



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Big Lake, Alaska	Accident Number:	ANC04LA033
Date & Time:	February 29, 2004, 12:00 Local	Registration:	N4492H
Aircraft:	Piper PA-15	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The private certificated pilot reported he was in cruise flight, about 800 feet agl, when the ski-equipped airplane began an uncommanded left turn. He applied right aileron control in an attempt to straighten the airplane, but the airplane's left bank became increasingly steep. He also applied right rudder to prevent the airplane from becoming inverted. He said the airplane was in a left descending spiral, and he decided to land as soon as possible. He selected an emergency landing area on a small frozen lake, but was unable to achieve his selected spot. He then selected a stand of trees, and during the landing, the airplane's wings, landing gear, and fuselage received extensive damage. The pilot said that the entire emergency event lasted about one minute. The airplane was rebuilt about 5 months before the accident, and had accrued about 2 hours of operation since the rebuild. The airplane skis were installed just prior to the accident flight. The airplane was disassembled and recovered from the accident site. The airplane fuselage and components were examined by NTSB and FAA personnel. No evidence of a flight control system malfunction was found. The ski retention cables and springs exhibited no anomalies.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: An in-flight loss of control for an undetermined reason, which resulted in a forced landing and in-flight collision with trees.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (C) REASON FOR OCCURRENCE UNDETERMINED

Occurrence #2: FORCED LANDING
Phase of Operation: DESCENT - EMERGENCY

Occurrence #3: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: EMERGENCY LANDING

Findings

2. OBJECT - TREE(S)

Factual Information

On February 29, 2004 about 1200 Alaska standard time, a ski-equipped Piper PA-15 airplane, N4492H, sustained substantial damage when it collided with trees during an emergency landing, about 18 miles west of Big Lake, 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 about 1130 from a cabin on a small frozen lake, about 5 miles west-northwest of Skwentna, Alaska, and was en route to Merrill Field, Anchorage, Alaska. 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 March 1, and during an interview on March 8, the pilot reported that after departure from his cabin, he observed areas of sleet near Beluga Mountain. He deviated east of his normal route of flight around areas of low visibility by following the Skwentna River to the Yentna River. While in cruise flight, about 1,200 feet msl, or about 800 feet agl, the pilot said the airplane began a gentle, uncommanded left turn. He applied right aileron control in an attempt to straighten the airplane, but there was no change, and the airplane's left bank became increasingly steep. The pilot applied right rudder to prevent the airplane from becoming inverted. He said the airplane was in a left descending spiral, and he decided to land as soon as possible. He selected an emergency landing area on a small frozen lake, but was unable to achieve his selected spot. He then selected a stand of trees, and during the landing, the airplane's wings, landing gear, and fuselage received extensive damage. The pilot said that the entire emergency event lasted about one minute.

The pilot indicated that he made a radio call to an over-flying aircraft to report the accident, but he was unsure of his exact position. No emergency locator transmitter (ELT) was installed in the airplane. The pilot was reported overdue by relatives on February 29, at 2034. Search personnel located the accident site on March 1, about 0830.

The closest official weather observation station to the accident location is Skwentna, which is about 26 nautical miles west of the accident site. At 1150, an Aviation Routine Weather Report (METAR) was reporting, in part: Wind, 330 degrees (true) at 4 knots; visibility, 1.5 statute miles in light snow and mist; clouds and sky condition, 1,000 feet broken, 1,800 feet overcast; temperature, 30 degrees F; dew point, 29 degrees F; altimeter, 30.27 inHg.

The pilot reported that in the area of the accident, he was flying under 2,000 foot overcast to broken sky conditions, with calm wind conditions. He said the visibility was VFR with low visibility to the south of his position, but clear toward the southeast.

The pilot indicated that the airplane was rebuilt, and had an annual inspection in September, 2003. Since the inspection, the airplane had accrued about 2 hours of operation. The pilot also said that airplane skis were installed on the airplane just prior to the accident flight. The installation date was not recorded in the airplane maintenance logs. The airplane was disassembled and recovered from the accident site by friends of the pilot. The wings, ailerons, horizontal stabilizers, elevators, and the rudder, were stored at the home of the pilot. The fuselage was recovered and stored at the pilot's parking spot at Merrill Field.

On March 19, the airplane fuselage and components were examined by NTSB and FAA personnel. No evidence of a flight control system malfunction was found. The ski retention cables and springs exhibited no anomalies.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	74, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea	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 Expired	Last FAA Medical Exam:	April 26, 2000
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	April 30, 2000
Flight Time:	4500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 4300 hours (Total, this make and model), 4325 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N4492H
Model/Series:	PA-15	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	15-280
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	September 14, 2003 100 hour	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1150 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	2 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	2810 Hrs as of last inspection	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	C-85F
Registered Owner:	Ted W. Greene	Rated Power:	85 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:	PASW,148 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	26 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	11:50 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	270°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	1.5 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 1000 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	306°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.27 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	-1°C / -2°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	N/A - None - Unknown obscuration		
Departure Point:	Skwentna, AK	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Anchorage, AK (PAMR)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	11:30 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:	61.707778,-150.516662

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Erickson, Scott
Additional Participating Persons:	Rudie Scott; FAA-AL-ANC FSDO 03; Anchorage, AK
Original Publish Date:	September 1, 2004
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=58840

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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](#).