

Jet Plane Crashes in Flames, Kills 2 in Auto, One in House

2 Fliers Safe in Disaster Near Utica After Search For Mysterious Aircraft



HOUSE BURNS AFTER JET CRASH – *The 157-year-old farmhouse belonging to Mrs. Mary Peck, Walesville, burns after being struck by a piece of a jet F94-C which crashed Friday. To the left of the house is the ruined auto (arrow), in which Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Phillips and their son, Gary, were killed when a portion of the plane, possibly a wing, struck the car as it was heading south. A piece of the wreckage of the plane fuselage can be seen in the right foreground. Bits of debris were scattered over a 500-yard area of the crash.*

UTICA, July 2. (AP) – A jet fighter plane returning from investigation of an unidentified plane crashed in flames in a crossroads hamlet today and killed four persons on the ground.

Two houses and an automobile were destroyed.

The two Air Force lieutenants in the F-94-C Starfire, which carried 48 high-powered 2 ½ - inch rockets, bailed out before it plunged into tiny Walesville, 11 miles southwest of Utica, about 12:30 p.m. The two, who escaped injury, were Lt. William E. Atkins, 24 of Dutton, Va., the pilot, and Lt. Henry F. Coudon, 26, of Perryville, Md., radar observer.

Killed were Stanley Phillips, 38, his wife, Florence, 32, and their son, Gary, 11, all of neighboring Hecla, and Mrs. Doris Monroe, 28, occupant of one of the houses that was destroyed. The Phillips family was in the automobile. Mrs. Monroe was in her home preparing lunch for her four children when the plane crashed.

The plane was attached to the 27th Fighter Interceptor Squadron at Griffis Air Force Base, Rome.

The base said it was one of two planes ordered up on a practice scramble that turned into an actual mission. The public information officer, Maj. Evelyn Watkins, explained that the two planes were barely airborne on the training mission when they received radioed orders to check on an actual unidentified plane in the area. Maj. Watkins said no information was available on the unidentified plane or where it was located by the jets.

In Washington, a Pentagon spokesman said the plane was about 75 miles northeast of Rome, on the edge of the zone covered by Griffis, when it was detected.

A Griffis spokesman said the pilots were satisfied that the plane was “friendly” and were headed back to the base when fire broke out in the cockpit of the ill-fated craft.

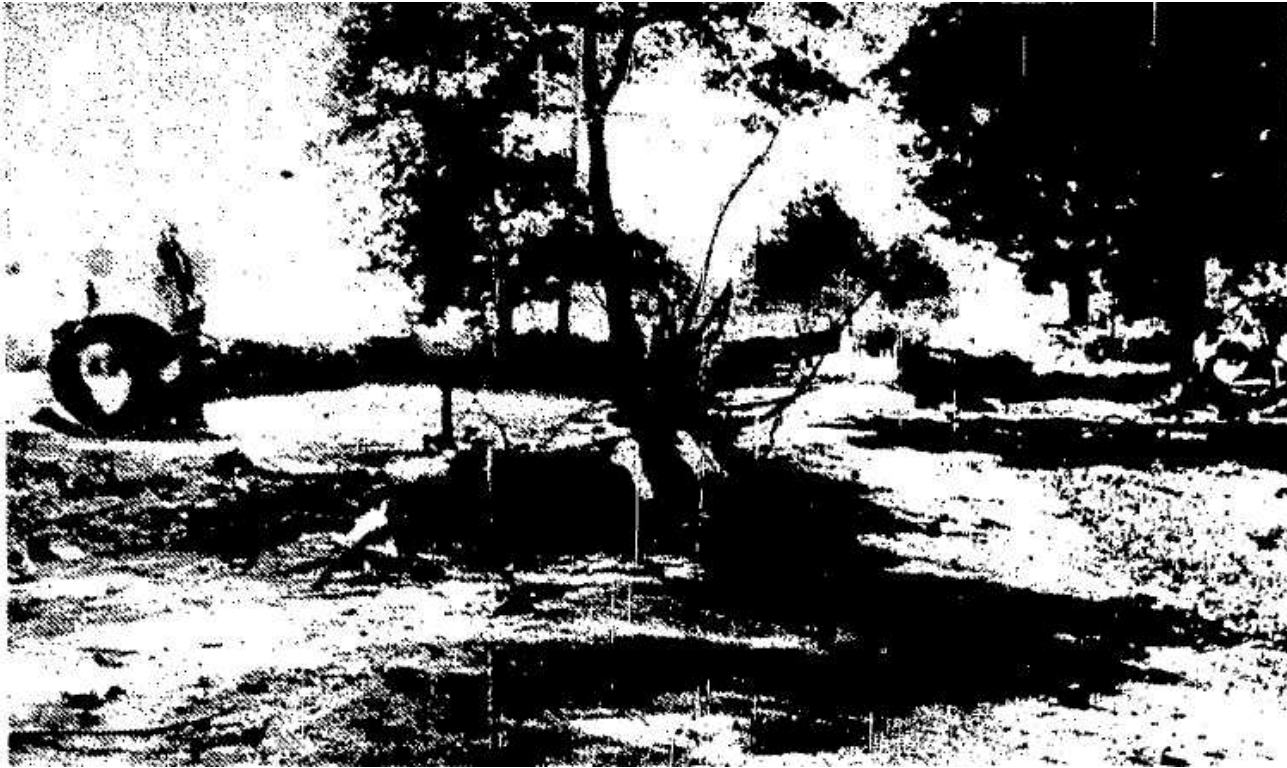
The air base said the pilot and radar observer stuck to the plane until the “last minute”. A spokesman quoted Atkins as reporting that he ordered Coudon to bail out, then jumped himself from about 7,000 feet.

Griffis said that fuel in the burning plane apparently exploded when the jet crashed. A spokesman said it had not been determined whether an explosion occurred while the jet was in the air.

Earlier, an air force officer has said there “must have been an explosion.”

The unoccupied plane struck a large elm tree behind the Walesville general store. A section of the burning craft, probably a wing, struck the car carrying the Phillips family home, presumably from the Rome State School, where both husband and wife were employed as occupational instructors.

The sedan burst into flames, plowed into the home of Mrs. Mary Peck, 79, and set the colonial frame structure afire. Mrs. Peck fled to safety. The bodies of the Phillipses were burned badly.



WRECKAGE STREWN – Looking east from the Halsey-Whitesboro roads Walesville, where a Starfire jet plane crashed at 12:30 p.m. Friday, killing four persons and destroying two dwellings. The center section is to the left in the photo, the engine on the highway and the tail, still smoldering on the right, about 400 feet from the intersection where the stricken plane struck a passing auto, killing the car’s occupants. (AP Wirephoto)

PREPARING LUNCH

Meanwhile, the body of the plane plunged through the roof of the one story Monroe home and fire quickly destroyed it.

Mrs. Monroe was preparing lunch for her four children who were playing outside. Her body was not recovered immediately. Her husband, Lloyd was at work in a foundry at nearby Westmoreland.

One of the children, Betty Lou 1, suffered a severe laceration of the leg presumably when struck by debris from the shattered plane, parts of which were scattered all over the community.

The three other Monroe children escaped without a scratch. They are Kenneth 9, Buddy 6, and Nora Mae 3.

Maj. John A. Recher, commanding officer of the interceptor squadron said “We haven’t determined anything definite at all. We feel that it must have been an explosion in the aircraft.”

The air base public information office said that a board of inquiry had begun an investigation but had not yet questioned the pilot and observer.

The weather was partly cloudy and windy at the time of the crash.

The plane's engine was found about 200 feet south of the four corners. Heat from the flames was so intense it melted the macadam road.

Orson Buck, father of Mrs. Leona Dressley, who operates the general store, said he was working about the grounds when he saw the plane strike and Betty Lou Monroe fall. He pulled the child away from the house and took her to the store. She later was taken to a Utica hospital.

SEARCH FOR ROCKETS

Later, an armament team from the air base roped off the general area and searched for rockets. It was reported that some were found.

The crash knocked out telephone and power lines in the immediate area.

The Monroe house was a converted garage. The family had moved into it only a few days ago. They formerly had lived in Franklin Springs.

The pilot and the radar observer were found a relatively short distance apart and a few miles from the crash scene. They were taken in the air base hospital, where examination disclosed they had escaped injury.