

that he was a bit groggy from being at altitude too long and he wasn't quite sure where he was.

With the aid of Flight Service Station (FSS) personnel, he regained his orientation, and said he was going to climb to cross the mountains near Salida.

Trinidad radio advised of heavy cumulus buildups along the entire front range, and advised that flight by Visual Flight Rules (VFR) was doubtful. The pilot told FSS that he had adequate fuel and would turn back to Alamosa if he could not maintain VFR across the range.

He was never seen alive again. Seven months later the wreckage of his plane was found by a hiker in the Sangre de Cristo mountains at an elevation of 12,000 feet.

That tragedy was just one of the nearly 150 aircraft crashes in Colorado in the past 25 years. Most of them have occurred in the mountains. Hardly a week goes by that the Civil Air Patrol is not called out for another search. Witness the local headlines: Two Lost Planes Defy Hunters . . . Five Dead in Wreck of Plane . . . CAP Resumes Search for Illinois Airplane . . . Major Search Begun for Wyoming Plane . . . Lost Plane Found Near Mt. Elbert . . . Air Search Under Way for Iowa Man . . . CAP Searching for Downed Craft . . . Crash Near Aspen Kills Four.

An oversimplified, and yet really quite accurate formulation of the problem (that variously has been called "murder in the mountains" and "suicide in the scenery") places Colorado's imposing array of mountains pitted against low-horsepower aircraft, overloaded with four people and lots of baggage. Add the ingredients of wind and weather, and the odds are on for death before the plane ever takes off.

Experienced mountain pilots are up in arms against the carnage. They say that most of the accidents are needless and that too much money is being spent and too many lives are being endangered in fruitless search missions.

"The government won't let you cross large bodies of water without clearance, briefing and survival equipment," says Warren E. White, former Air Force and airline pilot and currently president of Aero Training Academy, which operates light aircraft out of both Stapleton and Sky Ranch airports. "Why are inexperienced pilots from the flatlands allowed to take off and kill themselves and loved ones—and precipitate massive searches—without any type of control?"

Says Rocky Warren, Colorado's famous bush pilot who has been flying the Rockies in light airplanes for more than 20 years out of his base at Gunnison: "Mountain flying in light airplanes is perfectly safe, if you know the terrain, the weather and your equipment—and know when to stay on the ground." Warren received his training from the late, great Eddie Drapella, who logged more than 22,000 hours "over the rocks" in small planes, and only had one forced landing in that entire time.

Many flight schools offer mountain flying courses; aviation magazines publish articles on the nuances of high terrain flying; and the Public Utilities Commission for several years has offered free a pamphlet put together by Ray Wilson, Colorado's "Mister Aviation," entitled *Do's and Don'ts of Mountain Flying*.

But the transient pilot, hurrying to the ski slopes or en route to a blast in Las Vegas, rarely stops to think that his plane won't perform as it did back East or out West at sea level.

The pattern is tragically classic. He staggers off Stapleton International Airport, wondering why the old bus won't handle like it did off his home field, why it took nearly twice the runway to get airborne.

He remembers that he should have filed a flight plan, but this leg of the flight is so short and the weather does look good, bright and sunny, if a bit windy. Those saucer-shaped "lenticulars" over the front range are the only clouds in the sky, odd shaped, stacked just like hotcakes. Perhaps he has to circle a few times before he tackles the high mountains.

Soon he discovers the plane just won't get over the clouds. So he decides to go underneath, up a canyon. In the canyon, suddenly, the turbulence is fantastic. The plane drops a hundred feet like a free-falling safe, jumps up two hundred. "We're getting our brains knocked out," he says grinning weakly, "but we should be out of it soon." He tries to look confident so the passengers won't be frightened, but the churning air, breaking across the ridges like water over Niagara, is shaking their teeth loose.

The plane isn't climbing too well and the canyon is getting narrow. Fighting the bucking, wind-tossed plane, he tries to turn back. The horn that warns of an impending stall is making its death rattle now. He must tighten up the turn or