

03/21/2008

Testimony of John Bassler
Assistant Principal Avionics Inspector, SWA-CMO

This is the testimony of John Bassler, Aviation Safety Inspector assigned to the SWA-CMO from 06/2005 to 12/2007, serving in the capacity of Assistant Principal Avionics Inspector.

When I arrived at the SWA-CMO in 2005, one of the first things I noticed was how fractured the Airworthiness group was. I came from the CALA-CMO in Houston, where that airworthiness unit had scheduled meetings including both specialties (Avionics and Maintenance) on a regular basis. The SWA-CMO did not and as a matter of fact, it didn't start having meetings of this nature until the latter part of 2007. I found the airworthiness unit in my opinion to be dysfunctional. I had not been in the office for very long when I witnessed my immediate supervisor, Mr. Michael P. Colin, Principal Avionics Inspector, giving the middle finger to another supervisor, Mr. Doug Gawadzinski, Principal Maintenance Inspector, when he had his back turned. I thought that very unprofessional and I voiced my objections to my supervisor. I told him that I did not appreciate that in my presence.

Things progressively got worse in the office. Most of the friction was within the management ranks. During this time it must be noted that most of the inspectors continued to operate at an exceptional level without management's support. Around early March, 2007, rumors began to fly that Inspector Bobby Boutris had a couple of hotline complaints filed on him from outside the agency. This is when things really started to become hostile. Boutris began to spend a lot of time conversing directly to Robert Naccache, assistant manager and Michael Mills, the office manager behind closed doors, several times a day. Mr. Boutris also began spending a lot of time with the DEPM (Data Evaluation Program Manager) Mr. Doug Peters. I started to recognize what appeared to me, the obvious dislike Mr. Peters, Mr. Boutris, Mr. Mills, and Mr. Naccache had towards the SPMI, Mr. Gawadzinski. This dislike in my opinion seemed to be of a very personal nature towards the man. One day Mr. Peters was overheard by several inspectors including myself making the comment from Boutris's cubical, "The gloves are coming off".

Mr. Boutris was removed from his duties and work program pending the outcome of the investigations into the complaints made against him. He was to have no contact in any capacity with the air carrier or its programs. This is evidently right around the timeframe when Southwest Airlines contacted the SPMI disclosing the possible over fly of an Airworthiness Directive on some of their aircraft. Being avionics, I was not privy to this information and therefore had no knowledge of the details or specifics of the disclosure. Around mid April 2007 timeframe, Mr. Gawadzinski was looking for volunteers to help complete the job assignments that were issued to Mr. Boutris. Mr. Gawadzinski was having difficulty getting anyone to volunteer. He approached me and asked if I would be willing to work the Safety Attributes Inspection (SAI) 1.3.6, Airworthiness Directives. I

told him I would be willing to do the work assignment. Had I known at the time Mr. Boutris's intentions, I would have never volunteered myself for this assignment. It wasn't a couple of days later; I witnessed Mr. Boutris entering my cubical and removing data from the SAI folder I had just acquired from him. Mr. Boutris never started the SAI. He had a couple of notes on a paper Decision Collection Tool (DCT) but that was it. I had to start the inspection completely from scratch.

