

Piper PA20-135 (N8290C) Accident, KGEO, 02 May 2024, William David Brightwell

- The purpose of this flight was the return leg of a dinner flight to Bolton Field (KTZR) in Columbus, Ohio with my six year old daughter
- The flight home was excellent, very smooth air. Aircraft performed flawlessly
- Approximately 5-10 nautical miles to the NNE of GEO, I made an announcement on CTAF advising my location, altitude and intent
- A military helicopter then announced over CTAF that he was ~10nm to the east of GEO, stated his altitude and that he was inbound as well
- The helicopter did appear on my iPad via ADSB-IN
- I gained visual on the helicopter, and that was the only time I saw him. It was painted flat OD green making it very difficult to see and only had on it's red beacon(s).
- I notified CTAF that I had the helo in sight, he confirmed that he saw me as well
- Due to the difficulty associated with seeing him, the haze, and the sun starting to set, I turned on my wing tip strobes and wing-mounted taxi light. The red beacon on the belly of the aircraft was already on
- Shortly after the helicopter crew and I confirmed we had visual on each other, a Cessna 172 from Clermont County Airport (I69) announced that he was X miles northwest of GEO, inbound as well
- I never saw the Cessna, but I was monitoring his position on my iPad via ADSB-IN
- AWOS at I69 reported winds that favored RWY 18 at GEO
- The helicopter announced that he had entered a left downwind for RWY 18 at GEO
- I entered an extended left downwind for RWY 18, announced my position, my intentions and that I would be #2 to land for RWY 18
- I normally don't fly that long (or wide) of a pattern, but given how difficult it was to see the helicopter, I didn't know what type it was, how fast he was going or how bad his wake turbulence would be, I thought it would be wise to maintain a good distance between us
- After my radio call stating that I was on a left downwind for RWY 18, the Cessna announced that he too was entering a left downwind for RWY 18 at GEO
- At this point, I was preparing my airplane and my daughter for landing. Eyes outside of the cockpit, not staring at my iPad/ADSB data
- The helicopter announced that he was turning into a left base for RWY18
- I could not see the helicopter at all as I was passing the mid-field point in my downwind leg, and at this phase of the flight with two other aircraft in the vicinity, I did not want to find his location staring at ADSB data
- Wanting to make sure that there was adequate separation, I announced where I was on CTAF and asked the helicopter where he was. I made the comment that I wanted to verify their position and not cut them off or run them over
- The helicopter crew replied with something along the lines of "Oh, it sounded like it was getting pretty hectic so we decided to circle around and come in on RWY36"
- After all three aircraft agreeing to land on RWY18, for some reason they decided to land towards two incoming light aircraft

- If the helicopter crew stated what they did and/or where they went after announcing their switch to RWY36, I did not hear it as I was concentrated on configuring my airplane for landing, flying my pattern and making sure my daughter was ready for landing
- I make the usual announcements over CTAF for “left base, RWY 18. Turning final for rwy 18”
- Once on final, my head is on a swivel looking for the helicopter since I did not hear them state what they did or where they went after coming in on RWY36. I did not see the helicopter
- I did not see the helicopter sitting on the ramp until I was committed to my landing. A dark helicopter, idling on a dark colored surface with the sun low on the horizon was very difficult to see
- After I spotted the helicopter sitting on the FBO ramp, I completed a normal 2-point landing in my airplane. The tail came down and I had positive control with all three wheels on the ground
- I rolled past the idling helicopter with my airplane firmly on all three wheels
- Just after passing the projected centerline of the helicopter, my airplane, for the lack of a better term began to “levitate” from its three-point stance
- I felt the airplane lift straight off the ground in its tail down/nose up attitude. As it “levitated”, it began to turn, or weathervane towards the west (right side of runway)
- During this turn, the right wing began to lift
- I applied full right aileron and full left rudder (that also caused full left deflection of the tailwheel as well) to no effect. I believe I was going too slow to have any kind of aerodynamic control
- As a last resort, I applied left brake in an attempt to get the aircraft back on centerline
- We careened off of the west side of the runway while dragging the left wing tip and tip of the left elevator on the runway
- We experienced a rapid deceleration once we entered the grass and soft dirt/clay
- As the aircraft came to a stop, we tipped up on to the nose and balanced there for what seemed like an eternity. When the aircraft went on it’s nose, the propeller struck the mud and stopped the engine
- As we went on the nose, my daughter was thrown forward and bumped her head on either the yoke or glare shield (We both had on seatbelts. Just lap belts, aircraft does not have shoulder harnesses)
- I reached over and slammed her back into her seat with my right fore-arm and held her there, fully anticipating that we would flip over and come to rest upside down
- Thankfully, the tail started to drop and we slammed back down onto the ground in an upright position
- I immediately turned my attention to my now crying and screaming daughter. Once I verified she was ok, I turned off the magnetos, radios, battery and fuel
- I threw open the front cabin door, undid both of our seatbelts and we were able to exit the aircraft normally
- Several people who live at the airport witnessed the crash and immediately came to check on my daughter and I
- The helicopter remained in its spot idling, with the flight crew all staring at us from inside

- Eventually the Crew Chief exited the helo and asked me if we were ok. He quickly went back to the helicopter and got back inside (this is when I noticed that it was an Airbus UH-72 Lakota helicopter)
- They shut down the helicopter, and everyone onboard hopped out. They removed their helmets, dug out their cell phones and started taking pictures of the crashed Piper and everyone standing around it. They walked out onto the runway and photographed the tire skid mark and marks left by the left wingtip and elevator dragging the runway
- After taking their pictures, they climbed in the helicopter, started up and flew away
- I called my father to notify him of the crash (it is his airplane) and to ask what I should do next. He suggested I call Martha Lunken (retired FAA, a long time friend of his) for advice
- We agreed that calling the NTSB was the best bet. After speaking with the NTSB and two different FAA personnel, I began documenting the scene to the best of my abilities with my iPhone as the sun was going down
- With the permission of the NTSB and FAA, we moved the wreckage from where it came to a rest to a secure hangar. We moved it because of forecasted rain and its proximity to the runway
- I was told after the crash that the helicopter flew in to RWY36, then did a low hover down the runway, turned off on the taxiway that parallels the runway, and executed a hover taxi all the way to its parking spot





RED X: Location where propeller struck the ground. 73 feet from runway centerline
ORANGE X: Location where left wingtip stopped in the mud. 58 feet from runway centerline