



NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Office of Aviation Safety
Western Pacific Region

June 15, 2018

ACCIDENT SITE EXAMINATION SUMMARY

WPR18FA073

This document contains 15 embedded photos.

A. ACCIDENT

Location:	Elko, Nevada
Date:	January 11, 2018
Aircraft:	N54857; Piper PA-23-250
NTSB Investigator-in-Charge:	Andrew Swick

On January 11, 2018, about 1800 Pacific standard time, a Piper PA-23-250 airplane, N54857, collided with mountainous terrain about 42 miles south of Elko, Nevada. The commercial pilot was the sole person on board and was fatally injured. The airplane sustained substantial damage. The airplane was registered to Mach Tuck, LLC, and operated by Air America Flight Center, LLC., under the provisions of 14 *Code of Federal Regulations Part 91* as a cross-country positioning flight. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the flight, and a VFR flight plan was filed. The flight departed about 1500 from McClellan Airfield (MCC), Sacramento, California and had a destination of Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC), Salt Lake City, Utah.

According to Air Traffic Control (ATC), the pilot reported that he was encountering clouds and was asked by the controller if he would like information on nearby airports. The pilot asked for the nearest airport and that he would “head over there.” Directions and information on Elko Regional Airport (EKO), Elko, Nevada were provided to the pilot. He replied, “Alright, I’m getting super turbulent over here I’m going to head over there.” Shortly after, communication and radar contact were lost.

Review of preliminary radar data revealed a primary target, consistent with the accident airplane, was traveling on an eastbound heading at an altitude of about 11,000 ft mean sea level (msl). The target continued eastbound over Pearl Peak’s with a summit of 10,777 ft msl, and dropped off from radar shortly after.

After an initial search for the airplane at local airports was unsuccessful, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued an Alert Notification (ALNOT) for the airplane. Search and rescue efforts ensued, and on January 19, 2018, wreckage was identified from aerial photography on the east face of Pearl Peak near it’s summit. An onsite examination by ground personnel identified the wreckage as the accident airplane.

B. PARTICIPANTS

Andrew Swick-NTSB IIC

Sgt. Nicholas S. Czegledi-

Elko County Sheriff's Office, SAR Liaison Officer and Chief Deputy Coroner

Cheryl Cuthbertson-

Elko County Sheriff's Office, SAR Supervisor

Gary Steinhoff-

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Gary Mussener-

Human Remains Detection Canine Handler Great Basin K9 SAR, Salt Lake City, UT

Brian Burgess-

Elko County Sheriff's Office, SAR Technical Operations

C. SUMMARY

Examination of the accident site was conducted on June 15, 2016. All major structural components of the airplane were located at the accident site. The wreckage will be recovered to a secure location for further examination.

D. DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

1.0 Accident Site Examination

- Main Wreckage: N40° 13.878, W-115° 32.004' – Elevation: 10,035 feet msl
- EKO was about 42 miles on a magnetic heading 341 degrees from the accident site.
- Native 5 Home Base, Globe, AZ, was about 18 miles on a heading of 86 degrees from the accident site.
- The last location of the airplane in-flight was about 1-mile northeast from the accident site at an altitude of 11,000 feet.

Pearl Peak is a 10,777-foot summit in the southern part of the Ruby Mountains, southeast of Elko, Nevada. The accident site is located about 800ft below the summit on a southeast facing slope. The debris field spread along the side of a 30-degree rocky slope and was about 325 feet in length on a magnetic heading of about 213 degrees. The slope contained mature 20-30ft tall bristlecone trees. The last known flight path was identified to pass near the summit of Pearl Peak at about 11,000ft. There was a 3-4ft base of snow on the slope when the accident occurred.

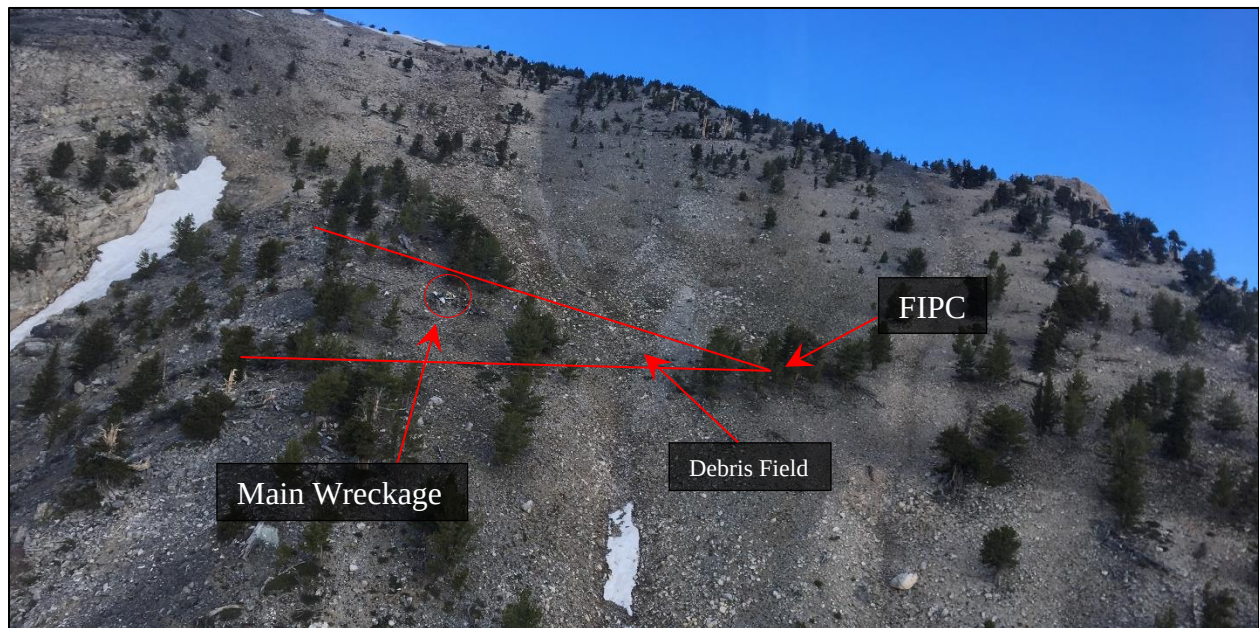


Figure 1-Accident Site

The first identified point of contact (FIPC) was from the top of a 25ft bristlecone pine tree about 60ft from the FIPC with the ground. The FIPC with the ground was on a small broken tree trunk and contained bent aluminum sheet metal and hub components from a propeller assembly. Broken branches were in the area of the FIPC. The next 40ft of the debris field contained small broken engine components, bent aluminum and three propeller blades broken from their hub. The blades revealed rotational scoring and impact damage consistent with an undetermined amount of power during the impact sequence. Over the next 100ft, the wing spars were found in several 3-4ft sections. Also, oil saturated ground was found in several areas.

Wing strikes on the ground were not found during the onsite examination.



Figure 2-First Identified Point of Contact with the Ground

The inboard right-wing section, including the landing gear strut was found half way down the debris field. The outboard side of the right-wing section and landing gear strut was crushed inboard.



Figure 3-Inboard Right-Wing Section

A long section (7ft) of wing spar was found near the inboard right-wing section. The spar had impact damage and bent in multiple directions.



Figure 4-Inboard Right-Wing Section and Wing Spar Section

The right aileron was found next in the debris field and was about 160ft from the FIPC with the tree. The aileron had impact damage throughout and thermal damage on its inboard side.



Figure 5-Right Aileron

The right flap was found near the right aileron at the base of a tree. The flap had impact damage on both inboard and outboard ends.



Figure 6-Right Flap

The left aileron was found near the main wreckage. The aileron was intact and buckled throughout its structure.



Figure 7-Left Aileron

The main wreckage consisted of the cabin area and the empennage. The cabin area was heavily disfigured. First responders who were onsite in January 2018, cut open several areas of the fuselage. Two seats were found further down the debris field and the pilots seat was found in the ravine at the end of the debris field. The fourth seat was not identified.

