



Registration	N183H
Type	Lockheed L-188C Electra
Aircraft damage	Destroyed
Location	1.5 mls NE of Ardmore Airport, OK (KADM)
Date	Friday 22 April 1966

The American Flyers Crash in Ardmore

Gary Heartsill

July 23, 2019



Saturday copy (April 23, 1966) of the Daily Ardmoreite at the Crash Memorial by the main gate. The airport water tower is through the glass document holder in the background.



QUESTIONS

1. What was the “probable cause” of this crash?
2. Who was really responsible?
3. Where was/is the crash site?
4. What is the significance, if any, for this review 53 years after it happened?

ANSWERS

1. "The Board determines the **probable cause** of this accident was the incapacitation, due to a coronary insufficiency, of the pilot-in-command at a critical point during a visual, circling approach being conducted under instrument flight conditions" (p. 1).

2. "**The failure of the pilot** of Flight **280/D** or any pilot exercising commercial privileges to disclose his total medical history by falsifying his application for a medical certificate, places in jeopardy the lives of not only those passengers aboard an aircraft but the lives of the crewmembers as well" (p. 23).

3. "Flight 280/D crashed **in the foothills of the Arbuckle Mountains approximately 1½ miles northeast of the Ardmore Municipal Airport** scattered along a line approximately 150 degrees magnetic, and all the major components of the aircraft were recovered in the wreckage area... The aircraft came to rest approximately 750 feet from the initial impact" (pp. 10-11)¹ [Note: yellow highlight mine.]

4. The reason for this review is to show the history of the crash and make available some of the information as **this crash was "pretty close to my home town"** and want to point out again the pilot was the probable cause and "this also **could have been pretty close to my family**."



As these two flight attendants could have been my wife and my daughter - metaphorically (or allegorically), of course. (See names on next page.)

Note: The focus here is not forgetting the rest of the troops killed...

¹ Aircraft Accident Report SA-392, CIVIL AERONAUTICS BOARD (adopted March 28, 1967). Received from the Web July 13, 2019: https://reports.aviation-safety.net/1966/19660422-0_L188_N183H.pdf

Have listed this URL in more than one place in the paper and provided a copy in the Appendix..

WANDA STONECIPHER, Stratford (left) and Dyana Duncan, Jacksonville, Tex., were members of the crew of the American Flyers Airline plane that crashed while trying to land at Ardmore's Industrial Airpark.

-from The Daily Ardmoreite, Sunday, April 24, 1966

"Flight Attendant **Wanda F. Stonecipher**, age 23, was employed by AFAX on November 15, 1964. She completed stewardess training on January 12, 1965, and her **last** recurrent emergency training was accomplished on January 15, 1966.

Flight Attendant **Dyanna J. Duncan**, age 23, was employed by AFAX on August 3, 1965. She completed stewardess training on August 20, 1965, and her last recurrent emergency training was accomplished on November 10, 1965" (p. 6, CAB report).

OUTLINE FOR THIS PAPER:

1. The crash - shown in The Ardmoreite
2. The Questions for the paper
3. The Answers in brief form
4. Sample pictures from The Ardmoreite of the crash/history/story
5. Embedded comments/details/explanations
6. Memorial site pictures from "This and That" - Butch Bridges
7. Appendix - the full CAB Crash Report



Praise Expressed For All Who Aided

Authorities responsible for the search for crash victims Friday night, said Saturday morning, have found bodies in places of death what's more.

Thirty or more bodies have been found in 20 miles away, most of them in the area of the crash site, said a spokesman for the FBI.

He quickly said to the hundreds of bodies found in the area, and help and support for the search.

Crash survivors described the search area, where hundreds of bodies were found, as "a scene of horror and tragedy." The bodies were found in places of death what's more.

All kinds of bodies of people found in various places, including a young boy's body, said a spokesman for the FBI.

A spokesman for the FBI said that the bodies were found in places of death what's more.

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and people established the initial contact with rescue operations on the ground plane.

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CRASH EVIDENCE... Personal articles of a young soldier the world crashed Friday night, killing 81 of the 82 servicemen and 4 crewmen aboard.

County Political Rally Cancelled

The Carter County political rally scheduled for last Monday night in Ardmore's Civic Auditorium has been cancelled and apparently will not be held.

Howard Hinkle, Carter County Commissioner, said that plans to hold the rally were dropped because of the crash.

The rally, which was scheduled for Monday night, was the only one held in the county since the crash.

