

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: RANDY VANDENHUL

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, Malcolm, we're ready to go.

MR. BRENNER: Okay, great.

INTERVIEW OF RANDY VANDENHUL

BY MR. BRENNER:

Q. When did you hire with the company?

A. I hired in the company back in 2002, August, I believe, 22nd, of 2002.

Q. Um-hum. And what have your jobs been with the company -- hired?

A. I was a line pilot, aviation service manager, and then a aviation manager, area aviation manager.

Q. When did you take on the current position?

A. That would be May 2009.

Q. And what are your responsibilities in this position?

A. It's -- my responsibility is the protection of certificates, training of the pilots in safety and operations and ensuring all of their training aspects are completed.

Q. Now, and are you also flying the line now or is that past?

A. I fly the line every now and then to -- as a, just a general asset when needed.

Q. And where are you based?

A. Lincoln, Nebraska.

Q. Oh, okay. And which bases come under your oversight?

1 A. Well, the oversight has changed, but the -- my -- well,
2 the bases that I held were LifeNet of the Heartland, which St. Joe
3 is one of them. That's Norfolk, Omaha, St. Joe, and the new one
4 we put in at Cherokee, Iowa.

5 Q. Um-hum. How many pilots do you use?

6 A. Overall, it's about 62 pilots.

7 Q. Oh. And how many hours do you have as a pilot?

8 A. How many hours?

9 Q. Yeah.

10 A. I've got -- it'd be around approximately 5,000.

11 Q. And how many rotorcraft and how many in the AStar?

12 A. Zero in the AStar. Rotorcraft, probably around 2,800.

13 The rest is fixed-wing.

14 Q. Um-hum. And what rotorcraft do you fly?

15 A. I fly -- currently, it's the BK117.

16 Q. Did you know the accident pilot?

17 A. Yes, I did.

18 Q. Tell me about him.

19 A. What would you like to know?

20 Q. Well, how did you meet him, what kind of interaction did
21 you have with him?

22 A. I actually hired him.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. And then after that, the only other interactions, once I
25 hired him, was the base visits, and that's about it.

1 Q. Well, tell me about hiring him. How did he compare to
2 other candidates and what did you like about him?

3 A. Well, the interview process, I initially talked to him
4 on the phone and he discussed his background in the Army aviation,
5 what he was interested in getting into. We held an interview at
6 St. Joseph, Missouri, at the base, and he was, as a recall, was a
7 topnotch candidate. I mean, the guy was very professional, very
8 forthcoming with his thoughts. In the interview process, he was
9 just -- answered all of the questions perfectly.

10 Q. Can you give me some examples?

11 A. Examples of the questions?

12 Q. Yeah, forthcoming and very --

13 A. Yeah. Well, he just -- well, not really. I mean, it's
14 been a while since -- and I've interviewed a few others. I just
15 recall that he was very professional, I mean, as far as his
16 manner, the way he carried himself, the way he answered the
17 questions.

18 Q. When was the interview about?

19 A. Oh, wow. I believe -- I can't answer that one. I think
20 it was August of last year.

21 Q. And what were his personal goals and his career goals?

22 A. Well, his career goals, from what we were talking, is to
23 get into the air ambulance operation, the EMS world.

24 Q. What did he like about it?

25 A. That I couldn't tell you.

1 Q. Okay. All right. So you met him then, you decided to
2 hire him, and then you say you saw him at base visits. When were
3 those?

4 A. That I don't -- I couldn't recall either. I don't have
5 that information.

6 Q. How often do you see the base?

7 A. I usually see the base at least every month.

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. And depending on -- the St. Joe base, actually I've
10 visited more because I was usually traveling in other directions
11 at the time.

12 Q. Oh, so it's just a good central point?

13 A. Yeah. It's right there on the interstate -- right off
14 the interstate, on I-29.

15 Q. And when you visit the base, how long are you there and
16 who do you see?

17 A. I usually talk to the pilot, the medical staff on, and
18 then the mechanic, if they're around. I usually -- I just stop
19 in, do a possible audit, a base audit, look at the base, look if
20 the appropriate documents are there, they're doing things
21 appropriately. And I'll talk to medical staff there, see how
22 things are going, and then I'll offer any assistance to the pilot
23 and anything I can do for the mechanic.

24 Q. When is the last time you saw the pilot?

25 A. I have not seen James, probably in, oh, probably 3

1 months.

