

## **The Crash of TWA Flight 260**

By Charles M. Williams

At 7:05 a.m. on February 19, 1955, TWA Flight 260 took off from the Albuquerque airport for a short flight to Santa Fe. The plane's approved air route was a dogleg running north-northwest from Albuquerque, then east-northeast into Santa Fe to avoid flying over the Sandia Mountains.

At 7:08 a.m. the Ground Service Help at the airport saw Flight 260 about half a mile north of the airport terminal headed directly toward Sandia Ridge, almost entirely obscured by storm clouds. An Air Force Colonel standing in front of his home a mile and half northeast of the airport saw Flight 260 pass overhead and observed that if the plane was eastbound, it was too low; if it was northbound, it was off course.

At 7:12 a.m. the plane's terrain-warning bell sounded its alarm. Instinctively looking out the window, both pilots suddenly saw the sheer west face of the Sandias just beyond the right wingtip. It was an appalling shock considering they should have been ten miles further west. Reacting instantly, they rolled the plane steeply to the left and pulled its nose up. When the heading indicator indicated a westerly heading, they started to level the wings. It was their final act. Hidden by the storm, another cliffside lay directly ahead. When they struck it, they were still in a left bank, nose high.

Charles Williams, one of the first men on the scene of this horrific crash, has spent a lifetime unraveling the enigmas of TWA Flight 260's final flight. It is a tale of days, minutes, and seconds spread out over the span of half a century and a dramatic mystery cast upon a beautiful and treacherous mountain. In the end, Williams helps solve some of the controversies surrounding the crash, including the Civil Aeronautics Board's over-swift determination that the pilots were at fault.

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