

NTSB rules small-plane crash off Cape May a suicide

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Beachgoers on May 29, 2019, were stunned to see a small plane skimming along the top of the ocean a few hundred yards offshore when it rose and then nosedived into the ocean near the World War II bunker. A National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) final report has ruled the crash a suicide.

The body of the pilot, the only person aboard the rented Mooney M20J single-engine plane, Lawrence Klimek, 58, of Howell, was recovered by divers from the State Police. Sea Tow and North Star Marine recovered the plane.

The Office of the Chief State Medical Examiner in Woodbine performed an autopsy on the pilot. The cause of death was listed as "blunt trauma of head, neck, trunk and extremities," and the manner of death as "suicide."

The report notes in a written statement, a witness described seeing the airplane flying parallel to the beach about 10 feet above the water.

It states the plane "appeared stable and in control but then dipped, hit the water, and skipped up out of control." The airplane entered

a steep climb to around 100 to 200 feet above the water, "stalled, turned downward, and plunged almost straight into the water."

A Federal Aviation Administration safety inspector stated reports of a low-flying airplane traveling along the beach from north to south were received from several towns north of Cape May. Witnesses reported that the airplane would dive to the surface, fly low along the beach and climb again, according to the NTSB report.

One witness forwarded a video of the airplane as it passed her position on Diamond Beach about 5 miles, or about 2.5 minutes, north of the accident site. The airplane was near the shoreline, about 10 feet above the wave break, and the sound of the engine was smooth and continuous throughout. At one point, the airplane descended below the horizon line. About 20 seconds into the 30-second video, the airplane began a steep climb. The airplane was about 200 feet above the surface when the video ended, according to the NTSB report.

The owner/operator of the airplane stated that the pilot had "returned" to flying in October 2018. The report states training and rental

records revealed that, since that time, the pilot had completed online FAA flight review training, received 17 hours of dual instruction and had accrued 44.1 total hours of flight experience.

All major components of the airplane were recovered except for the left wing. The roof, left wing and empennage were separated from the fuselage, according to the NTSB.

"The fracture surfaces displayed features consistent with overload failure. Flight control continuity was confirmed from the cockpit area, through several breaks, to all available flight control surfaces. The fracture surfaces at the breaks displayed features consistent with overstress. The leading edge of the right wing was uniformly crushed aft along its entire span," stated the report.

The engine was rotated by hand at the propeller and powertrain continuity was confirmed to the accessory section. Thumb compression was confirmed on all cylinders. Examination of the top spark plugs from each of the 4 cylinders revealed signatures consistent with normal wear and saltwater immersion. The single-drive dual magneto was destroyed

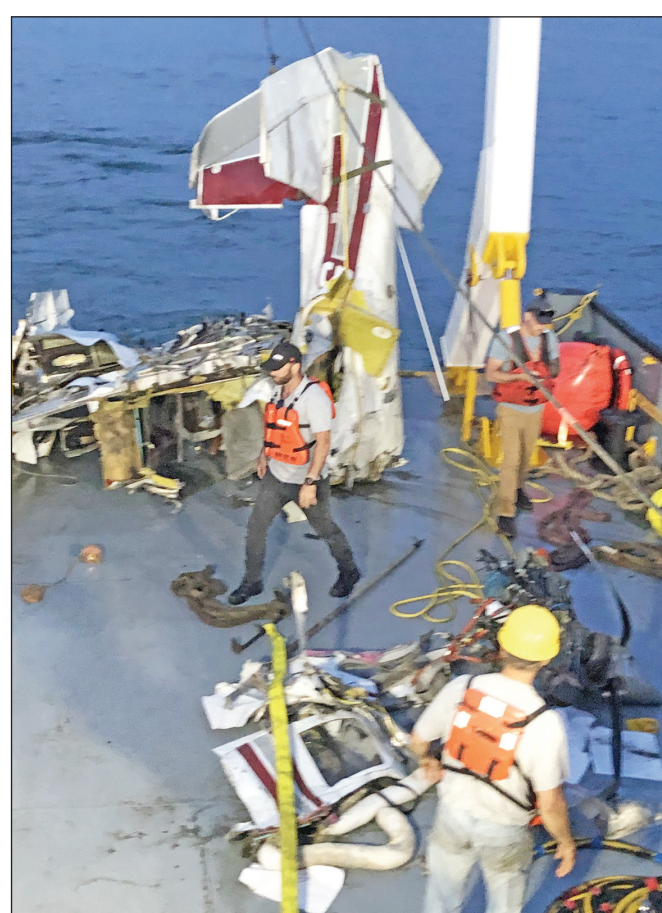
by impact and saltwater immersion. The engine-driven fuel pump was removed, and when actuated by hand, pumped fluid from the output port, according to the report.

