

May 19, 1936

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE  
Washington

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE CONCERNING AN ACCIDENT WHICH  
OCCURRED TO A PRIVATELY OWNED AIRPLANE AT RICH MOUNTAIN,  
ARKANSAS, ON MARCH 5, 1936

To the Secretary of Commerce.

On March 5, 1936, at approximately 9 35 a.m. at Rich Mountain, Arkansas, a privately owned airplane crashed with resultant death to the pilot and passenger and the complete destruction of the aircraft.

The airplane, a Beechcraft, Model B17L, bore Department of Commerce license number NC-15486, and was owned by the pilot. The pilot, Harley E. Woodward, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license. The passenger was Mr. Edward Martin.

Pilot Woodward was reported to have departed from the airport at Fort Smith, Arkansas, shortly before the accident and was last seen by the airport manager following the railroad toward Mena, Arkansas. A general fog condition existed at the time, approaching zero-zero in the vicinity of the accident. Witnesses at Rich Mountain could just see the airplane maneuvering in the fog above and stated that it would have been impossible for the pilot to have seen the mountains on either side.

The airplane was seen flying east at a low altitude, apparently following the railroad. After getting into the heavy fog the airplane made a complete turn and started back toward the west. It then turned again heading east. At the point of the accident the aircraft circled twice, striking the side of a mountain in the last turn. Fire followed immediately after impact. Witnesses state that the engine was functioning normally at all times. Inspection of the surrounding territory indicated that the airplane struck the mountain while in a bank.

It is the opinion of the Bureau of Air Commerce that the probable cause of this accident was poor judgment on the part of the pilot for attempting contact flying under adverse weather conditions.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal  
Director of Air Commerce