

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL PLANE CRASH NEAR KEARNEY,
MISSOURI ON JULY 20, 2023

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Accident No.: CEN23FA314

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Interview of: DENNIS E. FISHER, Mechanic

Via telephone

Wednesday,
July 26, 2023

APPEARANCES:

ANDREW FINNE, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

I N D E X

ITEM

PAGE

Interview of Dennis E. Fisher:

By Mr. Finne

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I N T E R V I E W

MR. FINNE: The recording has been started, so if you don't mind, just state your full name and if you're okay with being recorded.

MR. FISHER: Yes. Full name is Dennis E. Fisher, and I understand I'm being recorded.

MR. FINNE: Okay. So this is an interview for Accident Number CEN23FA314, which is an accident of November 2-0-0 Romeo Alpha, a Piper PA-31 Navajo, in Kearney, Missouri, on July 20th, 2023. This interview is with Dennis E. Fisher, the mechanic listed in the latest logbook entries and the ferry permit.

Again, the purpose of this interview is to increase safety and not assign, fault, blame, or liability. NTSB cannot offer any guarantee of confidentiality or immunity from legal or certificate actions. A certificate or summary of the interview will go into the public docket. In this case, it will be a verbatim transcript.

The interviewee can have one representative of the interviewee's choice. The representative may be an attorney, but it's not required to be an attorney. The representative may not testify for the interviewee. Do you request to have a representative present, Mr. Fisher?

MR. FISHER: No.

MR. FINNE: Okay.

MR. FISHER: No, not at this time.

1 MR. FINNE: Okay. And do you have any questions about the
2 items I just read to you?

3 MR. FISHER: No.

4 MR. FINNE: Okay, awesome. All right, we will get started
5 and I understand that you only have 60 percent of your battery, so
6 I will try to be quick. So --

7 MR. FISHER: Well, if we miss it today, we'll try again
8 tomorrow.

9 MR. FINNE: Yes, sir.

10 INTERVIEW OF DENNIS E. FISHER

11 BY MR. FINNE:

12 Q. All right. What is your certificate numbers and airman
13 certificates that you hold?

14 A. [REDACTED] is my mechanic's certificate and my pilot -- let's
15 see if I have it in my desk drawer. I don't have it with me.

16 Q. Okay, that's fine. Do you know what type of airman
17 certificates you hold? Or what class certificates?

18 A. Single/multi.

19 Q. Okay. Just airplane/land, airplane/sea?

20 A. Yeah, airplane/land.

21 Q. Okay. So what's your background?

22 A. Far as flying or mechanic-ing?

23 Q. Let's start with mechanic, so what's your mechanic
24 background?

25 A. I've just been mechanic-ing since '71 or 2 for several

1 different companies and then I started for myself back in the '80s
2 and '90s, working on single-/multi-engine airplanes and some jets
3 for corporate people.

4 Q. Okay. Do you hold your inspection authorization?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. Okay. What's your pilot background?

7 A. Most of it's just general flying for myself.

8 Q. Okay. What type of planes do you fly?

9 A. Single and multi.

10 Q. Okay. So on the day of the accident, what events do you
11 recall?

12 A. I just -- he started the airplane up, Doug did, and he called
13 me to the cockpit three times because he couldn't find the radio
14 master, and I can't remember what some of the other -- oh, one of
15 them was how to transfer fuel and I said you don't need to
16 transfer fuel. And I said you're the one with the POH, I didn't
17 even look at the POH, all I was concerned with was the maintenance
18 and operation of the airplane.

19 And then he started -- well, he had it running at the time
20 when I was talking to him and let's see, he had one light on, on
21 the panel, and it was the vacuum light for the left engine, so I
22 presumed that the left vacuum pump failed, and that was really all
23 we talked about. And then I got back out of the airplane and he
24 taxied out to the runway, which I didn't expect him to take off
25 and when he took off, I don't think he had it full power. And he

1 never did get -- I don't think he ever got a thousand feet and
2 that's all I remember until after the crash.

