

AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING OF THE PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION OF THE VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK
TO BE HELD ON TUESDAY March 2 2021, AT 7:00 PM AT THE VILLAGE HALL, 835 MIDWAY DRIVE, IN THE
VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK, DuPAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE VILLAGE WILL BE UTILIZING A CONFERENCE CALL FOR THIS
MEETING.

THE PUBLIC CAN UTILIZE THE FOLLOWING CALL IN NUMBER:

Dial in number: 1(312)626-6799

Meeting ID- 965-9115-5732

Password: 540196

- A. CALL TO ORDER
- B. ROLL CALL
- C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES-
 - 1) February 2 2021 Regular meeting of the Parks & Recreation Commission
- D. REPORTS
 - 1) Maintenance updates
- E. DISCUSSION ITEMS
 - 1) Review of FY2021-22 Park & Recreation Budget
 - 2) 2022 5K
- F. NEW BUSINESS
 - 1) Flight 529 Memorial at Prairie Trail Park
- G. VISITOR'S BUSINESS- Public comment is limited to three (3) minutes per person.
- H. COMMUNICATIONS
- I. ADJOURNMENT

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
HELD ON TUESDAY February 2, 2021, AT THE VILLAGE HALL, 835 MIDWAY DRIVE,
WILLOWBROOK, DUPAGE COUNTY, ILLINOIS

DUE TO THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC, THE VILLAGE WILL BE UTILIZING A ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL FOR THIS MEETING.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Robert Pionke called the meeting to order at the hour of 7:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Those present at roll call were: Chairman Robert Pionke and Parks and Recreation Manager John Fenske.

Present Via Conference Call, Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic were Commissioners Loraine Grimsby, Laurie Landsman, Carol Lazarski and Doug Stetina. ABSENT: Commissioner Ron Kanaverskis
A QUORUM WAS DECLARED

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. Minutes – January 5th, 2021 – Parks & Recreation Commission- Waived

4. REPORT

Manager Fenske gave a report on the following Maintenance Items.

The contractors were out at Prairie Trail Park during the week of January 14th repairing the parkway from the repairs to the broken sewer line. The air pump for the aerator has been repaired, but it cannot be reinstalled at this time. He also added that on January 28th, Public Works discovered one of the grills at Borse Community Park was damaged. PW Forman Passero will see if it can be repaired if it cannot a new one will be ordered. Commissioner Landsman inquired if the grill will be replaced with a similar style. Manager Fenske said the grill would only be replaced if it cannot be fixed.

Chairman Pionke asked about the work done at Farmingdale Park. Manager Fenske said that was Village related work to a water main.

5. DISCUSSION FY 2021-22 Budget Review

Manager Fenske stated that only line items over \$10,000 are required to have a breakdown. There were a few questions about the following contracted maintenance line items: playground grading & electrical/plumbing. These were answered by Manager Fenske. Commissioner Lazarski asked about where the money for Arbor Day event would come from. She also asked when the Village board would approve the budget. Manager Fenske answered these questions. Chairman Pionke asked what special projects were going to be included. Manager Fenske stated Ridgemoor Park and the replacement of the fishing pier. Chairman Pionke also inquired about the proposal to move or replace the equipment at Willow pond, and the planting of flowers around the park signs. Manager Fenske said that he has been in touch with Tod Stanton about the proposal to do the work at both Ridgemoor and Willow Pond, and that he is hoping to have this by next year. He added that the planting of flowers will be included in the landscape contract. Commissioner Stetina inquired about the cost of the contract for Wild Goose Chase and the money budgeted for the events that the Burr Ridge Park District runs and for the program guide. Manager Fenske said that

he still budgeted money for these items, because Burr Ridge is planning on running programs beginning in the Spring, and they hope to have a new program guide out by the fall. Commissioner Lazarski inquired about when the last time the plantings at Ridgemoor were done. Manager Fenske said it was when the Eagle Scout did the flower beds a few years ago, either in 2016 or 2017. Commissioner Lazarski also inquired about the SWAP program, and who schedules this. Manager Fenske said that this is done through Public Works. Commissioner Grimsby said she could reach out to the Sheriff to find out exactly what the program can do.

6. NEW BUSINESS

a. 2022 5K

Commissioner Lazarski suggested moving the race to April 2022, maybe tying it into Arbor Day. Manager Fenske said that there are established races around this time. Commissioner Landsman was in favor of also moving it, to avoid conflict with the walk in Hinsdale. Commissioner Grimsby added it that we could try it for one year and change it back if we need to. Chairman Pionke said that Hinsdale is a walk, so it would attract a different crowd, and he would be in favor of moving the race to later in the year, instead of back into April. He added that the biggest draw to a race is the “gimmick”. A discussion about possible dates and finding a partner and growing the event took place. It was suggested to table this discussion until March.

Commissioner Stetina mentioned that this is his 40th year on the board. He also asked about the drop-in day camp, and if that is going to happen. Chairman Pionke said we do not have the resources to run this program at this time. Commissioner Stetina asked if there was any update on the 825 building. Manager Fenske said that there is not.

7. VISITORS' BUSINESS

None presented.

8. COMMUNICATIONS

None presented.

9. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Grimsby, seconded by Commissioner Lazarski to adjourn the meeting.

ROLL CALL VOTE: AYES: Chairman Pionke, Commissioners Grimsby, Landsman, Lazarski and Stetina.
NAYS: None. ABSENT: Kanaverskis

MOTION DECLARED CARRIED at 8:03pm.

PRESENTED, READ, and APPROVED, _____, 2021

Chairman

VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK

Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting AGENDA ITEM – Summary Sheet

AGENDA ITEM DESCRIPTION

Report- Maintenance Updates

MEETING DATE

March 2 2021

COMMISSION REVIEW

Report Discussion Seeking Feedback

ITEM HISTORY (PREVIOUS PARK COMMISSION REVIEWS, ACTIONS RELATED TO THIS ITEM, OTHER HISTORY)

Update on Maintenance issues in the parks from February 1 2021 to March 1 2021

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK

Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting AGENDA ITEM – Summary Sheet

AGENDA ITEM DESCRIPTION

Discussion FY 2021-2022 budget

MEETING DATE

March 2 2021

COMMISSION REVIEW

Report Discussion Seeking Feedback

ITEM HISTORY (PREVIOUS PARK COMMISSION REVIEWS, ACTIONS RELATED TO THIS ITEM, OTHER HISTORY)

Continuing discussion on the FY2021-22 budget.

