

The plane was rented through St Pete Air on 11/28/2018 for a 12-2pm flight. Paul Carlson (rear passenger side), Dan Carlson (rear pilot side), and myself (Co-pilot seat) were passengers renting the plane to test out our spectrometry equipment over Tampa Bay. Paul Carlson and I are Florida Fish and Wildlife employees. We received word that the plane was delayed due to mechanical steering issues. At about 12:20pm we went down to the plane and were able to load our equipment. We met the pilot and he did a quick check-over, he then entered the aircraft, and I alerted him that one of the wings was still tied down. He untied it, got back in, and started the engine up. We taxied down the runway. While we were taxiing, flight control contacted him to ask about a brake issue, to which the pilot confirmed that everything was ok mechanically. We finished taxiing and waited for the all clear to take off. Once it was clear, we accelerated down the runway. Once we achieved take off speed, I looked over and saw the pilot (Scott) trying to remove the metal control locking pin from the steering column (picture attached). This was about halfway down the runway, in my estimation about 65mph. Scott continued to try to remove the control locking pin as we went down the runway, there was no attempt to decelerate. We ran out of runway, went over about 15 yards of grass and 5 yards of rock, landing nose-first into Tampa Bay. The force of the impact pushed water through the windshield and caused the plane to flip onto its back. While upside down, I was able to disengage both my seatbelts, open the passenger door, and crawl out onto the wing. The plane at that point was half flooded. I turned around, grabbed Paul Carlson and pulled him out of the aircraft. Paul sustained a visible head injury and was covered in blood but was conscious. While this was happening, Dan Carlson unhooked the pilot's seatbelt, opened the door, and pulled the pilot out of the aircraft. The pilot was visibly stunned but conscious. As soon as everyone was free of the aircraft, it sank nose-first and within 20 seconds was completely submerged. After treading water, we climbed onto a passing by skiff. Shortly thereafter, a Coast Guard boat pulled up, we boarded and were brought to the St Petersburg Coast Guard base. While at the coast guard base, Paul Carlson was taken in an ambulance to Bayfront Hospital.

Michael Poniatowski

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11/29/2018