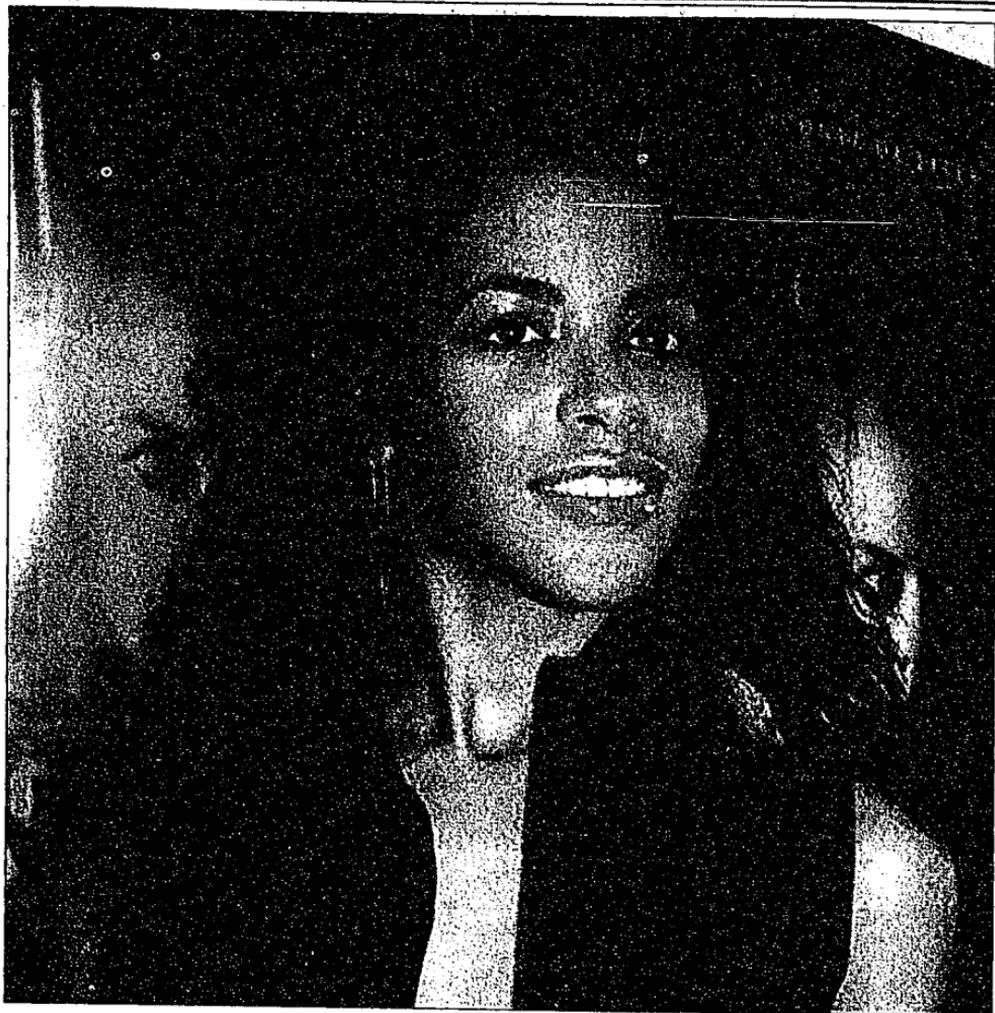


WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2001



R&B singer and actress Aaliyah arrives at New York's Paris Theater in this Aug. 2, 2001 AP file photo.

U.S. officials join crash probe

By Ian James

NASSAU, Bahamas — The investigation into the plane crash that killed 22-year-old singer Aaliyah and eight others widened yesterday as U.S. officials joined efforts to determine what caused the aircraft to go down shortly after takeoff.

Aaliyah and the others had come to the Bahamas to shoot a music video, authorities said. Their twin-engine Cessna was bound for Opa-locka, Fla., when it went down roughly 200 feet from the end of the runway at Marsh Harbour airport on Abaco

Island, 100 miles north of Nassau on Saturday.

