



**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD**  
**Central Region – Arlington, Texas**

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**Record of Conversation**

**Person: Mark McCuiston, Captain**

**Date: February 23, 2012**

**Subject: – CEN12LA151**

**People present for interview:**

**Mark Johnson, First Officer**

**Rocky DeVcenty, CEO TravelAire Services, Inc. (witness)**

**Pat Hendrickson, Chief Pilot (witness)**

**Terry Rubek, Learjet**

**Mark Siebert, Learjet**

**Leah D. Yeager, NTSB IIC**

Time started: 1130 MST

Mr. McCuiston was interviewed at the TravelAire Services (TAS), Incorporated hangar on February 23, 2012.

Mr. McCuiston said that he had been flying for 32 years. His flight background included flight instruction, cargo, corporate flying and crop dusting. He lives on a farm in Colorado and owned his own crop dusting business from 1988-2002. Mr. McCuiston reported that he is a contract pilot for TAS 9 months of the year; the other 3 months he is a full-time agricultural pilot in Dumas, Texas. He started flying for TAS in 2001, and at one time was a check pilot and chief pilot. Mr. McCuiston left TAS for 2.5 years to be a corporate pilot for Cabela's, then returned to TAS when Cabela's closed their flight department. He said he flies about 20-25 hours a month for TAS, flying both 135 and Part 91 flights. Mr. McCuiston does not have a set schedule with TAS and is basically on-call all the time and flies "as-needed."

On the day of the accident, Mr. McCuiston received a call at noon about the trip. He was able to accept the flight and started checking weather on flightplan.com. He was aware of the approaching weather and had several conversations with TAS's CEO/DOO, Rocky DeVcenty, regarding the flight. The scheduled departure time was 1900. He arrived at the TAS hangar around 1800, and already had the flight plans filed and re-checked the weather. He had been flying N31WS since 2006 and was very familiar with the airplane and the owners/passengers that he would be flying that night. They were headed to Las Vegas for the Superbowl. Mr. McCuiston had also flown with the first officer (FO) on numerous occasions and considered him to be a safe and conscientious pilot/FO.

When Mr. McCusition arrived at the airport, the visibility was 8 miles with 1,600 foot overcast. There was no visible snow or moisture on the ground. The FO was in the airplane. Mr. McCuistion then met with the FO and had a pre-flight briefing. In the briefing, the crew discussed that there were no discrepancies with the airplane, fuel load was 5,200 pounds, and that on take-off the FO would keep his head inside the cockpit monitoring the instruments while the captain performed the take off. Once airborne, they would both get on the instruments. Mr. McCuistion also performed a preflight inspection of the airplane (including the right main landing gear), and found no discrepancies. He punched the tires and they were all full and had good tread. He also confirmed with the Director of Maintenance that he had checked tire pressure and that the pressure was good. Mr. McCuistion then got their IFR clearance and re-checked weather while waiting for the passengers to arrive. At this point the weather was 2 miles visibility, 1,500 foot overcast, light snow, temperature +1, dewpoint -1, and the wind was from 350 degrees at 12 knots.

The passengers arrived around 1850-1900, and the FO helped load their bags and then got them settled into their assigned seats. In the meantime, Mr. McCuistion prepared to move the airplane out of the hangar. As he was on the ramp, he noticed that the snow was starting to stick to the pavement and he could tell the depth of the snow by how high it was in reference to the sole of his boot, less than a ¼ inch. They used the GPU to start the engines and had two good engine starts. At that time the temperature was still above freezing.

Mr. McCuistion then got on the airplane, closed the door and gave the passenger a pre-take off briefing and he confirmed everyone was wearing their seatbelts. At that time, the FO was trying to get the ATIS information but it was unavailable. Mr. McCuistion got into his seat and the FO called the tower for ATIS information. At that time, the weather was wind from 360 degrees at 15 knots with an RVR of 5,000 feet. The crew then ran through the normal taxi and pre takeoff checklists. Mr. McCuistion said the checks were all normal. He told the FO to request runway 8L for departure since it was longer and had less obstructions off the side of it. Once the pre-takeoff checks were complete, Mr. McCuistion once again visually checked the surface of the wings and confirmed that the snow was not sticking. He said he could clearly see the runway centerline stripes even though the snow was starting to stick to the pavement. The runway lights were also clear.

Mr. McCusition said that as he brought the power levers up half way with his feet on the brakes, all indications were normal. He then brought he power full up and did a final check of the engine gauges, flaps and trims. During the take off roll, Mr. McCusition said he watched the runway for “directional control.” As the airspeed began to increase, he heard the FO say, “80 knots, panel clear.” As the airplane continued to accelerate toward V1, Mr. McCusition said he felt a “lurch” to the right. He immediately applied full left rudder, full left aileron, and reduced power, but the airplane went off the right side of the runway. He estimated the angle was about 10 degrees from the runway centerline. Mr. McCusition described the airplane’s maneuver off the runway as fast (about 1 second and they were off the runway). He described it as a sensation that the airplane was veering to the right and did not recall being jerked in his seat by

the movement. Mr. McCusition said he had good peripheral vision and did not recall any caution lights illuminated as the airplane exited the runway. Mr. McCusition described the event as “something was pulling me off the runway” and a “a definite pull.” He said it was not a wind gust. Mr. McCuistion also heard a noise but could not recall the exact timing of the noise as the airplane was veering to the right, but he described it as a “shotgun blast.”

Mr. McCuistion said the last taxiway they crossed was the most violent and described it like hitting a pothole in a fast moving car. The airplane then came to rest and the FO began to shut off the electrical equipment. He then got out of his seat and saw the passenger that was sitting on the lavatory seat had already opened the top clam shell of the main door. The passenger then asked if they could get out and they exited away from the airplane in case there was a fire.

Mr. McCusition said he went back to the airplane before ARFF arrived, got in the main entry way of the airplane on his knees and made sure the airplane was clear. He did not try to apply power to the airplane or re-start the engines.

Interview Ended: 1245 MST

Leah D. Yeager  
Sr. Air Safety Investigator  
National Transportation Safety Board