



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	Koyukuk, AK	Accident Number:	ANC04LA018
Date & Time:	01/02/2004, 1630 AST	Registration:	N45008
Aircraft:	Piper PA-31-350	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air Taxi & Commuter - Non-scheduled		

Analysis

The Title 14, CFR Part 135 cargo flight departed for a destination airport about 20 miles downriver. Although weather at the departure airport was VFR, no reports of the actual weather along the route of flight were available. Unable to locate the destination airport due to deteriorating weather conditions, the pilot attempted to return to the departure airport following the river for ground reference. The airplane entered fog and whiteout weather conditions, and collided in-flight with the frozen surface of the river.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's continued flight into adverse weather conditions, and his failure to maintain clearance from terrain, which resulted in an in-flight collision with terrain. Factors associated with the accident were fog and whiteout weather conditions.

Findings

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

Findings

1. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - FOG
 2. (F) WEATHER CONDITION - WHITEOUT
 3. (C) FLIGHT INTO ADVERSE WEATHER - CONTINUED - PILOT IN COMMAND
 4. (C) ALTITUDE/CLEARANCE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
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Occurrence #2: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

5. TERRAIN CONDITION - WATER,FROZEN

Factual Information

On January 2, 2004, about 1630 Alaska standard time, a Piper PA-31-350 airplane, N45008, sustained substantial damage when it collided with terrain about 3 miles southeast of Koyukuk, Alaska, while maneuvering in whiteout conditions. The airplane was being operated by Larry's Flying Service, Inc., Fairbanks, Alaska, as a visual flight rules (VFR) cargo flight under Title 14, CFR Part 135, at the time of the accident. The solo airline transport pilot was seriously injured. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed, and company VFR flight following procedures were in effect. The flight departed Galena, Alaska, about 1620.

During a telephone conversation with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC) on January 2, the chief pilot for the operator said he was tracking the accident flight from Galena to Koyukuk because basic VFR minimums prevailed, and snow showers had been reported along the route of flight. He said when the flight failed to check in at the anticipated arrival time, he contacted the Koyukuk village agent. He said the village agent reported hearing the airplane overhead, but a snow shower had reduced the visibility to zero. When the accident airplane could not be contacted by radio, a search was initiated. Searchers located the airplane about 3 miles southeast of the village. According to the chief pilot, the accident pilot said he entered a snow squall and descended along the riverbed trying to maintain visual contact with the ground, and was in whiteout conditions when the airplane collided with terrain. The airplane sustained structural damage to the wings, fuselage, and tail. The chief pilot indicated that the accident pilot told him there were no preaccident mechanical anomalies with the airplane.

The NTSB IIC had a telephone conversation with the accident pilot on January 8. During that conversation, the accident pilot reported essentially the same information as the chief pilot.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline Transport	Age:	49, 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 1 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim.	Last Medical Exam:	12/02/2003
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	12/14/2003
Flight Time:	5283 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1400 hours (Total, this make and model), 500 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 358 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 123 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 4 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Manufacturer:	Piper	Registration:	N45008
Model/Series:	PA-31-350	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	31-8052167
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	10
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	12/26/2003, AAIP	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	7368 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	4006 Hours	Engines:	2 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	12808 Hours	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	Engine Model/Series:	LTIO-540-J2BD
Registered Owner:	LARRYS FLYING SERVICE INC	Rated Power:	350 hp
Operator:	LARRYS FLYING SERVICE INC	Air Carrier Operating Certificate:	Commuter Air Carrier (135); On-demand Air Taxi (135)
Operator Does Business As:	Larrys Flying Service Inc.	Operator Designator Code:	FWRA

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Observation Facility, Elevation:		Observation Time:	
Distance from Accident Site:		Condition of Light:	Day
Direction from Accident Site:		Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Temperature/Dew Point:	-29° C
Lowest Ceiling:	Obscured / 100 ft agl	Visibility	1 Miles
Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	Calm	Visibility (RVR):	
Altimeter Setting:		Visibility (RVV):	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	Galena, AK (PAGA)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Destination:	Koyukuk, AK (KYU)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	1600 AST	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

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

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Lawrence R Lewis **Adopted Date:** 04/28/2004

Additional Participating Persons: Jim Watson; Fairbanks, FSDO-01; 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 pubinq@ntsb.gov, or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at <http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/>.

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