

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Voluntary Statement

Date 12/24/2016

Case# 16MB005238

Page 1 of ²4

I, the undersigned, Perley J. Jerome, dob: [REDACTED] I currently reside at [REDACTED]
Salisbury VT 05769.

**I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO
Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.**

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:30 a.m., I was at Airport Auto on Schoolhouse Hill Road, in Middlebury checking on a vehicle to purchase. While there, I was outside on the north side of the building. I heard a plane sputtering. By "sputtering" I mean the engine sounded like it wasn't getting any fuel. I have heard small planes take off before from this airport many, many times, and this engine sound didn't sound like a normal plane taking off. I looked up and saw a plane with its engine sputtering, flying in a southerly direction. The plane then looped in a counter-clockwise direction. At this point, I didn't hear any motor running from the plane. As it was turning, I could see the plane was going down. As the plane was going down, it was heading in a northerly direction, but was going down at a fast rate. I saw the plane hit the top portion of a tree, and as the plane went beyond the tree, I caught glimpse of a piece of metal in the tree branches. I then heard the crash, but I did not see the plane hit the ground due to a small building between me and the plane crash site. As the plane was going down, I did not see any fire or smoke coming from the plane. [REDACTED]

I immediately ran toward the crash site, and I could see smoke coming from the crash area as I got to the west side of the road. I was the first person to get to the crash site. I could smell fuel, and I was worried the plane was going to blow-up. There was a round instrument on the dashboard of the plane that was still spinning around. The door on the co-pilot (right) side of the plane was gone. The pilot was in his seat, but was leaning way over onto the passenger side. I could see blood running from his nose, ear and mouth. I said, "Hey, you alive?" The pilot only groaned. I didn't even see his eyes open. The pilot was still in his seatbelt, a waist belt only. By this time there was fire on the building (shed) next to the plane, on the front of the plane where the engine is, and behind both seats of the plane. By then there were other people coming from the shop that is south of the crash site. I asked for a jackknife from somebody. Someone gave me a closed folding knife, and I opened it in a hurry and reached over the pilot and cut the seatbelt on the far (left) side of the pilot. I pulled the pilot out until his body was just out of the plane. At this time, a guy with a fire extinguisher arrived. He started spraying the plane, and the front of the plane and building. I asked for some help, and two guys helped me pull the pilot away from the plane to an area on the lawn near the garage. The girl from Airport Auto was there, and she started CPR. We then decided to move the pilot further away from the plane because there was a large amount of black smoke coming from the plane. We picked him up and took him around to the driveway next to the house. The girl

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Date/Time finished: 12/24/2016 2:00 p.m. Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 24th day of December, 2016.

[REDACTED]
Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Voluntary Statement

Date 12/24/2016

Case# 16MB005238

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Page 1 of 1

I, the undersigned, Perley J. Jerome, dob: [REDACTED] I currently reside at [REDACTED]
Salisbury VT 05769.

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continued CPR. The fire department arrived and then two ambulances. I think one police officer was
there before the fire trucks got there. [REDACTED]

At no time did the pilot speak or open his eyes. [REDACTED]

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that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police
is a crime. [REDACTED]

Date/Time finished: 12/24/2016 2:00 p.m. Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 24th day of December, 2016.

[REDACTED]
Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Voluntary Statement

Date 12/26/16

Case# 16MB005238

Page 1 of 1

I, the undersigned, Gary E. Delphia, dob: [REDACTED], currently reside at [REDACTED] Middlebury, VT, 05753.

I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:30 a.m., I was at my residence at [REDACTED] Middlebury. I was outside getting my car ready to go to Middlebury. I could hear an ungodly loud noise. I knew it was an airplane. I used to work in the garage at Louis Poirier's on a race car with him. I've heard many airplanes take-off and land at the airport. This plane sounded like it was skipping. The motor was revving, but it sounded like it was skipping. It sounded like it wasn't going anywhere, like it was stalled in the air. I never saw the plane. I got in my car and left, and as I was going to Middlebury I met police and rescue vehicles heading south on Route 7. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time finished: 11:22 a.m.

Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 26th day of December, 2016.

[REDACTED]
Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
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Case# 16MB005238

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I, the undersigned, Joshua J. Parks, dob: [REDACTED] currently reside at [REDACTED] New Haven, VT 05472.

