

Accident narrative
Aaron Hammitt, Pilot N381MG

Date: 02/16/2017
Time: 09:55 EST (14:55Z)
Location: KBUY, local flight, landing RWY 24

The morning of February 16, 2017 I was planning a local solo flight in the vicinity of KBUY. Prior to departing, I checked the current ASOS at Burlington, TAF at GSO, and the NWS forecast for KBUY at aviationweather.gov, as well as the graphical AIRMET/SIGMET and PIREPs in Foreflight. There was an AIRMET Tango expiring at 10:00, and winds were forecasted to increase to a maximum of 22kt later in the morning. Based on this information, as well as observing the windsock (which is visible from our hangar) several times throughout the morning, I determined that an hour flight beginning around 9:15 could be safely conducted within my personal minimums.

Prior to taxi (1420Z), I obtained weather from ASOS: wind 250 at 10kt, visibility 10mi, overcast at 7500. Based on the wind, runway 24 was in use. A check of the windsock prior to takeoff confirmed winds approximately in line with the runway. The takeoff and climbout were normal, with only a few small bumps. As I climbed through about 500-700 ft AGL I looked back and noticed I was drifting left of centerline, indicating winds aloft were from a westerly direction.

After flying a few miles to the southwest to check that the DME was functioning correctly, I returned to KBUY and entered left traffic for runway 24 on a 45-degree entry to downwind. The pilot of a Cessna 152 in the pattern ahead of me noted that winds were "a little rolly" near the runway, but he did not express any safety concerns. On my first approach I experienced a few bumps, but was able to maintain a stable glidepath on the extended centerline without difficulty. Upon touchdown I experienced a small gust and drifted slightly to the left; I responded by adding a touch of power (about 100 rpm), correcting to centerline, touched down smoothly and exited the runway at Taxiway E.

At this point I made a full stop landing to determine whether it was prudent to begin another circuit in the pattern. I watched the 152 take off, and then watched a Bonanza land on runway 24. I did not observe any aircraft behavior to indicate a dangerous wind situation. The Bonanza made a normal crosswind landing, and there was no indication that he was experiencing significant turbulence or wind gusts. Before departing, I made a final check of the windsock, which indicated winds generally aligned with the runway at 10-15kt. Based on these observations, I determined that I could safely make another takeoff and landing.

I made a normal takeoff, turned crosswind, then downwind for 24. The winds were pushing me away from the runway, so I corrected and was where I wanted to be abeam the numbers. On downwind, I watched an aircraft landing in front of me, behind the 152 that had completed his circuit. I checked ASOS and winds were reported from 280 gusting to 20kts. About this time another aircraft a few miles out made a radio call to inquire about the winds at KBUY. The

aircraft that had just landed indicated no problem. The 152 pilot said that he experienced some bumps at altitude, and then added that the winds would not be a factor for the incoming traffic.

Due to the gust factor, I made my second landing with partial flaps (20 degrees) and 60-65 KIAS approach speed. As with the first approach, I experienced a few light bumps, but nothing that indicated a hazardous situation. Final approach was on the extended runway centerline, crabbed to the right to account for the crosswind component. Crossing the threshold I transitioned to a forward slip and made a “textbook” crosswind touchdown: right main, then left main, nose wheel aligned with the centerline, longitudinal axis of the airplane aligned with the runway and direction of travel. But as the nose wheel was lowering, the airplane was abruptly lifted into the air.

Now, being near stall speed and several feet above the runway surface, I immediately initiated a go-around, applying full power. With 20 degrees of flaps already set (the manufacturer-recommended configuration for a balked landing), I expected to accelerate in ground effect and begin to climb. Instead, the airplane began to drift left and dropped back to the runway surface. Still expecting the airplane to gain airspeed and climb, I confirmed that I was indeed holding the throttle full open. However, the airplane drifted further left until the left main was off the runway. I crossed over a runway light and veered more sharply to the left, until I crossed over an embankment, skidded sideways, and came to rest in a brier patch on the south side of runway 24.

I shut off the electrical and fuel systems, assessed the situation, and called for help.

In the hours after the accident I checked the weather again and noted that a SIGMET had been issued shortly after the time of the accident for occasional severe turbulence and strong surface winds. The METAR issued within five minutes of the accident indicated winds from 270 at 16 gusting to 31 (about ten knots higher than the wind indication I received via ASOS or forecasted by the TAF). Post-accident observations of the on-field windsock confirmed highly variable gusty winds. Based on the abrupt nature by which the airplane was lifted off the ground, and the subsequent inability to climb with application of full power, I believe I encountered one or more sudden changes in wind speed and/or direction shortly after touchdown. This caused a rapid increase in lift, followed by a sudden loss of lift and inability to sustain flight.