Included in the packet is the FY 2021-22 Requested Budget

Budget Line Item detail reports.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

GL NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	FY20-21 REQUESTED	FY20-21 APPROVED	FY21-22 REQUESTED	NOTES
550-301	OFFICE/GENERAL SUPPLIES	4,000	1,000	1,000	Supplies used for multiple events
570-280	BALLFIELD MAINTENANCE	10,000	10,000	12,000	
570-281	CONTRACTED MAINTENANCE	135,000	120,900	125,000	Includes purchase of new trees
570-411	MAINTENANCE- PARK EQUIPMENT	7,000	3,500	4,000	R/R of park amenities, playground equipment, playground mulch & sand
575-119	SUMMER PROGRAMS	7,800	7,600	TBD	Fishing events, Co-Rec Softball (6/21-8/21)
575-517	SENIOR'S PROGRAM-Summer	5,400	5,400	5,400	Run with Burr Ridge Park District (2021)
580-118	FALL PROGRAMS	600	Cut	600	Programs from 9/21 to 11/21
580-517	SENIOR'S PROGRAM-Fall	5,400	5,400	5,400	Run with Burr Ridge Park District (2021)
585-121	WINTER PROGRAMS	2,000	0	1,000	Programs from 11/21- 3/22
585-150	CHILDREN'S SPECIAL EVENTS- OTHER	3,000	3,000	3,000	Halloween Party (2021) & Easter Egg Hunt (2022)
585-151	FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT- MOVIE NIGHT	1,500	1,500	1,500	
585-152	TREE LIGHTING	4,900	4,900	4,600	Includes cost of light display set-up (2021)
585-153	BACK TO SCHOOL EVENT	1,100	500	500	
585-154	SPECIAL EVENT – RACE	15,000	13,600	3,600	CANCELLED FOR 2021; Money for 2022 race
585-155	HOLIDAY PARTY	6,000	5,000	5,200	
585-157	COMMUNITY PICNIC	5,000	3,000	3,600	
585-517	SENIOR'S PROGRAM-Winter/Spring	5,400	5,400	5,400	Run with Burr Ridge Park District (2021-2022)
586-121	SPRING PROGRAMS	200	200	300	Kite-Fly & Fishing events (2021), Arbor Day (2022)
595-643	POND IMPROVEMENTS		400	400	
595-693	COURT IMPROVEMENTS	10,800	800	-	SEE DISCRETIONARY ITEMS
595-695	PARK IMPROVEMENTS	20,000	Cut	-	SEE DISCRETIONARY ITEMS
595-696	COMMUNITY PARK DEVELOPMENT	-	-	-	SEE DISCRETIONARY ITEMS
Discretionary Items	PRESENTED TO VILLAGE BOARD AS INDIVIDUAL ITEMS. Budget based on approved Expenditures.	Money comes from Village CIP Fund	Any funds budgeted would go under G/L 595-695 or 696		Examples: Any Park/Playground Renovation, CRC Improvements

NOTE	2020-21 PROJECTED ACTIVITY	2021-22 REQUESTED BUDGET	RECOMMENDED BUDGET
APPROPRIATIONS			
01-20-570-280 BALLFIELD MAINTENANCE			
FIELD PAINT			
BALL FIELD MIX/CHALK	10,000.00	10,000.00	
TURFACE		500.00	1,000.00
FIELD GRADING		500.00	500.00
FIELD PAINT/CHALK		500.00	
BALL FIELD MIX			
TURFACE			
Totals for GL# 01-20-570-280-BALLFIELD MAINTENANCE	10,000.00	12,000.00	
01-20-570-281 CONTRACTED MAINTENANCE			
HANSEN LANDSCAPE CONTRACT (34% SPLIT WITH PW) COMBINED WITH 595-6922; 565-341 & 565-342. PLEASE RENAME CONTRACTED MAINTENANCE & LANDSCAPING	9,700.00	42,000.00	
FALCO'S			
WILD GOOSE CHASE	1,000.00	4,800.00	
PURE PRAIRE ORGANICS- SPLIT WITH PW	3,900.00	19,100.00	
TREE TRIMMING/REMOVAL- STORM DAMAGE		15,000.00	
ADA PLAYGROUND MULCH- SPLIT WITH 565-341		300.00	
PLAYGROUND/VOLLYBALL SAND- BORSE, WATERFORD & CREEKSIDE		500.00	
TREE & FLOWER REPLACEMENT- PARK SIGNS		4,000.00	
ELECTRICAL/PLUMBING MAINTENANCE		15,000.00	
PLAYGROUND GRADING- TAMPLINGS		3,000.00	
SIDEWALK REPAIR (SPLIT WITH PARK ADA)		9,400.00	
MISC OTHER		15,000.00	
Totals for GL# 01-20-570-281-CONTRACTED MAINTENANCE	22,600.00	125,100.00	
01-20-585-152 FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - TREE LIGHTING			
COST TO PUT UP LIGHTS OTHER SUPPLIES- TO COVER COSTS ABOVE DONATIONS RECEIVED VILLAGE WIDE MAILER- PRINTING & POSTAGE, SPLIT WITH HOLIDAY PARTY PRINTING OF PROGRAM REFRESHMENTS/SUPPLIES	2,564.00	900.00 300.00 400.00 3,000.00 600.00	
LIGHTS			
SANTA RENTAL			
Totals for GL# 01-20-585-152-FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - TREE LIGHTING	2,564.00	5,200.00	
01-20-585-153 FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - BACK TO SCHOOL			
SUPPLIES & RENTALS TO COVER COSTS ABOVE DONATIONS RECEIVED		500.00	
Totals for GL# 01-20-585-153-FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - BACK TO SCHOOL		500.00	
01-20-585-154 FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - RACE			
5K TO BE HELD ON 5/3/20 TENT/CHAIRS/TABLE RENTAL BOUNCE HOUSE RENTAL ENTERTAINMENT-DJ/MUSIC PETTING ZOO TIMING COMPANY PROFORMA - SHIRTS, ETC PORT-O-POTTIES REFRESHMENTS VOLUNTEERS DONATION EXPENSE TO CHARITY FOR EXCESS FUNDS RECEIVED IN DONATION INCOME CLIMBING WALL MARKETING CARA REGISTRATION FEE			
CLIMBING WALL			
MARKETING			
CARA REGISTRATION FEE			
		3,300.00	300.00

NOTE	APPROPRIATIONS	2020-21 PROJECTED ACTIVITY	2021-22 REQUESTED BUDGET	2021-22 RECOMMENDED BUDGET
	MISC SUPPLIES; COURSE SIGNS; PORT-O-POTTIES TIMING COMPANY DJ & CLIMBING WALL TENT & CHAIR RENTAL T-SHIRTS RACE BAGS SHAMROCK SHUFFEL BOOTH			
	Totals for GL# 01-20-585-154-FAMILY SPECIAL EVENT - RACE	300.00	1,600.00	5,200.00
	01-20-585-155 CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY PARTY			
	HOLIDAY PARTY- HELPS TO COVER COSTS ABOVE DONATIONS RENTAL OF SCHOOL VILLAGE WIDE MAILER- PRINTING & POSTAGE. SPLIT WITH TREE LIGHTING ENTERTAINMENT SANTA RENTAL FOOD COSTS GIFTS OTHER	500.00 900.00 600.00 500.00 500.00 1,200.00 1,000.00		
	Totals for GL# 01-20-585-155-CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY PARTY		5,200.00	
	01-20-585-157 COMMUNITY PICNIC			
	NEW EVENT FOR FY19-20 PRINTING & POSTAGE FOR POSTCARD REMINDER FOOD & WATER SUPPLIES/GAMES BOUNCE HOUSE MISC		1,800.00 500.00 1,300.00	
	Totals for GL# 01-20-585-157-COMMUNITY PICNIC		3,600.00	
	01-20-590-518 SPECIAL RECREATION ASSOC PROGRAM DUES			
	PER SRA LEVY Totals for GL# 01-20-590-518-SPECIAL RECREATION ASSOC PROGRAM DUE	39,310.00	39,310.00	39,310.00
	01-20-590-519 ADA PARK MAINTENANCE			
	PER SRA LEVY - MULCH-SPLIT WITH 01-20-565-341 PER SRA LEVY - ADA TOILET AT BORSE & WILLOW POND FOR MARCH-APRIL	4,640.00 240.00		4,640.00 240.00
	Totals for GL# 01-20-590-519-ADA PARK MAINTENANCE	4,880.00		4,880.00
	01-20-590-520 ADA RECREATION ACCOMMODATIONS			
	* COVERED WITH SPECIAL RECREATION TAX		6,500.00	
	Totals for GL# 01-20-590-520-ADA RECREATION ACCOMMODATIONS			
	01-20-590-521 ADA PARK IMPROVEMENTS			
	AMOUNT PER SRA LEVY - LOCAL PARK TBD CRC BUILDING ADA		22,050.00 106,500.00	
	Totals for GL# 01-20-590-521-ADA PARK IMPROVEMENTS		128,550.00	
	TOTAL APPROPRIATIONS	79,654.00	336,040.00	

VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK

Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting AGENDA ITEM – Summary Sheet

AGENDA ITEM DESCRIPTION

Discussion- 2022 5K

MEETING DATE

March 2 2021

COMMISSION REVIEW

Report Discussion Seeking Feedback

ITEM HISTORY (PREVIOUS PARK COMMISSION REVIEWS, ACTIONS RELATED TO THIS ITEM, OTHER HISTORY)

Continuing discussion on the 2022 5K run.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

VILLAGE OF WILLOWBROOK

Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting AGENDA ITEM – Summary Sheet

AGENDA ITEM DESCRIPTION

New Business- TWA Flight 529 Memorial

MEETING DATE

March 2 2021

COMMISSION REVIEW

Report Discussion Seeking Feedback

ITEM HISTORY (PREVIOUS PARK COMMISSION REVIEWS, ACTIONS RELATED TO THIS ITEM, OTHER HISTORY)

On Sept. 1 1961 TWA Flight 529 crashed soon after takeoff from Midway airport in the area of 61st & Bentley Ave. To mark the 60th Anniversary of the crash Village Trustee Berglund would like to see a memorial to the 78 people who perished placed near the crash site. The nearest public spot would be Prairie Trail Park, located at the corner of 59th & Clarendon Hills Road.

Included in the packet:

Letter from Village Trustee Sue Berglund

1991 Chicago Tribune article about the crash.

The chapter from “Flight Failure” covering Flight 529.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff advised Trustee Berglund that she should present her request to have a memorial placed at Prairie Trail Park to the Park Commission before going to the Village Board for final approval.

February 22, 2021

To Everyone at Parks and Recreation Commission:

I hope you all have had a chance to read the chapter on TWA flight 529 from the book Flight Failure.

It will be 60 years on September First of this year that TWA flight 529 crashed 4 minutes after takeoff from Midway airport. All 78 passengers and staff lost their lives.

The crash took place just north of 61st between Bentley and Clarendon Hills Road. When the crash happened it was just farmland. Now there are houses on that land.

Nothing has ever been done to memorialize those lost lives because of a single bolt missing from the plane.

I am asking for permission/approval to place a bronze plaque 3 feet by 5 feet across the street from the tragedy which would be Prairie Trail Park.

Professor Keith Yearman from College of Dupage has contacted the village and we are now communicating to hopefully achieve a memorial at the park. Mr. Yearman has been in contact with the county board and they are planning a recognition of the anniversary at the august board meeting. He has also reached out to TWA museum, our state senator and representative and the US representative to see about proclamations.

I am not asking for monetary funds as I will start a fundraiser if you approve this memorial. Please honor those lives and their families.

Thank you,

Sue Berglund

AFTER 30 YEARS, FEW TRACES OF AIR CRASH THAT KILLED 78

By Rudolph Unger

AUGUST 28, 1991

The corn and soybean fields that once flourished just west of 6100 Clarendon Hills Road are long gone, replaced by single-family homes with large yards.

There is no sign that 30 years ago, just after 2 a.m. on Sept. 1, 1961, death fell out of the sky there.

A four-engine Trans World Airline Constellation, five minutes out of Midway Airport on a flight bound for Las Vegas, Los Angeles and San Francisco, plunged into those fields, killing all 78 persons aboard.

Until a DC-10 crashed while taking off from O'Hare International Airport on May 25, 1979, killing 275 persons, it was the worst air tragedy in Chicago history.

The Lockheed-built Constellation, like an enormous scythe, cut a swath 200 feet wide and 1,100 feet long through the fields. It struck with such force that the only remaining sizable parts were two fins from the triple tail, which were found 400 feet apart. Craters three to four feet deep were found where the four engines and nose hit with pulverizing force.

Flames, fed by more than 3,000 gallons of high-octane fuel, illuminated the carnage: bodies torn apart, a mother and infant clinging in death's embrace.

"There were no human sounds," said a Hinsdale police officer, who was one of the first on the scene.

Stunned neighbors stripped blankets and sheets from their beds to help cover the remains.

Fourteen persons, including four Chicago area residents, had boarded the Constellation at Midway after its arrival from Boston, New York and Pittsburgh. The crash wiped out four entire families, one of them with seven members. A mother with her four children were killed as the husband and father awaited their arrival in San Francisco.

The Chicago-area victims were a pharmacist from Evanston, en route to visit his ailing parents in Los Angeles; a nurse from MacNeal Hospital in Berwyn, departing for a vacation in San Francisco, and two servicemen returning to duty in California.

The lives were lost in an instant.

A Bensenville police officer, who was 15 miles away, reported seeing "a huge wreath of white smoke illuminated orange by the flames floating in the sky."

The Midway tower personnel, nine miles due east, who only five minutes earlier had cleared Flight 529 for takeoff, reported, "The first we knew was that we saw a glow in the western sky. Then we got a call from police informing us that the plane had crashed."

The airport controllers said the crew gave no indication of trouble.

Investigators for the Civil Aeronautics Board later said disaster apparently overtook the crew so rapidly that they were unable to prepare for an attempt at an emergency landing.

Charles V. George, an architect who still lives in the area, recalls, "I was asleep when I was awakened by a sound like a locomotive outside our window. I jumped up and saw a passing silhouette and then the plane crashed in our field.

"A tremendous wall of flames came rolling toward our house and stopped just short, singeing crops and trees. Some of the bodies were thrown into the barn of the Broz family just north of us."

George Ernest, a retired Clarendon Heights Fire Protection District captain, who was in charge of its rescue squad, remembers:

"I was awakened by the roar of engines and heard the crash as the plane hit about 800 feet southeast of us. Having been in the Air Force, I knew immediately what had happened.

"I summoned our men as well as firemen from Clarendon Hills, Westmont and Tri-State. We looked for survivors, but there were only bodies.

"The plane just disintegrated when it hit and all that high-octane fuel just burned everything. We checked homes on the fringes of the field to make sure they did not catch fire."

Thomas Powers, a retired Tribune reporter who was one of the first journalists on the scene, said:

"It was a dark night and the air was filled with smoke. I found a farm house, the Broz residence, which became a headquarters for emergency workers, and overheard a TWA official reporting to his superiors that there were no survivors. I then knew why no ambulances were leaving the scene."

At dawn, Powers said, "I climbed atop the Broz barn with one of our photographers and we could see the extent of the crash. Stakes had been placed in the fields wherever a body had been found and they looked like crosses."

It took five days to identify all the victims, 73 passengers and five crew members.

The official CAB report said that the plane, flying at 1,800 feet, had been heading west until it turned north at 63rd Street and Clarendon Hills Road. Just north of 63rd Street, the right fin of the triple-tail Constellation fell off.

A second fin was found 400 feet north at 6100 Clarendon Hills Road, where the rest of the plane hit and shredded as it hurtled through the fields until the engines and nose burrowed to a halt at 59th Street.

