



**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD**

Office of Aviation Safety  
Washington, D.C. 20594

September 16, 2019

**Attachment 4 – Accident Nurse Letter to Human Resources**

**OPERATIONAL FACTORS/HUMAN PERFORMANCE**

**CEN19FA072**

Per conversation on 12/11/18

Rachel Cunningham

Thu 12/13/2018 8:20 PM

To: Don Gregory <██████████@survivalflightinc.com>;

Cc: Amanda Wolfe <██████████@survivalflightinc.com>;

Don;

I apologize this took me a few days to get to you. I was able to get most things obtained to email to you about statements, etc. There are still multiple issues not in this email that I have not been able to obtain from someone out of town. I'd be more than happy to get that to you in a week or two when they're back in Ohio. Also ██████████ wrote roughly two pages of our concerns when he was in town with both bases for our core comps.

Here is some of the things we've discussed over the phone:

Offensive treatment and derogatory remarks concerning female coworkers:

██████████ during a PR in front of several firemen made a comment about imagining what is underneath a nurse's flight suite. This nurse's husband is good friends with one of the firemen and they were very upset about this.

-Another nurse stated when the base first started ██████████ made multiple comments around individuals regarding what type of underwear she wears under her flight suit. This was back in June/July 2018.

██████████ made a comment in front of Jackson Fire Department about an auto pulse used for continuous CPR. He made the comment if the patient had big boobs how he would throw one up and the other down and explained how he would grab them, etc. Then made a comment about the nurse's breasts and continued to make little remarks about breasts in general. Several of the Jackson medics made a later stated to that nurse how uncomfortable and unprofessional that was.

-██████████ at the base made a comment to the medic on shift about how him and that nurse on shift would be unable to be intimate at base and has made remarks about cuddling.

Additionally, there are several instances where ██████████ has an issue with the off going crew and the way they function with their patient care. He will use shift debrief to raise his voice, and yell at staff. He will spend easily 1-2 hours demeaning and scolding staff that have nothing to do with the previous staff he had issues with. This creates tension between crew members and negativity among the base. This has happened to nearly every single crew member at some point. The patient care we provide is the highest quality possible and we do our very best. It is incredibly frustrating to hear from our pilot about non-emergent details when they are not our top priority in patient treatment.

-One instance included ██████████ discussing the previous crew and how they "rammed" the foot of the patient into the vent of the aircraft while loading, and they did it so hard the foot "flipped backwards" and over the glass into ██████████ lap. And how he has already "written up" this particular crew member before about doing it. While this was none of my personal business because I was not on that flight and am not a manager, I spoke to the crew that was on shift about it because I was concerned about rumors starting. The crew discussed the situation with me, the patient's foot did hit the vent, but was strapped to the litter so there was no physical way it could have come over the glass, nor did it bend backward. At the time loading the patient quickly was the concern and though we do not want to ever bump someone's foot or cause any discomfort, when they are critical and time is of the essence their foot comfort is not my main concern. I do not tell this story because of the exaggerations, but because of my concern about starting rumors and creating animosity amongst the staff. He is constantly "writing up" crew

members for every detail but has no idea about what we are doing to save lives. The details about not bumping someone's foot while loading are important, but they should not be discussed negatively with other staff members and then by yelling at the crew, this does not promote learning or foster a positive environment.

-Another example was recently when a crew decided to hot load a simple patient on a flight that [REDACTED] was not even on. The nurse on the flight said the patient was simple and already packaged to load. Upon entering the hospital (that had previously received hot load training) they discussed with the staff if they were comfortable with it and all agreed they were. The EMS coordinator then entered the room and expressed some concern so the nurse offered to shut down if the hospital wanted and the decision was made to proceed with hot loading. The nurse apologized for not confirming the load situation before landing on radio, and assured the coordinator that in the future we would be sure to always confirm. The situation was handled and there were no further issues. The next day the nurse was told by multiple crew members that when [REDACTED] arrived at base that night he was furious and proceeded to yell and degrade the previous crew to the new crew. This nurse has personally had multiple conversations with [REDACTED] about if there are ever any issues with her to discuss them with her personally and if the manager needs involved than to include her too because we are professionals and should not be negatively discussing our coworkers.

[REDACTED] and his flight crew were stuck at Bolton field due to low clouds, heavy rain and lightning. They received a call for a flight. [REDACTED] stated they were taking it and "lets go". The medic and nurse expressed concern that it was lightening and pouring rain and it showed poor conditions on the iPad. The flight was denied at that time. [REDACTED] was angry and when they got back to base, he sat down both crew members together and proceeded to yell at them and lecture them about taking flights if the pilot wants to. [REDACTED] got into the medic's face and continued to yell. At this time, I was called and could over hear [REDACTED] yelling in the background. The medic locked himself in his room to avoid the progressing heated situation. I came on shift the following day and [REDACTED] went on an hour + rant about that medic walking away from him during that heated discussion. [REDACTED] stated, "If he ever walks away from me while I am talking to him. I will personally grab and snatch him up". I explained to [REDACTED] that is not how he handles things and we do not put our hands on anyone no matter how upset we may be and to call our base manager if its that big of an issue. [REDACTED] proceeded to state that he was angry and would have no hesitation to get physical with this individual.

There are many other instances of this and we will be happy to provide them if you feel it is necessary. The crew members are all frustrated with constantly hearing about how many things we do wrong with our patient care. We do not talk about each other and the pilots should not either, learning instances should be completed in debriefs with the crew that was involved. If the situation is bigger than that particular crew than it should be brought to our manager and she can address it in an appropriate environment. Degrading team members, starting rumors, and the pilot lecturing the crew is not our culture.

#### Un-Professionalism:

-We had a meeting at Logan Elm school for a mock drill we had scheduled for Oct. 12th. This meeting consisted of a sheriff, a few of the teachers including the drama instructor, a handful of students and a few SF crew. During this meeting [REDACTED] would constantly interrupt and go on a rant on what he was going to do as the pilot, although he was not flying for this Mock Drill. He constantly would cuss and make inappropriate comments. The students looked uncomfortable and several of them left. The one teacher asked me who the "cowboy" was and his name and didn't seem pleased with how he handled himself.

-During PR events [REDACTED] does nearly all of the talking, not allowing staff to interject. He makes excessive statements to fire departments about landing zones and only needing "40x40" or smaller landing area and he will "put a stamp on it." He states that his other pilots may not able to make these landings, but if he is on shift he will. Though we have amazing pilots that can make fantastic landings we should not be leading with this, if there is a safer landing zone and better place than the tight unsafe area that should be encouraged. Additionally, when discussing weather, he often states "I have been flying in Ohio my whole life, my other pilots won't necessarily fly in inclemental weather or the lowest allowable ceilings, but I am comfortable with it because I know the area." This does not make us look good. As you well know many helicopter crashes are due to someone being too comfortable. He is simply boosting his own self-esteem and at the same time demeaning his pilots. We are a team. We have our

minimums and we fly them with safety as our top priority. There is no need to boast, we demonstrate this through our work and the flights we take. Many of the rumors and negative comments about our company come from this mentality and PR events that this has been said at.

-If you were to go around and ask many of these fire departments where us flying in unsafe weather comes from you will always hear the term "cowboy". I have worked endlessly PRing to get that rumor out but it is constantly being used and asked everywhere I go.

Safety Concerns:

-One medic's very first flight at 13 was with [REDACTED] as the pilot. They were joking around and flying back from a PR. At this time [REDACTED] yelled bird and dropped the helicopter several feet or so down as a joke and scared this medic horribly. He also did this another shift with a nurse who was a 3rd rider training for base 14. This took place shortly after SF13 opened.

-There are multiple flights where [REDACTED] asks the crew in the back to take his Ipad and tell him about the weather and where to go to get around it. One shift he had two crew members in the pilot's room for over an hour and a half to teach us about weather and how to read weather on his ipad and how to switch back and forth between two programs he has. He has attempted to "teach" many crew members about how to read weather so they can help navigate.

