

Aircraft Wrecks in the Mountains and Deserts of the American West

SNJ-5 12/14/44

Fifty-seven years of aircraft crash site visitations have provided me many stories to research. One of my favorites is that of North American Aviation SNJ-5, Bu No 51834, piloted by two USMC aviators. On December 14 1944, 2nd Lt. Jerome L. Goebel, and 2nd Lt. Harding H. Ferris departed Marine Air Station, El Toro , CA for a routine instrument training mission. Visibility at the time of departure was unlimited, and Lt. Goebel flew on a northeasterly heading following the Santa Ana River into the San Bernardino Mountains. While flying near Moon Ridge, south of Big Bear Lake, the 550 hp Pratt & Whitney R-1340 began to lose power. 2nd Lt. Goebel applied more power, but without result as the carburetor had iced up. Within seconds a mountain ridge loomed, and the SNJ-5 crashed injuring both pilots. 2nd Lt. Goebel sustained a lacerated forehead, and abrasion to his right arm. 2nd Lt. Ferris suffered a cut on the forehead, and bruises.

At this point in the saga of Bu No 51834, I must rely on what a ranger assigned to the Barton Flats U.S.F.S. Station told me in the summer of 1964. I was working in Barton Flats at YMCA Camp Conrad, as the hike master. The ranger said one of the pilots hiked into Big Bear Lake for help, and that the other pilot was rescued that afternoon. Because the wrecked SNJ could not be easily removed (no heavy lift helicopters in those days) dynamite was used to make the wreck less visible. In the 1950's, the ranger said, the Civil Air Patrol painted yellow X's on the wings and tail to show that the wreckage was not that of a missing aircraft. I visited the SNJ-5 crash site many times during my summers working at Camp Conrad.

In 2021 the wreckage of Bu No 51834 is still visible. Sadly, both of the SNJ-5 crew have passed away. Harding H. Ferris, Major, USMC, on August 10, 2008. Jerome L. Goebel, Colonel, USMC on November 16, 2014.

Special thanks: Craig Fuller at AAIR who located the accident report in his archives. Until this year I did not know the accident date, the names of the flight crew, or the bureau number. It took Craig and his team considerable time to pour over hundreds and hundreds of SNJ accident reports to finally come up with the fate of Bu No 51834. San Bernardino National Forest Ranger, name unknown.

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Additional research, and assistance provided by Marc McDonald, David Mihalik, and Bruce Guberman, videographer. [Click here to view the SNJ-5 video.](#)



