

REPORT OF MISHAP FLIGHT

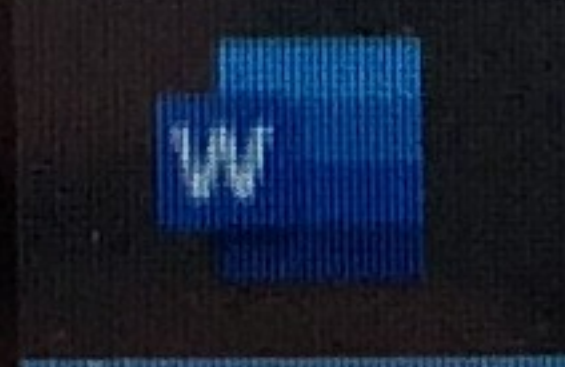
DATE: 8 December 2021

TAKEOFF TIME: 0957 local

DEPARTURE: Meadow Lake Airport (KFLY), runway 15

NARRATIVE: I met Mike in his hangar and discussed options for the flight. Due to other commitments, he said he only wanted to fly a single sortie, not an out-and-back. I told him the weather forecast for KCOS and KFCS predicted increasing winds from the West around 1100 local and verified he was comfortable with the chance for a strong crosswind on recovery. He was. I asked what type of mission he wanted to fly, and his choice was to lead a low level route he had flown before. After completing his route, we decided he would maneuver the flight from trail to a line-abreast formation and verbally give me the lead for the recovery to Meadow Lake. Gary Frith arrived shortly thereafter and I briefed the flight. Mission profile was a three-ship hi-low, with an interval takeoff, high cruise, followed by a trail formation, low level south of Pueblo, CO. Flight positions were as follows:

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Pueblo, CO. Flight positions were as follows:

*Lead: Mike Cranford flying RV-4 N456MC

*Two: Gary Frith flying RV-8 N642BG

*Three: Andrew Beasley flying RV-3 N223RL

Approximately 25-30 minutes after takeoff, while in a descent on a SSW heading and the flight in loose right echelon, Mike began a descending left turn toward the Cucharas River canyon. He directed the flight via radio call to move to a trail formation and we acknowledged with our flight positions. Mike continued his left turn while descending into the canyon in a NE direction.

Gary appeared to follow with several hundred feet of spacing and I followed several hundred feet behind him. Mike continued his descent to near the bottom of the canyon. There was a strong

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behind him. Mike continued his descent to near the bottom of the canyon. There was a strong SSW wind (210/35 mph) a couple thousand feet above the surface (the last point I recall checking the wind readout on my EFIS), and so I remained above the canyon rim to assess potential turbulence. Gary's aircraft appeared just slightly lower than I was. Mike followed the twisting course of the river bottom. During the third turn and after less than a minute inside the canyon, his aircraft was in a steep-banked left turn (heading approximately west), when it appeared to drag its left wingtip into the terrain. The aircraft immediately nosed into the ground and came to a complete stop. I observed no fire, no cloud of dust, and no scattering of debris. Total time from impact to stop was no more than a second.

Gary and I immediately climbed and began a slow orbit of the impact site. We confirmed that he would become the new Lead and I would assume the Number Two position with the responsibility of avoiding any flight path conflicts. We agreed the crash was not survivable, and we then contacted Denver Flight Service and Denver ARTCC with Mike's aircraft type and location. With our fuel level becoming a concern we recovered to Meadow Lake airport. Once on the ground we called Denver ARTCC with Mike's tail number, name, and a more accurate set of coordinates.

