

Investigative supplement:

07 May 2014

Plane Crash

Pilot: Kent Wingate

By: Chief Donna Turner [REDACTED]

On 07 May 2014 at about 11:30 PM I was contacted by Capt Shannon Beasley regarding his response to a possible plane crash in the area of the Covington Municipal Airport. The initial information was that the pilot, Kent Wingate was flying into Covington Municipal Airport from Dayton, Ohio area. He was the lone occupant of the Piper Archer single engine plane Tail # 4506W. The pilot radioed the tower saying he had the airport insight and was 7 miles out. He had called the Airport Manager Robin Anderson on 06 May 2014 and advised he was flying into Covington and would need to gas up. Director Anderson said the weather conditions were clear with a south wind of 15 knots. About 3 minutes later the pilot radioed that he was low on fuel and was putting the plane down.

Director Anderson contacted Central Dispatch and the plane down call was dispatched at 11:19 PM. Capt Beasley responded to the Airport and was directing ground searches by deputies. Sheriff Chumley responded to the Airport. I responded to the airport and went air borne with Pilot Ben Baker and Co-Pilot Rob Witherington at 11:57AM.

We began a grid search of the area surrounding the airport. The beacon was monitored and the grid search began 7 miles out from the airport checking south toward the airport. The beacon was noted 4 miles out from the airport between Durhamville Road and the airport. The signal was east of Hwy 51 and north of the airport. During the grid search the beacon signal was strong 3 miles north northeast of the airport. At 12:46 PM the strongest signal was 2.5 miles north and east of the airport which was the end of airport road at Gift. From the concentration of the beacon signal at 12: 50PM I texted the ground searches to be concentrated in the area of Locust Bluff Road near the gas line and that 4 wheelers may be needed due to the terrain. There was no sighting in the open fields so it was apparent the plane was possibly in trees in the grid area. The trees were on both sides of the Hatchie River which defines the County lines, Lauderdale to the north and Tipton to the south.

At 1:01 PM Pilot Ben Baker confirmed a sighting of possible plane debris in the wooded area on the Lauderdale County side of the Hatchie River about 2 miles north of the airport. There were two pieces of possible debris that could be seen. The access to the area was visible from the Tipton County side of the Hatchie River which is the property of Richard Kelly. The logging road from the Lauderdale County side was visibly flooded with recent rainfall. Memphis Aviation had responded to the area and was directed via the radio to the area of the sighting of debris. Detective Jay Rodriguez was in the helicopter and making photographs of the debris and wreckage. The Memphis helicopter hovered over the location described by Pilot Ben Baker for ground personnel to respond.

I began to take photographs of the debris from the air which was limited in the heavily wooded area that two pieces of possible debris had been spotted. Rick Finley who works for Ben Baker had been assisting in the search. Rick landed in the field adjacent to the Hatchie River south of the location of the debris. He was piloting a yellow fixed plane aircraft. I observed ground personnel in the area of the field south of the Hatchie River arrive and a citizen in a boat was visible in the area on the Hatchie River. Pilot Baker radioed Rick Finley and airport authorities of the boater. Once we observed the first responders in the area of the debris we returned to the airport and landed. It was apparent that the boater was flagged down and assisted in crossing the river. Capt Beasley, Det Chris Williams, Det Sheri Wassel, Detective Brandon Matlock and Deputy Bradley Williams responded via boat to the wreckage. Pilot Rick Finley had crossed the river first and located the wreckage.

We responded to the field south of the Hatchie River where multiple first responders were on scene. I met with Sheriff Chumley who advised the pilot had been located and rescue efforts were underway to free him from the wreckage. I confirmed that an ambulance and the wing was enroute to the scene. Personnel advised Kent was unconscious but breathing.

While waiting for personnel to transport Pilot Kent Wingate to the staging area I spoke with Mike Beasley and his wife who were the parties Kent was to be meeting at the Airport to go to a funeral. Mike Beasley provided a cell number for Kent Wingate's wife Dr Catherine Wingate [REDACTED]. The wing had landed in the staging area and I met with Nurse Rita McCoy. She was present when I called Kent's wife for medical history for Kent. She advised he suffered from Gout. I confirmed Kent's DOB as [REDACTED]. Due to the arrival of rescue personnel with Kent to the river bank I handed the phone to Nurse Rita McCoy who obtained information from her. Kent was triaged in the ambulance at the scene and then transported to Regional One in Memphis by Hospital Wing.

I left the scene with Sheriff Chumley and we responded to the airport to meet with awaiting media sources. Upon arrival I assembled media representatives in the conference room of the airport. Sheriff Chumley released initial information on the plane crash. Also present at the presser was Director Anderson, Pilot Ben Baker and Covington PD Chief Buddy Lewis.

Agencies that responded to the scene were Tipton County Sheriff's Office, Tennessee Highway Patrol, Covington Police Department, Covington Fire Department, Lauderdale County Sheriff's Office, Rural Metro, Lauderdale County Rescue, Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency, and Memphis Police Department Aviation Unit.

I was contacted by Shawn Etcher [REDACTED] of the NTSB and Dan Merrell [REDACTED] of the FAA. They responded to the scene and conducted a follow-up investigation. Detective Brandon Matlock and Detective Sheri Wassel assisted them at the scene.

On 08 May 2014 Det Wassel and Det Matlock were assigned to the recovery team lead by Dan Merrell. The wreckage was removed from the crash site under the authority of the FAA. Photographs, video, dispatch recordings, dispatch logs, and investigative supplements were released to Dan Merrell.

