



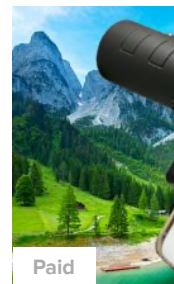
Pilot dies at controls; Wife, 80, lands plane

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(AP) STURGEON BAY, Wis. - An elderly woman took control of a small plane from her unconscious husband which was dangerously low on fuel and landed it on a runway at a small northeastern Wisconsin airport, the facility's director said Tuesday.

Helen Collins, 80, had some flight training years ago but was not familiar with the controls of the Cessna twin-engine plane on Monday evening when her husband passed out, said Keith Kasbohm, director of Cherryland Airport near Sturgeon Bay.



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Another pilot took to the skies to guide Collins to the ground, but she had to land the

aircraft herself.

"She was on her last attempt to get lined up with the runway," Kasbohm said. "She reported one engine was sputtering on that last attempt to land. We were all watching and knew she had to do it."

Collins' 81-year-old husband, John, was later pronounced dead at a hospital.

Helen Collins had called 911 from the Cessna prompting air traffic controllers in Green Bay to alert Kasbohm.

"The first thing I thought of is, 'We have to find someone to help talk this woman down,'" he said.

Kasbohm called Robert Vuksanovic, a pilot who lived just a mile from the airport. Vuksanovic jumped in another plane owned by the Collins and flew up to meet the Cessna while instructing the novice on the radio.

"He felt it would be easier," Kasbohm said. "With him alongside of her he could control her speed and altitude" before she attempted a landing.

Kasbohm described Collins as "cool, calm and collected on the radio" as the aircraft made a hard landing and skidded about 1,000 feet before coming to rest.

James Collins, the son of Helen Collins, said she knew her husband had died after he fell unconscious at the controls of the plane, yet she remained calm as she landed the aircraft.

Talking to the Associated Press exclusively in a telephone interview Tuesday, James Collins said he's also a pilot and that he helped his mother via radio as the plane ran out of gas Monday evening.

Collins said his mother learned to take off and land about 30 years ago at her husband's urging, in case something happened to him. She has flown hundreds of hours by his side.

"She must have flown around here about 10 times," said Torry Lautenbach, whose property is next to the airport. "She did a really good job (landing the plane). It was amazing," Lautenbach said. "It took one bad hop and then it came back down and skidded."

The Collins, of Sturgeon Bay, own a small manufacturing company in Door County, authorities said. John Collins founded C & S Manufacturing in 1962, according to the company's website.