



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Timothy W. Monville
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: January 26, 2021
Person Contacted: Darlene Lowder
NTSB Accident Number: N862UP

Narrative:

Mrs. Darlene Lowder was contacted by phone on January 26, 2021 at 1420 EST. She was called at [REDACTED]. She provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

She was advised that I was inquiring about her injury sustained during the flight on January 13, 2021. She confirmed she did sustain a broken rib as a result of the turbulence. At that time it was offered to her that I would send her an e-mail with my contact and after confirming the agency and whom I was she could call me back.

She called back the same day at 1444 EST, from the same phone number.

At the beginning of the phone call, she was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. She was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; she agreed to the interview without representation adding that her husband was a pilot and familiar with the NTSB.

She indicated there were 3 in her party including herself. The flight was made with Wheels Up which is a private charter company that allows members to book short-and-medium range private charter flights at an all-inclusive hourly rate. Mike and Belynda are members of this club and she was their guest. She indicated that normally she flies commercially.

With respect to the airplane, it was equipped with 8 seats.¹ The first row seats behind the flight deck were aft facing, while the 2nd row were forward facing. The third row seats were immediately aft of the 2nd row and were aft facing, while the last row of seats adjacent to the cabin entry door were forward facing. She was in the aft row seat on the left side of the airplane. She reported that the flight up to the turbulence event was very smooth. She had a friend seated next to her, and that friend dropped her potato chips. She was helping her pick them up and at that time, she flew up and hit the top of her head/skull on the light fixture which was extruded past the upper panel. She landed on her seat, and added that her tray table was ½ way extended. The same thing happened 3 times total. She added that after the 1st time, and subsequent events she could not get her lapbelt buckled. The wound on the top of her head/skull caused blood to run down her face, which did not require any sutures. At that point of the flight, it was the main concern during the flight. The pilots asked if an emergency landing was necessary. “We told the pilots to continue on to our home base of Norfolk, VA.” Mike examined her head with a flashlight and kept ice packs on the wound for 40 minutes until they landed. She also felt pain in her back and entire right side.

They landed and taxied to Signature Flight Support ORF – Norfolk International Airport Terminal, and airport paramedics met the flight. They took her into the terminal and checked her vitals and also the head wound. They did not feel it was deep enough for sutures and gave her the option that they could take her to a hospital emergency room. She also told the paramedics about the pain in her back and entire right side. She added to NTSB that she never lost consciousness. She declined the paramedics offer to go to the hospital and said to them that since they felt it did not need stitches and had stopped bleeding that she would call her doctor or go to the Virginia Beach emergency room in the morning. She also told them she would get the pain in her back and entire right side check out with her doctors the following day. She was driven home by her friends that were on the airplane. The following day she did a virtual visit with her doctor, and at that time her back was bruised. She went to the hospital near her house on January 15th, and had a CT done of her head and x-rays of her chest performed. At that time, they did not see any broken rib bone. She then went to the emergency room of the hospital near her on January 17th because she could not bear the pain, and during that visit noted the 11th rib was broken. She was given medication for the pain. During the call she said the pain was getting better.

There was no warning from the flightcrew about the turbulence. Later, the flightcrew told her it was clear air turbulence.

She was asked the following clarifying questions –

Was her restraint fastened or unfastened at the first event?

Unfastened

She added that she had flown commercially for 35 years, but never on a small airplane like that before. In the moment she was more worried about her head injury.

¹ She was asked at the end of the phone call to make a diagram of the seats and her location. She sent an e-mail with a photograph annotated with “Wheels Up Gama Aviation.” The photograph was taken just behind the aft row seats looking forward and depicted the seating configuration of the cabin.

Questions Continued:

What was her exact injury?

Closed fracture of rib 11 on the right side due to an initial encounter.

Could she tell the environmental conditions outside at the time?

They departed Naples about 1920. And the event occurred about 1.5 hours into the flight, or at an estimated time between 2030 and 2045. And the lights in the cabin were off because they were resting.

Was anybody else injured?

Her friend hit her head, and had a bruise, but did not break anything. Mike was bracing himself with his feet and is sore but nothing else.

Did the flightcrew classify the turbulence to you?

Mike said the flightcrew said they hit their head and it was the worse they had seen. They alerted 5 other aircraft in their area. Someone from Wheels Up called her on January 20th to see how she was doing.

Did the flightcrew give you any type of briefing about keeping your lapbelts fastened while seated?

She can't recall.

She indicated that she sneezed hard on January 16th and heard a break. It hurt immediately.

She provided the following timeline –

January 13, 2021 – (Wednesday PM) Event

January 14, 2021 – (Thursday) 0915 AM Virtual Appointment with Doctor. She ordered CT Scan of the Head and chest Xray (CT Scan was normal and could not see any broken bones)

January 15, 2021 - (Friday AM) – Went to Diagnostics Lab at Sentara Virginia Beach General Hospital and had CT Scan & Chest Xray

January 16, 2021 – (Saturday Evening) – Sneezed hard and heard a pop or breaking sound in my rib area. Then noticed excruciating pain on my right side to the point I could not sleep or get comfortable.

January 17, 2021 – (Sunday) Went to ER. Was examined by a doctor who ordered another Chest Xray and discovered the break in the rib.

January 20, 2021 - (Wednesday) at 2:10 PM, I received a call from Dave McGee, Exec VP of Suite Operations of Wheels Up. He apologized for not calling earlier and said that he had just gotten my phone number. He called to check in and I explained what happened on the flight and also told him about the broken rib.

She did recall an issue with her lapbelt keeping it fastened when she raised her arm up. At that time she did not tell the flightcrew until days later when they inquired about her condition. She added that her “seatbelt [was] not working good.”

Questions Continued:

She was asked if she had any pictures of her seated after boarding the airplane, or before the event?

She did not think so, but she will check.

She was asked to confirm her seating location relative to the entry door?

It was right behind her.

She was asked to explain Wheels Up?

Her friend Mike joined 2 months ago. She thought it was affiliated with a major US airline. It is a private charter company that allows members to book short-and-medium range private charter flights at an all-inclusive hourly rate. Mike and Belynda are members of this club and I was their guest.

She was asked if she had any questions for NTSB?

No.

The call ended at 1515 EST.

The digest was e-mailed to her for review on January 26, 2021. She replied the same day at 2139 EST with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to her on January 27, 2021.



Figure 1: Photograph Provided by Darlene Lowder. Photograph annotated with, “Wheels Up Gama Aviation” View taken behind last row of cabin passenger seats looking forward.



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Passenger Statement
Telephone Interview

Peter Wentz
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Passenger: Darlene Lowder
Date: January 27, 2021
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA115

Narrative:

Ms. Lowder was asked the following questions:

- 1) Did she received a pre-flight briefing from the crew: she stated remembering the pilot tell her about the exits and seats, she doesn't recall exactly all the points given, she felt the crew covered the safety briefing before departure.
- 2) Was she shown the safety briefing card before departure: she stated not seeing one at anytime while on the aircraft, but could not recall if the pilot said they were available?
- 3) To explain the turbulence event: she stated that it was dark out and the cabin lights were off, she and her friend were talking and spilled potato chips on the cabin floor, she unbuckled her seatbelt and was picking up chips when out of nowhere the aircraft dropped in altitude. She stated that she first flew up to the cabin ceiling heading her head and face, then dropped onto the passenger seat. She stuck the armrest with her rib cage. She stated that her friend assisted her back into her seat, she was bleeding from cuts to her face and head. She stated that after landing her ribs were sore but thought she would be ok. A few days later she stated that x-rays showed she had fractured a rib.