



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

All persons listed were interviewed by Zoë Keliher:

The following is a summary of conversation:

MATTHEW WAMPLER (RIGHT-SEATED PILOT)

Mr. Wampler [referred to as “the pilot” in this record of conversation] was not able to speak on my first visit due to jaw surgery. I was unable to speak with him before other people interviewed him and discussed the accident sequence.

The pilot stated that he was seated in the right seat and had his lap belt fastened. Paige Halbert was positioned in the left-seat and he thought she was wearing a seat belt, but could not remember [people have been probing him about this]. He stated that Ms. Halbert was manipulating the airplane’s controls, but he was guiding her vocally through the flights and would take control when she made errors. On a flight earlier in the day, he remembered that while the airplane was on final approach they observed another airplane still on the runway. He opted to have Ms. Halbert conduct a go-around to allow for the traffic to exit the runway.

The pilot stated that he remembered that on the accident flight everything was normal with the departure and unloading the skydivers at the prescribed altitude. The airplane was descending as expected at a planned airspeed of 110-115 kts with the power at idle. As the airplane turned onto final approach, about 3 miles from the approach end of runway 25, the left-seated pilot attempted to increase power by nudging the throttle forward slightly. He noticed that they were low and he reached up to put his hand on the control to add power. The engine power did not increase as expected and he moved the lever further forward. The throttle was still unresponsive and he estimated the airplane was about 400 ft above ground level (agl). He could not remember the events that transpired specifically, but did recall aiming for the open dirt field. The airplane was too low and was on a path to collide with a berm ahead. The pilot made a right turn in an effort to avoid the berm.

The pilot could not recall if the flaps were extended, but thought they would have been in the 10 or 20 degree position. He thought he would have told Ms. Halbert to turn the fuel boost pump “on” [from “normal” to the “on” position] and the fuel [valve] from “on” to “enrich” [he did not mention switching the fuel selector positions]. He thought he would reach over her if she did not respond quick enough. He regretted that he did not feather the propeller. He could not recall the engine noise (or lack of), but stated that he wore noise-cancellation headsets and probably wouldn’t have noticed. He did not recall making a 360-degree turn, but thought he may have done that after the engine problem [people had already told him about the flight path]. He did not remember any instrument indications. After I queried him about the forces he could remember, he did not recall the yoke being heavy or struggling to keep the nose up.

The pilot stated that he would normally keep the fuel selectors where the right-wing tank was “OFF” and the left-wing tank selected “ON.” He would keep the right tank filled with 300 lbs of fuel and would refill the left tank throughout the day. He would normally refill to 500 lbs every 3 loads, but it could vary depending on how much time he was on the ground between passengers boarding (normally 17-20

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minutes) and if the fueling amount was correct the last time. When refueling, he would maneuver the airplane to be perpendicular to the truck (location would vary) and he would use hand signals to communicate [to Simon] how much fuel to add to the left wing. This amount would be verified by the fuel gauges. During the preflight in the morning, he would sump the fuel reservoir [header tank] and the filter near the firewall. After being informed that they did not get fuel after the third load, the pilot opined that it was likely because it had been over-fueled the last time.

The pilot explained that his normal procedures at Oceanside were to use the field elevation to set the altimeter. Typically, he would start the engine at the beginning of the day and keep the airplane operating until the end of the day (he noted that this was unusual for the drop zones). He would drop off the skydivers and reduce the throttle lever to idle (he would only manipulate the speed lever on the ground, during the duration of the flight it would stay in the full forward position). From the base leg of the traffic pattern, he would overshoot the direct final approach path and follow the freeway on a stabilized approach. As the airplane would turn onto final approach, he would add power and subsequently lower the flaps to 10 or 20 degrees. He would have to do this type of approach to abide by the local guidelines of keeping the altitude above the residences, and flying at a lower traffic pattern altitude than normal for a turbine airplane (1,000 feet agl). After landing, he would normally stay at the end of the runway with the engine still operating and wait until the passengers were ready to load before he would maneuver over to the GoJump area. He was not accustomed to this type of approach and would typically fly back to drop zones without ever adding power.

The pilot stated that the airplane's caution panel light for the right-tank low level would read erroneously and be illuminated even when the tank had over 200 lbs. He never sees the BETA light or the Fuel Reservoir low light. The rudder was recently re-skinned and since then the trim was off and would be full right. The aileron trim would be adjusted according to the fuel loads in each wing. At 500 lbs to 100 lbs of fuel in the left wing he would use left aileron trim to offset the fuel burn. The pitot head would sometime erroneously be on because it was easy to bump the switch.

The pilot stated that the Bose earbuds were his that he would use when he would leave the airplane to use the restroom. He did not know that Ms. Halbert would listen to music.

