

Carol Lombard Killed in Western Airlines Crash



LOMBARD IS ONE OF THE VICTIMS - GABLE RUSHES TO SCENE OF FIERY CRASH

LOS ANGELES - 1/17/42 - - Army directed searchers on horseback, led by an Indian tracker, toiled over steep snow-packed trails of the Potosi Range in Nevada, seeking the spot where a Los Angeles bound TWA Skysleeper with 22 persons aboard, including film star Carole Lombard and 15 Army fliers, crashed in flames on Table Mountain.

Miss Lombard, returning from a defense bond campaign trip to Indiana, and others aboard the plane are believed to have perished. The searching party forced its way up the 8700-foot peak with little hope of finding anything by charred bodies and twisted wreckage.

At the foot of the mountain Clark Gable, actor husband of Miss Lombard, waited with the rescue squad of ambulances and motor cars marshaled in the faint hope that some of those on the plane may have survived.

The actor, who flew to the scene of the wreck last night immediately after learning of the crash, was reported badly broken up.

Guiding the posse of cowboys, Indians and soldiers under the direction of Major W.H. Anderson, executive officer of the Air Corps gunnery school at nearby McCarren Field, were accounts of workers at the Blue Diamond Mine near Arden, NV. They reported hearing last night a terrific explosion and seeing the

Table Mountain shroud of snow suddenly lighted by the burst of flame shortly after the plane had passed over the mine.

Assisting in the search from the air were TWA officials who took off from Las Vegas at 7:30 AM today. A few hours after the plane was seen at the mine, Western Airlines Pilot Art Cheney, flying from Los Angeles to Las Vegas, sighted the flaming wreckage.

The plane was at first reported to have been off its usual course from Albuquerque to Los Angeles. Officials of the airline however, explained that, although it had previously followed the Kingman-Los Angeles beam without touching at Las Vegas, its schedule had been recently changed to include a stop at Las Vegas.

The plane had landed at Las Vegas at 6:30 last night, refueled, and took off at 7:07 PM.

The crash occurred about 7:30 PM, less than a half-hour after the Los Angeles bound airliner had taken off from Las Vegas.

► **CAROLE LOMBARD, 21 OTHERS DIE - MOTHER OF STAR WITH HER ON ILL-FATED AIRLINER**



LOS ANGELES - 1/17/42 - The Army immediately took over the search for the wreckage of the plane and possible survivors, throwing a close guard around the area of the peak, which is about 30 miles southwest of Las Vegas in the range marking the eastern slope of Death Valley.

Army trucks and jeeps and a powerful tractor were hurriedly assembled, a scene of horseman were requested from among the Nevada cowboys and Tweed

Wilson, 73 year old Indian who has been a resident of the wild isolated district for years was called on to guide them.

At the same time investigations of the Civil Aeronautics Authority headed for the scene beginning an inquiry into mystery elements surrounding the crash.

The first news of the crack up came from O.E. Salyer purchasing agent for the Blue Diamond Mine who telephoned in to T.W. A. headquarters at Las Vegas.

"A plane has crashed into Table Mountain. there was a terrific explosion."

The crash was witnesses by Dan Yanish, watchman at the mine, who said he watched the plane "fly over the diggings."

"it was a beautiful clear night," he said, "and you could see for miles...the plane was fading away into the distance over Charleston Range way when I saw a flash and then big tongues of flame rising from a mountainside."

Pilot Cheney to whom TWA officials radios as soon as they learned of the accident, reported back shortly that:

"It's a TWA plane all right. I don't see any signs of life."

MARKS OUT DIRECTION

Lee Houston Blue Diamond Mine employee, said he had driven stakes in the ground to indicate the direction of the flames from the mine and searchers concentrated their efforts along the line he indicated.

Hampering the hunt was the wild, rugged nature of the country, the terrain being so rough in places that even men on foot proceeded with difficulty. Woody Pierce, Las Vegas policeman who was among the early ground searchers, returned with the soles of his shoes torn out.

Gable received the news of the Lockheed Air terminal here, where he was waiting for his wife's return. He at once chartered a plane and flew to the scene. Accompanying the actor were Mrs. Winkler, Eddie Mannix, vice-president of MGM publicity, Howard Streickland, MGM publicity chief, and Ralph Wheelwright and Don McElwaine, MGM publicity men.

Miss Lombard boarded the transcontinental plane at Indianapolis where she had participated in a defense bond sale yesterday selling \$2,500,000 worth of bonds.

The actress, born in Fort Wayne, had volunteered to assist the defense bond campaign in her home state. She had left for the trip accompanied by her mother and Winkler.

Her return on the ill-fated airlines it was learned in Hollywood today hinged on the flip of a coin. Winkler it was reported wished to make the journey to the Pacific coast by train, and Miss Lombard held out for the plane trip. They finally tossed a coin and Miss Lombard won to resemble losing her life on a lonely mountainside.

Three women and a man in Albuquerque escaped the crash by a chance as slender as that which Miss Lombard and her party might. J. Squigetti and a Miss Johnson, Mrs. C.E. Randner, and Florence Sawyer scheduled to take the plane at the New Mexico city gave up their place to accommodate the Army men.

Airline officials awaited word here today from their own investigators and from inspectors Frank Caldwell and Perry Hodgens and Warren Carey of the Civil Aeronautics Board for some explanation of the crash.

Captain Williams, they said had given no hint of trouble and the only word received from him after he left Albuquerque was a routine report that he was off. Visibility and weather conditions were reported good.

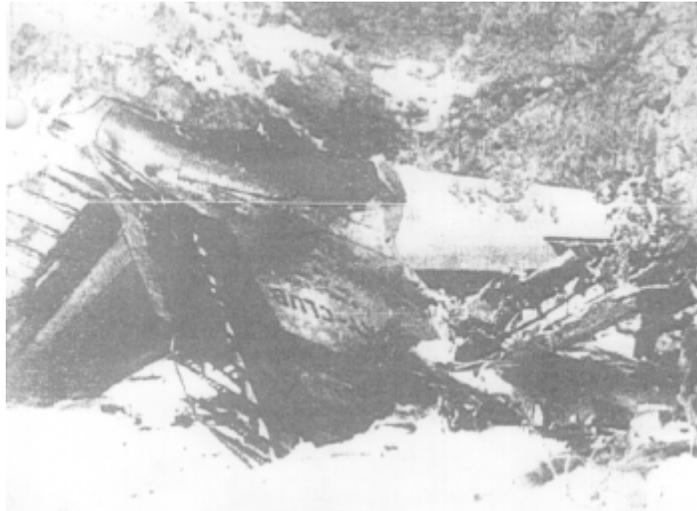
It was pointed out by airline officials that "a flick of the pilot's wrist could have sent the transport safely over the ridge," if something unforeseen had not occurred. "Something happened inside that plane and it happened so fast that Williams couldn't do anything about it," was the gist of opinions expressed by veteran pilots at the Lockheed Air Terminal today.

They said the stretch over which the plane was flying was one of the easiest flying stretches on the route. Williams, they said, was a crack pilot with years of service in commercial flying. His flying orders, they said, called for an altitude of 8000 feet. Most of the area over which the plane was routed is table land with an average elevation of 4500 feet.

Willard George Los Angeles furrier who owns a ranch in the Table Mountain district said he saw the plane passing over in the twilight and that it appeared to

him that the tail was bobbing up and down and otherwise acting in a peculiar manner.

➤ **DEATH MARGIN, TOLD AIRLINER CRASH PROBERS, MISSED GETTING BY PEAK BY FEW HUNDRED YARDS**



LOS ANGELES - 1/24/42 - There was a scant "few hundred yards" between safety and flaming death on the mountainside when the bit transcontinental West Air transport plane sped head on into Double or Nothing Peak as Friday, said Larry Fritz, vice president in charge of operations for the company testified toady. "If the plane had been flying just a few hundred yards to the left it would have missed the peak entirely," Fritz testified at the Civil Aeronautics Board hearing in the Town House here.

He was unable to give any cause for the accident in which Film star Carole Lombard, 15 Army fliers and six other persons were killed. His detailed account of the trip of the big transcontinental Sky sleeper was the story of a disaster coming at a moment when seemingly absolutely nothing was wrong.

"Flight 3 was operating on regular schedule" he said, reading from a prepared statement, "It stopped at Albuquerque landed in Winslow AZ and then proceed to Las Vegas.

"It started from here for Burbank. When the plane left Las Vegas at 7:07 PM the radio and instruments were in good order and functioning properly.

"The plane struck on an 8300 foot mountain peak 32 miles out of the airport. If it had been flying just a few hundred yards to the left it would not have struck.

"The weather was satisfactory, flying conditions were good and airway aids and lights were in good order."

In reply to a question from Robert Crisp chief of the accident legal division of the CAA, presiding at the hearing, Fritz said he was unable to assign any cause for the accident.

Actual destruction of the plane was described by Pilot Arthur Cheney who on the night of the tragedy was on Flight 10 the Burbank Salt Lake route.

Warned of a possible mishap when the Daggett radio asked him if he passed "Flight 3" as scheduled, Cheney said he was looking for evidence of trouble. He said he saw the fire on the mountain peak. "It looked like a pile of debris burning," he said.

Both Cheney and Robert Fletcher, Los Angeles weather bureau forecaster declared flying conditions and weather over the region as excellent. "The ceiling and visibility were unlimited," Cheney said. Sitting with Crisp on the board of inquiry are Frank Caldwell, head of the Civil Aeronautics Authority Safety Bureau and R.D. Hoyt assistant to Caldwell.

Joined with the CAA in the inquiry are House representatives Special Committee on Air Transport Safety, flown here for the occasion; investigators for the Army and officials of TWA.

► AIRLINER'S FLIGHT RECORDS LOST IN CRASH - NO DATA TO EXPLAIN TRAGIC MISHAP

LOS ANGELES - 1/24/42 - The sudden crash of a TWA skyliner against an icy Nevada mountain last Friday night, killing 22 persons including Carole Lombard and 15 Army men, was so devastating that it destroyed every ship's paper that would be of aid in solving the puzzle of the crash.

Not a trace remained of the pilot's flight plan the chart which would have shown the exact course which he had planned to follow.

This was the testimony today of Waldon Golien of Kansas City chief test pilot for Transcontinental and Western Air, as he resumed the witness stand at the federal hearing here which is seeking to penetrate the mystery of what caused the tragedy.

Golien, one of the searchers who sifted through the wreckage high up on the snow mantled Double or Nothing Peak was asked whether any documentary records were found in the debris. "Only a small part of a radio maintenance sheet," he said, explaining that this is a routine listing of radio contacts made between ship and ground stations." Aside from that, there were no other records concerning the operation of the flight."

Destroyed by the terrific impact and fire was the navigational log, along with the pilots flight plan.

Golien said that the ill fated flight was the first on which Wayne Williams, pilot, and Morgan Gillette, co-pilot, had flown the Las Vegas leg of the trip together. However, he added, they had known each other for some time "and this precludes the possibility that the two pilots were not well acquainted."

The inquiry developed this central puzzle: Why with the radio beam apparently functioning with skilled pilot at the controls, with perfect flying weather, was the plane 6.7 miles off its proper course when it hit the mountain." Further complicating the dark mystery of the cause of the crash was the expert testimony that there was no possibility of sabotage; that the plane was new; that engines and instruments had been checked shortly before the smashup; that the pilot had received flying instructions.

Civil Aeronautics Authority officials are conducting the hearing at the Town House. John Campbell, CAA patrol pilot, testified: "The crash occurred five or six miles north of the west edge of the 'on course' radio beam. the radio beam was operating normally at the time."

Golien said Williams received instruction to fly at 8000 feet after leaving Las Vegas. This would have given him 2000 feet clearance over the highest peak on his proper course. The ship crashed on 8300 foot Double or Nothing Peak.

Only possible hints as to possible contributing factors came out in references in testimony to the facts that: The Fourth Interceptor Command had given orders that all beacons in the vicinity but one be blacked out as a war precaution Pilot vision is reduced by glare when cockpit lights are turned up..., but no one really knows what really happened to that ill-fated flight.