



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Elliott Simpson
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: June 10, 2014

Person Contacted: Dennis Ward; [REDACTED]

NTSB Accident Number: WPR14FA239

Narrative:

Mr. Ward is a pilot with the fire department (LAFD). He holds private fixed-wing license, and commercial and CFI rotorcraft license, and he flies the Augusta Westland AW 139 for the department. He has a total of 2,300 hours total helicopter flight experience.

He was part of the LAFD group, and was planning on camping the night at El Mirage. He had brought along his recreational vehicle (RV) to stay in. He did not plan on flying, but rather riding on dirt bikes in the area.

He arrived at the lakebed at 0830, and both Jeff Moir and Brian Lee were already there. Both his colleagues Randy and Jason were flying with their powered parasails. He watched throughout the morning as Mr. Lee took both of his daughters flying.

About 1100 the airplane departed on the accident flight, taking off to the south; wind was out of the northeast, and not strong. This was to be the last flight before the group had lunch, and the pilot had been asked to perform a low-pass over the group. The flight progressed, and after about 10 minutes it approached the group out of the northwest at about 100 feet above ground level (agl). The pass took place just to the east of the group, following which the airplane began a climbing right turn over the lakebed flying south. About 1/4 a mile later it began another right turn, which Mr. Ward assumed was for landing. The bank angle was about 20 degrees as the airplane turned crosswind, the wing then dropped aggressively, and he could not understand what the pilot was doing. The nose of the airplane then, "tucked" and he immediately became alarmed that the airplane had stalled. The airplane continued in the descent, striking the ground nose-down.



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Date: June 10, 2014
Person Contacted: Jeffrey Moir; [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: WPR14FA239

Narrative:

Mr. Moir was the co-owner of the accident airplane (N9454L), with the pilot Brian Lee. They have owned the airplane for about 12 years. Mr. Moir is a pilot for the LAFD, in addition he holds an A&P/IA license and he performs all the maintenance on the accident airplane, N9454L. He performed the annual inspection about 6 flight hours prior (July 2013), and stated that there were no outstanding squawks. The airplane had recently been upgraded from a 110 horse power engine to an O-320 150 horse power engine. Mr. Lee had performed 3 takeoff and landings the week prior. He had flown the airplane with the higher power engine about 10 hours since it was installed in June of 2012. Except for currency mentioned above, it was the first time he had flown it in over a year (he recently purchased a Beech Bonanza).

Mr. Lee had been coming up through the ranks at the fire department, having initially been a paramedic, and then graduating to become a member of the aviation crew, and then a pilot flying the Fire Departments Bell 206 and Augusta AW139.

A recreation day had been planned at the El Mirage Lake Bed June 9th, for a group of about 12 people who were all members of the fire department aero division and their family and friends. A combination of activities was planned including flying powered parasails and camping. The parasailing was performed earlier in the day before the accident.

Mr. Lee drove to the location that morning with his two daughters; Mr. Moir flew solo in N9454L, departing from the hangar at Whiteman Airport and arriving at the lake bed at 0830. Mr. Lee was already there with his two daughters. Light winds prevailed, and he landed on the lake bed in a northerly direction. The airplane had been serviced to capacity that morning with 87 octane automotive gasoline, as was standard practice. Upon landing at El Mirage, the right wing tank was full, and the left tank was about 5-8 gallons short of full. Mr. Lee was advised as to the fuel status upon arrival. Mr. Lee had brought canisters of extra fuel to the lake bed, in anticipation of providing the above mentioned rides.

About 0930 Mr. Lee departed with one of his daughters in N9454L to perform a sightseeing flight around the lakebed. He departed from the lakebed on a southerly heading with light and variable winds, and performed an uneventful flight lasting between 10 and 15 minutes, at elevations reaching about 1,000 feet above ground level (agl). A short time later he flew his second daughter on a similar flight, for a similar amount of time.

A third flight was planned (accident flight), and the group requested that the pilot perform a "low-pass" over the area where everyone had assembled, on the north shore of the lakebed. The flight departed at 1015 with Mr. Lee in the left seat, and the young passenger in the right. They departed again to the south, but this time the wind had picked up to between 10-15 knots. The airplane used the same takeoff direction as before, now with a left crosswind.

The flight progressed like the others, and after about 15 minutes the airplane approached the group from the northwest, at a low altitude for what was presumably the low-pass. The airplane flew over the group about 100 feet agl, about 100 knots, and after passing initiated a climbing right crosswind turn to the south to about 300 feet agl. As he turned from crosswind to downwind, the bank angle was "excessive" such that Mr. Moir thought the pilot may have been, "showing off" and possibly returning for a second low-pass, but the pilot was not the type to show off. The airplane did not level after the bank, the nose then pitched down, and the airplane descended into the ground at a 45-degree nose-down angle. He did not hear any unusual engine sounds at any point during the flights that day.