



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Washington, D.C. 20594

August 24, 2015

Group Chairman's Factual Report

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL

ERA15FA099

Table Of Contents

A. INCIDENT	Error! Bookmark not defined.
B. AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL GROUP.....	3
C. SUMMARY	3
D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3
E. FACTUAL INFORMATION	4
1.0 History of Flight	4
2.0 Radar Data	6
3.0 Weather Information.....	7
4.0 Personnel Interviews.....	8
4.1 Radar North Controller	8
4.2 Handoff North	10
4.3 Front Line Manager	12
4.4 New Smyrna Beach Local Controller	14

A. Accident

Location: New Smyrna Beach Municipal Airport (EVB), New Smyrna Beach, Florida
Date: January 13, 2015
Time: 2058 eastern standard time (EST)¹ / 0158 universal coordinated time (UTC)²
Airplanes: N757ZM, Cessna 152

B. AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL GROUP

Mr. Charles Olvis
Operational Factors Division (AS-30)
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW
Washington, DC 20594-2000

Mr. Daniel Creedon
Safety & Technical Training
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
450 L'Enfant Plaza East, SW
Washington, DC 20594-2000

Mr. Eric Stormfels
National Air Traffic Controllers Assn.
Air Safety Investigator
Pittsburgh International Airport
660 Tower Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15231

C. SUMMARY

On January 13, 2015, about 2058 est, a Cessna 152 airplane, N757ZM, struck terrain near New Smyrna Beach, Florida. The commercial instrument rated pilot and sole occupant was fatally injured and the airplane was destroyed. The airplane was registered to and operated by SMTM Holdings Inc, LLC, Wilmington, Delaware. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed and there was no flight plan filed for the 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 flight. The flight originated from Massey Ranch Airpark (X50), New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The air traffic control group convened on Tuesday, January 20, 2015. The group met with Richard Derry, Daytona International Airport (DAB) air traffic manager (ATM) for an inbrief. Others present were Karen Reid, DAB operations manager, Richard Lovell, DAB support specialist for quality control, Michael Gabrielle, air traffic manager, Sanford, Florida, Robert Unterberger, DAB NATCA representative, Mark Tomicich, FAA Office of General Counsel, Larry Johnson, event investigation manager, and Irving Washington, Eastern Service Area (ESA) quality control group. The group received an in-brief from the facility manager that included a review of the air traffic control (ATC) services provided to N757ZM, was given a tour of DAB,

¹ All times are expressed in eastern standard time (est) unless otherwise noted.

² UTC – coordinated universal time – an international time standard using four digits of a 24-hour clock in hours and minutes based on the time in Greenwich, England.

reviewed all data related to the incident, and reviewed the training folders for the controllers to be interviewed.

On Wednesday, January 21, 2015, the group reconvened at DAB and conducted interviews with the accident controller working the Radar North sector, the Radar South sector controller, and the front line manager (FLM) responsible for the watch. The group requested information on facility refresher training, and requested additional data in support of the investigation.

On Thursday, January 22, 2015, the group reconvened at DAB and continued to review the accident sequence. The group moved to the New Smyrna Beach air traffic control tower to continue the investigation of ATC services provided to the accident pilot. The group received an inbrief from Air Traffic Manager Robert Dobbelaar and listened to a recording of the accident sequence. The group interviewed the local controller working the date of the accident, and requested additional data in support of the investigation.

On Friday, January 23, 2015, the group reconvened at DAB and met with Richard Derry for an out brief. Staff members from DAB were present, and members from ESA and FAA headquarters joined via telecon.

E. FACTUAL INFORMATION

1.0 History of Flight (UTC)

At 2042:03, radar data indicated N757ZM was about 1 mile south of the Massey Airpark (X50) where it was reported the pilot had been conducting practice approaches. Radar data indicated the aircraft was in a left 360 degree turn.

At 2047:22, the pilot of N757ZM transmitted on the emergency frequency, 121.5 mHz, “hello,” followed by two more transmissions of the pilot saying “hello.” This coincides with radar data that depicts the accident aircraft beginning to squawk 7700³ about 3.5 nautical miles south of X50, or about 8.4 nautical miles south of New Smyrna Beach airport (EVB).

At 2047:42, the pilot of N757ZM stated “uh I don’t know where I am I want to land.”

At 2047:52, the DAB Radar South controller transmitted, “The aircraft that doesn’t know where they are at; are they at 1700 feet squawking emergency and 1200?”

At 2048:21, the pilot of N757ZM transmitted “I want to land.”

The EVB local controller heard the pilot asking for assistance on 121.5 mHz. Because the aircraft was close to EVB, he was able to establish communications. Between 2048 and 2053, the EVB local controller provided assistance to the pilot of N757ZM. The pilot advised the EVB air traffic controller that she could see the ground but could not maintain visual flight conditions. When the EVB local controller turned the pilot toward EVB, the pilot reported that she could see

³ Squawking 7700 indicates the pilot has declared an emergency and is in an urgent situation.

the airport, but a short time later said she could no longer see it. The EVB local controller then attempted to transfer communications to DAB approach control on 125.35 MHz.

