

**STATEMENT  
GLIDER ACCIDENT AT 7NC5  
APRIL 16, 2021**

On April 16, 2021, the North Carolina Soaring Association was doing glider flying at Crooked Creek Airport (7NC5). A significant part of our operation here is flight instruction for new glider students. The club has a non profit foundation associated with it that provides scholarships for young students, between the ages of 14 – 28, to learn to fly, provided they are full time students in either secondary school or college. The Foundation pays 65% of their costs for both membership in the club, and flight instruction. The instructors, flight operations personnel, and towpilots donate their time, so the cost of instruction is as low as possible. We normally have around 6 students that the Foundation funds through the Private Pilot, Glider license, the rest (12 -15) paying their own way. We have an excellent track record with our students. For example two of the Foundation students who learned here are now flying for Piedmont, and one other commuter airline affiliated with American Airlines. Two others are flying for the Navy, one flying F-18's off an aircraft carrier in the Indian Ocean, another – a young woman – flying the Navy version of UH-60's off a Frigate in the South China Sea.

On Saturday the duty crew consisted of me, as towpilot for the day, Chad Hutchins, a Lieutenant Colonel stationed at Ft. Bragg with the Special Warfare Center, as CFG for the day. Operations Officer for the day was Dmytro Pashko, a Ukrainian national, green card holder, also learning to fly gliders here. We began flight operations around 09:00 in calm, overcast conditions, with ceilings around 3,000'. As the day wore on, around midday, the winds picked up significantly, with RDU showing winds out of the southwest around 14 mph, gusting to 19, and ceilings lifting. Winds were pretty much down the runway, with a slight crosswind component from the west. We got around 9 tows off before the winds picked up. Our runway is oriented 04/22. Since it's downhill toward the south and our facilities are on the north end, in calm or low wind conditions, we usually take off for tows on runway 22, and land on 04. As winds picked up around midday, we swapped landings from 04 to downhill, but upwind on 22. The instructor decided to cancel two students scheduled for the afternoon, because they were relatively new, with only a couple of instructional flights, and wind conditions were a bit rough for green students. Since we cancelled two of the students, Chad decided to do two final tows with a young, but more experienced student, Connor Tepatti. After the last of those two flights, I had planned to drop the towrope and take the towplane to KLHZ for fuel, as we have no fuel at Crooked Creek. The first of those last two flights with Connor – the 13<sup>th</sup> tow of the day – was a tow to 2000' AGL, and Connor made a nice landing on runway 22. The final flight of the day was to be a simulated rope break (normal training event for glider students, to demonstrate how you can easily get back to the runway after a towrope break – rare occurrence, but we practice it regularly for safety reasons). For the final, 14<sup>th</sup> tow of the day, we took off on runway 22, and the instructor released the towrope (simulated rope break) around 300' AGL 1/4 -1/2 mile south of the runway. I could see in the towplane's mirror that they turned to the left, and entered what appeared to be final approach to runway 04. I then made a right turn, and flew a downwind leg to

drop the towrope on runway 22, then go for fuel. As I was a bit over halfway down the runway, I looked down and saw the glider off to the left of the runway somewhere around midfield. I dropped the rope on runway 22, and as I climbed out, I could see the glider had impacted the Piper Cherokee tied down on the east side of the runway around midfield. I immediately turned around, landed, and took one of the golfcarts to see what the problem was. My wife, Terri, and Richard Wells – owner of the Cherokee, had been on a golf cart, waiting to retrieve the glider, and were first to get to the accident site. Connor, the student had immediately jumped out of the glider, Chad Hutchins, the CFGI, was still in the back seat of the glider. The access door to the back seat is on the right side of the glider, and was pinned shut by the wing of the Cherokee. The glider had hit it's right wing on the left wing of the Cherokee, slid down the left wing, and impacted the aircraft propeller, which pierced the glider canopy, just missing both pilots, and impaled into the rear panel of the cockpit. Both pilots had minor cuts from broken plexiglass, and Chad was complaining of back pain. Richard Wells is also an EMT, and assessed that Chad shouldn't be moved until the rescue squad arrived, with proper neck brace and back support equipment. The rescue squad and fire department personnel were there within 10 minutes. We pulled the glider back off the prop far enough to get the glider rear door open, and Chad was immediately transported to Wake Medical Center for evaluation. He was released around 11:00 PM that evening, and driven back home to Fayetteville by his wife. The student, Connor, appeared to be pretty much unhurt, and went home with his dad, stopping by the hospital to check on Chad on the way.

I personally didn't see the impact or events just before the impact, but I did talk to Connor, and several witnesses on the ground. As far as I understand it, the glider made a couple of circles to lose altitude before landing, and in the process was blown to the east side of the runway. The second circle was a bit too much, as the glider entered a 45 degree approach back toward the runway pretty low, and the right wingtip clipped the branch of a tree 100' or so on the east side of the runway, turning the glider toward the right, and killing it's flying speed. The place it landed was visible due to gouging in the grass. Witnesses said it landed flat, on the main gear, but hard, rolled forward 50' or so, and impacted the Cherokee tied down beside the runway.

I hope this helps.

Frank Swett

[REDACTED]

Chief Towpilot

North Carolina Soaring Association

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