

Big Pine, California
August 8, 1942

Commanding Officer
Army Air Base
March Field, California

Dear Sir:

This is to certify that while alone on May 4, 1942, from the summit of "peak 13,530", (Kidd Mt.) some ten miles southwest in an airline from Big Pine, using my binoculars, I discovered the U.S. Army plane lost on December 12, 1942. On the following day, accompanied by Albert Bergen, brother-in-law of one of the occupants of the plane at the time of the crash, I went to it. We found that it lay some 250 vertical feet above a lake 11,000 feet above sea level, a few hundred feet below the mouth of a chute running up the northwest face of Birch Mountain which rises precipitously to its summit 13,660 feet. Although in a very badly broken condition, the body of the plane was held together by cables. On either side and above it, strewn about both on the snow and on the slide rock from which the snow had already disappeared, distributed fan-wise, was a great deal of badly broken debris. Perhaps fifty yards above the wrecked plane, the body of one of the occupants of the plane was beginning to appear above the surface of the snow.

A few days later I discovered that the plane had struck a rocky rib between two chutes, at an elevation of some 12,800 feet. From the rib it had rolled into the chute to the east of it and had continued down the latter to its eventual stopping place at the time, or went only part way and was later carried the rest of the way by snowslides which during the winter from time to time sweep down such coulees. At the time of the finding of the plane, except for a short stretch almost reaching up the chute and a drop of some 200 feet near its mouth, from two to twelve feet or more of snow lay on its floor. Debris from the plane lay scattered on the surface of the snow and buried beneath it all the way from the point of impact to the lake, a distance of at least 1500 vertical feet.

Two bodies lay partially exposed on the crest of the rib slightly below the point where the plane had crashed. Those of the rest of the occupants of the plane had apparently been hurled from it into the chute or had been carried down it and thrown from the plane at varying distances. The problem of finding these was further complicated by the fact that during the winter, with the possible exception of the last 500 feet, numbers of snowslides had gone down the coulees, shot over the drop near the lower end of the latter, and debouched fan-wise from its mouth on the slope above the lake. Whether some or all of the remaining bodies had been carried down by the slides to the slopes there was no way of knowing. Eventually five of them were found buried at various depths, all in slide snow

(Cont)

within about a hundred yards of the wrecked plane. Apparently they had been picked up at various times somewhere along the chute and carried down by the chute and out its mouth onto the slope.

The finding of the last remaining body was somewhat of a problem. Eventually it was discovered in a chute adjoining the one down which the plane had come; whether the body had been hurled across the intervening rocky rib and then carried some distance down by snowslides is a question.

At the time of the discovery of the wrecked plane, with the exception of these, the bodies of its occupants were buried deeply beneath the snow, where--- no one knew. There was no way of expediting the finding of them, except perhaps by probing, and this although it might have resulted in the retrieving of several of them somewhat sooner than they would have appeared above the snow, would not have resulted in the recovery of all of them any sooner. None of the bodies buried under the snow were exposed more than two days before being discovered. They were found where only a hand or a foot protruded above the snow.

There is reason to believe that every person on the plane was killed almost instantly.

The lake near which the plane lay is so difficult of access that only a few hunters and fishermen visit it during the year and perhaps I am the only person who has climbed the northwestern face of the peak previous to the wreck of the plane. Apparently no one else had been on its summit.

(Signed)

NORMAN CLYDE
Member of American Alpine Club

A TRUE COPY:

WILLIAM C. EVANS
Major, Air Corps,
Commanding Recovery Detachment