

Statement of Mark Miller
Aircraft Crash on September 11, 2019

I was in a hangar cleaning up tools and doing some work when I noticed that Bob Eckelson had the top cowling off his airplane and was looking at the engine. As I was walking over to the plane I said "what are you doing back, I thought you had just left?" He replied that when they took off there was a fuel smell and the engine was running rough so he returned to the airport. I stuck my nose in and looked around at the fuel connections that I could see with the top cowling off. I didn't see or smell any fuel. Bob stated that they had just checked the gascolator at the annual and probably got air trapped in the system and that was the problem. That didn't make much sense to me, but owners know their airplanes and have their own ideas. Bob then decided to do a run up with the top cowling off to see if the aircraft would repeat the problem. I asked about the bottom cowling and he then placed a piece of safety wire around the cowling to support it and keep it from rubbing on the spinner. Bob climbed into the aircraft and started it up. While he was in the plane I looked for leaks and smells and didn't notice any. I came around to the cockpit and discussed with Bob that I couldn't see or smell any leaks. He then raised the idle to see if it would reach RPM and it did. He then did a mag check and cycled the prop. I asked if all the gauges were in the green and he said yes. He returned the plane to idle and shut down. He didn't smell any fuel or notice any nonconformity on the run up. My co-worker Tom had just arrived with his dog and I told Bob I needed to go make sure my dog was behaving because he gets over excited when Tom's dog shows up. I went over to where Tom and the dogs were and tried to calm my dog down while talking with Tom for a while. When I looked back at Bob and his plane, Bob had his airplane cowed back up. I walked over and asked him what he had decided to do and he said he was going to take it for a couple of touch and goes. Then he asked me if I wanted to go for a ride with him. I said, sure, I'll go for a quick ride. I asked Tom to keep an eye on my dog and told him I would be right back, I was going for a quick ride. Bob and I moved the plane around because Eric had just pulled in with his twin and blocked us. Bob then started the plane and taxied forward to taxiway P3. Bob contacted ground control and was told to taxi via P to P9 and hold short of P9. While on taxiway P I reminded Bob that ground said to hold short of P9, but he continued on. Ground called and stated 2890T you were instructed to hold short of P9, stop right there. Bob finally stopped and after a bit ground cleared us to back taxi on Runway 5 via taxiway F to Runway 5 and then get off at taxiway G so we could get around the Extra that was broken down on P. Bob proceeded to the run up area and performed a run up, cycled the prop and did a mag check. I noticed there was never a checklist used at any time. I closed the door and verified that it was latched, checked my belts and asked Bob about his shoulder harness. His reply was it wouldn't make any difference anyway. I was caught off guard by that comment, but let it go. Bob pulled to the hold short line for Runway 5. Bob called the tower and after ground cleared another aircraft to back taxi on Runway 5 the tower cleared us to taxi into position. The engine hesitated for a split second and I asked Bob if that was normal for his airplane and he said yes. I said to Bob that if anything wasn't normal we would abort the takeoff, right? He answered, yes. Bob throttled up and we were underway. I asked him if all the gauges were in the green and he said yes. We were now climbing 100 feet, 200 feet, 300 feet, and then at approximately 400 feet we lost power. The engine was still running however

not making power. I was shocked and couldn't believe that I had just climbed into an airplane that I didn't know anything about to go for a ride and now this happens. Bob made a call to the tower but I can't say what was said. He then went for what I was taught is the Impossible Turn at 400 feet, and started a turn back to the runway. I looked around and saw that we had passed Spanish River Blvd and it was no longer an option. I looked at Bob and he was frozen-- his white head and blue shirt with the yoke pulled to his chest. I yelled we're not going to make it and got no reply from Bob, frozen. I looked ahead at Airport Road, the swale or the parking lot as possible options. We were in a stall, going to roll over and would probably crash into the North T hangars. I stepped on the right rudder as hard as I could, pushed the nose over and rolled right aileron, thinking to myself if I can only get the plane flat we might get through this. I saw we now had the parking lot in line as the only option and then all hell broke loose. The right wing came off as we hit the light pole and the palm tree. We then ricocheted to the left falling to the ground and hitting the tree which took the tail section off. We then slid into the fence at Reliable Jet and the left wing came off before sliding to a stop in the parking lot. I looked over and yelled to Bob are you OK and got no response. The next thing I knew was Dave and Rick had opened the door and were asking me if I was OK. I responded that I wasn't sure and that Bob was unconscious. I tried again to wake him, shaking him and still got no response, his face was bleeding. Dave said we have to get you out of here, can you move? I said yes, but when I tried to move I couldn't. I couldn't move. Dave said we have to move you and I agreed and told him to get me the hell out of here. They then carefully hoisted me out of the airplane and took me over to the grass away from the aircraft. They then went back for Bob. I watched as the guys from Reliable Jet threw fire extinguishers over the fence to douse the plane and all the fuel so the plane didn't go up in flames. Those guys are real heros. They took Bob over to the curb where the Paramedics soon arrived and he was still out of it. Dave came back to check on me and asked me what hurt. I said my ankle felt like it was on fire. Dave went and got a bucket of ice and dumped it on my foot. The paramedics came over to me and said I had to go with them to the hospital. I said I didn't want to go so they took my vitals and made me sign a release and asked me what I intended to do. I told them I was going to get into a golf cart and go check on my puppy. I got assistance into the golf cart from friends and left. At this point there were police everywhere and news reporters behind them.