



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Timothy W. Monville
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 24, 2021
Person Contacted: Rex G. Dowtin
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA153

Narrative:

Mr. Dowtin was contacted by phone on March 12, 2021, at 1331 EDT. The call was made to [REDACTED]. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

At the beginning of the interview he 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 without representation.

He indicated that he has owned the airplane since 2005¹. His total time is about 575 hours, of which about 400 hours were in the accident airplane. The airplane is based at 3NR3. He reported no recent work to the normal brakes, nose landing gear, flight controls or nose landing gear steering system. His airplane was equipped with Aspen Multi-Function Display (Aspen MFD), a Garmin GNS530W, a Garmin GMX200 Multi Function Display and an iPad.

He indicated that he was a Master Crew Chief on a B-52D. As such, his preflight inspections are very thorough.

He confirmed that the accident occurred between 1300 and 1330 EST on March 7, 2021.

On the morning of the accident he noted it was very cold outside. As such he had the oil heater plugged in from the night before. He performed an in-depth preflight inspection which included a check of the flight controls, oil quantity, cowling latches, accessory drive belt, etc.

¹ According to FAA records T Rex LLC purchased the airplane on November 13, 2007.

He departed 3NR3 between 0830 and 0900 EST, and flew about 1.5 hours to Lynchburg, VA (LYH), where he performed 2 landings; both were uneventful. He reported it was calm air during the flight. After landing he taxied to Freedom Aviation where he planned to go on a test flight with a technician regarding an angle of attack probe that was installed and linked to his Aspen MFD.

He departed LYH and reported the ride conditions were too rough and they could not calibrate the AOA probe. The flight returned to LYH where he landed uneventfully and dropped off the technician.

He departed LYH en route to 3NR3 and reported moderate to severe turbulence while flying at 8,500 ft mean sea level (msl). He descended to 6,500 ft msl and when near his destination tuned the automated terminal information service (ATIS) for Asheville Regional Airport (AVL), Asheville, North Carolina, adding that his destination airport had a recently installed weather reporting system but you needed WIFI to access it and that part was not operational.² He also indicated that 3NR3 was equipped with 3 windsocks. The “big” windsock depicted a crosswind from left to right and it was at 15 knots, or straight out. He flew over 3NR3 and the airport windsock was favoring runway 9. He flew past 3NR3 to the west, and set up for landing on runway 9. He maintained 85 knots, and went flaps down when on approach. He lined up with the runway on final approach with either a bad tailwind or crosswind and landing hard. He applied the brakes and the right brake felt “soft.” The airplane went off the runway and the airplane spun 180° with the right wing off the runway.

He added that there was another pilot with him Robert Poole, who is not a certified flight instructor.

NTSB Follow-Up Questions –

During his preflight inspection did he notice any leaks on the ground by either main landing gear?

No, if there had been he would have seen it and would not have flown the airplane.

Did he experience any brake issues during takeoff?

No. He did not experience any brake issues at LYH where he performed 2 full-stop taxi back landings. He did not have any issues with the brakes while taxiing or at the hold-short area at LYH before takeoff.

On approach what was the airplane configuration?

Full flaps were lowered at 85 knots and he had 3 green lights indicating all landing gears were down and locked.

What was his touchdown point along the runway?

He indicated runway 9 was 3,000 by 50 ft, and there is a taxiway to the left maybe 250-300 ft from the approach end of the runway. He landed about that location.

² According to Google Earth, 3NR3 was located about 207° and 12 nm from AVL.

NTSB Follow-Up Questions Continued–

Did WIFI allow him to access the wind?

The WIFI does not work, and because of that he never tried to use it.

When did the soft brake issue first become evident?

On the landing roll. Between the wind and the soft right brake it all happened so fast.

What side of the runway did the airplane go off of?

The left side.

How deep was the ditch?

Maybe 6 inches. The left landing gear went into mud causing it to collapse.

When was the last annual inspection?

It was November 2020. Since then he has flown the airplane about 10 hours. That included the 2 hour flight from LYH to 3NR3 (accident flight).

Did he look at the right brake postaccident?

No, it was in the mud and pretty dirty.

Does he have the phone number for Mr. Poole?

It is on him. He will get and will give to me.

Did he have any air traffic control communications during the accident flight?

Yes. Atlanta Air Route Traffic Control Center, AVL ATCT, and Greensboro ATCT.

Did he have a flight plan filed for the accident flight?

No.

Describe the wind?

He was dealing with a 15 knot crosswind. On his flight over to 3NR3 it showed as 9 knots, but in final approach it showed a crosswind and felt like he had a tailwind. He had a “moderate to hard landing.”

Was Mr. Poole on the flight controls with him?

No. He does not know if the right brake issue caused the veering.

Was he or his pilot-rated passenger recording video during the landing?

No.

Was there anybody at the airport at the time of the accident?

Yes. After the accident a man came out of a hangar and went to the accident site.

