



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Person Contacted: Scott Wallace President-National Broadcast Pilot's Association
(NBPA)
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Phone:
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N215TV, Phoenix, AZ, July 27, 2007

Attendees:

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

The NBPA has about 400 pilot members, and some operators as well. There are more helicopters by default, but they do have some fixed wing. There are about 250 television stations, and about 100 use some form of electronic news gathering (ENG).

Heli, Inc., and US Helicopters are two of the major operators, accounting for about 100 programs and 37 programs respectively. These two operate about 150 helicopters between them.

Each station uses its ENG aircraft differently. Sometimes they use it like a fire truck; it is always ready to go with a full time pilot and photographer standing by. When a story needs coverage, the station will dispatch it. Other times, it might be cruising for news; this is especially true during prime time news or traffic hours.

The news director usually runs the operation, and in turn will delegate a launch to news managers. The aircraft could be used to cover special projects or investigative pieces, which could last several days.

The number of flight hours flown for ENG flight operations is market driven. Operators in smaller markets might fly 300 hours a year. Medium markets might fly 400 to 600 hours, and busy markets that fly both traffic and news with one helicopter might fly 1,000 to 1,200 hours per year. Operators devote about 5 hours a day to traffic watch. A typical

duty day would be from 1000 to 1830. Traffic pilots work a split shift to cover the morning and evening traffic.

Some stations could have two crews (traffic and news) up at same time near the prime hours. During the Nielson Ratings sweeps periods in February, May, and November, there is usually a bigger push. Operators may fly twice as many hours in the evening for lead in and out during prime time. Pilots change their shifts to 1400 to 2300.

Typically there are two crewmembers on board. He could not provide an estimate on what percentage of operations utilize a pilot who is also the reporter, pilot with photographer who is the reporter, or pilot, photographer, and reporter on board.

Initial and/or recurrent training for personnel involved in ENG operations is quite varied. Some operations hand the pilot the keys, and let them go fly. Others are very formalized. The pilot will spend time with maintenance personnel to learn the aircraft. Some utilize check airmen. Those operating under Part 135 have operating manuals and flight departments.

The NPBA is a big advocate of factory schooling and standardization training. With the increased number of night flights, there is a need to teach night autorotations to full touchdown. Training standards should match the situations that pilot's are likely to encounter. Pilots are always pilot first, but NPBA feels that it is OK for a pilot to also be a reporter. ENG pilots should be some of most experienced pilots.

He feels that if an operator has its own aircraft, it should have a corporate safety department. Larger corporate units with safety departments typically own independent stations; they usually don't have an aviation department. Some operators have manuals for pilots, reporters, photographers, producers, and directors. He feels that manuals should be shared among them all.

The NBPA encourages cross training in piloting and reporting, but emphasizes that piloting comes first.

The two largest operators follow Part 135 rules on the management side, and have the lowest accident rate in business operations. Some flight operations are under Part 91; most of the smaller operators operate under this part. Some stations own their own helicopters, and they operate under Part 91.

The PBPA and Helicopter Association International (HAI) ENG committee developed a manual called *Recommended Procedures and Guidelines for Electronic News Gathering*¹.

The NBPA encourage Part 91 operators to follow their template so that there are written procedures. He noted that one weak link was turnover, especially in the newsroom and management. Stations typically don't have formalized training or training process for new hires, and thus don't track the training or lack thereof.

¹ See Attachment to Operations Factual Report

One area of concern is weather minimums. Part 91 only requires clear of clouds, which the NPBA does not consider to be high enough. They feel that minimums should be defined in Part 91 or 135. News directors typically don't think about it; some maintain hands off from the operational control. Others dictate the launch, which might compromise safety. News directors sometimes put pressure on pilots to launch. He knew of one instance where the station fired the pilot for not covering a story. However, when the station's corporate parent found out, they fired the news director. The two largest operators entail about 66 percent of the markets. Their policy manuals usually spell out punishment for pilots who don't adhere to minimums. Weather is spelled out for night ops.

Duty time is spelled out in standard operating procedure's manuals along with Part 135 requirements. Part 91 operators don't have established requirements, so those pilots are more likely to get fatigued and have their flying ability affected. Sometimes a pilot will get fatigued, and needs to say no before the end of a scheduled 14-hour duty day. Pilots have an easier time saying no to a flight if they are not a direct employee of the station. They get better support if employed by a helicopter company.

Regarding improvement in policies and guidance, he noted that his particular company has a good operations manual. However, they are working on new formalized procedures. He noted that with growth more variables sometimes have to be formalized.

Some equipment enhancements are desirable. In a recent metro crash, a cameraperson was hurt because there was no shoulder harness. He indicated that everybody needs restraint. The NBPA in conjunction with Heliexpo will make recommendations for further improvements.

Separation between aircraft is more critical in a dynamic situation. In a moving and fluid situation, law enforcement will pick their position. The ENG aircraft will usually orbit them, even in a static situation.

Fellow ENG pilots usually handle aggressive flying. Either another industry pilot or law enforcement pilot will meet with the pilot privately. This also applies to law enforcement pilots who are aggressive. They talk about mistakes made, and how to prevent the situation from happening again.

Each market is different, and some have Letters of Agreement (LOA) with air traffic control towers in their area that address specific issues. His local ENG group has quarterly meetings with FAA tower facilities. They discuss any situations, both good and bad, that have happened, and the meetings are helpful.