

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: GARY WHITE

Kansas City, Missouri

Thursday,  
September 15, 2011

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: JIM SILLIMAN  
Accident Investigator

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INTERVIEW OF GARY WHITE

BY MR. SILLIMAN:

Q. All right. Could you state your full name, Gary?

A. Gary E. White.

Q. And what background do you have in aviation?

A. I've been with Rocky Mountain Helicopters, Air Methods, for 21 years. I started flying back in 1967 in the Army.

Q. And what position do you hold at Rocky -- or, I mean, at Air Methods now?

A. I'm a line pilot.

Q. Okay. And at Air Methods, then, how long have you been with them?

A. Well, since the acquisition of Rocky Mountain Helicopters, and I don't remember what year that was. I started with Rocky in 1991.

Q. Okay. And what kind of total flight hours do you have?

A. I would guess around 4,000. I don't really keep a logbook. Since I got the ATP, the only thing required is recent experience for that, but --

Q. Okay. And how much time in the AS350 B series?

A. Probably 1500.

Q. Okay. And is that all in the B2 or do you have others?

A. B model and B2.

Q. Okay. Do you have time in the B3 also?

1 A. No.

2 Q. Okay. How long have you been flying at St. Joe?

3 A. Two and a half years.

4 Q. And before that, with Air Methods, where were you?

5 A. Olathe, Kansas.

6 Q. Okay. With the -- have you been qualified in night  
7 vision goggles yet?

8 A. Yes.

9 Q. And was that with -- were you in -- did they have night  
10 vision goggle qualifications in the Army?

11 A. Yes. Well, in the National Guard after I got off active  
12 duty.

13 Q. Okay. So what experience have you had in the National  
14 Guard, I mean, as far as just time and years?

15 A. You're really digging deep in my memory --

16 Q. Oh.

17 A. -- because I got out of the Guard back in '91, when I  
18 started with Rocky.

19 Q. Okay. But you had -- so it was before '91 that you did  
20 the night vision goggle work?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. How much of a break between the National Guard, when you  
23 left National Guard around '91 or so, to the time that they  
24 started flying goggles with Air Methods?

25 A. Well, we at the St. Joe Base just started flying goggles

1 in March --

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. -- of this year. I'm not sure when Air Methods started.

4 Q. So you have -- so you just started flying goggles in  
5 March of this year?

6 A. Correct.

7 Q. Okay. Have you been flying -- was -- have you been  
8 flying November-352LN? Has that been the aircraft that's been  
9 based at --

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. -- St. Joe since you've been there?

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. Any idea how much time you have on just that airplane?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Okay. But you've been flying it for at least 2-1/2 to 3  
16 years?

17 A. Correct.

18 Q. Have you had any problems with that airplane other than  
19 just routine maintenance?

20 A. Just the normal sort of things that happen to an  
21 aircraft over time, I mean.

22 Q. Okay. In the time that you've been flying it, has there  
23 been anything -- no, it doesn't sound like there's been any  
24 serious malfunctions and problems?

25 A. No.

1 Q. When was the last time you flew 352-Lima-November?

2 A. I think it was about 2 weeks prior to the accident.

3 Q. Okay. Was there anything wrong with the airplane at  
4 that time?

5 A. No.

6 Q. Have you had any experience of, you know, improper fuel  
7 indications in the helicopter?

8 A. No.

9 Q. When does the low fuel light come on or the -- I'm not  
10 sure if they call it the low fuel light or the caution light?

11 A. About 10 percent fuel.

12 Q. Oh, really, 10 percent? And how many minutes of flying  
13 would that be?

14 A. About 17 minutes.

15 Q. Seventeen minutes? How much time would you anticipate  
16 would be on the aircraft with a fuel gauge reading of 24 percent?

17 A. Maybe 45 minutes.

18 Q. Okay. What are the procedures -- since you're the night  
19 pilot on the -- well, you work both --

20 A. I work both days and nights.

21 Q. -- (indiscernible) work both days and nights. When you  
22 come back from a flight, what is your procedures for refueling the  
23 aircraft if you're going to be coming off duty and you're leaving  
24 the fuel -- or the aircraft ready for the next pilot to pick up?  
25 How do you fuel it?

1 A. I'm not sure I understand.

2 Q. Well, I guess -- say you're the p.m. pilot.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. You get called out at 3 in the morning, and you get --  
5 and by the time you get back to St. Joe's, it's 6 in the morning.  
6 Your shift change starts at 6:30, if I understand correctly?

7 A. Correct.

8 Q. What will you do to -- as far as refueling the airplane  
9 at that -- or the helicopter at that point?

10 A. At night, the FBO leaves a fuel truck down there for us  
11 and we have keys to it, so I would fuel the aircraft back to 70  
12 percent.

