

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of:

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FATAL MID-AIR PLANE COLLISION

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NEAR LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA

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Accident No.: WPR24FA309

ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

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Interview of: PETER E. HOOPER, Accident Pilot
Yakovlev Yak-52 Aircraft

Tuesday,
September 24, 2024

APPEARANCES:

STEPHEN STEIN, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

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I N T E R V I E W

(11:50 a.m.)

MR. STEIN: This is Stephen Stein with the NTSB. It's
September 24, 2014 [sic], 11:50 a.m. Pacific Time.

INTERVIEW OF PETER E. HOOPER

BY MR. STEIN:

Q. Pete, would you mind giving me your full, your full name and
spell it out?

A. Peter Eric Hooper. It's Papa-Echo-Tango-Echo-Romeo; Eric,
Echo-Romeo-India-Charlie; Hooper, Hotel-Oscar-Oscar-Papa-Echo-
Romeo.

Q. Excellent. And then -- okay, then can you also state your, I
guess, your relationship to the accident?

A. I was the lead aircraft in the formation.

Q. Got it. Okay. Great. Okay. All right. So, and just like
we had just talked about, do you consent to being recorded?

A. I do.

Q. Excellent. Okay. Thank you, Pete.

A. We're not married, are we?

Q. No, we're not. (Laughter)

Okay. Do you, do you go -- you go by Pete?

A. I go by Pete.

Q. Pete. Okay. Great.

A. Um-hum.

Q. All right. So the first thing I'm going to ask you is really

1 just to go ahead and tell us the story. So in chronological
2 order, you know, as much factual information -- and when I'm
3 talking factual information, I'm talking as much data as you
4 remember.

5 A. Okay.

6 Q. So, you know, start with where you guys departed from --

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. -- and go from there.

9 A. All right. We departed from -- we briefed a flight to
10 fly -- do a section takeoff or a element takeoff formation. We
11 were taking off from Watsonville, waited for the weather to clear.
12 Once we had VFR conditions, we took off out of Watsonville with a
13 Dash 2 wingman on my right wing.

14 Q. And that was, that was --

15 A. That's Ryder.

16 Q. That was --

17 A. Do you want names? Well, what else do you want?

18 Q. I wouldn't do full names, yeah, because we have to redact
19 those out. So let's, let's --

20 A. That's why I said Dash 2.

21 Q. That aircraft, we'll make it the CJ-6.

22 A. What's that? Oh, CJ.

23 Q. We'll make the Dash 2, yeah, the CJ.

24 A. Okay. So CJ on the right side. We took off out of
25 Watsonville Runway 2-0 and then headed our flight plan to head to

1 the south end of restricted 2515, which is the -- just south of
2 the Edwards restricted complex, where we would break up the flight
3 and the CJ would continue on to Payson, Arizona, and the Yak 52
4 would head down to Gillespie Field, KSEE.

5 Uneventful takeoff, uneventful trip down to our detachment
6 point. We had briefed to detach, what we would do. Cruise speed
7 is about 210 kilometers, airplane -- our airplanes are in
8 kilometers, we're flying that. 210 kilometers about, what, 120
9 knots, I guess. We would accelerate, we would accelerate to about
10 250 kilometers, at which time I would kiss off the wingman. The
11 CJ, he was on the right side of the airplane -- right side of the
12 formation. He would pitch up and then bank to the left, left --
13 bank to the left and then continue on a flight plan to Arizona and
14 I would continue down to San Diego.

15 Q. Okay. And -- all right. So let's talk about what happened.

16 A. All right. So when we accelerated, I cleared the CJ to
17 detach, at which time I observed him pitch up and bank to the
18 left. At that moment or at that time, I looked forward or I
19 looked at my navigation. When I looked at my navigation, I
20 came -- then I came back to see where the CJ was. And he was in
21 my windscreen at the right quadrant, 1 to 2 o'clock, overbanked
22 about 120 degrees, I guess -- about 120 degrees overbanked and
23 probably 30 to 40 degrees nose low and I was hit.

24 I don't know how CJ got to that position. I was hit, and by
25 the time I kind of figured out that I was hit, looking down, 90

1 degrees down -- 90 degrees to the ground, with no prop, damaged
2 cowling, and that's what I knew at the time, I considered jumping
3 out of the airplane, but my -- way that I'm flying, I then pulled
4 the prop back because I figured, hey, I'm going to dead stick this
5 in. I pulled the prop back, which is kind of funny because I
6 didn't have a prop so it wouldn't help with my glide ratios
7 anyway. So I don't really know until now that I've looked at
8 flight track, I didn't realize my track. It looks like I came and
9 went around to the left.

