

ROBERT W McCLENNING



**US NAVAL AIR RESERVE
1954-1956**

AIRMAN ROBERT WAYNE MCCLENNING



Robert W. McClenning was born 18-JAN 1937 and lived at 232 North Dellwood Avenue in Ferguson Missouri a suburb of St Louis. His father was Ross McClenning (1911-1999), and his mother was Lucille Faustina McClenning (1912-1995). Robert had four brothers: Gerald, Ronald, Thomas, and Michael and one sister: Mary Catherine McClenning.

Robert was known as an ambitious young man and a hard worker. In his early years, he had a job as a pin setter at his local bowling alley (back in the day, at a bowling alley, a pinsetter or pinspotter was a worker that set bowling pins back in their original positions, returned bowling balls to the front of the alley, and cleared fallen pins on the pin deck).

Robert later worked for well-known radio personality, Ed Wilson, at WIL radio in St. Louis (Ed Wilson's St. Louis radio career spanned 30 years. In May of 1942 he moved to St. Louis from a radio job in Chicago and became a folksy-talking disc jockey at KWK, a job he held for 16 years. He had a huge fan base among teenagers and also hosted a local teen dance show on television, the weekly "St. Louis Hop.") Robert was also active in the Boy Scouts.

Robert graduated from DeAndreis High School, (a local Catholic Archdiocesan High School which opened in 1948 and was closed in 1976). After high school, Robert joined the Naval Air Reserve in St. Louis at Lambert Field. He was assigned to Air Transport Squadron Six.

The McClenning family has a long history serving the United States Armed Forces. His father served in the Merchant Marines in World War II and Robert's mother sewed parachutes for the troops during World War II.

Robert had one uncle who served in the Navy, one in the Army and two in the Coast Guard. Robert's sister served in the Army, one brother served both the Navy and the Army, and a second brother served in the Navy. Robert's nephew also served in the Navy, and today, Robert's great-nephew currently serves our country in the U.S. Navy.





Robert graduated and served in the Navy Reserve (1954-1956) and the Military Air Transport Service (MATS). His Specialty (or MOS) was 8289-Flight Steward / Attendant for MATS. MATS is an inactive Department of Defense Unified Command. Activated on 1 JUN 1948, MATS was a consolidation of the United States Navy's Naval Air Transport Service (NATS) and the United States Air Force's Air Transport Command (ATC) into a single joint command.

Although MATS was under the operational control of the United States Air Force, the United States Navy was a full partner in the command and operational components of the organization. MATS was the first Joint-Service command, and naval aircrews participated in every major MATS airlift operation.



Squadron Patch

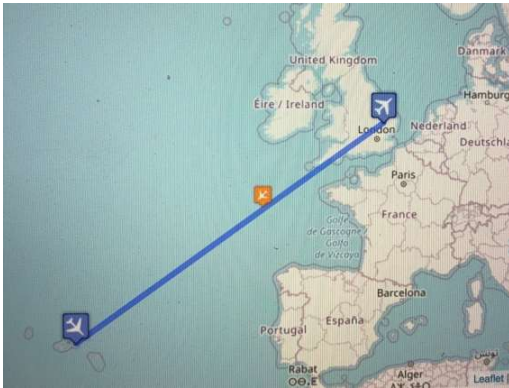
He served in the Navy Reserve until October 11, 1956, where, on that day, the U.S. Navy Douglas R6D-1 Liftmaster (DC-6) he was onboard operated by the Navy went missing in the Atlantic.



R6D-1 (DC-6)

The Search

Immediately after the plane went missing there was significant confusion. A distress call prompted over 80 planes from bases in six countries to begin the search. Within hours, the Ninth Air Force Rescue Squadron began a systematic search. An aircraft carrier and several destroyers scoured the area north of Azores. Reports trickled back into their bases; nothing was spotted. Twenty-four hours passed. No reports of wreckage.



