

A text dump on Sky King Richard Russell

Contents

Full Transcript of Russel’s Conversation with Air Traffic Control	3
I	3
II	3
III	4
IV	4
V	5
VI	5
VII	5
VIII	5
IX	6
X	7
XI	7
XII	7
XIII	8
XIV	8
XV	8
XVI	9
XVII	9
XVIII	10
IXX	11
XX	11
XXI	12
XXII	12
ATC Recording	13
Richard’s Journal	14
#Skyking (2026)	18

Full Transcript of Russel's Conversation with Air Traffic Control

On the evening of August 10th, 2018, Richard Russell—aka “Sky King”—took off in a stolen Bombardier Q400 from Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. For over an hour, he flew over Puget Sound, speaking candidly with air traffic controllers. His words, at times humorous and lighthearted, at other moments deeply introspective and heartbreaking, offer a rare glimpse into the mind of someone struggling in silence.

Below, you'll find the full transcript of Richard's communication with Air Traffic Control (ATC), as shown in the documentary #Skyking. This conversation is a powerful reminder of the importance of mental health awareness, especially for men who often feel they have nowhere to turn.

☒ **If you or someone you know is struggling, please visit this Resources Page for support. You are not alone.**

I

ATC: Aircraft on Charlie lining up runway 16C, say your call sign.

The Dash 8 holding on runway one six center.

The Dash on runway one six center say your call sign.

Who is the Dash 8 holding on runway one six center?

Russell: Seattle Ground. Horizon guy, about to take off. This is going to be crazy.

II

Hey, Horizon Ground, you on? Seattle Ground, I mean.

ATC: Who is transmitting on Ramp?

Russell: Sorry. Horizon guy, 449 Quebec X-ray.

ATC: Yeah, 449. Did you just take off?

Russell: Yeah.

ATC: And you're not supposed to be on that aircraft?

Russell: Uh, no.

ATC: What's going on? Are you flying the plane?

Russell: Uh, I did a kind of a bad thing. Kind of a selfish thing. Uh. Hah! But it's all good. I'm gonna go check out Rainier.

ATC: Yeah, 449. So, you hijacked the plane is what you're saying?

Russell: Uh, yeah.

ATC: 449, say again.

Russell: Yeah, I'm afraid I did. You know, I don't want to take up... take up this channel. What's another good one to talk to?

ATC: 449, stand by. I'm getting a frequency for you.

Russell: Hey, copy that. I appreciate it. Hey. Any idea of a Dash 8 Q400 can do a barrel roll?

III

ATC: The gentleman flying the Q400, can you hear me?

Russell: Hey, you on?

ATC: Yeah, Seattle Approach here.

Russell: — Hey. — Low terrain. — I keep getting a weather... — Pull up. like a weather thing. I just want to talk to you.

ATC: Okay, and you're in the... You're in the Dash 8 that just took off Sea-Tac?

Russell: Yeah, affirmative.

ATC: And do you have a call sign? Nah man, I'm a ground service agent. I don't know what that is.

IV

ATC: Okay, and what's your name?

Russell: That's a question I've been asking my whole life. Identity issues.

ATC: Just so I can talk to you, what's your name so I can reach out to you a little easier?

Russell: Sorry, my mic came off. I threw up a little bit. You know—

I— Hold on— Shoot. Man, I'm sorry about this. I hope this doesn't ruin your day.

ATC: No, no. You're not ruining my day. I just- can I just get your first name so I can, I know what to call you? So it'll be a little easier to talk to you.

Russell: Yeah, Richard Russell.

ATC: Okay, Rich, appreciate that.

V

ATC: As far as just flying the plane around, you seem comfortable with that?

Russell: Oh, hell yeah, it's a blast, man. I've played video games before, so I— You know, I know what I'm doing a little bit.

ATC: Okay, and— and you can see all the terrain around you? You've got no issue with visibility or anything?

Russell: Nah, everything's peachy, peachy clean. Just did a little circle around Rainier. It's beautiful. I think I got some gas to go check out the Olympics. And, yeah.

ATC: Okay, Rich, do you have an idea of how much fuel you have left?

Russell: Damn! I already burned like a thousand pounds, so I'm down to 2,100. I started at like 30 something.

VI

Russell: Let me be real clear here. I do not intend to hurt anyone. I'm just out for some sights. I do not want to hurt anyone. So, uh... No need to fear me.

ATC: Okay, we're just concerned because, well, it sounds like you shouldn't be piloting that aircraft. Is there other people on board?

Russell: No, no. I, uh— I figured it can't be that hard, right? So I'd just take it out for a spin.

ATC: So it's just you on board?

Russell: Yes, sir. I wouldn't want to hurt anyone else.

VII

Russell: Hey, you're probably going to send some some jets out this way, huh?

ATC: Well, Rich, that's not the plan right now, but can you just tell me the altitude you're at?

Russell: Yeah, I kind of think that's a lie, man. If I were you, I'd be sending the jets right away because, for all you know, I could be a bad guy. Well, I kinda am a bad guy.

VIII

ATC: And the gentleman in the Q400, flying the Dash 8, can you still hear me?

The grounds crewman in the Dash 8, are you still on this frequency? Can you still hear me?

Russell: Yeah. Hey, sorry. I— I lost you behind the mountain, I think. I thought you were just being boring!

ATC: Okay, I can hear you loud and clear now.

Russell: Hey. Can you get a Q400 expert on, or just some guy who knows all about it?

ATC: Ok, ah. Nobody here knows how to fly one of those aircraft, but we'll see what we can do and get you in contact with somebody.

What's your plan here? Are you going to come back to Sea-Tac and try and land, or what do you want to do?

Russell: What do you think I should do? What do you think I should do, FAA guy?

ATC: Well, we're trying to get... get in contact with somebody who can maybe help you because you said you're unfamiliar with how to land that, right?

Russell: Yeah I never really learned how to land the plane. I did a lot of research on like how to start it up and get it to go. In a couple of hours, I guess. But, yeah, I wouldn't know how to land it. I wasn't really planning on landing it.

IX

Russell: This is probably like jail time for life, huh? I mean, I would hope it is. For a guy like me?

ATC: We're not thinking about that. What we're thinking about is how we're just going to get you on the ground safe and resolve this situation. So, uh...

Russell: I don't know if I want to return this plane because I threw up all inside of it. It's bad.

Hey, what's your name, FAA guy?

ATC: Rich, my name is Andrew. And- Is there any chance that I can give you some headings or some control instructions to help you out here?

Russell: Yeah, that's all mumbo jumbo. I have no idea what all that means. I wouldn't know how to punch it in.

ATC: But if I were to give you like a heading, maybe you could look at the compass. If I gave you a heading that would be what the compass says.

Russell: Oh, right near the jets? You're going to take me to the jets?

ATC: No, I'm not taking you to any jets. I'm actually keeping you away from aircraft that are trying to land at Sea-Tac.

Russell: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah. I don't want to screw with that. I'm glad- glad you're not uh... you know, screwing up everyone else's day on account of me.

X

ATC: Okay, Rich. And, instead of bringing you back to Sea-Tac, there is the runway just off your right side in about a mile. Do you see that? That's the— that's McChord Field.

Russel: Oh man, those guys would rough me up if I tried landing there. They probably got anti-aircraft!

ATC: No, they don't have any of that stuff. We're just trying to find a place for you to land safely.

Russel: Not quite ready to bring it down just yet, but holy smokes, I gotta— I gotta stop looking at the fuel because it's going down quick!

XI

ATC: And Rich, here in a second, there's going to be another pilot that comes on. And he's a— he's a pilot of a Q400. And he's gonna try and help you out here a little bit, okay?

Russel: You are a very calm, collect voice. Not saying the wrong things. I know— you don't got to beat around the bush with me though. I'm not a sensitive kind of guy. So—

Captain: Hey Rich, this is Captain Bill here. Do you have any plans on landing the airplane?

Russel: I mean I'm kinda enjoying just cruising around.

Captain: Alright, well. How fast are you going right now? I hear the... the speed horn going off.

Russel: Uh... Where do I see that at?

ATC: Yeah, he's at 300 knots over the ground.

Captain: Okay, well, try not to go any faster than that because that's hard on the airplane. We don't want to hurt the airplane.

Russel: Oh, gotcha. Hey, pilot guy— You think— You think this thing can do a barrel roll?

Captain: Well, I'd try to figure out how to use the autopilot first.

Russel: Boring!

XII

ATC: Rich, are you still there?

Russel: Yeah. Hey boys.

ATC: Ok, Rich. Uh, do you have an idea of how much fuel you have left?

Russel: Aw, man, I'm sick. I'm throwing up quite a bit.

Andrew. I want you to whisper sweet nothings into my ear.

ATC: Rich, I don't think I can do that for you.

Can you tell me, do you know how much fuel you have left?

Russel: Damn it, Andrew! People's lives are at stake here!

ATC: Now, Rich, don't- don't say stuff like that.

Russel: Nah, I told you I'm not- I don't want to hurt no one. I just want you to whisper sweet nothings into my ear.

XIII

Russel: Hey, FAA guy, Andrew, you on?

ATC: Yeah, I'm still here, Rich. Rich, can you hear me?

Russel: How'd you get your job?

ATC: You asked how I got my job? I just applied for it online.

Russel: No way, straight off the street?

ATC: Well, I had some experience prior.

Russel: Right. Yeah, what kind of experience?

ATC: Just military service.

Russel: Hey, thanks for your service.

ATC: Thank you.

Russel: I was too fat. Well, yeah, I'm too fat to join. I was thinking about it and probably a good thing I didn't.

XIV

ATC: What were you thinking? You thinking you want to try and land?

Russel: Hey, I'll go on record for saying, you know, if you asked me why I did it, it's probably because... probably because not making minimum wage. We'll chalk it up to that. Maybe that'll grease the gears a little bit with the higher ups? Maybe- Yeah.

XV

ATC: Hey, Rich. How do you feel about just flying over Puget Sound for a while?

Russel: That'd be a good place to shoot me down, huh?

ATC: Well, it'd be a soft place to land.

Russel: Uh... I wouldn't want to drown.

ATC: Everybody's out sailing tonight. There'll be a million sailboats to pick you up.

Russel: That sounds nice, but I don't think a sailboat would get to me before the guys with the guns.

ATC: Well, there's plenty of life jackets on that aircraft, so you wouldn't have to worry about having to swim.

Russel: You think if I land this successfully, Alaska will give me a job as a pilot?

ATC: Uh... You know, I think they would give you a job doing anything if you could pull this off.

Russel: Yeah, right! Nah, I'm a white guy. Sorry, we won't get political.

ATC: Yeah, we don't talk about religion and politics on the flight deck.

Russel: Yeah (laughs).

XVI

ATC: Now just— just off your right and behind you, there is another aircraft. Would you be willing to talk to them if they're on the frequency and maybe they can help you land?

Russel: Um. Sure. I mean, I'm always down to talk to people. Uh... I'm super thirsty though. I threw up pretty much everything I had, so I kinda gotta go in the back and get some water.

ATC: No, no, no, no. Rich, if you could just stay in the seat, stay in the cockpit and stay with me on the radio, please.

Russel: Yeah, yeah, I already did it once, it's cool. But I just— (laughs) I got to step on my throw up, that's disgusting. One sec.

Captain: Hey, Rich. This is Captain Bill here. We're still listening. My airplane's doing just fine. How's yours?

ATC: He just stepped out for a second. He'll be right back on.

Captain: Okay.

Russel: Alright, I'm back.

ATC: All right, Rich. Welcome back. So, did you give any extra thought as to what you want to do? Do you want to try and land at McChord? Or were you thinking about on the water? Or what are you thinking?

Russel: I kinda fly by the set of my pants. Pun intended. I'm not quite sure what I want to do yet. I do want to see if I can land. That'd be cool, but I don't feel like living anymore, so... that's kind of the problem that I'm dealing with.

XVII

Russel: I don't want to have to deal with the repercussions. It's just kind of easier to just nose down, close my eyes or something, you know? It's sad, but kind of not either.

ATC: Well, Rich, just let you said, you don't want to hurt anybody, and we don't want to see you get hurt either.

Russel: Hey, where are the jets at? I want to see those guys flying around. Hey, I want the coordinates of that orca with the... you know the mama orca, with the baby? I want to go see that guy.

ATC: Hey. Hey Rich. How much fuel you got left on there?

Russel: Oh, man, not enough. Not enough to get by, like, uh, 760– 760 pounds.

ATC: Okay, Rich. Thank you.

Russel: Man, have you been to the Olympics? These guys are gorgeous. Holy smokes!

ATC: Yeah, I have been out there. It's– It's always a nice drive.

Fighter Pilot: Hey, Rich. This is ROCK 41. Man, how are you doing? How about we head out to the west here, get away from the terrain and stuff.

Russel: Why? You got some property out here you're worried about?

XVIII

Russel: I just imagine all the phone calls going on right now. Like, I don't know who's gotta talk to who and do this, and figure out that, but it's just funny how little... conversation's going on with us, you know?

ATC: Well, there are some phone calls being made and we're just trying to figure out the best option. Really, we just want you to turn back around so we can stay in contact with you.

Russel: How come?

Captain: Because we care.

ATC: It's true.

Russel: I got a lot of people that care about me, and it's going to disappoint them to hear that I did this. Um... I would like to apologize to each and every one of them. Just a broken guy. Got a few screws loose, I guess. Never really knew it until now. Um... It's, you know–

Man, and you know, the sights went by so fast. I was thinking I'm gonna have this moment of serenity. You know, be able to just take all in all the sights, and– there's a lot of pretty stuff, but I think they're prettier in a different context.

ATC: Well, Rich, you know you seem to get– you seem like you're getting down on yourself but there's no need to do that.

I mean, we're– we all get down on ourselves a little bit, but, there's no need to get upset with ourselves about it, you know.

IXX

Russel: I think this is part of the reason why I decided to do something so extreme, is just 'cause everything is always business all the time. Even when you know, you're hanging out with people, it's just business.

Um... I just— You know, those real close personal moments are just so few and far between. Um... Yeah, it sucks. So, like, I wouldn't mind just shooting the shit with you guys, but it's all business, you know.

ATC: Yeah, Rich. We'd like to talk to you too. So, you've made a turn— a right turn to the west now, so if you could just stop your turn and then keep it nice and level there and then we can start talking. Maybe we can set up something, maybe a place for you to land.

Russel: Yeah, I don't think I'm going to land it. Like, in a safe, safe kind of manner. Think I'm gonna try to do a barrel roll, and if that goes good I'll just go nose down and call it a night.

ATC: Well, no need to do that. If you could just start a turn to the right, and then I'll tell you when to stop turning, and then you can keep it level from there.

Russel: Alright. Well, I'll keep climbing a little bit. I feel like I need to be— What do you think? Like 5,000 feet at least to be able to pull this barrel roll off?

Captain: Really, there's no safe altitude for that. I wouldn't even try it. You're gonna hurt somebody on the ground.

ATC: And Rich, you said you didn't want to hurt anybody on the ground. And we don't want see you get hurt either.

Captain: Rich, you'd be a hero if you could pull off a landing.

Russel: No, I would just be a public nuisance that goes to jail for the rest of my life. So. I've been kind of weighing my options back and forth, and though I would love three squares a day and just reading books the whole time and I know I'd get some letters from my loved ones. I got a bunch of them out there. Um... You know, it just wouldn't be the best, you know?

Captain: You've got a wife.

Russel: Oh, you Facebook-stalked me?

XX

Onlookers filming: He's turning. He's completely sideways. He's going all the way. He's upside down.

— Oh, my God! — Sh...

Holy shit! Holy shit, man!

Holy shit! Holy shit!

Automated warning: Pull up. Pull up.

Onlookers filming: Oh, my God. I'm gonna have a heart attack.

Oh, my God. Is he okay? He's okay.

He's okay! He's okay, he's okay, he's okay.

Fighter pilots: TOI-1 just completed a barrel roll. Current altitude, 2,000 feet.
ROCK 42, confirm he did a barrel roll.

Affirm, he cleared the surface of the water by approximately 10 feet.

ATC Boss: He did it. He completed the barrel roll.

Russel: Hey, is that my jet pilot finally?

XXI

Captain: Alright, Rich, this is Captain Bill. Congratulations, you did that. Now let's try to land that airplane safely and not hurt anybody on the ground.

ATC Boss: All right, ROCK is trying to talk him into landing the airplane now.

Russel: All right. Ah, damn it. I don't know. Man, I don't know! I don't want to. I was kind of hoping that was going to be it, you know?

ATC: Hey, Rich, how much fuel you got left on there?

Russel: Uh... Over 500, like 550.

ATC: Okay.

XXII

ATC: Rich, you still there?

Russel: Yeah, not for long. I feel like one of my engines is going out or something.

ATC: Okay, Rich, if you could, you just want to keep that plane right over the water? Maybe keep the aircraft nice and low? Can you do that?

41 can you just verify that... that he's still over the water there?

Captain: Hey Rich, this is Captain Bill. How's it going up there?

ATC chatter: All right, just got a report on another phone that ROCK 41 reports splash.

Okay.

And target fade at 03:48. Target fade.

Western.

Colleen here.

Okay, Jason. Did you hear that?

Yes.

All right, ROCK 42 reported that he hit the island.

ATC Recording

Below, you can find an audio recording of Air Traffic Control's communications on that day, with Russel and other aircraft.

16:25 — Russell is first heard

17:45 — Russell starts talking more — stops after maneuver comment

22:50 — Russell apologizes

24:05 — Russell has played video games before, so he's got this

25:10 — Brief chatter

26:40 — Russell laughing about puking

46:00 — Orca comment

1:07:45 — Deciding to land or not

1:09:35 — Last we hear of Russell

1:11:25 — ATC seems back to normal — getting people landing and taking off

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x1A1xFCJHNk>

Richard's Journal

On page 198–99 of a released FBI report it's possible to find photos of two pages from Richard's journal:

At approximately 2220 hrs, I coordinated with Port of Seattle Police Officer [REDACTED] to conduct consent to search RUSSEL's locker located within the Horizon Air Grounds Ops area at SeaTac Airport. Consent was obtained from [REDACTED] Officer [REDACTED] took multiple items for evidence consideration to include a note written in a spiral notebook that appeared to be an undefined comment on President Trump and immigration policies.

