

CRASH

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Seventy-five years ago the crew departed Sioux City, Iowa, and was returning to its home base in Walla Walla, Washington. After stops in Casper, Wyoming, and Boise, Idaho, the flight was on the last leg to Walla Walla with another B-24 Liberator following.

Over La Grande, the pilot of the ill-fated B-24 crew mistook the lights of the town or those of Pendleton. This caused the pilot to get off course, reduce his altitude and crash into the Blue Mountains, according to David L. McCurry, author of "Aircraft Wrecks of the Pacific Northwest" and among those who attended Tuesday's ceremony.

McCurry said the second B-24 was bound for Walla Walla as part of a formation flight. It was following the plane that crashed because its navigation equipment was not working. It almost went down as well, but its pilot, First Lt. Horace W. Lehman, managed to pull up just in time but not before clipping some trees that damaged a wingtip. The plane later landed safely in Walla Walla, where its crew reported the crash in Union County.

The B-24 crashed Aug. 25 at about 11:30 p.m. A search flight found the wreckage Aug. 26 at 10 a.m.. Ground parties did not reach the site until 4 p.m. that day, said Armen Woosley of La Grande, who helped organize the ceremony.

Rich Cason of Elgin attended Tuesday's ceremony. He said he was 9 when he went to the crash that morning seven-and-a-half decades ago with his father, who directed traffic at the site as a state road department employee.

"There was junk everywhere and MPs (military



Staff photo by Ronald Bond

Shown is a piece of a B-24 Liberator that crashed on Aug. 25, 1945, in the mountains about 17 miles outside of Elgin. The aircraft was carrying 15 servicemen returning home following World War II. All 15 men died. La Grande residents Armen Woosley and Lyle Schwarz organized the service to remember the lives of the men who perished in the crash.

police) were all around," said Cason, now a retired educator.

Cason said he still remembers seeing a leg from one of the victims being buried at the site.

Today, the meadow the B-24 crashed in appears barren, but look closely and small poignant remnants are around. Pieces of pottery from England remain. Woosley said he believes the pottery may have been gifts the servicemen were taking back to their families. It is a symbol of the men's humanity, the memories of which Woosley, McCurry and many others at the

ceremony want to revive.

"These men could easily have been heroes if they had made it home. Instead they are forgotten. I want to help keep their names alive. That is my purpose," McCurry said.

The author said the timing and the youth of the victims multiplies the magnitude of the tragedy.

"They had just survived the war and then this happened," McCurry said. "They had their whole lives to live."

The crash, just eight days before WWII ended, was one of 52,651 state-side aircraft crashes

during the course of WWII, which in all claimed 14,903 lives, according to Lyle Schwarz of La Grande, who helped organize the Tuesday ceremony.

McCurry said the accidents probably reflected the limited navigation equipment planes such as the B-24 Liberators had. All pilots essentially had for guidance were altitude indicators and magnetic and radio compasses.

B-24 Liberators also were difficult to fly because their flight controls lacked good hydraulics and required considerable strength to operate,

SMOKE

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Rattlesnake Fire also is burning just north of the Oregon-Washington border. The Indian Creek Fire near Juntura has burned close to 50,000 acres, according to inciweb.nwcg.gov, and the Frog Fire just east of Bend has burned about 4,000. The rest have so far burned less than 1,500 acres each.

Multiple agencies are coordinating on fire suppression of the Meacham Complex, including the United States Forest Service, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, local volunteer fire departments and aerial resources.

"Many of the smaller fires within the southern branch of the Meacham Complex are contained and in patrol status or have been declared out," according to the Wednesday update on the complex from the Northern Rockies Incident Management Team. "At present, the more active fires in the Meacham Complex are the Horse Fire, Hager Ridge Fire, 896 (Horseshoe Ridge) Fire, and the Rattlesnake Fire."

Crews on the Hager Ridge, Horse and 896 fires continued Wednesday to work on strengthening containment lines and mop-up, moving inward from the fire perimeters to cool hotspots, the report stated. In some areas, containment lines are secure enough for crews to begin rehabilitating the suppression lines.

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Protect yourself from coronavirus fraud

Restrictions implemented to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus COVID-19 have saved untold numbers of lives. The world has adjusted to such restrictions, and many parts of the world have relaxed measures as case numbers have declined.

As communities begin returning to some semblance of normalcy, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned people against letting their guard down. While many of those warnings pertain to the importance of continuing to practice social distancing as economies reopen, advisories also include notices about fraud schemes related to COVID-19.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General has advised the general public about scams involving Medicare fraud. Such schemes are targeting Medicare beneficiaries in an assortment of ways, including through text messages, social media, telemarketing calls, and even door-to-door visits. When perpetrating such frauds, scammers seek beneficiaries' personal information, which they then use to fraudulently bill federal health care

programs, potentially leaving their victims on the hook for costly unapproved tests related to COVID-19.

The CDC notes the importance of being aware of such schemes. Awareness can help consumers avoid being victimized by scammers, and the following are some additional measures people can take to protect themselves from COVID-19-related fraud.

- Do not share personal account information. Scammers need their victims' personal information to perpetrate their fraudulent schemes. The CDC cautions beneficiaries to be suspicious of unsolicited requests for their Medicare or Medicaid numbers.
- Do not take callers or visitors at face value. Unsolicited callers or visitors requesting Medicare or Medicaid information should be met with extreme caution. Be suspicious of any unexpected calls or visitors offering COVID-19 tests or supplies. Compromised personal information may be used in other fraud schemes.

- Never click on links in emails or text messages. Do not respond to, or open hyperlinks in, text messages or emails about COVID-19 from unknown individuals.

- Ignore offers or advertisements for COVID-19 testing or treatments on social media sites. Offers or ads for testing are one of the ways scammers are accessing personal information. Only a physician or other trusted healthcare provider should assess your condition and approve any requests for COVID-19 testing.

The COVID-19 outbreak has made it easy for criminals to exploit consumers concerned about their health. Consumers who suspect COVID-19 fraud can contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud Hotline at (866) 720-5721 or visit Justice.gov/DisasterComplaintForm to file a complaint. TF208193

SOCIAL MEDIA TEXT: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General has advised the general public about scams involving Medicare fraud.

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