

Adopted: May 19, 1944

File No. 4069-43

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD
on the
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft
during a Cross-Country Pleasure Flight

Pilot Roy Emil Gagel, age 52, was seriously injured in an accident which occurred approximately 8 miles southwest of Cascade, Montana, about 11:15 a.m. on September 20, 1943. Gagel held a commercial pilot certificate with a single-engine land, C-80 h.p. rating, and had flown approximately 348 hours, all in the type airplane involved. The aircraft, a Piper J3, NC 20867, powered by a Continental 40 h.p. engine, and owned by the pilot, was demolished.

Pilot Gagel left Havre, Montana on September 19 for a cross-country flight to Helena, Montana, where the aircraft was to receive a 100-hour periodic inspection. After an overnight stop at Centerville, Montana, Gagel took off about 10:00 a.m. on September 20 to continue the flight and flew in a southwesterly direction to the Missouri River, where he entered a narrow canyon (approximately 3/4 mile wide) at an altitude of about 200 feet. The pilot stated, "I was flying low in the canyon. The air was terribly rough. I was afraid I was going to lose control of the airplane so I turned to get out. I guess I was excited and in too much of a hurry because I spun in. The aircraft and engine were working fine and it was entirely my fault."

Examination of the wreckage indicated that the aircraft struck the ground on the left wing tip and nose in an almost vertical position. Although the pilot's safety belt remained buckled, the fastener which held the formed wire ends of the belt to the tubing structure had failed, and the pilot was thrown clear of the aircraft. The weather was clear with a southwest wind of 34 m.p.h. which flowed over the mountains and through the gorge creating considerable turbulence.

Although extreme turbulence was a contributing factor, the direct cause of this accident was confusion of the pilot and poor technique which resulted in an inadvertent stall and spin at a low altitude, from which recovery was not effected.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary