



INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Date: January 6, 2016

Person Interviewed: William Hedges, Pilot, Wright Air Service, Inc.

NTSB Accident Number: ANC16LA012

Interview Attendees:

Brice Banning – NTSB

Shaun Williams – NTSB

Ken Machenis – Wright Air Service, Inc. (Teleconference)

Bob Richmond – Legal Counsel, Wright Air Service, Inc.

Narrative:

Mr. Hedges was the pilot of the accident flight involving N540ME from Fairbanks, Alaska to Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska on January 2, 2016. He holds an Airline Transport Pilot Certificate with single-engine land, multi-engine land and instrument ratings.

During an interview conducted on January 6, 2015, Mr. Hedges stated the following:

On January 2, 2016, he was flying a Cessna Caravan from Fairbanks, Alaska (FAI) to Anaktuvuk Pass, Alaska (AKP). Following a weather briefing in the morning from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Flight Service Station, he elected to conduct the flight under visual flight rules (VFR) and filed a VFR flight plan. He did not check the FAA installed weather cameras because it was still dark at AKP and the screen would be black and not helpful.

After departing FAI, he climbed to 10,500 feet mean sea level (MSL). While enroute, he checked the weather for Bettles, Alaska and AKP. The last weather report he remembered obtaining and writing down was the AKP 2100Z report. He wrote the report on the back of the passenger manifest. The flight was "going relatively normal" and "although it wasn't a beautiful day, it wasn't a terrible day." While flying over the Caribou Hills, the weather began "getting fuzzy" and the airplane began to accumulate ice. He stated that he turned on de-ice and anti-ice equipment and actuated the deicing boots about 12 times on the flight. The windshield began to accumulate ice on either side of the windshield hot plate, but the plate worked as designed and there were no visibility restrictions due to ice accumulation. He said there was not much ice on the windshield.

He descended to 2,500 feet MSL, 500 feet above ground level (AGL) and proceeded to fly up the Johns River to get to AKP. While at 4,500 feet MSL, he was communicating with the pilot of a Piper Navajo from Warbelows Flying Service that was at 2,000 feet MSL. The pilot of that aircraft stated that he too was VFR and the weather conditions were “pretty much as advertised.” At no point was an official PIREP filed or received.

When he was about 10 miles from AKP, he began a climb to traffic pattern altitude and flew close to the east side of the river valley in order to make a straight-in approach to runway 2. He stated that he did not realize how close he was to the hills on the east side. With the power set at 1900 RPM, he noticed a 200 foot per minute descent and assumed it was a result of winds coming over the hills. There was no turbulence, just the sink rate. He applied takeoff power and the engine powered up without hesitation. Mr. Hedges stated that the entire flight was VFR and the only visibility restrictions were over the Caribou Hills. He again stated that it was a little “fuzzy” and added that there was white snow, white walls and white clouds and he never saw the AKP airport. He said with the overcast skies and snow covered terrain, it was the closest he had been to white out conditions. He said he thought he was about 3.5 miles from the airport as opposed to 6 miles away and believes flat light contributed to his disorientation regarding distance from terrain. He said his depth perception was “not where it could’ve been.”

When asked about remembering any ground proximity warning system (GPWS) alerts, he stated that he did not remember the “TERRAIN” or “PULL UP” alerts, but he did receive a low airspeed awareness alert and the stall warning activated just prior to impact. He said he was busy looking outside the airplane due to reduced visibility and not the terrain display. He did not try to out climb the hills, but just get back to pattern altitude. He stated that he had loaded the GPS approach into the Garmin 530, but due to a high minimum descent altitude (MDA), after descending to traffic pattern altitude, he loaded a user defined waypoint called “corner” where the river valley makes a turn.

When asked about his training and experience, he stated that he was checked out in the Bonanza, Cessna 206, Cessna 208 and Piper Navajo. In 2015 he completed the Navajo training. He had only been to AKP in the Cessna 206 and 208 and none of his initial operating experience included flights to AKP. He observed while another pilot flew into AKP during training.

Controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) training is conducted on an annual basis in a Civil Air Patrol (CAP) simulator. The last time he accomplished this training, the CFIT escape maneuver was conducted on a missed approach from LAD. The training consisted of a maximum performance climb with a turn to a pre-determined heading.

When asked about safety culture and practices, he stated that the pilots will look at the weather and if they are not comfortable, will discuss the situation with management and wait for an improvement to the conditions. He said there is never any pressure by management to conduct a flight and he always feels backed up by management. He said most of his observations have been conducted by check airman. He vaguely remembered the FAA observing one of his flights, but it was to a different airport.

End of Interview.