



MEMORANDUM OF RECORD

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

NTSB Case Number: ERA18FA231

Surviving parachutist: William
Middlebrooks

Place: East Georgia Regional Airport
(SBO), Swainsboro, Georgia

Telephone interview: 5/27/2019

Subject: Accident recollection

In a brief telephone conversation with the rear parachutist Mr. William Middlebrooks, he said On the day of the accident around the second or third load of the day; after they landed the airplane, the pilot noticed that the fuel cap was missing. After finding that out, he contacted the mechanic of the airport and see if they had a spare that they could use for the day. The mechanic told them that he didn't have a cap but he did have some fuel tape. The plane flew fine for 2 more loads.

Mr. Middlebrooks did not recall what happen during the accident sequence.

To: Michael Pupek

From: Kathy Durden

Ref.: August 25, 2018 small aircraft crash at Swainsboro Georgia

My daughter, Katie Durden and myself went to the Swainsboro Country Club pool around 12:30. We notice a plane that had writing on it that said something about "sky diving". We had a brief conversation regarding that we did not know that Swainsboro airport had this activity. We watched the plane land and continue our day at the pool. Within about 40 minutes one of my daughter's friends arrived, Jill Sause. We spoke and then the three of us entered the pool. A fourth lady arrived and was standing outside the pool as my daughter introduced me to her. The four of us were talking (three in the pool (Katie, Jill, myself) and one outside of pool (Joan Nasworthy)).

My daughter was facing the airfield and stated, "that baby better get on up." The plane looked as if it was trying to climb. It was about 100 feet up in the air and maybe 150 yards out. We could see it from the pool over the pool fence. Within seconds of Katie's statement her friend Jill stated, "the engine just stopped." The plane slightly wobbled (my left, then right). Then within a micro second looked still. I stated, it is going to crash during this time. Joan Nasworthy stated, "they are playing". We began to move from pool as I was saying, "no it is going to crash." At this same time the plane took a sharp turn (my right his left). The planes nose hit the dirt very quickly once the sharp turn was made. It sounded like a thud—the plane flattened to the ground from my view still intact. I could see a small fire to the left of the front of plane. We all yelled call 911 as this was going on- and assisted as we could. A bystander, Dean Gowen was able to assist two people out as emergency personnel began to arrive.

I hope that this statement is helpful. I appreciated your kindness as you conducted the first interview with us. We continue to pray for the families and the young man still recovering. Please let me know if I can be of any more assistance. Thank you for the work you do. It must be very difficult task to investigate such tragedies.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kathy Durden, COO

CarePartners of Georgia

MEMORANDUM OF RECORD

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NTSB Case Number: ERA18FA231
Subject: Accident timeline witness statement

Parachute packer/ administration: Jack Broadhead

OK, here's basically everything I remember:

I'm sure you know this, but the runways in Statesboro were being resurfaced, so we had to move all our operations to Swainsboro. After school (I'm a senior at Statesboro High School) on Friday (Aug 24), Justin, Chris, and I took all the gear to Swainsboro. Once we got there, we set up and two tandem customers arrived. We did not have a pilot yet, because Cathy was flying in from Florida with Andrew. The customers waited all afternoon until, right as the sun was setting, Cathy and Andrew landed. The jump plane was already in Swainsboro; they flew in on another Cessna. Because there wasn't enough sunlight for any jumping, I left and drove back to Statesboro. One thing I noticed was that there were a ton of police or sheriff's cars parked on the ramp. We talked about it and figured they were doing some kind of training.

On Saturday morning, I picked up Cathy and Andrew from the airport in Statesboro (Justin had given them a ride the night before, but I don't know what they were doing in Statesboro). I drove the three of us back to Swainsboro. They mainly talked about flying and skydiving and their careers. Once in Swainsboro, the sun had just come up, and Cathy wanted to take Andrew on a flight just to familiarize him with the plane and the area. They invited me to go on a ride along, so I did. I think they flew to 5,000 feet, then landed. By that time, Justin and William had arrived so they decided to do a quick jump to get a feel for the landing site. I again went on a ride along, and Andrew flew while Cathy coached him. Justin and William jumped at around 5,000 feet and I had some fun watching them land from the air. Andrew, Cathy and I landed. Neither of these first 2 flights were recorded because the computer program we log all this stuff in (Burple) is mainly used for accounting purposes, and Cathy wanted to give Justin and William each a free jump. Cathy seemed pleased with Andrew's flying, and she flew away to Ohio sometime around this time in the same plane that she and Andrew had flown in from Florida on.

