



News Release

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T-38A ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT RELEASED

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE, Va. – Air Combat Command completed an accident investigation board for a T-38A that impacted the runway without its landing gear fully extended following an attempted touch-and-go landing, February 18, 2021 at Sacramento Mather Airport in Mather, California.

The two-person crew assigned to the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, Beale Air Force Base, California, was flying a day training mission that included practice landings at the civilian airport when the accident occurred.

At approximately 8:25 a.m. PST, after the crew completed other practice maneuvers in a military operations area, the instructor pilot flew to the civilian airport and executed an uneventful touch-and-go landing from the rear cockpit. The pilot then took control of the aircraft and flew a touch-and-go landing from the front cockpit. After the aircraft touched down, the pilot initiated the takeoff portion of the maneuver, advancing the throttles and raising the landing gear lever once he perceived the aircraft had begun to climb.

As the landing gear retracted, the aircraft sank to the runway. The pilot briefly put the landing gear level back down before placing it up again, believing the aircraft had begun to fly away from the runway normally. The aircraft continued to descend and the main landing gear contacted the runway in a partially extended position. The T-38A settled toward the runway, collapsed the main landing gear, and then slid on its fuselage for approximately 3,850 feet, catching fire in the right main landing gear bay.

Both the pilot and instructor pilot exited the aircraft without injuries and emergency response crews extinguished the fire.

The AIB president found by preponderance of the evidence the cause of the mishap was the pilot prematurely raising the landing gear lever during the touch-and-go landing maneuver. The pilot failed to execute correct touch-and-go landing procedures, which state that the landing gear lever should be raised when “DEFINITELY AIRBORNE” and “WHEN POSITIVE RATE OF CLIMB IS ESTABLISHED.” The premature landing gear retraction resulted in the aircraft impacting the runway without its landing gear fully extended, and with no opportunity for the instructor pilot to intervene to prevent the accident. The AIB president also found by a preponderance of the evidence the pilot’s misperception of an established positive climb rate following the touch-and-go landing attempt substantially contributed to the accident.

The estimated cost of damage to the aircraft is valued at \$3,001,563.

For more information, contact Air Combat Command Public Affairs at (757) 764-5007 or via e-mail at accpa.operations@us.af.mil.