
Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

Lieutenant Robert Dickhaus:

On 01-24-2018 at approximately 0700 hours I received information about a missing single engine aircraft from the Sauk Centre Airport (D39). The information was that the aircraft was last seen on 01-23-2018 at around 1530 hours near the airport by the owner of Planes Aviation identified as John Eugene Ricard [REDACTED]. Planes Aviation is an aircraft maintenance/repair shop located at the Sauk Centre Airport. The pilot/owner was identified as Matthew James Skwira, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Skwira was said to be operating his newly built Wittmann Tailwind 210 experimental aircraft which he recently completed. The aircraft was described as a single engine, two seat aircraft painted white over green with tail number N251WT. Skwira was said to be alone at last sighting and was planning on flying from Sauk Centre to the Princeton Airport (KPNM) then return to do practice take offs and landings at Sauk Centre.

At approximately 2130 hours a call was placed to the Stearns County 911 Center by a friend of the missing pilot, Ryan Joseph Eiden, [REDACTED], asking that an officer check the airport to see if Skwira's car was at the airport because he was unable to reach him. Eiden said that he had tried texting and calling Skwira but was unable to reach him. Eiden told Dispatch that Skwira is a friend of his and he told him he was going flying today around 1530 but he hasn't heard from him since. [REDACTED]

At approximately 2145 hours Sauk Centre officers arrived at the airport and found the vehicle but were unable to locate the aircraft. The Sauk Centre officers requested that Dispatch attempt to "ping" Skwira's phone which initially was unsuccessful but later placed the phone southwest of the airport moving in northwesterly direction. The Minnesota Duty Officer was contacted and the Minnesota State Patrol Helicopter was requested. Contact was also made with the FAA or subsequently contacted the Air Force who were able to find a radar ping of the aircraft at approximately 1527 hours southwest of the Sauk Centre Airport. Radar was lost shortly after that. Due to weather conditions the MSP Air Division was not able to launch any aircraft. The Stearns County Dispatch 911 Center sent out a

Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

region wide teletype advising other agencies to “be on the lookout” (BOLO) for the missing aircraft and to check their airports for the missing aircraft. Officers from the Sauk Centre Police, Stearns County Sheriff's Office, Melrose Police Department and Minnesota State Patrol then a conducted mobile ground search until approximately 0100 hours on 01-24-2018 with negative results.

On January 24th, 2018 I met with officers from Sauk Centre PD and Sauk Centre FD to coordinate a ground and aerial search of the area southwest of the Sauk Centre Airport. Arrangements were again made with the MSP Airwing to send an aircraft to assist with the search. Fire Department teams were initially dispatched to an area approximately 6 miles southwest of the airport which was indicated by the Air Force as an area of interest based on the final radar ping of the aircraft. At approximately 0820 hours word was received from Sauk Centre Fire that one of their crews had located the aircraft in a field near the address of , about two miles east of Hwy 71 in Getty Township. Sauk Centre Police Chief Bryon Friedrichs and his Officer Joseph Jensen responded to the area and confirmed that the aircraft was in fact the missing Wittmann Tailwind 210 bearing tail number N251WT and the lone occupant was deceased as an apparent result of the crash. I along with Deputy Troy Jansky arrived on scene a short time later on and concluded the same. The pilot had sustained injuries not compatible with life and that it appeared that the crash had occurred several hours prior to our arrival. Dispatch was notified to cancel the BOLOs for the aircraft and to notify the FAA that the aircraft had been located. The scene was then photographed and secured. The pilot's remains were left with the aircraft until further direction was received from FAA Investigators.

At approximately 0900 hours I was contacted by FAA Crash Investigator Allan Thilmany regarding the crash. I briefed Thilmany on the known details of the crash who advised that he would be responding to the scene. Thilmany advised that the remains of the pilot could be removed from the wreckage and the next of kin notified of the death. I advised that I would have the remains removed and standby until his arrival. A short time later, I was assisted by members of the Sauk Centre FD in the removal of the body.

Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

Additional photographs were taken during this process. Once removed I located a brown wallet in the right front pocket of the pilot. Inside the wallet was a [REDACTED] driver license of Matthew James Skwira and a FAA Private Pilot's license bearing the same name. The descriptors on driver license matched that of the decedent but I was not able to make a positive visual confirmation due to injuries of the pilot. The wallet and its contents were returned to the victim's pocket. The body was secured in a blue transport pouch and sealed prior to transport to the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's Office where is was sent for positive identification and post mortem examination.

