



Aviation Investigation Final Report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Location: | Welch, West Virginia | Accident Number: | ERA11LA168 |
| Date & Time: | February 27, 2011, 16:30 Local | Registration: | N739NY |
| Aircraft: | Cessna 172N | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Defining Event: | Landing area overshoot | Injuries: | 2 Serious |
| Flight Conducted Under: | Part 91: General aviation - Personal | | |

Analysis

The unlicensed pilot was practicing landings with a tailwind in the traffic pattern at a closed airport in an unregistered airplane. The pilot refused to provide a statement, but a witness stated that the airplane was too fast on landing and too slow on climbout after the landing was aborted. The airplane struck trees at the departure end of the runway, and then settled into trees below the elevated runway. A postcrash examination of the wreckage revealed no mechanical deficiencies that would have precluded normal operation.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The unlicensed pilot's decision to land on a closed runway with a tailwind, his failure to attain the proper touchdown point, and his delayed decision to attempt a go-around, resulting in a collision with trees.

Findings

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| Personnel issues | Decision making/judgment - Pilot |
| Environmental issues | Tailwind - Decision related to condition |
| Personnel issues | Delayed action - Pilot |

Factual Information

History of Flight

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| Landing-flare/touchdown | Landing area overshoot (Defining event) |
| Landing-landing roll | Attempted remediation/recovery |
| Approach-VFR go-around | Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT) |

On February 27, 2011, about 1630 eastern standard time, a Cessna 172N, N739NY, was substantially damaged during collision with trees and terrain following an aborted landing on runway 09 at Welch Municipal Airport (I25), Welch, West Virginia. The non-certificated pilot and the passenger were seriously injured. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for the local personal flight, which was conducted under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91.

The pilot, whose student pilot certificate was expired, refused to provide a statement to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector who responded, and he did not respond to telephone calls or letters from both the Safety Board and the FAA. One witness, the pilot’s brother, stated the airplane was performing traffic patterns at the airport when the accident occurred. The airplane was “too fast” on approach to the elevated runway, and the landing was aborted. The airplane was “too slow” on climb-out, struck trees at the departure end, and descended “a few hundred feet” into tall trees in the valley below.

Examination of the airplane at the accident site by the FAA inspector revealed scattered pieces of angularly cut wood, and no evidence of pre-impact mechanical anomalies.

According to FAA records, the airplane was registered to an individual in Georgia, but the airplane had been purchased by the pilot about a week prior to the accident. The most recent annual inspection was performed June 1, 2010, at 5,572 total aircraft hours.

At 1642, the weather reported at Bluefield, West Virginia, 20 miles southeast of I25, included wind from 230 degrees at 9 knots.

The Welch Municipal Airport was closed on March 15, 2007. The status of the airport was posted in the Notices to Airmen (NOTAM) and the runways were marked closed. City officials reported the pilot has operated aircraft from the airport since its closure and has continued to do so since the accident.

Pilot Information

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| Certificate: | None | Age: | 43, Male |
| Airplane Rating(s): | None | Seat Occupied: | Left |
| Other Aircraft Rating(s): | None | Restraint Used: | |
| Instrument Rating(s): | None | Second Pilot Present: | No |
| Instructor Rating(s): | None | Toxicology Performed: | No |
| Medical Certification: | Class 3 None | Last FAA Medical Exam: | March 30, 2005 |
| Occupational Pilot: | No | Last Flight Review or Equivalent: | |
| Flight Time: | | | |

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Aircraft Make: | Cessna | Registration: | N739NY |
| Model/Series: | 172N | Aircraft Category: | Airplane |
| Year of Manufacture: | | Amateur Built: | |
| Airworthiness Certificate: | Normal | Serial Number: | 17270685 |
| Landing Gear Type: | Tricycle | Seats: | 4 |
| Date/Type of Last Inspection: | June 1, 2010 Annual | Certified Max Gross Wt.: | 2300 lbs |
| Time Since Last Inspection: | | Engines: | 1 Reciprocating |
| Airframe Total Time: | 5572 Hrs at time of accident | Engine Manufacturer: | LYCOMING |
| ELT: | Installed, not activated | Engine Model/Series: | O-320 SERIES |
| Registered Owner: | GILBERT JOSEPH S | Rated Power: | 150 Horsepower |
| Operator: | Samuel Hazzard, Jr | Operating Certificate(s) Held: | None |

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

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|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Conditions at Accident Site: | Visual (VMC) | Condition of Light: | Day |
| Observation Facility, Elevation: | 116,2857 ft msl | Distance from Accident Site: | 20 Nautical Miles |
| Observation Time: | 16:42 Local | Direction from Accident Site: | 120° |
| Lowest Cloud Condition: | Scattered / 2400 ft AGL | Visibility | 10 miles |
| Lowest Ceiling: | Broken / 2800 ft AGL | Visibility (RVR): | |
| Wind Speed/Gusts: | 9 knots / None | Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Wind Direction: | 230° | Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Altimeter Setting: | 29.98 inches Hg | Temperature/Dew Point: | 16°C / 9°C |
| Precipitation and Obscuration: | Light - None - Rain | | |
| Departure Point: | Welch, WV (I25) | Type of Flight Plan Filed: | None |
| Destination: | Welch, WV (I25) | Type of Clearance: | None |
| Departure Time: | 16:25 Local | Type of Airspace: | |

Airport Information

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|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Airport: | Welch Municipal I25 | Runway Surface Type: | Asphalt |
| Airport Elevation: | | Runway Surface Condition: | Dry;Holes;Rough |
| Runway Used: | 09 | IFR Approach: | None |
| Runway Length/Width: | 2695 ft / 50 ft | VFR Approach/Landing: | Go around;Traffic pattern |

Wreckage and Impact Information

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| Crew Injuries: | 1 Serious | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Passenger Injuries: | 1 Serious | Aircraft Fire: | None |
| Ground Injuries: | N/A | Aircraft Explosion: | None |
| Total Injuries: | 2 Serious | Latitude, Longitude: | 37.416667,-81.523887(est) |

Administrative Information

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| Investigator In Charge (IIC): | Rayner, Brian |
| Additional Participating Persons: | Brian Givens; FAA/FSDO; Charleston, WV |
| Original Publish Date: | December 19, 2011 |
| Last Revision Date: | |
| Investigation Class: | Class |
| Note: | |
| Investigation Docket: | https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=78448 |

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).