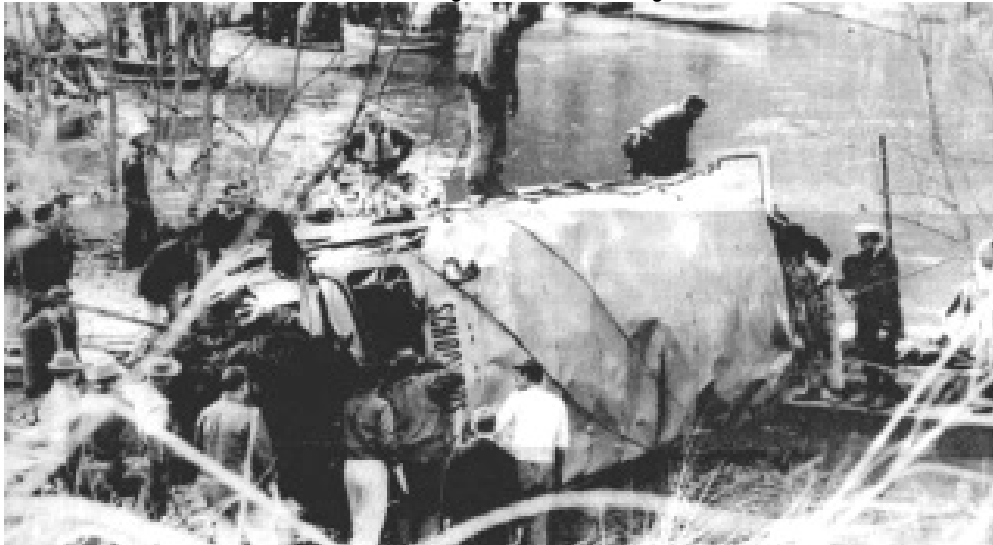


**KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD**  
**50<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY REMEMBRANCE**  
**1958 - 2008**

**The Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster**  
**28 February – 10 May 1958**



Compiled by John M. Trowbridge, Jason M. LeMay, and Jackie  
Branham Hall.  
2008

# **Kentucky Resolution**

SR 17 - J. Turner, R. Jones II

Commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Prestonsburg School Bus Crash of 1958.

January 9, 2008 –Introduced in Senate

## **A RESOLUTION Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Prestonsburg School Bus Crash of 1958.**

"I answer the heroic question 'Death, where is thy sting?' with 'It is here in my heart and mind and memories.'"

- Maya Angelou

WHEREAS, on February 28th, 1958, at 8:10 a.m., School Bus #27, loaded with 48 students, was in route to Prestonsburg Elementary and High Schools, when three miles south of Prestonsburg on US 23, the bus collided with a tow truck, swerved and struck a parked car, and then plunged into the icy waters of the rain-swollen Big Sandy River; and

WHEREAS, in a matter of minutes the 12,000 pound school bus disappeared into the murky depths with its innocent cargo - 26 children, ranging in age from 8 to 17, and their bus driver, the deadliest school bus crash in United States history, equaled only by the Carrollton Bus Crash of 1988; and

WHEREAS, the tragedy struck at the very heart of Prestonsburg and Floyd County, leaving no one untouched in some way, from the grieving families and friends to the 22 survivors, who each had to deal with the tragedy itself and adjust to life after the accident; and

WHEREAS, the children who died in the Crash were not given a permanent memorial immediately following the accident, as many parents wished not to be reminded of the tragedy; and

WHEREAS, a permanent monument to the victims of the crash at Jenny Wiley State Park was dedicated in 1984 and a memorial was recently unveiled in Prestonsburg at the site of the old Floyd County Courthouse; and

WHEREAS, this unspeakable disaster remains as painful for the survivors today fifty years later, and was summed up simply and eloquently by Prestonsburg resident Josephine Fields, who said, "It's the worst thing that's ever happened in Floyd County. The very worst thing;"

NOW, THEREFORE, Be it resolved by the Senate of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

Section 1. The members of this body, both individually and collectively, commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Prestonsburg School Bus Crash of 1958, and express our condolences to the surviving friends and family members of the victims.

Section 2. When the Senate adjourns this day, it does so in honor of the victims of the Prestonsburg School Bus Crash of 1958.

Section 3. The Clerk of the Senate shall forward copies of this Resolution to Senator Johnny Ray Turner for presentation to local officials and family members.

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Kentucky Resolution: Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Prestonsburg School Bus Crash of 1958.

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A - List of those who died in the Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster.

B - Information about the School Bus Disaster.

C – Kentucky National Guard Units Activated.

D – Awards and Decorations to Kentucky National Guard Personnel.

Cover photographs: Top photograph of the accident scene, 3 March 1958, *courtesy Floyd County Times*. Bottom photograph of the accident scene, 25 January 2008, *courtesy of Kathy Prater, Floyd County Times*.

**NOTE:** *Caution this document contains descriptions of the accident and the aftermath and may not be suitable for all readers.*

## Acknowledgements

As with all of our historical publications, many people have helped to pull this piece of Kentucky National Guard History together.

Major General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay's draft monograph entitled, "*Kentucky Military History 1920 – 1978*," followed by Colonel (Ret) Joseph Craft's, "*Kentucky National Guard History, World War II – Berlin Crisis 1937-1962*," laid the groundwork for this publication.

Special thanks to Kathy Prater of the Floyd County Times for her photographs and assistance in locating individuals in and around Floyd County who had pertinent information pertaining to the Kentucky National Guard's involvement with this tragic event.

Colonel (Ret) Armando "Al" Alfaro, one of the many Guardsmen who were on hand during the event, for his informative insight, on the Guards involvement in this tragic event, thank you sir.

The libraries at the Kentucky Historical Society, the Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, University of Kentucky's, William T. Young Library, and the Lexington-Fayette County Public Library for assistance in tracking down articles and information pertaining to the event. And finally, thanks to the staff of the Department of Military Affairs, Military Records and Research Branch for their assistance with compiling data and photographs for the publication.

## Introduction

The collision and plunge into a river involving a school bus near Prestonsburg, Kentucky on February 28, 1958 was the most disastrous bus accident in the history of the United States.

On a cold and cloudy morning, after a period of heavy rains and thaw, a Floyd County school bus loaded with 48 elementary and high school students bound for school at Prestonsburg on U.S. Route 23 struck the rear of a wrecker truck and plunged down an embankment and into the swollen waters of the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River, where it was swept downstream and submerged.

Twenty-Two children escaped the bus in the first few minutes as it became fully submerged in the raging flood stage waters and made it safely out of the river. However, 26 other children and the bus driver drowned. Kentucky National Guard and other authorities and agencies responded. The bus was finally located by Navy divers, and removed from the river 55 hours later.

Over 500 Kentucky National Guardsmen were activated during the sixty-nine day search and recovery operation for the victims of this tragic incident. Kentucky Guardsmen involved count the Prestonsburg Bus Tragedy as the grimmest state duty they ever performed. The accident drew nationwide sympathy for the parents of the children and respect for the stoic courage of the Prestonsburg people.

Fifty years later, the 27 person death toll is tied with the Carrollton, Kentucky bus disaster in 1988 for the highest number of fatalities resulting from a bus accident. Both accidents occurred in Kentucky and in each, the victims were all thought to have survived the initial collisions, but were unable to safely evacuate the school-type buses afterwards. After the 1988 accident, Kentucky changed its public school bus equipment requirements and requires a higher number of emergency exits than any other state in the country.

## The Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster

On the morning of February 28, 1958, junk dealer Donald Horn slowed to investigate a truck off the road in a ditch. Behind him, a Floyd County school bus, apparently not seeing Horn's wrecker in time, struck the rear of the vehicle, swerved across U.S. Route 23, and plunged into the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River.

The normally docile stream had been transformed by rain and flooding into a swiftly moving river thirty feet deep, twenty feet above flood stage. What might have been a multi-injury accident became a tragedy as panic-stricken schoolchildren broke windows and fought to get out the back door before the bus sank. Of the forty-eight on board, twenty-two escaped. The rest – twenty-six children and the driver – were carried downstream and under the water in the fierce current.<sup>i</sup>

The accident occurred at Knotley Hollow, three miles south of Prestonsburg. It was immediately labeled the worst traffic accident in state history and the National Safety Council called it the worst highway accident involving children in the nation's history.<sup>ii</sup>



Governor A. B. Chandler.  
*Courtesy KHS Special Collections.*

Answering the frantic appeals of local officials, Governor Chandler directed Adjutant General J. J. B. Williams to order to active duty "any number of National Guard units or individuals...deemed necessary to effect immediate aid to the bereaved families in the search for the school bus and children involved."<sup>iii</sup> General Orders #4, 28 February 1958, shows the following seventeen units of the Kentucky National Guard ordered to duty on the dates shown:

<u>Unit:</u>	<u>Station:</u>	<u>Date Ordered to Active Duty:</u>
138th FA Btry (Searchlight)	Lexington	28 February
Svc Btry 242 <sup>nd</sup> FA Bn	Jackson	03 March
Hq & Hq Btry XXIII Corps Arty	Lexington	04 March
Hq & Hq Btry 242 <sup>nd</sup> FA Bn	Frankfort	04 March
Btry A, 242 <sup>nd</sup> FA Bn	Carlisle	04 March
Hq & Hq Btry 441 <sup>st</sup> FA Bn	Richmond	04 March
Svc Btry 441 <sup>st</sup> FA Bn	Harrodsburg	04 March
Btry A 441 <sup>st</sup> FA Bn	Danville	04 March
Btry B 441 <sup>st</sup> FA Bn	Richmond	04 March
Btry C 441 <sup>st</sup> FA Bn	Richmond	04 March
Co A, 201 <sup>st</sup> Engr (C)(A) Bn	Carrollton	04 March

198 <sup>th</sup> FA Bn (Less C)	Louisville	09 March
Btry B 452 <sup>nd</sup> AFA Bn	Elizabethtown	15 March
Btry C 452 <sup>nd</sup> AFA Bn	Elizabethtown	15 March
Hq & Hq Btry 452 <sup>nd</sup> AFA Bn	Louisville	16 March
Btry A 452 <sup>nd</sup> AFA Bn	Louisville	16 March
Svc Btry 452 <sup>nd</sup> AFA Bn	Louisville	16 March



Elements of many other Guard units were called to duty before the search ended. In addition, the State Police, Coast Guard, Salvation Army, Red Cross, and some Army Reservists were all summoned for help. The Army Reserve Armory at Prestonsburg was prepared as an emergency morgue.<sup>iv</sup>

Major General J. J. B. Williams, The Adjutant General of Kentucky, at the time of the bus disaster. *Courtesy KY DMA, MRRB.*

Captain Armando Alfaro<sup>v</sup> of XXIII Corps Artillery received notice of active duty at the old Frankfort Pike armory in Lexington that afternoon. He and Second Lieutenant James Winkler of Searchlight Battery departed for Prestonsburg in advance of other personnel, taking one searchlight with them. They arrived in Prestonsburg late that evening, encountering swarms of sightseer, and reported to Lieutenant William Lykins of the Kentucky State Police and Prestonsburg Mayor William Napier. After reconnaissance, they positioned the searchlight at the West Prestonsburg Bridge.<sup>vi</sup>

By morning, personnel of the 138<sup>th</sup> Searchlight Battery, XXIII Corps Artillery and the 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Observation Battalion arrived with three more searchlights. Arriving was Master Sergeant Charles Haynes, Sergeant First Class John Roser, and Sergeant Charles Biddle of the 138<sup>th</sup>



Searchlight Battery; Chief Warrant Officers George Armstrong, Esby

Barber and George Mattocks, Jr., Specialist Nullan Burton and Private Thomas White of XXIII Corps Artillery; and First Lieutenant Thomas Buyher, Warrant Officer Hansel House, and Warrant Officer Edward Smith of the 640<sup>th</sup>.<sup>vii</sup>

Each searchlight was five feet in diameter and had the brightness of 800 million candles (candle power). These spotlights allowed the parents of the children, many of whom had vowed to stay on the river twenty-four hours (a day) until their children were found, to continue the grim search.<sup>viii</sup>



138<sup>th</sup> Searchlight Battery Truck. *AP Wire Service photograph.*

138<sup>th</sup> Searchlight Battery in operation. *Floyd County Times.*







Searching by night, under the lights of Kentucky National Guard searchlights volunteers cross the river in boats looking for the school bus and missing children. *Courtesy of Jackie Branham Hall.*

