



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Western Pacific Region

INITIAL INFORMATION & ACTIVITIES

WPR19LA017

Accident Date: October 30, 2018
Activity Dates: October 30 to November 7, 2018

This document contains 7 embedded images

A. ACCIDENT

Location: Cottonwood, California
Date: October 30, 2018
Aircraft: Cessna 180, N6414X, Serial # 18050914
NTSB IIC: Michael Huhn

B. ACCIDENT SUMMARY

On October 30, 2018, about 0924 Pacific Daylight time, a Cessna 180D airplane, N6414X, impacted terrain short of the runway during an approach for landing at Lake California Air Park (68CA), Cottonwood, California. The private pilot/owner sustained serious injuries, and the airplane was substantially damaged. The flight had originated from Palo Alto Airport (PAO), Palo Alto, California, earlier that morning. The pilot reported that when the airplane was on the final approach leg to 68CA, at an altitude of about 200 ft above ground level, the engine suddenly "quit." Given the low altitude, the pilot was only able to verify a few cockpit controls for proper settings before focusing on the landing.

C. INITIAL ON-SCENE and RECOVERY ACTIVITY INFORMATION

For multiple reasons, the recovery plans and personnel were changed after the initial recovery efforts had begun. The NTSB was not present on scene at any time. The relevant sequence of events is documented below.

Tues Oct 30

- Plane crashes at 0924 PDT
- The LMLG leg had fracture-separated at the fuselage, and the airplane was resting on the ground approximately 20 degrees left wing down
- About 2 hrs after the accident, a telephone conversation with the responding fire chief relays that he turned off fuel selector. When asked what position it had been in, he returned to the AC and looked and recalled that it had been set to the LEFT tank
- A nearby airplane mechanic (Eric Sawyer) was initially and informally/verbally designated (by the insurance claims representative) to recover the airplane. He estimated that the RIGHT tank contained about 2-3 g of fuel, and the LEFT contained about 20g
- Later, the mechanic reported that he "drained" both tanks. He stated that he obtained 1.5g from the RIGHT tank, and 7.5 to 8g from the LEFT tank
- Neither the mechanic nor the IIC explicitly clarified that the tanks still had fuel in them after the mechanic "drained" them, but this was not discovered until November 7

Weds 10/31

- Sometime either late Tuesday or early Wednesday, the insurance company claims representative formally designated the mechanic Eric Sawyer to recover the airplane. The

preferred vendor, Plain Parts, was not available until later in the week, and there was some urgency to remove the airplane from the field near some homes.

- The IIC advised Mr. Sawyer that the NTSB release was for recovery only, and that no work was to be accomplished on the airplane
- Mr. Sawyer's only reported association with this airplane was that he had been engaged by the pilot to install "Door Stewards" on the airplane, which was the purpose of the flight that day.
- Mr. Sawyer advised the IIC that his plan was to be to recover the airplane to a trailer which he would store at "his house"
- In thinking more about it, the IIC realized that that recovery plan would not facilitate any exams, and that the airplane would eventually have to make its way to a normal recovery facility, for evidence control and examination purposes.
- The IIC relayed this recognition and concerns to the claims representative. With this information, the claims representative determined that it did not make sense to do 'two' recoveries (one by the mechanic to his facility, followed by another by/to Plain Parts)

Thurs 11/1

- At some point before early Friday morning, the claims representative agreed w Plain Parts that Plain Parts was to be the only recovery company

Fri 11/2

- Early this morning the IIC received an email from the claims representative advising that Plain Parts was to be official & sole recovery company
- Concurrent with that decision, the claims representative, Plain Parts & the IIC all tried contacting Mr. Sawyer (by telephone and text) to have him cease recovering the airplane
- Those efforts were not successful until late afternoon, by which time Mr Sawyer had already conducted a significant amount of recovery activity.

Sat 11/3

- Plain Parts team (Dennis James and company) arrive at accident site to recover wreckage
- They level the airplane, and pull about 1 cup fuel from RIGHT wing, and about 20g from LEFT tank (This was not relayed to the IIC until 11/7)
- They found that the engine, cowling, propeller, seats and LMLG had already been separated from the airplane and transported to hangars at RDD by Mr. Sawyer
- The airplane was successfully recovered to Plain Parts later this day

Weds 11/7

- The IIC was advised by the pilot that allegedly, the initial fuel quantities pulled by Mr. Sawyer did not represent the emptying of the tanks
- The IIC checked with Mr. James and Mr. Sawyer to confirm this
- Mr. James advised the IIC that he pulled about 1 cup from the RIGHT tank, and about 20g (minimum) from the LEFT
- Mr. Sawyer told the IIC that the glass gascolator bowl was unbroken, but it had no fuel in it

- Mr. James told the IIC that the engine mounts and control cables had been cut by Mr. Sawyer to remove & relocate the engine
- Mr James also reported that when he arrived on scene, Mr Sawyer had a spare set of "old" spark plugs, and was planning to remove the accident spark plugs and replace them with the "old" ones. Mr. James advised him not to do this, and Mr. Sawyer did not change those spark plugs. Mr. Sawyer did not relay any of this to the IIC, nor was this topic ever discussed prior
- Mr. James also advised the IIC that Mr. Sawyer had already drained the oil from the engine. Again this was never discussed between Mr. Sawyer and the IIC. About 9 quarts (or possibly more) were recovered.
- At some point thereafter, the IIC became aware that Mr. Sawyer had conducted prior maintenance on the airplane, including the two most recent annual inspections. The mechanic's association with the airplane had been discussed previously between the IIC and the pilot, but the pilot never mentioned this background information.

D. ON-SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS

All photographs courtesy Tehama County Sheriff's Department



Figure 1 - Initial Impact Location



Figure 2 - Final Location



Figure 3 - Left Side View



Figure 4 - Front Left Quarter View



Figure 5 - Front Right Quarter View



Figure 6 - Cockpit View



Figure 7 - Instrument Panel