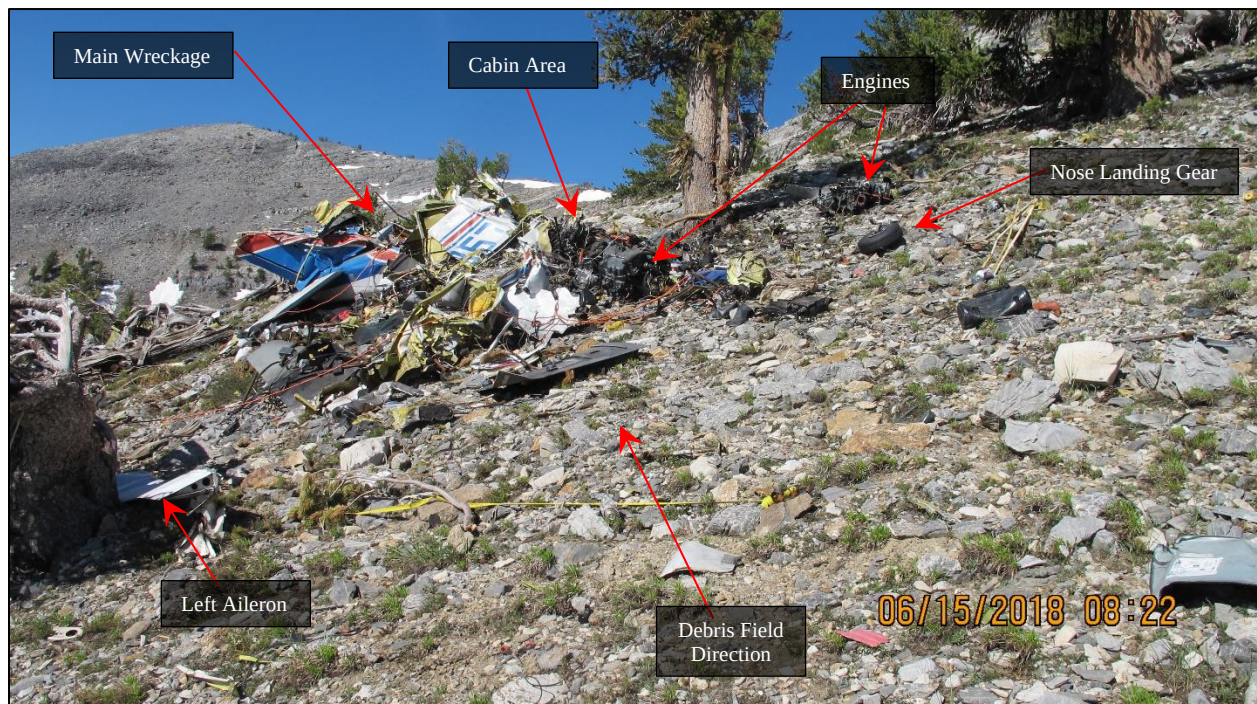


Figure 8-Main Wreckage



Figure 9-Cabin Area

Impact damage was noted on a tree just up hill from the main wreckage. The impact damage was about 10ft up from the base of the bristlecone pine tree where several large branches were broken.



Figure 10-Impact Damage on a Tree

The empennage had impact damage to the forward and top sides of the vertical stabilizer and rudder. The stabilator and trim tab remained attached to the empennage. The upper skin of the left side of the stabilator had thermal damage and discoloration.



Figure 11-Stabilator, Vertical Stabilizer and Rudder

The stabilator right outboard tip was bent up and aft.



Figure 12-Right Stabilator

The ELT was found mounted in the aft fuselage. The ELT had impact damage to its housing revealing internal components.



Figure 13-ELT

A JPI Instruments EDM 760 instrument separated from the instrument panel and was found near the main wreckage. A garmin panel mounted GPS was found near the main wreckage. Model number unknown.



Figure 144-JPI Instruments



Figure 155-Garmin GPS Unit

The pilot's seat, a section of wing and the oxygen bottle were found down slope from the main wreckage about 1,000 feet, by search and rescue personnel. The wreckage is planned to be recovered to a secure location for further examination.▯