



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 7, 2018
Person Contacted: Frank M. Swett, Jr.
NTSB Accident Number: ERA18LA087

Narrative:

Mr. Frank Swett, Jr., was contacted by phone on March 6, 2018, at 1446 EST, and left a voice mail message. He was called at [REDACTED] He returned the call the next day at 0833 EST, but the call was missed. He was called on March 7, 2018, at 0958 EST, and left a voice mail message. He returned the call the same day at 1020 EST. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the phone call he was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview without representation.

He indicated that he had about 8,000 hours total time in aerial application, and his last flight review was done in a Navion on June 9, 2017. He confirmed his last 3rd class medical with no limitations was dated November 21, 2016. He is 6'0" tall.

The A-9 was equipped with a Schweizer "type tow hook", that has had known issues related to releasing when the glider is out of position of the tow plane. The release lever which is an aftermarket part is about 2 feet long, and he indicated it was not the best installation there could be. He indicated that the German designed Tost tow release is a better system. The A-9 had 200 feet of tow rope attached. They have operated the A-9 for about 4 years, and since then, there have been no complaints related to the location of the release. During their first annual inspection of the airplane, their A&P/IA bent the release lever to make it a more comfortable reach for a pilot. An emergency locator transmitter was not installed.

The Schweizer SGS-2-33A has a stall speed of 35 mph. A release is installed in front of each seat.

They operate another A-9 (N267S), which has a release adjacent to the pilot's seat, in a much better position than the accident airplane.

He indicated that the glider student was from California, who recently moved to North Carolina. He began his glider flight instruction with them, and the accident flight was the student's 3rd flight that day. The first and second glider tows were performed by Ray, who is a 92 year old pilot. Ray described the tows with respect to the glider position as "being all over the place", and "it was a rough tow." Because of that, Ray took a break and Frank planned to tow the glider aloft.

He indicated that the flight instructor of the glider was a graduate of the Navy Test Pilot school, and a former Chief Pilot for the University of North Carolina.

It is their standard procedure before the first tow, to brief wind, intended runway, tow release altitude and purpose of the tow, and who the instructor and student are. Because that standard briefing would have occurred before the student's first tow aloft that day, as part of his briefing before the accident tow, he did not discuss the wind condition, nor who would be flying, but did determine that the tow release altitude was 3,000 feet mean sea level upwind of the airstrip. He indicated that in hindsight, his briefing before the tow should have included a discussion about who would be flying, the wind, and turbulence conditions.

With respect to the accident flight, before the tow, the flight instructor placed his hands in the air signifying to him that the student would be flying. He was wearing the 4-point military style lapbelt and shoulder harness that were snug. During the tow he noticed that the moment the glider became airborne, "it was a very turbulent tow" with the glider moving erratically back and forth; reporting moderate turbulence. The flight continued climbing at 70 mph, and when he looked into the mirror, the glider was out of position, and he noted slack in the towline. The nose of his airplane was suddenly jerked about 35° to the left, followed by the tail of his airplane raising. He indicated that the lift of the wing of the Schweizer is far greater than the downforce of the horizontal stabilizer/elevator of the A-9. Because of his low altitude, about that time, he attempted to release the glider but because of the position of the tow release handle in the cockpit, he had difficulty reaching it. He eventually did but the glider released about a split second before he did. He estimated that the release occurred about 75 feet above ground level (agl), or about 25 to 45 feet above the tree tops. The left wing then impacted trees, and the airplane then impacted the ground nearly fully inverted while in a nose and right wing low attitude.

A handheld GPS receiver was on-board the A-9, but it was not on, while the glider was not equipped with a GPS receiver, or video equipment. He suggested I contact the flight instructor to see if he had any type of recording device. He also indicated that he was not aware that anybody on the ground had videotaped the accident.

He was taken to a hospital for CT scan and x-rays. He does not have any broken bones, or any internal injuries. He did sustain a swollen left wrist, a cut on top and side of his head, a cut lip, a bump on his left hand, cuts to his hands, a cut and bruise on his left knee, and is sore. None of the cuts required sutures.

Immediately after the accident he prepared a statement for the association that described the facts and details surrounding the accident. He plans to discuss the lessons learned during their annual safety meeting, which will be held on Saturday March 10, 2018. In reviewing the circumstances of the accident, they will implement a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that will stipulate that on a turbulent day, no student will be allowed to manipulate the controls until reaching 500 feet agl. It was suggested by NTSB during the phone call whether he would consider changing their SOP's to require a thorough briefing after tow pilot change to discuss wind, turbulence, and who would be flying. He agreed to the suggestion and would consider that at their upcoming safety meeting. He was asked to provide a copy of the excerpt of their SOP with the old version and also the version with the change made. He indicated he would provide.

He was informed that as part of the investigation, the location of the tow release handle in the A-9 would need to be inspected. He was asked where the airplane was located and reported it was taken to Heritage Aviation.

The insurance adjuster is Aaron Hatch, of AIG Aviation, phone [REDACTED]

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on March 8, 2018, at 1308 EST. He replied the same day at 1634 EST with comments or corrections that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to him on March 9, 2018. He replied with comments that were incorporated, and the corrected digest was e-mailed to him for review on March 9, 2018. He replied the same day at 1015 with, "Tim, It looks pretty accurate. Frank"