



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Mitchell Gallo
Aviation Accident Investigator
Central Region

Person Contacted: Sean Binger,
NTSB Accident Number: CEN22FA298
Date: July 7, 2022

Narrative:

During a telephone conversation, Sean Binger stated that Buck Martin was his friend. The evening before July 2, 2022, Sean Martin messaged Buck Martin that they were in town from Florida for the weekend with N5235P and how available was he (Buck Martin). The flight with Buck Martin was to “familiarize himself” with N5235P and get him “checked off” with the airplane, so that he (Sean Binger) would be able to finish his requirements toward a private pilot certificate.

The evening of July 1, 2022, they planned for an 0830 departure from IL48 to EYE where they planned to pick up Buck Martin and get lunch. Buck Martin flew into Indianapolis because his planned flight at Delta Airlines was cancelled, and Buck Martin asked if they wanted to fly out and meet him and get lunch.

On the morning of July 2, 2022, they looked at the radar and saw a storm coming in from the west, so they decided not to have lunch and return to IL48 before the weather arrived. They departed about 0730 – 0800 from IL48. They fueled the airplane before departure from IL48 and “topped off the tanks” from the previous flight that was from Cape Girardeau to IL48 by adding “roughly” 11.8 gallons.

They departed IL48, and while en route, they had a tailwind. They set the mixture for a fuel flow of about 11gph, 12 gph, at an altitude of about 9,500 ft. mean sea level. It was a “very uneventful” flight to EYE. They parked and met Buck Martin and then departed without refueling, because based on their planning “they knew” that the round trip was within their “flight window,” with the winds and the “fuel available.”

Sean Binger said that during the flight to IL48 from EYE, he sat in the back seat and Buck Martin sat in the right seat so that Buck Martin could have some time at the controls and to familiarize himself. Buck Martin is a Delta Airlines pilot with an airline transport pilot certificate.

Sean Binger said that the return flight to IL 48 was “very uneventful,” and the fuel flow was 14 gph because of a slight headwind at 8,500 ft. mean sea level. The enroute flight time from IL48 to EYE was about 1:20 hours and the return flight to EYE was about 1:30-1:40 hours, which had a “little bit of a head wind.” The total flight time was “just over” 3 hours and they had 4 – 4:30 hours of useable fuel. He said the airplane fuel tanks had a 30 gallon capacity. They factored a 2 gallon loss and used a fuel quantity of 58 gallons in planning for all their flights.

Sean Binger said that after landing at IL48, he exited the airplane, and Robert Binger and Buck Martin then switched seats. They had five “successful” full stop taxi back landings. On the last takeoff there was “positive climb”, he heard the engine “sputter,” saw the airplane sink, the gear retracted, and the airplane began to climb. The airplane rolled right, nosed down, and impacted the ground.

Sean Binger said the airplane fuel tanks had bladders and they had an issue on a flight last year from Florida to IL48, during which he was seated in the right seat and saw fuel coming out of the right fuel tank cap during level flight. They landed without incident and inspected the airplane. They found broken clips or clips that were not in position that held the bladder to fully expand it. They purchased new clips and gaskets and ensured that the clips in both tanks were in place and intact. They then performed 5 gallon incremental refills to check fuel levels.

Sean Binger said that prior to the flight on July 2, 2022, he filled both tanks to the overflow hole on the filler neck. He said he filled it to the “base of the bulkhead neck at the overflow hole.” The airplane was an earlier model with an older gasket style cap, and it was a screw on style cap. He said the Robert Binger performed the preflight of the airplane at IL48. Sean Binger said he picked up Robert Binger and they drove together to IL48.

Sean Binger said that during the flight to EYE, he sat in the right seat and Robert Binger sat in the left seat. They made it a “habit” to fly 30 – 35 minutes on each fuel tank and then change fuel tank selections. Typically, they would start on the right fuel tank and then switch to the left fuel tank, back and forth.

Sean Binger said that at EYE, Buck Martin was wearing street clothes. Buck Martin arrived overnight and made his way out to EYE in the morning. Buck Martin had luggage and his pilot bag with him. After the accident, both bags were given to his wife, who was at the IL48 when the accident occurred. Sean Binger removed the luggage, which was in the rear cargo compartment of the airplane. The flight bag was later recovered out after Buck Martin was extricated from the wreckage.

Sean Binger said they did not get any services at EYE. Upon arrival at EYE, they shut down the airplane and picked up Buck Martin. They did an “abrupt” pre-flight, during which they checked flight controls to ensure they were intact but did not check the fuel tanks.

Sean Binger said they “expedited” a taxi for a straight-out departure after a run-up. He said Buck Martin had a “normal appearance,” and Buck Martin told them that he took a nap while waiting for them.

