NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety Washington D.C. 20594

Witness Group Factual Report DCA06MA064

A. ACCIDENT

Location: Lexington, Kentucky (LEX)

Date: August 27, 2006

Time: 1007 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) Aircraft: Comair CRJ-100, N431CA, Flight 5191

B. WITNESS GROUP

Chairman: John M. Brannen

National Transportation Safety Board

North Central Regional Office

West Chicago, Illinois

Members: Brian H. Hiler

Comair Line Captain, FAA Designated Examiner

Versailles, Kentucky

Shawn D. Etcher

Air Line Pilots Association Comair Line Captain Warrenton, Missouri

C. SUMMARY

On August 27, 2006, about 0607 eastern daylight time, Comair flight 5191, a Bombardier CL-600-2B19 (CRJ-100), N431CA, crashed during takeoff from Blue Grass Airport, Lexington, Kentucky (LEX). The airplane, which had been cleared for runway 22, taxied onto runway 26 instead and ran off the end of runway 26. Of the 47 passengers and 3 crewmembers on board the airplane, 49 were killed, and 1 received serious injuries. The airplane was destroyed by impact forces and postcrash fire. The flight was operating under the provisions of 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121 and was en route to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, Atlanta, Georgia (ATL).

D. DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

Interviews were conducted of persons identified as potential witnesses by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and local law enforcement. In addition, the property owner, property leasers, and a witness identified by the local news media were interviewed. Records of interviews conducted by the Witness Group and by the Federal Bureau of Investigation are appended to this report.

The interviews revealed that there were two eyewitnesses to the accident and several other witnesses that heard the explosion that resulted from the impact.

The first eyewitness was an American Eagle employee who saw the airplane from his location on the ramp near the C4B gate. His statements indicate that he witnessed the airplane taxi past his location to the runway and attempt takeoff on runway 26. He stated that he watched the airplane as it traveled down runway 26 and its impact and subsequent explosion. Details of his interviews are appended to this report.

The second eyewitness was a farm worker who was located on the property where the airplane came to rest. His statements indicated that the sound of the airplane drew his attention as the airplane traveled through the field and up to its impact with trees. He indicated that the airplane had already traveled through the airport perimeter fence prior to attracting his attention. He also indicated that once the airplane impacted the first group of trees, the horse barns located on the property obstructed his vision. Details of his interviews are appended to this report.

The other individuals that were interviewed were either earwitnesses only, or did not witness the accident at all. Details of the interviews are appended to this report.

Appendix 1

Records of interviews conducted by the Witness Group

Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Nick Bentley

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Bentley was contacted in relation to the accident involving Comair

Flight 5191 on August 27, 2006. He confirmed that he is the owner of the property where the aircraft came to rest. He stated that he does not live on the property and was not present when the accident occurred. He stated that he leases the property to two brothers, Duane, and Wayne Murty. He provided contact phone numbers for both brothers. He was not aware if anyone on the property witnessed the accident. Mr. Bentley mentioned that the airport had trimmed the trees on the property he believed last fall (fall 2005).

I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.



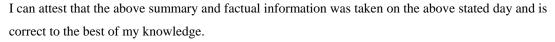
Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Duane Murty

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Duane Murty was contacted in relation to the accident involving

Comair Flight 5191 on August 27, 2006. He confirmed that he resides on the property where the aircraft came to rest. He stated that he did not witness the accident. He seemed reluctant to speak about the accident and no further information was received.





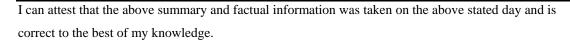
Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Wayne Murty

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Wayne Murty was contacted in relation to the accident involving

Comair Flight 5191 on August 27, 2006. He confirmed that he resides on the property where the aircraft came to rest. He stated that he did not witness the accident. When asked if anyone on the property had witnessed the accident, he stated that a temporary worker had been saying that he had witnessed the accident. He informed me that this worker had worked on the farm for about 6 days and was allowed to reside in the living quarters portion of a horse trailer that was located adjacent to the barns on the property. He stated that he did not have any contact info for the farm worker and that the worker was no longer employed at the farm. He was not sure what the worker's name was but thought it was similar to Gilbert.



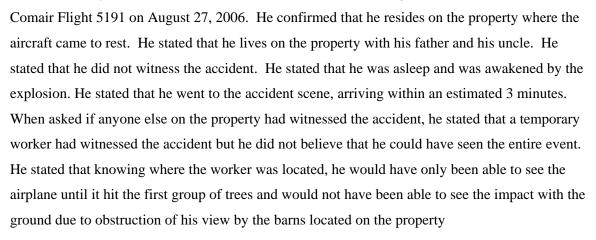


Date: August 29, 2006

Conversation with: Todd Murty

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Todd Murty was contacted in relation to the accident involving



I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.



Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Ricky Brown

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Brown was contacted in relation to the accident involving Comair

Flight 5191 on August 27, 2006. He confirmed that he resides near the airport and can see aircraft takeoff and land on the runway because his house sits a little higher than the runway. He stated that he was up early on the morning of the accident, as was his habit, and had just finished shaving when he heard a sound. He was not sure what the sound was and went to look outside. He stated that he saw some flashes of light coming from the direction of the airport, and then heard a boom and saw a cloud of smoke. He stated that he could see light coming through the trees. He stated that he did not see the airplane takeoff, nor did he see the impact.

I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.



Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Frank Pierce

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

The FBI identified Mr. Pierce as a witness. Mr. Pierce was contacted regarding Comair flight 5191. He informed me that he is a ticketing and gate agent working for Delta Airlines and that Delta performs ticketing and gate duties for the Comair flights in Lexington. He stated that he was working passenger boarding for the accident flight. He stated that he was aware that there was a jump-seat passenger who was a pilot for Air Tran Airways and that the Air Tran pilot was seated in the cabin as there were seats available in the cabin. Mr. Pierce mentioned that nothing seemed unusual with regard to the flight. He did not see the accident. He stated that he had let the flight crew into the Comair operations area and that he was not responsible for relaying the dispatch release to the flight crew.

I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.



Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Kerry Ray Williams

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

The FBI identified Mr. Williams as a witness. The Witness Group

contacted Mr. Williams in regard to the accident involving Comair Flight 5191 on August 27, 2006. He informed me that he works for American Eagle and has been employed there for the past 10 months. He relayed that he had worked the security check for American Eagle flight 882 and was on the ramp when the Comair airplane taxied past his location at gate C4B. He stated that he had watched American Eagle 882 take off and was climbing out when the Comair airplane taxied past him at a "normal" taxi speed. He stated that he witnessed the Comair airplane taxi toward the end of the runway and he saw the airplane make a sharp turn to the left, which he was not accustomed to seeing. He stated that he normally saw aircraft make a "slight" turn whereas the Comair airplane made a much sharper turn. He stated that he believed that the Comair airplane may have turned in this manner in order to return to the gate. He stated that he was not paying particular attention to the Comair airplane when he heard the airplane's engines power increase. He stated that he turned toward the airplane and realized they were taking off on runway 26. He stated that he ran toward the runways and witnessed the airplane continue down runway 26. He stated that he was focused on the solid white tail light and that the light went down slightly as the airplane progressed down the runway. He did not notice if the nose of the airplane rose because his attention was focused on the tail light. He stated that he then saw and heard an explosion followed by some "pops" and then 3 or 4 smaller explosions. He was not able to elaborate on what the "pops" that he heard were, only that he had heard them. He stated that he was able to see an amber light and the silhouette of the trees at the time of the first explosion. He indicated that the sound of the engines did not change from the beginning of the takeoff until the impact. He stated that the airplane performed a rolling takeoff as opposed to an application of engine power prior to brake release. When asked about the airport lighting, he noted that the runway lights for runway 22 were illuminated, as were the taxiway lights. He stated that the lights for runway 26 were not lit and that if they were he would have noticed it.

I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.

