

**EPISODE 311**

[EPISODE]

**[0:00:08] IP:** Hello and welcome to episode 311 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

**[0:00:16] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Hello, Ian. How are you –

**[0:00:18] IP:** Hello, Jason.

**[0:00:19] JR:** - this fine mid-March week?

**[0:00:22] IP:** It is a fine week. The weather's doing what mid-March weather does. We're cold and wet, or we're warm and sunny and we're taking what we can get these days.

**[0:00:31] JR:** Okay, that's nice. New York is either cold and wet, or warm and windy for some reason. It's always windy here. I don't like it. I know that's supposed to be Chicago's thing, but it –

**[0:00:42] IP:** Yeah. I mean, it's windy here, too. So, I don't know what to tell you. Maybe you're stealing our thing.

**[0:00:45] JR:** That's fine. We're known for that.

**[0:00:47] IP:** I don't know how I feel about this. But we do have a good show for you this week. We have a lot of updated information, some helpful, some unhelpful, some maddening, and we'll get to that in a moment. We've got some big changes coming to a few airlines around the world and we have a man with a turtle in his pants.

**[0:01:12] JR:** I mean, is that a euphemism? Or, no, no?

**[0:01:15] IP:** Wish. I wish it were.

**[0:01:17] JR:** Nope. We'll get there.

**[0:01:18] IP:** We'll get there. Let's start in Washington, D.C., where the NTSB had a further briefing yesterday, the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, where they briefed on the preliminary report on the mid-air collision between a PSA Airlines CRJ and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter. The information about the collision itself is not new. There was nothing really new in the preliminary report as far as information about the aircraft, about the crew, about the collision, about operations at DCA. That wasn't really the takeaway here.

However, the NTSB, in its investigation into this incident, has been looking at operations at DCA more generally. They took a look at voluntary safety reporting information that's collected by the FAA. Something that's not supposed to happen happens. It doesn't result in a collision, necessarily. It doesn't result in a crash. It doesn't even result in any injuries, but it wasn't supposed to happen. Things like, TCAS arrays, air proximity events, we flew too low on approach, things of that nature that are voluntarily reported, so that these things can be noted and ideally studied and mitigated.

However, the NTSB looked at data from 2011 through 2024. They looked at encounters between helicopters and commercial aircraft near DCA. There were a staggering number of incidents during that time.

**[0:03:10] JR:** It really is a staggering number. A four-digit number is crazy.

**[0:03:18] IP:** I'm just going to read this, because I don't even know how to describe it other than just giving you the actual numbers. At least one TCAS resolution advisory was triggered per month due to a commercial aircraft's proximity to a helicopter. In over half these instances, the helicopter may have been above the root altitude restriction. Two-thirds of those events occurred at night.

**[0:03:45] JR:** That's not great, because, Ian, you put together a great blog post about just how tight that airspace is, and being even marginally above the 200-foot limit puts the helicopters dangerously close to the glide path of the inbound aircraft. Seeing that there are that many

reports of this happening, especially at night, two-thirds of them at night. More than the majority. That's not good. That's really bad.

**[0:04:13] IP:** It gets worse, somehow. Narrowing the window to October 2021 and December 2024, captures a total of 944,179 operations at DCA. During that period, there were 15,214 occurrences between a commercial aircraft and a helicopter in which there was a lateral separation distance of less than 1 nautical mile, and vertical separation of less than 400 feet. There were 85 recorded events that included a lateral separation, less than 1,500 feet, and vertical separation less than 200 feet.

**[0:05:03] JR:** You don't ever want to say that this was an accident waiting to happen, but it's really hard to come to any other conclusion, other than this was an accident waiting to happen. I don't know how else you cut this. At some point, a flight's number came up, a helicopter's number came up, and the inevitable happened. Not good. There was a lot of warning here. To bring her up again, Colleen Mondor had a great article posted to Leeham News this past week, calling the FAA a tombstone agency. That the FAA only reacts to something after it's too late and after people have died. That's why it's referred to as a tombstone agency. This is really, I don't want to call it a good example, because it's a terrible example, but it really –

**[0:05:49] IP:** It's an apt example.

**[0:05:50] JR:** It's an apt example of the FAA just not doing anything in the face of something that is a clear and present danger to everyone in the airspace and nothing happened. We'll talk about a little about what has happened, until it's too late to save the lives that were lost.

**[0:06:07] IP:** Yeah, the NTSB, so in addition to issuing the preliminary report on the investigation into this specific crash, also issued two urgent safety recommendations. As we often note, the NTSB has no legal power to mandate safety features, procedures, anything.

