

## DENNIS MICHAEL PHILLIPS

Class 17-67

is honored on Panel 23W, Row 30 of  
the Vietnam Veterans Memorial

**Full Name:** DENNIS MICHAEL PHILLIPS  
**Wall Name:** DENNIS M PHILLIPS  
**Date of Birth:** 8/29/1944  
**Date of Casualty:** 5/31/1969  
**Home of Record:** IRVING  
**County of Record:** DALLAS COUNTY  
**State:** TX  
**Branch of Service:** ARMY  
**Rank:** CAPT  
**Casualty Country:** SOUTH VIETNAM  
**Casualty Province:** DINH TUONG



CPT Phillips served with the 135th Assault Helicopter Company. He was the pilot of a UH-1C Helicopter Gunship that was shot down while making a gun run on enemy positions in support of ARVN troops in contact.

### Mike was a true patriot

Mike and I were stick buddies in flight school at Hunter AAF, Savannah, Ga. in 1968. He was an easy going, upfront guy, married to a beautiful wife, Karen. His father-in-law, a doctor, had been a dirigible pilot in WWII and was very proud of Mike. Mike was a good friend, one who is still missed today.

Posted by: Roger Mothersbaugh  
Relationship: We were close friends  
February 5, 2009

### God Bless you all

I remember all the crew who died that day along with my husband Noel Shipp (RAN)

Posted by: Gloria Shipp  
Relationship: husband served & died with  
September 26, 2005

## Class Mates

We served together in OCS.

Posted by: Vance Marsh

Relationship: We served together

July 28, 2005

## Class Mate

I have not thought of you for some years (about 38). I am attempting to track down as many as our class mates from OCC 17-67 as possible. I want to let them know we are planning our 40 anniversary reunion. I do so wish you could join us. We will be at the OCS reunion at Fort Sill, June of 2007. I and the rest of your class mates will understand if you can not make it.

Thank you. May St. Barbara watch over you and all our fallen comrades until we are all together again.

Haliday M. Pullum Major, USA. Retired

OCC 17-67

RVN 68-69

Posted by: Hal Pullum

Relationship: We served together

March 3, 2005

## ANZAC DAY

Remembering Michael, my roommate in Vietnam when he died in the service of his country, on this special veterans' day in Australia.

Posted by: Charlie Rex

Relationship: We served together

April 25, 2001

**Dennis is buried at Oak Grove Cemetery Irving, Texas.**

**During his time in Vietnam he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.**

## **PHILLIPS DENNIS MICHAEL**

Name: CPT Dennis Michael Phillips

Status: Killed In Action from an incident on 05/31/1969 while performing the duty of Aircraft Commander.

Age at death: 24.8

Date of Birth: 08/29/1944

Home City: Irving, TX

Service: FA branch of the reserve component of the U.S. Army.

Unit: 135 AHC

Major organization: 1st Aviation Brigade

Flight class: 68-508/68-12

Service: FA branch of the U.S. Army.

The Wall location: 23W-030

Short Summary: Covering a combat assault in the Delta with WO1 Steven Louis Martin.

Aircraft: UH-1C tail number 66-00720

Call sign: Taipan 36

Service number: O5427094

Country: South Vietnam

MOS: 1980 = 19 Fixed Wing Aviator (Unit Commander)

Primary cause: Hostile Fire

Major attributing cause: aircraft connected not at sea

Compliment cause: weapons

Vehicle involved: helicopter

Position in vehicle: aircraft commander

Started Tour: 08/11/1968

"Official" listing: helicopter air casualty - other aircrew

Length of service: 03

Location: Dinh Tuong Province IV Corps.

Reason: aircraft lost or crashed

Casualty type: Hostile - killed

married male U.S. citizen

Race: Caucasian

Religion: Baptist - other groups

The following information secondary, but may help in explaining this incident.

Category of casualty as defined by the Army: battle dead Category of personnel: active duty Army Military class: officer

This record was last updated on 01/09/1997

## **Helicopter UH-1C 66-00720**

Information on U.S. Army helicopter UH-1C tail number 66-00720

The Army purchased this helicopter 0167

Total flight hours at this point: 00000974

Date: 05/31/1969

Incident number: 69053111.KIA

Unit: 135 AHC

This was a Combat incident. This helicopter was LOSS TO INVENTORY for Close Air Support

While On Target this helicopter was Attacking at 0200 feet and 110 knots.

