

THE LAST FLIGHT OF B-17 NO. 9161



WWII Tragedy Near Magdalena

Originally published in *El Defensor Chieftain* newspaper Socorro, NM, Saturday, January 6, 2007.

By Paul Harden, na5n@zianet.com

El Defensor Chieftain often receives letters or e-mail recommending a history article. Without a doubt, the most requested has been the history of the 1942 B-17 crash in Magdalena. It was Isidro Lopez, a former employee at the Very Large Array observatory, who first told me of this story. Following his instructions, I visited the crash site in the summer of 1978 and have been intrigued by this story ever since.

Obtaining credible information has been long and difficult. The Wartime Act prevented newspapers from printing stories of domestic military accidents. This is why there is no story of this crash in the *Socorro Chieftain* at that time. Finally, I located the official War Department accident reports, mission plans, and more, which allowed the definitive story to be told.

The B-17 "Flying Fortress"

The B-17s, designed by Boeing in 1935, were the world's first long-range bomber. With a range of 2,000 miles, they were armed with nine M2.5-caliber machine guns and a 16,000-pound bomb payload. Later models extended the range with heavier payloads and added more machine gun turrets. It is no wonder they quickly earned their name, the "Flying Fortress."

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the American war machine went from idle to full production, literally in weeks. Boeing, Lockheed and Douglas Aircraft built 12,726 B-17s at an average of 12 per day over the duration of the war.

Along with these bomber aircraft came a tremendous

need for personnel. Each B-17 required a crew of nine, and the same number as a ground crew. By early 1942, literally tens of thousands of new Army recruits were assigned to B-17 flight schools. Just to keep up with production, the Army needed to train B-17 pilots and flight crews at the rate of about 3,000 per month. As the war progressed and B-17s were lost in combat, that number rose to more than 5,000 per month. By war's end, a quarter of a million airmen had served in B-17 squadrons.

Where do you train all of these men? The Army decided to train them "out West" in the desert regions of West Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and California. At night, the flat desert looks just like the ocean and the numerous mountain ranges just like the Pacific islands. These areas were also safe from a feared Japanese coastal attack. And, the normally dry, good weather meant few interruptions in flight training.



Courtesy Boeing Corporation

There were 12,726 B-17 bombers built during World War II by Boeing, Douglas and Lockheed corporations. Today, only 12 remain in flying condition. The Magdalena B-17 was built by Boeing in September 1941.

In New Mexico, Army Air Fields, or AAFs, were quickly established at Albuquerque, Roswell, Alamogordo, Tucumcari, Carlsbad, and Fort Sumner — well, any place that had an existing airfield. The Alamogordo AAF, renamed to Holloman Air Force Base in 1948, served primarily B-17s. Later, the B-24 and B-29 bombers were added.

Squadron 459

In 1942, Alamogordo became the main training base for the 330th Combat Group, 459th Bomber Squadron. The thousands of men assigned to the 459th arrived at the flight school and were paired into crews. Thereafter, the pilot and his crew were never separated, becoming a virtual family. One of those crews was that of pilot 2nd Lt. John R. Pratt, co-pilot 2nd Lt. Donald F. Jackson, and a crew of seven others.

Pratt and his crew were assigned to B-17, model E, serial number 41-9161. The "41" indicates it was built in 1941. As a pre-war model, it was a dedicated training craft and would never see actual combat. However, brand new, combat-ready B-17s were arriving constantly.

As an interesting historical side note, due to the shortage of trained pilots, most B-17s were flown from the factories to the training bases, or overseas, by an elite team of civilian women pilots.

In early October 1942, Pratt's crew was transferred to the night flight training command. By mid-October, Pratt had accumulated 368 flight hours, with 86 hours



Courtesy 457th Bomber Group Squadron archives
Army Air Force archive photos exist for many of the nearly 13,000 B-17 crews. A photo of Pratt's B-17 crew, still in training, could not be located.

on the B-17. His co-pilot had 294 hours under his belt. With this amount of flight time, the crew was about ready to be transferred to the combat squadron for duty in Europe or the Pacific.

