



MEMORANDUM OF RECORD

Eric Alleyne
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern
Region

NTSB Case Number: ERA18FA128

NTSB telephone interview: John
Williams (Tow Pilot)

Interview date: 4/15/2018

Glider pilot: Thomas Irlbeck

Subject: Accident investigation
inquiry-tow operation

In a telephone interview with Mr. John Williams the glider tow pilot, he said he towed the pilot's glider for the past five years and spoke highly of the Mr. Irlbeck (glider pilot) abilities. He said that he and the Mr. Irlbeck were in radio communication prior to takeoff. He said Mr. Irlbeck requested a "left break" after takeoff, which was precautionary, in the event the tow rope broke on climb out. The Mr. Williams was not concerned with this request since the winds were aligned with the active runway. The Mr. Irlbeck also requested to be towed up to "3,000 ft above the field before release" and the Mr. Williams acknowledged. During the climb out, about 200 ft above ground level (agl), the Mr. Williams noticed that the tow rope had a lot of slack, which did not seem normal. He also said that the glider was "moving around a lot more than he was accustomed too." The Mr. Williams started a shallow turn to the right to keep the airplane upwind and to "take up the slack in the tow rope." After this maneuver the glider did not reduce the slack out of the line, which effected the glider's airspeed. At 400 ft agl the glider encountered a thermal and began to climb rapidly while lifting the tail of the tow airplane. The Mr. Williams was about to release the glider when it released from the tow rope. The Mr. Williams continued in straight level flight to avoid the glider, and when he was far enough away to look back, he noticed that the glider was about 200 ft below the tow airplane in a spin. Mr. Williams watched as the glider continued in a spin until it collided with the ground.