

***Lost Highways United 629* Transcript**

Underwriting: *Lost Highways*, from History Colorado, is made possible by the Sturm Family Foundation, proud supporters of the humanities and the power of storytelling, for more than twenty years.

Tyler: Hi, it's Tyler.

Noel: And Noel.

Tyler: Thanks so much for listening and subscribing to *Lost Highways* Now that we're done with the first season, we're hoping you can help us make next season even better by taking a quick online survey.

Noel: If you go to historycolorado.org/lost-highways, you'll find a link at the top of the page. The survey will only take you a minute or two, and as a thank you, here's a short bonus episode that Tyler put together about one of the first airplane bombings in the history of commercial aviation, which took place just outside of Denver, Colorado, in 1955. Thank you.

Tyler: On November 1st, 1955, Conrad Hopp was at home on his farm outside Longmont, Colorado. He had just finished eating dinner.

[Music]

[Conrad Hopp audio clip]

Conrad Hopp: We heard the explosion, it shook the whole house and the windows, and I ran outside and there was a ball of fire in the sky.

[End of clip]

Tyler: Conrad heard the engines and knew right away that it was an airplane. He and his brother jumped in their truck and drove to where the plane had crashed. And what they saw was the horrific aftermath of what remains one of the worst mass-murders in Colorado history.

[Music fades out]

[Conrad Hopp audio clip]

Conrad Hopp: There was parts of the airplane all over, and we were drivin' around those, and we both jumped out of the car, and I turned around and here was this seat, with a body in it.

[End of clip]

Tyler: The scene was pure chaos.

[Historic News audio clip]

Newscaster: The grim task of removing the dead from the wreckage of a seattle-bound airliner that exploded and fell in flames at Longmont, Colorado. Only minutes after take-off from Denver.

[Audio fades out]

[Conrad Hopp Audio Clip]

Conrad Hopp: There was cars and lights and people all over. You - it was unbelievable.

[End of clip]

Tyler: Conrad and his family helped in whatever way they could. MOstly by helping find and pick up the bodies.

[Conrad Hopp audio clip]

Conrad Hopp: One of them went into a straw pile, we had to fork the whole straw pile apart to find the body. And the bodies were like picking up jello, 'cause all the bones were crushed and everything.

[End of clip]

Tyler: The plane that exploded over their land was United Airlines flight 629. There were 44 people on board, ranging in age from 81 years old, to 13 months old. None of them survived. Over the coming weeks and months, authorities worked to determine the cause of the explosion. What they found was something Conrad had suspected from the moment he saw the wreckage.

Conrad Hopp: I said, boy, that's dynamite that blew that thing.

Tyler: I also talked to Julie Peterson. She's an exhibit developer and public historian at the History Colorado Center in Denver, where some of the wreckage from the crash is currently on display.

Julie Peterson: It's really warped and really kind of grotesque looking.

Tyler: The holes in this specific piece of the plane suggested to investigators that the explosion was intentional, and that it came from the cargo hold.

Julie Peterson: Pretty quickly it was revealed that John Gilbert Graham perpetrated this crash, through planting dynamite in his mother's luggage.

Tyler: John Gilbert Graham had a troubled childhood, and a complicated relationship with his mother, Daisy King. He was estranged from her growing up, but John and Daisy were eventually reunited when John was about 22. On November 1st, 1955, John took his mother to the Stapleton airport for a trip to Alaska. When they got to the airport there was a problem with Daisy's luggage.

Julie Peterson: It was actually overweight. And, you know, the authorities were trying to tell her that she could save money if she just took something out of the bag, and John Gilbert Graham insisted that she needed everything. After he checked her in and checked the luggage, he went to a vending machine where you could purchase life insurance policies.

Tyler: He paid a dollar fifty, and took out several life insurance policies for his mother. Later, when authorities searched his home, they found materials that matched the ones that had been used to make the bomb. Shortly afterwards, Graham confessed to the crime.

Julie Peterson: John Gilbert Graham didn't really have any remorse for the deaths of the other passengers. He's been quoted as calling them "dead ducks".

Tyler: He was charged specifically with murdering his mother, because at the time, there weren't actually any laws against blowing up an airplane. The trial attracted hundreds of people lining up everyday to get a seat. A judge decided to let television cameras in the courtroom, making Colorado the first state to do so.

Julie Peterson: This was unprecedented, nothing like this had ever happened before, and the jury only debated for 69 minutes.

[Music fades in]

Tyler: On May 5th, 1956, the Jury found Graham guilty of 1st degree murder. He was executed in January of the following year, at the age of 24.

Tyler: Along with a few other instances of airline violence around that time, this case resulted in new laws having to do with baggage checks, and it eventually led to the establishment of the Federal Aviation Administration. It was also a major milestone in the way the media covers crime, and was the first ever televised trial. Fragments of United Airlines flight 629, including the ones you heard Julie talk about, are currently on display at the History Colorado Center, in Denver. They are part of an exhibit called "Zoom in: The Centennial State in 100 Objects". You can see them there along with 99 other defining objects from Colorado's history, like...

Julie Peterson: John Denver's guitar, and Jack Swigert's flight suit from the Apollo 13 mission.

Tyler: I'm Tyler Hill. Thanks for listening.

[Music fades out]