

Near Airport Here—

Four Are Killed In Light Plane Crash

By KENNETH McCracken
Post-Bulletin Staff Writer

Minutes after taking off from Rochester Municipal Airport, a single-engine private airplane plunged out of a low-hanging cloud bank and crashed into a farm field early Sunday evening, killing all four persons aboard. It was the second fatal crash of a light plane here in just over two months.

Killed in the 7:10 p.m. crash 1 1/4 miles northwest of the airport — about nine miles southwest of Rochester — were: Erling Elverhaug, 56, the pilot; his two sons, John, 18, and Jeffrey, 24, and Jeffrey's wife, Mathilde, also 24, all of Wayzata, a Minneapolis suburb.

The plane had just taken off on a return flight to Wayzata after the four had spent the afternoon visiting Elverhaug's wife, Astrid, 55, a patient at St. Marys Hospital. Mrs. Elverhaug, admitted to the hospital Nov. 19 as an

orthopedic patient, was released this morning after learning of the deaths.

According to a control tower operator, the Elverhaug plane — a Mooney Master Model 20E — made a routine take-off and disappeared in a cloud bank to the northwest. No radio contact was made with the aircraft after it took off.

Control personnel and Mr. and Mrs. Adam Kapinski of Byron, who had been at the airport

watching planes land and take off, saw Elverhaug's plane dive out of the clouds toward the ground.

"I felt sure the plane had gone down," said Kapinski, one of the first persons at the crash site.

The plane, which did not burn, plowed up several hundred feet of earth in a mowed hay field on the High Forest Township farm of Edwin Doty.

A neighboring farmer, William Russell, said he "heard a loud bang" and looked out of the window in the direction of the sound, "but I didn't see anything."

Russell told the Post-Bulletin he did not hear any noise of an airplane engine prior to the crash.

"I didn't hear the bang myself," Mrs. Russell said, "and we didn't realize a plane had crashed until airport people came to our house and asked to use the telephone after saying a plane was down."

The plane scattered debris over several acres, said Olmsted County Sheriff Gerald Cunningham. He said the left wing apparently clipped the ground and tore off and the plane cartwheeled along. The four bodies were found more than 200 feet away from the wreckage and the engine also was found "some yards away."

The right wing, fuselage and tail section of the aircraft stayed relatively intact after the crash, Cunningham said.

A control tower operator said the plane took off in light winds under a broken cloud ceiling at 600 feet with a seven-mile visibility.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) investigators from Minneapolis and Kansas City were expected in Rochester today to begin probing the cause of the accident.

Olmsted County Coroner Dr. T. O. Wellner said he is still checking details of the crash to determine if an inquest will be held, but he said he doubted one would be.

Investigators are expected to explore several possibilities which might have caused the crash — mechanical failure, faulty instrument readings, pilot error or pilot illness.

FAA officials still have not concluded their investigation of a Sept. 20 light plane crash — about three miles south of Sun-

day night's crash — which took the life of Cleveland, Ohio, businessman Quay Kinzig, 37.

That crash was believed to have been the first fatal air accident since aviation came to Rochester more than 40 years ago.

Elverhaug was a manufacturing representative for Camp Hosiery Co. of New York City. His son, Jeffrey, who worked for him, was slated to take over the firm's Omaha, Neb., district in January.

Elverhaug, a friend of Charles Pine, manager of M. C. Lawler's, also spent part of Saturday afternoon in Rochester visiting his wife and helping Pine stock shelves at the new VIP shop — formerly Kingroy's Men's Store — for its opening today.

Pine, shocked at the news of the plane crash, said, Elverhaug "was a very outstanding man." He said he learned of the crash in this morning's newspapers.

Residents In Area Unaware Of Accident

The man perhaps closest to where a single-engine plane crashed Sunday night killing four persons didn't even know about it until telephoned by the Post-Bulletin three hours after the 7:10 p.m. crash.

"For crying out loud," exclaimed an incredulous Roland Townsend, who rents the house on the farm of Edwin Doty in High Forest Township, where the plane nosed into a hay field, when told of the crash.

"I've been home all night with my wife and two children and we didn't hear or see anything," said Townsend, who manages the One Hour Martinizing store across from Northgate Shopping Center.

The plane crashed about a quarter-of-a-mile from the house.

"That spot is partially blocked by a clump of trees," Townsend said, "but I didn't know a thing about the crash until now."

Olmsted 8, which runs near the house, had been clogged with emergency vehicles and curiosity seekers for more than two hours, but Townsend said he did not notice anything unusual on the road.

His neighbor, William Russell, who also lives about a quarter-of-a-mile from the crash site, heard the plane hit the ground, but saw no sign of a crash and did not realize a plane had come down until later.

Doty, owner of the farm and home where Townsend lives, resides about three miles east of the crash site. He, too, was unaware of the air tragedy on his High Forest Township property.

When first told of the crash, Townsend expressed skepticism. "I have been kidded about planes crashing near here since the tragedy in September and I thought someone was just pulling my leg."

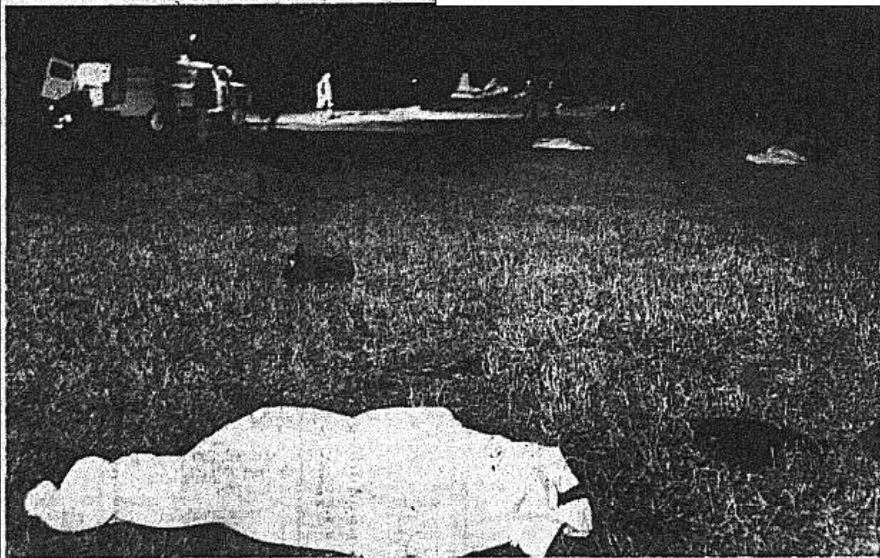
—KENNETH McCracken



Post-Bulletin Photo by Scott Wilco

FOUR WAYZATA RESIDENTS DIED IN THIS SUNDAY NIGHT PLANE CRASH

The Single-Engine Plane Plunged Out of a Low Cloud Into Farm Field Northwest of the Airport



Post-Bulletin Photo by Merie Dallen

WHITE SHROUDS COVER BODIES FOUND SOME TWO HUNDRED FEET FROM CRASHED PLANE

The Plane Is Faintly Visible In Background; Two of Four Bodies Are Under Shroud at Right