

Interviewee: Mitch Sutton
Representative: Declined

Date/Time: May 1, 2023 / 4:16 PM EDT
Location: via telephone
Present: Katherine Wilson, NTSB

During the interview Mr. Sutton stated the following:

He was the airport manager at Jesup-Wayne County Airport (Jesup, Georgia) and had been in that position since 2008. He had crossed paths with Mr. Wasdin in 1998 but did not know him on a personal basis until 2009 or 2010 when he became Mr. Wasdin's flight instructor. He was Mr. Wasdin's flight instructor for his private pilot certificate and, he thought, for his instrument rating too. During flight instruction, they flew a Piper PA-28-180 Cherokee. Mr. Wasdin previously owned a PA-28-235 Cherokee before he purchased a 2004 Cirrus (the accident airplane). Mr. Wasdin had asked him what he thought of the airplane and Mr. Sutton told him it was good.

Mr. Sutton was busy flying as a corporate pilot and did not think he had flown with Mr. Wasdin in the accident airplane, except maybe one time. He had done some maintenance work for Mr. Sutton on the airplane; specifically, he changed an air conditioning controller box and a magneto that went bad. Mr. Wasdin was his chiropractor and also rented a hangar from him.

He did not think anyone else flew the accident airplane. As a student pilot, Mr. Wasdin was very "OCD" and "checklist oriented" but he did not know what he was like when flying on his own. Mr. Sutton acquiesced that pilots did not always fly the same when flying with a passenger and flying alone. He never witnessed Mr. Wasdin "barnstorming". He occasionally witnessed Mr. Wasdin takeoff and make some quick turns but it was never anything dangerous. Ten years ago or so, Mr. Sutton would stay on him about banking steep when turning base to final.

After Mr. Wasdin purchased the accident airplane, he asked if Mr. Sutton could give him some instruction. Mr. Sutton advised him to fly with someone who flew a Cirrus more often than Mr. Sutton did. He advised Mr. Wasdin to go to Savannah Aviation or Hilton Head; Mr. Wasdin's insurance company required that he go to a Certified Cirrus Instructor for initial training. He believed Mr. Wasdin met an instructor, Chuck Copley from Hilton Head that told him about Savannah Aviation.

He believed Mr. Wasdin's insurance company required a yearly instrument proficiency check. He recalled Mr. Wasdin asking if he could do one for him over six months ago but he was not available. After the accident, he helped to locate records

and recalled documentation for Mr. Wasdin completing the check in 2021 with Savannah Aviation; he was not sure if there was a more recent check.

Mr. Wasdin's chiropractic practice was in Jesup, where he also had an airplane hangar, but he had a house in Florida. He would normally drive if the weather was bad, otherwise it was only a 20-minute flight.

Mr. Sutton had worked late the night before the accident and was still in bed when he received a call from his wife around 0850 stating that Mr. Wasdin had not arrived in Jesup. Mr. Sutton, his son and a deputy took off about 0930 to search for the wreckage. It was visible on his side of the airplane after takeoff. He did not hear an ELT signal. He landed the airplane and got in his truck and drove to the wreckage. To Mr. Sutton, it looked like the airplane spun in and it did not look like there was any nearby tree damage. The wreckage was located close to the runway, about a quarter mile or so away. Mr. Sutton's wife arrived at the airport about 0753 and told him she could not see either end of the runway because it was foggy, but the sun was shining through. There was also a pilot who landed at the airport about 0700 that had taken pictures during the rollout. There was low level fog around the treetops; Mr. Sutton was not sure if it was a mile visibility. There was also an image from a motion camera at the airport that showed the low-level fog had increased from when the other pilot landed around 0700. He was not aware of any witnesses to the accident. He talked to a resident who lived near the airport but the resident did not hear or see anything.

Mr. Wasdin's business was Absolute Precision Chiropractic and he gave the appearance that he was precise. Mr. Wasdin's son (who also worked at the business) came to the airport about 0845 because his dad had not arrived at the office and they had patients; Mr. Wasdin was never late. He had tried to call and there was no answer so he thought perhaps Mr. Wasdin was at the airport or had dropped off the dog somewhere.

When Mr. Sutton located the wreckage, the tail was broken off and the parachute was in the tail and had not been deployed. The panel that covered the parachute was missing and he could not see if the lock pin was still in place for the parachute. He was not sure where the dog was seated during the flight but stated the dog was located between the front and rear seats.

The airport did not have a control tower and the frequency pilots reported on was not recorded. He did not know if Mr. Wasdin made any radio calls coming in to the airport. He was also not aware of any other flights arriving or departing between the 0700 flight that landed and the time of the accident.

Mr. Sutton had seen Mr. Wasdin the day before the accident but they only waved to each other. Mr. Sutton could not understand how the accident happened. Based on the weather that morning, Mr. Sutton thought he would have departed but

also stated that he flew a multiengine airplane and could divert to another nearby airport if he lost an engine after takeoff. He would not have returned to the Jesup airport based on the weather he observed.

There was a NOTAM at the airport that the PAPI was out at the time of the accident. Since the accident, they had the approach lights checked and they were functioning properly.

Interview concluded at 4:48 PM.

In an email dated May 9, 2023, Mr. Sutton agreed with the information contained in this summary.

