

Inspectors statement of the Crash of N4326X

On December 14 at about 10am, I receive information that at approximately 8:47 AM Eastern Standard Time, a Piper PA-32, N4326X was on final approach into Wright Army Air Base (LHW) when it experienced a problem and crashed into some trees approximately 2 miles short of the runway. Day, visual meteorological conditions prevailed.

Upon arrival at WAAB, at a predetermined location, I was escorted to where the aircraft had come down in the woods. When we arrived at the location, I could see a small part of an aircraft but could not identify what it was from that distance. The escort identified themselves as part of the airfield safety and ATC maintenance. I asked them how they were able to find this aircraft so far from the road and airport? They explained that they had him on radar and were talking to him before he crashed. So they had an exact location of where the aircraft went down.

I was able to identify some trees that were struck about 40' above the ground before the aircraft penetrated the forest. I made a note that the tree pieces that were on the ground had no identifiable prop strikes on them. From those trees, the aircraft crossed an Army Tank trail and struck the next 5 or 6 trees on the other side of the trail before striking the final tree, about 15' above the ground with the belly of the aircraft near the empennage. As I walk towards the aircraft I identified the right wing which had been remove upon striking a tree. A tree strike was identified on the wing about 5' inboard of the tip. I grabbed the wing, which was standing up on its leading edge. I grabbed a hand full of some foreign object/liquid which covered the entire bottom of the wing. I was able to identify the fluid as that of oil. I made note of this, being that the wing was not connected to the airframe any longer. Continuing through the wooded area towards the aircraft, I could see that the aircraft was lying on its right side wrapped around the tree and totally destroyed. It appeared that the middle of the aircraft and cockpit were both on the other side of this same tree. The cockpit was separated and upside down and the engine was still attached. I made a note that the propeller appeared to be undamaged and the two blades, of the three, were straight and showed not to be bent or any major damage or deformation. I made note that there was no fuel smell and I could not identify either tank as being breeched at that minute. Another note was that there was no post-crash fire. I made note that there was no visible blood at the crash site.

We identified some personal effects and documented them and removed them to the base police. I tried to open the fuel tanks to check for fuel. The right wing had no visible fuel and the left wing was upside down. I did not remove the cover but could see that there was some fuel seeping out of a possible crack on the tank inside the wing.

By this time, one of the first responders had joined us. He advised me that when they arrived, they had found the pilot lying on the overhead (the cockpit is sitting upside down) of the aircraft, between the seats. They placed him on a back board and removed him to the hospital. He was alive and had some injuries but did not seem life threatening at that time.

At this time, I contacted the NTSB to find out what their plan was for this crash. They asked for the aircraft to be recovered by Atlanta Aircraft Recovery (AAR). The Army Base personnel, contacted AAR and arranged for the recovery. I contacted AAR and gave them directions to the sight and POC information. They advised me that they would gear up in the morning once they determined if the aircraft had insurance tied to the aircraft and owner.

At sundown, I departed along with the Army Base personnel and was escorted to the hospital about 1hr away from the site. I entered the Emergency entrance and Identified myself and asked for information on the pilot / patient. They directed me towards the ICU department.

I was able to interview the pilot who was awake and ready to talk and tell me what had happen. I identified myself and told him I was going to ask him some questions if he felt up to it. He responded quickly, that he was ready, willing and able and that he was totally transparent. He said he had nothing to hide and that he was interested in finding out if he

had done something wrong or it was something else. I told him that that is why I was there and that we would find these answers out.

I started out asking him for a statement. He told me that he was in communications with the tower and was on final approach to the runway when he felt a shutter and a loud bang and then the windshield was covered with oil. He reported this to ATC. They asked if he could make the runway, he said NO. IM GOING DOWN. He then stuck the trees.

When it was all over and he was sitting there, upside down, he remembers that he removed his seat belt and he fell down or up as it may be. He became wedged between the seats and he could not move very well but knew he was alive and that he had to get out of the aircraft. By this time the first responders had arrive.

He seemed to be very sharp and believable even though he was on some pain killers and in a little bit of discomfort. I asked if he could answer some questions. He said yes. I asked him about fuel in the aircraft. He states that he filled the aircraft with about 65-70 gals of fuel for the trip from Metter (MHP), Ga. to Wright Army Airfield (LHW) to pick up his brother and two (2) other friend. They were going to play golf in Ocala, Fl. The flight from MHP to LHW was about 18mins. He had enough fuel to make it to Ocala.

I asked about the Log Books for the aircraft. He states that they were in his office in Metter. He gave me the address and a POC at the office. I asked when was the last time they had performed some maintenance of the aircraft. Approximately 4 or 5 weeks ago. He states that he flew back from Auburn on or about Nov. 11 and the engine was running rough. Lance, his mechanic, looked at it and found a bad cylinder and two (2) plugs. (this could not be verified/confirmed in the maintenance records). He had been on a few flights since. On this flight, everything was working fine. He believes he had the Rt main tank selected and was on final approach into LHW, about 2miles out when he felt the shutter and oil was on the windshield. He was in contact with the tower and did not have a chance to declare an emergency when he went down. I left instructions for him to write a statement when he could and get it to me when he could. He agreed. I advised him that I would be passing by his office and picking up the log books and going by the airport to talk to the mechanics. I left the hospital and proceeded to the hotel for the night.

The next morning, I traveled to the pilot's office and met with his secretary. She went through his files and found the Maintenance Logs. I removed the logs to give them to NTSB, aircraft Reps or the insurance company. Once I read the log books, I felt it was not immediately necessary to meet with the mechanics right this moment.

On around Dec.20, I met up with the Lycoming rep at Atlanta Air Recovery where we performed a teardown of the engine.

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