

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

Instructor Jumell Ritchie was seriously injured and his student, Robert M. Hooks, received minor injuries in an accident which occurred approximately 14 miles northwest of Oktibbeha Airport, Starkville, Mississippi, about 10:30 a.m. on September 1, 1943. Ritchie held a student pilot certificate and was employed by the Starkville Flying Service as an apprentice instructor. He had accumulated approximately 577 hours of solo flight time, 442 of which were in the type airplane involved. Hooks was a War Training Service trainee enrolled in the Army indoctrination course. The aircraft, a Piper J5-A, NC 35609, owned by the Defense Plant Corporation and being operated by the Starkville Flying Service, received extensive damage.

Ritchie and Hooks took off from the Oktibbeha Airport shortly before 10:00 a.m. on a dual instruction flight. After a sequence of maneuvers in a practice area near the airport, Ritchie took the controls and flew to a point about 14 miles northwest of the airport. He stated that he circled a group of people standing near a small store and then undertook to demonstrate to the student how to make a forced landing in a small field nearby. After descending to within approximately 20 feet of the ground, Ritchie applied power but the plane failed to clear some telephone wires at the far end of the field. The landing gear struts pulled the cross-arm and wires loose from a supporting pole and the aircraft settled to the ground with the wires. This acted as an arresting device and greatly reduced the shock of impact.

Both the instructor and his student stated that the engine was operating normally prior to the accident. The field selected for the simulated forced landing was not suitable for such a purpose. A background of trees probably made the telephone poles and wires very difficult to distinguish during the landing approach. Ritchie admitted that he was entirely at fault and stated that he did not see the wires before hitting them.

This accident was due to poor judgment and carelessness on the part of the instructor in his selection of a field to demonstrate a simulated forced landing, and in failing to observe and avoid an obstruction while maneuvering at a dangerously low altitude.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs  
Secretary