

Here's why the Miami Air International plane overshot runway and hit Florida river

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US Florida Plane Crash River - Pilots changed runway before jet hit Florida river

Florida: Pilots of a chartered jet that ran into a river at a Florida military base made a last-minute change to the runway where they would make a landing, a federal investigator said on Sunday.

The pilots on the Miami Air International plane requested the change to air traffic controllers shortly before landing at Naval Air Station Jacksonville on Friday night.

The 9,000-foot-long (2,750 metres) runway where the Boeing 737 landed was essentially limited to 7,800 feet since there was a wire barrier set up to recover Navy aircraft in instances they couldn't land on a carrier during training, said Bruce Landsberg, vice chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board.

"We don't know what they were thinking or why they made that choice," Landsberg said at a news conference. "That will be one of the things we look to find out."

Landsberg didn't elaborate on the significance of the runway change but said it would be a focus of the investigation.

NTSB investigators said they hope a cockpit voice recorder helps them answer that question, but they have been unable to recover it yet since the part of the plane where it's located is still underwater in the St. Johns River. Investigators also plan to interview the pilots, Landsberg said.

Investigators have retrieved the flight data recorder.

Landsberg said the plane recently had been in maintenance, and logs showed a left-hand thrust reverser that was inoperative.

Thrust reversers are used to divert thrust from the engine, but they typically aren't used in calculating a plane's performance, Landsberg said.

According to a Purdue University College of Engineering description, reverse thrust can be used to help an aircraft come to a stop.

There were no serious injuries on the flight from a military base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, although almost two dozen of the 143 passengers and crew members sought medical attention for minor injuries.

The NTSB investigators are still deciding whether to relocate the plane off the base, which would require the use of a barge.

Divers on Sunday were sent into the plane's cargo area to search and remove a few pets that they had been unable to be rescued because of safety concerns. The investigators didn't say outright whether the animals were dead, but the pets would have been submerged for almost two days.

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