it back and forth?
A. Okay. That's a complicated question because we operate under, I think our company must have 18 different contracts we can operate under. Some of them are state, some of them are feds.
Q. Wow, so you've got, you've got everything covered. Yes.
A. Some of them are what they call exclusive use. Some of them, you know, on exclusive use state, exclusive use Fed, call when needed or on call Fed. But they all operate under an interagency agreement. So, all of our contracts whether state or Fed requires to be federally carded through the Department of Interior, OAS to operate on fires.
Q. Okay.
A. But see that's -- we don't directly, we only work, we don't, we don't have any Forest Service contracts. We work on Forest Service fires under these other contracts like the IDL contract that she was involved in. Actually some, probably Forest Service is the majority of the hours we get in any given year on Forest Service fires.
Q. Okay.
A. But not contracted to.
Q. So, just to, and in a few more I'll end it here but, you

know, when you talked about your main season, you're starting about, is it March you said? Some where in there?
A. The bulk, the bulk of the season starts where all the airplanes are out working 100 percent is usually mid-June.
Q. Mid-June, okay. And then when, well how far usually does it go?
A. It usually end of September it starts, about now we start cutting airplanes.
Q. So, your full-time pilots, let's say September, you know, your season's over what do they do in that interim?
A. Some of them don't do anything. They just hang out. Some of them pick up other jobs. Some go fly corporate airplanes.
Q. So, if you're full time, if you're full-time, you'd be like so you'd get an annual period --
A. It's full-time to a certain period but after that they'd --
Q. You'd get very little on call during that --
A. Very little. I mean I have a few, I'll keep a few airplanes available through the winter but we --
Q. Very, very minor.
A. Very minimal.
Q. Past the seasons.
A. Yes. We don't, we don't have big --
Q. So, it's really, your business season it's kind of --
A. Yes.
Q. You know, don't really got much going on?

A. Correct.
Q. For several months. Okay. And then, you know, we kind of talked about this but I'm just trying to get it through in my head. You know, like, you know, everyone has, you know, FAA has certain, you know, currency requirements, landing, stuff like that. What exactly do you have to have to keep your currency for the Fire Boss? Do you have a landing requirement? Do you have a tackle requirement?
A. No, it's a single pilot airplane.
Q. Yes. So, what do --
A. There's no, as far as the FAA's concerned, you know, you have the three, take of and landing --
Q. That's it?
A. -- and stuff, to haul passengers.
Q. Yes. And then -- yes.
A. But we're not hauling passengers. So, there's technically really nothing.
Q. So, like let's say I go on sabbatical, you know, in September and I show back up now in June.
A. There's a, there are, the OAS has requirements on us by our contract to have I think ten hours in the last 60 days. It's either five or ten, I can't remember exactly. And it's 100 hours in the last 12 months, I think it is.
Q. So, there's that.
A. That one, that one has been, that one they waive, they will

waive that one sometimes. We have somebody that doesn't have that because if they don't do anything else and they have this low fire season, but they've shown to waive that one. They've never waived the ten hours in the last 60 days though.

Q. So, if someone goes, let's say I'm one of your pilots and I took the, you know, the lag period off for the most part, you know, I didn't fly for let's say, it's over half a year, I have to get my minimum hours flying in that two seater now, is that --

A. No. Not necessarily. We'll put you in a, you know, you show up at an initial company training, go fly. Go fly. And you can fly as much as you want. You can show up. We tell everybody too, if, you want extra time show up earlier and take an airplane.

Q. Is that ferrying airplanes and stuff or is it any kind --

A. You can do that too but it's mostly just a lot, some of our guys like to show up early and just go get in an airplane and just say, I want to go out and do some scoops. Is that allowed?

Q. Oh so you're not fighting a fire, just doing training?

A. Yes. No, I'm not, no, they just training, yes.

Q. Yes, efficiency. Okay.

A. We'll get them, we'll get them up.

Q. So, you're just for --

A. But they all, they all have to, they all have to be aware though that they have to have that ten hours in the last 60 days.

Q. Ten hours, okay. So, to get on contract?

A. Yes.

Q. So, they're --
A. They can do that in their first --
Q. -- ferrying --
A. They can do that in their personal airplanes.
Q. And it doesn't, it doesn't -- that's all it is, hours?
A. Yes.
Q. And so you have to scoop or you thought you could have --
A. Yes. You have to have, no, they don't really say hours. They do say you have to have five take off and landings, like in a seaplane to the full stop within the last --
Q. Okay. They, it's a few more flights for instance.
A. Yes. Fine but small, minor stuff.
Q. Is there a scoop, is there a scoop requirement?
A. Not for a veteran. Not for somebody, you know, there is no --
Q. There's no tactical requirement either, right?
A. No. And I don't think it's really necessary. I mean the veterans come back and, you know, they do two scoops and they're back in the, it comes back. They're back in the game.
Q. Okay. I just want to make sure because I, you know, we talked about that a little bit, to make sure I was clear on it.
A. And I was a, you know, as far as changing it from 100 hours of seaplane time to 100 hours of scoops, I was probably the most vocal advocate of trying to get that changed, because I felt like that 100 hour requirement, you know, it can be done in a Piper Cub

on floats ferrying across the country never, hardly touching the water and that would qualify you for the 100 hours of seaplane time.

And I always felt that that was not valuable time. They'd be better spent, you know, 100 scoops would be better than 100 hours.

Q. Yes, I agree.

A. And I'd personally think it could be more than 100 scoops. I mean that's the minimum that you --

Q. That's the current, that's the current regulation?

A. Yes. And that's way better, that's a way better, and here because here's the deal. The most, the pilot group that we're looking for by contract, we have to have guys with ag time and then when you also had, you had to have 100 hours of ag, or 200 hours of low level, 100 of it being ag, and then you had to have 100 hours of seaplane time, those two career paths don't cross.

You never find somebody who's got all of that. It's just, there is so few, you know, they'd be unicorns is what you'd call them. There are so few people that have had a career in ag flying and seaplane flying.

Q. Okay. And then just going back to the, you know, Jacob ride where you fly the tactical was, I'm trying, you know, she's had the SA issue, you know, he flagged it. That meeting, did he agree with the, you know, you mentioned --

A. Yes. There was no --

Q. -- the accident.

A. There was a pleasant --
Q. There's no disagreement from him?
A. That was a pleasant discussion, okay time.
Q. Okay. So, he didn't have any differences in opinion about --
A. No, no, no. And --
Q. -- anything?
A. No.
Q. I just want to make sure if it's clear from that instructor discussion --
A. No, there was no --
Q. -- we need to work on her and --
A. No, it --
Q. -- be sufficiency, and yes, we need to keep, you know, she's progressing, we just need to --
A. His interview when you guys acted like he was more I demand this or whatever I think, you know, but that was not the case.
Q. So, it was --
A. It was, it was just --
Q. -- consensus and --
A. Consensus and --
Q. -- he agreed with it?
A. And he agreed.
Q. Okay.
A. Yes.
Q. All right. And then when he went up, you know, at some point

you gave me a text saying, you know, thumbs up like she was ready. Was that when he flew with her in the two-ship?
A. Yes. Or not --
Q. When she was in the back?
A. No, no.
Q. When did he send that, just curious?
A. He sent that when she was in front seat of the two seater. He was in the back seat, she was in the front and he said basically she's ready for the check ride. And that was in, that was mid-afternoon or at, or that morning of the day of the mock check rides.
Q. So, that was, that was, that was the ride before the ride he put her in the back?
A. Before the --
Q. Is that correct?
A. Yes.
Q. In the back seat?
A. She wasn't supposed to be in the back seat.
Q. Okay. But that was --
A. That was, that wasn't, that wasn't expected.
Q. That was, that was the ride before that. Okay.
A. Yes. Actually he wasn't even supposed to be in the air on that. I don't know what that, I don't know what happened.
Q. So, let me make sure okay. It's a little confusing. So, I got that part. He wanted, I thought he, it looks like he was

trying to give her additional training on his own, you know, I got that.

A. Yes.

Q. But getting back to the mock check that he flew it and she was in front, in the front seat. You know, he mentioned --

A. That wasn't a mock check ride.

Q. You know, okay, whatever it was.

A. Yes, that was, he was out there doing additional training.

Q. Okay. He was in the --

A. When she in the front seat he was --

Q. But he gave thumbs up --

A. He gave thumbs up.

Q. -- that she was ready for --

A. She's read for a check ride.

Q. Yes. So, nevertheless, even though it wasn't a mock check.

A. And this was after our discussion that she was lagging behind.

Q. But --

A. So, to me though when you say she's ready for a check ride she's ready.

Q. Right. Okay.

A. I mean that's --

Q. Now on top of that, just to make sure though, so he said that with the text but and the discussion he mentioned that even though, because OAS check's not all inclusive as in her case, they

didn't do the same check but --
A. Well it didn't, it doesn't --
Q. -- he still thought he had, she needed to be worked on like before she did --
A. Maybe he did. He didn't of course, he was, he was terminated after that and --
Q. But did he make that clear that she --
A. No.
Q. That the four-ship training --
A. No.
Q. -- or two ship or whatever it was, had to be --
A. No, no, and no, he --
Q. Still needed work?
A. -- didn't make that clear but actually, you know, that was not made 100 percent clear, but it was clear to all of us that she needed a little more work or, you know, if we're going to fly that close she needed some more experience being around, you know, in close proximity to other aircraft, which we gave her with these long ferries.
Q. Three ships and that.
A. Yes. And she actually proved on the two fires that she fought that she could do that successfully.
Q. And then once again though when she fought those two fires was she two-ship, three-ship, or four-ship?
A. Two on one and four on the next one.

Q. Okay. So, two the first time and four the second time?
A. Correct.
Q. And then the accident flight obviously she was four?
A. Four.
Q. Okay. And the two before were where one more time, where are they at again the two?
A. Out of Omak, Washington.
Q. Washington, okay. And then they were --
A. I don't know the exact but they were, they were scooping the Columbia River I think on the --
Q. Okay. So, you thought that was more challenging than --
A. Oh absolutely.
Q. -- because of the obstacles or --
A. Because it's a long climb out of the river there.
Q. Okay. I mean obviously it's lower altitude but you thought it was challenging?
A. It's, yes, it's more challenging, definitely.
MR. NIXON: Right. Is it probably the scoop location is probably smaller. Okay. Okay. We're going to, as we always do we're going to open it up to go around the room and I may have some follow up and then at the end we're concluded with you. So, Michael, go ahead please.
MR. SAVAGE: All right.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. Jesse, so when you, when you guys were going to do the first

round for her, when everybody else in the company was getting their carding done, you know, you have your OAS 69-A and your 64. Remember these were kind of --

A. Well when the Western Region showed up, I think, I think where you're going, there was some, Jacob said it it was paperwork issues, we had never, ever seen a 69 before, never. The company had never seen a 69. The Eastern Region inspectors, I had never seen one.

The 64s, the only snafu there was we normally give it to them in a digital file and they wanted them printed out and we couldn't find a printer that would work. So, there was no, there was no real paperwork snafus, it was, but then the Western Region inspectors wanted the top part of the AOS 69s filled out by each pilot and we'd never seen one. They may have had access to them --

Q. So, this was the very first time literally?

A. Correct. I'd never seen the 69 form. Now, and --

Q. I didn't think because contractually in the contract it requires it. It's part of the, it's in the contract.

A. Yes, I don't, I didn't, I don't remember reading that part that it's required. I don't remember where that is. It maybe in the back in the fine print somewhere but, you know, we always, we always gave them the 64 forms.

They all, the OAS cards always come back with, I think it's an OAS 68 form that backs them up behind there, but we had never,

we had never see a 69.
Q. Well yes, the 69 is the interagency pilot evaluation. It's a qualification--
A. Yes, I've seen it now. It's just got all the, a lot of the stuff's not applicable on our check ride, but I've seen it now and --
Q. I can clearly see that the different regions or the differences, they do different things. Okay.
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. What about the, on her 64, she was 60 hours just shy on mountainous terrain and 40 hours shy and --
A. Yes. Okay. That was the two --
Q. -- single engine sea.
A. The two things the Western Region flagged. See I told them right up that, okay, this one's not, she's not going to have the seaplane time, which is common practice for Eastern Region to come out and give check rides with, you know, they didn't give you a card but they would observe your check ride and then once you got the required time they would, you could send in another 64 form and they would send you a card. And that's been going on for 20 years. Eastern Region has always done that. The Western Region wouldn't do it. They said, no --
Q. No, we're --
A. So, that was something new to me because that had been a standard practice for 20 years.

Q. Okay.
A. Yes, no funny business there, that's just what you, you know, the mountain time, they originally said when they were looking at her, had her thing and said, they asked where, well you've, where'd you get your mountain time? And it was basically Brazil. And they said, no, that doesn't count because the definition of mountain time is this geographical area and --
Q. The whole western United States basically.
A. -- in the United States. And so they look at it and say it doesn't count. And I was at a loss there. I was like, well we may not be able to use her because but they went home that night and came back, the first thing they said the next morning was her mountain time is good. Brazilian mountains are no different than, American mountains and that was not an issue anymore.
Q. Okay. So, it wasn't, was that like low level mountain time or was that just flying through the mountains?
A. It's probably a mixture of both.
Q. I mean technically --
A. I mean she's flight instructed. She's --
Q. Sure, sure.
A. She had a history of, you know, ag flying near and around and of course --
Q. Because I know a lot of the ag flying in the sound is pretty flat.
A. Oh it is, and it, and it, yes. And --

Q. Or the East rather.
A. Right. And they, the OAS is starting to, started to scrutinize mountain time a little more than certainly when I started. They said, what about your mountain time. I said, well, I've done a lot of fertilizer in the mountains of Tennessee, you know, and they're not big, tall mountains but they're every bit of mountains and hell I flew a King Air 300 over the mountains all the time and they say, good to go.

You know, but they've, they've started scrutinizing that more but not near as much as they started scrutinizing the ag time.
Q. Okay. Who in the, like who in the company vets like the credentials or qualifications for your pilots?
A. Okay. That would be, ultimately I'm responsible for it but Steve Helinski has taken on the role of assistant chief pilot, has taken over all the, all the records. So, he and I go through that together.

You know, he checks it first and if I, you know, I give him, you know, we've missed a few things here and there over the years and so I give him, make sure he's looking for that ten hours of, you know, the last 60 days and all those little things.
Q. Let me ask you, Jesse, do you guys have training folders for each pilot that you keep and overtime, you know, this their accomplishments and stuff like that --
A. We have a --
Q. -- and shows everything, --

A. We have a training file it's online.
Q. -- efficiency, quals.
A. It shows everything over their career as they --
Q. Okay.
A. Yes. And we're getting better at that too. We're keeping more and more records as time goes by.
Q. Yes, I mean do you --
A. We used to not keep anything.
Q. Sure.
A. You know, just it wasn't, and when we started it was all in a file in a filing cabinet but --
Q. Have you guys ever like executed any formal mountain training to any of your new pilots --
A. We have, well I'd say formal --
Q. -- about here?
A. -- mountain training, we have a, we have always proposed and always tried to do an after annual company training for all the new pilots, we try to bring them to Coeur d'Alene and go out there and do some, you know, scenario based training in steep mountains.

And we don't, it's not required in our training syllabus because the reality of the world is if all the airplanes go to work early which happens, then we don't have access to say, hey, you four guys come up here, let's jump in four airplanes and go fly, which we have done in the past.

I mean that class of 2020 that was, they were all, you know,

had all struggled. We took everyone of those up but, in Coeur d'Alene and got in a flight of four and went out and scooped Sullivan Lake up north of Deer Park and came back around, hit the Priest River, hit Lake Pend Oreille, it's big, you know, did several of those type flights.

And we try to. It's our goal to do it every time but it's just, the reality of it is we just run out of time sometimes.

Q. Yes, I understand. Okay. How do you document your training exactly, like during your initial and then your company for a season?

A. Okay. We, the initial training is, there's a form lesson, each lesson, there's a syllabus, there's a grade, not a grade sheet but a training record that is filled out after every flight, which lesson we're on and then there's a little space for comments on that lesson, what we, what we covered, signed by the instructor, number of scoops that were done.

Q. And do you guys have a grading mechanism?

A. There's no grade. There's never, we never felt the need for a grade on that and it's, it was brought up on the last conference call I guess or the last one of these calls. I got to thinking about it and I don't even know that we need a grade for that at that point because every flight is, every flight to that point is such a learning experience. I don't, I don't even need the, I don't even want the pressure of a grade being on the those flights. I think --

Q. Right.
A. -- just go out and learn.
Q. Did you ever have anybody in the company tell you that there was going to be a fatality sooner or later and if so why?
A. Jacob would spout that off all the time. If we didn't agree with him you were going to have a fatality. And I had another pilot a few years ago basically said the same thing.

He was again a former employee with issues. But if things didn't go his way he's spout that out, and usually when he was drunk, actually always via text at night, tell me how good he was, I mean who was not and if, you know, who he thought wasn't performing as well and actually it was people that are performing quite well, just not as aggressive as he was so, mostly just Jacob and that happened on multiple occasions where, it didn't go his way, he'd say that.

And I, you know, to be honest I thought, you know, that's pretty shitty because the size of this company, the number of airplanes we have, the amount of time we've been in business, I bet you any company in the industry that's got 22 planes and 30 plus pilots has had a fatality so, you know, I dreaded the day but the reality is with the exposure we get it could happen, you know. And it, anyway, hurts thinking about it.

Q. Who is your director of safety?
A. He is right now, yes.
Q. Okay. That's what I thought. Okay.

A. He's recently taken that position.
Q. Oh is that, is that new or did --
A. We had it --
Q. -- somebody have it before --
A. We had a --
Q. -- and he's taken it --
A. Yes, one of our, we had one of our support drivers, crew chief, I guess, Ivan, the assistant director of ground operations had that SMS manager position and we've, he's still going to be involved in it but he was asking to kind of turn that role down so we get, when Dan became available and decided he wanted to work for us we was like perfect. Got somebody with real operational experience in what we do.
Q. Right. A lot of these questions have were covered really well by Albert. And I think we talked about this but how many accidents or incidents has Dauntless had in the last five years or is this --
A. Probably three.
Q. -- just three? Three. Were they just, but this is the only fatality?
A. Four, yes, no, this is the, this is the only, nobody's ever been hurt here before --
Q. Okay.
A. Yes. We've never had a, no, this is the first time anybody's ever been injured in one of these airplanes. We've had couple of

incidents, accidents, but nothing, I guess only one with a totaled aircraft, so.

Q. Right.

A. And that was just some pilot simply scooping too rough a water.

Q. Okay. I've been dying to ask, I'm trying to understand this. I need you to help me.

A. Okay.

Q. Okay. I don't understand why junior pilots get a relief role --

A. That's a --

Q. -- instead of just flying the line --

A. That's a good question.

Q. -- and so they can get a really solid foundation first in one particular airplane before they start branching out and moving around to these different aircraft.

A. Very good questions. It's out of my control.

Q. It really is, huh? Okay.

A. It's contractual. All of our exclusive use require, contracts require a level 1 pilot to be the primary pilot. A level 2 and come in on most of them can come in and do four days out of any 14 days as a relieve pilot and then they have to move on. They can't stay in the airplane. So, there's that. So, it's contractual.

I can also, I could put them in a call when needed aircraft.

A level 2 can be an a call when needed aircraft but that's almost just as bad if not worse because then they're gong to be who knows where, they're going to be out there trying to go to all these new different places, maybe by themselves, may not be flying with out guys.

They may fly with them one day, the next day they might not be, and they're going to be responsible for keeping up their 23s and learning how to, so that's something that I would like to see changed but I don't know to do it because the customer wants experienced pilots. That's why that's in there.

But it handcuffs me as to where I can send new people. I can only put them in the relief role. And I also have the other side of that is senior pilots, they've earned seniority here, or any company, most of them want to sit on a new contract or, you know, have their own airplane. They don't want to be moving around. So, I have to honor that, their seniority also.

Now I will tell you what I did for [redacted]. I gave her a relief in Coeur d'Alene on four airplanes. She was doing relief on five. And I gave her all four Coeur d'Alene airplanes. She, and the other one she was regularly scheduled to do was Deer Park. So, five airplanes total, she didn't even have to check out of her hotel room and she was flying with the same, she'd be flying with the same people every time, not having to move, she was also put there, Coeur d'Alene, this area has big water, not, you know, the water is not high density altitude.

The mountains are. We climb pretty high sometimes to make drops but pretty benign conditions in this area. And she's also flying with two of our most senior, most experienced pilots in the airplane are based here, Keaton Mitchell and Don McDonald. So, I gave her and Lat as well even though he was an experienced seat pilot, knew fires, had already done that, he'd never done the scooping. They were both put here to give them the best chance of success.

Q. I got it. Have you thought about maybe as a, you know, the chief pilot talking to your CEO about talking to OAS BLM to explain that?

A. It's been brought up in the past.

Q. Maybe talk about --

A. It's something --

Q. -- kind of flexibility?

A. Maybe with the UAFA now that the, all the federal firefighting agencies are starting to listen to the industry, maybe that's a platform to bring that up in.

Q. Yes.

A. I am 100 percent in favor of changing that rule to give me more flexibility. I would love to have an EU contract where I could put a level 1 and a level 2 together.

Q. Yes. Right. Yes. Now I think Albert brought this up, basically I was just going to ask you that if you agree that there's a pretty big difference between ferrying aircraft versus

tactically flying the fire --
A. There's a difference but I think there's value in both. I think there's a lot of value in, I know for myself, there's a lot of value in sitting in a new airplane on a cross country and just getting comfortable in it.
Q. Yes. And the formation part of it.
A. Yes, just sitting there --
Q. Just getting your --
A. -- holding --
Q. -- positions --
A. Get you being comfortable, no --
Q. -- sliding in and out of --
A. -- pressure.
Q. -- the knots trying to --
A. Yes. Yes.
Q. -- move around of the outside and in.
A. I don't know because I wasn't there but I suspect that might have been what [redacted] was doing on that long ferry over to Montana. She was either doing that. She might have been taking pictures. I don't know. She was, she was certainly into her social media. Don't know, don't know what was going there. I wasn't there.
Q. Okay. And then one more and then we'll kind of get into [redacted] a little bit.
A. Okay.

Q. And I think you already answered it to me and it's not your fault, it's the way the East does it. But I was just going to ask if you'd ever sent a pilot to a check ride that doesn't fully meet the requirements of the contract.

A. Oh lots, almost every year.

Q. And, yes, and that I'm still dumbfounded --

A. Well it's just --

Q. -- that's how they do that.

A. It's a lot to help them out on their schedule. They don't want to, they want to, they'd like to come and see training and then they also want to give check rides. So, to facilitate that a lot of times because of the way the system works if I've got somebody lacking in seaplane time it's, that's mostly what it is was seaplane time.

They give them a check ride. They say you're, you're good to go, you don't, as soon as you get your 100 hours send me a 64 form and you'll be good to go. We'll send you a card. And that's, that's been pretty standard. It's just, I like having that option, but if I don't have it I just, I just need to know the rules. I didn't know they were going to change the rules on me with a --

Q. Well that's always been the rules technically.

A. Well I didn't know that. I've never seen the OAS rules.

Q. Yes.

A. You know, I don't, that's not my, that's not my --

Q. The other interagency definitely stick to the rules whether it's CAL FIRE or --
A. Yes, I've never seen --
Q. -- the Forest Service.
A. -- their rules. I've --
Q. We will not, I will not issue a card to somebody until I can't. It could mean my job.
A. Okay. Well they weren't issuing cards.
Q. Right, right, right. But I won't even look at --
A. But they were given the check ride --
Q. -- you until --
A. Okay. Well --
Q. And a lot of times I have to wait and do that down the road --
A. Yes. Well that --
Q. -- you know, during the fire season sometimes.
A. Okay. Well that would be fine too but they've always told us, you know, we don't want to come back. If we come back we've got to charge you or whatever. I say okay, that's fine.
Q. Okay. We'll get into, a little bit into more [redacted] specific stuff. And I, some of the questions again I think Albert answered that one or asked it like that one. I already know the answer to that one too. This is helping us beat the stress. Because I already took half of my questions and said, okay.
A. Well I anticipated. I've been writing notes knowing that

we've done our, I've been anticipating a lot of these questions, so.

Q. And let's see, that one was answered. We discussed it, the instructors, [redacted] would need extra training during initial. And that was specifically for the formation aspect of it?

A. Pretty much, yes. Just --

Q. And also some maybe on the water or no?

A. No, no, nothing really on the water. She did fine on the water. She had gotten past the, gotten past that. She was at that high paced tactical environment was not clicking yet.

Q. And she got most of her, or she, all three of you gave her most of her tactical training during the company training?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay.

A. We touched on it and touched on it a little bit here. You know, we always, it was a constant source of, it always is, a constant source of discussion during our initial training. Of course we're there for two weeks of this.

So, there's a lot of, there's a lot of discussion during the day, formal lessons and then there's certainly a lot of discussions that go on, you know, over dinner and a couple, you know, dinner and beers.

Q. Okay. And she was never formally pulled out of training?

A. Never formally pulled out. No. Contrary to, no.

Q. Okay.

A. Just take a different path going forward but not pulled out.
Q. And you never told her you're not ready for fire?
A. I did not say those words.
Q. Okay.
A. If I did I do not remember it and it doesn't sound like something I would say.
Q. I got the answer to that one. A lot of these have been answered all ready so that's good. And you don't know how many would, you know, big picture, how many hours [redacted] got between April 11th and July 10th or how many scoops?
A. We know I think the number we had come up with just based on, you know, I saw a log that she kept, you know, we had the log at initial training. I saw a log that she kept on the, for the ferry flights and that she showed the OAS for every scoop she had that was in her personal, her personal deal. I don't remember that number but I know we went back and recreated her missions, followed her SpiderTrack stuff. And we, prior to her actually going on fire duty I think we came up with 146.
Q. Okay.
A. A good estimate.
Q. And then fire-wise she had the one in Omak, right?
A. Two fires in Omak.
Q. Two there, two different fires?
A. And I don't know how many scoops she got there. It was based on what I've heard, I'm guessing it's a long climb up.

Q. Did she leave from here?
A. No. She actually, we had a snafu in the schedule and I switched her for a little bit to run up to Omak against my plan of leaving her here. I sent her there and she got a fire, which was great, and she was also flying with --
Q. Are you the pilot scheduler too?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay.
A. Yes.
Q. How do you do that? Is that that board in there?
A. No.
Q. Oh okay.
A. It's right here.
Q. Oh you --
A. It's old school.
Q. Oh okay.
A. It's right here and then that is, it shows which airplane requires relief, who's on that airplane, who's doing the relief, it's quite a, it's a big ordeal to keep track of that many airplanes and a lot of moving pieces. Anytime the phone rings I break out my eraser.
But I'm, yes, I'm, I am training my new assistant director of operations to help or if not take over this role and he's doing quite a good job but I am the, I am primarily responsible for it.
Q. Okay. I think, I think that's -- maybe just a couple more

here. You said a term that kind of concerns me. You were talking about the OAS as abort, abort. And that's something that if I was on a runway and the tower said abort, I would reject the takeoff right. If I was on the water and somebody said abort, I would not take off.

A. Yes.

Q. I can understand using the terms jettison your load, but that's a very --

A. Yes.

Q. -- concerning to me is that --

A. Well that --

Q. Do I have that right?

A. I never thought about it but yes, for us abort means, you know, abort your scoop.

Q. But what if you needed to stop on the water, what's the term then?

A. Yes, that's a good point.

Q. Would you readdress that with your people and --

A. Yes, I would. I never even thought of it, you know, stopping on the water has never been a, never been a concern for us other than if we have an engine failure or something.

Q. Right, right.

A. There's no reason to stop on the water because you can jettison a load.

Q. Unless somebody sees something like a log in front of you or

something way up there or, you know.
A. Yes. You can't stop for it. You still, you still do the jettison then because it, when you jettison on the water it's instant, you're a rocket, you are off the water.
Q. Nothing, yes. Okay. Okay.
A. Yes, we could --
Q. It just is a weird --
A. We could --
Q. -- term to --
A. That is, we could correct --
Q. -- use.
A. -- our terminology there.
MR. SAVAGE: I mean I don't know.
MR. NIXON: It's a good point, Mike.
MR. WEAVER: Though it could be, it could --
MR. SAVAGE: I feel like --
MR. WEAVER: It could be -- yes. Well let me think about that. It, without being too wordy, you know, jettison, jettison --
MR. SAVAGE: Because --
MR. WEAVER: -- what? You know --
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. What would happen, you know, jettisoning your water, jettisoning your load, it doesn't matter how you say it. Jettison means get rid of whatever you're carrying, right?

A. Yes.
Q. Because you can drop it.
A. Yes, we could, we could change that term there.
Q. Well I want to tell you why, when I'm out there as a lead plane pilot and I get into some really bad air, Jesse, and I have you behind me, and I know we're in trouble, I want you to jettison your load. I'm going to tell you to jettison your load.
A. Right.
Q. I'm not going to tell you to abort.
A. Abort, right? I get that.
Q. I'm not ever going to tell you to abort the drop. I'll say let's go around or I'll say jettison your load, you know.
A. Yes.
Q. And start climbing because --
A. And that --
Q. And I've had to do this many times for different reasons.
A. Okay.
Q. And I am, so what the industry standard is is anything that's a runway, and I know the water, you know, you're using it as a runway essentially but abort means stop.
A. Right. No, that, yes. That makes sense. You know, I never thought of it. It's only a term that we've probably used at company training and it was OAS started using it, never thought about it because it was always used in that, but no, it's something we should talk about. And maybe we add that to our

procedures to have some different terminologies for a go around, a jettison go around.

Q. Yes. Jettison --

A. It could have --

Q. -- go around. It's perfect.

A. Yes.

Q. That makes sense to me.

A. That makes sense and that maybe, I've been thinking about that a lot, you know, with the accident, what Keaton said, what she heard or didn't hear. She didn't acknowledge either way. We did have a language barrier, a slight language barrier that there was, so yes, that makes perfect sense. And that we'll quit using, yes, we'll quit using abort. It'll be jettison go around, or abort, stop.

Q. Yes.

A. No, that make sense.

Q. I would highly recommend it.

A. Okay.

Q. When did [redacted] get here to Coeur d'Alene? Or when did she come on contract?

A. Well she was doing relief in Michigan, she was bouncing around doing relief, you know, I was trying to get her as much experience, exposed to the tanker bases, fire environment as possible so I was sending her out every chance I get. I don't remember the exact date she got her, but it was sometime after

June 15th because that's when the first two airplanes started.

It was, it was the last half of, the last half of June or first part of July where she was sitting here full time because that's, they came on July 1, the other, the surge contract and all the Omak, all the other Washington airplanes came on right in mid-June. So, it was in that time frame.

Q. Right. Have all of your pilots gone to NAFA II?

A. With the exception, all of them, they're level 1. The only ones that hadn't this year were [redacted] and Shannon Kern (ph.) who unfortunately fell into this deal of losing his medical because of the Veterans Administration and I think you might be in the same --

Q. I'm in the same boat.

A. Yes, so we lost a pilot there. He would have been in that, but --

Q. There's only up to 9,000 of us now.

A. Yes, well.

Q. Okay.

A. So, no but, no, the ones that were eligible have all been.

Q. All right.

A. Which is another suggestion I have, NAFA II is great training for new people, brand new pilots. If I could send my brand-new people to NAFA II and let them get that scenario based training in a simulator that would be great.

Q. That's what I was getting at, Jesse.

A. They won't let me do that. They have to be, that have to have done a complete season, 25 missions and a year as a level 2 pilot.
Q. And who made that rule, OAS or who's making that rule?
A. I don't know who made the rule. I've been asking for the last, since NAFA II came, NAFA I/II came out. I have been asking management to allow us to send level 2, brand new pilots to that training and the answer has been no. We don't want to be vetting your pilots. Glen Claypool, we don't want to be vetting your pilots for you. I said, then charge us. Charge us good money. If I've got candidate --
Q. Well it's just that I think it's more useful and superior to regular NAFA. I happen to be an instructor there.
A. Yes.
Q. And you know the mountain flying, mountain weather, fire --
A. I agree --
Q. -- mountain, fire weather --
A. I would --
Q. -- behavior, the models, the Sims, I just think it's --
A. I would, I would, I would love to have that opportunity. I don't.
MR. SAVAGE: All right. I'll work on that, too. I think, I think I'm good for now.
MR. NIXON: Okay. We'll do a final round again if some --
MR. SAVAGE: Yes.

MR. NIXON: -- if you think of something else. Okay. Thank you, Mike.

MR. SAVAGE: Yes, thank

you. MR. NIXON: Lea,

you're up. MS. WEINKAUF:

Okay.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. Maybe clarifications in here. You refer to assistant director of operations and assistant chief pilot several times, is that the same person or is that two different --

A. Two different people.

Q. -- people?

A. Yes.

Q. Okay. Can you tell me who they are?

A. Okay. Our chief flight instructor, assistant chief pilot is Steve Helinski. You're going to talk to him tomorrow. Assistant director of operations I have two right now. One is transitioning out starting toward his retirement, he's going to be releasing all of his duties.

He's going to become a part time pilot next year, he wants 12 on 12 off. His name is John Thomas. I have a guy named Brent Voris, who is acting in that role, transitioning into that role now.

Q. Okay. Thanks. You said something a few minutes ago and I didn't know what you were talking about. Maybe other people do or missed something, you mentioned along ferry to Montana.

A. Oh it, it was for a dispatch to go fight a fire, to fly for an hour and a half in the lower 48. To fly for an hour and a half before you get to your, around 35 minutes is a pretty long ferry before you become operational. That's not really common.

I'd say the longest for us, 40 minutes is usually considered long, you know, to, within your dispatch radius so to go that far I would, that's what I call the long ferry. It's not a ferry across country, you know, two fuel cycles to get an airplane.

Q. Right --

A. -- across but it's a --

Q. Home away flight.

A. Operationally that's a pretty long ferry.

Q. So, you said you didn't know what she was doing on that flight?

A. Yes, well as far as --

Q. I think that's what you said.

A. You know what I said in relation to the Reese's testimony and his questions of her, moving in and out of position she may have just been practicing getting, you know, doing that on purpose just to, you know, she's learning to do the lead, lag thing.

She's getting some, she's practicing I guess is what I'm getting at. When I said I don't know what she was doing I know what she was doing. She was following the flight to the fire. But, or following the lead --

Q. On the flight Reese was talking about?

A. Yes. Yes.
Q. Okay. So, Montana --
A. On the way to Montana from here, over to Helena.
Q. Okay. Got you. Thank you. I think you more or less covered this but let me just confirm, there's no designation to be lead?
A. No. And I'd like to elaborate on that. No, no designation to be lead, no lead, no lead designation, no wingman designation. And that goes back to the way the aircraft are contracted and where they could be.

There's no, I mean you could take a brand new person that could show up and theoretically be expected to lead. So, we don't have a designation for that. Do we informally try to keep less experienced pilots from leading in complicated situations, yes we do. But no, but there is no designation.
Q. Okay. And then what about to be designated as an instructor for Dauntless?
A. We have, there's no formal criteria set other than having a CFI which you don't even have to have technically because you're teaching people that are already qualified to fly the airplane but as a personal choice for me, I want somebody that has a CFI, somebody who likes teaching and somebody who is very good at flying the airplane.

And then we, I've got to candidates coming up this coming year that are excellent pilots that love teaching and we're going to start rolling them into the instructor role.

Q. Okay. And then when someone becomes a Dauntless instructor pilot do they get any additional training or is it --

A. Not after a certain point. I'll use Jacob as an example. Was it, it might have been 2021, we had him out at initial training, I started putting him in the back seat of the airplane flying with me. And then I started acting like a student that was messing up. So, training there. 2022, we only trained two students. We didn't need him. I'm sorry, wait. No.

2022, he came out. 2023, we only trained two, we didn't need him, so just Steve and I did that. 2024, we brought him out again and again I went and rode with him in the front seat, let him fly from the back, acted like a messing student. He handled the airplane quite fine and we, you know, we transitioned him there into, this was his first year as a primary instructor in the airplane.

Q. Okay. So, you did, you maybe do some flying with them as a pretend student.

A. Yes, and then after --

Q. But there's no syllabus or anything?

A. -- you know once a, like or Steve Helinski, no, I mean if, hell, I could, you know, he might teach me some things. You know, I don't have a formal program for check rides on instructors, no.

Q. Okay. Okay. This one we've heard a few different things and I just want to clarify why exactly she did not participate in the first OAS carding event? Why she didn't fly?

A. That's because the Western Region guys that showed up to do our check rides would not give her a check ride because she didn't have the seaplane time. Had it been Eastern Region she would have.

Q. So, the reason she didn't participate in the OAS carding that day was because OAS said she wasn't qualified but you all were putting her up for the check ride?

A. Yes. She would have been put up for a check ride. We could have done that right after initial training.

Q. Okay. Okay. We got answers for those. So, you did discuss the conversation with the other instructors and [redacted] about her lagging behind.

A. Yes.

Q. Was there any documentation?

A. No, we didn't document it. We just agreed to move forward on a different path.

Q. Okay.

A. And I can't remember the exact words of that conversation but it was not, we were not washing her out.

Q. Right. I think you covered that stuff. Oh I had a question about when you saw her resume you said you showed her resume to someone, maybe the lead --

A. Steve Helinski, our other --

Q. -- instructor?

A. -- chief, our chief flight instructor.

Q. You said you put your finger over her name.
A. Mm-hmm.
Q. Why did you do that?
A. I didn't want him to be biased by the fact that she was a female because his wife gives him a lot of trouble about flying with our other female pilot. And I didn't want him, his decision on that resume to be, I wanted him to look at the resume for what it was.
Q. Okay. So, if you hadn't covered her name what do you think would have happened?
A. I don't know. We'd have probably moved forward but I just wanted an honest assessment from him.
Q. Okay. You did mention you have actually washed some other pilots out during --
A. Oh yes.
Q. -- training. What was the trigger point for those pilots that they were washed out?
A. Yes, it just got to a certain point and could not safely scoop a load of water, poor decision making. We had the first one years ago spent almost ten hours with him, he never even got to where he could put the probes down and scoop any water.

It was like this is hopeless. You know, we've gone way beyond what's expected. You know, it's not going to work. That guy had actually flown for Service Beavers scooping water. So, for whatever reason in an 802, he couldn't do it. So, that was a

long time ago. Other ones just, you know, the last one we had we just purely washed out.

He was probably the best of the class on that very first day. Never got any better. That was it. That was a peak. So, it was just --

Q. Okay. Now particular decision point though.

A. No, no.

Q. Just a feeling --

A. It's a --

Q. -- as you go through --

A. But it's usually we --

Q. -- training?

A. We give people, you know, we'll try to, we try not to give up on them. We try to give them, you know, they're usually getting pretty close to that ten hour point before we make a decision.

Q. Okay. We talked about that. You mentioned you've done disciplinary action on a few pilots over the years.

A. I'd say more than just, not necessarily disciplinary action but it's like this is not weak, you can't tolerate this, you can't work for us anymore, you know, so.

Q. So, when you do that how is that documented?

A. I won't say it's a, it's not, I won't say it's documented. It's, no, we haven't, we just terminated their contract with us so it's like --

Q. Because all your pilots are contract?

A. We are. Yes. And they prefer it that way, so.
Q. Getting close to the end. How many people do you supervise? You talked about who they were and stuff? Do you know the number?
A. I couldn't give you an exact number off the bat. If you couldn't the part timers it's direct supervision of 26 to 30 give or take, indirect supervision, you know, I have, we have indirect supervision could be 70, you know, all the operational folks.
They technically don't work for me like all the ground guys, mechanics, they work for the director of maintenance or our director of ground operations, but ultimately at the end of the day I have some form of supervision over all of them.
Q. Sure. Okay. We had heard in a different interview the base she was at on her previous fire, I don't want to say the name of the town because I don't remember it correctly now.
A. When she actually flew a fire?
Q. Oh yes.
A. Omak.
Q. Yes. So, we heard on a previous interview that new pilots weren't supposed to go to that base. Can you say more about that?
A. That, the Washington DNR, their exclusive use contract requires a level 1 relief, not only a level 1 primary but a level 1 relief, but they have granted leeway for us to be able to put level 2 relief out there in order to even have relief because I mean that's, and that's something they're talking about changing in the contract because we have, whether it's the correct entry

way into the industry, we have to have a pathway to bring new people in and right now relief is the pathway. But yes, we were granted permission to allow a level 2 pilots to fly in Washington.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. I think that's all I have.

MR. WEAVER: Okay.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thank you, Lea. Kevin, any questions.

MR. MERRILL: I just had one that wasn't covered.

BY MR. MERRILL:

Q. And just kind of speaking culturally to your SMS, you spoke to they do a flight, some form of flight risk assessment every morning.

A. Mm-hmm.

Q. Is it encouraged through and known through the company that if conditions change or but I'm generally familiar on how the scoop operates, you do a cycle. Is it common to do a different frat at a different time of day for a different mission?

A. We don't necessarily do a different frat but it's encouraged to evaluate the situations. I mean it's not, I mean it's not uncommon to be in a mission and have it go to crap and be able to evaluate that and, you've got -- yes.

Q. So, it's more real time --

A. Real time.

Q. -- risk management.

A. Yes, and that's one of the things we talk about. We don't, like formation flying is not necessarily the word. We like to, we

like coining the term group tactics and that's what you do as a group. That's what, you know, somebody says something, raise it, you can talk about it, hey, what do you think? Well so yes, there are risk assessments going on constantly in a flight.

MR. MERRILL: Sure. Okay. Yes, that would just be a suggestion, I mean just for documentation throughout your SMS just capturing them some how. Thank you.

MR. WEAVER: We've actually -- yes, that's a --

MR. MERRILL: Yes. I've got you. That was it. Thank you.

MR. WEAVER: Thanks.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Kevin. We'll do final round now. I'll start it.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Remember with our interview with Jacob he mentioned he kind of did his own draft syllabus I believe. Did you ever, did he ever share a copy with you?

A. He shared multiple copies of, well he had a formation syllabus that was way too, way too detailed, way too long for us to realistically apply. We don't, we flat out, government's not asking for it and we don't have the budget for it.

Q. Okay. What about the, I'm assuming that another part was it in the, more in the training, not just formation, but, you know, dealing with the initial and company. Did he have any details?

A. A lot of, I don't remember, you know, we never bought into any of his suggestions 100 percent but a lot of this suggestions

have been implemented, or ideas. I mean they come from, they come from Navy experience just as a lot of them came from John Thomas, our, you know, so were his ideas discarded, thrown in the trash? No. But the reality of implementing everything wasn't just not realistic.

Q. Is there stuff still on the table from some of that stuff or is that, you talk about you're looking at some things --

A. I'd have to go back look at specifics that are, that might e there but I can't think of anything that's on the table. But there, you know, we're definitely going to change some things moving forward.

Q. Okay.

A. And some of them indirect, directly related to what he was doing that we don't want to do and we want to less of.

Q. That's it.

A. So, a lot of our training was focused around that this year.

Q. We, as you know met earlier, your interview we talked a lot about the grade sheets and in his case he had his own grade sheet he implemented. Did anyone else use that instructor-wise or was that just him?

A. Just him. And we did not see them.

Q. You, he never --

A. No. That was --

Q. -- tried to get you to --

A. That was something, that was something I was going to address

with him after training was over. I was going to require him to give me those grade sheets so we could put them in the training record and unfortunately I didn't get to do that because we fired him.

Q. Okay.

A. And we didn't, and we don't have them.

Q. And going back to that training file you have electronically, I know you sent us a bunch of stuff but we have everything of that's --

A. You have everything we have training.

Q. -- in that electronic file?

A. Yes.

Q. Is that correct?

A. Yes, correct.

Q. I just wanted to make sure. Okay. And then you mentioned, I think it might answer the question just to confirm, you know, you got the maintenance side of the house too that you that you obviously working because of flight scheduling and everything, you know, so you're working hand in hand but is it, the total employees of the company, everybody including, you know, admin or whatever, how many total employees are there?

A. Right now it varies, you know, but right now I think I looked at our all team email and there was 77. So, plus --

Q. Seventy-seven.

A. -- 80, and that, you know, we're trying, we're trying to hire

more Morgan Stanley (ph.).

Q. And that includes leadership too I guess.

A. Yes.

Q. Brett's on there too, --

A. Yes, yes.

Q. -- that 77. okay. You mentioned, you know, in big picture we talked a lot about tactical so I don't want to concentrate on that but, you know, it's very hard to, because a lot of people come in, you know, like you talked about ag time but not tactical time, so it's very hard to, you know, figure out where someone sits on that, you know.

But given what you know because you've been around a long time and you've seen the whole spectrum, someone that came in like earlier or a number 3 guy, you know, he already was, you know, flying with another company that, you know, tactical. Where did [redacted] sit, you know, as far as tactical given her experience level with tactical? Was she right in the middle or was she still behind? I mean if you're comparing with people that already have tactical experience obviously --

A. She --

Q. -- in her class she's going to be behind.

A. Yes, she expressed a lot more questions about it, maybe anxiety about it but as far as, as far as somebody with her experience level that just came in as a, you know, corporate ag pilot with her understanding of it was probably on par.

Q. About average with other people you've seen with the same experience?
A. Yes.
Q. Is that, does that check?
A. I think she over thought a lot of it.
Q. Okay. And then you gave her feedback, you know, obviously when, you know, at a certain time. About how many times did you talk to her about her having issues and a little bit behind in certain areas, tactical and --
A. It was mainly, you know, it --
Q. Was it one time or was it several times you talked to her?
A. It might have been twice.
Q. You gave her feedback?
A. Yes. I'm trying to, trying to remember now. It was for sure that one time during the company training, annual training. As far as she was a little behind the class as far as initial training but not behind what we would call a standard of, you know, she was I think that might have been discussed because she was worrying about it, you know, people were starting to solo and she hadn't.
Q. I see. But like you said that class had, some people had some advantages over her?
A. They had some advantages. If she had been in a 2020 class, she'd have been --
Q. Yes, you said right up there in front.

A. Yes, the --
Q. And then when you gave her the feedback, everyone's different, you know, pilots, you know, everyone's different but no one likes getting negative feedback. How did she take it?
A. She took the criticism very well and that's one of the things I admired about her was every time we had an issue for example she had an issue coming into the pattern, not understand a controller I think. And it was discussed, it's like what were you thinking? And well a little loss of SA.

I think it was talked about, not understanding. She took the extra effort instead of going to hang out with everybody else and eat and drink beer at the end of the night. She went and got her a bunch of YouTube videos downloaded on U.S., for -- videos tailored for foreigners to be able to understand U.S. air traffic control. And she studied hard to overcome.

So, whenever she was presented with a, whenever she had a challenge she excelled at fixing it.
Q. So, she tried to address everything?
A. That's, that's why we, you know, she --
Q. And she took it with a good attitude?
A. Yes, and that's, that's why we really wanted to go forward with her.
Q. She didn't disagree at all?
A. Never disagreed and always tried to make herself better. She was a kind of long term employee that we strive to have. You

know, she was an asset and --
Q. I see.
A. -- an inspiration to everybody else. I mean she -- yes.
Q. Yes. Okay. Well that's good to hear. Your SyOP, your company SyOP, you know, the standard operation procedure book you have is that approved internally or do you have to have OAS or someone else approve it as well?
A. No. We approve that internally. They --
Q. That's it?
A. Yes.
Q. So, there's no external approval on that?
A. Right. And --
Q. Okay.
A. -- we're, like I said, we are going to make some changes in it and they're not going to be major because we're just trying to reflect what the, we're trying to reflect PMS 518, you know, that's the standard we need to operate to.
Q. Okay.
A. You probably don't have a copy of that.
Q. And then you mentioned you don't flight lead designations. Part of it's a scheduling, you know, kind of a nightmare is what I'm here but you have, you have a select instructors after, you know, they don't, I don't think you have a formal program but like you said, you select them.
Do you have, do you designate, do you have a list where

they're, these following are authorized to fly as flight instructors in the company? Any type of ledger or something like that?

A. It's not a ledger I don't think.

Q. Authorization?

A. No. But it is a, they vary knowledge companywide as flight instructors, you know, as, but no, I probably --

Q. So, is it, is it official or is it not?

A. No. It's, well, it's --

Q. It's official but it's not --

A. It's not documented. No, we don't --

Q. -- documented? Okay. That's all, sure.

A. That's something we, you know, I never even thought about that until the questions started being answered and we probably should have some sort of a formal, you know, Dauntless designated, Dauntless flight instructor certification. But --

Q. Okay.

A. -- it's not, like I say, it's not required so we never really thought about it. Never --

MR. NIXON: Okay. I was just double checking. And I've got one more question if I could read it. So, and I had go with it around the last chance here. I don't think I could read it. Let me know what it's like. Do you have anything Lea? I'm going to pass here in a minute.

MS. WEINKAUF: (No audible response.)

MR. NIXON: Kevin?

MR. MERRILL: No, unfortunately.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Geez.

MR. SAVAGE: I don't either.

MR. NIXON: Okay. You don't. Let me, give me one second if I can't figure this out we'll close out. I apologize. I can't make what I wrote there. But so that concludes our questions from us. We appreciate everyone's time. I know it's a long one particular in your case and Dan as well being your representative. Before we end with Jesse, Dan, do you have anything?

MR. CARROLL: Nothing to add.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Jesse, you know, we always end with, you know, was there anything you expected to be asked or if there's something you want to make sure we're aware of that wasn't brought up before the ending?

MR. WEAVER: No, I'm just, I'd just like to eventually I really would like to know what caused this. I wish I could have been in the cockpit that day to see. I fully thought she would be prepared to handle that mission. I don't understand it so, I'd diligently like to figure it out.

MR. NIXON: Of course. Okay. Anything else before we close out?

MR. WEAVER: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Everybody, once again this was an interview of the chief pilot and today is September 12 (sic), so

that concludes our interview. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of Jesse Weaver
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 13, 2024

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.



Romona Phillips
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	*	
	*	
FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR	*	
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024	*	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
	*	

Interview of: JOHN J. THOMAS, Deputy Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

September 2024

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL SAVAGE, Standardizations and Safety
U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
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KEVIN MERRILL, Aviation Safety Officer
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JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot and Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

DANIEL CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air
(On behalf of Mr. Thomas)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. NIXON: Hey, good morning, John, how are you doing?

MR. THOMAS: Good morning, I'm good. How are you?

MR. NIXON: Good. Sorry for the sounds of the COMMs and us getting into the hangar to access a few issues to work through, but we're with you. I understand 10:30 is your -- kind of your time, Bingo time today, right? We got about -- almost an hour.

MR. THOMAS: I do.

MR. NIXON: Okay, so we'll make the best of it. Welcome. I'm Albert Nixon with the NTSB. Just a couple of guidelines for the interview. You have an option to have a representative to support you, did you choose that option?

MR. THOMAS: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And then you were also -- I know Jesse, hopefully, coordinated with you, we are going to record this session and the reason we're recording is it's going to the transcript service that makes a transcript and at some point you'll get a draft copy to go through just to make sure we accurately captured what you said, I'm saying, and once you send that back with any corrections, then we'll make a final copy so it's good for both of us, it's good for you and it's good for me and then nothing goes with the recording, it's not like we use that for anything, it's just for the transcript only, if that makes sense.

MR. THOMAS: Sure.

MR. NIXON: Yeah. So --

MR. THOMAS: No problem.

MR. NIXON: -- you're aware of that and you have no issue?

MR. THOMAS: No issue.

MR. NIXON: Okay. This is, as you know, an NTSB-led investigation. I'm the chairman of the operations group, is who we are interviewing you and with that, you probably know about the NTSB, I'm assuming, our function? Okay. As you know, we lead investigations, we try to get a probable cause out of the accident and along the way we try to determine any safety mitigations that could be had to hopefully mitigate or prevent another accident, you know, of this type, obviously.

We're independent, so we don't have anyone -- you know, we're not biased or anything like that, a lot of people think we're -- you know, we work for FAA or DOT or something, we don't, we're independent, totally independent, so in case you didn't know that.

So with that, I already introduced myself, I'm going to go around and introduce you to my team and then we'll start off, John, so let's go around the table.

Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: Yeah, Jess Weave, Chief Pilot, Director of Operations, Dauntless Air.

MR. CARROLL: Dan Carroll, Director of Safety, Dauntless Air.

MR. MERRILL: Kevin Merrill, Aviation Safety Officer, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region.

MS. WEINKAUF: Lea Weinkauf, Forest Service, Air Safety Investigator.

MR. SAVAGE: Michael Savage, U.S. Forest Service, standardizations office working with safety.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you. Let me just double check this recorder, my backup's not going.

(Pause.)

MR. NIXON: One sec, John, we'll be right with you.

MR. THOMAS: No problem.

(Pause.)

MR. NIXON: Okay, it's going, for backup. Okay, we're live again. All right, welcome, everybody.

INTERVIEW OF JOHN JOSEPH THOMAS

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. John, could you state your full name, please?

A. John Joseph Thomas.

Q. Okay. And give us your aviation background.

A. Okay. I started flying when I was about 27 years old, I got my private pilot's license while I was in the Marine Corps and then I went to a Marine Corps flight school. I flew the Harrier for 10 years and then I ended up flying the King Air for my last couple years in the Marine Corps, so I spent 20 years in the Marine Corps, 17 as a pilot, and got out in 2009, started crop dusting and then 2013 I started flying wheeled (ph.) SEATs for Queen Bee, flew with them from 2013 until the spring of 2018 and

that's when I joined Dauntless and I've been with Dauntless ever since. I have just under 7,000 total hours of PIC time, just under 1500 hours in the 802, which -- just under a thousand hours in the Fire Boss and multiple other types of aircraft.

Q. Okay, great. As far as Dauntless goes, what positions have you had with the company?

A. When I joined, I was just a line pilot and then 2019 time frame, I think at the end of the season, got hired on as the deputy director of operations.

Q. Okay.

A. So I fly for Jess Weaver.

Q. Okay. And that's your current position, as well, correct?

A. Yes, now.

Q. Okay, great. And I think you answered the question, you know, your reporting official is Jesse, correct, in your job?

A. Correct.

Q. Okay. And what type of pilot certificates and training certificates do you have?

A. Single-engine sea, multi-engine land, single-engine land, commercial instrument, type rated in the BE-200, agricultural sign-off for 137 operations, that's about it.

Q. Okay. And I know you're the assistant, but could you kind of go through your major responsibilities in your current position with Dauntless?

A. Well, I do -- going through Jess whenever he's not available

for writing like schedules, joining meetings, help out to coordinate between operations and maintenance. I write like schedules from time to time and whatever needs to be done on the operational side, sometimes working with the SEAT codes to get planes out the door on a contract, just whatever needs to be done at the -- that I can help Jess with in terms of running the operations from the flight side of the company, that's all I do.

Q. Okay. Where are you located? Where do you live, I guess?

A. Where I live, in Colorado.

Q. Colorado, okay. And then do you fly the line on occasion, too, part time?

A. As a line pilot?

Q. Yes.

A. Yeah, I mean, that's my primary job, I would say. And I'm, you know --

Q. Okay.

A. -- secondary as the deputy director. I'm on contract now, right, yeah.

Q. Okay. You know, we kind of ask this question in general because, you know, you've been in this business for a while and in your position, is there anything in the firefighting community or particularly the Fire Boss operations in general that you want to make sure we're aware of, you know, like they're always dispatched quickly, whatever the case is, something we may not be aware of, you know, from how OAS treats you, whatever it may be, do you have

any comments before we get a little more detailed?
A. Specifically on the Fire Boss?
Q. The operations in general, yeah.
A. No, no.
Q. Okay. So let's discuss a little bit about the company now. Tell us about, has there been any major changes in the last five years for the company?
A. Yeah. I would say when I joined in '19 or '18, the training officer was Steve Bailey, who is an Air Force pilot that had gotten out, he was a (indiscernible) guy and he had already started a really good training program, very, very thorough, wrote some SOPs and some training scripts or whatnot and my first year attending company training was 2019 and after that, every single year, I think that the training program just has gotten bigger and better and more efficient, more focused.

So as far as that goes, that's been a big change, just constantly adding more capabilities to our training and whatnot. The fact that we've added a lot more planes, that's been a big change. And with that, more people, obviously. Other than, you know, training and like growing, those were the -- are the big, big changes since I came on board.
Q. Okay, are you flying more now or has it been about steady the whole time you've been in this current position?
A. Yeah, yeah. My first year in the Fire Boss was my best year ever in like terms of I've always been a line pilot, so I go out

in every season and obviously, it just happens, you know, if you're in a busy spot you're going to fly more but I've always been available, so I fly, you know, as much as I'm needed to. I'm not sure if I'm answering that question, but from -- we're (indiscernible) for our contract with the company from March 1st through September 30th, we make ourselves available to the --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- company to fly, so --

Q. Okay. So really, for that -- you know, we'll call it the fire season, you know, that time frame, you're pretty much a full-time line pilot, but you do do other duties with the -- you're assistant -- is that correct, with your management duties?

A. Correct, yeah.

Q. Okay, got it. And then tell us a little bit about your safety culture, you've been with a few organizations, tell us about how Dauntless rates compared to what you -- I know you said you were in the Marines or whatever, your past in some other -- you were in some other organizations, as well, flying.

A. Yeah, you know, I think the military in, like general, has a very, very good safety program and like seeing -- you know, I think Steve Bailey kind of started it and whatnot, some of the programs and whatnot have worked their way into Dauntless, I think we have a really good safety program, I know the SMS system is active. Oh, I just joined the safety and compliance committee, so I like to sit in on those meetings and whatnot. We do cover quite

a bit of safety topics during our company training, we have briefers and different topics that we cover that are both, you know, required by the contract, we go through FAA procedures as they relate to our mission. We review all the safety requirements that are in the contract, it's talked about, we do debriefs on company training from the past season, go over things that like work well or things that could have worked out better. We use sand tables to create different types of scenarios to walk them through, see what they're thinking, maybe give them some ideas on how to handle different types of situations.

We put out e-mails a couple times each week, usually one or two of those e-mails will be a safety topic. So I think we do a pretty good job, you know, just like any program and we could do better and I think every year we are doing better, we're doing more and more, getting more focused on whether it's safety or techniques of flying or skills, we're just getting like better and better.

Q. Okay, so you would think your -- you mentioned earlier your SMS program, you think it's fairly robust and you're getting good feedback.

A. Yeah, you know, if we -- it's definitely taken very seriously and I think -- you know, Dan was just hired as the director of safety and one shortfall that he picked up on was that, you know, something like happens, some incident, it will be entered into the SMS and it may take a month or like longer to get out to the

actual company, what the issue was and what the resolution was. So Dan came up with the idea of, you know, if something happens, let's just take a quick snapshot of what that was and put it out, you know, within 24 hours put out an e-mail to the entire company, tell them -- telling them what happened and at least to make people aware of, you know, something happened and then that we're working on it to figure out why and how to prevent that from happening again, so I think that has been a very good move. But yeah, I think our SMS system is a good one and it's taken very, very seriously.

Q. Okay, thank you. And then, John, are you -- do you -- are you an "instructor" with Dauntless, a flight instructor?

A. I am not a civilian CFI, so no. I'm a member of the training committee, I like held flight instructor type qualifications in the military that don't transfer over as a CFI, I've like been in, you know, a bunch of different training departments, various squadrons, I was like -- and so I'm familiar with that training, I like flight training, but no, I'm not a "Fire Boss instructor."

Q. Okay. In your role on the training committee, we've heard that term, obviously, from some other interviews, but kind of enlighten me on, you know, how many people are on there and what's discussed, basically.

A. Yeah, so a couple years ago, like when I said I like joined Dauntless, Steve Bailey was the person in like charge of training for the entire company. As the company grew, it became a lot more

because we were trying incorporate a lot more training ideas into the company training program, so Jesse turned the position into a training committee. So Jess is on it, Steve Helinski is on it, I'm on it, Dan Carroll is now on it as usually Minnesota air attack, and Jacob Patrick was on it and Brent Voris is like now on it, too, so I don't know, that's six or so people and we usually start talking about company training, which is usually the first week of like March, we just start having monthly training committee calls starting in about September and then usually sometime maybe in November we'll start doing them every other week or every week, just kind of trying to narrow down the 10 or so days that we do our company training, what's going to happen on each day.

I've been pretty much responsible for writing the academic portion, so usually that's going to be Monday through Wednesday, maybe through Thursday morning, and that's just full of the contract-required classes that we have to put on. We look back at the prior season, see what areas people may have been deficient in, trying to create a class around that, whether, you know, it could be scooping techniques in rough water, it could be weather related things. I coordinate the guest speakers and whatnot, anyway, so we like try and -- I do that part of the training, I'm not involved in the actual instructing of pilots in the Fire Boss.

Q. So on the training committee, when you do meet, like you said, you know, it varies, but do you guys document the meeting,

like, the notes, do you do that at all, what was discussed?
A. Yeah. Well, you know, we -- we have tasks, you know, like towards the end of a meeting we'll like talk about okay, who's going to take care of this for the next meeting, you know, and we write down notes. I do it. Anyway, you know, they're not formalized notes, I just have a legal pad and I write the -- you know, like the date of the meeting, the tasks that I may do for the next meeting. Jacob Patrick was kind of making a summary, notes --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- or like minutes, kind of, of the meeting and then he would just send those out afterwards so that, you know, we could always go back to review what was discussed.
Q. Okay. Is the training committee, I get some of the bigger picture ideas, but do they discuss individual, for instance, new pilots or their training, how it's going individually and challenges there or is it more just --
A. Yeah, well, you know, we like -- normally, we like to hire pilots around the September/October time frame, so the training committee is really focused on, like, preparing for company training.
Q. Um-hum.
A. So we don't even talk about, you know, the pilots at that point.
Q. Okay. So that's more of like just an instructor meeting more

so than the training committee, is that correct, where you would talk about individual training?
A. Individual pilots like me, you mean?
Q. Yes.
A. Yeah, yeah. The training committee wouldn't necessarily be talking about specific pilots, we may talk about, you know, like a couple years ago we came up with any pilot with less than 500 hours in the aircraft would have to go through like yearly flight with a Fire Boss instructor in the backseat just to make sure that they're, you know, still using the right --
Q. Kind of like the proficiency flight type thing?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay, got it.
A. And then if you have over 500 hours, it's like every other year, so --
Q. Okay.
A. But having said that, we're still trying to get everyone through every single year, but what we focus on is pilots with less than 500 hours because they've got to get it probably (indiscernible) --
Q. Okay.
A. -- every year.
Q. Okay.
A. So in like that regard, yes, we talk about pilots as a group and not necessarily a specific pilot.

Q. Specific, got it. And then just to make sure, you know, initial's kind of -- initial training is kind of -- you know, I've seen your grade sheet and all, you know, the scoops, all that, it's pretty -- what's the word I'm looking for, established, you don't have to -- you know, the training committee is probably not reviewing that much, I'm assuming it's more for the company training which is what you're looking at and what you're going to schedule for the speakers and stuff, and stuff like that, is that true?
A. Yeah.
Q. Primarily, your time is more toward company training versus initial?
A. Exactly.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And then -- so like how often do you get to travel, like, when they give company training, do you come in person or do you do it online? You know, it looks like you're pretty -- you know, like you schedule guest speakers and other things like that, do they come in person or is it usually an online-type thing with it?
A. Oh, most of the time they come in person, yeah.
Q. In person, okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And where do you usually have that, just curious, your --

when you have the in-person briefings, where is it at?
A. Yeah, last two years we've been using the Cleburne, Texas conference center, it's a -- you know, made to host conferences, got great audio, great video, so it's --
Q. Okay. Big, nice facility.
A. -- just a nice, big building with plenty of chairs and whatnot, yeah.
Q. Do you go there, do you try to go there during the company training in person, as well?
A. I'm there the entire time, yeah.
Q. Okay, great. So every year you make the annual company training, for the most part?
A. The entire company goes to that.
Q. Okay.
A. We have to, yeah. Yeah.
Q. Okay, great. And then do you do other duties like, you know, I know you're talking about, you know, the training committee and certain things, do you do any oversight of any pilots or anything for your --
A. Just in my role as the deputy director if, you know, Jess isn't available to field questions from all their pilots or different agencies, I'll step in. Just as a senior pilot, I can (indiscernible) by myself, like a mentor to some of the newer pilots, you know, so --
Q. Okay.

A. But direct oversight, that's about it, yeah.
Q. And then you were coming from a background where there's formation flying, how do you feel the new hires when they get, you know, carded, how's their four ship and two ship tactical as far as formation goes?
A. How are they doing?
Q. In general.
A. That's what you're asking?
Q. Yeah. Do you think they're --
A. Yeah, I mean, I -- you know, it's -- I think they're doing okay. I think, you know, for some it comes easier than others, which -- like sure, some of them aren't as comfortable as others and they'll -- like flight school, they'll like be out farther and it hasn't been an issue. It's kind of like whatever they're -- you know, they're most comfortable doing, as long as it's safe and it doesn't affect the formation in, like, general, you know, they're all in the same piece of like sky together, it doesn't have to be a tight formation, just -- but yeah, so some pilots are like very comfortable with it, some aren't, so like ones that like aren't, they'll be farther out and, you know, that's okay, too, so --
Q. I'm assuming, from your background, you know, and experience level, you're probably flight lead a lot, you know, when you fly, give me a rundown, you know, approximately how long is your debrief after -- I mean, I know it varies depending on how the

flight went and everything and the complexity of it, but generally speaking, about how long is your debrief as flight lead?

A. It all depends on like who's in a flight, it will depend on how complex the fire was, could be anywhere from five minutes to 15 minutes. I would say most of the time they're five to ten minutes max.

Q. Okay, all right.

A. You know, we use a lot of SOPs --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- so, you know, we'll like say that the takeoff and join up are SOP and, you know, then we go out and execute it. We come back and we'll say okay, any (indiscernible) start of taxi/takeoff? No. Okay. How about the takeoff and like join up, everything good? Oh, well, you know, you were out of position here or you're -- you know, you like made this turn a little bit better to (indiscernible) to like join up. How was the entry into the FTA, questions on that, you know. So it can go very quickly if there aren't a lot of things to like talk about. I always try and find, you know, a couple things that were like good, a couple things that need improvement and, like I said, that could take anywhere from five to ten minutes max.

Q. Okay.

A. If there are new guys, new pilots in the formation, then you watch them more like time, make sure that they are comfortable with what happened, answering my questions, give feedback,

whatnot, so that like might go 15 minutes.
Q. Okay.
A. Depends.
Q. And then would you say that every time you are flight lead that you always debrief?
A. I always come back and I ask is there -- you guys have anything for the debrief, most people, you know, will say no or one or two things and I'll say okay, nothing on start of taxi/takeoff? No. Anything on the flight to and flight from? No. Anything in the FTA? Usually there's always something about like dropped sequences or, you know, something about the scoop with the winds or like whatnot on the lake, but they're -- yeah.

If you're flying and using the SOP and like things go as per the SOP, there doesn't have to be a lot to debrief. Again, it depends on the makeup of the flight, if it's a two ship, two very experienced guys, there's going to be very little to like debrief most of the time. If it's a four ship and you have someone new in there, it's going to take a little bit more time.

Q. Okay. I'm going to move on now to the accident pilot, [redacted] Tell us your involvement, anything to do with her training or as, you know, management or as, you know, a line pilot.
A. Yeah. So I met her for the first time at company training this past March and at company training; I flew with her twice. First time I was a flight -- I was the flight lead of a four ship,

I want to say she was three or four in the two seater with Jacob Patrick, and we were going to take off, like go do some practice drops with the Texas Forest Service, probably like 15 miles from the airport. We took off, we joined up at a waypoint west of the airport and then proceeded to the mock fire. I switched the flight to an FM air-to-ground frequency to check in with the flight prior to checking with the Forest Service and she never answered and I kept calling, you know, flight check to the airport and get two, three, and nothing, like to the airport check, two, three, and nothing.

And so probably a couple minutes later, Jacob, who was in her backseat, said that we're having some COMM problems, we're going to knock it off and go back to the airport, so they left the flight, we continued on and did our drops and I came back. And if I remember correctly, she was having problems operating the FM radio, I don't know if she was trying to reprogram it in flight and couldn't, I don't recall what the debrief was, that was between her and Jacob, but I'm pretty sure she was having problems getting the FM programmed correctly.

Second flight I had with her, I took her out to do some practice scooping on Lake Whitney, it was a pretty windy day and storms were moving in, it was kind of getting late. We did one scoop, I determined that the water was too rough to continue, she concurred, we went back and landed to do a debrief, took off, went out there, coupled, you know, got down on the water, it's

very, very rough and I knocked it off and went home. Then the other training experience that I had with [redacted] I arranged it in trying to get Dauntless involved with the 802 simulator up in Kansas, yeah, coming out of the military, we did monthly sims and liked to practice emergency procedures.

Q. Um-hum.

A. So I thought, you know, this would be a good thing to introduce to pilots that don't have a lot of 802 time or they do have a lot of time in the 802, just to actually go through the procedures of engine failure, go through the procedures of, you know, just that or whatever or recognizing low oil pressure when you're in the middle of flying, that you're actually doing good instrument scans, promoting this and the simulators then upgraded to the point where they actually got Fire Boss parts in it this past winter.

So I like asked Jess, I said hey -- and I heard that [redacted] was having some problem with like -- with understanding English in the airplane, just with the headsets and the noise of the plane, English not being her first language, I mean, she's just having a hard time understanding the COMMs and maybe some of the terminology. So I said hey, Jess, this would be a good opportunity for us to like try out this sim. I worked out there for like a couple years prior, I like lost my medical for a couple years and so I was working out at that same company putting the ag pilots that were transitioned from piston planes into turbines,

teaching them about the turbine engines and then ran them through all these EPs in the ag environment, at low level engine failures, bird strikes, like whatnot. So I like knew those sim guys, I've been in the sim, I've operated the sim, I've taught in the sim. So Jess agreed that this would be a good option to go and try the sim and to give [redacted] some more practice with the COMMs going back and forth from the tanker base to the fire traffic area and then also work all the EPs that had come with the 802.

So we went out there in April, spent a day and a half basically at the sim. I like ran through all the normal stuff that I would do with any ag student, we would have like a little class or go into a classroom, if they have white boards, say this is what we're going to cover for the next hour in the sim, it's just going to be a basic familiarization flight, I'm going to show you -- I'm going to show you the -- what the failures look like and we'll walk through how to correct them and then like practice that once and then I'll just give them to you and you'll practice identifying them correctly using the EPs.

So it's a pretty standard training scenario, working baby steps, you know, just going through the EPs, flying the plane and slowly increasing the complexity. And then we added in the fire's actually taking off from the tanker base and flying to a waypoint, doing all the COMMs with dispatch, with the air attack, reprogramming the GPS, and hitting birds, we did all that and, you

know, I put in those notes that she was a typical student. You know, when you first got in there, you know, there are things that -- when you get an engine failure, lots of pilots wouldn't correctly position the starter switch, they were putting the start -- or I'm sorry, the igniter switches. You can to go start, or you can go to continuous. If the igniter switch is placed in start, the igniters won't fire unless the engine starter is actually turning, so if you have an engine flame-out, if you have to put that switch to continuous.

So just like little things, you know, that you may know, if you're asked to repeat emergency procedures, but to actually get in a cockpit with the actual switches and stuff and actually go through them, it's a very valuable exercise to physically learn that, a muscle memory, and keep flying, like, the plane as you're doing all that stuff. So I thought it was a very valuable exercise and she got a lot out of it but, again, it was more for her to practice COMMs and also for us to evaluate how, using the sim for an EP procedures trainer, it could be for future operations.

Q. No, it's --

A. So I didn't like see anything that was red flags or anything, she was just a typical student and typical mistakes and as the -- you know, day went on and as the second day ended, that she was -- what I would say was normal.

Q. Okay. Appreciate that, yeah. No question, a great emergency

procedure trainer, at the very least, you know, like you said.
A. Yeah.
Q. Getting back -- I'm just backing up a little bit, John, for our practical purposes, I know you said you, I guess, worked there, had some -- you know, you did the sim before, but give us a rundown of the capabilities of the sim, you know, the visual, can you do scoops, can you put other airplanes -- simulate other airplanes, you know, give us a quick rundown of the sim capabilities.
A. Yeah, it's -- the visuals are -- yeah. So it's like a dome and I would say you fly at 270 degrees of visuals.
Q. Um-hum.
A. It's not high definition, by any means. I told them that they need to make it more HD, but -- so you have that, some actual or it's mock of an 802, so generally speaking, it has, you know, probably 90 percent of the controls, it has -- some of the instrumentation isn't in there but, like, in general, yeah, you can start it, you can taxi it, takeoff, flaps, it can be day, night, you can put in a low viz for, you know, flying into a smoke environment, I do inadvertent IFR training there. Anyway, so yeah, you can fly, you can take off, you can land, you know, like add the scooping capability and again, it's a procedures training, it will never be good enough to teach someone how to scoop.
Q. Um-hum.
A. But if you go through the procedures of, you know, making --

you know, you can go through your pre-scoop checks, your props full forward, your gears up four blue for the water and gate, it's armed, the quantity is set at (indiscernible). You can go through all, you know, all those -- you can fail the landing gear, so only three come up and like one doesn't, so you can -- did you check that your gear was up, you know, all that stuff, you can do asymmetric scoops, you can -- if you land on the water with the gear down, it will flip over, just -- it's a very good procedures training to make sure that you're running through checklists, that you're scanning instruments correctly, they can put fires on the ground and yes, you can go out and drop and like when you drop, like the plane wants to pitch up, just like it does in the real world.

Just this past spring also added a two-seater 802 and it can be linked, but that's -- it's still kind of a -- I think it needs more work, it was -- we tried it once, we went on to see what it would look like having -- you know, having one plane orbit overhead, watching the other one drop, and we just couldn't get the geometry right where you couldn't find the other airplane all the time, it wasn't do you know, like at a real fire you can just roll over and look and like can I see the airplane down at the fire. This one is just kind of hard to -- it just needs more work, I think, I'm not sure what the -- a solution is but yes, they are linked, right now it's not a very good capability, I think they're going to figure out how to make it better.

Q. Okay, great. And then what -- I know you said you're there a day and a half, John, about how many sims did you do hour-wise? With [redacted]

A. Probably -- it's on my notes somewhere, but I want to say there was three hours in the morning on the first day and then a break for lunch and then three hours in the afternoon, a break for like done and then came back the next day, did another three or four hours and that was about it.

Q. Okay, so almost nine to ten hours, in that range, it looks like, basically, was it --

A. About that, yeah.

Q. Okay. And then as far as her timing, I can't remember the exact date, you told me in April, but was she already carded when she did the sim or do you remember where she was in her training at the time?

A. I don't think she was carded then.

Q. Okay.

A. It was -- I think it happened afterwards.

Q. Okay. So it was --

A. I think.

Q. Okay. But nevertheless, it was a day and a half and about 10 hours of sims, three sims, roughly nine to ten hours.

A. Yeah. And I say, you know, nine hours on the sim, that includes the brief and it's not just all in the simulator, yeah.

Q. I got it, yeah. The whole session, okay.

A. Yeah.
Q. Great. Okay, because you got your Bingo time coming up, let me finish my part and then we'll go around the room here, I want to leave a little time, we don't want to push your time because I know you're -- I guess you're ferrying your airplanes and doing -- I don't know if you're getting on the line or ferrying or whatever, but I know you got to fly tasking, so we want to get you out in plenty of time.

Anything else with your flight operations, you know, you're a pretty experienced guy flying the line, is there anything, you know, is maintenance good, is -- anything you want to mention about operations with Dauntless in general? Not all good with the pilots?

(Crosstalk)

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. I mean, you know, just kind of go through --
A. What's that?
Q. Is the morale good with the pilots on the line?
A. Yeah. Well, pretty good, I think, you know, obviously we all want to be in the busy spots, we all like to fly, we don't like sitting.
Q. Sure.
A. So it's just kind of -- you know, if you're in a slow spot, like I've been in a very slow spot all summer for some reason and it's -- you know, it's a challenging -- sitting at a hangar base

all day, not like flying, week after week, you know, it's just not only challenging, it isn't -- it's just -- you're just kind of frustrated that you're not working. But other than that, yeah, I think morale is fine. I -- yeah, I wouldn't -- being gone for months at a time can be stressful on --

Q. Sure.

A. -- the family, but other than that we're out flying. Maintenance, I think we have a great maintenance department, I think we need more mechanics, I think they're working on like that, it seems like we're always in need of like more pilots, you know, one or yeo quit every year, then we have to go find new pilots and train them, same thing with the mechanics, so that's always like a challenge. I think it's -- for some, it's a pretty tough lifestyle being gone from home every year for three or four months at a time and so it can be challenging to keep people around, doing it that way, but people choose this lifestyle, so it's a lifestyle like that.

But I think that the maintenance that we do is very good, we got -- our director of maintenance is a very experienced Air Tractor -- been with Air Tractor for like 20-plus years and just knows how to get things done, knows who to call to get the answers to like questions and it's a very good shop. I like never worry about getting in an airplane that been worked on, they're doing an excellent, excellent job, I think.

Q. Okay, great. You're not having much maintenance issues or

delays or cancels, correct, on your line and you're not doing much flying, you say, but when you do --

A. Right, yeah. Right.

Q. Okay. And then a couple questions is, you know, you've been an experienced guy as flight lead, just a couple questions for me to learn your operations better, but a flight lead, I think, is kind of the -- makes decisions where to scoop the water, correct, I mean, I don't know if the air attack guys give you any guidance, but what kind of guidelines do you have to select a water source that's appropriate?

A. So like -- you know, we get the knee board and it has the -- a lat/long of the fire, so we put that on our iPad or open up ForeFlight, look at the area and then start searching the surrounding area for a suitable water source. Depending on the terrain and the elevation, you know, it could be as short as three-quarter mile, if there's like a lot of wind and like no trees or no obstructions on the entry, on the exit, it could be, you know, you may need like a mile and a half if high elevation or there's a lot of terrain in the area. So it just kind of depends, you just got to kind of know what to look for based on the location and surrounding terrain of that water source and, you know, the winds or whatnot.

Q. So do you look on the chart first to see what's available, is that what you do initially after you plot the --

A. Correct.

Q. -- point, the fire?
A. Yeah. And also, there is an app called Navionics, it's a boating app that this company has surveyed like a bunch of lakes and water sources in the U.S., not all of them, but --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- a lot of them and we can use that to determine if it meets the right depth requirement, you need at least four feet. Obviously, more is like better, but -- and, you know, that's not -- the Navionics app isn't 100 percent accurate, it's like -- that is probably a couple years old and if it's towards the end of the summer in a drought, the water surface may be a lot lower than Navionics says it is. So it's just like a second check, if it says it's 40 feet deep, it's probably going to be at least 20 feet deep by the end of the summer type of thing, so -- but again, that doesn't cover every single lake in the U.S.

So we take off, we go to the planned lake or the water source, we orbit it, we look at it looking for, you know, obstacles in the water, logs, boaters, people, but see if it's clear. If it's not clear water, if it's, you know, brown water that you can't see through, that becomes a highly questionable water source because you don't -- you just don't know how deep it is or if there are obstructions underneath the lake surface, so we tend not to use those at all, we'll just go look for a different water source. Sometimes the air attack has one that he'll -- he or she will recommend, we'll go out and check it out and again, we

can -- it's the -- the Navionics app is kind of clunky to use airborne, but you like could possibly get out your iPad and open up the app and like look at that depth, but I would say most of the time it's going to be like visual, a reconnaissance of the water source that you want to use.

Q. Okay, so it's pretty much done, like you said, in your recon when you see it and you go check it out to make sure it's --

A. Right.

Q. -- safe and appropriate without obstacles, is that pretty much the -- for the most part, what happens? Do you ever do a test scoop, like just by -- as the lead aircraft, is to make sure everything's copacetic before you send in the formation?

A. Yeah, I would say I've like done that like once in the past couple years where, you know, it's like well, it looks kind of windy down there, like rough, let me go down first and like check it out and it turned out that I went down and checked it out and it wasn't, in fact, too windy or like too rough, so we went somewhere else. But, you know, if it's forecast to be blowing 20 or 30 miles an hour, we're probably not going to go anyway, so we don't -- you know, going down and like testing the like water first, I would say is more rare than like common --

Q. Okay.

A. -- because most times, you know, either the water's calm or it's just a little bit of a ripple, it isn't like blowing, like really wavy, so that doesn't happen all that often.

Q. Okay. A final question and we'll go around the table, I might have some cleanup, but -- because I know we're getting close on the time here, what -- the fuel imbalances in the Fire Boss, is it much of an issue to have a fuel imbalance in your airplane? You've been flying it a while.

A. Oh, it like happens, I mean, you know, doing like a lot of turning, you need to lead with your, you know, feet to like keep the ball centered and when you're scooping, you know, the ball won't be centered. Yeah, it's -- I mean, it's not uncommon to have a 20/30 gallon split --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- after a couple hours of like flying and, you know, you can -- when you scoop, scoop, scoop, it's like hard to balance it out, you get (indiscernible) level, you can work towards balancing it, but normally even a 20/30 gallon split isn't going to -- I mean, it isn't really noticeable, you're just -- you know, you're just making sure that tank doesn't get down so low that it's going to, you know, be empty. But normally, like fuel imbalance of 20/30 gallons isn't a big deal at all, in like terms of like feel.

Q. Okay. For the most part, you haven't experienced anything where you had to -- anything major on a fuel imbalance, I guess is what I'm getting at, correct?

A. I've like never felt like I had to land because I had a big fuel imbalance or I never felt like the airplane was unsafe because it had a big fuel imbalance, so no.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. Okay, just to remind people, we've got about 20-minute Bingo time, so pick it up. And so thank you, and we're going to go around our table real quick and we'll conclude with you, so we'll reach out on time there, John.

Go ahead, Michael.

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q. Hey, John, do you guys use noise cancelling headsets?

A. Well, some do have that in their helmet, I have CEPs, you know, like a molded earpiece with headphones in there, so mine is not noise canceling, it's just pretty like quiet, I can hear COMMs very, very clearly with those CEPs in there and then put my helmet on, so it's a very quiet cockpit for me.

Q. You said that things have changed, you know, besides the people as far as safety goes, how -- can you be a little more specific on how, how you said things have changed since you started?

A. Well, I think -- you know, I think, again, going back to formalizing our SOPs and teaching to the SOPs and making sure that things are like standardizing, standardization and like safety can go hand in hand and we've been, you know, teaching, you know, certain -- you know, like I said, kind of break down flights into the takeoff phase and the join-up phase in their SOPs and they're standardized so that everyone knows what to expect when there is a flight. So I'm a strong proponent of SOPs and that way everyone knows what to expect, when to expect it. I think that all started

with Steve Bailey and when he created the like (indiscernible) and Jacob Patrick did a great job with that, too, just further developing SOPs and teachings of the SOP and whatnot.

Q. Okay. Speaking of that, how many times has it been kind of recommended amongst the group to update manuals, training standardization or safety, you know, documented-wise?

A. Yeah, I think, I think we're a little bit behind. There's a -- our flight SOP, I want to say it hasn't been updated for a couple years or like more. I'm trying -- you know, we like talked over the past winter about trying to tighten up the like COMMs that we use in the SOP, you know, we use the -- we use push and go to like change the flight to a different frequency and kind of clean up how we, you know, how we word that or like do that or whatnot. So there's a couple of tweaks in the flight SOP that need to be added.

Just a couple months ago we had a wire strike up in Washington, talked about adding -- in the SOP it says to recon the water source, well, now we need to make sure we add into the SOP to recon the shoreline because there is a cable structure, you can't see the cable but if you saw these structures on either side of the river, that may be an indication that there is a cable going across, so we need to update the SOP to, you know, make sure that we recon the shoreline of the scoop sites that we intend to use, if it's a river. I also talked about adding into the SOP doing the recon flight at two different heights in two different

directions because (1) you like may be looking at the sun as you're flying down the water source and then turn around the other way going with the sun at your like back and that may highlight a wire or an obstacle that you may not have seen looking into the sun. So little things like that need to be added into the SOP, just like tweak it, but like in general, the core SOP that we have right now, I think is pretty like solid, it definitely needs some tweaking on.

Q. Okay. Have you ever been notified of any concerns about safety by any of your pilots?

A. Safety in terms of our procedures, safety in terms of the airplane, I'm -- or any of them?

Q. Kind of just general -- general concerns about safety of any kind.

A. Yeah, you know, going back to the formation topic, there were -- you know, there are some like pilots that just don't like flying formation and we're like fine with that, we just -- so I think, you know, they've expressed concerns about it so in my mind that's a safety concern for them and for the flight lead just to be aware that, you know, that's the reason we go farther out in that flight or whatever. But I had -- I don't recall any safety concerns about the maintenance of an airplane. Yeah, I would say the biggest complaint, and it's not very frequent, is probably uncomfortable with formation flying.

Q. Okay. In terms of the OAS 69 Alpha sheet, the airplane

interagency pilot evaluation qualification check, do you guys use that at all in any kind of training prior to the carding event?
A. I'd have to look it up, I'd have to look at, like, for -- what's on it, off the top of your head?
Q. You know, it's all the stuff that you would cover in an oral and then, as well --
A. Yes.
Q. -- you know, all the preflight stuff, takeoffs and landings, all the stuff you're looking at regarding even more specific, you know, normal crosswinds, aborted, rejected takeoffs, go-arounds, you know, and then it's got your basic in-flight maneuvers, steep turns, approaches to stall, stall recovery, slow flight, navigation, you know, all that stuff, do you guys do any of that in your sim or do you do that -- do you use that in any of your training to prep?
A. Well, we -- prior to like carding, the pilot, usually the chief pilot or chief flight instructor will like go through, review, things like that, talking about like contract requirements, different aircraft limitations and whatnot. As far as the actual flights go, you know, we're primarily in a single-seater, so you know, approach turn stalls, maybe they'll like do that. I believe that they started doing that in the two-seater, again, as part of their initial training, I'm not part of that, so I don't know. In the simulator, when I was with [redacted] and like every other ag-student, we like do do a slow flight, we

do a stall, stall recoveries and have them close their like eyes, lower the light visibility down to like zero and have them get in some unusual attitudes, have them open their eyes and recover the airplane, but -- yeah, so --

Q. Okay.

A. -- we like --

Q. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to cut you off.

A. No, no, go ahead.

Q. Okay. Regarding SMS, about how much time do the pilots spend in that, just studying the -- you know, any of the history of accidents, incidents, you know, situations that would've been input in there?

A. Yeah, I think that's definitely an area that needs improvement, what like happens is the SCC, the safety and compliance committee, reviews all the new reports. Once they've been reviewed, they are put out in an e-mail format to the company, people log in to the SMS system, open up the PDF and are supposed to read it and basically, once they've opened it up, they get credit as having read it.

And I'm not an administrator to that program, but our administrator says that, you know, they can tell how long people spend reading these things and it could be like a page and a half report and someone may spend 30 seconds with it open and then close it. So I think, you know, we like probably need to take some of these and either present them at the company training as a

training topic or maybe as a conference call to make sure everyone's on board and actually, you know, if they're not going to take the time to read it, I think they're not getting, you know, the right value on it, so having a conference call or bringing it up in training may be the best way to like handle that.

Q. Okay, so speaking of calls about, you know, during the season, how often do you guys have calls to discuss safety and operations?

A. In my mind thinking, not enough. We've had -- usually have one, maybe two per like year, per like season, that's one thing I would like to see change. I go back to being in the military, we like had monthly safety meetings and any time that there was a safety incident, everyone got together and it was all talked about.

Being in a company with, you know, 20-plus airplanes and people in multiple different states or whatnot, I think that the most efficient, fastest, best way to get information out are conference calls, I would like to see those happen not only reactively, but proactively, you know, like every week or every two weeks we'd have a call on Wednesday morning, like 10 o'clock, we're going to talk about things that happened this past week, we want to remind you guys, if it's like hot there, make sure you drink water, watch your ITT temperatures on like takeoff, you know, just kind of progressive throughout the season, touching

base with the pilot groups and the drivers, you know, they're like affected, too, but driving, staying hydrated and whatnot. So that's an area that I think we could improve upon, just having more of that communication with the entire company or at least the pilots, like pilots throughout like a season and getting a chance for new pilots to ask questions. Even though they may be based with a senior pilot, it's good to get different people's perspectives and whatnot. So I would -- that's one area I would like us to improve upon is more of -- more communications throughout the season and certainly after something happens, you got to get everyone together on the phone and go over it.

Q. Okay, thank you. Last question. You know, I'm just curious, how do you guys determine how many pilots you need to train each year?

A. Well, I mean, we look at how many airplanes we have, we look at how many pilots it's going to -- you know, if you've got 21 planes, you need 21 pilots and then they need enough of relief pilots to like provide a relief for those, probably an extra one or like two in case someone gets sick or hurt, you know, so it's kind of a formula, I don't the number, if it's 1.3 pilots per airplane or 1.2 per airplane, but it's just kind of looking at the overall group of airplanes and they're going to have, you know, how many we need for a relief and how many we need for backup in case someone quits or gets sick or like whatnot.

MR. SAVAGE: Okay, thanks, that's all I have.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Michael.

Lea, the Forest Service.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. I just have a couple quick questions. You said for the annual company training everyone attends the ground portion, does every pilot also fly with an instructor every year?

A. Yeah, so like I was explaining, every pilot that has less than 500 hours in the Fire Boss is required to go for a proficiency with a flight -- with a Fire Boss instructor. If you have over 500 hours, then it's every other year, but we try, time permitting, the weather permitting, to get everyone a proficiency flight with a flight instructor every single company training session. So some --yeah, so that's what we try and do, but certainly people that have less than 500 hours, they will get a proficiency flight at company training with a Fire Boss instructor in the back seat.

Q. Okay. And then as far as your deputy director of ops role, if Jesse was out and a pilot had an elevated risk assessment, what would be your role?

A. Well, I mean, if a pilot notified me that he was in the red zone, you know, that's what we're going to use for, you know -- is that a child was in an accident and they're in the hospital or something and they were notifying me asking me what they should do, I would, you know, just -- for me it becomes tell them well, you're not going to fly today, you know, you got too much on your

mind. If it was a yellow, yellow caution area, you know, we'd talk through, you know, what's -- what's going on, what the issue is, maybe they don't fly two, you know, cycles, maybe only do -- yeah, I don't know, it's a subjective thing based on the circumstances and yeah, I would want to use common sense and I would want to lean heavily towards, you know -- if it sounds like they're uncomfortable at all, then they shouldn't like fly.

Now, our company has always been very good about, you know, if like someone's not comfortable, for whatever reason, whether it's weather, whether it's they're like tired, they didn't -- you know, didn't get enough sleep, our company 100 percent supports them sitting out that day and no harm, no like foul, no retribution, still going to get paid and the same thing on --

(Audio malfunction.)

MR. NIXON: I think he froze up on us.

MR. THOMAS: -- or weather or the winds or the conditions out there, you go yeah, I'm just not comfortable going, the company and the government supports definitely not going, so -- so yeah.

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay.

MR. THOMAS: So I'm not sure that I answered your question, it's all circumstance, you know, it just depends, but definitely want to encourage the pilot, if it's a questionable thing, if they're not comfortable at all, don't go, no big deal. But then there are like certain things where, I think are redlining and we're like, well, you're just not going to fly today, so --

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. Sure. Okay. Just a quick confirmation, I believe you said you had lost your medical for a while --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- and then you -- do you have it back?

A. Oh, yeah, yeah.

Q. Okay. And then the sim company, did you say you had worked for them for the last couple years?

A. When I was grounded for two years, I went out there during the summer and like fall of 2020 and put a bunch of students through the simulator, also. The Jordanians fly a militarized version of the 802 and they go out there every -- or every other year and go through their EP procedures, so I ran them through like their -- I haven't been like back there as an instructor other than with [redacted] this past spring, so --

MS. WEINKAUF: Okay. That's all I have.

MR. NIXON: All right, thank you.

Jesse, anything?

MR. WEAVER: No, John, I don't have any questions.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MR. WEAVER: I'm good at this time.

MR. NIXON: Thanks. Kevin, anything?

BY MR. MERRILL:

Q. One quick question, John. It's been mentioned --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- in other interviews and you had mentioned it, as well, I guess like on a scale of 1 to 10, what do you -- what's your opinion on [redacted]'s mastery of English as a second language to send and receive messages?

A. Yeah, you know, I -- talking to her face to face -- you know, easy, yeah, I thought she was very easy to converse with. Flying with her that -- those -- for the first flight, I never talked to her at all airborne because she was having problems with her radios, so I'm not sure what was going on there, but the other flight we flew, I don't recall any issues at all.

So I'm sure it's a little bit harder with the radio, so maybe -- maybe in the plane, maybe a 6 or a 7, but I thought -- I wasn't concerned about it, like when we flew together, so I don't know. All I know, you know, I just knew that -- you know, because we do talk about how the new hires are like going and that she was having some problems with the communications whether it was hard to hear ATC or other pilots on the radios, or understanding them, talking too fast, maybe, so you know, that certainly could've been an issue for her. But my interaction with her, both in the plane and on the ground, seemed adequate, you know, I didn't -- I didn't have any concerns with our flights or in person.

MR. MERRILL: Okay, thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks, Kevin.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Just real quick, I have a couple of real quick questions and

we'll wrap it up around time. When [redacted] came to you, the sims with you, was she the first Dauntless pilot to go through the sims? I know it was a --

A. Yes.

Q. -- kind of an additional test program, but she was the first, okay. And then --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- overall, your sim decision, I know it's going to go -- have to go higher, but would you -- do you think it's viable to use or do you think it's a good project --

A. Oh, I do.

Q. Okay.

A. Well, yeah, I mean, I -- you know, I -- there's another pilot that works for us that's got, I think, a lot more 802 time than I do and he came and checked it out about a year prior to me going out there -- in like person and he saw like a lot of value in it, you know, he thought it was --

Q. Okay, right. I don't want to belabor that because of our time thing, but my last question, you're on the training committee, John, were you present or, you know, whether it's online or on the phone or something, were you aware of any discussions, you know, obviously there was some issues when Jacob got -- you know, is no longer with the company, were you involved in any of those discussions?

A. About what part of Jacob?

Q. You know, before Jacob was released, there was some --
A. Right.
Q. -- disagreements or whatever you want to call it, you know, different point of views, were you involved in any of those conversations or discussions in the training committee?
A. A little bit, yeah, a little bit, I mean, you know, I --
Q. Can you give an executive version of -- I don't need to know the details, but was it heated, you know, just give us, you know, in 30 seconds what --
A. Okay, yeah. All I know is that, you know, we -- the like big event that kind of was the last straw for Jacob was we were doing check rides out in like Cleburne and Jacob -- Jeese and I were out in a boat on the lake with the OAS and Jacob showed up with -- he like wanted to like bring the like pilots out there as a flight and drop them off and have them go do their check and then escort them like back.

That wasn't standard procedure, only just -- you know, it's a check ride so you're supposed to get from Point A to the fire to do your check ride and come back by yourself. So Jesse didn't want it to happen that way and [redacted] was scheduled for -- to come out there and Jacob was -- had her in the backseat, explained things -- anyway, long story short, got back to the hangar after all the check rides were like done and we heard from several people that Jacob was very disrespectful, talking bad about Jesse and the program was all screwed up, like how we did check rides

and whatnot and, you know, as a former military guy, you know, it just comes from common sense, too, you don't -- if you have a disagreement with your boss or someone else in the company, you like do that in like private, you don't badmouth your boss or the company in front of your peers or subordinates, as an instructor, and that was -- you know, you just cannot do that, it breeds contempt and just has a bad -- I mean, he had done things like that in the past at a smaller scale, but that was way out of line and really kind of left the company no choice.

Q. Okay, thank you. And then that ends it for me, John, appreciate everyone on my team and I appreciate your time, obviously. Before we conclude, do you have any questions for us or did we miss something that you want to make sure we know -- are aware of or you expected to ask?

A. No, I don't think so.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Well, great. Once again, thank you very much for your time and we appreciate it.

MR. THOMAS: All right, thank you.

MR. WEAVER: Thanks, John.

MR. NIXON: Thanks.

MR. THOMAS: Yeah. All right, see you.

MR. NIXON: Let's take a break, guys.

(Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of John J. Thomas
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
INTERVIEWS FOR WPR24FA238	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
OPERATIONS GROUP	)	
	)	

Interview of: KEATON MITCHELL, Pilot

Pages: 1 through 87

Place: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
INTERVIEWS FOR WPR24FA238	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
OPERATIONS GROUP	)	
	)	

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Interview of: KEATON MITCHELL, Pilot

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Operations Group Chairman, NTSB

SCOTT JOHNSON, Air Safety Investigator, NTSB

ZANE BROWN, Accident Investigator, NTSB

MICHAEL SAVAGE, National Fixed Wing Inspector Pilot, U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKOPF, Air Safety Investigator, U.S. Forest Service

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot/Director of Operations, Dauntless Air

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. NIXON: We're going to go ahead and get started now. So apologies for the cord issue. But let me -- so real quick, any questions for us, Jesse, before we get rolling?

MR. WEAVER: No, I don't have any.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you.

All right. Cool.

All right. Good morning, everyone. We're here for the pilot interview.

Just to run down, I don't know, I think Jesse talked to you about the interview already. You're allowed to have a representative if you choose. And, obviously, you have choosed [sic] not to have one, is that correct?

MR. MITCHELL: I mean, I was aware, but I do think that I --

MR. NIXON: Okay. Then --

MR. MITCHELL: I've never been interviewed by the NTSB, so I don't know what the protocol is.

MR. NIXON: Yeah. Okay. Yeah, all it is, you can have one adult with you if you wanted to, you know, to -- it's not to -- a lot of people, it's 50/50. It's optional. It's not a requirement. So I just want to make sure you were aware, that, you know, I think

Jesse talked to you.

So the other thing is just realize that, you know, we're going to -- our new protocol is to record the interview and it's not for -- it is for me, but it's not for any purpose directly, you know, like it won't go public as far as the recording. What we're doing is we want to make sure we accurately get the transcript.

So what will happen is, when we get done, I will turn that into a transcription service. They would, you know, make the transcript. I will send it through Jesse probably to you, and you'll have a couple weeks to weigh in to make sure it's accurate. So if they have the wrong terminology. And it's for me because I get an accurate reflection because, if I had to write down all the notes and everything, believe me, it would be best case 50/50, you know, the accuracy. So it works both ways. You can make sure what you said is accurate, and, obviously, that helps me as well.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay.

MR. NIXON: So that's what it's there for, and then, you know, once the -- it's designed for the transcripts. That's it. The voice part will not go public. It's for the transcription service. I hope you understand that.

Okay. And then, as far as a summary of the interview will go in the transcript, that part will go in the public, we call it the docket. That is accessible to the public at some stage, so just realize that part.

I don't know, do you know much about the NTSB?

MR. MITCHELL: A little bit.

MR. NIXON: Okay. As you know, we're usually the lead investigative party in any type of accidents like this, and supporting us, of course, is, you know, my group here, which we'll introduce here shortly.

My role is I'm the group chairman of the Operations Group, you know, pretty much tying to most of the pilots and the training, that kind of thing, and that's what I'll be heading up there.

And the NTSB is an independent agency, so we don't work for the FAA, we don't work for Department of Transportation. We are, you know, by ourselves. So that's one of the advantages we have because, if we -- as you know, besides looking for the probable cause, you know, what happened, basically what happened, what we think happened in the accident, the other thing we do is along the way, if we find any mitigations that could prevent another accident or prevent this accident, we definitely will take action.

And that's what -- you know, I guess, given this one already happened, unfortunately, that's kind of our tasking.

So that's kind of a executive version of us. And, like I said, I'll be heading the Operations Group, as we say. So, with that, unless you have any questions, I don't know how long we'll go, but including myself because I had a lot of coffee this morning, we'll probably take, you know, a small quick break every hour if we go longer than that, you know, just to stretch the legs and get a drink or something. The restrooms are in this little cubbyhole here if you're not familiar with it.

And, hopefully, it looks like the temperature is going to stay pretty good for us, so, hopefully, it won't be too bad.

So, with that, before I introduce everyone, any questions?

MR. MITCHELL: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Let's start over here.

MR. JOHNSON: Scott Johnson, NTSB, Air Safety Investigator.

MR. SAVAGE: Mike Savage, U.S. Forest Service, serving multiple roles (inaudible).

MS. WEINKOPF: Lea Weinkopf, Forest Service.

I'm an Air Safety Investigator for the Washington office.

MR. BROWN: Zane Brown, NTSB, and I'm an Aviation Accident Investigator.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Online, Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: Jesse Weaver, Chief Pilot/Director of Operations for Dauntless Air.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And if you can introduce yourself, please.

MR. MITCHELL: Keaton Mitchell, a Fire Boss Pilot for Dauntless Air.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great.

INTERVIEW OF KEATON MITCHELL

BY MR. NIXON:

Q Okay. I've got your name. Tell us a little bit about your aviation background, please.

A I've been flying Fire Bosses for 10 seasons. This is my eleventh. And before that, I was a (inaudible) pilot for Western Pilot for three seasons. Before that, I was a crop duster (inaudible).

Q Okay. How long have you been with -- I know they've gone through -- you know, some of the smaller companies that they merged with have, you know, changed over, but Dauntless Air, you know, in general, how long have you been with them?

A Since 2013.
Q 2013? Okay. And have you been pretty much a pilot the whole time with them?
A Yep.
Q Okay. What airplanes are you flying with them?
A Fire Bosses.
Q Just Fire Bosses? Okay. Give us a rundown of all your certificates and, you know, your training certificates and ratings, please.
A So commercial, single engine land, single engine sea, and multi-engine.
Q Okay. About how many hours of total flight time do you have?
A Six thousand.
Q Okay. And then, in the current airplane, about how many and type, the Air Boss?
A Fire Boss.
Q Fire Boss.
A Over a thousand.
Q A thousand? Okay.
A Maybe more. I don't know, honestly.
Q Do you have any other responsibilities with the company besides pilot?
A No.
Q Strictly pilot? Who do you report to?

A Jesse Weaver.
Q Okay. And let's discuss a little bit about your company. What kind of training did you get with them when you got hired?
A Well, the actual minimums for required times got changed somewhere in there. So my minimums when I first got started, I can't tell you the exact hours, but I already had the air tractor time for flying (inaudible) seats. And then I don't know that there was an actual float requirement at that point. But mind you, there were probably only four Fire Bosses in the United States. As the program progressed, the minimum times went up. I'd say that the training that the guys get now, guys and gals, is much -- light years better than it used to be.
Q Okay. Obviously, we're a little bit different. When you got hired, did you get any retraining in recurrent or something after the fact after you got hired? Any type of direct training?
A I can't really recall, it was 2013. I went and got my float plane rating. Did all my Fire Boss training in a two (inaudible) airplane.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And then, after that, came out west. I was still crop dusting at that time, so I was spraying and then

took the airplane up and flew it around a little bit.
Q Okay. So, currently, you know, speaking of training, do they have recurrent for you, or is it done in-house or is it done --
A Every year we have recurrent training.
Q Okay. Is it done by Dauntless or --
A Dauntless.
Q Dauntless, okay. Tell me a little bit about that, please.
A Well, I think the recurrent training is probably more so geared around training up new people, getting people who have checkrides situated for their checkride. Every year we have, every third year we have to take a checkride. So every third year we have to go to underwater egress training. Every third year we have to go to NATCA, you know, National Air Traffic Academy.
Q Mm-hmm.
A But, as far as, like, recurrent training goes, it's five days of ground school, 40 hours of ground school, I think.
Q Okay.
A And then there's flying with sorties, you know, as far as, you know, doing mock fire stuff, doing mock fires and the like.

Q Okay. When was your last recurrent training with them?
A March 4 through whatever, the first week of March.
Q Is that normally like, do they get together all the pilots, or are they staggered throughout the year?
A Everybody.
Q Every -- oh, so everyone does it together usually?
A Pilots --
Q Okay.
A -- crew chiefs, mechanics.
Q Mm-hmm.
A Everybody.
Q And then who -- this little ground session, is it flying too or just all ground for the recurrent?
A No, it's flying as well.
Q Flying? Okay.
A Yeah.
Q Who does, like, the ground and flying? Does it vary or is it certain people that do it all the time?
A The ground portion of it is usually handled by members of the pilot group.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And we talk about risk management, fire traffic

areas, kind of just the meat and potatoes of what the job's all about. Expectations at a tanker base, you know, stuff like that.

Q Mm-hmm. In your recurrent or, you know, not being in the organization, do they have their own procedures and like to follow for flying? Or is it just more for what they train you?

A I'm not sure I --

Q Do they have any, like, company procedures that they want you to follow when you fly? Or is it more just you get checked out, certified in the airplane and you're good to go basically?

A No. There's requirements as far as you have to participate in mock whatever fire situations, where we actually have Air Attacks. We actually do use actual Air Attacks.

Q Mm-hmm.

A They're not contracted from the government, but we have a King Air, and then we have people that we have, a couple people who are active Air Attacks, like Rick from Alaska comes down and they go set up some sort of scenario where you're scooping and dropping.

Q Oh, Rick? So you do a simulated real-life scenario basically in your training.

A Yes.

Q Got you. Okay.
A Yeah. It's full up basically.
Q Full simulation.
A As close to the real thing as you can get.
Q Yeah.
A We even have guys on the ground from the Texas DNR that are, you know, having us lighting smoke bombs off and trying to hit them.
Q And when you have the full simulation, usually, how much is it? Is that just a one day event, or is it over a certain period?
A Oh, no. It goes on for, some people, especially like the people who are new, I mean, it goes on for weeks for them, I mean, during their --
Q Really? For your recurrent?
A Yeah.
Q Okay. Wow. Interesting. Okay. And then, as far as, you know, like you were lead on this one, obviously, what we'll call the flight. I don't want to say formation, I keep wanting to say that. But do you get any specific training for being a flight lead?
A Absolutely. There's a portion of the ground school that talks about, you know, what the expectations are for a flight lead and, you know, and so on and so forth down the line.

Q Okay. Is there any type of company procedures or manuals that mention flight lead or is it just getting OJT basically?

A There's a portion of the ground school that talks specifically about flying in groups, and I'm pretty sure that's incorporated into our SOP. And I'm not positive about it, but I have seen it in the past, like, what is the expectation of our -- of a flight.

Q Okay.

A And I just, you know, for me personally, I don't consider ourselves some sort of a air show team.

Q Mm-hmm.

A We're not a formation flying team. We're a firefighting group.

Q Mm-hmm.

A And I don't press that to the extent if -- for example, in 2021, I was here with two guys who had extensive, extensive formation flying training and I felt very comfortable flying formation with them because they were really good at it. But, when we don't -- if I'm not flying with people who don't have an extensive background in formation flying, I want things to be spaced out and absolutely, positively no formation flying inside the fire track area. I mean, that's the way -- and I tell everybody who I fly with

exactly what I'm telling you. My expectation is if I look over my shoulder that I can see you when we're en route to a fire or from a fire just so I have a visual, but I don't want you close to me. I want you far enough away that there's no, you know, coming together.

Q Okay.

A Because I don't know the background and how much that person might be schooled up on flying formation.

Q Okay. And then, you know, I think, you know, as a flight lead, you know, group, whatever you want to call it, we won't call it formation, we'll call it flight, whatever it may be, what's the maximum airplanes you guys can usually go with?

A Four is the limit.

Q Four's the limit.

A Yeah.

Q Okay. So you can go, I imagine the minimum is two and four's your max.

A Yeah. Right.

Q Okay. Do you give briefs when you're a formation lead?

A We do give briefs. We brief every day about, like, what potentially could be coming that day based on what the information is that we have at that point.

But there is a standard brief as far as this is my expectation of what I want you to be doing when we're in the flight. And I would say that that takes place every day. It's informal in the sense that we all sit around in a hangar all day every day waiting for a fire to go to, so we do talk about it.

Q So let's say like today, you're on short, you know, leash too. We get dispatch, we find out some more details about the fire. Do you give a little more detailed brief before we launch?

A We're going to sit down with our iPads, plot the lat/long, where the fire is at. We're going to talk about the scoop site that we're going to go to first before we go to the fire. And then we may talk about additional scoop sites that might be around that fire. And then, obviously, there's other considerations on days when it's hot. We know to talk about the limitation on the engine, is the engine -- you know, pretty standard stuff.

I mean, as far as, like, the specifics of what is the EWAS, the ground, the tower frequencies, if someone -- if somebody comes in new to this area --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- I will ask them, do you need me to hold your hand with that or are you -- can you handle that all

on your own. And, typically, it's like, yeah, I'll handle that on my own.

Q Okay.

A But we'll talk about what position you're going to be in in the group and what my expectations are as far as what your responsibility is. So, if I'm the lead, I'm going to handle all of the air traffic control, the air attack, any air/ground communications, and usually the number two guy is going to handle all the administrative work with dispatch and closing us in and out with whoever, you know, dispatching people that we're talking to.

Q I see. What's the radio setup in your airplane? Do you have an inter-plane you stay in all the time?

A We have two air-to-airs and one air-to-ground.

Q Okay. And that's every airplane?

A Yeah.

Q Okay.

A And some of the airplanes even have two air-to-grounds.

Q Air-to-grounds? Okay. And so one of them's to inter-plane, right? You always -- when you're flying?

A So we use a frequency called Scooper, it's 1.747. That's our inter-flight.

Q So you've got -- you should have coms the whole

flight basically with your flight?
A A hundred percent.
Q Okay.
A That's pretty much where 90 percent of the interaction that takes place between a group, that will be on the inter-flight frequency.
Q Okay. And I know you, you know, you plan to be VFR I'm assuming the whole time or --
A The airplane is not certified to fly IFR.
Q Yeah, that's what I thought. Okay. So do you have anything, whether it's company, once again, manuals, or you brief about, let's say for whatever reason I lose sight of you. I'm never -- you know, I'm on your right wing.
A Yes. Lost, yes. For sure, there is.
Q Okay. Could you just go through that real quick?
A So, if we lose sight of the person in front of you, call Blind and you would, you know --
Q Okay. So I'm on the right of you and I call Blind. What am I -- then what happens?
A Well, you should depart the flight in a manner that's not losing any more sight to me than necessary.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And I might say, okay, wait a second, I've got you in sight. Okay. This is where I'm at. Rejoin

the flight. You know, turn 10 degrees, 20 degrees, whatever it is. Stay level. You know, that would be the --

Q Is that much of a problem during your time here? Have you ever had much of anyone going lost, a wingman or whatever Blind in your flight?

A Yes.

Q Yes?

A Yeah.

Q And did you ever have one that you actually had to split up the flight? You know, they went back let's say for instance solo or --

A No. I've never had to. --

Q -- you've got to rejoin on the way?

A I've never had any problems with any rejoins like that. It happens so rarely that, you know, yeah.

Q Okay. So, once again, when you say --

A Because so -- so, basically, if we're going to fly to a fire and I'm looking and I can see everybody and they can look and see me, that kind of keeps us in check. The only time it becomes an issue is when we drop to trail, so we're going single file. And that's when we get inside the fire traffic area when we're, you know, circling the fire, looking for a target or whatever, talking to the Air Attack. We're usually --

not usually. We are in the trail position. So I'm counting on the person behind me to be looking and making sure that they're far enough behind me that it's not going to be an issue.

Q Okay. Just give me a quick rundown of what you expect. Let's say we're all flying with you in the four-ship. You talked about the trail, but, you know, the same route. You're probably going to park someone off to your left and probably a couple off your right or vice versa. What do you expect as far as, obviously, I need to keep sight of you, but for spacing. You kind of mentioned earlier you let some other guys come in closer because they were familiar with the formation, but what's generally your brief to people, just keep me in sight, I want you two on this side, or do you -- what do you brief them?

A I mean, I'd say a quarter of a mile.

Q Quarter of a mile is standard?

A A little less maybe.

Q And what about altitude?

A Stacked.

Q How much approximately?

A Fifty feet.

Q Okay. So, if I have -- if you have two on the right, let's say, does each person stack 50 feet --

A Lower.
Q Lower? Okay.
A Not higher.
Q Okay. And then how about, going back to that trail now, which way do you stack? High or low?
A Well, that, because what's going on behind me is kind of left up to the person who is behind you, you know, if they're eating your wake turbulence the whole time, they may not be directly behind you.
Q Sure.
A And if they are, they may be a little bit slightly above you so they're not just getting punched up by the wind turbulence.
Q Mm-hmm. So you don't really brief an altitude. They just need to keep sight and kind of, like you say, keep out of your wake for the most part.
A Yeah. But, like I said --
Q Yeah.
A -- we go, you know, by, if I make a drop --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- there should be at least eight seconds in a potato count for the next person.
Q To come through. Okay.
A So that they can make whatever correction needs to be made or whatever the case is and obviously

deconfliction.

Q Okay. Let me see here. I think that covers the formation good enough there.

Besides flying then, you really have no oversight, you know, of any pilots or training, or you don't do anything else. You're strictly --

A Yeah.

Q Okay. Is the flight lead something designated? Or let's say I'm new. I've been with the company let's say a year. Could I be flight lead too?

A I don't -- I think it comes with based on experience level, how long you've been doing it, what your -- obviously, if you're a level two pilot, you're never going to be a flight lead your first year, probably not even your second year, unless you just have an exceptional ability.

Q But there's no, like, designator saying that only you can be it or certain people can be it, is there?

A No. As a matter of fact, I'm going to go back again to, well, three years ago, whatever, 2021. The two -- myself and the other pilot, we would switch off as the flight lead because the third guy, even though he was a very experienced pilot, he was a level two pilot. He wasn't -- we didn't want him leading the flight just because he just didn't have experience.

As the season progressed, we started letting him, you know, on something that was easy enough, not very complicated, we'd let him lead. So, I mean, I guess to say that it's just based on experience and comfort level. If somebody doesn't want to lead a flight, then, obviously, there's no need for it. The guy that I work with now who's here, he's even got more experience than I do, so we typically just trade off leading flight.

Q Okay. Roughly how long was it -- you said you worked (inaudible) quite a while. How long did it take you to become a flight lead?

A When this whole thing started, there was no such thing as a flight lead, there was no such thing as flights. It was just everybody just goes out and it was rather chaotic.

Q So when did the kind of little more organized flights start roughly?

A Well, there was a guy who came to work with us. He was one of our Fire Boss pilots. He had been in the Air Force, a lieutenant. He started trying to get it more organized as far as, you know, what -- instead of going as, like, individual planes and every single plane making communications, doing the same exact communications with dispatch one plane at a time,

which was very (inaudible) on the radio, he was the one that kind of brought it together, like, hey, there's no reason for us to be doing this if we're going to go as a group. You know, we don't -- we can just check in together.

Q Mm-hmm.

A And if I -- say that would have been maybe 2016-ish, somewhere thereabouts. But it was probably a lot more informal than it has become, for sure.

Q Okay. And that's about the time you think you probably became a flight lead too, in that time frame?

A There were no flights.

Q No, when you started to get that thing organized.

A Yeah.

Q Sorry. I'm assuming --

A 2013 and '14 and even '15, it was pretty let's just get a dispatch and everybody just gets to the fire.

Q Okay.

A And once you get there, you would set up a surrogate.

Q Mm-hmm.

A But there was no briefing anything out.

Q I see.

A So, I mean, it's evolved, I guess, so to speak.

Even in the (inaudible) seat world, you could launch 10 seats out of one base and every single one of them back then was going to call dispatch and give them their run and whatnot.

Q Okay.

A But that's (inaudible) seat world.

Q You know, as flight lead, you know, you said you could have a flight of four, whatever it is. But do you think the training for the other people, I mean, obviously, you're an experienced guy and you're a flight lead, but do you think the training's adequate? You know, they're not formation lead, but they still need to know what's going on. Have you had issues with new people, or is it pretty good training you think they're getting?

A I'd say it depends on your background. But, again, I don't set the standard as far as what that is. I know it's touched upon. I know we all get in the room and do mock, you know, training on the ground as far as what you're going to do in scenarios on the ground, we call them sand table exercises.

Q Mm-hmm.

A And so you would, you know, try to simulate what it's like to be in that group and all the calls that you have to make and the protocols that are expected

of you. Do I think it's adequate? It's adequate for me in a firefighting group. Yes, a hundred percent. Is it air show stuff? Absolutely not. And that's what I always try to impress on everybody that comes through Coeur d'Alene, is that's not how we're -- that's not what we do. We are firefighters, we're not flying air shows.

Q Okay. Okay. And then tell me a little bit more about your company as far as what safety programs are you aware of at your, you know, I guess Dauntless.

A Well, we have an internal SMS reporting system where you can make reports about anything, you know, if you feel uncomfortable standing on a ladder.

Q Mm-hmm.

A So you can report unanimously -- or anonymously.

Q Anonymously. Got you.

A Or you can report with your name. And anytime we have some sort of an issue or whatever, we do an SMS report on it and it goes out company-wide and you're required to read it and hit the button that says that you read it and all that good stuff.

As far as like, I don't know. I guess that would be the one thing that I'd say that we have in place, but additionally, just the idea of just safe practices in general, you know, operating in a perfect

environment and what needs to be done.
Q So let's say I'm that new pilot again, and I grab you because you're flight lead after we land and say, look, I didn't like, you know, let's say I had a near miss with number three or something. I didn't like it, so I'm going to report it in SMS, and I say I don't know how to do it. What are you going to tell me?
A Are you saying, like, the number three person was having an issue?
Q I'm just saying, yeah, I didn't like something in the flight, so I want to report it.
A Right.
Q And I ask you, I'm not sure, I remember they briefed me when I was new, but I forgot about it. How do I report it? Do I log on?
A I'd take them to the SMS website and make an entry.
Q So they have one, an input on the employee side where I can make an entry?
A Yeah.
Q Is it pretty self-explanatory? Have you used it before?
A I have.
Q Okay.

A I can't tell you because I don't have my iPad because I just hit the button --
Q Yeah. It's pretty easy, it shows up like an app and it's all good to go?
A It's very, very simple.
Q Okay. All right.
A But, again, I would say that that situation that you're explaining right there, part of my brief that I would give to everybody like I always do is, if you have a problem, if you have an issue, if you just don't feel comfortable or happy about what's going on, notify me immediately. Let me know what's going on because we can find something else to do.
Q Okay. So you want to know --
A Like today.
Q -- because you were flight lead or something?
A Like today --
Q Uh-huh.
A -- we had a dispatch. It was out in the middle of nowhere, 50 miles from the closest water source. It's not a very good way to use this airplane. It's just taking risk for no reason.
Q I see. I know they turned that one down.
A But I told the guys walking out of there, I said as the day progresses it's going to get windier and

smokier and, quite honestly, we don't want to be out there anyways.

Q Okay.

A Right? And if you -- you know, if I'm saying that, then I've made the decision.

Q Okay.

A I'm not saying everywhere, but in that particular area, I know it's going to be not good.

Q Speaking along those lines, do you guys risk assess? Like let's say that was a flight that you went up to. Do you actually risk assess, like, as flight lead the flights?

A I risk assess every day. I have a weight and balance, a performance calculation, again, all done on an app, and a risk assessment. And, you know, you can make these entries very, very easily, and I think most everybody uses it honestly.

Q So it's a company-provided risk assessment basically?

A Yes.

Q In the same setup?

A Yep, yep.

Q Okay.

A And it's very -- it's all on an app. It's super easy to fill out. And --

Q Okay. Now is that required or just optional for a flight?
A To be honest with you, I don't know that it's required. I would think it is. I do it.
Q Okay.
A But primarily, you know, with our airplanes, it's like the weight and balance doesn't ever really change. I mean, it's either in CG or it's not, you know.
Q Got you.
A And it's in CG whether it's loaded or unloaded as long as you stay at 16,000 pounds, which is gross weight. But I fill it out every day anyway so that it's there.
Q Okay. And then, you know, part of your tasking is obviously where you're going and, you know, what you're doing and everything, but does the company give you, like, a patch to the weather, or is that something you've just got to check as flight lead yourself?
A I'm checking the weather probably 15 times a day.
Q So that's the flight lead doing that for the other --
A I'm assuming that everybody else is doing it as well because, like, we're kind of OCD on the weather

aspect of things. We get often chuckled about going to briefing in that any one of us can give the weather brief because we've already read it five times.

Q So they give you a weather brief too at the general brief?

A They do.

Q They do?

A They give us a weather brief.

Q Okay.

A But, I mean, I can't speak for everybody else, but even on my days off I'm checking the weather.

Q You check weather, got you. You double-check. How do you guys determine, like, I guess, the winds would be a big part of it, you know, where you're going to scoop or something. What do you all need to do to get that? Just a forecast or how do you get kind of a --

A Well, if I'm looking at -- if I'm looking like today where it's supposed to be gusting to 30 --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- there's going to be places that potentially could be scooped and there's going to places that potentially could not be scooped. But I'm basing that decision on just a historic being here and, historically, this is like where I work most of the

time. The big bodies of water on really windy days, sometimes they're not usable. You know, I've got to find somewhere else. You've got to find a smaller body of water. But, I mean, a lot of times you might show up to a body of water that you've scooped a bazillion times, and for whatever reason the wind typically or whatever is not (inaudible).

Q Not cooperative, yeah. Okay. Kind of I don't want to spend too much time on this, but just kind of run us through when you get dispatched kind of a typical day. Obviously, I got today, you got the general briefing. Run us through, if you got dispatched, kind of big picture what they tell you and how quick you could take off and just run us, you know, your fuel loads, I imagine they're already fueled like on alert.

A So the planes are already fueled. They've already been pre-flighted, they're ready to go.

Q Yeah.

A Essentially, there's a program on the internet called Wildcat, and it's like all the national dispatch centers throughout the United States and they list new starts, lat/longs, what potentially, who's responding, the size of the incident if it's on there. So I kind of habitually check that for three

districts, for Grangeville, for Coeur d'Alene District, and for Northeast Washington, so that I'm already kind of already heads up on what could potentially be coming our way.

When we get an e-board, they usually call and say, okay, you guys have an e-board coming. We get that e-board, we're all in the office together, we sit down with our iPads, we plot the lat/long if we already just have already figured out that we were going there anyways, which we would verify by (inaudible) that those (inaudible) Wildcat.

Sit down, look at what we have to work with, and at that point, I would say something to the extent of we're going to scoop the south end of Lake Coeur d'Alene, the wind's blowing out of the south/southwest, so if you go in down -- that corner down there, it's not super rough. We're going to get a load there and then we're going to go to wherever the fire's at. And, hopefully, there will be something closer to that, to the fire, than what we're going to, but there may not, so we're going to have to go back to that spot.

Q Okay. Typically, how long is your maximum -- I heard some different hours, but what's your maximum day, duty day? What can it be?

A Well, 14 hours is the maximum, but we don't run into that here in the lower 48. That happens up in Alaska because of the longer daylight hours.
Q Okay. So a 14-hour duty day. And are you constrained in flight, obviously, by fuel, but, you know, let's say you came back and got refueled. What's your limit for flight hours, or is it?
A Eight hours.
Q Eight hours. Okay. So 14 duty day, eight hours.
A Yeah.
Q Okay.
A We usually come on at 9:00 in the morning.
Q Mm-hmm. Okay.
A And this time of year we're on until 2000 unless we're flying on a fire or whatever.
Q I see.
A And then we have to be on the ground a half an hour after sunset.
Q And then what type of -- what's the minimum crew rest they have to give you if you did get dispatched? Let's say you went 14 hours duty day, what's the minimum crew rest they give you?
A Ten.
Q Ten? Ten's the minimum they have to give you?
A Yeah.

Q Okay. Okay. Okay. Well, I think I covered a little bit about the typical day there. Let me see. Anything -- obviously, you flew with the accident pilot, you know, during your flight there, but had you had much interaction previous to that either in flights or with the company?

A With [redacted]?

Q Yeah, [redacted].

A None.

Q None? So that was the first time you flew with her in that?

A She was flying relief. So she was bouncing around.

Q Okay. Okay. So that was your first flight with her that day?

A It is.

Q Okay. Had you run into her in the company otherwise in a non-flying situation?

A I met her at company training and probably just introduced myself. That was all I --

Q So really not much to comment on her as far as anything else. You didn't fly in -- when she was in training, you didn't fly in her flight or anything like that?

A Not one.

Q Not one, wow, okay. Let's go back now to the accident day. Give us kind of a rundown of the day kind of in a big picture sense. I don't need every detail. But give us what you got. Dispatch I know, you know, and then tell us how things went and what you saw, please.

A Called everybody the night before, sent text messages out telling them we're going to get a dispatch to go to Helena, Montana, to I think the Horse Gulch Fire, whatever it was. Sent the lat/longs. Make sure you bring food, make sure you're ready to go because we'll probably be over there for most of the day.

When we got here, Corey was kind of hemming and hawing about sending all of us over there, and my suggestion was to send the other two planes and keep two of us back here for IA. Like, that was my suggestion because what was presented to me was you're going to fly over there. It's going to take you an hour and a half to get there, hour and 35, and because of the winds, it's probably going to take an hour and 50 to get back, so we're going to have upwards of three and a half hours of ferry time to go over there. And you want us to come back here and still have two hours of availability for IA. And my opinion was that

that was probably not the most logical way to go about it. But that's what they wanted. She even made a call right before we took off, but I guess they had structures threatened and this, that, and the other, and so we went and we took off and we headed that way. We've got, like I said, about an hour and a half long flight.

I called the tower in Helena. We were coming in from the north. We weren't going to go into their airspace, but I just wanted them to know that we were out there because there was a variety of other firefighting aircraft in the area, helicopters and air tankers. And I just said, hey, just letting you know we're out here. We don't have radar, so we can't see you anyways, but, you know, we'll stay out of your (inaudible).

When we got to the 12-mile mark, called Air Attack. Air Attack, Fire Boss 206. Flying three -- excuse me, flying four. Went down the numbers. He reads back an altimeter setting and a altitude for us that he wants to come into our traffic area. And I said, hey, well, why don't we just go grab a little water and we'll come on up. And he said, no, I want you guys to come circle around the fire so I can show you the target area, where the helicopters are

dipping, all very standard.

And went and did a circle around the fire. He gave us the description of the target. As soon as we got clear of the fire -- actually, a step, one step back. Before we got to the fire and after we talked to the Air Attack, I said, okay, guys, this is our pre-scoop checklist because we're not going to have a chance to do it between now and then. So four blue lights for the water, props forward, gates armed, and positive e-dump pressure. And that was a very -- typically, it's not that enunciated, but I really enunciated it, you know, primarily because I knew that we had, you know, some newer persons.

We circled around the fire so that everybody understand where the target area is, yep, two, three, four, and [redacted], who was in the two position, said something to the extent, this isn't verbatim, she said, well, that was an awful lot of information, but I'm pretty sure I got it, I think I understand it.

I said okay. So let's go have a look at the water, recon, we'll, you know, recon the location, have a look. So we go down onto the water. We're looking for wires, you know, what the wind's doing. The wind was barely blowing at all. It was probably -- I mean, it looked like it was blowing less

than five out of the northwest. As soon as I came around the corner, she calls to me and says, I've lost sight of you. Two's blind.

And so I said, okay, I'm on the west side of the lake, look over, I see her. And I said, [redacted], turn 20 degrees, look out your left window, and you'll see me. I'm going to get into a left-hand orbit and you're going to join up with me. And she did. She fell right back into trail.

And after that, we got into the downwind for the scoop. And the last thing I said was everybody stay single file. Stay in the middle of the water. And give yourself space for the person who's in front of you. It's kind of standard. It's what I say all the time, you know, pretty standard.

So we get down onto the water or I should say I get down onto the water and I'm adding power, obviously, the density altitude's pretty high that day, so I'm looking at NG and I realized that we have got some sort of a tailwind component going on. Mind you, we have two miles of lake in front of us. So I roll a float, come off the water and just tell everybody, hey, you guys, just abort your loads, we've got, it seems like we've got maybe a little bit of a tailwind going on here, so if you have water, just

jettison your load and just -- we're going to do a go-around and hit it from the other direction.

I got the acknowledgment from three and four, and at this time, I'm up in a left-hand turn and I can't see the water anymore because there's an embankment there. I get eyes on two and three and I'm saying, [redacted], abort your scoop. Where are you? What are you doing? And then number four comes on and says she just hit the bank. And, honestly, I thought -- I was just like, how is that even possible and I just was flabbergasted.

Came back around. Okay. Two -- or three and four, go to the north end of the lake and orbit and don't come anywhere near here. I'm going to start working it. And Air Attack I guess saw the whole thing evidently. And I had made a call to him, and I think, at that point, I want to say he even said something to the extent on the air-to-air frequency of are one of you guys having a problem down there?

And at this point, I start circling around the lake and I'm not expecting to see -- I guess I don't know what I was expecting to see, but I wasn't expecting to see that, that's for sure. So I started doing orbits. Make the call to the Air Attack, hey, we have an airplane down, there's been an accident.

And I think at that point he was already aware and he wasn't responding to me.

And at that point, the boats were coming and all that kind of stuff. So I just went and joined up with the other guys and got out of the airspace because (inaudible), you know, deal with what's going on with the radio and, yeah.

And so we orbited north of the lake maybe for three or four minutes. I called the Air Attack. He finally got back to me. He said just go back to Helena and hold, and that's what we did.

Q Okay. Sorry to make you relive that, but appreciate the information. Just a couple follow-up questions on that. Before, you know, the -- when it started getting busy, you know, you did the recon of the fire and then you went and got your scoop, how was -- was there any issues with number two, [redacted]? I mean, radio chatter or anything she meant -- anything?

A She had asked some questions on the radio that were pretty much all the information that is on your e-board, your dispatch --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- were on that. Like, what's the dispatch frequency for Helena? And I said look at your

dispatch. Go to the box where it says Communications. Go three boxes down on the right. It's right there. And you don't need to worry about it anyways because you're not doing any of that. All you have to do is just follow me. That's it. Acknowledge when you're off the water, whatever, you know, and being out of the traffic.

Q Mm-hmm. Any other questions or comments she had on the flight?

A The remark that she made about the target description, I found that to be curious. But, again, her only -- the only thing she had to do was just keep me in sight and drop where I drop. It's kind of -- and that's kind of -- I would say that's the norm. You know, the easiest job in the flight is anyone besides, I mean, really, the easiest job is being behind someone because you don't have to talk.

Q Yeah, you've got one thing to do, yeah. Okay.

A I mean, all you do is just call out your number to acknowledge that you've understood whatever the command was that the lead gave you.

Q Okay.

A Up, two's up, two's off the drop. Are you guys all good? Two, three, four. Right? I mean, it's not -- it's a really -- I don't know. Like I said, I

don't know.
Q Was her -- you know, you saw her during the pre-brief, you know, the big brief, and, you know, getting to the airplanes and all that and when you talked to them. Did she seem in good spirits and okay?
A She -- yeah.
Q No red flags? I mean, it looked like she was, you know, not there? You know, if someone's tired, they get sleepy. She looked fine, in other words, in good spirits?
A I would have no reason to think that she wasn't how I would see her normally every day.
Q Okay.
A And, again, we had a long flight ahead of us to get over there.
Q Mm-hmm.
A So I kind of was thinking, if there's anything, you know, that needs to be seriously hashed out, we can talk about it on the radio, whatever. We've got plenty of time. But I just -- yeah, I don't -- I cannot give you any explanation. I just don't know.
Q Okay. Well, if I had to -- you know, let's say I asked you, you know, let's say things went well and you landed and I just say up to that point, you know, obviously, of the scoop area, take that away -- what

would you describe number two if I asked you for a few words about how things went? Describe her actions in the flight.

A In the flight?

Q Yeah. Adequate or, you know, what would you say?

A Okay. So, again, it's really hard to evaluate someone when they're behind you. Like, I can't see them and I really am focusing, especially when you're scooping --

Q Yeah.

A -- I'm focusing with my own situation that I have going on. And like I said, high density altitude day these airplanes are prone to have NG exceedances and you've got to be, you know, super aware of that. And I just, I wouldn't be able to tell you what she was doing.

Q Okay.

A Now the third and fourth plane maybe have something additionally, but --

Q Okay. But, like, she made all the radio calls and -- I mean not radio calls.

A She didn't have any calls to make.

Q But, when you make the radio calls to change what you're doing, like, she responded to as advertised for every time you called in?

A Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.
Q Okay. And what about when she lost -- she went blind there. About how long was that if you had to put seconds to it?
A Five.
Q Five seconds?
A Yeah. I reacquired her almost immediately.
Q Yeah. Okay. And then was there haze from the fire, or was it clear?
A No, no. Limitless visibility.
Q Okay. It wasn't anything to do with the visibility?
A No. No.
Q Okay. Just, okay, just double-checking there.
And then the scoop, I don't know if you brief anything or anything, but when you went in for your pass there, you know, I think the full load's what, 800 gallons? Is it -- what did you get?
A At that point, at that point, we would not have been doing full loads.
Q Okay.
A Especially because of the high density altitude, we're downloading and, I mean, realistically, if we --
Q Yeah. Do you remember how much you took on your scoop approximately?

A Oh, I maybe put a hundred in before I decided --
Q Oh, it was that little?
A Yeah, because as soon as you touch down --
Q You know.
A -- and you go to start accelerating --
Q Yeah, you know.
A -- it's one of three things. The prop's not forward, you forgot to put your flaps down, or you have a tailwind. If that happens, you just instantly go, oh, we have a little bit of a tail.
Q Okay. So it happened almost as soon as you said that?
A Yeah.
Q Okay. Okay. I got you.
A Yeah, very quickly.
Q Okay.
A And as a matter of fact, like, my thought was in my head was I could totally get a load out of here, but I'm not going to do it because it's just going to torture them and it's not worth it. We'll just come up again. This is a no-brainer.
Q Okay. Got you. Had you been to that lake before, that reservoir?
A No.
Q Never? First time? Okay. Anything -- you kind

of mentioned that you had two miles in front of you. It looks like it was a pretty big area. Anything else limiting or obstacles you had to worry about per se or pretty open?

A Not where we were scooping.

Q Okay.

A There were some wires in the corner up by the dam, but we were nowhere near that.

Q I know you mentioned the helicopters on the other side, but barring that, there's --

A The helicopters were on the other side of the dam.

Q Yeah. Okay.

A That was a absolutely excellent place to scoop water.

Q Okay. So really no issues. You'd go back there again if you had to?

A I wouldn't even think twice. Well, at this point, I don't know that I ever want to go back there.

Q Well, no, I understand.

A But, I mean, yeah.

Q I mean, as far as, you know, it was an adequate and safe area to get the water?

A Yes. Yes.

Q Okay. And then who selects that? Was that you,

or do you get guidance from the, you know, the Air Attack or the --

A The Air Attack pretty much leaves it up to us, but the deconfliction with the helicopters is a big safety issue. We try to stay away from them and vice verse. And if they've got a pattern going to and from the drop site that's got a dam separating us, that's a perfect fence. They stay on that side, we stay on this side, and, I mean, like I said, it was ideal.

Q So -- okay. So you're making the selection, and it's flight lead basically.

A Yeah.

Q Okay. They might give you advice, but you're actually making -- okay.

A As a matter of fact, that's one of the things that I did say to the Air Attack was, hey, we're going to the scoop right now. If you're interested where we're going to be, that's where we're going to be.

Q Okay.

A So that's why I think he was actually orbiting over us while we were --

Q Okay. I know you said you only took a hundred gallons. What was your plan? Did you have an estimate about what you were trying --

A I was going to try it with five. That was my

goal.
Q Five? Okay.
A After an hour and a half of flight you could probably on, you know, regular, you know, density altitude, realistic days, you could probably get six and a half maybe, but --
Q Okay. And then, as far as I think you told me you were going to go single. So, basically, everyone's just following trail was the plan on the scoop.
A Everybody should be on the same, like a railroad track in the side.
Q Just following what you did.
A Following the person in front of them.
Q Okay. That was the plan, in other words?
A Yes.
Q Okay.
A Single file, stay in the middle. Yes.
Q Okay. And then, when you orbited and you finally saw her, I know she went off to the left. Was it a pretty far change in course from your initial heading on the scoop?
A It was a how did that happen? How did she get over there? Like, to this day, I'm asking myself how.
Q So it was a pretty good turn then basically, what

you're saying.
A It was significant enough that if you were in the middle of the -- if you're in the middle of the lake going straight down the lake, how you would have ended up on that shore line to me, like I said, is --
Q You still can't -- okay. And do you remember your -- I mean, I can go look at the map, but what was your approximate heading coming in for scoop, do you remember?
A I don't remember.
Q Don't remember?
A No.
Q But it was down --
A It was maybe north, you know, between three, four maybe, somewhere like that maybe.
Q Okay. And like you said, when you got airborne, you still had plenty of lake in front of you basically.
A A lot of lake.
Q Yeah. Okay.
A A lot.
Q I mean, it wasn't anything challenging as far as area-wise at all.
A It was not challenging at all.
Q Yeah. Okay. Okay. And once again, you saw,

besides the radio, you saw nothing -- she did not respond to the abort call, correct?

A She never responded to the abort call and I made it twice.

Q Okay. Okay.

A Because I got an immediate acknowledgment from the third and fourth airplane. Then the second time I called, I was specifically calling her.

Q I know you're trying to get the job done. You know, you flew all the way out there from here, so for you, like you say, an hour and a half flight out there, so you definitely want to do what you can while you're there. Did you get any undue pressure to make sure you do the job?

A As far as from whom?

Q To do the drop from your company, internal pressure.

A No. If anything, it's the exact opposite. Like, 100 percent the exact opposite. It has been said by our CEO, it's been said by our Chief Pilot, it's been said by anybody who has any authority that if you don't want to go, you don't have to go. Don't do it if you have any reservations about it. Don't do it. And there's no -- there won't even be any questions asked.

Q So, if I was in your flight and, you know, you went in and scooped and I said, you know, for whatever reason I aborted and said, look, I just don't like the wind or it's kind of squirrely --

A Yeah.

Q -- you're not going to come back and haunt me on the debrief or something like that?

A No, not at all. I'm going to come back and be like, hey, what can we do to fix this?

Q Okay.

A And, again, we've been doing this long enough where there have been times like that, where we're scooping something that's, you know, less than ideal and one other person in the flight says I'm not good with this and then everybody goes somewhere else. It's happened on more than one occasion.

Q Right. Speaking of debriefs, do you guys do a debrief when you land, when you have a flight? Or is it just kind of a informal thing for you?

A We do do a debrief. I mean, it's, again, I wouldn't say that it's like a formal military-style debrief where we sit down and hit every bullet point. But we talk about the scoop, we talk about the drops. We talk about anything that might have been communication issues or whatever the case is. But --

Q Okay. So you do kind of go through to do it better next time potentially?
A Yeah. Well, it's typically like, well, how did that go for everybody? And most of the time it's like, yeah, that was pretty straightforward, that everything went good. Or oh, hey, you know, the Air Attack, you know, I was not really super clear about what he was wanting, and so we had to re-evaluate and maybe change the direction that we were making our drops, whether it be from the left hand or from a right-hand orbit, but it gets discussed, for sure.
Q Okay. Just kind of going back a little bit on the company, you mentioned your app and all. Is that where you get, like, your weight and balance and performance and all? Kind of every pilot does it themselves? Or does the flight lead do it for the flight?
A No, everybody should be doing it for themselves.
Q Okay. And same thing with the fuel planning and weather? It's all, even though you're kind of in charge of the flight, everyone still does it for their own airplane, I'm assuming, right? The weather and --
A The weather as far as en route weather?
Q Yeah. Fuel planning, weather, anything to do with the actual flight, they still back you up to when

they're --

A Right. Like for me, I think to myself three hours is -- three hours to three hours and 15 minutes typically is about -- because -- for a lot of reasons. We can go longer than that, but I don't really like to push it much past about three hours and 15 minutes, and that way it gives us adequate fuel if we had to divert or whatever the case is. But yeah.

Q Okay. And then let's say we're on the airplane, on the ramp here, and for whatever reason we have some issues, maintenance issues. Who do you work with on the radio? Do you call back here to the Idaho place and tell them, hey, we're running late? Or how do you work delays or someone cancels or something, for instance, real-time issues with the flight before you take off?

A If we were having real-time issues with the flight, we would call the dispatch number that we were flight following with and let them know what the problem was, and it may mean that everybody's going home, or it may mean that, you know, one's going home. You know, whatever the case is.

Q Okay. So you tell them the situation and they make the call basically based on the --

A No, we make the call.

Q Oh, you make the call.
A We just call them and tell them that that's what we're doing.
Q Tell them we lost one, one's down for maintenance and we're going to be a three ship or whatever the case is.
A If this is taking place while we're airborne --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- we call the dispatch center.
Q Okay.
A If we're on the ground, we would call whoever our seat manager is. We have a designated manager that takes care of our times and keeps track of all that.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. So that's -- and then let me just go through this and make sure I covered everything for me at least. I'll probably have some -- we talked about the risk assessment, scoop load. What we'll do is why don't we -- I think we're at a good point. We'll take a quick couple minute break to stretch our legs, get a drink, and then we'll reconvene around the table.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

MR. NIXON: Great. We're going to press with round two if you're ready.

MR. WEAVER: I'm ready.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. And before I open it to the table there, just one last question for you for my behalf. I do appreciate you coming out on your busy time, and it's not good to relive this. But is there anything I didn't ask you or a concern you wanted me to know about?

MR. MITCHELL: I -- like I said, I just -- it's been in my mind, you know, every day, trying to think of what could have been done differently, and I cannot come up with an explanation for what happened. I have been privy to many aviation incidents and accidents throughout my career, and they always have a smoking gun that's like yep, that's what happened. And this one, I -- I've got nothing.

MR. NIXON: Okay. All right. Well, thank you. With that, I'm going to open it up, and I'm going to start with the Forest Service. So, Lea, you want to start for the Forest Service, please?

MS. WEINKOPF: Sure. I just have a couple, and then Mike will probably have more detailed perhaps questions.

BY MS. WEINKOPF:

Q But the lake that you guys were at, there was the north lake, Hauser, and the south lake, I can't remember what it was called.

A Missouri River.
Q Yeah. Was there -- what was the decision-maker for which lake to scoop out of? Or was there --
A As far as separated by the dam?
Q Mm-hmm.
A The helicopters were scooping out of the --
Q The south one?
A -- the south.
Q Okay. And then the other thing I had was, as far as you, you said your gallon target would have been probably 500. Would that be something that you communicated to the rest of the flight, or would everyone select their own?
A I would say that that would be into their discretion.
MS. WEINKOPF: Okay. I think that's all I have.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Lea. We'll do one final round, like a short one when everyone gets done, but in case something comes up, don't feel too bad. You'll have one more chance.
But Mr. Savage, please.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q Okay. So you guys pretty much use this, right, the SAS?
A Mm-hmm.

Q You have that? You guys all have a copy of that, right? Okay. I figured you guys did because all your rules are the same. And I assume that's also in the contract, the SAS, all the interagency stuff. Pretty simple. What are kind of the expectations for the lead with you guys in the flight? Is it just really the communications?

A Yeah.

Q Expectations-wise, are you the ultimate decision-maker?

A No.

Q Or does each person have flexibility?

A Everybody has a say.

Q Sure.

A Everybody does.

Q Right. Sure. I know, if they don't like something, they'll say it obviously, right?

A I mean, and that is, you know, that is communicated long before we ever get in the airplane. Everybody's got a say.

Q Sure.

A You know, and if you don't feel comfortable doing something, then we will accommodate, we'll do something different, or hell, we'll just leave and go back.

Q Okay. When you were -- when you guys were on your way, you took off out of Coeur d'Alene here, and you were on your way, was it pretty silent? Or was she talking? Was she asking questions en route at all?

A She asked me the one question about the dispatch frequency, yeah, something along those lines.

Q Just the one question? Okay. That's pretty much it?

A Yeah. It was limitless visibility, smooth, like, actually enjoyable.

Q Right. So great visibility. I know we like to say we don't fly formation, but the reality is we're flying formation. The definition is anytime we're maneuvering our aircraft in relation to another aircraft, that's considered formation, right?

A Sure.

Q How far would you say typically you guys are en route away from each other?

A I like to see a quarter of a mile.

Q Okay. Which is about just over a thousand feet, 1200 feet?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. Fair enough. The -- you were talking about how she went blind. How -- I can't --

A How is that possible?
Q Yeah.
A Yeah. How is that possible? I can't -- I have no explanation for that. And, you know, when you talk to Reese, who's the number three in that, or whoever, ask them the same question because I have no idea how that happened.
Q Right. Okay.
A And so me hearing I went blind for a millisecond makes me nervous because I'm like, well, where are you then?
Q And when, about when did that happen? Can you talk me through that a little?
A On the way to go recon the lake.
Q Okay. So you're on the way to recon the lake. Do you think her head was outside too much, or she was fiddling with her settings?
A I cannot speak to what was going through her head. I have no clue.
Q Is there anything specific that would have happened during that time period that you guys were running a checklist? Is that around the time that you were like, okay, make sure your gates are armed, your this --
A We did that before we even made the orbit around

the fire.
Q Really? Okay. So you did it really early.
A I did it early.
Q Okay, that helps. When you -- what are the wind limitations when you're scooping? Do you guys have any written limitations for winds? Whether it's this much of a tail wind or a crosswind, we're going to knock it off, or is this an individual --
A Well, we are going to not intentionally (inaudible).
Q Well, absolutely.
A It happens from time to time.
Q Sure, sure.
A It does. But the limitations when it comes to wind are self-evident.
Q Okay.
A The water is going to be --
Q White-capped and all that?
A Well, white capping, not -- white capping close together, not a problem. White capping with four-foot intervals in between them, yeah, absolutely not going in that.
Q Sure.
A And cross-winds, as far as a cross-wind --
Q Right.

A -- it will only -- the airplane will only do so much in a cross-wind scoop.
Q Okay.
A You know, like, there's -- I can't tell you what that limitation is. It's probably based more on what your personal ability is. But I'm not --
Q So it's different than when you're -- what the plane's been tested to on land?
A Yeah, yeah.
Q You don't actually have one in the water, but, because you do on --
A But, again, it's self-evident.
Q Right.
A If you're coming down and you are running out of rudder to keep directional control of the airplane because of the crosswind --
Q Okay.
A -- that is the indication that it's not going to be possible.
Q Okay. And what would you say the conditions, the water conditions were that day?
A Benign.
Q Really? So glossy or --
A Probably --
Q -- like the scary kind of benign?

A No.
Q Okay.
A Because you could see ripples on the water.
Q Okay.
A But, like I said, I couldn't really tell. The fire behind us, when we went around the column, the wind was blowing out of the northwest and there was -- the smoke was ever so slightly tipped off to the southeast. You know, the airport was calling the same thing on the ADIS. And I looked at the water and it was like, oh, clearly, it's out of the northwest. Clearly, it wasn't. But it wasn't blowing -- I mean, it was not blowing that hard, so --
Q Okay. And each person in the formation is responsible for -- I know you made the go-around because of the NG basically. You were (inaudible) on that?
A Well, it wasn't because of the NG. It was just because there's no reason to force something when you can just come back around and make it easy.
Q Right. And so the other factors like props are forward, flaps are at approach, would you say is approach departure position not full, right, for scooping?
A Not full, no. Twenty degrees, yeah.

Q Twenty degrees, okay. And then you had the high density altitude, and you had mentioned that you had to roll a float. I know sometimes some people do, some don't. Why would you roll a float?
A I always roll a float.
Q Always?
A Always, every time.
Q So you're just going to pick one side up and then --
A The wind side.
Q The wind side. And then -- which would have been, it sounds like, from quartering left, maybe headwind, maybe?
A Yeah.
Q So you picked up the left one --
A Actually, I picked up the right one that day because it was almost --
Q Oh, so you went into the wind?
A Yeah. It was --
Q Okay.
A Like I said, it was benign.
Q All right. And you -- and -- but the reason that you decided to have everybody abort the scoop specifically was because of the --
A Yes.

Q -- performance part of it really?
A Because I noticed that the air speed was dropping off.
Q Right.
A And I wasn't getting the response from the engine that I was hoping to get, not necessarily the engine, but yeah, I mean, density altitude for sure, so the engine. And there's no reason to keep doing it.
Q Absolutely.
A It's pretty standard.
Q Could you kind of talk me through that, like, what you were looking at with the air speeds and what you were at about?
A Touch down on the water, get on the step, deploy the probes --
Q At about what airspeed? I'm sorry.
A Going 65-ish, somewhere thereabouts. You know, whatever.
Q Okay. Okay, sure.
A Some people scoop faster than other people.
Q Sure.
A The main thing is you just want to stay up on the step and be at a reasonable speed.
Q Okay.
A Deploy the probes, looking at NG, looking at NG,

looking at airspeed going, oh, my airspeed's dropping off. Good Lord. Okay. Roll a float. Abort. Go around.

Q Okay.

A And if you've got a load on, jettison it.

Q So you're landing with power. You're on the water, you're pushing the power up towards the max now while you're scooping?

A Yeah.

Q And you're leaving it there and you're seeing it still, you're not getting the performance that you were --

A Yeah.

Q -- the airspeed increase you would like to see?

A Right. You can feel it.

Q Absolutely. Yeah, I know, yeah.

A You can feel it.

Q Sure. Okay. Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm just trying to make sure I understand because, you know, my goal is to kind of put myself in her shoes, what would it have been like, that.

A Sure.

Q Can you tell me now, you're on the water. How much rudder are we talking here? I mean, you're going to be using a lot of rudder, obviously, but --

A If you're spinning a five-way prop, you know, obviously, it's not making 1600 horsepower.
Q Because of NCL. Go ahead.
A But it is definitely kicking up a lot of torque, right?
Q Yeah.
A So, obviously, the left turning tendency is --
Q Pretty high.
A -- is going to -- yeah, you use a ton of right rudder and trim when you're scooping.
Q Absolutely. And would you say, what percentage of availability of rudder -- I mean, you feel it. You know. How much would you say you had left?
A On that day?
Q Yeah. When you did that. How much rudder when you were in the water, like, how much did you have --
A I had it trimmed full right rudder. That's one of the last things you do when you touch down. One of the last things I do is trim the elevator, trim the rudder, add power, deploy the probes.
Q Okay.
A And that's not to say that you're not going to be doing this with the rudder pedals.
Q Oh, sure, sure.
A The predominant pressure is going to be on the

right foot, for sure.
Q Sure.
A As far as, like, what percentage, I couldn't tell you.
Q Okay. Fair enough. I got the picture.
A It wasn't like --
Q Any rodeo bucking, none of that?
A None, none.
Q No? Okay. So, really, a pretty ideal situation other than the performance portion --
A Like I said.
Q -- hey, maybe we ought to try this the other way.
A Yeah.
Q Okay. And then everybody else in the flight would acknowledge the abort and go around and you guys would go like mama and her ducks, right?
A Yeah, mm-hmm.
Q In line, right?
A Yeah.
Q So you don't want to hit the other person's wake. I assume you're in center line with each other?
A Yep.
Q Okay. Just like in the center of a runway. Okay. And about that 12 to 1500 spacing ish all the way through?

A Yeah. Yes. I can't -- again, I have no idea --
Q I know you don't know. You can't see behind you.
A -- where that was.
Q Do you not have a mirror in your --
A The mirror? No.
Q You don't have one of those?
A No.

MR. SAVAGE: Okay. Okay. I think that's good for me. I think I've got a pretty clear picture. Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And like I said, we'll have one quick, you know, for if you have one that you think of after everyone else.

MR. SAVAGE: I can go all day, but I don't think I need to.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks a lot there, Michael.

MR. SAVAGE: Yeah, thank you.

MR. NIXON: Jesse, are you ready to -- do you have any questions? I don't know if we need to turn this around. I don't know if he can hear you.

MR. WEAVER: Yeah, no, I don't have any questions.

MR. NIXON: Okay. You're good? Okay.

MR. WEAVER: Yeah.

MR. NIXON: All right. We're opening up to, I

have a couple of ASI's here from the NTSB, so we'll start with Scott.

Do you have any questions?

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, if you don't mind.

BY MR. JOHNSON:

Q Can you see on the airplane as the load is increasing, or is it a set point and a light? How is that -- is it --

A There's a big window right between your legs.

Q Okay.

A That's a clear view to the hopper.

Q Okay. So you can --

A And it has a gauge on the side that tells you how much, how many gallons. There's actually two gauges on the side to tell you how many gallons are in there.

Q Okay.

A They are -- I like looking through the window personally.

Q Can it be a point of distraction?

A Everything in that airplane is a point of distraction.

Q Okay. Okay, good. Good. As far as you were talking about some of the things she was doing, would you say that she fell into the normal first-time pilot scenario as far as what's your first impressions of

her on this first time she was going out there?
A I would not be able to say what --
Q She wasn't outside of normal?
A I would not say that she -- I don't even -- I guess I would say I don't even know what I would call the normal, to be honest with you.
Q Okay.
A Because I think everybody wants -- I mean, everybody has varied skill levels, you know.
Q Yeah. Okay.
A Some people come into this and fricking knock it out of the park their first season, and some people obviously have much more trouble. How I would evaluate her? I wouldn't -- I have no idea what to say about -- you know, I can't see her for the most part. You know, like, that's one issue.
Q Yeah. I was kind of not really after a huge analysis but more of a she's just -- she's doing things that a normal low experienced pilot might do and asking questions that exist on the brief sheet there.
A I would say that that would be more abnormal.
Q Okay.
A But, I mean, I can't speak to much more than that.

Q Okay. That's okay.
A I mean, I've never -- I think the idea is that the expectation is that when you are following and you have no responsibilities other than just saying two, I mean, I don't know.
Q Okay.
A Why would she ask me the question? I have no idea.
Q Okay. And you spoke to a debrief, you guys do a debrief. Can you kind of tell us how that debrief went that day?
A Between the three of us that were left?
Q Yeah.
A Yeah, not so lovely. It was just sad. You know, we're in shock. I'd say that --
Q So it was more a wrap --
A The two people behind me saw her fucking impact the shore line, but I did not.
Q Okay. So it was relatively quick and --
A It wasn't quick. We sat in the office over there in Helena for probably about three hours and tried, all of us sitting there trying to figure out what happened. And, I mean --
Q Okay.
A -- I don't know. You'd have to talk with them

about what -- I mean, it was pretty horrific.

MR. JOHNSON: I understand. I'm just kind of trying to wrap my head around what actually happened at the debrief. That's all. But thank you. That's all I've got. Thank you.

MR. MITCHELL: Okay.

MR. NIXON: All right. Zane, anything?

BY MR. BROWN:

Q I've got a couple questions about when you put the probes in, is there a pre-select, or is it you're just watching it and then that's when you pull off? So, like, do you pre-select 500 gallons on the airplane and the probes come back out?

A You can.

Q You can?

A Yeah. I don't. But you can.

Q All right. And then it's just performance-driven. Do you get, like, on your app when you're doing weight and balance and performance charts, do you get a max, like, I can pull 600 gallons when I get out there, I can pull 650 gallons?

A So the app tells you what you can haul, but it does not factor in environmental conditions.

Q Oh, really.

A It just leads you up to 16,000 pounds.

Q Got you.
A Pilot, hopper -- well, the hopper's down at the bottom. It's like pilot, right-hand baggage compartment, left-hand baggage compartment, aft baggage compartment. We have a jell system, at least mine has a jell system on it. How much jell is in the system. And then max fuel, max hopper load. So, for me, it never changes. My max hopper load every single day every time I put it in there is about 475 gallons.

Now, if I put full jell in there and load it all the way up full of jell, then it's about 445 gallons.

Q Okay.
A And as the fuel's coming off, you're adding more. But, on high density altitude days, you're not going to pull, you're not going to do that.
Q So you don't have a performance chart that you say, okay, density altitude is this, we have to drop down 20 percent?
A No, no.
Q Okay.
A But, again, it's -- I mean, you know. I mean, you know.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah. Cool. That's all.

MR. NIXON: Okay. For a final round, real quick, I just had one follow-up question.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q We mentioned she went blind, you know, when you guys were doing, I guess, the recon of was it the fire? Were you maneuvering at the time or were you --

A No, I was straight and level --

Q Straight and level?

A -- on the west side of the body of water.

Q Okay. And what side was she on at that time?

A The east side.

Q East side. So you were -- it was straight and level and a temporary call, and as soon as she made that you looked up and saw her?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Then you talked her back on to you basically?

A Turn 20 degrees to the left, look out your left window, and when you maneuver to join back up with me.

Q So, I mean, there was no reason, you weren't in a turn or anything, it was straight and level for quite a bit before the blind call and after, obviously?

A Yeah.

Q There was no maneuvering --

A Yeah, all the way down the lake.

Q The lake?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. All right. I just wanted to make sure I got that right.
A Yeah. Yeah.
MR. NIXON: Okay. All right. That's the only one I had. All right. Final round of the table. Scott?
MR. JOHNSON: No.
MR. NIXON: Mike?
MR. SAVAGE: Yeah.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q Where -- so she's -- you're now on the west side, she's on the east side. Where are three and four?
A On the east side following her because there's --
Q Okay. So they're following her, but did they have you, do you know?
A Yes.
Q They did have you in sight?
A Yes.
Q And anybody prompt her, like, hey, you know, come 20 degrees left?
A That was me.
Q Okay. So you saw. Okay. I'm just assuming probably she hasn't had much flight experience, formation experience at this point.
A Well, whatever she received at company training

would be to the extent, and I can't speak to that because I didn't do any of that.

Q Sure, right. Another one. You know, you had mentioned, and I thought about it, then I forgot to write it down. But what's the easy button, obviously, what's typical, filling an auto or manual, right? You can select or you can do it manually, right?

A I think a lot of people who are getting started use the auto because they pre-set it. But I don't like using the auto. I like using the manual because I can count on the fact that what I'm seeing is what it is, not what the ball that's sliding up and down the tube inside the hopper is thinking that it's thinking.

Q What's the safer of the two then?

A I think it would be personal preference.

Q Really?

A I don't know that one way's safer or not. Like I said, I think that the auto system is perfectly safe. I don't think, if anything, the auto system is going to underload you than overload you because it's, like I said, it's a tube going up the hopper with a ball inside of it that's bouncing around as the water's coming into it, so it's, you know, doing this number.

MR. SAVAGE: Okay. I didn't write the last one

down, and I can't remember what it was, but it's all right. I think that's all I've got, Keaton. Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great.

Lea, final round, anything?

MS. WEINKOPF: Yeah, I had some more questions to that.

BY MS. WEINKOPF:

Q So just to be clear, that manual or using your visual indication, that's pilot discretion? There's no official --

A I don't think -- I think if you ask, everybody would tell you that some of them use the manual, some of them use the auto.

Q Okay.

A I'd say maybe, and I don't know this to be factual, but I would think that more of the people who have been doing it longer probably use the manual instead of the auto. I think the auto is just there as in the sense that it's just one less thing to have to think about. As soon as that system thinks it's at the pre-determined amount of gallons that it's supposed to be in there, it immediately pulls the probes up.

Q When you're armed, is there a visual indication?

A Gate armed?
Q Yeah.
A There's a big green light right at eye level.
Q Okay. And then I had one more that I forgot earlier. So you had said that normally lead does most of the calls, number two does dispatch.
A Yeah.
Q But then --
A She did not do it that day.
Q She wasn't. So would that automatically go to four, or would you do all those then?
A It went to three.
Q Okay.
A It went to Doug or, I mean, excuse me, to Reese. My bad. It was Reese who was handling dispatch that day.

MS. WEINKOPF: Okay. That's all I have.

MR. SAVAGE: Can I go back? I just remembered what I was going to ask.

MR. MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah, go.

MR. NIXON: Come on, Michael.

MR. SAVAGE: Sorry.

MR. MITCHELL: No, no.

MR. SAVAGE: I'm lost. I didn't write it down.

MR. NIXON: Go ahead.

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q If I get into any one of these airplanes, these Fire Bosses, are they all the same? All standardized no matter what airplane I get in, it's all the same?

A No. I mean, the systems are the same. Maybe the --

Q Okay. But what's the difference?

A The GPS might be in a different location. Radio setup package might be in a different -- I mean, I shouldn't say that there are -- I guess there's a certain standardization in there, but it's not -- I mean, if you went through every single airplane, you would be able to pick out things that are different. But --

Q But, like, as far as the being on the water part and all the scooping and the lights and the auto/manual and the emergency dump and the triggers, all that's the same?

A So all the -- yeah. So like your fire gate box, they're all over here, whether it be Air Tracker gates or Kevin Bombering gates or whatever.

Q Sure.

A That's all on this side. All your scoop stuff is on this side. All the lights for the scoops, for checking them and all that good stuff is all over on

this side.

On this side, your V dub handle is in the exact same place in every single airplane.

I guess, when I say they're not all the same, like, the radio package is somewhat different. You'll use Technosonics and Digital NATs and stuff like that. It's a little from plane to plane -- all right?

MR. SAVAGE: Okay. Okay. Thank you.

MR. NIXON: All right, Zane, a final one?

MR. BROWN: Yeah. I've got a couple questions.

MR. MITCHELL: Sure.

MR. BROWN: I at least have one. I don't remember what the other one was.

BY MR. BROWN:

Q How come -- how did she end up in the number two slot that day?

A Well, because she was doing relief for the guy who was flying in 205, and 205 was in the number two spot that day.

Q Okay.

A And, essentially, since I was the person who was going to lead that flight, she was just the next person in line.

Q Got you. Okay. And then my other -- oh. Was she, like, overrunning you when she lost sight of you,

when she went blind?
A She did overrun me.
Q Oh, she did? She got in front of you?
A Yeah.
Q Okay.
A But there was no horizontal separation issues because she was on the other side of the lake.
MR. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Okay. That's all.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Zane.
And online, Jesse, do you have any questions for the final round?
MR. WEAVER: I don't have any questions. I can add some color to the whether she was probably in auto or manual and why if --
MR. NIXON: Yeah, go ahead, please.
MR. WEAVER: Yeah. We train when -- you know, granted, she was new and we train to use the auto system. You know, there's a -- Keaton was talking about the app we use. That app gives you basically the load you can take, you know, at your max gross weight, I mean, you're full of fuel, your first load out. And then, as we burn off fuel, there's a chart in the airplane, it will tell you, you know, if you've got this many gallons left, you can pick up X amount of water. You can dial that into the auto scoop

system. And that's how we train.

Keaton is correct, a lot of the veterans do just use the manual system because they just -- they're so used to watching the water come up and the auto system is not always right. It tends to underload you sometimes. Every once in a while it can let you get an overload situation.

So she probably would have been in auto just because, as a new pilot, there is just -- there's a lot of stuff going on in the airplane, and watching that load come in and everything else you're supposed to watch is -- it just takes time. So I would just about guarantee she was in the auto mode --

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MR. WEAVER: -- at her experience level.

MR. NIXON: Yeah.

MR. WEAVER: And I actually fly the airplane in the auto mode. I watch the load come up, but I like to make sure my auto system is working the way it's supposed to. But a lot of people don't.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great. Well, appreciate that commentary. And if you have no other further comment or questions, we're getting ready to conclude. Anything else, Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: No, no.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thank you.

MR. WEAVER: I don't have anything.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And then, finally, we told you we'd open the floor to you. First of all, we appreciate everything. I know it's a tough time, and, you know, condolences obviously to you when your compadre, you know, your fellow worker, you pilot's there, so -- but we do appreciate you giving us details going back to our, you know, if there's anything we can do to make anything, that's why we do these things, obviously.

So, with that, do you have any questions of us?

MR. MITCHELL: I don't have any questions. I guess, like, I guess my parting statement would be I just, like, I'm completely -- I'm like I have no explanation. I don't get it. It makes absolutely no sense to me that she ended up on that bank, none. So, yeah, that's all I can say.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Well, once again, on behalf of my group here, thank you very much. We appreciate your time and your interview.

MR. MITCHELL: Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Thank you. All right, Jesse, thank you.

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

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: Interviews for WPR24FA238 Operations Group

ACCIDENT NO.: WPR24FA238

LOCATION: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

DATE: --

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: November 13, 2025

[redacted]

Marcia Thurmond
Official Transcriber
Reporting Corporation

[redacted]

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
INTERVIEWS FOR WPR24FA238	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
OPERATIONS GROUP	)	
	)	

Interview of: LATT ARMEDA, Pilot

Pages: 1 through 65

Place: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Investigation of:	)	
	)	
INTERVIEWS FOR WPR24FA238	)	Accident No.: WPR24FA238
OPERATIONS GROUP	)	
	)	

Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Interview of: LATT ARMEDA, Pilot

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Operations Group Chairman, NTSB

SCOTT JOHNSON, Air Safety Investigator, NTSB

ZANE BROWN, Accident Investigator, NTSB

MICHAEL SAVAGE, National Fixed Wing Inspector Pilot, U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKOPF, Air Safety Investigator, U.S. Forest Service

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot/Director of Operations, Dauntless Air

DEANA ARMEDA, Representative

I N D E X

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By Mr. Nixon	8

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. NIXON: And, Latt, welcome.

MR. ARMEDA: Yes.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. Good afternoon. And are you guys ready to roll? Jesse and Latt, both ready to go?

MR. ARMEDA: Yeah, ready to go.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. Okay. Just real quick, welcome. Appreciate you both coming online.

The ROE, as we mentioned, Latt, about the representative, I think you said you're going to have your wife present, is that correct?

MR. ARMEDA: That's correct.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MR. ARMEDA: She's right here off camera with me.

MR. NIXON: Oh, okay, so she's there. Okay, great.

And we talked about, I think Jesse talked to you about recording to capture accuracy. We turn in the recording to a transcription service that gets a transcript, and then what will happen, Latt, is I don't know what their turn time is, but let's say it's a month. When I get that, I will send you a draft copy to go through and make sure that all your lingo and whatever is correct, so you get to see it and then

make corrections, and then we'll all do that. And then, at some point, we'll send it back to get corrections and then that will be the final copy.

So the recording doesn't go anywhere. It's just used to make the transcript and make sure it's accurate, so to make sure you understand that part.

And then I think me and you have talked before, Latt, but just in case, you know, I'm Albert Nixon. I'm leading the Operations Group for this accident, is my title. And, obviously, I'm with the NTSB.

And I think, in talking to you earlier, you know about the NTSB, you know what our taskings are, correct?

MR. ARMEDA: Correct.

MR. NIXON: Okay. You know, bottom line for us is we try to determine a probable cause, you know, of what happened in the accident, which is pretty much a, you know, what we think happened. And then, along the way, if we find mitigations both in potentially preventing another accident or this accident, obviously, we would take action that's appropriate, whether it's a timing thing or something we can do, you know, after the fact. You know, sometime if it's a manual or something might be a long change if it's not critical, but we look for things like that to

hopefully mitigate, you know, or lessen the chance of another accident. Obviously, nothing we can do about this one, but that's our task, to hopefully mitigate before the next one type thing.

And we are an independent agency. We lead the investigations on these type of accidents.

And with that, do you have any questions about the NTSB or anything on the interview, Latt?

MR. ARMEDA: No, sir.

MR. NIXON: Okay. So can we -- we'll get started. Can you -- I tell you what, before we get started, who did you choose to be your representative, and if you'd give us her full name, please.

MR. ARMEDA: With me?

MR. NIXON: Mm-hmm.

MR. ARMEDA: It would be my wife. Her name is Deana, D-e-a-n-a, Armeda, A-r-m-e-d-a.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. And she's right there with you behind you somewhere there?

MR. ARMEDA: Yes.

MR. NIXON: Okay.

MS. ARMEDA: Yes, sir.

MR. NIXON: All right. Welcome aboard there, Deana. Appreciate you spending a little time with us.

And what we'll do is the other people are at the

table, they don't have -- they're not logged on to the Teams meeting because we're having trouble with the internet here, so we're going to just have them introduce themselves. Go around the table here.

MR. JOHNSON: Scott Johnson with the NTSB. I'm an Air Safety Investigator.

MR. SAVAGE: Hey, Latt. Michael Savage, U.S. Forest Service.

MR. ARMEDA: Hi.

MS. WEINKOPF: Latt, this is Lea Weinkopf. I'm with the U.S. Forest Service also. I'm an Air Safety Investigator for the national office.

MR. ARMEDA: Hey.

MR. BROWN: And then Zane Brown with the NTSB. I'm an Aviation Accident Investigator.

MR. ARMEDA: Hey.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Before we get started, Latt, we might go a little long based on what I've, you know, heard from the previous experiences there, so, if we do, we'll most likely take a break. We'll try to take a quick break about every hour if necessary, you know, like --

MR. ARMEDA: Okay.

MR. NIXON: -- maybe, you know, three to five minutes. Not a long break but just enough to stretch

the legs, get a drink, use the facilities or whatever, whatever's necessary. So, if you need something earlier or I forget, just, you know, wave your hand or something and let me know you need a break and we'll take one.

INTERVIEW OF LATT ARMEDA

BY MR. NIXON:

Q So, with that, can you please state your full name, please.

A Full name is Latt, L-a-t-t, Armeda, A-r-m-e-d-a. No middle name.

Q Okay. And, Latt, tell us a little about your aviation background.

A I started flying when I was in high school. I got my private license. I joined the Army when I was 22. Spent about four years in the military and ended up getting out on a drawdown. Went into commercial aviation at that point, flying offshore oil and gas. Sprayed, sprayed for a number of years. I flew corporate. I flew internationally for 10 years. EMS, search and rescue, both helicopters and fixed wing. And I've been doing fire work now since I think the 2019 season. That's when I started doing fire.

Q Okay, about five years ago.

A (Inaudible).

Q Yeah. Okay.
A Yeah.
Q All right. And what -- for -- you know, I know they've gone through a merge with other companies, but, basically speaking, with Dauntless, how long have you been on board with them?
A Since January of this year.
Q Okay. So you're a pretty recent hire then. Okay.
A Yes.
Q Okay. And as far as, can you kind of give us your certificates and ratings that you have for your pilot side?
A ATP Helicopter and commercial multi-engine, fixed wing, single engine sea. I've got a few type ratings of -- I'm a DC3 type rated captain, AW139 helicopter type rating. I think that's got it, yeah.
Q Okay. How many total hours do you have, Latt, approximately?

A In the neighborhood of about 12,000-some.
Q Okay.
A I don't keep a close accurate on it.
Q Okay.
A Ball park it's around 12,000 hours.

Q Okay. And the current airplane you're flying, I guess the Fire Boss, about how many hours do you have?
A What I got in training, so, I mean, I don't have that in front of me, but I've got my training hours from this year.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And, oh, I did a currency flight when I came to work a few weeks back, and then the day of the accident I got about three hours. So I'm just going to -- I could, neighborhood, 35 hours in the airframe. Maybe more.
Q Okay. And then, as far as -- so your responsibilities, I'm assuming, are just being a pilot with Dauntless, correct? Strictly a pilot?
A Correct.
Q Okay. And who do you report to?
A The Chief Pilot/Director of Operations, Jesse Weaver.
Q Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the company as far as training. I know talking to a previous person that, you know, they got -- they came on board quite a bit earlier, so things have changed, but when you got hired, what did they require for you to be hired for the company hour-wise and rating-wise?
A It was per the contract and it's in the contract

as far as hours in the airframe, hours in the Fire Boss, hours flying fire. Honestly, I can't -- it was well over a thousand hours --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- in the airframe when I started with the company. Maybe 1200 hours in the 802 --

Q Okay.

A -- both doing ag and fire work.

Q I see. Okay. And the training, by chance, were you in training with [redacted] the accident pilot, the same class?

A I was. We hired on at the same time together.

Q Okay. So you went -- I'm assuming they had some type of ground school. When you flight train, you probably flew in flight with her for a lot of your training?

A Well, we all convened in Leesburg, Florida. We met in Leesburg to do our initial training, both ground and flight.

Q Okay. And that was in Florida as well, the ground portion?

A Yes.

Q Okay. And how long was the ground portion?

A We spent at least a few weeks down there. I mean, we would mix in ground and then flight.

Periodically, the ground would -- it was just -- it would be plugged in in between flying.

Q I see.

A So there was different times of the day we'd break and all sit down and do ground instruction.

Q And then what about the flight training part? How -- about how long is that? I think sometimes it's individually catered, but for yours, how long was the flight training approximately?

A I don't know. Until I got to the solo portion, I'm going to say maybe 10, 12 hours until I got soloed in the airplane.

Q Mm-hmm. Okay.

A That was something in question. I also previous to the training, I went to Texas and picked up a Fire Boss to fly it to Florida to get trained in, and I don't believe I ever got a ferry qual. I never saw any paperwork on it. If I got it, I never saw any of it.

Q Okay.

A But I did move an airplane prior to training from Texas to Florida.

Q Mm-hmm. I see. Just ferrying the airplane basically. It wasn't any -- is that correct? Just ferry the airplane and position it in position?

A It was a Fire Boss, ferrying it from Texas to Florida to get trained in it.
Q Okay. Okay. How -- was most of your training -- you know, maybe your first few you might have been, you know, just single solo, single ship, you know, just one airplane, or was it mostly four in a flight?
A When we're initially learning, we're in just one airplane, in a two-seat airplane.
Q Mm-hmm. Okay. So how much is -- so initially you're in a two-seat airplane, correct?
A Correct.
Q And then you transition to your solo with a -- in a flight-type thing, is that correct?
A Correct.
Q Okay. And given your previous experience, I'm assuming the transition wasn't too bad for you with the Fire Boss.
A Well, no. It's a different -- I mean, it's the same airframe, but it's a different mission. It's -- the scooping is the most difficult part of handling the airplane. It's not the flying itself. It's the scooping on the water.
Q The scoop is the most difficult part you thought of the training?
A Yes.

Q Okay. Do they touch upon -- I mean, I know you're not, you know, being, for instance, a flight lead or anything, but do they touch much upon during training about the, we'll call it the flight training, you know, where you're flying with multiple airplanes, like two to four?

A Yes. Tactics.

Q Tactics?

A Yeah.

Q And what -- I don't need all the details, but can you give me a brief, kind of a brief overview of what they train in the, you know, call it formation or flight, how you keep position and all that kind of stuff?

A Well, that's just it. It was kind of a pseudo military-type syllabus to get us up to speed on formation flying, and then the tactics are basically being able to hit, you know, where the Air Attack super or the Air supervisor tells you to put the water, and that just comes from nothing more than getting out and practicing. Whether you tag and extend the line or you double up or whatever, you're just -- it's a lot about trigger discipline and learning how to let go of the load to hit the area that is required by the ground firemen.

Q I see. Does your formation, you know, training, did it cover anything for, like, how to keep spacing? Or is that just something the instructor in the airplane taught you that looks about right to keep your spacing from the lead and stuff like that?
A Oh, no, we use references of pieces and parts on the aircraft to get you in the proper location for spacing and to hold you in a good tight formation or a loose one, whichever. But you use reference points on the aircraft.
Q Okay. So is it, like, numbers or something on the -- painted on the tail? Or what did they use?
A Like the exhaust and the flap hanger.
Q Okay. And did they cover -- like let's say you lost sight of lead, for instance. Did they cover things like that in your training for the, I don't want to say formation, for the flight?
A Yes. Yeah, they do.
Q Okay. And how detailed do they do? Let's say you had two, you have your lead and two airplanes on the right of lead. You know what I'm saying? Do they -- let's say you're the furthest one out, which would probably be the person losing sight because, you know, you have the longest distance to lead. Do they cover how to, once again, if you lost sight of lead,

procedures if you're -- if there's more than one airplane besides the lead on your side?

A Yes, there is. They do teach that procedure, and you just -- you're basically calling out what you're doing so the rest of the flight knows what you are doing.

Q Okay. And, like, for instance, in that situation, if you're -- you know, you have the lead and you have two people to the right of lead, you know what I'm saying, flying visually, if you're that furthest one out, what do they tell you to do if you lose sight?

A Call it and then turn away from the flight, you know, usually about a 30 degree turn away from the flight.

Q Do they tell you how long or anything? Or it's just judgment call?

A Not necessarily. Not a time line.

Q Okay.

A You know, no, I wouldn't say that there's a count, so to speak, a 30 count or whatever maybe, you know, that would lead time.

Q Okay. And then, you know, at times you're going to be, like I said, depending on how many airplanes are in the flight, you're either going to be on the

right or left side, or you might be stacked or, you know, in trail. What do you use for a reference for altitude when you're -- for instance, if you go into trail, do you try to keep co-altitude? Or let's say you're number two behind lead and he says, like, you're going to do a line-up for a potential -- you know, what do they teach you, I guess, for formation and trail?

A Try and stay slightly below --

Q Slightly below?

A -- the person which you're following.

Q Okay. And what's that to you? I'm new to the ball game. What's slightly below? Just curious.

A I would call it the height of the airframe from the bottom of the floats to the top of the cab, about that much distance below.

Q Okay. You put that much? Okay. And then same thing if you're laterally on the left or right side, do you have any -- you talked about some visual references, but do you have, like, a ball park figure you kind of keep laterally distance from lead?

A It just depends on what the flight calls for, whether you're en route to a fire, whether you're working in a fire. It's all dependent upon the part of the flight that you're in right at that moment.

Q Okay. And, like I say, I'm new to this formation stuff, so, like, if you come up to a turn, whether you're a position airplane or you're, you know, going out to fight, does the lead call the turns or do they just assume you're watching that person and make the turn accordingly?

A A good lead will usually call the turn, yes.

Q Okay. Did you feel your formation flight training was adequate to what you do in the -- you know, you've been out now on your own for a few flights. Do you feel that the training was adequate in that area?

A It would -- I have some background in formation flying both from the military and from some of the work that I've done, so I have a little bit better comfort level than maybe some or most. If this -- if I were new to it, yeah, no, I would not feel as comfortable flying in a close formation. If I was new to fire, the airframe, the mission, and everything, yeah, I can say I would definitely want some more space.

Q Was it just because you're not familiar with the formations? Or is it because you're close to other airplanes? Or is it because you think you need more training?

A I won't say that I need more training. It's just that it's a lot of airplane to handle and it's the type that if you take your eye off the road for one second you're going in a different direction. So it's more of a safety thing for me --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- about being clear from people when you need to program a radio or a GPS or whatever it may be. It's very easy to lose sight of the people that you're near, and if you're closer, it just makes it that much more dangerous.

Q Okay. You mentioned you thought the scooping was, at least for yourself, the most difficult aspect of your training.

A Yes.

Q Once again, I'm new to the ball game here. So explain exactly what part is the challenging part or, you know, parts I should say.

A Just handling of the aircraft on the water. When you deploy the probes, you get a porpoising going on the water where the airframe feels like it's rocking forward and backward. And with the water rushing into the hopper --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- that's the problem, and that's the hardest part

about learning the airplane, is the porpoising during the scoop. And then the next hardest part is probably just getting the airplane back airborne again depending upon the water conditions, whether it be glassy water or choppy water or what, or crosswinds.

Q I see.

A But the handling of the machine on the water is most assuredly the most difficult part of flying that airplane.

Q Difficult part, okay. Kind of going back because, you know, that would kind of tie into your general training. Do you feel that that was adequate for your scooping operations? I know it's difficult, but did you feel like you were adequately trained for it?

A I felt pretty good about it. But I think that I was -- I don't know if -- I spent a lot of time on the water as a young person. I spent a lot of time on the water as an adult on boats. I understand how the water is, and I think this is a natural progression --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- getting into an airplane and understanding it. But I can't say that if I didn't have that background, no, I would not have felt as comfortable with the scooping, for sure.

Q Okay. So kind of tie in both of them, the training in general and the flight training or formation training, whatever you want to call it. You felt given your background in both that it was adequate for you, but if it was someone that didn't have that experience you had, potentially might have a -- might need some more training flights, in other words?

A I would definitely say so, yes.

Q Okay. Speaking of that, is your training catered to -- I know you have a checkride and all the standard stuff to get checked out, but is the training pretty much catered to you? Like, if you're -- some people are slower learners or they require extra flights or they need to concentrate on something more. You know what I'm saying? Is that the way pretty much -- you've been through a bunch of training you said in the military and some other things. Is that -- compare your training to other organizations you've been in. Is it pretty similar or anything different?

A Usually, yes, it's catered to the individual because we all learn different ways and we're different people.

Q Mm-hmm. Okay.

A So, overall, yeah, we had a good mix of

experienced people as far as the training goes. So, if one couldn't break through, maybe the other could. I don't know. And that's, for me to say it, you know, I receive differently from people, and -- but I can't say for the other students in the class how they perceived it.

Q Okay. How many students were in your class there, Latt? Just curious.

A Six.

Q Six? And then did everyone graduate?

A Well, graduate or get carded.

Q Carded, the same --

A Well, no, we had a few that didn't get carded. There was two that did not get carded in Texas when we were due to checkride out of the original six.

Q Okay. And you don't know what happened to them since? Did they take a few more rides and get carded? Or you don't know what their status is, the other two?

A Well, one of them is not carded. He's a mechanic with the company. The other one is deceased.

Q Okay. Okay. Anything else you want to mention on training in general? You know, it looks like you have a pretty vast experience, so you have a good -- you're a good person to kind of, what's the word, compare it to other training you had. Is there

anything good -- it doesn't have to be always negative, but is there places at the ground school, in the flight training, in the flight, where it was above and beyond, or did you see anything lacking, I guess?

A I think it was lacking for certain people, and I think, in this case, the training department failed [redacted]. She was pulled out of training two days before our checkride and told that she was not ready.

Q Mm-hmm.

A Subsequent to that, I don't believe she ever got any dual training whatsoever in a two-seat Fire Boss. Now she got to fly a lot of Fire Bosses, moving them around, ferrying them. But, to the best of my knowledge, and she spoke to everyone in the class about these things on an individual level --

Q Mm-hmm.

A -- she never received any more dual instruction subsequent that day.

Q Okay. Well, since you brought her up, let's talk a little bit about that. She was in your training class. In ground school, was there any issues that you noted with her? Was she with the class or doing fine?

A Actually, she was the best student in the class.

Q In the ground school? Okay.

A She was best in the entire class throughout the training.
Q Okay.
A By far the most enthusiastic and the best student there was.
Q Okay. And then getting to the flight training up to the point you just mentioned, was there any issues that you were aware of? Because you probably fly in the flight with her, so you might be aware of it otherwise, you know.
A Well, we actually were either in a two-seat airplane with an instructor or we're in a single-seat airplane by ourselves. So I would never fly with her in a cockpit, so I wouldn't -- I can't "tell" you that I know because we never flew in the same airplane together.
Q Okay.
A And flying in a flight doesn't really -- it just means you can fly next to one another as far as, you know.
Q Okay. And speaking of flights, just one other question came up. Do you guys, do you always get a pre-brief when you go out? Let's say a flight of four. Is there a pre-brief before you take off?
A We like to, yes, for sure.

Q Okay. And then is there a debrief after you land to kind of recap lessons learned or how things went?
A Kind of like an after-action review?
Q Yes.
A Yes, you have that taking place.
Q Okay. And does that take place even now that you're on the line, not just in -- obviously, in training, it would definitely take place, but does it take place in the few flights you've had now online, that you had? You said you had a few hours that you flew, you know, on the line. Was it the same thing? You're still getting debriefs?
A I don't know. I'm no longer employed by Dauntless Air.
Q But I mean, before you -- didn't you fly a few before you left the company? Didn't you fly a few --
A The incident flight was the first dispatch of the summer for us.
Q Oh, okay. That was the first one for you as well. Okay. Got it.
A Yeah.
Q Okay. Let's talk a little bit about the safety programs in your company. Are you aware of any safety programs there?
A The SMS program --

Q Okay.
A -- with Dauntless that we -- we went through it in company training.
Q Okay. So let's say you have an issue on some flight, you didn't like something. You know, let's say it's maintenance-related or something. You know, you might make a phone call to somebody, but barring that, you decide to put it in the SMS system so it's captured, you know, permanently. How difficult is it for you to log onto that thing? Is it an app, or is it online access? Or how does that work if you wanted to log on --
A It's online access to the employee.
Q Okay. Okay. So you can get to it fairly easy?
A Yes.
Q And can you log -- let's say for whatever reason you want to log it anonymously. Can you do that?
A I'm told so, but I don't know that that's true.
Q Okay. So -- okay. They briefed that to you, but you're not sure how it would be done basically is what you're saying.
A Yeah, I don't see how.
Q Okay. Have you made any reports in SMS?
A I have not.
Q Okay. Is there any other safety meetings, emails

or anything you're aware of as your time as a pilot there? You know, I don't know if they had a --

A Yeah. We used to get a daily email, something to, you know, jog your mind about the aircraft or the mission or something like that. So, yeah, you would get things almost daily that would -- you know, as far as safety-related items or something with the aircraft or something -- you know, you might not use that much with the aircraft. It's just a reminder that it's there in case of emergency, things of that nature.

Q Okay. Talking some emergency systems, things like that sometimes?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Is the Chief Pilot the originator of those? Or where are they coming from, the emails?

A They come from a couple three different people within the company but not necessarily the Chief Pilot, no.

Q Okay. And just curious. Would they be -- what kind of people in the company? Safety people or leadership or --

A I guess they would be called leadership. I don't know. They're people that do the schedule or help do administrative things, but I don't know of their official titles with the company.

Q Okay. The kind of, you know, I know you only had one -- your first day, it was a typical day, but can you kind of run me through a typical day that you expected to have when you got hired there, like, you know, hour-wise and how much flying you're going to do per month and all that kind of stuff?

A Oh, there's nothing typical about the fire industry other than you can't tell from one day to the next. Things may be -- you know, you just never know when you're going to fly. I've flown EMS before.

Q Mm-hmm.

A It's the same thing. You can't predict when somebody's going to have a car wreck or when there's going to be a fire. So it's a lot of sitting around waiting for -- to get out and go to work. So there can be times of boredom and there can be times of you're very tired from you're working days on end and hours on end. So there's nothing really stereotypical about fire. Just it's ever-changing.

Q Okay. And then sorry to backtrack a little bit, but going back to your training, you mentioned [redacted] had some trouble, you know, there and she got took offline you said. Did you know her very well? Would she discuss problems with you in flying or anything? Or you just knew her from training basically?

A She -- we have a group text of our new-hire class of six.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And she was pretty much an open book and what one knew we all knew. We kind of shared information. So yeah.
Q Do you mind sharing a little bit about what her comments were when she got in trouble there, having difficulty? Did she -- was she open about that or --
A She was open. She said that she was having difficulties with the scooping portion of it. She got pulled out two days prior to our checkride in Texas --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- and told she wasn't ready. She shared that with me, she shared it with our group, although it didn't daunt her or phase her because she was told she was going to get brought up to speed and then get a checkride.
Q Did she mention exactly what she was having trouble with in the scooping? You know, there's a lot going on there, but did she mention at all what it was?
A Just predominantly the scoop, of getting on the water, getting the probes deployed, getting through the porpoise, and then getting back off the water.

Just the process. I know it sounds simple, but there's a lot to it and there's a lot going on when you're doing this and it can be -- you can get task-saturated very quickly.

Q Okay. So she was definitely -- and you mentioned it was the toughest part for you as well. So she's mentioning that basically from the time she got on the water to scoop until she got off, lifted off, pretty much those seconds there were the critical time for her, she was having a little trouble with?

A Yes.

Q Okay. Did she mention anything else along the way about training or anything?

A No. She was very -- she was hard to get down. She was very bright-spirited and always happy to be there. Actually, she'd get everyone else kind of pumped up. So no, never any down. If she was down, you never knew it.

Q Okay. And I'm assuming you guys, I don't know how it works, if you get assigned one instructor, then maybe two later on, but did you fly with any of her same instructors when you had the two-seat?

A I flew with all of them. There's three instructors. I flew with all of them.

Q Okay. Anything good, bad, indifferent to say

about any of them?

A Like I said, where one can't get through to you another can. I never had -- the things that I don't respond to are screamers or hollerers, and there's none of that. There's no hollering, there's no screaming. It's pretty decent instruction overall.

Q Mm-hmm.

A But, yeah, I did fly with all three. I had no issues with any, and I could receive pretty well the instruction that they gave me. I understood what they were trying to teach me.

Q Okay. Okay. Okay. Let me see here. Kind of take us -- I hate to make you relive this, but can you kind of take us back to the accident day? You know, you got checked out and, apparently, eventually, you know, obviously, [redacted] got checked out because she's with you that day, but -- so I don't know if you heard anything on your comments, on your group chat or anything since that time, but did she give you an update when she got checked out finally?

A She did send a photograph the day she got her OAS checkride, the day she got carded. Yes. She sent a picture to our group.

Q Okay. All right. So kind of take us back to the pre-brief, and then, if it's not something you think's

critical, just tell us it was done maybe. And then, you know, if we've got follow-up questions, we'll ask you, but take us back to that day to your taskings and how things went, you know, with your flight, how it was designated, different positions and everything if you could, please.

A The day of the accident?

Q Yes.

A You're referring to that flight?

Q Yes.

A Okay. We had actually been notified the night before we'd be going over to Montana to assist on the Horse Gulch Fire, so we had plenty of time to look at it and plan our flight over. There was a little bit about bringing one of the crews back early in case there was any fires break out in the panhandle of Idaho that they would be sitting there. That would have been the flight lead and [redacted], the one and two. Myself, I was in the number four position behind Reese Wilson.

And so we knew the night before, planned for it, came in early, got ready, got the airplanes ready, did a briefing, and everything was pretty routine.

Getting out, no issues. It was a good flight all the way over. We went direct to the fire. We had

enough fuel on board to go straight to the fire. At that time, I think it was roughly about 15 miles northwest of Helena, the fire was.

Went there, made one circuit around the fire, got the plan from the Air Attack as to the target description and where we would go.

As we exited the fire going towards the water source, flight lead asked if everyone had the plan. And you would typically just check in with your flight number. And [redacted] replied that was a lot to take in, but I think I've got it. And then number three and number four replied. We went on to our water source, found it.

Going into -- on a single-file line, everything was briefed. Thought we had the wind direction on the water correct. As we descended onto the lake, I was in the number four position. Like I say, we were single file. And number one noticed that we were in a slight downwind condition. He called for us to abort the scoop and jettison whatever we had on board. I never heard [redacted] check in, which you would hear her call out two. I never heard her call two.

Reese Wilson called three, and I called four. I told Reese, I said, Reese, I'm going to pass you on your right-hand side, you've got room to maneuver,

because I never got onto the water. By the time of the abort call, I had not gotten time to get onto the water yet.

Q Okay.

A From that point, I never actually passed Reese, I was kind of in his 4:00 position, just a little bit high, where I could look, so somewhat through him to look at [redacted] She remained on the water from the time my eyes picked her up until the impact. There was no turning, no swerving, no -- the airplane looked like it was on rails, it was going so straight.

The wake coming off of the pontoons was smooth and steady. It wasn't like there was any scalloping to the wake. It was a very constant wake coming off of the floats. There was disturbed water underneath the entire length of the wing like it was getting ready to take flight, like there was some pressure pushing down on the water there. But I never did see any control inputs of any type, you know, to avoid hitting this wall or getting airborne. It was just, it was on the water and it just went -- I just watched it drive straight into the wall.

Q Okay. Sorry to make you go through that again, Latt, but I think it's important.

A It's all right.

Q Getting back to the reservoir, I know Lead selected it. Was there -- you know, how close did you get to touching down on the water? How high were you?
A How high was I?
Q Yeah.
A I was probably maybe five or 10 feet from being on the water.
Q Oh, that close, okay.
A I was right there, yeah.
Q Yeah. Okay. How would you describe it? Was it, you know, pretty much calm, like a glass, or did it have much to it?
A It was -- there was some texture to it but not enough to tell the direction. It was more of, in scooping terms, I think you'd call it more of a glassy water. It was just the way the wind was, it was extremely hard to read on the water, which is how we ended up in a downwind state.
Q Yeah. Did you notice anything before Lead made that call on the tailwind to abort? Did you notice anything squirrely coming into land? I mean not land but, you know, put it on the water?
A Not really, no.
Q Okay. So you probably, if the abort call wasn't made, you were happy yourself that you were planning

to scoop, obviously, touch down and scoop, right?
A Right.
Q Okay.
A And I was watching number three ahead of me, and he was doing fine, so -- but he even after the fact said I recognized right away when I deployed the probes that the nose kind of tucked and that we were downwind.
Q Mm-hmm. Okay.
A So I'm sure I would have found out real quick after I'd gotten on the water.
Q Yeah. What -- you know, Lead said I think it was over -- you guys did the recon of the fire first, then you went and scooped, I believe.
A That's correct.
Q At some point earlier, before you got to the scoop and you got in trail, he lost -- number two lost sight of Lead temporarily. Did you hear that in interplane?
A I don't really recall that. I can see that because we were a pretty good ways behind the Lead as in, when I say that, two, three, and four --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- were a good ways back. Did I hear her say, I lost sight of Lead? No, I never heard that. I can't

say that.
Q Okay. At the time, since you're number four, you're probably in the worst position. You know, if anyone's going to lose sight, it normally would be you because you're furthest out. Were you guys kind of in a trail thing or more laterally spaced at that time?
A No, it was briefed we were going to go in trail single file the whole way in and out.
Q Okay. So you were in trail at the time?
A I was in trail.
Q Got it. Okay. Speaking of radio calls, was -- you know, obviously, we're concentrating on number two here. But, from takeoff or even from the pre-brief, was there anything abnormal or any questions or radio calls or anything that you can impart on us from number two that were --
A Not that I recall. The only thing that stuck was when we got the target description from the Air Attack and we went back internal and [redacted] said that was a lot to take in, but I think I've got it.
Q Okay.
A That was her reply.
Q That was the only -- that's -- so there was no excessive, like, no one missed radio calls when they, you know, they check everyone in, like at two, three,

four. Nothing was missed by two or anything you're aware of besides that comment?

A No, and up until that call on the water, all of her radio work, everything had been fine up and to that point.

Q Okay. You know what? I'm not familiar with your airplane, but what -- for fueling, is it just -- you don't have to do any balancing stuff yourself unless there's an imbalance, correct? It's all -- what do you have for keeping the fuel balanced between tanks?

A Gravity basically. You can get --

Q Does the P factor kind of shift it to one tank a little bit over time?

A Not really. Not really, no. I mean, it's --

Q Really? Okay. So hour and a half. You guys went out there. When you were getting ready to scoop, everything looked pretty balanced on your airplane pretty much fuel-wise?

A Yes, it felt good. Everything was balanced. Went in the fuel, I looked at that, the fuel in the wings were balanced, so that was -- everything was good there.

Q Okay. And that was all -- you didn't do anything during the en-route. That was just -- it just stayed that way from takeoff basically, is that correct?

A Right. Right.
Q Okay. And then you mentioned the winds were kind of hard to determine. Just before he called abort or around that time, were you noticing something? You kind of alluded to the fact you were kind of noticing things looked a little bit, I'm not sure what the word I want to use, but you noticed something, you know, that wasn't, something that --
A Not really because we looked at the smoke column at the fire and the smoke column was going straight up. There was no bend or drift to it whatsoever.
Q Okay. So you didn't notice anything that would make you personally get ready to abort or anything. You were, like I said, if he didn't call that, you probably would have scooped, is that correct?
A Right. That's exactly right.
Q Okay. And then speaking of scooping, what was your planned load when you were in -- how much gallons were you planning to take on that scoop?
A Myself? I had dialed it back to 350 gallons because it was my first scoop of the day, it was already hot, high conditions, so I didn't want to -- I want to find out how the airplane feels when coming off the water and then gradually work my load up from there.

Q Okay. So you were using the automated system for scooping for the amount, correct?
A I had the automated system selected, yes.
Q System set. Okay. Got it. For 350. Okay. And was the -- you know, I'm assuming, because it's a reservoir or a lake, whatever you want to call it, there's really no obstacles or anything to speak of, right? You've got plenty of room in front of you and all that at that scoop location. Was there any issues with it?
A Well, actually, we had to come in, there's a dam on the back side of it behind us and a set of high tension wires that draped across it that we had to fly over to get down into there to get to the water source.
Q How much of a --
A So, yeah, there was the dam --
Q Okay.
A -- and just terrain itself and then a set of power lines that we had to work over to get down to the lake.
Q Okay. So that was before you got to the scoop, you had to kind of jump over a few obstacles basically?
A Correct.

Q Okay. About how high was those, just curious, the highest about? How high would you guess?
A Oh, gosh, at least a couple hundred feet above the water I would say.
Q Okay. So substantial obstacles. Did you have any trouble getting set up to what you'd like to have for a glide path? Because you got pretty much close to the water. Did they affect you any on your approach at all once you got squared away?
A Not really, no.
Q Okay. I mean, obviously, it was challenging, but what I'm saying is --
A Right.
Q -- you were able to get to where you weren't uncomfortable going in, obviously. It looks like --
A Right.
Q -- you were able to correct, get into --
A Yes.
Q -- normal parameters by the time you got ready? Okay.
A That's correct.
Q Okay. Now let's go back to [redacted]. We already talked about her formation. That day she showed, you know, and, you know, you've been talking in texts as well previous to that, that she got checked out and

all that good stuff. Did she seem her normal self that morning in the brief and everything?

A The morning of the mishap?

Q Yes.

A Yes, she was.

Q Okay.

A I had a discussion with her at breakfast. She had -- she either would -- she would do some form of cardio every morning, whether she'd go out and jog or get on an elliptical or something like that. She was exercising and on her way to get ready to go to work.

Q Okay. So, you know, I know you got a text saying she was checked out, but barring that, since you said she was an open book, she never mentioned any issues or anything she was having on the personal side or anything before the accident day, right? Everything?

A No.

Q She got checked out and she was probably happy to go out and do her first flight, mission, whatever you want to call it?

A She was very excited about what she was doing and excited to be in the industry.

Q Okay. And that goes for, like you said, you didn't notice anything different during the brief or when you guys went onto the airplane or anything,

right?
A No.
Q Everything looked good, in other words, good spirits?
A No, she was in a very good mood and quite excited for the challenge of the day.
Q Okay. And then let's go back. You were saying you were watching her because you were kind of seeing three, she's in the background. Did you notice anything unusual, like her time on, you know, the water was longer than normal or -- I know you said you saw nothing with the flight control or any inputs or porpoising, but did you notice anything unusual, like time on the water or anything that was different?
A Well, I thought that she should have been off the water when I got -- my eyes got to her --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- because, if Lead and number three were off, she should have been off the water as well. And that was my thought. And I thought, okay, well, from the angle I was looking at her, which was about her 5:00 and I was maybe a hundred feet AGL, I had moved over land at this point, it looked like she was going to get airborne and going to get -- you know, clear this ledge, and then I distinctly remember everything looks

good, everything looks good. And then there was about a two count and I knew that she wasn't going to make it, and then I saw the airplane impact the wall.

Q Okay. So, as far as you could see, I know it's getting a little further out now because she's, you know -- did you -- you don't think she got airborne at all basically?

A No, she was not airborne at all.

Q Okay. Not airborne at all. Okay. And when, just kind of a reference, number three got the abort call, he got, I'm assuming, airborne shortly thereafter. Did he jettison his load, three? Did you see it?

A He did, yes.

Q Okay. Okay. And you definitely didn't see anything on two for load jettison or anything either, correct?

A No.

Q Okay.

A I saw no load jettison whatsoever.

Q Okay. So, when three jettisoned his load, I imagine he got airborne shortly thereafter. How far, I mean, was the number two aircraft in front of him? Quite a bit? Or did they -- give me a reference, how close two and three to spacing?

A As far as in front of us physically the two airplanes?
Q Yeah. Mm-hmm, because you said you stayed a little bit -- you kind of expected her to be airborne, but, I mean, was she pretty far down the lake, I guess? She had to be obviously if you thought that. But --
A She was a pretty good ways down the lake, but I wasn't necessarily looking ahead of her. I was looking directly at her and where she had just been. Then, when I see where she is getting close to, that's when I grow concerned. I thought she had it made, and then there was about a two count and I said there's no way, and then she didn't. She just hit the wall.
Q Okay. And as far as I know, you're back there, so it's hard to determine. As far as you can tell, you didn't see anything that would indicate anything mechanical, like an engine problem or anything like that, correct?
A No.
Q It looked like her speed and all was appropriate. The engine, you know, basically was running as appropriate. Is that a correct statement?
A Yeah.
Q Okay.

A Yes.
Q Okay.
A And just to add we did go through a thorough pre-scoop checklist where we all read through and go through it and do it ourself. She was a very methodical person, and I have no doubt the airplane was configured properly.
Q Okay.
A But we did do a pre-scoop check, and that's every member of the flight did that of the three.
Q And they all checked in afterwards, I'm assuming, right, that they did that?
A Well, we all go through it and we all say it.
Q Yeah. Okay. And then, so, obviously, unfortunately, you know. you saw her hit. What happened after that with the flight, the other three?
A After that, number three came over the radio and said she wrecked. Number one didn't know because he couldn't see being out in front. He was leading. He couldn't see or know what had just happened. Two -- or three and four, we kind of filled him in on where, what had just happened, where she was. Myself and number three, we went out to the west of the lake where the mishap had taken place and kind of formed up as a loose flight of two. Number one went back,

trying to find where number two had impacted. It was difficult for him, where she hit that wall, he was looking at it from the south, so he couldn't see it physically because there was structure in between him.

Q I see.

A He had to come around to the north side of the lake. He could see what had happened. There was a couple of boats that had responded relatively quickly.

After that, a quick talk with the Air Attack. We then recovered into Helena as a group, a flight of three. We went into Helena and landed after that.

Q Okay. I know you guys were -- you know, it's a bad situation obviously, so condolences obviously for one of your compadres there. But did -- was there any -- when you guys landed, did they have any debrief or did you guys talk about anything about the flight?

A We had a quick talk out at the wing of the airplane. Then we went inside to the fixed base operator and got a quiet room. We talked a little bit about what had happened, and then we started to write down a written statement so we would have it all fresh in our minds.

Q Okay. Did anyone bring up anything -- I obviously saw the statements, but is there anything that you have thought of since that time you made your

statement?
A As far as what transpired during that flight --
Q Yes.
A -- or afterwards?
Q During the scoop, whatever. Yeah, exactly. The scoop.
A No. I mean, I thought it was pretty straightforward. It didn't -- it looked like relatively benign conditions. And for me not being on the water yet, it would be a little bit more difficult to figure out that we were downwind. But everything was plain to understand. When Lead called, he said that we're in a slight downwind condition, let's abort, jettison, and we'll come around and take a look at it from the other direction. And I never heard two check in. Three and four checked in. And then we were up in the air, and that's when I went over and started watching [redacted].
Q Okay. So up to that point where you were coming in, you know, close to the water there, you thought everything was copasetic until you got the abort call. But I'm saying, as far as you went, your checklists are done, you're with the airplane, you know, you're ready to go basically. Nothing --
A Yes.

Q Yeah. I mean, in other words, you were --
A Yeah, absolutely.
Q Yeah. Okay. Everything was a go-mode for you.
A Yeah.
Q Okay. And the good Lead instruction what to do and, you know, you weren't confused about anything, correct? Ready to go?
A No, I understood what we were doing.
Q Okay. Was there anything else? Was there any convective activity by the lake or anything else going on at the lake that would affect --
A No.
Q Anything in the lake like a boat or anything that could be a distraction during that time you saw?
A No. There were a couple of boats, but they were so far away that they didn't affect us or our scoop lane at all.
Q Okay.
A So they -- yeah, no, they -- it was a pretty wide open lake there.
Q Okay.
A There was nothing really to run into.
Q So, really, besides the obstacles going in, that was kind of the only portion that you had to kind of work around. And, like you said, you made it work for

you. But barring that, everything --
A Right.
Q -- was pretty -- looked good, is that correct?
A Yeah. Nothing to stop us from what we were doing. Everything flowed really well.
Q Okay. And then going back to your load, you said you automatically selected the 350 gallons. Is that something that was directed or talked about beforehand, or was that just your own personal preference to do that?
A I kind of did that. We do a risk assessment and we look at the conditions of the day, and then what I do is I look at what the book says that I can haul --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- and I download for me. Because it's a new mission, first load of the day, I want to know how the airplane performs coming on and off the water. So there was nothing that we had briefed, but I was just, I was going to download that day for myself just because it was going to be my first load of the summer actually. I'd done some proficiency flights --
Q Mm-hmm.
A -- but my first real live load on a fire.
Q No, I get it. You're trying to be a little conservative until you see what you've got there.

Yeah, it makes sense. But that was all your decision. No one dictated that, though, nevertheless, correct?

A Yeah.

Q Okay. Let me look through here. Did you go that -- I'm assuming -- is that the first time you were at the lake? I know it's the first, you know, drop for firefighting, but did you go to the lake at all for training, where you're at there, doing the scoop or getting ready to, had you been there before to practice?

A No.

Q Okay. And then, in formation, help me out here, when you guys fly your flight, how many radios do you have in your airplane?

A The airplane I was assigned had three. Some of them have four.

Q Okay.

A Most all of them have three. Some have four.

Q Okay. And then, of the three, I'm assuming one of them's set to interplane with the flight, one of the radios, is that correct?

A Yes.

Q And do you set -- what do you set the other ones to? Just curious.

A Well, we had one set to the Air Attack --

Q Mm-hmm.
A -- that we were talking to. Our own internal. And then we have a dispatch frequency that we were following as well.
Q Okay.
A A local dispatch frequency in Helena.
Q You mentioned some airplanes have an extra radio. Is there any other differences, particularly like with your scooping equipment or anything in the airplanes that the company has, that when you fly -- it sounds like they have a few different avionics in their radios. But is there anything else? Any of the basic stuff all the same or is there differences too?
A Well, there's airplanes with two -- we have two different type fire gates. We have the Hydromax and the Trotter or air tractor gate, so two different fire gates, two different gate controllers. They operate differently. I'm not going to say that they -- one's less confusing than the other to operate.
Q Mm-hmm.
A And that is for me the toughest thing about this job, is when you do relief work, you're in a different airplane every two days and all these airplanes are different inside. They have different gates, they have different -- something's different somewhere. And

when you're brand-new to the mission, the job, the airframe, the last thing you need to be doing is jumping from airplane to airplane every two days --

Q I see.

A -- and a new part of the country, new part of the state, wherever it may be. But, yes, we do have differences in these airplanes.

Q Did you get any -- did you get both during training?

A We did get a class on the -- on both gate systems, yes. We did get classes on both.

Q Did you fly both?

A I'm more familiar with one than the other, so I even -- I had to be retrained when I got out to Idaho just to make certain that I had a good handle on how the gate system works.

Q So, when you say retrain, how did they do that like in your case?

A Somebody who's used the gate system before, who's very familiar with it, and I had a handwritten guide, and then we went through it one on one. So it was with somebody who had been using that gate system.

Q So you went through paperwork, paperwork and a diagram of the gate system, is that --

A Yeah, they have these quick reference things that

you can download. Either print them or keep them on an iPad or something for reference. Yeah, that's a quick reference.

Q So is it like a 3D diagram of it or, just curious, what exactly is it that you can download?

A It's a little bit, it shows you what and where to use -- what selections do what on different gate settings.

Q Okay.

A But, yeah, it's kind of a operator's guide, if you will, on how to use the gate settings.

Q So, on this first flight of yours, operational, you had a different gate system that you use in, that you didn't get in training, is that correct, that you got training on?

A We had gotten training, classroom training, not practical training.

Q Mm-hmm. Okay. But, when you got here, you said you got -- you had an instructor sit down with you and walk you through the other system, I guess?

A Not an instructor. Another pilot --

Q Another pilot?

A -- who had used that gate system. That way, because I needed to be familiar with it before I ever went out on any fires.

Q Did you get that one on this flight you had?
A Yeah.
Q Did you have the one you trained -- got the retraining on?
A Yes.
Q Okay. Did you -- how was it compared -- I mean, I know you got kind of a walk-through, but did you find it adequate training?
A I felt it good enough that I felt safe enough to go out and use it on a fire. Yes. Yeah.
Q Okay. Anything like during the flight that, you know, was it difficult? Did the training work as advertised and you had no issues with it?
A No, it worked as advertised. But it's just a different gate system, one that I hadn't really had much use of in the past.
Q Okay. And the only time you flew with it was the first time you were operational, is that correct?
A That's correct.
Q And which one exactly -- you said there's two. What's the one you hadn't flown with until the last flight there? What's it called again?
A It's the air tractor or Trotter, I believe.
Q Okay.
A But it's an air tractor component that they sell

with the airplanes.
Q Okay. And what was the previous one that you got trained in?
A Hydromax.
Q And that's the one you think you're more familiar with obviously because you got that training?
A I'm more familiar with it.
Q Okay.
A I'm biased, but I think it's a better --
Q A better system?
A I think it's a better gate.
Q Okay.
A But that's just my own personal bias.
Q Okay. I know you only had one flight, so it's kind of a tough question to, you know, ask you, but did you have -- is there -- you know, in general, I know the flight lead's kind of helping out as well, but is there any undue pressure to get the job done? I mean, you've been in other organizations. So let's say you wanted to -- you didn't like that last approach, you were too steep or something, you decided to go, you know, abort. Is there much pressure? Are they going to -- you know,, they get you on the ground and say why did you abort? They might do that, but you know what I'm saying. Do they put any undue pressure

on you from management?
A No, I wouldn't say so.
Q Okay.
A To get things done, it was, no, not any undue pressure in that regard.
Q Okay. I know, you know, like you said, since the time of the accident, at some point, you know, you went to Georgia. But, before that, was there any actions the organization took because of this accident before you left?
A I had been questioned on three different times wouldn't I like to maybe reconsider writing my written statement because of a supposed video that was out there or a eyewitness that said that something happened that I didn't see happen. But, on three separate times via phone calls, I was asked, you know, well, you know, there's a video that contradicts that, have you thought about maybe rewriting it a little bit or something on that nature. Yes, that happened post accident.
Q And when you say reconsider, is that what you're talking about what you saw from the number two aircraft while they were on the water? Is that -- that's the part you're talking about to rewrite? What part are they talking about particularly?

A The accident sequence, if you will.
Q Okay.
A I was led to believe that the airplane was flying and it stalled out, which is very characteristic of this type of airplane and what it does.
Q Mm-hmm.
A So I never saw the airplane leave the water.
Q Yeah, I was going to say you told me earlier. Yeah. Okay. All right. So that's your final, I mean, sense is you still believe that, correct? It never left the water?
A I don't believe that the airplane ever left the water.
Q Okay. Thank you. And did you change your statement, or you kept the original?
A No. No, I only added to just -- I did not change a thing. I added things just to drive home what I had said because the airplane did not appear to be airborne, it did not appear to break left and stall. The left wing -- it appeared to be like it was on rails in the water. And if it hit, wherever it hit above the water line on the wall could have been because it was rared up in a takeoff-type attitude. The airplane was preparing to fly, but it was on the water when I saw it hit the wall.

Q On the water. Okay. And I don't need names, but can you be a little -- in a general sense, you were saying you were getting a little pressure about changing it. Is that coming from leadership, I take it?

A From who?

Q The organizational leadership?

A Yes.

Q Or who's it coming from? Or is it external?

A Chief Pilot/Director of Operations.

Q Okay. All right. And just a couple more questions on, you know, I know the flight lead's going to navigate for the most part, kind of brief, you know, in some cases, you know, here's our attack plan and all the other stuff. For weight and balance and everything, you talked about this flight being a little bit, you know, you did 350 for the scoop and everything. Are you pretty much your own, do your own calculations for the performance of the airplane for what you need? Is that pretty much left up to every member that flies in the flight?

A Yes.

Q Okay.

A We are responsible to do that for each flight for, yes, for ourselves.

Q Okay. What about weather? I know you get briefed when you go in, you know, your morning brief. Do you look at weather yourself too closer? Or is that just more of a lead responsibility?

A I look at the weather long before I ever get a briefing on it.

Q Okay. So you're up to speed on the details of whenever you get dispatched.

A Yes.

Q Okay.

A Yeah.

Q And once again, going back to that flight, everything was on time, I'm assuming, on takeoff. Nothing was rushed going in. You guys, like you said, you had the checklist all done for the scoop. Pre-scoop check -- I mean, there was nothing pushing anyone to be rushed, is that correct? I know you had to navigate over some obstacles, but, you know, it looks like you had adequate time, the lake was long enough. But nothing to put you behind the eight ball, correct, on that flight for the scooping part?

A No. There was plenty of time. There was not a whole lot of talk on the way over there. Very little. Just, no, the flight over, everything went relatively well. Everything was fine. Yeah.

Q Okay, great. Okay. I'm winding down here, Latt. Let me -- I think I got most of the things I'm going to do. We're coming up on a little past an hour. I think this might be a good time to take a quick break, and then we'll reconvene around the table, and we'll end with you for any comments or questions you may have. But let me just go through to finish up for me and make sure I got everything I wanted to cover. The risk assessment, you mentioned that before. Is that something flight lead does, or does every airplane in the flight do a risk assessment?

A Each airplane does their own.

Q Okay. Is that optional or mandatory?

A It's mandatory.

Q Every airplane in the flight has to do it or every flight, for every flight, is that correct? What did your risk assessment come out to be for this one? It was your first time. Was it high because you're low hours in operational, or what did yours come out to be?

A Mine was right in the middle. The weather was benign, and so there wasn't a whole lot. I was current and was scooping. So there wasn't a whole lot to work against you to make it a high rating for safety.

Q Okay.
A It was relatively benign that day.
Q You got carded how long before this flight, the accident flight?
A In March of this year.
Q So, in the meantime, had you just been doing, like, not firefighting, but had you been doing some flights in between, like ferrying, you know, positioning airplanes, things like that?
A I do ag work, and I'd been out doing some ag work prior to doing fire.
Q Okay. Do you remember, you got a text message from [redacted] when she got her card. How long ago was that before the accident flight roughly? You don't have to give me an exact date and time. I mean, is it weeks or --
A I believe it was around the 11th of April.
Q April? And do you know if she did any, you know, similar, did she get anything with the company doing, like, ferrying airplanes or any other taskings? Because this was your first operational tasking for a firefight, but did she do other things? Do you know anything about if she did anything on the side getting flight experience?
A She ferried multiple Fire Bosses around the

country to get them in places that they needed to be to go to work. So she did a lot of ferrying of Fire Bosses after I left her in March.

Q Okay. Okay. Let's see here, I got safety. Let me just make sure I covered everything. Oh, one other thing on leads. Obviously, you know, this was your first operational flight. Do you know how they designate leads? Is it just experienced people, or do they have certain people they designate as being able to be flight lead? How does that work when you have multiple airplanes in a (inaudible)? Do you know?

A I don't recall that there's any true way to designate other than seniority in guys that have been around, obviously. I don't know that there's "a method" to making someone into a lead within the company. I don't know. But, if you would --

Q Okay. How did you end up as four versus, like, two or three, I guess? How did that happen? Did you pick four? Did they assign it to you? Or how did that work, your position there in the flight?

A Well, we're actually in pairs, and I was paired with the number three airplane.

Q Mm-hmm.

A And he was senior me and senior to the mission, so I would -- just in turn I would follow him because

he's got more experience.

Q I see. So, normally, you know, they call them elements a lot of times when they break up. So usually your lead is experienced, and the same thing, they try to get an element as kind of an experienced person as well if they can, is that correct?

A That is.

MR. NIXON: They don't -- okay. As far as you know, okay, is that how it goes? Okay. Well, I think I covered my basics. What we'll do, we'll take a quick break and when we get back, I'll open it up to the other people at the table. And then, at the end, we'll do one final round, and then, at the end, Latt, we'll give you time for any questions you may have or comments. So we're getting there. Appreciate your time. And let's take a quick break, stretch your legs, we'll be back about -- let's call it about five minutes.

MR. ARMEDA: Okay.

MR. NIXON: All right. Thank you.

(Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

(Whereupon, the audio in the above-entitled matter concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

CASE TITLE: Interviews for WPR24FA238 Operations Group

ACCIDENT NO.: WPR24FA238

LOCATION: Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

DATE: --

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: November 13, 2025

[redacted]

Marcia Thurmond
Official Transcriber
Reporting Corporation

[redacted]

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
*
FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR *
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 * Accident No.: WPR24FA238
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Interview of: "PETER"
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

September 2024

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
U.S. Forest Service

KEVIN MERRILL, Aviation Safety Officer
U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot and Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

DANIEL CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air
(Representative)

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I N T E R V I E W

A. -- single-engine scooper showed up and one of the things I normally do when they show up is I will follow them into the dip just so my right-seater actually sees where we're dipping for a number of reasons, looking for hazards, also where their flight path is, you know, just so, you know, when the heavy tankers get there we know where they're at and, you know, maybe we'll keep them, say, north of the dam or something along those lines.

So anyway -- so I saw them fly in, I'm not sure exactly originally which direction they came from, but I lined up behind them, I was thinking they were going to land, you know, scoop out of Canyon Ferry, but they didn't. They went over to Horse Gulch, I believe, is what they did, I wasn't sure why they were doing it at first, but looking at it, I was like well, there's no boats there and it looked like calmer waters and that's probably why they picked it, they know more about what they're doing than I do, I guess.

So I started following them, I was gaining on them, I was probably about 2500 feet above them when they started scooping. As we got closer, I started to lose sight of Scooper Number 4 and then Scooper Number 3 as I was gaining on them, Scooper Number 4 was probably right below me when Scooper Number 2 touched down for water, so I couldn't see them, but I had a good look at -- as I came in, I saw Scooper Number 1 come in and it was all very normal, I've seen this a hundred times, a small to medium wake

when it came down and scooped, and she -- everything was normal there and she took off and there was good spacing in between all four of the planes. Scooper Number 2 came in and almost immediately upon touchdown I noticed something was wrong. The wake that came out was twice as big, I mean there was a big wake that came out of Scooper Number 2. It wasn't any bigger on the left or on the right, it was even.

And the first thing I said, I said to you, "Matt," I said, "something's wrong," that's the first thing that came out of my mouth. Initially I thought okay, she's landing or, you know, it -- but then I noticed -- I noticed a nose-high attitude in the airplane and it's almost like I -- I couldn't tell for sure, but it looked like it was -- Scooper Number 2 was using full power, maybe to try and fly out of the situation, but the plane was gradually slowing down and still had the big wake out of both sides going in the same direction as the scoop but was slowly moving to the left and I don't know if that was torque or P-factor or what, but yeah, slowly moving to the bank on the left but maintaining the original direction.

Let's see. And then somewhere, as it got -- Scooper Number 2 got close to the bank, the plane turned a little bit more, actually, and started pointing more towards the bank and I did see it hit the bank and I think it flipped over, but actually I'm not a hundred percent sure on that, we were just starting to pass by, it was out my left window, so -- and that's about it. What I

could say, what I saw best was the wake. What I didn't see was -- it didn't look like the plane hit the ground hard, you know, there wasn't initial -- initially, there was a big wake but it wasn't -- it didn't get lighter, like it bounced up off the water or anything, it stayed, stayed heavy, the wake was equal and even -- and heavy all the way over to the edge, over towards the edge of the bank. Let's see. That's mostly what I remember about that. Did you have any questions?

Q. Yeah, I got a few and we'll go around the table here so we should be done here shortly, Pete --

A. Sure, yeah.

Q. -- but sorry to make you relive all that stuff, but it's important.

A. That's all right, yeah. I want to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Q. No, yeah, we appreciate it. Just a couple comments, you mentioned at the latter part she turned again, is that still to the left? I know initially you said --

A. Yes, yes.

Q. -- you had a slow turn to the left, okay. But just before --

A. Yeah, yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. So initially, after touchdown, like I said, the plane was going the same direction as the scoop --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- and it stayed going the same direction as the scoop but it was sliding to the left.
Q. Okay.
A. Okay. It didn't hit the water and make a left turn, it slid to the left.
Q. So it's more like a yaw to the left, you would say?
A. Yeah. And initially I was thinking that she was landing and she was thinking, you know, I've got somebody right behind me, I need to get off to one side or something, but apparently that wasn't the case.
Q. I see. And then what -- I know it's hard to tell from your altitude, but --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- from the -- it sounds like from the -- like you're talking about, you know, from the water mark that she was making, could you tell if she ever got airborne or not?
A. No, I'm pretty sure she did not get airborne again.
Q. Okay.
A. I think she might have been trying, but I don't know that for sure, but the plane did slow down.
Q. Okay, it slowed down. And then when you saw her touch down initially, you know, I think right after that you said you knew she was in trouble from the wake, but where she touched down, was it -- was it a good position in the reservoir or lake or was it did she float it longer --

A. Yeah, it was in good position, she was right in the center right behind Scooper Number 1.
Q. Okay.
A. The wind, I think, was relatively calm down there, I mean compared to Canyon Ferry, it looked like a good place to scoop, visibility was good, yeah, I didn't see anything, absolutely.
Q. Okay. And there was nothing, nothing in front of her she had to avoid or anything like that, correct, whether it was --
A. As far as I could tell, I mean, at 2500 I can't be positive on anything like that --
Q. You couldn't see anything, a boat or obstacle or something like that, okay.
A. -- you know, so I don't know.
Q. Okay. And then the -- how long would you say she was, if you had to guess, from the time she initially touched down on the water until, you know, I guess if she didn't get airborne, how long was she on the water?
A. Boy.
Q. Seconds-wise, you know, can you give me an estimate?
A. Yeah. Three, four, five seconds, I guess. It didn't take long.
Q. So she was only on the water five seconds and then she approached the shore? Is that what you're saying?
A. Yeah, I mean, I'm kind of guessing at that, but it sure didn't take long --

Q. Okay.
A. -- to get over there.
Q. Yeah.
A. Yeah.
Q. And then when you mentioned to your, I guess your first officer/co-pilot over there that was -- was that your guy in back or you had two pilots on your --
A. No, Matt counts as ATGS, he's an air attack --
Q. Okay.
A. -- who works for the Forest Service.
Q. Yeah, okay.
A. Yeah. He's not a pilot.
Q. When you mentioned to him that this --
A. He had his head down, he was looking at his -- he initially saw the scoopers, I'm pretty sure I pointed those out to him from --
Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- a distance and then we headed over to that direction, and then he had his head down and he was doing something with his laptop or something.
Q. Okay. Did he ever --
A. But -- yeah.
Q. -- pick up on Number 2 and say anything, like you mentioned that you thought she was in trouble or that Number 2 was in trouble?

A. Did she say anything? No, I didn't hear anything, no.
Q. Okay, I mean -- and then you didn't --
A. On the radio? On the radio?
Q. Yeah, on the radio. Did your person with you in the airplane observe Number 2, as well?
A. Yes, not -- Matt saw -- Matt saw her shortly after she touched down, I guess, because I said -- the words out of my mouth were something's wrong and he looked at me and he looked up and -- so I'm not sure how much he saw, you know, whether he noticed the airplane or not.
Q. Did he make any comments --
A. But he did, he did see half of it, anyway.
Q. Did he say anything after he saw it?
A. Did she (sic) say anything?
Q. Yeah.
A. I cannot recall him saying anything. I think the next words that I said was she crashed.
Q. Okay.
A. She hit the bank.
Q. Okay. And then you mentioned the winds, that you thought it didn't look too bad, anything else weather-wise going on out there?
A. No. No, really nothing out of the ordinary. There was good spacing on all four airplanes, like I said, I've seen this a hundred times --

Q. Um-hum.
A. -- everything looked really good.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah. Nothing unusual that I remember that way.
Q. Okay, when they came in and did their recon pass and all that stuff and I think they went into trail, did Number 2 spacing in the formation, everything look appropriate during the whole time you could see them?
A. Yeah, it really did. All four of them were evenly spaced out and well-spaced apart, so I don't think any wake from Scooper Number 1 affected Scooper Number 2 at all.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Okay, I'm going to open it up to the other people for questions.
Go ahead, Michael.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. All right, I just have a few. Can you kind of give me a little bit more description on the big wake you were describing, like was it just --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- a lot more white and foamy or --
A. It was white and foamy, yeah -- well, I don't know about foamy but it was white. But it was way bigger than it needed to be, I mean, way bigger than it should've been. It was easily twice as big a wake as Scooper Number 1 put out. That's what instantly alerted me that something was wrong.

Q. Okay. And how could you tell that Number 2 had like -- you said a nose-high attitude, how -- how could you tell?
A. That would be one of the harder things, you know, to see from up there, but that's what it looked like to me. Yeah, it just looked like -- I mean, I could see the whole aircraft and it looked like it was a nose-high attitude.
Q. In comparison to like lead and --
A. Yeah, or even the first scooper, you know, I didn't really see the whole top of the airplane on the first scooper because they were sort of flat and 45 degrees from me but yeah, just -- you know, it just seemed like a nose pitch up attitude, I could see the whole nose of the aircraft.
Q. Okay. And did I hear -- I just want to make sure I understood what you said, you saw that same -- I guess you referred to it as a heavy wake or a big wake, all the way to the cliff, literally?
A. Almost all the way to the cliff. I would say three-quarters of the way over to the cliff and then towards the end it didn't seem like the wake was quite as big and I think the aircraft turned more nose-wise, was no longer pointing straight ahead when it went over towards the bank.
Q. Okay. And did you ever see like a plume or anything like maybe, you know, a jettisoning of the load, water?
A. I did not, no. No.
MR. SAVAGE: Okay, that's all I have, thank you.

MR. NIXON: All right, thank you. Lea from the Forest Service.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. So you had said that you saw Number 1 come in normal, small to medium wake, and then take off?

A. Correct.

Q. Did you notice if he kept his water or not?

A. If he what his water, kept it?

Q. Kept it, if he jettisoned his load or not.

A. I don't believe he jettisoned his load, but after he was gone, I was looking at Scooper Number 2, so --

Q. Okay.

A. -- I didn't look directly at him after he took off, I could see him out of the corner of my eye, but no, I wouldn't know --

Q. Okay.

A. -- if he did or not.

Q. And have you ever watched a Fire Boss jettison their water on the water?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. No, I have not.

MS. WEINKAUF: I think that's all I have right now.

MR. PETER: Okay.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks.

Jesse?

BY MR. WEAVER:

Q. Yeah, Peter, just curious, when it gets to the initial -- she did the initial touchdown, you said you noticed a little more wake and then she started to veer left, was that just a gradual turn or was that a --

A. Okay, okay, what -- yeah. The plane itself was moving to the left, but the heading, the nose of the plane, was still pointing in the same direction as she touched down, same direction as Number 1 was flying and Number 3 and 4 were flying, so it just kind of moved to the left.

Q. Okay.

A. And then I think to when it got closer to the bank, I believe it did turn more, the actual nose turned, but yeah, I'm not as clear on that.

Q. Okay, yeah. And that wake seemed to stay the same, though, throughout the whole process.

A. It did, I couldn't say --

Q. No.

A. -- I couldn't tell you if it was different on the left or right.

Q. Okay, did it look like it was porpoise-ing, was it --

A. No.

Q. No, no porpoise-ing, okay.

A. Not at all, no.

Q. Oh, okay.

A. Yeah. And -- yeah.
Q. Okay. Well, very interesting. But thank you.
A. Yeah.
Q. We're trying to figure this out and that helps.
A. Yeah. I mean, I thought for sure when you guys found the -- found the aircraft, you would have figured something out, you know, wheels down or something, but --
Q. No, well, they flip over instantly if you do that, so --
A. Yeah, that's -- that's what I've heard, yeah.
MR. NIXON: Yeah, that's self-critiquing, I think --
MR. WEAVER: Yeah.
MR. NIXON: -- unfortunately. All right, thank you, Jesse.
Kevin, anything else from your side?
BY MR. MERRILL:
Q. Hey, Pete, just curiosity.
A. Yeah, sure.
Q. What is your air attack platform?
A. It is November 721 Tango Bravo.
Q. Is that a 690?
A. Yes, it is 690-B.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
MR. MERRILL: Thank you.
MR. PETER: Yeah.
MR. NIXON: Anything else, Kevin?

MR. MERRILL: No, sir.
MR. NIXON: Okay.
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. And then just to wrap this up, we'll have one final round, but I have a couple of follow-ups for you there, Pete.
A. Sure.
Q. I know you temporarily saw 3 and 4, then -- you know, because you flew over them and lost sight eventually, you know, 4 first and then 3, but --
A. Right, yeah.
Q. -- their wake in comparison to Number 2, you already talked about Number 1, you know, was twice, approximately twice, what about compared to 3 and 4, Number 2's wake?
A. Okay, I never did see the wake on 3 or 4.
Q. Okay, you didn't see --
A. I'm not even sure if they touched down.
Q. Okay, all right. So they were in --
A. They were underneath me --
Q. Okay.
A. -- and I was on their six, so flying right over the top of them, so we never did see 3 and 4 touch down.
Q. Okay. And then, just one more time, I don't want to be contrarian, but -- so going into initial touch down, she touched down on the water, did that slight, I don't know what you want to call it, but you said kind of like a -- more of a yaw to the left,

did that occur immediately or was it a slight delay?
A. It happened right away.
Q. Okay.
A. It happened right away.
Q. And then when it happened --
A. Like I said, I thought --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- you know, maybe there was something wrong where she had to land, that was my first -- and that's why, you know, she was slowing down, bigger wake, maybe something along those lines.
Q. Yeah, where did she slow down, where you could tell the speed difference and how long was that, like did that happen immediately, too, or is that after a few seconds after touchdown?
A. It was a few seconds after touchdown, it looked to me like it was slowing down, the plane was slowing down, still going fairly fast but yeah, not enough speed to probably get back in the air, I would guess.
Q. Okay. And so is that the same time you saw her nose high or where did the nose come high?
A. Yes, it is, yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. So initially --
A. I think the nose high was almost right away.
Q. Right away.

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. And then stayed nose high, yeah.
Q. Okay, so how long was the nose high, then, approximately? Seconds-wise.
A. Well, I couldn't tell you for sure, it looked like that whole nose high attitude was almost from touchdown for about three or four seconds, five seconds. Until they got -- the plane got close to the bank.
Q. Now, I know you can't reference 3 and 4 because they didn't -- you know, like you said, they probably didn't touch down or didn't ferry long, compared to Number 1, you're pretty sure you saw the nose high, though, was it extreme or just slightly high or can you -- I know you're pretty high, but --
A. Just slightly high.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. I'm just trying to get a reference for it.
A. Yeah. It reminded me of a boat trying to get up on a plane, I guess, you know, when I used to have a boat --
Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- before you get up on a plane, you know, you're pushing a lot of water.
Q. Yeah, okay.
A. It's along those lines.

Q. Okay. And then going back to that turn description, is yaw an accurate description, the headings kind of the right way but the airplane's a little bit yawed or --
A. Yeah, moving to the left even though the nose was pointed the same so, you know, I've never flown one of those, don't have any experience with --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- the Fire Boss or anything, but I do believe they have a lot of yaw torque --
Q. Okay.
A. -- so I don't know if that was it or not, but --
Q. And when she did that turn from touchdown, you know, whatever we call it, a turn -- but when she did that, you know, subtle turn, shall we say, did it continue the whole time toward the shore or did it stop at some point?
A. Okay, it -- it was drifting to the left almost right away from touchdown --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then as it got close to the bank, I believe, as -- it steepened up, the turn steepened up just before the bank.
Q. Okay.
A. So the plane did, I believe, turn to the left. I'm not as clear about that as I am, you know, the whole touchdown part of it.
Q. Okay.

A. But I do believe it turned and hit the bank and flipped over.
Q. And then that turn, obviously, did that affect the distance she had in front of her of water?
A. Say that one more time, sorry.
Q. No, if she would've kept the original heading like Number 1 had and she was veering to the left, did that cut down the water area in front of her? Did it make the shore closer, in other words?
A. Yeah, right at the very end I couldn't see as big a wake, if that's what you're getting at, so I don't know if she had the power --
Q. I was just wondering, did she --
A. -- I don't know.
Q. All I'm saying, Peter --
A. It could've been my -- it could've been my angle, too, but --
Q. Okay.
A. -- yeah, yeah.
Q. I'm just saying that her veering left at that -- did that reduce the water in front of her, basically?
A. Did it reduce the wake?
Q. No, no, what she had available in front of her of the lake, I guess.
A. Oh, oh. Yeah, I mean, it was fairly narrow, you could probably see where they were dipping, it was fairly narrow.
Q. Um-hum.

A. Did it reduce --
Q. In other words, were you concerned, as soon as she touched down or at some point when she started veering to the left that she was going to hit the shore and not make it?
A. Not initially. Like I said, I thought she was landing, was my first reaction, but I was thinking that was -- you know, something's wrong because, you know, that's not what we're expecting Number 2 to do, but -- no, actually -- no, I was not really expecting -- that they hit the bank was kind of a surprise.
Q. Okay.
A. -- that happened, yeah.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Well, like I said, I appreciate your reliving that. I'm going to just double check if we have any follow-up questions from anyone else and we'll conclude.
MR. PETER: Okay.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. Yeah, so you were saying that Number 2 is really literally the same heading and landed in the same lane as lead?
A. Yeah, exactly. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Probably very close to the same touchdown spot, everything looked normal, yeah.
Q. Okay, so when you say it was veering to the left --
A. Uh-huh.
Q. -- was the plane sliding to the left, kind of?

A. Okay, you could say --
Q. Because if the heading was the same --
A. -- it was sliding, but yeah, I mean -- like I said, it was pointed on the original heading and the plane was just moving to the left keeping the initial heading. But, you know, it's possible the pilot couldn't see where they were going because their nose was so high, that could be a real possibility. I haven't sat in one of those --
Q. But you never saw the nose start coming to the left at all until the very end?
A. Until the very end, yeah.
MR. SAVAGE: Okay, that's it. Thanks.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks, Mike.
MR. PETER: Yeah.
MR. NIXON: Lea, anything else, final round?
BY MS. WEINKAUF:
Q. The only thing for me is her speed.
A. Uh-huh.
Q. You had said it looked like that the aircraft was slowing down relative --
A. Right, I believe that the heavy wake, the water was slowing down, yeah.
Q. So the water was slowing the airplane down is what you're saying?
A. I believe so. I believe so, yeah.

Q. Okay. And then relative to Number 1 on the water, how would you compare her speed?
A. Well, all four of them were matched in speed. As far as, you know, them flying in for the scoop, her actual speed at touchdown, I don't know, I was doing about a hundred and 40 knots, not particularly fast, but I was gaining on them, so -- yeah, I don't know. It didn't look like it was the wrong speed to be scooping at, I guess I would say that.
MS. WEINKAUF: Okay.
MR. NIXON:Anything else, Lea? Okay.
MS. WEINKAUF: That's it. Thanks.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Jesse, final round, anything?
MR. WEAVER: I'm done, I'm good. Thank you, Pete.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Kevin, anything else?
MR. PETER: Um-hum.
MR. MERRILL: Noting further.
MR. NIXON: Okay.
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. All right. Well, listen, Pete, appreciate your time --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and, you know, sorry to beat you up on this thing but we're trying to, you know, get the details and capture them accurately, so --
A. Yeah, no. No, I hope you guys figure it out.
Q. Okay. And was there anything else, I mean, do you think it's

worthwhile talking to the -- your other -- you know, the guy, the supervisor in the airplane or it looks like he only glancedly (ph.) looked at the airplane, correct?

A. You know, I do believe he filled out a SAFECOM or something like that --

Q. Okay.

A. -- but he's not a pilot and he didn't see as much as I did but -- you know. You know, different people see -- you know, you're an NTS (sic) guy, you know, different people see different things.

Q. Of course, yeah.

A. So yeah, but -- but yeah, he was -- he did have heads down at first.

Q. Okay, great.

A. So he may be able to tell you a little bit more about the very last seconds, I don't know.

Q. Okay. We might --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- list for that before we talk about it and maybe contact him for follow up, but that --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- being said, we appreciate everything, is there anything else that you want to make sure we know about that we didn't ask you or something for -- being eyewitness?

A. I was thinking about it this morning and I think I've told

you everything that I remember.

Q. Okay.

A. Best of my ability, I guess.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. Well, listen, thanks again, Pete. Really appreciate you spending the time to help us out here, okay?

MR. PETER: Yeah. If you need anything else, give me a call.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks again, you have a good one.

MR. PETER: Uh-huh.

MR. NIXON: Okay, bye-bye.

MR. PETER: Thank you, good bye.

(Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of "Peter"
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *
*
FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR *
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 * Accident No.: WPR24FA238
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Interview of: RHYS WILSON, Pilot
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

Thursday,
September 12, 2024

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL SAVAGE, Standardizations and Safety
U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
U.S. Forest Service

KEVIN MERRILL, Aviation Safety Officer
U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot and Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

DANIEL CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air
(On behalf of Mr. Wilson)

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. NIXON: Okay. I think we're live now, so -- once again, could you give your full name, please?

MR. WILSON: Rhys Wilson.

MR. NIXON: And can you spell that first name?

MR. WILSON: R-h-y-s.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And Rhys, you're allowed an optional representative. Did you choose an optional rep to be with you today?

MR. WILSON: Dan Carroll.

MR. NIXON: Dan? Okay. He's present. Okay.

And then we talked about earlier you're aware that we are recording, and the reason we're doing that is to ensure there's accurate transcripts. So as soon as we get all these together, I'll send them in to the service to get the transcripts read. You will have a copy sent to you, a draft, and you'll review for it corrections or, you know, something that wasn't correct. And then once we get that, that will be the final copy. And that's a transcript that -- we call it the public docket; that goes in there. So that's what that will be used for, nothing else. So I just want to make sure you're good with that.

I'm not sure how familiar you are with the NTSB, Rhys, but we lead the investigations on things like this. We try to determine the probable cause, and that's obviously what we think, you know, happened that caused the accident. Along the way to that, if

there's any safety mitigations, whether they deal directly with the accident or just in general, you know, for improvement for safety, we obviously make those. And if they're time critical, we'll make them obviously right away, you know. Let's say we found, you know, something like an engine issue that could affect the fleet, we don't want them out there. We'll take immediate action on something like that. So that's our taskings, to look for safety mitigations, wherever they may be. And that was just an example with the engine thing. That wasn't, you know, nothing material-wise yet, but I'm saying that's just an example.

We are independent. A lot of people don't know that. We don't work for the FAA. We don't work for DOT. We're an independent agency. And that gives us a little more -- I don't know what the word I want to use -- latitude, flexibility when we do investigations obviously, because we don't have those strings attached, so --

Is there any questions about our role?

MR. WILSON: No. It seems clear.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And we made earlier introductions, but unfortunately for the tape we have to do it again. So I'm Albert Nixon, and I'm with the NTSB. I'm the operational group chairman.

MR. WEAVER: Jess Weaver, chief pilot, director of operations, Dauntless Air.

MR. CARROLL: Dan Carroll, director of safety, Dauntless Air.

MR. WILSON: Rhys Wilson, pilot, Dauntless Air.

MR. MERRILL: Kevin Merrill, aviation safety officer, US Forest Service.

MS. WEINKAUF: Lea Weinkauf, air safety investigator, Forest Service.

MR. SAVAGE: Mike Savage, US Forest Service, standardizations and work on safety as well.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Once again, welcome.

INTERVIEW OF RHYS WILSON

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. And we get started -- we already got your name, Rhys. Give us your aviation background, please.

A. I started flying -- I was 16 -- in Rigby, Idaho, and got the private pilot's license probably when I was 18. And then attended A&P school at Pocatello, or ISU. And then from there, got a commercial license and started spraying in Nebraska. That was my first spraying job. And between Nebraska, Montana, Idaho, aerial application has really been the last 10 years or so. I think this was my -- this would have been -- this is my probably -- this is my fourth year in fire, but I've sprayed as well every year since. So that's really the gist of it, is aerial application.

Q. Okay. And I know you said you're a pilot with Dauntless, but have you had any other positions with the company?

A. Not with Dauntless, just pilot.

Q. Okay. So you hired as a pilot and that's what you've been the whole time?

A. Yep.
Q. About how long, once again, you've been with the company?
A. This is my first year with Dauntless.
Q. First year. Okay. And when did you get hired, what month?
A. Probably officially March.
Q. March?
A. March of this year, yeah.
Q. Okay. And who's your -- who do you work for in this company? Who's your direct -- your boss in other words? Who's your supervisor?
A. Jesse.
Q. Jesse? Okay. And what -- you mentioned you had a commercial training certificate, I believe. Any other pilot certificates or training certificates you have?
A. I attended a formal ag school, AG Flight in Georgia. Other than the A&P maintenance certificate --
Q. Are you instrument rated or --
A. I am. I am instrument rated with a multi-engine.
Q. So another -- okay, with -- you're commercial instrument basically --
A. Commercial instrument, yeah.
Q. -- registered with FAA. Okay. Yeah. All right. About how many total hours do you have in Air Tractor type aircraft?
A. 4,000.
Q. 4,000?

A. 4,000 is probably pretty accurate, yeah.
Q. And is it all in Fire Boss or is it split between application probably and --
A. Yeah, most -- yeah, I think I've got probably at this point, at the end of the season, 280 hours in the Fire Boss. Everything else is 301 up to the 802.
Q. Okay.
A. It's all spread out between them.
Q. Do you have any other additional duties or responsibilities besides being a line pilot with Dauntless?
A. There's lots of duties that fall, I mean, as a line pilot that's not really geared towards being a pilot, but --
Q. For instance?
A. Being a representative of the company as far as like the contract is concerned.
Q. Anything else?
A. I mean, there's really not -- I mean, there's preventative maintenance, but that kind of falls under the scope of being a pilot, so no. So there's really not too much else I'm involved with.
Q. Now when you say preventative maintenance, obviously I get what that means. But can you give us a little more detail on what you're saying your duty would be in that with the company?
A. Well, just simple things like pumping the float -- well, pumping out water and, you know, doing general greasing and

lubing.
Q. Is that something that the average pilot does or are you doing it because of your A&P background?
A. I can do it because of the A&P, but I would say probably not the other pilots.
Q. Okay. So they're tapping you because your background --
A. Yeah. Yeah.
Q. -- your maintenance background? Okay. Got it.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. You haven't been with the company long, but is there anything that's changed or anything -- since you've been with the company?
A. That's changed?
Q. Yes.
A. As far as?
A. Improvements or, you know, changes, you know, just in general. Has the company grown? Is it -- you know, anything different, taskings different, you know? Like any major or significant changes since you've been employed?
A. Not that I've noticed. It all seems -- it's all new to me, so it all seems -- you know, it doesn't seem -- it's all one big change for me, so I haven't noticed any big changes, no.
Q. You haven't noticed changes. Okay. And you're one of the better people to talk about since you just got checked out, you know, on training. You haven't been with them that long. But

we'll talk about it here shortly, but before we get there, tell us a little about the safety culture of the company.

A. They have an SMS system. We're highly encouraged to contribute, and reports, I feel like I can file a report and not have the -- not have it be a -- be punished for contributing safety wise. The safety culture is, you know, it's encouraged for us to be safe, make safe decisions, turn down dispatches.

Q. How exactly is it encouraged?

A. Verbally we're told if there's any, you know, doubt that it can be done safely, don't do it. There won't be any repercussions for not doing something that feels unsafe.

Q. And who's making this comment?

A. In general, Jess, any management person, I've heard them say don't -- you know, if it doesn't feel right, don't do it.

Q. Okay. Is this in training or is this just everyday operations or both?

A. Both. Training, I mean, obviously, don't go somewhere you're uncomfortable with or, you know, operationally if it's not right, don't do it. Or if you see something that's happening that's not right, speak up and say something.

Q. Okay. On the safety culture you mentioned SMS. Have you filed any reports in SMS?

A. I have.

Q. You have? Okay.

A. Yeah.

Q. Have you gotten feedback from your reports?
A. Yeah. Yeah. I filed a -- we had -- I experienced an asymmetrical scoop light. It wasn't an actual asymmetric scoop. And I filed it and below, there's feedback on -- below the report that I filed, there's feedback on, you know, the nature of it.
Q. Did they already close that one out and give you some -- what they did for that?
A. Yep.
Q. What was the mitigation on that? Just curious.
A. There was, I think, a wire harness that was bad on there. It was the -- was the cause, and the mitigation, as far as I'm trying to understand the question, is don't continue scooping if you have an issue, which is what happened. I saw the light and didn't continue, returned.
Q. How bad did -- you said -- can you just go through the incident real quick that you had to make that report?
A. Sure. It was out of here. We had a fire that was north, kind of close-ish to Ponderay. I don't remember the name of it. I was number 2 in the flight. And everything was normal. I handled dispatch. We went in for the scoop. We did a pre-scoop check, and part of the pre-scoop check is deploying the scoops to make sure there's no light and you hold that for 5 seconds. That's important or else you won't get an indication. I went into the scoop and towards the very end of the scoop, I had just -- the light came on and immediately I came off the scoop --

Q. Now when you say light, could you be specific?
A. The asymmetrical scoop light.
Q. Okay.
A. And I let go of the scoop button and the light went out and I -- I didn't experience an asymmetrical scoop, just the light came on.
Q. Okay.
A. Anyways, I came off the water and called and told them I had a light. And we were told to hold outside of the fire because they had other people coming in, so -- I talked with the flight about possible causes and what to do next. And I decided everything was operating normally, so I decided to make -- get rid of the drop, so the water that I had, make the drop, and then return to the airport. So I didn't make another scoop because I wasn't sure what the cause of the light was.
Q. No, it makes sense. About how much did you scoop that time, how many gallons?
A. That was 500 gallons.
Q. 500 gallons?
A. Yep.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And how far was it from here? You said it was out of here.
A. Yeah, it's probably 15 to 20 miles.
Q. Fifteen to 20 miles?

A. Yeah.
Q. And that was your first scoop?
A. That was the first one of the day. Yeah. Yeah.
Q. And -- okay. Anything else on safety? We talked about SMS. Do you have -- do you get safety memos on occasion from management or is there safety meetings in the company training or is there anything else with safety?
A. Yeah, we get emails of reports that have been closed. And it has an acknowledgment button, and I know they can see how long I've looked at it. And it's always pretty good info, not just the narrative but the feedback on the bottom.
Q. Okay. Anything else that -- anything else on safety you want to mention, the culture or the programs here at the company?
A. I mean, it's strongly encouraged. I feel like we're outfitted with life vests and HEED bottles. They -- we had a -- they pay for maybe onX subscription for us so we can, you know, get a good look at where we're going. So -- yeah, I feel like it's very safe.
Q. Okay. What about management? Anything -- how often do you deal with -- you mentioned your supervisor's Jesse here, is the chief pilot. How often do you deal with him either on the phone or in person? Generally speaking, I mean. I know you can't -- you know, it varies on occasion, but --
A. It does vary, but probably weekly.
Q. Weekly? Okay.

A. Yeah, probably with a, yeah, with a schedule change.
Q. Do you deal with any other management at all for the most part or is it just Jesse?
A. Dan Carroll probably every 2 weeks.
Q. And why is that? Because I know he said he was the safety --
A. Emails. He's the SMS guy and just sometimes reaches out. I get emails from everyone really from the management team. Everyone's emailing with topics, topics of the day, things to keep in mind. So I guess as far as that's concerned, I get emails from probably most of the management weekly.
Q. Weekly?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Great. I think we covered safety and management unless you've got something else to add on management? Anything else to add that we need to be aware?
A. No.
Q. Okay. You've covered kind of management, you know, I think, and safety in general saying the culture, you know, you mentioned earlier. But you don't feel there's any undue pressure like to get the job done or anything with management per se?
A. No. From management and -- no, definitely not from management. There's -- I mean, they don't really -- I mean, the final decision's up to me. And I feel like that's -- whatever decision I make, the safer one is what they're going to back up.
Q. Okay. So like going back to your SMS incident where you had

the asymmetrical light come on, whatever.
A. Yeah.
Q. Did anyone second guess you and fly here when you landed?
A. No. The guys in the flight were supportive and they gave advice and things to try, just -- at one point I asked if the gear would come down and they said the gear would come down, and it did. They had a thorough understanding of the systems. So they were helpful and, yeah, as far as the decision to return, it was -- yeah, they encouraged it.
Q. Just in general, like -- you know, all emergencies or abnormalities are different, but do you get support from like your flight lead or someone on the ground? Do they have a patch where you can get an instructor on if you have an issue before you land and kind of bounce it off them to make sure, like you had on your situation, that your understanding of it is -- you know, if you have time that is. Sometimes you don't. But is there like a procedure where you can call back to the home station and talk to an instructor or something, get an update on your situation? Like here's what I got, here's what I'm doing, do you got anything for me type thing? And they might run through and say, hey, remember do this, that, or whatever?
A. Well, generally, we're in flights of four and usually there's a very experienced guy in the flight. But as far as someone on the ground --
Q. Because when you RTB, didn't you come back solo, I'm

assuming?
A. I did, yeah.
Q. The rest of the people stayed out there, right?
A. Yep. They stayed out there.
Q. That's what I figured. Okay.
A. As far as getting ahold of someone on the ground, I don't -- I wouldn't use a cell phone while flying, so --
Q. No, not cell phone. I mean, through an interplane or, you know, call the home station? Okay.
A. No.
Q. Just checking how it operates. So you pretty much bounce it off the time you're with the formation or the experienced person, probably flight lead, and then you're pretty much on your own from there, right?
A. Yeah. But most flights have an experienced -- I would say all flights have at least one guy that's pretty experienced.
Q. Did you get a chance to bounce it off the flight lead in that situation with your light?
A. I did, yeah. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. And he -- yeah, it was while I was holding, and I would cycle the scoops and I would keep getting the light. And he mentioned trying circuit breakers to make sure it wasn't an anomaly and reset the system essentially. But there really wasn't much I could do up there. I mentioned going back and they said, yeah,

that's a good idea.

Q. Okay. Was any circuit breakers popped?

A. No.

Q. Okay. Okay. Let's do -- you're a perfect example -- you know, we'll get to your number 3 position and what you saw, but before we get there, you're a perfect opportunity because you just got out -- you know, you've been with the company less than a year. So tell us about training. You know, obviously you went through initial and then you went, you know, I'm assuming the Fire Boss is new to you, although the airplane wasn't. And then you went to company training. So give us a quick rundown as to training, how thorough it was, how you felt when you got released, you know, how your tactical knowledge was. Because you probably didn't have a whole lot of tactical, you know, doing the spray stuff.

A. Right.

Q. So give us a rundown of training, like I said.

A. Okay. You want Air Spray initial or the --

Q. Go through the whole thing, yeah, initial and then --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Pardon me. Can I clarify something?

MR. NIXON: Sure.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He had already flown a Fire Boss for, what, 3 years?

MR. WILSON: Yeah. Sorry. I had been flying the Fire Boss for 3 years prior to that.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Okay. So you had experience before you got here?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. Go through what you went through with Dauntless then, nevertheless, the training. Did you go -- what all training did you have to do here, then?

A. So --

Q. Because of your background.

A. Yeah. So coming in, I had 3 years in the Fire Boss already. I was due for dunker, so we did dunker training beginning of March. And then we went -- I went to Cleburne for the spring training. And initially, I believe I had an instructor -- I was put in the two-seater, which has -- which is similar to most of the Dauntless planes. It has the Vondran gate and the NAT FM radio, which is different to the Air Spray planes. And the instructor went over that, the specifics of that with me, and then we both went out in the two-seater and just scooped and did general operations familiarization with the plane, landed. And that all went well. And then I was checked out and took a single seater out and just got used to the single seater. And that was the weekend.

After that, we did the ground portion of the spring training. I think that was -- that was most of the week, if I remember correctly. That was 4 or 5 days. And it's all posted on the -- they have the video of our ground portion uploaded on a OneDrive

so we can go back to it at any time.

Q. Okay.

A. And I felt like it covered everything as far as the contract requires and -- you know, it more than covers everything I was concerned with as far as the ground stuff.

And then after the ground portion, we did some scenario-based flying. I specifically did some scenario-based flying with the single seaters. There is formation -- the formation flying was new to me, the way they did it, and that was probably 3 hours of my flight time. That was probably about half, a little less than half of the overall flight time I had was formation stuff.

Q. Now are you able to be a flight lead, like currently?

A. I've -- yes.

Q. Okay.

A. Yeah. And I wasn't due for a check ride, so that was it. It was a total of 10 days, spring training, I was gone from home.

Q. Okay. And then how did you find -- you know, since you're already familiar with the airplane obviously, including the Fire Boss, how did you feel the training was, you know, particularly the scooping and stuff like that? And then their airplanes, I know some of them have different avionic suites and different switches. Did you have any trouble with the different -- the differences? I know between -- what is it, like three different things, right? I can't remember the exact -- three types of avionics and stuff on your --

A. Yeah.
Q. But did you have trouble with any of those?
A. It was something I was working on because I knew it was different, so I -- the gate and the FM were my main concerns. So they had planes just in the hangar and I -- and they were available to just turn on and, you know, as long as the gate was clear, sit there and get familiar on top of the instruction I got. The only thing that tripped me up was the Air Spray -- I was used to the Air Spray plane mic. The push-to-talk and the smoker, I believe, were reversed. And so that was the only thing I really had issues with because it was a muscle memory to go to the push-to-talk and I would smoke by accident.
Q. I see.
A. But everything else, tried really hard just to make sure it was clear how to operate both. And once I was operating them, it was not too bad.
Q. Okay. You mentioned the formation training was new. But barring everything else, based on your previous experience with the Fire Boss, anything to add for your training with Dauntless compared to that?
A. Everything was pretty similar. I had flown with lots of Dauntless guys before. We had flown all together and I kind of knew what to expect as far as tactical. So no, there really wasn't -- no, there wasn't.
Q. Okay. So when you were finally, you know, carded or

whatever, completed your, you know, familiarization training with Dauntless and you're clear to go, you're clear everything, right? You could technically be lead from that point on if they wanted you to be; is that correct?

A. Yeah. Yeah. And I was prepared to be. I was comfortable leading.

Q. Okay. How many instructors -- you mentioned you were once in the two ship and everything, but whether they're on the wing or, you know, you're flying with them, how many instructors did you have during that time when you did your training?

A. I probably had -- the two-seater instructor would be one, but he was just the one day. He was mostly familiarization. And then Jacob was the formation stuff, which was the majority of the onboarding for me. I don't think I did very much with Steve. So I'd say I had -- as far as like formal instructor, I'd say I had two --

Q. Two. Okay.

A. -- that were formally mine. Yeah. But I could talk with Jess or anyone at any time if I had questions.

Q. So, once again, when you were finally complete, though, you felt the training was thorough or you felt confident that, you know, they did the job safely and effectively obviously?

A. Yeah. Yeah. And like I said, I had flown the Fire Boss for 3 years before and I had flown with Dauntless and kind of knew what to expect as far as everything else, other than the layouts

of the plane.
Q. And what typically -- you know, every airplane, you know, certain things are harder than others. But, you know, you've been around doing this for a while. What's typically the most challenging maneuver in the Fire Boss? Is it the scoop or is it other things?
A. Probably the scoop, yeah.
Q. Scoop. Okay.
A. There's -- I mean, depending. Every scoop is different. You can get days where it's a good scoop and it's not a challenge or you can get days where the scoop is usually the biggest challenge.
Q. What's the most challenging? Is it aircraft control or is it the whole ball game, the pacing and just everything?
A. Just the environment is --
Q. I mean, for someone that -- can you kind describe it to me so I can relate to why it's so challenging?
A. A lot of -- I suppose reading water is probably the biggest, being able to see where is a good place to be is a challenge in and of itself sometimes. And then depending if there's a crosswind or if it's glassy or if it's just rough, you can just get in situations -- and it changes every scoop. So you just have to be mindful and pay attention of the people either ahead of you or behind you.
Q. What's worse, glass or rough or -- what's the worst water condition in your mind?

A. In my opinion, glass is probably the most dangerous, so you have to be respectful of glass at all times. But if you do it with a good technique, it's not hard. But sometimes if you -- if you're -- I mean, the best thing to do is just not do it if you don't feel like it's doable, so -- you can always choose to not go somewhere. But if it's rough and you're -- it's kind of a wide body of water and it's hard to find somewhere good to be, that's, you know --

Q. Okay. Going back to glass, what typically makes it challenging? Is it depth perception or is it --

A. Yeah, depth perception, and making sure you have, you know, a good stable approach and you don't get too close to the water with too much speed or not enough speed, and you have a nice gentle touchdown. And generally, the first guy in makes the first splash and then it's a lot easier for everyone behind him, but that's -- yeah.

Q. And tell us a little bit about -- you know, is there anything else in training you want to mention? It sounds like we covered that for you, at least. Anything else that we didn't cover and you want to make sure I'm aware of?

A. No.

Q. Okay.

A. No.

Q. Yeah, I -- we covered that good. Let's go to just kind of like a line pilot now, just to -- you know, and keep in mind say

we're writing an article for somebody that doesn't know your operation, you know, kind of come at the ground level. What -- give us kind of a routine -- I know you're on call, you're stationed out of here. How often do you fly? And I know it varies, but, you know, generally speaking, you're on call for how long and when you do get dispatched, how many flights do you do, that kind of thing. Give us kind of a rundown what the lifestyle's like.

A. Here, as far as in Coeur d'Alene, usually if you get a dispatch it's for one fuel cycle, which is 3 hours. If you're -- yeah, it's very circumstantial obviously, but -- here was a -- I'm not familiar with how the seasons go here usually, but I think we were doing one or two dispatches a week, so one or two fires a week. I think when you guys were coming through we had three or four in a row, and then we just do a fuel cycle and be done. I did go down to Cascade, Idaho for 10 days, and that was closer to two fuel cycles every day.

Q. So tell us about your day. So like if you've only -- you know, typical like you said is one mission. But what time do you come in for the pre-brief usually and how long is that? And then also, do you have a debrief or do you have to refuel, you know?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. Give us kind of a rundown of your day.

A. Oh, okay. Yeah. We usually get to the plane 8:55, do a pre-flight, make sure we're ready to go by 9. Do a briefing 9:30.

And then if we get a dispatch, we'll do a briefing before we go to establish positions, relevant information.

Q. So like a flight briefing, you mean?

A. Yeah.

Q. Is that what you said? Okay.

A. Yeah, we'll do a flight briefing. We'll do the flight, whether it's one fuel cycle, two fuel cycles. At the end of that, we'll debrief essentially by the planes or whenever everyone's done with their paperwork or outside the plane. And so we'll do our own flight debrief and we'll at some point talk with the fleet base manager to see if we're extended or not. And then with the air attack, if there was no glaring issues or nothing wrong, then we usually wait to do an after-action with everyone till the morning after.

Q. Okay. Your typical debrief, whether it's in the morning or after the flight, how long is it generally speaking? Let's say it's a, you know, your average mission and everything went fairly well for the most part.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: They're never perfect, but --

MR. WILSON: Yeah. For these guys here, there's a lot of -- the guys I was flying with this year had a lot of experience, so they'd be, you know, 5 minutes usually.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Five minutes. Okay.

A. Would be probably a pretty good average.

Q. Okay. Unless it was -- you know, things didn't go -- I mean situation-wise --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- things don't go well, you might have a little longer, but generally speaking.
A. Yeah, and there's a couple times this year we had a debrief and we had a 5-minute conversation with an air attack and just -- that was involved with our flight from our day before, just to clear things up for what we were all thinking, so --
Q. Okay. And then just for, once again, for the ground level, what's your -- you know, there's a certain duty day and certain rest requirements. What are they again, just to make sure we capture all those again?
A. So you can be on for 12 days -- in any 14-day period, you can be on duty for 12 days, have 2 days off. You can fly 36 hours. If you break 36 hours in a 6-day window, you have to take the next day off. And if you do, you can fly up to 42. You need to have 14 -- or you can have 14 hours of duty per day with 10 hours of rest.
Q. Okay. Fourteen hours is your max duty day even if you didn't -- is there a flying requirement per month or anything you can't exceed or anything like that, or per day?
A. Not per month, just the 36 in 6, and 8 hours per day is max.
Q. Eight hours per day is the max? Okay.
A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. Okay. In general, how are things on the maintenance side? Do you have many -- like since you've been on the line, any maintenance delays or cancels?
A. Just the one asymmetrical light I had was the only issue as far as maintenance. And it was intermittent. When I landed, it went back to working normally.
Q. Okay.
A. But no, that's the only mechanical I experienced this year between training and operational.
Q. And then, you know, whatever the airplane was, do they typically like, let's say at this base or -- Coeur d'Alene or you get transferred to somewhere else, do they typically try to keep you in the same airplane for the most part during that tasking or is it varied, you know, on maintenance?
A. You're talking about if during --
Q. Do you get assigned one airplane for the most part the time you're there as a normal scheduling thing or does it -- or every day you get a different airplane is the norm?
A. For me, personally, this year, at the location I was at, I would stay in that airplane. If I were to switch locations, I was most likely in a different plane. But I was primary in most -- in the location I was at.
Q. So using the locations wherever you're assigned, for the most -- I understand there's maintenance and spares, but for the most part they try to stick you in the same airplane for most of

the time you're there?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. I just wanted to see -- I understand there's, you know, like I said, there are exceptions, but --
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Anything else you want to add about your -- you know, being a line pilot in Dauntless? You know, compared to your past, anything different or better or worse or whatever the case may be?
A. This year worked out better for me than Air Spray, just for the simple fact I was a primary pilot, so -- and that was -- it was nice to be in one location for a while.
Q. Okay.
A. So that was good. And for the most part, I was in air sprayer -- the plane for -- yeah, I was in the air sprayer planes for most of the year anyway, so I didn't go back and forth that often. Not that it would have really been an issue.
Q. In your past training, when you got checked out in the Fire Boss, was there any restrictions after you completed your training, you know, when you were new to the Fire Boss?
A. I wouldn't say there was formal restrictions, but as a -- I had my personal minimums were a lot lower than or a lot, I guess, however you phrase that. I wouldn't have gone in a lot of the stuff that the experienced guys were going in. I wouldn't have

gone in any less than like 5 miles vis or, looking at water conditions, I would have left sooner.

Q. Did you actually -- I'm not sure what the word would be. But did you actually not go on some missions because of that in your previous employment?

A. Yeah. There was -- just last year, I was in Deer Park with Air Spray and collectively as a group -- they had the Oregon fire outside of Spokane and I think it was the Greyhound, and it was like a 40-mile-an-hour crosswind on the runway in Deer Park. And yeah, all of us collectively, as Dauntless and Air Spray, decided that's a bad idea, so we turned it down.

Q. Was there any where you turned it down and most of the other people went in your past employment?

A. There was one last year that the water was getting rough and I left before --

Q. You left before?

A. -- everyone else left. So yeah, and that just goes back to your personal minimums.

Q. Okay. Then the same question with Dauntless. Have you had any issues where you either, you know, you already (indiscernible) and left or before the mission said, hey, you know, I don't like it or something and decided to put yourself out?

A. You're talking about specifically with Dauntless this year?

Q. Yes.

A. I don't think I ever got in a situation this year where I

came back. I don't think there was anyone in the flight -- no, this year, I -- if we were out, it was pretty good conditions everywhere that I went this year.

Q. Okay. Let's -- and I hate to make you backtrack, but -- and unfortunately we have to go back to the accident day. But let's go back just previous to that. Can you give us your interactions with the accident pilot, [redacted] before the accident? Can you kind of give us how you knew her, how much you had flown with her before, that kind of thing?

A. Sure. I hadn't flown with her. I haven't -- I hadn't flown with her before the accident. Actually, I did in training. She was in a two-seater. And I think I knew her when I hired on with Air Spray in 2021. Yeah, I met her in 2021 and she was looking to fly a Fire Boss then. And then I -- the guy that I would help spray for, I got her a job working for him. And so she worked for him during usually July every year, I think '22 and '23. And then I got hired on with Dauntless. She was hired before I had been hired. And there was one flight in spring training where we did formation flight with -- I think Jacob was with her. And it was myself, and I don't remember who the other two. It was a flight of four. That and the accident day were the only days I think I had flown with her.

Q. Okay. On the previous training flight with Jacob and, I guess, her in a two-seater, you mentioned, anything of note on that mission?

A. Yeah. That was a -- we were strictly flying formation that day and that was just formation stuff.
Q. Who was lead or did it vary?
A. It wasn't me and it wasn't [redacted]. I don't remember who was leading that one. It was -- I don't remember who had that one or who else was with us there.
Q. Do you remember the debrief or anything of note on that flight?
A. I -- just a little. She -- we were just doing like regroup formation stuff and she went -- and I don't know what was going on, but they ended up just going to scoop instead, so -- instead of doing the formation stuff.
Q. Oh, they left early, but they used the scoop?
A. Yeah, they just went and scooped. And I don't know if that was the plan or what the intent was.
Q. Okay. Anything else from that flight?
A. No. It was all new to me, so -- all the formation stuff was.
Q. All right. Let's go to the -- I guess your only -- did you have any interaction seeing her anywhere else in passing with the company besides the accident flight day?
A. She was -- I was Gaylord, Michigan and she did a couple days relief there, but we never flew. So we were just stationed in Gaylord for 4 days, I think.
Q. Okay. Any conversations with her or anything that would --
A. She was super excited. She was very excited about the Fire

Boss and seemed happy.

Q. And then let's go to the accident day now. Obviously, you know, you saw her at the brief and all. Give us kind of an idea, you know, how she looked and -- looked rested, good spirits that day?

A. As far as I could tell, yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. And -- yeah.

Q. And take us -- we don't need all the details. If we do, I'll ask you a question, but take us kind of like up to the briefing, the takeoff, en route, and then, you know, obviously we get to the tactical with the scoop. But take us up there and hit the highpoints and tell us if there's anything you noticed. You were the number 3 aircraft, correct?

A. Yeah. That's right.

Q. And was there any rhyme or reason why they put you in number 3 or is it just the way it was scheduled?

A. Yeah, there was a reason why we did that. [redacted] was new and Latt, the number 4, was new. And the plan was for the number 1 and number 2 to do one fuel cycle and return to Coeur d'Alene. And then myself and number 4 were going to stay and fight that fire essentially for -- we were going to overnight. We were planning to overnight in Helena and --

Q. I see.

A. -- stay there to fight it. So the idea was I was going to

lead number 4 and -- once the flight broke up, if we broke up, just so that they could go get fuel while we finished a fuel cycle while they came back to Coeur d'Alene. So that was the reason why we oriented the flight that way.

Q. Okay. Like I said, take us to the -- unless there was something earlier, you know, the day before or anything, but take us up to the -- I guess everyone had, you know, your normal brief at 9:30, your NAS brief, whatever.

A. Yeah.

Q. Take us up to that point and kind of give us a rundown of that day, please.

A. Yeah. And even before the briefing, the night before, Keaton was texting us telling us that we were going to go to Helena, so to prepare. So we knew even the night before that we were going to go to Helena.

Q. Okay.

A. So we were preparing. It wasn't a surprise. We went to the -- I don't think we did a briefing over there with the base. We were going to -- I think we showed up at 9, from what I remember. Yeah. So we did the pre-flights of the planes and then we met up with the -- at the base of the planes and established our positions in the flight, what the plan was, for 1 and 2 to return to Coeur d'Alene, for 3 and 4 -- myself and Latt -- to stay in Helena, was going to be the plan.

And Keaton kind of led that. He said, don't get close with,

don't get close with the flight, no close formation stuff. And just general -- usually number 2 takes care of dispatch. We established that I was going to take care of calling dispatch. And it was very clear what everyone's responsibility and role was supposed to be as far as I understood it. So that was essentially the briefing we did, was the in-flight briefing.

And then we got our resource order. And then -- I mean, everything was normal. Got in the planes, started up. We took off and climbed out, and en route we had a -- we were echeloned off to the right, I believe. The only thing of note was [redacted] was not really holding her position really good. It was kind of back and forth.

Q. So right echelon, so 2, 3, and 4, everyone's on the right; is that the way it --

A. Yeah, kind of staggered off --

Q. Got it. Okay.

A. -- yeah, to the right. So I -- I mean --

Q. When she wasn't holding her position, was she aft or forward or too far out? What exactly was she --

A. So she would go back, too far forward. And I kind of gave her some space and every once in a while she'd -- I'd have to turn away a little bit; she'd get close, just --

Q. Close to you or to lead?

A. To me. And then she'd get close to lead. Well, I don't know if she got close to lead, but -- and then she'd get to kind

of where she was supposed to be and then -- it just kind of seemed like a never-ending chase. But Keaton did call back and told her what spacing looked good, so she had a slight picture, so --

Q. How was your number 4 guy doing on spacing with you?

A. He was -- it was relaxed. He was back. He was holding steady. I was flying number 1's sight picture to try and give him a good angle.

Q. So he wasn't having difficulties as number 2, then?

A. Not what I -- not that I saw. He was -- yeah, it was a relaxed echelon, which is what we briefed, was to just not get close, so -- and that, yeah, from what I could tell it was stable on his part.

Q. Okay. And then when you said number 2 got close to lead and yourself, how close approximately? How many feet?

A. Never danger close. I mean, you know, a couple plane's lengths, like maybe 120 feet would be as about as close as she got. But it's just the rate. I just knew that it was going to keep coming over, so I moved over.

Q. I see. Did you have to -- what's the word I'm looking for? Did you have to compensate for her position (indiscernible), turn away from her?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. I just -- every once in a while I had to just slowly kind of turn away a little bit.

Q. Okay.
A. And just -- yeah, just to try and make it easy on number 4, not any abrupt control movements.
MR. NIXON: Okay. We're coming up -- we are at the 1 hour point, so -- I'm almost done. I'll finish up and then we'll go around the table and we'll wrap it up. So let's take a quick 5-minute break. Is that -- I like to take a break every hour because, you know, (indiscernible). Let's take our break and then we'll continue and wrap it up here. So thank you very much.
(Off the record.)
(On the record.)
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. Okay. Welcome back for round two. I think we were leaving off the place where you're talking about the accident flight and -- I think you were talking about going en route, about the formation, is where we got and a little bit of the spacing. So please take it from there.
A. Okay. Initially everything -- initially we were going to scoop and then go to the fire was the plan. So we made contact with the air attack, and they wanted to bring us in while we're empty to get where he wanted us to work, get our targets, figure out where the heel, head of the fire was oriented. So we did a pre-scoop check before we even entered the FTA, because we were planning on scooping that, somewhere in there. So we did do a pre-scoop. And everyone acknowledged with their -- with our

checklist on chat.

We went to the fire. I don't remember where he wanted us to work. It was with the helicopters. I remember that. But we made an orbit and kind of got oriented. And after that, he cleared us to go scoop.

So from the orbit, we descended down to -- I don't remember the name of the lake, but to the scoop site. And then as we were descending, 2 went blind on 1, and she called it on chat. And it kind of just looked like her nose was -- like he got a little low on her nose. She kind of couldn't see him over the nose, from what I could see. And then she went and made like a 20-degree turn to the right. And I had both of them in sight. But number 1 talked her to where she could see him again. And at this point we were kind of all over the -- we were above the scoop site.

And we discussed to look out for power lines, and it didn't really look like there was much for hazards. There was lots of power poles, but we didn't see any lines that crossed. There was very little texture on the water. It looked -- there was ripples, but it wasn't real easy to tell from what direction the wind was coming. And from what I can remember, the wind column was going the other direction from what it was on the water. But I didn't know that at that time.

So she visually found him again, number 1, and we continued our recon. We flew over it and then flew back over in kind of a right downwind for what our line was going to be. And number 1

checked with all of us, that we all knew the direction of the scoop, what we were going to do for our ingress, our egress turns, and just to go single file down the lake. It's somewhat narrow at the mouth of it, but then it really opens up. But we were just going to go single file. And she acknowledged, I acknowledged, 4 acknowledged.

So 1 -- so the lead turned in, and I never -- I didn't see exactly where he touched because the walls or the canyon -- I was still in the turn when he was on the water essentially, so I didn't see exactly where he touched. I could faintly see his line when I came across. And 2 -- I was probably about a quarter mile in trail, roughly the same altitude, just slightly higher. And I could see -- like I said, there was like a faint -- I could see kind of where his wake was, but I don't know how far ahead he was. But -- and it looked like she was essentially right on his line.

She touched down. I touched down on the water. And I -- it didn't look like -- from what I could see, it looked like a normal touchdown. It didn't look violent or anything.

I started scooping and immediately the nose came down and -- which is pretty indicative of a tailwind, and the airspeed bled off pretty quick. And it was somewhere in there that I think I picked up 200 gallons and the speed had bled off enough that I let the probes come back up just to build up a little more speed. And 1, essentially during that, had called for us to jettison and go around, it's a tailwind.

So at that point I knew that the flight was going to go around and jettison, so I jettisoned. And I came right off the water; it wasn't an issue. And 4, I think, called at that point. He never touched the water. I think he said he was just going to go around. And at that point I kind of noticed she turned left. It wasn't like a hard left. It was kind of just a gentle left turn. But it still looked like she had plenty of room, and I couldn't tell exactly what she was aimed at.

And again, the lead came up and said, jettison, it's a tailwind. It's no big deal, we'll just turn around and scoop the other way. And it was kind of during that last call -- I acknowledged and 4 acknowledged, but she did not. And it was kind of right then that she started -- it started to look like she was in trouble. And I didn't see any real porpoising or any, you know, drastic nose changes. It looked like the -- it looked like it had full power or at least power, like it was accelerating. And she -- it was hard to tell from my angle exactly what she was aimed at until she was kind of right there on the cliffs. It kind of looked like she took a left -- like the floats hit some rocks right before she hit the cliff, and it kind of started to tear the floats off. And she hit the cliff kind of with the nose and the left wing, and it kind of spun the plane into the cliff. There was a fireball out the -- there's kind of a scoop on the left side and there was a pretty big fireball through there. And it just essentially stopped her in her tracks. And as I was flying past,

the airplane -- I didn't see the floats, but it kind of looked like it was -- it was upright, in one piece, sitting on the floats. And when it did hit, I did see like some stuff getting thrown around in the cockpit. I don't know really what that was.

And anyways, she -- the airplane was upright and it was -- there was no fire. It was just sitting there on the water really close to the shore. It almost looked like the nose was up on the shore a little. And I called to lead that we just had an accident. And he cleared myself and 4 to hold -- I think it was north of the lake. But we -- he wanted us to hold outside of the lake. And then he called to air attack, I believe, that we'd had an accident.

There was a boat that I saw essentially right away go right to her. So we held. While I was holding, I called dispatch. I think they already knew, but I called them and told them we had an accident and to send help to the lake, but I think they already knew. Lead circled and initially couldn't find where she was. I don't -- and I didn't see either. The way we were holding, I couldn't see where the plane was. Eventually, I think he saw the plane, but I -- yeah, anyways, from there, the air attack just cleared us to go back to Helena and hold.

Yeah, so that's kind of the -- yeah, that's how that went.

Q. Okay. And just to conclude your flight that day, did you guys -- I mean, I know it was a bad situation, but was there any debrief or anything mentioned when you got back? Did the flight

lead call you together and kind of go over things?
A. Yeah. Yeah, we had -- yeah, we had a debrief essentially right away. As soon as we landed, we all got out and put the tethers on the props and got together. He called Jess right away. And then he didn't -- from what I understood, he didn't understand how or why. So Latt and I explained to him what we saw and then to Jesse. And yeah, we just discussed, you know, why and -- yeah, it was kind of a shock, so it -- I mean, there really wasn't -- it was -- yeah, we didn't really know what to think.
Q. Okay. And like I said earlier, sorry to make you run back through that, but it's -- unfortunately it's something we need to cover.
A. Yeah.
Q. Let me go back a little bit. I have a few questions and then I'm going to open it up to the rest of the team here. But you mentioned, you know, I guess going into the recon of the fire or wherever that number 2 aircraft lost sight of lead temporarily but you had sight the whole time.
A. Yeah.
Q. Was there haze? What was the visibility then?
A. It was clear.
Q. Clear?
A. Yeah, 10 miles vis.
Q. No haze in the background and nothing affecting, you know, limited visibility or making the airplane blend in or anything

like that?
A. No. I'm not quite sure. I just think her nose got high and he was a little off to the left, from what I -- so it was almost like --
Q. So it never was anything dangerous, per se, just --
A. No.
Q. -- just that they unfortunately lost sight for -- how long did that go on for, (indiscernible) lost sight and they got reformed?
A. Twenty-five, 30 seconds, I would say would be pretty close.
Q. Okay. And then the whole time, like you said, you had both of them in sight?
A. I did.
Q. And your number 4 is hanging on you pretty good, so you weren't worried about him obviously?
A. Yeah. And lead was -- had been calm and collected the whole time. He just gave her where he was. So I just let them deconflict.
Q. How were the radio calls in formation? You know, that was obviously -- you mentioned she had trouble keeping position en route. Was she there -- I mean, there's probably not a whole lot of radio calls. But the ones that were made, you know, was she there like right away, like, you know, usually check in 1, 2, 3, you know, right away, or was there delay sometimes or have to redo the radio call, you know, to get everyone to respond?

A. From what I remember, she responded pretty quick.
Q. Okay. So there was no issues on the radio? It was positioning in the formation pretty much?
A. Yeah. She was -- yeah, from what I recall, the timing of her calls was appropriate. Yeah.
Q. Okay. I know you said there was ripples a little bit on the water. Can you be -- how would you describe it? Just fairly calm, just, you know, ripples being about how -- you know, give me a depth of the ripples, I guess.
A. I mean, there -- I guess a ripple, I'd say texture was -- in the center of the lake there was texture, but you couldn't really make out a direction of waves. You could just see texture, I guess.
Q. Right. So take the wind out, but you could see there was --
A. You could see there was air movement on the water. You just couldn't tell exactly where -- at least I couldn't tell exactly what direction it was coming from.
Q. Okay. And then just to make sure I got it right. I know lead called it to abort because of the tailwind and to, you know, to basically drop your load. Was that call made twice or just one time?
A. Twice.
Q. Twice. It was made twice?
A. Yeah. It was --
Q. Okay. I caught twice. I just wanted to make sure it was

twice.
A. Yeah. It was -- yeah.
Q. Okay. And what was the spacing between the first call and the second call approximately?
A. It was pretty quick. At first he said, I feel -- you know, it was a clear, it was a clear call the first time and she and I were both on the water. And the second one -- yeah, it was pretty much like maybe, maybe 5 seconds.
Q. Five seconds. So they were pretty quick in succession.
A. It was pretty quick, yeah. He just wanted to make sure we were getting off the water.
Q. Yeah. Did -- now I know definitely in the last one, number 2 didn't, but did number 2 ever respond at all to both those calls?
A. No.
Q. Okay. And then could you tell -- I know you talked about the slight left turn. Was there any -- do you think that -- you know, you said she hit rocks near the end there. But do you think she ever got airborne?
A. From my point of view, it didn't look like it. It looked like -- and I don't -- I didn't really see -- it looked like she was on the water because the floats were like the first thing that hit right away, took the initial impact, from what I could see. So it looked like she was on the water, the floats hit first and then the rest of the plane. But it was all pretty instantaneous after that.

Q. He called the tailwind and you said you had about, if I remember right, 200 gallons at the time. What was your planned scoop? You know, he called abort, but you were in the middle of scooping. But what were you planning to take?
A. 500.
Q. 500. So --
A. Yeah. I was not going to take a big one. We were -- it's a higher elevation.
Q. Sure.
A. So I wasn't going to, I wasn't going to pack anything too heavy, especially for the first one.
Q. But nevertheless, with the 200, you -- you know, you said that you noticed the nose go in the water a little more. You did feel the effects, in other words, of the tailwind?
A. Yeah. Yeah, right away the airspeed was hard to keep up, because -- and I was full back stick and it wasn't enough to keep the nose where I wanted it. It would've kept scooping and it would've been okay. Just I wanted the nose higher, a little higher.
Q. And then I think you told -- you mentioned on climbout though, nevertheless, even with the tailwind, you didn't really feel the performance loss on the climb, you know, when you got out the water, correct?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Just during that point when the nose went into the

water a little more than normal. Okay.
A. Yep.
Q. And then as far as the scooping -- I wish we had a diagram, you could draw it out for us. But on your original course that lead set, you know, how far off do you think she veered -- you said it was a very subtle left turn.
A. Yeah.
Q. And then did that put her in a more narrow part of that lake or reservoir or whatever you want to call it there?
A. Are you talking about where she touched down or where she made the turn?
Q. Where she veered to, where she ended up heading to?
A. Well, it seems like the whole lake opens up right there --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- so to what I saw. So where she made the left turn, it looks kind of like where the lake -- it had already started to open up.
Q. Open up. Okay.
A. It's just -- it's really steep cliffs that kind of wrap around that side.
Q. So did that -- I'm assuming when she made that left turn, that it put her in a direction that's more obstacles, where the original heading was, like you said, you really didn't have any obstacles to worry about.
A. Yeah. Yeah, so the initial heading, for sure, would have

been using at least, you know, most of the lake, from what I could see.

Q. Was there more -- would it be more of the lake if you had your original heading than what she had when she did the left turn?

A. Yeah. There would have been more -- if there was no left turn, there would have been a lot more lake.

Q. Okay.

A. And even with a right turn, there would have been even more.

Q. I see. So it was -- everything was good to the right, not to the left, basically in that situation; is that correct?

A. Yes.

Q. And then one thing going back to that formation where she lost sight of lead temporarily for a few seconds, like you mentioned, 25 seconds. Did she -- I think you told me earlier, but just to clarify, she was never in danger of posing with the lead or being in conflict with the lead aircraft, right, during that time? You said she kind of turned away. Just herself, she just couldn't see him, so it was just -- she made the right call and then --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- got back in formation when she got visuals again?

A. Yeah. And she called it, and as soon as she called it, she made that turn to the right. And which was a good move because then she could actually see him.

Q. I see.
A. But it took her a little bit to pick him up, but she did. And he saw her right away, so --
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah.
MR. NIXON: I think that's all my questions. We're going to go around the table, and I'll end it, so I may have some follow-up based on what we come up with. But let me -- we'll start with the US Forest Service, Mike. Let's work around the table, and we'll have myself, I'll close out and we'll open it up to you as well.
MR. WILSON: Okay.
MR. NIXON: So, go ahead, Michael.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. So Rhys, you were -- you said you're a primary pilot or is that a line pilot, same thing? You're not a relief guy?
A. Yeah, I'm a -- yeah, a line or primary pilot.
Q. What determines if you're -- like who does relief? Is it the more experienced people or how does that work?
A. It kind of changes in what people want to do. Generally, you know, generally some people, that's where the new guys start. I did relief for Air Spray and I was, towards the end, one of the more experienced guys and I would still do relief. So it kind of changes. One of the guys that relieves me, it's his second year and he's pretty experienced. He has probably about as much as experience as I have. And I've heard, especially in seats, some

people put relief as their most experienced guys. It just kind of depends what people want to do, I guess, and what they sign on for.

Q. Okay. So the -- would you refer to them as the lesser experienced or the junior pilots, are they -- is it expected for them to be relief pilots or are they line pilots?

A. I would say more or less they're kind of put in a relief role right away, I'd say, is probably more the norm, but it's not unheard of for a new guy to be a primary. That happens -- yeah, that -- I've seen that happen, too, so --

Q. Do you see any downsides to being relief pilot when you're new?

A. Yeah. Constant traveling and having to, you know, adjust the cockpit to your liking. And if there's -- there's nuances with every plane, so you need to be caught up to speed with that. The only thing is if you do -- with relief, people are cognizant of that and they hardly ever lead as a relief. So they're usually put somewhere in the flight where they don't -- they're not in a position where they're going to be, you know, task saturated as much the lead guy or the dispatch guy.

Q. Yeah.

A. So we try to -- try and correct for that, if that's, you know, the situation.

Q. Okay. What are the standards that are used to determine if a pilot either completes or doesn't complete initial training? Like

the -- I don't know if your initial training is also your company training or if they're separate?

A. You're talking about like getting checked out in the Fire Boss --

Q. Yeah.

A. -- as opposed to like a company training?

Q. So yeah, I guess the initial training would be in the Fire Boss.

A. Yeah. So I think Wipaire just started giving out certificates, I think, in '23, and they have a program, and then -- I'm not sure if there's a specific flight hour time, but you do receive a certificate with that. And I don't think they'd give it to you if you weren't, you know, signed off and capable. And then, as opposed to the company training, where they're training you towards, you know, contract requirements, tactical, more mission environment, mission oriented. So I don't know if that answers the question, but --

MR. WEAVER: Can you clarify, like, do you know anything about our initial training?

MR. WILSON: I don't know all that much about Dauntless's because I didn't do my initial with Dauntless. I did my initial with Air Spray.

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q. That's right. So you did 3 years there, and now this is your first year with Dauntless. Okay.

A. This is my first year with Dauntless, but, yeah, it wasn't my initial checkoff, yeah.
Q. That's right. I got kind of confused. For some reason, I thought --
A. I should have clarified that in my background, yeah. Sorry.
Q. That's all right. No problem. In general, in the community, how do you determine if somebody's -- like if a pilot's ready for fire operations, in general? Scooping, flying the Fire -- the whole nine yards.
Q. I mean, I'd say getting carded is the formal way. As far as like an informal way of knowing, you know, running scenarios and moving them 1 -- putting them in lead and -- not starting them in lead, moving them up, 3, 2, 1. And then in a mission environment, on a scenario, see how they fly. As opposed to -- you know, there's different positions in the flight, so -- and one of the -- one thing, we're always ready to take on lead. It's always something we try and be prepared to do, is lead the flight, so --
Yeah, that's a hard question. It's more or less, yeah, if they're carded, I would think -- where they've done -- if they're talking on the FM, they're making drops, I would think that would be, you know, a pretty good indicator to say they know how to run the systems and --
Q. Would you consider the carding process to be an adequate look at a pilot's ability to do this mission, honestly?
A. I would say, I would say yes, to an extent, but you have

someone with you that's experienced. I wouldn't go get carded and then go have you fly solo, by yourself without any support. So there's situations where they should know to turn down a dispatch. So as long as they know that, I'd say yes. I wouldn't say no.

