

# “The Service Knows and Will Remember” The Aircraft Crash Memorial on Japacha Ridge

Alexander D. Bevil

Winner of the James S. Copley Library Award

Located at an elevation of nearly 4,600 feet on a stone-lined terraced ledge just below and east of Japacha Peak in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park is a lonely memorial dating back to San Diego’s golden days of military aviation. Erected on May 22, 1923, and refurbished later in 1934 and 1968, it consists of the battered and burnt V12-cylinder aircraft engine mounted on a stone and concrete pedestal. Affixed to the pedestal’s base is a bronze plaque, dedicating the structure to the memory of U.S. Army pilot First Lieutenant Charles F. Webber and U.S. Cavalry Colonel Francis C. Marshall, “who fell on this spot on December 7, 1922.” All but forgotten by most modern military historians, the memorial marks the site of one of the most sought after crash sites in U.S. military history. It is also associated with several notable individuals who would go on to play major roles in U.S. military aviation history.

On December 7, 1922, between 9:05 and 9:15 A.M., a twin-seat U.S. Army Air Service DeHaviland DH4B model biplane took off from Rockwell Field, North Island.<sup>1</sup> Behind the controls was twenty-six-year-old pilot First Lieutenant Charles F. Webber. Sitting in front of him in the forward passenger seat was fifty-five-year-old Colonel Francis C. Marshall. A decorated World War I veteran, Colonel Marshall was acting as assistant to the newly appointed Chief of Cavalry on a fact-finding inspection tour of cavalry posts throughout the American Southwest. Having just completed an inspection tour of Troop F of the Eleventh Cavalry based at



*Major Henry H. “Hap” Arnold at North Island, 1919. As commanding officer of Rockwell Field, Major Arnold played an important role in the search for the missing airplane. A pioneer aviator, he is credited with transforming the Army Air Corps into the U. S. Air Force, first as commanding general during World War II and, later, as a five-star general on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Courtesy of the San Diego Aeronautical Museum, Research Library and Archives.*

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A California State Parks historian based in San Diego, Alexander D. Bevil has published several award-winning articles in *The Journal of San Diego History*. In 2005, he was the recipient of the Congress of History’s Ben Dixon Award for “significant contributions to the preservation and development of the history of the San Diego/Imperial County region.” Most of his work focuses on San Diego’s architectural history; this is his first foray in local military history. He hopes that his article will inspire others to visit Cuyamaca Rancho State Park where they can hike up to and pay their respects at the historic Airplane Wreck Monument.



*The Airplane Crash Monument after the Cedar Firestorm of October 2003. Author's collection.*

Camp Hearn near the United States-Mexico International Boundary in Imperial Beach, he was now on his way eastward on a three hour flight to inspect an ROTC cavalry unit at Tucson, then the Tenth Cavalry base at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.<sup>2</sup> Colonel Marshall was particularly keen on hitching rides in military aircraft whenever possible during his inspection tour, shaving hours if not days of travel time off his busy schedule.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing full well of Colonel Marshall's importance, Rockwell Field's base commander, thirty-six-year-old Major Henry "Hap" Arnold, made no small effort to guarantee the safety of Lieutenant Webber and his distinguished passenger. An accomplished award-winning aviator, Major Arnold was well aware of the dangers involved in early twentieth-century powered flight, especially flying outdated aircraft over the rugged mountain and desert route between San Diego and Fort Huachuca, where no fewer than nine military aviators had reportedly vanished without a trace.<sup>4</sup> Major Arnold had personally instructed Lieutenant Webber to turn his aircraft around and head back to Rockwell Field if conditions prevented him from flying over the mountains. If he was able to climb over the mountains, but was unable to reach his primary destination, Lieutenant Webber was to fly to alternative civilian landing fields either at Calexico, Yuma, Nogales, or Tucson. At a time when radio communication between airplanes and the ground was still in the experimental stage, Webber could only contact and inform Major Arnold by telephone or telegraph immediately upon landing.<sup>5</sup>

Knowing full well of Colonel Marshall's importance, Rockwell

If anyone could fly a plane over treacherous terrain through less than friendly skies, Lieutenant Webber, who had volunteered to fly Colonel Marshall, could. Born on January 15, 1896, in Mosca, Colorado, Webber had joined the U.S. Army Signal Corps' Aviation Section in December 1917. A graduate of the School of Military Aeronautics at the University of California, Berkeley, Webber completed ground, observation, and gunnery training at Army air fields in Michigan and Texas. He reported to the air station at Rockwell Field on July 6, 1919, where he made his first solo flight. After a short stint in the Philippines, Webber returned to Rockwell Field in February 1922. Here he became chief test pilot and officer in charge of flight training. Lieutenant Webber was also the assistant engineering officer assigned to the base's Air Intermediate Depot, the Army Air Service's primary supply and repair facility for the West Coast, as well as Hawaii and the Philippines. Among Webber's duty assignments was the testing of each repaired airplane before it could be returned to its respective air field. Despite his busy schedule, Webber squeezed in additional flight time, participating in a successful round-trip flight looking for suitable sites for auxiliary landing fields between San Diego and Phoenix, Arizona. From July 26 to August 7, 1922, Lieutenant Webber and his co-pilot, First Lieutenant Virgil Hines, logged almost 4,000 miles in a DeHaviland DH4B exploring and mapping potential air routes and emergency



*A twin-seat U.S. Army Air Service DeHaviland DH4B model biplane similar to the one flown by Lieutenant Webber and Colonel Marshall. Courtesy of the San Diego Aerospace Museum, Research Library and Archives.*

landing sites throughout the American Southwest. Their commander, Major Arnold, recognized their flight over uncharted desert and mountains, often in bad weather, for its “contribution to the establishment of future transcontinental airways.”<sup>6</sup>

While not exactly “state-of-the-art,” Lieutenant Webber’s DeHaviland DH4B was strong and powerful enough to carry him and his passenger along the 505.9-mile trip from Rockwell Field to a landing field at Fort Yuma, Arizona, where he would have to top off his fuel tank for the remaining flight to Fort Huachuca, near present-day Sierra Vista, Arizona. A variant of the earlier British-designed DH4 “Liberty Plane,” the only American-made aircraft that saw action in World War I, the U.S. Army Air Service “modernized” 1,538 post-war DH4s after the Armistice.<sup>7</sup> Webber’s plane, a Dayton-Wright-built DH4, serial number AS63789, had been modified by the Boeing Aircraft Company. While it retained its original 30 foot, 4 inch long fuselage and 43-foot, 6-inch wingspan, the pilot’s position was relocated to the rear observer/gunner’s position, and vice-versa. This, plus moving the fixed landing gear slightly forward, afforded the pilot a better view of the ground below, especially during landing. It also kept the pilot from being trapped between the engine and the 150 gallon fuel tank after a crash landing, which explained the original DH4’s reputation as a “flaming coffin.” The plane’s power plant, the famous water-cooled V-12 Liberty aircraft engine, was rated at 410-horsepower, and could propel the 3,557-pound aircraft to a top speed of 128 mph. However, Webber more than likely would have kept the throttle of the engine back to conserve fuel at its 90 mph cruising speed. Capable of flying at a height of 19,000 feet, the DH4B contained two compasses (one in each cockpit), an altimeter,

and other instruments necessary for long-distance flight. Rockwell Field ground crewmen, who had overhauled it on March 16, 1921, and again on July 20, 1922, had inspected it prior to its takeoff.<sup>8</sup>

The mainstay of the U.S. Army Aviation Service from 1919 to 1930, the DH4B served as a transport, trainer, photographic plane, air ambulance, target tug, and forest fire patroller. However, its most famous postwar role during the 1920s was as a record-breaker. U.S. Army Air Service pilots flew DH4B's on the 9,000 mile round-trip flight from New York to Alaska, July 15 to October 20, 1920. On September 4, 1922, hotshot pilot Lieutenant Jimmy Doolittle, with only one refueling stop at Kelly Field, Texas, flew a modified DH4B from Pablo Beach, Florida to Rockwell Field, California, completing the first transcontinental flight across the U.S. within a single 24-hour day. Escorting Doolittle from Yuma to his final destination were two North Island DeHavilands flown by Lieutenant Webber and Captain William Randolph. Webber's navigational skills were put to the test again on October 3 and November 3, when he guided Lieutenants Oakley Kelly and John Macready's heavily loaded Fokker T-2 monoplane through the 1,700-foot Temecula Pass between Riverside and San Diego counties on the first leg of their attempt to fly non-stop across the continental United States. Although mechanical trouble forced Kelly and Macready to abandon their attempt, their familiarity with the route no doubt contributed to their successful east to west non-stop flight from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York to Rockwell Field on May 3, 1923.

