

REPORT OF THE CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD  
on the  
Investigation of an Accident Involving Aircraft in a  
Scheduled Air Carrier Flight

A Douglas DC3A, NC 18942, owned and operated by United Air Lines Transport Corporation, received major damage in an accident which occurred at the Municipal Airport, Moline, Illinois at approximately 7:52 p.m. on December 20, 1942. The crew consisted of Captain Wesley Ray Lewis and First Officer Don Van Hayne, both of whom were properly certificated and appropriately rated for the flight involved, and Stewardess Virginia Gibson. Captain Lewis had accumulated approximately 2811 solo flying hours and had been employed by United Air Lines for two and one-half years. He had flown 1993 hours as first officer and 131 hours as captain in DC3 equipment. First Officer Hayne had flown approximately 1217 hours and had been employed by United Air Lines for two years. The flight carried three revenue passengers and a United Air Lines first officer who was deadheading from Omaha to Chicago. No injuries were sustained by any of the passengers or crew.

United Trip 8 of December 20, originated at Omaha, Nebraska, with New York, N. Y. as its destination. Several intermediate stops en route were scheduled, including the one at Moline. The flight was cleared to fly on instruments and departed from Omaha at 5:44 p.m. A scheduled stop was made at Des Moines, Iowa, and the flight departed that point at 6:44 p.m., flying on instruments at 3,000 feet. At about 7:42 p.m., when over Buffalo, Iowa, the first officer contacted the company operator at Moline, who gave him the wind at Moline Airport as east, approximately 3 m.p.h., and favoring Runway No. 9. This operator also informed the captain that the runways were slick and that brakes were not very effective. At 7:49 p.m., while circling the field, the flight again asked for the wind and was advised that it favored landing east, and that traffic was clear. Guided by this repeated mention of the east-west runway (No. 9) the captain made his approach. The first officer called out the airspeed during the approach and the plane crossed the field boundary at about 95 m.p.h. The approach was completed, using 3/4 flaps, and wheel contact was made at approximately 75 m.p.h. at a point about 1,000 feet beyond the approach end of the runway. After a skip of about 200 feet, with both wheels slightly touching the snow, firm wheel contact was maintained and the brakes were applied immediately. The tail-high position was maintained throughout the landing run and no braking effect was noticeable other than when crossing the runway intersection. Nearing the east end of the runway, Captain Lewis unlocked the tail wheel and attempted a ground loop by use of his right engine. The engine sputtered and the effort was abandoned after veering only a few degrees to the left. The aircraft continued on through the airport boundary fence, and crashed against the embankment of Highway No. 150, which adjoins the airport. The right landing gear failed from impact with the embankment and the plane stopped with its nose protruding over the highway.

There was no indication of failure of any part of the aircraft that could have contributed to the accident. The plane was loaded within

allowable limits. Captain Lewis stated that, "the airplane had a trace of ice on the wings, which the de-icers did not remove, and although negligible, influenced me to keep the airspeed previously mentioned until the field boundary was crossed." A similar statement was made by First Officer Mayne.

Moline Airport has three paved runways: The east-west (No. 9) is approximately 2950 feet long; while the northeast-southwest is 3,850 feet, and the northwest-southeast is about 4,100 feet in length. Runway No. 9 is seldom used due to its shortness and the fact that local winds seldom recur its use. The captain was warned that braking action was poor but was not advised that Runway No. 9 was covered with sheet ice coated with three inches of dry snow which had not adhered to the ice. The company station manager at Moline stated that the field had not been checked since December 1<sup>st</sup>, (three days prior to the accident) as conditions had remained approximately the same, with some variations due to temperature change. At the time of this inspection no particular attention was given Runway No. 9. The northeast-southwest and northwest-southeast runways, which intersect No. 9, were not extremely slippery at the time of the accident. The more favorable condition of these other runways, as compared with No. 9, appears to have been the result of traffic on them throughout the weather cycle of alternate thawing and freezing, which had produced a roughened surface. The wind from the east was negligible and a landing could have been accomplished on either of the longer runways.

Subsequent to this accident United issued instructions to the effect that it is the Station Manager's responsibility to make actual observations and keep company operations advised of any unusual field conditions which might be considered detrimental to safe, normal operations.

**PROBABLE CAUSE:** Slippery condition of the runway which made it impossible for the captain to stop the aircraft within the runway limits.

**CONTRIBUTING FACTOR:** Lack of vigilance by the station manager for not keeping himself currently informed on the condition of the runway.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred L. Toombs  
Secretary