

CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

Adopted: November 3, 1950

Released: November 3, 1950

CONSOLIDATED VULTEE AIRCRAFT, PASADENA, CALIF., APRIL 28, 1950**The Accident**

At approximately 1417,¹ April 28, 1950, a Consolidated Vultee BT-15 aircraft, NC-63418, owned and flown by Nelson Woods Lowry, crashed into a dwelling located in a residential district of Pasadena, Calif. Both occupants of the aircraft were killed. The four persons in the house were not injured. The aircraft was destroyed and a portion of the house was damaged by impact and fire.

History of the Flight

Nelson W. Lowry, accompanied by his wife, departed from the East Los Angeles Airport at approximately 1405 on a cross-country flight to Oroville, Calif. Prior to his departure, Pilot Lowry filed with the Los Angeles Airway Communication Station a flight plan which showed that he intended to proceed in accordance with Visual Flight Rules. Twelve minutes after takeoff, at 1417, the aircraft was observed over Pasadena just below a 2,500-foot overcast. Witnesses stated that when they first observed the aircraft it was spinning, and that it made approximately two turns of a spin. About 400 feet above the ground it was seen to recover from the spin after which it entered a steep climb. While in this climb the aircraft was apparently stalled for control was lost for the second time. Then, the aircraft dived steeply and struck a house which was situated on a hill at an elevation of approximately 1,100 feet.

Investigation

First contact with the house was made when the aircraft's engine struck the brick chimney and tile roof. The chimney was razed, and the aircraft's engine was torn free and fell to the ground. The left wing was also severed from the aircraft, and it, along with a portion of the center section spar which

remained attached, was found nearby. Fire which immediately followed the crash, badly damaged the remainder of the aircraft.

The two-position Hamilton Standard propeller remained attached to the engine crankshaft. One of the blades was bent rearward and lay over the engine, the other was twisted. This damage indicated that little or no power was being developed at the time of impact.

A teardown inspection of the engine and a thorough examination of the wreckage did not disclose any sign or indication of mechanical failure in the engine or aircraft which could have occurred prior to impact.

Aircraft records material to this investigation showed that on March 4, 1950, the right elevator and aileron were recovered and that a drain valve was installed in the bottom of the fuel selector valve. This work was accomplished by a certificated mechanic, following which the aircraft was certificated by the Civil Aeronautics Administration on March 11, 1950. The records also showed that the aircraft was equipped with flight instruments which included a directional gyro and artificial horizon.

Pilot Lowry's personal log book was not found after the accident, but his brother testified that he had accumulated approximately 300 flying hours. His brother also stated that after Pilot Lowry had obtained his private pilot rating, about eighteen months previous to the accident, the majority of his experience had been in cross-country flying. Within the preceding twelve months he had made several long cross-country flights, one of which was to Seattle, Wash. His most recent cross-country flight, made six weeks before the accident occurred, was to Oroville, Calif. Although Pilot Lowry had flown numerous flights of this kind, there was no indication that he had ever flown solely by instruments, or that he had received any instrument training whatsoever.

¹All times referred to herein are Pacific Standard and based on the 24-hour clock.

On the afternoon of April 28, 1950, there was a dense overcast to the north and north-west of the airport, and the mountains in the direction of Lowry's intended flight were covered with clouds. The airport manager said that because of this weather condition, he advised Pilot Lowry to obtain a weather report before he departed. It could not be found out if this was done.

An aftercast of the weather on April 28, 1950, showed that a weak cyclonic circulation and a deep layer of cool moist marine air prevailed from the southern California coast inland to the mountains. During the morning, a solid layer of strato-cumulus clouds with bases about 2,000 feet and tops near 5,200 feet above sea level were in this area. At the time of the accident the sky was overcast with breaks in the clouds to the south. The base of the cloud deck was variable at 2,500 feet, and the tops extended to 6,500 feet. Below the clouds, the visibility was approximately five miles, and the wind was from the south at 5 to 10 miles per hour.

Analysis

When Pilot Lowry's aircraft was first observed it was just below the overcast and was spinning. It is evident from the actions of the aircraft at this time and its subsequent actions before striking the house that it was out of control. Since Pilot Lowry was not qualified to fly by instruments, and since no indication of mechanical failure was found in the engine or aircraft, it is logical to conclude that he had entered the overcast under which he was first observed and that he

lost control. Having lost control of the aircraft, Pilot Lowry was never able to fully recover, and as a result struck the house.

Findings

On the basis of all available evidence the Board finds that

- 1 The aircraft was properly certificated
- 2 Pilot Lowry held an airman certificate with a Private Pilot rating, he did not have an instrument rating
- 3 The aircraft was in an airworthy condition and operating without mechanical trouble prior to the accident
- 4 Weather conditions at the time of the accident were ceiling, variable 2,500 feet, visibility, five miles
- 5 The aircraft was first seen immediately under the overcast in a spin
- 6 The aircraft recovered from the spin, climbed steeply, stalled, and fell almost vertically

Probable Cause

The Board determines that the probable cause of this accident was loss of control of the aircraft by the pilot while flying into an overcast.

BY THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD

/s/ D W RENTZEL
 /s/ OSWALD RYAN
 /s/ JOSH LEE
 /s/ HAROLD A JONES
 /s/ RUSSELL B ADAMS

Supplemental Data

Investigation and Hearing

The Civil Aeronautics Board received notification of the accident on April 28, 1950, at 1520, by telephone from the sheriff's office, Los Angeles, California, and immediately initiated an investigation in accordance with the provisions of Section 702(a)(2) of the Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938, as amended. As part of the investigation a hearing was held May 12, 1950, at Pasadena, California.

Personnel

Nelson W Lowry, age 41, held a valid airman certificate with private pilot rating

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He had accumulated approximately 300 flying hours in light type aircraft. His last CAA physical examination was accomplished on March 23, 1950.

The Aircraft

NC-63418, a Consolidated Vultee BT-15 type aircraft was purchased on March 8, 1949. The aircraft was owned by Nelson W Lowry and was currently certificated by the Civil Aeronautics Administration. It had been flown a total of approximately 1,000 hours since the time of its purchase. The engine was a Wright Model No R-975-11.

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