

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

August 14, 2006

Group Chairman's Factual Report

HUMAN PERFORMANCE

ADDENDUM

DCA06MA010

A. ACCIDENT

Operator: Flying Boat, Inc. dba Chalk's Ocean Airways
Location: Miami Seaplane Base (X44), Miami, Florida
Date: December 19, 2005
Time: 1439 eastern standard time¹ (est)
Airplane: Grumman Mallard G-3T, N2969

B. HUMAN PERFORMANCE SPECIALIST

Malcolm Brenner, Ph.D.
National Transportation Safety Board

Working with the Operations Group:

Kenneth L. Egge, Group Chairman
National Transportation Safety Board

Adalberto Munet
Federal Aviation Administration

Alex Larsen
Chalk's Ocean Airways

C. SUMMARY

On December 19, 2005, at 2:39 pm eastern standard time, a Grumman Mallard G73T, N2969, operated by Flying Boat Inc. as Chalk's Ocean Airways flight

¹ All times are Eastern Standard Time based on a 24-hour clock, unless otherwise noted. Actual time of accident is approximate.

101, crashed into a shipping channel adjacent to the Port of Miami shortly after takeoff. The aircraft, a seaplane, had departed from the Miami Seaplane Base (X44), and took off from the shipping channel with 2 crew and 18 passengers (including 3 infants). The scheduled flight was destined to Bimini, Bahamas, operating under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 121. The seaplane was retrofitted with Pratt & Whitney PT-6 turboprop engines. Witness and video recordings indicated a fire on the right wing and showed the wing separating prior to impacting the water. All 20 occupants suffered fatal injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident.

D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

This addendum contains a summary of an interview conducted with the Chalk's Ocean Airways ("Chalk's") Director of Operations.

Attachment 1 Interview Summary

Interview: Rajan (“Roger”) Nair, Chalk’s Ocean Airways

Date: August 3, 2006

Location: telephone interview

Time: 1530 edt

Investigation members present were: Malcolm Brenner, Ken Egge, and Alex Larsen.

During the interview, Captain Nair stated the following information:

He was hired by Chalk’s as a pilot in 1981. He has served as Director of Operations (DO) from August 2001 to the present, and as General Manager from February 2005 to the present.

The company was aware of the opinions expressed by Captain Washatka as described in his interview and letter in the earlier report.² The company responded seriously to Captain Washatka’s comments by systematically checking aircraft logbooks to confirm that all maintenance concerns mentioned in the letter had been addressed and fixed. Some of the items took months to fix but everything was addressed.

Captain Nair, who served as Director of Operations at the time that Captain Washatka resigned (and to whom the letter was addressed), was also an active pilot. He continued to fly the line and administer check rides while serving as DO.³ He personally conducted about 90% of acceptance flights following maintenance because he wanted to confirm that the airplanes were safe before he asked other pilots to fly them. He was personally satisfied that any issues in Captain Washatka’s letter had been resolved and that the airplanes were safe to fly.

Captain Nair described Captain Guidry as a good pilot who handled the in-flight loss of elevator control event very well. Captain Nair was sorry to see him leave the company.

² Attachments 4 and 5 of the Human Performance Group Chairman’s Factual Report of June 7, 2006. According to a Chalk’s representative, Captain Washatka’s letter was a submission to the company that he provided on his last day of employment rather than a resignation letter (as described in the NTSB report).

³ Captain Nair indicated that he had to involuntarily limit his flying after about August 2005 due to medical issues.

Captain Nair described Captain Weber favorably and noted that, after he handled an in-flight engine failure, he left the company on good terms. There had been some complaints from passenger service people that Captain Weber could over-emphasize his authority as captain, as by threatening to cancel a flight during a disagreement, suggesting a small area of improvement that Captain Weber would probably have shown as he matured in the captain role.

Captain Marks (the accident captain) was one of the nicest and most qualified pilots in the company. Captain Nair performed an operational experience (OE) check on Captain Marks and it was one of the best he had observed. She was comfortable in the airplane.

Captain Marks served as company Director of Safety for 4 or 5 months before the accident. In this position, she had responsibilities for all aspects of flight operations, ground operations, and maintenance. She attended monthly meetings and spoke in turn, but what she discussed was routine and nothing she raised, to Captain Nair's recall, concerned maintenance issues. Captain Nair also saw her in the building whenever she came to work so she had opportunities to pull him aside to express concerns. She raised concerns about underwater potholes on the ramp at Paradise Island, and even went diving on her personal time to examine these potholes. Captain Nair would have to check memos to review what other safety concerns were voiced by Captain Marks, but stated that she did not at all raise safety concerns about maintenance.

He also stated that each captain has the ultimate say as to whether to take an airplane or not. This is true regarding maintenance, loading, or whatever else. At Chalk's, the pilots run the airline. Pilots can park an airplane if there is a maintenance issue. Then the decision is made to either fix it right there or ferry it somewhere to have it fixed.

Fuel leaks, as raised by pilots, were always a company concern. Old Mallard airplanes always leak, and some fuel leaks had been around for 15 years. But these issues were always dealt with before a flight was released. Captain Nair first learned from Captain Washatka's letter of a possible event reported in which a rag was supposedly stuffed in the airplane fairing to stop a fuel leak. Captain Nair was unable to confirm such an event from other company employees, and noted that the event reported by Captain Washatka did not occur on his own flight but was based on what he had heard about someone else's flight. In general, Captain Nair was concerned that problems cited by Captain Washatka in his letter were not based on his personal experience. The company took Captain Washatka's letter very seriously. It looked into everything he complained about and corrected it.

Cracks, as raised by pilots, were a problem in the operation as this was a seaplane subject to cracking but every time a crack was written up, it was corrected, fixed.

Captain Nair did not agree that there was a general pilot concern with airplane maintenance before the accident. Only two pilots – Captains Weber and Washatka – left the company because of maintenance concerns and they were relatively low-time captains. By contrast, there were several captains with more than twenty years seniority (including himself) and they would provide a much more favorable picture of the company. He personally was a big fan of Chalk's. The company had an unblemished safety record for 86 years. He had taken his children and wife on the airplanes, and had flown two U.S. Presidents and other dignitaries and celebrities.