The board found that "The probable cause of this accident was the loss of a five-sixteenths-inch bolt from the elevator boost mechanism (in the tail of the plane), resulting in the loss of control of the aircraft.

"The proper positioning of this bolt is vital to the control of the aircraft and must therefore have been in place until immediately prior to the loss of control.

"The board concludes from the evidence at hand that during the climb out from Midway the bolt worked its way clear . . . resulting in a violent pitchup and accelerated stall."

The CAB report also stated that the craft's "flight from Boston (via New York and Pittsburgh) was routine. . . . The incoming crew briefed the new crew and it was agreed the aircraft was airworthy."

There was no mention of the statement made by Harry Savage of Pittsburgh, an Allegheny County prosecutor, who had left the plane at Chicago.

After the crash he called the FBI and said, "The plane should not have gone on. It shook violently and made grinding noises at the tail during takeoff from Pittsburgh."

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Student-Run
Newspaper
at the University of Illinois

START NOW!

FLIGHT FAILURE

Donald J. Porter

4

TRIPLE NICKEL

A dozen miles west of Midway Airport, tucked between the village of Clarendon Hills and the township of Hinsdale in the western suburbs of Chicago, there's a mystery yet to be solved. Buried beneath the soil in the back yard of a home, under an asphalt parking lot, or wedged under a rock could be a rusted steel bolt the diameter of a cigarette. Because that bolt hasn't been found, the world will never know for sure the cause of a tragic accident more than half a century ago. The missing bolt is thought to be responsible for what happened in the skies over Clarendon Hills during the early morning hours of September 1, 1961.

The bolt is thought to have fallen from a flight control linkage that moved the elevator control surface of a Lockheed *Constellation* belonging to Trans World Airlines, better known as TWA. Four minutes after taking off from Midway Airport, the plane became uncontrollable, plummeting into a cornfield and snuffing out the lives of all seventy-eight people aboard. The plane literally fell out of the sky.

From early on in the investigation of the accident, it became clear that the pilot had lost all control before the plane careened into the muddy field. After investigators from the Civil Aeronautics Board determined that the bolt was missing from the elevator linkage, a methodical ground search ensued in the hope that the bolt might turn up. The investigative team sifted the acres of charred dirt and debris where the *Constellation* had shed its weakened tail and dug a series of craters in the soft earth. The painstaking work consumed several days, but no bolt was found.

During the decades that followed, single-family homes built on deep lots replaced the plowed fields around Clarendon Hills Road. There's no marker at the tranquil, grassy site of this long-forgotten accident to memorialize the deaths of those seventy-eight people. In 1961, the accident ranked as the third-most-deadly aircraft accident in the nation's history. The dubious distinction of number one at the time was co-held by TWA. In 1956, one of the airline's Super Constellations crashed following a midair collision with a United Air Lines DC-7 over the Grand Canyon. The death toll resulting from the crashes of those planes totaled 128 people.¹

The early morning hours in Chicago were a blessing as the first day of September arrived. The humid heat of the summer months had begun to fade with the cooler days of autumn on the way. A mild 67 degrees registered on porch thermometers around Clarendon Hills. Although thunderstorms had moved through the area earlier, bedroom windows remained open for part of the night to admit cool air drifting in from Lake Michigan. For some residents of the largely undeveloped area, many of them farmers, a habit of retiring early and rising before dawn was a ritual tied to their chosen lifestyle. Long before midnight, they were already sound asleep. Looking forward to a long holiday weekend celebrating Labor Day on Monday, they would set aside chores, fire up a barbecue, and do nothing more than enjoy the weekend with family and friends.

Eleven miles to the east of the middle-class neighborhood, tucked inside the terminal building at Midway Airport, commotion contrasted with the tranquility of the suburbs.

From the air, Midway has been described as a square aircraft carrier stuck in the middle of a sea of homes and warehouses. Between 1932 and 1961, it attained the distinction of being the world's busiest airport. It served 10 million passengers in 1959. After nearby O'Hare International Airport opened, passenger traffic at Midway shrank by more than 60 percent. The spacious passenger facilities and longer runways of O'Hare, capable of safely accommodating fleets of new jetliners, lured the airlines away from Midway, along with their passengers. "Mile Square" Midway's runways couldn't be lengthened due to encroaching neighborhoods on each side.

The terminal's austere interior took on the appearance of a stylized bus terminal furnished with rows of plastic-covered black seats, their surfaces worn thin from years of constant use. A busy concession stand offered newspapers, cigarettes, and candy. A row of steel rental lockers graced the rear, and for \$2.50 in quarters, a vending machine dispensed life insurance policies to passengers hesitant to fly. As breadwinners, husbands sought to provide continuing financial support for their wives and children should the unthinkable happen.

Waiting areas on either side of the terminal were cramped and uncomfortable. The air was humid and tinged with the smell of tobacco. Near TWA's gates, plenty of seats were available as the airline had only one passenger flight scheduled for an early morning departure. The fourteen passengers ticketed for Flight 529 paged through magazines, took smoke breaks, or strolled outside on the observation deck to watch planes take off and land. Because it was the start of a three-day weekend, some of them planned to visit families during the holiday or tuck in a short vacation. For less than one hundred dollars a ticket, they could fly coast-to-coast although the trip would not be a nonstop one.

The airline jet age was less than two years old. Only 10 percent of the nation's population, eighteen years of age or older, had flown aboard a regularly scheduled airliner. It was a big deal for first-timers.

TWA's new jets were boarding passengers at O'Hare for nonstop flights to international and domestic destinations. But the airline's piston-powered Connies, a time-honored nickname for the Constellation airliners built by the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, continued to fly schedules out of Midway day and night. Some were filled with passengers, some loaded with freight.

With "red-eye" tourist flights, it wasn't unusual for large families to take advantage of budget fares for vacations or to visit relatives in faraway states. The airline took in much of its revenue by flying businessmen to last-minute meetings at full fare but filled the cabins with economy-minded families during the off hours. It needed to keep its planes in the air and working as many hours as possible. Flight 529 was one of those tourist flights.

As the hands of a clock on the terminal wall clicked closer to midnight, Jim Sanders could be found on the other side of the airport in TWA's flight operations room. He would serve as Flight 529's captain for its next leg to Las Vegas. Copilot Dale Tarrant and flight engineer Jim Newlin were there to greet him. Hostesses Barbara Pearson and Nanette Fidger soon joined them too. They exchanged customary introductions, sipped coffee, and shared small talk while getting to know one another. Where they stood under bright fluorescent lights, dozens of charts, airman notices, and forms were pinned to a bulletin board before them. A window overlooked an array of multicolored lights defining the airport's taxiways. The Connie they were scheduled to fly would soon come into view.

The weather at Midway wasn't a concern: scattered clouds at 10,000 feet, a high overcast on a moonless night, three miles visibility in haze and smoke, with wind blowing to the south at 9 mph.

In less than two hours, Sanders would be in the captain's seat on his way to Las Vegas, the plane's next stop. He and his crew patiently awaited the plane's arrival, scheduled to come in from Pittsburgh after originating in Boston and

making a quick stop at Idlewild Airport in New York. The airliner, a model L-049 Constellation, carried a TWA fleet number of 555. The airline's crews had nicknamed the plane *Triple Nickel*.

