10-25-1989

Worst Air Disaster In Central American History: Summary

Deborah Tyroler

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in NotiCen by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.
Worst Air Disaster In Central American History: Summary

by Deborah Tyrolo

Category/Department: General

Published: Wednesday, October 25, 1989

At about 7:45 a.m., a Honduran TAN-SAHSA jetliner carrying 138 passengers and eight crew members broke apart in the air and crashed into a peak called Cerro Hules in the Las Tablitas mountain region, about 30 km. south of the capital. The Boeing 727-200 was preparing to land at Tegucigalpa's Tocontin airport. The plane was on a regular run from San Jose-Managua-Tegucigalpa. According to AFP, the plane's next stop after Tegucigalpa was to be Houston, Texas. Notimex reported the plane's stop in the US was New Orleans. Control tower employees at Tocontin cited by AP said unusually strong winds were blowing at the time of the crash. Nicaraguan civil aeronautics chief Maj. Alejandro Arguello said, "Apparently part of the fuselage, the roof of the plane, tore off" shortly before the crash. He said he had received his information from the Central American Corporation of Aerial Navigation Services, an organization that provides regional control for commercial aircraft. Arguello said he was told it appeared that the plane attempted an emergency landing in a soccer field at the base of Cerro Hula. Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega decreed three days of national mourning for the dozens of Nicaraguans who died in the crash. AP pointed out that in the last two years, numerous incidents have occurred involving Boeing jets losing wheels, engines, or fuselage portions. Most of the incidents were blamed on metal fatigue which can affect older jetliners. AP cited Boeing as saying that the jet was 21 years old. Late Saturday, TAN-SAHSA general manager Raul Bonilla confirmed that 15 people had survived the crash, and 131 had been killed. Bonilla said, "After exhaustively analyzing the situation, we can be sure that a total of 146 people were aboard the plane." Earlier, the airline had said 164 people were aboard. Nicaraguan officials said at least 65 Nicaraguans were aboard the plane. TAN-SAHSA officials said the dead included Honduran Labor Minister Armando Blanco Paniagua; Jose Ricardo Fasquell, chairperson of the country's College of Forestry Engineers; and Fanny Sanchez, a daughter of Defense Minister Col. Wilfredo Sanchez. Mario Rodriguez Cubero, an aide to Costa Rican president Oscar Arias, was among the dead. Pilot Raul Argueta was one of the survivors. AP cited US Embassy spokesperson Terry Kneebone as saying there were 15 US citizens aboard, and that three had survived. It was the worst air crash in Central American history. Oct. 22: AFP cited flight supervisor Alfonso Valladares as saying that the pilot tried to make an emergency landing. Witnesses cited by AFP said the plane developed engine problems, forcing the pilot to attempt an emergency landing. The plane broke apart and caught fire on impact, witnesses said. Bonilla dismissed reports of the roof of the aircraft having torn loose as "speculation." He did not offer an alternative explanation for the crash. As of Sunday, the "black box" cockpit voice recorder had been recovered and sent to the US for examination. AFP cited an unidentified TAN-SAHSA official as saying the airplane was leased 25 years ago from Continental Airlines. The passenger list included 62 Nicaraguans, 45 Hondurans, 11 US citizens and another 20 from Latin America, Europe and Australia. Oct. 23: TAN-SAHSA manager Cesar Zelaya confirmed in statements to Notimex that the airline will pay life insurance to the relatives of the 131 persons who died in the crash. On Monday, a commission comprised of representatives of the Honduran government, the airline, Boeing, the US National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Agency began detailed investigations of the causes of the accident. A Nicaraguan air force plane arrived in Tegucigalpa with 45 coffins aboard to collect bodies of Nicaraguans who died in the accident. AP cited Honduran Economy Minister
Reginaldo Panting as saying that TAN-SAHSA had rented the plane for $180,000 a month about a year ago from Continental Airlines. He said it was valued at $30 million. (Basic data from AP, Notimex, 10/21-23/89; AFP, 10/22/89)

-- End --