



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

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Attachment 1 – Load Master Interview Transcripts

OPERATIONAL FACTORS

ERA20MA001

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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COLLINGS FOUNDATION BOEING B-17G *

CRASH AT BRADLEY INTERNATIONAL *

Accident No.: ERA20MA001

AIRPORT, WINDSOR LOCKS, CONNECTICUT, *

OCTOBER 2, 2019 *

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Interview of: MITCHELL MELTON

Load Master

NTSB Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

Wednesday,
November 6, 2019

APPEARANCES:

WARREN ABRAMS, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

GREG BORSARI, Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

TODD GENTRY, Accident Investigator
AVP-100
Federal Aviation Administration

G. DON SWAIM, Attorney
Cunningham Swaim
(On behalf of Mr. Melton)

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:32 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. ABRAMS: I'm Warren Abrams, the Operational Group Factors
4 chairman in the NTSB division, or the NTSB, for the B-17 accident
5 in Bradley, Connecticut, on October 2. We're here today to talk
6 with the mechanic/load master, multi-titled Mitchell Melton.
7 Mitchell, do you go by Mitch or how do you -- do you go by -- what
8 should we refer to you as?

9 MR. MELTON: You can refer to me as Mitch.

10 MR. ABRAMS: Okay, Mitch. Thank you. All right. Thank you.
11 Mitch, I'm going to go around the conference room here in just a
12 second and we're going to introduce ourselves and tell you what
13 our role is. I'll give you a little introductory talk, and then
14 we'll start asking you some questions.

15 As I said, I'm Warren Abrams with the NTSB. Mitch, we're
16 physically located today in Washington, D.C. We're at the NTSB
17 headquarters in a conference room. So we appreciate you being
18 with us today. Across the table from me is --

19 MR. GENTRY: I'm Todd Gentry. I'm from the FAA Accident and
20 Investigation Office. So if you want to tell them what my role
21 is?

22 MR. ABRAMS: No, you go right ahead. I want you to have it
23 on --

24 MR. GENTRY: I am one of a group of five people in the FAA
25 who do nothing but accidents. Everything that we talk about and

1 everything I do in my job does not equate to any enforcement
2 actions of any kind. So I'm strictly here just like the NTSB, to
3 find out what the facts are and see if there's anything that the
4 FAA could have done or should do to help prevent that in the
5 future. And that's my role.

6 MR. MELTON: Yes, sir.

7 MR. ABRAMS: And, Greg, you want to introduce yourself,
8 please?

9 MR. BORSARI: Yeah, Greg Borsari. I'm with the NTSB. I'm an
10 accident investigator and my function is maintenance. So I'll be
11 doing the records review on the B-17 maintenance records.

12 MR. MELTON: Yes, sir.

13 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch, before we get started, first and foremost
14 I want to extend my condolences and our condolences for your loss
15 of friends and colleagues in the accident. I know it's a trying
16 time for you. And I know I speak for everyone in the NTSB in
17 expressing our sorrow for your losses and pain you've experienced.
18 But again, thank you for making the time to speak with us today.

19 MR. MELTON: You're welcome.

20 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch, kind of how I'm going to run the
21 questions -- let me back up.

22 Don, we have not introduced you. But before we introduce
23 you, Don --

24 Mitch, you're allowed to have someone represent you today.
25 Who would you like to represent you?

1 MR. MELTON: Mr. Swaim, the gentleman sitting across from me.

2 MR. ABRAMS: Very good. So that is Donald Swaim at the firm
3 of --

4 Tell me the name of your firm again, please, Don.

5 MR. SWAIM: The firm is Cunningham Swaim.

6 MR. ABRAMS: Yes. Please introduce yourself.

7 MR. SWAIM: And we're located -- Don Swaim with Cunningham
8 Swaim. I am located in the Dallas office.

9 MR. ABRAMS: All right. Thank you.

10 Mitch, thank you as well. Mitch, what I was going to say is
11 our job is not to assign blame today or anything. You have a
12 story. I mean, it's quite a story, and we want to hear from you.
13 So anything we ask, it's not assigning blame. We're just here to
14 gather information and make sure or whatever we can do to prevent
15 this tragedy from happening again. So that is what our purpose
16 here is today.

17 MR. MELTON: Yes, sir.

18 MR. ABRAMS: The way my questions are going to go is I'm
19 going to kind of start with the, you know, phase of flight, the
20 pre-flight when you got to the airport that morning, what you did,
21 once the passengers got there, starting engines, taxiing out,
22 takeoff, coming back around. So, you know, that's -- kind of
23 phase of flight type of questions that I'll try to kind of stick
24 to, stick to that.

25 MR. MELTON: Okay.

1 MR. ABRAMS: But we do have a few more formalities we want to
2 go through before we get to it.

3 INTERVIEW OF MITCHELL MELTON

4 BY MR. ABRAMS:

5 Q. Mitch, would you state your full legal name and spell your
6 last name, please?

7 A. It's Mitchell Lee Melton, M, as in Mike, e-l-t-o-n.

8 Q. All right. Thank you. And how old are you, Mitch?

9 A. Thirty-four.

10 Q. And in a broad-brush term, you are working for the Collings
11 Foundation. What is your role in the Collings Foundation?

12 A. A little bit of everything; mechanic, a flight engineer, I
13 work the PX. It just, it depends on the volunteers. You know,
14 I'll work a day just -- I don't really, I guess, technically have
15 a job title because we do everything, you know. It just depends
16 on if we have enough volunteers and that kind of stuff.

17 Q. Speaking of volunteers, are you a full-time employee, are you
18 a volunteer, or what is your consideration, your job status?

19 A. Technically, an employee. I'm not a volunteer, no.

20 Q. Okay. Good.

21 A. I got hired on as a mechanic.

22 Q. All right. Thank you. Mitch, just a little side note here:
23 When you took your A&P, got your A&P license, you had a practical,
24 and it was probably for the FAA or a designated examiner, and they
25 told you don't offer too much information, because if you offer

1 too much, you might say something wrong. Today, nothing is wrong,
2 so there's no wrong answer. And if you don't know an answer, just
3 tell us flat out, I don't know. And that's okay. That's
4 certainly acceptable, as well.

5 Talk me through the morning. We're going to start in the
6 morning. Approximately what time did you arrive at the airport on
7 October 2nd? Do you recall that?

8 A. It was maybe approximately about 8:15.

9 Q. Okay. Did you get a --

10 A. A.m.

11 Q. Go ahead. I'm sorry. A.m.

12 A. I just said a.m.

13 Q. Yeah. Did you get a good night's rest the night before?

14 A. Yeah, other than, you know, sleeping in motels. But yeah, I
15 did.

16 Q. Okay. What do you do when you get -- in other words, you got
17 the B-17 there, you got a B-24 there, and you got a P-51. Let's
18 talk about the B-17. What did you do when you got there in
19 relationship to the B-17?

20 A. Got there, we called the fuel truck. I get there, you know,
21 I check the fuel, I stick the tanks. Depending on where it's at,
22 we take it up to 800 gallons. I checked the oil. You know, I
23 added oil that morning. Filled out the dailies, made sure
24 everything was good to go.

25 Q. Talk me through --

1 A. And, you know, the rest of the --

2 Q. Sure.

3 A. -- (indiscernible) rides.

4 Q. I didn't mean to interrupt you. The dailies, what are your
5 dailies? Obviously, fuel and oil. What other things are on the
6 daily list?

7 A. There's just discrepancies, stuff like that, you know, we
8 find that's wrong with it, you know, the airplane, for the day.
9 Of course, you know, you got your fuel, how much you put on, what
10 did you take it to. You've got the oil, the same thing; what it
11 was at, what you took it to. We take it up to 25 gallons. The
12 copilot's name, the actual pilot's name, and then my name goes on
13 there as the flight engineer.

14 Q. All right.

15 A. And then just the Hobbs meter, what it's at, how many flights
16 we're going to do that day. You know, that kind of stuff.

