

ACCIDENT

Aircraft Type and Registration:	Piper PA-30 Twin Comanche, N65PF	
No & Type of Engines:	2 Lycoming IO-320 piston engines	
Year of Manufacture:	1967	
Date & Time (UTC):	13 March 2008 at 1730 hrs	
Location:	Biggin Hill Airport, Kent	
Type of Flight:	Private	
Persons on Board:	Crew - 1	Passengers - None
Injuries:	Crew - None	Passengers - N/A
Nature of Damage:	Substantial damage to the left wing	
Commander's Licence:	Private Pilot's Licence	
Commander's Age:	52 years	
Commander's Flying Experience:	2,366 hours (of which 1,002 were on type) Last 90 days - 29 hours Last 28 days - 8 hours	
Information Source:	Aircraft Accident Report Form submitted by the pilot	

Synopsis

At about 900 feet amsl, after takeoff from Biggin Hill, the aircraft inadvertently entered cloud. The pilot carried out a descending left turn to regain visual flight; the ground rises to over 800 feet in this area. During the manoeuvre the left wing contacted the tops of trees, causing extensive damage to the left wing leading edge. The aircraft was still controllable and returned to Biggin Hill for an uneventful landing.

History of the flight

The pilot intended to fly N65PF from Biggin Hill (airfield elevation 598 feet) to Rochester, where it was due to have its interior refurbished. The aircraft had no functioning navigational aids, although the radio and transponder were operational. The weather at Biggin

Hill was observed by the pilot to be overcast in light rain. The pilot also noted the departure information 'Tango', which gave a visibility of 4.5 km in rain and drizzle and the cloud as broken at 1,500 feet. A colleague of the pilot had just flown from Biggin Hill to Rochester and had reported that the weather at Rochester was good for a VFR flight in the light rain.

This was the first time the pilot had flown N65PF, so he conducted a thorough pre-flight check. The taxi, engine run-up checks and pre-departure checks were uneventful. The pilot took off from Runway 21 and the aircraft climbed away normally. Once stable in the climb the pilot began to make himself familiar with the aircraft and was checking the instruments, looking

inside the cockpit at this time. At about 900 feet amsl he looked out and found that he had inadvertently entered cloud. The pilot levelled off; he was aware that he was close to the Gatwick controlled airspace so he started a left turn and descended to regain visual flight.

During the turn the pilot heard a loud bang on the left side of the aircraft, after which he noticed substantial damage to the outboard leading edge of the left wing. The pilot immediately climbed back to 900 feet amsl. Having established that he still had full control of the aircraft he elected to return to Biggin Hill. At about 2 nm from Biggin Hill the aircraft broke through the cloud and the pilot was able to approach Runway 03 visually for an uneventful landing.

After shutdown the pilot examined the left wing and noticed tree remains in the damaged sections.

A radar trace of the aircraft's track was obtained and it showed that the aircraft had started its initial turn to the left in an area where the North Downs rise to over 800 feet. The aircraft altitude at this time was reported by the pilot to be 900 feet amsl, leaving a minimal margin. It is probable that, during the descending left turn, the aircraft's left wing entered the top of the trees, causing the loud bang and subsequent damage.