

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report
199203460**

**Piper Aircraft Corp
Lance**

31 October 1992

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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.

Occurrence Number: 199203460 **Occurrence Type:** Accident
Location: 37km NNE Launceston
State: TAS **Inv Category:** 3
Date: Saturday 31 October 1992
Time: 1356 hours **Time Zone** ESuT
Highest Injury Level: Fatal
Injuries:

	Fatal	Serious	Minor	None	Total
Crew	1	0	0	0	1
Ground	0	0	0	0	0
Passenger	1	0	0	0	1
Total	2	0	0	0	2

Aircraft Manufacturer: Piper Aircraft Corp
Aircraft Model: PA-32R-301
Aircraft Registration: VH-JBA **Serial Number:** 32-8013031
Type of Operation: Non-commercial Pleasure/Travel
Damage to Aircraft: Destroyed
Departure Point: Launceston
Departure Time: 1348 ESuT
Destination: Moorabbin

Crew Details:

Role	Class of Licence	Hours on	
		Type	Hours Total
Pilot-In-Command	Private	101.0	735

Approved for Release: Friday, May 27, 1994

The pilot had planned to fly his own aircraft, a Rockwell 114, to Moorabbin via Flinders Island. On the day prior to the flight his aircraft was found to be unservicable. Over the years he had flown Piper PA 32 aircraft on several occasions. The local aero club agreed to hire a Piper PA 32R-301 Saratoga aircraft to the pilot for the flight.

On the day of the flight the weather in the morning at Launceston was poor with low cloud. At about 1000 hours the chief flying instructor gave the pilot a brief check flight, consisting of two circuits at a height of 800 feet. As the day progressed the weather at Launceston improved. A complex low pressure trough was over the area moving east. The forecasts covering the route, together with the Flinders Island and Moorabbin terminal forecasts indicated that low cloud conditions could be expected.

A flight plan was not submitted for the flight. At 1342 hours the pilot called Launceston tower for taxi clearance for a flight to Moorabbin via Targa Gap at 3,000 feet. A clearance was given to track out of the control zone on this route, at not above 3,000 feet. The aircraft departed at 1348 hours on climb to 3,000 feet. The pilot was advised that the area QNH was 1006.

At 1352 hours the pilot advised the tower he was approaching Nunamara and that he would be at 2,500 feet due to cloud. In response the tower controller told the pilot to close on this frequency passing Targa Gap and that the area frequency was 126.5. This call was acknowledged by the pilot. No further calls were heard from him.

That evening the Melbourne Search and Rescue Centre was advised that the aircraft had not arrived at Moorabbin. Initial checks and search activity did not find the aircraft. A full scale search was started the following morning. Areas to the north-east of Launceston could not be searched that day due to low cloud. The following morning the wreckage was sighted from the air.

The aircraft had struck the ground at very high speed on a track of 106-108 degrees magnetic. The elevation of the initial impact area was approximately 1,870 feet. Prior to impact it passed through a plantation of young trees at a descent angle of 18 degrees and a bank angle of about 40 degrees right wing down.

Examination of the badly damaged wreckage did not reveal evidence of any pre-impact defects. The aircraft had been filled with fuel prior to departure.

There were no witnesses at the accident site. Two persons had seen the aircraft approaching Targa Gap. At that stage it was tracking north-north-east towards the gap. It was just below the cloud base which was at about 1,750-1,800 feet. Much of the terrain directly ahead of the aircraft from Targa Gap was at or above the height of the aircraft. It may not have been possible for the pilot to turn around in the valley which narrows approaching the gap.

The pilot's qualifications limited him to operating under visual flight rules only. The observations of bank angle and descent path at high speed strongly suggest that the pilot lost control of the aircraft while operating in cloud. The route via the Targa Gap is the shortest route to Flinders Island. An alternative but slightly longer route is via the Tamar river. This route would have enabled the aircraft to track over low terrain and almost certainly remain clear of cloud for the departure.

The aircraft was fitted with a Narco model ELT-10 emergency locator transmitter. During the severe impact the beacon was damaged and hence no signal was transmitted to assist in the search for the aircraft. A second beacon was carried in the pilot's navigation bag. This was found to be unservicable, with batteries that had leaked and corroded the internal case of the beacon. It was switched off.

The Narco ELT-10 beacon fitted was of a type required to be able to operate after a shock of 50 times the force of gravity (G). There are beacons available which are designed to withstand an impact shock of 500 G.

Significant Factors:

The following factors were considered relevant to the development of the accident:

1 The route selected by the pilot was over hilly/mountainous terrain, covered by low cloud in the higher terrain areas.

2 The pilot, who was not qualified to operate in non visual conditions, probably lost control of the aircraft after inadvertently entering low cloud.

Safety Action:

Although there are no specific safety actions being formulated as a direct result of the investigation of this occurrence, the Bureau is conducting a research project on emergency locator transmitters. This research is based on information obtained from several investigations, of which this is one.

The project will continue into 1994 and will cover the effects of new legislation introduced by the Civil Aviation Authority in relation to the carriage of emergency locator transmitters.