I began to become aware of the militant attitudes that were developing in the office from the individuals I have identified in the aforementioned paragraph. I became concerned that I was going to be targeted by these inspectors due to my agreeing to perform the SAI. I sent an e-mail (see attachment 1) to my supervisor, Mr. Colin requesting that I be removed from the SAI because of the hostile environment developing in the office. Mr. Colin refused to remove me from the SAI. I then requested to at least add some inspectors to the inspection so that it would be a team event and I would not be individually targeted. Mr. Colin agreed and added one inspector, Mr. Larry Collamore (see attachment 2). During this inspection, Mr. Boutris felt it important enough to approach Mr. Collamore and notify him that the "SAI was being watched very closely". Mr. Collamore stated to me that he felt very threatened by Mr. Boutris's comment. I also learned of events that had transpired between Mr. Boutris and certain SWA employees. The manager of Airworthiness Directives for SWA, Mr. Bill Kervanik, divulged to me in a scheduled SAI meeting that Mr. Boutris had almost started a fistfight with him during a meeting at the air carrier and that Mr. Boutris was very unprofessional in his behavior. Because of these types of events in which Mr. Boutris was directly involved, it took the SAI team members a tremendous amount of time to re-establish communication with the air carrier. This was due to the deterioration of trust that had developed between the air carrier and the FAA (Mr. Boutris). Communication is critical when performing ATOS (Air Transportation Oversight System) surveillance functions. In order for the ATOS surveillance program to function properly, requires communication between the Air carrier and the regulatory agency. This must be accomplished in order to meet the agencies goal of establishing policy and procedures at the highest level of safety.

Mr. Collamore and I finished the inspection during the month of June, 2007. There was a lengthy delay in completing the SAI due to Mr. Kervanik being on leave due to a medical situation within his immediate family. The final product was sent to the DEPM (Mr. Peters) for review. It was returned with numerous (2 full pages) of comments (see attachment 3). This upset me because in my 10 years experience with ATOS, I had never seen so many comments from a DEPM. I had performed inspections in the past and never had anything like this returned from the DEPM in this fashion before these events. This upset me deeply and I brought my concerns to my supervisor, Mr. Colin. I explained that I felt I was being targeted and that the DEPM was using his position to personally attack my credibility. Nothing was done about my concerns. I made a couple of spelling corrections to the verbiage and again forwarded it to the DEPM for review. This time the SAI was saved concurred by the DEPM to the Master Record (ATOS database). Several days later, Mr. Colin wanted changes made again to the SAI "No" comments and had me request it back from the repository. This is a very unusual act. Once an inspection has been saved to the database, it normally never gets returned. I have never witnessed it in

my 10 years working in ATOS. Phone calls are made and the SAI is returned. At this particular time, management personnel are attending a seminar out of state so the only permanent management official still in the office was the assistant manager, Robert Naccache. The SAI sits in the DEPM's possession for approximately 15 days, when management finally returns to the office. I send an e-mail to the office manager, who now is Mr. Bobby Hedlund, and ask the status of the SAI (see attachment 4). He responds to let me know the DEPM is waiting for PMI feedback (This particular PMI is the 3rd person to temporarily hold the position in less than a year). I thought this peculiar since this individual had no information and was not present during the time the SAI was being performed. A meeting is held at the request of the DEPM to discuss his concerns with the SAI with the PMI and the PAI. I was not invited to the meeting nor was Larry Collamore. This upset me because I was the Team Coordinator for this SAI. I felt my knowledge was instrumental in the conversation. I voiced this concern to my Supervisor. Nothing was done about my concerns. After the meeting the PAI sent an e-mail to SAI team member Larry Collamore, requesting "Yes comments" in the "Controls" section of the SAI. At this time, ATOS 1.1 was National Policy and did not require "Yes" comments. Mr. Collamore responded to the e-mail by respectfully refusing to add the "Yes" comments. His response also identified the inappropriate behavior being displayed by certain inspectors in the office (See attachment 5). Management meets in the manager's office to discuss the SAI. The next morning, the SAI work instructions are changed to require "Yes" comments (See Attachment 6). This action was contrary to ATOS and AFS-900 policy. A meeting is held to discuss the SAI. The meeting included Mr. Colin - PAI, Mr. Hoover - Temporary PMI, Mr. Jay Nelson - Temporary POI, Mr. Bobby Hedlund - Office Manager, Mr. Peters - DEPM, John Bassler - Team Coordinator SAI 1.3.6, Mr. Larry Collamore - SAI Team Member. Larry and I voice our frustration with the entire process and the way this inspection is being handled. Both Larry and I felt we were being targeted and that we were not getting fair and equitable treatment. Our concerns went unaddressed again. By the time the SAI was saved to the ATOS repository, it sat in the DEPM's review for 20 days. This is contrary to ATOS data quality guidelines and required disciplinary action on the DEPM. None was taken.

