

= American Airlines Flight 1 =

American Airlines Flight 1 was a domestic , scheduled passenger flight from New York International (Idlewild) Airport (now John F. Kennedy International Airport) , to Los Angeles International Airport . On March 1 , 1962 , the plane ? having just taken off two minutes earlier ? rolled over and crashed into a swamp , killing all 87 passengers and eight crew members aboard . A Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) investigation determined that a manufacturing defect in the automatic pilot system led to an uncommanded rudder control system input , causing the accident .

A number of notable people lost their lives in the crash . It was the sixth fatal Boeing 707 crash and , at the time , the deadliest . Today , American 1 operates the same daily route from JFK to Los Angeles , but as an Airbus A321 .

= = Flight and crash = =

The aircraft was a Boeing 707 @-@ 123B , U.S. Registry N7506A . It was delivered to American Airlines on February 12 , 1959 . At the time of the crash , it had accumulated 8 @,@ 147 flight hours . Its last periodic inspection had occurred on January 18 , 1962 at 7 @,@ 922 hours of air time . The flight crew consisted of Captain James Heist , First Officer Michael Barna , Jr . , Second Officer Robert Pecor , and Flight Engineer Robert Cain . Also aboard were four stewardesses : Shirley Grabow , Lois Kelly , Betty Moore , and Rosalind Stewart .

The aircraft received instructions to taxi to Runway 31L at 9 : 54 AM EST , and clearance to proceed to Los Angeles non @-@ stop under instrument flight rules (IFR) at 10 : 02 AM EST . Flight 1 became airborne at 10 : 07 AM EST . Following American Airlines procedures and Departure Control instructions , the aircraft initiated a left turn to a heading of 290 . In the course of the turn , at 1 @,@ 600 feet , the Boeing banked too far , flipped past 90 degrees , and began an upside @-@ down , nose @-@ first descent in a nearly vertical dive .

Flight 1 crashed into Pumpkin Patch Channel , Jamaica Bay , at 10 : 08 : 49 , while angled at 78 degrees and on a magnetic heading of 300 degrees . Passengers aboard a Mohawk Airlines plane bound for Albany that took off immediately after Flight 1 watched the plane plunge into the bay . The jet exploded upon impact , a geyser of brackish water and black smoke erupted from the site , and the scattered debris and fuel caught fire . Long Island residents described hearing explosions which shook the foundations of nearby houses , though no one on the ground is known to have witnessed the plane hitting the swamp . However , a few men at Floyd Bennett Field saw the massive geyser of water rising above the hangars , and one guard ? at his post on a bridge that the plane flew over ? saw the plane roll over .

The aircraft crashed into a remote area of marshland on Jamaica Bay used as a wildlife sanctuary . Upwards of 300 policemen and fire fighters , including 125 detectives attending a narcotics seminar at the Police Academy , as well as Coast Guard helicopters were mobilized to the crash site within half an hour of the crash for rescue operations , only to find there were no survivors . The three @-@ alarm fire was under control by 10 : 50 AM EST , by which point only wreckage remained . Low tides aided search personnel in their attempts to recover bodies from the downed aircraft . Only a few bodies remained intact .

= = Investigation = =

The Civil Aeronautics Board received notification of the accident at 10 : 10 AM EST and immediately sent investigators to Jamaica Bay to conduct an investigation . The flight recorder was found on March 9 and sent to Washington for analysis . Public hearings were held at the International Hotel in New York on March 20 ? 23 , 1962 .

Investigators were unable to recover sufficient body tissue to determine whether the crew had been physically incapacitated at the time of the crash . Toxicology reports conclusively ruled out toxic gases , alcohol , and drugs as possible cause for the crash . Milton Helpert , Chief Medical Examiner , decided that having relatives attempt visual identification of the crash victims was

inhumane and ordered dental and fingerprint comparisons . In early July , the CAB announced their investigators believed that a cotter pin and a bolt missing from the rudder mechanism might have caused Flight 1 's crash . Though considered to be a " mechanic 's oversight " , the CAB nevertheless wired all 707 operators to inform them of the potential danger of the assembly .

In January 1963 , the CAB released a Civil Aeronautics Board Aircraft Accident Report stating that the " most likely abnormality " to have caused the crash was a short circuit caused by wires in the automatic piloting system that had been damaged in the manufacturing process .

From the CAB 's AAR , Pg 2 , probable cause : " ... rudder control system malfunction producing yaw , sideslip , and roll leading to a loss of control from which recovery was not effective . "

From AAR pg 54 : " The Board therefore concludes that a rudder servo malfunction due to shorted wires is the most likely abnormality to have produced the accident . "

CAB inspectors had inspected units at a Teterboro , New Jersey , Bendix Corporation plant and discovered workers using tweezers to bind up bundles of wires , thereby damaging them . The Bendix Corporation issued denials , stating that the units underwent 61 inspections during manufacturing , in addition to inspections during installation and maintenance work , and insisted that had the insulation on the wires been breached at some point , it would have surely been detected and the unit replaced .

= = Notable victims = =

A number of notable people were aboard Flight 1 when it went down in Jamaica Bay . They included :

Admiral Richard Lansing Conolly , USN (retired) , president of Long Island University and two @-@ time Deputy Chief of Naval Operations

Johnny Dieckman , world champion fly @-@ casting fisherman .

George T. Felbeck , vice president of Union Carbide and operations manager of Oak Ridge , Tennessee 's uranium refinement

W. Alton Jones , multi @-@ millionaire former president and chairman of Cities Service Company and close personal friend of Dwight D. Eisenhower ; Jones was found to be carrying \$ 55 @,@ 690 in cash , including a \$ 10 @,@ 000 bill

Arnold Kirkeby , millionaire realtor and former head of the Kirkeby chain of luxury hotels

Louise Lindner Eastman , whose daughter Linda Eastman would later marry Beatle Paul McCartney

Irving Rubine , TV writer

Emelyn Whiton , 1952 Olympic sailing gold medalist (6 @-@ metre keelboat)

Peter F. Masse , president of C. H. Sprague & Son , an integrated coal company of New York and Boston .

In addition , 15 abstract paintings by the artist Arshile Gorky that were en route to Los Angeles for an exhibition were destroyed .

= = In popular culture = =

The crash serves as a central plot element in the Mad Men season 2 episode , " Flight 1 " (S2 / e2) . The character Pete Campbell 's father is one of the passengers killed .