Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	AVALON, California	**Accident Number:**	LAX00LA038
Date & Time:	November 21, 1999, 10:15 Local	**Registration:**	N97CC
Aircraft:	Smith, Ted Aerostar AEROSTAR 600	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot/owner was performing a post maintenance check flight about 20 miles off shore. He was receiving visual flight advisories from a terminal radar approach facility while in level flight about 4,900 feet msl. Subsequently, the airplane started slowing then descending in a right spiral, and radar contact was lost about 1,000 feet msl. The pilot's body was recovered from the ocean. According to the autopsy report, the pilot had experienced sudden cardiac death secondary to an acute myocardial infarction due to atherosclerotic coronary artery disease. Tramadol, a painkiller not approved by the FAA for flight, was detected in a drug screen and may have masked the chest pain.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's in-flight loss of control due to physical incapacitation from sudden cardiac death secondary to an acute myocardial infarction.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings
1. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT POSSIBLE - PILOT IN COMMAND

2. (C) INCAPACITATION(CARDIOVASCULAR) - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings
3. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER

Factual Information

On November 21, 1999, about 1015 hours Pacific standard time, a Smith Aerostar 600, N97CC, descended into the Pacific Ocean near Avalon, California. The airline transport rated pilot, the sole occupant, received fatal injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the personal flight. The aircraft, owned and operated by the pilot under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91, was destroyed in the collision sequence and sank to the ocean bottom. No flight plan was filed for the local area flight, which originated at Fullerton, California, about 0930.

According to a family member, the pilot was accomplishing a post maintenance flight check.

Review of information and radar data provided by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) disclosed that the pilot was receiving visual flight advisories from Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control. At 1015, radar contact was lost on the 200-degree radial of the Seal Beach VOR at 20 miles. Recorded radar data revealed that the mode C return was level at 4,900 feet mean sea level (msl) and exhibited a slowing ground speed. The secondary beacon returns then started a descending right spiral and radar contact was lost at 1,000 feet msl.

The pilot's body was recovered from the ocean and an autopsy was conducted by the Los Angeles County Coroner's office. According to the autopsy report, the pilot had experienced sudden cardiac death secondary to an acute myocardial infarction due to atherosclerotic coronary artery disease. The attesting pathologist opined that the event began from 30 minutes to several hours before the pilot's death. Tramadol, a painkiller not approved by the FAA for flight, was detected in blood and tissue samples submitted for toxicological tests. The pathologist stated that the drug may have masked the chest pain symptoms of the cardiac event.

The aircraft was not recovered. Review of the maintenance records disclosed that on November 5, 1999, the oil was changed on both engines. During engine run-up a "hot" or non-grounding magneto was found on the right engine. A loose "P" lead for grounding the magneto was discovered and reattached. At the same time, a broken exhaust flange was discovered on the No. 6 engine cylinder. Subsequently, the entire exhaust system and a gas temperature probe were replaced on the right engine. According to maintenance records, the last annual inspection occurred on July 16, 1999.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline transport	**Age:**	44,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Unknown
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 3 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	March 26, 1999
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	1710 hours (Total, all aircraft), 851 hours (Total, this make and model), 100 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Smith, Ted Aerostar	**Registration:**	N97CC
Model/Series:	AEROSTAR 600 AEROSTAR 6	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	600154068
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	**Seats:**	6
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	July 16, 1999 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	5200 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	1 Hrs	**Engines:**	2 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4199 Hrs	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Lycoming
ELT:		**Engine Model/Series:**	TIO-540
Registered Owner:	WALTER L. CECIL	**Rated Power:**	290 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:	LGB ,57 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	20 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	09:56 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	20°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	0°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	16°C / 12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	FULLERTON , CA (FUL)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:		**Type of Clearance:**	VFLF
Departure Time:	09:30 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:**	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:**	33.379486,-118.449195(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Petterson, George
Additional Participating Persons:	RAY HANNA; LONG BEACH , CA
Original Publish Date:	May 9, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=47826