



Investigator Name: Doug Brazy
Title: ASI

Division: AS -ERA

Date: 01/06/22

Subject: ERA22FA095 - N3707H, Jacksonville, FL, 12/26/21

Witness Information

From FAA Inspector Ric Riccardi, Orlando Flight Standards District Office:

The pilot's girlfriend, Maria Bithell, reported that the pilot and his friend were working on the airplane's speedbrakes on the day of the accident.

From The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office:

Rachel Maguire and Jason Snodgrass

Couple booked romantic flight over Jacksonville through Virgin Excursion Gifts, pilot "Jim". Flying over Herlong airport and "paralleled" victim plane as it was performing a "touch and go" maneuver. Victim plane took off in a vertical trajectory then rolled on its side and "nose-dived" into the ground. Black smoke began to billow from wreckage.

Additional Witness Statements Attached

To Whom It May Concern,

On 12-26-2021 at approximately 11:00am, I was parked in front of hangar row T-4 watching planes takeoff and land. I observed a Mooney aircraft with a high angle of attack departing runway 25 at Herlong Field. It appeared to be doing a go around although I didn't have a clear view of the approach end of runway 25 and didn't observe the actual approach to land. The pilot lowered the nose and established a low climb attitude. As he passed midfield, I could hear small power adjustments both up and down. I didn't hear any engine abnormalities other than power adjustments. I observed the landing gear coming up and also what appeared to be the baggage compartment door pop open. This door was on the left side of the plane and although hinged, was visible above the fuselage. The climb gradient became shallow with a slow turn to the right. The plane was above the trees but soon disappeared. I heard another pilot that was inbound to land report the crash to the FBO. I saw a plume of smoke shortly afterwards.

Feel to call if you have any questions.

Regards,

William A. Barker



Follow up in person Interview with Willam Barker - 12/30/21

Mr. Barker provided the following information:

When he first saw the airplane, it was flying "slowly" with a "very high angle of attack" Over the runway (runway 25). He then saw the nose of the airplane lower, and heard the noise of the engine RPM briefly and slightly decrease, before returning to its previous level. The engine sounded "normal" and "did not sputter, pop or falter at any time." The airplane appeared to be "barely climbing." When the airplane was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way down the runway, he saw the landing gear retract, and the baggage door opened upward. The baggage door remained open and looked "like a sail" on top of the airplane. After the door opened, the airplane did not appear to climb any further. It "drifted or turned very slightly to the right" before he lost sight of it behind a tree line.

On Sunday, December 26th 2021 at approximately 11:00AM while returning from a flight with two passengers in Cessna 172 N8364U I observed a crash of a Mooney M20P N3707H at Herlong Airport. As I approached the Herlong airport on the upwind leg for a landing on runway 25, I noted the Mooney departing runway 25. He was climbing straight ahead and appeared to be aligned with the runway. The departure appeared normal as he climbed to 200-400 feet estimated as I observed him. As he continued his forward progress, he appeared to experience a slight buffet, appeared to stall, and the right wing dropped as he appeared to enter a spin. His attitude was almost vertical at this point. He continued in this spin or spiral until contacting the ground in the middle of the cow pasture. The downward trajectory only took a few seconds, and he did not appear to have time to recover from the spin. The aircraft caught fire upon impact.

I called in on the airport advisory frequency of 123.0 and advised an aircraft just crashed off the departure end of runway 25, and to notify authorities. I also had one of the passengers' call 911 to get rescue on the way. Airport operations called back on the radio and asked if the crash was on airport property, and I advised that it was not, and that it was further down Normandy in the residential area in a field.

James Wilson [REDACTED]

Cell: [REDACTED]