

# An Amateur's Reconstruction of TWA Flight 260 Accident

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February 2, 2018

# TWA Flight 260 was on a standard instrument flight plan to Santa Fe airport

- Snowy day; mountains obscured by clouds
- Experienced flight crew had flown the route multiple times
- Takeoff on RWY 12 to southeast
- Circling climb clockwise to 9000 feet and intercept RWY 17-35 localizer backcourse north of airport
- Proceed outbound (north) on backcourse localizer until intercepting specified radial of Santa Fe VOR
- Proceed inbound (northeast) on radial until intercepting KSAF RWY 2 localizer
- Descend to land at KSAF

TWA 260 Flight Plan Route  
KABQ to KSAF  
Saturday, February 19, 1955  
7:03 AM MST

Planned route

Planned route

Approximate air traffic control clearance:  
TWA Flight 260 cleared to SAF; circle  
and intercept RWY 35 backcourse localizer;  
proceed outbound to intercept SAF  
radial 260; proceed inbound to intercept  
KSAF ILS localizer. Climb and maintain 9000.



20 mi

Google Earth

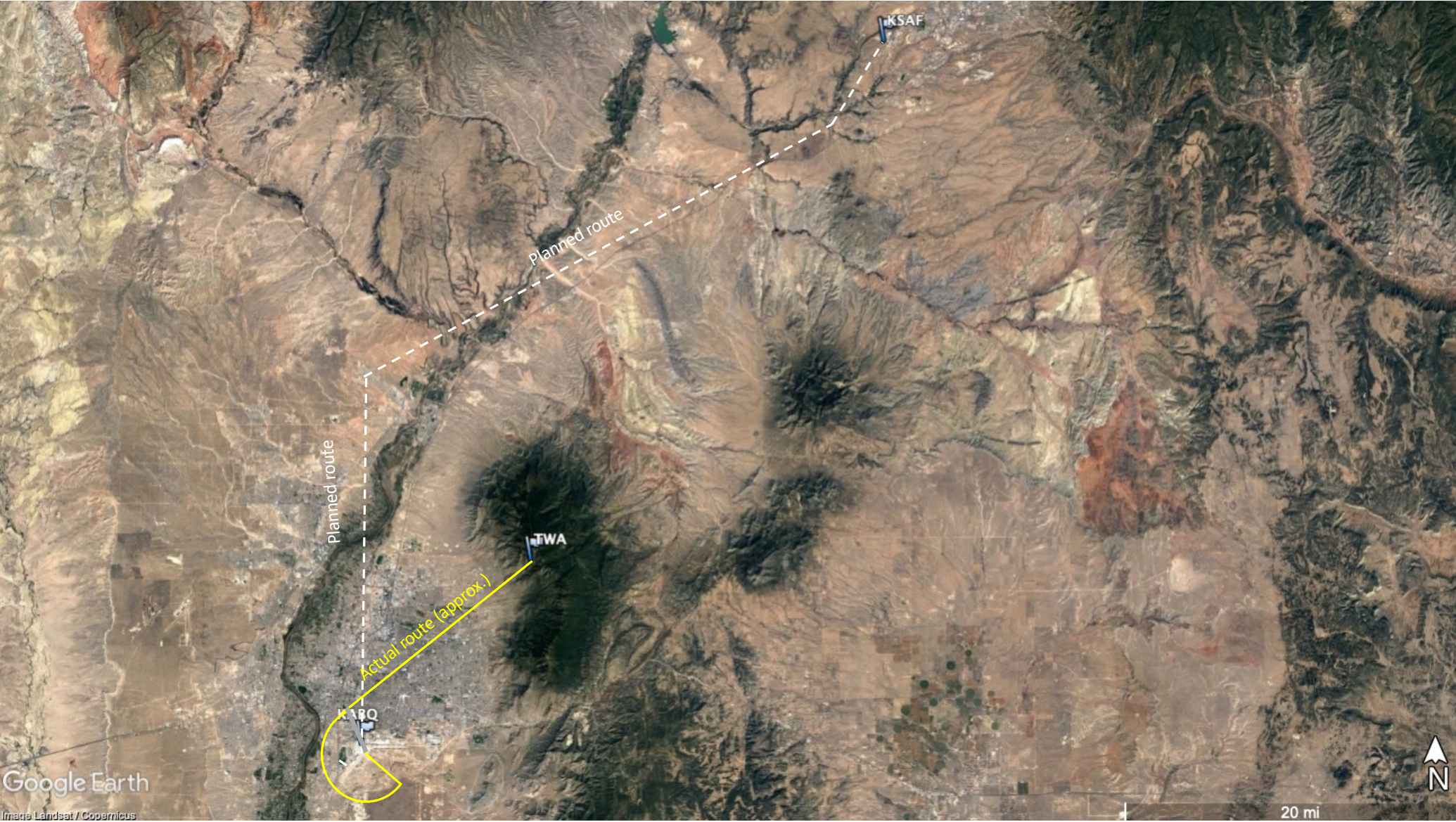
Image Landsat / Copernicus



## TWA Flight 260 instead proceeded as if on a direct course to KSAF

- Observer on ground north of airport saw plane passing in and out of clouds
- Climbed to 9000 feet as cleared
- Pilot failed to make turn to north at intersection with RWY 35 backcourse localizer
- Pilot almost succeeded in doing a climbing counterclockwise 180-degree turn when main Sandia ridge observed
- Crashed into lower ridge at 9300 feet heading 320 degrees (northwest) with fuselage pointing west (uncoordinated turn)







