

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety

Central Region

## Group Chairman's Factual Report

Joshua Lindberg

May 6, 2020

### Witness Factual Report

#### 1. ACCIDENT

Location: Lafayette, Louisiana  
Date: December 28, 2019  
Aircraft: Piper PA-31T  
Registration: N42CV  
Operator: Cheyenne Partners LLC  
NTSB Number: CEN20MA044

#### 2. EVENT SUMMARY

On December 28, 2019, about 0921 central standard time, a Piper PA-31T airplane, N42CV, impacted terrain shortly after takeoff from Lafayette Regional Airport/Paul Fournet Field (LFT), Lafayette, Louisiana. The commercial pilot and four passengers were fatally injured; one passenger sustained serious injuries. Two individuals inside a nearby building sustained minor injuries and one individual in a car sustained serious injuries. The airplane was destroyed by impact forces and a postimpact fire. The airplane was registered to Cheyenne Partners LLC and was piloted by an employee of Global Data Systems under the provisions of Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 as a personal flight. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed and a Federal Aviation Administration instrument flight rules flight plan was filed for the flight. The flight was originating at the time of the accident and was en route to Dekalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK), Atlanta, Georgia.

#### 3. DETAILS OF INVESTIGATION

Witness information was received via [witness@ntsb.gov](mailto:witness@ntsb.gov) which was solicited by the NTSB Investigator-in-Charge and broadcast by the local media. Other witness information was obtained from the Lafayette Police Department (LPD) report. Summarized versions of the witness statements are below.

#### 4. WITNESS OBSERVATION SUMMARIES

An LPD Sergeant at the accident site briefly spoke with the surviving passenger. The passenger identified the owner of the airplane and pilot by name. He stated that there were six people onboard the airplane and they departed from LFT and were en route to Atlanta, Georgia for a football game. The passenger stated that all he remembered was “that the plane went straight up and then straight down and he did not know what happened.”

Witness A: About 0920 he heard an airplane’s engine and it sounded like the engine’s power was surging. Then suddenly to the west through the overcast cloud layer at an extremely low altitude, he saw an airplane bank right, then hard left and continued turning left. The airplane descended almost directly overhead and to the north. Before he lost sight of the airplane it was about 85% upside down before it crashed, then he saw the plumes of black smoke.

Witness B: She was inside her apartment at the time and did not visually witness the crash, but she did hear the event. In the seconds before the crash, she heard a very distinct sound of an engine dying or rapidly losing power. This sound lasted for only a few seconds before she heard a crashing sound followed by at least one explosion-type sound.

Witness C: From inside her apartment, she heard the airplane overhead and it sounded as if the engine was straining and that something was loose in the engine. There was a loud rattling sound that lasted as long as it was overhead. Then she heard the airplane hit the electric lines. There was a loud popping sound then the electricity went out. She went outside to see what happened and saw the airplane on fire.

Witness D: She was in her back yard and head/observed a low flying airplane. There was noise coming from the engine and it was flying quite low. She did not see the crash.

Witness E: She did not hear an airplane. She heard a thud and a ripping noise and then there was an explosion. The lights in her apartment quickly flickered, then the lights went out completely.

Witness F: He was about ½ mile from the United State Postal Service (USPS) Post Office. He did not observe the crash, but he did see the airplane pass directly over him about 3 seconds before he heard the first boom. He heard an approaching airplane, looked up, and the airplane came into view from a tree line flying very low. The airplane was banked to the left and disappeared behind another tree.

Witness G: The airplane flew very, very low directly over his house, maybe 150 ft off the ground. Both engines were running and sounded like full throttle. The airplane was flying level but pitched up and down very quickly barely missing powerlines behind the apartment complex. After clearing a set of power lines, it nosedived into another set of power lines on Verot School road. He saw the electrical arc and heard the power surge,

then heard the airplane crash. A few seconds later the fireball rose. He drove to the accident site and arrived at 0926. There was no smoke coming from the airplane in flight. The engines sounded like full throttle they were not sputtering. The airplane was not banking, and the landing gear were up.

Witness H: He was at his place of business [about ¾ mile southeast of the accident site]. He and his son heard the engine at full throttle overhead, the airplane was extremely low. It sounded like it was running wide open on one engine and like the fuel nozzles were spitting fuel or dripping into the engine instead of being vaporized. From his experience as an aviation mechanic and pilot, the sound was not normal.

Witness I: He heard an airplane in the clouds overhead and the engines sounded like they were at full throttle. The airplane popped out of the clouds in a very steep left diving turn passing right over his apartment. The wings leveled before it hit the trees and power lines, then continued into the post office parking lot across the street. The airplane continued the nosedive even when the wings went level. The airplane sounded like it had plenty of power and he did not see any smoke coming from it. The wheels were not down, and it didn't look like the airplane was setting up to land. He estimated that the overcast cloud layer was at 200 ft, there was no rain or surface fog and not much wind.

Witness J: On the morning of the accident she was outside at 0915, the fog was very thick, and the clouds were low on the tree line at the back of the trailer park. She has lived at this location since she was little and has heard many airplanes overhead going to and from the airport. When the accident airplane flew overhead it sounded completely different than any airplane she had heard before. She could hear the airplane flying in the clouds and sounded normal, then she heard the engine get louder, which is something she had not heard before. About 3 seconds after hearing the engine [rev] up the airplane popped out the fog clouds and appeared very close and headed toward her. The airplane was a little above the tree line in the back of the trailer park then instantly made a sharp left turn. When the airplane was out of sight over the apartment complex, she heard the crash. She thought the engine sounded very loud like it was being strained, similar to the sound of airplane taking off from the airport.

Witness K: He and his wife were outside when they heard the roar of the airplane. He looked up and momentarily saw, at very close range, in the tree line along the fence, what he thought was the underside of the left wing and maybe some of the fuselage. The wing was pointing mostly up, and the airplane was flying northwest. The engine sounded like it was accelerating to gain altitude. A moment later they heard the crash, got in the car, and drove along Feu Follet road, past the USPS Post Office and saw fires and debris scattered in the field northwest of the USPS Post Office. There were men in the field, looking toward the burning airplane, and a woman was leading an injured man from the crash. There were some clouds, but the visibility seemed good.

Witness L: He was in the Wal Mart parking lot northeast of the accident site. He observed the wings nearly level before the impact. The airplane hit very hard. He saw black smoke immediately followed by a fireball.

Witness M: He was awoken by what he described as the sound of a large bore engine street racing down his street. The sound seemed to start within 200 or 300 ft of his house to the north or northwest and was diminishing quickly.

Witness N: She witnessed the accident and was outside of the ShopRite convenient store. She did not provide further details about the accident.

Witness O: He was outside when he heard a loud sound. He saw a blue or black airplane and it looked like it was struggling to maintain altitude and had smoke coming from it. It was not bad smoke, but he believed that it was definitely producing smoke. The airplane got lower and lower and it was banked to the left but continuing mostly straight. The airplane passed over his house then he heard a massive explosion. He reiterated that it looked like smoke was coming from one engine.

Witness P: She was a USPS employee inside the USPS Post Office when the accident happened. She did not provide any further details about the accident.

Witness Q: She was at her apartment complex when she observed the airplane in a turn. She could hear what she described as "...trying to restart engines and the sounds of crash dive." She observed the airplane very low and descending into a slight nosedive. The airplane impacted the power lines then went through the trees into the parking lot of the USPS Post Office.

Witness R: He was at the apartment complex across the street. He did not observe the accident, but he did hear the airplane low above the complex. He also heard the airplane impact the ground. He ran across the street and assisted a man in the Post Office parking lot.

Witness S: He was in the Wal Mart parking lot and heard the airplane before the crash. He believed the sound of the airplane was coming from the south and sounded very close to the ground. The engine noise sounded like it was oscillating up and down. Suddenly the engine noise significantly increased then he heard the explosion and saw a large plume of black smoke. He did not see the crash but the guy standing next to him stated he observed the crash (Witness L).

Witness T: He lives in the apartment complex across the street and was inside when he heard the airplane before the crash. He stated, "I heard a very, very loud sound, unmistakably the sound of [propellers] on an aircraft, it sounded as though the props were at full throttle, they were screaming, immediately after hearing that I heard a huge explosion, simultaneously the power went out in my apartment, this all happened very quickly." He served in an Air Wing in the U.S. Marine Corps for about 10 years. He was one of the first on the scene just seconds after the crash and assisted the surviving

airplane occupant. He spoke with the survivor who told him five other people were onboard. The survivor told him that immediately upon takeoff that they had problems, and they began a really hard climb and were flying really fast, then they made a turn but was not sure if it was to the left or right. He assisted the survivor to the ambulance and asked him the same questions again and the survivor was consistent with his answers.

Witness U: He was six blocks away from the accident site. He stated, "It sounded like the pilot started giving the engine's full throttle right before it crashed or it sounded like it was in a nosedive the engines were very loud."

Witness V: Statement given via his wife. She stated that her husband saw the airplane pass over their house, and it was smoking. The airplane shook their house as it flew over. She confirmed again that the airplane was smoking.

Witness W: He witnessed the airplane crash and also video footage of the post-accident events at the scene. He did not provide further details.

## 5. WITNESS LOCATIONS





Figure 1 – Google Earth image with approximate witness locations and accident debris field labeled



Figure 2 – Google Earth image with approximate witness locations and points of interest labeled

**6. ATTACHMENTS**

Appendix A: Compilation of Witness Emails.

Appendix B: Lafayette Police Department Report Excerpt.

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