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Colorado National Monument

Colorado National Parks

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### Memorandum to Coordinating Superintendent, Mesa Verde

Rusell L. Mahan

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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT  
~~GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO~~  
Fruita, Colorado

February 13, 1951

*Rose  
Recd 2/15/51 forwarded  
2 copies to Region Three by  
memo attached.*

Memorandum

To: Coordinating Superintendent, Mesa Verde

From: Superintendent, Colorado

Subject: Report on private plane crash, February 9, 1951

The following is a report on a private plane crash in Colorado National Monument on February 9th, 1951 at 4 p. m., involving an Aeronica Chief two passenger plane belonging to H. D. Lile of Moab, Utah, the pilot, and Kenneth Stocks, passenger, also of Moab, Utah.

Gerald Monger and E. E. Mayer, trimming peach trees in the Redlands district noticed a small plane pass over their place of work and head toward the cliffs on the east boundary of the monument. They paused in their work to watch its flight and when it reached the high cliffs they were under the impression that it stalled and went into a tail spin, crashing just below the crest of the cliffs in the vicinity of Liberty Cap. above the mouth of Ute Canyon. They drove to the Redlands store, a distance of about 2 miles, and reported the accident to the Mesa County Sheriff's office at 4:12 p. m. Deputy Sheriff Rupp advised me later that he called the city police and asked them to notify all interested parties and he proceeded to form a rescue party to travel to the scene of the accident. We were not notified and did not learn of the accident until 6:05 p. m. when General Foreman Atchison, who was listening to the radio at his home in Fruita, Colorado, heard radio station KFXJ, Grand Junction, giving an on the spot broadcast of rescue operations. He immediately called me and I contacted station KFXJ for more information.

Ranger Dobbins, Operator General Bowen and myself left headquarters at 6:45 p. m. and arrived at the base of the trail at Ute Canyon at 7:45 p. m. We were advised that one of the men in the plane, Stocks, had walked unaided from the scene of the crash to the Watson ranch, a distance of approximately 3 miles, and had already been taken to the hospital at Grand Junction. We could see the lights of the rescue party working their way down the trail so waited at the foot of the trail and the party arrived with Lile at 8:30 p. m. He was immediately taken to the hospital at Grand Junction by the Colorado State Highway Patrol. Lile asked me to notify his family of the accident so we returned to headquarters at 9 p. m. and I immediately called his brother, Glen Lile at Moab by phone and advised him of the accident. I also called

Assistant Superintendent Brown at Mesa Verde National Park and notified him of the accident.

At 8 a. m. the next day, February 10th, Ranger Dobbins, Operator Bowen and myself returned to the Redlands and made the trail trip to the site of the crash, arriving there at 10:15 a. m. A party of Civil Aeronautics Administration officials and others were already at the scene making an investigation for the Civil Aeronautics Board of Denver. The CAA officials making the investigation were John Zentner and E. H. Rickena of Grand Junction. After their investigation they stated that until clearance was received from the CAB office at Denver, the plane should be guarded against vandalism, etc, so Ranger Dobbins stayed at the site. Glen McFall, Keith McFall and Oscar Thompson, local pilots, who had accompanied the CAA officials, packed out the fresh meat which the plane contained to try to save it. After leaving the site of the crash I visited the sheriff's office to get information regarding rescue operations, etc and learned that the following men were members of the rescue parties; William Thomas and Roy Rupp of the Sheriff's office, Wayne Egbert, Larry Sutherland, Leon Sutherland, Jimmy Sutherland and Mr. Zentner and Rickena of the CAA.

After receiving this information, and trying to stress to them that we would certainly like to be notified immediately of any accidents that occurred on the monument, I visited Mr. Lile at the St. Marys Hospital. He was in poor shape but rational and I advised him that his meat had been taken care of and that pilot friends of his would take care of the salvage of his plane. I contacted Mr. Zentner of the CAA at 3 p. m. and he advised me that the CAB had released the plane and that no further investigation would be made at the site. I returned to the foot of the trail at 3:30 p. m. and called to Dobbins, advising him that it was no longer necessary to guard the plane and he returned to the foot of the trail at 4:30 p. m. We returned to headquarters at 5:15 p. m. Several parties of people had made the long hazardous trail trip to the plane during the day.

From my investigation at the site it looked like Lile had come direct from the airport at Grand Junction without gaining sufficient altitude and when he entered the mouth of the canyon he saw that he could not get proper altitude to clear the cliffs at the upper end of the canyon and he banked to the right over the mesa top near Liberty Cap but did not have sufficient clearance. His plane struck the mesa top travelling due north and bounced along the top for a distance of approximately 75 feet, shearing off pinyon trees, etc and then dropped over the ledge into a small pocket about 75' below the top of the cliff. The plane came to rest on about a 45 degree angle with the cockpit on the ground. One of the wheels of the undercarriage was torn off on the rim, about 15' from the edge of the cliff.

After the crash, which occurred along an old trail to the rim which was built years ago by John Otto, the survivors walked to the top of the cliff and tried to find a way out. They then returned and followed the trail, which

was covered with 6 to 8 inches of snow, down to the lava bench approximately 500' below. Stocks, who was in the best shape, left Lile at this point to get to the valley for help and he took off in a northeasterly direction down the cliff, eventually arriving at the Watson ranch near the buffalo corral. He arrived there about 7 p. m. The rescue party found Lile near the point where Stocks had left him and they brought him down over the old trail which runs due east from the point where he was found.

Stocks suffered a broken left arm, severe gash on forehead and scalp and injured knee. Lile had both arms broken, an injured knee, had several front teeth knocked out and had a badly lacerated mouth. I visited them in the hospital on February 10th and 12th and they both seemed to be getting along fairly well but did not look the part.

Pilot friends of Lile are taking care of the salvage of what is left of the plane, which will probably consist of wheels, motor, instruments and miscellaneous minor parts, all of which will have to be carried over the 3 miles of trail to the valley.

A request has been made to the CAA at Grand Junction for a copy of the report on their findings, but I do not know whether this request will be complied with. If same is received it will be submitted and can be included as a part of this report.

The attached map showing location of crash and trails, pictures of the crash site and copies of the Grand Junction Sentinel of February 10th and 11th carrying stories of the crash will give you a good picture of the whole incident.

in triplicate

*Russell L. Mahan*

Russell L. Mahan  
Superintendent

Approved for Distribution:

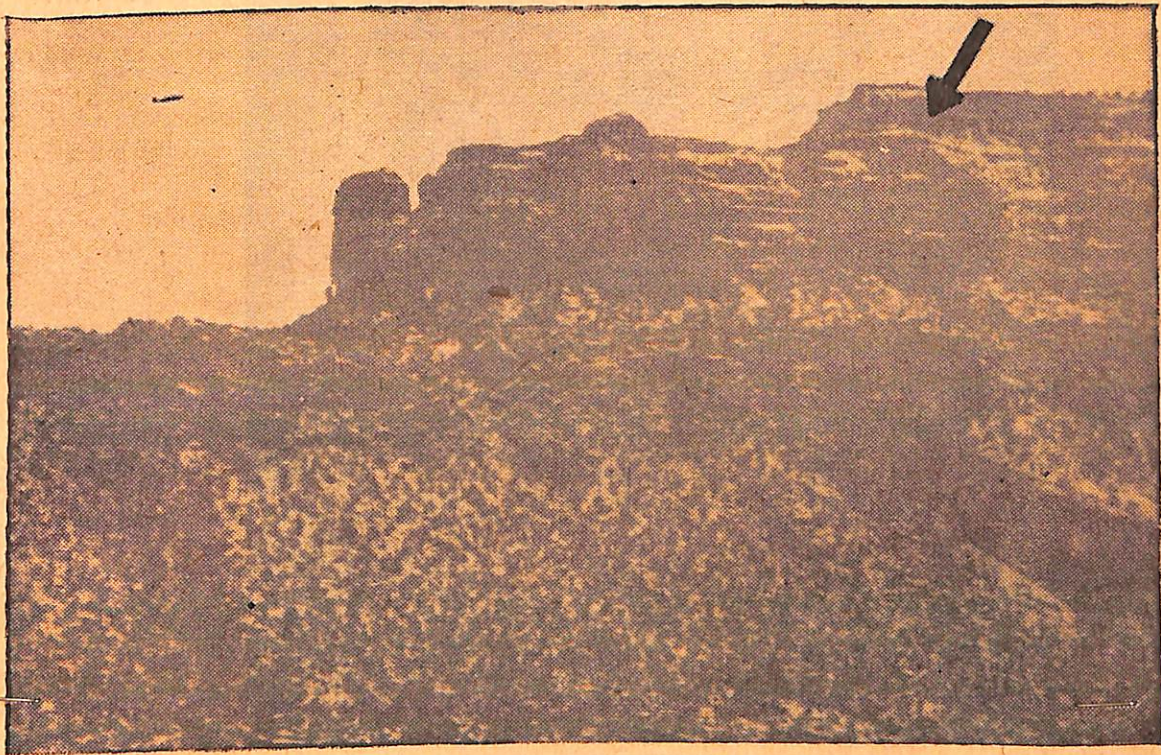
*Robert A. Stone*  
Coordinating Superintendent.



