

WORLD NEWS

Investigators find Alaska Airlines Flight 261 cockpit voice recorder

by Edwin Garcia, Brandon Bailey, Michael Bazeley, and Frank Sweeney
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PORT HUENEME, Calif. — Just hours after the Coast Guard called off its search for survivors of Alaska Airlines Flight 261, investigators Wednesday, February 2, found the cockpit voice recorder that may hold the key to explaining why the jetliner plummeted into the Pacific, killing all 88 people on board.

Investigators also said they're looking into reports that another crew had trouble with the horizontal stabilizer on the same aircraft on an earlier flight to Puerto Vallarta on Monday, January 31. Alaska Airlines has denied that report. But National Transportation Safety Board officials said they are pursuing an array of theories that could explain the crash of that same aircraft Monday afternoon.

Attention has focused on the possibility of mechanical failure caused by a jammed horizontal stabilizer, which helps pilots control the plane's climbs and descents. Two newspapers reported Thursday, Feb. 3, however, that investigators may also be considering whether the crew may have inadvertently caused the accident as they prepared for an emergency landing.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, Feb. 2, an American Airlines jet made an emergency landing in Phoenix after the pilot reported a possible problem with its horizontal stabilizer.

And relatives of the Alaska Airlines victims gathered in a Los Angeles hotel, where they prepared to visit the crash site in a large group some time last Thursday.

A Coast Guard admiral said it had been a difficult decision to stop searching for survivors, but two days of intensive searching had convinced officials there was no hope that anyone on the plane was still alive.

"We have tried to give every chance for success at reaching survivors," said Vice Admiral Tom Collins. "We must proceed to the next stage of this incident, this tragedy."

Collins said it was time to begin focusing on recovering the wreckage of the plane.

Less than 20 minutes before the Alaska jetliner plunged into the ocean, while en route from Puerto Vallarta to San Francisco and Seattle, the flight crew had notified air traffic controllers of a problem with the stabilizer on their MD-83 aircraft. After struggling with the problem for several minutes, the crew received permission for an unscheduled landing at Los Angeles International Airport.

Citing unnamed sources, the *Washington Post* and *Dallas Morning News* both said that preparations for emergency landing could have included changes in control settings that could change the air

flow over the plane's tail — which, in turn, could have caused a loss of control or an abrupt stall.

Earlier, the safety board said its investigators were planning to interview a different crew of pilots who flew that plane on its southbound journey to Puerto Vallarta earlier that Monday. The *Seattle Times* reported Wednesday, Feb. 2, that the earlier crew had radioed the airline's maintenance base in Seattle to discuss problems they were having with the stabilizer.

"We don't know if that's true. We are investigating that," said NTSB member John Hammerschmidt, during a midday press conference. Alaska Airlines denied the report.

"We stand behind our comment earlier this week that the aircraft had no history of stabilizer prob-

lem," said airline spokesman Greg Witter. He added that any further comment would have to come from the NTSB.

Investigators also were analyzing a tape recording of a second conversation, this one between airline maintenance workers and the crew that was flying when the plane crashed.

That crew had also called the Seattle base for help, as they were struggling to keep control of their plane in the final minutes before the crash.

NTSB Chairman Jim Hall said the tape of that conversation should give investigators "a very good understanding of what the pilots were encountering and what they were trying to do with the difficulty, the problems that they had reported to air traffic control."

"It covers all of their conversations while they are trying to troubleshoot this problem," Hall told CNN.

The conversations are apparently difficult to hear, because the tape also contains a great deal of background noise. But according to the *Dallas Morning News*, which cited an unnamed source, they were reporting that the stabilizer wouldn't respond to their commands.

Officials said the tape had been sent to a NTSB laboratory in Washington, where experts would be able to enhance the recording.

In a series of television interviews Wednesday, Feb. 2, Hall also gave the first official confirmation

well as all of the other information we have on the stabilizer."

The horizontal stabilizer is the distinctive 40-foot wing mounted high on the tail of all MD-80 jets.

Problems with the stabilizer are relatively rare, according to FAA records. Since 1982, there have been 50 reports of serious mechanical problems with the stabilizer, and its attached elevator flaps, on MD-80 series aircraft. None involved Alaska Airlines aircraft. On Wednesday morning, however, an American Airlines jet of the same series made a successful emergency landing at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, about 20 minutes after taking off for Dallas. An NTSB spokesman said ground mechanics confirmed the plane's stabilizer had jammed.

A few hours later, at the crash site off the coast of Southern California, the Coast Guard acknowledged what many had suspected earlier — that after two days of intensive search efforts, there was no more chance of finding any survivors. Officials delayed their announcement for several hours on Wednesday so they could notify the victims' families and explain the decision.

"Clearly... there was an expression of several desires to keep the search efforts going," Collins said. But he added, "I was very frank with them."

