

THE  
LITTLE KNOWN  
COST OF WAR



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by

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## Introduction

Most of us today are well aware of the battlefield costs of war. However, there is a lot more to it than those costs. To get the military prepared for war training must take place and that, in itself, involves risks, especially in training pilots and air crews. In WW II, here in the United States, records show that there were 52,651 Air Force training accidents. Air crew deaths amounted to 14,903 personnel with 13, 873 planes lost.

The story you about to read involves one of those planes, a B-24D four engine bomber on a training mission of sorts. Though their training was complete the flight was taken at night to familiarize a new crew member with the process.

It crashed near my home town of Miles City, Montana, and early the next morning I got to view the crash site. I was only 5 years old when the event took place, but the sights are etched in my mind so that at age 86 what I saw is still vivid.

Having flown RC model planes for many years, I am quite familiar with how multi-engine planes react when an engine or two on one side of the plane stops running. If you are flying a plane with an engine on each wing and the engine on the right wing stops, the running engine on the left wing will turn the plane to the right. In other words, the plane wants to turn “into” the dead engine. If the pilot is not prepared to handle such an event the consequences can be catastrophic.

In the 1980 I built an RC model called the Duelist. It was a “twin,” with an engine on both wings. The first time I flew it the engine on the right wing stopped. Immediately, the plane began a turn to the right or “into the dead engine.” Had I not responded instantly my new plane would have buried itself in the ground.



Today we train pilot on simulators so they can learn to hand these “engine out” scenarios without crashing an actual airplane. Though we had simulators in WW II they were pretty basic, so I doubt that the pilots in the B-2D that experience both engines on the one wing dying were well trained for that event. They tried to land, came in too high, and attempted “a go around.” With only two engines running they were not able to do so. To further complicate matters, the pilot had approached the runway down wind, instead of into the wind.

The accident report shows that the pilot made “a steep turn into number one engine, which proved to be feathered.” One of the crew members, Jesse Armell, related that both engines on that wing had quit running. Those were the engines on the left wing. The plane struck a low hill “breaking the left wing completely off the ship.” The plane then “cartwheeled up a ravine.”

Here is the story.

## Miles City B-24 Bomber Crash

In the early morning (about 2 am.) on May 13, 1944, a bomber crashed about two miles northwest of Miles City. The next morning my dad, Vern South, took me up to view the wreckage. I was nearly six years of age at the time and since then the memories of that experience have been etched vividly in my mind. My recollection is of a roped off area into which we could not go. Standing behind the rope was a fellow, military, as I recall, who explained to us what had happened. Further beyond were two aircraft seats, blackened by heat and/or fire. To the right was a pile of metal, but its shape and substance are blurred.

Someone asked the fellow there at the site about those two seats. He related that they were the seats of the pilot and co-pilot and that they had been thrown through the front of the plane and cut in two.

While in Miles City for the Great American Cattle Drive in 1995, we spent time in the library searching old papers for the news report covering that event and found the exact time and date. Using that information, we contacted the US Air Force at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, NM, and received from them a detailed report on the crash.

The plane, according to official records, was a B-24D based at Casper, Wyoming, and was on a familiarization flight into western South Dakota. The pilot contacted Miles City radio informing the operator of an emergency and that he wished to land. He passed over the field with gear down and landing lights on, but overshot. He banked to make another pass, but the plane lost altitude and crashed. Also listed were the names of the crew, seven of whom were killed outright or died shortly thereafter.

