

Victims Named - 'Alpine' Operation To Reach Crash Scene

The Army and the RAAF issued a list yesterday of the names of 27 servicemen and one RAAF nursing sister, victims of an aircraft crash in New Guinea 25 years ago.

The dead have been listed as "missing, presumed killed" since September 1945, and their relatives did not receive confirmation of their deaths until this week.

The wreckage of the RAAF Dakota, which was lost on a flight from Biak to Horn Island, was found by chance about a fortnight ago by two Americans.

A combined RAAF-Army team set out last week for the crash site on the side of a mountain in the (now) West Irian highlands at a height of about 13,500ft.

An army spokesman said the operation, code-named Tropic Snow, to identify the skeletal remains of the dead had the elements of an Alpine expedition, including the setting up of two base camps a short flying distance from the crash site, a helicopter pad at 10,500ft and oxygen bottle supplies.

"Never having had to land and operate at such high altitudes, the helicopter crews worked with the aid of portable oxygen tanks while flying at the 13,500ft site", the spokesman said.

The crash site had been found on the first day and, after setting up a landing pad, the helicopters had returned to Enarotoli.

Heavy cloud on the mountain on the second day had forced the helicopters to return to Enarotoli.

"However, at first light on the third day the two helicopters, flown by Squadron Leader Brian Dirou and Flight Lieutenant Frank Riley, both of Canberra, again located the crash site and recovery operations began", the spokesman said.

Squadron Leader Peter Mahood, of Canberra, who was responsible for this phase of the operation, had landed and one helicopter had returned to the landing pad and picked up Flight Sergeant Ken Maley, of Hobart, to help in the recovery work.

"During the two hours the two men remained on the mountain they regularly sought relief from the shortage of oxygen by taking gulps from their oxygen bottles", the spokesman said.

The RAAF said the air force personnel on the crashed Dakota, number A65-61, were:

CREW:

Warrant Officers A. J. Hunter, of Swansea. NSW; A. C. Hughes, 24, of Warialda, NSW; E. Wilkinson, 33, of Ipswich, Queensland. Flight Sergeants K. R. Wiles, 24, of Footscray, Victoria; A. G. Sawrey, 22, of Concord, NSW. Sergeant F. L. H. Blackmore, 28, of Hindmarsh, South Australia, and Sister Marie Eileen Craig, RAAF Nursing Sister, 33, of Drummoyne, NSW.

RAAF PASSENGERS:

Flying Officer N. R. Stibbard, 24, of Wollongong, NSW; Warrant Officer A. Campbell, 27, of Manning River, NSW, and Leading Aircraftsman W. R. Dunderdale, 19, of Oxley, Queensland.

ARMY PERSONNEL:

Privates Leonard Thomas Oakley, 21, Laurie Anthony Coombe, 35, Ian Scott McDowall, 23; Trooper George Phillip Duffy, 23; Private John McAlorum, 20; Trooper Ronald Leslie Mathieson, 20; Privates Arthur Trevor Jorgenson, 20, Keith John Bowden, 22, Trooper Frederick Joseph Ireland, 23; Private James Ivan Tindall, 32; Corporal George John Welch, 34; Private Mervyn John Ford, 25; Sergeant Arthur John Hyde, 37; Privates Donald William Smith, 22, Ian Thomas Lawler ray, 19; Sappers James Francis McDougall, 25; John Matthews, 22; Gunner Trevor Eiszelle, 24.

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