NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

August 21, 2012

Group Chairman's Factual Report

OPERATIONAL FACTORS

DCA12FA024

Contents

A. ACCIDENT

Operator:	AAR Airlift Group, Inc.
Location:	Camp Bastion
Date:	January 16, 2012
Time:	1045 Afghanistan Time[1]
Aircraft:	Bell 214ST helicopter, Serial # 28102, Registration # N5748M

B. OPERATIONAL FACTORS GROUP

B. David Tew - Chairman Operational Factors Division (AS-30) National Transportation Safety Board 490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW Washington, DC 20594-2000	Tony James – Member Federal Aviation Administration 800 Independence Ave, S.W. Washington, D.C. 20591
David Prewitt AAR Airlift Group 2301 Commercial Park Dr Palm Bay, FL 32940	Gary Vosburgh Department of Defense HQ AMC/A3B (Commercial Airlift Division) 402 Scott Drive, Unit 3A1 Scott AFB, IL 62225-5302

C. SUMMARY

On January 16, 2012, at approximately 1045 Afghanistan Time (AFT), a Bell 214ST helicopter, registration N5748M, serial number 28102, crashed 7 miles south of Camp Bastion in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan. The aircraft was operated by AAR Airlift Group under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 135, under contract to the Department of Defense Air Mobility Command (AMC), under the U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM). Visual meteorological conditions existed at the time of the accident. The Office of Aviation Safety has accepted full delegation of the accident investigation from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation (MoTCA).

Initial reports indicate that the accident helicopter was in cruise flight about 600 feet above ground level as the lead in a flight of two helicopters. The trailing helicopter flight crew observed the lead helicopter bank to the right and impact the ground where a post impact fire ensued. The trailing helicopter flight crew called Camp Bastion Tower who coordinated for crash rescue and for the Downed Aircraft Recovery Team (DART). The trailing helicopter remained on station until military assets arrived at the site, and then returned to Camp Bastion. The wreckage was recovered by the U.S. Marines and moved to a secure location at Camp Bastion.

[1] All times are Afghanistan Time (AFT) based on a 24-hour clock, unless otherwise noted.

The three crewmembers, all U.S. citizens, were fatally injured. There were no reports of any hostilities in the area.

D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The Operations Group conducted interviews[2] with AAR Airlift crew members on January 25, 2012. On February 29, 2012, the Operations Group conducted phone interviews with the current and previous Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Principal Operations Inspector (POI) of AAR Airlift. On March 5, 2012, phone interviews were conducted with the AAR Airlift Director of Operations and the Rotary Wing Chief Pilot. The NTSB investigator reviewed Department of Defense (DOD) records on the operator. The group chairman had several phone conversations with the Department of Defense representative concerning oversight of AAR airlift group in Afghanistan and conducted one interview. On July 11, the Operations Group conducted a phone interview with the Assistant Principal Operations Inspector Richard Sheppard.

E. FACTUAL INFORMATION

1.0 History of Flight

On January 16, 2012, a AAR Airlift Group Bell-214, registration number N5748M using a call sign "Slingshot 72" was operating as part of a flight of two aircraft for most of the day between several forward operating bases (FOBs) in Afghanistan.

At about 0731, the aircraft with call sign Slingshot 71 departed FOB Shindand (OASD) for a flight to FOB Herat (OAHR). Slingshot 71 landed at Herat at about 0759. The accident aircraft departed Shindand for a flight to FOB Spartan (SPN)[3]. Both aircraft then flew to FOB Stone (STN). Slingshot 72 and Slingshot 71 then departed Stone as a flight of two to Shindand. The two aircraft then departed Shindand at about 0901 and flew to FOB Farah (OAFR). The Slingshot 71 crew said the two aircraft were separated "by a couple of miles" during the flight to Farah but they could still see Slingshot 72. Slingshot 72 was the lead aircraft during the flight to Farah.

At Farah, both aircraft shut down their engines and refueled. Both aircraft picked up two passengers each for the next flight. Both aircraft departed Farah at about 0934 for a flight of two to FOB Bastion (OAZI). They arrived at Bastion at about 1031. At Bastion, both aircraft left their engines running while the crew chiefs went into the Arrival / Departure Airfield Control Group (ADACG). Both aircraft offloaded their passengers and Slingshot 71 took on four passengers for the next flight. The accident aircraft, Slingshot 72, did not take on any passengers. The pilot-in-command (PIC) of Slingshot 71, who was the pilot monitoring (PM)

[2] See attachment 1 – Interview Summaries

[3] Departure and arrival times were not recorded and generally not available for the accident aircraft (Slingshot 72) and Slingshot 71. Times that are listed were approximate and were recalled by the crew of Slingshot 71 during interviews.

said that the crew chiefs of both aircraft performed a walk-around inspection on the ground at Bastion.

When the aircraft were ready for their next flight from Bastion to Shindand, Slingshot 72 called for a taxi clearance for the two aircraft. As they moved toward the departure runway, they changed to the tower frequency and were told to "line up and wait" on runway 19. Slingshot 72 was the lead aircraft and the second-in-command (SIC) of Slingshot 71, who was the pilot flying (PF), estimated he was about "three rotor discs" behind Slingshot 72 as they hovered above the runway end for about two minutes awaiting takeoff clearance. At about 1040, both aircraft departed on a heading of 190 degrees. They climbed to an altitude of about 800 to 1,000 feet. Slingshot 71 trailed the accident aircraft during departure by about "¼ to ½ mile". The Slingshot 71 crew said that Slingshot 72 was slightly above them and to their right. The SIC/PF of Slingshot 71 said it was a normal climbout and he was using about 70 to 75% power. The SIC/PF estimated they were climbing at a rate of about 300 feet per minute (FPM) at an airspeed of 120 knots.

There was no radio transmission from Slingshot 72 indicating any trouble or stress. The PIC/PM of Slingshot 71 said "nothing seemed wrong at that time" and he looked down to make a radio frequency change. When the PIC/PM looked up again, he saw Slingshot 72 was in a nose low attitude that he described as a "steep pitch down". He said he saw things start to come off Slingshot 72 and described the debris as looking like "confetti". He also noticed that the tail boom of Slingshot 72 appeared to be folded under the aircraft. The PIC/PM said that when he saw the tail boom folded; he could see a "difference in color" that he described as a lighter shade. He said this color difference was because the inside of the tail boom was a "zinc" color. He said Slingshot 72 went straight down. He saw the aircraft impact the ground and burst into flames. The PIC/PM stated that he activated "Blue Sky"[4]. The SIC/PF of Slingshot 71 said he was following Slingshot 72 and saw it go into a "sharp" bank to the right that he estimated was about a 70 to 80 degree bank. He said he did not see Slingshot 72 yaw before the helicopter banked. The SIC/PF said he then saw Slingshot 72 begin to "come apart". He said he flew to the left to avoid the large "debris field" that he saw coming from Slingshot 72. He said the debris field included large blue pieces from the aircraft. The SIC/PF said he then saw the tail boom of Slingshot 72 begin to "separate and fold". He said everything happened very quickly and he estimated that about 2/3 of the tail boom came off the aircraft. He saw Slingshot 72 pitch down to about 75-80 degrees nose down. The SIC/PF saw Slingshot 72 impact the ground at about 1045 and burst into flames. Neither pilot observed any hostile action in the area at any time.

After contacting controllers and calling for DART, Slingshot 71 circled the Slingshot 72 wreckage several times looking for survivors. They continued circling until U.S. Forces reached the area and secured the site. Slingshot 71 then departed the area and landed at Bastion.

[4] "Blue Sky" was the name given to a Quick Position Report (QPR) global positioning system (GPS) tracker that the crew could activate. It transmitted a latitude longitude position plus airspeed and altitude information. This information was also retained in the device.

2.0 Flight Crew Information

The AAR accident flight crew consisted of a pilot-in-command (PIC) and second-in-command (SIC). Both crewmembers were current and qualified under AAR Airlift and FAA requirements.

2.1 Pilot-in-Command (PIC) Todd Darrel Walker

PIC Walker was 48 years old.
Date of hire with AAR was January 3, 2011.

2.1.1 PIC Walker's Pilot Certificates and Ratings Held at Time of the Accident

AIRLINE TRANSPORT PILOT (issued March 2, 2011)
ROTORCRAFT HELICOPTER BH-214ST; BK 117
PRIVATE PILOT PRIVILEGES
AIRPLANE SINGLE ENGINE LAND
INSTRUMENT AIRPLANE

FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR (issued April 22, 1992)
ROTORCRAFT HELICOPTER
INSTRUMENT HELICOPTER

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE SECOND CLASS (issued August 3, 2011)
Limitations: None.

2.1.2 PIC Walker's Certification Record

FAA records of the PIC indicated that:

Private Pilot - Airplane Single Engine Land - Airplane certificate was originally issued on May 23, 1984.

Commercial Pilot – Rotorcraft – Helicopter, Private Pilot Privileges, Airplane Single Engine Land certificate was originally issued on August 10, 1984. Instrument Airplane Privileges were added on May, 18, 1986. Instrument Helicopter Privileges were added on December 11, 1990.

Airline Transport Pilot Rotorcraft - Helicopter BK-117, Private Pilot Privileges, Airplane Single Engine Land, Instrument Airplane, BK-117 Second In Command Required certificate was originally issued on June 25, 1992. BK-117 Second In Command Requirement was deleted on August 9, 2000. BH-14ST Rating was added on March 2, 2011.

Flight Instructor Rotorcraft Helicopter certificate was originally issued on September 16, 1984.

A Notice of Disapproval was issued on March 1, 2011 when he failed the flight test for in-flight maneuvers and instrument procedures for his BHT-214-ST[5] type rating. He was retested and passed on March 2, 2011.

[5] BHT-214-ST is the Bell 214 helicopter

A Notice of Disapproval was issued on June 24, 1992 when he failed the BK–117 written examination for a type rating. He failed areas of operation III. He was retested and issued the certificate on June 25, 1992.

A review of FAA records found no prior accident, incident or enforcement actions.

2.1.3 PIC Walker's Training and Proficiency Checks Completed

Initial Type Rating Bell 214: January 25, 2011
Date of initial upgrade to PIC on Bell 214: June 16, 2011
Last recurrent ground training: March 1, 2011
Last Proficiency Check in Bell 214: June 16, 2011
Last PIC Line Check: June 16, 2011

AAR Airlift reported that PIC Walker had no record of failures during company training.

A review of FAA NPTRS[6] records for PIC Walker was unremarkable.

2.1.4 PIC Walker's Flight Times[7]

Total pilot flying time	About 7,247 hours
Total PIC Time	About 7,123 hours
Total Bell 214 flying time	About 483 hours
Total Bell 214 PIC time	About 483 hours
Total flying time last 24 hours	About .2 hours
Total flying time last 30 days	About 12 hours
Total flying time last 90 days	About 115 hours
Total flying time last 12 months	About 483 hours

2.1.5 PIC Walker's Reported Activities

AAR Airlift reported that the normal daily work schedule for pilots was from 0600 to1800. PIC Walker had been on duty for about four hours when the accident occurred.

AAR Airlift reported the following regarding PIC Walker:

On the day of the accident, Monday, January 16, 2012

[6] NPTRS – National Program Tracking and Reporting Subsystem

[7] Approximate based on AAR employment records.

- Was scheduled to fly fourteen flights, which included 2 refuel stops. The accident occurred during sixth flight of the day, which was supposed to be from FOB Bastion to FOB Shindand.

The day before the accident, Sunday, January 15, 2012
- PIC Walker flew for about 15 minutes.

Two days before the accident, Saturday, January 14, 2012
- PIC Walker was not on duty.

2.1.6 PIC Walker's Toxicology tests:

Post-accident toxicology tests were not performed.

2.2 Second-in-Command (SIC) Michael David Clawson

SIC Clawson was 51 years old.
His date of hire at AAR Airlift was: November 28, 2011.