**[0:06:31] JR:** They can yell loudly about that.

**[0:06:33] IP:** They can yell loudly about it and do and make recommendations. The FAA can act upon these recommendations. In this case, it seems like, that's what's going to happen. In

addition to the preliminary report, they issued these two urgent safety recommendations for helicopter traffic in the area around DCA. One of the recommendations is prohibit operations on helicopter route four, between Haynes Point and the Wilson Bridge when runways 15 and 33 are being used for departures and arrivals. That basically prevents helicopters from being in the general vicinity of where the Black Hawk was, when those runways are active.

Then, the other recommendation they make is to designate an alternative helicopter route that can be used to facilitate travel between Haynes Point and Wilson Bridge when that segment of route four is closed. We need to figure out where to put these helicopters in the meantime when these runways are in action. To support this, they published a safety study. One of the graphics in the safety study really struck me. They overlaid the Potomac River, the runway at 33 at DCA, the helicopter route altitude, and the three-degree glide slope approach to runway 33, that commercial aircraft file. There is a “safety” margin, and I'm using safety in the largest air quotes you can possibly use, of 75 feet.

**[0:08:13] JR:** That is not enough.

**[0:08:17] IP:** Aircraft on approach to runway 33 would be 75 feet above where a helicopter transiting that route would be. Assuming the helicopter is below the maximum allowable altitude, which given what we've seen in the voluntary safety reporting, doesn't seem like a given. I mean, Jason brought up the point, we never like to say this is accident waiting to happen, because that carries with it a lot of external baggage. I would be fascinated to learn if there have been any studies in the past about the DC airspace structure with regard to DCA approach departures and helicopter traffic and what the results of any of those days were, or if they just binned them, or they've never been done. I don't know. I've never seen anything, but I can't imagine that they wouldn't have had an inkling that this was possible. It's a lot frustrating, is what it is.

**[0:09:19] JR:** Yeah. There was one other part of the NTSB preliminary report that came out that I did want to mention as well. Also, a podcast listener had emailed and I can't find it at the moment. Last week, I had said that part of the problem here is the nature of analog radio where only one person can speak at a time, and if more than one person tries to speak at a time, nobody speaks at that time. That listener responded and saying, “Hey, that's the case with half

duplex radio. You can actually with analog radio, do full duplex radio with repeaters and all that.” That's true, but that's a yeah, but scenario, where it's not really how things work. That's really complicated, and it's just not how air traffic control works.

However, there was one part of the NTSB report here that did confirm, or did say that, and I think this is going to be pretty significant, that a part of the air traffic control transmission to the helicopter pilots saying to pass behind the PSA regional jet was stepped on by a 0.8 second mic key from the helicopter itself. They probably would not have heard “passed behind the.” That's really crucial. They did not have the situational awareness they needed to avoid that aircraft, because of the inherent, not going to call it flaws, but the inherent limitations of analog radio.

To our listener, yes, full duplex radio exists, but that's beyond the scope of how anything actually works here. I think that's going to play a significant part. I'm glad the NTSB was able to get the cockpit voice recorder from the helicopter to not just piece together what air traffic control said and what the flight crew of the PSA jet heard, but also what the helicopter pilots were, or more importantly, were not hearing.

**[0:11:10] IP:** Yeah. I think that's a really good point, Jason. We'll leave that here for the moment. We'll learn more as we follow along with the investigation, now that the preliminary report is out, now that the urgent safety recommendations are out. It'll be quite some time probably before we have another update and certainly before we have a final report, but we'll definitely keep after this one. The NTSB also released its preliminary report on the crash of the Medevac Learjet outside of Philadelphia that occurred just days later. The NTSB report here is very, very thin. Not much more is known than we had already known before.

However, the NTSB did recover the cockpit voice recorder. We talked about that. They recovered it under a whole eight feet in the ground. They were able to spend an inordinate amount of time and today, they posted some photos from the vehicle recorder lab of the NTSB technicians physically accessing the tape memory with an angle grinder.

**[0:12:14] JR:** Oh, whoa. I have not seen these pictures before right now. That's a hole in the ground.

**[0:12:20] IP:** Yeah. Then they managed to get the tape media read. However, “The CVR did not record the accident flight. During the audition, it was determined that the CVR had likely not been recording audio for several years.”

**[0:12:41] JR:** I wonder how they came to that conclusion. But either way, that is not good.

**[0:12:47] IP:** I wonder if the last thing on the tape is a flight that references something that – I wonder if the pilots on the flight are like, “Oh, COVID might be bad.”

**[0:12:57] JR:** That's the exact example I was going to give. Like, what more defining moment can you pick?

**[0:13:02] IP:** This is old.

**[0:13:04] JR:** Correct me if I'm wrong, but this was a Mexico registered Learjet. Was that right? I think I saw it with [crosstalk inaudible 0:13:10] registration?

