Australian Government
Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Wheels up landing involving a Cessna 441, VH-SMO

Honeymoon (ALA), South Australia, 3 September 2013

ATSB Transport Safety Report
Aviation Occurrence Investigation
AO-2013-143
Final – 10 December 2013

Released in accordance with section 25 of the *Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003*

Publishing information

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Addendum

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Wheels up landing involving a Cessna 441, VH-SMO

What happened

On 3 September 2013, at about 1531 Central Standard Time,[1] a Cessna 441 aircraft, registered VH-SMO (SMO), departed Adelaide on a charter flight to the Honeymoon aeroplane landing area (ALA), South Australia. It was the third return flight to Honeymoon for the pilot that day.

While en route, the pilot determined that the wind conditions were favourable for a straight-in approach to runway 01 at Honeymoon.

During the descent, the pilot selected the first stage of flap. The pilot reported that normally he would also lower the landing gear and confirm that it had been extended, but on this occasion he could not recall performing this action.

Prior to arriving at the airstrip, the pilot contacted ground staff at the ALA. The pilot reported that the ground staff then conducted a runway inspection and subsequently advised that the runway was clear. [2]

The pilot then selected the second stage of flap and established the aircraft on a 5 NM final to runway 01.

When about 500 ft above ground level (AGL), the pilot commenced his pre-landing checklist. After selecting full flap, the first item on the checklist, the pilot looked at the windsock to confirm the wind and observed 4-5 emus on the right side of the airstrip. He watched them run away from the airstrip and then continued the approach, but inadvertently omitted to complete the remaining checklist items, which included confirming the landing gear had been extended. The aircraft subsequently landed with the landing gear retracted.

The pilot reported that, as some engine power had been applied during the landing, the landing gear warning horn did not sound.[3]

Figure 1: VH-SMO after landing

Source: Operator

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1 Central Standard Time (CST) was Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) + 9.5 hours.

2 The pilot reported that emus were regularly sighted at the ALA and that the ground staff would normally notify him if animals were sighted during the runway inspection.

3 If the landing gear is not down and locked, and the throttle is reduced to the idle position, as in a landing approach, a landing gear unsafe warning horn will sound.

Safety message

This incident highlights the impact distractions can have on aircraft operations, particularly during a critical phase of flight. Research conducted by the ATSB found that distractions were a normal part of everyday flying and that pilots generally responded to distractions quickly and efficiently. It also revealed that 13 per cent of accidents and incidents associated with pilot distraction between January 1997 and September 2004 occurred during the approach phase of flight. The study also identified four occurrences associated with checklists and suggested that, if a checklist is interrupted, pilots should consider returning to the beginning of the checklist to reduce the potential for error.

The Flight Safety Foundation suggests that, after a distraction source has been recognised and identified, the next priority is to re-establish situation awareness by conducting the following:

- *Identify*: What was I doing?
- *Ask*: Where was I distracted?
- *Decide/act*: What decision or action shall I take to get back on track?

The following provide additional information on pilot distraction:

- Dangerous Distraction: An examination of accidents and incidents involving pilot distraction in Australia between 1997 and 2004: www.atsb.gov.au/publications/2005/distraction_report.aspx
- Flight Safety Foundation Approach-and-landing Briefing Note 2.4 – Interruptions/Distractions: http://flightsafety.org/files/alar_bn2-4-distractions.pdf
- The United States Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) On Landings Part III pamphlet: www.faasafety.gov/files/gslac/library/documents/2011/Aug/56411/FAA%20P-8740-50%20OnLandingsPart%20III%20%5Bhi-res%5D%20branded.pdf www.faasafety.gov/files/gslac/library/documents/2011/Aug/56411/FAA P-8740-50 OnLandingsPart III %5Bhi-res%5D branded.pdf

General details

Occurrence details

Date and time:	3 September 2013 – 1627 CST	
Occurrence category:	Accident	
Primary occurrence type:	Wheels up landing	
Location:	Honeymoon (ALA), South Australia	
	Latitude: 31° 38.77' S	Longitude: 140° 43.08' E

Aircraft details

Manufacturer and model:	Cessna Aircraft Company 441	
Registration:	VH-SMO	
Serial number:	4410132	
Type of operation:	Charter	
Persons on board:	Crew – 1	Passengers – 8
Injuries:	Crew – Nil	Passengers – Nil
Damage:	Substantial	

About the ATSB

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is an independent Commonwealth Government statutory agency. The Bureau is governed by a Commission and is entirely separate from transport regulators, policy makers and service providers. The ATSB's function is to improve safety and public confidence in the aviation, marine and rail modes of transport through excellence in: independent investigation of transport accidents and other safety occurrences; safety data recording, analysis and research; and fostering safety awareness, knowledge and action.

The ATSB is responsible for investigating accidents and other transport safety matters involving civil aviation, marine and rail operations in Australia that fall within Commonwealth jurisdiction, as well as participating in overseas investigations involving Australian registered aircraft and ships. A primary concern is the safety of commercial transport, with particular regard to fare-paying passenger operations.

The ATSB performs its functions in accordance with the provisions of the *Transport Safety Investigation Act 2003* and Regulations and, where applicable, relevant international agreements.

The object of a safety investigation is to identify and reduce safety-related risk. ATSB investigations determine and communicate the safety factors related to the transport safety matter being investigated.

It is not a function of the ATSB to apportion blame or determine liability. At the same time, an investigation report must include factual material of sufficient weight to support the analysis and findings. At all times the ATSB endeavours to balance the use of material that could imply adverse comment with the need to properly explain what happened, and why, in a fair and unbiased manner.

About this report

Decisions regarding whether to conduct an investigation, and the scope of an investigation, are based on many factors, including the level of safety benefit likely to be obtained from an investigation. For this occurrence, a limited-scope, fact-gathering investigation was conducted in order to produce a short summary report, and allow for greater industry awareness of potential safety issues and possible safety actions.