At 2053:52, the EVB local controller advised DAB ATC that the aircraft was proceeding towards Daytona Beach, and that EVB would have the lights set on high intensity if they needed the airport. The DAB Radar South controller replied, “thanks, we are going to try it.”

At 2054:35, the pilot of N757ZM transmitted “hello” on the emergency frequency 121.5, and at 2054:41 continued, “on 125.25 no ah contact.” The pilot had been instructed by EVB to contact DAB on 125.35 MHz. The DAB Radar South controller responded on 121.5 by asking the pilot if she could hear Daytona Beach.

At 2054:49, the pilot of N757ZM again transmitted that she was unable to reach anybody on 125.25. The DAB air traffic controller replied “ok just stay on this frequency you are all right, maintain your present altitude.” The EVB local controller informed the DAB air traffic controller that the pilot of N757ZM could not hear DAB on 125.35. DAB advised the EVB local controller that the pilot was on the wrong frequency, and that the DAB controller would assist the pilot on the emergency frequency.

At 2055:15, the pilot transmitted “hello.” The DAB air traffic controller established communications with the pilot on 121.5 and asked the pilot if she could hear DAB; the pilot responded, “I can hear you.”

At 2055:22, DAB instructed the pilot to “remain calm and to maintain present altitude.” The DAB controller told the pilot to continue the right turn northbound towards EVB, and that the airport would be off the right side. The DAB controller added that EVB would have all the runway lights turned on to high and instructed the pilot to advise when she saw the lights.

At 2055:40, the pilot of N757ZM transmitted on 121.5 that she was heading 100 degrees, and asked the DAB air traffic controller what heading she needed to fly. The DAB air traffic controller told the pilot that if she were able, to turn left heading 360 and that EVB would be at the pilot’s 12 o’clock position and one and a half nautical miles. After an unintelligible transmission from the pilot, the DAB controller told the pilot she was not required to read back any further transmissions, and to make the turn. The DAB controller instructed the pilot to advise when she saw the lights at EVB. The pilot verified the heading and asked if she needed a left turn heading 300. The DAB air traffic controller instructed the pilot to continue a left turn heading 360 and reiterated the EVB position relative to the aircraft. The pilot acknowledged the turn.

At 2056:57, the DAB air traffic controller told the pilot to land any runway at EVB if she saw the runway lights.

At 2057:06, the pilot stated she was at 600 feet and the DAB air traffic controller instructed the pilot to maintain her altitude until she saw the airport. The pilot replied that she was in the clouds. The DAB controller told the pilot, “okay don’t worry, don’t worry, don’t worry, don’t worry ma’am, just calm down, calm down; make a left turn.” The DAB air traffic controller then instructed the pilot to make a left turn to climb because she had been in a descent. The DAB air

traffic controller advised the pilot it was okay to be in the clouds but that the pilot needed to climb.

At 2057:48, the DAB controller asked the pilot if she was climbing, and told her that she needed to maintain at least 1000 feet. The pilot acknowledged the climb to 1000 feet, followed by an unintelligible transmission. The DAB air traffic controller reiterated the climb to 1,000 feet and for the pilot to advise DAB when she was comfortable.

There were no further transmissions from the pilot.

Communications on 121.5 recorded by the FAA had only recorded the pilot and DAB air traffic controllers, not the EVB local controller. All EVB recordings of 121.5 were poor quality but useable and included the EVB local controller and the pilot.

2.0 Radar Data

Radar data for this report was obtained from the FAA's Daytona Beach ASR-9 radar site. Figure 1 illustrates the radar plots of the aircraft as it attempted to land at Massey Ranch Airpark and New Smyrna Beach airport. Figure 2 is a close-up of the radar plots, and illustrates the accident sequence.