2 Q. And have you heard from him in between by -- has he
3 contacted you?

4 A. Yes. We've, we have spoken numerous times.

5 Q. Um-hum. When's the most recent?

6 A. I would say about 2 weeks before the accident.

7 Q. What was that about?

8 A. Him going back up to Rapid City.

9 Q. Sure. And, yeah, tell me about that. Just very
10 quickly, what was the arrangement then? I guess -- why did he
11 move to Rapid City and why did he come back?

12 A. He moved to Rapid City. That's where his family is from
13 and -- or he is from. From my knowledge, it's that he was from.
14 His wife had -- they wanted to move up to Rapid City. The slot
15 came open up there. He applied for it. And I already had another
16 person that wanted to move to St. Joe, so I moved him up to Rapid
17 City. And then that's where he wanted to be, wanted to live.

18 Q. Um-hum. And then why was he -- why did he come back to
19 St. Joe's?

20 A. He came back to cover the base. He was very
21 knowledgeable in the area, so he came back to cover a pilot that
22 was on medical leave.

23 Q. Oh, okay. Is St. Joe's up to full staffing?

24 A. Well, yes, it is, except we -- there's full staff, but
25 we do have a guy on medical leave.

1 Q. Oh, okay. Did you ever have discipline problems with
2 the accident pilot?

3 A. With James?

4 Q. Yeah.

5 A. Oh, never.

6 Q. Any commendations?

7 A. Other than for my personal commendations thanking him
8 for a job well done on talking to the medical staff, no.

9 Q. What did the medical staff say about him?

10 A. They just, they like his -- and, once again, I'll fall
11 back on the professional. He is very professional and they like
12 him. He gets the job done and not one to -- other than that, I
13 mean, that's about how they talked about him --

14 Q. Um-hum.

15 A. -- like any other pilot.

16 Q. Um-hum. Did you ever fly with him?

17 A. I did not.

18 Q. How was the fuel gauge on the aircraft?

19 A. I couldn't answer that.

20 Q. Okay. And what's the policy on fueling the aircraft,
21 say, after a mission? What's your responsibility?

22 A. Well, there is no policy on refueling the aircraft after
23 a mission.

24 Q. Well, I guess, some of the pilots said for St. Joe's
25 they typically filled it to 70, about 70 percent. Is that a

1 local --

2 A. Correct. Correct. But you've got to also remember that
3 this aircraft was on a training mission at the time so it wasn't a
4 duty aircraft.

5 Q. I see. Is -- but as a duty policy, the 70 percent fuel,
6 is that just St. Joe's or is that widespread (indiscernible)?

7 A. Well, that's just St. Joe. Each base is different
8 depending on their mission, depending on where they fly, what type
9 of patients they carry, if they carry the patient from the
10 hospital or if they depart out of a airport.

11 Q. I see. Sure. How does the pilot determine the fuel
12 level for a mission?

13 A. A normal pilot -- and I don't know what you're looking
14 for there. What do you mean, sir?

15 Q. Well, preflight. I guess when -- okay, starting a
16 mission, how do you know what the fuel is?

17 A. You would -- on preflight, you would look at the fuel
18 gauge.

19 Q. Okay. And that's standard, that's written policy or
20 that's --

21 A. That's in the flight manual.

22 Q. Um-hum. Do the pilots, when they're contacted, do they
23 perform a risk assessment before a mission?

24 A. Yes, they do.

25 Q. Tell me about the risk assessment.

1 A. The risk assessment is a standard risk assessment for
2 Air Methods.

3 Q. Um-hum. So the whole company uses it? It's a --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- written form?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. And if the -- you know, basically, what do they
8 learn from that? What does that do for them?

9 A. It tells them their, you know, their risk for the day --
10 or for the, excuse me, for that flight.

11 Q. Um-hum.

12 A. It's just a situational awareness tool.

13 Q. Good. Good. And do they have any responsibilities
14 either to record it or to take further action based on the
15 assessment?

16 A. Yes. Yes, they're supposed to record it on the duty
17 flight log --

18 Q. Um-hum.

19 A. -- and also tell it to the communication centers. And
20 that one is kind of a -- it's not driven at all communication
21 centers, but it's mainly -- most of the communication centers.

22 Q. Is there a point in the risk assessment, say, if it
23 passes a certain threshold, that they're required to consult with
24 someone else?

25 A. No.

1 Q. How long do they have to depart?

2 A. Excuse me?

3 Q. Once they're advised of a mission, is there a target
4 time to get off the ground?

5 A. Not from the operational side. As safely as possible.
6 Expeditiously, but safely as possible. We do not put times on
7 them.

