

Adopted: May 22, 1944

File No. 5247-43

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

Pilot Edwin Palmer Stiles was seriously injured and his passenger, Edward Henry Sevene, received minor injury in an accident which occurred at Mellenville, New York, about 4:45 p.m., on December 6, 1943. Stiles, age 24, held a commercial pilot certificate with single-engine land, 0-135 h.p., and flight instructor ratings. He had flown approximately 655 solo hours, about 280 of which were in the type airplane involved. Sevene, age 26, held a student pilot certificate and had flown a total of 20 hours, 8 of which were solo. The aircraft, an Aeronca KC, NC 19720, owned by the passenger, was extensively damaged.

Pilot Stiles, accompanied by Sevene, departed Lehighton, Pennsylvania, about 1:30 p.m. on a ferry flight to West Minot, Maine, with the intention of stopping at Lime Ridge, New York to refuel. They stated that they were unable to locate Lime Ridge, due to poor visibility, and proceeded on a northerly course until over Mellenville. Realizing they were getting low on fuel, they landed on a field about 1700 feet long, which was soft and covered with patches of snow. The airplane was then refueled with 5 gallons of automobile gasoline secured from a service station. The pilot started a take-off against a 3-mile wind from the south, toward the town, and after a run of approximately 1000 feet, the airplane left the ground but was unable to climb over trees and houses which were slightly up-graded. The pilot maneuvered the plane between the trees and continued about 700 feet to a point where the right wing struck a tree approximately 60 feet above the ground, severing the wing tip. The aircraft then rolled over and dived in a nearly vertical attitude to the ground.

Examination of the wreckage did not reveal a failure of any part of the airplane prior to impact with the tree. The automobile gasoline might have reduced the power of the engine sufficiently to be considered a contributing factor to the accident. Neither the pilot nor passenger could state definitely but both thought the engine was functioning normally at the time of take-off.

The probable cause of this accident was the pilot's poor judgment in taking off from a soft field, uphill, and toward obstructions, when he could have taken off downhill toward open fields, with a fence at the end of the field the only obstruction to be cleared. Although the take-off was made into the wind, a 3 m.p.h. wind does not seem to justify the pilot's judgment in this instance.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs  
Secretary