



Department of the Interior Aviation Lessons Learned



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Subject: Maintaining Situational Awareness

Area of Concern: All Aviation Activities

Distribution: All Aviation Users

Discussion: On August 8, 2007, a float configured Cessna 185 crashed during a repositioning flight in Alaska. The aircraft had just completed a 100 hour maintenance inspection and was being repositioned for a post-maintenance check flight. After takeoff, the pilot climbed to 500 feet AGL. Due to traffic in the area and the destination being less than 5 nm away, he elected to remain at 500 feet AGL. Approximately three minutes into the flight, the engine quit as a result of a mechanical problem. The mishap pilot made several attempts to re-start the engine but was unsuccessful. He then maneuvered the aircraft to set up for an emergency landing to a small pond approximately 800 feet in length. The aircraft touched down approximately half-way, exited the pond and hit a small berm. The aircraft became airborne for a short distance, then landed in a slightly nose down attitude. After its final impact, the aircraft slid for approximately 25 feet then pivoted over the nose and came to rest inverted.



Small berm hit by aircraft



LESSONS LEARNED: The following lessons can be learned from this accident:

There's an old pilot adage that says that, "The three most useless things during an emergency are the runway behind you, the altitude above you, and the fuel left in the fuel truck." And so it was, after this particular accident, the pilot stated that had he been at a higher altitude, it would have given him more options for an emergency landing. Although there were numerous ponds in the area, there was only one that he could make based on his altitude at the time. As a result, **he did a great job with what he had**. Although he walked away from this accident, the pilot suffered a fractured vertebrae.

In a separate event on April 10, 2008, another pilot operating in the same state as the pilot in the previous mishap was better prepared when the engine of his Cessna 185F failed during a ferry flight. The pilot cited training received from Mentor pilots, off-airport clinics, and specifically from the Lessons Learned from the previously discussed August 8, 2007 accident, as being instrumental in selecting a suitable emergency landing area. During the first leg of the flight, the pilot maintained an altitude that allowed him to scout potential emergency landing areas should the need arise. The area where the pilot landed was actually one of the areas originally observed during the first leg of the flight. As a result of superior airmanship, the pilot did not sustain any injuries and the aircraft received only minor damage.



Hole in engine casing



Pilots, do you play the “what if” game during the flight brief and then continually in flight? As in, “What if something happened right now.” Or, “What if I need to make an emergency landing right now.” By maintaining situational awareness, and remaining mentally alert, you’ll be prepared for potential emergencies.



Will You Be Prepared?

/s/ Robert Galloway
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