**[0:13:12] IP:** Yes. Registered in Mexico. However, the company does maintain US operations, so I'm not sure where they maintain these particular craft, and I'm sure the NTSB is looking into that.

**[0:13:23] JR:** Yeah. I would be, too.

**[0:13:25] IP:** All is not lost. However, hopefully all is not lost. The manufacturer of the ground proximity warning system device is still attempting to recover any data from that device's non-volatile memory that they can. Hopefully, some data is at least available through the GPWS device.

**[0:13:47] JR:** Yeah. Just crazy what the NTSB is able to pull, or in this case, not pull from flight data recorders when – We'll post a link in the show notes to what this recorder looks like and the hole it was taken from. It is a feat of engineering in and of itself that these things are able to be recovered. Too bad it wasn't working, but just, wow.

[0:14:11] **IP:** Not only was it recovered from that hole, not only did they have to use an angle grinder to cut the thing open and get the tape out, it was a magnetic tape.

[0:14:19] **JR:** That wasn't a miss spoken line when you said tape?

[0:14:22] **IP:** It's actually old enough that it's magnetic tape.

[0:14:26] **JR:** That explains a lot.

[0:14:33] **IP:** Yup. We'll keep after this one as well. Jason?

[0:14:37] **JR:** Yo.

[0:14:38] **IP:** For years and years and years and years and years, Southwest Airlines has said bags fly free.

[0:14:49] **JR:** Yeah. What if they didn't?

[0:14:53] **IP:** Well, they don't –

[0:14:55] **JR:** Surprise, they're not going to anymore, starting what is it? May something, or other. Starting sometime later this year.

[0:15:02] **IP:** May the 15<sup>th</sup>. Yeah.

[0:15:03] **JR:** May 15<sup>th</sup>.

[0:15:05] **IP:** Tickets book after that date. Will no longer receive two free checked bags.

[0:15:09] **JR:** Or any. Forget two. You won't get any free checked bags. Let alone, two.

[0:15:14] **IP:** Unless, of course, you have the co-branded credit card.

**[0:15:18] JR:** Or if you fly business select, or – Who books that? Come on.

**[0:15:22] IP:** The long and the short of this conversation.

**[0:15:24] JR:** Roll back. Let's take this from the top.

**[0:15:28] IP:** The long and the short of it is that Southwest Airlines is now every other airline.

**[0:15:34] JR:** Southwest Airlines, as you know it, as we knew it, the beginning of this year, late last year is dead. There is no more Southwest Airlines. It is now Elliott Investment Management, whatever airlines.

**[0:15:48] IP:** Southwest did an investor presentation at, I believe is that JP Morgan –

**[0:15:53] JR:** Are you going to read the bullet points? Because I was going to read the bullet points.

**[0:15:55] IP:** I am.

**[0:15:55] JR:** Do it.

**[0:15:56] IP:** By all means.

**[0:15:56] JR:** No, no. Do it. Do it. You got it loaded up.

**[0:15:58] IP:** Okay. Southwest is changing rapidly, is the title of the slide that Southwest showed the investor conference. I'm reading off of the slide. Bag fees, flight credit expiration, adding basic economy product.

**[0:16:13] JR:** No.

**[0:16:14] IP:** Assign seating and extra leg room. Loyalty program optimization.

**[0:16:19] JR:** Optimization is a bad word. You never want to hear that.

**[0:16:21] IP:** Online travel agency participation. Amended chase co-brand agreement.

**[0:16:28] JR:** We love brand card fees, folks.

**[0:16:30] IP:** The rapid rewards credit card agreement. Accelerated an increased cost reduction targets.

**[0:16:37] JR:** Oh, that could mean anything.

**[0:16:38] IP:** It means nothing good for the people that work at Southwest.

**[0:16:41] JR:** That's at the next fun five years.

**[0:16:41] IP:** Streamlining of corporate overhead.

**[0:16:43] JR:** That's layoffs.

**[0:16:45] IP:** This one is extremely interesting to me. Fuel hedging program discontinued.

**[0:16:52] JR:** Oh, that could be good in the short term.

**[0:16:55] IP:** What every good airline needs to increase its stock price, a 2.5 billion dollar share repurchase program completed by July 2025.

**[0:17:05] JR:** Sure. Those never come back to bite you, ever.

**[0:17:09] IP:** Southwest Airlines is, I mean, it hasn't been a low-cost carrier for a very long time. Its base fares have often been equal to, or more expensive than other airlines serving the same market, but the brand loyalty that they have engendered through both – the bags fly free thing, sure. But also, the people that work at Southwest. That is gone.

