



Memorandum for Record

Doug Brazy NTSB
Eastern Region, Office of Aviation Safety (ERA)
National Transportation Safety Board

Date: 3/12/2020

Witness Interviews

NTSB Accident Number: ERA20FA124, N1572H, 3/11/20, Sterling, MA

Mr. Thomas Duffy - Airport Manager at Sterling Airport (3B3) provided the following information:

Mr. Staudaheer flew somewhat regularly, he had flown his airplane as far away as Florida, though he was not a frequent flyer. He had purchased the airplane in 2014 having previously owned a fixed landing gear C177. The airplane was based at 3B3. It had not been fueled at 3B3 since sometimes in the fall of 2019. Mr. Duffy said that many pilots choose to purchase fuel at a nearby airport (Stowe, MA) because of lower prices. (a review of the airport fuel records indicated that N1572H was last fueled at 3B3 on July 16, 2019 with 32.3 gallons).

Mr. Duffy saw the airplane just as it flew over the end of the runway. The wings were rocking back and forth, and it was in a "very nose high attitude". He lost sight of the airplane before it descended.

Mr. Robert Mahar – Pilot

Mr. Mahar was sitting on a bench outside the FBO facing the runway. He saw the accident pilot drive up and park in the parking lot, and then walk to the airplane. His view of the parked accident airplane was obscured by another airplane on the ramp. He then saw the accident airplane taxiing from left to right toward runway 34. Another airplane was following the accident airplane on the taxiway. He recalled hearing the accident airplane's engine as the takeoff roll began. He then noticed the airplane when it was flying above and about ½ way along the runway, above the treetop height, "really high, too high to land on the remaining runway". At that he heard the engine "cough", then run again, then "cough" and then he heard no engine noise. The airplane appeared to be under control, with the wings rocking a little bit, and then he lost sight of the airplane. He did not see any smoke trailing behind the airplane, he did not see anything fall from the airplane.

Mr. Mahar provided the following clarification on 4/6/20 via email:

I was sitting right outside the 3B3 office and specifically watched and heard the accident airplane's takeoff when it lost power. It was a powerful normal takeoff until it suddenly wasn't.

I am writing to refine my observations to clarify the Preliminary Report language, referring to paragraph 2, after the the words ... “really high” and above the treetops and the engine “coughed”. (My refined language is that the next sentence read). “The engine noise (cylinders firing) stopped, silence, for 2 to 3 seconds ; engine 're-caught', cylinders firing, engine noise, for another 2-3 seconds, "coughed "a second (and final) time, engine noise stopped (cylinders not firing) , silence, no engine noise and engine never restarted after that- total silence. Next sound was the plane hitting the trees”.

There is language about “sounded as if it was running rough”- I never used that language because that’s not what I heard. What was notable was the immediate “silence” (no engine noise -cylinders not firing)- after each “cough” (only 2 coughs). I said to myself “ WOW, sounds like fuel starvation, I hope pilot figures out the problem, and was hopeful he had after the “brief 2 to 3 seconds-engine restart, but after the second cough and total silence after that I pretty much concluded he wouldn’t , and he didn’t- then crashed into the trees.

Robert Foracre – Employee at Bigelow Nursery

Mr. Foracre was working at a garden nursery and was located about 500 feet from the accident site. He was working near excavating machines and could not here the airplane’s engine. He saw the airplane flying by, it was “a little low” when it made a sharp left turn “as if trying to turn around” it then “started looking like a cartwheel and just fell”. He called 911 and then went into the woods and found the wreckage.

Ed Urbanowski – Flight Instructor and
John Panetta, Mechanic
Sterling Airport

Mr. Panetta was taxiing an airplane when he saw the accident pilot untie the accident airplane from its tie downs. He subsequently saw the airplane with its engine running at the tie down location. He parked the airplane he was taxing inside a hangar, then he and Mr. Urbanoski watched the accident airplane takeoff. During the takeoff roll and initial climb the airplane appeared and sounded normal. When it was over about the midfield point on the runway, it was above the tree height, when the engine sputtered. It was not just a misfire, there was a significant loss of power. The landing gear was in transit upward at that time. The nose then, lowered and the engine regained power, then it ran roughly again. The rough-running and return of power happened 2-3 times in total, and each time, the duration of the rough running portion increased in duration. It did not sound as though the engine completely stopped, just ran very roughly. The engine sounded like it was having a fuel issue and not a magneto issue. Neither Mr. Panetta or Mr. Urbanowksi saw any smoke emanating from the airplane. Just as the airplane began a left turn, Mr. Urbanowski lost sight of it. Mr. Panetta saw the left wing dip, then the airplane started a left turn, and he lost sight of it. They heard an impact and then responded to the accident site.

Gary Chamberland – Sterling MA Chief of Police

Chief Chamberland visited the pilot's wife at her home. She reported that the pilot had intended a local flight with no destination. The pilot had been flying about 1-2 times per month. She reported that the pilot was generally healthy and had high blood pressure and high cholesterol. He was not experiencing any unusual behavior or issues.

Sue Norlin-Staudaheer (Pilot's wife)

Ms. Norlin-Staudaheer provided the following information through emails on 3/25/20 and 4/1/20:

The pilot had "had trouble with the fuel gauges" in the past.

Ms. Norlin-Staudaheer found a record of a check written to Pioneer Aviation at Turners Falls Airport (0B5) on October 19, 2019, for \$158.88, which she believed was most likely for fuel. (According to the pilot's logbook, he flew the airplane to that airport on that day).