



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Central Region – Arlington, Texas

Record of Conversation

Person: Mark Johnson, First Officer

Date: February 23, 2012

Subject: – CEN12LA151

People present for interview:

Mark Johnson, First Officer

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

Terry Rubek, Learjet

Mark Siebert, Learjet

Leah D. Yeager, NTSB IIC

Interview start: 1005

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

Mr. Johnson stated that he has been employed as a contract pilot by TAS since 2004. He is employed full time as a boat technician when not flying. Mr. Johnson does not have a set schedule at TAS. He is always on-call and makes himself available when he is contacted about a pending flight. However, there are times when he is scheduled for pre-planned flights. Mr. Johnson said the majority of his flight time is Part 135, but he also does Part 91 flights. He has flown N31WS for approximately 3-4 years.

According to Mr. Johnson, he was notified around 0800 on the morning of the accident that the owners of N31WS wanted to leave a day earlier than planned and had requested a 1900 departure. He left his job at the boat company at 1400, and arrived at the TAS hangar approximately 1745. It was flurrying outside. He wanted to make sure the airplane was ready since the airplane owners were known to arrive early. Mr. Johnson said he met the captain at the hangar. He had not spoken to the captain about the flight prior to arriving at the hangar.

Mr. Johnson said the airplane was in the heated hangar and he prepared the airplane for the flight, which included making a pot of coffee, stowing his luggage and golf clubs on the airplane, performing a preflight inspection, and calculating performance data for the TOLD card. He then met the captain in the computer room and they reviewed the weather together. Mr. Johnson described the weather as “benign” and they would beat the approaching snow storm. The weather at their destination (Las Vegas, NV) was windy.

Since the weather was forecasted for reduced visibility, the captain and Mr. Johnson discussed a low visibility take off during their pre-flight briefing. This involved having Mr. Johnson keeping his head in the cockpit monitoring the instruments on the takeoff while the Captain executed the take off. The captain prepared a separate TOLD card for a contaminated runway in case they needed it, since the rate of snowfall had increased. The Captain also prepared the weight and balance and a seating chart for the passengers. The first passengers arrived at 1845. Mr. Johnson loaded their bags, while the captain got a final weather briefing.

The airplane remained in the hangar until the final two passengers arrived. After they were boarded, Mr. Johnson got in his seat while the captain used a tug to pull the airplane out of the hangar. They used a GPU to start the engines. Once the captain got back on the airplane, he gave the passengers their takeoff brief.

Prior to taxi, the Mr. Johnson tried to get ATIS information. It was not available and he was told to contact the tower for that information. At this time, snow began to fall more heavily and began to stick on the apron and grass areas. Mr. Johnson said the pavement areas were visibly wet.

Mr. Johnson said that they received their taxi clearance and performed their taxi and pre-takeoff checklists. Nothing unusual was noted during these checks. Wind at the time was 8-9 knots, so the captain requested runway 8L for the additional runway length. Mr. Johnson did not remember the Captain doing a brake check while taxiing, but he assumed that was because he had his headsets on and he was unable to hear the noise the brakes made when they are depressed.

Once they received their clearance to take off, the Captain pulled on to the runway and lined up on the centerline. The Captain increased power to N1. Mr. Johnson said that when the airplane reached approximately 120 knots, and he was getting ready to call out V1 (131 knots) he felt a "lurch" to the right. Mr. Johnson described this "lurch" as a lateral movement of his body (side to side) in his seat. He did not hear anything when the airplane started to move to the right of the runway. When Mr. Johnson looked up, he noted the airplane was tracking to the right. He estimated that from the time of the "lurch" to the airplane leaving the runway was approximately 1-2 seconds. Mr. Johnson's first instinct was push down on the left rudder, and when he did, he found it was already full down to the stop. Mr. Johnson did not touch the controls because he didn't want to "fight [the captain]." The captain's right hand was on the power levers and he was bringing them back as they went off the runway. Mr. Johnson could not recall the position of the control column at the time and he did not attempt to use the brakes. He also did not recall any forward movement in his seat that would be associated with braking.

When asked what he thought happened, Mr. Johnson said that his first instinct was that he hit something. The airplane continued onto the grass and they "floated" over three "humps". At some point the right wing hit the ground and the tip tank struck the ground. It was around this

time that he also saw a “glow” outside the right of the airplane. Mr. Johnson described it as a “flash of light with no flames...that lasted 1-2 seconds.” He said that as the airplane continued along the energy path, it was shedding parts and it was “getting noisy.” The “heaviest and sharpest impact” occurred when the airplane came across the last taxiway. The airplane finally came to a stop parallel to the runway. By the time Mr. Johnson had unbuckled his seatbelt, a passenger was already undoing the main cabin door. The Captain was also out of his seat and he met the passenger at the door. Mr. Johnson thought it was “unusual” that the passenger was already trying to open the door. When asked why he thought it was unusual, Mr. Johnson said that it was because the passenger brief prior to takeoff had actually worked.

At this point, Mr. Johnson turned off all the electrical switches, including his light panel and the battery switches. He looked for fire, saw nothing, and got out of the airplane. Mr. Johnson also assisted the passengers, who were trying to get their luggage and personal belongings. The passengers then started to walk back to the terminal building.

In closing, Mr. Johnson said the take off was normal up until he felt the “lurch.” There were no aural warnings or lights at anytime during the flight and there “was nothing wrong” with the engines. He said he has flown many times with the captain and they have a great working relationship. He described the captain as very “conservative” and a true “stick and rudder” pilot.

Mr. Johnson said that he returned to the airplane after the accident to retrieve his headset. At that time he turned off the stand by battery switch. He did not turn on any power or attempt to re-start the engines.

Mr. Johnson said he was concerned about the possibility that the right main landing gear had some sort of mechanical problem. When asked, he said he checked the right main landing gear and “punched” the tires during his preflight inspection and found no abnormalities. Mr. Johnson also confirmed with the captain prior to the flight that the TAS Director of Maintenance had checked the tire pressure.

Interview ended at 1115 MST.

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