AASF Safety Spot – February 2025

by **Rocky Capozzi**

2024 Accident Roundup Alaska: Alaskans experienced their fair share of accidents last year. Here's a breakdown of 2024 Alaskan airplane and helicopter accidents by FAR Part. The data is extracted from the NTSB database.

Part 91 Airplane: 61 total airplane accidents. Of the 61accidents, 9 were fatal claiming 18 lives. None of the fatal accident reports have been finalized.

Four lives were lost in a C207 crash near Saint Marys. This was a company airplane, flown by a company pilot, but on personal business. Therefore, it was classified as Part 91, Personal. I covered this accident in our September 2024 Safety Spot.

An Alaska Air Fuel, Inc. C-54 that crashed in late April near Fairbanks claiming 2 lives was classified as Part 91, Business. I'm sure most of you have seen the videos of this horrific crash apparently caused by a failed engine and ensuing fire.

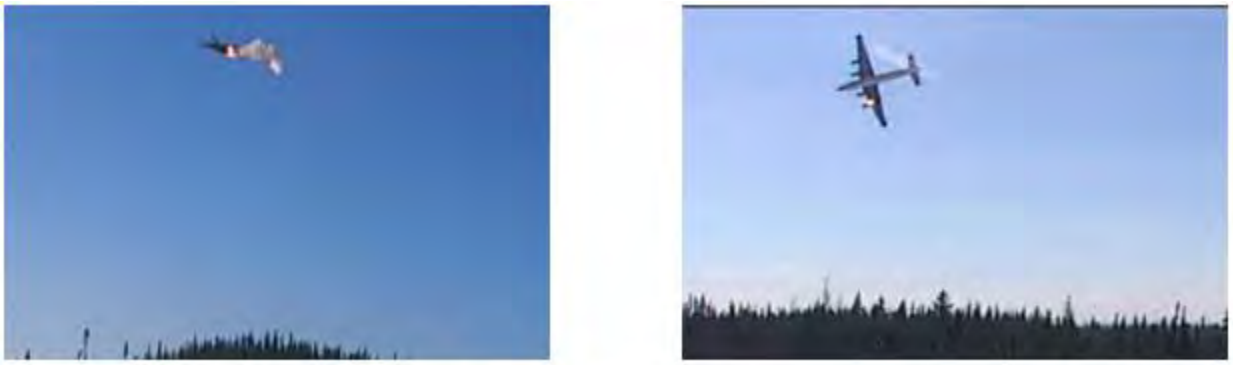

Figure 1. Surveillance Video Clips

A Taylorcraft BC-12D crashed about 5 miles from Nondalton, AK on May 17, 2024 claiming 2 lives. The pilot was *uncertificated* and flying in marginal VFR conditions from Port Alsworth to Nondalton. The plane crashed in shallow water on Six Mile Lake. A quote from the preliminary NTSB report:

Figure 1. Accident airplane in Six Mile Lake during recovery. Photo provided by recovery crew.

> *"Witnesses in the area reported low clouds, fog, and reduced visibility along the accident airplane's anticipated flight route..." and "According to acquaintances, the airplane had recently been purchased by the accident pilot."*

The Good News: 50 of the 61 Part 91 airplane accidents did not result in injuries. The majority of the 2024 NTSB reports on the non-injury accidents do not have a narrative description, so it is not possible to draw any conclusions or lessons yet.

Part 135 Airplane: There were 11 Part 135 Airplane accidents. None with injuries.

Part 121 Airplane: There was one Part 121 Airplane accident with no injuries. A Lynden Air Cargo Hercules experienced a rapid decompression caused by a crack in the pressure bulkhead. The plane recovered without further incident.

Part 91 Helicopter: One accident reported with no injuries. The pilot of a Robinson R-44 was able to auto rotate onto snow covered mountainous terrain after he lost power to the tail rotor. Nice save!

