

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE  
Washington

REPORT OF THE ACCIDENT BOARD  
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE

Statement of probable cause concerning an accident which occurred to a plane of Varney Air Transport, Incorporated, on May 1, 1935 at Rattlesnake Butte, Colorado

To the Director of Air Commerce

On May 1, 1935 at about 10 45 a.m. at Rattlesnake Butte, Colorado, an airplane of United States registry, piloted by a licensed airman, while being operated in scheduled flight carrying United States mail, accidentally collided with the ground with resultant death to the pilot and the complete destruction of the aircraft.

The airplane, a Lockheed Vega, bore Department of Commerce license number NC-891E and was being operated between Pueblo, Colorado and El Paso, Texas by Varney Air Transport, Incorporated. The pilot, John J. Montijo, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license. No passengers were carried.

Pilot Montijo, carrying mail only, departed from Pueblo on schedule and, so far as was known, proceeded on his normal course. Next known, a class of school children and their teacher at Rattlesnake Butte saw the plane approaching the school-house from the Northwest at an altitude of 150 to 200 feet. After circling the school-house and losing altitude to about 50 feet above the ground, the pilot increased the speed of the engine and flew to a point about one and one-half miles North of the school and while still losing altitude, attempted a turn which would allow him to pass in front of the school again. Near the completion of this turn and while in a steep bank, the right wing touched the ground, throwing the plane out of control, killing the pilot and completely destroying the aircraft.

Nothing was found to indicate that either plane or engine were not functioning normally. A letter found in the wreckage, evidently written by the pilot, requested the school children of Rattlesnake Butte to write him and let him know how close to the door of the school he had dropped the letter.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was an accidental collision with the ground while doing low flying in violation of the Air Commerce Regulations.

ACCIDENT BOARD

Jesse W. Lankford,  
Secretary.