Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	West Athens, California	**Accident Number:**	LAX07LA143
Date & Time:	April 29, 2007, 20:51 Local	**Registration:**	N3172L
Aircraft:	Beech B36TC	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot contacted approach control and requested a visual flight rules (VFR) approach to the airport. During the approach, the pilot attempted to maintain VFR, however, was unable due to low ceilings and haze. The controller then cleared the pilot for a localizer approach to the runway. During the approach, the airplane descended below the minimum descent altitude (MDA) and the controller obtained a minimum safe altitude warning alert. The controller then asked the pilot if he had the airport in sight. The pilot replied that he did not have the airport in sight and he was underneath the clouds. The pilot was cleared to change frequency, and no further communications were received from the pilot. The last radar return for the target was in the area of the accident site at a mode C reported altitude of 300 feet mean sea level (msl), or about 140 feet above ground level. The airplane collided with two static cables located adjacent to a high-tension tower about 1.5 miles east of the airport. The height of the tower was 118 feet and the terrain elevation was 164 feet. The airplane then impacted terrain and came to rest inverted. Examination of the airframe and engine revealed no anomalies. On the morning of the accident, the pilot received his complex and high performance airplane endorsements. At the time of the accident, the pilot had accumulated 237 total flight hours and 15 flight hours in the accident airplane. The accident flight was the pilot's first solo flight in the airplane. Review of the pilot's logbook disclosed that no instrument flights or approaches were recorded in preceding 6 months of logged flights.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's descent below the published minimum descent altitude for the instrument approach procedure, which resulted in a collision with wires and terrain. Contributing to the accident were the pilot's lack of recent experience in the accident airplane and in instrument

meteorological conditions, and the night lighting conditions.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: APPROACH - FAF/OUTER MARKER TO THRESHOLD (IFR)

Findings
1. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - NIGHT
2. OBJECT - WIRE,STATIC
3. (C) IFR PROCEDURE - NOT FOLLOWED - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (C) MINIMUM DESCENT ALTITUDE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
5. (F) LACK OF RECENT INSTRUMENT TIME - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On April 29, 2007, at 2051 Pacific daylight time, a Beech B36TC, N3172L, struck wires and impacted a dirt field in West Athens, California, while on an instrument approach to the Hawthorne Municipal Airport (HHR), Hawthorne, California. The owner/pilot was operating the airplane under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed, and an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan had been filed. The private pilot, the sole occupant, sustained serious injuries. The airplane sustained substantial damage. The cross-country personal flight departed Glendale Municipal Airport (GEU), Glendale, Arizona, some time after 1900 mountain standard time, with a planned destination of HHR.

A review of the Southern California Terminal Radar Approach Control (SCT) radar data and communications revealed that the pilot requested a visual flight rules (VFR) approach to HHR. SCT advised him that the last reported weather conditions at HHR was the ceiling overcast at 1,200 feet above ground level (agl). The controller asked him if he was IFR qualified, and the pilot acknowledged that he was qualified. The pilot was instructed to maintain VFR, because IFR was not currently allowed due to conflicting Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) traffic.

The controller instructed the pilot to descend to 3,000 feet, maintain VFR, and intercept the runway 25 localizer. The controller then asked the pilot if he'd like to fly the localizer approach or maintain VFR. The pilot responded, "I'd like to descend VFR...I haven't done one in uh, two months." Approximately 4 minutes later, the pilot stated that "...looking pretty bad right now, I can't see much of anything." The controller then asked if the pilot wanted to execute the localizer approach or go to another airport, and the pilot acknowledged he'll do the localizer approach.

During the approach, the radar target identified by ID tag "N3172L" was observed about 2 minutes prior to the accident to be below the minimum descent altitude (MDA) of 740 feet msl. (The MDA for the HHR runway 25 localizer approach is typically 600 feet, however, notice to airman (NOTAM) 7/4813 was in effect at the time of the accident. NOTAM 7/4813 increased the MDA to 740 feet.) The SCT controller told the pilot that she received a minimum safe altitude warning (MSAW) alert, advised the pilot of the warning, and asked him if he had the airport in sight. The pilot replied that he did not have the airport in sight and he was underneath the clouds. SCT instructed the pilot to switch to the local UNICOM frequency for HHR. No further communications were received from the pilot.

The last radar return for the target was in the area of the accident site/location at a mode C reported altitude of 300 feet.

The closest official weather observation station was HHR. An aviation routine weather report (METAR) for HHR was issued at 2053. The METAR reported the wind from 240 degrees at 5

knots; visibility 6 statute miles; sky overcast 800 feet and haze; temperature 16 degrees Celsius; dew point 13 degrees Celsius; and altimeter 30.01 inches of Mercury.

The National Transportation Safety Board investigator-in-charge (IIC) responded to the accident site. The airplane collided with the top two static cables located adjacent to a high-tension tower identified as Wil-Gra number 1079. A technician from The City of Los Angeles - Department of Water and Power, the owner of the high-tension tower, estimated that the two static cables were severed approximately 60 feet southeast of tower number 1079. The height of tower number 1079 was reported to be 118 feet agl. The location of tower number 1079, using a handheld GPS unit, was 33 degrees 55.506 minutes north latitude and 118 degrees 18.008 minutes west longitude, with an elevation recorded at 164 feet msl. The high-tension power lines were on the east side of Normandie Avenue just north of the 120th street intersection, approximately 1.5 miles east of HHR. The main wreckage came to rest inverted in a dirt field located on the west side of Normandie Avenue.

Examination of the wreckage revealed the forward fuselage, engine, and cockpit were crushed aft. The left main and nose landing gears contained abrasions consistent with wire contact. No anomalies were noted with the airframe and engine.

The pilot, age 26, held a private pilot certificate, issued December 27, 2004, with single engine land and instrument airplane ratings. According to the pilot's logbook, on the morning of the accident, the pilot received his complex and high performance airplane endorsements. At the time of the accident, the pilot had accumulated 237 total flight hours and 15 flight hours in the accident airplane. The accident flight was the pilot's first solo flight in the airplane. In preceding 6 months of logged flights, the pilot had not conducted any instrument flying procedures.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	**Age:**	26,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	**Restraint Used:**	
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	No
Medical Certification:	Class 1 With waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	August 1, 2005
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	April 1, 2007
Flight Time:	237 hours (Total, all aircraft), 15 hours (Total, this make and model), 15 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 7 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Beech	**Registration:**	N3172L
Model/Series:	B36TC	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal; Utility	**Serial Number:**	EA-485
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	**Seats:**	6
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 1, 2007 Annual	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	2900 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	1409.9 Hrs as of last inspection	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Teledyne Continental
ELT:	Installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	TSIO-520-UB
Registered Owner:	David K. Berling	**Rated Power:**	300 Horsepower
Operator:		**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	HHR,66 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	2 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	20:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	90°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		**Visibility**	6 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 800 ft AGL	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	240°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.01 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	16°C / 13°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	Light - None - Haze		
Departure Point:	Glendale, AZ (GEU)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	IFR
Destination:	HAWTHORNE, CA (HHR)	**Type of Clearance:**	IFR
Departure Time:	19:00 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	

Wreckage and Impact Information

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

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Jones, Patrick
Additional Participating Persons:	Frank J Siebold; Federal Aviation Administration; Los Angeles, CA Tim Rainey; Hawker Beechcraft Corporation; Wichita, KS Joshua Cawthra; Teledyne Continental Motors; Mobile, AL
Original Publish Date:	June 30, 2008
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=65722