

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Plane problems persist

Black boxes pulled from Denver crash

DENVER — Flight recorders pulled from the twisted remains of a Continental Airlines DC-9 were flown to Washington on Monday to determine what caused the jet to crash during a snowstorm, killing 26 people and injuring 56.

The twin-engine plane was taking off at Stapleton International Airport Sunday afternoon when it flipped upside down and broke into three pieces as it slid down the runway three-quarters of a mile. At least 10 survivors remained hospitalized in critical condition Monday.

It could be months before the cause of the crash is determined, authorities said. As many as 50 investigators may be involved in the next seven to 10 days, said Bob Johnson, chief of the National Transportation Safety Board office in Denver. It was the deadliest crash in the 58-year history of the airport.

"There were like three separate explosions," passenger Robert Linck said. "After the first explosion, there was a ball of fire shot up through the seats in front of me, engulfing four people in front of me."

The plane's two black boxes, containing cockpit voice and data recorders, were recovered "with no evidence of external damage," said a spokesman in the NTSB office in Washington, D.C.

The cockpit voice recorder will allow investigators to review exchanges between the crew in the

Skies called less safe

DETROIT — Airline pilots rate Continental Airlines along with Eastern as the least safety-conscious carriers, a newspaper poll showed; and one Continental pilot said he feels pressured to fly unsafe planes.

Continental and Eastern officials countered that their safety records are good and attributed the pilots' rating, in part, to labor problems resulting from their mergers with Texas Air Corp., the Detroit Free Press reported Monday.

The pilots rated Delta, American and United as the most safety-conscious carriers, according to the poll.

Nearly one in three airline pilots say the skies are less safe today than they were a decade ago, before airline deregulation increased competition and crowded airways, the poll showed.

Most pilots still felt air travel was safe, the survey said, but more than half of the nation's commercial pilots think airline performance has deteriorated since 1978, when Congress and the Carter administration eliminated federal control over routes, schedules and passenger fares.

seconds before the accident.

Flight 1713 originated in Oklahoma City, stopped in Denver and was delayed by a snowstorm. It was en route to Boise, Idaho, when it crashed at 2:16 p.m. MST.

Hearing opens for Northwest disaster

ROMULUS, Mich. — Wing flaps on a Northwest Airlines plane that crashed, killing 156 people, were in the proper takeoff position, but the jet took longer to get off the ground than expected, a witness testified Monday as hearings into the crash opened.

A federal investigator, however, said evidence compiled in the nation's second-deadliest air disaster indicates the flaps were not extended in preparation for takeoff.

The conflicting testimony came on the first day of hearings by the National Transportation Safety Board into the Aug. 16 crash of Flight 255. The only survivor was 4-year-old Cecilia Cichan, whose parents and brother were among those killed.

The hearing is scheduled to continue through the week, but the NTSB isn't expected to issue a report for months.

Douglas Allington, a first officer with Northwest now based in Memphis, Tenn., testified that he thought the doomed airplane could have become airborne if it had not clipped a light pole in a rental-car parking lot.

Other witnesses have told investigators the plane appeared to wobble to the left and right before its wings flattened out to a level position just after it lifted off from runway 3 Center at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

"The flaps and slats were extended," Allington testified.

Summit may be postponed

WASHINGTON — The United States and the Soviet Union will be faced with a "series of choices" including postponement of the scheduled summit meeting if a treaty to ban intermediate-range nuclear missiles is not ready to be signed by the end of the month, a State Department official said Monday.

With Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev due to arrive here Dec. 7, four treaty issues are not settled. These include safeguards against Soviet cheating as well as a Soviet proposal to follow the accord with negotiations apparently designed to impose restrictions on U.S. jet planes in Europe.

Chief U.S. negotiator Max M. Kampelman is discussing these sticking points in Geneva with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli M. Vorontsov. The summit is only three weeks away.

"It's possible that the treaty won't get finished unless there is Soviet willingness to face up to some issues," the official said.

"Whether you decide to have the summit without the treaty, I don't know. You might end up postponing it."

If the remaining issues are resolved, it will take U.S. and Soviet negotiators about another week to prepare and agree on treaty language. Gorbachev is due to arrive here Dec. 7 and hold talks with President Reagan Dec. 8-10.

If the treaty is ready there apparently is no question the summit will go ahead as scheduled.

The main sticking point concerns U.S. demands for more information about Soviet medium-range missiles than Moscow so far has been willing to provide.

Wright defends role in talks

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Jim Wright Monday accused the Reagan administration of treating Central Americans as "inferiors" and suggested that his involvement in regional peace efforts fills a vacuum left by Reagan's effort to diplomatically freeze out the leftist Nicaraguan government.

The harsh talk followed a meeting between Wright, Reagan, Secretary of State George P. Shultz and other top administration officials that failed to bridge differences over Wright's personal involvement in the peace process.

"Perhaps if they had an open door policy to people in Central America, those people would go to see them instead of coming to see me," Wright said at a luncheon with reporters after the White House meeting.

The Reagan administration "sometimes gives the unfortunate impression that it looks upon people in Central America as inferiors, by scorning them, lecturing them, holding them up to public ridicule, refusing to see them," he said. "I guess I'm just more egalitarian than they are."

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