



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: January 9, 2020
Person Contacted: Dennis Johnson

This investigator interviewed Mr. Johnson by telephone, and he stated he had performed maintenance on the airplane after a propeller strike in August 2018. The airplane was being fueled at Sky Acres Airport (44N), Millbrook, New York when a mechanic on the field noticed there was a large chunk missing from the propeller. Mr. Johnson stated the airplane was grounded and he was asked by the pilot's insurance company to perform a sudden stoppage inspection. He never met the pilot and the engine logbooks were never provided; the pilot would only send copies of requested entries. He stated he was uncomfortable with the arrangement and felt that maintenance "wasn't important to him."



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: January 9, 2020
Person Contacted: Ed Libassi

This investigator interviewed Mr. Libassi by telephone, and he stated he had performed limited maintenance in December 2017. The pilot brought the airplane to Mr. Libassi for an annual inspection. A list of repairs needed, 17 items, was presented to the pilot and he said it was “too expensive” and did not want the items completed by Mr. Libassi. He stated the pilot did seem to “not believe in the FARs,” and that “he did what he wanted.”



MEMORANDUM for RECORD

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: January 30, 2020
Person Contacted: Langston Majette- College Park Airport
employee

This investigator interviewed Mr. Majette by telephone, he stated he spoke with the pilot before he departed. He works at the College Park Airport and is a 16-year Federal Aviation Administration employee. They spoke about the flight routing, the flight path took the pilot west of Philadelphia, then he hoped to get a clearance to fly direct to White Plains. They also spoke about ADS-B and the new attitude indicator he had installed. The pilot told him he had a new G5 electronic attitude indicator, he liked it a lot, but said it took some time adjusting to looking at the G5. He stated the numbers were smaller and harder to read, and it took longer to interpret the data that it was displaying during his instrument scan. The pilot told him it was his first time flying in "hard IFR" with the G5. They spoke about the weather, NOTAMs, and the towers around the airport. The pilot stated he intended to depart runway 15, because the winds were favoring that runway. He stated the pilot had flown into College Park numerous times and that he seemed like a knowledgeable pilot.

Mr Gordon arrived at the airport this afternoon, around 1pm EST, to begin planning in preparation for his departure back to Westchester County airport (HPN). He paid his overnight tiedown fee, and his fuel bill from 12/28/19 (date of arrival). Afterwards, he began his flight planning in the CGS operations building. His flight planning consisted of calling Flight Service to obtain a full weather briefing (I was able to overhear this conversation), and check NOTAMs. He also filed an IFR flight plan to his destination, HPN. Afterwards, we conversed about aviation in general, speaking about ADS-B, transponders, etc. We also talked about new avionics he had installed in his aircraft (new transponder and a new G5 artificial horizon display). He mentioned this being his first time flying "hard IFR" with the G5 avionics. We also discussed the autopilots...he told me he had a single axis autopilot. He also shared with me his IFR flight plan routing that he was assigned...V265-EMI...then Northeast bound along the western edge of the Philadelphia Class B airspace. The pilot made several trips back & forth to the aircraft, preparing for his departure.

As I was getting ready to leave for the day, Mr Gordon asked me how long I was working today, to which I responded "I'm actually about to leave right now." He replied "Oh...ok..well I was gonna call back here to let you know I made it there safely." I departed shortly thereafter.

A short while later, I received a cell phone call from a colleague (officer) that works for Prince George's County police department, regarding a "plane crash near Good Luck road" that he heard on the radio. I then returned to the airport.

Langston Majette

I reported to my shift at KCGS at 1400 local time 12/29/2019.

When I was clocking in, Allen Gordon was preparing to depart KCGS to Westchester New, York.

I gave the pilot the number to file and receive clearance to fly in the FRZ. I watched the pilot carry his personal items to N26455 on the ramp. I watched the pilot complete his run-up and he completed a radio check. I verified that the comm 1 was loud and clear and read the pilot the current AWOS information. I watched the pilot taxi the aircraft to runway 15. I heard the pilot acknowledge his IFR clearance has his void times. I watched the pilot taxi to runway 15 I watched the pilot take off at 1445 local time everything sounded and looked normal.

Steven Edgin



Witness Reports

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: January 16, 2020
Source: Eye Witness Reports submitted to ntsb.gov

Good afternoon

My family and I live @ [REDACTED] in the Lanham area. We heard the plane prior to the impact. While it didn't seem to be any louder than any other of the numerous planes that fly over, it did sound as though it was "sputtering". With what I can only describe as a whistling sound as well. Not that they would be of any help but I do have photos of the crash site before emergency personnel arrived.

If I can be of any more assistance please let me know.

Jennifer Maragh
[REDACTED]

TWIMC,

My wife and I both heard the plane go directly over our house just prior to impact. Neither of us saw the plane due to serious IFR conditions at the time but we did hear the sound of the engine up until the sound abruptly cut off.

We live about 1/3 of a mile from the crash site.

Our contact information is:

[REDACTED]

Dear Sir,

Want to provide a small bit of information regarding the plane crash on December 29, 2019 in Lanham Md.

I live at [REDACTED], which is in the flight path of the College Park Airport. On the the afternoon of the crash I was sitting in my bedroom when I heard the plane fly over the house, the engine was sputtering which drew my attention because I always hear the planes when they fly over and you could tell something was wrong with the engine. I don't know if the helps and I'm sorry for the delay in providing this information which you may have already.

thanks for the time.

Randy R Davis

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I read the preliminary report ERA20FA060, and I was misquoted. The report lists "One witness said the sound of the engine was "loud" prior to impact." I actually said that the "wind" noise was very loud just prior to impact, and based on my 350 hours of single engine experience, I estimated that the plane speed was greater than 100 MPH before impact. I thought that I heard engine or prop noise, but wasn't sure. I only heard the wind noise for about 5 seconds, and did not hear any engine "sputter".

I also made a rough calculation of the energy required to push a 3000 lbm car 120 ft, assuming a coefficient of friction of 0.7 (a wild guess). If 30% of the plane energy was transferred to the car on impact, a 2000 lbm plane would have been travelling at 106 MPH. The transferred energy may have been more than 30%, but It seems unlikely that the plane was in a landing configuration.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: [eyewitnessreport](mailto:eyewitnessreport@ntsb.gov)
Subject: RE: plane crash ERA20FA060 on Dec 29
Date: Monday, February 3, 2020 8:53:59 AM

[CAUTION] This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click any links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Correction. James last name is Newman.

Since there was some confusion on my original statement about hearing the plane crash, I'll explain the details. I was in a small ground-level room on the side of my house opposite the crash. The outside walls are covered with bookcases and the window is double glazed. Most outside sounds are deadened. When I first heard the plane, I thought it was a jet fighter, which we sometimes get flying to/from Andrews. However I immediately (< 1 second) realized that it was a prop plane in a dive. How did I know this? The sound loudness and pitch (frequency) were increasing, indicating that the plane was close and in a dive. There was no jet engine noise. It sounded somewhat like the WW II Battle of Britain movies where one plane has been shot by another, and the dying plane is in a screaming nose dive. I definitely did **not** hear the beating noise of a prop and engine at cruise or takeoff power. It was a screaming wind noise. I think that there was a slight beating noise -- probably due to the prop -- but **no noise that I could define as engine**. I walked out of the bedroom and into the hall where I heard the crash. The total time from first hearing the plane to impact could not have been much more than 5 seconds.

Bruce Gibbs

From: Bruce Gibbs [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, February 01, 2020 11:33 AM
To: 'eyewitnessreport@ntsb.gov' <eyewitnessreport@ntsb.gov>
Subject: plane crash ERA20FA060 on Dec 29

To Millicent Hill

I have additional information on incident report ERA20FA060. A neighbor (James Newton, 7703 Sondra Court, New Carrollton) told me that a friend of his who lives "across the street from Parkdale High School" heard the plane before it crashed. He said that the engine coughed and then stopped. I assume that the plane was somewhere near Parkdale High School at the time that the engine stopped. (You should try to talk directly with the witness: get the name from James).

This seems roughly consistent with the statement in the preliminary report that the plane "climbed for about a mile as it tracked slightly right of the extended runway centerline". A mile from the runway would be slightly south of Parkdale High school. A right turn to 310° would have it heading back south of the airport, and the "spiraling descent" would have it circling near the high school. Somehow it traveled east for about 0.7 miles and made another turn to the west before crashing in our neighbor's carport.

As a pilot and engineer, I can't stop thinking about the crash and trying to analyze the somewhat puzzling facts. I keep asking myself what would I have done if I were the pilot. For my own benefit, I decided to put my thoughts on paper, but they may be of benefit to you. You may know other details that could invalidate my analysis, but it may be useful.

