

EPISODE 269

[00:00:08] IP: Hello, and welcome to episode 269 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik. Here as always with –

[00:00:16] JR: Hello, Ian. How's it going? I hear you've had a very quiet week.

[00:00:20] IP: Yeah. It's been a very, very quiet week, Jason. Nothing whatsoever related –

[00:00:25] JR: He's lying, folks. Somebody is holding him hostage, because he's lying.

[00:00:30] IP: I made it 15 seconds in. Yeah. The one story that I thought was going to be a big story is still, I guess, a big story, but not even close to being number one.

[00:00:38] JR: As far as commercial aviation is involved, which is the focus of this podcast. Not number one.

[00:00:44] IP: Our number one story this week is in fact the extreme turbulence event experienced by Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 on its way from London to Singapore. The 777-300ER experienced, based on the data and based on the photographs that we've seen from inside the cabin, an extreme turbulence event over the southern tip of Myanmar on its way to Singapore. We'll get right out of the gate and say that the aircraft diverted quickly to Bangkok where it was met by a large presence of medics and a variety of other officials.

Unfortunately, one person has died and dozens of others were injured. As of this morning, the 22nd of May, out of the 21 passengers and 18 crew members who were on board, 104 people have been treated in the hospital. 58 remain in hospital. And 20 of those are in the ICU. The person who died was a 73-year-old male who suffered a heart attack after the turbulence event. A very rare and tragic occurrence this week in the skies.

[00:02:00] JR: Yeah. Really tragic. Unfortunately, for Singapore Airlines having to deal with this. But, really, I can't think of many other airlines in the world better equipped to deal with such an event, a tragedy, unfortunately here. The communication coming from Singapore has been

fantastic. They've provided a whole host of updates, videos, precise information. I hate to have to see this from Singapore, but it's been really nice to see the level of information coming out from them.

Ian, you mentioned that this is rare. The clear air turbulence and a passenger being injured, let alone dying is exceptionally rare. And we tried to dig into just how rare an event like this is. And it's actually kind of difficult to find prior cases where a passenger died because of clear air turbulence on board and aircraft, because it happens so rarely.

The last event of this nature that we can identify using either Wikipedia, or **[inaudible 00:02:58]**, or any source would be 1997. December 28th, United Airlines flight 826 operated by – and this I'll give you a hint of just how long ago this was, a 747-100. Operating from Tokyo to Honolulu. Two hours into the flight, they hit clear a turbulence. They dropped 100 feet. 15 passengers and three crew members were injured. One passenger, unfortunately, died. But that's just how far back we have to go to the last incident where a passenger died on board due to turbulence. And that's a long time ago.

[00:03:34] IP: Yeah. And turbulence is common. Severe turbulence is becoming more common. Injuries from turbulence account for a third of all reported injuries. Certainly not uncommon. But this level of injuries, the amount of injuries and the severity of the injuries sustained by the passengers and crew on this flight, certainly not a common event.

[00:03:58] JR: No. Not at all.

[00:03:59] IP: Let's talk about what actually happened. The flight was in route nearing Singapore, nearing the end of its journey almost. Cruising at 37,000 ft. over the southern tip of Myanmar. At 7:49 UTC, the aircraft encountered extreme turbulence being subjected to forces up and down on the aircraft such that passengers were thrown into the ceiling who weren't wearing their seat belts. Crew members who were – it's our understanding that they were serving the breakfast service at this time. Crew members were thrown about. Anything that wasn't strapped down reached the top of the aircraft. And the aircraft went up and down multiple times over the course of about a minute.

We have the actual data from the aircraft showing the vertical rate of change. We've got that post on the blog, so you can have a look at the data if you'd like to kind of see a visual representation of what was happening. But it was a violent up and down motion. The thing about this is the aircraft only rose in total about 400 feet before settling back down to 37,000 ft.

[00:05:16] JR: Yeah. Not all that much.

