



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Elliott Simpson
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Accident Date: June 4, 2017
Person's Contacted: Alan Hermanson [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: WPR17FA120

Narrative:

Alan Hermanson reported the following during a phone interview with Elliott Simpson:

- Mr. Hermanson is a co-owner of the airplane with Mark Johnson.
- Mr. Harlan, the accident pilot, typically flies the airplane once or twice a week, he is a named pilot on the insurance policy, but not an owner.
- Mr. Harlan uses the airplane so much that he is essentially treated like an owner, and he has been flying it for about 3 years. Estimates a total of 500 hours experience in type, 2,000 total.
- Both owners had flown with him, and always felt comfortable with his flying abilities.
- The last interaction he had with Mr Harlan was the Friday before the accident, on June 2. In that conversation, they had discussed the condition of the airplane, both agreeing it was in good shape. Mr. Hermanson had not flown the airplane in quite some time, and Mr. Harlan bought up the possibility of buying the two owners out.
- They used to keep an airplane flight logbook, but it had not been kept up to date in over a year and a half.
- The airplane was not equipped with ADS-B
- The airplane was maintained well, but they did not want to spend more money on it than needed to.
- The standard practice after flight is to top off the tanks with fuel. Mr. Harlan makes that his practice, and he recalled one time when Mr. Harlan was unable to do so, he called to apologize.
- Mr. Hermanson looked at the airplane about one week before the accident, he did not check the fuel level, but he could not hear any fuel sloshing around in the tanks, so assumes it was full.
- He believes the other owner, Mr. Johnson flew the airplane last for his biannual flight review, possibly in April 2017.
- He believes Jim had then flown it since, because he called to say the tachometer was off by one hour.

- The Hobbs hour meter does not work, so they use the tachometer for flight times.



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Western Pacific Region

Date: June 4, 2017

Person's Contacted: Allison Miller Betancourt, [REDACTED]

Bonnie Tilley – [REDACTED]

