

Friendly tone belied acts of Seattle plane thief

Crashed on Ketron Island

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE — He cracked jokes, complimented the professional demeanor of an air traffic controller and apologized for making a fuss.

But the friendly tone of a 29-year-old airport worker who stole a commercial plane Friday night, performing acrobatic stunts before the fatal plunge into a thick island forest, belied his desperate actions.

"I think I'm going to try to do a barrel roll, and if that goes good I'll go nose down and call it a night," Richard Russell said from the cockpit, according to a recording of his conversation with the controller.

The Pierce County Medical Examiner's Office confirmed Sunday that Russell had died in the fiery wreckage, but whether the crash was deliberate or accidental was one of several topics remaining for investigators.

Others include how, nearly 17 years after the 9/11 attack, someone can simply take a passenger plane from a major U.S. airport without authorization.

Two F-15C aircraft were scrambled from Portland and pursued the plane but authorities say they didn't fire on it before it crashed.

The bizarre incident points to one of the biggest potential perils for commercial air travel: airline or airport employees causing mayhem.

"The greatest threat we have to aviation is the insider threat," Erroll Southers, a former FBI agent and transportation security expert, told the AP. "Here we have an employee who was vetted to the level to have access to the aircraft and had a skill set proficient enough to take off with that plane."



A stolen Horizon Air turboprop plane flying over Eatonville, Wash., on Friday.

The Seattle FBI office said Sunday that it had recovered the flight data recorder and components of the cockpit voice recorder from the Horizon plane. The National Transportation Safety Board is now processing the equipment.

The FBI also said it found human remains among the wreckage.

Tragic as Russell's death was, he could have inflicted vastly more damage had he been so inclined. Potential targets included tens of thousands of fans assembling at Safeco Field, about 12 miles away, for a sold-out Pearl Jam concert just as he took off.

"Last night's event is going to push us to learn what we can from this tragedy so that we can ensure this does not

happen again at Alaska Air Group or at any other airline," Brad Tilden, CEO of Alaska Airlines, told a news conference Saturday.

The plane was a Bombardier Q400, a turboprop that seats 76 people, owned by Horizon Air, part of Alaska Airlines. It had been parked at a cargo and maintenance area for the night after arriving from Victoria, British Columbia, earlier in the day.

Russell, a 3½-year Horizon employee, worked as a ground service agent. His responsibilities included towing and pushing aircraft for takeoff and gate approach, de-icing them, and handling baggage.

Authorities said he used a tractor to rotate the plane 180 degrees, positioning it so that

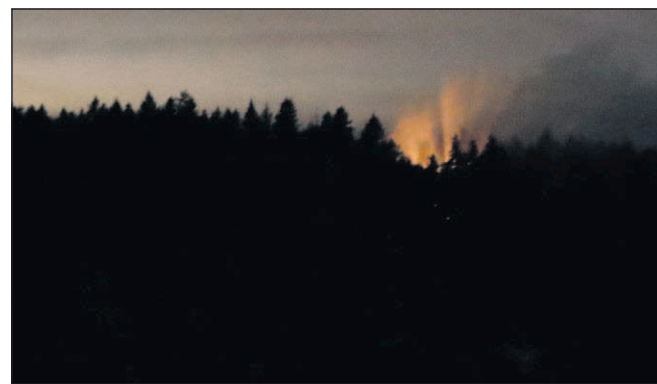
he could taxi toward a runway. They said it's not clear whether he had ever taken flight lessons or used flight simulators, or where he gained the skills to take off. The plane didn't require a key, but it did require buttons and switches to be activated in a particular order.

His 75-minute flight during the golden twilight took him south and west, toward the Olympic Mountains. As a flight controller tried to persuade him to land, he wondered aloud about whether he had enough fuel to make it to the Olympics, talked of the beautiful view, and said he had a lot of people who cared about him, apologizing for what he was doing.

He complimented the con-



Richard Russell, an airline ground agent, stole an empty commercial airplane on Friday.



Smoke and an orange glow are seen on Ketron Island in Washington state early Saturday after a plane crash Friday night.

troller: "You are very calm, collect, poised," he said.

He said flying was a "blast" and that he didn't need much help: "I've played some video games before."

"You think if I land this successfully Alaska will give me a job as a pilot?" he joked.

He also told the controller he "wasn't really planning on landing" the aircraft, and he described himself as "just a broken guy."

Authorities sent fighter jets to escort him, and the controller repeatedly tried to direct him to runways. But the plane slammed into tiny Ketron Island, a sparsely populated island southwest of Tacoma.

Russell went by "Beebo" on social media. On his Facebook page, which had limited

public access, he said he was from Wasilla, Alaska; lived in Sumner, Washington; and was married in 2012.

In a humorous YouTube video he posted last year, he talked about his job and included videos and photos of his travels.

"I lift a lot of bags. Like a lot of bags. So many bags," he said.

