



Investigator Name: Brian C. Rayner
Title: Senior Air Safety Investigator
Division: AS-ERA

Date: [04/02/2024]

Subject: ERA23LA071 Gaithersburg, MD - Media Interview with Accident Pilot

Contact: Patrick Merkle - Accident Pilot

Mr. Merkle sat down for an interview with a local media outlet in the Washington, DC metropolitan area (DC News Now) about the accident cited above, and the interview was viewed on their website.

In the on-camera interview, Mr. Merkle was asked what "ultimately led to the plane crash" and he stated, "Quite obviously I was flying too low." He was then asked why he didn't divert to another airport, to which he replied, "The possibility of diverting the flight to another airport always exists... it's extremely inconvenient to everybody on the ground." When asked if he wished he had diverted to another airport Mr. Merkle said, "Of course. There were airplanes ahead of us who diverted."

When challenged by the reporter as to why he chose to fly "knowing the weather was going to be bad" Mr. Merkle replied, "Well, I've been trained to fly in bad weather." He went on to explain his risk assessment for the flight and determined the risk was "manageable and marginal... people need to know this kind of stuff does happen. I seem to be a lightning rod for more of it than others..." referencing his previous plane crash in 1992 (NTSB ID - SEA92LA173) where the NTSB cited his "poor inflight decision."