

1. Synopsis of Missing Combat Talon C-130E

On December 29, 1967, one Combat Talon C-130 with eleven crew members failed to return from its clandestine mission over North Vietnam. Aircraft 64-0547 "Romeo Charlie" was assigned to Detachment 1 of the 314th Tactical Airlift Wing which was based at Nha Trang, South Vietnam. Its fateful mission called for two airdrops over North Vietnam. The first one was a high altitude leaflet drop on a northerly heading west of Hanoi. The second was a diversionary cargo drop on a southerly heading in the mountains east of Dien Bien Phu. SO-1 crew, commanded by Captain Edwin N. Osborne, Jr. was tasked to fly the mission.

It was a night mission whose departure was timed to have the leaflets reach Hanoi area at first daylight. The first part of the mission was flown at normal high altitude from Nha Trang all the way to the SKYLINE beacon in the Laotian Plain of Jars. At that point the aircraft descended into a terrain following flight profile, flying at 1000 ft. above the ground. This altitude and frequent changes of heading over mountainous terrain permitted the aircraft to penetrate into North Vietnam's Red River Valley without being detected by the enemy's early warning radars. Once there, the aircraft accelerated to its maximum airspeed and executed a rapid climb to 31,000 foot leaflet drop altitude. Its climb and the drop tracks were flight planned just outside of the lethal ranges of known surface to air missiles (SAMs) and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA), exposing it only to a possible encounter with a MIG interceptor. However, our planned avoidance of early detection, rapid climb to high altitude, with a short leaflet drop time, followed by an equally rapid descent to the terrain following altitude, insured that the enemy didn't have enough time to alert, launch and direct a MIG to our aircraft. After the drop, the aircraft proceeded westward through the mountains into the Black River Valley. There, at 4:30 AM, local time, over a prominent river bend the aircraft made its last progress report. Then the aircraft turned southward and its crew was getting ready for the diversionary cargo drop in the vicinity of Highway 6. The cargo was intended to be discovered by the North Vietnamese and its content was to lead them to believe that a commando team was operating in that area. Unfortunately, the aircraft never reached its intended drop zone.

Almost 25 years later, in October 1992, local villagers escorted a joint recovery team to an aircraft crash site which was confirmed to be that of our C-130. The site was located on a steep mountain rise about 7 1/2 minutes of flight time from its last reported position. Site examination confirmed that destruction of the aircraft was total and instantaneous. The site was visited again one year later in October 1993 when the excavation and retrieval of aircrew remains was completed. Positive identification of recovered skeletal remains accounted for only five of the eleven crew members. We join their families in remembering their sacrifice and honoring their devotion to our God and country.