The crewmembers lived in Southern California, and TWA domiciled them at Los Angeles International Airport. During World War II, Sanders had enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps and learned to fly. Piloting four-engine B-17 bombers over Germany, he and his crew survived flying a remarkable twenty-five missions. He joined TWA in August 1945 as a copilot. By the age of twenty-six he had flown Connies to Cairo, Madrid, Geneva, and Paris. He moved up from copilot to captain in June 1954, continuing to fly both international and domestic routes. By the time of Flight 529's planned departure from Midway, forty-year-old Sanders had amassed a remarkable 17,011 hours, with 12,633 of them in Connies. Sharing his love of aviation, wife Carol worked as a hostess for TWA. They lived in Manhattan Beach, a short drive from the Los Angeles airport.

Dale Tarrant joined TWA in December 1955. Born in Sturgis, South Dakota, in 1929, he attended Black Hills Teachers College and served with the U.S. Air Force from 1952 to 1955. He lived in Redondo Beach with his wife, Marian, a former Western Air Lines stewardess. Tarrant's flying time totaled 5,344 hours, with 1,975 of them logged in Constellations.

Thirty-eight-year-old Jim Newlin joined TWA in 1951, beginning his career as a flight line mechanic in Los Angeles. In 1954 he was promoted to flight engineer. Newlin was married and lived in Balboa Beach. He and his wife were raising two children from a previous marriage. He had logged 5,817 hours as a flight engineer in Connies.

Barbara Pearson, at twenty-five, had flown with TWA since August 1957. Living in Santa Monica with husband Richard, she was excited about completing this particular flight. Pearson expected to resign from the airline to devote full time to motherhood, her baby's due date being April 1962. She planned to tell her husband the good news after landing in Los Angeles.

Nanette Fidger, at the age of twenty, had been employed by TWA only since May. She began to fly scheduled routes on July 15, upon completing training. A short-timer like Pearson, Fidger intended to make only one more flight before leaving to get married.

The corporate culture at TWA in 1961 could be described as strained. For years, Howard Hughes, the company's absentee major shareholder, kept an unpredictable grip on its far-flung operations. By the end of 1960, TWA's lenders had prohibited Hughes from interfering with the management of the company. His questionable moves in arranging financing for a fleet of new jetliners re-

sulted in the drastic action. Uncertainty, coupled with the carrier's unprofitable operations, did nothing to pacify the rank-and-file, whether they earned a living in a cockpit, a hangar, or behind a reservations desk.

On March 20, 1961, the TWA board of directors elected Charles Tillinghast Jr. as president and CEO. Pilots and mechanics considered him an unknown quantity. A career lawyer, he had no airline experience except warming a seat as a passenger.

"It was in terrible shape," Tillinghast later said of TWA operations. "By mid-1961, I thought we were looking at bankruptcy. If there was any airline that would have thrown in the towel, it was TWA."²

In February, the flight engineers at TWA and seven other airlines went on strike.³ The dispute involved whether or not the new jetliners would be flown with a pilot or a flight engineer as a third crewmember. Most flight engineers had been promoted from mechanics at their airlines. They had little desire to join the pilot ranks, expecting to keep their flight engineer status and not be retrained as pilots or terminated from their chosen careers. Communication between the engineer's union and the airlines broke down completely. It became so unproductive that newly elected President John F. Kennedy appointed a fact-finding commission to investigate what drove the parties apart. Because the nation's passenger-carrying capacity was approaching a standstill with not enough crews to fly the planes, the commission's involvement ended the short-lived strike. It recommended that the jets be operated by three crewmembers, with the flight engineers trained as standby pilots in addition to performing their engineering duties. The decision signaled the end of non-pilot flight engineer careers and the emergence of pilots acting in that capacity with little practical mechanical experience.

Exposed to much negativity in the workplace, TWA employees began to wonder if their paychecks might bounce. The troubles facing the airline were distracting enough to bring worry into their lives.⁴

TWA found itself selling more tickets to tourists than to business travelers even though its route structure connected every major industrial city in the nation. Businessmen needed to arrive at destinations for sales calls or meetings as soon as possible, and not on a propeller-driven Connie at half the speed of a jet. While other airlines had ditched most of their piston-powered planes, TWA still relied on Constellations.

Tourist-class flights were flown with older L-049 Connies on an almost exclusive basis, while TWA's jetliners were assigned to international and nonstop transcontinental routes. The Connies were relegated to Sky Club Air Coach service and refurbished with headrest covers featuring shades of beige, green,

and orange. The window curtains had pastel shades, while dark blue carpeting perked up the aisles. Transforming the interiors created a warm and cheerful cabin environment.

Lockheed Aircraft Corporation manufactured many variants of the legendary Constellation for the airlines and military services. The plane's most distinctive feature was its futuristic triptail. Unlike contemporary airliners, the Connie had three vertical stabilizers.⁵ Its unique fuselage put it in a class by itself as well, having a contour shaped like the body of a dolphin. Other airliners were built with straight, tube-like fuselages.

At ninety-five feet long, the L-049 Connie was powered by four Wright Aeronautical eighteen-cylinder piston engines. Their cylinders were arranged much like the spokes of a wheel divided into two circular rows of nine cylinders each. Each engine was massive, weighing over one and one-half tons, its power output developed from 3,350 cu. in. of cylinder displacement. The power from each engine was comparable to what ten V-8 pickup truck engines could produce.⁶ Originally intended for transoceanic trips, the L-049 offered a cruising speed of 313 mph.

Constellations were considered the most complicated piston-powered airliners of the time. This meant there was greater potential for mechanical failure. The plane's weight and size necessitated the use of hydraulically boosted flight controls. During an early test flight of a TWA Connie, one-half of the hydraulic system failed. A few minutes later, the other one-half did the same. Captain Hal Blackburn, one of TWA's most experienced pilots, described what it was like flying the plane with no hydraulic boost to operate the controls: "It took the combined strength of myself and two husky copilots to move that yoke."⁷

Registered as N86511 with the FAA, *Triple Nickel* happened to be the oldest Connie that TWA owned. The airline took delivery of *Triple Nickel* on December 19, 1945. Six weeks later, the plane began flying passengers from New York to France as the *Star of Paris*. A tradition at TWA and some other airlines involved painting the names of the cities they served along the sides of a plane's nose. *Triple Nickel*'s flight to Europe in February 1946 was hailed as a major milestone for TWA: the first scheduled transatlantic passenger flight from LaGuardia Field in New York to Orly Field in Paris.⁸ As more advanced Super Constellations and the first generation of jet transports joined TWA's fleet, the L-049s were reconfigured to seat eighty-one passengers. The tourist class service served a burgeoning, budget-minded segment of the air traveling public. *Triple Nickel* had few creature comforts to offer its passengers and crews but got the job done, day after day. Having logged many hours in the air, the plane was well maintained and had served as a reliable workhorse for over fifteen years.

As a scheduled transcontinental flight originating in Boston, Flight 529 regularly made intermediate stops in New York and Pittsburgh followed by Chicago, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. The flight would terminate in San Francisco. Before leaving Boston, *Triple Nickel* had several discrepancies written up by its crew. Among them was a burned-out navigation light in the tail and a leaking drain valve on a wing fuel tank. Mechanics repaired both items before the plane left Boston. Another discrepancy carried over from a previous flight was a malfunction of the system supplying cool air to the passenger cabin.⁹ Not considered a "safety of flight" item, the discrepancy was again carried forward in a logbook to be repaired during a future stop.

One of the passengers boarding the plane in Pittsburgh was Harry Savage. "There were a lot of little kids running around, a lot of young people on the way to Las Vegas and Los Angeles for vacations," he recalled, noting the carefree mood of his fellow passengers.¹⁰ A prosecutor for Allegheny County in Pennsylvania, Savage would not be continuing on to the flight's final destination as he planned to disembark in Chicago on business.

