

“Happy Valley” Phan Rang AB, RVN

The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.

Phan Rang AB News No. 189 “...keeping the memories alive”

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Hell on Runway 25L

Authors in our midst

Doug’s Comments

25L left

Hell on Runway 25L left

Fighter Crashes Into Transport At Saigon Base

To begin telling this story I wrote my analysis based on all the available information I could find. All pertinent articles are reprinted after my analysis taking information from news sources, The MAC Flyer and information obtained from other sources, so there will be some repetition. Following is my view of what happened on that fateful October day 52 years ago.

Gia Dinh was experiencing torrential rains and a thunderstorm was hanging over Tan Son Nhut AB, Saigon making the afternoon skies as dark as late evening on 25 October 1967.

Earlier in the day a Phan Rang based C-123 54-0667, Bookie 66 with a tail code “WM” assigned to the 310th Air Commando Squadron experienced some maintenance problems on their first stop of the day at a 3,500-foot strip in II Corps area. The crew consisted of Capt. **Jack N. Dole**: Instructor Pilot, Lt. Col. **Samuel R. Smith**: Pilot, SSgt **Curtis Edward Stieferman**: Loadmaster and Sgt. **Thomas Clark, Jr.**: Flight Mechanic. After they landed, number two prop wouldn’t come out of reverse. They worked with the problem for a while and finally got the blades back in normal configuration, but decided they’d better divert into Tan Son Nhut and see if they could get some expert maintenance before things got any worse. They arrived at Saigon’s airport about 11:00 a.m., and the prop stuck in reverse again after landing, it was a very good decision to divert. They waited around until 5:30 p.m. when the aircraft was finally declared fixed and the area was still experiencing monsoon type rain and storms, in fact they

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seemed to get worse.

Even though they could have legally gone into crew rest at that time, the crew was anxious to try and get back to Phan Rang because the flying schedule was set up around 12-hours on duty/12-hours off cycle. Aircraft turnarounds interfaced with it, and getting out of cycle put extra pressure on the members of the squadron and support people to take up the slack. Besides Phan Rang was their home and there is no place like home.

Before they could get away from Tan Son Nhut, a giant tropical thunderstorm settled in over the field and brought aircraft activity to a standstill as far as takeoffs and landings were concerned for periods of time.

Meanwhile somewhere over Vietnam an F-105D 59-1737, call sign Olympia 01, out of Korat Royal AB, Thailand, with the 469th Fighter Squadron had just completed his 100th mission of pilot Maj. **Aquila Friend Britt** when he received instructions to proceed to Tan Son Nhut AB, to brief the 7th Air Force Staff on his current mission.¹ Olympia 01, was fragged for a combat mission from Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand, over North Vietnam and return to Korat RTAFB. [The mission was to bomb the Paul Doumer Bridge in Hanoi.] Olympia 01 was the mission strike force commander. Take off was at 1530H (1430 hours Korat local time). One air-to-air refueling was accomplished prior to striking the target. During post-strike refueling, Olympia 01 was advised to divert to Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN. A 'top off' refueling was accomplished in order to make the flight from the refueling area to Tan Son Nhut AB. Olympia 01 proceeded alone and was passed routinely through the tactical air control system and passed to Paris Control (Saigon) by Pyramid Control (Ban Me Thout) at 1839H. At this time, Paris descended Olympia 01 to 6000 feet and transferred control to Saigon Approach Control at 1847:30H. At 1848H, positive radio and radar contact was established between Saigon Approach Control and Olympia 01. Olympia 01 was passed from pick-up controller to feeder controller at 1849H. Olympia 01 was positioned and cleared for a TACAN straight-in approach to land on runway 25L, at 1852H. Olympia 01 was too high and made a missed approach. The pilot stated that he had 1800 pounds of fuel and then he was advised that he could be given a TACAN approach. The pilot accepted the TACAN approach and was given a vector of 240 degrees and 'cleared for a straight in TACAN approach runway two five left'. The pilot continued his TACAN approach.

¹ The MAC Flyer article dated October 1980 stated that the F-105 pilot was directed to come to Saigon for a special ceremony following his 100th mission over the north.

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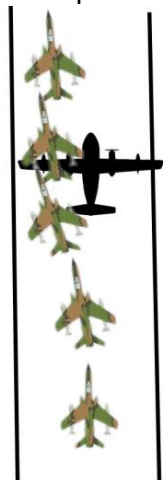
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The C-123 aircraft commander sitting in the right seat was Capt. Jack M. Dole a graduate from Arizona State University in 1963 and he entered the Air Force through the ROTC program. After finishing pilot training at Williams AFB Arizona, he was assigned to McChord AFB, Washington to fly C-124s.

