Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	PILOT POINT, Alaska	**Accident Number:**	ANC00LA108
Date & Time:	August 23, 2000, 17:30 Local	**Registration:**	N4985A
Aircraft:	Cessna 180	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	3 Fatal, 1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation		

Analysis

The commercial certificated pilot, an owner of a fishing lodge, departed a remote area of beach with three passengers to return to the lodge. The accident airplane was one of two airplanes transporting lodge guests. The beach was located along an area of coast on the south side of low mountains. The pilots of the two airplanes discussed several routes of travel to the lodge, located on the north side of the mountains. All of the routes necessitated traversing mountain passes of varying elevations. A scattered layer of low clouds partially obscured several mountain tops. The two pilots verbally agreed to head toward a pass that would require a longer flight, but would traverse lower terrain. After the two airplanes departed the beach, the pilot of the second airplane was initially leading the flight of two airplanes. After departure, the pilot of the first airplane reported that the most direct route through the mountains appeared to be open, and he elected to proceed toward the pass. The pilot of the second airplane then followed the first airplane by about 1/3 mile, and remained in radio contact with the first pilot. The two airplanes climbed to 3,000 feet msl, heading for the mountain pass. The second pilot said that 3,000 feet msl was the minimum altitude that he and the first pilot normally utilized to cross the pass. As the two airplanes proceeded northbound toward the pass, the pilot of the second airplane observed a solid layer of low clouds obscuring the pass, and he began to lose sight of the first airplane in clouds. He then lost sight of the first airplane, and began making a 180 degree turn to proceed toward lower terrain. The pilot of the first airplane radioed to the second pilot that he might want to turn around. The second pilot was already in a turn, and he asked the first pilot if he was turning around. The first pilot replied by stating, 'well, I'm kind of committed now.' That was the last radio contact with the pilot of the first airplane. The second pilot proceeded over lower terrain to the lodge. The first airplane was not there. The second pilot departed the lodge, searching for the first airplane. Near the mountains, the ceilings were about 900 feet overcast. The second pilot said he could hear an ELT signal near the mouth of a creek drainage. He could only get within about 5 miles of the pass. The accident airplane was reported overdue, but because of low clouds, a search helicopter was unable to reach the area of the mountain pass.

The wreckage was spotted the following day, and two passengers in the rear seats were transported to medical facilities, but one passenger died before reaching a hospital.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH WEATHER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE - NORMAL

Findings
1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - LOW CEILING
2. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - CONTINUED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings
3. TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On August 23, 2000, about 1730 Alaska daylight time, a tundra tire equipped Cessna 180 airplane, N4985A, was destroyed when it collided with mountainous terrain, about 34 miles south of Pilot Point, Alaska. The airplane was being operated as a visual flight rules (VFR) cross-country business flight, under Title 14, CFR Part 91, when the accident occurred. The airplane was operated by Painter Creek Lodge Inc., Anchorage, Alaska. The commercial certificated pilot, and two passengers, received fatal injuries. The third passenger received serious injuries. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed in the area of the accident.

During a telephone conversation with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC), on August 25, 2000, the vice-president of the lodge reported that two lodge airplanes transported lodge guests to a river near Amber Bay, Alaska, to go fishing. The area is about 20 miles south of the lodge, along Main Creek in the Aniakchak National Preserve. It is located near the coast, southeast of the Aleutian mountain range, on the Alaska peninsula.

The pilot of the second airplane, by telephone and written statement, reported that he and the pilot of the first airplane, discussed potential routes for the return flight to the lodge. Routes of travel included the Pumice Creek saddle, West Creek pass (Cinder River), or Aniakchak pass. A scattered layer of low clouds partially obscured several mountain tops. The two pilots verbally agreed to head toward West Creek pass. After the two airplanes departed the beach at Amber Bay about 1715, the pilot of the second airplane was initially leading the flight of two airplanes. After departure, the pilot of the first airplane reported that the most direct route through the mountains, following Pumice Creek, appeared to be open, and he elected to proceed toward the pass. The pilot of the second airplane then followed the first airplane by about 1/3 mile, and remained in radio contact with the first pilot.

The two airplanes climbed to 3,000 feet msl, heading for the mountain pass. The second pilot said that 3,000 feet msl was the minimum altitude that he and the first pilot normally utilized to cross the pass. As the two airplanes proceeded northbound toward the pass, the pilot of the second airplane observed a solid layer of low clouds obscuring the pass, and he began to lose sight of the first airplane in clouds. He then lost sight of the first airplane, and began making a 180 degree turn to proceed toward lower terrain and a longer route to the lodge. The pilot of the first airplane radioed to the second pilot, stating, "Jeff, you might want to turn around." The second pilot replied that he was in a turn, and he asked the first pilot if he was turning around. The first pilot replied by stating, "well, I'm kind of committed now." That was the last radio contact with the pilot of the first airplane.

