

https://dailyprogress.com/news/local/pilot-in-fatal-albemarle-crash-radioed-i-would-be-fine-going-to-charlottesville/article_d842ef40-354a-11ed-91c4-3f71d3a1b552.html

ALERT FEATURED TOP STORY

Pilot in fatal Albemarle crash radioed "I would be fine going to Charlottesville"

Hawes Spencer

Sep 15, 2022



The plane that crashed was a 1978 Piper Cherokee, similar to this one.

COURTESY OF BILL WORD The plane that crashed was a 1978 Piper Cherokee, similar to this one.

Hawes Spencer

“Potomac Approach,” radioed the pilot. “Level at seven thousand, five hundred.”

The man's voice was calm as he notified air-traffic controllers at Potomac Terminal Radar Approach Control that the single-engine plane was heading toward Washington, D.C. airspace at an altitude of about 7,500 feet.

Fifteen minutes later, he was dead or dying in a southern Albemarle forest.

The plane, a piston-engine Piper Cherokee, crashed and burned on a rural tract, killing the pilot, the plane's sole occupant, around 11 p.m. Wednesday, according to Virginia State Police. His identify remained unknown as of Thursday night.

The plane, according to plane-tracking websites, took off from Blue Ridge Regional Airport, about nine miles southwest of Martinsville, less than an hour before the crash. Although it headed northeast, its intended destination is unknown. Efforts to reach the owner, Ronnie Bilbo, of Lubbock, Texas, have been unsuccessful.

People are also reading...

- 1 Monticello chief to resign after nearly 15 years**
- 2 Charlottesville police searching for man who went missing in July**
- 3 Feast sells to owners of Merrie Mill vineyard**
- 4 Police ID victim in Friday night crash**

What is likely is that the plane, built in 1978, was suffering from engine trouble, according to statements radioed by the pilot, who told a controller he saw a problem with the engine's oil pressure.

"I've got a rough engine here, and I'm gonna need an airport to land at," he radioed around 10:53 p.m.

By that point, the pilot of plane N-2104J may have already lost 1,000 feet of elevation over Nelson County in the vicinity of Nellysford. The controller quickly suggested three nearby airports, with Waynesboro's Eagle's Nest as the closest, just 13 miles

away.

The pilot chose Waynesboro and got vectors for a left turn.

Within a minute, however, the plane lost another thousand feet.

“Are you declaring an emergency?” asked the controller.

“I am declaring emergency,” the pilot replied.

The pilot noted that he had about 70 gallons of fuel onboard, nearly three quarters of the plane’s tank capacity. It’s enough to reach airports in New England at the plane’s cruising speed of 160 miles per hour, but it could have devastating results on impact.

About a minute before 11 p.m., the controller asked the pilot if he’d like to consider flying to Charlottesville because of “easier terrain.” Even though it’s further away, about 20 miles versus 10 miles, both men likely realized at this point that reaching Eagle’s Nest required flying over the Blue Ridge. The tops of Wintergreen Resort, Humpback Rock, and other nearby peaks stand more than 3,000 feet above sea level.

“I would be fine with going to Charlottesville,” the pilot responded calmly.

“I see a descent indicating 3,300,” said the controller. “Are you losing power?”

“So far, I can hold it,” the pilot replied.

“So you would prefer Charlottesville? Like I said, Eagle’s Nest is the closest.”

“Keep to Charlottesville, please,” said the pilot, in measured words.

After a few minutes of discussing the elevation and weather at CHO, the controller voiced another concern.

“Altitude indicates 1,400,” says the controller. “Are you able to hold it?”

The pilot’s reply came quietly: “That’s a negative, sir.”

“Try to make it to the road,” implored the controller. “It looks like you’ve got a road just to the north of you.”

“Can’t see anything where am I going,” came the final reply.

The time was about six minutes after 11:00.

In desperation, the controller continued to voice ideas. There’s a grass airstrip at the Bundoran subdivision, but the controller ruefully noted that it’s likely invisible in the dark. Radar contact has been lost, he said, 15 miles southwest of the Charlottesville airport. The location was near the intersection of Plank and Stillhouse Creek Roads.

