



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Date: November 28, 2016 @ 1330
Person Contacted: Sergeant James Sears, Jr, pilot
NTSB Accident Number: ANC17LA006, N9804J

Narrative:

Sergeant Sears is a pilot for Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the pilot of the Piper Saratoga accident that occurred near Bethel on November 11, 2016. On November 28, a phone interview was conducted with Mike Inman, Aviation Safety Officer for Alaska DPS, present. Below is a summary of Sgt Sears statements:

- The purpose of the flight on November 11, was to transport two passengers from Nunapitchuk back to Bethel after their work was done. Sgt. Sears had dropped them off at Nunapitchuk earlier that day, and then returned to Bethel to wait. The accident occurred during the flight from Bethel to pick the passengers up.
- Earlier that day, he was scheduled to fly the passengers to Nunapitchuk at 1200; however, one passenger was not prepared so they were delayed 20 minutes. He had plenty of time to preflight and clean the windows. During the preflight he used a step ladder to check the engine oil quantity and it was about 10 quarts, which was good. He did not remove the dip stick, but merely pulled it out far enough to read, and then inserted it back in and closed the access panel.
- The first round trip flight began at 1220 and returned at 1316 with .6 hours of flight time logged. There were no problems with the runup or the flight.
- He shut down the airplane at Bethel Airport and installed all the covers, including the engine cover, and waited for about 3 hours until the passengers were ready.
- When he returned to the airplane 3 hours later, the engine was still warm to the touch. He crawled under the nose to disconnect the engine cover. There was no oil residue or fluid leaks at that time.
- The engine started normally. He did not perform a ground runup because it was the third flight of the day and the engine was still warm.

- He took off about 1635 from runway 01 and all indications were “in the green” (normal.) At about 700 to 800 feet during the departure, he turned on the autopilot and heard a momentary vibration. He noticed that the oil pressure was 0, so he turned back to the airport and called tower for assistance and landing clearance.
- The engine then made a loud popping sound and seized. Oil sprayed the windscreen.
- Sgt. Sears realized that he couldn’t make the runway, so rather than land in a housing area, he turned the airplane south and aimed for a flat area. He did not use flaps so that the glide distance was long enough to make his intended landing area.
- During the landing sequence, he braced for impact by putting two hands on the dash. The airplane went straight for a while, then it started bouncing hard. The airplane skidded to the left and stopped. The cabin filled with blue smoke. He turned the master switch and some electronics off.

When queried about his professional background, Sgt Sears stated the following:

- He is currently qualified to fly the PA-32R, PA-18, C-172 and C-182. In the past, he was also qualified to fly the C-206 and C-208.
- He recently started flying the Saratoga (PA-32R-301) and was given a check ride in August. He has accumulated about 20 hours in airframe.

The end