13 Q. Okay. So is 70 percent kind of the comfortable average  
14 fuel load that you --

15 A. Correct. That's --

16 Q. -- will leave for the next pilot?

17 A. -- what we normally carry.

18 Q. And 70 percent, how much flight time will that provide  
19 for you?

20 A. About 2 hours and 10, 15 minutes.

21 Q. So that will give you almost 2 hours of flight time,  
22 plus the 20-minute reserve --

23 A. Correct.

24 Q. -- for FAA regulations? Is that written guidance or is  
25 that just something that St. Joe has just kind of established as a



1 common practice?

2 A. Common practice.

3 Q. Do the other pilots that were based at St. Joe, would  
4 they follow that common practice also?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And James Freudenberg would do the same, then?

7 A. Yes.

8 Q. And I would guess --

9 A. Well, I would assume he would.

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. I mean, whenever I relieved him --

12 Q. Yeah.

13 A. -- that's where the aircraft was.

14 Q. Yeah. And that even for other augment pilots, Peter,  
15 the person who had helped out, he would have that understanding  
16 that you leave it at about 70 percent?

17 A. Whenever I relieved him --

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. -- that's where the aircraft would be fueled, at  
20 approximately 70.

21 Q. Did the mechanics ever fuel the airplane at night?

22 A. No.

23 Q. And so it was just the pilots that would get the truck,  
24 drive it out there, then fuel the aircraft as necessary in the  
25 middle of the night?

1 A. At night, yes.

2 Q. And then during the day, the FBO would just drive up and  
3 fuel it with you observing --

4 A. Correct.

5 Q. -- the pilot observing? Did you ever fly with James?

6 A. No.

7 Q. And did you ever see him wear sunglasses while he was  
8 flying?

9 A. No. Of course, I never really saw him flying, so --

10 Q. Yeah. Do you wear sunglasses when you fly?

11 A. No.

12 Q. The caution panel, where is that located on -- you know,  
13 in relation to where you're sitting as a pilot?

14 A. Pretty much right in front of you, just slightly to the  
15 right of center and at the top of the panel.

16 Q. If you're flying in like -- for instance, this airplane  
17 -- I keep calling it an airplane -- this helicopter was used for  
18 NGVs -- NVGs the night before. Is there a switch on the panel  
19 that would switch it from like a NVG light --

20 A. Well --

21 Q. -- to a regular light source?

22 A. No.

23 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Gary, make sure you let him  
24 finish his question before you answer because --

25 MR. WHITE: Okay. I'm sorry.

1 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: -- the tape can't get it and  
2 you're also anticipating what he's going to ask you, so just --

3 MR. WHITE: Yeah.

4 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So we get a clean record.

5 MR. WHITE: Okay.

6 MR. SILLIMAN: Thank you.

7 MR. WHITE: Sorry.

8 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

9 Q. Yeah, how does that work?

10 A. It's not specifically NVG. There is a day/night switch.  
11 In the night position, the lights are dimmer.

12 Q. If you leave it in the night position, even though  
13 you're flying during the day, how visible is that light?

14 A. Practically invisible.

15 Q. So if the switch had been left in the night position,  
16 would the pilot able to see the low level light?

17 A. Probably not.

18 Q. Would the crew, the medical crew in the back of the  
19 helicopter, would they be able to notice it?

20 A. No.

21 Q. That would be -- would that be part of a preflight item,  
22 to make sure it's in the day position?

23 A. Well, there is a preflight item to check the warning  
24 panel with a press-to-test --

25 Q. Um-hum.

1           A.    -- and if it's in the night position, they wouldn't  
2 light up. Now, even in the night position, the fuel pressure  
3 light illuminates brightly. And so if you push the press-to-test  
4 and it was in the night position, that fuel pressure light would  
5 be the one that would light up and you wouldn't see any of the  
6 others --

7           Q.    Oh, really?

8           A.    -- which is a key to sit there and flip it to the day  
9 position.

10          Q.    Oh. So even during the preflight, then, you turn the  
11 power on in the aircraft, you hit the press-to-test switch, even  
12 though it's in the night position, the low fuel light will try --

13          A.    Not the low fuel, the fuel pressure.

14          Q.    Fuel pressure. Okay. That's different than the low  
15 fuel --

16          A.    Correct.

17          Q.    -- low fuel quantity? Okay. So that is a preflight  
18 item that they'd be able to test and make sure that it's in the  
19 day position --

20          A.    Yes.

21          Q.    -- if you're flying during the day? Are you -- have you  
22 ever worn polarized sun glasses while you're sitting in the  
23 cockpit even during -- for any -- at any time?

24          A.    I've got a pair of sunglasses that I've worn when I've  
25 preflighted, but I can't tell you whether they're polarized or

1 not.

2 Q. I guess we're wondering if that would make a difference  
3 as far as being able to see that light if it came on or not,  
4 especially if it was in the dim position. But it sounds like it  
5 wouldn't be visible even if it was in the dim position on a --

6 A. No. If it was in the dim or in the night position, like  
7 I say, about the only light you see is the fuel pressure light.

8 Q. Okay. What's your -- when you come in for the morning,  
9 what's your typical morning routine? And I guess it's not just in  
10 the morning. When you come on shift, what's your basic routine  
11 for getting the aircraft and you ready for a flight?