**[0:17:36] JR:** It's a devastating time to work for Southwest. It's hard to work with them, knowing all the changes that are going on there. It's hard to be a Southwest loyalist right now. This checklist that we just ran off is everything you would need to do to kill the airline, to kill its brand loyalty, its differentiators, and everything that makes Southwest, Southwest. Now, it's just, I don't know, American but worse in a lot of ways, which is –

**[0:18:06] IP:** Saying something?

**[0:18:07] JR:** That's an accomplishment, ladies and gentlemen, to be American but worse, because it is a regular airline, but without a lot of the stuff. Without a fantastic frequent flyer program, without interline agreements, without any airline partners, so you can redeem your miles and go somewhere that isn't Southwest's network. They have not great inexpensive Wi-Fi, they don't have any buy-onboard food. It's basically the worst version of the mainline airlines that are out there today. It's just really disappointing. To highlight how big in news losing the two free bags with all fares on Southwest is –

My friend Eric – Hi Eric, if you're listening. I know you're listening. But he actually sent me a screenshot from his Disney News app, and a part of that was the news about Southwest no longer having two free bags, because it's such a big deal for families that without that, there is absolutely no reason to go to Southwest first. That it is making circles in Disney news, not even airline news, not even travel news. Disney news. It's so much brand damage, which is funny, because when they first started doing this, Southwest put out a lot about what they were going to change. The assigned seating, extra leg room, all these other changes, it sounded like, yeah, you should have done this 15 years ago. But the one thing they said they weren't going to do was charge for bags, because the reputational damage and the overall cost benefit that –

**[0:19:39] IP:** And cost. Yeah.

**[0:19:40] JR:** Cost benefit of charging for bags was a net negative, that whatever they would rake in now for charging from bags would be lost additionally in the future by losing out brand loyalty. I guess, Elliott management said, “You know what? That's fine. You could deal with that five years. Right now, we want those bag fee dollars today.” That's where we sit, where they are

extracting as much value out of this brand as possible today with absolutely no regard for what happens to Southwest in the future. It sucks.

**[0:20:17] IP:** Yeah, it absolutely does. When the strongest and the bags fly free thing, I don't think we can overstate it, but for sure we can't overstate how important the onboard experience, because of the people was, or is to why people choose to fly Southwest.

**[0:20:39] JR:** What is their marketing message now? Forever, basically, their only message was bags fly free. That was it. Southwest.com is the only place you could find this. What do they go on now? They're not the cheapest game in town. They don't include bags, even if it is included in the fare itself and isn't actually any cheaper. Why fly Southwest? I don't know what their message is. I don't know if they know what their message is, on why I should fly Southwest, unless you happen to live in Baltimore, or Kansas City, in Fortress Hub for Southwest. Why? Good luck to the marketing team there. You've been handed a very difficult job.

**[0:21:14] IP:** Yeah, I do not envy them. We'll see what happens to the airline, both in terms of its ability to retain brand loyalty, if it can do that, and its ability to thrive. I mean, I wish them success. I can't see this getting at them.

**[0:21:37] JR:** I never expected to be in the position of being disappointed and rooting for Southwest, because I don't care about Southwest in New York. They're a non-factor. I don't care what happens to them. Now, for some reason, they do, because what's happening to it is just terrible. I never really flew Southwest before. I'm certainly not going to now.

**[0:21:56] IP:** Yeah. I mean, my wife's family for many, many, many, many, many years was a huge Southwest family, because of partially, the bags fly free thing.

**[0:22:10] JR:** The brainwashing. It's a bit of the brainwashing. That was their thing.

**[0:22:13] IP:** The brainwashing. Yeah. Also, I mean, they did Disney. That was their thing, and they had relatives in Florida. It was Chicago-Florida, Chicago-Florida, Chicago-Florida. That was fine for them. We got them away from that now before all of this started to happen. It's

funny having conversation with my mother on it. She's like, "Yeah. I mean, oftentimes it's more expensive even with the free bag now." Well, that's not a very good value proposition, is it?

**[0:22:37] JR:** No.

**[0:22:39] IP:** I wish them the best of luck. I haven't talked to anyone who is a – We often talk about these things and the next story we're going to talk about is one of those things where it matters to a select group of people and just how much it matters to the rest of the people is where profit and loss happens. But I think with Southwest, so many people choose Southwest, because they are choosing Southwest, not they're booking an airline ticket and going somewhere. They're saying, "I'm going someplace and I'm choosing Southwest." I think far fewer people are going to choose Southwest when all of this gets rolled out.

**[0:23:18] JR:** Especially, now that it's also available on Expedia and Kayak and all these other places, where you can directly compare it and see, "Oh, I could fly Delta in basic economy and get all this extra stuff, like free Wi-Fi and seat bag screens." Maybe that matters to you. Maybe it doesn't, but now you're going to know about it.

**[0:23:36] IP:** That'll be very interesting to see as well. Let's head over to Seoul, where cover broke, thanks to a few crafty plane spotters.

**[0:23:46] JR:** Night plane spotters. The hardest kind of plane spotting.

**[0:23:51] IP:** A new livery. Korean air 787. A lot of us went, huh. Okay.

**[0:23:58] JR:** Somebody even replied to me and said, "Why would you share this either incomplete, or faked livery?" Guess what?

**[0:24:06] IP:** Joke's on them.

**[0:24:07] JR:** It's real and it's not spectacular.

**[0:24:15] IP:** Oh, that was a deep cut. I like it.

**[0:24:16] JR:** Thank you. Thank you. We're going far back to understand that.

**[0:24:19] IP:** The Seinfeld episode catalog. Yeah. Korean Air unveiled its new livery and branding this week. They did so in a spectacular –

**[0:24:27] JR:** For its 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**[0:24:30] IP:** Yeah. The backstory here, and it's a good reason to rebrand, and I totally get where they're coming from. They've completed the acquisition of Asiana. They are folding two extremely well-known brands into each other. They're reconfiguring how the airline operates. They're reconfiguring their cabins. They're moving forward. So, they need a new visual identity. I support that. I love the old Korean livery, but I get where you're coming from saying, okay, maybe we need something new, something to incorporate our growth and move forward. Then they did this, which is, and I think I posted this on Blue Sky. But it's basically a picture of a KLM 787, a La Compagnie A321neo, and then the Korean 787.

**[0:25:25] JR:** You should have also posted it side by side with that, also going back on NBC TV sitcoms of The Office as Pam going, "Corporate needs you to define the difference between these three images."

**[0:25:37] IP:** Yeah, exactly. I ran out of space in the canvas I was working on, but I could have also included TUI would have been an acceptable comparison here. We're slowly converging. It's not that I dislike the Korean livery in whole, but we're slowly, or maybe not so slowly, converging on having two or three, maybe four styles of how we paint airplanes. I'm just going to get on my old man yells at cloud soapbox and say, why? Why can't we have at least a little creativity here?

**[0:26:12] JR:** Well, it's funny you say that, because in the show notes, one of your bullet points is, showcase of other liveries not chosen. On Koreans microsite about their rebranding.

**[0:26:26] IP:** [New.koreanair.com](http://New.koreanair.com).

**[0:26:28] JR:** There you go. I don't know if this was staged for this video, or if there actually were three marketing people standing in front of a giant wall, of all of the things they could have chosen, and created and we're comparing against. It's a wall of all of these – I mean, there are sections called new liveries we explored and an overview. And should we retain, or reinterpret, or replace our brand symbol, which is the, oh, no, I don't know what to call it, the red and blue smooshie thing. Do you know what that thing's called?

**[0:27:01] IP:** I'm going to mispronounce it, but I believe it's called the [name inaudible 0:27:05].

**[0:27:06] JR:** Something like that.

**[0:27:07] IP:** Yeah. I don't know exactly how you pronounce it.

**[0:27:09] JR:** They have a list of interpreting national iconographies with the Swiss tail and Air Canada and American and BA and JAL and Air New Zealand and Cathay and Thai and all these different visual identities of airlines representing their countries and the change of the Amex logo and the BMW logo, and I don't know what that one is in the middle, and all of these inspirational things and all of these mock liveries they created, and then they went with the one they went with. They had options.

**[0:27:37] IP:** They had lots of options.

**[0:27:37] JR:** They had lots of options. They went with something so safe and so boring, when they had literally hundreds, hundreds of choices, presumably in front of them, if that was real, and they didn't. I like seeing that behind the scenes though, of all of their choices.

**[0:27:54] IP:** That was nice.

**[0:27:55] JR:** That was cool. I just wish that the end result was, I don't know, there are a lot of very cool looking liveries there. A lot of them are similar, but some of them are like, oh, that would have been – I would like that one.

**[0:28:09] IP:** That would have been a fine choice. We'll let you take a look at that and we'll link to that in the show notes, so that you can watch the video and ooh and aah at some of the liveries that weren't. This is the real one and this is what is flying already. That'll be interesting. Also, they're introducing a premium economy product on 11 of their 777-300ERs.

**[0:28:33] JR:** I did not know that. That's nice. This was announced as part of the basically, side interviews as part of the livery unveiling. That will be completed by the end of 2026.

**[0:28:47] JR:** Okay, so sometime in 2028. That's good to know.

**[0:28:50] IP:** Yeah. Exactly.

**[0:28:52] JR:** That's good.

**[0:28:52] IP:** These 777s will also have their first-class seats removed.

**[0:28:56] JR:** Oh, yeah. Well, I don't think they sell first-class anymore. They just sell it as a business-plus ancillary or whatever. But it's interesting, because both Korean and Asiana did not have premium economy, which is very much not the norm these days. Good to see them do something in that regard. Selfishly, I'm flying to Seoul on Korean at the end of this year on a 747-8. This will not be a thing I get to fly on.

**[0:29:22] IP:** No. Sorry.

**[0:29:23] JR:** But hey, it's a 747. Even in economy, I'm pretty okay.

**[0:29:26] IP:** You're going to be okay.

**[0:29:28] JR:** I'll be okay.

**[0:29:29] IP:** Yeah. The premium economy seats will come to the A350s and the 777Xs.

**[0:29:37] JR:** Asterisk, maybe, one day.

**[0:29:39] IP:** Whenever those are delivered. Keep an eye out for those, again. Also, Korean further reiterated that the four-engine aircraft that it currently operates, both the 747 and A380, will remain in service until it has enough of its new order aircraft. Again, read 777X, to replace those. If you want to fly a 747, or an A380, Seoul, Frankfurt, and Munich are your best bets for the foreseeable future. Apparently, we can see pretty far into the future, because I don't see the 777X arriving anytime soon.

**[0:30:21] JR:** No, that's not going to be next week, is it?

**[0:30:24] IP:** No. Let's go to Brazil, where Brazilian aviation regulator, ANAC, has said to Voepass that, "You're grounded. We tried to work with you. We inspected you in February. We inspected you at the end of last year. We said, here are your problems you need to fix." They came back in February. Not only were there new problems, but there were previous problems that they thought had been resolved, had re-emerged. They've said, "Okay. No. You're done. No more flying, and we're going to see where we go from here."

The airline for its part says, "We maintain our aircraft to the high standards. We have systems in place to ensure that everything is well maintained and we're doing everything we can to correct all of these things that have been mentioned." But that did not satisfy the regulator, which said, "No, you're done."

**[0:31:23] JR:** That all happened in the grand scheme of things real quick, because Voepass was regarded as a pretty normal airline, not making the news, not really having much going on. If you look at their Wikipedia entry, there wasn't another listed incident since 2010. This airline had gone a long time without doing anything noteworthy, which is good. That's what you want. Then all of a sudden, for it to all come crumbling down like that, that's not typically how this goes.

**[0:31:54] IP:** Yeah. Hopefully, they can turn it around. But if not, they may not be flying anytime soon. Following the suspected onboard battery bank fire earlier – was in February, sorry, a bunch of major airlines are now pushing forward with not only making sure that you can't carry them in your check luggage, but also saying, you can't carry them on the plane at all.

**[0:32:19] JR:** Yeah. Or if you can, they are banning the use of them onboard specifically. This comes to us from Executive Traveler. Singapore Airlines has now banned the use, or charging of them onboard. They're not banning the bringing them onboard, but they are –

**[0:32:37] IP:** The carriage.

**[0:32:39] JR:** Carriage of them on board. But you are no longer allowed to use them, or charge them using the onboard power supply, or USB port, or whatever. For an airline like Singapore, that's not really an issue. Why would you do that anyway? Every single seat on every single airplane on Singapore has at least a power outlet, or a USB port. You shouldn't need to do that, so I understand. If this picks up and it is, because I think Thai Airways and Air Asia have similar restrictions now. A lot of their aircraft, especially Air Asia, most likely none of their aircraft have so much as even a low-power USB port. To also not be able to use a battery bank is not so great, especially if these airlines offer Wi-Fi, or streaming entertainment to not be able to charge your phone at all, whether through the airline's power source, or your own, that stinks.

We've talked about this before, lithium-ion batteries are basically little bombs that you put in your pocket. There are a lot of cheap poorly made lithium-ion battery banks that really are just bombs, people are bringing onboard, and it burned down an airplane. If that happened in the air, not so great. I understand where airlines are coming from banning these. I just don't know when this ends. Probably doesn't.

**[0:34:00] IP:** Yeah. I mean, I totally get it why airlines are getting rid of these, or saying you can't bring, because there's no quality control.

**[0:34:10] JR:** No. This stuff is, some of this is manufactured garbage. If you buy this on Temu, or AliExpress, some of them are manufacturing rejects that the big companies don't want and then they find their way into some shady manufacture and suddenly, you've got yourself a defective power bank, but you don't know that.

