



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Chico, California	Accident Number:	WPR10CA106
Date & Time:	January 9, 2010, 08:45 Local	Registration:	N3160N
Aircraft:	Cessna 140	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	VFR encounter with IMC	Injuries:	2 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

About an hour prior to the flight the pilot checked the surface observation report for the nearest airport, which was about 5 miles to the northeast. He stated that it indicated an indefinite ceiling of 200 feet and visibility of 3 miles with fog and ground fog. An aviation routine weather report (METAR) for the same airport was issued at the approximate time of the accident and reported, in part, winds from 130 degrees at 5 knots, visibility of 1 3/4 miles with mist, and skies with a 200-foot indefinite ceiling. The pilot stated that the visibility was good on the ground. As the airplane took off and climbed, he realized that the visibility went to zero. He turned around, attempting to get back to the airport, and he descended to get low enough under the fog to see the airport. There were trees on the east side of the airport, and he tried to stay above them while looking for the runway. He was on left downwind for runway 14 and turning base when the right wing hit a branch and the airplane subsequently impacted the ground. The right wing and empennage sustained substantial damage. The pilot reported no mechanical problems with the airplane or engine.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's inadequate weather evaluation and failure to maintain clearance from trees while maneuvering in low visibility conditions.

Findings

Personnel issues	Weather planning - Pilot
Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot
Environmental issues	Low visibility - Decision related to condition
Environmental issues	Tree(s) - Response/compensation

Factual Information

History of Flight

Prior to flight	Preflight or dispatch event
Initial climb	VFR encounter with IMC (Defining event)
Approach-VFR pattern base	Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT)

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	25, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Without waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	December 11, 2009
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	March 13, 2009
Flight Time:	425 hours (Total, all aircraft), 201 hours (Total, this make and model), 332 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 40 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 10 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	Registration:	N3160N
Model/Series:	140	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	13418
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	August 7, 2009 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	30 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	2139 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Teledyne Continental Motors
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	C85
Registered Owner:	Samuel D McGowan	Rated Power:	85 Horsepower
Operator:	Samuel D McGowan	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument (IMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KCIC,240 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	4 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	08:47 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	345°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	2 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Indefinite (V V) / 200 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	5 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	130°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.25 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:	N/A - None - Mist		
Departure Point:	Chico, CA (O23)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Willows, CA (WLW)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	08:40 Local	Type of Airspace:	

Airport Information

Airport:	Ranchaero 023	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:		Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	Full stop

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	39.716667,-121.866668(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Plagens, Howard
Additional Participating Persons:	Norbert Schuchbauer; Federal Aviation Administration FSDO; Sacramento, CA
Original Publish Date:	March 23, 2010
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=75253

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](#).