12 A. Well, basic routine is I'll get a briefing from the off-  
13 going pilot and that will include things like weather, any  
14 peculiarities with the aircraft, fuel level, oxygen level --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. -- basically the things that you need to know right  
17 away. Then I will take a quick look at the weather myself after  
18 he's briefed me, go out and preflight the aircraft. The medical  
19 crew doesn't change out until 7, so I'll preflight first, then  
20 come in, brief the oncoming medical crew --

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. -- check NOTAMs.

23 Q. When you brief the medical crew, what kind of things do  
24 you brief them for?

25 A. Basically, I let them know what the weather's like,

1 whether we're going to expect any problems with weather, the  
2 oxygen level -- that concerns them -- any PRs or any special  
3 events going on during the day.

4 Q. When you -- in your sense of things, do you practice  
5 good crew resource management with your medical crew?

6 A. Well, I try to.

7 Q. During the course of your flying, do you keep the  
8 medical crew updated on the condition of the airplane, the fuel  
9 level, your considerations for navigation, you know, other things  
10 like that?

11 A. Not routinely. I will brief them if there is anything  
12 out of the ordinary, but if it's just business as usual, point A  
13 to point B -- and most of them have been at it for a long time  
14 too, so --

15 Q. Sure. If they -- as you say, they've been working -- I  
16 mean, both these medical crews that we talked to -- or the ones  
17 that we talked to yesterday and then the accident medical crew,  
18 they had been working together for years together as a team, so I  
19 would guess that they have really good rapport with themselves and  
20 also with the pilots and they know what to expect. Is that --  
21 would that be a good characterization?

22 A. Well, I can't speak for anybody else, but when I flew  
23 them, yes.

24 Q. Okay. Would you expect that they -- if you -- if they  
25 saw you doing something that was out of the ordinary or

1 questionable, perhaps unsafe, that they would raise that question  
2 and bring it to your attention?

3 A. Absolutely.

4 Q. Have they done that before in -- you know, when they  
5 felt uncomfortable with a flight, with you personally, I mean?

6 A. I can't recall a time when they became uncomfortable  
7 before I did.

8 Q. Are there times when you've turned down a flight in --  
9 or you had to abort a flight while you're in a mission?

10 A. Yes.

11 Q. How often did that happen?

12 A. Not very often. It -- and then it's usually weather  
13 related. Being out here, you know, there are a limited number of  
14 reporting points, so sometimes everybody's reporting good weather,  
15 but when you leave --

16 Q. Um-hum.

17 A. -- you encounter something else. And like I say, I'm  
18 usually the first one to become uncomfortable. But I've always  
19 stressed with them and our company's policy has always been if any  
20 of them say I'm not comfortable with this --

21 Q. Yeah.

22 A. -- you abort the flight.

23 Q. Yeah. And is there any negative consequence with the  
24 company when you abort a flight like that?

25 A. I've never seen any.

1 Q. Do you have to make a -- fill out a report or anything  
2 when they abort a flight?

3 A. We have something called an AIDMOR, and it's an acronym  
4 and I probably at one time knew what it stood for. But it's  
5 basically just saying that, you know, the weather was this and  
6 took off and encountered weather that was this, aborted the  
7 flight, and returned to base.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. And all I've ever gotten from it is thank you for your  
10 judgment.

11 Q. Okay. When you shut down on a helicopter pad, do you  
12 typically contact AirCom to tell them your status or if you  
13 have --

14 A. Typically call them to let them know that we landed  
15 safely.

16 Q. Okay. What kind of information to do you typically pass  
17 on to AirCom?

18 A. At?

19 Q. During the course of a routine mission, I guess.

20 A. When you lift off, you give them the number of souls on  
21 board, fuel in hours and minutes, ETE to the destination.

22 Q. Okay. How often do you -- can they assist when there is  
23 something out of the ordinary? I mean, have you had to call them  
24 to get assistance for an unusual situation that you've  
25 encountered?



1           A.    I can't recall ever needing assistance, but -- other  
2 than, you know, occasionally I'll ask them, okay, what's our  
3 closest trauma center.

4           Q.    Okay.  So AirCom, it sounds like they're doing a lot of  
5 work as far as the medical side of the mission, getting the  
6 hospitals aware and your crew aware of the -- and, of course, you  
7 aware of where you need to go to do the medical mission?

8           A.    Well, they get a patient report from -- and assuming  
9 it's a hospital transfer and not an accident scene, they will get  
10 a patient report from the sending facility and pass that on to our  
11 medical crew.

12          Q.    Okay.  How often do you contact OCC during -- well, how  
13 often -- well, how many -- have you contacted OCC for any reason  
14 while you were on a mission?

15          A.    And you're talking OCC, not LifeCom?

16          Q.    OCC.

17          A.    I have contacted them, and I've had an occasion or two  
18 where they have called in weather advisories to LifeCom who have  
19 passed it on to me.