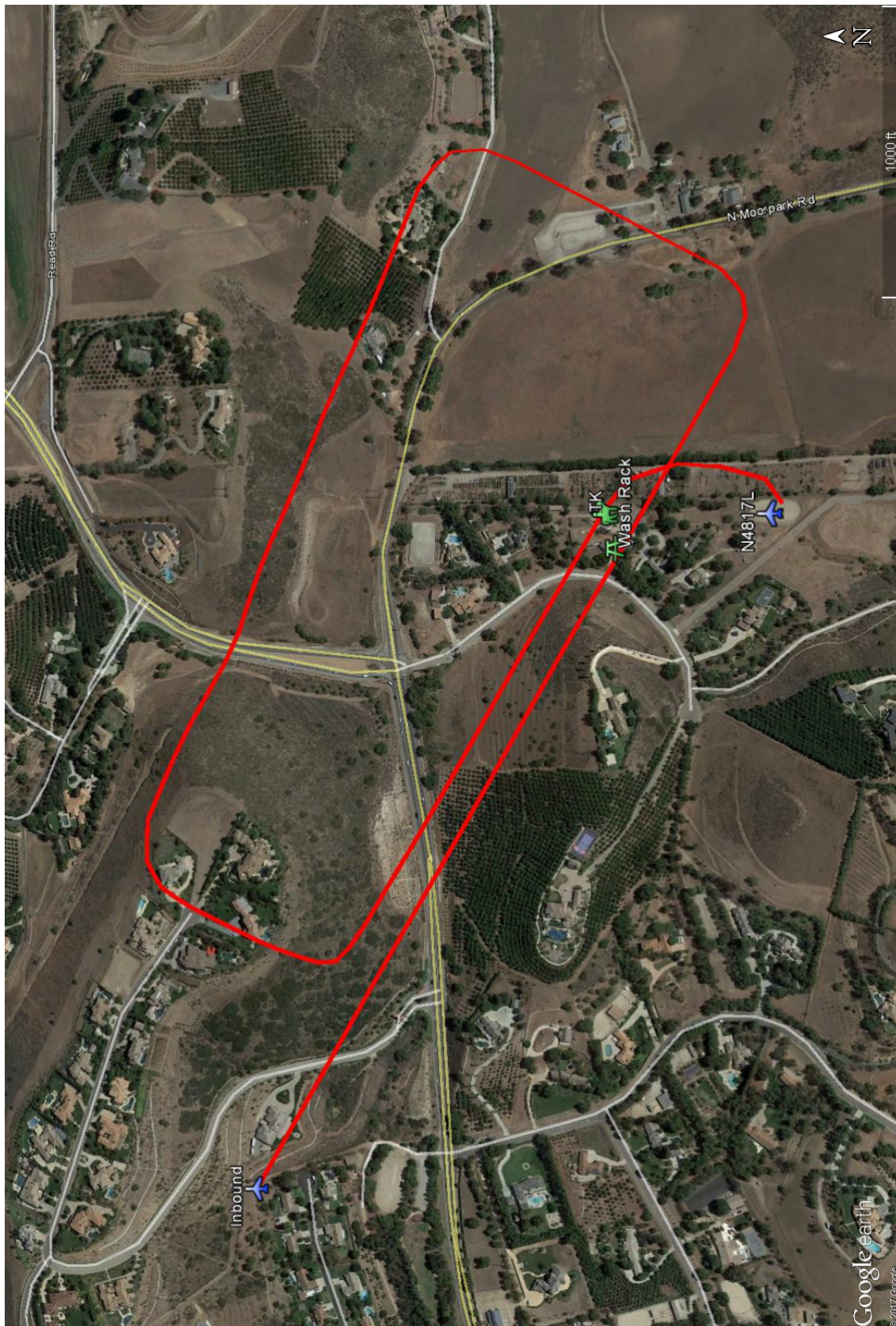
NTSB Accident Number: WPR17FA120

Narrative:

On June 4, 2017 Allison Miller Betancourt, and Bonnie Tilley reported the following during an in-person interview with Elliott Simpson:

- Allison is a horse trainer and riding instructor, she owns the property which includes the horse arena at [REDACTED]. This is the location the accident was witnessed from.
- Bonnie is a friend of Allison, she keeps her horse at the property along with the horse of the Jim Harlan's daughter [REDACTED].
- [REDACTED] was riding her horse in the arena with Bonnie assisting. [REDACTED] is 13-years-old.
- TK told them she had spoken to her father earlier that morning, when he told her he planned to fly with her brother out to Santa Cruz Island, and then back over the arena and horse barn where she was riding. He told her that he would let her brother fly the airplane.
- About 1530, Allison was in the wash rack area, and Bonnie in the arena.
- The airplane approached from the northwest and flew over the arena in a southeast direction. Mr. Harlan had flown over the area before, and although they could not definitively judge the airplane's altitude, it was about the same as on those prior occasions.
- The airplane then began a 180° left turn, tracking back past the arena and to the northwest. TK exclaimed that she could see her brother in the front left seat as the airplane passed by. They could see someone waving from the airplane.

- The airplane continued on the same track for about 1/3 of a mile, and as it overflew a house on the top of an adjacent hill it began to turn 90 ° left. The engine started to "sputter," and then stop producing a sound. The airplane continued the turn, until it was now lined up on the original inbound track.
- The engine sound then increased, as the airplane flew directly towards the arena, but now at a much lower altitude. The airplane continued to descend with the engine operating, and flew about 100 ft directly overhead, startling the horses.
- Electrical power transmission lines were situated just to the east of the arena. Prior to reaching the lines, the airplane began a steep right turn, such that the complete wing profile could be seen.
- Bonnie stated that the turn and engine sound were reminiscent of an airplane performing aerobatic maneuvers at an airshow. The turn progressed, with the nose pointing up, and then dropping back down, as the airplane passed out of view behind trees.
- They then heard two loud thuds, and immediately ran in the direction of the noise. They found the airplane in the center of another sand-covered horse arena, on an adjacent property, about 600 ft to the south of their arena.
- As soon as they arrived, a fire broke out somewhere within the airplane. A neighbor was already there and began extinguishing the fire.
- Mr. Harlan flew over the barn a week or so prior, and on multiple occasions in the past, but has never flown as low as during the pass before the accident.



Approximate Flight Path



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Accident Date: June 4, 2017
Person Contacted: Ann Carter
NTSB Accident Number: WPR17FA120

Narrative:

In an email dated June 6, 2017, Mrs. Carter stated the following:

"Hi Mr. Simpson,

My name is Anne Carter and you spoke to my son yesterday, Peter Carter, who I was flying with on June 4th and we both witnessed the Piper crash. He mentioned you asked where he was flying and he said he couldn't really say, exactly but I remember that last few seconds. He was flying in no particular pattern prior to his crash but we watched him for about 3-5 minutes. We wondered where he came from, there is an airstrip near by, behind Tierra Rejada farms that we thought he came from. (WE later learned he took off from CMA right before we did.)

We watched him flying extremely low, back and forth, doing what I call "crazy eights" but not necessarily in an eight pattern. I was really worried he was going to crash into the hillside. I am very familiar with the area as our kids went to the K-8 school (Santa Rosa Tech) which is near by. I am also familiar with the street he crashed on as my girlfriend lives next-door to where he crashed. Anyway, I attached the video I took just after it crashed. We circled back to see if maybe he landed. We both said "holy shit he crashed" but we couldn't believe it. We just saw the plane blend into the ground. No explosion, no dust...just gone. The picture I attached is a simple drawing I tried to do...should have had my kids do it, they would have done a better job!

