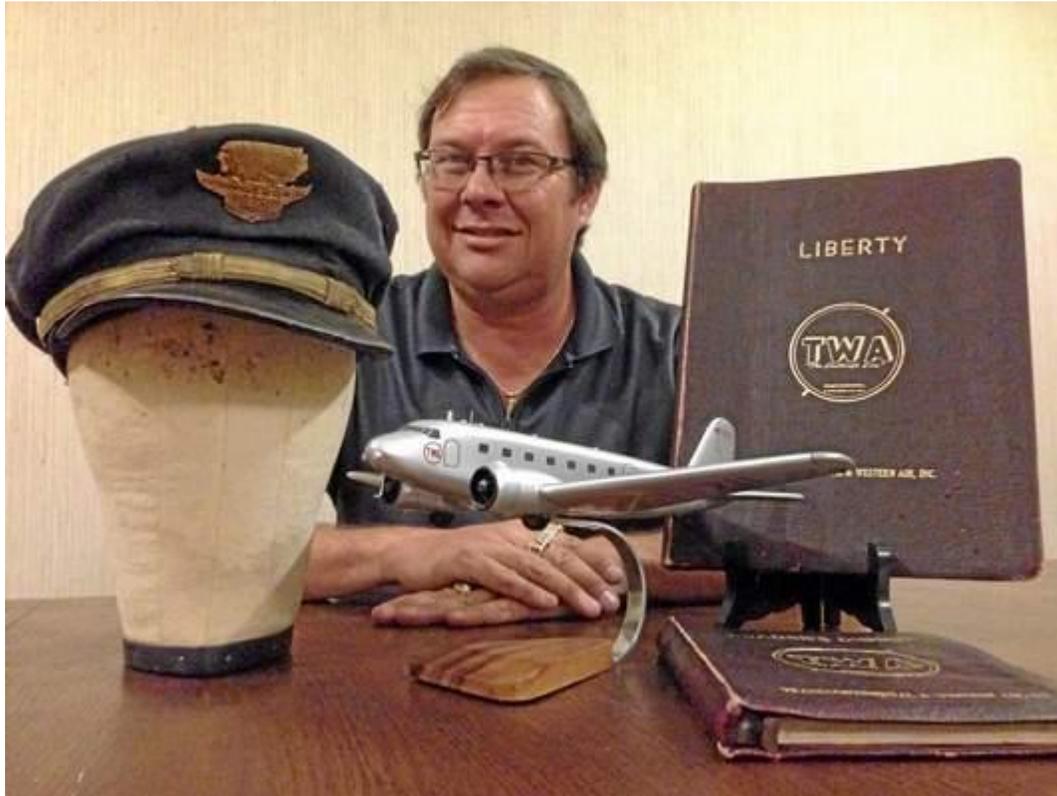


By [Kristina Hernandez](#), *Redlands Daily Facts*

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Bob Hoskin, owner of Variety Antiques, displays an unearthed collection of items documenting the 1938 Yosemite TWA crash. Among the items are a TWA pilot's hat, leather-bound magazines found on board, photos of the crash site and those involved in the search parties and newspaper clippings.

Photo by Kristina Hernandez-Staff

REDLANDS >> Every weekend, many scour through yard sales in hopes of uncovering antique treasures.

One Sunday morning in 2009, area resident Bob Hoskin uncovered something not seen in decades — a cedar chest containing accounts of the 1938 Yosemite Transcontinental and Western Air plane crash.

Only he didn't know it at the time.

The contents were uncovered off Buena Vista Street here in town nearly 71 years after the crash claimed the lives of the nine on board. The wreckage was discovered by a 23-year-old Fresno fruit packer and part-time gold prospector, H.O. Collier III, buried in the snow of Buena Vista Crest in Yosemite.

The yard sale was run by Collier's daughter, who lived in town.

