Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Statesville, NC	**Accident Number:**	WPR26MA063
Date & Time:	December 18, 2025, 10:22 Local	**Registration:**	N257BW
Aircraft:	Cessna 550	**Injuries:**	7 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

On December 18, 2025, at 1015 eastern standard time, a Cessna Citation 550, N257BW, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Statesville, North Carolina. The pilot and 6 passengers were fatally injured. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* Part 91 personal flight.

The airplane was positioned on the south parking ramp at Statesville Regional Airport (SVH), Statesville, North Carolina, for passenger loading and preflight. Ground personnel reported the airplane was fully fueled prior to the flight. Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) audio began recording the accident flight at 0944:21. The CVR recording confirmed the airline transport rated pilot was seated in the left seat, the pilot's adult son, who held a private pilot certificate with a single engine land and an instrument rating, was a passenger in the right seat. A rear seat passenger with a private pilot certificate and ratings for multi-engine land, instrument airplane, and rotorcraft-helicopter was positioned near the cockpit in the cabin area.

Engine start was initiated using onboard battery power and, following an initial unsuccessful start of the left (no. 1) engine, both engines were started about 0953. The airplane taxied from the south parking area at 0959, crossed runway 10/28 at midfield, and taxied to the approach end of runway 10. During taxi, the pilot and the two pilot-rated passengers discussed that a thrust reverser indicator light(s) for an unspecified engine was inoperative, but that the thrust reverser for the affected engine was working properly.

The airplane departed from runway 10 at SVH, under visual flight rules (VFR) about 1006. The pilot intended to activate an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan, with a planned destination of Sarasota/Bradenton International Airport (SRQ), Sarasota, Florida, once airborne. The pilot performed the takeoff and departure while the right seat passenger performed various checklists and communicated on the radio. During takeoff roll, the rear passenger commented

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that the left engine was producing more power than the right and indicated there may have been a faulty gauge. The pilot continued the takeoff.

Preliminary GPS data showed the airplane made a climbing left turn following takeoff. At 1007:19 the pilot commented that he would remain VFR until they received their IFR clearance. At 1008, the airplane had turned about 180° and attained an altitude of about 2,200 ft mean sea level (msl). The airplane continued to turn left and began to descend. The right-seat passenger attempted to contact ZTL ATC and activate the flight's IFR flight plan three times between 1008 and 1010 but was unsuccessful due to the controller's workload and associated radio communications.

About 1009 there was discussion between the pilot and rear passenger about climbing to a higher altitude, even though they were technically required to remain VFR. The airplane had descended to about 1,580 ft msl and was established on a heading of about 250° and 164 knots (kts) indicated airspeed (IAS) at that time. The pilot initiated a climb, and shortly after, the rear passenger noted a difference between the left and right engine interstage turbine temperature (ITT) indications. There were no further discussions regarding the engine instruments throughout the remainder of the CVR recording. The autopilot was either disengaged intentionally, or it disengaged independently at 1010:02.

Beginning at 1010:14 no intelligible CVR audio was captured from the left seat hot microphone and audio panel for the next 3 minutes and 55 seconds.

Starting at 1010:18, the cockpit area microphone captured the pilot making remarks indicating his altitude indicator was not working properly and that additional left side flight instruments may not have been working properly. The Garmin GTN-750 stopped recording airspeed data at 1009:37 and heading data at 1010:58.

About 1011, airplane control was transferred to the right seat passenger, at an altitude of about 4,500 ft msl. No comments were recorded during the remainder of the CVR recording to indicate there were any malfunctions with the right side cockpit flight instruments.

At 1011:04 severe degradation in CVR audio quality began in all channels, which continued for 3 minutes and 5 seconds.

About 1013, at an altitude of about 1,870 ft msl, the pilot and both pilot-rated passengers stated they could see the ground. Although a positive transfer of airplane control was not recorded, subsequent communication between the pilot and right seat passenger was consistent with the pilot having resumed control of the airplane at that time. The pilot requested the flaps be extended at 1013:03, made a right turn to a westerly heading, and requested the landing gear be extended at 1013:22. Subsequent discussions were consistent with the landing gear being configured; however, the gear indicator lights were not illuminated.

At 1013:48, the right seat passenger transmitted on the SVH common traffic advisory frequency (CTAF) in part "…we're having some issues here."

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At 1014:05 the rear passenger made a query to the pilot regarding power to the “alternator” (NOTE: the CE-550 airplane is not equipped with an alternator). About 4 seconds later audio quality returned to previous levels on all recorded CVR audio channels. After the audio quality returned, the pilot made a comment indicating that was the “problem”, however, did not specify what the “problem” was or what actions were taken to correct it. There were no additional discussions regarding the pilot’s flight instrumentation for the remainder of the CVR recording.

