



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

South Florida Flight Standards District Office 19
[REDACTED]
Miramar, FL 33027

Juan C Garcia Inspector Statement –Accident Investigation

Accident No. ERA23FA234
SAS PTRS No.: SO19202306967
Task ID: T-SO19-FY23-0979
ATQA: A-SO-19-23-113
Aircraft Registration: N430AB
Make: PIPER
Model: PA-25-235
Serial Number: 25-3996
Engine Tach: 8235.33 hrs.

When: May 17, 2023

Where: North Park Rd, Hollywood, Florida, 26°00'45.08" North, 80°10'31.72" West.

What: Part 91 operation Aerial Banners North, Inc., aircraft registration N430AB, a Piper PA-25-235 serial number 25-3996 was conducting banner towing operation. The aircraft left the banner hookup area at approximately 16:29 UTC and headed east northeast ascending to approximately 700 feet. The aircraft lost altitude to approximately 400 feet when the pilot released the banner and entered a stall spin. The aircraft crashed onto North Park Rd in a nose down attitude and ignited after impact. The pilot was fatally injured.

PIC Pilot:

Mitchell Allen Knaus

[REDACTED]
Murrieta, CA 92563-4205

Commercial Certificate No. [REDACTED]

First Class Medical Exam Date: 11/14/2022

No Passenger on board

Witness Interview with Mr. Ian Benolie

Mr. Benolie stated, "I was walking south bound on North Park Rd going to lunch like I do every day when I heard a sound like a loud lawn mower then I saw the plane come down on the road in a nose down position. I and some people ran toward the plane and saw a small fire, then several seconds later there was a loud explosion and the airplane burst into flames."

Witness Interview with Mr. Noel Gonzalez

Mr. Gonzalez said, "I was on the sidewalk on Johnson Street near the hospital when I saw the aircraft in a nose up position pulling the banner." He said, "The aircraft was hesitating, he then dropped the banner and continued upward a little bit then quickly dive downward and crashed."

Witness Interview with Ms. Karen Schiff

Ms. Schiff stated, "I was driving North on North Park Rd going to Hollywood Hills Plaza when I look left and saw the plane flying low near the top of the palm trees. The plane nose-dived and made a quick turn and crashed."

Interview with Roommate Mr. Daniel Corti

Mr. Corti stated, "I talked with Mitch several days ago and he said he thought the airspeed indicator was showing a higher speed than actual speed because at eighty knots seemed to close to stalling. He talked to other pilots in the company about the airspeed indicator and they said that's normal." I asked Mr. Corti, "Do you know whether the pilot entered this on a discrepancy log?" He said, "I don't know, he didn't say anything about it." Mr. Corti sent me the following message the next morning. Hello, I just wanted to add that talking with his parents they say Mitch told them, the day before, that he stalled at a 1000ft (probably because the indicator was showing a higher than real speed and he slowed down, similar to what he told me about slowing down to avoid breaking the banner). At that point he realized the indicator was wrong. Please confirm that you received my messages. Thank you.

Statement from Mr. Charles Ziade

On Wednesday, May 17th, 2023, Mitchel Knaus (pilot) took off around 12:25 from Runway 28R to fly a banner for 1.5 hours over Fort Lauderdale beach area. Everything seemed normal from takeoff to sound of the engine, nothing I could hear or see was abnormal to cause any concern on my part. Mitchel picked the banner at 12:29, after doing first pass for hook deployment and verification, again everything was normal. After he picked the banner, I asked to do a right climbing turn (per airport procedure), and he did so, he followed my instructions. He was on the downwind leg around 600 feet heading eastbound when he was communicating with HWO Tower. I was still watching him when HWO ATC asked the pilot if he was ok because he was not climbing, and may have lost some altitude, Mitchel replied that he was ok, and that he was climbing. ATC switched him over to FLL Tower.

When I saw he wasn't climbing, I tried to contact him a couple of times over radio, but no response. I wanted to talk him through it or bring him back to the banner box as I usually do. He seemed to have had a high "nose up" pitch more than needed which was preventing him from climbing in my professional opinion. I never heard any roughness from the engine or anything abnormal.

I did see him go left and then right a couple of times as he was flying east bound or northeast bound.

At this point, I was monitoring FLL Tower, and heard him advise FLL Tower that he was going to release the banner in a lake. A few seconds later, I saw black smoke!

I contacted HWO Tower to confirm, and they did. They gave me the crash site location and headed straight there. Charles Ziade

Aircraft Examination:

The propeller created a gouge in the asphalt and separated from the engine on impact. When the aircraft came to rest the engine and firewall were pushed back directly in front of the cockpit. The post-crash fire destroyed most of the aircraft forward of the wings except the engine and propeller. The wings frames were intact with some of the left wing frame members melted near the cockpit. The post-crash fire destroyed cockpit instruments and panel. Landing gear was flattened outward and most of the under part of the cockpit was destroyed.

After the post-crash fire was extinguished the fuel tank contained fuel. Fuel sample pulled from the fuel truck that the aircraft had fueled from prior to the flight was clean. Fuel samples pulled from the airport fuel farm was clean.

Flight control cables were intact and had continuity to all flight control surfaces.

The banner release mechanism for hook number one was open. The mechanisms for hooks two and three were closed. All three mechanism actuated, latched, and release properly under a test load.

On May 19, 2023, examination of Lycoming O-540-B2B5 engine, serial number L-8534-40 found no abnormalities. The front of the engine block was cracked from impact. Examination found no foreign material contamination and diaphragm was in normal condition. The engine crank shaft, pistons and lifters moved normally under manual power. Borescope inspection found no anomalies internally. Spark plugs found to be in normal operational condition.

Soon after leaving the banner pickup area HWO tower ask the pilot if everything was alright because he was descending. The pilot replied, "I'm trying to keep climbing." After switching to FLL tower, ATC acknowledged the aircraft at 700 feet. At approximately 16:33 UTC the pilot told FLL tower, I might have to drop this banner, I'm not climbing. At approximately 16:35 UTC the pilot told FLL tower I'm at 400 I gotta drop this over a lake.

Video shows the aircraft was flying in a nose up attitude before releasing the banner. The pilot released the banner over the Hollywood Water Treatment Plant pond. Immediately after releasing the banner the aircraft rolled right, then rolled left, then pitched down and descended rapidly. Video surveillance shows the aircraft impacted North Park Rd in a near vertical nose down attitude.

Examination of the banner, rope, hook, and attachment ring revealed all parts in normal condition. Banner fabric had no tears.

Juan C Garcia
IIC/Aviation Safety Inspector