

Inspectors Statement

My Name is Cornelius J. Baker, I am an Aviation Safety Inspector assigned to the West Columbia Flight Standards District Office and I am writing this from notes taken during an accident investigation of N3862W.

On August 28, 2021 at 1430, I received a call from Front Line Manager (FLM) Petrossian and was requested to respond to the accident in Spartanburg. Drove to [REDACTED] in Spartanburg and met with the Aaron Caldwell of the City of Spartanburg Fire Department. There were three persons on board and all three were transported to the hospital with non-life threatening injuries. Examined the accident site and took pictures. All major parts of the aircraft were found at or near the main wreckage. The left wing tip fuel tank and left aileron were farthest away. I asked the first responders if the pilot said anything about what happened. It was said by one of the first responders that the young lady was trying to tell owner to shut things down and at some point said they may have run out of fuel. But later when the first responder asked again, he said that a neighbor had stated that, but did not know who that person was. There was evidence of fuel at the site. One of the first neighbors to arrive was Michael Miller [REDACTED] and he stated, "The lady was already out of the aircraft and helping the man from the aircraft. There was still fuel draining from this wing." It was the right wing he was pointing at. Mr. Miller was asked about the flight instructor stating about running out of fuel. He said it was a man with dark hair who was trying to get the young lady to sit down. He did not know who the person was. The fire department stated they moved the fuel selector two places to the right. When I examined the fuel selector it was in the off position. Two places to the left from the off position, meant the left main tank was selected.

The left wing tip fuel tank was found below the first tree showing signs of damage approximately 55-65 feet from the main wreckage. The left wing main fuel tank appears to have received damage consistent with contacting a tree. A video provided by a neighbor (Alan and Becky Taylor [REDACTED]) from their security camera appears to show a mist of fuel as the aircraft crashes to the ground. [REDACTED] as the wing was separating. Examination of the propeller indicates the propeller [REDACTED]. Both blades are bent backwards but there is no leading edge or rotation damage found. Flight control movement was impossible to check with the damage to the wings and the aircraft hanging from its horizontal stabilator.

The aircraft owner/student pilot (Roy Griffin, Jr [REDACTED]) was questioned when out of the hospital. He stated the aircraft tip tanks were full and he had the FBO at Spartanburg bring the main tanks up to the tabs before they took off. They departed Spartanburg and flew to Morganton, NC and did stalls and figure 8's. Then to Hickory, NC and did 2 touch and goes. Then flew towards Cowpens and performed turns about a point over a water tower, and S turns over I-85. Then flew to right side of Spartanburg airport at about 1600 feet and passing mid field about 3 miles out the engine quit. Margo took control picked a spot and tried to run the checklist. He says they departed on the right tank and at some point switched to the left but doesn't remember switching again.

Each tip tank holds 17 gallons and the mains when filled to the tabs hold about 17 gallons.

Margo Anderson [REDACTED] the instructor pilot received a concussion and could not remember a whole lot. She also stated they switched tanks one time and could not remember switching a second time. Margo did take a picture of the Hobbs meter before starting and it was at 1026.1 and at the accident site it was showing 1028.4.

The aircraft was recovered by Atlanta Air Salvage on Monday August 30, 2021. Further investigation will be needed.

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