



NTSB RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Lynn Spencer
Aviation Investigator
Eastern Region, Office of Aviation Safety (ERA)
National Transportation Safety Board

Date Interviewed: 5/8/2019

Person Interviewed: Bradley Littleton, co-owner of Lightning Aviation

NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA164

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the above-named individual:

- Mr. Littleton had seen Jessica (flight instructor) that morning and all seemed normal. She did not complain of any problems or maladies, nor did she express any concerns about her upcoming lesson.
- The accident airplane had been reported as having a “rough running engine” the day before the accident (Sunday), and the maintenance personnel had found a fowled spark plug which was changed out, and then the engine was tested and returned to service.
- It flew several flights before the accident flight with two different instructors.
- The morning of the accident, Mr. Littleton was eating lunch in his office, where there is a window that looks to the north and a patch of sky.
- He saw the top of an airplane – a “top plane view” fly across that patch of sky. He stated that the airplane was flying west, wings fully 90° to the ground, and the fuselage parallel to the ground.
- He heard a “thud” and went to the noise.
- There was an instructor with his student and airplane near the site.
- David Ratcliff (pilot and EMT) landed with his flight instructor and taxied directly to the scene to render first aid. He was the first medical response on site. Another student on scene called 9-1-1.
- Mr. Littleton reported that Jessica had been flying 30-45 minutes when the accident occurred and was using Runway 36.
- He noted that the Runway 36 has a left traffic pattern.



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Date Interviewed: 5/8/2019

Person Interviewed: David J. Ratcliff, private pilot and flight medic

NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA164

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the above-named individual:

- Mr. Ratcliff is a private pilot who is receiving instrument instruction at Lightning Aviation. He is also a flight medic.
- At the time of the accident, he was doing a circling instrument approach procedure. While on left downwind for runway 36, he saw out his window as Michael Morganti (flight instructor) clear the runway and begin to taxi while Jessica was turning final.
- A couple minutes later, Mr. Ratcliff was turning base to final when he heard “My engine quit!” on the radio.
- He looked and saw the accident airplane pitched up high “like a power-on stall” and then the airplane leaned to the left to start a spin. He added that it was only about 3 seconds from the time he saw the airplane in a nose-high pitch to when it was heading down toward the ground and estimated their altitude to be 300-400’.
- He stated that he lost track of the airplane shortly after it turned back toward the ground.
- He told his instructor, “I am now a medic and you need to get me to that plane.”
- The instructor did a fast landing and taxi to the edge of the taxiway and Mr. Ratcliff and his instructor exited the airplane and ran to the accident airplane. He estimates that they were at the accident airplane 90 seconds after the crash.
- The top of the airplane was split open with the engine area folded under the cockpit. They peeled back the top of the airplane and removed a seat that was loose and blocking the instructor and student.
- He stated that both Jessica and her student were wearing lap belts, and that there were no shoulder harnesses installed in the airplane.
- He stated that he did not know if the male student was alive, but that he saw Jessica trying to breath, and considered her more viable with mostly head injuries, and extracted her and cleared her airway, and at that time she started to breathe on her own and he



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continued to render first aid as the paramedics arrived on scene shortly thereafter, and while she was transported.

- He stated that shortly after paramedics arrived on scene, a medivac helicopter that was in the area landed at the scene.



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Date Interviewed: 5/10/2019
Person Interviewed: Jose Pinto, flight instructor at Lightning Aviation
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA164

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the above-named individual:

- Mr. Pinto is a flight instructor at Lightning Aviation who started working there in October 2018. He is a CFI, MEI
- On the day of the accident, Jessica took off about 5 minutes before him.
- He was 2 miles out from the airport, entering the pattern on a 45-degree angle into the downwind.
- He watched the accident airplane depart runway 36, and he heard Jessica call on the radio, "I lost my engine."
- He looked, and at that time, she was just over the subdivision north of the airport at about 300 ft agl.
- He noted an immediate aggressive left turn, and lost sight of her in the treeline.
- His impression was that she was trying to get back to the airport.



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Date Interviewed: 5/8/2019

Person Interviewed: Michael Morganti, Flight Instructor at Lightning Aviation

NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA164

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the above-named individual:

- Mr. Morganti is a flight instructor with Lightning Aviation. He is a CFI, CFII, MEI who started working there in March 2019.
- On Sunday, May 5, the day before the accident, he was going to fly the accident airplane with someone who wanted an instructional sight-seeing flight. He mentioned this to his roommate, another instructor by the name of Richard Spohnholtz, who let him know that the airplane was not running properly.
- Mr. Morganti called the airplane scheduler at the flight school and requested a different airplane for the flight.
- The following day (the day of the accident), he flew and soloed a student in the accident airplane. He said that “it didn’t seem to climb very well” but there was no engine roughness, noise or vibration. He chalked it up to high density altitude at the time.
- He stated that, at the time of the accident, Jessica was doing simulated engine-out procedures in the pattern as touch and go landings. He knew this because she would announce their intention on CTAF (“N5542U, left downwind, simulated engine failure....”)
- He had just completed a full stop landing with a student when he heard Jessica, who was behind him in the traffic pattern, say on the radio “My engine just quit!”
- Moments later, the accident airplane flew over their airplane and hit the ground.
- He added that he shared one student with Jessica and the student used a “two swipe” approach that Jessica taught him to help with the landing flare. On very short final, the student swiped the trim wheel twice in a nose-up direction, just before the flare. Mr. Morganti stated that the student’s landings were very good, but the procedure made him a bit nervous, and he advised the student to get his hand back on the throttle.



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Date Interviewed: 5/8/2019

Person Interviewed: Richard Spohnholtz III, Flight Instructor at Lightning Aviation
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA164

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the above-named individual:

- Mr. Spohnholtz is a flight instructor with Lightning Aviation. He is a CFI, CFII, MEI who started working there in November 2018.
- On Sunday, May 5, the day before the accident, he flew the accident airplane. He was doing simulated engine-out procedures with a student.
- He stated that during these procedures, he would run-up the throttle every now and then to “clear the engine” and that he used carburetor heat.
- On his last simulated engine-out procedure, when he went to add power at 600’ AGL, the engine started shaking. He leaned the mixture and it smoothed out. He thought maybe it was fouled spark plugs, and he wrote up a maintenance ticket.
- The mechanic checked the spark plugs, did an engine run-up, and said that it checked out.
- Mr. Spohnholtz later flew the airplane on a cross country flight and also did some pattern work with no issues.