



LIMITED OCCURRENCE INVESTIGATION REPORT – FINAL

Reference Number	CA18/2/3/10630						
Classification	Accident		Date	9 January 2026		Time	0730Z
Type of Operation	Agricultural Operations (Part 137)						
Location							
Place of Departure	Groot Geluk Farm Airstrip, Free State Province		Place of Intended Landing	Groot Geluk Farm Airstrip, Free State Province			
Place of Occurrence	On the maize field in Groot Geluk Farm, Free State Province						
GPS Co-ordinates	Latitude	28° 04' 27.33" S	Longitude	029° 00' 14.15" E	Elevation	5 405 ft	
Aircraft Information							
Registration	ZS-KWA						
Make; Model; S/N	Ayres; S2R-T34 Turbo Thrush (Serial Number: T34-035DC)						
Damage to Aircraft	Destroyed		Total Aircraft Hours	11356.4			
Pilot-in-command							
Licence Type	Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL)		Gender	Male		Age	24
Licence Valid	Yes	Total Hours	1 239.7		Total Hours on Type	934.8	
Total Hours 30 Days	64,7		Total Flying on Type Past 90 Days	133			
People On-board	1 + 0	Injuries	1	Fatalities	0	Other (on ground)	0
What Happened							
<p>On Friday morning, 9 January 2026, a pilot on-board an Ayres S2R-T34 Turbo Thrush aircraft registered ZS-KWA took off on a crop-spraying operation from Groot Geluk Farm Airstrip in Free State province with the intention to land back at the same airstrip. The flight was conducted under visual meteorological conditions (VMC) by day and under the provisions of Part 137 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011, as amended.</p> <p>According to the operator, the pilot uplifted a full load of Urea fertiliser in the 510 US Gallon hopper of the aircraft; thereafter, he took off from the airstrip runway (in Groot Geluk Farm) to conduct the first spray run application on the maize crop field. After spraying the first fertiliser load, he landed back on the same airstrip and uplifted the second load of fertiliser in the hopper and, again, took off.</p> <p>An eyewitness who witnessed the aircraft during the spray run application stated that the aircraft dispensed the fertiliser on the maize crops at low-level. He then executed a left turn, and the aircraft impacted the ground with the left wing and cartwheeled. It came to rest with the right wing touching the ground and the left wing tilted high. The aircraft was destroyed by impact forces; the pilot sustained serious injuries and was unconscious.</p>							

The Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre (ARCC) was alerted, and an official rescue operation was activated. The South African Police Services (SAPS) and the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel responded to the scene; first aid was administered to the pilot. The pilot was airlifted to a private hospital. After recovery, he could not recall the sequence of events of the accident flight.



Figure 1: The maize fields that were sprayed and the approximate accident site. (Source: Google Earth)



Figure 2: The aircraft at the accident site.