Flight 529's journey from Pittsburgh to Midway went smoothly with no hitches. The Connie pulled into a gate at 1:18 a.m. Ramp workers were told to handle its fueling quickly to keep the flight on schedule. Although there wasn't enough time for the passengers continuing on to disembark, they welcomed the few minutes available to stretch and rearrange their belongings. The captain and flight engineer arriving from Pittsburgh briefed Sanders and Newlin about the cabin cooling issue. All agreed there was no effect on airworthiness. Outside on the ramp, workers pumped enough fuel and oil into the Connie's tanks to complete the next leg. The 3,240 gallons of aviation gasoline poured into its tanks weighed in at 19,440 pounds. Newlin computed the plane's gross takeoff weight to be 94,794 pounds, well below a maximum allowable of 96,000. Checking the passenger and cargo manifests, he made sure the plane's center of gravity fell within acceptable limits. Everything checked out okay. The flying time to McCarran Airport in Las Vegas was estimated to be six hours and twenty-three minutes.

Shortly after 1:30 a.m., a TWA passenger agent announced over the public address system that Flight 529 was ready to board. It was a relief for the parents and their children already seated in the plane. They were tired and beginning to doze off. Flying after midnight was stressful but meant that families could purchase bargain tickets to stretch household budgets, making it possible to travel with several kids in tow. By contrast, business travelers opted for morning or late afternoon flights, their companies paying the much higher fares.

A gate agent opened the plane's main cabin entry door. The flight and cabin crew from Midway boarded. A TWA crew bus had shuttled them from the

airline's hangar on the north ramp. Making their way into the Connie, fourteen passengers from the Chicago area followed them after trekking through the concourse. They stepped into the dimly lit cabin, soon finding their seats. Configured for tourist-class flights, the entire length of the cabin was fitted with five-abreast seating.

As departure time neared, hostesses Pearson and Fidger prepared their passengers for the routine red-eye flight. Pillows and blankets were passed around. Pearson was experienced working such flights after doing so at TWA for several years. Other than the fourteen passengers boarding at Midway, the passengers already on the plane remained seated for the next leg.

Following a family visit, thirty-eight-year-old Frances Gilliam looked forward to joining her husband, Neil, at home in Eureka, a seaside community in Northern California. She had visited her parents in Bedford, Massachusetts. Their four children, Karen, 11; Linda Jo, 4; Denny, 14; and Tommy, 7, were buckled in for what promised to be a tiring flight involving two stops before deplaning in San Francisco.

Four women, each 20 years old, were anxious to reach Los Angeles. They were relocating there to begin adult lives working in Southern California. Carole Chase, Linda Annis, Nancy Bergstrom, and Linda Peaslee hailed from Suncook, New Hampshire. Close friends who had met at school, they had worked part-time jobs during the summer months to pay for the trip.

Richard Maloney, an engineer, was aboard with wife Florence and their five children. At their sides were Michael, 5; Maureen, 3; Richard Jr., 10; Mary, 8; and James, 1. Following a visit with family members in Philadelphia, they were anxious to return to suburban Canoga Park in California. While away, carpenters at their home had kept busy building an additional room to provide more living space for the family.

Forty-one-year-old Edward Chamberlain, an architect at Stedman & Williams, hailed from Palo Alto, a suburb south of San Francisco. Along with his wife, Nancy, he was returning home following a trip to Europe. After arriving stateside, they had spent time in Connecticut visiting relatives before heading back to California. Accompanying them were their children Edward Jr., 14; Richard, 9; Grant, 4; and James, 2.

Sylvia Remnant, a 32-year-old Englishwoman, was aboard with her three children John, 10; Tym Elmer, 3; and an infant girl. She had purchased the tickets in Liverpool, England.

Of the seventy-three passengers aboard the flight, twenty were children, and fourteen were age ten or younger. Most of the passengers were continuing on from Boston or Pittsburgh. Among the people boarding at Midway were four

Chicago-area residents: a pharmacist headed to Los Angeles to visit his aging parents; a nurse traveling to San Francisco for a vacation; and two servicemen returning for duty in California following home leave.

A ramp agent rolled the loading stairs back, followed by Newlin pulling the door closed. Returning to the cockpit, he began the process of starting the four Wright R-3350 engines, each expected to develop its full 2,200 hp for takeoff. As he manipulated switches and levers at the flight engineer panel, the massive engines came to life one by one. Clouds of oily smoke poured from their exhaust stacks and swept across the ramp but quickly dissipated in the cool night air. All four engines now idling, a ramp agent guided Sanders from the gate onto a taxiway.

Tarrant picked up a microphone to contact air traffic control and read back their clearance to Las Vegas for concurrence. The Connie would be guided across the country under instrument flight rules (IFR) by following a series of airways. This involved tuning into one radio navigation station after another to hop across the country.

Sanders took the opportunity to brief Tarrant and Newlin on his planned emergency procedures should the plane suffer an engine failure or other problem during takeoff. Pilots live on the edge anticipating such events. Never predictable, the possibility of such an event causes flight crews to take these briefings seriously. During emergencies, they are aware that every second counts—and can mean the difference between life or death. Such planning helps ensure that the actions of each crewmember during an emergency are predictable and instantaneous.

Cleared by ground control, Sanders steered the Connie to a concrete run-up pad at the end of runway 22L. He twisted the steering tiller to swing the plane's nose into a gentle breeze and set the parking brake. This was the signal for Newlin to run up the engines, one on each side at a time, to check the rpm drop of their magnetos, exercise the pitch of the propellers to ensure they feathered properly, and attend to other procedural checks. Newlin gave the engines a workout, running them up to a throaty roar and watching the firing patterns of all 144 spark plugs on the scope of an electronic engine analyzer.¹¹

Sitting several feet in front of Newlin, Sanders and Tarrant checked the plane's flight controls by moving the yokes and pedals for the elevator, ailerons, and rudder, taking them through their full range of movement. Sanders took care of a related task to check the elevator shift control handle next to his right leg. Should the hydraulic boost system controlling the elevator fail, something that had never happened at the airline, pulling the handle would disconnect the "power steering" and enable the pilots to operate the controls manually. It was functional.

Seat Belt and No Smoking signs lit, Pearson and Fidger returned to their seats. Cabin lights were switched off to enable the passengers to view the lights of Chicago soon after takeoff.

Final checklist items completed and ATC clearance acknowledged, Sanders received permission from the tower to roll forward, stopping just short of the runway. Cleared for takeoff, he eased the throttle levers forward, creating a loud rumble. There was enough vibration to rattle a clipboard. As the heavy machine began moving, his gaze shifted to the engine tachometer and manifold pressure gauges on the center instrument panel. Four tachometers reading 2,800 rpm and manifold pressure gauges indicating forty-six inches of mercury were good numbers. The takeoff roll continued.

Reflected in the silvery wings, orange and blue flames shot from the exhaust stacks of the engines as the Connie thundered down the 6,445-foot long concrete ribbon. In seconds, the plane would climb into a moonless sky.

Sanders moved his left hand from tiller to yoke slowly, while Tarrant called out the airspeed for him. Tarrant announced reaching V1 speed, the point of no return at which the pilot must decide whether or not to continue the takeoff. Nothing amiss, they continued. Tarrant followed with another required verbal notification by saying, "Rotate." Sanders gradually eased back on the yoke as forty-eight tons of aluminum and steel shifted from rolling on tires to being carried aloft with lift from the wings. Flight 529 took to the sky gracefully, gained altitude, and entered a right turn just past the airport.