[00:05:18] IP: And the way I've been trying to describe this to people – and, Jason, you can kind of gut check my description and let me know if I'm off base here. But think about putting a marble in an empty bottle and hold it sideways, and hold it above your head, and slowly raise it or lower it. The marble's going to sit in the bottom of the bottle and not go anywhere. But if you hold the bottle straight out in front of you and shake it violently up and down but not move it very far, that marble is going to rattle around a whole bunch.

[00:05:47] JR: I feel like you conducted this experiment at home on your own just to make sure it would work.

[00:05:52] IP: Just to make sure that this was a thing. But, I mean, that's kind of what we're talking about here.

[00:05:55] JR: Yeah. It doesn't take much. If the vertical movement of the aircraft is anything more than you would see normally in the operation of the aircraft, you're going to feel it. And if it happens suddenly and violently enough, passengers are going to find themselves in places that they don't want to find themselves. And in this case, it was significant enough that the aircraft itself had a fair bit of damage on the interior. It looked like the further back in the aircraft you were from the videos we did see, the greater the damage. And that was either from galley carts or things being thrown around. Maybe bags. The damage to the aircraft was actually pretty significant. Ceiling panels were knocked loose. And it looked like there were even ventilation shafts knocked down into to the rear galley. It was violent. And you could totally understand why the majority of passengers on board this aircraft were injured in some form or another.

A lot happened on board that aircraft. But also, Ian, a lot didn't happen. And the show notes here just say Ian's rant all 6,000 ft. of it. What does that mean?

[00:06:58] IP: Well, Jason, let's the last bit of the news out of the way as far as what's going on

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[00:07:03] JR: And then you'll rant later. Okay.

[00:07:04] IP: And then I'll rant. Yeah. Singapore is leading the investigation. But the NTSB is sending an accredited representative and four technical advisers to Bangkok to assist with the investigation. They're participating under ICAO Annex 13 as the state of manufacturer because this is a Boeing aircraft. They'll be participating in the investigation. I assume that either — Singapore has the capability to read and analyze the flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder. I assume this is more of a technical adviser on the Boeing aircraft itself. But we'll see what happens as the investigation proceeds.

Now, when this was first reported, the data that was out there was our data. It was FlightRadar24 data or other competing services such as they are, that there was a descent from 37,000 ft. to 31,000 ft. That actually happened. The aircraft did in fact descend from 37,000 ft. to 31,000 ft. before leveling off and then descending again. But that descent took place over four minutes and change at a descent rate of roughly 2,000 ft. per minute. A little under 2,000 ft. per minute. A perfectly normal descent rate for any commercial aircraft beginning its descent from cruising altitude to land.

The 6,000-foot descent was described in a variety of ways, including plunge, plummet, all of the P-words that are bad. And that's not what happened. And I can understand why someone that is just looking at the graph going, "Oh, there's the drop. Turbulence must mean they fell out of the sky. So this is what happened." And I can understand that a little bit. But part of me thinks that looking at change over time when you're looking at that graph with a critical eye, especially if you're putting this as a lead story on an international news site. You would look at that with a critical eye and think to yourself, "Huh? I don't know about this. I should ask somebody who knows what they're talking about."

[00:09:37] JR: Nah. Better just run it without any real knowledge or insight.

[00:09:41] IP: Yeah. This happened early Tuesday morning. By Wednesday morning, some of the same organizations after being specifically told that that was incorrect. We're still running that. And that's what bothers me the most is – and this is a conversation that we've had multiple times. Anytime something happens where there's technical nuance or a necessary understanding of looking at this data before making a decision where that's not available. But you should be able to correct it when told you're wrong.

[00:10:22] JR: Yeah. They should be able to do a lot of things that in this case that they chose not to do. In one case, looking at the data – I'm looking at the data that I'm sure they were looking at too. It'd be quite curious if the turbulence just happened to end at exactly 31,000 ft. Isn't that miraculous that they dove and they just leveled out exactly at 31,000? Not 31,025. 31,000 ft. on the dot. That should be a little suspicious and cause to think, "Huh? Maybe they actually just descended to 31,000 ft." But, nope. That's what they went with.

