

Experimental Plane Crash: Micron CEO Dead at 51

Written by Bob Snyder
04 February 2012

Micron Chief Executive Officer **Steve Appleton** crashed and died while attempting to fly an experimental plane in Boise, Idaho. Appleton took charge of Micron at age 34 and was the memory chip industry's longest-serving CEO.



Appleton's aircraft crashed early Friday morning, shortly after his second takeoff of the day. The Lancair IVP aircraft departed first at 8:46 am, only to land after lifting off only 5-10 feet from the runway.

He flew again in a second try, but had to call in a request to land again, indicating an aircraft problem.

"I'm going to taxi back in and see if I can figure it out," can be heard on a recording of Boise airport's air-traffic control conversations. "I'd like to turn back in and land," he said. "Coming back in."

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Then you can hear people at the control tower, "Oh my God," repeated over and over in shock as the plane crashed between two runways at the airport.

When only 22 years old, Appleton joined Micron, working at first for the factory's night shift.

Micron is now the last-standing American maker of DRAM, an industry segment known for its volatility. It takes a strong stomach to run a memory company and Micron found their "Iron Man" in Steve Appleton. His competitive nature won him fame when he won a power struggle with Micron's board. They fired him but were forced to recapitulate, hiring him back 8 days later.

"The things that I do outside of work are why I've been successful inside that industry," Appleton once claimed in an interview. "When you look at airplanes and cars and motorcycles and big-wave surfing and all of that stuff, those things reflect the same personality traits that make us successful as a company and make me successful."

Appleton, a product of an upbringing in a rough Los Angeles neighborhood, was a nationally ranked tennis player at Boise State University who learned to play left-handed after he broke his right wrist. Allegedly he slept just four hours a night, and worked out twice daily at 4 am and 9 pm.

Last year, Appleton was awarded the US Semiconductor Industry Association's **Robert N. Noyce Award**, named after the inventor of the integrated circuit.

Micron says it has a "deep bench" of executive talent that will step up...but the company's hard-charging Pilot is now gone. RIP, Steve.

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