I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:30 a.m., I was moving a truck out of my shop which is south of where the plane accident was. I parked the truck on the north side of the shop building. I heard a plane that sounded like it was coming down the runway to take off. At this time, the plane sounded fine, like it was operating normally. I looked toward the area of the runway, I saw the plane taking off just above the tree line. At this point, I heard the planes motor start to spit and sputter. It sounded like the motor was misfiring. I saw the plane turn in a counter-clockwise direction. It appeared that the pilot turned the plane very quickly. The plane came around and it looked like it was starting to even out. While that pilot was making the turn, the plane went dead quiet, there was no engine noise. The plane started drop, and the left wing area collided with the upper part of a tree. The plane then nose-dived right to the ground. I don't think I saw any fire, flame or smoke when the plane hit the upper part of the tree. I definitely saw a burst of flame as the plane hit the ground. [REDACTED]

I grabbed my cell phone and discovered I didn't have any service. I ran toward the shop, and my boss Sean came out, and I asked him to call -911. I saw a male near the cockpit who came back toward me asking if anybody had a knife. I gave him my jackknife, and he went back to the plane and cut the seatbelt of the pilot. I followed him. He handed me back the knife and he started pulling back on the pilot and his legs were caught. He reached in further, and I assisted him in removing the pilot. During this time, the pilot said nothing, he was totally unconscious. I saw that he was gurgling blood from his mouth. We pulled him away from the plane. A number of other people started coming in. Wyatt Ploof's wife asked if he needed CPR, and I said yes. The plane was on fire. I could hear a buzzing noise coming from the plane in the cockpit area. I saw a key in the ignition. I reached in and turned it off, and pulled the key out of the ignition. I threw it on the passenger side floor. A guy from the airport arrived with a fire extinguisher. I went to get more and we tried to put out the fire as best as we could. The fire department and rescue then arrived. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time finished: 2:38 p.m.

Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 26th day of December, 2016.

[REDACTED] Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
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I, the undersigned, Michael C. Vincent, dob: [REDACTED] currently reside at [REDACTED] Middlebury, VT, 05753.

I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

I am the owner of J and M Aviation which is based at the Middlebury Airport. I've known Paul Bessler for approximately 14 years. Paul was employed by J&M Aviation as an aircraft mechanic. He was hired for that position in 2002, and has held it since that time. Paul obtained his private pilot's license in 2003. Paul had an air frame and power plant license, and IA (Inspection Authorization) license. Paul was a very thorough airplane mechanic. [REDACTED]

On 12/23/2016, Paul arrived at the airport around 8:15 a.m. He appeared normal, no health, or other complaints. He was excited about getting the "Warrior" set so he could take his daughter for a ride on the following Monday. The Piper Cherokee Warrior was the plane that Paul crashed in. Paul removed snow from the plane. I helped him move the plane so it pointed to the south so the sun would warm it up. I know he plugged the engine heater in. He also put a battery charger on the battery. I know he "sumped" (took samples of the fuel). The samples would show if there was water or other contamination in the fuel. The entire walk around inspection, fuel sumping, battery charging, etc. was captured on video outside of the hanger. It had been about two months since Paul had flown this airplane (The Warrior). Paul never mentioned any issues with the Warrior that day. I last spoke with Paul around 9:00 a.m. when I gave him his paycheck. [REDACTED]

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:35 a.m., I was walking in front of the main hanger at the Middlebury State Airport. On the airport video, it shows Paul taxiing to the end of runway 19 at 11:37 a.m. There is a radio call recorded on the State's Guardian recorder that from Paul that he was departing "19." As Paul was taking off, I was in front of the lean-to next to the taxi way. I saw the plane taking off from the runway. He lifted off the runway approximately 800 feet from his starting point. At this point everything looked and sounded normal with the plane. I watched him climb, and about an altitude of about 150 feet (in line with a Green Mountain south hanger) Paul "wagged" his wings. I thought he was making a friendly signal to someone on the ground. Just after that, at about another 150 feet in the air, I did hear a skip in the engine. It was one skip, then the engine went back to normal. Paul continued to climb, and just after the "skip" I saw the plane made a slight turn to the right. Right after that, the plane turned to the left (it appeared to turn smoothly) as it continued the turn, when it got to about a 45 degree bank, the plane stalled (Wing stall). The plane had no more lift. I saw the plane rapidly fall into the trees. I lost sight of the plane after it hit the trees. I heard the plane crash. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time finished: _____

Signed _____

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 27th day of December, 2016.

