

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety

Washington, DC 20594



CEN24FA260

ACCIDENT SCENE AND AIRCRAFT SUMMARY

July 13, 2024

A. ACCIDENT

Location: Bonita, LA
Date: 07/11/2024
Time: 1407 CDT
Aircraft: Air Tractor AT-502B; N6177J / Air Tractor AT-802A; N795LA

B. ACCIDENT SCENE PARTICIPANTS

IIC	Aaron Sauer NTSB Denver, CO
Investigator	Andrew Finne NTSB Denver, CO
Participants	Cory Titmus Federal Aviation Administration Baton Rouge, LA John Shamblin Federal Aviation Administration Baton Rouge, LA Janet Gonzales Federal Aviation Administration Baton Rouge, LA Kyle Schroeder Air Tractor Olney, TX

C. ACCIDENT SCENE AND AIRCRAFT SUMMARY

SUMMARY:

On July 11, 2024, about 1407 central daylight time (CDT), an Air Tractor AT-502B airplane, N6177J, and an Air Tractor AT-802A airplane, N795LA, were involved in a midair collision near Bonita, Louisiana. The Air Tractor AT-502B was destroyed, and the pilot was fatally injured. The Air Tractor AT-802A sustained minor damage,

and the pilot was not injured. Both aircraft were operated as Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 137 aerial applications flights.

N795LA was operated by Arkla Flyers, Inc., Mer Rouge, Louisiana, and departed a company airstrip about 2.3 miles west of the estimated collision point. The planned flight was to provide aerial application to a field about 12 miles east of the airstrip.

N6177J was operated by McGinty Flying Service, LLC, Jones, Louisiana, and departed a company airstrip about 3 miles northeast of the estimated collision point. The planned flight was to provide aerial application to a field about 10 miles southwest of the airstrip.

According to the N795LA pilot, he departed the private airstrip and was traveling east about 200 ft above ground level. About 2 miles after departure, the pilot suddenly observed N6177J about 100 ft to his left at the same altitude (See figure 1). The pilot pulled back on the control stick to avoid N6177J. The pilot felt and heard a bang, and he controlled the airplane after the collision. The pilot circled the area and noticed N6177J had impacted the terrain and observed a small ground fire. The pilot eventually returned to the airstrip, and the airplane landed with the tail wheel landing gear missing from the airplane. During the collision, the airplane sustained minor damage to the tail wheel and fertilizer spreader.



Figure 1. Overview of departure locations and collision point.

A witness, who was the loader for N795LA and located at the company airstrip, stated that he observed N795LA's take off from the airstrip and planned flight to the east. Above the distant tree line, he observed N6177J transitioning from the northeast to the southwest and then the collision between the two airplanes. He

observed one airplane descend into the terrain and then saw smoke, then the one airplane continued in flight. Shortly thereafter, N795LA returned to the airstrip.

According to the operators of both airplanes, neither pilot provided radio communications during the aerial application flights.