After a long period of silence, several SOS signals were picked up by commercial liners flying between Britain and New York. The belief was the distress calls were being sent from portable transmitters on rubber rafts carried by the plane from survivors of the crash. The Liftmaster carried three or four rubber rafts, each equipped with a portable transmitter and a limited number of survival suits (68).

Later it was surmised that these were not SOS calls, but instead they were alert calls being sent by land stations about the plane. Most of the purported SOS calls came from many, many miles beyond the presumed crash site. Other reports came from pilots flying nearby encouraging search teams. All these reports briefly raised the hopes of family members and searchers.

Many of the calls were later reported as “standard” distress signals from other sources (*Editor’s note: From Post-Dispatch story dated 12-OCT 1956*). The reports of garbled distress calls no doubt continued to raise the hopes of survivors. One by one, they were dismissed as signals from other ships. Officially, an Air Force spokesman at Ruislip England - a communications base set up for the search stated, “there has been no distress message as far as we know at this moment from the missing plane itself.” (*Editor’s note: St. Louis Post -Dispatch 11-OCT 1956, page one*).

The Telegrams

On **11-OCT 1956** at 10:28 am Ross McClenning would receive a telegram no parent should ever receive. It was from Capt. R. W. Millner, Commanding Officer Naval Air Transport, Squadron 6. It read: “THIS SQUADRON HAS AN AIRCRAFT OVERDUE ON A FLIGHT FROM LAKE HEATH ENGLAND TO MAJES AZORES ISLAND. YOUR SON ROBERT W. MCCLENNING A CREW MEMBER OF THAT AIRCRAFT IS PRESUMED MISSING. THE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST REPORTED AT 8:36 PM ON OCTOBER 10. DISTRESS SIGNALS WERE RECEIVED AND AN EXTENSIVE AIR AND SURFACE SEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED. I WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED OF ALL DEVELOPMENTS. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT ME.”

Hope continued...

On **16-OCT 1956** 4:25 PM another telegram would arrive from Capt. Millner. It read: THIS IS SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION ON YOUR SON ROBERT WAYNE MCCLENNING. TO DATE WHEELS AND A LIFERAFT OF THE TYPE USED ON OUR AIRCRAFT WERE FOUND APPROXIMATELY 300 MILES SOUTHWEST OF LANDS END ENGLAND. AWAITING POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION. SEARCH CONTINUES. WILL KEEP YOU ADVISED.

On **19-OCT 1956** 3:43 PM. Again from Capt. Millner: THIS IS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONCERNING YOUR SON ROBERT. RECOVERED LIFE RAFT AND WHEELS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT AS PART AND EQUIPMENT OF MISSING AIRCRAFT. SEARCH CONTINUES. I WILL KEEP YOU ADVISED.

And finally, on **26-OCT 1956**, 12:32 PM: WITH DEEP REGRET I OFFICIALLY NOTIFY YOU OF THE DEATH OF YOUR SON ROBERT W. MCCLENNING AIRMAN US NAVAL RESERVE 450 55 27 RESULTING FROM CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE OF THE CRASH OF A TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT ASSIGNED TO THIS COMMAND AND WHILE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY WHILE ON A FLIGHT FROM LAKE HEATH ROYAL AIR FORCE BASE ENGLAND TO LAKES AZORES ISLAND. OFFICIAL TIME OF DEATH HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AS 0021 GREENWICH MERIDIAN TIME 11-OCT 1956. YOU WILL RECEIVE DETAILS BY LETTER. I WISH TO ASSURE YOU OF EVERY POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE TOGETHER WITH MY SINCERE SYMPATHY IN YOUR GREAT LOSS.

CAPT R. W. MILLNER

COMMANDING OFFICER NAVAL AIR TRANSPORT, SQUADRON 6, 12:59P

Letters of Condolence

On 2-NOV 1956 a more formal letter from Robert's Captain would arrive. In it, Captain Millner expresses his deepest sympathy over the recent loss of their son.

