



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Westminster, SC	Accident Number:	ERA16FA001
Date & Time:	10/02/2015, 1512 EDT	Registration:	N782TM
Aircraft:	PIPER PA 32R-301	Injuries:	4 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

On October 2, 2015, about 1512 eastern daylight time, a Piper PA-32R-301, N782TM, collided with terrain following an in-flight breakup near Westminster, South Carolina. The private pilot and three passengers were fatally injured. The airplane was destroyed by impact forces. The airplane was registered to Smith Family Aviation LLC and operated by the pilot under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 as a personal flight. Day, instrument meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident, and an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan was filed. The flight originated from Warsaw Municipal Airport (ASW), Warsaw, Indiana and was destined for Oconee County Regional Airport (CEU), Clemson, South Carolina.

According to preliminary information provided by the Federal Aviation Administration, the airplane was at 6,000 feet above mean sea level (msl), approaching ZEYLM intersection to hold for the RNAV runway 7 approach at CEU. The pilot was subsequently cleared for the approach and reported that the airplane was established outbound on the procedure turn. The controller subsequently queried the pilot when he did not report inbound on the approach; no response was received. Radar contact was lost over Lake Hartwell, on the Georgia-South Carolina border, about 2,200 feet msl.

Local residents reported hearing and seeing the airplane prior to the accident. One witness heard a loud "boom," followed by white pieces of debris falling into the lake. Another witness saw the airplane descending vertically, in a spiral motion, until it disappeared behind a tree line. Another witness reported that the engine was running until ground impact. Several witnesses reported the event to 911, and the wreckage was located by first responders shortly thereafter.

The pilot, age 71, held a private pilot certificate with airplane single engine land and instrument airplane ratings. He reported 1,448 hours total flight time on his most recent application for an FAA third-class medical certificate, dated October 17, 2013.

The main wreckage was found inverted in a wooded area, about 50 yards north of the shoreline of Lake Hartwell, near Westminster. Damage to trees was indicative of a near-vertical descent

angle at impact. There was no fire. The main wreckage consisted of the main cabin, cockpit, engine, propeller, left wing, and the inboard half of the right wing. About 10 percent of the empennage was recovered near the south shoreline the lake, near Toccoa, Georgia. At the time of this writing, the outboard portion of the right wing and the remainder of the empennage have not been located.

The wreckage was retained for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Manufacturer:	PIPER	Registration:	N782TM
Model/Series:	PA 32R-301 301	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Amateur Built:	No		
Operator:	Charles D. Smith	Air Carrier Operating Certificate:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Observation Facility, Elevation:	CEU, 890 ft msl	Observation Time:	1854 UTC
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 1800 ft agl	Temperature/Dew Point:	17° C / 14° C
Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	10 knots, 40°	Visibility	10 Miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.81 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	IFR
Departure Point:	Warsaw, IN (ASW)	Destination:	Clemson, SC (CEU)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	3 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	4 Fatal		

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ralph E Hicks
Additional Participating Persons:	Bruce Vestal; FAA/FSDO; Columbia, SC Michael McClure; Piper Aircraft; Vero Beach, FL James Childers; Lycoming Engines; Williamsport, PA
Note:	The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.