MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Flight Instructor Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: December 31, 2020
Person Contacted: Zachariah Whitesell (Flight Instructor)
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA081

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

Mr. Zachariah Whitesell, along with his attorney, Mr. Michael Brannigan, called me on December 31, 2020, at 1338 EST. Mr. Whitesell provided an e-mail address of [redacted] and a phone number of [redacted]

At the beginning of the interview Mr. Whitesell was advised that the NTSB is a federal agency mandated by Congress to investigate aircraft accidents, and NTSB has no authority to take any action against any individual. He was also informed that the purpose of an NTSB investigation is for safety only, and any person NTSB talks with has the right to representation; he agreed to the interview with representation and would like the memo sent to Mr. Brannigan for review.

Mr. Whitesell was hospitalized for one week. His injuries included a broken femur requiring surgery, a broken wrist requiring surgery, a broken nose, and facial abrasions requiring stiches. Mr. Hartley suffered burns on his hands and face, and Mr. Symanski suffered a broken hand and jaw, and 3rd degree burns on his legs. Mr. Whitesell was in front right seat, Mr. Symanski was in left front seat and Mr. Hartley was in rear, right seat. The airplane was equipped with lap belts, which were used by all occupants to the best of Mr. Whitesell's knowledge.

They had fueled at Zephyr Hills, where they filled the tanks to the tabs. They had completed a weight and balance prior to landing at Zephyr Hills so they knew how much fuel to take on. The put in approximately 20gl of fuel in Zephyrhills and had an approximate total of 35gl of fuel at takeoff. It was a dual instruction flight. They performed touch and go maneuvers Zephyr Hills, then due to a meeting Mr. Hartley had, they flew back to TPA.

Everything was smooth and normal. They contacted TPA Approach and received clearance to enter the Class B airspace at 2,500 feet MSL. They were vectored to a visual approach to 1R. Mr. Whitesell noticed that in looking at the VASIs/PAPIs that the descent path was starting to get slightly low. He advised Mr. Symanski, "Hey, we're getting a bit low. Let's correct that." Mr. Symanski attempted to add power; however, the engine did not respond. He advised Mr. Whitesell that "the throttle is not responding." Mr. Whitesell immediately assumed the controls and pitched for best glide speed. He pushed the throttle to full IN, yet the tachometer indicated only 1000 rpm.

He checked to make sure the electronic fuel pump was on (it was), both magnetos were on (they were), pulled out the carburetor heat knob for about 5-10 seconds (the engine was not running rough so he did not suspect carburetor icing, but he wanted to double check). There was a drop in RMP, but no subsequent increase, so he pushed the carburetor heat back in. When he pushed the mixture to full rich, it was already at full rich and both the fuel pump and magnetos were on. He pushed the mixture in to full rich, cycled the throttle once (increase of 200 rpm), cycled it again with no increase in RPM, then declared an emergency. He explained again that the engine was not running rough at any point during the flight, but the throttle was not responding – the engine was basically at idle. The propeller never ceased.

It became clear to Mr. Whitesell that the airplane was not going to reach the runway even though he was maintaining best glide speed. He saw the small road lined up with runway and he was trying to avoid buildings, trees, and power lines. The airplane struck the power lines and power pole and caught fire. The airplane then banked 45° right wing down and fell to the ground. After impact, Mr. Whitesell opened his door latch, unlatched his seatbelt, and rolled off the wing and onto the ground. He yelled for his students to get out of the airplane. They were able to successfully egress and were assisted by bystanders until emergency crews arrived.

Mr. Whitesell added that he has flown this airplane many times, and he has never felt that there was anything wrong with engine. He has never experienced a bad run-up or any engine issues. This was very surprising to him.

The call ended at 1411 EST.

This digest was e-mailed to Mr. Brannigan for Mr. Whitesell to review on December 31, 2020, at 1430 EST. The corrected digest was received on January 6, 2021 and all additions were incorporated. The corrected digest was e-mailed to Mr. Brannigan on January 6, 2021 at 2:26 pm.

