



Joshua Lindberg
Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
Aviation Safety - Central Region

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Subject: CEN25LA081, N6799P

Contact: Nick Thomas - accident co-pilot and new owner

On January 16, 2025, about 1530 central standard time, a Piper PA-24 airplane, N6799P, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Bentonville, Arkansas. The left seat pilot sustained serious injuries, and the right seat pilot sustained minor injuries. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 ferry flight.

The following is a summary of a recorded phone conversation with Nick Thomas (NT).

NTSB Josh Lindberg (JL): Asked him to explain the background of this airplane and everything he remembers before the accident flight.

NT: This airplane was being sold by a family. The owner had passed away about a year ago last December. Mark Wilkerson is who the plane was registered under at the time. I've been in conversation with a family friend who is managing the sale for the deceased spouse, and have collected digital records of the logbook, and very basically done all the research that I could do without physically being there with the airplane. I decided to move forward with the pre-buy inspection, and we scheduled a pre-buy inspection before Christmas or right after Christmas that we had to cancel because of weather. You validate that the airplane safe before we can get back before weather so anyway, this is our second attempt and doing a pre-buy and potential purchase trip. So I've been in conversation with Mr. Logue throughout this. He's an A&P mechanic. He's someone that's kind of been a part of my aviation community for quite some time and he's owned three or four Comanches himself, 250s, and so when I started looking at this particular airplane, he's the person that I went to and trusted, and I told him I want you to go through these digital logs with me and let me know

what stands out. So that's how I came about the airplane. Then we flew out to North Vernon on Wednesday morning so Steve and my dad Greg Thomas, they flew out to Bentonville picked me up and then we flew to North Vernon. So the three of us flew out there got there Wednesday morning. We pulled all the inspection panels and basically did a 100 hour inspection on the airplane - it was led by Steve. I'd say my dad and I were pulling panels off and putting them back on. Steve was doing the inspection work, and we were helping put the airplane back together. On Wednesday, we pulled it out started it up, put some fuel in it and let it run for about 20 minutes. Did a couple engine run ups, cycled the prop a few times, and made sure the fuel flow is working in both tanks. This is on the ground on Wednesday, but I'd say we had it up and running for about 30 minutes. Did a compression check - all compressions were high 70s I don't remember exactly but we've got a note of what all those compressions were on each cylinder. But I mean without getting the more detail, that's kind of the extent of that we did. Steve entered that 100 hour inspection in the in the logbook. Then we negotiated a transaction Thursday morning and planned our flight home. That process was working with the local FAA office in Indiana to issue special ferry permit because this was not in annual because the guy passed away a year ago, so I think it was about two or three months out of annual. So I got this special ferry permit largely due to Steve's hundred hour inspection and Steve being that ferry pilot as well with his Comanche experience. We got the permit issued Thursday, got insurance under control, got transaction management and left North Vernon to start the trip back. Final destination was the Wichita, Kansas, area where I was going to get an annual and going to do a couple other things on the airplane.

JL: Asked about his father flying along with them in a separate airplane.

Yeah, we're flying as a two ship so we had the VFR flight following under his under his tail the whole way. Our flight tracks would have been almost identical. The only thing that's going to be different is when we took off from North Vernon, which is that original leg not the final leg, we did kind of circled the field and gained altitude right over the field up to about 4,000 ft before then heading west. Whereas I'm pretty sure my dad just took off and headed west but that would be the only thing that's different.

JL: Asked about fueling the airplane before the first leg.

NT: I filled the airplane myself. I think it was pretty even between the two tanks but I don't know for certain. I wasn't paying close attention to what I put in the right and left as I was just filling it all the way up. It was completely full with 60 gallons total when we left North Vernon.

JL: Asked about the fuel management from North Vernon to Farmington.

NT: We switched tanks midflight. It might've been a little bit more past midflight so the reason why was because Farmington wasn't our original destination. Originally I think Lebanon, Missouri, was our original destination. But I think Steve might've mentioned this in his statement but our cylinder No. 4 was running hot and so we couldn't lean it out in a way that you know we would've expected so we were we're burning more fuel than anticipated. I don't remember if we started out on left or right, but I know that we switched tanks midflight and I could pull the notes to figure out whether it was right or left, but I know that we switched tanks midflight. That was kind of the plan is that we were flying about two our legs, and we flipped tanks at the one hour mark, and we'd fly on one tank for an hour, then fly the other tank for an hour. But again, I think what's important here is that we did intend to fly farther, about two hours maybe about 2:15 to Lebanon and because we were burning more fuel, because we couldn't lean out the airplane as anticipated, we made a deviation and ended up in Farmington. The fuel receipt that I got in Farmington, unfortunately that's for both airplanes, but I know for a fact that I put 40 gallons in 99P because that was something we were paying really close attention to because our fuel burn was higher than expected. I mean you can do that math at what our fuel burn was from North Vernon into Farmington at 40 gallons. Yeah it was right about 20 per side. In the calculation meant that we were burning right about and it was like 19 to 20 gallons an hour which I mean is high for the Comanche.

JL: Asked about the second fueling in Farmington and adding 40 gallons and confirming that Bentonville was the next destination.

