

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report  
199101698**

**Piper Aircraft Corp  
Archer**

**10 December 1991**

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**NOTE: All air safety occurrences reported to the ATSB are categorised and recorded. For a detailed explanation on Category definitions please refer to the ATSB website at [www.atsb.gov.au](http://www.atsb.gov.au).**

**Occurrence Number:** 199101698                      **Occurrence Type:** Accident  
**Location:** Oxley Island  
**State:** NSW    **Inv Category:** 3  
**Date:** Tuesday 10 December 1991  
**Time:** 2045 hours                                      **Time Zone**                      ESuT  
**Highest Injury Level:** Fatal  
**Injuries:**

	Fatal	Serious	Minor	None	Total
Crew	2	0	0	0	2
Ground	0	0	0	0	0
Passenger	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

**Aircraft Manufacturer:** Piper Aircraft Corp  
**Aircraft Model:** PA-28-181  
**Aircraft Registration:** VH-MRQ                      **Serial Number:**  
**Type of Operation:** Instructional Other Training  
**Damage to Aircraft:** Destroyed  
**Departure Point:** Taree NSW  
**Departure Time:** 1849 ESuT  
**Destination:** Taree NSW

**Crew Details:**

<u>Role</u>	<u>Class of Licence</u>	<u>Hours on Type</u>	<u>Hours Total</u>
Pilot-In-Command	Commercial	2500.0	23876
Pilot-In-Command (AICUS)	Commercial	41.0	317

**Approved for Release:** Friday, September 23, 1994

At about 2045 hours ESuT, Piper aircraft VH-MRQ crashed onto the northern face of a small tree-covered hill on Oxley Island. The accident site was located on a bearing of 098 degrees from Taree Airport, at a distance of 6.5 km. Both occupants were fatally injured in the accident.

The aircraft had departed Taree at 1849 for a return flight via Port Macquarie and Forster. The purpose of the flight was to conduct a Command Instrument Rating flight test. NDB aerial work was planned to be carried out at Port Macquarie, Forster and Taree. The last reported contact with the aircraft was at 2041, near the completion of the flight, while it was conducting aerial work at Taree.

The aircraft was seen and heard by witnesses located near the accident site. Some of these witnesses reported that the aircraft had appeared to be operating normally prior to it entering a sudden descent. However, others reported hearing the aircraft engine apparently operating erratically before seeing the lights of the aircraft descend rapidly from a relatively low altitude. A sudden increase in engine noise was followed almost immediately by the sounds of an impact. The accident was non-survivable.

The aircraft struck the tops of large trees at a height of 18 m before impacting heavily onto a 12 degree uphill slope. The left wing was torn off as it struck a tree adjacent to the ground impact point. The aircraft overturned and slid tail-first up the hill before coming to rest 80 m beyond the initial tree contact. Damage to the aircraft was extreme and was consistent with it having struck the ground at a relatively high speed, with the engine delivering substantial power.

Weather at the time of the accident was overcast and dark, with no low cloud or rain, and with a light wind from the north-east.

No evidence was found of any mechanical failure or pilot incapacity. The reported erratic operation of the engine shortly before the accident could be consistent with the exhaustion of fuel from one fuel tank, although more than sufficient fuel had been carried for the flight. The circumstances of the accident were consistent with a loss of control. However, there was insufficient evidence to establish the reason for the loss of control.