



AND NOW THE REST OF THE STORY

I'm hoping that I can put all the bits and pieces into some sequence that will give a reasonable rendition of the "longest short flight I ever made."

I arrived with the Blue Max F Battery 79th ARA on the 27 of November 1971 and was put to work in short order.

By 9 December I was settled in. They made me the Armament Officer followed by Section Leader, Huey IP, IFE. After that I had a Cobra check out with "Iron Mike" Galloway which got me up to speed on the armament changes after 3+ years. I found that the ECU was a real blessing.

About a month after arrival, I was assigned to give a firepower demonstration to a group of "New Guys" just coming in country so they would have an idea of the capabilities of our aircraft in day and night operations. The GIF was along for the ride and was a short timer.

After clearance with Range Control, we made a clearing orbit at about 1200 feet and rolled hot for the first run. On Target. We called for another pass at 2500 ft., rolled hot in about a 70 dg., dive. First pair on target, second pair both burning in the outboard pods....then release....both on target. Noted a little thunk as the second pair launched. Eyeballs scanning the gauges, EGT rising, WTF?

I called a right break and fed in some pedal for trim and the pedal went to the floor. GIF jumped on the pedals and his went to the floor also. If mine went to the floor then his had to do the same thing. Duh! I leveled out and just waited to see where we would be if we waited a few seconds before thrashing around. I asked the GIF to call Ben Hoa AFB to declare an emergency and give our position and eta.

Luck was with us so far. We settled with about a 20dg. starboard yaw, nose tucked down about 5 dg. and a port roll about 5 – 7 dg. EGT continued to climb, I kept reaching for the jettison switch and kept pulling back. Finally reached up and started the clock. EGT still rising.

Getting closer to the fence, I was trying to make as shallow a touchdown as I could. Cleared the fence...pulled the stick back...collective coming down smooth... throttle coming back... aircraft yawing port...left skid makes contact...skids touchdown...cyclic neutral...steering with throttle...aircraft started yawing starboard...followed the starboard turn with forward cyclic...holding on with a death grip...three little skips to port and it settled upright after a 160 dg turn...I jumped out asap, ran around the left side of the aircraft...grabbed the fire extinguisher and told the GIF in the way by to shut the engine down.

As I came around the rear of the aircraft and looked at the hole in the vertical fin and realized that the T/R and gearbox were missing and then saw the gash from the T/R strike, my knees started to tremble..."just a little"...and then just a little more when I was the mess with the annular ring slashes and

cowl cuts as the T/R made its way toward the engine oil reservoir, swash plate and pitch change links.

Log book entry..."Tail Rotor Missing."

In closing, I would like to say that I was a little concerned about memory after 42 years and it took me three days of wrestling with it to get it right.

Clarence A. (Al) Smith

Blue Max 17

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