

THEY SERVED IN SILENCE

The Story of a Cryptologic Service and Sacrifice

CAP Flight 72



The Shootdown of CAP Flight 72 5 February 1969

...without the work of the Security Service's EC-47s...we would be completely in the dark about the enemy situation...

Director of Intelligence for the U.S. Pacific Command

The fifth of February brought overcast skies to the U.S. Air Force's 6944th Squadron based at Pleiku Air Base in the central highlands of South Vietnam. Monsoon season had come and gone, and weather conditions were dry with a comfortable temperature hovering around 70 degrees. It was looking to be a routine day on the flight line.

The 6994th Security Squadron represented the Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) segment of a highly successful US Air Force program devoted to Airborne Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) in the Indo-China area of operations. The unit history notes that the air crews and cryptologists did their work, "... in specially modified versions of the C-47 'Gooney Bird' (EC-47Qs) operated by three Tactical Electronic Warfare squadrons. 6994th personnel were instrumental in providing timely and vital intelligence to Free World forces throughout Southeast Asia." During its time in Vietnam, the unit established a distinguished record of success. Known as "Back-enders" due to the location of their work stations in the aircraft, the cryptologic professionals on board the squadron aircraft not only obtained indispensable intelligence but also saved countless lives.

Later that day, Flight CAP 72 took off to conduct a routine radio direction-finding mission over Laos. Their focus was activity along the Ho Chi Minh trail, which was used extensively by North Vietnam to move supplies south. Onboard were five 6994th Security Squadron personnel and five 362nd Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron crew members. Plane and crew headed north into Laos and circled back. Near the Laotian city of Saravane, the flight checked in and reported all conditions normal. The transmission would be the last received from the plane. After that, all attempts to make contact with the aircraft failed. Initial search efforts found no trace of the plane or those aboard—it was almost as if the aircraft had vanished.

Months later, the wreckage of the aircraft was discovered near Ban Phan, Laos, and dedicated salvage teams began operations to recover the remains of the fallen crew. Based on the initial evidence, it was thought that the plane had crashed due to an engine fire, but a more careful study of the site led investigators to suspect that the plane had been hit by hostile fire, causing a deadly blaze to break out on board and the right wing to detach from the plane. It was further concluded that due to the fire and the suddenness of the attack, no one was able to safely make it out of the aircraft.



The crew members and cryptologists who perished that day were a true cross-section of America. The oldest was 45, the youngest 22. They hailed from Florida, Illinois, New York,

North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington, DC. All of them had devoted a portion of their lives to serving their country and their fellow service members by working to get the critical information needed to defeat the enemy and to save lives.

The remains of the fallen crew were brought back to the states and buried in two separate gravesites at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. However, as time passed family members made inquiries, and at their request the remains were eventually disinterred, tested for DNA, and in some cases provided to the fallen member's family to allow for individual burials.

When considering the worth of America's almost two-decade-long involvement in Indochina, it is important to remember that despite the controversy surrounding the conflict, there were countless acts of courage, bravery and self-sacrifice made by those involved. It is in this spirit that we remember and honor the members of fallen cryptologic heroes of Flight CAP-72, who paid the ultimate sacrifice that day in the cause of freedom.



SSgt Louis J. Clever, USAF Tarentum Pennsylvania
Sgt James V. Dorsey, Jr., USAF Washington DC
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