

553rd Reconnaissance Wing - Fatal Personnel Injuries at Korat RTAFB
Larry Westin - July 3, 1999 - Rev M - 07/01/21 - Page 1 of 2

During the period of time the 553rd Reconnaissance Wing was assigned to Korat RTAFB, September 1967 through December 1970, I am aware of 25 fatal injuries to wing personnel. Fatality number one was due to a heart attack. Second fatality occurred due to a traffic accident, Third fatality due to illness. Eighteen personnel, the entire crew, were lost with the Batcat 21 crash on April 25, 1969. Four fatalities occurred with the Batcat 19 crash on Sept. 6, 1969.

First Batcat fatality was Lt. Col. John Pettersen, who died of a heart attack on the evening of February 1, 1968. Lt. Col. Pettersen was the 554th Reconnaissance Squadron Operations Officer.

Second Batcat fatality was A1C Douglas Chatlos. Doug was just leaving base to go into town, walking near the base gate to Korat city. On March 8, 1968 he was accidentally hit by a motorcycle driven by a NCO (not sure of his unit) who was returning to base. The Security Policeman at the gate immediately called for medical assistance, then gave medical help to Chatlos. Chatlos died on the scene. This was a vehicle accident. He was a CIM with the 554th Sq., crew 38. My thanks to Cliff Jensen, who knew Doug, for this information, with additional updated information from Jim Golden, CICO for Crew 38, his reporting officer. Updated 05/27/13.

SSgt. Henry J. Palmore on March 31, 1968, taken to 388th Hospital on Korat, diagnosed with blood infection, didn't improve. On April 7, 1968, taken to 31st Army Field Hospital at Camp Friendship (which is immediately next to Korat RTAFB), diagnosed with brain abscess. Didn't improve. On April 15, 1968 air evacuated from Korat/Camp Friendship to the USAF hospital at Clark AB, Philippine Islands. Died at the Clark AB hospital on April 27, 1968. Updated 07/01/21.

The following 18 fatalities occurred with the April 25, 1969 crash of EC-121R U.S. Air Force serial number 67-21493, with the call sign of Batcat 21. Data following last name is the panel (all on 26W) plus the line number on that panel of the Vietnam Memorial where the name is inscribed.

TSgt. James H. Belflower, 26W-42
TSgt. Albert N. Booker, 26W-43
Major Thomas M. Bandom Jr., 26W-43
A1C Michael J. Cotterill, 26W-44
SSgt. Jerald C. Davis, 26W-44
A1C Ronald C. Deforrest, 26W-44
TSgt. Warren C. DeLaney, 26W-44
SSgt. Paul Faulk, 26W-45
TSgt. Kenneth W. Fowler, 26W-48
Lt Col. Emerson E. Heller, 26W-46
Capt. George R. Kidd, 26W-47

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Major Paul R. Lunsford, 26W-45
1Lt. John A. Marsh, 26W-48
LT Col. William C. McCormick Jr., 26W-49
Sgt. Mitchel Messing, 26W-48
SSgt. James D. Moore, 26W-49
Sgt. Mark M. Steeley, 26W-50
Sgt. William D. Stepp, 26W-50

In earlier versions of this article I indicated that 26 members of the 553rd had lost their life. Recent information from Henry W. Martin leads me to believe that the RMT described below was not killed, but wounded. James Geimer, who was the 553rd NCOIC on site at the time of the attack, provided additional information on 05/25/07 and 05/28/07.

On June 16 1969, a radio maintenance technician from the 553rd Electronics Maintenance Squadron, TSgt. John Linaburg, assigned to temporary duty at a mountain top of an extinct volcano, Nui Ba Den (Nui BaDen), South Vietnam, was wounded. The mountain was about six miles outside of the city of Tay Ninh. There seems to be different English translations for the name of the mountain: Black Virgin, Black Lady and Black Widow. My earlier versions of this article incorrectly indicated Linaburg was killed. He was the 553rd Wing's first Purple Heart recipient. SSgt David Collins, a diesel mechanic from Bien Hoa, who was on the mountain to service our power source was killed, as were two (perhaps 3) Army enlisted troops who were manning the bunker line. This was a sapper attack by Viet Cong troops who attempted to overrun the site (my earlier version of this article incorrectly stated this was a rocket attack). Eventually the enemy was repelled, but it was a long night. My thanks to SMSgt. James Geimer, retired, for correcting my errors and adding additional information, corrections made 05/28/07. James Geimer was the 553rd NCOIC on site at the time of the attack. My thanks to Ron Cox, Officer In Charge of the 553rd EMS Communications shop for corrections made 10/18/09.

The following 4 fatalities occurred with the September 6, 1969 crash of EC-121R U.S. Air Force serial number 67-21495, with the call sign Batcat 19. Data following last name is the panel (all on 18W) plus the line number on that panel of the Vietnam Memorial where the name is inscribed.

Sgt. Julius C. Houlditch Jr., 18W-47
Sgt. Arnold Noel Jaco, 18W-47
Major Joyfull J. Jenkins, 18W-47
SSgt. Gunther H. Rehling, 18W-50

If I have made any error to the above information please contact me with corrections at westin@westin553.net Thank you - Larry Westin