



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 26, 2022
Person: Dennis DiDonna – Pilot of #1 Airplane in Flight of Three
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA162 Homestead, FL
Subject: Piper Sport

Narrative:

Mr. Dennis DiDonna – ATP – Retired Airline Pilot

Mr. DiDonna was one of 3 pilots who each flew their individual airplanes from Naples, FL to Marathon, FL for a pleasure flight, lunch, and then the return flight to Naples, which was where all 3 airplanes were hangered and based. Mr. DiDonna was interviewed by telephone, and the following is a summary of the interview.

Mr. DiDonna explained that they waited some time on the ground for Mr. Dean and the accident airplane at Naples after returning from Marathon, and the group became concerned. Their attempts to contact the accident airplane were unsuccessful, and another pilot separate from the initial party volunteered to search for N811SP in his own airplane. Mr. DiDonna accompanied him. He said, "Nobody had a VFR flight plan, nobody did flight following, and I have a small Cirrus. I go along the shoreline, and then over. (After the accident) we jumped too early, and in hindsight it was kind of stupid." Mr. DiDonna explained that they acted impulsively and reflected on the futility of searching such a large area with no defined dimension.

Mr. DiDonna was asked about the trip to Marathon. He said, "I got on the ground and said two other planes were coming. I really didn't see Rob. It took him longer than expected. He landed on 25 and when I asked why he landed in that direction he said, 'I looked at the windsock.'"

Mr. Di Donna was asked about Mr. Read's appearance, his demeanor, and how he presented himself. He replied, "I sat right across from him, and he was not punchy or loopy. We talked about him and his family. Talked about family history. I know all the signs of someone having a stroke, and he didn't seem to me... My wife said he seemed off, but I didn't notice anything unusual except that he didn't eat the dinner he ordered."

Mr. DiDonna volunteered that at some time in the previous weeks Mr. Read had mentioned he was struggling to “get frequencies into” his avionics suite. Mr. DiDonna said that he would do a local area orientation with him and work the radios and get him comfortable, but they never did.

Mr. DiDonna said he saw the flight track of the accident airplane on FlightAware but couldn’t explain the track.

Mr. DiDonna said that prior to departing Naples the ground controller provided incorrect taxi instructions to the accident airplane, and Mr. Read caught the discrepancy and corrected the controller. That convinced Mr. DiDonna that Mr. Read was lucid and aware of his circumstances.

“If I thought he was dopey or having a stroke, I would have done something about it. I never saw a sign...”



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

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Eastern Region

Date: March 26, 2022
Person: James Goode – Pilot of #2 Airplane in Flight of Three
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA162 Homestead, FL
Subject: Piper Sport

Narrative:

Mr. James Goode – ATP – Retired Airline Pilot

Mr. Goode was one of 3 pilots who each flew their individual airplanes from Naples, FL to Marathon, FL for a pleasure flight, lunch, and then the return flight to Naples, which was where all 3 airplanes were hangered and based. Mr. Goode was interviewed by telephone, and the following is a summary of the interview.

According to Mr. Goode, “We all left at the same time. At departure, Cirrus first, me second, Rob 3rd. On the taxiway he was right behind me. Going down, two or 3 times we spoke, going back, he didn’t respond. Maybe he still had the Marathon UNICOM.”

“It was a spur of the moment trip. We had formed The Old Farts Flying Club and for the past 10 years we started going someplace for lunch. We have over 1,000 people on our list, and sometimes 70 to 100 people will show up. The original lunch plan was to go to Leesburg, which we cancelled due to weather and decided on Marathon spur of the moment.”

When asked about his arrival at Marathon, Mr. Goode said, “The Cirrus pilot was out of the airplane, I parked next to him, and Rob came last. I landed on runway 7. He landed on 25. He did that based on what he saw ‘as a windsock.’ We saw him on the downwind. His altitude was fairly low, had started for one runway and changed his mind, then went for the other. I don’t think there was any conflicting traffic. I couldn’t hear the radio.” Mr. Goode was asked if Mr. Reed had expressed having had difficulty entering the pattern or completing the landing, and he said, “No.”

Mr. Goode said that he was monitoring the ADS-B target identified as N811SP. He said he noticed some altitude and course deviations, but that they didn't concern him. He added, "He might have gone a half mile to the east of a little puffy cloud. And then continued on to Marathon."

When asked, if he had any question about Mr. Read's cognitive abilities, he replied, "Maybe, but men don't think like that." Did he present any behaviors that concerned you? "Yes, he didn't eat his lunch. That was unusual, because he had a healthy appetite. When his wife heard it concerned her greatly, as it was very unusual for him."

When asked about the return trip, Mr. Goode said, "Never communicated with him on the way back. Tried him on 123.45 and never heard from him. I didn't hear him on UNICOM. We all have to assume that he had some kind of health event. He had health issues in the past. He owned a lot of airplanes, he was very successful, but because of health issues, he was flying as a Sport Pilot. I know he had a scare involving a surgery."



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Eastern Region

Date: March 26, 2022
Person: Mike Birt – Linesman – Marathon Aviation
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA162 Homestead, FL
Subject: ERA22LA162 Piper Sport, N811PS

Narrative:

Mr. Birt was a linesman at Marathon General Aviation (G/A) in Marathon, FL when the accident airplane arrived for a brief stopover. The pilot and 2 of his friends were meeting there for lunch.

According to Mr. Birt, “The two other airplanes landed, and they were waiting on the accident pilot on the G/A ramp. We were standing there talking with the two older guys, in their 70s and the airport was using Runway 7. All of a sudden, their friend came in and landed opposite direction on Runway 25, bounced the landing while at the very same time a jet was on short final for landing on Runway 7. I turned to the two gentlemen waiting and asked, ‘Did you see that?’”

The accident airplane taxied off the runway to the Jet Center on the opposite end of the airport (west end). A coworker at the Jet Center radioed Mr. Birt and said he was sending the accident airplane to the G/A ramp on the east end.

At the same time the accident airplane was taxiing on the only taxiway, the jet was headed west on the taxiway to the jet center while the accident airplane taxied eastbound towards the G/A ramp, and they again approached each other head-on. Only the Beechjet was transmitting on the radio while both planes taxied.

Once the accident airplane arrived on the G/A ramp, Mr. Birt parked the airplane. According to Mr. Birt, he was an EMT for many years and said the accident pilot, Mr. Read, struggled to egress his airplane and appeared “befuddled” when he got out. Mr. Birt asked Mr. Read if he wanted fuel, or any other services and he wouldn’t respond. A pilot outside the party of 3 confronted Mr. Read about entering the traffic pattern and landing without making any radio calls. Mr. Birt said that the Mr. Read did not respond, continued to appear “befuddled” and his

friends “defended him” and then took him away to go to lunch. The other pilots explained that the accident pilot “didn’t have a radio” as the radio in his airplane was inoperative.

Mr. Birt repeated that when he witnessed the bounced landing, he turned to the other 2 pilots and asked, “did you see that?” as he was more accustomed to smooth landings from the smaller sport airplanes.

“I feared for the pilot, because he was ‘devastated’ by what he had done. He was wrong, both on the landing and when he taxied. He looked devastated. I was afraid he would commit suicide.”