



Pilot Charles A. Spillman Jr. talks with Fire Capt. E. L. Hatcher after crash-landing his plane.

High Point Pilot Brings Crop-Duster Down Safely

By GENE WHITMAN
Staff Reporter

Charles A. Spillman Jr., 23-year-old crop-dusting plane pilot, made a crash landing at Smith Reynolds Airport this morning — and walked away without a scratch.

Five fire engines loaded with foam, an ambulance and half-a-dozen other emergency vehicles were deployed along the runway as the crippled plane came down.

To Spillman, bringing his craft in with a broken landing gear, the fire trucks were a welcome sight. But, by some beautiful flying, he managed to keep them from being needed.

He touched down first on the concrete runway, found his landing gear was hopelessly crushed and wouldn't hold the plane, then climbed again and circled for another try.

He came in gently over the green grass between runways, slowed almost to a stall and set the plane down on the soft ground so skillfully that it didn't ground-loop as the waiting aviation experts had feared.

It had been a tense 45 minutes around Smith Reynolds Airport.

The terminal was crowded at about 9 a.m. Piedmont flights 42 and 43, loaded with passengers, were preparing to take off for Washington and Atlanta. A third Piedmont liner was being checked out on another runway.

Then the small, green plane buzzed the tower. Planes don't buzz airport towers without a reason, and everyone rushed outside.

As the plane circled low overhead, people on the ground could see the right door open and the pilot leaning out, apparently trying to fix the landing gear.

"I was shaking it and pointing to it, so the tower would know what was wrong," Spillman said later.

"I was dusting tobacco and I must have gotten too much poison. The landing gear broke when I tried to land at High Point, and I thought I'd better come over here to put it down."

The Smith Reynolds Airport emergency procedure went into effect. The airport crash truck rumbled out to its deployment position near the long north-south runway. From every part of Winston-Salem, fire trucks and police cars, their sirens screaming, converged on the airport.

Piedmont personnel streamed outside to watch. A new class of 10 Piedmont stewardesses in

training ranged along the ramp, giving the scene an atmosphere of a beauty contest. Mechanics came out of the hangars.

"If that landing gear's gone, he'll have to crash-land," said one. "There's no other way to get it down."

Then the little green plane climbed and began circling high above the airport.

"That pilot was a pretty sharp boy," said a tower man. "We had no way to communicate with him, but he saw the fire trucks and knew he had alerted us, so he climbed and started circling to use up his gas."

That gave the tower a chance to get the airliners away. They left with their loads of passengers, and airport people breathed a little easier. But there was still the little green plane to worry about.

Finally, it came down. All air traffic in the area had been warned away. The fire trucks were cleared to roll out along the runways.

Spillman landed, picking a spot far out on the airport away from the terminal, just as if he had received radio instructions. And the emergency was over.

"Everything worked perfectly," said Airport Manager Arthur R. Graham. "We certainly had excellent co-operation from the fire and police departments."

Spillman looked over his dam-

aged Piper plane and waited for the FAA to give him clearance to get it removed and repaired. He said he was anxious to get back to his business at Trinity, Rt. 2, and finish the crop-dusting job.