



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 20, 2020
Person Contacted: Randal Lord, witness

This investigator interviewed Mr. Lord by telephone, he stated his farm is about 3 miles southwest from the airport. He was outside when the pilot flew over, he stated he was "lower than he would normally fly, he would typically be about 1,000 ft and fly straight and level." The pilot initially flew past the farm, then made two circles over the farm and flew back towards the airport. He stated the pilots bank angle in the turns was steeper than normal, "they were pretty steep turns for him." When he rolled out of the turn the airplane wobbled a little, as if he had overcompensated. He noted the wind was erratic and gusty that day. He stated the pilot used to fly over the farm often, but he had not seen him fly in about a year.



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Date: May 19, 2020
Person Contacted: Chuck Windham, witness

This investigator interviewed Mr. Windham by telephone, he stated he was standing in front of the fixed base operator (FBO) when he saw the pilot takeoff in the Ercoupe from runway 25. After reaching pattern altitude the pilot departed the area and was out of sight for about 10 to 15 minutes. When the pilot reentered the pattern to land runway 25, the engine sounded normal. He could not hear the engine on the base leg or final approach because it is a quiet engine and the airplane was too far away. The airplane was briefly out of line of sight during the turn from downwind to base, then reappeared on final approach. When he saw the airplane on final approach it appeared stable but low, it seemed that the pilot had control of the airplane. Then the right wing dipped severely and abruptly, about a 40° to 45° bank. It was a very fast movement, like the airplane was snagged to the right. The elevation of the accident site is higher than his position was, and he did not see the airplane impact terrain. He and another witness responded to the accident site. The airplane came to rest upright and a postimpact fire ensued. He estimated the height of the tree to be about 50 ft. The pilot did not make any distress call on the radio.

RECORD OF ☒ VISIT ☐ CONFERENCE OR ☐ TELEPHONE CALL		TIME 11:00 AM	DATE 05/16/2020
NAME (S) OF PERSON (S) CONTACTED OR IN CONFERENCE AND LOCATION Chuck Windham- [REDACTED]		ROUTING 	
		SYMBOL	INITIALS
SUBJECT N3956H Fatal Accident; witness to the crash.			
DIGEST Mr. Windam, a pilot at the airport witnessed the crash. Mr. Windham stated that the aircraft took off runway 25 at Hawkins County Airport and departed the pattern. N3956H returned approximately 20 minutes later under what appeared to be a normal left downwind for runway 25. No abnormalities were noticed as the aircraft turned final, however Mr. Windham stated he was low. No smoke was observed. As he came in, Mr. Windam observed the right wind dip and said he could see the bottom of the aircraft. It appeared to be an approximate 35 degree bank to the right followed by heavy black smoke. The weather was described as clear VFR with approximately 8-10kts of wind straight down the runway. Mr. Windham stated that he had flown earlier in the day and had not observed any downdrafts or poor weather.			
CONCLUSION, ACTION TAKEN, OR REQUIRED The pilots description made it sound as if the aircraft was under control and experiencing no mechanical problems. The low approach described matches the scene of the accident.			
DATE 05/21/2020	TITLE Aviation Safety Inspector	SIGNATURE	



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 20, 2020
Person Contacted: Mike Hathaway- witness

This investigator interviewed Mr. Hathaway by telephone, he stated had lunch with the pilot and another friend the day of the accident, followed by coffee at the airport. While at the airport the pilot stepped outside to speak with another pilot. When Mr. Hathaway went outside the pilot was not there, he thought he had gone down to one of his hangars. The pilot owned the Ercoupe and several other antique airplanes. He went back inside and shortly after that heard an airplane, went outside and saw the pilot takeoff in the Ercoupe. The pilot flew west, a typical flight path over a friends farm, then returned to the airport. He saw the pilot enter the downwind leg of the traffic pattern, but did not have line of sight and could not see him on the base leg. He stated the engine sounded great on takeoff and the downwind leg of the traffic pattern. He stated the wind was about 10 knots and may have pushed him out a little further out before turning base. He saw the airplane stable on final approach, then the right wing dropped violently, he briefly saw the bottom of the airplane before he lost sight of it. He and another witness responded to the accident site and found the airplane engulfed in flames.

He stated everything about the flight was completely normal until the airplane clipped the top of the tree. He stated the pilot typically flies low and slow, not climbing above 2,500 ft. He was very conscientious, if there was any "blip" with an engine he would return to the hangar and not fly, "he didn't take any chances." He believed the pilot was looking at the runway and focusing on his touchdown spot and did not realize he had gotten so low.

The precision approach path indicator (PAPI) lights were out of service, but Mr. Hathaway did not think it was a factor in the accident because the pilot had been flying there for 50 years and was familiar with the airport.

RECORD OF ☒ VISIT ☐ CONFERENCE OR ☐ TELEPHONE CALL		TIME 11:00 AM	DATE 05/16/2020
NAME (S) OF PERSON (S) CONTACTED OR IN CONFERENCE AND LOCATION Mike Hathaway- [REDACTED]		ROUTING 	
		SYMBOL	INITIALS
SUBJECT N3956H Fatal Accident; witness to the crash.			
DIGEST Mr. Hathaway witnessed the crash and had also spent time with the pilot before the crash. He went to lunch with the PIC of the fatal accident and described him as a friend. Mr. Hathaway stated that the PIC seemed normal and healthy that day with no abnormalities noted. Mr. Hathaway stated that the aircraft was on a low final with no apparent mechanical abnormalities. Mr. Hathaway is a pilot also. He stated that he believed the pilot made a mistake by being too low and hit the trees.			
CONCLUSION, ACTION TAKEN, OR REQUIRED The pilot was described as being in good health on the day of the accident and the aircraft was described as operating normally.			
DATE 05/21/2020	TITLE Aviation Safety Inspector	SIGNATURE	



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 19, 2020
Person Contacted: Mark Finley- RVN, airport manager

This investigator interviewed Mr. Finley by telephone, he stated the pilot is typically at the airport everyday and flies once every couple months or so. He believed the pilot had been flying at the airport for over 50 years, he had never seen the pilot flying that low before. The pilot's flights were typically short and in the vicinity of the airport. He had given the pilot a flight review in 2009.

The airport runway precision approach path indicator (PAPI) lights were permanently removed from service via NOTAM three years ago.



RECORD of CONVERSATION

Millicent Hill
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: May 15, 2020
Person Contacted: Barbara Johnson, witness

This investigator interviewed Ms. Johnson by telephone, she stated she was inside her house when she heard a “big boom.” She went outside and saw smoke, then the airplane, it was a “big ball of fire,” right before she saw it impact the ground. She believed that the airplane was leaving the airport at the time of the accident.