

SARASOTA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Case Number 14-51261

Date 07/27/14

Time _____

WITNESS STATEMENT

Page 1 of 25 Pages

SUBJECT: David Richard Theen

ADDRESS: _____

INVESTIGATOR(S): Det. J. Callahan [REDACTED], William Stokes, FAA Investigator (mf)

(door opens/closes)

JC: You're not in any trouble at all. We just, we do our interviews in here. It's more of a

DT: Yeah.

JC: And uh, he's going to be conducting an interview first. Just so you know it's, you're
being audio/video taped because we use that on all our interviews here, okay?

DT: Whatever.

JC: Okay. Go ahead, sir.

WS: And it's not part of the FAA investigation so their investigation is separate from ours.
All I'm doing is just working the accident, okay?

DT: Okay.

WS: So uhm, I'll just kind of go over these things again what you said, just uh, just so you'll
have all that done. You said your name is David Richard Theen, T-H-E-E-N.

DT: Correct.

WS: Private pilot, single engine, and you were sitting in the right seat. You weren't present
for the pre-flight. It was the first flight of the day and it was the first flight with Karl and
you hadn't been in an airplane for about ten years.

M.7.

DT: Correct.

WS: Pretty close? And he asked you if you wanted to go for a ride?

DT: Yep.

WS: Well I couldn't spell ride for a second. And you said you went down over Englewood
and then

DT: We left Englewood.

WS: Oh you left.

DT: We took off from Englewood.

WS: Oh, took off, okay. Took off from Englewood. And that's where the airplane is
based?

DT: Correct.

WS: Okay. And you were coming up to Venice to get fuel.

DT: Correct.

WS: Okay. Did you look at the fuel gauges to see how much fuel was in it

DT: It was about half full I believe.

WS: On both sides?

DT: Mmm I believe so, yeah.

WS: And uh, so how high were, up were you, do you remember? What's your altitude?

DT: About a 1,000 feet.

WS: Okay. What was your course of flight?

DT: We were flying, well we were, like I say we left Englewood, we flown down near
Rotonda and we were coming back uh, to Venice. We were going to land and, and
get fuel and we were over the, the runway, the active runway was two, three and uh,

we were flying, you know, down the beach and we were gonna go uh, you know make a, a right hand, or a, you know, forty-five into a downwind for two, three.

WS: Uh-huh (yes). And uh, so then when you got the airport in sight, had he called in to the traffic yet?

DT: Uh,

WS: Do you remember whether he did?

DT: Yeah, I. A lot of things happened and I think we were approaching, there was other, other plane shooting touch and goes on two, three and we had uh, we were approaching Venice. I don't know whether he had talked to them uh, at that point, but then when the engine quit we, he made, you know he called Venice and said we're, you know, declaring an emergency. And they called back. He, he had given them the end number but they had called back on the radio. I had the headset on and they were asking, you know, what's the end number and we gave, he gave them the end number and trying to get the uh, trying to get the airplane to run and it didn't run.

WS: Did he try using the key to start it do you recall?

DT: I don't recall.

WS: Were you looking outside or looking mostly inside?

DT: I was doing both. I was looking inside

WS: In and out?

DT: Yeah.

WS: And uh, as you got down closer to the ground what, what did you see? Were there

DT: Well they uh, we were gonna try to land on three, one and or what used to be three, one. I think they changed the numbers on them now, but we were gonna try to land there because it would have been a kind of a straight in, but we were, you know, we were still a ways away and, you know, that wasn't going to happen. And uh, there was a clear spot on the, on the beach and uh, there was people here and people farther up there and this clear spot and we were over the, over the, actually over the water and going and, and uh kept, you know, easing the nose up and easing the nose up an air speed kept, you know, dropping. I mean originally we were at the, probably the best (unintelligible) like 80, 80 indicated on the, I don't know whether it's in knots or, I think it's in knots on that airplane. And uh, you know, kept going and pulled up and, and, and just a lot, a lot of things happening at one time.

WS: Yeah.

DT: (unintelligible) but uh, we were over the water and going in and kept, you know, pulling the nose up to try to extend the glide and, and then we hit the water.

WS: You hit the water first?

DT: Yeah. And it, he must have the nose pulled up pretty good at that point because it was, well not good but we probably hit at a level at, attitude or maybe slightly nose up. It's hard to say for sure because

WS: Yeah.

DT: ...the, I, I believe probably the main gear hit the water and because we hit and then it nosed over. And it probably didn't go, I don't know, 30 feet or so, maybe, it's hard to say, it's in the water so it's hard to say how far the airplane went after it made initial contact and then started to, the nose went down so.

WS: And you felt the nose hit hard. You saw the ground come up in front of you?

DT: I would say so, yeah.

WS: Water splashing or any, anything?