**[0:34:28] IP:** Awesome.

**[0:34:29] JR:** I mean, I travel with three or four of these on longer trips. To be fair, they get banged around. They get damaged. If there's any indication that they're not safe, I stop using them. I throw them away. But man, there's a lot of these onboard airplanes. A lot of them.

**[0:34:46] IP:** This week, Nolinor showed off a – it's basically a protective blanket that goes over palatized cargo, so that they can carry electronics more safely. It's basically a giant fire blanket that goes over the pallet and then gets strapped down, which I thought was a really interesting solution to the problem that they've developed with Canadian.

**[0:35:14] JR:** Yeah. Things have come full circle, because JAL back in the day, I think on their domestic 777s and first class, they used to give passengers a power bank, because they didn't have onboard power. They actually had their own supply of onboard power banks that they would give to passengers. I don't see that being a thing anymore.

**[0:35:31] IP:** I don't think that that's going to happen much longer, or any longer. Okay, the title of this one in the show notes is much more appropriate than anything that I can say that it's family friendly, but Air India conducted a 10-hour flight from Chicago-to-Chicago last week.

**[0:35:50] JR:** Ooh. That's the worst kind of flight.

**[0:35:52] IP:** Because the toilet stopped working, which is, I mean –

**[0:35:58] JR:** Where are the Norwegian plumbers when you need them?

**[0:36:00] IP:** Exactly, exactly. Totally within the realm of possibilities, this happens. I've had a flight cancellation due to broken toilets. It happens. That's not a problem.

**[0:36:10] JR:** That happened to you on SAS, didn't it?

**[0:36:11] IP:** It did. It did. But that's not what happened here. They had to take the plumbing system apart. When they did, Jason, what did they find in the pipes?

**[0:36:25] JR:** They found all sorts of stuff you're not supposed to find. This is why airlines like United have signs on the toilet lid that say, "Don't flush anything that you're not supposed to flush down the toilet, because you're going to break the toilet and then you're going to ground the airplane." Nobody wants that. They found, according to this article from One Mile at a Time, polyethylene bags, rags, clothes, or is that claws? All sorts of other stuff that you're not supposed to put down a toilet. Somebody on board that plane was just flushing stuff down the toilet. Rags, clothing, bags.

**[0:36:56] IP:** I saw a photo from a local source, not –

**[0:36:59] JR:** I have not seen this photo.

**[0:37:00] IP:** - published publicly, of them pulling a blanket. They detached the pipe and pulled a blanket out of there.

**[0:37:08] JR:** Yeah. I mean, those toilets suck. You put something in there and you hit flush. It's going to take down whatever's in there. As long as it fits through the hole. Who would do this? Why?

**[0:37:18] IP:** I don't know.

**[0:37:19] JR:** Why?

**[0:37:20] IP:** Really don't know. Speaking of who would do this, you know how at the beginning of the podcast, I mentioned that there's a man with a turtle in his pants, Jason?

**[0:37:30] JR:** I recall that. You mentioned it. You mentioned it.

**[0:37:32] IP:** Jason, tell me more about the man with the turtle in his pants.

**[0:37:35] JR:** The TSA –

**[0:37:36] IP:** It's your neck of the woods.

**[0:37:38] JR:** - would love to tell you, they have mentioned this a lot on Blue Sky in the last few days, but a Pennsylvania man was caught with a turtle concealed in his pants, when the TSA body scanner triggered an alarm in the area of the man's groin on Friday, March 7<sup>th</sup>. Of course, at Newark Liberty International Airport. The exact terminal is not determined, so we can't deduce what airline this person was flying. But if I had to bet, it was probably terminal B. Everything bad happens in terminal B. When the TSA officer administered the pat down of the area of the man's body where the alarm was triggered and doing so, determined that there was something concealed in the area of the man's groin. I am not adlibbing. I am reading the TSA press release.

When asked if there was something hidden in his pants, the man, a resident of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, reached down the front of his pants and pulled out a live turtle that was wrapped in a small blue towel. The turtle was estimated to be about five inches in length. The man told officials that it was a Red Ear Slider Turtle. Port Authority Police questioned the man, took possession of the turtle and said, they would contact the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the local animal control. Additionally, the man missed his flight and was escorted out of the checkpoint by police. Why? You can take a turtle on an airplane in a box. It's fine. Is there any rule against taking away a whole turtle on a domestic flight?

**[0:39:07] IP:** Are you telling me that you don't fly with a turtle in your pants?

**[0:39:11] JR:** An emotional support turtle might be a thing that somebody has tried to do in the past. This was not that. But why?