Night Mission over New Mexico

At sundown on October 15, numerous B-17s departed Alamogordo AAF for regular night flight training. About a dozen at a time left every 30 minutes on different sorties, beginning about 6 p.m. Pratt and his crew were scheduled for mission departure at 1930MWT (Mountain War Time), or 7:30 p.m., for a midnight return.

1830MWT (6:30 p.m.)

— Pratt and his crew assembled in the flight building for the briefing. They were given their mission orders: several targets around

Carrizozo, Vaughn, Albuquerque, west of Socorro and Magdalena. These "targets" were mostly airfields, railroad tracks and distinctive buildings to locate. Of course, these training flights carried no live bombs; the navigator and bombardier simply "went through the motions" for simulated strikes.

Part of the briefing was the weather. The weather stations at Alamogordo, Engle, Socorro and Albuquerque were all reporting broken to overcast skies with ceilings at 6,000 feet to 8,500 feet. This would dictate their flight that evening to be well within their normal 3,000-5,000 feet above ground flight levels. Winds were generally out of the north less than 12 mph, with temperatures in the upper 50s.

At 7:30 p.m., Socorro was the warmest at 63 degrees; Albuquerque was 59. This meant little chance of icing at the flight levels they would be experiencing.

After the briefing, Pratt and his crew boarded their assigned bomber, B-17E, 9161. Following the pre-flight checkout, the four enormous nine-cylinder engines were started. These were Wright Cyclone Model R-1820-97 engines, each producing 1,200 horsepower and driving propellers 11 feet, 7 inches in diameter, thus giving the B-17s a very distinctive and nearly ear-piercing roar.



Pratt's B-17 was part of the 459th Bomber Squadron at Alamogordo. After training, the 459th flew combat missions over France and Germany.

1930MWT (7:30 p.m.) — Following final flight and radio checks, Pratt inched his B-17E to the end of the north-south runway. The 103-foot wings bounced up and down as he taxied over the rough pavement below.

Co-pilot Jackson contacted the tower: "Bee One Seven Echo (B-17E), niner one six one, ready for departure."

"Roger, 9161. You're cleared for departure," came the reply from the tower.

Pratt eased the throttle levers forward. As 4,000 horsepower of the engines propelled them down the runway, engineer Sgt. Hanson E. Ortmyer kept a close eye on the gauges monitoring the engine's RPM, manifold temperatures, and the like. At 130 mph, the 40,000-pound "Flying Fortress" lifted off the runway and disappeared into the night sky.

Once in the air, 2nd Lt. Lawrence Van Tessel, the navigator, set the course for their first mission destination: Carrizozo. Flying north across what is now White Sands Missile Range, they continued to climb to their 3,000-foot flight level.

2000MWT (8 p.m.) — About 8 p.m., the crew approached Carrizozo. The navigator made adjustments to the course to fly directly over the airstrip west of town as 2nd Lt. Joseph L. Grant, the bombardier, began his dummy high-altitude bombing runs. It is not known how long they spent in the Carrizozo area, or how many runs across the airfield target they performed. However, when completed, radioman Staff Sgt. Thomas C. Ferron contacted the Alamogordo AAF with a position report, which placed them en route to their next target area in Vaughn.

The archive reports do not list what the targets at Vaughn were. Presumably they were one of two airstrips near the town, or the railroad facilities located there. Upon completion of these mission targets, Pratt headed his B-17 toward Albuquerque.

2100MWT (9 p.m.) — The archive records indicate that at 2101, radioman Sgt. Ferron checked in on schedule with a status and position report, about 15 minutes away from Oxnard Field in Albuquerque. Oxnard Field was Albuquerque's first airport, located east of the present day Albuquerque International Airport. During World War II, it also served as the Albuquerque AAF.

The scheduled radio contact indicated all was well onboard the B-17 and they were authorized to continue

on to their next mission target areas: La Jencia Basin west of Socorro and Magdalena.

Pratt brought his plane around, navigating southward by visually following the Rio Grande. This was a part of all nighttime missions, to navigate using only visual aids. With the dim light from the quarter moon that only occasionally broke through the clouds, it was likely a challenge identifying the river and other notable landmarks along the way. With the stringent wartime rationing of gas and tires, there were probably very few cars to mark the roads.

