

ACCIDENT DETAILS N456 MC

My name is Gary Frith, pilot of N642BG and this is my statement concerning the accident and crash of Mike Cranford, pilot of N456 MC.

The flight was planned as a 3-ship and the briefing started roughly 9 AM on the 8th of December at Mike's hangar. The flight was planned for Mike to be the flight lead for the first half of the flight with a position change planned at the middle and have Andy Beasley, the pilot of N223RL lead the second half and return to Meadowlake (KFLY). I was briefed to maintain the number 2 position for the entire flight. We briefed a 0930 start time and taxi for a steady takeoff on Runway 15. The briefing included a review to fingertip/route and then a wedge triangle formation at altitude to fly south of Pabello and then descend for a low-level flight in trail formation. Mike would lead us through about 12-15 miles of low level and then a in-place position change would occur with a 90 degree turn. Then Andy would assume lead and lead some more low level followed by an RTB to Meadowlake with Andy as lead.

(2)

Following the brief we went back to our respective hangars to start at 0930. Start and taxi to runway 15 was uneventful and we all completed engine runups and checks before departure. The takeoff on Runway 15 was performed as briefed with about 5 seconds interval between aircraft. The takeoff and rejoin was uneventful and we proceeded SE on departure. On the way south to Pueblo we transitioned to the wedge formation and climbed to 9500' initially. After Pueblo, we turned more westerly and Mike climbed to 10,500'. South of Pueblo and past their traffic we started the descent down for the first low level planned. On the way down Mike brought us into route and crossed me over to the right side so that we were in a right echelon route formation ready to go to trail as briefed for the low level. About a mile north of the Cochavos Reservoir, Mike directed us to 'go trail' and we both acknowledged. Mike peeled off left and started a descent towards the canyon running north from the reservoir. We had hit some mild turbulence during the descent and I could feel the winds were still present at the lower altitude as well.

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As Mike turned and descended into the canyon, I was still above the rim and started to make some turns. I was about 1500' in trail to Mike and I think it was about my third turn behind him when I saw him impact the side of a ridge at high speed. I could not determine his exact attitude ~~at~~ or bank angle at impact but it appeared to break up the aircraft in a left rotation. No radio call was made by Mike indicating any problems or emergency. I started an immediate climb and circle back to the crash site and communicated with Andy to see if he saw that and notify him what had happened. He acknowledged he did and I asked him if he had me in sight which he did so I took the lead, and said I was going to overfly to assess the crash and get coordinates. We both overflew the accident site and started a climb to communicate with flight service to declare an emergency and get search and rescue going as soon as possible. We were able to reach flight service on 122.2 and relay our information that we had. We both did not know the N number of Mike's plane and was not able to pass on that info until after landing.

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Flight service had us also contact Denver Center and pass what info on that we had. We stayed in the area for about 10-15 minutes doing all this coordination and then my fuel status dictated that we head home. The flight back home was uneventful, despite being in shock and missing our good friend. Landing and taxi back were uneventful and after securing our planes we contacted the airfield manager, Dave Elliot, to advise him what had happened. In addition, Dave had a number for us to call Denver Center. We called them and passed on the best coordinates we had of the crash site along with the best description of where the site was, along with Mike's name and tail number which we were able to find in Mike's logbook.

6-17-11
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N642BG