

WORLD NEWS

Pilots struggled for control of jet before it plunged into ocean

by Nita Lelyveld
and William R. Macklin
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OXNARD, Calif. — For six minutes, the pilots of Alaska Airlines Flight 261 struggled to maintain control of their descending jetliner after reporting a jammed stabilizer and advising controllers that they thought they could make it to the Los Angeles airport. Then they fell silent, and moments later the plane plunged 17,000 feet into the Pacific Ocean, investigators said.

All 88 people aboard the Boeing MD-83 were presumed killed when it went down Monday, January 31, in turbulent seas nearly three hours into a flight from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, to San Francisco and Seattle.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators sought to interview the pilots of four other aircraft — including a second Alaska Airlines jet — who may have witnessed the crash off Port Mugu, about 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles International Airport.

As the crash probe focused on the possible failure of the MD-83's horizontal stabilizer — a winglike structure on the plane's tail that helps keep the aircraft from bucking up and down — weary rescue workers reluctantly surrendered hope of finding survivors.

"It happened with so much violence. You can see that," said Nick Worobieff, 41, who was among the commercial fishermen and charter-boat operators who joined the search Monday night and Tuesday.

Worobieff, who made two trips to the debris field that by Tuesday afternoon covered a 36-square-mile area, said he saw dozens of body parts in the water, some with clothing still attached.

He described seeing a sneaker, just like one his father has — same size,

same style — floating in the waves, with a leg still attached.

"I feel so, so sorry for everyone," Worobieff said, rubbing an unshaven, windburned cheek.

Hope against all odds that mild weather and calmer seas would aid an unlikely rescue, Coast Guard Vice Adm. Tom Collins said during a news conference that he would not decide until Wednesday morning whether to call off the search for survivors.

So far, the rescue effort has yielded only wreckage, personal effects, and human remains. Four bodies — an infant, two women, and a man — had been recovered as of Tuesday afternoon, Collins said.

Twelve boxes of debris had been collected, picked up by the Coast Guard, Navy, and civilian vessels, but some of the twisted metal and personal belongings that littered the ocean Monday evening had been swallowed by the waves.

"They've found things like a Bible, a child's teddy bear, a wallet, personal things," said a spokesman for the Salvation Army at Port Hueneme, north of Malibu.

As questions about what befell Flight 261 deepened, investigators reported hearing the pinging noise

characteristic of the plane's flight recorders. The data and voice devices could hold valuable information, and NTSB investigators said they were using video equipment on robotic

feet and down to 23,700, then advised that it had "kind of stabilized" the situation.

Minutes later, the pilots — Capt. Ted Thompson, 53, and First Officer

had flown 10,400 hours with the airline. Tansky, hired in 1985, had 8,047 flying hours with Alaska.

In addition to the crew, more than 30 of those lost in the crash were employees of Alaska Airlines or their friends and family returning from vacation, having flown on free employee standby passes.

It's been "pretty brutal," said Alaska spokesman Jack Evans. "I think the impact still hasn't hit us."

Mourners gathered Tuesday near the crash site. As the sun shone brightly over the wide expanse of Silver Strand Beach in Oxnard, dozens gathered on the edge of a pier to stare out at Anacapa Island, the small Channel Island where a park ranger saw

the plane plunge nose down into the Pacific. Many carried videocameras. Some had binoculars.

At one end of the beach, a bouquet of wildflowers was wedged into the sand below a locked-up green lifeguard station. At the other, local residents had erected a simple makeshift shrine — a driftwood cross hung with necklaces of shells, a rosary, red silk flowers. Surrounding it were birds of paradise, candles, and ferns.

Sobbing, Janelle Davis knelt at the base of the cross, where she placed a bouquet of purple and pink daisies and wildflowers, a white candle, and

two photographs. She said her sister, whom she declined to identify, had been on the plane, heading to Seattle.

"You never know when it's going to happen to a family member," she said.

Davis said the family had recently had a sort of reunion in Puerto Vallarta. "We were down there three weeks ago — all of us," she said. One of the photographs showed nine women posing in a room decorated in bamboo furniture. All smiled broadly, including Davis.

