

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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AIR METHODS CORPORATION  
LIFENET HELICOPTER ACCIDENT  
AUGUST 26, 2011  
NEAR MOSBY, MISSOURI

Docket No.: CEN11FA599

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Interview of: LOWELL FERGUSON

Telephonic Interview via  
phone call to AirCom in  
Omaha, Nebraska

Wednesday,  
September 21, 2011

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: JIM SILLIMAN  
Accident Investigator

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. SILLIMAN: Okay. Both are operating.

Malcolm, do you want to start?

MR. BRENNER: Okay, sure.

INTERVIEW OF LOWELL FERGUSON

BY MR. BRENNER:

Q. Lowell, when did you start with the company?

A. About 4 years ago. I think I started -- it was February of '08.

Q. And when did you become shift supervisor?

A. That would have been about -- it would have been September of that year.

Q. And tell us about this event, your involvement.

A. I was the supervisor on duty, so I was made aware of the event, and then I initiated the PIP procedure for the event.

Q. What is the procedure here if something abnormal comes up? Can you describe it for me?

A. Like for this event?

Q. Yes, please.

A. Well, when I was notified of the incident, I would begin working it. Once we realized the scope of the incident, I began making my notifications. I'm required to notify the Operation Control Center. I'm required to notify the field operations manager. And then I -- actually, I would notify my direct supervisor, the communications operations manager. So apart from

1 helping to provide assistance and guidance on the desk of the  
2 incident, I made those notifications.

3 Q. And these notifications, would that occur once you've  
4 determined that there has been, you know, an accident or an  
5 incident? Is that correct?

6 A. No, sir. Once I determined that it was something of an  
7 abnormal event, I went ahead and I made calls direct just to  
8 advise them that we were working a situation that -- I think  
9 actually my first call to the OCC, when they kind of -- they asked  
10 me directly what was going on. I just advised that it was an  
11 overdue aircraft. And that was kind of the angle we were working  
12 on at that point. We were trying to figure out of the aircraft  
13 had perhaps landed at a different airport than what they directed  
14 they were going to land at. It may have been hung up. So, we  
15 were trying to trace down exactly what had happened.

16 But despite the fact that we didn't have a confirmed  
17 event at that moment, I was already making the notifications on  
18 that just to make sure that everybody was on the loop and if they  
19 needed -- the decisions they needed to make, that they could do  
20 that.

21 Q. When did you first learn about the aircraft and the  
22 possibility of something abnormal?

23 A. In relation to the -- do you mean in relation to the  
24 crash or in relation to when there was, I guess, when it began  
25 happening?

1 Q. When it began happening.

2 A. It was pretty early in my shift. It was during the  
3 shift change procedure. The off-going communications specialist  
4 gave me a phone call and kind of advised me of the event. And  
5 then, actually, following the phone call, we had a face-to-face  
6 conversation where he kind of reiterated some of the points.  
7 Following that, I believe I spoke with Justine, who was the  
8 oncoming communications specialist, in regard to the flight plan  
9 itself. So, I already had more than cursory knowledge of kind of  
10 what the situation was prior to the event. So when Justine  
11 advised me that they'd fallen off tracking, I was already aware of  
12 what was happening, and I think she made that notification within  
13 about 3 minutes of them falling off.

14 Q. When Korey advised you of the event, why did he advise  
15 you of it?

16 A. He told me that the aircraft had taken a flight, that  
17 they did not have the fuel that they previously advertised, and  
18 that, due to that, they would be forced to conduct refueling.

19 Q. Why was he advising you?

20 A. Why was he advising me? It's -- it was, well, it was,  
21 it was a-typical, I guess you could say. It was something where,  
22 you know, that it's more than just a regular inter-facility  
23 transport; it was a deviation from that. So he was giving me a  
24 heads up as the shift supervisor.

25 Q. And is there -- is this -- is there a written procedure

1 for this?

2 A. In regards to anything like that happening?

3 Q. Yeah, when to contact a supervisor.

4 A. Well, I think that it would -- I can't think of anything  
5 concrete in regards to written. It's certainly a directive that  
6 we have here that anytime something out of the ordinary happens,  
7 the shift supervisor needs to know just so that we can -- I mean,  
8 one, if the communications specialist hasn't encountered a  
9 situation like this before, we can offer our own guidance or, you  
10 know, we can assist with whatever's going on or -- primarily just  
11 assist and guide at that point. So this was something that was  
12 not a -- it was a little bit different than the norm, so he gave  
13 me a heads-up on that.

