

Home Front War Casualties

Encyclopedia Article

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Contents

Home Front War Casualties Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
Home Front War Casualties.....	3

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Though no major enemy attacks occurred on the U.S. mainland during World War II, several small isolated incidents did occur. One incident led to several civilian casualties. In May 1945 a Japanese balloon bomb killed six people in southern Oregon. The bomb landed about 200 miles inland. On a pleasant Sunday afternoon the Reverend Archie Mitchell and his wife took five children, ages eleven to thirteen, from their church to the nearby mountains for a picnic. As Mrs. Mitchell and the kids hiked over a hill to the picnic spot, the reverend drove the car ahead to meet them with the food. As he got out of his car, he heard the children shouting that they had found a balloon. Though the U.S. Office of Censorship withheld news of Japanese balloon bombs, the reverend had heard of them. Before he could yell out a warning, a loud explosion tore through the peaceful mountain setting. Mitchell rushed to the scene and found all six people dead. They had gathered around an unexploded Japanese bomb and accidentally set it off by handling it. Two Forest Service employees in the area arrived moments later to find the six bodies and the distraught reverend. The Office of Censorship kept the news media from publicizing the incident for a month; then it decided it would be best to forewarn others and allowed the information to be released. The one adult and five children were the only known fatalities caused by enemy attack on the U.S. mainland during World War II.