



National Transportation Safety Board

Heart of Texas Hot Air
Balloon Rides
Kubíček BB85Z Balloon
Lockhart, Texas
July 30, 2016
Captain David Lawrence
Operations Group Chairman



Weather Briefing

- Checked two ballooning websites to obtain weather
- Received telephone weather briefing at 5:06 am
 - Briefer: “clouds may be a problem”
 - Pilot: “well we just fly in between them” and “we find a hole and we go”
- Another balloon operator cancelled multiple flights due to weather

Pilot Decision-Making

- Launch decision with chance of deteriorating weather
 - Weather reports and forecasts, weather briefing, presence of fog
- Decision to climb above clouds rather than land
 - Limited options to land visually
- Decision to land in reduced visibility
 - Increased risk of collision with obscured obstacles

Pilot's Background

- Pilot-in-command
 - Owner and sole pilot of operation
 - Commercial balloon certificate issued 1993
- No FAA surveillance records on pilot or operation

Pilot's Background

- 1987 – Possession of drugs
- 1996 – Interfering with arrest
- 1998 – Driving while intoxicated and possession of a controlled substance
- 1999 – Possession of a controlled substance; distribution and delivery of a manufactured substance
- 2000 – DWI/alcohol “persistent offender”
- 2007 – Leaving the scene of an accident and operating with suspended driver's license
- 2010 – DWI/alcohol “aggravated offender” and operating with a revoked driver's license

Pilot's Background

- Pilot failed to report convictions to FAA
 - Pilot's only airman medical in 1996
 - Medical applications include an NDR review
- Medical not required for balloon pilots

Pilot's Background

- FAA Security Division became aware of pilot history in 2012 and 2013
 - FAA Flight Standards not informed
- No enforcement action

FAA Oversight

- Part 91 commercial balloon operators
 - Limited resources for general aviation oversight
- Most surveillance conducted at large gatherings
 - Only 2% of balloon surveillance conducted on individual operations

