

The Secret Base Near 727 Crash

Washington

Mt. Weather, the federal installation near the site of yesterday's plane crash, is the sort of top secret mountaintop retreat Ian Fleming was always dreaming up for James Bond.

Located on the Loudoun-Clarke county line, 47 miles west of Washington and 1725 feet above sea level, the 85-acre site was purchased by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1903 and later considered for a summer residence by President Calvin Coolidge.

Now, according to Defense Department sources, local residents and those who worked on its conversion during the cold war days of the early 1950s, it is one of several alternate command posts for use in the event of an atomic attack on Washington.

Unlike Ft. Richie, Md., the hollowed-out mountain 65 miles north of Washington known as "the underground

Pentagon" or "The Rock," — Mt. Weather is not a military installation.

It is operated by the General Services Administration for the Office of Emergency Preparedness.

Pentagon sources say it is now used as a highly secret communications base for the Civilian Intelligence Agency — part of the CIA's worldwide communications network.

Mt. Weather, however, has had some problems staying anonymous.

Nearby residents of Clarke and Loudoun counties refer to it as "the government's worst kept secret."

For one thing, it is located astride the Appalachian trail, and hikers are forever pausing to gawk through its high, barbed wire topped fences at the signs and blinking lights warning people to stay away.

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