

Iola Aviator Escapes With Life In Spectacular Plunge On Occasion of Solo Flight

Francis "Fritz" Womack had a marvelous escape from death or serious injury Saturday afternoon at about 5 o'clock when the motor of his airplane stalled above a pasture north of town and his plane plunged spectacularly more than 500 feet to the earth. The only injury suffered by Womack was a slight scratch on his right forefinger. His plane was so demolished as to render it unfit for service until it is rebuilt.

No accurate information is to be had as to the exact cause of the accident. Womack who was taking his initial solo flight, attributes part of the blame to his inexperience and part to the engine of his plane stalling. Several of the few persons who were at B. T. Barber's flying field north of the city and who saw Womack take his nose dive believe that the motor was not completely stalled and that its temporary refusal to perform was due to the plane being nosed upward at too sharp an angle.

Those who watched it from the flying field state that until the airplane containing Womack disappeared from view behind the brow of the hill north of the flying field, it was plunging straight

down, but not spinning. From the moment the plane nearly stopped in the air Womack says he pulled back on the control stick and that he was but a short distance from the ground and almost certain death when the plane finally became controllable and straightened out to a comparatively easy landing. Owing to the fact, however, that flying speed was lost and that the plane was too near the earth to successfully straighten out before landing when it finally changed from the vertical to the horizontal position, it "pancaked" as it landed, smashing the running gear and part of the fuselage, and slowly nosing over, throwing Womack, who had not strapped himself in, out of the seat and preventing the body of the ship from falling on him.

Womack made no attempt to describe his feelings when the motor stalled, the ship came almost to a dead stop, still pointed upward, and then nosed over and headed straight for the earth at terrific speed. He said his one idea was to make a safe landing, and expressed satisfaction that it was just the plane instead of the plane and he which was demolished.

The damage to the plane will amount to several hundred dollars.