

Scenario

Event: C10

Schedule: 0930 / 1030 / 1300

Instructor: Jody Smotherman

Students: Shane Popko / Brian Hand

Aircraft: N2143G

Weather: SKC, Wind 070/5, Altimeter 30.40

Location: KESN

Runway: 04

Background

MIDN Popko flew his C1-C4, C7, C8, and C10 with Smotherman. He flew his C590 with CAPT Wagener, C6 with Wasi Baset (Trident) and his C990 with CAPT Ogden. His performance throughout the syllabus was average to above-average (his training jacket has been secured by the FAA).

Performance Trends

- Rapid progression post-C6. Learning curve steepened as the syllabus progressed.
- Tendency to initiate a deep base turn resulting in a shallow final.
- After power management demonstrations by Smotherman during flight, Popko had a better understanding of power management and power corrections.
- Instructor had no doubt he was progressing toward solo.

24 June Timeline of Events

0845: Popko and Hand arrive at Easton

0900: Instructor and students discuss the plan for crew swaps.

0915: Students inform instructor they are ready to brief. Standard PFP brief. Weight and balance within limits, weather was better than 5000/5. All required documents were reviewed and signed (Medical, photo ID, logbook w/endorsements, pre-solo exam graded and corrected).

1000: Students endorsed by instructor.

1010-1020: Instructor and students execute preflight. Instructor identified left tire was low on tread. No abnormalities were noted with the engine. Oil was warm and was indicating 6 quarts on dipstick. Popko noticed the fuel pressure gauge "did not move and may be stuck" at 7 psi but was explained that the line remained pressurized and would move post engine start. Previous crew took picture at aircraft.

1025: Engine start up. Fuel pressure indication fell to 5 psi (green range) supporting what instructor expectations. All engine start checks were normal. Received ATIS Information India (wind 070/5, weather better than 5000/5, altimeter 30.40).

~1027: Called Ground CTL for taxi authorization. Determined COMM 1 was transmitting but not receiving. Switched radios and cleared to taxi to RWY 04 via Bravo-Alpha, cross RWY 04 at Alpha. Popko had a good read back of the clearances.

1028: Taxi. Instructor troubleshoot radios and got all working 4.0. Arranged radios to ensure all frequencies were available without tuning. Instructor ensured Popko understood Comm Panel Functionality.

All run-ups were performed by Popko correctly and all indications were 4.0. Delivered a take-off brief IAW PFP Stan. Briefed a max power t/o, Vr of 55 kias, Vy of 79 kias. In the event of a complete power loss Popko briefed he would look for a landing site forward of the wings.

1030: Established at hold-short RWY 04. Cleared for Takeoff. Popko appeared comfortable and confident.

1030-1055: Two touch and go's. Assessed to be smooth, safe and passable. Both were left of centerline. Post-second touch and go on upwind, instructor told student to request a full stop and to taxi clear at Delta Taxiway for crew swap at Easton Jet. On downwind, Tower cleared Popko for a short base and touch and go due to traffic. Popko again requested the full stop / taxi off at Delta. Instructor intervened and accepted the short approach.

During the turn, Popko was set up to land long. Instructor told student to aim for the runway intersection as a touchdown point (RWY 04 is 5500') leaving > 3000'. Executed the T&G well and requested a full stop on next pass.

Final pass with instructor was an extended downwind to approximately three miles. Instructor allowed student to correct on his own to observe student's ability to adapt to unexpected changes. Student performed a good landing and taxied clear.

1100: Established at Echo ramp. Instructor signed solo endorsement and placed in back seat. Instructor joined other instructors. Student partner, Brian Hand, also joined with a handheld radio (which was directed by the instructor).

1105: Uneventful taxi to RWY 04. Popko took off, entered downwind and performed a T&G. Instructor monitored on the handheld and assessed student sounded "in control and not stressed."

1110: On climbout off the T&G instructor heard "a series of pops" over handheld. Aircraft began to turn crosswind and stopped climbing. According to multiple accounts, the aircraft was porpoising. Instructor heard communication to Tower stating "43G, I have zero RPM" which was quickly followed with "Tower, 43G, my engine is out, I'm going down. Help"

1115: Smotherman told Popko over the radio "Look for an open field. It's just a normal landing." Aircraft began to descend with a nose down attitude. As it approached an altitude level with the tree tops, aircraft nose pitched up in an apparent stall. Aircraft transitioned to a nose down attitude and disappeared behind the trees.

1116: MIDN Brian Hand and Adrian Schalk directed to run to the hangar to notify OIC (CDR Bernard). Noah Beauchamp immediately got into his car and proceeded to the scene. Smotherman notified Trooper 6 (MD State Police) that an aircraft had crashed behind the Easton Technology Center. Two patrol vehicles immediately proceeded to the crash site. Several instructors also proceeded to the site. From Trident: Nick Kellogg and Noah Beauchamp. From Navy: LCDR Brad Berthelotte.

CDR Bernard attempted to notify CAPT Ogden via text and phone who was located at USNA.

1120: Instructors made it to the scene. Beauchamp was the first person to arrive and was only joined by construction workers from a nearby job site. Popko was already out of the aircraft, laying on his back facing the burning aircraft. Beauchamp asked for a worker to help him move Popko away from the aircraft because the first was getting worse. While moving Popko, Beauchamp recognized how bad the injuries were and made a tourniquet with Popko's belt. The police arrived shortly after this. Another instructor, Nick Kellogg arrived with police and he witnessed Popko with a belt around his leg and seemed to be "in stable condition". Popko showed no signs of burns.

At the hangar, the OIC (CDR Bernard) instructed all students and instructors to secure their phones, asked Trident to secure the Maintenance logs, and asked the SDO to secure MIDN Popko's performance jacket. Another aircraft (instructed by Frank May) was operating at Cambridge but was inbound. May reported that Tower was efficient and timely in how they handled his recovery.

1140: OIC was notified that MIDN Popko had two broken legs (one was a compound fracture) and was going to be transported back to KESN to board an airlift to Shock Trauma.

1152: Ambulance arrived and Popko was transferred to the airlift.

1252: Bernard called Shock Trauma to confirm Popko had arrived. His name was not known but it was confirmed a victim of a plane crash in Easton MD had recently arrived.

I have statements from Trident personnel and from the Navy personnel. I do not have anything from police or from EMT's. The construction of the timeline was built off of the accounts of several people and the times / occurrences are all nearly exactly the same.

Very Respectfully,

CDR Colin Bernard, USN
Deputy Senior Naval Aviator
United States Naval Academy

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Luce Hall 237