

OR STATEMENT

05/11/2021

Ricky D. Flores
FAA/ATL FSDO-11



Friday April 16, 2021:

I received a missed call from the Atlanta Regional Operations Center (ROC). I contacted the ROC and was informed that an aircraft incident had occurred at the Thomaston, Ga. airport (KOPN) and that all the information was relayed to Mark Ricker, (ATL FSDO FLM).

I contacted Mr. Ricker and was briefed on the situation and informed him that I would handle the incident. Two people were onboard, including the pilot, and no injuries had occurred. The aircraft was currently parked and secured on the ramp away from the runway and was causing no obstructions to the operations of the airport.

I called and talked to Mr. Spencer Mamber, the pilot of the aircraft. He stated that he and Mr. Terry Hilderbrand, the new owner of the aircraft, were onboard and that when he landed at KOPN, he lost control of the aircraft. The aircraft ran off the runway and the RH vertical stabilizer struck an airport signage causing damage to the aircraft and to the runway signage. He stated that no one received any injuries and that the aircraft was secured on the ramp by the airport Fixed Base of Operations (FBO).

Mr. Mamber also stated to me that they departed from Vidalia Airport, (KVDI) and that he attempted two takeoffs. He felt the aircraft was not acting right but he made a third take off attempt and was able to get the aircraft in the air.

Mr. Mamber was contracted by Mr. Hilderbrand to fly the aircraft and Mr. Hilderbrand to the Sidney, NE airport (KSYN) with several stops enroute. However, they were experiencing higher fuel flow during the first phase of the flight and decided to land at KOPN to investigate the problem. Upon a three point landing, the aircraft became uncontrollable and veered to the left side of the runway and ran on the grassy area where it hit the airport signage. They were able to taxi the aircraft to the FBO and park it on the ramp. I asked Mr. Mamber to provide a statement concerning the event and relay the request also to Mr. Hilderbrand.

I asked Mr. Mamber for photos of the aircraft (Photo #1-2), the damaged areas (Photos #3-6), registration (Photo #7), airworthiness certificate (Photo #8), airport signage (Photos #9-10) and pilots credentials (Item #1) to be sent to me via email and/or text. Mr. Mamber agreed and he asked if they needed to stick around so they could get a commercial flight home. Since it would have taken me over three hours to get down to Thomaston, Ga. I told Mr. Mamber that I needed to review the photos and I would call him back. Upon review of the photos and documents, I called Mr. Mamber and stated to him that I was satisfied with not having to go down to Thomaston and that they could leave.

I stressed to Mr. Mamber that it was vital that I received their statements as part of the investigation. However, they could send me the statements on Monday or Tuesday after they returned back home.

The aircraft landed on RWY 30 at approximately the 1000' mark and made about a 35 degree turn off the runway and impacted the runway FBO signage. The aircraft damage was done to the RH vertical stabilizer and the LH side of the aircraft empennage, which was caused by the impact of the RH stabilizer. The aircraft was able to make it back to the runway and proceeded to the FBO ramp. Once parked on the ramp, the aircraft was secured down and the FBO was notified. The FBO signage was an FAA approved breakaway sign but was not extensively damaged and remained intact except for minor Plexiglas damage on the rear side of the sign. There was no airfield closure, the aircraft was parked safely way on the ramp and the slight damage to the airport signage did not cause any issues for the continued operations of the airfield.

Monday April 19, 2021:

I called Mr. Mitch Ellerbee, KOPN airport manager, to discuss the incident that happened at the airport. He stated that he was in his office at the time and that there were no calls or any indications of aircraft trouble coming into the airport. He stated the incident happened around 1110L. The aircraft had pulled up to the ramp and was being looked over by the operator. After about 10 minutes the pilot and passenger came into the FBO and told them what had happened. At that time Mr. Ellerbee contracted the ROC to inform them of the situation. I requested a statement from him and he stated that he would get me one in a few days.

Received Mr. Mamber's statement (Item #2).

Tuesday April 20, 2021:

Received Mr. Ellerbee's statement (Item #3).

I had made a few attempts to call Mr. Hilderbrand but was not successful and could not leave a voice mail to call me back. I requested assistance from Mr. Mamber to contact Mr. Hilderbrand.

Thursday April 22, 2021:

Mr. Hilderbrand finally contacted me and stated that he did send me a statement via email and I asked him to try again and I would get back with him on Monday. We also discussed on the whereabouts of the aircraft logbooks. He stated to me that the logbooks were onboard the aircraft and that the aircraft was not locked. I asked for permission to gain access to the aircraft and review the logbooks. Mr. Hilderbrand granted me verbal permission for access to the aircraft and logbooks.

Monday April 26, 2021:

Received Mr. Hilderbrand's statement (Item #4).

Wednesday April 28, 2021:

I traveled to Thomaston Ga. from Columbus, Ga., upon completion of a scheduled surveillance trip, to look over the aircraft and review the aircraft logbooks.

Upon review of the aircraft logbooks, it was determined that the aircraft had only been flown between 5 to 10 hours in the past ten years. The Aircraft Condition Inspections had several years of gaps that no inspection was performed and that the aircraft just sat around not being flown. The last Condition Inspection performed was on 02-06-2021 at 702.9 hours and prior to that was on 01-19-2017 at 702.5 hours (Item #6). The last maintenance performed was on 03-06-2021 for the rebuilt of the LH and RH brake calipers at 702.9 hours (Item #7)

I did not notice any damage to the brake system or any other significant damage to the aircraft except what was noted to the RH stabilizer and LH side of the empennage. The logbooks were not removed from the aircraft and I reviewed them from the RH seat. The logbooks were replaced back behind the cabin seats where they were found. The aircraft door was closed and secured.

Tuesday May 4, 2021:

I contacted the AP/IA Mechanic who performed the maintenance on the brake system on 03/06/2021. He stated that he was requested to bleed the brake system because only the LH brake was working. The mechanic stated that the current LH and RH brake systems were no good and the problem couldn't be solved with only bleeding the brakes. He told the owner that both calipers needed to be rebuilt. Upon repair, the aircraft was returned back to service. I requested and received a statement from him (Item 5).

I also contacted the AP/IA that performed the last Condition Inspection on 02/06/2021. He stated that the aircraft sat around for a very long time and the aircraft was not being maintained with required inspections. Upon completion of the Condition Inspection, he taxied the aircraft on the runway. He stated the aircraft just felt squirrely and was very sensitive to the controls but was still considered to be in an airworthy condition. He stated that it would require a very experienced pilot to fly this aircraft.

Thursday May 6, 2021:

I contacted the previous owner, Mr. Glenn Goode to discuss the condition of the aircraft and its history. Mr. Goode stated that he was accustomed to building and maintaining Experimental aircraft and that this particular aircraft was another project that he acquired. He stated that the aircraft just sat around, mostly in a hangar, because he didn't have the time to fly it. He decided to finally sell it. Mr. Goode provided me a copy of the Bill of Sale (Item #8) to establish Mr. Hilderbrand as the new owner.

Conclusion:

The investigation was conducted mostly via phone calls and emails with no in person contact, except for April 26, 2021 when I met Mr. Ellerbee to review the aircraft logbooks and look over the aircraft. [REDACTED] because the aircraft was not actively being flown, that the flight controls and landing gear [REDACTED] inactive over the years. This aircraft would also require a very experienced pilot to the fly it.

At this time, I do not believe that there were any system failures that would have contributed towards the loss of control of the aircraft. It has been noted that Mr. Mamber did not have an extensive amount of flight experience for flying this type of aircraft (Item #9). He was also not accustomed to this particular aircraft since it was the first time he was flying it.

Due the significant damage to the RH stabilizer, which greatly impacted the flight characteristics of the aircraft, it is my opinion that this event should be classified as an accident.

This statement is to the best of knowledge and recollection of the aircraft incident that had occurred.

RICKY D
FLORES SR

Digitally signed by
RICKY D FLORES SR
Date: 2021.05.11
10:28:10 -04'00'

Ricky D. Flores ASI

