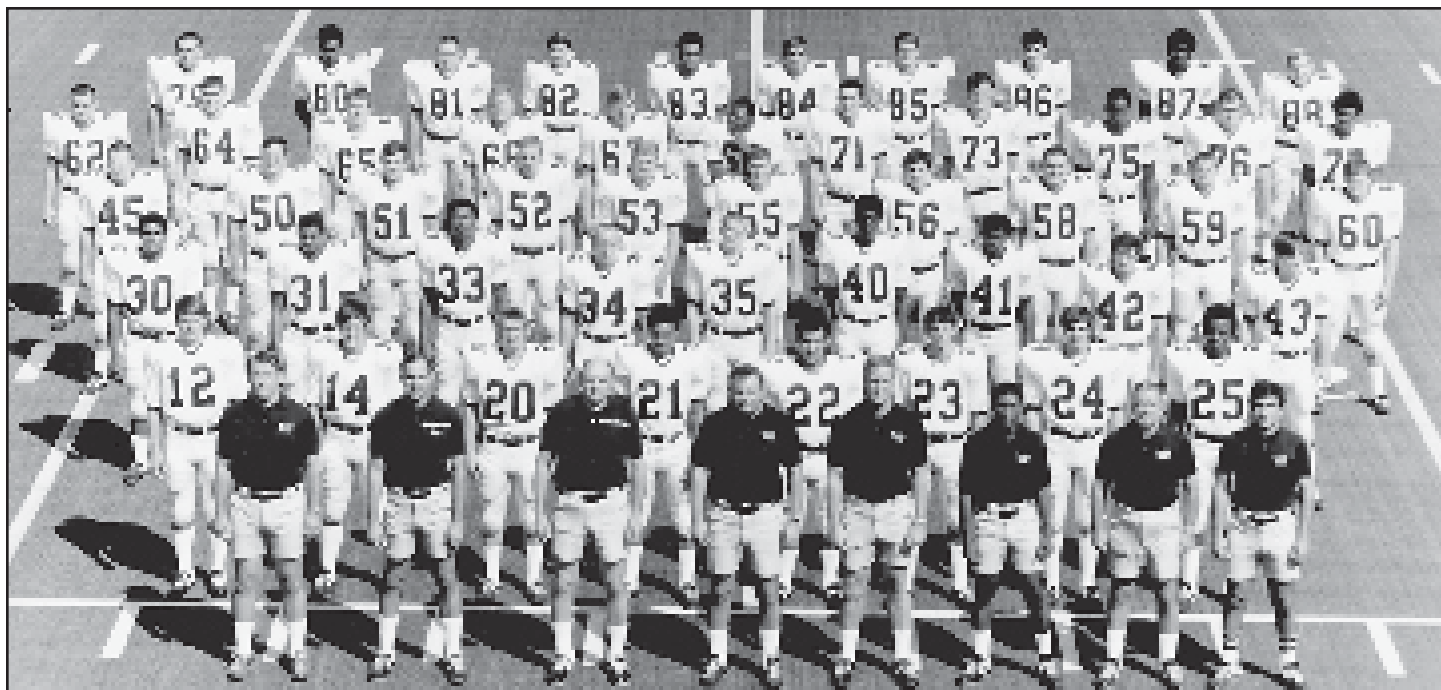


# Remembering the 1970 Team



▲ The 2005 season marked the 35th anniversary of the worst sports-related air disaster in American history. On November 14, 1970, seventy-five people lost their lives when a jet plane carrying Marshall players, coaches, administrators, fans and crew crashed three miles south of the Tri-State Airport.

It was a rainy and foggy evening on Saturday, November 14, 1970, when seventy-five persons lost their lives in the crash of the jet plane carrying the Marshall football team, coaches, administrators, fans and crew back from the game at East Carolina University. Crashing into the hillside below the Tri-State Airport, due in part to the weather and instrument error, all on board were killed. The Marshall campus, the city of Huntington, the state of West Virginia and the entire United States were stunned by the news and the weight of the tragedy.

Over 7,000 people gathered in the Cabell County Veteran's Memorial Field House, home of Marshall basketball for 20 years, the next day for a memorial service. Present on stage were Nathaniel "Nate" Ruffin, a co-captain who had not traveled due to injury; Acting Marshall President Donald Dedmon; Dr. Leo Jenkins, President of East Carolina; Mike Grant, President of the Marshall University Student Government; and West Virginia Governor Arch Moore, Jr., a tireless supporter of Marshall. Governor Moore referred to those who died as "beautiful people." Portions of the memorial service were telecast on the NBC program, "The Today Show."

