



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Office of Marine Safety

Summary

Subject: Review of U.S. Coast Guard Sector Puget Sound Command Center radio and phone conversations during search for downed aircraft N9114A

Date/time: May 27, 2021 12:00 EDT

By: Marcel L. Muise, NSTB (MS-10)

Case: WPR21LA097

I reviewed the radio and telephone audio recorded by U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Sector Puget Sound (SPS) Command Center, regarding the search for the downed aircraft N9114A on January 26, 2021. The audio was provided on request via the Sector's Assistant Senior Investigating Officer. The following is a summary of the key events heard on the audio and is not all inclusive.

The audio files for the radio communications were time stamped. These include recordings for marine VHF Channels 16 and 22A, and internal Coast Guard frequency CG151. The telephone files were not time stamped. These include desks for Communications Unit (CU) North, CU South, Situation Unit (SU), Operations Unit (OU), Situation Unit (SU), and CDO (Command Duty Officer).

- At 1635 PST on January 26, 2021, SPS received initial notification from Mr. Jeff Well at Rite Brothers Aviation, possibly forwarded by a Clallum County Public Safety Answering Point, regarding a down aircraft in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. A transcription of this phone call is included as Appendix A. The caller relayed that the aircraft was near a tug and barge. ATC Whidbey Island also relays the same information by telephone. Internal calls between SPS watchstanders discuss what tugs are in the area and that Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Sir Wilfred Laurier* was near Race Rocks.
- At 1642, SPS issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast (UMIB) on Channel 16. The UMIB was rebroadcast many times over twenty hours using the same language requesting assistance for an "airplane that has crashed north of Port Angeles in the Straits of Juan de Fuca." Several vessels in the area report not seeing anything in the area. Although phone calls were not time stamped, SPS talked to every tug and barge underway in the Straits including the east bound *Seapan King*. None of these vessels reported seeing the plane.
- Watchstanders initially looked in databases for partial tail number 14A, or N14A passed by the reporting source.
- At 1720 the first USCG helo, CG 6517, launched from Air Station Port Angeles. At 1730 SPS directs them to search a trackline from Pillar Point to Whidbey Island. The Canadian Coast Guard Ship (CCGS) *Sir Wilfred Laurier*, searching off Belcher Bay, British Columbia, coordinated with the CG aircraft by radio.
- At 1738, Coast Guard District 13 relayed a position from the Air Force and FAA, 48° 09.678'N 123° 22.416'W. The transcription of this call is attached as Appendix B and a follow up call as Appendix C. SPS directed various assets to this datum including 6517, a U.S. Navy Seahawk helicopter, a 45-foot Response Boat-Medium and USCGC *Adelie*. Over the next 22 hours, this datum corrected as needed for drift, was used to generate multiple search patterns for surface and air search and

rescue units. Resources used included USCGC *Adelie* and *Terrapin*, CCGS *Sir Wilfred Laurier*, Air Station Port Angeles HH-65's, Station Port Angeles Response Boat-Medium, NAS MH-60S "Firewood 58", and a Canadian CC-115 Buffalo fixed wing aircraft.

- At 1815, SPS recommended 6517 also search Clallum Bay based on a phone conversation with Rite Bros who believed the tow boat in question was the *Gloria*.
- The pilot's father called watchstanders and passed the correct tail number N9114A, that it was a white with blue trim Cessna 170 with one person onboard, no raft, and a hard mounted EPIRB. At 1837 Rite Bros forwarded a picture from the father, taken by the pilot and showing coast line and what they believed was Race Rocks. At some point, District 13 also relayed from friends of the pilot, via his mother that they thought the aircraft had a survival suit.
- At 2006, 6517 and Canadian fixed wing Rescue 462 discuss that a GPS position put the Cessna by Race Rocks, that one of several tugs was seen in that area, and that Rescue 462 should search by Race Rocks.
- Search patterns continued through the night with additional first light searches on January 27. At 0937, US Coast Guard District 13 relayed a new a position derived from radar at 48° 14.9'N 123° 28.42'W. CG 6594 is redirected to the site. MISLE documented this information as coming from Joint Rescue Coordination Center (JRCC) Victoria while phone records indicate Vancouver ATC.
- At 1558 the active search was suspended. Probability of success (POS) for a person in the water without a lifejacket was documented at 42%, and 99% for an aircraft. Functional time in the water was calculated at 4.3 hours, and 8.6 hours survival time.