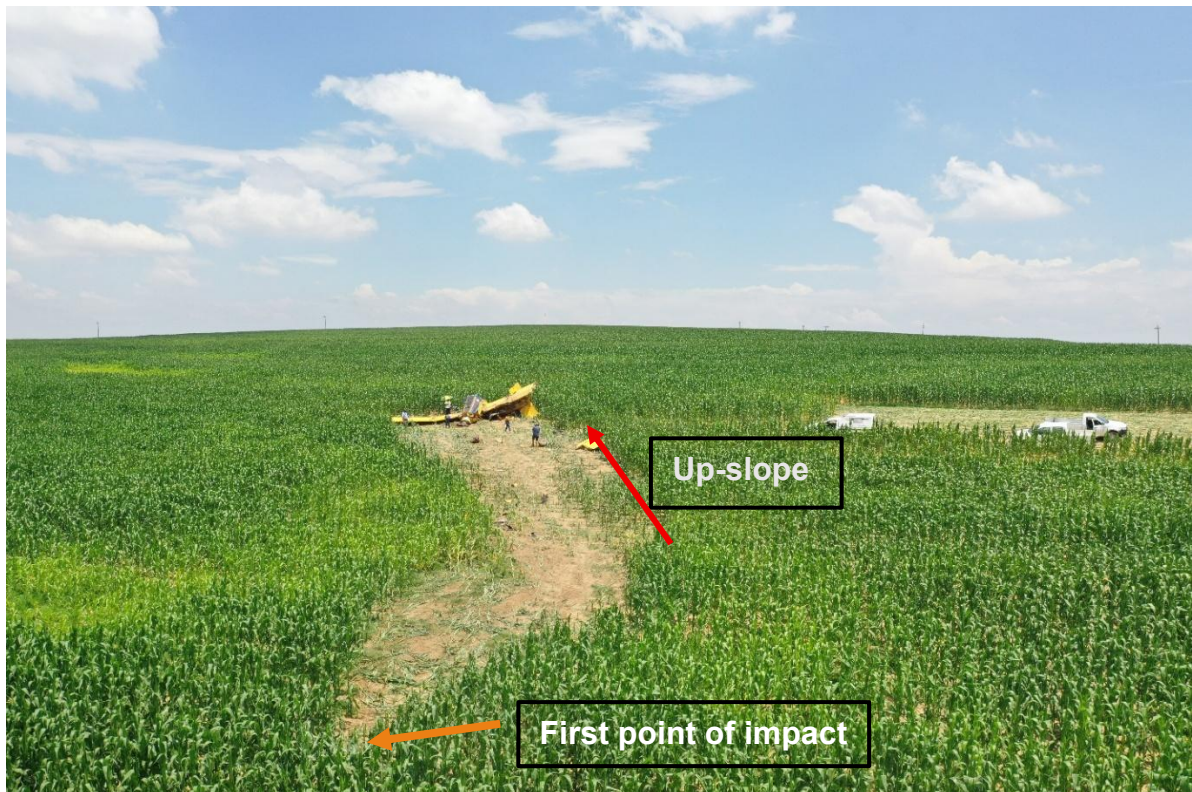


Figure 3: Ground marks impressed by the aircraft after it had crashed.

The topography of the accident site indicated that from the first point of impact (Indicated by orange arrow), the gradient on the terrain was steep (upward slope). Examination of the propeller blades indicated that the engine was producing a substantial amount of power at the time of the crash.



Figure 4: The three propeller blades indicate that the engine was producing power at the time of the accident.



Figure 5: The left wing that impacted the ground and separated from the fuselage.

Conclusion

The accident resulted due to low-level flying in the direction of a rising (upslope) terrain. It is likely that the pilot lost situational awareness and misjudged the aircraft's position (above ground) during a left turn; as a result, the left-wing tip struck the ground. The left wing separated from the fuselage and the pilot lost control of the aircraft.

Meteorological Information

The following meteorological aerodrome report (METAR) was issued by the South African Weather Service (SAWS) for Bethlehem Airport (FABM) on 9 January 2026 at 0800Z. The accident site was approximately 37.30 nautical miles (nm) north-east of FABM.

METAR FABM 090800Z 23006KT 9999 FEW025 26/17 Q1024=

Wind Direction	230°	Wind Speed	6kt	Visibility	9999 m
Temperature	26°C	Cloud Cover	Few	Cloud Base	FEW025
Dew Point	17°C	QNH	1024hPa		

Findings

1. Pilot Information

- 1.1 The pilot had a Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL) that was initially issued by the Regulator (SACAA) on 31 May 2023. The licence was renewed on 9 June 2025 with an expiry date of 31 May 2026.
- 1.2 The pilot had a Class 1 aviation medical certificate that was issued on 9 May 2025 with an expiry date of 9 May 2026 and with no restrictions.

2. Aircraft

- 2.1 The last mandatory periodic inspection (MPI) of the aircraft was conducted and certified on 11 December 2025 at 11 356.4 total airframe hours. The aircraft had accrued 57.8 hours since the last MPI.
- 2.2 The aircraft maintenance organisation (AMO) which conducted the MPI had issued the Certificate of Release to Service (CRS) on 11 December 2025 with an expiry date of 10 December 2026 or at 11 398.6 total airframe hours, whichever comes first.

2.3	The AMO had an AMO Certificate that was issued on 22 August 2025 with an expiry date of 31 August 2026.
2.4	A Certificate of Registration (C of R) was issued to the present owner of the aircraft on 8 April 2024.
2.5	The aircraft had a valid Certificate of Airworthiness (C of A) that was initially issued by the Regulator on 5 January 1981. The C of A was renewed on 8 January 2026 with an expiry date of 31 January 2027.
3.	<u>Meteorological Information</u>
3.1	Clear weather conditions prevailed at the time of the flight; the weather was not an attribute to the cause of the accident.

Probable Cause(s)

Misjudgment of height during a low-level left turn on a steep gradient terrain. Consequently, the left-wing tip impacted the ground and the pilot lost control. The aircraft cartwheeled before it stopped.

Contributing Factor(s)

Loss of situational awareness.

Safety Action(s)

None.

Safety Message and/or Safety Recommendation/s
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None.

About this Report

<p><i>The decision to conduct a limited investigation is based on factors including whether the cause is known and the evidence supporting the cause is clear, the level of safety benefit likely to be obtained from an investigation and that will determine the scope of an investigation. For this occurrence, a limited investigation has been conducted, and the Accident and Incident Investigations Division (AIID) has relied on the information submitted by the affected person/s and organisation/s to compile this limited report. The report has been compiled using information supplied in the initial notification, as well as from follow-up desk top enquiries to bring awareness of potential safety issues to the industry in respect of this occurrence, as well as possible safety action/s that the industry might want to consider in preventing a recurrence of a similar occurrence.</i></p>

<p><i>All times given in this report are Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC) and will be denoted by (Z). South African Standard Time is UTC plus 2 hours.</i></p>

Purpose

<p><i>In terms of Regulation 12.03.1 of the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR) 2011 and ICAO Annex 13, this report was compiled in the interest of the promotion of aviation safety and the reduction of the risk of aviation accidents or incidents and not to apportion blame or liability.</i></p>

Disclaimer

<p><i>This report is produced without prejudice to the rights of the AIID, which are reserved.</i></p>
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This report is issued by:

**Accident and Incident Investigations Division
South African Civil Aviation Authority
Republic of South Africa**