[REDACTED] was told we were not to mount the NVG's on the medic's helmet. [REDACTED] told myself and many others for the past several months he disagreed with that we were to mount our NVGs when flying with him. And the crew did so on his request up until the mount was removed all together. [REDACTED] on occasion will go on rants how stupid it is and wishes he could find a mount on his own for us to use.

-Early one morning a call came in from north in SF 13 area. SF 13 had declined the flight because of low ceilings and bad weather. The nurse expressed concern that that weather was bad, but [REDACTED] got the ipad out and showed the nurse the path they would take to get to the hospital which consisted of flying an extra nearly 20 minutes around weather and it would be a tight squeeze to get the patient back to their destination. But [REDACTED] assured they could do it if they hurried. During the flight visibility became increasingly worse. The nurse expressed concern three times but we continued "just a little further" until all visibility was lost and we aborted. All visibility was lost for approximately 20 seconds. After aborting the hospital that had been waiting on us then had to contact and arrange ground transport. This patient was a time sensitive patient that was now delayed transport almost 40 minutes because of our attempt to make it in bad weather.

-There are many other instances of [REDACTED] accepting flights that SF13 has declined because of weather. It is understood that sometimes we are capable of getting out because the weather is not over us. But most of them conclude in us aborting after trying because the destination has bad weather. By doing this not only are we putting ourselves in risky situations but we are delaying care of the patient.

-All of SF13 and SF14, each individual have multiple stories of unsafe flights with [REDACTED] and getting yelled at or talked to when you're unable to make a flight. I personally have had one flight down to a scene flight. [REDACTED] for some reason could not use his NVGs and requested the medic use his and talk him through the entire flight to about what he could see. Flying to this location it was pitch black, no lights and a ton of high terrain. The medic was nervous because he could only see out his side, a small portion of my window on the nurse's side and a small area straight in front of him. I was looking out the window and could only see black and a ton of clouds and precipitation. It takes a lot for me to get to that level of concern and feeling anxious. Once we got back to base I noticed my husband during that flight sent me multiple text messages asking me why we were flying because he knew the weather down there was not good.

-At SF13 a medic stated multiple times [REDACTED] would take off when he wasn't ready and didn't have his seat-belt on. This person states he would make comments about him being unbuckled but [REDACTED] would never respond.

Here is a situation I was recently in this past week:

I heard [REDACTED] from the pilot's room say we had a flight. From the doorway I noticed a large area of gray and blue on his screen. When I asked him about weather down in Holzer Jackson, he stated it was all clear and let's get going. Holzer Jackson is one of the areas where weather can be good or bad and it's hard to predict at times. Flying down that way [REDACTED], EMT-P and myself noted quite a bit of snow on the ground with heavy, thick snow currently falling. [REDACTED] asked [REDACTED] if she could use her NVG's to look at 12 o'clock and tell him what she sees. He was unable to wear his NVGs due to the heavy snow fall, he couldn't see through it. She said weather didn't look the best but she was still able to see the horizon and enough to continue with no concerns. Several minutes later [REDACTED] asked me to look out at my 3 o'clock and tell him what I could or could not see. I told him I see lights but they were starting to get harder to see and [REDACTED] confirmed the same on her side. Shortly after I mentioned I could no longer see the towers and [REDACTED] mentioned she was experiencing the same on the left side. This is commonly how we communicate during flights with difficult weather, we openly discuss what we see. Shortly after that [REDACTED] mentioned that the weather became worse at 12 o'clock and she was unable to see and I agreed. At this time, [REDACTED] asked me several times if I could get his Ipad and look at the weather in front of us. I told him no that I believe whatever he states he sees on the Ipad. Not long after that he agreed we needed to abort, he called and aborted the flight and stated we needed to turn back to base due to weather and visibility. He then handed the Ipad behind his head and asked me to look at it and tell him what I see going back. I mentioned the only direction we could go is north as the huge cell was west and east of us. [REDACTED] and I noted he was flying west, communications at this time called us on the radio and asked [REDACTED] to confirm we were heading back to base. He said yes and we questioned him because it appeared, he was still trying to find a way to get south down to Holzer Medical Center. [REDACTED] mentioned landing at the airport that was right in site to wait for some of the weather to pass. [REDACTED] agreed that sounded good and we hovered down the runway then all of a sudden, he lifted again. [REDACTED] then called Comms multiple times and asking about weather in the directions we were flying to get us back to Grove City. At one point he told us we were flying up at 3500 ft to try to get out of the weather we were surrounded by.