Arguably, the most historic use of DH4Bs occurred on June 26, 1923, when Rockwell Field Army pilots Virgil Hine and Frank W. Seifert made the first successful aerial refueling from their plane to that of fellow pilot's Lieutenants Lowell H. Smith and John Paul Richter beneath them. The following day, Smith and Richter kept their plane aloft using in-flight refueling for 23 hours and 48 minutes. Two months later, from August 27 to 28, they broke this record when they flew the equivalent of some 1,250 miles over San Diego for 37 hours and 15 minutes. Participating in this historic accomplishment, which established five new world flight records for distance, speed, and duration, were Lieutenants Hine, and Seifert, along with another plane flown by Captain R. G. Irvin and Oliver McNeil, who refueled Smith and Richter during the flight. On October 25, 1923, Smith and Richter, along with Major Arnold, flew 1,250 miles nonstop from the Canadian to the Mexican border, utilizing two in-flight refuelings. These pioneering pilots were the first to demonstrate the efficacy of extending the range of an airplane by mid-air refueling.<sup>9</sup>

Due to funding cutbacks, modern navigational aids, such as on-board radios and radio beacons, were lacking on most military planes. Because of this, pilots, especially during poor weather, were often hard-pressed to reach their destinations. Exacerbating the problem was the lack of auxiliary landing fields and adequate weather reports.<sup>10</sup> Most of the weather information that concerned Major Arnold had been gleaned from second-hand sources or from pilots flying into Rockwell Field. He was deeply concerned over the approaching North Pacific storm that was expected to bring rain as far south as the Tehachapi Mountains and possibly Southern California by late December 8. In fact, he personally followed Webber and Marshall in an SE-5 pursuit plane, turning back over Chollas Heights in East San Diego. No doubt he was extremely apprehensive as he watched Webber and Marshall's plane disappear into a low cloud bank over the eastern mountains.<sup>11</sup>

Major Arnold's anxiety would have been fueled by recent events. On two separate occasions, two Rockwell Field planes were overdue flying east toward Yuma. Both had strayed off course into Baja California, Mexico. While the crew of one plane was found and rescued, local fisherman had allegedly murdered and robbed the other.<sup>12</sup> Death or injury were no strangers to Army pilots flying in the line of duty during the 1920s. In 1921, 76 aircraft accidents in the United States caused 137 deaths. Fifty-eight percent of the casualties were military aviators, with over half being Army aviators. The majority of the crashes were caused by engine trouble, stunts, bad weather, or structural defects. However, 15 percent of aeronautical fatalities could not be explained, which suggests either that the planes were never found or that the cause of the crash was indiscernible.<sup>13</sup> With only 900 pilots and observers on active duty, there were proportionally more deaths among Air Service officers when compared to land army units. While it offered additional pay and the thrill of flying, the Air Service's chief drawback, as quoted by a contemporary pilot/writer in 1923, was "its uncomfortable brevity."<sup>14</sup>

When Webber failed to report in the following morning, Major Arnold ordered telegrams to be dispatched to fields along the route in order to investigate the plane's whereabouts. As soon as the return telegrams proved negative, he immediately organized and started a search and rescue effort. He directed Aerial Forestry Patrol commander Captain Lowell H. Smith to initiate an air search from Rockwell Field. One of the foremost cross-country fliers in the Air Service, Smith led a flight of three DeHavilands in search of the missing military officers. Captain Smith, with First Lieutenant Frank Seifert as his observer, flew directly to Tucson, then worked his way back westward over established air routes. Captain William Randolph and Webber's best friend, First Lieutenant John P. Richter, began their search eastward from El Centro. First Lieutenant John McCulloch, Rockwell Field's former adjutant, had been recalled from his leave of absence to pilot the third plane, with Lieutenant Virgil Hine. McCulloch and Hine reconnoitered the terrain eastward from Yuma to a point midway to Tucson.<sup>15</sup>

Reaction from Army headquarters in Washington was swift. The war department issued instructions that "the search for Colonel Marshall and Lieutenant Webber be [conducted] with every facility at the command of the government in an effort to clear up as rapidly as possible the mystery surrounding the fate of the two officers."<sup>16</sup> Army Chief of Staff, General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing personally ordered that other air units be made available. From Fort Bliss, Texas, Major L. G. Hefferman, commanding officer of the Twelfth Observation Squadron, led a flight of five DeHaviland planes for Tucson, which would serve as one of the search's interim base of operations. Despite years of interservice rivalry, the U.S. Navy lent a hand. Captain Albert Marshall, commander of the Pacific air fleet, transferred four naval aircraft from the North Island Naval Air Station over to Major Arnold's command. This was not the first time both commands cooperated in a search for missing aircraft. A combined squadron of Army and Navy airplanes out of North Island had participated during the previously mentioned searches in Mexico. Major Arnold directed the naval aircraft to search the mountains between Indian Wells and Warner Springs, after which they were to proceed eastward to El Centro, and join the search with the Army planes.<sup>17</sup>

Concerned for the aviators' welfare, and no doubt smelling a story, the *San Diego Union* had wired a telegram to the Western Union operator at Nogales,

who soon replied: "No airplane passed or landed here today." Through the Associated Press network, news of the missing airmen's plight soon appeared in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* newspapers.<sup>18</sup> Almost as soon as the pilots had been reported overdue, the *San Diego Union* began publishing unsubstantiated front page reports of unidentified airplane sightings. For example, on December 8, it reported that an "army airplane" was seen flying over Yuma toward Tucson at 11 o'clock in the morning. Two days later, readers learned that the plane was "last sighted at 10 o'clock Thursday passing over Estrella, 50 miles east of Gila Bend, about halfway between Tucson and Yuma." Major Arnold ordered his pilots to shift their search some 150 miles eastward from San Diego's mountains and desert to those of Arizona, placing them under Major Hefferman's immediate command. Flying out of Tucson, nine DH4Bs flew wing abreast along a 10-mile wide line, sweeping southeast over the range of mountains beyond Estrella. While there were small valleys where an airplane could land, it could not do so without wrecking the plane. If Webber and Marshall had survived a forced landing or crash, due to the area's isolation, there was little chance of their survival if not found within a few days. Because of this, search planes were equipped with emergency rations and water tanks that could be dropped in case a landing could not be made.<sup>19</sup>

Three days after they were reported missing, Lieutenant Webber and Colonel Marshall were the focus of what would become one of the most comprehensive combined air and land search and rescue missions instituted by the United States government at the time.<sup>20</sup> During its peak, between December 12 and 19, forty military and two civilian aircraft, with almost 100 pilots and observers, would fly along the 1,500-mile U.S.-Mexico border region between San Diego, California, and El Paso, Texas. Included were every available flight officer and airplane stationed at Rockwell Field.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the aircraft under Major Hefferman's command, planes from two aerial attack groups at Brooks and Kelly Fields, San Antonio, Texas, and the Ninety-First Observation Squadron from Crissy Field, San Francisco, took part in the search. Major Arnold dispatched spare parts, spare motors, and other equipment from Rockwell Field to the interim operating base at Camp Stephen Little, near Nogales. This way, if any search plane was forced to land or crash, as several would, reserve airplanes would rush replacement parts to the site in order to repair the plane.<sup>22</sup>

Without any solid leads, the search was often directed by rumor. On December 10, when word reached Major Hefferman that an army airplane had passed over Tacna, Arizona in a southeasterly direction, he ordered the searchers to shift their operations almost 100 miles westward from Estrella. Following a motorist's report, sheriff's deputies searched the highway between Bisbee, Arizona, and Rodeo, New Mexico, in search of "two men dressed in army uniform, answering the aviators' descriptions." Reports that an airplane was seen passing over Ruby and San Miguel, Arizona, precipitated a flight of five aircraft to search the area from Tucson to Nogales on the Mexican border.<sup>23</sup>

On December 11 the search for Webber and Marshall elevated into a bi-national humanitarian search and rescue mission. Upon hearing the possibility that the missing aviators might have flown and possibly crashed south of the border, Mexican president Alvaro Obregón had permitted U.S. military planes to expand their search over Baja California and Sonora. In a telegram sent to U.S. authorities, President Obregón stated:

I have just learned with sincere regret of the possible accident suffered by Col. Francis Marshall and Lieutenant Charles L. Webber. Acting in my official capacity as executive, permission is granted for you to search for these aviators and both the civil and military authorities in Sonora have been directed to try to find them and to render them every assistance and conduct them to the International Boundary.<sup>24</sup>

Besides allowing U.S. planes to fly in Mexican air space, President Obregón ordered his country's *Rurales* (federal rural police force) to coordinate their efforts on the ground.<sup>25</sup>

Flying out of Nogales, Captain R. G. Ervin led a four-plane squadron some 80 miles south to Magdalena, Sonora, then turned west for a distance of 60 miles before returning; he entered the United States near Ruby, west of Nogales. Flying low in a wing-abreast pattern, the planes, according to Captain Ervin, "grid-ironed a wide area."<sup>26</sup> On December 16, Major Theodore C. Macauley, a noted transcontinental flier, took off from Rockwell Field to Calexico, where he began a seven-day search of the vast tule fields extending from the Cocopah Mountains south to La Bomba. Major Macauley was following an unsubstantiated report to Rockwell Field that Lieutenant Webber's plane had been sighted near La Bomba, a small town on the edge of the tule fields.<sup>27</sup>

By December 17, the search for Webber and Marshall had evolved into the largest combined air and ground search in U.S. military history during peacetime. The search area encompassed the mountainous and desert region from San Diego to a point east of Nogales, Arizona. Besides including every available flight officer and airplane from military flying fields throughout the southwest, there was a large contingent of eyes on the ground. Arizona Governor Thomas E. Campbell had called out Indian runners from local reservations along with county deputy sheriffs and the Arizona National Guard. From Fort Huachuca and other army bases, approximately 300 mounted and foot soldiers, among them elements of the famed "Buffalo Soldiers" of the Tenth Cavalry<sup>28</sup> and Twenty-Fifth Infantry regiments, to search the rugged mountain region between Nogales and San Miguel. The First Battalion, Twenty-Fifth Infantry, sent patrols out from Douglas, Arizona, its interim base of operations.<sup>29</sup>

After twelve days of searching, the military authorities reluctantly abandoned all hope that the army officers would be found alive. By December 18, the mission shifted to a search and recovery mission. While forces continued to search on the ground, the pilots were ordered back to their respective bases. Captain Ervin explained that, "We have made flights into Lower California, northern Sonora, and along the entire air route leading to Tucson without obtaining any information that would throw any light on the disappearance." "We," he continued, "do not know, in fact, that they got safe across the mountains." There was a strong belief among the officers that Webber and Marshall's plane had gone down in a remote area and they were either killed outright in a crash or perished by their injuries or lack of food and water. If that were true, it might be months or years before someone stumbled across their wrecked plane.<sup>30</sup>

The following day, however, the search's focus shifted back to San Diego's mountainous backcountry. Ever since Webber and Marshall's plane was first

reported overdue, reports continued to reach Major Arnold from persons sighting a low flying plane with a misfiring engine over the Cuyamaca Mountains. The most intriguing reports came on December 11 and 16, respectively. On the former, J. B. Merritt reported that he had seen a "military plane sweep out of a thick fog bank about noon [on December 7] and thence head to the southeast." On the latter, J. J. Dorey, manager of the Oak Grove Store at Descanso said that Russell Alexander, a local cowboy, entered his store. Because he had been in country for over a week, he was hungry for news. When Dorey told him about the missing aviators, Alexander claimed that he had seen an airplane on the afternoon of December 7, between 1 and 2 p.m., flying over Green Valley north toward the Cuyamaca Ranch.<sup>31</sup> He specifically remembered that the plane's engine "seemed to be working badly and the airplane was flying at such a low altitude it would have been impossible, in his judgment, for it to have gone over the Laguna Mountains safely." Major Macauley had flown over Green Valley and the Lagunas enroute to Calexico on December 17, but reported sighting nothing that would indicate that Webber and Marshall had crashed in that vicinity.<sup>32</sup>

On December 20, Major Arnold sent fifteen planes from Rockwell Field on a flight northeast to Banning, Riverside County. Here they would turn south and search the mountains northwest of Palm Springs down six miles past the Mexican border before turning west back to San Diego. The following morning he sent thirty-five men from Troop F of the Eleventh Cavalry at Camp Hearn on a 10-day march to join the search for the missing aviators. Ironically, among the last soldiers that had seen Colonel Marshall alive, they were now involved in finding his remains. Under Major Arnold's direction, the troopers rode east along the border to Dulzura, where half of them continued on to Jacumba. From the west and east ends of this base line, they searched the Jacumba and Cuyamaca mountains along a triangular pattern north to Santa Ysabel. The leader of the troop, a Captain Heron, said that, although eyewitnesses at Viejas, Descanso, Guatay, and Morena Dam reported seeing a plane fly overhead on December 7, "no new clues had been received to divert the search again to San Diego County territory, but that the cavalry would be employed as a final resort." Assisting the Eleventh Cavalry was a complement of military officers and federal forest rangers on foot and in automobiles.<sup>33</sup>

On the same day that the Eleventh Cavalry troopers headed east, an officer acting for the Ninth Corps Area's Inspector General paid a visit to Major Arnold at Rockwell Field. His mission was to make a general inquiry regarding the circumstances of Webber and Marshall's disappearance. It would take at least two weeks for the Inspector General to interview Arnold and the pilots involved in the search, and to review correspondence related to the search before he could finish his report.<sup>34</sup>

While other soldiers celebrated Christmas, the Tenth and Eleventh Cavalry troopers continued their search for Colonel Francis C. Marshall and Lieutenant Charles L. Webber's remains. Although the air search had been called off days ago, the latter's wingman, Lieutenant John P. Richter, refused to believe that his friend was lost forever. For about a week, Richter made daily reconnaissance flights out of Nogales. Although acting without orders, the War Department permitted him to continue his quest.<sup>35</sup> On December 29, Major Arnold sent Lieutenant Richter, Captain William Randolph, and two naval DeHavillands to Yuma where they

would divide and continue south following the Colorado River to the Gulf of California. Afterwards they would explore the desert region of northern Sonora.<sup>36</sup>

Sometime prior to New Years Day, Lieutenant Charles L. Webber's brother officers and relatives of Colonel Marshall subscribed a \$700 reward for information leading to the recovery of the bodies. Both groups were experiencing a deep sense of loss. Colonel Marshall and Lieutenant Webber's families would never feel a sense of closure until the remains of their loved ones were found and returned for proper burial. Men like Major Arnold, Lieutenants Richter, Hine, and Siefert, and even those who didn't know Lieutenant Webber or Colonel Marshall were willing to put their own lives on the line doing everything they could to follow the time-honored military dictum to "Leave no man behind."<sup>37</sup>

On January 6, 1923, the Ninth Corps area inspector released his report. In it he stated that Major Arnold had not violated any military regulations in requesting or authorizing Webber and Marshall's flight. Lieutenant Webber, according to the report, was competent and qualified to fly the plane, which was suitably equipped and serviced. Despite his concern over the weather and the previous loss of pilots flying over the intended route, Major Arnold, according to the report, did not show any negligence or dereliction of duty.<sup>38</sup>

Five days later, on January 11, Major Arnold asked for and received permission to send an automobile search party to trace Webber and Marshall's flight on the ground "step by step" from San Diego to Nogales, "until either the airplane was found or its whereabouts located." Between January 15 and February 23, 1923, Major Macauley led the team of Lieutenants Richter, Hine and three others across primitive roads searching for clues to the aviators' whereabouts. Along the way Major Macauley and his men interviewed at least twenty-nine "eye witnesses," each one "positive that they had actually seen the Marshall-Webber plane on the morning of December 7th."<sup>39</sup>

On January 16, Major Arnold faced a Board of Inquiry into the possible scenario behind Webber and Marshall's apparent crash. He explained that he believed that Lieutenant Webber had turned southeast at Descanso in order to steer around a heavy cloud cover over the Cuyamaca and Laguna mountains. Finding a hole in the clouds over Campo, he continued eastward and was seen over the town of Seeley in Imperial County, before traveling eastward to the Colorado River. Somewhere east of Yuma, Arizona, possible engine trouble caused him to make a forced landing in rough terrain. The landing may have been hard enough to rupture the plane's fuel tank. The resulting fire killed Webber and his passenger.<sup>40</sup>

On February 12, 1923, Secretary of War John W. Weeks, acting on the Adjutant General's February ninth report of the incident, announced that "the name of Colonel Francis C. Marshall, veteran of the World War, Sioux Indian Campaign, the China relief expedition and the Philippine insurrection, had been dropped from the rolls of the army." This meant that the War Department had officially abandoned all hope of ever finding him alive. As far as they were concerned, "despite the most vigorously prosecuted and extensive search of its kind yet attempted by United States forces, the disappearance of Colonel Marshall and Lieutenant Webber will remain one of the unsolved mysteries of aviation history."<sup>41</sup>

Three months later, though, on Saturday, May 4, 1923, local rancher George W. McCain and a companion came upon a grisly sight while riding on horseback along Japacha Ridge. On the ground sloping eastward toward the Japacha Creek



The remains of the DH4B were found just below and east of Japacha Peak. The engine assembly was photographed in May 1923. ©SDHS, UT-1097, Union-Tribune Collection.

drainage was a large 12-cylinder engine laying on its side amid a jumble of twisted metal that looked like it belonged to an airplane fuselage. There were several sections of doped canvas wings bearing the red, white and blue star and circle of the Army Air Service. Amongst the wreckage, next to the battered engine, were two piles of charred bones. McCain noticed two tall pine trees about 200 yards from the crash site, the tops of which had been broken off. He speculated that the airplane had hit the trees, damaging its controls and forcing it to crash and explode on contact. He believed that both men had been killed instantly. Carrying a piece of burnt canvas bearing a number of undecipherable letters and figures as evidence, McCain immediately rode north to report his findings to Joe Peterson, caretaker at Cuyamaca Lake. Peterson then telephoned Ed Fletcher, director of the Cuyamaca Water Company, to tell him that McCain had discovered the missing aviators' crash site on the Cuyamaca Mountains. Around 4 p.m. Fletcher telephoned Major Arnold at Rockwell Field, informing him of the news. Quickly organizing a search and recovery party, the major and his men boarded a truck and took the last ferry from Coronado to San Diego. They drove all night, expecting to start their search at first light.<sup>42</sup>

Getting wind of the discovery, shortly before midnight reporters from the *San Diego Union* left San Diego ahead of Major Arnold. They had arranged to have McCain and others meet them at Descanso and guide them to the crash site. After hiking some three miles through heavy undergrowth through the oak and pine forest, in a thick ground fog, they all became hopelessly lost. Deciding to make camp around 1 a.m., they waited for daybreak to continue their search. When McCain and his party finally reached the crash site, he requested that nobody touch anything, but "to leave things just as he had found them until the arrival of the Rockwell Field forces." The *San Diego Union* later reported that "the order was complied with the big majority," which would suggest that the minority engaged

in some looting.<sup>43</sup>

When Major Arnold, Major Macauley, Captain Ervin, Lieutenants Hine and Richter, and six enlisted men finally reached the area, they investigated the crash site and conducted an informal inquiry to determine the cause of the crash. According to a May 14 *San Diego Union* reporter's statement, Colonel Marshall and Lieutenant Webber's remains contained broken leg bones and crushed skulls. Next to one of the charred skeletons lay uniform buttons and three fire-blackened silver dollars that may have been in a pocket. Nearby was a blackened thermos bottle, along with a safety razor, army service pistol and cap, and a bolo knife.<sup>44</sup>

Major Arnold, with Richter and Hine, identified the bolo and pistol, along with a cap and watch, as belonging to Lieutenant Webber. Likewise, they found Colonel Marshall's eyeglasses and West Point Class of 1890 ring near his remains. After photographing the site, the two parties reconnoitered some 1,500 yards along the mountain slope. They located and identified scattered wreckage. Using the evidence contained at the crash site, along with the previous reports, an informal Board of Inquiry held at the crash site speculated that the following events had led to the crash.

A U.S. forest ranger had seen Lieutenant Webber's DH4B fly over the Viejas Indian Reservation near the town of Alpine some 15 minutes after its takeoff from Rockwell Field. Five minutes later, his District Supervisor, a former employee at March Field near Riverside, identified the plane as a DeHaviland biplane flying low toward the Descanso Ranger Station, which it flew over at 10:00 a.m. Because of a thick ground fog, the operator of the Descanso Store could only hear what he perceived to be a low flying airplane over the store. One informant, a motorist, said he thought he was being followed by a motorcycle, and pulled off the road to give it the right of way, only to hear the roar of a motor pass overhead. A local rancher did report seeing an airplane circling over the northern end of Horse Thief Canyon. While it appeared as if the plane's pilot was trying to get his bearings, thickening ground fog prevented the rancher from seeing which direction the pilot took. Another rancher east of Descanso at Guatay reported seeing an airplane banking sharply northward in a successful attempt to avoid hitting the 4,885-foot Guatay Peak.

