



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Eastern Region – Ashburn, Virginia

Record of Conversation

Who: Robert Jacobsen

When: February 10, 2020

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Jacobsen stated the he is a member of the Skyline Soaring Club based at Front Royal Airport. He was volunteering that day and he helped the pilot assemble his glider. The pilot owned the glider and it was not part of the soaring club's fleet. Mr. Jacobsen said the glider assembled easily. He helped the pilot perform a comprehensive positive flight control check. He said the pilot sat in the cockpit and maneuvered the controls and he confirmed that all flight controls (and dive brakes) were operating properly. Mr. Jacobsen said all flight checks were normal and the glider was very airworthy. The only "issue" was that the radio was not working, so the pilot had to use a handheld radio. However, he never heard the pilot speak over the radio at any time that afternoon.

Mr. Jacobsen described the glider activity as "Ad Hoc" since most glider activity does not occur until March. But due to the nice weather, pilots were going up to help keep their currency and flying skills sharp. There were about 5 gliders up that day and most of them were staying in the local area only. The pilot told him prior to the flight that he planned to practice "speed control" in the traffic pattern.

Mr. Jacobsen said that the pilot was "100%" normal prior to the flight. He was a "very bubbly" person and was in a good mood. Mr. Jacobsen said there was absolutely no signs of the pilot not feeling well that day.

Mr. Jacobsen later volunteered as the club's assistant director of operations (ADO) and was monitoring the airport's common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF). He said shortly before the accident, a glider instructor was giving a biennial flight review to another instructor in a glider. As part of the review, they had to do an emergency simulated tow rope brake on takeoff. The glider departed runway 28, then conducted the maneuver when it reached about 300 ft above the ground, which involved making a 180 degree+ turn to land on runway 10. The glider landed without incident and rolled out to the end of the runway. When the glider reached the end of the runway (which would have been the approach end of runway 28), he heard the instructor say over the club frequency, "There is a glider spiraling down in the right base [runway 28] area."

An airborne tow pilot located the impact site and Mr. Jacobsen and others responded to the accident site. The pilot was still strapped in his seat and unresponsive.

Mr. Jacobsen added that he thought the pilot may have been flying at “minimum sink” speed, which is close to stall speed, to slow down to let the other glider move off the runway. He said it is not unusual to operate at minimum sink speed but there was a “small window” between that speed and stall speed. Mr. Jacobsen said the pilot would have been able to feel the glider’s decreasing speed in the flight controls.

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