

DOCKET NO. SA-516

APPENDIX BB

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, DC

INTERVIEW SUMMARY
MICHAEL JULIAN RUSSELL
(2 pages)

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Interview Summary

On July 19, 1996, Michael Julian Russell was interviewed by detectives acting on behalf of the FBI. He was later re-interviewed by the NTSB accompanied by the FBI.

Mr. Russell is a civil engineer and was a passenger on a survey vessel on July 17, 1996, which was proceeding from Moriches Inlet to a dredge located approximately 1 mile southeast of the inlet.

He stated he was in the cabin seated next to a window and he observed a white flash in the sky. According to Mr. Russell, within a second of the white flash he observed a burst of fire forming a huge fireball. He described the fireball as an object or substance of extreme flammability being suddenly ignited as opposed to an explosion expending side to side energy. He said that black smoke appeared over the fireball immediately and white smoke over the black smoke. Two large pieces engulfed in flames fell to the ocean, side-by-side, one lower than the other. These items fell straight down while it appeared the fireball remained suspended in air still burning for a period of time.

Mr. Russell said that he did not hear an explosion, but advised that the noise of the boat diesel engines is quite loud. In addition, he related that he saw no projectiles or light from surface to air and had not seen the aircraft flying. Also, he emphasized that he was unaware of what he was observing and had no idea that an aircraft was the object.

Following this event, according to Mr. Russell, the boat on which he was a passenger proceeded to the crash site at best speed (approximately 18 to 20 knots and a distance calculated to be approximately 7 miles). He said he witnessed debris falling in small pieces and described this as "raining debris." He also radioed the Coast Guard and described that the boat began to encounter debris when 1/2 mile from the crash site. Upon getting closer, he observed fire bubbling up and out of the ocean.

During the re-interview by the NTSB, Mr. Russell stressed he had no knowledge that what he witnessed was an aircraft and became aware of what the explosion had involved when the boat he was on entered the debris field and he recognized seat cushions and other objects which he identified as being interior items from an aircraft.

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Interview Summary

Mr. Russell related that from his recollection of the event, the boat he was on was the first entity on the scene. He said that a fixed wing aircraft and helicopter came about the same time and a little later a Coast Guard boat arrived. The Coast Guard vessel told the people on his boat to look for survivors vs. retrieving the numerous bodies which were floating in the area. The boat then proceeded with that tasking and found no survivors.

Visibility was good, according to Mr. Russell, as there were numerous fires burning on the surface of the water, and bubbles of diesel smelling fuel came to the surface for some period of time.