14 Q. Have you had this kind of deviation before?

15 A. Of this specific nature, no.

16 Q. And how often do flights -- inter-hospital transfers  
17 stop for fuel?

18 A. It's not common. I would say that -- previously, when  
19 it does happen, it's something that is going to be a big deal.  
20 Usually they know beforehand that this something that they're  
21 going to do and it becomes part of the planning, part of their  
22 fuel load. This is not a common event. I've never run into this  
23 exact event before.

24 Q. And how many times before have there been situations  
25 where they've refueled with the patient on board?

1           A.    I couldn't put it a number on it.  It's -- you know,  
2  again, this exact situation I've never run into.  Situations  
3  where, you know, they might be accepting a flight for long  
4  distance, it's something that's built into the flight plan  
5  beforehand and they make preparations for that.  A situation like  
6  this, I haven't really run into.

7           Q.    Now, they said that you and Korey had a face-to-face  
8  discussion.

9           A.    Yes.

10          Q.    What did you guys talk about?

11          A.    That's -- I was in a different part of the room, and  
12  then immediately following our conversation, he came over and  
13  talked to me direct a little bit just to kind of help out a little  
14  bit with kind of where I was thinking.  I was trying to -- I was  
15  thinking about notifications that might need to be made there in  
16  regards to the flight and we talked a little bit further about  
17  that.

18          Q.    Did you make notifications at that point?

19          A.    No, I did not.

20          Q.    What were you thinking about?

21          A.    Well, I was a little bit frustrated that the medical  
22  manager was on the flight because that was the call that I was  
23  going to make.  And determining that he was not -- determining  
24  that he was on the flight, I was realizing I would probably need  
25  to call somebody else.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. I wasn't looking at that as an emergent event, but I  
3 certainly needed to notify somebody. Somebody in administration  
4 needed to know that there was a fuel discrepancy that -- which is  
5 affecting patient care.

6 Q. Why did you want to talk with the medical manager?

7 A. Why did I?

8 Q. Yeah.

9 A. Because he's kind of the -- he's kind of the medical  
10 guru on base. This is -- you know, at this point the only thing I  
11 was really thinking about was patient care.

12 Q. Sure.

13 A. You know, this is not an ideal situation. That  
14 individual needed to be made aware and he could go ahead and  
15 notify anyone in their chain of command if they needed to talk to,  
16 you know, their regional medical director, on this, you know. And  
17 further, if they needed to communicate and they needed to talk to  
18 the lead pilot, this is something that they can do. But my  
19 thinking was is because of the impact that this was going to have  
20 on patient care, there were some people that would need to know  
21 about this.

22 Now, if the medical manager had not been on duty, had  
23 not been on that flight, then I certainly would have given him a  
24 call at that time and then, you know, got the ball rolling. Since  
25 he was on that flight, since he was part of the decision making

1 process, I just thought that I would have to call somebody  
2 following the flight.

3 Q. What were the medical issues in your mind?

4 A. Well, in regard to the patient, I don't know. I -- you  
5 know, I'm not qualified to speak about that. My main issue was,  
6 is that going from the pick-up to the drop-off facility, we were  
7 not going to be doing that in the advertised amount of time, in  
8 the quickest amount of time. That was not happening. The  
9 transfer itself had been impacted with a deviation --

10 Q. Sure.

11 A. -- and that's not good. That's not something that we  
12 can do.

13 Q. Sure. Ultimately, were you able to contact someone else  
14 -- did you contact someone at that point?

15 A. No, I did not. I was going to contact them following  
16 the flight.

17 Q. Uh-huh. And then you said you spoke with Justine?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Tell me about that.

20 A. In regards to the -- in the flight plan, there was a  
21 discrepancy with the airport. I believe that the airport might  
22 have had a previous name, but we -- once we found it on AirNav, we  
23 needed to ensure that it was in the RescueNet system, so I went to  
24 check on that. That was something that Korey had brought up. I  
25 went and I confirmed that it wasn't in the RescueNet system as it

1 was being advertised to us, and then I went ahead and I built that  
2 airport into the system so that we can include it in the flight  
3 plan.

