Plane crash leaves four dead

Mustang Daily
CALIFORNIA STATE
POLYTECHNIC COLLEGE

VOL. XXX, NO. 28
SAN LUIS OBISPO
MONDAY, APRIL 29, 1968

Special to Mustang Daily

By Joe Bauman

The day and the Poly Royal will long be remembered—for many reasons, among them a tragedy.

Four persons were killed in the crash of a 1958 Waco Cabin biplane, just west of the college airport, at 1:14 p.m. Saturday (March 29).

The pilot, Leo Philbin, 45, San Carlos, Calif., was killed, along with Charles Laughton, 40, San Francisco; Steven Garcia, 20, Anaheim, and Charles Eugene Johnson, resident unknown.

Philbin was an aviation instructor at the San Luis Obispo County Polytechnic High School and a pilot at the U.S. Army's San Luis Obispo airport. He was a graduate of Cal Poly and served as an instructor at the university and in the armed forces.

Laughton was a student at the Polytechnic High School and was a pilot for the school.

Garcia was an aviation instructor at the Polytechnic High School and a pilot for the U.S. Army.

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Earl Denton, a journalism student from Cambria, was flying over the scene of the crash just before it happened. He turned to the pilot of the aircraft and said, "It was only a matter of minutes until Cockrell and I were in the plane that crashed three years ago, but we were two feet away from the ground and the plane stopped rolling. Fortunately, we got away unharmed.

When asking about the circumstances leading up to the crash, Cockrell said, "It brings to mind a few years ago when we had a similar situation." A plane crashed three years ago, but we were two feet away from the ground and the plane stopped rolling. Fortunately, we got away unharmed.

"The plane crashed into Flame 10 seconds after taking off," Cockrell said. "Security Chief George Cockrell and Mustang Daily are on the scene of the crash. Young and said to Mustang Daily," "It was only a matter of minutes until Cockrell and I were in the plane that crashed three years ago, but we were two feet away from the ground and the plane stopped rolling. Fortunately, we got away unharmed."
TOO LATE TO HELP... Fire truck and car of campus security officers reach the site of the plane crash and officers begin to search for the bodies. In spite of their efforts, four persons were killed in the crash. Photograph was taken from another plane.

On the scene of the crash, Cockriel emphasized there was no airshow at the Poly Royal display, merely a collection of antique and experimental aircraft. Williams said he believed the Westfield plane was parked, possibly to refuel, before he realized the plane had just taken off and was an uncontrolled take-off. Cockriel said that as soon as he and his partner arrived at the scene of the crash, he and the other officers from the college security force tried to remove the victims. They were hampered, however, by spectators who had rushed to the scene on foot and by motorcycle.

The plane was almost entirely burned, with only a small portion of the right wing left intact. At the time, we were unable to find any remaining numbers on the plane to help identify it. However, a photograph taken by Williams before the plane crashed showed a number that ended in the figures thought to be "289." This figure conflicts with that given by the authorities as "N18066." As the word of the crash spread, crowds began to drift from the airport displays and focus their attention on the end of the runway. Some stood in visible shock, while others whispered rumors they had heard about the crash.

Some students said that as a Poly Royal they would all remember...