

Andrew Finne
Air Safety Investigator
Office of Aviation Safety

Date: July 21, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Witness Interview

Contact: Trevor Dunnivant - Airport Witness - [REDACTED]

This is an interview summary of lineman Trevor Dunnivant who witnessed the takeoff and accident from the airport. Mr. Dunnivant also has historical interaction with airplane and stated that he holds a FAA Airframe & Powerplant Mechanic and a Private Pilot Certificate.

It was previously told to Mr. Dunnivant that the airplane had been sitting in a field for a few years prior to his arrival at the airport. He saw the airplane in a hangar being worked on after he started working for the airport around February. He knew that the owner wanted to fix it up and fly it out of the airport, but Mr. Dunnivant did not know exactly what they were attempting to fix.

During the time it was sitting in the hangar, he had examined the airplane and knew within 5 minutes that it wasn't airworthy. The fuel hoses were rotted out, the right engine still had fire damage from several years prior, and the oil filters were dated from 2012 as a few examples. He was told, by other airport tenants, that the right engine fire damage was from a bird's nest during an engine run and the fire burned off wiring insulation and damaged other engine components. The damaged wire was bare in places and touching other wires. However, he did witness them splicing the damaged sections of wire at a later date but never saw them replace the oil filters.

He did not recognize the mechanic and he always played dumb whenever around them at the airport. He stated that he did not want to be asked to help or for his mechanical knowledge from the owner or the mechanic. At one point the owner asked for the crew car so he could go to O'Reilly Auto Parts to purchase unspecified

items. He also stated that he never saw any inspection plates beyond the wing tips and engine cowlings removed.

Two weeks prior to the accident, the owner and mechanic attempted to complete an engine test run. During the test run, the right engine was hard to start to the point that the mechanic gave up and focused on starting the left engine. After the left engine was successfully running the mechanic was later able to start the right engine. However, the right engine would not produce full power and smoked occasionally. Mr. Dunnivant remarked that the right engine sound like it was running "hard" with an unknown issue. Another lineman and him videoed the engine starts and run and provided those videos to investigators. He stated that the owner and mechanic gave up trying to get full power from the right engine.

On the day of the accident, the owner arrived around 0830 and requested that the airplane be fueled. Mr. Dunnivant towed the airplane to the self-serve and started to fuel the airplane. He noticed that the left inboard fuel tank only took three to four gallons of avgas while the right inboard fuel tank leaked the fuel he dispensed into the tank. He knew from previous conversations with the owner Mr. Reed that the two outboard fuel tanks on each wing would not hold fuel. Additionally, a horrible leak would occur around the sump or higher up the tank every time the right inboard fuel tank was filled. The leak was so bad the day of the accident that Mr. Dunnivant recorded an iPhone video and provided it to investigators.

Mr. Dunnivant stated that the owner and mechanic had been trying to fix the fuel leaks and thought it was the lower sump in the right inboard fuel tank. The owner was able to mostly fix the leak around the sump but was unable to fix a leak higher up in the tank.

After fueling the airplane, Mr. Dunnivant returned to the building to complete the paperwork and run Mr. Reed's credit card. During this time, Mr. Reed walked up to the window, knocked, and gave a thumbs up before walking away. Mr. Dunnivant then joined numerous others next to the runway to witness the airplane attempt to leave the airport. He stated that he did not hear any radio calls nor witness any engine run-up prior to takeoff. When the pilot went to full power on the engines the airplane veered to the right causing the pilot to correct. During the takeoff roll, the plane kept veering to the right causing the pilot to continually correct back towards the centerline of the runway. He stated that during the entire takeoff the engines did not sound like they were making full power.

The airplane settled during the first attempt to rotate causing the pilot to keep the airplane on the runway. This action repeated until the runway numbers where the pilot jerked the airplane off the runway causing it to pull hard right. The pilot

corrected for the hard right yaw and started a very slow climb only staying maybe 10 to 15 ft off the ground the entire time. The terrain climbed with the airplane, and he could see the shadow of the airplane merging with the airplane. At that point, the pilot retracted landing gear which briefly slowed the airplane's climb even further before it accelerated upwards near the far tree line. After the airplane cleared the trees, it started a left turn, and disappeared behind the tree line. Shortly afterwards he witnessed smoke rising from behind the tree line.

