

Crash

took charge of the scene. Before daybreak local officials and highway patrolmen from across the state started moving the remains of the victims to the Buffalo High School gym, which was set up as a temporary morgue.

At dawn on Tuesday morning, 259 soldiers from Fort Hood arrived to start the search, with a Civil Aeronautics Board investigator in charge. Linked by walkie talkie radios and guided by a helicopter, and the soldiers searched an area measuring 1 mile X 2-1/2 miles. The first time through they marked bits of wreckage so CAB inspectors could note its location in relation to other pieces. On Wednesday, the soldiers walked through again, picking up the debris which was taken to Dallas where the CAB experts would assemble a "partial layout" an attempt to determine the cause of the air tragedy.

According to Moore, "There was about a week of body recovery and investigation, and they wouldn't let people drive past that road." During the time that the search was underway, the community of Buffalo reached out to those involved in the tragedy. The article in the Buffalo Press stated, "The local ladies set up facilities for serving sandwiches, coffee and cake at the school and were serving relatives and friends of the victims and the officers."

DIAMONDS!

The Press article also reported an interesting side-note: "A large quantity of diamonds was found at the scene of the wreck and were placed under guard at the Citizens State Bank in Buffalo." Evan Moore remembered that part of the story, as well, re-

calling that they belonged to a diamond salesman who was on the flight. "He had a bag full of diamonds to show and display, and that bag of diamonds was bursted. (Workers) picked it up and put it in on a blanket." Asked if he thought the clean-up crew would have been tempted to pocket a few of the stones, Moore replied, "Seeing all that stuff, you wouldn't have a desire to do anything like that..." He did recall, however, that some young men who lived close by were helping gather stuff up later, and "two or three years after, their wives showed up with some beautiful diamond rings!"

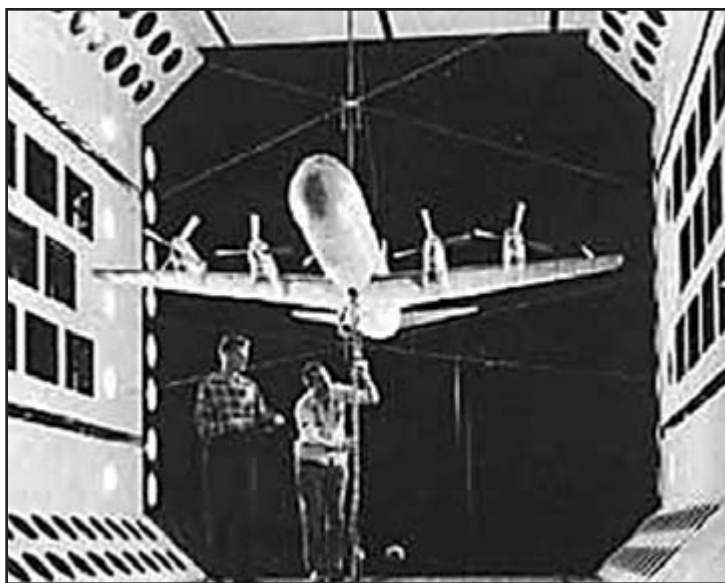
Flight 542 was also reported to be carrying 63 pouches of mail, and 63 pouches were recovered.

THE AFTERMATH -

Late September in Texas is still quite hot, and the BHS gym was, of course, without air conditioning in 1959. Mr. Moore recalls that during the week following the crash, the temporary morgue in the school "kinda fouled up the gym." His son Leon Moore, who was a student at BHS at the time, confirmed that, adding, "It still smelled in there at the end of the year when we held our Junior/Senior Prom...smelled of formaldehyde." James Mae Henson was a BHS coach at the time, and he recalls that the airline company later funded renovations to the gymnasium.

VICTIM'S FAMILY SHARES THEIR STORY

Elizabeth Henderson Walley of Mesquite was 13 years old the night her father, Lee Henderson, perished on Flight 542. He was a real estate developer who had been to Houston for a business meeting. The family



Engineers test the Electra model in a wind tunnel in 1960. Archive photo

was alarmed when it became late and he had not returned home. Elizabeth and her younger sister Elaine were sent on to bed, but she recalls hearing the commotion in the middle of the night as law enforcement officers came to deliver the terrible news. "I was awake all night, and could tell from their voices that something bad had happened, but I didn't get up. I guess I didn't want to know," Elizabeth shared. "It is the most vivid memory of that time of my life. Everything changed after that."

