



# National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

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<b>Location:</b>	LA JUNTA, CO	<b>Accident Number:</b>	DEN00LA002
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	10/01/1999, 2006 MDT	<b>Registration:</b>	N6406P
<b>Aircraft:</b>	Piper PA-24-250	<b>Aircraft Damage:</b>	Substantial
<b>Defining Event:</b>		<b>Injuries:</b>	1 Serious, 1 Minor
<b>Flight Conducted Under:</b>	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

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## Analysis

The pilot and pilot-certificated passenger were on a return cross-country flight that originated from Washington, D.C., with a final destination of Lancaster, California. They departed Missouri earlier in the day, and had planned a stop in Colorado. While approaching Colorado's La Junta airport for landing, the aircraft encountered wind shifts, downdrafts and turbulent weather conditions. As the pilot turned onto final approach during one of several unsuccessful landing attempts, the aircraft impacted the ground at an elevation of 4,500 feet msl in dark night conditions.

## Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot-in-command's failure to maintain a proper altitude during final approach to landing, and his misjudgment of altitude clearances. Factors were the sudden windshift, downdraft and turbulent weather conditions, the dark night, and the pilot's lack of familiarity with the geographic area.

## Findings

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Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT ENCOUNTER WITH WEATHER

Phase of Operation: APPROACH - VFR PATTERN - FINAL APPROACH

### Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - SUDDEN WINDSHIFT
2. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - DOWNDRAFT
3. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - TURBULENCE

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Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: APPROACH - VFR PATTERN - FINAL APPROACH

### Findings

4. TERRAIN CONDITION - GRASS
5. PROPER ALTITUDE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
6. LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH GEOGRAPHIC AREA - PILOT IN COMMAND
7. LIGHT CONDITION - DARK NIGHT
8. ALTITUDE/CLEARANCE - MISJUDGED - PILOT IN COMMAND

## Factual Information

On October 1, 1999, at 2006 mountain daylight time, a Piper PA-24-250, N6406P, was substantially damaged when it collided with terrain while on final approach to landing at La Junta Municipal Airport, Junta, Colorado. The private pilot received minor injuries, and the private pilot certificated passenger was seriously injured. Night visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for the personal cross-country flight being conducted under Title 14 CFR Part 91. The flight originated from Fredericktown Regional Airport, Fredericktown, Missouri, at 1530 central daylight time.

According to the pilot, prior to departure from Fredericktown, he received an outlook weather briefing from Missouri's Columbia Automated Flight Service Station (AFSS) the previous evening, and a standard weather briefing on the morning of the accident. The pilot stated that the weather "appeared normal with 20 knot headwinds, weather clear." While en route, he monitored several airport's ATIS (Automatic Terminal Information Service) reports, and the weather appeared "normal."

In the pilot's accident report, he stated that while en route to La Junta, he noted the aircraft's groundspeed to be 113 knots with a 20 to 30 knot headwind, as indicated on his Global Position System (GPS) receiver. As he approached La Junta, the wind shifted from a headwind to a tailwind and the GPS indicated the groundspeed to be 165 to 170 knots. As he approached the airport for landing, the turbulence increased with "wind direction shifts." He stated that he maintained an altitude of 5,000 feet above mean sea level (msl) while on a downwind to runway 8 (the airport's elevation is 4,238 feet msl; the Federal Aviation Administration recommends traffic pattern altitudes to be conducted at 1,000 feet above ground level [agl] unless otherwise specified.) As he turned onto final approach, the aircraft encountered a downdraft and began to lose altitude, then impacted the ground. During the impact sequence, the aircraft sustained damage to both wings, nose gear, and propeller.

Following the accident, the pilot was interviewed by the Otero County Sheriff's Department. The pilot stated in the interview that he and his father were on a cross-country flight that originated from Washington, D.C., with a final destination of Lancaster, California. During a stop at La Junta, he initially attempted to land on runway 8, but the "wind was strong and [he] missed the runway." He aborted the landing and was planning to return for another landing attempt. He stated that he was "heading east and [was] unfamiliar with the terrain," then struck the ground at an elevation of 4,500 feet msl in dark night conditions. According to the Sheriff's report, when asked if he had experienced any mechanical problems with the aircraft, he stated, "no, that it was just pilot error." The passenger was also interviewed while in the hospital. He stated that "the wind was strong and they misjudged the land around the airport."

## Pilot Information

<b>Certificate:</b>	Private	<b>Age:</b>	53, Male
<b>Airplane Rating(s):</b>	Single-engine Land	<b>Seat Occupied:</b>	Left
<b>Other Aircraft Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Restraint Used:</b>	Seatbelt
<b>Instrument Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Second Pilot Present:</b>	No
<b>Instructor Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Toxicology Performed:</b>	No
<b>Medical Certification:</b>	Class 3 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim.	<b>Last FAA Medical Exam:</b>	03/17/1999
<b>Occupational Pilot:</b>		<b>Last Flight Review or Equivalent:</b>	
<b>Flight Time:</b>	690 hours (Total, all aircraft), 286 hours (Total, this make and model), 690 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 34 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 28 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 10 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

## Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

<b>Aircraft Make:</b>	Piper	<b>Registration:</b>	N6406P
<b>Model/Series:</b>	PA-24-250 PA-24-250	<b>Aircraft Category:</b>	Airplane
<b>Year of Manufacture:</b>		<b>Amateur Built:</b>	No
<b>Airworthiness Certificate:</b>	Normal	<b>Serial Number:</b>	24-1516
<b>Landing Gear Type:</b>	Retractable - Tricycle	<b>Seats:</b>	4
<b>Date/Type of Last Inspection:</b>	06/17/1999, Annual	<b>Certified Max Gross Wt.:</b>	3000 lbs
<b>Time Since Last Inspection:</b>	36 Hours	<b>Engines:</b>	1 Reciprocating
<b>Airframe Total Time:</b>	4220 Hours	<b>Engine Manufacturer:</b>	Lycoming
<b>ELT:</b>	Installed, activated, aided in locating accident	<b>Engine Model/Series:</b>	O-540
<b>Registered Owner:</b>	DANNY C. & RALPH C. OLSEN	<b>Rated Power:</b>	250 hp
<b>Operator:</b>	DANNY C. & RALPH C. OLSEN	<b>Operating Certificate(s) Held:</b>	None

## Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	Night/Dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:	LHX, 4238 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	0 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	1953 MDT	Direction from Accident Site:	0°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Scattered / 8000 ft agl	Visibility	10 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None / 0 ft agl	Visibility (RVR):	0 ft
Wind Speed/Gusts:	25 knots / 32 knots	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:	20°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	29 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	12° C / 3° C
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	FREDERICKTOWN, MO (H88)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	, CO (LHX)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	1530 CDT	Type of Airspace:	Class G

## Airport Information

Airport:	LA JUNTA MUNICIPAL (LHX)	Runway Surface Type:	Asphalt
Airport Elevation:	4238 ft	Runway Surface Condition:	Dry
Runway Used:	8	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:	6852 ft / 100 ft	VFR Approach/Landing:	Full Stop

## Wreckage and Impact Information

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

## Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	B. BEACH SCOTT	Report Date:	06/21/2000
Additional Participating Persons:	RANDALL M HOLDER; DENVER, CO		
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 <a href="mailto:pubinq@ntsb.gov">pubinq@ntsb.gov</a> , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at <a href="http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/">http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/</a> .		

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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](#).