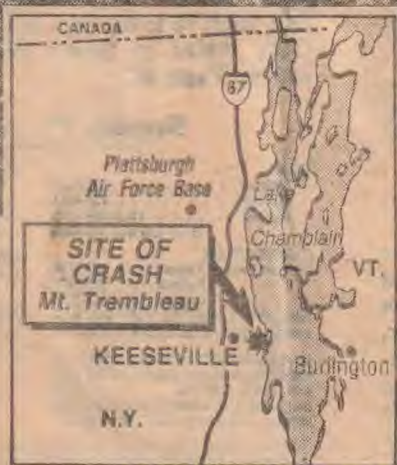


# 7 Guardsmen Die in Crash

Rescue-team members from LI and Queens killed as copter falls in thunderstorm



UPI Photo



Newsday Map by Ron Zembko

## 7 LI Guardsmen Die in Crash

A seven-man National Guard rescue team based at Westhampton Beach was killed in a mountaintop helicopter crash. The men, six from Suffolk and one from Queens, were on a training exercise.



## By Bob Wacker and Susan Page

Seven Air National Guardsmen from Suffolk County and Queens were killed yesterday when their helicopter crashed on an Adirondack mountaintop as they headed home from a rescue-training exercise.

The crash scattered wreckage and bodies over a quarter mile around the top of 1,500-foot-high Trembleau Mountain, which rises out of Lake Champlain about 10 miles south of Plattsburgh Air Force Base in upstate New York. Exploding flares started several small fires, an eyewitness said.

A last message from the HH-3 "Jolly Green Giant" helicopter reported sharply reduced visibility in a thunderstorm, and said that the aircraft was turning back to its base. The weather station at nearby Burlington, Vt., had reported a 3,000-foot ceiling with scattered clouds at 1,000 feet. It also warned of reduced visibility in the thundershowers.

The guardsmen were members of the 102d squadron of the 106th Air Rescue and Recovery Group, a team trained in underwater and mountain rescue techniques, based at Westhampton Beach. They had flown to Plattsburgh for water-landing exercises. The exercises were not conducted nearer to home because salt water corrodes the helicopter's steel hull, according to Maj. Richard Weissbard, an information officer for the group.

Weissbard said the bodies probably would be flown back to Westhampton Beach tomorrow.

The helicopter co-pilot, Capt. John Kleven, 30, of East Northport, was the son of an Eastern Airlines pilot who was killed, along with 113 other crewmembers and passengers, when a jetliner crashed at Kennedy Airport on June 24, 1975. The other helicopter victims were:

- The pilot, Capt. John Sfeir, 29, of East Moriches, chief safety officer at Westhampton Air Base.

- M/Sgt. Allen Snyder, 35, of Center Moriches, the oldest member of the rescue team, had married another member of the 106th Group's base staff 10 months ago and she is expecting a child shortly.

- T/Sgt. Ralph Tommasone, Jr., 29, of Bayport, the crew chief, married with a four-year-old son.

- S/Sgts Scott Hursh, 26, and David D. Lambert, 22, single, roommates in East Moriches and college students. Lambert, a native of Rochester, was attending Suffolk Community College and had hoped to transfer to Yale University in September. Hursh was a marine biology major at Southampton College, and a partner with his brother, Marcus, in a scuba-diving equipment business.

- T/Sgt. Ronald H. Allen, 37, the flight mechanic, of Corona, Queens, married and the father of one child.

Sfeir, Kleven, Tommasone and Allen were listed as "air technicians," or full-time employees of the Air National Guard. The rest were Guardsmen, or part-timers, although Snyder reportedly had given up a civilian job as a bartender, expecting to achieve technician status in another month. The 106th has about 190 technicians and about 525 part-timers, Weissbard said.

Last year, state police said, four persons died when their small plane crashed on Trembleau Mountain. Weissbard said that, about 12 years ago, three crew

members from the 102nd died and one survived when a C-119 Flying Boxcar transport plane missed a runway and landed in the water at the U.S. Naval Air Station at Floyd Bennett Field, Brooklyn.

The 102nd is a direct descendant of the first aviation unit in the National Guard. It was organized Nov. 1, 1915 as the First Aero Company, N.Y. National Guard, and its first military assignment was to fly observation for General John J. Pershing in his pursuit of the Mexican bandit-general, Pancho Villa, before World War I. It acquired the 102nd designation and observer mission in 1920, and since then has been based in Staten Island, Brooklyn and at Westhampton Beach.