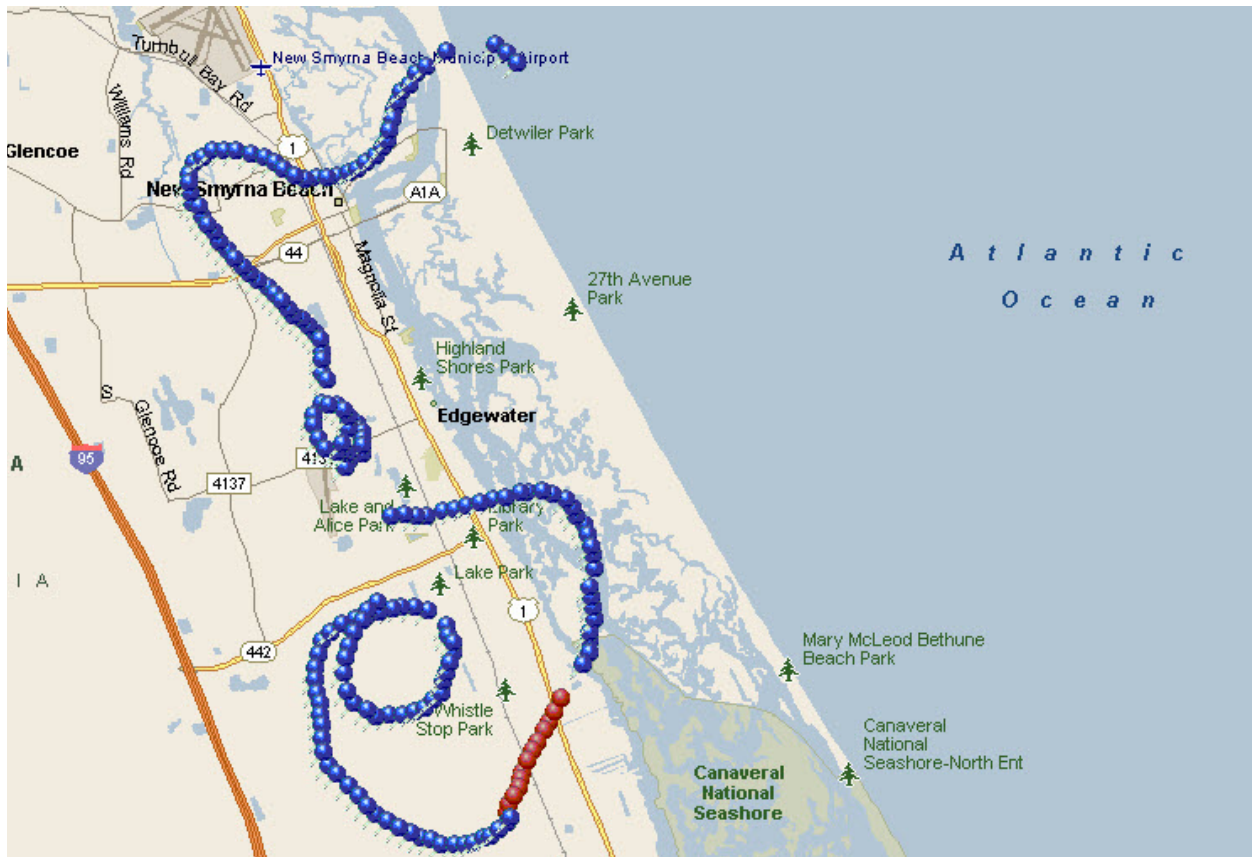


Figure 1 – Radar plot of the aircraft position while attempting to land at Massey Ranch Airpark and at New Smyrna Beach airport. The blue dots are the aircraft squawking 1200 and the red dots are the aircraft squawking 7700.

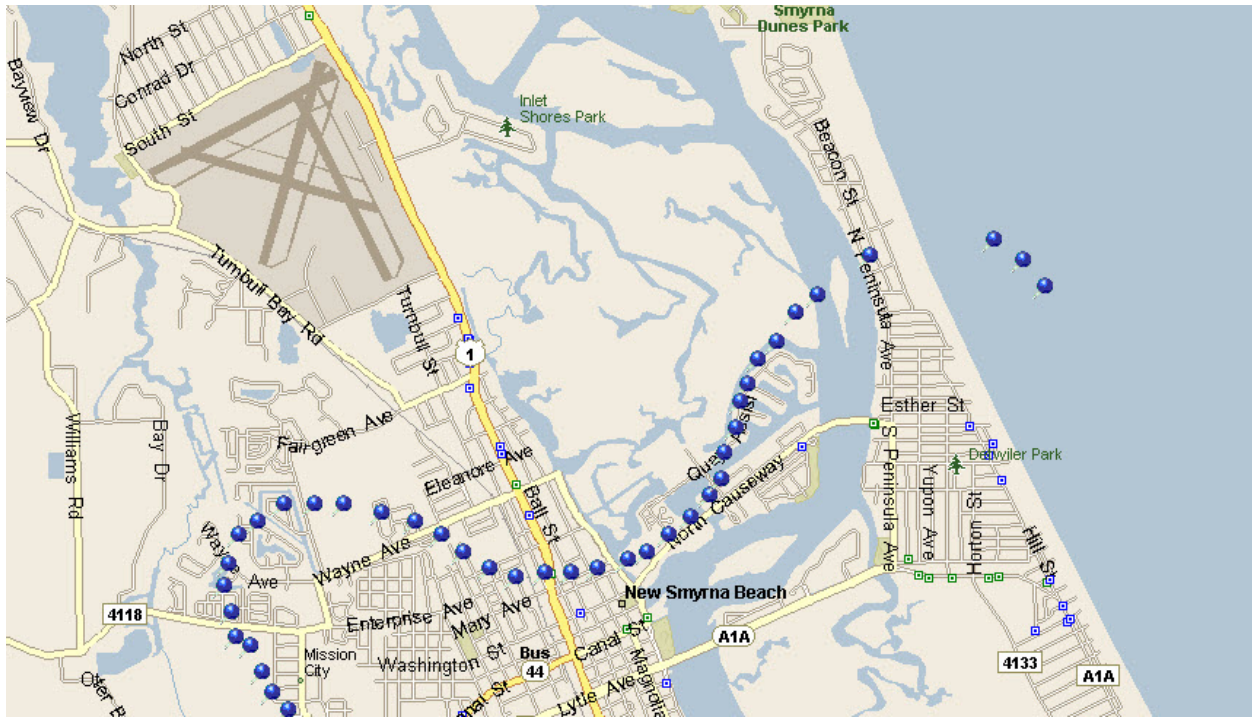


Figure 2 - The final radar plots of N757ZM.

3.0 Weather Information

The EVB airport weather was obtained from the EVB Automatic Surface Observing System (ASOS)⁴.

KEVB 140155Z 35008KT 8SM OVC005 17/16 A3014

KEVB weather at 0155 UTC, wind 350 degrees at 8 knots, visibility 8 statute miles, overcast ceiling 500 feet, temperature of 17° celsius (C), dew point temperature of 16° C, and an altimeter setting of 30.14 inches of mercury.

The DAB airport weather was obtained from the DAB Automatic Surface Observing System (ASOS).

KDAB 140153Z 02009KT 10SM OVC007 18/16 A3014

KDAB weather at 0153 UTC, wind 020 degrees at 9 knots, visibility 10 statute miles, overcast ceiling 700 feet, temperature of 18° celsius (C), dew point temperature of 16° C, and an altimeter setting of 30.14 inches of mercury.

For further weather information, see the weather group chairman’s factual report.

⁴ According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the primary function of the ASOS is to provide minute-by-minute observations and generate the basic Aviation Routine Weather Report (METAR) and Aviation Selected Special Weather (SPECI) report.

4.0 Personnel Interviews

4.1 Radar North Controller

Ms. Tiffany Williams began working for the FAA in September 2007 as a direct hire to Columbia Metropolitan Airport (CAE), Columbia, South Carolina. She attended the FAA Academy for basic air traffic control school in November 2007. After graduating from the FAA academy in December 2007, Ms. Williams returned to CAE for duty. In May 2011, Ms. Williams transferred to Daytona Beach International Airport (DAB), Daytona Beach, Florida. She was qualified on all operating positions in the facility. She held no other aeronautical ratings and her medical certificate was current with a restriction to wear corrective lenses. Her immediate supervisor was Kelly Raulerson.

On the date of the accident Ms. Williams was working a 1400 to 2200 shift. Traffic was light with a few practice approaches to DAB, and all radar positions combined to the Radar North position. Staffing was normal with plenty of controllers to work operating positions. Ms. Williams could not recall who she had relieved on the Radar North position. All of the airports in the DAB airspace had been below visual flight rules (VFR) weather conditions of 1000 feet and 3 miles visibility. After accepting the operating position from the previous controller, Ms. Williams observed an aircraft squawking beacon code 1200 at 1,700 feet over the Massey Ranch airport. Later, she observed the 1200 code begin to squawk the emergency code 7700 and then return to a 1200 beacon code; the STARS radar system flashed the beacon code back and forth between 7700 and 1200 for a few sweeps before settling on a 1200 code.

Ms. Williams heard an unidentified pilot transmit “hello” over the emergency frequency 121.5. She responded and asked the pilot saying “hello” if they were over Massey Ranch airport squawking 7700. The pilot did not respond by radio, but squawked “ident⁵.” Ms. Williams observed the radar target proceed northbound towards EVB. The DAB supervisor was talking via landline to the EVB local controller, and decided that because the aircraft was in the EVB class D airspace, EVB would control the situation. Also, the EVB local controller was a pilot and DAB personnel believed he was in a better position to assist.

Ms. Ramirez had been assigned as the handoff controller to assist Ms. Williams with coordination and to be an extra set of eyes working the Radar North position because of the emergency at EVB. Ms. Williams believed that Ms. Ramirez was up to speed on the EVB situation because she had either been briefed by the supervisor or overheard what was going on while previewing the position. The DAB controllers monitoring the emergency frequency could hear the pilot but not the EVB local controller. Sometime later, Ms. Ramirez took a phone call from the EVB local controller, who reported that the pilot had turned away from EVB and was proceeding north. Ms. Ramirez told the EVB local controller to assign the pilot the frequency 125.35. At that time, Ms. Ramirez opened the Radar South position to work the emergency aircraft. Ms. Williams could not remember if they had worked together to make that decision or if Ms. Ramirez had done it autonomously. Ms. Williams remembered the supervisor had been

⁵ Ident refers to a transponder function initiated by the pilot that transmits a signal to the interrogator of the radar system. It is displayed as concentric shrinking circles or flashing aircraft identification on the air traffic controllers’ radar display.

engaged in the situation and had been moving back and forth between supervisor's desk and the Radar North position.

Ms. Ramirez had heard the pilot of N757ZM transmit both on the emergency frequency and on the DAB approach control frequency. She decided to leave the pilot on the emergency frequency, and along with the supervisor coordinated with the EVB local controller to have the EVB runway lights turned to high. Ms. Ramirez vectored the pilot close to EVB for another attempt to land. There had been no discussion of a plan between Ms. Williams and Ms. Ramirez because Ms. Ramirez had been responsible for the aircraft.

