

Docket No. SA-520

Exhibit No. 6-A

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Washington, D.C.

SURVIVAL FACTORS FACTUAL REPORT OF INVESTIGATION

(43 Pages with Appendixes)

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
OFFICE OF AVIATION SAFETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

July 18, 2000

**SURVIVAL FACTORS
FACTUAL REPORT OF INVESTIGATION**

A. ACCIDENT : **DCA00MA023**

LOCATION : Pacific Ocean
DATE : January 31, 2000
TIME : 1621 Pacific Standard Time (PST)
AIRCRAFT : McDonnell Douglas MD-83, Flight 261,
N963AS, Operated by Alaska Airlines

B. Survival Factors Specialist

Cynthia L. Keegan
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, D.C.

C. SUMMARY

On January 31, 2000, at about 4:21 p.m., pacific standard time (PST), N963AS a McDonnell Douglas MD-83, operating as Alaskan Airlines flight 261, lost control, and plunged into the Pacific Ocean about 2.5 miles north of Anacapa Island, California. The flight crew had reported a loss of the airplane's horizontal stabilizer, while in cruise flight, 11 minutes before the accident occurred. The flight was operating under CFR Part 121 as a regularly scheduled passenger service flight from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico to San Francisco, California. All 83 passengers and five crewmembers onboard the flight were killed. The airplane was destroyed by its impact with the ocean.

D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

1.0 Notification

The FAA's Los Angeles Center reported the accident to the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) at 0025 Zulu (1625 PST) and requested that they notify the U.S. Coast Guard. After receiving notification from AFRCC, the U.S. Coast Guard's Pacific Area/District 11 Command Center (Pcc), located in Alameda, California, provided initial notification of the accident to Vessel Traffic Information Service Los Angeles/Long Beach¹. In addition, Pcc also notified the following Coast Guard units: Air Station in Sacramento, Cutter CONIFER in Los Angeles, and Cutter BUTTONWOOD in San Francisco, California.

At 1626 PST, 5 minutes after the airplane impacted the Pacific Ocean, the U.S. Coast Guard's Marine Safety Office and Group Los Angeles/Long Beach (MSO/Group LA/LB) received a phone call from the Channel Island Park Service dispatcher that a park visitor witnessed the airplane impacting the ocean. At 1627 PST the Coast Guard transmitted an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast on VHF-FM channel 16 requesting assistance from any vessels in the area of the accident. The Coast Guard also notified local and district Coast Guard units, the FBI, NTSB, FAA, LA County Fire Department, LA Department of Coroners, LA City Fire, Ventura Fire Department, and the Ventura County Sheriff Department. See Appendix B for copies of the Pcc's and AFRCC's logbook entries regarding the notification and search and rescue efforts for Alaska Airlines flight 261.

2.0 Search and Rescue

In accordance with the National Search and Rescue (SAR) Plan, the U.S. Coast Guard's District 11, Pacific Area Commander, is the Pacific Maritime area SAR Coordinator (SC) for all accidents and mishaps occurring in the waters adjacent to the United States, Hawaii and portions of Alaska.² Because the accident occurred within the Coast Guard's 11th District SAR region, SC responsibilities fell to the 11th District Commander. While the SC has overall SAR responsibility, the SAR Mission

¹ Coast Guard employees who monitor and report marine vessel traffic staff the Vessel Traffic Information Service Los Angeles/Long Beach.

² The Pacific Maritime area is made up of multiple SAR regions throughout the Pacific Ocean (see the U.S. Search and Rescue Areas map in Appendix B of this report.)

Coordinator (SMC) is assigned on an incident by incident basis to coordinate the operations pertaining to a specific SAR incident. Upon the initial notification of the accident, the Pcc assumed duties of SMC in addition to the SC duties, but as the rescue response developed the MSO Group LA/LB became the SMC, because of their proximity to the accident site. See Appendix C for the MSO Group LA/LB's Incident command structure, and organizational chart.

The MSO Group LA/LB initially established an incident command post in Long Beach, California, but moved the command post several hours later to Port Hueneme, California (about 8 miles east of the accident site.) The Incident Command Post remained in Port Hueneme, California, until the suspension of the SAR operation on March 14, 2000, at 1700. In addition, the Pcc continued to function as SC by supporting MSO Group LA/LB, and the AFRCC continued to play a supporting role in the search and rescue efforts by offering federal assistance until the operation officially transitioned to search and recovery. The U.S. Coast Guard's search and rescue mission lasted 44 hours, and ceased at 1200 PST on February 2, 2000.

The on-scene commander (OSC) was originally Station Channel Island personnel located on U.S. Navy vessel S/L 120. The OSC was transferred to the Coast Guard Cutter (CGC) POINT CARREW at 2026 PST, then to CGC CONIFER at 2353 PST, and then ultimately to CGC HAMILTON at 0300 PST, on February 1, 2000.

The MSO Group LA/LB provided 8 Coast Guard Cutters, 2 Small Boats, 5 helicopters, and 2 C-130 airplanes, for the search and rescue of flight 261. The U.S. Navy provided 3 Ships, 1 helicopter, and 1 P3 Orion, for the search and rescue response. The U.S. Airforce provided 1 C-130 airplane, and 2 helicopters, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) provided a sea vessel and the National Guard provided 1 helicopter for the search and rescue response. In addition, 7 local fishing vessels, and 17 commercial or personal vessels responded to accident.

3.0 Disaster Preparedness

The U.S. Coast Guard has statutory authority and responsibility under Title 14, of the U.S. Code of regulations. The code authorizes the U.S. Coast Guard to establish and operate search and rescue (SAR) facilities, render aid and assistance to distressed persons and property, both military and civilian, on and over the high seas, and the waters subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. It may also engage in such

activities on and over land areas. The Eleventh Coast Guard District's mission is to conduct search and rescue operations within the Alameda SAR Coordinator's Search and Rescue, Pacific Maritime Region in accordance with statutory authority, the National SAR Plan and current SAR agreements, in order to save life and property. See Appendix A for maps of the U.S. Coast Guard's Maritime search and rescue areas, and field district office locations.

The Los Angeles World Airports Air/Sea Disaster Preparedness Plan (LAWA Disaster Plan) provides a course of action to be followed in the event an accident involving an aircraft occurs over water adjacent to and extending 50 miles out from the coastline of Los Angeles County. Because, the Alaska Airlines flight 261 accident occurred more than 50 miles from Los Angeles County, LAWA was not officially notified of the accident.

The LAWA Disaster Plan requires a tabletop or full operational exercise for an air/sea rescue to be conducted at least once every three years, and a full debrief as soon as possible following each exercise, incorporating lessons learned into the plan. The most recent tabletop exercise performed by the LAWA Disaster Plan, prior to the Alaska Airlines flight 261 accident, was conducted on April 13th, and 14th, 1999. The most recent full operational exercise for an air/sea disaster drill was conducted by the LAWA on May 22, 1998. See Appendix D for excerpts from the Los Angeles World Airports Air/Sea Disaster Preparedness Plan, and the Eleventh Coast Guard District Search and Rescue Standard Operating Procedures.



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