3 Q. Okay. You said that there was a light on for a vacuum pump?

4 A. Yeah, the left vacuum pump --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- was out.

7 Q. Okay. Anything --

8 A. But he still had the -- no, but he still had the -- the right
9 panel was -- the vacuum gauges would work off of the right engine,
10 so he'd have to look for the vacuum gauges, he'd have to look on
11 the right panel.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. And I did notice the vacuum gauge for the left engine was
14 just bumping up and down off of two or three panels, so that's
15 when I figured that the vacuum pump had sheared on the left engine
16 and told him he'd have to go by the right gauges, the vacuum
17 gauges on the right panel.

18 Q. Okay. Did you do any inspections of this plane prior to the
19 accident flight?

20 A. He asked about something in the tanks and that's the only
21 thing I remember him asking, and I checked the oil for him on both
22 engines and showed him the dipstick, that was before he started
23 and I mean, he walked around and looked at things, you know, just
24 did a walk-around and --

25 Q. Okay.

1 A. -- that's all I can remember.

2 Q. Okay. So you don't recall you doing any other inspections
3 prior to him getting there, prior to him doing his walk-around?

4 A. No, no.

5 Q. Okay. What was the reason -- what was the reasoning for
6 requesting the ferry permit?

7 A. Because it needed some work, maintenance, so we were flying
8 it back here to annual it, really, to annual the airplane.

9 Q. Okay. What type of work did it require?

10 A. Well, we put a -- we put two tires on it up there and did the
11 gear retraction. And let's see, what else did we do? I guess we
12 just vacuumed out all the bird nests and everything and got it
13 running, had it running three or four times before Doug was going
14 to fly it back and --

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And somehow we got two -- ended up with two different ferry
17 permits.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Well, one of them run out, I'm sorry, one -- the first ferry
20 permit run out, so they got another ferry permit.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. And I don't know, I never, I never did see the second one, so
23 I can't tell you what it said.

24 Q. Okay. So what type of work were you going to do on the
25 aircraft once it got back to Kingman?

1 A. We was going to replace the OX tank on the left engine and --
2 well, just a lot of needed placards and, you know, there's all
3 kinds of little things, so --

4 Q. Okay.

5 A. And I did, I did have a squawk sheet in the airplane, but I
6 don't -- I don't think it survived. But I do have the AD list, I
7 still have that in my overnight bag.

8 Q. Okay. Do you have a copy of the squawk list in your
9 overnight bag?

10 A. No. No, it was on a clipboard in the -- in the cabin area.

11 Q. Okay. So to get the ferry permit, what all did that involve
12 from you?

13 A. I just inspected the current ADs and we replaced the left
14 main tire and the nose tire because they were pretty bad, and
15 serviced the brakes, it didn't have any brakes, so we got them
16 going. And like I said, that last day we did the gear retraction
17 and just more or less cleaned it up, got the bird nests vacuumed
18 out of it and looked it all over and made sure the trim tabs and
19 controls worked and basically a quick walk-around.

20 Q. Okay.

21 A. There were three or four us working on it, so --

22 Q. Who were the other individuals working on it?

23 A. Well, Tom, the owner, and his wife was vacuuming out bird
24 nests and stuff, and I replaced a couple burnt wires in the right-
25 hand engine compartment. The previous owner, I guess, fired it up

1 with the bird nests in there around the turbo and exhaust and
2 caught it on fire, so --

3 Q. Okay. So was the FAA involved in doing the ferry permit
4 application or the process?

5 A. Not to my knowledge, I didn't see any FAA people out there.

6 Q. Okay. How did you file for the ferry permit?

7 A. Tom's wife did it on the computer, I think.

8 Q. Okay. Let's see. Did you sign off any of the ADs prior to
9 the ferry permit?

10 A. No, I don't think so. I think I just signed off that each is
11 checked on the --

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. Looked it over and the current ADs were done or whatever.

14 Q. What airworthiness concerns did you have with this airplane
15 when you first inspected it?

16 A. Well, really just all of the bird nests and stuff in the
17 engine compartment and in the control and in the tail and ailerons
18 and stuff, just there was a lot of bird nests.