South Vietnam

UTM grid coordinates: XS350424

Helicopter took 1 hits from:

Small Arms/Automatic Weapons; Gun launched non-explosive ballistic projectiles less than 20 mm in size. (7.62MM)

causing a Fire.

Systems damaged were: PERSONNEL

Casualties = 01 KIA, 03 DOI . . Number killed in accident = 0 . . Injured = 0 . .

Passengers = 0

The helicopter Crashed. Aircraft Destroyed.

Both mission and flight capability were terminated.

Burned

costing 0

Original source(s) and document(s) from which the incident was created or updated:

Defense Intelligence Agency Helicopter Loss database. Survivability/Vulnerability

Information Analysis Center Helicopter database. Also: OPERA, UH1P3, 15101, Tony

Spletstoser (Operations Report. )

Summary: Shot down while supporting ARVN troops in contact.

Loss to Inventory and Helicopter was not recovered

Crew Members:

**AC CPT PHILLIPS DENNIS MICHAEL KIA**

P WO1 MARTIN STEVEN LOUIS KIA

CE SP4 BOWDEN BYRON BILL KIA

G LAC SHIPP NOEL ERWIN KIA

## War Story:

The following is an edited version of an unpublished manuscript titled "Hits Through the Chin Bubble!" by Tony Spletstoser. Chapter 20 - Crash and Burn by Tony Spletstoser with Bob Anders, Taipan 14, and Charlie Rex, RANHF/VN, EMU 26. UH-1C #66-00720, May 31, 1969, 135th AHC Bear Cat, APO 96530 The Gun platoon's call sign was the "Taipans" and the platoon motto: "Get the Job Done Bloody." On this day at the end of May 1969, shortly after a 'four star' lunch at the 162nd AHC's mess hall, I received word that I was to catch a ride to Bear Cat Army Air Field to check out a battle damage incident involving the 135th's gunship platoon, the Taipans. Bear Cat AAF was located on the other side of Saigon near Long Binh. The 135th and the 335th AHCs based there, belonged to the 214th CAB at Dong Tam. The two other companies, the 162nd and 191st AHCs, flew out of Dong Tam. I collected my camera gear and tape recorder and headed for the helio pad. My route to Bear Cat ended up being via Hotel 3 at Tan Son Nhut and then to Bear Cat. As usual this takes a little time, because these Ash and Trash flights do not run on any kind of schedule. I arrived at Bear Cat in time for evening chow. After chow, I located the Top Sergeant to make arrangements for an over-night and to find out who I was supposed to see about today's activity that I had been sent to investigate. It was then that I discovered that there had been no survivors and very little of the aircraft left to recover, as it had crashed and burned. Whenever I have to over-night at a base camp away from home, the 1st shirt (sergeant) will usually find me an empty sack belonging to someone who is on R&R, just rotated, in the hospital, or who has had a really bad day in the AO. In this case it was the latter. The final irony being that my bed for the night would be of today's unfortunate pilot. The man whom I was to interview regarding the incident was the wingman that day of CPT Phillips and close friend. My inner-thoughts were telling me that this was probably going to be a very a memorable evening. The rule for Vietnam friendship relationships is, "don't have any." In spite of this promise, the rule is quite often broken. The 135th AHC was a mixed unit of US Army and Australian Navy crew members. Their call sign was the EMUs. The gunship platoon's call sign was the "Taipans." This came from the name of a deadly Australian out-back snake. WO Bob Anders was the surviving wingman of today's gunship fire team. His friends, CPT Mike Phillips had been the AC and WO1 Stephen Martin had been the pete-pilot on the lead Charlie model gunship that had crashed. The crews of both aircraft were close and worked as a team. Anders recalls: "As for your room assignment for that night, at Bear Cat, the officers lived downstairs and the WO's lived upstairs. We use to joke that it was to protect the RLO's from the rockets. Anyway, you probably slept in Mike's bed if it was downstairs. I think we had the interview in Mike's room." Since there would be no aircraft to photograph, I had to be content to concentrate on the interview. Anders was the burly football player type, the kind of man whom you would think could feel no pain. In our room that evening I learned that no man was above feeling the pain of losing a best friend. This pilot would relate to me every facet of the day's tragedy. In the hushed solitude of that barrack room, it wasn't hard to sense Anders' grieving for his lost friends. Several times we had to stop the tape to allow him to shore up his emotions in order to go on. Anders wrote: "Yes, I remember you and that interview. It probably the toughest part of the war for me. But, I remember that you were compassionate and very understanding of the situation. You had a very tough job." The day had began when Phillips' and Anders' gun platoon were a part of a

