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Aviation Safety - Eastern Region (AS-ERA)

Date: May 4, 2023
Subject: ERA23LA217 Interview with Pilot
Contact: Mr. Al Whitmore

The following is a record of conversation with Mr. Al Whitmore. Mr. Whitmore was interviewed by phone on May 4, 2023, at 1555 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED] and provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

At the beginning of the interview, he was 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. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview without representation.

At this stage of the conversation, he was advised that for transparency I would be typing the notes and would send to him for review and comment.

Mr. Whitmore stated that he had almost 1,000 hours in this aircraft, and that the DeFuniak Springs Airport is his home airport. He explained that the winds are typically north/south, but the paved runway is east/west. There is only a dirt runway that runs north/south, and it makes a huge amount of dust.

He states that there were no preaccident anomalies or malfunctions that would have prevented normal flight. He just had a new engine and propeller installed in January. He has flown it 7-8 hours since then and he had someone else fly with him to check everything out.

Before the accident, he used two sources for weather and the winds were from the south and not as strong as he expected. He added, however, that after the accident, he noticed that the windsock was pegged out from the south, so the winds had increased.

Shortly after takeoff, the wind rolled his airplane left toward the median. He stated that it was a much bigger roll than he had ever experienced. He tried to counteract the roll, but the airplane started to settle back down into the median area. There is a slope to the median, so once it settled, he could not recover. There is also a berm in the median area, and the berm lifted the airplane up into the air and back down, and that is when the airplane incurred damage.

He explained that there is a tree line on the south side of the runway. He thinks that there was either a downdraft of some kind or it was an increasing wind over the trees that rolled him.

The call ended at 1607 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on May 4, 2023. He replied on May 4, 2023, at 1738 EDT with the statement, "Accurate as written." The final digest was e-mailed to him on May 4, 2023.