

THE SHACKLETON CRASH AT LOCHAILORT- 21'* DECEMBER 1967

Kinloss Shackleton "Bravo" iced up at 13.00 hrs on the shortest day of the year. Flying at 6000ft with a crew of 13 men aboard, she dived into the solid hillside to the north of the outlet of Loch Eilt and 600ft above it. All the occupants died instantly. A roadman, Angus Cameron of Glenfinnan, had been working near Arienskill when he heard the crash above him and saw the flash of the explosion through the low mist. The Kinloss Mountain Rescue Team had to drive 120 miles to the location and it was dark when they arrived 3 hours later.

The team set up base in the ballroom of Inverailort House and were very hospitably received by Mrs Cameron-Head, which was very much appreciated, as the weather was vile. Shifts of crash guards had been mounted immediately and they tried to shelter from the wind and rain in polybags in the middle of the spread of the wreckage. Pressmen had to be prevented from approaching the crash site, partly for their own safety on the wild hillside, but their cameras were soaked and useless anyway.

One important task was to search for outlying pieces of the wreckage to help the accident investigators. Another was to make sure that nothing was removed or tampered with, permission was given to recover the remains of the aircrew. Before Christmas it was established that all the engines had been intact until the moment of impact (on a previous occasion an engine had been shed into the Beaully Firth while still airborne). It had been necessary to piece together all the small pieces to make 24 propeller blades, and find the main shafts.

Nearby hills had been searched and the team were joined by RAF Leuchars MRT. On the 27th December there was a sweep-search of all the hills from the head of Loch Morar to the foot of Loch Beoraid, following the flight path of the aircraft. By Hogmanay the team had been called out to other emergencies in the mountains and returned in January after the flight-path had been re-plotted. Salvage teams and helicopter crews stayed at Inverailort House for almost a month till all vestiges of "Bravo" had been removed and pieced together in a hanger at Kinloss, in an attempt to find the accident cause.

One difficulty was to interpret photographs from Canberra reconnaissance aircraft. If suspicious markings had been circled on the photographs, the team would climb up around a 1000ft on the opposite hillsides trying to get as close to the line of the Canberra camera angle and direct another party by radio. The objects always turned out to be slabs of rock, land-slips or similar, and months later it was proved that nothing had been detached before impact. In all 10 days were spent searching the mountains until deeper and deeper snow made it impossible to find clues.

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This Report was by John Hinde who was team leader at Kinloss at the time

On Sat 8th November 2003 Charlie Seaman and I visited the area using a GPS with the above figures, Using A we found ourselves still on the footpath with no apparent crash site or memorial, so we walked to the viewpoint above Loch Beoraid. On the return route, nearing the area, I used the B grid reading with the GPS, which took us slightly to the west of the footpath, and before reaching B Charlie spotted the CAIRN. It is definitely the crash site with a collection of small bit and pieces from the aircraft and a disturbed area, a very solemn spot.

Climbing from the road one is close to the Allt na Criche burn, the path then leaves the river for a short distance and then returns to the river, and in the distance on the right of the horizon a very pronounced rocky TOR comes into view. From this point one should be able to see the cairn to the left some 60 yards from the track, it appears more like one of the erratic boulders strewn around the area at that distance.

Harry Clyne