THE CANYONVILLE MAIL PLANE CRASH

By Ron Bartley

As Grant Donaldson, pilot, approached from the south, he saw low clouds hanging over the mountains north of Canyon Creek Pass. It was Tuesday morning, October 2, 1928. As an airmail pilot for the Pacific Air Transport Company, flying the route between Portland and Oakland-San Francisco, this was a familiar weather pattern. He knew he had a difficult decision to make.

If he descended into Canyon Creek Canyon below the clouds, he could probably continue down the canyon and into the South Umpqua River Valley, which is usually clear. If he continued northward over the cloud-covered mountains, he might eventually be forced to descend through the clouds, low on fuel, and would not know if clear sky were present below.

The dilemma facing Grant Donaldson was further complicated by the presence of a passenger seated in the enclosed cabin along with the mail sacks of the Boeing-40-C mail plane. There could be no thought of parachuting to safety if trapped on top of the cloud layer.

The decision was made. He entered Canyon Creek Canyon at the Pass, flying the big biplane in the narrow space between the tree tops below, and the low clouds and fog above. As he flew down the canyon, he looked downward from his open cockpit to keep the Pacific Highway in sight. As he approached the Pioneer Bridge, two and a half miles from the Pass, it happened.

Excerpts from the Roseburg News-Review told the following:

MAIL PLANE CRASHES AT CANYONVILLE

A Pacific Air Transport company plane flying from Medford to Portland, crashed this morning on the summit of Canyon Mountain, 9 miles south of Canyonville, seriously injuring H.G. Donaldson, the pilot. A passenger said to be D.P. Donovan of Los Angeles, was reported to be missing. Donaldson was brought to Roseburg in a semiconscious condition, suffering from bruises, concussion and burns, and was taken to Mercy Hospital.

The accident occurred about 10 o'clock this morning when the plane, flying at a small elevation because of low hanging clouds, was caught in shifting fog in the canyon south of Canyonville and crashed.

Despite his serious injuries, the pilot make his way to the highway, about a hundred yards away where he was picked up in a semiconscious condition. He gasped about incoherent details of the wreck before lapsing into an unconscious state. Men were immediately sent out to the scene to seek for the passenger who was supposed to have been in the ship at the time of wreck.

Rev. H.C. Messerli, Lutheran minister at Albany, who with his wife and two children on the way home from a trip to Michigan, was nearing Pioneer Bridge from the south at the time of the wreck and heard the crash as the machine struck the hillside. He thought that a car ahead of him had hit the bridge railing, but as he came down to the bridge he heard someone calling and saw Donaldson running out of the brush.

"The flier was a mass of blood," Rev. Messerli said. "He did not seem to be so badly cut, but the flesh of his face, hands and feet was terribly burned and swollen. He did not talk coherently, but kept muttering about the fog forcing him down. We took him to Canyonville and stopped at the drug store, and a Dr. Patterson was called to treat him. They said they would get an
Board of Directors

President
Wilbur Heath
Cottage Grove ~ 942-2567

Vice President
Roger Starr
Aurora ~ 266-4282

Secretary
Elwood Hedberg
Portland ~ 246-7611

Treasurer
Al Alsing
Ashland ~ 482-2620

Royce Beatty
Myrtle Creek ~ 863-3951

Malcolm Buffum
Portland ~ 292-5315

Ray Costello
Corvallis ~ 746-5175

Al Grell
Tangent ~ 928-7068

Peter Stack
Ashland ~ 482-4148

Penn Stohr
Tigard ~ 639-5806

Tim Talen
Springfield ~ 746-6572

Lloyd Williams
Cottage Grove ~ 942-1268

The O.A.M. Newsletter is published by the Oregon Aviation Museum 78833 Airport Rd., Cottage Grove, OR 97424. Printing by Carlson’s Master Print.

The 4 passenger Boeing model 40-C of 1928. Designed for shuttle-type service up and down the Pacific coast.

ambulance from Roseburg and so I came on."

Donaldson was unable to talk after reaching Canyonville except to matter incoherently of the wreck. A report was immediately sent into the Pacific Air Transport company and an answer received at once requested news of the passenger, D.P. Donovan of Los Angeles. This was the first information that the pilot was not alone in the ship. Men immediately hastened for the scene but spent considerable time vainly seeking the wrecked ship.

While men were searching for the wreck of the plane and the passenger, people in Canyonville devolved their attention to caring for the injured pilot.

Information received from Portland was to the effect that L.G. Hubble, division superintendent of the Pacific Air Transport company, left Vancouver, Washington, for Roseburg immediately after being notified of the accident. He plans to see Donaldson at the hospital and take charge of the search for the passenger.

