

CUBAN CLIPPER CRASH LAID TO FREAK WAVE

MIAMI, Fla., Aug. 9 (AP)—A freakish wave that knocked the bottom out of a fast-moving four-engined Clipper as it took off from Antilla, Cuba, was blamed by a passenger today for the worst wreck ever suffered by Pan American Airways' Latin-American division.

Seventeen passengers died when the big, luxurious flying boat's back was broken and it sank in Nipe Bay. The wings and part of the fuselage remained barely awash, the cabin under water, and about one-third of the rear section, including a passenger compartment, extended downward into deep water.

Nine passengers and five crewmen were safe. Only those in the extreme front and extreme rear of the plane survived.

William D. Smallwood, San Juan, Puerto Rico, automobile dealer, said he was looking out of a window during the take-off.

"The water was rough, but we were getting off well enough," he stated. "We reached a speed of eighty or ninety miles an hour, and were skimming along ready to pull into the air when a swell higher than the others struck us. It knocked the bottom out of the boat hull and a wall of water came through the plane. The rear compartment broke off and twisted around so that we hung upside down from our safety belts."

He said passengers screamed. Mr. Smallwood released his safety belt, kicked a hatch door open and swam to safety. He praised the crew highly, declaring that they saved most of the nine passengers who survived.

Juan Martinez, director of the Juvenile Home at San Juan, credited the steward, Raymond Whitmarsh of Miami, with saving his life. Unable to swim, Mr. Martinez emerged from the wreck carrying a suitcase, with his glasses still on his nose, and Mr. Whitmarsh assisting him.

The passengers and two crewmen were brought here by a relief plane.