

Noted Test Pilot Killed, Aide Hurt, 10 Burned When New Warplane Falls

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 23. —(U.P.)—Harry R. Bridges, west coast director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, told President Roosevelt in a telegram today that nazi agents and sympathizers were engaged in "wholesale sabotage of airplanes for the United States government" at the North American Aviation Corp., Los Angeles, and Consolidated Aircraft, San Diego.

Bridges said government and company officials had ignored complaints of sabotage.

"Due to intimidation of union workers who have attempted to expose sabotage and the fact that alliance undoubtedly exists between company and government officials locally, we urged immediate investigation," Bridges' telegram said.

He said CIO unionists in the past had been blamed for much sabotage under a barrage of communist charges, "while in reality company has operated under this communist smoke-screen to employ nazi agents, bund members, who serve a twofold purpose in acting as labor spies and union disrupters while deliberately sabotaging army planes."

He said 12 navy planes manufactured by one of the firms had crashed within little more than a year.

"Abundant evidence and official records now exist to prove these drastic charges providing investigation is put in hands of proper government agency, free from any local employer pressure," the CIO leader said.

Spinning crazily out of control at an altitude of 400 feet, the nation's newest bomber—a huge Douglas twin engined, low winged monoplane being groomed for possible army use—crashed to flaming destruction at Los Angeles Municipal airport yesterday, missing by a matter of feet the giant gasoline vats of North American Aviation Corp.

The crash left in its wake one dead, one person critically injured, 10 others burned and the destruction of thousands of dollars of property—not counting the value of the ship. Hundreds of others were imperiled when the bomber narrowly missed the huge gasoline storage tanks.

In full sight of airport visitors and hundreds of airplane plant employes, John Cable, 35, of Pacific Palisades, top test pilot for Douglas Aircraft Corp., climbed over the cockpit of his gleaming ship and at 250 feet above the air terminus, bailed out.

To the horror of the watchers, Cable's parachute failed to open until he was about 50 feet from the ground—too late to save him. Hurling head over heels, Cable's body struck the ground with terrific force. He was dead when onlookers reached him.

Fifty feet away the giant bombing plane, spinning awkwardly, smashed into the muddy airport terrain and burst into flames, burying beneath it 11 parked automobiles.

Trapped in the gun turret in the rear of the plane, a man variously identified as Paul Chemidlin, or Paul Smithin, 33, said by officials of the Douglas plant to be an employe, was hauled from the craft

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Sabotage Hinted in Fatal Crash of New Warplane at L. A. Airport

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by George Hacker, Jimmy Martin and another mechanic identified only as Bolley.

Chemidlin, rushed to Santa Monica hospital, was reported to have suffered skull fracture, a broken leg and internal injuries.

Ten other men, all aircraft employes, suffered minor burns in working about the blazing craft in an effort to throttle the flames. The fire was put out after considerable difficulty by scores of airport men and firemen.

A strict guard was established at the bedside of Chemidlin, who earlier had been reported to be a member of the French army air corps. Likewise, the government and Douglas officials imposed strict censorship at the scene of the crash, refusing to give out information and warning cameramen not to take photographs. In several instances photographic plates were confiscated and destroyed.

It was reported army and Douglas officials were investigating the possibility of sabotage, although all refused comment when asked.

Declared by aviation officials to be one of the finest bombing craft built, the ill fated ship had been under secret construction for a year and was being readied for flight in the Dayton, Ohio, competition for United States army contracts.

Considerable mystery was attached to the bomber's crash, with government men refusing to make an official statement until the episode had been probed thoroughly. It was reported three separate investigations were under way by the army, the bureau of air commerce and Douglas heads.

According to eyewitness accounts of the crash, Cable had just put the huge craft through two screaming powerdives and had "cut" one of the plane's two engines in order to test the remaining one's ability to maintain flight.

At 400 feet the bomber was seen to go into a flat spin (horizontal spinning with the plane's nose up). The craft's engine sputtered and it was evident to listeners on the ground below that Cable was fighting to right the ship and bring it into normal position.

At 250 feet, Cable apparently gave up the hopeless task, swung over the side, hurled himself into space—and pulled the ripcord of his parachute. For breathless moments it appeared the crippled sky juggernaut would strike Cable falling body, but he swung clear. His pilot 'chute opened, releasing the main 'chute. But it was too late. Had Cable had another 100 feet to drop, he would have drifted safely to earth, observers said.

So terrific was the impact of his body that it rebounded into the air. Like a shroud, the white

parachute fluttered over his still form.

As the bomber wheeled crazily toward the earth, hundreds of aircraft workers going to or from lunch (the crash took place at 12:20) stared in horror at the craft or ran for their lives. For a moment it appeared the plane would smash into the petrol dump located in the center of the North American plant. Just as this seemed inevitable, the bomber veered, dived into the midst of parked cars with an impact heard for a mile.

Chemidlin, who possibly might have saved himself by bailing out of the craft, elected to "ride it" to the ground. An instant after he had been pulled from the wreckage, the bomber burst into searing flames.

Dr. George H. Ham of Culver City, department of commerce medical examiner and himself a pilot, was 100 feet away when the bomber plummeted to earth.

"I never saw anything so terrible," Dr. Ham declared. "The

plane was going along beautifully, flying twice across the port, when all of a sudden all of us on the ground knew something was wrong. Cable had cut one of his engines and was banking. The motor sputtered. He tried to kick the other engine over and then he went into a flat spin. The ship lost altitude rapidly.

"Cable appeared to be fighting the ship. At that altitude, he knew of course that unless he worked terribly fast the ship would crash. Then, suddenly, we saw him climbing over the side. I don't believe he was thrown out. He came down so fast, the eye could hardly follow. His 'chute opened about 50 feet from the ground. Everybody realized he was doomed. It was an awful sight. He landed on his head. He was a grand guy and one of the best pilots in the business."

Other eyewitnesses reported the municipal airport, formerly Mines Field, "was in a state of the wildest confusion just before the crash."

"We didn't know just where the plane would strike. We all ran. We were scared stiff," one eyewitness said.

Observers expressed the opinion that if the falling bomber had crashed into the gasoline dump, hundreds would have been killed.

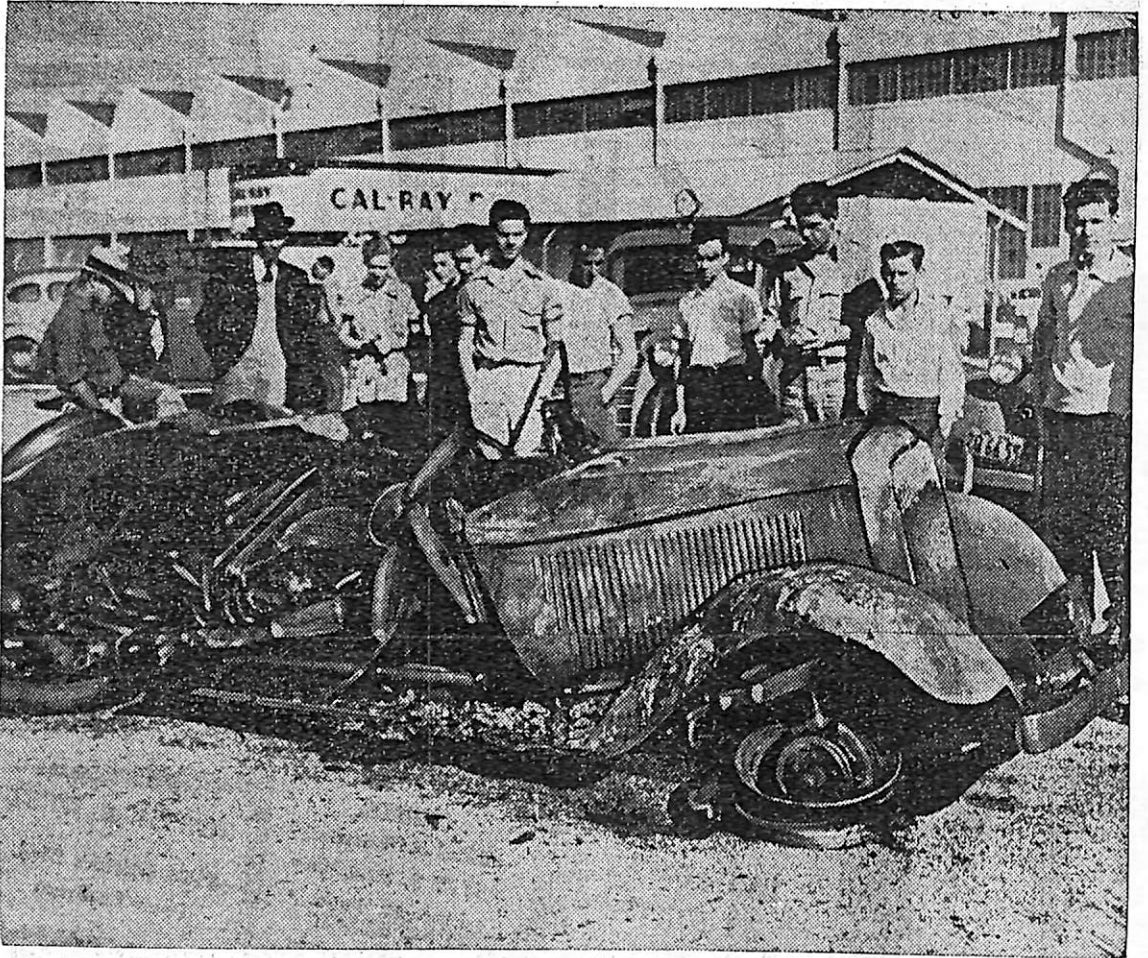
The bomber which, it was learned, was using for the first time a revolutionary type of stabilizer, had been in the air 20 minutes when it crashed.

Cable, father of three small children, was a veteran test pilot. It was he who made preliminary tests on the giant Douglas DC-4, one of the largest passenger planes ever constructed.

Little could be learned about Chemidlin. At Santa Monica hospital, attaches declared they had been "authorized by the Douglas Aircraft Co. to say that the patient is Paul Chemidlin, 33, an employe of Douglas Aircraft."

A Douglas spokesman insisted, however, the man's name was "Smithin."

Caught in Path of Catapult



ABOVE IS PICTURED one of the automobiles that was crushed by the bomber that hurtled with all the force of gravity and its flying momentum to its own demolition. A fractional part of a second after the car was splashed into junk, the bomber wrecked on the more unyielding earth and flames began completion of its destruction.—Acme photo.