



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Jim Silliman
Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

Person Contacted: Mr. Jon Slack, Glider Pilot
NTSB Accident Number: CEN16FA308

Narrative:

Mr. Slack assisted with the accident investigation. He is a retired airline pilot with extensive general aviation and glider experience. He also is a glider instructor pilot who provided flight training to the accident pilot. He knew the pilot personally and was familiar with the accident pilot's glider experience.

During the on-site investigation of the airplane wreckage, it was not determined where the seat back was located at the time of the time of the accident. Mr. Slack reported that the accident pilot was about 6 ft 1 inches tall and had a sleeve length of about 41 inches. He stated that the accident pilot likely had the seat back set at an aft seat back location, due to the accident pilot's height and the fact that he was wearing a parachute during the accident flight. Mr. Slack stated that if the seat back had accidentally fallen rearward, the back would have only traveled about 2 inches and would not have restricted the accident pilot's control of the cockpit flight controls.

He stated that during the accident flight, the pilot must have released the tow rope as evidenced by the complete tow rope and tow ring still attached to the tow plane after landing, and that the pilot likely would have been able to manipulate control stick and rudder pedals as well, had seat back somehow fallen rearward. A subsequent test of seat back placement in another glider of same type (SZD 55-1) showed that even with the seat back in the aft most position, or even removed, the operation of the tow release (located on the instrument panel) and the control stick were possible by a pilot of the accident pilot's stature.

Mr. Slack reported that the accident pilot was in excellent health. The accident pilot took vitamins and a prescription for lowering cholesterol, but otherwise, did not take any herbal medications or supplements. He stated he never saw the accident pilot having mixed drinks (which often use tonic water).



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Person Contacted: Mr. Mike Shakman, Glider Pilot
NTSB Accident Number: CEN16FA308

Narrative:

Mr. Shakman had given the accident pilot his biennial flight review on August 1, 2015, and as a member of the Chicago Glider Club, was familiar with the accident pilot. He reported that the flight review lasted 2+ hours and they did 2 takeoffs and landings, as well as stalls and steep turns. He stated that the accident pilot exhibited good aircraft control. He stated that N551DR was a new glider for the accident pilot, and he estimated that the accident pilot had about 10 – 15 hours of flight time in it.

Generally speaking, he stated that during the takeoff roll, a glider's wings might dip down and hit the ground momentarily due to the slow groundspeed. Wing runners try to keep the wings level during the initial stages of the takeoff roll, but they can't keep up after about 100 yards. Once sufficient wind is going over the wings, then it's no longer a problem. Once airborne, it's important to stabilize the glider at 1 – 5 ft as the tow plane gets off the ground. You keep the tow plane on the horizon as the visual reference point. He stated that light gliders typically stall around 35 kts.

He stated that the glider club purchased the property to the west of the runway as an emergency landing zone.



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Person Contacted: Mr. William Drury, Glider Pilot
NTSB Accident Number: CEN16FA308

Narrative:

Mr. Drury owned the glider for about 3 years before selling it to the accident pilot in April 2016. He had flown it about 50 flights and 160 hours, and it was the second SZD-55 he had owned. He stated that he has owned about 8 gliders altogether.

He stated that the glider felt no heavier or lighter on the flight controls. It had a conventional feel and conventional stall recovery techniques. The pitch control was the same as racing gliders. He stated the wings tend to drop on takeoff roll. You prevent that by using spoilers and opposite rudder and opposite aileron. The glider did not have flaps to optimize for high speed. He stated that it stalls a little sharper than other gliders.

Mr. Drury wondered whether the glider's seatback accidentally slipped backwards during the takeoff and cause the glider to "kite." It never happened to him, but thought it could be a possibility in this accident.