

PLANE CRASH

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Three Soldiers, Badly Burned, in Hospitals

Transport Hits Garnet Peak, Bursts Into Flames

Ranks With Nation's Worst Military Air Disasters —
Sergt Lee, Clothes Completely Burned From Body,
Hero of Disaster — Has Only 50-50 Chance to
Live — Darkness Hampered Rescuers

Peru, Aug. 16—(AP)—A large army transport plane carried 17 men to flaming death last night when it crashed on isolated 2200-foot Garnet peak on Peru mountain, located in one of the most inaccessible spots in the Berkshires.

Three severely burned men survived the crash, which with the exception of mishaps to lighter-than-aircraft, was one of the worst tragedies in the history of United States military aviation.

Sheared Off Tree Tops

Shearing off the tops of trees for a distance of about 100 yards before it crashed onto a level area atop the peak, the plane immediately burst into flames, the public relations officer at Westover field said.

Sergt Robert Lee of Columbus, O., his own clothes completely burned from his body—made two trips from the flaming wreckage, dragging four fellow passengers to what he thought was safety.

First, he carried out Private James Fern of Abington, Va., and Private Alonzo Pearson of Windber, Pa., who are given a good chance for recovery at Mercy hospital, Pittsfield. Then he carried out two others only to find that they already were dead.

Walked Nearly Mile in Daze
Signaling for help by firing three shots from his revolver, Sergt Lee walked dazedly three-quarters of a mile through dense underbrush to the nearest roadway, and directed state police back to the scene of the wreck. He was taken to St Luke's hospital, Pittsfield, where he was given a "50-50" chance for recovery.

The army said that an investigation of the crash, which occurred at 9.30 p. m., already was under way, and that a crew from Westover field was at work recovering the bodies, some of which already had been brought out.

On Flight From South
The plane was on a routine mission out of Fope field, Fort Bragg, N. C., the army said, and left Mitchell field, J. I., early last evening.

Peru's civilian defense aircraft observation unit first sighted the big craft as it plunged down among the pine trees, 16 miles east of Pittsfield, and notified state police. Then, by firing shotguns in answer to the shot from Sergt Lee's gun, the officers

17 KILLED AS ARMY TRANSPORT CRASHES ON PERU MOUNTAIN

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closed in on the survivor and finally found him.

Except for loss of the airship Akron on April 4, 1933, in which 73 men died, last night's crash was one of the worst in the history of United States military aviation, either army or navy.

Other major disasters included the crash of an airliner at Prenter, W. Va., in which 21 soldiers were killed July 1; the loss of a navy blimp off New Jersey on June 9, 1942, in which 12 men were killed; the crash of an army plane near Denver August 23, 1940, in which nine men died, and the destruction of a naval transport plane near San Diego January 5, 1941, in which 11 lost their lives.

Rescuers Fought Difficulties
Rescue attempts by citizens of Peru, augmented by soldiers, doctors, nurses, wagonmen and other volunteers, were made under the most difficult conditions.

Blatting darkness that made their task "like walking in an inkpot," they were aided only by the distant light of the burning plane, and by red flares and flashlights.

So narrow and winding were the roads stretching from the nearest main highway that only one car could pass at a time and oftentimes machines going in opposite directions were forced into small gullies by the roadside.

Ambulances, hearses, troop trucks and police cars negotiated the dangerous terrain at slow speed and sometimes guides with flashlights ran ahead to keep the roads clear.

Public Kept Far Away
As soon as the army regulars reached the wreckage, a strong guard was posted throughout the area and civilians not engaged in rescue work were kept at least two miles away.

Officers in charge of rescue operations said that all bodies probably would be brought out of the wilderness by midnight, but added "disposition of the wreckage has not yet been decided upon."

Army officials at Westover field, which sent a detail of 25 officers and men to the scene Saturday night immediately upon being informed of the crash, said Saturday night that a list of the fatalities would not be released until it was positively established that all next of kin had been notified. It was intimated that the list would not be available until some time today.

Army Men Honored at Peru Service

Memorial Dedicated At Spot Where 16 Fliers Lost Lives

HINSDALE—In military manner, the memorial on Garnet Peak was dedicated yesterday afternoon to the memory of 16 Army fliers who lost their lives there Aug. 15, 1942. The dedication was made by Rev. A. Rawson Holgate, a former pastor of the Middlefield Congregational Church, assisted by members of the Benjamin F. Sullivan Post of the American Legion from Dalton. The families of three of the men who died there were represented, and one of the three survivors of the crash, James Fern, now of Lee, was in attendance.

The dedication followed the annual home coming service of the Peru Congregational Church. Rev. Albert H. Plumb of Hartford, Conn., pastor of the church 50 years ago, gave an historical address at the church service which was conducted by Rev. S. R. Swift, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Hinsdale and Peru. Prior to the home coming service which began at 2, a basket lunch was held on the church lawn with coffee and lemonade furnished.

Four Miles From Highway

The spot on Garnet Peak where the monument and plaque stand is more than four miles off the main road. Under the direction of Cpl. James Ashe of the Pittsfield State Police barracks and the town constables the traffic moved along the dirt road to a spot less than a half mile from the monument. A few feet from the five-foot memorial a pile of twisted scrap metal, part of the fatal plane, was neatly piled and in the wooded area around the little shrine other pieces of fuselage lay, worn and faded by the weather of the last four years, but still vivid reminders of war's sacrifices.

The ceremony opened with a prayer by Rev. Holgate and a welcome to those present. His brief dedication address was titled "A Rendezvous With Life," and he referred to the rendezvous with life enjoyed by the 16 fliers who paid the supreme sacrifice while young and vigorous. He referred also to the untimely death of Jesus Christ who was crucified at the age of 33.

"A man is a failure only if he fails to utilize his powers and abilities to the fullest advantage. Even if a baseball team wins a game, it is not a success if it has played an ignoble game," he said.

He added that he believed the 16 fliers who lost their lives in the plane crash would tell us to live nobly, if they had the power to. In closing he stated that he was not dedicating the memorial to the death of the fliers, but to their rendezvous with life.

Families and friends of the deceased who made the trip to Peru include members of the family of Frank A. Lastosky. They were his mother, Mrs. Genevieve Lastosky, a sister, Teresa, his brothers, Walter and Adam and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Yuhas, all of Swoyerville, Pa. The family of Lieut. Gardner V. Plain of Ransomville, N.Y., was represented by his widow, his father, Dr. John C. Plain, and his brother and sister-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Carliss M. Plain. Mrs. Ethel Field, the mother of Pilot Lt. Joseph J. Field, had flown from Atlanta, Ga., to be present. Another

distinguished guest was 92-year-old James F. Merchant of 8 Shepard Street, Westfield, a former Pittsfield and Peru resident. Mr. Merchant's father was killed in action in the Civil War.

Legionnaires present from the Dalton post were Delmar W. Stevens, Lewis E. Armsby, Donald F. Filio, Charles H. Callaghan, Stanley A. Smith, Ernest W. Beals, George S. Galusha, George C. Galusha, Harry R. Stevens, Maurice L. Callahan, Albert H. Jandro, Edward G. Belcher, William J. White, Albert Phillips, Gordon Briggs and George Krapf, past county commander. The group was accompanied by Commander Maurice J. Callaghan. Orville A. White of Dalton, bugler, played taps following a three-gun salute by the Legionnaires.

Present from the Pittsfield post were Martin Bolander and Leo Lincoln. Past County Commander William Connelly from Great Barrington represented his post.

Pilot's Mother Visits Crash Scene *Aug 17, 1943*



After a most difficult trip through brush and over fallen trees brought down in last winter's ice storm, Mrs. Ethel M. Fields of Atlanta, Ga., mother of Lieut. Joseph James Fields, pilot of the transport that crashed at Garnet Peak, Peru, Aug. 15, 1942, taking 16 lives including that of the pilot, visited the spot where the ship piled up yesterday. To the left are Mrs. David Cochran and Mrs. Charles Wheeler, both of Peru, who with newspapermen guided Mrs. Fields to the area. Also in the picture is a rustic cross and wreath of flowers placed there Sunday on the first anniversary of the crash by these two women and other Peru residents. Mrs. Fields was most appreciative of the gesture. At the scene she displayed unexpected control of the emotion she must have experienced. Before leaving Peru Mrs. Fields donated to the fund for a permanent memorial to the 16 boys.

Exhibit - August 17, 1943

Peru To Dedicate Memorial

Sunday Ceremony Will Take Place Where 16 Men Died

PERU—A monument on Garnet Peak will be dedicated Sunday as a memorial to 16 Army officers and enlisted men who lost their lives there Aug. 15, 1942. The event will be in conjunction with the annual homecoming service at the First Congregational Church from 2 to 3.15 the 15th. The disaster which claimed the lives of 16 soldiers and put three other soldiers, badly burned, in hospitals, occurred when a large Army transport plane en route from Fort Benning, Ga., to Boston, sheared off tree tops for 100 yards, crashed, and burst into flame.

Families To Attend

The families of at least two of the victims will be in Peru Sunday to participate in the ceremony. They are the pilot's mother, Mrs. Ethel Field, who expects to fly from her home in Atlanta, Ga.; and Mrs. Eleanor Plain of Ransomville, N.Y., widow of Lieut. Gardner V. Plain. Mrs. Plain will be accompanied by her father-in-law, Dr. John Plain, also of Ransomville. Other families of the victims may be on hand.

Rev. A. Rawson Holgate, former pastor of the Middlefield Congregational Church, will officiate at the ceremony and will be assisted by members of the Benjamin F. Sullivan Post, American Legion of Dalton. There will be a basket lunch on the church lawn from 12.30 to 2 in the afternoon, followed by the church homecoming

service. Coffee, tea and lemonade for the basket lunch will be furnished from the Town Hall. Committee members stated last night that arrows would be posted to guide visitors to the site of the ceremony, about four miles from the top of Peru Hill. Edgar Eriggs of Dalton has donated his sound equipment so that everyone may hear the address.

The five-foot monument was erected some time ago, but the dedication plaque arrived only this week and was put in place today.

The inscription on the tablet is as follows:

"This tablet is erected in the memory of the following men who gave their lives here in a plane crash Aug. 15, 1942, while in the service of their country: Joseph J. Fields, Atlanta, Ga., who was a second lieutenant and pilot; Hyman B. Flinkman of Baltimore, Md.; Sam B. Hathorn of Printess, Miss.; John H. Kelley of Titus, Ala.; Robert W. Lamont of Shawnee, Okla.; Frank A. Lastosky of Kingston, Pa.; Joseph C. Neurohr, Brooklyn, N.Y.; Jack E. Palmer, Antigo, Wis.; 1st Lt. Gardner V. Plain, Ransomville, N.Y.; Stanley E. Racine, Pensacola, Fla.; Norman Sands, Chicago, Ill.; Steve E. Schollin, Oak Lawn, Ill.; Charles M. Scott, York, Pa.; James F. Thompson, Hollywood, Cal.; Austin W. Weeces, Craig, Neb.; and James D. Westbrooks of Anderson, S.C.

One of the survivors, James Fern, married a Lee girl and lives in that town.

Anniversary of Peru Crash Brings Note From Mother

The second anniversary of the plane crash at Garnet Peak, Peru, where 16 members of the Army Air Force died and three were saved, was yesterday. The day brought a letter to The Eagle from Mrs. Hazel L. Lee of Columbus, Ohio, mother of one of the three who lived through the crash and fire. She wrote: "We are still thinking with grateful hearts of the people of Pittsfield and Peru and the kindness that was extended to us during our many weeks there."

Two of the young men, Sgt. Robert G. Lee, 25, son of Mrs. Lee, and Cpl. Alonzo S. Pearson, of Windsor, Pa., are living together in Columbus, Ohio, where they are working in the Curtis-Wright plant on the assembly lines of a Helldiver bomber factory. Sgt. Lee wears the Soldiers' Medal of Honor awarded him in this city for saving the lives of two of his crew mates. The third of the trio saved is Sgt. James Fern of Abington, Va., who more than a year ago married Miss Florinda Cuillio of Lee, a supervising nurse at the House of Mercy where Fern recovered from injuries. Sgt. Fern is now assigned to Fort Benning, Ga.

Lee and Pearson were hospitalized in Pittsfield and at Lovell Hospital, Fort Devens, for a total of 15 months. Fern, less seriously injured, returned to duty after a shorter period at the House of Mercy.