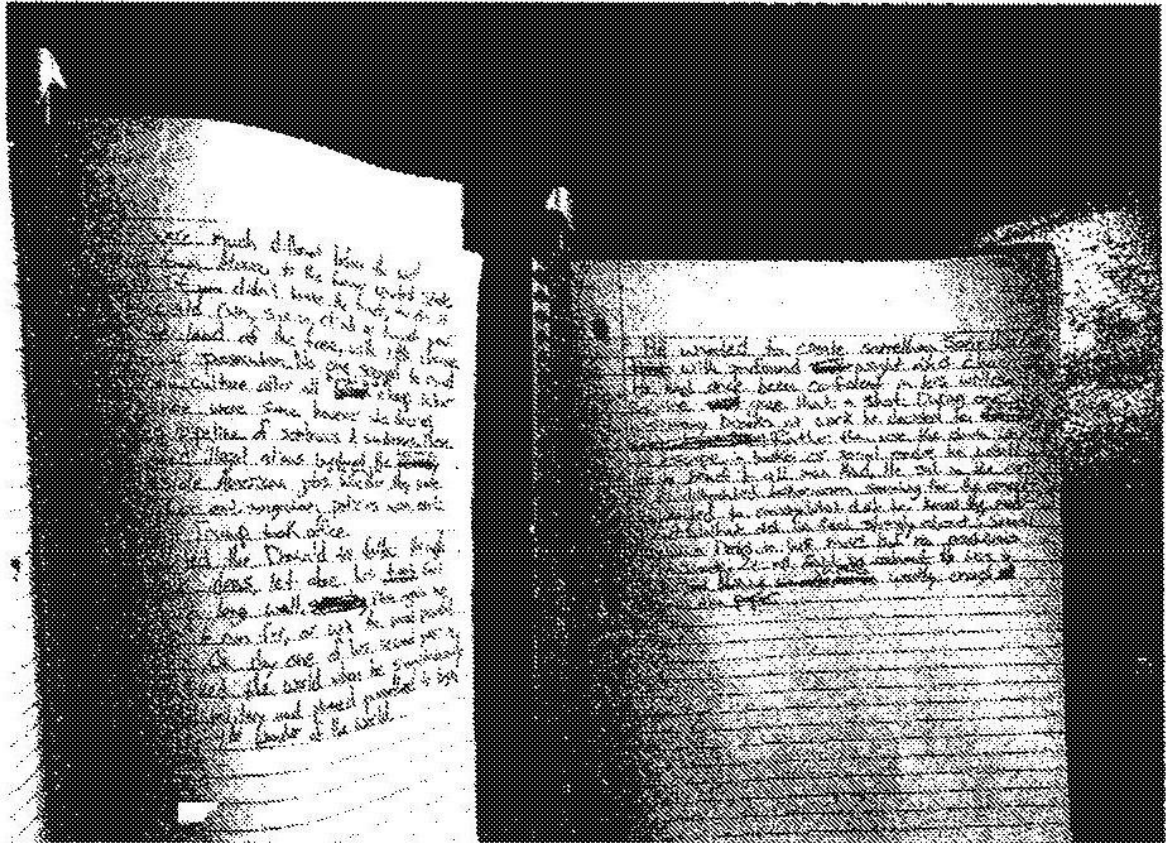
Also in the same notebook was a note that stated:

“He wanted to create something. Something with profound insight and charm. He had once been confident in his writing so he gave that a shot. During one of his many breaks at work he decided to go for it. Rather than use the down time to escape in books or social media he would use it to benefit his all mankind. He sat [in] the corner of the dilapidated locker room, searching for the concepts he wanted to convey. What did he know the most about? What did he feel strongly about? Several questions fizzed in his mind but no resolutions were made. It all felt so irrelevant. He was a cure. Nothing was worthy enough for the paper.”

On page 216 there is a picture of the note on Trump, but it's hard to make out:

Things were much different back ... Immigrating from Mexico to the ... easy. If you ... legally you could ... detection or prosecution ... Mexican culture ... tacos. There were ... underground pipeline of ... cloned illegal ... and stole American ... President Trump took office.

... expected the Donald to ... of his ideas, let alone ... mile long wall. ... shocked the world ... to the military ...



Things were much different
Immigrating from Mexico is the
easier. If you did it the way
you could even go to the
into the land of the free
detection or prosecution. The
Mexican culture also
Tacos. There were some
underground pipeline or
claimed illegal
and stole American jobs
way, their anti-immigrant
President Trump had
expected the Donald
of his ideas, let alone
mile long wall.
to run for, or
the world. On day one
shocked the world
to the military and
the 9th wonder in the world

#Skyking (2026)

A troubled airport worker's impulsive decision to steal and fly a commercial plane becomes a gripping aerial drama that reflects deeper issues of mental health and working-class struggles in America.

Director: Patricia E. Gillespie

Platform: Disney+ UK

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPfLaD2SL3Y>

Russel's Mom: I have not heard the audio. I still don't want to hear the audio. I can't hear his voice. 'Cause his voice was very special.

His voice... He spoke so well, and I knew that as soon as I heard... I just couldn't handle it.

ATC: This copy is being prepared by the Seattle Airport Traffic Control Tower.

The subject concerns an aircraft accident involving November 449 Quebec X-ray at approximately 02:33 UTC.

I certify that the following is a true copy of the original recorded transmissions pertaining to the aircraft accident.

Ready?

Let's do it.

...into the extraordinary case of a stolen plane in Seattle.

That is not a drone. That is a real plane.

What the hell?

Eyewitnesses on the ground were shocked at what they were seeing.

Live from Fox 13 News, this is Good Day Seattle.

Hi there, everyone. Just about 8:29 here on your Friday morning.

Thank you for joining us on Good Day Seattle.

— Hi, I'm Erin Mayovsky. — And I'm Bill Wixey, and we begin with a live look at Sea-Tac Airport, where a busy travel weekend is kicking off, and the weather's gonna cooperate.

It's gonna be a pretty nice weekend, right?

This will be a fantastic weekend in the greater Seattle area.
Here our Capitol Hill camera showing partly cloudy skies this morning.
Ramp Tower, Ken Rupp.
Hi, this is Colleen at Seattle Approach.
Hi Colleen, how are you?
Pretty good, how about you?
Just dandy.
Oh good.
Sea-Tac is considered to be a Core 30 airport,
which means it's one of the top 30 busiest airports in the United States.
As operations supervisor,
I'm responsible for handling anything that happens,
ordinary or out of the ordinary.
Immigration reform, a government shutdown,
all being discussed in one breath right now,
and for many on a daily basis.
It was a normal shift up until I got that call.
Horizon 2006 I'll have you turn in the air.
Runway one six center. Clear for takeoff.
Clear for takeoff one six center, Horizon 2006.
Aye sir, one one Papa on taxi pop across.
Runway one six left. What is your gate?
On Papa [unintelligible]. Gate zero one.
Marine biologists are keeping a close eye
on an endangered orca off the waters
around the southern Gulf Islands.
The mother has been carrying the corpse of her calf for more than a week,
as Tom Walsh explains,
they may believe the mother is going through a deep grieving process.
Depart Horizon 2006, 2300,
3000.
Horizon Air 2006.
Seattle Departure radar contact.
Cleared direct VAMPS.
Climb and maintain 15,000.
VAMPS up to 15,000, Horizon 24.
I'm sorry, 2006.
ATC: Aircraft on Charlie, lining up, runway one six center. Say your call sign.
The Dash 8 holding on runway one six center.
The Dash on runway one six center say your call sign.
Who is the Dash 8 holding on runway one six center?

ATC 2: That aircraft was taking off rolling. I don't know what he was doing. His wheels were smoking left and right, as they are right now, as he's rolling down the runway.

ATC: Alright, I'm not even talking to him.

Russell: Seattle Ground. Horizon guy, about to take off. This is going to be crazy. Approach, Colleen.

Hey, Colleen?

— Is this Jason? — Yeah. Hey, we just had a Dash 8-
He's just taken off, taxi out of cargo 1.

He never called us.

Okay.

He's climbing

just off the south end, about a mile.

— Okay, I think I see it. — We have no contact with him.

Okay, I'll take care of it. I'll get right back to you.

Bye.

You've reached the FAA Washington Operations Center.

Be advised. All calls may be recorded or monitored.

— Just answer. — Please stand by.

Headquarters. Go ahead, Seattle.

Hey, this is Colleen at Seattle Approach Control.

We got a potential very serious situation.

Everything pointed to it being a hijack.

This is a major metropolitan area.

If that plane was used as a weapon,

then thousands of people would definitely be killed.

What the hell?

— Shit. — Oh, my God. What is happening right now?

It's a fucking Alaska Airlines Q-400.

What the fuck is he doing over here?

Go get the truck keys and get my wallet.

Russell: Hey, Horizon Ground, you on? Seattle Ground, I mean.

ATC: Who is transmitting on Ramp?

Russell: Sorry. Horizon guy, 449 Quebec X-ray.

ATC: Yeah, 449. Did you just take off?

Russell: Yeah.

ATC: And you're not supposed to be on that aircraft?

Russell: Uh, no.

ATC: What's going on? Are you flying the plane?

