

CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
Aircraft Accident Investigation and Inquiry Board
Aircraft Incident Report

BASIC INFORMATION

Aircraft Registration : RP-C3271

Aircraft Type/Model : A320

Owner/Operator : Cebu Pacific Air, Inc.

Address of Owner : c% 8006 Airline Operations Center, Domestic Road, Pasay City

Date/Time of Incident: : May 24, 2013 at 0140Z UTC

Type of Operation : Commercial Air Transport

Phase of Operation : Cruising

Type of Occurrence : Emergency priority landing due to low fuel Indication

Place of Incident : Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), Manila, Philippines

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On or about 0223Z UTC May 24, 2013, Cebu Flight 5J -786, an Airbus A320 with Registry RP-C3271 departed Butuan Airport bound for Manila, Ninoy Aquino International Airport (RPLL) On board were six (6) aircrew two (2) Pilots, four (4) Cabin Crew and one hundred forty-three (143) passengers (140 adults and 3 infants). Earlier, on or about 0140Z UTC same date, checkout for radar rating commenced as traffic started to build up and to avoid unnecessary radar vectoring and frequent requests for weather deviations, some aircraft were instructed to hold at different fixes with the ultimate goal of preventing frequency congestion. RP-C3271, while approaching Manila Terminal Maneuvering Area (TMA) was instructed by ATC to hold over CONDE FL 180 apparently due to numerous arrivals at the Manila TMA. As RP-C3271 was holding at a designated TMA, the PIC monitored fuel usage and waited for turn-over to Manila Approach as all other aircraft were observed through the primary radio frequency especially those entering ahead holding at their respective holding patterns. The PIC due to time pressure, even queried the ATC on how long RP-C3271 would have to hold before getting clearance to land. At this juncture, in the course of flight monitoring specifically updates on fuel calculations and estimates, a sudden change of color from green to amber on the estimated fuel on board (EFOB) indicated in the Multi-Function Control Display Unit (MCDU) prediction screen. (Appendix 1) This change in indication/signal prompted

the PIC to make a quick assessment and perceived his apprehension that he may be flying with fuel diversion below the minimum which the PIC calculated to be 2300 kgs based on the flight plan. (Appendix 2) Thus, in confirmation with the First Officer, the PIC assumed resolving the situation urgent in nature and deemed it a safety concern primarily preventing an exposure to unsafe condition of the passengers on board. Hence, on or about 0341 UTC, RP-C3271 after holding for a few minutes at the TMA boundary, the PIC declared an emergency priority landing due to critical fuel. The Manila Traffic Controller turned the monitoring and control of the aircraft to Manila Approach Control which opted to give priority to RP-C3271 over other flights way ahead in the traffic pattern sequencing, vectoring to final leg of the Approach to RWY 06. The aircraft was given the heading and descent instructions which were complied with to hasten the final leg for the approach. (Appendix 3)

The aircraft landed safely on RWY 06 on or about 0356Z UTC and was considered uneventful with no ground assistance requested by the PIC. Landing fuel was discovered to be more than the emergency level. After engine shutdown, the PIC called the duty ATC thru landline and explained a miscalculation on his part in assessing the aircraft's fuel status. The PIC admitted that after landing, he discovered of his error and accepted the fact that it was pilot's discretion which he sourced his final decision. Likewise, he also mentioned that what contributed to the erroneous assessment was his judgment made in haste based on his apprehension on a safety concern that due to circumstances beyond his control such as the sudden change in indication of color from green to amber in the MCDU prediction screen in the diversion fuel status as well as the intense traffic in the vicinity during that particular time. Furthermore, the PIC also mentioned that what contributed to his assessment was his personal view that the situation necessitates urgency and involves flight safety.

PROBABLE CAUSE

The Aircraft Accident Investigation and Inquiry Board determined that the probable causes of this accident are the following:

- **Primary Cause Factor**

The Pilot-in-Command erred in declaring an emergency priority landing while holding at the TMA when he miscalculated the estimated fuel on board (EFOB). (Human Factor)

- **Contributory Factors**

While holding at the designated area, an indication of a sudden change of color from green to amber on the estimated fuel on board (EFOB) reflected in the Multi-Function Control Display Unit (MCDU) prediction screen.

The unusual heavy air traffic at the holding traffic pattern was contributory to the decision of the PIC made with reservation and in haste to declare an emergency priority landing.

The judgment call made by the PIC to declare an emergency priority landing due to low fuel, was based on his personal assessment or pilot's discretion of its urgency and was made with the intention of preventing an exposure to unsafe condition for the passengers on board.

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of this investigation, the Aircraft Accident Investigation and Inquiry Board made the following safety recommendation:

- CAAP shall ensure that operators especially Cebu Pacific conducts in-house Safety meetings for organic pilots to disseminate standards on fuel management and declaration of emergency due to low fuel.
- CAAP shall ensure that desired knowledge in fuel management techniques is adequately included in exam questions for pilots' renewal of licenses.

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