Once clear of Ladron Peak, the navigator commanded a course to the southwest for the La Jencia Basin, west of Socorro Peak, for some low-level flight maneuvers. Flying below 1,000 feet, Pratt and his crew located several targets placed on the plains for flight and bombing practice.

Former Socorro pilot Claude Ramzel had once shown me aerial photographs he had taken near La Jencia Gulch (northeast of Magdalena) of old World War II targets. They were made by bulldozing earth into an X-pattern about 3 feet to 4 feet high, and 20-30 feet long. Square mud tanks were also used as dummy targets. I wonder if those old ranchers knew how many times their cattle tanks and windmills must have been "bombed."

After the war, area ranchers, such as Tom Kelly, would often find burlap sacks around their tanks. Filled with flower, they were often dropped in lieu of dummy bombs to mark the spot of impact.



Image from Google Earth

Many "targets" were built around Socorro and southern New Mexico for WWII pilot training. This target, on present day White Sands Missile Range, is the German battleship Bismarck. This image from GoogleEarth shows it still exists in the New Mexico desert.

In early 1941, another interesting target was constructed southeast of Socorro. It was a scale model of the German battleship Bismarck, and was made of dirt with wooden logs for the gun turrets. This was built to train pilots from the Royal Air Force in identifying the famous battleship at night. However, the Bismarck was sunk in May 1941 — before the "adobe" Bismarck saw much use. It is still there today.

2215MWT (10:15 p.m.). About 10:15 p.m., the lights from the village of Magdalena came into view. The B-17 approached the town from the northeast for a "bombing run" on the airstrip northeast of town. Flying at only 700 feet, the B-17 crossed the small Magdalena airfield, circled over the village, and made a second pass over the airstrip. With the evening's mission completed, it was time to return to Alamogordo.

Most everyone in Magdalena that night remembers well the B-17 as it circled the town. For many, it woke them up. There is no doubt of this. A B-17 flying over your house at 700 feet would probably rattle the fillings loose in your teeth! For Magdalenians, it must have been quite a sight (and sound).

Most witnesses also remember hearing the plane, after circling Magdalena, head to the southeast toward the mountains, with a change in the sound of the engines as they worked to gain altitude. Many had an immediate feeling that there was no way the plane was going to clear the Magdalena Mountains.

Unfortunately, their premonitions were correct. About a minute-and-a-half later, everyone heard the engines suddenly go silent. Many ran outside to see a blaze on top of North Baldy Peak. Everyone knew what had happened.

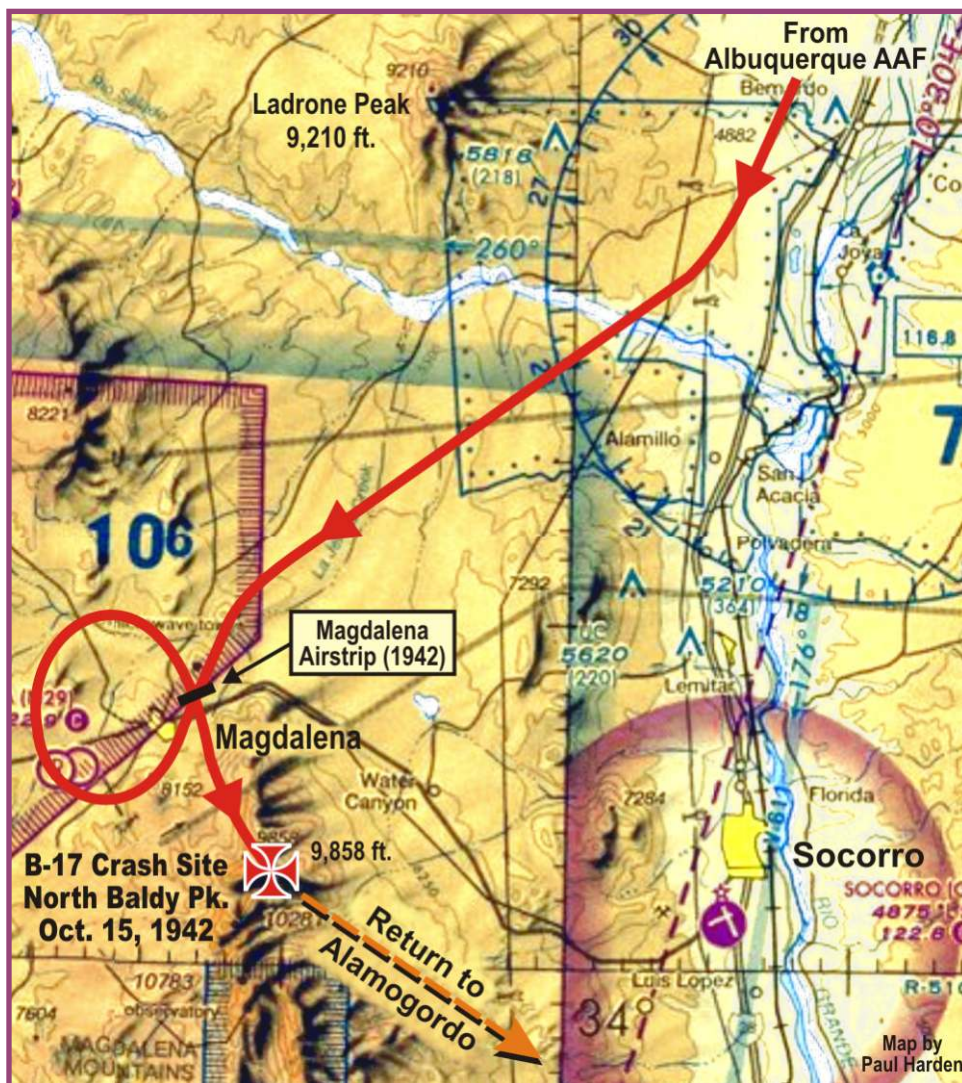
One of those who witnessed the actual crash was former Magdalena resident Isidro Lopez. As a young man, he had enlisted in the U.S. Army shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In mid-October 1942, he was home on leave prior to leaving for Europe.

Lopez said at a little after 10 p.m., the family began their evening ritual — taking turns making the trip to the outhouse before going to bed. It was about 10:30 p.m., when Isidro took his turn, about the time the B-17 circled over the town. He watched as the plane flew off to the southeast, and like the others, heard the guttural sounds of the plane's engines as they strained to clear North Baldy Peak..

Suddenly, the sound of the engines stopped. Turning around, he saw a red plume of flame expanding into the night sky from the mountain top.

Based on many local witnesses, the Army placed the official time of the crash at 10:30 p.m.

2345MWT (11:45 p.m.) — By 11:45 p.m., B-17E number 9161 had failed to contact the Alamogordo AAF for approach clearance. Tower personnel tried to establish radio contact to no avail.



The last flight of B-17 No. 9161 shown on a present day aeronautical chart. The nighttime mission to Magdalena was to locate and bomb-sight the village airstrip before returning to the Alamogordo Air Field.

At midnight, 0001 MWT hours on Oct. 16, the plane was officially reported as missing.

In the meantime, Magdalena Forest Ranger Arthur Gibson monitored the fire and decided it would be too treacherous to tackle at night. Instead, a small party, headed by Skip Stendel, agreed to survey the situation. Driving up Patterson Canyon and heroically scaling the steep canyon walls in the dark, they reached the crash site sometime after midnight. They found the fire was confined to the B-17 — and there were no survivors.

Some oral stories of this incident state the crash started a forest fire. This is not true. The fuel and the fuselage burned all night long, giving the appearance of a forest fire. The plane crashed into the treeless summit of North Baldy.

Upon their return, Ranger Gibson called the Albuquerque AAF to report the crash and the grim news. The official accident report states the call from the ranger arrived at 2:30 a.m. — making it a long night for many Magdalenians. Informed there was no road to the crash site, the Army asked Gibson to make arrangements for suitable transportation.

