

Never Saw Fiance Alive

Clio, Mich. (AP)—“He looked exactly as I expected him to,” Katherine Dancy said as she looked at the man she had planned to wed . . . dead and in his casket. She had never seen John Thomas May before.

They became pen pals in 1949 while he was a GI in Germany. May continued writing the Pemberton, W. Va., girl through three more years of Army life. By the time he was discharged three weeks ago, they had made wedding plans. The former Kentuckian came here where he has a brother living and took a job. Miss Dancy was to arrive by train Tuesday. He would know her by her clothing—a tan suit, white accessories and pink corsage. They were to be married yesterday.

But instead, his brother, Paul, met the train. He told her John had been struck by a car and killed while crossing a street Sunday. Miss Dancy saw her 27-year-old fiance for the first time at the funeral home.

All Bodies in Suffolk Air Crash Recovered

Westhampton Beach (UP)—The bodies of four of six fliers who died in the collision of a B-29 Superfortress and an F-84 Thunderjet over Great Peconic Bay April 24 have been recovered, the Suffolk County Air Force Base announced yesterday. The other two had been found earlier.

The men were identified as Capt. J. Vapenick, 30, pilot of the Superfort; Capt. H. C. McClana-

han, 29; M/Sgt. D. D. Shaffer, 34; and Sgt. J. R. Clarkson, 32, all bomber crew members attached to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Dayton, O. They were on an experimental flight at the time of the crash.

The sole occupant of the F-84 was Maj. John David, 32, who also was attached to the Ohio Field. His body and that of M/Sgt. Claud Schomp Jr., 34, Martins-Ferry, O., had been found.

Here's How 'Collision' Could Have Occurred

An eyewitness air expert who saw the flight of the B-29 and the jet but not the **crash** said a wing of the smaller plane was "attached" to a wing of the bomber.

He surmised the ships were practicing "wing-tip towing," a technique used to increase the range of jets. The jet hooks on in the air. How it does so is top-secret.

The eyewitness said the wing of the F-84 may have struck the B-29's wing, flipping the jet over onto the bomber's engines. He asked that his name not be used.

'Huge Wall of Water,' Witness

Tells How Jet, Bomber Hit Bay

Aronson, Harvey

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'Huge Wall of Water,' Witness Tells How Jet, Bomber Hit Bay

By Harvey Aronson

"There was a screaming wail like a diving plane makes . . . I looked up . . . nothing in the sky . . . then there was a huge wall of water . . . a tremendous explosion . . . and flames shot out of the bay."

An excited eyewitness told what he saw early last night after a B-29 Bomber and an F-84 jet collided suddenly over Peconic Bay.

"I was on the beach admiring a catch of fish when it happened," said Joe Polashock, proprietor of a New Suffolk fishing station.

Polashock arrived at the scene in his rowboat shortly after, to find a flaming sea filled with cushions, small pieces of wood and other debris, and patches of gasoline and oil that kept igniting.

He told me of seeing "something that looked like a body" handed to an air force boat, in a stretcher. "They also got a wallet and some papers out of the water," he added.

Only there was no trace of the B-29 that fell into the bay, somewhere west of Robin's Island. He thought he saw the jet which crashed about a mile north of Southampton because "after the flames there was a dark object dropping out of the sky" near there.

A Peconic Bay resident, Ted Wamback of Camp Mineola, saw

"a white steam cloud . . . then burst of flame and heavy black smoke," after the B-29 disappeared into the choppy seas.

Other boatmen near the spot where the bomber went under told of the flaming waters and the splinters of debris.

"I picked up my fire extinguisher and jumped in my speedboat," said Floyd D. Houston of New Suffolk. "Only when I got there all I could see was the fire and the oil slick and the bits of wreckage."

"Everything was completely broken up . . . the water was about 30 feet deep . . . it was like the plane just disintegrated . . . we did the best we could but there was nothing to save."

A Valley Stream CAP pilot, Lt. Tom Ward of 33 West Dover St. was about to refuel his Seabee Amphibian at Mattituck when he heard of the crash and flew to the scene.

"It was about two miles west of Robins Island and there was an area of burning fuel that covered a couple of acres. There wasn't much wreckage left, just six yellow looking oxygen tanks floating around. I was cruising at about 300 feet."

Ward flew all over the vicinity trying to sight any possible sur-

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Eyewitnesses Tell of Plane Collision

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vivors only "there didn't seem to be any."

