



Investigator Name: Albert Nixon
Title: Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
Division: Aviation Safety - WPR

Date: June 27, 2024

Subject: WPR24FA202 Memorandum for Record - Record of Conversation

Contact: Roark Veasy (Flying in formation with accident pilot)

In a conversation with Roark Veasy, the following is a summary of what he stated:

- He was a Commercial Pilot with flight experience of about 3,000 hours and hundreds in the Air Tractor.
- He has been with Coastal Air Strike for about 6 months.
- He initially flew wheeled Air Tractors on fertilizer drops on trees for about 3 months.
- He then got checked out as on the float equipped airplanes.
- He is currently certified as a level 2 pilot, for firefighting operations.
- The day of accident, he was flying in N915RA Tanker 802.
- They were released from their firefighting duties in Texas, and he received a call for the accident pilot to plan to come to the airport for their departure.
- They had no firefighting flight tasking for the previous 4 days.
- Ken was the flight lead, and Van (accident pilot) was the number 2 airplane, and he was in the number 3 airplane for departure.
- They taxied and took off together.

- He rejoined on initially of the left side but then ended up on the right side of the lead airplane.
- They saw weather (rain showers) in front of them.
- He was not comfortable being close to the lead airplane and used the reference to ready the tanker numbers (not the tail number) on the tail for approximate lateral spacing.
- He lost sight of the lead airplane and the number 2 airplane.
- He maintained VMC and turned slightly right and climbed.
- He observed the #2 airplane below him about 2,000 ft and called out to him that he had him in sight.
- He believed the #2 airplane was headed south.
- The number 2 pilot was "cool as a cucumber" and said he was in a VFR corridor.
- He turned to the North
- He said there was rain and dark sport around him and scattered and broken clouds. Additionally, there were clouds way higher than he was.
- He said there were some clouds broken-up by the mountains.
- He eventually rejoined on the lead airplane about 1 hour later and they approached Gallop NM.
- He assumed the accident pilot was heading to GUP solo, at a lower altitude, and would meet up with him at the destination.
- He said he maintained VMC the entire flight.
- He described the accident pilot was cautious, calculating, and caring.
- He said the accident pilot was fine and in good spirits both on the day of the accident and the previous 3 days.



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Date: June 25, 2024

Subject: WPR24FA202 Memorandum for Record - Record of Conversation

Contact: Ken Dromgold (Flying in formation with accident pilot)

In a conversation with Ken Dromgold, the following is a summary of what he stated:

- He was an Air Transport Pilot with flight experience of about 10,000 hours and 400 hundred hours in the Air Tractor.
- He has been with Coastal Air Strike for about 3 years.
- He was hired for the season.
- The company requires you to be checked out in the Air Tractor before they hire you.
- He is currently certified to drop water, fertilizer and retardant.
- He received training in the company for administration, tactics, and safety.
- Academics were in house and a specialist came in and training was about 1 week.
- The training was a requirement to fly.
- Three company airplanes were in Texas about a month for firefighting taskings.
- Their route to Oregon was a stop in Gallup NM, Elko, NV, and then to Oregon.
- Their cruise altitude was about 9,500 ft, and speed about 160 mph.

- The airplane had an endurance of about 4 hours.
- They were on the NE side of the TFR.
- It was a normal flight up to that point.
- He was the lead airplane.
- He had visual with left (accident airplane) and to the right (the #3 airplane).
- He was responsible for the radio calls and navigation.
- They maintained between 9,500 and 10,500 ft msl.
- They were closing in on a light rain shower.
- The number 3 airplane on the right lost sight and called it.
- A few seconds later the number 3 airplane reacquired lead.
- He heard the number 2 airplane (accident airplane) say "No, I got this; I have a VFR corridor."
- The number 3 airplane had the number 2 airplane in sight.
- The last turn the number 2 airplane made was to the right, and he figured that the number 2 airplane would beat them to GUP.
- He did not feel good about the number 2 airplane leaving.
- Tried to raise him on the radio several times.
- Asked center to try to contact the number 2 airplane as well.
- After landing at GUP, the number 2 airplane was not present called ATCT and his Chief Pilot to report the missing airplane.
- The accident pilot was top notch, talented, and resourceful.
- The accident pilot was fine the day of the accident and the previous 3 days.

