

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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FATAL CESSNA 172 CRASH *

NEAR MURRIETA, CALIFORNIA *

Accident No.: WPR23FA247

ON JULY 4, 2023 *

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Interview of: DAIVD SOWARDS, Owner
Executive Flight Institute

Murrieta, California

Wednesday,
July 5, 2023

APPEARANCES:

STEPHEN STEIN, Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

PAUL RHO, Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

CHRISTINE WALL, Air Safety Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

MARIA LEBLANC, Air Safety Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

RICARDO ASENSIO, Air Safety Investigator
Textron Aviation

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I N T E R V I E W

(12:14 p.m.)

MR. STEIN: Stephen Stein with the National Transportation Safety Board. It is Wednesday, July 5 at 12:14, Pacific Daylight Time in Murrieta, California, French Valley Airport. I am here with --

David, if you want to --

MR. SOWARDS: David Sowards, owner of the Executive Flight Institute.

MR. STEIN: Can you spell out your last name?

MR. SOWARDS: S O W A R D S.

MR. STEIN: Excellent, and then we're going to go around the horn.

MS. WALL: Christian Wall, FAA ASI.

MS. LEBLANC: Maria LeBlanc, FAA ASI.

MR. RHO: Paul Rho, ASI with NTSB.

MR. STEIN: Paul, you want to spell your last name?

MR. RHO: RHO, R H O.

MR. STEIN: Excellent.

Ricardo?

MR. ASENSIO: Ricardo Asensio, Textron Aviation, ASI,
A S E N S I O.

MR. STEIN: Thank you.

Okay. All right, Dave, what we're going to do is we're going to go ahead and I'm just going to -- well, a couple of things, do

1 you consent to being recorded?

2 MR. SOWARDS: Yeah.

3 MR. STEIN: And are you okay with the recording being
4 transcribed in the public docket?

5 MR. SOWARDS: Yes.

6 MR. STEIN: Thank you, okay.

7 INTERVIEW OF DAVID SOWARDS

8 BY MR. STEIN:

9 Q. So, you have the model airplane that I gave you?

10 A. I do.

11 Q. Fantastic, okay, so if you want to go ahead and kind of tell
12 us a story?

13 A. Okay.

14 Q. Just walk us through the -- tell us where you were and what
15 you saw?

16 A. Okay, I had been working in the hangar on a vehicle. I had
17 stepped outside and I see -- just watch the airplanes. I noticed
18 one of my aircraft was on approach, which ended up being a 5423E.
19 At the time, I had no idea who was flying it, but I noticed when
20 he was coming in, it was a little bit squirrely. He didn't -- I
21 won't say his directional control was bad, but he was a little bit
22 squirrely. I saw him touch down and I heard the chirp of the
23 wheels and at that point, I turned around and walked back in the
24 hangar, and that's when I heard the engine power up and I
25 though -- well, I noticed when he was doing his approach, it was

1 full flaps and when I heard him power up, it's like well, he
2 didn't have time to clean up.

3 So, I spun around and watched what was happening and at that
4 time, he touched down right here, just before the -- after the
5 500-foot markers and before the 1,000-foot markers. Then I heard
6 him power up right away and so, I spun around and I noticed at
7 that time that he was just off the side of the runway at about
8 probably a 30, 40-degree angle with the runway. Still had his
9 flaps out, full power, and he was grabbing toward the building,
10 climbing very slowly, if at all. He continued on the same course.

11 I believe it -- at some point, during air, he tried to raise
12 the flaps because the airplane was at such a high AOA, I could
13 actually see between the wing and the flap, so I could see the gap
14 that was in between there, which normally, you can't see that. I
15 knew he was at a very high angle of attack and he just kind of
16 mushed over toward the building. The wings were rocking back and
17 forth as he got closer to the building. I guess he realized he
18 wasn't going to clear it, you saw the airplane pitch up at a very
19 high angle of attack, and then it rolled to the right, and then
20 disappeared behind the building, and I heard at that point, a
21 large crash.

22 Q. It rolled to the right or left?

23 A. I'm sorry, it rolled to the left as it went over the building
24 and it rolled to the left.

25 Q. Okay, and you said he touched down between the 500-foot and

1 the --

2 A. He touched down right about here and I thought okay, and I
3 turned around to go into the hangar and that's when I heard the
4 power and I was like well, he didn't have time to clean up yet.
5 So, that's why I turned around to see what was going on and he was
6 already in the air and pointed to the left.

7 Q. Did you hear any interruptions in power?

8 A. No, no interruptions in power. It was definitely high power
9 the whole time.

10 Q. Okay, and if you had to estimate sort of his altitude when he
11 was at the high angle of attack before he rolled over?

12 A. He was maybe ten feet above that building. So, he was maybe,
13 what, 60 feet. He just barely made it over the building and I
14 thought he was actually going to hit the top of the building
15 because he rolled over violently and then disappeared straight
16 down. So, he just barely covered that building.

17 Q. So, he disappeared from your view?

18 A. He disappeared. I did not see the airplane hit the building
19 because I'm blocked by the building on this side.

20 Q. Was there anybody with you at the time?

21 A. There was nobody with me at the time, but my nephew had
22 pulled up right behind me. He was at the auto-parts store picking
23 up some parts and that's what -- I was waiting for him and that's
24 when I told him get in the truck and I called 911 and we headed
25 over there immediately.

1 Q. Okay, I don't have any other questions. Did -- and you said
2 he started to clean up flaps?

3 A. Well --

4 Q. Did you see him?

5 A. It appeared that the flaps were not down as much when he was
6 closer to the building. I mean, when they were down, it was barn
7 doors. I could see the gap between the wings and the flaps that
8 it had come down that far. But it appeared when he got closer to
9 the building, that the flaps were not in the full down position.
10 I believe he tried to clean up in order to maybe gain some
11 airspeed, but it of course would have killed his lift.

12 MR. STEIN: I don't actually have any further questions.

13 Does anybody have anything else?

14 BY MR. RHO:

15 Q. Did you see any fire, or fumes, or --

16 A. There was no fire. When we got there, there was fuel. But
17 there was no fire at all. There was plenty of fuel on the ground.
18 When we got there, we found the airplane on its roof. At first,
19 we didn't hear anything, but then the passengers that were in the
20 back heard the truck and started yelling and at that point, that's
21 when I told -- I still had 911 on the phone, I said there are
22 survivors, we need to get somebody over here, and my nephew and I
23 jumped out and started pulling them out of the airplane.

24 MR. STEIN: Ricardo, do you have anything?

25 MR. ASENSIO: No, I'm good.

1 MR. STEIN: Okay, all right.

2 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

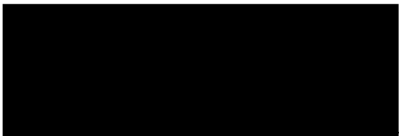
IN THE MATTER OF: FATAL CESSNA 172 CRASH
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ACCIDENT NO.: WPR23FA247

PLACE: Murrieta, California

DATE: July 5, 2023

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.



Carolyn Hanna
Transcriber