



# THE FLIGHT THAT NEVER WAS

A little something to read before your next trip

Flight can often terrify us. Not because aircraft crash... they do, but not often. No, what frightens us most about aircraft are the other things that can happen. The things which can't be explained.

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It shouldn't be telling you this but I don't think there is anyone of us left anymore. They've gotten rid of anyone else. Anyone who saw anything, anyone who heard anything. Do you remember the old East-West Airlines? They used to run a flight from San Jose to Washington, with a stopover in St. Louis. It was a nice summer day. Clear skies straight across the country. I think the only rain was in Alaska. Everything seemed normal. Better than normal. Flight 522 left Mineta San Jose International Airport on time and climbed its cruising altitude of 34,000 feet. A textbook flight.

Normally the flight takes about six hours. About four hours into the flight, Lambert Operations got a call from the cockpit of flight 522. It was from Captain Jackson Henry, a fifteen-year veteran.

"Lambert Operations this is East-West Flight 522."

"522, this is St. Louis Lambert Operations. What can we do for you?"

There was an extended period of silence. Operations started to repeat its message when they heard the captain's voice again. "Lambert, we are missing our passengers."

"Say again 522."

"Lambert, I say we are missing our passengers."

"No one boarded?" came the confused response.

"Negative Lambert, we left San Jose with 115 souls on board ... they're just not there."

"Say again 522."

"I had 115 passengers on board, Lambert, and a crew of four," there was a brief pause, "No one's back there. The seats are empty. No crew. No passengers. It's just myself and the copilot. Cabin integrity checks, all doors sealed. I had them." The strain in the captain's voice was clear, "I had them ... and they are just gone."

"Can you say again Flight 522?"

"I'm missing my passengers and crew, Lambert. They're gone."

"Hold on Flight 522." The flight controller switched frequencies. It was a second call ... and it appeared to be from the same flight.

"Lambert Operations, this is Angela Kelly aboard East-West flight 522 San Jose to St. Louis. We have a problem."

"Go ahead Flight 522."

"There's no one in the cockpit, Operations, the door is locked. I can see through the peephole; the seats are empty. Autopilot is on."

"Say again 522."

"We have no pilot; no copilot. The crew is locked out of the cockpit. We have no control over the aircraft. The flight crew is missing." Her voice was near panic. Standard operations meant the cockpit

door was locked from the other side. Once the flight crew was in the cockpit, no one else on board could get in without breaking down the door.

“Hold on Flight 522.” The flight controller changed frequencies back to the cockpit of Flight 522. “Flight 522, we have your crew on the reserve fuselage transmitter.”

“That’s impossible, Lambert,” Captain Henry’s voice was almost frantic, “I have the cockpit door open right now. No one is on board. Repeat, no one is back there.”

“Flight 522, check your oxygen.” The controller had begun to suspect the crew was suffering delusions due to a lack of oxygen. The final stages before they would pass out.

“Air systems on automatic, Lambert. Oxygen tanks are good. The Air systems report OK. No alarms. Request permission to descend to 15,000 feet.”

Descending to a lower altitude was mandatory in the case of an oxygen problem. The crew needed to breathe... and so did the passengers. “Permission granted. Make altitude 15,000 feet.”

“Lambert, this is flight 522.” The transmission crackled a bit.

“Go ahead, flight 522.”

“Autopilot locked, cannot disengage. Controls unresponsive. Repeat, all flight controls unresponsive. Unable to descend.”

“Hold on Flight 522. We’ll get you an engineer.” There was a strange clicking sound from the transmitter, like two metal surfaces impacting each other lightly. Rather like the noise a tap shoe makes.

“Flight 522, this is East-West Engineering, what is your status.”

But there was no response, only silence. “Flight 522 respond.”

“Captain Henry?” The flight controller switched off the main channel. “Supervisor, we may have a hijacking in progress. East-West flight 522 San Jose to St. Louis continuing to Dulles.”

“Notify the OOD, control. Get Whiteman to scramble two jets.”

“Buckley is scrambling two F-16s from the 120<sup>th</sup>. ETA fifteen minutes.”

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I remember this part like it was yesterday. Fifteen minutes later we heard: “Lambert this Echo Echo Two Tango. Flight 522 in sight. Delta Four One Alpha taking station aft. Proceeding to get visual confirmation on Cockpit.” The controllers saw two Air Force jets closing on Flight 522 on the radar screen.

“This is Lambert. Flight 522 has not started its scheduled descent, still on course for Lambert.”

“Roger that Lambert. Flight 522 at 34,000 feet. I can see in the windows now. Passenger cabins appear empty, no oxygen masks dropped. No sign of movement.”

“Command this is Delta Four One-Alpha. I have a weapons lock. Target is acquired.”

“Lambert, this is Echo Echo Two Tango. I can see the cockpit. Both seats are empty. I say again, both seats are ... wait a minute. I can see movement. There is something in the cockpit. Something ...”

“Can you see the crew Echo Echo Two Tango?”

“Command this is Echo Echo Two Tango, I don’t know what I see.” There was a strange silence, but the fighter pilot’s microphone was on, we could hear his engines. “Command, you’re not going to believe this. It has tentacles. I count six, maybe seven. It’s dark black with a small head. Command, I can see some red striped body markings, like someone threw paint on it.”

“Can you identify Echo Echo Two Tango?”

“Negative. I’ve never seen anything like it. Permission to fire sir. Delta Four One Alpha on station. Target acquired. No passengers or crew. Repeat, no passengers or crew. Hold on Command. The creature is doing something.” There was a tense pause. Flight 522, banked to the left on the radar screen and begin dropping altitude. “Command, engines two and four have just flamed out. Aircraft drifting to port, losing altitude, following it down command.”

“Delta Four One Alpha stay on it.”

“Roger that. Following target. Permission to fire. Target locked.”

“Negative. Follow 522 down. Do not engage. Repeat, do not engage.”

“Command this is Echo Echo Two Tango, I can see the thing moving again. It’s doing something to the controls. Engines one and three have now flamed out. Command, I can see the passengers now. They are slumped over in their seats. No one is looking at us. Passengers are non-responsive. Permission to fire.”

“Negative flight. Hold your fire.”

The fighters sounded desperate. Something had shaken them and shaken them good. They kept asking for permission to fire. Flight 522, now off course, was drifting down toward the ground. 30,000 feet ... 25,000 feet. The aircraft was now a giant glider without working engines. Then all we saw were the two Air Force F-16’s on the screen.

“Echo Echo Two Tango, can you see Flight 522?”

“Negative, Lambert.”

“Can you locate the crash site?”

“Negative, Lambert. There is no crash site. Flight 522 is gone.”

“Gone? Gone where?”

“Damned if I know. It was just there, I was following it down and then nothing. Delta Four One Alpha do you still have a target lock?”

“Negative.”

“Did you see what happened to it?”

“Negative, I had it in my sights and then ... I just wasn’t there.”

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That was the last anyone ever saw of East-West Flight 522. No wreckage was ever found. No one ever saw it again. Not a trace of it was ever located. Like I said, almost everyone who knows about this is gone. And I mean gone. Control, the air force pilots. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have told you that. Now you know too. Watch yourself. They’ll be coming after you next.