Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Wallops Island, Virginia	**Accident Number:**	ERA14LA415
Date & Time:	August 30, 2014, 15:17 Local	**Registration:**	N930RH
Aircraft:	Cirrus SR22	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Miscellaneous/other	**Injuries:**	1 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The airline transport pilot was conducting a cross-country personal flight. Radar data indicated that the airplane took off from the departure airport and then climbed to an altitude of 21,000 ft mean sea level before leveling off and maintaining that altitude for about an hour. Subsequently, the pilot contacted an air route traffic control center and requested and received several descent clearances over the course of about 45 minutes. The pilot's communications over the next 10 minutes were consistent with impairment. During this time, he reported that he was having some difficulties but did not state the nature of the problem. Near the end of the communications, the air traffic controller advised the pilot to descend, and the pilot replied, "hang on a second"; this was the last communication received from the pilot.

The airplane subsequently traveled into restricted airspace near Washington, D.C., and was intercepted by two military aircraft. The intercept pilots confirmed that the accident pilot was unconscious, and attempts to contact him were unsuccessful. The airplane continued on its course off the coast of Virginia and then descended into the ocean. After impact, the airplane sank, and it was not recovered.

The pilot's body was also not recovered; thus, an autopsy and toxicology testing were not conducted. A review of the pilot's medical history revealed no evidence that he had any medical conditions or used any medications that would have impaired his ability to control the airplane. However, it is possible that the pilot suffered impairment, as evidenced by his communications with air traffic controllers, and subsequent incapacitation from a stroke, cardiovascular event, hypoxic event, carbon monoxide exposure, or neurologic decompression sickness.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot's impairment and subsequent incapacitation for reasons that could not be determined because the pilot and airplane were not recovered.

Findings

Personnel issues	Other loss of consciousness - Pilot
Not determined	(general) - Unknown/Not determined

Factual Information

History of Flight

Enroute-cruise	Miscellaneous/other (Defining event)
Uncontrolled descent	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)

On August 30, 2014, at 1517 eastern daylight time, a Cirrus SR22T, N930RH, registered to and operated by a private individual, impacted the Atlantic Ocean about 35 miles east of Wallops Island, Virginia, after air traffic controllers lost contact with the pilot, who was the sole occupant. The airline transport pilot was presumed fatally injured and the airplane sustained substantial damage. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the personal flight conducted under the provisions Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91. The flight, operating under instrument flight rules, originated from Waukesha County Airport (UES), Waukesha, Wisconsin, at 1043 central daylight time, and was destined for Manassas Regional Airport (KHEF), Manassas, Virginia.

A review of radar data and voice transcriptions revealed that the airplane took off from the departure airport and climbed to an altitude of 21,000 feet mean sea level (msl) before leveling off. The airplane maintained this altitude for about one hour. At 1200, the pilot contacted air route traffic control center (ARTCC) and requested to descend to 17,000 feet At 1220, the pilot contacted ATC and again requested to descend to 15,000 feet, and was cleared to descend and maintain 15,000 ft. At 1228:20 the pilot contacted ATC and requested to descend to 13,000 ft., ATC advised the pilot to standby and he would get him lower shortly. At 1229:19, ATC cleared the pilot to descend and maintain 13,000 ft., and the pilot acknowledged. At 1249, the pilot contacted ATC and requested to go down to an unspecified altitude. The air traffic controller asked the pilot what altitude did he want to descend to, but for the next 2 minutes the pilot just keyed the mike with no answer. At 1251:12, the pilot advised ATC that he was having some difficulties, and was cleared to descend and maintain 9,000 feet. At 1252:35, the pilot again advised that he had a problem and ATC advised him to descend. The pilot responded that he'll try and repeated his call sign. At 1256:32, the controller asked the pilot if he had oxygen onboard in which he responded "I do", which was followed by the microphone being keyed with no speech. The air traffic controller asked the pilot if he was wearing his mask and did he have the oxygen working and the pilot responded "yes, affirmative sir." He then asked the pilot to turn his oxygen to 100 percent, and the pilot replied that "he was showing 100 percent at that time. Finally, the air traffic controller advised the pilot to descend and the pilot told the controller to "hang on a second," which was the last transmission made by the pilot.

About 1340, the airplane traveled into restricted airspace near Washington, D.C., and remained about 13,000 ft., before being intercepted by two North American Aerospace Defense Command intercept aircraft. The intercept pilots indicated that the pilot was unconscious, and attempts to contact him were unsuccessful. The intercept aircraft continued to follow the airplane until it impacted the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Virginia.

The pilot, age 67, held an airline transport pilot certificate with ratings for airplane single engine land and multi-engine land. His most recent FAA second class was issued August 7, 2014. The pilot reported

3,360 total hours of flight experience on that date. The pilot's logbook was not available for review; however a review of the pilot's Cirrus Training Profile May 21, 2014 revealed the pilot reported 3,330 total hours of flight experience of which 3,216 hours were as pilot in command and 2,780 hours were in single engine airplanes. The pilot declared approximately 500 hours of experience with both the Avidyne Entegra Avionics and Garmin GNS 430/530 GPS systems.

The pilot had accrued approximately 50 total hours of flight experience in the accident airplane make and model.

The pilot's wife was asked to provide a statement describing the pilot's routine during the 72 hours prior to the accident flight. She stated that nothing out of the ordinary had occurred and that the pilot had a full nights rest the night before the flight. She stated that no traumatic events or incidents had occurred that would have resulted in any stress.

The four-seat, low-wing airplane, serial number 0813, was manufactured in 2014. It was powered by a Continental model TSIO-550 series engine equipped with Hartzell PHC-J3Y1F-1N/N7605B propeller. Review of the factory logbook records showed that a fixed oxygen system was installed in accordance with STC SA01708SE, on June 14, 2014. The production test flight was completed on July 7, 2014, and an Airworthiness Certificate was issued on July 8, 2014.

The recorded weather at the Wallops Flight Facility (WAL), Wallops Island, Virginia, located approximately 59 miles from the accident site, at an elevation of 40.2 feet, at 1554, included wind from 150 degrees at 10 knots, 10 statute miles visibility, a scattered ceiling at 4,800 feet above ground level (agl), temperature of 27 degrees C, dew point temperature of 19 degrees C, and an altimeter setting of 30.20 inches of mercury.

According to the Coast Guard, they were launched on a report of a downed airplane approximately 50 miles off the shore of Wallops Island, Virginia. When they arrived on scene they noted that a fishing vessel was present at the impact location. They boarded the vessel and the occupants reported the incident from their point of view. They stated to the Coast Guard officer that they heard a loud "fighter jet" and began to scan the sky. Once they had eyes on the jet, they watched as the jet was flying in circles around a small airplane that was flying low towards the water. The witness said that the airplane got really low to the water and eventually impacted the water. He went on to say that his boat was the first to arrive on scene, and upon arrival, the tail of the airplane was still above the water. They attempted to put "lines on"; but within seconds the airplane was completely submerged. He said that they looked in the cabin and did not see any signs of a struggle. They picked up the floating debris and waited to see if more debris or fuel sheen would rise up, they found neither.

Examination of the floating debris revealed that it was a main landing gear strut with the wheel attached and the engine cowling. The rest of the airplane remained submerged and was not recovered.

The pilot's body was not recovered so neither autopsy nor toxicological testing were performed.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline transport; Commercial	**Age:**	67,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	**Restraint Used:**	3-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	**Second Pilot Present:**	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	No
Medical Certification:	Class 3 With waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	August 7, 2014
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 3330 hours (Total, all aircraft), 50 hours (Total, this make and model), 3216 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cirrus	**Registration:**	N930RH
Model/Series:	SR22 T	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	2014	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	0813
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	**Seats:**	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	July 8, 2014	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	3600 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		**Engine Manufacturer:**	Continental Motors Inc.
ELT:	C126 installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	TSIO-550-K
Registered Owner:	Ronald M. Hutchinson	**Rated Power:**	315 Horsepower
Operator:	Ronald M. Hutchinson	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	WAL,40 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	59 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	15:54 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	112°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 4800 ft AGL	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	10 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	150°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.2 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	27°C / 19°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Waukesha, WI (UES)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	IFR
Destination:	Manassas, VA (HEF)	**Type of Clearance:**	IFR
Departure Time:	10:43 Local	**Type of Airspace:**	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal	**Latitude, Longitude:**	37.929679,-75.490348(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Alleyne, Eric
Additional Participating Persons:	Matthew Rigsby; FAA; Washington, DC Christopher Lang; Continental Motors; Mobile, AL Brannen D Mayer; Cirrus Aircraft; Duluth, MN
Original Publish Date:	April 4, 2016
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=89990