



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Operator Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 2 and 5, 2022

Person Contacted: Mr. Justin Watlington, Mr. Tyler Tomann, Mr. Kendrick Meiners

NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Justin Watlington, Director of Operations for Rampart Aviation, provided a phone number of [REDACTED] 7 and an e-mail address of [REDACTED]; Mr. Tyler Tomann, Director of Maintenance for Rampart Aviation, provided a phone number of [REDACTED], and e-mail address of [REDACTED]. Mr. Kendrick Meiners, Director of Safety for Rampart Aviation, provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

At the beginning of the interview, they were advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. They were also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; They agreed to the interview without representation.

We do not have the information as to the number of jumpers, but they will get that for me. Their customer has requested that they stay external to this investigation. We agreed to continue the call at another time and that I would send them my questions.

August 5, 2022:

In addition to the above-referenced call participants, Mr. Tony Porterfield, CEO and owner of Rampart Aviation, [REDACTED], participated in this call.

I inquired as to whether there were any questions, and we discussed that the NTSB is retaining the airplane at this time. I explained that they should not access the airplane without seeking my permission first, and that any access will be overseen by the FAA. I explained that Mr. Crookshanks is an aerospace engineer who will be supporting this investigation and coordinating with the Spanish authorities and Airbus, and that he and I are fully coordinating and that they should respond to any requests from Mr. Crookshanks and simply copy me. They had no more questions, so I then proceeded to ask questions.

Q: Were the fractured bolts recovered with the landing gear?

A: Yes, and they are in NC with the airplane.

Q: Who accessed wreckage after the accident flight?

A: The FAA gave them permission to start their hard landing inspection. The airplane was in the grass between runway and taxiway and the airport authority needed the airplane moved; Eric, their employee, was escorted to the airplane to determine what would be required to recover it, which they did the next morning. The original landing gear was reinstalled with new bolts to recover.

Q: Are you going to attempt to obtain a ferry permit to move the airplane?

A: Yes.

Q: I see Mr. Crooks was approved for parachute dropping operations on March 30. Is that correct and when did he onboard with the company?

A: He was hired March 14. March 30th was his completion of Part 135 training for SIC.

Q: Was this flight intended for any kind of sign-off or check?

A: No. Our check airman are also line pilots, so this flight was just flying with a line pilot.

Q: How much line flying had Mr. Crooks done for the company?

A: About 197 hours.

Q: Was he working toward any other sign-offs at the time? Mission sign-offs?

A: No, there was no additional training or checks taking place. This was not a sign-off. There were no intentions to bring him to PIC at the time of the incident.

Q: How many hours in total had Mr. Oppedal flown with Mr. Crooks? I see some records in the training records, but how many non-training hours?

A: We can get that to you.

Q: What check airman flew with Mr. Crooks in addition to Mr. Oppedal?

A: Mr. Chad Smith

Q: Would you send me Mr. Smith's contact information.

A: Yes.

Q: Did anyone mention any turbulence on the flight?

A: No one mentioned anything about turbulence. We ask our pilots to write ALL things pertinent to that flight when preparing a narrative.

The call ended at 1307 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to them for review on August 5, 2022. Mr. Meiners replied on August 8, 2022, at 1653 EDT noting no discrepancies. The final digest was e-mailed to them on August 9, 2022.



[REDACTED]
Colorado Springs, CO 80916

August 3, 2022

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
www.rampartaviation.com

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

RE: ERA22LA348 Questions and requests

Dear Ms. Spencer,

Per your request, please see Ramparts Response to your questions.