Sean Binger said that he performed the airplane preflight at EYE. He did a “quick aileron check,” checked the lights, and checked the wing tips. Sean Binger said they did not sump the fuel and did not check fuel level during the pre-flight.

Sean Binger said that Robert Binger performed the takeoff from EYE and initial climb. Robert Binger contacted air traffic control and received flight following. Sean Martin said that at “some point in the middle of the flight,” Buck Martin took the controls.

Sean Binger said that he was not aware of Buck Martin having ever flown the accident make and model of airplane. They were working on getting Buck Martin “proficient” on flying the airplane and Buck Martin had flown a lot of low wing airplanes. They were trying to get Buck Martin familiarized with the airplane for purposes of Sean Binger’s training. Buck Martin was his original instructor during which they used a Piper PA 28 Warrior II based in Ocala. They sold the Piper PA 28 and then purchased N5235P. Buck Martin provided instruction as a family friend, and he was a friend before he acted as an instructor for Sean Binger.

Sean Binger said the engine runup at EYE was a “normal runup” They did magneto check, one or two propeller checks, they did not perform three propeller checks since it was not a cold run up. Everything was “normal,” and there were no issues with the magneto drops and the idle cutoff.

Sean Binger said that the fuel selector was on the right fuel tank for takeoff from EYE. About 35 minutes after takeoff, Sean Binger told them to switch tanks. They flew on the left tank “probably a little bit longer than we should have.” They selected the right fuel before final approach to IL48; Sean Binger said it may still have been selected to the left fuel. Sean Binger said it was “his job to keep an eye on the fuel.” The electric fuel pump was used on takeoff and landing and during inflight fuel tank selector changes.

Sean Binger said the only engine problem that they ever had during their ownership of the airplane was an intermittent rpm drop that was attributed to a broken P-lead, which was replaced. Robert Bringer had a mechanic certificate with airframe and power plant ratings and was the “primary mechanic for the airplane. The only other major issue aside from the P-lead was the fuel bladder issue they had with the airplane. The oil changes were routine, at 40-50 hours. The fuel filters never had metal. When they upgraded the avionics, they installed an inline fuel transducer from EI and a digital fuel flow gauge. Bobby Yonge or Yoge performed the airplane annual inspections and was a former neighbor who endorsed Robert Binger for his mechanics certificate through Baker School of Aeronautics. Bobby Yonge/Yoge is based at Ocala.

Sean Binger said the right fuel gauge showed just under a ¼ tank, and the left gauge showed just under ½ tank when he exited the airplane at IL48, and there was about 12 gallons of fuel remaining. The airplane was not shutdown when he exited the airplane at IL48.

Sean Binger said there was no rush for Buck Martin to complete the takeoffs and landings. Sean Binger took a single video of the first or second takeoff that just captured the takeoff to climb before turning crosswind. He said the airplane performed as it “normally should have,” and it did not sound like anything was “out of the ordinary.”

When the IIC asked Sean Binger if Buck Martin had questions regarding the airplane during the flight to IL48, Sean Binger said that the rear headsets were not connected and did not know the “full conversation” between Robert Binger and Buck Martin.

Sean Binger said that he needed an hour of solo flying and the last three hours of instruction for his private pilot exam.

Sean Binger said they were originally from the St. Jacob, Illinois, area, and the majority of the family is from the area.

Sean Martin said that there was convective activity and that is why they expedited their flight. During the takeoffs and landings, it was still VFR conditions and there was some cloud cover moving in, but the weather was above airport traffic pattern weather minimums. They had an iPad mounted at the left front pilot seat with Foreflight and used that for weather information. He said he removed the iPad, and the iPad was damaged.

Sean Binger said he talked to Buck Martin after the accident, and Buck Martin told him they took off, retracted the landing gear, the engine sputtered, and Robert Binger reached down to change fuel selector positions. He did not remember the wing dripping. Sean Binger said that Buck Martin said that there were trees in front of him and he put the nose down and tried to turn the airplane to the right to avoid the trees. Sean Binger said that Buck Martin remembered a loud bang and seeing Sean Binger. Buck Martin did not remember that the right wing lost airspeed and developed a right stall spin. Sean Binger saw Buck Martin on Sunday and Monday at the hospital and is doing well.

Sean Binger said they have the pilot and aircraft logbooks.

Sean Binger said he sumped the fuel prior to departing IL48. There is a single sump on the airplane, which was on the gascolator. Sean Binger said he only saw fuel staining at the on top of the wings that was attributed to filling the tanks to the very top.

Sean Binger said the Robert Binger and Buck Martin were wearing their lap belts.