From this point, the flight's final moments are based on speculation. Webber may have decided that, after narrowly missing Guatay Peak, heavy ground fog and a low cloud cover would prevent him from recognizing landmarks along the prescribed route from San Diego to Yuma. Traveling in a northerly direction through Descanso Creek and Green Valley, he could fly along the relatively safe route north from Descanso along Lake Cuyamaca Road (today's State Route 79). After gaining enough altitude, Webber would then veer toward the west and double back to return safely to Rockwell Field. It would only have taken him three minutes to reach the Japacha ridgeline. While he may have cleared the 4,781-4,800-foot ridgeline, low clouds may have obscured the tree tops, which he was approaching rapidly. Webber, who was a conservative and conscientious pilot, did everything within his power to avoid crashing into the trees. Perhaps a misfiring engine just did not have enough power to pull the plane high enough to clear the tree tops, which tore off the airplane's tail rudder and elevator. Losing control, the plane crashed down through the trees at about 125 mph, before smashing headlong into the ground. If lucky, the impact would have either killed or rendered Webber

and Marshall unconscious before fuel from the ruptured fuel tank spilled over the hot exhaust manifold and pipes, turning the DH4B into a "flaming coffin."<sup>45</sup>

The informal board of inquiry then tried to explain why neither the pilots from Rockwell Field nor the Eleventh Cavalry troopers and others on the ground could find the wreckage. They quickly deduced that hidden under a screen of branches, the scattered wreckage would have been nearly impossible to see from the air. Adding to this were poor weather conditions, which included ground fog and a low cloud cover with heavy rain, which also kept the fire from spreading over a wider area. As the temperature dropped, an ensuing blanket of snow may have further obscured the wreckage from both air and ground observers. Located in an isolated area, it was pure luck that McCain "solved the problem and shed light upon a mystery which," according to the *San Diego Union*, "attracted the attention of the whole world."<sup>46</sup>

Whether or not the local paper was reporting fact or hyperbole, the discovery of the wreck and the aviators' remains had a profound effect on Major Arnold and his men. After concluding their inquiry, they reverently removed Lieutenant Webber and Colonel Marshall's remains, along with their personal belongings and some of the wreckage down the mountain to a waiting truck. Upon reaching San Diego, Captain Lewis M. Field, a doctor in the Army Medical Corps, examined the shattered skeletons, determining that both men had died on impact. The remains were then taken to the Johnson-Saum undertaking establishment for preparation prior to their placement in coffins. On May 15, at 7:00 a.m., a horse-drawn caisson carried Lieutenant Webber's flag-draped casket from the funeral home to the San Diego Union Depot. Leading the caisson was the Fifty-Sixth Brigade Marine Band playing a funeral march, accompanied by Webber's brother officers and a detachment of civilian workers from Rockwell Field. Once aboard the waiting train, Lieutenant Richter accompanied his friend to his parents' home in Denver, Colorado. When informed that his son would be returning home, the Reverend S. A. Webber declared that, "It is a great relief to me to know that his body has been found. The days since he was reported missing have been filled with great suspense for his mother and myself."<sup>47</sup>

During the subsequent funeral ceremony, Lieutenant Richter eulogized his friend by saying that:

In the hazardous service in which he [Webber] served, he was a leader, and his sound judgment and conservative flying were demonstrated even in his last great flight, when we found that everything had been done by him the instant before his death to save his passenger and plane.

Next to Lieutenant Webber's grave was a floral spray bearing the Air Service insignia and the last line of Richter's eulogy: "The Service Knows and Will Remember."<sup>48</sup> Colonel Marshall's remains were held in San Diego until his widow notified Major Arnold as to her wishes where to bury her late husband's remains. The previous February, at a memorial service held at Washington, she had stated that if her husband's body were ever found, she wanted to have it interred at Arlington National Cemetery. However, something or someone must have changed her mind because Colonel Francis Cutler Marshall was buried with full military



*Bronze Dedication Plaque, Airplane Crash Monument. Author's collection.*

honors at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point's Post Cemetery on May 21, 1923.<sup>49</sup>

Such was the loss to his friends and fellow officers that, on Sunday, May 23, 1923, a large contingent of officers and civilian workers from Rockwell Field returned to the crash site. Led by Prentice Vernon Reel, civilian supervisor of the base's aero repair shop, the men, carrying digging tools and sacks of concrete, hiked up from the nearby road to Japacha Ridge. Here they mixed the concrete and poured it into a rectangular wooden form over the half-buried Liberty engine. While the concrete slab was setting, they placed several small pieces of the wreckage, and a small rectangular bronze plaque that Reel had cast in his machine shop. On the plaque was the legend:

IN MEMORY OF  
COL. F.C. MARSHALL  
AND  
First. LT. C.L.WEBBER  
WHO FELL AT THIS SPOT  
DEC. 7, 1922

After Reel installed the plaque, the group held a brief memorial service before heading back down the mountain. Major Arnold, along with Reel and Lieutenants Hine, Richter, Siefert and Smith, revisited the crash site a few days later. After removing one of the memorial's base stones, they inserted a 3-foot metal tube under the cement slab. Within the sealed tube was a list of the officers and enlisted men from Rockwell Field at the time, among these the names of

those actively involved in the search. It also included three copies of the *San Diego Union* that described the search and recovery mission, as well as a copy of a Coronado Masonic Lodge calendar for 1923. Major Arnold sent photographs of the memorial along with a letter to Webber's father, stating that he and the men had done "everything . . . possible to . . . preserve his [son's] memory to the present and coming generation, and that affectionate care and thought guided in the little that we were able to accomplish." He had predicted that, because of its relative isolation, lack of adequate trails (plus the fact that it was on private land), the Airplane Crash Memorial would be seldom visited by the public. While this was true for the next twelve years, the owner of the property, Ralph Dyar, reportedly granted a deed to a small plot surrounding the monument as a sort of protective easement, "so that it may forever stand as a monument to two brave men who gave their lives in the service of their country."<sup>50</sup>

Due to financial difficulties brought upon by the Great Depression, Dyar sold his ranch to the California Department of Beaches and Parks in 1933. The former Cuyamaca Ranch became Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. The following year, civil engineer Charles Carter stumbled upon the monument while surveying the park's boundaries. Carter then notified the unit leader of a Civilian Conservation Corps construction camp at Green Valley Falls, which was involved in improving the new park's infrastructure. The camp was one of many that agreed with state and federal governments to employ companies of out-of-work youth to improve local, state, and federal parks and forests between 1933 and 1942. Much of the work of the "CCC Boys," including aesthetically pleasing and functional structures, still survives in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, including a stone custodian (ranger) cottage, fire suppression station, bridge, retaining walls, as well as public picnic and camping facilities at the Paso Picacho and Green Valley areas. One of these construction projects involved the development of a number of hiking and equestrian trails "in order to make life more pleasant for park visitors."<sup>51</sup>

One of these trails, the Japacha Ridge Trail, led from the newly built Green Valley Falls Picnic Area to the Airplane Wreck Monument site. Because most of the CCC leaders were active or reserve Army personnel, they would have had prior knowledge of the 13-year old crash. However, they had no idea where it was located. They spent several Saturday afternoons searching fruitlessly before Carter had reported its location.

Completed in the summer of 1934, the one and one-half mile "Airplane Monument Trail" hugged the southeastern spur of Japacha Peak before leading up and over "Airplane Ridge," where it continued northward to the West Mesa Trail junction. At this point it descended northward down to a point overlooking the Japacha Creek where Webber and Marshall had perished. The CCC crews, which at times consisted of segregated African American workers, cleared brush, moved and split large boulders, widened and leveled the trail, and built at least three stone ramparts along the way. At the monument, the workers improved the surrounding landscape by planting shrubs and building stone retaining walls, including steps and a built-in stone bench, to prevent erosion and to make the site "a mountain sanctuary."<sup>52</sup>

Thirty-four years later, on March 12, 1968, California State Parks again chose to improve the Airplane Crash Monument, which had become a popular hiking destination. Park maintenance workers broke up the concrete slab, exhumed and

mounted the Liberty V-12 engine on a new, stone rubble and concrete platform, and placed the bronze memorial plaque on the low platform's east-facing side. Clearing the rocks around the engine, they discovered a heavy metal tube. Having no idea what the metal tube represented, they took it back to park headquarters and showed it to Park Supervisor Ronald McCullough, who recognized it as something the U.S. Army would use to hold documents. When McCullough, along with Park Ranger Eugene R. Junette, took off the tube's heavy brass top, he found that it had been sealed carefully with wax to keep out air and moisture. Inside they found three well-preserved copies of the *San Diego Union*, along with a 1923 Coronado Masonic Lodge calendar, and a paper listing the names of several officers: Major H. H. Arnold, Major H. D. Munnikhuysen, Captain R. G. Ervin, Captain William M. Randolph, and First Lieutenants Hine, Richter, Seifert, and Smith. McCullough and Junette were able to locate and contact Seifert, the only survivor on the list, who was a retired colonel living in San Diego. Invited to the park, he told the story of the metal tube's significance. Colonel Seifert summed up the tube's contents by saying, "We just wanted [to leave] a permanent record of the officers who had participated in the search, so we put the tube at the foot of the monument as a sentimental memorial to the two men."<sup>53</sup>

