

Docket No. SA-520

Exhibit No. 11-S

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Washington, D. C.

Letter and Statements Regarding Mr. Falla

(15 pages)

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MARCH 15, 2000

JOHN F. KELLY
CHAIRMAN/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
BILL AYER
PRESIDENT
ALASKA AIRLINES
P.O. BOX 68900
SEATTLE, WA 98168-0900

MR. KELLY AND MR. AYER,

THE EVENTS OF THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS HAVE TAKEN THEIR TOLL ON ALL OF US. WE ARE STILL GRIEVING EACH IN HIS OWN WAY AND HERE IN BASE MAINTENANCE, THE EFFECTS ARE INCALCULABLE. LET US STATE FROM THE OUTSET THAT PARAMOUNT IN OUR THOUGHTS ARE THE LIVES OF THOSE LOST ON FLIGHT 261 AS WELL AS THE FLYING PUBLIC WHO IMPLICITLY PUTS THEIR TRUST IN OUR ABILITIES AS PROFESSIONALS TO RUN A SAFE OPERATION.

IT IS WITHOUT MALICE OR ILL INTENT THAT WE BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION OUR CONCERNS REGARDING ROBERT FALLA, MANAGER OF BASE MAINTENANCE HERE IN SEATTLE. OUR CONSCIENCES CONSTRAIN US TO MAKE YOU BOTH AWARE OF AN ONGOING SITUATION ON THE HEAVY CHECK WHICH WE HERETOFORE HAVE BROUGHT BEFORE MANAGEMENT HERE IN THE HANGAR, BUT OUR PLEADINGS HAVE GONE UNHEEDED AND HAVE NOT STOPPED THE FOLLOWING PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR. AMAZINGLY, IN THE MIDST OF OUR GRIEF AND SHOCK SUBSEQUENT TO THE CRASH OF FLIGHT 261, MANY AMONGST US HAVE BEEN PRESSURED, THREATENED AND INTIMIDATED BY MR. FALLA IN THE DAILY PERFORMANCE OF OUR WORK. MANY OF THESE INSTANCES ARE WELL DOCUMENTED AND IT IS A PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR HE HAS ASSUMED SINCE JOINING ALASKA AIRLINES MONTHS AGO. ON COUNTLESS OCCASIONS, HE HAS DIRECTED US TO DO THINGS SPECIFICALLY CONTRADICTING THE FAR'S, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS HIS PERSISTENT DEMAND THAT WE PUT UNSERVICEABLE PARTS BACK ON THE AIRCRAFT. WHEN CONFRONTED BY GROUPS OF MECHANICS OR BY INDIVIDUALS, MR. FALLA CITES HIS EXPERIENCE. BUT WE HAVE SERIOUS QUESTIONS REGARDING HIS TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND KNOWLEDGE.

WE URGE YOU RESPECTFULLY MR. KELLY AND MR. AYER TO PERSONALLY ADDRESS THIS MATTER IMMEDIATELY FOR THE SAFETY OF OUR PASSENGERS, FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR OPERATION AS WELL AS FOR OUR VERY LIVELIHOODS. BY OUR SIGNATURES, WE SIGNIFY TO YOU THAT

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WE BELIEVE HIM TO BE DANGEROUS TO OUR OPERATION AND INCAPABLE OF RELEASING OUR CHECK AIRCRAFT BACK INTO SERVICE IN AN AIRWORTHY MANNER. WE HAVE SOUGHT NO OUTSIDE AGENCY IN OUR PLEA AND TRUST THAT YOU WILL HANDLE THIS IN A MANNER YOU FEEL APPROPRIATE.

**Before the National Transportation Safety Board
Alaska Airlines Flight 261
January 31, 2000
Anacapa Island, California
DCA00MA023**

**Alaska Airlines, Inc. Submission Regarding the Testimony of Robert A. Falla
Submitted: December 8, 2000**

I. Introduction

Alaska Airlines is informed that the NTSB intends to call Mr. Robert A. Falla as a witness to the Board's public hearing into this accident. Alaska Airlines objects to this witness because his testimony will be misleading, uninformed and counterproductive. Accordingly, Alaska Airlines requests the Board reconsider its decision to call Mr. Falla. The reasons underlying Alaska's objection are more fully enumerated below.

