

MEMORANDUM

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

TO : VPO

FROM : DSY

SUBJECT: Hotel Golf - Crash Of

DATE: 9 June 1961

REF. No. DSY-61-1136

1. Hotel Golf crashed at about 1615L on 30 May 1961 at Ban Padong, Laos. The pilot, Walter L. P. WIZBOWSKI and co-pilot, Charles H. MATEER were killed. The crew chief, Dale KLOCK was badly shaken up and in a state of shock.

2. Dale KLOCK was interviewed by the DSY on 31 May in Room 111, Erawan Hotel, Bangkok. The interview lasted from 1130 until 1205. KLOCK stated that on the night of 29 May they were RON at the Padong alternate Base. About 1500 on 30 May they took off from the alternate Base for Padong. Aboard were the pilot, co-pilot and crew chief, one JTAC member and one Laotian soldier. The cargo consisted of 10 or 11 cases of 75 MM AMMO, C-Rations and personal baggage. KLOCK stated the aircraft was in good condition at the time of take-off. He said it had an new engine with about only 15 hrs on it. He also said that neither the pilot nor co-pilot reported anything wrong with the aircraft either on that day or the previous day.

Regarding the weather, KLOCK said it was a fairly clear day with scattered clouds and little wind at the time of take-off. He indicated the weather remained much the same enroute to Padong.

KLOCK reported that they crossed the maintain base to Padong and started to circle to make their approach. They were still at altitude and went into a cloud. At that point visibility became zero. In a matter of minutes he saw tree tops and almost simultaneously they hit the tree tops and seconds later flew into the trees and crashed to the ground. KLOCK said he remained conscious. He got out of the aircraft. He noticed that the engines was still running. He crawled up to the cockpit, found the cockpit windshield missing, reached in and cut off the magneto. The engine did not stop so he pulled back the idle cut off. The engine then stopped. He said he yelled to the pilot and co-pilot but received no answer. Both appeared unconscious to him and he felt certain that the co-pilot was dead. He crawled back down to look for the 2 passengers to help. He said he went to the passenger compartment and found the passengers had already crawled out of the aircraft. He asked them to help but the American said he could not. Just about that time several Americans arrived at the scene and took over. They found the pilot and co-pilot both dead. KLOCK said he was escorted out and walked through the jungle to the Padong landing site which was only about 300 yards from the scene of the crash. He believes he was only at the crash scene for about 15 minutes from the time of the crash until he departed.

KLOCK said he was flew from Padong to Vientiane almost immediately. From Vientiane he departed right away for Bangkok aboard a C-46. He stated he remained at an Air Force facility at Don Muang airport during the night for medical observation. KLOCK said he was released about 0900 on 31 May. The Dr. informed him he was all right and received no physical injured.

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3. Robert J. CAMPBELL was interviewed by the DSY on 1 June 1961 at UDORN. The interview lasted from 0825 until 0915. CAMPBELL is a pilot. He reported that he flew Hotel Victor to the alternate Padong Base on the evening of 29 May. He said he and his co-pilot EARLEY operated with MATKEER and WIZBOWSKI who were flying Hotel Golf on 29 and 30 May. Both crews were RON at the alternate Padong Base on the night of 29 May due to weather at Padong. CAMPBELL said that the distance from the alternate base to Padong is about 10 minutes flight time.

He said on 30 May the weather in the general area was marginal. On that day Hotel Golf and Hotel Victor were operating independently but both were in the same general area around Padong. CAMPBELL said he was enroute to Padong and arrived about ten minutes after Hotel Golf crashed. He said the weather upon arrival at Padong was very poor. He explained that the Padong landing site, "sits in a bowl and the weather there changes rapidly, the general weather was scattered clouds with bases of clouds varying from the deck up to four thousand feet, and the approach area upon our arrival was zero zero". (see chart)

CAMPBELL stated he arrived at Padong around 1615L, to the best of his collection. He said no one was out at the landing pad so he shut down his aircraft. By the time the rotor stopped, a US civilian named TOM came over the hill and yelled that Hotel Golf had crashed and the pilot and co-pilot both were killed and the others injured. CAMPBELL said he refueled immediately and prepared to evacuate the wounded. He said that he had no time to go to the site of the crash. He departed about 1645L for Vientiane with the three wounded aboard. He stated that the crew chief, Dale KLOCK, was too shaken to talk. The LTAG member was in pain and not in a position to talk and he could say nothing to the Laotian soldier because of the language barrier.

CAMPBELL was asked whether or not any of the crew members of Hotel Golf had complained in anyway, either on 29 or 30 May, regarding the mechanic condition of Hotel Golf. He replied that he never heard anything from the Hotel Golf crew which indicated that the aircraft was not in good mechanical condition.

4. The DSY interviewed pilot Neal E. EARLEY at UDORN on 1 June 1961. The interview lasted from 0955 until 1025. EARLEY was CAMPBELL's co-pilot on Hotel Victor. He reported that they were operating in the Padong area on 29 and 30 May with aircraft Hotel Golf. He said that the crews of both Hotel Victor and Hotel Golf had to RON at the alternate Padong Base (YATMOU) on the night of 29 May because of bad weather at Padong. EARLEY reported that they flew into Padong with Hotel Victor about ten minutes after Hotel Golf.

Regarding the weather, EARLEY stated that, "at the time we approached Padong, we had low hanging clouds, pretty well broken but moving fast and small scattered clouds. The ridges were fairly well covered but the pass we came over was clear. I noticed when we came in we had a little trouble and the clouds moved in the opposite direction from the wind. I know the clouds move fast in that area and it is tricky to come into Padong when weather is not too good".

EARLEY said they landed at Padong about 1630L. No Americans were in the area. He was concerned because they always meet the aircraft. About that time he saw a Sgt. running toward his aircraft. The Sgt. reported that Hotel Golf had crashed. EARLEY stated he then started towards the crash site but saw a group approaching from that area. The crew chief of Hotel Golf was in the group and, according to EARLEY, appeared all right. EARLEY said, "I made him meet my eyes and he was coherent". EARLEY also stated, "I asked him what happened and he said they were OK down wind and they started to make their approach and got in a cloud and could not see and that was the last thing he could remember".

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EARLEY said he then returned to his plane with KLOCK. He never did go to the site of the crash. He was on the ground at Padong about 30 minutes during which time they refueled and loaded the wounded aboard the aircraft. EARLEY reported they then flew directly to Vientiane. The weather was good all the way.

Just prior to departing for Vientiane, EARLEY stated he was talking with an American Sgt. from LTAG who told him he witnessed Hotel Golf plunging into some tall heavy trees. The Sgt. said he just happened to be in that area at the time and the first thing he heard was a popping noise like blades hitting the trees. He said he looked up and saw the plane hitting the trees.

EARLEY reported that during his conversation with the crew of Hotel Golf on 29 and 30 May there was no indication that any of them had any complaints about the mechanical condition of the aircraft.

5. John H. SMOOT was interviewed by the DSY on 1 June 1961 at UDORN. The interview lasted from 0705 until 0740. SMOOT reported that he was dispatched from UDORN for the scene of the crash on 30 May. He arrived at the Padong about 1800L. He went immediately to the crash site which was about 300 yards from where he landed. When he arrived he found one American there, name unknown, and several Laotian soldiers who were guarding the aircraft. The bodies of the pilot and co-pilot were still in the aircraft. The contents in the cabin had all been removed prior to his arrival. SMOOT stated that he removed the bodies from the aircraft with the assistance of the local soldiers.

SMOOT reported that he found the aircraft to be broken from the aft section of the radio compartment. He said the rotor blades were in pieces and the transmission was to the left about 90 degrees on a horizontal position and about 2½ feet off the cabin floor. He further stated that the instruments on the left side of the cockpit were smashed, the pilot collective was out to the left about 45 degrees and the cockpit canopy on the left side was missing. He said that the struts were mashed up into the aircraft.

SMOOT reported that the trees in the area of the crash were about 80 to 100 feet tall. The aircraft hit a very large tree which was flattened by the impact. He stated that it appears to him that the pilot had been making his approach and was off too far to the right, resulting in his hitting the ridge as it started to slope upward. It seems to him that the aircraft took off the top of the first tree it hit and then continued about 30 yards after the initial impact.

SMOOT said that the bodies were removed about 1710L and were wrapped in parachutes then placed in wooden boxes where they remained overnight. Poor weather prevented their departure. He and CRAFTS flew the remains to Vientiane on 31 May, departing from UDORN about 0534L.

When questioned regarding the weather at the time they arrived on the scene on 30 May, SMOOT stated, "It was marginal and we were lucky to get in".

6. Richard B. CRAFTS, pilot, was interviewed on 1 June 1961 at UDORN. The interview lasted from 0745 until 0820. CRAFTS stated he flew with SMOOT to the scene of the crash on 31 May to recover the bodies and evacuate the wounded. He said they arrived there about 1745L. The weather upon their

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arrival was broken to scattered cloud layers at about 5200 feet. There was a light drizzle and visibility was limited to a maximum of 10 miles, but most of the time it was 5 to 6 miles.

