Jetliner Slams Homes In Kenner

KENNER, La. (AP) - A Pan American World Airways jetliner bulldozed into suburban homes just minutes after taking off from New Orleans International Airport in a thunderstorm Friday, killing all 145 people aboard and at least four on the ground, officials said.

It was the second-worst air disaster in U.S. history.

The three-engine Boeing 727 plowed through two blocks of houses, and workers labored into the night in search of additional victims. Eight people on the ground were injured, two critically, a hospital reported.

A witness, Bob Ledet, said it appeared the plane was hit by lightning.

No Survivors

George Burdge, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration's southwestern regional headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas, said there were no survivors aboard Pan Am Flight 759 from New Orleans to Las Vegas.

Pan Am spokesman Merle Richman initially reported 136 passengers and a crew of seven aboard the plane. However, airline spokesman Ann Whyte later reported an infant and a Pan Am employee riding in a jumpseat in the cockpit brought the total aboard to 149.

Burdge said inspectors at the scene had counted 149 bodies.

At least three people died in houses struck by the plane, said Dr. George Bodron of the Jefferson Parish coroner's office.

He said the body count was hampered by the severity of the crash and the difficulty of telling whether the dead had been aboard the plane or in houses.

"They're still picking up pieces and parts of bodies - legs, feet, torsos without limbs," Bodron said.

Flight 759 originated in Miami and was to go to San Diego, then Las Vegas, said Steven Moore with the Travelers Emergency Service System in Boston.

In Miami, Pan Am officials identified the crew: Capt. Kenneth McCullers, Sebastian, Fla.; First Officer Donald Pierce, Miami Lakes, Fla.; flight engineer Leo Noone, Miami; purser Dennis Donnelly, Fort Lauderdale; and flight attendants James Fijut, Miramar, Fla.; Lucille Brown, Hollywood, Fla., and Vivian Ford, West Hollywood, Fla.

Fires Controlled

At least eight houses in the area were damaged by debris, and fire officials said several were set ablaze. Lou Reese, deputy director of Orleans Parish Civil Defense, said the fires were under control about two hours after the crash, and rescue workers were looking for any victims in the homes.

Rescue workers used portable floodlights to search for bodies into the night, while utility workers labored to restore power and phone service in the area.

The search effort was called off about 10 p.m. CDT, after 86 bodies had been recovered. The effort was to resume at 7 or 8 a.m. Saturday.

There were six bodies in the area, including one who had been identified as a 10-month-old infant, the coroner said.

A row of black body bags lined a street near the crash zone. One by one, the bags were opened and the remains photographed before being carried into refrigerated tractor trailers for transfer to a temporary morgue.

Jefferson Parish Sheriff Harry Leen said workers found it too dark to identify remains mixed in the rubble.

About 100 people whose homes were destroyed or who were evacuated from the area were housed for the night in two nearby hotels.

"We do not know the number of casualties there might be on the ground," said Al Sella, director of fire and emergency services for Jefferson Parish.

Baby Girl Found Alive Under Debris

KENNER, La. (AP) - An 18-month-old child was found alive near her home under the debris from the Pan American World Airways jetliner that crashed in this suburban community Friday.

Melissa Trahan suffered burns on her feet, according to Patty Nickell, a spokeswoman at the East Jefferson hospital.

The child's father, Gabe Trahan, was reached by telephone at the hospital, and said he was happy his daughter was alive.

He said his wife, Melanie, and a 4-year-old daughter, Bridget, were killed by the crash.

The Boeing 727 crashed in a thunderstorm shortly after takeoff from New Orleans International Airport, killing all 136 passengers and a crew of seven.

Officials said at least three people were killed on the ground when the jet plowed into homes of this community 15 miles west of downtown New Orleans.

Several people were also killed in San Francisco and Las Vegas.

"Somebody said, 'Hey, we got a survivor,"' said civil defense worker Mark Larkin. "I turned around and looked, and they were carrying a little baby girl ... from under a pile of rubble. She seemed to be OK. I think everybody was convinced at that point that we wouldn't find anyone alive. It was a really good feeling."

"She was out of her home. Outside of her house, covered by debris from the plane and the houses that were knocked down all around her. She was wearing just a diaper and a pair of rubber pants," said Margaret Dubosan, a reporter with radio station WGSO.

"This huge wave of excitement came over the rescuers when they realized that there was a child alive in the wreckage. They rushed doctors and emergency personnel over to her. She had her eyes closed, but she was waving her hands and arms, crying a little, but very glad to see somebody who had taken her out of there."

Related Stories, Page 8
PAN AM 727 WRECKAGE — A fireman stands on the wing of the Pan Am jet that crashed into a Kenner neighborhood Friday during a fierce thunderstorm. The Pan Am logo is visible at left. (AP Laserphoto)

FIGHTING THE BLAZE — Brightly lit by flames behind him, a firefighter works to douse flames on one of the houses hit by a Pan Am 727 which crashed in flames Friday afternoon at Kenner. (AP Laserphoto)