

S-01 Crew Remembered

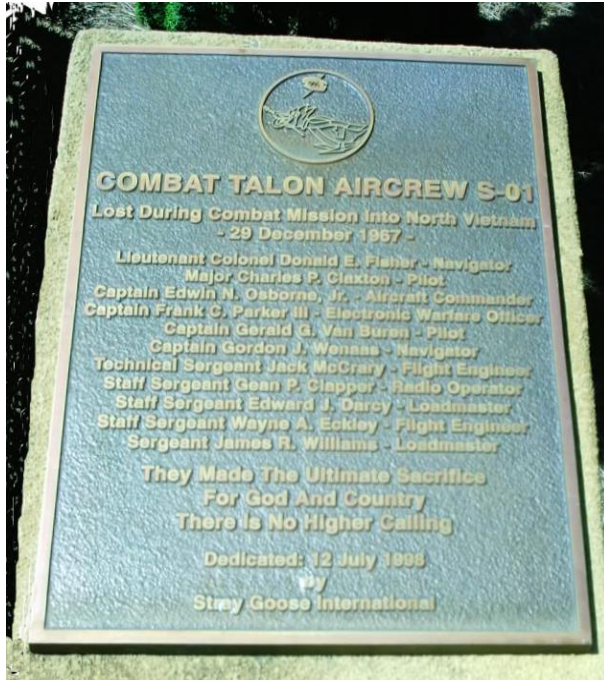
John Gargus



Composit photo of a Combat Talon fly-by and the S-01 memorial pedestal at the Hurlburt Field Memorial Air Park. (Photo courtesy of Lee Hess)

We are very fortunate to live in a society that respects and makes great efforts to remember the sacrifices of our soldiers. There is no other country on this earth that devotes as many resources to recover the remains of those who perished in wars on foreign soil. Hurlburt Field Memorial Park is perhaps the best example for how a local community honors and preserves the memory of those who made ultimate sacrifices for their country. Even though our nation devotes so much effort to recover and honor of its fallen soldiers, it is ultimately up to the units in which they served to erect appropriate memorials for them. Those dedicated individuals who established and now maintain the Memorial Park for the Air Force Special Operations Forces are to be commended for doing it just right.

The story about the recovery of Combat Talon MC-130 tail number 64-0547 that perished in North Vietnam in 1967 and the memorial dedicated to its S-01 crew is a good illustration for what the country will do and what a community should do to complement our nation's remembrance of those who made the ultimate sacrifices on our behalf.



COMBAT TALON AIRCREW S-01

Lost During Combat Mission into North Vietnam
29 December 1967

Lieutenant Colonel Donald E. Fisher - Navigator
Major Charles P. Claxton - Pilot
Captain Edwin N. Osborne, Jr. Aircraft Commander
Captain Frank C. Parker III – Electronic Warfare Officer
Captain Gerald G. VanBuren - Pilot
Captain Gordon J. Wenaas - Navigator
Technical Sergeant Jack McCrary – Flight Engineer
Staff Sergeant Gean P. Clapper – Radio Operator
Staff Sergeant Edward J. Darcy - Loadmaster
Staff Sergeant Wayne A. Eckley - Flight Engineer
Sergeant James R. Williams – Loadmaster

They Made The Ultimate Sacrifice
For God And Country
There Is No Higher Calling

Dedicated: 12 July 1998
By
Stray Goose International

S-01 Memorial at the Hurlburt Memorial Air Park.

The loss of eleven S-01 crewmembers that occurred in North Vietnam on December 29, 1967 was the largest single aircraft combat loss of lives during the Vietnam War. The crash site of their aircraft was not reported and identified until twenty five years later in 1992. Thanks to the efforts of the Stray Goose International (SGI) a memorial pedestal was erected in the park honoring the men and their ultimate sacrifice. Families of the S-01 crewmembers and many special operations community friends attended its moving dedication on July 12 1998. This was the first time the families and attendees learned the details of the classified mission on which they perished. The story came from the mission planners who had charted that fateful flight. The Department of Defense that expended much effort to bring them home did not have anyone to tell the families about how their loved ones perished. The story had to come from those with whom they served. Unfortunately, their mission was classified as a TOP SECRET operation and the only thing we were at liberty to tell the families was that their aircraft failed to return from a nighttime mission. The fact that they flew over North Vietnam could not be revealed.

Once the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting (JTF-FA) and the Central Identification Laboratory in Hawaii (CILHI) completed their recovery and identification of remains the Air Force Mortuary Services arranged for a common casket burial of the S-01 crew on November 15, 2000. Sixty eight veterans, who had served in Combat Talon units and their families, joined the families of the S-01 crew members on a very cold morning at Arlington National Cemetery to witness the ceremonial folding of eleven flags over the lone casket that was then lowered into the ground for their eternal rest. Their common grave is located in Section 60, Site 7915. Names of the crew

members are also engraved on the Vietnam Memorial Wall panels 32E and 33E. Visit them every time you are in Washington.



S-01 Gravesite marker at Arlington National Cemetery.

The S-01 story could stop right here. Our fallen comrades were finally laid to rest. However, there is so much more that can be written about the long process that brought the events surrounding the fate of the S-01 to this internment. Many friends from the Combat Talon community, who knew that I continued to be involved with the details of the “final accounting” process, kept asking me very pertinent questions. Why did the recovery and identification of crew remains took so long? Why didn't the AFSOC learn about the aircraft's crash site discovery in 1992? I resolved to find out some of the answers.