By Saturday morning, news of the tragedy had drawn more volunteers and sightseers to the area. U.S. Route 23 was lined with cars for a mile in either direction. Guardsmen performed traffic control duties in addition to probing the river and clearing brush and branches from areas in their search for the still-submerged bus. They supervised the flow of traffic in cooperation with local officials until 6:00 o'clock that evening. Then they manned the searchlights at the accident area and the West Prestonsburg Bridge.<sup>ix</sup> It was the first night all four searchlights were put into operation, and searchers gave whoops of joy at the day-like brightness the lights lent to the river.<sup>x</sup>

The bus, however, could not be found. U.S. Navy divers were finally used after all other means, including sonar equipment, grappling hooks, and long steel rods, failed.<sup>xii</sup> Metal nets were stretched across the Big Sandy three miles downstream to catch bodies. A river barge was also used in the search; holes were drilled through its deck and steel pipes run through the holes to drag the river. Lieutenant John Mundy of the Coast Guard coordinated all search efforts.<sup>xiii</sup>



(Left) Diver Carlton Hadley. (Right) An unidentified Kentucky National Guardsman watches as diver prepares for another descent into the murky waters. *Henry P. Scaff Collection.*



Kentucky National Guard soldiers assist in lower search boat down the bank of the Levisa Fork of the Big Sandy River. *AP Wire Service.*

Governor Chandler and his executive secretary Harry Davis arrived by plane at 3:10 p.m. on Saturday, March 1<sup>st</sup>. Colonel (Ret) Alfaro recalls Chandler's visiting some of the families:

"He was a very emotional man and I know he went to visit one family and I remember seeing him when he came out in tears ..."<sup>xiii</sup>

In a radio speech made to the citizens of Prestonsburg, Governor Chandler promised, "We will do all we can for you in this disaster." He added, "We should be grateful to God Almighty for those youngsters who were saved."<sup>xiv</sup>

Kentucky Guard units were organized into probing and dragging teams. They worked night and day, thoroughly covering the river and the willows bordering it. Boat teams dragged the bottom of the river, employing eight to ten boats at one time and working side by side so that the entire width of the river could be covered. Men sifted through flood refuse and probed along the banks.<sup>xv</sup>



Arrow to the left indicates the high water mark when bus plunged into the river the morning of February 28, 1958. Notice military helicopter in the field, across the river. *Courtesy Jackie Branham Hall.*

On March 2, the school bus was found approximately 250 feet from where it entered the river. It might have gone further but for a rock ledge in the center of the stream blocked it.<sup>xvi</sup> It was the body of young James Ousley, floating near the surface and caught in one of the bus windows, that indicated the location of the bus.<sup>xvii</sup> Divers attached grappling hooks to the bus and bulldozers dragged it out onto the bank. Colonel (Ret) Alfaro describes the bus after it came to rest and the events that followed:

"I remember the bus was loaded with mud and you could see hands and legs sticking out of the mud... The people were just sort of in shock, and I remember Hansel House... ran over and pulled up that front door and he grabbed the first body and with that everybody came in and started doing it."<sup>xviii</sup>



Kentucky National Guard soldiers watch as the bus is pulled to the river bank. *Petty Thompson Collection.*



*Floyd County Times.*

The "first body" was the driver's. Fourteen pupils were also pulled out of the bus, leaving twelve to be found.<sup>xix</sup>



Kentucky National Guard soldiers assist with the movement of bodies from the bus, as well as keeping the crowd back from the site. *Reverend Dan Heitzelman Collection.*



On March 3, Service Battery, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, assumed command in Prestonsburg. Due to a mix-up in orders, Alfaro's unit had departed for home after the bus was found. Now XXIII Corps Artillery was ordered back to Prestonsburg to assume immediate supervision of operations.<sup>xx</sup> As it was clear troops would be stationed in the area for some time, First Lieutenant Joseph R. Craft of the United States Property & Fiscal Office was assigned as procurement officer and directed the logistics end of the operation. All troops were stationed in the Prestonsburg High School Gym.<sup>xxi</sup>

The body of Linda Darby was pulled from the muddy river on March 3 by two civilian volunteers. Her body was recovered about one-half mile below the location of the school bus.<sup>xxii</sup>

On March 4 a meeting was held with local officials to coordinate search activities. Present at the meeting were County Judge Henry Stumbo, Mayor William Napier, Lieutenant Mundy, Floyd County Sheriff Hershel Warrins, County Coroner James Carter, and all Kentucky National Guard unit commanders. It was decided to continue probing operations along the flooded riverbanks, dragging the river, illuminating the river at strategic points, and maintaining nets stretched across the river at the West Prestonsburg Bridge, Auxier (a small community north of Prestonsburg), and at Paintsville (beyond Auxier).<sup>xxiii</sup>

Three bodies were discovered on March 4 by Service Battery, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.<sup>xxiv</sup> The next day, a fourth body, that of Joyce McPeak was recovered beneath a swinging bridge.<sup>xxv</sup> To facilitate the search, Guardsmen and volunteer searchers fashioned makeshift grappling poles with scrap iron and sixteen-foot 2x2's. Some of the irons were too dull to use; the 441<sup>st</sup> lost two bodies it had located and tried to recover.<sup>xxvi</sup> Materials for the poles were secured via announcements over radio station WEKY.<sup>xxvii</sup> Other appeals brought in 36 pairs of rubber gloves and 24 pairs of pliers.<sup>xxviii</sup>

