

FAMILIES OF CONTINENTAL FLIGHT 3407

VOLUNTARY SAFETY PROGRAM TRACKER - PASSENGER CARRIERS

MAINLINE CARRIERS	# Aircraft	AQP	FOQA	LOSA
AirTran	138	NO	Y	Y
Alaska	114	Y	Y	Y
Allegiant	52	NO	NO	NO
American	692	Y	Y	Y
Continental	331	Y	Y	Y
Delta	799	Y	Y	Y
Frontier	54	NO	Y	Y
Hawaiian	35	Y	Y	NO
Jet Blue	154	Y	Y	Y
Southwest	548	NO	Y	NO
Spirit	31	NO	Y	NO
United	431	Y	Y	NO
US Airways	346	Y	Y	Y
Virgin America	31	NO	Y	NO
Vision Airlines	13	NO	NO	NO

OVERALL	AQP	FOQA	LOSA
MAINLINE	8/15	13/15	8/15
REGIONAL	13/24	16/24	10/24
TOTALS	21/39	29/39	18/39

REGIONAL CARRIERS	# Aircraft	AQP	FOQA	LOSA
Air Wisconsin	70	Y	Y	NO
American Eagle	286	Y	Y	NO
Atlantic Southeast	164	Y	Y	Y
Chautauqua	78	Y	Y	NO
Colgan	48	NO	Y	Y
ComAir	97	Y	Y	NO
Compass Air	36	Y	Y	NO
Era Alaska	10	NO	NO	NO
Executive Air	39	NO	NO	NO
ExpressJet	269	Y	Y	Y
Golet	25	NO	NO	Y
Great Lakes	38	NO	NO	NO
Gulfstream	23	NO	NO	NO
Horizon	55	Y	Y	Y
Mesa	91	Y	Y	NO
Mesaba	92	NO	Y	NO
Peninsula	57	NO	NO	NO
Piedmont	53	NO	Y	Y
Pinnacle	142	Y	Y	Y
PSA	49	NO	Y	Y
Republic	90	Y	Y	NO
Shuttle America	56	Y	Y	NO
SkyWest	295	Y	NO	Y
Trans States	28	NO	NO	Y

Source: FAA Report to Congress, Voluntary Safety Programs, 3/15/11

NOTES:

Regional Airline Association Members highlighted in yellow

All 38 passenger carriers have ASAP programs

There are 94 total Part 121 operators, of which 38 have 15 or fewer aircraft

Regional Airlines not accounted for? Cape Air, CommutAir, Island Air, New England Airlines

THE FACES OF CONTINENTAL FLIGHT 3407



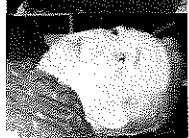
Beth Ann
Kushner



Darren
Tolsma



Susan
Wehle



Clay
Yarber



Shawn,
Dawn, and
Donald
Mossop



Ferris
Reid



Ronald
Gonzalez



Brad
Green, Sr.



Larry
Beutel



Sean
Lang



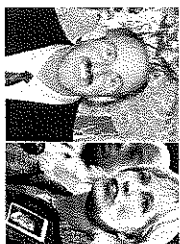
Alison
DesForges



Jean
Smeez



Jerome
Krasuski



Ernie
West



Beverly
Eckert



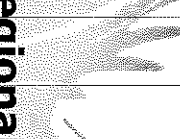
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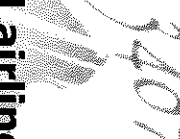
Dipinder
Sidhu



Elyce
Kauser



Ruth
Harel



David
Bonner



Donna
Prisco



John
Roberts III



Coleman
Mellett



Don
McDonald



Douglas
Wielinski



John
Fiore



Shitbin
Yao



Georges
Abu Kareem



Matilda
Quintero



Brian
Kuklewicz



Joseph
Zuffoletto



Madeline
Loftus



Kristin
Satran



Julie
Ries



Rebecca
Shaw

**Regional airline
passengers deserve
crews who receive the
benefit of the same
training and safety
management resources
as crews on the major
carriers.**



Steve
Johnson



Nicole
Koczynski



Jonathan
Perry



Ronald
Davidson



Linda
Davidson



Marvin
Renfrow



Gerry
Niewood



Jennifer Neill
and Baby



Guo
Zhaoqiang



Mary
Abraham



Mary 'Belle'
Petys



Kevin
Johnston



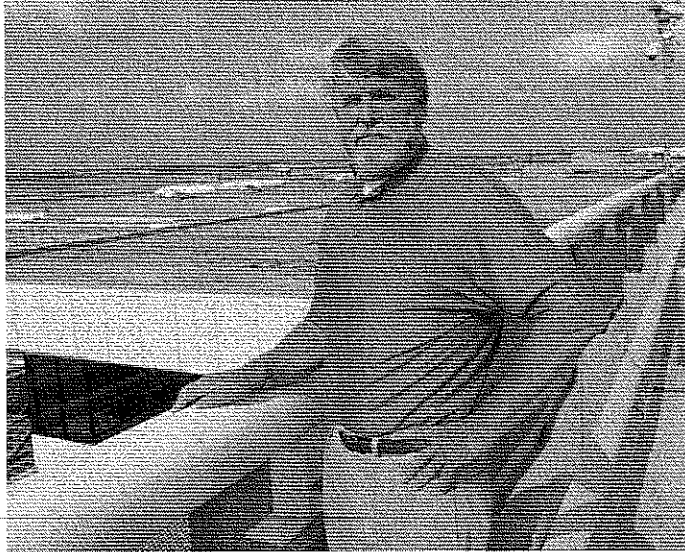
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"He said: 'I want you to do this right away and if not, I will have to take significant action against your airline.' We, of course, took that to mean that he'd shut us down." Dan Morgan, former vice president of safety and regulatory compliance at Colgan Air, recalling FAA official's warning to improve the airline's troubled safety culture. Jerry Zremski

Colgan warned by FAA about safety prior to 3407 crash Top official voiced 'very serious' safety concerns

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HOUSTON – Six months before Colgan Air's Continental Connection Flight 3407 tumbled from the sky and crashed into a home in Clarence, killing 50 people, a key federal aviation official delivered a stern message to Colgan executives.

"I have very serious concerns about the safety culture at Colgan Air," Nick Scarpinato, director of the Federal Aviation Administration's flight standards office in Herndon, Va., told executives of the regional airline, according to Dan Morgan, the former vice president of safety and compliance at the regional airline.

"He wanted us to stop virtually everything except the daily operations and immediately bring everybody in and talk to them about safety," Morgan said in a recent interview near his Houston home. "He said: 'I want you to do this right away and if not, I will have to take significant action against your airline.' We, of course, took that to mean that he'd shut us down."

Former Colgan pilots who asked not to be named confirmed much of what Morgan said about the safety culture at the airline.

In a statement, the FAA confirmed that it had threatened disciplinary action against Colgan in August 2008, including possibly suspending or revoking its operating certificate.

But the FAA never took the tough actions it threatened.

Instead, in response to the FAA warning, Colgan developed a safety presentation that top executives delivered to employees. That presentation didn't prompt any in-depth review or feedback from Scarpinato or any other FAA official, according to Morgan.

Six months later, on Feb. 12, 2009, Flight 3407 crashed in Clarence, taking 50 lives. Federal investigators blamed the crash on pilot error.

While that tragedy prompted a thorough federal investigation and several congressional hearings and the most far-reaching aviation safety legislation in decades, the story of the FAA's worries about Colgan remained untold until now.

Other former Colgan officials contacted by The Buffalo News have refused interview requests, but Morgan said he decided to speak out now because he's still worried that the major airlines continue to contract out many of their flights to low-cost regional operators like Colgan.

In a four-hour interview, Morgan offered several new details about the regional airline industry's penny-pinching ways, which, he said, stemmed from a "disastrous" business model that, even today, forces the regionals to cut costs at every opportunity to try to be profitable.

For example, Morgan noted the hiring of inexperienced pilots, who sometimes had to work exceptionally long days, and pilot training programs that could have been better.

"I am very troubled by it because I think the lowest-cost operator drives regional airlines to maybe to hold their costs at a minimum, just like we did at Colgan, using minimum training, just enough to get by," Morgan said.

'Shoestring operation'

The cost-cutting ethos of the regional airlines became clear to Morgan soon after he joined Colgan on Aug. 1, 2008, following a career spent largely at Continental Airlines, then one of the world's largest.

"It was very – I hate to use the pejorative term – low rent," Morgan said. "It was really a shoestring operation."

Morgan immediately noticed that the people in the key roles of director of operations and chief pilot were very young.

So, too, were the pilots. With the airline industry starting to run short on experienced pilots leaving the military and regionals like Colgan paying less than half what pilots would make at the major airlines, Morgan noticed that some of the Colgan pilots were not the same caliber as those at Continental.

"There were some people who towed a banner up and down the beach," he said. "That was a lot of their commercial aviation experience."

Less than two weeks after Morgan joined Colgan, Scarpinato called several top Colgan executives in to the FAA's Flight Standards District Office in Herndon, Va.

The message Scarpinato delivered – that he had serious concerns about Colgan's safety culture – "was burned into my mind," Morgan said.

Several of Scarpinato's concerns involved the maintenance of Colgan's airplanes. Most notably, a maintenance crew had recently installed a "trim switch" backwards on one of the small Saab planes that Colgan used to fly between small communities.

That was a worry because the trim switch helps control a plane in flight – and because only five years earlier, two Colgan pilots died while trying to reposition a plane from Cape Cod to Albany after a maintenance crew improperly installed a trim cable, causing the plane to lose control and crash just off the shore of Yarmouth, Mass.

The maintenance error on that Saab aircraft was one of the issues troubling Scarpinato.

"FAA officials met with Colgan executives in the summer of 2008, when the airline was expanding its fleet, to discuss recurring maintenance issues identified through FAA surveillance data," the aviation agency said in a statement. "The FAA officials reviewed open civil penalty cases and raised the possibility of certificate action" – that is, pulling Colgan's operating license or fining the airline.

FAA criticized

Scarpinato told the Colgan executives to act, Morgan said. In response, the airline developed a PowerPoint presentation that top executives used in meetings with employees all across the country.

When the PowerPoint presentation was completed, Morgan said, he sent a copy to Doug Lundgren, the FAA's principal operations inspector for Colgan.

Morgan said Lundgren replied with two words: "OK, thanks."

And that, Morgan said, was the only FAA feedback he got on the safety presentation.

Asked about the lack of feedback, FAA spokesperson Laura J. Brown responded with a statement indicating that the agency's August 2008 meeting with Colgan executives had its intended effect.

"Subsequent to the meeting, Colgan added staff to operations and maintenance, and FAA data confirmed improvements," the FAA statement said.

But Morgan offered a different explanation for why there was so little FAA follow-up, and why the slide show attracted no attention during the investigation of the crash of Flight 3407.

The FAA "didn't want to have to say: 'We saw problems in August 2008 and all we did was make them do a slide show,'" Morgan said. "There was no way the FAA was going to acknowledge that. That's why nobody's ever heard of that."

Short-staffed everywhere

Morgan's job was to make Colgan safer, and he and other recently hired Colgan executives worked to do that through the fall of 2008 – only to be shocked at how much they had to do to bring the airline up to what they saw as the industry standard.

"At that point in time in late 2008, there was zero leadership training," Morgan said. "We really didn't do leadership training for captains. We didn't have any kind of review program for first officers."

Harry Mitchel, then Colgan's vice president for operations, was working to set that up, while Morgan worked to bolster the voluntary safety programs that were quickly becoming the industry standard.

Mitchel and Morgan were part of a new leadership team that took the reins at Colgan after Pinnacle Airlines, a Memphis-based regional carrier, bought the Virginia-based airline in early 2007.

Founded in 1991 by a Virginia state senator named Charles J. Colgan, Colgan Air was largely a family operation up until the time of the Pinnacle purchase. And to hear Morgan tell it, the airline he joined in 2008 was one that was caught between its old family-business ways and the new reality that it was expanding rapidly.

"We were all pretty shocked to get there and see the lack of experience, the lack of people," Morgan said.

Colgan was short-staffed everywhere from its corporate offices to its cockpits. Lundgren, the airline's inspector at the FAA, was adamant that the airline needed to add more people in its flight operations and flight standards offices, Morgan said.

And Scarpinato kept pressing the airline to end its practice of making its pilots reposition empty airplanes to different airports after they were done flying passengers for the day.

While FAA regulations limited passenger airline pilots to eight hours a day of flying time back then, Colgan insisted they could continue flying empty planes once their shift ended under another provision of federal aviation law. The result, one former Colgan pilot told The News, was that some pilots sometimes found themselves working 20-hour shifts.

Under relentless pressure from Scarpinato, Colgan finally abandoned that double-shifting of pilots late in 2008, Morgan said.

"I never did agree" with the practice of working the pilots that hard, Morgan said. "I came out of the union environment at Continental, and we never did that."

Running short of cash

Colgan found itself under pressure at the time, though, because it was expanding rapidly. It had contracted with Continental to fly a new and larger plane, the Bombardier Dash 8 Q400, between larger markets.

By mid-2008, Colgan had 15 new Q400s and about 150 new pilots – all of which made Morgan, the vice president for safety, a little apprehensive.

"I thought the training was rushed through" for the pilots who were flying the Q400, Morgan said. "But it met the minimum requirements, and the FAA approved it. The training met standards, but you just had a lot of people to train."

Colgan had to get those new planes online in order to get paid by Continental, but once that happened, the smaller airline encountered another, bigger problem. Somehow Colgan had locked itself into a contract with Continental that made Q400 flights big money-losers for the smaller airline.

Always a bare-bones operation, Colgan now on occasion found itself running short on cash.

"There was more than one occasion in that fall of 2008 when Harry Mitchel had to give his credit card number to some captain somewhere to buy gas, because some station we were flying to hadn't been paid and they weren't going to give us any gas," Morgan said.

Mitchel did not respond to an interview request, but a former Colgan pilot confirmed that the airline executive had to buy jet fuel on his credit card on occasion. Similarly, the pilot said, at one point a contractor in Syracuse refused to de-ice a Colgan plane because the company hadn't paid its bills.

Crash ended safety illusion

In spite of all of Colgan's cash troubles, Morgan said: "At 10:20 p.m. on Feb. 12, 2009, I thought we were a very safe airline."

After all, Colgan was complying with FAA rules and bolstering its safety programs.

At 10:24 that night, though, Morgan's phone rang. It was Colgan's director of security, reporting that one of the airline's planes may have just crashed near Buffalo.

At the time, Morgan shared a northern Virginia house with Mitchel and Buddy Casey, Colgan's president. After telling them what happened, Morgan began making arrangements to pull a Colgan plane out of passenger service to ferry the executives to Buffalo as quickly as possible.

Once again, Colgan's cost-cutting culture came into play, at the worst possible moment: Another Colgan executive, whom Morgan declined to name publicly, suggested that the leadership team take the cheaper route and wait for a commercial flight to Buffalo at 6 a.m.

"It just verified for me everything from the past few months, that everything was on a shoestring," Morgan said. "We're so afraid to pull a plane out of revenue service for a crash?"

Thankfully, Morgan said, Pinnacle Airlines President Philip Trenary insisted that the Colgan executives get to Buffalo on a company plane as soon as possible.

There, the executives met with the families of the victims and worked with the National Transportation Safety Board as it began an investigation that eventually reached a damning conclusion.

Flight 3407's co-pilot, Rebecca Shaw, had misprogrammed an important switch on the controls of the Q400. After a stall warning, pilot Marvin Renslow reacted in exactly the wrong fashion and, in essence, crashed the plane.

Federal investigators found that Shaw was not trained in programming that switch and that Renslow did not have simulator training in the plane's stall-recovery equipment.

On top of that, the voice data recorder revealed that the crew was talking about issues that had nothing to do with the flight. In addition, Shaw was yawning repeatedly, and the investigation revealed that neither pilot had a full night of bed rest before the crash.

Because of the pending legal action stemming from the crash, Morgan said he could not comment on the causes.

But he said the crash led to a stark reckoning within Colgan.

"Our safety culture probably didn't do enough to push for following the rules as stringently as we should," he acknowledged. "Not that we weren't pushing; we did have safety programs, but those programs were still in development," in part at Pinnacle's behest.

Morgan said the crash led to a quick boost to Colgan's safety culture.

Morgan left Pinnacle in January 2012 when a new management team came in, only to watch from afar as Pinnacle sunk into bankruptcy. Pinnacle abandoned the Colgan name last year and is now a wholly owned subsidiary of Delta Airlines. Pinnacle announced Friday it was renaming itself Endeavor Air.

Flights go to lowest bidder

Looking back at it all, Morgan, who is now 63 and retired, sees the Colgan/Pinnacle saga as a cautionary one for the airline industry.

He said the major airlines' continuing practice of bidding out many of their flights to regional airlines poses a problem because, invariably, those flights go to the lowest bidder.

"What makes this so potentially dangerous is that if you don't cut your costs, somebody else will," Morgan said.

Legislation passed in wake of the crash of Flight 3407 has already led to tougher rules aimed at curbing pilot fatigue, and pending rules will boost pilot training and experience requirements.

The new fatigue and training rules are important, Morgan said.

"As long as there is a minimum to get by, somebody's going to be at the minimum to get by," Morgan said. "You raise the minimum, somebody's going to be at the minimum, but at least everybody's going to do a little more now."

Still, Morgan worries that regional airlines don't do enough to meet the lofty safety standards of the major airlines – and the majors don't force their partners to do so.

For example, he recalled that a top safety official at one major airline was happy to give Colgan information – but he refused to review Colgan's safety programs.

"When an airline doesn't want to have liability, they will not get involved in oversight, because then it would be shown legally that well, you came in, you looked at the programs, you didn't find anything wrong, or if you did, you didn't say anything," Morgan explained.

That means it's up to the nation's regional airlines to improve safety standards largely on their own – which, Morgan said, is just what Colgan was trying to do before Flight 3407 crashed.

"We were taking steps," Morgan said. "We were trying very hard to move this airline down the road and make it a really good professional airline. We didn't get there in time."

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