



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Eastern Region

Date: April 3, 2020
Person Contacted: Gregory S. "Scott" Leininger
NTSB Accident Number: ERA20LA129

Narrative:

Mr. Gregory S. "Scott" Leininger was contacted by phone on March 20, 2020, at 1051 EDT, at [REDACTED] and left a voice mail message. He returned the call the same day at 1123 EDT, from the same phone number. Also present on the call was Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector Todd Clamp. Mr. Leininger provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the interview he was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview without representation but indicated that if he has any concern during the interview he will stop the interview at that time.

He is not an airframe and powerplant mechanic, and provided a home address of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Madisonville, Louisiana [REDACTED]. He indicated that he holds a 3rd class medical certificate with a limitation to wear corrective lenses; he was wearing them at the time. He holds a private pilot certificate with ratings for airplane single engine land, and instrument airplane. He obtained his instrument rating on February 27, 2019; the checkride was in the accident airplane. The checkride was given by Wally Moran¹. FAA inspector Todd Clamp indicated that Mr. Moran is a FAA designated pilot examiner (DPE), in Summerville, South Carolina. Mr. Leininger indicated that he had not had any failure for his instrument rating or any other certificate or rating. As of the start of the accident flight, he has about 350 hours total flight time, of which 269 were in

¹ His full name is Wallace James Moran, and he is a DPE associated with the West Columbia, SC FAA Flight Standards District Office

make and model. In the last 90 days he accrued 16.5 hours, and in the last 30 days accrued 9.0 hours. He added he was instrument current at the time of the flight.²

He has owned the airplane about 2.5 years ago.³ It was equipped with a Garmin GNS430W, and Avidyne primary flight display (PFD) and multi-function display (MFD). It was based (hangared) at the Hammond Northshore Regional Airport (HDC), Hammond, Louisiana.

The purpose of the flight was that the airplane was sold (under contract), and he was delivering it for an acceptance flight. Money for the sale was being held in escrow.

At this point of the conversation Mr. Leininger was asked if there had been a pre-buy inspection performed?

He replied that the only thing that had been done related to the sale was sharing of information on-line. The buyer was located at the Columbus County Municipal Airport (CPC), Whiteville, North Carolina. He had planned after arriving there to take the buyer for a flight, and then anticipated “some sort of ground inspection.” He added that in advance of the purchase, he did not have any extra maintenance done to the airplane because the annual inspection had been completed on December 20, 2019. Prior to the accident flight the airplane had been operated about 8 hours since then. He reported no issues with the airplane since the annual had been completed. Since the annual inspection had been signed off, the Cirrus Airframe Parachute System (CAPS) line cutters were replaced in January as they were due replacement. The annual inspection was not owner assisted. The maintenance records were in the airplane during the accident flight and he took possession of them.

As part of the purchase the buyer talked with the facility that had performed the annual inspection and was very comfortable with the status of the airplane.

In advance of the flight, he asked the fixed base operator (FBO) the day before to have the fuel tanks topped off and the airplane out of the hangar by 0630.

He provided the following timeline for March 17, 2020 –

Before leaving home for HDC, he checked ForeFlight and noted 2 bands of rain, one near or at CPC, and another northwest of CPC.

He arrived at HDC about 0645, and loaded the briefcases in the airplane. He did the exterior preflight first, which included a check of engine oil, a check of all 5 fuel sump drains, and he reported no issues with the fuel. He did not use a checklist for the exterior preflight but does use it for the inside portion of his preflight. He grabbed the iPad and notebook and went inside the FBO. He checked the weather using ForeFlight for the flight to CPC, and noted rain returns would not be past CPC for about 3 hours, so he delayed his departure. He waited a few hours and checked the weather again using ForeFlight noting the weather was moving as predicted based on his estimated time enroute of 3.5 hours. To get another pilot’s opinion, he sent a text message

² Mr. Leininger was given an action item to e-mail NTSB copies of his pilot logbook going back 6 months to show instrument recency of experience. He provided the requested information on March 23, 2020.

³ According to FAA records (Bill of Sale), he purchased the airplane on September 1, 2017.

to the buyer at 0810 saying, "My flight time is [approximately] 3.5 [hours]. Looks like I may get a break in the fog in the next 30 [minutes] here. Looking at the line of rain that is over you and to the west of you, it seems like any heavy rain should start to clear around you in 3 to 4 hours? What do you think? Ceilings look fine at 1500 to 2000. Looks like that cell out around Chatt and Knoxville won't be an issue." At that time the Terminal Area Forecast (TAF) on ForeFlight was showing at his estimated arrival a ceiling between 1500 and 2000 ft. The buyer responded to his text message saying "Agree the stuff in TN won't be a factor, mountains will block it today. Looks like the local weather should move off to the NE. assumes not a lot of additional development. Ceilings should be okay for the approach. I think it should be safe but that depends on your personal minimums." The buyer also informed him that it was OK to cancel. Mr. Leininger indicated that ceiling due to fog started at 400 ft earlier then increased to 700 ft. The fog became a thin layer, which was above his personal minimums. He went to the airplane, filed his instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan from HDC to CPS for the flight at 7,000 ft mean sea level (msl), and went through the airplane's checklist. Everything checked satisfactory.

He contacted ground control and obtained his IFR clearance. He taxied to runway 31, was released for takeoff, and departed, climbing to 7,000 ft msl between layers. While flying eastbound he requested to climb to 9,000 ft msl, which was approved and climbed to 9,000 ft msl, which he remained for the majority of the flight while deviating due to buildups near the Carolinas.

At this stage of the conversation he asked if we had any questions and he was asked what constituted a preflight check of the autopilot?

He indicated that he would move the heading bug off either side, and as the airplane responds, would disconnect the autopilot at that point. Later on in the checklist he would verify that the autopilot was disconnected.

