

In Memory of the 66, May They Rest in Eternal Peace?



Douglas R6D-1 Liftmaster transport BuNo 128425 of VR-3 in flight over Belmont, California, U.S. Navy photo dated 25 October 1951

David Trojan, davidtrojan@earthlink.net

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Sometimes the tragedy of an aircraft accident is so great that people want to forget about it and the event is almost lost to history. Such is the case with the worst aviation accident in Hawaii history and the deadliest accident in the history of United States Naval Aviation. The naval aircraft accident involved a Douglas R6D-1 Liftmaster transport which crashed into a mountain in Hawaii on March 22nd, 1955, killing all 66 people on board. I believe that by recounting the events of this tragic accident is a way of remembering and honoring the victims, because they are not forgotten. The families and descendants of the victims deserve to know the truth and the public has a right to know about what happened so long ago. Very little has been previously published about this accident and some of it has been wrong. I want to correct the historical record with this story. This story is dedicated to the remembrance of the 66 victims.

This research project began as a result of curiosity and then became part of Project Remembrance (<http://aircraftwrecks.com/pages/dave%20trojan%20mrp/mrp.htm>) which is dedicated to facilitate requests of next of kin who wish to learn more about the loss of loved ones in aircraft accidents. I struggled for months which turned into years to complete this project. This accident was the most horrific, needless, and saddest that I have ever investigated due to the great loss of life. It is now more than 60 years after the tragic event, but the 66 families have not forgotten, nor have I. I wrote this story in an effort to expose the facts and stories that surround this tragic event.

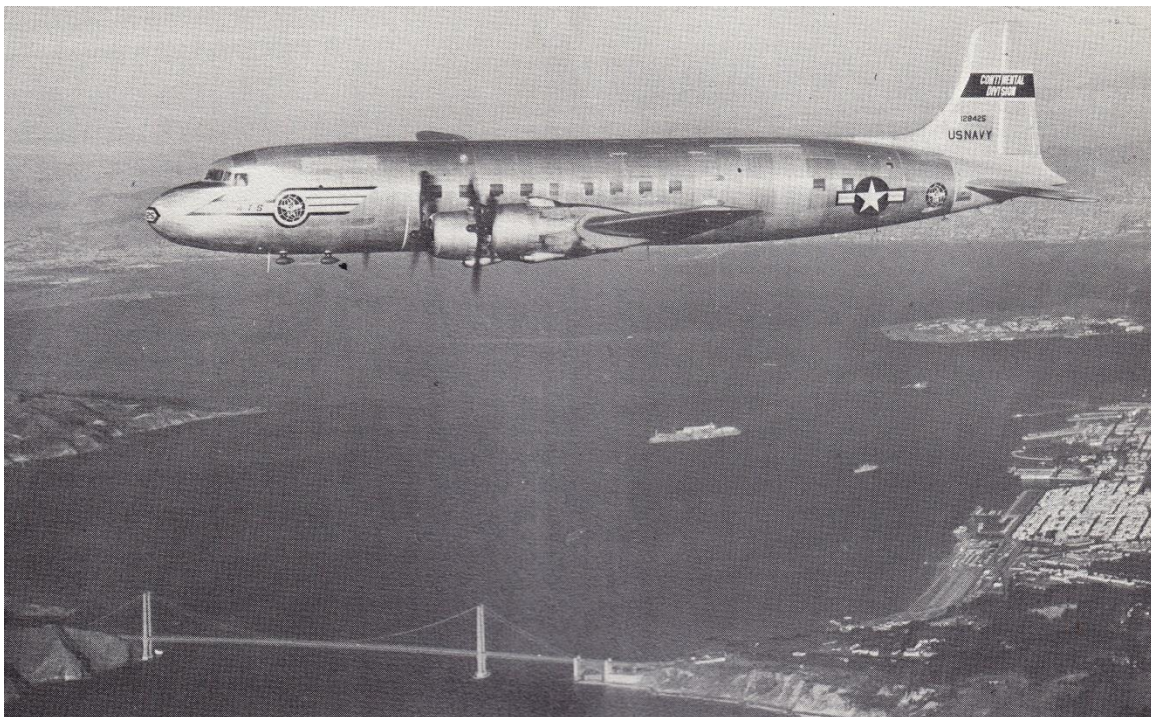
I took a personal interest in this accident for several reasons, one of which is the fact that I worked on radio equipment in the Navy. I never thought for a minute that a radio equipment problem could cause a plane to crash. There were just too many backup communication systems on aircraft to cause an accident. However, in this worst-case scenario, a simple radio failure leads to a chain of events that resulted in the accident. Another reason that I was interested in this accident is because I lived in Hawaii where the accident occurred and it was the worst in state history. Although I lived in Hawaii, it was not easy to determine exactly where the crash site was located or to access the crash site. It took years of research to discover the details and considerable effort to explore the crash site. Lastly, when I was in high school NJROTC during the 1970s, I flew on a R6D Liftmaster transport. The flight was a memorable experience which ignited my interest in aviation and led to a career in naval aviation. I maintain an interest in old propeller driven transport aircraft.



Picture I took of R6D 131577 when I flew on it in 1977

The aircraft involved in the accident was assigned to the Military Air Transport Service (MATs). The history of MATs began when it was activated on June 1st 1948. It was a consolidation of the United States Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) and the United States Air Force's Air Transport Command (ATC) into a single joint command. MATs was the first joint-service command and naval squadrons and aircrews participated in every major MATs airlift operation during its history. During the Berlin Airlift, naval aviators flew transport aircraft from the U. S. to European supply depots. In the Korean War, MATs navy squadrons airlifted some 17,000 battle casualties. This figure represented 25% of the total sick and wounded aero medically evacuated from Korea. The MATs system flew 1.12 million passengers and crossed the Pacific nearly 42,000 times between January 1951 and March 1955 with no major accidents or fatalities.

A major component of MATS was the Naval Air Transport Squadrons. They were designated "VR" squadrons where the "V" stands for Heavier-than-Air and "R" stands for Transport aircraft. VR-3 was one of the first Navy transport squadrons to transfer to the newly formed MATS. At the time, VR-3 was flying the Douglas R5D Skymaster (C-54). In December 1949, VR-3 moved from NAS Patuxent River MD to NAS Moffett Field California as part of the Continental and Pacific Divisions of MATS. VR-3 operated scheduled cargo and personnel flights to Japan and air evacuation flights from the Far East and across the continental U.S. In 1950, VR-3 received the Meritorious Achievement in Flight Safety Award for flying over 12,500 accident free hours between July and December 1950. During 1951, VR-3 flew 17,523 hours with no fatal accidents and won the Flight Safety Certificate award. Beginning in June 1952, VR-3 transitioned from the R5D Skymaster to the R6D-1 Liftmaster aircraft.



VR-3 R6D-1 Liftmaster over San Francisco Bay circa 1954

The R6D-1 Liftmaster used by VR-3 was the U.S. Navy version of the Air Force's C-118 Liftmaster and the civilian DC-6A airliner. The Navy ordered 65 R6D-1s in 1950 and the Liftmaster joined the Navy airlift force beginning in 1952. The R6D aircraft was considered a very dependable transport aircraft. The R6D was 100 feet, 7 inches long with a wingspan of 117 feet, 6 inches and overall height of 28 feet, 5 inches. The R6D-1 was powered by four Pratt & Whitney R-2800 Double Wasp radial engines. The R6D had a cruise speed of 315 miles per hour and a max range of about 4,584 miles. The Naval Historical Center lists "Last Reported in Squadron or Inventory" for the R6D/C-118 as VR-3 in October 1983. However, the last R6D aircraft in military service with the Navy Air Reserves was retired by VR-46 in February 1985.

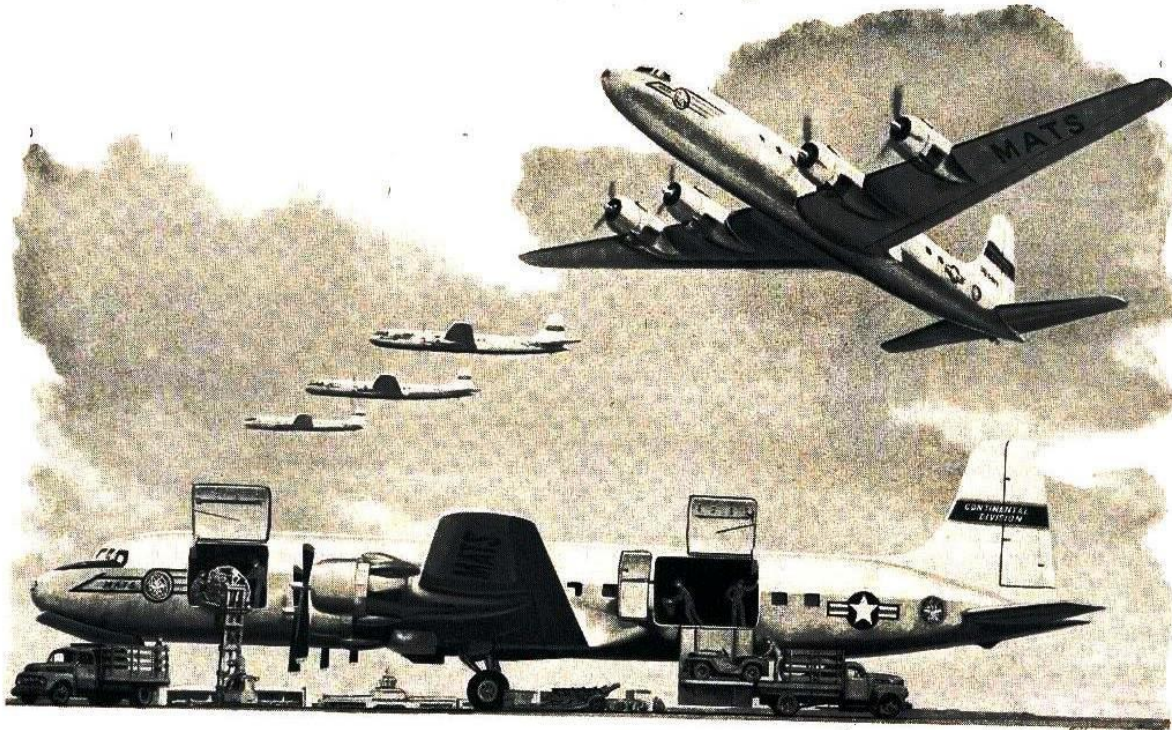
Flying for the Air Force as C-118A and for the Navy as R6D, the Douglas Liftmaster delivers 14-ton payloads 2850 miles non-stop—at the lowest cost.

