

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD
on the
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft
During a Cross-country Charter Flight

An accident which occurred approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Pardee, Virginia, about 2 45 p.m. on September 16, 1943, resulted in fatal injuries to Pilot Ralph Hugo Barry and a 5-week old baby, and serious injuries to the infant's mother, Mrs. Berthe N. Welch. Barry held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-495 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. He had flown approximately 2810 solo hours, of which 2250 were in the type airplane involved. The aircraft, a Culver LEA, NC 34799, owned by the pilot, was destroyed by impact and fire.

Pilot Barry secured clearance for a cross-country charter flight from Anderson, South Carolina to Port Columbus, Ohio and, accompanied by Mrs. Welch and her infant son, took off about 12:30 p.m. The weather at Anderson was suitable for contact flight but as the flight approached the Virginia mountains about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours later, rain and low-hanging clouds were encountered. Witnesses at Dunbar, Virginia, approximately 167 miles from Anderson, on a direct route to Columbus, observed the plane headed east at an altitude of about 500 feet, and watched it return, passing over the town headed north some 20 minutes later at an altitude of approximately 200 feet. According to Mrs. Welch, visibility was very bad and the pilot was flying up and down the valleys, following railroad tracks, searching for a way to get over the mountains without climbing into the overcast. When they reached the end of a spur line at the head of a very narrow valley near Pardee, the pilot, attempting a steep 180° turn to the right, exclaimed, "We are going to crash." The right wing struck a tall tree on the mountainside about 300 feet below the ridge and the plane nosed over on its back. It came to rest on an abandoned coal mine tramway, and burst into flames. Mrs. Welch unbuckled her safety belt and escaped from the wreckage. She was badly burned in her unsuccessful attempt to extricate the other occupants.

On the day prior to this accident, Mrs. Welch called Pilot Barry to Anderson, for the purpose of flying her and her baby back to Saginaw, Michigan. The pilot checked the weather for several stations along his route and obtained wind aloft reports from Spartanburg and Atlanta. He did not request a weather forecast, nor did he file a flight plan. Although weather reports on this route, individually, were not particularly unfavorable, they did indicate 21° colder air at Huntington, W. Va., on the west side of the mountains, than at Anderson on the east. This, coupled with a wind shift of around 180° , should have warned the pilot of a cold front with poor flying conditions over the mountains on his intended route. The aircraft was not equipped for instrument flight and the pilot did not hold an instrument rating.

Although the planning of this flight was faulty, the accident itself was due to the pilot's poor judgment in continuing contact flight into instrument weather over mountainous terrain.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary