PUEBLO PLANE CRASH IS FATAL TO 3

By RON MARTINEZ on Thursday morning, January 19, 1978

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Three persons aboard a Frontier Airlines twin-engine turboprop trainer airplane were killed instantly about 3:05 p.m. Wednesday when the plane suddenly slammed nose-first into the runway seconds after it was cleared for takeoff from Pueblo Memorial Airport.

Ed Dunaway, a Frontier Airlines spokesman, identified the occupants as Capt. Jack Howell, 48, who was piloting the plane, and Capt. Dale L. Glenn, 35, of Aurora, both flight instructors from Denver, and flight trainee Dennis A. Meyer, 34, also of Denver.

Kenneth Patton, 29200 E. Colorado 96, a temporary maintenanceman at the airport, saw the crash. He told Chieftain reporter John A. Salas he and a co-worker were in a truck crossing the runway about ½ mile from the plane.

"The plane started its ascent — I guess it was up about 12 feet — when all of a sudden it went into a nosedive," Patton said. "It landed on its nose and kind of stuck there. There was an explosion and the engine was on fire. It looked like the motor just quit and it went into a nosedive."

Charles Whitehair, assistant chief of the Pueblo Memorial Airport control tower, said, "It was a very typical situation. They had made a number of stop-and-go maneuvers. The aircraft was taking off on runway 17 (the north-south runway).

"On the takeoff maneuver, it crashed. He (the pilot) couldn't have been very high. The controller (in the control tower) was talking to him but did not see it crash but just after on impact," Whitehair said.

Whitehair said the plane had landed from an earlier takeoff and had come to a full stop when it was again cleared by the tower for a takeoff.

He said, "That aircraft is a shortfield takeoff and land craft and can climb fast or slowly. Things happenned so quickly." Whitehair said no one in the tower actually viewed the crash. The front section accordioned into the ground.

Dunaway confirmed a report that two other flight trainees who had been riding in the plane earlier Wednesday chose to stay behind for the rest of the maneuvers. He said the two were drinking coffee in the airport restaurant when the crash occurred.

Eyewitnesses of the freak crash were shocked when they learned of the deaths involved.

Betty Phelps, 56, of 309 W. 19th was sitting in a booth in the airport restaurant across from Dixie Owen, 42, of Minneapolis, Minn. "It was taking off and all of a sudden it just nose-dived. A little fire came from a burst in the plane and that was all," Mrs. Phelps said.

The two women, like most customers in the Wildflower Restaurant, were afforded a nearly unobstructed view of the airfield.

Rick Lippincott of Avondale, said, "I saw it do a fly-over. It didn't seem to be having any kind of problem and we had just come in and sat down. Suddenly some people starting grabbing their coats and started to go outside and look."

Lippincott was accompanied by Alyce Bouy, 30, of Pueblo. She said, "It looked like whatever happened, happened in a split second."

Mike Carroll, 29, head chef of the restaurant, stood alone in another corner of the restaurant. His steady gaze in the direction of the wreckage indicated some sadness.

"They're all dead." Carroll's remark just came out in a solemn monotone. His eyes were still fixed in the cold-shrouded distance. "They had lunch here today. They parked the plane the way that one is parked. They eat here all the time."

All were licensed pilots aboard the deHavilland Twin Otter training plane, capable of carrying 19 passengers.

Police immediately cordoned off the entrances to the airfield shortly after rescue and fire equipment from the city and a number of local law enforcement autos had entered. Reporters and photographers were not allowed near the crash site for nearly three hours.

All three occupants were pinned inside the wreckage and members of the fire department rescue squad were required to use special tools to free the bodies. The bodies were taken to St. Mary-Corwin Hospital.