

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

Date: October 22, 2024
Subject: ERA25LA015, Record of Conversation/Interview
Contact: Michael "Mike" Leonzo

Mr. Michael "Mike" Leonzo was contacted by phone on October 22, 2024, at 1508 EDT. He was called at [REDACTED] and left a voice mail message. He was also sent a text message that same day at 1514 EDT to the same number. Mr. Leonzo returned the call the same day at 1551 EDT from the same phone number. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED]

At the beginning of the phone call 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.

Mr. Leonzo holds private and commercial pilot certificates and has about 1,100 hours total flight time. He currently flies Dave's Aviat Husky airplane and "two Carbon Cubs that Dave owned in the past. I do not fly any other tailwheel aircraft." He began flying in 1987, then purchased a house and stopped flying due to financial reasons. He resumed flying again in 2016 and has accrued about 1,000 hours since then.

He was asked the following questions –

Explain what was going on at Cheat River Island Airport (56WV), Rowlesburg, West Virginia? He explained that twice a year in the Spring and Fall they hold a fly-in on Saturday. Pilot's who want to spend the night camping fly in the Friday before. He as the "AirBoss" provides volunteer

coordination for aircraft that are inbound or outbound, adding that he does not take away from the pilot's authority as pilot-in-command. He gives pointers to aircraft that are inbound or taxiing for departure. He added that it was busy on the accident date, October 11th, adding that the weather was perfect both days. He estimated that 60 aircraft landed at 56WV on October 11th, and another 40 aircraft landed the following day.

NTSB Questions Continued –

What was the time of the accident?

He indicated that he thought the accident occurred later in the day between 1600 and 1700 EDT. That day between 1800 and 1830 it was dusk.

What was the weather conditions like at the time of the accident?

The wind was calm, or maybe 2 knots of wind from the west with clear skies.

Is it a requirement to takeoff and land in a certain direction?

They want aircraft to land on runway 31¹, and to depart runway 13.

Do you recall any contact by the accident pilot while inbound?

The accident pilot was flying as a flight of two. His buddy (lead aircraft) was another tailwheel equipped airplane, that was orange and gray in color. He (Mr. Leonzo) talked with the pilot's of both those airplanes while they were inbound. While on approach to 56WV, "they were not on top of one another." The 1st airplane of the two to land was the orange and gray colored airplane. After landing he taxied into the high grass. While the accident airplane was on approach, he (Mr. Leonzo) was about 1/3 down runway and the runway was completely clear.

Did any of the two airplanes ask or inquire about the wind?

I don't recall. He would typically tell pilot's the wind, and to enter the traffic pattern for runway 31, maintain about 1.5 mile final. Using his hand held very high frequency (VHF) radio, he would typically hear pilot's announce downwind, base, and final legs of the airport traffic pattern. The runway was completely clear when the accident pilot landed.

Did the accident pilot advise on the frequency that it was his first time to 56WV?

I can't recall. His landing was "dead-on" touching down about 300 to 400 ft along the runway. The landing was "perfect, no bounce" and the airplane then began rolling down the runway. At that time, he (Mr. Leonzo) was at the northeast corner of the intersection of runways 31/36.

Explain any nuance about runway 31?

It is a relatively smooth runway with no bumps or dips. On approach, because of a mountain pilots will make a 45° dog leg before landing. Because of the mountain (Figure 1) straight-in approaches

¹ The accident pilot was landing runway 31. According to AirNav that turf runway was 2,000 ft long and 50 ft wide.

can't be performed. The last portion of final approach is flown over a river. The runway begins at the shore of the Cheat River.

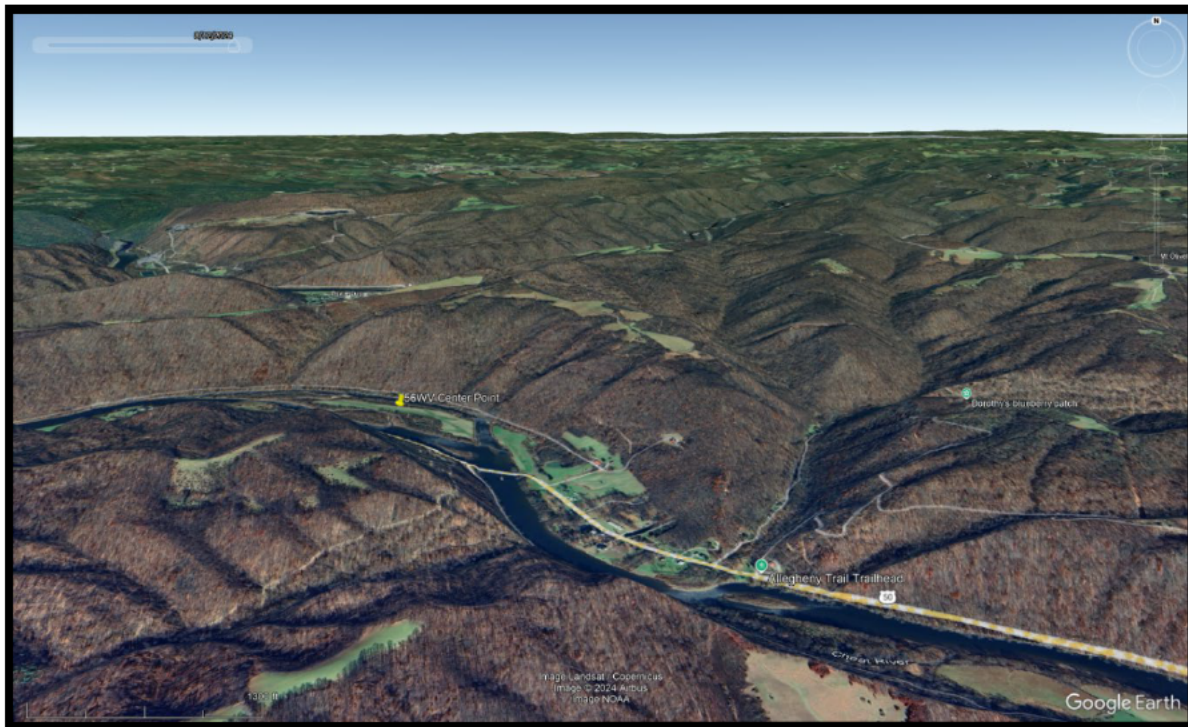


Figure 1: Google Earth Image of Airport Location Among Mountains

NTSB Questions Continued –

As the “AirBoss” are you watching each aircraft as they approach and land?

Absolutely. In that regard, occasionally he will tell a pilot if he perceives the flight is high, and if so to go-around. The following day (10/12) the pilot of a Mooney M20J called inbound to 56WV. He (Mr. Leonzo) is in a flying club (Lima Whiskey Flying Club) with 4 other people who own a Mooney M20J, advised the pilot not to try to land there.

Explain what you saw with respect to the accident approach and landing?

His buddy had landed ahead of the accident airplane and parked east of his position which was on the north side of the runway. The pilot of the accident airplane, an Aviat Aircraft, Inc., A-1B made a beautiful landing and was told to taxi to the right into high grass. During the landing roll, the airplane veered left into trees. He (Mr. Leonzo) was dumbfounded as to why the runway excursion occurred and stayed in his spot/location. The nose of the airplane went between 2 trees with the wings taking the brunt of the damage. The pilot was ok. The pilot of the accident airplane flew a standard approach touching down between 300 to 400 ft down the runway. It was a stable approach and normal until the airplane veered left into trees.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Was it a three point or a wheel landing?

Three-point landing. There was, “zero wind to blow him at the time.”

Afterwards did you talk with the accident pilot about the accident?

No, I didn’t talk with the pilot at all. The airport owner (Dave) and the pilot’s buddy who flew into 56WV did talk. He (Mr. Leonzo) did talk with the pilot’s buddy who had just landed and told him about the crash. His buddy went to the accident site.

Did you see any bounce of the accident airplane on landing?

No. it was a beautiful landing. It was the accident pilot’s first time into 56WV. It was a very smooth landing, unlike a Maule that crashed at 56WV the next day.

Was the approach flat, describe the approach?

The approach was fine and was not too high. The accident pilot didn’t have to slip too much to lose altitude. It was a “textbook” approach. There was nothing unusual about the approach or landing at all until the deviation during the landing roll.

Where is the airplane now?

The airplane is still in the woods. The insurance company is sending someone out to recover the Aviat airplane and the three other aircraft that were involved in an accident the following day.

Was there any video that captured the accident?

Not that he knows of. He did not recall anybody next to him at the time of the accident.

Is there anything else I should know?

Not at all. There were no aircraft west of the intersection of the two runways. All aircraft were on the east side of the island. The accident flight was fine until it wasn’t fine.

Do you have any questions for me?

No, not at all. The accident airplane was pretty far down the runway when it veered left. He relayed a story about when he was flying an Aviat Aircraft, Inc., with the tailwheel tire low on air. After landing the airplane wanted to go all over the place.

