FORMER SIKORSKY PRESIDENT KILLED IN P-51D CRASH

News / Personalities



Former Sikorsky president Jeff Pino was killed in a crash of his North American P-51D Mustang on 5 February.

Pino, the owner of the warbird nicknamed “Big Beautiful Doll”, and another man onboard the P-51D were confirmed killed in the crash in Pinal County, Arizona.

Local news video of the crash scene revealed a compact debris field, suggesting a near-vertical descent before the crash.

As news of the fatal accident spread on 6 February, dozens of tributes to the late aerospace executive spread on social media.

Lockheed Martin-owned Sikorsky Aircraft tweeted that the company “mourns the sudden loss”.

“We remember Jeff as a leader, pioneer, innovator and advocate,” Sikorsky added in a news release.

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The retired army master aviator was well-respected among flyers, particularly in the warbird community of which he was a member.

“RIP Jeff Pino. I enjoyed flying with you,” tweeted air show display pilot Patty Wagstaff.

Pino struck an unusual profile as both a top aerospace executive and a highly skilled pilot with a passion for flying and pushing the boundaries of technology.

“It's just a shame more real innovation is so slow in the industry. My 2 cents,” Pino wrote less than two weeks before his death in a 26 January “ask me anything” feature on Reddit.com.

In addition to the P-51D, Pino famously owned one of the first Eclipse 500 very light jets that rolled off the Albuquerque, New Mexico, assembly line.

At a time when Sikorsky was flush with cash due to a spike in military spending, Pino reinvested some of the company’s revenues in a bold programme to defeat the roughly 170kt speed barrier imposed on the most advanced helicopters.

The subsequent tests of the compound, coaxial, rigid-rotor X2 validated a design capable of surpassing 250kt in level flight, paving the way for the launch of the internally-funded S-97 Raider and a collaboration with Boeing called the SB-1 Defiant, which is now in development.

In retirement, Pino found another outlet for pursuing innovation in the aerospace industry, but from an unlikely source.

David Brody, an oil-and-gas industry attorney and author of a best-selling popular science book, is another passionate pilot with an entrepreneurial streak. In 2005, Brody founded AVX Corp to propose a ducted fan-powered, high-speed version of the Bell Helicopter OH-58D Kiowa Warrior. The US army passed on the offer, but has continued funding AVX to develop its high-speed rotorcraft concepts as an option for a future vertical lift platform.

In the meantime, Brody launch a new company last summer with Pino as vice chairman, proposing a vertical take-off and landing business jet powered by three ducted fans. The TriFan 600 concept, in fact, was the subject of the Reddit “ask me anything” feature with Pino on 26 January.

A Reddit user challenged Pino that “industry insiders tend to be skeptical of new programs like this”, but, Pino, a long-time industry insider himself, had an answer.

“Yes they do but you know the saying … those who think something is impossible need to get out of the way of those who are doing it," Pino wrote. "The aviation community is initially skeptical, but after study, they begin to see the merits of the design and business case."

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