

CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

WASHINGTON, D. C.

FOR RELEASE:

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD of the

Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft in Scheduled Air Carrier Operation

2893-40

An accident involving a Douglas, Model DC-3 (NC19974), owned by American Airlines, Inc., which occurred at Brainard Field, Hartford, Connecticut, on September 3, 1940, about 7:00 a.m., resulted in extensive damage to the aircraft and minor injury to one passenger, C. B. Cronnan. Thirteen other passengers and the crew of three were not injured. Captain E. J. Cheney, who held an airline transport certificate and who had logged about 4350 flying hours, was in command of the flight. He was assisted by First Officer C. E. Higbee, who held a commercial pilot certificate and who had flown about 1175 hours. Kathleen Regan was serving as stewardess.

The airplane took off from Boston at 6:10 a.m. on a scheduled flight (American's Trip 29) to New York City, with an intermediate stop at Hartford. At 6:49 a.m., when the airplane passed over the Hartford radio range station at 2000 feet, the ground was obliterated by dense ground fog. The last Weather Bureau sequence report for Hartford issued at 6:35 a.m., gave "High scattered clouds, visibility 1/2 mile, ground fog, temperature 62, dewpoint 62, barometer 29.99, wind calm." The Captain ordered the wheels lowered and started a descent to look over the field. According to Captain Chaney, he passed over the field twice and observed several holes in the ground fog which varied from light to moderate intensity. He states that he made an approach toward the west-northwest and got under the fog, but went around again, waiting for conditions to improve. On his next attempt, an approach toward the southeast, he stated the field was open except for light patchy ground fog about 100 feet thick on the edges of the field. The Captain stated that he could see one pole of the high tension wires as he passed over them at an altitude of 100 feet and that he was 50 feet above the ground as he passed the field boundary at which time he could see 3/4 the length of the field, but that before the plane touched the ground he could see its entire length. According to his statement, he decided to land on the grass-covered area east of the runway because in so doing he could use the Administration Building as a marker in lining up for a straight landing and also because that portion of the field was clearer of ground fog than the western part of the field. The airplane overshot 2,450 feet of the available landing area of 3,880 feet. The wheels first touched the ground on the grass approximately 152 feet east of the runway and the airplane continued its landing roll parallel with the runway. Although the pilot applied brakes, he was unable to stop the airplane on the wet ground, and it continued beyond the boundary of the airport onto soft, bumpy ground. After two or three bumps it stopped, nosed up, and fell back sharply on its tail.

Investigation revealed that, before departure from Boston, the trip had been cleared from that point to LaGuardia Field, New York, with Floyd Bennett Field as an alternate. When it became apparent from a later weather report that conditions at Hartford were below the minimums prescribed by the Civil Aeronautics Administration, the trip was contacted by radio, at 6:26 a.m., and Philadelphia was named as an additional alternate, in accordance with approved procedure.

PROBABLE CAUSE:

Action of the pilot in attempting a landing under conditions which were below the minimums set forth in the company's weather letter of competency as approved by the Civil Aeronautics Administration.