

No. 38

Compañía Aerovías Venezolanas, S. A. (AVENSA), Douglas DC-3C, YV-C-AVG, crashed in the "Peñas Blancas" hills, Venezuela, on 3 September 1957. Report released by the Directorate of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Communications, Republic of Venezuela.

Circumstances

The aircraft, chartered by the Socony Mobil Oil Company of Venezuela, took off on a special flight on 3 September at 0903 hours from the Maiquetía International Airport on a through flight to Barinas. It carried a crew of 3 and 5 passengers. As the aircraft did not reach its destination nor any of the neighbouring airports that same day an emergency was declared. The wreckage was found on 12 September in the "Peñas Blancas" hills. There were no survivors.

Investigation and Evidence

On the night of 3 September, a peasant, in the neighbourhood of the Niquitao village, noticed a fire on the slopes of the "Peñas Blancas" hills at a distance of 20 kilometres away. He reported the fact to the Niquitao civilian authorities who then notified the Ministry of Communications.

On 4 September, the head of the Boconó radio station reported that at 1045 hours on 3 September a Douglas DC-3C aircraft went through Boconó during a rainstorm on a north-south flight at an altitude of approximately 3 000 feet and with no engine failure noticeable.

The Ministry of Communications focused its search work on the aircraft's intended route comprising 20 kilometres on each side thereof and on both the stretch of the Puerto Cabello-Barinas pipeline and the lowlands south of Barinas. Although part of the search was limited

to the slopes southwest of the Andina mountain ranges, between Barquisimeto and Barinas, it was impossible to fly over the higher ranges because of unsatisfactory weather conditions.

On 12 September the Ministry of Communications' Search and Rescue Commission arrived in Boconó. On the following morning it examined the parts of the wrecked aircraft which had been found and been brought to Niquitao (i. e. parts of the right wing fillet belonging to a Douglas DC-3C and another part of its control cable) and then spent five days looking for the site of the accident.

According to information available, the aircraft had made its flight progress report at a point designated as Whisky 1 (3 miles north of Ocumare de la Costa). It was crossing at an approximate speed of 150 miles per hour. The message which, as established, must have been made at Whisky 2, was not received. At 0958 Avensa radio station at Barquisimeto picked up a message to the effect that the aircraft was on its way to Barquisimeto. At 1045, a captain, who was piloting another aircraft north of San Fernando de Apure, heard AVG and endeavoured to secure a radio relay with Maiquetía but failed to do so because of unsatisfactory weather conditions.

"Peñas Blancas", the site of the crash, is a crag with an 85° bank. It ends about 200 metres below the Los Frailes hills which are approximately 3 050 metres high whereas the height of the crag itself is 220 metres.

The lower part of the crag, continuing the mountain, is wooded terrain with a 45° bank.

For reasons unknown, the aircraft flew away from its route and when finding himself on the Boconó longitude the pilot endeavoured to reach Barinas on a 172° direct heading and at an altitude of 10 000 feet, (3047.9 m).

Visibility conditions were almost nil at the height mentioned. It can thus be gathered that the pilot saw the "Pefias Blancas" crag at a very short distance and manoeuvred sharply, endeavouring either to turn or to climb. Possibly he may have attempted a leftward turn in order to overcome his desperate situation; he may also have attempted a sharp climb which resulted in lift loss and the collapse of the left wing. It is impossible to tell. In point of fact, the left wing hit the crag's higher side; it came off and tore away part of the fuselage including a seat occupied by a passenger. Both passenger and wing fell into space impelled by the centrifugal force imparted to the aircraft by the impact's asymmetric force, while the aircraft's fuselage came down revolving on its vertical axis upon the top of the crag where the accident occurred.

From the examination of the wreckage and the comparatively small extent of the damage, it is believed that the pilot-in-command's last manoeuvre was not a turn to the left but rather a loss of speed due to a sharp climb entailing a loss in the lift of the aircraft's left section.

All the aircraft's accessories, engines and propellers were within the established maintenance time limits.

Probable Causes

Probable causes of the accident are as follows:

- 1) Bad weather and the latter's influence on radio communications and radio compass;
- 2) Leaving the recommended route led to the aircraft going into a dangerous area;
- 3) Flying between Boconó and Barinas at an inadequate height.