Four Road Deaths

Two Drivers Die In Sea of Flames

By LEWIS JACKSON

LAST NIGHT, a two-car crash occurred on the road in a forest near the town of Ardmore, Okla., at 10:30 p.m. The crash resulted in the deaths of two people.

The two involved in the crash were a man and a woman. The man was driving the car and the woman was in the passenger seat.

The crash occurred on a two-lane road that was in poor condition. The road was wet and there were trees on either side.

DISASTROUS AIRLINE CRASH SNUFFS LIVES OF 81 ABOARD

By ULLIAN LIGAN

ASTORIA, Ore., (AP)—A plane crashed into the sea Saturday night, killing 81 people and destroying the plane.

The crash occurred on the coast of Oregon. The plane was flying from Washington to Astoria.

The crash occurred on a foggy night. The plane was flying at a low altitude.

The crash resulted in the deaths of 81 people. There were 82 people on board the plane.

The Daily Ardmoreite

"Southern Oklahoma's Greatest Newspaper"

Third Year - No. 122 ARDMORE, OKLAHOMA, MONDAY, APRIL 24, 1966 PRICE 10c

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Ardmore Have a question?

Page 1

Note these Ardmoreite pictures are not to actually be read but are examples of the reporting the weekend of the crash. They are just for show.

Found out a person could get a copy of a page for \$29.99 plus \$9.99 to send it but no discount for previous Ardmoreite delivery boys...

April 22, 1966 83 Deaths in Plane Crash Was Top Story of 1966

CHIP MINTY

Published: Sun, April 18, 1999 12:00 AM

<https://oklahoman.com/article/2649983/april-22-1966-83-deaths-in-plane-crash-was-top-story-of-1966>

It was the year Oklahoma beauty queen Jane Jayroe was selected Miss America, Dewey Bartlett became the state's second Republican governor and the war in Vietnam was intensifying.

But none was picked as the state's top story in 1966. That distinction went to the state's worst plane crash, in the rugged outskirts of Ardmore.

On a rainy April night, an American Flyers Airline's four-engine, turboprop carrying 92 Army recruits and six crew members crashed into a hillside near Ardmore's Gene Autry Airport. Eighty-three people died, and 15 people survived.

Witnesses said the wreckage was scattered over 400 yards. Rescuers sifted through debris and broken bodies strewn among blackjack trees and gullies in one of the roughest regions in southern Oklahoma.

James Gorman, 20, a private from Bellerose N.Y., recalled the crash from his hospital bed the night of the accident. "We all had our seat belts fastened, I think. My seat belt stayed fastened, but some of them didn't.

"There was fire all around me, and I undid my seat belt and got out.... But I didn't have to climb out. There wasn't any more plane.

"I had to run through a wall of fire to get out of there."

Federal officials investigating what the National Transportation Safety Board calls the worst airline disaster in Oklahoma's history concluded the American Flyers president and pilot, Reed W. Pigman, 59, was at fault.

They reported Pigman suffered a heart attack while attempting to land the plane in foggy conditions.

In its report released nearly a year after the crash, the Civil Aeronautics Board stated the pilot had "deliberately" concealed his heart condition for 18 years.

The findings prompted the board to improve the quality of medical information about pilots.

The crash resulted in nearly two dozen wrongful death lawsuits totaling \$14 million against the Ardmore-based airline. The final case was settled out of court in 1971.

Former American Flyers pilot James Hamilton of Ardmore said recently that the airline merged with a Pennsylvania-based shipping company about a year after the crash and left Ardmore. Dr. Warren Silberman, the Federal Aviation Administration's aeromedical certification manager, said today's certification process is more stringent than in 1966.

FLIGHT SAFETY Foundation

<https://aviation-safety.net/database/record.php?id=19660422-0>

Status: Final
Date: Friday 22 April 1966
Time: 20:30



Type: [Lockheed L-188C Electra](#)
Operator: [American Flyers Airline](#)
Registration: N183H
C/n / msn: 1136
First flight: 1961
Total airframe hrs: 4019
Engines: 4 [Allison 501-D13A](#)
Crew: Fatalities: 5 / Occupants: 5
Passengers: Fatalities: 78 / Occupants: 93
Total: Fatalities: 83 / Occupants: 98
Aircraft damage: Destroyed
Aircraft fate: Written off (damaged beyond repair)
Location: 2,4 km (1.5 mls) NE of Ardmore Municipal Airport, OK (ADM) ( [United States of America](#))
Crash site elevation: 294 m (965 feet) amsl
Phase: Approach (APR)
Nature: Domestic Non Scheduled Passenger
Departure airport: [Monterey Peninsula Airport, CA \(MRY/KMRY\)](#), United States of America
Destination airport: [Ardmore Municipal Airport, OK \(ADM/KADM\)](#), United States of America
Flight number: 280/D

Narrative:

American Flyers Flight 280/D, a Lockheed Electra, crashed 2,4 km northeast of the Ardmore Municipal Airport, OK (ADM). Of the 93 passengers and five crewmembers aboard, 18 passengers survived, however, three of them later succumbed to injuries. The aircraft was destroyed by impact and subsequent fire.

The aircraft operated on a Military Air Command contract Civil Air Movement Charter flight from Monterey, CA (MRY) to Columbus, GA via Ardmore, OK.

Flight 280/D departed Monterey Peninsula Airport at 16:32.

The crew missed a runway 08 ADF instrument approach to Ardmore, so they attempted a visual circling approach to runway 30. The aircraft struck a hill at an elevation of 963 feet (airport elevation being 762 feet msl).

Probable Cause:

PROBABLE CAUSE: "The incapacitation, due to a coronary insufficiency*, of the pilot-in-command at a critical point during visual, circling approach being conducted under instrument flight conditions."

* **Coronary insufficiency** is a pathophysiologic state that can initiate lethal **cardiac** arrhythmias in the absence of myocardial necrosis. A heart attack is called a myocardial infarction..."

Accident investigation:



Investigating agency: CAB 

Status: Investigation completed

Duration: 1 years

Accident number: final report

Download report:  [Final report](#)

https://reports.aviation-safety.net/1966/19660422-0_L188_N183H.pdf

The Beatles and a man named Pigman

By Paul Johns paulj@nixaxpress.com Jan 14, 2014



Clockwise from top left: Reed Pigman with one of his training planes. The plane that carried the Beatles to the Ozarks. Inside the Electra turbo-prop the four Beatles celebrate their manager's birthday on the way to the Ozarks on Sept. 19, 1964. Reed Pigman and four of his stewardesses a month before his death. https://marshfieldmail.com/news/the-beatles-and-a-man-named-pigman/article_7bafaa8c-7d2c-11e3-ac8e-0019bb2963f4.html

Notice the two flight attendants on both ends of the picture with Reed Pigman?



Overhead picture of the crash site (See notes on CAB report page 10.)

Have finally determined, more or less, just exactly where this crash site is located. From Ardmore driving north on I-35, just past Lake Jean Neustadt on the left, is marker 40 which is highway 53. A right turn here goes east about six miles to the airport.

Two miles farther north is highway marker 42 which is the west leg of highway 53. The next mile north starts up into the Arbuckle Mountains - we used to see **LAZY S Ranch** written with quarry mountain rock on the south side of the mountain.

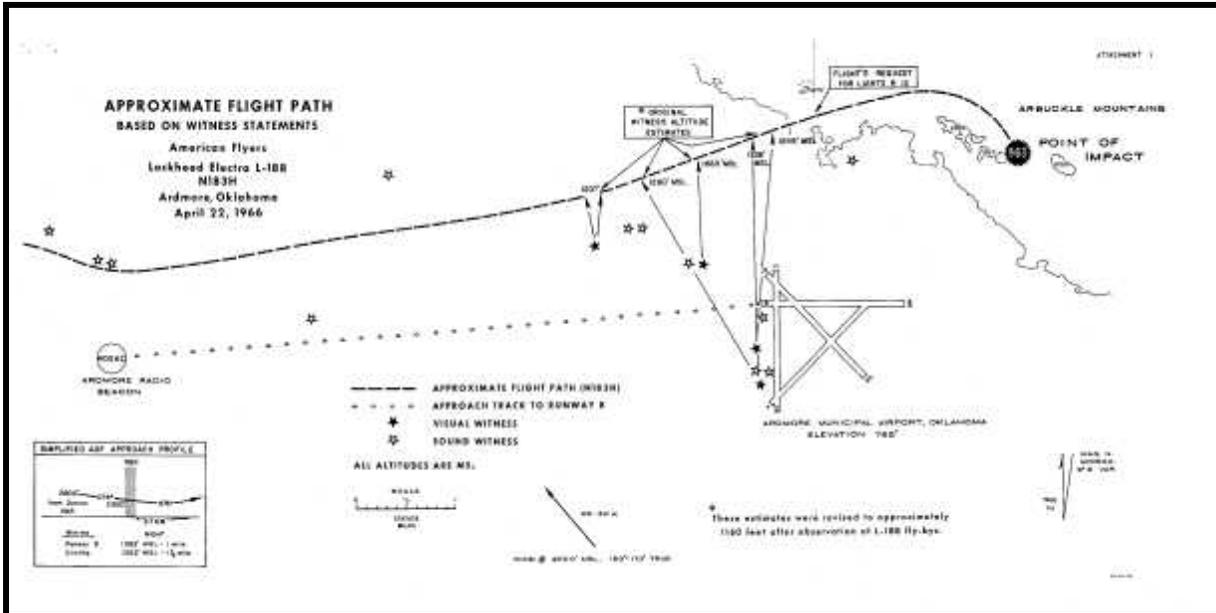
Course, we used to drive on Highway 77 a mile to the east. This is where I want to start the orientation of where (a) the Ardmore ADF radio beacon, (b) the airport, and (c) the crash site are located.

(a) The beacon (400 XC) is one mile east of I-35 (exit 40) on highway 53 where it intersects highway 77.

(b) The airport is about six mile east on highway 53.

(c) **The crash site from exit 42 is east on a straight line about eight miles** - notice the road runs out about a mile east of 77.

NOTE: If you extend this exit 42 east you can see it will run into a road north of the Washita River. The road then goes south past and around the airport. Just east and south of the 8 mile line is the crash site. The road, by the way, is named "**DEAD RIVER RD.**" The next sequence of pictures will show (1) Plan view of the airport, (2) A red circle of the crash site, and (3) The path before the crash and the planned path for the circle. First, see the Flight Path next.



This is attachment 1 from the CAB Report - see page 47 of this paper.

The middle dotted line shows where the flight should have flown from the Ardmore Radio Beacon (located at the intersection of Highways 53 and 77) to the airport.

They should have crossed over the beacon at 2300 feet with partial flaps for the 5.7 mile final approach leg of the approach. With their approach speed of 160 KNOTS this should have taken about 2:13.

Notice the stars show where witnesses were with either a visual seeing witness (black star) or a sound seeing witness (white star).

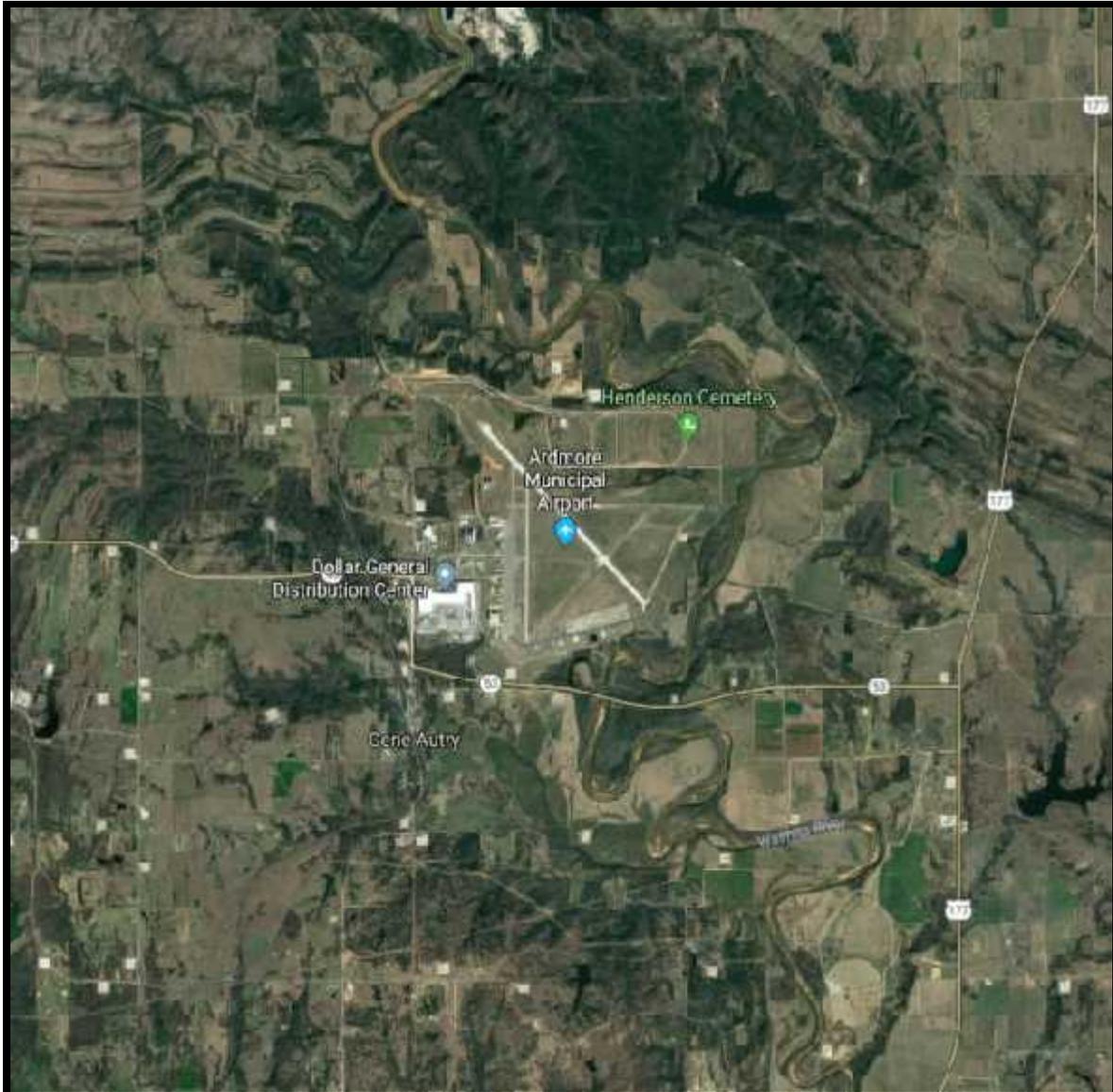
The top dashed line shows the actual path of the ship which reflects being north of the track varying from about 1 to 2 miles.

They reported passing the beacon and just after passing abeam north of the field they called the Flight Service Station to switch the runway lights to runway 12. The time from abeam to point of impact was about 55 seconds. The crash occurred at 20:30.

At least two visual witnesses saw the fire ball.

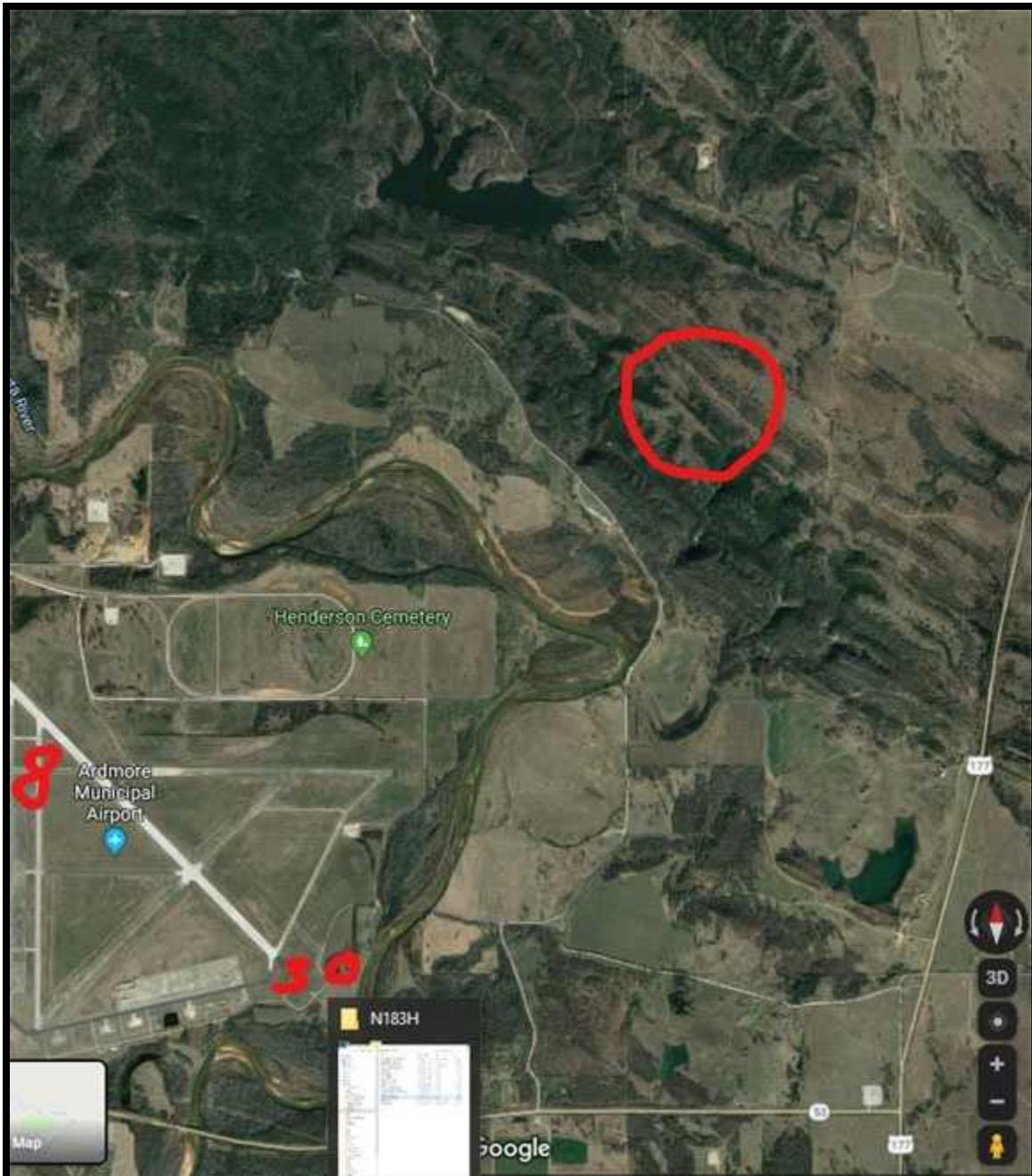
(1) Plane view: The Dollar General road goes from exit 40 to the control tower and is about the center of the airport. On this picture if you extend from the center of the runways north east out past the green dot showing the Henderson Cemetery, you will see the first ridge line, and near a small heart shaped clump of Cedar trees, is the approximate crash site.

