

The Loss of Capt. Mike Mendes — 30 November 1982

On the night of 30 November 1982, Capt. Mike Mendes of the Calif. Air National guard departed on a routine training flight in a T-33 Silver Star. Weather over Vancouver Island had deteriorated rapidly, with low cloud ceilings, freezing precipitation, and turbulent winds sweeping across the Coast Mountains. As Capt. Mendes approached the Comox area, conditions worsened further, obscuring the rugged terrain below.

At 9:40 p.m., radar contact was lost. No emergency transmission followed. The T-33 had gone down somewhere in the vast, snow-covered wilderness near Mount Albert Edward, one of the highest peaks in the region.

The Search Effort

For the next several days, search crews battled some of the harshest early-winter weather the Comox area had seen that year. Aircraft were repeatedly grounded by storms. Heavy cloud layers hid the mountains entirely, and deep snow made ground search impossible. Despite continuous attempts, no ELT signal was ever detected.

Between 1 and 3 December, search teams could do little more than wait for the weather to break.

Discovery and Recovery — 4 December 1982

On 4 December, the storm finally relented. A helicopter crew was able to push into the high terrain east of Comox. At approximately 4:00 p.m., they spotted a glint of metal protruding from the snow — the silver tail of the T-33, standing nearly vertical in a remote basin below Mount Albert Edward.

The aircraft had impacted the mountainside at high speed, burying much of the fuselage under snow and debris. Searchers confirmed that Capt. Mendes had perished in the crash. His remains were recovered that same day.

Legacy

Capt. Mike Mendes is remembered for his professionalism, dedication, and service. His loss deeply affected the Comox flying community, and his story remains part of the region's aviation heritage. The recovery effort — carried out under severe weather and difficult terrain — stands as a testament to the commitment of Canadian search and rescue personnel.

Elapsed Time

Crash: 30 November 1982

Recovery: 4 December 1982

Total time: 4 days

Timeline (grounded in the Comox Air Force Museum report)

30 Nov 1982 – 9:40 p.m. Capt. Mendes' T-33 crashed near Mount Albert Edward.

1–3 Dec 1982 Search efforts were repeatedly hampered by low cloud, heavy precipitation, severe winds, and a storm system over the Comox area. No ELT signal was detected.

4 Dec 1982 – ~4:00 p.m. Weather finally cleared enough for aerial search. A Blackhawk helicopter spotted the silver tail of the T-33 protruding from the snow in a basin near Mount Albert Edward. This discovery allowed searchers to confirm the fate of Capt. Mendes.