



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Witness Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 3, 2021
Person Contacted: Romano Almonte (Witness)
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA310

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

Mr. Almonte was contacted by phone on August 3, 2021, at 1505 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED], and a voicemail was left. He returned the call at 1522 EDT and provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

Mr. Almonte stated that he is happy to share the details of the accident, but that there is a video that was on the front of his hang-glider that shows the whole event, and he will send that video, which points forward and to the left. At the time of the accident, Mr. Almonte was the pilot of the hang glider being towed by the accident airplane.

They took off to the southwest. It was early morning, about 0937 EDT. The wind was from the right, from the northwest. The tow airplane started to accelerate, and all was good. This tow pilot, Sam, prefers to stay on the ground longer to build up speed and then he pitches up more steeply after liftoff, more than 30° relative to the horizontal. He estimated 30° because "(1) that's what the tug plane looked like from behind but I can't be entirely precise, (2) my unpowered hang glider stalls at a pitch up angle of 30 degrees relative to airflow so I never fly at that angle when off tow, and (3) for comparison the previous tug pilot who pilots that plane (William Estes) never climbs as steeply as Sam. I was towing with Sam the previous weeks and that steep climb seemed fine, but it was fine on all those other occasions because we were flying into a good headwind. But since last Saturday the wind was 90 degrees cross (not much headwind), he would have to rely solely on the thrust provided by the engine to sustain the airspeed needed to climb at that angle." Mr. Almonte stated that he cannot pitch up the way that Sam pitches up. He stated that "Sam has been towing only about a month and he is not yet very proficient with the Dragonfly."

After liftoff it appeared to Mr. Almonte that the tow airplane seemed to pitch up too high and the tow line then went slack and it look like the tow airplane was stalling, so he immediately disconnected his hang glider. The tow airplane fell straight down. It hit first on the left gear then ground-looped to the left and hit the plow, which was about 25 feet off to the left of the runway on the ramp. Romano was able to move to the right and land.

The call ended at 1533.

In an email with the video in regular and slow motion, he included the following explanation:

If you look closely at the slow-motion version, the propeller of the tug plane was still running and spinning as the plane fell from the sky, turned left on the ground and hit the farm machinery. Distal bits of the propeller were scattered all over the field.

After stalling, it looks like the NW crosswind caused the tug plane to roll left, causing it to land hard on the left wheel. Since the propeller was still running and the left wheel was smashed, the plane kept moving forward but it was pivoting around the broken left landing gear.

The airport owner has security camera footage showing the tug plane landing hard on the left wheel.

The other hang glider pilot who witnessed the event is Bunkhouse Bob. You can see him setting up his rigid wing glider near the 2 cars parked by the hangar at 0:18 of the original unannotated video.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on August 4, 2021. He replied on August 4, 2021, at 1417 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to him on August 4, 2021.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Operator Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 2, 2021
Person Contacted: Bryon Estes (Operator)
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA310

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

Mr. Bryon Estes was contacted by phone on August 2, 2021, at 1258 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED]. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

Mr. Estes explained that the pilot (Sam Cichon) was hospitalized and needing surgery, and that he had not spoken to him since he was taken to the hospital. He further explained that his father is the owner of the airplane.

He stated that it was the first flight of the day and they had just added about 5 gallons of fuel to the tow airplane. They hooked the hang-glider to the tow airplane and had planned to tow it to 1,000 ft AGL.

Shortly after the hand signal to start, the tow airplane started to accelerate and then took off. Shortly thereafter, he heard the engine sound "sputtery." He stated that sometimes that happens. He looked back at the airplane and it was in a "stalled position." I asked what a "stalled position" looked like, and he responded, "high angle of attack and very slow." He stated that he saw movement in the tail one way then the other then the airplane nosed over and "mushed in" from about 40-60 ft in the air. He said it looked like the airplane stalled and mushed in, did a left-handed ground loop, and hit a plow that was near the airfield. The pilot was out of the airplane when he got there, but then he laid down.

He hang glider pilot detached as soon as he realized that there was a loss of climb.

He stated that the FAA authorized them to move the airplane and that it will remain inside the hangar until they are notified otherwise.

The call ended at 1319 EDT.