

WHATCOM COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Follow-Up/Narrative Supplement

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DESC: AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT - FATAL

DATE: 05-06-94

EVENT# 94A07593

CONTACTS MADE BY THIS OFFICER:

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REPORTING OFFICER: SGT RON PETERSON 2A29 RKL

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NOTIFICATION: 1534 Hrs., I was advised via phone from What-Comm that an aircraft crash had occurred north of Lynden and that the shift supervisor was requesting that I respond. I immediately left my office and proceeded to the scene.

ARRIVAL: I arrived at the scene at approximately 1609 hrs and made contact with acting Sgt Stakelin. The scene of the incident is located East of the Bender Road, north of E. Badger rd in a freshly cut field. There are no trees or other obstructions in the area of the crash site, it is a very large open field area.

BRIEFING: Acting Sgt Stakelin advised me of the following situation. Witnesses had called 911 and reported that a small ultra light type aircraft had crashed in a field North of Lynden. WCSO and Fire units from the Northwood Volunteer Fire District had responded with the fire units being first on the scene followed by Lynden Police Units and WCSO Patrol units. Deputy Bremmer arrived very near to the same time as the Lynden unit and reported that the Fire Units were on scene and the fire had been extinguished. Witnesses had reported seeing the aircraft in flight and then the aircraft seemed to nose over crash into the ground. Firefighters reported seeing the body of a person in the wreckage and it was quite obvious that the person was deceased due to the charring of the body and impact injuries.

ASSIGNMENTS: Acting Sgt Stakelin had assigned Deputy Ratacyzak to go to the Lynden airport and contact persons that may have information about the aircraft and the pilot. Deputy Bremmer had been assigned to provide scene security until my arrival. Deputy Bremmer was also assigned to identify all volunteer fire fighters by name only for any follow-up contacts that may be necessary. Several persons had come forward indicating they had witnessed the crash and Deputy Bremmer, Deputy Ratacyzak and Acting Sgt Stakelin were assigned to take written statements from those witnesses. I also assigned Deputy Bremmer to assist with the scene by completing a scene sketch.

SCENE OBSERVATIONS: The scene is secured by means of crime scene and fire scene ribbon. A large perimeter has been established. A Northwood Fire District pumper is positioned near the aircraft wreckage. Volunteer firefighters are in position to extinguish any fire that may flare back up and are also available to assist with scene security. The wreckage is confined to an area that equals or is slightly smaller than size of the aircraft prior to the crash. There are no signs of multiple impacts or skidding or sliding across the ground - the crash site is consistent with the aircraft coming down in a near vertical dive with very little movement after impact. It appears that there are several quart sized cans in the burned wreckage. The total number of cans equals 24 and they all appear to have ruptured from the heat of the fire. None of the cans has any indication of being opened prior to impact. There is what appears to be a plastic tube with a fuel filter in the middle that is not charred, melted or burned. The tubing is located slightly south of the main body of wreckage. The odor from the tubing is similar to the odor of gasoline. There are no marks of clamps on either end of the tubing and the tubing and filter appear to be new - the aircraft was reported to be just assembled and this was the first flight. The engine of the aircraft is west of the main body of wreckage and the largest percentage of the engine is still in tact. Two small radiators are positioned on either side of the engine near the propeller and they are not burned. The propeller is wooden and one tip is broken off and found imbedded in the ground near the engine. The carburetors of the engine are burned and fall away from the engine block. The exhaust pipe, muffler and the majority of the exhaust manifold is unburned. The majority of the fire damage is in the center of the wreckage. The wings are in a folded back configuration that places them on either side of the engine and center section of the aircraft. The skin on one wing is completely melted and burned away, the aluminum frame under the skin is plainly visible.

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The majority of the skin on the other wing is melted away however the skin on the wing tip is still in tact. The tail section of the aircraft is located west of the motor and in an inverted position as to suggest that it may have folded over from back to front on impact. The tail section and supporting boom is not burned, the skin on the tail is still in tact. It appears that the aircraft had four wheels, one on either side, one near the center of the aircraft and one small wheel under the extreme end of the tail section.