[00:10:55] IP: Turbulence happens. Aircraft is stabilized. I'm sure there was a very chaotic situation in the cabin. The flight crew is talking with the cabin crew. They decided to divert the aircraft. They begin their descent from 37,000 ft. down to 31,000 ft. And then from 31,000 ft., it's more or less a continuous descent into Bangkok.

[00:11:19] JR: Yeah. And I think some of this might be – there might be some confusion because it was this continuous – if you look at the non-granular data, it is a continuously reported descent very suddenly from 37,000 to 31,000. And I think that can be attributed to the single Singapore flight crew descending very quickly. There was an incident on board. Many, many injuries. And they did not waste any time. I assume, we're only assuming at this point, they did not waste any time getting in contact with air traffic control to descend down to a lower level and divert to the nearest major airport that they could. Really, it's just showing what a good job the flight crew did, I think, rather than airplane plummeted 6,000 ft. No. That's not what happened. A flight crew did very well and they got that aircraft on the ground virtually as fast as they possibly could by the look of it.

[00:12:15] IP: Yeah. Absolutely. We're of course going to follow this to its conclusion. Hopefully, we'll know more soon with the preliminary report from the Singapore authorities. And then, obviously, a final report later on. Probably within a year or so. But speedy recovery to all of

those who are injured and who remain in hospital. And our thoughts are with the family of the passenger who died.

[00:12:42] JR: Yeah. Really sad. Just reminder, keep your seatbelt fastened at all phases of flight. Of course, it's not always practical at every single moment to have your seat belt on. Sometimes I go to the bathroom on board an aircraft. But, yeah, just buckle up.

[00:12:58] IP: Whenever you can. We now turn our attention to Iran where the helicopter carrying the president of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, amongst other dignitaries coming back from a dam opening with Azerbaijan crashed into mountainous terrain in very poor weather. The crash was first noted as a hard landing.

[00:13:25] JR: Big air quotes around that right now.

[00:13:28] IP: Iranian state news – I mean, obviously, they didn't know what had happened. Hard Landing is I guess good a description as any. After the fog cleared and we finally saw what happened, it was very clear that it was not a hard landing. It was – if not controlled flight into terrain. Then just flight into terrain.

We didn't track the helicopter. But what we did track – and this is an interesting thing that I didn't expect to be talking about this week, we tracked the Turkish UCAV that went and found the crash site. The weather had been so poor and the fog so thick that they were not able to deploy any crude aviation to find the crash site. Turkey sent a drone in and they were able to locate the crash site. And that particular aircraft is now our third most-tracked flight of all time. More than 2.8 million people followed that flight, which after finding the crash site flew back to turkey and drew a star and crescent over Lake Van.

[00:14:41] JR: Now that's the interesting part to me. Why did that happen? I don't know.

[00:14:46] IP: Good question. No idea.

[00:14:47] JR: Why did that happen? Do they have a button that they just pressed to make thing draw a flag? I don't know. Or did they actually just map out the way points and automate

it? I don't know. But an odd decision. But, thankfully, they found the crash site. Because the pictures from the site were – like you said, Ian, there was virtually no visibility. This aircraft probably had – the helicopter probably had no business being up in the air at that point. Which, regardless of who's on board the aircraft, you hate to see something like this happen. It's unfortunate. Hate to have to talk about it. , yeah, just very odd having the Turkish UEV draw the Turkish flag after a search. And I guess not a rescue mission, but just a search fight like this.

[00:15:32] IP: Yeah. So there you go. Let's completely switch gears and talk about ultra- low-cost carrier business models.

[00:15:40] JR: Wow. The gears don't change much more than that.

[00:15:44] IP: I don't even have a transition. There's no segue here. It's just completely different. Last week, Frontier surprised everyone with a new schema for how it sells its tickets.

[00:15:59] JR: It's like a regular airline now.

[00:16:03] IP: What?

[00:16:03] JR: Why, I know. If you've ever flown Frontier, really any ultra-low-cost airline, you would probably be familiar with their particular brand of get out of my way and give me your money mentality is kind of how ULCC operate Frontier and its competitor Spirit. In particular, very hardline on their fees, and their ancillaries, and their restrictive policies. If you've ever fallen Frontier, it's much like any other ultra-low-cost carrier. Where if you book your ticket, there are stringent change, and cancel fees, and all sorts of additional add-ons like seat assignment, and bag, and priority security, and priority boarding. Frontier didn't exactly throw that all away. You can still buy those things individually if you're booking your ticket the wrong way.

