



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Eastern Region

Date: January 27, 2021
Person Contacted: Gary L. Murphy
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA123

Narrative:

Mr. Gary L. Murphy was contacted by phone on January 27, 2021 at 0944 EST. He was called at [REDACTED]. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

He indicated that the flight was flying along and suddenly the engine started spitting and sputtering then it "shut off." After the engine started to develop problems and then subsequently quit the certified flight instructor (CFI) who was on-board attempted to restore engine power. He flared before touchdown adding that he pulled hard before water contact. After water contact with the empennage the tail skipped twice then the main landing gear contacted the water. The airplane did not go inverted. He only noted that the left wingtip had separated.

He is the owner of the airplane and the maintenance records are with "Mikey" at KFMY.

He provided details about the accident flight –

He was flying at 5,500 ft mean sea level, and believed he was operating on the left fuel tank. Shortly after the engine began spitting and sputtering the CFI turned on the auxiliary fuel pump which did not restore engine power. She also switched fuel tanks, while he flew the airplane. The propeller continued to rotate, and he did not smell any smoke. All occupants were wearing inflatable life vests. After coming to rest upright Rhonda was the first out of the airplane by the cabin entry door. Then he came out of the airplane and reported that the cabin was quickly filling with water. He swam to the rear of the airplane, inflated both their life vests and helped them out of the airplane. There were 4 people camping on a nearby beach, 3 of whom were pilots and the final was a fireman. While in the water they began making their way to shore while the people on the beach came to them in an inflatable boat. They got into the inflatable boat. Within 20 minutes the National Park Service and US Coast Guard arrived. He indicated that the controller of Miami Air Route Traffic Control Center did a good job after declaring an emergency.

He was asked the following questions –

Was the airplane equipped with ADS-B?

Yes

Was he the pilot-in-command?

Yes. He was actually getting his Flight Review on the flight to MTH and also planned to do so on the return leg to FMY. They planned to return several days later.

Did he have a chance to note the engine gauge readings at the time?

After the engine quit he did notice the exhaust gas temperature and cylinder head temperature readings “went out.” He attributed that to be from the actions of the CFI who was pumping the throttle attempting to restore engine power.

What was the time span between the spitting and sputtering and the engine quitting?

Less than 1 minute. The spitting and sputtering was the first indication of an engine problem. After they first heard the issue, they felt a vibration from the engine, which he attributed to be like the engine was firing on 3 of the 6 cylinders, with the, “engine running erratically.”

At the time was there enough fuel remaining in the left fuel tank?

Each tank total capacity is 40 gallons, and they only needed about 17 gallons total for the trip.

Was the fuel selector on the left fuel tank the whole time since takeoff?

Yes. At the time the engine first started acting up they were only 40 minutes or less into the flight. He makes the FMY to MTH trip frequently, and typically flies down there on one tank and back on the other tank.

Had there been any recent work done to the engine or its systems?

Yes. They just replaced the auxiliary (electric) fuel pump which he thought was made by Weldon. That was done at the last annual inspection last August. Because of several issues (tri-annual registration renewal, propeller overhaul/repair, etc.) the airplane was not operated for some time after the annual was done. The CFI on board during the event flew the airplane and noted spitting and sputtering. And that was the reason for the fuel pump replacement. He said previous to that the engine had been operating OK for about 3 to 4 years. After the fuel pump was replaced the mechanic flew the airplane on 3 separate flights about 1 hour duration each flight, which included multiple takeoffs and landings. The airplane then subsequently flown by the CFI a few weeks ago on multiple flight segments from FMY > EYW > MTH (where she picked him up) > EYW > FMY. The total flight time of all those flights was about 4.5 hours with no engine issues noted. Based on his analysis he thought the engine issue during the event was attributed to be related to fuel and was not an ignition issue.

Was his airplane hangered at FMY?

Yes.

Questions continued:

How long was the airplane airborne when the 1st symptom developed?

About 40 minutes

Was his airplane equipped with an engine monitor that recorded engine parameters?

No.

There was a brief discussion about the fuel vent. He indicated that he thought that was interesting because the NPS told him they were checking his airplane and there was no fuel leaking out.

He concluded by saying that he was impressed with the help the Miami Air Route Traffic Control Center controller did and wanted to write a formal letter.

The call ended at 1013 EST.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on January 27, 2021. He replied the same day at 1732 EST with, "Very good job looks like you covered everything that we talked about." The corrected digest was e-mailed to him on January 27, 2021.