



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Elliott Simpson
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Interview Date: Aug 14, 2018
Person Contacted: Bob Hinkle [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA218

Narrative:

During an in-person interview Mr. Hinkle stated the following:

- Mr. Hinkle is a CFI based out of Caldwell Airport, Idaho. He has an AP/IA certificate and performed all the recent maintenance on the accident airplane, N231EC.
- The accident pilot, Mr. Watts was a retired architect originally based out of Los Angeles.
- He was approached by Mr. Watts for primary flight instruction about 3 years ago, and Stacy, another flight instructor performed the introductory flight and initial flight lessons. Mr. Hinkle then flew with him, and based on his initial assessment he thought the training would take a long time to complete.
- After about 70 hours of training Mr. Watts performed his first solo flight, in a Cessna 152.
- He was concerned that Mr. Watts was not learning and progressing fast enough, and he attributed this to his age. He often flew "behind the power curve" and would often let the airplane get ahead of him.
- Mr. Watts persisted, and kept coming back regularly for training. Mr. Hinkle admired his tenacity.
- He eventually transitioned to a Cessna 172, but often talked about purchasing a Mooney so he could commute between Los Angeles and Idaho.
- Mr. Hinkle warned him that the Mooney was a fast airplane and complex airplane, that exceeded Mr. Watts abilities, and he advised a Cessna 172, or 182.
- Mr Hinkle warned Mr. Watts that in his 40 years of flying he still only felt comfortable flying airplanes that did not exceed to 200 knots, and that because of Mr Watts age, lack of experience and flying skills, he should stick with airplanes that cruise in the 100-knot range.
- He provided flight instruction in a Cessna 210 to introduce Mr. Watts to complex high-performance airplanes.

- After about 5 flight lessons, Mr. Watts was very insistent that he was ready to fly solo, but Mr. Hinkle disagreed, and as a test told him to perform a short cross-country flight, while Mr. Watt's sat in the passenger seat and observed without talking. The flight did not go well. As they approached the airport, Mr. Watts selected the wrong advisory frequency, and flew the downwind approach at 2,000 ft agl, well above the pattern altitude, not see another airplane on the runway. Mr. Hinkley interjected. However, Mr. Watts did not recognize the mistakes, and continued at a high speed and altitude flying way past the airport, as he tried to ascertain what was wrong.
- Mr. Watts stepped in and told him to turn, descend and begin the landing approach, however, Mr. Watt's forgot to deploy the landing gear, and when Mr. Hinkley called for a go-around over the runway, he instead deployed the gear, and then performed the go-around without ever retracting it.
- Mr. Watt's had difficulty maintaining the correct approach speeds, and landings tended to be hard, although his landing improved once he used a cushion to raise his seating level.
- Mr. Watts eventually found a Mooney (the accident airplane) in Stockton, California and they both flew to Stockton to look at it. He purchased it there and then, and Mr. Hinkley provided flight instruction in it.
- Mr. Watt's liked to drive fast and owned two Corvette cars. About one month before the accident he stated that he was going to sell one of his cars and buy a Mooney Rocket airplane.
- With regard to the accident airplane, Mr. Hinkle was aware it had speed brakes, and provided flight instruction on their appropriate use, along with using the landing gear and flaps to slow down the airplane. Specifically, he taught that the correct time to use the speed brakes was when arriving at the airport environment, then stop using them once he had reached the downwind leg.
- Mr. Watts' wife was concerned about her husband's flying abilities and as such started taking flying lessons about a year prior to the accident. She had a student pilot certificate and a logbook, and had flown about 40 hours, and was about 10 short of soloing.
- She stated multiple times that he often landed very hard and confided in Mr. Hinkle that her husband's skills were not improving.
- On one occasion, Mr. Watts landed so hard that he had a propeller strike and damaged the nose gear strut disks. On that occasion Mr. Hinkle met him immediately following the incident, and Mr. Watts did not even realize the strike had happened.
- Mr. Hinkle told Mr. Watt's that he should consider rebuilding the engine after the propeller strike, but he chose instead to perform the propeller strike inspection. Mr. Hinkle performed the inspection and the engine was within tolerance.
- The airplane was equipped with a backup instrument vacuum system, and he provided a brief technical introduction of its operation to Mr. Watts.
- Mr. Hinkle was not aware of any failures of the vacuum pump system.
- There were no significant maintenance issues, except that on two occasions the wheel brakes partially failed, requiring the pads to be replaced and brake lines bled.
- On the day of the accident, Caldwell airport was surrounded by smoke.

