



EDDIE MOORE/JOURNAL

Sam Beard examines a metal fitting that was part of an Air Force RB-57F weather reconnaissance plane that slammed into the Sandia Mountains in November 1966.

Two Die in Crash Of Jet in Sandias

By Staff Reporter
 An Air Force weather reconnaissance plane crashed into the Sandia Mountains in November 1966, killing two Air Force captains.

The RB-57F, a high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft, was on a mission over the desert mountains when it encountered severe weather. The plane crashed into a meadow, and the two crew members, Capt. [Name] and Capt. [Name], were killed.

The crash site was discovered by a local resident who reported seeing a large fire in the mountains. The Air Force quickly dispatched a search party, and the wreckage was found within a few days.

The investigation determined that the crash was caused by a combination of factors, including pilot error and adverse weather conditions. The plane was flying at a high altitude and was unable to maintain its altitude during the descent.

The two victims were identified as Capt. [Name] and Capt. [Name]. They were both highly decorated and had many years of service in the Air Force.

The crash of the RB-57F remains one of the most tragic accidents in the history of the Sandia Mountains. The site is now a memorial to the two men who lost their lives in the service of their country.



John [Name]

Paul [Name]



COURTESY OF DAVID WEADE

Pictures of the two men killed and an aircraft like the one lost appeared in Albuquerque Tribune stories about the 1966 crash of an Air Force jet in the Sandia Mountains.

Beard Will Investigate Crash Case



JOURNAL FILES

A Nov. 9, 1966, Albuquerque Journal story reporting the crash of an Air Force weather reconnaissance jet in the Sandia Mountains. Two Air Force captains were killed.

FRAGMENTS OF A TRAGEDY

Scattered debris in Sandia Mountain meadow reminder of 1966 Air Force jet crash

BY OLLIE REED JR.
 JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

SANDIA MOUNTAINS — Thin segments of aluminum, slabs of heavier metal, pieces of fiberglass and particles of Lucite are scattered through the mountain meadow, just 400 feet from the Sandia Crest Road.

If they were not looking for it, most people would not notice the debris, some of which appear to be nothing more than discarded Doublemint wrappers.

But these scraps are fragments of a tragedy, all that's left of an Air Force weather reconnaissance jet that crashed into these mountains 57 years ago, taking the lives of two officers.

Sam Beard knelt down and retrieved a sliver of corroded aluminum from the ground.

"The two heaviest parts of a plane are the engines and the landing gear," he said. "Nearly everything else is

From PAGE A1

aluminum."

Beard, 66, is a retired mechanical engineer who worked at Sandia National Laboratories from 1965 to 2003.

A member of the New Mexico Cross-country Ski Club, New Mexico Volunteers for the Outdoors and Friends of the Sandia Mountains, Beard knows the Sandias about as well as anyone. Early in the afternoon this past Friday, he guided two companions through the crash site.

"The plane was flying this way," he said, indicating an east-to-west direction. "It hit the trees first. Some of those Engelmann spruces are 300-foot tall. Then the plane fell to the ground and started a fire. This used to be dense forest, but the fire killed the trees and it became a meadow."

Emergency call

Compiling information from several sources and adding to it himself, Beard has put together a list of 36 plane crashes in the Sandias. The dates are unknown for two of the crashes in this tally, but those that are established range from July 18, 1937, to Nov. 18, 2015.

"Every eight years, on average, a plane crashes in the Sandias," said Beard, who has visited many of the crash sites.

Beard's list of crashes adds up to more than 50 fatalities. The incident most people know about is the TWA Flight 260 crash on Feb. 19, 1965, which took the lives of 16 people.

But the crash that burned out this meadow, a short distance up the Sandia Crest Road from the Ellis Trailhead, happened on Monday, Nov. 7, 1966.

Air Force captain Robert O. Bartlett, 35, the pilot, and Leo R. Orway, 29, the navigator, were returning to Kirtland Air Force Base from a routine training mission in a RB-57F weather reconnaissance jet, a \$3.5 million aircraft equipped to test for radioactivity in the air during nuclear tests.

The plane, part of the 56th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron, was flying back to the base at night and visibility was further limited by a thick, swirling fog and lightly falling snow.

According to The Albuquerque Tribune, "The two-crew jet called in an emergency report to the Kirtland Control tower about 8:45 p.m., and its bip disappeared from the AF West Mesa Radar Station's radar scope at the same time."

