



February 1955 Crash of B-47 Bomber near Big Sandy Lake, SK

Abilene Reporter-News 16 February 1955. As this report was generated by an Optical Character Reader program, some details are missing and are replaced by ?? marks.

LEG BROKEN IN CRASHING JET Test Suit, Gun,?? 'Chute All Texan Hod in Canada Cold WINNIPEG, Man. Flashing a big grin. Jeremy Pittman, who survived three bitterly cold nights and two days in the wilderness without food greeted newsmen: "I'm mighty glad to be here." The 34-year-old U.S. Air Force captain could still laugh and smile although his right leg was broken and frostbitten and his head injured. Last night Capt. Pittman was flown to Winnipeg, five hours after he was plucked from the northern Saskatchewan wilderness on which he dropped after a B47 Stratojet bomber exploded at a height of 35,000 feet ?? miles west of The Pas, Man., last Saturday. ??

Pittman was taken to the Deer Lodge, military hospital and after a quick examination by a staff doctor, called the press representative ?? lives in to tell his story. "I didn't have anything else to do last Friday so I decided to go along for the ride." he said. He wanted to test out a new type of survival suit. The suit saved his life. Pittman, a Stratojet captain himself, based at Riverside, Calif., was flying with Lt. Col. Kenneth G. McGrew, 33, and Capt. Lester E. Epton, 33, and Maj. Robert Dowdy, 31. McGrew and Epton also survived the crash - McGrew was rescued a few hours after the crash, Epton Sunday morning. Dowdy's body was found in the wreckage of the plane. ??

Knocked out Pittman, a native of Fabens, Tex. said Dowdy was knocked unconscious by the explosion, and he tried to press the button that would eject Dowdy's seat from the plane. But the violent motion of the plane sent him sliding. "It was a bad sensation, like a person sliding down a hill, and ?? within 15 minutes he had fashioned a split out of small branches. Pittman said his leg was broken ?? in the plane it seemed to buckle under me." Sometime between the explosion and when he reached the earth he lost all his survival gear, except for a .38 caliber pistol. He also had a handful of sulphur cold tablets which his wife slipped into his pocket before he left Riverside. Pittman said he landed on his broken leg, "but I didn't feel a thing. It was numb." ??

"But the shoe laces weren't sufficient so I chewed off two shroud lines from my "chute." It took him two hours to chew through the nylon ropes. Unable to move, other than to raise himself, he formed a small shelter over his face with the parachute. Iff decided not to eat any snow, as it would use up too many calories. He ate six cold tablets before he was rescued. "I tried to move two or three times but the snow was too deep." He fired three shots at a rabbit before bringing it down. "But it stopped 20 feet away from me and I couldn't get to it." He watched the rescue of either McGrew or Epton take place about a mile away. "I never lost faith though. I felt I could last a couple more days." Tuesday morning, a U.S. Air Force search plane spotted the parachute and Pittman on the ground. A para-rescue team in a helicopter picked him up.

Another part of the crash story from the history of RCMP Otter CF-MPP

Otter CF-MPP was first assigned to Churchill, Manitoba, a very remote posting, where it remained from 1954 until 1971. From there, it roamed the Arctic wastes of the Northwest Territories, including one flight in 1955 to Arctic Bay at the extreme north-west tip of Baffin Island, almost at latitude 74 North. It was also involved in much SAR work, a notable rescue in February 1955 being for the crew of a USAF B-47 Stratojet which on 12th February had caught fire and exploded over northern Saskatchewan.

The crash involved B-47 tail number 17013, assigned to the 22nd Bomb Wing at March AFB, California, which exploded while flying as the number two aircraft in a loose trail stacked formation of eleven B-47s en route from Thule Air Base, Greenland to March AFB. A major SAR operation code-named "Big Sandy Lake" was launched, centered at The Pas, Manitoba as the bomber had crashed north of there. A para-rescue team was dropped in by RCAF Dakota and located two survivors and the body of a third crew member killed in the crash. The two survivors were picked up by the RCMP Otter CF-MPP and flown to The Pas. The pilot of the Otter was subsequently awarded a Certificate of Meritorious Achievement by the USAF for his part in the rescue. The fourth B-47 crewman landed in a cluster of trees some distance from the crash site and survived 72 hours exposed to the Canadian winter before being rescued by helicopter. RCAF Otter 3662 of 111 Communications & Rescue Flight Winnipeg was also involved in the rescue, and flew in the USAF investigating team to the crash site.



B-47E Stratojet

51-7033

19th Bomb Squadron
Strategic Air Command 22d
Bomb Wing. March AFB, CA

Engine exploded and
tore the right wing off
the aircraft while it was
flying over
Saskatchewan.

12th February
1955



Lt. Col. Kenneth G. McGrew
Aircraft Commander ejected.
Regained consciousness on
descent



Captain Lester E. Epton
Co-Pilot thrown from aircraft
when it broke up in mid-air



Major Robert Dowdy
Observer never left the aircraft
and died in the crash



Captain Thomas Pittman
thrown from aircraft when it
broke up in mid-air survived
three days in the sub-zero
weather without food. Picked
up at 13:55 Central Time by
H-19 helicopter. Doctors were
forced to amputate the lower
part of his right leg after he
was rescued.