The 2 tandem customers from Friday were there, so I did their paperwork (waivers, watching a safety video, getting put into the computer). Justin got them harnessed up and did 2 loads with them, one at a time. I stayed on the ground, and I think William was on those flights to practice his camera work. I thought about it some more, and I think that it was after these two flights that Andrew fueled the plane. I went over to the fuel pump with him because I was done packing and had nothing else to do, and then he realized that the cap on the right wing was missing. We walked all around the ramp looking for it, inside the hangar, and in the plane. He talked about it with Justin, and they had me call the mechanic on Justin's phone. I told him we were missing a fuel cap and he told me that he had a plane in his shop and we could borrow the cap from it for the day. He said he would send someone over. A while later, a guy showed up and he and Andrew messed with the plane for a few minutes, then Andrew told Justin and I that they decided to use "fuel cell tape" but weren't too worried because the tank had a "secondary valve". He showed this valve to me and it was a little metal flap under the cap, like in a car. By this time, Chris and Alex were there, so on the next flight was Chris and Justin (doing one of Chris's AFF jumps) and William

"They" imp
pilot and th
mechanic

and Alex (just doing a fun jump). After they took off, Casey showed up and started repacking a reserve parachute. Casey and I walked out to the landing site (just the section of grass between the taxiway and the runway in front of the hangar) and watched Justin, Chris, Alex, and William as they landed. This means that one flight happened with the improvised fuel cap, and I didn't hear anything else about it so I guess it worked. They brought their chutes in and William and Alex packed theirs, Justin packed his, and I packed Chris's.

The next load was Alex (doing another fun jump), William (another fun jump), Justin (instructor for Chris), and Chris (AFF jump). I was in the office next to the hangar and I remember looking out the window and seeing Casey talking to them in the plane. He walked back into the hangar as the plane started and taxied to the runway, and I went and sat with Casey while he worked on the reserve he had been repacking. We didn't have the entire hangar door open (because it was huge), so I didn't see the plane take off. It felt like only a minute before I heard a siren. I figured it was all the police training from Friday, so I went to see what they were doing. When I could see outside, I saw a car (probably sheriff) driving really fast down the runway. My first thought was that they were doing some kind of high speed driving drill, but after a second I thought that was weird to do on an active runway or even the taxiway. There were trees in the way, so I couldn't see the end of the runway, so I walked out further to see what the car was driving towards. Once I was in the middle of the ramp, I could see around the trees and saw some fire trucks parked around some smoke. I still thought it was a drill, so I walked back to the office to grab a pair of binoculars. As I walked in, a customer had shown up (I never got her name, unfortunately), and she asked what was going on. I told her I had no idea, still sure it was some kind of training exercise. I grabbed the binoculars and we walked outside to look. By that time it was just a huge fireball off the end of the runway, with a ton of thick black smoke. I thought to myself, this is more than a training exercise. A guy in a pickup truck (with an old tractor on a trailer, I think he had been mowing) drove up and said something about a jump plane crashing. I walked to get Casey. I told Casey that I thought a plane had crashed, but the fire department got here way too fast to be our plane. He was kind of smiling and said, "you're scaring me a little". I think we both thought it wasn't really our plane that had crashed. He got up and we walked outside. The fire had calmed down quite a bit, and he got in his car and drove down to see what happened. I still thought it wasn't our plane, then the mower guy drove up again and told me it was a skydiving plane. He asked how many were on board, so I said 3, though about it, then corrected myself and said 5. He said, in a really insensitive voice, "Well, that's 5 fatalities right there" and drove away. That's when my first hint of how serious it was hit me. I went inside the office and used the radio they had and said, "Jump plane, are you on this frequency?" After no response I asked for any plane to respond but got nothing. By now more fire trucks and ambulances were driving to the crash, and I got a call from Adam (another skydiver and video editor for TJP who was in Savannah (where he lives; he had taken the weekend off)) and he asked for information. I had none and still wasn't convinced it was our plane, so I told him all I knew. I guess he heard about it on social media, I'm not sure. Casey got back and said it was our plane. That's when I finally accepted what happened. Some time after that, another skydiver (an AFF student whose name I can't remember) arrived and asked what happened. The female customer was still there but I lost track of her after that. Casey and I told him. Casey had me get the manifest sheet (with the list of who was on the plane), then told us there was nothing really to do but pack up the stuff. We had some trouble contacting Cathy because she had forwarded all her calls to my phone, but Casey managed to eventually. He drove back and forth between the hangar and the crash a few times. The AFF guy and I loaded our cars with as much gear as we could. At one point two life flight helicopters landed on the ramp in front of the hangar. An ambulance pulled up to one, and I think Casey did too. After a minute, the helicopter took off. I was scared of the answer, so I didn't ask Casey for any details of the crash or who that was in the helicopter. Once our cars were completely full, the AFF guy and I went into the office and found Casey talking to some paramedics and sheriffs. I sat down, and texted my parents just to tell them that I was OK in case they saw a plane had crashed on the news. I prayed

a lot too. I heard Casey tell somebody that, "...he is conscious but can't remember anything", but I didn't know who he was talking to or about. I found out later it was William. After that, Casey told the AFF student and I that we had been a huge help and that he would get all the rest of the stuff, and we could go back to Statesboro. Cathy called me at some point and had me grab her phone charger, then we drove back to our home base at the airport in Statesboro and unloaded all the gear we had. It was most of the parachutes and office supplies (a computer and a printer, pens/pencils, waivers, etc.). After that he left and I organized some stuff, at a loss of what exactly I should do. I went home after about an hour of time to myself and my thoughts.

I slept in for quite a while on Sunday but have gone to school like normal for the rest of the week. I did get some stuff for Justin's family on Tuesday and Wednesday. He had been fixing his personal parachute (some of the fabric was worn out), so had been using one of the drop zone's rental parachutes. Casey said he is going to look at Justin's chute and finish fixing it if he can for the family, so I took his container (the actual backpack the parachute goes in) and one of his GoPros which I found in a drawer in Statesboro. I did make a copy of all the footage on it and it's saved on the computer, but he didn't have it in Swainsboro so I don't know how helpful that is. He had at least one camera mounted on his helmet on the last flight because he films all the AFF jumps, but when I've ridden along he usually clips his helmet to his chest strap before takeoff and puts the helmet on just before he jumps. I think he does that just because it's more comfortable in the plane without a helmet on. I seriously doubt he would have been filming during takeoff, but I suppose he could have been. Also, I heard from Casey (yesterday, Thursday the 30th) that William stood up for the first time since the crash, which was excellent news considering how the mower guy felt.

I know that's a long email, but here's a condensed schedule of the day if it helps:

Flight 1: Andrew (pilot), Cathy (coaching him), me (ride along). Flew to around 5,000 feet then landed.

<Justin and William arrive>

Flight 2: Andrew (pilot), Cathy (coaching him), me (ride along), Justin (fun jump), William (fun jump). Flew to 5,000 feet, Justin and William jumped. The rest of us landed in the plane, Cathy seemed happy with Andrew's flying.

<Cathy left>

Flight 3: Andrew (pilot), Justin (TI), Sara Busskohl (tandem customer), Charles Busskohl (Sara's husband, riding along), William (probably, practicing his camera work)

Flight 4: Andrew (pilot), Justin (TI), Charles Busskohl (tandem customer), Sara Busskohl (Charles's wife, riding along), William (probably, practicing camera work)

<Plane fueled, fuel hole taped shut. Chris and Alex arrive>

Flight 5: Andrew (pilot), Justin (AFF instructor), Chris (AFF student), William (fun jump), Alex (fun jump) <Casey arrived>

Flight 6: Andrew (pilot), Justin (AFFI), Chris (AFF student), William (fun jump), Alex (fun jump)

<crash, AFF guy arrives>

Note: the tandem passengers riding along on flight 3-4 are not recorded in the computer because Cathy gave them ride alongs for free because they couldn't jump on Friday.

A few weird things I thought of after the fact: I remember in the car on the way to Swainsboro that Cathy and Andrew talked about the proper thing to do if an engine dies below 200 feet. They agreed that you can't turn, but just have to fly straight and keep the airspeed up. I'm sure it was just related to whatever else they were talking about, but it's weird that it did come up. Also, before one of the flights, Andrew was draining the fuel sumps, and he told me he is always really careful to do that because one of his friends had bad fuel and his engine died on takeoff and he

lost his leg. Again, I'm sure it was just general pilot caution, but it's interesting that he would mention such a thing.

