

Silver Eagles Newsletter

June 2012

I may have to call this the Tom Haueter edition! My only concern is Bill Adair's (see below) focus on aviation accident investigations – NTSB investigators in all modes have been extraordinary! In Haz Mat I was lucky enough to work with all modes! *[A note for those of you who get overwhelmed by the Haueter monologue, please go to the salutation for an important Silver Eagle notice!]*

New Members:

Tom Haueter

[His contact info is on the attached contact list.]

Board News:

Goodbye from Millie Starek:

As many of you already know, I will retire from the Federal Government on June 2. It has been both a privilege and a pleasure to work with so many of you during the past 3 years and 9 months. NTSB is an agency with a unique and remarkable mission, and it is staffed with equally extraordinary and dedicated individuals. I have proud memories of my years of service at the Department of Justice and the House Judiciary Committee. Now, as my Federal career draws to a close, it has been even further enriched by my amazing experience at an agency that so greatly and directly impacts the lives of so many.

My very best wishes to each and every one of you!

[Millie worked in GA (now part of the Office of Communications), and was the government affairs liaison (like what Betty Scott used to do). I tried to contact her, but got no reply.]

Goodbye from Tom Hauter to the Board:

Seems like yesterday was my first day with the NTSB. It has certainly been a fantastic career with more opportunities and experiences than I would have ever expected. As Member Coughlin once said, working at the NTSB is much more than a job... She was not totally correct; in fact the job is addictive. What this agency accomplishes every day with a very small staff, and in my opinion continual insufficient resources, is more than remarkable. It has been your tireless dedication to the NTSB's mission that makes it possible.

While at the NTSB I have been to every continent except Antarctica and have worked investigations in conditions ranging from deep snow to steaming jungles. I highly recommend the island of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean; Malaysia has the largest bugs on the planet; the poison transferred through your skin by touching a blue frog in Suriname will kill you; the Darien jungle of Panama has more snakes than one can count; Sorel boots with 2 layers of socks are the best for keeping your feet from freezing when standing on an ice pack all day; outside of

Narita; Japan there is a magnificent formal garden; St. Petersburg, Russia and Dubrovnik, Croatia are very much worth the trip; you really can set your watch by the trains in Switzerland; on an overcast/gray day at an altitude of maybe 400 feet every darn town in eastern England looks the same (that is a long story); and there are a whole bunch of magnificent places in the US that most people don't get the chance to see. More importantly, it is the people you meet while doing the job that stays with you. I am fortunate to have worked with so many of you and made close friends at the NTSB and all over the world.

I have had the great privilege and honor to have served in a variety of positions – starting in safety recommendations, then engineering, as an IIC, and into management. I have been very lucky in the investigations that I have been assigned too and the people that I have worked with. I have received much more visibility than I ever sought. Yes, I loved the adventure, but the real driving force was to find the cause of the accident and ensure that it would not happen again. I never focused on the tragedy but on the investigation. As an investigator I took some risks, as a manager I tried to hold people back from doing what I did. Also as a manager, I hope I provided my staff with the room and guidance to achieve their full potential – in many cases that just required staying out of their way.

In my mind's eye, I did not see the NTSB as a government agency, but rather as a specialized consulting operation. I will admit in taking special pride in being part of a small group that was able to take on much larger and more well-funded agencies and manufacturers and, on numerous occasions, prove them wrong based on our hard work, intelligence, commitment to detail, and most importantly the incredible strength of our credibility. If there is a flaw within the NTSB, it is that sometimes we do not recognize just how good we are ---- there is a reason the rest of the world knows us as the platinum standard. While some do not like the probable cause or findings in our reports and the direction of our safety recommendations, the vast majority of our investigations and recommendations stand the test of time. It was a joy and an honor to be part of the NTSB and I will miss you all. Thank you for all for the support, friendship, honest debate, making the job fun, -- it sure made my time at the NTSB flash by.

Finally, I want to pass on one of my favorite quotes. From Charles Lindbergh “We live the dreams of yesterday, and in living those dreams, we dream again.” I am moving on to my next dream and I wish you the best in yours.

And from Mr. Spock -- Live long and prosper.

[See Tom in his plane in the Silver Eagles photo gallery.]

Member News:

This bureaucrat may have saved your life

By [Bill Adair](#), Times Washington Bureau Chief
In Print: Sunday, May 27, 2012

Meet **Tom Haueter**, a bureaucrat who may have saved your life.

Haueter is the director of aviation safety at the National Transportation Safety Board, the federal agency that investigates plane crashes. In the language of the bureaucracy, he is SES, in charge of AS-1.

I often think of Haueter when I hear politicians belittling federal workers. It's a campaign year, so the attacks are coming fast and furiously. In Ohio, a U.S. Senate candidate says his opponent sides "with federal bureaucrats to stop exploration of natural resources." In Congress, Republicans decry a Medicare panel that is run by "15 unelected bureaucrats."

Running against Washington has long been a winning strategy — particularly for challengers trying to get to Washington. Federal workers are easy targets because of news stories about wasteful spending, lavish conventions and \$16 muffins.

The reality is more complicated. Yes, there are genuine tales of waste, and it's true the bureaucracy can be sluggish and frustrating. But the simplistic attacks ignore the reality about tens of thousands of federal workers who have dedicated much of their lives to public service.

Take Haueter. He is retiring this week after 28 years with the NTSB. He got into government because he needed to pay his mortgage. He ended up making it his career.

"I had no intention of being a government employee," he said during an interview in his Washington office last week. "Quite frankly, it taints you for getting back into private industry."

Haueter (it's pronounced how-ter), who looks the same at 60 as he did at 45, stayed because he loved the NTSB's mission and impact. The safety board not only solves mysteries about plane crashes, it pressures the Federal Aviation Administration, airplane manufacturers and airlines into fixing problems so accidents don't happen again.

I met him 17 years ago when he was in charge of the investigation into USAir Flight 427, a Boeing 737 that crashed near Pittsburgh. I had decided to write a behind-the-scenes account of an NTSB case and happened to choose the longest and most complicated one in history.

I've spent many hours talking with Haueter at his Virginia home — not just about the crash but about his life, hobbies (he restores old airplanes) and the tradeoffs of working in a government job. He earns a nice salary of \$178,000 a year, but he very well could have earned more at this point in his career had he worked in private industry.

I also spent lots of time with his friends and co-workers from the NTSB and the FAA. I found they weren't paper-pushers. They worked hard and loved their jobs. They too probably could have earned more money in the private sector, but they found the government jobs fulfilling because of their success at making aviation safer.

And one thing to keep in mind about bureaucracy: It can be a good thing. It can put the brakes on impulsive political responses and make sure agencies thoroughly consider the impact of their actions.

Haueter started at the NTSB in a job tracking the agency's safety recommendations. He moved up to become an accident investigator specializing in aircraft structures, then a lead investigator, and now the agency's top aviation official.

The biggest challenge in his career was the NTSB's probe into Flight 427. Haueter had to referee constant fights between Boeing and the pilots union over whether the plane or pilots were at fault. When the investigation stalled, he resisted pressures to give up and kept pushing until the case finally was solved.

The accident was blamed on a sudden movement by the plane's rudder that most likely was caused by a hydraulic malfunction. His work on the USAir 427 case led to many improvements in the 737, the world's most widely used jetliner.

With that case and dozens of others, Haueter had an impact. If you have flown on virtually any type of plane in the past three decades, he may have saved your life. He can point to many planes and identify things that got fixed because of the NTSB's work.

During his career in accident investigation, Haueter saw tremendous improvements in technology that make the detective work better. When he started, flight data recorders took only a few measurements, which made it difficult to piece together what happened. Today, those "black boxes" take several hundred measurements, giving investigators tremendous details about what caused an accident.

Looking back on his time at the NTSB, Haueter says, "I lucked into the perfect job." He's proud that the safety board has corrected so many problems and that crashes are now relatively rare.

"The system works extremely well," he says.

Because he has worked for more than 20 years, he can retire at 60. He plans to do some aviation consulting, but his main goal is to finish building a Lockheed Altair, a 1930s plane similar to one flown by his hero, Charles Lindbergh.

Haueter's departure is a reminder of the importance of federal workers and the need for government to keep attracting smart people. There are legitimate debates about whether government should be larger or smaller. But either way, we want to encourage smart people to get into public service.

We need more Haueters.

Please, it's time for the rest of you to toot your horns! This is getting frustrating. [*Important Silver Eagle notice!*] I'm going to begin contacting a half dozen of you directly after each month's newsletter asking for a quick note about your life, vacations, concerns, missions, - well, just about anything except politics and religion – to be included in the next month's newsletter. --in the hope that a few will respond... please... if you want to...

(does that sound desperate enough?) Happy Fourth of July!!