The second photo with a red circle will be a zoom of this area.



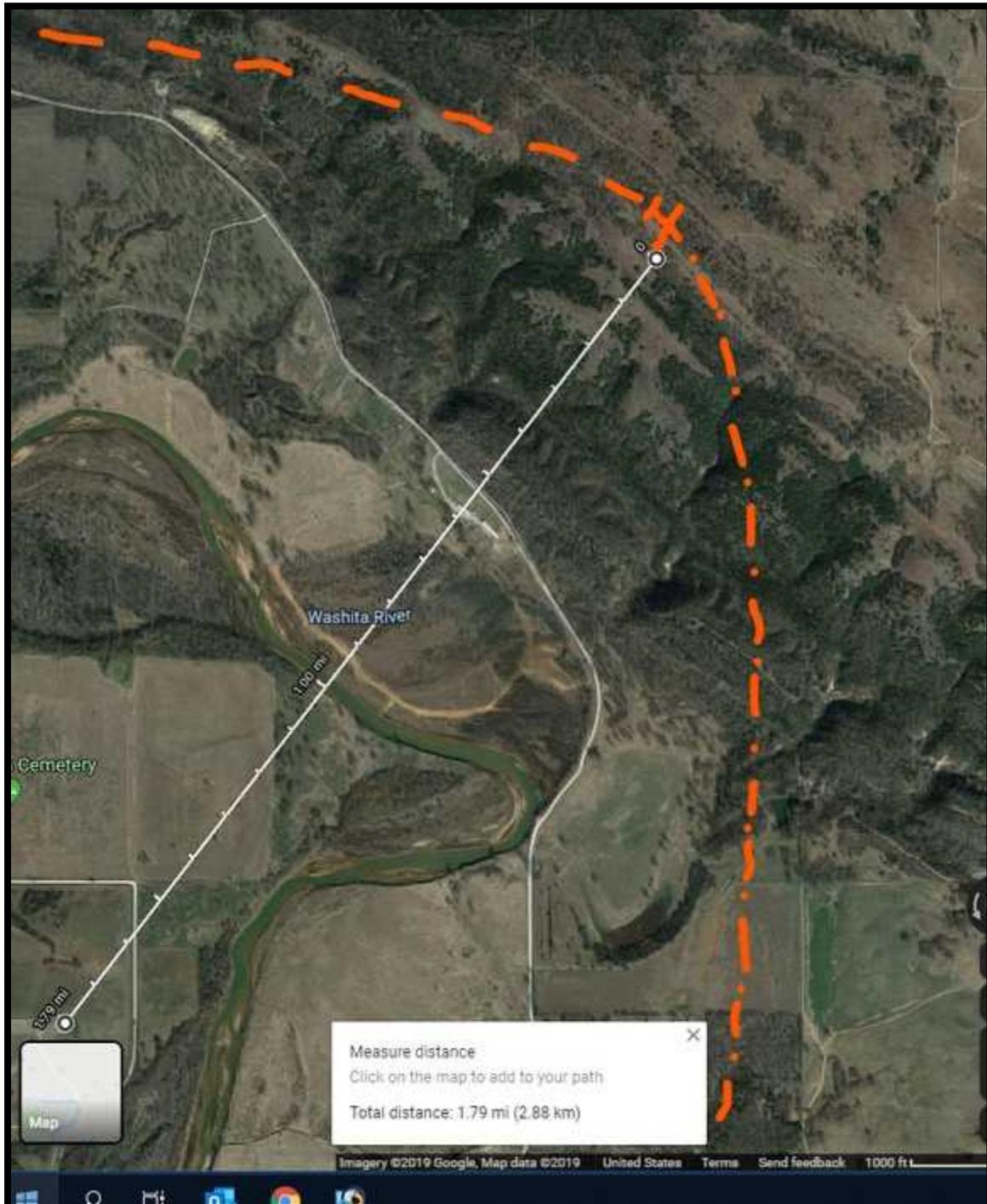
(2) Crash site is circled in red. You can almost make out the heart of trees in the lower left of the circle. The exact crash site is somewhat to the northeast of the heart. The scatter pattern of parts will line up parallel to the ridges pointing to the southeast and, as it shows in the CAB Report ATTACHMENT 1, the POINT OF IMPACT has the number 963 which is the elevation of the crash.

