

THE
LITTLE KNOWN
COST OF WAR



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by

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No doubt you were shocked to see in a previous story about the US losing nearly 15,000 air crew personnel, while undergoing training in WW II. However, that previous story about the B-24D crash and this story, which happened 6 months later reveal the truth of those losses. Miles City, Montana, was a fairly small town then with about 4,000 people living there. Yet, this small community alone saw the loss of 8 air crewmen.

Shortly after noon on Thanksgiving, November 23, 1944, we heard of a plane crash down near the Yellowstone River. Dad took me there to see it. I recall that it was still smoking. The pilot had been taken away by the time we arrived. One thing that impressed me, as a little guy just 6 years old, was the hole in the ground that one of the propeller blades made. I recall it being maybe 6 inches in diameter and was so deep we could not see the blade.

Two of my cousins, Bob and Lloyd South, were down by the Yellowstone and saw the crash. What they told me was that the plane stalled and dove into the ground.

The P-63 was built by the Bell Corp. They had also built the P-39. Both of these planes were different from all of the other fighter aircraft we produced in WWII in that the Allison engine was behind the pilot. This created somewhat of a balance problem, making the planes more likely to tip-stall. However, Chuck Yeager loved the plane, as did Doctor Copeland, our Prophetstown vet, who trained on the P-39, before transitioning to the P-38.

In this particular case the pilot began having engine problems before reaching the Miles City airport. With his engine sputtering and smoking, he made a pass over the airport, flew out across the Yellowstone and was attempting to turn back to the airport when he crashed. Common sense would tell you that if you are having engine problems you should get the plane on the ground as soon as possible. I asked Dr. Copeland why the pilot flew over the airport, rather than just come in and land. Dr. replied that they were always trained to fly over the airport to assess the situation, then fly around and land. When I explained what was going on, Copeland said that this was a case where his training cost him his life. His plane got too slow, tip-stalled and dove into the ground.

Most of the P-39 and P-63 aircraft went to the Russians and that is where the one that crashed was headed. They were going to Billings, Montana, then to Great Falls and on to Alaska.

I am sorry that the pictures of the crash are not of better quality, but this is what the Air Force sent me.

Body Flight Officer Killed In Crash Is Removed To Memphis

From the Miles City *Daily Star*, November 27, 1944.

Arrangements for the removal of the body of Elbert R. Partridge, Jr., killed in a plane crash here on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 23 to Memphis, Tenn. on yesterday. Sunday morning were completed by Colonel Thomas W. Ramsey, quartermaster, and Captain Joseph J. Garrison, purchasing and contracting officer, both of the ferrying division, at Gore Field. Great Falls. Lieutenant Robert C. Martin was detailed to escort the body.

Flight Officer Partridge, attached to the 554th AAF base unit, ferrying division of Memphis, was ferrying a P-63 from Detroit, Mich., to East Air Base, Great Falls, it was stated by the army air officers at the time of the crash. Captains Carrol S. Sinclair and Ronald J. Frude, investigating officers from Gore air base, arrived late on Thursday afternoon to inspect and determine the nature or cause of the accident and interview eye witnesses.

In a statement made public regarding the accident it is stated that a short distance out of Miles City Flight Officer Partridge contacted the C.A.A. communication station by radio for landing instructions. The flight officer advised he was having motor trouble and would have to make an emergency landing. The C.A.A. communication officer gave the pilot the wind direction and velocity and stated that the runways were 5,600 feet long, hard surfaced and clear of aircraft. He came over the east runway at about 1,000 feet high.

After passing the intersection he made a left turn. His motor was heard sputtering and dirty gray smoke came from the exhaust stacks. He flew south for about a half mile, then made another left turn. It was here that it was believed he encountered a complete power failure. The plane continued in an easterly direction in a side slip, nose high, left wing low, and continued in this position until the plane crashed and burst into flames.

