

INSPECTOR STATEMENT

1972 Cessna 421B

Aircraft # N3372Q

S/N: 421B0256

TT: 5806 approx.

Engines: Continental GTSIO-520-F-K

Pilot: Smith, Russell Neal [REDACTED]

Pilot Ratings: Airplane Multiengine Land, Airplane Single Engine Land, Instrument Airplane

On April 26, 2016 at approximately 1420 hours local the aircraft a Cessna 421B taxied to the runway to depart on a personal trip to West Georgia Regional Airport in Mount Zion to meet a friend. The aircraft proceeded down runway 18 and left the ground at the threshold barely clearing the airport's outer fence. The aircraft was unable to gain sufficient altitude to clear the trees less than ¼ of a mile south of the runway. The aircraft began hitting tree tops at approximately 1424 hours local and impacted a large oak tree with left wing causing it to spin into 2 other large oak trees 30 feet to the southwest. The aircraft flipped over and was approximately 15 to 20 feet off the ground before exploding and being consumed by fire. The pilot jumped from the rear entry door and landed on his back. Pilot refused medical attention and sustained burns and a cut to his left hand.

The aircraft was fueled by the FBO with 45.20 gallons of AvGas100LL. The pilot stated he had 50 gallons in each wing tank and 25 gallons in each tank behind them for approximately 150 gallons total. The fuel source and aircraft tanks were checked for contamination by the pilot and FBO personnel. The pilot according to witness Ray Vaught (CFI/pilot at Lightning Aviation) flooded his left engine on his first attempted start after it was fueled. The next start and other engine start were uneventful. Mr. Smith taxied out and lined up for takeoff on the runway. Mr. Smith said with brakes on, he cycled the propellers and they checked good. The mag check at 1500 rpm was good, oil press was good and oil temp was good. He said he then checked to make sure the fuel switches were on both mains, throttle was full, mixture all the way forward, boost pumps on low, and props were all the way forward. He put flaps to t/o and released the brakes. Mr. Smith said everything was normal (temps, pressures, in the green) and accelerated to 75-80 knots he pulled back on the yoke slowly and began to climb. He put his gear up and noticed he wasn't climbing. He looked at his air speed and he was at 80 knots. He heard the stall warning and pulled back on the yoke. He said he shut the boost pumps off and lowered flaps before a hard impact. He didn't know what happened but was upside down in the aircraft. He released his belt and saw fire and went to the back of the aircraft. He opened the back hatch and rolled forward landing flat on his back. 2 men helped him up and led him to the house before an explosion and intense fire on the aircraft.

I interviewed Douglas Wade Thompson who is a Private Pilot/Mechanic certificate [REDACTED]. Mr. Thompson said he saw Mr. Smith taxi out and it appeared that the 421B was going very slow down the runway. Mr. Thompson said everything sounded normal but the aircraft didn't appear to be airborne until it reached the threshold. Mr. Thompson

said he was wondering why Mr. Smith didn't abort the take-off. He said it was luck when he cleared the airport fence but knew he wasn't going to clear the trees. The aircraft didn't have the speed and it was barely climbing. The FBO called 911 as soon as it became apparent the aircraft was going down. I interviewed the pilot Russell Smith in the presence of Operations Inspector Nina McBride and Continental Motors Investigator Kurt Gibson at approximately 1110 hrs at Mr. Smith's residence in Pensacola. I informed him that Mr. Gibson could answer any technical issues regarding the engines. When asked about the engine problems he claimed he had on the local news Mr. Smith said, "the engines were operating fine and I screwed up." He claimed everything was in the green and appeared normal. The POH says to rotate at 100 knots but he was well below that speed. Mr. Smith claimed all of his records were on the plane. He said all the log books, his medical, and his logbook were in an AOPA bag on the co-pilots seat. There was no evidence of a bag or any log books even though the POH and a chart book were recovered with just the edges burnt. He told us his last annual was done by a man he paid cash to who is from Georgia and works on DC-3s in Slidell, LA. I also spoke to the airport manager in Slidell, LA Richie Artigue at [REDACTED] on May 2nd, 2016 at 1400 hrs who said he hasn't had a DC-3 land there in over 20 years. He said his last check ride was done 16-18 months prior by an instructor who used to work at JLS in Foley but moved to Fairhope with his CE-172. He didn't have his name but we tracked down the only pilot who meets that description, John Ward [REDACTED]. Mr. Ward checked his records and last saw Mr. Smith in 2011. The last medical Mr. Smith had in the FAA database was also in 2011. Mr. Smith said he will never try to fly again and asked how to surrender his certificate.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

Joseph M. Arvay
Principal Avionics Inspector