

INSPECTOR STATEMENT

Date of Statement: April 22, 2012

Date of Event: April 1, 2012 (0730 EDT)

On 04/01/2012 at approximately 1050 (EDT), this Inspector was contacted by Mr. Clyde W. O'Donnell, Manager at Blackwater Creek Flightpark (9FD2), [REDACTED], via the Atlanta Regional Operations Center (ROC). According to Mr. O'Donnell, a powered parachute model Airwolf 912ULS, N415BA, Serial No. A134UL, with two people on board clipped some trees during takeoff and crashed in a wooded area at Blackwater Creek Flightpark. The pilot Craig Allen Ewing sustained a head wound, was treated on scene, and released. The passenger Mark Harris was taken to the South Florida Baptist Hospital, Plant City, Florida, with back pain and difficulty breathing.

At approximately 1240 (EDT), this Inspector arrived at Blackwater Creek and met with pilot Craig Allen Ewing, Sport Pilot (CFI) Certificate No. [REDACTED]. Mr. Ewing's first words out of his mouth before the interview started was *"let me first say that there was nothing mechanically wrong with the powered parachute, I messed up, and I misjudged the flight."* Mr. Ewing stated that his intent was to taxi the powered parachute from the staging area to the grassy strip before taking off. He stated that he wanted to clear a sandy drop off area at the beginning edge of the grassy strip, turn right while still on the ground, get airborne, and continue South over the grassy strip. The powered parachute went airborne before they reached the drop of area and started the climb sequence directly toward the tree line.

Mr. Ewing stated that he tried to turn the unit right by moving the steering bar, foot pedals, but they did not respond in time. Before he knew it, the powered parachute was headed straight into the trees. He reached up to grab the trim lines in an attempt to gain flight. The powered chute hit the trees followed by the propeller assembly causing the engine to seize. The unit got stuck on top of the tree line momentarily before dropping over 75 feet to the ground.

Mr. Ewing stated that he heard Mr. Harris moaning in pain after the unit impacted the ground. He immediately released his seat belts to check the status of Mr. Harris. Mr. Harris was complaining about not being able to breathe, pain in his left shoulder and back. A few seconds later, a man hunting nearby made his way to the accident site. The gentleman called out for help to Amy Harris who was positioned near the grassy strip taping the takeoff.

Mr. Ewing stated the unit had a video camera mounted on it which he uses to provide customers with copies of the flight. This Inspector requested a copy of the video for the investigation. Mr. Ewing requested to know what was going to happen to him since he just received his CFI for the powered parachute a few months ago. This Inspector informed him it was too soon to in the investigation to make that determination.

This Inspector requested to see the exact location where the powered parachute was staged for flight. Mr. Ewing prepositioned the unit at an angle pointing South East toward the grassy strip. This Inspector questioned Mr. Ewing's decision to point the unit directly toward the tree line.

Mr. Ewing stated he planned to turn the unit right onto the grassy strip with the nose wheel just prior to takeoff. He also stated that he did not want to block any aircraft traffic by lining up directly on the grassy strip. This Inspector and Mr. Ewing discussed several other takeoff options on the airport which were safer than the one chosen.

Photographs of the staging area, point of takeoff, tree line, and crash site was taken. An inspection of the parachute and lines was performed with no obvious anomalies observed. All canopy lines and trim lines were secure. A visual inspection of the Rotax engine was also performed with no signs of obvious damage or indications of an engine failure noted. One of three propeller blades tip was severed off. Several main frame chromoly support tubes were broken and the engine support bolts were broken in half.

This Inspector requested a written statement from Mr. Ewing. Initially, Mr. Ewing supplied a written statement containing two incomplete sentences. When informed that the statement lacked enough detail about the accident, he stated he was very nervous and needed more time to gather his thoughts. Mr. Ewing was informed he could hand deliver the statement to the FSDO on the following day. A video copy of the accident flight was presented by Mr. Ewing to this Inspector on an SD card.

At approximately 1400 (EDT), this Inspector made phone contact with Amy Harris, spouse of passenger Mark Harris, [REDACTED] Mrs. Harris stated that her husband Mark was moved to the trauma center at St. Josephs Hospital, Tampa, Florida, with a broken back and a fractured scapula. Informed Mrs. Harris that the FAA will need to speak to her husband Mark and obtain a statement as soon as his available. Mrs. Harris was given this Inspectors email address after she offered to provide a video clip of the accident taken by her at Blackwater Creek moments before the powered parachute impacted the trees.

Provided the ROC and Mr. Eric Alleyne, NTSB, a status update of the accident. Mr. Alleyne informed this Inspector that an NTSB IIC will be assigned to the accident on Monday, 2 April 2012.

April 2, 2012: Provided Dennis Diaz, NTSB IIC, a summary of the facts captured during the accident investigation.

At 1400 (EDT), met with Mr. Ewing here at the Tampa FSDO to discuss the accident and obtain his statement. Mr. Ewing informed this Inspector that after looking at the video he thought he knew what may have caused the accident. According to Mr. Ewing, someone may have loosened the trim lines while the powered parachute was on display at Sun and Fun. Mr. Ewing was promoting the powered parachute for the manufacturer and offering Instructional flights during the aviation event in Lakeland, Florida, the week of 27 March to 01 April 2012.

This Inspector questioned Mr. Ewing on the manufacturer's requirements for pre-flight inspection of the unit. Mr. Ewing stated that the manufacturer Powrachute does has a pre-flight checklist which he used before Mr. Harris arrived for the demonstration flight the morning of the accident. When asked if the trim line slack is a pre-flight check, he responded with a yes.

Mr. Ewing stated that the manual does not clearly indicate what the exact tension should be on the lines.