Outside, Liftmaster shows the same aerodynamic lines as its commercial counterpart, the DC-6A. Inside, there's

room for 28,700 pounds of mixed freight. Large front and rear doors service cargo compartments. A self-powered loading elevator lifts 4,000 pounds from truck bed height to cabin floor level . . . fits either door. Through this combination of speed and utility, Liftmaster achieves

the ultimate in long-range, low-cost transportation of military matériel.

Performance of the Liftmaster is further proof of Douglas leadership in aviation. Planes, produced in quantity to fly faster and farther with a bigger payload, are a basic rule of Douglas design.



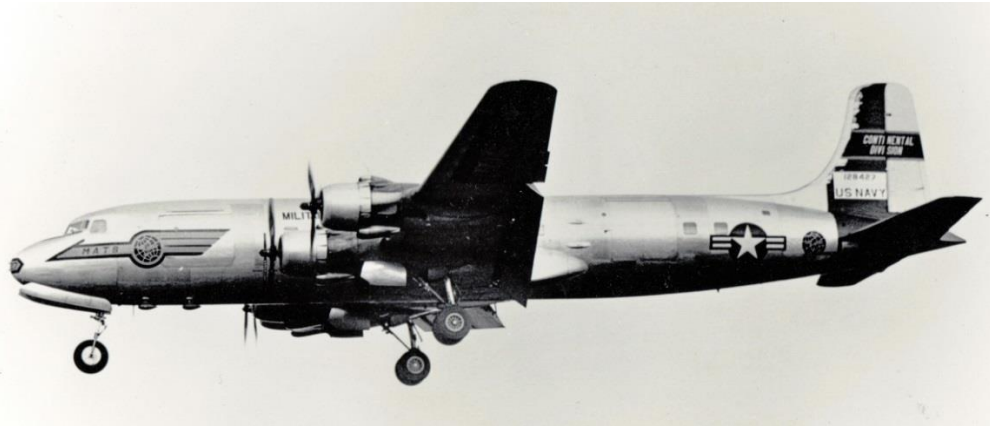
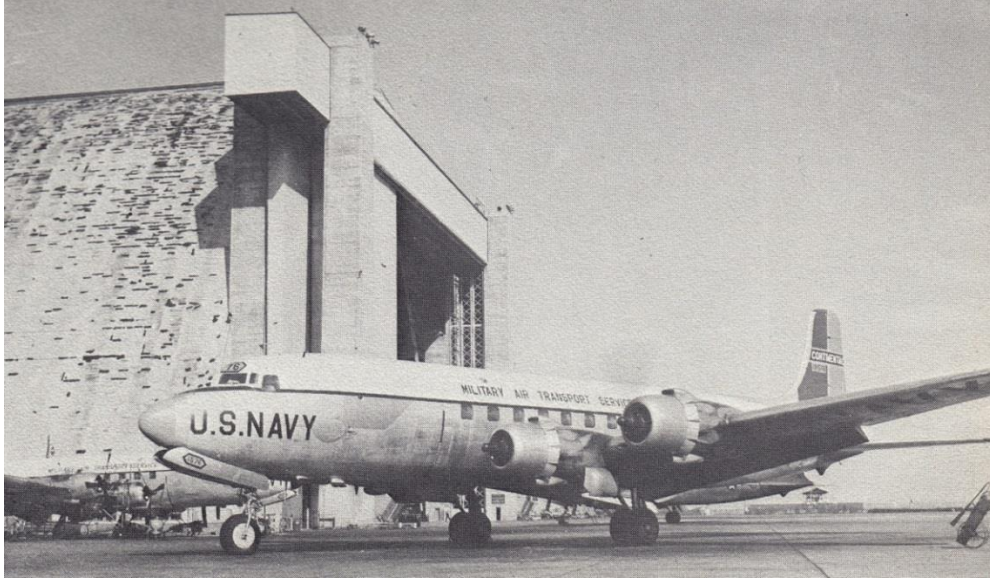
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First in Aviation

Douglas Liftmaster advertisement

The aircraft involved in the accident in Hawaii on March 22nd, 1955 was R6D-1 Liftmaster, Bureau Number 131612, Mfg. number 43715/362. It was delivered to VR-3 in 1953 and assigned as part of the Continental Division of MATS. R6D-1 Liftmaster 131612 had a total time of 2542.8 hours since new and 1038.6 hours since its last heavy maintenance period. R6D-1 Liftmaster 131612 had red painted panels on its wings and empennage because the squadron flew over snow country to Elmendorf AFB Anchorage Alaska. There are no known photographs of this particular aircraft while it was in service most likely because it was less than two years old at the time of the accident. There are pictures of other R6D-1 aircraft assigned to VR-3 during that time.



R6D-1 Liftmasters assigned to VR-3 at Moffett Field circa 1954

Harley D. Wilbur served with VR-3 from 1955-1958 as a Pilot, Aircraft Commander, Flight Instructor and Assistant Personnel Officer in the squadron. He gave the following account of VR-3 squadron activities during the time he served with the squadron.

“VR-3 at Moffett Field was a large squadron and had assigned 120 officers and about 750 enlisted personnel. Many of the officers were pre-WWII airline captains whose only Navy duties were that of “Line Pilot”. Their work spaces were in the former airship hangar. While at Moffett, VR-3’s principal mission was to transport passengers between USA and Japan. The normal crew on a R6D was 3 officers (pilot, copilot, and navigator) plus a flight engineer, radioman and two Navy WAVE passenger attendants. It normally carried 65 passengers. Crew changes were made at Honolulu, Wake Island, Tokyo, and Honolulu (returning). During the 1950s, before the advent of jets, flying across the Pacific was a long trip. The westbound route from Honolulu to Tokyo faced strong headwinds that required both refueling and a crew change at Wake Island. The trip back from Tokyo to Honolulu usually had tailwinds and could be made without a crew change, but required refueling at Midway Island. There were no satellite aids to air navigation then and Loran coverage was sparse. All VR-3 pilots had to be qualified as MATS Air Navigators, skilled in sextant use for overwater celestial navigation.”



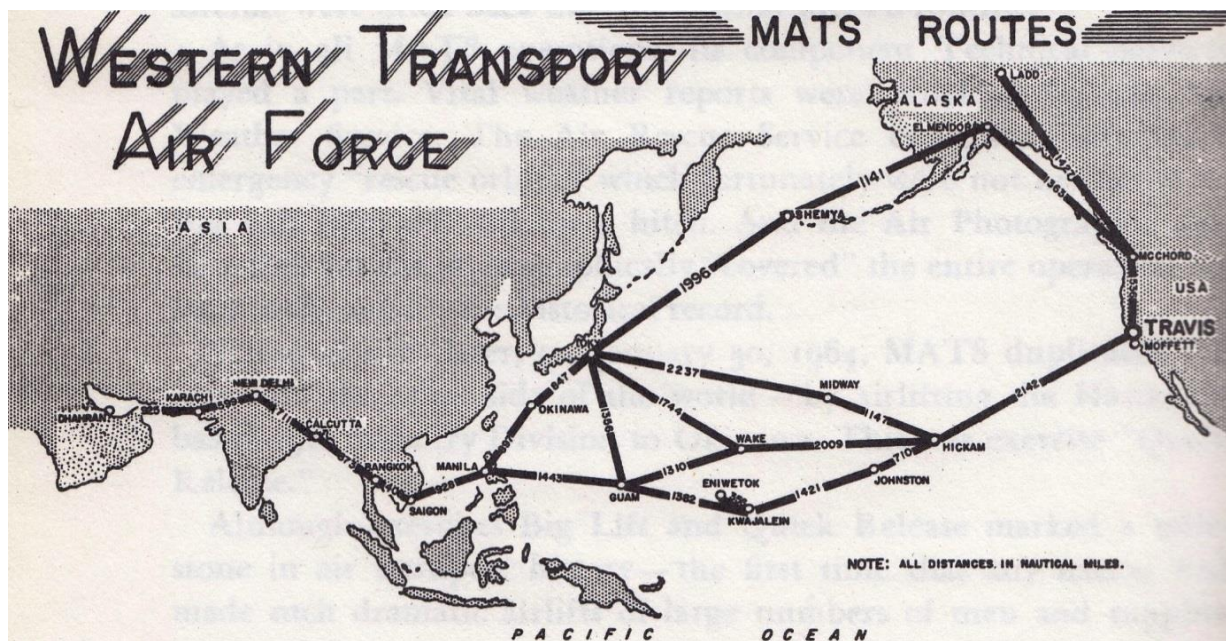
VR-3 R6D-1 at Hickam Hawaii circa 1955, photo by Harley D. Wilbur

“The normal mission of VR-3, as a MATS Squadron, was to carry people and cargo on scheduled MATS routes, much like a commercial airline. The routes and aircraft procedures were standardized and well known to all involved. Squadron personnel, especially pilots, navigators and other crew members, attended formal training classes to enable all of them to know their jobs, know their aircraft, and to perform in a safe and standardized manner. There were centrally published MATS manuals that provided official guidance “from on high” for almost everything, and periodic on-site inspections were made by teams from higher authority to be certain that the squadrons were performing properly. All this was safe and efficient, but sometimes stifled initiative when non-standard things came up.”



VR-3 R6D-1 on Wake Island circa 1956, photo by Harley D. Wilbur

According to another former VR-3 squadron member, Tim Applegate, who worked in the VR-3 Flight Radio shop during the mid-1950s, gave this account of its activities: “VR-3 flew regular airline type routes which started and ended at Travis AFB California. The destinations were Elmendorf AFB Alaska (twice weekly), Hickam AFB Hawaii (daily) Haneda AFB Tokyo (daily), and Andrews AFB (weekly). Every three months or so they were “pulled off” the regular routes for SAC (Strategic Air Command) support, such as moving SAC squadron personnel from one base to another for special operations.”



MATS route map circa 1964



VR-3 R6D-1 at Moffett Field circa 1955, photo by Harley D. Wilbur

Tim Applegate's assignment in VR-3 was to maintain the electronic equipment aboard the R6D-1 Liftmaster. Tim claimed that R6D-1 BuNo.131612 had previously been assigned to VR-6 for a short period(I have been unable to verify this claim). He said the popular myth in VR-3 at the time was that VR-6 had put all their bad equipment on the plane before they transferred it to VR-3. Furthermore, Tim said several VR-3 pilots reported that 131612 would not fly in the proper nose level attitude. Tim stated that the WWII vintage ART-13 HF transmitters on the R6D Liftmaster aircraft were known to be "temperamental". The ART-13 was used for hourly position reports and half hour "Ops Normal" checks. According to regulations at the time, if no contact was made for 90 minutes and the half way point had not yet been reached, the plane was required to turn around and return. During the mid-1950s, the R6D Liftmaster navigator used WWII vintage ARN-6 ADF (Automatic Direction Finding) and APN-4 LORAN (long range navigation) equipment. LORAN was used as a system of long-distance navigation in which position was determined from the intervals between signal pulses received from widely spaced radio transmitters. The APN-4 LORAN and ARN-6 ADF systems also required constant maintenance according to Tim.



C-118 Liftmaster radio operator station with ART-13 Transmitter top center

The engines, electronic radio and navigation systems aboard R6D Liftmaster 131612 were problematic during the entire scheduled roundtrip flight from Moffett Field California to Japan and to Hawaii. According to the official accident report several problems were reported during the flight to Japan. When the flight stopped at Tokyo, 131612 arrived with the #2 engine shut down with the propeller feathered. Inspection revealed bad spark plugs in the #16 engine cylinder which were changed. Also in Japan the LORAN was calibrated, but the #1 ADF would not home. Three vacuum tubes were changed in the ADF which corrected the discrepancy. During the eastbound trip and refueling stop at Midway Island, the ART-13 was replaced with the ART-13 from R6D-1 131580. Upon its arrival at Hickam AFB, low tension leads were replaced on the #5 and #7 cylinders of the #1 engine. The pilots' ADF was replaced and the VHF radio was tuned and ground checked. A control knob on the ART-13 HF radio was temporarily repaired. At each stop along the way all maintenance discrepancies were corrected and the aircraft was considered to be in air-worthy condition prior to departure.

R6D-1 transport 131612 was ferrying passengers from Tokyo to California with an intermediate stop at Honolulu-Hickam AFB Hawaii. Most of the passengers were on leave or were being reassigned. Information for a typical flight routine during that time period was combined with the known facts of the accident to provide an insight into what the passengers may have experienced during their final hours. On March 21st 1955, a procession of 57 persons left the passenger air terminal at Hickam AFB. They followed the Traffic Clerk through the gate and walked towards Navy R6D-1 Liftmaster 131612. The four-engine, silver, white and red aircraft stood glistening on the field

before them in the evening as they boarded the big plane. The passengers included soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines from 28 separate states. Among the 57 passengers were 17 Air Force, 22 Army, 12 Marines, 4 Navy and a Navy serviceman's dependent wife and daughter. R6D-1 Liftmaster 131612 had spent a little more than three hours on the ground at Hickam AFB Hawaii while the plane was refueled and a fresh crew change was made. For this trip they had nine crewmembers for a total of 66 souls aboard. The crewmembers: Pilot-LCDR Harold M. O'Leary; Copilot-LCDR Marx M. Teague; Navigator- Lt Lee Anthony Theroux; Radio Operator-AT3 Charles E. Sheehan Jr.; Radio Operator 2nd-AT3 Charles M. Preston; Flight Mechanic-AD1 Charles Lee Osborne; Flight Mechanic 2nd-AE3 Alfred Dewey Schroeder; Flight Orderly-AN Charles Wayne Enloe; and Flight Orderly-AN William R. Rimer.



Passengers boarding a VR-3 MATS R6D Liftmaster flight circa mid 1950s

On this particular flight there was a family group of three, they were Navy Petty Officer First Class Telem (TE-1) Nathan Webb, Mrs. Rita Laverne Webb and their three year old daughter. As the individuals boarded, the Flight Orderlies directed the passengers to fill every available seat on the plane because it was loaded to capacity. Once the doors were secured and the passengers settled in their seats, the Flight Orderlies briefed the passengers on the routine overwater flight procedures. Then they demonstrated the use of Mae West yellow colored inflatable life jackets that the passengers would need to use in the event of an emergency that forced the aircraft to ditch in the Pacific Ocean.

Although the R6D resembled the DC-6 airliner in practically every other way, the military model of the Liftmaster had the seats facing to the rear. There was a row of double seats on one side of the aircraft and a row of three seats on the other side separated by an aisle.



Looking forward in a crowded VR-3 MATS R6D-1 Liftmaster aircraft

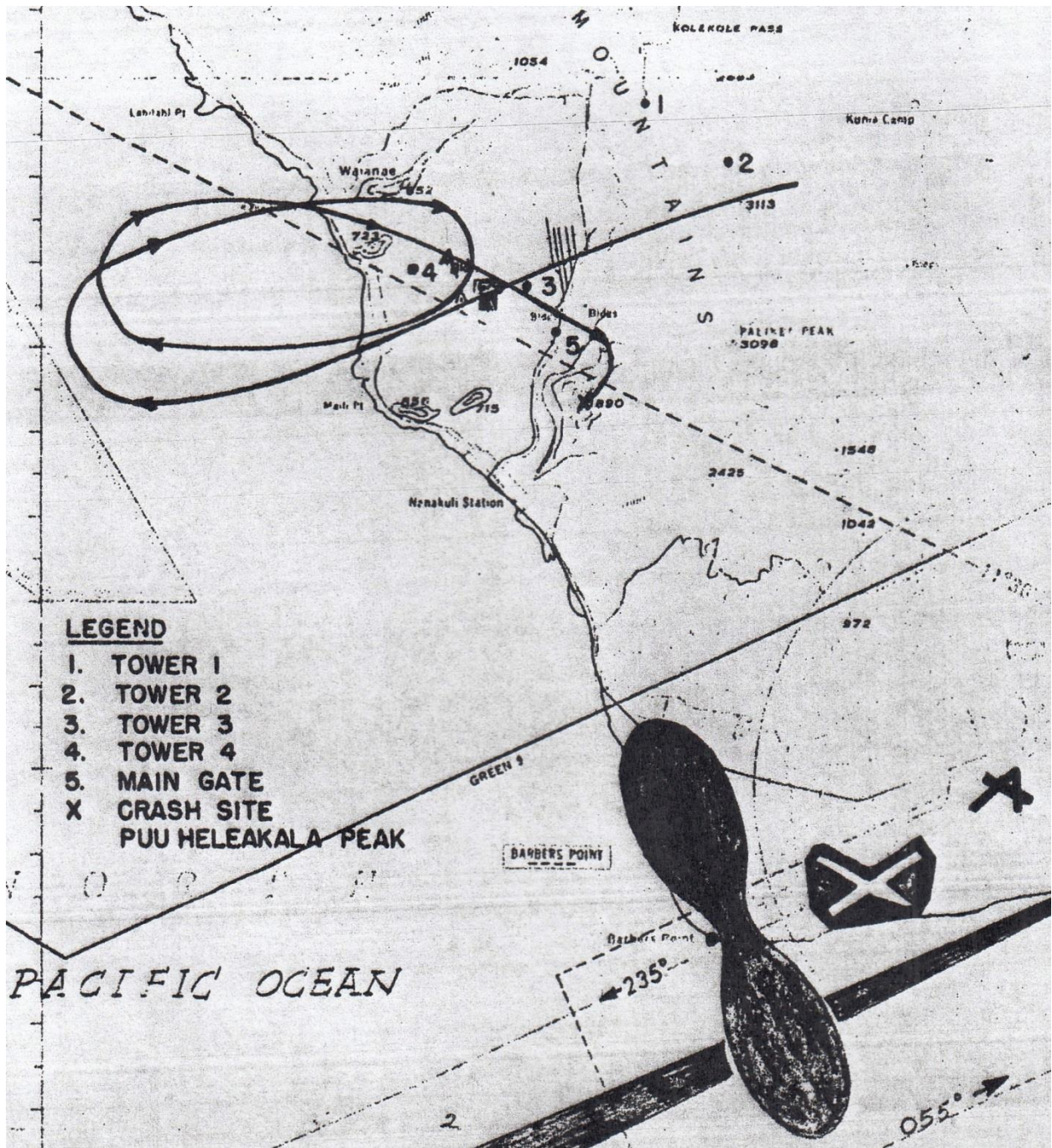
From the time that the safety briefing had begun, the four engines of the R6D started to turn over – first two on the right, then the ones on the left. The pilot was warming them up and getting them into synchronization. Soon the big plane began taxiing down the field. In a few moments the pilot got the OK from the control tower. He opened up the throttle, the motors roared, and the huge transport surged forward. Faster and faster it hurtled down the runway, and then lifted gracefully into the air. The aircraft took off at 7:06 p.m. Hawaii Standard Time (HST) on 21 March 1955 for the final leg of its flight to California. The estimated flying time was about 9 ½ hours. And so the flight continued into the unknown dark night...

