

On Tuesday, March 5, 2019, I arrived at work just before 0530 local time and began my morning routine of reviewing NOTAMs for all airports to which FlightSafety Academy (FSA) operates. I found no information impacting flight operations other than runway closures at a handful of airports. I updated the Dispatch slide deck accordingly.

Around 0545, students begin arriving at my office. Of the 5 solo students I saw that morning, Yujia Qu was the only one intending to fly cross-country. I reviewed her lesson sheet and confirmed it had her intended route of travel (VRB-PHK-OBE-VRB), cross-wind limitation, and CFI's signature. I then reviewed her Flight Risk Assessment Tool (FRAT) and found all items to be within FSA regulations. I next reviewed her FAA student pilot certificate, FAA medical certificate, ICE I-20, TSA initial training authorization, and U.S. travel visa and found all to be valid. I then reviewed her personal and FSA logbooks and found both to have the appropriate CFI endorsement for her intended flight. Finally, I reviewed weather conditions using SkyVector and found that VRB was reporting VFR, while OBE and FPR were reporting IFR. Because of the tendency for airports in the area to be IFR in the early-morning hours due to fog, then quickly go VFR after sunrise, I signed Yujia's FRAT so she could conduct her preflight inspection, but stressed she must check the weather again before take-off and must cancel the flight if the weather along her intended route was still IFR. I asked her, "What are you going to do if the weather is still bad?" She responded, "Not go." Around 0600, I checked the arrival/departure board and saw she was issued SFY211 at 0554. I made note of this on the Solo Flight Tracking log.

Sometime between 0700 and 0900 (the exact time I can't recall), SFY554 piloted by Bo Nie radioed VRB tower to inform them he had flown into the clouds. VRB tower told him to contact Palm Beach approach, who vectored him to F45. After informing Dan Gage, he and I immediately began assessing the status of the other solo aircraft. Using FlightRadar24, I was already tracking two aircraft conducting air work south of Blue Cypress Lake and instructed them via company frequency to land immediately at SEF. James Champley was made aware of the situation and immediately ordered a ramp check, which revealed that one aircraft was back, but the remaining—SFY 211—was not.

At 0900, Jarrod Gotschall arrived at Ops and together we contacted PHK, KOBE, F45, X26, and most private fields along Yujia's intended route to see if she had landed. We also contacted flight service stations and ATC facilities throughout southern Florida to see if they had any information regarding her location. They did not.

Sometime after 1130 (the exact time I don't recall), I received a phone call from Fellsmere Police Department stating they received a phone call from State Warning Point informing them of a beacon signal that was identified as belonging to an FSA aircraft. They provided me the coordinates of the signal, which I relayed to James Champley.

For the remainder of the day, I took calls from Air Force Rescue Center, Civil Air Patrol, and multiple ATC facilities requesting information about Yujia's aircraft and flight plan.

At 1430, my replacement, Jordan Samuels arrived. Around 1445, James Champley and Pete Nily cleared me to leave.

Brian Shackelford
Flight Operations Data Coordinator