



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	BROWNING, Montana	Accident Number:	SEA95FA209
Date & Time:	September 7, 1995, 10:30 Local	Registration:	N7820K
Aircraft:	CESSNA 180J	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

WHILE EN ROUTE TO A FOREST SERVICE AIRSTRIP, THE AIRPLANE COLLIDED WITH OPEN ROLLING TERRAIN. A WITNESS REPORTED THAT THE AREA WAS COVERED WITH LOW FOG AND VISIBILITY WAS LIMITED THE ENTIRE MORNING. WHEN THE FOG DID LIFT, VISIBILITY WAS ABOUT ONE-AND-A-HALF MILES. THE WITNESS ALSO REPORTED THAT THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SOUTH, WHERE THE DESTINATION AIRSTRIP WAS LOCATED, WERE COMPLETELY OBSCURED BY CLOUDS AND FOG. DURING THE INVESTIGATION, NO EVIDENCE WAS FOUND TO INDICATE A MECHANICAL FAILURE OR MALFUNCTION.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: CLEARANCE FROM THE GROUND WAS NOT MAINTAINED WHILE ATTEMPTING A VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC WEATHER CONDITIONS. A FACTOR TO THE ACCIDENT WAS FOG.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - FOG
2. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - ATTEMPTED - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND



Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On September 7, 1995, approximately 1030 mountain daylight time, a Cessna 180J, N7820K, collided with rolling terrain near Browning, Montana. Visual to instrument meteorological conditions prevailed at the time and no flight plan was filed. The airplane was destroyed by a post crash fire and the private pilot, the sole occupant, was fatally injured. The flight had originated from Cut Bank, Montana, on September 7, 1995, approximately 1000, and was en route to a Forest Service airstrip south of Browning, to deliver camping equipment to a friend.

A friend of the pilot reported that he met with the pilot approximately 0730 on the morning of the accident to load camping equipment into his vehicle. The two then went to the airport around 0900 to unload the equipment into the airplane. After all of the seats, except for the front left seat, were removed, they started to load the airplane. The friend stated that two propane tanks measuring in height of approximately four feet and weighing approximately 65 pounds each were loaded in the aft section and on the right side. Two metal stoves weighing 75 pounds each, were then loaded in front and beside the propane tanks and then packed tight. A carpet bundle weighing approximately 70 pounds was placed next to the pilot on the right side. The right side shoulder harness and rope secured the carpet bundle from moving forward.

The friend stated that the pilot then checked the fuel tanks and stated that he needed to go back home and get some fuel for the airplane. Prior to the friend leaving the pilot, the pilot visually looked to the southwest, at the mountains, and stated that he felt that he could get through Marias Pass. The friend stated that the mountains were obscured with clouds and he couldn't see the tops. He also stated that the pilot was very familiar with the area and had been into Shafer Meadows on several occasions to deliver camping equipment and supplies to another friend at Shafer Meadows. The friend did not know if the pilot had contacted a weather reporting facility prior to departure. The friend stated that the pilot expected to be back at Cut Bank around 1500, that same day.

A local resident reported that he was approximately four miles west of the accident site at 0940 and stated that the area was covered with low fog to the ground and limited visibility the entire morning. When the fog did lift, visibility increased to about one-and-a-half miles. The mountains to the south were completely obscured by the fog and heavy clouds. Approximately 1200 when the fog started to lift, the resident noticed smoke in an open field, and when he went to investigate, he found the smoldering remains of the airplane.

PERSONNEL INFORMATION

The pilot held a private pilot certificate for single-engine land and sea operations. The last rating was issued on February 13, 1985. Family members reported that the pilot did not keep a current flight logbook, however, Federal Aviation Administration records indicate that the pilot listed a total flight time of 1,000 hours at the time of the issuance of his medical certificate dated September 22, 1994.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

There is no record that the pilot made contact with a weather reporting facility prior to departure from Cut Bank. The Cut Bank weather facility located 28 miles northeast of the accident site, reports the weather hourly. From 0755 to 1055, the lowest ceiling was reported from 600 feet to 800 feet overcast. Visibility was 10 miles and the temperature was between 47 degrees to 51 degrees. The wind was from the east at four to eight knots.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

The wreckage was located on open rolling terrain. The ground was dry and hard and covered with two-foot tall dry weeds. The elevation at the accident site was approximately 4,800 feet. The main wreckage was positioned at the top of a ridge line. To the north of the site, the terrain dropped 50 feet into a valley covered with sparsely populated tall trees and a creek. To the east, the rolling terrain rose 50 to 75 feet.

The wreckage distribution path travelled from one ridge line on a magnetic bearing of 225 degrees, across a shallow valley to the final resting point on the opposite ridge line. The total wreckage distribution path was measured at 343 feet.

The first signs of ground impact were along the first ridge line. A 42-foot long scrape along the ground surface was noted. Along this scrape, white paint chips were noted. Also found was the broken anti-collision red case light from the left wing tip. It appeared that the left wing tip grazed over this area with the right side of the airplane still airborne. The airplane continued on and collided with the tops of small trees in the shallow valley. At the base of these trees, the left wing tip was located, along with a one-foot section of the outboard area of the left aileron. Across from the shallow valley, a second impact mark was located. A large area of ground disturbance measuring 41 feet in length was noted. The left wing strut was found in this area of disturbance. Below the disturbance in the valley, small sections of the left flap and aileron were found. Other small pieces of debris were also in the ground disturbance.

The main wreckage was on the edge of the valley wall. The fuselage was completely destroyed by fire. One propane bottle and the remains of the stoves remained inside the fuselage area. The other propane bottle and the carpet bundle were directly down hill from the wreckage and in the valley. These two items were not burned. The inboard section of the left wing remained with the fuselage and was severely deformed and burned. The entire length of the leading edge was crushed rearward. A section of the flap remained attached at a hinge. The empennage remained in place with the horizontal and vertical stabilizers attached. The

rudder and elevators remained attached to their respective hinges. The left horizontal stabilizer was bent upward nearly 80 degrees. The outboard tip of the elevator was ripped off and found along the wreckage distribution path. The right horizontal stabilizer was undamaged. The entire length of the right wing had separated from the fuselage at the wing root and was located 191 feet further into the path from the second impact disturbance, and 130 feet south of the main wreckage. The lift strut remained attached to the wing. The flap and aileron remained attached to their respective hinges. Leading edge impact was noted at the wing root area. The remainder of the wing displayed minor damage.

The engine remained near the fuselage and had sustained impact and heat distress. The propeller remained loosely attached to the crankshaft and was easily removed after cutting away the remainder of the spinner. Both propeller blades were twisted and displayed deep gouges and scratches. The accessory section was destroyed by fire. Both magnetos had separated at their mounts and were found further into the distribution path beyond the main wreckage. Both magnetos sparked with hand rotation.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

The autopsy report from the Department of Pathology at Great Falls, Montana, reported that the cause of the pilot's death was due to blunt force impacts to the head and chest with internal injuries and bleeding.

Toxicological samples were sent to the Department of Defense Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington D.C. for analysis. The results of the analysis to the samples were reported as negative.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The wreckage was released to a family representative on October 11, 1995. The wreckage was retrieved from the accident site and stored in a hangar at the Cut Bank Airport.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	67, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea	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 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	Last FAA Medical Exam:	September 22, 1994
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1000 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	CESSNA	Registration:	N7820K
Model/Series:	180J 180J	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	18052754
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	1
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	December 14, 1994 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2800 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	740 Hrs	Engine Manufacturer:	CONTINENTAL
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	O-470-S
Registered Owner:	NORMAN C. EBERHARDT	Rated Power:	230 Horsepower
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Does Business As:		Operator Designator Code:	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	CTB ,3854 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	28 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	10:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	41°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 600 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	8 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	80°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	9°C / 7°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	N/A - None - Fog		
Departure Point:	CUT BANK , MT (CTB)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	(8U2)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	10:10 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:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	48.58963,-113.270942(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Eckrote, Debra
Additional Participating Persons:	LEONARD R WHEELER; HELENA , MT STEPHEN T WILSON; WICHITA , KS
Original Publish Date:	January 29, 1996
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=42064

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