

## **Fairchild C-123B #55-4521A**

**October 9, 1958**

On October 9, 1958, Fairchild C-123B Provider #55-4521A was in transit from Pope AFB, North Carolina, to McChord Field near Tacoma, Washington. It was one of two C-123 aircraft used in support of the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds flight demonstration team. On board was the five man crew from the 347th Troop Carrier Squadron (464th Troop Carrier Wing), twelve Thunderbirds ground crewmen, and two North American Aviation employees. After taking on fuel at Hill AFB, Utah, the aircraft was passing near Payette, Idaho, when tragedy struck. Witnesses on the ground reported seeing the C-123B flying very slowly at low altitude with its landing gear down, as if to make an emergency landing. It appeared to stall, recover with a roar from both engines, then plummet toward the ground. At 6:15 p.m. it pancaked into a farm field and burst into a ball of flame, killing everyone on board. While eyewitnesses reported that the aircraft struck a flock of geese as it fell, a recent grounding of all C-123s due to fuel system problems was more likely a reason for the crash. This remains the largest loss of life in Thunderbird history.

On August 27, 1959, a pyramid-shaped monument placed near the crash site by students from Payette High School was dedicated in memory of the 19 men who were killed. The dedication was honored with a flyover by the Thunderbirds. On September 29, 2018, a 60 Year Commemoration ceremony at the monument was organized by the Payette County Historical Society and Larry Good, brother of Thunderbirds mechanic A/2C Adrian C. Gayther. Relatives of the men who were killed as well as representatives from the USAF Thunderbirds were present. For the first time in 60 years, the private property owner where the crash occurred agreed to allow a search for the crash site and Project Remembrance was invited to attend. With the help of Don Daniels, eyewitness to the crash, the site of #55-4521A was located on 9/28/18. The property owner has donated several pieces of this historic aircraft to relatives, the Payette County Historical Museum, and the Thunderbirds Museum at Nellis AFB, Nevada. Special thanks to Larry Good, Don Daniels, Payette County Historical Society, and the private property owner, who wishes to remain anonymous.



The telltale piece of plexiglass on the surface that marked the crash site



A small buckle



Pieces of stringers from the aircraft's framework



Many small fasteners were found



Green plexiglass



The top of a toothpaste tube



Various small pieces



The largest piece that was located



Eyewitness Don Daniels at the crash site



Larry Good with pieces of his brother's aircraft



Relatives and Thunderbirds representatives stand in front of the monument



The monument plaque with names of the 19 men killed on #55-4521A



1958 Thunderbirds publicity photo with C-123 aircraft in the background, taken at Nellis AFB, Nevada (Courtesy of Payette County Historical Museum)

**347<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Squadron, 464<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Wing**



Capt. James C. Wilson, Jr., instructor pilot



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. John N. Frisby, pilot



S/Sgt. James M. Hauver, co-pilot



1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Thomas C. Lamps, navigator



A1C James C. Miller, loadmaster

4520<sup>th</sup> Combat Crew Training Wing, USAF Thunderbirds



CWO Floyd L. Pulley



M/Sgt. Boyd O. Lambeth



S/Sgt. John H. Bishop



S/Sgt. George H. Blanchard



S/Sgt. Charles H. Hillhouse



S/Sgt. Robert L. Meyers



S/Sgt. George J. Stevens



A1C Elmer G. Houseman



A1C Richard T. Lashley



A1C Don L. Seaney



A2C Jerry R. Adams



A2C Adrian C. Gayther

**North American Aviation**



Stanley A. Shegda, NAA technical representative



Joseph Paul, NAA mechanic

(All 19 personnel photos courtesy of Larry Good)