8 Q. Okay. Do they ever consult with you in terms of whether
9 to take a mission or not?

10 A. Yes. If they're doing a search and assist mission, yes.

11 Q. What's search and assist?

12 A. Search and assist, if there's somebody lost or
13 something, we do not rescue, but we'll go out, if requested by the
14 agency, and clear it by -- they'll ask if we can go out and look
15 for somebody.

16 Q. I see. And what about on a hospital transfer, a more
17 routine mission?

18 A. Rarely. If it's a new pilot, they know that they call
19 me. The can call the lead pilot or call myself. If he's a new
20 hire just starting out, he can call at any time with any
21 questions.

22 Q. In this case, the pilot landed at the hospital,
23 recognized that his fuel was low, and contacted the communications
24 center, to his credit. What were -- what should he do at this
25 point and what are his options?

1 A. That's kind of hard because I don't -- I wasn't really
2 -- I'm not there so I don't know what his thought process was as
3 far as his options.

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

5 A. The flight follower?

6 Q. Yes.

7 A. The communications specialist?

8 Q. Um-hum.

9 A. Well, their role is to communicate with tracking, flight
10 tracking, securing any ground transportation, securing anything
11 the pilot needs. They're the ones that he actually talked to who
12 called, contacted the fuel down at the airport.

13 Q. Um-hum.

14 A. So, they would assist him with that as well.

15 Q. Do they share responsibility in terms of whether -- do
16 they assist him or cooperate or have responsibility in terms of
17 whether he takes a mission or not?

18 A. No, they don't. That is the pilot-in-command. That's
19 why he is the pilot-in-command. That's his responsibility. It
20 falls on his shoulders, his shoulders alone, unless there's other
21 augmented circumstances, such as weather. Or if the medical crew
22 feels that something is not right, they can say no, no go.

23 Q. And what happens then?

24 A. Then they don't go.

25 Q. Got it. What about the Operation Control Center? When

1 would they be involved?

2 A. The Operational Control Center normally gets involved if
3 they -- if there's weather; they see forecasted weather or
4 unforecasted weather coming, they'll contact the pilot. Or if
5 they can, to the aircraft or contact a communications specialist
6 telling them, hey, this -- the pilot may not see this weather. We
7 see, you know, weather turning bad. Can you communicate with the
8 pilot and tell him what we're seeing? It's just an advance heads-
9 up.

10 Q. Um-hum. So they contact the -- are there cases where
11 the pilot contacts them?

12 A. To the Operational Control Center?

13 Q. Yes.

14 A. Yes, I've heard cases.

15 Q. What are the situations for that?

16 A. The only thing that I could think of is if it's weather
17 driven. Because they have a, the Operational Control Center has a
18 very knowledgeable staff there, and they also got a -- there's
19 some really nice equipment as far as weather forecasting.

20 Q. Do they?

21 A. And if they pilot doesn't have -- oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
22 If the pilot is at a hospital or something and they don't have
23 access to the weather, they'll -- they could call the Operational
24 Control Center.

25 Q. Um-hum. Do they call them direct or through the flight

1 follower?

2 A. It'd be direct.

3 Q. How often does that happen?

4 A. I couldn't answer that. The Operational Control Center
5 tracks that.

6 Q. Um-hum. And I guess -- what's the difference in terms
7 of functions between the Operational Control Center and the flight
8 follower? You started to say it, but I'm not -- when would you
9 call one rather than the other?

10 A. The communications specialist operates on the day-to-day
11 business side of it -- I mean, the day-to-day operation. Excuse
12 me. The Operation Control Center monitors all aircraft.

13 Q. I see. So is the Operational Control Center aware of
14 all the missions? Are they tracking all the missions in the
15 system?

16 A. Yes. They are tracking all the flights. Every flight,
17 every aircraft that departs the ground, every Air Methods aircraft
18 that departs that ground has a flight plan on them and the
19 Operational Control Center tracks that. Matter of fact, the FAA
20 has stopped in there several times and they -- they're more than
21 welcome, I guess, to pop in the Operation Control Center and to
22 see that we are tracking every aircraft. We have operation
23 control of every aircraft and every air crew.

24 Q. What are they tracking for?

25 A. The flight plan. If the aircraft's up and operational,

1 they need to know who's in it, what's their -- where they're
2 going, everything, where they are.

