

# Plane: NTSB's preliminary report expected in a week or two

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Divers with the Sheriff's Office retrieved McKibbin's body from the cockpit that day but couldn't remove Mustain from the passenger seat until Monday.

## Raised from the river

Raising the plane was a bit more complicated.

"There's chunks the size of quarters down there," Sgt. Matt Phillips, of the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office, said before the operation.

Using a diver from Cascade Dive Co., a crane team from Bergerson Construction hoisted the plane parts from the river bed and onto a barge. Meanwhile, the Sheriff's Office marine patrol, working with U.S. Coast Guard personnel, created a 500-yard security zone around the operation.

Afterward, the plane sat on a trailer outside the Holiday Inn Express on Marine Drive. It is scheduled to be trucked on Wednesday to an AvTech Services airplane hangar in Auburn, Washington.

The National Transportation Safety Board, which has launched an investigation of the crash, will document the plane — "the systems, the flight control, making sure that they have the entire aircraft, and seeing if there's any signs of any sort of pre-crash failure



Crews inspect plane debris onboard a barge on Tuesday.

Photos by Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

that could have played a role in the accident," Peter Knudson, a spokesman, said.

In addition, the agency will investigate McKibbin's background — flight experience, licensing and ratings, medical history — and the circumstances of the flight, includ-

ing his communications with air traffic controllers.

The Federal Aviation Administration, a party to the investigation, has said that no flight plan was filed.

"We start with, really, every possibility," Knudson said. "We rule things out as we find they

played no role, and then we sort of narrow down the focus."

In one to two weeks, the National Transportation Safety Board will produce a preliminary report laying out the facts of the incident. The entire investigation to determine the probable cause could take a year.

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**Sgt. Matt Phillips**  
Clatsop County Sheriff's Office

to contacting the family, to information gathering — is by necessity a mechanical and mission-oriented one, but rituals like that can add meaning to the aftermath, comforting both the bereaved and the law enforcement officers involved.

"It reminds you of the purpose of your work," Phillips said.

A 14-year veteran with the Sheriff's Office, Phillips was present when McKibbin and Mustain were brought to the surface. In such moments, pure procedure takes over — the need to get the job done.

But even a seasoned officer, a regular witness to human suffering, can only compartmentalize the experience for so long.

"I tell you ... it causes you to think about what's important in life to you," he said. "There's always a point of reflection, once you get everything dealt with and put away."

## The aftermath

Among the items recovered from the river bed was Mustain's purse, which Sheriff's Office Deputy Justin Dimmick returned to her family.

The whole process of cleaning up after a tragedy — from the search for human remains,



Crews position the barge as they prepare to remove plane debris from the Columbia River on Tuesday.



A diver goes into the river near a buoy marking the location of the plane during a recovery mission on Tuesday.



Crews remove plane debris from the Columbia River on Tuesday. See more photos online at [www.dailyastorian.com](http://www.dailyastorian.com)

# Vigil: McKibbin's 'big personality was like a 1,000-watt spotlight'

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at Pearson Field to honor McKibbin and show love and support for his widow, their daughters and the whole extended family. A gentle rain started to fall toward the end of the 45-minute vigil, but that didn't stop folks from lighting candles and holding them aloft.

McKibbin, 69, and passenger Irene Mustain, 64, died last week while on a mission to scatter the ashes of Mustain's late husband, Terry Mustain, near the mouth of the Columbia River.

Terry Mustain was a Vietnam veteran and Air Force pilot who died in 2013. Wednesday would have been his 69th birthday; he and Irene had been married for 44 years.

McKibbin and Irene Mustain were flying in McKibbin's North American AT-6A when it went down on the river near Astoria.

The AT-6A was built in 1941 and was designed to train military pilots during World War II. It had been fully restored by McKibbin and his friend and fellow pilot George Welsh, and was frequently on display at Pearson. McKibbin was an experienced private pilot. The weather for flying on Wednesday was good, and the reason for the crash is still being investigated.

## 'Kiddo'

McKibbin was a popular person with a long résumé in public service in southwest Washington. He taught contemporary world problems at Columbia River High School and was active in Democratic politics before winning a 49th Legislative District seat in 1974. After serving two terms in the House, he was elected county commissioner in 1978, receiving nearly 71 percent of the vote. He left elected office in 1990 to work in real estate and development, and also served in numerous volunteer and leadership capacities for local civic organizations, including the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Clark County, Identity Clark County

and Evergreen Habitat for Humanity.

"He had an unfailingly, aggressively, relentlessly positive attitude about everything," state Sen. Ann Rivers, R-La Center, told the crowd Saturday. And when McKibbin would say, "Kiddo, it's time for a meeting," or "Kiddo, we'll get it done," Rivers knew he meant business.

Kelly Love, a fellow former CEO of the Chamber of Commerce, said McKibbin called her "kiddo," too. They didn't always agree, she said, but McKibbin's "big personality was like a 1,000-watt spotlight." For such a vital life force to disappear in the Columbia River really gives Love pause, she said.

"John was one of those special, rare people who could reach across divides and disagreements to bring people together," said state Sen. Annette Cleveland, D-Vancouver, who knew McKibbin for decades, worked with him and campaigned for him. "As a trusted and highly respected leader, his desire to serve our community and state was limitless."

John Wells, a good friend, laughed that he "spent a lot of time sitting behind John in airplanes." Their friendship grew after the McKibbins hosted a welcome-home party for Wells when he was returning from military service in the early 1970s. They didn't know him, Wells said, but he was a friend of a friend. That was enough for them.

"He was an incredible individual," Wells said. "We were supposed to meet again next Wednesday."

Neighborhood activist Bridget Schwarz, longtime organizer of the Fairgrounds Neighborhood Association, said she admired the way McKibbin "always included people. He was committed to the grass roots, and I guess that's what I was. I'm like, 'I mattered to this guy?'"

Ron Arp, a local businessman, said McKibbin was keenly interested in replacing the Interstate 5 Bridge and growing aviation opportunities and education at nearby Pearson Field. "He wanted people to be able to land here and live here," Arp said.

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**Sen. Annette Cleveland**  
D-Vancouver, Wash.

In the time to come, Arp added, if McKibbin's friends find themselves feeling "that nudge to get involved and make the community better — that's probably

John playing wing man."

## New world

McKibbin was married to Nancy McKibbin for more

than 40 years.

"I am so uplifted today" by the crowd and its kind words about her late husband, Nancy said. Some of the amazing

things they said about him were things she hadn't known, she said.

What she does know: "He wasn't ready to go," she said. They had many plans for the future, she said.

The couple had two daughters and two grandchildren — including Charlotte, who had her first birthday on Saturday. Nancy McKibbin introduced her to the crowd and said: "This is my new world."

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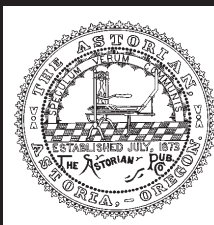
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