The crew is listed as:	Robert Krietzman, Pilot	Killed
	J. D. Busby, Copilot	Killed
	E. A. Cavallo, Navigator	Killed
	D. E. Duell, Bombardier	Minor injuries
	H. O. Bass, Engineer	Major injuries
	Stanley L. KIELTYKA, Radio Operator	Major injuries
	Leonard H. Geddes, Radio Operator	Killed
	Melford Vrooman, Gunner	Killed
	James W. Cleaver, Gunner	Major injuries
	Jack M. Koretzky, Gunner	Major injuries
	Jesse J. Armell, Tail Gunner	Minor injuries

Using a computer program, the US was searched for the four survivors and one was located - Jesse J. Armell, the tail gunner. He was quite pleased to hear from us and spent a great deal of time reviewing the details. Below is a summary:

Though the flight was listed as a "training flight," they were actually finished with their training. This flight became necessary when a new navigator joined the crew; it was to familiarize him with the crew and visa-versa. During the course of the flight, they became disoriented and got lost. An emergency developed when first one engine then another went out on the same side. In their pass down the runway at Miles City, a number of them were looking out of the waist gun ports, using powerful searchlights to see the ground. Jesse thought he would bail out, but was told by the pilot that they were only 300 feet up, which was too low. Consequently, he pulled the rip cord, opened the chute, wrapped himself in it, and hunched down in the rear of the fuselage.

With only two engines running, the plane could not gain altitude for another pass, clipped a hill with one wing and cartwheeled. Jesse was thrown through the side of the fuselage. The pilot and copilot were thrown through the front of the plane, strapped in their seats. He went to help them, but saw that only the upper portion of the copilot's body was there. He remembered thinking that he must get away from the wreckage, before it exploded, and was running away when John Regan and his girl friend drove up. They had seen the initial flash and were the first on the scene. They got him out of his chute

harness and John took him to the Holy Rosary Hospital, while the girl friend, who was a nurse, stayed behind to help the survivors.

The rumor circulated through Miles City that one of the fellows had jumped from the plane. That was not true, due to their low altitude. Perhaps it was thought true by those who saw Jesse running from the wreckage with his parachute trailing behind.

Armell remembers Bass and Cleaver holding emergency spotlights out the window, attempting to see the ground; they were in that position when the plane crashed. Bass died instantly, while Cleaver was severely wounded and died the next day in Miles City. Jack M. Koretzky had a severe injury to his leg, which was to be amputated there at Holy Rosary. Jack's father, a wealthy businessman from the Northeast, had him flown to Denver, where they were able to save the leg. Stanley L. Kieltyka's arm was severely injured, nearly wrenched out of the socket. He, too, was treated at the local hospital. Strangely enough, the bombardier, D. E. Duell, who had been in the nose of the aircraft, was the least injured of the bunch. Leonard H. Geddes, was a visitor on the flight. A friend of radio operator Stanley L. Kieltyka, he had joined the flight just for the fun of it; he died, while Stanley survived. Melford Vrooman, the nose-gunner at the time of the crash, had been the tail-gunner. However, he kept getting sick from the rough ride in the tail, so the pilot asked Armell (who was the nose gunner) if he would trade places with Vrooman. Had he not, most likely Vrooman would have survived, with Armell being the casualty.

Jesse remembers waking up to see people standing around his bed saying: "He's one of the survivors of that crash." One nurse asked him to meet her downtown one night. Though partially paralyzed from a back injury, he dressed in his torn uniform (all the clothes he had), and walked downtown to meet her, dragging one leg. He ended up at the Elk's, where partiers bought him drink, after drink. He awoke the next day back in the hospital, where one of the nuns said he had been "AWOL" from 10 pm. the night before until about 3 am. that morning. It was at that time someone dropped him off at the emergency room door and sped off into the night.

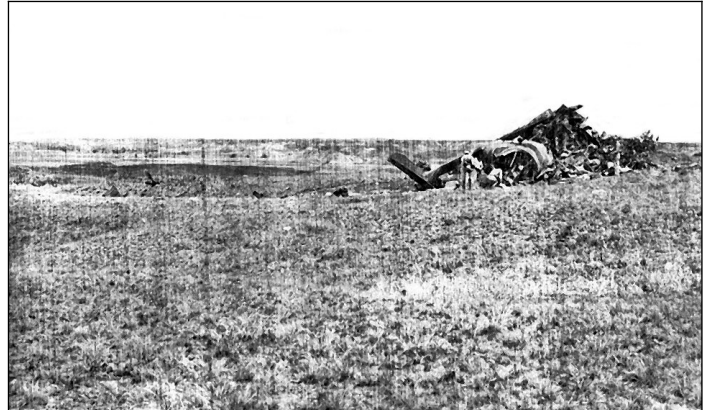
He was in Holy Rosary at Miles City for a couple of weeks, then transferred to another hospital, spending six months altogether. He was offered a disability pension, but being young and full of vigor, declined. Called in about it, he was shown the X-ray and told that at the moment he seemed to be all right, but that in later years he would suffer arthritis and he has, to the point where he cannot stoop to tie his shoes. Deciding to take the 10% disability pension, he has received a check every month since.

Armell became a parachute rigger and served in the Pacific, where he was when the Japanese surrendered.

After the war Armell, settled in the Northeast, where he raised his family and owned his own business. He then retired and moved to Florida.

Shortly after the war, Jesse has able to spend an evening with Jack Koretsky. In recent years he made contact with Stanley Kieltyka, talking to him by phone. The latter was found after the author placed a letter in Air Classics magazine, requesting information on the bomber crash. Paul Metro, from Edison, N.J., responded to that inquiry and noted that in his bomber unit had been a fellow by the name of Stanley Kieltyka. He lived in Detroit, he said, but was not sure Stanley was the fellow in question, in view of the fact that he had never mentioned anything about the event. We contacted Stanley and found him to be the one for whom we were looking.

Armell was able to locate the pilot's widow and has spent time visiting with her. Jesse has also been in contact with Don Duell. In a recent conversation, he noted that they were once again getting together. Duell and Armell are the only two left of the crew on that B24D.



The picture at the upper left was taken from the Miles City Star. The others were sent to Stanley Kieltyka by someone from Miles City. He sent us photo copies of those pictures, which we scanned and “doctored up” a bit. Sorry, but that is the best we could do with what we had.



# Rescuing Injured In Plane Crash Recalled by Volunteer Helpers

From the *Daily Star*, Miles City, Montana,  
March 1944.

A discord in the synchronization of four motors on a bombing plane circling over the municipal airport attracted the attention of Miss Angelin Fradet, dental nurse, and focused the minds of herself and escort, John Regan, S. F. Second Class, home from Port Hueneme, Calif, upon the ship of the sky early on Saturday morning as they were returning to the city from a trip to the north side.

“Something’s wrong with that plane,” remarked Miss Fradet. Hardly had she uttered the words when the plane, in the words of Miss Fradet, seemed to be attempting to rise on a takeoff by flying in what seemed to be from the northwest toward the southeast and over the airport.

“We thought at first it was a commercial plane,” said Regan, “and as we watched we saw, to our horror, the dropping of the ship after it seemed to be rising, when the illumination from something burning pierced the darkness of the night.”

Turning their car around Regan and Miss Fradet drove to within a reasonable distance of the place they had been watching and found it was a complete wreck.

“I ran toward the place and in going around to the other side, ran into a man who apparently was badly injured. I took hold of him to steady his walking and found he was hurt. I loaded him into the car and sped away to the hospital. In the meantime Miss Fradet said she would remain and do what she could to rescue other possible living occupants of the wrecked plane.”

Reaching the hospital Regan notified the authorities and called doctors, advising them of the circumstances.

When I first heard what I thought was an engine ‘going dead’ on the plane, it wounded like a discord in the functioning of the four engines on the craft,” said Miss Fradet. “I felt something was wrong and so we watched somewhat spellbound like. The plane at first seemed to be flying high enough, but we couldn’t tell exactly. It appeared to go down a little and then suddenly it – well, it looked like it ‘jumped’ into the air and I thought it was going to go higher for a takeoff. But it dropped down again and seemed to disappear we noticed that the night sky was being illuminated by something burning. We drove over, keeping the spot in mind, and soon, too soon, we saw an awful sight, a plane smashed on the ground, on a slight rise of an elevation just before us.”