(This attachment is on page 14.)



(3) The path before: Have drawn out a line from the airport to the approximate (airplane shaped) crash sight. The distance is reported as "1-1/2 miles northeast" heading 150 degrees and spread out 750 feet. The dashed/dot line shows the approximate line/path for the planned circle back to land on runway 12. See Appendix pp. 18-19 for details.

I don't know the exact point they measured from the airport.



EMBEDDED COMMENTS (cont'd)

We have looked at The Ardmoreite, and a few other sources for the reporting of the crash and have determined who was at fault, who died in the crash, and where the crash occurred. You may want to, just like me, go back (or forward) to tie some knots or connect some dots? It will just depend on how deep or how interested you want to be.

Now that I know where, what, and when, the question I want to explore is the why; better, HOW could this crash happen?

With no esoteric or special knowledge to add to this I still want to kick around some thoughts. For sure, there will be no real answers but I do have some questions.

Accident Investigation Comments

The Civil Aeronautics Board, in my opinion - given what they had - did a remarkable job of determining the investigative reasons, causes, and reporting of the accident. Reading of the report is worth the time (See Appendix, or: https://reports.aviation-safety.net/1966/19660422-0_L188_N183H.pdf)

This report, looking back 53 years, may/may not be Monday morning quarter backing but please let me ramble a bit without going through the history as you can read these worthwhile details in the report.

Once we get past the debris path, the precious life lost, and a destroyed airliner that has embarrassed aviation, an airline, and Ardmore, I still had to spend some time looking over the report of what they did. In all accidents it is not just one thing but a number of items in the chain of events that show up. This one may have 'just one.' It could have been caused by just the "coronary insufficiency."

But I don't think so.

There was some hurry, or a sense of urgency, in the approach - so it seems in the reading - and I want to discuss this.

First, the report again, as good as it is/was, did not have some of the latest investigative equipment used now in accidents. The cockpit voice recorder (CVR) did not work. The ship did not have a black box to give the aircraft flying parameters for the last minute(s) of 'what did the airplane do?' and they were only able to look at the pieces and speculate about what happened - a whole lot like I am doing now.

Pause, this whole paper is just for some of my friends and a record for me for having gone over the crash so I can look back and say I know where they crashed and have an idea of why. No more than this.

Second, he missed the beacon, missed the airport, and went below minimums seemingly being in a real hurry. Why?

We will never really know why. Have heard some rumblings but the bottom line it was his fault. He was responsible. It was 'pilot error.' Forget the 18 years of him hiding behind some meds and using nitroglycerine for his last three years. The board determined this and it is history.

I say he could have made the approach.

The flight path drawing in Attachment 1 caused me to spend more time than I should have trying to figure out some angles, speeds, altitudes, and "why did he do that?"

First, we know he was in a hurry - or more interested in getting cheaper fuel at his home base than perhaps going someplace more efficiently than KADM. Maybe...

Second, on the straight in ADF approach, was he skirting some weather just south of their track, or was he in a hurry to get her on the ground? There was weather southwest of the field. The navigation or his navigating to the beacon at Springer was not as exact as it should have been. Maybe for an ADF approach but not for what they were doing.