19 Q. Okay. Do you know --

20 A. So I must've spent 2 days, we spent 2 days just getting bird
21 nests and junk out of the airplane.

22 Q. Okay. Do you mind getting a little bit -- I'm having a hard
23 time hearing you right now.

24 A. Okay, how's that?

25 Q. There you go, that's better. Thank you. It was starting to

1 get a little tinny, like you're away from the phone.

2 A. Yeah, I turned my head and dropped my ink pen, so --

3 Q. Oh, okay. No worries, sir.

4 A. Yeah.

5 Q. Do you recall where his wife was vacuuming out all these bird
6 nests that you are mentioning?

7 A. Oh, several places. We took the wingtips off so we could get
8 in behind the ailerons and stuff and do that and then the engine
9 compartments, you know, all the cylinders, between the cylinders
10 and everything and the oil coolers and we put new conduction air
11 filters on it, on both sides.

12 Q. Okay. So prior to the flight, while it was being -- while
13 the aircraft was being fueled, it was leaking fuel from the belly.
14 Did you witness that leak?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Okay. What did you do regarding that leak?

17 A. Well, we took the fairing off of the wing root and tried to
18 figure out where it was coming from, but they still -- the line
19 service guy was supposed to leave it down 3 or 4 inches and he
20 filled it clear full. So we estimated that the filler neck was
21 what was leaking, so it had stopped dripping fuel and before Doug
22 even got in the airplane, so it had leaked --

23 Q. Okay.

24 A. -- down from around the filler neck, or wherever it was
25 leaking, it quit, quit dripping.

1 Q. Okay. Do you know how much fuel was on board the aircraft
2 prior to Doug taking it to Kingman?

3 A. There was 50 gallons in the main on the left, close to 50
4 gallons on the right wing and 40, I think, in the OX on the right
5 wing.

6 Q. Okay, 40 --

7 A. And there was no fuel, no fuel in the cells.

8 Q. Okay, no fuel in the cells. Anything in the left oxygen
9 cells?

10 A. No. The left OX did not have any fuel in it and in the cell,
11 left and the cell didn't have any fuel.

12 Q. Okay. Is there any reasoning why you all didn't put fuel
13 into the left OX?

14 A. Because it leaked.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. That was part of our maintenance, to bring it home to replace
17 that tank.

18 Q. Okay. Do you --

19 A. It was the nipple, the nipple on the bottom of the tank was
20 leaking.

21 Q. Okay.

22 A. There was some, just something at the nipple.

23 Q. Do you recall what all was inside the cabin prior to takeoff?

24 A. I think the ELT was in there, there was a couple of cases of
25 oil, my clipboard with the squawk sheet. I don't think there was

1 any tools left in there.

2 Q. Okay.

3 A. The POH was in there, the -- I don't know, several handbooks
4 on the airplane.

5 Q. Okay. Do you know, for weight and balance purposes, do you
6 recall how many cases of oil there was?

7 A. I think there was three.

8 Q. Okay. And were they the six-bottle cases?

9 A. Yeah, there were six-bottle cases. Six-packs --

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. -- or whatever.

12 Q. Okay. What do you recall about the fuel tank issues prior to
13 the accident flight?

14 A. I don't quite understand what you're asking.

15 Q. So you had said that the left OX nipple was leaking.

16 A. Yeah. And --

17 Q. The right -- go ahead.

18 A. The right main was too full, it was leaking, but it quit
19 leaking, so we put the wing root seal back on and I told Doug to
20 leave it on the mains, if he was going to stop somewhere in
21 between, to leave it on the main, not even switch tanks, leave the
22 selector on both mains, that would give him close to 50 gallons a
23 side, which --

24 Q. Okay.

25 A. -- the engines shouldn't burn more than 30 gallons an hour,

1 so that would give him an hour's flight, he probably could've made
2 it all the way in here in an hour.