9th Division "Ball Game." One of those games that had been based on 'military Intelligence' in which nothing could go wrong. Anders: "At this point in the Vietnam war, the 135th AHC flew strictly combat assaults for the ARVN. Every now and then we would get lucky and get scheduled to fly Americans or Australians. However, on that Saturday, May 31, 1969, we were supporting the 9th ARVN with leap frogging insertions. The slicks had been busy all day, while the guns took turns - two at a time, covering the insertions. CPT Phillips' crew and mine were at Ben Tre rearming and refueling when we heard that the slicks were taking fire while dropping off troops at the PZ. Several ships took rounds. "The AO was located near the city of Cai Lai about 20 km NW of Dong Tam, the 9th Division's base camp, across the river from Ben Tre Island. There had been two eagle flight lifts of ARVN grunts and the fire teams were to provide close air support. "The two gunships on station in the AO at the time came under heavy fire. One of the co-pilots was wounded. The damaged aircraft all headed for Dong Tam to include the two gunships. Phillips and I immediately cranked-up and beat feet to the AO. "It was mass confusion by the time we arrived on station. The ARVN had mingled with VC and now they both were shooting at whatever aircraft they could. (Yes, you are reading this correct.) As the slicks dropped off the ARVN in the LZ, they would turn and fire at the aircraft. (Must have been something about being left in a hot LZ that pissed them off. It was easy to blame the Chopper crews.) "There were no Americans on the ground, yet our C&C aircraft advised us that we were to hold our fire and only to provide cover the slicks on their way out. But by the time we got to the area, we figured out our own rules of engagement. Our slicks were being shot up by the ARVN and we were taking fire from VC, who were all over the place. Of course, one of the C&C's back-seaters was the local ARVN colonel. "Mike spotted Charlie first and immediately rolled in. The ground fire was tremendous, so we decided to come in from a different angle on the next run. As we circled to get in position, a large group of VC started running across a semi-open area. Mike broke hard right and dove the ship toward them. By the time Mike was set up on his run, most of the VC were in the tree-line firing up at us. However, there was this one who appeared determined to take on a Charlie Model gunship all by himself. He stopped, turned and began firing directly at Mike. "I cannot say if Phillips was hit or not, but the aircraft flew straight into the ground taking out the one lone standing VC. I can say that the aircraft was repeatedly hit by the people in the tree line and very possibly by the lone VC. I did not hear any radio call. The aircraft and door gunners were firing all the way down. No one can ever say for sure, but it would be hard to believe that a gifted and seasoned helicopter pilot such as CPT Phillips would fly into the paddy unless mortally wounded. "The aircraft hit extremely hard on the chin bubble and just seemed to crush flat to the ground at that point. No bounce, just sort of crushed like clay. The fire was a terrific ball that immediately engulfed the entire aircraft. "As I orbited the crashed chopper, we watched in disbelief as a figure stood up and walked out through the boiling flames. I rolled around and then giving myself enough space for a 'flying approach,' we were able to land close to Mike's chopper. "By the time we landed, just moments later, the aircraft and whatever was in it, was a burning black heap in a pile. Like I said the burning figure, Martin, just walked out of it. He didn't bump into anything or even climb over nothing - there was nothing left. I know that the gunner and crew chief were burned in the crash with Mike. The ammo on Mike's aircraft was cooking off and exploding now, not to