Anyway, we were ABOUT where the blue dot is at 2500 feet and I saw him come from the right of the picture, heading toward the hillside at the corner of Tierra Rejada and Santa Rosa road and I thought he was going to crash into it...he made a hard bank to his right and circled around, had to have been a hard turn to make and just circled around into the ground. He didn't appear to slow down at all. He was going really fast the whole time...it was just way to surprising to see, knowing the area, with the hills on all sides... and after being at the scene of the accident I noticed power lines that he would have been heading towards, after he made that hard right.

Hope this helps. I look forward to hearing the results of your investigation. I am interested in knowing if there was any mechanical failure or if it was stupid pilot error. I am shocked and saddened that one would risk so much, flying so low around homes and people. My son is 200+ hours into his pilot's training and this was an experience that will make him a better pilot, sadly. I am proud that he could overcome the shock and he remained calm and collected as we returned back to the airport.

Anyway, feel free to call if you need any more info.

Thanks for your time!"

Anne Carter



In a follow up conversation, June 6, 2107 Mrs. Carter stated:

They initially saw the airplane, and were concerned about its low altitude, “what the heck are they doing down there” was her immediate reaction. Her son then maneuvered the airplane so as to stay clear, because the airplanes flight path was so erratic that they did not know which way it could be going.

With regards to “crazy 8” his maneuvers were erratic, and not straight and level, he was not performing complete not complete turns, but rather maneuvering from side to side, and all primarily focused around the area of the accident site.

They continued to watch for between three and five minutes, and lost site of the airplane one time. He then flew round the accident site, now very low but fast, such that she thought he was about to hit the mountain. The airplane then turned sharply to the right, banking and diving straight into the ground.



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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Accident Date: June 4, 2017
Persons Contacted: Casey Lee [REDACTED]
Accident Number: WPR17FA120

Narrative:

On June 8, 2017 Mr. Casey Lee, during a telephone interview with Elliott Simpson, stated the following:

He is a friend of the property owner where the airplane crashed.

He was in the back yard of the property when it crashed, walking from the house to the sand area of the horse arena.

The airplane approached from his rear right, and flew diagonally past him and directly over the property to his left. It flew above the power lines and climbed up and to the left in a very aggressive "hard left" turn. The engine was operating throughout, with no smoke or vapors trailing.

The airplane then came back around again for a second pass, over the house, but this time much lower - so low that he was shocked as it passed directly over the adjoining trees and about level or below the power lines.

The airplane then aggressively pitched up and rolled right such that the right wingtip was almost completely down. The airplane immediately transitioned into a nose dive.

It stuck the ground, and he did not specifically recall seeing it hit a power line, and could not recall one way or another if the engine was running at the time of impact. It was not until after the accident that he saw damage to the line.

He stated that the power lines look deceptively farther away than they are at his location.

He ran to the airplane crash site as a member of the pilot's family also arrived.

Witness Statement
NTSB Accident Number: WPR17FA120
Date of Accident: 06-04-2017
Ventura County California

My name is [REDACTED]. I will be 14 years old on [REDACTED]. I am the daughter of the airplane pilot and the sister of the passenger. This is my personal statement that I have prepared on 06-30-2017

On the day of the accident, I was riding a horse in the riding arena near the barn. Allison, the owner of the horse property was close by at the wash racks. Bonnie, who is my friend, was next to me on foot. Bonnie and I were both facing west toward the foothills when we saw my Dad's plane approaching from the west toward us over the foothills. I pointed to the plane and said, "oh there they are!" I did not actually see my Dad and Dylan inside the plane, but I definitely knew it was them flying overhead. The plane circled over the general barn area about two or three times and everything looked and sounded normal. I am familiar with the sound of my Dad's plane, because over the last few years, I have been flying with him in that plane about 15 or 20 times.

The plane then came toward us at the same altitude as before on the last passes with the engine sounding normal. Then the plane very rapidly lost altitude with no engine sound at all for a couple of seconds. The plane was much lower than the previous passes and was flying so low to the point that I began to worry about my horse getting spooked and possibly throwing me off. Then the engine sound started again and it sounded normal as the plane passed over our heads. It then turned south and went around the trees behind the barn where I couldn't see them anymore and then we heard the crash.

About three weeks before the accident, my Dad flew over this same barn, but he stayed a little higher than he did on the day of the accident because he did know about the power lines and always mentioned in the past that power lines are a pilot's worst enemy.

To the best of my recollection, these were the events that I observed and heard on the day of the accident. [REDACTED]