

Witness Interview Statement
2/24/2018 Glider / Towplane accident
7NC5 Crooked Creek Airport
Zebulon

Inspector Toms telephone Interview of Glider student Jeff Stalk on 2/27/2018;
5:45 to 6:15 approx. Phoned from EA 39.

Jeff Stalk contact phone number: [REDACTED]

Background information:

Jeff began by stating he has only 9.5 total time in his logbook. No FAA Certificates yet. He took his first glider flight in November 2016 and is really enjoying the experience. He stated he has been a journalist for about forty years.

Jeff said he met with his instructor before 9am, scheduled from 9 to 11; and took off on this flight about 10:45am. The glider was a 2-33 but he wasn't sure what make it was. He spent quite a bit of time prior to takeoff on preflight instruction with his CFI James Hoteller; who was very thorough explaining details of the aircraft and things to look for, the flight controls a sort of ground school type experience.

On the initial takeoff he felt he was controlling the glider as he had in the past, but wasn't sure if the CFI was also on the controls with him. He explained the CFI was in the rear seat.

During the takeoff he felt a "wind gust" pulled the aircraft to the right and down below the glider, and he pulled the stick back to correct it, get the glider level with the tow plane, but the glider rolled to the right, putting me to the right and above the tow plane, worse than it was before.

Then I felt the CFI take corrective actions trying to get control and behind the plane and I saw the tow plane going downward, descending and we were following it. I was thinking that we should detach and it felt like the tow plane was coming loose. Jim the instructor was trying to release it and it seemed like a loud bang, much louder than usual. The instructor flew the glider, circling around to land back on the runway. I didn't see the wreckage, but the instructor saw it and broadcast on the radio that the tow plane was down, crashed. We landed on the runway going the opposite way from when we took off.

Jim, the instructor told me he tried three times to pull the release and the first two times it didn't release and then he yanked hard again and it finally released.

We landed a little long, and maybe a little fast; but it was in the opposite direction.



Jerry L. Toms ASI, EA30

Jeff Stalk, glider student pilot

From: Jim Hotelling
To: Toms, Jerry L (FAA)
Subject: RE: glider instructor statement
Date: Thursday, March 01, 2018 7:28:28 AM

Hi Jerry; here's my view of what went on during the unfortunate loss of our towplane. I tried to be brief and to the point, and I have lots more thoughts and opinions, so please let me know if more is needed. Thanks for your help with this, and hope to meet you in person some day -

Jim Hotelling

Chapel Hill, NC

(home
(cell/text)

Sat 24 Feb 2018 12:36 pm lcl (EDT)/17:36 Z

Crooked Creek Airport, Bunn, NC 7NC5

TAF RWI dtd 241120Z: FM241800 23011KT P6SM BKN060

LHZ AWOS 1723Z: winds 25004, vis 10sm, 2700 BKN, 3400 BKN, temp +22/dewpt +16, altimeter 30.20

On 3rd flight of the day, I was the instructor in the back seat of our club Schweizer 2-33 training glider, with the student in the front. We had made 2 flights already, with the student demonstrating good progress in controlling the aircraft off tow, and showing beginning competency on tow but requiring my corrections occasionally. He improved his towing abilities substantially on the 2nd flight. The student made the 3rd takeoff well under control into a ~ 5 kt headwind that was steady below the treeline, with moderate turbulence above, similar to the conditions on the first 2 flights. Above the treeline, at about 300 ft. AGL, a gust moved us somewhat down and to the right relative to the towplane, resulting in us picking up some speed, and also in a slight amount of towline slack. The student made the appropriate control inputs to move us back up and to the left. We felt the expected surge as the towline tightened and the slack dissipated, but the dynamics were such that we continued up and to the left at an alarming rate, reminding me of a winch launch, and we zoomed up to a maximum of what I estimate as ~ 400 ft. AGL. It seemed that perhaps we encountered another "counter" gust just as the towline tightened and the original control corrections took effect, but for whatever reason, the result was that I saw the tow plane well low on our right and banking right, indicating we were extremely out of position. By then I had taken over the controls and made large forward stick and right roll inputs in an attempt to fly us back down into position, along with full spoilers after observing slack in the towline, probably from the descent. The situation was not improving, and I determined we needed to release immediately, so pulled the release twice, with more force than usually required, but we did not release, perhaps due to side loads on the towhook. I was concerned I was pulling on the wrong thing, so diverted my view from outside back into the cockpit momentarily, and confirmed I was pulling on the correct control, but it seemed as if it was jammed. On the third try I yanked as hard as I felt I could and it finally popped open and released the towline. At that time, I felt we were well

under control and high enough for a choice of landing areas, so turned back towards the airport with altitude and speed to spare. In the turn, I viewed the towplane inverted on the ground. We were high on final compared to a normal pattern, but landed with no further incident.

-----Original Message-----

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Feb 28, 2018 3:08 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: glider instructor email check

Thanks for your help and consideration. I look forward to speaking with you later.

Jerry

From: Jim Hotelling [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 28, 2018 3:06 PM
To: Toms, Jerry L (FAA) [REDACTED]
Subject: glider instructor email check

Hi Jerry, nice talking to you just now. I'll get my report to you as quick as I can type it up. Would you mind hitting the "Reply" button so I can make sure I have your address correct? Thanks,

Jim Hotelling
[REDACTED]
Chapel Hill, NC [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (home)
[REDACTED] (cell/text)

Witness Interview Statement
2/24/2018 Glider / Towplane accident
7NC5 Crooked Creek Airport
Zebulon

Inspector Toms telephone Interview of Glider Instructor (CFI) on 2/28/2018. Mr. Hotelling [REDACTED] ATP ASMEL, SES, Rotorcraft Helicopter, Glider

Background discussion information:

From records I believe Jeff, the student, had about 11 prior glider flights totaling about 9 flight hours. In prior flights he had demonstrated modest ability, ability to control the aircraft at altitude and occasionally had been all over the place with his efforts to control the glider.

There were 3 flights that day. On the second flight Jeff was a little squirrely on the takeoff while on the takeoff phase of the 3rd flight he tracked straight down the runway against about a 5 knot headwind which was fairly steady with some gusts, and did well up to the level of about treetop.

At about 300 feet AGL the student diverted down and to the right; and made corrective action on the flight controls upward and to the left. The tow rope, when the aircraft was down to the right slackened and during the corrective maneuvering, it felt gusty, and the rope tightened and the aircraft surged, continuing up and left, but we were above the tree line. It appeared to smooth out during the students corrective maneuver but then almost like a slingshot rapidly went up and to the left: I immediately got on the controls and forced them down and to the right but the glider didn't respond, remaining up and left. I pulled full spoilers but it was still up and left – and seemed to be a gust.

I was then looking down and right at the tow plane: The spoilers weren't working and it still seemed to be climbing, going up and to the left.

I yanked the tow release and it did not release.

I yanked it hard again and it did not release.

I looked down inside the cockpit thinking I was not pulling on the right control for the release, but I confirmed I was.

I yanked again as hard as I could and it released with a BANG. It seemed like it had been bound up, possibly by the side forces.

Once released, I could control the glider and had enough altitude to safely make a turn back around, with intent to land downwind on runway 4. (we had taken off on runway 22 to the southerly direction). As I was turning back towards the airport, with my view looking down, I saw the Callair inverted and into the ground. I had a sick feeling, thinking it looked like no one could have survived that.

The control of the glider at this point felt fine, the downwind landing was a little fast and a little long but we were safe. It was downwind.

Followup conversation:

I had a hard time trying to get the release to work and the repeated efforts seem to take a lot of time. I had to yank it very hard to finally get it to release.

From my history with Schweizer 2-33's, I have noticed a few things that seem to make it more challenging. The front seat cushions are challenging to adjust in a way that enables good control travel in all directions.

It is a tough old design. Thinking about this flight over and over, when the glider was not responding to major control inputs and spoiler deployment; I couldn't figure out how to make it respond to the corrective control inputs. Was it the gusts? I wasn't sure.

I don't know if the tow rope stayed with the plane or released? The glider often feels like it is sluggish and control inputs are entered then you have to hold them full over and wait for the aircraft to correct its attitude. I keep going over this in

my mind, but felt much better when I learned Frank was alive and not seriously injured.

[REDACTED]

Jerry L Toms, ASI, FAA EA39

James M. Hotelling, ATP ASMEL, ASES, Glider

Jim, the instructor told me he tried three times to pull the release and the first two times it didn't release and then he yanked hard again and it finally released.

We landed a little long, and maybe a little fast; but it was in the opposite direction.

[REDACTED]

Jerry L. Toms ASI, EA30

James M. Hoteller

FAA INSPECTOR STATEMENT

AFTER MULTIPLE INTERVIEWS AND SITE INVESTIGATION OF GLIDER TOW ACCIDENT 2.24.2018

1970 Callair A9, N8401V, SN 1601 (Tow Plane) and Schweizer 2-33 Glider

Tow Plane, single pilot occupant Frank Swett; Glider Student Jeff Stalk and CFI James Hotelling

Preliminary thoughts after site investigation, records review, and interviews with tow plane pilot, CFI in Glider being towed, the student in the glider, one witness on site who is also a glider pilot and tow plane qualified, with experience towing and flying the 2-33, and a licensed glider pilot who also flies at that airport.