Russell: Uh, I did a kind of a bad thing. Kind of a selfish thing. Uh. Hah! But it's all good. I'm gonna go check out Rainier.

ATC: Yeah, 449. So, you hijacked the plane is what you're saying?

Russell: Uh, yeah.

ATC: 449, say again.

Russell: Yeah, I'm afraid I did. You know, I don't want to take up... take up this channel. What's another good one to talk to?

ATC: 449, stand by. I'm getting a frequency for you.

Russell: Hey, copy that. I appreciate it. Hey. Any idea of a Dash 8 Q400 can do a barrel roll?

When the plane took off, I had no idea who was behind the wheel.

Where is he going to go? What does he want to do? I needed to get a single controller on that frequency to talk to him. And the right person was Andrew.

ATC: The gentleman flying the Q400, can you hear me?

Russell: Hey, you on?

ATC: Yeah, Seattle Approach here.

Russell: — Hey. — Low terrain. — I keep getting a weather... — Pull up. like a weather thing. I just want to talk to you.

ATC: Okay, and you're in the... You're in the Dash 8 that just took off Sea-Tac?

Russell: Yeah, affirmative.

ATC: And do you have a call sign? Nah man, I'm a ground service agent. I don't know what that is.

Okay, he's a ground crew guy.

Proceed.

Just want to give you guys an update real quick.

We believe we have multiple witnesses
that saw the guy near the transit plex,
so the Cargo 1 area.

Push back the airplane himself.

While the plane was rolling,

— disconnect the pushback tug... — Mm-hmm.

...ran up the stairs, jumped in the plane,

— started driving it off... — Holy crap.

...cut off jetliners, and just took off.

Wow.

So, pretty, pretty brazen,

— amazing stuff. — Yeah.

When I got word that a plane was taken,
it was on the news.

I heard the voice, and I said, "That's him."

I couldn't believe it.

First of all, how did he pull that off?

How did he get that plane in the air by himself when it takes two... two people?

Takes the captain and the first officer.

And how did no one know?

ATC: Okay, and what's your name?

Russell: That's a question I've been asking my whole life. Identity issues.

ATC: Just so I can talk to you, what's your name so I can reach out to you a little easier?

Russell: Sorry, my mic came off. I threw up a little bit. You know—

I— Hold on— Shoot. Man, I'm sorry about this. I hope this doesn't ruin your day.

ATC: No, no. You're not ruining my day. I just— can I just get your first name so I can, I know what to call you? So it'll be a little easier to talk to you.

Russell: Yeah, Richard Russell.

ATC: Okay, Rich, appreciate that.

Richard Russell.

His name is Richard Russell.

When we heard the report, we had no clue that it was him.

He was never Richard Russell. He was never.

His name is Beebo.

It's always been Beebo. It will always be Beebo.

Beebo.

Hold it.

Deadly drama in the skies over Seattle.

Tonight we're learning much more about the 29-year-old ground employee with Horizon Air,

that company owned by Alaska Airlines, accused of bringing that busy airport to a halt and putting so many lives at risk.

When I heard it, it-it destroyed me.

I started working for Horizon in 2015.

Pay wasn't that good, but I needed the job, so I took it.

Richard trained me.

And we worked together.

Bringing in my first plane, I was nervous.

Well, the Q400, it's a prop plane.

It's like an open blender.

You can get hurt quickly if you don't know what you're doing.

But Richard was right behind me.

He reassured me not to be so scared of that, just take your time.

So that's how I got really to know Richard.

He seemed like a levelheaded person.

Why he did it? Well, that is still a mystery.

My first thought is, "What did they do to him?"

It wasn't what he did to Horizon.

What did Horizon do to make him do that?

He's been identified rather as 29-year-old Richard Russell.

Officials say he did not have a pilot's license,
but he did have clearance to be in a secure area of the airport.
It's just a whirlwind.

I remember seeing his picture on the TV,
and it was funny 'cause when he was a little boy,
three or four, I had a dream.

I was walking past a newspaper stand, you know, the old-fashioned one,
put the 50 cents in, get the newspaper,
and on that was his picture.

And I thought that was so funny. It was a dream.

But then 24 years later, it was a reality.

So I got a little bit off the beaten path and, uh,
don't really know where to go, um...

Kinda found myself in a pickle.

ATC: As far as just flying the plane around, you seem comfortable with that?

Russell: Oh, hell yeah, it's a blast, man. I've played video games before, so I— You know, I know what I'm doing a little bit.

That's when I realized he hasn't ever flown an airplane before.

ATC: Okay, and— and you can see all the terrain around you? You've got no issue with visibility or anything?

Russell: Nah, everything's peachy, peachy clean. Just did a little circle around Rainier. It's beautiful. I think I got some gas to go check out the Olympics. And, yeah.

The pilot sounds really hyped up.

Okay, can you ask him how much fuel
that he thinks he has on the airplane?

Okay.

There's two things that everyone is trained to do in air traffic control.

You find out how many people are on board the aircraft,
and how much fuel is remaining on the aircraft,
because if it crashes,

the firefighters need to know how big is the fire going to be.

And they need to know how many bodies they're looking for.

ATC: Okay, Rich, do you have an idea of how much fuel you have left?

Russell: Damn! I already burned like a thousand pounds, so I'm down to 2,100. I started at like 30 something.

At 2100 pounds, that gave him about an hour of fly time.

In an hour he's gonna fall out of the sky.

— Got a hot sunny day for you. — I know.

I think this one looks better though.

My little bundle of joy.

Mommy.

He was a bundle of joy.

He was always a treasure,
you know, in a house full of chaos,
it was nice to have something, you know, that was...
that was calm and that wasn't so rough.
Growing up in my house, it was pretty hectic.
Lots of kids. I am a twin.
Then I have two sisters that are twins, and then Beebo was the middle child.
You're the man.
My sisters and Beebo had a different dad,
— and he... he was an alcoholic... — Let's see your muscles.
...so that made the house a little more hectic.
I'll show you my muscle. There you go.
Oh, that's a big muscle, Beebo. I don't know what to do about that.
Growing up, we didn't have, like, the easiest childhood,
but, um, Beebo was always there to take care of my sister and I.
Their father was not a good person.
He was physically abusive.
He was verbally abusive.
It was awful.
When Beebo was six and the girls were five,
I took the kids, and we left.
I did not think I could survive with five kids, but I had no choice.
I had to step up. I had to be strong.
I did not get a dime in federal aid, not a dime.
Where would he live?
I think that was one reason he was so kind.
And that he was funny because he didn't want to be like his father.
And the birthday boy...
And, uh, Beebo has his first football game next Saturday.
Despite all of it, he busted through it.
Whoo! Whoo!
Whoo!
Everybody knew Beebo. Everybody loved Beebo.
He's the one and only Beebo, but really, truly he was the one and only.
— These are the lockers. — Yeah.
Okay, send that to Mom.
All right, I did it.
Beebo!
He played football. He wrestled.
Go, Beebo!
He did track. He was homecoming king.
— He was voted class clown. — Whoo-hoo!

He was all of the above.

Wasilla's most loved.

He was incredibly thoughtful, and he was an intelligent person.

I think that that escaped a lot of folks.

I think he was what people describe as a strong Christian.

Just a poster boy of what an all-American kid would be.

He was not the type of person that we ever thought would behave like that.

Russell: Let me be real clear here. I do not intend to hurt anyone. I'm just out for some sights. I do not want to hurt anyone. So, uh... No need to fear me.

ATC: Okay, we're just concerned because, well, it sounds like you shouldn't be piloting that aircraft. Is there other people on board?

Russell: No, no. I, uh- I figured it can't be that hard, right? So I'd just take it out for a spin.

ATC: So it's just you on board?

Russell: Yes, sir. I wouldn't want to hurt anyone else.

Given like the history in America of 9/11 and hijackings and these other things, if you were to like walk into a situation where the only thing that you know is that there is a person who has stolen an airplane, that doesn't necessarily bode well for that person's assumed character.

Russell: Hey, you're probably going to send some some jets out this way, huh?

ATC: Well, Rich, that's not the plan right now, but can you just tell me the altitude you're at?

Russell: Yeah, I kind of think that's a lie, man. If I were you, I'd be sending the jets right away because, for all you know, I could be a bad guy. Well, I kinda am a bad guy.

But he could never be a bad guy. He was always a good guy.

He had a heart of gold.

Western, Headquarters.

I'm requesting military assistance on that primary target.

He just made a threat.

Yeah, this guy's pretty messed up.

He sounds like a really bad dude here.

Western, observe. And we're scrambling Portland.

Thank you.

ROCK 41 active air scramble

in the [unintelligible].

ROCK 41. Seattle Approach. Roger.

And the Sea-Tac altimeter, 2-9-9-6.

The fighters were going to be launched off of Portland no matter what.

It's protocol.

If you're steal a commercial airliner, there's going to be fighters on your tail at some point in time.