CRAFTS said that the first thing he noticed when he arrived at the scene of the crash was that the tail pylon had been broken off right at the fold of the pylon. He noticed that it was lying down and next to a tree to the left of the aircraft and several feet away. He said he saw the transmission and rotor head had been torn loose from the mounts and were off to the side. The transmission was to the left and down in a horizontal position; the rotor head was hanging off the head of the transmission. All four rotor blades were sticking aft, upward and to the left of the aircraft and all in the same general position and direction. He observed that the cockpit roof had been torn off from the instrument panel on back. He also noted that the aft end of the cockpit had been sheared off just below the ASE motor box and the roof had been peeled back and was lying on top of the transmission deck. The pilot seat was still intact. The pilot collective was up to the left and the throttle linkage was broken. The mixture and carburetor lever were missing. All of the pilots instruments seemed to be intact but CRAFTS said he did not check any of the readings. He reported that the instruments on the co-pilot side were all broken. The co-pilot seat was pushed down and aft and folded slightly. He did not notice the co-pilot collective. The cabin floor of the cockpit and passenger compartment were both intact. The cabin roof was caved slightly and the sound proofing material was hanging down at some spots. The crew chief seats was down but the other seats were folded up against the side of the aircraft. All gear had been removed from the interior of the cabin. The cabin door was only partially opened and would not slide free. The radio compartment and most of the electronics gear was intact. All windows had been knocked out of the aircraft. The landing gear was folded back and torn loose from the belly of the aircraft. The vertical struts were bent and were in fairly good shape. The belly of the aircraft was smashed and resting about 6 to 8 inches from the ground. CRAFTS further reported that according to his observations the aircraft seemed to come in at a 20 degree angle from the point of initial impact until it came to rest on the ground. He estimated that the aircraft travelled about 30 feet forward from the point of initial impact until it came to a stop. It appears to him that the top of several trees were cut off and one tree about 8 inches in diameter had been knocked down. CRAFTS took photographs which are being processed and are being made a part of this report.

Regarding the condition of the bodies as observed by CRAFTS, he reported that WIZBOWSKI was in the pilot seat. He was back against the seat, arms down in his lap, head thrown back with his mouth open. He had a deep gash about 4 inches on his upper right arm. His face appeared to be in good condition. He helped lift the body to the ground and observed the back of the T-shirt was soaked with blood. He did not see WIZBOWSKI's hardhat. Regarding MATEER, his body had been removed from the aircraft and CRAFTS saw him for the first time when they were preparing to wrap him in the chutes. It appeared that he had been decapitated and that both arms had been severed.

CRAFTS stated he would like to express his personal opinion that MATEER may have been flying. He believes, upon his observation, that WIZBOWSKI's hands were in his lap and bore no visible signs of injury. He believes if WIZBOWSKI had been flying his hands would have been smashed because of holding on to the collective, which was twisted and bent and the throttle broken.

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7. Willie L. NEW, crew chief, was interviewed on 1 June 1961 at UDORN. The interview lasted from 0930 to 0950. NEW was the crew chief on Hotel Whiskey, flown by SMOOT and CRAFTS, which was dispatched to UDORN on 30 May to the scene of the crash. NEW confirmed that they arrived at Padong at 1800L. He stated the weather upon their arrival was, "pretty cloudy with scattered clouds over the site and they had to circle around some bad weather before coming to land." He continued by stating, "We went immediately to the scene of the crash. My impression was, "You could tell at first glance that the aircraft was a complete scratch and that the pilot and co-pilot were probably killed. The transmission was ripped completely out of the transmission deck and was laying over on the left side of the aircraft. The pylon was broken completely off. The engine was rammed up into the clutch compartment and the clutch was almost up into the cockpit with the pilot and co-pilot. Both landing gear were buckled. The tail rotor was completely missing. I don't know where it was. Rotor blades were all broken and kind of scattered around. The top of the cockpit was lifted off completely. The LTAC said when they came to the scene they just lifted the cockpit off - it was loose - without cutting it or anything. Most of the instruments on the co-pilot side were all broken. The belly seemed fairly well intact."

When asked about the path of the aircraft after initial impact, NEW said; "The trees were high and thick. It did not travel too far from the first point of contact to where it settled. It hit a real large tree and chopped it off. It traveled about three aircraft lengths before it settled and then hit another large tree and seemed to settle right down. The scene was on a slope but I do not know how far up - and it was about 200 yards from the landing pad. The bodies were still in the cockpit when I arrived but I did not climb up to see them. I saw them as they were being removed. I did not help remove them. I just stayed a few minutes after the bodies were removed. MATEER's hard hat with part of his head in it and an arm were lying on the ground just to the left of the co-pilot's seat. I did not see his body at any time. I saw the pilots. I did not look too close but I saw blood all over the back of his shirt. I did not want to look too close".

Donald M. Rinker

cc: file