

CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

Adopted: January 7, 1949

Released: January 10, 1949

LAGRANGE, GEORGIA—SEPTEMBER 27, 1948

An airplane accident which occurred near LaGrange, Georgia, September 27, 1948, resulted in fatal injuries to Virgil King Wood, of Louisville, Kentucky. The 140 Cessna, NC 76034, owned by Carl W. Elkins, was demolished. Wood, age 30, held a current CAA certificate with private and single-engine land ratings. He had flown approximately 228 hours.

On the morning of September 27 Pilot Wood took off from Louisville, Kentucky, for a cross-country flight to visit relatives in West Palm Beach, Florida. At 1515 he landed at Atlanta, Georgia, refueled, and took off to continue his flight at 1624. He did not file a flight plan.

On October 5 the pilot's wife, apprehensive because she had not heard from her husband, telephoned relatives in West Palm Beach concerning his return flight and learned that he had never arrived there. Various airports between Louisville and West Palm Beach were then circularized in an attempt to locate the missing pilot but nothing was learned. On November 21 the airplane wreckage was found by hunters in a wooded area 10 miles south of LaGrange, Georgia.

Evidence at the scene indicated that the airplane was traveling in a southerly direction at approximately normal cruising speed at impact. No evidence was found to indicate any mechanical failure or malfunctioning of any part of the airplane before the crash. Sixty-two yards from the main wreckage the remains of the pilot were found, together with his clothes, wrist watch, wallet, and other personal effects. Examination disclosed that he had received serious injuries, including a broken leg, arm and one rib. However, evidence of a camp fire, cigarette stubs, and trampled grass indicates that the pilot's injuries were not immediately fatal.

A notebook found near the wreckage contained information covering the landing and takeoff at Atlanta. A check of weather conditions at the time of departure from Atlanta showed them to be marginal. Reports for Macon, Georgia, southeast of Atlanta, and Columbus, Georgia, southwest of Atlanta, showed weather was unsatisfactory for visual flight and that ceiling and visibility could be expected to lower for the next few hours. Terrain where the crash occurred is hilly and wooded and ceilings in that area could have been lower than those at the weather reporting stations.

Had Pilot Wood filed a flight plan, a search for him would have been started when he failed to arrive at his destination, rather than eight days later. Furthermore, at the time the search was started there was no knowledge of where Wood might be, other than somewhere between Louisville and West Palm Beach. The fact that he had landed at Atlanta was not known until after the wreckage was found. It appears probable that after departure from Atlanta, adverse weather was encountered and Pilot Wood flew the airplane into the ground while attempting to maintain contact flight.

Upon the basis of all available evidence, the Board concludes that the probable cause of this accident was an inadvertent collision with trees during an attempt to fly visually in instrument weather.

BY THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD:

/s/ JOSEPH J. O'CONNELL, JR.

/s/ JOSH LEE

/s/ HAROLD A. JONES

/s/ RUSSELL B. ADAMS

Oswald Ryan, Vice Chairman, did not participate.