According to theNTSB, “The LIZRD 3 departure description for runway 18R is as follows: The pilot is to depart and climb on a 180-degree heading. This heading will lead to the intercept of the Scaggs Island VORTAC radial-127 [located about 6 miles from the departure end of runway 18R], which the pilot is to follow until reaching the LIZRD intersection [located about 10.25 miles south of the runway]. The pilot is to cross the LIZRD intersection at or above 3000 feet.

Instead, radar data reveal the accident airplane “making a shallow left bank following departure from runway 18R and gradually increasing its altitude toward the east. The target was first identified at a Mode C reported altitude of 100 feet mean sea level (msl). During the preceding minute, radar returns disclosed a gradual ascent to 1000 feet msl, corresponding to about 960 feet above ground level (agl). The last two returns show an altitude of 900 feet msl and a slight change of direction to the south. The last radar return was located about 0.5 miles north of the accident site.”

The pilot’s CFIs labeled him a “brilliant” aviator, and “performed the pilot’s instrument competency check a few days prior to the accident,” according to the NTSB. “During that time, they thoroughly discussed taking off in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) at an uncontrolled airport, and specifically the departure procedures the pilot was executing on the day of the accident.”