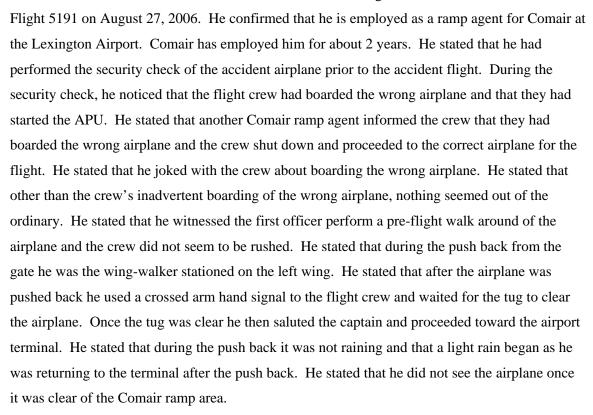
National Transportation Safety Board Senior Air Safety Investigator

Date: August 28, 2006

Conversation with: Timothy W. Johnson

Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Johnson was contacted in relation to the accident involving Comair



I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.

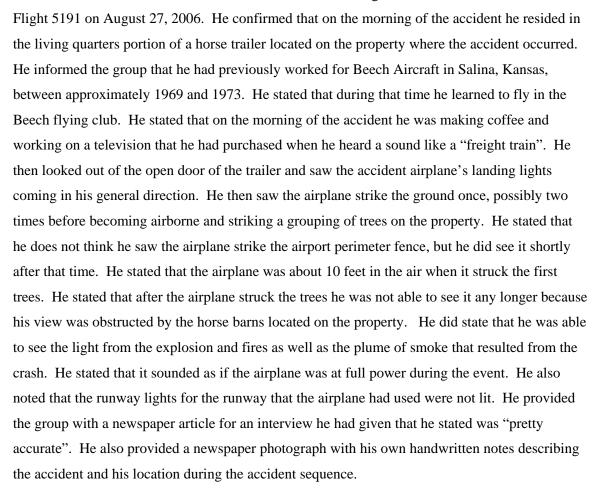


Date: August 29, 2006

Conversation with: William Giltner

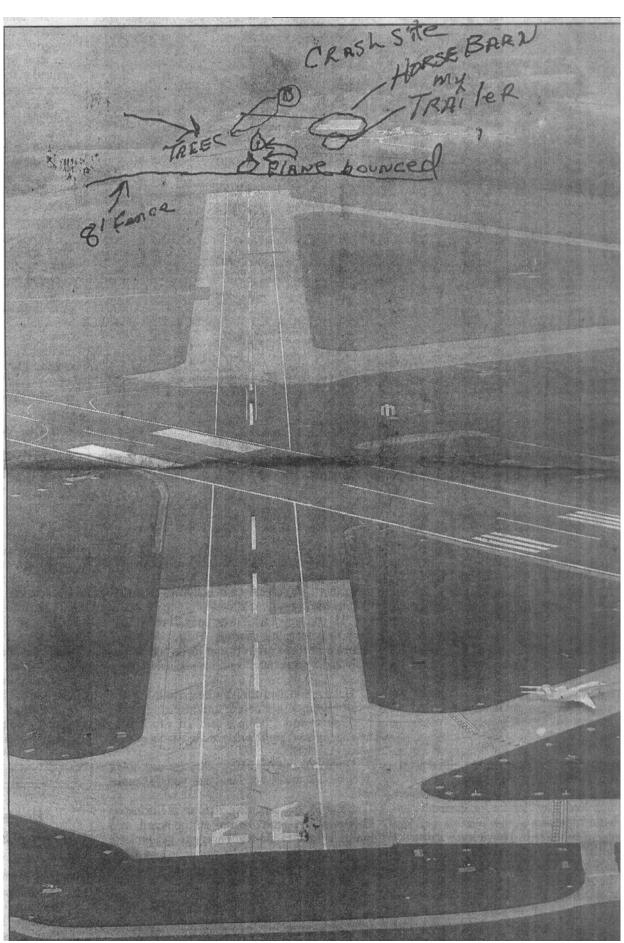
Summary and Factual Information from Conversation:

Mr. Giltner was contacted in relation to the accident involving Comair



I can attest that the above summary and factual information was taken on the above stated day and is correct to the best of my knowledge.





