

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD
on the
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft
During a Local Practice Flight

An accident which occurred about 8 miles northwest of Lockport, New York at approximately 3:12 p.m. on June 30, 1943, resulted in fatal injuries to Pilot Neiland Burdell Wille and serious injuries to Gordon Ellsworth Campbell. Wille held a private pilot certificate with a single-engine land, 0-80 h.p. rating and had flown approximately 125 hours, all in the type of aircraft involved. Campbell held a student pilot certificate and had logged 53 solo hours. The aircraft, a Piper J3F-60, NC 28167, owned by Lockport Flyers, was extensively damaged.

Both pilots were members of the local Civil Air Patrol and the purpose of the flight, a Civil Air Patrol mission, was to drop lime-filled paper sacks at a target. Pilot Wille, flying from the front seat, and Campbell, who was to drop the lime-filled paper bags from the rear cockpit, took off from Graf Airport at 2:45 p.m. for their target which was located in a plowed field about 4 miles northwest of the airport. One observer, standing about 50 feet west of the target to score the hits, stated that two runs from west to east were made at an altitude of from 400 to 600 feet and two bags were dropped, missing the target by a wide margin. Following this, a run was made from east to west but no bags were dropped. The aircraft then descended to tree top height, and the pilot made a run toward the west, passing over the target below the level of a 30-foot high power line running across the flight path directly ahead. The right wing and its diagonal lift strut struck the two lower wires, severing one and stretching the other. The plane then somersaulted and struck the ground in an inverted position, some 195 feet beyond the power line.

Examination of the wreckage revealed no evidence of failure of any part of the aircraft prior to collision with the wires. Dual controls were installed and operative.

The local Civil Air Patrol commander, who also operated the Graf Airport, stated that he had authorized the target practice from various altitudes but never lower than 400 feet. The position of the afternoon sun at the time was high enough that it should not have impaired the pilot's vision. However, from the approaching airplane the background of trees approximately 400 feet beyond may have made the wires difficult to see.

Interest in the target undoubtedly diverted the pilot's attention from his flying and accounted for his failure to avoid obstructions in his flight path while performing such maneuvers at a dangerously low altitude.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary