



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

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

NTSB Accident Number: WPR21LA080
Aircraft Registration & Make/Model: N737NB; Cessna 172
Accident Location: Palm Springs, California
Accident Date: December 4, 2020

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

Interview #1 Summary

Eric Rotelli
Flight Instructor

Interview Date & Time; April 13, 2021

Mr. Rotelli stated that he had been training the student pilot for about 2 months when the accident occurred. On the day of the accident they departed from Thermal airport and were bound for Palm Springs (PSP), where the accident took place, about 20 nm away. The plan that day was for the student pilot to perform 3 takeoffs and landings. They had completed numerous flights together leading up to the accident. According to the instructor, on the day of the accident they performed 3 takeoff and landings together with the student pilot as the sole manipulator of the controls and talking with air traffic control. The student then told the instructor she felt comfortable flying solo and dropped the instructor off at a local FBO. She then completed 2 takeoffs and landings to a full stop on her own. On her third landing the airplane landed too hard on the nose and started to porpoise, bouncing and then started a climb about midfield, which he believed was a go-around attempt. At this point the airplane started to slow significantly then turned left and performed a nose dive into the ground. Mr. Rotelli stated that the flaps were deployed throughout the accident, but could not tell at what setting.

The instructor reported that prior to the accident she had soloed 3-4 times; 2-3 solos at Thermal Airport, and one cross country from Thermal to Imperial. They flew together for a total of 42.3 hours and the accident flight was her first experience at a towered airport. The traffic at the time was light with maybe 1-2 airplanes in the traffic pattern when she was flying.

According to Mr. Rotelli he did not observe anything unusual with the airplane before the accident flight. The flight controls were functionally normally.



RECORD OF PHONE CONVERSATION

Scott Epler
Air Safety Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: 1/28/2020
Person Contacted: Joseph Witte (Father of Student Pilot)
NTSB Accident Number: WPR21LA080

Narrative:

Left a message for Mr. Joseph Witte [REDACTED] pacific on 1/28/2021 for information pertaining to his daughter Elizabeth's crash of N737NB a C172 at Palm Springs International Airport.

Elizabeth is a minor and her father was listed as the point of contact.

Mr. Witte returned my call at 1434 pacific on 1/28/2021. I have requested an interview with his daughter on Monday. Mr. Witte will confirm the time and attend the call. The NTSB form 6102 was sent to [REDACTED]

Phoned Mr. Witte on 2/1/2021 at 10:09. He requested I call back at 15:30 pacific.

Mr. Witte requested, on 2/1/2021 at 12:58, the interview be rescheduled until 2/3/2021 at 14:00 pacific.

Mr. Witte requested, on 2/3/2021 at 11:07, the interview be attended by a lawyer.

The following is a synopsis of the information provided by Elizabeth Witte with her Father and Lawyer "Wally" in a telephone conversation.

I did not give "Wally" permission to record the conversation.

Elizabeth stated that she was recovering from her broken jaw and leg.

Provided her age, birthday and certificate number. She did not file a flight plan and

received weather via AWOS.

Elizabeth departed KTRM and completed 2 or 3 full stop landings with her flight instructor, Eric Rottelline. She then completed 2 full stop landings solo. She does not remember the crash sequence just the plane falling out of the sky.

She did not recall any performance issues with the airplane. She usually flies one of two C172's and possibly flew this aircraft two days before the accident.

Mr. Witte requested the final report would be available and if her would be provided a copy of the tear down inspection.

Elizabeth stated that the NTSB 6120 would be completed and returned.

Total time: approx. 60

Make and Model: approx. 60



RECORD OF PHONE CONVERSATION

Scott Epler
Air Safety Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: 2/1/2021
Person Contacted: John Buleson (Witness)
NTSB Accident Number: WPR21LA080

Narrative:

Phoned Mr John Buleson, Volunteer Dusion at Palm Springs Air Museum [REDACTED] on 2/1/2012 at 10:11.

According to the witness the airplane engine did not sound like it was producing as much power as it was on other observations that same flight when he observed the airplane earlier.

The witness observed the crash from the 2nd Hanger at the Air Museum, 150 yards from the impact area. Due to obstruction from the building he was not able to see touch down yet he had observed the prior touch and go's during climb out when the aircraft was at 100 to 150 feet AGL.

He did not notice any smoke but saw the airplane struggling for 8 to 10 seconds before dropping out of the sky and impacting the runway.