

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Dennis McCusker, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/9/2021, 10:40 AM

Dennis was outside of the Walmart store in the parking lot, talking with a friend, Bill Feda. The Walmart store is just to the north of the Municipal airport when the accident occurred.

He heard the aircraft take off and saw that it looked like a Super Cub. The takeoff appeared normal from his perspective. About the time the plane got about over the gas station, it was about 200' above the ground. The plane made a banking hard right turn, which surprised him. Normally pilots don't turn until they are about 1000' elevation.

The wings leveled out and then the plane started down. The wings were going back and forth (rocking side to side) but the plane just continued going straight down until it disappeared behind the trees.

Dennis describes himself as a "motorhead". He is not really into planes but likes engines. During the entire event, he said the engine sounded good. There were no indications that the motor ever quit running good until the crash.

STATEMENT:

Deborah Moseley, CFI, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/16/2021, 2:45 PM

Deb works as a Medevac pilot full-time and does CFI work on a part time basis. She flew with Derek when he was getting his Private Pilot certificate.

Around 5/12/2021 Derek had talked with her on possibly two occasions. He was wanting to fly with her in his aircraft and get a High Performance Endorsement. He never followed up with that, however and did not fly with her.

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Kyle Eaton, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/7/2021, 18:25 PM

Kyle is the owner of Kingfisher Aviation, with an office on Lilly Lake, which is directly south of the Kodiak Municipal Airport. Kyle is a Commercial Pilot and flies year around in Kodiak in that capacity. He was at the municipal airport to work on a plane, and had seen the aircraft that was later involved in the accident parked between two hangars with wing covers on. It appeared to be a PA-12 or some other similar aircraft.

He later heard the airplane taxi by, and it did not sound like the typical Super Cub with a 150 hp motor. It sounded like an O-470 or other large displacement engine as it went by. He saw the aircraft take off headed northbound and climb normally till about 200 to 300' above the runway.

The aircraft then made a really hard right turn, got really slow, and then went into a dive. It appeared to be a stall / spin from his perspective. He didn't see it hit, as it disappeared behind the CAP building and the trees. He called 911 at that time.

STATEMENT:

Keith Ham, Chief Flight Instructor / Chief Pilot, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/16/2021, 4:20 PM

There was a CE-206 Weight & Balance form from Kenai Aviation in the Pilot Logbook of Derek Leichliter.

Keith said that he did two hours of Ground Instruction with Derek Leichliter on 5/10/2021 on the Cessna 206. On 5/14/2021, he did one hour of Flight Instruction with Derek in the Cessna 206. It was Basic Instruction and Keith did not give Derek a High Performance Endorsement.

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Keller Wattum, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/7/2021, 20:03 PM

Keller owns Deckload Aviation, is a commercial pilot and flies year around in both fixed wing and rotorcraft in Kodiak. His company hangar is located on the Kodiak Municipal Airport. He was at his house, which is just east of the Kodiak Municipal Airport, and just south of where the aircraft crashed. He estimated the distance from his house to the crash site was about 700 yards.

He heard the engine of the aircraft that took off, then it changed pitch and then abruptly stopped. His employee Ryan Rankin called him and said a plane had just crashed. He drove to the crash site and was one of the first people there.

Keller said that he had flown Derek Leichliter around the island of Kodiak on several occasions in the past few years, when Derek had come deer hunting. Derek had called him a few days ago, and said he was going to go bear hunting near Saltery Cove. Keller had told him that the winds were really blowing hard, gusting from 30 to 50 knots on the island, and recommended that he not bring his plane down for the trip. The plane, parked on the beach, would be subject to very strong winds and could be damaged just in being parked there.

Keller said the winds aloft today were Westerly, and were very gusty, upwards of 30 knots. He had been doing some sling loads in his helicopter today and the weather was not conducive for flying. He said that at the municipal strip, the wind on the ground can be misleading. The trees and buildings in the area block the wind and so the wind on the ground is not necessarily what it is doing at 300 AGL.

From his perspective as a long time commercial pilot who flies out of the municipal airport daily, Derek likely got above the protective trees and was hit with a wind shear / tailwind that could have exceeded 30 knots. A South takeoff with a turn to the West (into the wind) would have been a better choice.

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Nick Schmitt, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/9/2021, 3:00 PM

Nick was driving south on Mill Bay Rd. from the Safeway store and saw the aircraft as it took off from the Kodiak Municipal Airport. The plane flew right over the top of Nick's car. While watching it fly towards him, it appeared that it was flying too slow and not climbing enough. The aircraft just looked too slow and flat in the climb, and Nick had the thought that it could stall.

The plane flew over him, and Nick looked over his left shoulder as it flew by, and saw it roll, and then spin right into the ground. As it was disappearing from view into the trees, it looked like it was in a flat spin.

The engine was running the entire time, and did not cough or sputter at all. The engine shut off abruptly when the plane hit.