The report states the fuel supply line was removed at the inlet port to the fuel manifold, where trace amounts of fuel were detected.

The propeller was attached at the hub, and all three blades displayed similar aft bending. Witness Rob Lindsey told the Star and Wave the day of the crash that the plane touched the water and then rose.

"You could see the water coming off the bottom of the airplane and then he pulled back and started a steep climb and then the engine popped," he said. "He went straight down in and it stayed on top of the water for seconds."

John Achzet of Elkton, Md., said he saw the plane flying down along the beach about 3 feet off the water. He said the belly of the plane hit a small swell in the water followed by the aircraft flying straight up in the air 50 to 75 yards and arcing straight down into the ocean. Achzet said the plane went into the water at 11:14 a.m. and he called police one minute later.



Provided

Crews from Sea Tow and North Star Marine recovered the wreckage of a small plane that crashed May 29, 2019, in the ocean off Cape May. The NTSB ruled it a suicide.

Villas deaths deemed murder/suicide

VILLAS — A deceased couple found Jan. 4 in a Cardinal Avenue home died because of a murder/suicide, according to Cape May County Prosecutor Jeffrey Sutherland.

The Southern Regional Medical Examiner's Office conducted autopsies and positively identified the two individuals as Kristin Ryan,

39, and Rick Ryan, 45, who lived at 34 Cardinal Ave. in Villas.

Based on the preliminary investigation, Sutherland stated the incident was not a random act but appears to have been a murder/suicide. Based on the evidence currently known, detectives believe Ryan shot his wife

and then turned the gun on himself.

Sutherland stated the investigation is ongoing and urges anyone who may have information regarding the incident to contact the county Prosecutor's Office at (609) 465-1135 or the Lower Township Police Department at (609) 886-1619.

Middle Thorofare bridge work continues

LOWER TOWNSHIP — Work continues on the Ocean Drive Bridge over Middle Thorofare (Two-Mile Bridge).

South State is completing the concrete work on the south side and will be setting bridge railings in place in a few weeks. Once the new railings are set, the contrac-

tor will shift traffic from the northbound lane to the southbound lane using the same one-way alternating traffic pattern with the temporary traffic signals. Vehicles will pass through the toll booth traveling both northbound and southbound. However, tolls will be collected only when traveling southbound.

Beneath the bridge, a whole separate set of activities is under way now that the contractor has cleared both large and small rocks during night shifts in December.

Overnight closings at the bridge will continue from Mondays to Fridays for about two weeks. The contractor will be installing steel piling beneath the bridge that form the framing system for the new fenders and moving utilities in preparation for railing work. Bridge openings for vessels are prohibited from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. through Jan. 22.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Shannon Kearney/U.S. COAST GUARD

Examining the recruits

U.S. Coast Guard Capt. Kathy Felger, commanding officer of Coast Guard Training Center Cape May, visits medically cleared recruits going through boot camp Dec. 25 at TRACEN. The USCG says the base's top priority is to ensure the health, safety and well-being of every recruit going through boot camp, as well as ensure every recruit has the opportunity to be trained in a safe and efficient manner.

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Point holds reorganization

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY POINT — Robert Moffatt received his oath of office Jan. 2 during the borough's annual reorganization meeting to continue as mayor.

Commissioner Anita vanHeeswyk received her oath of office and was reappointed deputy mayor. The oaths for the four-year terms were administered by borough solicitor Brock Russell.

Catherine Busch received her oath of office to become Cape May Point's new commissioner. She replaced Robert Mullock, who did not seek re-election.

Moffatt also heads the Department of Public Affairs and Public Safety. Vanheeswyk oversees the Department of Revenue and Finance.

Busch will oversee the Department of Public Works.

Commission approved appointing Moffatt as a Class One member to the Planning Board and vanHeeswyk as a Class Three member of the Planning Board.

During commissioner comments, Busch said she looked forward to working with Moffatt and vanHeeswyk for the continued betterment of the borough.

"I hope we all have a healthy and safe year ahead of us," she said.

Moffatt echoed Busch's comments for a safe and healthy 2021.

"I've enjoyed every administration that I've worked with," vanHeeswyk said. "Every group has a different personality as everyone knows; I think this particular group will make up a great team."

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