3 Q. Okay. Was there any fuel tank leaking issues in the weeks
4 and months leading up to the accident flight?

5 A. Well, just when we put fuel in them to test them and that's
6 when we knew we couldn't carry any fuel in the left-hand OX and we
7 never put any fuel at all in the left cell tanks.

8 Q. Okay.

9 A. We just put -- you know, we just put 20 gallons in each one
10 just to see, see what we had.

11 Q. Okay. For about how long had you all been working on this
12 plane to get it airworthy?

13 A. I made three trips to Kansas City, so I worked on it 5 days,
14 probably.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. And then I don't -- you know, I don't know who else worked on
17 it when I wasn't there. I don't think there was anybody else
18 there, but I can't tell you that for sure.

19 Q. Okay. No worries. Did you know anything about the history
20 of this aircraft prior to Doug -- Tom buying it?

21 A. No. No.

22 Q. Okay. Several witnesses stated that there were issues with
23 the engines prior to the accident flight. Do you recall any
24 issues?

25 A. You mean before he took off or after?

1 Q. No, like during the engine runs during the weeks leading up
2 to the accident, when you tested --

3 A. No, I ran it -- I ran them twice and, you know, they run
4 good, I was surprised they run that good for setting for what, 5
5 years or whatever it was, and one of the other guys had run them
6 prior to Doug, so they'd been -- they'd been run three or four
7 times and even up and down the runway a couple times, you know,
8 before Doug took it.

9 Q. Okay. Do you happen to recall any RPM or manifold settings
10 when you were doing those ground runs?

11 A. No. I mean, they were pretty close together, both engines
12 run -- I mean, they run up to redline and I let them cool down
13 when I stopped them and -- or stopped the airplane engines and,
14 you know, I thought they ran nice.

15 Q. Okay. So do you recall any issues with the turbo or the
16 boost or anything?

17 A. No. I inspected all the clamps and it seemed like everything
18 was operating like it should on the ground.

19 Q. Okay. Let's see. What's your relationship with the airplane
20 owner?

21 A. I just helped him on a few airplanes. I annualized his 180
22 that he had a year or so ago and then I've worked on -- well, this
23 airplane and I've worked on -- he's got a Luscombe I've annualized.
24 I just know him as a customer, really.

25 Q. Okay. Do you know if the owner -- is the owner a pilot?

1 A. Tom?

2 Q. Yes.

3 A. No, no, he's not a pilot.

4 Q. Okay. So what's -- so does he just like buy and sell these
5 aircraft, just as kind of like a dealer?

6 A. Yeah. Yeah, he's -- and he sent some overseas, too, he's got
7 a Learjet or two right now that he wanted me to help him on and I
8 told him I didn't have time, so --

9 Q. All right, of course. Okay. Well, is there anything else
10 you can think of on this accident?

11 A. No, I just -- I just -- you know, it's just hard to -- I
12 believe he never got the airplane off (indiscernible) when I took
13 off, was get -- get some altitude so you had some room to do
14 something if you had a problem. And I don't think he ever got a
15 thousand feet.

16 Q. Okay. You're saying you didn't think that he put full power
17 in. What makes you think that?

18 A. Well, I don't know. After he left the airport, it just
19 didn't sound like it wound up and I didn't know whether he pulled
20 some power out of it after he took off or just (indiscernible).
21 Of course, I was between some other hangars, by the time I got out
22 to where I could look down the runway, there was a guy that just
23 landed and he went in the office and told them that the airplane
24 that just took off crashed.

25 Q. Okay. What did you all do after you all realized that he had

1 crashed in the field?

2 A. Well, we jumped in the pickup and went up to where we seen
3 the smoke. We were about, I don't know, I want to say we were
4 probably -- we were behind the fire truck, there was a fire truck
5 got in there and there was a sheriff there and then there was a
6 sheriff behind us when we got there.

7 MR. FINNE: Okay. All right. Well, if you think of anything
8 else, feel free to reach out to that number I originally called
9 you on, I'll be happy to try to take any of your questions or if
10 you know of anything else, of anyone else that would be useful
11 just to interview, just let me know, I'll be happy to reach out to
12 them.

