



Coast Guard History



And

**Captain Samuel Preston Martin III, MD
U. S. Army**

RECOGNITION DELAYED

Position Paper and Briefing Document

**Presented by
The Ancient Order of the Pterodactyl
May 6, 2005**



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
LEGION OF MERIT**

TO

**CAPTAIN SAMUEL PRESTON MARTIN III, MD
(POSTHUMOUS)
UNITED STATES ARMY**

"For exceptionally meritorious conduct in the face of almost insurmountable odds in attending to the survivors of the crash of Sabena Airlines Douglas DC-4 airliner 'Charlie Bravo George' on September 18, 1946 approximately twenty-two miles south-south-west of Gander Airport, Newfoundland. Doctor MARTIN, Captain, U.S. Army Medical Corps, was the leader of the rescue team of over fifty persons and the only medical doctor in the party. Due to the extremely remote location of the crash, Doctor MARTIN and his portion of the initial rescue party had to be flown by a Coast Guard PBY aircraft to a small lake some five miles from the crash site where they transferred to rubber dinghies, then paddling and shooting rapids down a small river to a point abreast the crash site where they traversed the remaining distance through almost impenetrable brush and forest. After reaching the crash site some thirty nine hours after the crash and having ascertained that 18 persons had survived, Doctor MARTIN directed the drop of needed medical supplies, food, water, blankets and other survival equipment as almost all of the supplies they tried to bring to the site had been lost in the rapids when their dinghy's were overturned. The first assessment was staggering. All but two of the survivors, two young men, were severely injured and in shock due to loss of blood and trauma. In making the assessment of priorities for treatment Doctor MARTIN found patients with great shreds of burned skin hanging from their bodies and extremities, the bones sticking out through broken skin, sent shocks of despair through his heart. The weather was cold, never higher than fifty degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime and going down to the forties at night in almost continuous rain and mist. Doctor MARTIN faced the fight of his life to save these people from infection, shock and loss of blood. To get the survivors out of the remote area when coupled with their immobilizing injuries demanded that the rescue be accomplished by helicopter. While Doctor MARTIN tended his patients day and night, comforting and treating them while directing efforts at the crash site, two Coast Guard helicopters were disassembled, loaded aboard military transports and flown to Gander where they were reassembled and readied for flight. Eventually, the last survivor was transported to Gander Hospital on Sunday, September 22, 1946 and Doctor MARTIN was brought out of the bush after three and a half days of continuous, all consuming effort. Doctor MARTIN, by his courage, exceptional professional competence, untiring and unflinching devotion to his duty, coupled with his indomitable spirit performed what has been titled a miracle in the woods. The survivors and those whom he led have titled the crash site St. Martin - In - The - Woods where a monument so attesting now stands. Doctor MARTIN's actions, medical skills and valor were instrumental in the rescue and recovery of the survivors who would have otherwise perished. His courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United States of America."

Background

The Ancient Order of Pterodactyls established a Coast Guard Aviation History Committee to assist in actively contributing to the enlargement and perpetuation of Coast Guard Aviation history. One of the initial projects was the establishment of the USCG Aviation History Web Site <http://uscgaviationhistory.aoptero.org>,

During the course of collecting and researching information, we obtained the records of Captain Frank Erickson, received a document from Commander Stewart Ross Graham and found a SAR summary report about the crash of the Belgian Sabena Airliner in Newfoundland near Gander. The story evoked interest. Most significant was that two USCG early helicopters were torn down and transported to Newfoundland by USAF C-54 aircraft where they were restored to flying condition and utilized to rescue 18 survivors of the crash. Since the reports and official records were focused on the mission there was little to tweak any additional interest – except, one statement by LT August Kleisch, USCG helicopter pilot. He made a rather matter of fact statement that an Army doctor named Martin had been at the site giving medical aid.

This spawned an inquiry about Dr. Martin. Who was he? Where did he come from? What had he accomplished there at the site? Was he still alive in 2005? What happened to him after the rescue?

An internet search search for information about him returned an unofficial obituary that is attached as Attachment 1. We learned that he was a special man and doctor. He was respected in every way as a doctor, a teacher, a citizen and a human being. He had died in Gainesville, Florida at age 80 of lymphoma. He had three children, Dr. Samuel Preston Martin IV, Dr. William Barry Martin, and Dr. Celia Martin.

Dr. Willam Martin was found practicing as an Orthodontist along with his sister, Celia in Gainesville, Florida while the other son is a surgeon, practicing in Orlando. Interesting to note that Dr. Samuel P. Martin III's father and grandfather were doctors and that on his mother's side of the family 15 of 17 children were doctors in Tennessee. The apple does not fall far from the tree.

In the conversation with Dr, Martin's son, William, we found that Dr. Martin had received no recognition for what he had done at the crash site except from the Belgium Government and that is receiving the Order of Leopold. His medal was of higher rank and came with a retirement annuity that he was forced to reject in order to receive the medal. The rejection was forwarded over the signatures of President Truman and General Eisenhower. As Dr. William Martin put it, "He did get some recognition from the Girl Scouts." He received no recognition from the Army, the Coast Guard or the Canadian Government.

The committee investigated further and found there had been a definitive book written about the events surrounding the crash and the rescue of the survivors titled "*Charlie Baker George: The Story of Sabena OOCBG*" by Mr. Frank Tibbo. We tried to obtain a copy but it is out of print; however, after contacting the publisher and telling them that we wanted to try to gain some recognition for Dr. Martin, they volunteered an advanced copy of the text of the book that describes the entire event. Pertinent excerpts from the text is attached as Attachment 2.

Contained in the attachment are detailed observations about Dr. Martin's performance as a leader, a doctor and caring human being. Rather than reiterate them, we will let the attachment speak for itself. Key passages about Dr. Martin and the situation are in red. Some items highlighted in blue are those times when He was called on or challenged as a leader.

Dr. Martin was a quiet hero and a very modest individual. He never said anything to his children about the crash or his part in it. Here follows is a statement from an e-mail sent by Dr. William Martin, his son; "It is interesting that growing up my father never discussed the Sabena crash and I learned the details from one of the survivors when I worked in Switzerland during college."

He was not recognized officially for his contributions and we ask that the oversight be corrected.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

It is recommended that a Legion of Merit Medal be posthumously awarded to Dr. Samuel P. Martin III for his actions through the period September 17 – 22, 1946. A recommended citation is included at the beginning of this document. Attachment 3 is a statement of appropriateness and justification for the award of the Legion of Merit. It is suggested that the Commandant present the award.

It is further recommended that an appropriate ceremony be conducted at Coast Guard Air Station Clearwater, Florida. This location is very convenient for his children and their families, his colleagues and friends (University of Florida Medical Center).

It is further recommended that representatives of the U.S. Army, DOD and the Canadian Government be afforded an opportunity to attend as guests of the Coast Guard. As the Commandant stated in his State of the Coast Guard speech that he is a history scholar and former teacher; here is certainly an opportunity to enhance our history, right an oversight and show the true colors of the Coast Guard.

ATTACHMENT 1 – Unofficial Obituary of Dr. Samuel Preston Martin III

Death of Dr. Samuel P. Martin

Dr. Samuel Preston Martin, III, an innovator in the field of medical education and management, died of lymphoma in Gainesville, Florida, on May 2. He was 80 years of age.

Dr. Martin was professor emeritus of medicine and health care systems at Penn. During his quarter century here he was professor of medicine, executive director of the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics, chairman of the Health Care Systems Unit of the Wharton School, master of Ware College Health and Society House, founding Director of the Robert Wood Clinical Scholars Program, for fellowship training in the social, behavioral and management sciences for board certified physicians.

A leader in developing the M.B.A. Program in Health Care Management at the Wharton School, he taught in it for some two decades. Since 1970, the program has graduated more than 100 physicians with an M.B.A. degree.

He was born May 2, 1916, in East Prairie, Missouri, a community of 600 where his father was a general practitioner. After receiving his medical education at Washington University of St. Louis, he pursued his house officer training at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis.

In September 1946, as a captain in the United States Army Medical Corps, Dr. Martina veteran Arctic explorer and woodsman led the team that rescued the survivors of a Sabena transatlantic airliner that crashed in a dense forest southwest of Gander, Newfoundland. For his heroic efforts he was awarded the Belgian Order of Leopold.

Dr. Martin was a Markle Scholar from 1950 to 1955 and began his academic career at the Duke University Medical Center as an assistant professor in medicine. He was recruited in 1956 to the newly organized School of Medicine at the University of Florida in Gainesville, as professor and head of the Department of Medicine.

Subsequently he was appointed Provost for Health Affairs of the J. Hillis Miller Health Center the teaching medical complex for the University of Florida, comprising schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, and the University teaching hospital.

In 1970 he spent a sabbatical year at the Harvard Medical School and the London School of Economics pursuing his interests in health services research. It was at this time that he was recruited to a newly organized Department of

Community Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and at age 54 began his remarkable career at Penn.

Over the years, Dr. Martin has served as a consultant to the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Office of Education, the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. For more than a decade he served on the Board of Directors of SmithKline Beckman Corporation. He also served as a consultant to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Revered by his colleagues and students, Dr. Martin enjoyed their awe and affection. At 6'4" he was an imposing figure. His long and varied career provided a wealth of stories, some told with tongue in cheek. A father figure to many young women and men in the medical profession, he will be remembered for his astute counsel and warm and gentle demeanor so reminiscent of the beloved country doctor. Always an innovator, he probed boundaries and constraints of conventional wisdom in search of creative resolutions for seemingly insurmountable problems in the American health care enterprise.

A memorial service will be announced in the fall for Dr. Martin, who is survived by his first wife, Ruth Campbell Martin, three children; Dr. Samuel Preston Martin IV, Dr. William Barry Martin, and Dr. Celia Martin and by five grandchildren. His second wife, Dorothy Everett Martin died in February 1996.

**ATTACHMENT 2 - New Text: Pertinent Excerpts from "*Charlie Baker George: The Story of Sabena OOCBG*"
by Mr. Frank Tibbo**

St. Martin-in-the-Woods

by

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Gander, NL
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***** COPYRIGHT *****

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Dr. Samuel P. Martin III.

This book was always meant to be called "St. Martin-in-the-Woods" after Dr. Sam Martin. The first publisher convinced me to agree (reluctantly) with the name "Charlie Baker George". The reason the publisher did not want to change the name on this book was because people were calling and asking for the "Charlie" book.

If a person is fortunate in this life they will encounter some one special - some one who they had no idea existed - but now has become real. It is analogous to an astronomer finding a new star.

I read of Capt. Sam Martin when I was researching the reason for the crash of OOCBG. The more I researched the more I became intrigued by the actions of this man - what he done with regard to the rescue of survivors. I just had to find out more. Was he still alive? Did he stay in the military medical corps? Did he go into private practice?

When I did discover that he was indeed alive and what he was doing I wondered if I should be so bold as to contact him. After all, this man - since the crash of 1946 - had become a prominent professor of medicine with a litany of awards and published papers. Would he have time to bother with such a matter after all these years? I was in for quite a surprise.

The manner in which he first spoke to me reminded me of a gentle giant. I told him that I was researching the crash with the intent of writing a book. He immediately took away any trepidation I had and said he would help me in any way possible. During the next few weeks he sent me a chapter of a book he was writing. The chapter was entitled, "The Affair at Gander" and contained a wealth of information concerning the rescue of the survivors. He and his wife came to Gander for the launching of the book and we were delighted that he agreed to stay at our home.

Samuel P. Martin, III, M.D., was Professor Emeritus of Medicine and Health Care Systems at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine and Wharton School until his death in May, 1996. From 1974-1978 he served as Executive Director of the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics.

As founding director of Penn's Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program, a position he held from 1974-1988, and as Co-director of the Charles A. Dana Scholars Program from 1984-1990, Dr. Martin mentored over 100 physicians, guiding their postdoctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania and their careers in medicine.

Before joining Penn in 1971, Dr. Martin's distinguished career as a medical educator included faculty appointments at Duke University School of Medicine and the University of Florida, where he served as Head of the Department of Medicine and Provost for Health Affairs. Dr. Martin was a member of the Board of Directors of SmithKline Beecham Corporation and served as special consultant to a number of national graduate medical education advisory groups, including the U.S. Office of Education, American Association of Medical Colleges, and National Committee for Quality Health Care. From 1989-1993, he also served as Special Consultant to the Los Angeles School Board.

Dr. Sankey V. Williams, Professor of General Internal Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania Medical Centre wrote to me after Dr. Martin's death and said, in part, "Not only a gifted physician, Sam had an unparalleled ability to challenge the existing order and to promote some of the dynamic strides which we now take for granted in the teaching and practice of medicine. Specific to the University of Pennsylvania, his vision led to his participation in the development of the MBA Program in Health Care Management at the Wharton School. As you know, Sam also founded and directed Penn's Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholars Program and served as the Director of the Leonard Davis Institute for several years at its outset.

"Perhaps most importantly, Sam served as an incredible source of knowledge and motivation for the many young men and women who looked to him as a mentor. In speaking with a number of his friends and colleagues, I found that all

were alike in remembering his dedication to his students and trainees. One young woman stated, '{Sam} believed answers were found in yourself. He opened your eyes, your ears, your mind, your soul. His stature, his voice resonated. He inspired allegiance.' I can think of few better measures of a successful life and career than the loyalty that Sam inspired in all whose lives he touched."

Note to readers

This is the second book which I have written about the crash of Sabena OOCBG. The first book was entitled Charlie Baker George and all copies of two printings were sold.

The reason I have written this book rather than reprint Charlie Baker George is because of additional information I have received. For instance one of the survivors, John King, with whom I had no contact prior to writing Charlie Baker George, contacted me and provided me with invaluable data.

October 7, 1992

Dear Mr. Tibbo,

The copy of your manuscript arrived. I have had an opportunity to quickly read it. You have done an excellent job.

Thanks again for letting me see your manuscript. You have done a superb job. I think you have done so much to point out that there were many heroes or maybe everyone is a hero. I find in going through life, I am tired of the hero search we see so frequently and believe credit should be spread on a wider base. It doesn't sell news papers! The British Historian Trevelyan in his great book on English social history pointed out that heroes are the product of the work of many people, the socio-cultural process of society, and frequently have arrived at the right place at the right time.

If I can be of further help, please let me know. You have done a superb job!

Sincerely,

Dr. Samuel P. Martin

January 9, 1994

Mr. Jean Libeert

Dear Jean

This last year brought a very interesting experience which I would like to share with you. Early in the year I received a phone call from a man named Frank Tibbo. He was a retired shift-manager of the Air Control Operation in Gander and a member of the town council in Gander. He asked if I was the Dr. Martin involved in the rescue of the passengers of Sabina Flight OOCBG. He had been given my address by Jean Polak a survivor.

From this contact I found he was writing a book about the disaster. He sent me his material. After careful study, I was certain he was a serious scholar and had done an outstanding research job on the cause of the crash. I was very impressed by his work and felt he was the first to reach the real conclusions as to the nature of disaster. With this confidence in Mr. Tibbo, I sent him my collection of pictures and my own personal notes of the rescue. He incorporated some of this into his book, found a publisher and they went forward with a book. I am enclosing a copy of the book. I think it is very well done. I have shown it to a number of people and they also think he did a good job.

In August Dorothy and I went to Gander to meet Mr. Tibbo and his family. The visit was a confirmation of my views of him from a distance. He is devoted to aviation and improving this area of Newfoundland. He wants to be sure that Gander's place in Aviation History is recorded and that there is a proper memorial to the pioneers of aviation.

While there we took a helicopter flight to the crash site. It was a very moving experience. I remembered that you and your mother had made a pilgrimage a number of years back. The site is very well maintained. The day we went there were about twenty people visiting the site on horse back. It is a beautiful and fitting way to memorialise both those lost and those who suffered but returned. For me it was a very moving experience. My mind was flooded with many memories, particularly the bravery of your mother.

Mr Tibbo and his fellow members of the City Government are planning a memorial in Gander to cover the History of Gander, its role in the War, and its place in aviation. Gander is probably the first town to grow from aviation. They are anxious to build a memorial for the passengers of this flight. I believe they are very dedicated people and will do a good job.

Sam (Samuel P. Martin, M.D.)

Forward

On Wednesday, September 18, 1946, a Douglas DC4 airliner crashed. It was the biggest airline disaster, up to that time. Aircraft crashes are not unique history; however, the events surrounding this disaster were indeed unique. An editorial in the New York Times on Sept. 24, 1946, said in part "...the organization of their rescue, employing every device of human salvage from the most primitive to the latest and most scientific, is little short of a miracle."

Some of the more pertinent questions asked at the time concerned the mystery of why the aircraft crashed in an area where it was not supposed to be, and the great quantity of diamonds, jewels and gold that disappeared. Relatives of the dead wanted to know why the victims were buried at the remote site and why exhumations were discouraged.

Newspapers all over the world carried the story of the dramatic rescue of the survivors. Journalists at the time did not know and could not find out the real stories. Many stories and articles have been written about the incident; however, practically all are rife with errors. The purpose of writing this book is to tell the true story, help the reader understand why the aircraft crashed - something not known until now, to pay tribute to some who did not receive proper recognition, and finally to tell about a man, Dr. Samuel P. Martin, III, whose name is revered by so many. The aftermath of the crash played an even more significant role in his life. Dr. Martin said: "This was my first encounter with what became known as post traumatic stress syndrome."

This book is based on interviews with some of the survivors, and people involved with various aspects of the incident. A great deal of the data is based on documents which had been confidential until the early 1990's.

Captain Samuel Martin

Captain Samuel Martin III was reading the latest medical journal. It was almost a year since the war ended and he would soon be shipped out of Argentia back to state-side. He had enjoyed his tour in Newfoundland but looked forward to doing some more exploring. Medical research intrigued him and he wanted to find answers to all kinds of things. He sometimes thought about private practice when he got out of the service in a few months. In the meantime, it was essential to keep abreast of new discoveries in medicine.

Samuel Preston Martin III was born in the small town of East Prairie in south-east Missouri, just west of The Ohio River. His father and grandfather, who had exactly the same name, were also physicians. It seems if you got the name you were going to be a physician. That doesn't necessarily follow, of course, but Martin's family tree has more physicians than any other profession - on both sides of the family. The following example is one that may be a record. Martin's grandmother's grandfather, down in Middle Tennessee, had seven sons. The seven sons had seventeen sons. Fifteen of them became physicians and the other two druggists.

Sam Martin graduated from Washington University and interned at Barnes Hospital. He volunteered to serve his country in 1934. His first service outside the United States had been in Greenland and from there had been sent to Argentia Naval Station in Newfoundland. Many servicemen complained about the cold and the isolation in Greenland, and others complained about the fog and drizzle in Newfoundland. Captain Martin wasn't the complaining type. He knew about the terrible conditions under which his father and grandfather had worked. If grandfather could see me now, he thought, he'd say I was in the lap of luxury and comfort. He thought of one instance when his grandfather had to swim through a swamp during a cold winter's visit in order to get to his patient, and afterwards sleeping in a lean-to with snow beating in through the cracks.

It was fate that Martin was stationed in Argentia in September, 1946. There weren't many who would have been up to the task that was ahead for the young captain.

The Argentia Naval base in Newfoundland.

The Argentia Naval Base was a beehive of activity. Mechanics had already readied the search aircraft. The Gander weather had improved and the meteorological office was forecasting a much better day than yesterday. Captain Samuel Martin had been alerted the previous evening to stand-by basis along with a rescue team. It was eight a.m. before Lt. Comdr. L. L. Davis, and Lt. Comdr. J. N. Schrader got the first two aircraft off the runway with the fourteen member army rescue team. Captain Martin was in charge along with Lt. J. Christian, Lt. K. Rothe and eleven enlisted men. The aircraft landed at Gander leaving the rescue team on the ground to wait for further developments. The weather at Gander had cleared and perfect conditions existed for the search.

The Search

At 09:45 a.m. a radio report was received at Gander that a ship was picking up survivors in the Atlantic Ocean just east of Newfoundland. Lt. Commander Davis was advised of this and radioed Argentia to dispatch an aircraft to check it out. Ten minutes later Lt. C. E. MacDowell departed Argentia flying a PB1G (no. 77249) to see if the radio report was true.

At 1010 a.m. two more aircraft departed Argentia for Gander to join in the search. The search area had been divided into six sections with an aircraft being assigned to each segment. Three civilian aircraft that had been in Gander doing survey work were chartered by the Newfoundland Government to assist.

Captain Wells Finds OOCBG

Captain Wells, flying TWA NC344, was estimating Gander at 1015 a.m. That would put him right on schedule. He received descent clearance and advised the Control Tower that he was going to do a visual approach.

Wells hadn't spent years in the USAF for nothing. He was a pilot that continually searched the sky and ground. About 30 miles west of Gander he spotted something that didn't look right. He positioned the aircraft in a descent and pointing ahead said to the co-pilot, "What do you see there?"

The co-pilot replied casually, "That's an aircraft crash all right, but it couldn't be the Sabena because the reports say it crashed east of the field."

Wells, known for his "eagle eye", told the Co-pilot to tell the Tower that they were checking out a crash. Just as the Tower acknowledged Wells yelled, "Hey, there are people down there! That looks like a DC 4 wreck. I'm going down for a closer look, turn on the seat belt sign!" Just as the stewardess gave the seat belt advisory, Wells banked the aircraft over to the left. His co-pilot looked a little alarmed and said with more than a little sarcasm, "Well, Captain the passengers are happy, that was a pretty good turn."

Wells ignoring him said, "That's Sabena and there are survivors. I saw three walking around, tell the Tower!"

"How in the hell did he end up there?"

"Never mind that, call the bloody Tower!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Gander Tower this is TWA NC344 about thirty miles out on the south-west leg, looks like we may have found the Sabena crash. There are survivors - at least three. Do you want us to circle while you get someone out here?"

"Roger 344, stay at site and standby, please."

The Air Traffic Controller on duty, Max Butler, looked rather sceptically at his assistant Bill Scott, "Scotty call the Chief and tell him about this, I suppose it could be Sabena - I don't know who else it could be but on the other hand if it is him, what was he doing out there?"

"Coast Guard 48314 this is Gander Tower, we have a TWA NC344 approximately thirty miles west of Gander reporting a crash with survivors. The TWA aircraft says it's the Sabena, proceed to that area immediately and advise, over."

"Gander Tower, Coast Guard zero zero eight, Roger, Wilco." Lt. Comdr. Davis swung the big PBY5A around and started scanning the sky for the TWA. Approximately five minutes later Davis was over the airport and in another five minutes had spotted the TWA DC-4. "Gander Tower, this is Coast Guard zero zero eight, I have the Trans World in sight and proceeding, will the Trans World confirm he sees us, over."

"Gander Tower, TWA Three Four Four, ah, I think we've got the Coast Guard, yeah confirm Tower we've got him and we'll move up a little to give him room to have a look."

Davis soon spotted the crash site. He pressed his intercom button, "Boys we're going down for a good look, I want a reading on the vertical stabilizer - get the letters. If it's the Sabena, the letters will be OOCBG."

That's OOCBG

The big PBY swooped down to less than fifty feet above the trees. An excited voice sounded over the aircraft's intercom "That's it! That's the letters!" Davis started barking orders, "O.K. I'm going to circle and come back in low, get ready to drop the emergency supplies!"

Davis turned to his first officer, "Advise the Tower we've got a positive identification. Thank the Trans World and tell him we've got it. Call Argentinia and tell him we're going to need lots of supplies. Advise 77249 to get over here to relieve us, we're going back to Gander and devise a plan to get those people out of there."

Davis made a few turns keeping the crash in sight while Captain Martin, Lt. Christian and he discussed the possibility of having Captain Martin parachute. This is how Dr. Martin describes it: "We decided by a vote of two to one that I would try to jump into the clearing made by the wreck, a hazardous undertaking which I did not relish. I donned my chute and prepared to join what I thought would be five survivors. I cannot say that I was overjoyed by the prospect of jumping into dense woods and adding one more casualty.

"The pilot got us into line with the opening in the timber and I crawled into the small belly hatch of the PBY. As we started the run I turned to Lt. Christian, asking him to push me if my courage failed. Just as we were getting into line for the run with the rear belly hatch open and my feet on the sill, Davis came on the intercom with an abort signal. I must say, that my emotions were mixed for I didn't know whether I would ever again get up sufficient courage to crawl into that hatch. I felt like a man on death row who had just received a pardon from the Governor after he had been strapped into the chair.

"In making the pass Davis spotted a small lake about ten to fifteen miles from the crash site that looked like a potential landing site for an amphibious plane. He thought we might try to go in that way and take the whole team, particularly since there was a possibility that there could be more than five survivors. I also suspected that he, as I, had visions of me swinging from the top of the highest tree in the vicinity."

In the Control Tower, Butler acknowledged the transmissions and made note of the local time. It was 10:15 a.m. "Scotty, that airplane has been down for a day plus five hours. If there are survivors, they must be awfully hungry by now. Did you reach Tilley?"

"Yeah, he's on his way up."

King, Henricot and PerierJohn King, along with Henricot and young Perier, had decided to do some limited exploring of the area. Although they were in no mood for extensive hiking they felt obliged to try do something. The thick growth of trees and the wet undergrowth combined with their physical condition prevented them from getting very far. King had cut his left hand as he was thrown from the aircraft and his left shoulder had been dislocated as he was thrown against a birch tree. Henricot was complaining about hunger pains and Perier's socks were torn and hurting his feet. Then they heard something they had been waiting to hear for more than day - an engine! An aircraft's engines. They stopped and listened. The noise became louder. Someone said, "They've found us!"

Henricot wasn't so sure, "Maybe it's a plane just passing overhead, the noise is abating now."

The three kept looking back towards the crash in the hope that they would see a plane. Suddenly they saw the big TWA DC4 and it was flying towards the crash site. King started back over the trail that they had been trying to follow, "Come on, let's go back!"

They've Found Us!

Ruth Henderson heard the noise of approaching engines. She thought about the prayers she had said during the night. Her neck strained skywards as the huge DC4 came into sight. It banked and flew back over them again. They were found!

Rene Libeert's smoke smeared face had streaks of white paths from her red swollen eyes to the corners of her mouth. "Will they be able to get my Raymond out soon do you think?"

Ruth Henderson was thinking only of those who were groaning from their injuries. Still she knew that Libeert's emotional injuries combined with her severe physical injuries were just cause for concern. Mrs. Libeert never once mentioned her own

physical condition. Her thoughts were strictly on the loss of her beloved husband. "I'm sure they will help Rene, now let's help the others get a little more comfortable. The sun is shining so we'll be able to get some of that clothes dry."

The sight of the big TWA DC4 flying above the crash site lifted the spirits of the survivors. Henderson wondered how far they were from the airport. She knew that if some of the injured weren't cared for soon they wouldn't last another night. Oh to have a physician magically appear - with a medical bag! Her dreams were broken by the sound of another aircraft. It was a different type aircraft - it looked like a military machine. It was making a low pass over the site and there were things dropping from it. Turning to Libeert she said, "Come on, let's get that stuff they're dropping. It's could be medical supplies and food."

It was more than Henderson expected. The first thing she found was a sleeping bag. Libeert had found a bag containing a message, "Here I can't read English so well. What does it say?"

Henderson read aloud, "'STAY WHERE YOU ARE. WE WILL HAVE A RESCUE SQUAD COME FOR YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.' It is signed United States Coast Guard."

Henderson gathered up several other packages containing pots, pans, tins of food, matches, candles and a medical kit containing bandages and two sleeping bags. Those who were able, set about using the bandages as best they could and then began opening the tins of rations that had been dropped.

Rescue Headquarters

Rex Tilley, Senior Air Traffic Controller at the Gander Control Tower, had just bounded up the Control Tower stairs as Max Butler, the controller on duty, was receiving confirmation from the Coast Guard that the Sabena had been located and that there were survivors. "Max, tell Trans World that I want to talk to him as soon as he's in." Tilley hastened back to his office and got on the telephone to the Airport Manager's office. Tom McGrath, the Operations Manager, who was acting in the absence of the Airport Manager agreed to an emergency meeting to devise a rescue plan.

Lt. Cmdr. Schrader landed at 11:35 a.m. and reported immediately to Tilley's office. Tilley and McGrath had gathered various officials for the meeting and had pinned a map of the area on a wall. McGrath asked Schrader if he would brief the meeting on the exact location of the crash site.

Schrader indicated an area on the map approximately twenty two miles south-south-west of Gander. There was no road close to the area. One possibility discussed was to bring the survivors out through the bush and then via river boat, a journey of approximately thirty miles. Another possibility was to have the PBYs land in a lake approximately five miles from the crash site and have the survivors brought there. The first thing to be decided was the plan to get the rescue teams to the site.

Tom McGrath knew that the going would be rough. He also knew that this was virgin country to the Americans. That's all we need now is to have the Yanks get lost. He knew that one of his Runway Foremen, Roland Pinsent, was an expert woodsman and probably familiar with the area. McGrath sent someone to tell Pinsent to come to Rescue Headquarters. Pinsent arrived within minutes. He looked around the room with all the "bigwigs" and wondered what McGrath wanted.

"Roe, are you familiar with the Dead Wolf area?"

"Yes, sir, - been up there lots of times - huntin' and fishin'".

"I want someone to go in with the Yan... er the Americans here to help them get to the crash site. You're aware of the crash?"

"Yes, sir everybody is. I'll do whatever you want. Show me where they crashed on the map and I'll guarantee I'll get them there - no sweat!"

Two things Pinsent had lots of, was confidence and enthusiasm. He had something else which was essential to the rescue and that was ability. He also loved a challenge. Pinsent worked for the Newfoundland Government but would have worked for no pay just to show that he could guide the Americans to the site and to be the first one there.

Schrader reported that he had spotted 5 survivors, 2 men, 2 women and a child. He said that he had dropped emergency gear, first-aid kits, sleeping bags, food and water along with a note instructing the survivors to remain at the scene and that a rescue team would be on the way shortly. He said he had seen them retrieving all the supplies that had been dropped.

The Evacuation Plan

Those attending the meeting represented the Newfoundland Government, the U.S. Army and the U.S. Coast Guard. It was agreed that the Coast Guard would be in command of the rescue operation.

It was considered essential that they get Captain Samuel Martin in to the crash site as soon as possible. It was also agreed that the young physician be in command of the first rescue party.

The following plans were then agreed upon:

The PB5A 48314 was to take Captain Martin, Lt. Rothe, Mr. Roland Pinsent, and half of the Army rescue team and proceed to a small unnamed (Caribou Lake) and uncharted pond. The pond was surrounded with dense wood about 5 miles upstream from the crash. They were to land there and have the rescue team proceed downstream in rubber life rafts until directed by the aircraft to climb the hill to the crash site.

The critical and risky part of the plan was to have the large PB5 aircraft land in an uncharted body of water. The pilots had no idea if there were hidden obstructions. Should a PB5 come to grief on the water because of unknowns, the problems would immediately multiply. Instead of one crash, the rescue team would be dealing with two. All unnecessary items would be taken out of the big PB5 to have the draft as shallow as possible.

The PB5A 34008 was to take the other half of the Army rescue party to the mouth of the South West Gander River in Gander Lake. From there they would walk to the site, a distance of approximately twenty kilometres (fourteen miles).

The Army Search and Rescue PB5A 34005, that had arrived from Harmon Field (Stephenville) was also to fly to Gander Lake to take the advance members of the civilian rescue party to the mouth of the South West Gander River to meet up with the second half of the Army rescue party. The combined team consisted of 39 members. They had the most difficult task by far and it seems that the reason the second rescue party was to proceed that way was in the event that the PB5s had trouble landing at Caribou Lake. It should be remembered that very large aircraft were about to touch down in waters that never before had been used by aircraft.

Each rescue party was provided with 'handi-talkie' sets and all communication between the aircraft and the ground search parties was to be done on a frequency of 3885 KCS. Each unit was assigned a code name. CG48314, pilot Lt. Comdr. Davis and his ground search crew (Captain Martin), were called Rescue 1.

Aircraft CG34008, pilot Lt. Comdr. Schrader and his ground crew, were designated Rescue 2.

Army aircraft 34005 was called Rescue 3, and his search party was also called Rescue 3.

