

Airplane Incident Report
By Peter Jensen, US Private Pilot License [REDACTED]

I chartered the airplane to take photographs and videos of the Bigfoot tow vessel, which was being moved from Galveston to a location south of Houma. The vessel Bigfoot was approximately 170 miles offshore.

I hired a Videographer, Seth, to get the video footage. Seth is also a student pilot. I was to take the still photographs.

I am a Private Pilot, with no multiengine airplane experience.

I chartered the twin engine Piper with Air Reldan in Slidell because they do offshore flights deploying marine buoys, and because their Piper is able to fly without its cargo door. The absence of the cargo door allows clearer photographs and videos to be taken without the need to shoot through Plexiglas windows.

Before the flight I contacted a friend with the Coast Guard Auxiliary to discuss what safety equipment would be important to have for flights offshore. Air Reldan had everything we needed.

The chartered airplane had arrived from Slidell airport and was waiting for us at Galliano airport. I met the pilot and co-pilot and gave them the updated position of the Bigfoot vessel which had been travelling at 2 knots parallel to the coastline (coming closer to us). I also asked the pilots if the airplane had been topped off with fuel.

Their answer was that they did not top off the fuel tanks, and that they had enough fuel.

My estimate was that with full fuel, the airplane had 6 hours of fuel endurance. My estimate was that the mission would be about 4 hours. Allowing 30 minutes of fuel to get to Galliano from Slidell should have provided a 1 hour30 minute fuel reserve. I was not happy that the pilots did not top off the fuel tanks, but OK – I had hired a reputable company.

We had to wait at Galliano about 45 minutes while a life raft was flown down from Air Reldan in Slidell for us to use.

I was sitting in the airplane facing rearward, behind the copilot. Seth the Videographer was facing forward, sitting behind the pilot seat nearest the cargo door opening.

When the engines were started, I turned on my GPS tracker which Geotagged the pictures on my phone. I also have a GPX file exported for detailed information if needed.



13:47 take off on Galliano runway 18, at Alpha 1 - (taxiway Alpha was closed and we did not back-taxi).

Maximum airspeed for this Piper without doors is 130kts.

We had some headwind enroute to the Bigfoot convoy.

15:14 Arrival at Bigfoot convoy and start photo/video work.

16:07 Finished with photo/video work and headed back to Galliano Airport.





16:28 we changed course and headed to Patterson Airport.

At that time I looked at the instruments and figured out that we would probably not make it. I took some pictures of the instruments to make my own calculations.

I asked the pilots to turn the intercom back on so that I could hear their communications and stay informed.

The pilots said that the fuel gauge needles might be stuck from all the circling we had done. I let the videographer know what was going on, and then I started preparing for an emergency landing.

I took the chip-card out of the camera. Seth did the same. I put my camera in a position so that it would not become a flying projectile during a sudden stop.

I put my camera lenses in bags and tried to secure the bags as well as possible. I prepared text messages to my friend with the Coast Guard Auxiliary so that if we made it within range of cell phone towers I would be prepared to communicate our position and situation. I checked my GPS tracker.

17:00 we changed course and headed to the closest land after the pilots called in our low fuel condition. At this time we put on the life vests. I placed the life raft container on my lap, and placed the emergency flares beside me.

17:08 we flew over the barrier island that had a good sand beach. I recommended to the pilots that they bring the airplane down at the beach rather than overfly more open water. The pilots were optimistic that we could make it to Patterson. It was around this time that we lost the first engine due to lack of fuel.

We continued towards the river line / coastline until we lost the second engine around 17:15.

17:16 we hit the water with high speed, the airplane made a sharp 90 degree left turn and stopped nearly immediately. The location was 13 nautical miles

away from Patterson Airport in a side arm of the Atchafalaya river Latitude: 29° 30' 8.31" N Longitude: 91° 15' 37.602" W.

We got out of the airplane. I had a sharp pain in my right rib cage so that I could not lift the raft. Seth was able to get it.

I was able to get out of the airplane by myself with the emergency flares.

We inflated the raft for safety but we were not in a hurry since the airplane was not moving at all - it was stuck in the mud.

After making sure that nobody was seriously hurt we could relax more.

I tried to text and call my friend with the Coast Guard Auxiliary to pass on our exact GPS location. I informed my company, and also shot some pictures with my cell phone.

We saw a mud boat on the river passing by and not reacting to the flare gun. We later saw a crew boat pass by, also not reacting to the flare.

When the airplane first touched down, the water came from the front, passed the side wall on my side and hit my arm and watch. The water pressure with its intrusion destroyed my Breitling watch. Later on I also had issues with my wrist.

The force of the water also had so much pressure that mud and water came into the camera chamber.

All my camera lenses were either lost or destroyed.

18:07 US Coast Guard helicopter arrived. I secured the life raft to the propeller of the airplane so that the prop wash from the helicopter would not cause an incident.

The Rescue swimmer came onto the wing of the airplane and we destroyed the raft with his knife.

We were winched aboard the helicopter using its cage. The Coast Guard helicopter brought us to Patterson Airport - myself and Seth first - and on the second trip the 2 pilots.

At Patterson Airport we received a thorough check by the first responders. The local Police remained there until we were picked up by a vehicle sent by Air Reldan. At our request, we were dropped off at Saint Ann hospital in Raceland where we were checked.

-- Passenger Injury Information Withheld --