There are three primary possibilities for the crash: engine failure, structural or control failure, or pilot unconscious.

1. Engine failure: The preliminary report lists one witness as stating that the plane's engine "suddenly cut off." The statement from the person living near Parkdale High school indicates that the engine stopped within earshot of his house. As noted above, this seems consistent

with the radar track. Possible explanations or questions:

- a. Fuel starvation: Although the report states that the left wing “was partially consumed by fire”, there was very little fire damage on the ground to the left (plane reference) side of the crash area. Apparently the fuselage ground trajectory was nearly midway between the main structures of the two houses. (The right wing struck the carport posts and car, but there was no direct damage to the two houses or porches from the wings.) The carport area and house showed significant fire damage, but fire damage to left side (plane reference) was minimal: vinyl siding 10 feet above ground level melted, but vegetation and leaves on the ground did not burn. This suggests that the left tank may have been mostly dry. (Are there any records that the plane was refueled at College Park?) Perhaps the pilot took off with the fuel selector on the empty left tank, but switched to the right when the engine failed. Normally props will continue wind-milling when fuel is cut off, thus allowing the engine to quickly restart when the fuel selector is switched. Although unlikely, perhaps the engine did not restart with either wind-milling or the electric starter. (Can you tell if the electric fuel pump was on?) If the engine did not restart, the pilot may have deliberately increased speed to make the prop spin faster.
- b. Mechanical engine failure: Is there any evidence for this? The report did not indicate any.
 - a. If the engine failed, why did the pilot continue flying at 153 kts in an easterly direction rather than heading back towards the airport (310°) as instructed by ground control? I don’t have an AA-5A owner’s manual, but the Piper Cherokee 180 (which I flew for about 10 years) has a glide ratio of about 9 at **76 kts** (87 mph). Except for the larger engine, the Cherokee is similar to the AA-5A, so I would expect a similar glide ratio. Thus at 1900 ft MSL (1850 above the airport), the plane should have glided for about 3.2 miles, which is much greater than the 1 mile distance from the airport. Landing on Kenilworth Avenue (pavement or median) would also have been an option. However, the pilot continued spiraling to the right and east at a high air speed. He may have been so focused on restarting the engine that he wasn’t paying attention to the air speed or direction. It is also possible that without being able to see the ground below him, he was not trying to extend the glide. He may have tried to quickly get below clouds to allow selecting a landing site, and was counting on high airspeed as energy storage to travel horizontally as far as possible. He may have gone east rather than west because he thought the clouds were less dense to the east. (After the crash, I looked at the sky: the clouds were patchy, but I thought the highest ceiling was about 1200 ft near the crash site.) This explanation seems far-fetched, but is possible. Even if this was true, it does not explain why the pilot attempted to crash between houses, rather than heading for the trees in Greenbelt National Park, which were less than 200 yards away.
 - c. Assuming that the plane did not clear the clouds until below 500 ft, the pilot may not have had many options for landing the plane. He apparently guided the plane midway between 2 houses to avoid ground casualties, but why did he crash at such a high speed? (As I stated before, the loud wind noise in the five seconds before impact indicated to me that the airspeed was > 100 MPH. Energy calculations on the displacement of the parked car support this.) He may have thought that the crash site was the best option for minimizing casualties, and he needed to dive the plane steeply to avoid trees and impact the carport. I would have side-slipped with full flaps to achieve rapid descent. Can you tell if the flaps were fully extended?
1. Structural or control failure: Since the pilot’s behavior is difficult to explain assuming engine failure, perhaps the aircraft control or structure failed. The wings, flaps and ailerons were found with the wreckage, so they didn’t fall off in flight. The report comments on flight control continuity are somewhat unclear. Could control cables have failed? This might explain the strange flight path, although it is not consistent with witness comments of engine stopping. Also, it appears that the pilot intentionally crashed between houses.
2. Pilot was unconscious: If the plane was properly trimmed, it would have flown nearly straight and level without pilot control. If the pilot slumped forward on the yoke, the plane could have descended in a tight spiral. However, this is not consistent with witness comments on engine stopping or the apparent selection of crash site. Another remote possibility is impact with a large bird, which could have smashed the plexiglass and blinded the pilot (or even choked the engine intake). Turkey vultures and owls are common near the National Park, but

I didn't think that birds fly in clouds. You would have also noticed bird debris on the plane.

Bruce Gibbs

