

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE
Washington

REPORT OF THE ACCIDENT BOARD
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE

Statement of probable cause concerning an aircraft accident
which occurred to a privately owned plane on August 15, 1935
At Walakpi, Alaska

To the Director of Air Commerce

On August 15, 1935 at about 6 00 p.m. at Walakpi, Alaska, about 15 miles south of Point Barrow, Alaska, an airplane, owned and piloted by Wiley Post and carrying Will Rogers, fell out of control while taking off with resultant death to both men and the complete destruction of the aircraft

The airplane, at the time of purchase by Mr Post, was a Lockheed Orion, model SE, and bore a Department of Commerce license. Prior to the flight, however, the airplane was completely rebuilt and several major changes incorporated which changed it from the original model. The engine, propeller, wings and fuel tanks were changed entirely. This remodeling was inspected and approved for workmanship by the Department of Commerce and the remodeled airplane was issued Department of Commerce restricted license number NR-12283, which limited its use to long distance and special test flights. The pilot, Wiley Post, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license

At Seattle, Washington, pontoons were substituted for the wheel landing gear. No inspection of the airplane was requested after this change. Mr. Rogers joined the flight at this point. At Fairbanks, Alaska, the airplane was partially refueled and flown to Lake Harding, about 40 miles away, to be completely refueled for the Point Barrow flight

The take-off for Point Barrow was accomplished at some time between 1.30 and 2 30 p.m. When next heard of, the airplane had landed on a small lagoon about 15 miles south of Point Barrow where Mr. Post inquired the direction of Point Barrow.

Having obtained this information, he proceeded to take off from the lagoon and when an altitude of approximately 50 feet had been reached, the engine was heard to stop and the airplane fell to the water out of control. Both occupants were killed instantly.

A study of the effect of the various changes made on the airplane indicated that it was decidedly nose-heavy and must have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to properly control without the aid of the engine. A statement made by the pilot after the change to pontoons confirms this conclusion.

The exact cause of the engine failure cannot be determined. The temperature at the time was about 40° and the failure could have been due to the engine having become cool while standing on the lagoon or to ice or water condensate forming in the carburetor.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was loss of control of the aircraft at a low altitude after sudden engine failure, due to the extreme nose-heaviness of the aircraft.

ACCIDENT BOARD

Jesse W. Lankford, Secretary