20          Q.    Okay.  What did you contact OCC concerning?  Do you  
21 remember?

22          A.    Usually with computer issues.  You come in and you get a  
23 flight release on our 411 system, and if for some reason you're  
24 having problems getting logged into that, you can call the OCC and  
25 get it that way, or if you're going to do a maintenance flight on

1 an aircraft that's been out of service and has not been put back  
2 in service yet, you have to contact the OCC to get a maintenance  
3 flight release.

4 Q. And is that more of a recordkeeping or a -- to show that  
5 you're doing something with the helicopter and that the helicopter  
6 is released, that type of issue more than anything else?

7 A. Well, they check to make sure that we're current in the  
8 aircraft and all our records are up to date and that we've had all  
9 our required training and that we're legal to fly.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. They, I think, also check or have access to maintenance  
12 due on the aircraft so they can help you avoid over flying  
13 something.

14 Q. Okay, great. Have you ever contacted them in an  
15 emergency situation?

16 A. No.

17 Q. Have you contacted them to get a decision about whether  
18 to take a mission or not?

19 A. No. They don't decide; the pilot decides.

20 Q. Right. In this situation where James Freudenberg found  
21 himself on the helicopter pad and he realized that he was low on  
22 fuel, that he didn't have as much fuel as he thought he had, is  
23 that a situation -- he contacts AirCom. Is that a situation where  
24 it would have been better or wiser to contact OCC?

25 A. No, I think LifeCom would be the one to contact just --

1 that's who I would call if I were in that position.

2 Q. Does LifeCom have anybody on staff there that you would  
3 know that, you know -- that would understand the situation from a  
4 pilot's perspective?

5 A. Not that I'm aware of, no.

6 Q. Would OCC have somebody available that would understand  
7 that from a pilot's perspective?

8 A. Yes, but I think LifeCom would be better at facilitating  
9 any corrective action you might need to take.

10 Q. Because they know the -- is it because they know the  
11 local area, they know the airports or --

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. -- that kind of thing? Have you -- it sounds like  
14 you've been in Rocky Mountain Helicopter and in Air Methods since  
15 1991. Have you ever had a situation where you've had to stop en  
16 route with a patient to refuel?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Have you heard of anybody in either Rocky Mountain or  
19 Air Methods before having to stop with a patient on board to  
20 refuel?

21 A. I know there are provisions for it in our GOM, but I  
22 don't have personal knowledge of anybody doing it.

23 Q. Okay. If you have -- if you leave the base with 70  
24 percent fuel, certainly with the legs or the distances that you  
25 fly, that would generally be adequate for any distance that you're

1 going to be flying in the helicopter, I would guess. Is that  
2 correct?

3 A. On flights to Lincoln or Omaha, we will normally refuel  
4 there before we return to base.

5 Q. Um-hum.

6 A. Other than that, yes, that should be plenty.

7 Q. But it's not like you go a long distance, cross-country  
8 distances, to -- you know, going cross state or something like  
9 that? Yeah.

10 A. No.

11 Q. Have you ever -- do you ever -- I mean, you know, do you  
12 know what the procedures are stated in the GOM for refueling with  
13 a patient on board?

14 A. That you leave the patient in the aircraft, but open  
15 doors and have crew ready to evacuate them in case of an  
16 emergency.

17 Q. Is there -- do you have the GOM -- you don't -- do you  
18 have the GOM on board the airplane?

19 A. There is a copy on board the airplane.

20 Q. Oh, there is?

21 A. Yes.

22 Q. So that can actually be referenced in a situation where  
23 you need to look it up?

24 A. It is in a baggage compartment, so it wouldn't be  
25 accessible in flight, but once on the ground, yes.

1 Q. Okay. If the -- and in your experience flying with  
2 these medical crews, if they had -- would you -- in a situation  
3 where James found himself in, on the helicopter pad wondering  
4 about the level of fuel on board the airplane, presented with that  
5 similar scenario, would you have briefed the flight crew or the  
6 medical crew about the fuel situation?

7 A. Yes. Like I say, try to keep them advised of anything  
8 out of the ordinary.

9 Q. In that situation, would you have still called Life --  
10 or AirCom rather than OCC for assistance with that decision?

11 A. Well, I think you referenced 24 percent when he left  
12 base. Is that --

13 Q. Well, that may be what he had available.

14 A. I can't speak to what anybody does or should have done.  
15 I know that in my case, I wouldn't see any way of making it. I  
16 mean, he flew, what, 20, 25 minutes to Bethany?

17 Q. Twenty-eight minutes.

18 A. Twenty-eight minutes? If he left with 24 percent, you'd  
19 think he'd be down to about 10 percent by the time he got there.  
20 I wouldn't lift off with 10 percent.

21 Q. Would you -- do you think the medical crew would advise  
22 you concerning that if you shared that information with them?

