



Timothy W. Monville
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Office of Aviation Safety - Eastern Region

Date: December 9, 2024
Subject: ERA25FA071, Record of Conversation/Interview
Contact: Corey M. Kirkwood

Mr. Corey M. Kirkwood was contacted by phone on December 9, 2024, at 1736 EST. 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 pilot certificate number is [REDACTED]. He holds an Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate with Airplane Single Engine Land rating. He also holds a Commercial Pilot certificate with airplane multi-engine land, and gyroplane ratings. He holds a flight instructor certificate with airplane single engine, airplane multi-engine, gyroplane, and instrument airplane ratings. He is type rated in the Cessna 525 and Cessna 500 series aircraft. He is a Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE) in gyroplanes and airplanes up to the ATP level. He is a DPE in the Nationally Managed AFS 600 and is considered a Specialty Aircraft Examiner (SAE). He has 5,000 hours total flight time, and about 1,000 hours total time in Gyroplanes.

The accident Gyroplane is owned by Southern Gyro LLC, which is owned by 4 individuals. He (Mr. Kirkwood) is one of the four owners. The accident pilot (William Becker) is not an owner but did have permission to use it.

NTSB Questions Continued –

What was the purpose of the accident flight?

The pilot said he was going flying to the river and would return to Foley Municipal Airport (5R4), Foley, Alabama.

When was the last time that you flew the gyroplane?

On December 8th, 2024. He had given two Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees training in it. The individuals were from AFS 900 on contract.

What are the names of the two FAA employees?

Ryan Nelson and Shey Pontsler.

How many flights with them and what was the flight duration?

He flew with each of them once each flight lasting about 1 hour. One of his flight instructors Ashley Collier had also flown with them in the gyroplane.

Did you have any issues with the airframe, engine, or flight controls during your flights with the FAA inspectors?

“No, none whatsoever.”

Was Ashley the last person to fly the gyroplane?

He was not sure. He answered that way because the way he operated if a person is rated in it, that person was allowed without permission to fly it. Meaning, people would have an open invitation to fly it without permission if they were rated.

Where were you located when you saw and heard the accident sequence?

He was at the hangar entrance, standing about 10 ft on the ramp. He was looking towards the runway. The hangar was located west of the runway. Using Google Earth, he was located at 30.429169° north latitude and -87.702511° west longitude. The pilot walked past him and advised he wanted to fly the gyroplane to the river and then would be back in 5 to 10 minutes. He responded by saying will see you later. The pilot responded ok, and he then told the pilot, “Be safe don’t hurt yourself.” He watched the pilot get into the gyroplane, start the engine, advised on the common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) that he was taxiing, taxi out, then performed a run-up. He saw the pilot “pre-rotated” then rotated and “wiggled around a little bit.” The pilot, who was almost 70 years old, who had his 1st flight lesson 2 years ago and who had under 500 flight hours, rotated, and “wiggled around a little bit.” He (Mr. Kirkwood) looked around for a hand-held Very High Frequency (VHF) transceiver, and if he found one, he would have broadcast on the CTAF to the pilot to encourage him. The pilot “got the shakes out” and began accelerating then started to climb. The pilot pitched up too much then he saw full left rudder pedal input, which continued to the point that the cockpit was 90° to the direction of flight. The pilot paused, then applied full right cyclic input. With those kind of inputs with the main rotor, which is high inertia, can become unloaded, causing the gyroplane can bunt over. The gyroplane turned right, rolled right to inverted then

continued to roll towards upright, but he walked inside the hangar knowing what would occur. The gyroplane impacted the runway before the pilot could continue the roll to an upright position. A fire occurred on impact.

NTSB Questions Continued –

He clarified that the full left rudder input occurred when the gyroplane was in a high pitch attitude and slow airspeed regime, then the pilot paused, then applied full right cyclic input. About 5 seconds after impact a fire occurred. The pilot told him there were 9 gallons of fuel on-board.

What runway was the pilot using?

Runway 18. There was a 5-knot wind, and he estimated the ceiling was between 2,000 and 2,500 ft agl. There was no precipitation at the time of the flight.

Was there any turbulence?

There was a report from Pilot Reports of a slight burble while over trees, but it was “comfortable” below the trees. Additionally, it had stopped raining 30 minutes earlier, and the weather looked fine.

Did he use full length of the runway?

Yes.

What was the highest altitude attained?

100 to 150 ft agl.

Was the airplane approaching him, abeam him, or past him?

Just past his position. The runway impact was about 800 ft before the fixed distance marker at the approach end of runway 36. During the takeoff the pilot applied full left pedal input which caused the nose to yaw 90° to the left. He then applied right cyclic which caused the gyroplane to roll to the right to an inverted position. The pilot continued the roll past inverted but impacted the runway before the gyroplane was upright. The gyroplane impacted the runway 45° to the runway centerline.

Did it seem like the pilot intentionally continued rolling to the right to become upright?

Yes, once upset, the pilot tried to continue the right roll. While inverted the main rotor blades would become unloaded. Postaccident the main rotor blades appear to be symmetrically damaged, and the propeller blades were sheared near the propeller hub. Full power and high pitch attitude contributes to bunt. With the high nose up, left rudder input, followed by a pause, then right cyclic input, then the gyroplane bunted.

Did you perceive of any engine issues?

“No, no it was running strong until impact full throttle.”

NTSB Questions Continued –

Why do you think the pilot applied right cyclic?

Generally, the bunt condition and causes are not spoken about. He teaches a lot and tells students that if you perceive you are travelling sideways to put cyclic in the direction of travel, the gyroplane will fly away. The pilot applied right cyclic stick into the skid. He teaches that left pedal turns are standard or common.

Was there any discussion with the accident pilot before departure on his or any other flights about doing a pedal turn?

He never discussed pedal turns before departure of the accident flight. With respect to pedal turns, the nose of the gyroplane was way too high at 25° to 30° nose up. He teaches 3 possible recoveries while in a nose-high attitude:

1. Do nothing, and the nose will eventually drop
2. Apply cyclic opposite the direction of movement, or stick toward the rudder not away, which will cause the nose to descend
3. Apply full left pedal input

He added that the pilot had a “bad” takeoff.

Had you seen the pilot do this before?

I had not seen it myself. He had not given the accident pilot lessons in pedal turns, and he never demonstrated to the accident pilot how to do it.

What minimum altitude should a pedal turn be initiated at?

The height/velocity curve for 0 airspeed is 400 ft. So 500 ft would be a safe starting altitude.

Describe the wiggling you previously reported?

After the gyroplane rotated, he saw yaw and pitch oscillations, followed by left pedal input then right pedal input. The pilot was overcontrolling, then regained controlled flight flying several hundred ft. He then noted a smooth, continuous pull up to a high pitch attitude of 35° gaining about 100 ft of altitude. He noted left pedal input, which stopped when the nose of the gyroplane was 90° to the direction of flight. The pilot then applied right cyclic input, waited for 5 seconds, then the gyroplane quickly rolled inverted and continued rolling towards an upright position but impacted the runway while sideways with the nose 45° to the runway.

Did you perceive any issue with the engine?

No, there was nothing wrong with the engine. The pilot made a radio call announcing “takeoff runway 18.” That was the last call he made.

Who has the maintenance records?

They (the four owners should).

The call ended at 1820 EST.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on December 9, 2024. He replied with several e-mails with corrections the same day between 2145 and 2150 EST that were incorporated into the narrative. The amended digest was e-mailed to him for review on December 11, 2024. He replied by text message on December 12, 2024, at 1146 EST with, "It is fine, I'll send an email." He replied by e-mail on December 12, 2024, at 1220 EST with, "That existed version is fine. You can proceed. Best Regards, Corey Kirkwood DPE, SPE, Airplane & Gyroplane." The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him and the investigative team on December 12, 2024.

Robert Gretz
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 7/17/25

Subject: ERA25FA071

Contact: Ken Lancaster, FAA BHM FSDO

During a telephone conversation, Mr. Lancaster stated the following:

I advised Mr. Lancaster that the case was reassigned to me due to Brian Rayner's retirement and I was trying to get up to speed. Mr. Lancaster stated that according to an eyewitness, who was also a gyrocopter designated pilot examiner, the pilot unloaded the rotor system during takeoff, which resulted in a loss of control. Additionally, the engine continued to run after impact with the ground.

Mr. Lancaster added that a majority of the wreckage was consumed in a postcrash fire, but he did not observe any preimpact mechanical malfunctions when he examined the remaining wreckage.