- About 1 +45 flight to GUP.
- The day of the accident, he was flying in N915RA, Tanker 802.
- They were released from their firefighting duties in Texas, and he received a call for the accident pilot to plan to come to the airport for their departure.
- They had no firefighting flight tasking for the previous 4 days.



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Subject: WPR24FA202 Memorandum for Record - Record of Email

Contact: Michael Petrofes (FAA Aviation Safety Inspector)

- In an email from Michale Petrofes the following is a summary:

- ON JUNE 21, 2024, AT APPROXIMATELY 1100 MST, AN AIR TRACTOR AT-802, CRASHED WHILE IN CRUISE FLIGHT IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN 6 MILES ENE OF CAPITAN, NM. THE COMMERCIAL PILOT WAS KILLED. THE AIRCRAFT WAS DESTROYED. THE AIRCRAFT WAS A PART OF A THREE-PLANE FERRY DEPARTING ALPINE-CASPARIS AIRPORT, TX (E38) TO GALLUP MUNICIPAL AIRPORT, NM (GUP) AFTER BEING RELEASED FROM USFS FIREFIGHTING OPERATIONS. THE FLIGHT WAS OPERATING VFR AT 9,500 FEET. NO FLIGHT PLAN WAS FILED. THE LEAD PILOT STATED THAT, WHILE ENROUTE TO GUP, THEY ENCOUNTERED A RAIN SHOWER IN THE CAPITAN AREA. HE DIRECTED THE OTHER TWO AIRCRAFT TO TURN 30 DEGREES AND CLIMB TO REACQUIRE VISUAL CONTACT WITH ONE ANOTHER. HE REPORTED THAT SHORTLY AFTER THAT, HE AND THE NUMBER TWO AIRCRAFT REGAINED VMC AND VISUAL CONTACT. HE THEN RADIOED THE MISHAP AIRCRAFT TO ASCERTAIN HIS SITUATION AS THAT AIRCRAFT WAS SEEN TURNING TO THE WEST. THE ONLY RESPONSE WAS, "OH, I GOT THIS..." THE TWO AIRCRAFT CONTINUED TO GUP EXPECTING TO FIND THE THIRD THERE. THE LEAD PILOT CONTACTED ATC AND THE COMPANY CHIEF PILOT TO INITIATE LOST AIRCRAFT PROCEDURES. WHEN LOCATED SEVERAL HOURS LATER, THE WRECKAGE WAS SCATTERED IN A NORTHERLY DIRECTION AT ABOUT 7,500 FEET. INVESTIGATION OF THE SITE DETERMINED THAT THE ACCIDENT WAS CONSISTENT WITH CONTROLLED FLIGHT INTO TERRAIN (CFIT).

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Date: February 3, 2026

Subject: WPR24FA202 Memorandum for Record - Record of Email

Contact: Les Doud (Manager Air Safety Investigations, Hartzell Aviation)

- In an email from Les Doud the following is a summary:
- The photos contain the remnants of just two blades. I don't know what the others look like, but these are enough for me to conclude power and thrust at impact.
- WPR24FA202 Propeller Blade Damage Observations:
- Prop Model: HC-B5MA-3D/M11691NS
- S/N: HBA2306
- Installation Data Sheet No.: 1789
- One of the five blades impact-separated from the propeller assembly retention clamp and was found in two, large pieces near the main wreckage (Photo #1 montage). The blade fractured in the mid-blade area. Both pieces exhibited chordwise/rotational scoring, primarily on the face side. The outboard section of the blade was bent forward in the thrust direction with chordwise/rotational scoring on the face side. A small fragment of another blade tip that impact separated was also seen near the wreckage (Photo #2). These impact signatures indicate rotation at high RPM, high power and generating thrust at the time of impact.

- Photo #1 - Montage of fractured blade



- Photo #2 -Tip fracture of another blade.