"I landed on the water but the fire was still going strong so I couldn't get too close. There were lots of boats around but it didn't seem like there was much they could do."

Parker Wickham and his brother Hull, owners of Mattituck Airport, also soared over the "circle of fire," in a Stinson-150. "We heard the explosion and saw a cloud of smoke," said Parker, "and got there about ten minutes afterwards."

"All that was left was the debris and the flames. The oxygen tanks were just small cylindrical objects.

I guess there weren't any survivors."

There seemed to be few eyewitnesses of the crash of the F-84 which fell into the woods north of Southampton and a mile from the Mackay station near there.

"We didn't see a thing," said a man on duty at the receiving station. "But they say that the houses in Southampton trembled when the plane hit."

A North Sea Fire Department fireman described the wooded area where the jet smashed trees to the ground.

"We got there sometime after 5:30," said fireman Al Dunkirk. "There was a body hanging out of the plane . . . It wasn't very pretty . . . It was so charred."

Hunt Bodies of 4 in Mid-Air Crash

Bergmann, Art

Newsday (1940-1986); Apr 27, 1953; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Newsday

pg. 3

Hunt Bodies of 4 in Mid-Air Crash

By Art Bergmann

Hampton Bays—An official board of inquiry today is piecing together the wreckage of the B-29 Superfortress and the F-84 jet fighter which collided over eastern Long Island Friday killing six, as a crew of Navy divers starts salvage operations in Peconic Bay in search of the bodies of four airmen.

Grappling operations by the Coast Guard and Air Force over the week end recovered the body of one of five bomber crewmen and pieces of the giant aircraft which lead investigators to the theory that the bomber exploded and killed its crew before sinking in Peconic Bay.

The planes, detached from Wright Field, Dayton Ohio, had taken off from Republic Aircraft Corporation's Farmingdale field minutes before the spectacular crash at 5:47 PM. They were on a top secret experimental mission, according to Republic and Air Force officials, who denied that the planes were refueling at the time of the crash.

Hit Bomber Wing

The air tragedy occurred 20,000 feet over Southold Town when the jet, piloted by Capt. John Davis, 32, of Dayton, Ohio, "collided with the left wing of the bomber, causing both planes to go into crash spins," reported Capt. Frank Love of the Suffolk Air Base, Westhampton last night.

Love, together with officials from Wright Field and Republic,

comprise the investigating board which launched its probe immediately after the crash.

According to observers who witnessed the crash, the planes "seemed to go apart and come together" several times. Then the left wing of the bomber disappeared and the big ship plummeted earthward, out of control. It exploded twice, once just before crashing in Peconic Bay and once underwater.

Didn't Bail Out

Love said he thought Davis was "partially conscious" although he gave no radio distress signal nor did he bail out by use of his ejector seat.

Three bursts were fired from his loaded machine guns which alerted Coast Guardsmen at the Shinnecock Station. His plane came down in a long, lazy spin, over an unpopulated area, and crashed in North Sea, three miles from the site of the B-29 crash, in scrub oak territory. His plane was destroyed by fire and Air Force rescuers found his blackened body nearby.

Believed killed before the bomb-

er hit the water was its pilot, Capt. J. J. Vapenick, 30, of Cleveland, Capt. H. C. McClanahan, 29, of Dayton, M/Sgt. D. D. Shaffer, 34, of Dayton, Sgt. J. R. Clarkson, 32, of Austin, Texas, and M/Sgt. Claud Chemp Jr., 34, of Oxford, Ohio.

Of the crew, only the body of Chemp, who leaves a sister, Mrs. Virginia Wile of 124 Percheron Lane, Rdsllyn Heights, has been recovered. The Air Force crash boat late Saturday was knocked out of commission when its propeller fouled on his body.

Wallets Found

Other debris picked up by fishermen, sightseers on nearby Cedar Beach and the Coast Guard include wallets and pieces of clothing.

Davis' and Chemps' bodies were removed to DeFriest's Funeral Home, Southold.

Yesterday the Air Force ordered up a Navy barge and diving crew from Bayonne, N.J. under the assumption that the missing bodies are trapped in a main part of the bomber fuselage still intact at the

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TRAGIC SEARCH through the waters of Great Peconic Bay reveals the body of a bomber crewman still attached to a parachute. Air Force rescue team and Coast Guardsmen from Shinnecock Coast Guard Station had to cut parachute cords from the boat's propeller where they had become entangled, before they could pull the body aboard. (Other Photos in Centerfold)

Start Probe of Fatal LI Plane Crash

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bottom of the bay in 30 feet of water.

"We will do everything possible to locate and remove the bodies as soon as is humanly possible," said Love last night. He declared that the nature of the secret experimental mission would not be revealed and that the inquiry board's job was "nearly completed."

The catastrophe, worst on eastern Long Island since the ill-fated Pelican overturned taking the lives of more than 50 persons off Montauk Point, sent 20 to 30

powerboats speeding to the spot where the bomber went down. Its explosions rocked the mainland for miles and sent up a tower of water marked by burning oil and floating debris.

The bomber hit and sank one-and-a-half miles southwest of the southern tip of Robins Island, a scrub oak game preserve, strewn plane parts for ten miles.

Haggard rescue crews grappled on round-the-clock patrols in three boats off Robins Island until yesterday afternoon, when fog closed in on them. They failed to locate any large plane pieces.



OVERCOME WITH JOY a native ROK soldier covers tear-filled eyes as he is greeted at Freedom Village by Brig.

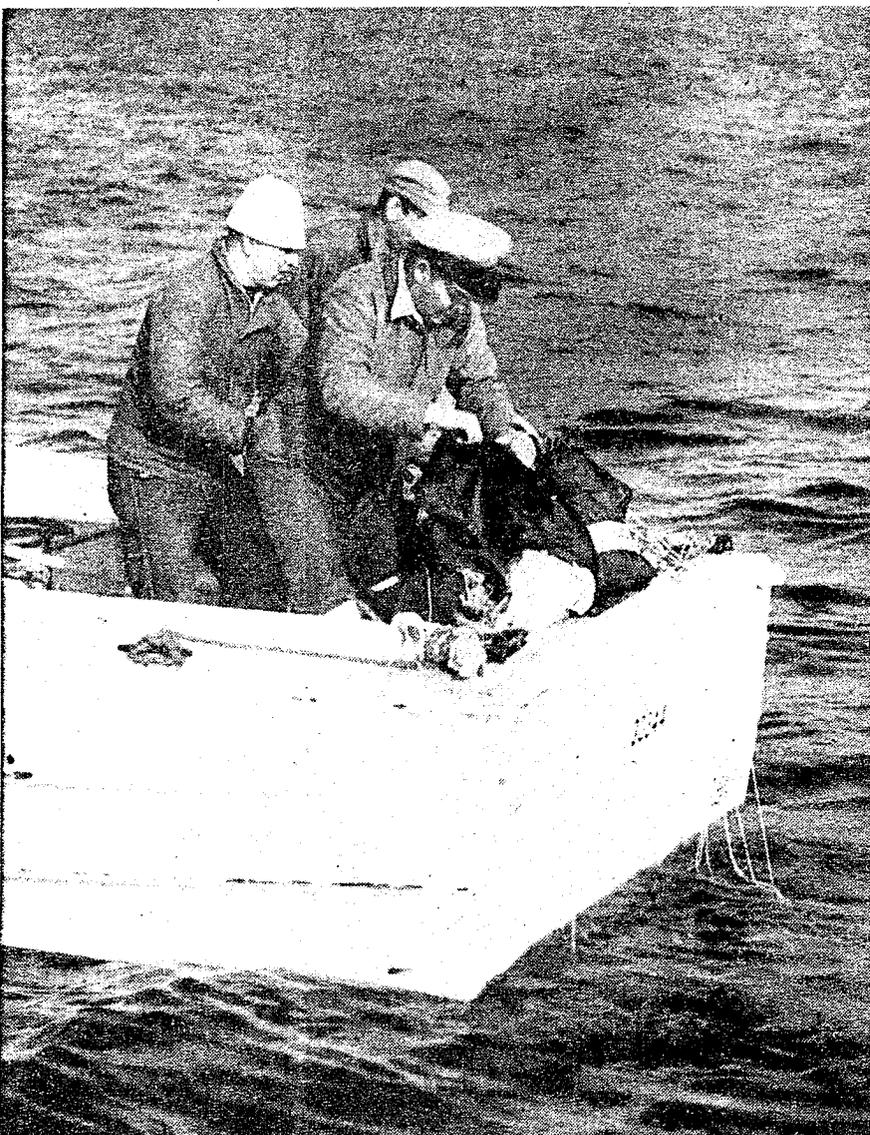
Gen. Choi Suk who is in charge of the ROK part of "Operation Little Switch."

(AP Wirephoto)



LOSER WINS a kiss from Ingrid Bergman as he stops his car in Rome, quitting the Mille Miglia auto race after reaching Rome in seven hours.

Drag for Jet Crash Bodies



ONE FOUND. The broken body of crewman is placed on Coast Guard rescue ship after jet plane collided with bomber over Great Peconic Bay.



LIFE JACKET pulled from Great Peconic Bay is searched for identification marks by Airmen and Coast Guardsmen. (Story, other photo on Page 3).

Prettiest She at Ski Club Ball



(AP Radiophoto)

Bergman. Director Roberto Rossellini, the Mille Miglia (thousand mile) race in ten hours, 28 minutes, 26 seconds.



BIG SMILE

lights the pretty face of Joan Brell, Baldwin, as she is crowned Long Island Ski Queen at the annual ball in Freeport Yacht Club, Freeport. Stein Erickson, Olympic champion from Norway, crowned her.



(AP Wirephoto)

SOLEMN-FACED Koreans in the first group of returnees march to the receiving room of the Freedom Village hospital after trip from Panmunjom. They will soon be returned to their homes in South Korea.



(AP Wirephoto)

RELEASE from the Reds brings another release—laughter—to Sgt. Walter H. Mitchell, left, Greenville, Tenn., as he talks to Navy chaplains E. Vaughn Lyons, center, Wilmington, Del., and Lee Rice of New York City.

BODY IS RECOVERED IN WRECK OF B-29

Bay Gives Up First of the Five Airmen in Bomber That Collided With F-84

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

SOUTHAMPTON, L. I., April 25
—The body of one of the crew members of the B-29 that crashed with an F-84 Thunderjet here yesterday afternoon was recovered from the waters of Great Peconic Bay.

Coast Guard and Air Force patrol boats stood by all day near the oil slick that marked the place where the giant bomber sank after colliding in mid-air with the jet while on a classified training flight. Divers and salvage equipment were on the way from Bayonne, N. J., to begin the laborious job of raising the hulk of the Superfortress.

The body, recovered at 2:35 P. M., was identified as that of M/Sgt. Claude Schemp of Martins Ferry, Ohio. Sgt. Schemp is the brother of Mrs. Virginia Wild of 124 Percheron Lane, Roslyn Heights, L. I. Identification was made from the name stamped on his parachute pack.

Boats Drag for Bodies

The crash boat from the Suffolk County Air Force Base at West Hampton Beach, which has been patrolling the crash area, was disabled, but three other boats were dragging the area in the hope of recovering other bodies.

The four boats arrived on the crash scene, about four miles southwest of Robins Island, shortly after 4 A. M. this morning, and secured after 4 P. M. today. The boats plan to resume their patrol at 5 A. M. tomorrow.

In charge of the salvage operations is Maj. Lester L. Applegate of the Suffolk Air Force Base at Westhampton, L. I.

Meanwhile, the wreckage of the F-84, which had fallen and burned in the dense woods on the south side of Peconic Bay, was removed to the Suffolk base, where it will be studied for clues to the cause of the collision.

The pilot of the jet plane was Maj. John Davis, a 31-year-old test pilot from the Wright Air Development Center at Dayton, Ohio,

who had been assigned to temporary experimental duty with the Republic Aviation Corporation. The plane belonged to Republic.

The pilot of the bomber was Capt. J. J. Vapenick, also of the Wright development center. The B-29 was on detached service from the Wright center.

Maj. John Barron, public information officer at Mitchel Air Force Base, Hempstead, L. I., said the two planes were on "an experimental flight of a classified nature." There was no elaboration.

Both planes took off from the Republic Aviation Corporation airfield at East Farmingdale at 4:17 P. M. yesterday, and had been in the air for more than an hour, passing and repassing one another.

Alex Gerard, grounds keeper of the National Golf Links of America here, who witnessed the crash, fixed the time of the accident at about 5:45 P. M.

Major Davis was the assistant chief of fighter operations and director of flight and all-weather testing at the Wright center. A West Point graduate, he piloted the first French-built jet fighter, the Mystere 88, to a speed faster than sound last October.

Other members of the crew of the B-29 included Capt. H. C. McClanahan, 29, the co-pilot, of Dayton; M/Sgt. D. D. Shaffer, 33, of Dayton, engineer, and T/Sgt. J. R. Clarkson, 31, of Austin, Tex.

