ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA-28-181 Cherokee Archer II, G-BPTE
No & Type of Engines:	1 Lycoming O-360-A4M piston engine
Year of Manufacture:	1976
Date & Time (UTC):	12 May 2006 at 1225 hrs
Location:	Blackbushe Airport, Camberley, Surrey
Type of Flight:	Private
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1 Passengers - 1
Injuries:	Crew - None Passengers - None
Nature of Damage:	Propeller destroyed, right wing leading edge skin damaged
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence
Commander's Age:	42 years
Commander's Flying Experience:	82 hours (of which 11 were on type) Last 90 days - 2 hours Last 28 days - 1 hour
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot

Synopsis

The aircraft struck two fire tenders while taxiing away from a fuel installation because, in his own judgement, the pilot had left insufficient space to manoeuvre the aircraft safely. The investigation revealed no evidence to contradict this assessment.

History of the flight

After refuelling the aircraft the pilot started the engine and requested aerodrome and weather information prior to his intended flight. In order to taxi away from the fuel installation, the pilot increased power and attempted to turn left, away from the pumps. He was unable to complete this manoeuvre before the starboard wingtip struck a fire tender parked nearby, causing the aircraft to swing to the right. Despite applying the wheel brakes and reducing power, the aircraft continued to swing to the right until its propeller hit a second fire tender that was parked parallel to and slightly beyond the first. During this impact the propeller became trapped between the bumper and chassis of the second fire tender and the engine stopped suddenly. The pilot and his passenger vacated the aircraft using the normal entrance door on the right hand side of the fuselage. Both occupants were uninjured.

The pilot judged that he had failed to allow sufficient clearance between his aircraft and nearby obstacles as he taxied away from the fuel installation.

A member of the airfield Rescue and Fire Fighting Service (RFFS) present at the time of the incident commented that, shortly after it left the fuel installation, the aircraft stopped very close to the first fire tender with its engine operating at sufficiently high power to attract his attention. When he approached the aircraft the pilot appeared to be using the aircraft radio. The aircraft then moved off but impacted the first fire tender shortly afterwards.

Damage to aircraft

Impact with the first fire tender caused damage to the outboard and centre sections of the right wing leading edge skins and impact with the second fire tender damaged the propeller. The propeller was destroyed when RFFS crew cut the trapped blade in order to remove the aircraft. Subsequently, the engine was removed for an inspection to determine the effects of shock loading caused by its sudden stoppage. A visual inspection of the aircraft revealed no pre-existing faults with the steering or brake systems that could have contributed to the incident.

Damage to fire tenders

The first fire tender received only superficial damage. The second fire tender received damage to its nearside front wing, bonnet and bumper caused by the propeller and nose of the aircraft. Although both tenders remained serviceable, they were blocked by the aircraft until it could be removed, 20 minutes after the occurrence. Two spare fire tenders, equipped to provide a reduced category of fire cover and occasionally substituted for tenders under maintenance, were parked elsewhere on the airfield. They could not be manned at short notice because all available crew were occupied with removal of the incident aircraft. The airfield was therefore without dedicated fire cover and all commercial flying activities were curtailed for that period.

Follow up action

The CAA does not require fire tenders to be dispersed or protected from collision damage when parked. In order to minimise response time, fire tenders and their crew will inevitably be co-located within the RFFS compound, which itself must be situated near to aircraft manoeuvring areas for the same reason. The airport RFFS considered, therefore, that it would be impractical to change the parking arrangements for its fire tenders in a manner that would guarantee the continued provision of at least one unit. The CAA concurred with this assessment.