

**Information on U.S. Air Force helicopter CH-53A tail number 68-10925**

Date: 05/15/1975 MIA-POW file reference number: 2003

Incident number: 75051555.TXT

Unit: 21st SOS

Cambodia - UTM grid coordinates: TS965400

Casualties = 13 BNR

Original source(s) and document(s) from which the incident was created or updated: Defense Intelligence Agency Reference Notes. Defense Intelligence Agency Helicopter Loss database. Survivability/Vulnerability Information Analysis Center Helicopter database. Also: 2003, US Marines in Vietnam Anthology ()  
Loss to Inventory

**Crew Members:**

P 2LT VANDEGEER RICHARD BNR

AC MAJ HA CORSON

**Passengers and/or other participants:**

PFC BENEDETT DANIEL ANDREW, MC, PX, BNR

PFC BLESSING LYNN, MC, PX, BNR

PFC BOYD WALTER, MC, PX, BNR

LCP COPENHAVER GREGORY SCOTT, MC, PX, BNR

LCP GARCIA ANDRES, MC, PX, BNR

HM1 GAUSE BERNARD JR, NA, PX, BNR

PFC JACQUES JAMES JOSEPH, MC, PX, BNR

HN MANNING RONALD JAMES, NA, PX, BNR

PFC MAXWELL JAMES RICKEY, MC, PX, BNR

PFC RIVENBURGH RICHARD WILLIA, MC, PX, BNR

PFC SANDOVALL ANTONIO RAMOS, MC, PX, BNR

PFC TURNER KELTON RENA, MC, PX, BNR

**REFNO Synopsis:**

What follows is an edited version of the SYNOPSIS record for RUMBAUGH, ELWOOD EUGENE and RICHARD VAN DE GEER, US Air Force, Unit (probably) 21st Special Operations Squadron - Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. The full narrative included a lengthy recount of the MAYAGUEZ Incident.

**SYNOPSIS:**

2LT Richard Van de Geer, assigned to the 21st Special Ops Squadron at NKP, had participated in the evacuation of Saigon, where helicopter pilots were required to fly from the decks of the 7th Fleet carriers stationed some 500 miles offshore, fly over armed enemy-held territory, collect American and allied personnel and return to the carriers via the same hazardous route, heavily loaded with passengers. Van de Geer wrote to a friend, "We pulled out close to 2,000 people. We couldn't pull out any more because it was beyond human endurance to go any more..." On May 15, the first wave of 179 Marines headed for the island aboard eight Air Force "Jolly Green Giant" helicopters. Marines of the 2/9 made landings on two areas on Koh Tang Island. The eastern landing zone was on the cove side where the Cambodian compound was located. The western landing zone was a narrow spit of beach about 500 feet behind the compound on the other side of the island. The Marines hoped to surround the compound. At the eastern landing zone, the first two helicopters landing were met by enemy fire. Ground commander, (now) Col. Randall W. Austin had been told to expect between 20 and 40 Khmer Rouge soldiers on the island. Instead, between 150 and 200 were encountered. 1LT John Shramm's helicopter tore apart and crashed into the surf after the rotor system was hit. All aboard made a dash for the tree line on the beach. One CH-53A helicopter was flown by U.S. Air Force Major Howard Corson and 2LT

Richard Van de Geer and carrying 23 U.S. Marines and 2 U.S. Navy corpsmen, all from the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines. As the helicopter approached the island, it was caught in a cross fire and hit by a rocket. The severely damaged helicopter crashed into the sea just off the coast of the island and exploded. To avoid enemy fire, survivors were forced to swim out to sea for rescue. Twelve aboard, including Maj. Corson, were rescued. Those missing from the helicopter were 2LT. Richard Van de Geer, PFC Daniel A. Benedett, PFC Lynn Blessing, PFC Walter Boyd, Lcpl. Gregory S. Copenhaver, Lcpl. Andres Garcia, PFC James J. Jacques, PFC James R. Maxwell, PFC Richard W. Rivenburgh, PFC, Antonio R. Sandoval, PFC Kelton R. Turner, all U.S. Marines. Also missing were HM1 Bernard Gause, Jr. and HM Ronald J. Manning, the two corpsmen. Other helicopters were more successful in landing their passengers. One CH-53A, however was not. SSGT Elwood E. Rumbaugh's aircraft was near the coastline when it was shot down. Rumbaugh is the only missing man from the aircraft. The passengers were safely extracted.

This record was last updated on 06/28/1998

<http://www.flyarmy.org/incident/75051555.HTM>

*Edited for formatting only*