1. Contact information, including the email address, of the captain on the accident flight.

Michael Oppedal

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

2. Medical and pilot certificates of both pilots

Attached through secure message portal

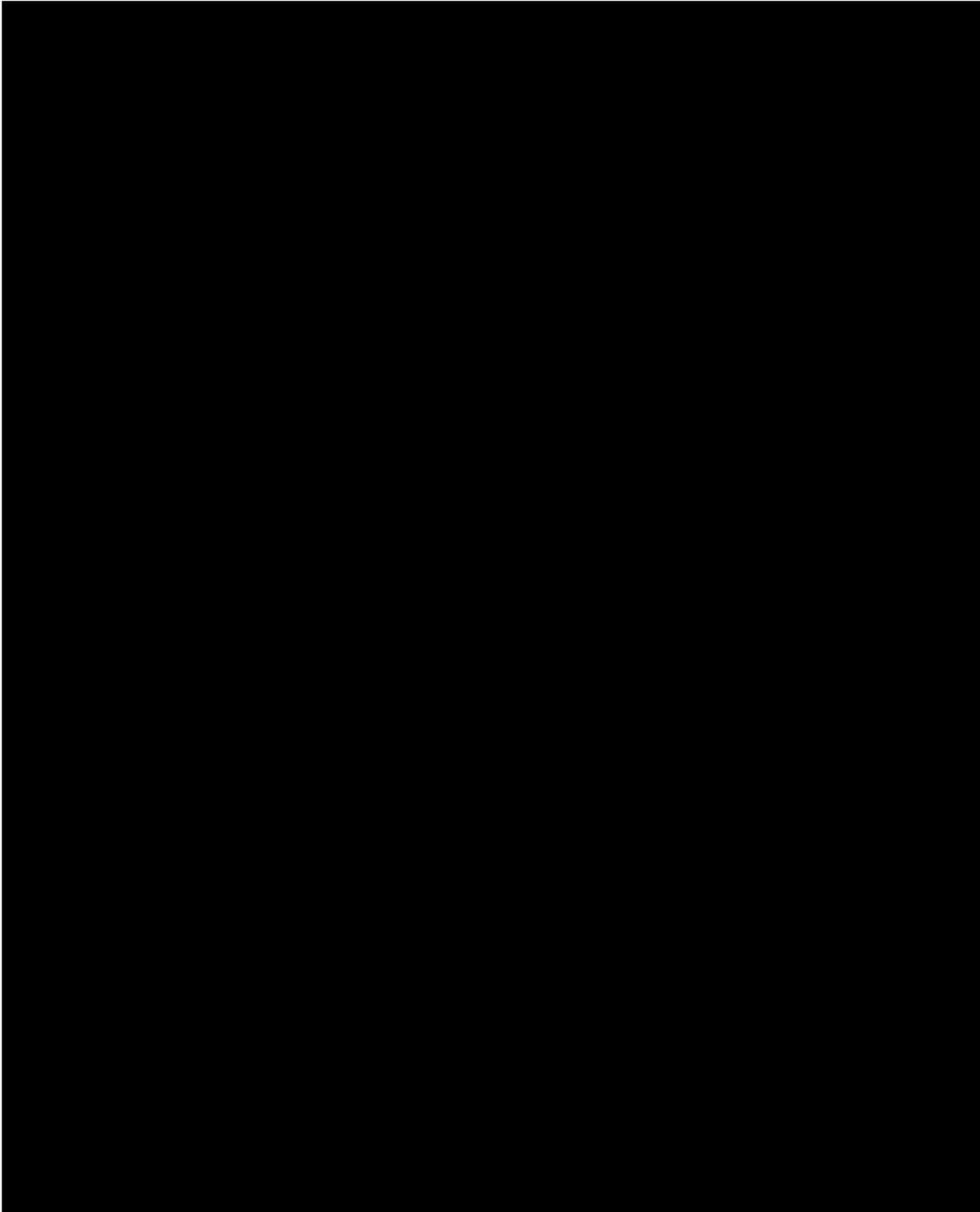
[REDACTED]
Colorado Springs, CO 80916

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

www.rampartaviation.com

3. Contract which covers the work being conducted by the accident airplane at the time of the accident, or the page of the contract that specifies the operator.



[REDACTED]
Colorado Springs, CO 80916

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
www.rampartaviation.com

4. Names and contact information for any individuals who witnessed the crew before the accident, or who saw the landing during which the gear came off the airplane.

Our customer has requested that you contact the following POC:

Matthew W. Radd
Training Deputy

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

5. All training records for both pilots

Attached through secure message portal

6. Names and contact information for 2-3 pilots who most recently flew with the accident captain.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

7. All maintenance logbooks (or the logbooks themselves) if not already provided to the FAA

It is Ramparts understanding that you have received the requested maintenance logbooks from the FAA Greensboro FSDO PMI Mike Allen. If you require further documentation, please inform us.

Additional Questions:

1. How many groups of jumpers had been released at the time of the accident, and how many jumpers were in each jump group of jumpers?

No jumpers were on board the aircraft at the time of the incident. 2 groups of jumpers had been released prior to the incident, 10 on the 1st and 5 on the 2nd jump run

2. How many jumps remained when the accident occurred?

It is unknown how many jumps remained.

3. Did any jumpers witness the landing attempt during which the gear came off the airplane?

Our customer has requested that you contact the following POC:

Matthew W. Radd
Training Deputy

4. Was it customary to land with the platform down after a jump or would one of the pilots move to the back to raise the platform (or was this down via a mechanism in the cockpit)

There are 2 aft doors on the CASA 212, the upper Cargo Door and the Ramp Door. The Cargo Door opens upwards and inwards and the Ramp opens downward and outward. Both are hydraulically operated from the cockpit via the cargo door handle located directly behind the Co-Pilots station.

Per the Aircraft Flight Manual, the Cargo and Ramp door will be closed for all takeoffs and landings. In this particular incident, it has been verified with the PIC that the door was closed after the jumpers exited the aircraft and during the landing.

Should you require further information contact me at [REDACTED].

Kind regards,

Justin Watlington
Director of Operations
Rampart Aviation, LLC



MEMORANDUM OF RECORD

Interviews with SIC's Father

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: December 2, 2022
Person Contacted: Hew Crooks (father of second in command pilot)
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

The following are summaries of conversations that occurred with the individual named above:

August 8, 2022:

Mr. Crooks stated that there has been a great deal of media attention, and that his daughter's company was doing pro-bono media control. He stated that he knows from Rampart what their pilot says happened, and he wanted to tell me about Charlie's frame of mind. He stated that Charlie was extremely happy, and he loved to fly. He just moved into a new apartment and was asking his dad how to put money aside, how to get a deal on a mattress, etc. He spoke with his brother and sister a lot.

Mr. Crooks stated that there was clearly a great deal of stress on that flight. Charlie loved the organization. It is managed by ex-Special Forces guys. Charlie had told them that during training, they operated like it was a boot camp. The guys came out and yelled at them, "Well, you think this is funny?" They said Charlie smiled too much. "It's a Special-Forces owned business and it's probably that kind of organization."

He stated that Charlie normally flew with a local guy, but the accident flight was with one of the Check Airman and they thought it was for Charlie to fly left seat.