Ms. Ramirez vectored the pilot towards EVB, and Ms. Williams believed that she had heard the pilot of N757ZM report that she had the EVB airport in sight. Ms. Ramirez cleared the pilot to land on any runway. Ms. Williams observed the pilot begin to turn away from the airport and heard her say "very frantically" on the emergency frequency that she was in the clouds. Ms. Ramirez told the pilot to stay calm and to start a climb because the pilot had been descending. Ms. Williams said the last thing the pilot said was, "I am climbing," and then radar contact with the aircraft was lost. A short time later the supervisor relieved Ms. Williams from the Radar North position.

Ms. Williams had solicited pilot reports (PIREPS) for the DAB local area earlier in her shift, but could not recall their specific content. During the accident sequence, Ms. Williams had been working an SR22 requesting the RNAV runway 29 approach into EVB. The SR22 was at 3000 feet holding at RISRE, about 10 NM east of EVB and near the accident aircraft, but Ms. Williams had not solicited a PIREP from the pilot or asked about cloud tops.

FAA JO 3120.4N, chapter 4, paragraph 5.b, required air traffic control facilities with simulation capabilities to provide one hour of locally identified evidence-based simulation to each controller. Ms. Williams said that she did not receive any of the required refresher training via the air traffic simulator. She recalled receiving a PowerPoint presentation on VFR aircraft encountering IFR conditions several months ago, but could not remember details of the presentation. She said the information provided had been from FAA JO 7110.65.

According to Ms. Williams, January was usually very dry in Florida, and she believed the weather pattern experienced on the night of the accident was unusual. Sea fog would generally move inland for about 5 miles. She said it would affect all of the airports in DAB airspace because they were all along the shoreline. Ms. Williams said that I-95 north and south was generally the cut off point for the sea fog descending down and creating IFR conditions, with airports west of I-95 in VFR conditions. This was common information that had been passed on by word-of-mouth from controller to controller during training. Earlier PIREPS had indicated all of the airports in DAB airspace were experiencing instrument weather conditions, so Ms. Williams did not consider getting additional weather information. She could not recall if anyone had suggested turning the pilot to an airport west of DAB. Ms. Williams said that in order to listen to ASOS weather information from non-towered airports in DAB airspace, they could dial-in the ASOS frequency; she used the Deland airport as an example.

Ms. Williams had experienced several emergencies involving landing gear issues since arriving at DAB, but had only experienced one weather emergency since becoming an air traffic controller. She said the emergency frequency 121.5 was generally quiet, and that sometimes she heard Jacksonville Center using it for frequency issues involving pilots. Ms. Williams was familiar with who the pilots were at the DAB air traffic control facility, but was not aware of their ratings.

Ms. Williams characterized her training on emergency procedures as “okay,” and that she had been trained by the FAA. She could not recall if she and Ms. Ramirez had used the emergency checklist on the information display system (IDS) during the emergency sequence, although it was easy to find on the IDS. Ms. Williams could not recall if she had used the emergency checklist in the past because it been so long since she had worked an emergency aircraft. She said she had been comfortable working the accident sequence.

4.2 Handoff North Position

Ms. Bonnie Ramirez began working with the FAA in May 1988 as a direct hire to McAllen ATCT (MFE), McAllen Texas. In January, 1991, she transferred to El Paso ATCT (ELP), El Paso, Texas. In November 1996, she left the FAA and held various non-air traffic related jobs. In 2002, Ms. Ramirez began working as a contract air traffic controller at the Kennedy Space Center and in May 2008 rejoined the FAA at Sanford ATCT (SFB), Sanford, Florida. In August 2011, she transferred to DAB where she qualified on all operating positions. Her previous experience as an air traffic controller was with the United States Air Force (USAF) at Tinker AFB, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma from October 1982 until October 1986. After she left the Air Force, she worked as a Department of Defense contract air traffic controller at Biggs Army Airfield, El Paso, Texas, from 1987 until 1988. She possessed a current medical certificate with a restriction to have reading glasses accessible. Her reading glasses were accessible at the time of the event. Her immediate supervisor was Kelly Raulerson.

On January 14, 2015, Ms. Ramirez worked her assigned evening shift of 1400 to 2200. She had just returned from a break and was assigned the Handoff North position by the operational supervisor in charge. Traffic was light with five to six IFR aircraft, and the weather was generally instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) with rain or drizzle that night. She had just returned to the radar room from a break and saw Ms. Williams working all radar positions combined at the Radar North position. The supervisor was sitting on the Radar South position observing the operation, and assigned Mr. Ramirez to work the Handoff North position. Mr. Ramirez keyed up the Radar North frequencies and land lines to monitor. Ms. Williams provided Ms. Ramirez with a relief briefing. Ms. Williams told Ms. Ramirez that the local area weather was IFR with no weather specifics. Ms. Ramirez then heard a “Hello, Hello...” on the emergency frequency 121.5. She told the supervisor, “that’s her again.”

