

Lucas Winn
Aviation Accident Investigator
Aviation Safety, Eastern Region

Date: July 20, 2024

Subject: Operators statement, ERA24FA294

Contact: [REDACTED] Skydive Mountain City

The following statement was sent to Investigator Todd Gunther by email from [REDACTED] of Skydive Mountain City regarding the accident involving Cessna 182A, N2198G, on July 7, 2024, in Rutherfordton NC. The statement was sent on July 20, 2024.

On Sunday July 7, Skydive Mountain City, contracted/leased the C-182 from Airstar Aviation LLC for our jump operations that day.

Even though all three men, [REDACTED] (Pilot), [REDACTED] (instructor) and [REDACTED] (instructor) worked as independent contractor for both companies- on this day [REDACTED] were hired by Airstar Aviation as the pilot and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] as instructors for Skydive Mountain City.

The plane flew in that morning from Rutherford County Airport (FQD) to Johnson County Airport (6A4). We had a normal day of skydiving operations. The plane flew a total of 8 "loads" (take off and landings with jumpers). Weather at 6A4 was for the most of the day great. We were on the ground for 3 hours or so, in the early afternoon due to clouds, but once they cleared we continued the jump operations.

There were no issues, as far as we could tell, with the plane. Everything was smooth. We finished jump operations around 7.45pm if I recall right.

Before the commute back to FQD, we had conversations about the weather that had been over FQD during the day. We had three plans in place. One was for me to drive the men back and [REDACTED] were going to pick up the plane on another day. Second was to fly to FQD. Third was to divert to Asheville (I do not recall which airport [REDACTED] told me) in case weather was not cleared over FQD.

[REDACTED] checked the weather a last time and it looked like the weather had just cleared FQD, so [REDACTED] decided to fly. We still talked about him diverting to Asheville in case weather was different from what he saw on the radar. They left 6A4 right before 8.30pm and the weather was beautiful.

At 8.44pm I texted with [REDACTED], and there were no indications on anything other than the flight was going as planned and they were heading to FQD.

I texted [REDACTED] again around 10pm, but didn't hear back. I didn't think anything more about it since I figured he was driving back to his house.

I woke up around 4am by [REDACTED] ([REDACTED] wife) call saying he never came home.

[REDACTED] was an experienced jump pilot. Over the last two+ years I have known him he has flown for me and also worked as a skydiving instructor. He was the guy that always looked out for everyone else and never took any unnecessary risks.