

INQUIRY

Dec. 11/90

Tower wasn't on map

Dead pilot's dad raises concerns over omissions

By Sheldon Alberts

(Herald writer)

AIRDRIE — A 118-metre-high tower that an RCMP plane crashed into last winter wasn't marked on the navigation map used by the pilot, a fatality inquiry heard.

And the pilot's father wants to know why.

Special Const. Nancy Puttkemery, 34, and Special Const. Vincent Timms, 42, died Dec. 9, 1989 when their Cessna 182 hit a Cantel cellular phone transmitter tower amid heavy fog north of Crossfield.

An inquiry Monday into their deaths heard Puttkemery, the RCMP's only female pilot, was using a map dated January, 1987. The Cantel-operated tower was erected in January of the same year but wasn't marked on the map.

Puttkemery's father, Gordon Puttkemery, said he doesn't know why the tower wasn't marked on the map. He said he had written to the Cantel company in 1987 but never received a reply.

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Const. Puttkemery and Const. Timms were returning to Edmonton from Calgary, where they had been doing aerial surveillance a day earlier.

Because of bad weather and poor visibility, the plane was flying between 23 and 30 metres above ground, said Tony Allinson, an investigator with the Canadian Aviation Safety Board.

Puttkemery seemed to be following the path of Highway 2 towards Edmonton, said witnesses who saw the plane shortly before it crashed.

"The aircraft came out of the fog . . . straight for us," said Lorne Gustafson, who was headed to Calgary from Innisfail.

"I could see the occupants of the plane. I could see their faces," said Gustafson. "I thought she was going to land."

The Cantel tower lies just east of Highway 2. The plane appears to have struck one of the tower's guy wires. It crashed 600 metres to the northwest, Allinson said.

The warning lights at the tower's top were obscured from the crash site because of fog, said Paul Jaquish, an oil and gas worker who discovered the plane.

Crown attorney Lionel Whittaker has tried to establish why Department of Transport officials, who record the location of ground obstructions, didn't know the tower had been erected.

An updated map printed in September 1989 — more than 2½ years after the transmitter was built — also failed to show where it was located.

Michel Barbeau, a transport department inspector, said he was made aware of Cantel's intention to construct the tower in November 1989. But the department had no records showing its completion.

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