A witness, Claude Sawyer, said he was alongside the runway when the plane started to plummet.

"It appeared to be a normal takeoff," Sawyer, a 25-year-old pilot, told The Associated Press yesterday. "It departed and he rotated the nose (of the plane) and lifted off the ground. After that he pulled his landing gear up and then the plane veered slightly to the left and then it went toward the ground."

Sawyer said he saw the plane disappear below the trees and

then saw a ball of fire. He could not hear any engine noise.

Bahamian investigators have searched through the wreckage for clues to the crash. Police Superintendent Basil Rahming said only that one of the Cessna's engines "apparently failed."

Yesterday, two local newspapers quoted a baggage handler they did not name as saying he had warned the pilot that the plane was too heavy for a safe takeoff.

Gloria Knoles, an office manager for Abaco Air, a local airline that flies in the Bahamas

(Continued on Page 5-A)

U.S. officials join probe of plane crash

(Continued from Page 1-A)

and Florida, said on Saturday night she saw a pickup truck headed toward the plane with equipment and luggage that towered above the truck's sideboards.

"I thought, 'That's a lot of stuff to be on a plane with nine passengers,'" she told AP.

Lewis Key, a Bahamian pilot on Abaco, said he had heard rumors the plane was overloaded, but he did not believe extra weight could have caused the crash if both its engines were working.

Key, who said he has flown the same model of Cessna in the past, said that judging by the distribution of the wreckage, it appeared the plane veered off sharply, indicating a failed engine.

Authorities from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration arrived yesterday.

Aaliyah (pronounced Ah-LEE-yah), who had two Grammy nominations, a platinum album and several high-profile movie roles, was killed instantly. Five others on board also died in the crash, while three more died later of their injuries, Rahming said.

Born in New York City and raised in Detroit, Aaliyah — whose name in Swahili means "highest, most exalted one" —



The wreckage of a Cessna that crashed Saturday afternoon rests in a swamp area on the western end of the Marsh Harbour International Airport runway. All nine people on board, including R&B star Aaliyah, perished in the crash. — AP PHOTO/M. SILES

had deep roots in the R&B community. She later returned to live in Manhattan.

She is survived by her mother, father and brother.

"Aaliyah's family is devastated at the loss of their loving daughter and sister," said a statement from the singer's publicist, PMK. "Their hearts go out to those families who also lost their loved ones."

Police identified the other victims as bodyguard Scott Gallin, 41; Keith Wallace, 49, of Los

Angeles; Douglas Kratz, 28, a representative for Virgin Records, makeup artist Eric Foreman, 29, Gina Smith, 29, all of Hollywood, Calif.; Anthony Dodd, 34, of Los Angeles; and Christopher Maldonado, 32, of New Jersey. The plane's pilot, identified only as L. Maradel, also died.

Andrew Kelly, a pilot who owns Abaco Air, helped Gallin before he was loaded onto a plane bound for a hospital in Nassau.

He said Gallin had mild burns on his arms, a laceration to his

mouth and a twisted ankle.

"He was conscious when he was on the ground," said Kelly, 48.

"He kept asking for water. He looked like he was going to make it. I told him all I had was red and green Gatorade and he asked for the green Gatorade, but the nurse wouldn't let him have it."

Kelly, who then flew Gallin to the hospital, said Gallin was given water by a nurse and collapsed soon after. A medical team could not resuscitate him, Kelly said.

The bodies were taken to the morgue at Princess Margaret Hospital in Nassau, where they were to be kept for relatives to help identify them, U.S. Embassy spokesman Brian Bachman said.

The Cessna 402B was owned by Skystream, a company based in Pembroke Pines, Florida, said Kathleen Bergen, a spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Administration in Atlanta. The company's telephone number was not listed, and company officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

A spokeswoman for Wichita, Kan.-based Cessna, Marilyn Richwine, said she was not aware of any safety problems with the twin-engine 402B model. The company hasn't manufactured that model for about 12 to 15 years, she said. — (AP)