

Way We Were

A Silver Lining

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Just after midnight on November 17, 1941, Park City witnessed the fatal crash of B-18 Army bomber into Iron Mountain. Five men of a crew of seven survived.

Twenty-seven year old, Second Lieutenant C. A. Smith was the last man to bail from the doomed aircraft as it flew uncontrollably west of Park City that stormy night. Miraculously, Smith was able to somehow get to the bomber's tail door and fall out after being knocked into the bomb bay of the ship as it lurched violently to the left.

Smith's parachute opened with such force that it tore the shoe from his left foot and caused blood to spurt from his nostrils. At that time, he was in the clouds over Park City. As Lt. Smith fell from the sky above the lower part of town, he heard the plane's motors and saw it pass by to his left. It was close enough for Smith to see flames from the exhaust pipe and the red passing light on the wing. Shortly before hitting the ground, he heard the explosion and saw huge flames shooting up from the warbird's burning wreckage on Iron Mountain.

Lt. Smith became ill and wrapped himself up in his chute as protection from the sleet-covered ground after landing in a freshly manured farm field northeast of town. As Smith he recovered, he moved toward the burning glow of the wreckage, passing through a swamp. After running into a barbed wire fence, he came out on a railroad track and saw the neon lights of what he thought was a service station to his left. Smith was brought to the Miner's Hospital a few minutes before 2 a.m. after making his way to the gas station.

As they say, "Every cloud has a silver lining." For Smith at least, the clouds enveloping Park City that Sunday evening were no different. Lt. Smith was transported to the infirmary at Fort Douglas the next day and while recovering, he met a charming, young hospital volunteer from Preston, Idaho named Edna June Stoddard. Ms. Stoddard was living in Salt Lake City and working as a telephone operator while living in Salt Lake City.

In fairy tale fashion, Lt. Smith married Ms. Stoddard a year later in a little white church at the Pocatello Army Air Base while Smith's 7th Bombardment Group was on a stopover bound for the war in the South Pacific.

Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) C. A. Smith returned to Park City more than a decade later with members of his family but said nothing to them of that horrific night in 1941. While working in the family's central Idaho logging business, C. A. would often deliver loads of timber to the Park City mines. One can only wonder what he was thinking as he drove past Iron Mountain.

Come back next week to learn the story of another of the crash's survivors.



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Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Thomas F. Hansen Collection

Caption: C.A. Smith, ill and injured after escaping a deadly plane crash on Iron Mountain, was taken to the Miner's Hospital, pictured, around 2am on November 17, 1941.