



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Tifton, Georgia	Accident Number:	MIA01LA065
Date & Time:	January 27, 2001, 21:40 Local	Registration:	N3978K
Aircraft:	Piper PA-28-140	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot was in cruise flight at 4,500, when the engine rpm decreased from 2400 rpm to idle power. He turned on the boost pump, applied carburetor heat, and switched fuel tanks with negative results. He contacted ATC, informed them of the situation and declared an emergency. ATC pointed out an airport, and he turned towards runway 15 at the airport. The pilot's approach was too high and he made a 270-degree turn. During the turn he realized that he would not be able to make the runway. He initiated a forced landing to a highway but was unable to get aligned, and crashed into a marshy area. Examination of the engine assembly and accessories, and no anomalies were noted. The engine was started and run at 2150 rpm.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot's failure to properly judge his altitude (too high) during a forced landing to a runway. The pilot made a 270-degree turn in an attempt to lose altitude resulting in a forced landing in a swampy/marshy area short of the runway. Contributing to the accident was a reported loss of engine power for undetermined reasons.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF ENGINE POWER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) POWERPLANT - UNDETERMINED

Occurrence #2: FORCED LANDING

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - EMERGENCY

Findings

2. (C) ALTITUDE - MISJUDGED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #3: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - EMERGENCY

Findings

3. TERRAIN CONDITION - SWAMPY

Factual Information

On January 27, 2001, at about 2140 eastern standard time, a Piper PA-28-140, N3978K, registered to a private owner, operating as a 14 CFR Part 91 personal flight, experienced a reported loss of engine power in cruise flight, and crashed during a forced landing in the vicinity of Tifton, Georgia. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan was filed. The airplane sustained substantial damage. The commercial pilot reported minor injuries and the private pilot rated passenger sustained serious injuries. The flight originated from Savannah, Georgia, about 1 hour 50 minutes before the accident.

The commercial pilot stated they departed Savannah at about 1950, with the fuel selector on the right fuel tank. They climbed to 4,500 feet heading 270 degrees magnetic and contacted Jacksonville Center for VFR flight following. At about 2135 the engine rpm decreased from 2400 rpm to idle power. He turned the boost pump on, applied carburetor heat, and switched the fuel tank to the left fuel tank. There was no change in engine rpm. He notified Jacksonville Center they had a loss of engine power and declared an emergency. Jacksonville Center pointed out Tifton Airport, and he turned towards runway 15. His approach was too high and he made a 270 degree turn. During the turn he realized he would not be able to make the runway, he initiated a forced landing to a highway but was unable to get aligned, and crashed into a marshy area.

Examination of the engine assembly and accessories was conducted at Atlanta Air Salvage in Griffin, Georgia, on January 31, 2001. No anomalies were noted. The engine was started and run at 2150 rpm. The magnetos were checked and a 100 rpm drop was noted on each magneto. (For additional information see Piper Air Safety Investigation Department Single Engine Accident Report, an attachment to this report.)

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial; Flight instructor	Age:	38,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Airship	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane single-engine; Instrument airplane	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	Last FAA Medical Exam:	October 19, 2000
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	451 hours (Total, all aircraft), 8 hours (Total, this make and model), 305 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 25 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 25 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N3978K
Model/Series:	PA-28-140	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	28-238104
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	August 1, 2000 AAIP	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2150 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	69 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4338 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	O-320-E3D
Registered Owner:	Aaron P. Sawyer	Rated Power:	150 Horsepower
Operator:	Rockston O. Thomas	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Night/dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	ABY,197 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	50 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	21:53 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	280°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	7 miles
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/ None	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.29 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	7°C / 6°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Savannah, GA (SAV)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Enterprise, AL (EDN)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	19:50 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	31.460578,-83.589859(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Smith, Carrol
Additional Participating Persons:	Rene Rasado; Atlanta FSDO; College Park, GA Michael McClure; The New Piper Aircraft, Inc; Arlington, TX Edward G Rogalski; Textron Lycoming; Belleview, FL
Original Publish Date:	July 30, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=51399

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](#).