17 Q. How many flights were you going to do that day?

18 A. It depends on how much Denny, our flight coordinator would
19 make, but we had two that morning.

20 Q. All right. And do you know if you were going to have any
21 that afternoon or not?

22 A. No, sir. I mean, I could look. I don't know.

23 Q. Okay, that's fine. That's a fine answer. That's fine. So
24 we've got the fuel. You added a hundred -- we know from the fuel
25 slip there at the FBO, you added 160 gallons and that brought you

1 up to 800 gallons. Would you have to refuel if you flew in the
2 afternoon, as well?

3 A. That depends on the flight.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. If we only had, you know, one or two flights that afternoon,
6 no, I wouldn't.

7 Q. All right. Do you drain the fuel sumps in the morning?

8 A. No, I don't. Mac told me never to mess with them because
9 they leak.

10 Q. All right. And when you say Mac, we're talking Ernest
11 McCauley, the captain of the flight?

12 A. Yes, sir.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Yes.

15 Q. All right.

16 A. Because he's the chief pilot, I just did what he said.

17 Q. All right. I'll refer to him as Mac, as well, instead of
18 Ernest McCauley.

19 A. However you want to, yeah. It's however you all want to go
20 by. I just know him as Mac.

21 Q. Okay, that's fine. That is fine. We'll talk more about him
22 later. Mitch, when you -- do you guys send your oil samples out
23 for analysis from time to time?

24 A. That I don't know.

25 Q. All right.

1 A. I mean, (indiscernible) might try to -- I don't know how Mac
2 would do that. Mac's, you know, our -- what do you call him?

3 MR. SWAIM: Director of maintenance.

4 MR. MELTON: Yeah, director of maintenance. Sorry, I --
5 yeah, my brain went blank there for a little bit.

6 BY MR. ABRAMS:

7 Q. That's quite all right. Let's talk about fueling the
8 airplane. Was there dew on the wings that morning?

9 A. Do what?

10 Q. Was there dew, condensation, dew on the wings?

11 A. Yes. Yes, sir, there was a little bit. Usually, in the
12 mornings -- I mean, it depends on the humidity, you know. There
13 is a little bit.

14 Q. Now, do you get on the wing yourself to fuel the airplane or
15 do you stand on a ladder and fuel over the top of the wing from
16 the ladder? Or tell me how the fueling goes.

17 A. No, I get up there. There's, you know, wing walk. You know,
18 the rubberized texture that goes up on the wings, I get up there
19 and I'll stand on it when I do fuel it, check the fuel.

20 Q. Okay. You mentioned the drip -- well, let me back up. We've
21 got four engines, and we've got a whole bunch of fuel tanks. So
22 we've got the 425-gallon tanks for engines -- what -- fill me in
23 on that, please, Mitch. The 425-gallon tanks go to what engine?

24 A. Oh, I believe it's 2 and 3, if I'm not -- if I'm correct, I
25 believe it's 2 and 3.

1 Q. And then the 212, 213 tanks go to 1 and 4. All right.

2 A. I believe.

3 Q. Yeah. You've got a fuel stick that you stick down in the
4 tank and it tells you how much fuel you have in that tank. Do you
5 also have fuel gauges in the cockpit?

6 A. Yes, there are. From what Mac had told me, they didn't work.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. But I don't remember.

9 Q. That's fine. That's fine. So, do you air-up the tires or
10 does Mac usually do that?

11 A. I've aired up the tail L tire. As far as the mains, whenever
12 we -- we had just changed the tires, oh, maybe 3 weeks before
13 that, maybe a month. I can't remember. We checked them, you
14 know, of course, the day after. We changed them. But as far as
15 ever adding air or nitrogen to the mains, no, I hadn't, because, I
16 mean, they didn't -- we have a ruler that we check them with.

17 Q. Right.

18 A. Periodically. And depending on where they're setting at, I
19 mean, we don't have to, you know, add air to them every day, no,
20 sir.

21 Q. Certainly. Where does that tire pressure ruler stay when
22 it's not in your hand checking the tire height?

23 A. It's usually in the tail.

24 Q. Okay. Mitch, do you guys have a maintenance vehicle truck
25 that follow the airplane around?

1 A. No, we carry -- I mean, we have a van that takes all the, you
2 know, the CHIRP and stuff, but as far as a maintenance vehicle,
3 no.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. All of our tools and stuff stay with us. We carry all of our
6 parts with us.

7 Q. So, when you say all your parts --

8 A. (Indiscernible) --

9 Q. I'm sorry, Mitch.

10 A. -- like a generator, starters, stuff like that, you know. We
11 have cylinders with us if we need them. But as far as a
12 maintenance, no.

13 Q. And you say those are on board the airplane at all times?

14 A. Yes, sir.

15 Q. What about a spare tire, do you carry a spare tire for the
16 mains around?

17 A. No. We carry spare tubes but we don't carry spare tires.
18 Whenever they start, you know, wearing down, we'll call, or Mac
19 will call either New Smyrna Beach where, you know, the airplanes
20 go in for their annual inspections. He'll call there, whatever,
21 and order another tire or tires.

22 Q. Okay.

23 A. Usually, if one's starting to -- you know, if one's wearing
24 more than the other, we just change them both at the same time.

25 Q. Right.

1 A. So they're both fresh.

2 Q. Do you have anybody other than Mac that works with you when
3 you're doing maintenance on the airplane? Is there another
4 Collings Foundation volunteer/employee that works with you guys?

5 A. There's two other mechanics that travel with us. One of
6 them --- both of them typically -- well, I mean, we all work --
7 the three mechanics usually work on every airplane. It just
8 depends, but, like, our other two mechanics, they'll engineer, you
9 know, or whatever, like, the B-24 and the B-25 or whatever.

10 Q. Yeah. Were those two other gentlemen onsite at Bradley at
11 the time of the accident?

12 A. Honestly, I don't remember. You know, as far as, like, did
13 they show up to the airplane and help, or what are you asking?

14 Q. I'm asking were they there to work on either the B-24 or B-25
15 or the P-51, and if they were there --

16 A. I mean --

17 Q. I'm sorry, go ahead, Mitch.

18 A. They're always with us. Like, the other two mechanics are
19 always with us. One of them had to go and drop off, you know,
20 parts that we changed out. The other one was there with us.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. That morning, before. Yeah, there was one other mechanic
23 there with me besides Mac.

24 Q. Okay. We were talking and we just touched briefly on the
25 tail wheel, about proper inflation on that. Is the tail wheel in

1 a locked-down fixed position? In other words, does it no longer
2 retract when you bring the main gear up?

3 A. No, it retracts as well.

4 Q. Okay. Let's talk about the passengers. We have a copy of
5 the load manifest that day and it indicates there are 10
6 passengers that were on board. Does that fill up every seat?

7 A. Yes, sir.

8 Q. How many seats --

9 A. There's two --

10 Q. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to --

11 A. You're fine. There's two right in behind the copilot and the
12 pilot. Their backs are facing them. There's three in the radio
13 room, and then five in the tail.

14 Q. Where do you sit?

15 A. Right in between the copilot and the pilot. But, typically,
16 I don't sit. I don't have an actual seat to sit in.

17 Q. All right. So is it, would you call it a jump seat, or you
18 just kind of stand there?

19 A. I stand in between the copilot and the pilot.

20 Q. Okay. Good. When the passengers show up, do you give them
21 any kind of briefing, any kind of safety briefing?

22 A. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Can you --

24 A. I tell them --

25 Q. Go ahead.

1 A. Yeah. So as soon as they get there, you know, I'll let them
2 know -- I'll give them their seating arrangements. Like, you
3 know, if two of them want to sit in behind the copilot and pilot,
4 normally, I do agile people there because it's really hard to get
5 up from right there. And then, you know, if somebody can't really
6 sit on the floor, I put them in the radio room because there's a
7 chair there. And then everybody else goes into the tail. And,
8 you know, and there's two other spots in the radio room.

9 I let them know, you know, in case of emergency, of course,
10 we have, you know, the door right underneath the copilot and the
11 pilot, we have the hatch in the radio room if they have -- you
12 know, in an emergency, we have to get out from there, they can, of
13 course, jump out, you know, climb up. It's kind of a pain in the
14 butt, probably, to get out from there, but -- and then of course
15 we have the door in the tail.