It's always difficult to call off a search for survivors, he explained.

"It's not a decision you look forward to making. But it was the correct decision."

The search for survivors ended 41 hours after the jet crashed into the cold waters of Santa Barbara Channel, about six miles off the Ventura County Coast. Dozens of specially equipped military boats, helicopters, and airplanes had scoured an area of 1,100 square miles — along with a number of volunteer fishing boats — but they found only the remains of four victims.

As the effort shifted to a salvage operation, the first steps on Wednesday involved deployment of three ROVs — remotely operated vehicles, or unmanned robots that can be sent underwater to videotape the wreckage while under the control of operators on the surface.

Officials said their first priority was locating the flight recorders. Experts have said these should give investigators a good idea of whether mechanical failure caused the crash, since the flight crew had been struggling with mechanical problems for at least 11 minutes before the plane went down.

The voice recorder, which was recovered by one of the ROVs late Wednesday afternoon, should contain actual cockpit conversations between the two pilots as they were fighting to save the aircraft. It was lifted on board the *Kellie Schouest*, a privately owned salvage ship that works on contract with the Navy.

The second recording device, which investigators are still hoping to locate, contains a variety of data about the plane's speed, altitude, and the recent operating history of various mechanical and electronic systems.

Separate investigative teams are also studying the maintenance history of the MD-83 aircraft and analyzing radar data from both the Federal Aviation Administration and the Air Force. In addition, they are interviewing pilots of four other airplanes that were flying in the area and may have witnessed the crash.

Meanwhile, more than 100 relatives of people who were on the doomed flight had gathered Wednesday, Feb. 2, at the Renaissance Hotel in Los Angeles, where the Red Cross was operating a counseling and assistance center in conjunction with the airline.

Many of those who had arrived at the hotel remained in a state of shock, said Chris Thomas, a Red Cross volunteer.

"I just want to know that our family members didn't suffer and that it was just fast," said Janis Ost Ford, whose brother Bob Ost was on board the plane. Officials planned to take family members to the coast near the crash site Thursday, Feb. 3. A memorial service was to be arranged later last week.

"They will be able to deal with the emotional responses; they'll be able to see the search-and-rescue recovery process," Thomas said. Mercury News staff writer Rodney Foo and wire services contributed to this report.

First lady declares candidacy for U.S. Senate

by Susan Feeney
Knight-Ridder Tribune
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PURCHASE, N.Y. — First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, telling New Yorkers that she may be new to the neighborhood but "not new to your concerns," made history Sunday by formally declaring her candidacy for the U.S. Senate from New York.

Appearing before a giant "Hillary" banner with President Clinton and daughter Chelsea, Clinton told an adoring crowd, "I care about the same issues you do. I understand them, and I know how to make progress on them. That's why, my friends, I want to be your senator."

Her announcement made Clinton, an Illinois native who has never held public office, the first Presidential spouse ever to run for office. After almost a year of rocky preliminary campaigning, she is in a virtual dead heat with her likely opponent, Republican New York Governor Rudy Giuliani.

"She's trying to reintroduce herself and take a second try to make a first impression," said Lee Miringoff, a poll taker at the Marist Institute in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

The famously verbose President said not a word Sunday, so the spotlight could shine on his wife. He instead sat behind the first lady, clapping and nodding with spousal approval. As a part of that effort, Cabinet officials in the audience were not acknowledged, while virtually every state and local lawmaker in attendance was.

New York Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who is retiring from the Senate, said during his introduction of Clinton that he also knew former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who is Clinton's idol and role model.

"Hillary, Eleanor Roosevelt would love you," he said.

Clinton, seeking to reassure New Yorkers and to answer critics who have questioned her candidacy in New York, said: "Some people may ask why I'm doing this here and now. That's a fair question," she said. "I may be new to your neighborhood, but I am not new to your concerns."

She suggested she is a centrist Democrat who has been fighting for issues such as education, children, health care, gun control, and women since long before her husband was elected President. "I'll be on your side," she said again and again.

Miringoff, the poll taker, said the number of New Yorkers bothered by the first lady's outsider status dipped below 50 percent for the first time in his most recent survey. Howard Wolfson, Clinton's press secretary, predicted that concern would continue to decline as the first lady campaigns more in the state.

But Bruce Teitelbaum, Giuliani's campaign manager, said that, given what Teitelbaum called the mayor's strong record of rejuvenating New York City, Clinton's candidacy "is going to be a tough sell."

Referring to what is expected to be a fierce race — and probably the most expensive in U.S. Senate history — Clinton said, "I know it's not going to be an easy campaign. But hey, this is New York."

Clinton and her advisers sought, through her speech and a biographical video on Sunday, to remake and soften her sometimes controversial public image.

