Mercy plane kills 6 on mountain

VOLUNTEER PILOT DIED WHEN HE LET MATES SLEEP

Brisbane, Sunday

COMMANDING officer of No. 10 Maritime Reconnaissance Squadron, R.A.A.F., died yesterday because he would not wake up other members of his unit at Townsville.

He was Wing-Commander John Peter Costello, one of six people who died when the Lincoln he was piloting on a mercy flight crashed 200 feet from the summit of rugged Mt. Superbus just before dawn.

When the call for a plane was received about midnight on Friday, he took it off rather than disturb sleeping officers.

Other victims were a day-old baby girl being rushed to Brisbane for a blood transfusion to save her life, three crew members and a nursing sister from Townsville general hospital.

Nurse had resigned

The nurse was Sister Mafalda Gray, 26, who had resigned on Friday to take up another position, but volunteered for the flight.

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Mt. Superbus is in rugged country, 26 miles from Warwick and 60 miles from Brisbane.

With Costello, a married man with three children, and Sister Gray, died: Squadron-Leader Charles Surtees Mason, married; Squadron-Leader John Watson Finlay, navigator; Flight-Lieut. William George Cater, wireless operator.

Plane and ground searches were organised as soon as the plane was reported overdue, but a party of holiday bushwalkers were first to reach the scene at 2.35 p.m., after fighting their way through precipitous country for seven hours.

Wreckage was scattered for hundreds of yards.

Wartime ace

Wing-Commander Costello, whose crew also volunteered for the flight, had been commanding officer of the squadron for about nine months and had served with it in the war in Britain's bomber command.

Squadron-Leader Finlay had flown in Beaufighters during the war and had served in Korea.

Flight - Lieutenant Cater, who had logged more than 3,000 flying hours had served recently in Malaya.

No. 10 Maritime Squadron, based at Garbutt, near Townsville, is known as the "good deed" squadron.

Mercy trips, search and rescue flights, looking for missing aircraft and launches are almost routine for it.