3 Q. Do they have someone -- a pilot available or someone
4 with pilot skills in the OCC?

5 A. Yes, they do. They always -- they have one pilot on
6 duty at all times, one pilot and one communications specialist.

7 Q. Um-hum. What's the pilot do?

8 A. I couldn't answer that. I don't have that full
9 knowledge of the full Operation Control Center.

10 Q. Have you ever interacted with the pilot from the
11 Operation Control Center?

12 A. To be honest, I don't know. When I call up there, I
13 don't know whether I'm talking to the pilot or I'm talking to the
14 communications specialist.

15 Q. How often do you call up there?

16 A. Not very often.

17 Q. Well, about how often? Can you estimate?

18 A. I usually don't call at all because I don't fly that
19 often.

20 Q. Sure. And how about the other pilots you oversee, are
21 you aware of them calling it?

22 A. I am not aware.

23 Q. Suppose in this case, the pilot -- okay, the pilot has
24 to make a decision. He's on the ground. He has to make a
25 decision about fuel. What would happen if he cancelled the trip

1 because of the fuel situation?

2 A. If he cancelled the trip and I found out about it,
3 nothing would happen.

4 Q. Um-hum. Has that ever happened?

5 A. Not for this type of circumstance. The only other would
6 be weather. We do not -- we just don't preach safety and promote
7 it, we actually use it, and we do not chastise our people for
8 turning down flights.

9 Q. Would he have to fill out paperwork?

10 A. He would have to fill out probably an AIDMOR, or
11 accident investigation or accident incident reporting form, to let
12 them know what happened, and that informs the certificate of
13 what's going on.

14 Q. Who would that go to?

15 A. That goes to Aaron Todd on down. Well, actually, above
16 me. It goes from the regional aviation directors on up through
17 Aaron Todd, the CEO.

18 Q. And, normally, would you or someone else interview them
19 just to establish the details of what happened?

20 A. Yeah.

21 Q. When would that happen?

22 A. Depending on the circumstance. If somebody had a
23 question -- if the director of operations, the chief pilot had a
24 question, it would be the regional aviation director, myself,
25 would ask them.

1 Q. Now, in this case, it seems to me that he could
2 potentially face some sort of discipline because he took off
3 without knowing the fuel state. Now, he did recognize it, to his
4 credit. How would you have balance that?

5 A. I'm sorry. Say that again, please?

6 Q. Well, as a supervisor, how would you balance it? I
7 mean, it seems to me like, you know, in this case, he possibly had
8 some exposure in it in terms of his preflight and arriving there
9 without adequate fuel. Would that lead to discipline?

10 A. Well, it'd lead to some sort of counseling. I wouldn't
11 say discipline.

12 Q. Um-hum. All right. How do you practice autorotation?

13 A. We practice it normally twice a year.

14 Q. Um-hum. And are you familiar on the AStar how you
15 practice it?

16 A. I do not.

17 Q. Okay, okay. Well, a couple of questions about the
18 company. Do you need a break or anything?

19 A. No, I'm fine.

20 Q. Did Mr. Cox provide coffee and snacks?

21 A. No, he just told me to suck it up, sit in the corner.

22 Q. Boy, he's toughened up in the last few days. He was
23 generous with us.

24 MR. COX: I was softening you up.

25 BY MR. BRENNER:

1 Q. Okay, well, we're going to try to get through this fast
2 before you (indiscernible). Okay, how would you characterize pay
3 in the company?

4 A. Oh, I think pay is very good. Matter of fact, we have
5 hired people away from what I believe is companies that have
6 higher pay.

7 Q. Um-hum. And what's special about this company? How do
8 you do that?

9 A. How do we hire people? Because --

10 Q. Yeah. What's especially attractive about this company?

11 A. Well, it's just like what we were talking about. What's
12 special about this company is fairly easy. We're well known. We
13 treat our pilots well. We treat them with respect. We pay well.
14 We got good benefits. We got programs: SMS program; we got ASAP
15 program. We've got programs out there -- you know, I wouldn't say
16 to protect their certificate, but it's -- pilots like to have that
17 knowledge that we're not out to, you know, whack them with the big
18 stick, if you will, discipline them all the time. We make sure we
19 train them well and we just don't preach safety, we practice it.

