

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL AIRPLANE CRASH - N5381J NEAR

* Accident No. WPR17FA171

BIG BEAR, CALIFORNIA, JULY 29, 2017

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Interview of: RICHARD WRIGHT

Monday,
July 31, 2017

APPEARANCES:

STEPHEN STEIN, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

Also Present:

MRS. WRIGHT

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:09 a.m.)

MR. STEIN: This is Stephen Stein with the NTSB. It's Monday, July 31st -- no.

MRS. WRIGHT: Yes.

MR. STEIN: Yeah, it's the 31st, about 11:09 a.m., in Big Bear, California. I'm here with Mr. Richard Wright.

Richard, do I have your consent to record you?

MR. WRIGHT: Yes, you do.

MR. STEIN: Thank you, sir.

INTERVIEW OF RICHARD WRIGHT

BY MR. STEIN:

Q. Okay. So what I'd like you to do is go ahead and just walk me through your observations --

A. Okay.

Q. -- from the very beginning. Give me a little bit of background, what you were doing, and just dive right into it.

A. Okay. We were located in my hangar, hangar 0- --

MRS. WRIGHT: B1.

MR. WRIGHT: B1. Excuse me. Which is located three-quarters of the way down runway 0-8, on the north side of the airport.

Okay. We were leaving the hangar when we noticed the 172 coming towards us after takeoff on 0-8. The aircraft was approximately 100 feet high to 125 feet high. It was virtually what we call an aviation hanging from the prop. It's nose was

1 elevated 10 or more degrees up, flying very slow, on the edge of a
2 stall.

3 BY MR. STEIN:

4 Q. That's a very good summary you wrote.

5 A. Thank you. Thank you very much.

6 Q. My kids saw that plane.

7 A. They did?

8 Q. Yeah, and that coincides with everything --

9 A. Oh, okay. Very good. I'll be darn.

10 The aircraft engine appeared to be operating well, smoothly,
11 and seemed to have been -- the mixture control well used, by the
12 sound of the rpms.

13 There was no attempt to lower the nose, and both my wife and
14 I were yelling at the aircraft to lower the nose. We did not have
15 a two-way radio with us; otherwise, I would have spoken to him on
16 the radio and asked him to lower the nose and fly straight ahead.

17 He did not gain any altitude, and reached the park and turned
18 90 degrees to the right, which is south, without gaining any
19 altitude. Engine still sounded very good. Nose was still in the
20 air. And we were surprised that he made a very coordinated turn;
21 therefore, not stalling and spinning out at that low airspeed and
22 nose-high attitude.

23 He continued on what I would call an abbreviated crosswind.
24 Is it okay to use that word?

25 Q. Sure.

1 A. That's what it is, a crosswind, but she should have been
2 further out. For about a mile. Not gaining any altitude, still
3 with the nose in the air. Never -- no attempt was made to lower
4 the nose.

5 And then that situation happened. He made a downwind turn to
6 the downwind leg of the airport close in. And when he did, he did
7 not lower the nose at all. He kept it up, and the aircraft began
8 to sink. And it kept sinking slowly, the nose in the air, until
9 it approached tree level.

10 At that time we saw it approaching a stall due to the fact
11 that the wings were rocking back and forth, and that is an
12 aerodynamic condition that occurs that you don't see very often --

13 (Off the record.)

14 (On the record.)

15 MR. STEIN: Take 2. July 30th, 2017 [sic].

16 MR. WRIGHT: Where do you want me to start?

17 MR. STEIN: I'm here with Robert Wright. Sir, do you consent
18 still to being recorded?

19 MR. WRIGHT: Excuse me?

20 MR. STEIN: Do you still consent to being recorded?

21 MR. WRIGHT: Richard Wright.

22 MR. STEIN: Richard Wright.

23 MR. WRIGHT: That's okay.

24 MR. STEIN: I apologize. That's --

25 MR. WRIGHT: Yeah, I still --

1 MR. STEIN: I mix up your name and his.

2 MR. WRIGHT: I still consent.

3 BY MR. STEIN:

4 Q. Okay. Yeah, just -- let's start at -- let's see. Start back
5 at the downwind leg, when he turned downwind.

6 A. Okay. He -- that was a critical moment at that time, in my
7 mind, because turning downwind with your nose in the air at that
8 airspeed and that -- you're bound to sink. And it was a 10-knot
9 tailwind. And it did, it sank slowly, with the nose still in the
10 air. At no time did he try to lower the nose nor did he use any
11 flaps, to the best of my knowledge, at the time he entered the
12 area where he crashed. Well, he disappeared behind the trees --
13 am I correct?

14 At which time we didn't know if he didn't make it or not, so
15 we drove to the far end of 0-8 to see if we could see a departing
16 aircraft. Because there still was a chance he got that nose down.
17 He could have flown out. And we didn't see any.

18 We checked the radio for 121.5 signals; heard none. So we
19 drove to the airport office and we asked, did you hear of any
20 aircraft going down? Did you hear of any reported emergency
21 signal from the locator beacon that's in the airplane? They said
22 no, but they had received a phone call of a low-flying aircraft --
23 I think that's what she said -- that hung up, didn't have the full
24 conversation. And that's about all.

