

MEMO

TO: CHRIS LANGTON

FROM: TOM COKER

DATE: AUGUST 6, 2007

RE: PLANE CRASH / VIET NAM / APPROX. DATE / FEB 1970

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Chris Langton has requested that I present a narrative on the plane crash that we were both involved with in February of 1970 in Viet Nam. It will be my intent to be brief in the memo, but I would look forward to further question or comments concerning this incident.

By way of introduction, I was born in Houston, Texas, USA. I graduated from the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York in 1967. Prior to going to Viet Nam, I served in Europe for almost two years and successfully completed Air Borne and Ranger Training at Ft. Benning, Georgia, USA. I arrived in Viet Nam with the Rank of Captain in the US Army. While serving in Viet Nam as an Infantry Company Commander and Brigade Staff Officer, I was awarded the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars for Valor, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, numerous Air Medals as well as several other service medals. More information on my background is available upon request.

The incident that I have been requested to discuss, happened approximately in February of 1970 in Viet Nam. Chris Langton and myself were on an air reconnaissance mission in an OV- 10 Model Aircraft for our Brigade in the 1st Infantry Division. I was sitting back seat as an observer and Chris was the Pilot. A Long Range Patrol (LRP) called for assistance and we were the first Forward Air Controller Unit on location. They reported being surrounded by a large enemy force, but as yet undetected. Chris began calling in Air Support and I assisted in controlling potential Artillery fire in the area. After several passes to mark the area for air strikes, the LRP alerted us via radio that we were taking ground fire with each pass. It was about that time that I noticed that Chris seemed to be struggling with the controls and the plane did a complete roll. With no hesitation, Chris informed me "Mattie, we are going to eject." My reply was "Roger that..." and out we went.

As I have since been told by experienced pilots, the ejection system for this airplane was designed to potentially save a pilot's life, but little else. The system fired an explosive devise under the seat that catapulted the pilot and his back seat passenger through the canopy, which was marginally released during this

process. The pilot is ejected first by the system, and, thus takes the major impact of the canopy with the top of his head, neck and back. The back seat passenger is then fired out of the plane and into the canopy as well. Since the plane was in a roll at the time, the wind force on the canopy was tremendous.

At the point of ejection, I believe I was briefly unconscious after hitting the canopy. I do recall arching my neck and back as I hit the canopy. My pilot's helmet was ripped from my head during this process. The next recollection I had was checking my parachute and looking for Chris. He appeared to me to be unconscious or severely hurt at that time. I did try briefly to yell to him, but it was to no avail. I was thankful that his parachute was working properly. From that point on, I focused on the remaining task at hand, which was to land in triple canopy jungle and potentially being surrounded by the enemy.

Once on the ground, I discovered via my emergency radio that Chris was alive. We were separated by several hundred meters of very dense jungle. To make a long story short, as I worked my way down from the dense canopy to the ground, I heard that Chris had a helicopter coming into a small clearing he was near to rescue him. I was too far away to make it to this clearing. It is my understanding that Chris attempted to grab the Landing Strut of the helicopter when it was shot down by enemy fire, with the helicopter almost landing on top of him. I have no idea how he survived this venture nor many of the details. Eventually, over a few hours, we were rescued. I was pulled out of the jungle by a helicopter using a "jungle penetrator." I was reunited with Chris that afternoon, but very briefly. We were both very beat up from the crash and tired as well.

During my extensive debriefing by the Air Force, I was informed by one officer that we were one of the few and possibly the only crew to live through and ejection of an OV-10 aircraft up to that point in Viet Nam. They seemed to be puzzled that an Australian Pilot and an Infantry Officer, albeit, airborne trained, were the only two survivors of this type of event. I received the Purple Heart for this action. I felt that Chris deserved the equivalent of this medal for his part as well as several valor awards. I was informed that the Australian Air Force would most likely not recognize this event and to go about my own business.

I did see Chris one brief time prior to leaving Viet Nam. We flew together one more time. I did notice the lack of mobility and apparent stiffness in his upper body and neck. I had a similar problem for a long time.

As mentioned earlier, I would look forward to discussing this incident in any detail you wish. I can be contacted via email at tomcoker67@comcast.net or by phone (303-400-9507). My address is:

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