APPENDIX A

Phone conversation between Sector Puget Sound Comms Unit and Reporting Source

Filename: CU NORTH_1012006589 (continues on file 1012006719)

Transcribed by Marcel Muise, NTSB Marine Accident Investigator, 26May2021

Reporting Source: Yeah, this is Jeff Well at Rite Brothers Aviation. We just got a Mayday call from the aircraft that, just is saying he's going down in the Straits. He's right behind a boat pulling a barge.

Coast Guard: Ok, do you have a more specific location?

RS: No, I guess, I think he's in the water, he just made a couple of transmissions and I tried to get some stuff.

CG: Any additional information what so ever? What was the rest of the broadcast?

RS: He just said Mayday Mayday, I'm going down in the water, I'm going down in the water. And I got on the line and asked him are you east or west of Port Angeles. Where are you at? And he says I'm behind a boat towing a barge. We got another, I got an airplane that was in the pattern, he's heading out that way, I'm gonna try to talk to him on the radio and see if he can get a visual.

CG: Got it, can I get your name and phone number, please?

RS: Yeah, it's Jeff Well. W-E-L-L, and the Rite Brothers Aviation...

[the same audio file picks up a different conversation at this point]

RS (Andrew): ... the 14 [N9114A] reported that they were going down in the water. They said they were not too far off the Port Angeles base. They're out in the center of the Straits. They said they were going down by a tug that was pulling a barge. It was closest they could give us. We don't have a lat or a long or their...

CG: Were they east or west of Port Angeles?

RS: It would be actually be north of Port Angeles where this plane was going down, out in the Straits.

CG: So it's directly north out from Port Angeles?

RS: I couldn't give you exact placement of where the ship is. We were just landing and it was probably almost due north of our position. Off Angeles Point. A little bit...

CG: Sorry, one second. I was just talking to my watch floor.

CG: And what airport are you at right now?

RS: We're at Port Angeles,

APPENDIX B

Phone conversation between Sector Puget Sound Comms Unit and Unknown Caller

File: CU NORTH_1012011282

Transcribed by Marcel Muise, NTSB Marine Accident Investigator, 26May2021

Caller (possibly CG District 13): ...another position. He said I guess because they didn't request any like oversight from air traffic. And he said he was squaking 1200 VFR, that they weren't actually tracking them. And they just, once they started getting phone calls about this they went back and like started looking at some stuff. And they, all they see is like this aircraft and it does a couple of weird spirals and it's losing altitude and then it starts trying to head for land, and they lost it and they said this was all around the time we, that we reported that the Mayday calls came out. ...not 100% sure.

CG: What was the altitude at that position you gave us?

Caller: Let me see. He gave it to me earlier. Stand by one.

Caller: So 400 feet and 71 knots

CG: 400 feet, 71 knots?

Caller: And descending.

CG: And it was just circling?

Caller: Yeah, he said he saw it do a couple of spirals and then head towards land.

CG: I'm gonna call the Ops Boss, Ops Boss at PA and see if he can't help me figure out what this means.

Caller: Ok. Roger.

CG: Thank you.

APPENDIX C

Phone conversation between Sector Puget Sound (SPS) Command Duty Officer and District 13 Watchstanders

File CDO 1_1012009846

Transcribed by Marcel Muise, NTSB Marine Accident Investigator, 26May2021

SPS: JHOC, Lieutenant Morris.

D13: Hey sir, it's [LT?] Henderson at District. So we got two separate reports, one from the Air Force and one from Seattle Center, both with correlating positions of where they believe the aircraft went down. The Air Force called us first. Seattle Center called us four minutes later and they match exactly. We have 48-16N 123-37W [as in 48° 16'N], decimal. Yeah... radar off PA.

SPS: Ok, we will direct our assets in that direction

[Different male voice] Hey, so it's 48 decimal 16 and 123 decimal 37.

SPS: Ah, ok.

Unknown voice: Cool?

SPS: 123.37

Unknown Voice: Yeah 3736 West and 1613 North.

SPS: 13N. Roger that, thank you