

Mt. Tom B-17 Crash – July 9, 1946

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Massachusetts

On the night of July 9, 1946, a B-17G, (#43-39136), with twenty-three servicemen and two civilians aboard was en-route from Goose Bay, Labrador, to Westover Air Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts, on a transport mission. Since the war was over, the aircraft had been stripped of its guns and converted to a transport aircraft. Some of the men aboard were getting ready to be discharged from the service after having served in WWII.



B-17G "Flying Fortress"
U.S. Air Force Photo

According to the Army crash investigation report, at about 10:15 p.m. the pilot asked Westover Tower for landing instructions and they were given. He also asked if the runway lights were on, and was advised that they were, as well as two search lights at either end of the runway. The pilot acknowledged, and this was the last heard from the plane. At 10:20 p.m. the B-17 slammed into the southeast slope of Mt. Tom at an elevation of 900 feet, and immediately burst into flame. Another large explosion occurred about ten minutes later. When the first would-be rescuers arrived on the scene they were driven back by the intense heat.

The time of 10:20 p.m. was established by a gold watch found at the scene that had stopped at that time.

According to an Associated Press article that appeared in *The Tuscaloosa News*, a reporter for the *Holyoke Transcript* found what appeared to be the pilot's log book and turned it over to army investigators. The book was of interest for it mentioned a possible fire aboard the aircraft.

There was an entry dated July 9th that read, "*Took off BW at 1400 with 24 passengers for the states*", but the next part was undated. The article then went on in part; "*but the subsequent penciled entry was undated and there was a lack of evidence that it concerned the flight which ended in disaster. It contained a reference to Mitchell Field, a notation that oil pressure was low in the No 2 engine,, and that the cylinder head temperature was so high that it was beginning to smoke.*"

The next paragraph stated; "*Then followed the words 'fire on the port side of nacelle. Arriving Westover on three engines at 10:20. Will have engines changed and on inspection made for return to Newfoundland.'*"

All 25 men aboard were killed in the crash. Passengers included men from the Army/Army Air Force, Coast Guard, and two civilians. They were identified as:

Army/Army Air Force

(Pilot) **Herman J. Valdrini, Jr.**, 24, of Phoenix, Arizona. A photo of him can be seen at www.findagrave.com, Memorial #51808993. He's buried in St. Francis Cemetery in Phoenix, Arizona.

(Co-pilot) **1st Lt. Wayne L. Austin**, 23, of Fort Collins, Colorado. He's buried in Grandview Cemetery in Fort Collins, Colorado.

(Navigator) **Flight Officer Samuel A. Turrentine**, 20, of Greenville, South Carolina. He's buried in Springwood Cemetery in Greenville, South Carolina. To see an obituary for more information, go to www.findagrave.com, Memorial #9901580.

(Radio Operator) **Daniel R. Roe**, 20, of Prescott, Arizona.

Capt. Henry A. Lebrecht, 43, of Brooklyn, New York.

Pfc. Howard E. Carson, 20, of South New Berlin, New York.

Pfc. Eulogio Sanchez, 19, of Detroit, Michigan.

Pfc. Rex A. Tansey, 20, of Salem, Oregon. He's buried in Clear View Cemetery in Salem, Oregon.

U.S. Coast Guard

Lt. (jg.) Frank G. Meriam, 32, of Melrose, Massachusetts.

Lt. Wilfred U. Johnson, 25, of Winonah, New Jersey. He's buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Lt. (jg.) George E. Orford, 29, of Garden City, New Jersey. He's buried in Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York.

Chief Yeoman Hugh J. Worth, 31, of Boston, Massachusetts.

RM2c Lee Winnard, 19, of Dearborn, Michigan.

BM2c Russell S. Scott, 24, of Clayton, New Jersey. He's buried in Cedar Green cemetery in Clayton, New Jersey, Section Q-171.

RM3c Alfred L. Warm, 19, of Brooklyn, New York.

RM3c Arnold J. Simons, 19, of Providence, Rhode Island.

RM3c Ernest R. Gillis, 26, of Beverly, Massachusetts. He's buried in Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York.

ETM3c George R. Benfield, 18, of Dallas, Texas.

ETM3c George E. Fleming, 18, of Indiana, Pennsylvania. He's buried in Long Island National Cemetery in Farmingdale, New York.

S1c Arthur C. Miller, 19, of Springfield, Illinois.

S1c Stanley P. Warshaw, 19, of Brooklyn, New York.

S1c Gregory S. Davenport, 18, of Rhode Island. He's buried in Oak Grove Cemetery, Pawtucket, Rhode Island, Section K4.

S2c David F. Archilles, 18, of Dorchester, Massachusetts.

U.S. Public Health Service

Lt. Pasquale P. Coviello, 32, of North Bergen, New Jersey – surgeon assigned to U.S. Coast Guard. He's buried in St. James cemetery in Woodbridge, New Jersey.

American Red Cross

Arthur L. Bailey, 32, of Fairbury, Nebraska. He's buried in Fairbury Cemetery in Fairbury, Nebraska.

In 1996 a memorial honoring those who lost the lives in the crash was erected on Mt. Tom by a group of private citizens.

Sources:

Army Air Force crash investigation report

City of Holyoke, Massachusetts, vital records.

www.check-six.com

Springfield Republican, "21 In B-17 Killed on Mt. Tom", July 10, 1946, page 1

Lewiston Daily Sun, "23 Die In Plane Crash On Mt. Tom, Holyoke", July 9, 1946

Boston Traveler, "Plane crash dead 25 – All But Five Service Men, B-17 Burns On Mt. Tom", July 10, 1946, page 1

St. Petersburg Times, "23 Reported Dead In Plane Crash", July 10, 1946

Gettysburg Times, "25 Are Killed As Army Plane Hits Mountain", July 10, 1946

Ludington Daily News, "B-17 Crashes; 24 Are Killed", July 10, 1946

Fitchburg Sentinel, "25 Die As Bomber Hits Mountain", July 10, 1946

Springfield Republican, "...Destroyed At Summit", "Converted Bomber, Twice Unable To Land At Westover, Fails To Clear Peak" July 11, 1946, page 6

The Tuscaloosa News, "Log Notation Tells Of Fire", July 11, 1946

www.findagrave.com

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