Mr. Crooks stated they were told that the airplane encountered windshear on landing and lost a landing gear. He stated, "Even if it were to turn out that the pilot was so rough on him in the moment where someone breaks something, he was ex-special forces. Charlie was a wonderful, optimistic kid and so happy with where he was going." He stated that they don't need to what happened other than it was a tragic accident. He could see Charlie being physically sick because of something like this; he had had one other event as a flight instructor which weighed on him heavily.

He stated that they spoke with Mr. Oppedal (the PIC) as well as Charlie's students and friends at the flight school where Charlie had taught, and they all stated that he was feeling so lucky in this job. He was not there to build

hours, did not want to be an airline pilot - he loved doing this. Charlie had said, "I don't know how I got so lucky. There is no person on Earth I would trade places with." Mr. Crooks stated that when Charlie stepped into that airplane, he was in an excellent frame of mind. He added that Mr. Oppedal had been the one to interview Charlie for the job, and had done his training, and Charlie had never said anything bad about him. As far as he knew, Charlie liked him.

The call ended at 12:06 EDT

December 2, 2022:

I returned Mr. Crook's call, and he inquired about the autopsy/toxicology reports. I informed him that I was waiting for a medical interpretation by NTSB doctors of the toxicology. Mr. Crooks also had questions about the preliminary report, which I answered. I asked Mr. Crooks if his son had any history of panic or anxiety attacks when things went wrong. He responded, "He could certainly be tough on himself." He explained that his son had an incident the previous year when he was in an airplane and it lost its landing gear, and he did everything right, and they gifted him a piece of the gear. His son had described the experience as 'neat.' I described the reported event with company purchase card and he said, "That could be Charlie to get mad at himself." He added that he could see Charlie getting himself physically ill after the windshear encounter.

The call ended at 1536 EST



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 17, 2022
Person Contacted: Paul Peckham
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Peckham was interviewed by phone on August 19, 2022, at 1449 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I explained the reason for the call, which is to attempt to gain an inside perspective about the company and how it operates and get a sense of the culture at Rampart Aviation. I explained our investigative process.

Q: How long have you been with Rampart?

A: Just under 6 years. He flies left seat in the Otter and left seat in the CASA.

Q: Do you find the company to have a “military”/drill sergeant approach to training (i.e “take that smile off your face!! This isn’t fun!!)

A:

Q: What is the culture at Rampart Aviation?

A: Management never questions the PIC decisions as to safety. Airplanes are maintained to 135 standards, and training is to 135 standards. Very different than other places he has worked; they don’t fly crappy airplanes and they can ground an airplane. The mission does not come before safety. Not a military culture. The boss hires veterans because they take orders and are mission oriented and are team players. You work together to accomplish a goal. CRM is important. He did it all day today with his co-pilot.

Q: How are mistakes handled in the airplane?

A: Depends upon the flight regime. If he is 2 dots off on the course and he is approaching minimums, then you take the controls and say “my controls.” He recently flew a checkride with Mr. Oppedal and he was tired and had to do a part over again. “This is what you did wrong and this is what you need to do . . . do it again.” He has never experienced nor would he get into a situation where he corrects an SIC in a manner that makes the situation worse, esp not on an operation. They correct each other . . . team effort.

Q: Did you fly with Charlie? What was he like?

A: "From the first time I met him I liked his company. He's articulate and smart and great sense of humor. We did not travel together but he was a good pilot, a good stick. He knew the rules, I taught him a few things. One thing I will say is that he strove to be near perfect in everything. If we were coming back and we were a few degrees off on the heading, he would chide himself. His approaches were absolutely perfect. I was impressed with his abilities. He took to the jump side quickly and was very good at it. The one thing I noticed is that he wanted to be perfect all the time. He didn't allow himself any slack."

"One time he was so flustered after he dropped the fuel card. He was so upset with himself. "I dropped the card, I can't believe I dropped the card." His face was red, and he was sweating. I told him to take 20 minutes to walk to the fuel farm and find it. He RAN to the farm and found it. He was hard on himself, really hard. He knew what the customers needed for a precise product, and he really strove for that and wanted to do a good job. He took great pride in that, and he was loyal to the organization. As I understand it, the airplane was side loaded at landing, and they were not able to recover in time."

He stated that he was the last one to fly with Charlie before Mike Oppedal flew with him. They had a night operation, and "I reminded him a couple times that he needed to have the wings level lined up on the center line. He was getting better on that and acknowledged that he needed to fix that. They had had a hot, demanding day of day lifts and night lifts. I had him recite, wings level, heels on the floor, manage your energy with power."

After one landing, he said, "Charlie, you did it again," and Charlie snapped at him, "I know!" He just wanted to be perfect and so good. He just took this all on himself.

I asked him about Mike Oppedal. He stated, "Mike wears many hats and is one of the smartest people I know, and he never berates. He has leadership experience. He is cool, calm, and collected. I have not talked to Mike since this happened.

I can't connect the dots. I would have just said, "Hold on, catch your breath, this is just an airplane. We're gonna land, we're gonna have a beer, we're gonna put a new gear on it, we're going fly it again."

He added that they lower the ramp to a level position for the jumpers, because if the ramp is not perfectly level, it is slippery. He said that Charlie had it full down and he had never been back there with it full down. He would not even know there was bar overhead. If he was running back there and took one step onto that ramp, he was gone. It is very steep when fully down. I think he made himself physically ill. I would have said, "You okay to fly? Compose yourself."

"I've been flying for 40 years, and I cannot think of another guy I'd want to be in the cockpit with other than Mike Oppedal." I lost my son when he was 20.

