

Matt Pothier Witness Statement to Scott Reinhard on Aircraft N323AX Mishap

As recounted to Scott Reinhard during two sessions, one in the evening of 12 Dec 2018 (the day of the mishap) in person, one by phone the morning of 13 December 2018:

Aircraft taxi and runup on the runway were normal. I have flown this aircraft many times and am very familiar with the engine indications and all other indications. The EGT while waiting before takeoff was between 560 and 580. Runup indications were normal for this jet, with the RPM around 7750 and EGT at full power was between the yellow and red lines.

After gear retraction and starting the right turn to rejoin on ATAC 01, I experienced a significant loss of thrust. There wasn't a loud "thump" like something hit the aircraft, and no pops or explosion sounds, but definitely a loss of thrust. There was considerably less noise in the cockpit at this point, like the ECS wasn't running, and it didn't sound like the engine was running much if at all. My initial reaction was to control the aircraft and then to analyze the engine. I informed ATAC 01 that I had "engine rollback" and after he radioed that I should consider turning back to the runway to land I began a shallow right turn. I realized quickly that I couldn't make the runway and then rolled wings level and began troubleshooting my problem. I remember putting my fingers on the TTC switch but I cannot remember for sure if I broke the wire and pulled the switch back to off. I hit the engine relight button and waited for the engine to respond. I glanced at my EGT and saw it standing straight up, and remember that my RPM was definitely less than it should have been but do not remember exactly where. I was thinking about ejection already, radioed to ATAC 01 again that I was having engine problems, and began to position the jet for ejection. During this time I also hit the engine start button but got no response. I then radioed ATAC 01 that I was ejecting. He instructed me to use good body position.

I don't remember the maximum altitude that I reached but I estimate that it wasn't above 500 feet AGL. I watched my airspeed a lot and the most I saw was 270 knots, and the last indication I saw was 170 knots while I was descending.

When I decided to eject, I looked in front of me and saw several boats in the immediate area. I knew that I was going to hit a parasail boat if I didn't move the jet, so while I had one hand on the ejection handle, I steered the jet away from the boat.

I remember looking at and grabbing the lower ejection handle with both hands and then leaning back in the seat. I don't assess that my body position could have been any better. I pulled the handle and saw the canopy depart. I felt the initial thrust from the ejection seat and immediately felt some pain in my back. As the seat started up the rail, everything went black, but I think it was because my helmet went down over my eyes. That fixed itself and I saw the parachute open. I felt that I only got one swing in the chute and then I was in the water.

I didn't have time to release my seat kit and remember landing on it kind of hard. I initially unhooked the lanyard and then undid both seat kit buckles. The parasailing boat was very close to me, and a person immediately jumped into the water and swam up to me. I asked if he could help untangle me from the parachute lines, and he said of course, that was his job. He helped a lot and then assisted me in getting onto his boat.