



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Log # 2176

Date: November 21, 1989

In reply refer to: A-89-108 and -109

Honorable James B. Busey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

On June 11, 1989, at about 1330 local time, a Beechcraft BE-H18, N34AP, owned and operated by Lani Bird, Inc., and d.b.a. Scenic Air Tour, Hawaii, crashed about 8 miles north of the Kamuela VOR 1/ station on the 360° radial in the Waipio Valley of the Kohala Mountains on the island of Hawaii, Hawaii. The flight had departed Hilo International Airport, Hilo, Hawaii, on a revenue sightseeing flight conducted under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 135; its destination was Maui. A visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan had been filed. The pilot and 10 passengers were fatally injured, and the airplane was destroyed by impact forces and postcrash fire.

The Safety Board's investigation of the accident is continuing; however, preliminary evidence indicates that the pilot of the accident flight entered an enclosed canyon and ultimately proceeded beyond a point from which a safe exit could be made. The airplane struck the canyon wall about 900 feet below the rim.

The investigation has determined that, because of poor prevailing weather in the vicinity of the Waipio Valley, Lani Bird's sightseeing flights normally remain slightly offshore over the Pacific Ocean. At the time of the accident, however, reports from pilots operating near the accident location indicate that weather was unusually good--clear, unlimited visibility, and no turbulence--in the area. It is believed that the good weather, and a desire to give the tourists an enhanced view, were factors in the pilot's decision to enter the canyon.

The investigation has also determined that Lani Bird pilots would, when weather permitted, depart the normal route of flight along the north coast of Hawaii and proceed over the canyon, but above the rim. Although none of the pilots interviewed admitted flying below the rim of the canyon, they said they had heard of other pilots (of sightseeing flights) who had flown below the rim. A passenger on a sightseeing flight about a month prior to the accident stated that the pilot of the accident airplane flew below the rim of the Waimea Canyon on the island of Kauai. Company officials of Lani Bird said that it was against company policy to operate below the rims of canyons; the operations manual, however, did not contain any policy, guidance, or cautions about operations on their established tour routes, nor was such information required. Safety Board investigators also examined Lani Bird's operations specifications; they found no operational restrictions or limitations that addressed Lani Bird's tour routes.

1/VOR--very high frequency omnidirectional radio range.

The Safety Board believes that flight safety and standardization would be improved, and oversight of the operator made more effective, if appropriate restrictions and limitations concerning flight routes and operations near canyons, volcanos, and glaciers were placed into the operations specifications of the operator. These limitations could include, for example, restrictions on flight below the rims of canyons and/or minimum distances to be maintained from active volcanos.

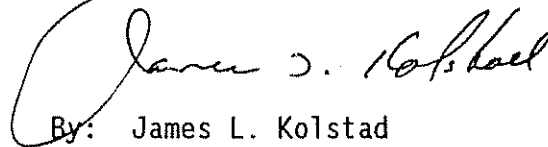
Furthermore, the Safety Board believes that the Federal Aviation Administration should require its principal operations inspectors to encourage commercial sightseeing operators to place company policy, guidance, and cautions about particular sightseeing highlights in their operations manuals.

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

Amend the operations specifications of commercial sightseeing operators to include appropriate restrictions and/or limitations concerning flight routes and operations near canyons, volcanos, and glaciers. (Class II, Priority Action)(A-89-108)

Require the principal operations inspectors to encourage commercial sightseeing operators to place company policy, guidance, and cautions about particular sightseeing highlights in their operations manuals. (Class II, Priority Action)(A-89-109)

KOLSTAD, Acting Chairman, BURNETT, LAUBER, NALL, and DICKINSON, Members, concurred in these recommendations



By: James L. Kolstad
Acting Chairman