Upon arrival of FAA Investigator Allan Thilmany I provided necessary assistance and detail related to our investigation. Thilmany requested copies of photos and reports taken and completed by the Sheriff's Office when ready. I advised the Sheriff's Office would continue to secure the scene until the arrival of the NTSB and the removal of the aircraft from the scene.

Further developments will be noted.

:RD

Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

ICR # 18006319

DEPUTY TROY JANSKY:

At the start of my shift on 01-24-18, I was requested by Sgt. Soyka to gather the Stearns County drone from the Law Enforcement Center and deliver it to the Sauk Centre airport and meet up with Lt. Dickhaus in regards to a search of a missing person last seen in an aircraft. I gathered the drone from the Stearns County Law Enforcement Center and responded to the Sauk Centre airport where I met with Lt. Dickhaus.

Upon my arrival at the airport I spoke with Lt. Dickhaus. I learned that the missing pilot was a Matthew James Skwira, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I also learned from Lt. Dickhaus that Skwira's vehicle was still parked at the airport. That vehicle was [REDACTED]. Also at the airport was another male known to Lt. Dickhaus. I learned that this party had last seen Skwira at approximately 1530 hours as he was practicing landings and take-offs at the Sauk Centre airport. Lt. Dickhaus informed me Sauk Centre fire and police had a briefing and through the events of last evening's call, they had been given a search grid based off the last known pings from the aircraft and also through Skwira's cell phone.

While at the airport at approximately 0820 hours, I overheard radio traffic from Sauk Centre Fire that they had spotted the aircraft out in a plowed field. This was reported to be near the intersection of 395th Avenue and 370th Street in Getty Township. Lt. Dickhaus, Stearns County Sgt. John Niemi, and I then responded from the Sauk Centre airport to this location.

Upon our arrival, Sauk Centre Police Chief Friedrichs and Sgt. Joey Jensen and members of Sauk Centre Fire had been on scene prior to our arrival and confirmed the pilot was present within the plane and deceased. The CAD note for that time was at 0824 hours with a noted temperature of 23 degrees.

I walked out to the site of the crash along with Lt. Dickhaus and Sgt. Niemi. Also present were Sgt. Jensen and Chief Friedrichs along with a few members of the Sauk Centre Fire Department. Sgt. Jensen advised that he had taken a few photographs already.

[REDACTED]

Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

I was requested to take additional photos and video of the crash scene. Lt. Dickhaus would be able to confirm the identity of the decedent through his Minnesota driver's license and pilot's license contained in a billfold on the decedent. The decedent had multiple traumatic injuries incompatible with life. Once those photos and videos were completed, they were uploaded through iCrimeFighter and later sent to the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's Office. I also reported this death by phone to the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's Office, speaking with Jonathan Banks. I also spoke with Stearns County Investigator Tony Kotschevar who had gone to the decedent's address and met with family. For the report to the Ramsey County Medical Examiner's Office,

I remained on scene with Lt. Dickhaus who advised the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) advised the decedent could be removed from the aircraft. Lt. Dickhaus, with the assistance of Sauk Centre Fire Department members, did the removal of the decedent from the aircraft. Lt. Dickhaus took additional photographs during this process. The decedent was released to Mar-Ben for transport to Ramsey County at 1045 hours.

I remained on scene until we met with an accident investigator from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). That investigator was identified as Al Thilmany. Thilmany and his partner were brought to the crash site and they also took additional photographs and requested that the plane be kept under security watch until the arrival of the NTSB investigator who would be arriving on 01-25-18. Nothing was removed or collected from the aircraft 01-25-18.

I identified the landowner of the plowed field where the crash occurred to be a with a phone number of . I spoke with and other members

Stearns County Sheriff's Office

Narrative Report

whose farm property and residences were directly west of the crash site and no one saw or provided any useful information for this investigation.

I remained on scene of the crash site until approximately 1600 hours when I was relieved by Stearns County Deputy Jason Dahl. Please refer to further reports by Lt. Dickhaus. No further action by this officer. This matter is being further investigated by the NTSB.

TB:tlk/tj