officer Robert E. Lewis and stewardesses Jean Storer and Shirley Wheelhouse. Captain Ator stated that the aircraft was cruising at 18,000 feet when "...without any warning whatsoever, there was a terrific jar. My first thoughts were that we had hit a duck or something solid." The first officer wrote that "...the panel vibrated, warning lights lit, and the fire bell rang...I grabbed #4 and feathered, and...it took two hands to get the feather knob - the throttles were flying up and down and the wings were shaking."

Engine out procedures were completed, and after a visual check for damage, Captain Ator stated that first officer Lewis "...turned to me and said, 'Doc, better get this darned thing on the ground. The #4 engine is gone and the nacelle is on fire.' By this time I had the ship slowed down, called for the gear and 20 degree flaps and started for the ground."

The DC-6 was descending at about 2500' per minute, with "...Bob keeping check on the fire and giving all the information he could over the radio." Deming, New Mexico, was the initial choice for landing, but at about 500 feet, the fire appeared to go out, Captain Ator decided to reverse urse and land at El Paso. At that oint, however, "...Bob took another check on it and looked it over real good, and he told me that he thought he could see some of the leading edge of the wing peeling back...not knowing how badly the wing was damaged, we thought the best thing to do was put it on the ground...we thought it best to go to a lighted field - Columbus looked mighty good." So the Captain headed for tiny Columbus, just inside the southern border of New Mexico.

Meanwhile, in the cabin, the stewardesses prepared for an evacuation. The forty-two passengers listened calmly to the instructions of the stewardesses - with one exception. When questioned later about passenger cooperation, First Stewardess Jean Storer stated that "...there was one man who would have liked to take a walk at 18,000 feet, but otherwise everyone was fine."

She went on to describe her encounter with the man, who was up and arguing with her colleague, Miss Wheelhouse: "Well, I was coming back up again and Shirley had her fist doubled up and was standing in front of him and she said, 'Jean, he won't sit down,' so I pushed her aside and started to cuff him...he just kept saying, 'Look, lady, it's my life. Where's your parachutes? Where do you keep them?' and he wanted to go. He said, 'you can open the door and jump out,' and I told him we had 42 people on the airplane, and it was going to stay

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