

FAA Inspector's Statement / Michael Matthews / Grand Rapids FSDO

On February 22, 2020 at 1342 local time, a Commander Aircraft Company 114B, N374JW, registered to and operated by a commercial pilot, received substantial damage during a simulated engine out procedure shortly after departure from runway 22 at the Coldwater/Branch County Airport (OEB), Coldwater, Michigan. Visual meteorological conditions and light winds prevailed at the time of the accident. The training flight was being conducted under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 91 without a flight plan. The pilot, flight instructor, and rear seat passenger were not injured. The local flight originated from the Kirsch Municipal Airport (IRS), Sturgis, Michigan at approximately 1230L.

According to the flight instructor, the pilot was completing the final phase of a biannual flight review and had successfully landed at Coldwater. He also stated he believed the pilot was getting tired so following landing they back taxied to runway 22 and sat for a few minutes prior to departure so the pilot could "collect his thoughts". The pilot then performed a normal takeoff with 10 degrees of flap and established normal departure speed and angle. According to both the pilot and instructor at approximately 300' AGL the instructor reduced power to idle to simulate an engine failure. The instructor expected the pilot to make a gradual right turn to land mid-field on runway 25 (an intersecting runway). Once the instructor realized the pilot had missed the cue he assumed control and initiated a right turn and lowered the nose. At this point, according to the pilot rated rear seat passenger, the tail began to buffet and the aircraft started a rapid descent. The pilot applied full power but the descent could not be arrested. The aircraft impacted on a magnetic heading 250 degrees approximately 300 feet south of the runway edge then skidded 170 feet coming to rest on a heading of 180 degrees. All three occupants were able to egress from the aircraft unassisted. There was a post-crash fire contained within the engine cowl that was extinguished by the passenger using the on-board fire extinguisher.

The aircraft was found setting upright with all three landing gear torn off the airframe and laying within the debris field. All three propeller blades are curled rearward and show cord wise scratching indicative of high power output on impact. The left wing shows extensive impact damage and is pushed up and aft. Both fuel tanks were breached due to impact structural failure of the main landing gear attach points through the top of both wings. The fuselage shows impact damage to the tail and minor compression of the roof. The cockpit and passenger areas remained intact. Both doors were opened by the crew during egress and did not fail during impact. It is believed the ELT functioned but was turned off by the pilot following evacuation. Control continuity was established on all flight controls and no mechanical anomalies were reported prior to impact.

Weather report at KOEB at 1915 UTC was: wind 220 degrees at 14 knots with gusts to 20 knots, visibility 10 statute miles, clear, temp 05 dew point -04 and altimeter 3018.