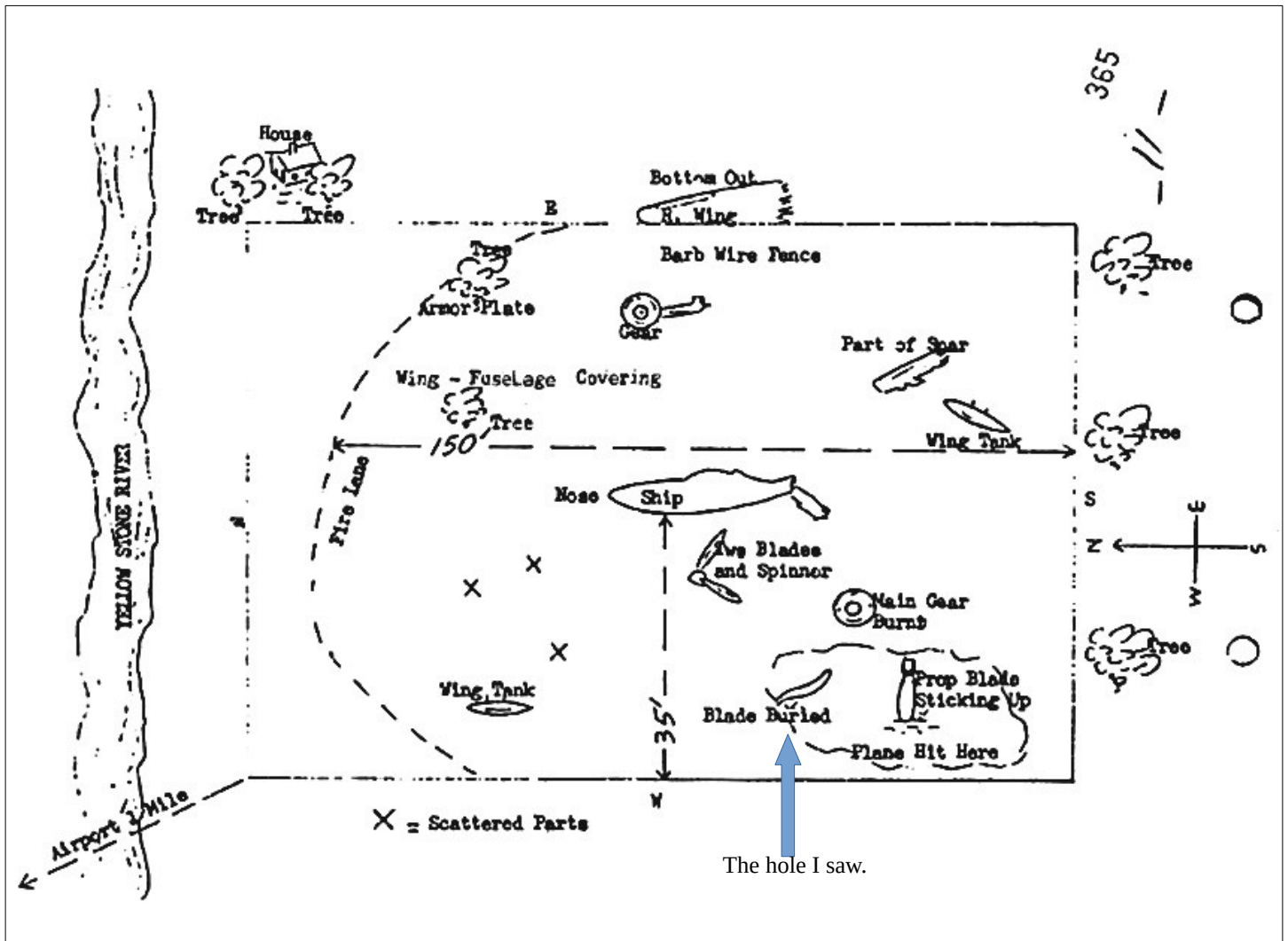
A number of residents who saw the fall of the plane and were interviewed are reported to have stated they figured the ship was going to crash, and called the fire department which arrived at the scene and had the fire under control in ten minutes.

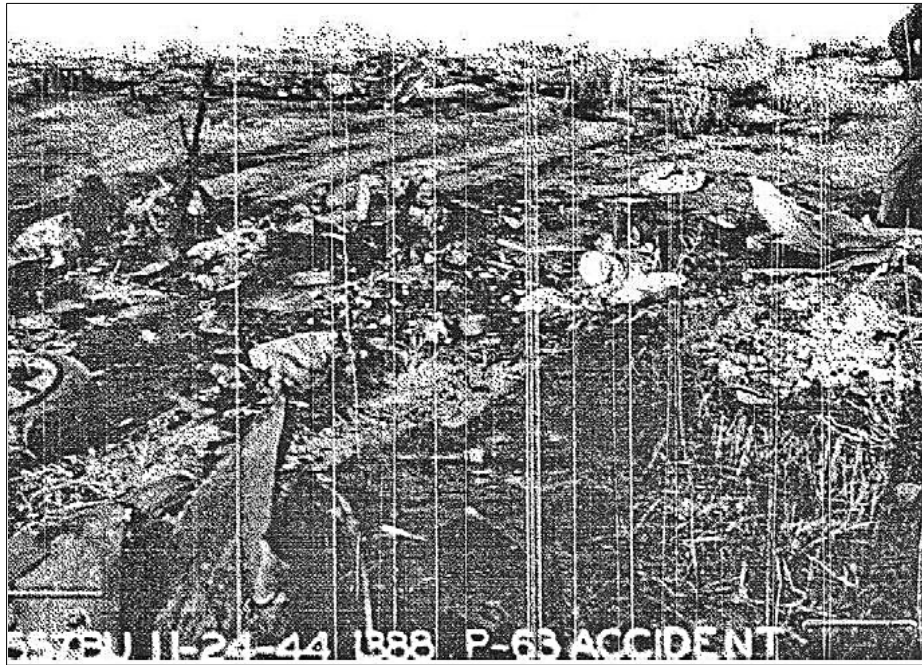
Lieutenant James W. Estabrook, engineering officer at the East Air Base, was in charge of the removal of the wreckage. Arriving here in a truck he loaded the wreckage and departed shortly after noon on Saturday.