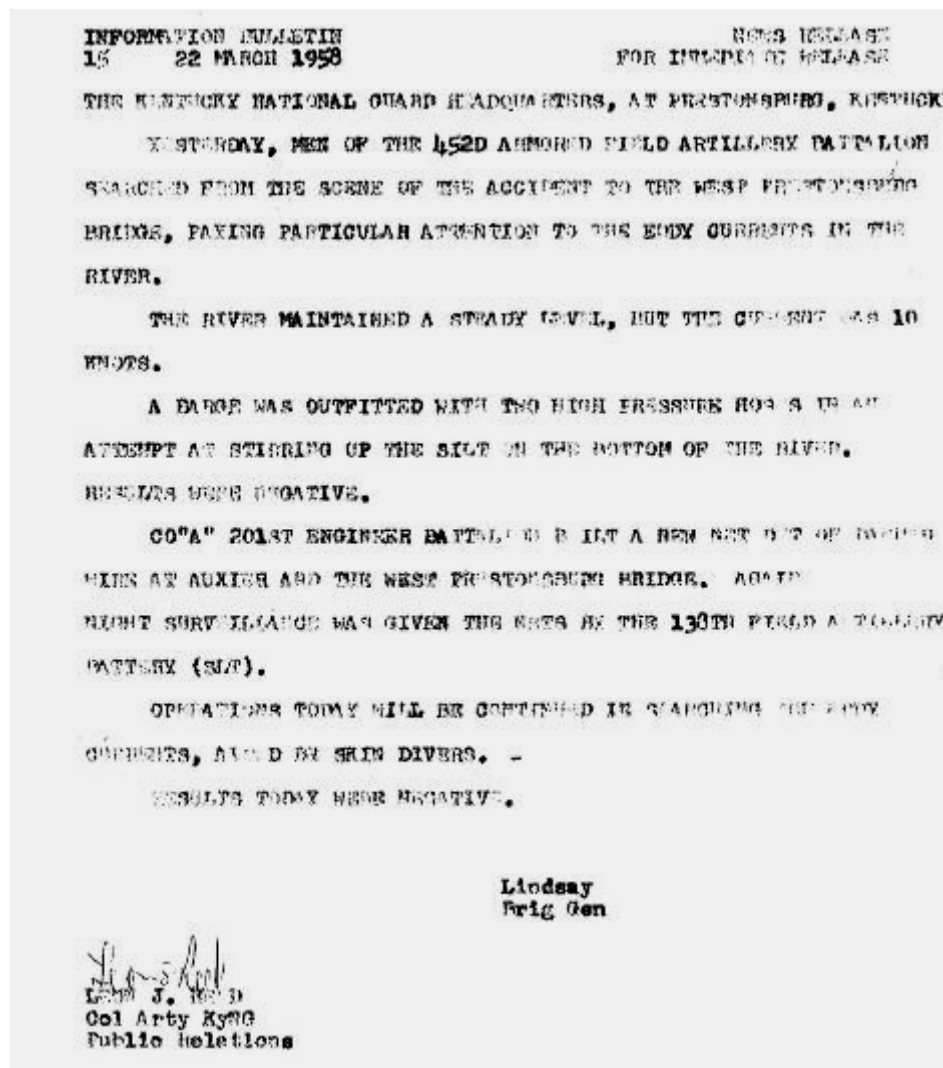
Guardsmen recall the Prestonsburg folk as polite and helpful during the extensive search, able to lay aside personal grief to assist in the search and support the Guardsmen. Communities such as Auxier donated cots and other supplies and prepared food for Guardsmen.<sup>xxix</sup> Colonel (Ret) Jerry Heaton recalls the townspeople as "extremely cooperative." Colonel (Ret) Joe Craft remembers in particular the Gobles, who had lost three children in the accident and who expressed continual concern for the welfare of the Guardsmen.

Captain David May of the 441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion is another who recalls the kindness he encountered during the tragedy. He cites one man who informed him that the ladies of a church at Auxier had prepared lunch for his men. Captain May, remembering his instructions not to impose on the citizens, declined, saying he had

seventy-seven people in his company. "He said he knew, and told us to come on," Mays says, adding:

"Those people were just tremendous in their support of the Guard, and I don't know that I have ever seen that many men work for such hours with just total absence of any complaining and I think that this is a credit to the Guard, and also an indication of how sincerely those Guardsmen felt about trying to find those kids."<sup>xxx</sup>

No more bodies were discovered through the rest of March.



22 March 1958, press release from Brigadier General Jesse Lindsay, commander, XXIII Corps. *Courtesy of Jackie Branham Hall.*

Suggestions as to how to raise the seven remaining bodies poured into the Governor's Office and the Office of the Adjutant General. It was suggested that detonating dynamite might be the best way to dislodge the bodies in the river.<sup>xxxxi</sup> This suggestion was based on the old practice of firing a cannon over a body of water where a person had drowned, the concussion often being sufficient to nudge the body to the surface. Meanwhile, superstitious town folk suggested that a forked peach tree limb with a toenail and a lock of hair attached would lead to the location of the bodies.<sup>xxxii</sup>

On April 6, a new net was constructed below the one at the West Prestonsburg Bridge. Units dragged Levisa Fork from four miles north of West Prestonsburg Bridge, working north to Auxier four and a half miles. No recoveries were made until April 8, when a little girl's body was spotted at 11:10 in the morning.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Early the next morning, April 9, another body was withdrawn from the river. Around three o'clock on April 10, a third body was recovered. Headquarters Company, 623<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, was responsible for each of these recoveries.<sup>xxxiv</sup>



April 10, 1958, Kentucky Guard soldiers from the 623<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery gather around a stove on a bridge lookout. L-R, SFC Warford Utley, SP2 James Stewart, and MSG Charles Froedge. *Courtesy Courier-Journal newspaper.*

The return of warm weather and the gradual descent of the river caused the bodies to rise and surface.<sup>xxxv</sup> But divers were used on April 14 and 15 after another lull in the recoveries. As before they met with no success; the waters were still too dark and the current too strong.

On April 16 a new operation was put into effect. Bulldozers were used to clear away the troublesome willow trees and shrubs having branches in the water. It was thought that these could trap and hold a body down. Operations were begun at 7:30 a.m. and proved effective soon after when, at 9:45, the body of Doris Faye Burchett was found.<sup>xxxvi</sup>





The Rescue Group which recovered the body of Doris Fay Burchett, one of the 27 school bus victims last Wednesday was composed of these five. From left, they are: Jones Kerr, Paris, Ky., Col. Stanton T. Smith, Lexington, National Guard commanding officer, Sp-3 Ronald Harmon and Sgt. 1 Kenneth Miller, of Carrollton, and Pvt. Clyde Stephens, of Ashland. Col. Smith heads the 41 National Guardsmen who continue to aid recovery operations here. Mr. Kerr, a Paris businessman, came here immediately after the school bus tragedy was reported and has recovered two bodies. Except for three or four brief visits home, he has been in Prestonsburg at his own expense, searching the river day after day. When the School Bus Disaster fund was started he was one of its first contributors. As a civilian searcher he could have claimed the \$1,000 offered for the recovery of each body, but he refused to benefit financially in any way.

