



NO. 93-008

PIPER PA28-140

ZK-DBT

CARTERS BEACH, WESTPORT

22 APRIL 1993

A B S T R A C T

On the night of 22 April 1993 an unqualified pilot broke into a hangar and removed an aircraft which he subsequently flew for some two hours before it dived into the sea. The occupant lost his life in the accident.

TRANSPORT ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION COMMISSION

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT REPORT NO. 93-008

Aircraft Type, Serial Number and Registration:	Piper PA 28-140, 28-24550, ZK-DBT
Number and Type of Engines:	One Lycoming O-320-E2D
Year of Manufacture:	1967
Date and Time:	22 April 1993, 2345 hours *
Location:	Carters Beach, Westport Latitude: 41°44' S Longitude: 171°35' E
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew: 1
Injuries:	Crew: 1 Fatal
Nature of Damage:	Destroyed
Pilot in Command's Licence:	Nil
Pilot in Command's Age:	19
Pilot in Command's Total Flying Experience:	Approx 2 hours Approx 1 hour on type
Information Source:	Transport Accident Investigation Commission field investigation
Investigator in Charge:	Mr J J Goddard

* All times in this report are NZST (UTC + 12 hours)

1. NARRATIVE

1.1 During the evening of 22 April 1993, probably between 2100 and 2130 hours, the pilot broke into a locked hangar on Westport Aerodrome and removed ZK-DBT. Entry was gained by cutting the chain used to padlock the doors.

1.2 He started the aircraft's engine and proceeded to get airborne. No witnesses saw the take-off from the dark and deserted aerodrome.

1.3 At 2145 hours the aircraft was heard and its navigation lights seen as it was circled over the town of Westport. The alarm was raised and Police, Search and Rescue, Fire and Ambulance facilities assembled at the aerodrome, along with the operator of the aircraft and the flying instructor who normally flew it.

1.4 VHF radio contact was made with the pilot, and the instructor was able to establish that the pilot knew how to operate basic controls and read the aircraft's instruments. The procedure to be used for his approach to land was explained and guidance and directions were given by the instructor. The pilot did not sound upset by his situation, but his lack of flying experience, especially at night, was of concern to those trying to assist him.

1.5 Emergency lighting was arranged on Runway 04, using two cars at each end and to each side of the runway. The surface wind was calm. There was no moon, but visibility was good, with no low cloud.

1.6 The pilot's first approach was shallow but well aligned with the runway. When the aircraft was a few feet above the ground the pilot reapplied power and made a go around.

1.7 A second approach was flown similarly a few minutes later, again with the instructor guiding the pilot by RTF. This time the aircraft touched down on the runway and rolled for a few seconds before the pilot again reapplied power and took off.

1.8 The instructor then asked the pilot what the aircraft fuel gauges indicated, and was advised that the right gauge read "empty" while the left read "10". As the pilot had reported the right tank was selected, the instructor told the pilot to change tanks to the left tank, with an explanation of how to do it. Shortly afterwards the pilot

reported "I'm losing power", so the instructor told him to change the tank selector back again, and to apply carburetor heat.

1.9 A third approach resulted in the aircraft touching down short and rolling onto the runway. After a ground roll of some 300 m, the pilot reapplied power and took off again.

1.10 The aircraft was then flown away from the aerodrome, over the sea, with the pilot not responding on the radio to the instructor. The ground radio was then handed over to a relative of the pilot, who was able to persuade him to fly back to the aerodrome. The pilot at this stage was sounding depressed and less cooperative.

1.11 Another approach was made, this time too high, which resulted in the aircraft overflying the runway. The aircraft was turned to fly downwind, over the sea, when the pilot was heard to transmit "too low, too low", and the aircraft descended steeply into the sea about 100 m offshore.

1.12 The principal wreckage was located early the following morning, in heavy surf. The body of the pilot was found later that day washed ashore some 6 km north of the accident site.

1.13 Examination of the incomplete wreckage disclosed little of note. Damage was consistent with the water impact and the effects of heavy surf during several tides. The pilot was evidently thrown out forwards at impact. He had not been wearing the lap/diagonal seat belt fitted to the aircraft, which was found jammed under the seat. The fuel selector was in the "right tank" position, and engine controls were in normal positions except that the throttle was closed. Neither engine nor the propeller showed evidence of significant power at impact. The tachometer reading indicated that the flight had been of about two hours duration.

1.14 The front seats had been removed from the aircraft by the owner before the event, for re-upholstering. The pilot's seat had then been replaced temporarily on its tracks, trapping the lap belt of the safety harness beneath it. Even if the pilot had worn the safety harness, it was unlikely that he would have survived the water impact or the heavy

surf near the shore.

1.15 No logbook record of the pilot's flying experience was available, but he had had a total of three flying lessons; one on a Cessna 172 and two on a PA 28-140, but none on ZK-DBT. He had taken part in an Air Training Corps gliding course some years previously.

1.16 The event may have been related to the pilot's upset state of mind following his arrest by Police earlier in the day. While his intentions were not known the prospect of a safe outcome had to be considered unlikely in view of the slight flying experience of the pilot.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 The aircraft was taken from the hangar and flown without permission of the aircraft's owner or operator.

2.2 The pilot's night flight was illegal.

2.3 The pilot had little flying experience and none by night.

2.4 The pilot had no flying qualification.

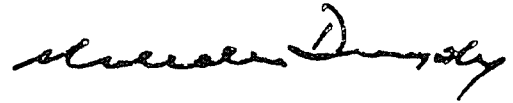
2.5 The aircraft was probably capable of normal operation.

2.6 Substantial efforts were made to assist the

pilot to land the aircraft safely.

2.7 After some two hours flight, the aircraft dived into the sea.

2.8 The descent into the sea may have resulted from fuel starvation, mishandling, or a deliberate act.



9 August 1993

M F Dunphy
Chief Commissioner