Q. Do you guys have your currency or proficiency tracked throughout the season each year you're here?

A. The currency during the season, yes, we do personally, and usually the agency is pretty on top of it, too. They'll say you're ready.

Q. So if you haven't flown for X amount of days, do they pay for that?

A. Yes. Yeah, they --

Q. And what does that entail, generally, one of those flights?

A. It should contain a scoop, drop, talking on the FM is, I believe, how it's spelled out in the contract to do a proper mission currency. And it needs to be, you know, as close to the mission environment as possible. And I believe it says specifically to be talking on an FM in there. So, yeah, that's what a mission currency would entail: scoop, drop, and some type of coordination on the ground.

Q. Does your -- you all's two-seater aircraft, is that yours or Wipaire's or --

A. Dauntless has a two-seater and then Wipaire has a two-seater as well that Dauntless usually leases out. So we have two.

Q. Do those go out on contract as well or are they just used for

training?
A. In the past, Dauntless has put their two-seaters on contract. This year, they put one on contract and one was not on contract.
Q. Okay. Only one?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. How often do you guys as a group have like, I don't know, if it's a Teams meeting or something to discuss like safety concerns, relative stuff? Like, for example, like every month I have one for the entire lead plane group. We take time to do that and make it happen. Do you guys have anything like that?
A. We -- no, as far as like a Teams geared towards that.
Q. Like, you know, safety, operations discussions, concerns?
A. We don't use Teams. We have -- like I said, we get emails. We get usually the SMS reports or an email with a known problem, and -- so we get notification and we can always reach out if we need more information. But as far as like a Teams, we don't do that. We do get like blanket emails with known issues and what's going on.
Q. Okay. Well, that's good.
A. So there is notification.
Q. Do you guys have a no notice check ride program or do you guys have anybody that's going to be in your formation and you're getting evaluated on this fire today and nobody told you until the day of?
A. Not to my knowledge. All the evaluations I have done or I've

known that have been done, I've asked for specifically and for my records. So no, I'm not aware of no notice evaluations.

Q. Okay. Let's see. I just have a few more for you, Rhys.

A. That's okay.

Q. How do you guys determine if someone is tactically proficient? How do you know you're tactically proficient? Is it you who determines or is it somebody else in the company or who has that responsibility?

A. I mean tactically proficient, I would say --

Q. And I know that's a big --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- broad spectrum of things. You've got the formation, even though it's loose typically; you've got the scooping, and then you have the actual fire.

A. I'd say -- the question is who? Who would make the --

Q. Yeah, who determines you guys are --

A. Who determines you're tactically proficient?

Q. Or is it yourself or is there somebody that does that?

A. I mean, there's the comfort level. If I weren't comfortable to do something, I wouldn't do it. But I feel like at like the company training we do, you know, sandbox exercises and you get put on the spot. And if you're not picking it up, the instructor cadre or the instructors would pick up on that and they'd let you know whether you were, you know, not ready.

Q. So you have an instructor cadre? You don't have one who's --

like oversees everybody who's the chief --
Q. There's people that oversee certain exercises. You go back and forth. They'll have a sandbox exercise and, you know, a radio exercise over here. And there'll be people that run that and you go to that, and they kind of run through you exercises. And if you're not picking up, you know, the -- if you're not picking up the basics, they're going to know it and I'm sure they'd tell you or -- you know, if you're not picking it up, you'd know that that's something you need to work on. So, I suppose some of that would be, you know, self-evaluation. But, I mean, you don't usually put a new guy in the front for their first fire and they just get to see and hear, you know, how it's done.
Q. Do you guys -- when you guys do that kind of stuff or when you're doing proficiency, do you go out single or -- as an element or a flight?
A. For proficiency?
Q. Yeah.
A. You know, for the initial proficiency, I'd say it's usually by yourself, you know, or in the two-seater.
Q. So do you have any proficiency flight standards that you guys have to hold yourselves to or anybody to check that you're within those? Is there anything of that nature?
A. There's the flight standards for the ride. But, you know, I'm not really an instructor, so I -- you know.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Are you talking about proficiency once

you're on line?

MR. SAVAGE: Well, you know -- yeah, your proficiency, you go out and I'm going to -- I haven't flown for a few days or before I go on contract or --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay. I think I was just trying to clarify the question. So you're on Coeur d'Alene, you hadn't flown in 14 days.

MR. WILSON: Oh, the currency?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What -- is that what you were getting at?

MR. SAVAGE: Yeah, yeah. That's all part of it, too.

BY MR. SAVAGE:

Q. Like, you know, I guess my thing is, you know -- you know, proficiency is like super important. The only way to be super proficient is to get the seat and get the reps in.

A. Right.

Q. It's a lost art. I mean -- you know, I kind of -- it seems like you guys kind of more or less wait for the fire season to -- you really get proficient and that's that. You wait until you're on contract. Or do you guys have proficiency standards you need to meet outside of that little OAS BLM carding event?

A. Generally, when I'm starting, I start with repetition. We usually -- and I think it's even on the company. At least it's offered to us. We're always encouraged to go do it. You just go get repetitions and get comfortable again, so get proficient and

current again. And those usually -- I mean, you know, the ones I've done have usually been by myself. And yeah, go out and scoop and just repetition until you're comfortable again.
Q. And so you're fairly experienced. You've been a Fire Boss pilot. What about some of your lesser experienced and newer people? How do they truly stay proficient, especially in a -- I mean, we know that if you haven't flown for 14 days, that's like that's not going to work --
A. Right.
Q. -- for a younger person, a newer person in a mission.
A. Right.
Q. They need the reps.
A. Yeah. And I mean, but like I said, we're encouraged --
Q. To go fly.
A. -- to just to go do it, even if we go off of availability.
Q. Now, when you have somebody younger, do you guys take the two-seater or does somebody go and fly and watch that person? How do you do that?
A. I'll give you -- so I'll give you a scenario that I actually experienced this year. We had a new, a newish guy come out and he was coming out kind of mid-ish season and he was going to go to Montana and it had been a while since he'd scooped. It had been since company training, since all that. And instead of just sending him out there, he came here, where we had more planes. And we organized it where I took him out. I flew -- we were both

in single-seat airplanes, but we both went out and I led him through. So I ran him through the pre-scoop checks and just slowed it down and nice stabilized approaches and found nice, comfortable scooping water. And so that's how we approached that. If it's someone that wants that, it's open to them. We -- I mean, I -- essentially I don't think -- we weren't penalized, but I, you know, I took time out of the day to go with him to get him comfortable again. We just went until he said, I'm good.

Q. And were you guys scooping and dropping on a target or just putting it back in the water?

A. We were -- for that one we were mostly just scooping and dropping in the lake. This was on Lake Coeur d'Alene and I didn't want to -- there was lots of people around and I didn't want to create any undue hazard or alarm anyone. So it was mostly just the scooping on that one, but -- so, yeah. That's how -- yeah. And it's worked out well for him. He's had no issues this year.

Q. You said -- you were talking about scooping earlier and you said good, you know, a good technique, something -- what is a good scooping technique? What does that mean? What would I expect to --

A. There's different techniques for different conditions, but I guess a really basic form is -- a good technique is to just good power management, not be slow on power and not be too fast on power, just slow and -- not slow, but steady and don't overshoot. And it just makes everything a lot easier if you manage your

power. It all kind of stems from where your power comes in and where you leave it, and the rest of it kind of follows as far as technique. You know, initially where you're scooping, where you put the nose in the current conditions, if it's choppy, if it's glass. It all kind of plays into technique, which until you actually get into it, it's -- you know, I'm sure it's, yeah, it's something that you just get. We go into different areas, different altitudes.

Q. Well, yeah, how much -- I mean, when you guys are doing your carding and your training, obviously you don't get any high density altitude scoops or drops or any of that stuff because you're down in, where is that, Cleburne, Texas?

A. Yeah. Cleburne (indiscernible)

Q. Which is about 800 feet or so. So it's springtime, it's nice and cool.

A. Yeah. Yeah.

Q. How does that -- when you come out here and you're not in training anymore or you're not in that proficiency mode but now you're starting to fight fire, how does that --

A. I feel like we're all, we're all aware that that's -- I mean, we're going from a training environment as well to an operational environment with -- you know, an environment that's hard to replicate as far as when the weather's cooler and now it's hotter. And that's kind of where it's -- especially when it's -- we're initially starting on a contract, it's important that we go out

and scoop and get familiar in a not so high tempo work environment, just go out and scoop and drop and scoop and drop.

Q. So do you guys ever use the two-seater and you're -- you got an instructor and, you know, Joe-bag-of-donuts is going to be -- he's not a qualified pilot in the company but he's a trainee, he's in trainee status until we get him enough experience to where we feel comfortable to let him go on their own. Does that happen here?

A. It's offered. I haven't seen it happen yet, but I was about to move the two-seater just for that reason, just to get it up here. And we had -- the Wipaire's one was here for a long time for most of the season, at least my season here, just sitting there. So it was an option. I don't think it was used. But, yeah, if there's a new person, it's, I'm sure, available. And I think it's made known to everyone that if they want a two-seater, you can -- they can move it up here to make it happen. So, like as I said, I was getting ready to move it -- or the one in Cleburne for that, but then the Wipaire one was here, so -- yeah, it's a very real possibility and everyone, I think, understands that that's an option.

Q. And that's always been an option or it is now?

A. As far as I've been here, yes.

Q. What's your theory as to why [redacted] veered to the left?

A. I don't know. I mean, it could have been torque. It could have been task saturation. It could have -- I don't know if there

was something wrong with a float or a scoop. All I know is it didn't look like an asymmetrical scoop. It was a gentle turn.
Q. About how many degrees would you say from the line that you guys -- your lane? Were you guys all in a single lane?
A. Yeah. At least that was the theory, we're going to go single file. I was slightly -- I don't remember which side. I was off slightly just to stay clear of the wake, but it was essentially close enough to be single file. I mean, it wasn't much, like 15, 20 degrees. And it's kind of hard to tell as well, because as that was happening, I was also dealing with what I was dealing with and kind of looking out the corner of my eye. So it wasn't 100 percent, but --
Q. So there's parallax there --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- obviously.
A. Yeah. There's probably error to what I saw, but, I mean, that's what I noticed.
MR. SAVAGE: Thanks, Rhys. I don't have anything else right now.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Lea?
BY MS. WEINKAUF:
Q. I have a few questions that didn't get answered already and some follow-ups. So the -- you were talking about the two-seater and being available to people if they wanted more training.
A. Yes.

Q. Have you seen anyone take advantage of that?
A. Not outside of company training.
Q. Okay. And then you had mentioned you asked for copies of your evaluation from Dauntless. Do you remember what evaluations you had?
A. So what I meant with evaluations was when we're actually on a fire and I asked for an evaluation. Usually it's off frequency. I go to air attack and ask for an evaluation. I haven't asked for or seen flight evaluations of what happened at company training. If that is clear?
Q. Okay. So -- yeah, it is.
A. Yeah.
Q. Thank you. And then what about lead, how do you know you can be lead? Is that designated somehow?
A. I would say not formally. There's not a formal way, other than the fact that we're not going to do that to someone that's not ready yet. That's just -- we'll turn down a dispatch if it's two people that won't lead. You know, they either -- someone else will turn it down for them or they will be turning it down. But we're also trained to, you know, that's not -- if it's -- yeah, if you're not comfortable to do it, don't do it.
Q. Yeah. Okay.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I can add a lot more light on how that can happen when --
MS. WEINKAUF: Yeah. I'm sure we'll --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

MS. WEINKAUF: I'm sure we'll talk about it again.

BY MS. WEINKAUF:

Q. Is there any SOP or limitations for distance from obstacles that you're aware of?

A. From obstacles? Well --

Q. Like on a scoop or when you're taxiing.

A. On a scoop, I believe the -- a quarter mile is standard from each other. Or not standard. That's as close as you want to get on the 205. As far as a hard-set number from obstacles, like just the standard 500 foot above -- I mean, AGL on your ferrying and -- but no, I don't know a hard-set number --

Q. Okay.

A. -- to stay clear of obstacles.

Q. Let's see. So as far as when you were watching [redacted] at the end there, did you notice or did it appear there was any correction either in heading or speed?

A. Correction as far as like --

Q. As she approached the cliff, as the aircraft approached the cliff.

A. No. From my point of view, it just looked like it didn't -- there was no -- the heading was unchanged. It looked like it was accelerating all the way into the cliff and it -- it just looked like there was still power in there.

Q. Yeah.

A. Like all the way into it.
Q. Okay.
UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Was the nose high?
MR. WILSON: I would say not extremely, but it looked like it -- like the nose was above what, you know, the sweet spot is. But it's hard to tell from where I was at. Yeah. And it just looked like a scoop into the cliffs, honestly, with no porpoising that I saw.
BY MS. WEINKAUF:
Q. Okay. Going back a little further, you mentioned before you guys took off that day there was a discussion about 3 and 4, you were going to stay in Helena, and then 1 and 2 were going to go back to Coeur d'Alene.
A. Yep.
Q. I might have missed -- you may have said why that was?
A. Coeur d'Alene wanted resources because there was fire pressure here. So they just wanted resources back here for in case that happened, as far as I understood.
Q. Sure.
A. That wasn't immediately made known to me, but that's what I understood. And that we'd be there until they sent us back to Coeur d'Alene.
Q. Okay.
A. Three and 4 would be there.
Q. And then Keaton, you said his name -- I'm assuming his name,

a few times. Was that number 1?
A. Yeah, Keaton was lead.
Q. Okay. Just to clarify who that was.
I just have a couple more little things. When you were talking about your initial training and then the company training, you said you weren't due for a check ride. What do you mean? Like check ride, do you mean you weren't due to get carded? Do you mean --
A. No. I needed to get carded again, but I think it's every 3 years we need to do a check ride.
Q. With?
A. With the agency OAS inspector.
Q. Okay. I just wanted to clarify who you meant with.
A. Gotcha.
Q. You mentioned that you, if I'm correct in what you said, you haven't turned down a mission or a scoop since you've been with Dauntless on your own without a whole group sort of agreeing to it. Have you seen anyone do that at Dauntless since you've been at --
A. Just individually?
Q. -- since you've been at Dauntless? Yeah.
A. Individually turn one down without the whole group?
Q. Um-hum. And not like the mechanical that you mentioned.
A. Right, just because of the environment. Not that I'm aware of. Nothing that I was involved in.

Q. Okay.
A. Yep, everything has been -- yeah.
Q. I just have a couple more. Have you received any SMS training with Dauntless?
A. Yes. How to access, how to fill out a report. And I have filled out a report and got feedback on it.
Q. Okay. And then you had mentioned when you were talking about your asymmetrical scoop light mechanical issue, you said there was something you needed to hold for 5 seconds?
A. Yeah. There's a timer when you deploy the scoops and it -- I think it's 5 seconds. If there is anything wrong with the probes, then it'll give you the light. It's on a 5-second timer, so that's why you hold it for 5 seconds.
Q. Okay. I just wanted to get more info on that. And then I think this is the last thing. You were talking about doing some preventative maintenance on your aircraft because you have you're A&P.
A. Um-hum.
Q. Who would do that preventative maintenance on the other aircraft?
A. There's generally a mechanic onsite per plane or someone that's received the specific training from Wipaire to do it.
Q. So a mechanic per plane?
A. Per group usually.
Q. Okay. One more, just to confirm that I understood you

correctly. When you did your initial before the company training, I think it was, you had one flight in the two-seater?
A. Yeah. So -- yes. I had my initial training with Air Spray and that was a lot of two-seater. That was like 20 hours in being in a two-seater. And then I hired on with Dauntless and did a cockpit familiarization and then a flight with a two-seater.
Q. Okay. Cool. I just wanted to clarify that.
MS. WEINKAUF: That's all I have.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks.
And we're going to you next -- do you have a lot of questions, Jesse?
MR. WEAVER: No. No, I don't have a lot.
MR. NIXON: We're at the break time. So if there's not a lot of questions --
MR. WEAVER: Yeah, I'm going to be quick here.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Not to cut anyone out, but we could take a break if there's -- if you have a lot.
BY MR. WEAVER:
Q. You said you had personal minimums, you know, as far as scoop conditions, whatever or whatnot. Accident day, compared to your personal minimums, where did that fall?
A. It would -- to me, that was a very low risk scoop. It was -- even when I was new, I probably would have made that scoop. I mean, it -- with a tailwind, even with a tailwind, I feel like I would have -- that would have been something that I would have --

Q. Could have handled. That was my next question.
A. Yeah, I probably would have continued.
Q. Okay. You mentioned being, I don't know, for lack of -- it wasn't lack of a better word, but flights, you know, have been mentored or having experienced pilots in there. Are you aware of what a Level 1 pilot trainer is?
A. They have to have -- be an instructor and have, what is it, 500 hours. And I believe they can --
Q. It's 500 hours and 3 years.
A. Three years?
Q. Three years as a Level 1. Did anybody ever let you know -- we might not; I might have missed this -- how many Level 1 pilot trainers we have in the company?
A. I don't know.
Q. There are nine.
A. There's nine?
Q. Yeah.
A. Okay.
Q. So just to -- I had made a note here about debriefs. I can't remember what my question was there. Oh, why did you guys pick echelon on your ferry? Is that just something that happened or was it briefed that you were going to stay in echelon the whole ferry out there?
A. All that we really briefed was don't get close. We just kind of did a loose echelon for the ride. It wasn't tight at all.

Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, but just kind of just what happened.
Q. Okay. You said formation flying was new to you. You had obviously flown in lots of scooper circuits.
A. Yeah.
Q. Your training, you know, did the formation flying we offered you give you any insight or, let's say, do you feel like it made you a better person in a scoop circuit or a better --
A. In a -- in the FTA, no, but outside the FTA, it was helpful for like regroups if you're closing quickly, just what to expect from the other person. So it was advantageous there. But as far as in the scoop circuit that it's in an FTA, probably not.
Q. Okay. Did anybody teach you about -- there was a question came up about a way to communicate back to the base, you know --
A. Oh, yeah.
Q. You know, you obviously said you don't use -- didn't want to make a call with your cell phone, but did you -- did we discuss Spidertxt and how to use the Spidertracks in there to send a message? You'd have still had to use your phone, but it would have been a text.
A. No.
Q. Okay.
A. I wasn't aware of Spidertxt.
Q. Okay.
A. You still use your phone for that, though?

Q. Yeah. You couple it to the Spidertracks and you can -- if you don't have a cell signal and you got a problem, you can send a message, you can communicate.
A. Okay. Yeah, I was just aware of the red distress button. Yeah.
Q. [redacted] went blind. Well, we talked a little bit about it. My question was, was there any reason for that or other -- yeah, I think you kind of answered that.
A. Yeah. I think she just --
Q. Her nose got high or --
A. I think her nose got high and --
Q. Was there any terrain --
A. -- I think she was maybe looking at the water possibly and terrain and just got confused.
Q. I was going to say was there terrain that -- I went out there and it looked like you all might have been going around some terrain to make your --
A. Yeah. Yeah. The inlet of that lake, there's terrain on -- it's essentially a canyon on both sides and it comes up --
Q. So you all were in trail doing the -- that's what she --
A. Yeah. We were in trail, yep.
Q. And you answered -- I had some more questions for you as far as what you saw, you know, the reasons -- any reason for the bank, for the -- I mean for the turn on the scoop and did it look like she was struggling in that position, you know, that -- I mean,

porpoising you said no. That'd be an indication. So anything other than that?

A. I didn't notice anything drastic, just -- yeah, I didn't notice anything violent or drastic, just gentle turn to the left.

MR. WEAVER: Okay. That's about all I have. I was -- I think the questions I had, you all -- they already asked, so --

MR. NIXON: Okay. Great.

Kevin, anything to add?

MR. MERRILL: No. I think everything that I was curious about has been clarified. Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And we'll get to you at the end. Let me just finish up. I got a couple follow-on questions, partly because I couldn't read my original writing, so I apologize.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. But you mentioned in the brief kind of along the lines what Jesse was saying, you know, you didn't catch anything directly, you know, observe anything, but you made a comment that you said she might be in trouble at some point. I don't know if you saw the cliff or whatever, but could you kind of go in a little more detail why you thought that?

A. Well -- yeah. So I noticed she was getting closer to the shore, but it was hard for me to tell exactly what she was aiming at. And so I wasn't sure -- she still had plenty of time to make a turn to the right or, you know, stop or, you know, jettison and -- with how easily I got off the water, it just felt like

there was escape avenues at that point, I guess, is what I meant. I didn't know that shew as in trouble, but she was starting to get closer to the cliff and I couldn't tell exactly where she was pointed.

Q. Okay.

A. So I just noticed she was starting to get close.

Q. And then speaking of jettison, can you do that while you're still in the water or is that something you have to do airborne?

A. You can do it on the water.

Q. Okay. Did you notice anything coming from her at all, jettison, anytime?

A. No. I didn't notice any water leave the plane.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: If you're still on the water, that's hard to see, too.

MR. NIXON: Is it? Okay.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. But nevertheless, you didn't see it either? You didn't notice anything?

A. Sometimes -- I mean, unless she did it while I was on the water. You can see -- it is hard to see, but you -- if it's a while load, it's -- I mean, there's -- you can see it happening.

Q. Sometimes you can make it out, though.

A. Yeah.

Q. That being said, you didn't notice anything, whether it was --

A. I did not notice.
Q. Okay. And then going back to risk assessment, we kind of talked about this, you know, kind of thing. But do you individually risk assess this or does the flight lead do it or does everyone do it? When you -- like in this case, four ships, did you do your own?
A. I did an -- or we have a risk assessment at the beginning of the day we do, and which was right before the flight. And I did one. I wasn't sure if the rest of the flight did one, but --
Q. Okay. What was yours that you could speak to, though? What was the -- do you remember what level or wind scores?
A. It was low. I think the only thing I added was -- because it was going to be warm and it was a higher altitude than what we were thinking, I think I added -- it was either weather or mission environment, I added some points to that. And --
Q. Did you still end up in the low side even with that?
A. Yeah. I was still in the low side. I think anywhere between 16 and 21 is danger and you need to talk with Jesse and make a different decision. But --
Q. Do you remember your total, by chance?
A. I don't remember. I need to go back and look.
Q. Okay. And then, did flight lead discuss anything on the risk assessment, like -- I don't know if he did one. You know, you don't know if he did, but did he mention anything about the higher risk especially with higher density altitude or anything?

A. Yeah. He did say be prepared for the high altitude and -- or the higher altitude and the warm weather, just as far as we have NG limits and -- yeah, limits that are affected pretty drastically because of that, so it was mentioned in the brief.

Q. Okay. And then just going back to -- I think you kind of answered this, but just to make sure. You were comfortable, and really there was no obstacles, generally speaking. But you were saying that -- and I think you said earlier that even if you were new, you know, had initial, you felt comfortable doing the mission that happened on the accident day, correct?

A. Yes.

MR. NIXON: I think that's it for me. Before we close out, anything else from my group? Last round. Nothing? Okay.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I don't believe so.

MR. NIXON: We do appreciate your attention. I know it's a long one and, you know, but obviously we have an important task to do here. We're trying to figure out what happened. So we appreciate you coming in. We tried to get you earlier, but, you know, it didn't work out, so I'm glad we finally did.

MR. WILSON: Yeah.

MR. NIXON: Thanks for your attention and your time today. Before we get to you, anything to add for the interview?

MR. CARROLL: Nothing to add.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Thanks for attending as well.

So let's go ahead. Is there anything before I let you have

the table, anything that you expected me or my group to ask you or you have a concern you want to make sure we're aware of?

MR. WILSON: No. No. Everything -- I guess, I suppose, all the questions were appropriate and expected, so --

MR. NIXON: Okay. Is there any questions you have for us before we close out?

MR. WILSON: No, not at this time.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Once again, thank you both for your time and we appreciate it.

MR. WILSON: Thank you.

MR. NIXON: Thank you.

(Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of Rhys Wilson
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 12, 2024

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.



Kay Maurer
Transcriber

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
Investigation of: *
*
FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR *
HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 * Accident No.: WPR24FA238
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Interview of: STEVEN ROSS HELINSKI, II, Assistant Chief Pilot
Chief Flight Instructor
Dauntless Air

Dauntless Air Facility
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

September 2024

APPEARANCES:

ALBERT NIXON, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

MICHAEL SAVAGE, Standardizations and Safety
U.S. Forest Service

LEA WEINKAUF, Air Safety Investigator
U.S. Forest Service

KEVIN MERRILL, Aviation Safety Officer
U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region

JESSE WEAVER, Chief Pilot and Director of Operations
Dauntless Air

DANIEL CARROLL, Director of Safety
Dauntless Air
(On behalf of Mr. Helinski)

I N D E X

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. NIXON: Okay, good afternoon again. My name is Albert Nixon, I'm with the NTSB and I'm the operational group chairman, and that's who my team is here that supports me. So I'm going to first start with introductions, let's start on this side this time, go ahead.

MR. WEAVER: Jesse Weaver, Chief Pilot and Director of Operations, Dauntless Air.

MR. CARROLL: Dan Carroll, Director of Safety, Dauntless Air.

MR. HELINSKI: Steve Helinski, Assistant Chief Pilot and Chief Flight Instructor, Dauntless Air.

MR. MERRILL: Kevin Merrill, Aviation Safety Officer, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region.

MS. WEINKAUF: Lea Weinkauf, I'm an air safety investigator for the Forest Service.

MR. SAVAGE: Michael Savage, U.S. Forest Service, pilot standardization as well as safety and lead plane pilot.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. And then we already talked about you can have an optional representative to be here with you, did you choose that option today, Steve?

MR. HELINSKI: Yes.

MR. NIXON: Who did you choose?

MR. HELINSKI: Dan Carroll.

MR. NIXON: Okay. And he's present, obviously. You're aware that we are recording and once again emphasize we're recording to

make sure there's an accurate transcript, it's not like we use -- recording public or anything like that, it's assigned for the transcript, like we talked about, you'll get a draft copy at some point to review and when we get that back, that will be the final copy, what we call the transcript, so no objection there?

MR. HELINSKI: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. You probably -- I'm sure you heard of NTSB and you're probably aware of us, but just real quick, we lead the investigations and we try to determine probable cause of the accident and along the way, if we can have any type of safety mitigations to prevent another accident like that, we will, you know, use that.

And then one thing important some people may not know is we're an independent agency, so we're not under, you know, the Department of Transportation, we're not under the FAA, we're our own, kind of by our self, kind of like safety, you know, you're your own little ball game there, so -- and that gives us a lot more latitude in investigations with, you know, being independent. So just want to point that out, any questions about our role or NTSB or anything?

MR. HELINSKI: No.

MR. NIXON: Okay. We made all introductions and before we get going, if it goes long, we'll try to take a break every hour, but if someone needs a break before that, just kind of raise your hand and it's obvious, we'll take an earlier break. I know we're

all drinking coffee or water, so you know, if someone needs an emergency, we can accommodate. And if you need to, if you want a break to converse with your representative or something, that's fine, too. Just let us know, we can take a break at any time. So with that, let's get started.

INTERVIEW OF STEVEN ROSS HELINSKI, II

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Steve, could you give us your full name and spell it, please?

A. Steven --

Q. Okay.

A. -- R. Helinski, II. So S-t-e-v-e-n -- oh, well, Ross is the middle name.

Q. Okay.

A. Helinski is H-e-l-i-n-s-k-i and it's like I-I, two, the second.

Q. Okay. And give us a rundown of your aviation background, please.

A. I started -- sorry. I went to -- started at Western Michigan University, that's where I got all my flying done. Went directly from there to Piedmont Airlines and went through the whole course and that was 2008, so they kind of dumped everybody out, basically, and furloughed a bunch more. I went from there to getting my instructor certificate, CFI II, started instructing, went to North Carolina, flew a few different types of airplanes there, but ended up flying with an ag pilot and realized that was

the path I wanted to go down, so I started flying tail-wheel, went to Vegas to fly tail-wheel, ended up flying a bunch of different airplanes and doing a lot of like BFM and thrill ride stuff and -- so I got a lot of instruction out of that. Sorry, I got throat struck (ph.). And we did Grand Canyon tours in a Caravan, so I got some 135 there. From there, I went to ag, through three seasons of ag, out of like Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska.

Moved back to Michigan where I grew up at and worked in the shop at Turbine Conversions, they have a bunch of STCs. He still sprays, but they have like, you know, building all kinds of parts for ag planes, so I started on my A&P there. This is in between like spraying and like off-seasonal, it's shop/seasonal spraying.

Go back to North Carolina again and finish my A&P out there off season at -- it's called Bowie Aero, it's like -- we were doing all air -- like air show guys, stuff like Rob Holland and Bill Stein and worked on Mike Mangold's like race (ph.) plane and stuff, so I finished A&P there and came to Jess and been there, been here since 2016.

Q. Okay.

A. In that time I got my MEI, we got about 6100 total, 1750 in a Fire Boss, about 250 dual (indiscernible) in a Fire Boss, that's including 32 initial students and 10 -- basically, they'd already been flying for a couple years, but we re-current or, you know, retrain them in a way, so -- oh, in -- we had a little decathlon, like a little aerobatic tail-wheel upset flight school in North

Carolina for a couple years, too.
Q. Okay, well great, yeah. Pretty vast aviation background and a little bit on the mechanic side, too, so impressed. Can you restate, I think you said you're assistant chief pilot or your position currently, is that correct --
A. Correct.
Q. -- with the company? And then what other role, positions have you had with the company, a line pilot --
A. Yeah, just line pilot.
Q. Line pilot. How long have you been the assistant chief?
A. Just since spring.
Q. Okay. Of this year, obviously.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Do you have anyone that works for you, directly, as your role as assistant chief instructor?
A. No.
Q. Okay. And then you kind of covered some of it, but can you give the specifics in your training, both your pilot and training certificates that you do have?
A. CFI II, MEI.
Q. Okay. And your A&P, as well?
A. Correct.
Q. A&P. And then did you -- do you have any training certificates from any of the other schools or anything?
A. I got like a diploma, I guess.

Q. Okay. Is it like a university diploma?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay, some grade of pilot, anything --
A. A what?
Q. Is it an aviation school?
A. Yeah. Yeah, it's -- it's Flight Science.
Q. Flight Science, okay, great. And I think you kind of mentioned already your total time and your Fire Boss time, so give me a little bit, a rundown of -- I don't need all of them, but what are some of your major responsibilities in your current role at Dauntless?
A. Assistant chief pilot with basically whatever he would need me to help him with, assisting with the initial training --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- the initial pilot training, and I'm responsible for keeping track of some records including like NAFA, underwater egress, check rides, you know, because we do it at different frequencies, so I've got a spreadsheet for that.
Q. Okay. Do you get involved with scheduling at all, the day-to-day, or is it just more --
A. No.
Q. -- of that stuff? Okay. You've been around the community for a while now, you know, before we get into specifics, is there anything in general that, you know, about the firefighting community, particularly the Fire Boss operations that you think we

should be -- we should know about, nothing to do with the accident, but just in general that we should know about?
A. I can't think of anything.
Q. Okay. All right, let's talk about your company now, Dauntless. Has there been any significant changes in the last five years?
A. A lot of growth.
Q. Okay. Can you go and explain that to us in detail?
A. We went from, I don't know the exact numbers, but probably 17 pilots to 30-ish and I don't know how many planes we had, either, 10, maybe, to 20.
Q. Okay. So pretty good growth. And then one thing I forgot to ask you earlier, on your personal stuff there is -- I know you're rated as a CFI and all that good stuff, but when you got here, you're designated as an instructor in the Fire Boss, obviously, was there any type of -- did you get a FAM ride with the chief pilot or was there any type of qualification to get that instructor rating with this company?
A. So I had an Air Tractor flight instructor certificate --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then I started doing backseat rides and then started getting in with, you know, more experienced students --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- that were stable and predictable and doing good, to get more familiar and I just kind of built from there.

Q. Okay. But there was no specific checkout program or anything for a Dauntless instructor, per se?
A. Backseat checkout.
Q. When you say backseat checkout, what do you mean by that?
A. Just fly from the backseat and make sure everything looks good and feels good.
Q. Okay, but I mean, I'm talking for you, though, you getting qualified, you know, as an instructor here for the company, that was -- when you're in the backseat, someone's watching you or something from there?
A. Oh, from the front, yeah.
Q. Yeah.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.
A. He would be in the front and --
Q. Okay.
A. -- we had another guy that rode in the front with me, too.
Q. Okay. Are you involved with the company standard operating procedures, do you have anything to do with that besides obviously you know them, but do you alter that or look at that at all, is that something --
A. We look at it.
Q. Are you responsible for that at all, in your duties?
A. I provide input.
Q. Okay. You know, we know there wasn't changes since -- it's

been about five years, are you helping with the revision of that, by chance?
A. Yeah. Well, I'm looking at it.
Q. Okay. So you're reviewing it as we speak?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. We had a couple inputs we'll get through Jesse later to add to your list of, you know, improvements, whatever, revisions, but you're involved in doing that for the rewrite or whatever, is that correct? The SOP, you're involved with that?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Tell us a little bit about the safety culture in your company.
A. Strong. It's always -- it's always had the feel of don't do anything you're not comfortable with, safety always will come first and the company has our back, whatever decision we would choose, so turning down dispatch, no problem. It's all built around safety.
Q. Okay. And I'm thinking that you're -- you fly the line, too, obviously --
A. Correct.
Q. -- is that correct, full time, and you had this other duty as required, basically --
A. Correct.
Q. -- is that correct? Okay. Have you ever seen any of the pilots not take a mission?

A. I have. I don't have exact detail on it, though. I wasn't there for --
Q. Okay. You don't remember what the circumstance was?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. What about your risk assessment, have you ever had anyone turn down a flight or mission because it was in a high risk?
A. I don't know that. I don't think so, but I don't know that.
Q. Okay. And then, obviously, you're supposed to use that yourself, do you use it when you fly?
A. I do.
Q. Okay. What's your comments on it, though? You know, what I heard, it's 1 to 5 on the items, but there's number of distinction, like let's say it's a higher temperature, it felt like a hundred and above, certain score or something, it's just a kind of subjective call on your part where you fit on that thing, is that correct, for most of the scoring?
A. Yes, correct.
Q. Have you had any missions canceled because of being in the red?
A. No.
Q. In a risk -- okay. What's your thoughts on the -- you know, do you think it's effective or do you think it's a square filler or somewhere in between for your risk assessment for flights?
A. I'd say it should be effective because you're critiquing yourself, it's for yourself to say, you know, where am I at and

think about what your -- what challenges you might have for that particular day or mission or you're just wrapping your -- self-checking yourself, I guess, so I -- it's effective to me.
Q. Okay. What about the culture, you know, anything else, the safety culture, you want to add?
A. No.
Q. Can you tell me a little about your SMS program, please?
A. It's Vortex --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and it's really easy to file an SMS. And then what happens is it goes through the appropriate channel and then e-mails you and then you log in, go to whatever, write up their laws --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- read it, click that you've read it and then it's closed for you at that point but you still have the whole list of -- you can go back and look at all of them.
Q. Now, when you say list, is that because you're a management person or is that just a list of your personal stuff?
A. No, it's everybody, all of them.
Q. So you get a list because you're management, though, right? If I was a line pilot, I couldn't get all of them.
A. No, a line pilot would, too.
Q. Oh, really? Everyone has access to them, but they're scrubbed, though, right, there's no names or anything associated

with them, I'm assuming? Or are they?
A. No, there is.
Q. There is?
A. Sometimes, yeah.
Q. Can you report anonymously on there --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- if you want to?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. But if you don't, it's going to highlight who you are, then, right now, correct?
A. Correct.
Q. I'm assuming from what you told me, okay. Have you filed any reports?
A. I have.
Q. Okay. Did you get feedback yet?
A. Yeah.
Q. Was it resolved to your liking or --
A. Yeah.
Q. Any open?
A. Any open?
Q. Any of your reports still open, waiting for feedback or closure?
A. None that I know.
Q. Okay.
A. No.

Q. What about like, you know, safety meetings, you've been to a few organizations, but do you get memos from like either you draft them or from Jesse or somebody or the safety director, do you get memos on a monthly basis or do you have any meetings or what type of -- I guess, what's safety talk about besides your SMS reporting thing?
A. We get a topic of the day e-mail discussing --
Q. And what's the topic of the day discuss?
A. Oh, it could discuss anything, really, but it's a lot of safety oriented stuff, could be mechanical stuff or a lot of airplane stuff.
Q. Do they -- how often do those come across, daily?
A. Yeah, every day.
Q. Every day a new topic comes across?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. And do they ever talk about, you know, close calls either from this company or other companies that had, you know, something happen that could effect -- could happen to you, I suppose, you know, that kind of thing, you know, hey, watch out for this or --
A. That would be something that would come out in there.
Q. Oh, really?
A. Yeah.
Q. It would be part of that topic if that was --
A. Yeah, it could be, yeah.

Q. Okay. So that comes out daily, is that just during the fire season or the whole year?
A. It's fire season.
Q. Fire season, okay. Are you aware of any NTSB incidents or accidents the last five years here at the company?
A. Yes. This one that we're talking about --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then there were two in 2020.
Q. Tell me about the ones in 2020, please.
A. Twenty-twenty, the first one was a misjudgment of the lake size versus the wind conditions, basically, or the deteriorating wind conditions --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and they ended up kind of hitting the shore on the other end coming off, flew out of it, and it did a little bit of damage but not enough to where it couldn't be ferried, so it got ferried to fix. The next one was a sharp veer on the water, it wasn't really determined completely why that veered like that.
Q. Do you remember where that was at?
A. That was in -- yeah, that was in Alaska.
Q. Alaska?
A. Yeah.
Q. That's what I thought, okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay.

A. That one tore the airplane up pretty good, though. But he was still unhurt.
Q. Okay. Good. The first one, you said there was a -- you know, was it a tailwind, was that the problem on the --
A. No, just the headwind went away.
Q. Okay, so kind of like --
A. I'm pretty sure.
Q. Okay. Okay, is there anything else on safety you want to mention in the company, anything I didn't ask or you wanted to make sure I knew about?
A. Not that I can think of.
Q. What about management, what -- you know, you're one of the management officials, are you on any committees or other groups besides -- you know, obviously you're attached to Jesse here because you assist him, but do you have any formal groups you're assigned to?
A. We have a training committee, too.
Q. Okay, so you're a formal member of that?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. Any other committees or groups you're a part of?
A. No.
Q. And tell me a little bit about this training committee, please, what they do, what's your role, and then how often they meet and let's talk about that.
A. So when we're, say, after the season ends --

Q. Um-hum.
A. -- we just did a meeting the other day, but it was kind of to get going, so the frequency will start getting collapsed to where it might be once every two weeks to once a week and if we need it, a couple weeks, what it's doing is getting ready for our company training, not initial training, company training.
Q. Company training, go ahead.
A. All right, so it's -- talk about who's going to present topics, guest speakers, what -- you know, stuff that -- it's just building, building out, basically, company training.
Q. Okay, so basically you're planning and looking for the next company training --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- what to do and who's going to be there --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and schedule that.
A. When and why and -- yeah.
Q. Okay. What's your role in doing that, are you -- besides being on the committee, are you actively soliciting speakers or what's your role in that committee, I guess, besides --
A. More than anything, just input.
Q. Just input. And when's the last time it met?
A. About a week ago, maybe.
Q. A week ago, okay. And once again, the topic was looking for next year's company training agenda and filling it in type thing,

okay. Who's all members of that committee?
A. Me and Jess, Dan, and Brent Voris, that's all we got right now.
Q. Now, when you say Brent, what's his position?
A. He's assistant director of ops.
Q. Okay. So those four individuals, basically? And what --
A. John Thomas has been, too --
Q. Okay.
A. -- for -- well, let me take that back. So Brent's transitioning into John's role --
Q. Okay.
A. -- so it was both of them --
Q. Okay.
A. -- last year.
Q. Okay. Do you have any input -- you know, we talked about company training scheduling up for next year, do you have any input into initial training at all besides actually doing the instruction, per se?
A. Yeah. There's a lot of discussion that goes on between all the instructors.
Q. Okay, so it's -- it's kind of an informal group with all the instructors when you get the initial and -- is that correct? There's no formal group or is it for instructors?
A. I mean, we're all working together with --
Q. Yeah, so it's kind of --

A. -- that group of students, so --
Q. Yeah, okay. Tell us a little bit about how initial training goes in general, I mean, that's probably some of your ball game, obviously, because --
A. Yeah.
Q. So just, you know, take it from -- I mean, we don't want to spend a half hour, but I mean from a layman's term, give us a big picture about how it's done and how you -- kind of like your role in it, you know.
A. Well, we'll start with ground systems, kind of build up a little bit on that. They'll get in with Jess and do a demo ride, so I'll just get in the back and get a -- see how it -- what they're shooting for, basically.
Q. Um-hum. Before we go there, take it one step earlier, resumes, do you look at them at all?
A. I do some, yeah.
Q. Do you screen them, I mean, to decide who --
A. Yeah, some, some.
Q. -- work with them as a group --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- who to select for your initial hires?
A. Um-hum.
Q. So okay, go ahead, I'm sorry. I just wanted to get it before you got to where you were at there.
A. I would just kind of start, maybe start flying, you know, get

them, depending on what their experience is previously, if they've been in 802s before or whatever world they're coming in, you kind of got to tailor a little bit to them but, you know, you start with basic maneuvers rides and stuff like that, runway landings, and then transition to water, get them used to the water before they start scooping and then start practice scooping and then, you know, keep maybe stepping -- increase more skills in it.

Q. What would you say the hardest part for most students is in the airplane, what do they have the most trouble transitioning to?

A. Scooping.

Q. Scoop, okay. And what, particularly, in the scooping maneuver do they have trouble with or is it the whole ball game?

A. I mean, they're trying to control the porpoise.

Q. Is that the major problem that you see here?

A. I don't want say it's a problem, but that's their challenge.

Q. Challenge, okay.

A. Yeah. They can still porpoise safely, but to get it really good, it takes experience.

Q. Okay. You know, as far as training goes, specifically, how do you cover the higher altitude density altitudes in your training?

A. Just reduced power takeoffs and stuff like that, we talk about it a lot, too.

Q. So when you say reduced power takeoffs, you actually do that to simulate the environmental --

A. Yeah.
Q. -- factor, is that what you're saying?
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And the rest of it's classroom whether it's in charts or showing them, you know, the facts, is that pretty much it?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And you know, I'm a new guy, let's say I come out of flying airplanes in the ag field, now I'm doing the scoops, not only is a scoop maneuver difficult, but now you got to select an appropriate water source, correct?
A. Correct.
Q. I mean, hopefully you have a way to do that, but technically, once you're carded you could go out, you know, single -- probably not, but there's still a chance or, you know, whatever, you end up lead because some people got sick or crumpled, you know what I'm saying, but whatever, you're still legal to do that, so let's say a new person goes out there, you know, fairly new person, I should say, that recently got carded and they have to select a water source, what are some of the things you instruct for the water source to make sure it's appropriate?
A. You're talking how to teach a recon?
Q. Yes.
A. I'm going to start big to small, ingress/egress, look for your entry, your exits, so you're not like just looking at the water --

Q. Um-hum.
A. -- you have a plan to go on and go off. I mean, there's all kinds of stuff, you tell them about sun angles, terrain, how to read obstacles, reading water. Like I say to everybody, it's all over the place, some people know how to read water better than others and so, I mean, you just give them -- talk them through and make them recon themselves all the time and ask them what they think --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- see what they're spitting out and add where you can on them.
Q. Is there any guidelines they have to follow, like for obstacles or shorelines or anything being a certain distance, or is it all just "that looks about right," you know, or something --
A. I mean, you're looking --
Q. -- like that?
A. Generally, looking for a mile --
Q. A mile?
A. -- at sea level to get a full load.
Q. Okay. And how does that change as you go up in altitude, like at 5,000 feet, do you have a -- what does that change on your --
A. They'll double it.
Q. Double it, is that what the technique is, to double it to about 5,000 feet. What about eight -- I don't know how high your

airplane could go, you know, to still do a useful load, but let's say you double it to higher than that, do you have any technique for each thousand feet or anything?

A. It's going to be almost triple.

Q. Triple.

A. Well, once you get to probably 10.

Q. Okay. And then what do you teach them, you said read the water, what are you teaching them when you instruct to read the water, obviously you're looking at the surface to see what it's doing, but give me a quick executive (ph.) rundown of what you -- what you're looking for.

A. Oh, like easiest example, that would be can you tell where the wind's coming from.

Q. Um-hum.

A. There's a smooth spot on the lake, you know, and then it gets chop out here, the wind's coming from that smooth spot or, for example, they could use -- once it gets over about 15 you'll see all these white lines running --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- so you got that. Those kind of things.

Q. Okay.

A. Is that what you're asking?

Q. Just a general, yeah, from -- and then is there any limitation, like wind-wise or cross -- anything for a water scoop, per se? Any restrictions, limitations? It's just what you can

handle, you think you can handle safely?
A. Yeah.
Q. There's nothing, components, you know, something -- like I said, there's nothing that restricts me, basically, as long as I have the weather, I guess.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. How do you tell the depth of the -- what are some techniques to make sure you got the right depth of scoop?
A. Well, you can use Navionics, for one, which is a sonar chart on an iPad or --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- device.
Q. How good is that, does that work pretty good in an airplane?
A. It's pretty good.
Q. Yeah.
A. I mean, I wouldn't say trust it completely --
Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- but it's something to start with.
Q. Sure.
A. Flat terrain versus, you know, if you're on super flat, it's not going to just go like that --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- make a big deep lake, right, you know, if there's a cliff going in --
Q. Um-hum.

A. -- probably going to be deep. Sometimes you can see through it, see the bottom.
Q. And what's a ballpark you look for for a minimum depth?
A. Four or five feet.
Q. Four or five feet. And you said about a mile at -- I think that was at sea level, you said, right, about a mile --
A. Correct.
Q. -- a mile, you know, distance? And then what about, do you have any guidance for the guardrails, the lateral side, do you look for a certain width or anything?
A. I mean, the wider the better.
Q. Of course, but do you have any, like, that looks about right, what you'd use to -- when you instruct someone, like hey, you got to look for, at least, you know, whatever it is, you know, I don't want put words in your mouth but, you know, do you look for -- what's the narrowest corridor you could take if the winds are calm, I guess, might be another question.
A. Four feet.
Q. On each side, would you say? That's pretty tight, yeah. Okay, the -- do, you know, like you talked about earlier, there's company training and there's initial training, when you get done with initial training, do you normally go to company training or do you normally go get -- get your check ride after you finish?
A. No, you would go -- you'd normally go initial training to company training.

Q. Okay. And then when you finish company training, that's when you go get squared away and finally get your check ride after you're done with that?
A. Correct.
Q. Assuming everything works out.
A. Yeah, correct.
Q. Okay. And then to get your check ride, I know there's been some discussion now with the OAS folks, you know, they get the check ride, what exactly is requirements on paper for the pilot to go for their check ride?
A. You want like total times and all that kind of stuff you're talking?
Q. Yeah, whatever the requirements are, yeah, for them to check.
A. You need 1500 hours total, 200 mountain, you need 200 low level with a hundred of it being application. You need -- now you need a hundred scoops and 25 hours, I believe.
Q. Okay. So when you go to, let's say, on your initial -- what do you call it, pilot, you know, trainee, whatever -- do you double check they have all that before you send them to their OAS check ride?
A. Yeah, we look at their 64s.
Q. Okay. And in all cases they're good under scoop, whatever it is?
A. Not always. Well, the hundred scoop thing is brand new, after, but --

Q. Yeah. But barring that, is that -- what do you mean not always, give me an example.
A. Sometimes they won't have the minimum that's required on the -- for the requirements.
Q. But you still send them, though, nevertheless, OAS, for the check ride?
A. We have before.
Q. And then what happens?
A. They'll be observed and then after -- not get carded or anything, but they get observed --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then -- I mean, an easy example would be if somebody's a little bit short on seaplane time --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- they'd go get some seaplane time and then call back to OAS and say okay, now the requirements are met and they've already observed them do the check ride, so --
Q. And then they would card them after that, is that correct?
(No audible response.)
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. Okay. Is that pretty standard between -- I know sometimes you have substitutes come from each coast, you know, different offices, but is that pretty standard or is that just one side of that?
A. No, it's not standard.

