



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Eastern Region – Ashburn, Virginia

RECORD OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

Who: Albert Rene Vargas, pilot

Witness: Alan Armstrong, Attorney representing Mr. Vargas

When: January 26, 2016, at 1400 EST

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Vargas stated that he rented an airplane from his employer, Florida Flyers Flight Academy, for the purpose of flying to his home in Alpharetta, Georgia, to have dinner with his wife. As part of his pre-flight planning, he obtained the weather along the route of flight, which included a 20 knot headwind, and planned a VFR flight on Foreflight to Lawrenceville, Georgia. The pilot said he visually checked each fuel tank before the flight and they were topped off for a total of 26 gallons (24.5 usable). He said that had sufficient fuel to get to his destination and did not plan to stop for fuel.

The pilot said he and his passenger departed St. Augustine, Florida, at 1600 and climbed to an altitude of 5,500 ft. The pilot said the flight was normal and when he was about 50 miles from Lawrenceville, he descended to 3,500 ft. Once level at the new altitude and about 3.5 hours into the flight, the engine began to run rough. The pilot turned on the carburetor heat thinking the roughness was due to carburetor icing, which seemed to restore power. The pilot then contacted air traffic control and began a diversion to Madison, Georgia. While en route to Madison Municipal Airport, the engine started running rough again. The pilot trimmed the airplane for best glide speed and made several attempts to re-start the engine even though he said it was still producing some power. The pilot realized he was not going to make the airport and told air traffic control that he was going to make an off-field landing. The pilot did not recall what occurred after he landed because he got knocked unconscious from the impact. However, he did say that he and his passenger were wearing their respective seatbelt and shoulder harnesses, but still sustained serious facial injuries.

The pilot said that before takeoff he noted that the fuel gauges both indicated full-tanks. The last time he saw the fuel gauge was about an hour into the flight, when the right fuel gauge was "on empty" and the left fuel gauge indicated just below the "full" mark. The pilot said he had flown this airplane numerous times and felt that these fuel gauge readings were normal for this particular airplane. When asked what he thought caused the

engine to lose power, he said it was most likely fuel starvation. When asked if he ran out of gas, he replied, "yes."

Leah D. Read

Sr. Air Safety Investigator

National Transportation Safety Board