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Flight Instructor statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: March 12, 2021
Person Contacted: Zachariah Whitesell (Flight Instructor)
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA081

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

- I asked Mr. Whitesell what he had taught Mr. Symanski as a before landing flow during the few hours of instruction he had provided in the accident airplane.
- For the configuration and before landing check he taught: fuel pump on, carb heat IN, mixture full, flaps 10, throttle 17. He did not teach Mr. Symanski to change fuel tanks on the fuel selector before landing.
- He stated that he would typically only change fuel tanks on the ground during prelight run-up or in the air when they needed to switch tanks after about 30 minutes of flying and if they were near an airport.
- He stated that he did not recall if they performed a preflight inspection after refueling that day but that he was certain they had not switched fuel tanks on the flight back to Tampa, and the engine was running smoothly up until the point they realized that it was no longer producing power.
- I asked if at any time during the approach he witnessed Mr. Symanski reach down to change the fuel selector, and he responded, “no.” He added that Mr. Symanski was a new student, and generally would not take any actions without first asking, or without receiving specific guidance to take an action.
- I asked if, during the forced landing, Mr. Whitesell had instructed Mr. Symanski to turn off the fuel selector, and he responded, “No.”
- I asked how many times he and Mr. Hartley, the airplane owner, had flown the airplane since the fuel selector valve was replaced, and he responded, “12 hours.” They had switched tanks during those lessons if they had been flying for 30 minutes and if they were near an airport. He did not recall if they did a preflight or changed tanks before returning to TPA, and they did not change tanks during the flight.

- I asked if he had any other information to share, and he stated that during a discussion he had with Mr. Hartley, Mr. Hartley told him that he was videotaping their approach into Tampa on his phone on the day of the accident, with his phone resting on the top of the left pilot's seat, and when Mr. Symanski readjusted his seat, it wiggled the video during the approach and that is why he knew that he was readjusting his seat. Mr. Hartley had noted that the engine failure occurred not to long after that.

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Aircraft Owner/Passenger Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: March 11, 2021; 1056 EST
Person Contacted: Mark Hartley (Aircraft Owner/Passenger)
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA081

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

Mr. Hartley owned the accident airplane and confirmed that the fuel selector was mounted on the airplane's left sidewall near the pilot's left leg. He stated that it was a 3-position fuel selector with the left tank at the 10 o'clock position, the right tank at the 2 o'clock position and the "off" at the 6 o'clock position. He stated that during the airplane's last annual, they replaced the fuel selector valve with a new one. He stated that when he looked the valve before it was installed it seemed to him that it went "off" when moved between the left and right tank positions. This seemed unsafe to him and he asked the mechanic about it and was assured that the valve was new and "FAA approved." He noted that there was a small détente on it, but no safety. I asked if he could locate the type of replacement valve that was installed and let me know.

He stated that on the day of the accident, he was sitting in the backseat and watching the student and flight instructor in the front seats. He stated that Mr. Symanski (student) had repositioned in his seat shortly before beginning the approach. Mr. Hartley was observing the approach when Mr. Symanski attempted to add power and the engine did not respond. He stated that things went very quickly after. Mr. Whitesell (flight instructor) took the controls, scanned all the gauges, attempted to restore power, and declared an emergency. Mr. Hartley was scanning the instrument panel from the back seat and noticed that the fuel pressure was showing zero. He went to move his microphone to his mouth in order to tell the others, but that is when the airplane impacted the power lines. He wondered if when Mr. Symanksi repositioned himself in his seat prior to the approach if he may have moved the fuel selector to "off" inadvertently.

This digest was e-mailed to Mr. Hartley to review on March 11, 2021, and again on March 16, 2021, at 0931EDT. Mr. Hartley stated during a phone call on March 17 that the digest was accurate.

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Student Pilot Statement

Lynn Spencer
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region Aviation

Date: March 16, 2021; 1425 EDT
Person Contacted: Anthony Symanski, student pilot
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA081

Narrative:

The following is a summary of a conversation that occurred with the individual named above:

Mr. Symanski called in response to my request for a phone call. He indicated that he was healing well and had no recollection of moving the fuel selector to the "OFF" position during the approach to Tampa Airport. He stated that if he had known that he had inadvertently moved the fuel selector, he would have immediately addressed that.