



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Thomas J. Latson, Jr.
Air Safety Investigator
Central Region

NTSB Accident Number: CEN13CA372 – N1235J - Kubicek Balloon at Windsor, Colorado

On June 24, 2013 I spoke on the telephone several times with Sergeant Robert Shainline of the Windsor Police Department in Windsor, Colorado, whose officers had spoken with the pilot and the passengers of the balloon. I also spoke with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Inspector Larry Ciano, of the FAA's Denver Flight Standards District Office. Both, while they were on-scene at Windsor, Colorado, balloon accident site. Additionally I reviewed the Police Department accident report and Inspector Ciano's field notes of his on-site investigation.

Following is a summary of those conversations and my review of the written documents:

- Mr. Joseph R. Hart, age 59, said he was the pilot and the registered owner of N1235J;
- N1235J is a Kubicek model BB70Z hot air balloon;
- The pilot was operating the balloon through his company Longmont Hot Air Balloon, LLC as a commercial sightseeing flight with passengers who had paid for their flights.
- The pilot holds an FAA commercial pilot certificate;
- The pilot was seriously injured and was transported to the hospital by ambulance;
- One passenger was seriously injured and was transported to the hospital by ambulance;
- The other seven passengers sustained minor injuries;
- The pilot said there had been very little wind when he had launched earlier and his flight at about 1,000 feet above ground level (agl) was normal;
- As he was descending there was very little wind until he got about 300 feet agl when the wind began to interfere;
- Several passengers said the pilot had advised all passengers to lower themselves inside the basket and to brace themselves for a hard landing;

- Evidence at the scene showed the basket of the balloon struck the ground several times in a northbound direction and then struck the upslope side of a dirt hill;
- The terrain impacts resulted in substantial damage to the main basket, the basket partitions, and substantial damage to the burner cage. The damage to the basket, basket partitions, and burner cage will require a major repair;
- The total distance from first impact to the final resting location was estimated at about 1,300 feet;
- The police officers reported that the passengers they interviewed all said they knew that there something was wrong and that they were coming in too fast as the balloon was beginning to land;
- The passengers advised that the basket hit the ground “very hard”;
- The entire balloon bounced several times before hitting the concrete curbs on Alagar Drive when it then hit the up slope side of a dirt hill;
- The basket flipped onto its side and was dragged in the dirt in that tipped-over position;
- After the balloon came to rest on its side at least one of the occupants was at the bottom of the basket and was partially covered with dirt;
- The police officers interviewed Mr. Lance Whittaker and Mr. Dave Fier who were ground crewmembers with the balloon company. They said they assist the pilot during set-up, takeoff, the balloon chase, the landing, and during take down of the balloon;
- The ground crewmembers said the pilot had told them that he had made several attempts at high-speed landing and on the last landing attempt is when he struck the dirt hill;
- Mr. Whittaker told the police officer that they had been in radio contact with the pilot during most of the entire flight;
- An aircraft maintenance logbook was observed in the balloon and it had an entry showing that an annual inspection was completed on April 4, 2013, at an aircraft total time of 62.20 hours.

On June 26, 2013 I spoke on the telephone with Mr. Hart who told me:

- He was the pilot of N1235J on the day of the accident;
- He thought his departure time was about 0705 MDT and he had launched from Longmont, Colorado, near highway 119;
- He holds an FAA commercial pilot certificate with only a lighter than air (LTA) rating;
- He does not hold an FAA medical certificate since a medical certificate is not required for pilots operating balloons or gliders;
- His last biennial flight review was completed in December, 2012;
- His total pilot experience is about 2,000 hours, with about 30 hours in the past 90 days, about 15 hours in the past 30 days, and about 1 hour of pilot experience in the previous 24 hours;
- He estimates that N1235J had a total of about 80 hours at the time of the accident;
- He has a total of about 80 hours of pilot experience in all Kubicek BB70Z balloons, with all of that experience in N1235J;
- He has no pilot experience in airplanes, helicopters, or gliders, all of his pilot experience is in LTA balloons;
- He was not using a GPS receiver inflight, but he estimated his ground speed when flying at 800 feet agl was about 15 to 20 knots;
- During descent he thought the wind near the surface was almost calm;
- During the last 30 to 40 feet before touchdown the wind speed “really began to pick up”;
- Just before touchdown he began to pull the “red line” and he had completely pulled the crown out as the balloon began its subsequent impacts;
- He briefly lost consciousness during the landing impacts;
- He was seriously injured;
- He understood that one of the passengers was also seriously injured, but when I spoke with him on June 26, 2013, he reported that hospital staff would not tell him the condition of the injured passenger.

(end)