Tragically, the tube, along with its historic contents, may be lost forever. Reportedly stored in the basement of the park headquarters building (the historic Ralph Dyar House), it was consumed by the October 26-29, 2003 Cedar Firestorm along with hundreds of other archaeological and historic artifacts. Spreading at a rate of 6,000 acres per hour in its first 36 hours, the fire incinerated Cuyamaca State Park. Burning thousands of acres of trees, brush, and chaparral, and killing untold numbers of wildlife, the fire destroyed a number of historic buildings and structures.<sup>54</sup> Concern for the loss of these irreplaceable resources led the author, in his capacity as a California State Park Historian, to investigate the Airplane Crash Monument's condition. On December 6, 2003, one day before the crash's eighty-first anniversary, the author, after gaining permission from the Park Supervisor, hiked up through the ash-covered trail to the monument. Not knowing what to expect, he half-expected to find a pile of melted metal and shattered rocks. Intense heat could have ignited the engine's aluminum crankcase and manifolds, and shattered its stone retaining walls and cement mortar. Finally, upon descending down the final leg of the trail, he was surprised by what he saw. While the stand of manzanita and pine trees surrounding the site was reduced to blackened sticks, the monument, including the upright engine and the stone retaining walls, was relatively unscathed. Untouched by the fire was a small plant growing under the propeller hub, as well as a metal U.S. flag and plastic flowers that the author had placed next to the memorial plaque one year earlier.<sup>55</sup>

Symbolically, the survival of the flag and flowers, along with the battered and rusting V-12 Liberty engine and discolored bronze plaque, is a fitting tribute. Neither monumental nor imposing, the Airplane Crash Memorial on Japacha Ridge is a simple expression of three generations' honor and respect. First in 1923, then again in 1934 and 1968, they built and improved the monument so that "the present and coming generation" would honor the memory of the two pioneer military aviators who died on this spot while flying outdated machines through treacherous skies over forbidding terrain.

NOTES

1. Recognized as the "Birthplace of Naval Aviation," Rockwell Field was the first permanent military aeronautical installation on North Island. Established in January 1913, the United States Army Signal Corps named it after the late Lieutenant Lewis C. Rockwell, who had recently died after a training flight accident. See Elretta Sudsbury, *Jackrabbits to Jets: The History of North Island, San Diego, California* (San Diego: North Island Historical Committee, 1967), 27. In July 15, 1915 students trained at North Island became part of the Army's First Aero Squadron stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. On March 13, 1916 the squadron was attached to General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing's command at Columbus, New Mexico, where it flew reconnaissance and courier missions with the American punitive expedition into northern Mexico seeking Mexican rebel leader Francisco "Pancho" Villa. Besides being the first use of fixed-wing aircraft in a military engagement, it tested the Army's fledgling pilots who had to operate their primitive aircraft under harsh conditions, often flying over inhospitable desert and mountain regions at altitudes beyond their planes' recommended ceiling. Joe Christy, LeRoy Cook and Alexander T. Wells, *American Aviation: An Illustrated History* (Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Aero, 1994), 19-20.
2. "Chief of Cavalry to Leave for Tucson," *San Diego Union*, December 6, 1922, 6; Frank Kent Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber: Pioneer Army Aviator," in *American Aviation Historical Society Journal* 34, no. 4 (1990), 275; Major Henry H. Arnold, *The History of Rockwell Field* ([San Diego, s.n.], 1923), 105, on file at the San Diego Aerospace Museum, Research Library and Archives, and at the San Diego Public Library, California Room. The Auxiliary Naval Landing Field, Imperial Beach occupies the historic site of Camp Hearn.
3. A well-respected, energetic and resourceful field commander, Colonel "Tildy" Marshall was intimately familiar with the American West. His first commission after his 1890 West Point graduation was as a Second Lieutenant, Eighth Cavalry, where he led a detachment of enlisted Sioux scouts during the 1890 Pine Ridge campaign in South Dakota. From 1892 to 1895 Lieutenant Marshall took over command of "Casey's Scouts," a troop composed of Cheyenne Indians. Transferred to duty in the Philippines in 1900, his regiment was sent to mainland China as part of the multi-national relief expedition to lift the siege of foreign nationals at Tientsin. First Lieutenant Marshall distinguished himself leading a combined charge of the U.S. Sixth Cavalry and British Bengal Lancers, routing a large number of Chinese nationals and taking over 300 prisoners. After the campaign, he served as Adjutant General of the U.S. forces in China, with the rank of brevet captain. Officially promoted to Captain in 1901, he continued to serve in the Philippines during the army's attempt to "pacify" intractable native Filipinos opposed to American administration. Returning to the United States in 1904, he was an instructor of Tactics at West Point until 1908. He later served as Inspector/Instructor of Cavalry with the New England National Guard from 1911 to 1914. Once again sent to the Philippines, he was there until the United States entered World War I in April 1917. In command of the One Hundred Sixty-Fifth Field Artillery brigade, American Expeditionary Forces, in June 1918 the newly promoted Brigadier General accompanied his troops to war-torn France. In October-November 1918, Gen. Marshall commanded the Second Brigade, First Division during the Meuse-Argonne operations. As a result of his leadership and bravery, Marshall was awarded the Croix de Guerre with palm, the highest honor the French government could bestow to a foreign officer. Likewise, the U.S. government awarded Marshall the Distinguished Service Medal for "exceptionally meritorious and distinguished service . . . [subsequently contributing] in large measure to the success of his division." After the November 11 signing of the armistice, he served with the American Army of Occupation in Germany before returning to the United States in 1919. Reduced in rank to Colonel in the peacetime army, he was stationed at various posts along the U.S.-Mexico border until appointed Assistant Chief of Cavalry in 1920. Col. Marshall had flown from Crissy Field, San Francisco, to Monterey before arriving at Rockwell Field. "Colonel Francis Cutler Marshall," *Fifty-fourth Annual Report of the Association of Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, June 11, 1923* (Saginaw, MI: Seeman & Peters, 1923), 110-114; "Marshall, Francis Cutler," *Who's Who in America, 1922-1923* (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who in America, 1923), 12:1836; "Planes Search over Mexican Hills for Lost Army Officers," *San Diego Union*, December 12, 1922, 1; "Staff Officer Lost in Flight from San Diego," *San Diego Union*, December 8, 1922, 1.
4. One of the great men in American military aviation history, Major Henry H. "Hap" Arnold (1886-1950) had earned his flight wings from the Wright Brothers in Dayton, Ohio. A daring and innovative pilot, he had narrowly survived some serious crashes and near misses during his early career. In October 1912 he won the first Mackay Trophy for successfully using aerial reconnaissance to locate a

cavalry troop. Ten years later, Major Arnold would be hard pressed to repeat that scenario searching for the lost aviators. He led a distinguished career in the Air Service, rising to the rank of Commander of the Army Air Forces in World War II. He went on to become the only air commander ever to attain the five-star rank of General of the Armies. General Arnold was personally responsible for building up the Army Air Corps into the U.S. Air Force, a completely separate branch of the United States' armed forces. Colonel Phillip S. Meilinger, USAF, "Henry H. Arnold," in *American Airpower Biography: A Survey of the Field; Air and Space Power Chronicles* <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/arnold.html> (accessed March 28, 2006); "Staff Officer Lost in Flight from San Diego," 1; Howard E. Morin, "Marks to Guide Aviators Needed in Southwest, and Needed Right Away, Government Neglectful," *San Diego Union*, December 13, 1922, 1.

