



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

Location:	VOLCANO, HI	Accident Number:	DCA99MA088
Date & Time:	09/25/1999, 1726 HST	Registration:	N411WL
Aircraft:	Piper PA-31-350	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	10 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 135: Air Taxi & Commuter - Non-scheduled - Sightseeing		

Analysis

The full report (NTSB/AAB-01-02) is available on the NTSB Web site. See <http://www.nts.gov/Publictn/publictn.htm> for details.

On September 25, 1999, about 1726 Hawaiian standard time, Big Island Air flight 58, a Piper PA-31-350 (Chieftain), N411WL, crashed on the northeast slope of the Mauna Loa volcano near Volcano, Hawaii. The pilot and all nine passengers on board were killed, and the airplane was destroyed by impact forces and a postimpact fire. The sightseeing tour flight was operating under 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 135 as an on-demand air taxi operation. A visual flight rules flight plan was filed, and visual meteorological conditions existed at the Keahole-Kona International Airport, Kona, Hawaii, from which the airplane departed about 1622. The investigation determined that instrument meteorological conditions prevailed in the vicinity of the accident site.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's decision to continue visual flight into instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) in an area of cloud-covered mountainous terrain. Contributing to the accident were the pilot's failure to properly navigate and his disregard for standard operating procedures, including flying into IMC while on a visual flight rules flight plan and failure to obtain a current preflight weather briefing.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH TERRAIN/WATER

Phase of Operation: CLIMB

Findings

1. (F) TERRAIN CONDITION - MOUNTAINOUS/HILLY
2. (C) PLANNING/DECISION - IMPROPER - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. (C) VFR FLIGHT INTO IMC - CONTINUED - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (F) FLIGHT/NAVIGATION INSTRUMENT(S) - IMPROPER USE OF - PILOT IN COMMAND
5. (F) PREFLIGHT BRIEFING SERVICE - NOT USED - PILOT IN COMMAND
6. (F) PROCEDURES/DIRECTIVES - NOT FOLLOWED - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

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A Big Island Air employee who observed the pilot upon his arrival at KOA shortly before 0700 on the day of the accident stated that the pilot appeared to be alert and well rested. The pilot was scheduled to make two air taxi flights that day. The morning sightseeing flight departed about 0700, and the second (accident) flight departed about 1622.

The morning's weather report was included on the "Flight Plans and Weather" form that Big Island Air pilots typically reference before flying with an indicated time of about 0700. Big Island Air's Director of Operations reported to National Transportation Safety Board investigators that he had obtained this weather information from the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Honolulu Automated Flight Service Station (AFSS). No evidence exists to indicate that the pilot sought or obtained an updated weather briefing for the accident flight later that afternoon as required by the FAA.

The pilot departed KOA about 1622 for his second sightseeing tour of the day and followed a half-island tour route. About 1720, the pilot requested permission from the Honolulu AFSS to transition through a restricted area of airspace (R-3103) that encompasses part of the center of the saddle area. The pilot was advised by AFSS that the restricted area was "open," and he was authorized to transition the area for the next 30 minutes. The FAA did not record any further radio transmissions from the accident pilot.

According to FAA-recorded radar data, at 1721:04, the accident airplane was located approximately 16 nautical miles (nm) east-southeast from the eastern side of the restricted area (about 8.5 nms from the crash site). The accident airplane's altitude, as transmitted by its Mode C-equipped transponder, was about 6,600 feet, and the underlying terrain's elevation was about 4,600 feet mean sea level (msl). Both the airplane's altitude and the terrain's elevation were increasing.

Between 1721:04 and the last recorded radar return at 1725:29 (when the airplane was within 1/3-mile of the accident site), the airplane's average ground track was approximately 291 degrees, magnetic. During this time, the accident airplane's altitude increased from about 6,600 to 9,600 feet. Several witnesses observed clouds below the 10,000-foot level around the time of the accident. About 1726, the accident airplane crashed on the northeast slope of the Mauna Loa volcano at 10,100 feet msl.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Airline Transport; Flight Instructor; Commercial	Age:	51, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Multi-engine Land; Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):		Restraint Used:	Seatbelt
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	Airplane Single-engine; Instrument Airplane	Toxicology Performed:	Yes
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Valid Medical--w/ waivers/lim.	Last FAA Medical Exam:	08/14/1999
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	11500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 13 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 13 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 1 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Piper	Registration:	N411WL
Model/Series:	PA-31-350 PA-31-350	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	8352039
Landing Gear Type:	Retractable - Tricycle	Seats:	10
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	08/03/1999, Continuous Airworthiness	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	7368 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	44 Hours	Engines:	2 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	4523 Hours	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	TIO-540-J2BD
Registered Owner:	BIG ISLAND AIR INC	Rated Power:	
Operator:	BIG ISLAND AIR INC	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	On-demand Air Taxi (135)
Operator Does Business As:		Operator Designator Code:	BIAA

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Instrument Conditions	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 6000 ft agl	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	KONA, HI (KOA)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	VFR
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	VFR
Departure Time:	1622 HST	Type of Airspace:	

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	9 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	On-Ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	10 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	ROBERT P BENZON	Report Date:	09/26/2001
Additional Participating Persons:	ROBERT HENLEY; WASHINGTON, DC		
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 pubinquiry@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .		

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), established in 1967, is an independent federal agency mandated by Congress through the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974 to investigate transportation accidents, determine the probable causes of the accidents, issue safety recommendations, study transportation safety issues, and evaluate the safety effectiveness of government agencies involved in transportation. The NTSB makes public its actions and decisions through accident reports, safety studies, special investigation reports, safety recommendations, and statistical reviews.

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](#).