What's going on?
 We got an airplane circling our neighborhood with two jets.
 But to have fighter jets blow an American citizen out of the air,
 I didn't want that to happen.
 Nobody wanted that to happen.
 F-15 fighters scramble from Portland, flying faster than the speed of sound, intercepting Russell south of Seattle.
 They are prepared to shoot him down as controllers try to talk him down.
 I just couldn't fathom... what he had done.
 I don't know why he snapped.
 If he sees the fighters, that's— obviously going to change the situation because...
 — Sure. — ...what's he's going to do.
 Sure. I've asked the pilot,
 the fighters to stay away from the airplane,
 not to scare him.
 — Okay. — So it's mission inspect
 — right now. — Okay.
 Headquarters, Western. We are shadowing.
 Alright, thank you. Mission shadow.
 Those are not... Oh...
 Oh, those are the shoes I wore at people's wedding.
 Do you want to bring this in and go through it later, Mom,
 see if there's anything you want to take?
 I put all of this stuff in here...
 Let me see this.
 ...when I was cleaning out the house after the accident to keep it safe.
 Oh, here we go. This is it.
 Is that the one? Oh, yeah.
 — There's a bunch of stuff. — I-I...
 I don't know what I wanna do with Beebo's stuff.
 Repack it and... But I-I just can't take it with me, Phil.
 — Yeah, I know. — I just can't.
 — His varsity letter. Look at that. — Oh, wow.
 Wrestling, track, football.
 — I couldn't afford to get a, uh... — A letterman?
 — ...a j... Yeah, the jacket. — The jacket?
 Yeah.
 That's okay. We got this.
 I said, "You can always put it on a T-shirt."
 — It's pretty nice. — It is.
 "18 years ago, a beautiful"... Oh, God, I'm gonna cry.
 ..."nine pound baby warrior was born."

“He was named Richard Bryan, and he brought great joy to his family. As you write the rest of this story, always remember you are loved.”

“We are all so proud of the wonderful young man that you have grown into.”

“You bring such humor and unpredictability to our lives.”

Uh, “Go forth and enjoy all life has to offer.”

— And... Ugh. — Who wrote that?

— I did. — You did? That’s awesome.

Yeah, I’m not just a pretty face.

ATC: And the gentleman in the Q400, flying the Dash 8, can you still hear me?

The grounds crewman in the Dash 8, are you still on this frequency? Can you still hear me?

Russell: Yeah. Hey, sorry. I– I lost you behind the mountain, I think. I thought you were just being boring!

ATC: Okay, I can hear you loud and clear now.

Russell: Hey. Can you get a Q400 expert on, or just some guy who knows all about it?

ATC: Ok, ah. Nobody here knows how to fly one of those aircraft, but we’ll see what we can do and get you in contact with somebody.

What’s your plan here? Are you going to come back to Sea-Tac and try and land, or what do you want to do?

Russell: What do you think I should do? What do you think I should do, FAA guy?

ATC: Well, we’re trying to get... get in contact with somebody who can maybe help you because you said you’re unfamiliar with how to land that, right?

Russell: Yeah I never really learned how to land the plane. I did a lot of research on like how to start it up and get it to go. In a couple of hours, I guess. But, yeah, I wouldn’t know how to land it. I wasn’t really planning on landing it.

Beebo graduated high school kind of our hometown, golden child, and went off to play football at a junior college in North Dakota. Got a scholarship to go play football, and, uh, go live his dream.

That transition from Wasilla to North Dakota,

I think that’s probably where he started really first kind of considering his identity and purpose in, like, more precise terms.

I remember him talking about how like everyone was drinking, doing the kind of the typical, like, early college things, and he was not participating.

He loved football. He didn’t really like North Dakota.

I think there was a lot of things that didn’t align with his Christianity.

He just realized that like,

maybe this football thing isn’t the thing that I should be doing.

After high school, I ended up going to school down in Oregon,

a small kind of junior college there.
And I said, "Hey, man. You could come here."
Turned out to be one of the best things for him
'cause that's where he met Hannah.
Spin her, Beebo. Spin her!
He was smitten from day one,
and I do remember him calling me up and saying,
"Mom, she is authentic for Christ.
She is the real deal. She's everything."
Hannah was perfect for Beebo.
She was really funny. She was a baker, which spoke to his heart.
We all knew the story.
We knew this was the love of his life.
He fought for her, and won her love.
Got engaged and married before he graduated from college.
She was beautiful.
You saw the pictures. Oh, God. They were just so beautiful.
After they got married,
Hannah finished her culinary arts degree,
and had this dream to open a bakery.
They found this bakery for sale.
They bought it, and made it Hannah Marie's bakery.
And it was kind of cute, you know, the two of them in a bakery.
It was their baby. It really was their baby.
Beebo kind of put everything on hold.
Schooling. His...
Everything just to help her out and support her,
which was awesome, you know, that he could do that for her.
He had a-a degree of optimism
about his future, and his life and purpose,
even though it wasn't necessarily refined at that point.
He was distinctly hopeful.

Russell: This is probably like jail time for life, huh? I mean, I would hope it is. For a guy like me?

ATC: We're not thinking about that. What we're thinking about is how we're just going to get you on the ground safe and resolve this situation. So, uh...

Russell: I don't know if I want to return this plane because I threw up all inside of it. It's bad.

Andrew, will he take control instructions?

Just ask him. "Will you accept control instructions?"

Russell: Hey, what's your name, FAA guy?

ATC: Rich, my name is Andrew. And— Is there any chance that I can give you some headings or some control instructions to help you out here?

Russell: Yeah, that's all mumbo jumbo. I have no idea what all that means. I wouldn't know how to punch it in.

ATC: But if I were to give you like a heading, maybe you could look at the compass. If I gave you a heading that would be what the compass says.

Russell: Oh, right near the jets? You're going to take me to the jets?

ATC: No, I'm not taking you to any jets. I'm actually keeping you away from aircraft that are trying to land at Sea-Tac.

Russell: Oh, okay, yeah, yeah. I don't want to screw with that. I'm glad— glad you're not uh... you know, screwing up everyone else's day on account of me.

The only way out where nobody dies is
if he lands the plane successfully.

But we have a... a pilot with zero experience.

We can't have him land just anywhere.

It has to be a runway
that is long enough and wide enough
for a Dash 8 to land on it.

ATC: Okay, Rich. And, instead of bringing you back to Sea-Tac, there is the runway just off your right side in about a mile. Do you see that? That's the— that's McChord Field.

Russell: Oh man, those guys would rough me up if I tried landing there. They probably got anti-aircraft!

ATC: No, they don't have any of that stuff. We're just trying to find a place for you to land safely.

Russell: Not quite ready to bring it down just yet, but holy smokes, I gotta— I gotta stop looking at the fuel because it's going down quick!

And good morning, everybody. We'd like to welcome you aboard.

We'll do the best we can to get you on your way down to San Diego,
where it's a beautiful 75 degrees.

My mom hasn't been the same since.

Really crushed her.

She's renting her place out, so she doesn't have a home base anymore.

She just feels like she has to be on the move all the time.

Okay, the pilot— The other Horizon pilot is on frequency.

ATC: And Rich, here in a second, there's going to be another pilot that comes on. And he's a— he's a pilot of a Q400. And he's gonna try and help you out here a little bit, okay?

Russell: You are a very calm, collect voice. Not saying the wrong things. I know— you don't got to beat around the bush with me though. I'm not a sensitive kind of guy. So—

Captain: Hey Rich, this is Captain Bill here. Do you have any plans on landing the airplane?

Russel: I mean I'm kinda enjoying just cruising around.

Captain: Alright, well. How fast are you going right now? I hear the... the speed horn going off.

Russel: Uh... Where do I see that at?

ATC: Yeah, he's at 300 knots over the ground.

Captain: Okay, well, try not to go any faster than that because that's hard on the airplane. We don't want to hurt the airplane.

Russel: Oh, gotcha. Hey, pilot guy— You think— You think this thing can do a barrel roll?

Captain: Well, I'd try to figure out how to use the autopilot first.

Russel: Boring!

Please remain seated with your seat belts fastened
and keep carry-on items stowed

until the captain has turned the seat belt sign off.

Be careful when opening the overhead bins to avoid injury.

Every year, I fly down to San Diego,

and pick up Beebo's car at his sister's house.

It's a trip with no plans.

That's my release, traveling, getting on the road.

You know, I can get in the car and go anywhere,

where I know nobody, and be fine.

Okay. Let's go. Road trip.

This car's name is Sally.

Every year, I take Sally out for, um...

about three months.

And we head east and west and north and south,

and we visit friends and family,

and it's just a great way for me to be lost in the...

my thoughts.

And nobody expects anything.

Um, nobody expects you to be strong when you're sad.

ATC: Rich, are you still there?

Russel: Yeah. Hey boys.

ATC: Ok, Rich. Uh, do you have an idea of how much fuel you have left?

Russel: Aw, man, I'm sick. I'm throwing up quite a bit.

Andrew. I want you to whisper sweet nothings into my ear.

ATC: Rich, I don't think I can do that for you.

Can you tell me, do you know how much fuel you have left?

Russel: Damn it, Andrew! People's lives are at stake here!

ATC: Now, Rich, don't— don't say stuff like that.

Russel: Nah, I told you I'm not— I don't want to hurt no one. I just want you to whisper sweet nothings into my ear.

Somewhere in my nephew's life, something changed.

He went from a fun-loving,
easygoing, happy person

to someone who felt a lot of pressure in their life.

The bakery was going along really well,

and then, next thing I heard,

they were moving out of Oregon and heading north.