In summary:

Rescue 1 - Coast Guard 48314 plus one half of the Army search party;
Lt. Comdr. L. L. Davis.

Rescue 2 - Coast Guard 34008 plus remaining half of Army search party;
Lt. Comdr. J. N. Schrader.

Rescue 3 - Army 34005 plus the Civilian search party

JATO Bottles

A discussion took place among the crews of the PBVs about getting on the pond and not having sufficient room to take off from the small lake due to the unknowns of the water. The flying boat CG77249 was diverted from the scene of the crash where it had been circling. It was to proceed to Argentia in order to pick up JATO (Jet Assisted Take Off) bottles and additional emergency gear.

JATO bottles were small portable jet engines that were strapped on an aircraft to shorten the take-off run. The engines were capable of a short powerful thrust and very effective. It was later determined that JATO bottles were not required to assist in the take-offs but it was a measure of comfort for the pilots to have them.

A few minutes past noon on the 19th., after a quick lunch, the Coast Guard flying boat 48314, commanded by Lt. Comdr. Davis, departed Gander for Caribou Lake. The JATO bottles had been attached and some fuel drained from the tanks in order to lighten the big amphibian.

On the way, he passed over the crash site and dropped additional food, sleeping bags and first-aid kits. He then proceeded to Caribou Lake and flew over the lake several times looking for shoal water, rocks, logs or other debris. He could find no visible obstructions. A landing was tried and it worked. Lt. Comdr. Davis didn't breath a sigh of relief until the aircraft was slowed down to a taxiing speed. It was the first time an aircraft had landed on Caribou Lake. It was September 19th, 1:15 p.m.

Newfoundland time. Davis cautiously guided the PBY through the water looking for obstructions. None were found and he immediately broadcast the good news to the other aircraft flying overhead.

It wasn't all good news, however, because there wasn't a place to beach the aircraft. This meant that the survivors were going to have a fourth segment added to their journey back to civilization. It was going to be a litter (stretcher) ride from the crash site to the shore of Caribou Lake, a ride in a rubber boat to the PBY, an aircraft ride from Caribou Lake to Gander Airport and then an ambulance ride to the hospital.

Martin Arrives at Crash Site

Five hours had expired since the Rescue 1 team had left Caribou Lake. Valuable time had been lost because the going had been much rougher than anticipated. Approximately two hours after their journey started they had reached the point in the River where Dead Wolf Brook flows into the river that they were traversing. They were heading north but Dead Wolf Brook flowed in at a right angle from the east. The fast currents from the two rivers joining into one caused the dinghy behind Martin's to lose control. It crashed into Martin's dinghy throwing all eight men in the water.

Martin climbed back aboard the dinghy. Pinsent had beaten him to it.

"You O.K. Mr. Pinsent?"

Pinsent, like everyone else, was soaking wet and trying to keep from shivering in the cool air. This had been his second swim for the day, the first being when the boats had gone over a waterfall an hour ago. He also had no change of clothes and realized that he'd probably spend the night trying to dry them.

"Yes sir, I didn't know this was going to be so much fun."

Martin realized that McGrath had really picked the right man. He not only knew the river and where to turn, he had a sense of humour. I wonder, he thought, if all Newfoundlanders are like him?

The air arm of Rescue 1 was flying in a circle overhead. Martin ordered the party to head for the shore. "This radio got wet and I doubt if we're going to make contact." Martin jumped from the dinghy, waded to the river bank and tried the radio. "Rescue 1 Air from Rescue 1 Ground Party do you read, over." The radio was silent.

The aircraft banked again and headed at a right angle from the river.

Martin looked at his watch, "O.K. men that's the signal we were waiting for. We must be adjacent to the crash site. We're going in through the bush. It's 8:15 p.m., local time, so we've got only a few minutes of light." He gave directions to secure the dinghies and then arranged the men in single file.

"Lt. Christian take the point with Mr. Pinsent. Confirm you have the compass heading."

"Yes sir it's 090 degrees True, we'll be walking a Magnetic heading of approximately 125 degrees."

Pinsent shrugged, "Don't need a compass to go up there boys."

Martin knew that Pinsent would probably laugh if he asked him if they should mark the trail but he decided to stick to military procedures, "Sgt. Braksick fall in behind and mark the trail."

"Yes sir."

The searchers then got another rude surprise. The terrain was rough which they expected; it was heavy slogging up a steep incline which they also expected; but the mosquitoes were large, thick, persistent and unexpected.

PFC Joseph Morehouse, following behind Cpl. Harry Houghton, found very little solace in buttoning his wet coat and tucking up his even wetter collar. "Gosh, Corporal you think we'll get a medal for killing the most mosquitoes? I don't think I've ever seen them so bad."

Houghton paused for a breath, "I'll bet a damn we don't have any fly dope in our supplies. Of course if we did have it when we started, it's probably at the bottom of the river now."

A shout halted their conversation. It was Lt. Christian calling to Capt. Martin, "Captain we've got something in sight over to the north sir, if it's the crash we've been travelling too far to the south."

Martin joined Christian and both men conferred. Martin trained his field glasses in the direction Christian was pointing. "That has to be it. I see a trail of smoke coming from the area, let's go!"

The men moved much faster now that the target was in sight. Within fifteen minutes, twelve cold, wet, and tired men came crashing through the trees to the scene of the crash.

Martin glanced around, held up his hand to get the attention of his men and ordered them to see if they could find the parachutes that had been used to drop supplies. He told the men to make shelters out of the parachutes and to cut some pine branches for bedding.

Ruth Henderson was the first to greet the men. "Thank God!", she shouted, "we had given up hope that anyone would get here tonight." She went on to tell about the hunters and that they had gone for help. Henderson pointed out where she had seen a large package drop which could be a tent. Within a few minutes Pinsent had found a tent and had started to set it up.

Martin quickly made an examination of all the survivors - making a mental note of his priorities. The sight of great shreds of burned skin hanging from their bodies and extremities, the bones sticking out through broken skin sent shocks of despair through his cold wet body. It was frightfully evident that he needed antibiotics, plasma, splints and other additional medicine. He calmly told the survivors that the medical supplies had been lost, that he would do his best for them and that replacement medical supplies would arrive the next day. He told them he did have some medicine if their pain became unbearable. Martin had fortuitously tucked a package containing morphine supplies inside his vest; it was the only medical supplies that had survived the unpredictable river. He bent over Walter Devos and quickly realized the man had gone into shock. Martin looked up at one of his two medical assistants, "Get this man to the medical tent immediately but handle him with extreme care, he has some severe burns."

Martin carried the morphine to the tent and peeled away the protective covers. "I'm going to give you something for your pain sir." Martin administered morphine to the suffering man and instructed his assistants to wrap him in some of the blankets that had been dropped. "If necessary get blankets from someone else, this man has more need of them."

Martin abruptly wheeled around and left the tent. His second patient was Jean Rookx. "Now miss, tell me where you hurt the most." Before Rookx had a chance to answer Martin was yelling, "Lt. Christian, have the men make some splints from tree branches - now miss we're going to try to get you more comfortable. It looks like your leg is hurt, how is the pain?"

Rookx had been in complete control of her emotions. Maybe it was because of her inherent responsibility as the only surviving crew member. She hadn't wept, nor had she admitted to any pain. Both legs were paining above the knees. She had dragged herself around the site by grabbing branches of trees and anything else she could reach. Her uniform was covered with mud and dried blood. Her face was splattered with dirt that had mixed with the blood from the cut on her forehead.

Her arms reached out to Dr. Martin and she began to shake. Tears burst from her eyes. "Hold me", she sobbed, "So many people died and I couldn't help them."

Martin held her as she continued to shake. "Lt. Christian have you had any luck with the splints."

"The men will have a few finished soon sir."

"Get two men and help me lift this woman to the tent. Be careful of her legs, looks like she has a severed patella." Have the men make up some stretchers and have them search for more blankets."

Roland Pinsent was partially in awe with the fact that the broken and burned bodies of the dead were lying around like some child's discarded broken dolls. He approached Martin, "Anything you want me to do with the bodies, sir? They look awful the way they're all lying there."

"Mr. Pinsent we don't have time yet. I would like you to get a fire going and get some water boiled. I'm going to need lots of it. You can get the containers from Lt. Christian."

"Yes sir, you'll have boiled water in a couple of minutes."

Martin returned his attention to Rookx, "Miss do you have any feeling in your legs?"

"Yes my legs are paining very badly, it seems they're getting worse now."

"Well I think that's because you've been holding yourself together for so long. You are now just beginning to realize the extent of your injuries. I'll give you something for your pain now before we move you."

Martin deftly prepared a syringe, and through a tear in the sleeve of her uniform, injected a dose of morphine in her exposed left shoulder.

Leaving her in the temporary care of Christian, Martin rushed over to Joseph Des Chuyfflur. He turned his attention to the large scalp cut. Pointing to the cut he instructed an assistant to start cleaning the area in preparation for bandaging. "Infection - that's the danger, and our medical supplies are at the bottom of the river. Don't bandage it until I come back to look at it again, I wish I could suture it, he's losing too much blood."

His next patient was Leona Tonglet. She had a ghastly looking bruise on her forehead and a bad cut on the side of her face. The bleeding had been temporarily stopped by a towel that had been crudely tied around her head. "Bring over some large bandages and hot water and get some more light over here." One of the men who had been working with him suddenly wheeled around and dashed behind a tree. Martin could hear him vomiting. He looked up as he heard him returning. He was wearing a sheepish grin, "Sorry sir, I'm not used to this."

Martin looked back at his patient, "That's all right soldier, by the time morning comes you'll have lots of experience."

Many things happened during what Martin described as "the longest night in my life." Probably the most unpleasant and one of the most memorable was an unwanted proposition from a wealthy, and unsavoury, survivor. He had waited until he could catch Martin alone. The only periods of time that the young physician was alone that night was when he was en route from one patient to another. "Sir, I have a proposal for you." Martin looked surprised, "Yes, sir?" "I am a very wealthy. You look after me and get me out of here and I will see that you don't have to work the remainder of your life." Martin looked aghast. Is this man out of his mind? Does he think I spent years in university to stoop to some stupid suggestion that I get rich to look after some jerk at the expense of people that need my help?

Martin lost his equanimity but fortunately not his temper. "Sir, I suggest that you start making yourself useful and help those who are hurt! We are all in a very precarious situation here and there is no guarantee that we'll get back to civilization soon. I am here, along with the others, to help everyone. There are times, sir, when money can't buy you anything - this happens to be one of them."

Martin continued working through the night. He improvised splints, bandaged, patched, cleaned, consoled, and treated shock. Several times his assistants were obliged to ask him to leave a patient to attend to a new medical crisis. In some cases it was the effects of the first dose of morphine wearing off.

Lt. Christian was worried, "Sir don't you think you'd better take a break, you haven't stopped for five hours."

"No Lieutenant I'm O.K. but let the men have some sleep and why don't you have some hot coffee that Mr. Pinsent has miraculously made?"

