

Pilot Blamed in Rikers Island Crash

Northeast Airlines Flight 823, a Douglas DC-6A, N 34954, crash landed on Rikers Island, New York, at 1802¹ on Feb. 1, 1957. The accident occurred at night under IFR conditions less than one minute after takeoff from runway 4, La Guardia Field, New York. There were 101 persons aboard the aircraft—95 passengers (which included 11 children) and six crew members. Of these 20 passengers received fatal injury, 25 passengers and three stewardesses serious injury, and 50 passengers minor injury. The pilot, copilot, and flight engineer were uninjured.

The aircraft received major damage from ground impact and was destroyed by subsequent ground fire.

HISTORY OF THE FLIGHT

Northeast Airlines Flight 823, a DC-6A, N 34954, was scheduled to originate at La Guardia Field, a nonstop to Miami, Florida, with a departure time of 1445. This aircraft and the same crew, operating as Flight 822, had arrived at La Guardia from Miami at 1250. The crew consisted of Capt. Alva V. R. Marsh, First Officer Basil S. Dixwell, Flight Engineer Angelo V. Andon, and Stewardesses Doris Steele, Catherine Virchow, and Emily Gately. A short time before the scheduled departure time the crew and passengers boarded the aircraft.

Snow, which had started at La Guardia at 1202, began to accumulate on the aircraft's horizontal surfaces after its arrival at the La Guardia ramp position. Snow removal by ground personnel, during preflighting, was ineffective because of the continuing snowfall. Accordingly, about 1600 the aircraft was taxied, with all occupants aboard, to a nose hangar on the west side of the airport for snow removal. This was accomplished and at 1745 the crew advised La Guardia ground control that they were ready to taxi from the nose hangar for the IFR departure to Miami.

Flight 823 was then cleared to runway 4 and was advised that the wind was northeast 10, altimeter setting 30.12, and a time check of 1747½. Air Route Traffic Control cleared the flight as follows: "Cleared to Bellemead, maintain 7,000 ft."

A supplementary climb-out clearance was then given: "After takeoff, a left turn direct Paterson, direct Chatham, cross 081-deg. radial of Caldwell 4,000 ft. or above, cross Paterson between 5,000 and 6,000 ft. and cross the northwest course of Idlewild not above 6,000 ft." Both clearances were repeated and acknowledged.

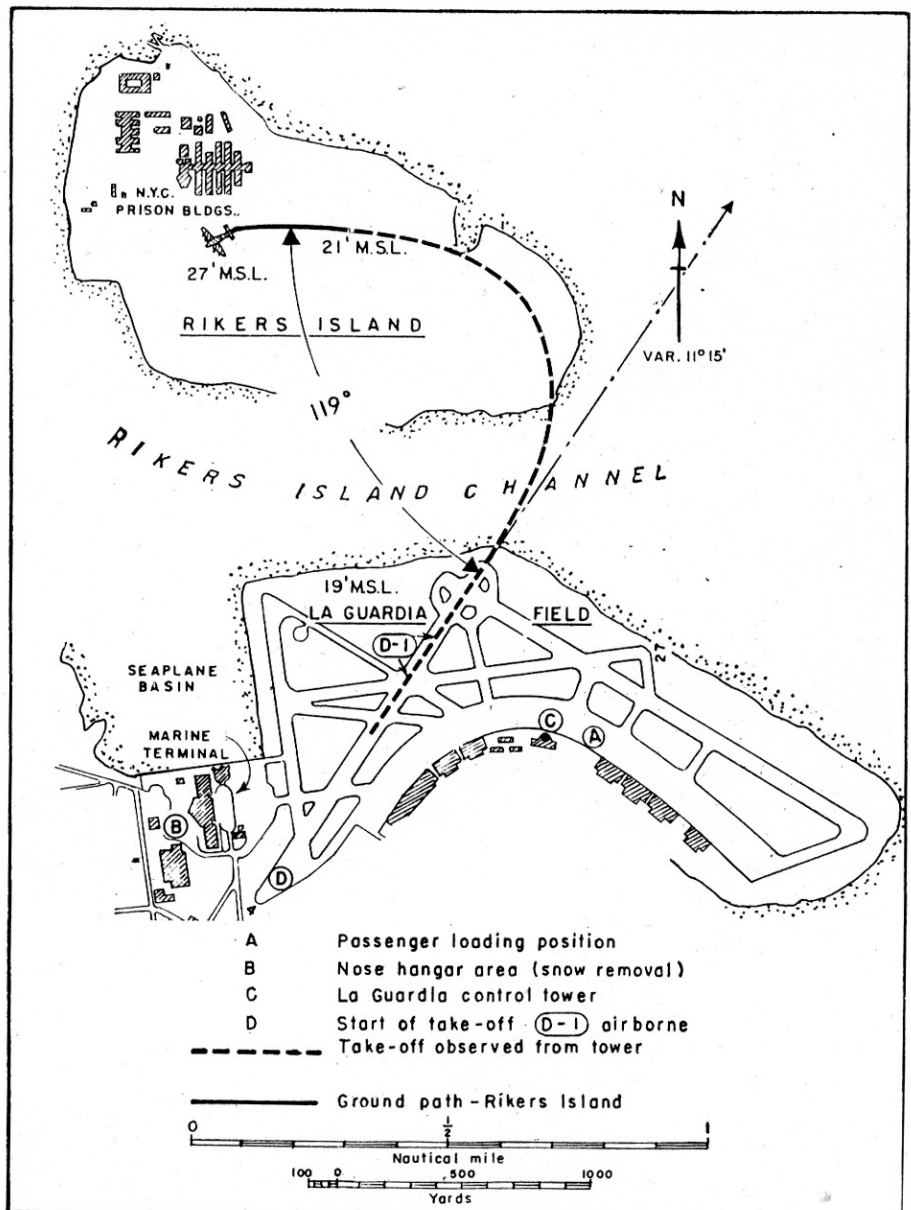
Takeoff clearance was issued at 1800 and a tower controller saw the aircraft airborne at approximately 1801. The controller advised the flight to contact La Guardia radar departure control on 120.4

mc. This message was acknowledged but the radar controller did not receive a call from the flight; however, he did observe a target on the scope that indicated an aircraft over the runway. The next two sweeps on the scope disclosed the target beyond the end of the runway. A subsequent sweep indicated that the target was turning left. The target then disappeared from the scope. The La Guardia tower controllers observed a large flash at approximately 1802 in the vicinity of Rikers Island, the approximate center of which is about one mile north of the point where the aircraft left the runway. It was learned

at 1819, by telephone, that Northeast Airlines Flight 823 had crashed on Rikers Island.

At 1753 a La Guardia weather observation was as follows: Precipitation ceiling 500 ft., sky obscured; visibility three-fourths; light snow; fog; wind north-northeast 10; altimeter 30.12. An 1806 special weather observation, four minutes after the accident, was the same as at 1753 except that the ceiling was 800 ft. and the wind velocity had increased to 15 kt.

Northeast Airlines has been a scheduled air carrier operating routes in the New England States for 24 years. The company



PATH of Northeast Airlines Douglas DC-6A which crash-landed on Rikers Island Feb. 1 1957. Accident occurred under IFR conditions less than one minute after takeoff.

¹All times herein are eastern standard based on the 24-hour clock.