



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	KETTLEMAN CITY, California	Accident Number:	LAX95FA016
Date & Time:	October 22, 1994, 23:58 Local	Registration:	N2326G
Aircraft:	PIPER PA-38-112	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

DURING A NIGHT CROSS-COUNTRY FLIGHT, THE AIRPLANE ENTERED A STEEP DESCENT AND CRASHED ON A 5-DEGREE DOWN-SLOPING OPEN FIELD. IMPACT OCCURRED IN AN ESTIMATED 45 TO 60 DEGREE, RIGHT BANK, DESCENDING TURN. NO PREIMPACT MECHANICAL MALFUNCTION OR FAILURE OF THE AIRPLANE WAS FOUND. THE AIRPLANE'S LAST RECORDED ANNUAL INSPECTION WAS IN OCTOBER OF 1991. THE STUDENT PILOT'S CERTIFICATE HAD NOT BEEN ENDORSED FOR SOLO FLIGHT. AN ACQUAINTANCE AND A FAMILY MEMBER REPORTED THE PILOT HAD EXPERIENCED A STROKE ABOUT 4 YEARS EARLIER; HOWEVER, THE PILOT DID NOT NOTE THIS DURING APPLICATION FOR A THIRD-CLASS AVIATION MEDICAL/STUDENT PILOT CERTIFICATE. A PATHOLOGIST REPORTED THE PILOT HAD EXPERIENCED 'ARTERIOSCLEROTIC HYPERTENSIVE CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE WITH LEFT MIDDLE CEREBRAL SUBARACHNOID HEMORRHAGE' AND THAT THIS MAY HAVE IMPAIRED HIS ABILITY TO OPERATE THE AIRPLANE. THREE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS WERE FOUND IN THE PILOT'S EFFECTS. ONE OF THESE CONTAINED A CAUTION, 'MAY CAUSE DROWSINESS;' HOWEVER, THE INVESTIGATION DID NOT VERIFY RECENT USE OF DRUG(S); A TOXICOLOGY TEST FOR ETHANOL WAS NEGATIVE.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: FAILURE OF THE STUDENT PILOT TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE AIRPLANE FOR AN UNKNOWN REASON. FACTORS RELATED TO THE ACCIDENT WERE: DARKNESS AND THE PILOT'S LACK OF QUALIFICATION/INSTRUCTOR ENDORSEMENT FOR A CROSS-COUNTRY FLIGHT AT NIGHT.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT

Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - BRIGHT NIGHT
2. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (F) QUALIFICATION - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (F) LACK OF CERTIFICATION - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On October 22, 1994, at an undetermined time prior to 2358 hours Pacific daylight time, a Piper PA-38-112, N2326G, owned and operated by the pilot, descended into an open field about 4 nautical miles (nmi) south of Kettleman City, California. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the personal flight, and no flight plan was filed. The airplane was destroyed, and the student pilot was fatally injured. The flight originated from Compton, California, at an undetermined time on October 22, 1994.

Family members reported to the National Transportation Safety Board that the pilot had likely departed Southern California on October 22, 1994. A Rancho Palos Verdes-based automated bank teller receipt was located in the pilot's personal effects. The receipt was date/time stamped October 22, 1994, around 1100. The pilot's intended destination may have been the Chandler Downtown (uncontrolled) Airport, Fresno, California.

Family members further reported that when the pilot flew from Southern California to Fresno, he typically flew over Interstate 5 until several miles north of Bakersfield. Then, the pilot would fly directly toward Fresno.

The Safety Board located the pilot's automobile at the Compton (uncontrolled) Airport. The car was parked adjacent to a vacant airplane tie-down spot. Airport management personnel reported that the tie-down location had been leased to the pilot. (See attached County of Los Angeles lease agreement form.)

The Safety Board was not able to determine the pilot's route of flight between Compton and Kettleman City. The crash site was approximately 50 nmi south of Fresno and 3 miles west of Interstate 5.

PERSONNEL INFORMATION

The Safety Board's partial review of records maintained by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) indicated the following history: (1) On September 6, 1989, while operating under student pilot certificate number BB-4849941, the pilot was cited for a careless or reckless operation. The FAA suspended the pilot's certificate; (2) On December 1, 1990, the pilot was cited for a careless operation and his student pilot certificate was suspended; (3) On June 17, 1991, the pilot was cited for operating an unairworthy airplane, and he was assessed a civil penalty.

The pilot's personal flight record logbook was not located. The Safety Board was not able to determine the pilot's total flight time or recent flying experience. Family members reported

that the pilot last flew his airplane from Compton to Fresno between July 12 and 13, 1994.

On October 4, 1993, the pilot informed the FAA on an application for a combined third-class aviation medical and student pilot certificate (number DD-1555365), that his total pilot time was 500 hours, and he had flown 40 hours during the past 6 months. For undetermined reasons, the pilot also indicated on the application that he held a private pilot certificate. Review of the FAA airman records revealed no evidence that the pilot had ever been issued any certificate other than student pilot certificates.

A student pilot certificate, dated October 1993, was found in the accident airplane. It did not bear any flight instructor endorsements for solo or cross-country flying.

Information received from family members indicated that the pilot's date of birth was not February 3, 1930, as listed on the October 1993 student pilot certificate. During an October 31, 1994, meeting with family members, the Safety Board was informed that the pilot had desired to work as a commercial truck driver. The pilot changed his date of birth to indicate a younger age. The pilot's actual date of birth was February 3, 1924.

The Safety Board made inquiries regarding the pilot's occupation. Family members and acquaintances variously reported that he was a writer/producer, security guard, automobile sales and leasing consultant, hypnotherapist, or retired.

