

Monument Dedication / Scout Accident / 30th Anniversary

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The crowd gathers at the monument site near Escalante which marks the site of an accident that killed Boy Scouts.

Monument marks accident

Survivors honor fellow scouts

By JANET HART
Herald Staff Writer

ESCALANTE — A desolate place of tragedy was transformed Thursday into a source of healing as hundreds gathered to dedicate a monument to the victims of one of Utah's worst traffic accidents.

Although the event, which killed nine Provo Boy Scouts and leaders, occurred 30 years ago, memories of it brought tears to many in the crowd of more than 300 people.

"There's been a lot of healing because of this. It brought together lots of people who prior to this

haven't spoken at all about it. It's been very good for them," said Provo resident Tom Heal, a survivor of the accident who helped spearhead the monument project.

The group consisted of survivors, the family and friends of victims and residents of Escalante and other surrounding towns. The tears, hugs, handshakes and shared stories were evidence of the tragedy's profound effects.

On July 10, 1963, a group of 49 people left Provo's Pleasant View meeting house for a Colorado River expedition. Included in the group were numerous

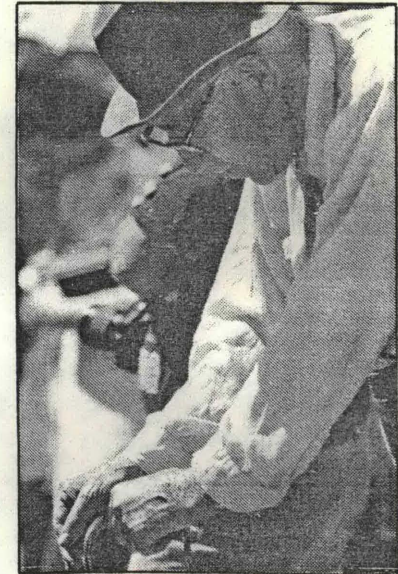
scouts and leaders from Explorer Scout Post 36 in the Pleasant View Ward.

The group was scheduled to enter the river at Hole-In-The-Rock and travel south to Glen Canyon.

However, the trip ended abruptly about 15 miles from their destination when the cattle truck they were traveling in stalled going up Carcass Wash, rolled backwards and plunged over a 30-foot embankment.

Because the Scouts had been riding in the back of the truck, many were pinned under the wreckage when it finally came to rest.

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A man bows his head during the services.

MEMORIAL:

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"It was a horrible thing. I'm a sympathetic man anyway but it was just about as much as I could stand," said Ivan B. Willis, a life-long Escalante resident who assisted in the original rescue efforts.

An employee of the Bureau of Land Management, Willis was out in the mountains near Carcass Wash at the time of the accident.

Another rescuer who was transporting injured Scouts met Willis along the road and told him about the tragedy. The person asked Willis to go out and help with the wreckage.

Willis said he assumed the other person had all of the injured so he didn't expect to see more people at the accident site. Unfortunately, he was wrong.

"I saw the doctor (at the site) and his white uniform was just saturated with blood. He said he had stopped all the bleeding but didn't have any painkillers," Willis remembered.

After bringing another doctor and nurse to the scene, Willis assisted with the remaining transportation needs.

Willis and many of the other rescuers from Escalante, Panguitch and surrounding towns were among the crowd that gathered at the newly constructed sandstone monument — designed and built by Salt Lake stone mason Kenny Jorgensen and his wife Teri.

Located directly across from the embankment where the truck went over, the monument gives a brief outline of the accident's details and then lists all those who lost their lives.

"Never until this day have we had the opportunity to thank the people from Escalante and Panguitch and surrounding areas for

their efforts," Heal said.

Heal said he and fellow survivor Lee Colvin decided to pursue the monument idea after visiting the site three years ago. As their dream worked its way into reality since that time, they feared it might bring up old memories many would rather keep hidden.

"In doing so, it's been a healing process for many of us. The feeling of tragedy has changed now to peace...and it will always be that way," Heal added.

Many of the accident victims' family members echoed Heals feelings. As she wiped away tears rolling down her cheeks, one woman said, "I think it's bad for me but I needed to do it."

Fay Miller, mother of victim Randy Wayne Miller, said the dedication gave her time to see a lot of old friends and thank the people who had worked so hard to rescue the Scouts.

Miller's husband had a heart attack at the same time as the accident so that left the mother little time to grieve for her son.

"It's been hard for me. I think it's wonderful they thought this much of him to do it," Miller said.

