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Date: September 7, 2023

Subject: ERA23LA365, Record of Conversation/Interview

Contact: Ethan Ensley

Mr. Ethan Ensley was contacted on September 6, 2023, at 0814 EDT. He was called at ([REDACTED])
[REDACTED] He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

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.

At the onset of the call, he was asked if he was on any medication. He indicated that he was on muscle relaxers.

He was asked to explain the flight-

He indicated that the airplane is based at Orlando Sanford International Airport (SFB), Orlando, Florida, on the southeast ramp. Earlier that day he departed SFB and flew to Umatilla Municipal Airport (X23), Umatilla, Florida, where he planned to fuel the airplane. After an uneventful landing there was another airplane ahead at the fueling facility. He waited for that airplane to finish fueling then he secured his airplane and topped both fuel tanks. It was starting to get late, and he wanted to depart before it was dark. He started the engine, used the checklist, and announced on the common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) that he was departing to the north. He applied power, lifted off or rotated, and then when the flight was between 150 and 200 ft above the runway, the engine "sputtered." He knew the auxiliary (electric) fuel boost pump was on, and he looked down, noting that there was no runway remaining. He looked 30° left and right of his position looking for a suitable forced landing spot and switched fuel tanks. The engine quit, and he pushed the control yoke forward to maintain airspeed. He noted a house on a hill with a large backyard, but the yard was uphill. He maintained wings level, hit hard, and the airplane spun around about 100° coming to rest on a southeasterly heading. He noted the right wing seemed to be damaged. The nose started sinking fast, and he undid his 5-point Hooker harness, slid the canopy aft, and got out

of the airplane while it was sinking. People waded into the water to help him. Once on shore EMS arrived.

He was asked by NTSB the following –

At X23 what was the fuel load in each fuel tank before fueling?

Each fuel tank has a total capacity of 21 gallons. The left had 17 gallons and the right had 7 to 8 gallons. The day before he flew to Inverness Airport (INF), Inverness, Florida and during that flight the fuel selector was on the right tank. Thus the lower value in the right tank than the left.

Did you check each fuel tank for contaminants after fueling?

No I did not.

What was the fuel selector position to when the engine began sputtering?

On the right tank. The mixture was full rich, and he had takeoff power applied at the start of the takeoff.

Does your airplane have a fuel pressure gauge?

Yes.

Did you see what the fuel pressure was when the engine was sputtering?

No I did not. He did scan the engine instruments at the start of the takeoff and all were good at that time.

Did you feel rushed to depart and that was the reason why you did not check the fuel tank sumps before departing?

Maybe a little. He was “chasing daylight.” He wasn’t conscious of being rushed, adding that he usually does check the fuel tank sumps before each flight. The engine started ok.

Is your engine fuel injected or carbureted?

It is carbureted. When he arrived at X23 another airplane had just landed. He announced his overflight on the CTAF, and he applied carburetor heat when he pulled engine power back for the approach. He landed ok. He announced on the CTAF his taxi, he was holding short, and then that he was planning to depart the airport to the east. During the first part of the takeoff he checked the engine gauges and rotated. Then at 150 ft above ground level, the engine sputtered and he switched tanks.

Did the engine quit after he switched tanks?

No, it was sputtering. The mixture was full rich, the throttle was full forward and the auxiliary or electric fuel pump was on.

NTSB Questions Continued –

He was asked to clarify if the engine quit after he switched tanks?

I can't say for sure that it did. The propeller was "winding back" like the engine was not producing power. The rpm was "way back."

What engine is installed?

Mattituck O-360.

Has there been any recent maintenance or work done to the engine or engine fuel system components?

He bought the airplane in August 2023. During a pre-buy inspection of it before purchase, the No. 4 cylinder had low compression, which was attributed to be a worn valve guide. The cylinder was removed and sent out for overhaul. It was reinstalled after overhaul, and the engine was operated.

Did you perform an engine run-up before departure at X23?

He did not at X23, but he did perform an engine run-up before departure from SFB. The run-up at SFB was normal.

What medication are you on or taking?

He had not yet taken the medication that was prescribed to him by medical personnel during the post-event medical examination. He was prescribed Ketorolac (Toradol) which is a pain medication and Methocarbamol (Robaxin) which is a muscle relaxer.

Did you touch down in the yard you mentioned?

No. He landed in the water 50 to 75 ft from the bank.

Are there any personal effects in the airplane?

Yes, a headset, reading glasses, and the maintenance records are in the front baggage compartment.

Do you have any questions for NTSB?

No.

The call ended at 0850 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on September 7, 2023. He replied the same day at 1115 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him for FINAL review on September 7, 2023. He replied the same day at 1143 EDT, with, "Tim, No issues. Thanks, Ethan." The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him on September 7, 2023.