

April 15, 1935

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE CONCERNING AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
WHICH OCCURRED TO PLANE OF BRANIFF AIRWAYS, INCORPORATED,
ON DECEMBER 8, 1934, NEAR COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

To the Secretary of Commerce

On December 8, 1934 at about 5 20 a.m. near Columbia, Missouri, an airplane, being operated in scheduled flight carrying mail and express, crashed with resultant death to the pilot, the complete destruction of the aircraft and the loss of considerable mail.

The pilot, Lewis L. Bowen, held a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license and had a scheduled air transport rating. The airplane, owned and operated by Braniff Airways, Incorporated, was a Lockheed Vega, model 5-C, and bore Department of Commerce license number NC-1064. This was a mail and express schedule and passengers were not permitted to be carried.

Pilot Bowen departed from Kansas City at approximately 4 37 a.m. Weather along the regular route was not good. However, the pilot elected to take an alternate route over which weather reports indicated favorable weather. About five minutes before the accident, a special weather broadcast announced a change in weather over the alternate route which indicated icing conditions.

Observers on the ground heard the plane pass over the field headed east and, from the sound, the engine was functioning normally. The wreckage was found at a point about four and one-half miles east of the airport and indicated that the pilot had turned back, probably to effect a landing. The plane had flown into a road embankment with the engine full on and the force of impact had practically disintegrated the plane. No one witnessed the accident and apparently no flares were released.

From available facts and the path of flight, it appears that the pilot, after unexpectedly encountering icing conditions, had decided to land at Columbia. He crossed the airport flying east and turned with the probable intention of landing toward the west. Enough ice had collected on the plane to make it difficult if not impossible to maintain altitude. Crashing so far from the airport and with full engine suggests that the pilot had experienced this difficulty and was utilizing full engine power in an effort to keep the plane from diving into the ground nose first. It is also probable that both windshield and instruments were iced up, making it practically impossible for the pilot to judge his proximity to the ground. There was nothing to indicate either mechanical or structural failure.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was unexpected icing conditions which made proper handling of the aircraft impossible.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal,
Director of Air Commerce.