NT: Bentonville was the destination but originally we would've flown it straight to Cook Field K50, from there, but we wanted to continue to maintain the flight following party too and have that secondary safety. Another decision that we made while in Farmington is that we need to keep the two airplane party that we've got for safety and we need to make another stop before going to Wichita.

JL: Asked about fuel management on the second leg to Bentonville and if they also switched the tanks halfway.

NT: Correct, yeah I know on this one that we started out on the left, switched to the right so we took off on the left from Farmington switch to the right. The reason that I know that is because in our emergency procedure when we knew that we lost power, that was one of things that that I distinctly remember that Steve asked me to do was to flip tanks and I distinctly remember flipping from right to left.

JL: Asked about the loss of engine power as they approached Bentonville.

NT: What I remember was basically a pretty standard normal descent nothing abnormal. Got down to traffic pattern altitude. We're basically flying crosswind of 36 at Bentonville so you know we're coming in from the east with the intention to land on 36. Cross the north end of the field and our left downwind that was kind of the intended entrance to the traffic pattern. So got down to traffic pattern and altitude and Steve started to slow the plane down, started to pull throttle out to initiate our slow flight procedures and get into landing configuration. On that initial reduction of throttle 100% was lost. So we basically just reached traffic pattern altitude, we were about 1,000 ft off the ground, we lost all power. I remember mentioning full power and he's like no we don't have any power. The procedures that I remember is he mentioned he'd asked me to flip tanks. So I flipped tanks from right to left. We had a very quick dialogue on whether or not we could make 18 and to me it was very clear that we weren't. Not to mention there's a water feature off of the end of 18 at Bentonville and a pretty hefty bank or ledge from the end of the runway into the water feature. So if we didn't make 18, we were in bigger trouble, so we started looking for a field. Found what I believe about the only field around there and managed to clear a couple really busy intersections with some powerlines. Put it down in that field on the southwest corner of 14th and I Street.

JL: Asked to clarify what he said about switching fuel tanks, did he switch from the right to the left tank? They either of them turn on the boost pump, checking the mixture or anything else?

So this is what I distinctly remember when he asked me to flip from right to left I said flip the fuel pump on, he flipped the fuel pump on. I flipped from right to left. Nothing changed. I don't remember the sequence of events here I do distinctly remember, Steve, ensuring the mixture was full rich, which it was, but I remember him kind of shoving on it and the reason I remember that is because that mixture handle was a little tough, you had to shove it sort of thing. So it was full rich, and I remember him turning the fuel pump on when I flipped from right to left. I know his statement mentions hitting the starter a couple times. I think I must've been scanning outside at the time, like I was looking at runway, looking at other places that we could put the airplane down. Those are the things I remember is fuel pump and switching tanks.

JL: Asked if the propeller was windmilling or if it had completely stopped.

So I don't remember that. [Steve] does, he does remember it not windmilling and I mean to me it's evident that it wasn't when milling when we touchdown because of the way the prop was damaged. There were only just the two blades that hit the ground were bent.

JL: Summarized the on-scene evidence, all other evidence gathered so far, previous statements about the pre-buy inspection, engine run, and fuel selector operation, it appears that the fuel system and especially this fuel selector valve were working as expected for the first leg of the flight. What the FAA found on scene and what the team found during the follow up exam at the recovery facility was that the left tank was empty, and the right tank contained 27.5 gallons. It appears that the left tank was used for a majority of the accident flight, and the right tank might have been used for 10-15 minutes at some point. There was no fuel leak observed at the accident flight and both tanks remained intact. The evidence does not support the claim that they switched tanks midflight during the accident flight.

NT: Yeah, and I understand that, and I'm not surprised because I know I was there on site. I saw what the fuel tanks were, so I'm not surprised to hear you say that.

JL: Asked if he was 110% sure that they switched the fuel tanks in flight on this accident leg.

NT: Oh, I'm positive about it yeah, I mean I'm positive of it. So I can't explain it.

JL: Stated that the NTSB attempted to download the onboard JPI EDM 700 but it's such an old recorder that it actually does not store any non-volatile memory so it did not have any data on it. Stated that the onboard Shadin fuel flow analyzer will be examined, and we hope to see the last indications that it was showing during the accident flight.

JL: Stated that the evidence suggests that they forgot to switch the tanks and were just running on the left tank the whole time and ran it dry.

NT: Yeah, I'm confident that it was flipped. The other thing that makes me question fuel starvation is that I would expect that the engine would sputter out, like not all cylinders aren't going to lose fuel the exact same. And that's not what happened. RPM went to zero in a matter of seconds with a throttle adjustment so that's the other thing that's led me to question the evidence as well. I mean obviously there's my own pilot bias probably too, but I would've expected the engine to just kind of sputter out if it was fuel starvation.

JL: Stated that I wanted to run all of this evidence by him before we actually went through the process of completing the examination to ensure that he was 100% sure that he didn't just forget to switch the selector in flight.

NT: I'm very confident of it just because it was something we are just so aware of because of the fuel burn. So I mean, I would definitely talk to Steve as well.

JL: Stated that I wanted to walk him through the evidence as I saw it so that we're on the same page. Asked him for more maintenance records and information. Told him he would schedule an airplane and engine examination.

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