

National Transportation Safety Board  
Washington, DC 20594

Printed on : 2/10/2010 1:47:14 AM

Brief of Accident

Adopted 06/11/2009

LAX08FA203  
File No. 25194                      06/28/2008                      Mount Charleston, NV                      Aircraft Reg No. N4063W                      Time (Local): 14:50 PDT

Make/Model: Piper / PA-32-300  
Engine Make/Model: Lycoming / IO-540-K1A5  
Aircraft Damage: Destroyed  
Number of Engines: 1  
Operating Certificate(s): None  
Type of Flight Operation: Personal  
Reg. Flight Conducted Under: Part 91: General Aviation

	Fatal	Serious	Minor/None
Crew	1	0	0
Pass	3	0	0

Last Depart. Point: North Las Vegas, NV  
Destination: Byron, CA  
Airport Proximity: Off Airport/Airstrip

Condition of Light: Day  
Weather Info Src: Weather Observation Facility  
Basic Weather: Visual Conditions  
Lowest Ceiling: None  
Visibility: 10.00 SM  
Wind Dir/Speed: 110 / 011 Kts  
Temperature (°C): 39  
Precip/Obscuration: No Obscuration; No Precipitation

Pilot-in-Command                      Age: 37

Flight Time (Hours)

Certificate(s)/Rating(s)  
Private; Single-engine Land

Total All Aircraft: 77  
Last 90 Days: Unk/Nr  
Total Make/Model: Unk/Nr  
Total Instrument Time: Unk/Nr

Instrument Ratings  
None

The pilot's initial course after takeoff would have put the airplane passing to the north of a mountain range. As the airplane continued the climb, the pilot changed course towards the mountainous terrain. The air traffic controller asked the pilot if he would be flying southwest of the mountain range, to which the pilot replied in the affirmative. The air traffic controller then terminated radar services. The airplane then made two heading changes and continued to fly into a mountain valley area. Witnesses located about 6 miles further into the valley observed the airplane flying at altitudes of 300 feet above ground level and below, and towards rising terrain. Witnesses additionally reported hearing steady engine noise consistent with high rpm. The airplane then collided with a tree and rising terrain at the base of a box canyon. The accident site was located at 7,660 feet, on a 10-degree uphill sloping valley floor. The accident site was about 6 miles west, and 860 feet above the final radar return, and 26 miles west, and 5,455 feet above the departure airport. Steep sloping canyon walls with elevations ranging between 10,000 and 11,918 feet surrounded the site immediately to the north, west, and south. From the accident site's elevation, the peak of the canyon's rim rose in excess of the airplane's climb performance capability. The calculated density altitude at the accident elevation was about 11,000 feet. The service ceiling for the airplane at a maximum gross weight was 16,250 feet. Within the valley area, about 4 miles west of the last radar return, a course reversal turn would have been possible using a bank angle of about 30 degrees. At the accident location, there was insufficient clearance from terrain to perform a course reversal. Investigators found no evidence of preimpact mechanical malfunctions or failures during the examination.  
Updated at Jun 11 2009 4:55PM

Brief of Accident (Continued)

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OCCURRENCES

Enroute-climb to cruise - Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT)

FINDINGS

Personnel issues-Action/decision-Info processing/decision-Decision making/judgment-Pilot - C  
Personnel issues-Psychological-Attention/monitoring-Monitoring environment-Pilot - C  
Environmental issues-Physical environment-Terrain-Mountainous/hilly terrain-Decision related to condition - C  
Environmental issues-Physical environment-Terrain-Mountainous/hilly terrain-Effect on operation - F  
Environmental issues-Conditions/weather/phenomena-Temp/humidity/pressure-High density altitude-Effect on operation - F

Findings Legend: (C) = Cause, (F) = Factor

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The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident as follows.  
The pilot's failure to maintain clearance from mountainous terrain and his selection of a cruise altitude that provided inadequate terrain clearance. Contributing to the accident were the high density altitude and the rapidly rising terrain.