

## **Pine Mountain Trail Association and FDR State Park To have 1953 B-25 Pine Mountain Crash survivor come to FDR for Veterans Day weekend. Daughter of pilot and her husband also to come to unveiling of memorial.**

A couple board members of the Pine Mountain Trail Association had known of a military plane crash in FDR State Park back in the early 1950's and had tried to learn more about it. The crash site was known. The second week of August they some found details and then many more.

The crash involved a USAF TB-25J which took off from Eglin AFB on October 1, 1953 with six on board. Two USAF men and one 19 year old Navy seaman were just passengers. All but USN Richard K. Schmidt of New Jersey were killed as the plane struck the mountain around 9:30 pm in fog and rain. Schmidt was found with a severely dislocated hip and minor injury to one arm, by four men from Manchester and Pine Mountain Valley who heard the plane fly overhead very low and knew it crashed into Pine Mountain near Dowdell Knob. Schmidt recovered and was discharged from the Navy in 1955. He had not been contacted by anyone about the crash till Pine Mountain Trail Association secretary Jim Hall called him August 12th.

Hall said his brother Eddie did an internet search, found the first details and then searched for phone numbers of a Richard K. Schmidt in NJ who might be about 78-79. The first phone number he called was Schmidt, who said "Yep, I'm the guy who survived that crash."

[Read the full story here.](#)

The trail association first invited Schmidt and his wife to be their and FDR State Parks guest for Veterans Day weekend November 9-11. They are coming. Then on September 18, 2012 Jim talked to Monica Clisham Coffey of Maine, the daughter of the planes pilot. She and her husband Dennis are coming to the park that same weekend.

On Saturday November 10th at 10 am, there will be a memorial ceremony first at Dowdell Knob then visitors can view the memorial rock and crash site (which is located right on the Pine Mountain Trail just 850 feet from the Dowdell Knob Scenic Area Parking Lot.) Those wishing to attend are urged to arrive no later than 9:30 am. The PMTA Board and FDR State Park officials will have Schmidt and Monica Clisham Coffey unveil a memorial to those who died in the crash and in his (Schmidts) honor.

The trail association is collecting funds for memorial and the trip down for the Schmidts. Those wishing to contribute are asked to mail contributions to the Pine Mountain Trail Association- PO Box 5- Columbus Ga 31902 (and mark/note the contribution is for "plane crash survivor fund.") For complete details of the crash see B-25 crash in 1953 at [www.pinemountaintrail.org](http://www.pinemountaintrail.org) For information about the ceremony or question on contributions, call PMTA Jim Hall at 706-325-4113.

Full Story....

**From: Jim Hall - Secretary of the Pine Mountain Trail Association**

For years several of us with the Pine Mountain Trail Association had of a military plane crash (B-26 I was told) that crashed in the fall of 52' or 53' west of Dowdell Knob about .2 mile by what is now our Pine Mountain Trail. Many of us have found the area and seen and collected small bits of aluminum and rivets and such. D. Neal Wickham founder of the PMT, said there was a newspaper article about the crash but we were not able to locate it. I tried to contact the history section of the US Air Force who handles all military aircraft crashes (in Gunter AFB in Montgomery, Al) and they got back with me last year saying they didn't have anything on it. We didn't have an exact date. We had been told there was one survivor and he was a Navy guy.

Several years ago Craig McInvale (formerly assistant manager at FDR) had a guy come into the park office wanting to know how to get to Dowdell Knob. He went on to tell Craig he'd survived a plane crash there in the early 50's. Craig did not get his name, etc.

**Then Sunday evening August 12, I got a call from my brother Eddie.**

Seems in a search on the internet he finally found some details! It was not a B-26 after all, but a B-25 and the one survivor was one **Richard K. Schmidt** and he was in the Navy and 19 at the time. At long last we had some details to work with!

Below is what is shown on the Wikipedia site Eddie found.

1 October 1953

A USAF [North American B-25 Mitchell](#) attached to [Andrews AFB](#), Maryland, crashes in fog and heavy overcast into the forested pinnacle of historic [Pine Mountain](#), striking [Dowdell's Knob](#) at ~2130 hrs., near [Warm Springs](#) in western Georgia, killing five of six on board, said spokesmen at [Lawson AFB](#). The bomber had departed from [Eglin AFB](#), Florida, at 1930 hrs. for Andrews AFB. Two Eglin airmen were among those KWF. The sole survivor, Richard K. Schmidt, 19, of [Rumson, New Jersey](#), a Navy airman assigned at [NAS Whiting Field](#), Florida, who had hitch-hiked a ride on the aircraft, was found by two farmers who heard the crash and hiked to the spot from their mountainside homes "and found the sailor shouting for help as he lay in the midst of scattered wreckage and mutilated bodies. They said [that] they found a second man alive but base officials said [that] he died before he could be given medical attention." Tom Baxley, one of the farmers, said that the bodies of the dead, most of them torn by the collision, were flung about among the pine trees, and bits of the plane were hurled over a wide area. Schmidt was hospitalized with a possible hip fracture and cuts. Among the fatalities were two airmen assigned to Eglin AFB who had also hitch-hiked a ride and were on their way home on leave. The impact location is on the site of the proposed \$40,000,000 Hall of History to mark a scenic point frequented by the late President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#). <sup>[168]</sup>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_accidents\\_and\\_incidents\\_involving\\_military\\_aircraft\\_\(1950%E2%80%931954\)#1953](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_accidents_and_incidents_involving_military_aircraft_(1950%E2%80%931954)#1953)

