Wal Davis, Director of the Film Recounts the Last Hours of the Two DC-3 Pilots Who Disappeared

"We took three years to prepare the plane to get it in perfect condition to fly."
"Despite the flight plan of the DC-3, I convinced my wife to travel on my plane."

Spain – 18 October, 1980
Published in HOLA

“On Wednesday, October 1, we were at the airport called Cuatro Vientos or “FourWinds.” We were doing a film shoot for a documentary on the history of aviation, titled “Air Classics.” The main character on this occasion was the DC-3. Days before, and just when we were ready to begin the work, some Englishmen, who have already been located by Interpol, stole all of the instruments of the plane. In just a few days we again put the airplane in order and the Air Ministry granted permission for airworthiness. We rolled from Madrid on Friday heading for Frankfurt, via Perpignan and Strasbourg. Although, apparently, the plane did not offer any warranty and we were joking about the possibility of an accident, both pilot and mechanic repeated again and again that "the DC-3 aircraft is as safe a plane as exists."

On Saturday morning, the film's director, Wal Davis, phoned us to communicate the tragic news. The DC-3 had disappeared and it was feared that the two pilots had died.

Last Moments Before the Loss

It was planned to travel to Frankfurt with three aircraft: the DC-3, a Junkers JU-52 also used in the film, and the small Cessna 337 carrying Wal Davis. The latter two planes took off at the same time to film the exterior of the Junkers. "On Thursday I had several problems that had to be resolved and, fortunately we were able to shoot everything that was planned for that day and the next. The mechanics checked over the installation of the new equipment and the radio in the
DC-3. We made the flight plan for there to be three people who would fly on this plane: my wife, Adela; Commander Whitaker and the second in command, Eckmann. My wife convinced me that she should fly in the small plane with me, so the two pilots and all the material - some two hundred pounds – were loaded in the DC-3.” recalls Wal.

"The two aircraft are flying side by side, the Cessna and the Junkers. We were filming him. We all hoped that at any moment the DC-3 would appear because it is the fastest. In Gerona we lost contact with the Junkers. We knew we needed the radio to land in the dark. We warned Barcelona. The airspace was closed. All the aircraft circling the city waiting to be given permission to land. The Junkers had the priority, and guided by us, we managed to arrive safely to earth. Then they tell us that they received our communications but that they just could not transmit."

NO NEWS OF THE DC-3

"Upon arriving in Barcelona we were alarmed to find that the DC-3 had not arrived. We requested information from Saragossa and they told us that the aircraft had taken off half an hour after we departed Cuatro Vientos. Calmly, we decided to have dinner in Barcelona to celebrate the happy ending of the odyssey of the Junkers."

When they later reached the hotel, they were surprised that there was still no news of their comrades. They called Saragossa. No DC-3 had flown through its airspace. The same response was obtained everywhere. They then thought that the DC-3 would have landed in another city. After contacting several other airports and always getting negative responses, they alerted the authorities to initiate the alarm.

On Saturday and Sunday, the Search And Rescue (SAR) helicopters from Four Winds, as well as other rescue equipment scoured the area without any positive results.

Wal Davis, the director of the film, with his wife, Adela, who he dissuaded from flying in the DC-3
A taxi driver and some other people who sailed in boats claimed to have seen a plane flying low over them on Friday, but Wal was convinced that this was the Junkers they saw.

"Witnesses say they were flying without lights at 9 PM in the evening. The word from Perpinan reported a plane flying due south, so I think that was diverted to search for a beach or other place suitable for landing.” Wal continued - "I think we might assume some short circuit fault. The thieves who stole the equipment could have damaged any hydraulic tube which went unnoticed in the review, but that could be more damaging after hours of flight."

**EXPERIENCED PILOT**

Both Whitaker Eckmann as were two experienced pilots. The first, retired commander, had the highest level. He had nine children and was of German birth. Eckmann, of twenty four years, married with five children, was an officer of the U.S. military. "Knowing their careers, I rule out the human failure, but you can never know." Wal says.

**Will you continue rolling the film?**

--“Not now I feel like nothing. We have lost everything. The plane was not insured and in addition the material was filmed. Not only is the money, but also the months of preparation. First, the theft of the equipment, worth more than two million pesetas, and now this. Of course this does not worry me one iota, compared with losing these two great men. They were also good friends.”

Gunter Kurfiss, co-producer of the film and majority owner of Aviation Museums of Germany had traveled to Frankfurt to give the news to the relatives of the victims. The pilot of the Junkers could not have imagined as he landed his aircraft that his two partners had died.

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*Originally published in HOLA 18 October, 1980*