Copy of Newspaper photograph with descriptive items drawn by William Giltner

Account of last seconds matches scrapes, markings

By Ryan Alessi HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

As Comair Flight 5191 reached the end of Blue Grass Airport's shorter runway, it broke through an 8-foot chainlink fence, bounced off the ground and was almost airborne until it brushed a clump of trees, a witness said yesterday.

"He came bouncing across the pasture there. He just about had it off the ground when it clipped those trees," said Bill Giltner, who was hired to tend horses at the farm next to the airport.

Giltner said he was making coffee near the window of a small trailer that faced that runway on the horse farm owned by Nick Bentley. Giltner, 59, who had started there five days before, said he was stunned to see the CRJ-100 commuter plane struggling to get off the ground.

Its engines — which are much bigger and louder than the small private planes that usually take off on that runway and pass over his head — caught his attention.

"This sounded like a freight train coming right at you, I' mean, full-blast," he said.

Giltner said he saw the plane first hit the metal fence at the perimeter of the airport, then he watched as its tail scraped the ground.

"He hit, and there were all kinds of sparks flying out of the back of that plane," Giltner said.

The plane bounced back into the air and over a smaller fence and the farm's lower horse pasture. It had begun going airborne when it clipped the top of a thicket of trees.

Giltner said that's when he left the trailer in time to see a "a ball of fire" followed by a large plume of smoke from behind the trees. The crash killed 47 passengers and two crew members. The lone survivor, first officer James Polehinke, remained in critical condition yesterday at University of Kentucky Hospital.

"There wasn't anything I could do about it," Giltner said. He rushed back to the trailer to call 9-1-1 and finish getting dressed.

Eyewitness accounts of disasters don't always get the details right, but Giltner's descrip-



JANET WORNE | STAFF

Bill Giltner had recently been hired at the farm next to the airport. From his trailer, he saw the plane's attempt to take off.

tion matches some key evidence, including markings on the ground past the runway as well as the scrapes on the trees that were confirmed by National Transportation Safety Board investigators.

Investigators are still measuring and evaluating the impact marks on the trees to determine the plane's trajectory, NTSB member Debbie Hersman said at a briefing.

Giltner, a native of Salina, Kan., has been living in Kentucky since May, working around horses.

After the crash, he said, he rushed to wake Wayne Murty, who lives on the farm and oversees the care of the horses. Murty helped him open the farm's gates to give access to the first emergency vehicles, which arrived within minutes.

Giltner said he never saw the crash site. Still, the gravity of what had happened sunk in after a few hours.

"It didn't really hit me until noon," he said. "I could still smell the jet fuel burning."

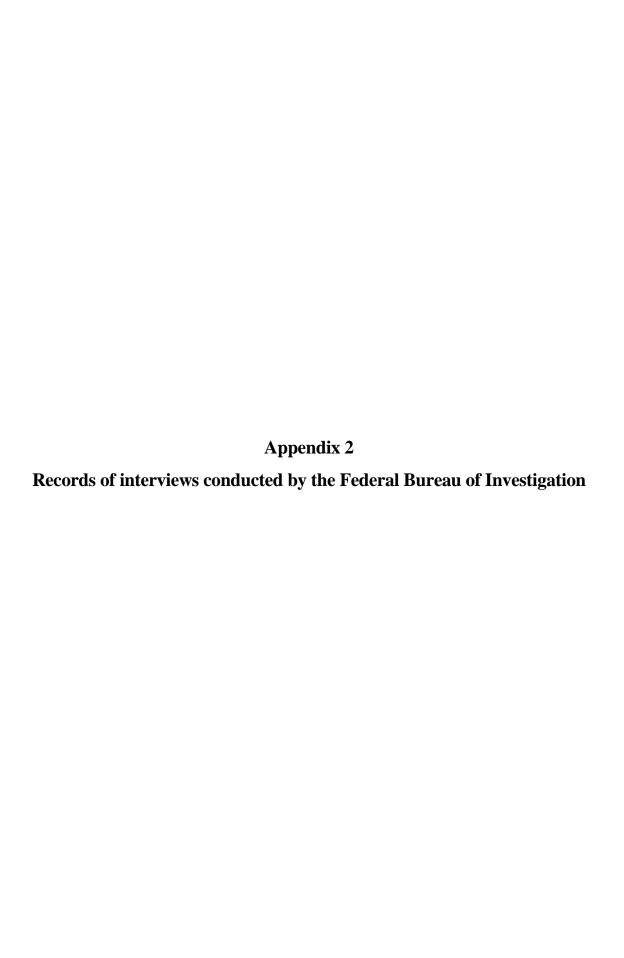
Giltner said he quit his job at Bentley's farm yesterday because of the heavy workload.

