



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	PATTERSON, California	Accident Number:	LAX91LA319
Date & Time:	July 18, 1991, 19:45 Local	Registration:	N23142
Aircraft:	PIPER J3C-65	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

THE PILOT AND HIS PASSENGER WERE FLYING IN THE VICINITY OF A RIVER AND A POND TRYING TO LOCATE STRAY CATTLE. THEY WERE FLYING AT ABOUT 400 FEET ABOVE THE GROUND WHEN THE PASSENGER THOUGHT HE SPOTTED SOMETHING AT THE NORTH END OF A POND. NOT BEING ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE OBJECT, THEY BEGAN A DESCENT TO TRY TO IDENTIFY THE OBJECT. DURING DESCENT THE AIRCRAFT COLLIDED WITH ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION WIRES. THE AIRCRAFT ENTERED AN UNCONTROLLED DESCENT AND IMPACTED THE WATER IN THE POND. THEY SAID THAT THEY DID NOT SEE THE WIRES OR SUPPORTING POLES. AN FAA SAFETY INSPECTOR REPORTED THAT 3 WIRES HAD BEEN BROKEN. THE POLES ARE ON LAND AND THEY ARE APPROXIMATELY 1,140 FEET APART.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: THE PILOT-IN-COMMAND'S IMPROPER VISUAL LOOKOUT IN A DESCENT AT LOW ALTITUDE, RESULTING IN AN IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH WIRES AND SUBSEQUENT IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

1. OBJECT - WIRE, TRANSMISSION
2. (C) VISUAL LOOKOUT - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Occurrence #3: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

3. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER

Factual Information

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	34, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Unknown
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):		Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	February 26, 1991
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	508 hours (Total, all aircraft), 50 hours (Total, this make and model), 443 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	PIPER	Registration:	N23142
Model/Series:	J3C-65 J3C-65	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:		Serial Number:	2923
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	January 2, 2000 Unknown	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1099 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	CONTINENTAL
ELT:	Installed	Engine Model/Series:	C85-12F
Registered Owner:	MICHAEL MAHAFFEY	Rated Power:	85 Horsepower
Operator:	MICHAEL MAHAFFEY	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:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	15 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	0°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	WESTLEY , CA (CA67)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	19:25 Local	Type of Airspace:	

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 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	37.450588,-121.230667(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Childress, Richard

Additional Participating Persons: JIM SHAMP; FRESNO, CA
EDWARD HAMMONDS; FRESNO, CA

Original Publish Date: July 13, 1993

Last Revision Date:

Investigation Class: [Class](#)

Note:

Investigation Docket: <https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=27297>

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](#).