

FINAL REPORT

AAIU Synoptic Report No: 2010-015
State File No: IRL00909074
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In accordance with the provisions of SI 205 of 1997, the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents, on 10 August 2009, appointed Mr. Paul Farrell as the Investigator-in-Charge to carry out a Field Investigation into this Serious Incident and prepare a Report. The sole purpose of this Investigation is the prevention of aviation Accidents and Incidents. It is not the purpose of the Investigation to apportion blame or liability.

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| Aircraft Type and Registration: | Cessna 180K, N71763 | |
| No. and Type of Engines: | 1 x Continental O-470-U | |
| Aircraft Serial Number: | 18053191 | |
| Year of Manufacture: | 1981 | |
| Date and Time (UTC): | 9 August 2009 @ 1900 hrs | |
| Location: | Private airfield, Co. Meath, 2.5 nm East of Kinnegad | |
| Type of Flight: | Private | |
| Persons on Board: | Crew - 1 | Passengers - 0 |
| Injuries: | Crew - 0 | Passengers - 0 |
| Nature of Damage: | Minor | |
| Commander's Licence: | FAA CPL, based on Hong Kong ATPL | |
| Commander's Details: | Male, aged 60 years | |
| Commander's Flying Experience: | 25,430 hours, of which 305 hours were on type | |
| Notification Source: | Airfield owner | |
| Information Source: | AAIU Pilot Report Form submitted by Pilot, AAIU Field Investigation | |

SYNOPSIS

The aircraft was on approach to a private airfield in Co. Meath when it struck cables. The aircraft climbed away and landed safely at another airfield. The aircraft suffered minor damage and there were no injuries.

NOTIFICATION

The AAIU became aware of the occurrence on 10 August 2009, the day following the event. The airfield owner was interviewed but he was unable to identify the aircraft that struck the cables. The AAIU made enquiries to try to identify the aircraft. On the morning of 18 August 2009, the occurrence Pilot sent an Email notification to the AAIU. On 20 August 2009, the Pilot telephoned the AAIU to confirm that the Email notification had been received.

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1. FACTUAL INFORMATION

1.1 History of the Flight

The aircraft (N71763) was travelling in loose formation behind another Cessna 180 (N180WJ). The two aircraft had visited a number of airfields on the day of this serious incident. The first aircraft (N180WJ), under the control of Pilot A, had landed at the airfield several times previously; it approached and landed first, on runway (RWY) 20. Pilot A, now on the ground, observed that Pilot B's aircraft was low on the approach and he contacted him by radio to warn him of obstacles. Pilot B pulled-up but the aircraft's wheels contacted electricity supply cables on the approach. The cables were broken.

ESB Networks, the owner of the power cables, informed the Investigation that the cables in question were a pair of 25 SCA (steel and aluminium) cables with an operating voltage of 20 KV, which were at a height of approximately 6.5 m above ground level.

The aircraft suffered minor damage comprising a missing brake line clip and a fracture of part of the VOR aerial.

1.2 Permission to Land

The airfield is a privately owned, 400 m grass strip, 2.5 nm east of Kinnegad. Details of the airfield are published in "*VFR Flight Guide Ireland*"¹. Arrival and departure instructions are listed as "*PPR by telephone please*", PPR meaning Prior Permission Required. The "*VFR Flight Guide Ireland*" lists "*wires on 20 end*" as an obstacle.

The airfield owner told the Investigation that in the weeks before the occurrence, he had been contacted on a number of occasions by Pilot A requesting permission for a group of Cessna 180 aircraft to land at his airfield that weekend. The owner declined permission due to concerns about nuisance noise. He also had a policy of accompanying visitors on their first flight into the field to ensure that their routing caused the least annoyance to his neighbours and that the visitors were properly briefed on the obstacles, including the cables at the end of RWY 20. On the day of the occurrence the airfield owner's (adult) son was again contacted by Pilot A, requesting permission for aircraft to land. The airfield owner's son told the Investigation that he declined permission citing his father's earlier refusals. Pilot A told the Investigation that during this conversation he indicated to the airfield owner's son that he would be arriving at the airfield that evening.

At around 18.40 hrs on the day of the occurrence the airfield owner was flying in his own aircraft, when he received a mobile phone call from a third party, a friend of Pilot A. The airfield owner told the Investigation that he could not hear the caller properly and because of background noise he thought the caller was travelling in a car at the time of the call. The airfield owner informed the caller that he would return the call after he (the airfield owner) had landed. Pilot A informed the Investigation that the caller was travelling with him in his aircraft at the time of the call, and that during the call the airfield owner gave permission for them to land at his field.

¹ *VFR Flight Guide Ireland*, (2006), is a copyrighted, commercial publication which provides details of airfields and other aviation matters, and is widely used by the General Aviation community.

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The Passenger who made the call told the Investigation that he had received permission to land during the call. The Investigation asked the Passenger how exactly the call was made given that headsets are normally worn in the aircraft. The Passenger said that he put his phone on speaker to make the call.

However, Pilot B told the Investigation that he knew that he did not have permission to land at the airfield.

1.3 Events after Cable Strike

Pilot A told the Investigation that after the cable strike Pilot B applied power and climbed away. The airfield owner and his son told the Investigation that, having heard the two aircraft approaching, they returned to the airfield from their house, which is nearby. The airfield owner and his son saw the occurrence aircraft climb away. The airfield owner went to talk to Pilot A, who was on the ground at the airfield but, according to the airfield owner, he taxied away and took off.

Pilot A told the Investigation that following take-off from the airfield, he led Pilot B's aircraft to Milltownpass airfield. Pilot A landed first followed by the Pilot B. Pilot A told the Investigation that he never saw the occurrence aircraft after landing. He said that he gave Pilot B the keys of the hangar, told him to put his aircraft away, and left the airfield.

Pilot B stated that he handled the aircraft by himself after landing.

Pilot B was asked whether he contacted the airfield owner to discuss the events. He said that he did not but that Pilot A had contacted the airfield owner on his behalf. Pilot A said that he did not contact the Airfield Owner but that he did contact ESB Networks to advise them of the occurrence and to arrange to pay for any costs associated with repairing the damaged cables.

ESB Networks, the electricity provider, informed the Investigation that their National Call Centre was advised of the electric power outage at 20.32 hrs. The Network Technician who attended the scene found 2 cables broken, but had no indication of the cause of the damage. ESB networks were not made aware of any third party details relating to the invoice for the cost of repairs (€1,110). ESB Networks have a safety pack that they were anxious to deliver to Pilot B as part of their public safety awareness procedure, but as they had not been provided with his contact details, ESB Networks were unable to deliver the safety pack. The Investigation was provided with a copy of the safety pack. It contains a wealth of information pertinent to those working in and around electrical cables, with the primary emphasis being on the overhead cable hazard relating to high vehicles, construction work and farm activities.

The airfield owner said that neither pilot contacted him in the aftermath of the occurrence.

N71763, and Pilot B, left Ireland on August 11, 2009, and returned to England, where the aircraft is normally based.

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1.4 Damage to Aircraft

The initial email notification, received nine days after the occurrence, stated that there was no damage to the aircraft. Pilot B subsequently submitted an AAIU Report Form that stated that there was no structural damage, but the right landing gear brake line clip and part of the VOR aerial were missing. Faced with this contradictory information, and as the aircraft had left the AAIU's jurisdiction before the occurrence was reported, the FAA, as the regulator in the state of registry, was requested to have the aircraft surveyed and provide a report to the Investigation. An FAA inspector reported, "*no major structural damage and the propeller had no markings of striking the electrical cables*".

1.5 Aircraft Log Entries

The aircraft log for N71763 had an entry dated August 9, 2009, wherein Pilot B indicated that he consulted with a third party following the cable strike, and that he was advised to conduct a prop "track" check and a visual inspection. The entry noted the following, "*one VOR antenna + one brake line clip missing*". The Investigation notes that this entry was actually signed off, by the Pilot, on August 11, 2009. Pilot B informed the Investigation that he does "*not hold any engineering certificates*", however he also informed the Investigation that he "*communicated with my engineer on the morning of Monday, 10th August and inspected the aircraft thoroughly upon his advice*". The next aircraft log entry, dated August 11, 2009, was signed by a licensed engineer, and confirms the damage reported by the Pilot. Between the entries on August 9, 2009 and August 11, 2009, the aircraft had flown for 3.7 hours, crossing the Irish Sea.

1.6 Medical

Pilot B, the sole occupant of N71763, suffered no injuries as a result of the occurrence. Pilot B informed the Investigation that he is required to wear spectacles when flying and that he was wearing them at the time of the occurrence.

1.7 Briefing

Pilot A had flown into the occurrence airfield on several previous occasions, with the prior permission of the owner, and he was familiar with the cable hazard. The Investigation asked Pilot A if he had briefed Pilot B for the approach to the occurrence airfield, and specifically on the cables. Pilot A said that he had not. He said that each of the pilots travelling on the weekend airfield tour had a copy of "*VFR Flight Guide Ireland*" with the hazards marked. The Investigation notes that the a/m guide does describe hazards, but hazards are not marked on charts.

