



FROM THE NTSB AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT

A passenger in an automobile traveling south-easterly on Interstate 77 . . . stated that the aircraft crossed from left to right in front of the automobile. He first saw the aircraft to his left about 400 to 500 feet away. He then saw it about 150 to 200 feet directly in front of his automobile . . . He then saw red flames and black smoke.

THURMAN MUNSON'S FINAL HOUR



AKRON CANTON AIRPORT

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the ground when Munson pushes the throttle all the way forward. Witnesses on nearby Interstate 77 are alarmed by the dangerously low-flying aircraft, the runway still a couple of thousand feet away. In his rear-facing seat, Anderson has turned around and faces forward so he can help. Now he faces toward the rear and kneels down and braces for the crash he knows is coming.

During his stay with the Murcers in Chicago, Munson finds a small airport to fly in and out of. Lou and Anita Piniella are also staying with the Murcers. Munson wants Bobby and Kay to fly back to Canton with him Wednesday night after the game. "You don't have enough hours in that thing for me to fly with you," Murcer tells him, only half-joking.

The Murcers and their two children all go to the airport and sit with Munson in the Citation before he takes off. The interior is Yankee blue. It's a beautiful new plane and Munson seems very proud of it.

"Why don't you go down to the end of the runway and watch me take off?" Munson says.

The Murcers drive down the runway, and soon Thurman Munson and N15NY

are zooming toward them, sleek and fast and with a rush of full-throttle roar. Bobby Murcer turns to Kay: "I cannot believe that Thurman is up there in that powerful machine all by himself."

"And then the plane disappeared into the night," says Murcer. "It was the last time I saw him."

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4:02 p.m. The cockpit is quiet as N15NY keeps going down. Munson keeps on flying, hoping for lift that doesn't come. "He went too slow and basically dropped out of the sky," George Ackley says. The plane rips into treetops and Munson stays steady, and even as a wing is ripped off he tries to ease it down. N15NY hits the ground 870 feet from Runway 19, and skids through the low brush of a sloping, uncultivated field. It careens into a ditch, ripping off the nose gear and through small trees and then slams into a massive tree stump, spinning around and kicking forward and coming to rest on Greensburg Road, a two-lane strip of asphalt just outside the airport fence. Runway 19 is still 600 feet away, at the top of a 50-foot embankment.

N15NY is stopped, at last. Hall and Anderson each have the same incredulous thought: "We're on the ground. We're still alive. We actually are going to sur-



Munson's 4-year-old son, Michael, dons his dad's pinstripes at funeral.

DAILY NEWS

vive this."

Says Anderson, "Thurman flew that airplane to the last nanosecond. He kept it under control and brought us down. He never panicked. He saved our lives."

Munson's legs are pinned by the crushed fuselage. The main cabin door is jammed shut and his seat is loose, smashed off its track. His face is bleeding from slamming into the panel. Thurman Munson can't free himself. Any moment the plane is going to go up. The pilot is worried about his friends.

"Are you guys okay?" he asks. They are the last words he will ever speak.

Hall leans over and tries to free Munson, but can't, and Anderson tries to open the door right behind the pilot's seat, but it won't budge.

"Thurman was unconscious," Anderson says. "We just couldn't get him out of there. We tried, but we just couldn't budge him. Smoke and fire were entering the cabin, and when I opened the emergency door, flames shot in and it was so intense we didn't have any choice."

Anderson dives through the flames to the ground, and Hall follows.

"We had to leave that airplane know-

ing that Thurman was not coming with us," Anderson says.

He and Hall are taken to area hospitals, suffering from second- and third-degree burns.

Fire and rescue trucks arrive within minutes. It takes 30-40 seconds for the flames to be doused. It is too late for the Yankee captain, who is overcome by smoke and heat at the controls of N15NY. He likely would've been fine if the plane had not hit the stump. He is pronounced dead at the scene by the Summit County coroner. According to the NTSB report, "the pilot died from the effects of fire." There has not been a fatality at Akron Canton Regional Airport since that day.

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4:45 p.m. The doorbell rings at the Munson home in North Canton. The kids come running. "Daddy's home!" they yell. Diana Munson looks quickly through the door before she opens it. It is Don Armen, the head of the flying school at the airport, along with two colleagues. She knows right away this is not good. She figures Thurman might've been hurt. That must be it.

"There's been an accident at the air-

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The pilot's injuries prevented him from extricating himself. The passengers were unable to remove the pilot before the cockpit and cabin environment became intolerable. . . The evidence indicates that the injuries to the pilot's head and neck were caused by the pilot's head striking the instrument panel . . . This caused the dislocation of the cervical vertebrae and consequent spinal cord damage . . . Postcrash fire was also a major survivability factor.