The airplane started a left turn (consistent with the base leg) towards runway 28 about 1014:10, at an altitude of about 1,325 ft and 142 kts groundspeed. The Garmin GTN-750 recordings of airspeed data returned at 1014:12. The GPS data showed the airplane rolled out of the turn onto runway heading about 1014:50, at an altitude of about 1,240 ft msl and 114 kts IAS. Recorded CVR audio indicated the right seat passenger visually acquired the runway and provided directions to the pilot as to where the runway was. About 1015:00, the pilot made comments which indicated he had acquired the runway visually.

Recorded data from the GTN-750 showed that the airplane’s airspeed and altitude continued to decrease from the time the airplane was aligned on final approach to the runway until 1015:18, when the airplane was at 984 ft msl and 99 kts IAS. The airplane continued to descend to 942 ft msl until the CVR audio and GPS data ended at 1015:23. The IAS increased to 107 kts and then decreased to about 93 kts during the final five seconds of data. (See figure 1.)

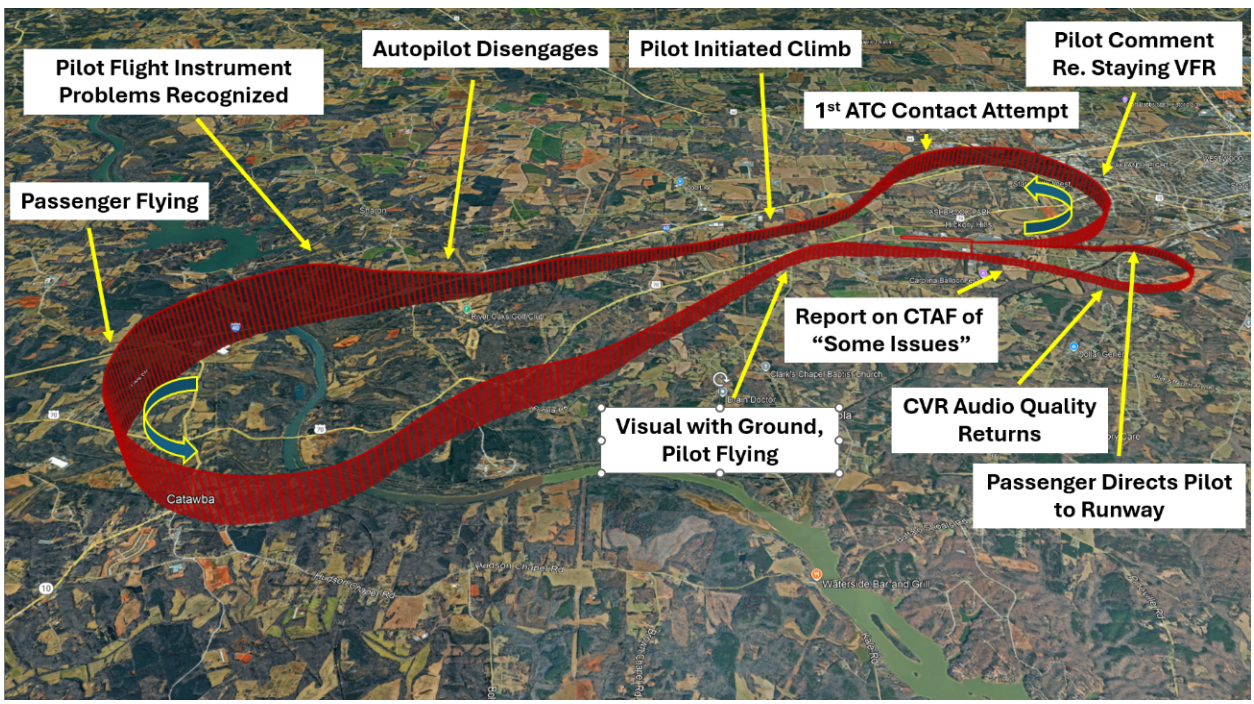

Figure 1: Flight Path Overview with Sequence of Events

Accident Site and Wreckage

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Examination of the accident site revealed that the first identified point of impact (FIPI) was the first (easternmost) light station of the runway 28 Medium Intensity Approach Light System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR), located about 1,380 ft from the runway threshold. Two lightbulbs, the left and fourth from the left position (when viewed looking towards the runway), approximately 6 ft apart, were separated from the otherwise intact 29 ft tall light station (figure 2) and located on the ground near the station. The upper portion of the second MALSR light station located about 180 ft from the FIPI was separated, of which about 15 ft of the frangible pole was still standing. A group of damaged trees located about 235 ft from the FIPI, were sheared about 12 ft above ground level (agl). The first indication of fire was blackened branches and grass near the west side of the trees.

A ground impression was observed about 350 ft from the FIPI, near the airport perimeter fence, and extended through the MALSR decision light station. The debris path continued along a westerly heading through the runway overrun to where the main wreckage came to rest on the runway blast area about 400 ft short of the runway 28 threshold, oriented on an easterly heading. Heavy charring of the ground began near the decision light station and continued along the remaining length of the debris field to the wreckage.