In response to the Draft Final Report, Pilot B informed the Investigation that he accepted his liability to brief himself on any airfield he intends using, and that he had briefed himself using the VFR Flight Guide Ireland. In this regard the Investigation notes that the UK CAA's General Aviation Safety Information Leaflet 6 of 2009, "*encourages pilots always to telephone any aerodrome they intend visiting, not only to gain any permission they require, but also to obtain whatever safety information the aerodrome operator may be able to give them*".

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1.8 Legislation

Statutory Instrument (SI) 205 of 1997, Regulation 11, obliges a pilot to report an accident or serious incident as soon as practicable and by the quickest means available. The SI defines a Serious Incident as “*an incident involving circumstances indicating that an accident nearly occurred*”; the Investigation is satisfied that this occurrence was a serious incident.

SI 355 of 2008, IRISH AVIATION AUTHORITY (AERODROMES AND VISUAL GROUND AIDS) ORDER, 2008, prescribes the requirements for operation at aerodromes in Ireland. Para 5, (2) states, “*A private aeroplane ... may, use a place which is not licensed as an aerodrome ... provided that the pilot of such an aeroplane shall...— obtain the prior permission of the owner or occupier of that place*”.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 Reporting

The Pilot-in-Command of N71763 (Pilot B) did not report this Serious Incident until nine days after the event. This did not comply with SI 205 of 1997 requirements to report serious incidents “*as soon as practicable*”.

2.2 Permission to Land

In the weeks preceding the event, Pilot A made several requests to the airfield owner for permission to land. The owner declined to grant permission. On the day of the Serious Incident, the airfield owner’s son received a request that was also refused. Twenty minutes prior to the event, whilst airborne, Pilot A contacted the airfield owner, via a third party, by mobile phone; he maintains that during that call the airfield owner gave him permission to land. This third party, the Passenger, believes he did obtain the airfield owner’s permission during the call, which was made with the telephone on speaker. The airfield owner informed the Investigation that he could not hear the caller clearly and that he informed the caller that he would return the call after he had landed. The use of a speaker phone from the cockpit of the aircraft would have resulted in background noise being audible, adversely affecting normal telephonic conversation. Notwithstanding, the airfield owner informed the Investigation that he did not give permission to Pilot A to land at the airfield.

Pilot B told the Investigation that he knew that he did not have permission to land. As Pilot A was the point of contact between the group and the airfield owner, Pilot B could only have known that he didn’t have permission to land because Pilot A told him.

In light of the foregoing, it appears to the Investigation that neither Pilot A nor Pilot B had the owner’s permission to land at the airfield, contrary to the provisions of SI No. 355 of 2008.

2.3 Briefing

The airfield owner had a prudent policy of accompanying first-time visitors to the field to brief them, *inter alia*, on the cables hazard. Pilot B knew that he did not have permission to land, but made an approach with the intention of landing. Failing to obtain prior permission denied him the opportunity to have a personal briefing (*viva voce*) from the airfield owner that would have discussed the cable hazard.

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Pilot A was familiar with the cable hazard but he did not brief Pilot B, leaving Pilot B to read about the hazard in the “*VFR Flight Guide Ireland*”. Contrary to Pilot A’s belief, this guide does not have charts with hazard locations marked on them. Pilot B informed the Investigation that he accepted his liability to brief himself on any airfield he intends using, and that he had briefed himself using the VFR Flight Guide Ireland. However, the Investigation, whilst recognising the importance and usefulness of written briefing material, also notes that for approaches to smaller airfields a *viva voce* briefing from someone familiar with the approach e.g. the airfield owner, is best practice.

2.4 Operation of aircraft after Cable Strike

After the event Pilot B, who did “*not hold any engineering certificates*”, inspected the aircraft and flew the aircraft for 3.7 hours, across the Irish Sea, before a licensed mechanic examined it. Notwithstanding Pilot B’s report that he “*communicated with my engineer on the morning of Monday, 10th August and inspected the aircraft thoroughly upon his advice*”, the Investigation does not consider that this was a prudent course of action.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(a) **Findings**

1. The aircraft attempted to land at the airfield without permission.
2. The Pilot had received no *viva voce* briefing on the approach hazards, particularly the cables.
3. The Serious Incident was not reported in a timely manner.
4. The aircraft sustained minor damage.
5. After the event, the aircraft was subsequently flown for 3.7 hours, across the Irish Sea, before a licensed engineer inspected it.

(b) **Probable Cause**

The aircraft was too low on the approach and struck cables.

(c) **Contributory Factor(s)**

1. The Pilot had not received a *viva voce* briefing on the approach hazards.
2. The Pilot attempted to land at the airfield without obtaining permission from the landowner.

4. SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

This Investigation does not sustain any Safety Recommendations:

- END -