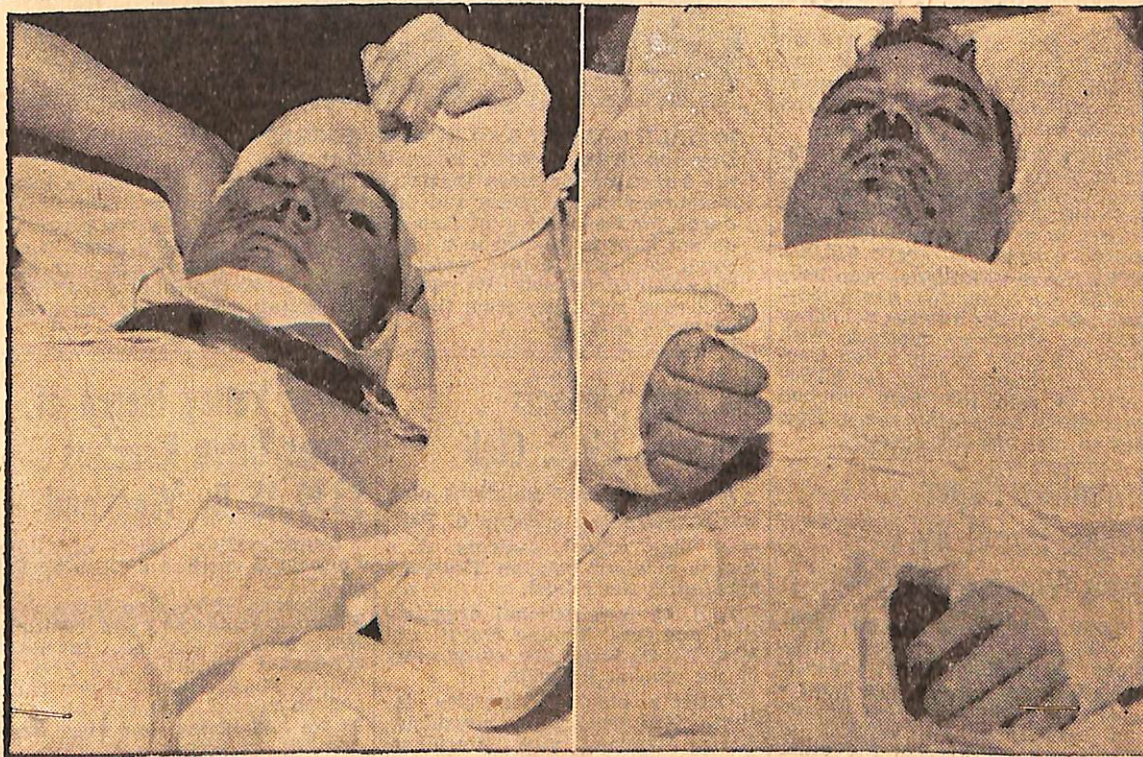
(DAILY SENTINEL PHOTO)

## ABOVE SHEER WALLS

—The dark arrow in this picture shows where two men narrowly escaped death here late Friday when their two-place plane mushoomed on an upper ledge of the Colorado National Monument only five air miles southwest of Grand Junction. It took a rescue party three hours to climb up to near the crash scene and return with one of the injured men. The other made his own trail down the almost vertical cliff. At some places descent is possible only by working down in crevices.



