



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	PITTSVILLE, MD	Accident Number:	NYC98FA041
Date & Time:	12/11/1997, 2235 EST	Registration:	N3448W
Aircraft:	Piper PA-32-260	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	3 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The noninstrument-rated pilot and two passengers departed from an unlighted grass strip in night instrument meteorological conditions (IMC). A witness, who observed the takeoff, stated the ground visibility was 1,200 feet. A witness, who lived near the accident site, stated that he was in bed when he was awakened by the sound of an airplane approaching. He said the engine noise sounded constant, and after the airplane passed over his house, he heard a 'thud.' The main wreckage of the airplane came to rest in a wooded area, about 4.3 miles from the departure airport. Examination of the wreckage did not disclose any preimpact malfunction. Toxicology tests of the pilot showed he had a blood/alcohol level of 102 mg/dl (0.102%) and a urine/alcohol level of 221 mg/dl (0.221%). Before flight, the pilot had been observed ingesting alcoholic beverages.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's impairment of judgment and performance due to alcohol, his resultant improper planning/decision and flight in instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), and his failure to maintain sufficient altitude while flying over wooded terrain. Factors relating to the accident were: darkness, and the adverse weather conditions.

Findings

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

Findings

1. (C) PLANNING/DECISION - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) IMPAIRMENT(ALCOHOL) - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - DARK NIGHT
4. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - LOW CEILING
5. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - FOG
6. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - PERFORMED - PILOT IN COMMAND

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

Findings

7. (C) PROPER ALTITUDE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

HISTORY OF FLIGHT

On December 11, 1997, about 2235 eastern standard time, a Piper PA32-260, N3448W, was destroyed when it struck trees, and impacted terrain in Pittsville, Maryland. The certificated non-instrument rated private pilot and two passengers were fatally injured. Night instrument meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan had been filed for the local flight which departed the Davis Airstrip Airport, at 2209. The personal flight was conducted under 14 CFR Part 91.

According to a Maryland State Police report, witnesses observed the pilot enter a local bar between 1545, and 1600, where he was served five beers before leaving at 1830. The pilot was then observed at another bar where he was served one beer before leaving, at 1900. The bartender at the second bar stated the pilot appeared drunk. At 2000, the pilot was again observed at the first bar where he was served two mixed drinks. A witness at the bar stated the pilot was with two other men, and shortly after 2100, the three men left the bar and stated they were going flying.

In a telephone interview, a witness who lived near the runway stated he heard a "fluttering" noise about 2145. When the noise became louder, he went to his door and observed the accident airplane with its lights on, back taxiing on runway 36, an unlighted turf runway. He observed the airplane begin its takeoff roll and estimated the ground visibility was about 1,200 feet. He stated that the engine sounded "loud and smooth." He noted the time was 2209. Shortly thereafter, he heard the airplane above his house. Again, he described the engine noise as "loud and smooth."

In a telephone interview, a witness who lived near the accident site stated he was in bed when he was awakened by the sound of an airplane approaching. He said the engine noise sounded constant, and after the airplane passed over his house, he heard a "thud." He noted the time was 2235.

The accident occurred during the hours of darkness, about 38 degrees, 22 minutes north latitude, and 75 degrees 24 minutes west longitude.

METEOROLOGICAL INFORMATION

There was no record of the pilot obtaining a preflight weather briefing.

Weather observations taken at an airport about 5 miles west from the accident site reported:

At 2150, Visibility 2 statute miles with mist; Ceiling 400 feet overcast; Temperature 43 degrees F; Dew point 41 degrees F.

At 2250, Visibility 1 1/2 statute miles with mist; Ceiling 400 feet overcast; Temperature 43 degrees F; Dew point 41 degrees F.

PILOT INFORMATION

The pilot held a Private Pilot Certificate with a rating for airplane single engine land. He was not instrument rated.

His most recent Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Third Class Medical Certificate

was issued on April 4, 1997.

The pilot's current log book was not recovered. However, the pilot's family said the pilot flew "regularly." The pilot's previous log book revealed the pilot had flown 251 hours as of February 13, 1994. The pilot reported 600 hours of total flight experience on his last application for a Third Class Medical Certificate.

WRECKAGE INFORMATION

The airplane wreckage was examined at the accident scene on December 12 and 13, 1997. The examination revealed that all major components of the airplane were accounted for at the scene. The main wreckage of the airplane came to rest about 4.3 miles from the departure airport, in a wooded area. The left wing was suspended about 75 feet in a tree that was located about 480 feet southeast of the main wreckage. The debris path was oriented on a magnetic course of 270 degrees. Also located in the debris path was the left outboard portion of the horizontal stabilator, the left main landing gear, the bottom portion of the tail cone and several pieces of fiberglass.

The main fuselage came to rest inverted at about a 45 degree angle. The right wing was partially separated and had been compressed aft. The inboard portion of the left horizontal stabilator had been crushed aft, while the right horizontal stabilator remained attached and was not damaged. The rudder and vertical stabilizer sustained minor damage.

The engine was examined at the accident scene. The number 1, 3, and 5 cylinder spark plugs were found to be of the massive electrode type and appeared gray in color. The right magneto was removed and rotated. It produced spark on all towers. The position of the engine precluded a check of the number 2, 4, and 6 cylinder spark plugs, and the left magneto. The main oil screen was removed and found to be absent of debris.

Both fuel tanks were compromised during the accident. The carburetor was removed and fuel was observed in the carburetor bowl. **MEDICAL AND PATHOLOGICAL INFORMATION**

An autopsy was performed on the pilot on December 13, 1997, by Dr. John T. Bulkeley of the Wimcomico County Medical Examiners Office.

The toxicological testing report from the FAA Toxicology Accident Research Laboratory, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was negative for drugs and positive for alcohol for the pilot. The report stated:

102.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Ethanol detected in Blood. 151.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Ethanol detected in Brain Fluid. 165.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Ethanol detected in Muscle Fluid. 221.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Ethanol detected in Urine. 12.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Acetaldehyde detected in Muscle Fluid. 68.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Acetaldehyde detected in Blood. 4.000>>>>(mg/dl, mg/hg) Acetaldehyde detected in Urine.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Part of Federal Aviation Regulation, Part 91.17 "Alcohol or drugs" stated:

"(a) No person may act or attempt to act as a crewmember of a civil aircraft- 1. Within 8 hours after the consumption of any alcoholic beverage; 2. While under the influence of alcohol; 3. While using any drug that affects the person's faculties in any way contrary to safety; or 4.

While having .04 percent by weight or more alcohol in the blood."

The wreckage was released on December 13, 1998 to Mr. Bobby White, a representative from the pilot's family.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	37, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	Seatbelt, Shoulder harness
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 3 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	04/04/1997
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	600 hours (Total, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N3448W
Model/Series:	PA-32-260 PA-32-260	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	32-315
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	6
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	06/10/1997, Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	3400 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	46 Hours	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	3249 Hours	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	O-540-E4B5
Registered Owner:	RAYMOND F. WHITE	Rated Power:	260 hp
Operator:	RAYMOND F. WHITE	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions	Condition of Light:	Night/Dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	SBY, 52 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	5 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	2250 EST	Direction from Accident Site:	260°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown / 0 ft agl	Visibility	0 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 400 ft agl	Visibility (RVR):	0 ft
Wind Speed/Gusts:	Calm /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	6° C / 5° C
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	, MD (6MD8)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	2209 EST	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	2 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	3 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	LUKE SCHIADA	Report Date:	10/30/1998
Additional Participating Persons:	LINDA M NEVIN; BALTIMORE, MD		
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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The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).