

Budd Conestoga crash site near Grants, NM

DATE November 7, 1945

AIRCRAFT Flying Tiger Airline RB-1 cargo plane, “most probably” N45353

GENERAL LOCATION Zuni Mountains SW of Grants, NM

PEOPLE ABOARD Pilot, Co-Pilot & Flight Engineer

REFERENCES *Gallup Independent* Newspaper, *Flying Tiger Line* Website, Wikipedia

HISTORY

Most of the following information was found on the Internet on-line encyclopedia, “Wikipedia.”

Budd “Conestoga” stainless-steel cargo planes were designed and manufactured by the Budd Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during World War II. Some were ordered by the Navy and were designated the RB-1. None entered service and several were bought and used by the *Flying Tiger Line* after WWII. The subject aircraft that crashed could only be identified on the Flying Tiger Website with a “most probable” registration number. The plane was hauling magazines from Dayton, Ohio, to Los Angeles. This crew apparently fell asleep and the plane crashed. The captain and co-pilot perished, but the flight engineer survived and walked out to a nearby canyon where he found help and was taken to Albuquerque for medical treatment.

In 2008, crash finders measured a piece of stainless steel metal fuselage skin and noted it as being approximately 0.010 inches thick. This is considerably thinner than aluminum aircraft skin, but was quite satisfactory strength wise. This was undoubtedly due to the ability to trade off stainless steel strength properties versus those of aluminum to come up with an adequately light aircraft. During the war, this unique use of stainless steel in the RB-1 design was used because of a concern that enough aluminum might not be available. That proved not to be the case. Interestingly enough, stainless steel

would not be utilized again in aircraft construction until the advent of the advanced design XB-70 bomber in the early 1960’s.

Photos of the similar Budd Conestoga aircraft



Two Killed as Cargo Plane Hits San Rafael Mountain Near Grants

Third Man Hurt But Walks From Peak for Help

Airship Loaded With Magazines Refueled Here Wednesday Night

Two flyers were killed and a third was injured Wednesday night when a National Skyway Freight Co. cargo plane from Long Beach, Cal., crashed into San Rafael Mountain, 20 miles southwest of Grants. N. M. State Police reported Thursday, to the Associated Press.

Assistant Chief A. B. Martinez said the dead had been identified as Richard Sawyer, pilot, and Lawrence Fabster, co-pilot, both from Long Beach.

Found Help
The survivor, Flight Engineer Ronald E. Lewis, 31, was able to walk from the mountain top to Benito canyon, where he found help. Martinez was told by State Policeman Archie White. Lewis was to be brought to the Presbyterian Hospital by an ambulance of the French-Fitzgerald Mortuary, which also took charge of the bodies of the dead men.

Martinez said Sawyer and Fabster appeared to have burned to death. The plane was carrying between 6000 and 8000 pounds of magazines to the west coast and refueled in Albuquerque about 9:15 Wednesday night, he reported. It apparently ran into high winds, snow and rain west of here.

Went to Crash Scene
White told Martinez the crash was believed to have occurred at 11:15 o'clock.

A party of Grants men headed by Patrolman White and J. M. Keeney, the men Lewis encountered at Benito canyon, went to the crash scene to investigate. They were accompanied by Dr. John Syard, Eddie Baca and G. F. Wakefield of Grants.

Sawyer and Fabster, both about 28, were former members of the famed Flying Tigers division in the China-Burma-India war theater. They joined the National Skyway Freight Co., which was recently organized by Robert Prescott, another Flying Tiger.

In Long Beach, Prescott, president of the firm, was unavailable for comment.



Crash Survivor Leaves for Coast

Flight Engineer Ronald E. Lewis, sole survivor of a freight plane crash in the San Rafael mountains 20 miles from Grants Wednesday, departed Monday by plane for California. He had suffered multiple bruises and was hospitalized until Sunday.

A CAA official from Fort Worth here for investigation of the crash also left Monday for his headquarters. The pilot and co-pilot of the National Skyway Freight Co. lost their lives in the accident.