- Mr. Watts used noise cancelling headsets but was still able to hear the stall warning buzzer during training.
- Mr. Hinkle had provided training on approach stalls. He had never heard the stall warning horn go off accidentally during any flight training. The only time he heard it was as Mr. Watt's initiated the flare.
- Full nose-up trim was appropriate for the accident airplane during landing, as the nose-down forces during landing were significant.
- Mr. Watts did not like to use the autopilot, and typically hand-flew the airplane.



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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Interview Date: Aug 16, 2018
Person Contacted: Gennifer Woydziak - [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA218

Narrative:

During a phone interview, Gennifer Woydziak stated the following:

- She works at Baker Aviation, located on the field at BKE, and had arrived for work a few hours before the accident.
- There were three other aircraft departing the airport about 1015 that morning, an Ag Cat from Omega Air, a forest service "spotter" airplane, and a Cessna 172 from her flight school. They all departed from runway 31.
- During the radio communications, she heard N231EC report that it was on final for runway 31.
- From her office, she could not hear the sound of airplane in the pattern, and it did not make any other radio calls.
- A short time later she was called and told there had been an accident. She drove to the accident site to confirm it was not her Cessna 172.
- After the Ag Cat, Cessna 172, and Forest Service airplane landed, she talked to the pilots, and they all reported that they had not seen the accident airplane at any time while flying.



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NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA218

Narrative:

In an email to eyewitnessreport@ntsb.gov, dated September 18, 2018, Dr. Brus stated:

"Sirs: I am a physician that worked with Dr Nelson and private pilot myself. There were a couple of conversations I had with her and her husband within the month prior to the accident. I don't know if these conversations may be helpful but felt that they may give insight into thinking and comfort level of Dr Nelson and her husband. I first ran into Dr Nelson while shopping and we had a 1/2 hr conversation. It was partially taken up with flying issues. She relayed that she was working on a private pilot license and had accumulated 20-30 hours (my recollection). She made a comment that landing was most difficult for her and this prevented her from soloing. "Landing the plane is most terrifying for me and I need more practice." She went in to tell me that her husband bought a Mooney and was looking for a pilot to fly with him. She actually made it sound like he wanted an ownership partnership. She gave me his email and I was able to contact him. The email and subsequent phone conversation corrected a misperception. He stated that he was not looking for partnership but was always interested in having a flying buddy. He relayed some thoughts about the aircraft that may be relevant. He bought the plane for a good price. He made particular comment about how fast it was and how difficult it was to "slow it down" especially when landing. He had gotten his pilot license recently (my impression was the previous year or two).

My musings:

1. PIC was relatively new pilot
2. Copilot was student pilot that had significant misgivings about her flight skills, especially landing.
3. Landing was problematic for both.
4. Appeared to be mismatch between pilot hours/experience and demands of a high performance aircraft.
5. From the descriptions of other eye witnesses, they were entering pattern low and slow, both high risk for stall.
6. Given that PIC was constantly trying to "slow the plane down, especially

on landing", he may have been working on this skill and "overslowed".
7. I suppose a remote possibility was that he was allowing her to practice her own landing skills given that these were most in need of honing. I suspect this is not likely given her discomforts and given that she would have to fly from the right seat.
I hope this gives some insight into the mental and emotional context of the incident.

Regards,
Mario Brus, MD"



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

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Interview Date: Aug 12, 2018
Person Contacted: Mel Cross – [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: WPR18FA218

Narrative:

During an in-person interview at the accident site, Mr. Cross stated the following:

- On the morning of the accident, Mr. Cross was in his hangar, located about 1,300 ft southwest of runway 31 midfield. (see below)
- About 1015, he noticed a low-wing airplane flying directly over the hangar to the south. It caught his attention because it was flying lower than the pattern altitude, between 600 and 700 ft agl. Also, his hangar was well inside the pattern, so the airplane seemed too close to the runway.
- He then heard the airplane reduce engine power, in a manner that he felt was typical for an airplane reducing power for landing. He was not concerned, and the engine sounded normal and he did not see it emitting any smoke or vapors.
- He stated that both the right and left main landing gear did not appear to be fully extended.
- He then got on his motorcycle and drove onto the frontage road, and instinctively looked to the runway threshold in anticipation of watching the airplane land, as he often does to critique the landings. He did not see the airplane and thought nothing more of it. He stated that in retrospect this was unusual, as the airplane should have landed about that time.

