



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	TATITLEK, Alaska	Accident Number:	ANC97FA051
Date & Time:	April 9, 1997, 12:55 Local	Registration:	N59AK
Aircraft:	Cessna 185	Aircraft Damage:	Minor
Defining Event:		Injuries:	2 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation		

Analysis

The two airplanes collided while engaged in fish spotting in a rural area of Alaska. The pilot and observer of the Cessna 185, N59AK, said they were cruising over water at 2,000 feet msl in straight and level flight, about to exit a bay. They said they did not see the other airplane until an instant before impact, and that the Bellanca, N5025K, seemed to approach them from slightly below, and slightly to the right, or about their 1 o'clock position. The pilot related that he does not recall a conscious effort to avoid the collision, but that he probably 'instinctively' pulled back on the wheel. The Bellanca fell nearly straight into the sea. The Cessna pilot said the right float was slashed by the Bellanca's propeller. A portion of the Bellanca's right wing fuel tank was found imbedded in the right float of the Cessna. Both airplanes have high wings. The pilot of the Cessna said the weather was clear and sunny, with reflected sunglare from the water and snow covered mountains.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The command pilots of both airplanes inadequate visual outlook which led to their failure to see and avoid each other's airplane. A factor associated with the accident was sunglare.

Findings

Occurrence #1: MIDAIR COLLISION
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - SUNGLARE
2. (C) VISUAL LOOKOUT - INADEQUATE - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) VISUAL LOOKOUT - INADEQUATE - PILOT OF OTHER AIRCRAFT

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On April 9, 1997, about 1255 Alaska daylight time, an amphibian float equipped Cessna 185 airplane, N59AK, and a float equipped Bellanca 8GCBC airplane, N5025K, collided in mid air about 12 miles northwest of Tatitlek, Alaska, near geographic coordinates 60.57.36 North, and 146.43.59 West. The Cessna received minor damage to the right amphibian float; the commercial pilot and the private pilot passenger (observer) aboard were not injured. The airplane continued on to Birchwood Airport, Birchwood, Alaska, and landed without incident. The Bellanca airplane was destroyed, and the two occupants, a commercial certificated pilot and a passenger (observer), were fatally injured. The Bellanca fell into the waters of Prince William Sound, and the victims were removed by nearby fishing boats. The airplane was recovered by a landing craft type boat and taken to Valdez, Alaska. The two airplanes were operated under 14 CFR Part 91, and visual meteorological conditions prevailed. No flight plans were in effect for either airplane.

The pilot of the Cessna, and the observer, were interviewed on April 9th by the NTSB investigator-in-charge (IIC) at the Birchwood Airport. The pilot reported he had started flying about 0900, and had stopped for lunch and fuel at a fishing vessel in Galena Bay. After the stop, he resumed his fish spotting duties. The pilot stated he and the pilot of the Bellanca airplane were among a group of 20 or more airplanes all flying in the same general area near Galena Bay to spot herring (the airplanes fly in support of nearby fishing vessels, and the pilots, or their observers, radio information to the boat crews where the herring are schooling. The herring fishing season had not opened, but an opening was deemed imminent). The other airplanes were dispersed in about a one mile circle, with altitudes estimated from 1,000 feet msl to 3,500 feet msl. The Cessna pilot related his airplane was at 2,000 feet msl, in level flight, with 20 degrees of flap extended. He said his airplane's wingtip and vertical stabilizer strobes were turned on, as well as the navigation lights. His airplane was heading in a southwesterly direction, exiting the mouth of Galena Bay. The pilot said he was flying the airplane from the left seat, and that his passenger, whom he employed as an observer, and who is also a private pilot, was seated in the right front seat. He said neither he or the observer saw the Bellanca until an instant before impact, when they saw "a flash of yellow." He said he believes the collision was nearly head on, with the Bellanca slightly below and to his right. He said the impact happened so quickly that he does not recall a conscious attempt to avoid the Bellanca, but that he probably "instinctively" pulled back on the control yoke.

After impact, the pilot said he became aware that the other airplane had crashed. He radioed for a nearby airplane, piloted by Mr. Terry Holiday, owner of Holiday Aviation, Birchwood, to fly alongside of him and assess the damage to his airplane. The damage appeared to be limited to the right amphibian float, and a decision was made to fly the airplane to Birchwood

(approximately 110 miles west of the accident site) for landing and subsequent repairs.

The observer in the Cessna, a private pilot, related essentially the same information as the pilot. The observer said his job was to look for fish and other aircraft, assist in the communications, and to take over the controls if required in an emergency. He said he had no flying duties, and that he did not see the Bellanca until an instant before impact.

The Cessna 185's right float sustained damage to its hydraulic landing gear actuating system, and its wheels were hanging down, partially extended, but not locked. The left float was undamaged. The pilot elected to leave the left float's landing gear retracted, and landed without mishap on a hard surfaced runway at Birchwood.

According to witnesses on the fishing vessels (see attached Alaska State Trooper's report) the Bellanca fell nearly vertically into the water close to a fishing boat. None of the witnesses actually saw the impact between the two airplanes.

Crewmen from the fishing boats were able to recover the victims, and fastened the Bellanca to a boat with a line.

PERSONNEL INFORMATION

The pilot of the Cessna was James P. Blue, of Homer, Alaska. Mr. Blue was a member of the Alaska Fish Spotter's Association, and has been spotting fish for several years. Mr. Blue was involved in another mid air collision in 1991 near the same location (Tatitlek). That accident also occurred on April 9. There was a single fatality in the other airplane.

Mr. Ronald J. Gribble was the pilot of the Bellanca. Mr. Gribble was also a resident of Homer, and was a member of the Alaska Fish Spotter's Association. Mr. Gribble had several years experience spotting fish in Alaska.

AIRCRAFT INFORMATION

The Cessna 185 had been modified by replacing the original, solid, lower main cabin doors with transparent lower panels on both sides of the airplane, and overhead skylights to increase visibility. The airplane has a high wing, and was painted principally yellow, with areas of aqua and black trim. It was equipped with night navigation (position) lights, wing tip strobes, and a strobe on the vertical stabilizer.

The Bellanca is a high wing airplane, and was painted principally yellow with areas of black trim. It was equipped with night navigation (position) lights, a strobe light on the vertical stabilizer, and cabin skylights.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

The pilot of the Cessna indicated in his verbal statement to the NTSB investigator-in-charge that at the time of the collision, he was flying the airplane in a southwest direction. In his written statement to the NTSB, he related he was flying in a westerly direction, about to exit Galena Bay. He also noted in his written statement that his visibility was hampered by bright sun reflecting off the ocean and snow covered terrain.

At the time of the accident, 1255 (estimated) Alaska daylight time, a review of solar tables places the sun at an azimuth of 163.6 true (138.6 magnetic), and 36 degrees above the horizon.

Witnesses, and the pilot of the Cessna, described the prevailing weather as clear and sunny, with light winds.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Cessna pilot stated that at the time of the accident, he was monitoring the State of Alaska's Fish and Game radio frequency, as well as the common traffic advisory frequency the other fish spotting airplanes were using. He said he was not in communication with the pilot of the Bellanca.

It is unknown what frequency(s) the Bellanca pilot was monitoring.

Both airplanes were operating in Class E, General Controlled Airspace. They were not in contact with any air traffic control facility, nor were they required to be.

At the altitude they were flying, radar coverage was not available in the accident area.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

The NTSB IIC inspected the Cessna airplane at the Birchwood Airport on April 9. The airplane was parked outside, on the parking ramp. The only damage visible was to the right, yellow colored, float. The damage to the right float was described by the pilot of the Cessna as "prop slashes."

Five slashes were noted on the right float. The first slash, (moving from the toe of the float aft) was located about 70 inches aft of the toe, nearly abeam the right front, outboard spreader bar attachment. Adjacent to, and below the first slash, on the bottom of the float, was a large, irregular shaped hole, about 2-1/2 feet long by 2 feet wide. Inside the hole was a piece of crumbled metal and tubing. This metal was later identified as a portion of the Bellanca's right wing fuel tank.

The second slash was about 30 inches aft of the first. The remaining three slashes continued nearly equidistant, about 40 inches apart. The second slash penetrated the right side, to a vertical height roughly equal to one-half the float depth. The third, fourth and fifth slash also

penetrated the right side, with the slash depth increasing sequentially as the float tapered towards the heel. The fifth slash was approximately 18 inches from the heel, and had cut through about one-half of the float, inclusive of the float deck (see attached photographs).

The slashes were all oriented at essentially the same angle. Given the top of the float deck is 12 O'clock, the slashes paralleled the 1:00 to 7:00 or 1:30 to 7:30 plane, or about 20-25 degrees to the right of an imaginary, vertical, right angle line placed on the float.

The Bellanca was inspected by the NTSB IIC in the Valdez Harbor, Valdez, on April 10. It was originally viewed on the deck of the landing craft/barge which recovered and transported it to Valdez from the accident site. The wreckage was taken ashore with the NTSB IIC present for further inspection.

All major components and flight controls of the airplane were found in the wreckage. The airplane's wings and cabin area exhibited extensive crushing, particularly on the right side.

The wings were still attached to the fuselage, and all flight controls were found attached to the wings and empennage. Flight control continuity could not be established due to fuselage/cabin area deformation. The top of the right wing, inboard of the right lift strut attach point and fuel tank, was smashed downward and rearward, and both spars were broken. A portion of the right wing fuel tank and vent were missing.