The rain was still bearing down on the aircraft, so much that their radios started shorting out and quitting because the plane was leaking like a sieve in the heavy rain.² To prevent the radios from shorting out, they spread their raincoats over the console and they were able to keep at least the TACAN and UHF dry enough to remain operational.

Jack Dole said we kept getting crew duty extensions so we could try and make it home, but by 7:30 p.m. the visibility and weather was still too bad for a takeoff, so he had a confab with the



crew. He told the crew ‘I want to get back tonight, but if anybody wants to quit for any reason, I’m willing to call it a day right now.’ One of the guys said he felt like it would be a good idea to hang it up and try again in the morning after a good night’s rest, so Capt. Dole called the tower and got permission to return to the parking ramp. Since they had been in the number-one position for so long, there were several airplanes lined up behind them, and the only way to get back was to taxi down the active runway.

“We had only gone about 2,000 feet down the active when I heard our call sign, and the voice on the radio said, ‘**Clear the runway immediately!**’ There was no explanation of why, but before we could take any action whatsoever, we were in the middle of experiencing two aircraft trying to occupy the same space at the same time.”³

With landing clearance from approach control, an F-105 had emerged from the low overcast, touched down, and while still traveling at nearly 150 mph plowed right into the C-123. The “Thud’s” right wing ripped down the left side of the Provider like a can opener, splitting the fuselage as it flashed by.

² Because Capt. Dole was also qualified on the C-124 aircraft which was affectionately called “ole Shakey” he might have nicknamed the C-123 Provider “ole Leaky”. These are the thoughts of the writer only and have no basis in fact.

³ At this point the C-123 should be 2,000 feet in the middle of the runway because the runway was the only way for the aircraft to get out of the takeoff position and back to a parking spot on the ramp. Once they received the call to ‘clear the runway’ they did not do it because there wasn’t enough time.

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The F-105's wing ripped through the fuselage as it roared down the runway and past the C-123 while traveling at approximately 150 mph. It also tore off the number one reciprocating engine and the auxiliary jet on the left side and ruptured the fuel tank in the nacelle, which released 3,000 pounds of avgas to feed the fire ignited by the collision. The F-105 continued another 5,000 feet down the runway before finally coming to rest in a ball of fire.⁴

My opinion is that the C-123 truly did not have time to take evasive actions as requested by the tower because as one person stated “...105s don't play well with others” and speed is the problem. Upon landing, Olympia 01 touches down about 1,000 feet from the approach end of the runway going between 180 and 210 knots. Upon landing, Olympia 01 has his nose in the air and has little forward visibility and when he overtakes the Bookie Bird he is probably doing 120 to 150 knots and was probably dropping his nose and reaching for his drag chute handle when he might have seen the the C-123 in his path and swerved to the left but that wasn't enough and during the impact it is likely the F-105 lost part of its wing and the loss of momentum and pull from one side caused the F-105 spin and rolled as one eyewitness claimed and continued down the runway until it stopped and erupted in a ball of fire.⁵ The right wing of Olympia 01 cut through the left side of Bookie 66 and the nose section of the F-105 impacted on the nacelle tank and continued forward knocking the left reciprocating engine off the C-123. The Propeller and front case of the reciprocating engine were broken away from the power section at the time of impact and came to rest at the intersection of taxiway W-2 and runway 25L.

Capt. Dole was knocked out momentarily during the crash and doesn't remember for how long, but when he came to he noticed that the co-pilot was not in his seat, and the flight mechanic was gone, too. He also noted that the whole back end of the aircraft was on fire. He felt warm, but not hot, from the stuff that was burning all around him. He decided the co-pilots window (right side of aircraft) was the best way out, and he remembers opening it and unfastening his seat belt. The next thing he remembers is hanging by his fingertips outside the window just before dropping a few inches to the ground. Later on he would discover that he left a layer of skin on the window frame. He then took off running for the area between the two active

⁴ Another eye witness account says the F-105 hit the C-123 broadside and the F-105 started cart wheeling down the runway and wrapped the plane around the pilot.

⁵ The F-105 flies a 250 knot final and eventually slows to 210 on short final and touches down at around 180 knots. As the C-123 is cleared, tower hits the green light for the F-105 on final and Maj. Britt is given a landing clearance. Heavy rain is falling and tower does not see the C-123 abort and there is a slight delay in him reporting his abort to the tower. Meanwhile, the F-105 is barreling in at 250 knots and might even be carrying a few extra knots more due to the heavy rain. The tower is expecting a normal jet arriving but they have someone super fast bearing down the runway. Tower may have hit the red light telling the GCA controller (Ground Control Approach) to send the traffic on final to go around. Depending on when all this happened, it may have been impossible for the F-105 to make a go around.

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runways and because it was wet from all the rain he threw himself down and rolled around in the grass and puddles. His survival training was kicking in at this point and he didn't even know if he was on fire or not, but he knew if he was it would put out any flames and cool off any burns.

He now felt like he was out of harm's way and became concerned for the other crewmembers and headed back toward the flaming aircraft. Nearing it, he found two of the crewmen trying to assist a third away from the searing heat. With his assistance, the two less seriously injured were able to carry their comrade a safe distance away. SSgt Curtis Stieferman was the worst injured in trying to rescue his fellow crew members. He inhaled flames as well as receiving burns over most of his body.

SUMMARY

Jim Lombard, former Air Force and FAA Air Traffic Controller stated it very well, “What we do have are a series of bad luck events that accumulated with tragic results. Very seldom are accidents caused by a single event. In this case it could not be truer. The events started with maintenance problems with the C-123 and they just kept on building. Maj. Britt had executed two TACAN approaches and had missed (gone around) on both of them and then declared a fuel emergency. The real fault appears to rest with the tower who cleared the F-105 to land and the controller that directed the Bookie bird to taxi on the runway. This report was not meant to answer all the questions, but to simply explain the accident.

Jim summed it up so eloquently this way. “I was fascinated by the accident - it is sad at times to put events which are seemingly disconnected into a stream of logical order and realize just how fragile our lives can be and how totally random life changing, but obscure decisions can be. IF you remove any of the decisions or events from the accident chain, many times the accident simply could not have happened. For example, the guy who made the ultimate decision to NOT approve and extension of crew-duty time for Bookie 66 could not possibly have foreseen that his decision would play into a series of events that would cost two lives. Life is really a crapshoot at times.”

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The Media

GREAT BEND DAILY TRIBUNE

GREAT BEND, KANSAS, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1967

SAIGON (UPI) —An F105 Thunderchief fighter-bomber jet coming in for a landing in heavy downpour at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut airport tonight crashed into a C123 transport plane taxiing along the runway. The planes exploded into an orange fireball that lit up the sky.

A spokesman said the pilot of the Thunder-chief was killed and the four crewmen aboard the C123 Provider were injured. They were removed from the wreckage by teams clad in asbestos suits and rushed to hospital. One suffered a broken leg, the other three were burned.

The rain was so heavy at the airport—the world's largest and busiest—was closed to all flights for a time after the crash. It is just outside Saigon and is used by both commercial and military planes.

A spokesman said the left wing of the F-105 collided with the right wing⁶ of the C-123. There was a tremendous explosion and the two planes skidded about 500 feet where they burned. Wreckage still littered the runway an hour and a half after the crash.

The C123 was taxiing from one side of the field to the other for a maintenance check when the crash occurred.

(Great Bend Daily Tribune, Great Bend, Kansas, October 25, 1967)

⁶ This account is completely opposite from any other credible accounts.

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The Human Tragedy



Aquilla Friend Britt

Date of Birth: 11/07/1934

Date of Casualty: 10/25/1967

Air Force Maj.

F-105 Pilot

On October 25, 1967, a U.S. Air Force Republic F-105D Thunderchief (#59-1737) from the 469th Tactical Fighter Squadron was landing in marginal weather on runway 25L at Tan Son Nhut Air Base when it collided with a USAF C-123K Provider (#54-0667) from the 310th Air Commando Squadron, Phan Rang AB. The Provider was about to take off for its return flight to Phan Rang when the pilot saw a huge thunderstorm directly in its path and decided to abort the flight. He was observed to taxi along the runway to return to the parking area and had covered about 2,000 feet when the tower warned him to clear the runway immediately. However, before the Provider could turn off the runway, it was hit by the Thunderchief as it landed in poor visibility. The F-105's starboard wing sliced through the left side of the C-123's fuselage, the jet's fuselage tearing off both the Provider's engines from its port wing. The Thunderchief pilot, MAJ. Aquilla F. Britt, was unable to eject and died in the crash as his F-105 cart-wheeled 5000-feet down the runway. MAJ Britt, who had just completed his 100th mission, was 5 days from returning to the U.S. The C-123 crew survived the collision, but one crewmember died a few days later.

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Curtis Edward Stieferman

Date of Birth: 03/07/1939

Date of Casualty: 11/04/1967

Air Force SSgt

Loadmaster

SSgt Stieferman died on 4 Nov 67 from severe burns suffered on 25 October 1967 when a landing F-105 crashed into the C-123K (tail #54-0667), he was a crew member, on the aircraft and while maneuvering on the ramp at Ton Son Nhut AB enroute back to Phan Rang where they were assigned to 310th Air Commando. Loadmaster SSGT Curtis E. Stieferman exited the Provider which was engulfed in flames; however, he reportedly returned to the blazing wreck to save a crewmember and inhaled flames and was extensively burned. SSgt Stieferman was evacuated to Brooke Burn Center, San Antonio, Texas for treatment.

On 25 October a C-123K (tail number 54-0667) from the 310th Air Commando Squadron, Phan Rang Air Base, was conducting a routine "round-robin" administrative flight, with Tan Son Nhut Air Base as its last stop before the return leg to Phan Rang. As the aircraft taxied out for take-off, the pilot noted massive thunderstorms in the area, decided to abort the flight, and was cleared to back-taxi down the active runway in order to return to parking ramp. At the same time, Major Britt in F-105D tail number 59-1737 was cleared to land. The tower personnel realized their error and directed the C-123K to clear the active runway immediately, but before the C-123 pilot could do so Major Britt landed - and struck the C-123's left wing and fuselage. The C-123 promptly burst into flames, while the burning F-105 tumbled down the runway. Major Britt did not eject from his aircraft and died in the crash. Although all four crewmen on the C-123 suffered burns they escaped the aircraft alive. At least one, SSgt Curtis E. Stieferman, was evacuated to

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Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio, where he died on 4 November 1967. Curtis was married but it's unknown if he had any children.⁷

I've included this screen shot from the Coffelt Database that gives casualties and there are only the two that I've previous highlighted. Some reports indicate that all three crewmembers that were medevaced to Brooke Burn Center in San Antonio perished. The Vietnam Veterans Wall shows the same results.

Coffelt Database of Vietnam casualties

Searching for
Event ==> F-105D HITS C-123K WHILE LANDING AT TAN SON NHUT AFLD 19671025

There are 2 qualifying records:

Click the GO button to see a detailed record.

Full Name	HoR	Svc	Born	Incident	Death/PfOD	Gravesite	Detail
BRITT, Aquilla F	EL CAJON, CA	AF	11/07/1934	10/25/1967	10/25/1967	EL CAMINO MEMORIAL PARK, SAN DIEGO, CA	Go
STIEFERMAN, Curtis E	SAN ANTONIO, TX	AF	03/07/1939	10/25/1967	11/04/1967	MOSSWOOD CEMETERY, COTUIT, MA	Go

The MAC Flyer

The MAC Flyer, Volume 27, Issue 10, October 1980

Not long ago an unassuming gentleman paid a "drop in" visit to The MAC Flyer's Inner sanctum. After Introductions and some pleasant chitchat about the vagaries of flying, he walked over to a bookcase containing bound copies of The MAC Flyer back to 1954 and pulled out the volume for 1969. Opening it to a page in the January issue, he pointed to a photo of an extremely sad looking hulk of mangled aluminum and said, "That was my airplane." Yielding to our immediate entreaties for an explanation, he modestly regaled us for the better part of the next hour with the details of what it's like to be involved in—and survive—a serious aircraft accident. That gentleman was Lt Col Jack Dole, and what follows is an account, largely told in his own words, of a never to be forgotten time at Tan Son Nhut airport during the height of the Vietnam war when he came within a hair's breadth of being claimed by the Grim Reaper.

⁷ His wife's name was Gail according to DD Form 1330.

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Jack Dole

For the crew members of (then) Captain Jack Dole's C-123 squadron at Phan Rang, a typical crew duty day started with a wakeup at 0530, breakfast, and a 0630 show for pre-mission briefings. Ten missions a day were usually launched, and they were planned so that, with luck, all the Providers were back on the home ramp by sundown. "Many of the places we flew into didn't even have runway marker lights," explained Dole, "so there was good reason for keeping it a daylight operation. This particular day," he continued, "the first stop on our itinerary was a 3,500-foot strip in III Corps area, after we landed, number two prop wouldn't come out of reverse. We worked with the problem for a while and finally got the blades back in normal configuration, but decided we'd better divert into Tan Son Nhut and see if we could get some expert maintenance before things got any worse. We landed at Saigon's airport about 11:00 a.m.. the prop stuck in reverse again, and we ended up pounding the ramp until 5:30 p.m. before they were able to finish fixing our airplane."

Even though they could have legally gone into crew rest at that time, the crew was anxious to try and get back to Phan Rang because the flying schedule was set up around a 12-hours on duty/12-hours off cycle. Aircraft turnarounds interfaced with and getting out of cycle put extra pressure on other members of the squadron and the support people to take up the slack. Before they could get away from Tan Son Nhut, however, a giant tropical thunderstorm system settled in over the field and brought aircraft activity to a standstill as far as takeoffs and landings were concerned.

"After a while," said Dole, "our radios started shorting out and quitting because the plane was leaking like a sieve in the heavy rain. By spreading one of our raincoats over the console we were able to keep at least the TACAN and UHF dry enough to remain operational. We kept getting crew duty extensions so we could try and make it home, but by 7:30 p.m. the visibility and weather were still too bad for a takeoff, so I held a confab with the crew. At the time, Dole was an IP and had a lieutenant colonel in the left seat who was new in country and out for one of his first trips.) "I want to get back tonight," I told them, "but if anybody wants to quit for any reason, I'm willing to call it a day right now." One of the guys said he felt like it would be a good idea to hang it up and try again in the morning after a good night's rest, so Dole called the tower and got permission to return to the parking ramp. Since they had been in the number-one position for so long, there were several airplanes lined up behind them, and the only way to get back was to taxi down the active runway.

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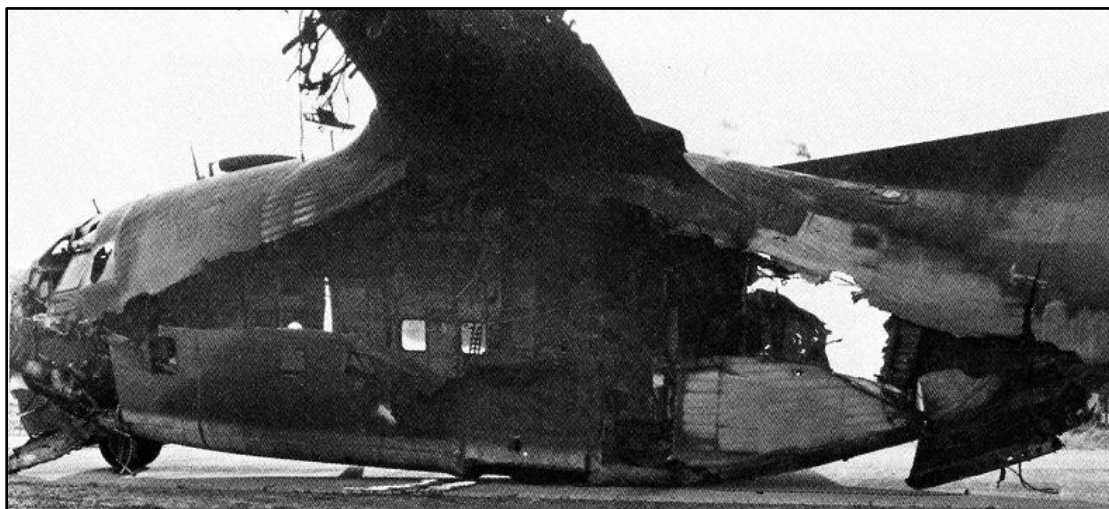
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'Clear the runway immediately!'

"We had only gone about 2,000 feet down the active when I heard our call-sign, and the voice on the radio said, 'Clear the runway immediately!' There was no explanation of why, but before we could take any action whatsoever, we were in the middle of experiencing two aircraft trying to occupy the same space at the same time."

With landing clearance from approach control, an F-105 had emerged from the low overcast, touched down, and while still traveling at nearly 150 mph plowed right into the C-123, The "Thud's" right wing ripped down the left side of the Provider like a can opener, splitting the fuselage as it flashed by. It also tore off the number one recip engine and the auxiliary jet on that side, and ruptured the fuel tank in the nacelle, which released about 3,000 pounds of avgas to feed the fire ignited by the collision. The F-105 continued another 5,000 feet down the runway before finally coming to rest in a ball of fire. Another C-123 pilot who witnessed the horrifying tableau from his aircraft, which was parked nearby, told Dole later that he didn't see how anybody could have escaped alive, considering the amount of damage done by the impact and the conflagration which rapidly enveloped the wreckage.



Lt Col Dole's C-123 was opened up like a tin can by the wing of an F-105.