13 MR. FISHER: Okay. Well, I think Tom and I and his wife were
14 the only ones there the day Doug took off and like I say, I was
15 sitting with Doug that morning for breakfast and he was plotting
16 out his course on the maps and so --

17 BY MR. FINNE:

18 Q. Did Doug seem knowledgeable and capable?

19 A. Oh, yeah, yeah. I've known him for a little while, I've
20 known of him, he's an old airline pilot, so he's probably -- I
21 don't know how many thousands of hours he's got. But he didn't
22 really act right to me that morning, he was asking a lot of
23 questions two and three times, the same question, and I just, you
24 know -- it keeps going over my mind that I didn't know whether he
25 was -- was having a medical issue or what and I just -- he just

1 didn't act right.

2 Q. Okay. So you said, you spoke that you knew of the pilot.
3 Did Tom also know of the pilot prior to?

4 A. Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. I presume he did because Tom was the one that told me he was
7 going to fly it, so --

8 Q. Okay, so -- okay. Do you know how Tom came across having
9 Doug ferry the aircraft?

10 A. Not unless it was one of Tom's other mutual friends.

11 Q. Okay.

12 A. I mean, he's got quite a few friends, pilots, you know.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. Older pilots, so --

15 Q. Do you know if Doug was the first pilot he approached or did
16 he approach other pilots before he approached Doug?

17 A. He approached another pilot before Doug.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. Well, I take that back. There might've been two before that,
20 because while I was finishing up cal-ing up the airplane and
21 getting it ready to go, there was some guy and his wife and the
22 dog come out and talked to Tom, and then we come back to Kansas
23 the day after that and then -- let's see. Tom told me he had
24 somebody else that was going to fly it. So Tom talked to two or
25 three people and I can't tell you who they was.

1 Q. Okay. So two or three people prior to him talking to Doug?

2 A. Yeah.

3 MR. FINNE: Okay. All right. Well, like I said earlier, if
4 you think of anything else, don't hesitate to give me a call.

5 MR. FISHER: Okay.

6 MR. FINNE: If I need anything else, I'll give you a shout.
7 We got the -- we were able to get the maintenance records for the
8 aircraft, they weren't fire damaged, thankfully, they were just
9 water damaged.

10 MR. FISHER: Well, good, good. I was surprised that they
11 wanted them put in the airplane and I'm glad we put them in the
12 nose and not in the back baggage or in the cabin area.

13 MR. FINNE: Right. So yeah, we got those records, so I have
14 the airframe logbook, both engines, both props, the bill of sale,
15 the registration application, and then I have both ferry permits.
16 They're fire damaged, but they're still -- a majority of the ferry
17 permits are still legible. So I see where you requested -- I'm
18 looking at it right now. I see where you requested that first
19 ferry permit, that you said you just ran out of time on it?

20 MR. FISHER: Yeah, yeah.

21 MR. FINNE: Okay. And then here's the second ferry permit,
22 it looks like it's dated either the 22nd or the 23rd. It expires
23 then, so okay.

24 MR. FISHER: Yeah.

25 BY MR. FINNE:

1 Q. Was there any pressure to get the plane back to Kingman or
2 were you all just getting it over --

3 A. No, no, not really, because like I said, I made three trips
4 up there --

5 Q. Okay.

6 A. -- so I mean, there was -- nobody was pushing me and I even
7 told that to Doug the night before he left, that he ain't going to
8 piss me or I didn't think he'd piss Tom off if he refused to fly
9 it for some reason, I don't know, but I said he wasn't going to
10 piss me off and so I don't even know what he said to me, but --

11 Q. Okay. Do you have any of those records of your previous
12 visits of what you worked on and anything related to the
13 maintenance of the plane?