23 A. If I told them that I had 20 minutes worth of fuel?  
24 Well, my conversation would be we've only got 20 minutes of fuel,  
25 we're not lifting off --

1 Q. Yeah.

2 A. -- make other arrangements for the patient.

3 Q. Sure.

4 A. So --

5 Q. Let's see.

6 MR. SILLIMAN: Malcolm, do you have any other questions?

7 MR. BRENNER: Yeah.

8 BY MR. BRENNER:

9 Q. Tell me about the accident pilot.

10 A. The only time I saw him was at shift change.

11 Q. How were his shift changes?

12 A. Normal. He would brief me on those items on our  
13 checklist and I would brief him when he relieved me.

14 Q. What's he like personally?

15 A. How much do you learn personally about somebody briefing  
16 on those items and then --

17 Q. I see.

18 A. -- and then skipping out? I --

19 Q. So, really, you have no other contact?

20 A. I can't -- I don't have any personal --

21 Q. I guess you're tired by the end of the shift and vice  
22 versa, yeah.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Okay. And let me understand, let me make sure I  
25 understand. Every time you took over from him, you relieved him,

1 you found that he had fueled the airplane to 70 percent; is that  
2 correct? That was the custom and he followed it?

3 A. Yes.

4 Q. Did I understand that correctly? Okay. And so the  
5 procedure there is to fuel it up for the next person to 70  
6 (indiscernible)?

7 A. Correct. The only time it would be different than that  
8 would be if he were returning from a flight after I was already  
9 there --

10 Q. Yeah.

11 A. -- then I would handle the refueling, or vice a versa.

12 Q. Um-hum.

13 A. If he were already there when I got back, he would  
14 handle the refueling.

15 Q. I see. And then how would you -- as the incoming pilot,  
16 how would you determine the fuel level in your checks?

17 A. Well, one of the first items on the checklist is to turn  
18 on the battery and check the fuel level and the warning lights.

19 Q. And then if you lifted off with 24 percent fuel, when  
20 will you discover that?

21 A. I would have discovered it when I turned on the battery  
22 and --

23 Q. Okay. Well, let's --

24 A. -- wouldn't have lifted off with 24 percent.

25 Q. -- let's do a hypothetical case.

1 A. But assuming that for some reason, I went --

2 Q. Okay. Let's say you went to breakfast.

3 A. -- blind in my left eye and --

4 Q. Yeah, yeah.

5 A. -- and didn't see that and took off.

6 Q. You had a big breakfast and by the time you got there,  
7 you had a mission, whatever. Yeah. Okay, now, what are the  
8 procedures --

9 A. So the first time I looked at the fuel gauge it would  
10 be, all right, we're turning around, going back to base, and  
11 getting gas.

12 Q. When would be the first time you look at the fuel gauge?

13 A. Well, when I do it is when I turn on the battery.

14 Q. Um-hum. So even on a routine flight, just -- yeah.

15 How do you determine whether to accept a flight? They  
16 call in, they have something for you. How do you determine?

17 A. Well, the basic issues are weather and weight and  
18 balance. If the weather is acceptable and --

19 Q. Right.

20 A. -- we get a patient weight and that's not a problem for  
21 weight and balance --

22 Q. Do you fill out a risk assessment form?

23 A. We have a chart that we determine a risk assessment and  
24 note that on our daily flight log for each leg.

25 Q. Is there a maximum risk when you have to do other



1 considerations or other procedures or turn down or what? What is  
2 the criteria with risk assessment?

3 A. The risk assessment is just a tool that you use in your  
4 decision-making process. There is no point on risk assessment  
5 that says don't go.

6 Q. Um-hum. Is it helpful?

7 A. It can be.

8 Q. Give me an example where it was helpful.

9 A. It basically gets you to think about things. Because  
10 one of the criteria is visibility within 1 mile of minimums,  
11 ceiling with 100 feet of minimums, and it gets you to think about  
12 those things. You also consider if you're in your normal aircraft  
13 or a spare aircraft, fatigue, if you're working consecutive  
14 shifts.

15 Q. Um-hum. Okay, how much do you know about the patient  
16 and the medical situation when you make a decision?

17 A. Pardon me?

18 Q. How much do you know about the patient and their medical  
19 situation when you make your decision?

20 A. I know their weight. We always stress for AirCom not to  
21 provide us with any patient information until the flight has been  
22 either accepted or declined. That's not a factor in whether we  
23 can do a flight or not.

24 Q. Is that a written policy or a procedure, just a typical  
25 procedure?

1           A.    If it is, it would be in LifeCom's area, which I don't  
2 have access to or have never looked at.  It's --

3           Q.    Do you ever consult with anyone else in making the  
4 decision whether to accept or not?

5           A.    The National Weather Service.  I mean, you check  
6 weather, not directly face to face with them.

7           Q.    How about OCC?  Do you ever call them?

8           A.    When at an intermediate stop, say, at a hospital where I  
9 really don't have access to weather information, I have talked to  
10 OCC to determine, you know, if there are thunderstorms or  
11 something and I want to know where they are.