Q. It's not standard, okay. Can you explain that, does one side do it and the other don't or -- for OAS, are they all the same or is it not standard, like you said?
A. Not standard.
Q. Okay, so they're different.
A. Correct.
Q. Okay.
A. In that regard.
Q. Okay. Any other differences? Between the offices?
A. Don't have enough experience to be able to tell you that, I don't think, because we've only done the West Coasters once.
Q. Okay.
A. But they're -- I like working with both of them, but --
Q. Okay. So coming from your perspective, let's talk a little bit about formation training now, correct me if I'm wrong, but it looks like you've got vast flying experience, you know, but -- ag and some other things, too, but not really formations, is that correct, before you came here?
A. No, I had a lot in doing those dogfights and --
Q. Oh, okay, the dog -- they were flying formation in those when you --
A. Always, yeah.
Q. Always, okay. Even in dogfights, when you're fighting them, you're in formation?
A. That's right.

Q. Just going in and out, I mean, going into the area and out, is that what you're saying?
A. The whole thing's --
Q. Formation, okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. So when you got here, you felt pretty comfortable with all the formation two ship, four ship?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. Talk to me about, once again, initial training because a lot of people potentially have not been exposed to any of that.
A. Initial training, we'll get them a ride, if we can.
Q. Um-hum.
A. Initial training is for learning how to fly the airplane and scoop safely.
Q. Okay. So where does the formation come in at, company training?
A. That would come in at company training, correct.
Q. Okay. So how many flights -- but they are flying formation, probably, in initial, correct, nevertheless, even though they're not?
A. In initial?
Q. Yeah.
A. No.
Q. They're all going single ship?
A. We only have one two-seater at initial.

Q. Um-hum. But I'm just saying, when they go out and practice scoop, they're going out by themselves every time single ship?
A. Yeah. In initial?
Q. Yes. All flights?
A. No. Yeah, they go out in single.
Q. Single, all of them, okay. So when you get to company training, that's where you're sent to formation.
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. And then two ship, four ship, whatever it may be, three ship --
A. Yeah, in baby steps.
Q. Yeah, okay. How many flights, approximately, do they get with the formation for the -- you know, the people that just came from initial, I should say.
A. Well, we'll give them at least a purely formation ride --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then it's more of -- more to -- and then it's more of a group tactic, which it's not like -- you're not sucked up, it's just how to maneuver in relation to other aircraft, right, so you can just go out -- I mean, trails of formation --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- or extended route 500 feet, thousand feet would be a formation, right, so we don't -- not harping on them on like a full-up formation, you know.
Q. Um-hum.

A. Does that make sense?
Q. Well, what -- someone that didn't have a formation background, so you give them that ride, how many, approximately -- they all differ, I suppose, but about how many times are they exposed to, in company training formation before they go out on their -- you know, after getting carded, they go on their own?
A. Six, seven, eight.
Q. Okay.
A. New guys we spend a lot more time with.
Q. Is there academics on the formation flying, as well?
A. Yeah, there's ground.
Q. How long is that?
A. Varies, but anywhere from a few hours to a lot of hours.
Q. Okay. You know, you're coming from a formation background, so I apologize earlier, but what -- what's been kind of the trend items for any areas of improvement for most people that haven't been exposed to it, how many on those company training rides?
A. Say that again?
Q. You know, someone that hasn't been exposed to formation flying, you know, getting checked out in the Fire Boss, they get through initial, now they're -- company training where, you know, you're throwing formation at them, what are some of the areas that -- you know, the trend items, the weaker areas or areas of improvement?
A. What's their biggest challenge?

Q. Yeah, challenging areas of formation.
A. Well, understanding what formation actually is, how we use -- it's more of a group tactic.
Q. Um-hum.
A. We're getting them not to think they have to fly close and stuff like that. Getting them used to like what we're trying to accomplish with what we're doing --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- right, does that make sense?
Q. Yeah. So when they, you know, get done with company training, complete company training, then they get -- like we talked about, get carded, now you get, you know, that person on the line and, you know, say your flight lead, do you think the program is adequate to check them out or are you still seeing issues with the newer people, pilots, that don't have that background?
A. No, they all do fine.
Q. They all do fine. You don't really see much needing corrections in formation --
A. No.
Q. -- and you debrief and/or whatever it may be.
A. No.
Q. Okay. What about -- you mentioned scooping being challenging, as well, have you had anything at post-parting where someone had trouble scooping still? In your formation.

A. I mean, there's always going to be a challenge scooping.
Q. Um-hum.
A. Not to a problem, not to a problem extent.
Q. Um-hum.
A. There might be considerations of, you know, not going to take this person into this water source yet type of thing, I mean, I'm just talking consideration, but I can't think of any particular --
Q. Okay. So you feel that the program is adequate and they seem to be doing adequate after they're -- you check, they're carded, so to speak.
A. Yeah.
Q. Getting formation. Okay, let's go to tactical, kind of the same questions. I'm assuming the same thing applies, right, they're getting company training, as well?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. Is there a minimum flight requirement in company training for tactical or what's considered tactical, first of all?
A. Going out for a mission.
Q. Okay.
A. With a mission in mind.
Q. Could it be single ship?
A. Could be.
Q. Okay. And it could vary from, I'm assuming, single ship to four ship, right?
A. Correct.

Q. Okay. So whatever it may be, about how many is average tactical flights that people get in company training? Once again, let me rephrase that. This is not a regular person coming in for the annual, this is the new hire that goes to company training, those people, those pilots, about how many tactical flights do they normally get in company training?
A. Five or six, at least.
Q. Okay. And then when they do fly tactical flight, whether it's a single ship or four ship, is it logged in the company training that they got tactical training on that flight? What kind of forms do you use in company training?
A. We're just briefing, debriefing, and we've been writing on a white board, you know, how much time, how many scoops --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and tracking it that way as far as cataloging notes.
Q. So if I went back and asked for someone's, you know, from previous classes, you wouldn't have it, you wouldn't have any notes on company training, is that correct? Unless you remember -- you know, remembered it.
A. Yeah, unless they're in my -- on my notepad or something.
Q. Your notepad or something, okay. So when you say you're tracking five or six is that a scheduling thing or is that just between all the instructors to make sure one gets about the average flights or that's the way it works out in company training?

A. I don't think I understand.
Q. You said the average was like five to six tactical flights in company training. If you don't have any records, how do you know they got that many, you said that's average, is that just from watching?
A. Oh, well, yeah.
Q. Yeah.
A. It's just -- new guys are going to be out on a lot more flights than like veterans would be.
Q. Um-hum.
A. Like some veterans might come in and do a flight or two just to get back in the swing of things and jump into flight, so we've already run them through, you know, a formation ride -- well, (indiscernible) but -- and then we'd start them out at two ship tactical, maybe another two ship tactical --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- starting into fours. But, I mean, that's not a progression of -- with those --
Q. Okay.
A. -- how that gets set up.
Q. What's the criteria if you graduate -- once again, I'm just concentrating on the initial hires that go to company training, what's the criteria to complete company training, is that -- they're ready to go get carded, you take the check ride, is that what the -- or what is the finish line for them?

A. Yeah, you got to get carded at the end.
Q. Okay, so that's the finish line, they're ready to go, you feel they're ready to go take that check ride.
A. Correct.
Q. Okay. So does sometime, do the amount of flights for each person vary depending on their background and everything like that with new people?
A. Yeah.
Q. Just like we talked about, some people had the formation training, they may have other training but, you know, they obviously would probably be more advanced than someone who didn't have it, you know, just by nature of the beast. As far as -- let's talk a little about that OAS check ride. I've heard, you know, it's either someone in a boat or someone on a dock or something with a radio, is that pretty much the check ride and they're watching, they come in for a scoop and do some things and they're talking to them?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. Have you seen them give the oral at all to the initial pilots, the oral exam?
A. Yeah.
Q. And how do they do that, like the last class, for instance?
A. A group setting.
Q. Group setting.
A. Yeah, just kind of went around one by one with questions.

Q. How long was the total session, would you say?
A. Easy hour, at least.
Q. Okay. And then about how many people were in the classroom?
A. There were 10.
Q. Ten new pilot types?
A. Well, new and recurrent.
Q. Mixed in with the veterans?
A. Yeah.
Q. And then how many of the OAS people were there, one or two or --
A. Two.
Q. Two. And roughly -- I mean, I know you're not keeping notes here, but can you give me a rundown of -- so you got, you know, two or probably one's doing the questions but regardless, one or two of them doing the questions, you got 10 people in there, about how many questions during the hour did each person get, roughly?
A. Three, four.
Q. Three, four. So everyone got about three, four questions?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. And when you went through and got checked out, was it about the same thing or did you get a smaller group or individual on the oral?
A. No, it would've been -- are you talking, like, my first time ever getting carded or just previous to --
Q. You got to take them what, every -- your last, your last

check ride when you got OAS.
A. We've done them with the whole --
Q. Does it vary, how the oral goes, the oral exams, or is it all pretty much the same, they all put you in a classroom and ask a few questions? When you had your --
A. It's pretty much the same --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- it's a lot of contract questions.
Q. Okay, so that's pretty much what you've seen in your past, too, personally, flying and the oral exams?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. You might get, like you said, about three, four questions with the group?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay, yourself? Okay. And then -- so tactical, you know, you're obviously a flight lead instructor type thing, what's -- generally speaking on these tactical formation rides, how long's the debrief? I mean, I know it varies, you know, in the backseat and all, but generally speaking, about how long -- let's say you had like -- how long's a debrief usually?
A. Fifteen minutes.
Q. Fifteen. And that's in the company training, not --
A. Yeah, it could be more.
Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, it varies, like you said, but --

Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- could be anywhere.
Q. Okay.
A. Fifteen.
Q. Does it change any when you get on the line flying, is it less?
A. Generally.
Q. Generally, okay. Because you expect people to be, you know, for the most part, checked out, so they should know what they're doing, right?
A. Yeah. Well, yeah, I mean, they should've been -- are you talking debrief?
Q. Yes.
A. Yeah, I mean, it's -- yeah, that can vary, it depends what you had going.
Q. Okay. Anything else in training? You mentioned you're part of the training committee and you got the instructor group and that's -- because you all work together, you kind of have informed discussions, I guess, you know, and -- so once again, let me just rephrase. So initial, you got the form, I think it has the scoops on there, has a little thing for notes and that you sign off or flew with them that, you know, that day. And company training, you're taking some informal notes personally but there's no, per se, record, correct, of what they're doing, tactical or let's say they had a four ship or whatever they did?

A. Won't be a sheet like the initial --
Q. Okay.
A. -- if that's what you're asking.
Q. Yeah. And then you do instruct the higher altitude, density altitudes, but -- and then you simulate, you told me, the reduced power on takeoffs and stuff like that, but it's not like it's documented, per se, it's just something all the instructors do, is that correct, as well?
A. No, it's in the syllabus.
Q. It's in the syllabus, okay. How do you know it was completed, I guess, is my question.
A. It's part of that lesson, right --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and they still got -- if it's less than seven, it says --
Q. To do it, you do it.
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. And how many times is it listed there to do it on that syllabus, do you know, top of your head?
A. I don't.
Q. And you mentioned the ground portion of it, as well, but you know, the flight portion was --
A. We're talking a lot on the ground.
Q. Yeah, okay. Okay. And we talked about the formation, there was a ground school, too. Is there a ground school in tactical, by the way?

A. Yeah.
Q. Okay, how long is that?
A. Six hours or so.
Q. Okay.
A. And there's a lot, it gets -- it gets sprinkled in everywhere, so --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- you know, it's in briefings and --
Q. Do you instruct all of the above or do you guys switch off on all these different classes?
A. No, we all do. No.
Q. You all do. So you've done it, whether it's tactical formation, whoever's available does those classes on the ground?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. And then as far as the students in initial and company training, do you just randomly fly with different people including, you know, all your instructors in Dauntless or is there some kind of -- the way you schedule it?
A. Yeah, they're certainly random. All right, ask that question again, sorry.
Q. When you -- like, in initial training -- let's just divide them first.
A. Yeah, okay.
Q. Initial training, you know, you have field instructors with Dauntless, how does it work, who flies with who, who's the

scheduler, does he just do it or is there some type of --
A. No.
Q. -- rhyme or reason who flies with who?
A. Well, there's -- there's rhyme or reason. I mean, some students are going to work better with students, others, you know, certain instructors --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- but you don't know that right off the bat, but we might stick with one, done it both ways, switch-switch-switch or, you know, stick with somebody for three --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and then pass them on and try both.
Q. What's the current policy on that for initial? Do you fly like three and then switch or do you just switch off?
A. Last year we just switched off.
Q. Switched off, okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And then same question for company training, is it just -- do they have any logic or anything in how they schedule that or is it -- for your tactical formation training for the new hires or is it just whoever's available jumps in there?
A. I mean, it's all scheduled out, but I wouldn't say just jump in but, I mean, we're all trying to -- we also have recurrent stuff going on, so --
Q. Yeah, of course, yeah.

A. -- we're trying to all fly with recurrent stuff, too, so --
Q. Um-hum. So I imagine for the instructors that's a pretty good workout during the company training.
A. Can be.
Q. Yeah, on the flight side, including the ground stuff, yeah, okay. I think I covered enough about training, I mean, let's go through here, do you got anything else to add on training in general?
A. No.
Q. Okay. And then what's a typical -- going back to the line now, not training, but what's a typical day like for a line pilot, you know, when you get dispatched, how long of a day can you have and usually do you get, do you get one or two missions in or just give us kind of a rundown, we don't know anything about your operation, about what a day is like or a week.
A. I mean, we're usually just sitting there for 10 hours and go home and do that again the next day, but if you do get a dispatch, depends where you're at --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- you know, you might -- some places, if you get dispatched in Alaska, we're going to be gone for three and a half hours probably or not come back to where we were and fly all day or, you know, if there's something in -- like Texas grass fire, you might only go out for an hour and catch it and come back, I mean, it's all over, is that what you're asking?

Q. Kind of, kind of just a typical day you're describing, yeah, because I can't relate to you, I'm just trying to -- I'm trying to relate to what -- to be like one of your line pilots, what kind of lifestyle and schedule they have, that's all. Now, when it gets busy, what's like a bad day, I wouldn't say a bad day, but you know, where you get real busy, a busy day, I should say.
A. A good day.
Q. Yeah.
A. You'd fly two three-and-a-half-hour fuel cycles.
Q. Um-hum.
A. May or may not come back to where you started off at.
Q. Oh, so you overnight somewhere.
A. You might.
Q. Yeah, okay.
A. Like we've been overnight, we've been staying at the same place since we got down to Washington, but like say you're in Alaska, if you get a dispatch there, you better have all your stuff with you because you might go to a village for a month and --
Q. It's that long when you -- potentially, you --
A. It can be, yeah. Everywhere is different.
Q. Uh-huh, okay. So when you're on call, sometimes it's boring because nothing's happening, but when you do go, what -- when you get a dispatch, how long do you have to get to the airplane, whatever?

A. The contract says shoot for 15 minutes, but --
Q. Uh-huh.
A. -- in reality you take whatever you need.
Q. Okay. So you get the brief and you're just kind of on standby and as soon as you get the call, you try to get airborne as soon as you can, basically, huh?
A. Yeah.
Q. I think that's all I have on training. Let's go on to -- you know, we're coming up on an hour, so I'll talk a little bit and I'll be almost done and then we'll take a break and we'll go around the table here, but let's go on to what -- you know, unfortunately, with [redacted], the accident pilot, tell me a little bit about your training that you were involved with and what you saw, you know, observed because, you know, you're -- it looks like you're one of the key players, obviously, involved with that.

And then take us through her training all the way up to the time where -- obviously, Jacob was doing a lot at the beginning and then at some point, as you know, he's no longer with the company, so take us up to there and what you did for the follow-on training and what your involvement was, if any, there and discussions with the group and everything and start the grouping. I believe it just stayed there, but if it went above to the training committee or everything, give me all those conversations, what you heard, you know, from -- feedback from other instructors including Jacob until the time he departed and things like that.

So take me -- you know, I don't know when you were introduced, if you saw a resume, that far out or whatever, but take me until when you either met her or, you know, were aware that she was going to get hired or whatever the case may be.

A. Justin showed me her resume, it looked very well rounded, which is really good. I thought that it fit, you know, that's the kind of person you're looking for or is potentially trainable. I did not meet her until, in person, until we trained her at initial. She had a really, really good attitude, super nice, really happy, always had fun.

She took -- she took it very seriously, she did a lot of studying. Flew the airplane really well. Did have to slow-step her a little bit, like first -- actually, first, did the first flight with her, she wasn't familiar with how to work all those Garmin products, the radios and stuff --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- so I had to spend a lot of time talking her through that work, so that's what I mean, it was a slow, "all right, before we do anything else, we need to make sure all these radios work," it probably took 45 minutes to an hour just to get her set up on that, but everything else -- she continued to get better. Most students regress and she did, but not that much. Still at initial here. She was the last one to solo, but she wasn't that much behind the others and the others had started earlier, so -- does that make sense for initial?

Q. Yeah, makes sense.
A. Okay.
Q. How were the scoops, you flew the first ride, but did you fly any more with her in the initial?
A. Yeah.
Q. Talk a little bit about the scooping.
A. Nothing abnormal.
Q. Nothing abnormal, okay.
A. No. I mean, like I said, you'll expect some porpoise and --
Q. Yeah.
A. -- stuff like that, but we did, you know, scoops in the river and with turns and various conditions, glassy and, you know, rougher and -- nothing abnormal.
Q. Did you fly with her any on those -- I know in your syllabus it calls for it probably in the latter part when you did the reduced stress takeoffs and stuff to simulate the high altitude, did you do any of that with her, by chance?
A. I'm not sure.
Q. Okay. What did you note in initial, anything? You mentioned some good things, but anything that needed room for improvement?
A. Radios, probably. Radio work.
Q. Was it more just like the SA and the radio work or do you think the language barrier was --
A. The language barrier, yeah.
Q. Was that present, too? Okay.

A. Yeah.
Q. All right. And what about differences in the airplanes, I know some of them have different, you know, avionics suites and a few other switches are different, do you think that was any factor for training, as well, being confused a little bit?
A. I mean, it's all Garmin stuff, so it's all -- it's all about -- it's all about the same.
Q. Um-hum, okay. Any other observations from your part in the initial?
A. Not that I can think of.
Q. Okay. How many flights did you have with her in the initial, do you remember?
A. I think four.
Q. Four, okay. And were any of them in the two-seat airplane with her?
A. All of them.
Q. All of them, okay. And was there any other comments made in initial from other instructors or do you remember from the discussions, because I'm sure virtually, you know, all the instructors are talking "hey, how did that go" or, you know, whatever, just informal, was there any other talk about, you know, her training, how things were going?
A. I don't know, I don't know exact specifics but, I mean, we talked about different things we would notice like language barrier or how -- you know, how to communicate particular aspects

of -- I don't even really have an example right off, but like -- I mean, just generally speaking, we would debrief each other and then whoever's flying with her next, what the last flight was like, moving on what to work on in there.

Q. Um-hum.

A. I mean, besides the language thing, which I think -- well, I'm not even going to say that, but nothing really sticks out real big to me, that's what I'm saying.

Q. Okay. So I mean, like everyone in training, they're going to have some --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- areas of improvement, but nothing --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- nothing real concerning nevertheless, is that correct?

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. So let's go to company training now, same question, did you have any input, any training, direct training with her in the flights?

A. I did.

Q. Okay. Let's go through that, please.

A. The first flight we did, I did a formation ride with her. She did okay, I didn't see anything dumb or dangerous, I guess --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- like it was a normal first formation ride, so it's just, you know, setting space and things like that. Well, I mean, it

was full rejoins and, you know, all that, took her through the whole thing, but not abnormal for a first formation ride, so -- second ride was a tactical ride --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- so a two ship tactical ride. So that is just -- so where we were working is Lake Whitney, nice big lake, it's got an island on it, that's where we're calling our target, right, so this was two two-seaters because we had released another one for company training, so another instructor in Airplane 1, me and her were in Airplane 2 and that was just a circuit, so drop, scoop, drop, scoop and that's to wrap your head around, you know, introduction to tactical flying, flying with other airplanes, spacing --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- all that, what you're going to have to deal with and that looked fine, too.

Q. Were you two or lead in that?

A. Two.

Q. Two.

A. Yeah.

Q. So really, nothing to note on that one, either --

A. Um-hum.

Q. -- just like you said, pretty much where she should be for --

A. Yeah.

Q. -- introduction of formation and tactical.

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay.
A. Yeah, that one went fine.
Q. Any other flights with her?
A. I think there was. It might take me a minute to think what that one was.
Q. No problem.
MR. WEAVER: Didn't you have the one of the weather, came in on you?
MR. HELINSKI: Yes, okay. Yeah, thank you. Okay, so another one, another -- she had done a couple other tactical rides, I think, in between that, but there was a bunch of flights going to -- a flight to the south and there was some little scattered weather out there and stuff, so we decided to go to Possum Kingdom Lake, which is north, see a new area, you know, new recon, new circuit, new targets, all this stuff and it turned out the weather kind of -- it kind of collapsed in on the lake when we got there, it kind of kept getting lower and lower. When we got to the lake, it kind of collapsed in and there was quite a bit of wind on it, so that lake is -- it was a strange color that time of year, even say it's choppy, it's still kind of hard to tell your height, maybe --
MR. NIXON: Yeah.
MR. HELINSKI: -- like the water color is the same as the land or something, it's a strange color, some weird illusion, so there was a lot of new stuff going on for her, the weather, the

wind, probably bigger waves than she's been in. She was doing fine following, she actually stretched out, ended up stretching out to where we were almost 180'd in the circuit.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Um-hum. Were you Number 2 again or would you be --

A. Yes, Number 2 again, yeah.

Q. Okay.

A. She was having trouble picking up water because that much wind, if you bump any power in, it flies off of it, so it was -- and it looked -- it wasn't that short, but it looked shorter than what she's used to seeing with the terrain and all this.

Q. Um-hum.

A. So she was getting on the water and going to scoop and putting some power in like she's used to and it was flying off and since it was -- didn't want to go back on with a perceived shorter run, she was just flying off and then we were basically following around, didn't get much water out of that, but she just tried a few times and then we came back, so --

Q. Okay. I mean, I know it's hard to tell, but was it a pretty strong wind?

A. Yeah, it was going pretty good.

Q. Yeah. Did you try to scoop just to get a feel for it or --

A. No.

Q. Okay, just watching her do it, basically.

A. Yeah, I mean, it was --

Q. Okay.
A. It was good exposure.
MR. NIXON: Yeah. I just got a couple more questions, I'm almost done but then we'll open it to the group, but we're at a good breaking point, too, it's been one hour and we all had coffee, so let's take a quick break for about five and then we'll finish up.
MR. HELINSKI: Okay.
MR. NIXON: Okay, thank you.
(Off the record.)
(On the record.)
MR. NIXON: Okay, welcome back from the break. I'll finish up real quick.
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. I think we were just kind of covering, finishing up the accident pilot, [redacted]s training. I think we were at company training, if I remember right, so you recreated the second one you flew with her, I think there was weather involved.
A. That was the --
Q. Anything else?
A. Yeah, that was the third flight --
Q. Third flight.
A. -- that was the last one I flew with her.
Q. Okay. Did you fly, was that after Jacob left or was it before, your last flight with her --

A. That was --
Q. -- do you remember?
A. -- before.
Q. Before, okay.
A. Yeah.
Q. And then -- so that was the last flight with her in company training you had?
A. No. With me, yeah.
Q. Yeah, okay. Was there --
A. Jacob flew --
Q. Was there any discussions you were involved in afterwards even though you didn't fly with her, about, you know, her status or progression, whatever you want to call it, in company training?
A. Yeah, she was, you know, a little -- progressing a little slower than the rest, I guess, on that one, but I think she was just maybe a little overwhelmed, you know, it's a lot. It's a lot of fire hose stuff going on --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- and Jacob worked with her a little bit after that and he is kind of overwhelming, very fast. I don't think he was doing any favors with the rate, she needed more of a relaxed -- maybe, my thought process, but -- yeah, we talked to her and made sure she recognized what we were recognizing, right, and she did. Told her she was over-thinking and she agreed with that, tried to tell her, you know, if you make a mistake, put it behind you and that

seemed to help her, then we put her in the air attack airplane so she could just ride and see and observe and hear, and she said that was very helpful, so --

Q. Okay. When Jacob was here, do you remember any discussions afterwards that he brought up about any potential issue she was having that all the instructors talked about in your, you know, formal meeting-type thing? Because I'm sure, you know, once she -- you know, she was, I wouldn't say having difficulties but, you know, there's some challenges you guys would definitely, after each flight, when a guy had to go, you know, I'm sure that all the instructors were talking about it, but what do you remember from after your last flight with her later on as she flew, what do you remember the discussions being?

A. He said he pulled her out of a flight.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Don't really have the whole details on that, just --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- going -- pretty fast talking, bouncing around, but -- so I don't know exactly why he pulled her away from that ride but it sounded like he took her to another spot on the lake and just started scooping by themselves instead of staying with the tactical flight.

Q. I see.

A. So I remember him saying that.

Q. Did he have any ideas about going forward on her training,

did he suggest any or recommend any type of, you know, specialized training for her from that point, to concentrate on these areas or anything, do you remember any discussions at that level?

A. No.

Q. Because he did the scooping, was there an issue with scooping or did he mention anything was a problem?

A. I can't remember what he said. He said she regressed a little bit and I can't -- I can't recall what it was, but then he said they went out and fixed it, so -- I don't know what it was, I can't remember what he said it was.

Q. Okay. And then were you involved or part of any of the -- you know, obviously there was a -- you know, Jacob is no longer with the company and there were some, you know, I don't know what you want to call it, heated discussion about, you know, possibly this accident pilot or anything, but were you involved in any of that or overheard any of that stuff that happened?

A. The -- say that again, kind of.

Q. With Jacob there were some conversations or discussions that happened, I guess, maybe his point of view wasn't taken or whatever it may be, were you in the background or involved in any of those discussions, whether it's the training committee, as instructors, or during any of the training for the accident pilot?

A. We're talking about a Jacob problem?

Q. Yes. Well, I wouldn't say problem, but I'm saying did you -- were you aware of, you know, any interplays with the other

instructors or about her training or differences of opinion? In his case, with Jacob. Going forward with her training, did he have something he suggested and it wasn't taken or --

A. Not that I know of, no.

Q. Okay. So when he came back, as far as you knew, everything -- he had problems, but he'd fix them, issues with --

A. Yeah, that's what he said.

Q. Okay. And then did you have any other -- you know, at some point, you know, she -- I think she got delayed in her carding, were you part of that, where she got delayed in her check ride as requirements or something?

A. Well, I had her six -- at company training, is that what you're talking about?

Q. No, afterwards when she was getting ready to go take a check.

A. No.

Q. Okay. And do you remember when you proposed putting the paperwork forward to do her check ride with OAS, was her -- all her stuff up to speed, requirements?

A. She was lacking mountain time.

Q. Okay. Had they waived that previously?

A. No.

Q. Okay. What do they usually waive on that? Or not waive but, you know, they let you do it and then --

A. Oh, oh.

Q. I'm not sure of the word I'm looking for, they let you

postpone until the requirements are met type thing, you know, on the --

A. It's just been seaplane time, I think.

Q. Seaplane. So mountain's never been waived, though, as far as you know?

A. No.

Q. Okay. And how -- what would the -- how close was she in the requirement?

A. Thirty hours, maybe, I think.

Q. Okay.

A. But she -- she had it --

Q. Um-hum.

A. -- just wasn't -- wasn't in the U.S.

Q. I see, it was in a foreign country, then.

A. Yeah.

Q. Okay. And that's what the point of contention was with the paperwork?

A. Um-hum.

Q. Okay. How did it finally get resolved, were you involved in that?

A. Uh-uh.

Q. Okay. And then after company training, did you have any -- did you fly with her any more after she -- you know, she went on and did some -- were you on any of the formations or anything with her --

A. No.
Q. -- after the fact or --
A. Uh-uh.
Q. -- up to the time? And then she flew some on the -- you know, she ended up getting carded and then flew a couple flights before the accident, you weren't involved in any of it, you weren't in any of those flights or anything?
A. No.
Q. Was there any discussions with the instructor corps or anything about her training or, you know, obviously she got carded, but any other discussions that were worth noting?
A. No.
Q. Okay, whether it's -- okay. And then were you down there when she was getting her check ride at Texas, at all?
A. No.
Q. Okay. Did you hear anything or was there any discussion about what happened up there with the paperwork and/or with anything?
(No audible response.)
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. Or did you get feedback that she had to -- she didn't -- you know, she had to be delayed on her check ride because of that paperwork, how did you --
A. Right in Texas.
Q. Texas, okay.

A. Yeah.
Q. And then, you know, you've flown with her, I heard some of your comments before, but as far as piloting skills, give me some words to rate her, how would you rate her overall on flying skills?
A. Are we talking compared to all of the students that I've ever taught or --
Q. I'd like you to compare -- I know it's tough to do, but compare it to someone with her similar background, a lot of hours but not in a tactical formation, you know, arena. So, you know, someone that's, you know, experienced but not in, you know, some of the tactical or formation flying.
A. Probably about right in the middle.
Q. Right in the middle, okay.
A. Oh, yeah.
Q. And since the accident, has there been any change in training since that time in your training, how you go about business?
A. No, we haven't trained any since.
Q. Okay. Is there any plan changes or anything, you're aware?
A. Not yet, no.
Q. Okay. Anything else in your training I didn't ask that you want to make sure you let us know, any other issues, whether in your training or meetings or anything to do with her training that we need to be aware?
A. Not that I can think of.

Q. And then since you've been in your position has there been anyone that got eliminated from initial training or company training that was a new hire pilot?
A. Since '18, when I started, we've washed out two.
Q. In a general sense, what was -- in each case, what was the reason?
A. The first one, he -- he came -- I don't want to say opinions or anything, but he was very unprepared, he was an airline guy. He owned a Bonanza or a Debonair or something that it didn't even seem like he'd done ant flying in that, so he -- his stick and rudder skills weren't --
Q. Weren't up to speed.
A. Weren't even close.
Q. Okay.
A. The second guy actually had good stick and rudder skills, but his instincts on the water were inconsistent, I guess, like he could fix -- if there were five things to fix, for example, and you go through and start fixing one, you fix two, you start fixing three, all of a sudden one and two are back falling apart and he just couldn't -- I wondered if he'd ever been on the water, he said he drove boats all the time, so I don't know, it was -- he could fly fine, everything else was fine, water, it's like the instincts weren't there. And both of these guys knew, like, when we talked to them and said they're really not progressing like they should, they already knew that --

Q. Okay. And getting back to the -- [redacted]'s progress, obviously she had a few challenges, but she wasn't in that same category, obviously, correct?
A. No.
Q. And the feedback she got, I'm assuming it's not in the same category, either, right, just you need to improve here, but --
A. Yeah.
Q. Is that correct?
A. Yeah, it was not anything --
Q. Nothing like that.
(Cross-talk.)
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. So like keep working on this or whatever.
A. Um-hum.
Q. How did she take the feedback, by the way, when you did debrief her to challenges?
A. Good.
Q. Good.
A. Yeah. She was ready to move forward.
Q. Okay. So you felt -- you know, I know you didn't fly with her the whole time, but when you flew the company training, you expected her to be carded and had no issues or never was, right, even though she wasn't there yet, when you were --
A. Correct.
Q. She was progressing and --

A. Yeah, she was progressing at a good rate.
Q. Okay. So you expected her to be carded and go to check ride, you know, at some point in the future.
A. Yeah.
Q. You didn't see any chronic issues or anything?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. Okay. Anything else you'd like to add about the accident pilot?
A. No, not that I can think of.
MR. NIXON: Okay. I think, as I told you earlier, I only had a few more questions so I'm going to open it up to the rest and then I'll come around, I might have some follow-up and then we'll close out with you.
MR. HELINSKI: Okay.
MR. NIXON: So we're almost there, so with that, I'll let Mike take it from the U.S. Forest Service.
BY MR. SAVAGE:
Q. Okay. Albert asked a lot of questions and so I don't have very many, but who decides who gets sponsored to go to NAFA or how do you guys go about that? Is it just an automatic thing, how your initials go every year, do you guys get spots for that or how does that work with you guys? Or do you know that before you're going to hire them, like oh, we're thinking about hiring them but we got a class, we need to get them to NAFA first so we can --
A. Well, those definitely are going to have to go, some -- some

prospectives go sometimes, I mean, they all come through.
Q. So before they can -- so you guys probably hire, what, in the fall before that happened so you know who you're going to have in training and stuff?
A. Well, the NAFA window closes October 30th, I think.
Q. Okay.
A. They'll still let us get some in sometimes after, we'll hold new hire slots --
Q. Right.
A. -- because some of these prospectives come from -- do you know what NAAA is? Some of them come from NAAA and NAAA is the first week of December, so --
Q. Okay. So did all four, for the class of 2024, go to NAFA?
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay, awesome. And then do you guys kind of, as a group of instructors, decide who's ready to solo or is that --
A. Yeah.
Q. Okay. So some, you guys discuss.
A. Yeah. And we've all flown with them at that point --
Q. Right.
A. -- definitely.
Q. That's what it sounded like, okay. And can you kind of give me some specific standards that you guys use to determine, you know, when a pilot is -- completes the initial and then company training, like do you guys have set standards or is there anything

as an instructor you use specifically to decide that or this person's good to go or --

A. I don't know of any set standards besides what the OAS check ride is, but we're looking for consistency.

Q. Well, so the OAS check ride kind of looks at your paperwork, right?

A. Drop height --

Q. The 69A and -- yeah. And the paperwork and then they -- it sounds like you do an oral, some --

A. Um-hum.

Q. -- open discussion forum. And then they look at the drop height and what else?

A. Accuracy, accuracy.

Q. Okay.

A. They're looking for E-dump, split loads --

Q. Okay.

A. -- full salvo drops. They're looking for controllable -- going on, coming off the water and during the scoop because we're scooping right in front of them and then dropping right in front of them, too, or --

Q. Okay. What about fire operations? More specifically, operation in the FTA. The 12-mile call, the seven-mile call, that --

A. Oh, yeah. Yeah, they're looking for those, too.

Q. Okay --

A. Yeah.
Q. -- so do you guys actually do all those --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- calls and you go out to 12 and call --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- and then you don't get a response and then if you don't get a response at seven do you guys -- tell me about what would you do then.
A. You're probably not going to get a response at seven with a line of sight radio, so it's more of a simulated --
Q. Okay.
A. -- call, but they're making sure that all the calls are happening correctly, you know what I mean?
Q. Sure.
A. Handheld.
Q. So what do you guys teach if there is no -- you don't get clearance, what do you do, what do you --
A. You don't come in.
Q. -- guys teach? How do you not come in, how do you do that?
A. At the seven-mile ring is what you're --
Q. Yeah, you still haven't heard anything by seven.
A. Turn around.
Q. How? I mean seriously, like do a left-hand turn, a right-hand --
A. Oh.

Q. -- the orbit, do you fly around the whole FTA, how do you do that? What do you guys teach?
A. It depends on the circumstance.
Q. Okay. How do you -- how do you guys determine if a pilot's ready for fire operations, specifically? Because I know there's a lot more to it than just the scooping and the dropping.
A. I mean, once you've passed your check ride, you're -- you've met the requirements. But other than that, basically talk about it within each other, but they've already -- it would be beyond at that point or whatever. Does that make sense?
Q. Yeah. Did [redacted] exhibit any specific signs of difficulty during the initial training phase with you, like anything that you were concerned about, like -- well, anything?
A. Not super concerned, no, it's like I said, there's a language barrier a little bit, I think, because she -- talking to the tower a little bit was a -- she had a little bit of problems talking to tower, but hard to -- hard to say what her -- she talked so well having a conversation with her --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- that I don't know what kind of terminology would throw her or whatever, so -- besides that, no.
Q. Okay. Was it discussed by yourself and other instructors that [redacted] would need more extensive training or more specifically like any "we're going to need to do some of this extra" or that -- or anything of that nature, specifically?

A. I mean, yeah, just the ferrying --
Q. Okay.
A. -- would be helpful, so --
Q. And in your opinion, how would that be helpful?
A. Well, you're gaining familiarization with the airplane, so it's more natural. All the airplanes, I mean, just like any other airplane is going to be rigged a little bit differently and --
Q. Sure.
A. -- and you're -- and flying with somebody else across distances and just a general more comfortable -- you know, slow down and just enjoy the airplane.
Q. Okay. Had you done any of those flights with her, the ferrying, or in the same formation?
A. I'd been in the formation with her, in the backseat. No ferrying, though.
Q. Oh, okay. Yeah, that's what I meant, like in the same flight, not in the same airplane during the ferrying, you didn't do any ferry flights with her or anything?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. Okay. Have you flown any fires with her, have you been on a fire with her --
A. No.
Q. -- at the same time?
A. Uh-uh.
Q. Okay. And can you just, one more time, hit why she was last

to solo, what -- specifically, what was it?
A. She came in last, for one, so the other couple -- well, one guy was 802 experienced, there was a couple -- there was actually a couple guys there were 802 experienced, one had a lot and then the other two already had -- actually, three of them did, but the -- we must've had -- she was the last one to show up so we had already knocked out a day and a half or whatever with more experienced people, so yeah, that was all that was.
Q. And what is the solo, what does that entail when you're like okay, you're blessed to solo, what do you do?
A. What's that ride like?
Q. Yeah.
A. It's obviously going to be ideal conditions or, you know, consistent conditions, I should say, we'll go out with them and have them do a few, three, four, five, get their circuit set up with them. Like I said, the -- everything looks good, they know where they're going, come back to the airport, we'll jump out and have them go do, you know, like two or three, it's just a confidence builder, that first one.
MR. SAVAGE: Okay. I think I'm done.
MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks. We'll have a final round, too, so if you think of any -- we'll go next with Lea with the U.S. Forest Service safety.
BY MS. WEINKAUF:
Q. I just have a couple questions. So you said Jacob said he

had pulled her --
A. Yeah.
Q. -- from a flight and took her to scoop by herself, why did he say he pulled her from the flight?
A. I'm not sure, I don't know that.
Q. Okay. Something I haven't heard is how -- and you may not know, do you know how long she had been in the United States?
A. Five years, I think.
Q. Okay. And do you know if she had been flying in the United States that whole time?
A. She had -- no, what -- the whole time she's been in the United States? I know she was spraying, flying ag. I don't know beyond that what flying she would've done.
Q. Okay. But she had been flying in the United States for a while?
A. Um-hum.
Q. Okay. I think the last question I have is during that flight with the bad weather --
A. Um-hum.
Q. -- what was her reaction when she wasn't able to scoop, when she wasn't getting water?
A. You know, that's a good question. I mean, she didn't quite know what to do. No, she -- well, I can't say she didn't know what to do, she followed the airplane in front of her around, just like she should have, she just didn't know how to get water --

Q. Um-hum.
A. -- on, right, because it was way beyond what she had seen as far as all the factors, there was all kinds of different stuff going on and it was changing, too, so the guy in front of her, I think, was a lot more -- oh, he was a lot more experienced, so he was grabbing a load, no problem --
Q. Um-hum.
A. -- so that's the first time she's seen that and I just told her it's fine, you know, just -- you can try again, if you're not comfortable, we don't have to try again. She tried and she did fine with it, when it was coming off the water, she put power and then go.
Q. Okay. So how did she communicate that to you when she was not getting the water?
A. She didn't have to, we were already gone.
Q. So she didn't say anything to you about it, you just saw it happen.
A. I don't know what she said.
Q. Okay. That's okay.
A. Yeah, she just flew away --
Q. Okay.
A. -- just like you're supposed to.
MS. WEINKAUF: I think that's all I have.
MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks. Jesse, from the company there, any questions for your assistant?

BY MR. WEAVER:

Q. No, but I -- I just -- at any -- I mean, we've already talked about some of her struggles in training, language barrier, you know. In your mind, did she have the potential to become very good at this?

A. Yes, definitely.

Q. I don't really have any more questions, I'm -- I'm good. I guess, to get back, let me see. The standards for solo, for you, what's a -- what's a trigger point where you start thinking, you know, this person's getting close, this person is -- will be ready to solo here after the next few lessons, what gives you that --

A. Oh, to myself, which -- you know, text and drive, but if I thought I could take a video of them scooping, they're definitely ready.

MR. WEAVER: Well, okay, that's fair. Like for me, if I don't have to touch anything for a couple rides, I'm pretty sure they're ready to go, so okay, I'm good.

MR. NIXON: Okay, thanks.

Kevin, anything to add for the service over there?

MR. MERRILL: Just one kind of follow-up.

BY MR. MERRILL:

Q. You said earlier that she had to be -- you had to slow-step it with her or take baby steps.

A. Um-hum.

Q. In all of the students that you've instructed since you came

on in '18, how does she rate within that spectrum?
A. Probably somewhere in the middle.
Q. Okay.
MR. SAVAGE: Can I add something? Compared to the class of 2020.
MR. HELINSKI: Higher than average or higher -- higher than middle, probably.
MR. SAVAGE: Okay.
MR. HELINSKI: That was our --
BY MR. MERRILL:
Q. Why was it --
A. That class?
Q. Yeah.
A. Oh. It was a lot of weird rudder and just -- you know, it was an entertaining crew, it was --
Q. Were there more students or just more challenging?
A. There was five, I think, or six. A couple of the guys had come from like the Middle East flying Dash 8s and stuff and they had sprayed but it had been earlier, so getting their -- you know, getting their feet back under them and all, it's just a different kind of challenge, but her stick and rudder skills were much better than a few of those guys.
MR. MERRILL: Thanks, that's all I got.
MR. NIXON: That's all you got? Okay, final round.
Anything, final round, Jesse?

MR. WEAVER: No, I think I would like to kind of add to one of your questions, though, if it's all right.

MR. NIXON: Go ahead.

MR. WEAVER: And that was -- you asked if they had all been -- all the students had been to NAFA and it -- I can't even hire them if they haven't been, so --

MR. SAVAGE: Oh, I didn't know that.

MR. WEAVER: Yeah.

MR. SAVAGE: Thank you. That helps.

MR. WEAVER: Okay.

MR. SAVAGE: Appreciate that.

MR. NIXON: Okay. Anything else, Jesse? Okay.

MR. WEAVER: Yeah, I guess I just have one last question.

BY MR. WEAVER:

Q. Typically, how does the instructor cadre communicate issues, like, you know, when Jacob was having an issue, was he communicating with you other instructors or when you're having issues with somebody, would you typically communicate or do you guys use like a grade sheet to do that or do you guys have a verbal "hey, you know, I'm having some problems with this, just so you know this is what we're working on," I mean, how do you -- how do you do -- I don't understand how.

A. Verbal. We'll all chat amongst each other and --

Q. But you never knew specifically what her issues were with Jacob, he didn't share that?

A. That was at company training and he was going a million miles a minute, so --
Q. Just with everything else going on or just --
A. Yeah, like.
Q. -- that's just his personality or --
A. No, it was with everything else going on, like, he was going immediately to the next flight, to this, to that, to -- you know.
Q. Okay. So he wasn't necessarily pinging, he wasn't -- it was just that he was really busy?
A. Yes.
Q. Okay. So there wasn't really that time to --
A. Correct.
MR. WEAVER: Okay. That's it, thank you.
MR. NIXON: Okay. Lea, final round, anything?
MS. WEINKAUF: Nothing to add.
MR. NIXON: And Kevin?
MR. MERRILL: Nothing further.
MR. NIXON: Okay.
BY MR. NIXON:
Q. And for me, my question is similar to what Mike was asking, it's the same thing versus Jacob on the feedback, kind of similar, but that being said, was anything mentioned at company training, an instructor verbal like you talked about, that -- that he flagged, whether it was tactical or formation training with [redacted]s training, that she needs some or was challenging or

anything, was there anything mentioned verbally, directly, you know, what area?

MR. WEAVER: Can you elaborate a little bit or --

MR. NIXON: Let me get his first, then we'll get --

MR. WEAVER: Okay.

MR. HELINSKI: I mean, just kind of what Jake said, but that wasn't -- I never got -- I don't think I ever got the full elaboration on what he like -- when he, you know, pulled her off --

MR. NIXON: Um-hum.

MR. HELINSKI: -- I don't know exactly what happened there.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Yeah, I got that part but he never gave, either before or after that, you know, I'm not just talking about the flight, but the whole company training, he never gave any feedback whatsoever in instructor, you know, meetings or when you were there to discuss any issues or challenges there?

A. Not anything that's -- that I can stick my finger on, I guess.

MR. NIXON: Okay. All right, go ahead, Jesse.

BY MR. WEAVER:

Q. I was going to say do you remember when he came back from that particular flight and had troubles, we had all agreed, we had all -- you, me, and him and -- or I guess it seemed that she was a little behind, I think -- did we agree at that point that she

wasn't being pulled out of training but that we might take a different course?

A. Yeah.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. Do you remember anything, based on what Jesse said now, anything else come to light from that discussion?

A. That one happened quick, so -- he said, I think she -- like I said, I think she was overwhelmed or something and he decided to cut the flight and came back, I was standing there, he was on the phone and then, like he hadn't even debriefed her yet, so he didn't really -- he didn't really debrief me, he said she's struggling, you know, we should sit down and talk to her or whatever and he was like, "Want to do it right now?" I'm like yeah, you know, and he got off the phone and we walked in there and talked to her and, you know, told her that, do you recognize that you're having a little bit of troubles or whatever and she said yes and that went into that one conversation.

Q. Did he give any specifics that you remember to her?

A. Uh-uh.

Q. He didn't. And then did he have anything -- you know, you were there, was anyone else there instructor-wise, just you and him, Jacob?

A. And Jess.

Q. Okay. Was there anything talked about moving forward from that point, what the plan was or anything? Like she needs a

couple more rides or whatever the case may be, I'm just speculating here. You don't remember what the discussion was to go forward or anything like that?

A. Yeah, he wanted to work with her individually, so --

Q. Um-hum, okay. Was there ever discussion of, like you talked about earlier, that she was in the category where, you know, like we talked about the earlier trips, this was more we just need to fix the challenges and get her to check ride, you know, there was -- I mean, there was a few challenges there, but it wasn't something overwhelming, you know.

A. Correct.

Q. Okay. Is that pretty much the gist, though, for the whole time --

A. Yeah.

MR. NIXON: Okay. That's the only -- I think that ends our questioning, so before we let you close out, Dan, do you have anything to add? Okay.

MR. CARROLL: Nothing to add.

MR. NIXON: Thank you.

BY MR. NIXON:

Q. And then first of all, let me thank you, I know it's a busy time and, you know, appreciate you being here in person, I'm glad you made it and I appreciate, you know, your time to give us, you know, what you thought of things. Is there anything before I let -- turn it over to you, is there anything you think I should have

asked you or you were expecting me to ask you that you want to make sure I know about or my team?

A. Not that I can think of.

Q. Okay. And finally, we'll close out with, you know, I already thanked you, but any questions for my team?

A. No.

MR. NIXON: Okay, great. Well, that concludes our briefing. Once again, thank everyone for their time and expertise at the interview.

(Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:	FATAL AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT NEAR HELENA, MONTANA ON JULY 10, 2024 Interview of Rhys Wilson
ACCIDENT NO.:	WPR24FA238
PLACE:	Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
DATE:	September 2024

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.



Karen D. Martini
Transcriber