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A GENERAL VIEW OF THE ANDOVER HAYFIELD into which a Pease Air Force Base KC-97 tanker plane crashed before dawn yesterday is seen in the picture above. Firemen and rescue teams are shown extinguishing flames in the wreckage of the 11,200,000 cwt which proved to be an inferno of death for all seven aboard. The crash created a crater all least 10 feet deep and the bodies were strewn in a radius of some 10 feet. (Staff Photo by Norm Emmerson)

From the front page of the *Manchester Union Leader* on July 23, 1959. Bob Peters found this in a shoebox of old newspaper clippings that his mother, Helen Peters, had saved.

### 50 YEARS AGO

## JULY 1959

*Condensed from the Franklin Journal-Transcript*

#### July 23, 1959 - Front Page

In the moonlight over Andover, fogged by haze below, seven members of an Air Force crew fought valiantly for their plane and for their lives early Wednesday morning - and lost.

The time was precisely 1:40 AM.

At that exact instant, despite the hour, there were some 14 or 15 or more actual witnesses to the tragedy written in the sky as the plane circled with one side ablaze.

All on the plane died instantly as it crashed, and its cargo of 8,000 gallons of gasoline exploded on the Andover Plains farm of Bud H. Keyser. [The plane was a KC-97 tanker from the 509th Air Refueling Squadron at Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth.]

But the stories of the witnesses indicated that until the final plunge, the pilot was battling to keep the craft aloft after an explosion and fire in one of its motors. The plane circled several times as it came down from its flight altitude of 15,000 feet.

The closest witnesses were Mr. and Mrs. Chester Champney and members of the family of Bud H. Keyser, Sr., all living within a few hundred yards or so of the Keyser farm, where the plane came down.

The elder Mr. Keyser and his wife were awakened by the sound of the circling plane. "I first heard the sound of the plane," Mr. Keyser said. "It made a considerable noise. It circled and went out three fourths of a mile and came back and landed with a blast in the field." Mrs. Keyser said the plane made a peculiar noise and "lit up the sky," as it went by.

A son of Mr. Keyser, Harold Keyser, living nearby with his wife, were awakened by the plane in time to see the flash of the crash.

The Harold Keyser's son-in-law and daughter, Mr. and Mrs. John Ireland,

also living not far away, heard the plane, rushed out of the house and saw its circling fiery course until it finally swerved downward to explode.

The Champneys, nearby neighbors of the Keyser's, heard the circling plane and were at the window in time to see that it was on fire, and in time to see the final terrible explosion.

Clarence Keyser, another son of the elder Bud H. Keyser, also living nearby, saw the burning plane in the air, too, and was a witness to the crash.

The Keyser's and Mr. Champney all were among the first on the scene of the crash, as the field and the adjoining woodlands were lighted by the blazing gasoline surrounding the scattered wreckage.

It was obvious from the first that there were no survivors.

Only quick action by the East Andover Fire Department, under Chief Leland Miller, and the fact that a soaking rain had fallen a few hours before, prevented what could have been a serious forest fire.

The plane slammed to the ground at the edge of an open field, a few yards into a heavily wooded area. When the plane exploded it spewed wreckage and burning gasoline for hundreds of yards around.

The East Andover firemen, arriving only about twenty minutes after the crash, kept the blaze from spreading through the woods, and in less than three hours had the scene under control.

The East Andover firemen were assisted by the Andover Fire Department, which brought a third truck to the scene.

A team of Air Force enlisted men and officers was at the scene shortly after 6 AM to recover the bodies and set up a guard for the wreckage. Throughout most of the morning the curious arrived at the scene a car or two at a time, and stayed to gather in hushed, sober-faced

See Crash on page 19

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