



Interesting Facts About the Bombing of United Airlines Flight #629 November 1, 1955

This case represented many firsts within U.S. history regarding sabotage, courtroom practices, and the FBI investigation process. The following list is not exhaustive. (Compiled from sources documented in the Endnotes, *Finding My Father – Beyond Tragedy, Through Trauma, and Into Freedom* by Marian Poeppelmeyer, daughter of a passenger killed – Marion Pierce Hobgood, personal interviews, and with special thanks to Andrew J. Fields, *Mainliner Denver-The Bombing of Flight 629* for his detailed research and work). Deepest thanks and tribute to all first Responders and Denver area residents at the time of the bombing. They remain the unsung heroes.

1. **The downing of Flight #629 ranks the first commercial airplane bombing and the largest mass murder ever in U.S. airlines history over U.S. soil at that time.**
2. The sabotage of Flight #629 became the worst plane bombing and mass murder in Denver history. In 2005, the explosion's 50th anniversary, local Denver media remembered the tragedy through TV documentaries and newspaper articles.
3. John Graham had set the bomb to explode over the Medicine Bow Mountains, 20 minutes after take-off which would have made a rescue mission impossible due to the snowy, rugged mountains. Graham would never have been caught and the loss of Flight #629 would have remained a mystery.
4. The delay of Flight #629 leaving Denver caused the bomb to go off 10 minutes earlier than Graham had planned. This providential delay allowed the rescuers to find the bodies, the FBI to conduct its investigation, and the authorities to arrest John Gilbert Graham. A miracle in the midst of tragedy.
5. The homemade bomb consisted of 25 sticks of dynamite with a homemade timer.
6. Graham purposely bought insurance policies from insurance vending machines stationed in airports.
7. Graham's mother, Daisy King, was unaware her son wanted to kill her and that he put the bomb in her suitcase. When the baggage people weighed the suitcase and it was over the pound limit, Graham told his mother, "I put a special Christmas present in your luggage," and paid for the overage.
8. Grahams sat in the airport's diner waiting for the plane to take off and to hear the explosion. Due to interviewing many people, following leads, and the forensics, the investigation quickly ended within 14 days to led to his arrest.
9. Within 10 minutes of take-off, the plane exploded mid-air and fell into pieces over a 6 square mile beet field near Longmont, Colorado, just a little north of Denver.
10. Eyewitnesses in a 20-mile radius reported seeing a massive ball of fire in the sky, like a rocket, and debris was later discovered as far as 12-square miles away.
11. No farmhouses surrounding the beet fields and no persons on the ground were injured, - one of the many miracles in the midst of tragedy.
12. The first on the scene to see what had happened were three teenagers. Two of them are still known to be living at the time of this publication (2021) and I chose to keep them anonymous for their privacy. At 18 years of age, they began to cover up the bodies strewn throughout, some still in their seats.



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13. The authorities marked off the six-square-mile tract of beet fields into 1,000 square foot grids, marking where the debris and passengers had fallen. Each piece and the location of each body was then labeled.
14. The head and the tail were found one and a half-mile apart. From a Civil Aeronautics Board investigative report, the explosion split the plane also lengthwise in half.
15. The explosion exerted such power that plane parts and bodies landed approximately one foot deep into the ground, leaving outlines and imprints.
16. The following spring, farmers noticed a strange phenomenon in their fields: seeds would not take root where the falling bodies landed, and the crops grew around each outline of the deceased. During the years after, cows grazing in the area began dying for no apparent reason. Examination of the dead livestock determined the cows had eaten tiny pieces of debris from the crash site.
17. Further details of the rescue mission may be found in Scene 5, Meanwhile Back in Denver, [Finding My Father](#) by Marian Poeppelmeyer.
18. **This changed how the FBI performed forensics and became a case study for FBI training for many years.**
19. At an undisclosed warehouse, to protect the investigation, the FBI housed all the airplane sections and debris, including passenger seats, for the reconstruction of the airplane for forensic purposes. Each retrieved piece was placed within a scaled-down grid within the warehouse. See LIFE Magazine 11-28-1955 and pictures in Finding My Father by Marian Poeppelmeyer.
20. President Eisenhower took a direct interest in this case, not just because of its tragic, historical event but because he also had links with two of the victims.
21. **The case was handed over to the State of Colorado because Colorado had the death penalty, and the Federal Government did not.**
22. John Graham was charged with one count of murder, not 44 counts. It would have been impossible to prove in court that Graham knew each passenger and intended to kill each one. This decision sped up court proceedings.
23. It took over 240 interviews for the jury to find anyone in the area who would give a verdict based on facts, not emotions. An undisclosed resource who lost her father on that flight shared that her mother and grandmother attended the case. People were outraged.
24. The case marks the first time ever for photographers and film cameras to be allowed inside a courtroom. Media, locally and nationally, swarmed to capture the proceedings. A special booth was constructed for the press.
25. The courtroom buzzed with multitudes of angry Denver residents, press, and families of the victims. Marty Hobgood could not attend due to her babies, grief, and distance.
26. **Deemed a national disaster, the entire nation followed this case.** Magazines like LIFE and Detective, and newspapers throughout the nation covered this shocking news.