25 Q. About what time?

1 A. Immediately following -- it was about 2:00 when he took off.
2 And so, by this time, it would have only been 2:10 at the most.
3 It was only -- he wasn't in the air any amount of time at all.

4 We yelled and yelled at him. That's kind of stupid. If I
5 had my radio, I could -- if he had gone straight, even the nose in
6 the air, he could have avoided the trees just by turning a little
7 bit to the left.

8 Q. You said when he turned downwind and started to sink into
9 tree level, you saw the wings rocking back and forth about 15
10 degrees; is that correct?

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. Okay.

13 A. At the most 15 degrees. But I saw that as he was approaching
14 treetop level. It was not rocking as he descended. He was coming
15 down like this, and then when he got down to treetop level, then
16 the wings started going like this and then he disappeared behind
17 the trees.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. I figured at that time he was going in.

20 Q. You mentioned at one point that the mixture control seemed
21 well. How do you --

22 A. Well managed.

23 Q. Well managed. How do you figure?

24 A. Because by the sound of engine. I'm very familiar at my
25 point where I am at the airport. I've been flying out of here for

1 years. And you have to -- if you don't use the mixture control
2 correctly, the engine will not gain the necessary rpms. Or the
3 engine will smoke sometimes from too rich a mixture. You can have
4 misfiring of the spark plugs, and you'll not have adequate rpm.
5 And the engine seemed to be running evenly, better than most of
6 them, as far as rpms are concerned. Very smooth, very powerful.

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. If that makes any sense.

9 I have -- I told that thing, that I have 3,000 hours flying
10 out of this airport, the last 1500 in the same kind of airplane,
11 except my engine is the 145 six-cylinder Continental, which is 5
12 horsepower less.

13 Q. He never got over 100 to 125 feet --

14 A. Never.

15 Q. -- the whole time? Okay.

16 A. I got some assumptions, if you -- well, do you kind of -- do
17 you want me to do that?

18 Q. No. I don't want any of your analysis. I appreciate it,
19 though, sir. But no, I just want to stick to the facts on this.

20 A. Sure. I understand.

21 Q. Okay. Did you know the pilot or his wife or -- at all? Had
22 you seen that airplane in here before?

23 A. I think so.

24 Q. You think so?

25 A. Yeah. It was out of 1974, thereabouts, a couple of years

1 plus or minus; 150-horse Lyc. It was a light tan, faded,
2 aircraft. 172. It looked like a school plane to me.

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. It wasn't -- that had been outside. It wasn't necessarily
5 parked inside. And then after I heard where he came from, I
6 assumed he took off at full tanks, so he had about 35 gallons --

7 Q. Okay.

8 A. -- of gas up here, two adults and some luggage. Because if
9 they stayed all night, you're going to have 25, 30 pounds of
10 luggage.

11 Q. The -- oh, yeah, that's if --

12 A. And I assume, too, that if she's (indiscernible), she's 900
13 pounds.

14 Q. The question I forgot to ask you at the very beginning of
15 this, if you wouldn't mind giving a little bit of background about
16 yourself, sir? Just your flight history --

17 A. Well, I'm 77 years old. I soloed, first --

18 Q. I would've had you for at least like almost 40.

19 A. You got to be kidding. I'm 77 years old. I first soloed in
20 1955, at the age of 15. And I got my first certificate at 16, and
21 I've been flying ever since. I've owned five airplanes, and I
22 have tach time 5400 hours -- real time, not make-up time. And I
23 have 1500 hours on my recent 172 -- I just sold it 30 days ago --
24 that we had for 22 years here in hangar B1. And we were flying it
25 two to three times a week, and we accumulated 1500 hours on it.

1 Because we just went through the logbooks to be able to sign it,
2 we know exactly what the time was. No accidents. And that's
3 about all.

4 MR. STEIN: Okay. Mrs. Wright, any flight experience?

5 MRS. WRIGHT: No.

6 MR. STEIN: No. Okay.

7 MRS. WRIGHT: Just a passenger, but that's been many years
8 ago.

9 MR. WRIGHT: We did -- I have to mention to you, it might be
10 important. But we did sell the 172 only because I had a detached
11 retina. We had an operation and it didn't turn out real well. I
12 have 20/20 in this eye; I can see in this eye, but I felt it was
13 in the best interest of myself to do that, sell the airplane. But
14 I bought another one, and I have it in the hangar and we're
15 assembling it as we talk. And it's an experimental --

16 BY MR. STEIN:

17 Q. What kind?

18 A. Single seat. It's a Fly Baby 1, single seat -- yeah,
19 fabric/wood.

20 MR. STEIN: I'll stop the recording so we can chat about
21 this.

22 MR. WRIGHT: It looks like a World War airplane.

23 MR. STEIN: It's -- that's (indiscernible) --

24 Do you guys have any questions for the Wrights?

25 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: No. I mean, you --

1 MR. STEIN: Okay.

2 MR. WRIGHT: And I'm awfully sorry about what happened. I
3 just have to -- are we off the recording?

4 MR. STEIN: I will turn it off now. I didn't know if you had
5 something to add?

6 MR. WRIGHT: No. Did you --

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL AIRPLANE CRASH - N5381J NEAR
BIG BEAR, CALIFORNIA, JULY 29, 2017

ACCIDENT NO.: WPR17FA171

PLACE:

DATE: July 31, 2017

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Kay Maurer
Transcriber