

Approved April 17, 1944

File No. 4428-43

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

Pilot Ira Morgan Gillespie was fatally injured in an accident which occurred approximately 3 miles northwest of the Municipal Airport, Birmingham, Alabama, about 1:35 p.m. on October 18, 1943. Gillespie held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-80 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. He had flown approximately 460 solo hours, around 100 of which were in the type airplane involved. The aircraft, a Piper J3C-65, NC 38741, owned by the Defense Plant Corporation and being operated by the Southern Airways Sales Company, was demolished by impact and fire.

Gillespie took off from the Birmingham Municipal Airport at approximately 1:30 p.m. for the purpose of ferrying the airplane to Roberts Field, Birmingham, where it was to be used for instruction purposes. A few minutes later several Southern Railroad employees, who were working near a trestle about 300 feet from where the accident occurred, observed two airplanes, one about 400 feet behind and slightly lower than the other, flying low over and parallel to the railroad tracks. The lead plane was seen to pull up and clear a power line about 75 feet above the railroad tracks but the pilot of the second plane apparently saw the wires too late. As he pulled up into a climbing turn, his left wing struck the power line and the plane crashed through trees to the ground. It came to rest in an upright position and burst into flames.

Witnesses were agreed that the engine was operating normally when the plane struck the wires. The poles supporting the wires are located on ridges on either side of the narrow valley in which the railroad tracks are located and the wires sagged to such an extent that they were lower at the center than these ridges. The scene of the accident is not on a direct course from the Municipal Airport to Roberts Field, as that field is in a southerly direction from the Municipal Airport. It could not be determined who was the pilot of the lead plane. The pilots of the several planes known to have been in the air at the time denied having been in the vicinity of where the accident occurred.

The probable cause of this accident was the pilot's failure to clear an obstruction in his flight path while flying at a dangerously low altitude.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Thomas
Secretary