A period of mourning was observed throughout the state, as flags were lowered to half-mast. Classes at Marshall were dismissed for two days, as were Huntington City and Cabell County offices. Most local events came to a standstill in the wake of the worst air disaster in the history of West Virginia. Many memorials have been made to the 1970 team on the MU campus, including the Marshall University Memorial Student Center, the Memorial Fountain in the plaza of the center (which is turned off for each winter on November 14th at a special ceremony on the plaza), a bronze plaque placed on the entrance to the football locker room recalling the date of the crash and the Memorial Garden, placed first at Fairfield Stadium, and now at Joan C. Edwards Stadium.

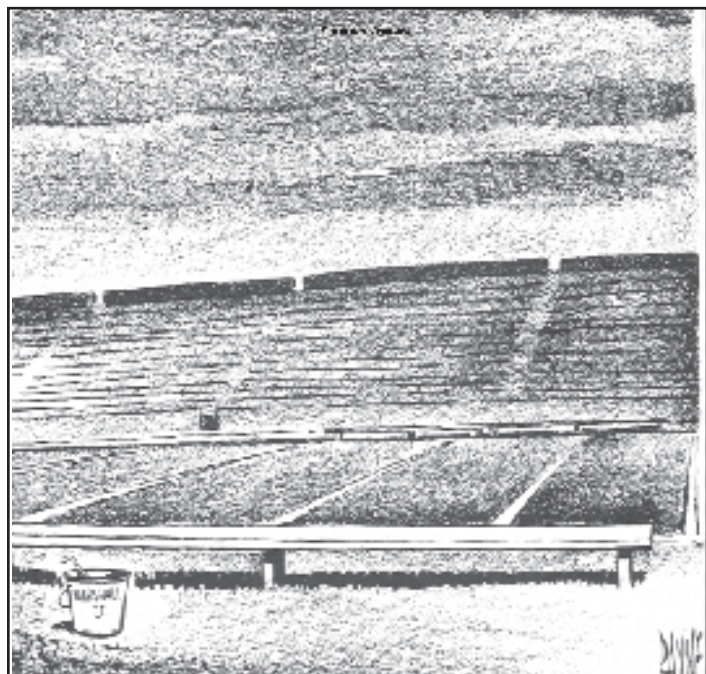
The 2005 season marked the 35th anniversary of the tragedy, and more was done to remember the people who perished on November 14, 1970. Twentieth Street in Huntington was designated "Marshall Memorial Boulevard" by Huntington's City Council, it runs past the Spring Hill Cemetery – where six players who were not identified are buried in six graves- with blank stones- down to the Marshall University Stadium.

A new bronze memorial symbolizing Marshall's rise from the crash to the successes of the 1990's was unveiled prior to the Miami game on Nov. 11, 2000. A documentary on the tragedy and comeback of the program

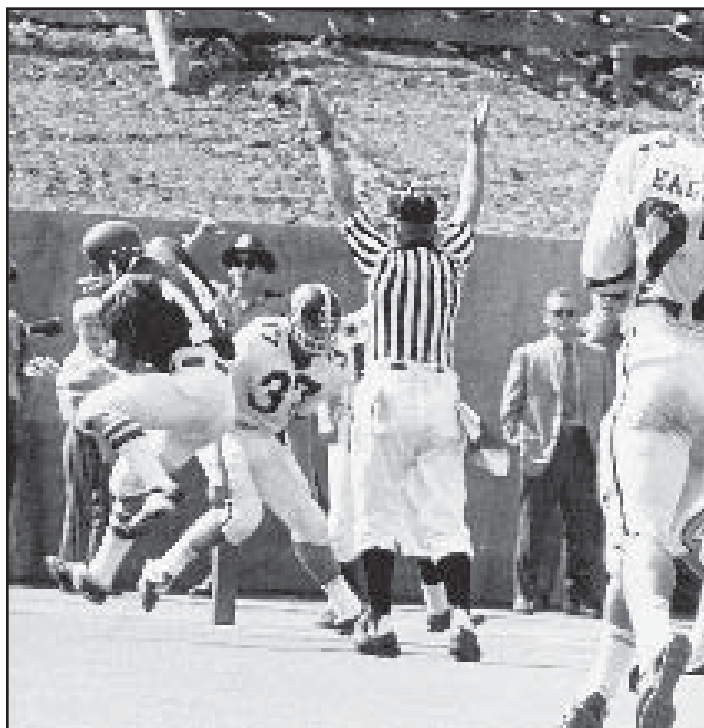
titled "Ashes to Glory" was released in 2000 and won a regional Emmy and Hollywood's prestigious Angel Award for Excellence in Media.