-END-

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Date: July 21, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Witness Interview

Contact: Keaton Fisher - Airport Witness - [REDACTED]

This is an interview summary of lineman Keaton Fisher who witnessed the takeoff and accident from the airport. Mr. Fisher also has historical interaction with the airplane and stated that he holds a FAA Private Pilot Certificate.

It was previously told to Mr. Fisher that the airplane had been sitting on the ramp for numerous years prior to being move to the field where it sat for another year. He had mowed around the airplane during that year and provided a picture to investigators.

Mr. Fisher's main interaction with the plane after being purchased by Mr. Reed was towing the airplane back and forth from the hangar to the self-serve fuel. The first time he fueled the airplane, Mr. Reed requested 90 gallons of avgas a side. He was told to only fuel the inboard fuel tanks due to bladder deterioration of the two outboard tanks on each side. While fueling the right wing, as instructed, he noticed it leaking fuel almost immediately. He stopped fueling at 40 gallons due to the leak growing.

Mr. Fisher was asked what the maximum amount of fuel leakage is allowed on the fuel pad. He stated that to his knowledge there isn't a limit, but he thought it smart to stop fueling at 40 gallons due to the substantial leak. At later dates, Mr. Fisher was asked to stop fueling the inboard tank when about 1 to 2 inches of air space remained inside the tank. Mr. Reed told Mr. Fisher that he thought the leak was from a line on the upper part of the tank and that the air space should stop the leak.

Mr. Fisher knew that the owner and the owner's mechanic were both working on the airplane. The owner was present many times without the mechanic doing work to the airplane and the mechanic never came without Mr. Reed.

On the day of the accident flight, Mr. Reed came into the building and asked Mr. Fisher to move the airplane from the hangar to the self-serve fuel. Once at the self-serve, he requested that Mr. Fisher fill both inboard tanks as previously instructed. As in the previous fueling, the right tank began leaking soon as fuel was introduced into the tank. The leak did not stop before Mr. Fisher finished the left inboard fuel tank, so he turned the airplane around and left it leaking on the fuel pad. Mr. Fisher then returned to the building and later witnessed Mr. Reed tapping on the window with his thumb up. Mr. Fisher saw that the airplane had been started and only about 10 minutes had passed since he completed the fueling process.

He proceeded to get into the truck with Mr. Dunnavant and Ms. Williams to watch the airplane takeoff next to the runway. He did not hear or see the airplane complete an engine run-up while the airplane sat for 5 minutes prior to taxiing. Once the airplane throttled up on the runway, he noticed that the plane shifted to the right before the pilot throttled down the left engine. This action fixed the issue and the airplane again started the takeoff roll. Mr. Reed had previously told Mr. Fisher that they were unable to make the right engine run correctly. So, seeing the airplane shift to the right at full throttle made sense to Mr. Fisher.

The takeoff roll was very long, and the rotation was slow with the airplane settling back to the runway several times. Once airborne, the airplane climbed very slowly and would sink back towards the ground every time it would leave ground effect. After a few attempts to climb, he saw the airplane retract the landing gear and perform a quick pull up to get over the far tree line. During the landing gear retraction, the airplane started to slowly descend before the gear was full retracted. Once over the tree line, he saw the airplane start a left hand turn and disappear below the trees.

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Date: July 25, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Pilot Interview

Contact: Ed Duckworth - Potential Ferry Pilot - [REDACTED]

This is an interview summary of Ed Duckworth who was approached by airplane owner, Thomas Reed, to ferry Reed's airplane to Wichita. Mr. Duckworth stated that he is an active pilot, a retired American Airlines pilot, and has owned and currently owns several general aviation airplanes.

Mr. Duckworth stated that Mr. Reed approached him and asked if he would be willing to ferry his airplane to Wichita, Kansas for him. Mr. Reed stated that the airplane was only out of annual, and he needed the annual inspection completed in Wichita. Mr. Duckworth agreed to the terms and Mr. Reed subsequently gave him the airplane keys, his credit card, and the airplane books.