20 Q. Um-hum. Did the accident pilot ever file an ASAP
21 report?

22 A. That I do not know.

23 Q. That would not come through you?

24 A. That would not come through me. That goes straight to
25 the ASAP committee, ERC board, and they get that.

1 So --

2 Q. Are you aware, have there been previous cases where the
3 aircraft landed for fuel with a passenger on board?

4 A. From St. Joe?

5 Q. Yeah, St. Joe or actually from any of your bases? When
6 does that happen?

7 A. Not that I recall. And if they would have done that, we
8 would have got a post-action incident plan alert. We get that
9 broadcasted by the communication center here.

10 Q. I see.

11 A. Any deviation from point A to point B, be that for
12 something like that or turning around, aborting a flight, any
13 deviation, we get that alert.

14 Q. I'm sorry. What's the name of the alert?

15 A. A post-accident incident plan alert.

16 Q. Did they issue that in this case?

17 A. Yes, they did.

18 Q. When did they issue that?

19 A. That I don't know on this one. That got stopped at the
20 OCC and goes to the director of operations, the chief pilot.

21 Q. Um-hum, right. How is pilot morale?

22 A. I would say it's great. I mean, I don't know if you've
23 interviewed our guys, but I would like to think it's great. The
24 guys I talk to think well of the company. Morale is high. As you
25 can -- I don't know if you know, but, you know, for the most part,

1 other than natural attrition of losing pilots for medical, we
2 rarely lose a pilot that goes to another company. So I think it's
3 very great, very well.

4 Q. And how's the turnover for managers?

5 A. It's rare. It's rare for a manager to turn over. We
6 like our jobs. We like interacting. If a guy takes a job as a
7 manager, such as myself, Regional Aviation Director, we like
8 interacting with the pilots and that's our main focus is take care
9 of our pilots.

10 Q. How's the quality of new hires?

11 A. Quality has been great. I believe you talked to one of
12 my new hires, Bret Koski.

13 Q. Yeah.

14 A. So you tell me what the quality is of our new hires.
15 Very good. Very good. You've talked to one of the newest ones
16 and you've talked to one of the oldest ones. I believe you talked
17 to Gary White --

18 Q. That's right.

19 A. -- one of our, how would you say, elderly pilots, and
20 then Bret Koski's a fairly new pilot.

21 Q. No, they're impressive. Personal opinion. I'm not
22 speaking for the Board, but they're impressive.

23 How competitive is St. Joe's?

24 A. As -- I'm sorry, as far as what? In reference?

25 Q. How much competition is out there, other companies

1 competing for the business?

2 A. Oh, there's always that. I couldn't tell you that
3 because I'm not on the business side. I try not to get involved
4 with that, so I just concentrate on my pilots.

5 Q. Sure. Any sense what's the financial position of the
6 company?

7 A. I think we're doing well.

8 Q. Why do you think that?

9 A. I mean, we just acquired Omni. Other than that, that's
10 about all I know.

11 Q. How's the relation between the company and the labor
12 union? How about the labor union, pilot labor union?

13 A. I don't get involved with that.

14 Q. Oh, I'd think you'd get pulled in. Okay, I didn't know.

15 A. No. No, the pilots never ask me because they know it's
16 all way above my level.

17 Q. I see. Has the company experienced previous accidents?

18 A. Yes. I think that you just asked me if we've had
19 previous accidents?

20 Q. That's right.

21 A. Oh, yes.

22 Q. And what changes came about as a result of that?

23 A. I didn't -- in reference to which accident, I guess I
24 would have to ask?

25 Q. Any you're aware of? Anything (indiscernible) aware of?

1 A. Well, I believe the flight (indiscernible) one, we
2 implemented the change in policy where we now call in at certain
3 distances on a helicopter frequency.

4 Q. I'm sorry. I don't understand that. Could you explain
5 that a little more?

6 A. Well, I believe the flight (indiscernible) when two
7 aircraft ran into each other --

8 Q. Right, uh-huh.

9 A. -- and now it's required that all, at least all Air
10 Methods aircraft, call in at certain distances from the helipad,
11 come inbound and outbound.

12 Q. Excellent. To track them in the critical parts of
13 flight, I guess?

14 A. Right.

15 Q. What's the safety office do?

16 A. The safety office at Air Methods?

17 Q. Yeah.

18 A. Oh, my gosh. I mean, where do you want me to begin?
19 They're in all aspects of our operation.

20 Q. Well, what interactions do you have with them?

21 A. I actually talk, actually at least monthly, to the
22 regional safety manager for the area.

23 Q. Um-hum.

24 A. So, I mean, any aspect. He does audits. We
25 communicate, if we open up the base, what's required. He pops in

1 unannounced, communicates with people from a -- looks at it from a
2 safety standpoint instead of an operational standpoint.

3 Q. What kind of procedures have come out of the safety
4 program?

5 A. Wow. I mean, that's -- you got SMS, you got ASAP, you
6 got -- I mean, we can go on and on --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. -- to include even the OSHA training, which is, you
9 know, exceptional.

10 Q. Okay. Yeah, we'll be talking to the safety office. I
11 was curious just, you know, in your position, how it comes
12 through.

13 A. Oh, it, yeah, it comes through in all aspects of our
14 operation, I mean, in the day-to-day business. And that's why I
15 was very impressed with them, especially, you know, in the past
16 few years. They've really come through, and not just being a
17 department, but being part of the operations.

18 Q. How are relations with the FAA?

19 A. Well, you would have to ask the FAA. I do not deal with
20 them on a daily basis.

21 Q. How often do you see them?

22 A. Last time I saw them was when I was out there with Jim
23 at the accident scene.

24 Q. Oh, okay. And before that?

25 A. Rare, rarely. They -- they'll stop in at Lincoln, Jim,

1 James Fazma (ph.). He'll do a operational check. I think I saw
2 him -- well, I guess it's been a while since I've been at the base
3 when he popped in, but --

4 Q. If, now, the pilot was in a difficult situation. He's
5 at the -- he just arrived at the hospital. He realizes that he
6 has less fuel than he expected. If he had contacted you at that
7 point, what would you have done?

8 A. If he would have contacted me, I would have said stay on
9 the ground.

10 Q. And why is that?

11 A. Why? I mean, if he had have contacted me and told me
12 what he told -- I would have just told him to stay on the ground
13 because -- and that we would have gotten fuel to him.

14 Q. Um-hum. And so cancel the mission?

15 A. Cancel the mission, affirmative, and the patient could
16 have gone by ground.

17 Q. Why didn't he contact you?

18 A. I don't know. I'm not -- I wasn't there. You know, I'm
19 not in James' head.

20 Q. Was he supposed to have contacted you if you --

21 A. No, he's not -- well, in that condition, yes, he could
22 contact the communications specialist. He could have contacted
23 me.

24 Q. Okay. So in terms of, you know -- and I guess getting a
25 second opinion or getting assistance or some sort of oversight or

1 show responsibility, if I understand, it would be the flight
2 follower, is that right, or you is his choices.

3 A. Well, as far as second opinion, it's the pilot-in-
4 command. He has to look at what's going on and he makes the
5 decision what he wants to do. If he wants a second opinion on
6 something, then he contacts me.

7 Q. And what about OCC? Would that be in his hierarchy of
8 the people?

9 A. No.

10 Q. Why not? You've got some grizzled pilot up there --

11 A. Well, he's not a grizzled pilot. It's just a pilot to
12 know what's going on the pilot's mind. If you have a pilot on
13 shift there so he can relate to what's going on the pilot's mind,
14 yes, the OCC contacts him in flight or something.

15 Q. Sure. Randy, I misspoke and I apologize. I'm a
16 grizzled investigator. I see that as a compliment. So, no, I --
17 that's just how I visualize it. I visualize the fellow who did
18 the training as being there and, gosh, just, you know, what a
19 great opportunity. But you're right, it's just -- it is another
20 pilot though.

21 A. Yeah, it's just a pilot. I mean, I would to say there's
22 a grizzled old pilot up there that could do that, but, you know,
23 it's a just normal -- it's just a pilot who has decided to -- we
24 have a pilot there so he can interpolate stuff that a
25 communications specialist doesn't have knowledge of.

1 MR. BRENNER: Um-hum. Well, Jim, I think I've worked
2 this man through. Do you have questions?

3 MR. SILLIMAN: Yeah, just a couple, I think.

4 BY MR. SILLIMAN:

5 Q. When -- Malcolm asked about your responsibilities. I
6 think the thing that you said, protection of certificate. I'm not
7 exactly sure what that means. Could you kind of explain that more
8 fully?

9 A. Sure. Yeah. I mean, the protection of certificate is
10 operational control, plain and simple. No flight launches out
11 unless the pilot-in-command, which is our lowest tier, says that
12 it is allowed to go. If the pilot has a question on a flight or
13 concerning a flight, then they call me, you know, or the regional
14 aviation director. That's what I meant by a certificate. Make
15 sure the pilot is trained. Make sure that he has got -- he's
16 trained and qualified appropriately. I mean, that's what I mean
17 by protection of certificate.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. So we don't have pilots flying out there that have not
20 had their recurrent training, not had their -- I mean, all the way
21 down to the computerized testing system, their ground training, et
22 cetera.

