



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Belle Chase, Louisiana	Accident Number:	FTW01LA158
Date & Time:	July 3, 2001, 21:25 Local	Registration:	N5883V
Aircraft:	Piper PA-32R-300	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The private pilot attempted to find an unlit airport at night. Radar data depicted the airplane flying low at various altitudes on two separate occasions. Witnesses located near the accident site stated that they observed the airplane flying low until it impacted a utility pole. The airplane burst into flames after impact with the pole and descended into a canal. Post-accident examination of the wreckage revealed no anomalies with the aircraft or engine. The pilot did not have the frequency selected for the pilot controlled runway lighting system at the private airport, and a witness stated that the runway lights were not illuminated. Toxicology tests performed on the pilot revealed that he was intoxicated (0.14% ethanol in vitreous fluid) at the time of the accident.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's failure to maintain clearance with a utility pole while maneuvering. Contributing factors were the pilot's impairment due to alcohol intoxication and the night light conditions.

Findings

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

- Findings
1. OBJECT - POLE

2. (C) CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (F) IMPAIRMENT(ALCOHOL) - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - NIGHT

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On July 3, 2001, approximately 2125 central daylight time, a Piper PA-32R-300 single-engine airplane, N5883V, was destroyed when it impacted a utility pole and water while maneuvering near the Southern Seaplane Airport near Belle Chase, Louisiana. The private pilot, who was the registered owner of the airplane and the sole occupant, received fatal injuries. Night visual meteorological conditions prevailed and a flight plan was not filed for the 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 personal flight. The cross-country flight departed Jonesville, Louisiana, approximately 2030, and was destined for the Southern Seaplane Airport.

Radar data obtained from the New Orleans Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base (NAS JRB, located two miles south of the Southern Seaplane Airport) radar facility depicted the airplane approaching the Southern Seaplane Airport from the northwest. The airplane initially descended to 400 feet msl; however, the airplane's altitude fluctuated between 500 and 200 feet msl as it over flew the airport on two separate occasions. The last radar return depicted the airplane at 100 feet msl on a southwest ground track, approximately 0.5 miles northeast of the Southern Seaplane Airport.

Numerous witnesses, who were located near the accident site, reported that they observed the airplane flying low, impact a utility pole, burst into flames and descend into the Intracoastal Canal.

PERSONNEL INFORMATION

The pilot held a private pilot certificate with an airplane single-engine land rating. The pilot was issued a third class medical certificate on February 16, 2000, with the following limitation: "must have available glasses for near vision." According to this last medical certificate application, he had accumulated a total of 2,000 flight hours. The pilot's logbook was not located and it is unknown how much flight time he had accumulated in the accident airplane.

According to the pilot's friend, the pilot had landed at the Southern Seaplane Airport on three or four separate occasions; however, he did not think that the pilot had previously flown to that airport at night.

AIRCRAFT INFORMATION

According to FAA registration data, the pilot had owned the accident airplane since May 22, 2001. The FAA inspector recovered the aircraft's maintenance records from the wreckage. According to the aircraft's logbook, the airplane underwent its last annual inspection on March

1, 2001.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

At 2155, the New Orleans NAS JRB weather observation facility reported calm wind, visibility 7 statute miles, scattered clouds at 3,000 feet and 20,000 feet, temperature 26 degrees Celsius, dew point 23 degrees Celsius, and altimeter setting of 30.14 inches of Mercury.

According to the U.S. Naval Observatory, the sun set at 2006 on the evening of the accident, and the end of civil twilight occurred at 2033.

AIRPORT INFORMATION

The Southern Seaplane Airport is a private use, non-towered airport located 2 miles northwest of Belle Chase, Louisiana. The airport utilizes a 3,200-foot long asphalt runway and a 5,000-foot long water runway. The asphalt runway, 2-20, has low intensity runway edge lights, which can be activated by the pilot on frequency 119.8. The airport has a rotating beacon; however, it was listed as indefinitely out of service at the time of the accident.

According to the pilot's friend, who was waiting for him at the airport, he could not remember seeing the runway edge lights illuminated. He and his wife added that the only light they noted was one located at the parking lot.

WRECKAGE AND IMPACT INFORMATION

The main landing gear were located on the waterway's bank approximately 75 feet from the base of the pole. The nose landing gear was found floating in the water. The FAA inspector, who responded to the accident site, stated that he observed tire marks on the upper side of the utility pole. The airplane came to rest inverted underwater.

The airplane was recovered on July 4, 2001, and was examined by the FAA inspector. Photographs of the wreckage revealed that the wings were separated from the fuselage at their roots; however, they remained attached to the aircraft via the aileron control cables. The empennage remained attached to the fuselage and the rudder and elevator control cables extended from the control surfaces to the cockpit. The lower side of the horizontal stabilizer sustained fire damage. The flap handle and flaps were found in the retracted position. The landing gear actuator was found in the extended position. Examination of the two communication radios revealed that the communication frequencies selected were 123.80 and 122.80.

The propeller and throttle controls were found in the full forward position. The mixture control was found in the idle cut-off position. The propeller remained attached to the engine and one of the blades was bent aft approximately 90 degrees. The other blade displayed chord wise scragging near its tip. The engines exhaust pipes were found flattened.

PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION

An autopsy on the pilot was performed at the Plaquemines Parish Coroner's Office. According to the coroner's report, the pilot tested positive for 141 mg/dL of ethanol in vitreous fluids. A toxicological test was conducted by the Civil Air Medical Institute, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The toxicological tests were positive for the following:

161 mg/dL ethanol in blood
188 mg/dL ethanol in brain
153 mg/dL ethanol in lung
154 mg/dL ethanol in spleen
15 mg/dL acetaldehyde in blood
2 mg/dL acetaldehyde in brain
23 mg/dL acetaldehyde in lung
18 mg/dL acetaldehyde in spleen
1 mg/dL n-propanol in blood
1mg/dL n-propanol in brain
2 mg/dL n-propanol in lung
1 mg/dL n-propanol in spleen

According to the coroner, some of the ethanol production could be attributed to post-mortem ethanol production; however, the amount of ethanol in vitreous fluids (0.14%) indicated that the pilot was intoxicated at the time of the accident.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The airplane was released to the owner's representative on October 2, 2001.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	55, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	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:	February 16, 2000
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	2000 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N5883V
Model/Series:	PA-32R-300	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	32R-7780372
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	7
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 1, 2001 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	3400 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	1501.18 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	IO-540-K1G5D
Registered Owner:	George D. Keeth, Jr.	Rated Power:	300 Horsepower
Operator:		Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:	NBG,3 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	5 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	21:55 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	230°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 3000 ft AGL	Visibility	7 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	0°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.13 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	26°C / 23°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Jonesville, LA (L32)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Belle Chase, LA (65LA)	Type of Clearance:	VFR
Departure Time:	20:30 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class D

Airport Information

Airport:	Southern Seaplane Airport 65LA	Runway Surface Type:	Asphalt
Airport Elevation:	0 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	Unknown
Runway Used:	20	IFR Approach:	Unknown
Runway Length/Width:	3200 ft / 40 ft	VFR Approach/Landing:	Unknown

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:		Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	On-ground
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	29.839445,-89.999008(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Charnon, Nicole
Additional Participating Persons:	Brian Capone; FAA FSDO; Baton Rouge, LA
Original Publish Date:	February 20, 2002
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=52614

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](#).