Interviewee: Debbie Wasdin
Representative: Bill Hunter, attorney

Date/Time: May 2, 2023 / 12:10 EDT
Location: via telephone
Present: Katherine Wilson, NTSB

During the interview Mrs. Wasdin stated the following:

She was Mr. Wasdin's wife; they had known each other for over 21 years. On April 6, 2023, the morning of the accident, Mr. Wasdin left early. They were texting at 0708 so he would have left for the airport sometime before that. He was an early riser and she helped him locate the leash and tether for the dog. Their daughter drove him to the airport about 10 minutes from their home. Mrs. Wasdin's son called and said he had not arrived at the office; he was not a late person. The dog would be groomed on Thursdays so they thought Mr. Wasdin had taken the dog to the groomers. Mrs. Wasdin checked FlightAware and saw that the airplane movement had stopped, what looked like between counties. She made many phone calls, including Brantley County, Jesup airport, sheriff's department, 911, Mr. Sutton (Jesup airport manager). Mr. Sutton took an airplane up and located the wreckage. He called her on her way to Jesup to tell her her husband had passed.

Mr. Wasdin did not fly to Jesup a lot in the mornings because he could not take the chance if there was fog on the runway. He would generally stay at their home in Brunswick, Georgia, and drive to the office which was about 30 minutes away. Their home in Florida was being renovated and they just recently were moving into it. He rarely flew back and forth between Jesup and Fernadina if he was working during the week.

The day before the accident (April 5), he had flown to Jacksonville to meet with friends he knew from when he did search and rescue; one of them had passed away. He flew back to Fernandina that night. He decided to fly because it was quicker than driving.

Mr. Wasdin was "obsessed with weather". They had an agreement of "no chances". He would check the weather before he flew and he also would pay attention to the weather on the nightly news. He used an iPad to check the weather using ForeFlight; it connected via satellite in the plane to get updated weather enroute. He also would call to the airport about 10 miles out or so to get weather information. He mentioned to his daughter on the way to the airport that it would be a beautiful sunrise and he would take pictures. They did not receive any pictures so she was not sure if he took any.

Mr. Wasdin purchased the accident airplane in 2019. He was the only pilot that flew it. She thought he would log his hours in his phone and then in a logbook. The last couple of times that she flew with him, he would take pictures of the odometer with his phone.

When flying with the dog, the dog would be tethered in the rear passenger seat.

If he was uncomfortable with the weather the morning of the accident, he could have driven her car to Jesup; the drive was about 90 minutes. They did not discuss him driving that day. He had done that before and also diverted when flying because of weather. She had driven as long as 4 hours to pick him up before.

She did not know what time he wanted to arrive by in Jesup. The office opened at 0800 but she did not know when his first appointment was. When she received a call from her son, it was about 25 minutes after Mr. Wasdin was expected to arrive at the office.

He typically woke between 0445 and 0530 every morning and would be in bed between 2030 and 2100, would read for 30 or so minutes and be asleep by 2130. The days preceding the accident were no different except she thought he went to bed about 2200 on April 5. She did not know when he awoke on April 6 but thought he would have been up by 0500 to check the weather. He had no problems sleeping. He was a heavy sleeper and slept through the night; he rarely woke in the middle of the night. He was prescribed Ambien by the VA years ago to help him sleep but he never took it.

He was in good health and was training for a triathlon. He took natural supplements, such as fiber, and took a low dose medication daily for slightly high blood pressure. She was not sure what time of day he took the medication, but he had no side effects from it. He did not use any illicit drugs.

The day of the accident was just a regular day. She could not think of anything on his mind that would have taken his mind off the airplane. He was a very focused person. There were no issues in his personal life or with his financial situation that would have impacted his performance; there was nothing out of the ordinary. He fractured his foot in November 2022 but did not need a cast for it. He went to the VA for regular checkups.

His flying had been sporadic, and he was thinking of selling the airplane but then began doing Angel Flight missions.

According to the records she had found, Mr. Wasdin's last proficiency check was in September 2021 with Chuck Copley. She had reached out to another

company recommended by Mr. Copley to confirm he did the check in 2022. If he had not done the check she would have been surprised. Her husband was a learner and due to his Navy Seal background, he did everything in perfect order. He had a calendar and was never late. Mr. Copley trained Mr. Wasdin on the Cirrus. She recalled her husband using a checklist sometimes but also doing items from memory. Regarding the lock pin on the airplane's parachute system, she recalled he would do something before each flight. And he would tell everyone he flew with about how to slow the engine if the parachute needed to be deployed.

Mr. Wasdin had planned to stay in Brunswick the night of April 6, work a half day on Friday, April 7, and then drive to Fernandina. The airplane would be kept in his hangar in Jesup. When he flew to Fernandina, he did not have a hangar but rather the airplane would be tied down.

He was meticulous about everything but particularly the accident airplane. He had just installed new lights and everything was "top notch". He used a Cirrus certified shop in Augusta for maintenance and she thought another company in St. Augustine.

Her husband was not a novice pilot. He was instrument rated and needed about 20 hours to obtain his commercial pilot's license. He was a great pilot. He did not take risks and they had an agreement of no chances.

She was having a hard time understanding how the accident happened. Her husband experienced a magneto failure on a previous airplane and was able to recover. The training he received was extreme because he could take the pressure, so the instructor pushed the limits with him. He was a fast thinker and did not cave to pressure. He was a great pilot and would have been in survival mode. He knew the risk of human error.

Mrs. Wasdin did not have anything else to add to the interview. She did not know anyone else that the NTSB should talk to.

Interview concluded at 12:58 PM.

In an email dated May 3, 2023, Mrs. Wasdin agreed with the information contained in this summary.