



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

BOLIVIA - Air Crash

Date: January 1, 1985

Location: Mount Illimani, southeast of La Paz

No. Dead: 29

No. Affected: None reported

Damage: Boeing 727 airplane destroyed

The Disaster

On the evening of January 1, 1985 an Eastern Airlines Boeing 727 approaching La Paz's El Alto airport slammed into Illimani mountain, killing everyone aboard. El Alto, the world's highest airport, is built on a plateau amid the Andes at an elevation of 4,100 m. It is also considered one of the most treacherous airports; pilots approaching the airport must skirt the imposing Mt. Illimani before descending to the runway below. Eastern flight 980 was embarked on a routine flight from Asuncion, Paraguay when, for reasons still unknown, the plane failed to bypass the 6,463-m mountain. The wreckage of the plane was found buried in the snow where it crashed at 5,975 m.

Among the 29 people (19 passengers and 10 crew members) aboard the aircraft were eight U.S. citizens, including the wife of the U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay and the Director of the U.S. Peace Corps in Paraguay. When rescue workers reached the crash site, they found no survivors.

Action Taken by the Government of Bolivia (GOB) and Non-Governmental Organizations

When flight 980 failed to regain contact with the control tower and was presumed downed, the GOB promptly organized search planes, both military and private, to find the missing Boeing 727. The crash site was spotted

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Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies and Other Private Organizations

Eastern Airlines - When flight 980 was reported overdue, Eastern Airlines conducted a land search of the populated areas along the plane's approach path to determine if anyone had sighted the aircraft. At the request of the Foreign Minister, an eight-member air crash team was flown in by company jet to assist the GOB in the search for the missing airplane and in the subsequent air crash investigation.

Assistance Provided by the International Community

None reported.