Floyd County Times newspaper article concerning recovery of the body of Doris Fay Burchett. *Courtesy of Jackie Branham Hall.*

On April 20, Guardsmen, assisted by rescue workers from Tennessee, used four bulldozers to clear the river's right bank of willow shrubs and stumps from the accident scene to approximately 1,000 feet downriver. Bulldozers on the left bank duplicated the procedure. Except for the recover of a coat on April 18, there were no more results.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

In late April, heavy rains again raised the water's level and strengthened its current, hindering search efforts. On April 23, Specialist James P. Seals and Private Wayne Hopkins sighted a body, floating amid trash, from the boat dock watch position. The body was retrieved approximately 500 yards below the West Prestonsburg Bridge on the left bank by Master Sergeant Okie S. Green, Warrant Officer Thomas W. Muncaster, Master Sergeant Vaughn Holbrook, and Specialist James Stephens. Two civilians assisted. The body was taken to the Reserve armory where it was identified by clothing and a wristwatch to be that of James L. Meade.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

The 640<sup>th</sup> worked with the 201<sup>st</sup> Engineers to clear willows from the right bank beginning just below the accident scene to the Bull Creek Bridge. Hard rains delayed the operation. On April 25, ten boats manned by National Guard personnel patrolled the river from the scene of the accident to Auxier. The units' efforts were further hindered when the searchlights began needing replacement parts that weren't available.<sup>xxxix</sup> Consequently, only two searchlights were

manned, one at the boat dock and one at the West Prestonsburg Bridge. A searchlight was burned intermittently at Auxier.<sup>xI</sup>

On April 30, Beddie Goble and William Goodman, two volunteer searchers, were working approximately one and a half miles from the scene of the accident when they found another body. Personnel of Battery B, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, and the 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion assisted in the recovery of the body, which was later identified as that of James Edward Goble, Beddie Gobel's son.<sup>xII</sup>



Unidentified Kentucky National Guardsman with civilian searchers.  
*Henry P. Scaff Collection.*

By May 7, the Levisa Fork was again at flood stage. Boat patrols were used only to confirm the identification of objects resembling bodies. The Guard assisted families in moving from low areas, constructed levies to hold back flood waters, and assisted the Army Corps of Engineers in distributing pumps.<sup>xIII</sup>

On May 10, two Kentucky Guardsmen, Jarrell Caudill and Billy Banks, assisted in the recovery of the final body, nine-year-old Paulette Cline was discovered at dusk under the Cliff Bridge nearly three miles from the site of the accident. After 72 days the search and recovery operation was finally over.<sup>xIIII</sup>

Veteran Guardsmen count the Prestonsburg Bus Tragedy as the grimmest state duty they ever performed. The accident drew nationwide sympathy for the parents of the children and respect for the stoic courage of the Prestonsburg people.

Less than a month after the recovery of the last body, Guard members were surprised to receive citations for "Outstanding Service contributed in the recovery of the bodies of the twenty-six schoolchildren and the bus driver lost in the Big Sandy River". The citations had been prepared by the Prestonsburg Schoolchildren Recovery Committee, and were signed by the parents of the deceased. The gesture touched the Guardsmen, who were unaccustomed to receiving thanks for doing their duty.

Know Ye, to Whom These Greetings Come, that

is awarded this CITATION in grateful recognition for

# Outstanding Service

contributed in the recovery of the bodies of the 25 schoolchildren and the bus driver lost in the Big Sandy River in the nation's most tragic school bus accident near Prestonsburg, Floyd County, Kentucky, February 25, 1958.

## THE PARENTS

*Bill and Bernice Dyer*  
Parents of Linda Dyer

*James B. and Virginia B. Goble*  
Parents of James Edward,  
John Spencer and Anne Laura  
Goble

*James E. and Louise M. Carey*  
Parents of James Edison Carey

*Otis and Elizabeth Cline*  
Parents of Glenda Mae and  
Bessie Forrest Cline

*Ed and Madeline Hunt*  
Parents of Margaret Louise Hunt

*Mrs. Pauline Matney*  
Parents of Miss Cheryl and  
Joyce Ann Matney

*Levi and Blanche Justice*  
Parents of Kathryn Justice

*Scott and Lillian Allen*  
Parents of Randy Scott Mallon

*John and Lucille Hight*  
Parents of John Harlan Hight

*James C. and Audrey Cline*  
Parents of Sandra Faye and  
Paulette Cline

*Mr. W. S. Madys B. Harris*  
Parents of Jane Carol Harris

*Bill and Rebecca Jarrell*  
Parents of Bucky Ray and  
Katie Carol Jarrell

*Alex and Lorna De Passett*  
Parents of John Alex Demassett  
The Bus Driver

*Alvin and Charles Lewis*  
Parents of Marcelle Lewis

*John and Virginia Dyer*  
Parents of Bonnie Dyer

*Edith C. Lin*  
Guardian of Nanette Joyce Hofest

*Virgil and Nancy Jane Davis*  
Parents of Montaine Davis

*Bill and Lucille Cassin Breckel*  
Parents of Doris Faye Breckel

*James L. and Phelma Meade*  
Parents of James L. Meade, Jr.

*Orville and Abigail Dyer*  
Parents of James Thomas Dyer

*Jeff and Mary Belle Lewis*  
Parents of Roosevelt Lewis

In Testimony Whereof, We have hereunto caused this evidence of appreciation to be signed and the seal of the Prestonsburg Schoolchildren Recovery Committee, affixed. Done at Prestonsburg, Floyd County, Kentucky, the twenty eighth day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred fifty-eight.

## PRESTONSBURG SCHOOLCHILDREN RECOVERY COMMITTEE



Chairman: *William S. Madys B. Harris*  
Secretary: *James B. Goble*  
Treasurer: *John H. Hight*

Citation for Service - Citation given by the families of the children who perished in the Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster to individual members of the Kentucky National Guard who assisted in the recovery operation. Certificate presented to Harold McSpadden. Donated by CSM (Ret) Lee McSpadden.

