

**Accident – April 5, 1978** approx. 1645 hrs.

**N8777A was departing from St. John**

*AAB was authorized to fly the Grumman Goose as single pilot operations.*

***Capt. Mooney had recently arrived at AAB and was undergoing the company requirements of getting checked out in the aircraft. Capt. Dave Howard was the AAB Instructor Pilot and was flying with Mooney on several days before. He had completed his initial flight training (without passengers) and was continuing his training with route checks at AAB stations (with passengers)***

***Capt. Mooney was flying the left seat and Capt. Howard in the right. Both were very experienced pilots with many years of flight time in a wide variety of aircraft more sophisticated than the Grumman Goose.***

***As stated earlier, the AAB Goose is a single pilot operations. With one pilot, he certainly is making all the decisions and flying his aircraft. When the single pilot is selecting which fuel tank he will draw fuel from he turns to his right and on the bulkhead above the right seat (co-pilot) is the fuel tank selector valve. The valve has five positions (BOTH -ON / LEFT-ON /RIGHT-ON/ OFF 2 positions).***

***It is believed, Capt. Dave Howard assisted Capt. Mooney with selecting the fuel tank while taxiing into position for take-off. While sitting in the right seat Dave Howard would reach behind his head to turn the selector valve. Normally, as pilot, he would turn to his right and with his right hand and easy visual confirmation turn to proper tank. Reaching behind his head he turned the valve inadvertently to the OFF position. The aircraft had sufficient fuel to get airborne and climb before the engines stopped. Without having sufficient altitude there was no time to respond to restart and tried to control an open sea landing.***

***Most of the impact was taken in the forward fuselage /nose and sank quickly. Fortunately, all the passengers got out and ultimately were rescued. The VI Daily News articles have reported the statements from passengers that confirm the events minutes before and after accident.***

***Dave Howard and Tom Mooney's loss was very difficult. Dave had been flying at AAB since 1971 and was loved by everyone. He truly was a friend. Tom Mooney may have just arrived but we were all excited about getting to know him and hear about his early days flying another Grumman... the F4F Wildcat.***

***The VI Daily News tells the story of the search and finally locating the aircraft five days later.***

***Once the aircraft was located, Capt. Blair came to me to talk about bringing N8777A up out of the water. Even though the salvage divers were contracted, Capt. Blair wanted to discuss a plan. He knew that because of previous accidents the press would be waiting to get photos of the wreckage upon its return to the ramp. He said that they already had photos of the wreckage on the sea bottom. He knew that additional bad press was going to take its toll on AAB. Capt. Blair asked me to take the aircraft apart underwater and bring it up in pieces at night.***

***The aircraft was dragged just off the bottom from a depth of about 100 feet to about 40 feet where it would be easier to work. On my first dive, I arrived at the aircraft where there were still personal items thrown about and even though I prepared myself to witness the wreckage, my thoughts of both pilots came to be overwhelming. I came back up, took five and went back down to start the work.***

***When I went back in water, the other salvage divers joined me. They had crowbars and other non-aviation tools and I quickly told them again that this was going to be a different kind salvage. I had a separate tool box for my water work. Over the years, you learn to keep them separate.***

***I removed the control surfaces, engines, landing gear and many of the valuable one of kind Goose parts and brought them to the surface. We needed to get them in fresh water and oil as soon as possible. The engines of course would never see service again.***

***Capt. Blair came out a few times with Fred Romney on the AAB Boston Whaler to monitor the efforts. It took a couple of days or so but each night we would come ashore and unload with less fan fair than if we returned with a full carcass of a Goose.***