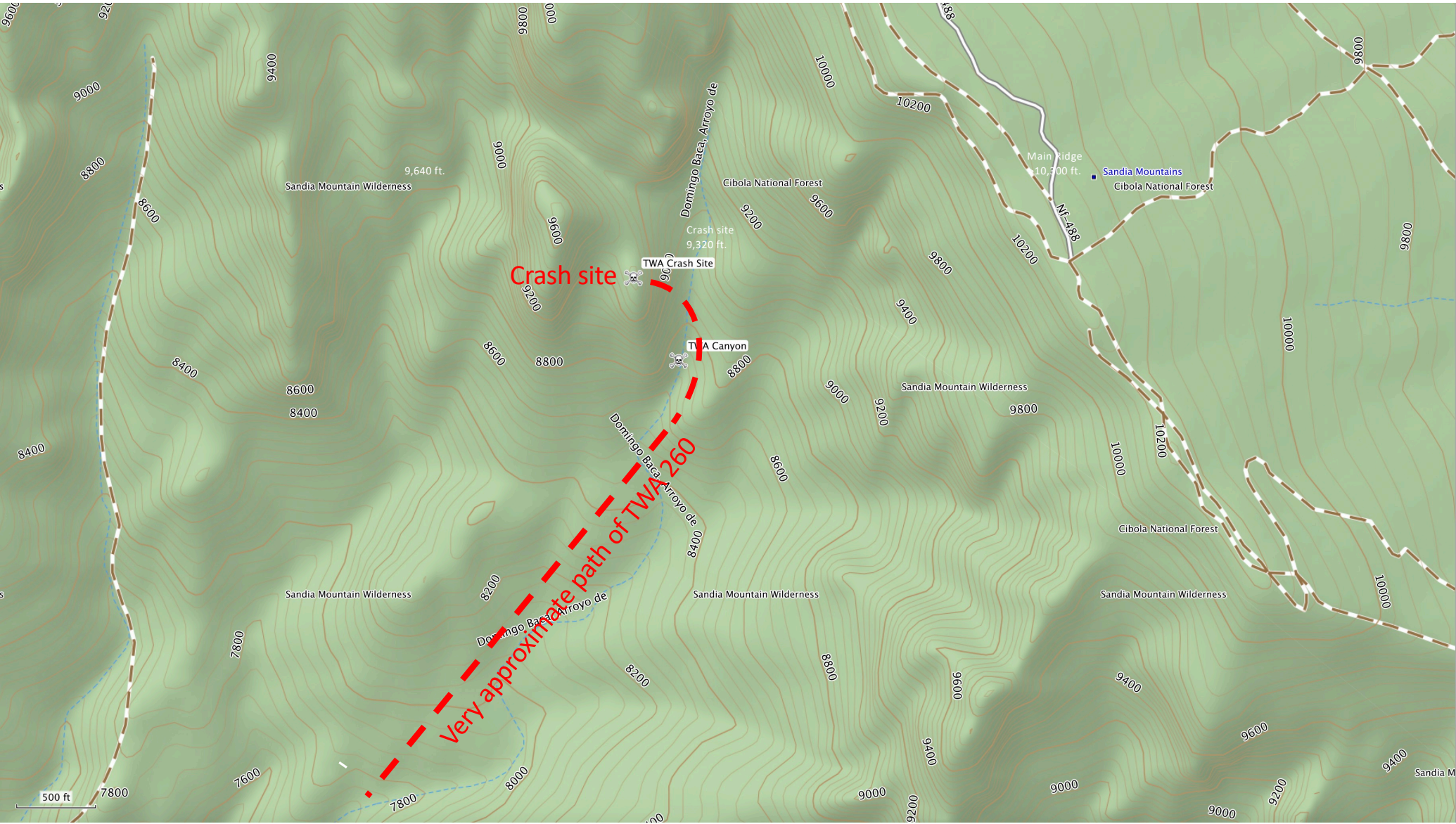


9,640 ft.

Crash site  
9,320 ft.

Main Ridge  
>10,300 ft.









Crash site

TWA

Very approximate flightpath of TWA 260

Google Earth

2000 ft



# Cause of crash remains a mystery

- Civil Aeronautics Board at first concluded crash was intentional
- Another TWA pilot convinced board to change conclusion after showing unreliable history of flux-gate magnetic compass
- Problem: Even if pilots were tracking an erroneous compass heading, this doesn't explain why they didn't turn north when they intercepted the RWY 35 backcourse localizer.
- The localizer needle should have been their primary reference not the magnetic compass.
- Reference: Charles M. Williams, "The Crash of TWA Flight 260"



