



Memorandum of Record

Dan Baker
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: 06/08/2022

Subject: WPR20LA295, National Park Service Report Extracts

The National Park Service produced an independent report following the accident involving a Beech 35 airplane, N818S, on 09/04/2020. The following information was extracted from that report.

At 0435 hours on 09/05/2020, SEKI Dispatch received report from the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) of a possible downed aircraft within Sequoia National Park. The initial report stated that there was at least one person on board who was identified as the registered owner of the plane. Preliminary investigation reveals that the pilot was likely disoriented due to the smoke in the area from the Sequoia Complex Fires. It is unknown if the pilot received information prior to the flight on the fires in the area or the smoke activity. Two confirmed occupants of the plane were identified as Brian NEPINSKY and Garry ZINGER. Both were deceased. The remains were removed from the scene and transferred to the Tulare County Coroner on 09/05/2020.

A single engine fixed wing aircraft traveling from Visalia Airport to the Needles Airport crashed in Upper Horse Creek within the Mineral King area of Sequoia National Park on 9/4/2020. The airplane crash ignited a wildland fire that consumed much of the interior of the aircraft.

LOCATION OF CRASH SITE
36.401569; -118.613297

DETAILS OF CRASH

On 09/04/2020 at approximately 1126 hours Pacific Time, a Beech V3B5 (CA Registration: N818S), departed Visalia Municipal Airport (VIS) in Visalia, California with an intended destination of Needles Airport (EED), CA. There were two occupants on the plane. It was not apparent at the crash site, nor through interviews who definitively was the pilot due to the heavily fragmented cockpit, wings, and fuselage.

[Type text]

Through flight-following data provided by the AFRCC, the aircraft demonstrated a trajectory that did not readily indicate mechanical issues with the aircraft.

At 1148 hours on 09/04/2020, the final recorded position of the aircraft was at 36.401569, -118.613297 and within the Mineral King subdistrict of Sequoia National Park.

INCIDENT ENVIRONMENT

The crash site is at an altitude of approximately 9,500 feet in designated wilderness. The wreckage was on top of a small plateau with large pine trees and large boulders. The location of the crash was approximately N36.40151, W118.61269. The wreckage was on top of a small plateau with abundant large diameter pine trees. There were large boulders and exposed granite outcrops surrounding the crash site. The difference in elevation between the first known impact point and the nose of the fuselage is six feet, however, the first impact point is at the top of an approximate 30 degree slope. The crash produced an .5-acre wildfire (approximate).

WEATHER AND WILDLAND FIRE BEHAVIOR

The National Weather Service produced a spot forecast for the approximate area of the crash site:

09/04/2020:

Weather

Sky/weather: Sunny. Areas of smoke in the morning. Haze. Max temperature: 77-82. Min Humidity: 13-23 percent. Wind - 20 Foot (10 Minute Average). Mixing height: 11500 ft AGL. Transport Winds: Southeast around 5 mph in the morning shifting to the southwest in the afternoon. Chance of Wetting Rain: 0 percent. Snow Level: 17000 ft MSL.

Fire Behavior in Area (SQF Complex Fire)

09/04/2020

From SQF Complex Fire Update, Northern Rockies Incident Management Team 1: Weather: The weather pattern is holding steady, with a high-pressure system over the area bringing hot and dry conditions. Relative humidity continues to remain low, potentially dropping into the single digits, which can contribute to extreme fire conditions. The typical pattern of light drainage winds is expected early in the day, with the inversion forecast to lift around 10:00 am. Increasing southeast winds with gusts to 20 mph are expected in the afternoon. Highs will likely reach the mid-80s to lower 100s. An extreme heat warning will extend through the Labor Day weekend, with critical fire weather to persist in the area.

Smoke Impact:

Stable air conditions continue to keep smoke in the valleys. Kern River Valley remains impacted by Unhealthy to Hazardous air quality. Most areas improve to Moderate for a few hours each day.

INTERVIEWS

09/05/2020

Katherine Bales
Airport Manager, Visalia Airport
1115-1125 hours

Bales stated that there could possibly be three on board and that the third occupant might be Eric Ritter. She stated that she did not have a flight plan for the plane. It was unknown who the pilot was.

Scott Zinger
Son of Garry Zinger
1130 hours- 1132 hours

Stated that his father was overdue. Stated that he thought the plane was carrying his father and Brian NEPINSKY. Zinger provided the number of an airplane mechanic at the Visalia Airport.

Darryl Tunnel
Visalia Airplane Mechanic
1135 -1145 hours (approximate)

Initially, Darryl stated that ZINGER was the pilot and that he was taking NEPINSKY to Needles, CA. Initially stated that he was "pretty certain" there wasn't a third person on the flight. Stated that he saw the plane take off around 1115-1130 on September 4th from Runway 1 he thought. Tunnel stated that ZINGER was a licensed airplane mechanic and had asked Tunnel for two quarts of oil prior to departure. Tunnel stated that he did not think anything was mechanically wrong with the aircraft. Tunnel also stated that NEPINSKY's wife was going to pick them up in Needles, CA. Approximately ten minutes after this conversation, Tunnel called back to stated that there could be a third person on the flight named Eric Ritter who often flew with ZINGER and NEPINSKY. Stated in this message that he also could not say definitively who the pilot was.

09/07/2020

Ronald and Lynn Sawl (Lynn is Garry ZINGER's sister-in-law)
1350-1405 hours (approximate)

Ronald stated that ZINGER had an incredible amount of flight experience. ZINGER was an air squadron commander in the air force, a commercial pilot, and regularly flew in Tulare County for search and rescue (SAR) missions. If ZINGER was the pilot, they stated that he knew Sequoia and Kings Canyon very well. Both were unsure who the pilot would have been but stated that ZINGER had likely flown that route before. The last contact both had with ZINGER was approximately two weeks prior. No indication of issues between ZINGER and NEPINSKY. Stated that both ZINGER and NEPINSKY were two very qualified pilots.

09/11/2020

Scott Zinger
1603-1615 hours

When asked if any information came to light on who the pilot might be, Zinger stated that no one knew who the pilot was. When asked about the relationship between NEPINSKY and ZINGER, Zinger stated that his father knew NEPINSKY for a long time and that his dad always did things

for him (NEPINSKY). Zinger stated that NEPINSKY likely wanted to become a pilot because of ZINGER. Zinger did not know if they flew together often but stated that ZINGER had been a pilot for over 60 years and has flown over Sequoia National Park. Stated that flying is what ZINGER did for a living. He was a corporate pilot for most of his life after the military and then was involved in aircraft operations for Tulare County SAR.

10/11/2020

Barbara Summers (Mother of Valerie Nepinsky)

1045-1100 hours

Stated that she was sure that Garry ZINGER was the pilot. She stated that NEPINSKY had his pilot's license but didn't pass his last physical. Stated that her daughter (Valerie Nepinsky) found a check stub from Brian NEPINSKY for \$600.00 paying ZINGER to fly him to Needles, CA. Stated that they couldn't figure out why they took the route that they did- stated that they typically fly through Tehachapi, CA to Needles, CA. Stated that the plane had just recently passed its annual check before the flight. Stated that she didn't know much about the relationship between NEPINSKY and ZINGER but stated that NEPINSKY would not hire ZINGER if there was an issue with their relationship. Stated that she heard that ZINGER was one of the best pilots and that she heard that "if you ever got in trouble in a plane, Garry was the one to be with."