The call ended at 1621 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on October 22, 2024. He replied on October 24, 2024 at 0539 EDT with, “Good morning Tim, I reviewed the document. Everything looks fine. I wanted to clarify that currently I fly Dave’s Husky and that I used to fly the two Carbon Cubs that Dave owned in the past (Paragraph 4). I do not fly any other tailwheel aircraft. I believe that everything else is recorded accurately. Let me know if you need anything else. Mike.” The amended digest was e-mailed to him for final review on November 4, 2024. He did not reply. The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him and the Federal Aviation Administration inspector on April 2, 2025.



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

Date: October 23, 2024
Subject: ERA25LA015, Record of Conversation/Interview
Contact: Travis D. Burchfield

Mr. Travis D. Burchfield was contacted by phone on October 23, 2024, at 0910 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.

He provided the following statement on the NTSB 6120.1 form, "Left home strip in Arkansas 7:45 CDT. Landed at 0M4 for first fuel stop. 2nd fuel stop was 2A1. Flew to Cheat River Island after fueling at 2A1 Jamestown, TN. Day was coming to an end as we arrived. Approached 56WV from the SW and announced position 5 miles out.

Entered a left downwind for runway 31. Was in contact with air boss on the ground at Cheat River. Took a long downwind to set up approach. The final approach was fine. Touched down very gently. Upon rollout, the airplane bounced up and came back down. The airplane was rolling and then started veering left. I tried to use the right brake to get lined back up but this did not seem to help at all. By this time, I was closing in on the trees lining the left side of runway and I just rode it out until contact with trees. I turned off master switch and exited the airplane. This is the first time I have not been able to make the airplane get back to where it needed to be after 368 hours and hundreds of landings (most on grass strips or fields). The airplane ran into 2 bigger trees that

substantially damaged the right wing. I was not injured, and the next day had no soreness from the wreck. Witnesses on the ground said it was a beautiful landing. They turned their attention to the next airplane landing and did not see the accident as I was well past them. The air boss even gave instructions to tax as I was rolling out. I tell this to say the landing was good, the rollout was not.”

He was asked the following questions to supplement the statement above –

Was the airplane insured and who is his insurance adjuster?

It was insured thru Avemco and his insurance adjuster is Larry Belmont of McLarens General Aviation. His contact is [REDACTED]

What is the N# and name of the pilot flying in with him?

N127BD¹ and Anthony Davis, [REDACTED]

Have you ever flown into Cheat River Island Airport (56WV), Rowlesburg, West Virginia before? He has never previously landed but he did fly over it on Labor Day 2023. He was vaguely familiar with the airstrip but had never performed an approach and landing at 56WV prior to the accident flight.

What preparation did you perform in advance for the approach and landing into 56WV?

Inbound, he announced the legs of the airport traffic pattern. Once contact was initially made there was one airplane that was ahead. He followed the contours of the hills, flying on the downwind, base, and final legs of the airport traffic pattern for runway 31. He had carburetor heat applied, slowed the airplane, and had flaps extended. He announced all his legs of the airport traffic pattern. He set the airplane up like a normal approach and while expecting some wind, reported the, “wind died down” for his approach and landing adding that there was “not much wind at all.” In Google Earth he noted the area was hilly. He also reviewed his electronic flight instruments and entered onto the downwind leg of the airport traffic pattern for runway 31.

Did you ask for the wind before landing?

I don’t believe I did. He checked Foreflight for wind at Upshure County Regional Airport (W22), Buckhannon, West Virginia and recalled the wind being from 260° at 4 kts². Nothing about that wind was alarming. He and the pilot of N127BD talked about stopping at W22 for fuel because of how late in the day it was but elected to continue to 56WV,

During your approach and landing what was the position of the sun and what was the light condition?

There was a little bit of sun on the horizon, with the sun on his tail. There was still some sunlight on the hills.

¹ According to the FAA Registry Branch, this airplane, an American Champion Aircraft 8GCBC was registered to John A. Davis.

² Using Google Earth, W22 was located about 35 nm west-southwest from 56WV.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Could you see the runway clearly?

Yes.

Explain in detail the approach providing speeds, flaps, etc.?