The call ended at 1402 EST.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on March 24, 2021 and again on April 21, 2021. He replied on April 21, 2021, at 0813 EDT with, "Good Morning, I have no changes to the Draft phone call Summary on March 24th 2021. Rex Downtin." The corrected digest was e-mailed to him on April 21, 2021.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Timothy W. Monville
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 26, 2021
Person Contacted: Robert Robeson Poole
NTSB Accident Number: ERA21LA153

Narrative:

Mr. Poole was contacted by phone on March 25, 2021, at 1130 EDT. The call was made to [REDACTED]. He provided an e-mail address of [REDACTED].

At the beginning of the interview he 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 without representation but was advised that at any point of the discussion if he felt unsure, he should let me know. He asked about the display of his name and was advised that NTSB does not prefer to use anonymous, adding that the fire department and local law enforcement likely have his name associated with the accident.

He was advised that any personally identifiable information (PII) would be redacted and not released into the public domain.

He provided an address of [REDACTED] Penrose, North Carolina [REDACTED]. He holds a commercial pilot certificate, certificate number [REDACTED] with airplane single engine land and instrument airplane ratings. His total flight time is 1,532 hours, of which all but 286 were either in a Cessna 152 or 172 airplane. He has received 305 hours dual training. He did take the flight instructor written examination but never completed the practical oral and flight portion.

Additionally, previously he was the airport manager of the Transylvania Community Airport (3NR3), Brevard, North Carolina.

He was asked the following -

What was his relationship to the pilot?

They were friends. Because he managed 3NR3, they met and became friends when Mr. Dowtin brought his airplane there in 2009. They have been friends since then.

What was the purpose of the flights?

To go to an avionics shop in Virginia to have a technician calibrate the Angle of Attack (AOA) probe/instrument of the Aspen flight display.

Tell the story in detail about the flights that day?

He arrived at 3NR3 about 0730 and made a visual inspection of the runway using his automobile. He was checking for FOD. That was his standard operating procedure (SOP) since he was previously the manager of 3NR3. After completing that he went to Mr. Dowtin's hangar and Mr. Dowtin was already there. They discussed the details about the flight, and Mr. Dowtin did a, "proficient preflight" inspection of the airplane. He (Mr. Poole) followed around the airplane once the airplane was out of the hangar. They got the weather using ForeFlight, but a flight plan was not filed with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic control, but they did obtain visual flight rules (VFR) flight following. After the preflight inspection was completed Mr. Dowtin entered the left seat as pilot-in-command (PIC) while he (Mr. Poole) was in the right front seat. Their SOP when flying together with Mr. Dowtin as PIC is that he (Mr. Poole) handles the radios and communications, getting the automated terminal information service (ATIS), etc. The flight departed 3NR3 between 0800 and 0830 from runway 27 and flew uneventfully in smooth air conditions to Lynchburg Regional Airport/Preston Glenn Field (LYH), Lynchburg, Virginia, where the flight landed about 1.5 hours later. There were no issues with the airplane or its systems during that flight. After landing they taxied to the avionics shop.

About 30 minutes later, the flight departed LYH with a technician in the back of the airplane and Mr. Dowtin as PIC. After takeoff they encountered rough flight conditions and couldn't complete the calibration flight which lasted about 30 to 40 minutes. The technician told them how they could do the calibration procedure themselves and they both felt comfortable being able to do this.

After returning to LYH, the airplane was fueled adding 15 gallons of fuel into each fuel tank, which gave them enough fuel for the intended flight. They departed LYH about 1130 and while en route to 3NR3 while flying at 8,500 ft mean sea level (msl). About 30 to 40 minutes into the flight he suggested to Mr. Dowtin to descend to 6,500 ft msl after encountering moderate to severe turbulence. He made a pilot report concerning the turbulence regarding Atlanta Air Route Traffic Control Center. The flight continued towards 3NR3 and they obtained the winds from Asheville Regional Airport (AVL), Asheville, North Carolina, since there is no weather reporting at 3NR3. When at AVL, they flew their regular/routine route by crossing the extended runway centerline, then about 1 to 2 minutes later began descending. At 3NR3, they entered onto the downwind leg of the airport traffic pattern for runway 9 which allowed them to check the windsocks (1 called the main and 2 others he and Mr. Dowtin installed one each at the approach end of each runway). Based on the main windsock it appeared there would be a direct crosswind. Mr. Dowtin determined to land runway 9, and on final approach of the airport traffic pattern for

that runway the main windsock reflected a wind off the nose at 10 to 11 o'clock or from the north-northeast. Mr. Dowtin maintained 88 (groundspeed based on the Aspen flight display) but he couldn't see the airspeed indicator for landing. On short final before touchdown with the wind from the northeast, the wind shifted 45 to 60° to the other side of the nose of the airplane. The airplane was landed "harder than normal" and when Mr. Dowtin applied the brakes, he felt the airplane pulling to the left. The airplane went off the runway and spun around coming to rest in the opposite direction. He added that on short final at touchdown there may have been a tailwind component, adding that at 3NR3 it is common to have the wind change frequently.