14 A. No. They were on the -- between the galley way and the
15 cockpit and on a clipboard.

16 Q. Okay. Speaking of --

17 A. I mean, I've got the AD list, that's really all I've got, and
18 the squawk sheet I sent back with the airplane and the books
19 because that way we'd know, when we got it back here, what we
20 needed to do to it, so --

21 Q. Okay. Are you able to send me a copy of that AD list you
22 have?

23 A. Yeah, yeah.

24 Q. Would mailing it, e-mail, what would work best for you?

25 A. Probably just -- I'll just run copies of it and mail it to

1 you, if that's fine with you.

2 MR. FINNE: Yeah, let me give you -- let me give you the
3 address whenever you're ready.

4 MR. FISHER: Okay, I'm ready.

5 MR. FINNE: All right, the address for the office is 14291
6 East 4th Avenue, Suite 7-300, Aurora, Colorado, and Aurora is
7 A-u-r-o-r-a, and the zip is 80011.

8 MR. FISHER: Eight zero zero one one.

9 MR. FINNE: And you can address it to Andrew Finne.

10 MR. FISHER: Andrew?

11 MR. FINNE: Yes, Andrew Finne, that would be F-i-n-n-e.

12 MR. FISHER: Okay.

13 MR. FINNE: So if you want to repeat the address back, you
14 can.

15 MR. FISHER: Okay, 14291 East 4th Avenue and -- what did I
16 write there, South, South -- or Suite something, what was the
17 suite?

18 MR. FINNE: It was Suite 7-300.

19 MR. FISHER: Seven dash 300, okay. What else I got there?
20 What else did I miss? Suite 7-300.

21 MR. FINNE: And then Aurora, Colorado.

22 MR. FISHER: Okay, I got Aurora, Colorado 80011.

23 MR. FINNE: Yes, sir. So yeah, just --

24 MR. FISHER: And your last name is F-i-f-f-e?

25 MR. FINNE: F-i-n-n-e.

1 MR. FISHER: N-n-e.

2 MR. FINNE: Yes, sir.

3 MR. FISHER: That's what I thought you said, but I can't read
4 my own writing, so I'm sorry.

5 MR. FINNE: No, no worries, sir.

6 MR. FISHER: Okay.

7 BY MR. FINNE:

8 Q. So I guess my last question, just so I can get an accurate
9 weight and balance of this plane, what was the -- do you recall
10 the configuration of the cabin?

11 A. No, there was nothing -- nothing setting in the seats besides
12 his baggage or he had an overnight bag.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And I can't remember, I mean, I think he had the owner's
15 manual or POH in the back seat there right behind the galley way
16 and I can't remember if there was anything else in there or not.
17 I don't think there really was.

18 Q. Okay. How many cabin seats were there?

19 A. There were four plus the toilet or whatever.

20 MR. FINNE: Okay, all right. Yeah, I'm just looking over the
21 POH, trying to see what the configuration was so I can, you know,
22 do a quick weight and balance calculation.

23 MR. FISHER: Yeah.

24 MR. FINNE: All right. Well, thank you, sir, for your time.

25 MR. FISHER: Okay.

1 MR. FINNE: You have my phone number, I have your contact
2 info, so if you need anything, just call. If I need anything, I
3 will call. And thank you very much for taking your time out of
4 your busy day to let me ask you some questions.

5 MR. FISHER: Well, no problem. If you need anything else,
6 give me a holler, and you know, I'll go ahead and get a -- get
7 some copies of these ADs and what I'd made notes of on the AD list
8 and then I'll send it to you.

9 MR. FINNE: All right, awesome. And if you find anything
10 else, just stick it with the ADs, I'd be much appreciated.

11 MR. FISHER: Okay, will do.

12 MR. FINNE: Thank you, sir.

13 MR. FISHER: Okay, thank you. Bye.

14 MR. FINNE: You, too. Bye.

15 MR. FISHER: Yeah.

16 (Whereupon, the interview concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL PLANE CRASH NEAR
KEARNEY, MISSOURI ON
JULY 20, 2023
Interview of Dennis E. Fisher

ACCIDENT NO.: CEN23FA314

PLACE: via telephone

DATE: July 26, 2023

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



David A. Martini
Transcriber