

My name is Brendan O'Rourke. I am a Private Pilot for Single Engine Land, no additional ratings. I have a total of 67 hours, most of which are in Light Sport aircraft. I have around 10 hours combined in a Piper Archer, the Cherokee 140 and in the Cessna 177 Cardinal.

I remember the vast majority of the flight. But my memory of the event is not complete. The majority of the outing was routine and the moments during and immediately following the crash are just pieces or moments.

June 12th 2024, my dad Brian O'Rourke, 14 year old brother [REDACTED], and I left our home in Spokane at approximately 7:45am for Felts Field. Skies were clear. Before leaving home we checked winds to be sure we were comfortable. Temperature was between 55 to 65 degrees. Our plan was to fly the Cessna 177 Cardinal to Elk River, ID and back home. This was a routine outing to spend some time in the air together before my brother's elementary school promotion that evening.

We had flown to Elk River before with 3 people in the Cherokee 140. We took off in the same direction on a significantly hotter day yet had no concern or issue getting the altitude to clear the valley in a less capable aircraft.

We had never flown the Cessna 177 Cardinal to Elk River before - but we know the plane itself has been there with other pilots in the flying club. I do not know why we remained so low in the valley in the Cessna 177 Cardinal on the day of the crash.

My dad was the Pilot in Command. Pre-flight was conducted when we reached the hanger. Everything was normal. The aircraft's right and left tanks were full. My dad did the weight and balance conservatively and double checked. We brought the plane out of the hanger. My dad was PIC in the left seat, I was right seat, my brother was in the right rear seat. We were all properly restrained. The aircraft started up with no issues and taxied with no issues.

I personally do not remember the run up. I believe this is simply because it was routine. I can attest to the fact that both my dad and I are very good with check-list discipline and run up is not something either of us would have forgotten. My brother does remember the run up and has specific detail to the fact that he would not otherwise know. The run up was complete and we experienced no errors. We had wanted to do some touch and goes but the airport was busy so we decided to wait till the return.

Looking back on the event, there may have been a longer ground roll on take off than usual. This would have been odd given the temperature and wind conditions. My dad did not show any concern and I am not intimately familiar with the airplane so I did not comment. As soon as we rotated, speed increased to 90 indicated. My thought on the ground roll did not become significant of course until reflecting on the experience.

I did not notice anything of concern in the climb out. There were no obstacles to clear. After leaving tower frequency, we requested a flight following which we had until we were in sight of Elk River airstrip. They gave us an updated altimeter setting before we left the frequency. There was a moment in flight when my dad mentioned he was not getting the airspeed that he felt he should be getting. He adjusted manifold pressure and rpms and airspeed increased. He did not comment after that. We examined the maps and talked about a plan to approach the airfield. We planned to enter the valley from the south, overfly the field to ensure it was safe to land, continue north, climb out of the valley, and circle back to land on runway 17 (due to the mountains to the south it is recommended that 17 is the landing runway and 35 is the takeoff runway in all conditions). We entered the valley. We overflew Elk River airstrip at my estimate of 700 ft AGL. When we crossed the threshold of the airstrip, he ensured we were in configuration

for best power, full RPM, full throttle, mixture rich, no flaps. This configuration did not change for the rest of the flight as far as I remember. We started flying along the valley and I was looking at the charts and surrounding terrain to proactively determine what we would do should we lose an engine or struggle climbing out of the valley on take-off. I remember considering wind. I felt light turbulence. I determined that airspeed was identical to ground speed and said it aloud. I determined the route which would give us the most time to climb would consist of flying north along the river valley and then make a slight left turn. Eventually we came to a slight fork, and my dad made an early left. I immediately told him that this not the optimal path - that we would have more room to climb if we continued straight. At that point he was laser focused, looking at the instruments and did not respond to me (after examining the map post flight, I had in fact miss read the chart and any valley would have ultimately resulted in a dead end a few miles north of where we were had we not been able to climb). At this point my memory becomes episodic. We were not high enough. He attempted to increase the rate of climb by slowing down. The last things I remember him saying are "Its just not climbing", "I don't like this". I looked to verify all three levers were forward. Then I saw him confirm by trying to push them in but they were full. We were riding the edge of a stall and I remember telling him that we need to turn around but it was too late. He may have attempted a turn around but we were too slow and we did not have the space. I possibly have a vague recollection of hitting trees. The next thing I remember is being stuck in the plane. It was upside down on the ground. I heard my brother say he was out. I remember getting unbuckled and my brother pulling me out. Both right and left sides/doors of the plane were gone. I jumped over the plane to my dad's side. My brother retrieved the fire extinguisher though I only remember having it in my hands. It only functioned for a few seconds and did not impact the rise of the fire. We tried to pull my dad out asking him for help but he was unresponsive. There were pops. Flames became too hot. I had to get my brother away from it and did a blood sweep on him for injuries. My memory becomes more clear after we got away from the airplane.

There was no cell service. We started walking south and came upon a hiking trail which we followed to a parking lot. We started south towards Elk River until someone picked us up on the road.

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