

C O P Y
AIR RESCUE SERVICE
DETACHMENT 8 (C2d AAF BG)
McChord Field, Tacoma, Washington

4 August 1947

SUBJECT: Final Mission Report

TO: Commanding Officer
Air Rescue Service
MacDill Field, Florida

1. MISSION NUMBER Thirty-Nine.

2. NATURE.

a. At 0400 PST, 1 August 47, ARMY FLIGHT SERVICE notified this detachment that a plane had been seen to crash and burn thirteen (13) miles south of KELSO, Washington (46°08'N, 122°05'W).

3. ACTION TAKEN

a. 1 Aug 47. At 04:30 PST, AFS received information from Mr. O. C. Clark, local sheriff of KELS0, Wash., that the scene of the crash was fifteen (15) to twenty (20) miles east of KELS0 in the vicinity of COMLE CREEK. The KELS0 Chief of Police saw an aircraft fly low over the town, then crash and burn to the east. The time was about 0230 P.M. A check of aircraft known to be in the vicinity revealed that 8-26 #1316 had departed MCCORD FIELD at 0212 PST for HAMILTON FIELD, California. The weather was reported as CFR. A full moon made visibility exceptionally good. The pilot's name was CAPT. W. C. DAVIDSON; the plane carried three (3) additional persons. The Base Operations Officer and Base PIO were notified. This detachment began organizing a ground party of base personnel to supplement that being formed by the KELS0 Chief of Police. At 0500 PST information was received from KELS0 by AFS that ground fog in the valleys at the scene of the crash was preventing a ground party from locating the plane. Since no communication had been received from 8-25 #1316, it was assumed that it was the plane reported as crashed. ARS C-47 was pre-flighted to transport the Army ground party to KELS0 but a check of the field conditions there deemed it advisable to use a smaller aircraft. Of the two C-46s available, one belonging to AFS was unserviceable after a night flight; the other, belonging to AACE, was readied even though a responsible officer of that organization was not present to authorize the flight. Fog at KELS0 prevented take-off until 0700 PST. The ground party, led by CAPT. W. L. LITTLE and CAPT. T. H. FORSEBERG, consisted of six men including a medical technician and a photographer. At 0800 PST, the KELS0 Chief of Police notified AFS that a passenger of the crashed airplane was in his office and had confirmed

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The belief that the crash was that of the unreported C-25. The Passenger, Sgt. E. L. TAPP, of PT. LANTON, SEATTLE, was uninjured, but reported that the crew chief, T/Sgt. N. D. MATHEWS, was at a farm house near the scene of the crash and was injured. Sgt. TAPP then led an ambulance to Sgt. MATHEWS who was subsequently taken to a local hospital. At 0610 PST an attempt was made to telephone Sq. B at HAMILTON FIELD but no answer was received; however, it was known that HAMILTON AFS was aware of the incident and would notify Sq. B. At 0700 PST Capt. LITTRELL departed in a C-45 for RIELSO. At 0746 PST Sq B was contacted by phone and given a flash report. At 0906 PST CAPT LITTRELL phoned and informed that he had placed CAPTAIN FORSDEN in charge of Army personnel proceeding to the scene of the crash. No aerial search was necessary as civilians in the area knew the exact location of the crash and had reported finding one (1) body in the wreckage. CAPT. LITTRELL prepared to fly Sgt's TAPP and MATHEWS to MCCORD FIELD for medical attention, arriving at 0945 PST. The survivors stated that they believed neither the pilot nor co-pilot has parachuted from the plane. The cause of the incident was at this time determined to be a fire in the left engine. CAPT LITTRELL was informed by Sgt. TAPP that he believed classified documents had been aboard the plane; CAPT FORSDEN was instructed to take necessary precautions. An ambulance met the plane at MCCORD Field carrying the two survivors and took them to the hospital. Interrogation revealed that the left engine had caught fire in the power section and flames and smoke had spread to the flight deck almost immediately. The crew chief, MATHEWS, assisted TAPP in attaching his chest pack and TAPP abandoned the plane at an estimated altitude of 10,000 ft (this fact is doubted but is not considered necessarily relevant). MATHEWS helped the pilot and co-pilot attach their chest packs (all personnel had been wearing the harness) and as he left the plane was aware that the co-pilot was preparing to follow. The pilot had started to leave and, to the best recollection of MATHEWS, was partially standing and holding the control wheel with his left hand. MATHEWS' statements indicate that proper emergency procedures had been performed but that the flames had enveloped the entire left side almost immediately. TAPP stated that, because of the full moon and good visibility, he saw MATHEWS leave the plane and was able to follow the plane to the ground and that he saw no one else bail out. The ship was enveloped in flames and was beginning to fall apart before hitting the ground where it exploded and burned about one (1) mile from where he, TAPP, landed. He lit in a tree, and not knowing how to release his parachute of the quick-detachable kind, cut himself loose from the harness with his pocket knife. He kicked and struggled and eventually jumped to the ground, receiving a jolt on impact but was unable to guess how far he had fallen. He then followed a cow path for an estimated two (2) miles to a farm house, arriving after MATHEWS. Meanwhile, as MATHEWS cleared the plane he turned and saw the plane strike the ground, explode and burn. Just before or just at the time of impact he saw an object a few feet clear of the plane but did not know whether it was a person or part of the plane. MATHEWS also lit in a tree, and after freeing himself from his harness, fell to the ground where he injured his back. He lost consciousness and on recovering went to the burning plane, about fifty

