

March 23, 1935.

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE CONCERNING AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
WHICH OCCURRED TO PLANE OF RAPID AIR LINES CORPORATION
ON NOVEMBER 15, 1934 NEAR AMAZONIA, MISSOURI

To the Secretary of Commerce:

On November 15, 1934 at about 11:42 p.m., an airplane of United States registry, piloted by a licensed airman, while being operated in scheduled flight, carrying one non-pay passenger and mail, crashed with resultant death to the pilot and passenger and the complete destruction of the aircraft.

The plane, a Stinson, model SM-6000-B, bore Department of Commerce license number NC-10809 and was being operated between Omaha, Nebraska, and Kansas City, Missouri, by the Rapid Air Lines Corporation. The pilot, Benjamin F. Billings, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license, No. 31, and had a Scheduled Air Transport rating. The passenger, H. C. Brasfield, also a transport pilot, was manager of the airport at St. Joseph, Missouri, and received his salary from that city. By a special arrangement between the City of St. Joseph and Rapid Air Lines, he also acted as dispatcher and weather man at this point for Rapid Air Lines.

This trip was scheduled to leave Omaha at 9:40 p.m. However, due to a delay in mail connections with a plane of another airline, the actual take-off was not made until 10:30 p.m. Weather at the time was favorable, with fog predicted at a later hour in the vicinity of St. Joseph, Missouri. The plane was cleared from Omaha to Kansas City with definite instructions that no stop was to be made at St. Joseph.

The plane was seen flying the beacon light course at an altitude of approximately 400 feet at a point about seven miles from the scene of the crash. There were broken clouds in the sky but the stars were plainly visible and the plane could easily be seen from the ground. The plane was next seen at a point about eleven miles on the approach side of St. Joseph and close to the place where the crash occurred. There was a heavy fog at this point but the navigation lights on the plane could be seen from the ground. Witnesses state that the plane disappeared beyond them and returned almost immediately. The plane was then observed to make one or more turns just prior to the crash.

The terrain in this vicinity is very hilly and the crash occurred within a few feet of the top of one of these hills. Marks on the ground indicated that the plane was in a turn at the time of impact. The left side of the undercarriage struck first and was driven back between the left stabilizer and fin. The plane next struck on the right side of the undercarriage and the nose dug into the ground. It then bounced ahead for about forty feet, hit, bounced again and crashed into the side of a road cut at the top of the hill. Fire followed immediately.

The pilot departed from Omaha with a weather report indicating possible fog in the area around St. Joseph, a mid-point in the flight, at a later hour. This report, however, was more than one hour old at the time of departure and, due either to local conditions or the predicted change, the area closed in sooner than had been expected. Apparently, no effort was made to communicate this fact to the pilot. The pilot entered the fog area at an altitude scarcely above the highest hills in the vicinity. Why he elected to

stay low and to circle at such an altitude in a fog bound area is a matter of conjecture. There was nothing to indicate that the plane was not functioning properly. Kansas City, the destination, remained open all night with light rain and a ceiling of 1000 to 1200 feet. Had the pilot been advised, the weather encountered could not have been considered hazardous to a through flight from Omaha to Kansas City, as called for in the pilot's clearance.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable causes of this accident were:

1. Pilot committed an error in judgment in turning too close to the ground in a fog-bound area.
2. Weather reporting facilities of the Company were inadequate to meet the conditions that confronted the pilot on this flight.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal,
Director of Air Commerce.