4 Q. So what is the RescueNet system? I'm sorry, Lowell.

5 A. Oh, that's the CAD system that we use so when we take a  
6 request, that's how we build the flights so we can determine the  
7 closest aircraft assigned, and then flight follow.

8 Q. I see. And then what happened after that? At what  
9 point did you realize you may have an abnormal situation?

10 A. Well, I guess, following that, I got in the system and I  
11 confirmed that Justine was able to bring it up. And I think I  
12 previously had been conducting a meeting in another portion of the  
13 room and I went and I concluded that meeting and I think I was  
14 working on the daily log, and then Justine advised me that they  
15 had fallen off of tracking.

16 So at that point I went over and she kind of brought me  
17 up to speed. I was already aware of what was going on, but she  
18 kind of brought me up on the events that had followed since I'd  
19 been there. And then at that point we began working it. And at  
20 that point it was simply a matter of, you know, they were supposed  
21 to land at the airport in a certain amount of time. The tracking  
22 had stopped, but there was still a couple of minutes there where  
23 we were expecting them. And at that point, you know, we were  
24 expecting that a simple phone call to the airport would -- we  
25 would find the aircraft there.

1           So that was kind of how we began that, and then as we  
2 found that the aircraft was not there, then we began escalating.

3           Q.    And if I understand, there was a standard procedure and  
4 then you had people to notify.  And is there paperwork also in a  
5 standard procedure?

6           A.    There is.

7           Q    What is that?

8           A.    It's a -- we have a PIP sheet and it just kind runs down  
9 various scenarios.  And then on this sheet, you know, you just  
10 follow the -- it's basically a hit list.  So it's just kind of  
11 something to keep us on track just to make sure that we're hitting  
12 all the right points.

13          Q.    And who does it go to?

14          A.    The operations manager.

15          Q.    How often do you have interaction with OCC?

16          A.    I probably talk to them at least once a night in regards  
17 to a mileage question, a tracking issue.

18          Q.    And if a pilot wants -- how often do pilots have to talk  
19 to their supervisors?

20          A.    How often do pilots have to talk to their supervisors?

21          Q.    Yeah.

22          A.    I don't think I can quantify that.  I mean, we have one  
23 program specific in the run that's unrelated to this that are  
24 required to use us for communication of that nature, but other  
25 than that, we never facilitate that transport -- or that

1 communication.

2 Q. Do you folks assist in terms of aviation issues?

3 A. No.

4 Q. If a pilot wants assistance on aviation issues, who do  
5 they contact? Do you assist them in contacting someone?

6 A. If they ask us to, then we can facilitate that phone  
7 call. We can conference them with somebody. But --

8 Q. Great.

9 A. -- we don't make any aviation decisions in this  
10 building.

11 Q. How often do they ask for that type of support?

12 A. To be connected to the OCC? I don't know, it happens.  
13 From time to time they'll ask it, but they all have that phone  
14 number and, typically, they'll call direct to the OCC.

15 Q. And I guess the other one was I'm thinking that if you  
16 had an aviation issue, you'd call your supervisor. Does that  
17 happen?

18 A. You mean would I call my supervisor?

19 Q. No, no. I'm sorry. The aviation -- the chief pilot or  
20 the regional pilot, the -- you know, the area aviation manager,  
21 something like that.

22 A. If that's their protocol.

23 Q. Okay. So what was your background that brought you into  
24 this job?

25 A. I was interested in EMS.

1 Q. Did you have experience in EMS?

2 A. Very brief. I'm an EMT.

3 Q. And why did you apply to this company?

4 A. I knew some people I'd gone to school with who worked  
5 here. They had a lot of positive things to say about it. It  
6 sounded interesting. It didn't sound normal. I'd been looking  
7 for something, something a little different, something where I  
8 could possibly have some responsibilities greater than what I had  
9 had at the time.

10 Q. And what did you do between February and September of  
11 '08, from the time you were hired until you took this position?

12 A. I was a communications specialist.

13 Q. Day shift or night shift?

14 A. Night shift.

15 Q. How did you end up on the night shift?

16 A. I was the new guy.

17 Q. Do you like it?

18 A. You know, there's pros and cons to it, yeah. It's, you  
19 know, it's -- there's definitely some benefits to it.

20 Q. What is your actual shift? When do you come on?

21 A. 6 p.m., and then all the way to 6 a.m.

22 Q. And what are your days off at that time? You know, that  
23 was a Friday, so --

24 A. That would have been -- typically, that would have been  
25 my last day on.

1 Q. Uh-huh.

2 A. And actually it was my last day on. I had a trade  
3 arranged with a supervisor where I was going to work the next  
4 couple of days. Following the incident, the supervisor and I  
5 spoke and we cancelled that trade, and then he worked the next  
6 couple days for me.

7 Q. Okay. What days did you work that week? Do you  
8 remember that?

9 A. Oh, I would have worked that Thursday, Friday.

10 Q. Sure.

11 A. So I would have -- previously, I would have worked  
12 Saturday, Sunday, Monday.

13 Q. So you had Tuesday, Wednesday off, and then Thursday and  
14 then Friday?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. How was the workload at that time?

17 A. Well, it was -- do you mean during the event or just --

18 Q. Yeah, about that time. Yeah, during the whole event.

19 A. It was during shift change, so it can get a little  
20 interesting. You have a lot of people who are taking over the  
21 consoles. We have it staggered so half the shift begins at 5:30  
22 and the other half at 8:00 to kind of help mitigate some of that.  
23 But you have a lot of people trying to get logged onto the system,  
24 so it can get a little interesting. At that time, I had -- I was  
25 having a conference with another area of the building where I had

1 needed to speak to some people about some program issues.

2 Q. Is there a rush hour in your work like that?

3 A. Pretty much when the phone rings.

4 Q. Okay. Is there a time of day when it tends to ring more  
5 or is that spread out?

6 A. You know, I would say that it's probably, I guess,  
7 whatever the rush hour would be around the country. So usually, I  
8 guess, maybe 5 to 6:00 in the different time zones that we cover  
9 in the building. We see an uptick around the time that the bars  
10 get out around the country. But it's usually pretty steady in  
11 between.

12 Q. When you say 5 to 6, that's in the afternoon rather than  
13 5 to 6 a.m.?

14 A. That's correct, sir.

15 Q. Um-hum. And tell me about Korey. How is Korey as a  
16 specialist?

17 A. I haven't been a direct supervisor of him for a couple  
18 of years. He's certainly very competent though and I was  
19 certainly impressed that, you know, that he had not only taken the  
20 time to notify me via phone, but to come to speak to me face to  
21 face regarding this situation.

22 Q. How's Justine?

23 A. Justine's good.

24 Q. What are her strengths?

25 A. I can trust her on the desk. She's -- she was certainly

1 on the ball in this situation. There was certainly early  
2 notification from her to me regarding the situation. She gave me  
3 the maximum amount of time to do what I needed to do. I was very  
4 impressed with her performance.

5 Q. Are you a pilot yourself?

6 A. No, sir.

7 Q. Any aviation background?

8 A. No, sir.

9 Q. What are your responsibilities?

10 A. In the room, I'm responsible for, I guess, supervising  
11 the desks. I have a number of communications specialists in the  
12 room. They're charged with assisting with the facilitation of  
13 these transports. They relay the requests to the pilots. The  
14 pilots accept and then we assist with flight following. Those are  
15 their duties. And then, in turn, I'm responsible for them.

16 Q. How is the pay there for the specialists, communications  
17 specialists?

18 A. Well, I haven't been a communications specialist for a  
19 while.

20 Q. How's the company?

21 A. How's the company?

22 Q. Yeah. How -- I wanted to talk a little bit about the  
23 company, just get your impressions. How was the pay in the  
24 company?

25 A. Pretty good.

1 Q. How's morale?

2 A. I can only speak to my shift, but the individuals I'm in  
3 charge of seem comfortable speaking to me and I'm comfortable  
4 speaking to my direct bosses. I mean, other than that, I don't  
5 know if I'd be qualified to speak, you know, in regards to morale.

6 Q. How's the turnover with specialists, communications  
7 specialists?

8 A. It certainly happens in the way of some people who are  
9 currently in school, you know, trying to better themselves that  
10 way. So it is something that does happen.

11 Q. And how about the turnover of managers?

12 A. It's fairly rare. In fact, that's a pretty rare event.

13 Q. How is the quality of the new hires?

14 A. Pretty good. We've had a quite few lately and I've been  
15 pretty impressed with what we've had out on the floor.

16 Q. How's the training?

17 A. It's pretty good. It's something that's pretty  
18 formulaic. I think they kind of have an idea of what they want to  
19 do, what they want to -- how they want to mold the people coming  
20 in, and as far as I can determine, it's happening.

