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Date: October 16, 2024
Subject: ERA24LA366, Record of Conversation/Interview
Contact: Michael L. Hapka

Mr. Michael Hapka was contacted by phone on October 16, 2024, at 1257 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED] He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the interview, he was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview without representation.

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.

His current home address is [REDACTED] Wildwood, Florida [REDACTED] His date of birth is [REDACTED] His pilot certificate number is [REDACTED] He holds a private pilot certificate is airplane single engine land and instrument airplane ratings. He has been flying since 1993. He has about 1,500 hours total time, and 454 hours total time make and model. He had previously owned 2 other Mooney M20J aircraft. Though, he has trained in Cessna aircraft. He is the sole owner of the airplane having owned it for about 9 years and 8 months¹. His last flight review in the accident airplane was on May 16, 2023. He holds a 3rd class medical certificate with limitation, "Must have available glasses for near vision."

¹ The Federal Aviation Administration Bill of Sale to Mr. Hapka was dated January 22, 2015.

With respect to the accident flight, his girlfriend Rebecca Renninger who is not a pilot was in the right front seat.

His initial statement sent by e-mail to the Federal Aviation Administration inspector on September 3, 2024, consisted of, "Rebecca and I were on a trip from KGWB to KRMN Friday, August 30, 2024, to visit the grandchildren. Weather looked fine except for low cloud cover at KRMN but was supposed to improve that afternoon. We departed KGWB at 1:11 EST. Upon arriving on the east side of the Appalachian Mountains, I saw that the cloud cover was still mostly very low overcast, so I performed a 180 degree turn to go back from where we came from and land at an airport to wait out the cloud cover at KRMN. I chose 4G7 to land at. I checked Foreflight and the runway length was 2900+ feet and I was comfortable with that. Winds were variable. I overflew the airport going west and set up for a left downwind for Runway 5. Upon reaching the runway my airspeed was too high, so I executed a go around. It was a hot afternoon, about 90 degrees and I didn't have the lift that I needed to clear the trees on the north end of the runway. We impacted the trees and cartwheeled to the ground. Time was 3:14 EST."

He was asked the following questions to supplement his initial e-mail statement -

When you added power to go around did the engine respond?

Yes.

Was there anything mechanically wrong with the airplane that caused the accident?

"No, it was all pilot error."

What was the flap setting during your approach and go-around?

The flaps were full on the approach and raised full up on the go-around. On the go-around he went full up with the flap selector but did not retract the landing gear.

Are the flaps manual or electric?

Electric.

Explain the wind velocity and direction at the time of the approach and accident?

The wind was variable that day.

What was the wind velocity during the approach and accident?

At 3 knots.

Explain the touchdown location?

I did touch down too far along the runway and that's why I did a go-around.

Exactly where along the runway did the airplane touch down?

I don't remember, things happened so fast. He was too fast at touchdown, that's why I performed a go-around.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Did you touch down in the 1st half or 2nd half of the runway²?
1st half.

What was your speed at touchdown?

I don't really know, things happened so fast. He usually maintains 65 knots on final but on that approach that day he was not looking at his airspeed. He was deciding if he needed to go-around.

After touchdown did you apply the aircraft's normal brakes?

Just momentarily. He knew he was fast and in the same instant said he needed to go-around.

Have you been to Fairmont Municipal Airport-Frankman Field (4G7) before?

No.

Did you get any wind information before landing?

No.

Was there anybody at 4G7 when you were landing?

I have no idea. There was no aircraft moving on the airport. I couldn't tell if anybody was inside the fixed base operator (FBO) at the time since he had not gone in there yet.

What restraint were you both wearing?

A seatbelt and shoulder harness.

Did you or your passenger sustain any injuries?

She had 2 broken cheek bones and a cracked vertebra. She hit her head on something in the aircraft, but she will not need surgery. He felt fine initially but later experienced back symptoms like his girlfriend, but he has not been to a doctor yet.

Explain the approach from entering the downwind to the accident?

He was on a standard downwind, base, and final legs. In the back of his mind was the hilly terrain and trees. He wanted to get low and slow into the airport. He flew over the airport about midfield and entered onto the downwind leg of the airport traffic pattern. On the downwind leg he is usually about 1,000 ft above the airport elevation, and he did not recall the airspeed while in the traffic pattern.

² According to AirNav, runway 5 was an asphalt runway 2,965 ft long by 75 ft wide. It was reported to be in good condition.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Do you recall what altitude and airspeed you were at while on the base leg?

He knew he was descending during the base leg. On usually turns onto final when the flight is 500 ft above the runway elevation. His global positioning system (GPS) alerts him when the flight is 500 ft about runway elevation.

Do you know where or why the airplane was fast?

I don't. I have been thinking about the approach. He was flying a little higher because of terrain. He should have flown to other alternate airports.

Did you have any recent experience flying in a runway that same length?

About 2 to 4 weeks before the accident he flew and landed on a 2,500 ft long runway. That airport also had trees. During the accident approach it was hot outside, with the temperature close to 90°. He flies into a lot of short trips but chalked his approach that day into 4G7 as being "lackadaisical."

If you took the outside air temperature into account, what would you have done differently?

I would have flown to a different airport with a longer runway. I had plenty of fuel to get there. He said his decision was overconfident.

Who is the insurance adjuster?

The insurance company is Old Republic and Pat Dolan is the adjuster.

Was the accident landing videotaped?

No.

Where are the maintenance records?

Sent to his insurance adjuster.

Do you have any questions for me?

No.

He was called the same day at 1419 EDT and left a voice mail message asking about any visual flight rules or instrument flight rules flight plan or clearance-

He replied by e-mail the same day at 1554 EDT with, "I was on an activated VFR flight plan from [KGWB] to KRMN."

The call ended at 1337 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on October 16, 2024. He replied on October 21, 2024 at 1128 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him on October 21, 2024.