



The wreckage of a small plane in which two men died Monday was brought to Lake in the Hills Airport Tuesday.

This photo by Jim Prichard

2 pilots killed in crash mourned

One friend helped other learn to fly, loved ones say

By Carolyn Sharke
Tribune staff reporter

Two close friends—one a former Navy fighter pilot, the other his student—were remembered Tuesday as an instructor flying team as investigators continued to probe the crash that killed them.

David Barthele, 51, was a Top Gun instructor who parlayed his combat experience into white-knuckled stunt performances in air shows across the country.

Former flight school student was a carpenter who best career and realized his dream of becoming a pilot.

The two were killed Monday when Hildebrand's plane—a 1987 Yak-52—crashed shortly after takeoff from the Lake in the Hills Airport.

"We are in shock. His dream was in shock," said Hildebrand's former wife, Nancy. "It was always a dream of his to fly."

The two-seat plane crashed shortly after 2 p.m. into a 450-acre conservation area near Lake in the Hills. Witnesses said the pilot made a hard left turn before crashing into the wooded area.

The Yak-52 was used by the

plane for the Russian air force. The cockpit has tandem seating and the plane can be controlled from either seat. Officials aren't sure who was piloting the plane, said Pam Sullivan, a senior air-safety investigator with the National Transportation Safety Board.

The wreckage was removed Tuesday by NTSB officials, who are leading the probe.

"Witnesses said the gear came up, it veered to the left descending," Sullivan said. Hildebrand and Fox River Grove had four children—two teenagers and two adults—and one grandchild, said his former wife. He liked to take his sons to the Lake in the Hills Airport while he flew.

When each rudder of Barthe

le said Hildebrand survived cancer four years ago, and the family's faith got them through the crisis. The church plans to hold a memorial service.

"A few years ago when he had cancer, I got to know him well," Fish said. "He was a beloved father to his boys."

The friendship of the pilots grew after Hildebrand began taking flying lessons in 2002, with the flight veteran Barthele as his instructor.

"They were flying out of here on a regular basis, taking people for rides; they were just great guys," said Mike Carlson, owner of Blue Skies Flying School at the airport. "They were licensed pilots. Whether or how long, however, that

Barthele of Barrington was a retired Navy commander who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1977, an Academy spokesman said. He went to Navy flight school and flew the F-14.

After receiving special training in Soviet tactics, he became a Navy pilot instructor teaching military pilots how to fly against MiGs.

According to his Web site, Barthele showcased his aerobics as "Squashton 17" and was "one of the few who has intentionally" put a jet into an end-over-end tumble.

The Web site said his last naval assignment was as commanding officer of the Advanced Flight Training

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