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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
BUREAU OF AIR COMMERCE
WASHINGTON

March 28, 1935.

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE CONCERNING AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
WHICH OCCURRED TO A PLANE OF TRANSCONTINENTAL AND WESTERN AIR, INC.
AT PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA, ON JANUARY 26, 1935

To the Secretary of Commerce:

On January 26, 1935 at about 2:20 a.m. near the Pittsburgh Allegheny County Municipal Airport, an airplane, while being operated in scheduled flight carrying express and United States mail, crashed with resultant death to the pilot and the complete destruction of the aircraft and cargo.

The pilot, Floyd F. Church, held Department of Commerce transport pilot's license No. 8180 and had a scheduled air transport rating. The plane, a Consolidated Fleetster, bore Department of Commerce license number NC-13212. No passengers were permitted to be carried.

The plane arrived at Allegheny Airport at about 2:05 a.m., was serviced with gas and oil and the cargo loaded. Icing conditions existed at the time and a mechanic called the pilot's attention to a coating of ice then on the wings and landing gear of the plane which in places was one-quarter of an inch thick.

The pilot elected to continue the flight and take-off was accomplished using a major portion of the long runway. As soon as the plane was well off the ground, it was observed to make a flat turn, as though returning to land. When at an altitude of approximately 200 feet and apparently about to assume a glide into the field, the airplane was seen to waver and fall into a spiral descent. The landing lights were seen to flash on at the beginning of the maneuver. Due to the terrain, the plane disappeared from the sight of witnesses on the airport before the actual crash occurred. The plane struck the ground with the engine running and fire followed immediately.

It is apparent from this description that the airplane had collected a further coating of ice which in addition to increasing its weight materially, also impaired the lifting action of the wings and probably obscured the pilot's vision.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was poor judgment on the part of the pilot for attempting to take off under existing weather conditions and on the part of the Company for permitting the take-off.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal,
Director of Air Commerce.