



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	URBANA, Illinois	Accident Number:	CHI96LA312
Date & Time:	August 21, 1996, 18:56 Local	Registration:	N23176
Aircraft:	Piper J3C-65	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Fatal, 1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot was giving rides in the airplane, and conducting the third ride of the day. While on the climb he noticed what he thought to be an unusual engine sound. He continued the climb and told his passenger that he would return to the airport. He then initiated a turn to land in the opposite direction on the runway he had just departed. At about the 180-degree point of the turn the airplane departed controlled flight and impacted the terrain in a cornfield.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's failure to maintain airspeed. A factor was the diverted attention of the pilot.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING - TURN TO REVERSE DIRECTION

Findings

1. (C) AIRSPEED - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (F) DIVERTED ATTENTION - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. STALL/SPIN - INADVERTENT - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

4. TERRAIN CONDITION - CROP

Factual Information

On August 21, 1996, at 1856 central daylight time, a Piper J3C-65, N23176, sustained substantial damage during impact with the terrain following impact with the terrain shortly after takeoff. The airplane was departing to the east from a private turf runway eight miles north of Urbana, Illinois. The pilot suffered serious injuries while the passenger received fatal injuries. The personal 14 CFR Part 91 flight was operating in visual meteorological conditions. No flight plan was on file. The flight was originating at the time of the accident.

During a direct interview with the pilot and in his written statement, the pilot stated that he had given two rides in the accident airplane and was climbing out to the east on the third ride, when he thought that the engine did not sound right or that he heard an unusual noise. He said that after sensing that there might be something wrong with the engine, it continued to produce power and he was still able to maintain a climb. He then told his passenger that he was going to return to the airport and at the same time initiated a turn to land to the west on the runway he had just departed from, but in the opposite direction. He said that at the 180 degree point of the turn, he remembered going down into the cornfield. He said that the airplane had been inspected in May of 1996, and since that time, he had never experienced any mechanical difficulties with the accident airplane.

Federal Aviation Administration inspectors examined the airplane the day after the accident and found no mechanical anomalies which they could associate with other than impact damage. There was a strong odor of fuel and no reason could be found to indicate a power loss for the engine.

The airplane wreckage was released to a representative of the owner on September 5, 1996.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	42, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Rear
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Valid Medical—no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	August 24, 1995
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	505 hours (Total, all aircraft), 67 hours (Total, this make and model), 412 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 31 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 11 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N23176
Model/Series:	J3C-65 J3C-65	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	2956
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	May 22, 1996 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1220 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	12 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	2656 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	A-65-8F
Registered Owner:	DAVID H. MENNENGA	Rated Power:	65 Horsepower
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Does Business As:		Operator Designator Code:	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KCM ,754 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	8 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	18:45 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	210°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 6000 ft AGL	Visibility	7 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	170°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	29°C / 21°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	(NONE)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	18:50 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:		Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:		Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:	0	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	Precautionary landing

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal, 1 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	40.099842,-88.20005(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wilson, Stephen
Additional Participating Persons:	RUSSELL E ATKINS; SPRINGFIELD , IL JAMES E HILL; SPRINGFIELD , IL
Original Publish Date:	May 23, 1997
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=10375

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](#).