



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Eastern Region – Ashburn, Virginia

RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Who: Von Richter, CFI and A&P/IA mechanic

When: September 27, 2017

RE: ERA17FA330

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Richter stated that he is a freelance flight instructor and was John “Kyle” Barron’s primary flight instructor. Mr. Richter said he was 76 years old, had over 28,000 flight hours and was also an FAA certified mechanic. He had previously owned the accident airplane and sold it to Mr. Barron so he could conduct his training. Mr. Richter was very upset and distraught about the accident. He said he has been a CFI for many years and this was the first time one of his students had ever had an accident.

Mr. Richter stated that he had flown with Mr. Barron the day before the accident (9/19) and they planned to meet in the morning (9/20) and fly to St. Simon’s Island, GA, where Mr. Barron was scheduled to take his private pilot check-ride the following day (9/21). Mr. Richter stated that Mr. Barron wanted to do some additional training prior to the check-ride. Mr. Richter said that Mr. Barron told him that he wanted to leave “early” the next morning but did not discuss a specific time. Mr. Richter said that on the morning of the accident, he was up early (normal for him) and checked the weather. He knew Mr. Barron would be departing his private airstrip in Rhine, GA, (about 30 miles away) and flying to Turner County Airport, Ashburn, GA, to pick him up before heading to St. Simon’s. The weather was reporting fog in some areas, so he called Mr. Barron about 5:57 am, but he did not answer his phone. Mr. Richter then got a text from Mr. Barron at 6:05 am, that stated, “I’ll see you in a few.” Mr. Richter responded, “ok.” This was his last communication with Mr. Barron.

Mr. Richter was asked numerous times why Mr. Barron wanted to depart so early that morning. He responded, “not sure.” It may have been due to the convective weather that was forecasted later in the afternoon, and he wanted to get his training in beforehand. However, Mr. Richter said that they could have departed at 9:00 am and been fine. Mr. Richter described Mr. Barron as “head strong” and that when he got something in his mind to do, he did it. He was the boss.

Mr. Richter said Mr. Barron was “very healthy” and drank power drinks. He said that Mr. Barron was “always moving – can’t sit still.” He also said Mr. Barron didn’t sleep much, but was “...always coherent and functioned well.” Mr. Richter was not aware of any health issues or if Mr. Barron was taking any medications.

Mr. Richter said he knew for a fact that Mr. Barron had landed/taken off at least 30-40 times from his private airstrip at night. He had advised him not too on several occasions because it was not safe. The strip was in poor condition and not properly lighted. He learned after the accident that Mr. Barron had also taken several family and friends up for rides when it was illegal to do so as a student pilot. Mr. Richter said Mr. Barron was a “good pilot” but “very head strong.” Mr. Barron had “no fear – saw no danger.” He also said that Mr. Barron always checked the weather before a flight but that he “didn’t know weather” like a more experienced pilot would. Mr. Barron also used his iPad for Foreflight and his handheld GPS to navigate.

Mr. Richter said the accident airplane was in good operating condition. The pilot and another family member, who had flown the airplane, had reported a “hiccup” or “shake” in the engine. The cause of this was not identified. However, Mr. Richter said that he wanted to make sure the airplane was “perfect” for the check ride, so his son (also a mechanic) replaced the magnetos a few days before the accident thinking the “hiccup” was due to an electrical problem. Mr. Richter said the pilot flew “a lot” and he had replaced the oil and oil filter about 4 times in the past few months. He said that he opened the oil filter each time and no metal was observed. Mr. Barron had not reported any difficulty in starting the engine. Mr. Richter said that he had never experienced it either.

On the morning of the accident, Mr. Richter received a phone call from the pilot’s uncle asking him if Mr. Barron had arrived in Ashburn. Mr. Richter said, “No, he’s 15 minutes late.” He then advised the uncle to walk over to his airplane and monitor 121.5 to see if they could hear an ELT. While still on the phone together, the uncle tuned his airplane’s radio to 121.5 and they could hear a strong ELT signal. It was then that they both knew that Mr. Barron had crashed. Mr. Richter said he drove immediately to Rhine and later was on-scene of the accident. His observations of the wreckage were that the engine was producing power and the landing light was turned “on.”

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