

Inspector Statement

Subject: Telephonic interview with Robert Simpkins

Created by: FAA Safety Inspector Dwight Greenlund

On 6/23/2021 I interviewed Mr. Robert Simpkins telephonically regarding the aircraft accident of N1300Q. Aircraft N1300Q was involved in a fatal accident on 6/18/2021. Mr. Simpkins was a student pilot who flew aircraft N1300Q on a training flight prior to the fatal accident with the instructor pilot Mr. David Cuttino.

I initially asked Mr. Simpkins what his background was. Mr. Simpkins mentioned that he works for the Federal Aviation Administration as a technical manager in the airfield support division. He is a retired Air Force veteran who was an aircraft mechanic on F-16 and Stealth Fighters. Upon his retirement from the Air Force, he had a desire to fly airplanes and obtain his pilot certificate. He was working on his Private Pilot certificate and had five flights with A-Cent Aviation in Fernandina Beach.

I asked Mr. Simpkins about the events of the morning of June 18th. He said he arrived at the airfield about 7:45 am. His scheduled instruction time was from 8:00 am to 10:00 am. He said Mr. Cuttino arrived at about the same time, and they began the flight session. He said he conducted the pre-flight of the airplane and Mr. Cuttino obtained the fuel sample. He said Mr. Cuttino commented they had about 10 gallons of fuel on board which was about 2 and a half hours of flight time. He said they departed the airport around 8:00 am. They flew up to the St. Marys River at an altitude of about 1000 feet. Over the St. Marys River he said they performed clean stalls, dirty stalls, and a power off glide at altitudes between 1000 and 1200 feet. They also performed turns around a point, standard rate turns, and split S maneuvers. During that time he said the weather was great with little winds and the ceiling and visibility good. They then returned to Fernandina Beach airport. They conducted some touch and go landings at Fernandina Beach, and completed the flight with a 180 degree power off landing. Mr. Simpkins commented that he performed well during the flight, and that the aircraft had no issues. He said after they talked a little bit after the flight, shook hands, and that was the last time they spoke.

I asked Mr. Simpkins if he recalled preflighting the control surfaces before the flight. He said that he had preflighted the ailerons, rudder, and elevator and found no unusual play or binding. He said the aircraft was in pretty good shape.

I asked if he knew if the aircraft had ADSB. He said that they had a white box that they would put in the dash of the aircraft. The white box would provide data of other aircraft onto an iPad so they could see the location of other aircraft. I asked if it was a Stratus device, and he said he wasn't sure exactly what it was.

I asked how many flights he had with Mr. Cuttino. He referenced his log book and said he had five flights with him, ranging in time from .6 hours to 1.1 hours in length. He said he had booked lessons on Friday mornings as that was his RDO (day off) from the FAA. He said all of his flights were with Mr. Cuttino.

I asked if they always performed the stall maneuvers at 1000 to 1200 feet. He said that on other days they may have climbed to 1800 feet to perform stalls, but on that Friday morning he was pretty

sure they were at 1000 to 1200 feet. He said they had never gotten above 1800 feet in his previous flights. I asked if he thought that may have been low to do those maneuver, and he replied that it seemed kind of low but he had nothing to judge it against. He said he had a flight in an F-16 in 1984 but they did not stall it.

I asked him to tell me how they performed the stalls. He said he would pull back the power to about 17, then the airspeed would come down. He said at about 45 knots the stall whistlers would go off and the nose would fall away. He would then add power and recover the aircraft. When I asked how far the nose would drop, he said that up to the stall the nose would be pretty high, then when it stalled the nose would drop maybe 35 to 40 degrees. He said it was pretty significant. He said that after the power was applied the aircraft would recover pretty quickly. He said Mr. Cuttino would not be on the controls when he was flying the maneuvers, and that he (Mr. Simpkins) was doing all the flying.

I asked him if he had ever did a low altitude engine failure. He said he had not. I explained that at a low altitude and a relatively high airspeed, you would conduct a simulated engine failure. You would use the excess airspeed to gain altitude to allow for a better viewing access of available landing areas and then establish a regular engine out attitude. He said he had not conducted that maneuver.

I asked if Mr. Cuttino had told him that he was quitting. He stated that one of the first things Mr. Cuttino said to him that Friday morning was that he was sorry, but this would be his last day flying with him. He said that he had a long flying career and wanted to have more time at home with his wife. He said that after the flight he spoke with the school Ground Operations Director, Jack Bishop. Mr. Bishop told him the name of the instructor he would be flying with next time but Mr. Simpkins could not recall his name. He said that right after the flight Mr. Cuttino said he had to run home to do something and quickly left the airfield. Mr. Simpkins said he was speaking with Mr. Bishop for a few minutes and by the time he left around 10 am Mr. Cuttino was not there. He also commented that he did not see the next student Ms. George arrive.

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