Factual Report – Attachment 4

Summary of an interview performed with the Kenai Flight Service Station specialist who provided preflight weather briefings to the accident pilot on the accident day

METEOROLOGY

ANC17FA049

Interviewee: Meleade Wasson
Representative: Mark Tomicich, Attorney for the FAA

Date / Time: December 7, 2017 / 1400 eastern standard time (EST)
Location: Telephone
Present: Mike Hodges, NTSB; Brian Soper, NTSB; Jennifer Stark, NWS (on detail with NTSB); Justin Evans, FAA
Investigator: Mike Richards

During the interview Ms. Wasson stated the following:

Her air traffic control experience began in the United States Navy where she served as an air traffic controller from February of 1990 until December of 1994 when she was discharged. Between 1998 and 1999 she was in training as a control tower operator with the FAA. From 2000 until 2005 she worked as a flight service specialist in San Diego, CA. From 2005 until 2007 she worked at Lake Charles Approach Control as a certified professional controller. She then worked outside of aviation from 2007 until August of 2016 when she was hired by the FAA as a flight service specialist and began working at Kenai Flight Service Station (FSS).

She was the preflight (PF) sector flight service specialist that had provided services to the accident pilot on the day of the accident. She was certified on PF sometime around February of 2017 and stated that she was current and proficient in accordance with facility standards on the day of the accident. She stated that she had no previous record of suspensions or operational incidents at Kenai FSS. She held no collateral duties, and had not been on any recent details. She recalled nothing remarkable about the 72 hours leading up to the day of the accident, recalling only routine daily activities, sleep, and meals.

Her operating initials were MW and her supervisor of record was Dana Phillips on the day of the accident. She possessed a second-class medical certificate and her last ATC physical had been conducted in October of 2016. She was required to either wear or have in her possession (was not sure which) corrective lenses while performing air traffic control duties. She could not recall if she was wearing them on the day of the accident, but stated that she generally wore them. She was not prescribed any maintenance medications, and had not taken any over-the-counter medications on the day of the accident. She could not recall what other waivers or restrictions she may have had to her medical certificate. She held no other current aeronautical ratings or certificates.

On the day of the accident, she was working her normally scheduled shift and according to information provided to her on the day before this interview, the general weather conditions in the area that the accident pilot had called about were MVFR. On the day before this interview she had been provided with an accident package that included the weather information from the day of the accident, as well as a transcript of the conversations she had with the accident pilot on the day of the accident. She stated that no training was being conducted on the PF sector during the time she had provided services to the accident pilot. On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the heaviest) she said that she would classify the traffic load as 2 on the day of the accident. On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being the most complex) she said that she could not recall exactly and did not recall anything unusual occurring around the time she had provided services to the accident pilot. A position relief briefing

was not conducted when she began working the PF position on the day of the accident because she was "opening" the position, and not actually relieving anyone. She did not learn there had been an accident until being informed by the Operations Manager (OM) on the day following the accident, and subsequently submitted to toxicology testing. She did file an ATSAP report as a result of this accident, and she indicated that the report had been accepted by the ERC.

When she provided weather briefings, she would basically summarize the weather information and "paint a picture" of the weather for the pilot. She tried to provide as much information as she had available and would file a flight plan if needed. She kept up with TWEBs, flight data, airport information, and NOTAMs and would provide the pilots with the particular information they asked for. When asked, she stated that the average number of briefings they provided depended on the time of year and that they conducted 30 to 40 times more briefings in the summer than in the winter. Time of day was also a factor in the average number of briefings provided. She guessed that during a normal summer shift she might provide between 15 and 20 briefings, depending on the length of the call and information being requested.

To determine the type of briefing she would provide to a pilot, she relied primarily on the pilot to state the type they requested, and if the pilot did not know she would just ask the pilot if they wanted a standard briefing. When asked about what sources of information she used when providing weather briefings to pilots, she said that the OASIS system provided her all the weather information that she needed, and added that pilot weather reports (PIREPs) could also be filed through OASIS. She liked the OASIS system, though said it did have some kinks. For instance, sometimes various weather products were delayed or repeated, and in those cases required her to call NWS and ask for products to be resent. Volcanic ash products specifically, were not plotted correctly in OASIS. When there were problems with OASIS, they would contact the Harris OASIS Support Desk for assistance. She had not experienced this too much at Kenai FSS.