Upon getting back to base, [REDACTED] and myself sat with [REDACTED] in the living room to debrief. He asked us if there were any issues. [REDACTED] and I stated other than the weather getting extremely bad, and hitting IFR it went well. The three of us discussed the flight calmly and all agreed there were no issues. I asked [REDACTED] if he wanted us to sign the book because it was late and I needed to get some sleep. He acted slightly frustrated and stated he will fill it later and for us to just sign the book in the AM.

The next day I received a phone call from our base manager, [REDACTED] asking how the flight went. I told her the exact same story as above and was pretty upset to hear that [REDACTED] had told [REDACTED] we could have made that flight and that [REDACTED] was really upset and got me worked up during that flight. This is completely untrue. That morning I told [REDACTED] to call [REDACTED] and discuss exactly what happened during the flight. When we went to sign the debrief sheet that morning, [REDACTED] stated no issues; which [REDACTED] and I refuse to sign because we had discussed the issues. Additionally, we have a form that the pilots fill out when we turn down or abort a flight. On this paper he wrote "VFR reports enroute, hit snow at ross co line, low hanging, sct, unable to find hole, abort." Between his debriefing sheet, this sheet and his word, they're each different.

This is a recurrent issue with [REDACTED]. He will tell us everything was great and he agreed we couldn't make that flight then goes behind our back and throws the crew under the bus. He manipulates our words and often makes up his own story to make himself look better. I shouldn't have to stress over my pilot and how he is going to react in front of me, others or behind our back. Let alone constantly attempt a flight that is unsafe, aborted and put myself and the crew at risk. Our base is getting to the point where I am concerned things are going to blow up.

I do the schedule for our base and when there are openings, I ask people at 13 if they'd like to pick up the entire shift or half of it. The first thing out of their mouth is, "Who is the pilot"? If my answer is [REDACTED] they will not fill in here at 14. As a group we do not trust him, we do not feel fully safe with him and we're constantly concerned we're going to get yelled at or lectured over something we did or said or another crew did. We have no issues with any other pilots, we trust them, and feel very comfortable with them. If we abort a flight due to weather, we never get questioned or talked to by the pilot or management, we debrief and handle things professionally. We are a team. When we have to abort a flight with [REDACTED] we get talked to by management, get questioned, and we are always made to look like we are just lazy and don't want to do it.

We have decided to try not to use names as [REDACTED] has retaliated in the past towards staff who have went to higher ups and confronted him personally. He frequently "writes people up" or treats them unjustly if he doesn't like them.

Several staff have attempted to talk to him personally, we care about him and appreciate all of the hard work that he has put into our base. But his leadership qualities including the unprofessionalism, offensiveness to female coworkers, divisive undermining of the team, safety concerns, and manipulation are truly concerning to our base. Most of the base was included in writing this email. It is truly becoming a toxic environment working with him and we need help to fix it. We have expressed this concern to many people and feel we are not being heard. Feel free to reach out to anyone at our base and they will confirm this. We recently just found out about needing to record these issues in the debrief log, as a new base we are still learning. In the future these accounts will be included in any debrief. But we need help now.

Per our phone conversation I appreciate you keeping me in the loop about how this will be taken care of on a professional matter and I look forward to hearing from you. Myself as well as SF13 and SF14 appreciate you taking the time to hear our concerns and taking them seriously. If you have any questions or further needs feel free to reach out any time.

Thank you,

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