



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Weslaco, Texas	Accident Number:	CEN21LA040
Date & Time:	November 3, 2020, 17:53 Local	Registration:	N87715 (A1); N6463H (A2)
Aircraft:	Piper J3C (A1); Piper J3C (A2)	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial (A1); Substantial (A2)
Defining Event:	Midair collision	Injuries:	1 Minor (A1); 1 Serious (A2)
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal (A1); Part 91: General aviation - Personal (A2)		

Analysis

The pilots of two Piper J3C-65 airplanes, N87715 and N6463H, were conducting personal flights in the airport traffic pattern when they collided in flight.

The pilot of N87715 reported that during the climb following a touch-and-go landing, he inadvertently allowed the airplane's ground track to drift right of the runway while his attention was diverted to the cockpit instruments, and his airplane collided with another airplane about 80 ft above the ground. The crash site was in a grass area located about 110 ft off the right side of runway.

The pilot of N6463H reported that after turning from base leg to final approach, he realized that his airplane was too close to the airplane ahead of him (N87715) in the traffic pattern. He decided to go around and sidestepped to the right of the runway to provide separation from the other airplane. He maintained visual contact with the other airplane, keeping it at his 9-to-10 o'clock position and slightly below his position, as he continued his go-around. The pilot stated that shortly after he shifted his gaze to the right side of his airplane to assess if there were any additional impediments to his flight path, the other airplane "made an apparent right turn" and collided with his airplane. The pilot was unable to maintain control of his airplane after the collision and it descended to the ground intermingled with the other airplane.

Neither airplane was equipped with an electrical system or handheld radio. The lack of two-way communication equipment limited the pilots' ability to communicate their positions and intentions while operating in the airport traffic pattern.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot of N87715 inadvertently allowed his airplane to drift right of the runway during the climb after a touch-and-go landing, and the pilot of N6463H did not maintain adequate separation from the other airplane during his go-around. Contributing to the accident was the lack of two-way radio communication equipment in both airplanes.

Findings

Aircraft (A1)	Heading/course - Not attained/maintained
Aircraft (A1)	(general) - Not installed/available
Personnel issues (A1)	Aircraft control - Pilot
Personnel issues (A2)	Monitoring other aircraft - Pilot
Aircraft (A2)	(general) - Not installed/available

Factual Information

History of Flight

Initial climb (A1)	Midair collision (Defining event)
Approach-VFR go-around (A2)	Midair collision

On November 3, 2020, about 1753 central standard time, two Piper J3C-65 airplanes, N87715 and N6463H, were substantially damaged during a midair collision at Mid Valley Airport (TXW), Weslaco, Texas. The student pilot flying N87715 was not injured, and the airline transport pilot flying N6463H sustained serious injuries. Both airplanes were operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flights.

The pilot of N87715 reported that visual meteorological conditions prevailed during his local flight in the traffic pattern for runway 14 at TXW. He stated that on his third touch-and-go landing he made a normal wheel-landing and the airplane touched down about 1,000 ft from the approach end of the runway. After the airplane's tailwheel contacted the runway he advanced the throttle to takeoff power and the airplane accelerated to liftoff speed. The pilot stated that the airplane became airborne about midfield and continued to climb over the runway. The pilot reported that the airplane's ground track drifted to the right (west) while his attention was diverted to the cockpit instruments, and that his airplane collided with another airplane about 80 ft above the ground. The pilot reported that after the collision he was unable to maintain control of the airplane and that both airplanes descended intermingled to the ground. The crash site was in a grass area located about 110 ft off the right side of runway 14.

The pilot of N6463H reported that he was operating in the airport traffic pattern for runway 14 with two other airplanes. He stated that after turning from base leg to final approach he realized that his airplane was too close to the airplane (N87715) ahead of him in the traffic pattern. The pilot decided to go-around and sidestepped to the right of runway 14 to provide separation from the other airplane. He maintained visual contact with the other airplane, keeping it at his 9-to-10 o'clock position and slightly below his position, as he continued his go-around. The pilot stated that shortly after he shifted his gaze to the right side of his airplane to assess if there were any additional impediments to his flight path, the other airplane "made an apparent right turn" and collided with his airplane. The pilot was unable to maintain control of his airplane after the collision and it descended to the ground intermingled with the other airplane.

Neither airplane was equipped with an electrical system or handheld radio.

Pilot Information (A1)

Certificate:	Student	Age:	40, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Rear
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	Unknown
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	January 31, 2018
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	95 hours (Total, all aircraft), 40 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 35 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 15 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Pilot Information (A2)

Certificate:	Airline transport	Age:	40, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Rear
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	January 15, 2020
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	January 25, 2020
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 8500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 50 hours (Total, this make and model), 3100 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 120 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 35 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 0 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information (A1)

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N87715
Model/Series:	J3C 65	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	1958	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	15373
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	October 25, 2020 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1220 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	2 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4393 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	A-65-8
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	65 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information (A2)

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N6463H
Model/Series:	J3C 65	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	1946	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	19641
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	October 25, 2020 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1200 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	3816 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	C-85
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	85 Horsepower
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	TXW,70 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	0 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	17:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 11000 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	8 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	None / None
Wind Direction:	100°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.21 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	23°C / 12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Weslaco, TX (A1); Weslaco, TX (A2)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None (A1); None (A2)
Destination:	Weslaco, TX (A1); Weslaco, TX (A2)	Type of Clearance:	None (A1); None (A2)
Departure Time:		Type of Airspace:	Class G (A1); Class G (A2)

Airport Information

Airport:	Mid Valley Airport TXW	Runway Surface Type:	Asphalt
Airport Elevation:	70 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	Dry
Runway Used:	14	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:	6002 ft / 75 ft	VFR Approach/Landing:	Traffic pattern

Wreckage and Impact Information (A1)

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	26.178708,-97.974006

Wreckage and Impact Information (A2)

Crew Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	26.178708,-97.974006

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Fox, Andrew
Additional Participating Persons:	Beau B. Young; Federal Aviation Administration - San Antonio FSDO; San Antonio, TX Carl Newton; Federal Aviation Administration - San Antonio FSDO; San Antonio, TX
Original Publish Date:	March 22, 2023
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=102235

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).