This Inspector requested copies of the preflight checklist and manufacturer's maintenance manual. A meeting was scheduled for April 4, 2012, 0930, at Blackwater Creek to re-examine the trim lines and associated hardware.

April 3, 2012: Spoke to Mr. Harris over the phone about the accident. According to Mr. Harris, he had no idea Mr. Ewing was going to take off directly toward the trees. Mr. Harris stated that his commercial pilot for Air Tran and would never had taken the ride had he known Mr. Ewing's intent before hand. According to Mr. Harris, he arrived at Blackwater Creek with his wife Amy around 0715 on April 1, 2012. Mr. Ewing was preparing the unit for the flight when they arrived. According to Mr. Harris, the pilot briefed that he was going to taxi to the grassy strip and take off parallel to the tree line.

Mr. Harris reported feeling very uncomfortable as the pilot increased RPM but did not turn right down the grassy strip as briefed. Mr. Harris recalls them getting airborne, never turning right as thought, and climbing directly toward the trees. According to Mr. Harris, the pilot reached up, grabbed the trim lines, and pulled hoping to gain more flight to clear the trees. The unit clipped some trees causing the engine to shut down. He recalls the unit being stuck on top of the trees for a few seconds before they fell to the ground. Mr. Harris provided his statement and a copy of Amy's video clip by email.

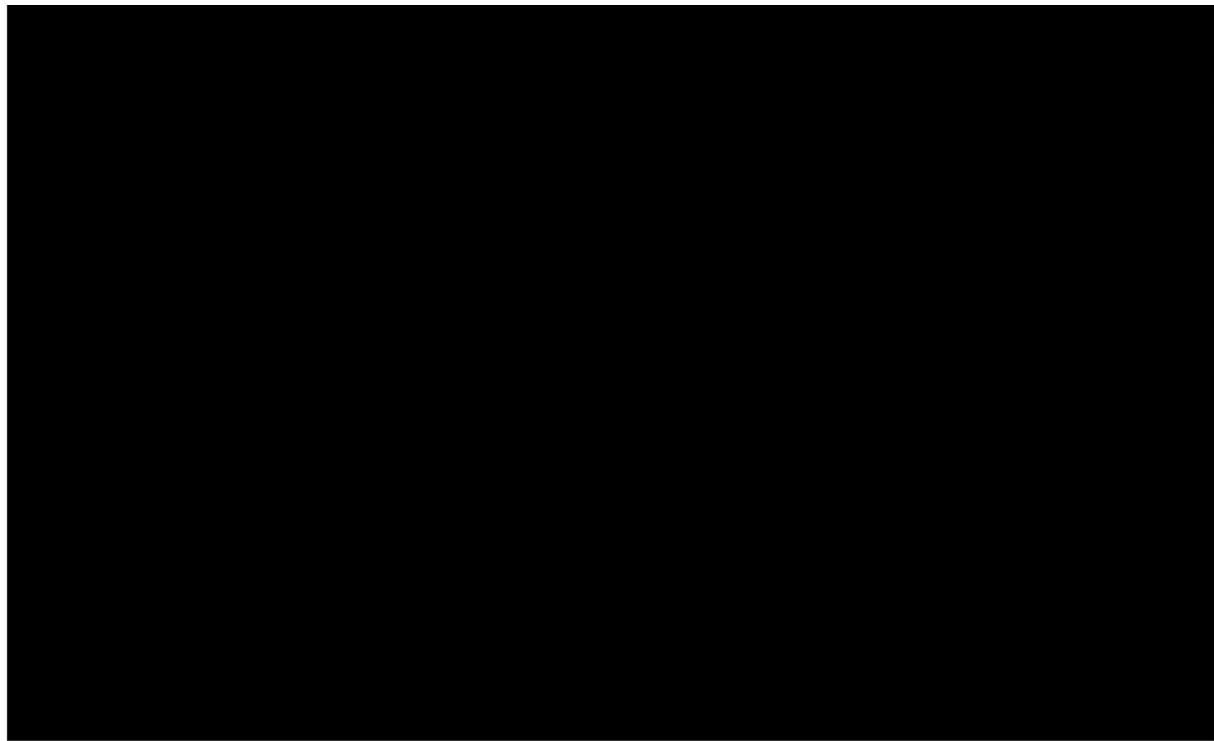
Contacted NTSB IIC Diaz to provide additional information and concerns presented by Mr. Ewing regarding possible compromise of trim lines at Sun and Fun. Emailed photo copies of the pilot and passenger statements to IIC. Informed Mr. Diaz that another inspection of the unit was scheduled for April 4, 2012.

April 4, 2012: Met Mr. Harris at Blackwater Creek. An inspection of the trim lines and steering bar was conducted. Additional photos were also taken. The left trim line had noticeably more slack than the right side. The video presented by Mr. Ewing clearly demonstrates the excessive slack in the left trim line just prior to takeoff and the pilot's inability to maneuver the unit after repeated attempts at moving the steering bar. For the record, this Inspector did not take physical measurements of the slack in the trim lines on the day of the accident. Additionally, there's no definitive way to determine if the trim lines were adjusted before today's inspection.

Obtained copies of the Powrachute Air Wolf – LSA Pilot Operating handbook (POH) and Performance Designs, Inc., Powered Parachute canopy User/Owner Manuals.

The following GPS Coordinates of the starting point, takeoff point, tree line, and crash site were recorded by this Inspector:

Starting Point: N 28 08.277, W 082 08.846
Airborne: N 28 08.226, W 082 08.808
Tree line: N 28 08.199, W 082 08.784
Crash Site: N 28 08.167, W 082 08.752



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A handwritten signature in black ink is written over a solid black rectangular redaction box.

Hector L. Diaz
Aviation Safety Inspector
04/22/2012