

Pilot survives as plane crashes at Nanaimo airshow

Campbell River pilot, 71, sustained serious head and internal injuries

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Daily News

Saturday, June 04, 2011

A 71-year-old pilot suffered serious injuries after his small plane slammed into the ground before horrified spectators at the Nanaimo Airport on Saturday afternoon.

The pilot, Dr. Bill Phipps of Campbell River, was taking part in an airshow sponsored by the Nanaimo Flying Club.

A noisy crowd hushed instantly when Phipps's plane lost altitude and crashed.

"It was a super hubbub while he was in the air, and then just shocked silence after he hit," said Aaron Hamilton, a photographer who managed to snap a photo of Phipps's plane the instant before it crashed.

John DeVries described the manoeuvre Phipps had attempted as a quarter barrel roll before he had to correct his path and try to regain control.

"His right wing clipped the ground and he did a cartwheel. There was just dust, and no explosion, smoke or fire."

First on the scene were golfers from the adjacent Cottonwood Golf Course, who were at first mistaken by some of the crowd to be Phipps himself emerging from the wreck. The golfers rushed to help the fallen pilot. Minutes later, fire crews at the scene arrived and began to cut Phipps from the cockpit of his biplane-style Steen Bolt aircraft.

A flight safety instructor had turned his gaze moments before Phipps's plane came dangerously close to the ground.

"I didn't see it, but I do recall being surprised by how much altitude he had lost already this early in his routine," said pilot Sigmund Sort of Qualicum Beach. "By the time I looked back he hit the ground. It's likely that he stalled and his wings lost lift."

Phipps suffered head and internal injuries as a result of the accident, but Cranberry



CREDIT: Aaron Hamilton/Special to the Daily News

A plane piloted by Dr. Bill Phipps of Campbell River, just before the aircraft crashed into the ground at an airshow Saturday at the Nanaimo Airport.

Fire Department chief Ron Gueulette reported that he was stabilized and conscious.

"He was conscious and talking to us during the rescue, but he was on the low-end of the consciousness scale."

The crash occurred at approximately 2:05 p.m. and a B.C. Ambulance chopper lifted off, carrying Phipps, at approximately 2:45 p.m. and headed to Victoria.

The Nanaimo Flying Club cancelled the rest of the weekend's performances out of respect for Phipps and would not comment until the ongoing investigation is completed.

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