AIRCRAFT INFORMATION

An examination of the airplane and engine logbooks indicated that the last recorded date on which the airplane received an annual inspection was October 9, 1991, at a total time of 1,768.3 hours. The recording engine tachometer was observed at the accident site indicating 1,883.79 hours.

Personnel at the Compton Airport reported that the pilot had provided use of his airplane to others in exchange for compensation. A student pilot at the airport reported that after having taken flight instruction in the airplane, she flew it on a solo flight in June 1994.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore is 25 nmi north of the crash site and was the closest facility which reported aviation weather. Naval personnel verbally reported to the Safety Board that between the late evening hours of October 22 and the early morning hours of October 23 visual meteorological conditions existed in the area.

Paso Robles, about 35 nmi southwest of the crash site, reported its weather at 2355, in pertinent part, as follows: scattered clouds at 18,000 feet; visibility 15 miles; temperature/dew point at 48/38 degrees Fahrenheit.

COMMUNICATION

No evidence was found that any FAA services or communications had been provided to the accident airplane.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

From an examination of topographical features including the hillside which surrounded the accident site and the site's proximity to roads, ground scar, and airplane wreckage, evidence was found that the airplane descended into the terrain upon overflying a 5-degree down-sloping hill (see photographs). The crash site was located at 35 degrees 57.11 minutes north latitude, by 119 degrees 59.63 minutes west longitude.

The airplane was found to have crashed into an open field while in an estimated 45 to 60-degree right bank. Fragments from the right navigation light lens and lens housing were found at the initial point of ground impact (IPI), which consisted of a ground scar covering a 32-foot-long southerly track from the IPI to the main impact crater (MIC).

The airplane's nose wheel strut was found partially buried in the MIC. The propeller was located about 27 feet southwest of the MIC. The main wreckage was found in an upright attitude approximately 55 feet southwest of the propeller. There was no evidence of fire.

All flight control surfaces were found attached to the airplane. The leading edges of both wings were observed accorded in an aft direction. The outboard portion of the right wing was found bent upward at an estimated 30-degree angle relative to the inboard portion of the main spar. The left wing main spar appeared straight. The continuity of the flight control system was established.

The propeller was found torsionally deformed and bent into an "S" shape, and its cambered surface bore chordwise scratches. The spinner was found partially crushed against the propeller, and it was observed bent in a direction opposite that of propeller rotation.

The engine was found broken from its attachment mounts and was upside down. Oil was observed in the engine. The carburetor was found separated from the engine. An estimated 1 ounce of blue-colored fuel was found in the carburetor. Fuel was also observed in fuel lines, and in the engine-driven fuel pump. The engine fuel primer control handle was exercised, and fuel discharged from the broken primer line.

Compression was noted upon rotation of the crankshaft, and the accessory gears were observed to rotate. Spark was observed from all spark plug leads upon rotation of the magneto drive gears.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

An acquaintance of the pilot reported that the pilot had experienced a stroke about 4 years prior to the accident, and the pilot's recovery from the condition did not appear to have been complete. A family member confirmed that the pilot had suffered a stroke; however, the family member reported that the pilot appeared to have "pretty much recovered from the stroke."

The acquaintance also reported that the pilot had a history of high blood pressure for which he may have been taking medication. Another acquaintance reported that, at times, the pilot seemed emotionally depressed and confused, and he had demonstrated an inability to recall specific recent events.

Several containers of different prescription medications were found in the pilot's personal effects. According to the dates on the containers, the prescriptions had been filled on June 28, August 8, and October 17, 1994. The containers were labeled "CAUTION May Cause Drowsiness." Copies of the prescription labels are attached to this report.

Review of the pilot's October 1993 FAA medical certificate application form revealed that he did not report the stroke or hypertension conditions. The pilot also noted that he was not currently using medications.

On October 25, 1994, an autopsy was performed by the Kings County Coroner's Office, Hanford, California. The autopsy report listed the cause of death as multiple injuries due to blunt force trauma. The contributing conditions were listed as "arteriosclerotic hypertensive cardiovascular disease with left middle cerebral subarachnoid hemorrhage." The pathologist verbally reported that this finding was significant. The conditions observed likely would have resulted in the pilot's incapacitation or impairment, and would have adversely affected his ability to operate the airplane.

Specimens were retained during the autopsy for toxicological analysis by both Kings County and the FAA Civil Aeromedical Institute (CAMI). Results of blood tests conducted by Kings County were negative for ethyl alcohol. Toxicological tests conducted by CAMI, which include a complete drug screen, have not been completed as of May 16, 1995.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Safety Board examined the (uninsured) wreckage on October 23, 1994, and did not take custody of it, or move it. On October 26, 1994, after being informed of the next of kin, the Safety Board verbally informed family members of the accident site location.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Student	Age:	70, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Invalid Medical for flight	Last FAA Medical Exam:	October 4, 1993
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	PIPER	Registration:	N2326G
Model/Series:	PA-38-112 PA-38-112	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	38-79A0498
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	October 9, 1991 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1670 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	116 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	1884 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	LYCOMING
ELT:	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	O-235-L2C
Registered Owner:	STANLEY B. NOBLE	Rated Power:	112 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/bright
Observation Facility, Elevation:	PRB ,836 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	35 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	23:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	225°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 18000 ft AGL	Visibility	15 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	0°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	9°C / 3°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	COMPTON , CA (CPM)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	FRESNO , CA (FCH)	Type of Clearance:	Cruise;None
Departure Time:	00:00 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:	36.049026,-119.990417(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Pollack, Wayne
Additional Participating Persons:	DONALD MAHAFFY; FRESNO , CA CHARLES LITTLE; CHINO , CA
Original Publish Date:	August 21, 1995
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=28892

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](#).