



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Palmer, Alaska	Accident Number:	ANC04CA082
Date & Time:	July 21, 2004, 16:00 Local	Registration:	N3458N
Aircraft:	Piper J3C	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The private certificated pilot was departing an old airstrip located along a creek. The creek area is located in a canyon in mountainous terrain. The pilot said that when he began his departure, the wind was blowing from the south about 20 knots. The pilot reported that he departed toward the south and during the initial climb, about 500 feet above the ground, the airplane encountered a downdraft, and descended and collided with several trees along the creek bed. The airplane then collided with uneven terrain and received damage to the landing gear, wings, and fuselage. The pilot said that after the crash, he exited the airplane and began removing survival equipment and his global positioning system (GPS) receiver. As he walked near the front end of the airplane, he said that a gust of wind lifted the tail of the airplane and blew it over, on top of him.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's inadequate evaluation of the wind conditions which resulted in an encounter with a downdraft during the takeoff/initial climb, and subsequent collision with trees and terrain. Factors contributing to the accident were the presence of a downdraft, and mountainous terrain features.

Findings

Occurrence #1: LOSS OF CONTROL - IN FLIGHT
Phase of Operation: TAKEOFF - INITIAL CLIMB

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - DOWNDRAFT
2. (C) WEATHER EVALUATION - INADEQUATE - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

4. OBJECT - TREE(S)

Occurrence #3: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: DESCENT - UNCONTROLLED

Findings

5. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - ROUGH/UNEVEN

Factual Information

On July 21, 2004, about 1600 Alaska daylight time, a tundra tire-equipped Piper J3C airplane, N3458N, sustained substantial damage when it collided with trees and the ground during the initial climb after takeoff from a remote mountainous area, about 17 miles southeast of Palmer, Alaska. The airplane was being operated as a visual flight rules (VFR) local area 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. No flight plan was filed, nor was one required for the intended flight to Wasilla, Alaska.

At 2127, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC) was notified by FAA personnel that an emergency locator transmitter (ELT) signal was being received in the area of mountainous terrain, and search aircraft had located an overturned airplane in a canyon area. A rescue helicopter landed near the accident and picked up the pilot.

During a telephone conversation with the NTSB IIC on July 22, the pilot reported that he landed along a creek area at an old airstrip. The airstrip was oriented north/south at an elevation of about 1,600 feet msl. The pilot said that when he began his departure, the wind was blowing from the south about 20 knots. The pilot reported that he departed toward the south and during the initial climb, about 500 feet above the ground, the airplane encountered a downdraft, and descended and collided with several trees along the creek bed. The airplane then collided with uneven terrain and received damage to the landing gear, wings, and fuselage. The pilot said that after the crash, he exited the airplane and began removing survival equipment and his global positioning system (GPS) receiver. As he walked near the front end of the airplane, he said that a gust of wind lifted the tail of the airplane and blew it over, on top of him.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	65, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea	Seat Occupied:	
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	
Instructor Rating(s):		Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 3	Last FAA Medical Exam:	
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1987 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1350 hours (Total, this make and model)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N3458N
Model/Series:	J3C	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	22676
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	
Date/Type of Last Inspection:		Certified Max Gross Wt.:	
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	O-200
Registered Owner:	Ronald E. Hills	Rated Power:	
Operator:	Ronald E. Hills	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:		Visibility	
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	20 knots / 30 knots	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	180°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	Palmer, AK	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Wasilla, AK (PAWS)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	16:00 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:	
Total Injuries:	1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	61.343334,-148.823333

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Erickson, Scott

Additional Participating Persons:

Original Publish Date: September 29, 2004

Last Revision Date:

Investigation Class: [Class](#)

Note: This accident report documents the factual circumstances of this accident as described to the NTSB.

Investigation Docket: <https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=59707>

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](#).