



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Venice, FL	Accident Number:	ERA23FA181
Date & Time:	April 5, 2023, 21:37 Local	Registration:	N635BD
Aircraft:	Piper PA32R	Injuries:	4 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

On April 5, 2023, at 2137 eastern daylight time, a Piper PA-32R-300, N635BD, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Venice, Florida. The pilot and three passengers were fatally injured. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

Earlier during the day, the airplane departed Albert Whitted Airport (SPG), St. Petersburg, Florida, and flew to Venice Municipal Airport (VNC), Venice, Florida, without incident. The accident occurred during the return flight to SPG, while the airplane was on the initial climb after takeoff from runway 23 under night visual flight rules.

Runway 5/23 at VNC was 5,000 ft long and 150 ft wide. It was equipped with medium intensity runway lights and runway end identifier lights. A noise abatement procedure indicated that Runway 5/23 was the designated noise abatement and calm wind runway and recommended that runway 23 departures maintain runway heading and best rate of climb (Vy) until 1,000 ft above ground level (agl).

The 2135 recorded weather at VNC reported that the wind was calm, visibility was 10 miles, and the sky was clear.

Review of Astronomical data indicated that the moon was full. Moonrise had occurred at 19:33:49 (about 2 hours and 4 minutes before the accident) and was at an altitude of about 25° and an azimuth of 109.68° at the time of the accident.

Examination of recorded video from security cameras at the Venice Airport Festival Grounds, and the Venice Fishing Pier indicated that the airplane took off over dark water with no discernable horizon, began a shallow climb, and then started a right turn before the runway lights extinguished. The airplane then peaked in altitude, entered a rapid descent, and impacted in the Gulf of Mexico.

Preliminary track data provided by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also indicated that the airplane lifted from the runway about 2136 and climbed approximately on the runway heading until reaching a barometric altitude of approximately 300 ft and a groundspeed of about 103 knots. The airplane then began to turn to the right, and about 2136:40, began to descend. Over the next 14 seconds, the track data indicated that the rate of descent and groundspeed were increasing, and at 2136:54, the final plot depicted the airplane at 100 ft, with a groundspeed of about 136 knots, and a vertical descent rate of approximately 3,008 feet per minute.

Local emergency services and Sea Tow Venice (a local Sea Tow franchise that provided boat towing services), recovered most of the wreckage from the Gulf of Mexico, at a depth of approximately 23 ft. The wreckage was then moved to a secure facility for examination, which was performed on April 10, 2023

All major airplane components and control surfaces were identified, except for the right wing, right, aileron, right flap, sections of the main fuselage and parts of the fuel system.

The fuselage was destroyed by impact; the top portion of the cabin and right wing were not recovered. The left wing was impact separated and the empennage was impact separated, approximately 12 ft from the rear of the airplane. The two rear seats and one seat back that were recovered were impact separated.

Flight control continuity was established from all primary flight control surfaces (except the right aileron) to the control column and rudder pedals except for impact and recovery related separations.

Examination of the vacuum powered attitude indicator revealed that the gyro was in place, would rotate, and displayed evidence of rotational scoring. Examination of the electric powered turn and bank indicator also revealed that the gyro had remained in place and rotational scoring was evident.

Examination of the propeller and engine revealed that the two bladed propeller had remained attached to the engine. Both blades were bent and twisted towards the face side. One blade exhibited leading-edge gouging on the outboard portion of the blade, consistent with rotational contact with the No.3 cylinder during the impact sequence.

Thumb compression and suction was produced on all cylinders. Fuel was found in the fuel servo and in the inlet fuel line. The oil finger screen and oil filter element were free from blockage.

The engine driven fuel pump was manually field tested and was operational. The cable ends of the mixture, throttle, and propeller governor had all remained attached to their respective components.

Both magnetos were water damaged but produced spark during rotation. The engine driven

vacuum pump was functional and air pressure and suction was felt through its respective ports when rotated. The electric powered auxiliary vacuum pump initially rotated when powered but then jammed. The pump was disassembled and was found to be contaminated with sand.

Examination of the wreckage revealed no evidence of any preimpact failures or malfunctions of the airframe, engine, or propeller that would have precluded normal operation.

According to FAA records, the pilot held a commercial pilot certificate with ratings for airplane single-engine land, and instrument airplane. His most recent FAA second-class medical certificate was issued on June 3, 2016. He reported on that date, that he had accrued approximately 1,221 total flight hours. On June 17, 2021, the pilot received certification under the FAA BasicMed program.

The wreckage was retained for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N635BD
Model/Series:	PA32R 300	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KVNC, 19 ft msl	Observation Time:	21:35 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	1 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	26°C / 22°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	/ ,
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.13 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Venice, FL (VNC)	Destination:	St. Petersburg, FL (SPG)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	3 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	4 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	27.06718,-82.46138

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Gunther, Todd

Additional Participating Persons: Darren J. Pilawski; FAA / FSDO; Tampa, FL
Robert Martellotti; Piper Aircraft; Vero Beach, FL
James M. Childers; Lycoming Engines; Williamsport, PA

Investigation Class: [Class 3](#)

Note: