

Adopted: February 6, 1945

File No. 1239-44

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

Pilot Ralph Leo Burton, age 34, of Cheyenne, Wyoming was fatally injured about 7:45 a.m. March 26, 1944, when the aircraft on Flight 3 of Inland Air Lines struck the ground under conditions of low visibility, seven miles north-northwest of Ottumwa, S. D. No passengers were aboard. The plane was being operated in scheduled air carrier service between Huron, S. D., and Cheyenne, Wyoming, with intermediate stops at Pierre, S. D. and other points.

Burton held a commercial certificate with single-engine land, O-330 h.p. and flight instructor ratings. He had accumulated 5251 hours of flying time, including 569 in the type aircraft involved. The plane, a Beechcraft C17B, NC 17060, powered by a Jacobs 285 h.p. engine and owned by Inland Air Lines, Inc., was demolished by impact and fire. It was seven years old and had been operated 2733 hours, including five hours since the last major overhaul of the plane and engine. Total time on the engine was 1912 hours.

The flight, which originated at Huron, had been held over at Pierre on March 25 because of darkness. Burton took off from Pierre at 7:16 a.m. March 26 to fly to Rapid City, S. D. Weather Bureau forecasts and maps indicated generally favorable weather with scattered squalls and snow showers along the route. The only report received from Burton was two minutes after take-off when he radioed that he was cruising contact. A rancher, three miles from where the airplane crashed, saw the plane flying in a southwesterly direction so low it barely cleared his barn. He said the engine sounded normal. The flight was due over Milesville, S. D. at 7:45 a.m. and when no position report had been received at 7:48 a.m., a search was started. The wreckage was located about three hours later on a snow-covered rolling prairie suitable for an emergency landing.

Investigation revealed that the aircraft had struck the ground with power applied and the landing gear retracted. Smaller parts of the plane were scattered some distance from the main wreckage and the body of the pilot, who had been thrown out of the ship, was lying 125 feet away. It could not be determined whether there had been an explosion. The pilot's hair had been singed, his right knee burned and his right glove, which had been thrown clear of the body, was charred.

A farmer living 3/4 mile from where the accident occurred stated that there were low clouds near the scene and at the time of the accident visibility was from 300 yards to two miles. The air was misty and light snow was falling.

The possibility that the pilot was overcome by carbon monoxide was considered because of the presence of a crack in the engine exhaust collector ring. However, investigation revealed that there was no monoxide leakage into the cabin. The possibility of fire in the air was also considered, but it appears more likely that the pilot was killed by flaming gasoline after impact.

The probable cause of this accident was the action of the pilot continuing contact flight under conditions in which snow and haze prevented his recognizing the proximity of the ground.

BY THE BOARD

/s/ Fred A. Toombs
Secretary