

Telephone Interview

Walt Ridge (Prospect Airport Caretaker)

Prospect, Oregon 97536

February 5, 2019 at 1300 hours

I contacted Mr. Ridge by telephone, and he provided the following eye witness account.

Mr. Ridge identified himself as the Oregon Department of Aviation caretaker for the Prospect Airport (64S). He said that he lived at the facility since 1990. Mr. Ridge said the pilot for N12037 arrived on January 25, 2019 with the airplane on a trailer. He did not know the name of the pilot.

Mr. Ridge watched the pilot of N12037 attached the wings on the fuselage on January 25, 2019 utilizing a "boom truck." The pilot then worked on the engine from January 26, 2019 through January 28, 2019. Mr. Ridge said that the pilot accomplished all this assembling work and engine maintenance without help from any other individual.

Mr. Ridge witness the pilot of N12037 start and taxi the airplane from the ramp onto Runway 20 at Prospect Airport at 1745 hours on January 28, 2019. It was nearly dark with sunset occurring at 1720 hours.

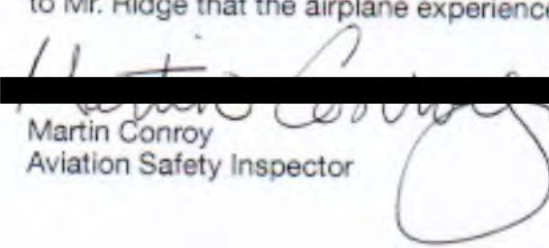
The pilot then accelerated the engine and depart Runway 20 impacting one of the runway lights as N12037 became airborne. Mr. Ridge was not in a position to watch N12037 after it became airborne and determine its departure course.

When the airplane did not return in 20 minutes, Mr. Ridge said his daughter inspected the runway to determine whether N12037 was on the property. It was not. She did find the pilot's truck on the ramp running with one door open. She noted tools scattered over the ramp surface. With this information, Mr. Ridge called 911 to inform the agency that he suspected the pilot was overdue.

Mr. Ridge said that Search and Rescue personnel and equipment arrived about 2100 hours on January 28, 2019 and initiated a search in proximity of the Prospect Airport. During the morning of January 29, 2019, they found the pilot and the wreckage of N12037 in dense brush and trees about 1.8 miles southwest of the departure end of Runway 20 (N42.717388 W122.517129).

A local helicopter company (Brim Aviation) extracted the pilot from the forest by long line and transported him to the Prospect Airport and a waiting Mercy Flight ground ambulance.

Mr. Ridge completed the interview stating that he briefly spoke to the pilot of N12037 as medical attendants loaded him into the ground ambulance. Mr. Ridge said that the pilot stated to Mr. Ridge that the airplane experienced "mag problems."


Martin Conroy
Aviation Safety Inspector