

EPISODE 227

[EPISODE]

[0:00:08] IP: Hello, and welcome to episode 227 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:00:17] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Ian, how's it going?

[0:00:19] IP: It's going well, Jason. How are you, sir?

[0:00:21] JR: I'm good. I'm temporarily home, in between bouts of being in Dulles, Virginia. I'm enjoying being home with my actual microphone and not on hotel Wi-Fi for a change.

[0:00:33] IP: Everything's going according to plan. But you made it home. I don't want to call it surprisingly, but close up calls, you could make it without derailing travel plans entirely.

[0:00:43] JR: Yes. I refer to the Dulles LaGuardia route as the cursed route, because it is frustratingly short. It's only 500 something miles, but it is incredibly prone to lengthy delays and very last-minute cancellations. On this occasion, I was originally booked on the 5.30 flight and said, "You know what? I'm done at the office today. I'm going to fly standby on the 4.35 flight." It was a very good decision, because we took off. We just beat storms in Dulles. We landed at LaGuardia. We blocked into the gate 17 minutes early. That was unprecedented for that flight.

But less than an hour later, I had a co-worker who was I was supposed to be flying with at first, but sorry, I abandoned her. Sorry, Lisa. When they got into LaGuardia, a mere 60 minutes later, they waited over three hours on the ground for a gate at LaGuardia, as the entire airport just totally devolved into chaos. In less than an hour, it was quite something. I paid for it. Our little Mesa E175 had an inoperable APU, which meant no air conditioning while on the ground, which is not something you want to hear when it is 97 degrees out, or about 40 degrees Celsius, and I'm pretty sure 10,000 percent humidity. Given the trade off, I would do it again in a heartbeat.

[0:02:09] IP: Somebody who was following along watching how things were devolving said, “You know it's bad when one of the country's major airports, which only has two runways, is using one of them as an aircraft storage facility, rather than an active runway.”

[0:02:24] JR: That was not great. They simply ran out of places to put aircraft. Nothing was going out. Stuff was still coming in. Nothing could push back, because all of the taxiways were blocked. You couldn't even get to a runway. It was quite something. It wasn't even whether here in New York, it was whether in the Northeast. It wasn't even that severe. It really came down to FAA not being able to keep up with reroutes to get aircraft new clearances, to get out of LaGuardia, so they just sat there.

They sat and they sat and they sat and then aircraft couldn't get off gate, and then aircraft coming in couldn't get to their gate. It was just yet another instance of the FAA's low staffing levels in New York just biting everyone all at once. In this case, very suddenly and without warning. I used a lot of my travel karma to avoid that one this time.

[0:03:17] IP: Well, nicely done, sir. Nicely done.

[0:03:18] JR: Thank you. I will be taking Amtrak back to New York next week.

[0:03:23] IP: There you go. That's Jason's flying and we wish him the best in his upcoming travels later this week.

[0:03:30] JR: Something going on in Chicago, buzzing around, right?

[0:03:33] IP: Yeah, we have NASA buzzing around right now. The NASA DC-8 flying laboratory out of the Armstrong Flight Research Center is performing, basically sniffing the atmosphere. I didn't do too much in-depth reading into this, but the top line is actually really interesting, why they're doing these things.

The program itself is designed to understand why ozone levels, which have been decreasing since the banning of chlorofluorocarbons and all that good fun stuff. Why they have stabilized above EPA standards, above major cities in the US.

[0:04:18] JR: Somehow flying a DC-8 at 1,500 feet, you're going to figure it out. They're on to something.

[0:04:24] IP: Not only a DC-8 at 1,500 feet, but also a Gulf Stream at 30,000 feet above. They're getting the full stack of the measurement. I think the acronym is supposed to be pronounced EROMA, but it's AEROMMA. I think that's EROMA, if you'll indulge me. The atmospheric emissions and reactions observed from megacities to marine areas. They're flying over major cities. They're flying over Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. they're going as low as 2,000 feet above the ground over the cities. They're dropping down to as low as 500 feet above the ground over bodies of water near those cities.

I mean, just some really incredible flying from a DC-8 over the major metropolitan areas across you. If you live in Los Angeles, Chicago or New York, be on the lookout for NASA's DC-8. We got a few right in saying, "Hey, what is this plane doing?" Then there were a lot more going, "I saw this plane. It was really cool." Because it's not very high off the ground. It is flying fast.

[0:05:29] JR: Just watching the tracking, they didn't take off and stay at 1,500 feet. They flew out of, I think, Dayton, Ohio. They climbed up to 33,000, 32,000 feet. They took a half an hour long spiraling descent, all the way down to 1,500 feet, pretty much over the same point. I guess, they really wanted to be specific about the exact spot they started their low altitude run at. It's just really interesting to see the track of a DC-8 make these huge swooping circles to get from very high altitude to extremely low altitude in probably the exact position they wanted to be.

[0:06:11] IP: Yeah. There are some specific points where they've decided that they're going to perform the spiral maneuvers. I haven't seen the explanation why.

[0:06:21] JR: Because it looks cooler than doing it any other way.

[0:06:25] IP: There you go. Apparently, the spirals are helpful as far as science goes. I will point this out, the acronym for the program is AEROMMA. Jason, over where was that first spiral conducted?

[0:06:37] JR: That first spiral was over Kentucky.

[0:06:41] IP: Kentucky, but no.

[0:06:43] JR: Okay, no.

[0:06:45] IP: If you zoom in, if you zoom in –

[0:06:47] JR: I haven't zoomed it. I'm looking at a screenshot I took earlier. If I zoom in, things just fuzzier.

[0:06:51] IP: It's over Aroma Park.

[0:06:54] JR: Ah, see. I knew there had to be a reason they were over a very specific point in it. I did not know that. That's an interesting bit of information.

[0:07:03] IP: Yeah. Somebody at NASA's got a good sense of humor.

[0:07:05] JR: You could be making that up and I wouldn't know.

[0:07:08] IP: I'm not. I will put a link to the flight track in the show notes, so that everyone can go. Even you can go. You don't even have a little listen to the podcast, Jason. You can just go and click on the link and see that they did spiral over –

[0:07:20] JR: They're still going off their flight from when I took that screenshot earlier. They're on their six and a half hours so far. Now, 1,600 feet over the heartland, or actually, Heartland, Wisconsin. That's nice. They're really making the rounds in the area. Are they drawing something, or they just doing zig zags here?

[0:07:38] IP: No. It has to do with how the wind patterns work. They've got different proposed paths based on the wind patterns. There's boundary layers involved. All of this is exactly what you would expect from NASA, as far as everything they're doing is purely based on the science, except maybe that spiral over Aroma Park. I think that may have been something slightly –

[0:08:02] JR: You got to start somewhere, right? Why not there?

[0:08:05] IP: Why not there? If you're listening to the podcast, they should be wrapping up in Chicago towards the end of the week, if all goes according to plan, and they may fly a flight over the weekend as well after the podcast comes out, so look out for that one.

[0:08:19] JR: They were really interested in Gary, Indiana, huh?

[0:08:21] IP: Who isn't?

[0:08:23] JR: Somebody's got to be, and it might as well be this NASA DC-8. They drew a lot of circles over Gary. We all know, nothing interesting happens there.

[0:08:31] IP: I mean, maybe as far as the science goes, this is the place to be. Speaking of interesting things, before we get on with all of the rest of the things we're going to talk about, we are about a month away from Cranky Flier's Dorkfest and NYC Aviation's Spot LAX event weekend in Los Angeles at LAX. From what I hear, it is going to be a very, very good time. There will be FlightRadar24 giveaways, as well as all sorts of things being raffled off by Brett at Dorkfest, which is at 11 a.m. in the small park across the street from the in and out, directly adjacent to LAX.

The only requirement for showing up is that you bring your natural curiosity and love of airplanes. Everything else is just gravy. Jason and I will both be there for the weekend and we look forward to seeing everybody on September 9th. Saturday, September 9th, at 11 a.m. If you're planning on going, drop us a note at podcast@fr24.com and we can plan some podcast stuff. Hopefully, we'll see many of you there. I know in years past, I think the longest distance traveled by a podcast listener was from South Africa, if I'm –

[0:09:47] JR: Hey, it's pretty good.

[0:09:49] IP: That was pretty cool. Somebody heard it on the podcast and flew to Los Angeles from South Africa. Hey, can you beat that? Now onto the news. Jason.

[0:09:59] JR: Yes.

[0:10:01] IP: TCAS is a thing of wonder. It is a thing of beauty. This week, or last week, really, it came in handy again off the coast of Florida as an Allegiant Air A320 and Gulfstream 5 were coming into conflict with each other. TCAS once again, saved the day.

[0:10:21] JR: That thing's been saving the day quite a lot these days, which is good and bad. But good that it works. Good that people are listening to it as they're supposed to, but not great that it's being used so often.

[0:10:35] IP: Yeah. I'm going to read the FAA statement, because the language in here is very interesting. "Allegiant Air Flight 485 and Airbus A320 took evasive action on Sunday, July 23rd, after the pilot received an automated alert about another aircraft at the same altitude." Here's the interesting sentence. "An air traffic controller in the Miami Air Route Traffic Control Center had instructed flight 485 to turn eastbound at an altitude of 23,000 feet, when it crossed in front of a northbound Gulfstream business jet. The pilot of the Gulfstream also took evasive action after receiving a similar alert. The Allegiant Air aircraft returned to Fort Lauderdale, because a flight attendant was treated for injuries."

It sounds like, based on the climb that the Allegiant Air aircraft did, the flight attendant may have been standing in the aisle, or in a galley, or something like that and was injured. The interesting thing here is that these two aircraft were on roughly parallel flight tracks. The Allegiant Air aircraft was flying northeast roughly. The Gulfstream was flying northeast roughly. Then the Allegiant Air aircraft was told to turn eastbound. Looking at playback, it looks like those turns may have been necessary, because there was weather up ahead and they were trying to route the A320 around the weather event, because it was trying to get to Lexington and it needed to fly around storms.

But the controller, based on the FAA's initial statement, told the aircraft to turn at the same altitude, turn in front of the Gulfstream jet. The A320 was instructed to climb by the TCAS resolution. The Gulfstream was instructed to descend. They did not come close to contacting – I mean, they came close enough that TCAS was involved, but they came no closer than the

resolution warned them about. Then they continued both for safe and eventual landing. It did what it was supposed to do, but not great that it had to do its job.

[0:12:29] JR: No. This seems pretty cut and dry to be controller error, which happens. Humans are humans and humans make mistakes. That's why we have these nice safety nets, like TCAS in place. Of course, it only works when pilots listen to it and that seems to be exactly what happened here, and hope that injured flight attendant is doing okay.

[0:12:50] IP: Yeah, absolutely. Another incident that happened, this one just a few days ago on the 29th of July in Houston. A United Airlines 76 – It just has not been a good couple weeks for United 767s. A United 767 landing in Houston. This was 767 registration N641UA was landing in Houston from Newark. It landed hard enough that it wrinkled the fuselage.

[0:13:21] JR: Not great. Not something we haven't seen before with the 76. Apparently, this is a particular vulnerability in earlier 767s that was reinforced in later builds. This is a 32-year-old vintage 76-300. There's a good chance this aircraft probably won't fly again. We won't say definitely, because we've seen Boeing and Airbus pull other aircraft back from the brink of death. This particular aircraft has a recent history of just not being good operationally, probably because it's almost 33-years-old.

[0:13:57] IP: Yeah, going back a week, it was late, late, late, canceled, late, late. Had a nice spate of on time departures and arrivals for a day, day and a half, and then it was late-late. Oh, man. There's a lot of red on this plane.

[0:14:13] JR: Yeah. It's bad. This aircraft is just there's some diversions in there. It seems to honestly be – the they stuck it on a lot of long-haul routes, which is interesting. I probably would have kept this one closer to home. This is an aircraft that was just begging to be put down. It looks like it was pitted on a little too hard. Pilot said, "All right, you're done. Off to the bone yard."

[0:14:35] IP: I mean, that's one way to do it.

[0:14:37] JR: Yeah. They should probably do it in Roswell, rather than Houston. Yeah, this aircraft's probably not coming back.

[0:14:42] IP: Put it on a truck. Chop off the wings and put it on a truck. The FAA reports, the aircraft made a hard landing. Post-flight inspection revealed damage to the fuselage.

[0:14:51] JR: You know what? It's a shame that the aircraft landed early this flight. It was actually running ahead of schedule.

[0:15:00] IP: Well, at least they made it to the gate.

[0:15:01] JR: Can't win them all.

[0:15:02] IP: Yeah, this information comes from the FAA's Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing System, which is interesting reading, because it lists all of the incidents we don't normally talk about and the ones that we do. For instance, also this week, a baggage belt loader hit a 717 in Honolulu. There was another United 737 encountered turbulence over Myrtle Beach and injured some of the flight attendants. These are quick summaries, but they give an indication of what's happening in the US as far as incidents and accidents. Interesting reading if you are interested in these sorts of things, like we are. Jason, shall we turn our attention to India? We've got some good news.

[0:15:47] JR: Common topic these days.

[0:15:48] IP: We're certainly talking about Indian Aviation much more. Much of the reasons are because of the global implications of massive, massive plane orders and frankly, the largest growing domestic network and domestic market in the world. Some interesting stuff here this week. Akasa Air has taken delivery of the first 737-8-200 MAX, which is the more community-driven 737 MAX.

[0:16:19] JR: It had some physical modifications to cram more paying people inside.

[0:16:23] IP: 197 seats above the standard – not 197 more.

[0:16:28] JR: Above the standard.

[0:16:28] IP: 197 total seats. Yes. 197 total seats, which raises above the standard MAX 8. For that, it receives an extra pair of exit doors aft of the wing. These are the ones that Ryanair basically asked Boeing to build. Other airlines said, "Yeah, we'll take those." Akasa Air has taken delivery of those. It's also worth mentioning that they're teasing with this delivery. They're talking about it in their press as the possible order for 100 new aircraft in addition to the aircraft they already have on order. The MAX 8-200 that they just took delivery of is part of a current batch of 72 orders. But they're saying, "We might order a 100 or more new aircraft and announce new international routes soon." That'll be interesting to see, because they're a relatively new airline and they only have 20 aircraft at this point.

[0:17:26] JR: Well, there's been some space opening up in the Indian Aviation sector recently. a vacuum has formed that Akasa Air seems to be taking advantage of.

[0:17:37] IP: Indeed. Indeed.

[0:17:38] JR: Of which, continue.

[0:17:40] IP: Yes. The initial sucking sound that we heard in Indian Aviation was the, I guess, the second round of Jet Airways' demise. They've been in a, well, they won't they for quite some time they were trying to revive the airline and have run into all sorts of problems. A few months ago, we talked about how they let their AOC lapse. Well, now they've gotten their AOC back somehow. The director general of Civil Aviation in India has granted Jet Airways and AOC. But they still owe a lot of people a lot of money.

Last week they were ordered to pay employees and make the employees whole from the last time the airline operated. They're not quite back in the air yet. Having an AOC to even think about operating is a good first step for them. We'll see if they ever make it back into the air. At this point, I'm just very doubtful.

[0:18:43] JR: Yeah. Still not holding my breath, but we're not done with India yet. What else we got?

[0:18:48] IP: Not even close. Here's what's going on with Go First. Go First suit against Pratt & Whitney was thrown out this week after the Singapore arbitration body, upon which the suit was based, rescinded their original decision. Let's unpack this a little bit. Go First went to Singapore arbitrator.

[0:19:09] JR: Why Singapore?

[0:19:11] IP: I don't know exactly why Singapore, but I'm pretty sure it's because that's where the subsidiary that they're getting the engines from from Pratt & Whitney is coming from, but I could be wrong. If anyone knows exactly why, by all means, email us at podcast@fr24.com. There was a Singapore arbitration body. I assume that's the one they had to go to. They initially said, Pratt & Whitney needs to supply Go First with 90 engines by the end of the year. Because the engines are unreliable and you need to make them whole. You need to give them 90 good engines by the end of 2023.

Pratt & Whitney for its part went to the arbitrator and said, "Look, they don't pay us. They're a serial defaulter. They don't pay us for the engines we've already given them. 90 engines is an unrealistic number, given everything we're going through, so we're not going to do that. We can't do that. And, why should we give good engines to an airline that's not operating?"

[0:20:09] JR: That's an excellent point, because I know for a fact there are many airlines waiting for engines that they can't get their hands on, that could probably be placed in a little better way right now.

[0:20:19] IP: The initial decision was based on Go First representation that Pratt & Whitney had basically, "The engines don't work. We need new engines." They said, "Okay. Give them new engines." Then they went and looked at the whole situation again and they said, "No, you don't have to do that." Pratt & Whitney is still on the hook for something, but we don't know what. They still have to supply them with some sort of equipment, but we don't know what exactly. That information was not shared outside of the agreement that they reached.

The US judge seeing that the original arbitration decision that the lawsuit that Go First filed in US court against Pratt & Whitney, seeing that, the revision of the initial decision says, "This is

moot. I'm dismissing the lawsuit." Go First is still dealing with not having very many engines at work for their aircraft. Their lessors want all of their planes back, because if they're not going to use – if Go First isn't going to use them, they want to at least try and get them used somewhere else. Go First needs to come up with a bunch of money before they can think about having paying passengers on the planes again.

[0:21:36] JR: Doesn't seem like there's a very clear path to coming back from the brink here. If Jet Airways can do it, Go First can do it.

[0:21:45] IP: I guess, that's one way of looking at it. Let's leave India and go to Seattle, where Boeing has now said that the first delivery of the MAX 7 is now scheduled for 2024, something that was either confirmed, or echoed or acknowledged, however, you want to phrase it, by Southwest Airlines, CEO Bob Jordan, who they have, Southwest as one of the only airlines with orders for the MAX 7. The idea now is that the aircraft will still be certified by 2023 by some time in 2023. First deliveries will slip now to 2024, so from one quarter to the next.

[0:22:26] JR: Sure. Well, keep waiting.

[0:22:29] IP: The MAX 10 is still scheduled for 2024 as well. Again, okay. Great.

[0:22:34] JR: Okay, sure.

[0:22:37] IP: This one is an interesting bit coming out of additional information from the NTSB's investigation into the RED Air MD-82.

[0:22:48] JR: That was a dramatic one.

[0:22:50] IP: Issue on landing, where in the landing gear came off and then the aircraft slid off the runway and caught fire. No one was injured. There were a 140 people onboard the MD-82 in Miami when this happened. No one was injured, thankfully. The investigation has continued and NTSB investigators are now looking at the shimmy damper mechanisms on the MD-82 to better understand if a lack of shimmy dampering contributed to what happened to the aircraft. This comes from Flight Global Reporting on the NTSB docket. Because I was having a little bit of

trouble following exactly the linear thinking here, as far as what caused what. But the fine folks at Flight Global, David Kaminski-Morrow has helpfully summarized this.

The MD-82 has a single axle main landing gear. During braking, there's a shimmy damper that is activated to prevent excessive vibration in that landing gear. It's a hydraulically actuated dampening system. You can add fluid and that prevents the shimmy from happening, so that the aircraft stays, going straight down the runway.

What they're looking into was whether or not there were issues with this particular shimmy dampering, which led to severe vibrations. Then the gear basically failing, because it was shaking violently as the aircraft moved down the runway. Interesting stuff. They haven't made any determinations. This is not a final report. This is just added information to the docket about what the investigators are looking at, what they have discovered so far.

I think in my mind, what I find interesting about this is there are so many parts of a plane that you don't think about, because they're not necessarily designed for the safe operation of the flight, but they're super important.

[0:25:04] JR: So many important parts of an aircraft that even decades and decades after this thing's first flight, we are still learning about that could cause a major problem, that NTSB is probably just discovering now for the first time, that this could cause, this could cause that. This aircraft is decades old. Has this ever happened before? I don't know. Maybe not.

[0:25:24] IP: I do not have experience, a whole lot of experience with shimmy dampering. But I will say that I'm keen to learn whether or not this has happened before. I think a deep dive into the NTSB report system is warranted. Jason, I thank you for offering to do that.

[0:25:40] JR: Wait a minute. All right. All right.

[0:25:46] IP: Oh, I love giving Jason homework. It's so much fun.

[0:25:49] JR: Yeah, it's going to be turned in incomplete.

[0:25:52] IP: Speaking of incomplete, JetBlue has incompletely retired its first A320 this week.

[0:25:59] JR: Yeah. Its very first aircraft delivered in 1999 for the beginning of operations in the year 2000. November 503 Juliet Bravo, 503JB, nicknamed Bluebird, or I think internally, it was named Katherine, I think for some reason. I don't really know the backstory to that, but it's official name that was always on the side of the aircraft by the nose was Bluebird. This week, it was officially retired and then unretired, because they just couldn't get enough.

A tweet went out earlier this week saying, it had operated its final international flight. It indeed did that. It flew JFK down to Nassau Bahamas and back up its final international flight. Then that was supposed to be that. But today, N503JB to the rescue, flying JFK to Newark, of all places, a 22-minute flight. Man, I would hate for that to be the final flight of an aircraft, JFK to Newark. Then it was called into service from Newark to West Palm Beach, and I can only assume, Palm Beach back up to Newark, because one of its much younger siblings couldn't get the job done today. An earlier flight canceled and somebody was thinking on their toes at JetBlue and pressed this aircraft into service, to operate a makeup segment or two, which is –

[0:27:21] IP: Just can't let it go.

[0:27:23] JR: I think pretty interesting like, “Hey, we have this elderly A320 sitting at JFK. Can we borrow it for one more flight?” “Sure.”

[0:27:31] IP: I mean, if I'm the passengers at Newark trying to get to Palm Beach and the option is not go, or take the plane that they retired yesterday, I'll take the old A320.

[0:27:41] JR: We can only assume it still had seats and seat belts and all that good stuff onboard. They didn't just start taking all this stuff off. You get hand straps and that's it. Good to see this aircraft get one last flight in before retirement. It has a special place in my heart as well. I've flown on this aircraft many times, dating back to the year 2000 for JetBlue a lot back in its early days. Happy to see that it's getting a happy retirement and not a forced retirement in Houston after being landed a bit too hard.

[0:28:10] IP: There you go. I don't know what to add to that. I'm just going to say, let's close the show with some sunny information. I thought this was neat.

[0:28:19] JR: This is neat. Coming from quite an unexpected airline. I assume this is one of their technology integrators, or someone else doing this for them, but SCAT of Kazakhstan, Jonk, if you're listening, your airline did a good thing. Has an interesting widget on their booking – direct channel booking site, where it will tell you the percentage of the flight which side of the aircraft the sun will be shining, which I think is really cool, because if you're like me, you spent way too much time trying to remember on flights what side of the aircraft is going to be the hot side, especially flying East Coast to West Coast in the US. It makes a big difference. It is noticeably much hotter on one side of the aircraft than the other.

I always try to pick the cool side, because the views are a little nicer, because you have the sun illuminating off to your side of the aircraft, and it's just cooler. I think that's a really interesting thing to do. I wish other airlines did that. There are some other airlines that do other types of things like that. A couple of the Japanese airlines. I can't remember if it's JAL or ANA, has an entire micro site devoted just telling you what side of the aircraft will mount Fuji be on your departure from Tokyo, which is also pretty cool.

[0:29:36] IP: I think that would be fun, especially for other airlines that are focused on certain cities, where there's always a good view on one side of the aircraft or the other, like Alaska, or Delta leaving Seattle, or –

[0:29:51] JR: Or into LaGuardia. It's almost always the left side of the aircraft gets the good view of the city. Sometimes it's the right side, but more often than not, it's the left side.

[0:30:00] IP: I know for a fact that there are people who look at which way the aircraft are landing that day and will change their seat if possible.

[0:30:12] JR: You mean aside from me?

[0:30:13] IP: Aside from you, yes. There are other people like us out there.

[0:30:18] JR: There are dozens of us.

[0:30:19] IP: That are probably all listening to this podcast. Yeah. If you're flying SCAT in the near future, by all means, please take advantage of this and let us know how it works out.

[0:30:28] JR: I mean, it should work out, right? Unless, the sun magically swaps positions in the middle of the day. If it doesn't work out, something has gone horribly wrong.

[0:30:37] IP: Maybe they're going to fly their 737s backwards.

[0:30:40] JR: Huh, I don't recommend that. I don't know if the MAX is capable of that or not. Well, we don't know.

[0:30:45] IP: No. It's not a Cessna in some wind.

[0:30:48] JR: Oh, right.

[0:30:49] IP: Okay, that's enough of that. This has been Episode 227 of AvTalk. Thank you so very much for listening, if you made it this far. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

[0:31:05] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]