



# The Laura Taber Barbour Award

## 1956-2006

Sixty-one years ago — April 14, 1945 — a Douglas DC-3 with 17 passengers and three crewmembers was en route from Pittsburgh to Birmingham, Alabama, U.S. The captain of Pennsylvania-Central Airlines Flight 142 had checked several sources to learn the weather at Morgantown, West Virginia, a scheduled stop where minimums were a 1,000-ft ceiling and 1 mi visibility and instrument approaches were not authorized. The captain and first officer discussed the weather. The captain reported that he would “take a look” in the Morgantown vicinity and decide whether to land or proceed to the next scheduled destination.

The pilots encountered a continually lowering ceiling and flew the airplane through the irregular cloud base. At 1658 local time, the airplane crashed near the top of a ridge at about 2,100 ft.

It was 7 mi off course. The airplane was destroyed by the impact and a subsequent fire, and all its occupants were killed.

The terrible event probably didn’t attract much attention, except among grieving relatives, in a nation that had been fighting a world war for more than three years. But it resulted in the creation of an award, presented by Flight Safety Foundation at its annual International Air Safety Seminar, recognizing individual or group effort that helps avoid aviation tragedies.

The Laura Taber Barbour Award was established in 1956 by Clifford E. Barbour and his son in memory of Laura Taber Barbour, killed in the controlled-flight-into-terrain accident at Morgantown. The recipient is selected by independent aviation professionals on the basis of these criteria:

- A significant individual or group effort contributing to improving aviation safety, with emphasis on original contributions.
- A significant individual or group effort performed above and beyond normal responsibilities.

The award has been presented every year since 1956. The recipients in recent years are Capt. Robert L. Sumwalt (2003), Kay Yong, Ph.D. (2004) and Capt. Ralph S. Johnson (2005). The award for 2006 went to Don Bateman for his many outstanding contributions to aviation safety, particularly his leadership in developing the ground-proximity warning system, which has been instrumental in reducing CFIT accidents such as that which took the life of Mrs. Barbour. 

— Rick Darby

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