But what they've done is basically emulated what all of the major non-ULCC and non-LCC airlines are doing where you have a basic economy fair, which is very restrictive. No free. No free cancel. And you pay for everything. But then there's a regular economy where it comes with free change, free cancellation with the notable addition of a fair difference if applicable. And you get to pick your seat. And you get a carry-on bag and all that good stuff. And they even have this

pseudo-European business class thing now where it's just regular economy seat, but there's an empty middle seat. There's no one sitting next to you, which is nice.

Seemingly, out of absolutely nowhere, like you said, Ian, I did not see this coming. I don't think many people saw this coming. And I don't think its main competitor, Spirit, saw this coming. As just I think two days after Frontier announced, Spirit said, "Yeah, okay. Us, too." I guess? And no press release. No nice micro site. No CEO in a cowboy hat. I know. Unfortunately, no real anything except a couple lines on their homepage saying, "Oh, yeah. We have eliminated change and cancel fees on all fairs, interestingly. Spirit kind of took it a step further. But really weird days here when our ultra-low-cost carriers are basically just the same as the regular carriers now. Hmm.

[00:18:21] IP: I don't know. What are the regular – I mean, I suppose Legacy, your network carriers, don't really have to do anything.

[00:18:28] JR: I mean, no. But if you fly a Legacy carrier, you get notable extra things, like more leg room, and entertainment, and Wi-Fi, and food and beverage on board. Not just snacks or whatever.

[00:18:40] IP: A network.

[00:18:40] JR: A network. But, also, importantly the schedule. ULCC offering free changing of your flights is one thing. But if they're only operating one frequency a day on your route at most, I mean it could be once or twice a week, it's not all that helpful to have free change –

[00:18:57] IP: Yeah. Free change fees. You can go next week instead.

[00:19:00] JR: Yeah, you can go next week. As opposed to American, Delta, United, JetBlue, Alaska, whatever, where there might be 10 flights a day on your route. And if you want to change from the 4pm flight to the 5pm flight, you can do that, so long as you're willing to pay the fair difference, if that's applicable. Or get a fair refund. The fair difference could be deposited into your account.

Frontier said, "No. No. No. No. No. We will not be participating in that if you change your flight." And the new flight costs less than your original flight, you are forfeiting that. Get out of here. That's our money.

[00:19:29] IP: The new flight does not actually cost less. It costs what you already paid us. And you'll be happy about it.

[00:19:34] JR: Yes. The house always wins in this case.

[00:19:36] IP: There you go.

[00:19:37] JR: But not sure if this is a reaction to the new DOT rules being passed about, being more upfront about all of the fees associated with everything. I don't think it is, because Frontier seem pretty prepared for this. But Spirit, man, they were caught flat-footed and just kind of panicked. Still, no official communication from Spirit on those changes, but you'll love to see it.

[00:20:01] IP: Would you want a plane? We'll give you a plane, too.

[00:20:03] JR: Just get on board. We need the money.

[00:20:05] IP: Yeah, it's fine. It's fine. Okay. Hey, so the Estonians have figured out how to resume flights to Tartu. Finnair cancelled their service from Helsinki to Tartu at the end of April because of GPS jamming. There was no non-GPS path to the ILS for the airport. There was only a GPS. Not even the final approach. But the approach to the approach.

And because of the GPS jamming, they said we can't fly this anymore. And so, they canceled service while the Estonians put something together. And they said, "Okay. We figured it out. We're going to do DME DME. And everything's in place now. Please resume service." Finnair says, "Great. We'll get that loaded into our procedures and we'll be operating again by the 2nd of June."

They said they were going to cancel it for a month. And it was almost exactly a month. Quick work by everyone involved to get this flight back up and running. A reminder that that was the

airport's only commercial service. I'm sure that folks are happy to see the aircraft back in action sooner rather than later.

[00:21:16] JR: And it's nice to not just see Finnair say, "Screw it. We're done here," and cancel the route outright. No. They work to fix the situation and resume service. A lot of other airlines probably would have said we're not flying there anymore. Deal with it yourself. And that would have left the airport with nothing. Kudos to Finnair for not just recognizing the situation and leaving, but actually helping to fix the situation. That's nice.

[00:21:38] IP: In order news, We've got Saudia and Flyadeal, which is the low-cost arm of the Saudi national carrier, ordering a total of 105 A320Neo family aircraft. 90 – this is another this is another one of those how did they decide –

[00:21:57] JR: How did you get to this number?

[00:21:59] IP: Yeah. 93 A321neos and 12 A320neos. 54 of the A320neos will be assigned to Saudi, while the balance as well as all of the 320neos will go to Flyadeal. An incremental order. Not blockbuster. But, also, nothing to sneeze at when you're ordering more than a hundred aircraft at a time.

[00:22:25] JR: Yeah. And this is on top of everything that will also be going to Riyadh Air eventually at some point in the near future. I don't believe they have any narrow bodies on order. But you kind of feel like they probably will at some point. Saudi Arabia, really going all-in on these aircraft builders.

[00:22:41] IP: So much capacity.

[00:22:43] JR: So much. I assume maybe those 12 A320neos are kind of like – maybe they're the new A319 where there are some particularly hot and high destinations that the 321 just can't do. I don't think that's the case anymore. But we did see that with a couple of the Chinese Airlines going with the extremely rare unicorn breed A319Neo. I don't know if we'll ever see any more of those ordered by airlines. But maybe that was the thinking here. I don't really know.

[00:23:09] IP: Yeah. I guess it all depends on how soon Comac can do their plateau version of the C919.

[00:23:14] JR: Interesting. But, yeah, that's a lot of airplanes. 105 is a lot.

[00:23:20] IP: It's a fine number. JetBlue and British Airways are going to codeshare, and not just on a few routes. It's a pretty impressive network right out of the gate.

[00:23:30] JR: It's a lot of flights. And this comes to us breaking news, just before we hit the button, from Seth Miller, PaxEx.Aero. He is the only one with this story right now. And now we have it. But you'll hear two days later. He pulled this from the DOT filings, as he's been known to do. I haven't seen this reported anywhere else. But JetBlue coming off the heels of breaking up with American Airlines after the Northeast alliance, didn't really last all that long. And the whole thing with Spirit fell apart. It's got to do something to make some more money. And that something right now might be a code share with British Airways if that gets approved. Probably will. Maybe not. Who knows? But it goes both ways.

It would see the JetBlue code placed on the 17 cities throughout Europe on BA's network, which is particularly interesting, because it gives onward connecting opportunities for JetBlue passengers flying to Heathrow. Because, today, you just kind of go to Heathrow and you're done. You can't really connect on anything with JetBlue. Being able to connect onward on a code share is quite interesting even if it does involve a terminal change at Heathrow, which is never fun, because you have to do it by a bus. And the buses are not great. Okay. Deep breath.

[00:24:44] IP: Tell us how you really –

[00:24:44] JR: On the US side, it is a much, much different game. And I'd imagine that Americans probably not too happy about this. But it is everywhere, from short routes, from New York to Syracuse down to San Juan, Puerto Rico, all the way to the West Coast, to Seattle, San Francisco, LA, Las Vegas, Boseman, Montana. Really, really interesting. Something I did not see coming. I don't think a lot of people saw coming. But this is probably one of those things that the new JetBlue has to do to survive after the collapse of the everything, really?

[00:25:21] IP: [inaudible 00:25:21] everything. Yes.

[00:25:25] JR: Yeah. I'm very interested to see if this goes through. Or if it goes through in the state that it is applied to at this point, because it is pretty far-ranging. Really looking forward to what American has to say about this. And, also, Alaska. Since Alaska's also a one-world Alliance, something, or other. I forget if they're affiliate or a full-blown member. I think they're full-blown at this point.

[00:25:45] IP: Yeah. Member. Yeah.

[00:25:47] JR: But Jet Blue getting in here with BA on some coachers, that's an interesting move. I like it.

[00:25:52] IP: Well, we'll keep an eye on the filings.

[00:25:55] JR: Thanks, Seth.

[00:25:57] IP: The DOT filings always give the airline lawyers a chance to really stretch their legs.

[00:26:03] JR: Yes. And we thank Seth for setting up a bot for crawling through there and picking up good ones.

[00:26:07] IP: Absolutely. An Emirates flight that was arriving in Mumbai hit a flock of flamingos. I think they're called a flock. Shortly before touchdown.

[00:26:17] JR: Is it a flock? I've never –

[00:26:17] IP: I think it's a flock.

[00:26:19] JR: Okay. Well, they hit a flock of 39 flamingos. Leaving 39 of them dead, unfortunately. And, yeah, all passengers and crew disembarked without injury. And the Emirate

spokesperson is quoted by saying, "All passengers were fine. But, however, sadly, a number of flamingos were lost." And Emirates is cooperating with the authorities on the matter.

Okay. Not your typical bird strike. Flamingos, sometimes I find it hard to believe that they're actually like flamingos out there in the wild and they don't just live in zoos. But they're real and they're out there.

[00:26:53] IP: They are real. A thing that I learned not long ago. We recently sent Gabe to do a video at Gatwick. Behind-the-scenes tour with ops folks. It's a fascinating video and great fun to watch. And you learn a ton about how airports work. What I didn't know I was going to learn is that, for bird strikes, they send the DNA of the bird if it's not possible to easily tell what kind of bird it is. They will send out for DNA testing to find out what kind of bird it is.

And in this context, there was an aircraft that landed at Gatwick. They discovered that they had struck birds and they were trying to say, "Oh, this happened at Gatwick." They sent the DNA out. And it was a flamingo. And so, the Gatwick folks were obviously saying, "Obviously, this didn't happen here."

[00:27:55] JR: Puzzled by that.

[00:27:55] IP: Yeah. It didn't happen here. So now we can say that, okay, this bird strike did not happen at Gatwick. It happened obviously elsewhere. Most likely at the departure airport. I learned the other day they send out DNA testing for birds.

[00:28:09] JR: There you go. Somewhere, there's got to be a database of all the bird strikes out there.

[00:28:13] IP: There is.

[00:28:13] JR: And an analysis of which bird species is most likely to hit your aircraft. Hopefully, Canadian goose isn't up there, because we know what happens when you run into a flock of Canadian geese. But Flamingo, I can't imagine is all that high up there.

[00:28:29] IP: About the same size.

[00:28:31] JR: No. I do want to know what a group of flamingos is called. We should ask –

[00:28:36] IP: Pretty sure it's a flock. But, yeah, if only we had the entire compendium of human knowledge at our fingertips. There you go. Let's move on and talk about Iberia and where they're taking the A321XLR while I furiously search for what a group of flamingos is called. Anyway.

[00:28:55] JR: All right. Well, I think we talked about this last week.

[00:28:59] IP: Okay. Stop. I got it. The internet works in mysterious ways. It's called a flamboyance.

[00:29:04] JR: See? I knew it would have to good. Are you sure about that?

[00:29:09] IP: This is from SeaWorld. I assume they're correct.

[00:29:12] JR: What is a group of flamingos called?

[00:29:14] IP: I can't believe we're taking time on the podcast to do this.

[00:29:18] JR: I mean, we have to.

[00:29:19] IP: It's a flamboyance.

[00:29:20] JR: Interestingly –

[00:29:21] IP: Yes. Dictionary agrees.

[00:29:24] JR: An archaic name for a group of flamingos is a flamboyance. Still in scientific terms, a group of flamingos has a very plain name. A flock of flamingos.

[00:29:33] IP: Yeah. All right. Fine.

[00:29:34] JR: No. We got to mention it as soon as this ambulance –

[00:29:36] IP: We did mention it.

[00:29:38] JR: Yeah. But we didn't say flamboyance.

