

Joshua Cawthra
Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
Aviation - Western Pacific Region

Date: July 19, 2022

Subject: WPR22FA256

Contact: Ben Thompson - Owner of Bluebird Air Tours

During an in-person interview, Mr. Thompson, who was represented by Brad Rose, of Rose Law LLC, reported that the accident flight was a 91.147 local sightseeing flight and was to remain within 25 nautical miles of the departure airport. He added that the 91.147 letter of authorization (LOA) issued by the FAA's Denver Flight Standards District Office on January 6, 2022.

Mr. Thompson stated that the normal route of the tour was direct west to flatirons, turn to north over Boulder, out to the 25-mile ring, and then follow that 25-mile ring to the south, which would normally get pretty close to Indian peaks, and that they usually stay on the east side of the divide. Mr. Thompson said they flight then starts to descend to the Red Rocks, over interstate I-70, then over downtown Denver, prior to returning to the departure airport. Mr. Thompson said that they typically will ascend to 12,500 to 13,000 ft.

Mr. Thompson stated that he started the company in June, 2016. Additionally, he stated that as of July 19, 2022, he had no employees, but they had hired contract pilots, which included Randy Evans, Steven Chase, and himself. He added that they were on the drug testing program as well. Mr. Thompson said that he just contracted out another pilot, but they had not completed their ground training.

Mr. Thompson further stated that he contracted out to Mr. Chase as of June 6, 2022, the day his drug test came back, which was when he was officially hired as a contractor. Mr. Thompson said that the training included 3 hours of ground instruction via teams, and then the flight portion, which was a combination of showing the pilot the route of the tours along with conducting some maneuvers. Mr.

Thompson stated that they departed from the airport, did stalls west of Boulder, and did a bunch of different scenarios which included talking about gear retraction failures, smoke in the cockpit, and pressurization issues.

Mr. Thompson said he then pointed out landmarks for the tour, then had the pilot perform steep turns, and where he would usually shut an engine down, he decided to simulate it with Mr. Chase, by reducing, what he recalled was the rear engine to zero thrust. They then performed 4 or 5 touch and go landings at the airport. Mr. Thompson stated that Mr. Chase was the most confident pilot by far, even more than some former airline pilots, and that he had pressurized [Cessna] 210 time, flew carbon cubs, was extremely sharp on the systems knowledge, and he had no hesitation at all to sign him off with the training and checkout. Mr. Thompson said it was a short checkout, but he was extremely confident to sign Mr. Chase off.

Mr. Thompson said that he purchased the airplane in December 2018, and had used the airplane about 295 hours since then. He added that the airplane log was in the airplane, and that the last 10 days of the flight log were completed to the best of his knowledge. When asked about maintenance, Mr. Thompson stated that there were no recent issues with the airplane, and no major problems. When queried about the airplane registration expiring, he replied that he was aware the registration was expired, and that he had changed LLCs, and mailed the paperwork in to the FAA the week previous.

When asked if the company had ever held a Part 135 Certificate, Mr. Thompson replied that they had not held a 135 certificate, however, they entertained the idea about 1 to 1.5 years prior, but determined it was cost prohibitive. He added that the Federal Aviation Administration visits and inspects the airplane every year, and recalled they were last there in April.

Mr. Thompson reported that Mr. Chase had flown 3 air tours since his checkout, and the accident flight would have been his fourth flight. He further stated that the typical tour flight is just over an hour from engine start to shut down, perhaps 1.1, and that the flight time is closer to 50-55 minutes.

Mr. Thompson said that between himself, Randy Evans and Steve, the contractors set their schedule, and if they are open, they can book flights. He added that it is not less than 24 hours notice via phone. The accident flight was the first flight of the day and Mr. Chase was scheduled for a second one afterward.

Mr. Thompson felt that the accident site is pretty close to their normal route of flight, and that they have a unique callsign with the tower (Bluebird 1). He added that they do not have set route, and that the pilots can fly it backwards if they want.

When asked about Mr. Chase's flight time, Mr. Thompson recalled that when he hired Mr. Chase, he had 670 hours of flight time, however, stated that Mr. Chase had flown 8.5 hours the day before in a Citation, and he wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Chase had over 700 hours. Mr. Thompson said that Mr. Chase had a few gigs which included instruction in Carbon Cubs, under his own LLC, sitting right seat in a Cessna Citation that he thought operated under Part 91.

Mr. Thompson said they have weather minimums for tour flights, which are in place, they have a flow chart the pilots are encouraged to use. He additionally provided a copy of this flow chart.

Mr. Thompson said that the airplane would have had only 1 go pro on it, which wasn't scheduled to be on it.

When asked, Mr. Thompson didn't think there was anything else he wanted to add, just that Mr. Chase was a great pilot, it was great airplane, and that it was the last thing he'd ever expected.

Mr. Thompson said that the airplane was recently registered under his new LLC of Skymaster 16 LLC. And that the pilot's LLC was Grizly Training Ops.

- END