

# McMurdo Sometimes



VOL. 1 NO. 16

MCMURDO STATION, ANTARCTICA

Nov. 30, 1979

Air New Zealand DC-10 crashes; killing all aboard

An Air New Zealand DC-10, on a tourist flight over Antarctica, crashed Nov. 28 at the 1,500 foot level of Mt. Erebus, 30 miles from McMurdo Station, killing all 257 persons on board.

An extensive eight-hour search and rescue mission ended at midnight when a VXE-6 Herc, piloted by CDR Vic Pesce, spotted the wreckage. The DC-10's last known radio communications came when the pilot requested visual descent to the McMurdo area.

The search and rescue mission was launched at 4:00 p.m. when no further word was heard from flight 901.

Assisting in the search was a USAF C-141, returning to Christchurch after a resupply mission to McMurdo. The C-141 retraced the flight path of flight 901.

At 8:06 p.m., Air New Zealand released news that a DC-10 was overdue but that the aircraft still had fuel and they were not giving up hope.

At 9:06, Air New Zealand released the news that the DC-10 had run out of fuel and was presumed lost.

At midnight, Nov. 28, the plane was spotted on the slopes of Mt. Erebus and initial estimates figured the wreckage to be strewn over an area 400 yards long and 50 yards wide.

The largest piece of the aircraft sighted is a tail section approximately 30 feet in length.

A helicopter attempted to

land at the site at 1:25 but was unable to because of poor surface condition and blowing snow and had to return to McMurdo.

A circling Herc provided a communications link.

Attempts to land at the crash site continued but were constantly hampered by the poor weather in the area.

At 9:05 a.m., Nov. 29, two UH-1Ns departed McMurdo for the crash site, carrying three mountaineers from Scott Base to access the situation. "Non-survivable and no survivors" was their comment at 10:33.

The surface of the crash site has been described as containing a "foundation of hard, permanent ice, with four to six inches of lightly packed snow covering it." The area is heavily crevassed with two large fissures, each eight feet wide and 30 feet long. Air temperature at the site is a +14 degrees Fahrenheit with winds gusting to 35 miles per hour in the blowing snow. The temperature and wind combined produced a chill factor of 30 degrees below zero.

Upon arrival of the mountaineers from the crash site, it was learned that the aircraft debris is scattered over an area about 600 yards long and approximately 100 yards wide on either side of the impact path. It was also learned the site is on a 20 degree slope. The team estimated 60 to 70 bodies were visible but no actual body count was taken (cont. on page 2)



## DC-10 crashes

(cont. from page 1)

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Eight mountaineers established a field camp Nov. 29 approximately 50 yards from the crash site. The camp is stocked with survival gear and food sufficient to last 20 men for three weeks.

The mountaineers were joined by several members of a New Zealand police investigation team, a government air accident team and several men of Air New Zealand.

Several members of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) arrived at McMurdo to help in the recovery efforts Nov. 29. Several members of the National Transportation Board (NTB),

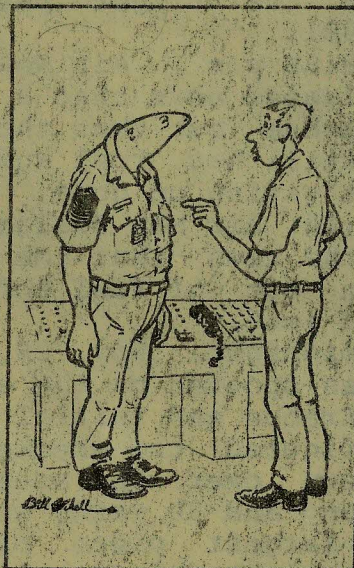
Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), McDonnell-Douglas Corporation and General Electric have arrived at Christchurch and will be flown to McMurdo today.

The mountaineers and investigation team will establish a grid of the wreckage area. The mountaineers also have staked out the crevassed areas.

At a press conference on Dec. 1st, at Scott Base, Mr. R.B. Thomson, Superintendent of DSIR, mentioned the possibility of a Scott Base crew going out to the campsite to build a small helicopter pad, enabling a more stable area for helos to land.

The McMurdo Sometimes is printed each Tuesday and Saturday during the summer season. It is an official publication of Naval Support Force Antarctica. It is published in accordance with U.S. Navy printing regulations NAVEXOS P-35, and any views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Commander, NSFA, or the Department of Defense. All Contributions will be considered for publication. Turn in submissions to the PAO Production Office, bldg. 155. PAO reserves the right to edit any submitted material.

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"Just how long have you been assigned to the underground command post?"