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27. The nation was traumatized, not just the families of the victims. Five children lost both parents,
28. **Justice was swift.** Graham was executed on January 11, 1957, within 14 months, in the gas chamber. Different clergy tried to reach Graham spiritually failed. He refused Bibles. He had no remorse for those he killed.
29. **Baggage checks had not been required at the time.** The check-in counter flagged an overweight piece of luggage belonging to Daisy King but did not inspect it when Daisy innocently told them it was a surprise gift from her son. John Graham, her son, paid the extra for the added weight.
30. July 14, 1956, President Eisenhower signed into law authorizing the death penalty for anyone convicted of sabotaging a commercial airline which results in death and twenty years in prison for any sabotage not resulting in death.
31. April 1, 1960, FBI Director J. Edward Hoover recommended the x-raying of all passenger luggage. The FAA and the airline industry opposed this measure.
32. United Airlines did not pay compensation for the loss of the lives to the surviving family members. A few families sued United Airlines which in turn settled out of court.
33. Marty Hobgood never received any settlement for her husband's loss. Philco Corporation, Marion P. Hobgood's employer, had sent him on a business trip from Philadelphia to Portland, Ohio. Philco had hired the best lawyers in Philadelphia to sue United Air Lines. The lawyers concluded it would be impossible, since there were no laws requiring baggage checks and the plane exploded due to sabotage and not a malfunction.
34. **Following the bombing of Flight #629, the insurance vending machines continued to be used in airports.**
35. The Air Lines Pilots Association lobbied to outlaw the insurance vending machines to remove incentives to commit murder for monetary gain. The insurance companies prevailed.
36. When banks began offering free travel insurance for those purchasing airline tickets with a credit card, the insurance vending machines slowly disappeared from airports. This decision to remove the vending machines had nothing to do with this catastrophe, but the emerging credit card industry.
37. Stapleton Airfield became Stapleton Airport, and later Stapleton International Airport. In 1995, it closed when the new Denver International Airport opened.
38. By February 2005, Denver International Airport began screening all checked baggage for explosives when it implemented TSA mandatory screening of all passengers and luggage.
39. Copycat bombings of commercial flights occurred over the next two decades.
40. United Airlines, at the time of this writing, still uses Flight Number 629, between Washington, D.C., and Chicago.
41. Marty Hobgood showed her daughter, Marian, for the first time in 42 years in 1997, the cufflinks, and watch with the FBI tags still left on them. Marty's road ahead would be rough.



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This list of firsts and interesting facts may be updated in the future and was compiled for:

- Media and the many individuals interested in this first-ever domestic terrorism
- The surviving families of those lost that fateful day, and
- Others to realize that whenever evil acts occur, real families are left devastated, struggle to pick up their lives, and try to find meaning out of it all.

Once media dies down, how do families cope?

Finding My Father - Beyond Tragedy, Through Trauma, and Into Freedom tells the rest of the story, and is only one among 43 others.

Marty Hobgood's faith kept her hanging onto life in midst of her grief and shattered dreams. Forty-two years later, in 1997, Marian Hobgood Poeppelmeyer heard her mother's story for the first time. Her mother never carried bitterness or hate in her heart. Rather, she told Marian that Marian's counterpart her age was alive somewhere and that her heart always went towards the wife of Graham who, too, was left behind with a baby, but in a world of hostility and shame.

She also told Marian,

"There was not a couple more in love than your daddy and I.
Not a day in 42 years has passed that I have not thought of him."

Marty secretly carried that ache in her heart for the man she loved all the days of her life.

After losing a loved one by any evil act, much time is needed to heal and move forward in life. The pain and emptiness rarely goes away. Whether you have experienced such hardships or other types of trauma and loss, a message for you is that you do not have to suffer alone:

There is hope beyond tragedy.

If you are suffering or have suffered from deep wounds or loss, check out:

<https://marianpoeppelmeyer.com/freedom-coaching>
Connect at: <https://www.MarianPoeppelmeyer.com>