OTHER AGENCY INVESTIGATION: Proper protocols for an aircraft incident were followed by the dispatch center and Acting Sgt Stakelin. I made contact with FAA Supervisor David Lehman via phone. I requested guidance as to if an NTSB Investigator would be in route to assume jurisdiction. He advised that due to the fact that the aircraft is most likely homemade or an ultra light that they would not be investigating the incident and also due to the fact that the aircraft is not a registered aircraft. Mr. Lehman indicated we would be the primary agency for the remainder of this incident.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE BODY: The body of the lone occupant of the aircraft is in a face down configuration and is located in the center area of the wreckage. There is extensive charring visible and it appears that the internal organs are exposed in the area of the right side of the stomach. There is a covering over the victim's head which would be consistent with a cloth or fiberglass soft head cover with ear protection. The clothing has been burned away. There appears to be something adhering to the victim's left hip. Closer examination reveals that it is the burned remains of a wallet. Some parts of the documents are still in tact and visible. There appears to be a Washington State Driver's License and some type of British Columbia Identification card. Remnants of U.S. and Canadian currency are also visible. The name on the documents is the same as the name given by persons at the airport who reportedly are friends of the pilot. The process of body removal reveals that there is extensive damage to the victim's right leg and hip, multiple open fractures. There is also evidence of fractures to the right arm and left ankle. The left arm does not show obvious signs of fracture. The face is completely charred and unrecognizable. The chest is mostly in tact, chest hair is plainly visible as well as unburned skin. The visible penis is evidence of the victim being a male. The description given by friends of the pilot and the physical description on the driver's license is consistent with the body. Dr. Goldfogel is advised of the incident and he dispatched Steve's Body Removal Service to the scene to recover the body. The body is transported to the morgue facility.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Photos are taken from all corners showing the overall scene. Other close-up photos are taken of the different component of the aircraft and of the body prior to, during, and after removal from the wreckage.

WRECKAGE REMOVAL: Normally the National Traffic Safety Board would be responsible for aircraft wreckage however since they decline to assume jurisdiction I took responsibility for removal of the wreckage. I first conferred with the Bellingham Airport Manager who had responded to the scene to assist us in any way we needed. He checked his normal channels for agencies or companies who handle the removal of aircraft wreckage and no one was available. I then contacted the area tow service which is BJ's Towing. I talked with the representative from BJ's and he declined to come to the scene as he did not have a truck designed to handle the wreckage. He suggested Berk's Towing which is a Lynden area tow service. I contacted Berk's Towing and they responded with a large flat bed truck. I assisted them in removing the wreckage from the field and they transported it to their Lynden yard. I was advised that there was a co owner of the aircraft and he was one of the friends that had been at the airport just prior to the take off and crash of the aircraft.

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I was also advised that the friend and co owner of the aircraft was reluctant to come to the scene because of the emotional trauma. I advised Berk's Towing to contact either the Lynden airport manager, who is familiar with the victim pilot and co owner of the aircraft, on Monday for information as to billing for the wreckage removal. I also advised Berk's to call WCSO on Monday if there was a problem locating the co owner as our personnel would also be doing follow-up investigations with the co owner.

EVIDENCE: Personal property taken from the victim is taken into custody by Deputy Bremmer for safekeeping.

SUMMARY: The information related by witnesses, and the speculations offered by knowledgeable individuals is consistent with an in flight incident that caused the aircraft to crash and burn after the crash causing the death of the lone pilot. Airport manager Ashfield assisted at the scene in examining the wreckage prior to the wreckage being disturbed. Lt Hurlbut, also a pilot and instructor, examined the wreckage and listened to information relayed to us from witnesses. It would appear, at this point, that the engine may have stopped in flight and the aircraft ceased to fly and the right wing dipped and the aircraft fell to the ground in somewhat of a spiraling fall. Mr. Ashfield has had experience with air crash situations and commented that in most cases when an aircraft impacts the ground and the engine is running at impact the internal components of the engine, the crank shaft and pistons, are severely damaged. We examined the engine and the propeller shaft turns freely and that is consistent with the engine not being in operation at impact. Lt Hurlbut commented that the actions of the aircraft as described by witnesses just prior to impact is consistent with the aircraft ceasing to fly and the right wing dipping and the subsequent spiralling to the ground. It is also common to find marks or dig marks in the ground made by a propeller when the propeller is turning under power at impact. There were no such marks or digs found. The propeller has one side broken off and that would be consistent with that side hitting the ground and breaking off at impact. The broken part of the propeller is found close to the engine. There is no solid conclusion made in regard to the 24 cans of oil found. One thought was that the case of oil was on board the aircraft for weight. It is also odd that the length of tubing found with the in line fuel filter has no sign of clamps on either end which causes the speculation that the fuel line may not have been permanently attached to the fuel supply and the fuel line may have separated from the engine from the vibration of the engine which caused the engine to stop in flight. The consideration of pilot error cannot be overlooked. If the pilot made a mistake while flying the aircraft that caused the aircraft to stall, there would not have been enough altitude for the aircraft to recover, especially if the engine stopped.

We are not, at this time, able to find any indication of anything other than an accidental incident.

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