The airplane's engine was broken free of its motor mounts, but remained attached to the fuselage by wires and cables. The propeller was nicked and gouged on both blades, with extensive chordwise scratches appearing on the outer half of each blade.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

An autopsy was performed on the pilot on April 10 under the auspices of the State of Alaska's Office of the Medical Examiner, 5700 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska, 99507.

The cause of death was listed as: "Multiple blunt impact /deceleration injuries due to an airplane incident/accident... ."

No evidence of any preexisting disease was noted.

Toxicological samples were tested by the FAA's Civil Aero Medical Institute. No evidence of any drugs or alcohol was discovered.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The wreckage of the Bellanca was released to a representative of the owner/pilot's family, Mr. Gary Porter, on April 10.

The Cessna airplane was inspected, but not retained, and no wreckage release was completed.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	37, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 26, 1997
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	8400 hours (Total, all aircraft), 4000 hours (Total, this make and model), 8340 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 50 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	Registration:	N59AK
Model/Series:	185 185	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	18503604
Landing Gear Type:	Amphibian; Float	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 20, 1997 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	3600 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	35 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	5750 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	IO-520-D30
Registered Owner:	JAMES P. BLUE	Rated Power:	300 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:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	80 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	6 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	270°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	10°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:		Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	12:10 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class E

Airport Information

Airport:		Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:		Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:	0	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	

Wreckage and Impact Information

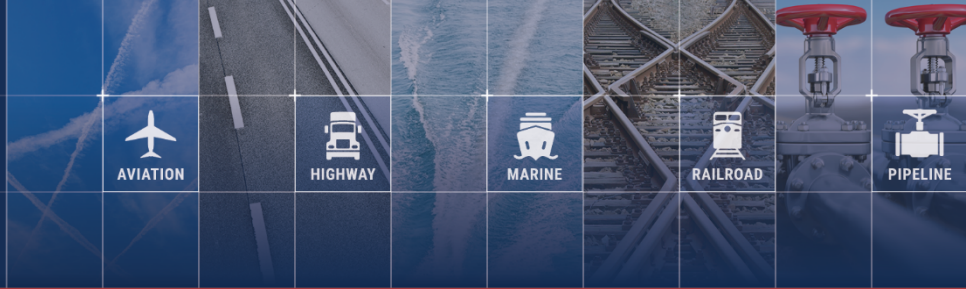
Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	Minor
Passenger Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 None	Latitude, Longitude:	60.880058,-146.650772(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	LABELLE, JAMES
Additional Participating Persons:	LARRY LYBARGER (FAA); ANCHORAGE , AK
Original Publish Date:	November 10, 1998
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=2934

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](#).



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	TATITLEK, Alaska	Accident Number:	ANC97FA051
Date & Time:	April 9, 1997, 12:55 Local	Registration:	N5025K
Aircraft:	Bellanca 8GCBC	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation		

Analysis

The two airplanes collided while engaged in fish spotting in a rural area of Alaska. The pilot and observer of the Cessna 185, N59AK, said they were cruising over water at 2,000 feet msl in straight and level flight, about to exit a bay. They said they did not see the other airplane until an instant before impact, and that the Bellanca, N5025K, seemed to approach them from slightly below, and slightly to the right, or about their 1 o'clock position. The pilot related that he does not recall a conscious effort to avoid the collision, but that he probably 'instinctively' pulled back on the wheel. The Bellanca fell nearly straight into the sea. The Cessna pilot said the right float was slashed by the Bellanca's propeller. A portion of the Bellanca's right wing fuel tank was found imbedded in the right float of the Cessna. Both airplanes have high wings. The pilot of the Cessna said the weather was clear and sunny, with reflected sunglare from the water and snow covered mountains.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The command pilots of both airplanes inadequate visual outlook which led to their failure to see and avoid each other's airplane. A factor associated with the accident was sunglare.

Findings

Occurrence #1: MIDAIR COLLISION
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - SUNGLARE
2. (C) VISUAL LOOKOUT - INADEQUATE - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) VISUAL LOOKOUT - INADEQUATE - PILOT OF OTHER AIRCRAFT

Factual Information

See narrative for ANC97FA051A.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	46, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea; Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Front
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--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 17, 1997
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	9850 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bellanca	Registration:	N5025K
Model/Series:	8GCBC 8GCBC	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	285-78
Landing Gear Type:	Float	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	Unknown	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2150 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	O-360-C2E
Registered Owner:	RONALD J. GRIBBLE	Rated Power:	180 Horsepower
Operator:	RONALD J. GRIBBLE	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	80 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	6 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	270°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	10°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:		Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	00:00 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class E

Airport Information

Airport:		Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:		Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:	0	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	

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:	60.880058,-146.650772(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	LABELLE, JAMES
Additional Participating Persons:	LARRY LYBARGER (FAA); ANCHORAGE , AK
Original Publish Date:	November 10, 1998
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=2934

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