The call ended at 1520.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 17, 2022
Person Contacted: Marc Bretz
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Bretz was interviewed by phone on August 18, 2022, at 1600 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I explained the reason for the call, which is to attempt to gain an inside perspective about the company and how it operates, and get a sense of the culture at Rampart Aviation. I explained our investigative process.

Q: How long have you been with Rampart?

A: Since December of 2021. He has been flying the Caribou.

Q: What were you doing before you came to Rampart?

A: He was in flight school. Before that he worked at the White House as a political appointee.

Q: What was your ground training like at Rampart?

A: He was hired by Rampart with about 250 hours of flight time. The first week was Indoc in Colorado Springs then a week of ground school after Indoc and learned the systems. . . . here are your policies and procedures. The majority of the pilots and managers are former military so they have a military stamina. No small talk. Here's the ground school, no talking. It was a bit intimidating, but he never felt scared to ask a question.

Q: Flight training?

A: The third week was the flight training. It was good. It was more in depth than he expected, esp going from a piston airplane to a turboprop. His checkairman was very intimidating. No conversations at all. He had to ask about everything, nothing was explained. He was burnt out.

Q: What are the PICs like?

A: The other PICs that he has flown with are totally different. They are willing to give you tips and tricks. They alternate legs and he can ask to fly one for extra practice and they would be receptive. The CRM with the

captains he's been flying with are great. They had an issue in flight where the gear failed to lock into place. It was the first day he had flown with that captain, and Marc was flying. Right main was not showing as locked. They ran the checklist, called maintenance, etc and one of the wires had slipped loose preventing it from locking into place. "Do you mind if I offer you a suggestion?" "Yes, of course." "Our main gear fall back . . . let's do a 20 degree climb and see if the gear will settle back into place." It worked. They were in COS the next week and the company asked them what they could do better with their CRM, and the owner and chief pilot complimented them profusely and suggested that perhaps they teach CRM to the other pilots. If he had been flying with that checkairman when that happened, he believes it would have been received differently.

Q: Do you find the company to have a "military"/drill sergeant approach to training (i.e "take that smile off your face!! This isn't fun!!)

A: Gosh no, not at all. Overall, he could ask a question to any captain.

Q: What is the culture at Rampart Aviation?

A: You have to have thick skin to work there. It's the military environment. There are very few civilians flying for the company. It's not operated like the military, but it is mission first. They're going to make fun of you. No one is yelling orders at you, but the atmosphere is military. Example: he was one minute late one morning, and they gave him crap. But no one is yelling at you.

Q: How are mistakes handled in the airplane?

A: "Hey, you're 10 kts slow, you're left of course." No one would berate you. Nothing where they are screaming at you. "You're high, correct."

Q: Have you ever had to take an issue to the company and how was it managed?

A: Personnel wise, no. Safety of flight stuff, no. Maintenance issues, yes. "You must fly your tires until your cord lines show," because there is a supply chain shortage right now. They like to drag their feet on certain things due to the mission first mentality. They will put temporary band-aids on things to fly the mission. EX: For a while, the torque limiter got popping the circuit breaker, cannot be MELED. If it pops, re-set once. They have 1-2 A&Ps and the others are maintenance techs. The torque limiter went a month before they finally repaired it. Something is leaking oil for the last month, although everything is in the green, and the leak does not get addressed because everything is in the green. Their schedules are very demanding. People are leaving left and right. He is moving because his fiancé got a job on the east coast. The pay is not great. The maintenance guys don't seem to get much time off, and the Captains fly a lot. There is burn-out. They fly starting at 2 am, then there may be a meeting, then they are cleaning the hangar and washing the airplane. Oh, and be back at 2 am. All the line pilots are doing the work and it creates a negative work environment. People get burned out and tired, and people are leaving left and right. "I can't wait to go be a real pilot" but they are building time. There just doesn't seem to be much appreciation. There is a complete disconnect between upper management and the pilots. The Chief pilot actually flies, and he gets it. The upper management was there and asked what time they had lunch. They said, lunch? What lunch? We've been here since 2 am. But that's kind of what he expects given the military nature of the company. This week, Marc is the only SIC able to fly this week since the other is out of state. What if he gets sick? What if he has a car accident? You kind of pressure yourself given that. You have a cough, you say, "no, I need to go in." They are having 2 captains fly together this week because of it. They sign contracts when hired, and the new pilot contracts are not pro-rated like his was. You get 3 SIC together, and the training contracts are different. His current salary is 40k, his colleague's 18-month contract is 21K, his training contract was \$29K and it is pro-rated. His last day is Aug 29. His new company is paying off his contract 15 days after but they are asking it to be paid before or they will take legal action. "Okay, as long as we get the funds by then, we won't get the lawyers involved." The pilots are trapped for 18 months or they owe back their pro-rated contracts.

Q: Did you know Charlie?

A: Yes, he saw him a few times and followed him on social media.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about the accident or what is the talk?

A: The company sent out an email and that is how he found out. You hear about aviation accidents all the time, but it's so strange when it happens where you work. He could not believe it happened there. Thoughts about the chief pilot. He's a great guy and a teacher. Always there to help and he cares about the pilots. Hey, do you have any questions, what can we do better. I think he actually gives a damn about the pilots.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on December 30, 2022. He replied on January 3, 2023, via a phone call at 0937 that he had no edits and that Rampart had called him to ask about his interview. The final digest was e-mailed to him on January 3, 2023.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 19, 2022
Person Contacted: Santiago Gayon-Gonzalez
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Gayon-Gonzalez was interviewed by phone on August 19, 2022, at 1525 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I explained the reason for the call, which is to attempt to gain an inside perspective about the company and how it operates and get a sense of the culture at Rampart Aviation. I explained our investigative process.

