Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	New Milford, Connecticut	**Accident Number:**	NYC01LA121
Date & Time:	May 12, 2001, 15:15 Local	**Registration:**	N33907
Aircraft:	Schweizer SGS 1-26E	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Instructional		

Analysis

The student pilot departed in a glider from an airport with an elevation of 675 feet, and was aero-towed to 3,000 feet msl, over the airport, where he released. Initially he stayed north of the airport and climbed to 4,000 feet. He then headed to the northeast, while the winds were from the southwest. Over a period of several minutes the glider lost 1,900 feet while the pilot was searching for thermals. The pilot then elected to return to his departure airport. En route to the airport, he encountered a rain shower, and was sinking 500 to 600 fpm. He had insufficient altitude to reach the airport with the existing headwinds of 5 to 10 knots, and settled into trees about 1/4 of a miles from the approach end of the runway. The glider club field safety manager reported that he had cautioned the pilot to remain upwind of the airport prior to his departure. The pilot reported that he had focused his attention to finding lift and did not maintain his awareness of his proximity to the airport.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the student pilot's improper decision to fly northeast of the airport with winds from the southwest, and his subsequent diverted attention to the glider's proximity to the airport while he searched for thermals, which resulted in an off airport landing.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: APPROACH

Findings
1. (C) IN-FLIGHT PLANNING/DECISION - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) DIVERTED ATTENTION - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On May 12, 2001, about 1515 eastern daylight time, a Schweizer SGS 1-26E glider, N33907, was substantially damaged during an off airport landing, in New Milford, Connecticut. The certificated student pilot received minor injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the solo instructional flight. No flight plan had been filed for the local flight that was conducted under 14 CFR Part 91.

The student pilot departed in a glider from an airport with an elevation of 675 feet, and was aero-towed to 3,000 feet msl over the airport.

According to a statement from the pilot:

"...I released the tow at 3,000 feet [msl] and climbed to 4,000 feet at the south end of the field. I then headed to the north end and the sand pit area. Upon reaching the sand pit area, I lost 1,000 feet. After 10 - 15 minutes I had lost another 900 feet. I headed back for the airfield and encountered rain and 5-6 sink [500 to 600 fpm down]. I realized I was too low and radioed in twice to announce a straight in landing. When I realized I would not make the airfield, I slowed to 40. At this point I was about 1,000 feet from the field. About 50 feet from the trees, the left wing dropped. As soon as I brought it up, I entered the tops of the trees. The glider was spun 180 degrees to the left and caught in the trees. After a few seconds, the plane dropped to the ground...."

A witness reported seeing the glider about 15 minutes after release, about 2 miles northeast of the airport, at an altitude of about 2,000 feet agl. It was headed straight toward the approach end of Runway 17, on an approximate heading of 220 degrees. He watched the glider as it descended into the tops of trees, about 1/4 mile northeast of the approach end of Runway 17.

The pilot was asked how this accident could have been prevented, and he replied that he should have maintained his awareness of the winds, and the location of the airport while searching for thermals. He further added that he had focused his attention on finding a thermal and lost his awareness of the airport location, and his ability to return safely.

The field safety manager for the club reported that prior to departure of the student pilot, he had cautioned him to remain up wind of the airport.

According to the inspector from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), both wings and the fuselage were wrinkled and bent.

According to statements from several pilots, the winds at the airport were from the southwest at 5 to 10 knots. The pilot had reported winds from the southwest at 5 to 7 knots. The

direction was primarily from the southwest, but was variable between south and west. The sky was described as unstable with cumulus clouds present. Visibility was described as 10-15 miles. Cloud bases were estimated at 5,000 feet to 6,000 feet mean sea level. The pilot had estimated the cloud cover at 3/10. However, another witness said it was near overcast just after the accident.

The pilot reported that he had completed 51 flights in gliders, for a total flight experience of 14 hours, 22 minutes, including 3 hrs, 07 minutes solo, and 1 hour 02 minutes in the Schweizer SGS 1-26E.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Student	**Age:**	16,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	**Seat Occupied:**	Single
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	**Restraint Used:**	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	No
Medical Certification:	None None	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	14 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1 hours (Total, this make and model), 3 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Schweizer	**Registration:**	N33907
Model/Series:	SGS 1-26E	**Aircraft Category:**	Glider
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	627
Landing Gear Type:	Hull	**Seats:**	1
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	November 19, 2000 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	700 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	5 Hrs	**Engines:**	0
Airframe Total Time:	2156 Hrs at time of accident	**Engine Manufacturer:**	
ELT:	Not installed	**Engine Model/Series:**	
Registered Owner:	Nutmeg Soaring Asociation, Inc.	**Rated Power:**	
Operator:		**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

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:	Scattered / 5000 ft AGL	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	7 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	220°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:		**Temperature/Dew Point:**	75°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	Light - None - Rain		
Departure Point:	New Milford, CT (11N)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	New Milford, CT (11N)	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:	14:15 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:	Candlelight Farms 11N	**Runway Surface Type:**	Grass/turf
Airport Elevation:	675 ft msl	**Runway Surface Condition:**	Dry
Runway Used:	17	**IFR Approach:**	None
Runway Length/Width:	2900 ft / 50 ft	**VFR Approach/Landing:**	Straight-in

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	41.575,-73.459999

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Hancock Robert
Additional Participating Persons:	Marilyn Pearson; FAA FSDO-03; Windsor Locks, CT
Original Publish Date:	September 26, 2001
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=52244