Miss Fradet describes her experience as having been strenuous. She saw a man outside the plane who asked her to loosen his parachute strap from around his neck. In another instance she removed what looked like a piece of sheet metal over the head of another man, and dragged him out from and away from the wreckage of the plane.. She unloosened the parachutes from two or three other men.

“It wasn’t long – I don’t know who long, it seemed like hours – but someone came up and handed me a fire extinguisher and instructed me how to use it. We applied the liquid to what seemed like a trail of fire moving toward the plane. We put the fire out and kept it from crawling closer and closer to the plane. I told the men helping in the rescue work to lay the injured together – away from the plane so it would be handier when the ambulance came to load them and get away more quickly to the hospital. Then, sometime during the work of the rescue I helped the doctor to administer a ‘hypo’ to one of the injured men.”

“Hold my head up,” one of the injured men said to Miss Fradet. She did so and soon he was rescued from his perilous position.

“Open my neck so I can breath,” said another, which was done.

“If I hadn’t heard that ‘funny’ noise in the beginning, which seemed to be like a discord in the functioning of the four engines on the plane we would have most likely have driven into the city. But we heard it and we watched the plane and it was only a little while until we were at the scene of the wreck and doing all we could in the best way we knew to help save those who were still alive. We worked swiftly and hard to save those who we found were injured. It all happened early this Saturday morning, but it seems as if it took place a long time ago. We hadn’t the least idea of time, that time was flying as we worked, said Miss Fradet.

Returning to the scene of the accident Regan said he found that many others had reached the spot and were doing whatever these was to be done to ascertain that no occupant of the place had been overlooked. A barrier was placed to hold back spectators from the immediate spot on which the wrecked plane rested, pending the arrival of inspectors from the Army Air Force.



Jesse and Rita Armell on the right with the pilot's daughter, son-in-law and grandson on the left. The daughter was born about 8 months after the crash.



This was taken  
at a time where we have on  
the beach in Jupiter  
God has been good to us  
but it could not have ended this way  
if not for the quick response of the people  
in Miles City, Montana.  
Rita & Jesse Armell

Jesse and Rita Armell in a 1995 photo taken at their place in Jupiter, FL. Written on the back of the picture.





Jesse and Rita Armell

## Jesse Armell Obituary

Jesse J. Armell Jr., 87, died Oct. 24, 2009, at St. Lucie Medical Center. He was born in Attleboro, Mass., and lived in Port St. Lucie for 25 years.

He entered the armed forces in 1942, serving as an engineer and corporal in an Army squadron in Okinawa. He was honorably discharged in 1946.

He was educated in drafting and engineering at the Rhode Island School of Design, going on to form his own construction company, Jesse J. Armell & Son.

He was a former member of the Port St. Lucie Lions Club. He served as deputy district governor-at-large and was given the distinguished award of a Melvin Jones Fellow in Attleboro.

Survivors include his son, Jesse J. Armell, III, of North Attleboro, Mass.; daughters, Christine Swanger of Fort Pierce, Lori Dorr of Warwick, R.I., and Kimberly Watson of Portland, Maine; 10 grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Rita Armell. Memorial contributions may be made to Massachusetts Lions Eye Research Fund, P.O. Box 6050, New Bedford MA 02742.

Private burial will be at a later date. Arrangements are by the Neptune Society.

## **John W. Regan**

MILES CITY — John W. Regan, age 84, of Miles City, passed away Monday, Jan. 6, 1997, at the Holy Rosary Health Center in Miles City.

Born on Sept. 12, 1912, in Miles City, he was the son of J.F. and Helen (Nugent) Regan. He attended grade school at the Sacred Heart Convent and graduated from Custer County High School. While attending high school, he was very active in basketball and football. The team won the state championships in football and basketball.

Following graduation, he worked for local contractors until he joined the family business, Regan Plumbing and Heating. John entered the Navy during World War II.

Following discharge from the service, he rejoined the family business, serving as office manager and master plumber until 1981, when he retired. Upon retirement, he continued to come to the office every day to visit and have coffee until recent months.

