

DOCKET NO. SA-516

APPENDIX W

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC**

**INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT
NYANG TSGT. CHARLES RAMERIEZ
JANUARY 15, 1997
(14 pages)**

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BEFORE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20594

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IN THE MATTER OF TWA FLIGHT :
800; INTERVIEW OF: :
CHARLES RAMIREZ. :
- - - - - X

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION

The above entitled matter came on for interview pursuant to notice before NORM WIEMEYER, NTSB Official, at the New York Air National Facilities in Westhampton Beach, New York, on January 15, 1997.

1 APPEARANCES:

2

3 NORM WIEMEYER

4 NTSB Official

5

6 LOU BURNS

7 Air Line Pilots Association

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WITNESS:

CHARLES RAMIREZ/C-130 Communications Specialist, New York Air National Guard.

(Tape 4, Side B, only interview on side.)

(No exhibits were presented or accepted into evidence at or as a result of this interview.)

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Today is January 15th,
3 1997. We're at the facilities of the New York Air
4 National Guard. We're interviewing Charlie Ramirez, a
5 member of the New York Air National Guard. My name is
6 Norm Wiemeyer with the National Transportation Safety
7 Board. I'll be starting the questioning; followed by
8 Lou Burns of the Air Line Pilots Association -- and he
9 will so identify himself.

10 To start with would you give us your full
11 name and please spell your last name.

12 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir. My name is Charles
13 A. Ramirez; that's R-A-M-I-R-E-Z.

14 MR. WIEMEYER: And what is your affiliation
15 here at the Guard?

16 MR. RAMIREZ: I'm an Airborne Communications
17 Specialist.

18 MR. WIEMEYER: And could you give us just a
19 little bit of a background what that means?

20 MR. RAMIREZ: Basically my primary role is to
21 coordinate communication and -- during a rescue, as
22 well as to running -- run tracking equipment to -- to
23 guide the airplane to a crash site of a boat or a
24 plane, or a sunken boat. We track ELT.

25 MR. WIEMEYER: Does that include the use of

1 radar equipment?

2 MR. RAMIREZ: No. That's -- radar is
3 navigator's responsibility.

4 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. What specific
5 equipment, then, do you use to track ELT?

6 MR. RAMIREZ: We have an on-board tracker
7 that was -- it's a pretty -- pretty old version of a --
8 a tracking model. Basically what it does is it --
9 get -- it -- we're able to track different radio
10 frequencies on a uniform band.

11 MR. WIEMEYER: Is that kind of DF-type of
12 operation?

13 MR. RAMIREZ: Basically. The -- the tracking
14 equipment runs from the cargo area. And it's a duty
15 that, you know, we have to keep current -- current on.
16 And, specifically it is to track, you know, an ELT.

17 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. What was your
18 experience with regards to the night of July 17th, 1996
19 and the loss of TWA 800?

20 MR. RAMIREZ: Basically -- let's see.
21 Around -- around five or 10 minutes prior we had just
22 completed a troop deployment right over here at the DZ.
23 We headed out to the water after we had gotten -- we
24 saw all the chutes and the guys were on the ground
25 safe.

1 We headed out to -- to the water. We set up
2 for search patterns. And I don't remember at -- you
3 know, the exact time. It was approximately 30 -- 8:35
4 to 8:40. I was standing in the cargo area -- in the --
5 on the flight deck; right behind the pilot.

6 And we were -- I believe we were turning into
7 it and just leveling off our wings when we saw what
8 appeared to be two, like, big balls -- two meteors,
9 like, just falling out of the sky. I saw it a little
10 bit later than the rest of the crew that was up on the
11 flight deck. You know, their -- their reactions drew
12 my attention to the window. And it was, like, right --
13 it, like, what appear -- it appeared to be, like, right
14 in front of us. These just two pieces just falling.
15 Firey balls.

16 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. How would you judge
17 them size wise?

18 MR. RAMIREZ: All right. It was really
19 difficult. You know, I -- I thought we were -- we were
20 a lot closer than we were, which kind of threw the size
21 off quite a bit. But at -- you know, at first glance
22 to me it looked like, you know, it was, like, a 50-,
23 60-foot ball, you know, dropping. And when we got on-
24 scene, you know, that was -- it was -- it was obviously
25 a lot bigger than that.

1 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. What were the light
2 conditions at the time? Outside lighting conditions?