**[0:39:19] IP:** This was a physical support turtle.

**[0:39:21] JR:** Physical support turtle. Sometimes we need news like this. It keeps us together.

**[0:39:29] IP:** That's why I included the next story, which is not really a story at all. It's a one sentence story. There is an airline called Spacebee Airlines.

**[0:39:39] JR:** I'm going to take this one line news article, and give you a quiz.

**[0:39:44] IP:** Okay.

**[0:39:44] JR:** How many airlines are there, or were there with bee in their name?

**[0:39:50] IP:** Bee in their name or bee-themed?

**[0:39:52] JR:** Bee in their name.

**[0:39:53] IP:** In their actual name.

**[0:39:54] JR:** B-E-E, like the animal, like the little insect.

**[0:39:59] IP:** Space, we're counting Spacebee. We've got space B. We've got Flying Bee. We've got, I think, just Bees.

**[0:40:08] JR:** Who can forget their name?

**[0:40:08] IP:** I'll say, I'm missing one, and I'll say four.

**[0:40:11] JR:** Okay. It's more than that. It's at least seven. I just went to [planespotters.net](http://planespotters.net), typed in the word bee and we've got Busy Bee from Norway.

**[0:40:18] IP:** Oh, French Bee.

**[0:40:20] JR:** We've got French Bee from France, Spacebee Airlines, who we just mentioned, from Uzbekistan. Busy Bee Congo from Congo. Gee Bee Air from Greece, which is apparently, a thing at some point. Italy comes in strong with just Air Bee, B-E-E, so not Fly Bee, Air Bee.

**[0:40:39] IP:** Just a singular B.

**[0:40:41] JR:** It existed for one year, from 2007 to 2008, and then had a nice little bee in the logo. Then, of course, we have AeroBee Airlines from Canada, which did not last long. I don't know. From September 2012 to March 2013. Not long.

**[0:40:57] IP:** Not long.

**[0:40:58] JR:** On top of that, what was it? Bees Airlines. I don't know why that didn't come up in my list, but Bees Airlines was also a thing. I don't think it is still a thing. I'm sorry. There's Bes Airline and Bees Airlines, one from Ukraine and one is from Romania. Those are different. There are a lot of bee-themed airlines for some reason.

**[0:41:18] IP:** Huh.

**[0:41:20] JR:** Yeah.

**[0:41:21] IP:** All right. Cool.

**[0:41:22] JR:** Also, there's the Baltic Bees. Apparently in, I don't know.

**[0:41:27] IP:** Their flight demonstration team.

**[0:41:28] JR:** A flight demonstration team called the Baltic Bees.

**[0:41:31] IP:** Where they fly the Albatross, I think.

**[0:41:33] JR:** They do, indeed. That's cool. They've got a very nice blue and yellow kind of, sort of livery. It's actually quite nice.

**[0:41:42] IP:** We'll take what we can get.

**[0:41:43] JR:** Airlines love bees, apparently.

**[0:41:45] IP:** Then, we're going to end the show with some congratulations. Happy birthday to young listener, Leo Weiser. It is his birthday this week, a regular podcast listener. We wanted to wish him a very happy birthday. Finally, congratulations to Seattle Times Pulitzer Prize winning Boeing and aerospace reporter, Dominic Gates. He is retiring after, I didn't know this. I learned it while I was reading about the retirement announcement. Not a very long journalistic career, surprisingly enough. Came to the Seattle Times from a previous career and said, "I want to write," and they said, "Okay. Go write about Boeing." He did, and has doggedly covered the beat for years now. He will be missed.

**[0:42:36] JR:** Yes. He is relevant and important enough that – he actually has a Wikipedia entry, which is pretty cool. Yeah. Hopefully, someone fills his rather large shoes in the Boeing beat. Otherwise, Boeing is going to get away with a lot more than it used to, not to say they do anything nefarious. But if they were, Dominic Gates was going to find it and he was going to report on it. Hopefully, someone else can pick up that sack, because Dominic has had an amazing career covering Boeing and every – Not just Boeing, but the aviation scene in the Puget Sound region as a whole.

**[0:43:12] IP:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Dominic's replacement, or successor is Lauren Rosenblatt. She'll be the Seattle Times new Boeing beat reporter and aerospace correspondent. Look out for her writing in the, I guess, coming weeks and months as Dominic Gates moves on to retirement. Congratulations again, Dominic. Thank you very much for all that you have done for the industry. We appreciate it very much, and wish you well in your retirement. This has been episode 311 of AvTalk. I am Ian Petchenik, here, as always with –

**[0:43:49] JR:** Jason Rabinowitz. Thanks for listening.

[END]