

October 4, 2017

Richmond FSDO

Richmond International Airport
Richmond, Virginia 23250-2415

ATTN: Ken Bain

RE: Se5a, N685SE Off-Airport Landing Incident

Dear Inspector Bain:

Per your telephone request, the following is my account as the pilot of Se5a, N685SE on October 3, 2017 at Virginia Beach Airport (42VA) and the ensuing off-airport landing. This is a first flight for this aircraft.

On the previous day, I had started, taxied and fast taxied with the tail up the aircraft to ensure it was running properly and satisfactorily for flight. The intent was to fly it at that time, but the wind speed and direction became unfavorable and decided to fly it the next morning early while it was still calm or low winds. All ground ops checks this day were satisfactory and I was comfortable that the aircraft was ready for flight.

The following morning, the winds were calm and we started the aircraft at approximately 0830. I taxied out to runway 29. I chose this runway so the sun would not be in my eyes on take-off and landing. The aircraft started and ran well during taxi and run-up. I advanced the power slowly and the engine ran perfectly as the aircraft quickly accelerated and became airborne. Once in the air, I normally check all gauges and assess how it's running and will pull power back and land back on the runway if there are any questions whatsoever about its airworthiness. It was running like a top and had immediately accelerated to 80 mph with ease. Watching it's progression for the next few seconds, I committed to continue flight, as it was running perfect. At about 200-300 feet AGL, and beyond $\frac{3}{4}$ ways down the runway, I sensed it was losing power, even though I could hear no change in sound of the engine. By the end of the departure end of the runway, it was becoming apparent that it was definitely losing power, even though it sounded unchanged.

I started a gradual left turn, looked at my speed and it was at 60 mph and it had stopped climbing. I made a few minor changes in throttle settings and it made no difference at the higher end. I made a very small adjustment in the mixture to see if it would do anything different. It appeared to for a second, but continued to lose power. All this time, I am making a left turn hoping to get back around and land on the airport in the opposite direction. The power continued to degrade and I had to continue to steepen my decent to maintain my airspeed of 60 mph. I quickly realized I was not going to make it back to the airport and turned back South to steer clear of houses between me and the airport and headed for a recently cut corn field. I was still trying to look for something that would bring it back to life, but it was not to be. I committed to land in the corn field, as there were swampy woods just beyond the field and nowhere to land. I pulled the throttle back to idle and the engine did reduce in RPM, telling me that it was still running, but just not producing power to sustain flight.

Approach and initial touchdown were coordinated and smooth. I was in the flare with the main wheels rolling on the ground and aircraft was decelerating with the tail I couple of inches off the ground. I could hear the cut corn stalks (approximately 10-12 inches high) hitting the wheels and landing gear. Suddenly there was a loud

crack, a sudden drop to a very hard vertical stop, a then a sudden stop of forward motion and aircraft flipped over and remained upside down.

I dropped down out of the aircraft, and shut everything off (fuel, mags, etc.) and called for help. There was no further distress to the aircraft. There was no fire, or fluid draining from the aircraft. I had a small cut on my forehead where my sunglasses broke and caused a small cut after hitting my head smartly on the padded edging of the cockpit.

Let me know if you need any additional information from me.

Thank You,

[REDACTED]
Michael A. Spalding

[REDACTED]
Chief Pilot
Military Aviation Museum



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Todd Gunther
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: January 17, 2018
Subject: Information Provided by Tom Kurtz
NTSB Accident Number: ERA17LA003

Mr. Kurtz was the Director of Maintenance for The Fighter Factory.

According to Mr. Kurtz, the engine was in very good shape. After the accident they could find nothing wrong with the airplane, and when they looked at the engine, the engine would pull through easily without binding. There appeared to be no mechanical failures, and the fuel system, lubrication system, and ignition system, were functional.



MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

Todd Gunther
Air Safety Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: May 16, 2018
Subject: Interview with Roger Freeman (Freeman Heritage Collection)
NTSB Accident Number: ERA17LA003

Mr. Freeman was interviewed over the telephone.

According to Mr. Freeman, the airplane's fuel system was an "oddball fuel system" and was pressurized and did not use a fuel pump. He believed that the fuel system may not have been properly vented and the engine could have incurred fuel starvation.

To avoid a fuel starvation problem in the future, they changed from a pressurized system to a fuel pump type system and included a vent in the fuel system.