"I was knocked out momentarily during the crash," recalls the colonel. "I don't know for how long, but when I came to, I saw the copilot was not in his seat, and the flight mechanic was gone, too. I also noticed that the whole back end of the airplane was on fire. In fact, I distinctly remember seeing mainly two colors—red from the flames and black from the smoke. I also felt

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warm, but strangely enough not hot, from the stuff that was burning all around me, I decided the copilot's side window was the best way out, and I remember opening it and unfastening my seat belt. The next thing I remember is hanging by my fingertips outside the window just before dropping a few inches to the ground. "I took off running for the area between the two active runways. It was wet from all the rain and I threw myself down and rolled around in the grass and puddles. I wasn't even sure if I was on fire or not, but I knew from first aid and survival training that that would put out the fire and would also help to cool off any burns."

Aware now that he had sustained painful burns on his arms, hands and face, but that he was out of harm's way for the time being, Dole became concerned for the other crewmembers and headed back toward the flaming cargo aircraft. Nearing it, he found two of the crewmen trying to assist a third away from the searing heat. With his assistance, the two less seriously injured were able to carry their comrade a safe distance away, where they waited for the firefighters and emergency medical assistance.

The plane became a 'fire-ball'

"One thing I remember that really shocked me was seeing how badly the other crewmembers were burned," observed Dole. "All three had exited the aircraft through the worst of the fire. Since we were only wearing short-sleeve fatigues, they were especially seared on their arms, hands and faces. In fact, all three were medevaced back to the military burn center in San Antonio right away for extensive treatment. Evacuating the plane on the side away from the most intense flames saved me from more serious injury, and I ended up recuperating in several military hospitals in Vietnam for a month. Even though I started out with bandages from my armpits to my fingertips, luckily I didn't need to have skin grafts—although for a while the doctors thought I might require them. To give you an idea of how hot it was in the cockpit, I left the skin from my fingertips in the superheated paint on the window frame. I didn't believe it until the accident investigators took me out to the wreckage several days later and pointed out the grim evidence that showed where I had hung momentarily while I was getting out of the plane."

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The front of the aircraft opened up by a wing of an F105. The interior of the fuselage is clearly visible with side-wall web seating showing on the opposite side of the aircraft.

Aside from surviving such a devastating collision of two aircraft with relatively minor injuries: one thing that amazed Colonel Dole was the idea that if a person isn't too seriously injured in an accident, they will often carry out certain actions, such as emergency procedures, automatically. For example, even though he couldn't remember pushing the button or seeing anybody else do it, the number two engine was feathered. The most plausible explanation anybody could come up with was that Dole probably did it during the time he was getting ready to leave the plane, knowing that he was going to exit from that side. Such actions, in the colonel's opinion, make a strong case for knowing one's aircraft and emergency procedures completely and were enough to do them without hesitation should the need arise.

After recovering sufficiently to travel comfortably Dole was sent back to the states to complete his recuperation and eventually return to flying status. 'Initially I had a fear that I wouldn't want

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to fly again," he admits. But over a period of time—thinking about it, praying about it, and talking to people about it—I lost the fear. Back at McChord a couple of months later, after convalescent leave, I had no problem going up in a C-124 and flying a local." Although the memory of the accident didn't cause him any undue anguish on his Initial return to the cockpit, Colonel Dole revealed that "It did come back to haunt me once."

Not unexpectedly, the frightening flashback occurred at Saigon. It happened several months later, while Dole, who was a C-124 copilot at the time, was awaiting clearance for takeoff. "We were sitting on the same position al runway 25-left and we were number one to go. When the tower finally called, the controller said, 'If you can make an immediate takeoff, you're cleared onto the runway.'" My answer—without even asking the AC— was, 'No, we can't.' Right then I had a fear that fate was putting me in the same situation as before. I could even see a guy three or four miles out on final, and knowing the response time on our Old Shakey, I felt It would have been really tight. The AC looked over at me kind of surprised and said, 'Hey, I'm supposed to be the decision maker here,' but we waited till the plane on final landed anyway. Later, on the way to Kadena, I told him about the accident, which explained my sudden negative reaction to the controller's offer, and he was very understanding."

Colonel Dole made numerous subsequent trips to Tan Son Nhut in C-124s and later on in Starlifters, but never again had any problems with unpleasant memories. As to the cause of the accident, the colonel feels It resulted primarily from a breakdown in communication between his aircraft, the tower, RAPCON and the F-105. Bad weather also played a key role by seriously limiting visibility and keeping the C-123 on the ground long past the time when it should have been safely in the blocks back at Phan Rang. Some people might also speculate that fate's touch was evident In the fact that the F-105 landed at Saigon under unusual circumstances. "Thuds" were rarely ever seen at Tan Son Nhut, but the pilot of the ill-fated fighter had been directed to come there for a special ceremony following his 100Th mission over the north.