During review of the airplane books and further conversations with Mr. Reed, Mr. Duckworth became concerned about the airworthiness of the airplane. Mr. Reed would mention that some item was okay and then slowly change his story as Mr. Duckworth discovered more issues. As examples, Mr. Duckworth stated that:

- Both aux fuel tanks leaked fuel.
- One main fuel tank leaked fuel.
- Hydraulic system was inoperative.
- Brakes would fail if the parking brake was engaged.
- Numerous areas of mice infestation, especially in areas with wiring.
- Unable to swing the landing gear.
- Both flaps were inoperative.
- Both engines had trash and mice infestation within the cowl.

Mr. Reed would change his story whenever Mr. Duckworth confronted him about the forementioned issues. Mr. Reed even stated the engines ran great after Mr. Duckworth was told by airport workers that the engines sounded horrible during ground runs. Mr. Duckworth described that each time they spoke, the story got worse and worse, and he realized Mr. Reed was "full of it". At that point, Mr. Duckworth returned the keys, credit card, and books to Mr. Reed and informed him that he needed to do work with the airplane before ferrying it.

Mr. Duckworth stated that the airplane was a "piece of junk" and had sat around the airport for years. Various individuals had told him it was parked under a tree off airport property which he found strange.

He found the accident very unfortunate and was angry that the owner and mechanic allowed the airplane to be ferried in its condition.

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Date: August 4, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Aircraft Owner Interview

Contact: Thomas Reed - [REDACTED]

This is a telephone interview summary of Thomas Reed, owner of the accident airplane.

Mr. Reed stated that he purchased the airplane for family use or to sell once he was able to get the aircraft repaired. Prior to purchasing the airplane, he stated that the airplane was in nice condition with a brand-new interior furnishing and brand-new exterior paint. The only major issue was some burnt wiring on the right engine due to an engine fire some years prior. He also stated that the airplane only had 1100 hours, which was extremely low for an airplane of its age.

The only issue discovered once Mr. Reed purchased the airplane was a persistent fuel leak from the left aux fuel tank. They discovered a faulty nipple on the fuel tank that was causing the fuel leak and stated that his mechanic fixed the nipple, which solved the fuel leaking issue.

Mr. Reed stated that he had approached the accident flight pilot, Mr. Moler, prior to approaching a second pilot. Mr. Moler was a family friend that Mr. Reed had met when looking at purchasing some real estate. Mr. Moler reported to Mr. Reed that he had medical issues and needed time to get it sorted out before he could fly the airplane. So, Mr. Reed approached a second pilot who was initially willing to ferry the airplane but after review of the logbooks and airplane, declined the job. While Mr. Reed was looking for other pilots, Mr. Moler reported to Mr. Reed that he had resolved his medical issue and was able to fly the airplane.

Mr. Reed stated that on the day of the accident Mr. Moler was acting "weird", so he had him drive with the mechanic. The mechanic was to evaluate Mr. Moler to make sure he was able to conduct the flight. Before the flight, Mr. Moler purposely approached Mrs. Reed and asked her if she wanted to ride with him on the ferry flight. During this conversation Mr. Moler gave Mr. Reed a "devilish" look that greatly concerned Mr. Reed. Mr. Reed stated that Mr. Moler was acting very odd towards both and that his wife politely declined the offer. Mr. Reed also stated that he thinks Mr. Moler could have had a heart attack during the takeoff.

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Date: July 21, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Interview

Contact: John Davis - Interim Airport Manager - (██████████)

This is an interview summary of Airport Manager John Davis.

Mr. Davis is currently the interim Airport Manager of Midwest National Air Center (GPH) in Mosby, Missouri. Mr. Davis is knowledgeable of the accident airplane, as well as everyone else on the airport. He stated that the airplane was sitting in a field next to the airport due to the previous owner failing to pay his fees to the point of being evicted in 2021. The airplane was moved to the field, by the previous owner, and chained to a tree where it remained until Mr. Reed purchase the airplane in December of 2022 for around \$12,000. Mr. Reed negotiated the price down from around \$20,000 due to the owner striking the airplane on a highway sign while trying to pull it out of the field. The new owner rented the first hangar in the row and brought in a mechanic to work on fixing the airplane.