5. Based on experience, if Webber and Marshall were forced to land in the rugged area due to bad weather, engine trouble, or a combination of both, their chance of survival and rescue was less than favorable. Major Arnold was also concerned over reports that worsening weather conditions over the mountains would force Webber to fly dangerously lower than his DeHaviland DH4B's 19,600-foot service ceiling. A low ceiling and ground fog might also prevent him from recognizing familiar landmarks, forcing him off course and well below the Laguna and Cuyamaca mountain ranges' respective 5,960 to 6,512 foot elevations. "De Haviland DH-4: Air Service Workhorse," USAF Museum, [http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/early\\_years/ey8a.htm](http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/early_years/ey8a.htm) (accessed March 28, 2006); Arnold, *The History of Rockwell Field*, 96, "Shipping Warned of Coming Storm," *San Diego Union*, December 6, 1922, 6; "Staff Officer Lost in Flight from San Diego," 1.

6. From December 1919 to January 1922, Lt. Webber was stationed at Clark Field, the Philippines, where he flew many observation missions as well as regular mail and passenger runs between Manila, Corregidor and Cavite Bay. Upon being reassigned to North Island, he became close friends with fellow airmen Lieutenants Virgil Hine, Frank Siefert, and John Paul Richter. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 95, 100; Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 264-68, 271-73; Frank Kent Rodgers, interview by author, June 10, 2005.

7. United States Army Air Forces (USAF), Historical Office, *The Official Pictorial History of the Army Air Forces* (New York: Army Air Forces Aid Society, 1947), 54.

8. *Ibid.*, 54; Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 276; Rodgers, interview. Regarded as one of America's greatest technological contributions to World War I, the 820-pound cast aluminum and iron Liberty V-12 engine had a higher horse-power-to-weight ratio than any aircraft engine in use at the time. During and after the war, American automobile companies like Packard, Lincoln, Ford, Marmon, Cadillac and Buick built over 20,478 Liberty 12s. The majority were installed in the DH4s. Following the war, the U.S. Army Air Service continued to use them in numerous types of airplanes. During Prohibition, smugglers installed them in speed boats used for "rum running," while others found their way into British and Russian tanks during World War II. See also Christy, et. al., *American Aviation*, 26-28; John H. Lienhard, "Engines of Our Ingenuity No. 1309: The DeHavilland DH-4," <http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi1309.htm> (accessed March 28, 2006).

9. USAF, *The Official Pictorial History of the Army Air Force*, 54; Sudsbury, *Jackrabbits to Jets*, 97; Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 273-274. Army and civilian pilots also piloted DH4Bs flying the U.S. Mail from 1919-1926. See also "DeHaviland DH-4," <http://www.aviation-central.com/1914-1918/aca20.htm> (accessed March 28, 2006); Christy, et. al., *American Aviation*, 74.

10. *Ibid.*, 54; USAF, *Official Pictorial History*, 54.

11. "Shipping Warned of Coming Storm," *San Diego Union*, December 6, 1922, 6.

12. Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 275; Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 87-93; "San Diego Rescue Plane Finds Clue to Missing Army Officers," *San Diego Union*, December 9, 1922, 1. In January 1920, Lieutenants Frank Waterhouse and Cecil Connelly had been allegedly robbed and murdered by local fisherman at Santa Rosalia, Baja California. Mexican authorities at La Paz subsequently captured, tried and executed the malefactors. Morin, "Marks to Guide Aviators Needed in Southwest," 1.

13. Ford A. Carpenter, "Aeronautic Accidents of Two Years Compared," *Scientific Monthly* 14 (April 1922), 361-362.

14. Samuel Taylor Moore, quoted in "Sudden Death in the Army Air Service," *Literary Digest*, May 12, 1923, 67. Between 1918 and 1922, forty-five planes flying to and from San Diego had crashed or made forced landings. Of these, fifteen aviators were killed. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 2, 106.

15. When a pair of DH4Bs soon approached Rockwell Field from the east, Major Arnold and others wondered if one of them was Webber's plane. Did worsening weather conditions over the mountains force him to return? Did he pick up an escort on the way? Unfortunately, upon landing, neither of the planes was Webber's. Instead, they were part of an expected squadron commanded by Major Ralph Royce on a flight from Brooks Field, Texas. Royce told Arnold that two planes from his squadron had crashed prior to reaching El Centro, where another had landed for fuel. Royce and his wingman were able to fly directly to Rockwell Field, but they reported extremely strong winds and a heavy cloud cover over the mountains. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 106; Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 275; "Staff Officer Lost in Flight from San Diego," 1; "Planes Continue San Diego Flight," *San Diego Union*, December 6, 1922, 6; "San Diego Rescue Plane Finds Clue," 1.
16. "Forestry Patrol Planes to Join Aviator Search," *San Diego Union*, December 15, 1922, 1.
17. Rodgers, interview; "San Diego Rescue Plane Finds Clue," 1; "Thorough Search Instituted for Missing Aviators," *San Diego Union*, December 10, 1922, 1.
18. "Staff Officer Lost in Flight from San Diego," 1; "Fear Felt for Safety of Two Army Officers Missing on Aero Trip," *Washington Post*, December 8, 1922, 1; "No Word of Lost Fliers," *Washington Post*, December 9, 1922, 3.
19. "Planes Combing Skies Seeking Missing Fliers," *Washington Post*, December 10, 1922, 6; "Safe Across Mountains When Seen," *San Diego Union*, December 9, 1922, 1.
20. "Planes Combing Skies Seeking Missing Fliers," 6; "Forestry Patrol Planes to Join Aviator Search," 1.
21. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 105. At the time of the search, Rockwell Field's command consisted of 10 officers, 2 warrant officers, 42 enlisted men, and 190 civilian employees.
22. *Ibid.*, 107, "Thorough Search Instituted," 1; Rodgers, "Charles Leland Webber," 275; "Planes Search over Mexican Hills," 1; "Lost Army Plane Traced to Desert Mountains," *San Diego Union*, December 11, 1922, 1. Two of the five airplanes from San Antonio had made forced landings while en route to El Paso, but none of the occupants were injured.
23. "Lost Army Plane Traced to Desert Mountains," 1; "Trail of Lost Aviators Found in Southwest," *New York Times*, December 14, 1922, 8. Exasperating the search was an increased number of false leads after Fort Bliss' commandant Brigadier General Howze announced a reward of \$100 paid to any civilian who found the lost plane or one or both of its passengers. "Aeros Hunt in Mexico Vainly for Lost Fliers," *Washington Post*, December 12, 1922, 3.
24. "Planes Search over Mexican Hills," 1.
25. "Search for Lost Fliers Shifts to Laguna Mountains," *San Diego Union*, December 16, 1922, 1. This compassionate act of international cooperation is all the more significant considering that only six years previous, the current Army Chief of Staff had led a punitive expedition into northern Mexico against General Villa.
26. *Ibid.*; "Aeros Hunt in Mexico Vainly for Lost Fliers," 3. Captain Ervin would fly as far as 150 miles over northern Sonora before ordered to give up the search. "Planes Ordered to Return to Their Stations," *San Diego Union*, December 19, 1922, 6.
27. "Yaqui Indians Join in Search for Two Missing Army Aviators," *San Diego Union*, December 14, 1922, 1; "Mountain Clue to Lost Fliers Fails to Solve Tragic Mystery," *San Diego Union*, December 17, 1922, 16; "Theodore C. Macauley - 1965," *The Early Birds of Aviation Roster 1996*, <http://www.earlyaviators.com/emacauley.htm> (accessed 2005). Another pioneer military aeronaut associated with San Diego early aviation history, Macauley had been chief instructor and manager of the Curtiss flight school at North Island from 1912 to 1915. In May 1916 he broke a number of American and world seaplane speed records in the Newport News-Baltimore area. Between January 21-30, 1919, he made the fourth and the Army's second trans-continental flight, from Jacksonville to San Diego, and the first cross-country round trip flight. Macauley, who was thoroughly familiar with flight conditions in Lower California and northern Sonora, having been involved in the previous search for downed pilots Waterhouse and Connolly, had offered his services to Major Arnold in the search for Webber and Marshall. "Search for Lost Fliers Shifts to Laguna Mountains," 1.
28. Composed of African-American troopers, the Tenth Cavalry had formed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in 1866. By the end of July 1867 the Regiment consisted of eight troops of enlisted men led by white officers, who would distinguish themselves in the late nineteenth-century Indian and the Spanish-American wars. Tenth Cavalry troopers from Fort Huachuca accompanied General Pershing,

