



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Folkston, Georgia	Accident Number:	ERA22LA031
Date & Time:	October 26, 2021, 23:23 UTC	Registration:	N525AT
Aircraft:	VANS AIRCRAFT INC RV-12	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)	Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

Flight track information indicated that, about 1 hour and 35 minutes after departure, in night conditions, the airplane was maneuvering in the vicinity of an airport. The pilot crossed over the runway twice while descending, maneuvered near a roadway, and the groundspeed decreased before the airplane contacted a utility pole beside the road and then impacted terrain.

Postaccident examination of the airframe and engine revealed no evidence of any preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures that would have precluded normal operation. A family member reported that the pilot had difficulty with his vision during the day, and especially at night. Additionally, a witness stated, and a published NOTAM confirmed, that the runway edge lights at the airport were inoperative. Given the airplane’s maneuvering in the vicinity of the airport and its decreasing speed similar to an approach to landing phase of flight, it is possible that the pilot was maneuvering in an attempt to locate the runway and land when the airplane struck the utility pole.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot’s low altitude maneuvering, which resulted in a collision with a utility pole.

Findings

Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot
Environmental issues	Pole - Awareness of condition
Environmental issues	Dark - Effect on personnel

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT) (Defining event)
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On October 26, 2021, about 1914 eastern daylight time, a Vans Aircraft RV-12, N525AT, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Folkston, Georgia. The pilot was fatally injured. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

According to automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B) data obtained from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the airplane departed Winter Haven Regional Airport (GIF), Winter Haven, Florida, at 1725. About 1900, after about 1 hour and 35 minutes of flight on a generally northbound track, the airplane made a right turn toward Davis Field Airport (3J6), Folkston, Georgia. The airplane crossed over the middle of the runway at 3J6 at 575 ft above ground level (agl), then completed a descending left turn. The airplane again crossed over the runway, this time at 100 ft agl, and made a descending right turn, while the airspeed decreased from 76 knots to 47 knots. The airplane contacted a utility pole and came to rest next to a road. Figure 1 depicts the flight track as the airplane maneuvered in the vicinity of 36J.



Figure 1 – The airplane’s ADS-B-derived flight track while maneuvering near 3J6.

A witness stated that he and his wife had just parked their car in their driveway when his wife looked up and saw the accident airplane fly over. He then walked inside his house and received a phone call from a neighbor at 1914. The neighbor said that the airplane just flew over his house, toward the east, and he noticed that the right navigation light was not operating. During the phone call, the witness heard the airplane impact and could hear the engine running “like it was hitting something.” The witness and his wife drove in their car to the accident site, which took about 30 seconds.

The airplane impacted the ground next to a road and the engine was on fire when the witness pulled the pilot from the airplane. The witness also stated that the runway lights at 3J6 did not work and that there was a published NOTAM regarding the inoperative lights.

A family member of the pilot stated that the pilot had difficulty with his vision and finding airport runways during the daytime. He believed the pilot was not supposed to be flying at night.

Postaccident examination of the airplane by a Federal Aviation Administration inspector revealed that the cabin, cockpit, and instrument panel were destroyed by postimpact fire. The right wing was folded back and separated from the fuselage. The left wing remained attached to the fuselage; however, the outboard portion was damaged due to impact forces. The empennage remained attached and displayed minor damage. The engine remained attached to the fuselage, but the three blades on the propeller were separated.

According to the Astronomical Application Department of the United States Naval Observatory, sunset occurred at 1845, the end of civil twilight was at 1909, and moonrise was at 2303. The phase of the moon on the day of the accident was waning crescent, with 66.1% of the moon's visible disk illuminated.

3J6 was located 3 miles southwest of Folkston, Georgia, at an elevation of 68 feet msl. It had one runway, designated as 1/19, which was 2,500 ft long by 50 ft wide. At the time of the accident, a NOTAM was active indicating that the runway 1/19 runway edge lights were inoperative.

An autopsy was performed on the pilot by the Office of the Office of the Medical Examiner, Gainesville, Florida. The report listed the cause of death as blunt force trauma.

Toxicology testing was not performed on the pilot due to the length of his stay in the hospital before his death.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Sport Pilot	Age:	82, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Sport pilot	Last FAA Medical Exam:	
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 0 hours (Total, all aircraft), 0 hours (Total, this make and model)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	VANS AIRCRAFT INC	Registration:	N525AT
Model/Series:	RV-12	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Special light-sport (Special)	Serial Number:	12065
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	Unknown	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	Rotax
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	912
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	100
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Night/dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KJAX,32 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	26 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	19:56 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	141°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	None / None
Wind Direction:	310°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	29.81 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	19°C / 13°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Winter haven, FL (GIF)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Reidsville, GA (RVJ)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	17:25 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	30.84,-82.013297

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Boggs, Daniel
Additional Participating Persons:	Jeff Davis; FAA/FSDO; Atlanta, GA
Original Publish Date:	September 7, 2023
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=104165

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](#).