

Miracle in the Andes: 72 Days on the Mountain and My Long Trek Home

To Download this book in many format Visit :

<https://wocoentala.org/source1/f412f4efa7d06d737ebb6e6266d67b80>

In the first hours there was nothing, no fear or sadness, just a black and perfect silence.

Nando Parrado was unconscious for three days before he woke to discover that the plane carrying his rugby team, as well as their family members and supporters, to an exhibition game in Chile had crashed somewhere deep in the Andes. He soon learned that many were dead or dying-among them his own mother and sister. Those who remained were stranded on a lifeless glacier at nearly 12,000 feet above sea level, with no supplies and no means of summoning help. They struggled to endure freezing temperatures, deadly avalanches, and then the devastating news that the search for them had been called off.

As time passed and Nando's thoughts turned increasingly to his father, who he knew must be consumed with grief, Nando resolved that he must get home or die trying. He would challenge the Andes, even though he was certain the effort would kill him, telling himself that even if he failed he would die that much closer to his father. It was a desperate decision, but it was also his only chance. So Nando, an ordinary young man with no disposition for leadership or heroism, led an expedition up the treacherous slopes of a snow-capped mountain and across forty-five miles of frozen wilderness in an attempt to find help.

Thirty years after the disaster Nando tells his story with remarkable candor and depth of feeling. Miracle in the Andes-a first person account of the crash and its aftermath-is more than a riveting tale of true-life adventure: it is a revealing look at life at the edge of death and a meditation on the limitless redemptive power of love.

Nando Parrado lives in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Vince Rause lives in Pittsburgh.Chapter One

Before

It was Friday, the thirteenth of October. We joked about that-flying over the Andes on such an unlucky day, but young men make those kinds of jokes so easily. Our flight had originated one day earlier in Montevideo, my hometown, its destination Santiago, Chile. It was a chartered flight on a Fairchild twin-engine turboprop carrying my rugby team-the Old Christians Rugby Club-to play an exhibition match against a top Chilean squad. There were forty-five people aboard, including four crew members-pilot, copilot, mechanic, and steward. Most of the passengers were my teammates, but we were also accompanied by friends, family members, and other supporters of the team, including my mother, Eugenia, and my younger sister, Susy, who were sitting across the aisle and one row in front of me. Our original itinerary was to fly nonstop to Santiago, a trip of about three and a half hours. But after just a few hours of flying, reports of bad weather in the mountains ahead forced the Fairchild's pilot, Julio Ferradas, to put the plane down in the old Spanish colonial town of Mendoza, which lies just east of the Andean foothills.

We landed in Mendoza at lunchtime with hopes that we would be back in the air in a few hours. But the weather reports were not encouraging, and it was soon clear that we would have to stay the night. None of us liked the idea of losing a day from our trip, but Mendoza was a charming place, so we decided to make the best of our time there. Some of the

guys relaxed in sidewalk cafés along Mendoza's broad, tree-lined boulevards or went sightseeing in the city's historic neighborhoods. I spent the afternoon with some friends watching an auto race at a track outside of town. In the evening we went to a movie, while some of the others went dancing with some Argentinean girls they had met. My mother and Susy spent their time exploring Mendoza's quaint gift shops, buying presents for friends in Chile and souvenirs for the people at home. My mother was especially pleased to find a pair of red baby shoes in a small boutique, which she thought would make the perfect gift for my sister Graciela's new baby boy.

Most of us slept late the next morning, and when we woke we were anxious to leave, but there was still no word about our departure, so we all went our separate ways to see a little more of Mendoza. Finally we received word to gather at the airport at 1:00 p.m. sharp, but we arrived only to discover that Ferradas and his copilot, Dante Lagurara, had not yet decided whether or not we would fly. We reacted to this news with frustration and anger, but none of us understood the difficult decision confronting the pilots. The weather reports that morning warned of some turbulence along our flight path, but after speaking with the pilot of a cargo plane that had just flown in from Santiago, Ferradas was confident the Fairchild could fly safely above the weather. The more troubling problem was the time of day. It was already early afternoon. By the time the passengers were boarded and all the necessary arrangements were made with airport officials, it would be well past two o'clock. In the afternoon, warm air rises from the Argentine foothills and meets the frigid air above the snowline to create treacherous instability in the atmosphere above the mountains. Our pilots knew that this was the most dangerous time to fly across the Andes. There was no way to predict where these swirling currents might strike, and if they got hold of us, our plane would be tossed around like a toy.

On the other hand, we couldn't stay put in Mendoza. Our aircraft was a Fairchild F-227 that we had leased from the Uruguayan air force. The laws of Argentina forbade a foreign military aircraft to stay on Argentine soil longer than twenty-four hours. Since our time was almost up, Ferradas and Lagurara had to make a fast decision: should they take off for Santiago and brave the afternoon skies, or fly the Fairchild back to Montevideo and put an end to our vacation?

As the pilots pondered the options, our impatience grew. We had already lost a day of our Chilean trip, and we were frustrated by the thought of losing more. We were bold young men, fearless and full of ourselves, and it angered us that our vacation was slipping away because of what we regarded as the timidity of our pilots. We did not hide these feelings. When we saw the pilots at the airport, we jeered and whistled at them. We teased them and questioned their competence. "We hired you to take us to Chile," someone shouted, "and that's what we want you to do!" There is no way to know whether or not our behavior influenced their decision—it did seem to unsettle them—but finally, after one last consultation with Lagurara, Ferradas glanced around at the crowd waiting restlessly for an answer, and announced that the flight to Santiago would continue. We greeted this news with a rowdy cheer.