**MIRACULOUSLY ESCAPE CRASH**—"I never expected to come out alive when I saw the plane go over the ledge," Kenneth Stocks, 19 year-old-Mesa college student told The Daily Sentinel from his hospital bed at St. Mary's Saturday, where he is recovering from injuries sustained when the H. D. Lyle plane crashed over Colorado National Monument Friday at 4 p.m. as they were enroute to Moab. The youth said he was happy to wake up and discover that the engine was on top, even if it was hard to crawl out. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Angus Stocks of Moab, visited him here Saturday. He is getting along satisfactorily. Mr. Lyle (right) also is getting along satisfactorily, despite his serious injuries, and happy to be alive following the crash. He said "Bet your life it was a miraculous escape." Mr. Lyle figures he was too low to the ground and carrying too much meat—the latter for his uranium camp. He said that after taking the wheels and motor off, he doesn't expect the plane will be worth a dime.—Daily Sentinel photo by Walter White.



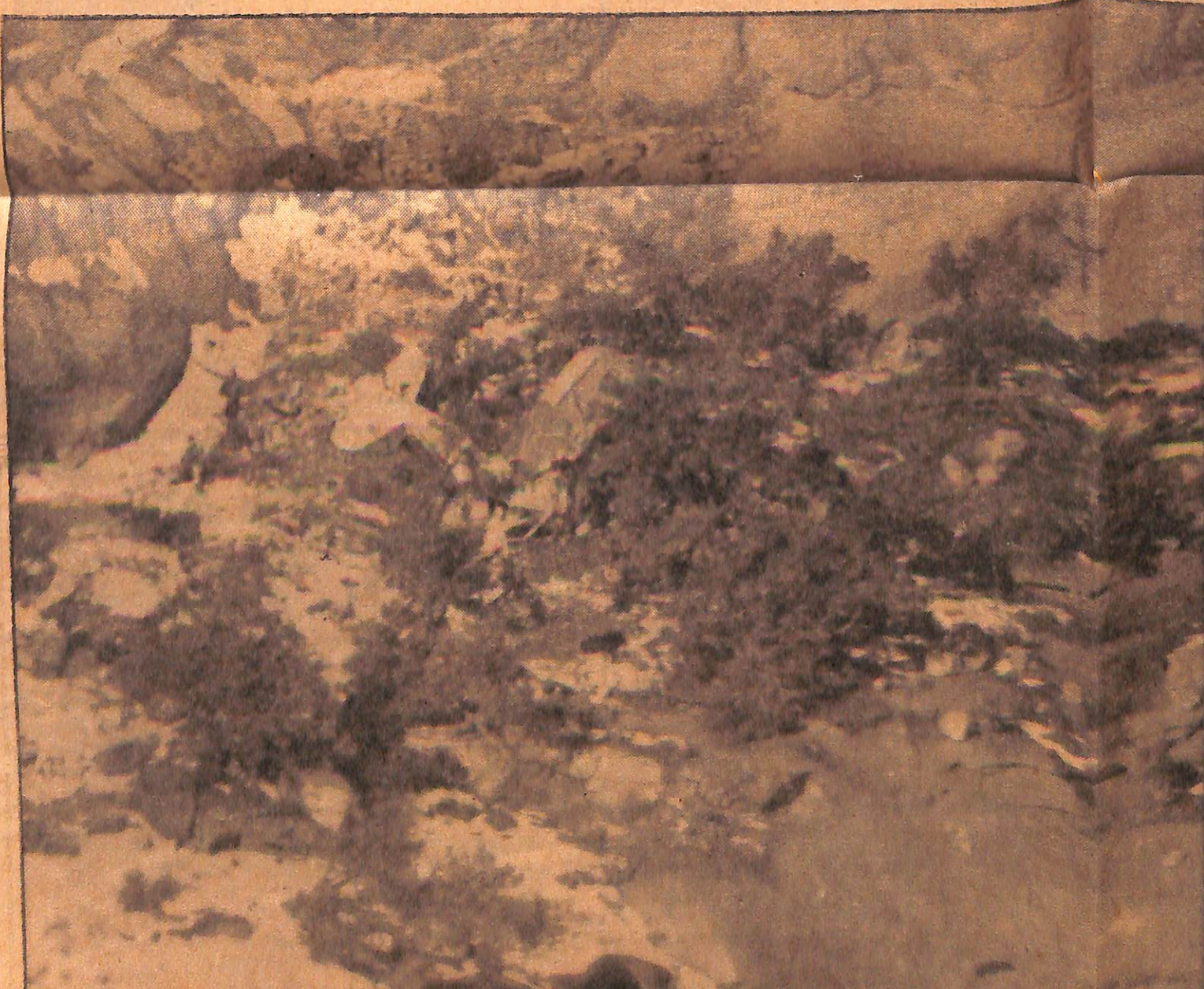
# THE DAILY SENTINEL

# PLANE CRASHES ON MONUMENT; TWO MEN ESCAPE

(DAILY SENTINEL PHOTO)

## WHEELS IN AIR

This is the H. D. Lyle plane where it crashed at the base of Liberty Cap on the upper rim of the Colorado National Monument Friday evening. The plane mshed into the base of Liberty Cap and flipped over on its back, dumping the two passengers. Mr. Lyle and his companion, Kenneth Stocks, both from Moab, are resting today in St. Mary's hospital. Robert Grant, Daily Sentinel photographer, took this picture from a Rader Flying Service plane this morning.



## H. D. Lyle, Ken Stocks of Moab Hurt in Mishap

### Plane Stalls and Pancakes On Only Shelf Available In Rugged Area

H. D. "Had" Lyle, 45, Moab, Utah, and Kenneth Stocks, 19, a Mesa college student whose home is in Moab, were painfully injured at 4 p. m. Friday when Mr. Lyle mshed his stalling two-place *Aeronca Chief* on a ledge 1,700 feet above the floor of rugged Colorado National Monument. The couple were flying to Moab.

Mr. Lyle, most seriously injured, is resting in St. Mary's hospital today with two broken arms, a punctured left knee, several teeth out, and a badly lacerated lip. Mr. Stocks, also hospitalized, has a deep forehead gash near his right eye to the hairline, a broken left arm, and a gash on the right knee.