Little work was done at the base yesterday as pilots, mechanics and all those who do the daily work at the base waited for word from Plattsburgh. In the high-ceilinged administration building, not a typewriter was to be heard as clerks talked quietly among themselves, falling silent as a stranger approached. Flight mechanics sat on the front step of the base operations building, staring at the walkway with giant green footsteps leading to the runway where the Jolly Green Giants land and take off.

M/Sgt. Michael McManus, who was in charge of the rescue unit, tried to recall his last conversation with Snyder, one of his best friends. It was a casual goodbye, he recalled, with reassurance that Snyder's pregnant wife would be looked after.

"I don't know what I said," McManus recalled. "I think I told him to have a good time. I told him if his wife needed anything we'd take care of it. Of course, we'd do that anyhow. We've really got to take care of her now."

Maj. Jeffrey Frank, another pilot, said Sfeir and Kleven were two of his closest friends, "two of the finest professionals I've ever known. That's as straight as I can give it to you. We're a pretty tight family here. Something like this happens—it's like losing seven brothers."



# Copter Crash Brings Tragedy to 7 Families

—Continued from Page 3

room. Kleven's mother, Charlotte, lives in Queens.

Kleven, a longtime helicopter pilot and veteran of Vietnam, was co-pilot of the helicopter flight. But he had another reason for the mission: On this flight, he would have qualified as a certified helicopter instructor.

The house at 16 Orchard Neck Rd. in Center Moriches—the home of M/Sgt. Allan Snyder—is neat, yellow and sits by a small inlet that runs to the bay. Joseph Geller, the father of Snyder's 28-year-old wife, Marlene, answered the door.

Crying, Geller stood on the small porch. Marlene, he said, is expecting a baby "any day." They had heard of Allan's death only moments before. Snyder, a former bartender who had requested to be made a full-time guardsman, was to be transferred in a few weeks to Eglin Air Force Base in Florida as an air technician. "This is so tragic," Geller said. He rushed back into the house, crying.

A woman who answered the door at Capt. John Sfeir house at 32 Mill Pond La. in East Moriches politely but firmly asked a visitor to leave. She declined to give her name or that of Sfeir's wife; she would only say, "They were such a nice couple . . ."

Sfeir, who piloted the helicopter, was also a Vietnam veteran and was air safety officer at the Westhampton base.

Tech Sgt. Ralph J. Tomassone Jr. was born in Patchogue. He, his wife, Christine, and their four-year-old son, Ryan Joseph, lived at 24 Gerritsen Ave. in

Bayport. Tomassone joined the Air Force in 1969, after he was graduated from Patchogue-Medford High School, and later served in Southeast Asia. His father, Ralph Sr., said that his son had been planning a career in the guard. Staff Sgts. Scott B. Hursh and David D. Lambert, both single, were roommates at 77 Evergreen Ave., East Moriches.

Lambert was attending Suffolk Community College, where he had made dean's list in engineering, according to Paul Cooke, the school's assistant dean of instruction. His father, Herman Lambert of Rochester, said his son had hoped to transfer to Yale Univer-

sity this fall.

"He was going to hear the end of this week," Mr. Lambert said. "He wanted to be an architect; he always liked to construct things . . . He loved hunting and fishing. He was a loner about that."

Hursh, a 1970 graduate of Ward Melville High School in East Setauket, was a marine biology major at Southampton College. He had attended Suffolk Community College.

The seventh victim, T/Sgt. Ronald H. Allen, was the helicopter's flight mechanic. Allen, 37, lived in Corona. He was married and the father of one child.

## A View of Death on a Mountaintop

Jim Dynko usually arrives for his job as managing editor of the Plattsburgh Press-Republican in the afternoon. But he dropped in at about 9 AM yesterday—wearing blue jeans and sneakers and accompanied by his five-year-old son—because he had gotten a tip on a news story.

As he was checking on that story, he heard on the newspaper's police radio the report of a plane crash on nearby Trembleau Mountain.

Dynko left his son at his grandmother's house and drove to Keeseville, about 15 miles away.

As he and a local volunteer fireman neared the top, they found the twisted body of a man in a green flight suit lying across the muddy path—one of seven

Air National guardsmen on their way home to Long Island killed when their HH3 "Jolly Green Giant" helicopter slammed into the fog-shrouded mountain.

"The flares the chopper was carrying had started to go off," he said, "and flaming debris was scattered all over. Wreckage and bodies were scattered over a quarter-mile tract on the top of the mountain. There wasn't much left of the helicopter. You could see orange pieces of metal on the ground . . ."

A handful of volunteer firemen from the Keeseville Fire Department and Rescue Squad worked with Air Force personnel to recover the bodies. At 1:30, the rescue teams started the trip back down the mountain.