

August 2, 2018

2200 hrs.

Statement by Kent Howell

Regarding aircraft accident on Lopez Island WA at approximately 1700 hours this date.

At a minute or two before 1700 hours this date I was departing Friday Harbor Airport (KFHR) runway 16 en route to Orcas East Sound Airport (KORS) to pick up a subject for a charter flight to Lopez Island (S31). I was operating a Cessna 172, N24ME. I climbed out of KFHR and at 1,000 feet MSL I initiated a 90° turn to the left. During the climb out I heard another aircraft announce that they were on an extended left base for runway 14 at Lopez. The announcement sounded as though the pilot was unsure or distracted. Lopez runway is 16/34 so I was concerned about what I assumed was an unfamiliar pilot in the area and if he was in fact on an extended left base for 34 he would be in my immediate vicinity. I leveled off at an altitude of 1,000 to 1,100 feet on a heading of approximately 090° and began searching for the aircraft inbound to S31. I located the aircraft as it appeared to initiate a base to final turn for runway 16 at S31. As the aircraft banked to the left it appeared to continue banking to a rather excessively degree. The bank continued to increase and turned into a spin. The aircraft rotated approximately one to one and a half turns in the spin and went below my line of sight in pine trees. I called my base on the company frequency and advised that I believed I had just witnessed a plane crash on Lopez Island. The Office Manager, Barbara Pluff, who was manning the base radio immediately called the company Operations Director (and owner) Jackie Hamilton and advised her of my transmission. The time of that call (as logged on her cell phone) was 1702 PDT and is what I have based my time estimates on.

As close as I can estimate I was 3.3 miles west (281°) of the accident aircraft at the time I observed the spin. The aircraft appeared to be fairly slow which may have been part of the reason that I initially thought it was a Piper Pacer or similar aircraft. When I first observed it I would estimate it's altitude at less than 300 feet and when it entered the spin it was probably about 200' to 250' above the ground.

I proceeded to where I thought the aircraft would have impacted if it had in fact "spun in" and circled the area for several minutes. I looked primarily where a base to final turn should have occurred but saw no sign of a downed aircraft. The Office Manager, immediately after calling

the Operations Director, called the San Juan County Sheriff's Office and reported what I had told her. I circled the area until two deputy sheriff's units showed up and then left to pick up my charter at KORS. I advise my base to tell the sheriff's officers that I would be back at S31 in about 20 minutes if they needed to talk to me. Upon returning to S31 I was met by Sergeant Scott Taylor who requested that I accompany him to the area of the crash and render any assistance I could. I agreed and went in his unit to the vicinity of Lopez Sand and Gravel on Channel Rd. which is nearly on the extended center line to the north of the runway. Most all of the first responders on Lopez Island were already there and searching the area. A hand held scanner was receiving a strong ELT signal but there was no direction finding equipment to help pinpoint the crash site. A Navy helicopter that had arrived on scene was having the same problem, they could hear the ELT but could not locate it. After an hour to and hour and a half, one of the off duty sheriffs deputies located the downed aircraft. The area was immediately cordoned off and no one but necessary personnel were admitted. I was returned to S31 and proceeded with my next charter assignment.

Personal Information:

Kent Howell

Mailing address:

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Part time charter pilot for Island Air Inc., Friday Harbor, WA

Retired Senior Pilot Nevada Highway Patrol

Flight hours logged 10,400 (all but 44 in SEL)