Eighty-year-old Holmes Brown and his wife were in their house when the plane fell into a forest on their land several hundred yards from their house.

“I thought it was the wind blowing a door closed,” said Brown. “It was that brief.”

Brown says that the Stillhouse Creek Road, which divides his tracts, is regularly plied by apple trucks serving nearby Crown Orchard. Even after his wife mentioned hearing two booms after the first sound, he said their thoughts went to “spot-lighters,” the unsportsman night-time deer hunters. He said they didn’t see the fire.

“So we didn’t think anything of it until the sirens and the flashing lights showed up,” said Brown.

A line of Virginia State Police troopers kept watch over the property Thursday. The wreckage — located near a creek called Whiteside Branch — was not visible from public roads, though the top trunk and upper limb of a nearby pine tree showed fresh damage.

Virginia State Police spokesperson Corinne Geller said that the identification of the pilot would come no sooner than Friday after positive identification from the state medical examiner’s office and notification of the pilot’s relatives. Geller said that

investigators with the National Transportation Board and Federal Aviation Administration visited the scene Thursday afternoon and will return Friday morning to coordinate the removal of the wreckage.

By Hawes Spencer

https://dailyprogress.com/news/local/home-for-the-holidays-waltons-house-and-hamner-house-for-sale-this-season/article_0f0c0f40-6aa5-11ed-a8ea-0b8145a201d0.html

ALERT TOP STORY

Home for the holidays: Waltons house and Hamner house for sale this season

Hawes Spencer

Nov 22, 2022



Carole Johnson stands outside the Hamner family house.

HAWES SPENCER, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Hawes Spencer

The book that inspired the iconic CBS show “The Waltons” begins inside a crowded house with the main character, best known by his television name John-Boy, contemplating a big deer hunt on Thanksgiving Day.

This holiday season, deer-hunting may get displaced by house-hunting, as the home where the real-life John-Boy was raised has recently hit the market.

For about the price of a typical Charlottesville townhouse, the childhood dwelling of late author Earl Hamner Jr. in the tiny Nelson County community of Schuyler, can be purchased.

“People come from all over to see that house,” says Nelson shopkeeper Russ Simpson. “It’s like a shrine.”

Virginia’s Department of Historic Resources and the National Register of Historic Places would seem to agree, as each landmarked the house in 2004.

People are also reading...

- 1 **First United Methodist Church denied request to install solar panels**
- 2 **Regal closing Stonefield theater**
- 3 **UVa unveils plans for new \$300 million biotech institute**
- 4 **'Microtransit' could come to Albemarle County as early as this summer**

Despite the acclaim, owner Carole Johnson, 56, says she wants to see her father through his final years back on the west coast at her own childhood stomping grounds.

“My dad is 86, and part of me just wants to go and be there with him,” says Johnson.

A longtime fan of “The Waltons,” Johnson uprooted herself from Mendocino, California, when she bought the Hamner house five years ago. Three years ago, she completed construction next door of John & Olivia’s Bed & Breakfast, a house that

mimics the television family's house. Both buildings are open for tours and overnight stays.

This superfan concedes that while the B&B may have captured the spirit of the television family, its six bedrooms and 3,500 square-foot footprint far outscale the original dwelling.

"Hollywood made the Depression look good," laughs Johnson, as she gives the tour of the much smaller Hamner house. Measuring about 1,600 square feet, this white clapboard building has just one bathroom, and as many as four of the famous family's eight children would share one of the three bedrooms.

At a reporter's request, she dials one of the surviving siblings, 90-year-old Paul Hamner, now living in a New Jersey retirement home.

"I will always love that house," says Hamner. "And sometimes cold chills come over me thinking about the times we had there."

"We watch you guys every day," Johnson tells him.

The television show debuted in 1972 and ranked as high as the #2 spot in the Nielsen ratings. Johnson marvels at the continuing popularity of the program, which still airs on such networks as Hallmark Drama, MeTV, INSP, and Amazon Freevee. She says the show has been dubbed for several international audiences.

