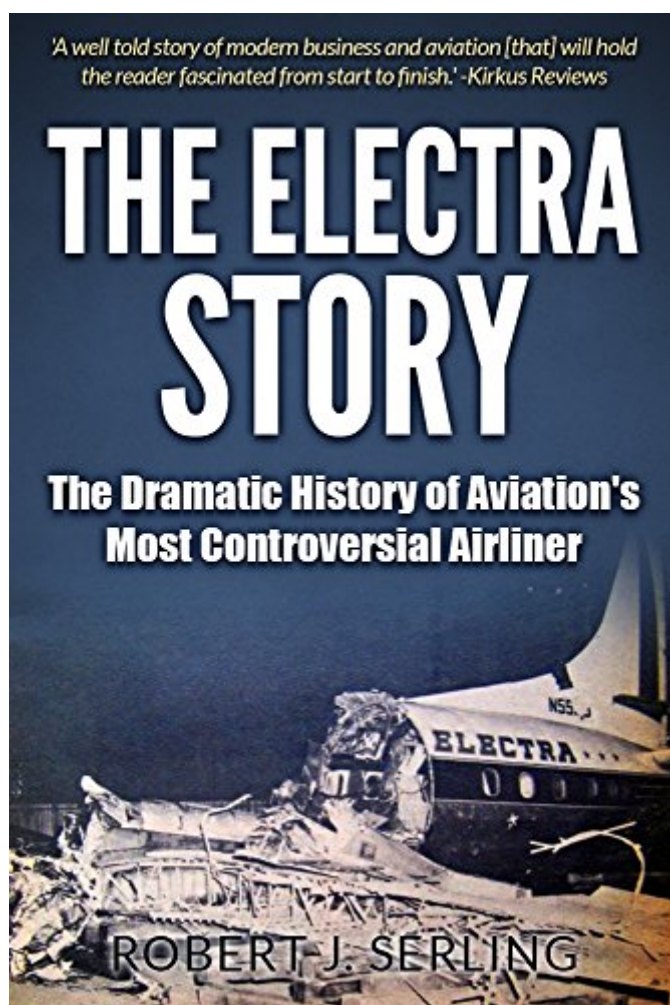


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The Electra Story: The Dramatic History Of Aviation's Most Controversial Airliner



Synopsis

At 11:08 P.M. on the humid night of September 29, 1959, Braniff Flight 542 crashed on a farm near Buffalo, Texas. Less than six months later, Northwest Flight 710 crashed in a soybean field near Tell City, Indiana. Both planes were Lockheed Electras, and both, for no apparent reason, had lost a wing in mid-air. The combined toll of the two crashes was 97 lives. There were no survivors. Early the following October, during take-off from Boston's Logan Airport, there was another Electra disaster, and the plane that had been supposedly foolproof became the object of the ugliest controversy in the history of commercial aviation. The Electra Story is an illuminating and incomparably thorough study of the plane's entire career. From design through construction, rigorous testing, and brilliant initial performance, to the minute-by-minute record of the fatal flights, the scenes of wreckage, and then the painstaking efforts to solve the mystery. While the search for a probable cause went on, there was a crucial decision to be made: whether or not to let the Electras go on flying. Elwood R. Quesada, then Administrator of the Federal Aviation Agency, had to make that decision, and how he coped with this frightening responsibility is a remarkable tale in itself. The plane that had been a dream, then became a nightmare, is still flying today, and out of tragedy has come an important advance in man's knowledge. Robert Serling's evaluation of The Electra Story is an enlightening, vivid, unbiased and rare documented account. It is a human story of suspense, with dedication and courage. And as a story of how government, industry, technology, science and the public were all trapped in one intricate web, it is both revealing and significant. Praise for Robert Serling's "High level of suspense and excitement." - De Moines Sunday Register "Serling has spun another winner" - "Publisher's Weekly" "keeps you guessing til the end" - Arizona Daily Star "Aviation buffs will revel in this thoroughgoing chronicle" - Kirkus Robert J. Serling (1918-2010) was aviation editor of United Press International and won the annual TWA Best Aviation News Reporting Award for four years running.

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Customer Reviews

Have read other accounts of the Electra story, but this is by far the most objective, comprehensive, and fair-minded I have encountered. Riveting. Thank you.

An old, but extremely well done factual story.

Excellent retelling of the history surrounding this aircraft's design problems and the human tolls around it. I believe that engineering/technically oriented readers will most enjoy this book.

This is the story of a new kind of airplane that had a hidden problem. The problem was the worst kind -- it killed everyone aboard the airplanes and left virtually no clue as to why. The story is about the task force who figured out the problem with the Lockheed Electra and what they did to solve the mystery. If you liked "The Spirit of St. Louis", or "Apollo 13", you will not be able to put this one down.

Very interesting book.

Amazing recount of a crash that happened in the town where I live 50 years ago. I found out it's a collectors' item. I am writing a newspaper story to commemorate this event that changed aviation history. Email me if you have info.

In the late 1940's and early 1950's aircraft engineers were working with new technologies both for the airframe and the propulsion systems. The first turbo jet powered commercial aircraft was the British de Havilland Comet, flown first commercially on January 9, 1951. Lockheed had begun studies on Jet Prop Propulsion as early as 1947. In 1954 Capital Airlines of the United States had ordered sixty examples of the British Vickers Viscount, a turbo prop design, first flown on July 16, 1948 and entered service with British European Airways on April 19, 1953. The first Lockheed L-188 Electra flew on December 12, 1957. The Comet and Electra were intended for different markets, but, each enjoyed radically new designs that would make them superior in those markets. Sadly that was not to be. Each would be the victim of a design issue that had deadly effects and was especially difficult to ascertain. The first Comet crash happened on March 3, 1953. Three more crashes occurred from May 2, 1953 to April 8, 1954 when the entire fleet of operating aircraft was grounded. Intense studies and incident reconstruction revealed problems with metal fatigue related to the square window design and the riveting method used on the fuselage skin. Correction and redesign resulted in the Comet 4, flown first in 1958 and which then flew for thirty successful years, but, just 114 total aircraft were built as the damage had been done to the public's confidence. The first Electra crash took place on February 3, 1959 with a loss of 65 lives. The next two crashes happened on September 29, 1959 and March 17, 1960, with total loss of life, eighty-five and sixty-three, in each crash. Grounding resulted, the determination being made that an as yet unknown factor called "whirl mode flutter" was responsible for in flight break up of the aircraft. The Lockheed Electra Action Program, LEAP, corrected the problem and the Electra flew for another forty successful years. But, here again the damage was done and only 170 of these advanced aircraft were built. This book details the study and results of the Electra's problems.

The Lockheed Electra was a fine airliner. However, several crashes later and the flying public began to doubt this plane. A combined effort by Lockheed, airlines, and other aerospace companies showed that this airplane was indeed had a issue that under certain conditions could result in it crashing. This is the suspenseful story on how Lockheed found what was causing the problems and the fix it imposed on the hundred and fifty aircraft that were made and flown by 14 different airlines. This is an interesting story of the life of one airliner. The author loved this aircraft and it shows in his writing. A good story about a great plane.

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