

Allegations of staggering criminality by Boeing spelled out in complaint by whistleblower John Barnett, released by lawyers after his death

Jacob Crosse
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On Wednesday, lawyers for the deceased Boeing whistleblower John Barnett released the full 32-page complaint filed by Barnett against the major aerospace and military contractor. The complaint was at the center of Barnett's civil suit against the corporation and alleges years of criminality and abuse on the part of the corporation.

Barnett, a 32-year employee of Boeing, was providing a detailed deposition in his civil suit against the company in Charleston, South Carolina, earlier this month when he was found dead in his truck. Police say that he was found with a gunshot wound to his head in a hotel parking lot Saturday morning, March 9.

In the complaint, Barnett's lawyers Robert M. Turkewitz and Brian M. Knowles allege that during his seven years at Boeing South Carolina (BSC), located in North Charleston, South Carolina, Barnett made "numerous ethics complaints" about a "deep-rooted and persistent culture of concealment."

BSC is one of two facilities in the US where the Boeing 787 Dreamliner is assembled.

Barnett charged in his lawsuit that he was forced to retire 10 years earlier than he had planned because he was getting harassed at work for refusing to work in "the grey area" and not document defects. Barnett claimed he was getting passed over for promotions because his bosses were angered that he resisted their efforts to put production and profitability above safety and quality. Barnett said the abuse from upper management reached the point where he was suffering from PTSD and panic attacks due to work.

Barnett claimed he, and others, were "pressured by Boeing upper management to violate Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Standards and Regulations." This included failing to document remedies and defects on the 787 resulting in "an incomplete build record, which constitutes a criminal felony offense and has the potential to adversely impact the safety of the flying public."

For refusing to "pencil whip" lost part documentation and

sign off on illegal procedures that violate FAA, Boeing and criminal statutes, the complaint states:

Barnett was given Low Performance Management (PM) scores, he was separated from his team and moved to other areas in the plant, and blacklisted and blocked from transferring to other Boeing divisions outside of BSC. In addition, he was subjected to a gaslighting campaign in which he was harassed, denigrated, humiliated, and treated with scorn and contempt by upper management, which was calculated to discourage him and others from raising such issues and complying with the law.

Among the major issues raised by Barnett was the lack of documentation of work done on 787 aircraft at the assembly plant. Boeing has a proprietary software system for the 787 Dreamliner called "Velocity." All work and inspections, including defects and remedies, are supposed to be logged into the Velocity system. Failing to log or falsifying such records is a federal felony known as "Fraud involving aircraft or space vehicle parts in interstate or foreign commerce."

Instead of documenting repairs, Barnett's complaint alleged that records were not kept, or were improperly documented. Barnett alleged there were "countless instances" in which parts from one plane were "being stolen" and "installed on an incomplete airplane without any documentation, traceability or engineering review. In most cases, the mechanic would come to work to find that the parts s/he installed the day before were gone."

Barnett claimed that upper management, instead of addressing the issue, ignored the stolen parts problem and scolded him for "documenting" it in emails and on "corrective action" forms.

Years of “Performance Management” (PM) reviews cited in the lawsuit show Barnett was frequently being scolded for documenting issues on paper and in emails, and even, it seems, being too “knowledgeable.”

In a July 2014 PM, cited in the lawsuit, a senior quality manager allegedly wrote, “John is very knowledgeable almost to a fault.” This “knowledge,” the manager wrote, “gets in the way at times when issues arise. John likes to be right and at times rechallenges issues that appear to [be] resolved at a round table.”

In the same review, under the heading “Delivers Results,” Barnett, who prior to being transferred to South Carolina only received perfect scores, had received a 2 out of 5 score. This “Opportunity for Improvement” was because of his habit of documenting issues in writing. The PM noted that “John still needs to learn the art of F2F (‘face to face’) engagement to address and follow up on issues instead of using e-mail to express process violations.”

If just a fraction of the harassment, abuse and criminality alleged by Barnett in his whistleblower complaint, known as an AIR-21 is accurate—and there is no reason to doubt its veracity—then there is certainly ample motive for the Boeing corporation to silence this vocal critic.

There are many questions remaining surrounding the death of Barnett. Police have claimed they found him dead in his vehicle with a pistol in his hand and his finger still on the trigger. Next to him was allegedly a white piece of paper resembling a note, but they have yet to state what was written on the note, if anything.

Police, so far, have also refused to release the security camera footage from the Holiday Inn where Barnett was staying. In the original police report, the cops acknowledged that the hotel had security cameras installed and facing the parking lot where Barnett’s vehicle and body were located.

Following the discovery of Barnett’s body on March 9, officials quickly labeled the 62-year-old man’s death a suicide, with the Charleston County Coroner’s Office saying Barnett suffered “an apparent self-inflicted wound.”

Lawyers and friends and Barnett immediately disputed this assertion. Jennifer, a family friend of Barnett, recounted to ABC News 4 that Barnett told her prior to his death, “I ain’t scared but if anything happens to me it’s not suicide.”

Jennifer added, “somebody didn’t like what he had to say” and “wanted to shut him up.”

In interviews with *Fortune* published this past weekend, Barnett’s lawyers, Turkewitz and Knowles, recounted their last days with their client. On Friday, March 8, “John testified for four hours in questioning by my co-counsel Brian,” Turkewitz said.

“This was following seven hours of cross-examination by Boeing’s lawyers on Thursday. He was really happy to be telling his side of the story, excited to be fielding our questions, doing a great job. It was explosive stuff. As I’m sitting there,

I’m thinking, ‘This is the best witness I’ve ever seen.’”

At one point during his testimony, Turkewitz said the Boeing lawyer objected, claiming that Barnett, without looking at documents, could not have recalled details from specific incidents that had occurred a decade ago. Turkewitz recalled Barnett retorting, “I know these documents inside out. I’ve had to live it.”

Barnett’s testimony ended Friday at about 5 p.m. and about an hour later, Turkewitz said Barnett told them he was “really tired and didn’t want to testify any more that day,” and instead, “wanted to drive home to Louisiana starting that evening, as he had planned. He’d told his mom that he’d be home on Sunday, and it took him two days to drive home. I suggested that we break for a week or two.”

However, Turkewitz said, “the Boeing lawyers took the position that no more depositions could be taken until Barnett completed his testimony.” While Turkewitz didn’t think the judge would agree with the Boeing lawyers, Barnett relented and told his lawyers, “Let’s just get it done. I’ve already been waiting for seven years.”

Less than 17 hours later, Turkewitz called the Holiday Inn looking for Barnett after he failed to show up to the Saturday deposition. Workers at the hotel searched Barnett’s room and noticed that all of his luggage was “packed up, but he’s not there.” After Turkewitz provided the workers with a description of Barnett’s “Clemson Orange” Dodge Ram truck, the hotel manager told Turkewitz that the truck was “Still there, and we called EMS. I can’t tell you anything more.”

A hotel worker at the Holiday Inn told the *New York Post* last week they had witnessed Barnett eating a quesadilla, drinking a Coke and scrolling on his phone the night before he was found dead.

“I didn’t think of him at all until I heard the news the next day. He didn’t seem upset at all,” the worker told the paper.

Bob Emery, a friend of Barnett’s, told the *Post* last week that he had spoken to Barnett about two weeks before he died and that Barnett “seemed too focused on what he was doing” with the lawsuit and that he “didn’t seem depressed.” Emery told the *Post* that he and Barnett commiserated over the fact that they had both lost their wives in the last year, with Barnett calling Emery frequently to provide emotional support.

“I lost my wife last year and he checked on me a lot,” Emery told the paper.

The *Post*, citing unnamed “sources,” claimed that even though the coroner ruled Barnett’s death “self-inflicted,” more tests were being done, including dusting Barnett’s vehicle for fingerprints.



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