12          Q.    Why don't you call LifeCom?

13          A.    LifeCom doesn't have pilots.

14          Q.    Got it.  Um-hum.

15          A.    I don't think LifeCom is qualified to evaluate  
16 weather, where OCC does.

17          Q.    Have they been helpful?

18          A.    Yes.

19          Q.    What's the role of the flight follower?

20          A.    I don't know.  I pass along information to him/her, and  
21 they enter it into the computer.  They pass along -- that's the  
22 same person that would pass along patient reports to our medical  
23 crew.  If we're going somewhere where the receiving hospital is  
24 one that we don't have radio contact, as is with the case in  
25 Lincoln or Omaha, they will pass along patients' reports from us

1 to the receiving hospital.

2 Q. What role do the medical crews play in aviation  
3 missions? Do they have any duties during flight or --

4 A. They're another set of eyes to help look out for other  
5 air traffic. If we're landing in any kind of -- well, actually,  
6 anywhere, they'll advise us if they see something that might be a  
7 hazard.

8 Q. Do any of the medical people at your base have pilot  
9 experience?

10 A. No, at least not that I'm aware of.

11 Q. What were you flying in the Army?

12 A. Well, I flew Hueys overseas. Flew TH-55s and OH-23s  
13 after return doing training and flight evaluation.

14 Q. How much experience do you have in autorotations?

15 A. How do you quantify it?

16 Q. Okay. Have you performed them?

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. In actual aircraft?

19 A. Yes.

20 Q. Tell me about it. How many times? Is that -- is it  
21 from the Army or --

22 A. Well, with the AS350, we don't do them to touch down.  
23 We keep the engine running and power applied. So we terminate  
24 those at a hover. In the Army and in the National Guard, we did  
25 them to the ground.

1 Q. How often do you practice on the AStars?

2 A. Twice a year. I mean, not two autorotations a year, but  
3 two sessions.

4 Q. Two recurrent sessions, you're saying?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. And how many autorotations within that?

7 A. Probably half a dozen, depending on how they turn out.

8 Q. Oh, yeah.

9 A. If you had a problem, you might do more.

10 Q. Do more, yeah. Do you feel comfortable with the  
11 autorotations?

12 A. Yes. I'd rather not do one, but --

13 Q. Have you ever had to do one on the AStar?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Do you know anyone that has?

16 A. Nobody comes to mind.

17 Q. Once you're notified of a trip, how long do you have to  
18 lift off?

19 A. Well, our goal is 5 minutes, but we have whatever time  
20 it takes to determine that it's safe to do it.

21 Q. Is that a written policy or just understood or --

22 A. I don't know that either of those are written.

23 Q. How's the base doing, just --

24 A. In what way?

25 Q. Well, I guess it's in terms of the permanent pilots,

1 you're down to -- you're below your full staffing. And then I  
2 heard rumors that maybe they're thinking of closing the base. I  
3 don't know. Any of this --

4 A. I hadn't heard those rumors and it's my understanding  
5 that we are up to full staff.

6 Q. No, but you're flying in guys from Colorado and --

7 A. We have been short. One was just assigned to our base  
8 full-time earlier this month, and we've got another one coming  
9 back off medical leave, so --

10 Q. Okay, great. Well, that's -- I'd like to talk about the  
11 company, if you can help me on that. How would you characterize  
12 -- compared to industry standards, how would you characterize pay,  
13 pilot pay?

14 A. I don't know what industry standards are. I haven't  
15 looked for a job in a long time, obviously, so --

16 Q. That's true. Well, how would you characterize the pay  
17 by any standards?

18 A. I'm comfortable with it.

19 Q. How about morale?

20 A. The people that I see at our base and interact with all  
21 seem to have good morale.

22 Q. How's the size of the workforce compared to the workload  
23 you need to perform the missions?

24 A. It takes three people, a pilot and two medical crew, and  
25 we've always got that.

1 Q. How's the turnover rate of pilots?

2 A. Compared to?

3 Q. Compared to any standard. What do you think? How would  
4 you characterize it?

5 A. Well, we've had a couple of people that were either  
6 transferred or promoted. I suppose that's normal.

7 Q. How about turnover of management?

8 A. There hasn't really been any in the management that I  
9 interact with.

10 Q. What's special about this company?

11 A. I work for them. They're my boss. They pay me.

12 Q. Great. I can deal with that, yeah. How's the quality  
13 of new hires?

14 A. You're talking about pilots or --

15 Q. Yeah, pilots.

16 A. Again, the only time I would see them would be at shift  
17 change, so -- I can only judge based on when I look at the  
18 aircraft when I come on duty and I've never noticed a problem.

19 Q. How's the quality of training there?

20 A. I think they do good.

21 Q. Why is that?

22 A. They keep me feeling comfortable with the tasks I have  
23 to perform.

24 Q. How's the quality of the equipment?

25 A. I think it's -- are you talking about the helicopter?

- 1 Q. Yeah.
- 2 A. Because that's really --
- 3 Q. That's -- yeah, yeah. That's --
- 4 A. That's my equipment.
- 5 Q. Exactly.
- 6 A. I mean, it's a good aircraft.
- 7 Q. How about the quality of maintenance?
- 8 A. I think they do a good job.
- 9 Q. How's promotion opportunity?
- 10 A. Better than I want.
- 11 Q. Why is that?
- 12 A. I'm 65 years old. I'm comfortable where I am.
- 13 Q. How's the financial condition of the company?
- 14 A. I wouldn't know. They send out financial statements,  
15 what, quarterly, or whatever they are. I don't remember ever  
16 taking the time to look at one.
- 17 Q. How's the relationship between the company and the pilot  
18 union?
- 19 A. You'd have to ask somebody with union management or  
20 company management that --
- 21 Q. So it doesn't spill over into your world?
- 22 A. No.
- 23 Q. Has the company expanded recently or contracted, scaled  
24 back, either one?
- 25 A. I think they've pretty much continued to expand.