Notary Public

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Date 12/27/16

Case# 16MB005238

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I, the undersigned, Michael C. Vincent, dob: [REDACTED] currently reside at [REDACTED] Middlebury, VT, 05753.

I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

I got in my vehicle and went immediately to the crash site. Upon my arrival, I saw the plane up against the shed and tree. The left wing was on the opposite side of the fuselage. A guy told me "I cut the seatbelt and pulled him out, I didn't want to leave him in there." I could see that the wing started on fire. I saw no fire when I first got to the scene. However, there was some smoke coming from the front of the plane. Paul was at the back of the garage at this point. A guy that works for the State, Cisco, at the airport started CPR on Paul. A female then arrived, we moved Paul to the side of the garage, and the female took over CPR. [REDACTED]

I don't know why Paul tried to return to the airport after whatever occurred with the plane's engine. As pilots, we try to fly the plane forward, and not turn back due to a lack of altitude. My sense is that Paul felt he could make it back to a space where he could safely land. I feel that the engine was still running when Paul made the turn. I'm quite certain that if it wasn't running, Paul would have continued south. [REDACTED]

The plane that Paul was flying (Piper Cherokee Warrior, PA-28 161) was actually owned by an airport customer. Paul had flown this plane for many, many years, and had performed all the routine maintenance on it for the last eight (8) years or so. Paul was thoroughly familiar with this plane. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time finished: _____

Signed [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 27th day of December, 2016.

[REDACTED] Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
Voluntary Statement

Date 12/27/16

Case# 16MB005238

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I, the undersigned, Allen M. Vincent, dob: [REDACTED] currently reside at [REDACTED] Middlebury, VT, 05753.

I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:30 a.m., I was in front of the main hanger at the Middlebury State Airport. Paul Bessler and my father, Michael Vincent were getting the plane ready so Paul and I could go flying. The plane was a Piper Cherokee Warrior. Paul performed all the pre-flight checks to make sure everything was functional. I was asked again by my father to see if I still wanted to go flying. At that time, I was acid washing panels to another plane. I said no, because I didn't want to get in it because I was a little too big for it. The plane is a little too small for me. [REDACTED]

Paul got in the plane and taxi'd down to the northend of the runway. I went into the paint hanger to drop off parts of the plane I was scrubbing. By that time, Paul was taking off as I walked back outside. I watched him take off until he passed our main hanger. I turned around to walk back to the paint hanger, and as I did so I continued watching the plane. I heard a quick little back-fire coming from the plane. I heard it only once as I walked in the paint hanger door. I walked back out again saw a ball of smoke off the southeast side of the runway. I went into the main hanger, and my dad screamed across the hanger that Paul had crashed. I got on a 4-wheeler and went to the southend of the runway. I got around the fence and through the woods to the crash site. I walked by the nose of the plane that was on fire at that time. At that point, Paul was about twenty feet from the plane. A lady was doing CPR on him. There were at least 3 or 4 people around Paul. I picked up Paul's hat. We decided to pick him up and move him further away from the fire. We dragged him to near the corner of the house. Cisco (Francisco Herrera, Airport Manager) did CPR on Paul after the woman got tired. I was there when the Rescue personnel used the paddles (AED) on Paul. I saw no response from Paul, and I walked away. [REDACTED]

I don't think that plane was flown for a couple months. Paul was very familiar with this plane. On this day, I talked with Paul while he was looking over the plane, before he went up. Paul seemed fine, and had no complaints. He never mentioned any issues with the plane at all. He did all the pre-flight checks as he was supposed to do. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time Finished: 11:56 a.m.

Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 27th day of December, 2016.

Notary Public

MIDDLEBURY POLICE DEPARTMENT
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I, the undersigned, Francisco A. Herrera, dob: [REDACTED] currently reside at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] North Clarendon, VT, 05759.