mention that there were still a lot of bad guys shooting at us from various positions in the tree-line. I was seated in the cockpit on the right as AC and I had landed my ship next to the crash on my side. I sent my door gunner out on the left to lay down a covering fire. He had the M-60 going to town with a 100 round belt draped over his shoulder. While the gunner suppressed, the crew chief ran out to the burned pilot - it was Martin, the Pete. His Nomex was completely burned away. Nothing was left of his uniform or his boots except a small band around his waist where there had once been a belt and part of his flight helmet. There were no ears, eyes, hair, or facial features left. When the crew chief removed Martin's helmet, he was to find that the foam liner had melted to his head. Martin appeared to feel no pain. "I would pull the collective up under my armpit and pop the cyclic aft then forward in order to get the skids off the ground for a few moments. My Pete and I continued to fire miniguns every chance we found targets to keep Charlie's head down. I'd kick pedals and swing to the new target. I even fired off a few rockets from this modified hover. This modified hover consisted of pulling the aircraft off the ground and firing our weapons until the main rotor RPM would bleed off. "I remember the deafening noise in my helmet even with the radio headsets over my ears. I had all the radios going, the noise of the ammo blowing up, the firing of our weapons and that damned Low RPM warning buzzer continually going off. I had my hands full trying to get the aircraft up at a hover, that I was unable to take the time to reach up and pull the circuit breaker. You must remember, I was only able to get the aircraft to hover for a minute or two, because the gunner and crew chief were not on board. Once they were back on board and with the extra weight of Martin - hovering was out of the question. I tried bouncing along trying to pick up airspeed. It was no use. I could see that we would not clear the tree-line and set it back down. We had a little bit of an open area behind us, but we could see bad guys all over the place. We did consider throwing stuff out in order to get light but then I heard CPT Nesby come on the air. CPT Richard Nesby heard one of our calls and came to the rescue. He had been flying a spare slick down to the AO when all hell broke loose. CPT Nesby landed and we transferred Martin to his ship, an empty UH-1H model, then we followed him out putting fire all underneath him until we both cleared the tree line. Nesby made a bee-line for the Dust-Off pad at the 9th Division MASH unit at Dong Tam and I returned to the rearm and refuel point." In a crash and burn fire such as this one, the burns on the skin of a human body are bad enough, but it's the damage on the inside that will do you in, with the heat from the fire searing the inner tissues of the lungs as the victim tries to breathe. The lung tissues react by generating mucus, which slowly fills the lungs, causing a condition much the same as pneumonia. The medico's at the MASH tried their best, but it was not enough and he died. Anders: "I had plenty of fuel but no ammo by this time. I went to Dong Tam and rearmed and went back and dumped the area. I went back and forth to Dong Tam three times before they sent out the MPs to stop us. It seems the ARVN commanders were complaining that we were shooting at their men - they were right. If the MP's hadn't stopped us, I think that we would have flown continuous sorties until we had emptied Dong Tam's ammo bunker. "This really doesn't do justice to the story of these men's lives, but you have the idea. CPT Phillips and WO Steven Martin were both great guys. I know that Phillips was a dedicated family man in every way. He had a little over a month before he was going back to the world." In this case, the pilot was likely KIA from ground-fire, the two door-gunners were killed in the

crash, but the co-pilot would have lived except for the burst fuel cells. With all of the Bell helicopters and their stiff skid legs, resulted in burst fuel cells which was always the downside to the Huey's hard landings. Fortunately, by the time the Vietnam War ended, all new Bell helicopters had cellular plastic foam built into the fuel cell, which worked even better. In between then and the end of the war, a lot of chopper crews burned to death. I would like to thank Bob Anders for his assistance and additional information. I try to do the best that I can, but sometimes I miss things in the interview. There is a big difference between what I had to write for my Battle Damage report and what would have been needed to write accurate history. The former was only an account of what caused the aircraft to crash. I'm happy to be corrected. It's obvious that Robert Anders hasn't forgotten any of the details, or ever will. Anders wrote: "And yes, I remember you and that interview. It was probably the toughest part of the war for me. But, I remember you were compassionate and very understanding of the situation. You had a very tough job. If you would permit me to, I'd like to help you re-create that chapter. Let's face it in your original version, you were close enough that I recognized the episode. There are just a few things that I would like to see in there to do justice to Mike. "At the EMU compound, I was Rick Sharpe's roommate. Steve Martin's roommate was a guy named Bill Estes, flight school buddies. Mike and I got to the EMU's about the same time and had about a month to go. Memorial Days are always a bummer to me, since it happen the end of May. "My call sign in the EMU's was EMU 44. I was in the first platoon under an Australian named I.M. Speedy. My Taipan call sign was Taipan 14. When I came back to CONUS, I was an Instructor Pilot at Ft. Wolters and then decided to stay in the Army for 20 years. Since I already had served a tour in the Marines, I had too many years in the military to just throw away." Charlie Rex, former RAN VHF EMU 26, wrote: "I also read your story about the guy who walked out of the gunship on fire. My memory is a bit hazy about the Australian pete-pilot. Bob Kyle will know those details but the story sounds as though you are talking about my roommate CPT Mike Phillips. (Author's note: the pete-pilot was an American.) I remember packing his things and contrary to all the rules I kept out his medals and a few personal things that I sent directly to his wife so that she got them quickly rather than through the US Army system. We corresponded a couple of times but I lost track of her after a while. When I first arrived in country, Mike was a lieutenant and my platoon leader. As a commissioned type I became his APL. I took the platoon over from him when he moved to gunships."

This record was last updated on 11/25/1999