16 I let them know they're not to grab hold of flight control
17 cables. If they feel like they're going to get sick, come find me
18 because, you know, I have sick bags. No selfies with the pilots.
19 Don't be poking them on their shoulder, asking them what they're
20 doing. I only let two people in the nose because there's really
21 not enough room in the nose for more than three adults. Once two
22 people come out of the nose, they go back into the radio room, and
23 then I'll let back -- two more people can come up front.

24 I let them know that they have to be seated and seat-belted
25 for taxi, takeoff and landing. I try to joke around with them,

1 you know, just to let -- you know, typically, I try not to go more
2 than just a minute or so because I start losing people, you know.
3 You know how that goes. They'll start getting distracted, wanting
4 to take pictures of the airplane. I show them how to get in and
5 out of the airplane.

6 I load them, they go in there, you know, get seated and seat-
7 belted. And then, of course, I go back out and I watch, you know,
8 I watch the engines get started. And then once I get back in the
9 airplane, if they haven't figured out their seatbelts by then, I
10 help them out, make sure they're seated, you know.

11 Q. So you don't actually demonstrate the seatbelt to them,
12 they -- it's just self-explanatory?

13 A. Yeah. Yeah, it's self-explanatory. I mean, it's not rocket
14 science. Once I get in the airplane after the engines are
15 running, you know, we're still parked. We're not moving, we're
16 not doing anything. If they need help with the seatbelts at that
17 time, I do help them.

18 Q. Okay. Do you have a little briefing card or is this just
19 kind of memory that Collings Foundation has said for you to say,
20 or how do you come up with the information you tell the
21 passengers?

22 A. You know, I've listened to the other guys that have given the
23 passengers -- we were actually in the process of making new ones.
24 Because at one point, I guess, the Foundation did have briefing
25 cards, but I guess they've been lost. I don't -- I've never seen

1 them, I don't know. But we were actually in the process of making
2 new ones. I had a list, I don't know where it's at now, of
3 everything, you know, of my briefings and stuff like that, and we
4 were going to laminate them and everything and put them in the
5 airplanes. But as far as briefing cards at the time, no, I did
6 not have one, it's just memory.

7 Q. Okay. Mitch, let's talk about the engine start. But I'm
8 going to take you out of Bradley and put you back in Florida, or
9 put you in Florida, on a nice spring morning. What is the usual
10 start sequence? The engines are good, no problems or anything,
11 and you've got nice air down there in Florida, what is the normal
12 start sequence for the B-17? Which engine started first and go
13 through that, please.

14 A. We start Number 3 first because what the generator is on.
15 I'll go 3 and then 4, and then 2 and 1. We have a generator on 3,
16 2 and 3, but typically we start 3 first.

17 Q. All right. I'm going to put you back in Bradley right now.
18 So, which engine was started first in Bradley?

19 A. Went and tried to start 3, it wouldn't start, so I grabbed
20 the nitrogen bottle out, grabbed the nitrogen bottle and pulled
21 the cowling off. I blew out the mags because they had got
22 moisture in them. It rained the day before. Blew it out, it
23 fired up no problem.

24 Went to start Number 4 and it did the same thing. So I
25 pulled the -- we shut down 3. I got the nitrogen bottle, blew out

1 the mags on 4, you know, closed up the cowlings. You know, I
2 closed up the cowlings, as well, on 3 as well. So started 3,
3 fired right up. Start 4, it fired right up. And then, of course,
4 I went over to 2, no problems; 1, no problems.

5 Q. And you're outside the airplane for all of this, is that
6 correct, except for going back in to get the nitrogen bottle? Do
7 I understand that correctly?

8 A. Yes, sir. The nitrogen bottles and, you know, all of our
9 hoses and everything are right up underneath the copilot seat,
10 pretty much.

11 Q. All right. Mitch, I'm not familiar with blowing out the mag
12 as you discussed it. Where do you put the nitrogen charge -- or I
13 say charge. Where do you squirt the nitrogen into the mag?

14 A. On Number 3?

15 Q. Yes.

16 A. There's a hose with a check valve. Well, a valve that kind
17 of hangs out below the -- into the wheel well. And I just blow
18 nitrogen into the back of the mag. On Number 4, we don't have the
19 hose with the valve, so I have to pull the back plate off and
20 there's a little -- Mac had showed me. I don't -- without looking
21 at the mag, I can't tell you. But I just take, you know, and blow
22 nitrogen right into the back of the mag to clear out all the
23 condensation. That's the first, I mean, that is the first time I
24 had ever done it. Mac had showed me, you know, how to do it. As
25 far as ever doing it before, I've never seen anybody do it. But

1 that was Mac's thing.

2 Q. All right. And so you don't get into the ignition harness or
3 anything like that, it's all up there within the mag where you
4 blow the air -- blow the nitrogen?

5 A. Yes, sir.

6 Q. Okay. And you said this is the first time you had done this
7 procedure. How long had you been flying on the B-17 with the
8 Collings Foundation?

9 A. This is my first year, and I started in January.

10 Q. All right.

11 A. The end of January.

12 Q. Approximately, not a hard number but approximately how many
13 flights would you say you have flown on as the flight engineer?

14 A. I have no clue.

15 Q. All right.

16 A. That's a hard guess. I don't -- the B-17 flies more than,
17 well, the B-24. It probably, maybe, flies almost as much as the
18 25. But as far as a guess on how many flights I have, I couldn't
19 tell you. I have no clue.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. A lot. Quite a few.

22 Q. That's fine, Mitch. Thank you. So we've got the engines
23 started and you're back in the airplane. Do you close the outside
24 door or does somebody outside the airplane close the door once
25 you're back in?

1 A. I go in the tail and I close it. There's a handle on the
2 inside.

3 Q. Okay. When you're --

4 A. And I, you know -- sorry, go ahead.

5 Q. No, you go ahead.

6 A. You know, of course, I check to make sure everybody's seated
7 and seat-belted, and then I climb over -- or I walk over the five
8 passengers in the tail; then, you know, I go up through the radio
9 room, make sure they're all seated and seat-belted, and, of
10 course, go up to the front. And the two that are seated there, I
11 make sure they're, you know, seated and seat-belted, and then wait
12 on the engines to warm up.

13 Q. When you say wait on the engines to warm up, is there an oil
14 temperature that Mac is looking for before he starts to taxi?

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. Do you know what --

17 A. It's around 40 --

18 Q. 40 degrees?

19 A. 40 degrees Celsius. Yeah, Celsius.

20 Q. Thank you. This is going back a little bit off topic here.
21 We had a report that approximately 2 weeks prior to this flight,
22 in Keene, New Hampshire, the flight was cancelled and the airplane
23 was grounded. Now, that's what the report said. Now, I don't
24 know anything about that. Do you happen to recall anything about
25 that?

1 A. No, not the airplane was grounded or the flight was
2 cancelled. No, I don't remember any of that.

3 Q. Okay. While the engines are warming up, while the oil's
4 warming up, does the crew run any checklist?

5 A. Yeah, they do.

6 Q. Do you recall what checklist they run?

7 A. Not without looking at the checklist. I couldn't tell you
8 exactly what Mac goes through.

9 Q. All right. Once the oil temps are good and the taxi begins,
10 there's usually an engine run-up. Do you recall if there was an
11 engine run-up this day or not?

12 A. Yes, sir, there was.

13 Q. And how long do they run the engine up for?

14 A. We go up to -- what is it? 1700 RPMs. Mac will feather
15 everything. Well, he'll feather the props twice, and then goes to
16 the feather button, feathers, does the feather buttons on all four
17 engines, goes back, feathers the props again; then goes to the mag
18 switches, makes sure all the mags are good. And that morning,
19 everything was perfect. I mean, we had no drop, we had no
20 backfire. We had nothing. I mean, there was no reason not to
21 fly, you know.

22 Q. All right.

23 A. As far as the time-wise, I mean, you just go through the, you
24 know, the checklist and the run-up, you know. And -- the run-up,
25 we -- there's not an actual specific time on how long we run the

1 engines for.

