

United Flight 585 – March 23-24, 1999 UA585 and US427 . . . and the aftermath . . .

We eagerly awaited the NTSB Public Hearing for USAir 427 scheduled March 23-24, 1999. We had the impression that the NTSB was finally going to conclude the 737 investigation of US427 (and United 585), and release a True Probable Cause for both flights.

Media had been taping interviews and doing research for over a month before the NTSB Public Hearing so that they would have the story ready to go. There was still controversy about the cause of the crash because corporate interests were in full force that factors other than the rudder failure caused both crashes.

Tom McSweeney, FAA Director of Certification at that time, was traveling and working the press more than ever to try and convince the public that the two slides in the one servo-valve were “redundant” and therefore provided a back-up system for the 737. Fact is that the 737 has one power control unit that goes through one servo-valve, with slides inside the servo-valve which is the size of a pop can, and other commercial aircraft have two or more power control units.

The NTSB Public Hearing went well and they did excellent work in unfolding the 737 USAir 427 investigation. Some family members could quickly tell that the March 1999 US427 Public Hearing reflected true facts and findings very different from the December 1992 NTSB “meeting.”

The room had a couple hundred people or more and a full house with press all ready to report the story for us. However, in the afternoon of March 24th the press was all called out of the Public Hearing to go to the White House because the U.S. had decided to bomb in Kosovo and that story became most important at that moment. I share this as a part of the history of other events taking precedent over aviation disasters, and investigations that better serve all the traveling public. Aviation safety has been upstaged by “Elian Gonzales” and other instant celebrity diversions from real news.

So the NTSB recommendations for redesign of the 737 were not front page news, but family members from US427 and UA585 felt reassured that after so many years the Probable Cause and the TRUTH prevailed on March 24, 1999.

October 2002 the FAA finalized rule making requiring airlines to install new rudder-control systems on Boeing 737's. In the U.S. 2,000 to 3,000 were retrofitted over a period of years. The 2,500 foreign 737's may or may not have been retrofitted – the process was much slower with foreign aircraft. The FAA also issued rules for airlines to install safer airline passenger seats.

Recommendations dating from 1999 and even earlier were not expedited for much-needed Updated Flight Data Recorders.

US Airways sued Parker-in turn sued Boeing as a third party to the airplane manufacturer to share the liability. **In June 2002 there was a month long civil trial about who was financially responsible for US427**, US Airways vs. Parker-Hannifin, the manufacturer of the servo-valve. The jury ruled that Parker-Hannifin was 75% liable for the US427 crash and Boeing, was 25% liable. We do not know the actual dollar award paid to US Airways insurance carrier, London-based Global Aerospace.

The above civil trial was important because the jury concluded the NTSB had been correct when they released the Probable Cause on March 24, 1999 – that the crew members acted properly and did nothing to contribute to the crash and the causes were mechanical.

The family members of US427 brought together other air crash family members and on August 1, 1995 incorporated the *NATIONAL AIR DISASTER ALLIANCE & FOUNDATION*, with short term goals of support for victims' families, and long term goals of safety, security and survivability. Working together *NADA/F* Founding Members passed the Family Assistance Act in 1996, and this legislation serves air crash family members to this day.

The USAir 427 family members also purchased the crash site to preserve its quiet peaceful environment, and it is a peaceful place to reflect for the long term. There is also a US427 memorial at the Sewickley Cemetery. This outstanding group of family members, through the years of grief, investigation and litigation found the energy and resources to pass important legislation and establish memorials which honor their loved ones forever.