



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Murfreesboro, Tennessee	Accident Number:	ERA17LA243
Date & Time:	July 14, 2017, 19:30 Local	Registration:	N3282P
Aircraft:	Balloon Works FIREFLY 8B 15	Aircraft Damage:	None
Defining Event:	Ground handling event	Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

Analysis

According to the commercial pilot, after a successful sightseeing balloon flight, all the passengers exited the gondola and were helping the pilot secure the balloon. As they were holding on to the maneuvering handles, the balloon began to ascend; the pilot directed the passengers to "let go" of the gondola, and all except one released the maneuvering handles. The passenger who did not let go was carried about 30 ft into the air before he let go and fell to the ground; he sustained serious injuries. The pilot regained control of the balloon and landed.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The passenger's failure to let go of the balloon's gondola when the balloon began to ascend. Contributing to the accident was the pilot's failure to maintain control of the balloon after landing, which resulted in an inadvertent takeoff.

Findings

Personnel issues	Delayed action - Passenger
Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot

Factual Information

History of Flight

After landing	Ground handling event (Defining event)
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On July 14, 2017, about 1930 central daylight time, a Balloon Works, Firefly 8B-15, N3282P, ascended unintentionally after landing near Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The commercial pilot was not injured and one passenger was seriously injured. The commercial sightseeing flight was conducted under the provisions of Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan was filed for the local flight.

According to the pilot, after a successful flight, all three passengers exited the gondola and were assisting the pilot in securing the balloon. As they were holding on to the maneuvering handles the balloon began to ascend. The pilot directed everyone to "let go" but one of the passengers continued to hold on to the maneuvering handles. As the gondola ascended the passenger was carried about 30 ft into the air, before letting go and falling to the ground. The pilot regained control of the balloon and landed.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline transport; Commercial	Age:	53, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	None
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Balloon	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane multi-engine; Airplane single-engine; Instrument airplane	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 1 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	February 22, 2017
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	July 30, 2017
Flight Time:	12300 hours (Total, all aircraft), 301 hours (Total, this make and model), 6600 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 290 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 90 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Balloon Works	Registration:	N3282P
Model/Series:	FIREFLY 8B 15 UNDESIGNAT	Aircraft Category:	Balloon
Year of Manufacture:	2017	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Balloon	Serial Number:	F8B-520
Landing Gear Type:		Seats:	0
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	April 1, 2017 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1900 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	
Airframe Total Time:	309 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	
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:	MQY,543 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	10 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	19:38 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	319°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	280°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.1 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	27°C / 23°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Murfreesboro, TN	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Murfreesboro, TN	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	19:00 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class E

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	None
Passenger Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 None	Latitude, Longitude:	35.845554,-86.390274(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Alleyne, Eric
Additional Participating Persons:	Aaron deVogel; FAA/FSDO; Nashville, TN
Original Publish Date:	September 27, 2019
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=95579

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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](#).