When the Army investigators arrived early that morning, Gibson had his own small army of local ranchers assembled. They were Frank Kelly and son, Tom; Jim Kelly and son, J.B.; and Dutch Knoblock and son, Clifford. All were on horseback and ready to escort the Army team up the mountain.

By mid-morning on Oct. 16, the mixed squad of cowboys and soldiers reached the crash site.



Courtesy U.S. Forest Service archives

The Magdalena Ranger Station in 1942. North Baldy is the peak in the center. Arthur Gibson, who reported the B-17 crash, served as District Ranger from 1943–1946. For unknown reasons, the Forest Service leveled this elaborate complex in 1947.

Several of the GIs returned to Magdalena and contacted Alamogordo with the initial status report. Immediately, the following message was sent to the Combat Group Commander (CG) in Washington, D.C., at 10:30 a.m. (1630Z, or Greenwich Mean Time):

ALAMAGORDA AB
OCT. 16, 1630Z

CG AAF WASHINGTON, D.C.

PILOT JOHN R. PRATT AND CREW MISSING.
PRESUMABLY FLEW INTO MOUNTAIN SIDE.
PRESUMABLY ALL FATAL. AIRPLANE OVERDUE
2400. CRASH OF 4 ENGINE AIRPLANE
MAGDALETA, NEW MEXICO REPORTED 0230.
IT IS PRESUMED THIS IS MISSING
AIRPLANE. AIRPLANE HAS BEEN REACHED
BUT NOT DEFINITELY IDENTIFIED. LOCAL
NAVIGATION FLIGHT. WEATHER UNKNOWN.
B-17-E, 41-9161. CONFIRMATION WILL
FOLLOW WITH DETAILS.

COL. AMES ALBRO

ALAMAGORDA AAF

Apparently, Col. Albro didn't have a clue as to how to spell New Mexico names.

Over the next two days, the Magdalena ranchers continued to assist the Army with access to the site and in recovering the bodies.

The Crash Investigation

The official U.S. Army Air Force archives, Report of Aircraft Accident Form 16, describe the crash as follows: "Airplane flew into mountain at approximately 9,500 feet elevation. Airplane collided with North Baldy Peak approximately 75 ft. from crest. Tail section remained on northwest side of mountain. Engines, Wings, and Center Section catapulted over crest to southeast side of mountain."

As described above, the B-17 collided just below the summit of North Baldy Peak on the northwest side. The force of the crash caused the tail section to break off, typical of most B-17 crashes. The rest of the plane slid over the summit and broke into flames as it slid down the southeast side of the peak. The right wing separated and fell into the deep canyon south of the peak with two of the engines. It has always been rumored that these two engines have never been found. Or, have they?

On Oct. 16, when Army investigators first reached the crash site, most of the plane had been totally consumed by fire. There was little left. This is typical of most airplane crashes, as the fire totally consumes all the aluminum, just as a house trailer fire is usually a total loss. Two of the engines, the landing gears, and the tail section were all that remained.

By Oct. 17, recovery and identification was complete. The following Accident Report No. 1015 was sent to the Combat Group headquarters in Washington, D.C., reading in part:

OCT 17 2135Z

AIRPLANE IDENTIFIED AS B-17 E 41-9161,
459TH BOMB SQUADRON 330TH BOMB GROUP
PERIOD NINE BODIES RECOVERED.

The bodies of the crewmen were identified as follows:

Pilot, *John R. Pratt, 2nd Lt.*

Co-Pilot, *Donald F. Jackson, 2nd Lt.*

Navigator, *Lawrence W. VanTassel, 2nd Lt.*

Bombardier, *Joseph L. Grant, 2nd Lt.*

Engineer, *Hanson E. Ortmyer, Sgt.*

Asst. Engineer, *Robert C. Myers, Sgt.*

Radio Operator, *Thomas C. Ferron, S/Sgt.*

Asst. Radio Op., *William G. Walls, Sgt.*

Gunner, *Dale A. Rottier, Sgt.*

Area weather reports are also included in the Accident Report for the entire evening of Oct. 15, 1942. At 2230, the time of the crash, nearby weather was as follows:

Albuquerque, overcast, 57 degrees, light rain.

