



To:
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: Suwannee County plane crash
From: Karl Smeltzer <[REDACTED]> - Thursday 03/20/2014 11:09 PM

1 attachment



g000258000000000000ebfdaf5d160b9b1ef70c5e37bc813ff1753a9fb6.jpg

On Sunday March 9th, 2014 around 2:30 PM.

I was traveling East on I-10, 1 mile West of Live Oak exit, when I saw a yellow and white small plane flying very low to the ground about 200 yards ahead of me across my path. I looked to my left and to see why he would be so low when I noticed a open field. I thought to myself how cool it was that I was going to get to see a plane land in a field. The plane approached the field and started to land just as my truck was directly behind the plane. The Field is somewhat higher than I-10 so I couldn't see all of the landing gear but it seemed that when the plane hit the ground upright it bounced, which I'm sure is normal, but when it came back down it was as if the plane tripped and it went nose down. The tail went straight up and over the nose and then it went out of view. I called my wife and told her what I saw and I told her I was going to call 911 and turn around to see if I could help. I'm a High School Football Coach and trained in First Aid so I try to help when I can. I looked for a place to turn around in the median but couldn't find a place so I went to the Live Oak exit and turned around. I called 911 and told them where I was and what I saw. The 911 dispatcher told me somebody else had already called but took my name anyway. When I arrived back at the scene I parked my truck on the side of I-10, ran up the little hill and climbed over the fence and ran towards the plane. There was another man there, whose name I didn't get but I learned he lived across I-10, and knew the 2 Gentlemen in the plane. I asked him if he was in the plane and he said no that he saw the plane going down. I approached the plane on the right side and asked if anybody could hear me. A man's voice said yes, and asked me to please go around to the other side. As I walked around the tail of the plane I looked for leaking fuel or smoke and saw neither. The man, who I learned later was named Sonny, told me to go get his tractor so we could lift the plane up. The other man, who had arrived when I did, said he knew where it was and he walked down the airstrip to retrieve the tractor. I asked Sonny how many were in the plane and he said 2. I asked him if he was hurt and he said they were banged up but seemed to be OK. He said if we could get the plane up they could get out. I asked if I could lift the plane up myself and if he could he get out on his own and he said he doubted I could lift it up. I got under the left wing and lifted the plane until the right wing touched the ground and asked if he had enough room and he said if we could remove the window then maybe he could crawl out. I let the plane down and crawled under the wing to the window, that was already cracked and broken, and pulled on the plexaglass while he pushed from the inside and it broke away. I went back to the wing and lifted the plane again and he, Sonny, broke the rest of the glass away so to make the hole bigger. He then crawled out of the plane and rolled to his back. Sonny then said to me, we need to get Don out. I lowered the plane and crawled back under

and asked Don if he could move. Don said he couldn't get his seat belt off and that it was hurting him. I tried to reach in but I couldn't reach far enough. I told Sonny I couldn't reach Don with the plane down. Sonny told me if I lifted the wing back up he could hold it up with his feet. I asked him if he was OK to do that and he responded that his neck hurt but he could try. Against my better judgement, I agreed to let him try. I lifted the wing again and Sonny positioned himself and put his feet on the wing and braced himself. I hurried over to the window and crawled in as far as I could and unbuckled Don's seat belt. After releasing the buckle I asked Don if he could slide out and he told me his leg was pinned and he couldn't move it. I then removed as much debris from around Don I could so he could be more comfortable. I tried to see what had his leg pinned but I couldn't see what it was. I backed out of the window and told Sonny that he could put his legs down because I had the wing again. I actually crawled under the wing and put my back against the wing and lifted it that way, thinking I could hold it longer. I kept scanning the plane to see if I could see or smell fuel or smoke. I was comfortable with the fact that I didn't think we were in jeopardy of the plane catching on fire. I'm not sure of the number of minutes we stayed that way until somebody showed up to help. When a Suwannee County Deputy arrived he spoke to Sonny and Don but there wasn't much he could do until the paramedics arrived. After a few minutes the tractor drove up and it was then that I told the Deputy that something had to happen because I couldn't hold the plane up much longer. He said we should trade places. He said he would hold the plane up if I could hook the strap around the landing gear and to the bucket of the tractor. I agreed. The Deputy assumed the same position I was in and I wrapped the strap around the landing gear and directed the tractor to the right side of the plane and hooked the strap to the teeth of the tractor's bucket. I directed the driver of the tractor to lift the bucket up slowly to take the slack out of the strap. I asked if everyone was ready and when the paramedics said they were I motioned to the driver to lift the plane. After the plane was lifted I backed off and let the paramedics remove Don from the plane. I stood there for 5-10 minutes longer and then told the Deputy that I was leaving and if he needed anything from me. He asked for my name, address, and phone number and I left.

Several things stuck out to me as I was driving back. 1) When I walked up, the guy that lived across I-10, told me he heard the plane spitting and sputtering and that's what caught his attention. 2) At some point during all of this Sonny said the plane stalled. Now to be honest I couldn't remember hearing the plane as much as I saw the plane. I did have my windows up and the radio playing but I couldn't recall actually hearing the engine of the plane. 3) I do remember thinking to myself that the plane was going pretty fast to land but I have never seen a plane of this size land on a grass airstrip so I don't know what the right speed would be. 4) It seemed that the initial contact with the ground seemed to be very hard and that the plane seemed to bounce hard. 5) I read in the Suwannee Democrat that they believe the front landing gear broke or got stuck in the mud but it doesn't appear in the picture I attached, that the landing gear was broken, and I don't remember it being broken when I wrapped the the strap around the gear.

I called the Suwannee County Sheriff's Department a few days later to see if the 2 Gentlemen were OK and they didn't have much to tell me. I have not spoken with anybody regarding what I saw or what I did so I still do not know how they are.

I hope this helps and please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

Thank You,