In 2004, a stretch of highway that runs by Tri-State Airport and into the town of Ceredo was also designated "The Big Green Memorial Highway" in honor of the crash victims.

The Marshall University community will never forget the 75 lives that ended in the most catastrophic airplane accident in American sports history.



▲ Drawing by Eugene Payne of the Charlotte Observer that appeared on November 15, 1970. The words, "America Weeps" appeared at the top.



▲ Ted Shoebridge scored the first touchdown on the astroturf at Fairfield Stadium against Morehead State in 1970.

Marshall football was trying to right the ship in 1970. An 0-10 season in 1967 that saw the firing of nine-year head coach Charlie Snyder – a Marshall football captain on the 1947 Tangerine Bowl team for Cam Henderson – and was followed by a 0-9-1 mark by Perry Moss.

The 21 games in a row without a win, since the loss to Ohio in the final game of 1966, was nothing compared to what came next.

A group of well-intentioned boosters had come up with a plan to catch up quick in the Mid-American Conference in 1968. By the time all was said and done, Marshall was on one-year probation by the NCAA for more than 140 violations. Perry Moss was stripped of his coaching duties. Basketball coach Ellis Johnson was relieved of his duties. Recruiting coordinator Pete Kondos was fired and Director of Athletics Eddie Barrett resigned. The MAC suspended Marshall indefinitely from the league by an order of the Council of Presidents.

Rick Tolley was hired to be Marshall's interim football coach two days before the pre-season started in 1969. By seasons' end, he had definitely turned things in the right direction. Despite the late start, Marshall would win three games in a row down the season's home stretch. The first win came over Bowling Green and their coach at that time, Don Nehlen. That victory stopped what had grown to a 27-game non-winning streak. Wins would follow at Kent State and at home versus East Carolina and the Herd finished 3-7.

With the season done, Marshall reapplied for the MAC and was immediately denied and told they would not be reviewed again until at least 1973. Charlie Kautz, the Director of Athletics, put this behind him and moved to make Tolley the permanent head coach based on the improvements he had made in the program. Tolley moved quickly to make sure some of the players, many recruited by Moss, stayed with the program. Chief among those was quarterback Ted Shoebridge of Lyndhurst, New Jersey.

Shoebridge had set records for single-season passing, total offense, passes attempted and completed and touchdowns thrown in 1969. With "Shoe" in the fold, Tolley pressed on, filling recruiting needs and preparing for the 1970 season.

"The Jersey Jet," a nickname for Shoebridge, was going to be joined in the backfield by Dickie Carter, a senior from Man, and sophomore running backs Art Harris (a transfer from Massachusetts) and Joe Hood, from

Tuscaloosa, Ala. Backing up Shoebridge would be Bob Harris, a Cincinnati junior. Jack Repasy from Cincinnati and Dennis Blevins of Bluefield would line up at receiver and the tight end would be Kevin Gilmore, a 6-foot, 187-pound senior from McCook Junior College.

The offensive line was a question mark, as it was neither deep nor experienced. It included Mike Blake (from Huntington East), Freddy Wilson, Wes Hickman, Mark Andrews, Dave Debord, Tom Howard (from Milton), Pat Norrell and Roger Vanover.

Defense looked to be the strong suit. Junior college All-American Greg Finn was a defensive lineman, along with Eddie Carter, Larry "The Governor" Brown, Scotty Reese, Dave Griffith and Tom Zborill. Linebackers included former Ferrum All-American Jerry Stainback, Willie Bluford, Robert Van Horn and Frank James of Barboursville. Defensive back was the strongest position with Nate Ruffin, Larry Sanders, Felix Jordan and Bobby Hill back. Kicking specialist Marcelo Lajterman of Lyndhurst, N.J., would punt and kick.

In addition to the players, the games were being played in a Fairfield Stadium that was getting its first facelift in 40-plus years. New Astroturf replaced the grass, mud and hay of days gone by. A new scoreboard was being put up, new locker rooms were being built and 6,500 seats were being added to the facility.

The new surroundings agreed with the Herd as they swamped the Eagles of Morehead State in the opener, 17-7. It was the first win in an opener since 1966 and the Marshall defense was all it was billed to be. Morehead was held to 153 yards of total offense. Felix Jordan picked off two passes and Larry Baldrige a third. Morehead also coughed up the ball twice in front of a standing-room only crowd of 11,000.

Shoebridge hit only 5-of-14 passes for 63 yards, with one interception, but he ran for two touchdowns. A 29-yard field goal by Lajterman set the final total for the Herd offense. He also averaged 41.9 yards per punt.

Game two was best forgotten at Toledo as the Rockets pounded the Herd 52-3. Marshall's only score came on a 37-yard fourth quarter field goal by Lajterman. Shoebridge threw a school-record 43 passes, but completed only nine and had four picked off. Harris was no more effective with a 1-6-1 for 2-yards relief effort. Three players were hurt in the game as well, thereby depleting the "Thin Green" even more for the remainder of the season.

The Herd bounced back in great fashion in the third game of the season with a 31-14 win in Cincinnati over the Musketeers of Xavier University. The Herd jumped out to a 17-0 lead by the half, only to watch Xavier claw back into it. Two third quarter scores had the Musketeers down by just three as the game entered the final stanza.

Marshall's defense again asserted itself. Pete Naputano recovered a fumble to set up a Shoebridge run for touchdown with just over two minutes left. Larry Sanders sealed the deal with a 54-yard interception return for a touchdown in the final minute of play. Joe Hood had his best day of the young season, gaining 67 yards on 23 carries. Shoebridge hit on 9-of-16 for 141 yards and rushed for 56 yards and two scores. At 2-1, Marshall was off to the best start since the 1965 team opened 4-0 on the way to a 5-5 season.

The fourth game was against the dreaded, the hated, the feared Miami Redskins, a team Marshall had not beaten since Cam Henderson turned the trick three straight years from 1937-39. The series since then was 0-18-1 and games had not even been competitive in recent years as Miami had won 35-7 in 1969 at Oxford, 46-0 in '68, and 48-6 in '67. Thirty years of losses was staring MU right in the face going into the second home game.

In a steady rain, the Herd gave as well as they got against the Redskins. While the new turf – with a block white M in the center and white buffalos added to the corner of both end zones – certainly improved the footing, the ball was no less slick and the teams combined for 15 fumbles. Marshall lost four fumbles and threw five interceptions while Miami turned the ball over seven times, on two interceptions and five fumbles.

Miami rolled up 438 yards of total offense but the turnovers and a stout Herd defense stopped the Redskins on all but two of 18 offensive drives. A

# Remembering the 1970 Team

punt return for touchdown by Miami's Dick Adams provided the winning margin, but most of the 7,500 Marshall fans saw this at least as a moral victory. Shoebridge hit on 11-of-29 passes, but with five interceptions, for 82 yards and a touchdown in a 19-12 loss.

The Herd was even on the season at 2-2 when it returned to Fairfield Stadium the next week to host Louisville and its 34-year old coach, Lee Corso. Corso was impressed by the new Astroturf and declared it to be "the surface of the future". He was less enthused by the game, even though his team escaped with a 16-14 win over the Herd.

Louisville ran up 24 first downs and 447 yards of total offense, but managed to cash in with just three field goals and one touchdown. MU led 7-6 going into the fourth quarter, only to watch the game get away. But there was no shortage of tension in the closing minutes. Marcel Lajterman was just short with a 57-yard attempted field goal that would have won the game for the Herd.

Shoebridge was 11-28-1 for 128 yards and one touchdown. He also rushed for 20 yards on four carries while Art Harris rushed for 80 yards on 13 carries. Hood caught three passes for 69 yards as the Herd fell to 2-3 at the mid-point of the season.

Western Michigan visited in game six for homecoming and the game left a bad taste in the mouth of Herd fans with regard to the MAC because the Broncos walloped the Herd 34-6. Lajterman actually gave MU a 3-0 lead early, but the rest of the game was all WMU. Shoebridge was 13-of-40 with two interceptions and 163 yards. Harris rushed for 72 yards on 12 carries but the Herd fumbled two times, and fell to 2-4 on the year.