23 Q. And I would guess that that's part of what's required by
24 Part 135 operations and that kind of thing as well, to make sure
25 that they're current and legal and the whole bit then?

1 A. Exactly. Medical, everything. That's my purview.

2 That's what I do.

3 Q. Okay. So you and people in the safety office, I guess,
4 or chief pilot's office and OCC, they're -- you're tracking that
5 all the time then, I guess?

6 A. Yes. The records department, yeah.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. We all work together because, I mean, there's so many
9 that are there that, as far as the variations of aircraft and
10 pilots and on and off medical status, weather, it just -- we
11 needed an aviation manager to track that.

12 Q. Yeah. We asked Bret the other day, you know, if you --
13 you know, what kind of stuff -- or what he would do in certain
14 circumstances if he had a, you know -- was in a situation that he
15 would be confused by or, you know, had a question. And he said
16 calling you, that would be one of the first things he would do.
17 But I guess since you're not a AStar pilot and he's not going to
18 necessarily call you for AStar or specific information, but it's
19 more like, you know, how to handle other type of situations from a
20 person who has more experience then?

21 A. Yes. That's exactly right. And they all know that.
22 Every guy -- all of my pilots know that they can contact me, they
23 contact the regional aviation director. Even the chief pilot's
24 door is open, if you will, to phone if someone needs to talk or a
25 question. And there is, as far as I know, in my, all my time,

1 there's never been a repercussion for calling any of us.

2 Q. Sure. You were hired in 2002. What kind of experience
3 or -- and who did you work for prior to 2002, then?

4 A. The Army.

5 Q. Oh, okay. And what kind of aircraft did you fly there?

6 A. I flew the OH-58-Alpha-Charlie, and then I flew the 58-
7 Delta, flew the Huey, flew the Black Hawk.

8 Q. What -- in the twin engine in the aircraft, I guess, the
9 Black Hawk and the -- well, I guess the Huey, that's still a
10 single engine on the Army side. But in the Black Hawk, did you
11 guys practice autorotations or did they outlaw that sort of thing
12 in twin engine aircraft?

13 A. Oh, no, we still did autorotations.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. It's not full -- I mean, you can't really classify it as
16 full auto, like we do now even in the BK. You just pull it back
17 to idle.

18 Q. Yeah, to a flight idle position?

19 A. Exactly.

20 Q. And then you do a power recovery?

21 A. Right.

22 Q. Okay. Yeah. And in the AStars, the B2s anyway, they
23 don't have that flight idle stop so they don't bring it down to a
24 flight idle position, they just simply lower the collective all
25 the way.

1 A. Correct.

2 Q. And they do a power-on recovery. So it's really not an
3 autorotation really. What's your opinion about that? Because
4 that's -- you have to deal with your pilots and even though you
5 don't have to practice that way, what's your sense of things on
6 that?

7 A. Well, I can't really answer that, Jim, because, I mean,
8 I'm old school from the Army where we actually roll the throttle
9 off in the Hueys. But I can't really speculate that. I can't get
10 into that side of the house.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. I don't know the whys and the wherefores on why they
13 don't do it or why they, you know --

14 Q. Yeah.

15 A. I can't answer that one.

16 Q. Yeah. And the BK117, is that -- do you still have those
17 in your fleet, different bases, then?

18 A. Yes, we do.

19 Q. And what's the -- I mean, that's the perfect, you know,
20 EMS aircraft, I think. I mean, that's my opinion. What's your
21 sense of that?

22 A. You're really going to open up a can of worms, aren't
23 you?

24 Q. Yeah, I am. That's the point.

25 A. I'm a BK guy from the beginning when I started EMS, so,

1 yeah, I love the BK. It's like a Chevy. It's, you know, it's
2 bulletproof. She'll do what you want her to do and it's just a
3 great aircraft. But then again, if you ask AStar guys, they'll
4 give you the same answer for the AStars.

5 Q. Yeah, but, you know, having a twin engine with those
6 clamshell doors, come on. I'm serious.

7 A. I do like the clamshell doors and the medical staff love
8 that, putting them in, in the back.

9 Q. Yeah, yeah.

10 A. And the cabin is just huge.

11 Q. Yeah.

12 A. So --

13 Q. Yeah. Well, I have an opinion about that, obviously.
14 So do you have other bases that have the, what is that, the EC145
15 or something, whatever the BK117 equivalent is?

