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Short Investigation Bulletin

DATE: 21st February, 2024
REPORT # OCC - 2023/0036
AIRCRAFT REGISTRATION: C-GCWI
INVESTIGATION STATUS: Completed

Summary

Occurrence Bulletins are concise reports that detail the facts surrounding an aviation occurrence, as received in the initial notification and any follow-up enquiries. They provide an opportunity to share safety messages in the absence of a full investigation.

Released as required, the Bulletin provides a summary of the less-complex factual investigation reports conducted by the AAIA. The results, based on information supplied by organizations or individuals involved in the occurrence, detail the facts behind the event, as well as any safety actions undertaken. When applicable, the Bulletin also highlights important Safety Messages for the broader aviation community, drawing on earlier AAIA investigations and research.

General Details

Date and Time of Occurrence:	21 st November 2023; 4:30 pm local (2130 UTC)		
Location	Waters near settlement of Spanish Wells, Eleuthera, Bahamas		
Persons on Board	Crew	1	Passengers 3
Injuries:	Crew	0	Passengers 0
Commanders License:	Commercial Pilot		
Occurrence category:	Loss of Control – In Flight (LOC-I)		
Occurrence type:	Accident		
Investigation status:	Complete		

Aircraft Details

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Maule M-5-235C; C-GCWI
Year of Manufacture & Serial #:	1976; 7006C
Number and Type of Engine(s)	Single, Lycoming 0-540-J1A5D
Type of operation:	Private
Information Source:	Notification
Nature of Damage:	Substantial

Meteorological Information

Condition of Light:	Day	Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC
Observation Facility:	16 ft.	Observation Time:	2100UTC
Distance from Accident Site:	50 NM	Temperature/Dew Point:	27°C / 19°C
Lowest cloud condition:	FEW028	Wind Direction/Speed:	100/10KT
Lowest Ceiling:	SCT045	Visibility:	>6SM
Altimeter Setting:	30.03 in. Hg	Type of Flight Plan:	Visual Flight Rules

Occurrence Summary

On the 21st November 2023, at approximately 4:30 pm local (2130 UTC), a Maule M-5-235C aircraft on floats, with Canadian Registration C-GCWI, was involved in an occurrence while attempting to land in waters near the settlement of Spanish Wells, Eleuthera, Bahamas.

It was reported by the pilot in command that after taking off from waters near the Governor’s Harbour International Airport (MYEM), Eleuthera, Bahamas, he experienced a loss of control while flying over the harbor to seek a suitable area for landing and docking. The area in question was not designated a Water Aerodrome¹ as defined in *CAR AGA 4 Water Aerodromes*².



Fig. 1: Point of departure from waters near MYEM and destination (Spanish Wells)

¹ Water Aerodrome – A defined area, primarily on water, intended to be used either wholly or in part for the arrival, departure and movement of aircraft, and any building and equipment on ground or water

² Bahamas Civil Aviation Regulations – Aerodromes & Ground Aids

The pilot further stated that while flying at around 100 ft. above the surface, he identified an area that he deemed suitable for landing. While carrying out this maneuver, the pilot indicated that the first degree of flaps were set (setting of 25°). As he proceeded to turn into the wind, the aircraft engine settings were at a maximum RPM of 2400 and 18 inches of manifold pressure.



Fig.2: Google Earth imagery of accident site at Spanish Wells, Eleuthera, Bahamas

At this point, the pilot observed an indicated airspeed of approximately 75 mph. After which, as he prepared to commence a left turn, it was during this time he described experiencing a sharp un-commanded left turn where “it was like if you kicked the rudder”.

The resultant sharp left turn was estimated by the pilot to be in excess of some 60° of bank and the aircraft was described as being in a “nose down” attitude in excess of 50°. The pilot responded by pulling back on the control yoke. However, the input was observed to have no effect, and the aircraft continued the sharp left turning motion until the left wing tip impacted the surface of the water. After which, the aircraft subsequently flipped over, became inverted and then partially submerged in approximately 5 feet of water.

After the aircraft came to rest, all passengers were able to safely exit the aircraft where they were provided assistance almost immediately by individuals boating in the vicinity.

There were no injuries reported in relation to the accident. The aircraft received substantial damage in multiple areas including both wings, both floats and the fuselage.



Fig. 3: C-GCWI partially submerged in waters near settlement of Spanish Wells, Eleuthera, Bahamas

Analysis

In accordance with Bahamas Regulations, *CAR AGA 4 Water Aerodromes, Chapter 1, section 1.3.3: A person shall not conduct a splash down at any location in the territory of the Bahamas without the written permission of the Authority.*

Post-accident investigations revealed that there was no regulatory approval granted by the Civil Aviation Authority Bahamas (CAA-B) to the pilot in command to execute a splash down with the aircraft at that location.

There was no evidence received to indicate that the pilot was aware or familiar with this requirement prior to the occurrence.

In the immediate aftermath of the accident, nearby boaters in the vicinity of the crash site recorded video footage of the wreckage. In review of the footage, there was a noticeable sound of wind in the background during periods when the boat was not under power.

This observation in tandem with the Bahamas Area Forecast from the Bahamas Meteorology Department, which indicated predominantly Easterly winds between 20-25 knots, do suggest windy conditions in the vicinity during the period of the event.

To what extent, if any, those conditions may have contributed to the loss of control as described by the pilot could not be determined.

The AAIA has determined the probable cause of the accident to be Loss of Control in-flight. The altitude at which the loss of control occurred (approximately 100 feet AGL), impacted the probability of the pilot to successfully recover control of the aircraft.

This Occurrence Bulletin contains facts which have been determined up to the time of issue. It is published to inform the aviation industry and the public of the general circumstances of accidents and serious incidents and should be regarded as tentative and subject to alteration or correction if additional evidence becomes available.

All AAIA investigations are conducted in accordance with Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, and The Aircraft Accident Investigation Authority Act and Regulations. The sole objective of the investigation of an accident or incident under these Regulations is the prevention of future accidents and incidents. It is not the purpose of such an investigation to apportion blame or liability. Accordingly, it is inappropriate that AAIA reports should be used to assign fault or blame or determine liability, since neither the investigation nor the reporting process has been undertaken for that purpose.