



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Investigator: Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: Witness Interview
Person Contacted: Daniel Donohue
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA113 – Louisburg, NC

Narrative:

Mr. Donohue was employed as an aircraft mechanic at the LHZ at the time of the accident. Mr. Donohue held a commercial pilot certificate with ratings for gliders and held a private pilot certificate with a rating for airplane single engine land. He estimated he had 150 hours of flight experience.

According to Mr. Donohue, he and a friend who also works on the airport were parking an automobile inside a hangar when their attention was drawn to the airplane about 1920. The airplane's engine was heard to "power up" which surprised the two, because they had not noticed the airplane taxi, or heard it perform an engine run-up. The airplane's lights were not clearly visible, as they were obscured by fog and had a "halo" appearance. The two questioned each other out loud, "Who would take off in this weather?" According to Mr. Donohue, the conditions were foggy in moderate rain.

The airplane accelerated, and the sound of the engine was smooth and continuous throughout the takeoff roll and the takeoff. The airplane disappeared from view behind a hangar about the same time it entered the clouds, approximately 200-300 feet above the runway.



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Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: Witness Interview
Person Contacted: Jonathon Forney
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA113 – Louisburg, NC

Narrative:

Mr. Forney was employed as an aircraft mechanic at the LHZ at the time of the accident. Mr. Forney held a student pilot certificate with an estimated 42 hours of flight experience.

According to Mr. Forney, he and a friend who also works on the airport were parking an automobile inside a hangar when their attention was drawn to the airplane about 1920.

The airplane's engine was heard to "power up" which surprised the two, because they had not noticed the airplane taxi, or heard it perform an engine run-up. The airplane was "all lit up and at full power" coming down the runway. Mr. Forney said he heard it before he saw it, and that the engine sound was smooth and continuous throughout. "It sounded good, like a big-bore engine, like a 540, which is what it was."

Mr. Forney said his line of sight was between two rows of hangars, and that he lost sight of the airplane as it passed behind the second row. He may have gotten another glimpse of the airplane, but only briefly, but did hear the airplane as it continued its departure.

When asked about the weather, Mr. Forney said it was "low clouds and a lot of rain. Made you wonder who would want to fly in this?"



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Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: Witness Interview
Person Contacted: Ronnie Martin
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA113 – Louisburg, NC

Narrative:

Mr. Martin was employed at LHZ airport. He was not at the airport at the time of the accident, but at his home, which was on the departure path of the accident airplane.

Mr. Martin said that he had spent many years living near and working at the airport and was very familiar with the sounds of airplanes approaching and departing from the airport. On the night of the accident, he distinctly heard the loud, smooth, and continuous sound of an airplane engine on its departure climb, and wondered to himself “who would fly in this weather?”

When asked why he thought that way, and what the weather conditions were at the time he said, “The rainfall was so hard at the time of the accident that it disabled my satellite television signal!”



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Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: Witness Interview
Person Contacted: Todd Huvard
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA113 – Louisburg, NC

Narrative:

Mr. Huvard was the owner/operator of Aircraft Merchants, and brokered the sale of the accident airplane to the pilot/owner in December of 2012. He was based at the same airport as the pilot owner.

According to Mr. Huvard, he had watched the pilot depart in the airplane VFR into IMC on numerous occasions before the pilot had acquired an instrument rating. After he had acquired his instrument rating the pilot was seen to depart in conditions that Mr. Huvard considered challenging for a small, single-engine airplane.

Mr. Huvard stated that he had cautioned the pilot “numerous” times about flying VFR in IMC conditions, and about overall risk management and risk decisions when flying in instrument conditions, when measured against the equipment one operated.

After “years” of attempting to caution the pilot about his decision making, Mr. Huvard said he “gave up trying” to reason with the pilot. He said, “There was no getting through to him. I tried, but I finally realized it was hopeless. He was foolhardy. When I heard of the accident, he was the first person I thought of.”



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Eastern Region

Date: March 4, 2019
Subject: Witness Interview
Person Contacted: Dion Viventi
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA113 – Louisburg, NC

Narrative:

Mr. Viventi was employed at Rocky Mount-Wilson Regional airport as its managing director. He was a commercial pilot and flight instructor who flew with the accident pilot both recreationally, and in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and he also had experience flying the accident airplane. He was interviewed by telephone on two occasions, and the following is a summary of those interviews.

According to Mr. Viventi, he was flying the accident airplane in July 2018 en route to the EAA Airventure fly-in event in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, when he experienced a malfunction with the Aspen Avionics suite that had been recently installed in the airplane. He said the system “blanked out” and was hot to the touch. Mr. Viventi said he completed the flight using the standby instrumentation, and upon arrival, he sought out the Aspen Avionics representatives who attended the event.

The Aspen representatives suggested that it was a cooling issue, and to open the cockpit vents for the return flight, and to seek further troubleshooting at an avionics shop. Mr. Viventi said the system worked properly on the return flight. Later in the conversation, Mr. Viventi stated that the pilot/owner told him he had made numerous warranty claims and had several components of the system replaced. He further stated that the pilot/owner had an air-conditioning system installed in the airplane to address the issue of cooling the avionics (installed August 27, 2018).

Mr. Viventi was asked about the pilot’s habits and performance in the cockpit. He said the pilot was a “heavy user” of the autopilot, who would routinely depart, set up the autopilot, and then contact air traffic control. Mr. Viventi said that the pilot was very proficient, with the consideration that the autopilot was in use. He added that if corrective actions were required while performing instrument procedures, the pilot would perform remedial actions through the

autopilot rather than disable it, and then hand-fly the approach. Mr. Viventi stated that the pilot had often flown in instrument meteorological conditions.

Mr. Viventi was asked about the pilot's mission planning and operational risk management assessments prior to performing flights in the Coast Guard Auxiliary, and how those habits transferred to his personal flying habits. According to Mr. Viventi, the pilot was proficient in those skills as a Coast Guard Auxiliary pilot but abandoned those practices when he flew for personal business or pleasure.