



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Elliott Simpson
Aviation Accident Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Interview Date: March 13, 2019
Person Contacted: Robin Petgrave
NTSB Accident Number: WPR19FA095AB

Narrative:

Present for Interview:

Robin Petgrave – Executive Director of Tomorrows Aeronautical Museum

Elliott Simpson – NTSB

Michael Hicks – NTSB

- The T-28 accident airplane, N5440F, is owned by Tomorrows Aeronautical Museum. It was purchased in 2018, with the intention of preserving it as an actively flying museum piece.
- Mr. Diehl, who is a volunteer at the Museum had given advice during the pre-purchase phase, and then after purchase regarding how best to maintain the airplane, and bring it to “showpiece” standard.
- Mr. Diehl had recently made some recommendations regarding upgrades, and these upgrades were being performed by Mark Drew at Whiteman Airport. Mr. Petgrave does not know the specifics of the work performed, and had entrusted those decisions to Mr. Drew.
- Mr. Drew owns a T-28 and also assisted during the pre-purchase phase of N5440F.
- N5440F had been with Mark Drew at Whiteman for quite some time, and Mr. Petgrave had been concerned after receiving a large fuel bill from the airport. As such, he had requested multiple times that Mr. Drew bring the airplane back, but Mr. Drew declined to do so until the bill was settled.
- Eventually the fuel bill was payed, but the airplane was not delivered by Mr. Drew, so the decision was made to ask Mr. Diehl to fly the airplane back. He agreed, and this was the accident flight.
- The plan was to depart by 1600 to 1700 on the day of the accident, and Mr. Petgrave would then fly Mr. Diehl back to Whiteman in his R44 helicopter.

- Mr. Petgrave arrived at Compton in his helicopter a few minutes before the accident, having been on a training mission with a student pilot. During the landing approach, both he and his student had zero forward visibility due to sun glare, and the student suggested they go-around. Mr. Petgrave could see the ground out of the side window, and motioned the student to continue, and they landed uneventfully.
- He stated this was the worst glare he had ever seen, and at no time did he hear any other aircraft in the traffic pattern.
- After he got out of his helicopter, he watched the T-28 overfly midfield and upwind, which he assumed was a clearing overhead approach. The T-28 then joined the left downwind leg for the 25 runways, and extended its landing gear. As soon as it turned base, he was surprised to see a Cessna 152 already on final for runway 25L. This was the first time he had seen the airplane, and he was shocked by its sudden appearance.
- He assumed Mr. Diehl had seen the Cessna 152, and was going to land on runway 25R.
- However, the T-28 began the turn to the final leg, and was lining up with Runway 25L.
- The separation between the two airplanes was minimal and he became extremely concerned that Mr. Diehl had not seen the other airplane.
- He considered running onto the runway, or getting into his helicopter to call on the radio, but he did not have enough time.
- Both aircraft continued inbound; the Cessna 152 then landed on runway 25L, still followed closely behind by the T-28. The T-28 then landed and a few seconds later struck the Cessna which was still on the runway.



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Narrative:

The following draft narrative has not been reviewed or confirmed by Mr. Diehl

Present for Interview:

Ross Emory Diehl – Pilot of T28, N5440F
Elliott Simpson – NTSB
Michael Hicks – NTSB
Steve Sonneson – FAA LAX FSDO

NOTE: At the beginning of the interview, Mr. Diehl stated that he had attempted to contact the AOPA legal department for representation, but was unsuccessful. He was offered the opportunity to defer the interview until he had representation, but declined, stating that he did not want to hinder or delay the investigation.

- He is a career pilot, and began flying for the Air National Guard at the age of 21. During his time with the ANG, he flew multiple fighter aircraft including the F86 and F104.
- Is career includes time as an airline transport pilot for Western and Delta Airlines, and has he worked in the capacity of a test pilot for Lockheed.
- Estimates a total flight time of 24,000 hours, but has recently only been logging the minimum flight time necessary for ongoing currency, rather than all his flight time.
- Since retirement in 1994 he has volunteered at museums specializing in “Warbird” aircraft, including Tomorrows Aeronautical Museum. During that time, he maintained and became proficient in the operation of multiple vintage military airplanes, including the T-28.
- Owned a T-28 for 27 years, and has also owned a Beechcraft C-45. He sold the T-28 in 2017, replacing it with a Bonanza.
- Since purchasing the Bonanza, he has been working toward accruing flight time in it, as required by his insurance company. However, due to a recent injury sustained to his leg (the sciatic

nerve) he has not flown the Bonanza as often as he would like. As such, he has only flown the Bonanza twice since purchase.

- Regarding currency, his last flight prior to the accident took place about 90 days ago, and was in the Bonanza. He has flown about 20 hours total in the last 12 months, and the last time he flew a T-28 was in May 2018, and that was the accident airplane.
- His most recent flight review took place about March 2018, and was in the accident T-28.
- Regarding vision, at the time of the accident he was not wearing sunglasses. His medical certificate required glasses available for near-vision, and these were available during the accident flight, but he was not wearing them. He believes his vision is improving with age.
- Has been flying in the Los Angeles area since the 1940's and reported being very familiar with the area, having flown into Compton many times, and also having been based there in the early 1970's when he kept a hangar on the field.