## Annex A

### List of those who died in the Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster<sup>xliv</sup>

**Doris Faye Burchett**, 15, of Emma.

**James Edison Carey**, 9, of Emma.

**Glenda May Cisco**, 17, and her brother,  
**Kenneth Forest Cisco**, 14, of Sugar Loaf.

**Sandra Faye Cline**, 8, and her sister,  
**Paulette Cline**, 9, of Lancer.

**Emogene Darby**, 17, of Cow Creek.

**Linda Darby**, 14, of Cow Creek.

**John Alex DeRossett**, 27, of Water Gap.

**James Edward Goble**, 12, his brother,  
**John Spencer Goble**, 11, and sister,  
**Anna Laura Goble**, 9, of Emma.

**Jane Carol Harris**, 14, of Emma.

**John Harlan Hughes Jr.**, 13, of Emma.

**Margaret Louise Hunt**, 15, of Cow Creek.

**Bucky Ray Jarrell**, 14, and his sister,  
**Katie Carol Jarrell**, 13, of Sugar Loaf.

**Marcella Jervis**, 14, of Emma.

**Montaine Jervis**, 15, of Endicott.

**Thomas Roosevelt Jervis**, 13, of Buffalo Creek.

**Kathryn Justice**, 16, of Endicott.

**Nannie Joyce McPeck**, 17, of Lancer.

**Joyce Ann Matney**, 14, and her sister,  
**Rita Cheryl Matney**, 8, of Lancer.

**James L. Meade Jr.**, 9, of Lancer.

**James Thomas Ousley**, 15, of Lancer.

**Randy Scott Wallen**, 17, of Lancer.



Doris Faye Burchett

# The Twenty-seven Who Died In The Nation's Worst School Bus Disaster Near Prestonsburg, Ky., February 28, 1958



James Edison Carey



Glenda May Cisco



James Edward Goble



John Spencer Goble



Anna Laura Goble



Linda Darby



Emogene Darby



Kenneth Forrest Cisco



Paulette Cline



Sandra Faye Cline



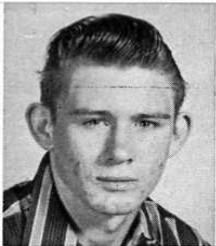
Jane Carol Harris



Margaret Louise Hunt



John Harlan Hughes



Bucky Ray Jarrell



Katie Carol Jarrell



Marcella Jervis



Montaine Jervis



Thomas Roosevelt Jervis



Kathryn Justice



Randy Wallen



Rita Cheryl Matney



Joyce Ann Matney



James L. Meade, Jr.



Nannie Joyce McPeck



James Thomas Ousley

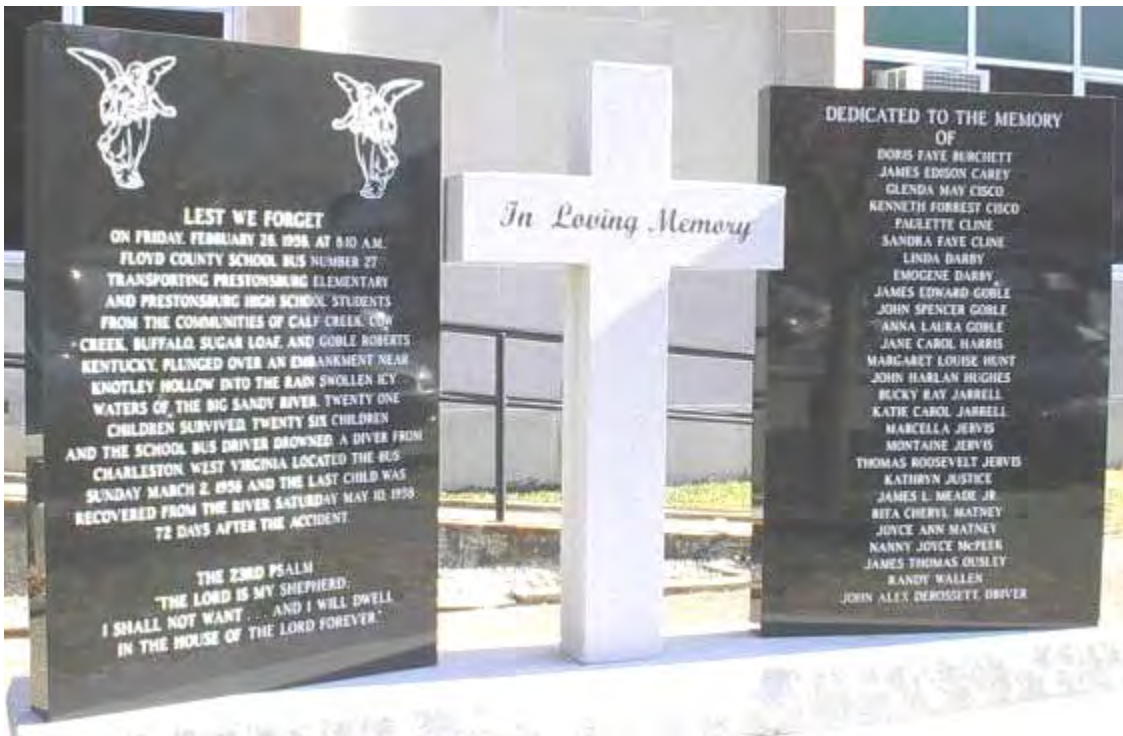


John Alex Derossett, Driver

A memorial to the school bus victims is located about midway between the convention center and May Lodge at Jenny Wiley Park. The stone monument sits at the top of a heart-shaped garden. Three plaques are displayed on the monument. One plaque has 27 crosses representing the children and bus driver who died in the he accident. A cross stands at the heart's point. The monument was dedicated in 1994.