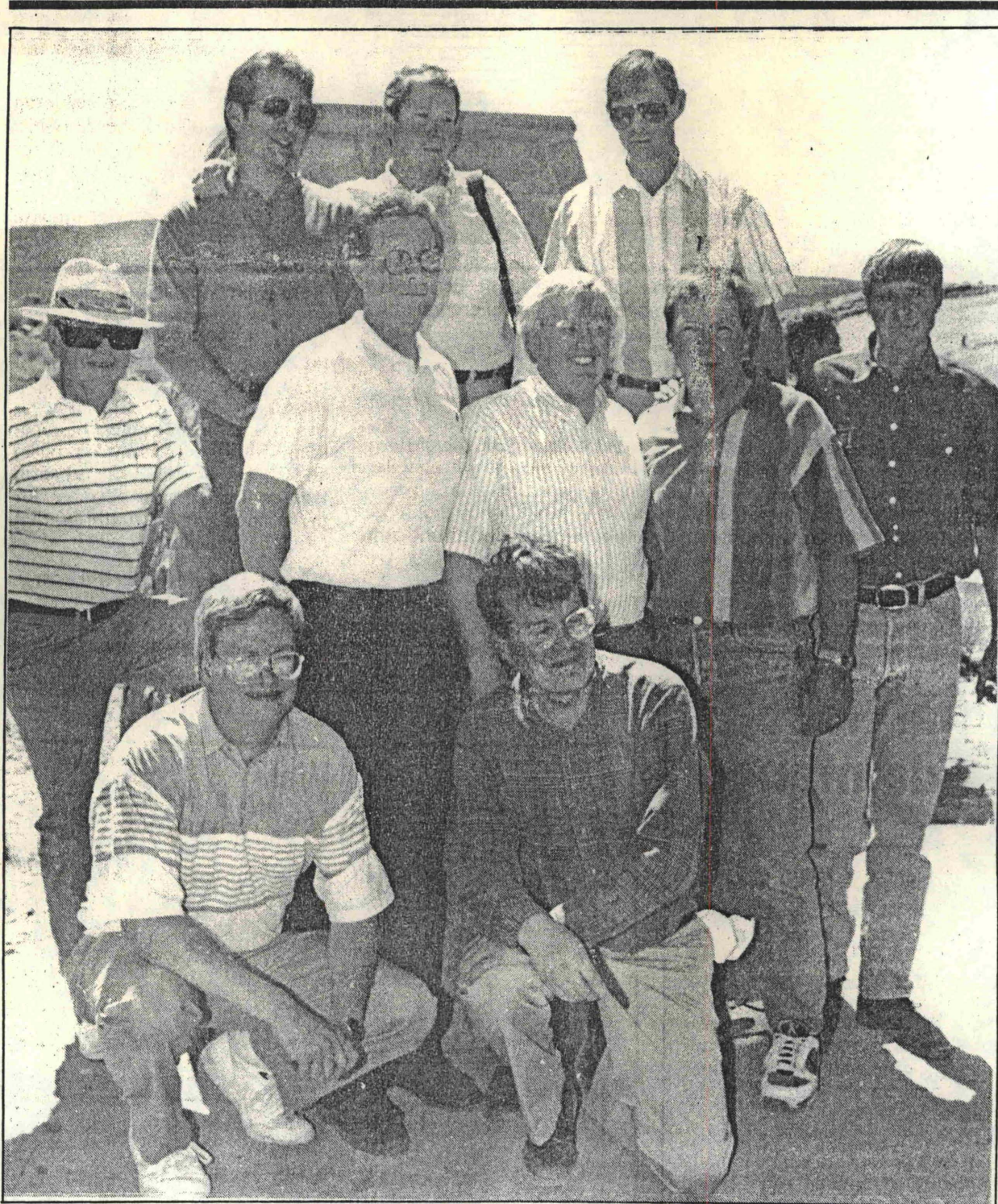
"I've been anxious to go; I think the ones that are gone will be here in spirit."

William Christensen, brother of victim Gary Lynn Christensen, said he and his brother had spent many summers in the Escalante area as children because of having family in the area.

However, he had not returned to the wash since the accident — not even during the eight years he lived in Escalante.

"I tried a dozen times, but I'd get so far down and I'd have to go back," Christensen said, choking back his emotion.

Christensen said five of the boys who died lived within a block of each other so their death devastated the whole neighborhood.



Survivors of the Boy Scout accident gather for a photo in front of the memorial. Herald Photo/Jennifer Grigg