

Death dive into mudflats

## **83 DIE IN SHANNON CRASH**

Most bodies recovered

Eighty three people died in the early hours of yesterday morning when a President Airlines DC6 airliner crashed into the muddy, fog-shrouded waters of the Shannon estuary just after taking off for Chicago.

The 77 passengers, mostly farmers and agriculturalists were on their way from Dusseldorf for a three week study tour in the U.S. Only one was seen alive again after the take-off. She was a woman of about 25 who died three hours after her rescue.

Within seconds of the plane's death plunge, Shannon's rescue services were in operation and voluntary workers, some in night attire, rushed to the scene. The rescuers had to wade almost waist deep in glue-like mud to get to the plane.

The scene of the disaster in the bleak estuary mudflats at a place known as the Silver Strand where another air disaster occurred last year, when an Italian airliner crashed with a loss of 29 lives. Rescue workers toiled yesterday to remove bodies from the ill-fated plane. Many of the victims were still strapped to their seats and many of the bodies had been stripped by the force of the crash. Other bodies lay jammed in the wreckage.

### **TIDE STOPPED RESCUE WORK**

Up to late last night, 63 bodies had been removed from the wreckage and one was washed up in Kildysart, Co. Clare, six miles down the river. The bodies not yet recovered are crushed together in the forepart of the plane, which is buried deeply in the mud.

With the rising tide moving in over the mudflats, work had to stop yesterday afternoon and it was feared that the sea might wash many of the remaining bodies out of the wreckage.

The search resumed at dawn but it will not be possible to make a close approach to the wreckage until the low tide this afternoon. Reports that there was a baby on board as well as the 77 passengers listed could not be confirmed.

The doomed plane arrived at the airport at 9.47pm on Saturday but Airport officials yesterday declined to give any reason for almost the 8 hours delay before it took off again. No official account of the crash or the reason for it has yet been given, and these will have to await the outcome of the enquiry.

The aircraft's wheels were torn off indicating that they were down. The plane crashed to the left of the main runway which might suggest that the pilot banked to the left before trying to re-land on an old runway. That is standard procedure when an aircraft gets into difficulties.

A statement by the Clearance Office at Shannon says: "A DC6 aircraft of the President Airline crashed into the Shannon Estuary, approximately 2 miles from the airport after take-off at 3.53am. There were 77 passengers and a crew of six .....To Page 4

## **SILENT CROWDS CAME AND WEPT**

IRISH PRESS Reporter

The scene of the crash is in the estuarial mud flats fronting the Silver Strand at Rineanna and facing Askeaton across the Shannon.

A half gale was blowing in from the Atlantic and the dark clouds were clinging to the low Clare hills as the rescue workers battled through the mud and slime to free the bodies still trapped in the fuselage.

The tall fin of the plane thrusting up from the sea looked like some weird tombstone half a mile off-shore. River craft bobbed about among the floating wreckage on the grey waters, searching and probing in the mud exposed by the falling water.

All through the day, silent crowds came and wept. They crossed the wet fields and boggy marches to the two mile long embankment fronting the shore – some with binoculars – to get a close up view of the ill-fated plane and the boat-loads of tired, mud-spattered rescue workers.

In the pouring rain the crowds parted momentarily as the mud-caked rescue workers carrying their grim cargo lurched along the wet, uneven grassed top on the embankment.

Cine-cameras, dolls, fur stoles ... many more presents for relatives in America... were being carried away, to help in piecing together why 83 people died.

A tired-eyed young garda with congealed blood splattered on his bright blue shirt, stood coatless, seemingly impervious to the pouring rain.

Twisted sacks cut into the soft mudflats, traced a path taken by the pre-dawn rescue workers.

By afternoon, the silver plane was still the mausoleum of more than 50 bodies as the turning tide threatened to submerge the tail.

Seen through binoculars, the plane which should have winged its way proudly across the Atlantic but now lay broken in death, reminded one of a small graveyard whose walls were the Kerry and Clare hills and the wide sweep of the Shannon.

Motor launches were like hearses of these young dead, as they piled from plane to pier with the mangled bodies. Shuttle services of ambulances met them at the pier-head and brought them to the temporary morgue set up in the airport.

The cause of the crash, the plane's last moments, its last message – if any – to Shannon Airport Control remain a mystery. The 25 year old German-speaking, dark-haired girl, who made a gallant but vain effort to get ashore paid a simple compliment of "Thank you" in English to the rescuers before she died.