Photograph of memorial at Jenny Wiley State Park. *Courtesy of Kathy Prater, Floyd County Times.*



Photograph of the "new" memorial located at the Old Floyd County Courthouse. *Courtesy of Kathy Prater, Floyd County Times.*

On October 10, 2007, a second memorial dedicated to the memory of the 27 lives that were lost in the 1958 school bus disaster was officially unveiled in front of the old Floyd County Courthouse.<sup>xlv</sup>

## Annex B

### KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD AFTER-ACTION REPORT CONCERNING THE BUS DISASTER<sup>xlvi</sup>

On 28 February 1958 the 138th FA Btry (SLT) was ordered to Prestonsburg, Kentucky for the purpose of aiding in the search for drowned school children in the Big Sandy River. On 4 March 1958 the following additional units were ordered for this duty: Hq & Hq Btry XXIIIrd Corps Arty, Hq & Hq Btry 242<sup>nd</sup> FA Bn, Btry A 242<sup>nd</sup> FA Bn, all of the 441<sup>st</sup> FA Bn. On 15 March 1958, Btry B 452<sup>nd</sup> FA Bn was ordered for this duty and on 16 March, Hq Btry and Btry A 452<sup>nd</sup> FA Bn were ordered for this duty. Co A, 201st Engineer Bn (C)(A) had elements for this duty during the entire operation. In addition several units had elements of the units ordered for this duty.

#### PRESTONSBURG SCHOOL BUS DISASTER FUND<sup>xlvii</sup>

Allotted from Governor's Emergency Fund            106,000

#### Expenditures

##### Personal Services:

Active Duty payrolls	76,608
Doctors' Fees and Hospital bills	2,039
Total Cost, Personal Services	78,647

##### Current Operating Expenses:

Telephone and Telegraph	377
Travel in Kentucky	146
Maint. and Repair of Vehicles	30
Laundry and Dry Cleaning	159
Food Supplies	14,794
Gas and Oil	11,039
Clothing	114
Janitors' Supplies	72
Medical Supplies	82
Recreational Supplies	12
Miscellaneous	30
Total Current Operating Expenses	26,855
Total State Cost,	
Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster	105,502

## Annex C

### KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD UNITS ACTIVATED

Many of the men pictured below took part in the Prestonsburg bus disaster recovery operation. All photographs were taken during Annual Training at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, in 1959.



**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
XXIII Corps Artillery  
Lexington, Kentucky**



**138th Field Artillery Battery (Searchlight)  
Lexington, Kentucky**





**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
198<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Service Battery, 198<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



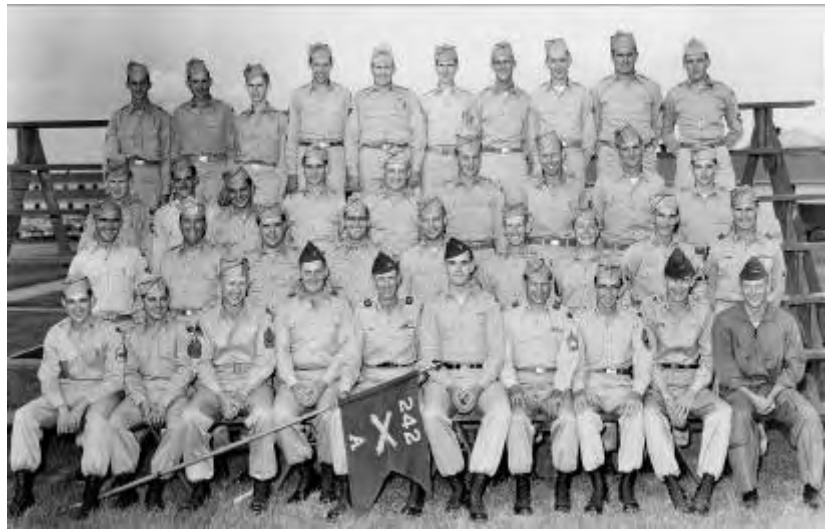
**Battery A, 198<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Battery B, 198<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Frankfort, Kentucky**



**Battery A, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Carlisle, Kentucky**



**Service Battery, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Jackson, Kentucky**



**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Richmond, Kentucky**



**Service Battery, 441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Harrodsburg, Kentucky**



**Battery A, 441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Danville, Kentucky**



**Battery B, 441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Richmond, Kentucky**



**Battery C, 441<sup>st</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Richmond, Kentucky**



**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
452<sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Service Battery, 452<sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Battery A, 452<sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Louisville, Kentucky**



**Battery B, 452<sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Elizabethtown, Kentucky**





**Battery C, 452<sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion  
Elizabethtown, Kentucky**



**Headquarters & Headquarters Battery,  
623<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
Glasgow, Kentucky**

## **NO PHOTOGRAPH AVAILABLE**

### **Company A, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer (Combat) (Army) Battalion Carrollton, Kentucky**

Partial list of names of personnel from Company A, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer (C)(A) that participated in the recovery operation:

MAJ Tilman O. Blackburn  
MAJ Royce H. Gregory  
MAJ John R. Somerville  
MSG Robert E. Brown  
SFC Joseph W. Simmons  
SP2 Cecil Daniel  
SP2 Ernest D. Howard  
SP3 Richard L. Bittel  
SP3 Louis E. Boone  
SP3 Jimmie L. McCoy  
SP3 Albert R. Brown  
SP3 James R. Simmons  
SP3 Paul E. Smith  
SP3 Kenneth S. Underwood

## Annex D

### **AWARDS AND DECORATIONS PRESENTED TO KENTUCKY NATIONAL GUARD PERSONNEL**

#### **Kentucky Medal for Merit.**



Captain William S. Dalton,  
Service Battery, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.

First Lieutenant Glenn A. Fisher,  
Company A, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion.

Chief Warrant Officer Frank J. Hickey,  
Service Battery, 242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.

Chief Warrant Officer Hansel House,  
Headquarters and Service Battery, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.

#### **Kentucky Commendation Ribbon with "V" Device.**

Master Sergeant Robert H. Young, Jr.,  
Company A, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion.

Sergeant First Class Kenneth G. Miller,  
Company A, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion.

