

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Vickers Slingsby T65A Vega, G-EECK
No & Type of Engines:	N/A
Year of Manufacture:	1979 (Serial no: 1917)
Date & Time (UTC):	13 October 2021 at 1216 hrs
Location:	Near Portmoak Airfield, Scotlandwell, Kinross
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - 1 (Serious) Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Damaged beyond economical repair
Commander's Licence:	Other
Commander's Age:	70 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	212 hours (of which 64 were on type) Last 90 days - 5 hours Last 28 days - 3 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and further enquiries by the AAIB

Synopsis

The pilot lost control of the glider and struck the ground after the canopy became insecure soon after takeoff.

The canopy had not been secured properly during the pre-flight preparation due to the pilot, and a person assisting him with the canopy, being distracted.

History of the flight

Background information

The canopy on the Slingsby T65A Vega has an opening hinge on the nose of the glider and opens vertically at the rear (Figure 1).

The canopy lock is located on the top of the fuselage behind the pilot's head. The pilot commented that it was not possible for him to lock the canopy, or to see the locking indicator, when seated in the glider due to his stature and his requirement to use a seat back. He would normally be assisted by his syndicate partner in lowering the canopy, engaging the lock and checking the indicator button was flush. The syndicate partner would then say, "canopy closed and locked". When the syndicate partner was not available, the pilot would ask for assistance from someone else and brief them this procedure.



Figure 1

Slingsby T65A Vega glider showing canopy open and side window

The accident flight

On the day of the accident, the syndicate partner was not available, so the pilot obtained assistance from a gliding club member who he briefed on the canopy locking procedure.

The pilot stated that as he was distracted talking to the club member and not fully focused on his flight, he did not complete his cockpit pre-flight checks correctly. As the club member was also distracted by the conversation with the pilot, he did not complete the canopy locking procedure. However, the pilot convinced himself that when the canopy was closed, it was also locked.

The glider subsequently took off on a winch launch from grass Runway 28. At the time the wind was from about 290° at 8 kt. Soon after takeoff, at approximately 300 ft agl, the canopy started to bounce up and down and the pilot realised it was not locked. At about 500 ft agl he released the winch cable and levelled the glider with the intention of making an abbreviated circuit, landing halfway down Runway 28.

Conscious that if the canopy detached in flight it may damage the empennage, he opened the left side panel window and pressed down on the canopy's lower rim with his right hand. His arms were thus crossed in front of him while he controlled the glider with his left hand.

During the circuit, the pilot realised he was unable to simultaneously hold down the canopy, hold the control column and select the flaps and airbrakes. Therefore, on the final approach he attempted to secure the control column between his legs while he temporarily let go of the control column to select the flaps. However, when he did so the glider started to 'porpoise', probably because the glider was not in trim. He then lost control and the glider

struck the ground at an attitude of about 20° to 30° nose down, cartwheeled and came to rest inverted in a field of vegetables in the undershoot of Runway 28 (Figure 2). This left the pilot trapped upside down in the cockpit supported by his harness.

Rescuers from the airfield were quickly on scene. The pilot was removed from the glider after his seat harness and parachute straps had been cut and a farmer had lifted the glider with a forklift tractor. The pilot was subsequently taken by an air ambulance to hospital. He sustained serious injuries including a broken arm.



Figure 2
G-EECK after the accident

Pilot's comments

The pilot believed that the canopy eventually detached just before the glider struck the ground.

The pilot commented that the primary cause of the accident was inadequate pre-flight checks. He added that while he was technically current, he was out of regular flying practise and so a lack of recency also contributed to the accident. Additionally, he believed he was overconfident on the day, as he was in a hurry to get airborne and was thinking of the flight ahead and not the launch.

Analysis

The glider became airborne with its canopy not closed and locked. This led him to secure it with one hand while trying to fly the glider and configure it for landing with the other. This meant he released the control column during the approach and lost control.

Despite him not being physically able to secure the canopy on the ground, he had a procedure in place to overcome this. However, despite this, he and his assistant became distracted in conversation at a critical time of the flight's preparation, the result of which was that the canopy nearly came off in flight. Had it done so, it may have damaged the glider to such an extent that control may have been lost at a greater height leading to more serious consequences.

This accident highlights how easy it can be to become distracted, and the consequences. Flight preparation is a critical phase of any flight, and it would be wise to treat this part of a flight as a time where only things related to the operation of the flight are discussed.

Conclusion

The glider's canopy was not secured during the pre-flight preparation because the pilot and his assistant became distracted. This led to the canopy becoming unsecure soon after takeoff.

While distractions are a part of life, it is good airmanship to notice when this happens and try to return to a point in a procedure before the distraction occurred so anything that was missed can hopefully be spotted and rectified.