2 Q. On the morning of the takeoff, the decision was made to do an
3 intersection takeoff on Runway 6. In other words, you don't use
4 the full length of the runway, you takeoff at about -- this was
5 almost the midpoint of the runway. Do you recall that?

6 A. Yes. And I don't know how long the runway is. That I don't
7 know.

8 Q. Yeah, I don't either. You know, any thoughts of why they did
9 an intersection takeoff?

10 A. No, I don't. That's Mac's call. I have no clue why he did
11 that.

12 Q. All right. The tower says you're cleared for takeoff, who
13 pushes the throttles up for takeoff?

14 A. The copilot and the pilot.

15 Q. And who was the pilot flying this day?

16 A. Mac.

17 Q. Does Mac --

18 A. You know --

19 Q. Go ahead.

20 A. Go ahead. No, go ahead.

21 Q. Does Mac ever let the copilot fly?

22 A. It depends on the copilot.

23 Q. Did you ever --

24 A. Takeoff and landing, no. Ninety-nine percent of the time,
25 Mac does that.

1 Q. All right.

2 A. We do what -- you know.

3 Q. Do you ever get involved in, in either takeoff or landing,
4 working the throttles?

5 A. It depends. Ninety percent of the time, I don't. Every once
6 in a while, I'll walk down the control, you know, the locks,
7 but -- the throttle lock, you know. But most of the time, I show
8 the copilot if he's not, you know, if he -- I show him. I'm like,
9 all right, this is how you do it, you know. And I let him do it.

10 Q. Okay. Michael Foster was the copilot that day. Had you ever
11 flown with Mike Foster before?

12 A. A few times.

13 Q. When you push the power up for takeoff, how much manifold
14 pressure do they usually pull? Do you have any idea?

15 A. We go to 30. Once we're at 30, if everything is looking
16 good, we go to 40.

17 Q. All right.

18 A. And that's when Mac releases the brakes and, of course, takes
19 off.

20 Q. And on this flight, everything was running properly at 40
21 inches of manifold pressure?

22 A. Yeah. I mean, that's what I don't -- I don't understand what
23 happened. But, I mean, everything, yes, of course, everything for
24 takeoff and everything, engine run-ups, everything, it was all
25 good. There was no issues as to why what happened.

1 Q. Okay. You takeoff, and we have reports of one of the
2 passengers from the back that said one of the engines was running
3 rough. And that's his terminology, not mine. Would you agree
4 with one of the engine was running rough after takeoff?

5 A. As soon as we gear up, I take my headset off, I go -- you
6 know, I let all the passengers get up. So the two that are
7 sitting in behind the copilot and the pilot, I reach down and I
8 tap them on the shoulders. I told them to go down in the nose. I
9 go to the tail. I let everybody get up. You know, I'll go back
10 there and I'm like, all right, you all can get up, we can go, you
11 can walk freely throughout the airplane.

12 As soon as I come back up to the front, I put my headset back
13 on and Mac said Number 4 is losing power. I looked up at the RPM
14 gauge, of course, it was losing power. He said he wanted to cage
15 it. I wasn't ready to cage it, I told him, because we weren't
16 climbing, and I don't know why. He reached up, caged it. And
17 caging means shutting the engine off.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. When I realized we weren't climbing, I went down into the
20 nose. I grabbed the two passengers that were down there, I seated
21 them. I made sure they were buckled. I went to the tail; I made
22 sure everybody was seated and seat-belted. When I came back up
23 there, as far as -- I'm sorry, I'll go back to the engine, the way
24 it was running.

25 I don't remember it ever backfiring. It all happened so

1 fast. I don't remember ever hearing it backfire, nothing. I just
2 looked up at the RPM gauge and it was dropping power. But as far
3 as running rough, I do not remember.

4 To go back to when I came back up front, that was whenever we
5 were starting base to final. I remember him -- I remember hearing
6 the airplane had, I guess, dial approach light. That's when I sat
7 down. I sat down on the turret right up between the copilot and
8 the pilot, and that's the last thing I remember.

9 I don't, yeah, I don't know what happened. I don't know why
10 we weren't, you know, gaining altitude. I do not know, and that's
11 what's frustrating. I don't know what happened. I don't know if
12 Mac froze. I know I noticed -- you know, Mike Foster, he didn't
13 really have much time in the airplane. I don't know what
14 happened.

15 Q. Do you know if they raised the landing gear or not?

16 A. Yeah, that I do know. They did, and then as soon as Mac
17 realized -- right before I seated everybody, Mac wanted to put the
18 gear back down, so Mike Foster put it back down. I don't know
19 why, because we weren't gaining altitude. But when he said we
20 weren't gaining altitude, you know, I went back and started
21 seating everybody.

22 Q. So when they caged the Number 4 engine, did they feather it?
23 Was it feathered?

24 A. That I don't remember. I don't remember that, him doing any
25 of that.

1 Q. Do you recall if there was any issues with the Number 3
2 engine?

3 A. No, I don't.

4 Q. Let me back up a little bit. I don't want to put words in
5 your mouth but I'm trying to repeat what you said. Mac said to
6 you let's cage the Number 4 engine, and you replied you were not
7 ready; is that correct?

8 A. I don't -- me personally, I wasn't ready. I don't remember
9 saying that.

10 Q. Okay. Does the Collings Foundation have a dual verification
11 for shutting down an engine and feathering the engine?

12 A. That I don't know.

13 Q. All right.

14 A. I don't know.

15 Q. Okay. Mitch, I'm going to ask a few questions here and, you
16 know --

17 A. Okay.

18 Q. Yes? And --

19 A. I said okay.

20 Q. Yeah. Some of them are, you know, quite frankly, some of
21 them are about the impact. And if you don't feel like answering
22 them, that's fine with me. We have a survival factors group here
23 at the NTSB and they asked me was this a survivable accident. And
24 based on fatalities and based on people who survive, but with
25 injuries or burns, it was kind of a yes/no type answer. So these

1 questions are kind of related to this.

2 We have a witness statement that said that the tail wheel hit
3 first, hit the ground first, or the approach lights first, and
4 then the main gear hit really hard, and then everything flew
5 forward. Do you happen to recall anything like that?

6 A. I honestly don't know. As soon as we started hitting those
7 lights, that's the last thing I remember.

8 Q. All right.

9 A. I don't know what was hitting them. I don't know because I
10 sat down. I sat down right on the turret and I just held on. I
11 was blacked out. Whenever I guess I woke up, I wiggled my feet to
12 see if I could move them because I was not sitting on the turret
13 anymore. I don't even know what I was sitting on right in between
14 the copilot and the pilot. I don't know.

15 My arm was stuck. I've got a big laceration on my left
16 bicep. My arm was stuck on something. I thought it was a hook
17 but, honestly, I don't know. When I realized I could get up, I
18 just yanked my arm off. And I've got nerve damage in my left arm
19 now. They had to go in and fix it and now my arm's all numb.
20 They fixed my bicep.

21 When I stood up, I realized I could not go through the tail
22 because of the, you know, the flames. I pushed the plexiglass out
23 and I jumped. I don't even remember looking. I think I landed on
24 a tank, one of the deicing tanks, and then I went to the fence. I
25 turned around and the whole cockpit was in flames.

1 There was two people sitting down kind of over -- I don't
2 even remember where they were sitting at. They were sitting on
3 the same side which I jumped. I remember briefly seeing them. I
4 don't remember who -- I didn't remember who they were at first,
5 but I don't know who came in to me in the hospital. I don't know
6 if they were FBI. Honestly, I can't remember.

7 They wanted me to identify Mac. I didn't want to, they kept
8 pushing it. But they finally told me that it wasn't of him
9 deceased, it was him in the airplane. So I said fine. Well, they
10 just showed up in the room when I was trying to get discharged.
11 And I finally said, whatever, okay, fine. So I looked at them,
12 the pictures, I identified Mac.

13 Then they told me the two that were sitting outside the
14 airplane thanked me because they didn't know how to get out of the
15 airplane and they jumped right behind me. So I'm very grateful
16 that she told -- that I was actually able to save them too. And I
17 don't even feel like I did. It's just, you know, I just -- 20
18 seconds longer, none of us would have been there. I mean, we
19 wouldn't be here.

20 MR. ABRAMS: Don, I think this is a good point to take about
21 a 10-minute break.

22 MR. SWAIM: Yes, we'll do that. I've got 16 after. Let's
23 try to be back at 26 after. Does that work with you guys or you
24 want to go -- let's make it on the half hour. How's that?

25 MR. SWAIM: Okay.

1 MR. ABRAMS: On the half hour, we'll be --

2 MR. SWAIM: That's fine.

3 MR. ABRAMS: All right. Thank you. We'll be back on the
4 line.

5 (Off the record.)

6 (On the record.)

7 MR. ABRAMS: All right, we are recording again.

8 Mitch, I want to thank you for your heartfelt analysis of
9 what took place. My heart goes out to you, it really does. I
10 don't know how you're -- how you did what you did.

11 Also, Mitch, I'm going to -- we're going to go have a second
12 round of questioning, but I'm going to not ask any more questions,
13 I'm sure you're tired of listening to me ask questions, and I'm
14 going to turn it over to Todd Gentry. He's with AVP-100, with the
15 FAA. And just again, he has no enforcement action authority in
16 this proceeding. Whatever you tell him, he's looking for what
17 happened and what caused it to happen and to make sure it doesn't
18 happen again.

19 Just as a side note, Congress mandated that the FAA be a
20 party to all NTSB investigations, so that's why the FAA is a part
21 of this.

22 So anyway, Todd Gentry, I turn the floor over to you, or the
23 mic over to you.

24 BY MR. GENTRY:

25 Q. Hey, Mitch. Thank you for giving us your time. I do

1 appreciate it. As Warren said, I'm not here to cause any blame or
2 anything like that. I just want to find out what we can do
3 better, and that's why I'm here. So I'm blessed enough to be
4 along with the NTSB on almost every investigation they do, which
5 is a good thing.

6 A. Yeah.

7 Q. So I do want to thank you. I'm going to start off with some
8 easy questions, actually. Did you have any -- you said you were
9 with the Collings Foundation since January of this year; is that
10 right?

11 A. Yes, sir. It was around the end of January. I don't
12 remember the exact date on when I started.

13 Q. Okay. Did you have any training with them? Do you remember
14 doing any specific training, like --

15 A. We do more or less OJT.

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. So, you know, I'll watch Mac do it. Mac will show me, you
18 know, how to do it, and then he watches over my shoulder. That's
19 just how we did our training wise.

20 Q. Okay. So the only thing you remember is training OJT-wise on
21 the road with Mac?

22 A. Yes, sir.

23 Q. Okay. Who logs the maintenance while you're on the road, is
24 that you or is that Mac that logs it?

25 A. It would have been Mac.

1 Q. Okay. So I'm going to let Greg talk about some other stuff
2 maintenance-wise, but that's about the extent of my maintenance
3 questions.

4 A. Okay.

5 Q. Do you know if there is a safety management program for
6 Collings?

7 A. What do you mean safety management?

8 A. Do they have a safety program at all?

9 A. That I don't know.

10 Q. Okay. Do you guys have -- I'm going to back up a little bit.
11 Do you guys have, like, a crew briefing when you go to the new
12 city? Do you guys get together at the FBO or talk about anything
13 like that?

14 A. Typically, no.

15 Q. So can you tell me what happens the minute you arrive at a
16 new city?

17 A. We start unloading the airplane. It depends on how far we go
18 as far as if the B-17 carries, like, the PX, like the shirts and
19 stuff like that. If it's over a hundred miles, we carry it.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. So as soon as we get there, we, you know, of course, unload
22 it. We take everything into the FBO, set up the perimeter. We
23 have cones and ropes and stuff like that that we set up.

24 Q. Okay. Have you, Mitch, have you ever seen Mac brief the
25 passengers, or is it always you when you're with him?

1 A. I've never, no, I've never seen -- Mac will talk to them, but
2 as far as briefing them, no, I've never seen him do it.

3 Q. Okay. Have you -- well, did you hear any anomalies with the
4 engines while you were airborne, not, you know not on the run-up
5 or on the takeoff but after airborne?

6 A. No, I don't -- that's what I -- I never heard anything.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. I just seen Mac had said Number 4's not running right. I
9 looked up at the RPM gauge and, of course, that was dropping. But
10 as far as backfiring, I don't remember hearing anything.

11 Q. Okay. Did you know if all the passengers got back to their
12 seats or in their seatbelts before the lights were hit? Do you
13 know?

14 A. Oh yeah. I know that because I pulled everybody out of the
15 tail -- or not the tail. I pulled the two passengers out of the
16 nose, I told them to get back up in their seats. They were the
17 first two that were down in the nose, so they were the first --
18 you know, they sat right in behind the copilot and the pilot. I
19 made sure they were seated and seat-belted. I went to, you know,
20 of course, the radio room and made sure they were seated.
21 Because, I mean, it all happened so fast that we were not -- I had
22 just got the passengers up.

23 Q. Right. Do you remember --

24 A. So they weren't really moving around a whole lot at that
25 time, so I just -- I went back there and made sure everybody was

1 seated and seat-belted.

2 Q. Okay. Do you remember if anybody had difficulties getting
3 their seatbelt on initially? In the chocks, before you guys
4 taxied out, do you remember if anybody -- you had to show them how
5 to use the seatbelts on this flight?

6 A. I always do, but I don't remember that morning, no.

7 Q. Okay. I didn't know if there was an individual that you had
8 to show or anything like that. For the pilots themselves, Mitch,
9 do you know if they have shoulder harnesses or just lap belts?

10 A. I don't know.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I don't know if there are shoulder harnesses.

13 Q. Okay. We just had it as part of the questions.

14 A. They never wore them. If there were shoulder harnesses,
15 nobody ever wore them if there were any.

16 Q. Okay. So did you have any, like, CRM training or emergency
17 training for just the crew, egress training, anything like that,
18 how to get out of the airplane?

19 A. No. Not that I know of as crew-wise, no.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. I've never been a part of it.

22 Q. Okay.

23 MR. GENTRY: Warren, that's all I've got for now. Thank you.
24 Thank you, Mitch. I appreciate your time.

25 MR. MELTON: Thank you.

1 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch, we're going to keep going here because
2 time is valuable. And we're going to give it to Greg Borsari. As
3 we mentioned earlier, he's with our Structures Division here at
4 the NTSB. He's going to be discussing some maintenance issues and
5 engineering issues with you.

6 So, Greg, we'll turn it over to you at this time.

7 BY MR. BORSARI:

8 Q. Yeah, Mitch, Greg Borsari. I'm actually with the Engineering
9 Group. My specialty is maintenance. I do appreciate your time.
10 I'm going to try not to repeat too many of the questions that have
11 already been asked, but I'm going to have to on a couple of
12 things. You do have an A&P certificate?

13 A. Yes, sir.

14 Q. And how long have you been an A&P?

15 A. This January it will be 2 years that I've actually held the
16 certificate.

17 Q. Okay. Did you work as, like, an apprentice beforehand at
18 all?

19 A. Oh yeah. I did sheet metal work on F-16s in the air force.
20 I joined the army, I didn't do anything aviation related. I got
21 medically retired out of the army. I went to work for a small FBO
22 in Dalhart, Texas. It's up in the panhandle up by Amarillo.

23 I worked there under an IA. I had enough time between
24 everything to just sign -- get signed off for the feds. I did the
25 structural part. Oklahoma City, they signed me off that I didn't

1 have to go through the schooling. I wish I'd have done it for
2 everything else, but I didn't. So I went to Spartan College of
3 Aeronautics in Tulsa. I used my GI bill.

4 As soon as I got done there, you know, life happens. I've
5 had kids. I wasn't able to afford to finish getting my A&P,
6 actually taking the test-wise, you know, for the, like, the RSIPs
7 and the OMP. So, I mean, I worked general aviation for several
8 more years, and then I finally got enough money to go and -- I
9 went down to Houston and took, you know, my tests and stuff like
10 that, and a small crash course. I can't remember what you would
11 call it. I went in there and took my RSIPs and everything.

