



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Durham, North Carolina	Accident Number:	MIA08LA109
Date & Time:	May 30, 2008, 18:54 Local	Registration:	N3544N
Aircraft:	Piper J3C-65	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	Collision during takeoff/land	Injuries:	1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

Examination of the airplane by a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector found that the airplane had impacted the tops of trees and came to rest on a road in a steep nose down attitude, about 100-yards short of the runway. The propeller and spinner showed evidence of high speed rotation at the time of impact. All flight controls were intact. No evidence of precrash failure or malfunction of the aircraft structure, flight controls, or engine was found. The pilot stated that due to his injuries he had no "recollection of the accident and had lost all recent memories since the accident."

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 clearance from trees while approaching to land.

Findings

Not determined	(general) - Unknown/Not determined
Environmental issues	Tree(s) - Contributed to outcome

Factual Information

History of Flight

Approach-VFR pattern final	Collision during takeoff/land (Defining event)
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On May 30, 2008, at 1854 eastern daylight time, a Piper J3C, N3544N, collided with trees short of runway 14, at the Lake Ridge Aero Park Airport (8NC8) in Durham, North Carolina. The certificated private pilot, who was the owner of the airplane, received serious injuries, and the airplane sustained substantial damage. The flight was operated as a personal flight under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 91, and no flight plan was filed for the local flight. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident. The flight originated from 8NC8 about 1834.

Examination of the accident site by a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector found that the airplane had impacted the tops of trees and came to rest on a road, in a steep nose down attitude, about 100-yards short of the runway. Damage to the airplane consisted of the engine, wings, and cockpit.

The airplane was removed from the site and transported to 8NC8 for further examination. During the examination the FAA Inspector found the airplane resting on a trailer with the wings removed and unprotected from the elements. The reserve fuel tank was empty and the 12 gallon main fuel tank contained an unknown quantity of fuel. The top forward weld seam of the main fuel tank was ruptured. A fuel sample taken from the main fuel tank contained evidence of water and other contaminants. Heavy rains were reported on the night before the fuel samples were taken. Rotational damage was noted on the propeller spinner and the wooden propeller blades were shattered. Continuity of the flight control systems was confirmed. No evidence of precrash failure or malfunction of the aircraft structure, flight controls, or engine was found.

Several attempts by the FAA inspector to interview the pilot were unsuccessful due to the extent of his injuries. On February 9, 2009, the pilot was interviewed via telephone by the National Transportation Safety Board investigator. The pilot stated during the interview that due to his injuries he had no "recollection of the accident and had lost all recent memories since the accident."

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	56, 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 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	May 17, 2006
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1000 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N3544N
Model/Series:	J3C-65	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Utility	Serial Number:	22778
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	March 1, 2008 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1220 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	40.6 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	2719 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Continental
ELT:	Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	A65-8
Registered Owner:	Richard R. Fuller	Rated Power:	65
Operator:	Richard R. Fuller	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Dusk
Observation Facility, Elevation:	RDU,435 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	7 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	18:51 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	60°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 4500 ft AGL	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	11 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	210°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.05 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	28°C / 17°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Durham, NC (8NC8)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Durham, NC (8NC8)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	18:34 Local	Type of Airspace:	

Airport Information

Airport:	Lake Ridge Aero Park 8NC8	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:	309 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	Full stop;Straight-in

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	36.05611,-78.78332

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wilson, Ralph
Additional Participating Persons:	Richard Kiang; FAA/FSDO; Greensboro, NC
Original Publish Date:	May 12, 2009
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=68131

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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](#).