

Chapter 49

“The Unthinkable”

Darrell Moody was awake and working at the Capitol House when he received the call. The voice on the other end wanted to know if he knew the call number of Bo’s airplane. “No,” Moody answered, thinking, “Why would I know that?” He had never been asked that question before. It was the first inkling something was amiss. A second call from Paul Dietzel came later, asking him to meet at the football office.

At the Capitol House, Bobby Morrison, according to his memory bank, awoke sweating profusely as Jon Mirilovich stood over him. Exactly why he was sweating, Morrison isn’t sure. Maybe a premonition? The news that followed, Morrison would proclaim, triggered the worst day of his life outside of the death of his parents.

Mirilovich said, “Bo’s plane is missing.”

“What?” Morrison exclaimed.

Note: Although Moody did not recollect the following call, here’s how Greg Williams remembers it:

Greg Williams was exhausted. He and Bo had been out recruiting all day and he needed some rest. Normally, Williams would drive back to Bossier City and spend the night at the Sheraton hotel. On this evening, Williams remained in Shreveport and stayed at a local motel across from the airport. Sometime around 3 am, Williams got a telephone call from the Shreveport Police Department.

The caller asked, “Are you Coach Williams?”

“Yeah,” Williams responded.

The caller advised Williams to call Darrell Moody at the football office at LSU. Though he had just been awakened out of a deep sleep and was a bit disoriented, Williams said he wasn’t terribly concerned about the pre-dawn phone call because it was not that unusual. His only thought was “I wonder what the hell Moody’s up to?”

Williams made the call. His first words: “Darrell what the hell is going on?”

Moody has a question, too, asking, “How many people were on that plane?”

“What?”

“How many people were on that plane?”

“Bo and the pilot. That was it,” Williams responded.

“Are you sure,” Moody demanded.

Williams, becoming a bit agitated at the cryptic line of questioning said, “I’m positive Darrell, I was standing by the fucking door when they left. Why?”

“His plane crashed in the Atlantic Ocean,” Moody replied.

Williams’ mind was now churning a mile a minute, trying desperately to comprehend what he just heard. “Wait a minute,” Williams said, puzzled. “I can almost see the Mississippi from where I am, and you’re telling me the plane crashed in the Atlantic Ocean?”

“Yeah,” Moody said. “And they think Bo’s dead.”

Disbelief and shock set in, and Williams lamented, “Holy shit!”

Bishop Harris and Jim Stowe had spent the day at the American Football Coaches Association convention in New Orleans. After seeing Stowe off on his flight back to Raleigh on Thursday afternoon, he met for a planned weekend stay at Otis Washington’s home in New Orleans. “That’s when we got the call,” Harris said.

Otis Washington received the sad news like everyone else; at home, early morning, and by telephone.

“Is anyone with you,” the caller queried.

“Yeah, Bishop’s with me,” Washington said. “Why the questions at this time of the morning?”

“Bo’s plane went down in the Atlantic,” the caller said.

Stunned, Washington woke up Harris and said, “Bo’s plane went down.”

“What?” Harris questioned. “Come on, man, you serious?”

Reflecting on that time, Harris said, “Those were tough times then man. I was supposed to have been on that plane. If Jim Stowe had not been in town, I would have been on that plane.”

Harris recalled a discussion the previous night at the restaurant about using the charters and how much more accessible the aircraft were compared to NC State. The group marveled at the ease at which the fleet of aircraft and even a helicopter could be had.

Jim Stowe had only been back home in North Carolina about two hours or so when a telephone call from Bishop Harris awakened him.

Bo was dead.

George Belu, in Houston, Texas, recruiting, received a similar call from Al Masella, saying, “George, something terrible has happened.”

Carolyn Stuart, awakened in the dead of night back in North Carolina, received one of the saddest telephone calls she would ever get. On the other end, Coach Greg Williams told her Bo was dead. She said Williams was very upset and despondent as he conveyed the awful news.

She asked, “Greg, what are you talking about?”

“Bo’s gone, Bo’s gone! His plane’s gone,” Williams told her. Unable to go back to sleep, Carolyn got up and began a day she wished she could forget.

Williams called Bruce Hemphill, too, relaying information that morning that would remain a part of Hemphill’s spirit the rest of his life. The late plan changes the evening before was all Hemphill could think about. As instructed, Hemphill saw James White that day, and then drove 20 minutes to

a Monroe hotel. Williams was probably the only person who knew to find him there. “Bruce, wake up,” Williams began the early-morning call. “We don’t know where coach Rein’s plane is.”

Hemphill sat up in bed. “What are you talking about,” he asked. “He’s supposed to be in Baton Rouge by now.”

Williams explained, “Something happened to his plane. They cannot find it, but it did not land in Baton Rouge.” Hemphill was stunned. None of this made any sense at all.

“That’s all I know right now,” Williams continued. “Stay right there, don’t leave. I’ll call you back as soon as I know more.”

At some point during this time span, Al Masella was desperately trying to contact Sue. When she returned his call, she learned her husband’s plane was missing. A subsequent call from Masella confirmed that Bo’s aircraft had indeed crashed. In a state of shock and natural confusion Sue responded, “Well, do they know anything?”

Masella clarified: The aircraft had gone down into the water. Caught somewhat off guard, and not expecting to hear about the water, Sue replied, with a bit of hope, “Oh, it crashed in the water?” Masella delicately dashed all hope, explaining Bo’s survival was not expected.

A short while later, Williams called Hemphill back with more information. Williams said the airplane definitely had not landed in Baton Rouge, but had instead deviated around a storm into Mississippi and could not be located. That was all the information he had at that time. On a third call, Williams’ updated information was devastating. Bo Rein’s plane had crashed into the Atlantic Ocean. Incredulous, Hemphill said, “Greg, that’s impossible. How could it crash in the Atlantic Ocean on its way to Baton Rouge?” Williams explained what was known at that time; how the aircraft had been tracked for hours as it traveled off course and without communication until it crashed.

Hemphill was in shock. The first thing he did was to call his parents to allay any fears that he may have been on the airplane. He was certain some would assume he was also on board because he had traveled so frequently with Rein. In Raleigh, around 2 am, NC State football player Dave Horning was awakened by a knock on the door of his College Inn dormitory room, where he roomed with Jim Ritcher. It was a local newspaper reporter, wanting a comment from them in reference Coach Rein. Horning described his feeling as being, “stunned and perplexed.” This was the first they had heard of what was going on and they did not know what to say. He could hear teammates consoling Curtis Rein who lived eight doors down the hall in room #212.

Curtis Rein confirmed the magnitude the news had on him. He had just returned from a date with his girlfriend, Martha Evans - the sister of former quarterback Johnny Evans - whom he would later marry. A teammate asked, “Have you heard?”

“Heard what?” Curtis asked.

From there, Curtis’ recollection is foggy. He only remembers turning on the radio and watching television broadcasts to get information. “Everybody was in disbelief,” he said. “This couldn’t have happened. Words can’t describe it.” After a long pause, Curtis told me, “I didn’t get out of bed for three days. I didn’t cry... I wailed.”