The crash scene is approximately five air miles southwest of Grand Junction. The plane hit on a shelf about 50 feet from the top of Liberty Cap, a knob on the steep cliff rim, and flipped over on its back.

Gerald Monger and E. E. Mayer, trimming trees in a Redlands orchard near the monument, saw the crash and went to Redlands store operated by L. A. Sutherland and phoned the sheriff's office. The sheriff's log records the call at 4:12 p. m.

After that there was a race with a; proaching darkness. Capt. Cran Rader, Civil Air Patrol pilot and local flying service operator, was notified at 4:15 p. m. and within 15 minutes after takeoff had spotted the wreckage.

He reported seeing two men waving at him from near the plane. From that time on until well after dark CAP planes hovered over the scene.

Turn to Page 10, Col. 3

16 PAGES TODAY

### WEATHER

Continued Fair and Mild Tonight and Sunday; Low Sunday 25 City to 15 Lower Valley.

Yesterday's Distribution

13,073

## ● ● H. D. LYLE

In the meantime sheriff, state patrol and CAA cars sped to near the monument. Deputy Sheriff Bill Thomas and a party of 10 started up the steep canon wall equipped with ropes and supplies.

From aircraft reports they understood that the crash victims had started downhill and before reaching the top members of the party started looking over various ledges below the one where the plane crashed. Mr. Mayer volunteered to go on up to the plane. He came back in 20 minutes and reported no one was there.

Darkness was settling over the area when a member of the party spotted Mr. Lyle down in a snow drift and unable to get up. He said he had fallen at least a hundred times and gotten on his feet by rolling down hill and falling onto his feet over rock ledges. Both arms were useless. When he bent his left leg blood squirted from two puncture wounds in the knee. Because of his cut lip he could barely talk.

Mr. Thomas said Mr. Lyle could never have made the trip down by himself.

Despite the puncture wound in his left knee Mr. Lyle's right leg was giving him the most pain. An old injury incurred previously was bothering him. He weighs around 240 pounds.

Aided by two men on each side and one in front at steeper places, Mr. Lyle came down under his own power, a distance of about three miles. His knee quit bleeding but swelled up and had to be cut out of his plants at the hospital.

