

Final Flight
possible subtitle 1 A Tragedy in the High Sierra
possible subtitle 2 A Personal Tale of Discovery

by

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proposed

Chapter 1
November 18, 1942.

2nd Lt. William Gamber and three cadet aviators lift off from Mather Field in Sacramento, CA, on a navigation training mission. The student pilots are chosen to fly with Lt. Gamber on the basis of the alphabet: John M. Mortenson, Ernest Glenn Munn and Leo Mustonen. The four strangers and their Beech 18, AT-7 Navigator, #41-21079 are never heard from again. Review of the weather forecast. Explanation of their mission.

Chapter 2
Discovery on the Mendel Glacier.

I find the body of one of Lt. Gamber's students above the ice of Mendel Glacier in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. He is leaning over a rock, his left arm curled under him. On his ring finger, a gold intaglio signet ring of a Roman soldier shines in the sun. His body is desiccated, the skin black. His blond, wavy hair does not cover up a crushed skull. Beside him is an

undeployed parachute, the pack long ago rotted away. The parachute shrouds are still tightly packed. I am on the glacier with my hiking companion, Michele Hinatsu, in hopes of finding wreckage from Lt. Gamber's aircraft. Almost two years ago, another body was found 100 feet away from this person. Until his identification he is called the "Ice Man."

Chapter 3 An Earlier Discovery.

The Ice Man's body is found melting out of a glacier by two climbers on October 16, 2005. They are in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. Description of the scene. In dramatic, near-winter conditions, rangers recover the body. I hear about the story from a park ranger friend and secure an assignment to write about it for a magazine called *Sierra Heritage*. Thus begins a personal and meditative story for me, exploring the dual metaphors of mountain wilderness and the wilderness of flight.

The Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command [JPAC] takes charge of the body and reports it could months, or even years, to identify the remains.

Chapter 4 A Personal History.

How my interest in the Sierra Nevada developed. My magazine assignment with *Sierra Heritage* to write about cover-up Ice Man's discovery, recovery and identification.

Chapter 5 Holes in the Holes.

I interview climatologists, pilots, glacial geologists, military historians and other experts for my feature story. Everything I learn contradicts national news reports. I feel like a detective from some 1940s film noir because the more I investigate, the more I discover that is erroneous. Did a cover-up occur over 60 years ago? Is a coverup occurring now?

Chapter 6 Elements of a Mystery

A review of books, magazine and newspaper articles from 1942 up to the discovery of the Ice Man and how these stories contributed

to the errors following his recovery. For such a small and seemingly insignificant event, the disappearance of Lt. Gamber's airplane has actually sporadically generated interest with the public and within the aviation press and community.

Chapter 7

An Even Earlier Discovery.

I find declassified military records from a search conducted in 1942 for Lt. Gamber's airplane. Research reveals that today's media have relied on a low resolution summary copy of this accident report posted on the internet. Also, I discover a follow-up report from 1947 which identifies two college students who discovered the wreck of Lt. Gamber's airplane in Kings Canyon National Park - hundreds of miles off-course. There is a brief description of a small military party traveling to the glacier with one of the students in order to retrieve human remains. They fail in this assignment. I begin the search for Bond and Hodges, the two students.

Chapter 8

Climate is What You Want, Weather is What You Get.

The Beech 18 may have disappeared in a storm though the pilots were told to expect clear weather. But this was a navigation training mission; could Lt. Gamber knowingly flown into bad weather as a teaching exercise? Though their flight plan says one thing, it wasn't uncommon for training flights to go elsewhere. Could they have planned to cross the Sierra crest to visit a training facility in Bishop, CA - due east from Mendel Glacier and where the plane wreckage and bodies were found?

To know what the pilot and his students faced it's essential to understand the singularity of weather in California's Central Valley. Weather creates specific challenges for flying in the mountains. Historic precipitation records in the mountains account for why the crashed plane remained hidden so long. And recent negative trends in California's montane glaciers explains why wreckage - and bodies - are now appearing.

Chapter 9

The Crew.

Biographies of the four missing aviators and why they yearned to fly. How personalities may have contributed to the crash. Why the missing plane, a Beech 18 AT-7 Navigator, was so useful for training pilots. Limitations of the aircraft. The state of

navigation, cockpit instrumentation and weather forecasting in the 1940s. Why do we cover aviation in terms of romance and adventure?

Chapter 10

Leo Mustonen - the first Ice Man.

Finding Leo Mustonen in the Mendel Glacier began a nearly six month-long process in recovery and identification. First, he had to be removed from the glacier - a two day procedure that occupied half a dozen national park service and JPAC employees working at an elevation of nearly 13,000' in sub-freezing temperatures.

After a brief stop-over with the Fresno county coroner's office where the body was thawed, the Ice Man was flown with full military honors to the JPAC facility in Hawaii. There he was subjected to the type of CSI [crime scene investigation] examination television viewers have become accustomed to.

Using old-fashioned detective techniques, friends and relatives of the four men were interviewed for possible leads in the Ice Man's identification. Finally, mitochondrial DNA samples were collected from family members.

Chapter 11

The Science of Identification.

An in-depth look at how mDNA is used to identify the unidentifiable. Other techniques, including forensic odontology, used to ascertain identity. The role of forensic anthropology and archeology. The use of dog tags to identify service personnel. Why all these techniques don't always work.

Chapter 12

The glaciers are melting.

Lessons learned about glacial geology of the Sierra Nevada and the affects of global warming. What geologists have learned to explain why the Ice Man was found in 2005 and not earlier. The difference between "clean" glaciers and "rock" glaciers and why this difference is important in uncovering the remains of both aviators.

Chapter 13

Witnesses Missing No Longer.

Tracking down, finding and interviewing the two students who first found the missing airplane in 1947. How their stories don't jibe with official reports. Discovery there were *four* students! Also, what happened during a 1948 search of the glacier.

Chapter 14 Ground School.

I decide to enroll in pilot training in order to understand what pilots must learn about how to fly. Interviews with my teachers and with other student pilots. My first flight.

Chapter 15 Second Day on the Glacier.

After discovering the body on Mendel Glacier, we return a second day to look for more evidence. Afterward, Michele and I hike down to the McClure Meadow Ranger Station to make our report.

Chapter 16 Ice Nine.

Both aviators were found on Mendel Glacier in Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks at the base of the Ice Nine couloir. The climbers who found Leo Mustonen were planning an ascent of Mt. Mendel. I was there to do research for Final Flight and look for wreckage of Lt. Gamber's airplane though I have hiked and climbed extensively in the Parks. The story of wilderness and what draws people there. Without the people who find solace, challenge and inspiration in wilderness, the plane and the aviators never would have been found.

Chapter 17 Failure

Finding the aviator on Mendel Glacier in 2007 involved both serendipity, bad luck and personal loss. Michele and I had planned to hike in to the glacier during July of 2006 but late season snowfall had made the area inaccessible. A second trip planned for October of the same year was cancelled due to the death of my father. Had I made it to the glacier in 2006 I would most certainly not found any wreckage or the aviator since everything would have been covered by snow. In retrospect, these twin failures in one year were actually fortuitous in the

following year. This is my reflection on how personal loss not only allowed me the opportunity to discover the second aviator but also gave me a deeper application for the loss suffered by the airmen's families.

Chapter 18 Identifying the Second Ice Man.

Chapter 19 Aircraft Crashes in Sequoia & Kings Canyon.

The missing Beech 18 was not the first and it will not be the last aircraft to crash in the Sierra Nevada. A history of other crashes [military, commercial and private] and why there are so many in the same area. Other wilderness mysteries with emphasis on those in the same area.

Chapter 20 The Mystery Solved?

What most likely happened: weather, the era, preparing for war, personalities of Lt. Gamber and crew, getting lost, global warming and glacier melt, record keeping, present-day media. What probably happened between Lt. Gamber and the crew during their last minutes in the cockpit.

Chapter 21 Only the Mountain Endures.

What I wanted to accomplish by my visit to Mendel Glacier in August, 2007. Visiting Golden Gate National Cemetery and the common grave of the aviators [where no bodies are buried]. Reflections on the complete story while visiting the aviator's planned destination at Orland Airport.

Dedication.

List of illustrations.

Bibliography and a note on sources.

Acknowledgments.

Author biography.

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