Q: What is the culture at Rampart Aviation?

A: Very safety oriented. It's laid back in San Diego. Everyone gets along. There is no drama and everyone has their duty. As long as you get your job done and do a good job, all is good. He enjoys working there.

Q: What are the check-airman like?

A: Pretty relaxed, respectful and knowledgeable. I worked with Mike in a classroom for one week watching power points, and he was in San Diego for a week when they had their flight training. HE came across as very knowledgeable and patient.

Call ended at 1531.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 17, 2022
Person Contacted: Joel Smith
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Smith was interviewed by phone on August 17, 2022, at 0940 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

Q: What is the culture at Rampart?

A: They work for the military, so it is quite secretive and always changing and developing. It's a small community of pilots; if you have a concern, you go to someone who can fix it and it gets done. You literally have the chief pilot's cell phone number.

Q: What were you doing before rampart?

A: He had just finished flight school; had 500 hours. He had accrued those hours with personal flying.

Q: Who did your training at Rampart?

A: There was a check airman who works for Spirit now. It was unorganized; the company is busy and it's hard to fit in training with the mission. A lot of the training is on the job training. When he did the training, it was only training. "Really, dude, you did that again." He was leaving to go to Spirit so that was just him. I didn't like flying with him. There are different personalities. Some are not calm, some bang on the dash, some will let you do something incorrect so you learn. His instructor was not very patient because he just wanted to get it done. But now, he loves flying with who he flies with. It's calm, "let's work it out together."

Q: How long have you been flying with Rampart?

A: He started the same day as Mr. Crooks. He flies the de Havilland Caribou

Q: How was training? Did any of the instructors yell at you?

A: Chief Pilot did an excellent job; it was thorough. No one was yelling at him, and he did not witness anyone else being yelled at. Chief Pilot is very calm.

Q: Have you ever had to take an issue to the company and how was it managed?

A: Never had that issue. If something is broken and if they cannot fly safely, they don't fly. That just happened last week in NC. They just kept extending the hotel until the airplane was fixed. No pushback, the airplane was fixed. He didn't know what they would say when they said it was not airworthy and he felt good about it. Their maintenance guys fly with them. Yesterday, he said, "this" has to be done. Their maintenance guy was there all day and he took care of business. It's small and you know people personally.

Q: How well did you know Charlie? They trained together and became friends, but he was on a different platform. He told him and everybody that it was his dream job. He was more excited than anyone. He did all the homework and knew more about Joel's airplane than Joel did. He went to Bucknell and was very smart.

Any other thoughts? Charlie was very much a pilot. He has never flown with Mike Oppedal. Mike is calm, cool, collected and you can ask him anything. Very approachable. He's a guy you never want to disappoint. He's like your dad, and you'd feel bad if you disappointed him. He's trying to get you to the best and you want to show him your best. He's not banging on the dash.

Call ended at 1020.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 18, 2022
Person Contacted: Chris Sullivan
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Sullivan was interviewed by phone on August 18, 2022, at 1530 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED]-[REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I explained the reason for the call, which is to attempt to gain an inside perspective about the company and how it operates and get a sense of the culture at Rampart Aviation. I explained our investigative process.

Q: How long have you been with Rampart?

A: Since December of 2021

Q: What were you doing before you came to Rampart?

A: He was flying for the Army, where he flew an Apache. He was in the Army for 26 years and flew the Apache for 12 years, and came to Rampart immediately after leaving the Army. He has over 3000 hours of flying.

Q: What was your ground training like at Rampart?

A: He flies the CASA 212 for Rampart and he enjoys flying a fixed-wing airplane and has 355 hours in it. His ground training in the Army was about 2 years and his ground training at Rampart was about 2-3 days of Powerpoint slides. Then they had about 4 days of Indoc which was more Powerpoint slides. It was casual. He thinks the operator is much like the military in terms of demands on people. Long hours, mission first Army mentality. All that matters is the mission. There was no yelling at anyone at any time during the ground training.

Q: Flight training?

A: It was pretty brief. He did two flights then a reposition flight for the company which counted as a training flight. The reposition flight was the checkride. He flew it with Chad Smith. They flew a few approaches but did not do anything else related to it being a checkride. He said, "Hey, you're good to go." Chad was good to fly with. He was straight to the point and rather quiet. He was very good about addressing anything he did wrong . . . "hey, we don't do it like that . . . we do it like this." There was good CRM.

Q: Do you find the company to have a “military”/drill sergeant approach to training (i.e “take that smile off your face!! This isn’t fun!!)

A: No.

Q: How are mistakes handled in the airplane? What is the mood.

A: The mood is normally okay in the cockpit. The customer is demanding about how they want things, but the CRM good most of the time. Some people are better than others in their CRM abilities.

Q: Have you ever had to take an issue to the company and how was it managed?

A: He has not.

Q: How well did you know Charlie?

A: Met him about 3-4 times. He was young. He was there for training one day and they said hello, and when he saw him a week before the accident he was chipper and happy.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about the accident or what is the talk?

A: None of it makes sense.

Q: Anything else you wish to add/discuss?

A: No.

Call ended at 1555 EDT.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Second-in-Command Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 18, 2022
Person Contacted: Matt Swinden
Contact [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

Mr. Swinden was interviewed by phone on August 18, 2022, at 1300 EDT. He provided a phone number of [REDACTED] and an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I explained the reason for the call, which is to attempt to gain an inside perspective about the company and how it operates and get a sense of the culture at Rampart Aviation. I explained our investigative process.

Q: How long have you been with Rampart?

A: Since June 1, 2022

Q: What were you doing before you came to Rampart?

A: This is his first aviation paid gig. He is retired from Fire and EMS. This is career 2.5. He was an EMT after college then went into EMS management. He then got into corporate security and then he joined the fire department. They retired in 2020, after 10 years of employment. They started flight training in 2019, and he finds this a great learning opportunity. He is at 398 hours right now.

Q: What was your ground training like at Rampart?

A: Went to Colorado for Basic Indoc – combination of company's policies and procedures and basic operations. Came back to San Diego where they had ground school for 2 weeks in Systems of the Twin Otter and how to fly it.

Q: Flight training?

A: They went through the maneuvers, how they take off and land. The Twin Otter is pretty easy to fly. He flew about 5 flights and then had his checkride. Chief pilot did the checkride. Went through all the maneuvers, and emergency procedures. He had him re-do his steep turns, when he was slightly high. He also had to re-do the engine out because he got too slow. "This is your deficiency. This is how you need to do it. Do it again." The

chief pilot was very mellow and low-key. He speaks softly. He's a steady ship and doesn't get excited. He thought it was a good experience. He learned from every flight.

Q: What check-airmen did you fly with?

A: Mike Oppedal

Q: Do you find the company to have a "military"/drill sergeant approach to training (i.e "take that smile off your face!! This isn't fun!!)

A: No, not at all.

Q: When someone talks about the culture of an operator, do you know what that means?

A: Yes, I do

Q: What is the culture at Rampart Aviation? How are mistakes handled?

A: We're out here in San Diego and not near corporate headquarters. Their culture in San Diego is fly the mission, be safe, correct any deficiency so that it is safe. For the first three weeks, he flew with a mentor/coach and he basically coached him through everything . . . landings, flying the aircraft, being more proficient in the airplane. He was a great guy. Former Navy who flew for DHS. Very mellow . . . "this is how you do it. This is how it works for me." Through your career, you always have mentors who taught you how to be a better pilot and Adam is one of those for him.

Q: Have you ever had to take an issue to the company and how was it managed?

A: He has not had to bring anything at all to the company's attention. He had to down the airplane for a pre-inspection for tire wear. He went to the PIC who agreed and said, "Yep, let's change that tire." Positive safety culture.

Q: How well did you know Charlie?

A: No, never met him.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about the accident or what is the talk?

A: There was some talk . . . mostly along the lines of "what the heck happened?"

Q: Anything else you wish to add/discuss?

A: No, not really.

Call ended at 1320.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on December 30, 2022. He replied on January 3, 2023, at 1359 EST with the comment, "the record of conversation is correct without any corrections or additions needed." The final digest was e-mailed to him on January 3, 2023.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Company Pilot Interview

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: August 10, 2022
Person Contacted: Mr. Bill Willis
Contact # [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA348

Narrative:

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

I called Mr. Willis on August 10, 2022, at 0953 EDT and left a voicemail. Mr. Willis returned my call at 1012 EDT. He confirmed his phone number as [REDACTED] and provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

I asked about the culture at Rampart, and if it was a military culture. I let him know that I had heard about one of the leaders coming into the new hire class yelling like a drill sergeant and telling them class not to smile. Mr. Willis stated that many in Rampart's leadership were associated with military special operations during their careers. He responded that Mr. Portfield was the only one who really talked like a drill sergeant. I asked if the pilots were intimidated or afraid of him, and he responded, "No."

He said that the company was responsive and that he has always gotten the support he needs. Maintenance issues are addressed, and there is good maintenance support. He said that they have had some change with Director of Operations, and that the staff all have good aviation backgrounds. Management is primarily centered on the operation, but he has never seen safety compromised in any way, shape or form.

I asked about Mr. Oppedal (PIC of accident flight) and he stated that Mr. Oppedal had done a huge amount in terms of standardization of procedures. The cockpit was becoming more regimented, so everyone knows exactly what everyone's going to do in the cockpit.

Mr. Willis stated that he just became a checkairman and his checkride was exactly by the book. Mr. Oppedal came to the company with not a whole lot of flight time, yet he is competent, excellent pilot. Mr. Willis stated that he had about 35,000 total flight hours, and he called Mr. Oppedal to tell him what an outstanding landing he did at RDU after this event.

I asked Mr. Willis if he knew Mr. Crooks (SIC), and he responded that he had only met him twice and that he was personable.

I asked him about CRM with Mr. Oppedal, and he stated that he would say something like, “You of all people shouldn't be 2 kts off.” He holds everyone to a standard and he flies by the book. He'll dig into things as deep as he needs to ensure that the person understands what they need to. He emphasizes crew coordination and CRM.

I asked if Mr. Oppedal had shared anything with him about the accident flight. He stated that he did not comment about Mr. Crooks and Mr. Oppedal did not bring it up. He knew Mr. Oppedal was upset about it. He said that he thought they encountered windshear. He just talked about the landing gear. Mr. Willis said that he had also flown right seat for Mr. Oppedal and that he is like a sponge . . . Eager to learn. He is very professional, safe, conscientious pilot.