The second pilot proceeded through West Creek pass and arrived at the lodge about 1750. The first airplane was not there. About 1815, the second pilot departed the lodge toward the south with the company vice-president to look for the first airplane, searching along the Painter Creek, Old Creek, and Pumice Creek drainages. Near the mountains, the ceilings were about 900 feet overcast. The second pilot said he could hear an emergency locator transmitter (ELT) signal on his airplane radio near the mouth of the Pumice Creek drainage. He could only get within about 5 miles north of the pass.

The accident airplane was reported overdue at 1923. Aircraft from the U.S. Coast Guard Air Station, Kodiak, Alaska, began search operations. Due to low clouds, a search helicopter was unable to reach the area of the mountain pass. The wreckage was spotted the following day.

The accident occurred during the hours of daylight about latitude 57 degrees, 00.49 minutes north, and longitude 157 degrees, 28.51 minutes west.

PERSONNEL INFORMATION

The pilot was an owner/operator of the lodge. The lodge had transported passengers by airplane in the past as an incidental aspect of the lodge operation, conducting their flight operations under CFR Part 91. The pilot applied for and was issued an on-demand air taxi certificate. Operation specifications were issued for Painter Creek Lodge Inc., on May 11, 1999. On June 13, 2000, the pilot informed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that he intended to resume lodge flight operations under CFR Part 91.

The pilot held a commercial pilot certificate with airplane single-engine land, and instrument airplane ratings. He held private pilot privileges with an airplane single-engine sea rating. In addition, the pilot held a flight instructor certificate with an airplane single-engine rating, and a mechanic certificate with airframe and powerplant ratings. His most recent second-class medical certificate was issued on January 20, 1999, and contained the limitation that the pilot must wear corrective lenses. A second-class medical certificate is valid for 12 calendar months for commercial flight operations, and 24 calendar months for private flight operations.

A review of the pilot's logbook, revealed that flight time information was entered into the logbook up to May 19, 2000. At that time, the pilot's total aeronautical experience consisted of 3,532.2 hours. The logbook reflected an FAA Part 135 check ride on May 3, 1999.

AIRCRAFT INFORMATION

Examination of the maintenance records revealed that the most recent annual inspection of the airframe and engine, documented in the records, was accomplished on June 10, 1999. At that time, the airplane had accrued 6,226.6 hours.

As of the last documented annual inspection of June 10, 1999, the engine had accrued a total time in service of 4,668.2 hours. The maintenance records note that a major overhaul was

accomplished on April 29, 1992, 950.0 hours before the 1999 annual inspection.

The engine propeller was installed on February 24, 1994. At that time, the airplane had accrued 5,545 hours.

A representative of the company reported that although the maintenance records did not reflect an annual inspection after June 10, 1999, the pilot had rented hanger space to perform annual inspections on company airplanes from May 25, 2000, to May 30, 2000. The company presented a receipt for the hanger rental from Airplane Hangers Inc.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

The closest official weather observation station is Port Heiden, Alaska, located about 37 miles west-southwest of the accident site. On August 23, 2000, at 1735, an Aviation Routine Weather Report (METAR) was reporting, in part: Wind, 340 degrees (true) at 5 knots; visibility, 9 statute miles; clouds and sky condition, 2,400 feet scattered, 3,900 feet broken, 4,700 feet overcast; temperature, 46 degrees F; dew point, 41 degrees F; altimeter, 29.93 inHg.

An area forecast, issued on August 23, 2000, at 1145, and valid until 2400, included a forecast for Bristol Bay and the Alaska Peninsula. The forecast for Bristol Bay stated, in part: Clouds and weather, 2,000 feet scattered, 3,500 feet scattered, 5,000 feet broken, tops at 14,000 feet. Occasionally 3,500 feet broken in light rain. Outlook, valid from 0000 to 1800 on August 24, 2000, along the coast at Egegik, Alaska, south, instrument flight rules conditions with ceilings in mist. Elsewhere, visual flight rules conditions, occasional marginal visual flight rules with ceilings in rain showers along mountains. No significant turbulence. Icing and freezing level, light isolated to moderate rime icing in clouds from 4,000 feet to 14,000 feet. Freezing level, 4,000 feet.

