



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Ninilchick, Alaska	Accident Number:	ANC03LA117
Date & Time:	September 16, 2003, 16:30 Local	Registration:	N6978B
Aircraft:	Piper PA-18	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The private certificated pilot was making a landing approach to a ridgeline that was oriented east/west, and was about 1,000 feet long and 30 to 100 feet wide. The pilot said he was landing toward the east. He described the wind as 10 to 15 knots from the southeast. As he approached the ground, the pilot said a burble of wind over the ridge lifted the right wing. The airplane collided with the ridge, and then nosed over. The airplane received damage to the wings, fuselage, and landing gear.

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 control of the airplane which resulted in a collision with terrain during an approach to landing on a ridgeline. Factors contributing to the accident were the pilot's inadequate evaluation of the wind conditions, and an unfavorable wind along the ridgeline.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: APPROACH - VFR PATTERN - FINAL APPROACH

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - UNFAVORABLE WIND
2. (F) WEATHER EVALUATION - INADEQUATE - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: APPROACH - VFR PATTERN - FINAL APPROACH

Findings

4. TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY

Factual Information

On September 16, 2003, about 1630 Alaska daylight time, a tundra tire-equipped Piper PA-18 airplane, N6978B, sustained substantial damage when it collided with the ground during the final landing approach to a remote ridgeline, about 15 miles east of Ninilchick, Alaska. The airplane was being operated as a visual flight rules (VFR) cross-country personal flight under Title 14, CFR Part 91, when the accident occurred. The airplane was operated by the pilot. The private certificated pilot, the sole occupant, received minor injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed. The flight originated at Merrill Field, Anchorage, Alaska, about 1530. No flight plan was filed, nor was one required.

During a telephone conversation with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC), on September 17, the pilot reported that he was making an approach to a ridgeline that was oriented east/west, and was about 1,000 feet long, and 30 to 100 feet wide. The pilot said he was landing toward the east. He described the wind as 10 to 15 knots from the southeast. As he approached the ground, the pilot said a burble of wind over the ridge lifted the right wing. The airplane collided with the ridge, and then nosed over. The airplane received damage to the wings, fuselage, and landing gear.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	46,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Front
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 Expired	Last FAA Medical Exam:	December 7, 2000
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	April 11, 2001
Flight Time:	710 hours (Total, all aircraft), 697 hours (Total, this make and model), 648 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 45 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N6978B
Model/Series:	PA-18	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	18-5100
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	April 26, 2003 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1750 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	70 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4692 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	O-320
Registered Owner:	Jerold L. Vantrease	Rated Power:	150 Horsepower
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:	Clear	Visibility	20 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	10 knots / 15 knots	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	160°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	10°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Anchorage, AK (PAMR)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Homer, AK (PAHO)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	15:30 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

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:	59.983333,-151.095001

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Erickson, Scott
Additional Participating Persons:	Michael Dolsen; FAA-AL-ANC FSDO 03; Anchorage, AK
Original Publish Date:	April 28, 2004
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=57949

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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](#).