Ms. Ramirez was listening to all of the transmissions from the pilot on the emergency frequency, but did not remember the specifics. She believed that the pilot and her supervisor were both in contact with the EVB controller. She recalled Ms. Williams telling the EVB controller that if he could get the pilot to see the airport, to go ahead and get her to land. EVB Federal Contract Tower (FCT) began communicating with the pilot on the emergency frequency.

Ms. Ramirez accomplished coordination with Central Florida Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON F11) and began to actively watch the Radar North sector because Ms. Williams still had 5 or 6 IFR aircraft to work. The EVB controller called back via the landline and told her that the aircraft was going around at X50, and that EVB would transfer communications with the pilot to DAB. Ms. Ramirez requested that the pilot be transferred to frequency 125.35 (the Radar South frequency) to reduce the complexity of the situation.

Ms. Ramirez moved to the Radar South position but could not remember utilizing her preference set when she signed on the position. She believed the pilot had tried to change frequencies to 125.35, but was not sure if she had successfully done so. EVB called via a landline and said that the pilot could not accomplish the frequency change. Ms. Ramirez attempted to contact the pilot on the emergency frequency and tried to calm her down; the pilot was scared and nervous. Ms. Ramirez realized that she had established communications via the emergency frequency when the pilot replied to Ms. Ramirez's attempts to contact on 121.5. The pilot had an accent that made it difficult for Ms. Ramirez to understand her transmissions. Ms. Ramirez did not know the aircraft's call sign.

Ms. Ramirez's plan was to vector the aircraft to EVB and hope the pilot would see the airport. She believed the pilot had seen the EVB airport on a previous attempt to land. Ms. Ramirez issued a turn trying to get the pilot back towards EVB, although she had considered not issuing heading changes while the aircraft was in the clouds. Ms. Ramirez heard the pilot report the runway in sight, and observed the pilot begin a descent to EVB. She told the pilot that EVB had turned up all the runway lights and she could land any runway. The pilot descended below 300 feet and began a turn toward the north. The pilot transmitted that she was in the clouds, and Ms. Ramirez told the pilot that it was okay, but that she needed to climb. Ms. Ramirez observed the primary radar target of the aircraft start a turn and then fade out. She used the STARS "multifunction D *" tool to identify the last position of the aircraft, and passed the last known position to the supervisor who made the necessary telephone calls.

Ms. Ramirez did not attempt to contact EVB for an updated weather report and did not know the actual weather at EVB, although she did know it had been IFR. She said the SFB weather conditions were not good, but could not recall the weather at ORL. Mr. Ramirez could not remember what the tops of the clouds were, and could not remember if they had received a report from a pilot because traffic had been slow.

Ms. Ramirez could not recall refresher or proficiency training on emergency operations at DAB other than a PowerPoint presentation or something similar a few months ago. She could not recall any specifics of the presentation, and could not recall the title. Ms. Ramirez had not received any simulator training on VFR aircraft into IMC conditions, or any other simulator sessions. She characterized the refresher or proficiency training at DAB as awful and not effective training.

Ms. Ramirez had worked emergencies before during her career. The last emergency she had worked had been an overflight of DAB airspace, when a pilot declared an emergency and turned around to land at DAB. She was familiar with the emergency handling requirements contained in chapter 10 of FAA JO 7110.65. During this accident, Ms. Ramirez had not obtained any

additional emergency information because she felt the pilot had a hard time understanding instructions and that it would make the pilot more nervous. She wanted the pilot to fly the airplane. Ms. Ramirez said that it was rare to have a VFR into IFR emergency at DAB. She had no formal experience in that type of situation, and that during this emergency, she was thinking of her airspace and the airports within the airspace. She said the only airport she considered outside of DAB airspace was Deland airport.

4.3 Front Line Manager

Mr. Theodoris Aftonomos began working for the FAA in January 2005 at the FAA training facility in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. After completing basic air traffic control school, Mr. Aftonomos reported to Atlanta Air Route Traffic Control Center (ZTL). In May 2013, Mr. Aftonomos transferred to DAB, and in November, 2014 was promoted to front line manager. Mr. Aftonomos had no other ATC experience, and had been hired from the collegiate training initiative (CTI) program at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida. He had a current medical certificate without restrictions, and was operationally current on DAB Local Control, Ground Control, and the two high altitude sectors in the TRACON.

On the date of the accident, Mr. Aftonomos had been called in for an overtime shift by Ms. Karen Reid, the operations manager. He arrived for work at about 1730, and described the traffic as light with moderate complexity due to weather and IFR conditions throughout DAB airspace. After receiving a position relief briefing, Mr. Aftonomos assumed the front line manager in charge (FLMIC) position. Mr. Aftonomos reported the staffing for the shift as adequate due to the low volume of traffic. All radar sector positions had been combined at the Radar North position and were being worked by Ms. Williams. She had approximately four to five aircraft in the sector.

Mr. Aftonomos was monitoring the operation from the overhead position located behind the Radar North sector. Ms. Ramirez returned to the radar room after a break, and Mr. Aftonomos assigned her to assist Ms. Williams on the handoff position for the Radar North sector. All of the aircraft under the control of Radar North were in one sector of the DAB airspace and Mr. Aftonomos thought that Ms. Ramirez would be able to offer more assistance working the handoff position rather than opening another radar position.

