

ERA12MA122

Human Performance Factual Report

Attachment 1

Interview Summary - Pilot's Next of Kin

(4 pages)

Interview: **Wife of E. Hoke Smith**
Date: **January 7, 2012**
Time: **1200 EST**
Location: **SK Jets Headquarters, St Augustine, Florida**
Representative: **Michael B. Ely, Hassell, Moorhead & Carroll**
Interviewer: **William Bramble, NTSB**

The pilot's wife stated the following information:

She was retired. She was not a pilot. She had been married to the pilot for 50 years and they were living together at the time of the accident. They had one adult child who did not live with them. They had one grandchild, age 13, who lived with them three days per week.

The pilot had been flying all his life. He had learned to fly light aircraft at age 16 and then joined the U.S. Army, where he received additional flight training. He had been stationed at Ft. Rucker, Ft. Knox, and Ft. Bragg, and completed one and a half tours of duty in Vietnam where he earned a bronze star, purple heart, and distinguished flying cross with three oak leaf clusters. After he left the army, Mr. Smith continued to fly for pleasure. He earned an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago and he and his wife started an overnight delivery trucking company. He owned a Mitsubishi MU-2 with one of his business partners and they used it to visit company facilities.

The Smiths sold the trucking company in 1996. Mr. Smith had planned to retire, but he was too energetic. He bought a helicopter. He was friends with a couple of physicians at the Mayo Clinic, and they told him they were having trouble transporting organs. He told them he could get a bigger helicopter and provide organ transport, so they agreed to form a business relationship. Mr. Smith formed SK Logistics in 1997. At first it was just Mr. Smith and one other pilot, and it took a while to get the business going. Mr. Smith did not hold any other form of employment outside of SK Logistics at the time of the accident.

Mr. Smith had several close friends, some of whom were former neighbors or members of his church. He got along well with his colleagues. In fact, he got along well with everybody. His wife had received 800 condolence cards after the accident, and some had come from young people who said he had influenced their decision to become a pilot.

Mr. Smith had flown former Governor Mitt Romney around during his campaign for the 2008 presidential election and he had received a medal from Mr. Romney recognizing him for his assistance. Mr. Romney would always ask for Mr. Smith as his pilot. Some doctors at the Mayo Clinic also preferred to fly only with Mr. Smith.

The pilot's wife said that her husband had not received any disciplinary action for his performance in aviation and he had not been involved in any prior aviation incidents or accidents. She also said he had not been involved in any recent safety-related incidents or accidents outside of aviation. In 2009, however, his femur was fractured when he was struck by a car while walking in a parking lot. She said that that accident had not been his fault. His recovery from that injury had lasted about four months.

She stated that her husband had never discussed any specific abnormal or emergency situations that he might have encountered in aviation.

In the last 12 months, there had been no significant changes in Mr. Smith's finances, personal life, or health.

Mr. Smith normally woke about 0630 every day and went to sleep around 2330 or 2400, whether it was a workday or not. He had been a six-hour-a-night sleeper for at least fifty years. He felt well-rested on six hours of sleep. He was a very energetic 68-year-old man. He was not really a morning or an evening person. If he was awake, he was ready to go. He did not have difficulty falling asleep at night or remaining awake during the day.

Mr. Smith normally ate breakfast at 0730, after he showered. If he had to be in the office early, he would grab a nutrition drink and some coffee. If he had time, he would eat a bagel with peanut butter. He normally ate lunch at the office. He typically ate dinner around 1830 or 1900, but the timing of his evening meal varied.

His leisure activities included going for long walks and bike rides with his dog, playing tennis with his granddaughter, and spending time with his wife. He attended mass regularly and met with family for breakfast every Sunday.

Mr. Smith enjoyed working, particularly flying. He went to the office every day unless he was on a trip. He did not have a regular start time at the office. It depended on the flying and whether he was on call or not. His days off also depended on whether he was on call. His recent schedule had been no different than usual.

The pilot's wife described her husband's activities in the 72 hours before the accident. Asked about the quality of the sleep that Mr. Smith had received in the days before the accident, she said it was normal and he was in good spirits.

On Friday, December 23, 2011, Mr. Smith woke about 0630. He went in to the office about 0700-0730. The pilot's wife did not remember anything unusual about that morning. The pilot had come home early because it was their 50th wedding anniversary. They ran an errand and went to a nearby resort, arriving about 1500. They ate a late lunch. They had a quiet evening at the resort, ate dinner, and stayed the night. The pilot's wife estimated that Mr. Smith might have fallen asleep around 2330, but she was not sure. She recalled that they fell asleep watching reruns of a television show. (A check of the schedule for that channel indicated that last episode of that show ended at 2300 that evening.)

On Saturday, December 24, 2011, Mr. Smith woke and got out of bed at 0630. His wife encouraged him to rest more because it was a holiday, so he got back in bed and slept some more (perhaps an additional hour or more). He ate breakfast at the resort with his wife. After that, they went to a cellular telephone store where Mr. Smith purchased a new smart phone. They returned home and then visited the residence of a relative where they ate lunch. They returned home again about 1620, bringing their granddaughter with them. Mr. Smith engaged in routine activities and

took a nap. She was not sure exactly when he napped but she thought it might have been between 1800 and 1900. The Smiths left the house at 2230 and attended midnight services at their church.

On Sunday, December 25, 2011, the Smiths returned home from church about 0115. The pilot's wife was not certain when Mr. Smith went to sleep, but she thought it might have been an hour or so later, around 0215. They woke about 0800 and celebrated Christmas morning. Mr. Smith went for a bike ride with his dog in the early afternoon and said that he might stop by the office, but he was not gone very long. He returned and ate lunch about 1330. Mr. Smith told his wife he was going to take a nap in case he had to fly that night because an SK helicopter pilot named Aaron was not going to be available. He lay down for a while, beginning about 1600. She was not sure how long he napped, perhaps an hour to an hour and a half. After his nap, Mr. Smith got up and engaged in routine activities around the house. He ate dinner and went to sleep between 2230 and 2300.

On Monday, December 26, 2011, Mr. Smith received a call notifying him about the accident trip. The pilot's wife was not sure when the call came in, but estimated that it might have been between 0200 and 0300. She vaguely recalled Mr. Smith saying something about an operating room at five o'clock, okay, he would check the weather, Aaron could not fly that night but he could, and it would be no problem. She said it was not unusual for him to receive this sort of call. It had been happening for the last 15 years. She thought Mr. Smith probably left the house within 30 minutes to an hour of the time he needed to take off.

The pilot's wife described her husband's health and fitness. He was very physically fit and in excellent health. He wore eyeglasses with trifocal lenses. He did not have a history of chronic medical conditions. He had had high blood pressure since he was 30, but he was on medication for it and it was under control. He had not experienced any recent illnesses. There was no history of serious medical conditions resulting in sudden death among his close relatives. He did not snore or exhibit any signs of sleep disorders. He visited a flight surgeon regularly and had been seeing a personal physician for 30 years.

Mr. Smith was taking three prescription medications to control his blood pressure, one of which was Atenolol. The pilot's wife said that her husband did not take any medications, prescription or nonprescription, that might have affected his performance in the 72 hours before the incident. She said he rarely drank alcohol, and when he did it was perhaps a glass of wine with dinner. His most recent consumption of alcohol was a glass of champagne consumed on Friday evening, December 23, 2011. He did not use tobacco products.

The pilot's wife did not know who Mr. Smith's closest contacts were at the Mayo Clinic. She did not have anything to do with the business activities at SK Jets. She said Mr. Smith enjoyed working with Mayo Clinic. Specifically, he enjoyed interacting with the doctors and flying the trips. Asked what he enjoyed about running SK Jets, she said he enjoyed working. Asked whether he had recently complained of any problems at work, she said that running a business could be stressful at times, but Mr. Smith had not expressed any unusual complaints.

The pilot's wife was not sure if Mr. Smith maintained personal pilot logbooks. He did whatever the FAA required.

Asked whether she could provide any additional information that she had not been specifically asked about, the pilot's wife said that her husband would have prevented the crash if at all possible. She did not think he was tired. She believed something catastrophic must have occurred during the flight.

The interview concluded at approximately 1300 EST.