ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	PZL-Koliber 160A, G-BZAJ
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-320-D2A piston engine
Year of Manufacture:	1999
Date & Time (UTC):	26 October 2005 at 1230 hrs
Location:	Near Clayton, Sussex
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - 1 (Minor) Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Extensive
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	67 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	934 hours (of which 196 were on type) Last 90 days - 23 hours Last 28 days - 8 hours
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot and enquiries by the AAIB

Synopsis

On a planned flight from North Weald to Bembridge, the pilot encountered deteriorating weather and became lost and disorientated. While attempting to turn back towards better weather, the aircraft struck the ground. The pilot acknowledged that he had not fully evaluated the weather forecast and his decision to turn back was too late.

History of the flight

The pilot intended to fly from North Weald Aerodrome to Bembridge (Isle of Wight) Aerodrome, a route with which he was familiar. On his arrival at North Weald the local weather was good and he checked the METARs for Stansted, Gatwick and Southampton. These all indicated a visibility greater than 10 km and no scattered cloud below 1,400 ft agl. With no apparent weather limitations, the pilot planned his route to pass east of London crossing Mayfield and Goodwood VORs and then to Bembridge.

He took off at 1139 hrs and climbed to 1,900 ft amsl for his initial cruise. Initially, the weather was excellent but, as he passed to the east of Gatwick, he experienced some light turbulence and scattered cloud and he descended to 1,700 ft amsl. At about 1210 hrs, he listened to the Southampton weather frequency (VOLMET), which was broadcasting a visibility of 10 km and cloud scattered at 2,000 ft agl. Then, after passing Mayfield VOR, the pilot

became aware of a lowering cloud base and he reduced his altitude to 1,200 ft amsl. Shortly after, the visibility also began to reduce and the pilot was unable to locate one of his planned geographical reference points. He was aware that he was now lost and becoming disorientated and so he decided to turn back towards Mayfield. However, as he was turning left, he suddenly saw ground directly ahead of the aircraft and pulled back hard on the control column. As the nose of the aircraft came up, the pilot felt the aircraft hit the ground. He was knocked unconscious during the impact and, when he regained consciousness, the aircraft was at rest with the gear detached and the canopy slightly open. The pilot was in pain and aware of minor cuts to his face and arms but he was mobile. After switching off the fuel and electrics, he walked across a field and down a lane, where he met police personnel coming to investigate the reports of a crashed aircraft. At the time, the area was covered in thick fog.

The elevation of the crash site was approximately 600 ft amsl.

Weather information

The Met Office provided an aftercast for the area. The synoptic situation at 1200 hrs showed a moistening south-westerly flow covering Sussex as a warm front moved in from the south-west across southern England during the morning. In the area of the crash, there were outbreaks of slight rain or drizzle at times with a surface visibility of 6 to 9 km in haze or rain. There were also patches of stratus with the lowest cloud base between 300 and 700 ft amsl.

The weather forecast shown on the UK Low Level Forecast (Form 215) for 26 October 2005 was substantially correct. This indicated a low cloud base over the coastal area. Additionally, the TAF for Southampton was also accurate with the forecast issued at 0910 hrs and valid between 1000 and 1900 hrs as follows: Surface wind 190º/ 12 kt; visibility greater than 10 km and cloud broken at 1,400 ft agl; temporarily between 1000 and 1500 hrs, visibility of 7,000 m and cloud broken at 700 ft agl; 30% probability of a temporary condition between 1100 and 1400 hrs of visibility of 4,000 m in rain or drizzle and cloud broken at 400 ft agl.

Conclusion

The pilot produced a very honest account of the accident and assessed the cause as a late decision to turn back after encountering deteriorating weather. On reflection, he also acknowledged that a closer evaluation of the weather forecast would have left him better prepared for the possibility of deteriorating weather along his route.

Safety Sense Leaflet 1 *General Aviation* in LASORS 2005 contains advice on general airmanship and includes information that one of the main fatal accident causes during the last 20 years has been continued flight into bad weather. The publication contains good practical advice as does Safety Sense Leaflet 5 *VFR Navigation.*