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65 years after plane's crash, its crew will be remembered

A B-17E Flying Fortress went down near the Pali Lookout during WWII

By Laurie Au
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On Easter Sunday -- four months after the Pearl Harbor bombing -- 19 crew members onboard two planes were on routine combat patrol without any city lights to guide them during a heavy rainstorm.

"All these guys could do was, based on their senses, hopefully plot their track," said Donald Hinton, a historian with the Hawaii Aviation Preservation Society. "In the rain, clouds and darkness, they both found the mountains."

The crew members died after their planes crashed -- one at Makapuu Point and the other on Mount Keahiakahoe near the Pali Lookout.

At 10 a.m. tomorrow, the 65th anniversary of the deaths, the Hawaii Aviation Preservation Society will hold a memorial ceremony for the 19 crew members whose plane crashed near the Pali Lookout. An Air Force chaplain and some Air Force members will attend the ceremony.

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COURTESY MUSEUM OF FLIGHT IN WASHINGTON
This is the B-17E Flying Fortress that crashed on the Pali on Oahu, though the picture was taken off California. Aviation enthusiasts may note the remote-controlled Bendix turret on the belly, with a small dome behind it for the periscope the gunner used to train the guns. Few B-17s had this gun turret.
[CLICK FOR LARGE](#)

Three society members on Sunday installed a plaque at the Pali Lookout for the crew members onboard the B-17E Flying Fortress plane. The society is dedicated to researching and recording Hawaii's aviation history.

"This particular crash is very frustrating because there is no accident report," said Colin Perry, one of the founding members of HAPS. "It's important to remember these men because they died here 65 years ago and people never really made any acknowledgment of these crews."

Last year, the society held a similar memorial for the other nine killed aboard a PB5Y-5A plane at Makapuu Point.

HAPS couldn't find many details concerning these plane crashes, other than a few anecdotes and the crews' names and ranks.



COURTESY DON HINTON
Donald Hinton, left, and Colin Perry of the Hawaii Aviation Preservation Society pose at the Pali, about 600 feet below and in front of where the B-17E Flying Fortress crashed. [CLICK FOR LARGE](#)

Robert Gaskell, a roommate of one of the crew members on the B-17, told HAPS last year that his Army squadron believed a submarine at the French Frigate Shoals was refueling an enemy plane that flew over Honolulu almost nightly. At dusk, it was common practice for a B-17, equipped with bombs, to search for the submarine or plane, Gaskell said.

In his diary, Gaskell wrote, "April 5 One of our ships No. 43, on returning from French Frigate shoals, ran into a mountain near the

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Pali, killing the entire crew. It was at about 20:30 during a rain storm."

In February, two nephews of Staff Sgt. Mathias Donart, who died on the B17, hiked with Perry to the crash site during a visit to Hawaii for the Pro Bowl.

"It was an interesting experience to finally get the truth about what had happened," said Don Donart, 60, of Lynnwood, Wash. "It's something I've been curious about for years and years."

Donart said he can't make it for tomorrow's dedication ceremony but will be back in Hawaii next year. As for tomorrow though, he said he'll think of his uncle.

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