According to Colonel Dole, however, pondering over reasons for the accident is not as important in the case as paying heed to the lessons in survival which he learned. Here was a mishap which killed the fighter pilot outright, Injured one of the C-123 crewmen so seriously that he died several days later, caused a second to be medically discharged from the service and resulted in the over pilot permanently grounded; and yet Dole escaped with relatively

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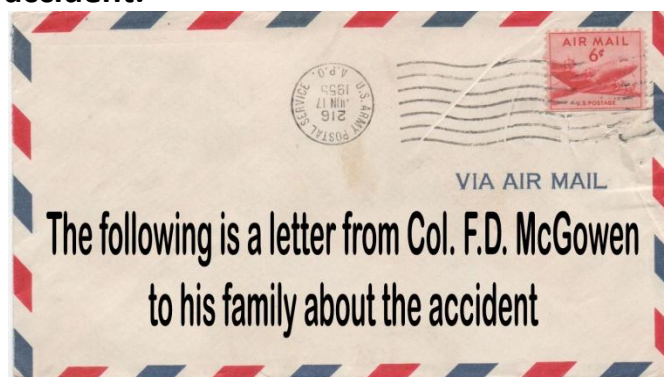
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minor burns and returned to active flying status largely because of his correct actions following the impact and ensuing holocaust. "I wouldn't wish this kind of experience on anybody," he avows. "It's not a pleasant thing, but I believe I'm a better aviator for having gone through it For one thing, you can be sure that I wear my flying gloves, especially for takeoffs and landings: I keep my sleeves rolled down; and I'm very happy to have the protection of Nomex."

"If I could impress only two suggestions on the minds of other crewmembers," says Colonel Dole, "they would be these: Know your aircraft and understand your emergency procedures — by that I mean have an actual, clear Idea in your mind of exactly what you will do in certain emergency situations. And, always use the protective gear the Air Force provides for your safety. Every piece of it is there for a good reason. It can help save your skin...and maybe even your life."

The following is a letter from Col. F.D. McGowen to his family about the accident.



Thursday 26 October 1967 (Tan Son Nhut)

Dear Norma Mike &Patty,

Had a bad accident on the runway last night. A C-123 was cleared by the Tower to taxi across the active runway. When it got to the middle of the runway, an F-105 had just landed and hit him broadside. It spun the C-123 around and the F-105 started cart wheeling down the runway and wrapped the airplane around the pilot. He was killed instantly, and three men in the C-123 died in the hospital. What I heard was the C-123 thought he had landed at Bien Hoa. One more accident that shouldn't have happened. I saw the aircraft this morning and there's not very much left of either. The C-123 burned.

Love Dad.

Col. F.D. McGowen

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The History of Phan Rang AB and the stories of those who served there.

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Sgt David Koopman, a jet engine mechanic assigned to Tan Son Nhut Air Base records his memories of Hell on Runway 25L.

“I had been assigned to the 460th Field Maintenance Squadron at Tan Son Nhut Air Base as a Jet Engine mechanic. I soon fell into the rhythm of my duties. But, other than witnessing elephants using their tusks and trunks to pick up and carry away trees felled at the Main Gate, I didn't see much difference between Tan Son Nhut Air Base and my previous duty station at Mt. Home Air Force Base in Idaho. Strange as it may seem, after my initial apprehension upon arrival, I felt faintly disappointed that I hadn't seen anything dangerous. The only thing relating to combat that I'd seen had been the flares in the night sky. I would regret that thought later as I saw more than enough danger to satisfy me. After my arrival in Viet Nam I had been told some disturbing rumors about the Tan Son Nhut Air Base attack of 1966. And that some of our Vietnamese barbers had been killed in the attack. Any Vietnamese on base could be a VC sympathizer. That was on my mind on October 25th 1967 as **I was walking by the outdoor movie theater when there was a loud explosion and the sky lit up with a flash. I thought we were under attack. But nothing further happened. And later I was told that a USAF Republic F-105D Thunderchief and a C-123K Provider had collided on runway 25L. The C-123K had crossed the runway just as the F-105D came in for a landing. The pilot of the F-105D, Maj Aquilla Friend Britt, died in the crash. The crew of the C-123K escaped with burns. And the C-123K loadmaster, SSgt Curtis E. Stieferman, was evacuated to Brooke Army Hospital in San Antonio. He subsequently died there from his burns on November 4th 1967. Both aircraft were destroyed.**”