Jet and B-29 Collide, 6 Die at Southampton

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

SOUTHAMPTON, L. I., April 24

—Six Air Force men lost their lives here early this evening in a midair collision between an F-84 Thunderjet and a B-29 Superfortress.

Maj. John Barron, Public Information Officer at the Mitchell Air Force Base, reported tonight that the planes had been on "an experimental flight of a classified nature." The B-29, he said, was on detached service from the Wright Air Development Center at Dayton, Ohio, while the jet fighter belonged to the Republic Aviation Corporation at Farmingdale.

Alick Gerard, grounds keeper at the National Golf Links of America here, fixed the moment of the crash at 5:45 P. M.

He said there was a tearing, ripping sound from high aloft and that the jet fighter then fell, burn-

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WAR PLANES CRASH IN AIR, KILLING SIX

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ing. The larger plane plummeted almost immediately afterward.

The fighter crashed in dense woods on the south shore of Peconic Bay. The bomber went down in flames into the bay waters with a tremendous splash, roughly three to four miles south of Robins Island.

A wide area of oil slick formed on the waters before volunteer firemen and other rescue parties put out from shore. The large plane sank.

Moments after the crash, an Army truck carried Dr. John Nugent, the town coroner, to the scene of the crash, where surrounding trees had been "mowed down like corn." Dr. Nugent found the jet destroyed by flames and the pilot; who had been thrown clear, lying dead on the ground near-by.

The burning wreckage sent up dense smoke in the woods and was a charred ruin before volunteer firemen from the village of North Sea got to it.

The jet pilot was identified as Maj. John Davis, a 31-year-old test flier from the Dayton development center, who was assigned to temporary experimental duty with the Republic Aviation Company.

The body was taken to David De Friest's morgue in Southhold. Other bodies were to be removed there, if taken from the bay.

The passengers in the B-29 in-

cluded two Air Force captains—the pilot and co-pilot—two master sergeants and a technical sergeant.

The name of the pilot was not disclosed pending notification of next of kin. The others, whose families already had been notified, were listed late tonight as Capt. H. C. McClanahan, 29, of Dayton, co-pilot; M/Sgt. D. D. Shaffer, 33, of Dayton, engineer; M/Sgt. C.

Chemp, 33, of Martins Ferry, Ohio, and T/Sgt. J. R. Clarkson, 31, of Austin, Tex.

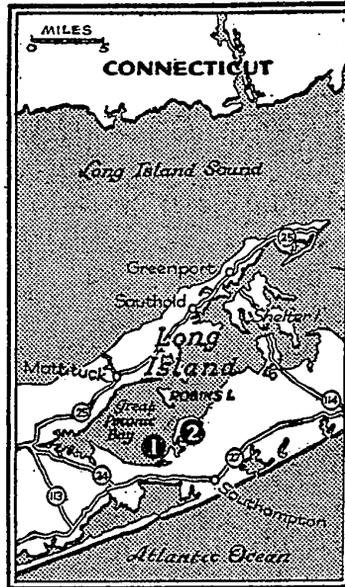
Both planes had left the Republic Aviation Corporation airfield at East Farmingdale at 4:17 P. M. for the experimental flight and had been in the air more than an hour, passing and repassing one another.

Nick Nowaski and Frank Casttricone, operators for the Mackay Marine Receiving Station outside Southampton, heard the two ships pass in their last moment of flight. Though the crash occurred only one mile east of where their shack sits on a hilltop, they did not see or hear it.

But the firemen at North Sea had. They tore up to the shack in their car, with fire-fighting equipment, and asked for directions through the woods to the spot where the Thunderjet had fallen. The operators had the point fairly well fixed from the smoke they had seen. They put the firemen on the proper path.

Air Force rescue planes patrolled the bay after dark with only scant hope of finding any bomber crewmen living. Three Coast Guard vessels from the Shinnecock Station at Hampton Bays searched for the victims throughout the night, beaming powerful lights over the water. At the first sign of daylight tomorrow, rescue planes will resume the search.

A valiant rescue effort was made shortly after the crash by Lieut. Thomas Ward, a Civil Air Patrol officer, who was flying a privately owned amphibian plane. Lieutenant Ward, who lives in Valley Stream, L. I., set his plane down in the middle of the oil slick but found no trace of the crewmen.



The New York Times
April 25, 1953
AIR COLLISION: Where bomber (1) and fighter plane (2) crashed after their accident over the eastern part of Long Island.