[* I don't know if they had a VOR/DME approach available or if they used the VOR station for some directional/distance guidance. The ADF had the lowest limits (which were 600 feet and one mile) and they seemed bent on using it. *My reflection on approaches at this time (FAA requirements) was one could not make a straight in ADF approach without radar assistance (to get lined up). The pilot had to pass the beacon twice to absolutely determine his location before the descent.* Course, this is certainly Monday morning conjecture and I know it. *]

Third, he missed the beacon - over a mile (to the north). They were abeam by one mile. They really did not have this luxury. Two reasons for being abeam by a mile could have been (a) skirting some weather and not pinning down the line up to be exactly over the beacon when they passed it, or (b) they had no correction for the 27 knots of wind blowing them north.

Maybe it was both? The cockpit recording of the three of them would have maybe helped determine why they missed the beacon.

Fourth, no one knows what the planned missed approach was going to be if they missed the field or if they had to circle how that would be accomplished. The miss was published but we have no crew briefing it.

Fifth, it seems they didn't have a plan to miss as they descended below the limits of the approach - a cardinal ~~error~~ mistake.

Sixth, I think he/they could have made it doing exactly what they did IF THEY HAD HIT THE BEACON AND IMMEDIATELY DESCENDED TO 1362 FEET (this is called "dive and drive" (mostly not used these days).

If they had crossed the beacon holding the heading into the wind and stayed on the proper bearing to the field of 076 degrees (by watching the tail of their needle - it would have shown them to turn right to get on that bearing) then, the combination of getting on/staying on the bearing and hustling on down to limits, they might have seen the airport somewhere to the left out the front window screen (holding into the wind). FOR SURE IF YOU ARE GOING TO CHEAT AND DIP BELOW LIMITS (AN ~~ERROR~~ MISTAKE) they would have had at least one or so miles to see the approach end of runway 8.

Seventh, they didn't see the field. Well, they (the copilot and maybe the flight engineer) could see something to their right. They and their airplane certainly could be seen and heard as it was going east while at least a mile and half north of the field.

Eighth, it is reported, as they started the turn to the south and asking for the lights to be turned on for runway 12, they were at 1160 feet indicated or about **two hundred feet below limits!** for the approach and **only about 160 feet above the terrain!**

This part of the CAB investigative reporting gets high marks from me on page 20 saying they could see the ground/lights/airport but if they got into cloud or no visibility they would not have gone below 1160 feet above the Arbuckle Mountains (this is still below circling limits). Look at the CAB discussion on into page 21 of the six seconds it took them to go from 1160 feet to 963 feet.

In part, the first officer "who was probably looking out the right window and keeping the field in sight" only had about six seconds after the captain became incapacitated for the plane to recover from the 1,950 feet per minute descent (wonder where the trim was set? This was quite a drop or dip for an airplane in just a slight turn - unless the captain fell on the wheel).

Well, the F/O didn't recover or reverse the descent. His 1.5 seconds was in vain as the recovery time to rotate the nose 12 degrees and get some power in was a tad late. The flight service specialist on the field saw the "fire ball" some distance northeast of the airport."

So, it added up to not being lined up with the proper inbound bearing to the beacon (maybe weather), they missed the beacon (maybe in a hurry), they missed the bearing track/path to the field (too far away?), let down below minimums (maybe desperation), then not enough time to recover (again, they only had 160 feet to play with and just six seconds to respond).

I still think they could have made it. If they had continued the circle at 1160 feet to a point about one mile from where they were, the first officer would have had about 500 feet to recover the ship - if the captain had delayed his heart attack - about 23 seconds.

American Flyers Memorial





One of two granite benches with Memorial Donors names on it.



Official American Flyers Memorial Website
<http://www.brightok.net/~wwwafm>

Butch Bridges has some additional pictures of the crash site and some comments on his Web site at:

January 11, 2006 Circulation over 5,000 Vol 10 Issue 468
<http://www.oklahomahistory.net/newsletters/tnewsJAN06.html>

APPENDIX

Please see the CAB Accident Report on N183H in second file on the Web site or click on this URL:

https://reports.aviation-safety.net/1966/19660422-0_L188_N183H.pdf

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ADDENDUM

1. Just to add to my red print note on page 12 about avoiding a crash site if you can, I have found out two of my very close friends were in Ardmore that weekend and experienced the crash (one) by seeing a morgue set up in the Civic Center and (2) by hauling out some of the dead and taking them to the mortuary. Both agree to stay clear if you can.