

Crashed on Tan Son Nhut

1964 Sep 28 - U.S. Army Captain Freeman I. Howard taxis his Grumman JOV-1A "Mohawk" to the end of the 1,700-foot runway and prepares to take off for a return flight to Vung Tau. His Observer, ARVN 2d Lt. Don Ton That, watches as Howard applies the brakes and pushes the throttles forward to get maximum power from the two Lycoming T-53 turboprops. It's a short, narrow strip and a warm day here in IV Corps. Dust from a previous airplane's takeoff still obscures the field as Howard releases his brakes and the little Grumman surges forward. With a field density altitude of 2,280 feet and aircraft gross weight of 13,724 pounds, Howard will have to use the entire runway to obtain a takeoff speed of 85 knots. Just as he reaches the end of the runway, the dust clears enough for Howard to see a 20-foot high pile of gravel, 70 feet from the end of the runway and just off the centerline!

With no room to stop, Howard pulls back on the controls and rotates. As soon as the Mohawk lifts off, he hits the gear retract switch. There's a big jolt, but the Mohawk keeps climbing. To Captain Bill Taylor, standing beside the runway, the JOV-1A seems to fly through a big cloud of dust right after liftoff.

In the cockpit, Howard realizes the left main gear hasn't retracted. He cycles the switch again, but there's no response; the gear is down and unlocked - the next landing is going to be hairy.

At Vung Tau, Howard performs a snap roll to try and lock the gear to no avail, and decides to fly on to Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon, where there is paved runway and complete crash rescue facilities, including field foaming capability. By the time the Mohawk arrives, 3,000 feet of runway has been foamed for the landing. Howard makes three touchdown passes in an attempt to collapse the main gear and make a wheels-up landing, to no avail; in fact the left main locks after the first touchdown and the other won't come down. With fuel running low, Howard decides to crash land since his observer has no training in use of the ejection seat.

Just before touchdown, Howard feathers the right engine and brings the left back to ground idle as he attempts to maintain directional control following touchdown with rudder and aileron until the right wing drops. He puts the left engine in reverse and maintains a straight rollout as the right wing settles to the ground. Fortunately, the right outboard ordnance pylon acts as a skid, which keeps the wingtip from touching the runway. After sliding 1,425 feet, the Mohawk turns right, using up another 325 feet of runway before coming to a stop just off the runway. Howard and his observer climb out uninjured.

1966 Feb 18 - Lt. Drazba and Lt. Jones were assigned to the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon. They died in a helicopter crash near Saigon, February 18, 1966. Drazba was from Dunmore, PA, Jones from Allendale, SC. Both were 22 years old.

1966 Oct 01 - Skyraider Crash - <http://www.chui101.com/crash.html>

(Comments from Chuck Henry) I was a Security Police officer there at the time, had been down to the Jamboree and took a lot of photos on 35 mm. slides of the Scouts, left and got the radio report of the crash and went back.

Got there while the crash site was still burning.

American and Vietnamese responders and all kinds of military personnel (many of whom had no business running around in the wreckage amidst scorched ammo from the aircraft, which was loaded for a combat mission when it went in, yes, inverted, after hitting the top of a concrete guard tower in front of Gen Ky's walled compound on the main drag), came from everywhere.

I ended up involved in the Air Police efforts to control news photographers and sightseers from the base who were trying to get around the people we and the 33rd VNAF Quan Cahn tried to post around the perimeter, but the crash site was in Vietnamese housing, and there were too many approaches for us to seal them all off.

American TV cameramen were trying to get pictures of the dead Vietnamese dependents, some of whom were children, and it made us madder than hell that they would not respect the Air Police trying to keep them out for their own safety, and would not respect Vietnamese sensitivities about the dead dependents not being filmed.

(Bill Price remembrance of Oct 1, 1966) I never did see the VNAF Letter of Commendation. I almost forgot that day.

It happened about 2 or 3 PM on a regular Base duty day. I heard was a large explosion from the Base proper and elements "B" Flight Security headed towards the scene.

We were the initial response force, setting up the Entry Point and On-Scene CP on the main drag across from VNAF HQ. Our task was to get the emergency vehicles, ambulances and fire trucks, in and out, and maintain a tight perimeter to keep unauthorized personnel out.

That was a major problem in itself and didn't make much difference, if they Vietnamese or American Forces. There was a VNAF Officer on-scene which worked with us and allowed us to control the situation, which was the smartest thing he ever did.

We ran a bunch of news folks off and that didn't go over so well, but so what. We were there three or four hours. I do know that the A1E had came in too low and pancaked on top of a RVN Gate Bunker at VNAF HQ and it rolled into the RVN Housing Area, burning as she went.

It was very messy. I couldn't have been more proud of our guys on that operation, as, in fact, I was every day.

The US AF/Army folks should have received a unit decoration from VNAF for that day, because the 377th plus others and the Emergency Forces came out of the woodwork to help.

I am thankful that the aircraft missed the Boy Scout Jamboree. Actually, I never did know how many were killed/injured that day.

Regards,

Bill Price

"B" Flight and On-Scene Cmdr.

PS: I left 32 days later on Nov 2, 1966

Air Show Crash Kills 5

Oct 1st
1966

SAIGON (UPI)—A South Vietnamese fighter-bomber doing aerial acrobatics for Premier Nguyen Cao Ky and a boy scout jamboree crashed Saturday into a shopping-housing area on Tan Son Nhut AB.

Military spokesmen said five Vietnamese were killed, including the two unidentified Vietnamese Air Force pilots, a civilian and two children, and 25 others were injured.

The injured included 17 Vietnamese and eight U.S. servicemen. None of the Americans—five from the Air Force, three from the Army—was injured seriously.

Military spokesmen said the injured Americans apparently were caught in the barber shop-bicycle store area by the crash.

Witnesses said the A-1E Skyraider wobbled as it swung low out of a maneuver and struck a machine gun nest defending the base, skidded across a roof and plunged into a barber shop-bicycle store complex.

They said hundreds of boy scouts, meeting with Ky, watched the prop-driven craft explode in flames.

Ky rushed to the scene and helped direct rescue operations.

A sudden monsoon rain burst and the South Vietnamese base commander credited the downpour with dousing the flaming debris.

1966 Nov 26 - Captain John R. Humphrey was the copilot of C-47B tail number 44-76574, a wing transport aircraft assigned to the 388th Tactical Fighter Wing at Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

According to Hobson's Vietnam Air Losses the aircraft departed from Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon after dark on 26 November on an administrative flight back to Korat RTAFB. Shortly after take-off the aircrew advised Tan Son Nhut they had an engine problem and were returning to that airfield. Their first approach was aborted when the landing gear would not extend; their second approach ended in a fiery crash into a rice paddy while on short final to the runway. The port engine's propeller was in the "feathered" position, indicating that engine had been shut down before the crash.

1967 Jun 22 – Plane crash shortly after take off. Aircraft was a L-1049H Super Constellation and an RF-4C Phantom II that collided on the ground. 7 people died, but the RF-4C pilots ejected safely. (.pdf Jun 24, 1967, page 1)

1968 Jan 31 – During TET 1968, Lt Col Glenn K. Otis, of the 3/4 Cav, 25th Infantry Division was involved in three crashed “command and control” helicopters, that he was in during the Defense of Tan Son Nhut.

1968 Nov 19 –

On 19 Nov 1968 a UH-1D (tail number 66-16195) from the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company was flying a routine courier run in the Saigon area. On departure from the 93rd Evac Hospital helipad at Long Binh the aircraft proceeded toward Tan Son Nhut Air Base with six men aboard:

- WO E. L. Daniel, 173rd AHC, pilot;
- 1LT Gary M. Kimbrell, 173rd AHC, copilot;
- SP4 Ted L. Sharp, 173rd AHC, aircrewman;
- CPT Peter B. Livingston, 74th Med Bn, passenger;
- SSG Calvin Fielder, 173rd AHC, passenger; and
- PFC James C. Holt, unit unknown, passenger.

As the aircraft was nearing the end of a normal approach to landing two loud bangs were heard and the tail rotor stopped turning. Without tail rotor function the aircraft began spinning to the right and fell out of the air. The aircraft began to burn immediately after impact. WO Daniel was able to exit the aircraft under his own power, and ground personnel were able to pull 2LT Kimbrell and PFC Holt from the burning wreckage, but the other three men were trapped in the passenger compartment and died in the crash or post-crash fire.

<http://www.virtualwall.org/ds/SharpTL01a.htm>

Link to photograph of SSG Fielder

<http://www.virtualwall.org/df/FielderCx01a.htm>

1969 Oct 11 - First AC-119G Aircraft Loss in the crash of Shadow 76 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Five of eight crewmembers killed. An USAF photographer from the 600th Photo Squadron was also onboard and was killed.

1970 Apr 28 - Second AC-119G Aircraft Loss in the crash of Shadow 78 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Six crewmembers killed. Two survivors.

1975 Apr 04 - Baby Lift Crash at Tan Son Nhut

1975 Apr 29 - According to Lien Chau (a doppler radar maintenance technician with the 718th): During the chaotic evacuation in the morning of 29 April 75, an EC-47 crashed during take-off. It could not gain altitude because one aileron safety pin was still in place. It was unknown as how many were killed or injured in that accident. Capt. Nam was the pilot, his fate was also unknown. Lien Chau said he barely had time to remove one aileron safety pin from the aircraft before Capt. Nam began to taxi. Chau ran after the aircraft to warn Capt. Nam without success. There was no radio communication between the cockpit and the ground crew. Capt. Nam was in a hurry and probably didn't even think about a flight control check prior to take off. Later in the morning, Lien Chau got out of Vietnam as a passenger on another EC-47 piloted by Lt. Col. Bach, then the 718th's squadron commander.