Part 135 Helicopter: There were two accidents in this category with one fatality. A Bell 206B with one pilot and 4 passengers crashed in the Naknek River shortly after departing King Salmon on a special VFR clearance. According to the NTSB, the pilot requested and was granted an SVFR departure by tower. The weather was wind 170° at 5 knots; visibility ¼ mile with fog; indefinite ceiling of 200 feet. The quote below is from the NTSB preliminary:

> *"During a brief post-accident interview with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC), the accident pilot reported encountering an area of dense fog while flying over the very calm water of the Naknek River and he subsequently lost all visual reference, and the helicopter struck the surface of the river."*

No Alaskan **Part 121 Helicopter** accidents 2024.

Conclusion: Three of the most significant accidents in 2024 involved pilots who consciously made the decision to operate in less than VFR conditions. Stunningly, all three pilots made their go decision knowing the weather was marginal at best.

Editorial Comments: The following comments are my (Rocky's) opinion only. I hope you find them reasonable.

Case 1. Never takeoff into marginal or less than VFR conditions (intending to proceed VFR) unless your life literally depends on it. If staying on the ground doesn't threaten your life, then consider that taking off under those conditions definitely does. If you choose to gamble with your life, I guess it's your choice. However, if you have a passenger, now you are gambling with their life, too, and that's a different proposition.

Case 2. We've all seen this. The cloud base gradually lowers luring you to press on. Soon you are uncomfortably low. Make a timely decision to turn around, BUT IF YOU DON'T, and you suddenly find yourself in the cloud with no ground reference, the right answer is seldom to push the nose lower. A better answer is to gently raise your nose (not jerk it) to a normal climb attitude, maintain a normal climb speed and get away from the ground.

We've all heard average time to impact statistics following inadvertent VFR flight into IMC conditions. It's pretty startling but I submit that you have a better chance of "making it" if you *maintain aircraft control* and fly away from the ground rather than hoping to regain visual contact with terra firma by descending. The clouds are soft, the ground is hard, and altitude is your friend. Now, what do you do?

You are conducting an unplanned, unauthorized instrument flight. So what? You're alive! Keep your wits about you. Maintain aircraft control, continue your climb towards or over the lower terrain. Make gentle turns as necessary, declare an emergency. Try to slow your heart down and speed your brain processes up, and begin to solve your problem.

I had the privilege of flying fighters for over 20 years, often at speeds of 480 – 540 KIAS at altitudes between 100 – 300 feet AGL. There were four priorities that applied to every flight: 1) Fly your plane. 2) Fly formation, then 3) Employ your plane. Finally, 4) Don't hit the ground or anything attached to it. You couldn't do 2, if you failed at 1. You couldn't accomplish 3, if you didn't take care of 1 and 2. You weren't coming home if you failed at number 4.

Anchorage Terminal Area Airspace & Procedures Study (ATAAPS): The Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation is participating in the Anchorage Terminal Area Airspace & Procedures Study (ATAAPS) Ad Hoc Committee meetings looking at FAA Class C airspace redesign. The redesign is necessitated by the operational impacts from the planned installation of an ILS 16 on Elmendorf's lengthened Runway 16-34.

The committee is co-chaired by Adam White of the Alaska Airmen's Association and Alex Moss, Deputy Director, Anchorage International. The committee's work is preparatory to public outreach, proposed rulemaking and the public comment process. Marshall Severson, AASF Board Member, is our primary representative for the ATAAPS process. AASF Members with thoughts on safe operations in the area, including Class C airspace, SFAR Part 93 and related topics may contact Marshall via email: severso@cs.com . Rocky Capozzi, Board Chair, is the secondary contact for the ATAAPS process rocky.capozzi@gmail.com.

During the last ATAAPS meeting an interesting data point was brought up -- during a sample period last summer, nearly 25% of aircraft transiting along the Anchorage East Side Overflight route, were primary radar targets only. They weren't equipped with Mode C or ADS-B out and generally were not in contact with Anchorage Approach Control.

Spring Seminar Save the Date: Our Spring Seaplane Seminar will be held on Saturday, April 26th. We are working the speaker line-up now. We've got some good topics and speakers picked out and we'll let you know as soon as we get their commitments.

Membership renewal & Pick-Click-Give: If you haven't had a chance to renew your membership for 2025 yet, please go to www.aasfonline.org and click on the blue JOIN, RENEW, or DONATE banner. Also, please consider a donation from your PFD through Pick, Click, Give. If you've already filed for your PFD you can always go back and add charitable donation. Thank You in advance.