[00:29:40] IP: We said flamboyance.

[00:29:41] JR: Did we?

[00:29:43] IP: Do you want to say flamboyance again?

[00:29:45] JR: Oh, we're still recording. Okay. Let's leave this all in. Can we just leave this all in and continue to the next topic, because this is great?

[00:29:52] IP: Iberia having taken the A321XLR launch operator away from Aer Lingus. And somebody helpfully wrote in, a podcast listener wrote in and said, "No. No. No. You guys are wrong about how this happened." And I think I was being a little glib last week. And in my glibness, my description of the situation was a bit inaccurate. IAG made the decision based on a set of criteria, one of which was the pilot pay negotiations needed to be wrapped up before a certain date so that they could then move these around within the IAG group. It's not that Aer Lingus said, "No. We don't want them." And so, in my glibness, I think I was incorrect.

Iberia has now listed the first routes. They're going to go to Boston and Washington, D.C. first. But as Jason reminded me before we started recording, there are no airports in Washington, D.C. They will operate to Dulles.

[00:30:48] JR: That's true. I mean, if somebody wants to operate a Transatlantic A321neo flight to DCA. Still not DC. Even though DC is right there in the name of the airport, that would be great. I am all for that. But, unfortunately, it would be all the way out in Dulles.

[00:31:06] IP: All right. Let's see. What else do we have to close the show? We've got S7 Airlines taking a bunch of A321s that were apparently just kind of hanging out in Russia. The whole thing has gotten very difficult to follow now that things have been sitting so long. But, Jason, tell me more.

[00:31:25] JR: Yeah. Not really sure how this happened or why this happened. But when I saw the headline come up of S7 taking three A321s from a Russian lessor, I said, "Huh? How's that possible? Where are they possibly getting 321s at this stage?" But, apparently, that's exactly what's happening. They found a few of them, three to be exact, that were not retired. But they were withdrawn from use and parked by Yamal Airlines, I believe that pronunciation correct, in October of 2023. And they've just been stored there. And they're not all that old. They're about 20 years on average. 20, 21. They have to be restored to be flight-worthy. Apparently, they've been sitting around for a little while and they – if they're retired by a Russian Airline given the state of everything that's going on, they must not have been in the best shape. But S7 saw them. Said, "We want them. They'll be pressed into service. I'm sure it will probably be fine." But just odd to see a Russian airline at this point taking delivery of any aircraft, especially a Boeing or an Airbus. Figured they all would have been running nonstop. Not just parked for months and like half year at this point.

[00:32:35] IP: Or used parts at least.

[00:32:36] JR: Yeah. Or something. But maybe they were used for parts and they're going to shove those parts back in and get them back in service.

[00:32:43] IP: There you go.

[00:32:43] JR: Totally possible.

[00:32:44] IP: As we've continued to dig through the FAA reauthorization, because what's a thousand pages among friends, this is one that we didn't get to last week, but is an interesting bit of decision-making for regulators. Is it a boat? Or is it an airplane? Jason?

[00:33:02] JR: An age-old question. Maybe it's both. Maybe it's a flying boat. And in this case, maybe it is. But US regulators are given now two years to define a wing-in-ground-effect craft oversight. Basically, I think we've talked about this a long time ago. But there's this breed of aircraft being developed by Regent Craft that is not quite a boat, not quite an airplane, but uses ground effect to fly at high speeds, very low altitudes over water, which has all sorts of implication and problems of how do you manage that? Who manages it? Is it the FAA? Is it the US Coast Guard? Is it both? I don't know.

But the FAA or lawmakers, regulators will have two years to figure out what is this thing. And who regulates it? And what do we do with this thing? I just found this particularly interesting. I don't know if this kind of aircraft boat thing will ever actually enter service. But when is the last time we had to define what is this thing? And is it an aircraft or a boat? That's a good question.

[00:34:09] IP: It's a great question. And I look forward seeing the report come out in exactly two years, because you know they won't have it done ahead of time.