21 Q. How's the financial condition of the company?

22 A. Their checks clear. Pretty good.

23 Q. That's a good standard. What's special about this  
24 company compared to other ones out there?

25 A. Well, I mean, I've worked lots of jobs where, you know,

1 I didn't have very much responsibility or wasn't very appreciated.  
2 This is kind of the opposite. I feel like I have kind of a lot of  
3 responsibility. I have certainly had an opportunity to do a lot  
4 of good, to do everything I can to help people around the country.  
5 So it's something I really enjoy doing.

6 Q. And that St. Joe's area, how competitive is that?

7 A. How competitive is St. Joe area? I know that we have  
8 some competitors in the area, but I don't know how many or even  
9 where they're based at. But it's -- they're there.

10 Q. In the past several years, has the company had any  
11 significant expenses or scaling back?

12 A. I wouldn't know. I -- we have our LifeNet 22 base there  
13 and I don't believe we have any other bases in the area, at least  
14 that we dispatch here out of this side.

15 Q. Is there a company safety office?

16 A. I believe there is at corporate.

17 Q. What do they do? How do they interact with you?

18 A. Oh, I don't know.

19 Q. Have you had previous accidents -- has the company has  
20 previous accidents?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. How have they affected operations? Any changes?

23 A. Well, the -- I've been here for one previous accident.  
24 That accident, the -- I didn't see any noticeable change here. I  
25 believe that that was -- any information regarding communications

1 on our stuff, on our end, would have matriculated down to us  
2 regarding that.

3 Q. Which accident was that? What is that?

4 A. That was the LifeNet 12 accident. It was in Tucson.

5 Q. Yeah. Were you folks handling that -- was your facility  
6 handling that event?

7 A. We were.

8 Q. Uh-huh. How are relations with the FAA?

9 A. I don't know. I've never spoken with them.

10 Q. Do you ever see inspectors from the FAA?

11 A. I have not.

12 MR. BRENNER: Jim, do you have questions?

13 MR. SILLIMAN: Yeah, thanks.

14 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

15 Q. Yeah, Lowell, so your shift is 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.?

16 A. Yes, sir.

17 Q. So when you arrive -- do you remember what time you  
18 arrived that night?

19 A. I typically get to work about 40 minutes early and I  
20 recall being here early. I like to be here for the arrival of  
21 both portions of my shift, so I typically get here about 5:20 just  
22 to make sure that the portion of my shift gets in okay, and then  
23 that allows the maximum amount of time for pass-down from the  
24 previous supervisor.

25 Q. And when you say two -- who are you referring to as far

1 as your different parts of shift? I thought you just have your  
2 guys -- your communications specialists that would come in at 6  
3 p.m. Are there other people or something?

4 A. Well, yeah, I have about 12 to 15 guys on any given  
5 night and it's broken up into four banks. And then two banks will  
6 arrive at 5:30 and they'll conduct their changeover, and then the  
7 remaining two will arrive at 6.

8 Q. Oh, I see. Okay. So you've got -- not everybody  
9 arrives at the same time, then, for their shift changes?

10 A. Absolutely, and I hope to keep that ongoing.

11 Q. Sure, it makes sense. So when did you -- do you get a  
12 shift turnover from the departing shift change?

13 A. I do.

14 Q. And when did that occur?

15 A. Well, I -- on that day, I watched the shift changeover,  
16 and then we conducted a verbal, I'd say probably in the minutes  
17 leading up to the 6:00 changeover.

18 Q. So you were briefing with your -- the outgoing shift  
19 supervisor prior to 6 p.m., then?

20 A. That's correct, sir.

21 Q. Okay. And at 6 p.m., do you remember what you were  
22 doing about that time, at 6 p.m.? Were you on -- were you in the  
23 room with all of the other communications specialists or were you  
24 in a different room?

25 A. I was in the same room.

1 Q. And the departing or the off-going shift supervisor, he  
2 was also in the same room?

3 A. That's correct, sir.

4 Q. Okay. And so, at about -- so when did you complete your  
5 shift change with the outgoing shift supervisor then about?

6 A. That day, he would have left -- the off-going shift  
7 supervisor would have left at 6 or shortly thereafter.

8 Q. So that was about the time that you had wrapped up your  
9 shift change debrief with him, then?

10 A. That's correct, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Do you remember what you did next after the shift  
12 change debrief that night?

