

From: Cobb, Charles F (DNR)
To: Swenson Eric
Subject: PLANE CRASH NEAR LOWER FIRE LAKE, EAGLE RIVER, ALASKA
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2020 9:47:22 PM

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Dear Mr. Swenson,

Per your request, I am providing this information regarding my observations of the plane crash on April 11, 2020. My names is Charles Cobb. I am a professional engineer, a certified Wilderness First Responder, an inactive private pilot and former airplane owner. I live at [REDACTED] in Eagle River. This is located on the west side of Lower Fire Lake and my living room faces the lake. Lower Fire Lake is a popular, float plane and ski plane base but is not recognized by the FAA on charts to my knowledge (at least when I was actively flying several years ago). Saturday was a busy day on the lake with several planes using the runway, and I was working on my computer in the living room for most of the day, watching the planes come and go.

The pilot, Mark Renner is my neighbor in the second house towards the north from my residence. I know him to be an accomplished bush pilot owning a Cessna 185 and a Piper Super Cub. He regularly flies the Super Cub to the Brooks Range from Anchorage to hunt sheep. I have never flown with him. Within the past couple of weeks, I complimented Mark on a smooth, short landing in the Cessna from the south onto Lower Fire Lake that I observed, and he responded (in my understanding) that he likes to practice short field landings on approach to his home field.

On the day of the crash, in the early afternoon, I heard Mark start the Cessna and observed him taxi out from his tie down area. I watched his rollout and heard him check both mags and the engine sounded normal. After a brief wait in position, Mark took off smoothly and departed. I do not know where he went and did not know who was on board, but assumed it was his two teenaged sons, Torsten (oldest) and Conrad. I noticed that the skis on his wheel skis were down.

Shortly after 8:15PM, the electricity went off. I do not recall hearing the crash; I recall hearing my microwave oven beep from the power interruption. I was alerted by the police car sirens approaching, and when they turned on W. Lake Ridge Drive and passed my home, I walked up the street and discovered the accident. I was not the first responder. If the police were the second responders, I was in the wave of third responders. The plane crashed in the driveway of the third house to the north, Mark's next door neighbor. The plane was nose and left wing down. The right wing and fuselage were up and supported by the steel cable carrying the telephone/TV/internet wires. The electric wires higher up in the array were severed, but the steel cable for the tele/TV/internet wires did not break and was holding the fuselage and right wing up.

As I recall, when I approached the scene, one victim was lying on the near side of the plane and was being attended by the police. I walked around the front of the plane and observed the glass was broken out and did not see any victims in the cockpit. Two other victims were lying on the other side of the plane. The oldest son Torsten, was farthest away, and was yelling and cussing and being

attended by early responders. I attended the nearest victim which was Mark's wife Caroline. She responded to my entreaty, appeared to recognize me, and asked me to take care of their dog locked in the home and gave me the combination to the door lock. At that point, I realized the fourth family member was missing, as Torsten was screaming for reports on the condition of his family. I left Caroline and found the youngest son Conrad on his feet, standing with other neighbors who were gathering nearby. I returned to Caroline and began to monitor her pulse and tried to provide comfort to her and Torsten by telling them everyone was alive and accounted for, while waiting on the paramedics. Of note, Torsten seemed to be blaming himself for the accident when he yelled, "I should have been at the controls." As I understand, he aspires to be a pilot.

I remained on the scene after the victims were transported to the hospital. Some of the gear in the plane was on the ground in front of the plane. One of the police officers asked me to take custody of the gear, knowing I was a neighbor and friend of the family. I advised against moving anything, pending your investigation. Sometime later, representatives of FAA arrived on the scene. They authorized me to take custody of the gear, given that NTSB was not responding immediately to the scene. I collected gear that was readily accessible and placed it in the Renner's garage. The next day, after the GCI utility crew lowered the steel cable and the airplane was stabilized by the salvage crew, I removed the remaining gear from the back of the plane and placed it in the Renner's garage. I did not inventory the gear. As I recall, there were 3 to 4 sleeping bags, 3 to 4 daypacks/duffels, a pilot's bag (I assumed) which seemed heavy so I opened it looking for a pistol and observed two quarts of water and a small computer (like an iPad). I also recall a bag of tools, a couple of sets of skis, poles and boots, an engine cover and some odds and ends such as a small bag of garbage and some unwashed cookware. There was also a Ruger Mini-14 rifle which I retained in my custody to prevent leaving a weapon unattended in the home. I am hesitant to speculate on the total weight. I also recovered the clothes cut off of Mark by the paramedics that included his cell phone and I found another cell phone near the left back seat.

Regarding the crash, as a pilot, I tried to recreate and understand the flight trajectory. The approach seemed unusual for Mark given my earlier comment about his smooth, short landing from the south. If Mark was on a southerly downwind leg parallel to the Glenn Highway, he turned base unusually short. He clipped several tree tops between the Glenn Highway and W. Lake Ridge Drive with his left wing on a descending flight path which scattered woody debris across W. Lake Ridge Drive and into the yard of the house at the crash site. The impact with the trees apparently caused a left rotating yaw and the powerlines and cables seemed to intercept a skidding flight path and cause the plane to crash nose down in a direction pointing back towards the north at an acute angle to the left base leg turn. In other words, it appeared to be more than 90 degrees to the easterly base leg. The left wing was buckled at the ground and the fuselage was buckled at the firewall. The tail section was broken aft of the cargo area and hanging from control cables.

I hope this information is useful for you and pray that God's mercy will spare Mark's life, and look forward to a firsthand account. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Respectfully,

cfc