As Member Hammerschmidt stated at the prehearing conference on December 6, the purpose of the public hearing scheduled for December 13-15, 2000, is to supplement the facts and circumstances surrounding the crash of Alaska Airlines Flight 261. Public hearings are not adversarial proceedings. They are not designed to assess fault or lay blame or, more colloquially, engage in "finger pointing."

Member Hammerschmidt's December 6 statement reiterates the Board's policy regarding public hearings as expressed on the NTSB's official government website:

The National Transportation Safety Board conducts public hearings for the purpose of supplementing the facts discovered during the on-scene and subsequent follow-up investigation of the accident. . . . Testimony is obtained through public hearings to ensure an accurate, complete and well-documented factual record. . . . A public hearing enables the Safety Board to meet its mandate to conduct in-depth objective accident investigations, without bias or undue influence from industry or other government agencies. It is an exercise in accountability: accountability that the Safety Board is conducting a thorough and fair investigation and accountability on the part of industry and other government agencies that they are fulfilling their responsibilities.

The Safety Board does not determine the rights or liability of the parties involved in the accident. Therefore, matters dealing with such rights or liability are excluded from the hearing proceedings. Instead, the hearing is intended to collect information that will assist the Safety Board in its examination of the safety issues arising from the accident.

Alaska Airlines fully supports the Board's stated objective in conducting public hearings. The hearings should serve to supplement the facts and circumstances of the accident. Notwithstanding Alaska's support, the presentation of Mr. Falla as a witness at the hearing into Flight 261 will effectively thwart the objective of the public hearing.

II. Mr. Falla is Unqualified to Testify

Any testimony Mr. Falla gives will be uninformed and lacking in basis. Mr. Falla was actively employed at Alaska Airlines for only ten months. His entire tenure with the company lasted approximately 19 months, but he had been on administrative leave from March of 2000 until his employment with the company ended in November. At the time of the accident, Mr. Falla had worked at Alaska for only eight months. He was placed on administrative leave two months after the accident.

Mr. Falla was employed at Alaska Airlines as the Manager of Seattle Base Maintenance. In that position, Mr. Falla was responsible for overseeing the maintenance performed on aircraft at that facility. Alaska Airlines has two models of aircraft in its fleet, the MD-80 and the Boeing 737. Alaska's maintenance operation is organized such that heavy maintenance on MD-80 aircraft is performed in the company's Oakland facility, and heavy maintenance on B-737 aircraft is conducted at the company's Seattle facility. Occasionally, there are exceptions to this arrangement, but those exceptions are rare. During Mr. Falla's brief tenure as Manager of Seattle Base Maintenance, MD-80 aircraft did not fall under his purview. Accordingly, any expertise he developed related to the B-737.

In addition to his lack of experience with Alaska's MD-80 aircraft in general, Mr. Falla also had no involvement whatsoever with the accident aircraft. The maintenance of N963AS that is under investigation in this case was performed at the company's Oakland facility in 1997, two years prior to the time Mr. Falla began his employment with Alaska. Clearly, this witness lacks any first hand knowledge of the accident aircraft or the maintenance performed on it. His testimony will constitute nothing more than speculation.

III. Mr. Falla's Testimony is Unreliable

Mr. Falla has provided various statements relating to the investigation of Flight 261 to the NTSB, the FAA and Alaska Airlines. The content of the testimony Mr. Falla gave to the NTSB

in November, 2000, belies the fact that he lacks first hand knowledge of the facts at issue in this investigation. The testimony he provided at that time is misleading and inaccurate, sometimes blatantly so. For instance, during his November interview, Mr. Falla discussed his attendance at a Maintenance Review Board meeting and his signing of an ME-01 reducing the lubrication intervals on the MD-80 "tail." According to Mr. Falla, this was evidence that Alaska Airlines knew of problems with lubrication intervals. In fact, no such problems existed. The change was proposed as the result of an issue specific to two particular aircraft and extreme cold weather operations. In his interview, Mr. Falla also discussed grinding work that was performed on aircraft N935AS. Mr. Falla indicated that a MIG-4 form should have been written for the work. His statement is incorrect and incomplete in that he fails to mention that the work was properly authorized and then documented on a MIG-2 form. Mr. Falla was unaware of these facts and he never made the effort to discover the information. He made his misleading pronouncement during the interview despite his lack of knowledge about the matter. Finally, during the November interview, Mr. Falla claimed that while he was manager of Seattle Base Maintenance, all of the heavy checks were performed on time. He stated that when he left, aircraft no longer went out on time. These statements are also incorrect. There was no measurable difference in on time performance during the periods in question. These are just a few of the specific inaccuracies contained in Mr. Falla's November testimony.