There was not an immediate insurance settlement because Braniff officials initially maintained that the cause of the crash was probably a lightning strike, so Elizabeth's widowed mother, Marjorie Henderson, went back to school to get a teaching degree to support her family.

CAUSE OF CRASH PINPOINTED

Flight 542 was a Lockheed L-188 Electra equipped with four Allison 501-D13 engines. The Buffalo Press re-

ported that it weighed 113,000 pounds and cost \$2,121,000 to build. The plane was conservatively designed and had been thoroughly tested. It was manufactured at Lockheed's California plant and had come off the manufacturing line only eleven days earlier on September 18, 1959, so it had only 132 hours of flight time. All six crew members - two pilots, a flight engineer and three flight attendants - had little experience with the Electra, having only recently completed their transition training.

Weather reports for the date of the crash relate winds ranging from 7.36 to 25.10 mph. No precipitation data was available, but visibility was reported as 14.1 miles. "Severe clear air turbulence" was later looked at as a factor in the crash, but initially, no cause was given for the crash.

Flight 542 took off from Houston 22 minutes later than scheduled, with the delay attributed to a minor mechanical discrepancy with the No. 3 generator. A follow-

up story in the October 8th issue of the Buffalo Press mentioned that a transcript which arrived at the FAA in Fort Worth showed that after being cleared for take-off, the pilot had paused for a period of time at the end of the runway, then took off. The pilot gave no reason for that delay. The accident occurred before the age of "black box" cockpit voice recorders, but the Press article also stated that the transcript showed that in the aircraft's last known communication, which was at 11:07, the pilot reported mechanical difficulties to company officers in Dallas. That report was a maintenance request on the generator, and routine in nature. There was no indication of the imminent disaster.

After the crash, many of the larger sections of aircraft had landed in a potato field southeast of Buffalo, but the left wing was found a mile away from the potato field. As officials began their investigation of the accident, they determined that the left wing had failed, leading to the general disintegration of the aircraft and a fire. There was no trace of metal fatigue, and no hint as to the cause of the catastrophe. For a period of time, the investigation stalled and the September 29th accident was considered a "flake" or possibly a lightning strike.

The investigation was stepped up when a second

Electra crashed on March 17, 1960 at Tell City, Indiana. Its right wing was found 11000 feet from the crash site, indicating that the plane's design was at fault. There were still 130 Electras flying commercially at the time, though at reduced speeds, so NASA, Lockheed and Boeing personnel began urgent testing with an elaborate Electra model. They determined that violent flutter had torn the wings off the two planes -- and one engineer suggested that "the Electra had stimulated the catastrophic fluttering through the coupling of engine gyroscopic torques, propeller forces and moments, and the aerodynamic forces acting on the wings." The engineers labeled the problem "propeller-whirl flutter".

The engineers were able to duplicate the flutter in wind tunnel simulations with the model. When they tried reducing the stiffness of the outboard engine mounts -- a condition that could possibly have happened due to previous hard landings or violent storms -- the weakened engine mounts would develop the propeller-whirl flutter until the wing fell off. They determined that the fatal resonance could build up and tear the plane apart in thirty seconds. The engine mounts on all the remaining Electras were strengthened and there were no further problems.

Flo Committee

from page 1A

around at that time the portables were intended to be a "temporary fix". The bond monies will be used to build a new elementary school.

As the group toured the facility Scoggin explained there are several concerns about having the students in the portables. Kids walk under a covered walk way from the portable buildings to the main school building to go to the cafeteria, library, etc. Although it is covered the chil-

dren are exposed to blowing wind and rain. Each room has a restroom which works well for the smaller children, but the bigger kids get pretty self conscious when the whole class sees who is going in and out. The fact that the children are not together is another issue.

The group complimented Scoggin on his work and his ability to make the best of the situation. The Oakwood School District moved from

last year's TAKS rating of "academically unacceptable" to "academically acceptable" this year, with the elementary school receiving a "recognized" status.

Scoggin thanked the group for taking the time to get a first hand look at the school. As the tour came to a conclusion he said, "You each will vote either "for" or "against". Whichever way you vote I want it to be an educated vote."



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