After talking with Eddie that Sunday evening the first time, I began to do a search for any Richard Schmidts in NJ about age 78 or so. Eddie called back and said try this number....So I called a number got an answering machine. Left a message telling who I was and if he may happen to be the guy who was in a crash etc call me back..... About 30 minutes later **Richard K. Schmidt called me and said he was the guy!**

I was so excited. **Richard is alive and well** still living in New Jersey.....

Course I had a bunch of questions, but asked Richard if ok to tell our trail folks and FDR managers what he told and he said yes. Also included are details learned from a USAF crash report and eye witness to the crash who also went to the crash site that night.....**So here goes**

### **THE CRASH**

#### THE CRASH

Richard said he was assigned to Whiting Field (north east of Pensacola ) in 1953 in the Navy on a crash crew. Whiting was and still is a Navy Aviation training base. On September 28th of '53 he got a 30 day leave, as was wanting to go home to New Jersey to propose to his girlfriend and get married, so he went down to Eglin AFB and waited two days for ride/flight north. He wanted to get home before October 1 which was his girlfriend's birthday. He confirmed that the B-25 took off around 1930 hours (7:30 pm central time) with a crew and two more guys catching rides (total of six on board.) It was raining and they were flying low as they headed north. He was sitting in the radio operator seat in the lower part of the aircraft with a head set on and was sleeping some. He had his back to the wall facing rearward. All at once he heard the pilots saying "mayday mayday" and then he blacked out. Crash time was recorded at 2130 hours (9:30.) He woke up in the fog and rain outside the aircraft on the ground on his back. His hip hurt and his cloths were torn and he had hurt his arm. He guessed that he was flung through the trees and along the ground. He said he couldn't move and found his parachute was imbedded in the ground holding him down. Releasing the chute, he crawled free. Hearing moans he thought from at least two others on the plane, he went to one who was only a few feet away (who died shortly afterwards.) He said he wasn't sure about the other person he thought he heard. He then crawled over to a nearby tree and sat by it. Soon some guys came along. It seems four men from Pine Mountain Valley had seen and heard the plane go over and remarked "if that thing doesn't get up it is not going to make it over the mountain." One was Lee Wadsworth of Manchester who was visiting his father in law Homer Swann (who lived at intersection of Trammel Mill Road and Hines Gap Road.) Lee said as the plane approached Swanns house he told Homer to come out as the plane flew low overhead. It went over a rise toward the home of his brother in law Billy Colquitt. Then it went up some. Then they didn't hear the plane. Knowing it was likely down they headed up the mountain from Hines Gap Road then to the Dowdell Knob area. . Lee Wadsworth (now 85 of Manchester), Colquitt and Swann were first to the crash. Behind them were others who were hunting nearby (Wesley Castleberry, and brother Joe, James Lipp.) Also two others came to the site later including Charles and Raymond Minton. Lee recently told me that when they found the crash site and as they approached Richard told them to not light a match there was fuel everywhere. Lee sat at the site with Schmidt and Airman Benny Shepard (who died about 30 minutes after he arrived) till further help arrived...Shepards last words Wadsworth said were "Good bye ole' world, I'm going." Richard was given a shot of morphine by the doctor and taken off the mountain back to the road in Pine Mountain Valley about 12:30 . A couple of the men went back to a phone called Ft. Benning and reported the crash. Officials at Benning didn't have a record of a flight they said (Richard said he was later told they were some 15+ miles off course. This would explain if they had been 15 miles further west they would have missed the Pine Mountain Ridge.) The men finally persuaded the Benning folks to assist and they sent an

ambulance up US 27 and met the doctor and guys with Richard about half way to Columbus. Richard was stretched out with that hurt hip (severely dislocated ) and being 6' 3" tall was cramped in the car. The ambulance took him on to Martin Army hospital at Benning where he remained for about a month. During that time his mother and fiancé came to visit him. Seems the mom worked with the Redbank NJ Salvation Army Corps. His Mom and fiancé came to Benning and the Salvation Army arranged transportation while they were here. One weekend, a lady with Columbus Salvation Army, arranged for him to visit with a local family. He was given civilian clothes to wear during the visit which he described as a stress free visit. He was then flown to Pensacola and after several weeks was up and doing light duty (wiping down rails in the halls.)

He requested leave and was allowed to head back home to get married! But, he had to get his own transportation north. He got married.

Richard said he did go visit some time later the wife of the pilot of the plane when he got back north. He was on crutches and was then assigned to the Naval Hospital in Philadelphia for a while. Then back to duty. Seems he still had 2 years to go. Two years were supposed to be "sea duty" but it worked out so that he was assigned to a unit that just came back from the Azores. The DW2 Airborne warning unit was at Pax River NJ, so he was able to stay there for the duration of his Navy service which ended in December 1955. For the next 36 years he was with an electronics firm.

He is married to his wife Janet of 18 years. His first two wives passed away. He has one son and two daughters (58 -56 and daughter 41). He just visited his first great grand child. He is still working some at a local church.

I asked Richard if he thought about coming back to FDR State Park and seeing the crash site again and he said yes, but didn't know when they might be able to. He and wife have relatives in Florida they could go see and she has a brother in Brooklet, GA near Statesboro. Needless to say, I told Richard I was so thrilled to hear he is alive and hear his story which completes a part of the history of FDR State Park and the Pine Mountain Trail. I sent him photos of the park and one of some of the pieces we have found in the crash site. He sent us back photos of himself (from back then and a current photo.)

Thanks to Eddie Hall for finding out crash info on Sunday August 12th. Until I spoke with Schmidt on Sunday evening, no one had made mention of the crash since he got out of the Navy in 1955.

### **THE STORY CONTINUES**

On August 16, 2012, the Pine Mountain Trail Association board met at FDR State Park office area with Desmond Timmons (FDR manager) and David Jordan (FDR Assistant Manager) and Jim Hall presented a proposal that was passed by all.

"What I proposed and what we are going to do is: The PMTA in conjunction with FDR State Park host Mr. and Mrs Schmidt on the weekend of November 9-11," he said. "Our first idea being to offer to him to fly them down (all expenses paid) on Friday, November 9th."

When Mr. Hall got home after the meeting, he called Mr. Schmidt and told him and his wife of our offer. Mr. Schmidt said that they needed to think about it. Then they called back about 15 minutes later and agreed to come. However, they prefer to drive down due to some medical issues. So they will be at FDR State Park about midday on Friday, November 9, 2012.

Then on September 18, 2012 Jim received a call from Gary Lewis who is interested in B-25 crashes. Gary had located the daughter of the pilot of the plane Monica Clisham Coffey of Maine. He called Monica and talked to her husband Dennis and then got a call from Monica that night. Monica was thrilled to learn something was being done in memory of her Dad. She was born in 1952 and the crash was in 1953 so she never really knew her Dad, just read all about him and heard from family members about him. Monica and Dennis are also going to come down to FDR State Park in November and be there with us too.

## **THEN HERE IS WHERE you come in as Pine Mountain Trail Association members and you friends receiving this:**

You are invited to meet up at Dowdell Knob and join us as we have Richard Schmidt and Monica unveil a plaque that will be later placed on a large rock at the crash site. After the memorial ceremony you can walk down the trail west to crash site. Please arrive at Dowdell Knob no later than 9:30 am.....at 10 a.m we will start the ceremony.

Later we will lead the family down the PMT to the crash site (it is 842 feet from the parking lot west) and those joining us can visit there too after we give the families a few moments..

The ceremony: We will have FDR folks, PMTA board, DNR officials, media, hopefully a Navy color guard.) You might want to bring a folding chair. The Schmidt's and Coffeys' will be introduced along with those in attendance (DNR officials and any others) Then Ret. Navy chaplain Norman Drummond (of Columbus) will lead the group in the pledge to the flag followed by a prayer. Then the PMTA board and FDR managers will ask Richard and Monica to pull the cover off the plaque we will have there.

Later we will have the plaque (cast in bronze) attached to a large rock at the crash site. Rock (about 3'x2' flat on one side.) The plaque will show a B-25 and about the crash, in memory of those who perished and in honor of the one survivor RICHARD SCHMIDT.

After the ceremony and visit to the crash site on the trail, we'll walk back up to the Dowdell Knob scenic area and all can meet and greet the Schmidts and Coffeys . We'll then have lunch for them back down at the Liberty Bell Pool shelter. Then back by the FDR Park Office where we show the display we have set up about the crash. Then if they are up to it take them over to the Little White House.

Display in the park office: We have a copy of some of the USAF crash report.. Photos of Schmidt and Clisham and a narrative about the crash to display. Over the years, several of us have collected bits and pieces of the plane crash and we will have those in a display case too. A metal model Of the B-25 is planned too. .

### **Money for all this:**

Since we told the Schmidts all expenses will be paid, we will need contributions for gas, motel bills for night coming and going (it 1045 miles for them.)

Several folks have already voiced an offer to help out (two folks said \$100)

In short we need contributions right away for the Schmidts travel and for the memorial plaque.

So please let me know if you would like to contribute to this grand Veterans Day tribute to the lone survivor and those who died in the B-25 crash in 1953 on Pine Mountain.

Please Email me back with the amount you'd like to contribute (so I can keep track of it right away) and then mail that amount To :

Pine Mountain Trail Association

PO Box 5

Columbus, Ga. 31902