During the flight across the vast Pacific to California, the crew experienced radio problems with their long-range ART-13 high frequency (HF) radio transmitter. At 10:32 pm HST the aircraft relayed a position report to Air Route Traffic Control through another aircraft using short range radio equipment and reported that their contact with Airways had been lost and that they were returning to Hickam AFB (as per procedure). Hickam tower said the plane was less than half way to its destination and about 3 1/2 hours out after departure when they decided to turned back to Hickam AFB because of

the radio trouble. A return clearance was received for MATS 131612; the aircraft descended to 10,000 feet and proceeded to return to Honolulu-Hickam AFB. The weather in the Honolulu area at the time was reported as 900 broken, 3000 overcast, visibility 7 miles, rain showers, and occasional lightning northeast. It was a very dark night with very few light references as the plane returned and approached Oahu.

A normal flight into the Honolulu area during that time period required the use of one or more radio navigation aids such as the ADF and LORAN to establish geographic position. It is the bearing and distance from the radio signals that determine when to descend during the approach. An inbound aircraft will normally be cleared by the Honolulu authority for an approach to the airport with reporting times, fixes and altitudes. An instrument approach procedure to Honolulu involves a descent outbound on the south west (SW) course of the range to the NAS Barber's Point fan marker (Fan-type marker beacons are identified by a flashing white light and a repeating dot-dash-dot radio signal). Normally upon reaching the Barber's Pt. fan marker, a procedure turn is made to the SW "A" quadrant with altitude limited to a prescribed minimum. When the turn is completed, the approaching aircraft should be over the fan marker and inbound to the range station. Descent is then made to the minimum prescribed approach altitudes and the pilot should report the presence of the range signals.

MATS R6D-1 131612 did not make a normal approach as it roared in low over the Navy's tightly-guarded Lualualei Ammunition Depot on the west side of Oahu at about 2:00 a.m. HST. For unknown reasons MATS 131612 was eight miles off course to the north as it was making its approach back to Hickam AFB. A sentry at the ammunition depot, Marine Pfc. Joseph T. Price was an eyewitness to the tragedy. He said the plane came roaring over the depot at an altitude of about 600 feet -- narrowly missing a 700-foot radio antenna. MATS 131612 was then observed by several ground witnesses to circle the Lualualei Navy radio towers before it continued its descent and approach into Hickam AFB. The sentry said the pilot switched on his powerful landing lights and apparently saw the ridge ahead. He said the plane banked sharply to the right a split second before the crash, but it was too late. MATS 131612 plowed headlong into the side of Heleakala Ridge at the 1120 foot level about 200 feet from the top and about 650 feet above the valley floor below just after at 2:00 am HST. All 66 persons aboard died instantly when the transport plane crashed into the steep mountain ridge. The Navy transport plane exploded upon impact and lite up the whole valley below. The front half of the aircraft virtually disintegrated and only the tail section was left intact with the remainder of the wreckage spread over 300 feet along the mountainside.



Estimated flight path map from the official accident report

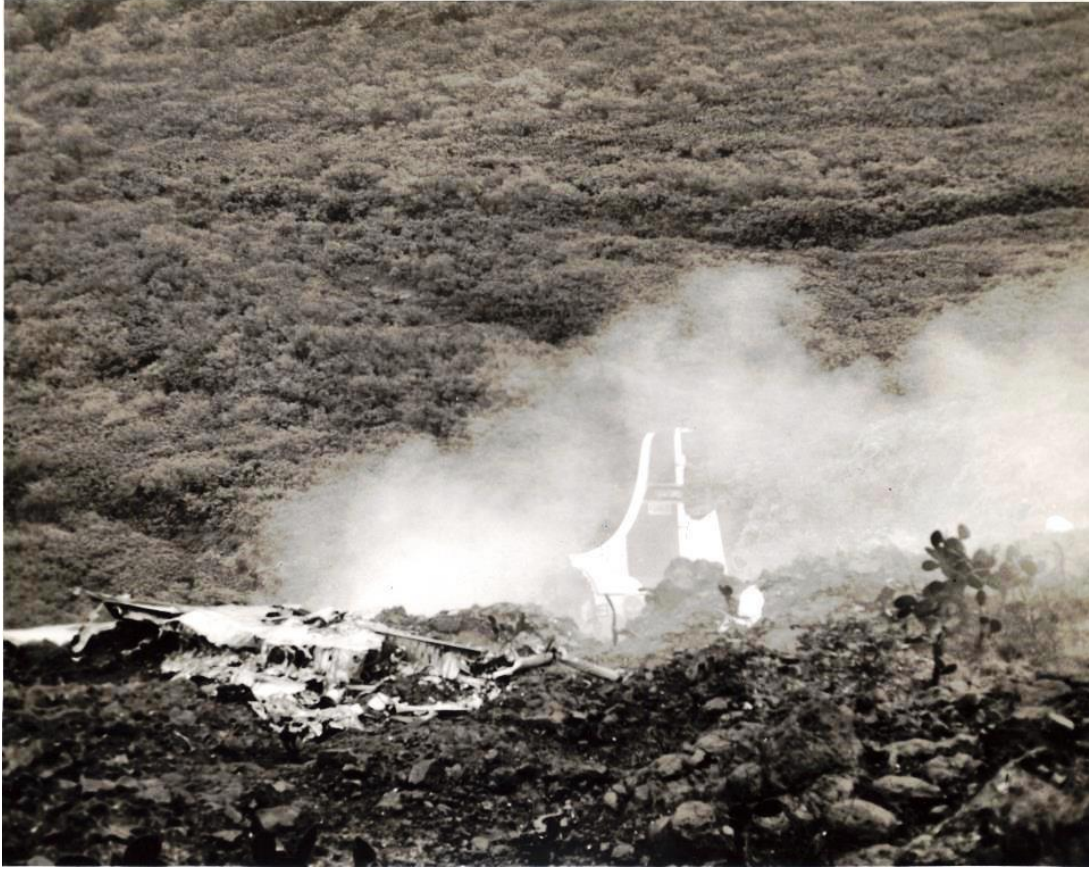


Search and rescue efforts underway shortly after the crash, newspaper photo



Crash site circled on mountain, newspaper photo

The following photos were reproduced from original photographs that appeared in the official accident report. They were taken the morning after the accident while the aircraft wreck was still smoldering from the crash and fire. Photos from PJ Permejo collection via Don Hinton.





The wreck was located on a very steep mountain ridge





Clarence Hoe describes to reporters how the plane rested against the side of the mountain, Star Bulletin news photo

"It sounded like 100 gasoline drums exploding," said Clarence Hoe, a civilian employee of the Lualualei Naval Ammunition Depot who was 2000 yards away from the crash scene on the west coast of Oahu Island. Hoe, the first to reach the scene, said the wings were sheared off, but the body of the plane fell in one flaming piece to the bottom of a gully. The resulting fire was so hot that it took rescuers nearly two hours to get close enough to confirm there were no survivors. "The whole sky was red for more than two hours", said policeman Philo Owen. The officer, who was five miles away, said the plane blew up in "one big explosion like a thunderclap".

