



Investigator Name: Leah D. Read
Title: Sr. ASI
Division: ERA

Date: October 2, 2023

Subject: ERA23FA384

Contact: David Nigri, Friend of pilot Robert "Bob" Ashe

In a telephone conversation, Mr. Nigri stated that he was a very close friend of Mr. Robert Ashe. He said they were "like brothers." They both owned a home in the same fly-in community in W. Ossipee, New Hampshire, where Mr. Ashe lived full time. Mr. Nigri said he was employed as a corporate pilot and was also a certified flight instructor. He lived in Rhode Island full time.

Mr. Nigri said that Mr. Ashe flew his Cessna 150 down to Rhode Island in early September. On September 9, 2023, Mr. Nigri gave Mr. Ashe a flight review in the airplane. Mr. Nigri described the flight review as "thorough" and even commented in the endorsement that Mr. Ashe had good aeronautical decision making (ADM) skills. Mr. Nigri said that Mr. Ashe planned to fly the airplane back to New Hampshire after the flight review but kept getting delayed due to weather.

Mr. Ashe was in the process of flying the airplane back to New Hampshire at the time of the accident. Mr. Nigri said that he met with Mr. Ashe before the flight. Mr. Ashe was looking at the weather en route and was aware that sunset was around 6:42 pm. Since he could not land at the private airstrip in Ossipee at night, he planned to land at Laconia Municipal Airport (LCI), Laconia, New Hampshire. Mr. Ashe commented that the "ceilings looked good" and that if he just got out of Rhode Island T.F. Green International Airport (PVD), Providence, Rhode Island, he would be ok. Mr. Nigri told him the dewpoint was going to drop and that he should just postpone the flight until the morning. He tried to convince Mr. Ashe several times to just stay and even invited him to stay the night at his home, and they would have "tacos and beer" for dinner. However, Mr. Ashe insisted on flying back to New Hampshire. He kept telling Mr. Nigri that "he would be okay." Mr. Ashe said he planned to fly to LCI at 2,000 ft msl, and he would stop if the weather got too bad. Mr. Ashe's girlfriend would pick him up at LCI.

Mr. Nigri helped Mr. Ashe with his flight clearance and reviewed how to fly through Class C airspace, since the route of flight took him directly over Manchester – Boston Regional Airport (MHT), Manchester, New Hampshire. Mr. Nigri then returned home. Mr. Nigri monitored Mr. Ashe's flight via Flight Aware and even called the PVD clearance delivery to make sure he had cleared the PVD airspace ok. They said he did.

Mr. Nigri then texted Mr. Ashe at 6:49 pm and asked how the flight was going and informed him that he was tracking his flight. Mr. Ashe responded by texting a picture of his iPad at 6:54 pm, which was mounted to the control yoke. Mr. Nigri responded at 6:55 pm and said, "Ok, good, weather looks ok, how is the visibility?" Mr. Ashe did not respond. At 7:06 pm, Mr. Nigri texted Mr. Ashe and asked if he had been cleared through MHT's Class C airspace. Mr. Nigri was concerned that he would violate the airspace. At 7:15 pm, Mr. Nigri texted Mr. Ashe again and said, "Bob, weather is IFR at LCI." He then sent Mr. Ashe two more back-to-back texts at 7:16 and 7:17pm, telling Mr. Ashe to "land at Concord before it goes IFR," "Go to Concord." Mr. Ashe did not respond.

Mr. Nigri continued to monitor the flight and the weather along the route. The weather at LCI improved and showed VFR conditions. He watched Mr. Ashe enter the 45 degree to downwind for runway 26 at LCI. The airplane continued to fly downwind and over Lake Winnepesaukee. Mr. Nigri said Mr. Ashe should have turned left base sooner, and he was not sure why he extended the downwind leg. He then watched the airplane make a vertical descent over the lake and go off radar at 600 ft at 131 knots. Mr. Nigri then called Mr. Ashe's girlfriend to see if he had landed, and she said no and she heard sirens. Mr. Nigri then called police and told them that he thought his friend had crashed his airplane into the lake. A dispatcher with the Gilford, New Hampshire, police department told Mr. Nigri that they had received a call about an airplane in the lake. He confirmed to the police that the pilot of the airplane was his friend and asked if they could send a patrol car to the airport to be with the pilot's girlfriend.

Mr. Nigri said he listened to ATC Live after the accident and heard Mr. Ashe announce his entry into the LCI traffic pattern. He said Mr. Ashe sounded "normal" and "calm." Mr. Nigri said Mr. Ashe was physically fit and did not drink alcohol or take any medications. Mr. Ashe appeared and sounded normal prior to the flight.

Mr. Nigri knew that Mr. Ashe's girlfriend planned to pick him up from the airport; however, he did not know until after the accident, that they planned to have a "special dinner" after he landed that night. He was not sure what the "special" occasion was though. Mr. Nigri felt that his friend had a case of "get-there-itis" and just really wanted to get back to New Hampshire that evening.