The call ended at 1034 EDT.

Record of Telephone Conversation

Name: Justin Watlington, Rampart Aviation Director of Operations

Date: 7/29/2022 5:35 p.m.

Description: N497CA accident

I contacted Rampart Aviation to get additional information on the accident as the aircraft is listed on both a Rampart Aviation (3RAJ) Part 91 LOA and Rampart Aviation LLC (3RAA) Part 135 Operations Specifications.

I attempted to contact the DO with no answer and the main phone number for the company, also with no answer. When I contacted the Director of Maintenance, Tyler Tomann, he did answer his phone. I identified myself and told him I was contacting them about the accident on N497CA in Raleigh, NC. He stated that the Director of Operations, Justin Watlington, and the Chief Inspector, Kenrick Mimms, were with him and we were on speakerphone. Mr. Watlington took over the conversation at that time.

I asked them if they could provide me with information about the accident. They provided the following narrative:

The aircraft was attempting to land at the Raeford airport, which is an unimproved airport. The SIC was flying and, as the aircraft passed over the treeline, the PIC stated that they encountered a 'windshear event'. This caused the aircraft to land hard on the main gear and the PIC immediately took over and initiated a go-around procedure. The PIC is also a company check airman.

The airfield then contacted the aircraft and told them that the right main gear was left behind. The PIC informed the company that they had only touched down on the main gear – the nose gear did not strike the ground. The crew then discussed their options and decided to fly to RDU as it was the nearest airport where they would have crash and rescue equipment if it was needed. The aircraft then proceeded to RDU, conducted a go-around there before landing on its second attempt. The pilot made a full-flap landing and was able to keep the aircraft on the left main gear and nose gear until it got slow enough that it just quit flying. At that time the aircraft veered off the runway and entered the grass area where it came to rest.

The PIC conducted an emergency shutdown and evacuated the aircraft. His back was hurting so he was transported to the hospital where he still is.

The PIC told them that around 35 miles from RDU the SIC asked the PIC if he could open the ramp at the back of the airplane to let some air through the aircraft. (Mr. Watlington stated that this is a normal procedure to help cool down the aircraft and is not an issue as long as the proper conditions are maintained). The PIC agreed. The SIC then opened the ramp. As soon as it was fully open, the SIC unbuckled, walked to the cockpit entryway (which is only a couple steps), told the PIC that he was 'sorry' and then ran out the back of the aircraft. They have no idea why he would do this.

I asked if the aircraft had left FAY before it went to Raeford. They stated that the aircraft had actually left Rocky-Mount Wilson Airport (RWI), where it was based to go to Raeford West airport (NR20). They had a request from the military to conduct night jump operations there that evening, so the aircraft was being repositioned.

They provided the PIC and SIC information as follows: PIC – Michael Oppedal. SIC – Charles Crooks.

I asked if they had a damage assessment to the aircraft. They stated that they did not, but they had someone on their way from Charleston, SC to look at the aircraft.

Mr. Watlington provided his cell phone number of [REDACTED]. He stated that the management team would be coming to Raleigh, either tonight or early tomorrow.

He asked who they would need to coordinate with to move the aircraft. I told him that I would speak with the NTSB to confirm, but I was under the impression that the airport was currently closed because of the accident and I thought the airport would want the aircraft moved so that they could resume operations. If the NTSB did not have any objections, and we could get some pictures of the damage, we could probably authorize the aircraft to be moved.

After speaking with the NTSB, Raleigh Airport Ops, and receiving pictures of the aircraft, I contacted Mr. Watlington at 6:44 p.m. to let him know that the airport was intending to leave the aircraft in place overnight. However, they did have permission to move the aircraft if necessary. At that time he informed me that they would be leaving at '0 dark thirty' in the morning to come to RDU. I provided him with contact information for Mike Allen for Saturday.



E James Creider
Front-Line Manager
Greensboro FSDO

Record of Telephone Conversation

Name: Ronald Kuist, President / Chief Instructor FlightGest Academy

Date: 08/11/2022 1:00 p.m.

Description: Charles Crooks employment with FlightGest

I contacted Mr. Kuist (pronounced Kest) to ask him questions about Mr. Crooks during his time he was employed at FlightGest. I confirmed with Mr. Kuist that we were speaking of the same individual by providing him the full name. He confirmed that Mr. Charles Hew Dalrymple Crooks had been employed by FlightGest Academy.

In reponse to the questions below, Mr. Kuist provided the answers shown.

When did Mr. Crooks begin employment with FlightGest Aviation?

May 1, 2021.

In what capacity?

He was a 1099 contractor. He was hired as a flight instructor.

Did his duties/responsibilities change during his employment (i.e. become a check pilot, etc)?

No, he was always a flight instructor.

When did his employment with FlightGest end?

March 14, 2022

Why was his employment terminated (by him, by FlightGest)?

He found employment at Rampart Aviation.

How much personal interaction did you have with Mr. Crooks?

He personally hired him and regularly interacted with him.

Was he instructing under 14 CFR Part 61, 141 or both?

They have a 141 certificate, but no students enrolled in Part 141. He only instructed under Part 61.

How often was he flying or instructing? (every day, sporadically, etc) Was this more/less than your average instructor?

He was available 5 days a week and had a fairly regular flight schedule. He would have had an average student load for their flight instructors.

Approximately how many students did he instruct during his time there?

Unsure without looking at the records.