Mr. Reed then disappeared around March, didn't reappear until May, and started asking if Central Airlines would be willing to fix the airplane. Mr. Davis stated that Central Airlines wanted no part in fixing that airplane much less to provide any tools. During this time Mr. Reed became hard to contact and always had an excuse when asked to pay his rental fees. Mr. Reed had stated to Mr. Davis that his credit card had been hacked and that he needed additional time to pay. Starting sometime after May, Mr. Reed asked multiple pilots if they would be willing to ferry the airplane to Wichita. The first three pilots he asked told him they were not interested. One of those pilot's ended up returning the airplane keys and Mr. Reed's credit cards to the front desk.

On the day of the accident, Mr. Reed arrived with his family, mechanic, and a pilot willing to ferry the airplane to the Wichita area. Mr. Davis had never seen the

pilot before and remarked that he must be from the Wichita area. Mr. Reed asked the airport to tow the airplane to the self-serve pumps and fuel the airplane. The lineman was able to fuel the airplane with 18.52 gallons of Avgas but remarked that the airplane was heavily leaking the fuel from the belly.

Mr. Davis then went inside and did not witness the pilot start the airplane or start his taxi. When Mr. Davis did step back outside next to the back door to the building, he saw the airplane running with the door still open and the mechanic speaking to the pilot. The mechanic then exited the airplane, closed the door, and the pilot taxied to the south end of the runway. Mr. Davis witnessed the airplane start its takeoff roll and watched until it disappeared behind the hangars. He then noticed that the airplane never appeared again before seeing black smoking rising from above one of the hangars.

-END-

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Date: July 21, 2023

Subject: CEN23FA314 - Witness Interview

Contact: Elizabeth Williams- Airport Witness - [REDACTED]

This is an interview summary of Airport Admin Elizabeth Williams who had interactions with Mr. Reed on several occasions, including the day of the accident.

Ms. Williams stated that Mr. Reed was a struggle to receive hangar rent payments from over the last few months. He was always asking to push back the date to run the card on file and coming up with different excuses.

The first time she saw him in person was on the day of the accident. Additionally, after the accident, Mr. Reed's wife requested that Ms. Williams text her a photo one of the linemen took of the accident. She texted the photo to the wife and then received a reply from different number asking who this was. Then later the same day, Ms. Williams received a text from Mr. Reed's on-file number with a statement that the pilot either had a heart attack or death by suicide. Ms. Williams found this very strange and commented that the text from Mr. Reed was not solicited.

After the accident, Ms. Williams recalled that the mechanic was very distraught, but the owner did not seem upset at all. She previously had no interactions with either the mechanic or pilot.

-END-

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Subject: CEN23FA314 - Witness Interview
Contact: Andy Jacot - Accident Site Witness

This is an interview summary of Mr. Andy Jacot who is a homeowner adjacent to the accident site.

Mr. Jacot was outside in his backyard when he heard a loud low flying airplane. He looked to the east and saw an airplane appear out from behind the far tree line and pulling up higher into the sky. Mr. Jacot stated that the airplane barely cleared the tree line prior to making it into the open field between him and the tree line. He thought that the pilot was screwing around in his airplane.

The airplane continued towards him and impacted the high lines on the powerline just to the side of his house. The lines struck the middle of the airplane and the airplane continued in a straight line with a slight left bank. His wife saw the airplane impact the tree in their front yard causing multiple branches to break off. Mr. Jacot was able to get around his house prior to the airplane impacting the field. He stated that the airplane was in a left bank and impacted the field nose first while still in the left bank.

Mr. Jacot then rushed to the field to provide any assistance possible and arrived on scene with a fire on the right side that was starting to spread to the left side. He stated that he did not see any movement in the airplane before the landowner told him to get away from the airplane for his safety.



Figure 1: The Witness's Reported View

-END-