Tarrant retracted the landing gear, soon followed by the flaps. All appeared normal. It was now one minute after 2:00 a.m., and passengers seated near a window amused themselves by watching the twinkling lights of the city pass below as the plane began a steady climb to its initial cruise altitude.

The throttles were pulled back from takeoff power. Even so, the noise made it all but impossible for the passengers to chat among themselves, but they knew it would be quieter once the plane leveled off for cruising.

One minute and thirty-four seconds after the pilots acknowledged their takeoff clearance, a controller at Midway began following Flight 529's initial progress on a radarscope. Four minutes after the plane left the runway, the image on his scope indicated that it was five miles west of the airport, proceeding on its assigned course. As another second passed, the image disappeared. Assuming it was a temporary glitch of the radar system, he had no idea that something unthinkable had just happened.

In the darkened cabin, a tremendous jolt threw anything into the air that wasn't secured. The passengers must have thought they had run into a severe air pocket, or maybe hit another plane. Rocking crazily, the Connie bounced

like a speeding car ramming into a series of deep chuckholes. The force turned so violent that people were slammed down, then yanked backward; children were tossed about and battered by loose handbags and books. If not restrained with seat belts, they were rag-dolled against the ceiling. A colossal thudding noise could be heard over the familiar roar of the engines. But people seated near a window saw nothing out of the ordinary. Propellers turning, the engines were producing power. However, the front of the wings seemed to be angled up way too high, as though the plane were climbing. In reality, it was doing the opposite: losing altitude fast. The plane felt like a roller coaster dropping into a plunge. For everyone from the cockpit on back, panic set in. Engine failures and fires were not unusual occurrences with Connies. But this was unfathomable. Continuing for half a minute, the gyrations weren't showing signs of stopping. The Connie was dropping like a rock. Women screamed. Children yelled and cried. Men dug their fingers into armrests and prayed silently. The chaos would span almost a full terrifying minute.

The graceful airliner remained stuck in a nose-up attitude, trapped in a series of unforgiving aerodynamic stalls.

Faces flushed and hearts pounding, Sanders and Tarrant gripped the yokes in unison with both hands, pushing them forward, employing every bit of strength they had. They needed to lower the nose to pull out of the stalls. Consumed with a rush of adrenalin, they reacted instinctively as pilots are trained to do. They knew it would be impossible to remain in the air long enough to return to the airport for an emergency landing.

Sweating and wholly occupied in coping with the crisis, the pilots never radioed the controller at the Midway tower. Both of them were pushing on the yokes but with no result.

The Connie was not responding to the movement of the yokes, and the plane remained in the stalled condition, falling like a leaf. It appeared to recover somewhat, then entered another stall. While Tarrant continued to push against the yoke, Sanders tried pulling a knob on the thin metal handle at his side to deactivate the elevator's hydraulic muscles. Drawing on thousands of hours' experience flying Connies, he knew what to do. He suspected that the elevator boost system must have failed.

The handle was jammed. It wouldn't move an inch. Before they took off from Midway it worked fine.

Airspeed slowing with little altitude remaining and the lights of Chicago growing brighter and bigger every second, the Connie continued its vertical plunge, not unlike dropping down a shaft in an out-of-control elevator.

Once stuck in the series of oscillations from the stalls, the plane couldn't gain any forward airspeed. The only way to exit a stall is to push the yoke forward to increase the speed, but the plane wasn't responding to the forward movement of the yokes.

The combination of an elevator jammed at an extreme angle and the pilots pushing forward on the yokes at the same time made it impossible to free the handle and disengage the boost. The crew didn't know this in the few crucial moments they had, but the handle would disengage the boost *only* if they weren't pushing forward on the yokes. Nobody had told them about this life-saving tip buried in a pilot's flight manual and largely glossed over in training sessions. Sanders pondered other options. There weren't any.

He had survived twenty-five missions during the war, enduring engine failures and enemy flak. But this was unreal. Losing their last hope for a safe recovery, the crew began experiencing the same distressing feeling being felt by their passengers. During the final seconds in the air, they could only gird themselves for the inevitable, pray perhaps, and wait for the inexorable conclusion.

A hundred feet over the darkened neighborhood of Clarendon Hills, a portion of the plane's horizontal stabilizer separated from the tail and fell to the ground.

The flickering green symbol representing Flight 529 did not reappear on the controller's radarscope. Grabbing a pair of binoculars and focusing them on the horizon over the city, a controller in the airport tower noticed a bright flash erupting west of the airport. He radioed the pilot of a Northwest Orient Airlines flight waiting to take off from the same runway that *Triple Nickel* had departed from. Clearing the plane for takeoff, he asked the captain to report what he saw in the area. Circling west of Midway, the pilot observed one-hundred-foot-high flames reflecting from the overcast sky; they illuminated the suburbs for miles around. He saw a massive cloud of smoke hovering in the same area. An American Airlines crew preparing to land also spotted the flash. They abandoned their landing approach and flew westerly to where the fire seemed to be centered. Told that a TWA flight hadn't been heard from, and looking almost straight down from altitude at an inferno engulfing the landscape, the captain reported that what he saw looked bad . . . very bad.

There was little doubt the flames and smoke represented the end of Flight 529. The plane had crashed eleven miles west of Midway Airport, one-and-one-half miles southwest of Hinsdale, a suburb of 15,000 people about twenty miles from downtown Chicago.

Shedding pieces of its airframe, the Connie had passed over Plainfield and Rogers Roads, turned north and flew along Clarendon Hills Road at almost treetop level. After enduring at least four violent stall oscillations, one of its

vertical fins and an attached rudder separated from the stabilizer. The assembly fell in an empty field.

The rest of the plane impacted the ground, disintegrated, and exploded in a fireball. What was once a streamlined airliner vanished in seconds, its nose auguring into the earth. It had dropped vertically more than horizontally and bounced on impact several times, the airframe shredding into pieces.

Triple Nickel ended up in a muddy corn and soybean field at 61st Street and Bentley Avenue in Clarendon Hills. The soil had become saturated by heavy rain from a thunderstorm moving through the area an hour earlier. The plane struck the ground in a slightly left-wing-low, nose-down attitude on a heading of almost true north.

To residents living under the flight path of the disabled airliner it sounded like dozens of railroads cars roaring overhead. The thunder and vibration was unlike anything they'd experienced before. The ground shaking from the tremendous explosion caused some residents to think it could be coming from Argonne National Laboratories—a sprawling Atomic Energy Commission research facility, built to develop nuclear reactors, located five miles southwest of the crash site.

The raging fire, fed by nearly three thousand gallons of high-octane aviation gasoline carried in the wing tanks, created a bewildering environment. Thick, oily smoke from the burning fuel rose thousands of feet in the placid, early morning air.

People living closest to the crash site rushed to the scene. They described the Connie's final seconds as much like an enormous scythe, chopping a swath wider and longer than a football field. Five craters had been dug, each about four feet deep, burying the sizzling-hot R-3350 engines and the heavy center section of the wing. Only shards of metal and fabric and the bodies of victims littered the field. The intense fire rendered unrecognizable most of what remained. The scene had become a blackened, lifeless landscape.

