

## DC-3 Lands in Jersey Swamp

By Henry M. Holden

On January 7, 1938, an American Airlines DC-3, NC16015 c/n 1553, carrying five passengers, a crew of three, and 780 pounds of mail, dropped out of a pea soup fog and pouring rain shortly after 3 o'clock in the morning to a safe, mud cushioned landing in the Jersey meadows. Captain Usher Rousch made the landing after narrowly missing fences at the south end of Newark Airport. The plane settled down in a water-coursed gully. The landing gear was smashed, one engine was damaged and Rousch suffered a gash over his right eye when his head struck the control panel. The passengers, mildly shaken, got out into the swamp with flight attendant Veronica Lally until the danger of an explosion was past. Then they re-entered the plane to await help. After a mile hike through the swamp the captain returned with rescue party of police, firemen, doctors and postal employees, who escorted the passengers back to the airport.

Captain Rousch, due in at 2:39 am. from Chicago, by way of Detroit and Buffalo, arrived on time, following the radio beam that ends at the airport. The fog was so dense; he could not see the field. Ground crews could hear the plane circling overhead. Miss Lally, a native of Janesville, Wis., and a graduate nurse of Mercy Hospital there, warned the passengers of possible trouble and fastened their safety belts. Then she served tea, crackers, and cheese, and Rousch jockeyed for a landing in the fog.

The passengers were Jack Ryan of Evanston, Ill., a motor boat salesman; A. Rush Watkins, Chicago dog-food manufacturer; W. E. Ogilvie, public relations man for stockyard interests, and Michael Lunder, of Boston, and Herbert Shapiro, of Dover, N. H., business men returning from a shoe manufacturers' convention in Chicago.



After circling about twenty-five minutes, Rousch discovered a hole in the fog, got a glimpse of the ground and quickly shot down. As the wheels of the ship were about to touch the ground, however, the pilot saw that he had come down at the end of the field, with no space for taxing. Rousch pulled back on the yoke and the huge plane skimmed over the wire fences on either side of the State Highway, Route 25, and another fence around a parking lot. Contact with the fences would have meant almost certain disaster.

Soon Captain Rousch was ready for another try and eased the airplane as best he could into the marshes, about a mile south of the field, in the direction of Elizabeth. He immediately set out on foot for the airport, while his co-pilot, Stan Gerding, contacted radio communication with Theodore. A. Schmidt, night manager of the airline at the field, and notified him that everyone was safe. It took the pilot an hour to reach the field. The fifty men who manned rescue apparatus then headed for the plane, with Rousch leading. By 7 am. everyone was back at the airport. When the passengers had coffee and other stimulants, they praised highly the conduct of Captain Rousch and his copilot, and particularly Miss Lally. Airline officials said the plane would have to be dismantled and towed out of the marsh.

**Note:** The aircraft, built in October 1936, went into service with American Airlines on October 15, 1936, as Flagship Kentucky. It was successfully removed from the swamp and rebuilt. Registered N492, with Trans Alaskan Airlines, it then went to Bonanza Airlines as N492 in 1945. Bonanza Airlines merged with West Coast & Pacific, forming Air West on April 18, 1968. It was later registered as JA5100 to the Japanese

Civilian Aviation Bureau and Flight Inspection Bureau and scrapped in the Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan.

For the complete story of the Douglas DC-3 see: [“The Legacy of the DC-3”](#)