

Statement:

Cliff Wicks (Pilot): Sunday August 6th 9:25am

Friday August 4th events: "Me and Aaron Ponstler moved hotels, we left N353AH at W96 airport in New Kent, VA. We were weathered out all day." "We got to the new hotel before 3:00 pm. Soon after we went grocery shopping, after getting back to the hotel I stayed in all night and slept great."

Saturday August 5th events:

"I got up at 5:00am on Saturday, showered, and had some fruit for breakfast in my room. I road with Aaron to W96 and we arrived around 7:15am. The pressure washer was already installed on the aircraft, the aircraft did sit outside overnight. We had to wait for weather due to low ceilings. I was using foreflight. We went to a mini mart in the meantime and Aaron got gas while I got a drink. We got back to the airport around 8:00. We had to drop the pressure washer tank to get a fuel sump and it was all good. I conducted a preflight and FRAT. Visibility was good at 10 miles, and winds were out of the North but extremely light gusts of up to 7, maybe 12 mph. I sent deconfliction emails and called the call center. I had roughly 220 lbs. of fuel on board. I called Marc Crider before taking off for flight following. I was unable to conduct a power assurance check due to the pressure washer being installed. Once I arrived at the LZ which was KAKQ airport in Wakefield around 9:30am I also texted Aaron to let him know I arrived. On my way to the KAKQ I flew by structures 122 and 123 to check them out. Once I landed, I asked for 20gal of fuel. Marc Crider fueled it out of LT124. Marc got in and we went for a recon flight."

"We flew to structure 122 and 123 to look at them. We then flew east down the line due to Dominion requesting a flight for entire line the NRO was scheduled for to look for any other issues. We found that structures 95,94, and 81 insulators needed cleaning due to bird droppings. Marc and I talked about washing the center phase and if it were possible. We flew to the west to continue looking at the line and made it to around Waverly, VA. We found that structure 138 needed insulators washed as well. We ended recon at structure 195 due to nearing my fuel load. I asked for 25 gallons out of LT124 and shut down for the tailboard."

"The tailboard was good and in depth. We went over everything and all the structure numbers. I discussed with Sam (Dominion) that structure 94 may be a no go due to cows being below it in pasture. After the tailboard I looked up Hospital and kept it on my gps. I noticed it had a Helipad. It was the Sentara Hospital. Sam showed me videos of Air 2 washing the center phase. Sam offered me the videos to watch, so I thought I'd take the opportunity to see how they positioned their aircraft as we discussed MADs during the tailboard. Sam Hamrick and Bobby Parks (Dominion) were present for the entire tailboard as well. I Signed the tailboard."

"We discussed with Sam and Bobby that structure 123 didn't need the insulators washed so we would start with structure 122 instead. We filled the pressure washer tank to the spot we previously marked for good weight/power reasons. I can't remember who got in the aircraft first, possibly Austin. Upon take off we headed to structure 122. It was a normal ferry to the structure. Austin took pre-work pictures while we hovered away from the structure while I checked torque and temperature for a good hover. Austin boomed out the pressure washer wand while we were away from the structure. We began on the south side outside phase first starting with the inside insulator. It was going normal though we couldn't get a good wash on the inside insulator. We then moved to the outside insulator working from the bottom up. I then crossed over the line at the tower and angled differently due to an awkward wind. We washed that side the same exact way."

"We attempted to wash middle phase; Austin tried to point the washer boom down but it was difficult to hold down that far. We tried some other angles, but we really didn't get a good wash on them. We were basically making the glass wet."

"I then flew us to structure 95 and washed the south side inside insulator first and then outside. I repeated the same steps and method as structure 122. We tried the middle phase again, but it just wasn't working out. We returned to LZ for water/fuel. On the way back to LZ Austin and I discussed that we just weren't going to wash the middle phase. Upon landing I radioed Marc Crider that we were not going to do the middle phase. I got topped off with another 20-25 gallons. I took back off to structure 95 north side and repeated the steps. Inside insulator first then outside. Structure 95 had blue insulators and we got them real clean."

"We moved to structure 94 on the south side and repeated the same exact steps. No cows were out at this time. That structure went quickly and wasn't bad at all. We didn't even try the middle phase."

"I had enough water and fuel, so we went to structure 81 and planned on doing the same steps. Seemed like a different style insulator, maybe longer and more vertical. The south side was done, started on the inside insulator on north side just like before and completed that insulator. Started on the outside insulator on the north side next and hit it with water straight on. We wanted to go over it one more time and that's when I think I brought the aircraft down. I was watching the nozzle and he couldn't point it down far enough. I saw a flash then heard a bang sound. The aircraft started shaking and vibrating. It started doing its own thing and went to the right, away from the line. I didn't lower the collective. I remember looking through the floor window and knew we were going into the trees."

"On the way down, the deeper we went into the trees the worse it got. Just before making it to the ground the shaking got really bad. When it stopped, I gathered my thoughts after a few seconds and pulled the red fuel control knob. I reached down and turned the battery off. I tried to find the collective, but it was in the dirt. The aircraft shut off and I unbuckled."

"I stood up and for some reason though I had a platform on. I started calling for Austin and he stood up out of the top of the aircraft. I asked if he was ok, and he said his back hurt. He then said we had an arc flash. Austin climbed out of the helicopter, and I recommended he lay down. I went back over to the aircraft and found my phone."

"Austin told me I was bleeding, and I didn't realize it, I noticed my leg was bleeding, but I didn't think it was bad. I remember pacing around and grabbing my helmet for some reason. Austin kept asking me the same questions, I assumed he had a concussion."

"Out of nowhere 2 guys came into the right of way wearing hi-vis asking if we were with a helicopter, I said we were. I called 911, as I was talking to them, I turned around and saw a truck coming. It was Aaron Ponstler. I laid down then I was starting to feel worse. Possible from the heat and adrenaline. EMS showed up and I just tried to answer all their questions. I got loaded onto a backboard with a neck brace. I had my wits about me but just kept my eyes closed. They put me in an ambulance, and I remember being loaded into a helicopter, the flight, and landing at the hospital. I remember being taken into the ER, I told them I was hurting but didn't feel like anything was broke."