who had led a detachment at the Battle of Kettle and San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War, on the 1916 Punitive Expedition into Mexico. Lieutenant John Bigelow, Jr., "The Tenth Regiment of Cavalry," *The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line with Portraits of Generals-In-Chief*, eds. General Theophilus Francis Rodenbough and Major William L. Haskin (1896), <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/books/R&H/R&H-10CV.htm> (accessed March 28, 2006); Carl Ploense III, "Ready and Forward Again: A Unit History of the 10th Cavalry Regiment," The Spanish-American War Centennial Website, <http://www.spanamwar.com/10thcavhist.htm> (accessed March 28, 2006).

29. "Planes Search over Mexican Hills," 1; Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 107; John H. Nankivell, ed., *The History of the Twenty-Fifth Regiment, United States Infantry, 1869-1926* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Old Army Press, 1972), 152. Organized at New Orleans, Louisiana and West Texas 1869-1870, the Twenty-Fifth Infantry Regiment was another all-African American segregated Army unit. Also known as "Buffalo Soldiers," they distinguished themselves on the Western frontier, the Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection, and World War II. "Twenty-Fifth United States Infantry," in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/qlt2.html> (accessed March 28, 2006).

30. "Planes Ordered to Return to Their Stations," 6; "Search for Lost Fliers Shifts to Laguna Mountains," 1. The searchers had followed every possible clue, even those given by mediums, in the slim hope that the mystery surrounding the fate of the two missing army officers would be solved. "Resume Search for Lost Fliers," *San Diego Union*, December 30, 1922, 6.

31. Located between Descanso and Cuyamaca Lake, west of the Laguna Mountains, it is now part of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.

32. "Search for Lost Fliers Shifts to Laguna Mountains," 1; "Mountain Clue to Lost Fliers Fails to Solve Tragic Mystery," 16.

33. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 107; Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 275-276; "Cavalry Troop Will Start Today on Mounted Search of S. D. Mountains," *San Diego Union*, December 21, 1922, 1; "Military Officers to Continue Search," *San Diego Union*, December 20, 1922, 6; "Still No Trace of Army Fliers," *San Diego Union*, December 23, 1922, 2.

34. Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 276.

35. "Lone Wingman of lost Airman Keeps up Search," *San Diego Union*, December 26, 1922, 6; "Relatives, Brother Officers of Airmen Missing Three Weeks Subscribe to Fund," *San Diego Union*, December 29, 1922, 6.

36. "Resume Search for Lost Fliers," 6.

37. "Relatives, Brother Officers of Airmen Missing Three Weeks Subscribe to Fund," 6; Rodgers, interview. The tradition of "leave no one behind" may have started during the French and Indian Wars with Colonial Rangers, who, after a fight, were not willing to leave their wounded or dead comrades to be mutilated by the enemy.

38. Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 276.

39. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 108; Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 276.

40. *Ibid.*

41. "Aviators' Bodies Are Not Found," *San Diego Union*, December 24, 1922, 1; "Col. F. C. Marshall, Missing, Dropped from Army as Dead," *New York Times*, February 13, 1923, 1.

42. Arnold, *History of Rockwell Field*, 109; "Wrecked Plane and Bodies of Two Officers, Long Sought, Found in Cuyamacas," *San Diego Union*, May 13, 1923, 1; "Bodies of Lost Officers Returned to Rockwell Field," *San Diego Union*, May 14, 1923, 1; National Air and Space Museum, Photographs Taken at Airplane Crash Site, Japacha Ridge, Cuyamaca Mountains, San Diego County, May 13, 1923.

43. "Bodies of Lost Officers Returned to Rockwell Field," 1. In a telephone interview with the author on June 10, 2005, Lieutenant Webber's biographer, Frank Kent Rodgers, confirmed that some "collecting" had occurred at the site prior to Major Arnold's arrival.

44. "Bodies of Lost Officers Returned to Rockwell Field," 1.

45. *Ibid.*; Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 276-77. The author had inspected the radiator to Webber's plane that was stored in the basement of the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park's headquarters' building. A protruding and ragged semi-circular hole along the steel and copper radiator's lower

front base suggests that the force of impact drove the plane's front engine crankcase through it. The historic building containing the radiator and other historic artifacts was itself destroyed by fire during the October 2003 firestorms that devastated the park. At the time that this article was written, the disposition of the radiator is unknown, having been buried under two stories of debris.

46. "Bodies of Lost Officers Returned to Rockwell Field," 1.

47. *Ibid.*; "Military Honors Will Be Accorded Dead Officers," *San Diego Union*, May 15, 1923, 6.

48. Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 280, 281, 137n.

49. "Military Honors Will Be Accorded Dead Officers," 6; *Fifty-fourth Annual Report*, 114. Colonel Marshall's remains are buried at Section 8, site 41.

50. "Military Honors Will Be Accorded Dead Officers," 6; Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 277-78; California State Museum, *CCC Photograph Collection*, SP14-052 and SP14-53, February 1934.

51. Donald Hobart, *Civilian Conservation Corps Camps and Projects in the California State Park System: Selected Worksheets*. National Park Service, Project No. SP-14, Green Valley Falls Camp, Cuyamaca Rancho State Park (U.S. Forest Service: California Region), on file at the Southern Service Center, California State Parks, San Diego; California State Parks, "About the CCC," [http://www.ssmrc.parks.ca.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=72](http://www.ssmrc.parks.ca.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=72) (accessed 2005).

52. Rodgers, "Lieutenant Charles Leland Webber," 278; Bill Wright, "Tales and Details," *San Diego Union*, March 17, 1934, II-1; Harriett Begemann, *Cuyamaca Rancho State Park History* [1957], Southern Service Center, California State Parks, San Diego; *CCC Photograph Collection*, SP14-035, SP14-037, SP14-038, SP14-039, SP14-042, and SP14-044, all February 1934.

53. Homer Clance, "Mementos in Tube Recall Early Fliers of San Diego," *San Diego Union*, March 19, 1968, B1; Richard A. Bloomquist, *A History of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, Addenda*, 1968, unpublished report, January 8, 1969, 3.

54. Dave Downey, "Environment Caught in Firestorm," *New York Times*, November 8, 2003; Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Interpretive Association, <http://www.cuyamaca.us/> (accessed March 28, 2006); *Rancho Cuyamaca Earth Day: Summary of Events*, <http://www.sbc pioneers.org/home/index.html> (accessed April/May 2004).

55. Another "survivor" of the firestorm is a small hard plastic or ceramic "Smiling Buddha" near the west retaining wall bench. His back was fused to an adjoining manzanita stalk. After finding the metal flag and plastic flowers on the slope below the monument, the author has since replaced them with a cloth flag.