12 Q. Okay. So you were talking about Mac, you know, being -- a
13 lot of training was OJT kind of training and, you know, you'd
14 watch Mac, and then Mac would watch you.

15 A. Yes, sir.

16 Q. How was he to work with? Was he a good instructor?

17 A. Yeah. I mean, he's got a lot of years as far as flying the
18 airplane and maintenance. I mean, I think he'd been with the
19 Foundation for 20-something years. I mean, he had a lot of
20 knowledge, extreme amount of knowledge. So I mean, yeah, he was
21 grumpy at times, but as far as, you know, teaching you how to do
22 stuff, he was pretty good.

23 Q. Okay. So never a problem raising a question with him?

24 A. No.

25 Q. I mean, I heard, you know, he was --

1 A. You know, I mean, of course he was set in his ways. He
2 didn't want to change, you know, how to, you know -- he was set in
3 his ways. He was 75 years old, you know.

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. There was some stuff that I, you know, I would try to do,
6 the -- for, you know, everything like that, but he didn't want to
7 do it. And I mean, he was the DOM, so I did it how he wanted to
8 do it, you know.

9 Q. Okay. Were there -- so have you been to, you know, where
10 they maintain the airplane over the winter in New Smyrna Beach, or
11 are you always based up in New England?

12 A. No, I was -- we started the Florida tour, I guess they
13 started it the middle of January. I'm not a hundred percent sure.
14 I arrived maybe 2 weeks after they started. So we did the whole
15 Florida tour, and then we go back to New Smyrna Beach for 2 weeks.
16 I had to do -- there was, you know, some maintenance stuff that we
17 had to do on the B-17, and I helped a little bit on the B-24 and,
18 of course, the B-25, because it didn't do the Florida tour. But
19 yeah, I've been in New Smyrna Beach.

20 Q. And you work with, I think it's Gary?

21 A. Is it Norville (ph.)?

22 Q. Yes, Gary Norville.

23 A. I believe he's the owner. I don't think he holds an A&P.

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. He's an owner, so I never worked beside him.

1 Q. Okay. Okay. He is an IA, by the way.

2 A. I didn't -- I had no clue. I heard that he did not have an
3 A&P or anything, but I didn't know that.

4 Q. So you worked with other people then?

5 A. Yeah.

6 Q. And how were they to work with?

7 A. They were good.

8 Q. All right. So was there plans for you to, when the tour
9 ended, to go to New Smyrna Beach and work there, or what would
10 happen after the tour ended? Do you know?

11 A. That I'm not a hundred percent sure. Supposedly, in the
12 past, they would just drop off the airplanes and leave. You know,
13 they would give them a list, you know, a discrepancy list and
14 everything. As far as sticking with the airplanes, I was going to
15 stick around, you know, a week or so just to kind of go over
16 everything that was wrong, you know. We had a, you know, a small
17 discrepancy list on some of the airplanes that we didn't have to
18 fix, you know. And then I would just stick with the airplanes for
19 a week or so, and then, of course, I would go home and spend time
20 with my daughter.

21 Q. Okay. I was just curious. Thanks. So back to the, you
22 know, the day of the accident. The engine run-up, I heard when
23 Mac did the run-ups, you were observing, and when he got to the
24 mag checks, there was no drop at all?

25 A. I mean, not enough to make it backfire or nothing like that.

1 I mean, you know, typical, you know, 40 RPM, 30 RPM drop, but --

2 Q. Okay. Okay.

3 A. I mean, nothing, you know, as far as backfiring on the
4 engine. I mean, a heavy, heavy, heavy drop in RPM, nothing like
5 that, no.

6 Q. Okay. But there was some drop, which is normal.

7 A. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The typical drop, you know.

8 Q. Okay. And it was smooth on both mags, either mag?

9 A. Yes, sir. On all the engines.

10 Q. Okay. Where was I going to go now? So you were talking
11 about blowing out the mags. I know Warren asked a number of
12 questions there. On the one mag there, you said you pulled a --
13 Number 4, you have to pull the back cover off because there's no
14 tube to blow the nitrogen up into the mag from the ground. So how
15 much -- what's the access like to get to that back cover?

16 A. Just the side cowling, is what I pulled off.

17 Q. Okay.

18 A. The accessory cowling.

19 Q. And there's enough space between the firewall and the mag
20 to -- is it easy, is it somewhat difficult?

21 A. I mean, there's just two bolts that hold that, you know, the
22 access plate on. So all I did was just pull one bolt out,
23 completely out, and then the other one I partially pulled out and
24 just slid the cover over enough to where I could get the hose with
25 the, you know, the air nozzle in there, you know, to blow it.

1 Q. So you blow it. I know you're using nitrogen, which is a dry
2 air. You're trying to dry it out. I'm assuming you had, like, a
3 small nozzle on the end that you're just kind of shooting the
4 nitrogen in with?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Could you see inside the mag, like at the points or anything,
7 if there was, you know, anything unusual?

8 A. No, I couldn't, no.

9 Q. Yeah. Because of the angle?

10 A. Yeah.

11 Q. So it's basically just --

12 A. I mean, there's probably, maybe, 8 inches, 10 inches in
13 between the mag and the firewall, maybe that much.

14 Q. Right.

15 A. There's not a whole lot.

16 Q. Okay. All right. So you blew it out and you put the cover
17 back on. And after that, everything was fine?

18 A. Yes, sir.

19 Q. Okay. I want to talk a little bit about -- we did recover,
20 just so you know, the daily logs or the daily sheets that were
21 carried on the airplane. We have recovered them. Unfortunately,
22 they're still in our lab here at NTSB and it's probably going to
23 take us another month to get them all dried out so we can do a
24 thorough review. However, I see that a Number 4 25-hour
25 inspection was done toward the end of September. Did you

1 participate in that inspection?

2 A. Not that I remember. Mac did most of all that. Towards the
3 end of September? I don't really remember without actually
4 looking at the log, you know, the dailies. I don't remember. We
5 typically work on just about every airplane out there, so without
6 actually looking at it, I don't really remember.

7 Q. Yeah, Mac --

8 A. Mac did all that -- paperwork-wise. You know, I don't know.

9 Q. Okay. Would somebody else have helped him from Collings?

10 A. I mean, possibly. I don't really remember. I don't know.

11 Q. Have you ever assisted with one of the 25-hour inspections
12 while on tour?

13 A. Oh yeah. Yeah.

14 Q. On the B-17?

15 A. Yes, sir. I mean, I assisted with them, but I mean, I don't
16 really -- we moved so much, I forget which cities we were in. You
17 know, everything runs together. Moving every 3 days, 4 days, it
18 just, it all runs together --

19 Q. Sure.

20 A. -- remembering every inspection, no, I don't, you know, and
21 who did it, who helped, I don't remember.

22 Q. Okay. No, the reason I'm asking is, as you know, Number 4
23 engine is an area of interest. And of course, the Number 4 --

24 A. It's a higher-timed engine, but it was the best-running
25 engine we had. Between 2 and 3, it was a different builder. But

1 it was the best one we had. That's why I don't understand what
2 happened.

3 Q. Yeah, it was getting up there in hours but it wasn't --

4 A. I know it wasn't extremely high, but it was our driest
5 engine. It was our best one.

6 Q. Yeah. So the other ones were giving you trouble or --

7 A. No, no, no, they weren't giving us trouble. I'm just saying
8 it was the cleanest out of, you know, oil leaks, you know, stuff
9 like that. It was our cleanest engine. But no, there were never
10 any problems, like, no.

11 Q. Okay. All right. So do you know, typically, where they
12 would do a 25-hour inspection while on the road, while on tour?

