

FAA IIC (ASI Delbert L. Areford) Statement of Conversation with N907L Commercial Student Pilot
Eduardo D. Vargas

On 15 December 2023 at approximately 0500 hrs I was dispatched as the FAA IIC to investigate an aircraft accident in Asheville, NC involving Diamond DA 40NG, N907L, Ser. No. 40.NC262, which had crashed the evening prior. The below account is a record of my conversation with the commercial student pilot, Mr. Eduardo D. Vargas (REDACTED) at 0800 hrs on Tuesday, 19 December 2023. Also present were FAA ASI Mr. Michael Everhart, and on the phone with Mr. Vargas and with his approval, was LIFT Academy counsel Mr. Chad Pulley.

Mr. Vargas stated this flight was planned by him as part of his Commercial Student Cross-Country requirement, with his assigned CFI, Mr. Parker Klehr. The planned route was MYR>LZU (Touch & Go Only)>DKX>MYR. Mr. Vargas continued that he woke around 0920 hrs, performed a self-eval, ate breakfast and headed to the airfield, arriving around noon. The aircraft they would be utilizing for their trip (N907L) was flying and once it landed, Mr. Vargas performed his preflight of the aircraft and calculated 27 gallons of fuel, enough to get them to DKX with reserve.

At approximately 1340 hrs they departed MYR, performed a touch & go at LZU, and landed at DKX at approximately 1700 hrs where the aircraft was serviced with fuel and tied down. Mr. Vargas and Mr. Klehr utilized a courtesy vehicle to grab dinner, returning to the airport around 1900 hrs and departing to MYR around 1930 hrs. At approximately 2000 hrs Mr. Vargas stated there was an unusual engine noise with oil pressure dropping to zero. Mr. Klehr took control of the aircraft while Mr. Vargas squawked 7700 and ran the checklists. Mr. Klehr took comms and made the MAYDAY call to AVL. Mr. Vargas stated he attempted to re-start the engine multiple times, and initially was able to obtain about 20% for a moment. On another attempt they got smoke in the cockpit, which they were able to clear.

At approximately 2010 hrs and once they had a visual on AVL, it was determined they would not be able to make it with the calculated best-glide, so Mr. Klehr picked a spot on the highway and attempted to make an emergency landing. Mr. Klehr deployed flaps once they were over the highway and continued flying the aircraft until they seen power lines crossing the highway at the last second. Once the aircraft struck the power lines, the aircraft hit the ground and both Mr. Vargas and Mr. Klehr were able to egress the aircraft, though Mr. Vargas stated he was momentarily tangled in his headset cord. Once they were both clear of the aircraft, Mr. Vargas stated he felt severe back pain. Mr. Vargas and Mr. Klehr were both transported to the hospital with injuries. Mr. Klehr was able to be discharged the following day, but Mr. Vargas was hospitalized for the following 5 days with a spinal fracture along with multiple bumps, bruises, cuts, and scratches.