Virginia Tech Was Flying High Without Plane

By The Associated Press

When Virginia Tech Coach Jimmy Sharpe left the University of Kentucky's Commonwealth Stadium last Saturday night, he was sure the rest of the night could be no worse than the 32-0 licking the Hokies had received.

It turned out he was wrong.

Arriving at Bluegrass Field in Lexington, Ky., the Hokies found an airport terminal that was being closed for the night and there was no transportation.

A Piedmont Airlines charter flight had been delayed. The plane was to take Ball State from Winston-Salem, N. C., to Indianapolis, Ind., and pick up Tech on its return flight.

The problem was on the ground.

Ball State had played Appalachian State in Boone, N. C., Saturday afternoon and had chartered a bus to Winston-Salem. The bus had mechanical problems, delaying the plane's departure and Tech's pickup by two hours.

At Bluegrass Field, Sharpe and his players found themselves with plenty of time to contemplate their plight, past and present.

"At first, I thought it was just bad luck piling up," said Sharpe, "First the loss and then the delay."

"I think now it might have been an act of God, because we really got together during that time in the terminal."

Because of the late hour, all the airport's facilities were closed, but two Piedmont employees stayed with the Techmen and distributed the box lunches that would have been served on the plane:

Cold chicken. Hot soft drinks. And not enough food to go around.

Assistant Coach Wayne Hall was dispatched with one of the airline employees to find food. They reached a restaurant just as it was closing, and ordered 100 double hamburgers to go.

Back at Bluegrass Field, some of the players had begun playing cards and chess. Others had gathered around a television set and settled in to watch the late movie.

"I guess it was about 12:30, when all of us were really interested in the film, then the TV went off," said Hall. "It had a clock that shut it off automatically at that time."

With that, one Tech player decided it wasn't a good idea for the Hokies to go home then.

"Somebody stood up and said, 'Coach, I think we'd better stay here and go to church in the morning before we fly home,'" Sharpe laughed.

"At that point, we felt like Kentucky had got us down and we still kicking us. But we became very close and forgot about that game and began thinking about this week."

"We had some great conversations. Even Dr. Lavery (Tech President William Lavery) was pitching in, and making coffee and tea for everybody."

The plane finally arrived about 1:30 a.m. The players got back to Blacksburg after 3 a.m.