DT: Yeah, made, made a splash.

WS: Okay. So uh, what was the first thing you do once, once it stopped?

DT: Uh, turned off the master, shut off the fuel. Uh, made sure, you know, we were okay
and uh, then I undid my seatbelt and opened the door.

WS: Just, did you have a lap belt on?

DT: Lap belt, yeah.

WS: Did you have a shoulder belt on?

DT: No.

WS: Did he have his shoulder belt on?

DT: Mmm, not to my knowledge. He had a lap belt on I know, but

WS: Yes, uh-huh (yes). Okay. Uh, when you, what'd you first, what'd you do when you
first got out of the airplane?

DT: Uh, actually I picked up the nose gear piece that was laying in my way and put it up
on the beach.

WS: It was kind of right there where you were getting ready to get off, right underneath
you?

DT: Right, yeah.

WS: By the step, kind of by the step?

DT: Yeah, in that general area. It's hard, I

WS: Was it in water or were you on the beach at that point?

DT: Uh, no I think we were in the water at that point. Uh, cause I know when I stepped out it was in water and the gear was right there so I just picked it up and put it up on the beach.

WS: Up farther, yeah. So then what did you observe from that point?

DT: Uh, I, you know I, I saw people down on the beach farther down the way. Uh,

WS: Ahead of you.

DT: Yeah,

WS: Or behind you?

DT: There were people up there. Well both. I mean when I got out I was looking toward, to, to the south so I saw people down there and there was people up to the north. It seemed to me like it was, I don't know, but maybe a hundred yards away or more. It's hard to judge distances.

WS: Uh-huh (yes). So then what happened?

DT: I got up and walked around and looked at the airplane and Karl was getting out and we're just kinda, you know, stood there for a minute, make sure we were okay. And uh, and then there were people, you know, yelling down, down at the end of the beach.

WS: Which end?

DT: The south end.

WS: So then what'd you do?

DT: I stayed there at the airplane is what I did.

WS: Okay.

DT: I didn't know what was going on. I just wanted to kind of stay calm.

WS: Okay. Did you feel like you were hurt in any way? I mean did you hit anything?

DT: No.

WS: Your head or your shoulders?

DT: No uh, I don't, I don't really think so. I mean my, my shoulders and my neck are
always sore, but

WS: Yeah.

DT: ...it wasn't uh, I didn't really hit anything in the airplane.

WS: You didn't feel like you were faint or anything or kind of dazed, or nothing like that?

DT: Uh, I, I, no I can't really say I was

WS: You just

DT: ...just in shock cause I, you know, first time I'd been in a light plane in, you know, ten
or twelve years and, you know, attempt an emergency landing and failed.

WS: Yes. So what did Karl do then when he got out of the airplane that you observed?

DT: Uh, he walked down to see what was going on down at the south end of the beach
and then he, you know, had come back. He was down there for a little while and I
just kind of stood there by the airplane.

WS: What did he say when he got back?

DT: Uh, I don't really recall. I mean I, you know, I, I really don't know. He didn't. I don't
know.

WS: Okay. Uh, when did emergency equipment start arriving then?

DT: Well he called 9-1-1. Actually, the, the radio, when we were still in the air and after
he had declared it an emergency and they got the end numbers, they said they would
call 9-1-1.

WS: Oh, I see. Okay.

DT: And then I think he had called 9-1-1 on his cell phone as well.

WS: And he was able to do all that from a 1,000 feet in the air?

DT: No, not in the air, no.

WS: Oh, I see.

DT: He was on the radio to the, Venice Unicom or whatever

WS: Ohhh.

DT: ...and they had

WS: After the airplane came to rest?

DT: No. When we were in the air

WS: Oh, okay.

DT: ...and they declared an emergency in the air

WS: Yes.

DT: ...and they called back on the radio wanting the end number of the airplane

WS: Uh-huh (yes).

DT: ..and he had told them we're not gonna make the airport, we're gonna, you know,
land on the beach. And uh, they said we'll call 9-1-1.

WS: Okay, I understand.

DT: And then after we crashed uh, he had walked down there and I think called 9-1-1
down there or gave somebody else a phone, his phone to call 9-1-1.

WS: I see. Okay. Okay. And then you just stayed there by the plane until (chime sound)

DT: I stayed there till, by the plane, yeah.

WS: Until the uh, what the emergency people got there or the Sheriff?

DT: I think the Sheriff came first. I think Venice Police boat came.

WS: Oh, I see.

DT: They came on the water and, and because it was quite a ways from the, uh, from where they could bring vehicles.

WS: I see. Uh-huh (yes).

DT: So there was a, the Venice Police boat came and then there was a guy on a jet ski that came and then uh, firemen were walking down the beach.

WS: Firemen? The rescue people?