[00:34:16] JR: Yeah. And there's all sorts of questions. Pulling this from a Flight Global article, which published today, on the 22nd, that notes that, "Unlike the FAA, the US Coast Guard does not issue type certificates for maritime vessels. Rather, it approves vessels for commercial operations under certificate of inspection, which confirms merely that a vessel is structurally sound and probably won't sink at the first sight of something going wrong."

This is interesting, because the Coast Guard clearly is not equipped to certify an aircraft. And the FAA isn't equipped to certify a boat. What do you do here? I don't know. But it's probably going to be really complicated and expensive.

[00:34:53] IP: You form a couple committees and figure it out. What we can say is that the hope of pushing this into service by 2025 is not going to happen if it's going to take them two years to figure out, "What do call this thing?"

[00:35:06] IP: Yeah. That's true. United came out with a statement last week that said we're done being reviewed by the FAA. We can do whatever we want as far as new roots, and aircraft, and everything like that. And then the FAA said, "Whoa, buddy. Hold on just a second.

We didn't say anything of the sort." And now we're maybe done with that? Jason, what's going on?

[00:35:30] JR: Unclear.

[00:35:32] IP: Excellent.

[00:35:34] JR: Yeah. Very unclear. Because the really hasn't commented on this. But there was this internal publication from United saying, "Hey, we're at this stage where we can induct new aircraft and we can do new routes again. And we're still working with the FAA. But we could do that again." And then as you said, the FAA said, "No. Actually, that's not what's happening."

But now, finally, we have – United seems to be taking delivery of an A321neo for the first time in quite a while. Hasn't put it into service yet. But the mere fact that the delivery line is now moving aircraft from Hamburg or France to the US to get this aircraft service is notable. Really just an odd chain of events here. Either they are still prohibited from putting aircraft into service or they're not. But taking delivery of aircraft seems like they would be able to do that.

[00:36:24] IP: It's a start.

[00:36:26] JR: It is the first step in putting an aircraft into service is taking physical possession of it. But, really, just strange that this is still a thing that no one really wants to say is it over or not? But progress nonetheless.

[00:36:38] IP: Progress nonetheless. Speaking of progress or not –

[00:36:45] JR: What are you talking about?

[00:36:47] IP: I mean, we're mostly commercial aviation. But sometimes we like to watch things get tossed into space. And in this case, it doesn't seem like we're going to be seeing that anytime soon.

[00:36:57] JR: No. The Boeing Starliner, Boeing's – well, one of two contracted entities that was supposed to provide NASA with lift for humans into space. The other notable competitor, of course, would be SpaceX Dragon, which is so successful at this point. They're like double parking them outside the International Space Station. They did actually have to move one around in anticipation of Starliner finally making it to the International Space Station like half a decade late. But, unfortunately, yet again, that will not be happening. And we're not just looking at a couple days of delay to the next launch window. The next launch window is an definite period of time at this point. We don't really know. It was supposed to be last week. Then it was supposed to be earlier this week. Then later this week. Then possibly on Friday or Saturday. And now, not. And that would be this time due do some sort of helium leak on board, which they need to take a closer look at. And at this point, I feel like they should just toss Starliner into the ocean and forget about it and pretend the whole thing never happened, because it's just not good.

[00:38:00] IP: It's just not good.

[00:38:02] JR: It's just not good. That is my professional analysis and opinion of Starliner. It is not good. Toss it into the ocean. Forget it happened. This is embarrassing at this point.

[00:38:12] IP: Well, that's episode 269 of AvTalk. Episode 270, who knows what that's going to be? Because, next week, I will be in Stockholm. Jason will be in Hamburg for AIX. And –

[00:38:28] JR: I think those two places are in the same time zone. That's exciting.

[00:38:30] IP: They're in the same time zone at least. We'll have an interesting episode for you next week. We'll surely cover whatever's happened in the world of aviation. And, also, whatever's happened in the world of what goes inside the world of commercial aviation as Jason explores all of the new stuff that's going to be on aircraft in the next 5 to 10 years. Look for a bit of a different episode. But our standard kind of – our road show next week. So, we'll look forward to that. I am Ian Petchenik. Here as always with –

[00:39:04] JR: Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]