Ms. Williams reported hearing a call “in the blind”⁶ on 121.5 saying “hello, hello.” After assigning Ms. Ramirez to the handoff position and hearing the transmissions on 121.5, Mr. Aftonomos observed an aircraft squawking 7700 in the vicinity of X50. Mr. Aftonomos observed Ms. Williams attempting to contact the accident aircraft on 121.5, and heard coordination calls from EVB on the landline. He observed the aircraft on the radar display heading in the general direction of EVB and returned to the supervisor’s desk to phone EVB tower. He asked the EVB controller if they had seen or had been working the 7700 code to the south of EVB. While Mr. Aftonomos was speaking to the controller at EVB, he could hear the accident aircraft in the background on 121.5. He decided that EVB tower should contact the pilot on 121.5 to work the aircraft into EVB, and contact DAB if the EVB controller required any assistance. Mr. Aftonomos was relieved to find that the controller on duty at EVB tower was Mr. Monfort. Mr.

⁶ TRANSMITTING IN THE BLIND– A transmission from one station to other stations in circumstances where two-way communication cannot be established, but where it is believed that the called stations may be able to receive the transmission.

Monfort was a very talented controller with several years of experience in the DAB area as well as a very skilled pilot. Mr. Aftonomas felt that the accident aircraft would receive the best service from EVB.

Mr. Aftonomos could hear the pilot responding to EVB on the frequency but could not hear the EVB controller transmit to the pilot. As the aircraft proceeded over X50, the pilot began turning to the north. The radar target indicated 400 feet and Mr. Aftonomos heard the pilot say “I see it” or “I see the field.” According to Mr. Aftonomos, a short time later it became apparent that the pilot had not seen the field because she did not land. Mr. Aftonomos contacted Ms. Reid, who was off duty, and briefed her that he had a developing situation with a lost pilot. He told her the pilot sounded panicked and that it was an emergency situation. Shortly after the conversation with Ms. Reid, Mr. Aftonomos observed the pilot traveling east and away from EVB. A decision was made to split the Radar North and Radar South sectors and have Ms. Ramirez attempt to vector the aircraft back towards EVB.

Mr. Aftonomos contacted the EVB controller on the landline and they decided that DAB controllers would work the aircraft into EVB. The EVB controller attempted to put the pilot on DAB frequency 125.35. Ms. Ramirez moved to the Radar South sector and opened the position. Mr. Aftonomos believed Ms. Ramirez was communicating with the pilot on 121.5 and did not hear the pilot on 125.35. Radar data indicated the pilot was proceeding northbound away from X50. Ms. Ramirez asked the pilot if she was IFR capable and began to assist her. The pilot appeared lost and seemed very confused.

Ms. Ramirez gave the pilot a northbound heading towards EVB. Mr. Aftonomos saw the aircraft descend below 900 feet. Ms. Ramirez focused on keeping the pilot at a minimum safe altitude. The aircraft began to turn east and Ms. Ramirez asked the pilot to begin a climb to 1000 feet. The pilot read back “1000 feet.” Mr. Aftonomos observed the aircraft continue to descend below 300 feet and start to turn back to the east over the water. A short time later the target stopped moving on the radar display. Mr. Aftonomos called 911 and reported a possible aircraft accident. He opened the Falcon replay tool and reported the last known position to the 911 operator as East of Flagler Avenue and A1A. The dispatcher advised him that they were receiving ground reports of an aircraft accident in the same vicinity.

Early in the accident sequence, Mr. Aftonomos had heard the pilot report ground contact in the vicinity of X50. Later, Mr. Aftonomos heard the accident pilot transmit that she was “in cloud.” He believed the best option was to try to keep the aircraft low and in visual contact with the ground as the controller attempted to work the aircraft back to EVB. Mr. Aftonomos had not asked Ms. Ramirez to get the pilot’s flight conditions during the accident sequence. He did not know the tops of the clouds in the DAB airspace, but had heard pilots reporting throughout the shift that they were in layers between 2000 and 5000 feet. Mr. Aftonomos said that a few aircraft had reported breaking out on final to DAB at “minimums.”⁷

Mr. Aftonomos had not referred to the facility emergency checklist located on the IDS during the accident sequence. He was familiar with the requirements of FAA JO 7110.65, chapter 10, regarding emergency services. He made the call not to apply the provisions of FAA JO 7110.65

⁷ LANDING MINIMUMS– The minimum visibility prescribed for landing a civil aircraft while using an instrument approach procedure.

chapter 10. Mr. Aftonomos had not instructed Ms. Ramirez to obtain any additional information from the pilot because he did not want to distract the pilot from flying the airplane. When asked if he was familiar with the section in FAA JO 7110.65 (10-2-9) on how to assist VFR aircraft that inadvertently entered IMC conditions, Mr. Aftonomos said no and, “I know I should be.”

Mr. Aftonomos indicated that he was in charge of the situation but was comfortable with how Ms. Ramirez handled it. He believed the situation had deteriorated rapidly, and did not know which airports close to DAB were VFR.