DT: Yeah, firemen walking down the beach.

WS: Firemen first.

DT: Yeah, they didn't have a vehicle, they were walking down the beach from, you know, from the end of the road I guess.

WS: Okay. Okay. Did you ever see, did the prop continue to run during this whole time? Do you think, David, or not?

DT: Uh, it, it did. It was uh, I don't know what you call it, but it was, it was, it was turning, yeah.

WS: Okay.

DT: But there was no power.

WS: Yeah. No noise of any kind from the engine, just

DT: I don't recall.

WS: Yeah.

DT: It was, the prop I guess was freewheeling or uh

WS: Uh-huh (yes).

DT: Yeah, I guess that's the term.

WS: Uh-huh (yes).

DT: It was doing that, but uh, the engine had no power. It wasn't really running.

WS: How do you think the airplane hit? Do you think, and, and you think it kind of hit in
this

DT: I do, I do.

WS: ...in this attitude

DT: Right.

WS: ...and then lunged forward.

DT: I believe it did, yeah. Because it kept easing back. I mean we were like at 80 and
pulling down 70 and it was getting, and as we were getting closer to the water he
eased the nose up and

WS: Uh-huh (yes).

DT: ...because I'm, I'm pretty confident that the main gear hit the water first and then it
went over.

WS: Do, do you think it dropped suddenly at the end at all or you just kind of, kind of just
scooted on do you think?

DT: Oh we didn't scoot on. It just, it hit and, you know

WS: Okay.

DT: ...it pretty, pretty, pretty quickly.

WS: It didn't go very far.

DT: No. Like I say it maybe went, seemed like 30 feet or something. I mean it's hard to
say. I mean

WS: Sure

DT: ...we're in an airplane moving and

WS: Sure.

DT: ...it's hard to say, but uh, it didn't go very far once it hit the water.

WS: Okay. Anything else you want to tell us about it that seemed unusual to you or

DT: No, well it, nothing really seemed unusual.

WS: You've flown before. You said you had a pilot's license, so

DT: Since 1974.

WS: ...so you, you kind of knew some of the things that were going on so

DT: Right.

WS: ...you have very good information and I appreciate your

DT: Right.

WS: ...I appreciate your uh, cooperation and your

DT: Yeah.

WS: ...willingness to, to uh, share with us what's going on.

DT: Uh-huh (yes). Yeah.

WS: Things are happening like you say real fast

DT: Real fast.

WS: ...for, for a while there and of course I'm very glad that you're

DT: At ten thousand feet you got a long time, but at a 1,000 feet

WS: It's

DT: ...or maybe 900 we were getting, you know, close

WS: Right.

DT: ...900 to 1,000 feet, pattern altitude's 800 feet so.

WS: Sure.

DT: Uh,

WS: But up until that time you hadn't seen the airplane do anything unusual, didn't see anything

DT: Well I seen the airplane, you know, all the time and Jonathan and, and Karl, they keep the airplane in my hangar.

WS: Oh, I see.

DT: So, yeah I see the airplane every day when I'm out in the hangar, but.

WS: And uh, is it a, is it a closed hangar? They lock it, there's

DT: Yeah, my hangar I lock it, yeah.

WS: Oh, okay.

DT: Uh-huh (yes).

WS: But, on today's flight you hadn't heard it burping any or on the takeoff you hadn't noticed anything unusual?

DT: No, it seemed to be running fine. It uh, yeah it seemed to be

WS: Really surprised when it, when it quit, huh?

DT: Yeah. It uh, had started running, you know, like there was a fouled plug or something like that uh, it's hard to say. But it started running rough a little bit, but we were, you know, almost to Venice at that time. That was just before it quit actually.

WS: How long before you think?

DT: Thirty seconds maybe. At that.

WS: Really? Yeah. Pretty, pretty close, pretty short warning period, you think?

JC: Karl did a good job?

DT: Yeah.

JC: Okay. All right. And uhm, so obviously the people uh, that were hit, did you see them? Did, did you remember seeing them?

DT: I didn't see anybody.

JC: Didn't see anybody? So the plane crashed, you guys get out, shut the fuel off and as you say the

DT: I thought we were past, you know the people on the beach.

JC: When you found out that people were hit, were you shocked like, oh my God?

DT: I was.

JC: Yeah.

DT: I'm still in shock pretty much.

JC: You know and I can imagine. I mean you said what, it's 10 years since you've been in a plane. It's not funny, what I'm saying is just

DT: Yeah, well I was in an airliner, but not

JC: Right.

DT: ...in a little airplane.

JC: You ever been in a situation like that before, all the years of flying?

DT: I've made forced landings before.

JC: Really? Okay. So you've had a pilot license since '74? Flying little planes like that? I mean that's considered

DT: Swift.

JC: Swift?