1 Q. Any issues that come up because of expansion affect you?

2 A. No.

3 Q. Did anything get better or worse?

4 A. I don't see any difference in what I do.

5 Q. Has the company had any previous accidents?

6 A. Sure.

7 Q. Tell me about what they do that's different now.

8 A. Well, you're asking for specifics about incidents that I  
9 wasn't involved with, so --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- I don't have the personal knowledge.

12 Q. Are they discussed in training?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Give me an example.

15 A. You know, my memory is not that good, I'm afraid. I  
16 know we do have a review of accidents at recurrent training, but I  
17 don't recall anything specifically sticking out the last time we  
18 were in.

19 Q. What kind of complaints are there from the pilot group,  
20 things for improvement?

21 A. They wouldn't complain to me. I'm in no position to  
22 affect change.

23 Q. I hear you. Is there a safety office?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. What do they do?



1 (Phone rings.)

2 MR. SILLIMAN: Let the record reflect that's Malcolm's  
3 phone.

4 MR. BRENNER: Let's continue.

5 BY MR. BRENNER:

6 Q. Would you like a break?

7 A. No, I'm fine.

8 Q. Okay. Please, safety office.

9 A. What's the question? I'm sorry.

10 Q. Well, we were talking about the safety office, what they  
11 do.

12 A. Well, they contribute to publications that I see.

13 Q. What publications?

14 A. I want to say newsletter, but it's not really a  
15 newsletter. I'm not sure what --

16 Q. Well, are there ways that you can communicate safety  
17 issues to the company?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. How?

20 A. You can either do it directly or anonymously through our  
21 Alert Line, which used to be Silent Whistle; now it's Alert Line.

22 Q. Oh, I like the Silent Whistle. That's a shame.

23 A. Yeah.

24 Q. Yeah.

25 A. AIDMORs, those get read at the highest level.

1 Q. Have you submitted any?

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. About what?

4 A. Well, as I was answering before, anytime you have a  
5 weather abort, you have to submit an AIDMOR.

6 Q. Okay, um-hum. What are other cases where you have to  
7 submit an AIDMOR?

8 A. If you were to exceed 14 hours of duty time, that would  
9 be grounds for an AIDMOR, any kind of safety-related incidents.  
10 But it's basically a system for sharing these things so that other  
11 people can learn from them and not have to go out and make all the  
12 mistakes themselves.

13 Q. Is there immunity in the program?

14 A. No.

15 Q. Is there like an ASAP program?

16 A. Yes, there is an ASAP program.

17 Q. And that does have immunity?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay. How are relations with the FAA?

20 A. My relations with them have all been very good.

21 Q. How often do you see an inspector?

22 A. Well, it seems like about two or three times a year. I  
23 think budget cutbacks have got them not traveling quite as much,  
24 so we're close.

25 Q. How do you see them?

1 A. They stop by for base visits.

2 Q. Are they announced ahead of time?

3 A. No.

4 MR. BRENNER: I think that I've wrung this witness out  
5 here.

6 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

7 Q. Going back to the autorotation. So, in the -- you fly  
8 the B -- as far as Aerostars, I understand you've flown the B,  
9 what, the BA?

10 A. The B and the B2.

11 Q. B2?

12 A. I think we did have a BA spare in there for a while.

13 Q. Okay. And in all those helicopter models, they don't  
14 have a flight idle stop; is that correct?

15 A. That's correct.

16 Q. So have you ever flown any Aerostar where you actually  
17 take the fuel control lever and put it into a corresponding flight  
18 idle stop position, you know, the thumbs-width thing?

19 A. We do hovering autorotations in that manner, but as far  
20 as in flight, no.

21 Q. Okay. Do you have any idea what the difference would be  
22 from, you know, flying in flight and going, you know -- or having  
23 a -- putting the throttle, or the fuel control throttle -- how do  
24 you call it? What is that called, the thing --

25 A. Well, it's still throttle.

1 Q. Throttle, okay. Putting the throttle into a -- you  
2 can't put it into a flight idle position. Is there -- do you  
3 think there's very much difference between doing an autorotation  
4 where you can put it into flight idle position as opposed to  
5 simply lowering the collective to initiate the autorotation?

6 A. I think only at the termination is the only place I  
7 would see that there should be a difference.

8 Q. What procedures do you use when you practice your  
9 autorotations?

10 A. Well, we normally do them at an airport. You know,  
11 lower the collective and then increase it, probably, to control  
12 rotor RPM because it will tend to build in an AStar. Continue on  
13 down and fly her and instead of cushioning it onto the ground, you  
14 terminate at a hover.