The pilot had been flying skydiving operations for over 20 years. He learned how to fly turbines by on-the-job training. He was training Ms. Halbert in the same manner. He did not see her resume, but knew she had flown the Cessna 206 and had never flown a Cessna 208. He thought she was a good pilot and caught on very quickly; he was comfortable with her abilities. She asked for referenced to learn more about turbine engines and he provided her links to some publications/materials he found useful. They would communicate a lot in the airplane. She would use an ipad in the cockpit with ForeFlight displayed. She would plug it into the cigarette lighter and have the cord clipped on the pedestal placing the ipad in her lap. He was never told the operations at Oceanside and had to figure out on his own.

At the end of the day, he would submit the following to Desert Sand: total time the airplane was on; total airplane flight time (measured by the GPS device that records when the airspeed was over 30 kts); number of starts (which was normally 1, unless there was weather); number of loads.

SHANNON HALBERT (MOTHER OF THE LEFT-SEATED PILOT)

Ms. Halbert stated that Paige Halbert loved flying and had plans to work for the airlines. She stated that she was a very cautious pilot and had difficulties with companies that she flew for prior because they would pressure her to do things she did not feel safe doing.

Ms. Halbert additionally stated that her daughter had her gull bladder removed at 15. She had a feeding tube numerous times since that, the most recent in December. She had been diagnosed with rumination, where she would vomit all the food she ate. She was able to keep down liquid shakes but any solid food she would vomit and would only be able to retain the calories that she could process before vomiting. In Texas she had dust mite allergies.

DAVID FOREMAN (WITNESS)

Mr. Foreman was riding his bike near the accident site. He observed the airplane flying low about 30 feet above the ground; he looked up at the airplane because he could hear the engine. The right wing then dipped down and the airplane went directly into the side of a hill.

CRYSTAL PATTERSON (WITNESS)

Ms. Patterson was with her daughter and driving when she witnessed the accident. She pulled over and ran toward the airplane. She saw the male pilot hanging partially out of the left side of the airplane and noticed the female's hair underneath him. After he was removed, she stabilized the female's head in her hands until paramedics could take over.

TRENT ALKEK (OPERATIONS MANAGER)

Mr. Alkek stated that Desert Leasing owns 14 airplanes all of which are leased to Spaceland. He stated that the right-seated pilot was a regular contractor, flying with the company for over 20 years. They employed 4 pilots.

He stated that the pilot requirements are that they have 750 hour total time. After being hired, the higher-time pilot's provide training. At a minimum (for insurance requirements to be met), the new pilot will be provided 25 hours of training in type.

He stated that the right-seated pilot was assigned to Oceanside and wanted to move back to his base, so they looked to hire a replacement. The left-seated pilot was hired recently to take that position. Her resume stood out because she had experience flying skydivers. The company did not do a background check or contact her prior employers, because they knew she was still work with them. The right-seated pilot stated that the left-seated pilot was doing very well and he was confident in her abilities. She had accumulated 3 day as pilot-in-command and they were planning on her taking the Oceanside position.

He stated that Spaceland does all the maintenance, will the exception of small repairs. The had not discussed the upcoming maintenance with GoJump.

BOBBY BISHOP (TEXAS TURBINES)

According to a Texas Turbine representative, there are changes in throttle sensitivity (change in thrust per unit of power lever movement) around the transition between the propeller-governing and underspeed-governing modes of the engine, which corresponds to a zero-thrust condition. When at the low speeds (80-100 knots), the TPE331 thrust changes in this transitional area require only small physical movements in the power lever (about ¼ to ½ inch of deflection). The representative stated that this relatively small movement resulting in large speed fluctuations (±10-15 knots) can be challenging for lower-time or inexperienced pilots. He stated that many experienced pilots in this airplane fly with their hand braced on the side pedestal and grip the side of the power lever to help make small power lever movements smoothly, as opposed to placing their hand on top of the power lever. He additionally stated that if the pilot grips the top of the power lever handle, they tend to make larger power inputs and fluctuations due to the thrust changes which would be especially prevalent with the airplane having a lighter load.

A Texas Turbine representative further stated that he has trained over 150 pilots to fly the Supervan. He stated that during the approach, there is a tendency for pilots to create a pilot-induced oscillation because they are not familiar with the response time of the engine. Typically in this scenario he would observe that when the airplane is on approach (about 80 knots) if the power lever were reduced to idle, the drag would increase (as the propeller blade angle goes to the low pitch stop), and the pilot would then advance the power lever in response to the increasing drag. During this response, the pilot would over-correct and add too much power and the airplane would surge forward and accelerate above 80 knots with full flaps. The pilot would then reduce the power lever rapidly in response to the acceleration and that rapid power lever reduction would cause a significant amount of drag and deceleration. The oscillation could occur for several cycles until the pilot could begin to limit the amount of power lever movement during the power on and off applications.