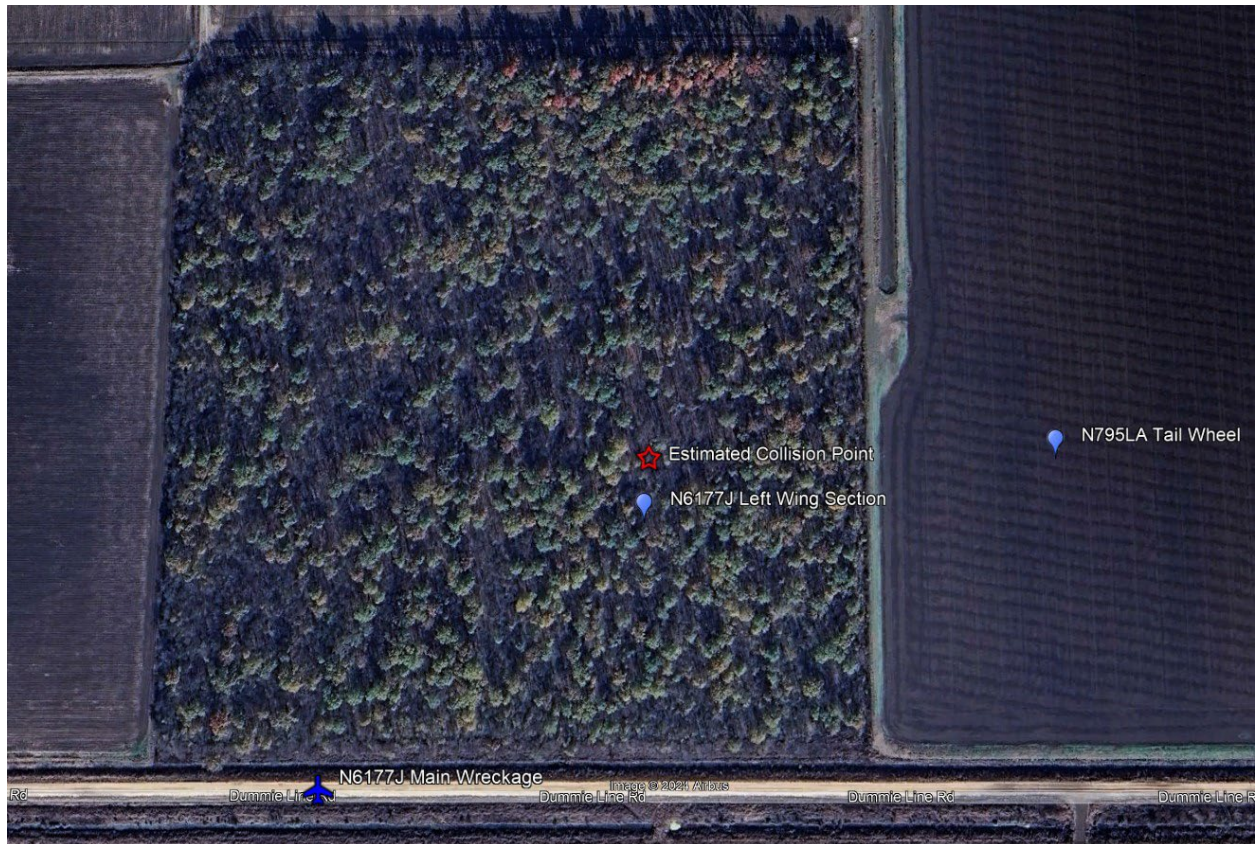


Figure 2. Accident site with debris and main wreckage annotated.



Figure 3. Aerial view of N6177J accident site.

AIRCRAFT EXAMINATION:

N795LA; Air Tractor AT-802A Summary

Initial postaccident examination of N795LA revealed the operator had completed repairs to the tail wheel assembly to continue their agricultural operations prior to the investigators' arrival to the airplane's location. The operator provided photographs of the airplane after it landed following the collision and details of what was repaired. The tail wheel and tail wheel fork were separated during the collision and located in a rice field to the east of the accident site location. Yellow paint chips and fiberglass shards were located on the underside of the spreader unit, consistent with the left wing tip from N6177J. Two additional areas of transfer marks were located; however, inconclusive on whether they were related to the collision: paint transfer on the right main landing gear tire (side walls), black transfer marks on the

right forward leading edge of the spreader consistent with the wire deflector cable. The airplane sustained minor damage during the midair collision.

The SATLOC unit was accessed by the Air Tractor representative and several flights were downloaded onto a flash drive device. The flight files were encrypted, and Air Tractor will coordinate with the software manufacturer for access to the flight data.

The airplane was equipped with standard navigation and strobe lights located on the wing tips and empennage.

Postaccident examination of the airplane revealed no evidence of any preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures that would have precluded normal operation.



Figure 4. N795LA in the operator's hangar facility (tail wheel assembly repaired).



Figure 5. Missing tail wheel assembly following landing after the collision (Source: Arkla Flyers, Inc.)



Figure 6. Accident tail wheel assembly after recovery from the rice field.



Figure 7. Paint and fiberglass debris located on the underside of N795LA's spreader.

N6177J; Air Tractor AT-502B Summary

Postaccident examination of N6177J revealed the airplane impacted wooded terrain, and the initial ground impact was located on the north side ditch of Dummie Line Road. The initial ground impact was consistent with the right wing and forward

fuselage. Green navigation lens was found at the end of a long ground scar on the left side of the initial ground impact, consistent with the airplane impacting the terrain in an inverted position. Separated sections of the forward fuselage, main landing gear, engine, 3-blade propeller assembly, spreader, and right wing tip were located on the Dummie Line Road surface. The left and right wing structure and miscellaneous debris were separated from the fuselage and located in the south ditch (full of water) of Dummie Line Road. The cockpit, rear fuselage, and empennage were located on the top of a levee to the south of the ditch. A postaccident fire ensued and partially consumed the wing structure, miscellaneous debris, and vegetation in the south ditch.



Figure 8. N6177J initial ground impact with right wing tip structure.



Figure 9. N6177J debris field.

The outboard 72" of left wing structure, to include a portion of the aileron, a boom hangar, and miscellaneous aluminum skin and fiberglass were located in the wooded terrain, about 800 ft northeast of the initial ground impact. The separated wing structure exhibited a semi-circular impact and black rubber transfer, consistent with a main landing gear wheel from N795LA (See figures 10 and 11.). The left horizontal stabilizer, about mid-span and mid-chord, was deflected upward with black rubber transfer consistent with the size of N795LA tail wheel tire.

Flight control continuity could not be established due multiple control tube and cable fractures. All separations of control tubes and cables were consistent with overstress failures during the collision and impact sequence. The cockpit and flight control surfaces connection hardware were secure with no anomalies noted.

The 3-blade propeller assembly remained attached to the engine propeller shaft and forward compressor section. The 3 blades were bent aft, twisted in the direction of rotation, and all 3 blade tips were separated. The engine was separated between the compressor and turbine modules. The exposed turbine wheel blades displayed foreign object debris and thermal damage.

Postaccident examination of the airplane revealed no evidence of any preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures that would have precluded normal operation.



Figure 10. N6177J separated outboard left wing structure located in wooded terrain. (Source: Federal Aviation Administration)



Figure 11. N6177J separated outboard left wing structure.



Figure 12. N6177J separated left wing structure with exemplar Air Tractor main landing gear wheel/tire.



Figure 13. N6177J left horizontal stabilizer with black rubber transfer mark.

N6177J was equipped with standard navigation and strobe lights located on the wing tips and empennage. In addition, the forward fuselage (nose) contained two pulsating LED lights. Postaccident examination of the cockpit switch positions were undetermined due to impact and thermal damage.

The SATLOC control unit and a Garmin G5 unit were recovered from the aircraft. The units were retained for further examination and data extraction.

___END OF SUMMARY___