

Log 1697

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: May 31, 1984

Forwarded to:

Honorable Donald D. Engen  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-84-52

On August 17, 1983, Las Vegas Airlines Flight 88, a Piper PA-31-350, N88LV, was being operated as a scheduled Grand Canyon sightseeing flight from Las Vegas, Nevada, to Tusayan, Arizona. About 1142 p.s.t., Las Vegas 88 departed North Las Vegas Airport as the second of five Las Vegas Airlines airplanes flying to Grand Canyon National Park Airport. The first portion of the flight over the Las Vegas Strip and Lake Mead was uneventful; however, weather conditions precluded the pilot of Las Vegas 88 from flying over the Shivwits Plateau under visual conditions as normally done, so he flew into the west end of the Grand Canyon at 5,000 feet. Radio conversations between the pilot and other company pilots indicated that Las Vegas 88 encountered deteriorating weather conditions in the Canyon and that the pilot had decided to abort the flight and climb out. Later attempts to contact Las Vegas 88 were fruitless. The wreckage was found on the west wall of a mesa inside the Canyon on August 18, 1983, by company pilots. The airplane was destroyed by impact and by postimpact fire. The pilot and all nine passengers were killed. 1/

About 250,000 visitors annually use some form of air transportation to visit the Grand Canyon. These visits include flyovers in fixed wing or helicopter aircraft and day or night stopovers. In 1983, about 50,000 passengers flew into Grand Canyon Airport via some 900 air carrier flights and 200,000 passengers flew in on some 33,500 air taxi sightseeing flights similar to Las Vegas Airlines flights. The frequency of the flights varies seasonally, with more flights during the tourist season. There are about 90,000 total flight operations at Grand Canyon Airport annually. Timing and scheduling of flights are at the discretion of each operator and are dependent on passenger load, positioning of aircrafts, personnel available, weather, maintenance capability, and other operational factors.

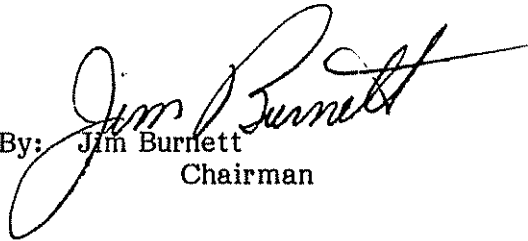
1/ For more detailed information, read Aircraft Accident Report--"Las Vegas Airlines, N88LV, Piper PA-31-350, Grand Canyon, Arizona, August 17, 1983" (NTSB/AAR-84/05).

While the August 17, 1983, accident may be regarded as an isolated instance wherein the pilot of the airplane misidentified his position, the Safety Board is concerned that there are not more positive or effective procedures to control this type of commercial flight. The scope of these operations is extensive and flights are offered on a large scale to the traveling public, both in the United States and abroad. While VFR rules stipulate that the pilot remain clear of the weather, other aircraft, and obstacles, because of the scope and number of operations at Grand Canyon Airport, additional procedural guidelines may be required to insure that Grand Canyon sightseeing passengers are provided a level of safety equal to that offered to other air taxi passengers.

Therefore, as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Examine the operating procedures used by Grand Canyon sightseeing tour operators and, if necessary, develop and publish standards for operating procedures, including route selection, flight scheduling, and altitude selection for sightseeing flights in the Canyon, and require that operators incorporate these standards in their operations specifications.  
(Class II, Priority Action) (A-84-52)

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and BURSLEY and GROSE, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

By:   
Jim Burnett  
Chairman