Sean Binger said the estimated engine time since overhaul was 700-900 hrs. in 2012, 2014 by Mantucket.

Sean Binger said there were no changes in wind and it was relatively calm. It was not a windy front when it got to the airport. There was not a lot of wind.

When the IIC asked Sean Binger if he had any concerns, he said that it was with fuel starvation or a mechanical problem of the engine because of the way the engine sounded and the sputtering that occurred during initial climb.

Sean Binger said they used no flaps for takeoffs.

Sean Binger said he was standing at the FBO porch at IL48 at the time of the accident.

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Aviation Accident Investigator
Central Region

Person Contacted: Joe Garrett, [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: CEN2
Date: July 6, 2022

Narrative:

During a telephone conversation, Joe Garrett stated that he did not see N5235P, but heard the airplane. They had been doing touch and go landing. He was not counting how many touch and go landings they had performed; he said they performed "a few." During each takeoff, he would hear the airplane "power up." Mr. Garrett was in the hangar working on an airplane with the doors open. On the last touch and go, he heard them power up and heard the propeller noise go silent, but he did not know if the engine "went to idle." He looked out the hangar door and did not see anything for about a second. He then saw 4-5 people running towards the end of tall hangar across from him. One girl was yelling "oh my God they crashed." He started running and when he got to the corner of the hangar, he could see the airplane in the field. He then got his truck and drove to the accident site.

The hangar blocked his view and was unable to see the airplane climb out. The airplane would have been easily less than 400 ft. for him the airplane. Based on his available view, while at his hangar, the airplane would have had to have been 400 ft. agl or higher for him see the airplane. He heard from somebody else that the airplane climbed to only 150 ft.

He did not talk to Robert or Sean Binger on the morning of the accident. Mr. Garrett went to the fuel pumps, and they left receipt in the pump showing they put 11.8 gallons of fuel into the airplane at 0802.

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Mitchell Gallo
Aviation Accident Investigator
Central Region

Person Contacted: Buck Martin
NTSB Accident Number: CEN22FA298
Date: July 26, 2022

Narrative:

During a Zoom meeting, Buck Martin was represented by his attorney, William DeYoung. St. Louis FAA FSDO Inspectors Dawn Sherlow and Robert Prenger were participants.

Buck Martin stated that he was employed as a pilot for Delta Airlines. Buck Martin stated that he was in Los Angeles when he received a call from the son of Robert Binger, Sean Binger, asking for him to accompany them on a flight in their new Piper Comanche. Buck Martin stated that his work flight with Delta Airlines from Los Angeles, California, to St. Louis, Missouri, was cancelled, and he obtained a flight from Los Angeles to Cincinnati, Ohio. Buck Martin stated that he asked Sean Binger to pick him up in Cincinnati, and that they could get a hamburger and make it a fun trip. Buck Martin stated that they originally planned to have Buck Martin's wife, Robert Martin, and Sean Martin pick him up in Cincinnati and have brunch. After reviewing the weather, they decided that it was best to leave Cincinnati as early as possible with weather approaching from the west into the Illinois area. Buck Martin stated that his wife decided to wait in Illinois due to the earlier departure. Buck Martin said that Robert and Sean Binger flew to Eagle Creek Airpark (EYE), Indianapolis, Indiana, to pick up him up. Buck Martin stated that when they arrived at EYE, they met him inside a fixed base operator (FBO) at the airport. Buck Martin stated that Robert and Sean Binger used the FBO restroom, and they all climbed into the accident airplane to depart. Buck Martin stated that he was seated in the right pilot seat, Robert Binger was seated in the left pilot seat, and Sean Binger was seated in a rear seat. Buck Martin said the flight in the accident aircraft was the first time that he flew aboard a Piper Comanche. During the flight, they talked about the airplane, engine power settings, and flap settings. The airplane was equipped with an autopilot/wing leveler and a new Garmin GPS. Midway through the flight, Robert Binger asked if Buck Martin wanted to take the controls, which Buck Martin did. Buck Martin said he performed a full stop landing at St. Louis Metro-East Airport/Shافر Field (IL48), St. Jacob, Illinois, upon arrival. Buck Martin said Sean Binger exited the aircraft

and they switched pilot seats so that Buck Martin was seated in the left pilot seat and Robert Binger was in the right pilot seat, and Sean Binger stayed on the ground. Buck Martin stated that they taxied to and departed from runway 13 and remained in the airport traffic pattern from which Buck Martin performed five full-stop takeoff and landings. Buck Martin said the airplane was “not far off the ground” and “just above the treetops” when the engine lost power during climbout from the sixth takeoff. Buck Martin said that “we” lowered the landing gear and Robert Binger said, “I have the airplane.” Buck Martin said he saw Robert Binger reach down, and it looked like he was taking actions that you would undertake following engine power loss. Buck Martin said it looked like Robert Binger turned the airplane toward the right “pretty aggressively” and the airplane quickly descended in a nose low attitude into the ground.

Buck Martin stated that he was unaware if the accident aircraft was refueled at EYE, and the aircraft was not refueled at IL48.

When Buck Martin was asked if he believed Robert Binger stalled the accident aircraft, Buck Martin stated that he felt that Robert Binger had the aircraft under control, and it was not clear that there were any aircraft indications of a stall, such as a stall horn sounding.

Buck Martin stated that the flight from EYE to IL48 was 1 hour 15 minutes and they had spent about 20-30 minutes to complete the five takeoffs and landings at IL48.

Buck Martin stated that he was a Delta Airlines Boeing 757 and 767 pilot, and he was not current flying single engine airplanes and did not have landing currency in single engine airplane for years.

I asked but if there was any discussion between Robert Binger and Buck Martin concerning the systems of the aircraft. Buck Martin stated that during the flight back to Shafer, there was approximately 30 minutes of discussion over various systems, power settings and airspeeds. No specific system was discussed.

Buck Martin stated that in the airport traffic pattern, an aircraft indicated airspeed of 100 mph was used, on base and final it was 80 mph, take off rotation speed was 75 mph and climb out was 80 mph or 100 mph. No flaps were used for landing or take off.

Buck Martin stated there were no performance issues with the aircraft prior to the accident.

Buck Martin stated that there were no weather issues between EYE and IL48.

Buck Martin stated that during the flight from EYE to IL48, Robert Binger had set the aircraft to cruise setting; the propeller was at 2,400 rpm and that Robert Binger used an EGT gauge, and the manifold pressure was set at 24 inches. Buck Martin stated that Robert Binger liked to buy fuel and ran the aircraft engine mixture rich.

Buck Martin stated that Robert Binger performed an aircraft runup prior to departing EYE and there were no issues, and Robert Binger did all the normal checks that Buck Martin expected to see.

Buck Martin stated that after arrival at IL48 from EYE, the aircraft was not shutdown.

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Person Contacted: Stuart Meyers, [REDACTED]
NTSB Accident Number: CEN22FA298
Date: July 7, 2022

Narrative:

During a telephone conversation, Stuart Meyers stated that he lives at [REDACTED]. He said his house backs up to St. Louis Metro-East Airport/Shafer Field. He said that he has previously been to the airport.

Mr. Meyers said he was outside replacing his mailbox at his house at the time of the accident. The only reason he was outside was to replace his mailbox because it was a hot day and "bordering" on raining. When he began to install the mailbox, it began to "lightly rain." He saw and heard the entire accident. He said he heard airplane engines being run-up at the airport on previous occasions.

Mr. Meyers said that saw N5235P perform two or three full stop taxi backs. During the first taxi back, he saw Sean Binger making a video recording of the airplane. Mr. Meyers said he likes to watch airplanes that have retractable landing gear and that is the only reason he was paying attention to N5235P, because it had retractable landing gear.

Mr. Meyers heard the airplane taking off again and looked to watch for the retractable gear. He heard the "engine start to sputter right after it lost power in and out couple of times." The right wing then dropped down, and the airplane started to rotate clockwise as viewed from above. He saw the airplane descend behind a hill with a soybean field, at which time he lost sight of the airplane. When the plane hit the ground, he heard Sean Binger holler and Sean Bringer started to run toward the crash site but turned around and got into his truck. Mr. Meyers also ran towards the accident site.

Mr. Meyers said the airplane lost power, the power came back and then lost power; he did not think the engine regained power again. He said that it sounded like the engine did not lose complete power, and it seemed as if it lost its ability to produce full power.

Mr. Meyers said he talked to Sean Meyers a little bit after the accident. Mr. Meyers friend, Trenton, told him there were some “great people” he had to meet, and those people were the ones that were involved in the accident.

Mr. Meyers said that during the takeoff and landings of N5235P, the airplane stopped just beyond the halfway point of the runway. They were not trying to stop the airplane “really fast.” The airplane would taxi back to the beginning of the runway after each landing. The airplane would lift off “just before the midway point” of the runway, and the accident takeoff was no different from the previous takeoffs, but it just lost power during climb.

Mr. Meyers said there was no lightning from the west/southwest and it was just light rain. It started to “lightly rain” and then he saw the airplane takeoff. He “wondered” if the pilots saw the forecast because nobody at the airport performed takeoffs and landings in the rain or after dark because the runway is not well lit and most people would want to fly on a “calm and pretty day.” There were no other airplanes taking off and landing while N5235P taking off and landing.

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