The Fairchild finally departed from Mendoza Airport at eighteen minutes after two o'clock.

local time. As we climbed, the plane banked steeply into a left turn and soon we were flying south, with the Argentine Andes rising to our right on the western horizon. Through the windows on the right side of the fuselage, I gazed at the mountains, which thundered up from the dry plateau below us like a black mirage, so bleak and majestic, so astonishingly vast and huge, that the simple sight of them made my heart race. Rooted in massive swells of bedrock with colossal bases that spread for miles, their black ridges soared up from the flatlands, one peak crowding the next, so that they seemed to form a colossal fortress wall. I was not a poetically inclined young man, but there seemed to be a warning in the great authority with which these mountains held their ground, and it was impossible not to think of them as living things, with minds and hearts and an old brooding awareness. No wonder the ancients thought of these mountains as holy places, as the doorstep to heaven, and as the dwelling place of the gods.

Uruguay is a low-lying country, and like most of my friends on the plane, my knowledge of the Andes, or of any mountains at all, was limited to what I had read in books. In school we learned that the Andes range was the most extensive mountain system in the world, running the length of South America from Venezuela in the north to the southern tip of the continent in Tierra del Fuego. I also knew that the Andes are the second-highest mountain range on the planet; in terms of average elevation, only the Himalayas are higher.

I had heard people refer to the Andes as one of the earth's great geological wonders, and the view from the airplane gave me a visceral understanding of what that meant. To the north, south, and west, the mountains sprawled as far as the eye could see, and even though they were many miles away, their height and mass made them seem impassable. In fact, as far as we were concerned, they were. Our destination, Santiago, lies almost exactly due west of Mendoza, but the region of the Andes that separates the two cities is one of the highest sections of the entire chain, and home to some of the tallest mountains in the world. Somewhere out there, for example, was Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Western Hemisphere and one of the seven tallest on the planet. With a summit of 22,831 feet, it stands just 6,200 feet shy of Everest, and it has giants for neighbors, including the 22,000-foot Mount Mercedario, and Mount Tupungato, which stands 21,555 feet tall. Surrounding these behemoths are other great peaks with elevations of between 16,000 and 20,000 feet, which no one in those wild reaches had ever bothered to name.

With such towering summits rising along the way, there was no chance that the Fairchild, with its maximum cruising altitude of 22,500 feet, could fly a direct east-west route to Santiago. Instead, the pilots had charted a course that would take us about one hundred miles south of Mendoza to Planchón Pass, a narrow corridor through the mountains with ridges low enough for the plane to clear. We would fly south along the eastern foothills of the Andes with the mountains always on our right, until we reached the pass. Then we'd turn west and weave our way through the mountains. When we had cleared the mountains on the Chilean side, we would turn right and fly north to Santiago. The flight should take about an hour and a half. We would be in Santiago before dark.

On this first leg of the trip, the skies were calm, and in less than an hour we had reached the vicinity of Planchón Pass. I didn't know the name of the pass, of course, or any of the

flight details. But I couldn't help noticing that after flying for miles with the mountains always off in the western distance, we had banked to the west and were now flying directly into the heart of the cordillera. I was sitting in a window seat on the left side of the plane, and as I watched, the flat, featureless landscape below seemed to leap up from the earth, first to form rugged foothills, then heaving and buckling up into the awesome convolutions of true mountains. Shark-finned ridges raised themselves up like soaring black sails. Menacing peaks pushed up like gigantic spearheads or the broken blades of hatchets. Narrow glacial valleys gashed the steep slopes, forming rows of deep, winding, snow-packed corridors that stacked and folded one upon the other to create a wild, endless maze of ice and rock. In the Southern Hemisphere, winter had given way to early spring, but in the Andes, temperatures still routinely dipped to 35 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, and the air was as dry as a desert. I knew that a...

Other Books

Flights of No Return, Discover the mysterious, controversial, and sometimes downright eerie history of flights that didn't end as planned. The history of aviation is full of accounts of history's most spectacular flights. But what about the ones from which someone failed to return? - A celebrated millionaire--who also happened to be the world's foremost aviator--lifted off in a small plane one clear morning in 2007 and disappeared. - The glamorous son of a beloved fallen president took off on a hazy summer night in 1999 and plunged himself and two others into the Atlantic Ocean. - A US Navy blimp landed one Sunday morning in 1942 in the middle of a city street in California with no one aboard. Some of these "non-returns" occurred because of errors in judgment; others were intentional, and some resulted from causes still unknown. Get the full, meticulous account of the fascinating people involved in these flights, the mistakes they made, and the ways in which their "flight of no return" affected the world. Pilot and aviation writer Steven A. Ruffin covers the entire 230-year span of manned flight in all types of aircraft through war and peace. Balloons, blimps, biplanes, jets, and spaceships have all suffered mishaps over the years. Don't miss the mystery, adventure, intrigue, and a sprinkling of the supernatural and extraterrestrial in Flights of No Return.

Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ Ⓜ . Andes Accident Official Website. www.viven.com.uy/571/eng/default.asp. Accessed 2013. Parrado, Nando, and Vince Rause. *Miracle in the Andes : 72 Days on the Mountain and My Long Trek Home* . New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006."