The Navy accident investigation concluded the following: The ART-13 HF Transmitter was the principal reason for retuning to Hickam, but the accident investigation board concluded that it was not considered a direct contributing cause of the accident. The R6D-1 aircraft had two R-105A/ARR 15 HF Receivers installed in the airplane. Post-crash analysis revealed evidence of inflight arcing and burning of wiring common to both the transmitter and receiver prior to the crash. Since failure of the ART-13 transmitter was reported, it is possible that the receiver was the real problem because the transmitter that was removed at Midway Island was later found to operate properly in another aircraft. RADAR coverage of the aircraft was not in operation at the time of the accident. Approach Control instructions were issued to and understood by the aircraft crew except the final clearance to report NAS Barber's Point fan marker navigation beacon inbound at 2000 feet was not acknowledged by the crew. It was concluded that MATS 131612 made a circle flight path over the Lualualei Naval Ammunition Depot before continuing its approach into Honolulu. The crew made a navigational error which placed the aircraft 8 miles (13 km) off course to the north of a

standard fan marker approach. It was determined that the aircraft made a last second turn and was on a heading of 282 degrees at the time of impact. The exact reason for the navigational error was undetermined, but clues in the final radio communications and wreckage were used to determine the most probable causes.

From the voice transmission recordings there was a possible indication that there was some discussion or preoccupation in the cockpit during the final approach. Approach Control issued the following clearance at 1:52:45 am HST (about 10 minutes before the crash)

“MATS 1612 continue your descent in the 2 minute pattern, your instruction to cross the fan marker inbound at 3,000 is cancelled, over.”

At 1:53 am HST MATS 1612 acknowledged as follows:

“MATS 1612 roger, understand (are we going down to – roger fan marker minimums), ah, anticipating, ah, holding at 56, over.” The portion in parenthesis is considered to be a side conversation in the cockpit.

MATS 1612 then replied again, “MATS 1612, negative, we’re going right on down to minimum altitude, over.”

MATS 1612 did not say he would call again over NAS Barber’s Point fan marker at 2000 feet which was the normal procedure. In fact it is was not clear what was meant by minimum altitude, either 2,000 feet over the fan marker or 600 feet over the range station. At 1:55:40 MATS 1612 reported inbound “procedure, ah 56, (pause) 3,000 feet, over.” It was the last transmission by 131612. Normally the report would be made “inbound to Barber’s Point fan marker at 3,000 feet altitude”.

Another clearance from Approach Control made just 4 minutes before the crash was partially broken up by another aircraft transmission and was not acknowledged by MATS 131612.

The reasons for the non-standard approach were surmised by the accident investigation board. They concluded that the most likely course of action taken by the crew was as follows assuming that the pilot may have called the passing of Honolulu range at some point abeam the range station to the north. Considering a parallel track from the abeam point to the radio towers at Lualualei, the distance is 6 nautical miles, or reasonable close to the distance from Honolulu range to Barber’s Point fan marker. Reasoning that the pilot then began a normal procedure approach, the aircraft was in a plausible position to continue in the vicinity of the radio towers, perform a 360 degree turn and crash within the time limits of 4 minutes 20 seconds. The reason why the aircraft circled the radio towers at Lualualei is unknown, but they may have mistaken the tower lights for something else.

Two directional flight instruments recovered from the crash scene indicated a potential clue which could have contributed to the cause of the accident. This potential clue was the indicated headings of 55 degrees and 256 degrees on the "Heading Selector" instruments. The outbound heading of the approach course of the Honolulu range is 235 degrees magnetic. Assuming that an outbound heading of 256 degrees was mistakenly selected as an outbound heading at some point between the Kaneohe intersection and the Honolulu range, and assuming that this heading was followed, the aircraft would have passed well to the right of the Honolulu range and continued almost directly into the area in which it eventually crashed. If this procedure were the one followed, it would be possible to miss both the aural and or visual indication of the Barber's Point fan marker. This conclusion can be partially verified by the lack of a positive report of reaching, passing or leaving the Barber's Point fan maker facility.

The recommendations from the official accident report were to expand the RADAR surveillance coverage of the area and use the GCA unit at NAS Barbers Point for vectoring of aircraft approaching Honolulu.

At the time, it was the worst crash involving any variant of the Douglas DC-6 airliner, the second-worst aviation accident in U.S. history, and one of the worst air accidents anywhere in history. It remains the worst air disaster in the history of Hawaii and the deadliest accident involving a heavier-than-air aircraft in the history of United States naval aviation. The crash was also the first fatal one suffered by MATS since it began operation in 1948 and was the first serious accident of any kind by VR-3. A VR-3 squadron member recalled that they were "really jarred" because their typical general conviction that they were invulnerable at that age was called into question.

The greatest sacrifice of all was borne by the families of those killed. Left behind after the accident were broken parents, heartbroken wives, promises of a future destroyed, and children who would never know their fathers. There was an irreparable sense of loss that each of these families would have felt for their fallen family member; a loss that would have followed each of them for the rest of their days.

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

7 CENTS PER COPY FOUR SECTIONS BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA, TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 1952 \$1.00 WEEKLY DELIVERED 24 PAGES No. 199

66 DIE IN PLANE CRASH

Good Year Seen for Kern Crop
Improve Selling Methods, Potatoes Conclude Told

Atom Cloud Drifts Over Las Vegas
No Survivors, Navy Reports
57 Passengers, 9 Crewmen Aboard When MATS Craft Hits Mountain

FLASHES

Radiation

NO SURVIVORS
57 Passengers, 9 Crewmen Aboard When MATS Craft Hits Mountain

FLASHES

Radiation

Twenty six sets of remains were identified and sent to their families for burial; however it was not possible to identify the other forty sets. In a letter sent to the family of Sgt. Larry P. DiVuolo by Lt. Col. Emery D. K. Jackson to the families of the victims; "With the deepest regret we must advise you that despite exhaustive efforts, it has not been possible to segregate the individual remains." "Consequently it will be necessary to inter his remains and those of 39 of the others in the aircraft accident in Hawaii on March 22 in a United States National Cemetery as a group consisting of nine caskets." "Since relatives of these decedents live in widely separated parts of the United States, Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery (located in St. Louis) has been designated. This cemetery has been selected to equalize the burden of travel for persons who desire to attend the interment services." The interment service was held May 17, 1955.



Grave marker for 40 victims at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery

It is impossible to measure the cost of this accident to the many lives it forever changed; however the military did provide some estimates in the official accident report. The cost for the aircraft was \$1,183,699.00. The cost for the removal of the aircraft wreckage was \$2,300.00. The cost for the loss of 66 people was \$1,363,375.00. For a total estimated cost of the accident \$2,549,374.00. The cost per each victim in 1955 worked out to be \$20,657. To put this amount in perspective and using an inflation calculator, \$1 in 1955 is equivalent in purchasing power to \$9.43 in 2019, which means that in current dollars each victim would be worth \$194,795.51.

Sixty-six people had taken a leap of faith when they boarded the transport plane believing they would arrive safely at their destination. However, that was not to be the case. There are 66 individual tragic stories that go along with the 66 victims. I have included just a few below in this story.

One accident victim was a St. Louis soldier enroute home on emergency leave to the bedside of his seriously ill mother. Army Private Charles J. Combs, son of Mrs. Minnie Combs Of 6132 Bartmer Ave. St. Louis MO, was stationed in Japan. He had received emergency leave and was on his way home after his mother suffered a stroke at her

home. The stroke followed a previous one which had left her paralyzed. Charles Combs served as a Marine in the Pacific Theater during World War II and afterwards he was a factory worker. He enlisted in the Army two years before the accident. He was 31 years old at the time of his death in the aircraft accident. Besides his mother and sister, he was survived by Charlene Combs, his 7-year-old daughter by a marriage which ended in divorce; another sister, Miss Vernetta Combs, and a brother, Russell.

One crash victim was on his way to his wedding. Army Sergeant Raymond L. Smith, 21 years old, was one of the men who died in the crash. Smith was the son of Oakland California Fire Captain Harold L. Smith was to marry Irene Harvest 23 of Alameda who was his childhood sweetheart. Smith was stationed with the Army near Tokyo when the opportunity came to get aboard the ill-fated plane for a trip to California to be married.

United States Marine Cpl. Almeron A. Freeman was scheduled to finish his three-year military service in just a matter of months. After nearly 1½ years in Korea with the 1st Marine Division, Freeman was headed for California aboard the ill-fated Navy transport. He never made it home and he is listed as one of the 40 service members buried in the group grave site at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

The tragedy of the aircraft accident extended beyond the immediate victims and their families. Air Force Staff Sgt. Marion "Billy" Shackelford was scheduled to be on that flight, but because he forgot his travel papers, he was denied boarding. He was spared the fate of the 66 crash victims and returned home to Alabama to report for a new assignment. However less than a month later, on April 19, 1955, the car he was driving was hit head-on by a Trail Ways bus. He was killed instantly. His father, working on a nearby construction job, witnessed the accident. The grim reaper took his life just like the others. Was it his fate to die that way?

Fatality list taken from The Oakland Tribune 1955-03-23

CREW

Lt. Comdr. HAROLD M. O'LEARY, 35, Pilot, Mountain View, Ca.

Lt. Comdr. MARK M. TEAGUE, 39, Co-Pilot, of Sunnyvale, Ca.

Lt. LEE A THOROUX, 31, Navigator, of Mountain View, Ca.

AD1 CHARLES L. OSBORNE, 35, Flight Mechanic, San Francisco, Ca.

AT3 CHARLES M. PRESTON, 24, Radio Operator 2nd, Mountain View, Ca.

AE3 ALFRED DEWEY SCHROEDER, Flight Mechanic 2nd, Cannelton, Ind.

AT3 CHARLES EDWARD SHEEHAN, Radio Operator, Bangor Me.