After Mr. Lyle was found, the party took him to a fire on a lower rim and decided to split up, Mr. Thomas recalls. One group headed by Mr. Thomas started down from the fire at 6:40 p. m. and arrived at the cars at 8:40 p. m.

Roy Rupp, deputy coroner, took charge of one party which started to follow Mr. Lyle's young companion. Mr. Lyle said the youth was dazed and had started running down the steep cliff wall. The full party, before splitting up, included Mr. Thomas, Mr. Rupp, Mr. Mayer and Mr. Monger, Larry, Leon and Jimmy Sutherland, Wayne Egbert, and John Zentner and Edward H. Rickena of CAA.

Mr. Rupp reported that his party followed Mr. Stocks down with flashlights on a trail of blood. He says the youth speeding down the wall was lucky not to have lost his balance.

The young man, however, took advantage of daylight, and arrived at the John Watson ranch shortly before 7 p. m. Mrs. Watson and a patrol car relayed him to St. Mary's hospital. He didn't follow an established trail and went down to the east of where the rescue party took Mr. Lyle down.

Mr. Zentner and Mr. Rickena climbed to the crash scene today to complete a CAA investigation and an attempt to determine the exact cause of the crash. They were accompanied by a party who recovered personal belongings from the crashed plane.

The engine of the plane was reportedly smashed back into the canyon area and the craft is

# PLANE CRASHES AT MONUMENT; TWO MEN ESCAPE

(TO)

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## H. D. Lyle, Ken Stocks of Moab Hurt in Mishap

Plane Stalls and Pancakes On Only Shelf Available In Rugged Area

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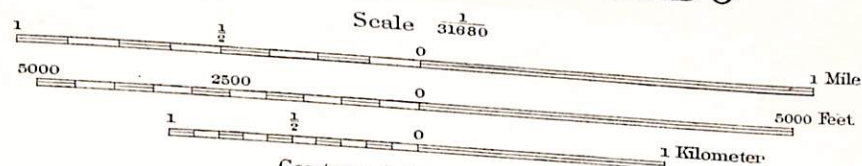
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UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

# TOPOGRAPHIC MAP OF COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT MESA COUNTY, COLORADO



Contour interval 20 feet  
Datum is mean sea level



Topography by W. S. Higginson  
Surveyed in 1934

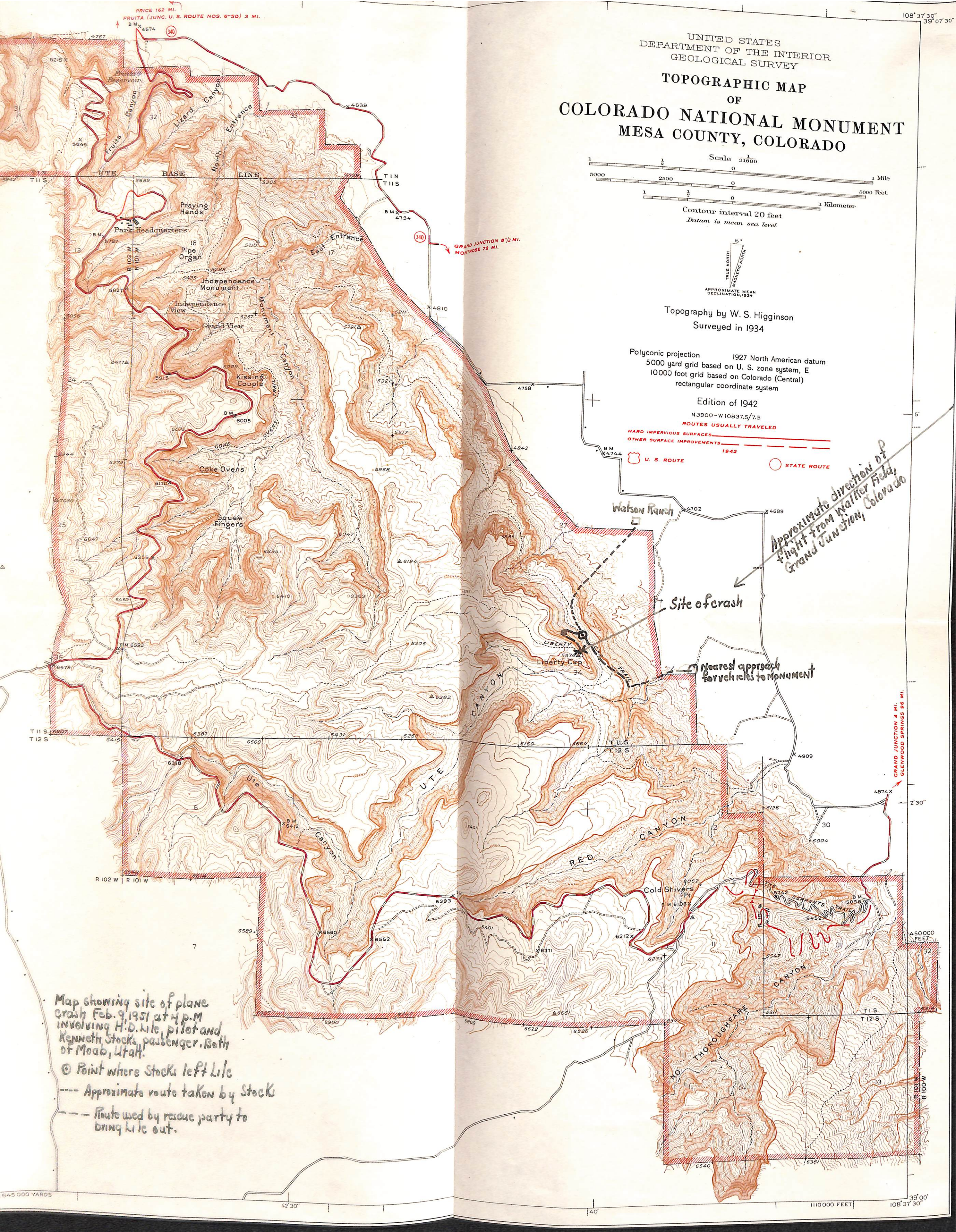
Polyconic projection 1927 North American datum  
5000 yard grid based on U. S. zone system, E  
10000 foot grid based on Colorado (Central)  
rectangular coordinate system

Edition of 1942  
N3900-W10837.5/7.5

**ROUTES USUALLY TRAVELED**  
HARD IMPERVIOUS SURFACES  
OTHER SURFACE IMPROVEMENTS 1942

U. S. ROUTE (red dashed line)  
STATE ROUTE (red circle)

*Approximate direction of flight from Walker Field, Grand Junction, Colorado*



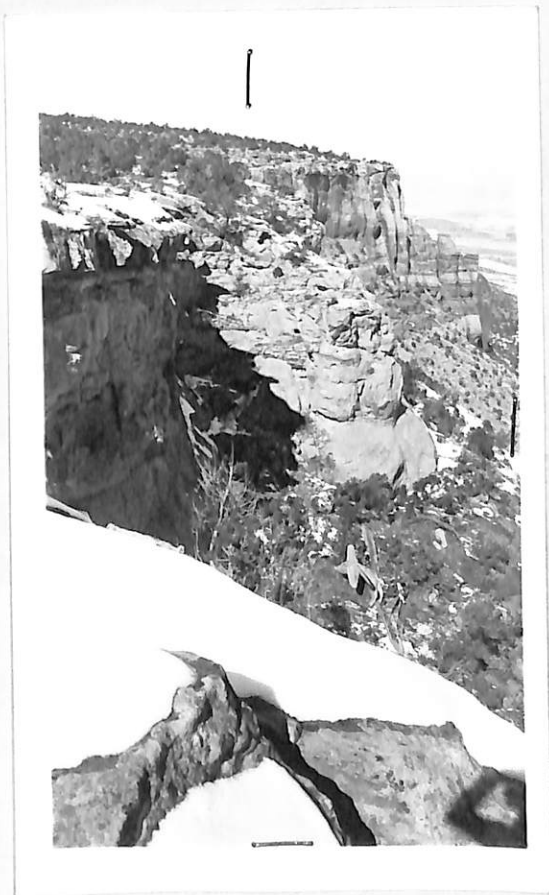
Map showing site of plane crash Feb. 9, 1951 at 4 P.M. involving H.D. Lile pilot and Kenneth Stocks, passenger. Both of Moab, Utah.  
● Point where Stocks left Lile  
--- Approximate route taken by Stocks  
--- Route used by rescue party to bring Lile out.

Wheel torn from undercarriage



Showing path of plane after striking mesa top. Travelled seventy five feet before dropping over edge of rim. Wheel lays approx. fifteen feet from rim.

View showing position of plane and cliff approx. 75' high over which it toppled. Trail to rim discernible on point beyond plane.

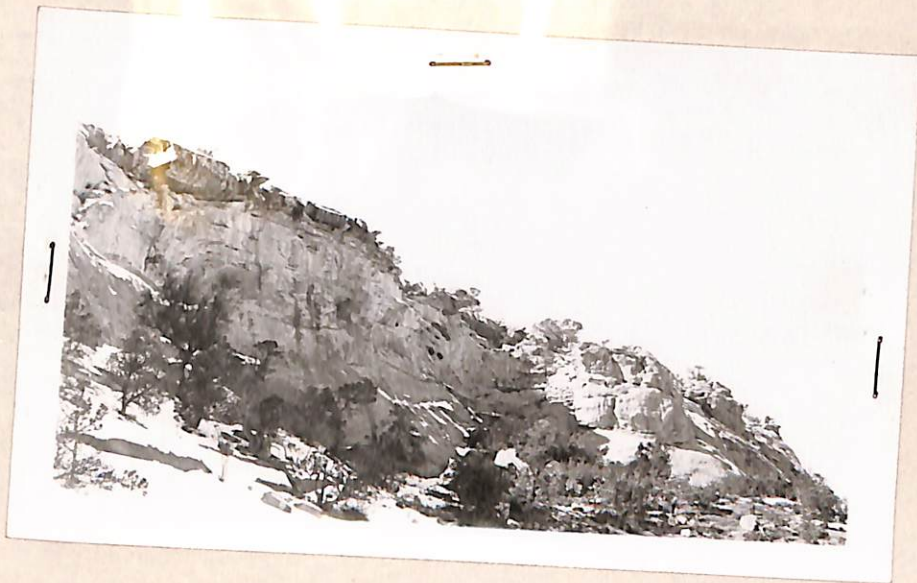




View showing mangled condition of the plane.



View of cockpit from which these two men miraculously escaped  
alive.



View from below showing tail of plane in lower center of picture and cliff behind over which plane toppled



View looking up over top of wrecked plane to top of cliff over which it fell.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
REGION THREE OFFICE  
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Radio Station KNKU

Message No. 4

Received from

~~Transmitted to~~ KNKU-3

8:38 A. M. Date 2-12-51

Operator Smith

Radio Message

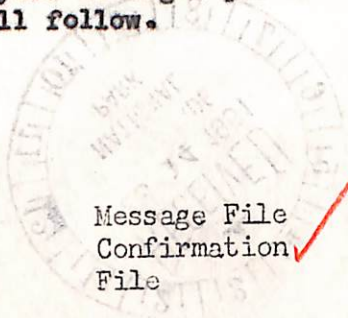
2-12-51 1951

*Wade  
Phil  
P. Brown  
HPL*

To: Regional Director (~~Thru Mesa Verde~~) *Rose #14*

From: Supt., Colorado National Monument

Private plane crash occurred February 9 at 4 P.M. in vicinity of Liberty Cap on east boundary. Pilot H. B. Lile owner of plane and passenger Kenneth Stocks, both of Moab, ~~Utah~~, both occupants severely injured. Lile sustained 2 broken arms, injured knee, lost front teeth and badly lacerated mouth. Stocks has broken left arm and bad gash on forehead and scalp. ~~Both~~ <sup>Stocks</sup> walked from scene to Redlands under own power, distance approximately 4 miles. Sheriff's office handled rescue of these men. We were not notified. Learned of wreck by broadcast from local radio station at 6 P.M. Investigated that night and present when second man Lile brought from scene. CAA investigated and released plane. Local flyers salvaged parts. Visited wreck on Feb. 10 and took pictures, etc. Detailed report will follow.



Message File  
Confirmation  
File

*note: - When Supt. Mahan called via radio to Mesa Verde I cleared his direct transmission of message direct to Region Three to avoid unnecessary repetition - Rose #14*