



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	VAN HORN, Texas	Accident Number:	FTW95FA075
Date & Time:	December 27, 1994, 17:18 Local	Registration:	N8112P
Aircraft:	PIPER PA-24-250	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

AFTER PASSING THROUGH EL PASO, TEXAS, CLASS C AIRSPACE AT 6,500 FEET MSL, THE PILOT CONTACTED THE FBO AT PECOS, TX, AND REPORTED HE WAS '20 MINUTES OUT' AND REQUESTED THAT THE FBO REMAIN THERE UNTIL HE LANDED BECAUSE HE NEEDED TO PURCHASE FUEL. THE AIRPLANE NEVER ARRIVED. THE WRECKAGE WAS LOCATED BY ELT SIGNAL THE NEXT MORNING IN HILLY TERRAIN AT THE 5,700 FOOT LEVEL, 57 MILES WEST OF PECOS. AT THE APPROXIMATE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT, DARKNESS WAS APPROACHING. WEATHER SATELLITE PHOTOGRAPHS REVEALED SOME CLOUD COVER IN THE VICINITY AND AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT. ELEVATION AT THE PECOS AIRPORT WAS 2,617 FEET MSL.

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 proper altitude. Factors were reduced light conditions, clouds, and the pilot's premature descent.

Findings

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

Findings

1. (F) DESCENT - PREMATURE - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) PROPER ALTITUDE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

3. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - DUSK
4. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - CLOUDS

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On December 27, 1994, approximately 1718 central standard time, a Piper PA-24-250, N8112P, was destroyed when it collided with terrain during descent approximately 29 nautical miles north-northeast of Van Horn, Texas. The commercial pilot and passenger were fatally injured. Weather conditions at the accident site could not be determined.

Family members said the pilot and his wife were returning to Llano, Texas, from a California vacation. Records indicate that at 1223 on the day of the accident, he purchased 22.1 gallons of fuel at Van Nuys, California, then flew to Tucson, Arizona, where he purchased 45.2 gallons at 1428. According to the control tower, N8112P departed at 1458. The pilot contacted El Paso, Texas, approach control, was assigned a discrete transponder code of 4666, and entered its class C airspace. At 1653, the airplane exited El Paso's airspace, was assigned transponder code 1200, and radar services were terminated.

According to the fixed base operator (FBO) Pecos, Texas, the pilot contacted him "some time between 1715 and 1730" and reported he was "20 minutes out," and requested that he remain at the airport until he arrived because he needed to purchase fuel. The FBO noted that there was "a ragged 1,000 foot overcast ceiling and good visibility." This was the last known radio communication from the airplane. The airplane failed to arrive at Pecos. Homing on ELT (emergency locator transmitter) signals, a Texas Department of Public Safety helicopter crew located the wreckage the following morning about 57 miles west of Pecos. Although the pilot was instrument rated, he did not file a flight plan.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

Two weather satellite photographs of the west Texas area were examined. These photographs showed cloud cover in the vicinity, and at the approximate time, of the accident.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

Wreckage scatter was aligned on a magnetic heading of 081 degrees and extended for 210 feet. There was a ground scar, 25 feet long and 8 feet wide, on the side of the hill. At a point 71 feet from this scar was the right wing tip. At the 180 foot point was a second ground scar measuring 17 feet long and 10 feet wide. The airplane was found inverted 210 feet from the first ground scar.

On the evening following the accident, it was noted that darkness was approaching at the approximate time of the accident. It was also noted that at the accident site, no ground lights

were observed. The accident site was situated in an uninhabited area of rolling hills.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

An autopsy was performed by the El Paso Mortuary Service. Toxicology protocol, conducted by FAA's Civil Aeromedical Institute, was negative for drugs and alcohol.

TESTS AND RESEARCH

NTAP (National Track Analysis Program) data retrieved from the Albuquerque, New Mexico, Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) showed N8112P tracking outbound from the El Paso (ELP) Vortac on V66-198. Radar contact was lost in the vicinity of the Hudspeth (HUP) Vortac when the airplane was at an encoded altitude of 6,500 feet MSL. Evidence indicates the airplane was tracking outbound on V-66 when it collided with a hill at the 5700-foot level, about 39 n.m. east of the Hudspeth Vortac and 54 n.m. miles west of the Pecos Vortac. Elevation at the Pecos Airport is 2,617 feet MSL.

The digital radios installed in N8112P were later tested. When electrical power was applied, the active frequency for the number 1 navigation receiver was blank and the standby frequency was 115.0 MHz (Hudspeth Vortac). The active frequency on the number 2 navigation receiver was 111.9 MHz and the standby frequency was 115.0 MHz. One of the LED display bars in the active frequency window was inoperative. Technicians said it was possible that the frequency displayed was actually 111.8 MHz, the Pecos Vortac frequency. The DME (distance measuring equipment) was found coupled to the number 2 navigation receiver.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The wreckage was released to the pilot's representative on December 29, 1994.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	35, 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 2 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	Last FAA Medical Exam:	July 13, 1994
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	2001 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1508 hours (Total, this make and model), 1253 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 48 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 10 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 6 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	PIPER	Registration:	N8112P
Model/Series:	PA-24-250 PA-24-250	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	3362
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 7, 1994 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2800 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	17 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4468 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	LYCOMING
ELT:	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	O-540-A1D5
Registered Owner:	M.E. GOULD & W.C. INGRAM	Rated Power:	250 Horsepower
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Does Business As:		Operator Designator Code:	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Unknown	Condition of Light:	Dusk
Observation Facility, Elevation:	ELP ,3956 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	92 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	17:50 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	274°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 3300 ft AGL	Visibility	20 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 4800 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	3 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	300°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	9°C / 6°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	Light - Showers - Rain		
Departure Point:	TUCSON , AZ (TUC)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	PECOS , TX (PEQ)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	14:58 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:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	31.039363,-104.829956(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Scott, Arnold
Additional Participating Persons:	KARRY D RAY; ALBUQUERQUE , NM
Original Publish Date:	August 23, 1995
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=19200

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