

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Pilot Who Operated Plane That Crashed At St. Croix Airport Was Not Licensed To Fly Multi-Engine Aircraft, FAA Records Show

VIC News / **Published On December 10, 2017 12:07 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert **December 10, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- The pilot who operated the plane that crashed at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on Thursday night, killing all five occupants including a member of the Stylee Band, was not licensed to operate a multiengine plane like the one he operated that fateful night, according to official Federal Aviation Administration (F.A.A.) records obtained by The Consortium.

The pilot, David Richardson, one of five who perished in the accident, was licensed to operate only single engine aircraft, according to the F.A.A. records.

The aircraft that crashed was owned by Mr. Richardson, the F.A.A. records show. It was manufactured by Beech, and was a Baron model 58 with fixed wing multi-engine, built in 1970 -- making the plane 47 years old, the [F.A.A.'s registry record](#) of the aircraft shows (screen grab [here](#)).

Pilots have different levels of certification which authorizes various levels of clearance for the operation of aircraft and even certain altitudes. The certifications include airplane single-engine land, which authorizes a pilot to operate only single-engine aircraft; airplane multiengine land, which authorizes the operation of aircraft with multiple engines, and instrument airplane, which authorizes pilots to operate aircraft inside clouds and other meteorological conditions.

As already established above, the aircraft that Mr. Richardson operated on Thursday that wound up crashing at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, was a twin-engine, Beech-branded plane. However, Mr. Richardson's F.A.A. certification record [shows](#) that he was certified to operate only a single-engine aircraft. (To see the certification, go [here](#), insert "Richardson" in the last name box, and "David" in the first name box. Then choose "Virgin Islands" as state and hit search, and look beneath "search results".)

Airports are not responsible for the certification and supervision of pilots; that falls under the purview of the F.A.A. The U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are governed by the F.A.A.'s office in San Juan, PR (see coverage area [here](#)). Because there's no F.A.A. office in the USVI, Mr. Richardson may have been able to get away with operating the twin-engine aircraft even if he did not have the proper certification to do so.

This could cause a few problems. Since Mr. Richardson died in the crash, the case will be closed because there's no one to prosecute. And any financial compensation through insurance that could have been rewarded because of the accident, is void, since Mr. Richardson violated the agreement by operating the twin-engine plane.

"Public safety is put at risk when people do stupid things like this with airplanes, because 1), he is not qualified, and 2), if he had any liability insurance on that airplane it will be voided because he violated his insurance policy," said a pilot with three levels of certification who helped The Consortium obtain Mr. Richardson's F.A.A. certification records. "You can own an airplane and not be able to fly it. That means you have someone else flying it for you who is qualified," he said.

The accident

The crash occurred about 8:54 p.m. on Thursday, according to [a statement](#) the Port Authority issued on its Facebook page.

Police Commissioner Delroy Richards told The Consortium hours after the crash that the aircraft took off from the St. Croix airport and soon after started experiencing engine problems, with flames coming from one of its two engines. The pilot circled back and attempted to land at the airport, but the plane crashed in a field area near the runway, leaving all occupants dead, Mr. Richards said, corroborating an [F.A.A. notice](#) of the crash.

David Goodrich, commander of St. Croix Rescue's extrication team, who was on the scene of the incident, told The Consortium that by the time they arrived to the area, there

was nothing they could do.

The plane included one member of the Stylee Band. At least two other persons on the plane were affiliated with the group, but they were not members of the band.

Moments following the accident, the V.I.P.D. cordoned off the east and west entrances of the airport, only allowing in first responders. The V.I. Fire Service and other first responder agencies were already on the scene when a medical examiner vehicle was spotted heading to the area.

The tragedy has cast a cloud of sadness over the territory, as the Stylee Band, currently one of the territory's premier groups, is known to help carry the festival season, especially their performances during the Festival Village, j'ouvert morning and the parades.

And the news of the crash along with the plane's high-profile occupant sent a shock through social media, with thousands mourning the unfortunate occurrence.

Next of kin notification

As of Sunday, the Department of Justice had yet to release the identities of the individuals who died during the crash. However, Attorney General Claude Walker told The Consortium on Saturday that the names would be released within days.

Feature Image: A Beech model 58 aircraft built in 1970.