What autopilot was the airplane equipped with?
S-Tec 55

As part of your preflight of the autopilot do you override the autopilot in pitch or roll to see if the clutches are ok?

No. He does check to see that the autopilot is disconnected

How do you disconnect the autopilot?

By the button on the control yoke. He added that it worked OK.

Inspector Clamp was asked if he had any questions and he replied he did not.

Mr. Leininger continued with his narrative indicating that when he was 25 to 35 minutes from his intended destination (CPC), he asked air traffic control for a lower altitude, and was advised when able descend and maintain 7,000 ft msl. He descended to 7,000 ft msl, and not too long afterwards, talked with Myrtle Beach Approach control. While in contact with that facility, he informed the controller that his on-board weather was showing the ceiling at his destination as 400 ft, which agreed with the latest METAR. He asked the controller if there was any more current weather, and the controller responded that was the most current weather. The flight

continued and a few minutes later when the METAR did not update, he amended his destination with the controller to Myrtle Beach International Airport (MYR), Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. He was not sure if the controller gave a heading to fly, but he began heading to the right, and was told to expect the instrument landing system (ILS) approach to runway 18, via UXDEP which was the initial approach fix. He was not clear and asked the controller to spell that which the controller did. He loaded that point into the GPS, and entered the approach. The controller advised him to cross UXDEP at or above 2000 ft, he proceeded to UXDEP. As the flight was getting closer, he recognized that the flight was higher than he wanted (airplane was at 3,000 ft msl and he wanted to be between 2,100 and 2,200 ft msl). He reduced power to lose altitude. As the flight continued towards UXDEP, the airplane was not descending as fast as he wanted, and he indicated the flight “was not as stable as he wanted to be.” At that time the autopilot was maybe in NAV mode, but he could not be certain. While in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), it felt like the airplane was veering to the left.

He added power to maintain altitude or climb, and intended to “re-shoot the approach.” When he added power it felt like it was “harder and harder to keep the instruments centered”, adding that it felt like it was less stable than more, and felt like he was, “fighting it.” He saw the chevrons⁴ and reported he was trying to stabilize the airplane. He decided to pull the CAPS, and indicated that the behavior of the airplane was exactly as he had been taught. The airplane went into a nose-down attitude, then righted by the line cutters. At this point he had no concept of time. He told the controller of the CAPS activation, and it appeared to him that the airplane was drifting towards an open field. While descending under canopy he cracked open both front doors, pulled the mixture control, and up to that point the engine had remained running. After reducing the mixture control the engine quit, and the airplane landed on all 3 gears. While on the ground the controller could not hear him, but another airplane that was nearby relayed his status to the controller. He indicated that the emergency locator transmitter active, and the landing location was the yard of a house. The owners came out. He indicated that he was not injured.

He was asked if he was in IMC when the airplane was turning to the left?

He indicated that he was in IMC conditions and did not break out of IMC until under canopy while descending.

Did he get to the IAF?

He was at or just prior to the IAF when the airplane veered to the left. He believed the approach was coupled.

He was asked if he recalled the airspeed when he activated the CAPS?

He did not recall.

He was asked if he attempted to disconnect the autopilot?

He did not remember turning the autopilot off.

⁴ According to the Entegra Cirrus EXP5000 Primary Flight Display Pilot's Guide, the excessive pitch chevrons are “Large white chevrons display at pitch values greater than +50 degrees and less than -30 degrees. In all cases, the chevrons point towards the horizon line.

What flight control access was he fighting?

He felt like he was fighting in roll. He thinks in the last few seconds the pitch and roll were factors that led to the unusual attitude the airplane was in.

Did you look at the secondary flight control trim settings during the issue?

No.

Did you notice any engine or engine systems issues during any portion of the flight?

No. When he added power, it was a familiar response of the engine but he did state that it didn't feel like he was getting the altitude response. He thinks the airplane at that time was in an unusual attitude.

Explain what unusual attitude the airplane was in?

It was in some sort that did not feel level. He can't describe it. The excessive pitch chevrons came up, and it was almost to the point that he couldn't see the background. It was an attention getter.

FAA inspector Clamp asked did you have any flaps extended at that time?

No. He never got to that point. He wanted to be at 120 knots, more stable, and a couple hundred feet lower. At the IAF, he planned to join the localizer for runway 18, and would extend the flaps during the approach. He planned to fly a coupled approach, and as the flight proceeded to the IAF, the autopilot was engaged. The airplane began going to the left.

Was the ATC controller helpful?

Yes. He had nothing negative to say about his handling by ATC.

What was the time of the accident?

Estimated to be 1545 EDT, on March 17, 2020.

Inspector Clamp asked if the autopilot was on NAV mode, and at the fix if approach mode was not selected, would the autopilot keep the airplane at the fix?

He was not sure.

NTSB asked whether NAV mode was selected on the autopilot at the time the airplane was veering to the left?

He was not 100% sure but he does believe the airplane was flying to the IAF.

Are there any personal effects in the airplane?

He took them out and he has the key for the airplane.

Was the ELT turned off?

He was not sure.

Did the airplane have inflatable restraints?

No.

At CAPS pull, how was he wearing the restraint?
He was wearing the 4-point restraint and it was tight.

What was the time of departure?
Estimated to be 1115 CDT. He sent a text to the buyer at 1051 and said he would be leaving soon.

The call ended at 1215 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on April 3, 2020. He replied on April 8, 2020, at 1422 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative in Track Changes mode. The corrected digest was e-mailed to him for review on April 8, 2020. He replied on April 9, 2020, at 0900 EDT with, "You captured all of my amendments Tim." The corrected digest was e-mailed to him on April 15, 2020.