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

Instructor Grayson Joel Brown and his student, Robert Martin Daugherty, were fatally injured in an accident which occurred at Fredonia, Pennsylvania, about 7:00 p.m. on July 17, 1943. Brown held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-80 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. He had accumulated over 1200 hours of flight time, around 150 of which were in the 90 days preceding the accident. Daugherty held a student pilot certificate and had flown about 11 dual and 3 solo hours. The aircraft, a Piper J-4, NC 24314, owned by CBX Club, was demolished.

Brown and Daugherty took off from the Mercer, Pennsylvania Airport at approximately 6:35 p.m. on a local instruction flight. About 20 minutes later the plane was observed over a wheat field three miles west of the airport at an altitude of approximately 500 feet. After two turns of a spiral over the wheat field, with the engine idling, the pilot headed eastward over a wooded area at a very low altitude and the airplane disappeared from view. Almost immediately thereafter it was heard to crash. There were no known witnesses to the accident.

Evidence indicated that the aircraft had struck a tree 30 feet above the ground while heading in an easterly direction. This reversed the plane's heading and it crashed nose-first approximately 200 feet west of the tree in a small clearing surrounded by bushes and trees. Examination of the wreckage revealed no sign of failure of any part of the aircraft prior to the accident. The manner in which the propeller was broken indicated that power was not being developed at the time of impact. The throttle was in the open position and the switches were on. Weather conditions were suitable for flying and were not a contributing factor to the accident.

Instructor Brown was reported to have made a practice of giving simulated forced landings, allowing students to descend to within 50 to 75 feet of the ground before applying power. Whether or not a simulated forced landing was being given in this instance could not be determined. It seems inconceivable that an instructor of Brown's experience would have selected such an inappropriate approach if he had been attempting an actual emergency landing, as fields suitable for landing bordered both sides of the 540-foot wide wooded area. Nevertheless, it is apparent that for some undetermined reason either the instructor or his student placed the aircraft in a position where obstructions could not be cleared without the use of power and the engine failed to respond when it was needed.

The probable cause of this accident was poor judgment of the instructor in descending or permitting his student to descend to a dangerously low altitude over hazardous terrain.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary