



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	NOME, AK	Accident Number:	ANC96LA027
Date & Time:	03/02/1996, 1330 AST	Registration:	N8374T
Aircraft:	PIPER PA-32-301	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air Taxi & Commuter - Scheduled		

Analysis

The pilot and passenger departed a remote airstrip on a commuter flight in marginal VFR conditions. The pilot reported that he was crossing low hills about 1,000 feet AGL and encountered turbulence and a possible loss of engine power. The engine did not run rough but the airplane continued to descend until impact. The airplane struck a snow covered hill about 15 miles west of the destination airport. The passenger reported that the majority of the flight was conducted with limited downward visibility. Just prior to impact, the passenger reported white-out conditions, and no terrain was visible. The airplane received damage to the landing gear, fuselage, and wings. The pilot and passenger were rescued about 4 hours after the accident. The destination airport reported weather conditions that included a 1,300 feet overcast sky and a visibility of 10 miles in light snow. The operator reported no engine malfunction.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's continued VFR flight into instrument meteorological conditions and his failure to maintain adequate altitude/clearance from terrain. Low ceilings and snow covered terrain were factors in the accident.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH WEATHER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - LOW CEILING
2. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - CONTINUED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings

3. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - SNOW COVERED
4. (C) ALTITUDE/CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On March 2, 1996, about 1330 Alaska standard time, a wheel equipped Piper PA-32-301, N8374T, collided with terrain about 15 miles west of Nome, Alaska. The airplane was being operated as a visual flight rules (VFR) scheduled domestic commuter flight under Title 14 CFR Part 135 when the accident occurred. The airplane, operated as flight number 3321 by Grant Aviation Inc., Emmonak, Alaska, sustained substantial damage. The certificated commercial pilot was not injured. The sole passenger received minor injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed. VFR company flight following procedures were in effect. The flight originated from Teller, Alaska, at 1300.

On March 2, 1996, about 2110, in a telephone interview with the National Transportation Safety Board, Investigator-in-Charge (IIC), the pilot reported that after departure from Teller, he encountered moderate turbulence and followed the coast in a southeastern direction until turning eastbound toward Nome. He climbed to 2,500 feet mean sea level (MSL) to cross an area of low hills located to the west of Nome. The hills varied from 1,000 to 1,500 feet msl. The pilot indicated that there were strong winds from the northeast. As he was crossing the hills, the airplane began losing altitude.

The pilot indicated that he thought the engine was losing power and pushed the throttle, propeller control, and mixture control full forward. The engine did not quit, run rough or sputter. The pilot reported that he activated the engine boost pump but did not pull the alternate air source. The airplane continued to lose altitude and the pilot slowed to about 75 knots before touching down on snow covered terrain. The airplane received damage to the landing gear, fuselage, and wings. The operator submitted a pilot/operator report (NTSB form 6120.1/2) and indicated on the form that the airplane did not experience a mechanical malfunction.

On March 8, 1996, about 0918, in a telephone interview with the passenger, he reported to the IIC that he boarded the airplane in Brevig Mission, Alaska, after missing an earlier flight. The flight proceeded to Teller without incident. After departure from Teller, the flight proceeded west and then south over sea ice. The passenger described the weather as dense, white-out conditions with limited downward visibility. He recalled occasionally seeing sea ice and brush and also observed Sledge Island (8 miles southwest of the accident site). The forward visibility was described as... "dirty, cloudy, whiteness."

The passenger indicated that his first indication that the airplane had crashed was when the airplane suddenly stopped and he sustained a cut on his forehead. He recalled the pilot commenting... "If only he'd been 10 feet higher...we'd have made it and we'd be drinking coffee in Nome now." The pilot and passenger were rescued by search personnel from Nome about 1700.

At 1254, the weather conditions at Nome were reported, in part: Sky conditions and ceiling, measured 1,300 feet broken, 2,900 feet overcast; visibility, 10 miles in light snow; temperature, 32 degrees F; dew point, 29 degrees F; wind, 120 degrees at 12 knots; altimeter, 30.38 inHg.

At 1351, the weather conditions at Nome were reported, in part: Sky conditions and ceiling, measured 1,300 feet broken, 1,800 feet broken, 3,200 feet broken, 4,000 feet overcast; visibility, 10 miles; temperature, 33 degrees F; dew point, 29 degrees F; wind, 110 degrees at 12 knots; altimeter, 30.39 inHg; remarks, snow showers, west through northwest.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	29, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Multi-engine Land; Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	Seatbelt, Shoulder harness
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	08/25/1995
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1572 hours (Total, all aircraft), 15 hours (Total, this make and model), 253 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	PIPER	Registration:	N8374T
Model/Series:	PA-32-301 PA-32-301	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	32-8106058
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	7
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	02/09/1996, 100 Hour	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	3600 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	62 Hours	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	8077 Hours	Engine Manufacturer:	LYCOMING
ELT:	Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	IO-540-K1GS
Registered Owner:	GRANT AVIATION INC.	Rated Power:	300 hp
Operator:	GRANT AVIATION INC.	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Commuter Air Carrier (135)
Operator Does Business As:		Operator Designator Code:	ENHA

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	OME, 37 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	15 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	1254 AST	Direction from Accident Site:	90°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown / 0 ft agl	Visibility	10 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 1300 ft agl	Visibility (RVR):	0 ft
Wind Speed/Gusts:	12 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	120°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	0°C / -2°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	TELLER, AK (AK54)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Destination:	, AK (OME)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	1300 AST	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

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

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	SCOTT R ERICKSON	Report Date:	05/09/1996
Additional Participating Persons:	HUGH KEITH; FAIRBANKS, AK		
Publish Date:			
Investigation Docket:	NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at pubinquiry@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .		

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