

Mrs. Tracie Walter
Vice President/Director of Operations
Bemidji Aviation Services, Inc.
2/28/2019

As requested, below is my recollection of the events as stated to me by our Pilot Ryan Ehlert, after the incident in which he was involved on February 22nd, 2019 at Colby, KS. (KCBK) in N62069. I drove to Colby from McCook, NE. because Colby was below landing minimums when I got there in the aircraft and finally arrived in Colby at approximately 2:10 pm local time. I immediately met with the pilot. I was not there to interview the pilot about the event, but rather to ensure his well-being, verify the security of the aircraft and area, and handle any requests by media or other personnel on behalf of the company. Ryan had already made a trip to town for his post accident drug and alcohol test, gotten some coffee, and called his wife for a ride home by the time I had arrived. Any statements provided below in quotes are accurate to the best of my memory, but may not be verbatim.

Upon meeting with Ryan, I shook his hand and stated that we were glad he was okay, and he replied that he was too. I believe that he honestly believed that he was going to die. He mentioned rethinking his career choice, and told me that he was seriously considering being done with aviation altogether. He was visibly shaken by the events of the morning, and shortly thereafter began describing the event as he remembered it to me:

Shortly after departure from runway 17, his crew hatch opened. He stated that he was able to reach up and grab the handle to pull it closed, but was unable to actually close it. He then recognized that he was losing control of the aircraft and abandoned his attempt to get the hatch closed and focus on maintaining control and "just fly the plane". At some point in the conversation he stated that "The worst part of all this is that it's going to be pilot error." and that he knew the open hatch had no negative effect on the performance or handling of the airplane, and acknowledged that he "panicked" during the event. He was unsure why, but stated that he did not have as much airspeed or altitude as he wanted and decided that he would immediately attempt a return to KCBK for landing. Weather at KCBK was low IFR all day long (see attached METARs). He was very focused on trying to maintain visual contact with the airport and mentioned that "I can guarantee 1000% percent that this would not have happened had it been VFR.". He told me that he elected to leave the landing gear extended because he knew he was returning to the airport and it would be one less thing he'd have to worry about doing once he got back around to land. He attempted a 45 degree entry for the downwind to 17 and "saw that that wasn't going to work" but he continued around in an attempt to land on runway 17. He stated several times that he could feel the aircraft "buffering" as he maneuvered around the airport (I have to assume he was referring to the aerodynamic buffet preceding a stall, and instead meant 'buffeting'). He stated "the last airspeed I saw was 88 knots" and that prior to impacting the ground he retracted the landing gear in a last ditch attempt to "gain some airspeed". I asked if he had pulled the power back prior to impact and he stated that he "honestly had no idea".

I visited the aircraft to ensure its security and take photos for the company and returned to Ryan to keep the locals from harassing him too much. At this point, I also discussed several other unrelated topics with Ryan in an effort to help him settle down a little and maybe recover psychologically from the events of the morning, and by the time I left at about 4:30 pm local time he seemed less morose and was at least able to laugh at unrelated comments/stories. He was adamant that I need not remain there with him until his ride home arrived, despite several offers to do so.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey M Belanger
KDEN Lead Pilot
Bemidji Aviation Services, Inc.

KCBK 222215Z AUTO 14012KT 1/4SM -RA OVC002 00/00 A2985 RMK AO2
KCBK 222155Z AUTO 15015KT 1/4SM -RA OVC002 00/00 A2985 RMK AO2
KCBK 222135Z AUTO 14016G19KT 1/4SM FG OVC002 00/00 A2986 RMK AO2
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