# Aviation Investigation Final Report

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| **Location:** | Sierra Blanca, Texas | **Accident Number:** | FTW02LA053 |
| **Date & Time:** | December 12, 2001, 23:30 Local | **Registration:** | N4530K |
| **Aircraft:** | Ryan Navion A | **Aircraft Damage:** | Substantial |
| **Defining Event:** | | **Injuries:** | 2 Serious |
| **Flight Conducted Under:** | Part 91: General aviation - Personal | | |

## Analysis

According to the pilot, while en route under night visual flight rules the flight encountered clouds. During a maneuver to fly out of the clouds, the airplane impacted the terrain at an estimated elevation of 5,000 feet msl. A helicopter attempted to respond to the accident location, however, a snowstorm suspended their efforts. While sitting in the aircraft prior to departure, the pilot had obtained a weather briefing for a VFR flight. The pilot stated his intended cruising altitude would be 6,000 feet with a possibility of climbing to 9,000 or 10,000 feet. The briefer stated there was an AIRMET for rime icing along the route of flight, to which the pilot responded, "I will be VFR, I will not be in the clouds." The destination extended forecast reported visibility 6 plus statute miles, occasional 3 statute miles visibility, light snow showers, few clouds at 3,000 feet, ceilings at 5,000 broken and 12,000 overcast.

## Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's inadverent VFR flight into instrument meteorological weather conditions which resulted in an in-flight collision with terrain. Contributing factors were the night light conditions and the clouds.

### Findings

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

Findings
1. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - NIGHT
2. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - CLOUDS
3. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - INADVERTENT - PILOT IN COMMAND
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Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings
4. TERRAIN CONDITION - GROUND

## Factual Information

On December 12, 2001, approximately 2330 mountain standard time, a Ryan Navion A single-engine airplane, N4530K, was substantially damaged after it impacted terrain while maneuvering near Sierra Blanca, Texas. The non-instrument rated private pilot, who owned and operated the airplane, and his passenger sustained serious injuries. Night instrument meteorological conditions prevailed and a flight plan was not filed for the 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 personal flight. The flight departed Midland, Texas, approximately 1930, and was destined for El Paso, Texas.

Prior to departure from Midland, while sitting in the aircraft, the pilot obtained a weather briefing from the San Angelo Automated Flight Service Station (AFSS). According to a tape recording of the weather briefing, the pilot stated that after a full stop landing to El Paso, the flight would continue to Phoenix, Arizona. The briefer stated there was an AIRMET for rime icing near the New Mexico border in the area near El Paso, to which the pilot responded, "I will be VFR, I will not be in the clouds." The El Paso extended forecast, valid to 0500, reported visibility 6 plus statute miles, occasional 3 statute miles visibility, light snow showers, with few clouds at 3,000 feet, ceilings 5,000 feet broken and 12,000 feet overcast. The pilot stated his intended cruising altitude would be 6,000 feet msl with a possibility of climbing to 9,000 or 10,000 feet.

During a telephone interview, conducted by an NTSB investigator, the pilot stated that while "en route under visual flight rules to El Paso, he encountered clouds." During a maneuver to fly out of the clouds, the airplane impacted the terrain. The pilot then attempted to contact rescue personnel via a cellular phone.

A U.S. Border Patrol helicopter, based at El Paso, attempted to respond to the accident location, however, a snowstorm had suspended their efforts. The pilot and his passenger were located by U.S. Border Patrol personnel approximately 0520 on December 13. The elevation at the accident site was estimated at 5,000 feet msl.

At 2251, the weather observation facility in El Paso, located approximately 45 nautical miles northwest of the accident site, reported the wind from 310 degrees at 11 knots, visibility 10 statute miles, few clouds at 4,000 feet, overcast ceiling at 7,500 feet, temperature 39 degrees Fahrenheit, dewpoint 25 degrees Fahrenheit, and an altimeter setting of 30.04 inches of mercury.

