



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Brian C. Rayner
Senior Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: June 4, 2019
Person Contacted: David Ferguson – Witness
NTSB Accident Number: ERA19FA184 Cape May, NJ

Narrative:

Mr. Ferguson was on the beach in Cape May, NJ, when his attention was drawn to the airplane. He witnessed the accident, and later provided an email statement that recounted what he observed. He was also interviewed briefly by telephone, and then later added more detail in subsequent emails. The following are excerpts from that email chain.

I walk the beach from the Mt. Vernon entrance to the first surf break beyond the lighthouse every day. I'd walked out and started my return, probably a bit after 11:00 a.m. Just west of the WWII battery I saw a single engine plane flying parallel to the beach but only about 10 feet above the water. It appeared stable and in control but then dipped, hit the water, and skipped up out of control. It climbed steeply gaining perhaps 100-200 feet, stalled, turned downward, and plunged almost straight into the water perhaps 500 feet off shore, directly off or slightly west of the battery. I'd been walking along the water line but started up the beach after the plane skipped off the water because it looked like he might crash into the beach where I was. A couple of people called 911. We watched the crash sight for any sign of the pilot or debris but saw nothing. About 10 minutes after the crash a strong smell of fuel came ashore, dissipating after 15 minutes or so. A few minutes after that, the first emergency pickup arrived from the Cove, sending a surfer and two swimmers into the water east of the battery.

After the plane first touched the water then began its steep climb, it was white. (The underbelly I assume.) When it reached the top of its climb, stalled, and started falling, it

was a darker color. (I believe it had rotated and I was now seeing the top side of the plane.)

The plane climbed at an angle of perhaps 65-70 degrees. It fell, I believe, at slightly steeper angle, perhaps 75-80 degrees.

Hey, this may be too much information or too low a quality but I realized I can give you a rough estimate of the time that elapsed between when I first saw the plane strike the water and it crashed.

Low tide at the lighthouse on 5/29 was at 11:05 a.m. I was walking east at water level when the plane crashed. The three other witnesses close to me were on the sand above the high tide line (two to the NE and one (the young blonde-haired woman who called 911) behind me to the NW). There was another group of witnesses farther along the beach to the east of the battery. (I hope you heard from them. The plane flew right by them. They would have watched it and they clearly saw it crash.) They were also, I believe, all above the high tide line. So, for what it's worth, my vantage point was from the water line and therefore perhaps 10 feet below that of the other nearby witnesses.

When I first saw the plane it was flying toward me parallel to the beach. It then struck the water, lost control, and began climbing steeply. As soon as this happened, judging that the plane might crash into the beach where I was, I turned slightly north and started walking away from the water, up the beach toward the high tide line. By the time I realized the plane wouldn't hit me, I was a little more than half way up and stopped walking. The plane crashed into the water a couple of seconds later.

When I wrote up my notes on 5/29, I didn't give an estimate of the amount of time that elapsed between when I saw the plane first strike the water to when (after climbing and falling) it then crashed into the ocean. I guessed it was maybe five seconds but had little confidence in this, which is why I didn't include it in my account. I realized, however, that I could get a better estimate by retracing my steps at that spot on the beach about 15 minutes after a low tide. I did this yesterday afternoon. 15 seconds is the estimate I arrived at.