



Australian Government

Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Landing on a closed runway, involving PA28 VH-FEZ

Wangaratta Airport, Victoria, 12 April, 2014

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Addendum

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Landing on a closed runway, involving PA28 VH-FEZ

What happened

On 12 April 2014, a PA-28 aircraft, registered VH-FEZ (FEZ) departed Mangalore airport, Victoria, at 1043 Eastern Standard Time, to conduct a dual navigation training flight. The planned route was Mangalore to Shepparton, Tocumwal, Wangaratta and back to Mangalore. Landings were planned for Shepparton and Wangaratta.

On board were an instructor, a student pilot acting as pilot flying, and another student pilot to be dropped off at Shepparton airport.

After departing Shepparton for Tocumwal, the instructor requested the student divert directly to Wangaratta Airport. The aircraft approached Wangaratta from the northwest and, when at about 10 NM, descended to about 2,000 ft to join the circuit for a touch and go.¹ The student broadcast all mandatory radio calls on the Wangaratta common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF). The instructor also crosschecked the frequencies the student had selected.

At the time, there was a jet model aircraft group event in progress, and Wangaratta airport was closed. The closure had been advised by NOTAM². The model aircraft group had obtained the required CASA permit to conduct the event and, as per required procedures,³ had placed a white cross near the primary windsock, indicating that the airport was closed.

Although the student had broadcast all mandatory calls, the model aircraft ground controller, monitoring a UNICOM⁴ did not hear anything, and therefore was not aware of the aircraft's intentions. There were at least 3 jet model aircraft airborne at the time. These model aircraft have a wing spans up to 3 meters and operate up to 1500 feet above ground level and at speeds of up to 230 knots.

As FEZ approached the circuit, the student flew the aircraft parallel to runway 18 for a short time, before turning crosswind. Neither the instructor nor student noticed the white cross near the windsock (Figure 1).

The model aircraft flight line director heard the engine sound of FEZ as it approached the circuit, and watched it continue to the east. He assumed that the pilots had seen the barricades and the group of 20-30 trailers and tents, and had therefore departed the area. Shortly after, he was advised that the aircraft was now on final approach for runway 18. The flight line director quickly coordinated all personnel to move back the barricades, and clear the runway. He also arranged the three airborne model aircraft to hold to the east, well clear of the runway.

Jet model aircraft



Source: www.vjaa.org.au

¹ Touch and go is a manoeuvre that is common when learning to fly a fixed-wing aircraft. It involves landing on a runway and taking off again without coming to a full stop. Usually the pilot then circles the airport in a defined pattern known as a circuit and repeats the manoeuvre. This allows many landings to be practiced in a short time.

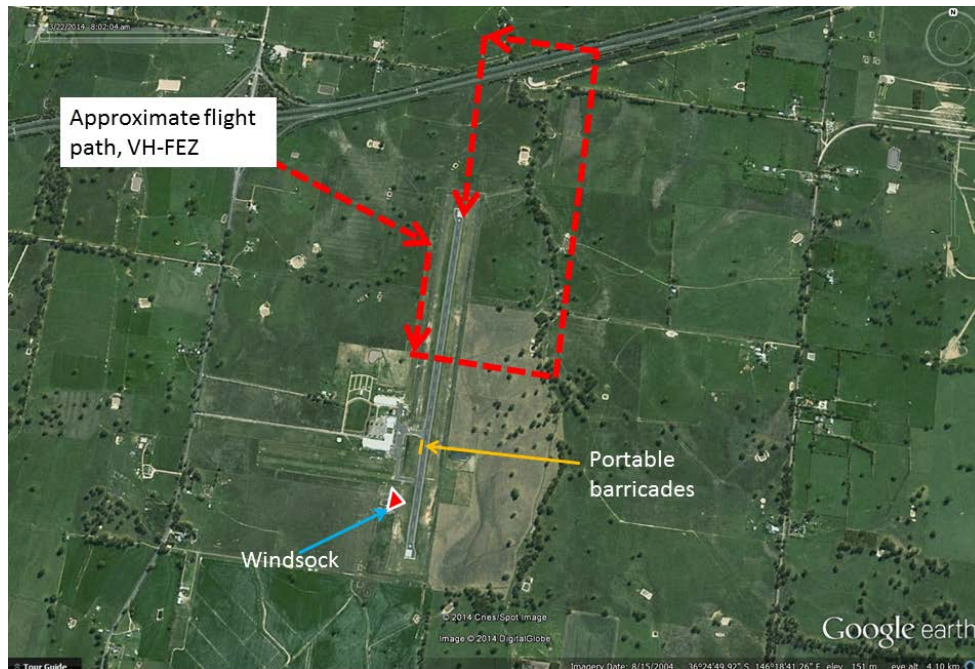
² NOTAM is A Notice To Airmen advises personnel concerned with flight operations of information concerning the establishment, condition or change in any aeronautical facility, service, procedure, or hazard, the timely knowledge of which is essential to safe flight.

³ Manual of Standards Part 139 – Aerodromes

⁴ Unicom is a non-Air Traffic Service communications service provided to enhance the value of information normally available regarding a non-towered aerodrome

FEZ touched down near the threshold on runway 18 (Figure 2). As FEZ became airborne following the touch and go, the instructor then noticed some barricades off the right side of the runway (Figure 3). The instructor took over control of the aircraft and vacated the area, departing to Mangalore.

Figure 1: FEZ approach profile at Wangaratta airport



Source: Google earth

Figure 2: The aircraft touchdown



Source: Russell Eastaway

Figure 3: Barricades alongside runway 18 at taxiway intersection



Source: Russell Eastaway

Instructor Comment

The instructor's day started with maintenance release duty of about 1 hour. This was followed by the 4 hours block for the navigation flight, to be followed by a 2 hour circuit session, and some catch up paperwork.

He started to feel some time pressure with ongoing delays caused by his student. Although his student had been given the route the night before, he still was not ready at the allocated departure time, and there were some errors in his flight plan. The flight planned route was slightly different to the normal navigation exercise at this level, and this timeframe did not give the student a lot of time to prepare.

Also, his sleep had been disrupted for the last few nights, due to a sick family member.

He advised that during the approach and landing at Wangaratta, he had narrowed his focus onto the student. The student had been experiencing some difficulty with directional control during the flare and touchdown, and the instructor was working intently with the student on his approach and landing.

Operator comment

In the morning the student obtained the current weather and NOTAMs for the flight. The instructor reviewed and assessed the weather, but did not check the NOTAMs, and therefore missed the NOTAM regarding the closure of Wangaratta airport. The operator advised the instructor wanted to remain punctual and efficient, and this probably contributed to him overlooking this step.

The operator also suggested a positive action for future closures maybe to place a white cross at each threshold to further alert pilots that the runway is closed.

Safety message

Before commencing a flight, the pilot in command should review all available information appropriate to the intended operation, including current weather reports and forecasts, and the condition and suitability of the selected landing area/s. This occurrence also highlights the need to check for any operational markers.

General details

Occurrence details

Date and time:	12 April 2014 – 1210 EST	
Occurrence category:	Incident	
Primary occurrence type:	Runway event	
Location:	Wangaratta Airport, Victoria	
	Latitude: 36° 24.95' S	Longitude: 146° 18.42' E

Aircraft details

Manufacturer and model:	Piper Aircraft Corporation and PA-28-161	
Registration:	VH-FEZ	
Serial number:	28-8016055	
Type of operation:	Flying Training	
Persons on board:	Crew – 1	Passengers – 1
Injuries:	None	None
Damage:	None	

About the ATSB

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is an independent Commonwealth Government statutory agency. The ATSB 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.