13 A. I do, sir. There was a directive in regards to another  
14 program in the building, something that people on the desk needed  
15 to be made aware of immediately. It was something that had  
16 happened quickly and was fairly important, so they received an  
17 e-mails on it, but I went and I went with them to go over it  
18 verbally, and that's where I was when Korey called me.

19 Q. And so, were you still in the room with all the  
20 communications specialists or some other room then?

21 A. The same room, sir.

22 Q. And were you talking to all the shift communications  
23 specialists on your shift about this new directive or --

24 A. It was only affecting one desk and two com specs who  
25 work that desk, so I was talking to those individuals.

1 Q. And what area of the country do they control?

2 A. They're on the eastern portion of the country.

3 Q. So after your shift change debrief, then you went over  
4 and talked to that desk about something that affected the eastern  
5 portion of the country?

6 A. Just that specific program.

7 Q. Okay. Do you remember how long you were talking to them  
8 before Korey talked to you?

9 A. I recall going over there. They were on the phone, so I  
10 needed to wait for that to clear up. So I think I was talking to  
11 them for a couple of minutes, and then when Korey called, I talked  
12 to him regarding that situation, and then I concluded the meeting  
13 and I -- the whole meeting, in total, probably was maybe 10 to 15  
14 minutes.

15 Q. Okay. So from about 6 p.m. to about 6:15 p.m., you were  
16 pretty engaged with this directive that you had to debrief this  
17 program on the East Coast?

18 A. Well, I was speaking to them. I know that I spoke to  
19 Korey during the meeting, and then I wrapped it up, and then Korey  
20 and I spoke face to face immediately following that at the  
21 termination of the meeting.

22 Q. Okay. And the phone call -- so Korey was at his  
23 station, then, in front of his computers, and you were in just  
24 talking with this other group. Did he call you on the phone, and  
25 so you're basically calling each other on the phone even though

1 you're in the same room?

2 A. That's correct.

3 Q. Okay. That phone call, is that the one that's recorded  
4 where Korey first tells you about the incident that's forming and  
5 the fact that the medical supervisor or the medical lead is on the  
6 helicopter itself?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. And then after that, then Korey comes over and talks to  
9 you face to face and that's not recorded anywhere?

10 A. No, sir.

11 Q. Okay. So Korey -- you know, the helicopter lands on the  
12 helicopter pad at, I think it was 1758 and departs anywhere around  
13 1811 to 1812. So during that time that Korey is talking to the  
14 pilot about the fuel situation, really, you're really involved and  
15 focused on this other directive that you need to talk to about the  
16 East Coast guys?

17 A. Well, I certainly needed to talk to them, but I was  
18 available to talk to Korey on the phone when he called me.

19 Q. Sure. Yeah, I understand. But you were there, and so  
20 -- but Korey was handling his situation and you were handling  
21 another situation. Had --

22 A. I would say so, sure.

23 Q. Yeah. Now, when Korey gets the phone, or when he gets  
24 the phone call from the pilot and the pilot has this unusual  
25 deviation because of the patient being on board when they need to

1 refuel, is that typically something that Korey would get you --  
2 make you aware of that right away if you hadn't been, you know,  
3 involved with this other task that you needed to do?

4 A. Yeah, that's something I like to know about immediately.

5 Q. Okay. And where would you normally be located, you  
6 know, if you were available that night? I mean, had you not been  
7 doing this, would you be located someplace directly in the room  
8 there? I remember when Malcolm and I were at AirCom the other  
9 day, they had that platform in the back or some other place -- or  
10 where would you have been located typically?

11 A. The platforms where my computers are at, but -- the  
12 beginning portions of the shift, I'm there when they arrive, and  
13 then as they get settled, I like to walk around the room. I like  
14 to talk to everybody and I like to see what's on their screens.

15 Q. Okay. All right. Anyway, so when -- so Korey's  
16 handling this situation about this unusual deviation with the  
17 fuel. Is that something that you would expect him that -- is  
18 there any directive saying, hey, if something like this happens,  
19 you need to get a hold of me, or is it, you know, really left to  
20 Korey or the communications specialist's judgment on that point?

21 A. I think that everyone's pretty aware that if something  
22 a-typical like that happens, they need to notify their supervisor.