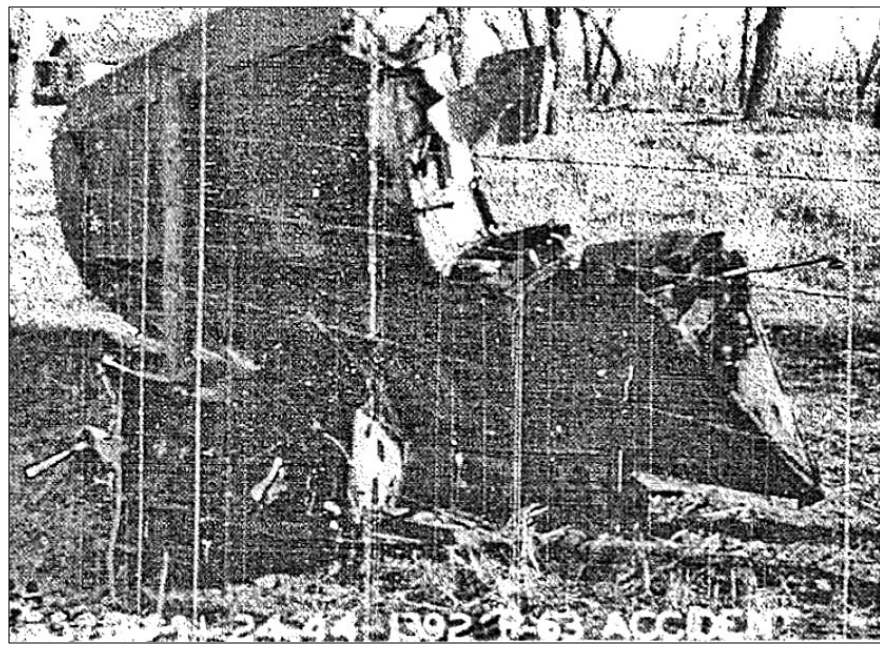
The Miles City squadron of Civil Air patrol, an auxiliary of the army air forces, was called to active duty to guard the wreckage. It is the responsibility of the unit, said Major Roy Milligan, to search for lost aircraft, rescue aircraft personnel, guard government property, and train American youths between the age of 15 and 18 to enlist in the civil air patrol cadet program.

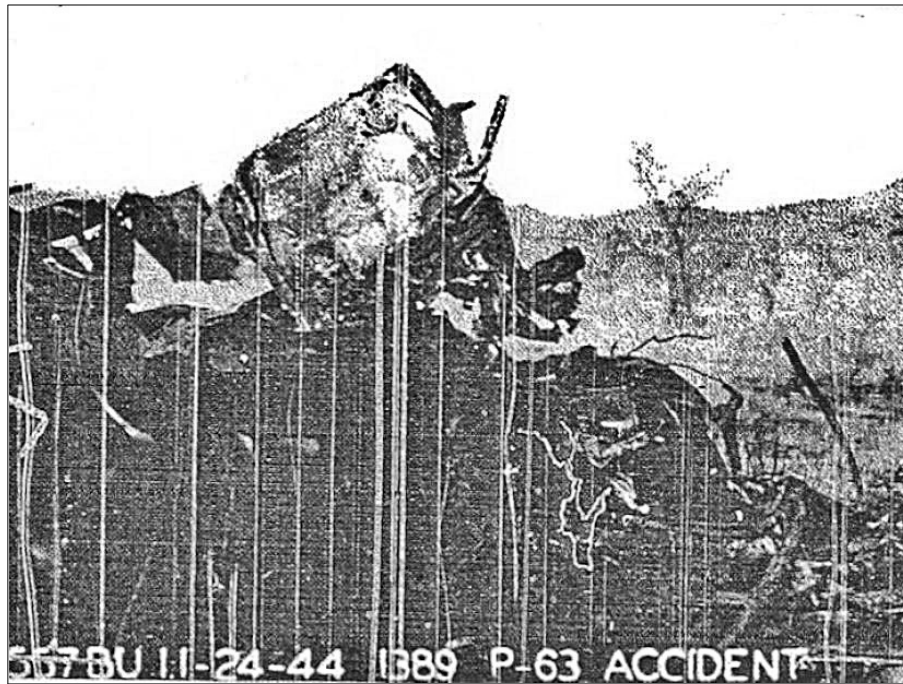
Major Milligan announced that the following cadets were detailed to guard the wreckage until the arrival the army air forces officers: Dave Lewis, sergeant in charge: Sergeants Jim Frisble, Wesley Sutton, Walter Williamson, Jr.: Carl Beckman, Garry Cook, Frank Kilifil, Harland Lund, Dan Norton, Jr., Dick Parks, Jack Rost Jr., Robert Saddler and Jim Snell.

"I want to extend my thanks and appreciation," said Major Milligan, deputy wing commander of Montana, "to the persons responsible for calling the fire department, the firemen individually, and those who helped to remove the body of Flight Officer Partridge from the wreckage. It is also my duty to inform the public that people must stay clear of the wreckage as many of the army air forces planes are loaded with armament and this, along with the unburned gasoline, makes any wreckage extremely dangerous. Please don't question the authority of any person wearing a Civil Air Patrol or Civil Air











Notice the star
It was a read star because the plane was headed to Russia.

