

CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

Adopted: June 3, 1949

Released: June 3, 1949

BEECHCRAFT BONANZA—STURGEON BAY, WISCONSIN—DECEMBER 4, 1948

An aircraft accident near Cherryland Airport, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, about 1800* December 4, 1948, resulted in death to Pilot Karl Reynolds and his two passengers, Lougee Stedman and Ervin Kossow. The Beechcraft Bonanza, NC 80459, owned by Reynolds Brothers, Inc, was destroyed by impact and fire. Mr Reynolds, a certificated pilot with private and single-engine land ratings, had flown approximately 1,000 hours, which included 200 hours at night and 450 hours in this type aircraft.

On the morning of December 4 Pilot Reynolds and his passengers took off from Cherryland Airport for Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. Low ceilings there prompted them to turn back and land at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, and they continued their trip to Beaver Dam by automobile. The afternoon of the same day they returned to Fond du Lac and at approximately 1645 took off for Sturgeon Bay, about 85 miles NNE. There was a 3 1/2 hour fuel supply on board. Numerous witnesses reported an airplane flying low in the general vicinity of Sturgeon Bay between 1720 and 1800. They stated that the weather was adverse with mist, fog, low clouds and restricted visibility, and that there was a brisk south wind. At approximately 1800 the airplane was heard to crash in a heavily-wooded area about 8 miles northeast of Cherryland Airport, the flight's destination. Because of darkness and adverse weather the wreckage was not located until approximately 0930 the following morning.

Investigation disclosed no evidence of any mechanical failure or malfunctioning of any part of the airplane prior to the crash. Indications were that initial impact was with a tall pine tree while the airplane was heading in the general direction of Cherryland Airport. Terrain in the vicinity is rolling farm land interspersed with wooded sections. The accident occurred about 5 miles from the nearest town and the only ground lighting was that provided by an occasional farm house.

Takeoff from Fond du Lac, an unlighted airport, was almost half an hour after official sunset, which was at 1617. No known attempt was made to check weather conditions en route to and at the intended destination. The operator of Cherryland Airport reported that when he left the field at 1630 the weather there was—ceiling estimated 200 feet, visibility 1/2 mile. This airport was not equipped with boundary or obstruction lights but did have a privately-operated rotating beacon which was turned on at 1530 and was on at the time of the crash. Although the airplane was equipped for instrument flight, Pilot Reynolds did not hold an instrument rating and there were no radio aids to navigation in the area in which he was flying.

Evidence indicates that the flight, aided by a brisk, quartering tail wind, arrived in the general area but considerably northwest of its destination approximately one-half hour after takeoff and that the remainder of the one and one-quarter hour period was spent maneuvering at low altitudes in an apparent attempt to locate Cherryland Airport. The airport manager at Menominee, Wisconsin, 27 miles NNW of Sturgeon Bay, reported seeing the airplane circling beneath the overcast at approximately 1720. He stated that he turned on runway lights and the airplane then flew off southeasterly in the direction of Sturgeon Bay.

The Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was the pilot's attempt to maintain visual contact with the ground by flying below minimum safe altitudes under conditions of poor visibility.

BY THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

/s/ JOSEPH J O'CONNELL, JR
/s/ OSWALD RYAN
/s/ JOSH LEE
/s/ HAROLD A JONES

Russell B Adams, Member, did not take part in the adoption of this report

*All times referred to herein are Central Standard and based on the 24-hour clock.