National Transportation Safety Board
Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	SAN JOSE, CA	**Accident Number:**	LAX99LA002
Date & Time:	10/01/1998, 2013 PDT	**Registration:**	N957AF
Aircraft:	Cessna 152	**Aircraft Damage:**	Destroyed
Defining Event:		**Injuries:**	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The aircraft collided with mountainous terrain about 3,000 feet msl while descending from 4,500 feet toward the destination airport on a dark night. Weather reports showed consistent overcast cloud bases of 2,800 feet in the immediate area of the accident site. A review of the ATC tape revealed that the pilot did not clearly state his intentions when speaking with air traffic control. ATC had to ask him several times what he said and told him that they did not understand him. Interviews conducted with ATC controllers revealed that they were unsure exactly what the pilot intentions were other than to land at Reed Hillview airport. Weather in the area was deteriorating and ATC was in the process of sequencing traffic for IFR approaches into nearby airports. At one point ATC asked the pilot if he was going to find a hole and descend. The pilot stated affirmative. When radio and radar contact was lost, the controller asked a police helicopter flying near the last observed position to search for the airplane that had disappeared off the radar. The helicopter pilot told the controller that he was unable to proceed to the location due to clouds obscuring the ridges. The pilot stated he could hear a helicopter above him but could not see it because of poor visibility.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: Continued VFR flight by the pilot into instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) at night over mountainous terrain. The pilot's use of unclear language when stating his intentions to air traffic control was a factor.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: CRUISE

Findings
1. TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY
2. WEATHER CONDITION - CLOUDS
3. LIGHT CONDITION - DARK NIGHT
4. (C) IN-FLIGHT PLANNING/DECISION - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND
5. (F) INFORMATION UNCLEAR(LANGUAGE) - PILOT IN COMMAND
6. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - INTENTIONAL - PILOT IN COMMAND
7. SELF-INDUCED PRESSURE - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

On October 1, 1998, at 2013 hours Pacific daylight time, a Cessna 152, N957AF, collided with mountainous terrain approximately 4.8 miles north of Reed Hillview Airport, San Jose, California. The airplane was destroyed and the private pilot, the sole occupant, sustained minor injuries. The pilot reported the accident at 0800 the following morning. Instrument meteorological conditions existed at the at the accident site at the time of the accident. The aircraft was operated by Wings International of San Jose and rented by the pilot for the cross-country personal flight under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91 of the Federal Aviation Regulations.

The 1950 official aviation surface observations at the San Jose International Airport (8 miles west of the accident site) and the Reid-Hillview airport included overcast sky conditions at 2,800 feet. The Santa Clara Sheriff's Office reported that there was a heavy overcast with a 1,500-foot base the next morning when they located the wreckage. The accident site was on the side of a hill at the 3,000-foot elevation.

The pilot was initially interviewed over the telephone by Safety Board investigators shortly after he had reached a nearby farm house located near the crash site. The pilot told investigators that he hit a downdraft, which forced him into the ground. He stated that he had power and full fuel tanks. He said that there was no problem with the engine. He stated that he had departed San Jose airport about 1900, performed a touch-and-go at Oakdale Airport, and was returning to Reed HillView Airport when the accident occurred.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) interviewed the pilot 4 days after the accident. According to the FAA Aviation Safety Inspector who conducted the interview, the pilot said he was in the vicinity of the Sunol Pass, heading 190 degrees at 4,500 feet, when Bay Tracon "told" him he should turn left to 180 degrees and that he could begin his descent from 4,500 feet. The pilot said he could see the lights on the ground in front of him, and that there were a "few" clouds between him and the ground. He stated he never went into the clouds, and would have maneuvered around the clouds in his descent, had he deemed it necessary to maintain visual flight rules (VFR). He said he was not completely comfortable with Bay Tracon's 180-degree heading, in that he thought the heading would take him toward the mountains rather than away, but he complied with the their instruction.

The pilot said he began his descent and shortly thereafter entered the "downdraft." He said he felt the downdraft and saw on the vertical speed indicator first a 400-feet-per-minute descent, and then later a 700-feet-per-minute descent. He said that he then saw the ground approaching, applied full power, and pitched the nose up in an attempt to avoid the terrain. He said the airplane impacted the terrain, rolled left on the ground, and slid backwards and down the mountain for a distance.

He said that the airplane came to rest inverted, the wings supported by the sides of the narrow ravine. He was able to force the door open and climb out. He then began walking for help. At one point, he said he could hear a helicopter above him, but that he could not see it "because of the poor visibility." The pilot eventually came to a house and called "911" for help.

Safety Board investigators reviewed personnel statements received from the FAA Bay Terminal Radar Approach controllers who were working the accident aircraft. The controller who was talking with the pilot asked him what his intentions were and he responded that he "intended

to land at Reid Hillview Airport (RHV)." The controller, in his written statement, replied "I then asked him if he was going to find a hole for his descent," and he responded with "affirmative."

Safety Board investigators listened to a working copy of the ATC tapes with the air traffic controller working the AR-2 position from 0242 to 0250 hours UTC, and the air traffic controller working the DR-3 position from 0249 to 0300 hours UTC.

The following is a synopsis of the air traffic control tape. During discussions with the accident aircraft, other traffic including 14 CFR Part 121 scheduled airlines were being sequenced into the Bay area for IFR approaches. A complete copy of the ATC tape is appended to this report.

ATC controller working position AR-2: 957AAF, altimeter 30.03, Quebec current at Reed Hillview Airport.

ATC: 7AF radar service terminated.

Pilot of 7AF: unintelligible

ATC: Didn't understand, say that again.

Pilot of 7AF: unintelligible

ATC: Still didn't understand, say that again.

ATC: 7AF, you're below MVA (minimum vectoring altitude,) suggest a heading of about 200 degrees.

ATC: Below MVA, Sir, suggest heading of 200 degrees for Reed Hill View. Radar service terminated, squawk 1200. Frequency change approved, good day.

7AF: Can get Bay Approach on 121.21?

ATC: 7AF stand by, remain this frequency.

ATC: 7AF, contact approach 121.3.

7AF: 7AF, 121.3?

ATC interphone: 7AF, I don't know what he wants...he wanted radar vectors, he was down at 4,300 feet. Response, Ok, I'll take care of him

7AF: Cessna 7AF with you at 4,500.

ATC position DR-3: Cessna 957AF, roger. What are your intentions now?

7AF: going to land at Reed Hill View Airport.

ATC: Ok, are you going to find a hole and descend?

7AF: Roger.

ATC: 7AF, radar contact lost. What is your altitude now?

ATC: Cessna 957AF, radar contact lost. Say your altitude.

ATC interphone: Reed Hill View (RHV), Saratoga.

RHV: Reed Hill View

ATC interphone: Are you talking to 957AF?

RHV: Negative, I'm not talking to anybody.

ATC: Let me know when you do, ok?

RHV: 957AF?

ATC: Yeah, he's about 5 north of you. I lost him on radar and he's trying to descend down through a hole or something...

RHV: Oh God! I don't see any holes! Ok, I'll keep my eye out for him and call you as soon as I hear anything.

ATC: Ok then.

ATC: 957AF, Bay

ATC: 957AF, Bay Approach

According to the written statements provided by the controllers who were working the accident airplane, one controller said the controller who was talking with the pilot of the accident airplane notified him that radar and radio contact had been lost. This controller asked a police helicopter flying near the last observed position to search for the airplane that had disappeared off the radar. The helicopter pilot told the controller that he was unable to proceed to the location because of weather.

The FAA inspector informed Safety Board investigators that the pilot had been preparing for his commercial pilot certificate at the time of the accident. The pilot "insisted" on taking his checkride in the days immediately following the accident. The pilot passed the oral portion of the checkride, but "dismally" failed the flying portion of the examination. The FAA also stated that the pilot was scheduled to depart from the United States en route to his home country within days of the crash.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	**Age:**	22, 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:**	No
Medical Certification:	Class 2 Valid Medical--no waivers/lim.	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	05/01/1998
Occupational Pilot:		**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	
Flight Time:	262 hours (Total, all aircraft), 111 hours (Total, this make and model), 166 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 140 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 3 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	**Registration:**	N957AF
Model/Series:	152 152	**Aircraft Category:**	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		**Amateur Built:**	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	15279580
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	**Seats:**	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	100 Hour	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	1650 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		**Engines:**	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		**Engine Manufacturer:**	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, not activated	**Engine Model/Series:**	O-235-L2C
Registered Owner:	DARYL ALAN VORNE	**Rated Power:**	118 hp
Operator:	INTERWINGS CORPORATION	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	None
Operator Does Business As:	WINGS INTERNATIONAL	**Operator Designator Code:**	

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions	**Condition of Light:**	Night/Dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	SJC, 58 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	6 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	1953 PDT	**Direction from Accident Site:**	90°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown / 0 ft agl	**Visibility**	10 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 2800 ft agl	**Visibility (RVR):**	0 ft
Wind Speed/Gusts:	10 knots /	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	/
Wind Direction:	340°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	/
Altimeter Setting:	30 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	15°C / 12°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	OAKDALE, CA (027)	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	None
Destination:	REED HILL VIEW, CA (RHV)	**Type of Clearance:**	VFR on top
Departure Time:	1930 PDT	**Type of Airspace:**	Class C

Wreckage and Impact Information

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

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	DEBORAH L CHILDRESS	**Report Date:**	04/20/2000
Additional Participating Persons:	BILL DIME; SAN JOSE, CA		
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 pubinq@ntsb.gov, or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.ntsb.gov/pubdms/.		