



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Fort Apache, Arizona	Accident Number:	ANC18LA034
Date & Time:	May 6, 2018, 13:38 Local	Registration:	N337VT
Aircraft:	Grumman TBM-3	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Loss of engine power (partial)	Injuries:	2 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot and passenger were conducting a cross-country flight in the pilot's newly-purchased and refurbished World War II-era airplane when the engine experienced vibrations, smoke, an oil leak, and a partial loss of power. The airplane was over remote, rugged, tree-covered terrain with no emergency landing areas, and the occupants, who were wearing emergency parachutes, egressed about 1,500 ft above ground level. Both the pilot and passenger sustained serious injuries during their landings under parachute. Radar data indicated that the airplane continued a steady descent into terrain. The wreckage was never located despite numerous searches; therefore, the engine could not be examined and the reason for the loss of engine power or smoke and vibrations could not be determined.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

A partial loss of engine power for reasons that could not be determined based on the available information.

Findings

Not determined	(general) - Unknown/Not determined
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Factual Information

History of Flight

Enroute-cruise	Loss of engine power (partial) (Defining event)
Enroute-cruise	Fire/smoke (non-impact)
Uncontrolled descent	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)

On May 6, 2018, about 1338 mountain standard time, a Grumman TBM-3E airplane, N337VT, was presumed destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Fort Apache Reservation, Arizona. The private pilot and pilot-rated passenger sustained serious injuries. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 personal flight.

The pilot was relocating the newly-purchased airplane from California to Illinois. The airplane had undergone refurbishment and condition inspections during the previous 6 months. Before the flight, the airplane was loaded with emergency and survival gear and the pilot and passenger watched the parachute manufacturer's safety video.

On the morning of the accident, the pilot flew from Zamperini Field Airport (TOA), Torrance, California, to Ak-Chin Regional Airport (A39), Maricopa, Arizona. After refueling, the pilot departed A39 and climbed to an altitude between 11,500 ft and 12,000 ft mean sea level (msl). About 45 minutes into the flight, the pilot heard a loud bang with vibrations and thick smoke entered the cockpit. He stated that the engine was operating, but not producing enough power to maintain altitude. The passenger stated that he saw sheets of oil exiting the right side of the engine cowling. As the airplane descended, they determined that there were no safe landing areas due to trees and rugged terrain, and decided to egress about 1,500 ft above ground level (agl).

The passenger exited first, followed by the pilot. Both parachutes deployed successfully; however, the pilot and passenger received serious injuries after landing in trees and falling to the ground, and were unable to call for rescue due to the lack of cell phone coverage in the area. The following morning, about 1100, a fire service truck passing through the area found the pilot and passenger and they were subsequently transported to a nearby medical facility via ambulance.

A review of Federal Aviation Administration air traffic control radar data revealed that the airplane continued eastbound on a stable, descending flight path after the pilot and passenger egressed. The last radar return at 1337:44 was at 10,000 ft msl, (about 1,900 ft agl) 19 miles east of Whiteriver Airport (E24), Whiteriver, Arizona, and 8 miles southwest of Mount Baldy. Multiple air and ground searches were conducted; however, the airplane was not located.

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	58,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Single-engine sea	Seat Occupied:	Front
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	No
Medical Certification:	Unknown With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	March 28, 2018
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	January 1, 2017
Flight Time:	(Estimated) 1900 hours (Total, all aircraft), 25 hours (Total, this make and model), 1850 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 15 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 10 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 0 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Pilot-rated passenger Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	54,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land; Multi-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Center
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Airplane	Second Pilot Present:	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:		Last FAA Medical Exam:	
Occupational Pilot:	No	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:			

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Grumman	Registration:	N337VT
Model/Series:	TBM-3 E	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:	1945	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Limited (Special)	Serial Number:	53337
Landing Gear Type:	Tailwheel	Seats:	3
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	February 28, 2018 Condition	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	15000 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	6 Hrs	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:	5060.3 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Wright
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	R 2600-20
Registered Owner:		Rated Power:	
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KCNY,4560 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	6 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	19:53 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	233°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	6 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/ None
Wind Direction:	140°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/ N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.14 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	27°C / -6°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	MARICOPA, AZ (A39)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	ALBUQUERQUE, NM (ABQ)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	12:51 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Fire:	Unknown
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	Unknown
Total Injuries:	2 Serious	Latitude, Longitude:	33.770057,-109.980171(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Price, Noreen		
Additional Participating Persons:	Gary Hendrickson; Federal Aviation Administration FSDO; Scottsdale, AZ		
Original Publish Date:	May 25, 2021	Investigation Class:	3
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.		
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=97198		

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](#).