My sense is that Hannah's family wanted them closer in Seattle.

I asked him once how successful the bakery was,

and he described it as,

when you do all the math of all the hours and the hard work that they put in,

they were basically making both, like, \$4 an hour.

I do wonder if because Hannah came

from kind of a traditional family where, you know, her dad worked,

her mom homeschooled the girls,

I think that that was maybe the expectation of what they wanted

for their daughter.

Hannah's family was different than ours.

Married couple still, very, very religious, pretty wealthy.

Hannah's father wanted Beebo to get a real job.

He wanted Beebo to have the perfect middle class family.

The picket fence, you know.

But that was never important to Beebo.

I think that really kind of it was like the first stumbling block along the way.

Beebo did not wanna move to Seattle.

He was not a big city boy.

I'm sure it was tough for him, you know, starting over in a big city.

Beebo was kinda, "Well, what do I do now?"

Russel: Hey, FAA guy, Andrew, you on?

ATC: Yeah, I'm still here, Rich. Rich, can you hear me?

Russel: How'd you get your job?

ATC: You asked how I got my job? I just applied for it online.

Russel: No way, straight off the street?

ATC: Well, I had some experience prior.

Russel: Right. Yeah, what kind of experience?

ATC: Just military service.

Russel: Hey, thanks for your service.

ATC: Thank you.

Russel: I was too fat. Well, yeah, I'm too fat to join. I was thinking about it and probably a good thing I didn't.

He went to apply for the military.
But he couldn't get in because of his weight.
He went to apply for police,
but he didn't.....pass the practical.
I said, "Why... How did you not pass that?"
And he goes, well, let's just say
the police and I have different opinions on how we treat people.
So he said, "Well, I'm gonna get a job with an airline."
So he could do trips up to Alaska.
That was Beebo's dream. He wanted to come home.
So Beebo took the job with Horizon.
As far as I know, he wears a little yellow vest and, uh...
He, um...
He receives luggage, he sends it on its way.
He does the, um... You know, leads the planes in and out.
He sent me the video of him driving the plane
over to the repair spot or whatever.
He goes, "I'm taking the plane for a ride."

Russel: Hi, I'm Beebo Russell, and I'm a ground-service agent. That means I lift a lot of bags. Like, a lot of bags. So many bags. Look at all them bags. Ooh, a purple one. I usually have to work outside in this. But it allows me to do some pretty cool things too.

I remember him telling me that the reason he took the job was for the travel benefit.
And he really... He really dug that.
A little sheep herding in Ireland.
He flew Hannah, and they went to Ireland,
and-and, uh, France, and the Faroos.
And I think they traveled well together.
Beebo wanted to have fun in life.
And Hannah was good with that.
They said at one point that he had used, like, 170 trips
in the three years he was there.
He and I would, um, compete with each other,
because I was flying on his perks.
Pushing rocks, Las Vegas.
One of the things that he did for me,
I was interviewing for medical schools and I didn't have any money left.
And he gave me a bunch of his, like, family tickets,
so I could interview, and I did this, like, really big loop.
And there's, like, no way I would've been able to afford that.
Most importantly, I get to visit those I love most.

It evens out in the end.

He... He liked his job.

Really did...

at first.

Hi, my name's Beebo Russell,

and today, I will be interviewing my fellow employees
about their work and travel life as a ground-service agent.

Do you like working as a ground-service agent?

Why or why not?

I do and I don't.

One of the good things about working here is
there's good people that work here,
and one of the bad things about working here is
there's really bad people that work here.

I enjoy the flexibility of the schedule and the flight benefits.

I do not enjoy management.

Agreed.

A ground-service agent's job is hard work.

Working in hot weather in the summertime. And having the cold season.

Working 12 flights a day.

We're understaffed, underpaid, overworked.

But Richard, I've never really seen him mad.

You know, I've never seen him frustrated.

We had at least 50 people in that break room.

But in the midst of everyone talking, he's in the corner reading a book.

He was really quiet and-and stayed to himself.

And I think he was just trying

to keep that persona of professionalism at the job,
because he was trying to move up.

He was serious about it.

He was trying to better himself

to make more money, to provide for his wife, to be a provider.

I think one of the narratives that we're given
definitely within, like, a lot of traditional Christian institutions is,
that as men, you must provide for your family
in these very specific ways.

And if you're not doing that abundantly economically,
then somehow you are, uh, less than.

It was the end of the third year when I started to notice
that the taste of the job was a little bit more bitter for him.

The longer he worked there, I knew he wasn't happy there.

It's a physical job, repetitive motion, which is really tough on your body.

He said they worked long hours. They didn't really treat him that good. Pay wasn't very good.

So I think the job wasn't worth the travel benefits anymore, you know. They did not treat us with dignity and respect.

Some of the pilots would call us "monkeys in the tug."

And then we're like, "Did he just really just call us that?"

Once he was there long enough, he started to see the separation between the pilots and the air crew, and those on the ground.

He would hear the chatter over his headset.

They would call them "ramp rats," and things like that.

It made him feel like crap.

We would tell our supervisors. They wouldn't do nothing about it.

ATC: What were you thinking? You thinking you want to try and land?

Russel: Hey, I'll go on record for saying, you know, if you asked me why I did it, it's probably because... probably because not making minimum wage. We'll chalk it up to that. Maybe that'll grease the gears a little bit with the higher ups? Maybe— Yeah.

The minimum wage statement got me nervous.

He sounded disgruntled.

I was looking at the airport radar display thinking,

"Oh, my goodness, all these airplanes sitting here filled with fuel, and if Richard turns around and decides to come back

and land on top of one of them, it's gonna explode the whole airport."

So minimum wage in Seattle was \$16 an hour,

but we wasn't getting that.

The pay was \$12.75 an hour.

You can't live off of 12.75 an hour.

We're like, "How could this be legal?"

The first excuse was,

"Well, we're a smaller airline. We're not really making enough money."

But then, we're like, "Well, when we look at our numbers, we're making a lot of money."

He was definitely vocal about how ridiculous it was

that that company was able to pay less than minimum wage.

They didn't like us talking about it.

They didn't want to hear us.

But in the break room, we talked about our pay

and everyone was like, "Eventually, someone's going to do something that's going to be dangerous.

Something that's gonna get their attention.

So not talking, someone's gonna take action."

Alright. What we're gonna do is

we're gonna keep him in non-populated areas like the vector.

Keep him over the Sound.

Okay.

Time was ticking,

and the fuel was just running out, and running out, and running out.

ATC: Hey, Rich. How do you feel about just flying over Puget Sound for a while?

Russel: That'd be a good place to shoot me down, huh?

ATC: Well, it'd be a soft place to land.

Russel: Uh... I wouldn't want to drown.

ATC: Everybody's out sailing tonight. There'll be a million sailboats to pick you up.

Russel: That sounds nice, but I don't think a sailboat would get to me before the guys with the guns.

ATC: Well, there's plenty of life jackets on that aircraft, so you wouldn't have to worry about having to swim.

Russel: You think if I land this successfully, Alaska will give me a job as a pilot?

ATC: Uh... You know, I think they would give you a job doing anything if you could pull this off.

Russel: Yeah, right! Nah, I'm a white guy.

Yeah, and there it is.

There's the, uh...

"The white guy."

The white guy line that's been...

Russel: Sorry, we won't get political.

ATC: Yeah, we don't talk about religion and politics on the flight deck.

Russel: Yeah (laughs).

Um...

Yeah, um...

Is this hard to talk about for...

I mean, it's a little bit hard.

Oh, boy. Why am I...

I need to stop and think about it.

But we're still rolling, right?

— Yeah. — Okay.

— Could we cut the cameras? — Yeah.

Especially being a white man,

I feel like if I say anything,

it's gonna come off as, like, white privilege,

or I don't know.

I just don't wanna get put in a box, you know,

'cause it's all these boxes people are getting put in.

You gotta address the elephant in the room.

It definitely sounds like racism to say,

“I didn’t get the job because I... ‘cause I’m white.”
White people have a better chance of getting a promotion
than an African American.
You just gotta be real about it.
But I’ve been Black for a long time.....all my life...
...so I know for a fact that he was not racist.
I never heard him make any kind of complaints
about him being a white guy,
so that really surprised me.
People are gonna “conspiracize” so many different ways,
but you gotta listen to everything,
listen to every single thing.
“Okay, I heard that part, but what was he saying before then?”
He was saying someone else’s words back to us on the recording.
He was letting people know what was said to him.
It’s tough to try and... try and pinpoint,
you know, what happened.
Somewhere around the third, into the fourth years,
he had talked with his supervisor, “Okay, I’m in a dead-end spot.
I wanna move up. It’s not happening as quickly.
How can I...” You know, “How can I make this move along?”
And one of the things that they spoke about was
having a college degree looks really good and it’s one way to set you apart.
So he was doing night classes trying to finish up his first degree.
He was starting to go to business school,
‘cause he wanted to get, like, a management job with Horizon
or move higher up.
And you know, school’s a full-time job on top of a full-time job.
He did everything he thought he was supposed to do.
Went to school, got the qualification, and still got shot down.
His supervisor told him
he’s not going to get that job as a white guy.
But Beebo’s skin color had nothing to do
with him not getting that job.
Because the person who did get that job was white. [chuckles] So...
I think it’s divide and conquer.
They wanted him to be angry.
They wanted division, so that we could not come together
and actually get something going, because we were not covered by a union.
And if they kept us bickering against each other...
...that never could happen.
It wasn’t because that he was a white man.

