

Adopted: May 25, 1942

File No. 3135-41

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD  
of the  
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft in  
Scheduled Air Carrier Operation

A Douglas DSTA aircraft, NC 18101, owned by Western Air Lines, Inc., and operated on that carrier's Trip No. 7 of July 16, 1941, was damaged during an emergency landing at Los Angeles, California, at approximately 1:45 p.m. The crew consisted of First Pilot Lester C. Holtan and Second Pilot George E. Cerveney, both of whom were properly certificated and appropriately rated, and a stewardess, Evelyn Bartlett. Five passengers were aboard. There were no injuries to either passengers or crew.

After being properly dispatched to San Diego, California, Western Air Lines Trip No. 7 departed Burbank, California, its origin, on schedule at 1:30 p.m. July 16. An intermediate stop was scheduled at Long Beach, California. The flight proceeded normally, reaching the vicinity of Long Beach at about 1:45 p.m., and contacted the control tower for landing instructions. The control tower operator informed Trip 7 that the wind was from the west-northwest at a velocity of 18 miles per hour, which indicated a landing on the 3000 foot east-west runway, and advised caution due to the presence of a disabled Army aircraft about midway of the runway and 100 feet north of it. The pilot, in an effort to effect a short landing and thereby minimize the chance of collision with the Army aircraft, brought his plane in under power at a relatively low speed. As the aircraft neared the east end of the usable portion of the runway, a sudden shock was felt. This was followed immediately by the sound of the landing gear warning horn. Power was applied and the ship was placed in a climbing attitude. On checking, the crew found that the right landing gear was not fully extended and that the landing gear latch was not functioning. The control tower asked the flight by radio whether anything was wrong and was advised of the trouble with the landing gear. The tower operator requested the pilot to fly low over the tower so as to permit the personnel there to check the wheels. Pilot Holtan complied, and while he was flying at a low altitude, the crew attempted to ascertain the nature of the obstruction which the landing gear had struck but no obstruction could be discerned. The control tower advised that the gear appeared to be all right, but Trip 7 replied that the right gear could not be fully extended and that the flight was returning to Burbank. The carrier's office at Burbank was advised and the flight proceeded in that direction. After arrival over Burbank, while the crew was carrying out instructions from the company's ground station, it was found that the right landing gear would retract only partially. It became apparent, after repeated efforts to dislodge the landing gear had failed, that a wheels-up landing would have to be made. In accordance with instructions from the company, the flight proceeded to the Los Angeles Municipal Airport where, after the fuel supply had been almost exhausted, a successful landing with retracted gear was effected at approximately 5:14 p.m.

Subsequent investigation disclosed that during the attempted landing at Long Beach, the right landing gear wheel had struck a mound of newly graded earth and gravel extending north and south across the aircraft's path of approach at a point some 330 feet east of the east end of the usable runway. This mound was between 6 and 8 feet wide at its base and between 12 and 18 inches high. It was about the same color as the surrounding surface and was not readily discernible from the air. Investigation also disclosed that the Army aircraft, previously mentioned, had been disabled by striking this same obstruction during a landing about two hours before Flight 7's attempted landing.

Examination of the right landing gear revealed that impact with the obstruction at Long Beach had forced the landing gear brace strut upward into the wing, bent the retracting strut piston and caused other damage. During the subsequent wheels-up landing at Los Angeles, all propeller blades were damaged.

Pilot Holtan was not advised of the existence of the obstruction in his path of approach at Long Beach. Having been informed of an obstruction north of the runway and about one-half the distance down the runway, he was displaying good judgment in attempting to make a short landing, particularly in view of the quartering wind from the north. It appears that the control tower operator at Long Beach was negligent in failing to apprise the flight of the obstruction beyond the east end of the runway, especially since another aircraft had been damaged by striking the same obstruction before the arrival of Trip 7.

The crew was most diligent in applying precautionary measures to minimize the danger of injury to passengers and damage to the aircraft during the landing at Los Angeles, which was well executed and which resulted in no personal injuries and in a minimum of damage to the plane.

PROBABLE CAUSE: Presence in the final approach path of an unmarked obstruction, of which the pilot was not informed.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Darwin Charles Brown

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Secretary