3 MR. RAMIREZ: There was -- the sun was just
4 -- was just setting. I think it -- it was pretty good
5 light. It was a little bit hazy. So, you know, it --
6 it made the -- the fire, you know, a little brighter.
7 A little more orange, you know, 'cause --

8 MR. WIEMEYER: Could you still see the sun at
9 all?

10 MR. RAMIREZ: No. Not that I -- not that I
11 recall.

12 MR. WIEMEYER: What -- these fireballs, how
13 would you describe the color of those?

14 MR. RAMIREZ: Just basically bright orange to
15 even to yellow.

16 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. And those two objects
17 that you just described were the only two fireballs
18 that you saw?

19 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir.

20 MR. WIEMEYER: Or, emissions of light? Or,
21 you know, anything along those lines?

22 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir.

23 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Around seeing the
24 fireball that -- fireballs that you saw, did you see
25 any other light emissions, or anything along those

1 lines, around the scene of those two fireballs?

2 MR. RAMIREZ: No, sir.

3 MR. WIEMEYER: You didn't see any streaks, or
4 vapor trails, or anything like that?

5 MR. RAMIREZ: No, sir.

6 MR. WIEMEYER: If you will now, go on and
7 pick up right there and tell me what events, then, took
8 place.

9 MR. RAMIREZ: Okay. When -- when the two
10 objects impacted with the surface, it appeared to -- to
11 me, you know, send flames shooting vertical from the
12 impact site. And that could've just been, you know, an
13 optical illusion from it falling so fast. But it -- it
14 just seemed to shoot up flames going up about, you
15 know, eight -- to about 800 feet.

16 And we were at 1,500 feet at the time. We
17 descended. Our helicopter, which was also doing
18 training on the water, was a little ahead of us, from
19 what I believe, getting on-scene. And they told us to
20 steer clear 'cause there was still falling debris.

21 It took us probably approximately two minutes
22 to get on-scene. And --

23 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. I'd like to regress
24 just a little bit.

25 When you first saw the fireballs --

1 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir.

2 MR. WIEMEYER: -- in your field of vision,
3 where were they altitude-wise from, let's say a level
4 with what you consider the horizon?

5 MR. RAMIREZ: Right. Well, like I said, we
6 were at 1,500 feet and they appeared to be above us
7 falling, probably around -- I don't know -- three,
8 4,000 feet, you know. Like -- I mean, that's the first
9 point where I saw them.

10 As far as in reference to the horizon, they
11 seemed to be well above the horizon when I first saw
12 them. And we -- we basically watched them drop from
13 that point.

14 MR. WIEMEYER: Do you have an estimate of how
15 they were when you first saw them?

16 MR. RAMIREZ: Like I said, I --

17 MR. WIEMEYER: No?

18 MR. RAMIREZ: -- would -- I mean, at the
19 point where I saw them it was -- I would -- I would
20 guess the three to 4,000 feet maybe.

21 MR. WIEMEYER: Above the surface?

22 MR. RAMIREZ: Above the surface, yes, sir.

23 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. And did you -- did they
24 stay in your view until they contacted the water?

25 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir.

1 MR. WIEMEYER: Could you describe the rest of
2 the fall and the water impact, then?

3 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes. It was -- there was, you
4 know, black -- black smoke was in trail of the -- the
5 major -- the larger of the two objects. I had a very
6 -- a better view of the larger object than the smaller
7 object. And I -- I basically focussed my attention on
8 that.

9 And as it got closer to the surface it kind
10 of -- it didn't fall, like, straight down. But it kind
11 of, like, corkscrewed a little bit. And -- but it
12 still was, you know, a round object. And when the --
13 the bigger of the two hit the surface, you know, it --
14 it just appeared to me like flames went vertical.

15 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Could --

16 MR. RAMIREZ: And then -- and then they
17 dissipated. And then we just vectored to -- to the --
18 our last view.

19 MR. WIEMEYER: In viewing that scene to the
20 best of your recollection, can you identify whether or
21 not you saw any solid objects? Or was it just the
22 fireball?

23 MR. RAMIREZ: No, just the fireballs. I --
24 I -- I believe -- you know, my perception was, again,
25 that we were closer than we were. And when we started

1 our -- our trek to the scene, you know, it -- it always
2 seems to take long -- longer than -- than it feels, you
3 know. But it -- it took a lot longer. And then, you
4 know, everybody was talking about the distance.

5 We actually think we first estimated, like,
6 seven miles. And then it ended up being more like 14.

7 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Once you got on-scene
8 what transpired?

9 MR. RAMIREZ: We took a wide orbit, you know,
10 heading in. We still didn't know what it was. We made
11 a radio call into -- to the command post and notify
12 them that we had a -- some -- some type of object on
13 fire, in the water.

14 And we took a wide orbit in. After viewing
15 -- I think we descended to about 500 feet. We took a
16 -- you know, a good look around; took a few passes.
17 And after viewing the debris we determined it was an
18 aircraft.

19 We had saw some of the -- the exit slides --
20 the raft deployed. Some were deflated. We marked them
21 with -- with flares. We had the helicopter go down and
22 take a look to see if there was any visible survivors.
23 At which that point the command post was calling to get
24 the helicopter sent back to Pawn [phonetic sp.] station
25 so they can switch out the pilot.

1 So, I had -- I had relayed that call to them.
2 And I think they -- I think they -- I don't know if
3 they checked one or two sites and then they headed back
4 in.

5 We maintained an orbit. Approximately 10
6 minutes later we got a call from command post. It was
7 Col. Stevey, who works at the FAA, and notified us that
8 20 miles off the Hampton DOR a trade con lost tower
9 with a TWA Flight 800. And we gave them our position,
10 which was approximately 20 miles off the Hampton DOR.

11 MR. WIEMEYER: And during the course of that
12 event do you recall hearing, or were you in contact
13 yourself, with a Navy aircraft?

14 MR. RAMIREZ: Not at that point, no. No,
15 sir. There -- there -- a Navy aircraft came on-scene
16 -- there was a call made. And I think the pilots took
17 it and asked us if we needed any assistance. I don't
18 really remember the particulars.

19 But --

20 MR. WIEMEYER: You do remember a call from a
21 Navy aircraft, though, that --

22 MR. RAMIREZ: Right. A -- a Viking -- I -- I
23 can't really remember the call sign.

24 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. Well, I don't have any
25 further questions.

1 Lou?

2 MR. BURNS: Hi, Charlie. I'm a TW 74
3 captain, representing the Air Line Pilots Association.

4 The -- you thought you were closer to the
5 fireball and it turned out this was because it was so
6 large --

7 MR. RAMIREZ: Right. The --

8 MR. BURNS: -- or because it was so --

9 MR. RAMIREZ: -- because of the size.

10 MR. BURNS: Yeah.

11 MR. RAMIREZ: And I -- and I think also
12 because of the haze kind of threw us off a little bit.
13 You know, I -- it -- it filtered -- seemed to filter a
14 lot of the -- maybe some of the other details of the
15 object. And it just made it more -- a little bit
16 cleaner than it -- than it was, probably. You know,
17 I -- I'm just speculating here.

18 MR. BURNS: Yeah. The corkscrewing motion
19 that you described, was that just one of the fireballs
20 coming down? Or were they both --

21 MR. RAMIREZ: At that time I was --

22 MR. BURNS: -- doing that?

23 MR. RAMIREZ: -- fixated on the larger of the
24 two.

25 MR. BURNS: Yeah.

1 MR. RAMIREZ: And I won't -- I only --

2 MR. BURNS: It was the larger of the two that
3 was --

4 MR. RAMIREZ: The larger of the two, yes,
5 sir.

6 MR. BURNS: Yeah. Okay. Thanks. That's all
7 I have Charlie.

8 MR. WIEMEYER: I have one follow-up, Charlie.
9 During the course of watching that whole scene, did you
10 see another aircraft up higher above all of this that
11 would've been proceeding from your left to your right?
12 In other words he'd have been going northbound?

13 MR. RAMIREZ: No, sir.

14 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay.

15 MR. RAMIREZ: We -- we took a large survey of
16 the area. But I wasn't paying a lot of attention -- it
17 was -- our attention was focussed -- or, at least
18 mine -- my attention was focussed on the surface. And
19 really didn't take a good look above.

20 MR. WIEMEYER: Okay. I appreciate your help
21 very much. And thanks for taking the time to talk to
22 us.

23 MR. RAMIREZ: Yes, sir.

24 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded [no
25 time noted.])