"No matter what language you translate 'The Waltons' into, family is what comes through," says Johnson.

On Tuesday morning, as the smell of bacon lingers inside John & Olivia's Bed and Breakfast, two couples are finishing breakfast at the large kitchen table.

Stephen and Jodi Skinner, both 53, travelled from Prince George, a county about two hours southeast of Schuyler.

"Stepping in here is like stepping back in time," says Stephen. "It's a magical place."

“I even made my four children watch the show,” recalls Jodi. “On Friday nights we would get pizza and watch the Waltons.”

Such memories buoy the owner, but she also confesses to some fatigue.

“I love honoring Earl and his family,” says Johnson. “But after three years I am tired.”

The Hamner house on three quarters of an acre can be had for the price of \$346,000. The larger John & Olivia’s is priced at \$745,900. Both are offered with their period furnishings for any business-minded person who wants to keep the Hamner-Walton story going.

Still, Johnson isn’t sure the houses will sell, and she’s already devising a backup plan to automate the tours and figure out the breakfasts so that she can spend time with her father.

“It’ll be sad and bittersweet,” she says, “if I actually do sell.”

By Hawes Spencer

https://dailyprogress.com/news/crime/what-led-to-charlottesville-gratata-social-media-stars-arrest/article_0ca056ca-65f6-11ed-932a-d7741a0d5e8d.html

ALERT FEATURED TOP STORY

What led to Charlottesville 'gratata' social media star's arrest?

Hawes Spencer

Nov 16, 2022



Silva was arrested in the second-floor office where he was facing eviction.

HAWES SPENCER, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Hawes Spencer

In those earliest Sunday-night moments as people in and around the University of Virginia were gripped by the terrifying news that a homicidal gunman was on the loose, some social media networks veered in the direction not of the eventual suspect

but toward a Charlottesville-based social media phenomenon named Bryan Michael Silva, also known as the “gratata” guy.

That’s because, just six hours before the shooting that killed three student-athletes and injured two other students, Silva, 31, posted statements on social media vowing to impose “pain and suffering” on UVA.

Later, less than a day after the shooting, Silva was arrested when a search warrant allegedly turned up drugs and weaponry at his rented Downtown Mall office.

“CPD does not believe at this time Mr. Silva’s threats were related to the tragic events that occurred last night at the University of Virginia,” read a police release. “However, we understand the fear this caused in our community and acted swiftly to resolve this investigation.”

People are also reading...

- 1 Police ID victim in Friday night crash**
- 2 Feast sells to owners of Merrie Mill vineyard**
- 3 Judge tosses former police chief's \$10 million discrimination suit**
- 4 Police ID victim, charge motorist in fatal Ivy Road crash**

Silva is no stranger to the CPD. In January, 2016, he barricaded himself in a Jefferson Park Avenue-area apartment after pointing a gun at a 17-year-old girlfriend whom he’d met online. During the barricade, which shut down JPA for about nine hours, Silva spent the time recording— and posting— videos. He later pleaded guilty to two charges, including brandishing a firearm and, according to court records, served nearly two years in jail.

A knack for the racy

Silva’s flirtation with fame began about eight years ago after he uploaded a six-second video to the now-defunct Vine platform. There, shirtless and gunless, he recites a violent rhyme and points a finger pantomiming a handgun toward a bathroom mirror

and says “gratata,” a phonetic representation of a machine gun.

Although incessantly mocked, including for his appearance on the popular “Tosh.0” show, Silva embraced his internet fame and now includes his “gratata” catchphrase in most of his social media channels which typically mix sex, weapons and male bravado. On Facebook, where he has 751,000 followers, Silva’s recent postings include videos of him caressing cash, bullets, and his own genitals. Two months before his most recent arrest, at @GRATATATheGREAT on Twitter, he posted video of himself in an explicit sexual act.

“Watch me f**k,” he urged his 26,500 Twitter followers as he touted his **onlyfans.com** pornography channel.

But it was his Facebook posting at 4:13 p.m. on November 13, six hours before another man turned a gun on five UVa students, that would eventually compound widespread grief with outrage.

“I want u v a to know what pain and suffering is,” Silva wrote. “They put me through that everyday of my life here and laughed in my face. I want them to feel how I feel. I will sell everything I have to make that pain and suffering happen.”

A nurse has enough

UVa nurse Lisa C. Turner was up late Sunday night after driving home to the Shenandoah Valley after her shift. Like countless others, she was grieving the slaughter of three football players on a bus on Culbreth Road. And then she saw Silva’s post about UVa— as well as news of others in which he’s wielding firearms. And she learned of his prior criminal convictions.

“I went to his page and saw the guns and stacks of ammo,” said Turner. “How does this person still have access to guns?”

As several others did, Turner tagged local police as a comment underneath Silva’s Facebook post.

“Go girl,” wrote another Facebook user lauding Turner’s action. “Nip that bud from the root.”

Many were asking the same question as Turner: How can a convicted felon be allowed to possess guns or ammunition?

Under state law, he can’t.

The next afternoon, police broke down the door of an office Silva was renting on the Downtown Mall to serve a search warrant and arrested him. They charged him with possession of firearms or ammunition by a convicted felon and with possession of a controlled substance.

Police say the arrest happened around 4 p.m. Monday and that they also served an outstanding/active protective order issued by the Albemarle County General District Court.

They did not specify the nature of that protective order, but Charlottesville court records show that Silva pleaded guilty in June to stalking a UVa student. The student asserted that Silva, a stranger, twice attempted to enter her West Main Street apartment without invitation. The records indicate that he was sentenced to a four-month jail sentence and ordered to pay \$89 in court costs. The records also indicate that his financial obligation was not met.

When arrested on this stalking charge, Silva described his work as “social media” and noted \$8,000 in monthly income. The stalking victim noted that Silva appeared once in her building’s parking lot driving a Porsche and another time in a BMW.

At the time of his most recent arrest, Silva was separately facing arrest for failure to appear in court in Bridgeport, Connecticut. There, he faces an earlier stalking charge as well as a charge of failure to appear.

Keeping the streets safe

Silva's most recent arrest came just a day before he was to appear in Charlottesville General District Court on a civil matter. In that case, he signed a lease for his Downtown Mall office space on August 30. Nine days later, the landlord sent him a certified letter seeking his eviction.

The landlord, the Joe H. Gieck Trust, alleged that Silva failed to obtain insurance, failed to return a key to an office that he did not rent, and repeatedly parked vehicles on the premises in contravention of his lease agreement.

The day after his arrest, the door to that second-floor office at 223 W. Main Street still bore evidence of the police incursion: a deep crack in its wooden face as well as trim damage. Coincidentally, this building houses Lucky Blue's, a pedestrian mall-level restaurant/bar where a salvo of gunfire erupted on October 23 that resulted in a homicide, which remains unsolved.

Scott Goodman, the attorney who represented Silva in his local stalking charge, says that police needed to get his former client off the street after a spate of local slayings, including those of the UVa football players.

"It's obvious that the arrest of Mr. Silva is no coincidence," said Goodman. "This serves the goal of law enforcement to get an individual off the street who may in some way be a threat to public safety."

Goodman notes that UVa has been scrutinized for failing to prevent the actions of Christopher Darnell Jones Jr., the UVa murder suspect. At a Monday morning press conference, UVa Police chief Tim Longo acknowledged several concerns: that Jones may have boasted of having a gun, that he was convicted for carrying a concealed weapon, and that he failed to disclose that conviction as required by university rules.

"You could tell from the press conference that the police wish they had done something about Mr. Jones," said Goodman.

The attorney notes that Silva— being held without bond at the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail— faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted of the two new charges, neither of which directly relate to what he wrote on Facebook.

“The police feel this is an individual they want to get off the street, and they don’t want to be second-guessed a second time,” said Goodman.

“They legitimately consider him dangerous,” continued Goodman. “It’s aggressive policing, but it’s absolutely legitimate.”

By Hawes Spencer
