

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

A mid-air collision which occurred approximately 3 miles southwest of Hale Field, Missoula, Montana, about 7:30 a.m. on September 10, 1943, resulted in fatal injuries to Instructor Stanley Hillman and Student William T. Richards, in Piper J3C-65, NC 35807; and Instructor Clyde Reynolds and Student Robert N. Schwenter, in Piper J3C-65, NC 35851. The two instructors held commercial pilot certificates with single-engine land, 0-80 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. Hillman had flown approximately 422 and Reynolds about 1061 hours. Students Richards and Schwenter were War Training Service trainees in the Army indoctrination course. Both aircraft, owned by the Defense Plant Corporation and being operated by Johnson Flying Service, Inc., were demolished.

The two flights took off from Hale Field at approximately 7:10 a.m. to practice low altitude maneuvers in an area 3 miles southwest of the airport. Sometime later another instructor flying nearby observed two planes in the practice area, at an altitude of about 500 feet, a considerable distance apart; shortly thereafter he saw two planes on the ground in a wrecked condition. There were no known witnesses to the accident.

The aircraft were located about 1000 feet apart. Examination of the wreckage revealed no sign of failure of any part of either aircraft prior to impact. Evidence indicated that the two planes, flying at the same altitude, in opposite directions, collided almost head-on while both were turning to the left, banked at an angle of around 30°. This would place each in a blind position to the other at the time of impact. The engine in the plane flown by Reynolds, with one propeller blade still attached, apparently was torn or vibrated loose from its mount during or immediately following the collision and was lying 40 feet from the main portion of the wreckage. One blade of the propeller was found 500 feet northwest of the wreckage. Occupants of both planes were equipped with parachutes but apparently had made no attempt or had had no opportunity to use them. Weather was suitable for flying and is not considered to have contributed to the accident.

Following this accident representatives of CAA General Inspection and War Training Service conferred with the operator, and the following rules were put into effect:

- (1) No more than two airplanes shall operate in one practice area at the same time.
- (2) When two airplanes are flying in the same practice area, one pilot shall engage in his low sequence maneuvers, while the other performs his high altitude maneuvers.

It is regrettable that these or similar rules had not been put into effect at an earlier date since such rules might have prevented this accident.

The probable cause of this accident was lack of vigilance of the occupants of both aircraft while engaged in maneuvers which required close reference to the ground.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary