



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

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Eastern Region Aviation

Date: March 22, 2012
Person Contacted: Victor Hulett – Ground Crewman
NTSB Accident Number: ERA12LA231

Our first load of the day begins at about 8:30 am with two flights scheduled One in the morning, which included two, launches. The first took place about 2 miles south west of the Fitzgerald airport. The surface winds were very light and headed northwest. It was a perfect launch and the first jumpers got out over the airport. Ed then started his decent and was able to land on the airport himself in the balloon. We then loaded the next set of jumpers into the balloon and Ed ascended to altitude where the jumpers exited the balloon and landed on the airport as well. The upper winds then took the balloon northeast through town and he got down in a field just north east of town at Joshlyn road. Than ended the first flight for the morning.

The second flight was scheduled to take place Friday afternoon. The launch site according to the weather was going to be the same place we had launched Friday morning. The wind was mostly calm and we had no trouble at all putting the balloon in the air for this flight. The first set of jumpers had no problem making the airport. But Ed was having trouble getting down at that point so he could land there as well. The balloon was headed in the same direction as the morning flight But Ed was able to set down in a field northeast of town on Rhine rd. between Plate rd and hwy 319. Ed advised me that he was going to need at least one tank of L.P. The surface winds at that time had increased somewhat and we were having a little trouble keeping the balloon upright so the jumpers could load in the basket. At this time we had at least 2 jumpers running video. Ed made the decision with the jumpers loaded that everything was fine and we changed 1 tank out with a full one and he was ok with loading the one instead of 2 as we were going to. After that the lift off went fine it seemed that only the ground winds had picked up but not so much that it was any concern. Shortly after lift off we put everything back in the trailer and started to chase the balloon. Moments after lift off I received a call from Jason Miller our EMA director that there was a sever storm warning and I immediately informed Ed of the warning. Ed had me to tell Robert to pull the storm up and tell him what it seemed to be doing was it building or staying the same size. Robert looked at his radar on his cell phone and showed

it to me and it was very small but in the loop it was getting big very quick. Ed then must have told the 5 jumpers that must get out now. Although they were not as high as planned Ed must have assured them it was safer to jump than stay with the balloon and we watched them leave the basket in 2 pairs. As the jumpers left Ed asked for an update on the storm. At this time Ed made the decision to try and climb over it. We approached the end of Johshyln rd. and I got out of the van to watch the balloon. Ed called me again and said I don't know if I am going to be able to get over the storm this is not good. From that point we watched as the balloon disappeared into the cloud on the right side of the storm. We were at the corner of campbrooklyn rd and joshlyln rd. Robert and I made the decision to follow the part of the storm in which Ed entered. We took union cemetery road to flint road during this time Ed kept updating me on his attempt to get over the storm. At 8000 feet Ed began to tell me that the winds were very strong and swirling real bad and this was not going to good. At around 12,000 feet said Ed said I don't think I am going to be able to get over this thing it is really bad in here. From 12,000 feet he began to tell me that hail was really bad and he thinks he is caught in an up draft his reports of altitude were coming very quickly and he went from 15,000 to 17,000 much quicker than he had been calling out 1,000 foot increments. Just before Robert and myself reached the end of flint road, Ed's voice changed on the radio and he said "I got nothing over my head I am at 16,000 feet I am at 15,000 feet I got nothing over my head, 14,000 feet I got nothing over my head." I was trying to talk to him at the same time before I realizes that he was not releasing the button on his radio so all I could do from that point was listen. The only thing that changed in his transmission was the attitude until 2,000 feet when he said. " I am at 2000 feet I see trees I'm in the trees I am at 1,000 feet I am not gonna to make it I'm sorry." After that I called 911 and everyone I could think of to help find him. As Robert and me started to go in the direction we thought he was headed we turned down a dirt road and after only a quarter to a half mile down this road which only took us about 2 minutes hail the size of golf balls were hitting us so hard and the rain was so heavy that we slid into a ditch where we were totally covered with hail as was the ground. It looked like 4 inches of snow in a matter of about 2 minutes. The storm lasted at least half of an hour. By then it was dark.

Brian if there is anything else I can help you with please feel free to call me at anytime. The one thing I think that could have speed up the rescue was a transponder or a homing device on the balloon however this would only have helped us to find Ed's body sooner as he died on impact. I thought about something like the A.A.D. we as skydivers use to activate our reserve chute when falling through a certain altitude at a certain speed maybe a device that will turn on this transponder if the pilot cannot or he forgets. Or a pressure switch that will activate the transponder if the basket hits the ground too hard. F.Y.I.

Victor Hulett

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