STATEMENT:

Pat Clark, Pilot, Kenai Tower ATC, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/18/2021, 1:15 PM

Pat works at the Kenai Tower as an Air Traffic Controller, and is also a pilot / aircraft owner. He knew Derek well for the last four / five years.

Pat had flown with Derek when he owned a PA-20 Pacer but not in the new Experimental aircraft. Rick Davis, another pilot, had flown with Derek just about one month ago, after Derek had installed the new Bushwheels.

Derek had a history of taking too many risks in aircraft, and Pat had told him on at least one occasion that he “was going to kill himself” in an airplane. As an example, Derek would cross the Forelands near Kenai, going from one side of Cook Inlet to the other, at just 1000’. Most pilots fly across the open water above 3000’.

Derek was known for doing 60 degree bank turns in the pattern, though he typically did not do that at the Kenai towered airport. Pat also said the baggage section of the experimental aircraft went all the way to the back, and suggested it was probably loaded to maximum weight.

STATEMENT:

Richard "Rick" Davis, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/16/2021, 2:58 PM

Rick was a friend of Derek, and had helped him locate and buy the experimental aircraft. He said that Derek had been working on the aircraft for the last year, adding marker lights, avionics, an engine heater, landing lights, a T3 tail spring, and the 31" Bushwheels.

He said the aircraft had a D&E riblet airfoil wing. The wing has a thicker cord than a standard Super Cub wing, and has a lower stall speed and a gentler stall. The builder of the plane, Gerald Jones, had been the lead welder for Atlee Dodge for many years. Atlee Dodge has numerous STCs for PA-18 Super Cubs and is well known in the STOL community.

Rick flew with Derek about one month ago, after the 31" Bushwheels were installed. He had never flown with Derek in the aircraft before. It was a normal flight just for fun, with a few beach landings. He did notice that Derek make steeper banked turns for no real reason. They were certainly steeper than Rick would have done in the same circumstance. He said that the turns were about 45 degree banks, where he personally would have done no more than 30.

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Ryan Rankin, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/7/2021, 20:17 PM

Ryan works for Keller Wattum at Deckload Aviation as a cargo handler. The base for Deckload Aviation is a hangar located on the Kodiak Municipal Airport. He was standing just outside of their hangar when the accident occurred.

He saw the airplane initially when it was warming up, and then saw it takeoff headed north, into the prevailing wind.

He heard the engine “change pitch” and that is what caught his attention. He saw the plane turning sharply to the right. He said the plane was “turning really quick”. The engine was at full power and was running steady the whole time. He thought the turn is what made the engine sound different to him.

The one wing went suddenly down, and the airplane started to nose down more and more as it also started spinning.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Mark P. Ward
Aviation Accident Investigator
Alaskan Region

Date: November 09, 2021
Person Contacted: Mr. Tomas Holbrook
Location: Telephone
NTSB Accident Number: ANC22FA005

Narrative:

On November 07, 2021, about 1405 Alaska daylight time, a Gerald Jones 2+2 homebuilt airplane, N540AK sustained substantial damage when it was involved in an accident about 2 miles northeast of Kodiak, Alaska.

Mr. Holbrook was an eyewitness to the flight and stated the following:

He heard the aircraft takeoff and when he saw the airplane, the plane was in a clockwise, right spin. He estimates the plane was in a 30-degree bank and the nose was about 10-degree low. He said there was no change in engine noise from when he first heard the plane to when it disappeared below the tree line. Mr. Holbrook said he was an experienced pilot and recognized the plane to be in a stall spin. - END

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Sadie Vargo, [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/9/2021, 11:00 AM

Sadie was driving northbound on Mill Bay Rd, near the Kodiak Police Department building, when she saw the airplane climbing north, like it had just taken off the Municipal airport. It was gaining elevation (climbing). It started to turn right, and then “really turned right”, almost 180 degrees. Then the left wing came up and the airplane dove straight down into the trees. The plane was almost going straight down, but not quite straight down.

Sadie was one of the first people on the scene but did not approach the aircraft, which had crashed into the trees.

WITNESS STATEMENT:

Willard "Bill" Feda, [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Telephone Interview on 11/9/2021, 10:30 AM

Bill was outside the Walmart store, in the parking lot, talking to his friend Dennis McClusker. The Walmart store is straight north of the Municipal airstrip.

He saw the plane just after it took up, climbing straight north, at about 300' elevation. All of a sudden, the plane make a hard right turn, almost 180 degrees. The wings leveled, and then it made a hard left turn, almost 180 as well. The wings leveled, and then it made another hard right turn. The right wing dropped, and the plane started going straight down and disappeared behind the trees, where he lost sight of it.

Bill ran a boatyard for over 30 years, and is quite accustomed to watching and hearing small aircraft taking off. He said when a plane is heavy, the engine really has to work. This aircraft did not sound like it was doing that. The engine was running fine, and there were no changes in sound during the entire event. There was no sputtering or hiccup in the sound of the motor.