

Monday, February 19, 1990

Flight experts investigate Williams crash

PUTNAM (AP) — Both engines were running and flight controls apparently were in order when an airplane carrying five business associates of gubernatorial candidate Clayton Williams plowed nose-first into the ground, killing everyone aboard, an investigator said Thursday.

Gene Roth, investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, refused to speculate Thursday on the cause of the crash of a twin turboprop Mitsubishi MU-2 Wednesday morning in a field south of Putnam.

Roth, four investigators from the Federal Aviation Administration and three engineers from Mitsubishi examined the wreckage Thursday and determined that the plane's engines and controls seemed to be working at the time of the crash.

The 9-year-old plane, owned by one of Williams' companies, had no record of mechanical problems, Roth said.

Wreckage was still in the field Thursday. Roth said it will be gathered and hauled to a salvage yard in Lancaster within a few days. The plane was not equipped with a cockpit voice recorder or flight data recorder.

Killed were Jamie Winkel, 45, chief executive officer of Clayton W. Williams Jr. Companies; Randy M. Kidwell, 37, vice president for business development for Advanced Telecommunications Corp.; Robert Smith, 62, president of R.R. Smith Consulting; Aaron Giebel, 63, president of Aaron Giebel Petroleum Ltd.; and Kenneth Mardis, 51, pilot with Williams Aviation.

The plane was carrying the five men from Midland to Dallas.

A memorial service for the five victims was scheduled for 11 a.m. Friday at First Baptist Church of Midland. Williams was expected to deliver the eulogy.

Propane tanker derails

Light rains, flames keep residents homeless

EMHOUSE (AP) — A flaming propane tanker and light rains kept residents and firefighters at bay Sunday, more than a day after a freight train carrying hazardous chemicals derailed, causing an explosion and forcing the evacuation of several families.

Firefighters decided Saturday to allow the liquid propane tanker to extinguish itself, fearing that dousing unseen hot spots in the tanker could cause additional explosions, Capt. Darrell Stevenson of the Corsicana Fire Department said.

"It burned all night and it's still burning now," he said.

Firefighters under the supervision of the Texas Railroad Commission pumped water into the burning tanker Sunday, forcing the propane to rise and burn off.

Stevenson said officials were unsure how much propane was left in the tanker or how long the fire would burn.

Stevenson compared the burning tanker to an oil burning lamp, that will continue to flame until all the

propane gas is burned off.

Three families living closest to the derailment hadn't been allowed to return to their homes Sunday.

A spilled car of sodium chlorate powder also caused concerns. Firefighters said the chemical, used in manufacturing explosives and cosmetics, could feed the fire, spreading flames beyond the scattered wreckage in a remote area near Emhouse, a community of 200 about 45 miles south of Dallas.

"Sodium chlorate is an oxidizer," Stevenson said. "If there is any fire around, it just enhances the fire. The fire will burn more intensely."

The car is about 50 feet from the burning tanker, officials said.

Emtech Environmental Services Inc., a hazardous chemicals team, covered the car containing sodium chlorate and the surrounding area with a plastic tarp Sunday. A violent smoldering reaction occurs when sodium chlorate gets wet.

Texas World Speedway change to horse racing track possible

COLLEGE STATION (AP) — The Texas World Speedway has a reputation as the world's finest auto racing facility lying dormant. To the pain of many auto racing fans, it might soon be a horse track.

"It's just a shame what happened to that track," said racer Richard Petty, who won three of the eight NASCAR events held at the speedway. "It was one of the best facilities. But things just went wrong from the very first. It just wasn't meant to be."

The track, located near Texas A&M University, opened for its first stock car race in December 1969 to rainy skies and a small crowd, and aside from two major speed records set at the speedway, the track struggled for attention.

The track's last major race was the Texas Race of Champions in October 1988.

Racers blamed management for the demise of the track, while management blamed the media.

"Basically, poor management is

what did it in," Petty told the Dallas Times Herald. "The first couple of owners had financial problems and it seemed to change hands often. Then they didn't want to seem to want to do anything to take care of it."

Harry Wharton, who now manages the track and has worked at the

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—Terry Labonte, NASCAR racer

facility for 15 years, said the Texas media ignored the track.

"We would do whatever the media wanted us to do, but we just couldn't get any publicity," he said.

There has been speculation that Dick Conole, the owner of the track since 1976, will try to turn things around by making the speedway a horse-racing facility.

"That would be awful," said NASCAR racer Terry Labonte, of Corpus Christi. "I don't have anything against horse racing, but that was a great facility for auto racing at one time. By the time I started racing on it, the surface had gone bad. I just wish I had the opportunity to run it just after it was built ... It was my favorite track."

The track was originally called Texas International Speedway and was a twin to Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn, Mich., which is host to the Michigan 500. Both were built by American Raceways.

In 1973, Bobby Unser set the world's closed-course speed record at the track at 212.766 mph, only to have it broken six weeks later by Mario Andretti, again at the track, at 214.158 mph.

Tug of war



Photo by Kim Collier

Members of Sigma Chi fraternity participate in tug of war, one of many competitive events at Playday 1990 held on Saturday. Playday is a charity event sponsored by Alpha Delta Pi sorority to raise money for Ronald McDonald House.

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