Statement Regarding Airplane Crash

05/07/14

By: Capt. Shannon Beasley

On 05/07/14, at approximately 1118 hrs., Central Dispatch transmitted a call to the Sheriff's Office of a possible plane crash near the Covington Municipal Airport. Capt. Beasley, along with several other TCSO patrol units, proceeded to the area of the airport looking for any obvious signs of a possible crash site. After no immediate sign of a crash site, Capt. Beasley went to the airport where he met with Mr. Robin Anderson to get a briefing on the events as they had unfolded. Mr. Anderson stated that he was expecting Mr. Kent Wingate to fly into the Covington Airport from Ohio and he was to be picked up by Mr. Mike Beasley and taken to a funeral in Covington. Mr. Anderson stated that he called for Mr. Wingate over the radio and Wingate answered stating that was about 7-10 miles out and "had them in site". Mr. Anderson told him that he would meet him outside to greet him and begin to fuel his plane. According to Mr. Anderson, only a few minutes later he heard Mr. Wingate come back over the radio and state that "I'm out of fuel, I'm putting it down" or something very similar to those remarks. Mr. Anderson then tried to raise Wingate over the air again but received no response after several tries. Mr. Anderson stated that they were picking up an Emergency Locate Transmitter (ELT) signal north west of the airport, which was toward Hwy. 51 and Rialto Rd. area. Mr. Anderson explained to Capt. Beasley that this type of transmission was sent from a plane that had received a hard impact. By this time there were a couple of private planes in the air searching for any wreckage. THP helicopter as well as the Memphis Police helicopter had been requested. MPD helicopter helped with the search but THP was in Smyrna, TN with an extended ETA. With no further radio contact and the fact an emergency signal was indicated, we felt that there was a strong possibility that Wingate had in fact crashed. Capt. Beasley obtained Mr. Wingate's cell phone number from Mr. Anderson and had dispatch "ping" the phone to see if we could get a more certain area where the plane may be. Shortly after that request we were advised that the phone was within 3.1 miles of the cell tower on Turning Point Rd and that the last activity on the phone was an incoming call at 1232hrs but the call was not answered. We then began mapping out a radius around that cell tower and it seemed to not be in line with the flight path that Mr. Wingate filed earlier that day. During this time we were receiving information from Chief Donna Turner and pilot, Ben Baker, that they were picking up the strongest signal due north/northeast of the airport but could not locate the plane. This area seemed more practical to the flight plan Wingate had mapped out.

While the air and ground search continued, Capt. Beasley notified Shelby County Sheriff's Office personnel and was requesting the use of their cell phone system that could pin point exactly where the phone could be located. This was at approximately 1300 hrs and we heard a radio transmission from Ben Baker that they had in fact

spotted the plane and it was crashed in a wooded area just inside Lauderdale County due north of the runway at the airport. Sheriff Chumley, Capt. Beasley and Lauderdale County Sheriff, Steve Sanders, left the airport in route to that area. Radio traffic indicated that the plane was just across the Hatchie River, barely in Lauderdale County. Sheriff Chumley and Capt. Beasley could see the airplanes and the MPD helicopter hovering over the crash site and knew that it was very close to Tipton County and believed that reaching the crash site would in fact be easier and quicker from the Tipton County side. Being familiar with the area, Sheriff Chumley and Capt. Beasley were aware that the distance of heavily wooded area from the Tipton County side would be a shorter distance than if EMS were to try to reach it from Lauderdale County. We reached the wooded area via a farm owned by Mr. Richard Kelly. We found that there was approximately 30-40 yards of woods before we reached the Hatchie River but it was surrounded by a deep slough. While surveying the best route to reach the river, Mr. Ricky Jones reached us via the slough in a boat. We then loaded Law Enforcement and EMS personnel in the boat and was taken to the crash site. Jones stated that he had picked up another pilot that had made his way to the bank of the river and he was already at the crash site with the victim. Jones went "up river" about 100 yds and positioned his boat on the Lauderdale County side where we exited and began working our way to the crash site. After trekking about 50-75 yds into the woods we reached the site where we found the pilot rendering aid to Mr. Wingate. Wingate was unconscious and had visible signs of head trauma from what Capt. Beasley could see. EMS began their work, which included starting an IV. Capt. Beasley contacted Sheriff Chumley via cell phone to relay Wingate's status and requested rescue personnel with extrication tools. Wingate was trapped between his seat and the dashboard of the plane. EMS continued their work as Sheriff's Office personnel continued to try and free Wingate before rescue personnel arrived. Detectives Williams, Matlock and Wassel aided with those efforts and assisted EMS and Capt. Beasley and Deputy Bradley Williams obtained some rope and tied the tail section of the plane to a large tree to keep it from flipping over on any personnel. Rescue personnel from the Covington Fire Department had already arrived on the scene and quickly began extrication. A Dewalt reciprocating saw was used to cut an opening large enough to remove Mr. Wingate. Capt. Beasley estimates that it took approximately 10 minutes from the time the CFD personnel assessed the situation, prepped the patient from being injured from debris and cut around the patient. This rescue effort was stalled a few minutes in order to tie the tail section of the plane to the tree for their safety. Mr. Wingate was eventually removed from the plane onto a backboard and carried to an awaiting boat. Wingate and EMS personnel traveled in the boat back to our original location to the awaiting ambulance and helicopter Wing. Personnel from CFD brought Wingate's shirt and personal bag to the bank of the river where it was turned over to Lauderdale County deputies. All law enforcement and EMS personnel then traveled back to the original site. This was all of Capt. Beasley's involvement with the crash for the day. Capt. Beasley forwarded Chief Turner pictures he took via his cell phone of the crash site and extrication efforts.

Capt. Shannon Beasley