Murty confirmed that Giltner worked there for five days until yesterday, but Murty declined to talk about the crash.

Reach Ryan Alessi at (859) 231-1303 or 1-800-950-6397, Ext. 1303, or ralessi@herald-leader.com.

"He just about had it off the ground when it clipped those trees."

Bill Giltner, eyewitness



information:

Date of transcription 08/28/2006

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

CHRISTOPHER ROBIN DAMRON, white male, born (R), social security account number (R), residing at (R), Lexington, Kentucky, 40503, telephone number (R), employed by the Federal Aviation Administration as an Air Traffic Controller at Blue Grass Airport, (R), Lexington, Kentucky, 40510, work telephone number (R), after being advised as to the identity of the interviewing agent and the nature of the interview, provided the following

He has been an air traffic control specialist at the Blue Grass Airport (BGA) for seventeen years. He worked a shift on Saturday, then returned to work a shift another shift at 11:30pm Saturday night. He explained that the shift change for his schedule occurred that Saturday, so he was working two of the last three shifts.

At approximately 5:45am, the crew from ComAir #191 requested clearance to taxi to the runway. At 6:00am he granted the crew clearance to taxi from the ramp to the runway. At 6:06am, the crew requested permission to takeoff. He cleared the plane for takeoff. He observed the plane taxi to the end of the taxiway and begin to turn. He then began another task, possibly to log in data, and looked down. He heard a loud "boom" and immediately looked up. He saw an orange glow in the west, beyond Runway 26. He looked at the radar monitor and did not see ComAir #191 on the screen, so he called fire and rescue on a designated telephone. There had been no communication between the flight crew or the tower after clearance for takeoff was granted.

He explained that runway 26 is a smaller runway, approximately 3500 feet long. It is a daytime only runway for smaller aircraft, not commercial flights. When the flight crew requested clearance for taxi and take-off, he gave clearance for runway 22, which is 7000 feet long and the only lighted runway. Runway 22 is the only runway used by commercial aircraft.

There were two flights prior to ComAir #191, and both of those flights used runway 22. A Skywest flight and Eagle flight both departed prior to ComAir being cleared for it's flight.

Investig	gation on	08/27/2006	at	Lexington,	ı, Kentucky		
Filc #	149A-	-LS-72701		•	Date dictated	08/28/2006	
by	(R)						_

Date of transcription

08/30/2006

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

KERRY RAY WILLIAMS, white male, born (R)
social security account number (R), residing at (R)
Winchester, Kentucky, 40391, cellular telephone
number (R), employed with American Airlines as a station
agent at the Blue Grass Airport, Lexington, Kentucky, work
telephone number (R) after being advised as to the
identity of the interviewing agent and the nature of the interview,
provided the following information:

He has been employed as a station agent for ten months. His job duties include numerous things such as handling baggage, checking tickets, security checks of aircraft and coordinating FAA training.