16 A. Actually, I just acquired Casper, Wyoming. Yes, it's
17 got an EC145 and that's my first -- and actually, my Farmington
18 base just acquired a 429.

19 Q. Oh, okay.

20 A. And the 429 reminds me of a BK. It's gorgeous.

21 Q. Yeah, I am not familiar with that one, but I've heard
22 good things.

23 A. Yeah, I mean, we're getting sidetracked here, but, I
24 mean, I could go on and on about the 429. It reminds me of the
25 BK --

1 Q. Okay.

2 A. -- and it does have a lot of power, so the guys love it.

3 Q. Yeah. But I guess those kind of decisions are all,
4 that's upper management and contracts and all that kind of stuff?

5 A. Yeah, exactly, exactly. I mean, I wish I had some say
6 in that, but --

7 Q. Yeah.

8 A. -- I don't.

9 Q. Yeah. Let's see. Well, you know, the guys that we did
10 meet, you know, the medical guys, the pilots, you know, like
11 Malcolm, I thought they were just topnotch guys and, gosh, I have
12 just a lot of respect for what they do and what you guys do. So
13 -- but they're real sharp guys, obviously.

14 We went to, what is it, AirCom, and that was very
15 interesting, so that -- we'll talk to those guys later today. But
16 I was just kind of curious. The whole thing about the OCC and
17 not, you know -- it's really not really -- the OCC then, it really
18 doesn't sound like it's at all like a dispatcher or like a Part
19 121 dispatcher at all, that it's really -- or, I mean, how would
20 you characterize that?

21 A. Personally, I'd characterize OCC as a -- as just what it
22 is, Operational Control Center, and I don't believe it is supposed
23 to replace the communication center or the communications
24 specialist. It's there to enhance them and to maintain and ensure
25 that the company has operational control on the aircraft by

1 tracking all these flights --

2 Q. Um-hum.

3 A. -- so they know at any given point in time who's out
4 there and what they're doing.

5 Q. Yeah. And what is an AOC? On the tape, one of the
6 people say is there an AOC, and they say it's not like in Arizona.
7 What is an AOC?

8 A. That I don't know.

9 Q. Okay.

10 A. I don't know as to that.

11 Q. Okay. Well, I think maybe it might be on the medical
12 side, actually.

13 A. It could be.

14 Q. Yeah. Well, I can't think of anything else, Randy.
15 Let's see. Let me just think for just for just a minute here.

16 BY MR. BRENNER:

17 Q. Randy, Malcolm again. How are the promotion
18 opportunities for the pilots?

19 A. Oh, I think there's -- it's pretty good. I mean, if you
20 just look at me, I went from a line pilot to a aviation service
21 manager, which is a senior lead pilot at a base, and then I got
22 promoted to the aviation manager position. Or you could go up
23 another line and train and become a certificate check airman,
24 training captain. Yes, there is -- there's usually a lot of
25 promotional. It depends on what you want to do. You may have to

1 move to another base, depending on -- some of these guys, like
2 Gary White, stay there for 20 years, but -- but they, yeah,
3 promotion, there's always promotion.

4 Q. Um-hum. Great.

5 MR. BRENNER: I'm good, Jim.

6 MR. SILLIMAN: Yeah. I can't think of anything else. I
7 certainly appreciate you helping us out this morning, that's for
8 sure, Randy, and --

9 MR. VANDENHUL: Thank you.

10 MR. SILLIMAN: -- I'll look forward to meeting you in a
11 different context, that's for sure, maybe at a conference or
12 something like that.

13 MR. VANDENHUL: Oh, yeah, definitely. I look forward to
14 it.

15 BY MR. BRENNER:

16 Q. Is there anything else we didn't ask you that might help
17 us with the investigation? Mr. Cox always expects us to ask that,
18 so --

19 MR. COX: Yeah, that's my favorite question.

20 MR. BRENNER: I don't want to disappoint him.

21 BY MR. BRENNER:

22 Q. Anything else that we should talk about?

23 A. Not that I can think of.

24 Q. Randy, I'm real sorry we don't get to meet you in
25 person, but the logistics didn't work out. We sure appreciate you

1 coming in and, you know, helping the investigation.

2 MR. VANDENHUL: Oh, my pleasure. Anytime. Are we off
3 the record, guys?

4 (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 Randy Vandenhul

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.

Karen M. Galvez
Transcriber