

Worst Crash In U.S. History

An Alaska Airlines jetliner with 111 people aboard crashed into the sheer wall of a mountain in Tongass National Forest west of Juneau Saturday, destroying the aircraft and killing all aboard in the worst single

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Worst Airline Crash...

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aircraft disaster in United States history.

At least 51 Alaskan were among the dead.

The crash occurred at about the 2500 foot level of the Chilkat Mountains, about 20 miles west of Juneau and just eight minutes before the flight was due in at Juneau on its flight from Yakutat.

Alaska Airlines flight 1866 originated at Anchorage and landed at Cordova and Yakutat. It was headed for Juneau, Sitka and Seattle. It was to have landed at Juneau at 12:10 p.m. but crashed on approach, one mile east of Teardrop Lake.

There were no survivors.

As of Saturday night, State Troopers were at the disaster scene guarding the bodies and

the wreckage and troopers began the arduous process of removing bodies from the site last Monday. Adverse weather conditions on the mountain on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, prevented the movement of helicopters and other disaster equipment and delayed the recovery operation.

In Juneau, local units of the Alaska National Guard, called into action by Governor Egan, readied the National Guard Armory to serve as a temporary morgue. An FBI Disaster team, flown into Juneau on Sunday, will use fingerprints and other methods to identify the bodies of the plane's 111 victims.

Initial disaster reports set the number of passengers on the plane at first 107 and then 109. The final total of 111 was due to the presence on board of 4 infant children of passengers—children who are not issued tickets or manifests.

On Monday, one of the airplane's flight recorders was recovered from the crash site. It was too early, however, to know in what condition it was or to determine the cause of the fatal crash. Bits and pieces of the Boeing 727 airliner were scattered across some two square miles of rugged Chilkat Mountains.

The U.S. Weather Service reported that skies over Juneau were cloudy with light rain at noon on Saturday, with 15 miles visibility. The Alaska Airlines flight had been cleared for a landing at the Juneau Municipal Airport before radio contact was lost, 8 minutes before their estimated time of arrival.

An investigative team from the National Transportation Safety Board was immediately dispatched from Washington, D.C. and will investigate the crash site. According to James Wellington, Alaska deputy commissioner of public safety, the recovery operation and investigation of the crash site would probably take 3 to 5 days.

Two hunters at Glacier Bay reportedly heard the plane go overhead and heard the crash. However, it was some time after the crash before Coast Guard search and rescue teams spotted the crash site and even more time before ground parties were able to reach the isolated crash area.

Robert Giersdorf, Alaska Airlines vice president and Charles F. Willis, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of the Airline took part in the search before the downed plane was sighted.

There was no way as of yesterday to determine what the jetliner was doing several thousand feet below its planned flight level or whether pilot or mechanical error caused the drop.

Much speculation surrounds the fact that Juneau Municipal Airport does not have an instrument landing system to help pilots land in bad weather. Such a device, an FAA official says, had not been installed because the geography in Juneau made it impractical.

The Alaska Airlines flight was piloted by Capt. Richard Adams, 41 of Seattle.