



## MEMORANDUM for RECORD

**Ralph E. Hicks**  
**Senior Air Safety Investigator, IIC**  
**Eastern Region Aviation**

---

**Date: October 25, 2022**  
**Witness Statement: Nick Hechler (PIC of N43RG, DA-42)**  
**NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA395 – Orlando, Florida**

---

The following witness statement was provided by Mr. Hechler via telephone conversation.

- Mr. Hechler confirmed that the other pilot in the airplane, Mr. Ekele, was about 70 in tall and 149 lbs (his last reported height and weight on his FAA medical exam).
- We were sitting at runup pad, winds were picking up, at some point gusting to 60 (the last call he recalled from tower). He recalled a quartering, left headwind. We were pointed approximately 130 deg, for runway 7. We were perpendicular to the runway. Heading SE. System seemed to be moving out of the south. Applied elevator control down and left aileron into the wind. The left wing was bouncing around a little more than the right wing.
- Mr. Hechler was seated in the left, front (pilot's) seat, and Mr. Ekele was in the right, front seat. The wind then lifted the left wing, definitely off the left main gear, it felt like it was pushing us over the ground to the right. He could not say if the right main gear was on the ground at that point or not. He thought it may have been off the ground as well. Next, we were trying to shut down the engines. We did not know how severe it would be. Mr. Hechler grabbed for the engine masters, and that is where his memory stops. Whatever happened after that he does not remember. The next thing he recalled was waking up in an inverted flight deck. His feet were in the pilot's seat (his seat) and his head was over the center pedestal, toward the right seat. Mr. Ekele's head was near the PFD/MFD. He never turned around to see where his legs were. There was no response from Mr. Ekele.

- Three-point lap belt and harnesses were fastened prior to the event, set as if ready for flight (not relaxed or loosened). Tight across the shoulder and lap. The seatbelt was not around him when he woke up; he did not recall why he was not strapped in. He stated that he must have slipped out somehow. Seat positions: There is a placard with 3 seat positions. Full upright, full aft, and then a red position. There is a red mark and you line up the seat back with that position. Mr. Hechler's seat was lightly aft of the full upright position. He believes that Mr. Ekele's seat back was a little more upright than his position.
- Canopy was closed and locked. The canopy folds upward to the front (there is a hinge near the lower front part of the canopy). He believes that the DA-40 and DA-42 canopies are the same design, maybe slightly different in size. Canopy glass was shattered. Built-in roll bar? Yes. Right above your head. That was missing when we were flipped upside down.
- How did he egress the airplane? The first responders arrived and put an air cushion under the right engine nacelle and lifted the wreckage. They helped pulled him out by his feet as he tried to crawl out. They put him on a stretcher. Mr. Ekele remained inside.