"Sir I've already had some, can I get you a cup?"

"That would be nice Lieutenant, thank you."

Friday, September 20, 1946

By the time morning came, lots of bones had been pulled and pushed into place by the young Captain. He had substituted kind words for the medicine he didn't have. The soldier who had vomited a few hours ago seemed hardened to the task at hand. His condition had been psychologically conditioned by the fact that most of the others had no better luck with keeping down the little food that they had eaten.

The two Coast Guard aircraft, Rescue 1 and 2, at Argentia were set to depart for Gander at 6 a.m., however, the weather had deteriorated at Argentia and Gander. At 10:10 a.m. Rescue 1, with Lt. Comdr. Davis in command, departed on instruments for Gander and upon reaching the Gander Radio Range proceeded out the south-west leg in an effort to contact the ground parties by radio. He was unsuccessful and since there was no hope of contacting them visually, he decided to land at Gander to wait for better weather conditions. It was 1:25 p.m. when he landed.

At 12:20 p.m. Rescue 2 (Lt. Comdr. Schrader) departed Argentia on instruments and proceeded to Gander. His intentions were to proceed to the radio range beacon and then make an instrument approach at Gander. Instead of landing he planned to proceed under the overcast in an attempt to find the crash site and drop new handi-talki radios so that radio contact could be re-established. He arrived over Gander just before two o'clock and proceeded to make an instrument approach. He broke out of the clouds at about five hundred ft. above ground and proceeded to the crash site. Rescue 1 then departed Gander and also proceeded to the crash site under the cloud. The base of the clouds was only about two hundred feet above the crash site and it was definitely no place for two aircraft. Rescue 2 proceeded to Gander Lake and began circling in the vicinity of South West Gander River while Rescue 1 dropped supplies to the ground rescue parties. Rescue 2 then flew over the site to drop more supplies.

Little did the aircraft crew realize that the medical supplies that they were dropping were so critical. There was no way of knowing that the medical supplies carried by Martin's party had been lost in the river.

This air drop was no more critical to anyone than Rene Libeert. Martin had kept her alive through the night, but by morning she was having chills and a raging fever. He could feel the gas beneath the scalp and upper neck. She had been having problems breathing throughout the night and without pillows Martin propped her up in his lap and talked, and talked, trying to allay her fears. Just as he thought he was going to lose her, a break appeared in the clouds and they received their first air drop of the day. Martin instructed Sergeant Cassilino to quickly search through the supplies for penicillin and gas gangrene antitoxin. Cassilino rushed back, "I've got it!"

"Quick! prepare it!", Martin knew how critical it was that no time could be lost. Within a few minutes of the air drop Martin had administered the life-saving drugs. Within a few hours she was fever free. She was going to survive the ordeal.

Rescue Aircraft Drop Radios

At 2:10 p.m. Rescue 1 arrived over the crash site and dropped new handi-talki radios to the ground party. Up to this point radio contact had not been possible with ground crew and therefore no one except the ground party knew the number or extent of the casualties. The new radios dropped by the rescue aircraft were a blessing. Radio contact was made on 3410kc and the world learned for the first time that 18 had survived the crash

The time was 2:30 p.m. on Friday, September 20th. And fifty seven hours (57) had expired since the crash.

The news was that the survivors were wet, cold, hungry, and badly in need of medical supplies, food, clothing, blankets, tents, sleeping bags, cooking utensils, stoves, bed pans, urinals, etc. A complete list of medical supplies and other emergency gear needed was immediately passed to Rescue 2 who was circling over the mouth of South West Gander River on Gander Lake. Rescue 2 copied the information and proceeded back to Gander Airport landing there at three minutes past three with his list.

Rescue 1 continued to circle the crash site and the names of the survivors were radioed to the Rescue 1 from the ground party. Rescue 1 relayed the names and their physical condition back to Rescue headquarters. The news media were pressing Rescue Headquarters for news, any news of the disaster. A large civilian airliner crashing in 1946 was world news as it is today.

Back at the crash site, Dr. Martin and Mr. Roe Pinsent were exploring the area. They were trying to determine the best way to get the survivors out of the woods. They spotted an enormous male caribou and Pinsent decided that he would demonstrate how to call the animal by imitating a female caribou. He gave a few groan-like sounds and the animal took off towards them at full speed. Martin, telling it afterwards said, "After going through all I had been through, it was a shame to die on the horns of an amorous male caribou." The incident ended with Pinsent waving his arms at the caribou. The big animal stopped in his tracks and walked away.

The Good News

The names of the 18 survivors relayed to Headquarters by Rescue 1 were:

1. CAUCHIE, Georges
2. DES CHUYFFLUR, Joseph
3. DEVOS, Walter
4. HENDERSON, Ruth
5. HENRICOT, Philippe
6. KING, John
7. KRONEGOLD, Charles
8. KRONEGOLD, Selma
9. LIBEERT, Rene Jacquet
10. MARTIN, Suzanne
11. PERIER, Etienne
12. PERIER, Jeanne
13. POLAK, Jean
14. REVEL, Rudy
15. ROOKX, Jean (Stewardess)
16. TONGLET, Leona
17. TONGLET, Leon
18. WANDERER, Betsy (Elizabeth Kyzer)

The Bad News

The Belgium airline, Sabena, then had the grim job of determining from the passenger manifest the names of the 26 passengers and crew who were killed in the crash:

1. ALSTER, Joseph
2. BEAUSILLON, Ann F.
3. BRUYLANT, Jeanne M. (Stewardess)
4. DASCOTTE, Rose M.
5. DEVOOGHT, R. L.
6. DROSSAERT, A. E. (Co-Pilot)
7. DUMONT, A. A.
8. DUPONT, Franz
9. DUTOICT, J. (Radio Operator)
10. ESTER, J. (Captain)
11. FASSBENDER, A. (Engineer)
12. HENRICOT, Isabelle
13. LEHNERTZ, Lilly Rupert (nee Frisch)
14. LIBEERT, Raymond
15. LINDENBAUM, Nathan
16. LOWENTHAL, Nelly (nee Lehnertz)
17. PAUWELS, H. W.
18. PERIER, Marie Henriette Wianda (Noblet)
19. PERIER, Marie Jeanne Jacqueline Augustine
20. REYNAERDTS, Hubert J.
21. REYNAERDTS, Louise R.
22. SCHYNS, L. G.
23. VERSTRAETEN, L. C. J. (Navigator)
24. WACHSBERGER-GOMMERS, G.
25. WILSON, Mary M.
26. WILSON, M. W.

The aircraft departed Brussels with thirty seven (37) passengers and a crew of seven (7) for a total of forty four (44). Twenty (20) passengers and six (6) crew had died.

Martin Demands Helicopters

Rescue 1 continued to copy information from Captain Martin. He radioed that only 4 or possibly 5 of the survivors were in a condition to be evacuated as planned. The initial plan was to help them through the woods to the river and then down the river to Caribou Lake in rubber boats to the PBY flying boats. Martin transmitted the following message to the circling Rescue 1: "Look, we're going to kill some of those people if we take them out the way we planned. There are six or eight that just will not make it. After what the rescue team had to go through to get here, there is just no way I can permit those patients to be taken out that way. See if you can get helicopters and I'll keep them as comfortable as I can until you get the 'copters here, urgent, over."

Rescue 1 acknowledged, and contacted Argentia immediately.

Helicopters!

The Coast Guard commander at Argentia got on the telephone to his headquarters who in turn had his staff find the closest base to Gander where they had helicopters. One was found at the Coast Guard facilities in New York City and another at the Coast Guard airport in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. Now of course there was another problem. The helicopters could not fly to Gander in a reasonable amount of time, and even if they could there were other problems such as the inexperience of the pilots to fly and navigate such a distance. In addition their distance that the helicopters could fly without refuelling was such that it would be very difficult to get them re-fuelled along the route to Gander. The helicopters were also known for an inherent problem with their tail rotor which was a constant concern of the manufacturer, the pilots and mechanics.

There was only one thing to do. The helicopters would have to be dismantled, placed aboard a military transport, flown to Gander and re-assembled. The reaction of the Commanding Officer at Transport Command was predictable when he was told that, not only did the Coast Guard want two helicopters in Newfoundland, but also they wanted them taken apart and flown to Gander Airport on a C54. "What in the hell are you fellows up to?" he yelled "Don't you know the war is over?"

The Coast Guard Commander in Argentia knew it wasn't going to be easy. "General, we've got an emergency situation. The crash I mentioned was on its way to New York, and the survivors are from several countries including the United States. The

aircraft crashed Wednesday morning. It's now Friday afternoon at 4 p.m. My men say that the only way some of them will live is to get them out of there by helicopter."

"Well damn it why didn't you say so."

"Well, sir, I was trying..."

"Don't you know our motto, son? 'The difficult we do at once - The impossible takes a little time'. How soon do you want them?"

The Argentia Commander didn't know how he could put it any plainer. "Time is critical sir, very critical."

"They'll be there be tomorrow noon!"

The reaction on the other end of the telephone was that of thankful relief but the Coast Guard Commander silently doubted whether it could be done that fast. The Air Transport Commander just said "They'll be there!" The incredible thing is that he did what seemed impossible.

Everything must have gone like clock-work. Mechanics and pilots were recruited for the helicopters. Two giant C54 transport aircraft, to carry the helicopters, were mobilized immediately. Crews were obtained and briefed The two aircraft were fuelled, supplies requisitioned, the helicopters were mechanically certified, inspected, disassembled, and loaded aboard the C54. Hoisting equipment and personnel to lift the helicopters aboard the C54 had to be rounded up. Many of the parts had to be crated, the helicopters had to be stowed securely aboard the C54's, and many other details.

It is hard to conceive how it could have been done much faster with the modern equipment of today. It was an incredible feat and is one of the many remarkable events that surrounded the Sabena crash.

It was 4:10 p.m. and Rescue 1 aircraft returned to Gander. The captain had relayed the vital information to Argentia about the critical need for helicopters, but the news that was getting out to the world was the number of fatalities and the condition of the injured.

Dr. James Paton

Dr. James Paton was in charge of the hospital at Gander and quickly gathered together all of the medical supplies requested. The medical supplies were packed in bed rolls and Gibson Girl containers in preparation for a parachute drop. Capt. McConnell, Commanding Officer of the Army Transport Command Detachment at Gander, was able to supply some of the equipment such as sleeping bags, and what he could not supply was requested from the Army at Harmon Field, (a U.S. Military Base at Stephenville, Newfoundland), Fort Pepperal, (a U.S. Military Base at St. John's, Newfoundland), and Argentia (the U.S. Coast Guard and Navy Base in Newfoundland).

More Supplies Dropped

In the meantime, the U.S. Army at Fort Totton, New York, had sent Capt. M. Wiener to Gander as Search and Rescue Officer. He immediately took control of the situation and made arrangements for additional gear to be sent from Harmon Field.

It seemed that all the U.S. Bases put this rescue on the top of their priority list. Lt. MacDowell departed Argentia at approximately 4:15 p.m., flying a PB1G, (77249), with all available equipment.

MacDowell, flying the PB1G, and Schrader, flying the Rescue 2 flying-boat, were advised that they would be doing all of the equipment drops. The Rescue 1 flying-boat (Davis) returned to Argentia to check on the progress of the helicopters and to try to get additional tents, blankets and other emergency supplies.

At 5 p.m. flying conditions had deteriorated due to poor visibility and low ceiling. It was therefore with extreme caution that Rescue 2 proceeded to the site to drop more food supplies. He made 15 drops of supplies getting the majority right on target, and the remainder within a short walking distance for Rescue 1 and Rescue 2 ground parties.

It was 6 p.m. before the PB1G arrived on the scene in order to commence dropping supplies. After doing an instrument let-down he decided, after consultation with Rescue 2, that he would have to wait until Rescue 2 was finished. The weather just would not allow two aircraft operating together. Rescue 2 finished his drops after another 15 minutes and radioed the PB1G to start his drops. Rescue 2 proceeded down the South West Gander River to see if he could locate Neddy Spencer's Rescue 3 ground party.

Saturday, September 21, 1946

It was with a great deal of relief that the rescue crews awakened in the morning to good weather conditions. The pilots had been flying with extreme pressure because of the low ceiling and reduced visibility. A constant concern was the danger of low hills surrounding the crash site and the presence of other aircraft. The improved weather conditions would expedite the rescue operation and increased the chances of the survivors.

Lt. Comdr. L. L. Davis (Rescue 1) had his crew up at 5 a.m. He told them before going to their barracks on Friday night that they had to be ready to leave Argentia for Gander at 6:15. Right on schedule, they arrived over the crash site at 7:30 and dropped new food supplies to the ground team. The handi-talkie radios, working through the relay boat on Gander Lake, had kept the rescue party at the crash site in radio contact with rescue headquarters.

Dr. Martin's rescue party had spent a reasonably comfortable night, thanks to the equipment dropped to them. The survivors had been moved inside tents to protect them from the wind chill and dampness. Dr. Martin had been able to keep them reasonably comfortable with the drugs and medical supplies. He had told them that helicopters were on the way from the United States and that they would probably arrive on Saturday. That meant that the most severely injured would be evacuated soon.

What must have seemed to be a miracle to some then occurred. The military Air Transport Command had pulled it off. The two C54 aircraft, carrying a helicopter each, reported fifty miles west of Gander. They were put in radio contact with the Rescue aircraft 1 who guided them to the crash site for the familiarization of the helicopters' pilots. The military had arranged to get two crews for each helicopter. The four pilots, Comdr. F. Erickson, Lt. A. Kleisch, Lt. S. R. Graham and Lt. W. C. Bolton were invited to the cockpit of the C54s to get a good look at the terrain in which they would be operating.

The helicopter pilots immediately advised that the terrain looked doubtful and that they would require a platform constructed of heavy lumber. Word was passed to Gander Rescue Headquarters, who then passed the word to Tom McGrath that lumber was needed. McGrath promised to have it ready for air drop in the morning.

First Helicopters in Newfoundland

Two C54s carrying two un-assembled helicopters arrived at Gander, Newfoundland. It was the first time in history. Never before had helicopters been on the island of Newfoundland. It was 8 a.m., Saturday, September 21, 1946, 3 days and 3 hours

after the crash. Some of the survivors were in critical condition and time was getting short, some may not make it. Captain Martin had stemmed the flow of blood, but some of them desperately needed hospitalisation for burns and fractures. Martin was very concerned about the deteriorating condition of one burn victim in particular. He had done all he could do there in the woods, and was treating him for shock and trying to ease his pain.

The military transports carrying their precious cargo of helicopters taxied to the ramp and were carefully unloaded. The mechanics started working immediately. It was going to be non-stop work now in a frantic effort to ready them in time. The mechanics were told the gravity of the situation. There was a determination among the mechanics that there were going to be no errors in their work, everything was going to be done efficiently and as fast as possible. Not one of them stopped for a coffee break.

The aircraft had to be reassembled, fuelled and flight checked. Unloading commenced at 9:15 a.m. The chief engineer announced to his crews that while both aircraft would be assembled simultaneously, priority would be placed on getting one aircraft certified airworthy so that rescue operations could commence as soon as possible. HOS-1 No. 75610 was designated the priority aircraft. That meant that one of the mechanics working on HNS-1 no. 39051 may have to be seconded to the priority aircraft should the need arise. The chief said he expected that 75610 would be certified airworthy, fuelled and ready to fly at 4 p.m. Everything would have to go right!

The helicopter pilots needed to get a good look at the area in order to determine landing sites. They had looked at it through the windows of the C54s coming in but could not see a suitable place for a landing site near Caribou Lake. The Rescue 2 aircraft was about to leave for another food drop so Lt. Kleisch was designated to go along with the sole purpose of surveying the site and selecting a place for the helicopters to land. Rescue 2 aircraft contacted the ground team and told them of the plans for selecting a helicopter site and that they were hoping to start airlift operations by 4 or 5 p.m. Kleisch made notes on his map with the idea of consulting with his fellow pilots when he returned to Gander. Rescue 2 had been instructed to see if he could contact the Rescue 3 ground party. Concern had been expressed at Rescue Headquarters because the Rescue 3 ground party had still not turned up at the crash site. Rescue 2 aircraft located the civilian rescue party (Rescue 3) one and a half miles down stream from the crash. A message block containing directions to the crash site was dropped it to the Rescue 3 ground party. Rescue 2 radioed Rescue Headquarters that Rescue 3 ground party should be at the site in about another hour. It was about 10 a.m. on Saturday morning, more than three days after the crash.

Rescue Headquarters was making notes regarding the progress of their three rescue teams. It was noted that the Rescue 3 ground crew would arrive at the site within the next hour - 39 hours behind Rescue 1 and 2 ground parties. The decision to

send Rescue 1 and 2 via the Caribou Lake route was a critical factor in saving some lives. There was no doubt in anyone's mind by now that had Rescue 1 and 2 ground teams gone with Rescue 3 ground teams under Neddy Spencer, some of the injured would not have survived. The statement made by someone at Rescue Headquarters echoed everyone's thoughts: "Thank God that Capt. Martin went in via Caribou Lake and not up Gander River."

It was considered essential that the three other helicopter pilots get a detailed look at the site. Rescue 1 took the remaining helicopter pilots, Comdr. Erickson, Lt. Graham and Lt. Bolton, aboard his PBY5A and proceeded to the site. While the three helicopter pilots were looking at the site and the surrounding area Rescue 1 contacted Captain Martin and told him of the plans. Martin agreed with the plans and Rescue 1 returned to Gander for final planning of the evacuation.

Rescue Headquarters

The Commanding Officer of the American Coast Guard Air Detachment called a conference to finalize plans. In addition to the Coast Guard personnel, Army and civilian representatives attended. The plan was to have the Rescue Party move their camp from the crash site. The crash site was on the side of a hill covered with trees and not at all suitable for helicopter operations. The top of the hill, three quarters of a mile away, consisted of a large open plateau and it was there that the Rescue Party would be told to move their camp. A party would be sent to Caribou Lake to erect a camp and make a site suitable for the helicopters to land in a small clearing at the south end of the lake. This was the only clear area on the entire circumference of the lake. The helicopters would proceed to the plateau, pick up survivors, one at a time and take them to the lake. The PBYs were to land on the lake, taxi as close to shore as possible and anchor.

Considerable discussion had taken place regarding whether the helicopters should fly directly from the crash site to Gander with the survivors. The question was decided by reviewing the history of the mechanical defects of the tail rotors. It was considered prudent to fly the helicopters as little as possible. It was very unlikely, even with this reduced flying schedule that the helicopters would survive without serious mechanical problems.

The shore party then would place the survivors in Stokes litters, place them aboard rubber boats and row them to the PBY flying boats. The PBYs were to fly two survivors at a time to Gander. There, an ambulance would be waiting to take them to the hospital where additional staff had been placed on an emergency basis.

The plan started immediately. The Rescue 2 PBY flying boat departed Gander with a shore party headed by Comdr. A. H. Giffin with Capt. M. Weiner as deputy leader. Lumber and other supplies were aboard to set up the rescue camp.

Spencer Finally Arrives at Crash Site

In the meantime, back at the crash site, the civilian search party, Rescue 3, headed by Neddy Spencer, finally arrived. It was estimated now that approximately 50 people were depending on air drops for food and water. This kept the PB1G (77249), shuttling between Gander and the scene making continuous drops of supplies.

Spencer was about to have his second confrontation. His first question on arrival was, "Who's in charge here now?" It could be considered from his tone that whoever was in charge, a change of command was now imminent with his arrival.

His tone softened somewhat when he was introduced to Captain Martin. Martin was an imposing chap, tall and lean. Spencer was short and stout - and stubborn. Spencer, however, was smart enough to know when he was out-gunned. He quickly detected Martin's no nonsense attitude. The plan for the helicopter evacuation had clearly startled Spencer. Spencer knew as much about helicopters as most of the people there - nothing. He challenged the plan, espousing the plan devised at Rescue Headquarters to have the survivors go out by the river.

Spencer shouted, "Do those helicopters really work?"

Martin was tired. He had worked on the survivors practically non-stop for approximately forty hours. He looked at Spencer coldly, "If you take them out your way, some of them won't survive to get to Gander."

Spencer backed down, "O.K. you win, what do you want my men to do - sir?"

"We need some help in getting a platform ready for the helicopters, I'll have the sergeant show you."

More radios had been dropped to the site and Lt. Christian had asked the rescue aircraft to drop some planks at the site selected for the helicopter base. Christian and his men had set up a tent there and were in the process of having everyone moved from the crash site to the place the hunters referred to as "Shank's Bog." Shanks Bog or not - it was the closest place (one mile) devoid of trees and with a clear approach required by the helicopters. The rescuers immediately dubbed the new site the "Helicopter Camp".

Jim John

One of Spencer's party was Jim John. John was a descendent of the Micmacs brought to Newfoundland from Nova Scotia by the French to fight the British. He was famous throughout the country as a hunting and fishing guide. Ruth Henderson remembered him the remainder of her life and vowed to return to Newfoundland to go fishing with him.

Mr. John was assigned the duty of getting Henderson from the crash site to the helicopter camp. John had never in his life been assigned this type of task but had never backed down from a challenge. "Take my arm and when we get to bad spots I'll carry you." John wasn't too sure how he was going to carry her but he didn't have long to find out.

"Mr. John, I'm having trouble walking."

John thought for a minute, "You mind me carrying you piggy-back Miss?"

She looked at the swarthy man and hesitated. "Well, if you think you can manage to carry me, you can try."

Henderson got on John's back and the strong guide didn't stop until he gently released her at the door of the tent. "You O.K. now Miss?"