Refresher training at DAB was lacking and Mr. Aftonomos said most air traffic controllers view it as an annoyance. He said the controllers just wanted to work live traffic.

4.4 New Smyrna Beach (EVB) Local Controller

Mr. William Monfort began with Robinson Aviation (RVA) in September 2007 as a direct hire to Ormond Beach Municipal Airport, Ormond Beach, Florida. In June 2008, Mr. Monfort transferred to New Smyrna Beach Municipal Airport, New Smyrna Beach, Florida. Before working for RVA, Mr. Monfort had been employed by the Federal Aviation Administration. He began working for the FAA in August 1982, reporting to the FAA training facility in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. After graduating from the training facility in November 1982, Mr. Monfort reported to Miami ATCT (MIA), Miami, Florida. In January 1984, Mr. Monfort transferred to Albert Whitted Airport (SPG), St. Petersburg, Florida, and in June 1986, Mr. Monfort transferred to CAE, where he stayed until returning to SPG in June 1988. In September 1990, Mr. Monfort transferred to Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, Christiansted, St Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. He remained there until January 1991, when he transferred to Cyril E King Airport, Charlotte Amalie, U.S. Virgin Islands. In April 1994, Mr. Monfort transferred to Piedmont Triad International Airport, Greensboro, North Carolina, and in January 1997 transferred to DAB. In May 2005, Mr. Monfort transferred to Orlando International Airport, Orlando, Florida, where he remained until retiring from the FAA in September 2007. Mr. Monfort had no military ATC experience. He was a licensed pilot with ATP, commercial, CFI, CFII, MEI, Glider, and Glider Instructor ratings. Mr. Montfort’s medical certificate was current with restrictions to have glasses for near vision. His supervisor at RVA was Robert Dobbelaar.

On the date of the accident, Mr. Monfort was working his regular scheduled shift of 1400 to 2200. The EVB airport was IFR with low ceilings and no traffic for at least one hour before the accident. Mr. Monfort heard the emergency alarm on the radar tower display and ranged out to observe a VFR target flashing emergency (EM) about 2 or 3 miles southeast of X50. Mr. Monfort tuned the tower’s portable radio to 121.5. He overheard someone who sounded foreign on the emergency frequency saying she was lost and looking for X50. He recalled hearing an airliner also attempting to contact the pilot.

A short time later, DAB called on the “shout line”⁸ and asked Mr. Monfort if he was talking to the aircraft that was squawking emergency south of EVB. Mr. Monfort replied that he was not, but had heard the pilot on the emergency frequency. Mr. Monfort asked DAB if he should communicate with the pilot and attempt to assist; the DAB controller said yes. Mr. Monfort attempted to contact the pilot on the emergency frequency and asked if they were attempting to

⁸ Shout line refers to a landline between two facilities that is always open rather than a line that must be dialed.

land at X50. The pilot responded she was, and Mr. Monfort provided a heading of 270 degrees to X50. He advised the pilot she was about 2 miles from the airport. Mr. Monfort observed the pilot begin to drift left away from X50, so he instructed the pilot to turn right 10 degrees to align with the airport. Mr. Monfort observed the aircraft descend to 500 feet over X50 and asked the pilot if she had the airport in sight. Mr. Monfort recalled the pilot sounded as if she had the airport in sight and transferred communications to the X50 Unicom frequency.

Mr. Monfort observed the pilot climbing to 600 feet northbound and believed she was entering the VFR pattern at X50. He observed the aircraft continue to climb and attempted to contact the pilot on 121.5. DAB called and asked if the pilot had seen X50; he responded that he thought she had seen it. Mr. Monfort established communication with the pilot on 121.5 and asked if she could see X50. The pilot advised she could no longer see the airport. Mr. Monfort asked the pilot if she was above the clouds or in the clouds. She responded with something unintelligible, so he assumed she was one or the other. Mr. Monfort instructed the pilot to maintain VFR and to fly her airplane. He asked DAB if they wanted to work the aircraft because he was not radar certified, and because it was IFR. DAB instructed Mr. Monfort to wait 30 seconds and then switch the pilot to 125.35. He instructed the pilot to contact DAB on 125.35, but heard her return to 121.5. Mr. Monfort instructed the pilot to remain on the emergency frequency and that DAB would be providing further assistance. Mr. Monfort had no further interactions with the pilot.

Mr. Monfort said the situation was very frustrating and believed DAB was doing the right thing. The pilot sounded very inexperienced and foreign, so he kept the instructions simple and easy to understand. Mr. Monfort said that if he had been a certified radar controller, he would've climbed the pilot until reaching VFR conditions, obtained weather reports in the area, and instructed the pilot to proceed west towards the VFR conditions. He said the weather conditions affecting EVB were typical for that time of year.

Mr. Monfort said he was required to conduct the same refresher training every month that FAA controllers are required to complete. He remembered completing computer-based emergency procedures training, or training for VFR aircraft inadvertently encountering IFR conditions, sometime in the last year, but he could not remember the date.

Charles Olvis
Senior Air Traffic Investigator
August 24, 2015