15 Q. Have you -- you've never flown the B3 model where they  
16 have a flight idle stop?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Have you flown smaller helicopters where you've done  
19 full autorotations, or at least you were able to roll the throttle  
20 down to a flight idle stop before issuing an autorotation?

21 A. Well, I've done them in an OH-58 in the National Guard.

22 Q. Did you practice those in your Huey days back in the  
23 Army?

24 A. Yes. I got off active duty in 1971, so --

25 Q. Yeah, it's been a ways. What's the sight -- you know,

1 what kind of sight picture or experiences do you have when you  
2 practice the autorotations in the B2 as far as when you initiate  
3 it? Is there -- you know, as far as pitch, roll, yaw, those kind  
4 of things?

5 A. Well, you're looking for a --

6 Q. Just what --

7 A. -- 60/65 knot attitude.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. It depends. If you're doing a straight in, then wings  
10 level. If you're doing a turn, then turn.

11 Q. How fast do you think you'd lose your rotor RPMs in or  
12 on a rotation if you didn't immediately respond to an engine  
13 failure?

14 A. Pretty quickly. It's a low inertia rotor systems.

15 Q. So how many seconds would you anticipate, I guess?

16 A. I have no idea.

17 Q. Yeah. Do you think it would be better training if you  
18 were able to do a -- at least be able to roll your throttles to  
19 flight idle rather, as opposed to lowering your collective full  
20 amount?

21 A. Well, I think doing them to the ground is probably  
22 better training because in the event of an engine failure, that's  
23 what you have to do, but, you know, within limitations of the  
24 aircraft.

25 Q. Yeah. Oh, I've got just -- what I'd like to do, and

1 this is probably the last thing, is to play this clip from the  
2 thing that we did yesterday. This won't take long.

3 A. Okay.

4 Q. James is going to be on here. It's going to be a  
5 notification and the tone's going to go off. They're going to  
6 have the notification for the medical thing. I'd like you to  
7 listen to it. I'm going to put this on pause while we listen to  
8 it.

9 (Off the record.)

10 (On the record.)

11 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

12 Q. Okay, we listened to the notification from LifeCom to  
13 the helicopter crew. They identify that they want a flight to  
14 Harrison County in Bethany, Missouri and they want a weather  
15 check. Is that a typical portion of the call?

16 A. Yes.

17 Q. The pilot takes, and I didn't time it exactly, but you  
18 know, roughly 30 seconds, to confirm that weather is good. Is --  
19 would that be typical under a lot of circumstances?

20 A. If the weather were marginal, it might take longer, but  
21 if the weather were good, then it's typical.

22 Q. It's reasonable?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. Now, the next thing that happens is that the -- LifeCom  
25 basically tells the age of the patient, the weight of the patient,

1 and the basic medical condition that they're launching or why this  
2 person needs to be transferred. Is that something that they  
3 typically do on the notification where the pilot can be -- you  
4 know, can hear that as well?

5 A. Yes. That information is provided to the medical crew,  
6 but the pilot will hear it --

7 Q. But it's --

8 A. -- after he's made his decision.

9 Q. After he's made a decision. Okay. And is that true all  
10 the time or is that just -- does it happen like that all the time  
11 or is it just on this one, this is kind of a different one?

12 A. Typical.

13 Q. Okay. Hypothetical situation, I know, but had this been  
14 a patient who was just an infant that needed a -- a neonatal or  
15 something that needed to be transferred or something, would that  
16 also be related in the initial notification like this? Would the  
17 pilot be able to hear that?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. Okay.

20 A. Although if it were neonatal, it would be something that  
21 we would refer to Children's Mercy Hospital because they're  
22 equipped for it and we aren't.

23 Q. Oh, so they'd -- a flight crew, you mean, and a  
24 helicopter or --

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. Children's Mercy has their own helicopter and they have  
3 an isolette for transport of neonatal.

4 Q. Do you take other, you know, small children --

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. -- at times? Do they notify you during the initial  
7 notification that it might be a child that's involved with a --

8 A. Again, not until after a decision is made --

9 Q. Right. Okay.

10 A. -- and primarily for that reason.

11 Q. Yeah. Okay. All right.

12 MR. SILLIMAN: Malcolm, any further questions?

13 MR. BRENNER: How was breakfast? No, I'm

14 (indiscernible).

15 MR. WHITE: This is (indiscernible) breakfast.

16 MR. BRENNER: Yeah, since he seems to enjoy --

17 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF:           AIR METHODS CORPORATION  
                                  LIFENET HELICOPTER CRASH  
                                  AUGUST 26, 2011  
                                  NEAR MOSBY, MISSOURI  
                                  Interview of Gary White

DOCKET NUMBER:            CEN11FA599

PLACE:                      Kansas City, Missouri

DATE:                        September 15, 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.

---

Karen M. Galvez  
Transcriber