Henderson leaned over and gave him a kiss on the cheek, "You're wonderful, Mr. John, thank you for the ride and thank you for telling me the stories about the salmon."

John blushed and hurried back to the site.

Lumber Air Dropped

In addition to the helicopter platform being prepared at Shank's Bog, another had to be prepared at Caribou Lake. The place on the shore line selected for the landing site was at a fifteen degree incline and considered too dangerous without some preparation. Rescue 1 and 2 aircraft brought in planks and materials along with two carpenters to make a suitable level platform.

At approximately 3 p.m. Rescue 2 returned to Gander for a second load of lumber and supplies. This time he dropped a few pieces of plank at the new camp site on the plateau (Shank's Bog). The men needed some spikes and two twelve foot long planks to be used to secure the logs for the helicopter platform being prepared there. The Shank's Bog platform was being constructed of tree logs and was almost complete. The Rescue 2 aircraft then proceeded to the lake to take more supplies to the shore party before returning to Gander for another load.

Helicopter Ready to Fly

The crew boss of the helicopter mechanics, Lt. Fisher, was informed that there was a problem with the helicopter that had been selected as number one priority. The first survivors were stretcher cases and had to be kept prone because of spinal injuries. The problem with the helicopter that the mechanics were frantically working to reassemble was that it could not accommodate a litter. "That's not a problem if you can get me a tinsmith!" Within minutes, Tom McGrath had authorized Graham Powell to put himself at the disposal of the crew boss.

"Mr. Powell, I want you to cut a hole through the plastic in the front of the helicopter. I want it big enough for a stretcher or litter to pass through and I've got to have it done so that the plastic doesn't crack. If it cracks the whole bubble may be destroyed and we won't be able to fly it."

Powell scratched his head, thought for a few moments and said, "I'll be back in a jiffy."

Powell was back soon with a truck full of tools and tin. "How much time do I have?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to keep working until it's done - can you do it in a half-hour?"

"I'll have to!"

Within twenty five minutes Powell had the hole cut, trimmed with riveted tin and was standing back admiring his handiwork.

Fisher had been watching Powell work. "Damn fine job, Mr. Powell, if you want a job anytime in the States, I'll certainly recommend you."

"Well", Powell laughed, "I've still got a few jobs to do around here yet."

The helicopter mechanics had not stopped working and it was with a great deal of pride and satisfaction that their boss, Lt. Fisher, announced at 3:00 p.m. that one of the helicopters was assembled, flight checked and ready to fly.

Losing no time, Lt. Kleisch, flying HOS-1 no. 75610, departed Gander at 3:10 p.m. escorted by Rescue 1. Rescue 1 also carried several barrels of fuel to the lake for the helicopters. Rescue 1 landed on the lake and waited for the first survivors to be brought out by the helicopter.

Helicopter Lands on Shank's Bog

Kleisch made the first landing on the plateau at 3:40 p.m. Fifteen minutes later the search party had loaded the only surviving crew member, hostess Jean Rookx, aboard the helicopter. Rookx had been selected by Martin as the first to go. She had protested this decision. It was her right, she said, to go last. For the first time in three days, Martin laughed. He had been admiring her courage during this ordeal. She would not admit to him that she was in severe pain and kept insisting that she wanted to help. Martin knew the difference, of course, and knew the brave woman was trying to hide her pain from him. "You're under my command here, you'll do as I say. You are going first whether you like it or not." She frowned at him, then she smiled, "Thank you, doctor for all you have done." Martin smiled back, "Off you go now."

Rookx was a litter patient and in serious condition. Her severe lacerations and other injuries made it extremely difficult getting her in the helicopter even with Capt. Martin supervising. It was fifteen minutes later that Kleisch took her to the site on the lake. The crew at Caribou Lake carefully pulled the litter out through the hole Graham Powell had cut in the plexiglass.

Rookx had never seen a helicopter prior to this and looked thoroughly confused and perplexed. The smiles from the men, however, soon made her feel more relaxed. Two rubber boats had been tied in tandem. One of the rescue crew had already positioned himself aboard one of the boats with his oars at the ready. Rookx was gently lowered in the other boat by the litter-crew. One of the men suddenly stumbled over a rock. He desperately kept his arms up in order to keep the litter level. A few drops of the cold water splashed on Rookx's face and she then noticed that the men were walking out in the water up to their waist. Turning her head to each of the men she said, "Thank you, but you must be cold."

One of the usually laconic soldiers shrugged, "Shucks, it's Saturday and it's bath night - we gotta get wet anyway."

More anxious moments passed during the transfer from the rubber boat to the PBV. The plan was for the PBVs to take two survivors each trip, however, the PBV captain, Lt. Comdr. Davis, decided not to wait for a second survivor and departed immediately. Davis reasoned correctly that Rescue 3, the Army PBV, that had just landed on the lake to assist in the evacuation could take the next survivors without delay and he was anxious to get the first survivor to Gander.

First Survivor in Hospital

It was seven minutes past five in the afternoon, September 21, 1946, when the PBV touched down in Gander and ten minutes later Jean Rookx was in the hospital. It was exactly three and one half days since she had been violently thrown from the aircraft.

In the meantime, the helicopter had delivered Joseph Des Chuyfflur to the lake site and the Army PBV departed with him at 5:15 p.m. The Army PBV, like Rescue 1, decided not to wait for a second survivor either. Des Chuyfflur looked terribly ill, and the captain of the amphibian knew that Rescue 2 was waiting for the next survivors. Just 15 minutes later Rescue 2 departed with the third survivor, Walter Devos. A sad note, that must be added here, is that Mr. Devos later succumbed to his injuries while at the hospital in Gander.

The first three survivors to be rescued were taken one at a time in three different PBVs. It was agreed that the original plan of taking two survivors together on the PBVs could be carried out for the next four. Rescue 1 made his second evacuation carrying Rene Jacquet Libeert and Ruth Henderson. Rescue 2 had returned from delivering Walter Devos, and evacuated John King and Leon Tonglet.

Lt. Kleisch flying the helicopter advised Captain Martin that the darkness would prevent any further operations and that since he had to fly the helicopter back to Gander for preventative maintenance he could take one of the survivors directly to Gander. It was decided that Rudy Revel would be the eighth and final evacuee for the day.

Although Revel was the eighth to leave the platform site, he was the sixth to reach hospital. Rescue 2 landed 15 minutes later at 8 p.m. In the meantime Rescue 1 returned to the lake to pick up the "Pond Party" and successfully completed a night take-off at twelve minutes past eight.

The remaining survivors, weather notwithstanding, found their last night at the site the best of a bad lot. They were forced to remain in weather conditions that were anything but comfortable, but the thought of getting out the following day made the horrible conditions bearable.

Altogether it had been a very successful day. Eight survivors had been evacuated and Capt. Martin had his work load at the crash site lessened considerably. Tomorrow, things should go much faster because the survivors were in far better condition and the use of stretchers would not be necessary for some of them. In addition to that it was expected that the second helicopter would be in action.

Sunday, September 22, 1946

Everyone was ready to go at daybreak. Rescue 1 and Rescue 2 departed Gander with the pond party. Rescue 3 was refuelling and would be taking off soon. Both helicopters, HOS-1 75610 piloted by Lt. W. C. Bolton, and HSN-1 39051 piloted by Comdr. Frank A. Erickson proceeded to the plateau to begin operations.

At 8:05 a.m., the first helicopter lifted off the plateau followed a few minutes later by the other. The first to lift off was the veteran from the day before followed within a few minutes by the other. Rescue 1 departed the lake at 8:33 a.m. with Betsy Wanderer and Selma Kronegold. Approximately thirty minutes later Rescue 2 departed with Leona Tonglet and Suzette Martin. Rescue 3 departed the lake at 9:30 with Jeanne Perier and George Cauchie.

The wind played a trick on Rescue 3 when landing at the airport and forced the aircraft to land too hard on the port side. The noise from the exploding tire sent a shock through the crew and the two survivors. It caused young Perier to become terrified and the crew members had some difficulty in calming him. He was still weeping when he was helped from the aircraft to the waiting ambulance. It was little wonder that he was weeping. His mother and sister had been killed - he had been unsuccessful in trying to get back in the burning aircraft to rescue them, he was injured in the crash, bitten by insects, hungry, dirty, and exposed to a harsh climate for the last four days. A loud explosion when the aircraft landed was indeed terrifying to the young boy. The last explosion he had heard had sealed the fate of two of the people he loved more than anyone else in the world.

That damaged tire eliminated the aircraft from further operations. It was fortunate that the two remaining PBVs were quite capable of taking care of the work to be done.

At 9:55 a.m. Rescue 1 was off the lake again, this time with three survivors. They were Philippe Henricot, Etienne Perier, and Jean Polak.

All Eighteen Survivors in Hospital

It was 10:35 a.m. when Rescue 2 departed the lake with the last (eighteenth) survivor, Charles Kronegold. Rescue 2 landed in Gander in time to get Kronegold to the hospital by 11 a.m. It was four days and six hours since the crash and almost five full days since he had left the airport at Brussels.

In addition to Kronegold, Rescue 1 had on board four very tired members of the Army rescue team, PFC Haughton, Pvt. Rasun, PFC Ptzacsnik, and PFC May. Rescue 1 and Rescue 2 along with the two helicopters continued to evacuate the rescue team from the site. **Captain Martin was brought out at 1 p.m.** He and his team had been in the bush for three days and nights contributing to what can really be called a modern day miracle.

Reporters had arrived in Gander from The United States, Canada and Europe. They had been rushing to the PBY aircraft on the crowded ramp before the aircraft's engines stopped. Cameras clicked and reporters pushed their way through airport employees. It was shock treatment for young Captain Martin. Instead of treating him with the respect he deserved, they rudely screamed questions and jostled each other for positions. **The quiet and modest six foot four captain may have been tempted to belt a few of them but he kept his usual equanimity.** When one of them slapped him on the face with a film cassette in order to get him to look up, Martin had had enough. He turned to Lt. Commander Davis, "Mr. Davis, your job is not over! Rescue me from these demons!" Davis, not known for his gentleness, quickly lost his patience. He came out front and centre of the mob and yelled, "O.K. get going - that is all!" They took one look at Davis and backed off. Davis and Martin walked briskly back to a restricted area. The rude reporters had lost their chance for the best story of all.

This type of behaviour had been going on every time a PBY landed with survivors. The reporters had been frustrated by the inability to talk to any of the eight survivors brought out on Saturday. On Sunday, however, they were having better luck because some survivors were in better conditions and were ambulatory.

All of them were hustled to the nearby hospital where Dr. James Paton kept reporters at bay until all of the survivors had been thoroughly examined.

A few hours later, Dr. Paton gave some of the survivors permission to talk to reporters. It soon became evident that they were giving credit to Dr. Martin for keeping them alive during the long wait for evacuation.

Ruth Henderson told reporters, "We have heard that the dead will be buried at the crash site. We have decided to call the place 'St. Martin-in-the-Woods' after Dr. Martin."