In the testimony he provided in November, Mr. Falla also stated that Alaska suffered from various problems in its maintenance operation, and he implies that the company may have been more concerned about its operating costs than anything else. This testimony is flatly contradicted by the statements he made to Alaska Airlines and the FAA in March, 2000. Mr. Falla said in a March 16 interview that safety is his highest priority, and no Alaska aircraft has ever been released into service that was unairworthy, had unserviceable parts, or had open MIG items. In a March 23 interview, Mr. Falla said "I've been at a lot of airlines, and the best maintenance I have ever seen performed is here at Alaska Airlines." In the same interview he was asked by an FAA inspector if he had ever been threatened by any "upper supervisor" at Alaska to get an aircraft "out on time." Mr. Falla replied, "Never. Never happened. Alaska is a great airline." See the Declaration of James Trimberger (Attachment A hereto.)

Again, there are numerous problems with the testimony Mr. Falla provided in November. The statements he made were based entirely on hearsay information. In addition, many of his statements constituted nothing more than "finger-pointing." He was attempting to lay blame for matters of which he had no direct knowledge. Also of concern is the fact that Mr. Falla's November testimony was not fully developed and it was not followed up by the NTSB. Alaska Airlines, along with other parties to the investigation, were excluded from the interview.¹ When

¹This is not the first time during the course of the NTSB investigation that Alaska Airlines has been excluded from a witness interview. In previous correspondence, Alaska has expressed its dismay over the Board's newly evolving practice of excluding parties. For purposes of this submission Alaska simply reiterates that aside from the fundamental fairness

parties are precluded from participating, testimony is not fully developed, and a complete picture cannot be developed. In this case, important lines of questioning were not pursued, and the NTSB made no efforts to seek corroboration of Mr. Falla's testimony from the other witnesses who were present at the pertinent times.

To date, the testimony that Mr. Falla has provided to the Board has been accusatory, incomplete and unreliable. There is no reason to believe that the testimony he will provide at the public hearing will be any different. The testimony Mr. Falla will deliver to the Board runs counter to the Board's stated purposes for conducting public hearings. This type of testimony can in no way assist the Board in its examination of the safety issues arising from the accident.

IV. Mr. Falla's Motives are Questionable

Alaska Airlines gave Mr. Falla official written notice of his termination on October 18, 2000. Before providing him with the written notification, Alaska had informed him that his services with the company would no longer be needed, and the parties had begun negotiations concerning a severance package. However, Alaska refused to concede to many of Mr. Falla's more exorbitant severance demands and at the time of the NTSB interview, the discussions were at an impasse. When Mr. Falla testified in November, he reversed much of the favorable testimony he had provided in March and attacked Alaska Airlines and its employees. In light of his termination by Alaska and his frustration with Alaska's refusal to accede to his severance demands, Mr. Falla's motivations during the November interview are highly suspect.

V. Conclusion

Mr. Falla is not qualified to testify because he possesses no first hand knowledge of the matters at issue. When he has testified in the past, his testimony has proven to be inconsistent, inaccurate, misleading and inflammatory. Alaska Airlines is convinced this witness' testimony at the public hearing will serve no purpose other than to create a firestorm of doubt, mistrust and recrimination between the Board and Alaska Airlines, and between the Board and the public. Alaska Airlines cannot allow Mr. Falla's erroneous testimony to go unchallenged. Alaska Airlines will use all of its efforts to ensure that the errors and falsehoods contained in Mr. Falla's testimony are brought to light at the hearing and corrected.

If the Board is convinced that despite all of the obvious shortcomings with this witness, it nevertheless wants Mr. Falla's testimony on the record, Alaska Airlines suggests that his testimony be obtained after the public hearing via deposition. The Board has proceeded in this manner in past investigations and Alaska Airlines respectfully suggests that the Board would be

of this practice, it is also an unsound practice.

wise to proceed in the same manner here. Otherwise, the Board, the witness and the parties are almost sure to suffer embarrassment at the hearing. More importantly, the public's confidence in the NTSB and the party system is sure to be undermined.

Respectfully Submitted,

ALASKA AIRLINES, INC.

By: Keith Loveless
Vice President of Legal and Corporate Affairs

TRIMBERGER

1. My name is James Trimberger. I am Director of Quality Control at Alaska Airlines. If called to testify, I could and would testify as follows.

2. I assisted Alaska in its investigation of a March 15, 2000, letter addressed to John Kelley, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Alaska, as well as to Bill Ayer, the President of Alaska. The letter, which was signed by 64 Alaska mechanics, raised concerns about Robert Falla, the Manager of Alaska's Seattle Maintenance Base.

3. Alaska's investigative team interviewed each and every one of the 64 mechanics who signed the March 15 letter, as well as some additional Alaska maintenance personnel who had relevant information. I participated in these interviews, and followed up on matters raised by the mechanics. At Alaska's invitation, two FAA inspectors also participated in the interviews, as part of the FAA's independent investigation of the letter.

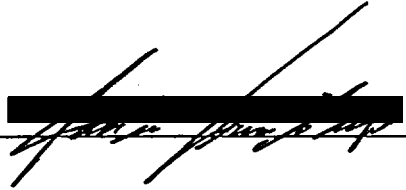
4. The investigative team did not find evidence of airworthiness or safety of flight problems at Alaska, or improper or incomplete maintenance. The FAA inspectors who participated in the interviews voiced no objection to these conclusions.

5. Before the 64 mechanics began to be interviewed, we interviewed Mr. Falla the evening of March 16, 2000. Because the FAA did not participate in this interview, a separate FAA interview of Mr. Falla was conducted on March 23, 2000. I attended both interviews. On the subject of overall safety at Alaska airlines, Mr. Falla said in the March 16 interview that safety is his highest priority, and no Alaska aircraft has ever been released into service that was unairworthy, had unserviceable parts, or had open MIG items. In the March 23 interview, Mr. Falla said, "I've been at a lot of airlines, and the best maintenance I have ever seen performed is here at Alaska Airlines." In the same interview he was asked by an FAA inspector if he had ever been threatened by any "upper supervisor" at Alaska to get an aircraft "out on time." Mr. Falla replied "Never. Never happened. Alaska is a great airline."

6. Mr. Falla expressed no concern in either interview about the maintenance performed by Alaska on aircraft 963. He also did not express any concern about the maintenance or lubrication schedules used by Alaska for MD-80 horizontal stabilizer jackscrews, or the type of grease used by Alaska for jackscrew lubrication. Similarly, he did not mention or describe any confusion or concern within Alaska about the way grease guns are used by mechanics.

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I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed this 7 day of December, in Seattle, Washington.



James Trimberger

Executed this 7 day of December, 2000.

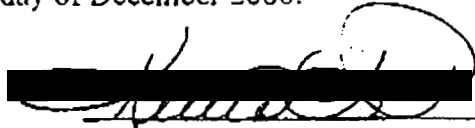
AFFIDAVIT OF KEVIN PAPE

1. My name is KEVIN PAPE. I am employed by Alaska Airlines as the Manager of Quality Assurance. If called as a witness, I could and would testify from my own personal knowledge as follows.

2. During the period between approximately March 16, 2000 and April 10, 2000, I was part of an investigation team consisting of myself, Jim Trimberger, Director of Quality Control, FAA Inspectors Darrett Kanayama and Bucky Coon, and counsel employed by Alaska, that interviewed the 64 mechanics who signed a letter dated March 14, 2000, to Bill Ayer and John Kelly, complaining of maintenance irregularities and improper conduct of the Seattle Maintenance Base Manager Robert Falla. Allegations in this letter included assertions that incomplete or improper maintenance had been performed at Mr. Falla's direction, causing unairworthy aircraft to be released into service.