Figure 2: First Identified Point of Impact

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A post impact fire consumed a majority of the fuselage and heat damaged both wings, empennage, and both engines (figure 3). All flight control surfaces were identified in the debris path and main wreckage. No evidence of pre-impact separation of any airplane component or structure was observed.

Figure 3: Aerial view of the accident site.

ENGINES

Both engines remained attached to the pylon structures and both thrust reversers were found in the stowed position. There was no evidence of uncontained engine failure with either engine. Examination of the cockpit throttle quadrant found both thrust levers to be in the full forward position and both reverse throttle levers in the down position, consistent with being stowed.

The No. 1 engine stage 2 low pressure turbine (LPT) blades, viewed through the exhaust duct, were all full length and appeared undamaged. The No. 1 engine fan blades, viewed through the engine inlet, exhibited various degrees of damage and had missing material at the blade tips. The engine inlet surfaces exhibited circumferential scoring between the fan blades forward to the inlet.

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The No. 2 engine stage 2 LPT blades, viewed through the exhaust duct, were all full length and appeared undamaged. Most of the engine inlet was not attached to the engine. The No. 2 engine fan blades exhibited various degrees of damage and had missing material at the blade tips.

Pilot Experience

The pilot had type ratings for the A-320, A-330, A-350, B-737, B-757, B-767, CE-500, and DC-10. As part of the pilot's CE-500 type rating, he had the limitation "CE-500 Second in Command Required." The pilot reported civil flight experience that included 17,000 total and 400 hours in the last six months as of his last first-class medical application dated April 29, 2025.

Review of the right-seat passenger's logbook indicated that he had 175.3 total flight hours in single engine land airplanes as of November 29, 2025. The right seat passenger's most recent first-class medical certificate was issued on August 12, 2024. The right seat passenger was not qualified to perform second in command duties per Title 14 *CFR* part 61.55.

The rear passenger reported civil flight experience that included 3,500 total and 65 hours in last six months as of his last medical application dated February 21, 2025. He was issued a second-class medical certificate without limitation.

Weather

The SVH Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS), recorded on the CVR audio, reported the weather at 0945 as wind calm, visibility 10, ceiling 3,900 ft broken, 4,800 ft overcast, temperature 7° C, dewpoint -0° C, altimeter 30.19.

The SVH AWOS, recorded on the CVR audio, reported the weather at 0954 as wind from 050° at 3 knots, visibility 10, 3,900 ft scattered, ceiling 5,000 ft overcast, temperature 7° Celsius, dewpoint 0° C, altimeter 30.19.

The Meteorological Aerodrome Report (METAR), at 1015, reported weather at SVH as: wind calm, visibility of 5 statute miles, heavy drizzle, ceiling broken at 1,200 ft agl, ceiling broken at 2,200 ft agl, overcast clouds at 5,000 ft agl, temperature of 7°C, dew point temperature of 1°C, altimeter setting of 30.19 inHg; Remarks: station with a precipitation discriminator, temperature of 7.2°C and dew point temperature of 1.0°C.

Recorders

The airplane was equipped with a Fairchild GA-100 tape-based cockpit voice recorder (CVR). The CVR was recovered at the accident site by NTSB personnel. Audio recording of the accident flight was successfully downloaded from the CVR. The recorder contained about 31 minutes of analog audio on a continuous loop tape in a four-channel format: one channel for each flight crew and one channel for the cockpit area microphone (CAM) with one spare channel. Audio quality of the recording was poor with low signal-to-noise ratio and extraordinary means were required to make portions of the recording intelligible.

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The airplane was not equipped with a flight data recorder, nor was it required to be.

A Garmin GTN-750 was recovered at the accident site by NTSB personnel. The GTN-750 is a combination GPS/Navigation receiver/Radio/Multi-Function display that has the capability of recording some data in non-volatile memory. In its configuration on the accident aircraft the unit recorded about 20 parameters for the full accident flight.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	**Registration:**	N257BW
Model/Series:	550	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	GB AVIATION LEASING LLC	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	IMC	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KSVH,965 ft msl	**Observation Time:**	10:15 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	1 Nautical Miles	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	7°C /1°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:**	
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 1200 ft AGL	**Visibility:**	5 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.19 inches Hg	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	IFR
Departure Point:	Statesville, NC	**Destination:**	Sarasota , FL (SRQ)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Fatal	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	5 Fatal	**Aircraft Fire:**	On-ground
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	Unknown
Total Injuries:	7 Fatal	**Latitude, Longitude:**	35.763788,-80.941827 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Baker, Daniel
Additional Participating Persons:	Edwin Miller; FAA ; Washington, DC PJ Beavers; Textron Aviation; Wichita, KS Brady Freeman; Pratt and Whitney Canada; Bridgeport, WV
Investigation Class:	Class 2
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.

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