
From: Michael Mainiero [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, May 11, 2020 2:17 PM
To: Arraiz, Michael (FAA) <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Byron Airport Accident

Hi Michael,

Thank you for reaching out. Definitely an unfortunate event to witness.

I'm a local professional pilot who has been flying out of Byron airport for a number of years with the Patriots Jet Team. I also have experience in the make and model of aircraft involved in the incident, and have observed hundreds of glider operations over the years out of the airport. In addition I also am a volunteer rescue pilot with the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office Air Support Unit.

I first caught view of the glider and tow aircraft as I was driving south on Falcon Way, approximately 500' after passing the skydive facility. The tow aircraft I would estimate was at about 50' AGL on departure from Runway 30. The glider caught my attention as it abruptly and abnormally climbed about 25' above its tow. At this point they were at an 11 o'clock position from me at a distance of 1,200', just prior to passing the Taxiway A1 turnoff.

The glider maintained its high position for 2-3 seconds, then quickly descended about half-way back down to the glider tow's altitude, which was now appeared to be 125-150' AGL. While occurred the tow plane had briefly leveled out, and begun losing a small amount of altitude. There was no noticeable acceleration during this time.

As the pair of aircraft passed the mid-point between Taxiway A1 and the end of Runway 30, they were at my 9 o'clock position in the car at a distance of 700'. The tow plane was at about 100' AGL, seemed to be attempting to maintain altitude, and the glider had begun to try and climb again. Visibility from the glider to the tow aircraft appeared to potentially have been an issue, as there was a 30-40° angle on the tow line.

At a distance of 500' from the end of the runway, the glider in its attempt to maintain or gain altitude caused the tow line to pull up on the tail of the tow plane abruptly. The pilot attempted to correct and pull the nose up, but was fighting against the tow line. The tow pilot cut from the tow line, but were still in an aggressive nose-low aircraft attitude which was not recoverable with the low altitude and energy state. The tow plane contacted the Taxiway A turnoff pavement in a 45° nose-low attitude to the left of the runway, flipped over on its back, and slid about 200'. Almost immediately the aircraft caught on fire.

I immediately made a u-turn and pulled into the employee parking lot at the skydive facility, which had the closest point of access to the accident. There was already two or three skydivers who had run out with fire extinguishers, but flames had already engulfed the much of the aircraft. Would estimate from the time of impact to myself making it out to the aircraft was about 90 seconds.

Friends from the Patriots Jet Team arrived immediately after me with two additional fire extinguishers. One of the skydivers who had first made it out to the aircraft thought he had heard "gurgling" from the pilot and had attempted to get the door open but was too hot. Based on the time stamps off the photos I am providing below, this would have been at 1326:00-05. He ran back toward where I was located (100' from the wreckage), and he told us he thought the pilot was still alive. Myself, along with two others from the Patriots and this skydiver ran back towards the aircraft with two extinguishers to try and put the fire around the cockpit out, but the cockpit was completely engulfed in flames. At that point it was hard to tell the position of the pilot through the fire, but there was no movement.

At 1327 the airport fire truck arrived, operated by the on-duty Lead Airport Operations Specialist for Contra Costa County. He began to apply water on the fire from the cab. I circled behind the truck to the north side to get a better view of the cockpit. Each time the fire would appear to be mostly out, it would flare up and he would continue spraying again. At some point one of the left wing fuel tanks or lines exploded as well.

About 1329 as the fire was still going, three of us (myself, one other Patriots member and a skydiver who is off-duty CalFire) began to run hoses from the front and right side of the fire truck. The CalFire individual and myself ran the front water hose off the truck, and then I ran back to pull the right hose out. Myself and the Patriots member couldn't get the water to function, but I found the purple fire retardant powder was functioning and began applying it to the right and left wings. This continued until the fire was finally out, sometime between 1333-1334 I would estimate.

When the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department and EMS arrived, they attempted to get through the locked gate located just south of the skydive facility (near where I observed the accident sequence). I was able to get the keys from the Airport Operations Specialist, and ran over to get the gate open for them.

I remained on site for an additional 30 or so minutes to provide statements to the sheriff's and show them where the glider operations office was located on field.

Photos I took during the event can be found here:

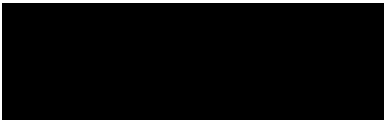
Please feel free to call/email if you have any additional questions.

Fly Safe,

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Michael A. Mainiero

See Photography at:



Sent From My iPhone X