Another MAC school, another bad result, was the story in the seventh game of the year. Marshall led Bowling Green 24-21 on the Falcons home field – where Marshall had not won since 1954 – with 2:19 to play in the game. Coach Tolley told Lajterman to take a knee for a safety rather than punt out of the end zone. With the scored now 24-23, BGSU took the free kick and drove down for a 38-yard field goal with 1:04 to go to win 26-24.

"It's my fault," Tolley said after the game. "I didn't think their guy had the leg to beat us." It was, in fact, the longest field goal of the season for the Falcon kicker.

Bob Harris started at quarterback in place of the injured Shoebridge, hitting on 13-of-25 for 205 yards and two interceptions. Kevin Gilmore caught a 14-yard touchdown pass while Art Harris rushed for 36 yards and one score.

The Herd hoped to snap a four-game losing streak the next week against the Golden Flashes of Kent State. KSU was a team still trying to deal with the tragedy of the National Guard shooting of four students during a protest earlier that spring. Marshall wanted to go out on a good note at home and got great play from a variety of individuals in a 20-17 win.

Bob Harris started and hit on 10-of-18 passes for 100 yards, with one interception. He connected with John Young on an 18-yard scoring strike while Blevins, Hood and Art Harris each caught three passes. Hood also had a season-best 122 yards rushing on 24 attempts. Marshall was 3-5 and still had a chance for the first .500 record since 1965.

The ninth game of the season was at East Carolina, which came in with a record of 1-8 and was a team Marshall had defeated 38-7 in Huntington the previous year. Marshall flew by Southern Airway charter to the game. Coach Rick Tolley was quoted after a disappointing 17-14 loss, "We had a real nice flight down, and some of them are still flying."

Part of the problem was the players who did not make the trip because of injuries. Defensive end Pete Naputano, defensive back Nate Ruffin, defensive back Felix Jordan, linebacker Frank James, nose guard Greg Finn, offensive tackle David Withers, center Wes Hickman and John Calvin all missed the trip with a variety of ailments. Ed Carter, a defensive tackle, had flown home to Texas for a funeral and did not join the team in Greenville as planned. In addition, defensive back Rich Taglang overslept and missed the team bus to Tri-State Airport.

Some players did return for the trip, however. Defensive tackles Larry Brown and Al Saylor and tight end John Young. Some players played exceptional games for Marshall as well. Jerry Stainback recorded 22



▲ Marshall tied Morehead State, 17-17, in the 1970 season opener. Nate Ruffin (#25) is in the background.

tackles, nine of them solo, while "The Governor" Brown had 18 stops in his first game back. Shoebridge returned from injury as well to hit 14-of-32 passes for 188 yards, including a 16-yard scoring strike to Repasy.

Shoebridge was involved in the controversial play of the game. The play was witnessed by quite a few Marshall supporters, who had flown down with the team, as well as John "The Shiek of Seth" Zontini, who was witnessing his first Herd game since his 1935 graduation from Marshall. Shoebridge was wrapped up at the 44-yard line as he threw on third and 10 from the 25-yard line. The official called him for intentional grounding despite the fact that the ball one-hopped to Art Harris, the intended receiver. Marshall had fourth and 34 from the ECU 49-yard line, and a desperation pass fell incomplete with only 11 seconds left on the clock and a 17-14 ECU lead.

The dejected Herd boarded the bus for a trip to Ficklin Field and the trip home to Huntington. A light rain was falling as they approached Tri-State Airport around 7:45 p.m., on Saturday, November 14, 1970.

## 1970 Season Statistics

**Passing:** Ted Shoebridge (78-of-212, 1,000 yards, 3 TD, 11 INT)

**Rushing:** Art Harris (113 att., 413 yards, TD, 3.6 ypc, long 31)

**Receiving:** Art Harris (29 rec., 242 yards, TD, 8.3 ypc)

**Punting:** Marcelo Lajterman (60 punts, 2,319 yards, 38.6 avg.)

**Scoring:** Marcelo Lajterman (15 XPT, 7 FG, 36 points)

**Punt Returns:** Kevin Gilmore (10 returns, 74 yards, 7.4 ypr, long 38)

**Kickoff Returns:** Art Harris (17 returns, 419 yards, 24.6 ypr, long 46)

**Interceptions:** Felix Jordan (4 returns, 74 yards, 18.5 ypr)

**Tackles:** Jerry Stainback (114 total tackles - 38 solo, 76 assisted)

**Listed are the names of the 75 men and women who perished in the most catastrophic airplane accident in the history of American athletics.**

