



Aviation Investigation Final Report

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 inadvertent 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 degrees 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

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

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

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

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

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

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](#).