

WAR DEPARTMENT
U. S. ARMY AIR FORCES
REPORT OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

Cablegram

(1) Place Wheeler Field, Oahu, T.H. (2) Date 16 December 1942 (3) Time 0915 HRT
 AIRCRAFT: (4) Type and model B-24D (5) A. F. No. 41-23901 (6) Station Wheeler Field, T.H.
 Organization: (7) VII Bomb. Com. 7 AFM (8) 307th (9) 371st B-24 (10) (11)

PERSONNEL

DOVT	NAME (Last name first)	GRADE	SERIAL No.	RANK	PREVIOUS CLASS	GRADE	ARMY FORCE OR COMMAND	RESULTS TO PERSONNEL	USE OF PARACHUTE
(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)
P	McClendon, James H.	P	0726437	1st Lt	0/21	AC	VII B.C.	Fatal 4	
P	Miller, Charles H.	P	0662813	2d Lt	0/21	AC	"	Fatal 4	
P	Main, James G.	P	0726794	2d Lt	0/21	AC	"	Minor 2	S 15
P	Steele, Wendell A.	P	0663326	2d Lt	0/21	AC	"	Minor 2	S 8
P	Stiekis, William A.	P	0728430	2d Lt	0/21	AC	"	Fatal 4	
P	Vaughn, Robert W.		0582211	Sgt	2016	AC	"	None 1	S 13
P	Dillon, Harold D.		19059162	Sgt	2016	AC	"	Fatal 4	
P	Hutton, Charles C.		35127642	Sgt	2016	AC	"	Fatal 4	

PILOT CHARGED WITH ACCIDENT

(22) McClendon James H. (23) 0726437 (24) 1st Lt (25) 21 (26) AC
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STATEMENT, IN SUBSTANCE, BY SERGEANT ROBERT W. VAUGHN, 10582211, REGARDING AIRPLANE ACCIDENT ON 16 DECEMBER 1942.

We started out on a search mission, and were out possibly two hours. I was seated in the back with Sgt. Dillon, Assistant Engineer, who was on the flight deck watching instruments, and I had my head phones on when I heard the co-pilot tell the navigator that we were turning around due to No. 2 engine acting up and at that time I called Lt. McClendon, the Pilot, on the interphone asking what the trouble was. He said No. 2 engine was cutting out, that we were turning around. From that time on I started watching the No. 2 engine from the left. I was watching for further indications of cutting out and Sgt. Dillon was on the flight deck. About 15 minutes from then Lt. McClendon told Sgt. Dillon to transfer fuel. A few minutes after that Sgt. Dillon came on back and was holding his arm over his eyes. Gas was all over his body, and he apparently had gas in his eyes. I looked down in the bomb bay and saw that the bomb bay tank was flowing over in the bomb bay. My idea was that Sgt. Dillon was not familiar with the system or the copilot might have had the booster pump on. However, Sgt. Dillon had handled my job while I was on furlough. I had showed him the fuel systems, both the old and new.

There was a man standing close to the bomb bay doors and I issued orders to crack them just a little in order to let fumes out in the open. Just a few seconds after I issued that order the explosion came, and the bomb bay started burning. Then at that time I started for the exit. I had been forward about half an hour offshore coming in. While I was up there nothing was said about transferring fuel. Lt. McClendon had a habit, if I wasn't around, of not telling all his plans. If I was around he would tell me. This time he didn't tell me what he was going to do. There was no necessity of transferring fuel as far as I could see. There was plenty of gasoline in the wing. I actually heard Lt. McClendon tell the crew chief to transfer fuel, and the assistant engineer said that Lt. McClendon had ordered the transfer. I was at the airplane the night before when gasoline was put in, and checked it then. Sgt. Dillon didn't tell me he was transferring gasoline until he had started, then came back and told me. He went forward then came back, which took from 15 seconds to a minute, though not longer than two minutes.

I didn't actually see gasoline coming out of the plane, though it seemed as if it was running along the bottom. However, I did see gasoline coming out of the right bomb bay tank and dripping on the floor. I had an idea that the bomb bay tank was filling up and flowing out over the top. The cap was off at the time. The reason for that is that we can see it going down, and suction is also prevented. I have never transferred gas from the bomb bay tank without removing the cap. If the airplane had had the old fueling system Sgt. Dillon would have had to come back where I could see him. Some airplanes carry the hoses attached all the time, but commonly for each separate wing tank gasoline is transferred to the hose has to be transferred too.

When I noticed the trouble I called Lt. McClendon over the interphone and he told Sgt. Matton to open the bomb bay door as he was nearest at the time. I saw him reach for the handle and just about that time the explosion came. I don't think he touched the handle. The next thing I remember was heading for the rear hatch door to get out. I don't recall the explosion knocking me

down. I saw a small sheet of flame burning on the rear hatch door, and a small patch around the hatch.