That's not why he didn't get the job.
He didn't get the job because of other things.
I think the reason why he wasn't hired is
'cause he wasn't the right kind of a white.
And drawing back to the, "I'm just a white guy."
Well, "Just a white guy." Okay. Well, what kind of white guy are you?
Do you come from a wealthy background? Does your family have stature?
If you grow up with money,
you're definitely gonna have doors open for you
that normally wouldn't open.
White does not wash away poor.
He did not fit that mold that they wanted.
Richard, I believe, did not get the job because he was considered white trash.
Beebo got fucked by the... just the way things are.
He's getting this pressure that he is a man, he's a provider,
he should, you know, be making so much a year.
But then, at the same time, when he's trying to make advancements,
he's running into these roadblocks.
I see how he could've felt, like, just every turn,
there was an obstacle and a setback.
All of these things combined just are creating the perfect storm.

ATC: Now just— just off your right and behind you, there is another aircraft. Would you be willing to talk to them if they're on the frequency and maybe they can help you land?

Russel: Um. Sure. I mean, I'm always down to talk to people. Uh... I'm super thirsty though. I threw up pretty much everything I had, so I kinda gotta go in the back and get some water.

ATC: No, no, no, no. Rich, if you could just stay in the seat, stay in the cockpit and stay with me on the radio, please.

Russel: Yeah, yeah, I already did it once, it's cool. But I just— (laughs) I got to step on my throw up, that's disgusting. One sec.

Captain: Hey, Rich. This is Captain Bill here. We're still listening. My airplane's doing just fine. How's yours?

ATC: He just stepped out for a second. He'll be right back on.

Captain: Okay.

Russel: Alright, I'm back.

ATC: All right, Rich. Welcome back. So, did you give any extra thought as to what you want to do? Do you want to try and land at McChord? Or were you thinking about on the water? Or what are you thinking?

Russel: I kinda fly by the set of my pants. Pun intended. I'm not quite sure what I want to do yet. I do want to see if I can land. That'd be cool, but I don't feel like living anymore, so... that's kind of the problem that I'm dealing with.

I've never heard that.

Uh... I've never heard him say that.

Yeah, maybe I do need a minute. So sorry.

"I don't feel like living anymore."

That's the first time I've heard that.

Russel: I don't want to deal with the repercussions. It's just kind of easy to just nose down, close my eyes. You know? Sad, but kind of not either.

Okay.

He's just talking about doing a nose dive.

ATC: Well, Rich, just let you said, you don't want to hurt anybody, and we don't want to see you get hurt either.

Russel: Hey, where are the jets at? I want to see those guys flying around.

ROCK 41, do you want vectors for the intercept?

ROCK 41, affirmative. Confirm altitude 2995.

I'm his mom. I should've known.

Hey, I want the coordinates of that orca with the... you know the mama orca, with the baby? I want to go see that guy.

ATC: Hey. Hey Rich. How much fuel you got left on there?

Russel: Oh, man, not enough. Not enough to get by, like, uh, 760– 760 pounds.

ATC: Okay, Rich. Thank you.

The last report we got from Horizon was

750 pounds would've lasted him 15 minutes.

Roger.

Western. Headquarters.

Western.

Equates to 15 minutes of fuel.

Western.

Russel: Man, have you been to the Olympics? These guys are gorgeous. Holy smokes!

ATC: Yeah, I have been out there. It's– It's always a nice drive.

Fighter Pilot: Hey, Rich. This is ROCK 41. Man, how are you doing? How about we had out to the west here, get away from the terrain and stuff.

Russel: Why? You got some property out here you're worried about?

Never ever would've thought that he was...

unhappy with his life.

You know, not more unhappy than, you know, normal.

I'm pretty, pretty guilty of it too.

I don't openly share my feelings with anybody.

Um... Maybe my wife, you know, I-I'll talk to her.

But my other guy friends, I'm not gonna tell them that I'm feeling sad or anything like that, because then I'll be a little pussy.

It's gone down through the ages.
Men aren't supposed to be weak. They're supposed to be the strong ones.
They're supposed to be the ones that, um, are taking care of everything.
It becomes an abyss.

And you're expected to pull yourself from the pit
when you feel like you can talk to nobody about it.
How are we even supposed to entertain the idea of counseling?

I mean, that-that's just... it's a foreign...
It doesn't even make sense. It doesn't even register.

Taking the time to see a counselor,
like, I don't even have time to go see the dentist.

Like, I mean...

...if the truck's broken, I know exactly what it takes to fix it.

If I'm having issues inside, I don't even know where to begin.

And in Beebo's situation,

I think for him to seek help, it would be...

He would think of it in terms of, "Am I man enough?"

And also, "How are the people that depend on me gonna look at me
if I'm showing this kind of, you know... if-if I'm having these kinds of problems."

Come on.

Go ahead and use that for your knees.

Okay. Yeah.

Go ahead, finish getting that off with your finger.

When you get pushed and pushed and pushed,
and you bottle it up and bottle it up long enough,
it's... it just becomes a cycle.

Russel: I just imagine all the phone calls going on right now. Like, I don't know
who's gotta talk to who and do this, and figure out that, but it's just funny how little...
conversation's going on with us, you know?

ATC: Well, there are some phone calls being made and we're just trying to figure
out the best option. Really, we just want you to turn back around so we can stay in
contact with you.

Russel: How come?

Captain: Because we care.

ATC: It's true.

We didn't see the signs, and I...

I think that part of that was because every time he would see us,
it was a little whirlwind weekend, and it was just fun.

And that's one of the things that frustrates me the most
is that I did not know that he was depressed.

I...

And that makes me sad that maybe I missed the signs.

I really wish he would have told me he felt that way before.

The pilot, Rich is getting kind of emotional right now.

ATC: Well, Rich, you know you seem to get– you seem like you’re getting down on yourself but there’s no need to do that.

I mean, we’re– we all get down on ourselves a little bit, but, there’s no need to get upset with ourselves about it, you know.

Being at Horizon, it just became too much, so I had to leave.

But I saw Richard a week before he took that plane.

I said, “Why don’t you come over to my job?”

He says, “Yeah, but I really am trying to move up.

I really do. I don’t want to leave.”

I said, “Okay. Well, if you ever want to, let me know.”

Why didn’t I talk to him a little bit longer?

Was that a chance for me to... to find out what’s really going on?

“Are you okay?”

Russel: I think this is part of the reason why I decided to do something so extreme, is just ‘cause everything is always business all the time. Even when you know, you’re hanging out with people, it’s just business.

Um... I just– You know, those real close personal moments are just so few and far between. Um... Yeah, it sucks. So, like, I wouldn’t mind just shooting the shit with you guys, but it’s all business, you know.

ATC: Yeah, Rich. We’d like to talk to you too. So, you’ve made a turn– a right turn to the west now, so if you could just stop your turn and then keep it nice and level there and then we can start talking. Maybe we can set up something, maybe a place for you to land.

Russel: Yeah, I don’t think I’m going to land it. Like, in a safe, safe kind of manner. Think I’m gonna try to do a barrel roll, and if that goes good I’ll just go nose down and call it a night.

ATC: Well, no need to do that. If you could just start a turn to the right, and then I’ll tell you when to stop turning, and then you can keep it level from there.

Russel: Alright. Well, I’ll keep climbing a little bit. I feel like I need to be– What do you think? Like 5,000 feet at least to be able to pull this barrel roll off?

Captain: Really, there’s no safe altitude for that. I wouldn’t even try it. You’re gonna hurt somebody on the ground.

ATC: And Rich, you said you didn’t want to hurt anybody on the ground. And we don’t want see you get hurt either.

Captain: Rich, you’d be a hero if you could pull off a landing.

Russel: No, I would just be a public nuisance that goes to jail for the rest of my life. So. I’ve been kind of weighing my options back and forth, and though I would love three squares a day and just reading books the whole time and I know I’d get some letters from my loved ones. I got a bunch of them out there. Um... You know, it just wouldn’t be the best, you know?

Captain: You've got a wife.

Russel: Oh, you Facebook-stalked me?

I... I still can't believe he chose the path he chose.

I didn't see it.

Onlookers filming: He's turning. He's completely sideways. He's going all the way. He's upside down.

— Oh, my God! — Sh...

Holy shit! Holy shit, man!

Holy shit! Holy shit!

Automated warning: Pull up. Pull up.

Onlookers filming: Oh, my God. I'm gonna have a heart attack.

Oh, my God. Is he okay? He's okay.

He's okay! He's okay, he's okay, he's okay.

Fighter pilots: TOI-1 just completed a barrel roll. Current altitude, 2,000 feet.

ROCK 42, confirm he did a barrel roll.

Affirm, he cleared the surface of the water by approximately 10 feet.

ATC Boss: He did it. He completed the barrel roll.

Russel: Hey, is that my jet pilot finally?

Pilots contacted me and said that that plane should never have done what it did.

That plane was just not meant to do those things.

