

STATEMENT OF SAM SANTA RITA
SEPTEMBER 17, 2014

The weather conditions were checked and were favorable for a VFR flight.

I performed a normal pre-flight inspection of the aircraft and found nothing unusual. I then conducted a run-up which included a confirmation that all flight controls were free and correct. After the run-up and control check, I taxied the airplane to the runway and departed to the southeast. Shortly after rotation, the plane started a gentle turn to the left. Right rudder was applied to correct this left turning tendency. At that time I also applied slight right aileron.

As I continued to climb over the trees at the end of the runway, the left turning tendency continued. I applied full right rudder and increased right aileron in an attempt to counter the left turning phenomenon. I eventually had full right aileron and full right rudder, but the aircraft continued to turn to the left.

I was approximately 200-300 feet above the ground and approximately 90 degrees from the runway when I made the decision to attempt to land the aircraft in the neighbor's bean field and started the decent. As the air speed increased in the decent, the left turn steepened. Despite full right aileron and full right rudder, the plane continued to aggressively turn to the left. The plane impacted the trees on the left edge of the field. The aircraft entered the woods above the tree line with the left wing down, nose pitched down, and full power.

Since the crash, I have had the opportunity to make certain observations. First, the plane's tracks in the field, which was used as a runway, were straight. Second, the tire tracks narrowed as the plane accelerated down the runway which indicates lift. Third, I recreated my flight path on Google Earth based upon my memory of the landmarks as I was making my decision where I could land the plane. The path of travel appears to be approximately 3,900 feet. I left my property and flew over my neighbor's property to the southeast and my neighbor to the north before returning to the woods on my property.

I had previously given a verbal statement to the FAA investigator at a time when I was under the influence of pain medication and without appropriate sleep after the accident. I noted these limitations when being interviewed. As a law enforcement professional, I know that many law enforcement agencies, including those working on behalf of the federal government, are not allowed to make statements concerning critical incidents until the officer has been through two complete sleep cycles. This policy recognizes the fact that, contrary to popular belief, one does not remember more at the time of the incident as individuals recall more accurately the events of the critical incident after two or more sleep cycles.

Thus, I submit that this statement presents an accurate recitation of the events, and any inconsistencies with any prior verbal statement were caused by the "fog" of the accident, medication, and lack of appropriate sleep cycles before the interview.

SAM SANTA RITA