The independent interviews, some by phone and some at the airport; several statements are consistent, which indicate there may be mechanical considerations as possible causal factors related to both the towplane and the glider.

Both the CFI in the glider and the PIC in the towplane had difficulty using the tow release mechanisms, though both were very familiar with their operation and experienced under normal operations.

The student pilot in the glider indicated he believed he was diverted by a gust at treetops but when he made corrective movements of the flight controls, there was little or no response as needed.

The CFI in the glider indicated there was a gust at treetop which diverted the glider, and that the student made proper corrective control inputs but the aircraft did not respond as expected; and even when he took the controls and added spoilers and rapid extensive control inputs as additional corrective action, the aircraft did not respond as expected.

Added circumstances indicated that the maneuvering was "sluggish", which is somewhat consistent with this type of glider, but the failed responses to hard inputs at full control travel and spoilers deployed may indicate improper control rigging or travel or cable tension.

In the Tow plane the location of the release handle made operation of the system under the exaggerated maneuver very difficult to impossible immediately when attempted, and it took more effort than normal.

The Tow release mechanism in the glider was pulled harder than normal twice in a row by the CFI who then thought he must not be pulling the right handle, so he verified it visually and he

was; then pulled as hard as he thought he could and there was a release with a loud bang type noise.

There is a need to check the rigging of the glider release system, the cable rigging and tension and travel, the flight control rigging and travel and tensions and the smoothness of flight controls themselves; to determine if it met its type certificated design and was in a condition for safe operation.

I stated this to Tony Congelosi this morning (3.1.18 about 7:20am) and he agreed I should go and check these items out.

[REDACTED]

Jerry L. Toms, FAA ASI EA 39

FAA Inspector Toms' Interview with John Swett: Witness to takeoff and departure of N8401V and glider 2.24.2018 at Crooked Creek Airport, near Zebulon, North Carolina. Interview conducted at the airport (7NC5) on 2.25.2018.

John is a Glider Pilot, Airplane Pilot and, experienced Glider Tow pilot who is familiar with the people and aircraft involved in this accident. His father is the PIC of the 1970 Callair Tow Plane which was destroyed in this accident.

John stated that the Callair flown by his father initiated the takeoff with Schweizer 2-33 glider in tow, N1186S, serial number 236, manufactured in 1972. They were departing on Runway 22 with the Southwesterly heading. The wind was reported at Louisburg as 220 at 6 to 8 knots with higher gusts. John said he had just flown in to the airport and the wind at the ground level was straight down the runway, with gusts at higher altitudes above the trees.

John stated he was walking from the shop towards the runway and watching as they took off. After the glider lifted off the ground climbing to about treetop, it diverted to the right and down and the tow rope became slack. He said they use both hand signals, aircraft movements and radios to communicate between the tow plane and the glider and with the glider. The launch seemed pretty normal tracking pretty straight down the runway, and lifting off at about the normal spot; and remained straight until the glider was climbing. John said it seemed higher than normal.

John said the student in the glider, with the CFI James Hotelling; was a relatively new student only having flown here a couple times.

As they got to treetop level or a little higher, John said the glider veered to the right and down, pulling the tow plane around by its tailhook.

Next the glider made some erratic changes in direction then back and the rope went slack for a period of time. When the rope went slack, John thought they had released from the tow plane which he said he felt was the right thing to do.

John said he and Richard, another witness nearby both thought they should be released from each other based on the erratic changes in direction of the glider.

Next he said the glider turned and accelerated hard to the right and when the slack went out of the tow rope, it jerked or snapped the tow plane around, pulling the tail to the right and nose hard left and down.

John said this happened above tree top but he wasn't sure how high they were. John said it appeared that Jim, the CFI had taken control and deployed spoilers and full control deflections in an attempt to recover the glider quickly.

He said then the glider CFI turned the glider around and lined up to land on the downwind runway 4, landing a bit long and with a higher speed.

John said it looked like the tow plane when veering up and left then down, had its left wing contact a tall tree in those woods. One he saw it hit the tree it appeared to go down, but he couldn't see where it went and he did not see it hit the ground in the wooded area.

John did state he went to try and help get his dad out of the wreckage.



Jerry L Toms, FAA ASI EA39

John Swett, Glider Pilot, experienced tow pilot.