## **Thundering Herd Football players**

Adams, James Michael – Guard  
 Andrews, Mark Raeburn – Guard  
 Blake, Michael Francis – Linebacker  
 Blevins, Dennis Michael – Wide Receiver  
 Bluford, Willie Jr. – Linebacker  
 Brown, Larry – Nose Guard  
 Brown, Thomas Wayne – Nose Guard  
 Childers, Roger Keith – Defensive Back  
 Cottrell, Stuart Spence – Defensive Back  
 Dardinger, Richard Lee – Center  
 DeBord, David Grant – Tackle  
 Gilmore, Kevin Francis – Halfback  
 Griffith, David Dearing Jr. – Defensive End  
 Harris, Arthur W. Jr. – Halfback  
 Harris, Robert Anthony – Quarterback  
 Hill, Bobby Wayne – Defensive Back  
 Hood, Joe Lee – Halfback  
 Howard, James Thomas Jr. – Guard  
 Lajterman, Marcello H. – Kicker  
 Lech, Richard Adam – Defensive Back  
 Nash, Barry Winston – Back  
 Norrell, Patrick Jay – Guard  
 Patterson, James Robert – Tackle  
 Reese, Scottie Lee – Defensive End  
 Repasy, John Anton Jr. – Wide Receiver  
 Sanders, Larry – Defensive Back  
 Saylor, Charles Alan – Defensive End  
 Shannon, Arthur Kirk – Linebacker  
 Shoebridge, Lionel Ted – Quarterback  
 Skeens, Allen Gene – Lineman  
 Stainback, Jerry Dodson – Linebacker  
 VanHorn, Robert James – Defensive Tackle  
 Vanover, Roger Amie – Tight End  
 Wilson, Freddie Clay – Tight End  
 Young, John Patton – Tight End  
 Zborill, Thomas Jonathan – Nose Guard

## **Thundering Herd Coaches**

Brackett, Herbert B. "Zeke" – Kicking and Freshman Coach  
 Carelli, Albert C. Jr. – Offensive Line Coach  
 Loria, Frank – Defensive Back Coach  
 Moss, James M. "Shorty" – Offensive Coordinator  
 Tolley, Rickey D. "Rick" – Head Coach

## **Administration and Staff**

Booth, Donald – MU football game film  
 Chambers, Dr. Joseph – MU team physician  
 Chambers, Mrs. Peggy  
 George, Gary – MU student assistant  
 Sports Information Director  
 Hagley, Dr. Ray – MU team physician  
 Hagley, Mrs. Shirley  
 Jones, Ken –  
 MU Sports Director for WHTN-TV 13

Kautz, Charles "Charlie" –  
 MU Director of Athletics  
 Morehouse, Gene – MU Sports Information Director  
 and "Voice of the Herd"  
 Nathan, Jeff – The Parthenon, MU student newspaper reporter  
 O'Connor, Dr. Brian – MU Director of Admissions  
 Prester, Michael – MU Big Green former president and delegate-elect  
 to WV Legislature  
 Preston, Dr. Glenn – MU team dentist  
 Preston, Mrs. Phyllis  
 Proctor, Dr. H. D. – MU team physician  
 Proctor, Mrs. Courtney  
 Schroer, James "Jim" – MU Head Trainer  
 Tackett, Donald – MU student trainer  
 Weichmann, Norman – MU football game films

## **Thundering Herd Supporters**

Arnold, Charles "Red"  
 Arnold, Mrs. Rachel  
 Harris, Arthur Sr. – Father of player Art Harris  
 Heath, E. O. "Happy"  
 Heath, Mrs. Elaine  
 Jarrell, James  
 Jarrell, Mrs. Cynthia  
 Ralsten, Murrill – Huntington City Councilman  
 Ralsten, Mrs. Helen  
 Ward, Parker Sr.

## **Southern Airways Personnel**

Abbott, Captain Frank – Pilot  
 Deese, Danny – Charter Coordinator  
 Poat, Charlene – Stewardess  
 Smith, Jerry – First Officer  
 Vaught, Patricia – Stewardess



▲ Each point of the Memorial Fountain represents one of the lives lost in the tragedy. The water is shut off in a memorial ceremony every Nov. 14th. The above photo was taken during the making of the WAM movie.