"I was the first person there," Hoskin said. "This lady was dragging out a cedar chest, so I helped her put it where she wanted it and asked if I could go through it. I opened it up and there was a

bunch of paperwork, (but) among (it all) there was a little cardboard box, and in this cardboard box this hat was sitting upside down.”

That hat belonged to one of the crash victims — M. H. Salisbury, an off-duty TWA pilot who was returning home to Kansas City.

“I know that sometimes these hat badges can be valuable, so I turned (the hat) up and knew I had something,” Hoskin said.

He paid for the chest and its contents and hit a few more yard sales before settling down for the day. Once settled, he dove further into the chest.

Inside he uncovered photos of the crash site by photographers capturing a search party that Collier led through the park to find the wreckage, two leather-bound magazines — a Reader’s Digest and Liberty Magazine — commonly found on TWA planes, and a handwritten account of Collier’s experience.

The plane had taken off on March 1, 1938, from San Francisco for Winslow, Ariz. California was in the midst of one of its most severe storms in more than 60 years, causing the plane to be rerouted from its original destination.

According to reports, the plane crew had radioed their intention to land in Fresno, but they never made it. Reports said the plane was off course, causing it to get caught in the severe storm and crash land into Yosemite at speeds up to 200 mph.

Three months went by before Collier discovered the wreckage after TWA President Jack Frye offered a reward of \$1,000.

Dozens joined the search efforts, including Collier, who left his job on June 7 and headed toward Yosemite. He found the wreckage on June 12.

The bodies of the nine victims — Salisbury, pilot John D. Graves, First Officer Clyde W. Wallace, stewardess Martha Mae Wilson, Mr. and Mrs. Walts of San Francisco, Mr. V. Krause and Stanford University students Jay Tracy Dirlam and Mary Louise Dirlam.

Eight were thrown from the 12 passenger DC-2 at impact, said Hoskin. Wilson was found inside the wreckage.

As Collier stumbled upon the wreckage, he made sure to grab a hat lying near the plane and a briefcase to bring back with him. Why? For proof, Hoskin explained.

Collier received a reward of \$1,000 for his efforts.

Hoskin’s collection includes the stub from the check received from TWA officials, and a letter asking Collier to return the hat to the company. Collier ignored the request.

“He became a local hero. He was the man for six weeks, and was back to being a normal guy some time after that,” Hoskin said.

Hoskin, who owns and operates Variety Antiques in the area, has no intention of selling the collection.

Though he had the items appraised — items could fetch thousands for Hoskin's pocketbook — he opted to go a different route.

He wants to instead tell Collier's story, and is currently reaching out to television networks to make it a reality.

He talked with relatives of Collier to get their stories about the man born on June 25, 1914, and served in the Marine Corps in World War II. He died months before his 91st birthday on March 3, 2005. He is buried at Riverside National Cemetery, and Hoskin believes he lived in Redlands for a time.

He received permission from Collier's family to share his story and the contents he uncovered, which included headlines from newspapers up north that had covered the crash and the events that followed.

Rejection letters Collier received from magazines of the time are also in the collection.

"(His story) was never published. He had tried for several years to get his story out there. And after reading (the rejection letters) it touched a soft spot in my heart — I wanted to preserve that history in his honor," Hoskin said. "What people don't realize is this crash was very detrimental to our aviation history because at that point all they used was radio signals ... and when the plane crashed, they were on their own. There wasn't any way of finding them. And another pilot with a different airliner got tired of that. ... He wanted to do something about it, so he invented the homing beacon."

Newspaper articles and history books document that pilot's story, but Collier's still remains relatively unknown.

Hoskin is hoping to change that — and allow fans or those seeking information on aviation history to unearth a new story.

"It's not about the money," he said. "It's about bringing the historical point of this story that this guy — literally — risked his life and went out in the wilderness by himself in the middle of winter to bring closure.

"I'll never sell the collection. Am I trying to sell the story? Absolutely. I'm only trying to sell the story to get it out there and expose it for Collier."