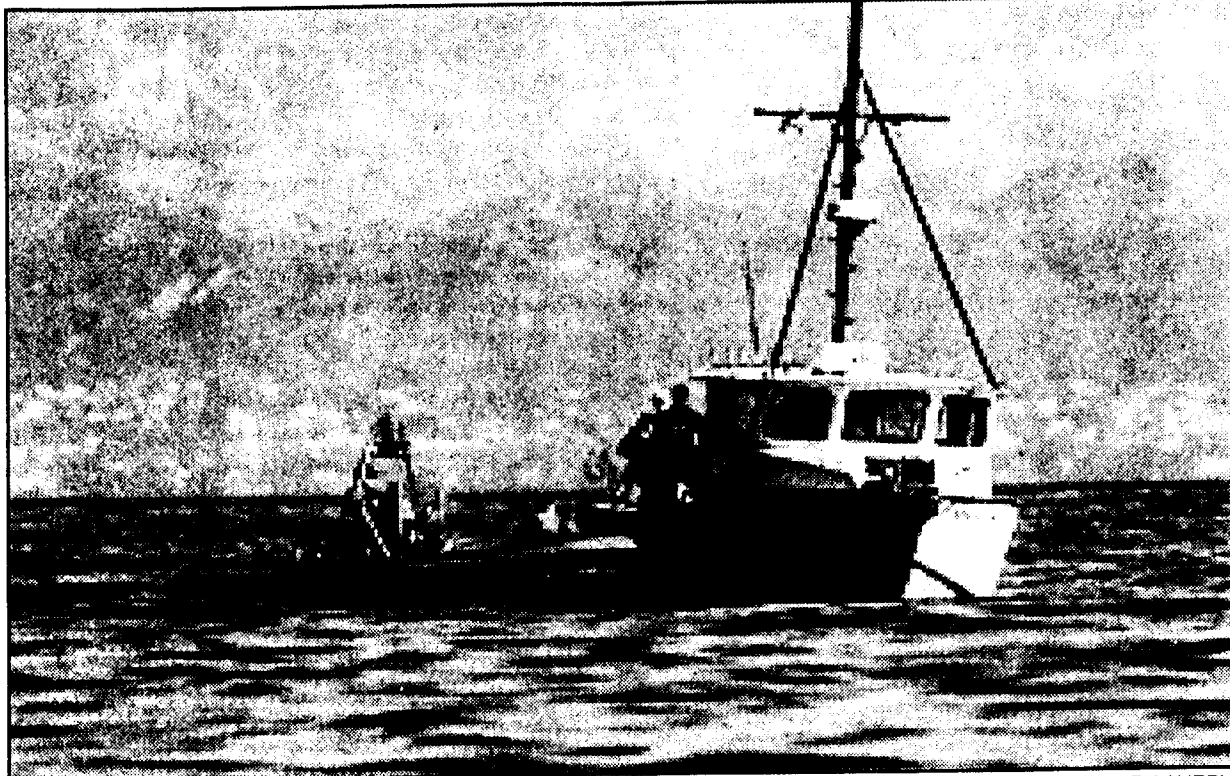
Linda Quintero, 37, said she was drawn to the beach, not to stare, but to send prayers. "Somebody's got to hold out hope for the people," she said. "I keep thinking, 'Maybe there are some people in an air pocket. Maybe it's like that little boy Elian. If he could survive out in the water, maybe somebody can here. Maybe we'll have a miracle.'"

Quintero, who grew up in Oxnard, said she had trouble reconciling the tragedy with her hometown — a place of blue waters, white beaches and sprawling strawberry farms.

She said she heard about the crash Monday afternoon, when her 10-year-old son, Eric, came running toward her in the house. The cartoon he had been watching was interrupted, she said, with an announcer saying that there was breaking news and that children should go get their parents.

"We've been saving to go to Hawaii, and Eric said he doesn't want to go anymore," Quintero said. "But I told him we can't live in fear."

Just before dusk Tuesday, as the setting sun glowed orange over Port Hueneme, about a dozen family members of the dead approached the shore. As police kept a watchful eye, some waded into the chilly ocean waters. Others filled plastic cups with water and sand. On the beach behind them, candles flickered and bouquets lay nestled in the sand.



A Coast Guard boat, left, pulls alongside a squid boat to off-load debris picked up in the area where Alaska Airlines flight 261 crashed Monday evening off Anacapa Island. All 88 passengers and crew died when the plane crashed January 31.

KRT PHOTO BY MARK AVERY

submersibles to try to locate the recorders in about 700 feet of water.

What is already clear from the plane's final radio transmissions is that something went terribly wrong shortly after air controllers at Los Angeles International Airport cleared it at 3:55 p.m. (6:55 p.m. Philadelphia time) to continue north to San Francisco at 31,000 feet.

At a news conference Tuesday at a makeshift rescue center at Port Hueneme, John Hammerschmidt of the NTSB summarized those transmissions, describing a cockpit crew that first reported control difficulties at 4:10 p.m., dropped through 26,000

William Tansky, 57 — specified that their horizontal stabilizer was jammed and that they were having trouble maintaining altitude.

