



## RECORD OF CONVERSATION

**Howard Plagens**  
**Senior Air Safety Investigator**

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Person Contacted: Jeff Baugh American Federation of Television & Radio Artists (AFTRA)  
Date: 3-05-2008  
Time: 1230 PST  
Phone:  
Subject: LAX07MA231A/B; Eurocopter AS350B2, N613TV, and Eurocopter AS350B2, N215TV, Phoenix, AZ, July 27, 2007

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The following is a summary of statements made by Mr. Baugh:

Mr. Baugh has 20 years in the LA market.

If the station needs a crew, they reach out to local vendors for a bid. The companies that are the vendors vary in size and type of equipment. Helinet one of the largest companies. He is not aware of any written guidelines for ENG operations.

There are various setups and configurations for the news gathering team. Some vendors use a pilot with a photographer and reporter. Others may use a pilot with a photographer who also does the reporting; sometimes the pilot is also the reporter.

The industry really got busy in the 90s, and with the new cameras that came out it got busier. In radio, the reporter is the observer in the front left seat, and is constantly looking out.

There used to be contracts that were no fly/no pay. However, most of those contracts are gone; he is not aware of any Los Angeles contracts of that type. Most vendors are now guaranteed a minimum.

Most Los Angeles pilots are experienced, but there are several new pilots. The trend now is for new pilots to fly an airplane or helicopter to build time. Some pilots sell the left seat time; a time builder operates the controls while the pilot reports. In some cases, a chief pilot will say that they flew with a new pilot, and the pilot is OK. However, when queried by a reporter, the chief pilot might not want to go on a flight with the pilot on a dark night with no left controls on his side.

AFTRA members have to look out for themselves. For breaking news, news directors determine how they want the story covered.

For preplanned events, such as awards show, the vendors and the Radio and Television News Association (RTNA) get together. They designate a pool unit to cover the story, and coordinate the airborne coverage.

Twenty years ago the stations were more involved, but now they put the operations out for bid.

For TV he thinks that a pilot should be a pilot, and the photographer should be the reporter. Some operators have three people on board, a pilot, a reporter, and a photographer. He is busy enough just as a radio reporter, and is always looking at the ground. He doesn't know how a TV pilot does it.

A typical breaking news story will draw media, law enforcement, freelancers (paparazzi), and civilian aircraft. This can result in 10 or more aircraft on scene.

He has flown with pilots that he would go into any situation with. However, the Vietnam era pilots left in the 90s, and now there is a new group. New hires get no special training; there is a need for ENG specific training. Reporters need to sit down with pilots and discuss different situation, and determine what each others needs are. They develop strategies to get the news shots that are needed. Sometimes new pilots have less than 10 hours in type, and are lacking in world experience. Older pilots are more likely to turn down stories. If a pilot does turn one down, all of the vendors support the pilot's position.

He thinks new pilots should be told to make their own decisions, and not base what they are going to do or not do based on what another pilot is doing.

His group will not go over water. They have been asked (during the Catalina fires), but their aircraft was not equipped with floats and there were no flotation devices for the crew. This should be included in any best practices standards that are developed.

Some AFTRA members have had bad experiences that involve weather. He was in Burbank airspace when the pilot tried to hover the helicopter, but it settled with power and went into spin. He thought that they were going in. Another reporter had an incident where the pilot landed at a remote site, and left reporter alone in a running helicopter. The helicopter rolled on takeoff. AFTRA feels that reporters should not be left alone in running helicopters. The reporter did tell AFTRA about this. There are different judgment calls for different pilots.

AFTRA members can talk to the vendor managers on safety issues; the managers are very receptive. AFTRA's safety department representatives will go to operators or stations with issues brought to them by their members.

There needs to be a training syllabus for reporters that includes weather information. There should also be ride-alongs before turning the reporter loose, and there should be specific goals to accomplish during those ride. There is no blanket standard among operators.

Reporters and photographers don't know the difference between Part 91 and Part 135.

AFTRA members are aware that they operate in a see and avoid environment. There is usually plenty of room for all ENG operators. They do assist the pilot with traffic. The pilot will sometimes ask if the crewmember has a specific aircraft in sight. Lost sight calls are frequent, especially when there are low ceilings. The crewmembers have a Unicom and monitor the aircraft's radios except when the crewmember is reporting. There are a lot of position reports. A pilot typically calls inbound and announce the altitude and geographic location. Usually one or more aircraft already on scene respond, and identify how many aircraft are there. There is concern about aircraft that

are not being operated by a news organization or law enforcement. He frequently encounters aircraft that are hired by photographers, and don't necessarily monitor the common frequency utilized by ENG operators or announce their intentions. Other curious pilots also enter the mix when they come to observe what is happening on the ground; they also do not monitor the common frequency or announce their intentions.

Pursuits are the most stressful; there are no guidelines. As long as the pursuit moves along a freeway, the situation is not too bad. However, when the pursuit entails a change of direction, the situation gets more complicated. A pilot/reporter is looking at a monitor; for pursuits, pilots need help from the reporter or photographer. Sometimes, pilots get overwhelmed. It occasionally happens that, as the group is going through controlled airspace, a pilot does not respond when a tower tries to contact them. Sometimes another pilot will inform the pilot on the common frequency that the tower is trying to get a hold of them; this usually happens when the pilot is reporting on the air. There is a lot of chatter on the common frequency asking other pilots of their intentions.

AFTRA members report quite a few near midair collisions (NMAC). A reporter might ask pilot about a close call. The reporter will notify AFTRA if it was the result of the bad judgment of a pilot. There is no formal reporting policy in place that identifies who to contact and how to reach them. They usually don't make an official report, and the verbal notification very seldom goes anywhere. When I told him that ASRS reports could be anonymous, he thought that they might be more likely to report a NMAC.

Typically, members notify AFTRA of less than 12 NMAC a year. He is more concerned about weather situations. Some pilots go into fog (he counsels reporters about this). He figures that there are about two dozen weather concerns a year.

He is aware that the local area pilots have an association, and the association holds periodic meetings. He has attended meetings in the past, but that that the majority of the attendees were public use pilots rather than media pilots. He was not aware of any guidelines set up for counseling pilots reported for questionable practices.

AFTRA would like to participate in any group that will try to establish industry guidelines and standards.

A black rectangular redaction box covers the signature of Jeff Baugh. The signature is written in cursive and extends above and below the redaction box.

Jeff Baugh

Date: 3/9/08