AN CHARLES WAYNE ENLOE, Flight Orderly, Kansas City.

AN WILLIAM RICHARD RIMER, Flight Orderly, Edina, Mo.

Note: The pilot and co-pilot left behind three children each.

AIR FORCE

T/Sgt. ALBERT E. DAWSEY, Selma, Ala.

T/Sgt. JOHN T. POWELL, Mitchallville, Md.

T/Sgt. ROLAND B. WILHELM, Baltimore.

S/Sgt. SAMUEL J. ALVARADO, El Paso.

S/Sgt. WILLIAM F. BRITT, Amarillo.
S/Sgt. CARLYLE J. HUMMEL, Bismarck, N. D.
S/Sgt. EUGENE L. LOFTON, Winchester, Va.
S/Sgt. THADDEUS F. SHYDA, Lebanon, Pa.
A/1c WILLIE G. HARRELL, Austin, Tex.
A/1c MILTON O. MATTHEWS, Bordentown, N. J.
A/1c AUBREY G. MORGAN, Union Springs, Ala.
A/1c EARL G. SISSON, Depew, New York.
A/1c ALVIN ALEXANDER, Sunnyside, N. Y.
A/2c JOHN D. ANTHONY, Hobart, Ind.
A/2c DAVID L. BOYLE, Osaka.
A/2c STANLEY B. HORTON, Indianapolis.
A/3c DANIEL K. EATON, Winslow, Ariz.

ARMY

Cpl. DONALD B. ANDERSON, Brockton.
Pfc. PAUL B. BAYER, Chicago.
Cpl. DEAN C. BULLEN, Smithfield, Utah.
Pvt. ROBERT E. DELHAGER, Chase, Kan.
Sgt. RAYMOND L. SMITH, Oakland.
Sgt. ROBERT L. THOMPSON, North Long Beach.
Sgt. REXIE L. DEWESSE, Lake Creek, Tex.
Sgt. LARRY P. DIEUOLO, Nutley, N. J.
Pfc. ROBERT G. DUNCAN, Robbinsdale, Minn.
Cpl. EDWARD J. HALVEY, JR., Chicago.
Cpl. WILLIAM B. HENDON, Brownwood, Tex.
Pfc. ROBERT E. HILL, Waterloo, Ind.
Cpl. KENNETH G. HOFFMAN, Glyndon, Minn.
Cpl. DAVID A. HORNE, Somersworth, N. H.
Pvt. CHARLES J. COMBS, St. Louis.
Sgt. WARREN R. HULER, Shamokin, Pa.
Pfc. JOHN R. IRWIN, JR., Elbow Woods, N. D.
Pvt. CHARLES M. JOHNSON, Cleveland.
Pfc. BERNARD J. KURAS, Gaylord, Mich.
Pvt. LOUIS F. MONTANEZ, Bronx, N. Y.
Pvt. JOHN R. PANETTI, Windber, Pa.
Sgt. JAMES L. WHITE, Minneapolis.

MARINE CORPS

M/Sgt. FREDERICK L. WILLIAMSON, Oceanside.
M/Sgt. EUGENE E. BENNETT, Orange.
Cpl. RICHARD C. HARRISON, Inglewood.
Lt. Col. C. G. EDWARDS, Philadelphia.
M/Sgt. GORDON B. MURRAY, Wilmington, N. C.
S/Sgt. MORGAN L. OGDEN, Stafford, Va.
Cpl. WALTER W. CHASE, Mendham, N. J.

Cpl. DALE L. LAKE, Jolley, Ia.
 Cpl. MICHAEL J. MESZAROS, Asbury Park, N. J.
 Cpl. ALMERON FREEMAN, Mauston, Wis.
 Cpl. CECIL A. BRITTAIN, Timpson, Tex.
 Cpl. RICHARD R. BROOKS, Brookville, Ohio.

NAVY

AN JAMES B. QUINN, JR., Long Beach.
 SA GERALD JOSEPH ROBICHAUX, Monteget, La.
 TE1 NATHAN WEBB, Louisville.
 MRS. RITA LAVERNE WEBB Yokohama Japan.
 TERESA LYNN WEBB daughter.
 GERALD DEAN WHITE, ADAN, Lawton, Okla.

A virtual cemetery has been created for the crash victims on the Find-A-Grave web site at this link: <https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/428613?page=1#sr-9949655>
 Faces to go with some of the names, I was unable to locate photos for all the victims.



H. O'Leary L. Theroux M. Teague C. Osborne C. Sheehan



C. Preston C. Enloe (VR-3) S. Alvarado E. Bennett C. Brittain



R. Brooks W. Chase C. Combs R. Dellinger L. DiVuolo



G. Edwards



A. Freeman



D. Lake



E. Lofton



G. Murray



M. Ogden



J. Quinn Jr.



T. Shyda



R. Smith



R. Thompson



L. Webb



R. Webb



T. Webb

The Navy had the problem of what to do with the wreckage that was left high up on the mountain ridge. It could be seen from below, so it was decided that it must be removed somehow. At the time there were few options available. They tried to carry down parts of the wreckage in large trash cans (one trash can was later found by me), but some parts were just too big and heavy. The Navy decided to use explosives to blow up the wreckage to reduce its size and to get rid of it. It is believed that most of the aircraft wreckage is still located at the crash site, however it is spread all over up and down the side of the mountain ridge.

Another crash explorer hiked up the crash site in 1999 after there was a large brush fire in the valley below that cleared the area of brush and exposed a considerable amount of wreckage. The crash explorer told me that at that time the explosion craters were still very visible and that he photographed a lot of the wreckage. However, I only obtained copies of his photographs in 2018. He witnessed much more wreckage than I did when I made my crash site visit six years after his visit. During his visit in 1999 he discovered and recovered two very interesting artifacts. He recovered one of the propellers that had

broken off its hub and was separated from the engine. This same propeller was photographed during the original accident investigation. The other interesting artifact that he recovered was the front landing gear door which he said was facing down to the ground. When he turned it over, he discovered the gear door had the aircraft's last four numbers of its BuNo. painted on it in yellow and insignia blue paint. He managed to carry both the heavy propeller and the gear door down off the mountain and preserved them for display. The following are his photographs from 1999.



Aerial view of Haleakalā Ridge Waianae showing wreckage locations



Wing section with "AV" (part of NAVY) on it photo courtesy Don Hinton



Engine intake



Propeller hub photos courtesy Don Hinton



Engine cowling photo courtesy Don Hinton



Wing section with remnant of Star and Bar burnt off photo courtesy Don Hinton



Main Landing Gear wreckage on steep slope photo courtesy Don Hinton



Cabin cargo door from the left side photo courtesy Don Hinton



Lower debris field wreckage, foremost is a wing section, vertically on the right is the bottom side of the cargo floorboard photo courtesy Don Hinton



Two views of the wrecked BC-778 "Gibson Girl" emergency radio transmitter photos courtesy Don Hinton



Pile of passenger seat frames and other wreckage photo courtesy Don Hinton



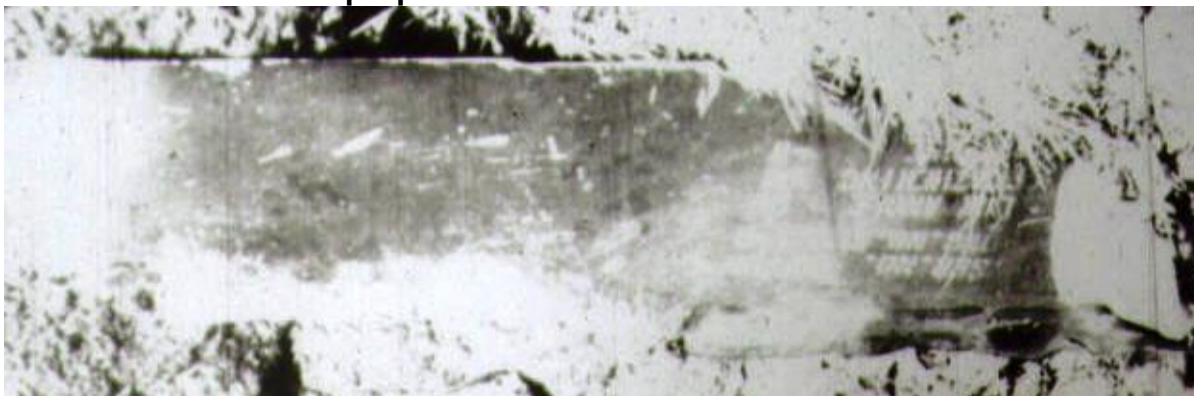
**Uniform collar device & watch band from one of the passengers
The personal items are poignant reminders of the tragedy
photo courtesy Don Hinton**



Nose gear door with last 4 digits of the BuNo recovered from the crash site



Broken off propeller blade recovered from the crash site



Same propeller blade photographed in 1955 from the official accident report



**Nose gear door and propeller blade donated to the Moffett Field Museum
They bear silent witness to the tumultuous event of a time long past
They have finally come back to their home base from where they departed**

After months of research and questioning others who about the exact location of the crash site, my friend Blade Shepherd-Jones and I attempted to visit the crash site in February 2015. The crash site is located along the Waianae coast of Oahu high up along the side of a mountain. The proper Hawaiian name for the place where the R6D plane crashed is Haleakalā Ridge Waianae, not Palikea Peak which is higher up the mountain as reported elsewhere. Haleakalā is a Polynesian word that when translated into English means "House of the Sun". Hawaiian legend says that Haleakalā is where the demigod, Maui, snared the sun. The demigod was also known for his tricks and supernatural powers. In this case, Haleakalā Ridge Waianae is where the mountain snared the aircraft possibly using tricks and supernatural powers. This crash site had been on my "bucket list" for a long time. Finally the time was right for a hike to the crash site because it was a holiday weekend and few people (we hoped) would be in the area.