Scattered throughout the field were the possessions of people whose lives had been snuffed out: an opened book, a bathrobe, a baby bonnet, shower shoes, and crushed suitcases were among the items. A propeller blade, snapped from its hub, protruded from the ground. The outer portion of a wing had been thrown against the fence of an adjacent house. Two of the plane's husky, three-foot-diameter tires fitted to a main landing gear assembly remained unburned, resting alongside the perimeter of the fire-scorched earth.

"I woke up with sirens screaming," said Nancy Malsack, who lived six blocks from the crash site. "I quickly began to smell the unmistakable smell of burning flesh."

The body of a dead woman was found clinging to an infant for a last embrace. Realizing there wasn't anything they could do to help, residents ran home to strip blankets and sheets from beds and returned to cover the bodies. Not having enough sheets to go around, they unbundled stacks of newspapers to use in their place. The sound of sirens wailed in the distance as the residents awaited teams of first responders rushing to the scene.

"I was asleep when I was awakened by a sound like a locomotive outside our window," said Charles George, a nearby resident. "I jumped up and saw a passing silhouette, and then the plane crashed in our field. A tremendous wall of flames came rolling toward our house and stopped just short, singeing crops and trees. Some of the bodies were thrown into the barn of the Broz family, just north of us."¹³

Hot engine oil spewing from fifty-gallon tanks in each wing nacelle scorched the outside walls of a home owned by Jerry and Josephine Broz. The heat melted their nylon window screens. One of the main landing gear assemblies shot through a side of the family's corrugated steel shed at the rear of the property. When first responders arrived, they found the crumpled remains of three victims there. "The plane hit the ground and bounced several times," said Josephine Broz. "We could see the wheels, the wings, everything falling apart."¹⁴ The Broz farm is where most of the wreckage and all the victims came to rest.

"I saw the plane come into the backyard through my bedroom window," she continued. "Then the nose of the airplane landed in the cornfield." Grasping the gravity of the situation, her husband reacted instantly. "The minute she hollered, I jumped up and saw the plane in the backyard. The first thing that I said was to leave and get in the car. I called the police department, the fire department, and anyone I could get ahold of." After the explosion, all they heard was the crackling of flames. "I couldn't hear any screams or any sign of life," Broz said.¹⁵

It took only minutes for the firefighters and police officers to arrive, their sirens continuously yelping in the stilled air. They roared up the narrow dirt driveway leading to Broz's two-story home at 59th Street and Clarendon Hills Road. The couple lived only 450 feet from what remained of the Connie.

Before daybreak, dozens of firemen and members of suburban, county, and state police departments converged on the scene. Workers from a nearby carnival set up for the holiday weekend loaned their portable light stands to illuminate the cornfield.

"My farmyard is a cemetery without crosses," Broz said as the sun peeked over the horizon.¹⁶ He was sickened by the sight but realized how lucky he and his wife had been to have escaped the inferno.

Tuning in a TV set in his hotel room before heading to work that morning, Henry Savage, the passenger who had gotten off the flight in Chicago, slipped into a chair in a state of shock. The macabre scene televised from the crash scene made him sick. Thinking of his experience flying into Chicago, he had heard a grinding noise when the plane took off from Pittsburgh. Awakening from a nap as the plane neared Chicago, he remembered that the plane "shook rather violently."¹⁷ He regretted not telling anyone.

As the early morning sun peeked over the horizon, more than one hundred officials and volunteer workers began the unpleasant task of collecting the bodies. Red Cross workers crisscrossed the field all morning, driving wooden stakes with numbers pinned on them into the soil where each victim was found. From a distance, the stakes could be mistaken for crosses. The workers weren't alone. Representatives from the U.S. Post Office arrived. Their job was to retrieve whatever scorched mail had been scattered over the field. From surrounding communities, thousands of curiosity seekers trekked to the neighborhood during the first few days to view the destruction from a distance.

Several hours after daybreak, black hearses were lined up along Clarendon Hills Road. All was strangely quiet and somber as a funeral would be. The bodies were wrapped in rubber sheets and moved to the Cook County Office of the Coroner in Chicago for identification. The gruesome task would consume five days. DNA testing for accident victim identification did not exist at the time.

By mid-afternoon, Najeel Halaby, a record-setting test pilot and second administrator of the fledgling FAA, had arrived on the scene. Accompanying him was a team of investigators to augment the work of the Civil Aeronautics Board. The public wanted answers. During evening news telecasts, Halaby assured viewers that a cause for the crash would soon be determined.

A theory about a bombing began to blossom, although there were no facts to support it. Some eyewitnesses said they heard an explosion while the plane was in the air. But seasoned accident investigators had learned to dismiss many of those accounts. The chief of the FBI's Chicago office was asked if the plane could have carried a bomb. At this early stage of the investigation he couldn't say, but a medical team that examined the corpses ruled out a bombing. The victims didn't exhibit signs typical of an explosion. Their injuries appeared more like those suffered by people involved in an automobile accident.

If it was not a bombing, the question of what caused the accident remained a mystery.

The only person who reportedly witnessed the plane's final seconds of flight happened to be an eleven-year-old boy by the name of Elmer Maves. Living three blocks south of the crash site, he didn't see any flames while the plane was

in the air. But he did hear a loud popping noise, followed by a series of three less intense reports as the structure that held the vertical and horizontal stabilizers to the fuselage began to buckle and collapse.

"It was going east . . . and then it turned, and its right tail blew off," he said. "After it crashed, there was dead silence for two or three seconds. And then, all of a sudden, it exploded. Flames were like a thousand feet in the air."¹⁸

Although not verified, one report indicated there was a survivor. First responders hovered over the victim with lifesaving equipment. The victim was eventually covered with a sheet.

The death count was finalized in the morgue: seventy-eight men, women, children, and infants had perished. The only tribute to lives taken too soon and their next-of-kin would be a thorough investigation to determine the cause. And to make sure that a horrendous accident such as this would never take innocent lives again.

The crash of Flight 529 was traumatic for a TWA captain by the name of William Gordon. At the last minute, he had traded his assignment to fly *Triple Nickel* with Captain Sanders and moved on to another flight. He happened to be a good friend of Sanders and knew his crewmembers. Ironically, Gordon's younger brother, Robert Gordon, then a student at the University of California, Berkeley, had boarded the plane for San Francisco and died in the crash.¹⁹

Rodger Morphett, a ramp service agent working for TWA, helped board Flight 529's passengers while *Triple Nickel* was in New York. One of his duties involved ensuring that the airplane's landing weight wouldn't exceed limits. Three passengers needed to be pulled from the flight. Two of them were soldiers. The third happened to be a young mother traveling with her two small children. She was planning to be reunited with her husband stationed at Fort Ord in Monterey, California. Morphett convinced the reluctant woman to remain overnight in New York. After rebooking her for a flight the next day, he told her that a message would be sent to her husband to let him know about the change in plans. Then before he and a fellow worker left the airport for the night, they tried repeatedly to reach her husband without success. For many years after the accident, when Morphett and his former colleague got together, they would talk in hushed tones about whether they had really selected the woman and her kids—or if a greater power had intervened to choose her over another passenger.²⁰

What no one knew at the time of the crash was that the lives of every one aboard Flight 529 were cut short because of a two-cent cotter pin that someone forgot to install.

Note: Many of the details presented in this chapter, including dates, places, descriptions of events, conclusions, and quotes (unless otherwise attributed), were derived from Civil Aeronautics Board, "Aircraft Accident Report, Trans World Airlines, Inc., Lockheed Constellation, Model 049, N86511, Midway Airport, Chicago, Illinois, September 1, 1961, SA-363."