



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	BATTLEMENT MESA, Colorado	Accident Number:	FTW94FA104
Date & Time:	March 15, 1994, 03:10 Local	Registration:	N9HC
Aircraft:	BEECH 95-B55B	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

DURING THE AFTERNOON AND EVENING HOURS BEFORE THE ACCIDENT, THE PILOT HAD DINNER WITH FRIENDS AND CONSUMED ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES. LATER, HE AND HIS FRIENDS BECAME SEPARATED. AT ABOUT 0030 MST, A TAXICAB DRIVER MET THE PILOT AND DROVE HIM TO THE AIRPORT, ARRIVING ABOUT 0200. THE DRIVER DESCRIBED THE PILOT AS BEING 'HAMMERED,' BUT SAID HE SLEPT DURING THE TRIP TO THE AIRPORT. THE PILOT TOLD THE DRIVER HE WAS GOING TO GET IN THE AIRPLANE AND 'SLEEP IT OFF' BEFORE DEPARTING. A WITNESS, LOCATED 5 MILES WEST OF THE AIRPORT, REPORTED AN AIRPLANE MADE LOW DIVING PASSES OVER HER RESIDENCE BETWEEN 0235 AND 0305. THE WRECKAGE WAS LOCATED TWO DAYS LATER AT THE 10,550 FOOT LEVEL OF A MESA, ABOUT 12 MILES SOUTHWEST OF THE AIRPORT. TOXICOLOGY TESTS FOR ETHANOL IN THE PILOT'S BLOOD AND BILE DISCLOSED LEVELS OF 200 AND 220 MG/DL (0.20% & 0.22%), RESPECTIVELY.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: IMPAIRED JUDGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF THE PILOT BY FLYING WHILE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF ALCOHOL THAT RESULTED IN HIS FAILURE TO MAINTAIN CLEARANCE (OR ALTITUDE) FROM TERRAIN, WHILE FLYING AT NIGHT.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE - NORMAL

Findings

1. (C) JUDGMENT - POOR - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) IMPAIRMENT(ALCOHOL) - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - DARK NIGHT
4. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY
5. (C) CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On March 15, 1994, approximately 0310 mountain standard time, a Beech 95-B55B, N9HC, was destroyed when it impacted terrain 8 miles southeast of Battlement Mesa, Colorado. The commercial pilot was fatally injured. Dark night visual meteorological conditions prevailed.

The following is based on telephone conversations with, and reports filed by, the Aspen Police Department and the Garfield County Sheriff's Office. On the afternoon and evening of March 14, the pilot had dinner with friends and consumed alcoholic beverages at several night clubs. He became separated from his friends shortly after midnight. A taxi driver told police that about 0030, he picked up the pilot and drove him to the Rifle Airport, arriving approximately 0200. He said the pilot slept during the trip, and he described him as being "hammered." The pilot told the driver he was going to get in his airplane and "sleep it off" before departing. The driver said the pilot looked like he had "just slept off a couple hours of drunkenness." He left him standing next to the airplane with the keys in his hand. Police reports are an enclosure.

An off-duty Eagle County police dispatcher reported an unidentified airplane made low diving passes over her residence in South Rifle Village, located about 5 miles west of the Rifle Airport, between 0235 and 0305. The airplane then flew away towards the southwest. The pilot's friends reported him missing to the Aspen Police Department, and a subsequent ramp check at Rifle Airport at 0600 revealed the airplane was gone.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

The wreckage was located by the Civil Air Patrol on March 17. It was embedded in a rock wall at the 10,550 foot level of Haystack Mountain, at Battlement Mesa, about 12 miles southwest of the Rifle Airport. The wreckage was aligned on a magnetic heading of 210 degrees. Accordion-type crush damaged extended from the nose section to the cockpit area. Both wings bore similar damage from the leading to the trailing edges. Both engines were fragmented.

The left engine was in the cabin area and the right engine was located 100 feet below the main body of wreckage. Both propeller assemblies separated from their respective engines. All of the blades were bent in an S-shape fashion, and had extensive leading edge damage, gouges, and 90 degree scratches on the cambered surfaces.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

An autopsy was conducted on the pilot at Community Hospital, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Toxicological analysis of specimens submitted to the U.S. Armed Forces Institute of Pathology was positive for acetaldehyde (35 mg/dL, blood; 41 mg/dL, bile) and ethanol (200 mg/dL, blood; 220 mg/dL, bile).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The wreckage was released to the owner's representative on March 21, 1994.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	29, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	December 12, 1993
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1486 hours (Total, all aircraft), 398 hours (Total, this make and model), 1424 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 56 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 21 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 4 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	BEECH	Registration:	N9HC
Model/Series:	95-B55B 95-B55B	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	TC-857
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	6
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	May 5, 1993 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	5100 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	2 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	CONTINENTAL
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	IO-470-L
Registered Owner:	CHAPPELL, CHARLES H.	Rated Power:	260 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:	Night/dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	GJT ,4858 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	34 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	02:50 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	230°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 14000 ft AGL	Visibility	30 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	70°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	8°C / -5°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	RIFLE , CO (RIL)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	02:15 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:	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Scott, Arnold
Additional Participating Persons:	JAMES A RALPH; SALT LAKE CITY , UT
Original Publish Date:	January 11, 1995
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=18888

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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](#).