Because of the poor



Sam Beard, 66, gazes into the forest that surrounds the site of a November 1966 Air Force jet crash in the Sandia Mountains. The meadow he's standing in was created when the fire from the crash burned away the trees.



Pieces of a U.S. Air Force weather reconnaissance plane that crashed into the Sandia Mountains in 1966, killing the two crewmen, can still be found at the crash site just off the Sandia Crest Road.



EDGEWOOD JOURNAL

“ THESE [CRASH SITES] ARE IMPORTANT TO ME BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE STEPPED UP TO SERVE IN THE MILITARY AND KNEW THEY WERE TAKING GREAT PERSONAL RISK.”

DAVID WADE

weather conditions and initial confusion about the approximate location of the crash, it was after midnight before the plane was found.

Smelling smoke

The plane crashed at 10,440 feet, about 300 feet below the mountain's crest.

A trio consisting of a Bernalillo County Sheriff's deputy, a Cedar Crest resident who was a veteran of Sandia Mountain searches and a U.S. Forest Service ranger found the wreckage by following the smell of smoke through the thick fog that cloaked the mountain. A spark falling from a tree tipped them to the exact location.

The plane had sliced its way through trees, leaving stumps in its wake, before landing on its belly. The three men who found it put out several fires in the area, but the deputy reported that the bodies of the two Air Force captains were unburned and lay about three feet in front of

the plane.

Bartlett, who lived on Mercury SE, had 1,700 flying hours to his credit and a graduate degree in nuclear engineering from the Armed Forces Institute of Technology. He was survived by his wife, Sigrid, and his parents in Los Angeles.

Orway, who lived on Madeira SE, was a Vietnam veteran with 2,600 flying hours. Prior to his assignment to Kirtland, he had been stationed in Japan, where he met his wife, Yoko. He was survived by his widow and a mother in Michigan.

Somber tribute

In March 1982, when he was 17 years old, David Wade was a member of a Socorro Search and Rescue Team that found a plane that had crashed on a ridgetop southwest of Magdalena, killing 16 people.

"I have felt a connection with victims of plane crashes since then,"

said Wade, now 39 and an employee of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "I have really only looked into two military crashes at this point. These are important to me because these people stepped up to serve in the military and knew they were taking great personal risk."

Wade is a military veteran himself, having served a total of more than 28 years in the active Army, Army Reserve and Army National Guard. He is also a retired Albuquerque Police Department crime-scene investigator, which he thinks is another reason he is interested in crash sites.

He learned about the RB-57F crash when he attended a Sam Beard presentation about Sandia Mountain crashes. He went to the site last month.

"I started finding bits of aluminum as soon as I got in the area of the meadow," he said. "I found more as I

walked. I eventually found pieces of the instrument panels. I had no doubt I was in the right place.

"I knew the direction the plane had come from and imagined what the last moments for the crew could have been like."

Remembering he had read in the 1966 newspaper stories that the crew radioed an emergency report just before the plane disappeared from radar, Wade was especially moved when he found a part from the radio.

"It struck me that two young men had died on this site, where so many people hike and ski without having any idea why this beautiful meadow is here," he said. "I found plenty of evidence of the crash. I took photos of some of it and left it all at the site."

Scraps and shards, bolts and rivets, bits and pieces left behind in somber tribute to two lives lost on a foggy mountain 57 years ago this week.

Sandia Mountain crashes

Sam Beard's list of Sandia Mountain plane crashes is as follows:

Date unknown: Small plane, just east of Albuquerque Academy property. Fatalities unknown.

Date unknown: Plane type unknown. North and east of big switchback on Tree Spring Trail. Fatalities unknown.

July 18, 1937: Taylor Cub, 200 yards north of U.S. 66, near Sandia foothills. Two killed.

Nov. 17, 1941: Northrop A-17 attack bomber, in upper Bear Canyon. Two killed.

Nov. 16, 1944: C-47, south of Picoitas and west of N.M. 365. Seven killed.

July 7, 1952: Navy Grumman Goose, 0.3 miles south of Cienega Canyon Trail. Five killed.

Feb. 19, 1955: TWA Flight 260, at 8,550 feet, just north of Sandia Peak Tramway cables. Sixteen killed.

