

Grant Mills
Air Safety Investigator
Western Pacific Region

Date: February 5, 2026

Subject: WPR26LA095, Memorandum for Record

Contact: [REDACTED] Pilot

The following is a synopsis of the information provided by Mr. [REDACTED] in a telephone conversation.

The pilot departed Alpine Airport for a local, personal flight and initially flew about 6 miles southwest to practice aerobatic maneuvers before returning to the airport traffic pattern at Alpine to practice landings. The airplane entered the traffic pattern on the right downwind leg for runway 13 at approximately 6,600 feet mean sea level. The pilot extended the downwind leg to view cross-country skiers on the snow-covered, dry, lakebed northwest of the runway. While flying the base leg, the pilot thought to look over at the runway. Immediately after that, before being able to view the runway, the airplane collided with the snow covered, dry lakebed. Additionally, the pilot stated that after entering the traffic pattern, he relied on visual reference and was not cross checking the airplane's flight instruments.

The pilot reported that he was unaware that the airplane's altitude was low or that his flight path would impact terrain. He mentioned that overcast cloud conditions prevailed, visibility was greater than 10 statute miles, and most of the terrain around the airport was covered in snow. The pilot spoke with one of his flight instructors after the accident and they concluded that he had experienced a flat light illusion.

The pilot reported that there were no preaccident mechanical malfunctions or failures with the airplane that would have precluded normal operation.