

State/Local

Delta pilot admits possible detours before take off

IRVING (AP) — The pilot of a Delta Air Lines jetliner that crashed Aug. 31, killing 14 people, testified Tuesday that some rules might have been bent in re-advancing the Boeing 727 for takeoff but that preparations were adequate.

Larry Davis admitted seeming deviations from the rules under questioning by aerospace engineer Jeff Gorney as the National Transportation Safety Board opened an inquiry into the crash on takeoff at Dallas International Airport. Ninety-four people survived.

For instance, the Delta veteran of 23 years said he had used hand signals instead of calling out completion of each item on the pre-flight checklist and had made a takeoff briefing at the gate instead of on the runway.

"I like to get as much done as possible before we get into the position of getting rushed," Davis said.

Gorney also said a flight attendant was allowed into the cockpit when the jet was waiting to take off, despite a Federal Aviation Administration rule requiring a "sterile" cockpit once the plane has left the gate.

But he said the plane was "waiting in a line of traffic" and added: "I don't believe it was a critical phase of flight, but technically it was (in violation)."

The FAA requires pilots to go through a checklist but does not specifically require a verbal "challenge and response" between pilots. The agency, however, has made clear on many occasions that such an exchange is preferable.

According to NTSB documents, Delta procedures Aug. 31 only suggested a verbal exchange during some phases of the checklist.

FAA recently chastised Delta for inadequate cockpit discipline

and poor coordination and communications among pilots, and Delta has said that it will formalize the checklist process with increased emphasis on verbal challenges.

Delta procedures say the pre-flight briefing should take place "before takeoff" but also says it could begin during the "before start check," which normally occurs about five minutes before the plane pushes back from the gate.

Davis testified that he went to full power as soon as he felt engine "compressor stalls" unlike any he had ever felt before.

"It was like driving a car 60 mph down the highway and driving into a water puddle. It was pronounced deceleration," Davis he said under questioning from a representative of Pratt & Whitney, manufacturer of the airplane's engines.

Investigators have ruled out mechanical failure as a cause of the stalls, and have focused instead on the position of the wing flaps, which the NTSB said were found retracted instead of extended for takeoff in the wreckage.

The wing flap lever in the cockpit was in the wrong position after the crash, the board said. But in the cockpit recording, the co-pilot can be heard saying "15, 15, green light" before takeoff to verify the flaps' proper deployment.

Davis said Tuesday he did not know if the other crew members might have touched the flap handle as the plane was in trouble.

A pilots union contends a "split flap configuration" may have occurred, placing one flap up and one down. The union contends that in that case, the takeoff warning system of the 727 would not necessarily alert the crew of the danger.

GSS president: Organization hopes to 'blend into' A&M

By Richard Tijerina
Staff Writer

Not much has been heard of the Gay Student Services lately, but the organization's president said the group is still around, and trying to "blend into the woodwork" at A&M.

The president, who asked not to be named, said that although the group is not very large, it maintains a steady group of 15 to 30 members.

The group's main function, he said, is to provide services to help both members and nonmembers live more easily in the local gay community.

Among the services GSS provides are roommate referral services for gay people who want to live with other gays, guest speakers at GSS meetings and Texas A&M classes to talk about gay relationships, AIDS and dealing with homosexuality.

GSS is a support group, the president said.

Its primary goal is to make the lives of gays in the local gay community a bit easier, he said.

"We try to help those individuals new to the area become part of the gay community," he said. "This is a way for people who cannot go to bars, who are not 21 or older, to come and meet people who have something in common with them. We are basically a support group."

He said the GSS also holds periodic "rap sessions," which serve as a way for group members to talk informally about a variety of topics, ranging from the latest gay movies, first homosexual experiences and the ways of talking to their parents about homosexuality.

Discrimination and harassment are not problems to gays on campus, the president said, although Larry Hickman, the group's faculty adviser, is trying to push an anti-discriminatory bill through the A&M's Regulations and Rules committee.

"That (discrimination) has pretty much stopped around here," the president said. "It has really died down since some of the older people in the organization, who were here when A&M was trying to kick the GSS off campus, have graduated. But we have blended into the woodwork and are now a part of the University."

Attempts to make the organization blend in on campus met with many hardships in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

GSS was denied recognition in 1976 on the grounds that homosexual conduct was illegal in Texas. University officials said they believed it was wrong to recognize an organization that was likely to "incite, promote and result" in homosexual activity.

However, a federal judge in Dallas later struck down the section of the Texas Penal Code forbidding sexual acts between adults of the same sex.

After the judge's decision, the University argued that GSS was a social organization, and A&M does not recognize social groups.

The Texas Court of Appeals later stated that A&M's refusal to give benefits which are available to other campus organizations to GSS denied the group its First Amendment rights.

However, in 1982, U.S. District Judge Ross Sterling ruled that the University had not violated any protected constitutional right by denying the group official recognition.

That decision was reversed on Aug. 3, 1984, when the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that A&M would have to recognize the group as an on-campus organization.

The case wound up in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in April 1985.

The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the August ruling stating that A&M must recognize the group.

Military expertise gives Tower potential for defense secretary

WASHINGTON (AP) — John Tower has been talked about as a potential defense secretary for the better part of a decade, so it's no surprise that he's now considered the front-runner for that post in the new Bush administration.

But it isn't coming easily, with almost daily reports of negotiations over conditions President-elect George Bush wants to set before possibly appointing his fellow Texan.

No one doubts the military expertise of the 63-year-old Tower. He was chairman of the Armed Services Committee when he retired from the Senate in 1985 after 24 years. And he served as an arms negotiator for President Reagan after that.

By all accounts, despite apparent opposition from some Bush aides, Tower is the leading choice to head the Pentagon for the new president. However, he was mentioned as a possible defense secretary for President Reagan — a development that never occurred.

A source close to the Bush transition office said Tuesday that a decision on Tower could come by Wednesday.

The source, who spoke only on condition he not be named, said Bush likes Tower and thinks he would do a good job at the Pentagon. But some Bush advisers have raised objections, partly because they do not have a high regard for a number of people who have worked

for Tower and might have an inside track for top Pentagon jobs should he be named. The negotiations supposedly concern who would control which appointments on Tower's Pentagon team.

Tower himself has said little in public in recent days. His aides say each day, when asked: No call from the White House yet.

Tower has worked for Bush before. In fact, he was one of Bush's key emissaries to the platform committee at the Republican National Convention last summer — essentially speaking for Bush in the negotiations.

In the Senate, Tower championed Reagan's military buildup and in-

crease in defense spending, but if he gets the Pentagon job he'll become Bush's point man.

And Bush, in publicly describing the role of his Defense secretary, said last week that his nominee must be willing to take a fresh, tough look in these times of budgetary crunch at the Defense Department.

Also, the president-elect's choice for national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, suggested cuts of at least \$300 billion from the Reagan administration's military spending plans for 1990 to 1994. The suggestions were included in a report presented to Bush by former Presidents Ford and Carter.

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