3. Every single mechanic who signed the letter was interviewed by Alaska and FAA personnel. At the conclusion of the investigation, all members of the investigation team, including the FAA representatives, agreed there was no evidence that any unairworthy or unsafe aircraft, or any aircraft with unserviceable parts, had been released into service following maintenance at Alaska.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that the foregoing is true, and was signed this 14th day of December 2000.



Kevin Pape



NOTARY PUBLIC, MY COMM EXPIRES: 10.19.02



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Memorandum

Subject: ACTION: Alaska Airlines Interview's

Date: April 4, 2000

From: Bucky W. Coon
Darett I. Kanayama

Reply
Attn. [REDACTED]
of: [REDACTED]

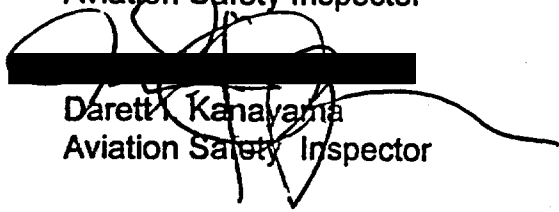
To: Robert Hill, Manager ,Seattle Flight Standard District
Office.

On March 16, 2000, we were asked by Seattle Flight Standards District Office Manager, Mr. Robert Hill, to participate in interviews of Alaska Airlines mechanics, concerning the airworthiness of aircraft, unserviceable parts, safety, and maintenance practices at Seattle Base Maintenance, Alaska Airlines. The interviews stem from a letter dated March 15, 2000, to upper management at Alaska Airlines. The interviews started on March 16, 2000, and continued through March 21, 2000, there were sixty-five mechanics interviewed whose signatures were affixed to the letter.

Before the interviews we were divided into two teams and asked each mechanic specific questions, regarding the airworthiness, safety and maintenance practices at the Alaska Airlines Maintenance Base Seattle, Washington, each mechanic was given the opportunity and ample time to answer each question that was asked. Due to the mechanics working shifts at Alaska Maintenance Base, scheduling was a time factor.

At the end of our interviews we concluded there were no issues regarding the airworthiness of aircraft or unserviceable parts, there were serious concerns from maintenance personnel about the management practices and policies in the area of aircraft maintenance conducted at Alaska Airlines Maintenance Base, Seattle Washington.


Bucky W. Coon
Aviation Safety Inspector


Darett I. Kanayama
Aviation Safety Inspector

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64 MECH INTERVIEWS
March 16-21



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Memorandum

Northwest Mountain Region
Flight Standards District Office
1601 Lind Avenue SW, Suite 260
Renton, Washington 98055

Subject: Action: Second Interview of Alaska Airlines
Mechanics and Inspectors

Date: May 11, 2000

From: FAA Interview Team

Reply to
Attn. of: ENB

To: Supervisor, Air Carrier Airworthiness, Seattle-FSDO


On May 4, 2000 the Seattle Flight Standards District Office Management Team decided to conduct a second interview of mechanics and inspectors regarding the airworthiness of aircraft, unserviceable parts, and maintenance practices at Alaska Airlines Seattle Maintenance Base.

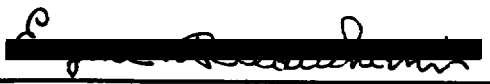
During March 16, 2000 through March 21, 2000 two Federal Aviation Administration Inspectors participated in an interview of 64 mechanics and inspectors conducted by Alaska Airlines.

The Seattle-FSDO Management Team completed an evaluation of ongoing inspections of Alaska Airlines, the statements made by mechanics and inspectors and concluded a second interview would be appropriate. To assure a 95% confidence level 32 of the 64 mechanics and inspectors were randomly selected for a second interview to assure something had not been missed in the first interview.

At the end of the interviews we concluded that there were no unserviceable parts or un-airworthy aircraft in operations within Alaska Airlines fleet of aircraft.

It was determined however, that mechanics and inspectors clearly stated concerns regarding a change in maintenance practices and excessive pressures imposed by specific Alaska Airlines management personnel. It was also very clear that Alaska Airlines senior management was aware of these issues because the manager of base maintenance was relieved from maintenance projects twice during this period.


Daniel J. Carboy, Aviation Safety Inspector


Eugene N. Beauchemin, Team Leader

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Second Interview
32 mech 11/11/00