



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Todd Gunther
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: December 23, 2020
Subject: Information Provided by Naples Police Department
NTSB Case Number: ERA21LA087

On December 22, 2020, The Naples Police Department (City of Naples, Florida), provided the NTSB with the following statements:

Benjamin Wilson (Witness)

Mr. Wilson was sitting on the beach in the area of the flight path of Naples Airport. Wilson stated he frequents this area of the beach every other weekend.

Wilson stated there had been numerous airplanes overhead and observed that the accident airplane was approximately 1,000 ft. lower than the other airplanes. The airplane continued to go lower and lower as it got closer to the beach. Wilson stated he thought the airplane would crash into the beach, so he got up and ran.

Wilson stated he believed he heard an engine and stated the pilot made a controlled water landing. Wilson stated after the crash a helicopter was on-scene in about a minute.

Rodney Gandee (Witness)

Mr. Gandee stated he was walking on the beach when he saw the airplane come in low and hit the water. Gandee stated he did not remember hearing the airplane's engine.

Gandee stated the occupants of the airplane got out on the wing and were there for about 5-10 minutes before jumping into the water.

Earl Hoskin (Witness)

Mr. Hoskin stated he and his wife Patricia Hoskin, were sitting on the beach facing southwest and the airplane was flying to the north. Hoskin stated they did not see or hear the airplane flying but did hear a 'thud' when the airplane hit the water.

Christopher Sereno (Witness)

Mr. Sereno stated he was boating in the area when he observed the Charlotte County Sheriff's helicopter fly close to his boat waiving and motioning him to follow the helicopter. Sereno stated he followed the helicopter and then observed the airplane in the water and two subjects swimming in the water. Sereno stated he maneuvered his vessel alongside the subjects and opened his port side dive door. Sereno stated he and his passenger Emery Sereno, and Julia Johnston, assisted the one male and one female subject into his boat. Sereno recalled that female subject was difficult to get onboard as she was in pain and less mobile. Sereno remembered that the male subject explained that they were the only two occupants of the airplane several times. Sereno stated that the male subject stated he was flying the airplane from Sarasota to Key West when the engine died, and he had to land the airplane in the water. Sereno also stated the Naples Fire Department (City of Naples, Florida) then arrived on scene and transferred the subjects to their boat.

Karl-Heinz Zahorsky (Pilot)

Mr. Zahorsky stated they were flying from the Sarasota International Airport (KSRQ) to the Key West International Airport (KEYW). Zahorsky stated their flight path carried them over the Gulf of Mexico (from the area of Ft. Myers) directly to Key West.

Zahorsky stated when he switched fuel tanks for the plane (which was normal practice), the engine began 'sputtering' so he switched back to the original tank. Zahorsky stated he could not get the engine fully operational and radioed to make a landing at the next closest airport (Naples Airport). Zahorsky stated he realized that he did not have enough altitude to make it to the airport so he radioed that he would be heading toward the beach. Zahorsky stated the airplane could not make it to the beach, so he made a landing in shallow water so they could get out and swim. Zahorsky stated there was a helicopter near them after the crash and a boat shortly arrived on-scene after they were swimming. Zahorsky stated they then got on the boat.

Zahorsky stated when he lost power to his engine during the fuel transfer, he put the nose of the airplane down to maintain speed so the airplane would not stall. Zahorsky stated the airplane was gliding well, but they did not have enough altitude to make it to the airport.

Zahorsky stated he had been flying since 1999 and had flown the aircraft all over the world. Zahorsky stated his airplane was a Piper Malibu PA46-310P, single engine, pressurized, six passenger, airplane and had been serviced/maintained.

Helga Bischof (Passenger)

Ms. Bischof stated that she and her husband (pilot) took off from the Sarasota (SRQ) airport enroute to Key West, FL. At approximately seven thousand feet, her husband switched the fuel tanks, and when he did, the engine cut out. Bischof stated her husband then attempted to switch the fuel tank back and restart the engine, but it would not restart. Bischof stated her husband put the airplane nose down to gain speed and keep lift while trying to restart the engine. Bischoff stated they could not restart the engine, knew they would not make the Naples airport, and landed in the water. Bischof stated there were no issues or problems with the flight until her husband switched the fuel tanks.



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Subject: Information Provided by Karl-Heinz Zahorsky (Pilot)
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According to Mr. Zahorsky, he had taken off on the right fuel tank. His destination was Key West International (EYW), Key West, Florida.

While heading direct to EYW at 7,000 feet above mean sea level, when he was abeam Naples Florida, he switched the fuel selector to the left fuel tank, and the engine began to sputter. He then advised air traffic control of his problem and turned direct towards Naples Municipal Airport (APF), Naples, Florida.

He realized that he was going to end up in the Gulf of Mexico and configured the airplane for a water landing. The impact was straight forward, and the propeller was damaged when the airplane contacted the water. He then opened the upper half of the air stair door, he egressed, and then his wife egressed. They then began swimming towards the beach. The United States Coast Guard then directed a boat to their location, and they were transported to a hospital.

The annual inspection had been completed in October. The fuel selector had felt like it was working fine during the flight. During the annual inspection though, all the test flights had been done on the right fuel tank, and this was the first time he had selected the left fuel tank since the annual inspection.