At this point, I was fed up with the office environment and how I was being unfairly treated by management and inspectors Bobby Boutris and Doug Peters. I requested to be transferred to another office in the local area. I finally was told by the Manager, Mr. Hedlund, that I received a transfer to the DFW FSDO. This meeting took place in my cubical. During the conversation Mr. Colin, my supervisor walked by and made some comments, then flipped me off with both middle fingers in the manager's presence. I sent a grievance to region (see attachment 7) and requested immediate removal from the office. The SAI letter (see attachment 8) addressing the findings during SAI 1.3.6 still had not left the office. I do not know what the final letter looked like since I was no longer employed in the office. I also cannot take ownership of the final SAI, since I believe the data has been manipulated since my departure.

I made every attempt to complete this assignment in the most professional manner humanly possible. I followed National Policies and Guidance through the entire process. I pride myself as a public servant to make every attempt at establishing the safest

transportation system in the world; I swore an oath to do just that. In my 11 years with this agency, I have never witnessed events of this magnitude before. I hope and pray that the truth surrounding these events is identified and the individuals who in my opinion sought out through their selfish desires to destroy fellow employee's careers, be brought to justice.

This is my testimony,
Regards,

John Bassler
Aviation Safety Inspector
DFW-FSDO

Attachments:

1. E-mail dated 04/20/2007 requesting to be removed from SAI 1.3.6
2. E-mail dated 04/23/2007 adding Mr. Larry Collamore to SAI 1.3.6
3. Copy of DEPM comments returning SAI 1.3.6 dated 07/26/2007
4. E-mail dated 08/28/2007 requesting status of final SAI 1.3.6 with a copy of e-mail dated 08/10/2007 showing SAI 1.3.6 originally met Principals satisfaction.
5. E-mail dated 08/30/2007 reflecting the SAI team member's position on adding comments outside National Policy ATOS 1.1 requirements.
6. E-mail dated 08/30/2007 showing the SAI instructions changed by management after it originally met National Policy requirements.
7. E-mail dated 10/15/2007 requesting immediate transfer out of office due to hostile attitude displayed towards me by management officials including formal statement.
8. Original Letter of findings to the Air Carrier generated by me, dated 09/10/2007 addressing the "NO" answers to SAI 1.3.6 questions.

Mitigating and/or Aggravating Attachments:

9. E-mail dated 05/29/2007 showing the difficulties with the DEPM
10. Record of Meeting, dated 06/05/2007
11. Record of Telephone Conversation dated 07/11/2007
12. EEOC package dated 07/20/2007.
13. Memorandum dated 07/27/2007 complaining of the DEPM's hostile attitude.
14. E-mail dated 07/30/2007 recommending to management an Enforcement Action.
15. Record of Conversation dated 08/30/2007 documenting the hostile attitude of management concerning official e-mail traffic.
16. E-mail dated 08/06/2007 showing the request to have the SAI returned from the ATOS repository. Also shows on 08/10/2007, the SAI met management's satisfaction and saved to final. SAI sits waiting for DEPM approval.
17. E-mail dated 08/28/2007 revealing my frustration with the DEPM.

18. E-mail dated 08/30/2007 concerning the status of SAI 1.3.6 still in the DEPM's possession.
19. Copy of grievance around October/2007 timeframe concerning inequitable workload assignments by supervisor.
20. Fax Transmittal, dated 11/17/2007 to Southwest Region HR of the Memorandum dated 09/25/2007 requesting a transfer from the SWA-CMO.
21. Business card with religious overtones given to me via mailbox by my supervisor, Mr. Michael P. Colin around July/2007 timeframe.