Google Earth view of the crash site

The west coast area of Oahu, better known as the Waianae area has a reputation as a “sketchy” region. Many run down homes, old WWII Quonset huts that are still in use and homeless people are located in the Waianae area next to where the crash site is located. This was the Hawaiian land that time forgot. Pigs could be heard squealing and wild chickens scattered as we drove around. Things have not changed around here in a long time. This was old Hawaii, a place of myths and legends and I was trying to find a mythical airplane crash site.

The first problem was finding a good place to park the car. As we were driving up and down the road looking for a spot to park, a local Hawaiian questioned us what we were doing here. They don't see too many “Haole” visitors in this area (Haole is a Hawaiian term used to refer to individuals of European ancestry, in contrast to those of native Hawaiian ancestry). I quickly explained that we were in search of an old crash site and he kindly offered to let us park in front of his property and said he would look after our car. We placed our trust in him and took our first leap of faith hoping that nothing would happen to the car.

We decided to take the most direct path up mountain from the valley below. There was no trail and this route was the most difficult, but it had the promise of encountering the most wreckage that had come down from the ridge above. So off we went over a fence and up the valley as we assaulted the mountain. At the beginning of the hike, it did not look too bad making an attempt to hike up from the bottom. I had pre-measured the distance and elevation gain. The main problem we soon encountered was the tall grass that was chest deep in most places and over our heads in other places.



Blade Shepherd-Jones hikes into the abyss of tall grass, me and my machete

It was another leap of faith for every step we took. I could not see the ground, so every step was a step into the unknown. Sometimes we stepped on hidden rocks, sometimes trees and the worst were hidden holes. A couple of times I ended up stepping into holes that swallowed me up as I went tumbling in. Luckily there are no snakes in Hawaii, but there were plenty of spiders to walk into. It was a hard slog up the mountain, stopping occasionally to check the reference photos attempting to get good photo line ups. I was excited to use a machete again. It had been a long time since I had attempted to cut a trail up a Hawaii mountain. However, the machete was of little use. The iron hard kaiwe trees just repelled the whacks as I struck them as hard as I could because they are such a hard wood. Furthermore, you could not cut through the tall grass. It would bend with the blows and bounce right back. It was more useful to just push the brush aside and plow ahead. It was hard going and I would say that this hike ranks as one of the hardest that I have ever done. Lack of sleep and food complicated the matter and the few beers that I had the night before did not help.

It was a constant climb up in altitude as we kept getting closer and closer to the target area. As we were climbing up the mountain, I sometimes felt like we were not alone. Some unexplainable force was guiding us up and urging onward. We made our own trail as we plowed ahead into the unknown. I had no exact coordinates and only the words of others who had been to the site before. At the time, no one had given me photos of what was up there and we did not know the best route or what to expect. We finally arrived at the base rock of mountain and searched around. It was just impossible to see anything up the steep mountain and we were sorely disappointed because there was no visible wreckage in the area. It may have all been covered by the thick vegetation.



Looking up from the base of the mountain

Just as we were about to give in, I looked up and spotted a glint of light high up above us on the mountain. I was sure it was aircraft aluminum reflecting light from the sun. The trouble was it was much higher up than us. We debated for a time what to do. Our water supplies were critically low and it was not looking good. We actually started hiking down the hill for a while until we came upon a rock clearing that had a clear view back up the mountain. From this new vantage point we decided that it did not look too bad. We had come so far and wanted to find something. The more we looked, the more glints of light I could see high up on the mountain. The light had to be just right and we had to be in the right location to see them. We took another leap of faith that what I was seeing was airplane parts on the mountain and reversed course. We headed straight up to the largest group of light specks. It was a steep constant climb up loose rocks all the way; at least we had left the dreadful tall grass behind us as we climbed higher.



Dangerous climbing up loose rocks trying to reach wreckage

My hiking companion Blade Shepherd-Jones was first to come upon a piece of wreckage which was a large section from the left wing. From its location we could see more wreckage up above. As we climbed higher, suddenly everywhere we looked was airplane wreckage. The higher we climbed, the more we saw. I got a boost of adrenaline by seeing so much wreckage after we had spent so much energy trying to reach it. I saw wing sections, landing gear parts, fuselage parts and miscellaneous wreckage scattered on the side of the steep ridge. Blade Shepherd-Jones climbed higher to find more parts because I was busy examining the wreckage, getting coordinates and taking pictures. Many parts were wedged into the side of the mountain as a testament to the tremendous impact forces. There was no sign of the large empennage section that can be seen in the newspaper photos. It later learned that it was blown up with dynamite explosives to make it less visible to the public. From the vantage point high up on the ridge, I could now see how hard it would have been to remove the wreckage from the mountain.



First large piece of wreckage discovered, a wing section



Wing section with "AV" (part of NAVY) on it, same part the earlier crash explorer discovered in 1999, but now it is almost completely covered by vegetation



Dangerously sharp metal wreckage poking out of the brush



Aircraft wreckage ripped wide open



Wreckage everywhere hidden in the brush



Wreckage obscured by vegetation



Part number tag on piece of wreckage



**Trash can most likely used by the recovery crew
left behind wedged under wreckage**



Memorial flag left behind on large piece of wreckage



Belt buckle discovered by Blade Shepherd-Jones

Blade Shepherd-Jones discovered a military belt buckle that was a reminder of the tragedy of the huge loss of life. Other previous hikers reported many personal effects still on site. I did not look for any personal items and I did not find any. I was too busy examining the large pieces of wreckage.

From near the top of the ridge, it was a spectacular view of the Waianae mountain range and valley below. This was a once in a lifetime hike (I hope) and I wanted to take in the magnificent view. The beautiful landscape was tempered by the fact that we were where so many died. Also looking down at how far we had come was a revelation of how far we needed to go to get back to the road.



My photo of the Hawaiian Pyramid with interesting shadow

One of the strangest things about the crash site is that directly across the valley from the crash site is a mountain peak the locals nicknamed the “Hawaiian Pyramid”. I knew nothing about it until much later when researching the area and came across references to it. The highest point (at 3,098-feet) above the ridge where the plane crashed is called Palikea Peak at the southern end of Oahu’s Waianae Range. Looking up at the Waianae Mountain peak from below or to the sides it looks just the end of the mountain ridge, but when viewed directly from the crash site, across the valley, it clearly forms an almost perfect pyramid. The picture I took of it from the crash site is one of my all-time favorite photographs. It just makes me think about all the mysteries of Hawaii.

With our water about gone, we started down to a large debris pile that we had spotted from above. We reached to large pile of parts that consisted of aircraft floor and fuselage panels. Strangely there was a large metal garbage can wedged into the pile. It must have been used by the recovery crew to collect the pieces of the aircraft and was left behind. I attached a small American flag to the largest piece as a memorial. We took a few more photos and then headed down and back into the abyss of tall grass and hidden dangers. At least it was all downhill from there. We ran completely out of water,

but we knew the only way home was down, down, down and out. I fell into several more hidden holes on the way down and once summersaulted into a pile of grass. It was times like this that I was glad I had a buddy along just in case I got injured or worse.



Blade Shepherd-Jones hiking back down into the abyss of tall vegetation

We finally reached the fence near the end of the hike, but it looked much higher now. It was one last hurdle to get over. Back over we went as we began to drag ourselves back to our vehicle that we hoped was still there and OK. We were almost there when the Hawaiian man that we had met earlier came up to us and asked if we had found it. We said yes and he invited us onto his property for food and drinks. We had none in the car and we were so hungry and thirsty we gladly took the offer. It turned out that his whole family and a few friends were there. They had been keeping an eye out for us and waiting for our return. They invited us in and treated us like we were family. They all wanted to know what we had found. We were the most exciting thing to happen to them in a long time and they said they don't get any visitors where they are located. They were of the friendliest Hawaiian family I have ever met. Who said that Waianae is a bad place? The food was *ono* (#1) delicious and the cold water drinks were much appreciated. They even gave us some tasty chocolate pie.



Extended Hawaiian family who live near the crash site

We sat around and talked story for a while as many traditional Hawaiians do. I told them the story of the crash and how 66 lives were lost making this accident the worst in Hawaiian history. They never knew that the crash site was right across the street and up the mountain. During the conversation, the topic turned to ghosts. They had taken the leap of faith and believed in Hawaiian superstitions, spirits and gods. They related a story to us that several family members had seen a ghost of a military man dressed in an old military uniform wandering around their property. We walked over to the place where the ghost was last seen and you could see a direct visual line up to the crash site. They wanted to know if it could be related to the accident. They also said the ghost was usually seen very early in the morning around 2 am. I pulled out my copy of the accident report and read from the official report. The crash had occurred just after 2am, the same time as they had reported seeing the ghost! There was a collective gasp from the group and everybody got "*chicken skin*" (literally means goose bumps- but also used to describe how scary the story was to them). They now all thought they knew where the ghost came from. They said they could not wait to tell their other family members and friends. As we prepared to leave, I gave them a copy of the file I had about the accident so they could prove to others that we had come down from the mountain and visited them. We were all believers in trusting others and the power of the gods to watch over us to keep us safe. We were also believers that strange paranormal things had happened in the area.

