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The Mystery Of Flight 427: Inside A Crash Investigation



Synopsis

The immediate human toll of the 1994 Flight 427 disaster was staggering: all 132 people aboard died on a Pennsylvania hillside. The subsequent investigation was a maze of politics, bizarre theories, and shrouded answers. Bill Adair, an award-winning journalist, was granted special access to the five-year inquiry by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) while its investigators tried to determine if the world's most widely used commercial jet, the Boeing 737, was really safe. Their findings have had wide-ranging effects on the airline industry, pilots, and even passengers. Adair takes readers behind the scenes to show who makes decisions about airline safety "and why.

Book Information

File Size: 6114 KB

Print Length: 257 pages

Publisher: Smithsonian Books (July 9, 2013)

Publication Date: July 9, 2013

Sold by:Â Penguin Random House Publisher Services

Language: English

ASIN: B00EKJKAH0

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #423,020 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #204

inÂ Books > Engineering & Transportation > Transportation > Aviation > Commercial #755

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Nonfiction > Science > Technology > General & Reference

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Customer Reviews

The idea of a book about an airline crash and the following investigation is not new. There have been plenty of books using this formula. But this one is special. Very readable. As an airline pilot who has taken (but thankfully never had to use) crash site courses the technical aspects are pitch perfect, and as a reader of tons of aviation books, the writing is engaging and accessible. Just about

anybody could read, understand, and become involved in this text. The epic story of the world's most popular jet with an unknown fleeting flaw is the story. Adair avoids the clichés of the Airplane! genre, but the whole book smoothly reads like a novel. He seemed to have interviewed everybody involved in the 737 investigations. And as a professional journalist he knew how and what to ask. Balanced without preaching. It is clear the 737 was safe, but had a fatal flaw. Thanks to folks at the NTSB that never gave up, and people like Adair who track and report on the detective story, airline flying becomes even safer. If you want to know what it is really like inside a crash investigation, without the hyperbole, but with all the smells and politics, this is a super book to start with.

I am generally skeptical of aviation accident books, but Adair's account of the USAir 427 accident is near the top of the heap. As an airline pilot who has flown (and generally disliked) the 737 among other airliners for a major US airline, I was pleased with the pains that Adair went through to be balanced in telling this story. It is generally a very accurate account of the accident sequence and investigation. Of particular note is the ability Adair has to tell the story from all points of view, particularly from the victim's family and NTSB's point of view, without giving short shrift to Boeing (despite their general arrogance). In fact, the book, if anything, goes too easy on Boeing. The mantra about how safe the plane is repeated frequently. The reader is constantly told how safe the plane is, and then is told that the NTSB says it is less safe than its peers, which seems hard to swallow. That it has a low accident rate (but NOT the lowest, as some have incorrectly stated, by any accepted statistical methodology, i.e., accidents per departure, accidents per flight hour, etc.) seems to permeate the book without emphasizing that so do all western built airliners. At the end of the day when the NTSB does rule against the 737 rudder, it almost seems that Boeing is redesigning the rudder actuators out of the goodness of its corporate conscience, rather than the FAA mandates, which doesn't really square with reality. (Bottom line, airlines have until 2007 to replace the faulty system with the new design, so basically you have 737s flying around with a known defect for upwards of 13 years, which is one reason I personally avoid flying on 737s unless there is absolutely no other choice available.) My hat is off to Mr. Adair. Though I may quibble with the tone of certain sections of his book, it is, nonetheless, a masterpiece. Enjoyable for professionals and laymen alike.

This book is a must read for any commercial aviation enthusiast. It details the investigation of USAir Flight 427 which crashed on approach into Pittsburgh in September 1994. The crash claimed the lives of 132 passengers and crew. The book humanizes the passengers and crew, the victim's

families and the investigators themselves as they undertake the longest aviation investigation in aviation history. The book follows path of the investigation from the moment the passengers board the ill-fated 737-300 until the final report is released by the NTSB five years later. It documents what the victim's families went through dealing with USAir, the lawyers and the government. It reads more like a fiction novel rather than a non-fiction piece. I read the entire book in 6 hours and could not put it down. It is the best piece of work on the crash of Flight 427 I have seen, and I have read them all. I definitely recommend to anyone interested in air safety.

Adair has written a compelling, easy to read book but the sub-title "inside a crash investigation" is perhaps a slight exaggeration. Huge chunks of the book are devoted to the plight of a bereaved husband seeking compensation for the loss of his wife. It's a moving story but not really part of a crash investigation. In fact, compared to some other books I've read recently, Adair is quite light on the science and technology of air crash investigation and skims over some of the details. He barely mentions the subsequent FAA probe into the 737 which is now leading to the redesign of the airplane's tail and is covered in much more detail in *Flight 427: Anatomy of an air disaster* by Gerry Byrne. Another useful book on air crash investigation I've recently read is *Aircraft Accident Analysis: Final Reports* by James M. Walters and Robert Sumwalt although it is much drier than both Adair and Byrne.

The Book itself was very good and it kept my attention throughout. One of the main characters in the book, however, the husband of a victim, was made to be, in my opinion, too much a part of the story. The book often mentioned how he stayed away from the other grieving families, preferring to remain in the background, yet he seemed to have plenty to say when it came to getting his story told in this book. It was continually stated that he was not "in it for the money" (referring to the lawsuit he filed, etc), yet that seemed to be exactly what he was in it for. It was as if his wife's life was the most important one on the plane and none of the other victims mattered. There should have been other families stories in the book, along with his, or his should have been left out. His story was not really needed, and it didn't really add anything to the book. Besides that, this was a great book and I would recommend it. It sheds a great deal of light on the complex job of the accident investigators and should give most readers a reason to doubt the so-called "cause of the day" that the news media puts out and changes with every new twist.

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