The Legacy of Douglas Corrigan: "Wrong Way" Landings by Commercial Airliners

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Aviators have been landing aircraft at wrong airports since at least Douglas "Wrong Way" Corrigan flew to Ireland instead of California (although his flight is widely regarded to have been an intentional stunt). Despite the tremendous advances in navigational technology since 1938, such incidents continue to occur - most often when two airfields are located in close proximity, and a pilot relies on what he sees out the cockpit window rather than his instruments and charts (although air traffic control sometimes shares at least some of the blame).

This paper briefly summarizes "wrong way" landings by commercial airliners – not including deliberate/emergency landings; landings on the wrong runway at the correct airport; military operations; and approaches aborted before the wheels touched the runway.


2010s

- January 14, 2019 – A Saha Air 707, bound for Payam International Airport in Karaj, Iran (PYM) mistakenly lands at Fat'h Airport; 15 of the 16 aboard are killed, apparently the first-ever civilian fatalities in a "wrong way" landing. [Link](#).
- July 7, 2016 – A Delta Air Lines A320, bound for Rapid City, South Dakota (RAP), mistakenly lands at Ellsworth Air Force Base. [Link](#).
- January 12, 2014 - A Southwest Airlines 737, bound for Branson Airport in Taney County, Missouri (BKG), mistakenly lands at M. Graham Clark Downtown Airport (PLK). [Link](#).
- December 18, 2013 - An Ethiopian Airlines 767, bound for Kilimanjaro International Airport (JRO), mistakenly lands at Arusha Airport (ARK). [Link](#).
- October 13, 2012 - A Sriwijaya Air 737, bound for Minangkabau International Airport in Padang, Indonesia (PDG), mistakenly lands at Tabing Airport, a military airfield. [Link](#).
- August 7, 2012 - A Silver Airways Saab 340B, bound for Clarksburg, West Virginia (CKB), mistakenly lands at Fairmont Municipal Airport (4G7). [Link](#).
- October 30, 2011 - An Azul Linhas Aereas E-195, bound for Teresina, Brazil (THE), mistakenly lands at Domingos Rego Airport in Timon. [Link](#).
- September 7, 2011 - A Colgan Air Saab 340, bound for Lakes Charles, Louisiana (LCH), mistakenly lands at Southland Field (L75) in Carlyss. [Link](#).
- September 13, 2010 - An Aeromexico MD-83, bound for Tuxtla, Mexico (TGZ), mistakenly lands at Francisco Sarabia/Teran Military Airport. [Link](#).

2000s

- April 17, 2009 - A TAAG Angola 737, bound for Lusaka, Zambia (LUN), mistakenly lands at Zambia Air Force City Airport. [Link](#).
• April 8, 2009 - A Turkish Airlines 737, bound for Tbilisi, Georgia (TBS), mistakenly lands at Tbilisi Vaziani, a military airfield. Link.

• August 16, 2006 - A Turkish Sky Airlines 737, bound for Poznan, Poland (POZ), mistakenly lands at Krzesiny, a military airfield. Link.

• March 29, 2006 - A Eirjet A320, bound for Derry, Northern Ireland (LDY), mistakenly lands at Ballykelly, a military airfield. Link.

• December 16, 2005 - A Pakistan International Airlines 737, bound for Karachi, Pakistan (KHI), mistakenly lands at Faisal, a military airfield. Link.

• September 5, 2005 - A Wings Air MD-80, bound for Minangkabau International Airport in Padang, Indonesia (PDG), mistakenly lands at Tabing Airport, a military airfield. Link.


• January 9, 2004 - A Shuttle America Saab 340, bound for University Park Airport in State College, Pennsylvania (SCE), mistakenly lands at Mid-State Regional Airport in Philipsburg (PSB). Link.


• July 30, 2002 - A LOT Polish Airlines aircraft, bound for Kaliningrad, Russia (KGD), mistakenly lands at Chkalovsk, a military airfield. Link.

• June 27, 2001 - A TAM Fokker 100, bound for Teresina, Brazil (THE), mistakenly lands at Timon. See "Brazilian pilot mistakes private airstrip for urban airport," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, June 27, 2001.

