

The Angry Mountains

A radio newsman fights the High Sierra

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Have you ever been tested, mentally and physically? I mean really tested?

Do you know what kind of shape you're in, or how much you can take?

For myself, I found the answer to those questions last weekend.

I earn my rent, food and car payments by radio announcing and producing; not a vocation requiring the acme of physical conditioning. To be perfectly truthful—it's a profession of strong voices and weak bodies.

Dave McElhatton and I do an afternoon stint on KCBS radio, Monday through Friday. It's a happy partnership. We're both private pilots. We love flying and flyers.

That love has led us to two of the most exciting, yet tragic stories of the year. Strangely—both concern events that happened many years ago: Twenty-three and seventeen years to be exact.

Amelia Earhart disappeared twenty-three years ago. That story took me 6000 miles to the Island of Saipan last June. A B-24 bomber disappeared seventeen years ago. That story took me 365 miles to Kings Canyon National Park just last week.

The Liberator bomber was reported found in an 11,000 foot elevation lake in the High Sierra. The information was meager and incomplete. Dave and I decided I should head for the isolated location and see if further documenting evidence could be turned up.

KCBS and The Times had cosponsored the Saipan trip, and a similar arrangement was made for this jaunt. It's interesting to note that two highly competitive news gathering organizations can co-operate so effectively in a worth-common cause. Refreshing, too, when most competing newspapers and radio stations are tearing their hearts out for the advertising dollar and leaving the reporting to the wire services—that at least two, The Times and KCBS are willing

to give the readers and listeners the benefit of first hand reporting regardless of the cost.

I took San Mateo's Bob Fischer with me. His specialty is aqua-lung diving. If the bomber was at the bottom of the lake, I wanted to be able to get to it.

We drove all night arriving at Bishop at five in the morning. Then 23-miles west into the park over rough mountain roads to Rainbow pack outfit. This group specializes in providing guides and stock for treks into the back country.

By 9 a.m. we were on horseback headed for the interior and the scene of the wreck. It took two mules to carry our diving equipment, cameras and tape recording gear.

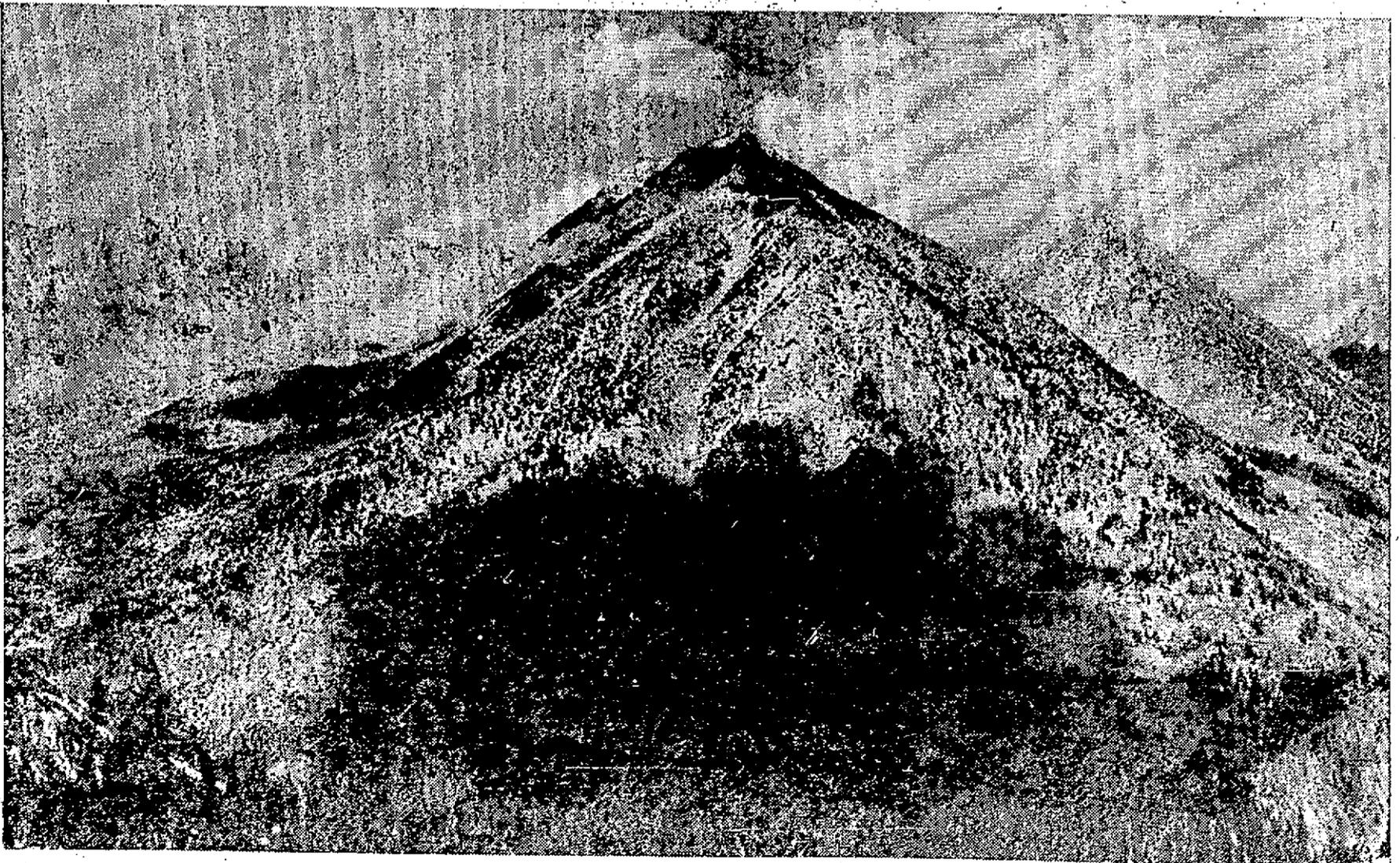
It is 18 miles from the Rainbow pack outfit to the La Conte Ranger tent which lies 3000 feet below the crash scene. I hadn't been on a horse other than a merry-go-round since I was eleven years old. Both Bob and I were totally unprepared for the distance or the trail; up and down precipitous cliffs and through barren basins. During the nine hour ride we experienced almost every kind of weather from boiling hot sun at the lower elevations to hail, rain and sleet at the higher.

It was winter in July at the near 12,000 foot Bishop pass; snow piled up high on all sides.

Finally toward evening we made the Le Conte Ranger's tent. I literally rolled out of the saddle trying not to show how much damage nine hours in the saddle can do to one's psyche.

The ranger, Leroy Brock, told me how difficult it was to reach the unnamed lake which had served for 17 years as a vault for the B-24 and its crew. "It's a mile and half west," Brock explained. "There's just one trouble. You've got to climb 3000 feet during that mile and a half." He pointed to the approximate spot. Almost straight up from the floor of the canyon between "Langille" and "The Citadel" peaks. Brock had been on a mapping expedition with two geologists when they stumbled on the lake and its grisly secret.

Bob and I slept on the ground in sleeping bags. At five



FORBIDDING BARRIER—Langill Peak and Black Divide where the B-24 first struck. The unnamed lake is located just behind the peak near the summit, a grueling six-hour trip on hands and knees.