This investigation took a bizarre turn while I was researching information about the accident. I made contact with a former Lualualei Ammunition Depot security gate guard soon after I hiked to the crash site. His security gate post was less than one mile from the crash site and the only permanent structure in the immediate area. He had an incredible tale to tell. I included this part of the story because I thought it was important to document some of the mysterious ways that the traumas from this accident are still affecting people to this day. My intention is to not distract from the overall facts and specifics of the accident, but I wanted to include other aspects of my investigation.

The Waianae area where the accident occurred may be a repository for psychic energy and is well known by the Hawaiians and locals for hauntings. The area was once solely occupied by proud, ancient people who believed in the power and spirit of the land. The retelling of ghost tales has been a favorite form of entertainment and an important cultural link in Hawaii since ancient times. There have now been generations of different immigrant cultures, each with numerous stories about the Waianae Coast. It is hard to explain, but there is a completely different feel in Hawaii because it is more spiritual there. People are connected to the land and its myths much more. Ghostly images or hauntings have been reported along the Waianae Coast around old buildings; deep in the valleys; near sacred burial sites and at ancient heiau temple sites. With a rich history of mythology and folklore and numerous sacred sites along the Waianae coast, the link to the past is ever present. It is with these surroundings that the security guard shared with me his personal experiences as I interviewed him.

The security gate guard often spent many dark nights alone guarding over the main entrance to the high security base. He was assigned to the Lualualei Naval Magazine from 1991 to 2009 and he still lives in the nearby community of Nanakuli. While guarding the main gate, he had several encounters with what he called spirits from the R6D aircraft. They first got his attention by turning on and off lights in buildings at Lualualei. He would investigate all these occurrences only to find no one around. He said that there was a lot of "unexplainable stuff" going on in the area. The unexplained events escalated and he started seeing the ghostly figure of a man wearing old military clothes wandering around. Throughout the months, the ghost would appear more often to him until the hauntings escalated to the point where he had full apparition experiences with the spirits. The guard claimed that he actually communicated with the pilot Harold O'Leary and one of the passengers Eugene L. Lofton. He said the spirit of Harold O'Leary appeared to him urgently requesting help in rescuing passengers from the crash. He stated that he was "like their communication piece." He said that he never felt threatened by the spirits. When I questioned as to why they made contact with him, he said that he had looked up information about the pilot and discovered that they shared the same birthday, same day different years. He was born in 1946 and O'Leary was born in 1920. Furthermore, was the fact the guard was the nearest official authority to the location of the crash which made him the nearest place for anyone to go for help. In 1955 the former Lualualei Ammunition Depot security gate sentry was also one of the first to report the crash. I wondered if history may be repeating itself.

There were several possible reasons why spirits were still haunting the crash site waiting to be rescued. It made sense the ghost reported by the guard was O'Leary because it may have been his error that caused the accident. O'Leary was the pilot who would have had tremendous guilt and the remorse for the deaths of so many passengers. It also makes sense that he is wandering down by the road waiting for the rescue party because it was his responsibility for the safety of the passengers as a MATS Transport pilot according to his obligations in the following official MATS Transport Pilot Code:

As a MATS Transport pilot, I recognize my obligations in the following Code:

- *To the United States Armed Forces, who trust that I am professionally qualified for the tasks expected of me.*
- *To the passengers who trust their lives and safety to my skill and judgment.*
- *To my fellow pilots, who depend upon me to follow established good practices.*
- *To my crew members, who expect me to exercise my best judgment and leadership.*
- *To my coworkers, who constantly are striving for greater achievements in the Military Air Transport Service.*
- *To my organization which entrusts me, in the conduct of my flights, with moral and economic responsibilities.*
- *To discharge these responsibilities, I will at all times observe the highest standards as an officer of the U.S. Air Force (and Navy), and as a professional transport pilot.*
- *I will never knowingly jeopardize the safety of a flight by undertaking a risk to satisfy personal desires, nor will I fly when my mental and physical condition might lead to additional risks.*
- *I will use all means at my disposal to assure the safety of every flight.*

- *I will aggressively maintain my proficiency as a pilot and keep abreast of aviation developments so that my judgment, which largely depends on such knowledge, may be of the highest order.*
- *I will conduct myself, both on duty and off, to reflect credit upon myself, my uniform and my country.*
- *I will constantly strive to keep my standards high.*
- *I pledge adherence to these principles so that I may contribute my part to a safer and more efficient Military Air Transport Service and advance the dignity of my profession.*

The security guard said the haunting spirit encounters continued for some time, always repeating the same pleading for help and rescue. He finally had to bring in a spiritual medium to put the mountain at rest. He asked the spiritual medium if he had some kind of gift to be able to communicate with the spirits. The medium said that we all have the ability, but you must have an open mind to it. The medium performed a ceremony at the site and convinced both spirits to cross over to the spiritual dimension. According to the guard, they did so. After that he said the mountain was quiet from then on during his remaining time. In support of his claims of making contact with the spirits; he gave me a photograph of what he claimed was the pilot in spiritual form. He took the picture using a digital camera and discovered that he was able to capture the spirit. He said to look in the left upper corner and then down a little. The image does show some mist or haze in the image.



Unaltered image from the guard

The former guard now believes that the spirits have crossed over and are no longer haunting the area. He did say that if Mr. O'Leary has not passed over, that he wanted to have a little discussion with him, because he is much wiser now than in the past. When asked what he gained from the experience of the spiritual encounter, he said that he now firmly believes that there is life after death. The guard believes that we all have things to accomplish in life to get to our destiny and beyond that there is eternal peace.

I researched further looking for more accounts of unusual paranormal activity in the area and found another similar story by a different military police officer who served the same Lualualei Naval Magazine area 2004-2007. He also reported strange things that happened to him and ghostly encounters. He absolutely hated making his rounds during the hours of 2200-0600. He said that during those times he had "the most dreaded feeling" that things were watching him during his patrols. He said that some of the older DOD police would refuse to patrol the main magazine complex because of stories that had been passed down over the years. Because of the stories, he adopted a practice of turning his mirrors inward before heading out on patrol. The reason for turning the mirrors was because of a story about a white dressed woman who wandered the complex and would appear in their rear view mirror at random times (could it be Mrs. Rita Webb?). He said that the time he spent there was the most interesting and scary years of his naval career. You can read more of about his haunted experiences in Hawaii at this link:

https://www.reddit.com/r/Paranormal/comments/9itmxg/hauntedweird_military_base/

I believe both the guard and the military police officer told credible stories and I just have to respect their stories. I give a lot of credence to their stories because they came from unlikely observers of such phenomenon - in this case, professional security personnel. As a professional accident investigator, I was taken aback by the first-hand descriptions of the spirits. It took me a long time to reflect on their accounts because I was stunned by the many strange coincidences that coincided with the facts in the case. The Hawaiian family had no prior knowledge of the accident on the mountain that was located so close to them, but they claimed to have encountered the same paranormal ghostly phenomena as the guard. There was no way for the security guard to know all the details about the pilot and the accident because the accident report was not available at that time. The military police officer did not know about the plane crash, but he also had strange feelings in the same area. I truly believe the people who told me the ghost stories had no reason to make them up, nothing to gain from telling me about them and that they themselves absolutely believe them. The ghostly hauntings occurred many years apart from each other, but all were similar accounts. There have been other similar occurrences of hauntings by flight crew members. Another reported example is Flight 401 – The Ghost Crew of Eastern Air Lines, more about that at this link: <https://www.historicmysteries.com/flight-401-ghosts-eastern-air-lines/>.

When researching ghostly phenomena, I read that it was not uncommon for some ghosts to return after they were thought to be put to rest, because some are quite strong willed. Because of the fact that so many people died so suddenly; I could imagine that the event would cause experiences in the paranormal. There are just too many unanswered questions and the restless spirits are frustrated by the tragic event. I write this story in an effort to not only bring closure the families of the dead, but also the help bring closure to the dead themselves. Maybe by investigating and recounting this tragic event we can finally bring peace and closure for so many. I have uncovered some of the truths about this accident and we now know much more about what happened.

I finally reached closure myself by writing this story and I plan on widely disturbing it. I have informed the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) located at Hickam AFB about this crash site. The DPAA is interested in possibly doing training at the crash site. Maybe the DPAA will uncover more secrets of the dead. On February 2nd 2019, I gave a presentation at Moffett Field (the home base of the R6D aircraft involved in the accident) to more than 60 people from the Society for Aviation History. It was a very moving and well deserved tribute. I discussed the accident in detail and at the conclusion of the presentation; I officially donated two artifacts (propeller and gear door) that were recovered from the crash site back in 1999 for display in the Moffett Field Museum. I had earlier made arrangements with the previously crash explorer to obtain the two artifacts and I personally transported them hundreds of miles to their new permanent home. It has been a long journey spanning many years for the artifacts and myself investigating and exploring this accident. Now that I had brought a little bit of the aircraft back to its home and honored the memory of the 66 victims, maybe all involved will find eternal peace!