



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Watervliet, Michigan	Accident Number:	GAA17CA347
Date & Time:	June 16, 2017, 19:20 Local	Registration:	N9404E
Aircraft:	Aeronca 11AC	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	Aircraft loading event	Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Instructional		

Analysis

The flight instructor reported that, during the takeoff climb from a grass runway with the student pilot flying, about 25 ft above ground the "climb rate became stagnant." He added that he instructed the student to "lower the nose slightly," but after "several seconds the airplane did not resume a normal climb rate." The flight instructor took the flight controls and noticed that they were "sluggish" and it felt as if the airplane was caught in "wind swirls" and downdrafts. Subsequently, the flight instructor made a "small left turn" toward a small gap in the tree line ahead and the airplane impacted a heavily wooded/treed area.

The fuselage and both wings sustained substantial damage.

The flight instructor reported that there were no preaccident mechanical malfunctions or failures with the airplane that would have precluded normal operation.

According to the flight instructor, the airplane departed "loaded at gross weight." The student pilot reported that the flight instructor did not discuss weight and balance with him before flight.

During postaccident interviews with the National Transportation Safety Board investigator-in-charge, the student and flight instructor each reported their personal weight and a total of 10 gallons of fuel on board at takeoff. Based upon the information provided, the takeoff weight was 1,389 lbs, which was 139 lbs over the maximum gross weight (1,250 lbs) published in the airplane Pilot's Operating Handbook. The airplane's center of gravity for takeoff was within limits at 18.65 (12.4 to 22.0).

An automated weather observation station 8 nautical miles (nm) southwest of the accident site reported that, about the time of the accident, the wind was from 200° at 5 knots, temperature 82°F (28°C), dewpoint 54°F (12°C), and barometric setting of 29.76 inches of mercury. The calculated density altitude 8 nm southwest was 2,648 ft. The flight instructor reported that they took off from runway 20, which was 2,600 ft long.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Koch Chart, when considering the surrounding temperature and field elevation, the airplane would have likely experienced a 30% increase to the normal takeoff distance and a 25% decrease in the normal climb rate. The airplane's POH did not publish takeoff performance information.

The FAA Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge stated, in part:

Effect of Weight on Flight Performance

The takeoff/climb and landing performance of an aircraft are determined on the basis of its maximum allowable takeoff and landing weights. A heavier gross weight results in a longer takeoff run and shallower climb, and a faster touchdown speed and longer landing roll. Even a minor overload may make it impossible for the aircraft to clear an obstacle that normally would not be a problem during takeoff under more favorable conditions.

Runway Surface and Gradient

Runway conditions affect takeoff and landing performance. Typically, performance chart information assumes paved, level, smooth, and dry runway surfaces. Since no two runways are alike, the runway surface differs from one runway to another, as does the runway gradient or slope.

Runway surfaces vary widely from one airport to another. The runway surface encountered may be concrete, asphalt, gravel, dirt, or grass. The runway surface for a specific airport is noted in the Chart Supplement U.S. (formerly Airport/Facility Directory). Any surface that is not hard and smooth increases the ground roll during takeoff. This is due to the inability of the tires to roll smoothly along the runway. Tires can sink into soft, grassy, or muddy runways. Potholes or other ruts in the pavement can be the cause of poor tire movement along the runway.

It is likely that the airplane was unable to clear trees at the end of the runway due to the decrease in takeoff performance, which resulted from the high-density altitude, the turf runway, and a takeoff weight over maximum gross weight.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The flight instructor's inadequate preflight planning, which resulted in a takeoff over maximum gross weight from a turf runway in high-density altitude conditions and the airplane's inability to attain a climb rate and subsequent collision with trees.

Findings

Personnel issues	Weight/balance calculations - Instructor/check pilot
Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Instructor/check pilot
Aircraft	Maximum weight - Capability exceeded
Aircraft	Climb rate - Attain/maintain not possible
Environmental issues	Tree(s) - Contributed to outcome
Environmental issues	(general) - Contributed to outcome
Environmental issues	High density altitude - Effect on operation

Factual Information

History of Flight

Prior to flight	Aircraft loading event (Defining event)
Initial climb	Miscellaneous/other
Initial climb	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)

Flight instructor Information

Certificate:	Airline transport; Commercial; Flight instructor	Age:	36, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea; Multi-engine land; Multi-engine sea	Seat Occupied:	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Glider	Restraint Used:	Lap only
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane multi-engine; Airplane single-engine	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 30, 2017
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	July 19, 2016
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 8500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 100 hours (Total, this make and model), 4 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Student pilot Information

Certificate:	Student	Age:	27, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	Lap only
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	February 9, 2006
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:			

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Aeronca	Registration:	N9404E
Model/Series:	11AC	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	1946	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	11AC-1041
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	June 10, 2017 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1250 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	C91 installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	A&C 65 SERIES
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	65 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KBEH,649 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	8 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	23:53 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	230°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/ None
Wind Direction:	200°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/ N/A
Altimeter Setting:	29.76 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	28°C / 12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Watervliet, MI (40C)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Watervliet, MI (40C)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	19:20 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:	WATERVLIET MUNI 40C	Runway Surface Type:	Grass/turf
Airport Elevation:	656 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	Dry
Runway Used:	20	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:	2600 ft / 200 ft	VFR Approach/Landing:	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None	Latitude, Longitude:	42.2,-86.25(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Gerhardt, Adam
Additional Participating Persons:	Thomas G Kozura; FAA/ FSDO; Grand Rapids, MI
Original Publish Date:	September 22, 2017
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	This accident report documents the factual circumstances of this accident as described to the NTSB.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=95392

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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](#).