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- Robin Petgrave owns the accident T-28, through Tomorrows Aeronautical Museum, and Mr. Diehl had given him advice regarding its purchase, registration, and maintenance.
 - Mr. Petgrave had asked that Mr Diehl fly the T-28 back from Whiteman Airport where it had undergone maintenance performed by Mark Drew. It was Mr. Diehl's understanding that there was a dispute regarding maintenance and fuel purchases between Mr. Drew and Mr. Petgrave, and the decision was made for Mr. Diehl to fly it back to Compton rather than Mr. Drew.
 - He was under the impression that the maintenance performed was to repair cosmetic rather than airworthiness issues.
 - The plan had been for Mr. Diehl to fly the airplane back to Compton, and then be flown back to his car at Whiteman by Mr. Petgrave in one of the museums helicopters.
 - Just prior to the accident flight, Mr. Drew briefed him on the work performed, and configured the transponder code and setup the radio frequencies. Mr. Diehl stated that he had great difficulty reading the comm frequency screen, as it was low, the screen was small, and he needed to bend his head down and to the left to see the screen.
 - Departure was uneventful, and he followed a route to the east close to the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, about 1,000 ft agl. He flew east of El Monte, then turned south following highways. He believes that during this portion of the flight, he likely inadvertently penetrated the Class D airspace of Fullerton Airport.
 - He then turned west after finding the highways that he typically uses as a ground reference. He began to become concerned, because the haze was extreme, the sun was low and bright obscuring his forward vision, and he was unable to find Compton Airport.
 - He then saw an open area on the ground that he thought was likely the airport, and confirmed it was the airport as he got closer.
 - In an effort to announce his presence at the airport, he flew an abbreviated military airport overflight, approaching the airport from the southeast, crossing midfield then making left descending turns into the left 25 traffic pattern. (see red lines in image below). During the

maneuvers he could see a helicopter on the field, which he assumed was his ride back with Mr. Petgrave.

- Once he was on the left downwind for Runway 25L, he extended the landing gear.
- The airplane was a little fast as he made the turn from base leg to final (80 knots), but his primary concern was now his vision, as the sun glare had obscured his entire forward view.
- He could not see the runway, as it was now also reflecting the sun, and the glare was the worst he had experienced at any airport. He could see two white lights on the ground, and then realized he was in-between both 25 runways, so he performed a left sidestep maneuver.
- The descent continued, and eventually he was over the runway. The main landing gear touched down, and all felt stable, then a few seconds later he suddenly saw an airplane in front of him. He felt a significant jolt followed by an explosion.
- His airplane came to rest in the dirt to the right of the runway. He was able to egress unaided, and left his flight bag and map on the wing as he got down.
- Reported that at no time during the enroute, approach or landing did he ever see or hear another airplane. He stated that he was fairly sure he made one traffic call at some point during the approach, but did not hear anything back, and he was not convinced that the radio was working correctly so he did not try again. He recounted again that the radio was hard to reach and see, and went on to state that he felt it was more important to look out of the window for traffic rather try and get the radio configured.
- He was carrying a sectional map and airport guide, and when asked to recall the Compton CTAF frequency, responded that it may be 122.7. he further reiterated that Mark Drew set the radio frequencies while at Whiteman, and that he did not touch them or make any other radio calls while enroute.
- In his experience, both the Chino and Compton westerly runways are particularly hazardous in the evenings due to sun glare.





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The following was changed by Mr. Diehl

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- He is a career pilot, and began flying for the Air National Guard at the age of 21. During his time with the ANG, he flew multiple fighter aircraft including the F86 and F104 and obtained an Aeronautical Engineering degree from USC in 1960.
- His career includes time as an airline transport pilot for Western and Delta Airlines and he worked as a test pilot on the F104 for Lockheed prior to joining Western.
- He estimates a total flight time of 24,000 hours, but has recently only been logging the minimum flight time necessary for ongoing currency, rather than all his flight time.
- Since 1966, he has volunteered at museums specializing in “Warbird” aircraft, including Tomorrow’s Aeronautical Museum. During that time, he maintained and became proficient in the operation of multiple vintage military airplanes, including the T-28.
- He owned a T-28 for 27 years and has also owned a Beechcraft C-45. He sold the T-28 in 2017, replacing it with a Bonanza.

- Since purchasing the Bonanza, he has been working toward accruing flight time in it, as required by his insurance company. However, due to a recent injury sustained to his leg (the sciatic nerve) he has not flown the Bonanza as often as he would like. As such, he has only flown the Bonanza twice since purchase.
 - Regarding currency, his last flight prior to the accident took place about 90 days ago, and was in the Bonanza. He has flown about 20 hours total in the last 12 months, and the last time he flew a T-28 was in May 2018, and that was the accident airplane.
 - His most recent flight review took place about March 2017, and was in a T-6 Texan.
 - Regarding vision, at the time of the accident he was not wearing sunglasses. His medical certificate required glasses available for near-vision, and these were available during the accident flight, but he was not wearing them.
 - Has been flying in the Los Angeles area since the 1940's and reported being very familiar with the area, having flown into Compton many times and also having been based there in the early 1970's when he kept a hangar on the field.
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- His airplane came to rest in the dirt to the right of the runway. After receiving assistance from a bystander to get the canopy open, he was able to egress unaided, and left his flight bag, headsets and map on the wing as he got down.
- At no time during the enroute, approach or landing did he ever see or hear another airplane. He stated that he was fairly sure he made one traffic call at some point during the approach, but did not hear anything back, and he was not convinced that the radio was working correctly so he did not try again. He recounted again that the radio was hard to reach and see, and went on to state that he felt it was more important to look out of the window for traffic rather than try to troubleshoot the radio.
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