He and his crew had completed a security check on an American Eagle aircraft, flight #882, shortly before 6:00am. There was some time before he and the rest of his ground crew team had to complete the next security check, so he was watching a ComAir flight taxi along the runway. He observed the aircraft make a very sharp turn to the left. That was very unusual, and he thought that maybe the crew was turning the aircraft around to return to the Instead of the plane returning to the terminal, he terminal. heard the engines engage "full throttle", and watched the plane travel on runway 26. He realized that the plane was on the wrong runway and began to run toward it. He watched the plane speed to the end of the runway and watched the tail beacon light. He saw the beacon light drop, as if the nose of the plane had lifted off and was going to gain altitude. The beacon light did not rise from the ground, and then he saw an orange flash. He then heard an explosion, followed by several "popping" noises, then three or four other explosions. He said the popping noises sounded like trees snapping. Although he heard the subsequent explosions, he did not see any more flames.

When he realized that the plane had crashed, he used his radio and informed the American Airline's supervisor of the accident.

Investi	gation on	08/27/2006	at	Lexington,	Kentuck	У		
Filc #	149A-	LS-72701				Date dictated	08/30/2006	
by	(R)							

Date of transcription

08/30/2006

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

GREGORY ALLEN COTTON, white male, born (R)
social security account number (R) residing at (R)
(R) Lexington, Kentucky, 40503, home telephone number
(R), employed with ComAir at Blue Grass Airport, work telephone number (R), cellular telephone number (R)
telephone number (R) , cellular telephone number (R)
(R) , after being advised as to the identity of the interviewing
agent and the nature of the interview, provided the following
information:

He has been employed with ComAir for six months as a customer service agent. Prior to working at ComAir, he was employed for over 25 years with Air Wisconsin as a foreman of the ground crew. His responsibilities include supervision of the ground crew, notifying the gate agent of aircraft status, watch and assist the boarding of passengers and their luggage, and completing cargo load reports.

At approximately 5:15am, he saw the pilot and first officer board aircraft #7824, which was the incorrect aircraft. He heard the auxiliary power unit (apu) start, which indicated the flight crew had entered the cockpit. He checked his documentation and verified that the crew should have boarded aircraft #7472. He asked a coworker, TIMOTHY WAYNE JOHNSON, and confirmed that the crew should have boarded aircraft #7472.

He boarded aircraft #7824 and walked to the cockpit. He asked the crew if they were schedule to use this aircraft, and explained his documentation indicated that aircraft #7472 was to be flown next. The first officer and pilot checked their paperwork, and confirmed that they had in fact boarded the wrong aircraft.

Soon after he had informed the flight crew of the error, he saw them board the correct aircraft. At approximately 5:30am, he saw the flight attendant walk to the aircraft and board. A few minutes later the flight attendant looked outside the aircraft and gave him a "thumbs up" sign, indicating he was ready for passengers to begin boarding the plane.

He was asked if he observed anything unusual inside the cockpit when he informed the crew of their mistake of boarding the wrong aircraft. He did not observe anything unusual. He did not

Investigation on	08/27/2006	at	Lexington,	Kentucky		
File # 149A-I	LS-72701			Date dictated	08/30/2006	
by (R)						

149A-LS-72701

Continuation of FD-302 of	Gregory Allen	Cotton	, On <u>08</u>	/27/2006	, Page	_2_
---------------------------	---------------	--------	----------------	----------	--------	-----

smell the odor of any alcohol, and the crew appeared to be alert, pleasant and friendly. Once they realized they were on the wrong aircraft, the crew seemed embarrassed and chuckled about it.

While the plane was being boarded, he began his final walk around and inspection of the outside of the aircraft. He did not observe anything unusual.

Once all of the passengers had boarded the plane, he operated the "tug" that pushed the aircraft into position for taxi to the runway. While he was operating the tug, he had a headset plugged into the aircraft which normally allows communication between the cockpit and the tug operator. On this day, the headset was having problems and he could hear the cockpit, but the flight crew could not hear him. He and the rest of the ground crew responded to the flight crew with hand signals instead of relying on the headset. After the plane was in position for taxi, the tug was released and the plane taxied to the runway. He did not see the aircraft once the tug was released.

