

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE
Washington

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE
CONCERNING AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
WHICH OCCURRED TO A PRIVATELY OWNED GLIDER
ON DECEMBER 1, 1934 NEAR MIAMI, FLORIDA

to the Secretary of Commerce

On December 1, 1934 at about 11 30 a.m., near Miami, Florida, a glider, being towed by an airplane, was involved in an accident resulting in the death of the glider pilot.

The glider, owned by the pilot, was a Franklin, model P S-2, and bore Department of Commerce glider license number G-12185. The cockpit cowling of this glider had been replaced by one made up to the pilot's special order and differed materially from the original factory cowling. The pilot, Warren E. Eaton, held Department of Commerce transport and glider pilot's licenses.

Mr. Eaton was piloting one of two gliders being towed behind an airplane. Instructions were to cut loose at the proper point and so maneuver the gliders that a picture could be made of the two gliders in soaring flight with the city of Miami as a background. During a previous flight Mr. Eaton had experienced difficulty with the cockpit cowling of his glider and on this flight it was observed that he was again having difficulty with it. While making a turn his glider got into the slipstream of the tow plane, making it difficult, if not impossible, to both hold the cowling and pilot the glider. He cut loose from the tow plane with the idea of landing and immediately after cutting loose his glider went into a fairly steep left turn. At this point the cowling was observed to fall off completely. The glider continued over on its back and about five seconds after the loss of the cowling the pilot was seen to fall from the glider. The glider descended in a series of gentle gyrations and landed with practically no damage.

An inspection of the cowling and the cowling fastenings indicates that in his first efforts to fasten the cowling, the pilot had hooked it through a punch hole about four inches to the right of the proper hole, which left the cowling at an angle, improperly and insecurely fastened. The pilot's safety belt, which had been properly fastened before the take-off, was found to be unfastened and the ends tucked carefully to either side of the seat, indicating that he had unfastened it in order to reach far enough ahead to work with the cowling. A severe head injury and marks on his goggles appear to have been inflicted by the cowling as it left the glider. The parachute, upon examination, gave no indication that there had been any attempt to use it and on ground test after the accident, broke from its case perfectly when the rip-cord was pulled.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was the failure of the cockpit cowling which, in tearing loose, struck the pilot in the head, thus rendering him unconscious.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal
Director of Air Commerce