

## **RYAN EHLERT NTSB STATEMENT: February 22, 2019**

I pulled out onto runway 17 and initiated full power. After takeoff, my crew hatch door opened unexpectedly. I tried to reach out and close the hatch door. Unable to close the hatch door, and during the time of me trying to close the door, I wasn't able to fully control the airplane normally (mainly heading and pitch) so I decided the best action was to immediately make left traffic for runway 17 and land. I did not want to continue flight with an open hatch (directly to the left of me) due to freezing conditions (ground temperature was minus 3-4 degrees Celsius with icing conditions). I was uncertain as to how the freezing temperatures and icing conditions in the air would adversely affect my conscious ability to safely fly the aircraft, so I decided to make the decision to not continue flight into those unsafe conditions.

With the clouds at 300 OVC with fog and visibility at 1 1/2sm, I was struggling to maintain visual contact with the ground and the runway. My landing gear was down, flaps were up, props and mixtures were full forward during the initial decision to make left traffic for runway 17. As I started the left turn, I was still climbing to gain as much altitude as I could without losing sight of the ground/runway and to not be fully IMC. Once I got to an altitude I felt was as high as I could get to without losing visual contact with the ground/runway (visibility out of the front windshield was IMC), I then started to pull my power back because I was making left traffic for runway 17 to land and I didn't want my airspeed to be too high.

Once I was paralleling runway 17, I realized I was continuously losing visual contact with the runway, but I had ground contact visually. I then decided to turn left towards the runway. Upon turning left, I noticed my airspeed was decreasing and I started to get a slight buffering. During this realization that the control of the aircraft was decreasing, I then scanned again for the runway. I realized that I was coming into the runway at a 45 degree angle (roughly a south west heading) approximately at 300ft AGL and was crossing over midfield. The aircraft was buffering, the wing tips were dipping back and forth, and the decreasing airspeed of the aircraft were all getting worse, so I decided to put in full power and retract my landing gear in the expectation that I would start to gain airspeed. After the gear was up and the power levers were full forward, I realized I was not gaining airspeed and the buffering was further increasing along with the wing tips dipping back and forth, I realized I was losing altitude.

At this point I knew I was going to hit the ground and my main objective was to keep the nose in a slightly pitch up attitude and the wings level for impact. Fearing for my life throughout this entire situation, I was uncertain about my survival at this point. I just held the wings level and my pitch attitude and waited for impact. Once the aircraft hit the ground (frozen muddy farm field) it was surprisingly smooth due to the landing gear being up and the aircraft sliding along the ground on its belly. As the aircraft was sliding, I was expecting the aircraft to flip or roll over due to drag from the aircraft along the ground which continued to fuel my uncertainty of death. The aircraft then came to a stop on a snow bank and I realized I was okay. As I sat there in disbelief of what had just occurred, I was very thankful to be alive.