He reported, *"an extensive air search had been conducted. In addition, surface vessels of various nations covered two and one half million miles of ocean searching for the personnel. On October 15, wheels, part of the undercarriage and a life raft were found and subsequently identified as parts of the missing aircraft. The various SOS signals reported were checked and investigated. It was determined that the signals had nothing to do with the missing aircraft.*

It appears that death was instantaneous, and no mental or physical anguish was suffered by the personnel. As a member of this command, your son was liked by all of his associates. He was an excellent airman performing all tasks assigned to him in a cheerful and efficient manner thereby winning the commendation of his immediate superiors and respect of his comrades. News of his death came as a real shock to all who knew him, and his loss will be felt keenly in the organization. Losses such as these can never be adjusted, and that we all painfully know. I sincerely hope that the knowledge that your son was an exemplary sailor and died while serving his country will afford you some consolation in your bereavement.

Please feel free at all times to communicate with me or any member of the squadron and be assured our sentiments run deeper than can ever be stated."

R. M. Millner
Captain, U.S. Navy
Commanding Officer

On 14-NOV 1956, the Secretary of the Navy Charles S. Thomas would send his regrets:

**THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON
14 NOVEMBER 1956**

My dear Mr. and Mrs. McClenning:

I offer to you my personal condolences in the death of your son, Robert Wayne McClenning, Airman, United States Naval Reserve, which occurred on 11 October 1956.

I know what little solace the formal and written word can do to help meet the burden of your loss, but in spite of that knowledge I cannot refrain from writing to express to you my genuine sympathy in your bereavement.

Sincerely yours,
Charles S. Thomas
Secretary of the Navy

The Memorial Service

A memorial service for Robert was held on 10-NOV 1956 at Saint John and James Catholic Church at 164 North Elizabeth Avenue in Ferguson MO.

Robert's body along with the other 58 passengers of the military transport were never recovered. Robert Wayne McClenning is memorialized at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery. Sections MA, MB, MC and MD are Memorial Markers to commemorate those veterans whose remains were buried, lost at sea or non-recoverable. Robert was nineteen years old.

Today, 19-DEC 2020, Senator Josh Hawley and the Department of the Navy award the "Next of Kin, Deceased Personnel Lapel Button" to the family of Robert Wayne McClenning.



"No one is ever gone as long as someone remembers them"

Robert's rank was E-3. He was awarded the National Defense Medal and was likely eligible for additional medals.



Remembering those on the flight on 10-OCT 1956 C-118 that crashed off Azores

Combined members of the 307th Bomb Wing flown by a U.S. Navy crew.

Captain Kenneth E Goodroe
Captain Robert W Ryan
MSgt William A Caisse
SSgt Thomas I DeCota
A1C Alton J Gaines
A1C Orest D Giancola
A1C Billy B Grogan
A1C Eugene D Gruenberg
A1C Richard K Hunter
A1C Ronald L King
A1C Robert Lada
A1C Joseph D Loontiens
A1C Michael C Macedonia
A1C Ronald F Mountain
A1C Stanley L Osgar
A1C Keith A Peterson
A1C James L Schorr
A1C Robert C Urban
A1C Earl F Vasey
A1C Herbert A Banks
A2C Albert L Beard
A2C Dale R Brockman
A2C Conrad J Buehler Jr
A2C Edmond R DeWolf
A2C John F Disanto

A2C Raymond E Drake
A2C Lyle C Giberson
A2C Gene O Godfrey
A2C Cloyse A Hepler
A2C Gerard A Hummel
A2C Robert H Lipina
A2C George F Luce
A2C William R Ray
A2C Leonard J Roman
A2C Henry J Schuver
A2C Robert D Spurling A
A2C James B Whitlock
A2C Frank C Williamson
A3C Roscoe F Deel
A3C Willie B Ferguson
A3C Ronald L Gardner
A3C Charles W Hannah
A3C Lloyd D Harding
A3C Lee R Kane
A3C Sherman W Lock
A3C Ralph M Pacelli
A3C Donald L Reynolds
A3C Abelardo Siller Jr
A3C Bruce B Stewart
A3C Earl E Tanner