#### **Kentucky Commendation Ribbon.**

Presented to the following personnel of Service Battery,  
242<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion:

Sergeant First Class Charles A. Combs.  
Sergeant First Class Bert Goff.  
Sergeant First Class Hobert Scuth.  
Sergeant Thomas R. Bach  
Sergeant Arch Stacy, Jr.  
Specialist Third Class Cecil W. Griffin, Jr.  
Specialist Third Class Donald Privett.  
Specialist Third Class John M. Smith.  
Private First Class Morton McIntosh.  
Specialist Second Class Norman Dunn.  
Private Second Class J. B. Scuth.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>i</sup> "Death Toll Set at 28 In School Bus Tragedy." *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 01 March 1958, p. 1.
- <sup>ii</sup> "Bus Tragedy Termed Worst of Its Kind." *Louisville [KY] Courier-Journal*, 01 March 1958, Sec. 1. p. 12. cols. 4-5.
- <sup>iii</sup> Executive Order, Office of the Governor of Kentucky, 28 February 1958. Governor's Papers, Executive Journal, A. B. Chandler, 1955-1959, p. 385.
- <sup>iv</sup> Gerald Griffin, "Bus Carries 24 to Death in River," *Louisville [KY] Courier-Journal*. 01 March 1958, sec. 1, p. 12, col. 4.
- <sup>v</sup> Then-Captain Alfaro retired from the Kentucky National as a Colonel in 1988.
- <sup>vi</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 28 February 1958, State active duty history files, Military Records and Research Branch (MRRB).
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>viii</sup> Brigadier General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay and Major General (Ret) William Buster, "Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster," Folder #14 of 20 of unfinished research project, MRRB, 3 (hereafter "Prestonsburg School Bus Disasters").
- <sup>ix</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 01 March 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>x</sup> Colonel (Ret) Armando Alfaro interview, 30 November 1989, MRRB.
- <sup>xi</sup> Gerald Griffin, "School Bus, Its Grim Cargo Believed Located In River," *Louisville [KY] Courier-Journal*, 02 March 1958, sec. 1, p. 1, col. 8.
- <sup>xii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Colonel (Ret) Armando Alfaro, interview by Brigadier General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay, transcript, n.d., folder # 14 of Lindsay/Buster research project, MRRB.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Gerald Griffin, "School Bus, Its Grim Cargo Believed Located In River," *Louisville [KY] Courier-Journal*, 02 March 1958, sec. 1, p. 1, col. 8. "Army Engineer Says Workers Have Looped Line Around School Bus in Swollen River," *Sunday Herald-Leader*, 02 March 1958, p. 1, c. 4-5.
- <sup>xv</sup> "Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster," 3.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Captain (Ret) David May, interview by Brigadier General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay, transcript, n.d., folder # 14 of Lindsay/Buster research project, MRRB.
- <sup>xvii</sup> "Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster," 4.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Colonel (Ret) Armando Alfaro, interview by Brigadier General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay, transcript, n.d., folder # 14 of Lindsay/Buster research project, MRRB.
- <sup>xix</sup> "Big Sandy Yields Bodies of 15 Tragedy Victims," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 03 March 1958, p. 1, c. 2-7.
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 04 March 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xxii</sup> "Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster," 4. "Searchers Continue looking for 11 Still Missing in School Bus Tragedy," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 04 March 1958, p. 1, c. 5.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 04 March 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 04 March 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB. "Bodies of 3 More Bus Victims Are Recovered," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 05 March 1958, p. 1, c. 7-8.
- <sup>xxv</sup> First Lieutenant Charles C. Combs to The Adjutant General, "Emergency Duty at Prestonsburg, Kentucky," Summary report, 12 March 1958, State active duty history files (folder marked "Hq & Hq Btry, 441st Field Arty"), MRRB, 1.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> "Prestonsburg School Bus Disaster," 5.

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- <sup>xxvii</sup> WEKY, 1340 AM, Richmond, Kentucky.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Morning report, Provisional Detachment, XXIII Corps Artillery, 05 March 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Joe Craft interview, 10 October 1989, MRRB.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Captain (Ret) David May, interview by Brigadier General (Ret) Jesse Lindsay, transcript, n.d., folder # 14 of Lindsay/Buster research project, MRRB.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Lawrence J. Foster to Harry Davis, 17 March 1958, State active duty history files (folder marked "Correspondence – 1958-1959"), MRRB.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> J. J. B. Williams to Ted Ingleheart, Memorandum (a "suggested reply" to a letter from H. F. Colliers), 26 March 1958, State active duty history files (folder marked "Correspondence – 1958-1959"), MRRB.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> "Bus Victim's Body is Found," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 09 April 1958, p. 13, c. 4.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Morning reports, Headquarters Company, 623<sup>rd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 08-10 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB. "Searchers Find Body; Four Left," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 11 April 1958, p. 26, c. 4.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Jerry Heaton interview, 26 October 1989, MRRB.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Morning reports, Provisional Detachment, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Observation), 18 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB. "24<sup>th</sup> Body Found In Big Sandy," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 17 April 1958, p. 24, c. 8.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Morning reports, Provisional Detachment, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Observation), 18 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Morning reports, Provisional Detachment, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Observation), 23 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Morning reports, Provisional Detachment, 640<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion (Observation), 25 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xl</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xli</sup> Morning report, Headquarters and Headquarters & Service Company, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, 30 April 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB. "Body of Bus Victim Found One Remains," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, 01 May 1958, p. 4, c. 6.
- <sup>xlii</sup> Morning report, Headquarters and Headquarters & Service Company, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, 7 May 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB.
- <sup>xliiii</sup> Morning report, Headquarters and Headquarters & Service Company, 201<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, 10 May 1958, State active duty history files, MRRB. "Prestonsburg Vigil Ends After Last Body is Found," *The Lexington [KY] Herald*, May 13, 1958. p. 17, c. 3-4.
- <sup>xliv</sup> "Cause of '58 Bus Disaster Still a Mystery Crash That Killed 27 Left its Mark on Survivors" *Lexington [KY] Herald-Leader*, 28 February 1988, p. B1.
- <sup>xlv</sup> "Floyd Dedicates Memorial to Bus Crash Victims," *Medical Leader*, Paintsville, KY., 19 October, 2007, p. 1.
- <sup>xlvi</sup> Triennial Report of the Adjutant General, 01 July 1957 to 30 June 1960, p. 39, Item 2.
- <sup>xlvii</sup> Triennial Report of the Adjutant General, 01 July 1957 to 30 June 1960, p. 28.

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*Photographic Collections:*

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Henry P. Scaff Collection. Owned by Jackie Branham Hall.

Petty Thompson Collection. Owned by Jackie Branham Hall.

