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Aleknagik, Alaska
August 9, 2010
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DeHavilland DHC-3T, N455A
GCI Communications Corp.

Survival Factors Group Chairman's Factual Report

Attachment 5

Statement from Dr. Dani Bowman

2 pages

Statement of Dr. Dani Bowman for NTSB

On the day of the accident, I was at the Agulowak lodge. I recall having lunch with Bill and Willy Phillips, Senator Stevens, Jim Morhard, Dana and Cory Tindel, and Terry Smith. The group decided to go salmon fishing for the afternoon during lunch. I do recall a discussion about the weather at the next table, where Sean, Kevin, Sen. Stevens, and Terry Smith were sitting, prior to the Otter leaving. I recall that the weather was checked, including looking at the radar on the internet. The weather looked improved from the morning. I recall the ceilings were not excessively low, but there was intermittent rain. I do not recall the exact time the Otter departed for fishing. I estimated at my interview that the Otter departed around 3:00 pm and that my husband, Ron Duncan, and I took off in his aircraft on a “look for sunshine” flight after the Otter departed.

The flight that Ron and I took in Ron’s aircraft lasted about an hour. I recall there being plenty of visibility for the flight. We in fact flew in the general area of the crash site, without knowing it, and there was good visibility in the area. We did encounter some low clouds when we flew north of the lodge, and decided to return to the lodge. After returning to the lodge we re-packed gear on the aircraft and worked on other tasks.

Later that afternoon, I recall Greg Chapados stating that “I think we have a problem” as the Otter had never arrived at the HRM camp on the Nushagak River. I am not sure who would have called the camp, but the call was likely made to determine when the group would be returning for dinner. I went to get my medical kit and grabbed fleece and sleeping bags for a search flight. We also had blankets, a satellite phone and a hand-held radio. Ron checked the weather, and then Ron and I left in his Lake Renegade to search for the Otter. I do not recall how long we had been back at the lodge, or when this flight took off.

The route to the fish camp was in the GPS in the Renegade, and we followed that route. The flight would have initially taken us north and east, and then to the south. We talked to another pilot who had said he had flown much of the route, and he suggested we fly to the south of the route. Less than ten minutes later, the other pilot said “I got him,” meaning he had located the Otter. He gave us the coordinates and we put them into the GPS, and flew to that area, where we circled around the area and spotted the aircraft. The aircraft was pointed up the hill, and Willy Phillips was outside waving his arms. Ron and I agreed that because there were survivors, I needed to get to the crash site.

Ron found Tom Tucker by radio, and we made arrangements for Tom to pick me up at Lake Aleknagik in his helicopter. Tom then flew me to the site and we landed on the mountain above the site, about 1000 feet above the crash site.

There was a GCI employee, Bob Himshoot, already at the landing site, and he helped carry equipment down the hill. We found it quite a difficult climb down to the Otter because of the steep slope. The 8-10 foot high canopy of Alder made it impossible to see anything other than the Alder brush, the mud and the rock scattered on the slope. We did lose our way once, taking a wrong turn across a rock slide; I think it took us about 30-40 minutes to reach the crash site. Soon thereafter, the fog began descending from the top of the mountain and within a few hours completely obscured the site both on the ground and from the air.

When I arrived at the wreckage, it could only be approached from the left side. The plane was oriented almost perpendicularly to the slope of the hill. Willy was back inside the plane. I entered the plane via what remained of the back right double door and assessed the passengers. I determined that there were four survivors. I assessed Jim as the most seriously injured of the survivors; Sean O'Keefe had significant left lower extremity fractures; Kevin was not very verbal, but was hemodynamically stable with several fractures. Willy had a broken ankle and a facial fracture. All were conscious. I talked to Willy about the accident some time during the night. He said he was asleep on impact and did not recall the accident. I did not ask the others how the accident occurred or what they remembered.

I was later joined by volunteer first responders, an RN and an EMT from Dillingham. Another EMT, Josh Flint, also arrived at the site. I do not believe that Bob Himshoot stayed the night at the site. I do not recall seeing Tom Tucker at the Otter. I recall hearing of a couple of other EMTs trying to locate the site but subsequently getting lost, and later I heard a helicopter leaving the top of the hill. The EMTs who came to the site had blankets, bandages, some trauma supplies, but no medications. I had some pain medication in my medical bag, which I dispensed to several of the survivors. I did have a satellite phone and did talk to Dave Roseman at the lodge. I also called the Dillingham police and hospital to let them know that supplies and medications were needed at the site. However, a decision was made in Dillingham by the search and rescue team there that the weather at the crash site prevented any attempt at rescue or delivery of supplies during the night.

Two pararescuemen, who I believe were from the Air National Guard, arrived around seven in the morning, and were able to help us extract the survivors and evacuate them to Dillingham. EMT Josh Flint and I were the last to leave the site along with some Guard personnel; we were flown to Dillingham via their Jay Hawk helicopter.