

Brazilian Tragedy: Flight Controller Noticed Foul Up But Couldn't Undo It

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Disgruntled with their working conditions and the slow pace of reforms, air traffic controllers in Brazil continue to vent their dissatisfaction and shed light on the worst Brazilian air tragedy ever in candid talks to reporters during anonymous interviews.

The last revelation comes from a veteran flight controller in Brazilian capital Brasília who talked to the Federal District's main daily, the *Correio Braziliense*.

According to this account, when a more experienced controller - he has been working for over five years in Brasília - took over from a beginner worker he immediately noticed there was something wrong with the Legacy executive jet piloted by two Americans.

The small plane was on the same 37,000 feet route of the Boeing 737 coming from the opposite direction. And he immediately started a frantic effort to avoid what he saw was an imminent tragedy.

"He wanted to undo the foul up, trying to contact the jet to find out the altitude the plane was flying, but he was not able to establish communication," said the controller, who has been in the job over 25 years. According to him, his colleague has been feeling "disoriented" since the accident, which killed 154.

He wouldn't reveal, however, the age of the younger and inexperienced professional, who seems to have mistakenly assumed that the Legacy was in a different altitude. It's known that the youngest of the 13 controllers who are being investigated in connection with the accident is 27 years old.

At Cindacta 1 (the Brasília Air Control Tower), says the *Correio*, controllers admit that they have made a mistake, but according to one of the professionals there the oversight by the unskilled controller may also be explained by excessive work: "My God, he was monitoring 22 planes," he stated.

During a Senate hearing, Air Force commander brigadier Luiz Carlos Bueno, told senators that the controller in charge of the Legacy was monitoring only 5 planes when the collision occurred. He didn't mention, however, how many planes were being overseen by the previous professional at the tower.

The young operator who erred had gone through a short four-months internship. Controllers like him, who monitor planes in a 500-mile radius, normally train double the time before they are allowed to become a full-fledged professional.

But the use of untrained controllers hasn't been that rare in Brazil these days. And they apparently continue to be integrated in the service. Another controller reported that he saw a discussion between a Cindacta 1 supervisor and the control center's new chief, colonel Carlos Aquino:

"The controller, who was being transferred from another Cindacta, had just arrived that same day. And the commander already wanted to put him on the job. They are qualifying people who are not prepared and then throwing them in the fire."

Hiring New Controllers

Brazil's *Diário Oficial* (Federal Daily Gazette) is publishing today the rules for those interested in working as air traffic controllers. The military, which are in charge of flight control in the country, have 160 openings for the position.

Candidates need to have finished high school and well as knowledge of computer and English language. Registration can be completed online from December 5 to December 15. There will be several scholastic as well as medical and psychological tests.

Training starts February 26 and will last one year. To get the position candidates will have to become Air Force sergeants. Average salary for an air controller is 1,600 reais (US\$ 740) a month.

Registration won't be an easy task. According to the instructions posted on the Internet for those interested in applying for a chance to become an air traffic controller the conditions are:

a) to be Brazilian;

- b) to be volunteer;
- c) to be at least 1.55 m tall if a female and at least 1.60 m. if a male;
- d) to be within the age limit contemplated in item 2 of the appendix to these instructions;
- e) to be single;
- f) if younger than 18 to be expressly authorized by the legal responsible person;
- g) to be up-to-date with your electoral obligations;
- h) to not have criminal records regarding offenses of fraudulent nature;
- i) if female, to agree with the requirement regarding impediment to getting pregnant in the period between the registration to the admission exam and the course conclusion;
- j) to not possess Certificate of Military Service Exemption due to physical, mental or moral inability;
- k) if male to be up-to-date with the Military Service;
- l) to not have been, previously, excluded from the active military service due to bad behavior, lack of moral integrity or for incompatibility with the military career, or dismissed from course or course administered in a military teaching establishment for the same reasons;
- m) to not be performing the Initial Military Service at registration time;
- n) if on active military service, to be classified, at least, as having "Good Behavior";
- o) if on active or reserve military service, to have ranking lower than a Third Sergeant
- p) if a military, include, in the Registration Request Form, the information on your Commander, Chief or Director regarding the conditions contemplated in paragraphs "d", "h", "l", "m", "n" and "o" of this item;
- q) to have concluded or be in conditions to conclude high school , with good performance:
- r) to pay the registration fee and prove that it has been paid; and
- s) to register using the proper Registration Request Form.