I hope that's enough info. If you need any more, please contact me at (307)-240-1649 or email me, I should respond soon.

Thanks for all your help,
Jack Broadhead

Statement- Casey Kloess-Finley

I arrived from Savannah International airport around 1220. Upon arrival I saw Justin Duff, Alex Bagritsevich, Christopher Eldridge, and William Middlebrooks about to board 85D for a normal freefall skydive from an approximate altitude of 11'000 AGL. Andrew Swenson (the pilot) was already on the aircraft wearing his pilot rig and the four skydivers loaded the aircraft. I introduced myself to Andrew as the jumpers climbed in and buckled up. Jumpers were in a standard configuration with Justin Duff sitting the farthest forward on the starboard side, facing the rear, with Chris Eldridge in the same orientation, just in front of Justin. Alex B was facing the rear of the aircraft as well, directly behind the pilot, and William being the lightest jumper, was in the aft facing forward with a full lap belt. At approximately 1230, the jumpers proceeded to close the door and taxi towards the end of the runway. The load took off from Swainsboro, on runway 32, Climbed up with no events to an exit altitude of slightly over 11'000 AGL. I heard over the radio, "skydivers away," call and went back outside to watch the skydivers land. All four skydivers had good landings in the middle of the planned landing area and we all returned into the hanger to repack.

Shortly after landing the aircraft at approximately 1300, Andrew Swenson, remarked to me jokingly did anyone see a flying Ipad. I responded with a no way or something of that sort and said you lost it? He responded yeah and explained it fell out of his lap when he was attempting to close the door at altitude. We then we talked about trying to use the find my iPhone app to attempt to find it. We attempted to do that over the next 15 minutes unsuccessfully. I was packing a reserve parachute at the time and we began talking about mutual friends and skydivers from Deland. Andrew told me he had 185ish jumps and was looking to buy a Sabre 150. Shortly thereafter he told me that he lost not just the iPad, but sometime earlier in the day he lost a fuel cap and didn't want Cathy to be upset, so I assumed she didn't know. I asked about it and he told me that a mechanic on the field had given him, what he called, "fuel tape" and briefly discussed how he/they (no specification) taped the fuel filler cap insert. We then had about a 5 minute long conversation about fuel bladders and how these 182s have vented caps. I made an analogy of kind of understanding by using a boat trying to suck a non vented fuel tank. He explained to me that was right and the tape was made for the fuel bladders and was acceptable. I don't know a lot about the system and went on to talking to Justin about an upcoming Military training contract.

At approximately 1350, I saw Justin Duff getting his gear on and asked if they were going back up. Shortly there after, the other three skydivers that were on the previous jump also had gear on and were walking to the Taxiway. I walked with the jumpers and Andrew was already in the cockpit. The skydivers boarded the airplane in the same orientation and positions and Load 3 (the previous load). I made a joke about being a better skydiver than Justin and that compared to Alex we both suck. The pilot started the engine on the first attempt, and I didn't detect any abnormal sounds as they shut the door and began taxiing to runway 32 for departure. It was shortly after 1400 and I walked back inside the hanger to finish packing the reserve parachute I had previously been working on. Around 1410, I heard a siren and saw smoke on the far end of

the runway. I immediately got in my car and sped towards the scene and told myself there is no fucking way. I saw the plane was partially engulfed in flames and two jumpers had been carried away from the scene maybe 25 yards or so. I attempted to get closer and paramedics directed me step back and away from the attempts to put out flames.

Throughout the next 2-3 hours I attempted to contact Catherine Kloess (President of TJP@JAX, Inc.) who was unreachable as she was flying to Ohio. I also was in constant communication going back and forth providing manifest information and attempting to get any information on potential survivors. I positively identified William Middlebrooks as he entered the Life Flight Medevac. I later identified Justin Duff at the hospital. I attempted to assist in identifying at the scene of the crash and was told to step back, but I was able to see that Chris Aldridge was on the brink of the door opening, but was unable to escape. I could not see Andrew or Alex at anytime.

Over the 5 hours after the accident I was attempting to find points of emergency contact and get updates on conditions of all people involved. I assisted in providing emergency responders with manifest, DOB, and other details that were requested.

Around 1900, members of the FAA and NTSB arrived and I began sharing my statement.