10 I'm looking for a place, a suitable place to put the airplane
11 down. Considered the desert, but never know how smooth a
12 smooth -- it doesn't -- it looks smooth, but it might not be, so I
13 chose a road. I looked to a north road. There was a semi on the
14 north road. I then decided for an east-west road. We had a head
15 wind from the east when last time I looked, so I figured that was
16 a, that was a good choice. Decided not to put the landing gear
17 down, but in a Yak, they're semi-retractable so the gear is down
18 sort of. Anyway, so don't have any idea about airspeeds, I just
19 flew the airplane and made sure I didn't hit the telephone poles
20 to my right and the cement wall to my left and landed on the
21 middle of the road and came to a pretty uneventful stop on the
22 right-hand side of the road.

23 As the airplane started decel, I don't remember having any
24 braking authority, but I did have rudder authority. Again, I
25 don't know what speed I touched down at, but I did have rudder

1 authority and was able to maintain road centerline until about, I
2 guess, 20 knots or so, at which time the airplane drifted to the
3 left. I stabbed the right rudder and then it came right and
4 crossed back over entirely across the road and I came to a stop
5 just off the side of the road.

6 Q. All right. Thank you for that. And -- let's see. And then
7 I just want to reask the question just since we're audio recording
8 now. There's nothing mechanically wrong with the aircraft?

9 A. There's nothing mechanically wrong with the aircraft.

10 Q. Okay. Got it. Okay. About what time do you remember taking
11 off from Watsonville?

12 A. I guess it was about 2 hours before that, so 10:45 local.

13 Q. Okay.

14 A. And I think the accident was 12:47; is that right?

15 Q. Something like that, yeah. Okay. And then what were you
16 guys doing in Watsonville?

17 A. We were doing formation flights, also some introductory
18 flights for friends, sightseeing.

19 Q. Okay. All right. And then I've heard a rumor of there was a
20 third plane that was following you. Was there anybody --

21 A. There was -- a friend of ours was coming from, I think it was
22 Modesto. There was a clinic up there, a NAVA -- I think it's
23 called NAVA. I don't know what stands for, but a NAVA clinic.
24 Our friend Pat Foley, Trout, was in his T-6 coming back from that
25 and happened to flip up our TAC frequency, which is 135.95. He

1 made contact with us when we were over Tehachapi and said that we
2 were -- he was 10 minutes from trail.

3 Q. Okay. What -- do you know his tail number?

4 A. No.

5 Q. No. Okay. Do you have contact information for him?

6 A. I do.

7 Q. Okay. We'll ask after the recording, so --

8 A. Okay.

9 Q. -- we don't have to redact that. Oh, coming back to the
10 accident, do you remember was there anything -- speaking of your
11 TAC frequency, did the CJ pilot say anything, did you say anything
12 over the radio frequency?

13 A. To?

14 Q. To the CJ pilot or --

15 A. Yes. It was (indiscernible) when I was accelerating --

16 Q. Yeah.

17 A. -- once we were accelerating, I cleared him to detach.

18 Q. Right. No, but after that, after you guys made contact,
19 physical contact?

20 A. Oh, after we made contact. I heard nothing from him after
21 that.

22 Q. Okay. Heard nothing.

23 A. I did make a mayday call to Trout, Pat Foley, the C -- I
24 mean, the T-6 in trail. I think he was flying a T-6. Yeah, I
25 know he was because I saw him fly over. Yes.

1 Q. Okay. Is there anything you would want to add that would
2 help us with the investigation?

3 A. I want to show you the ForeFlight information.

4 Q. Me too. I'm dying to see it. So I'm going to go ahead and
5 stop the recording now.

6 A. All right.

7 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

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

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 NEAR LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA
 ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2024
 Interview of Peter Hooper

ACCIDENT NO.: WPR24FA309

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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.



Kay Maurer
Transcriber

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Interview of: Richard Shelar, Witness

Tuesday,
September 24, 2024

APPEARANCES:

STEPHEN STEIN, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board

FRANK LIGHTBOURN, Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

FRANK MOTTER, Investigator
Federal Aviation Administration

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I N T E R V I E W

(3:43 p.m.)

MR. STEIN: All right. Stephen Stein with the NTSB. It's September 24th, 2024, 3:43 p.m. local time.

Let's see. Let's go around. Everybody go ahead and spell out your name or --

MR. LIGHTBOURN: Frank Lightbourn, L-i-g-h-t-b-o-u-r-n.

MR. MOTTER: Frank Motter, M-o-t-t-e-r.

MR. STEIN: Both the Franks are with the FAA.

MR. SHELAR: Richard Shelar, S-h-e-l-a-r.

MR. STEIN: Excellent.

INTERVIEW OF RICHARD SHELAR

BY MR. STEIN:

Q. Okay. And then Richard, go ahead -- I'm going to give you, I'm going to give you this airplane.

A. Okay.

Q. Do you want to go ahead and just demonstrate to me -- well, actually walk us through again what you observed.

A. Okay.

Q. So first, tell us a little bit about what you were talking about over there.

A. Okay. Well, I was --

Q. What you heard. Yeah, go ahead.

A. I was working in my yard, took a break, sat down to have a soda and cool off. And while I was sitting there, hearing

1 airplanes go by as usual, and then all of a sudden I heard an
2 engine sputtering and popping, and then accelerate into high rpm.
3 And to me, that's an engine going lean, he's losing fuel. You
4 know, that's the way my race cars do.

5 So I got up out of the chair and walked out from under the
6 tree and started looking in the direction where I heard them. And
7 I saw a gray airplane, and I was seeing the bottom of the
8 airplane, and it was in a nose down attitude with the nose at 5
9 o'clock and the tail at 11 o'clock.

10 Q. Okay.

11 A. And at the scene, I told the CHP I thought he was like 3- or
12 400 feet off the deck when I picked him up. But when I got home
13 and realized where he was relative to what I was seeing, when I
14 first picked him up, he was above that telephone pole. So I would
15 say he was probably closer to 1,000 feet.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. Do you want --

17 A. And then --

18 Q. Oh, go ahead.

19 A. -- I saw him -- I saw it hit the deck, a big cloud of dust,
20 and I kept looking for smoke. I didn't see any smoke. So at that
21 point I went in the house, grabbed my truck keys and my wallet
22 with my ID, and went out looking for him.

23 So I went out to 30th and G, turned left on G and headed
24 east. And I figured they were somewhere around 50th and G area
25 from what I was seeing. So I turned left on 50th going north and

1 went as far as F and didn't see anything. So I turned around and
2 went back to G thinking, well, maybe I misjudged and they were
3 further out. And as I approached the intersection of 60th and G,
4 60th East and G, I could see the other airplane, the one Pete was
5 flying. It was off on the shoulder and belly down. So I drove up
6 there and checked on Pete, see if he was okay, and he was
7 uninjured and he was trying to call the other pilot.

8 Q. Okay. And then could you just demonstrate to us using the
9 airplane what you observed?

10 A. Okay. So say this was -- it was at this attitude and just
11 above the height of that telephone pole and about 2 miles away.
12 And I saw it come down until it hit the dirt, and I just saw the
13 big puff of dust.

14 Q. Was it rotating at all?

15 A. No. It was direct in, no rotation at all.

16 Q. Okay. Okay. That's helpful.

17 A. I didn't see him pull up at all either. It just looked like
18 he was nosed in --

19 Q. Did you see --

20 A. -- from what I could see.

21 Q. Did you see the other airplane?

22 A. I thought at the time I could see another airplane, but I was
23 focused on that one, and after he went into the -- in the dust
24 cloud, I started looking around. I didn't see any more, so I
25 thought, well, maybe it was -- because it was just in my

1 peripheral, so I figured maybe it was just a bird in the area.
2 Because there's a lot of birds like to fly around here on these
3 wires and stuff and so I just wrote it off as that until I found
4 Pete.

5 Q. Gotcha. And you don't know Pete, do you?

6 A. No, I don't know --

7 Q. Just from this event?

8 A. The only reason I know his name is because it was on his
9 jumpsuit he was wearing --

10 Q. Gotcha.

11 A. -- and he introduced himself to me.

12 Q. Okay. Gotcha. All right.

13 MR. STEIN: Do you have any questions?

14 MR. SHELAR: I figured it was easier to call him Pete than
15 Pilot 1 or Pilot 2.

16 MR. STEIN: Right.

17 MR. SHELAR: Because it's a lot easier to identify him that
18 way.

19 MR. STEIN: Okay. Do you guys have any questions?

20 BY UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:

21 Q. It was -- it basically appeared to go nose down all the way?

22 A. It appeared to go that way to me.

23 Q. It wasn't, wasn't --

24 A. I mean, I don't know if he made any kind of last minute
25 adjustment to flatten it out or not because -- but it looked to me

1 he went in nose first. And I never really got close enough to the
2 airplane to verify that, but by the time I talked with Pete and
3 stuff, we -- you know, he and I talked and he just, you know,
4 wanted me to go looking for his friend or -- I don't know if
5 they're friends, but anyway he knew the guy by name -- wanted me
6 to go looking for the other pilot. So I left him there and I went
7 looking for the other pilot. And then I spotted a fire truck
8 turned onto F, and I had actually did my U-turn right there at F
9 and 50th. And so he went down F, the dirt side, going west. So I
10 followed him in, and then there was a CHP motorcycle officer
11 there. So I just stopped there and approached the motorcycle
12 officer. I figured they don't need me on the scene. You know, I
13 just let them know that there was another airplane involved.

14 MR. STEIN: Very good.

15 Do you have any questions?

16 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do not.

17 MR. STEIN: Okay. All right.

18 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)
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Kay Maurer
Transcriber