

**Ocala Police Department****Ocala, FL 34771****INCIDENT REPORT NARRATIVE****Incident #:** [REDACTED]**Officer:** G. L. Uptagraft

On 04/04/14, at approximately 1645 hours, I responded to a reported plane crash at the Ocala Airport, located at 750 SW 60th Avenue. Upon arrival, I observed numerous emergency vehicles surrounding what appeared to be the crash site, a grassy field at the northwest of the complex.

I made my way to the crash site, and noticed the burned wreckage of a plane with the tail section mostly intact. I further observed a wide circle of burned vegetation surrounding the plane, indicative of a post-crash fire. (This field appeared particularly dry and susceptible to fire.) I noted that OFD personnel were actively applying water to the wreckage and surrounding area. I noted that the exposed tail section bore the markings N599WT, which a later FAA search revealed to be registered to a "Tango 2" single-engine aircraft.

I was able to speak briefly with OFD medics, who were already on scene and treating the pilot (and sole occupant of the plane), Helen Helpling. I learned that Helpling had suffered burns as a result of the crash and was being flown to Shands Hospital in Gainesville for treatment; however, she was expected to survive.

I was then able to make contact with several witnesses to the crash. I first met with Dennis Liebrecht, who identified himself as the boyfriend of Helpling. He stated that Helpling had flown the plane to the airport on 04/03 to have "radio work" done to the plane by Quest Avionics, which is headquartered at the airport. Liebrecht stated that on 04/04, the repairs had been completed, and he delivered Helpling to the airport to fly the plane back to Shady Airport. Liebrecht stated that he and Helpling had filled the plane with fuel, and Helpling had then taxied toward runway 8-26 for takeoff, while he prepared to leave via car. Liebrecht stated that he had heard the plane doing a "run up" before takeoff, but at this point, the plane was out of his line of sight. However, he was then flagged down by Phyllis Rowe (an employee of Quest) who stated that Helpling had just crashed. Liebrecht stated that he had then run to the crash site, where he had located Helpling lying in the grass approximately 50 yards from the plane. (It appears as though Helpling had self-evacuated from the wreckage, as opposed to being thrown from the plane on impact.) Liebrecht had stayed with Helpling until the arrival of medics, and stated that during the intervening time, Helpling had told him that the plane's canopy had opened unexpectedly on takeoff.

I was further able to meet with witnesses Michael Keeling, Barry Daniels, and Jerry McLauchlin. Keeling and Daniels are "A&P" mechanics with ExecJet Club, also located at the airport. At the time of the crash the two were working on McLauchlin's plane and the ExecJet hangar. All three observed the crash together from the location of the hangar. While they were interviewed separately, their statements were generally identical, and are summarized below:

Each stated that they heard and observed Helpling's plane conducting a "run up" on runway 8-26. Each further reported that the aircraft engine was making an unusual sound at this time. (Keeling described this as a "popping" sound, while McLauchlin advised it sounded "like it had a bad magneto".) Due to the engine sound, all three stated that they were actively watching the

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plane as it took off. After travelling westbound down the runway (a distance which McLaughlin estimated as 800-1000 feet) the plane took off normally and had ascended to a height of approximately 20 feet when the left canopy suddenly opened. McLaughlin stated that the plane immediately began "porpoising" before making a hard left turn with a steep bank, with the open canopy "flapping up and down." The plane continued in this hard left bank until it impacted, left-wing tip first, into the aforementioned grassy field. Keeling, Daniels and McLaughlin had also run to the crash site, with McLaughlin arriving first. They also reported finding Helpling approximately 50 yards from the plane, but did not establish any dialogue with her concerning the causal factors of the crash. Each stated that despite their early observations about the plane's engine sound, the aircraft appeared under full power at the time of the crash, and none suspected that engine failure played a part in the crash.

I learned that Officer M. Crandall had met with Phyllis Rowe and obtained a written statement from her concerning her eyewitness account of the crash. Her brief statement read "Aircraft took off to the west. Altitude seemed to be a tree top height looking from my office door. Airplane banked left then crashed." This statement was later forwarded to the Records Section under this case number, and I added Ms. Rowe's persons information to this report.

I also spoke with Wayne Middleton, the Assistant Airport Manager at the facility. I learned that Middleton had already been in touch with FAA representative Rick Riccardi of Atlanta, who had stated that there was no need for our agency to maintain any type of crime scene security at the crash site, adding that FAA investigators would likely be arriving the following day.

OPD Evidence Officer M. Zarco responded to the scene and photographed the crash site and wreckage.

Report for documentation purposes only.

Entered by G. L. Uptagraft, 04/04/14

**Ocala Police Department****Ocala, FL 34771****EVIDENCE REPORT NARRATIVE****Incident #: [REDACTED]****Officer: Zarco 5364**

On this date, 4/4/14 at approximately 1715 hours, I responded to 750 SW 60th Ave, Ocala International Airport, in reference to a plane crash. Ocala Fire Rescue, airport, and law enforcement personnel were already on scene. I observed the remnants of, what appeared to be, burnt wreckage of a small red aircraft, bearing tail number "N599WT", on the west end of the field; numerous parts were scattered nearby. The victim had already been transported at the time of my arrival, but I was advised that had she had escaped from the aircraft and was found some distance away by first responders. Their viewpoint with the victim in relation to the aircraft wreckage was documented via photograph.

Photographs of the scene were uploaded to the secure case file as evidence, and are as noted below.

Photographic Log:

1. Case ID
- 2-3. View from where victim found
- 4-100. Photos of scene

As typed by CST Zarco 5364