NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

NEWSDAY, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2001

Pilots' Losing Battle

'Black box' tells of fight to control jet

Pilots of American Airlines Flight 587 fought to control the jet just before it plunged into the Rockaway peninsula Monday after rattling sounds filled the cockpit on takeoff from Kennedy Airport.

The captain noted a "wake encounter," a kind of air turbulence caused by another plane, and the co-pilot called for maximum power just seconds before they lost control of the jet, investigators said yesterday.

Sounds from the harrowing final moments of the Santo Domingo-bound flight on the cockpit voice recorder retrieved from the crash scene in Belle Harbor were among the "significant pieces of progress" made in the crash investigation, National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Marion Blakey said at a news briefing.

NTSB member George Black said investigators received "remarkably similar" accounts in interviews of two flight crews that were in the area and several eyewitnesses.

"They saw the aircraft 'wobble' — that was the word they used — they saw pieces come from it, then it went into a steep spiral and into the ground," he said.

More will be known, Black said, after synchronizing the cockpit voice tape with data from the second of the Airbus A300's "black boxes" — the flight data recorder — which investigators recovered yesterday. The flight data recorder, which records altitude, speed and instrument settings, was flown to the agency's headquarters in Washington for analysis.

"Things are progressing rapidly," Blakey said.

Officials have said indications are that the crash was an accident, not the result of sabotage. Still, they have not ruled out terrorist activity as a cause of the crash, which killed 260 passengers and crew when the twin-engine jetliner nose-dived into the Belle Harbor neighborhood at 9:17 a.m., setting homes ablaze. Police yesterday identified five Belle Harbor residents in three destroyed homes on Beach 131st Street as missing, for a potential death toll of 265.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said 262 bodies had been recovered, and 180 body parts had been found at the crash scene in Belle Harbor, where residents gingerly began to move about the streets.

"We are hopeful we'll be able to restore loved ones to their families as soon as possible," Giuliani said at a news conference at the Jacob Javits Convention Center in Manhattan, where a family assistance center has been set up for relatives of those killed.

NTSB officials yesterday all but ruled out engine damage from a flock of birds as a cause, with Black saying examinations showed "no indication from the engines of any kind of foreign-object damage."

The two engines were torn from the jet as it plummeted to the ground. Both, though damaged, were recovered and "are largely intact," Blakey said.

Preliminary analysis of the cockpit recorder, which Black reiterated is a "good quality" recording totaling 30 minutes, 38 seconds, revealed a mind-boggligly quick succession of events as Flight 587 rolled down Runway 31 Left and soared into the sky:

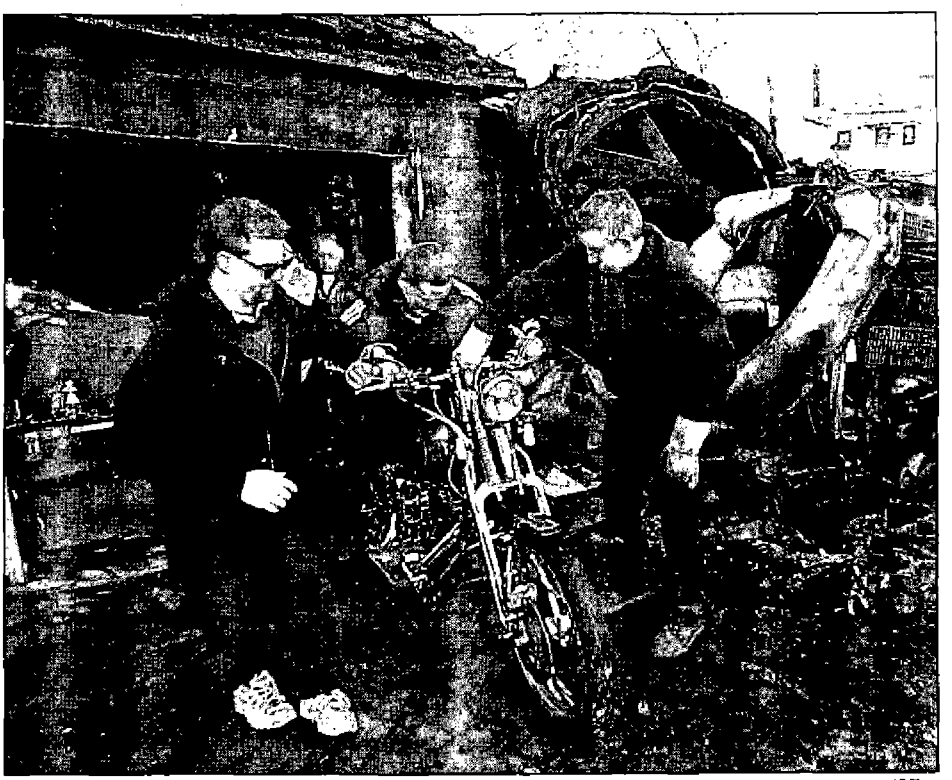
- With co-pilot Sten Molin at the controls, an "air-frame rattling noise" was heard 107 seconds after the plane began its takeoff roll.
- At 114 seconds, the pilot commented about the "wake encounter" that NTSB officials attributed to a Japan Air Lines 747 jumbo jet that took off just ahead of the American Airlines flight.
- At 121 seconds, more rattling was heard.
- At 125 seconds, the co-pilot called for maximum power.
- At 127 seconds, the recording has sounds indicating loss of control of the jet.
- Finally, at 144 seconds, the cockpit voice recording ended.

Asked about the effect of the "wake encounter," NTSB officials said there was two minutes and 20 seconds separation between the two planes, enough to avoid a problem.

Experts suggested that such turbulence could not exert enough aerodynamic force on a jetliner to cause it to break up in the way that Flight 587 did, with part of its huge vertical tail fin falling into Jamaica Bay before the plane dived to the ground.

Investigators also learned yesterday that the rudder trim actuator, which helps turn the plane, was set at 10 degrees to the left shortly after takeoff. Last night, an American Airlines pilot said that set-

See CRASH on A38



AP Photo

Belle Harbor residents check out a motorcycle that appears to be in good condition yesterday despite Monday's tragic jet crash.

This story was reported by Sylvia Adcock, Bobby Cuza, Beth Holland, Dan Janison, Graham Rayman, Joshua Robin, Katie Thomas and Lauren Terrazzano. It was written by Holland.

INSIDE

Ellis Henican	Page A33	A Queens Neighborhood Copes with Disaster	Page A39
Weary Passengers Return to Skies	Page A36	Parishoners Return To Belle Harbor Church	Page A40
Javits Center Once Again Becomes Emergency Base	Page A37	Pataki as Grief Counselor	Page A41

CITY_21MC100_011832971

NYC-WTC_000414933