At 4:16 p.m., controllers cleared the aircraft to land at Los Angeles International Airport. The pilots acknowledged the clearance and asked for a block of altitudes in which to fly.

That was Flight 261's last transmission. Five minutes later, the plane and 83 passengers and five crew members disappeared from radar.

Both pilots were Alaska Airlines veterans. Thompson, hired in 1982,

McCain wins first primary Woman swindled by fake man

by Jodi Enda
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NASHUA, N.H. — Republican Sen. John McCain won a landslide victory over Gov. George W. Bush in New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation Presidential primary Tuesday, handing Bush a significant loss in their first head-to-head contest and guaranteeing a harder and longer fight for the Republican nomination.

In the Democratic race, Vice President Al Gore defeated former Sen. Bill Bradley for the second time in eight days, but Bradley vowed to "continue the fight" into the next contest, the possibly decisive 15-state primary March 7.

With 83 percent of the precincts reporting, Gore led Bradley 52 percent to 48 percent. McCain had accumulated 49 percent of the vote, leading Bush by 18 percentage points. Magazine publisher Steve Forbes was far behind in third place and radio commentator Alan Keyes came in a distant fourth.

In a victory speech, McCain characterized his win as a triumph of the little guy over Washington's powerful special interests. As he prepared to leave New Hampshire, he declared that "a great national crusade" had begun.

"It is the beginning of the end, because today the Republican Party has recovered its heritage of reform," McCain declared to a cheering crowd in a hotel ballroom here. Then, turning his attention — and some vitriol — to Democrats, he added, "And it is the beginning of the end for the truth-twisting politics of Bill Clinton and Al Gore."

McCain's victory is a setback for Bush and is bound to raise new concerns among voters and the Texas governor's financial backers about his ability to win in a general election campaign against the Democratic nominee. Though Bush won the Iowa caucuses last week, McCain did not campaign there and they were not viewed as a test of his strength.

Exit polls of New Hampshire voters showed McCain beat Bush in practically every demographic group

— he won with every age group, he won with high school graduates and college graduates, he won with Protestants and with Catholics, he won with the affluent and with the less than affluent. Significantly, he also got more support from women than did Bush, a candidate who has shown himself to be popular with women in national polls.

Bush conceded just 20 minutes after the last polls closed, saying he had called McCain to congratulate him for running "a really good race and a strong race."

"New Hampshire has long been known as a bump in the road for front-runners, and this year is no exception," Bush said. "The road to the Republican nomination and the White House is a long road. Mine will go through all 50 states and I intend it to end at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue."

From here, the Republican contest moves to Delaware, where McCain is not competing, and South Carolina, a state with a large military presence in which the former war hero has been campaigning heavily.

Despite his sizable victory Tuesday, McCain faces an uphill battle against a candidate with much more money and much deeper support within the Republican establishment.

On the Democratic side, Gore, who weeks ago had trailed Bradley in statewide polls, compared his victory to Sunday's Super Bowl game, noting that unlike the Tennessee Titans, who lost by falling short of a touchdown in the final seconds of the game, he had persevered.

"During the day today, some people thought this might be like the Super Bowl, they thought that we might fall a yard short," said Gore, a former senator from Tennessee. "But let me tell you this Tennesseean is in the end zone and it feels great," he said, punching the air for emphasis. "And you ain't seen nothing yet. We've just begun to fight."

Still, Bradley's ability to deny Gore a major victory in New Hampshire assures that the former New Jersey senator will stay in the race until at least March 7, when voters in New York, California, and 13 other states



Two dogs, Curtis, right, and Tailore, left, confront each other outside a polling station in Hancock, New Hampshire last Tuesday. Tailore is wearing a McCain sticker and Curtis a Bradley blanket. New Hampshire voters went to the polls Tuesday in the state's Presidential primary election.

KRT PHOTO BY PETE SOUZA

weigh in. Political experts had warned that a loss here could be deadly to Bradley, coming a week after his loss in the Iowa caucuses by a 2-1 margin.

But by staying close to Gore, Bradley was able to escape the embarrassment of a second drubbing. And with the money to carry on, he could make life difficult for Gore even though he trails in national polls.

Bradley's advisers have said he could withstand a close defeat in New Hampshire, in part because he appears to be strong in New York, where he remains known for playing with the New York Knicks, and because he has at least a shot at winning California, where he has shown strength in fund raising.

"We have made a remarkable turnaround but there is still a tough fight ahead," Bradley told his supporters Tuesday. "Al Gore has run a strong race and I congratulate him. But we are smarter and better prepared and we're ready and eager to continue the fight."