2.2.1 SIC Clawson's Pilot Certificates and Ratings Held at Time of the Accident

AIRLINE TRANSPORT PILOT (April 9, 2011)
ROTORCRAFT HELICOPTER; BH-14ST;
PRIVATE PRIVILEGES; AIRPLANE SINGLE ENGINE LAND;
[LIMITATIONS]: ENGLISH PROFICIENT

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE SECOND CLASS (issued August 3, 2011)
Limitations: None

2.2.2 SIC Clawson's Certification Record

FAA Records of the SIC indicated that:

Private Pilot - Airplane Single Engine Land certificate was issued on October 29, 1981.

Commercial Pilot – Rotorcraft Helicopter; Instrument helicopter; Private Pilot Privileges; Airplane Single Engine Land; certificate was originally issued on August 6, 1986. BH-14ST Rating, BH-14ST SIC Privileges Only was added on June 6, 2010. The BH-214ST SIC Privileges Only was removed on April 9, 2011.

Airline Transport Pilot – Rotorcraft Helicopter; BH-214ST; Private Pilot Privileges; Airplane Single Engine Land; [Limitations]; English Proficient certificate was issued on April 9, 2011.

A Notice of Disapproval was issued on February 24, 2011 when he failed instrument procedures on the flight test for a BHT-214-ST. He was retested and issued a certificate on April 9, 2011.

A review of FAA records found no prior accident, incident or enforcement actions.

2.2.3 PIC Clawson's Training and Proficiency Checks Completed

Originally transitioned to F/O on the Bell 214 on: November 28, 2011
Last Proficiency Check in Bell 214: November 28, 2011
Last recurrent ground training: December 19, 2011
Type rated on Bell 214: April 9, 2011
Last SIC Line Check: December 30, 2011

AAR Airlift reported that SIC Clawson had no record of failures during company training.

A review of FAA NPTRS records for SIC Clawson was unremarkable.

2.2.4 SIC Clawson's Flight Times[8]

Total pilot flying time	About 4,170 hours
Total pilot-in-command time	About 3,870 hours
Total Bell 214 flying time –all SIC	About 120 hours
Total flying time last 24 hours	About .5 hours
Total flying time last 30 days	About 14 hours
Total flying time last 90 days	About 250 hours
Total flying time last 12 months	About 350 hours

2.2.5 SIC Clawson's Reported Activities

AAR Airlift reported that the normal daily work schedule for pilots was from 0600 to1800. SIC Clawson had been on duty for about four hours when the accident occurred.

AAR Airlift reported the following regarding SIC Clawson:

On the day of the accident, Monday, January 16, 2012

- Was scheduled to fly fourteen flights, which included 2 refuel stops. The accident occurred during seventh flight of the day, which was supposed to be from FOB Bastion to FOB Shindand.

The day before the accident, Sunday, January 15, 2012

- SIC Clawson flew for about 30 minutes.

Two days before the accident, Saturday, January 14, 2012

- SIC Clawson was not on duty.

[8] Approximate based on AAR Airlift employment records.

2.2.6 SIC Clawson's Toxicology tests:

Post-accident toxicology tests were not performed.

3.0 Meteorological Information

Weather at time of departure from Bastion, Afghanistan was reported as clear sky and unrestricted visibility. The wind was reported as from variable direction at 6 knots.

4.0 AAR Airlift Afghanistan Operations and Training

AAR Airlift reported that company training was conducted in simulators and in aircraft at various locations around the United States and some international locations, including Turkey and Guam. Bell 214 helicopter ground training was conducted in Melbourne, FL and Afghanistan, however only recurrent ground training was conducted in Afghanistan. All Bell 214 helicopter flight training was conducted in the aircraft. All instrument flight rules (IFR) and some visual flight rules (VFR) training and evaluations were conducted in Melbourne, FL and only VFR flight training and evaluations were conducted in Afghanistan. Prior to AAR Airlift ownership, some IFR training and evaluations were conducted in Afghanistan.

AAR Airlift provided commercial air transportation into and out of Afghanistan at the beginning and end of each pilot's Afghanistan duty rotation. Pilots had different duty rotation schedules according to their personal preference. A typical Afghanistan rotation was 30 days in country then 30 days off.

When pilots were in Afghanistan, they had a duty schedule with designated time off[9]. AAR Airlift stated the company complied with Part 135 crew rest requirements. Pilots were not scheduled to fly over 10 hours per day and were restricted to a 14 hour duty day. The pilot's normal duty day was a twelve hour duty period that started at 0600 local Afghanistan time and ended at 1800.

AAR reported that in Afghanistan, AAR Airlift pilots lived on the U.S. military base and were housed in huts or tents that had 5 or 6 individual rooms inside. Each room had a bed, desk, and closet. Meals were provided by the military.

When pilots were in the U.S, they were off duty unless required to accomplish a recurrent checkride.

5.0 Company Overview

Information supplied by the company indicated the airline's current legal name was AAR Airlift Group, Inc. The company changed its FAA Part 135 certificate name from Presidential Airways, Inc. effective January 1, 2011 in the wake of its acquisition by AAR Corp. AAR Corp. acquired Presidential Airways, Inc. in April of 2010 from Xe Services, LLC. Xe Services, LLC. was formerly named EP Investments, LLC. EP Investments LLC. acquired Presidential Airways,

[9] See Attachment 2 – pilot flight duty logs.

Inc. in 2004. In Afghanistan, the company operated under the name Presidential Airways, Inc. until that name was changed in January 1 of 2011 to AAR Airlift group, Inc.

AAR Airlift Group, Inc. was located at 2301 Commercial Park Drive, Palm Bay, Florida. AAR had about 900 employees at the time of the accident which included 179 flight crew members, 41 cabin crew members [crew chiefs], 15 flight attendants, and 259 mechanics. At the time of the accident, AAR Airlift operated the following aircraft: 2 Sikorsky S92 helicopters, 17 Sikorsky S-61 helicopters, 3 Bell 214 helicopters, 8 Bombardier Dash 8 airplanes, 9 CASA 212 airplanes, 2 CASA 235 airplanes, and 3 Fairchild Swearingen SA227 Metroliner airplanes.

6.0 FAA Oversight

At the time of the accident, the current FAA 14 CFR Part 135 certificate for AAR Airlift Group, Inc was held in the Orlando, FL (ORL) Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) and the principal operations inspector (POI) for the airline was Inspector Billy Meadows[10]. At the time of the accident, Mr. Meadows had been the POI for AAR Airlift for about 9 months. The certificate and airline were sold to AAR Airlift Group, Inc in April, 2010 and the airline's FAA certificate was transferred from the Greensboro, NC (GSO) FSDO to the ORL FSDO on September 1, 2011. The airline's certificate had a name change from Presidential Airways to AAR Airlift Group, Inc. in December, 2011.

When the certificate was held in the GSO FSDO, the POI was Inspector Oscar Bocanegra[11]. The previous POI, Mr. Bocanegra said his oversight of the airline was done mostly by reviewing records. He did provide some direct surveillance and said he had completed all required surveillance items in his assigned work program. His direct surveillance included observation of Dash 8 training that occurred in Atlanta, GA, observations of CASA 212 checkrides that were performed in Turkey, and a base inspection of the company's base in Guam. There had also been some direct oversight of AAR Airlift by other FAA inspectors from the Montana, CO and Seattle, WA FSDOs when they observed type rating checkrides. Mr. Bocanegra said the majority of flight training was performed in Montana, CO.

Mr. Bocanegra said that the FAA did not allow him to travel to Afghanistan to perform direct oversight so his oversight of the Afghanistan operation was performed by reviewing written records. He said from his review of written records, he thought the Afghanistan operation was "okay" and the minor issues he found were corrected by the company. Mr. Bocanegra did say that without the ability to perform direct oversight, "what looks good on paper may not be happening over there". AAR Airlift company checkairmen performed checkrides and line checks in Afghanistan and Mr. Bocanegra said the company checkairmen were "high caliber" except for one or two who were removed from checkairmen status. Mr. Bocanegra said, at one point, he did have some concerns about some checkrides that were being performed in Afghanistan because some required approaches on the checkrides were not being performed because required navigation aids were not available. Mr. Bocanegra filed a violation against the company and the company had to redo the affected checkrides when the required navigation aids were available. Mr. Bocanegra said he also filed a violation against the company for performing

[10] See attachment 1- interview summaries
[11] See attachment 1- interview summaries

low cost low altitude (LCLA) extractions when they did not have an approved roller system in the airplane and had not been approved for LCLA extractions.

Mr. Bocanegra said that there had been 214 hot line complaints concerning the company and all of the complaints had been responded to by the GSO FSDO manager and operations supervisor. The hot line complaints had all occurred during a 2-3 month span which occurred shortly after the certificate was sold to AAR Airlift and the company was replacing key personnel.

The current POI, Mr. Billy Meadows, located in the ORL FSDO, said that during the transfer of the certificate to the ORL FSDO, he received a briefing from Mr. Bocanegra. Mr. Meadows said that there were no problems with company manuals or training. He said in the time he had been POI for AAR Airlift, he had visited the company about 6+ times, observed training or checkrides about three times, and had reviewed written records.

Mr. Meadows said AAR Airlift had a significant amount of training in the United States. He said AAR Airlift had some training facilities and did perform some training in Afghanistan, but he had not observed any of the operations in Afghanistan as he was not allowed to travel there. Mr. Meadows said he had no operational concerns with the Afghanistan operations except with the company request for LCLA cargo drops. He said the approval for the LCLA drops was still in progress at the time of his interview.

Mr. Meadows said that when the AAR Airlift certificate was transferred to the ORL FSDO, there were some outstanding violations against AAR Airlift. One violation was due to the deHavilland aircraft using a runway with “inappropriate width”. He thought another violation was due to the use of Russian TS1 fuel. He said the violations were currently in the hands of FAA legal staff. He said he was not “personally concerned” with the violations.

The assistant POI (APOI) Richard Sheppard was assigned to the AAR Airlift certificate because of his experience on the Puma helicopter. He was the National Resource Specialist (NRS) for the Puma helicopter. He had been on the certificate since September of 2011.

APOI Sheppard said “in general”, he was at AAR Airlift headquarters at least once every other week. It was about an hour drive to AAR Airlift. He had mainly been focusing on the Puma helicopter at AAR. There were times he performed checkrides on the Puma helicopter at AAR about 2 or 3 times a week. He performed all the type certification checkrides on the Puma. He had observed AAR training on the Puma. When the company operated under the Presidential name, he went to Fort Collins, CO, Middleton, DE, and Rhode Island to observe training or perform checkrides. He said all Puma training was now being performed in Melbourne, FL. He had observed one Bell 214 helicopter oral examination for a Part 135 checkride and it went fine. He had gone through AAR training records and said there was “nothing that jumps out” about the records. SK61 helicopter training would be done in Oregon in the future and he would be going to Oregon to perform oversight. He said the POI had traveled to perform oversight on the CASA 212 airplane. He said the people he had worked with at AAR did their best to conform to Part 135 regulations and he was “satisfied with what I have seen”. He had not received any complaints about AAR from pilots or others.

APOI Sheppard said the movement of the certificate from the GSO FSDO was a "long drawn out process". There were issues with the name change from Presidential Airways to AAR Airlift. There had been some enforcement proceedings in place which needed to be taken care of before the transfer occurred. The enforcement proceedings were "taken care of" before the name change and movement of the certificate. The certificate was officially moved in August, 2011. Before the certificate was transferred to the ORL FSDO, APOI Sheppard said the GSO FSDO POI and Principal Maintenance Inspector (PMI) came to visit and briefed ORL FSDO personnel who would be working on the certificate. In attendance for this briefing were the operations supervisor, the POI, the APOI and other inspectors that would work on the certificate. APOI Sheppard said it was a "pretty thorough" briefing.

APOI Sheppard said there was now a plan for him to go to Afghanistan to perform oversight on AAR as soon as the "paperwork was in place" He was in the process of getting a U.S. Government passport to "possibly" travel to Afghanistan.

6.1 FAA Enforcement Investigation Reports[12] (EIRs)

EP Investments / Xe Corporation owned Presidential Airways from 2004 to April 2010 when the air carrier was sold to AAR Airlift, Inc. When Presidential Airways was sold, the management personnel were changed by AAR Airlift.

The NTSB reviewed FAA records of Presidential Airways from 2004 to February 2012. FAA records indicated that Presidential Airways, when owned by Xe Corporation operated under two different Part 135 certificate numbers. Certificate number P4YA was used until January 2009 when it was changed to 3PRA. When AAR Airlift purchased the air carrier in April 2010, it operated under certificate number 3PRA until the certificate number was changed to 39LA in 2012.

A Review of FAA records for certificate P4YA indicated that in:

- 2004 – no EIR records found
- 2005 – no EIR records found
- 2006 – no EIR records found
- 2007 – Two EIRs were filed in the categories of drug testing and flight operations. The company was given Letters of Correction by the FAA, the company provided corrective action and the EIRs were closed.
- 2008 – Five EIRs were filed in the categories of maintenance (3), hazardous materials, records and reports. The company was given Letters of Correction by the FAA, the company provided corrective action and the EIRs were closed.

There were no open EIRs on the certificate P4YA.

[12] Enforcement Investigation Reports were filed by the FAA against an air carrier or airmen when a violation of FAA rules and regulations was suspected. It informed the company or airman that an investigation was being conducted. Some possible outcomes would be a monetary fine, a letter of correction or it could be closed or dismissed.

A review of FAA records for certificate 3PRA indicated that in:

- 2009 – Four EIRs were filed in the categories of training and maintenance (2). The company was given Letters of Correction by the FAA, the company provided corrective action and the EIRs were closed.
- 2010 – Eight EIRs were filed in the categories of flight operations (4), maintenance (3), and flight crew training. The company was given letters of correction by the FAA on two of the flight operations EIRs and two of the maintenance EIR and the flight training EIR, the company provided corrective action on these EIRS and they were closed. The other four EIRs were dismissed with "no action" taken by the FAA and the EIRs were closed.
- 2011 – While the company was still owned by Xe Corporation, two EIRs were filed in the categories of maintenance and records/reports. Both EIRs were dismissed with "no action" taken by the FAA and the EIRs were closed.
- 2011 – When the company was owned by AAR Airlift, one EIR was filed in the category of flight operations. The EIR was dismissed with "no action" taken by the FAA and the EIR was closed.

There were no open EIRs on the certificate 3PRA.

A Review of FAA records for certificate 39LA indicated that in:

- 2012 – One EIR had been filed in February 2012 and was in the category of drug testing. The company was issued a letter of correction, the company provided corrective action and the EIR was closed.

At the time, of the accident, there were no open EIRs against the air carrier.

6.2 FAA NPTRS Records

A review of FAA NPTRS records indicated that in the 5 years prior to the accident, the FAA documented the following records of operational activity on the air carrier:

- In 2007, 52 inspections
- In 2008, 88 inspections
  In 2009, 240 inspections
- In 2010, 255 inspections
- In 2011, 295 inspections

6.3 Company History of Accidents, and Incidents.

A search of FAA records for the Part 135 certificate for the previous ten years indicated that:

When owned by EP Investments LLC,

- In 2004, a CASA 212 airplane crashed in Afghanistan. There were no survivors

When owned by Xe Corporation,

- In 2009, a Hughes 369F helicopter crashed in Moyock, VA during a training exercise. The only occupant, the pilot, did not survive.

When owned by AAR Airlift, the only accident was the Bell 214 accident in Afghanistan that is the subject of this investigation.