13 A. On the ramp.

14 Q. They do it on the ramp, huh? Even if they have to --

15 A. Where are you going to find a hangar big enough to put the B-
16 17 in?

17 Q. That's true. Including jacking the airplane and doing gear
18 swings?

19 A. That I don't know. I never participated in a gear swing. I
20 don't know.

21 Q. Okay. All right. So how are -- so all right, you didn't
22 participate in the Number 4, but you've done other 25-hour
23 inspections on the Curtis, on the 1820s?

24 A. Yeah.

25 Q. Changing the spark plugs, pretty straightforward?

1 A. Yeah. Oh yeah.

2 Q. Any issues, typically, with changing spark plugs?

3 A. No.

4 Q. How often do you run into a problem with the mag, the
5 ignition harnesses, the wires, the leads?

6 A. I've never had a problem with them as far as, you know, the
7 leads and stuff like that, no.

8 Q. So while on tour, do you just replace the spark plugs, or do
9 you clean and test them?

10 A. No, we don't clean and test them. We just put new ones in
11 and that's it.

12 Q. That's good to --

13 A. We don't have -- most of the time, we don't have the
14 capability to clean it and it's just easier to just get rid of the
15 old ones and put new ones in.

16 Q. Okay. All right. Well, if you -- while on tour, okay, you
17 didn't participate in the Number 4 25-hour, so I'll skip over all
18 of those. You did do or you did help with a couple main gear tire
19 changes?

20 A. Yes, sir.

21 Q. And where did you get the tires from?

22 A. Usually, Mac makes the call. As far as I know, they call New
23 Smyrna Beach and then New Smyrna Beach gets them from, I think, --
24 Air. I don't know where they actually get them from, no.

25 Q. Okay. But that's --

1 A. I know New Smyrna Beach usually sends them out to us on a
2 pallet. Once we get to that destination, we change them out.

3 Q. I got you. Okay. So it was a coordination between Mac and
4 New Smyrna Beach for work that was coming up in the future; do I
5 have that correct?

6 A. Yes.

7 Q. Okay. That helps me. Thank you. So while on tour, did --
8 was there ever any radio or navigation problems, communication
9 problems on any of the electronics?

10 A. No.

11 Q. That's good. Were there any engine problems prior to
12 arriving at Bradley?

13 A. As far as running-wise, no. I mean --

14 Q. Because I thought I heard that, you know, you had to blow out
15 the mags before because they get wet or moisture gets in them.

16 A. That's the first time I'd ever done it.

17 Q. Oh, that's the first time. Okay.

18 A. Yeah.

19 Q. But you knew what to do?

20 A. Mac was there, showing me how to do it.

21 Q. Okay. All right. So he showed you on Number 4 or --

22 A. He showed me on Number 3 and showed me on Number 4, because
23 there was two different ways how to do it. Because Number 3, of
24 course, had the hoses -- and Number 4 didn't.

25 Q. So this was really the first time you blew out the mags?

1 A. Yes, sir.

2 Q. Okay. And you've been on tour with the airplane for how
3 long?

4 A. Since January.

5 Q. Okay. So that actually helps clear something up, if that's
6 the first time that it needed to be blown out.

7 A. That I know of. I don't know. You know, I go home and stuff
8 like that, but that is literally the first time I had ever done
9 it.

10 Q. Okay. So do other mechanics fly on the airplane at times?

11 A. We have volunteers that help, you know, a flight engineer. I
12 mean, it's not always a mechanic that's on the airplane.

13 Q. I got you. Okay. All right. But Mac is though, huh?

14 A. Yeah.

15 Q. Well --

16 A. Yeah.

17 Q. Or was, yeah. So while on tour, did you have any carburetor
18 or fuel distribution issues?

19 A. Not that I know of, no.

20 Q. Okay. And no other ignition-related problems while on tour?

21 A. Not that I know of. I don't remember. Not that I was a part
22 of, anyway.

23 Q. Oh yeah, okay, you didn't participate in the Number 4 25-
24 hours. I was going to ask about the magneto timing and
25 everything, but -- did you ever have to time those magnetos?

1 A. I helped on -- we had a magneto problem on 3 at one point.
2 We had another mechanic that came out, was on tour, and he helped
3 me. Mac was, of course, part of that, as well. Yes, and they,
4 you know, they showed me how to time the magneto.

5 Q. Okay. And that was on Number 3, huh?

6 A. Yes, sir.

7 Q. Okay. What about doing a cylinder compression test, have you
8 ever done that on the B-17?

9 A. Yes.

10 Q. And can you kind of walk through it?

11 A. Of course. We pull all the cowlings, pull all the parts.
12 Well, the front cylinder plugs. We get the nitrogen bottle and
13 stuff like that out. We have a little hose that goes in there
14 and, you know, just typical cylinder -- we've got differential
15 compression tests. And of course, you go through all the
16 cylinders. You put it on, you know -- you start off with Number
17 1, of course, hook up the different compression tester to the
18 nitrogen bottle.

19 And Mac would usually stand up there on the ladder, and then
20 me and one other guy would hold the prop because, of course, I
21 don't weigh enough to -- by myself. And then we would just, you
22 know, go through all the cylinders and make sure everything was
23 good, you know, above whatever psi we would, you know, check it
24 up. We'd usually put it up to 80 psi on the differential side.
25 And just go through all the cylinders.

1 Q. So, you know, I know about doing all that and the
2 differential pressure, and, you know, you do start at 80. What do
3 you typically see as a reading?

4 A. It just depends on the cylinders. Usually, we see around 70,
5 75, 80, some of them 60.

6 Q. At what point would you be concerned or, you know, have to do
7 something? In other words the compression wasn't in the 70 range,
8 you know, it was lower than that. At what point would you say --

9 A. Anything lower than 60.

10 Q. Anything lower than 60. Okay. So let's say you had one that
11 was below 60, what would you do?

12 A. Just check to see where it's coming from, the, you know, the
13 exhaust or whatever. I'd stick the valve to see if it would come
14 up, just to see where, you know, see where it's coming from
15 first --

16 Q. Sure.

17 A. -- stick the valve. Most of the time they just have a stuck
18 valve. The, you know, psi and everything comes back up, be good
19 to go.

20 Q. Yeah, hundred low lead. It isn't really that low in lead, so
21 the exhaust valve does get leaded up.

22 A. Yeah.

23 Q. Okay. I was just curious. All right. Have you ever had to,
24 on the B-17, change a cylinder?

25 A. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. How often?

2 A. I only did it once.

3 Q. Okay. Wasn't any -- was it as difficult or about the same as
4 any other engine?

5 A. It was about the same as any other engine that I've ever done
6 one on. Not, you know, warbirds-wise. I mean, I've worked
7 general aviation.

8 Q. Right. Okay. So we talked about getting, you know, material
9 out of New Smyrna Beach. You ever run into a problem where you
10 needed special tooling that you didn't have?

11 A. Yeah. They would send them to us.

12 Q. Oh they would? Okay.

13 A. I mean, if they had them, yeah. It's not -- you know,
14 wrenches, you know, changing out a prop governor. We would make
15 them ourselves, you know, if we had the capability to do --

16 Q. Okay.

17 A. But most of the wrenches and stuff like that Mac would
18 already have.

19 Q. All right. All right, that pretty much answers my question.

20 MR. BORSARI: Warren, I'm going to give it back to you.

21 MR. ABRAMS: Thank you, Greg.

22 BY MR. ABRAMS:

23 Q. Mitch, how you holding up? You doing okay? We're going to
24 do a second round, but this is much shorter and much easier. Can
25 you hang in there or you need another break?

1 A. No, let's just do it.

2 Q. Okay. I just have, you know, five or six questions here.
3 Commemorative Air Force down there in Texas, are you familiar with
4 a Captain Rosendahl (ph.) with the Commemorative Air Force?

5 A. No, I'm not.

6 Q. Okay. Do you know if there are any women pilots that
7 volunteer at the Collings Foundation?

8 A. Yes, there are.

9 Q. And have you ever flown with one on the -- or have you been
10 with Mac and a female pilot, that crew pairing?

11 A. Yes, I have.

12 Q. And how does Mac react to a female copilot?

13 A. Just like anybody else.

14 Q. All right. Good.

15 A. I mean, just a different person sitting in that seat.

16 Q. Great. Back where we started; the night before the flight,
17 did you guys as a group, as the Collings Foundation, did you guys
18 have dinner together? In other words, did you and Mac and the
19 first officer and maybe even some of the other volunteer pilots
20 have dinner together?

