

EUROPE

Co-Pilot in Germanwings Crash Hid Mental Illness From Employer, Authorities Say

By MELISSA EDDY, DAN BILEFSKY and NICOLA CLARK MARCH 27, 2015

DÜSSELDORF, Germany — Andreas Lubitz, the pilot at the controls of the Germanwings jetliner that crashed into the French Alps on Tuesday, had a mental illness but kept the diagnosis hidden from his employer, the authorities said Friday.

A psychiatric diagnosis might explain why Mr. Lubitz, a 27-year-old German, did not disclose his full medical record to Germanwings and its parent company, Lufthansa. Lufthansa company policy requires notification of conditions that could affect flying or a pilot's license.

Prosecutors said Friday that among the items found at Mr. Lubitz's home were several doctors' notes stating that he was too ill to work, including on the day of the crash; one of the notes had been torn up. These documents "support the preliminary assessment that the deceased hid his illness from his employer and colleagues," the prosecutors said in a statement.

But there remained considerable confusion about the precise nature and severity of his psychiatric condition. A German hospital said it had evaluated Mr. Lubitz twice in the past two months but added that he had not been there for assessment or treatment of depression.

The crash killed Mr. Lubitz and the other 149 people on board the Airbus A320 jetliner bound from Barcelona, Spain, to Düsseldorf, Germany, on Tuesday morning.

Airlines and their regulatory agencies have longstanding processes to screen for pilots whose mental illness could affect their flying ability or even

jeopardize the lives of their passengers, crew and people on the ground. But the gatekeeping system in the United States and abroad relies heavily on pilots' volunteering information about their illnesses.

The German investigators said they had not found a suicide note or "any indication of a political or religious" nature among the documents from Mr. Lubitz's apartment in Düsseldorf. They also played down the possibility that his actions were the result of a romantic breakup, saying he was in a long-term relationship.

"However, documents were secured containing medical information that indicates an illness and corresponding treatment by doctors," Ralf Herrenbrück, a spokesman for prosecutors in Düsseldorf, said in a statement.

The Federal Aviation Office of Germany said Friday that a medical certificate issued to Mr. Lubitz that allowed him to fly noted that he had a medical condition, although it did not specify whether it was related to a psychological issue. A history of mental health issues like depression does not preclude being cleared to fly.

The absentee notes found in Mr. Lubitz's apartment were from different doctors, suggesting that he sought a second opinion for a recent diagnosis, prosecutors said.

The Düsseldorf University Hospital said in a statement that Mr. Lubitz had been seen in their clinic in February and a last time March 10 for what it called a "diagnostic evaluation." The hospital refused to give further details, citing Germany's privacy laws for medical records, including those of the dead, but denied reports that the co-pilot had been treated for depression.

The hospital said it had handed over Mr. Lubitz's medical records to prosecutors.

Speculation about Mr. Lubitz's mental health had set off a worldwide discussion among pilots, airlines and officials about how airlines screened their pilots and documented potential physical or mental health issues.

Martin Riecken, a spokesman for Lufthansa, said Friday that its pilots were examined at least once a year by doctors employed by the airline's medical services unit, Lufthansa Aeromedical Services, in compliance with

European pilot licensing rules. But as is the case with most airlines — including those in the United States — the annual checkup focuses mainly on physical fitness to fly, he said.

Questions of psychological fitness are largely addressed with a questionnaire filled out by the pilots and signed on their honor.

“The questions are developed in coordination with the D.L.R.,” said Mr. Riecken, referring to the German Aerospace Center. However, he said, the teams of doctors performing the examinations do not normally include trained psychologists.

In Mr. Lubitz’s hometown, Montabaur, people who knew him or his parents said the co-pilot’s girlfriend had swiftly gone with her family to a hotel to escape the news media. The girlfriend was questioned by investigators.

The mood Friday in Montabaur contrasted drastically with the outpourings of grief in other communities that lost residents in the crash. Signs of mourning were restrained, perhaps reflecting shame at what a native son appeared to have done.

At a Roman Catholic church at the edge of Montabaur’s old quarter, a few candles had been placed near the front door with a small hand-lettered sign expressing sympathy for the victims’ families. At Mons Tabor Gymnasium, a local high school from which Mr. Lubitz graduated in 2007, a German flag flew at half-staff, but otherwise, there was no reminder of the loss of life.

At a Protestant church on the edge of town, one of two affiliated churches where Mr. Lubitz’s mother plays organ, the shades of the minister’s office were drawn and no one answered the doorbell.

On Thursday, the French prosecutor leading the investigation said the evidence from the cockpit voice recorder suggested that Mr. Lubitz, a former flight attendant with a passion for flying, had locked the pilot out of the cockpit and deliberately set the plane on a descent into the Alps.

The crash claimed victims from more than a dozen countries, including Germany, Spain and the United States.

Police officers and rescue workers on Friday continued to search the site of the crash for victims’ remains, along with other clues and DNA that could

help them identify the dead. Families continued to trickle into Seynes-les-Alpes, France, a village near the crash site, with 20 more people arriving mostly from Germany and Colombia, said Francis Hermitte, the village's mayor.

There are now two investigations into the crash, in France and in Germany. Spanish investigators are also at the crash site, along with French teams, said Capt. Benoit Zeisser, the head of a local police operations center.

In an interview with the French broadcaster i-Télé, Prime Minister Manuel Valls of France said it was incumbent upon Lufthansa to reveal as much information as possible to help "understand why this pilot got to the point of this horrific action."

President Joachim Gauck of Germany attended a memorial service in Haltern am See on Friday for the 16 high school students and two teachers who died in the crash, German news reports said. He was accompanied by the state premier of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hannelore Kraft. He was also to meet with friends and families of the victims.

Carsten Spohr, the chief executive of Lufthansa, said Thursday that Mr. Lubitz had passed the company's health checks with "flying colors."

"He was 100 percent flightworthy, without any limitations," Mr. Spohr said.

But he said Mr. Lubitz had taken a break from his training for several months six years ago. He said that if the reason was medical, German rules on privacy prevented the sharing of such information. Mr. Spohr said the revelation of Mr. Lubitz's actions had left him stunned.

Some international airlines responded to the crash by introducing new rules requiring that two crew members always be present in the cockpit. The airlines that said they were instituting a two-person rule in the cockpit included Air Canada, EasyJet and Norwegian Air Shuttle.

All German airlines will introduce that requirement, the German aviation association said Friday.

The European Aviation Safety Agency, based in Cologne, Germany, also advised airlines across the region to adopt a two-person rule. The agency said

the recommendation was temporary, pending the outcome of the French investigation into the Germanwings crash.

Thomas Winkelmann, the head of Germanwings, however, expressed doubt that such a rule would have prevented the crash.

“I ask myself, when a person is so bent on committing a criminal act, whether that is preventable, if for example a stewardess or steward is in the cockpit,” Mr. Winkelmann told the German public broadcaster ZDF on Thursday.

The State Department confirmed on Thursday that a third American, Robert Oliver, had been on board the aircraft.

Mr. Oliver, 37, had been working for more than four years for Desigual, a fashion company based in Barcelona, where he was tasked with steering the company’s expansion in Germany, including finding locations for new shops. Another Desigual employee, Laura Altamira, also died in the crash.

Mr. Oliver was married and had two children. His father had moved to Spain more than 40 years ago, said Cristina Gispert, a spokeswoman for Desigual.

Melissa Eddy reported from Düsseldorf, and Dan Bilefsky and Nicola Clark from Paris. Reporting was contributed by Alison Smale from Berlin; Jack Ewing from Montabaur, Germany; Raphael Minder from Barcelona, Spain; and Alissa J. Rubin and Maïa de la Baume from Seynes-les-Alpes, France.

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