

Grumman AA-5A, G-COPY

AAIB Bulletin No: 11/97 Ref: EW/G97/07/05 Category: 1.3

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Grumman AA-5A, G-COPY
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-320-E2G piston engine
Year of Manufacture:	1978
Date & Time (UTC):	4 July 1997 at 2000 hrs
Location:	Canterbury Airfield, Kent
Type of Flight:	N/A
Persons on Board:	Crew - None - Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - N/A - Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Extensive to propeller, landing gear and wings
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	48 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	250 hours (of which 180 were on type)
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

The pilot returned to the aircraft at about 1745 hrs for a return flight to its base at Biggin Hill Airport. The Battery Master Switch had been left on during the day and there was not enough charge left in the battery to start the aircraft. With the assistance of the airfield security guard, the engine was started using an external car battery. The pilot allowed the engine to run at 1,200 RPM for five minutes, then completed the engine power checks. A further five minute period at 1,200 RPM was then allowed before the radio and navigation aids were switched on. The displays were intermittent and unsatisfactory but the pilot elected to taxi for take off, reasoning that the displays would get better once the battery was fully charged. While taxiing, all of the electrical services were lost completely.

The aircraft was returned to its parking position for a further 10 to 15 minute run up period in a further attempt to charge the battery. Whilst waiting during this period, the pilot remembered that he had not refitted the battery cover. Since he could not see it, he believed that it was in the possession of the security guard, who had by now returned to his caravan across the airfield. Not wishing to depart without the battery cover, for fear of criticism by the flying club instructors, the pilot elected to recover the missing cover but did not want to stop the engine because it would not restart.

The aircraft's brakes were holding and had done so during the power checks. The pilot therefore decided that his only chance was to leave the aircraft with the engine running and to run over to the caravan to retrieve the battery cover. He reasoned that he could be there and back within 90 seconds and vacated the aircraft. He found that the airfield security guard did not know the whereabouts of the battery cover. The pilot returned to the parking position but the aircraft had gone.

At this time, the airfield manager arrived at the scene and was informed that the aircraft had been stolen. He and the pilot circumnavigated the airfield by car in search of the aircraft but failed to locate the machine. The airfield manager informed the local police of the event, then suggested an aerial reconnaissance flight using his PA-28 aircraft. This was carried out, initially to cover the local area around the airfield, but found nothing. Upon returning to directly overhead the airfield, a steep turn was initiated in order to inspect the airfield boundaries. During this manoeuvre, the missing aircraft's tail was sighted in woods just to the north of the boundary.

Subsequent inspection indicated that the aircraft had started to move forward and turned left through almost 180°, running downhill before becoming airborne for a short distance and colliding with trees. It came to rest in a ditch and had incurred substantial damage. The aircraft's sliding canopy, which had been left open, had closed during the impact sequence. Luggage and flight equipment located in the rear of the aircraft had been thrown into the front.

The pilot stated that he realised the decision to leave the aircraft was misconceived, but that it was in a stable condition when he left it.