Before the results were known, Bradley challenged Gore to weekly debates, starting this weekend. Gore's campaign said they would consider the challenge. Gore has repeatedly asked Bradley to debate him twice a week, and to eliminate tele-

vision commercials in at least one state, but Bradley has declined, saying that as the underdog he needs ads to make himself known.

The popularity of McCain and Bradley — and the difficulty that many voters said they had in choosing between them — is the strongest indication to date that voters are paying as much attention to questions of integrity as to candidates' positions on issues.

After the Clinton sex scandal and at a time of national prosperity, voters here and in Iowa have said that more than anything else they want a President who can restore dignity to the Oval Office. Working in their favor was a New Hampshire election rule that allows independent voters to vote in the primary for candidates of either party.

Nancy Trask and her husband, Fred Daniels, had so much trouble choosing between Bradley and McCain that the two independent voters decided to split their vote. She voted for McCain, he voted for Bradley, said Trask, a human resources director for a high-tech company.

"We want to see new people," Trask said as she emerged from the voting booth at the Amherst Street Elementary School here. "We don't want politics as usual."

by Chris Krewson
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BELLEFONTE, Pa. — The 52-year-old Boalsburg, Pa., woman never met the man she fell in love with over the CB radio four years ago. Although Linda Vongehr said she didn't have a lot of money, she borrowed from whomever and wherever she could to help him — his CB handle "Cowboy" and real name Randy Dillard.

Last week in Centre County Court, Vongehr — now bankrupt — testified in a preliminary hearing against Barbara Morrow, who police said invented Dillard as part of a confusing swindle that netted nearly \$100,000. Morrow, 45, is charged with theft by deception and related charges.

Vongehr said she first met Dillard in February 1995 over the CB radio, and they began talking two to three times a day, sometimes on the telephone. Dillard told her of many troubles, including a custody fight for his daughter in Texas.

"I asked him if we could meet. I wanted to see what he looked like, what it was like to be around him," Vongehr said. But Dillard said he couldn't, as part of a custody battle for his daughter, Vongehr said. "He said he'd signed an affidavit that said he could not have sex or be with a woman for one year," she testified.

But Dillard said Vongehr should meet a friend in town named Barbara Morrow. A few days later, Vongehr said she met Morrow. "She knocked on my door with flowers in her hand," she testified. "She said they were from Randy."

Morrow told Vongehr that Dillard's father was rich, and owned several banks and oil wells in Dallas, Vongehr testified. Dillard's father hated him, but an uncle was more kind, Vongehr said.

Soon after, Dillard began asking for money to help in the custody battle. But any assistance had to be delivered in cash to Morrow — for if Dillard's father found out someone was helping his son, Vongehr could be in danger, she testified.

So Vongehr said she gave the money to Morrow, who was supposed to take it to the University Park airport where Dillard's uncle would fly into town in a private jet. Morrow would pass the

cash onto him, Vongehr testified. Dillard's uncle would then fly back to Dallas with the money, she testified.

"And all the money I gave to Randy was a loan," Vongehr said. "Randy said he'd pay all the money back."

The amount of money increased as Dillard's problems did — his custody battles caused stomach problems, and Dillard couldn't pay the medical bills, she testified. So Vongehr said she started sending cash, via Morrow, to Dillard for those bills. But the money wasn't enough, and eventually Dillard was sent to jail, Vongehr said she learned from Morrow and messages Dillard sent from prison.

Vongehr sent more and more money, with the final count just shy of \$99,000. And after a particularly large amount — the remaining \$52,000 of Vongehr's divorce settlement — Dillard said he needed still more to get out of prison and get his daughter back. "He said 'Do you have any money left?' I said yes," Vongehr said. "He said any you can send will help get me out . . . he said I could trust him to pay it back."

Morrow eventually moved out of the area, and Vongehr said she started to get suspicious. But it wasn't until the police investigation — prompted after Vongehr's bankruptcy lawyer couldn't find a Randy Dillard in Texas — that Vongehr knew Dillard didn't exist, she testified.

"Understand that [Morrow] devastated this woman, emotionally and financially," said Lance Marshall, the assistant Centre County district attorney who is prosecuting the case.

A search warrant police served on Morrow's trailer yielded about \$5,000 in cash, still bundled, packed away there, Marshall said. But he said it will be difficult to get more restitution, especially if Morrow goes to jail for her crimes.

Morrow faces at least seven years per felony charge, and there are 21 — 14 of theft and seven of receiving stolen property.

Margaret Spicer and Wendy Owens, both of State College, Pa., said after the hearing that they were friendly with Morrow, and that she had impersonated men before to meet women. Owens, who said she knew Morrow for more than 20 years, said she lost track of how many different aliases Morrow used.