



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

Date: June 21, 2024

Subject: ERA24FA265

Contact: Dan Gill, witness

The following is an excerpt of Mr. Gill's written statement to the FAA:

"Good Afternoon,

On Monday afternoon on 6/17/24, I was working at a residence on Harwood Drive in North Andover. At roughly between 1 and 2pm, I noticed a plane taking off of, i assume, from runway 23 from Lawrence Airport and noticed very shortly after take-off, not even at pattern altitude, the engine sputtered and quit. At that point it caught my attention, and I was watching at first, thinking it was practicing stalls. However, knowing you never practice stalls at low altitude. Less than a minute later he was able to restart the engine and continue to climb and a moment later I heard multiple sputters and again the engine quit. At that point, I saw him heading out east toward the Merrimack thinking he would hopefully be able to get down to any emergency runway at that point."

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Contact: Stephen Sides, Friend of Pilot, Leon Archambault

I spoke with Mr. Sides via telephone. He stated that he and Mr. Archambault had been friends for over 35+ yrs. and had worked together at Raytheon. He helped Mr. Archambault build the RV-6A. On the day of the accident, Mr. Sides met Mr. Archambault at his hangar around 1100. At noon, they pulled the grill out and made hamburgers. Mr. Archambault decided that he was going to take his RV-6A up for a flight and do some full stop landings. Mr. Sides observed Mr. Archambault pull his airplane out of the hangar, then walk around the airplane, which he presumed was Mr. Archambault conducting a preflight inspection. Mr. Sides did not see him specifically check the fuel. Mr. Archambault then started the engine (which started immediately), then do an engine run-up and finally taxi to the active runway and takeoff. Mr. Sides said everything appeared normal with the takeoff and he turned his attention away for a minute because the DEA helicopter was landing. When he returned his attention back to the airplane, it was on a right downwind and descending. He thought the airplane was lower than normal. Mr. Sides was monitoring the tower frequency on a handheld radio, and he heard Mr. Archambault report that he was having a problem, and that the tower was trying to get him back to the runway. Mr. Sides then watched the airplane make a controlled descent before it disappeared behind trees and out of view.

Mr. Sides described Mr. Archambault as being in a good mood that day with no obvious health or stress problems. He seemed "fine." Mr. Sides said that Mr. Archambault is not someone that flies often. He was not aware of any recent mechanical problems with the airplane. Mr. Sides said that Mr. Archambault did his last flight review with a CFI in May/June 2023. The flight review was conducted in Mr. Sides's Cessna 172, because the CFI was not current in the RV-6A.

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Subject: ERA24FA265

Contact: John "Alex" Jackson, Special Agent/Pilot, DEA

Agent Jackson has been based at the Lawrence Municipal Airport for the past 8 years and was familiar with the pilot of N715PA. He said that the pilot was a "menace" and had a reputation for not communicating and getting lost or "kicked out" of the airport's traffic pattern. On the day of the accident, Agent Jackson and his observer were returning from a mission in their A350 helicopter and were on a 1.5 mile final when then heard N715PA key up on the control tower's frequency. Agent Jackson immediately knew who it was and mentioned that he had not heard the pilot at the airport in about 9 months or so. He watched the pilot depart and start his initial climb. Agent Jackson then focused on completing his approach and sidestepping to land on his agency's dolly. While doing so, he heard the pilot report he was having a problem and the tower clearing him to land any runway. Agent Jackson set the helicopter down on the dolly and started looking for N715PA. He looked over his right shoulder and spotted the airplane on downwind (where you would start the base turn) in a low, slow, very stable, flat descent, before it disappeared behind trees. He did not see any smoke or fire trailing the airplane. Agent Jackson told his observer and the control tower that the pilot was not going to make it to the airport. The tower controller then cleared Agent Jackson to depart and go look for N715PA. Once airborne, the observer spotted the airplane inverted in the Merrimack River. They descended down to about 30 ft above the river to look for any movement of the pilot trying to get out of the airplane. They did not see any movement and did not notice any fuel leaking from the airplane. Agent Jackson began to give coordinates to law enforcement to help them find the airplane's location.



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Contact: Mr. Joseph Rynne, Sr., witness

Mr. Rynne owns Rynne's Auto Sales located in Lawrence, MA. He stated that he has been an auto mechanic for over 30 yrs. and used to take flying lessons at the Lawrence Municipal Airport. His business is located just a few miles from the airport, and he has observed aircraft taking off and landing at the airport for many years.

Mr. Rynne stated that on the day of the accident, around 2:00pm, he was taking the garbage out, when he heard an airplane departing runway 23. He looked up and noticed a small silver airplane with short wings climbing with the engine at "full throttle." The engine then suddenly went silent and just stopped. Mr. Rynne observed the airplane level out, and make a right-hand turn (north to east) over Interstate 495 at an altitude of about 1,500 to 2,000 ft. He thought maybe the pilot was having a fuel issue with the engine, or it was an instructional flight, and the pilot was practicing a simulated engine out in the traffic pattern. He never heard the engine re-start. Mr. Rynne did not see any smoke or oil trailing the airplane. He said the airplane looked "in control" the entire time before it disappeared from his view behind trees and buildings. Mr. Rynne did not know the airplane had crashed until later that afternoon.

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