

This is a corrected version of the article printed in the C-7A Caribou Association Newsletter, Vol. 18, Issue 1, March 2007. The major changes are: (1) the correct date of the incident was October 9, 1967 and not October 8 as stated in the original article and (2) Joe Dennehey's rank was Captain at the time and not Major.

### **Corrected Copy**

As a member of the 459<sup>th</sup> TAS, I had my share of flights to Khe Sanh and the article "Support Critical at Khe Sanh", Volume 2, Issue 17, brought back lots of memories. I would like to provide more detail, and some corrections, to the following statement in the article, "To add to the excitement of Tet, Joe experienced a double engine failure and ended up dead sticking his Bou into Quang Tri Lavang."

It was early in the morning of October 9, 1967, when Capt. Joe Dennehey and I took off from Da Nang on the first flight of the day to take a load to Khe Sanh. I was a newly promoted 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. copilot, but was an experienced hand by that time, having arrived in-country the first week of July as a brown bar. There were angry clouds and numerous thunder bumpers as we proceeded north from Hue. The thunder bumpers increased in number and intensity as we left the coastal plain and crossed into the mountainous region in route to Khe Sanh. We tried unsuccessfully to find a path through the dark clouds and it became impossible to remain VFR. During these gyrations, we lost oil pressure on the right engine and the Flight Mechanic visually confirmed the engine was covered with oil. We shutdown the engine and headed for the coast. Joe was not able to maintain altitude on the single engine and we were already at a low altitude when we finally broke-out of the clouds and could see the ground. A quick review of the terrain told us we were close to Quang Tri. It was obvious we weren't going far and our options were limited. Joe immediately decided to land at Quang Tri City.

Quang Tri Lavang was a different airfield than Quang Tri City. I think Lavang was closed for air operations at the time, but I could be wrong about that. As I remember, Quang Tri City (listed as Quang Tri 1, VA1-79 in the Tactical Airdrome Directory) was on the northeast edge of the town. It was a dirt strip approximately 1,500 to 1,600 feet long and about 50 feet wide with no over runs worth mentioning. The airfield was surrounded by several rows of barbwire fences with mine fields at each end of the runway. The runway was basically aligned north-south and there was a ditch with a culvert that ran under the runway a hundred feet or so from the north end.

Less than five minutes after we broke-out of the clouds, we were on final approach for a landing to the north. Joe certainly didn't want to land short (minefield) and going around was not a realistic option, so Joe wanted to make sure we made the runway. We touched down farther down the runway than usual for a short runway, but we still had plenty of room to stop under normal conditions; however, not much was normal that day. The runway was very slick due to recent heavy rains. Joe reversed the good engine and attempted to keep the aircraft on the runway while I held the yoke full forward. Despite Joe's efforts the Bou slowly drifted left. The left gear left the runway, but we continued to track down the runway. We were slowing down, but the end of the runway was coming up quick. Forward progress ended abruptly when the left gear hit the culvert. The landing gear collapsed and the working propeller sheared from its shaft upon impact with the ground. The freed prop spun up and impacted the left side of the fuselage, shattering the passenger window and tearing a large gash in the fuselage where the flight mechanic normally sat for landing.

I do not remember the Flight Mechanic's name (*A1C Lyhue Fisher, Jr.*). He was a young, black Airman, broad-shouldered and solidly built. I don't know if it was from training, habit or natural intelligence, but instead of sitting with his back to the window, the Flight Mechanic had strapped-in and sat side-ways, facing the rear of the aircraft with his back braced against the bulkhead in anticipation of a possible rough landing. His foresight saved him from serious injury and kept our day from being really tragic. As it was, we all walked away with minor bumps and bruises.

Many other things happened before that long day ended, but that is my story of what happened when Joe Dennehey landed the crippled Bou at Quang Tri City.

There are a couple of other stories related to the crash landing I would like to pass along.

The damage to the Bou we left at Quang Tri City was substantial. Repairs were estimated at 6,000 to 8,000 man-hours. The lack of space and facilities, and security issues, made it impossible to repair the aircraft on-site. The recovery plan was to take the wings off and use a Sky Crane helicopter to lift the fuselage and fly it to Phu Cat - a long haul from Quang Tri City. I later saw a photo of the Bou sling-loaded under the helicopter in route home, but it never made it. I am not sure what happened or why, but the unlucky Bou was dropped from several thousand feet. When I heard about the dropped Bou, I thought it was the end of the story, but it wasn't. Several weeks later, the aircraft Crew Chief came up to me and said, "I thought you might want to have this". He was holding the co-pilot's yoke from the lost Bou. A maintenance team had been transported to the Bou's final crash site to salvage what they could and the yoke was one of the items they brought back. The original trim button had been lost sometime during the Bou's helicopter adventure and the missing button had been replaced with a shiny new trim button. Other than that, it was clearly the same grungy looking yoke I had held during the Quang Tri landing, including the black electrical tape that was wrapped around the upper right portion of the yoke. I gladly accepted the yoke from the Crew Chief.

I was among the first group of 459<sup>th</sup> co-pilots that arrived as brown bar co-pilots and upgraded to Aircraft Commander (AC) towards the end of their tours. Shortly after being made an AC, I had a run-in with one of the senior maintenance sergeants. I don't remember the exact discrepancy in dispute, but the bottom line is that I refused to accept a plane he thought I should take. He was not at all happy and I am sure he was thinking, "That smartass Lieutenant has no business being an AC anyway." (*In all fairness to the maintenance sergeant, I probably was something of a smartass.*)

Several weeks later, it was time to rotate home. You had to pack your bags and turn them in for inspection the day prior departure. I had several 'memento' items packed including the co-pilot's yoke, a copy of the Tactical Airdrome Directory, and an Army field jacket I had scrounged the first few weeks I was in country.

It was late afternoon when I heard a knock and Lt. Col. Secrest's large frame filled my barracks room door. He had the copilot's yoke in his hand. My favorite maintenance sergeant had been in charge of out-bound bag inspection that day and my 'mementos' had been confiscated. The sergeant had personally gone to Lt. Col. Secrest, 459<sup>th</sup> TAS Commander, and filed a complaint that I was illegally in possession of government property. Lt. Col. Secrest gave me a lecture on the proper and improper use of government property - and taking government property out of country was not proper. He then growled something about "anyone who squeezed this not knowing if he was going to walk away or not deserves to have it" and stomped from the room.

*The yoke was finally mounted and hung on the wall in 2014.*

Ron Lester  
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