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## ARCHIVED - Remembering the crash of Boxtop Flight 22

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#### News Article / October 30, 2015

By Corporal Michael Thomas, with files from Captain Marsha Dorge and RCAF public affairs

*As we approach Remembrance Day, we remember those who served and died during wars in the defence of our nation. However, we also remember those who served – and made the ultimate sacrifice – during times of peace. Their names, including the names of those who died on the Boxtop 22 mission that occurred 24 years ago, are recorded in the Seventh Book of Remembrance – In the Service of Canada – which, along with the other Books of Remembrance, resides in the Memorial Chamber of Parliament's Peace Tower.*

Every year, in the cold and darkness of late October, personnel at Canadian Forces Station Alert on Ellesmere Island, Nunavut, gather at a cairn near the runway to remember the crew and passengers of Hercules 130322 who lost their lives during a resupply mission to the station.

On October 30, 1991, at approximately 4:40 p.m., flight 22 of Operation Boxtop – as the biannual resupply mission is called – was on its final approach to the station from Thule Air Force Base in Greenland. As the CC-130 Hercules from 435 Transport and Rescue Squadron, loaded with 3,400 litres of diesel fuel, began its descent, the pilot flying lost sight of the runway.

Moments later, radar contact and communication were lost as the aircraft crashed approximately 16 kilometres south of the station. The crew of another CC-130 Hercules, also bound for Alert, saw the fires of the crash and identified the location of Boxtop 22.

The crash took the lives of five Canadian Armed Forces members – four died in the crash and one perished before help arrived – and led to the boldest and most massive air disaster rescue mission ever undertaken by the Canadian military in the High Arctic. Thirteen lives were saved.

Within a half hour of the rescue call, a Hercules carrying 12 search and rescue technicians from 440 Search and Rescue Squadron in Edmonton, Alberta, was in the air. It reached the crash site seven and a half hours later, but the SAR technicians couldn't descend due to the weather. Another Hercules from 413 Search and Rescue Squadron in Greenwood, Nova Scotia, soon joined the search. Meanwhile, search and rescue technicians formed a ground rescue team at Alert and set out overland for the crash site, guided through the darkness and horrendous weather conditions by a Hercules.

The survivors, some soaked in diesel fuel, endured high winds and temperatures between -20C and -30C. Many sheltered in the tail section of the downed aircraft but others were more exposed to the elements.

Finally, the 413 Squadron team finally got a break in the weather and six SAR technicians parachuted into the site more than 32 hours after the crash and began looking for survivors. They were joined soon after by more SAR technicians. When the ground rescue team finally arrived – 21 hours after it had set out – 26 rescuers were on the ground. They warmed and treated the injured and prepared them for medical evacuation. A Twin Huey helicopter from Alert made three trips to bring the survivors back to the station.

Once again this year, personnel at Alert will conduct a parade on October 30 to commemorate the crash. The parade will begin at 4:30 p.m. and continue through the 4:40 p.m. timing when the crash occurred.

"Twenty-four years ago during Operation Boxtop, the Canadian Armed Forces lost five souls – Captain John Couch, Captain Judy Trépanier, Master Warrant Officer Robert Grimsley and Master Corporal Roland Pitre – due to the harshness of the weather here at Alert when their plane crashed in an attempt to resupply the station," said the acting commanding officer of Canadian Forces Station Alert, Captain Larry Hocken.

"These flights are our lifeline to the rest of Canada. We will remember the five who died [during one of those flights] at our memorial parade, which is dedicated to them. Our hearts still go out to the families who have suffered in this tragic event."

Petty Officer 1 (retired) Dave Highsted attended the 2010 ceremony and said he had mixed feelings during the event.

"Sadness, for I remembered the death of an old friend and the injuries incurred by three men I had worked with over my years in the communications research trade, but also I felt a great sense of satisfaction at being able to be a participant in the memorial service.

"My last Alert tour was in the spring of 1994 so this was my first opportunity to be on the ground in Alert, and pay my respects personally to those who perished in the crash and remember those who had been so gravely injured on that day almost 20 years ago – a long overdue personal closure."

The downed Hercules remains at the crash site to this day, preserved by the desert-like Arctic conditions.

## **The crash toll**

### **Deceased**

Captain John Couch, pilot, 435 Transport Squadron, Edmonton, Alberta

Captain Judy Trépanier, logistics officer, Canadian Forces Communication Command Headquarters, Ottawa, Ontario

Master Warrant Officer Tom Jardine, regional services manager CANEX, Canadian Forces Base Trenton, Ontario

Warrant Officer Robert Grimsley, supply technician, Canadian Forces Communication Command Headquarters, Ottawa

Master Corporal Roland Pitre, traffic technician, 435 Squadron

### **Rescued**

Robert Thomson, civilian, Canadian Forces Base Trenton

Susan Hillier, civilian, Canadian Forces Base Trenton

Captain Richard Dumoulin, logistics officer, Canadian Forces Communication Command Headquarters

Captain Wilma DeGroot, doctor, Canadian Forces Base Trenton

Lieutenant Joe Bales, pilot, 435 Squadron

Lieutenant Mike Moore, navigator, 435 Squadron

Master Warrant Officer Marc Tremblay, supply technician, Canadian Forces Communication Command Headquarters

Sergeant Paul West, flight engineer, 435 Squadron

Master Corporal Tony Cobden, communications researcher, 770 Communication Research Squadron, Gander, Newfoundland

Master Corporal David Meace, radio technician, 1 Canadian Division Headquarters and Signal Squadron, Canadian Forces Base Kingston, Ontario

Master Corporal Mario Ellefsen, communications researcher, Canadian Forces Station Leitrim, Ottawa

Master Seaman "Monty" Montgomery, communications researcher, Canadian Forces Station Leitrim

Private Bill Vance, communications researcher, Canadian Forces Station Leitrim

## **To the rescue**

In addition to search and rescue crews from 413 Search and Rescue Squadron, 435 Transport Squadron and 440 Search and Rescue Squadron, a MAJAID (major air disaster) Hercules was dispatched from Edmonton, carrying a medical team and supplies.

Labrador helicopters set out from 424 Transport and Rescue Squadron in Trenton, Ontario, 103 Rescue Unit in Gander, Newfoundland, and 413 Squadron. And three Auroras came from 415 and 405 Maritime Patrol Squadrons in Greenwood to provide the Labradors with "top cover" and to provide navigational aid