I was the first to jump. I was told I was kicked loose of the airplane, though I don't remember hanging on. My chute opened all right. I might have been scared, but it didn't seem that I floated more than 20 feet. The only injury I received was on my little finger which they said was from Lt. Steele kicking me while I was holding on, and a small little patch on my face, but no serious burns.

I saw the airplane after I jumped, and the whole tail assembly was a mass of flames. I couldn't see any other part, as I was in back and going away from it. I was on the ground before it crashed. I landed in a sugar-cane field. The stalks didn't stick into me at all, just settled in them.

This airplane wasn't the regularly assigned one I had been flying in. I have been trained on a B-24D airplane.

I am positive the airplane was on a red diagonal, but don't know the reason.

DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT

(Brief narrative of accident. Includes statement of responsibility and recommendations for action to prevent repetition.)

This airplane was on ordered routine sea search mission, piloted by Lt. McLENDON. The airplane was approximately two hours out on search when trouble with #2 engine caused the pilot to decide to return to Oahu. Upon return and when almost at the home base the pilot ordered transfer of fuel from the bomb bay tank to the wing tanks. The reason for this decision is obscure inasmuch as there should have been more than ample fuel in the wing tanks for all engines. The transferring of this gasoline, either due to a malfunctioning of the system or due to ignorance on the part of the engineer or co-pilot, caused the gasoline to back up from the wing tanks and overflow the bomb bay tank. This overflow of gasoline in the bomb bay caused structural damage which resulted in the crash. Whether or not the explosion knocked the pilot and co-pilot unconscious, is indeterminable. One or the other, or possibly both occurred, resulting in the subsequent crash.

Lt. JAMES G. MAIN, who was acting as student co-pilot aboard this airplane, is now on the mainland on sick leave, after having suffered broken ribs and burns as a result of this accident, therefore is unavailable for questioning at this time. However, his account of the accident immediately thereafter would be substantially as set forth here, and is of interest. He was riding on the flight deck at the time of the explosion. He was not wearing a parachute at the time. The explosion apparently blew out part of the port or left side of the airplane. Lt. MAIN related that he seized a parachute in his arms and dove out directly through the side of the airplane, pulling the rip-cord on his parachute while still clutching it to his chest. He was not in any way in the harness. The opening of the parachute and resultant tug on the harness broke his ribs. He landed safely otherwise. From this information it is logical to assume that there was structural failure.

The responsibility for this accident is believed to be a mechanical failure within the airplane.

It is recommended in the future all bomb bay doors be bonded to the fuselage by flexible wire; that all switches, motors and other electrical appliances, especially those in the bomb bay be manufactured along flash-proof principles.

D.S. 3/20/49

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STATEMENT, IN SUBSTANCE, BY 2ND LIEUT. WENDELL A. STEELE, 0663326, REGARDING AIRPLANE ACCIDENT ON 16 DECEMBER 1942.

The first trouble we had did not pertain to the accident. About an hour and a half out on the search McClendon called back and told us to put on 'chutes as No. 2 engine was about to go out. We went up to around 10,000 feet, made a turn, and started back. Shortly after we got up higher the motor came back and was o.k., but we continued on back. I left my 'chute on and I don't know how much later I smelled gas. I went down the companionway to the bomb bay door and noticed there was gas all over. When I opened the door into the bomb bay the sergeant who was inside came back in the tail. He was Sgt. Dillon, the assistant engineer. He had his 'chute on, all but the leg strap. When he came out he was covered with gas and so scared he was sobbing. The student copilot was on the flight deck. The radio operator came down to open the door, so they must have known about it up front. I saw him reach for the handle to open the door and then it blew. I wouldn't say for sure, but think I remember a little amount of gas blowing back. I never actually saw the doors open; I'd say they blew. The force blew me out of the door, and the next thing I remember I was back by the escape hatch. There was a time interval of approximately an hour and a half between the time the engine went out and the explosion occurred. We were over land when it happened. Most of the visible gas was in the right rear bomb bay, and pouring out like it was coming out of can. I also saw gas leaking through the bomb bay door and streaming outside the airplane. There were only two of us in the back and neither one had been smoking. I couldn't say where the liquid gas was coming from in the bomb bay, as it was all over everything. Particularly noticed it over the booster pump because there was more light in that area. There wasn't a report like an explosion, it was more like a "whoof." I remember seeing a flame over the bomb bay. We didn't wait for orders to bail out. We all proceeded to the escape hatch. We were around the door and Sgt. Vaughn was on my left, Sgt. Dillon in back on the other side. Sgt. Vaughn jumped first and I went second. I don't know whether Dillon jumped or not, I thought he was right behind me. I couldn't observe any structural failure of the airplane after the explosion, as I was back in the bomb bay with my back to the fire. I couldn't see anything up front. At the time I jumped I figured my 'chute was on fire, since there were flames all around and back by the tail gun. The only injuries I received were a few minor burns around my right ear and around my wrist, and a few scratches on the right side of my face.