Once the left main landing gear got into mud, the airplane spun around. He noted that 2/3 to 3/4 of the left wing was over the runway after coming to rest. He got out of the airplane and noted the airplane was damaged, but he did not smell any fluids or see any leakage. After about 2 to 3 minutes after they settled down, a person from a hangar at 3NR3 came out to them. Because he was the previous manager of 3NR3, he knew he had to call Asheville Air Traffic Control Tower and alert them of the disable airplane on the runway to have the runway closed. Asheville's procedure is to call fire department, which they did. They showed up in 10 to 12 minutes. Additionally, the NC State Highway Patrol responded and took his driver license and went back into his patrol car.

Subsequently someone from FAA Atlanta, GA called his phone asking for details about the accident. He put that person in touch with Mr. Dowtin. He was told that within 30 to 40 minutes he would be getting a call from an FAA inspector, but after waiting about 1 hour he had not yet received that call. He (Mr. Poole) started calling the FAA to ask if they could recover the airplane.

The airplane was raised and put onto a trailer and secured at 3NR3. He then told AVL ATC that the runway was opened.

NTSB Follow-Up Questions –

What restraint was he wearing and was it loose, or tight?

He was wearing the seatbelt and shoulder harness. The shoulder harness has an inertia reel that stopped him from going forward during the accident sequence. It did cause him to bend at the waist, and it "operated OK."

Did he have any injury?

No.

Explain the weather reporting at 3NR3 and Wifi?

The weather station was installed about 3 months ago on the fuel farm vent. It was self-contained and had a website that can access the reported weather via Wifi while on the ground. He tried to access it on 3 separate occasions while in-flight using an iPhone, an iPad, and also by an Ipad connected to Stratus ADS-B but he was never able to access it in-flight. He used Mr. Dowtin's non-iPhone, on a previous flight, but was unable to access the WiFi report while airborne. Because the airport was unattended on Sunday there was nobody there to give them a wind report.

NTSB Follow-Up Questions Continued –

Was the weather system designed to be accessed in-flight?

All pilot's who operate out of 3NR3 were given an e-mail in either December or January advising that the weather station was accessible via Wifi. The airport owner subsequently asked him if he had received that notice and he said yes but he asked the airport owner if it could be accessed while in-flight 10 miles away. Since 2005, his SOP when arriving at 3NR3 when no-one is present is to cross the airport midfield, enter the downwind leg of the airport traffic pattern for runway 9, and then check the windsocks to see if runway 9 or 27 is favored. If approaching 3NR3 from the North such as the accident flight, simply enter a left downwind for runway 09, which would give a good view of the main windsock and the windsock at the fuel farm. While on the downwind leg for runway 9, that is what they did.

On final leg explain the wind?

As Mr. Dowtin turned onto final approach on extended final centerline, the wind was off the nose 10 to 11 o'clock. Shortly before touchdown, the wind shifted to 1 to 2 o'clock position off the nose, which was about 40 to 50°, and there may have even been a tailwind. Topography near 3NR3 is like a soup bowl with the south edge knocked out. Therefore, the winds can be "squirrely" at any time. While he was the airport manager, he would tell all pilots, especially "newbies" to keep your hand on the throttle in case a go-around is needed.

Did he hear the stall warning while landing?

No.

Explain the flare/roundout?

He indicated that he has flown with Mr. Dowtin a lot and he always nails his landings. This time it, "seemed a bit harder than normal." The pilot did the proper flare, but just landed hard. He did not forget to flare and did not drive the airplane onto the runway.

Did he perceive a steep vertical descent before touchdown?

No.

How long after touchdown did the airplane veer?

Within 2 to 3 seconds after Mr. Dowtin applied the brakes.

Did Mr. Dowtin say anything to him in the moment?

He may have said something or had a verbal reaction to what was happening and said "brake" or something like that.

Was there any problem with the engine?

No.

While at 3NR3 or LYH was there any problem with the normal brakes?

No. It was their standard operating procedure to also test the toe brakes on the right side, and he did so.

NTSB Follow-Up Questions Continued–

Did he feel any issue with the normal brakes during his brake checks?

“Not that he recalled no.”

Was his seat pan or bottom crushed down?

No. It was a sudden stop that pushed him forward. He didn’t notice damage to the seat. He never saw any brake fluid or leaks around the wheels during any of the preflight inspections.

At LYH did Mr. Downtin perform a preflight inspection?

Yes. He did a standard preflight before takeoff to come back to 3NR3, and there was “nothing untoward nothing out of the ordinary.”

He was asked if any flight data was stored for the accident flight?

Not to his knowledge. He did not think Mr. Downtin was using his iPad on the flight from LYH to 3NR3.

Did he have any questions for NTSB?

He asked whether the FAA was coming out to inspect the airplane and when it could be released. He was informed that I was waiting to coordinate an inspection of the airplane and brake system.

The call ended at 1224 EDT.

The digest was e-mailed to him for review on March 26, 2021. He replied on April 9, 2021, at 1046 EDT with comments that were incorporated into the narrative. The corrected digest was e-mailed to him for review on April 21, 2021. He replied on April 22, 2021, at 1813 EDT with, “Mr. Monville, I have reviewed your attached document of my description of the flight - it seems to be in proper order and ready for your final report.” The final version was e-mailed to him on April 22, 2021.