

TWA Flight 206 crash site in Sandia Mountains, NM

DATE February 19, 1955

AIRCRAFT Martin 404, Registration No. 40416

GENERAL LOCATION West face of Sandia Mountains, NM, beneath the Sandia Tramway

PEOPLE ABOARD Three crew members, Pilot, Co-Pilot & Stewardess; and thirteen passengers

REFERENCES Several Albuquerque newspaper articles; and book, *The Crash of TWA Flight 260*, by Charles M. Williams

HISTORY

This is probably the most famous plane crash in New Mexico history. The plane took off from the Albuquerque Airport at 0703 hours, and ten minutes later crashed on top of a pinnacle on the western face of the Sandia Mountains. All sixteen people aboard perished. The crash was not discovered until the next day and rescue teams hiked in and found the dead.

There was a lot of speculation about what caused the crash and the Civil Aeronautics Board felt it occurred because the pilot committed suicide by crashing the plane and taking everyone in it with him. In fact, later in 1955, the CAB Probable Cause statement indicated the crash was intentional. However, another TWA pilot would not accept that cause. He and others knew the plane captain very well and strongly felt he would never do such a thing. That pilot's investigations resulted in the determination that the plane's flux gate compass was prone to problems that could easily have affected navigation near the mountains. In fact, investigation indicated that the crash occurred as the plane was headed westward **away** from the mountains. Subsequently, several years after the crash the CAB revised their Probable Cause to reflect the flux gate compass information. Not only that, but the CAB originally thought the weather by the mountains was clear. It was later shown that 85% of the mountains were obscured. The CAB then revised their Probable Cause to



Photo of similar Martin 404 aircraft

say that Flight 260 deviated from the approved flight plan for "reasons unknown."

A black and white photograph showing a vintage car, possibly a Ford Model A, parked on a dirt road in a desert. The car is dark-colored and viewed from the rear. In the background, there are rugged, rocky mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene is arid and open.

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