When the aircraft was being pushed back by the tug, he overheard the conversation inside the cockpit. One of the flight crew mentioned that he had dinner with his wife and children the night before, and joked about changing diapers. There was no unusual or unprofessional conversation or behavior between the crew members. It seemed just as normal as any other day.

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Date of transcription 08/30/2006

TIMOTHY WAYNE JOHNSON, white male, born (R)
social security account number (R), residing at (R)
(R) Winchester, Kentucky, 40391, telephone number (R), employed with ComAir as a Ramp Agent at the Blue Grass Airport, Lexington, Kentucky, work telephone number (R), after being advised as to the identity of the interviewing agent and the nature of the interview, provided the following information:

He has been employed with ComAir as a ramp agent for two years. He responsibilities include inspecting the landing gear, engines, cockpit, galley, and cargo bin prior to flight.

While he was inspecting the aircraft this morning, he noticed that the pilot and co-pilot boarded the wrong plane. Another coworker confirmed with him that the paperwork they had identified aircraft #7472 as being the first plane to fly out, not #7824. After the pilot and co-pilot were told that they boarded the wrong plane, he watched them walk to the plane he was inspecting. He looked at the pilot and said, "It's going to be one of those days, huh?" The pilot looked at him and smiled, then boarded the plane.

While the tug was attached to the front wheel of the plane, he was the "wing man" and followed the wing until the aircraft was in position to taxi. After the tug was detached from the aircraft, he saluted to the crew and pointed to the taxiway, indicating to the crew that they were in control of the aircraft and the ground crew was clear.

Investi	gation on	08/27/2006	at	Lexington,	Kentuck	У		
File #	149A	-LS- 7 2701				Date dictated	08/30/2006	
ьу	(R)							

Several individuals were interviewed regarding their involvement with ComAir flight 5191. The following individuals were interviewed on August 27, 2006, however, they did not provide enough information to be captured in an FD-302:

Duff Ortman, Air Traffic Manager at Blue Grass Airport,

(R)
Lexington, Kentucky, 40515
Telephone(R)

DOB-(R)

Frank Scott Pierce, Delta ticketing agent for ComAir Flight 5191,

(R)
Lexington, Kentucky, 40511
Telephone(R)

DOB-(R)

SS#

Shawn Keith Glass, ComAir Lead/Ramp Supervisor,

(R)
Lexington, Kentucky, 40505
Telephone(R)

DOB-(R)

SS#

Appendix 3 Witness Contact Information

DCA06MA064

Location: Lexington, Kentucky (KLEX)

Date: August 27, 2006

Time: 1007 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) Aircraft: Comair CRJ-200, N431CA, Flight 5191

Witness Contact Information:

Nick Bentley (Property owner)
(R) Lexington, KY
(R)
Duane Murty (Property Leaser, resided on property)
(R) Lexington, KY
-(R)
Wayne Murty (Property Leaser, resided on property)
(R) Lexington, KY
(R)
Todd Murty (Son of Wayne Murty, resided on property)
Lexington, KY
(R)
Ricky Brown (Ear-witness, resides near airport)
(R) Lexington, KY 40510
(R)
Frank Pierce (Delta Airline ticketing and gate agent)
(work)(R) (cell)
• •
Kerry R. Williams (American Eagle employee)
Winchester, KY 40391
(work) (cell)(R)
(Cell) -(R)

Timothy W. Johnson (Comair ramp agent)
(R) Winchester, KY 40391 (cell)(R)
William Giltner (Eye-witness on accident property) (cell) Fathers address:
Salina, KS 67401
Ken Every (American Eagle crewmember that witnessed accident)
(-(R)
Christopher Damron (Tower controller)
The Witness Group did not interview this witness. Interview deferred to ATC Group.
Duff Ortman (Lexington ATCT manager)
(The Witness Group did not interview this witness. Interview deferred to ATC Group.
Gregory A. Cotton (Comair ramp agent. Drove tug during push back)
(work) - (R) (R)
(cell)
Shawn Glass (Comair ramp lead) The Witness Group did not interview this witness. Interview deferred to Operations Group.