• March 14, 2001 - A TWA MD-80, bound for Yampa Valley Airport (HDN), in Steamboat Springs, Colorado mistakenly lands at Craig-Moffat Airport (CIG). Link.

• December 8, 2000 - A BAX Global DC-8, bound for Oscoda-Wurtsmith Airport (OSC) in Oscoda, Michigan, mistakenly lands at Iosco County Airport (ECA) in East Tawas. Link.

• June 17, 2000 - An Air Nova Dash 8, bound for Mont Joli, Quebec (YYY), mistakenly lands at Rimouski Airport (YXK). See "Pilots land at wrong airport," The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec), June 20, 2000.

1990s

• June 22, 1999 - An Avensa 727, bound for Latacunga Airport (LTX) in Ambato, Venezuela, mistakenly lands at Izamva Airport. [According to some reports, the pilot did not complete the landing but did make contact with the ground.] See "Pilot Attempts Wrong Airport Landing," Associated Press, June 24, 1999.


• June 2, 1997 - A Saudi Arabian Airlines 747, bound for Madras International Airport (MAA) in Chennai, India, mistakenly lands at Tambaram Air Force Base. Link.

• May 11, 1997 - A Continental Airlines 737, bound for Corpus Christi, Texas (CRP), mistakenly lands at Cabaniss Field, an abandoned Navy airfield. Link.

• March 27, 1997 - A Sun Pacific International Airlines aircraft, chartered by the Arkansas Razorbacks and bound for Fayetteville, Arkansas (FAY), mistakenly lands at Springdale Municipal Airport (SPZ). Link.
• December 24, 1996 - An Atlas Air 747 bound for Pinal Airpark (MZJ) in Marana, Arizona, mistakenly lands at Avra Valley Airport (AVW). Link.

• October 15, 1996 - A Nations Air 737, bound for Orlando, Florida (MCO), mistakenly lands at Sanford Airport (SFB). Link. See also "Airline's inaugural flight lands at wrong airport in Orlando," Tampa Tribune, October 16, 1996.

• October 3, 1996 - A Continental Express aircraft, bound for Lake Charles, Louisiana (LCH), mistakenly lands at Southland Field (L75) in Carlyss. Link.


• September 5, 1995 - A Northwest Airlines DC-10, bound for Frankfurt, Germany (FRA), mistakenly lands in Brussels, Belgium (BRU), approximately 200 miles off course. [In this case, air traffic control has been blamed for providing incorrect flight plan data to the pilots.] Link. See also Don Phillips, "U.S. Jet Bound for Germany Mistakenly Lands in Belgium," Washington Post, October 1, 1995.

• March 21, 1995 - A Great China Airlines Dash-8, bound for Taipei, Taiwan (TPE), mistakenly lands at Penghu Island. [In this case, the airline has been blamed for providing incorrect instructions to the pilot.] See "Misinformed Pilot Lands at Wrong Airport," Associated Press, March 22, 1995.

• May 5, 1993 - A Jet Airways 737, bound for Coimbatore, India (CJB), mistakenly lands at Sulur Air Force Base. Link. See also "You have arrived at err..." The Advertiser, May 6, 1993.

• December 21, 1991 - A United Airlines 757, bound for San Juan, Puerto Rico (SJU), mistakenly lands at Fernando Ribas Dominicci Airport (a/k/a Isla Grande Airport; SIG). Link.


• November 24, 1990 - A Wings West Fairchild Metro, bound for San Luis Obispo, California (SBP), mistakenly lands at Santa Maria Airport (SMX). Link. See also David Dietz, "Bay Airliner's Landing at Wrong City Probed: Plane Missed Destination By 36 Miles," San Francisco Chronicle, November 27, 1990.


1980s

• March 2, 1989 - A Dan Air BAe 748, bound for Aldergrove Airport (BFS) in Belfast, Northern Ireland, mistakenly lands at Langford Lodge Airport. Link. See also "Flight ends at wrong destination," Independent, March 3, 1989.


- December 19, 1987 - An aircraft, bound for San Luis Obispo, California (SBP), mistakenly lands at Santa Maria Airport. (SMX). Link.
- October 6, 1987 - A United Express BAe 31, bound for Tri-Cities Airport (PSC) in Pasco, Washington, mistakenly lands at Vista Field Airport (S98) in Kennewick. Link.
- July 7, 1987 - A Delta Air Lines 737, bound for Lexington, Kentucky (LEX), mistakenly lands at Capital City Airport (FFT) in Frankfort. Link.
- March 18, 1982 - A Frontier Convair 580 bound for Farmington, New Mexico (FMN), mistakenly lands at Aztec Municipal Airport (N19). Link.
- July 14, 1980 - A Delta Air Lines 727, bound for Miami (MIA), mistakenly lands at Fort Lauderdale (FLL). [In this case, air traffic control has been blamed for providing incorrect flight plan data to the pilots.] Link. See also "Controller Reprimanded in Wrong Airport Landing," Associated Press, July 25, 1980.

1970s


March 24, 1977 - A Pan Am 707, bound for Las Americas Airport in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (SDQ), mistakenly lands at San Isidro Air Force Base. Link. See also "Wrong Airport," Aviation Week and Space Technology, April 4, 1977.


May 25, 1975 - An Aviaco DC-9, bound for Aldergrove Airport (BFS) in Belfast, Northern Ireland, mistakenly lands at Langford Lodge Airport. Link.


June 10, 1973 - A United Airlines 727, bound for Miami (MIA), mistakenly lands at Opa Locka (OPF). Link.


December 14, 1972 - An Interflug Ilyushin-18, bound for Bombay, India (BOM), mistakenly lands at Juhu Aerodrome. Link.

September 24, 1972 - A Japan Airlines DC-8, bound for Bombay, India (BOM), mistakenly lands at Juhu Aerodrome. Link.


1960s


January 3, 1969 - A United Airlines 727, bound for Omaha, Nebraska (OMA), mistakenly lands at Council Bluffs (CBF). Link.


June 29, 1968 - A Pan Am 707, bound for Karachi (KHI), mistakenly lands at a military airfield in Barrackpore. Link.


July 4, 1967 - A TWA 707, bound for Columbus, Ohio (CMH), mistakenly lands at Don Scott Field at Ohio State University (OSU). Link. See also Bob Thomas, "Columbus Recollections: From Stunt to Kangaroo, Aviation Has Rich History," Columbus Dispatch, January 5, 1997.


February 10, 1964 - A Delta Convair 880, bound for Jackson, Mississippi (JAN), mistakenly lands at Hawkins Field (HKS). Link.


June 5, 1963 - An Eastern Air Lines DC-7, bound for Broward International Airport (FLL), mistakenly lands at Fort Lauderdale Executive Airport (FXE). Link.


December 26, 1961 - An Eastern aircraft, bound for Idlewild Airport (IDL), mistakenly lands at Mitchel Air Force Base. Link.

October 18, 1961 - A North Central DC-3, bound for Oshkosh, Wisconsin (OSH), mistakenly lands at Fond Du Lac Airport (FLD). Link.

October 12, 1961 - A North Central aircraft, bound for Big Rapids, Michigan (WBR), mistakenly lands at Reed City (RCT). Link.


1950s

December 28, 1959 - A United Airlines DC-6, bound for Omaha, Nebraska (OMA), mistakenly lands at Council Bluffs (CBF). Link.


December 8, 1957 - A Delta Air Lines aircraft, bound for Greenwood Municipal Airport in Greenwood, Mississippi, mistakenly lands at Yazoo County Airport (87I). Link. See also "Plane Mired Up at Wrong Airport," Los Angeles Times, December 9, 1957. (According to "Wrong-Airport Landings: the Pilots Blush," Los Angeles Times, October 14, 1973, Delta aircraft twice mistakenly landed at Yazoo County Airport in 1957.)


March 25, 1950 - A Greek four-engined aircraft, bound for Northolt Airport in London, England, mistakenly lands at Hendon Field. [The aircraft may have been a C-47 operated by Hellenic Airlines, but I have not been able to confirm this information.] See "Perfect Landing, Wrong Airport," New York Times, March 25, 1950.

1940s


Selected Non-Commercial Incidents

April 2, 2017 - A delegation of Olympics corporate sponsors, bound for Pyeongchang, South Korea (YNY), mistakenly lands in Pyongyang, North Korea (FNJ), supposedly due to a flight planning error. Link.


July 20, 2012 - An Air Force C-17, bound for MacDill Air Force Base, mistakenly lands at Peter O. Knight Field (TPF). Link.
• August 29, 2008 - Two parachutists, intending to deliver the opening football to a North Carolina-McNeese State game at Chapel Hill, mistakenly land at Duke University’s Wallace Wade Stadium. Link.

• November 6, 2007 - A private aircraft, bound for Cedar Rapids (CID), mistakenly lands at Des Moines International Airport (DSM). [The aircraft was transporting presidential candidate Barack Obama.] Link.

• August 8, 2006 - A Nordic Airways MD-80, chartered to operate a Spanair flight to Santiago, Spain (SCQ), is provided incorrect instructions and instead flies to Sevilla Airport (SVQ), approximately 400 miles off course. Link.

• July 20, 2004 - A U.S. Air Force B-52, bound for Farnborough, England (FAB) to perform a low pass at an air show, instead performs the low pass at Blackbushe Airport (BBS). Link.

• May 5, 1997 - A Cyprus Airways aircraft, bound for Larnaca, Cyprus (LCA), lands at Paphos International Airport (PFO). [The pilot, reported to have been working strictly to rule, stated that the landing was necessary to avoid exceeding the total working hours allowed by international regulations.] See “Government blasts pilots union for working to rule,” Associated Press, May 7, 1997.

• April 2, 1997 - A private aircraft, bound for Guatemala City, Guatemala (GUA), mistakenly lands at a military airfield in San Jose. [The aircraft was transporting United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.] See “U.N. chief lands at wrong airport,” The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec), April 3, 1997.

• March 5, 1997 - A private aircraft, bound for Americus, Georgia (ACJ), mistakenly lands at Peachtree-Dekalb Airport (PDK) in Atlanta. [The aircraft was transporting Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. In this case, air traffic control has been blamed for providing incorrect flight plan data to the pilots)] See “Arafat’s plane lands at wrong airport,” United Press International, March 6, 1997.

• May 10, 1976 - A private aircraft, bound for Hopkins Airport in Cleveland, Ohio (CLE), mistakenly lands at Burke Lakefront Airport (BKL). [The aircraft was transporting Paul McCartney and Wings to a show at the Coliseum.] See “Memorable Moments: A Quick Look Back at Cleveland History Shows the Events and People Who Helped Make This City a Happening Place,” Plain Dealer, August 27, 1995.


• May 14, 1972 - A private aircraft, bound for Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW), mistakenly lands at Detroit City Airport (DET). [The aircraft was transporting presidential candidate George McGovern.] Link.

• October 22, 1970 - A private aircraft, bound for Kars, Turkey mistakenly lands at Leninakan, Armenia, then part of the Soviet Union. [The aircraft was transporting two U.S. Army generals.] See “U.S. Blames Pilot and Wind For Landing in Armenia,” Washington Post, October 28, 1970.

• 1969 - A Seaboard World Airways DC-8, operating a military charter flight, bound for Da Nang, Vietnam, mistakenly lands at Marble Mountain Air Facility. Link.


• December 18, 1953 - A U.S. Air Force B-29, bound for Hill Air Force Base in Utah, mistakenly lands at Ogden Municipal Airport (OGD). [One of the eight members of the crew was killed; until 2019, this appears to have been the only “wrong way” fatality.] See “B-29 Crashes in Smog,” New York Times, December 19, 1953.

• March 31, 1952 - A private aircraft, bound for Teterboro Airport (TEB) in New Jersey, mistakenly lands at Newark Airport (EWR). [The aircraft was piloted by Merrill C. Meigs, who was at that time
a consultant to the Civil Aeronautics Administration, and was the namesake of now-closed Meigs Field in Chicago, Illinois. See "Newark Has Air Visitor," New York Times, April 1, 1952.

- May 7, 1942 - During the Battle of Coral Sea, a group of Japanese Aichi Type 99 bombers mistake the U.S.S. Yorktown for a Japanese carrier and attempt to land. Link.