My brother is this guy, never flown a plane in his life, takes off, flies around, and then does a freaking barrel roll and doesn't crash land it.

It's pretty impressive.

I mean, the kid had unlimited potential.

I feel like if he would have, uh,

just known all the potential he had inside him,

instead of whatever it was that made him feel like he wasn't good enough, then, who knows? He...

He could have been whatever he wanted to be.

Captain: Alright, Rich, this is Captain Bill. Congratulations, you did that. Now let's try to land that airplane safely and not hurt anybody on the ground.

Western. Headquarters.

Western.

Have ROCK ask the altitude again. Confirm altitude.

ROCK has him at 2,000.

Thank you.

ATC Boss: All right, ROCK is trying to talk him into landing the airplane now.

Russel: All right. Ah, damn it. I don't know. Man, I don't know! I don't want to. I was kind of hoping that was going to be it, you know?

ATC: Hey, Rich, how much fuel you got left on there?

Russel: Uh... Over 500, like 550.

ATC: Okay.

So at 550 pounds of fuel, that's about five minutes of flight time.

It's decision-making time for the fighter pilots.

DEN. I don't know how familiar you are with this area,

but basically we have,

a lot of islands and a lot of inlets of water.

So, the fighters

will have opportunities

where he's over with the water a lot.

But, there's all kinds of houses

on all the edges of the water.

So, they're not really wide waterways,

they're kind of narrow.

So, their opportunity, references the amount of fuel that he has.

Just kind of giving you a heads up.

He's over Ketron Island. K-E-D-

K-E-T-R-O-N Island.

He's right next to Ketron Island. K-E-T-R-O-N.

And a report from a local says about thirty people live on the island.

ATC: Rich, you still there?

Russel: Yeah, not for long. I feel like one of my engines is going out or something.

ATC: Okay, Rich, if you could, you just want to keep that plane right over the water? Maybe keep the aircraft nice and low? Can you do that?

41 can you just verify that... that he's still over the water there?

Captain: Hey Rich, this is Captain Bill. How's it going up there?

ATC chatter: All right, just got a report on another phone that ROCK 41 reports splash.

Okay.

And target fade at 0348.

Target fade.

Western.

Colleen here.

Okay, Jason. Did you hear that?

Yes.

All right, ROCK 42 reported that he hit the island.

Uh...

That's it?

Well, I mean...

There was no more... There wasn't any other transmissions from... from Beebo from the cockpit?

It was just kinda...

I just hope that...

It looked like it was probably instantaneous.
I mean, he didn't feel any pain.
Hope he wasn't scared.
After the entire ordeal was over, Andrew was up off position.
I just walked out there, and he was in the hallway.
I went to go talk to him.
I looked at him, and I could just see it in his face.
That he was devastated.
And we cried.
And I said, "I'm sorry."
I needed you t-t-to do that. You were the one I needed.
Please don't go home alone." "Don't go home.
Stay here with your friends, call your parents, call someone.
Don't go home. Don't be alone now."
I think he was still in the air
when Alaska Air put me on the next flight out.
So I think when I got on the plane to come down to Seattle...
...I think they knew, but they didn't tell me,
that the plane had gone down.
I remember telling Hannah that we are family, and we'll always be family.
But we just lost touch.
And I just have to accept that maybe seeing me hurts too much.
I'm just so sad.
People say that you have visions or dreams or whatever of your lost loved one.
And I don't... [stammering] I haven't received any kind of... any visit from him.
You know, if it's a feather blowing in the wind,
or if it's a rock hitting me on the head, doesn't matter.
I just want to know that he's okay.
This is a look at the crash scene.
We take another look at that wild video.
An airline employee steals a passenger plane
from Seattle's Sea-Tac Airport.
I can't get the story out of my head.
Initially, they didn't know the man's motives.
I was hoping that the press would just leave me alone.
I had no interest in talking to the press.
I had no interest in sharing my story with anybody.
I just didn't understand the obsession with this.
I didn't understand it. To me, this was a horrible death.
Fighter jets were sent out.
There were concerns this could be terror related.
Federal investigators are hoping the recovery of those black boxes

give them a better understanding into what motivated this airline ground worker to steal this plane and fly off in the first place.
It was pretty clear, like, this was gonna get controversial.
My family, my parents, they say, "Don't watch it.
You can't watch it. It's gonna drive you nuts."
It was sensationalized and politicized almost exclusively just to argue preexisting, um, political points that were very extreme.
The far-left demonized him.
'Cause this just seems to be another angry white man, right?
As simple as that.
Like, lacking a bunch of this sophistication.
And then, like, equally wrong on the right side.
They're like, "Look at this hero for white nationals."
Like, "Dude, that's not even close to being right!"
If he was a terrorist, why did he not fly into something?
Why did he not try to harm others?
Why did he not take the plane when there was people there?
There's this quote in there,
"I think he feels the pain of an entire race being exterminated but can't quite articulate his depression."
That's so stupid.
That is the most incorrect diagnosis of what he was thinking and feeling.
These T-shirts here from a neo-Nazi, white nationalist outfit uses my brother as, you know, kind of a poster child to sell merchandise that supports their ridiculous beliefs.
It's bad enough to take somebody's suicide and...
...make T-shirts and monetize it, um,
but to be somebody that outside of his beliefs is just gross.
Traditional conservatives, we don't believe that America should be only white.
Beebo was not about any of that. He would be absolutely disgusted.
Here's this incredibly sad event that people made him out to be something he wasn't.
Beebo was not part of your agenda.
He said why he was doing what he was doing.
He named off work stuff.
But very shortly after all of that,
there was a lot of these memes that were popping up on social media.
I noticed it went viral when I saw a meme with, uh, him doing the loop the loop over the Sound.
It said, "#SkyKing."
And I kinda looked into it a little bit,

like, “What are they talking about, Sky King?”
Something about it had resonated really deeply with, uh, a group of people.
To me, the whole Sky King thing is, uh...
It’s like Beebo giving a big “fuck you” to corporate America.
I feel like that was definitely part of him.
There was this person who felt like he was this cog
in this giant machine.
And this was his last stand to kind of finally break free
from being what they described online as this “wage slave.”
In many ways, this could be me, right?
This video is in memory of the Sky King: Richard “Beebo” Russell.
The last thing I want to do is glorify suicide,
and that’s the opposite of what I’m here to do on the Internet.
But for some reason, this story really resonated with me and a lot of people.
He was just a regular guy...
I got letters and texts from people all over the world.
From South America to Europe to India, to, uh, everywhere
about how they were gonna, um, commit suicide,
but they read his story, and they didn’t.
I got a lot of people that care about me,
and, uh, it’s gonna disappoint them
to... to hear that I did this.
Um, I would like to apologize to each and every one of them.
Um... [sighs] ...just a broken guy.
Got a few screws loose, I guess.
Never really knew it.....till now.
I got hundreds of emails from ground-service workers,
from flight crews, from, um, ex-pilots who...
Basically...
“Your brother’s a rock star. He said what we’ve all been saying.”
Um, “It’s how we all feel.”
And they see him as somebody
that was kinda sticking up for those that are put to the wayside...
...and thought of as “ramp rat.”
They, uh... They internalize how they feel.
And, uh...
He let that cat out of the bag.
And, you know, for some of them, that’s all they needed to hear was,
they weren’t the only ones that felt that way about their job.
The younger generations are losing what we had.
We all believed in the American dream.
The kids today, they even question, “What is the American dream?”

My nephew, his generation,
I think they were just caught right there in the middle
as everything was transitioning.
Even though it's the economy changing,
people are going to think, because they can't attain it, that it's their fault.
Keep going, keep going.
There's a sorrow that is always there.
If I could talk to Beebo right now,
I'd slap him upside the head and go,
"What the hell were you thinking?"
I really would. I...
You know, "Beebo, don't."
You know, "Don't."
Talk to me.
Just talk to me.
There's nothing that we cannot solve.
Just talk to me."
— Did he disappoint you? — Oh, God, no.
He was the best.
He never disappointed me. Ever. He was...
I was so proud of him.
Just saw this video. Ugh, brought me to tears.
This video is in memory of the Sky King: Richard Beebo Russell.
I just went down a rabbit hole on Sky King,
and, oh, my God, the audio...
I hope maybe Sky King and this message helps you too.
There is almost a poetry to someone who has spent their entire career, at least...
If you or someone you know is struggling, please seek professional help.
So instead of playing by the rules, he had nothing to lose.
He was gonna break it and show the world what he was capable of.
He performed unbelievable aerial stunts, including a barrel roll.
A video I'd like you to watch of him talking to the air traffic controller...
...of mental health and the different ways people might reach out for help.
I've listened to the audio of the Sky King a few times now, and it really does...
I just watched another Sky King video, so.....if you need me...
There are a lot of men out there that are carrying so many burdens.
Man, I'm telling you that might be some of the most important audio I've ever
heard.
As the voice recordings show, Beebo's intent was not to harm anyone.
He was right in saying that there are so many people who have loved him.
You know, do your barrel roll. Do your barrel roll.
Land safely.

The Ted K Archive

A text dump on Sky King Richard Russell
2026

If you or someone you know is struggling, please visit this [Resources Page](#)] for support. You are not alone.

www.thetedkarchive.com