The place where the accident occurred is one of the worst portions of the coast airway. The mountains are high, and when there is much fog the canyons are filled with low hanging clouds that completely obscure vision. Searchers for the wrecked plane reported to Canyonville that the fog was so dense at 1 o'clock that they had not been able to find the wreckage, and had secured no trace of the passenger, who, it was reported, might have been killed in the crash.

ROSEBURG NEWS-REVUE
October 3, 1928

The body of D.P. Donovan, of Los Angeles, passenger in the ill-fated P.A.T. mail plane wrecked yesterday south of Canyonville, was found late yesterday afternoon in the cabin of the burned plane. The body was charred beyond all recognition, the extremities being completely burned away. Searchers were greatly handicapped by brush and fog, and did not find the plane until several hours after the accident. Pilot Grant Donaldson who was terribly burned about the face and hands was taken to Portland yesterday evening in a plane piloted by Lt. J.R. Cunningham. Donovan apparently was killed by the impact when the place struck the mountainside. At least it is quite certain that he was knock unconscious be-
WHERE WE ARE . . .
By Elwood Hedberg

Future museum plans discussed at the Annual Meeting in March included obtaining a facility for the storage and restoration of artifacts, publishing a newsletter on a regular schedule, finding alternate storage for the Super V, and having a presence at the Oregon Air Fair in November.

Our contacts with the ODOT's Department of Aeronautics have identified an excellent location on the Cottage Grove airport which can be leased from the State, and on which can be built a double hangar type building of approximately 3,200 square feet for storage and restoration. Alternative wood truss and all steel designs are being reviewed for code compliance, cost, and construction requirements.

All Aviation Museum artifacts kept at the Air & Space facility at Mahlon Sweet have been removed to other temporary locations. The Link trainer and parts of the Stinson project remain in the Eugene area as we look for an alternate storage location. The Super V has been moved into a rented hangar at Mahlon Sweet.

Plans for an exhibit at the November 12-13 Oregon Air Fair are coming together nicely. An operating airway beacon and identifier light, parts of the mailplane salvaged from a crash site near Canyonville, and other early airmail memorabilia will be featured in the main entry area of the Oregon Convention Center.

Copies of this issue of the Newsletter and a freshly printed supply of membership brochures will be available for visitors to the museum display at the Air Fair. The museum Board welcomes membership participation at the display. Call Vice President Roger Starr to schedule one or more two-hour blocks of time.

Two sections of the Boeing 40-C mail plane fuselage as it was "skidded" approximately 1/2 mile out to the road. This represents the largest surviving artifacts remaining from the 1928 Canyonville mail plane crash. Pictured from left are Ron England, Al Alsing, Tim Talen, and Ron Bartley. These fuselage sections and other smaller remains will be on display by the Oregon Aviation Museum at the Portland Convention Center during the Oregon Air Fair, November 12 & 13. (Bartley Photo)
There are several opportunities for members who have an interest to become involved in the following specific museum activities:

- A person with a telephone to help develop a list of volunteers to work on various museum projects.
- A person with skills in publicity and communications related to audio, visual and written material in brochures, the newsletter, displays, fund raising, and media releases.
- A person with the skills, and equipment for desktop publishing.
- A person with experience in fund raising planning.
- A person with skills to manage the hangar construction project.
- Persons to write and/or compile articles relative to Oregon aviation history for inclusion in future issues of the Newsletter.

Any Board member (see list and phone numbers on page 2) will be glad to provide further details about these volunteer jobs for those who are interested.

**A WORD ABOUT THE MUSEUM'S NAME...**

Originally incorporated as the OREGON AVIATION MUSEUM, the name was changed to the OREGON AVIATION & SPACE MUSEUM in April 1991 in anticipation of a merger with the OREGON AIR & SPACE MUSEUM.

As reported to you in March of this year, merger talks have been abandoned, and each museum is going its own way. Your Board has registered the original name as a dba and has elected to do business as the OREGON AVIATION MUSEUM, although articles of incorporation, records with the Internal Revenue Service and other official documents are in the name of the OREGON AVIATION & SPACE

MUSEUM.
We will continue to use Oregon Aviation & Space stationery until existing supplies are exhausted. The mailing address of the Oregon Aviation & Space Museum (dba OREGON AVIATION MUSEUM) is:

78833 Airport Road
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

You may also direct questions or comments to:

Oregon Aviation Museum
c/o Elwood Hedberg
Corporate Secretary
7903 SW Ruby Terrace
Portland, OR 97219
(503) 246-7611

Oregon Aviation Museum
78833 Airport Rd.
Cottage Grove, OR 97424