



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Howard Plagens
Senior Air Safety Investigator

Person Contacted: Paul Alukonis Director of Operations for Westcor Aviation.
Date: 2-19-2008
Time: 1300
Phone: [REDACTED]
Subject: LAX07MA231A/B; Eurocopter AS350B2, N613TV, and Eurocopter AS350B2,
N215TV, Phoenix, AZ, July 27, 2007

Attendees:

The following is a summary of statements made by Mr. Alukonis:
Mr. Bowerbank's primary job was managing Westcor Aviation, and it was mostly administrative. He did the billing for flight ops, and provided flight following. He worked in the Westcor hangar. He didn't necessarily fly electronic news gathering (ENG) flights every day. He last worked as a pilot on Wednesday July 25. He flew a 1.5-hour Westcor charter flight, and was scheduled from 0745 to 0900.

Mr. Bowerbank's normal schedule was to do the morning show for Ch 3 on Mondays. He would be in the door at 0545, and the show was over at 0800. About 0900 he would start work for Westcor, and he typically went home early at 1400. His Tuesday through Thursday schedule was to be on standby for Ch 3 from 0900 to 1600. If he wasn't flying, he did administrative duties for Westcor. He usually started late on Fridays; he started at 1000, and worked for Ch 3 from 1600 to 1830. He would take breaking news stories for Ch 3 during the day, which was the reason he was flying on the day of the accident. His work schedule on the day of the accident was normal. He had no flights scheduled, and came in about 0900. Mr. Alukonis saw him, and noted that he seemed very normal; he had a positive attitude.

Mr. Bowerbank lived alone and close friends did not know his exact schedule over the previous 72 hours. He typically had the weekend off, but pilots traded on call duties occasionally. If the phone rang, he would take the flight if he could. His last vacation was from February 2 to February 5, 2007; he frequently took short vacations throughout the year.

Mr. Alukonis did not know of any history of accidents for Mr. Bowerbank. He knew that Mr. Bowerbank had a certificate for 10,000 accident free hours.

It is unknown if Mr. Bowerbank had any major changes in his health, financial situation or personal life over the last year. He was not married, and did not have a girlfriend. His health seemed good, and he had no visual or aural problems. He was not known to take medications. If he didn't feel good, he would just call in sick. He did not drink or smoke. The company had a drug and alcohol screening program, and there were no issues with him.

The helicopter did not have any recent problems.

Mr. Bowerbank and the photographer were friends. The photographer was always positive and in a good mood; he was very humorous. The two of them had flown together many times before. They did not see each other socially, just at work. Mr. Bowerbank was fairly quiet and reserved.

Mr. Bowerbank completed high school, but he did not know about other educational levels. Mr. Bowerbank indicated that he got interested in aviation in elementary school. One of the earlier pilots at Ch 3 traveled to elementary schools for presentations. Mr. Bowerbank saw this and got interested; in fact he wanted to work for Ch 3 only. He got his initial training in the 1980s at Arizona Wing and Rotor, which is now out of business. He was a parts runner for one company, and then became a certified flight instructor (CFI) at Arizona Wing and Rotor. His next job was as a CFI at Quantum, a flight school in Chandler, Arizona, where he became the chief pilot. His next position was at Westcor; he was chief pilot, and then promoted to Director of Operations. He loved flying helicopters, and most of his time is in helicopters. He liked the AS350.

Mr. Alukonis has been at Westcor since 2000. Mr. Bowerbank started with Westcor as a pilot on April 6, 1998. He reported that he had 9,768 hours at the date of hire. Pilots fill out a resume every year on the anniversary of their hire date. On September 26, 2006, Mr. Bowerbank noted a total time of 13,578 hours.

One of Mr. Bowerbank's strengths was his experience; he logged roughly 10,000 hours over 10 years as an instructor. No one ever complained about flying with him.

The only comments he had heard Mr. Bowerbank say about their equipment pertained to getting faster implementation of new technology. Ch 3 had just installed high definition cameras, and that feature was going to be turned on the day of the accident, and Mr. Bowerbank would have been the pilot to launch that. This technology was much more complicated than the current system, and the companies that sold the equipment had to make the necessary modifications. The pace of this was frustrating to him.

Mr. Alukonis and Mr. Bowerbank were the only two pilots at Westcor. They received two types of training.

The training required for their Part 135 operations was done in house. They took turns instructing each other, and the FAA did the proficiency

checks. On April 27, 2007, Mr. Bowerbank had check rides in the AS350B2 and the AS355N.

A company called Euro safety provided additional training. Euro safety was based at Grand Prairie, Texas, but went to the client's location to provide the training in the client's aircraft. The training lasted 2 days; the first day consisted of 8 hours of ground school for that particular model. The second day consisted of preflight and 1.5 to 3.0 hours in the air. Mr. Bowerbank completed training in the EC120 on May 16, 2007, and the AS355N on June 27, 2007.

Mr. Alukonis knew both pilots and thought highly of them.

Westcor has been in business since 1981, and currently has three helicopters. They have an EC120, an AS350, and an AS355. They own one and manage the other two. As chief pilot, Mr. Alukonis flew about 500 hours a year, and Mr. Bowerbank flew about 240 to 270 hours a year for Westcor. His year to date flight time for Westcor was 88 hours.

Westcor is a Eurocopter Service Center, and they have six mechanics. They maintain four of the five ENG helicopters in Phoenix. He considers their pay above industry standards, and there are periodic raises. The company is in good financial condition. Morale is very good, and the turnover is low. The office manager has been with the company over 20 years, and the Director of Maintenance has been there 14 to 16 years. Overtime is very rare, especially for pilots. Pilot duty time is typically 7 to 8 hours, so working a couple of extra hours on the weekend is not a burden.

The company provides an employee assistance program, and pays sick leave. Their equipment and training is good. Anyone at any level can go to management with a safety issue. Personnel usually discuss a safety issue immediately as soon as they identify it. Since all but one of the local stations keep their ENG helicopters in Westcor's hangar, the pilots see each other frequently and discuss any issue that they are concerned about. Westcor is a member of Helicopter Association International, and Mr. Alukonis monitors their safety briefings.

Mr. Alukonis typically sees FAA inspectors three to four times a year unless they are making revisions to their Part 135 manuals. Then they see them more often.

Since the accident, one media company has spent the money to paint their rotor blades with high visibility paint. All stations have made some changes to their operations to enhance safety since the accident.



Paul Alukonis

Date: 2/27/2008