



National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety – Central Region

Interview Summary: Hunter Gillett – CEN17FA196

Date: June 19, 2017

Location: Cameron, Wisconsin

Interviewers: Jennifer Rodi NTSB, Denver, Colorado

Christopher Gregersen FAA, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Interviewee:

During the Interview, Mr. Gillett stated the following:

Mr. Gillett was in the hospital for 22 days following the accident. He sustained a broken left ankle, a broken lower spine, multiple facial fractures, a collapsed lung, and a concussion.

Mr. Gillett had known the pilot for about 2 years. They met while ice fishing and had become good friends. They did not attend school together and he had not flown with the pilot prior to the accident flight. The accident flight was Mr. Gillett's first flight in a small general aviation airplane.

Mr. Gillett agreed to meet the pilot for a flight on the evening of the accident, about 1750. When he arrived at the private airstrip, the pilot was pulling the airplane out of the hangar. The pilot walked around the airplane before they boarded for the flight.

Mr. Gillett sat in the front seat and the pilot helped him to secure his lap belt. It was a long strap across his waist. The pilot did not show him how to fasten it; he just fastened it for him. There was no harness over his shoulder. The pilot then boarded the airplane and sat directly behind Mr. Gillett.

After taking off from the private airstrip, they "looped around the house" and waved at friends on the ground. Then they headed towards the pond where several friends were fishing. They overflowed the pond and waved at their friends. The pilot stated that they would "go around" and fly over their friends again. The airplane started to turn to the right and then went straight down. The passenger did not recall hearing anything abnormal with the engine. He stated that nothing changed with the engine – it was loud the entire time. Just prior to the impact with the ground the pilot stated, "This isn't good."

Mr. Gillett recalled that, after the airplane hit the water, he was “drowning” and could not get air. He could not feel the seatbelt and never took it off or unlatched it. He recalled swimming “to the top of the water” but did not recall seeing the airplane or the pilot. He saw the river bank and swam towards it. He recalled laying on the bank of the river for what seemed like 5 minutes before he was assisted by several boys and first responders.

Mr. Gillett stated he suspected that he came out of the windscreen area of the airplane. He stated further that he hit his face hard and suspected that his face hit “the dash” of the airplane. His upper jaw was broken in 4 places, his lower jaw was broken, his nose was broken, his skull was cracked, and his cheek bones were fractured. He stated that it happened so fast he had no time to brace or react. He stated that, according to his doctor, the L1/L2 injury was a “clean break” consistent with a whiplash or car accident scenario.

When asked, he elaborated that the door of the airplane was open for the entire flight. He did not recall seeing shoulder harnesses in the airplane. They were not wearing headsets, but it was easy for him to hear the pilot. He stated that there was no discussion with the pilot, prior to the flight, regarding what to do in the event of an emergency or accident.

When asked about the pilot, Mr. Gillett characterized him as a happy kid with no issues. He was unaware of any drug or alcohol use prior to the flight and was unaware of any health issues.