23 Q. Okay. And so, when Korey notified you, that seemed to  
24 be what you would typically expect, then, after he had handled the  
25 situation and then he tells you?

1 A. Yes.

2 Q. Had you been able to get into the decision making, you  
3 know, before the pilot had departed, would you have -- would that  
4 have been a better, you know -- I guess, would you have inserted  
5 yourself into that decision making had you been aware of it?

6 A. No.

7 Q. So you let Korey take care of that decision?

8 A. Are you talking about the pilot's decision or Korey's  
9 decision?

10 Q. Korey's decision.

11 A. And what exactly is Korey's decision? I'm just trying  
12 to clarify.

13 Q. Well, I'm not exactly sure exactly. I'm trying to think  
14 of -- had you been aware -- had Korey been able to make you aware  
15 of the pilot's dilemma, is that something you would have been --  
16 inserted yourself into and tried to help Korey with that decision?

17 A. Well, with -- in speaking to Korey on the phone and then  
18 on the -- and then when he came and spoke to me afterwards, you  
19 know, as far as I could determine, it was handled. The pilot had  
20 a plan. The pilot was going to go through with the plan. Korey  
21 brought me up to speed and I was -- it was certainly something I  
22 was going to notify the program about later, but as far as at that  
23 moment in time, all my concern was just kind of in regards to  
24 patient care. The pilot had, you know, made a decision. He was  
25 -- he set a course of action. That was what was going to happen.

1 Korey had, you know, assisted him as a resource. So as far as,  
2 you know, inserting myself, there was no need.

3 Q. Yeah. And when you heard about it, your first -- your  
4 real reaction then is -- was about the patient care and that was  
5 your focus and that was your concern is that you had a patient on  
6 board and there needed to be somebody notified that --

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. -- optimal -- something happening was not optimal. Were  
9 you concerned at all about the fuel situation? Did that really  
10 factor into your thinking?

11 A. Well, it was certainly abnormal. And when I spoke to  
12 Justine, I needed to look at the flight plan because I knew that  
13 there was a discrepancy, but we had made fuel arrangements. The  
14 fuel plan -- or the flight plan was correct. I really had no  
15 concern regarding, you know, the pilot. It was -- the pilot said  
16 that he could do it, so, you know, I didn't have any concern about  
17 that. Everything I was thinking about was the patient care.

18 Q. And the pilot had informed Korey that he had 45 minutes  
19 of fuel on board and I believe Korey had mentioned that to you as  
20 well?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. Now, concerning the other flights that needed -- that  
23 had to be refueled before, do you remember anything in the last --  
24 you know, since last September, where there was a flight that  
25 needed to be refueled with a patient on board that was kind of ad

1 hoc like this, that had not needed to be planned out ahead of  
2 time?

3 A. That had not been planned out before time?

4 Q. Yeah, yeah.

5 A. No.

6 Q. Okay. So as far as you're -- as far as you remember or  
7 are aware of, there were no other flights in the last year that  
8 needed to have -- to be refueled with a patient on board that  
9 hadn't been planned out?

10 A. As far as I'm aware, yes, sir.

11 Q. Okay. Were you involved in the -- when the -- Cherokee,  
12 Iowa, they just recently opened their base, I understand, and they  
13 had to have a flight from Cherokee to Rochester and they knew that  
14 they needed to refuel because of the length of the leg of the  
15 flight and stuff and they put that in their flight plan. Were you  
16 involved with that flight at all?

17 A. I don't believe so.

18 Q. And were you aware of that flight?

19 A. I don't believe so, no.

20 Q. I think, Bret, the station -- or the pilot lead in  
21 St. Joe, told us about it, about that. That's the only one that  
22 he could remember where an aircraft had been refueled. And as you  
23 mentioned to Malcolm before, was that that was part of the flight  
24 plan. They had planned it out so there wasn't, in a sense, there  
25 was nothing -- there were protocols that they followed to do that.

1 Is there any protocols or something in your manual that would  
2 cover this situation that would say what do you need to do if  
3 there's, you know, this situation where they need to refuel and  
4 it's an anomaly and it's not planned out?

5 A. I couldn't speak specifically on that. I don't know.

6 Q. Okay. So you don't -- as far as you know, there's  
7 nothing in your SOPs that cover this one?

8 A. Yeah. I -- as far as my purview, you know, we try to  
9 work within our own specific protocol, so that's not something  
10 that we ever really encounter.