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(50) yards away. Flares were going off and he thought best to leave the scene. He heard a stream nearby and followed it until he came to a house and aroused the occupants. Soon TAPP arrived at the same house and, being uninjured, was driven into town. Then he led an ambulance to effect transportation of MATHEWS to a hospital. Meanwhile, civilians reached the scene of the crash where they found one body. At 0930 PST, a message from Sq B informed that top secret material was in the navigators kit and to request Commanding Officer MCCORD FIELD to expedite all available information to Commanding Officer HAMILTON FIELD. Meanwhile, CAPT FORSBERG and four (4) enlisted men departed KELSO at 0930 PST for scene of the crash. They were transported by the WASHINGTON STATE POLICE who knew the exact location of the plane (46°00'N - 122°43'W). The ground party determined upon arrival at the scene, that two (2) bodies were in the wreckage. Indications led to the belief that the co-pilot was afire when he left the plane an instant before impact. The pilot's remains were found in the wreckage. Preliminary investigation by CAPT FORSBERG disclosed the planes left wing about one hundred twenty-five (125) yards from the widely scattered portions of the plane. The left wing was intact and had apparently torn off just outboard of the left engine before impact. The forward portion of the wing stub was melted but the rear two thirds indicated that it had ripped loose from the inboard section of the wing. The wing leading edge was undamaged. The navigation and landing lights were unbroken. The aileron was undamaged but the flap section was crushed, leading to the belief that the wing struck the tail section. From these indications it is believed the wing ripped from the airplane just after MATHEWS abandoned the plane. The resulting spin thus prevented the remaining crew members from bailing out although the co-pilot may have been in the hatch. A few civilians were in the area when CAPT FORSBERG arrived and he took precautions to prevent them from disturbing the wreckage. At 1157 PST CAPT LITRELL flew CAPT RICE, U. C., to KELSO. An ambulance dispatched from MCCORD FIELD, met them at KELSO, and was led to the scene of the crash by the STATE POLICE. The bodies were recovered and transported in the ambulance to MCCORD FIELD. CAPT LITRELL returned to MCCORD FIELD where camping equipment was prepared to be dropped to the ground party. CAPT LITRELL made a successful drop at dusk by sighting on a signal fire. The ground party set up camp at the wreckage scene to act as guard and to investigate further the following day. They were relieved of responsibility of all recovered documents by a CIC agent who had arrived about 1800 PST.

b. 2 Aug 47. The ground party remained at the scene of the crash pending official securing of the incident. No aerial activity.

c. 3 Aug 47. MCCORD FIELD Operations Officer departed at 1000 PST to investigate the accident and to relieve CAPT FORSBERG, who returned at 1600 PST. Incident closed.

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5. STATISTICAL SUMMARY

a. GROUND ACTIVITY

- (1) Total man hours by ARS Personnel in field 72
- (2) Total man hours by other Army Personnel
(estimate) 300
- (3) Total man hours by civilian personnel (est) 150
- (4) No. of miles driven by Army Vehicles 500

b. AERIAL ACTIVITY

- (1) Total No. of sorties flown 3
- (2) Total hours flown by Army aircraft 6

c. LOCAL PURCHASES

- (1) None

6. COMMENTS

a. Cooperation received from all civilian agencies concerned was complete and excellent.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. None.

ROBERT H. MASON
Captain, Air Corps
Commanding Officer

1 Incls
1-Photographs

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