

Mechanical Faults in Reuther Jet

Washington

An altimeter in the jet plane that carried United Auto Worker President Walter Reuther to his death had some parts missing "and one part installed upside down," the National Transportation Safety Board said yesterday.

Safety investigators said there was a "strong possibility" a faulty reading from the altimeter misled the pilot.

The crash occurred at Reelston, Mich., May 9, 1970. The Lear jet hit tree tops two miles from the end of the runway, staggering in flight for another half mile, sheared into another clump of trees and crashed. Reuther, 62, his wife, his nephew, and the pilot and copilot were all killed.

A spokesman for the transportation safety board said the owner of the Lear jet — Executive Jet Inc. — had sent the pilot's altimeter to Coll-Aire Inc., Columbus, Ohio, to be overhauled after it had been reported out of tolerance on September 28, 1969.

In its investigation, the safety board said it checked three other altimeters Coll-Aire had overhauled for Executive Jet. Two were found to be out of tolerance.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said it was sending an investigative team to check Coll-Aire's "manufacturing setup."

United Press

NYTimes

Safety Panel Says Reuther's Jet Had A Faulty Altimeter

WASHINGTON, Feb. 18 (UPI)—An altimeter in the plane that carried Walter P. Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers, to his death last May 9 had some parts missing "and one part installed upside down," the National Transportation Safety Board said today.

Safety investigators said there was a "strong possibility" that a faulty reading from the altimeter reinforced the pilot's belief that he was higher than he was as he approached Emmet County Airport in Pellston, Mich., for a nighttime landing.

The chartered twin-engine Learjet hit treetops two miles from the end of the runway, staggered in flight for another half mile, sheared into another clump of trees and crashed. Mr. Reuther, who was on his way to a union function, his wife, her nephew and the pilot and co-pilot were all killed.

The investigators' report said the defective altimeter apparently reinforced the pilot's illusion of height created by the plane's moving over the darkened ground and with no visible lights on the runway.

On a normal landing approach, the co-pilot's altimeter serves as a cross check for the pilot's altimeter. But the investigators said the plane was circling to the left as it began its approach to the airport and the co-pilot may have been looking out the left side of the cabin toward the airport.

"In such a case, he may have been obtaining his altitude information from the pilot's altimeter," the report said.