



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Date: November 22, 2019
Persons Contacted: Asaf Newman, observer (pilot)
NTSB Accident Number: ANC20LA004, Piper PA-32R-300

Narrative: Mr. Newman was an observer in the front right seat during the Yute Commuter Services accident that occurred on November 10, 2019, near Goodnews Bay, Alaska. The interview was conducted via teleconference and the FAA IIC, Charles Gillespie, participated via telephone and the Yute party representative, Keith Henthorn, was present with Mr. Newman in Bethel, Alaska. Mr. Newman was provided with the purpose of the interview and was given the opportunity to have someone present for his assistance, which he declined. This is a summary of his statements.

Mr. Newman stated that he was a new hire pilot at Yute Commuter Services and was in initial training. He has a commercial pilot license with about 950 total flight hours and an instrument rating. He is current for instrument flight. He has a total of 58 hours of nighttime and his last night flight was October 10, 2019. He had never flown in an airplane with a dual pilot crew, except for flight training. He did not have any PA-32 systems or emergency evacuation training before the accident. Most of his flight experience was in Cessna 172s and Piper Cherokees.

On the day of the accident, he was studying and hanging out at the company hangar. He was waiting for the opportunity to ride along on a flight as an observer. The pilot, Mr. Rau, said he had room and asked him if I wanted to go. He believes that the pilot provided him with a preflight brief, but he could not remember the specifics. He recalled discussing the route. There were no mechanical issues with the airplane. He did not look at the instruments unless he was flying, so he could not recall if the panel lights were working once it was dark. The instruments were on the left side and he was sitting on the right side. There were dual flight controls.

Mr. Newman flew the airplane while enroute from Bethel (BET) to Platinum (PLT). There was no weather information at GNU, but there was a lit windsock. He saw it during landing on runway 06 at GNU and recalled the winds were a quartering front left wind; it was not strong. He could not recall if the pilot briefed him on any special nighttime considerations. The pilot did mention that they would be flying direct back to BET, over the mountains, and that they would need to climb.

During takeoff, he did not monitor the instruments because he was not flying. He looked outside. The takeoff was normal, but the airplane drifted right rapidly after rotation. He assumed it was a crosswind or a gust and said “woe” over the intercom. The pilot straightened it out and the airplane climbed out straight. Mr. Newman stated that he usually wears the headlamp on his head, in order to see the panel better, but he had recently seen another pilot wearing it on his neck, so he wanted to try that. He didn’t have time to get it situated before takeoff, so after takeoff, once climbing out straight, he removed his headset to adjust the head lamp. He was engrossed in adjusting the light for the remainder of the flight and was not looking outside or at the instruments. He was not a crewmember and did not feel like he needed to.

After about 1 to 2 minutes of flight, he sensed something unusual out the right side so he looked out the window and saw what he thought was heavy rain and it seemed bizarre, “this is not good” he thought; “we need to get out of this,” then impact occurred. They were “slammed”, and he wasn’t sure what they hit at first. The impact was hard enough to throw off his headsets and glasses. It seemed like the right wing hit first. Mr. Newman did not hear the pilot saying anything about engine power or bracing for impact. He did not know they were in extremis until impact. When the airplane came to a complete stop, water started coming up. The pilot yelled “get out, we have to get out!” They opened the top and bottom latch of the right door and evacuated. They climbed on top of the fuselage and stood in water up to their knees or waist.

Mr. Newman was able to retrieve his mobile phone that was under water in a side wall pocket before he evacuated. The phone was a new waterproof Galaxy S9. He wiped the water off and looked at recent phone log and redialed a friend who worked at Yute, and that person notified the authorities.

Mr. Newman recalled that the engine sounded normal and the RPM sounded high about 1-2 seconds before impact. He was paying close attention then because of the unusual water spray on the right side of the airplane. Mr. Newman did not recall whether the horizon was visible or PLT was visible because he was looking down and not outside of the airplane.

He stated that it was very dark at the time of the accident. The clouds were obscuring the moonlight on the flight into GNU.