

Investigator Name
Title
Division

Date: June 18, 2025

Subject: CEN23FA361

Contact: Jim Brown (Former Air Force Test Pilot)

Spoke with Mr. Brown by telephone. He stated that he was formerly a pilot in the United States Air Force. He was in the Air Force for 14 years, during which time he flew F4 and F5 airplanes. He then graduated from the Air Force test pilot school and flew F15 airplanes before transitioning to classified programs. He was still in the classified programs when he retired from the Air Force. After leaving the military he flew for United Airlines and then went to work for Lockheed Martin as a test pilot. During his time with Lockheed Martin, he flew as test pilot on the F117 and F22 programs. After leaving Lockheed Martin he then worked for the National Test Pilot School. This was the time which he became authorized for several experimental aircraft, including the MiG 23.

He said that he became acquainted with accident pilot because he had a MiG 23 that needed to be ferried, and Mr. Brown was authorized to fly the MiG 23. He flew with the accident pilot several times and they (NTPS) were setting up a training program to get the accident pilot authorized in the MiG 23. During a training flight in about 2018, when they were practicing engine out approaches, the engine did not respond to power inputs, much like the event in Michigan. He said that in that case, they had sufficient altitude and brought the power back and performed an air start of the engine. Following the air start, the engine performed as expected and they executed a normal landing. When asked if they had performed any other emergency procedures prior to the air start, he said they did not and that they had sufficient altitude. He said the engine restarted about the base leg of their approach. He noted that after that flight, the engine fuel control unit was leaking and they suspected the

loss of power was due to a faulty fuel control unit. He said the owner replaced the unit after that event.

When asked about the ejection seat envelope for the KM-1 ejection seat, he noted that this is the same seat as installed in the MiG 21 airplanes. He said it was not a zero-zero seat, meaning it could not be used a zero airspeed and zero altitude. From recollection he thought it was a zero altitude - 70 knot seat. As the conversation progressed, he looked in a translated MiG 23 flight manual and found that the optimal airspeed for ejection seat use was between 215 and 325 knots and the minimum level flight speed for ejection was 115 knots. When asked, he stated that the KM-1 ejection seat only has a small drogue parachute for stabilizing the seat. He added that the minimum ejection altitude would be affected by other factors such as the airplane descent rate, bank angle, etc. He noted that the ejection sequence was the same regardless of who activated the system. First, the forward canopy would eject, followed by the rear canopy, then the rear pilot and finally the front pilot.

When asked if he had an opinion regarding the timing of the ejection in the accident event in Michigan, he stated that he believes that they got out of the airplane at the last minute possible. He said he saw videos where he believed the pilots were only under full parachute canopy for a few seconds before hitting the water. He further stated that if this had been a military ejection the timing of the ejection would not be in question. He further stated that the biggest reason that ejection seats do not save more lives is because of delayed ejection.

In regard to the accident flight, he stated that his opinion was that the pilot's intent was to glide the airplane to an open area on the airport perimeter. In his view, he doubted that this would have been a survivable scenario.

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