7.0 Department of Defense

The accident aircraft, a Bell 214 helicopter was being operated by AAR Airlift under a U.S. Transportation Command (TRANSCOM) contract with the Department of Defense (DOD) under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 135. AAR Airlift was conducting operations in Afghanistan for the DOD. All AAR aircraft in Afghanistan were dedicated to exclusive use by the DOD. The DOD required it's contractors to operate under a 14CFR Part 135 certificate to regulate the operations and provide rules and guidance in various areas such as flight time limits, crew rest requirements, duty limits, training, maintenance, etc.

Prior to the sale to AAR Airlift, the company name was Presidential Airways and Presidential was issued a "temporary non use" directive after an accident with one of its CASA 212 airplanes in 2004. It was subsequently removed and operations resumed.

The DOD reported that they conducted in-theater oversight of the company operations in Afghanistan. The DOD strived to place an evaluator in-theater for a period of time in 6 month intervals [twice a year] to observe AAR Airlift operations, procedures, aircraft, and facilities.

This in-theater evaluator "for the most part" had been an operations specialist, but had occasionally been a maintenance specialist.

The operations evaluators had access to cockpits and used this access to evaluate in-flight operations in the aircraft. The evaluator used a cockpit evaluation form which was similar to a checklist to evaluate flight operations. The completed cockpit evaluation forms were shared with the FAA.

The maintenance evaluator looked at aircraft, stations, and any maintenance records that were in Afghanistan.

All inspection discrepancies and records were tracked in the Air Carrier Analysis System (ACAS) and follow-ups were performed on any discrepancies.

The evaluator could also write a "Memo for Record" (MFR) to capture any additional information he deemed necessary.

Every two years a biennial on-site survey was performed on the carrier. The biennial on site survey covered all DOD transportation operations which were performed by the company which included "vertical replenishments" on U.S. Navy ships and some operations in Africa. A DOD team was sent in to do an evaluation. The in-theatre visits were not part of the biennial survey. This was a totally separate event and one that was driven by Congressional mandate. The biennial team looked at all maintenance areas and operations areas. After the biennial survey, the DOD performed a "desktop" performance evaluation (PE) approximately every six months. There were usually three desktop PEs performed between biennial surveys. The desktop PE looked at areas such as operations, maintenance, accident and incident reports, financial data, and service quality. The DOD communicated with FAA certificate personnel and key management personnel such as the Director of Operations (DO), the Director of Safety, the Director of Maintenance, and the Director of Quality control. They attempted to validate the currency of the operations, document any changes such as personnel, fleet changes, mission changes, etc. The company was required to document Quality Assurance and Safety programs were active and up to date. The DOD attempted to determine "how good is the product" they were receiving from the contractor. If there were any concerns on the part of DOD during the desktop PE or any other oversight process, they could perform a short notice special survey or call in the company to discuss any concerns with DOD leadership. All records were shared with the FAA.

The last biennial on site survey of AAR was moved up to an earlier time due to "risk factors" that appeared. These risk factors included the company moving its headquarters after being sold to AAR Airlift, a "huge" management change including several positions that were changed several times, the aircraft fleet increasing in number, and a shared concern with the FAA that the Quality Assurance program was not meeting standards. The company had been under increased surveillance due to these risk factors. The company was subsequently put back under "normal surveillance".

The DOD could cancel a contract if there was concern that the company did not meet DOD Quality and Safety standards. The DOD had canceled contracts in the past but not with AAR Airlift.

The DOD maintained a liaison representative with the FAA. This liaison officer was often one of the evaluators who performed in-country evaluations.

The DOD had access to and used all FAA oversight information and also maintained continuous communications with the FAA. The FAA and DOD shared all information on the company.

A NTSB review of all DOD operational reports and cockpit evaluations of the company from July 2010 to July 2011 indicated satisfactory operations.

On October 24-27, 2011, the DOD conducted a Biennial survey of Presidential Airways [previous name of AAR Airlift]. A NTSB review of the survey indicated that all operations areas met DOD Quality and Safety standards as prescribed in Federal Regulations.

F. LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – Interview Summaries
Attachment 2 – Pilot Duty logs

Submitted by:

_____
David Tew
Aviation Safety Investigator - Operations
August 21, 2012