Engle, broken ceiling, 58 degrees, no rain.

Socorro, overcast, 60 degrees, no rain.

In Magdalena, the temperature was in the mid to low 50s. In spite of these seasonably warm temperatures, it does not mean that freezing and icing would not be a pilot consideration at higher altitudes. Temperature drops about 3½ degrees to 5½ degrees per 1,000 feet, depending upon humidity. If the temperature in Magdalena, at an elevation of 6,500 feet, was as low as 50 degrees at the time of the crash, it could be freezing at about 10,000 feet. That would just about be the



Courtesy of 457th Bomber Squadron

The tail section breaking loose was typical of most B-17 crashes and often the only means of identification.



Courtesy Army Air Force microfilm archives

One of the actual photos (microfilm) of the Magdalena crash from the official U.S. Air Force accident report clearing showing the "41-9161" tail number ("41" indicates the year of manufacture). This Oct. 18, 1942 shows the crash site less than 100 feet from the summit.

elevation of North Baldy.

This may have been a contributing factor to the crash. In the handwritten notes of the investigators, it states: "The plane had no de-icing equipment, which may have been the reason for the pilot wanting to stay as low as possible."

Pilot John Pratt, perhaps concerned about icing the wings on the fast climb, may have been a bit too conservative in trying to clear the mountain. If only he had been about 100 feet higher.

In all the archived accident reports, they consistently cite the elevation of North Baldy at 9,500 feet, when the actual summit is 9,858 feet. One has to wonder if incorrect understanding of the summit may not have been a factor. Pratt may have attained an altitude higher than 9,500 feet and assumed he had cleared the summit.

There is also a practical matter of climb. A B-17 climbs about 500-600 feet per minute. Starting out at 700 feet above Magdalena, clearing North Baldy only 6½ miles away seems an impossible task. With a normal flight speed of 170 mph, or about 3 miles per minute, the math just doesn't work out that one could clear the mountain in such a short distance. It is no wonder that Magdalena was quickly removed from future B-17 missions in New Mexico.

The final summary of the Accident Report, Form 16, reads as follows: "Airplane circled the town of Magdalena, New Mexico, at approximately 700 ft. altitude, took up a heading of Southeast and started climbing. Airplane struck the Northwest slope of North Baldy (sic) approximately 6-1/2 miles from Magdalena at the 9500 ft. level. Airplane was on course and performing the mission as assigned. Major cause — Pilot's Error. Minor cause — Error in Judgment; miss judged altitude or location of peak. Underlying causes — flight indicator inoperative, no deicing equipment."

The report also pointed out that none of the propellers were feathered, indicating there were no engine problems. Another form was found, signed by Capt. Paul Gardner, certifying there was no evidence of

WAR DEPARTMENT
U. S. ARMY AIR FORCES
REPORT OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

Accident No. *13-10-15-7*

(1) Place *6 mi. Southwest of Magdalena, New Mexico* (2) Date *10-18-42* (3) Time *2250*
Aircraft: (4) Type and model *B-17-D* (5) A. F. No. *41-9161* (6) Station *Alamogordo, New Mexico*
Organization: (7) *16th Wing 2nd AF* (8) *350th* (9) *459th* (10) *1st* (11) *1st*

PERSONNEL

DOIT	NAME (Last name first)	RATING	SERIAL NO.	RANK	PERSONNEL CLASS	BRANCH	AIR FORCE OR COMMAND	RESULT TO PERSONNEL	USE OF PARACHUTE
01	Pratt, John R.	01	0-661962	2nd Lt.	2-C-1	AC	16th Wing 2nd AF	Total	None
02	Jackson, Donald F.	01	0-723874	2nd Lt.	2-C-1	AC	"	"	"
03	Van Tassel, Lawrence W.	01	0-723878	2nd Lt.	2-C-1	"	"	"	"
04	Grant, Joseph L.	01	0-723747	2nd Lt.	2-C-1	"	"	"	"
05	Ortmyer, Hemson E.	20	33118035	Sgt.	1-B-1	"	"	"	"
06	Ferron, Thomas G.	20	39014479	Sgt.	1-B-1	"	"	"	"
07	Myers, Robert G.	20	35166201	Sgt.	1-B-1	"	"	"	"
08	Walls, William G.	20	18051872	Sgt.	1-B-1	"	"	"	"
09	Rottier, Dale R.	20	16092175	Sgt.	1-B-1	"	"	"	"

PILOT CHARGED WITH ACCIDENT

(20) Pratt, John R. (21) 0-661962 (22) 2nd Lt. (23) 2-C-1 (24) AC
(Last name) (First name) (Middle initial) (Serial number) (Rank) (Personnel class)

Assigned (25) 16th Wing 2nd AF (26) 350th (27) 459th (28) Alamogordo, New Mexico
(Command and Air Force) (Group) (Squadron) (Station)

Attached for flying (29) 16th Wing 2nd AF (30) 350th (31) 459th (32) Alamogordo, New Mexico
(Command and Air Force) (Group) (Squadron) (Station)

Original rating (33) Pilot (34) 0-661962 (35) 2nd Lt. (36) 2-C-1 (37) 459th
(Rank) (Serial number) (Rank) (Personnel class) (Squadron)

First Pilot Hours:
(at the time of this accident)
(38) This type 86:50 (39) This model 86:50 (40) Last 90 days 102:40 (41) Total 289:00
(42) Instrument time last 6 months 22:25 (43) Instrument time last 30 days 7:40
(44) Night time last 6 months 25:00 (45) Night time last 30 days 12:00

RECEIVED AIRCRAFT DAMAGE
DAMAGE TO PLANE AND EQUIPMENT (46) LIST OF DAMAGED PARTS

(46) Aircraft	(47) Engine(s)	(48) Propeller(s)	(49) Complete airplane and all accessories and parts
W 2 W	W 2 W	W 2 W	W Complete airplane and all accessories and parts

(50) Weather at the time of accident *High overcast Visibility 2 miles Light Rain*
(51) Was the pilot flying on instruments at the time of accident *No*
(52) Cleared from *Alamogordo, New Mexico* To *Local* (53) Kind of clearance *Local CTR*
(54) Pilot's mission *Night Navigation Alamogordo, Carrizosa, Vaughn, Albuquerque, Magdalena, Alamogordo*
(55) Nature of accident *Airplane flew into mountain at approximately 9800 ft. elevation. Airplane collided with North Baldy Peak approximately 7.5 ft. from Crest Tail Section remained on Northwest side of mountain. Engines, Wings, and Center Section catapulted over crest to Southeast side of mountain.*
(56) Cause of accident *Insufficient altitude to clear peak.*

RESTRICTED

Author's Collection

The cover sheet of the 36-page "Report of Aircraft Accident, Form 16" for the B-17 crash on North Baldy. The original and microfilm records were located in the Army Air Force accident archives, Maxwell A.F.B., Georgia, and from Aviation Archeological Investigation and Research (AAIR), Mesa, AZ.

sabotage — another concern during time of war.

With literally tens of thousands of airmen being so quickly trained in New Mexico, accidents were inevitable. There was always a special sadness expressed for those who died in training rather than combat. There were more than 100 fatal crashes in the Southwest during World War II, which claimed about 1,400 lives. Although the microfilm records, once



Courtesy of 457th Bomber Squadron

B-17s were also famous for their “colorful” nose art. The bombs indicate the number of combat missions completely. Nearly 50,000 B-17 airmen were lost in combat during World War II.

found, are quite detailed, the exact location of the crash is seldom described.

As a result, there are several organizations, notably the Aviation Archeological Investigation and Research group, that organizes expeditions to find these crash sites, and with some remarkable successes. In turn, memorials are erected at the crash sites so these valiant airmen, and their service to our country, will never be forgotten.

The North Baldy site is unique. It is one of the few mountain crash sites known today with certainty.

The Crash Site Today

The Army recovered very little, mostly nameplates from the engines and other equipment for identification purposes. Magdalena resident Tom Kelly remembers that the bomb-sight and rear machine gun were also taken. The burned hulk of the plane, the left wing and tail section remained at the site for many years.

In the early 1960s, a road was bladed along the ridge for access to nearby mining activity. Shortly thereafter, the engines, wing and tail section were salvaged. Only small pieces remain today. When I first visited the site in 1978, there were no pieces of the airplane remaining larger than what you could put in your hand. Mostly just hundreds of small marble-sized pieces of molten aluminum, a few control cables and a rusty engine exhaust manifold.

If you visit the site, remember the airmen who perished there 65 years ago.

1942 Military Aircraft Crashes (New Mexico)

Date	Craft	Crash Location
Oct. 1	AT-17	Roswell AFS
Oct. 1	AT-11	25 Mi NE of Roswell†
Oct. 5	TG-2	Fort Sumner AAF
Oct. 6	B-17	Alamogordo AAF†
Oct. 6	AT-11	Kirtland Field
Oct. 11	AT-11	10 Mi E of Roswell
Oct. 13	AT-11	Roswell AFS
Oct. 14	AT-11	4 Mi W of Belen†
Oct. 14	AT-11	1 Mi SE of Artesia
Oct. 15	B-17	6 Mi SE of Magdalena†
Oct. 15	AT-11	Kirtland AAF
Oct. 17	B-17	Sierra Grande Mt.
Oct. 18	L-3B	Tucumcari, NM (2 planes, mid-air)
Oct. 20	BT-13	Fort Sumner AAF
Oct. 21	AT-17	6 Mi W of Clovis
Oct. 21	AT-11	Kirtland Field
Oct. 21	AT-11	Carlsbad AAF
Oct. 22	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 22	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 22	AT-17	Roswell AAF (no pilot)
Oct. 22	L-4B	Fort Sumner AAF
Oct. 23	AT-9	Roswell AAF
Oct. 23	L-3B	Tucumcari Airport
Oct. 23	L-4F	Fort Sumner
Oct. 24	L-3B	Tucumcari Airport
Oct. 26	AT-11	30 Mi NE of Roswell†
Oct. 27	AT-11	Kirtland Field
Oct. 28	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 28	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 28	TH-5	Fort Sumner AAF
Oct. 28	L-4E	Fort Sumner AAF†
Oct. 30	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 30	AT-17	Roswell AAF
Oct. 30	L-3B	3 Mi E of Tucumcari
Oct. 30	AT-11	Hobbs-Carlsbad Hwy62

† Fatality and/or total destruction

A listing from the official records showing the number of military training aircraft accidents in New Mexico – just for the month of October 1942.

Some of the references used in this article:

National Archives, War Department; U.S Air Force accident archives, Maxwell A.F.B., Georgia; Aviation Archeological Investigation and Research (AAIR), Mesa, AZ; archive records at the 330th Combat Group, 457th and 459th Squadrons; personal interviews with Tom Kelly, Ambers Guin, and the late Isidro Lopez.

Update to the story . . .

After the publication of this story in *El Defensor Chieftain* (January 2007), I heard from quite a few people who had visited the crash site in the 1940s–1960s, or who had served on B-17s and appreciated the article.

One of the people visiting the crash site was Professor Kay Brower at New Mexico Tech in Socorro (now retired). He provided several photos he had taken of the crash in the 1950s, giving true testimony of the extent of the crash site as it appeared for many years.



Photo by Kay Brower

A view of a surviving portion of the fuselage and wing, still resting only yards from the summit.



Photo by Kay Brower

The left wing was torn off by the crash and hurled over the summit, falling into the trees on the southern face of the peak. Shown here is part of the wing and one of the engine cowlings.



Photo by Kay Brower

A closer view of the above photo.



Photo by Kay Brower

Another piece of the left side wing.



Another reader, who did not identify himself, sent this photo of the B-17 he served on during WWII in the Pacific. He wrote: "You said in your article how large the tail section of a B-17 was. I am submitting this photo to show how HUGE the tail really was. It was the characteristic feature of the B-17s and always got us home."