

A LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER

When an airline accident occurs, almost anywhere in the world, air-safety teams rush to the scene to begin a painstaking effort to establish the cause—and, where possible, to find ways of reducing the chances of similar tragedies. The probe of last week's collision of two 747 jumbo jets on a foggy runway in the Canary Islands may continue for months, as investigators question witnesses and survivors and study the tapes from the flight recorders that were on board both planes. In our cover stories this week we set ourselves a broader task: not only to piece together the narrative of the Tenerife disaster but also to examine the wider question of just how safe air travel is today. Answer: very.



HANNIFIN AFTER A FLIGHT

DAILY KINSHORE

This effort involved many of our correspondents around the world. Madrid Bureau Chief Karsten Prager flew to Tenerife early in the week to begin assembling our detailed account of the tragic crash of the 747s. While he was interviewing the officials involved and the survivors, TIME staffers in London, Amsterdam and our U.S. bureaus talked with pilots, aviation officials and other experts about the entire state of air safety in general.

From Chicago, Correspondent Madeleine Nash reported on traffic-handling procedures at O'Hare Airport, the nation's busiest. Correspondent Marion Knox spent a day in the control tower at New York City's Kennedy Airport for a firsthand look at the pressures facing controllers who must keep track of as many as 87 arrivals and departures in a peak hour.

Much of our reporting came from Washington Correspondent Jerry Hannifin, who has long covered developments in aviation and space for TIME. To this assignment Hannifin brought some particularly apt qualifications: he is not only an associate member of the Society of Air Safety Investigators, which promotes improved crash-probe techniques, but also a pilot of what he describes as the "Lindbergh baby" generation, with nearly 2,500 hours of flying time which he has accumulated over the past 27 years in craft ranging from modern jet interceptors to his own classic Ecoupe and a Cessna 182 that he shares with other enthusiasts.

Hannifin continued to send his files throughout the week to New York, where Senior Writer Ed Magnuson and Associate Editor James Atwater wrote this week's cover stories. But he did manage to take time out at least one evening for a dinner engagement: the Goddard memorial banquet of the National Space Club, which was held in Washington and which presented its 1977 Press Award to Hannifin for "outstanding reporting in covering the U.S. aerospace program."

Ralph P. Davidson

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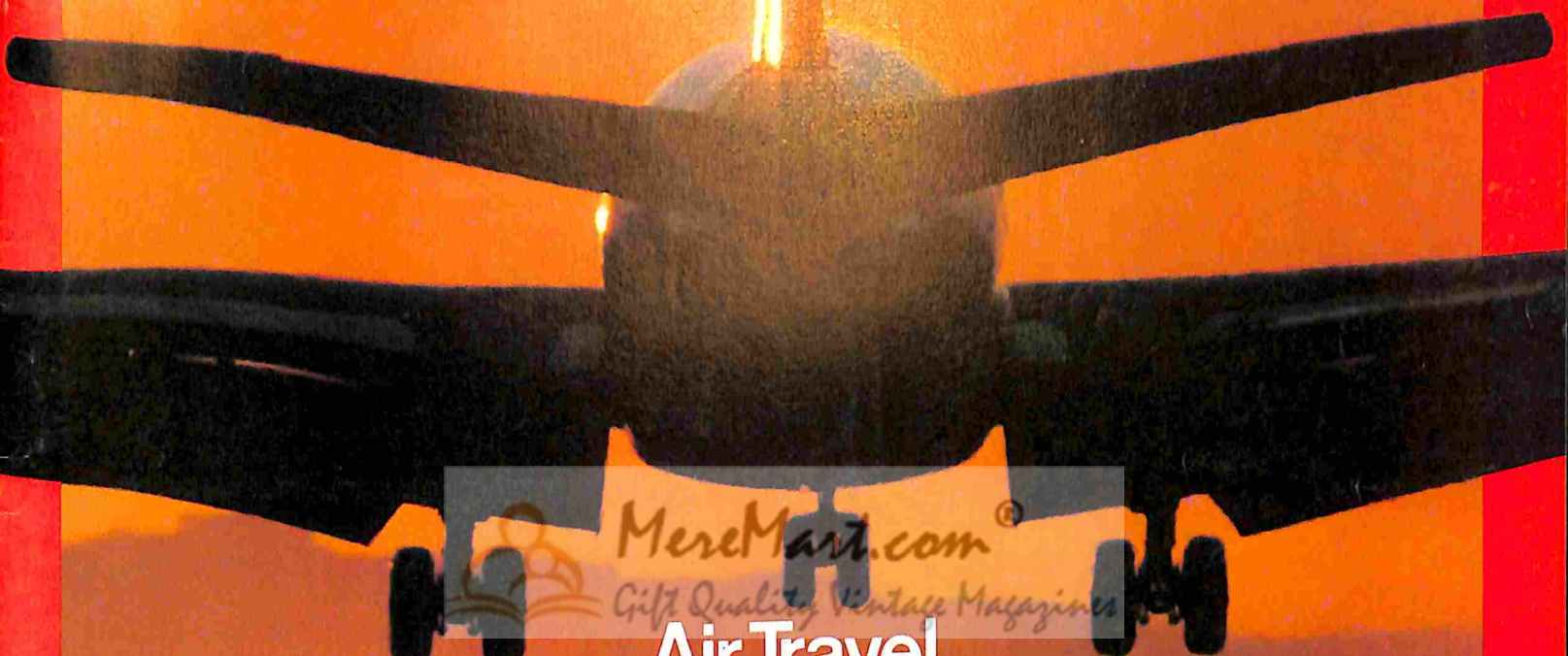
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