



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: May 16, 2022
Person: George Nugent – Former Aircraft Owner
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21FA377 Lansing, WV
Subject: Beech BE23 N3342L

Narrative:

Mr. Nugent said he was the original owner of the airplane and later brought Mr. Fletcher in as a partner. Then 3 months prior to the accident, Mr. Fletcher purchased his share. Mr. Nugent said he was a private pilot with 1,000 hours of total flight with 900 hours in the Beech Sundowner. Mr. Nugent provided information on the history of the ownership of the airplane, his partnership, some of their habits as owners, as well as some of his observations. According to Mr. Nugent:

I don't believe he maintained the airplane at the same place I did. The maintenance records should be at his house.

As a rule, we would only keep 40 gallons of fuel on board, but I assume he topped the airplane off prior to the 2.5 hour flight he was going to take. I've been flying these Sundowners for a long time, and even with 40 gallons on board and with only 3 people on board you'd catch hell getting it to climb. With the density altitude for the day, 3 people on board, and all of that camping equipment, the 3rd seat and the luggage compartment had to be full. Looking at the airport, and all of that equipment, if I was there, I would have taken an Uber.

Those Sundowners are ground hogs. They need a lot of runway to take off.

When I saw the airplane was going to West Virginia I was worried he'd be taking a bunch of camping equipment. He was one of those guys that was so smart that sometimes he was dumb, you know what I mean?

Mr. Nugent was asked to expound on what he meant by that statement. He explained that Mr. Fletcher was a very bright man, an engineer, but that at times his experience and application didn't quite equal his academic understanding of things.

One time we were at Hummel Field, which is a very short runway. I came back from the FBO, we started rolling, I asked how much fuel did you take? He told me how much he took, and I said, "It's going to be tight." He said, "we'll be alright" and we just barely got out of there and then he said, "I'll never do that again."

Another time, we were in the clouds, and we are climbing and descending 3-800 feet per minute, banking left and right and I said, "Get the hell out of these clouds." And he replied, "I got this..." You know, just because you have an instrument rating, that doesn't necessarily make you an instrument pilot.

I don't mean to throw Nick under the bus, but there were times when he was too smart for his own good. I would tell him, this is aviation, you only get one bite at the apple. You have to be careful because these things have sharp edges.

Mr. Nugent went on to add that while he felt compelled to have these conversations with Mr. Fletcher from time to time, Mr. Fletcher welcomed his counsel. Mr. Nugent described a time when he shared some preflight concerns with Mr. Fletcher, who followed his advice, and thanked him for it. Mr. Nugent added that he wanted to reach out to Mr. Fletcher about the trip to West Virginia, about weight and balance, elevation, density altitude, and aircraft performance, but he did not. He said:

I wish I had sent that text...