Log 1076

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: October 17, 1979

Forwarded to:

Honorable Langhorne M. Bond
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-79-80 and -81

The air taxi industry, particularly the commuter air carrier segment, has enjoyed tremendous growth in recent years. U.S. commuter airlines have gained an average of 10 percent more passengers and 30 percent more freight each year since 1970. Commuter air carrier revenue passenger miles have increased from 750,048,000 in 1975 to 1,145,000,000 in 1978. The FAA has forecast a 116 percent increase in commuter passenger enplanements between fiscal 1978 and 1989. This forecast growth of the air taxi industry has prompted aircraft manufacturers to produce new and larger aircraft.

However, this expansion has been accompanied by a corresponding rise in commuter air carrier accident fatalities. For example, in the first 7 months of 1975 there were 27 commuter air carrier accidents which included 9 fatal accidents and 24 fatalities. During the first 7 months of 1979 there have been 27 commuter air carrier accidents including 10 fatal accidents and 48 fatalities.

In the past 2 years, the National Transportation Safety Board has investigated numerous commuter accidents in which the aircraft was at or above its maximum certificated gross weight or at or beyond its center of gravity (c.g.) envelope, or both 1/. In all of these accidents, pilots were confronted with the two-fold problem of unfavorable weight and balance and mechanical malfunction. Safety Board investigations of

1/ Aircraft Accident Report: Rocky Mountain Airways, DHC-6, Cheyenne, Wyoming, February 27, 1979. (NTSB-AAR-79-10)
Aircraft Accident Report: Columbia Pacific Airlines, Beech 99, Richland, Washington, February 10, 1979. (NTSB-AAR-78-15)
Aircraft Accident Report: Antilles Air Boats, G-21A, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, April 5, 1978. (NTSB-AAR-79-9)

AAR-79-16

these accidents also revealed that the pilots had received no flight or ground training on the performance capabilities and handling qualities of the aircraft when loaded to its maximum certificated gross weight or at the limits of its c.g. envelope.

On March 1, 1979, a commuter air carrier flight, a Beech Model 70, Excalibur conversion, crashed during takeoff at the Gulfport-Biloxi Regional Airport, Gulfport, Mississippi. The investigation revealed that the aircraft was over its maximum certificated gross weight, and out of its c.g. envelope. It also revealed uncorrected maintenance discrepancies, that the ADF and wing flaps were inoperative, and that the starter interrupt system had been bypassed. Further, it revealed that aircraft dispatch operations were hurried and that, in particular, data for weight and balance computations were carelessly compiled. Moreover, the pilot had received no training on the performance capabilities and handling qualities of the aircraft under high gross weight conditions. The accident illustrates a typical result of poor operational practices and incomplete training. The pilot had flown the aircraft earlier that day at its maximum weight for the first time even though it was on a regularly scheduled, unsupervised passenger flight.

Safety Board investigative experience has disclosed also that air taxi/commuter flights are often conducted at high gross weights. Many of the aircraft used by these operators exhibit flight characteristics and handling qualities at high gross weights that are markedly different from those exhibited at lower gross weight.

While it may be impractical to accomplish flight training in aircraft loaded to the maximum gross weight or at the limits of the c.g. envelope, all pilots should be thoroughly familiar with the performance deficiencies which could be produced by such conditions and have training under conditions approaching these limits. Such performance deficiencies may include an increase in takeoff speed, a longer takeoff roll, a reduction in the rate and angle of climb, and a higher stall speed. These deficiencies may be compounded further by an aircraft malfunction, such as an engine failure. Training regarding these factors would have alerted the pilot in the Gulfport accident to the importance of proper weight and balance for safe flight and he might have required accurate computations to be made.

The Safety Board is aware that the Federal Aviation Administration is currently evaluating comments on NPRM 78-3, "Flight Crewmember Flight and Duty Time Limitations and Rest Requirements," as they apply to 14

CFR 121 operations. However, recent commuter air carrier accidents have given added urgency to the need to revise the crew duty time, flight time, and rest period regulations contained in 14 CFR 135 2/.

The Safety Board believes that the expansion of 14 CFR 135 operations, and particularly commuter air carrier operations, to more closely approximate those of air carriers certificated under 14 CFR 121, should be accompanied by measures to assure a comparable level of safety. Differences in the types of operational activities usually conducted by a commuter air carrier pilot are other factors which support a need for such changes. Commuter air carrier flights are usually short, and during a long-duty day a pilot can be required to make numerous approaches and landings, and numerous instrument approaches -- often conducted as single pilot IFR operations. The commuter air carrier pilot may be required to perform collateral duties such as baggage handling and aircraft refueling. These factors can all contribute to pilot fatigue, with a possible resultant deterioration of basic flying skills and judgment.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

> Require that pilots involved in 14 CFR 135 operations be thoroughly trained on the performance capabilities and handling qualities of aircraft when loaded to their maximum certificated gross weight or to the limits of their c.g. envelope, or both. (Class-II, Priority Action) (A-79-80)
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> Expedite rulemaking which would make the flight time and duty time limitations, and rest requirements for commuter air carriers the same as those specified for domestic air carrier crewmembers under 14 CFR 121. (Class-II, Priority Action) (A-79-81)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, BURSLEY, and GOLDMAN, Members, concurred in these recommendations.

By: James B. King
Chairman

2/ Aircraft Accident Report: Universal Airways, Beech 70, Gulfport, Mississippi, March 1, 1979. (NTSB-AAR-79-16)
Aircraft Accident Report: Columbia Pacific Airlines, Beech 99, Richland, Washington, February 10, 1978. (NTSB-AAR-78-15)
Air New England, DHC-6, Yarmouthport, Massachusetts, June 17, 1979. (Currently under investigation)
NTSB-AAR-80-1