Dec. 2, 1961: Piper Aztec twin engine, just north of South Peak, 50-75 feet west of South Crest Trail. Four killed.

July 12, 1964: Piper Comanche, 0.4 miles north of CCC Trail. Four killed.

Nov. 7, 1966: RB-57F Air Force jet, at 10,400 feet just off Sandia Crest Highway. Two killed.

Sometime before October 1967: Cessna 210, east of Three Gun Spring Trail. Two killed.

Feb. 26, 1975: Piper Aztec twin engine, high on west mountainside, just south of Pino Canyon. Two killed.

Aug. 6, 1989: Cessna 172M, Whiskey Peak, north of Train Tower two. One killed.

Jan. 20, 1990: Cessna P210N, at 2,500 feet north of Pino Trail. Three killed.

June 16, 2007: Beech 58 Baron two-engine, north of Needle and southeast of North Peak. One killed.

Nov. 16, 2015: Cessna C182, 0.17 miles southwest of Cienega Canyon Pico Area. Three killed.

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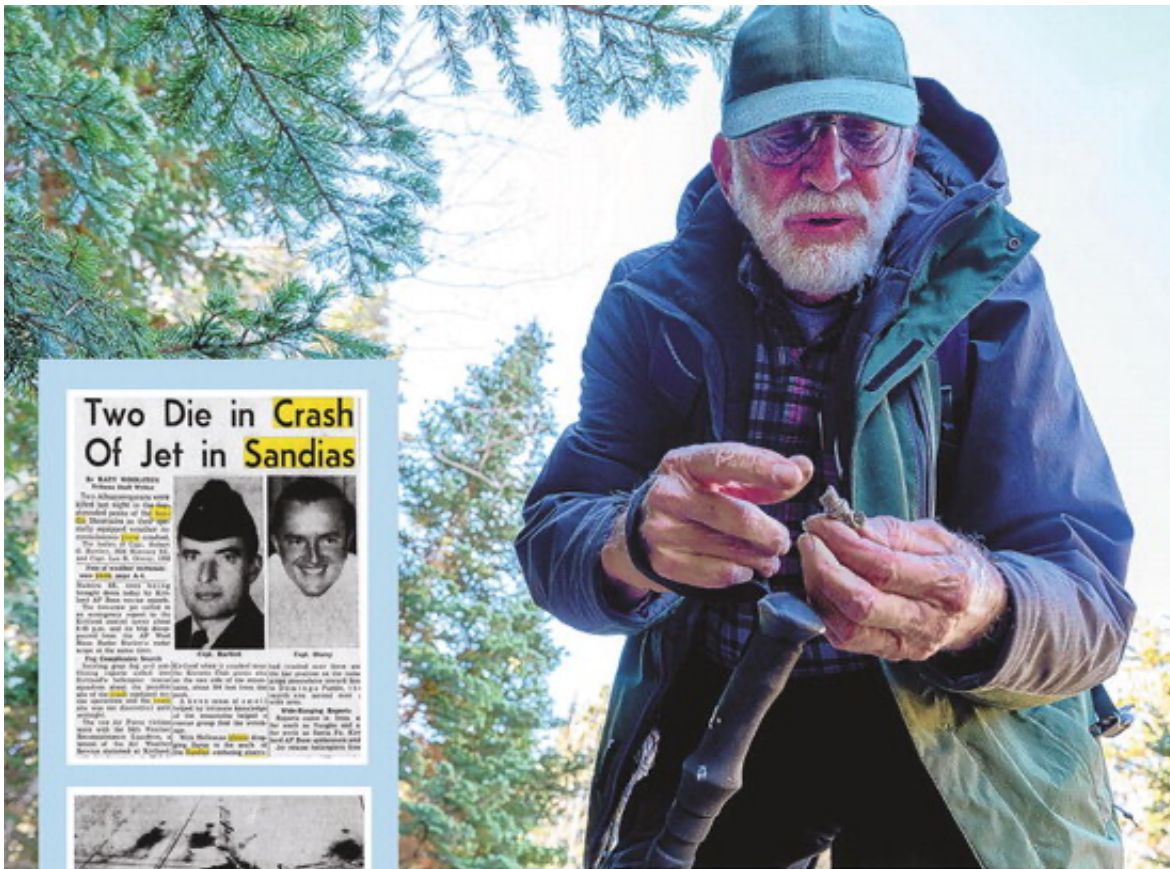
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