At 0051, the weather observation facility in El Paso reported the wind from 150 degrees at 4 knots, visibility 5 statute miles, decreasing snow, scattered clouds at 2,000 feet, broken ceiling at 3,300 feet, overcast ceiling at 6,000 feet, temperature 36 degress Fahrenheit, dewpoint 30 degrees Fahrenheit, and an altimeter setting of 30.07 inches of mercury.

Numerous attempts to obtain a completed Pilot/Operator Aircraft Accident Report (NTSB Form 6120.1/2) from the pilot and a passenger statement were unsuccessful.

## Pilot Information

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| **Certificate:** | Commercial | **Age:** | 73,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:** | No |
| **Medical Certification:** | Class 3 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim | **Last FAA Medical Exam:** | January 10, 2001 |
| **Occupational Pilot:** | UNK | **Last Flight Review or Equivalent:** | |
| **Flight Time:** | 500 hours (Total, all aircraft) | | |

## Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

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| **Aircraft Make:** | Ryan | **Registration:** | N4530K |
| **Model/Series:** | Navion A | **Aircraft Category:** | Airplane |
| **Year of Manufacture:** | | **Amateur Built:** | |
| **Airworthiness Certificate:** | Normal | **Serial Number:** | NAV-4-1530 |
| **Landing Gear Type:** | Retractable - Tricycle | **Seats:** | 4 |
| **Date/Type of Last Inspection:** | Unknown | **Certified Max Gross Wt.:** | 2850 lbs |
| **Time Since Last Inspection:** | | **Engines:** | 1 Reciprocating |
| **Airframe Total Time:** | | **Engine Manufacturer:** | Continental |
| **ELT:** | Installed, not activated | **Engine Model/Series:** | E-185-9 |
| **Registered Owner:** | Lynn R. Lane | **Rated Power:** | 205 Horsepower |
| **Operator:** | | **Operating Certificate(s) Held:** | None |

## Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

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| **Conditions at Accident Site:** | Instrument (IMC) | **Condition of Light:** | Night |
| **Observation Facility, Elevation:** | ELP,3958 ft msl | **Distance from Accident Site:** | 45 Nautical Miles |
| **Observation Time:** | 22:51 Local | **Direction from Accident Site:** | 300° |
| **Lowest Cloud Condition:** | Few / 4000 ft AGL | **Visibility** | 10 miles |
| **Lowest Ceiling:** | Overcast / 7500 ft AGL | **Visibility (RVR):** | |
| **Wind Speed/Gusts:** | 11 knots / | **Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:** | / |
| **Wind Direction:** | 310° | **Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:** | / |
| **Altimeter Setting:** | 30.04 inches Hg | **Temperature/Dew Point:** | 4°C / -4°C |
| **Precipitation and Obscuration:** | No Obscuration; No Precipitation | | |
| **Departure Point:** | Midland, TX (MAF ) | **Type of Flight Plan Filed:** | None |
| **Destination:** | EL PASO, TX (ELP ) | **Type of Clearance:** | None |
| **Departure Time:** | 19:00 Local | **Type of Airspace:** | Class G |

## Wreckage and Impact Information

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| **Crew Injuries:** | 1 Serious | **Aircraft Damage:** | Substantial |
| **Passenger Injuries:** | 1 Serious | **Aircraft Fire:** | None |
| **Ground Injuries:** | N/A | **Aircraft Explosion:** | None |
| **Total Injuries:** | 2 Serious | **Latitude, Longitude:** | 31.517778,-105.418609 |

## Administrative Information

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| **Investigator In Charge (IIC):** | Snyder, Georgia |
| **Additional Participating Persons:** | Bryan Novickis; FAA FSDO; Albuquerque, NM |
| **Original Publish Date:** | April 1, 2003 |
| **Last Revision Date:** | |
| **Investigation Class:** | Class |
| **Note:** | |
| **Investigation Docket:** | https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=53906 |