



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Stephen Stein
Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Office of Aviation Safety – Western Pacific Region

NTSB Accident Number: WPR20LA216
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N167TM; Schleicher ASW27
Accident Location: Ely, Nevada
Accident Date: July 11, 2020

Note: The following interview was documented by the Investigator –In-Charge (IIC), Stephen Stein.

Interview #1 Summary

Charles Hayes
Witness

Interview Date & Time; July 28, 2022, 1356 PT

Mr. Hayes stated that the accident pilot was the driving influence for pilots flying out of Ely, Nevada. He stated that he had heard another pilot after the accident had expressed that the accident pilot seemed frustrated because the weather conditions were not favorable. On the morning of the accident, Mr. Hayes towed Marek and released him about 2,000 ft above ground level over the field (8,500 ft mean sea level). Approximately 5-10 minutes after he landed he saw the accident pilot still in the thermal halfway between the mountain range where the accident took place and the airport. Later he received a report from the Bureau of Land Management that some hikers observed a crashed aircraft between 1500 and 1600. According to Mr. Hayes, he recalled that the winds were stronger than normal for a typical day of soaring. The conditions were turbulent and at the ridge height the winds were between 200° and 270°, varying between 15-25 kts at the ground. The witness recalled that there were strong thermals mixing with winds near the mountain where the accident occurred.

According to Mr. Hayes, the day of the accident was not ideal for soaring because the thermal lift was breaking from the wind gradient, making it more difficult for gliders to climb, particularly when the accident pilot launched. Mr. Hayes didn't remember many pilots flying that day as he had maybe 3-4 tows. The conditions were challenging at the ridge level, which could surprise a pilot. The winds aloft on the day of the accident favored wave lift. He did not remember what the buoyancy/shear ratio was, but recalled that it was not a favorable number.

Mr. Hayes recalled that the debris field was 200-300 ft long and appeared that the glider came from the upwind side of the ridge and had moved from southwest to northeast.



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Interview #1 Summary

Keith Essex
Witness

Interview Date & Time; August 2, 2022, 1004 PT

Mr. Essex stated that although he was the camp organizer, he was not present on the day of the accident, but had daily contact with the pilots. According to Mr. Essex, the accident pilot had been flying out of Ely for a long time and was driven to set records.

The witness stated that Ely is one of the best places in the world for gliders because it's "powerful" over a wide area. The air mass in the area over the basin heats up and rises resulting in big thermals, but can also result in big "downs" as well, or sink. Mr. Essex reported that he wouldn't fly close to mountains in certain wind conditions because the thermals come off the mountains and can be very violent. For example there may be 1,500 fpm up winds on one side of the mountains and a few hundred feet away 800 fpm down winds.



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Interview #1 Summary

Michael Price
Witness

Interview Date & Time; July 27, 2022, 1248 PT

Mr. Price stated Ely was known for long distance flights and that the accident pilot helped organize these flights for several years. He stated that flying days in Ely are desirable due to the thermals and are commonly used by glider pilots to set distance or speed records. The day of the accident was a mix of strange conditions including thermals, ridge and wave all occurring at the same time. The conditions were chaotic with wind gusts and deep sink when there shouldn't be. On the day of the accident the pilot told Mr. price to remain close to the field because of his experience level. There were three pilots who flew on the day of the accident including Mr. Price. They all connected at the end of the runway to synchronize and take launches from a tow pilot.

The accident pilot did not explain his intentions to Mr. Price on the day of the accident. Glider pilots will attempt to complete certain tasks such as completing a certain distance or speed within a prescribed distance using a flight recorder to log the parametric data. The pilot can declare their

flight on the recorder and then submit the file to an official judge as proof that they completed the task.

Normally there would have been more glider pilots flying, but due to the conditions on the day of the accident only a few of them had decided to fly. Mr. Price stated that it wasn't a safety of flight issue, but an issue with pilots not being able to set their records due to the conditions. According to Mr. Price, the accident pilot was highly skilled.