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Date: March 8, 2024

Subject: WPR24FA104, Witness Statements Summaries from Sheriff's Office

Contact: Gerald Bayard, Josephine County Sheriff's Office

WITNESS STATEMENT - Daniel West

The witness reported he was at the north end of the airport by a gravel pit. He witnessed the plane takeoff and reach an altitude of about 1000 feet. The witness stated the plane flew north and shortly after turned back somewhat towards the airport in a southeast direction. He described hearing the aircraft engine sound like it was "bogged, not under power". He then described it as if the engine was just idling and then saw it "nosedive" towards the ground before crashing. West did not witness the plane roll or turn prior to crashing. I asked West how long he estimated Thomas was in the air for and he believed it was less than five minutes.

WITNESS STATEMENT - Lori Ridenour

The witness reported that she was inside her trailer and heard the sound of a motor and very shortly after heard what sounded like a loud crash. She thought it was possibly another resident who lives behind her trailer that may have crashed his motorcycle into a building. Lori exited her trailer and immediately observed the plane wreckage in the front yard of her residence. After seeing the crashed plane, she called 9-1-1 to report it. She did not approach the plane but saw several other witnesses come onto the property to observe the crash. She did not see anyone get very close to the plane and did not see anyone touch or interfere with the plane. She did not hear nor see the plane prior to the crash.

WITNESS STATEMENT - Calvin James Schmidt:

The witness reported that he drove up to "Captain Drake's" hanger at the airport. Upon pulling up, he noticed that the accident pilot had just started up the engine on his plane. The officer asked the witness if he spoke with the accident pilot at all and the witness did not. The witness was familiar with the pilot from previous contacts with him. The witness observed the pilot go out onto the runway and did a mid-field take-off. The witness also made it a point to tell the officer that he thought it was odd that the pilot did no preflight check off like they normally do prior to flying. The witness further reported that the pilot had just put a new engine in the plane and was surprised the pilot did not do a "run up" at the end of the runway. The witness also mentioned that usually during take-offs, one will go to end of runaway and takeoff; however, the pilot took off from mid field. He added that he believed it was somewhat unusual, but he has seen the pilot do it before to just get up in the air. The witness saw the airplane take off and climb to an altitude of about 500 feet and headed north. he did not continue to watch the plane; however, very shortly after, outside the hanger, the witness heard the engine of the plane rev up. He immediately turned to look towards the sound and saw the accident airplane in a nosedive towards the ground. He described the revving of the engine as similar to the sound heard when planes are in a nosedive and air pushing against the propellers causes the ending to accelerate. The witness and another person responded to the crash and upon first glance, they knew the pilot was deceased.

WITNESS STATEMENT - Alan Martin

The witness reported that he was at the hanger all morning. He has a plane as well and flew there from his home in Dorena, OR. Martin was waiting for fog to lift so he could take his plane up. He saw the accident pilot show up about 1030 to work on the pilot's plane. He knew the pilot had just overhauled the engine on the plane and believed he was finishing up on things with the motor and cockpit. Prior to taking off, the accident pilot asked the witness if he would do a radio check and it worked fine. The witness added that nothing the pilot said sounded out of ordinary. The pilot appeared to be his normal self. They talked about flying and always learning. The pilot mentioned how he had 4500 hours of flight and still learning. The pilot told the witness that he needed to get up in the air. The witness told me he did not have eyes on the pilot or airplane the whole time. He thought the pilot did not spend a lot of time like one usually would for a walk around on that type of plane. He added that he thought the pilot should have done more of a "run up" on a new motor and

was surprised he did not. HE further added that he observed the pilot take off, it looked like he climbed straight and level up to about 500-600 feet. Martin resumed conversation with another person and shortly after, the other person spotted the plane diving down. The witness turned around and saw plane pointing straight down. The witness stated that he did not specifically recall hearing the engine. When asked about the pilot's arrival at the hanger, the witness reported to the officer that the pilot arrived in green Jeep which he left door open as it was parked by the hanger. The witness stated that the pilot leaving the door open was not uncommon if he was going to take short flights.

WITNESS STATEMENT - Sharon Naylor

The officer reported the airplane accident of her husband and was in complete shock and disbelief; she told me he was a Marine. When the officer asked her if she believed it could have been intentional due to the call the night prior, she advised the officer that the pilot would not have due to his religion. She added the pilot speaks to a psychologist from White City VA once a week and she did not believe he had spoken to the psychologist is a week or so. She added that the pilot never attempted suicide but had ideations. They had been married for about 60 years. She further reported that the pilot had severe depression and bi-polar disorder.