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Date: June 15, 2023

Subject: ERA23LA231, Record of Conversation/Interview

Contact: Charles D. Walker

Mr. Charles D. Walker was contacted on June 12, 2023, at 1428 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED] and left a voice mail message. He returned the call the same day at 1449 EDT. He 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.

He was advised by e-mail when sending this document for review that it will not be released to the public until the investigation is finished and when published, any personal identifiable information (PII) such as cell phone number, e-mail address, address, pilot certificate number, etc., will be redacted and not viewable in the released document.

He provided a home address of [REDACTED] Bowling Green, Kentucky [REDACTED] His date of birth is [REDACTED] He holds a private pilot certificate, certificate number [REDACTED] with airplane single engine land and instrument airplane ratings. Although his current pilot certificate was issued on January 17, 2011, he obtained his private pilot certificate in 1974. He was issued a 3rd class medical certificate on April 6, 2023, with a limitation, "corrective lenses to meet vision standards at all required distances."

He was asked by NTSB the following –

Were you wearing your corrective lenses at the time of the accident?

I was.

NTSB Questions Continued –

How long have you owned the airplane and how many flight hours do you have?

He has owned the airplane¹ since 2011 and has about 1,200 hours total time, of which about 430 are in that airplane.

Since you have built/owned the airplane have you have any engine issues?

He did previously, and as a result he put in a new engine. The airplane received its airworthiness certificate in 2013. As indicated, he purchased a new engine and since it was installed he has had no engine issues.

How many hours on the new engine since it was installed?

About 350 hours.

Where did you purchase the engine from?

General Motors.

What make and model engine was it?

A 350 small block. It was a carbureted engine that did not have an electronic ignition system.

Explain in detail any preflight inspection, the departure and destination airports, and the accident flight?

The airplane was equipped with an 18 to 19 gallon capacity fuel tank, and it burns between 11.5 and 12.0 gallons-per-hour (GPH). He normally flies 70 to 80 miles, and the airplane cruises at 70 miles-per-hour (MPH). The airplane is wind sensitive, thus the reason for him to carefully planning his flights. The airplane was being flown to Scott Air Force Base/MidAmerica Airport (BLV), Belleville, Illinois because of an airshow there on May 13th and 14th. The airplane was operated by a non-profit company to spotlight early aviation aircraft. Because the airplane was wind sensitive and it was forecast to be windy on May 12th, he decided to fly to BLV on Thursday, May 11th. On that date he and Craig Omara made 3 fuel stops and arrived at BLV in late morning. Following the airshow he looked at the weather and there were 2 major storms on Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Because of that he spent Sunday night, and on May 15th the wind died to about 5 knots, which he felt comfortable with. He departed BLV between 1100 and 1115, and because of weather deviated briefly to the north. He made 3 fuel stops and reported the engine was running “fine.” The last stop was at Madisonville Regional Airport (2I0), Madisonville, Kentucky. While there he filled the fuel tank, then departed about 1700. About 10 minutes after takeoff while flying at 1,500 ft above ground level (agl), the engine suddenly stopped “as if it were turned off.” He tried to restart the engine and on the 3rd attempt it started and operated to full power for about 10 seconds then stopped again. He again tried to restart the engine but was unable. At that point in time the flight was over rolling hills and no improved roads or highways. He saw a logging road and a field, but thought a

¹ According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) airworthiness file, the Special Airworthiness Certificate for the experimental amateur built (EAB) aircraft was issued on August 6, 2013.

recovery might be easier from the logging road so he maneuvered for landing on the logging road. When the flight was closer to the logging road he saw stumps and opted to divert to the nearby field, which had been a strip mine. He performed a three point landing in the field and skipped, then after a second touchdown something grabbed the main landing gear which tore it off. The airplane came to rest with the empennage twisted to the left. The right lower wing was torn off from the wing root about 2 ft outboard, and the landing gear were sheared off. The empennage broke at a separation joint.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Explain the preflight inspection?

During the preflight it is standard to perform a walk-around. That inspection included a visual check of the engine compartment to verify oil capacity. He noted that the engine burns, “very little to no oil” and there have not been any radiator leaks ever. He checked the fluid levels, checked for any loose wires, cables, attachments and flying wires, and closed up the compartments. He then climbed into the airplane and started the engine.

Explain the flights on May 11th?

He departed from Bowling Green-Warren County Regional Airport (BWG), Bowling Green Kentucky and flew to 2I0, then to Harrisburg-Raleigh Airport (HSB), Harrisburg, Illinois, then to Sparta Community Airport-Hunter Field (SAR), Sparta, Illinois, and finally to BLV.

Explain the fuel stops made on May 11th?

He obtained fuel at 2I0, HSB, and SAR.

What type of fuel did he obtain?

100 low lead.

Explain the flight(s) on May 15th?

He fueled at BLV, then departed and flew to Mount Vernon Airport (MVN), Mount Vernon, Illinois, then flew to HSB then to 2I0, which is where he fueled last and was his last departure point.

What time did you depart from 2I0?

1650. When the airplane came to rest the passenger in the front seat was ok, and verbally said he was ok. He (Mr. Walker) turned tried to turn off the fuel shutoff valve but it seemed to be jammed. He then got out of the airplane and the front seat passenger’s left leg was trapped. He was then able to help the front seat passenger from the airplane and after getting out he noted a red spot of blood on the bridge of his nose which he wiped away and the blood did not come back. He then took a picture of the passenger and reported the emergency locator transmitter (ELT) did activate. He (Mr. Walker) contacted the sheriff’s office to alert them of the accident and they sent a rescue unit. The team leader of the rescue unit asked if they were ok, and initially the response from the front seat passenger that he was ok but his shoulder then began to hurt. He went to a hospital and had a MRI and x-ray of his shoulder and there was no broken bones.

NTSB Questions Continued –

What is the passenger's full name?
Craig O'Mara. He is a certificated pilot.

What is his contact information?

Phone [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Who was the pilot-in-command for the accident flight?
I (Mr. Walker) was for the flight from 2I0 to BWG.

At 2I0 did you see any fuel contamination?

He did not see any fuel contamination while the fuel was dispensed. After landing at 2I0 the airplane was taxied to the fuel pump, and he (Mr. Walker) fueled the airplane. After it was fueled he closed the fuel cap, and resumed the flight. He did not check the fuel system for contaminants after fueling. His procedure is only to check the fuel system for contaminants before the 1st flight of the day regardless whether the airplane was fueled. The fuel system quantity was checked after landing to see how much fuel was on-board. He uses a dipstick to check the quantity.

Explain the fuel system?

It is between 18 and 19 gallons. Because of an airplane accident in Georgia involving an experimental amateur built JN4D that killed 2 people.² As a result of that accident he had a bladder placed inside the fuel tank. Thus was his reason for not being precise about the fuel quantity. Because of the inherent issues of the original engine in the Curtis Jenny (Curtiss OX-5), flying cross country is not a reliable option. Because of the engine reliability issues they put a Chevrolet engine with a 2:1 reduction gear. The maximum propeller rpm is between 1,550 and 1,600, and the cruise rpm is between 1,275 and 1,350.

How is the airplane certificated?

Experimental.

Was Mr. Omara a required crewmember for the flight?

No. The airplane can be flown single pilot from either seat. Because hand flying the airplane is fatiguing, he brings along another person to split the flying.

Explain the ignition system?

He does not know, but he has a mechanical team who would know.

² The NTSB investigation of the accident that occurred on November 17, 2016, was identified as NTSB investigation ERA17FA050. That accident was known to the NTSB investigator because it involved FAA inspector Larry Enlow, of the Orlando, Florida FAA Flight Standards District Office.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Who is the operator of the airplane?

Friends of Jenny. Mr. Walker owns the EAB airplane but it is leased to Friends of Jenny.

Are there any unusual engine starting procedures?

It is normal key starting. They added a starter.

What restraint were you wearing?

A lapbelt with a shoulder harness across each shoulder. It was worn and snug.

What restraint was the front seat passenger wearing?

A 5-point restraint.

Is there anything I have not asked that I need to know?

He told me everything I needed to know. They did have a previous power issue but as a result the carburetor was rebuilt.

The call ended at 1605 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on June 15, 2023. He replied on June 17, 2023, at 1806 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him on July 18, 2023.