

# DAKOTA A65-61

Two hours before this picture was taken the No 5 Sqn crews were engaged on their most difficult recovery operation — the recovery of the remains of 27 Australian servicemen and one RAAF nursing sister, killed when their RAAF Dakota crashed into a mountain in West Irian 25 years ago. Success meant negotiating almost inaccessible mountains rising 14,000 to 15,000 feet, freezing temperatures and, most hazardous of all, overcoming a considerable reduction in the supply of oxygen to helicopter crews flying at such heights.

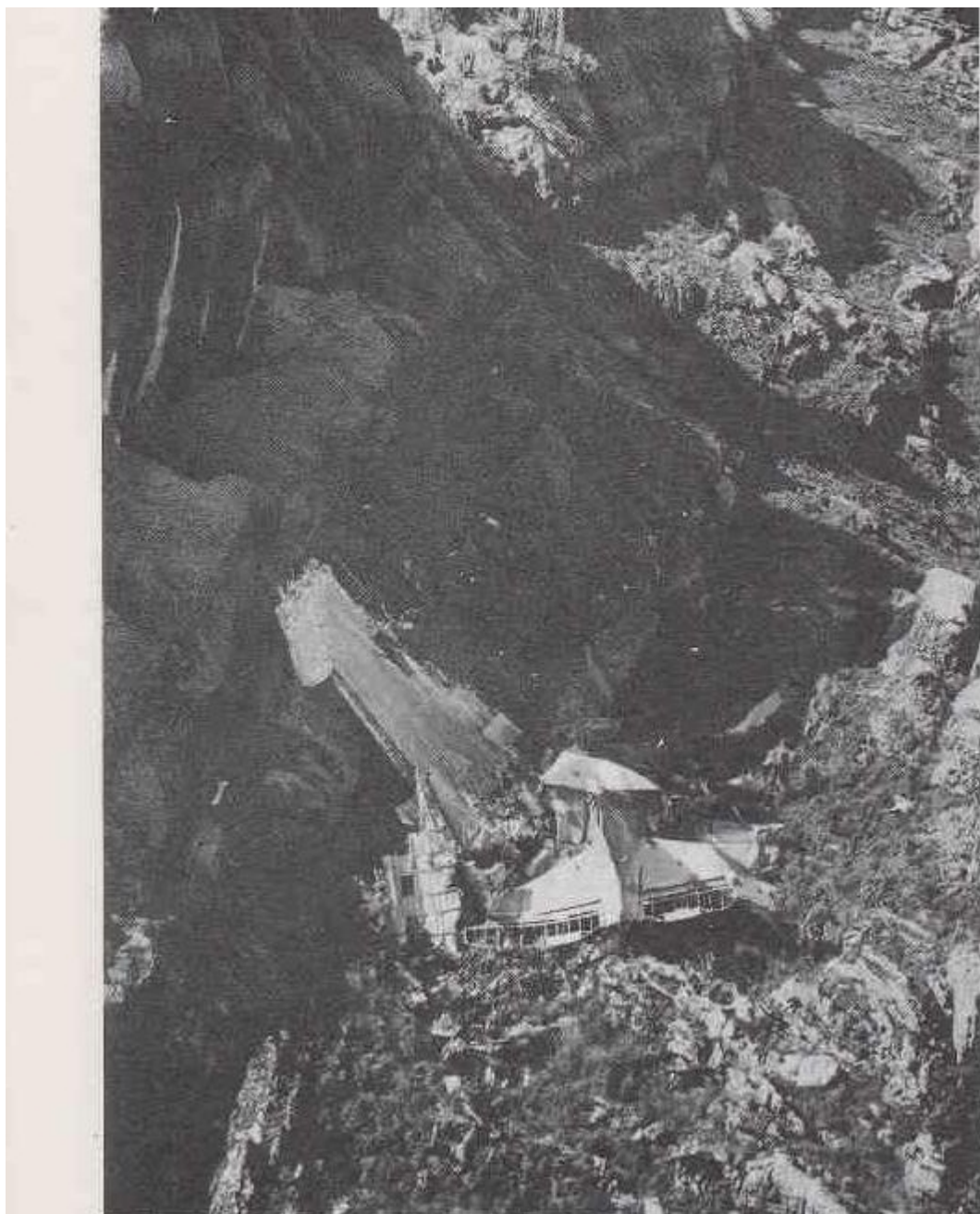
Within three days of the start of the actual operation, the well-known Air Force signal, "Mission Successful", had been radioed to Canberra, and the RAAF party was on its way home again.

Pictured (left to right) are: F Sgt Ken Maley, Sqn Ldr Peter Mahood, Flt Lt Frank Riley, Cpl John Parsons, Sqn Ldr Brian Dirou, LAC Peter Amos, Flg Off Joe Driver and Flg Off Bevin Pettitt.

Two other members of the party, not shown, who played a prominent part in the recovery operation were Flt Lt John Gavey and Lt Mick Mumery.

The RAAF party received great support from Indonesian authorities and American missionary personnel stationed in the area.





● The crashed Dakota, A65-61. This photograph, taken by RAAF Public Relations photographer, Flg Off Mal Lancaster, gives some idea of the rugged West Irian terrain, with its jagged mountain ranges.

The Dakota crashed at 13,500 feet while on a flight from Biak to Australia. All of the 27 Australian servicemen and one RAAF nursing sister perished in the crash.





● Mission successful, the RAAF helicopter crews relax and enjoy some well-earned refreshment.





● Right: The American missionary pilot, Mr Jerry Reeder, pictured second from left, who first sighted the Dakota wreckage, was on hand to assist the RAAF pilots with their recovery operations.

Pictured with Mr Reeder are (from left): Sqn Ldr Brian Dirou, Sqn Ldr Peter Mahood and Sqn Ldr Ron Raymond, who was the leader of the RAAF party.



● Ground staff assemble a helicopter at Biak.

The 10 RAAF personnel lost in the Dakota crash were: Crew: W Off A. J. Hunter, of Swansea, NSW; W Off A. C. Hughes, 24, of Warialda, NSW; W Off E. Wilkinson, 33, of Ipswich, Qld; F Sgt K. R. Wiles, 24, of Footscray, Vic; F Sgt A. G. Sawrey, 22, of Concord, Sydney; Sgt F. L. H. Blackmore, 28, of

L. H. Blackmore, 28, of Hindmarsh, SA; Sister Marie Eileen Craig, RAAF Nursing Sister, 33, of Drummoyne, NSW.

RAAF passengers: Flg Off N. R. Stibbard, of Wollongong, NSW, 24; W Off A. Campbell, 27, of Manning River, NSW; LAC W. R. Dunderdale, 19, of Oxley, Qld.





● Left: The Caribou crew played a vital part in the operation. Here pictured at Enarotali with two Indonesian Army men are (from left): Plt Off John Maxwell, of Mosman, Sydney, and Plt Off Scott MacGregor, of Hobart, Tas.





- **Surrounded by native tribesmen, this RAAF helicopter crew study the course they will fly to the mountain. They are (from left): LAC Peter Amos, Flg Off Joe Driver, Sgt Dennis Olsen and Flg Off Bevin Pettitt. The two helicopter crews established a landing pad at 10,500 feet up the mountain, from which the final successful attempt on the crash site was made.**



- **Sister Marie Craig, of the RAAF Nursing Service, the only woman on the ill-fated Dakota.**