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Alpine Flight Training  
Accident Report (N5755B)  
6/4/2024

Prior to our departure, a fuel top off was called into Signature over 30 minutes before we preflighted the airplane. After speaking with my boss (the owner of the flight school), he checked signature's logs the next morning (6/5/24). It appears their records don't indicate fueling our aircraft prior to our flight. My student and I were busy briefing our flight and the approaches we were going to fly for roughly 30 minutes before our preflight. During preflight, we checked the manual wing fuel gauges and they appeared to be slightly fluctuating back and forth from  $\frac{1}{2}$  tank to  $\frac{3}{4}$  tank. Myself, as well as my student, were under the impression that this was a normal indication based on prior experience in that specific airplane. They were known for being a little faulty and other CFIs at the flight school can attest to the fact that they are not the most trustworthy gauges. Whether this was true or not, this is what I was taught. We agreed that we didn't have an exact number for our fuel quantity, however, we were aware of the inaccuracy of these gauges so we assumed we had been topped off with fuel because of the early fuel request. Also, even if the indications were showing properly, based on fuel flow calculations in that airplane, we would have had enough fuel for the day vfr requirements. Our flight was going to be roughly 2.5 hours plus 30 minutes of reserve for a total of 3 hours of required fuel on board. Additionally, after completing the preflight checklist, we found no issues with the aircraft, both agreeing it was in flying condition: oil dipstick at 11 liters, all lights functional, gas (based on wing gauges) fluctuated from more than half to a little higher than  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a tank, no gross deformities on the propeller or damage to the plane. The run-up checklist all passed within normal limits for this specific aircraft. We decided the aircraft was in flying condition so we proceeded to depart KEGE and fly up to KSBS to practice our first approach we had briefed.

We never checked the tanks visually, which at the end of the day is a massive mistake on our behalf, and I take full responsibility. However, I was specifically taught that when preflighting that airplane, we were never to check the fuel tanks visually because it is a high wing aircraft and we would need a ladder to climb up and make a visual check. That never seemed to sit right with me because the aircraft that I fly much more frequently, a PA-28-181 (low wing), I always made it a habit to do a visual check. This specific C-182 was the first high wing aircraft I have ever flown throughout all my flight training and my career. Since the accident, it has been brought to my attention that we have a straw in the baggage compartment of the plane to dip into the fuel tank as a process for checking the fuel. This technique was never taught to me, and I'm fairly confident that if it had been, I would have made it a habit as part of my preflight routine just as I had done so when preflighting the Piper Archer.

With all this being said, we assumed we had a full top off of fuel, and after engine start, we set the electronic fuel gauge in the airplane to read full fuel, giving us a very inaccurate reading of our fuel quantity throughout the duration of our flight.

In terms of when the emergency actually arose in the air, our last departure point was KHDN, and after we departed to head back to KEGE, I remember reading approximately 26 gallons of fuel remaining on our electronic fuel gauge. We were roughly 15 miles north of the Eagle County Regional Airport (our final destination) at approximately 11,000 ft. when we first noticed a significant drop in RPMs and manifold pressure. My first instinctive response was to immediately turn the carburetor heat on as I presumed we could have a carb icing problem. The engine preceded to run rough for a few seconds, and then the manifold pressure and the RPMs returned to a normal indication (within the green arc) on our tachometer. After another 45 seconds or so, the RPMs and MP dropped significantly again. I proceeded to pitch for best glide speed (80 kts) and started running our “power loss in flight” checklist. When I had to determine our best place to land, I thought about potentially trying to glide it into the Eagle airport. Based on the mountainous terrain in front of us, our distance, altitude, descent rate, and my glide advisory feature on my iPad, I didn’t feel great about that option. I quickly looked around for a field to land in and there weren’t a lot of great options as it was all very mountainous terrain. I spotted a small grassy field just off of our left wing (east of our position) and proceeded to set up for a forced landing with what I thought was relatively into the wind and away from rising terrain. During the emergency descent, we quickly finished our checklist items, squawked 7700 and declared an emergency on 121.5. Just prior to touchdown, as we circled to a northwesterly heading, I pulled the mixture all the way back to lean, and turned off our battery master switch to prevent a fire in the case of a hard impact. When we were approximately 30 feet above the ground, we were faced with a significant loss in vision due to the sun glare from the sun setting over the horizon. I lost all visual reference and we overshot our intended landing zone, preceding to crash into the hillside of sagebrush that surrounded the flat terrain at the bottom of the shallow valley. As soon as the aircraft came to rest, we checked on each other to ensure our wellbeing. We preceded to exit the airplane promptly through the left door. Thankfully, neither of us were injured. The property owners, Nick and his wife, responded immediately in their UTV. They were walking their dogs when they saw us crash, and Nick attested to the fact of how blinding the sun glare was. Authorities responded within 25 minutes or so.