**I DO VOLUNTARILY GIVE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT OF MY OWN FREE WILL TO
Sgt. Michael Christopher of the Middlebury Police Department.**

THIS STATEMENT IS THE TRUTH TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF.

I am the Airport manager at the Middlebury State Airport, and have been for over one year. I've known Paul Bessler since I have been in this position. Paul was a top-notch mechanic. He was very meticulous and by the book. He was also an excellent pilot. [REDACTED]

On 12/23/2016, at about 11:40 a.m., I was in the Green Mountain hanger with Bill Hanf. We heard Paul on the radio saying that he was taking off on runway 19. I could hear the plane take off. It sounded like a normal take-off. I never heard a sputter or any other unusual noise from the plane. Mike Delaney came into the hanger and yelled "We just had a crash." I ran outside told Mike to jump in my truck, and we both headed to the southend of the runway. Mike told me "whoever's in that plane is dead." When we got to the end of the runway, I could see the smoke, and I jumped the fence. I ran to where the smoke was. I saw the plane lying next to the shed. The plane was on fire. I didn't see Paul in the plane, and I asked where he was. One of the guy's who pulled him out said "He's over here." Paul was about twenty feet from the plane lying down. Mike had just got there, and he shook Paul, saying "talk to me." There was no response. I immediately felt for a pulse, and there was none. I started chest compressions. A girl showed up and I told her I didn't get a pulse. She checked and verified no pulse. She then took over CPR. At no time did Paul regain consciousness or say anything. We moved Paul again because the fire was getting bigger. I took over compressions again until rescue got there. [REDACTED]

I saw Paul that morning. He was in a good mood. There was no indications that anything was wrong, he was acting normally. He said he was going to brush off the plane and run it up. (Go through all pre-flight and start the plane.) I'm very certain that had Paul found or sensed that anything was not right with the plane, he would not have flown it until it was addressed. [REDACTED]

By signing this statement I acknowledge that I have read or have had this statement read to me and that it is the truth. I further understand that to give a false statement intended to mislead the police is a crime. [REDACTED]

Time Finished: 12:26 p.m.

Signed: [REDACTED]

Subscribed and sworn to me on this 2nd day of December, 2016.

Notary Public

Michael Delaney.

At 12:00 I Michael Delaney was a passenger in my girl friend's vehicle on the Airport Access Rd, perpendicular to the Runway. We saw a Brown/Gold Warrior taking off. Upon stopping to enter the taxiway I looked Right (South) and saw (Sun was behind, I don't know if it was top side or bottom) the warrior in a nose down attitude wings perpendicular to the Runways, in a cartwheel spin. When it became apparent he was not going to recover, he entered the tree line nose down, I looked away. I heard the crash, got out of the vehicle, grabbed everyone at Green Mountain Audubon, and proceeded to the scene.

My only audio was of the short time on Roll up. where I was perpendicular. At the time I had no indication there was any issue.



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Heidi Kemner
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

December 27, 2016

Subject: ERA17FA072
Who: Witness – Michael Vincent

In a conversation with Mr. Vincent, he stated the following:

- The pilot was taking the airplane out to fly since it had not flown in the past two months. He was ensuring everything work correctly prior to taking a family member flying.
- The airplane was kept outside, but they were going to put it inside over the weekend since the pilot intended to take the airplane out on Monday, December 26th.
- The pilot preheated the airplane for about 2 hours until he was going to go fly.
- The pilot performed the preflight check and engine run up prior to taxiing out to runway 19.
- He saw the airplane take off, and then “wave its wings” around 150 feet above ground level. Right after it “waved its wings,” the engine “skipped.”
- After that, the airplane continued to climb until about 300-400 feet above ground level.
- Then the airplane made a slight right turn and then a steep left turn. In the left turn, when the wings passed the 45-degree angle turn, the airplane stalled and went down.
- The airplane struck a tree prior to impacting the ground.
- The witness stated that the pilot was an A&P and IA as well.
- The pilot was a great mechanic who would never fly an airplane he didn’t think was safe.
- The pilot helped maintain the airplane and would make sure it “was exercised” for the owner.
- The witness said that it was about 20 degrees the night before the accident and it warmed up to about 40 on the day of the accident.