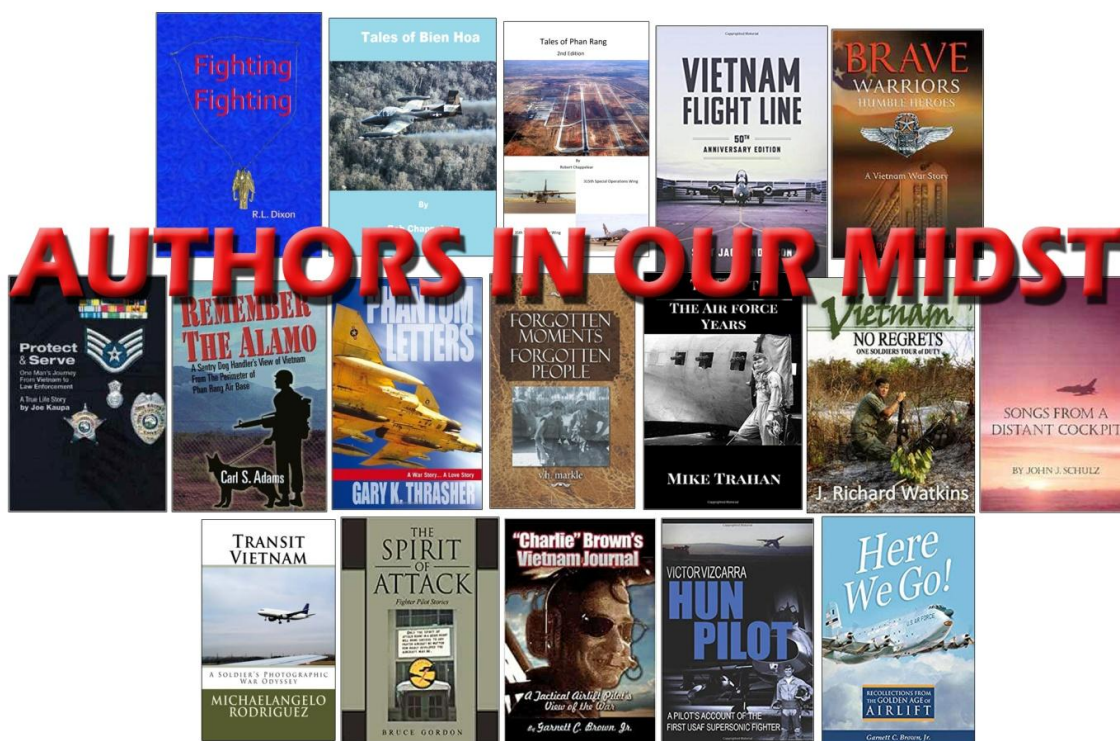
Special thanks to Paul Minert and Jim Lombard for providing information for this story.

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Doug’s Comments: I never knew of this terrible tragedy on the runway at Saigon until receiving the story from Paul Minert, late 2019 and since then I seemed to become obsessed with it and tried to find as much information as I could. So many of the reports said the F-105 plowed broadside into the Provider but if that were true why did the provider turn because it was supposed to go straight down the runway until it could get on a taxiway to a parking spot and if it was hit broadside there wouldn’t have been any survivors and the F-105 wouldn’t have continued down the runway for another 5,000 feet because it would have sliced through the C-123 and there wouldn’t be any survivors and both aircraft would have erupted together in a ball of fire, but I realize that any analysis made at this time would be purely conjecture. When I started I wanted to get the names of all crew members and I’ve done that. Another stated goal of mine is to remember Phan Rang fallen by making a posting on the anniversary of their death on the Phan Rang Facebook page. I have dedicated an entire issue of the Phan Rang Newsletter to those that have fallen and if any reader knows of anyone not included in that issue, I would appreciate it if they would let me know. You can view the Phan Rang Newsletter 155 issue [here](#). I hope that you enjoyed this newsletter and if you have any comments or would like to submit a story, just send it to me. This newsletter was composed and all graphics by Douglas Severt. To see a list of all previous newsletters click [here](#). To unsubscribe to Phan Rang News, mailto:dougsevert@cox.net and put ‘unsubscribe’ in subject line.

⁸ To order your copy, simply send twenty dollars (includes postage) to Bruce Gordon, 105 Broadbill Ct., Georgetown, KY 40324.