11 Q. Okay. What does PIP stand for, by the way?

12 A. Post-action incident plan.

13 Q. Post-action incident plan.

14 A. Or post-accident incident plan.

15 Q. Okay. Okay. And your dealings with OCC, then, it  
16 sounds like, from what I've heard others talk about, a lot of it  
17 has to deal with weather-related information that the OCC passes  
18 on to the pilots through the AirCom?

19 A. That's correct. That's a good portion of it. Also,  
20 other PIP notifications that I would need to make, I would make to  
21 them during the night.

22 Q. Okay. And what are some other post-accident incident  
23 plans -- the PIPs, what are some of the other common ones that you  
24 would remember having to do --

25 A. I would say probably the majority of them would be

1 weather related.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. You know, the pilot thinks he can get somewhere,  
4 encounters some weather, advises that he can't get through, and  
5 they just return to the base; that's the majority of them.

6 Q. Okay. And is there any negative repercussion as a  
7 result of that?

8 A. Oh, I don't know.

9 Q. Okay.

10 MR. SILLIMAN: Malcolm, I can't think of anything else.

11 BY MR. BRENNER:

12 Q. I did have another question. When you learned that the  
13 medical manager was on board, did that address your concerns about  
14 patient care?

15 A. No. That was who I would have spoken to.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. Being that he was on board, then I would have to notify  
18 somebody else at that point.

19 Q. Why didn't it address your concerns?

20 A. Well, because he was part of the patient transport  
21 decision, so I needed to speak to somebody who was outside who was  
22 impartial. That's who I needed to relay it to.

23 Q. Yeah, I see. So not in the heat of battle or whatever,  
24 not in the heat of the moment?

25 A. Yes, sir.

1 Q. Who would be the next person in line then?

2 A. After that, I believe it would have been Lyle Butler is  
3 who I would have proceeded to call at that point, following the  
4 flight.

5 Q. Now, how -- from a medical standpoint, how much urgency  
6 was there in this particular mission?

7 A. I don't know. We treat all of our transports as  
8 emergencies.

9 Q. Sure.

10 MR. BRENNER: Well, I think that's all my questions as  
11 well.

12 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

13 Q. Oh, I did have another one here. You had the phone call  
14 from Korey, and then you said a face to face. What kind of  
15 information did you talk about when you were face to face with  
16 Korey?

17 A. Korey kind of saw what direction I was looking at when  
18 we were talking on the phone about who I needed to notify. And  
19 then at the end of the call, I believe he said something, you  
20 know, the book's over there; I can take a look -- you know, the  
21 book with the program administration for who I need to call. And  
22 he followed by coming over and talking to me about some other  
23 members of the program.

24 Q. Okay. And I remember in the phone call, you talked  
25 about the AOC. Can you explain what that is?

1           A.    That's an admin on call.

2           Q.    And how does that -- I guess LifeNet does not have an  
3 admin on call, but how would that make a difference if there was  
4 an admin on call?

5           A.    In regards to other programs, it's just if you have some  
6 sort of issue, you can call the admin on call and then they will  
7 take whatever information, and then they'll direct it wherever it  
8 needs to go, kind of, you know, a one-call deal. This program did  
9 not have an admin on call, but that's kind of where my gears were  
10 turning at that point.

11          Q.    Okay. And they take care of more of the medical issues,  
12 as opposed to the OCC, which would be more of a flight issue or  
13 something?

14          A.    I believe so.

15          Q.    Okay. All right. Well, thanks for that. That helps,  
16 understanding what that is.

17               MR. SILLIMAN: Yeah, I don't have anything else,  
18 Malcolm, unless you do.

19               MR. BRENNER: No.

20               MR. SILLIMAN: Okay, I'll turn off the recorders here.

21               (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)  
22  
23  
24  
25

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           AIR METHODS CORPORATION  
                                  LIFENET HELICOPTER ACCIDENT  
                                  AUGUST 26, 2011  
                                  NEAR MOSBY, MISSOURI  
                                  Interview of Lowell Ferguson

DOCKET NUMBER:            CEN11FA599

PLACE:                      Via phone call to AirCom in  
                                  Omaha, Nebraska

DATE:                        September 21, 2011

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,  
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been compared to  
the recording accomplished at the hearing.

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Karen M. Galvez  
Transcriber