"I make a mean tossed salad and a great omelet," Clinton said at one point in the video crafted by Hollywood producer Linda Bloodworth-Thomason.

The film focused on Clinton's childhood and career but played lightly on the last seven years. It also, for the first time, drew considerable attention to first daughter Chelsea, whom the Clintons had kept out of the political spotlight.

Saturday night, the Clintons attended a potluck supper in their honor in their new neighborhood of Chappaqua, N.Y. The campaign let it be known that Clinton walked in carrying a chicken casserole.

She told the *New York Times* in an interview that, on her "listening tour" of the state, she learned that voters have a caricature image of her.

"What I have found is that people don't know anything really about the work that I did before Bill was elected President. And [they] know very little — except about health care — about the work that I've done in the White House," she said.

Clinton, who led the administration's failed health overhaul in 1993, said, "It became so apparent to me that in order to introduce myself to the voters of New York, I was going to have to go back and really share a lot of my lifestyle."

There was no mention during the exuberant kickoff of the scandal-plagued Clinton administration or how Clinton, while her husband was governor, once parlayed a \$1,000 investment into \$100,000 on the cattle futures market.

And there were few doubters among the invited crowd of some 1,700 supporters who packed the gymnasium at Purchase College of the State University of New York, where the New York Knicks practice. The site is not far from the Clintons' new home on Old House Lane in Chappaqua.

But at the White Plains Coach Restaurant and Diner, in another nearby suburb, opinion about the race was as passionate and deeply divided as the public opinion polls suggest.

"Can't stand her," said John Phelan, a retired real estate manager and registered independent.

"I don't care for her principles," his wife, Carolyn Phelan, added. "I don't think she has any."

Suzie Zweig, an office supply saleswoman and Democrat, praised Clinton's concern for education and health care and said it is important to put more women in the U.S. Senate.

"I don't think it matters where they're from. Bobby Kennedy also was not from New York," she said.

Businessman Ray Fernandez said bluntly he was backing Clinton because, "I don't like Giuliani. As far as I'm concerned, he can drop dead."

Stock trader Pete Viglucci also supports the mayor. "He might be crude but he's been effective."

Of all the breakfast diners interviewed Sunday morning, only Chris Kamenos, owner of the glass-block-and-neon diner, said he was among the small slice of New Yorkers who are undecided.

First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton outside the White House on Dec. 2, 1999.

KRT PHOTO BY HARRY HAMBURG



Study says origin of AIDS was 1930, disputing other recent claims

by Jeremy Manier
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SAN FRANCISCO — As researchers on Tuesday, February 1, 2000, officially presented the details of a study that pushes the origin of the AIDS pandemic back to around 1930, their results gave new ammunition to an obscure yet often emotional scientific dispute over recent claims that the virus first entered humans during tests of an early oral polio vaccine derived from primates.

Most HIV experts at the Seventh Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections praised the meticulous work that went into the new date estimate, calculated by running a massive database of HIV genetic sequences through one of the most power-

ful supercomputers in the world.

Researchers from Northwestern University contributed to the study, which is summarized in the current issue of *Science* magazine and was reported by the *Chicago Tribune* on Monday, Jan. 1. Such work may give crucial insights into HIV's long-term evolution and future vaccines for the virus.

Yet some of the world's top AIDS authorities at the conference were just as interested that the new date of 1930 seemed to weaken the controversial thesis, advanced in a book last year by British science writer Edward Hooper, that the virus spread to humans through accidental contamination of an oral polio vaccine tested in central Africa during the late 1950s.

Many researchers doubt Hooper's argument, saying it is

more plausible that HIV spread from chimpanzees to people who hunted the animals for food. Moreover, they say, the polio vaccine theory could have a destructive effect, especially in Africa where some people have a distrust of Western researchers and may draw the incorrect conclusion that polio vaccines are dangerous.

One conference attendee with a personal stake in the debate is Dr. Stanley Plotkin, a professor emeritus of immunology at the University of Pennsylvania. In the 1950s Plotkin was a research fellow at the Philadelphia-based Wistar Institute, which conducted the African polio vaccine tests.

Plotkin said Tuesday, Feb. 1, that he believes the new estimate gives fresh evidence that HIV entered people decades before the vaccine tests took

place.

"I am more than ever convinced that the book is completely wrong," Plotkin said, referring to Hooper's book, *The River: A Journey to the Source of HIV and AIDS*.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said Tuesday, Feb. 1, that the new estimate of HIV's origins damages the argument that HIV came from a polio vaccine.

"It's important because of all the publicity *The River* is getting," Fauci said.

The lead author of Tuesday's study, Bette Korber of the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, took a relatively balanced view in assessing the significance of her work.

"My work doesn't disprove Hooper," Korber said. "It just makes [his thesis] less likely."