Did he ever apply to fly under 14 CFR Part 135 for FlightGest?

I don't believe so.

Did he receive any training by FlightGest?

Every new flight instructor gets checked out in each of the aircraft. That would be logged as 'dual given'. He doesn't recall who would have done the aircraft checkouts with Charlie, but he does not remember doing them.

What type of employee was he?

He was a very dedicated employee. He took lots of pride in his flight instruction and the flight instructor community. He always tried make sure his students learned best practices for flight and he went above and beyond to ensure that his students understood what was being taught and felt comfortable in the airplanes. He spent a lot of time preparing lesson plans and preparing for his flight instruction. He was second to none in that regard.

Any issues while he was employed by FlightGest? (Absenteeism, interactions with others, etc.)

There were no issues at all. He got along very well with everyone and had a lot of friendships with others there that lasted beyond the end of his employment with FlightGest. He always received top reviews from the students he flew with.

When was the last time you personally saw or spoke with him?

About two weeks after he ended his employment. He was returning from training in the new aircraft and his car had an issue when he returned. While he was waiting for help to arrive, he came in and visited in the flight school. He was very enthusiastic and excited about his training.

I have been told that he had an incident while employed with FlightGest where there was an issue with the landing gear not extending on an aircraft and he had to make a gear up landing. Is this correct? What were the circumstances?

He did not have a gear up landing. He did have an incident where the left main gear to a fixed gear aircraft was damaged during landing. The damage occurred at another airport. The root cause of the damage never was determined (whether it was a hard landing, metal fatigue, etc.). The aircraft had just come out of maintenance. It occurred during a flight instruction session. The feedback he (Kuist) received was that Charlie handled everything very professionally. He did do follow-up interviews with both Charlie and the student. Charlie was very matter-of-fact about what had happened. He (Kuist) asked both Charlie and the student, separately, very specific questions about the details of the incident. Both stories lined up. Charlie was very open and honest about what happened, as far as he could tell.

How did Mr. Crooks handle the emergency and post emergency situations?

He handled himself very professionally.

How did Mr. Crooks handle stressful situations while employed with FlightGest?

He handled himself well. When he was first hired he needed the normal mentoring, like all new flight instructors do.

Anything else you would like to add or you feel I should know about Mr. Crooks?

He was an incredible instructor who went above and beyond to instill passion and knowledge to his students. He knew that it was a tough decision for Charlie to leave FlightGest, but he was very excited about his next journey in aviation.

E James Creider
Front-Line Manager
Greensboro FSDO

Record of Telephone Conversation

Name: Hugh Crooks (203) 550-6967

Date: 08/01/2022

Description: Death of Charles Crooks – associated with accident for N497CA

I received a voicemail message from Mr. Crooks that was left at approximately 7:49 p.m. on Saturday, July 30th. Mr. Crooks identified himself as the father of Charles Crooks, the co-pilot for N497CA that jumped from the aircraft prior to the accident on July 29th. Mr. Crooks was requesting that I contact him.

At 7:56 a.m. I attempted to contact Hugh Crooks. There was no answer, so I left a message with my cell and office phone numbers.

At 9:55 a.m. I received a return call from Hugh Crooks. He stated that he and his wife arrived in Raleigh, NC on Saturday evening and have been trying to get information on the investigative process being followed for the accident investigation and the investigation into his son's death. They are trying to find out what happened, but not dig too deep into the details because that would be too difficult for them. They aren't looking for anyone to blame (they have 'all the money in the world') they just want to find out what happened. The media has been hounding them for their comments.

I briefly explained the investigative process by the FAA and NTSB and told him that the investigation was just starting. I had only been able to speak with company management who relayed the pilot's statement to me. Because the pilot was in the hospital on Friday evening, I had not been able to speak directly to him yet.

Hugh Crooks stated that it didn't make sense because his son was in a 'fabulous state of mind' before the flight. He had a new apartment he just moved into, was opening his first investment accounts, had purchased a Fiat convertible, and was in his dream spot. He had told his dad a few day prior that he wouldn't trade places with anyone in the world. He was a very optimistic person all the time.

He asked if we would be listening to the cockpit voice recorder as part of the investigation. I told him that we were checking into that, but we did not believe that the aircraft had a CVR and it was probably not required for this aircraft. I told him that if we found out there was a CVR on board we would let him know.

He asked how long the investigation would take and I told him that we could be completed with our part in a couple of weeks but the NTSB would probably not officially close their investigation for about a year. He said he hoped that we would not rush through our investigation. He asked if we would be interviewing him and his wife, Charles' friends and students, etc. I said that we might if the investigation led that direction.

He also provided some additional information that he had heard about the flight:

- According to Charles' brother and sister, they believed that this flight was not just a normal flight, but was also a checkout to upgrade Charles from co-pilot to captain.
- Charles had flown with Mr. Oppendal and spoke very highly of him.

- Charles had about 1100 hours of flight experience and would not have been panicked about making an emergency landing without a landing gear. He had an experience when he worked for FlightGest Aviation where he had lost the landing gear on the airplane and had to land the airplane that way. There was no damage to the propeller or engine and they didn't have to report it. So Charles was very familiar with landing an airplane without landing gear.
- A detective from the RDU police department had interviewed the pilot in the hospital, but they hadn't been able to talk with him yet.

Mr. Crooks stated that he would probably contact me again in the future to follow up and I said that was fine.

E James Creider
Front-Line Manager
Greensboro FSDO