He entered on left downwind for runway 31 and lowered the flaps to 10° when the airplane had slowed between 75 and 80 kts. The flight was stabilized and then the flaps were lowered to 20° after slowing between 70 and 75 kts. He had carburetor heat applied and turned onto final approach to runway 31. He lowered the flaps to 30° (full) and recalled flying 60 kts. He added that his airplane has micro vortex generators (VG's) installed³. He intended to perform a two-point or wheel landing in a tail low attitude and reported the touchdown was fine and “felt great.” During the landing roll the airplane “bounced back up on me” at the time he was about to set the tail down. The airplane settled and he did not think about performing a go-around as he had complete control of the airplane at that time. He continued with the landing roll, and the airplane then started pulling to the left which he, “could not get it back.” I don’t know if I relaxed the stick. He applied right brake, but that did not correct the left veer. The airplane impacted trees. He was very shocked that the airplane veered to the left, adding that he has landed at a lot of grass runways before.

Where is the airplane home base?

Wooster, Arkansas (there is no airport/airstrip identifier). He keeps his airplane in a hangar at Searcy County Airport (4A5), Marshall, Arkansas. Two days before the accident date he flew his airplane from 4A5 to Wooster, Arkansas. On the accident date, he flew from Wooster, Arkansas to Benton County Airport (0M4), Camden, Tennessee where he fueled the airplane. He then departed 0M4 and flew to Jamestown Municipal Airport (2A1), Jamestown, Tennessee where he had lunch and fueled his airplane. His next stop was 56WV.

On his preflight on 10/9/2024 at 4A5, did you notice any issues with the tailwheel or flight controls?

No.

At 4A5 prior to departure to Wooster, Arkansas, did you check the tailwheel tire pressure?

He did not, but he looked at it and it looked fine.

At 0M4, did you perform a preflight before departure and were there any issues with the tailwheel or flight controls?

He did not perform a preflight inspection, but he did not notice any issue with the flight controls or tailwheel during landing or taxiing at 0M4.

³ According to the FAA Airworthiness File, the micro VG's were installed on the wing leading edge and underside of the horizontal stabilizer in accordance with Supplemental Type Certificate (STC) SA00668SE on July 8, 2009.

NTSB Questions Continued –

At 2A1, did you perform a preflight before departure?

He did not perform a complete preflight.

At 2A1 before departure did you check the tailwheel assembly?

No, I did not.

At 2A1, did you notice any issue with the flight controls or tailwheel during landing or taxiing at 2A1?

No.

Has there been any recent work or maintenance done to the flight controls, brakes, or tailwheel?
Other than an oil change there has been no recent work to those systems since the annual inspection.

Do you have any idea what happened?

No. I only think that I must have released the back pressure on the controls, but I don't know for sure. He knows to be vigilant on the rudder pedals and to keep the "stick" back. When the airplane bounced, he likely relaxed some back pressure, adding that is something he likely did. I did not inspect the airplane in detail after getting out of it.

How high did you bounce?

Not all that high. He was not alarmed and did not feel that he would have to do a go-around. He guessed he may have bounced 3 ft, which was not expected.

Did you relax control pressure when the bounce occurred?

I don't know that I did. In response to the bounce, I should have pushed the stick forward or let off some aft stick pressure a little bit to let the nose come down.

How far along the runway was your touchdown point?

You will need to ask the AirBoss. He did touch down near his position.

When did the bounce occur?

He touched down close of the AirBoss, then began the landing roll. Once past the AirBoss and being told to taxi the airplane bounced then veered to the left. His home airstrip length is 1,600 ft. He felt he had plenty of runway remaining that day.

When the left veer occurred were you on the brakes at that time?

He corrected the left veer with application of right brake.

When the left veer occurred were any brakes applied at that time?

He does not believe so. He had been told in his training to stay off the brakes. The right brake was only applied in response to the left veer.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Is there anything I have not asked?

Well, I don't really know. "I feel I did something." On landing you have to mind the "stick and 2 rudder pedals and somewhere in there I must have left something go."

Do you have any questions for me?

No, not really.

Is the airplane still where it came to rest?

Yes. He was waiting on the insurance company.

The call ended at 0951 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on October 23, 2024. He replied on October 25, 2024 at 0950 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him for review on November 4, 2024. He replied the same day at 2221 EST with, "Mr. Monville, This version is correct. Thank you, Travis Burchfield." The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him and the Federal Aviation inspector on November 5, 2024.



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

Date: October 23 2024
Subject: ERA25LA015, Record of Conversation/Interview
Contact: John A. Davis, Owner of N127BD

Mr. John A Davis, owner of N127BD, was contacted by phone on October 23, 2024, at 1256 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.

He indicated that he has been flying for 20 to 25 years and has about 20,000 hours total flight time, and about 11,000 hours in tailwheel equipped airplanes. He has flown commercially in Agricultural Application and also Fire Suppression. His pilot certificate number is XXXXXXXXXX¹.

His airplane, an American Champion Aircraft 8GCBC, serial number 620-2022 was gray with orange trim.

He was asked the following questions –

¹ He was asked by e-mail of October 24, 2024 for his pilot certificate number to complete the document but no reply was received.

Explain to me the environmental conditions, light conditions, and your approach into the Cheat River Island Airport (56WV), Rowlesburg, West Virginia?

He and the accident pilot had been trying for a couple of years to make the fly-in. In preparation of their flight they watched YouTube videos of aircraft on approach to 56WV, and also reviewed Google Earth looking at the airstrip and nearby terrain. In addition, they obtained weather, and briefed radio procedures. They had made the long trip to 56WV and while late in the afternoon approached from the west, adding that they needed to be on the ground in the next 30 minutes due to the lighting conditions. The wind forecast was for gusts to 18 kts, but the wind in the valley was not gusting and was much less between 5 and 10 kts, which was not even enough for him to notice or require a control input; wind was not a factor for him during his approach. Mr. Burchfield, flying N79HY was in front of him landing first. Mr. Burchfield turned 45° onto the downwind leg of the airport traffic pattern for runway 31, while he (Mr. Davis) was about 1 mile away and slowing to match the speed of the flight of Mr. Burchfield. He was maintaining the intended separation and was not gaining or falling back. Mr. Burchfield turned onto base and final legs of the airport traffic pattern for runway 31 while he (Mr. Davis) extended his downwind leg to give him adequate spacing. Mr. Davis turned onto the base and final legs of the airport traffic pattern for runway 31 and when he was about 1/2 way on final he heard a call for the red/white Husky to taxi in the tall grass. He (Mr. Davis) continued his final approach but did not see Mr. Burchfield's airplane nor did he hear him call for a go-around. He (Mr. Davis) did not witness the accident and landed on runway 31, then during the roll-out as the airplane was almost completely stopped he glanced to his left and saw Mr. Burchfield's airplane among trees off the left side of the runway. He could see that Mr. Burchfield was ok and then Mr. Davis taxied his airplane and parked it.

After securing his airplane, an individual picked him up, and that person had said that Mr. Burchfield had made a good landing. He was driven to where Mr. Burchfield was located and asked him what happened. He replied that he did not know. He also asked him if a wind gust had occurred and Mr. Burchfield replied no. Mr. Burchfield said that the tail was on the ground and that the airplane suddenly went to the left. He applied right rudder and brake to correct.

At this stage of the conversation Mr. Davis said that he had flown with Mr. Burchfield into grass airstrips previous and Mr. Burchfield had never before done anything unprofessional or unsafe. Mr. Burchfield does perform preflight inspections, checks weather, etc.

NTSB Questions Continued –

You said the wind was 5 to 10 kts where was it from?

I can't remember, likely out of the northwest. It "wasn't a windy afternoon at 56WV." He had seen Mr. Burchfield land previously with more crosswind and he had no issues.

NTSB Questions Continued –

Did you inspect Mr. Burchfield's aircraft after the accident?

He checked the tailwheel assembly, springs, checked the left tire, and even pushed the brake pedals pedals trying to find the "smoking gun." He did not see or find anything mechanically wrong with the brakes, rudder control cables, or tailwheel assembly.

Did you see proper cable tensions for rudder and tailwheel?

Yes, but keep in mind he did not have any tools. None of the springs at the tailwheel were broken. Keep in mind that he did not spend a lot of time looking at the airplane as he wanted to console his friend.

Are you an airframe and powerplant mechanic?

No.

If there was anything wrong with the airplane do you think you would have detected it?

Yes sir. In addition, they landed at multiple airports that day and they also did a walk around, which included a visual check for a low tire. There were no issues with the brakes, rudder or tailwheel on the previous flight landings.

Did you perform a pressure test of the tailwheel tire?

I did not. I recall standing on it with his foot, and he felt the pressure was ok. He checked the control cables, springs, and tailwheel tire.

When you put your foot on the tailwheel tire, did you put enough pressure on it to sense if it was low on air?

"Oh yes sir, yes sir for sure."

Is there anything else I should ask you?

No. Mr. Burchfield learned from this accident. "I don't think there was anything wrong with the aircraft." It was not weather related either.

The call ended at 1318 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on October 23, 2024. He replied the same day at 2121 EDT with, "Mr. Monville, I think this is an accurate summary of what occurred on the day of the accident. Like I say I didn't witness the actual accident. I think it was just one of those things that happen occasionally to good pilots. Respectfully John Davis." The FINAL digest was e-mailed to him and the Federal Aviation Administration inspector on April 2, 2025.