Reporters remained on the watch for Martin, the newly named hero, when he returned to the airport a little later. Word soon spread that Martin had been spotted by one of the hangers. Very soon a dozen reporters were ready for him and a possible press conference.

"That's him!", someone shouted. He was pointing at a tall tired looking military man. A U.S. military officer confirmed that it was Martin and the reporters all took off in chase. Martin looked behind, saw what was happening and quickened his pace.

"Hey Doc!", one of the reporters shouted, "We'd like an interview."

Martin turned his head and, talking over his shoulder, said, "Got nothing to say, I'm kind of tired now and would like to get a little rest."

"Can we talk to you afterwards sir?"

"I'll see, I have to get back to McAndrew."

Martin had no plans for a press "circus" (as he put it) again.

From several newspapers (after interviewing survivors):

They all agreed on one thing. They want the spot where they crashed, and their fellows died, to be called "St. Martin-in-the-Woods."

They'll never forget Dr. Samuel P. Martin.

EPILOGUE

On Monday, September 23, one day after the survivors had been evacuated, three remained on the critical list. Joseph Des Chuyfflur had severe burns and fractured legs; Leona Tonglet had head injuries, a possible skull fracture and a severely injured leg. Walter Devos had severe burns and multiple fractures including both legs and ankles.

The remaining fifteen departed Gander within a few days.

A few days after the fifteen departed Gander, Walter Devos suffered a heart attack and died. Des Chuyfflur and Tonglet departed Gander on Oct. 2.

Dr. Samuel P. Martin, III went on to become an eminent physician, medical professor, author of hundreds of medical papers, scholar, and professor emeritus. There are hundreds of interesting things about this fascinating man, but one that is of particular interest to Newfoundlanders is his involvement with the medical school at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). He visited St. John's in 1970 at the invitation of the University and the Government. They had hoped that he would consent to be the chief of the new medical school at MUN. Despite the temptation and his love for the Province, he declined the offer. His busy schedule and many projects were too numerous for him to take on the task.

The traumatic experience proved beneficial in Martin's medical research. One extremely interesting tid-bit from a book that Martin is writing for posthumous publication states, "there is little doubt that many people survived the burns, blood loss, shock, fractures and trauma because we had no blankets nor heat. Unwittingly and without other recourse we were forced to treat them with a course of unskilled but highly effective hypothermia. This was before the recognition of the value of lowering the body temperature to treat certain types of injuries and medical condition."

Jean Rookx, who Martin described as intelligent, tenacious and courageous, went on to become the chief stewardess for Sabena.

The Graveyard

Officials at the scene and at Rescue Headquarters discussed the disposition of the twenty six dead.

Everything up to now had gone to plan. There were no serious accidents. Not one of the men involved with this hazardous rescue had been hurt. A lot of things had been done fast. A lot of equipment had been moved. Helicopter rescue was relatively new. Edward (N eddy) Spencer had reflected the public's lack of knowledge about the things that Lewis Collins referred to as "a bloody dragon fly." Spencer had questioned their safety. The fact that the two helicopters carried out a fantastic rescue mission was still incomprehensible. The pilots themselves admitted that everything had to go like "clockwork" for the rescue mission, just completed, to go with no problems.

The sentiment expressed by all was: Let's not push our luck.

The Newfoundland Government was contacted for permission to establish a graveyard at the site.

It was possible to identify only ten bodies. They were buried in separate graves. The other sixteen were buried in one large grave. Spencer supervised the internment and gathered all the men around for prayer at the conclusion of the grim task.

Twenty Six White Crosses

Tom McGrath had his men make twenty six crosses. They were painted white and dropped to the crash site. Spencer had his men mark the mass grave with a large cross, made of lumber, at the site. They then placed ten crosses at the individual graves.

Two of the men started to place the other sixteen on the mass grave. Spencer didn't like that. "All of those people should have their own cross, spread them around evenly as if there were twenty six separate graves here."

Later it was learned that two of the dead were Jewish. The crosses were replaced with appropriate markers.

Burial Service from the Air

Burying human beings without a proper funeral service, clergymen or flowers was not to be. Airport officials along with local clergy conferred.

Rev. Leonard Woolfrey represented The United Church of Canada, Father J. P. McCarthy was the Roman Catholic priest, and a Jewish Rabbi was flown in from New York by Sabena Airlines. It was agreed that all would partake in the service. Some

discussion centred around an ecumenical service. This idea did not get far, however, and it was decided that they would each perform a funeral service.

Military officials agreed to provide an aircraft for Wednesday, September 25. The services would be performed aboard the C-47 aircraft while it circled over the new graveyard at the crash site.

It was to be the first aircraft flight for the two Christian pastors. It was to be another first - the first funeral service ever conducted from an aircraft.

Bill Heath, manager of the Aeradio Station at Gander, arranged with his chief technician, W. J. G. Strong, to record the services. The idea of the recording was to make it available for relatives of the victims.

The aircraft, carrying officials of the airline, military, civilian dignitaries and the clergy took off on schedule. Three funeral services were conducted - the United Church service was conducted in English, the Roman Catholic service was in Latin and the Jewish in Hebrew. Flowers, some from the Newfoundland Government, were dropped and fell forlornly in the dense bush missing the target. One week ago an aircraft had missed its target - the flowers didn't matter.

Graveyard Maintained

The graveyard has been maintained and most treat the site with the respect that a graveyard deserves. Twenty four people lay interred there.

Approximately two years after the crash the bodies of Hubert J. Reynaerdt and his wife Louise R. Reynaerdt were exhumed. Their bodies were respectfully sealed in a copper coffin made by Mr. Graham Powell, tinsmith with the Government of Newfoundland. The bodies were sent to Belgium for internment.

Medals Awarded

The lounge of the North Star Hotel, Gander, was the scene of a very impressive ceremony later in the year when the Prime Minister of Belgium, Henri Spaack, presented medals as follows:

The Chevalier de la Couronne was awarded to:

R. A. (Bob) Bradley - Chief Engineer.
E. S. (Ned) Spencer - Superintendent of Housing.
T. M. (Tom) McGrath - Operations Manager.

The Medaille Argent Leopold II was awarded to:

Rex Tilley - Senior Air Traffic Control Officer.
Jack Collins - Chief Customs Officer.
Nurse Gardiner - Head nurse at the Banting Memorial Hospital.

Officier de la Couronne was awarded to:

Dr. J. G. Paton - Chief Medical Officer, Gander.

The Palmes Couronne was awarded to:

Roland Pinsent - Runway Foreman who accompanied Dr. Martin on the first search party to reach the scene.

On April 26, 1992, forty six years after the crash there was another presentation. Charles Overstraeten, the Belgian ambassador to Canada, presented the gold medals of his country's Order of the Crown to Bruce Shea and Abbott Pelley. The presentation was made at the ambassador's residence in Ottawa after arrangements were made for the two men to travel to the nation's capital.

The awards to Pelley and Shea came about as a result of a television program on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation called "Land and Sea". Bill Kelly, producer of the program, did an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the crash. He asked the Belgium airline, Sabena, why Pelley and Abbott had not been recognized for the part they played. (They, along with forty others, had been given a cigarette lighter.) **The airline said the efforts of the two Newfoundlanders were "overlooked" at the time.**

ST. MARTIN-IN-THE-WOODS

It is not surprising that the cemetery and crash site was called, and is still known as "St. Martin-in-the-Woods". Captain Samuel Martin, a physician by profession, had worked in a thick cold damp forest among stumps, boughs, moss, wet branches, rocks, flies and spiders with hardly any sleep, in order to keep eighteen patients alive, some of whom were severely injured.

The Belgium Government recognized the work done by Captain Samuel P. Martin, III, physician, by awarding him its highest honour - d'Officier de l'Ordre de Leopold. An interesting note concerning this is that a pension always goes with this highest of honours, however, the Founding Fathers of the United States prevented Dr. Martin from being awarded the pension. It seems as if the Founding Fathers considered it dangerous for Americans to be pensioned by a foreign government. Therefore, before Dr. Martin could accept the honour, a letter had to be obtained from President Truman and endorsed by General Eisenhower to the effect that Dr. Martin would forego the pension.

Another letter was written by the survivors after they arrived at the Sir Frederick Banting Memorial Hospital. It read as follows:

"To Dr. MARTIN, OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN

We, the undersigned, desire to express our deep gratitude for the valour, skill, understanding, and many acts far beyond the call of duty which Captain Martin, his assisting officers and each enlisted man showed in our rescue and care. What greater can a man do than to risk his life for another fellow man.

"The spirit of "Camp St. Martin in the Woods" will stay with us as long as we live.

"We hail you!"

(signatures of all of the survivors)

MEMORIAL AT ST. MARTIN – IN – THE – WOODS



The left Plaque on the wall lists the crew and passengers who did not survive. The right plaque lists the survivors.

Top Center plaque says: St. Martin's in the Woods, On Sept. 18, 1946 a Belgium DC 4 Sabena OOCBG with 44 souls aboard crashed here at 4:15 am 18 Survived and 26 were killed. It was the biggest airline disaster of the era

Bottom Plaque reads:

This site was named for Doctor Samuel P. Martin by the survivors of the crash to commemorate his dedication to the crash victims and his determination to save their lives. Dr. Martin at the time was Captain Sam Martin of the U.S. Medical Corps stationed at Fort McAndrew in Argentia, Newfoundland.



St. Martin – In – The – Woods

Pictured September 2003 – Remains of the aircraft

The Cemetery

After 57 years the crash site still exists.
Until few years ago Gander's 103 Rescue Squadron tended
the graves



ATTACHMENT 3 – Justification for Award

In selecting the appropriate medal for Dr. Martin the following was considered:

His exemplary conduct during the period under consideration was of such to commend a level higher or at least equal to those that the rescue pilots had received.

Those medals (Air Medal and Distinguished Flying Cross) are for air crews only and Dr. Martin does not qualify. According to precedence, the Legion of Merit is one step above the DFC.

To look for a medal below the Legion of Merit one has to look at the Coast Guard medal (this does not apply as Dr. Martin was not a member of the CG); or the Gold Life Saving Medal (which is not appropriate as Dr. Martin was not a member of the CG nor was the event on or in the waters of the US or subject to US jurisdiction).

It is noted that from a search about the Legion of Merit, the first award of the Legion of Merit: Legionnaire's Degree was to LT Ann A. Bernatitus, USN (Nurse) for her heroic performance of duty at Bataan and Corregidor.

Currently, the award of a Legion of Merit is the award of choice for retirement and composes three quarters of all the medal's presentations.

Your attention is invited to the criteria for award of medals as appropriate. Please note that the example of the Medal Citation that is page 2 of this presentation is the format the USCG Aviation History Website uses for the Roll of Valor in that the members service logo is upper left and the awarding service is upper right. We know this is not the true format, but wanted no confusion about what we are presenting to you.