The forecast for the Alaska Peninsula stated, in part: AIRMET for mountain obscuration, mountains occasionally obscured in clouds and in precipitation, no change. Clouds and weather, 2,000 feet scattered, 4,000 feet broken, 7,000 feet overcast, tops at 13,000, layers above to 25,000 feet, occasional light rain. Occasionally 2,000 feet broken, 4,000 feet overcast with the visibility 5 statute miles in light rain and mist. Outlook, valid from 0000 to 1800 on August 24, 2000, on the Bering Sea side of the peninsula, instrument flight rules conditions with ceilings in mist. Elsewhere, visual flight rules conditions. No significant turbulence. Icing and freezing level, light isolated, occasional moderate rime icing in clouds from 6,000 feet to 13,000 feet. Freezing level, 6,000 feet to the north, sloping to 8,000 feet to the south.

COMMUNICATIONS

Other than the radio conversations between the pilots of both airplanes, no other communications were conducted.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

The National Transportation Safety Board investigator-in-charge (IIC) did not travel to the accident scene. An Alaska State Trooper, who responded with search and rescue personnel to the accident scene, reported that the airplane wreckage was located on a steep rock slope at the foot of a glacier. The slope varied from 45 to 55 degrees. The airplane was oriented on a 340 degree magnetic heading. The area of the accident was about 150 feet below the summit of the pass.

The Alaska state trooper reported that the airplane came to rest pointing upslope on its left side. All of the airplane's major components were found at the main wreckage area. The engine remained attached to the fuselage. The propeller blades were curled aft. The tailwheel was broken at its attach point and was found in the cockpit. The left side of the fuselage was twisted to a near vertical position. The left wing was displaced to a position that was parallel to the fuselage. The right wing was bent upward about 45 degrees and twisted. The main landing gear was sheared from the fuselage.

The pilot of the second airplane submitted a written statement, and included diagrams of the accident scene, and his search efforts. His statement is enclosed as a portion of this report.

MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

A postmortem examination of the pilot was conducted under the authority of the Alaska State Medical Examiner, 5700 E. Tudor, Anchorage, Alaska, on August 27, 2000. The examination revealed the cause of death for the pilot was attributed to blunt trauma injuries.

A toxicological examination was conducted by the FAA's Civil Aeromedical Institute (CAMI) and was negative for any alcohol or drugs.

SURVIVAL ASPECTS

The only surviving passenger was seated in the right rear seat. She submitted a passenger statement that is included as a portion of this report. The passenger reported that the weather conditions were deteriorating during the ascent. She stated that she saw a "brief glimpse of land, close to the right wing, probably just prior to impact." After the accident, the passenger did not recall many details about the events associated with her rescue.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

On August 24, 2000, a search helicopter spotted the wreckage about 0945, but low clouds prevented a landing near the accident site until 1107. Rescue personnel found two female survivors and had to cut the airplane apart to extract the occupant of the right rear seat. One survivor was transported to a medical clinic. The second survivor died before reaching a hospital.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The transportation of passengers via aircraft by guides to fishing lodges, hunting lodges, and camps in Alaska, has been permitted, in the past, by the FAA under CFR Part 91 rules. In January, 1998, the FAA published a notice to operators in the Federal Register. The notice signaled the FAA's intent to require compliance with CFR Part 135 rules to ensure that passengers, transported by air, had the level of safety required of an air taxi operator. Many lodge operators and guides in Alaska applied for, and received, on-demand CFR Part 135 certificates. The Alaska Professional Hunters Association brought suit against the FAA, seeking relief of the Part 135 requirements. As a result of the lawsuit, guides in Alaska may still operate under Part 91 regulations.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor; Private	**Age:**	61,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:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane single-engine	**Toxicology Performed:**	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	January 20, 1999
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	3532 hours (Total, all aircraft), 3327 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	**Registration:**	N4985A
Model/Series:	180 180	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	32382
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	**Seats:**	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	June 10, 1999 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2550 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	6227 Hrs	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Continental
ELT:	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	**Engine Model/Series:**	O-470-R13
Registered Owner:	PAINTER CREEK LODGE INC.	**Rated Power:**	230 Horsepower
Operator:		**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	On-demand air taxi (135)
Operator Does Business As:		**Operator Designator Code:**	P4CC

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:		**Distance from Accident Site:**	
Observation Time:		**Direction from Accident Site:**	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown	**Visibility**	5 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 2500 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	0°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:		**Temperature/Dew Point:**	10°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	AMBER BAY , AK	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	PAINTER CREEK , AK	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	17:15 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:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	2 Fatal, 1 Serious	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	3 Fatal, 1 Serious	**Latitude, Longitude:**	57.499794,-157.279739(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Erickson, Scott
Additional Participating Persons:	TONY FISCHER (FAA); ANCHORAGE , AK
Original Publish Date:	July 10, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=50089