

STATEMENT OF PROBABLE CAUSE CONCERNING AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT
WHICH OCCURRED TO A COMMERCIALLY OWNED PLANE
ON MAY 18, 1935 AT FLINT, MICHIGAN

To the Secretary of Commerce:

On May 18, 1935 at about 6:35 p.m. at the Municipal Airport, Flint, Michigan, a commercially owned aircraft, carrying passengers for hire, was forced to the ground with resultant death to the pilot and two passengers, serious injuries to six passengers, minor injuries to three passengers and the complete destruction of the aircraft.

The plane, a Ford, model 4-AT-E, was owned by the Knowles Flying Service of Detroit and bore Department of Commerce license number NC-7864. The pilot, Theodore E. Knowles, holder of a Department of Commerce transport pilot's license, was killed in the accident. The passengers killed were Mrs. Mary Rushlow of Flint, Michigan, and her son, Conrad Rushlow, aged 7. The severely injured were Clement D. Rushlow, Marilyn Rushlow, De Witt Elwood, Mrs. Labelle K. Harwick, Linnie Ann Griese and Alfred Anderson. Those receiving minor injuries were Mildred Anderson, Joseph Fetzer and John Skolnik.

Knowles had been flying passengers on short trips around the airport practically all day. His attention was called to the fact that he had not replenished his fuel supply since the previous day and on inspecting his gas gauges stated that he still had sufficient fuel for two more flights but would take on fuel after one more flight. He then taxied across the field to take off.

On the take-off the right outboard engine was misfiring and just after clearing the north boundary of the airport and at an altitude of approximately 75 feet, this engine stopped entirely. The pilot immediately made a 90° turn to the right and flew parallel with the airport until reaching the NE corner. Evidence indicates that the center engine stopped at this time, leaving only the left outboard engine functioning. The altitude of the plane was then between 100 and 150 feet. The pilot at this point attempted a right downwind turn in an effort to effect a landing on the airport but due to loss of flying speed and the pull of the left outboard engine, the plane stalled, started a spin to the right and struck the ground with the right wing and then bounded over on its nose and left wing, finally coming to rest with the nose in the ground and the tail up in the air.

The cabin of the plane was only slightly damaged. An examination of the safety belts indicated that only a few of them were used and it was further learned that the passengers were neither instructed in their use nor cautioned to use them and those passengers most seriously injured did not have their safety belts fastened.

An inspection disclosed that there were 22 gallons of fuel remaining, 11 in each of the two tanks. Experience has proven that this is sufficient fuel level to keep the three engines running while flying in level position but is not sufficient head when the plane is in a climb.

There was ample room for a reasonably safe forced landing ahead and slightly to the right of the pilot from the position of where he first experienced engine trouble. A landing in one of these fields would have been far less hazardous than the pilot's attempt to return to the airport under existing conditions.

It is the opinion of the Accident Board that the probable cause of this accident was carelessness and negligence on the part of the pilot for not replenishing his fuel supply before it got dangerously low and poor judgment on his part for attempting to return to the airport when there was open terrain ahead of him.

Respectfully submitted,

Eugene L. Vidal,
Director of Air Commerce.