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Four Radio Amateurs Killed in Plane Crash En Route to CQWW Phone Contest

Just after take-off -- around 6:30 AM on Wednesday, October 21 -- a twin-engine plane carrying four Amateur Radio operators crashed into the woods, only 250 yards off the end of the runway in Jedburg, South Carolina, about 20 miles northwest of Charleston. The plane -- piloted and owned by Peter Radding, W2GJ -- carried Ed Steeble, K3IXD, Dallas Carter, W3PP, and Randy Hargenrader, K4QO. The four men were on their way to the Bahamas to operate in this weekend's CQ World Wide Phone Contest as C6APR, competing in the Multi/2 category.

Radding, of North Charleston, South Carolina, was 69; Steeble, of Summerville, South Carolina was 68; Carter, of Laurel, Delaware, was 67 and Hargenrader, also of Summerville, was 55. All were ARRL members; Radding and Steeble were Life Members.

According to Dorchester County Coroner Chris Nisbet, the four hams had made this trip before with Radding piloting the plane. Nisbet said Radding had flown to Delaware to pick up Carter earlier in the week.

"How quickly can a joyous event -- setting off with close friends in anticipation of a weekend of intense radio activity -- turn to unfathomable tragedy," said ARRL Chief Executive Officer David Sumner, K1ZZ. "As we mourn the loss of these four well-known members of our global Amateur Radio community, our hearts go out to their families."

Dorchester County Administrator Jason Ward characterized the crash site 250 yards east of the runway as "extremely severe" and that the plane was fully engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived; investigators were hindered by the flaming wreckage and "charred foliage" at the scene. A crew from the county public works department had to create a path to the wreckage. Chief Deputy Sheriff Sam Richardson said there was damage to treetops in the area of the crash. The coroner said it appears the severity of the crash, and not the fire, is what killed the men.

One of the victims was found beneath some of the wreckage, Ward said. Debris was spread around an area several yards wide at the crash site, and the wrecked plane was apparently upside down, he said.

It was extremely dark when the plane took off, Ward said. Airport Manager Don Hay said the weather was clear at the time. "[Radding] was a very experienced pilot who knew the area," Ward said. "He had been flying for over 40 years." Nisbet said Radding filed a flight plan detailing his route and who was on board, but the plane never climbed high enough for those plans to be activated.

Robert Biss, W8ZA, of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, accompanied Steeble, Carter and Radding to the Bahamas last year for the 2008 running of the CQWW SSB Contest. "It was only one year to the day that I first flew with Pete Radding, W2GJ," he told the ARRL. "He was a good pilot with more than 40 years experience. He loved to fly and did a lot of it. Pete was also president of the [Angel Flight](#) organization for the Southeastern United States. I met Ed Steeble through

common interests -- ham radio and contesting -- and the Potomac Valley Radio Club. In time, Ed became the Liaison Officer between my place of employment and his, and we spent more time together. He also joined our club station at work and became one of the operators at W8ZA Multi-Multi station for SSB DX contests. Even after he moved to South Carolina, he made the 10 hour trip several times to contest with friends. I had talked with Dallas many times over the years, but had never met him personally until just before we left for the Bahamas. I met Randy for the first time in October 2008 when we had our departure dinner in Summerville. It is just too hard to understand what went wrong this time. I will wait until the NTSB releases its report. Until then I will grieve along with their families and the ham radio fraternity, for we have lost four very special people in this one tragic event."

Radding's neighbor, Jim Deaton, said the man and others planned to stop in Florida, pick up more passengers and then head to the Bahamas.

Stella Bazzle, who lives about a half-mile from the airport, described to [*The Summerville Journal Scene*](#) what she heard right before the plane went down: "The motor sounded like it was coming over the house. I heard the first explosion...then the second (explosion) wasn't as loud." She described the engine noise as "kind of a funny noise, like a grinding type thing." Bazzle said she then heard ambulances and called her neighbor, who'd heard similar noises.

Carter, Steeble and Radding were members of the Potomac Valley Radio Club ([PVRC](#)); Carter and Radding were also members of the Frankford Radio Club ([FRC](#)). PVRC President Ken Claerbout, K4ZW, told the ARRL that he was "stunned and saddened" when he heard the news of the crash: "I had several e-mail exchanges with Dallas over the last two weeks about our Sweepstakes effort. He spoke with excitement of the group's trip to C6 for CQWW SSB and vowed to be on for Sweepstakes CW. He said he might have to work during Sweepstakes SSB, but if not, he would be there! Dallas joined PVRC in 1963. Ed was also a very active member of PVRC before moving to South Carolina. Ed joined PVRC in 1992 and is a past chairman of our Northwest Chapter. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the friends and families of all four gentlemen. Another stark reminder of how fickle life can be." -- *Thanks to the many friends of these four hams, the Associated Press and The Summerville Journal Scene for the information*



Robert Biss, W8ZA, accompanied Radding, Steeble and Carter to the Bahamas last year for the 2008 running of the CQWW SSB Contest. The crew getting ready to leave for C6: Ed, K3IXD/C6AXD; Dallas, W3PP; Pete, W2GJ/C6APR, and Bob, W8ZA. [Photo courtesy of Robert Biss, W8ZA]



Bird Rock Lighthouse, ARLHS BAH-005, through the window of Pete Radding's W2GJ, twin-engine plane. [Robert Biss, W8ZA, Photo]



Bob, W8ZA, and Dallas, W3PP, look over the shoulder of Pete, W2GJ/C6APR, while calculating the weight and balance for the trip. [Robert Biss, W8ZA, Photo]



Dallas, W3PP tunes the 80/160 meter vertical under the watchful eye of Pete, W2GJ/C6APR. [Robert Biss, W8ZA, Photo]