CHS Midair Collision
Moncks Corner, SC
July 7, 2015
ERA15MA259AB

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ATTACHMENT 1

CHS Controller Interview Summary

4 Pages

Interview:	Ms. Patricia Covert, Radar West Controller, CHS
Date/Time:	April 12, 2016, 0925 edt
Location:	CHS Air traffic control (ATC) facility, CHS, Charleston, South Carolina
Representative:	Ms. Nichole Vitale, labor relations attorney, NATCA
Present:	Katherine Wilson (NTSB), Daniel Bartlett (NTSB), James Estes (FAA), Jason Demagalski (FAA), Eric Stormfels (NATCA)

During the interview, Ms. Covert stated the following:

Prior to working at CHS, she worked at McGuire Air Force Base for a year and a half working C-141 and KC-10 aircraft and also FAA Oakland Center. She had been at CHS for 8 years. Her experience working fighter aircraft was only at CHS. She was qualified on all positions at CHS and was also a trainer.

When a conflict alert (CA) went off, she would determine if it was system sensitivity or equipment discrepancy. CA went off a lot, primarily due to climb rate issues, so in those cases she would know if she stopped an aircraft's climb or not to avoid a conflict. When making a decision of how to respond to a CA, she considered direction of the aircraft, altitude, speed, rate of decent, minimum decent altitude (MDA), whether aircraft had each other in sight, nearby airports and other traffic. She received CA training and it was constantly an issue as a trainer and controller.

It had "been awhile" since she became an on-the-job training instructor (OJTI). She thought almost all controllers became an OJTI and some were better than others.

New controllers were assigned a trainer who would sit with them during on the job training.

She received recurrent training in the classroom but she did not recall how often it occurred. She thought she received classroom training within the two months prior to the interview and recalled it included wake turbulence and fatigue. She was also observed annually during her birth month for her performance evaluation. She was not sure if any extra training would come from those observations but said feedback would be given if the observer saw something that could be done better or differently.

Learning to handle military traffic was done on the job. She received the same training to work at CHS as she did at Oakland – someone plugged in behind her and was there to answer any questions. There was a training form completed and a debrief at the end of the day.

The differences between working CHS versus Oakland was that at CHS they used knots for airspeed and at Oakland they used Mach because it was an enroute center. But traffic wise, it was still separating airplanes.

During training she learned about different categories of aircraft but it was not specific to the type of aircraft expected at CHS, it was just different types of aircraft and wake turbulence. Her

familiarity with the performance capabilities of the F-16 came from her experience working at CHS.

Even if a pilot reported having traffic on the TCAS, she would still want to have them acquire the other aircraft visually. She thought the ability to acquire another aircraft was based on the pilot and not how large the aircraft was; even large aircraft cannot be seen by some pilots. She was not familiar with the radar on board the F-16.

Fighter traffic was pretty frequent at CHS but she could not quantify it. Fighters would come out of the MOA and then go back to Shaw. The fighter traffic was usually from Shaw or McIntyre. She did not know where the traffic was from until they indicated where they were departing to.

Regarding high performance, evasive maneuvers performed by fighter aircraft, she said they were having them do more simulated flame outs (SFOs) for training. In these instances, the fighter would be cleared to climb up to 10,000 feet (to avoid having to coordinate with center) and then do a quick 360 degree decent just above the airport to a landing. The whole maneuver took about 20 seconds.

When deconflicting traffic, the heading to turn the aircraft to was determined based on traffic or turning the aircraft away from an airport; it depended on the situation.

When she used the term “immediately” her expectation was the same whether it was IFR or VFR traffic. The term was used more so in the tower than in radar control, mostly for departures. As a trainer, she would tell controllers that if the term was overused then pilots would not react to it. She mentioned that a Cessna aircraft could not put it on its side like a fighter could. He expectation was that “immediately” meant react now but with a fighter aircraft it also meant do a max performance turn to the heading.

She thought she issued traffic advisories daily but safety alerts were issued less often. The CA went off regularly due to a tour helicopter that flew in the local area when it was on final. There was no way to silence the CA and the volume was set by the tech personnel, not controllers.

No paperwork was required if the CA sounded. MORs (mandatory occurrence report) were completed by supervisors when something “pinged”.

She was involved in a near miss on a runway in 2009. The appropriate paperwork was completed. She received a cash award as a trainee for noticing a cement truck crossing a runway and telling the tower controller to send the aircraft around. She had not received any disciplinary actions.

She would not know if an aircraft was staying in the traffic pattern at Moncks Corner (MKS). There was no expectation of what the traffic pattern would look like. She was not aware of any joint training between CHS and MKS to inform pilots flying out of MKS about operating near CHS airspace.

She did not have to deconflict traffic coming out of MKS very often. There was a concern about MKS traffic because it was uncontrolled airspace and they never knew where the aircraft were going so CHS controllers would route their traffic wide or to the south to avoid overflying MKS.

The workload on the day of the accident was low. The normal configuration was to combine east and west. If workload got high, they could open up east and she could handoff to the supervisor on duty who was there monitoring as an extra set of eyes.

She did not recall any communication problems on the day of the accident.

She did not have a pilot's license but did some flying in high school.

She had no health issues at the time of the accident, and did not have any sleep issues nor had been diagnosed with a sleep disorder. She had no issues with her hearing. She had no side effects from medication she took daily for her thyroid and allergies, both which were reported on her FAA medical. She took a multivitamin and did not drink alcohol or smoke tobacco.

She had no significant changes, good or bad, to her health or financial situation in the 12 months prior to the accident. She got married in April 2015.

She was not drug or alcohol tested following the accident.

Following the accident, she was off duty for 45 days in accordance with the Office of Workers' Compensation Program (OWCP). She worked with a local counselor and sent the appropriate paperwork to the flight surgeon in Atlanta. When returning to duty, she was supervised over 4 days and recertified – 2 days in the control tower and 2 days in the radar room.

There had been no changes in written procedures at CHS since the accident. She began issuing more traffic advisories, when traffic was within 5 miles rather than 3 miles. She also observed general aviation (GA) airport traffic more and if there was traffic at a nearby GA airport, she would also keep CHS traffic a little higher.

She used the term "immediately" when doing a "squeeze play" like when someone was on short final and she cleared another aircraft for an "immediate departure." The phrase "without delay" would be used if the aircraft on approach was further out and she did not need the aircraft departing to "go."

She considered a maximum performance turn to be a harder turn than standard rate. When asked, she did not know the rate of a standard degree turn.

When she used the phrase "immediately," she expected more than "lollygagging."

When a pilot reported traffic on TCAS, she did not think that affected frequency congestion. She thought that meant the pilot had them on radar and was still visually looking for them.

She was asked about an observation that the CA speakers were covered up during the tour of the radar room. She was not aware that they were covered up until that day and had never heard the CA when the speakers were uncovered. She thought they were covered because it was loud.

Ms. Covert was asked about her cell phone number current at the time of the accident; she declined to answer.

Asked if there was any technologies that could have changed the outcome of the accident, she said she had not worked with the newer equipment so did not know what to expect.

She did not have anything else to add to the interview.