Russell's family said in a statement that they were stunned and heartbroken. They said it's clear Russell didn't intend to harm anyone, and "he was right in saying that there are so many people who loved him."

Associated Press reporters Rachel La Corte in Olympia, Washington, and Keith Ridler in Boise, Idaho, contributed.

After 17 days and 1,000 miles, a mother orca's 'tour of grief' is over

By JENNY GATHRIGHT
National Public Radio

After carrying her deceased baby for at least 17 days and 1,000 miles, an orca mother has shown signs of returning to normal.

She was seen Saturday with fellow members of her pod, chasing a school of salmon. She is no longer carrying her baby and she looks healthy. "Her tour of grief is now over and her behavior is remarkably frisky," according to a statement on the Center for Whale Research's website.

Researchers commonly refer to the mother orca as J-35. She's also known as Tahlequah, a name she was given as part of the adopt a whale program at The Whale Museum on Washington's San Juan Island.

Her recovery is important — not just for her own health, but for the health of the rest of her pod. National Public Radio's Colin Dwyer previously reported that "given the fact that orcas move in matrilineal groups, dependent on mothers and grandmothers," Tahlequah's death would put her adult son and others in danger.

Not a single orca born in the past three years has been known to survive, according to the Center for Whale Research. That's why the fact that Tahlequah recently gave birth was so exciting, if only for a brief moment. Her calf died just 30 minutes after it was first spotted by a whale watch operator on July 24.

The Center for Whale Research keeps track of every single known orca (known more formally as the southern resident killer whale), and as of December 2017, the population contains just 76 whales. According to NPR's Dwyer, the population of southern resident killer whales has decreased by about a quarter in the past 20 years, largely because their food source, the Chinook salmon, has also seen

a dramatic population decline.

Jenny Atkinson, executive director of The Whale Museum, told "Here & Now's" Jeremy Hobson that Tahlequah's grieving period was unusually long. Typically, Atkinson said, researchers have seen mothers carry stillborn calves for "a day or so." But Tahlequah's baby was not stillborn. "She carried this for 17 months before it was born," Atkinson said. "And we

know that it swam by her side ... so there is a part of me that believes that the grief could be much deeper because they had bonded."

Atkinson said it made sense that Tahlequah's grief generated a global response. "Orcas ... are charismatic megafauna," she said. "You're going to feel that pain of grief — particularly if you've gone through grief in your own life."

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Starting August 16th thru August 19th 2018, Cross Stitchers from all over the world will descend on a small Oregon town, Seaside, for the 3rd Annual Heaven and Earth Designs Convention, or HAEDCon, as it's known in the Cross Stitching world. A Stitching Convention for cross stitching you say? Well things have changed. Gone are the days of cute teddy bears and flowers. HAEDCon is a convention sponsored by the locally owned company, Heaven and Earth Designs. Attendees come to see finished stitched pieces, socialize, and shop! Cross stitchers from all over the world—Iceland, Australia, the United Kingdom—are just days away from meeting new friends, meeting old friends, and meeting the artists behind the work they stitch. Everyone has great ideas about spending four days stitching, but from past experience the amount of talking, laughter, "Stitchtalk", and adding to one's stash is a must for any attendee.

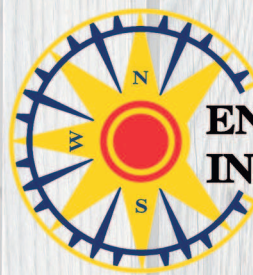
A loyal following quickly came to Michele and Bob Sayetta, who packed up six years ago and moved from Minnesota to a small coastal town in Oregon. Starting in 2002, the Husband and Wife team changed how people viewed cross stitch. They began by creating the most stunning hand dyed fabric to be used for stitching. Michele's talent for color came naturally to the Californian-born computer programmer. This was the beginning of Heaven and Earth Designs. They then moved onto converting famous artwork into cross stitch charts by artists all over the world. Adding to these works of art, Michele and Bob also hand craft many coveted stitching tools. As well, they also feature beautiful linens and cloths from well-known manufacturers such as ZWEIFART, as well as stitching floss from DMC, direct from France. Heaven and Earth Designs has a small dedicated team that send out hundreds of the now famous "purple package" to fulfill orders that range from a chart to fabric, floss and tools.

The Heaven and Earth Designs Convention also features artists whose stunning pieces have been transformed into cross stitching charts. Returning for her third year, artist Aimee Stewart says, "If a unicorn wearing roller skates and juggling polka dot lemons streaked by just now singing the Macarena at the top of its lungs... it STILL wouldn't be as fun as HAEDCon!"

Also joining Aimee this year are returning artists - Hannah Lynn Disney, Rob and Jean Carlos, Jeff Haynie, and, for the first time, we welcome artists Randal Spangler and Joan Marie.

Stitchers are enthusiastic to arrive, with one stitcher saying they, "Feel like they are attending the 'Oscars' of Cross Stitching. The Countdown to HAEDCon is on."

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