

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

An accident which occurred near the Municipal Airport, Lakeview, Oregon, about 5:15 p.m. on September 6, 1943, resulted in fatal injuries to Passenger George Collins; serious injuries to Passenger Elaine Ellison and Pilot Clifford William Hogue; and minor injuries to Passenger Donald Cogburn. Passengers Betty Snider, John Snider, and Cyrus McColgin, Jr., escaped injury. Hogue held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-865 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. He had flown approximately 1375 solo hours, 42 of which were in the type of airplane involved. The aircraft, a Consolidated Fleetster Special 17, Type 2H, NC 73117, owned by Louis Soukup, was destroyed by impact and fire.

Pilot Hogue, an employee of Soukup, secured the local passenger-carrying concession at Lakeview during a three-day Labor Day celebration and rodeo. About 5:00 p.m., on September 6, six passengers boarded the plane for the usual ten to twelve minute flight and as there was seating capacity for only five passengers, two school boys (ages 14 and 16) shared the copilot's seat in the cockpit, and the pilot took off on his 65th passenger flight of this operation. Approximately ten minutes later, while at an altitude of 1200 feet some 4 miles east of the airport, the left rudder pedal, without warning or excessive pressure being applied, fell forward to the floor. Realizing that he was without left rudder control, the pilot experimented in turning left and right while circling the airport and finding he could do so by use of the aileron, he prepared to attempt a landing on the airport. He told the two boys occupying the right seat in the cockpit to go to the rear of the cabin and "hold tight." Because of the likelihood of groundlooping, the pilot elected to land between the surfaced runways and descended to about 50 feet above the ground to examine the condition of the field. At the far end of the airport he pulled up to an altitude of around 200 feet and about this time one of the passengers called the pilot's attention to smoke coming into the rear of the cabin. Hogue looked around, gave one of the passengers a fire extinguisher to use, then made an immediate landing on the open prairie, parallel to a long, narrow, water-filled ravine. Attempts to extinguish the flames in the baggage compartment were unsuccessful and the intensity of the fire increased until the wall between the cabin and baggage compartment was aflame. During the landing roll, Passenger Cogburn broke and crawled through a window onto the left wing, while Passengers Cyrus McColgin, Betty Snider and John Snider crawled through the cockpit hatch, also out on the left wing. The pilot stated that when the wheels touched the ground he turned off the ignition and released the fire extinguisher in the engine compartment. The airplane rolled straight until the speed was reduced to about 10 m.p.h., after which it veered to the right, rolled into a shallow water hole and nosed over, throwing the four passengers on the left wing to the ground. It came to rest on the nose and landing gear at an angle of about 45°. The fire in the baggage compartment rendered the door in the rear of the cabin unusable and the two remaining passengers, severely burned, escaped with the assistance of the pilot through the emergency hatch in the cockpit.

Examination of the left rudder control revealed that it had parted due to a local application of high temperature, apparently caused by arcing from an unattached, spare 12-volt storage battery which the pilot was carrying in the baggage compartment. Several sheets of newspaper had been placed on top of this battery and the edges tucked between the homemade coverless case and the sides of the battery. The floor boards of the baggage compartment were not rigidly held in place. The pilot stated that he inspected this compartment about an hour before the accident and found the battery in place on the floor, along with two small canvas rolls of mechanics tools. He said there was no severe air turbulence experienced after this inspection, nor did he make any rough landings. The tail wheel of the subject aircraft is the non-steerable type and the pilot reportedly made a practice of turning the airplane by applying brakes and, with the controls forward, blasting the engine to lift the tail around. It is possible that this action may have upset the battery and allowed it to fall through the unsecured floor boards on top of the rudder cable.

PROBABLE CAUSE: Fire in the airplane resulting from arcing of the storage battery by a rudder control cable,

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS: 1. Carelessness of the pilot in carrying a spare unsecured battery in the aircraft.

2. Loss of left rudder control which delayed emergency landing, allowing the intensity of the fire to increase.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toorbs
Secretary