

*File 100-122*

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE  
Washington

NC 27 2

REPORT OF THE ACCIDENT BOARD, BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE

Statement of Probable Cause Concerning a Collision Accident Which Occurred Between Two Airplanes at Norristown, Pa., on July 16, 1935

To the Director of Air Commerce

On July 16, 1935, at approximately 7 00 p.m., at Patco Field, Norristown, Pa., an airplane engaged in student instruction and a privately owned airplane collided while attempting to take off, with resultant serious injuries to one pilot and student, the complete destruction of one aircraft, and major damage to the other.

One airplane, an Aeronca, model C-3, was owned by the Philadelphia Air Transport Company, and bore Department of Commerce license NO. NC-12495. The pilot, J. Wesley Smith, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license. Gracom Bettle, Jr., taking flying instruction from Mr. Smith, held a Department of Commerce student pilot's license. Both men received serious injuries.

The second airplane, a Waco, model YMF, was owned by the Sharples Specialty Company, and bore Department of Commerce license No. NC-14000. The pilot, P.T. Sharples, held a Department of Commerce private pilot's license. Mr Sharples was not injured.

There was no wind at the time, and except for the danger of colliding with other aircraft, landings or take-offs could be made in any direction that the limitation of the field would permit. It appears that this airport had no one in authority to establish a traffic direction under these conditions and that it was the pilot's own responsibility to assure himself that the airport was clear when taking off or coming in for a landing.

In this case, the Aeronca, engaged in student instruction, had just landed and rolled out of sight over the crest of a hill which is in the center of the airport. At this time, the Waco was taxied to the end of the airport preparatory to taking off in the same direction in which the Aeronca had landed. In the meantime, the Aeronca, at the other end of the airport, had turned around for a take-off in the reverse direction from which it had landed. The two airplanes took off from opposite ends of the airport, neither being able to see the other due to the hill between them. They came together at the top of the hill, the Waco still on the ground accelerating to flying speed, and the Aeronca about six or eight feet in the air.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was carelessness and negligence on the part of the Aeronca pilot for taking off in the reverse direction from which he had just landed and for taking off without definite knowledge that the airport was clear, and carelessness and negligence on the part of the Waco pilot for taking off without definite knowledge that the airport was clear.

Respectfully submitted

ACCIDENT BOARD

/s/ Jesse W. Lankford, Chief Safety Section (Secretary) /s/ Joe T. Shumate, Jr Chief, Gen'l Insp Svc /s/ Richard C. Gazley, Chief En, Manufacturing Insp. Service