



MEMORANDUM OF INTERVIEW

Dr. David C. Bowling
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

Date: October 2, 2015

Subject: Conversation with Mr. Neal Smith, Passenger on the Accident Balloon N266LB
NTSB Accident Number and Location: CEN15LA434, Albuquerque, NM

Mr. Neal Smith is a commercial balloon pilot and was flying as a passenger in the Lindstrand 69A balloon being piloted by Ms. Neida Courtney-Naumberg, age 75. He said that the purpose of the flight was so that Ms. Courtney could perform her three takeoffs and three landings to be current. She wanted to perform landings like the ones she would need to do during the 2015 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta, getting into tight spaces, meaning steep approaches and landings between objects.

The balloon had undergone an annual inspection on January 2, 2015, but had not been flown since. Ms. Courtney was flying the balloon for the owner to get some time on it. Mr. Smith said before he arrived at the Rainbow launch site that morning, he checked the weather with Lockheed Martin Flight Service. The weather was forecast to be good for the flight. At the launch site, they had minimum crew available to put the balloon up, but they got it up without any problems.

Ms. Courtney was in control of the balloon for the flight. She wanted to get the work done first, then they'd go have fun; do some ground tracking, some spot landings, etc. She took off and began tracking to the south. She spotted a dirt road that she wanted to drop in on. She performed a steep approach and hit the raised upwind side of the road hard. Mr. Smith said Ms. Courtney was positioned in the downwind side of the basket and had her left hand on the vent line. He could not recall what she was holding onto with her right hand. The balloon hopped back into the air and came down on the opposite side of the road. The basket dragged about 10 feet, stopped, and tipped over. Ms. Courtney looked as if the wind had been knocked out of her. Mr. Smith asked her if she wanted him to stand the balloon up again. Ms. Courtney said, "Please." He stood the balloon up and noticed Ms. Courtney was doubled over and was having trouble catching her breath. She had hit the bolster with the underside of her arm pit. Finally, she looked like she was doing better. Mr. Smith asked if she wanted to continue. She said she was done for the day.

Mr. Smith said that she wanted him to fly. He continued. He took the balloon up to 8,600 feet msl and performed a terminal descent. He wanted to see how the balloon performed after not being flown for so long. It took a 6 second burn to slow the descent to a stop. That was a little

longer than expected, but there were no signs that there were porosity issues with the envelope. After the flight, Mr. Smith asked Ms. Courtney again if she was okay. Ms. Courtney said she was, but would probably see her doctor just to be sure she was alright. A day later she found out that she'd broken three ribs.