

MGMCOMP  
WHEELER TECHNOLOGY  
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Western  
Union Mailgram



1-082601U220037 08/08/90 ICS WA16614  
00056 MLTN VA 08/08/90 JN27906

PHXA

AUGUST 8, 1990

DEAR EXPRESS BUILDER,

WE ARE DEEPLY SADDENED TO REPORT THAT ON THE MORNING OF JULY 25TH, ON THE WAY TO OSHKOSH, N210EX CRASHED KILLING ALL THREE ABOARD. WE LOST THREE FINE YOUNG MEN, ALL EMPLOYEES. THEY WERE GARY MAVROVIC, COMPANY PILOT, CHUCK GEITZEN, ENGINEER AND BRIAN BERG, SALESMAN.

THE CRASH WAS INVESTIGATED BY A TEAM INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, TELEDYNE CONTINENTAL MOTORS, AND WHEELER TECHNOLOGY. THEY FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF FAILURE ON THE PART OF EITHER THE AIRFRAME OR THE ENGINE, NOR DID AUTOPSIES REVEAL EVIDENCE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL OR CARBON MONOXIDE POISONING. THE PLANE HAD BEEN FUELED ABOUT AN HOUR PRIOR TO THE CRASH AND THE ENGINE WAS RUNNING AT IMPACT.

THE WEATHER WAS CLEAR WITH FIFTY MILES VISIBILITY, TEMPERATURE 70 DEGREES, CALM WINDS, WITH THE TERRAIN ELEVATION AT 4500 FEET. AT THE TIME OF THE CRASH THE PLANE WAS NEAR GROSS WEIGHT WITH PASSENGERS, BAGGAGE, SHOW MATERIALS, AND FUEL. THE NTSB DETERMINED THAT THE AIRPLANE WAS WITHIN ITS CG ENVELOPE.

PRIOR TO DEPARTURE, GARY AND CHUCK HAD DISCUSSED WITH OTHER EMPLOYEES THEIR INTENTION TO RELIEVE THE BOREDOM OF THE FLIGHT BY ROLLING THE AIRPLANE AND FLYING "ON THE DECK". UNFORTUNATELY, THESE DISCUSSIONS WERE NOT REPORTED TO ME.

IF THEY HAD ATTEMPTED A ROLL AT THE NORMAL ENTRY SPEED OF 185 MPH, IT PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL DUE TO THE EXTRA WEIGHT AND THE HIGH DENSITY ALTITUDE. THERE WAS A WITNESS TO THE CRASH AND HE REPORTED THAT THE PLANE DESCENDED RAPIDLY NOSE DOWN IN A TIGHTENING SPIRAL WHICH IS A CLASSIC CONCLUSION TO A FAILED ROLL. THE AIRSPEED INDICATOR WAS FROZEN AT 200 MPH AT IMPACT, AND THE INVESTIGATORS FELT THAT THE PLANE HAD NOT DESCENDED FROM A GREAT HEIGHT.



ALL WHO KNEW THESE MEN WOULD AGREE THAT NONE WOULD HAVE DONE ANY MANEUVER THEY FELT TO BE CARELESS OR DANGEROUS. FURTHERMORE, GARY WAS AN EXCELLENT PILOT, AS MANY OF YOU CAN ATTEST. HOWEVER, OVERCONFIDENCE IS SOMETIMES SUBSTITUTED FOR GOOD JUDGEMENT, AND AN IMPULSIVE EXECUTION OF A MANEUVER THAT HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL MANY TIMES PREVIOUSLY, WITHOUT ACCOUNTING FOR DIFFERENT CONDITIONS IS A TRAP THAT HAS CAUGHT MANY PILOTS. MOREOVER, AS THE NTSB INVESTIGATOR POINTED OUT, PILOTS WITH GARY'S TIME OF ABOUT 1200 HOURS OFTEN FEEL THEY ARE BEYOND MISTAKES. AS SOMEONE WROTE, "FLYING IN ITSELF IS NOT INHERENTLY DANGEROUS, BUT IT CAN BE TERRIBLY UNFORGIVING OF INATTENTION."

OUR LOSS IS PERSONAL AND DEEP. THESE THREE MEN WERE WELL LIKED, RESPECTED, AND DEEPLY COMMITTED TO OUR COMPANY, OUR CUSTOMERS AND OUR PRODUCT, THE EXPRESS. GARY AND CHUCK WERE INTIMATELY INVOLVED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXPRESS AND THEIR UNFAILING INSISTENCE ON PERFECTION IS REFLECTED IN THE ENGINEERING AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE EXPRESS AND ITS KITS. ALL THREE HAD A DEEP AND LONG ABIDING LOVE OF AVIATION AND WERE TOTALLY ENTHRALLED WITH THEIR WORK. THEY CONTRIBUTED TREMENDOUSLY TO OUR COMPANY AND THE EXPRESS, AND HAVE THEREFORE LEFT THEIR MARK ON AVIATION HISTORY.

I UNDERSTAND THAT SOME OF YOU HAVE RECENTLY RECEIVED A LETTER FROM HUGH SMITH OF SMOOTH AIR, INC., IN WHICH MR. SMITH IMPLIES THAT THERE ARE STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS WITH THE EXPRESS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN ADDRESSED BY WHEELER AIRCRAFT, AND THAT WHEELER AIRCRAFT IS EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES AND MAY NOT SURVIVE. AS YOU MAY KNOW, SMOOTH AIR IS AN ASPIRING COMPETITOR OF WHEELER AIRCRAFT. IN HIS LETTER, MR. SMITH IMPLIES THAT AN ACCIDENT INVOLVING AN EXPRESS WHICH OCCURRED ON JULY 25, 1990, WAS A RESULT OF STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS WITH THE AIRCRAFT, WHICH IS ASTONISHING SINCE THE LETTER APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SENT OUT BEFORE THE FAA HAD ARRIVED AT THE CRASH SITE TO INVESTIGATE THE ACCIDENT AND BEFORE ANY FINDINGS OR CONCLUSIONS HAD BEEN REACHED AS TO THE CAUSE OF THE ACCIDENT. WE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN ADVISED BY THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD INVESTIGATORS THAT BASED ON THE INVESTIGATION WHICH HAS BEEN CONDUCTED TO DATE, THERE IS NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THE ACCIDENT WAS CAUSED BY ANY STRUCTURAL OR DESIGN PROBLEMS WITH THE EXPRESS. IN SHORT, THERE IS NO BASIS FOR THE IMPLICATIONS MADE BY SMOOTH AIR. THE DESIGN OF THE EXPRESS WAS COMPREHENSIVELY REVIEWED AND FULLY TESTED PRIOR TO OUR OFFERING THE EXPRESS KITS FOR SALE. I AM APPALLED THAT SMOOTH AIR HAS ATTEMPTED TO USE THESE UNFORTUNATE DEATHS FOR THEIR OWN FINANCIAL GAIN.

I GIVE YOU MY PERSONAL ASSURANCE THAT THERE IS NO VALIDITY TO THE ASSERTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN MADE BY SMOOTH AIR. THE FINANCIAL CONDITION OF WHEELER AIRCRAFT AND ITS ABILITY TO CONTINUE TO PROVIDE YOU WITH KITS AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE HAS NOT AND WILL NOT BE IMPAIRED BY THIS ACCIDENT.





I HOPE THAT THIS LETTER HAS RESOLVED ANY CONCERNS WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN RAISED BY THE RECENT LETTER FROM SMOOTH AIR. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS CONCERNING ANY OF THE ISSUES DISCUSSED ABOVE, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT ME PERSONALLY.

ON A MORE POSITIVE NOTE, AT OSHKOSH EVEN PRIOR TO THE NTSB FINDINGS, THE PUBLIC SEEMED RELUCTANT TO BLAME THE EXPRESS FOR THE ACCIDENT. BOTH PRIOR TO, AND FOLLOWING THEIR REPORT, THERE WAS STRONG, CONTINUED INTEREST IN THE EXPRESS AS MANY OF YOU WITNESSED. THE MAIN HINDRANCE TO SALES WAS LACK OF A DEMONSTRATOR, NOT THE CRASH. I BELIEVE WE COULD HAVE COME CLOSE TO OUR SALES PROJECTIONS EVEN WITH THE CRASH, HAD WE HAD A DEMONSTRATOR. WE HAVE MORE THAN A THREE MONTH BACKLOG, WE TOOK ORDERS AT OSHKOSH, AND WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ORDERS. AS FAR AS THE CRASH(ES) AFFECTING COMPANY SURVIVAL, YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT ROBINSON HELICOPTER HAD SEVERAL CRASHES AND FATALITIES OF CUSTOMER HELICOPTERS DUE TO POOR MAIN ROTOR ASSEMBLY, AND THE PROTOTYPE BONANZA BROKE UP IN FLIGHT TEST DUE TO FLUTTER. BOTH COMPANIES EXPERIENCED THESE PROBLEMS EARLY IN THEIR PROGRAMS AND BOTH SURVIVED. IN OUR CASE, THE AIRFRAME HASN'T BEEN AT FAULT IN EITHER CRASH, SO WE DON'T ANTICIPATE ANY LONG TERM NEGATIVE EFFECTS.

AND SO GAIL AND I ARE HOME AGAIN AND ARE MOVING STRONGLY TO GET EVERYTHING BACK ON TRACK. REGRETFULLY, SOME OF OUR EMPLOYEES COULDN'T COPE WITH THE ACCIDENT AND LEFT THE COMPANY. OTHERWISE THE ATTITUDE HERE IS UPBEAT AND POSITIVE AND WE WILL MEET OUR COMMITMENTS TO OUR BUILDERS. IF NOTHING ELSE, GAIL AND I ARE TENACIOUS AND HAVE SOLID EXPERIENCE IN GETTING THROUGH A CRISIS LIKE THIS. WE WILL TAKE EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO PRESERVE YOUR TRUST IN US AND WE WILL GET YOUR PLANES IN THE AIR!

OUR FIRST CUSTOMER BUILT PLANE (MICHAEL BETTS) IS AT THE POINT OF FLYING, AND HARDY HUBER ISN'T FAR BEHIND. WE ARE PUSHING TO GET ALL OF YOU TO THIS STATE OF GRACE AND LOOK FORWARD TO SUN 'N FUN AND OSHKOSH WITH LOTS OF EXPRESS' IN ATTENDANCE.

I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE THIS LETTER WITH A WARM AND HEARTFELT THANKS TO OUR BUILDERS AND THEIR WIVES WHO HELPED SO MUCH AT OSHKOSH. YOU MADE OSHKOSH THE BEST EVER FOR US, DESPITE THE TRAGEDY.

SINCERELY,

KEN WHEELER  
PRESIDENT

22:20 EST