RECORD OF CONVERSATION

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Date: November 22, 2019
Persons Contacted: Peter Rau, pilot
NTSB Accident Number: ANC20LA004, Piper PA-32R-300

Narrative: Mr. Rau was the pilot in command 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, and the Yute party representative, Keith Henthorn, called in. Mr. Rau was provided with the purpose of the interview and was given the opportunity to dismiss the FAA from the interview and to have someone present for his assistance; he declined both. This is a summary of his statements.

Mr. Rau stated that he had been working for Yute Commuter Services for about a year. He was assigned as a pilot-in-command of PA-32-300. He has a commercial pilot license with about 2,000 total flight hours and 1192 hours in a PA-32-300. He is instrument rated and obtained currency during a private flight in Portland, Oregon, recently. He flew about 15 hours of nighttime within the last 30 days and 3 hours the week of the accident. He was night landing current. Mr. Rau had no dual crew pilot experience.

Mr. Rau explained that he had flown with new pilot observers before to provide them exposure to route operations and provide safety advice about various runways. The observers are not assigned any flight duties. On the day of the accident, Mr. Rau invited Mr. Newman to fly along as an observer. He provided a standard passenger brief and discussed the route. He had never flown with Mr. Newman before.

Mr. Rau described the dispatch process of the flight. He arrived at the hangar pilot room, where he was provided a manifest with the load. He checked weather on the company computer. He filled out a flight risk analysis, which he remembered to be an assigned number of 6, which is acceptable risk. He had 800 lbs of cargo for Platinum Airport (PLT) and one passenger for GNU. The airplane had no mechanical issue nor deferred maintenance. He had flown to GNU many times during the day and night. He was assigned to the same airplane for all the preceding flights the day of the accident, and he had no mechanical problems with it. There was a surge of power at altitude a few months prior, but he thought that was due to an issue with the electronic ignition system and it had been fixed. The airplane's instrument panel lights worked properly. He wore a headlamp (red light) to see the gages on the bottom better.

On the evening of the accident flight, he landed the airplane at GNU and spent 5 to 10 minutes on the ground. He did not perform a runup because he had just performed one at PLT. There was no weather reporting at GNU, but he recalled the weather at PLT to be wind at 130° 15 knots gusting to 20 knots. It was dark at GNU, but not quite pitch dark. The sun set about 1745. He back taxied on runway 6 and departed on runway 6. There were mountains to the north so he had to turn right after takeoff and depart to the southwest to avoid them. After takeoff, he retracted the flaps and landing gear and turned right about 300 ft agl. He reset the power and rpm to 25 inches and 2500 rpm and continued the turn to the northwest at an airspeed of 95 knots for the flight back to BET. There was a visible horizon and Beluga hill on the north side of the bay was visible. The area east and north of the airport was dark due to no village lights. He could not recall what pitch attitude or climb rate he attained during the climb.

While in a right turn during the departure, he suddenly had a feeling that the airplane was descending. He looked at the VSI and saw that the airplane was in a 500 ft per minute rate of descent. He did not recall what any of the engine instruments were indicating at the time. He estimated that the airplane was at 500 ft agl at the time. He rolled wings level. He did not hear any unusual engine sounds and did not recall what the airspeed indicated. When Mr. Rau was queried about what he did to correct the abnormal situation, he stated that he pulled back on the yoke, but nothing happened. He did not have time to perform any emergency procedures, such as restoring engine power or ditching. He stated that the airplane descended due to insufficient power, but he did not adjust or check any of the engine controls. When he was asked what indications of a loss of power there were, he replied, “a negative VSI indication,” and the airplane “continued to descend unexplainably.” He did not prepare the airplane for a water landing, because there was no time. He did tell the observer that they were going down. He did not make any emergency calls or activate the ELT because he had no time. He stated that there was between 30-60 seconds from the time of the descent indication and impact. He concentrated on flying straight ahead with wings level. After the impact with the water, they egressed out the right door and the observer called for rescue from his phone. A rescue boat picked them up within 10-15 minutes.

When queried about the weather and visibility in the area before the accident, Mr. Rau stated that he could see the western coastline as a sliver of light near Platinum but could not see stars or moonlight above. Although there was some light coming through breaks in the clouds as they arrived at GNU. The weather looked better toward the north and west. The east was very dark because there were no villages.

He stated that the vacuum gage was “in the green” before the takeoff.

When Mr. Rau was asked if it was possible that he did not set the appropriate power (25 by 25) after the takeoff, he stated “no; I fly every day and I do the same procedures every time. Over and over.”