21 A. Sometimes we go to dinner, and sometimes we don't. I don't
22 remember if we actually went out to dinner that night.

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. Like I said, my days ran together. I don't have the time. I
25 don't even remember where we're at. We move so much that I

1 forget.

2 Q. Yeah. Mitch, when you're drying out the mags, those engines
3 are pretty high up off the ground. Do you have to get a ladder
4 to -- do you have to get on a ladder to get up there to dry out
5 the mag?

6 A. 4, yes. 3 I don't because the hose is long enough.

7 Q. All right.

8 A. Yeah.

9 Q. Do you keep a ladder in the bomb bay, strapped in the bomb
10 bay?

11 A. No. Once we get to wherever we're going, everything gets
12 unloaded.

13 Q. All right.

14 A. I don't know why it was not next to the --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Or in the --

17 Q. Engine covers, you guys use engine covers at night when
18 you're through with flying for the day?

19 A. No.

20 Q. I'm sorry, say that again, please?

21 A. I said no.

22 Q. Okay. Thank you.

23 MR. ABRAMS: Greg, we talked about --

24 I'm not talking to you this time, Mitch.

25 Greg, we talked about Gary Norville down there at New Smyrna

1 Beach having an IA certificate. For the transcription recording,
2 will you define an IA certificate, please, Greg?

3 MR. BORSARI: Inspection Authorization. It's one level up
4 above an A&P.

5 MR. ABRAMS: Good. Thank you.

6 And for the transcription, as well, we're referring to the
7 word mag, m-a-g, and that is a magneto, spelled m-a-g-n-e-t-o.

8 Mitch, that's all I have at this time. I'm going to turn it
9 over to Todd and he has a few follow-up questions.

10 BY MR. GENTRY:

11 Q. I've just got a couple questions, Mitch. And again, thank
12 you. Have you ever seen -- does anybody do a weight and balance?
13 Just let me ask you that.

14 A. I'm assuming they do. I don't know. I've never been there
15 for, like, the annual inspection. I don't know.

16 Q. Okay. But not on the road?

17 A. No.

18 Q. Okay. Did you --

19 A. I have never been -- no.

20 Q. I'm sorry, you cut out, Mitch. Can you say that again?

21 A. I have never, I've never been a part of one, so no.

22 Q. Okay. Do you know if there's any written SOPs, or standard
23 operations of flight procedures? Is there anything written?

24 A. No, I don't know.

25 Q. Okay. And I know you may have a hard time answering this,

1 but I'm going to ask it anyway. During the emergency, do you know
2 if the pilots were -- did they even reference a checklist? Did
3 they have a checklist in their hands?

4 A. I don't remember.

5 Q. Do you know if there was an emergency checklist on the
6 aircraft?

7 A. Yes. There's usually one sitting over next to the copilot.
8 I mean, you know, a checklist on everything, you know, engine
9 starts, you know, stuff like that. So I'm pretty sure there was
10 an emergency one in the same binder.

11 Q. So do you think they -- I mean, it's over by the copilot, you
12 said. So I just didn't know --

13 A. I don't know if he grabbed it. I don't remember.

14 Q. Okay.

15 A. It all happened so fast that I don't really remember if he
16 ever grabbed it or any of that.

17 Q. You're doing good. You're doing very good. So we're not
18 trying to, you know, put words in your mouth or push you. I
19 understand how things happen fast. That's all I have, though.
20 Thank you.

21 A. You're welcome.

22 MR. ABRAMS: Greg?

23 MR. BORSARI: No, at this point I do not have any follow up.

24 So I appreciate all the information and I appreciate your
25 time, Mitch.

1 MR. MELTON: Thank you.

2 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch --

3 MR. MELTON: I didn't really want to talk about it, but I
4 wanted to get all this over with, you know.

5 MR. BORSARI: I understand.

6 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch, this is Warren again. Is there anything
7 else you would like to tell us that we haven't asked about?

8 MR. MELTON: Not that I -- I don't have anything, no, other
9 than, like, my tools and stuff like that. Like, you know, when am
10 I going to be able to get that stuff back, and I had some boots
11 that were in the tail and -- I mean, the tools were expensive. I
12 mean, it's all Snap-on stuff.

13 MR. ABRAMS: Mitch, those tools were gathered and they're at
14 the facility where the -- the storage facility in Connecticut
15 where the wreckage is stored. And I don't know if they've
16 separated out those bags or not. They're huge bags. You know,
17 they're 6 by 6-foot bags, industrial-type bags. But tools were
18 scattered all over the place. I thought your boots were returned.
19 They're beautiful boots, because I saw them out -- they were in
20 the tail. They survived.

21 MR. MELTON: Yeah, they were in a suitcase. There was a
22 couple manuals that were in that suitcase that I was fixing to
23 actually send home that were donated. They had no, I mean, they
24 had no -- they weren't involved with any of the airplanes we had.
25 They were just donated and I thought they were cool, and my boots

1 were actually in that suitcase with them.

2 MR. ABRAMS: All right. That is a different set of boots
3 than I'm referring to. These boots were in a box that said
4 Merrell on them. And so --

5 MR. MELTON: I had just bought a pair of -- it couldn't have
6 been. Maybe they were in a Merrell box. I mean, they were cowboy
7 boots. Were they orange tops, or do you remember?

8 MR. ABRAMS: I don't recall. They were -- in the middle of
9 the boot there was some different colors, though.

10 MR. MELTON: No, I had a pair that had -- that were orange
11 tops that were in a suitcase. I think they may have been in a
12 box, but they were actually in a suitcase back in the tail.

13 MR. ABRAMS: Yeah, this was in a --

14 MR. MELTON: And I don't remember --

15 MR. ABRAMS: Yeah, I don't remember --

16 MR. MELTON: I had bought a pair of combat boots that were
17 Merrells, so my boots could have been in that box, but they were
18 actually in the suitcase at the time.

19 MR. ABRAMS: Yeah. You'll get them back. I'm not sure when,
20 but you'll get them back. And I can't speak for the tools at this
21 time, but I will certainly look into it.

22 MR. MELTON: Yeah, they were -- I mean, I had a lot of money
23 invested in those tools. I don't know if you know Snap-On wise,
24 but --

25 MR. GENTRY: Twenty grand.

1 MR. MELTON: -- it's not cheap.

2 MR. ABRAMS: No, it's not. I know exactly what you --

3 MR. BORSARI: Hey, Mitch, Mitch, Greg here. And yes, I do
4 know, and I do sympathize. And we'll raise the question with the
5 investigator in charge to see what's the proper protocol on
6 personal, you know, property and getting it returned.

7 MR. MELTON: Okay.

8 MR. SWAIM: Anything else?

9 MR. ABRAMS: That's it, Don. Mitch, I want to thank you for
10 your time. I know it's been a difficult day for you.

11 MR. MELTON: Very difficult.

12 MR. ABRAMS: It is a heartfelt thank you for what you've gone
13 through and what you've given us today, and we appreciate it more
14 than you know.

15 MR. MELTON: Thank you.

16 MR. ABRAMS: No, we thank you.

17 At this time, I'm going to discontinue the recordings, and
18 I'm assuming nobody else has anything.

19 (Whereupon, at 1:15 p.m., the interview was concluded.)

20

21

22

23

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: COLLINGS FOUNDATION BOEING B-17G
 CRASH AT BRADLEY INTERNATIONAL
 AIRPORT, WINDSOR LOCKS, CONNECTICUT,
 OCTOBER 2, 2019
 Interview of Mitchell Melton

ACCIDENT NO.: ERA20MA001

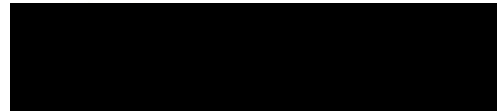
PLACE: Washington, D.C.

DATE: November 6, 2019

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Transcriber



Corrections made 6/25/2020