She received her initial Flight Service Specialist training at the FAA academy in Oklahoma City, OK in 2000. At that time, the system she was trained to use in briefing pilots was known as "Model 1", and she did not receive training on the use of OASIS until reporting to Kenai FSS in 2016. She had also been required to receive additional unspecified training as a result of this accident. With regards to training in general at Kenai FSS, she said that the facility did conduct training on new procedures when applicable, as well as, required recurrent and refresher training. Proficiency checks are conducted through "direct monitoring", where another specialist will monitor a specialist on position for an unspecified length of time, and provide feedback later on how they did, and areas of suggested improvement. The also conduct "simulated" type training, where another specialist would act as a "ghost pilot", calling into flight service and requesting a briefing. She indicated that this may happen during initial training for certification or as a means of proficiency training, it depended on the supervisor. She did not recall whether anybody from outside FSS (i.e., pilots or weather specialists) had conducted training to the flight service specialists at Kenai FSS. For as long as she had been there, Kenai FSS had been operating with short staffing, and she believed this to be the same throughout Alaska FSS. She had heard that the FAA was always trying to hire people for Alaska.

There was a checklist that a specialist could use when conducting the various pilot weather briefings, and it was available at some of the positions at Kenai FSS, but it was missing from some.

The checklist was based on FAA Order JO 7110.10 requirements, and was recommended for use by all specialists. Sometimes pilots were clear on exactly what they were looking for in their briefings, but if a pilot was not sure, she would try to find out what exactly they wanted. Using OASIS, once a route of flight has been entered and the flight path mapped, she could ask the pilot for any additional information requested and she could pull up that particular area. In her experience, she tried to use the latitude and longitude provided by the pilot when they called to get the most accurate location and provide the weather information closest to that area. In OASIS, there were selectable "tabs" that would allow her to select different areas as needed. There was no "set" way to obtain data through OASIS, and different specialists had different ways of obtaining the needed information. When she provided a pilot weather briefing, she said that route of flight, current weather, forecasted weather, winds, NOTAMs, METARs, TAFs, AIRMETs, SIGMETs, and Area Forecasts were all considered.

Regarding her conversations with the accident pilot on the day of the accident, she said that the first call was very quick, that the pilot just wanted an outlook briefing and to know if it was VFR. While informing the accident pilot that it was VFR, and that she did not think it would stay that way, the call was disconnected. She thought it was a satellite phone. In the following calls with the accident pilot the calls kept disconnecting, and she also felt that the pilot was in a rush. Based on the repeated disconnections in this case, she did not feel she could say whether the briefing provided to the accident pilot was her "normal style." She could not recall everything about the calls, but said that she tried to summarize for the pilot all the information that was available to her at the time. She believed that the accident pilot understood that it did not look good for his prospective flight. To the best of her recollection, she did not feel the accident pilot was apprehensive, but could not say for sure. She repeated that she felt the pilot understood the information she had provided, but could not testify to how the pilot felt. She informed the pilot of other passes that were not good, and that VFR flight was not recommended, specifically she remembered saying that about at least one of the passes but was not sure which one. She thought they were kind of "stepping on each other" during the calls, and felt he may have been in a hurry since he was worried about the phone cutting out.

She said they did not get in the habit of recommending to pilots, but she thought in this case that she had told the accident pilot that VFR was not recommended. She recalled giving the pilot everything she had available to her. One of the passes that the pilot asked about was not even depicted on some of the maps they had at Kenai FSS or in OASIS at that time, which is why she had asked the pilot for the latitude and longitude. She then provided the pilot with the information that was closest to his requested route of flight.

Specifically, regarding the third and final weather briefing she had provided to the accident pilot, she said that she did not file a PIREP from the pilot's report of "clear as can be" from his present location at Telaquana Pass. However she did solicit a PIREP, requesting that the pilot give a PIREP upon departure. She said that briefing the radar weather picture could be part of a normal weather briefing, and when asked why she had not briefed it in this case, she could not recall but guessed she was just basing her brief on specifically what the pilot was asking for. Regarding why she did not provide the Merrill Pass IFR ceilings, rain and mist, as well as the moderate turbulence under 6,000 feet that was available in the current Area Forecast, she could not see all of that data and could not remember specifically when she informed him that VFR was not recommended.

At Kenai FSS, specialists normally rotated the positions they worked regularly, and as per union agreement, tried to take a 15-minute break for every two hours on position. Kenai FSS was a 24-hour facility, and there were four supervisors including herself, and she had just been promoted to supervisor in September of 2017.

They would generally only reach out to NWS personnel outside the facility when they were having problem with products or needed them resent.

Interview concluded at 1615 EST.

Submitted by: Mike Richards
NTSB, AS-30