

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety

Washington, DC 20594



CEN24FA083

ON SCENE SUMMARY

January 6, 2024

A. ACCIDENT

Location: Dolores, Colorado
Date: January 6, 2024
Time: 0945 Mountain Standard Time (MST)
Helicopter: Just Highlander N712DG

B. ON SCENE SUMMARY

IIC Alexander Lemishko
NTSB
Denver, CO

Party to Investigation Kieth Crockett
FAA FSDO
Salt Lake City, UT

C. SUMMARY

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On January 6, 2024, about 0945 mountain standard time a Just Highlander airplane, N712DG, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Dolores, Colorado. Both pilots sustained fatal injuries. The airplane was operated as Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* personal flight.

According to Automated Dependent Surveillance - Broadcast (ADS-B) data, the airplane was flown from the Cortez Municipal Airport (CEZ), Cortez, Colorado on January 4, 2024. The data showed the departure time of about 1601. The airplane landed at the pilot's private dirt airstrip about 1616. The airplane was parked outside at the private airstrip until the morning of January 6, 2024. The distance from CEZ to the private airstrip was about 17 miles.

On the morning of January 6th, about 0915, a family member received a text message from one of the pilots that they were flying back to CEZ. The family member responded but did not receive a response. The family called local authorities. An Alert Notice (ALNOT) was issued, and a search team was assembled. According to the time stamp of the departure text messages, the time of the accident was after 0915 and before 1000. For the purposes of the report, the time of the accident was about 0945.

On January 7th, about 1400, the airplane wreckage was located by local law enforcement beyond the departure end of the private runway. A severe post-impact fire consumed most of the airplane.

Witnesses

There were no eyewitnesses to the accident. However, a local pilot that was flying in the area reported that he and his pilot-rated-passenger saw 3 tire tracks on the snow-covered dirt runway near the estimated time that the accident occurred.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

Since the airplane departed from CEZ on January 4th, until it took off from the private runway on the morning of January 6th, temperatures were mostly below freezing. Cycles of snow and sun melting that resulted in areas of surface ice prevailed throughout the area. The weather conditions were confirmed by reports of residents who lived in the area, and a preliminary National Transportation Safety Board weather study.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION



Accident Scene/General

Detailed examination of the accident site showed that the airplane went off the end of the runway, impacted a 3-wire barbed wire fence, and came to rest upright about 610 ft. beyond the departure end of the snow-covered dirt runway, heading about 175°. The approximate runway heading was 250°. The length of the runway was about 1,800 ft, and its width was about 30 ft.

No preimpact mechanical anomalies were found with the flight controls, airframe, or engine at the accident site. It should be noted that 8-12 inches of snow covered the area including the wreckage. Brooms were used to brush off the snow to examine the airplane. The wreckage was recovered to a secure facility in Denver.

Airframe

Severe fire damage consumed all the fabric flight control surfaces, and all the cockpit instruments. Other than damage from impact forces and fire, examination of the flight controls and airframe did not reveal any pre-impact anomalies. Flight control continuity from the cockpit to the ailerons, elevator, and rudder was confirmed. The flap position could not be confirmed due to severe fire damage. The tubular frame structure was mostly intact but had severe fire damaged.



Cockpit Engine Controls

The cockpit engine controls were severely damaged by fire. However, the hardware securing the cockpit throttle control was secure and in the full throttle position. The hardware connecting the engine cockpit controls forward to the engine and engine fuel control unit were secure and in the full throttle position.

Engine/Propeller (On Scene)



The engine was separated from the fuselage and displayed severe fire damage. The 3-bladed propeller assembly was found separated from the engine. It was located behind the empennage and did not have fire damage. Two of the composite propeller blade's spans were damaged, and one of the blades had about 3 turns of the barbed wire wrapped around its root, consistent with rotation at the time of impact with the fence.

Date & Time: Tue, Jan 09, 2024 at 12:08:06 MST
Position: +037.527272° / -108.515497° (±16.1ft)
Altitude: 6989ft (±10.2ft)
Datum: WGS-84
Azimuth/Bearing: 209° S29W 3716mils True (±14°)
Elevation Angle: -61.1°
Horizon Angle: -00.5°
Zoom: 1.0X



Submitted by:

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