



MEMORANDUM for RECORD

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Date: October 10, 2022
Person Contacted: Frank Isbell ([REDACTED]) Pilot of N52652
NTSB Accident Number: ERA22LA379 – Bealeton, VA

This investigator spoke to Mr. Isbell by phone. He reported the following:

Review Mr. Isbell's written statement from the NTSB Form 6120.1. Anything changed, different?

No. The written statement is still correct. It's pretty self-evident what happened. There are a lot of things we can discuss to prevent it from happening again. He has been flying at Flying Circus 10-11 years. This could have happened many many times. The system there is antiquated. Outdated. "Nobody really likes to use the radio." If either one of us were using the radio in this case, the accident would not have happened. There is this "old barnstormer" mentality where there is resistance to use radios. Mr. Isbell believes that if you have radios, use them.

How many aircraft make up the Flying Circus? What % have radios?

Normal Sunday, 8-10 Stearman-type airplanes plus a couple of other high performance aerobatic airplanes. About 15 total on any weekend. 51-52 years ago it started. It's been the same for a long time. A bunch of airline guys had airplanes and this was a way to write them off. It's an operation very similar to Rheinbeck, NY.

Can you describe the right-of-way restrictions for this situation (aircraft in the pattern and you are #1 for takeoff)? Are they published?

To announce your intention to land, you fly down the bean field (west of the runway) at 200-300 ft, then you make a normal right hand pattern, always away from the crowd. Right-hand pattern if taking off to the south (02/20). As he was taxiing out that day, he

was following another airplane. We were both “s” turning to look for traffic. I never saw NN55267 come through and make the low pass, I guess I had my attention on the airplane taxiing in front of me. I never saw him. When you are at the north end of the runway, getting ready to takeoff, there is limited visibility (from trees), you cannot see airplanes on a longer final approach. He assumed that there was nobody out there (on approach). Obviously that wasn’t the case. His problem with the “system” at 3VA3 is that it makes two assumptions: (1) that the pilot taking off sees everyone coming through, and (2) the pilot landing assumes that the pilot taking off saw you. Without any verification of that, “...it’s a crapshoot.”

You stated that you were lined up for the pretakeoff runup check, were there any restrictions to visibility looking for traffic in the pattern? What direction were you heading vs the runway (south runway for takeoff, correct)?

Before taking the runway, while doing his pre-takeoff check, he was lined up about 45 degrees to the runway (heading southwest).

Do the trees at the end of the runway restrict your ability to see the traffic? Any visibility issues with the aircraft design itself?

The trees at the north end of the field definitely restrict your visibility. And the upper wing on the Stearmans also restrict visibility....you have to line the airplane up just right to see.

Did you have a VHF radio installed in your airplane? Is there a CTAF at Flying Circus Aerodrome? Are you able to communicate with other aircraft with radios?

Both airplanes had electrical systems with VHF radios. We talk a little bit, but we do not make position calls such as you do in a normal traffic pattern. There are only one or two airplanes that he knows of that do not have a radio.

Did you use a helmet? Intercom with passenger?

Leather helmet with intercom for the passenger.

Did you know that Mr. Brown was up flying when you were preparing for your flight?

No. Balloon Festival is one of our busiest weekends. “Airplanes were everywhere.” On a normal weekend there may be 4-5 airplanes up at a time, this weekend there were 6-8, maybe more up at a time. Even more reason to be using radios.

You mentioned that you were going to have a meeting with the other pilots to discuss ways to prevent future accidents? Did that occur? What was discussed and what was agreed upon, if anything?

There was a meeting after the accident. A friend of his (Keith, chief pilot at American) was tasked with coming up with recommendations. Keith was going to present those recommendations at another meeting that Mr. Isbell was not able to attend, doesn't know the status.

Did you have a conversation with Mr. Brown after the accident? What transpired during that conversation. Did you discuss who had the right-of-way?

He believes that he did For the first 10-15 minutes after the accident, Mr. Isbell believed that it was a ground collision, he had not realized that Mr. Brown had landed on top of him.

Everyone uses 123.4 to communicate when they do.