

PLANE: Pilot seeks teachable moment in incident

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Madras airport, Lansburgh and his passenger pilot returned to Sisters to find the winds had picked up considerably since their departure.

Located on the east slope of the Cascade mountains, the Sisters Airport can experience strong and often unpredictable winds that can make it a technically challenging place to land. In an effort to teach a lesson in difficult flight conditions, as it turned out the “teachable moment” was in considering options, such as diversion to another airport to wait out the weather. Lansburgh hopes to turn the incident in to a lesson for all pilots flying at airports like Sisters.

About five miles from the airport, Lansburgh learned from the radio-activated Super AWOS (Automated Weather Observation System) that wind conditions at Sisters had become turbulent, and cautioned of crosswind and wind shear. Once he had the airport in sight, he found the three wind indicators conflicting. The wind socks at the ends of the runway indicated erratic wind in opposite directions, while the flag in the middle was hanging flat indicating no wind. From that information, he decided the best choice was landing in the direction of Runway 20, and entered a standard left pattern for landing.

On final approach, Lansburgh acknowledged the NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) filed by the Sisters Airport regarding the flooding and closure of 200 yards at the

north end of the runway. He prepared to land long, overflying the flooded area of the runway. Once below tree line, they continued to experience turbulent and windy conditions. Lansburgh, attempting to get cover from the wind by getting closer to the trees on the right, made a safety decision to sidestep the plane to land into the more forgiving dirt to the side of the paved runway. The landing was uneventful, as Lansburgh performed a normal roll-out after touchdown. He was surprised when the plane suddenly flipped forward, the propeller caught the ground, and he found himself hanging upside down from the seat belt in the plane.

The extent of the many factors involved, including managing gusting winds which were shifting directions, avoiding the flooded area, in a light tailwheel airplane, is still unclear to Lansburgh.

“It just happened in an instant,” he recalls.

The jury is still out regarding other possible effects which may have contributed to the cause of this incident.

Tailwheel airplanes, like Lansburgh’s PA-12, can be tricky to land in conditions like these. Also known as “taildraggers,” the configuration offers advantages in backcountry and short-field environments. In order to fly a tailwheel airplane, a pilot must receive special training and an endorsement. Lansburgh specializes in giving this type of training, and has become well-known nationally as “Tailwheel Town.”

Lansburgh has been a pilot for over 30 years with over 6,000 hours of flight time without incident. With a colorful career in aviation,

Lansburgh’s diverse experience includes being a Coast Guard helicopter crewman, air-show pilot, aerial filmmaker, certified airframe and powerplant mechanic, owning a glider operation, and managing the Sunriver airport.

Lansburgh was instrumental in the beginning of the Flight Science program at Sisters High School, both as a teacher at Sisters High School, and as flight instructor for students learning to fly. He was the founding CFI in what has become Outlaw Aviation today.

Lansburgh is a well-respected pilot and instructor within the aviation community because of his outspoken advocacy for training that pushes students’ comfort zones in a way that gives them the tools they need to handle any situation that may arise while they are flying. Thousands of pilots have studied the videos on Lansburgh’s website, www.tailwheelersjournal.com.

“To have this happen to a pilot as accomplished as Brian is a clear reminder in pilot decision-making and potential consequences,” said Walt Lasecki, also a CFI with Outlaw Aviation, who witnessed the incident.

“What I would like other pilots to know is that when the conditions put you in a scenario that is possibly beyond your capabilities, or your plane’s capabilities, it’s better to fly a go-around than try to land,” Lansburgh said. “Pilots often have incidents at their home airports because of ‘get home-itus,’ and an



PHOTO PROVIDED

Brian Lansburgh is a skilled and experienced pilot – who ran into trouble with the wind last week

unwillingness to be inconvenienced by repeated attempts at landing, or simply going to another airport. I could’ve just flown back to Madras or Redmond and waited until

the wind calmed down before returning to Sisters. That would’ve been far less inconvenient for me than spending the next year fixing my plane, which is what I’ll be doing.”

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