John's greatest passions in life were his family, his plumbing business, hard work, true friendships, all sports, which included bowling, independent basketball and dancing. He was inducted in to the Bowling Hall of Fame in Miles City.

John enjoyed seeing his nephews and nieces and great-nephews and great-nieces in all sporting events. He attended every state basketball A and AA state tournament until the last few years due to ill health. John was a member of the Eagles and Elks Lodge, Range Riders, Miles City Bowling Association, Knights of Columbus and Sacred Heart Catholic Church.

His survivors include two brothers and their wives, Edward and Peggy Regan and Robert and Mary Regan of Miles City; nieces and nephews, Billy Regan and Helen, of Alhambra, Calif., Nancy Henderson and Tom of Incline Village, Nev., Nora Regan of Redmond, Wash., Edward Regan and Gail of San Diego, Calif., Jack Regan and Charlene of Miles City, Mary Terese Wood and Todd of Spokane, Wash., James R. Regan and Sandy of Miles City, Charles E. Regan and Linda of Tucson, Ariz., Thomas H. Regan and Janet of Columbia, S.C., Timothy E. Regan and Kari of Miles City, Robert Regan Jr. of Nashville, Tenn., J. Joseph Regan of Miles City, Michael Regan of Scottsdale, Ariz., John Regan of Livingston, Patrick C. Regan and Cathy of Seattle, Wash., and Daniel W. Regan of Seattle, Wash.; and a host of great-nephews and -nieces that he dearly loved. He was preceded in death by his parents and brother, Dr. James R. Regan, in May of 1992 and his wife, Alva.

Vigil services will be Thursday, Jan. 9, at 7:30 p.m. in the chapel of Stevenson & Sons Funeral Home. Mass of Christian Burial will be Friday, Jan. 10, at 11 a.m. in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church with Father Kirk Morgan, celebrant. Rite of Committal will follow in the family lot in Calvary Cemetery with military graveside rites. Stevenson & Sons Funeral Home of Miles City is in charge of arrangements.

From the *Billings Gazette*, January 8, 1997.

## Angelin Fradet Bjerknes

Angelin Fradet Bjerknes, 87, of Billings, passed away March 16, 2005, at the St. Vincent Healthcare.

Angelin was born to Lawrence and Evelyn Fradet on July 24, 1917, at Berlin, N.D. She graduated from Berlin High School in 1936. She worked for years as a dental assistant and later married Robert "Bob" Bjerknes in 1946 in Miles City.

Angelin was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Bob; and two brothers, Robert Fradet and his wife Evelyn and LeRoy Fradet.

She is survived by one brother, John D. (Jeannette) Fradet of Oregon; sister, Delores Cass of Billings; sister-in-law, Katherine Fradet of Sheridan, Wyo.; several half-brothers and sisters; and numerous nephews, nieces and cousins.

Sincere thanks are extended to the St. Vincent Healthcare, their staff and clergy for their excellent and compassionate care that was given to Angelin during her brief six-day hospital stay.

At her personal request, no services are planned and cremation has taken place. Should friends choose, memorials may be made to Big Sky Hospice, PO

Box 35033, Billings, MT 59107-3300, or the charity of one's choice. Michelotti-Sawyers is in charge of arrangements.

In 1942, a B-24 bomber crashed in the Miles City area. Angelin and a friend witnessed the crash and were at the scene immediately to help. Angelin remained to help while her friend took some of the injured to the hospital. Additional help arrived to aid in the rescue.

Because of the horrible memories of this terrifying and tragic ordeal, Angelin has never wanted to talk about it and has tried to erase this from her memory these past 62 years. However, she had been contacted on numerous occasions by one of the survivors, who time and again thanked her for being in the right place at the right time, to have saved his life and the lives of his buddies.

In contacting this gentleman March 16, 2005, he said that Angelin and her friend saved his life. He is now 87, married and has a family. He also added that Angelin was the prettiest girl he had every seen.

In a Christmas letter, December 2004, he sent this article and photo below: