

The crew departed the Udorn hotel at approximately 0730 hours. They arrived at the aircraft and performed the preflight inspection at approximately 0830 hours. On preflight CW3 Hart, the pilot, noted that the tone of the hydraulic reservoirs was low and had it filled to the proper level. No other discrepancies were noted. After a normal run-up, they departed Udorn and flew to LS 272. The flight in route was normal and lasted approximately one hour, arriving at LS 272 about 1030 hours. After setting down at LS 272, the crew received the missions from the RO who stated they had 5 sites to service. One site was to receive a D-4 bulldozer weighing about 17,000 lbs which, at the time, exceeded the capability of the aircraft due to a large amount of fuel on board. The AC, CW2 Hokanson, decided to fly one sortie of ammo in order to be at minimum fuel for the dozer. The first load of ammo was to go to Charlie Papa site which is about a 30 minute flight round trip. The flight was normal with the exception of three distinct shutters that the pilots believed to be turbulence due to the fact that they were flying in a valley. When they returned to LS 272, they had approximately 2,100 lbs of fuel left putting them near alternate maximum gross limits to carry the dozer. They picked it up, hovered momentarily, and found they had plenty of power available. At this time the HIGH TOWER LZ was weathered in so they set the load down, hovered off to the side, landed and shut down.

At approximately 1130 hours the site cleared although there were showers in route. They decided to go at this time and departed about ten minutes after their escort, H-90, who was to lead them into HIGH TOWER LZ. The flight up to HIGH TOWER was normal and took about 10 minutes, a distance of approximately 5 1/2 kilometers. The winds were reported to be from the northwest at 3-5 knots. The pilot of 96 Whiskey, a Bell 204, had just departed HIGH TOWER pad to allow room for the crane. Upon his departure 96W popped a smoke grenade to give the crane crew a better idea of the wind direction. The AC set his approach almost directly into the wind approaching SE to NW. The approach was a bit on the steep side and he had to flare more than usual at the bottom. The aircraft was at maximum allowable power (BUGS) ON final short. The load touched the ground a little short of their intended touchdown point. The flight engineer stated that the load was released and almost immediately the nose pitched down it then jerked upward into a nose high attitude which was immediately followed by a nose down attitude causing the nose gear to strike the ground. As the nose came up again, the aircraft seemed to hesitate, and then started to spin to the right, gradually getting faster. After one complete turn the aircraft cartwheeled to the west northwest on the pad. There was no fire immediately. The pilots were able to crawl to safety with minimum help. The crew chief's seat belt had to be cut by ground rescue personnel in order to free him. The flight engineer was thrown out of the cabin and it is unknown if his seat belt was fastened or not. Both of the pilots' seat belts and shoulder harnesses worked properly. The Bell helicopter, call sign 96W, that had just departed the pad to make room for the crane was flying behind and off to one side of the crane. Within one minute after the crash, 96W was on the ground and let his first pilot and flight engineer out to aid the injured. He then took off to let H-90 land. H-90, a CH-34 landed, picked up the most seriously injured, SP4 Stritesky, and medevaced him to LS 272. As soon as H-90 departed, 96W landed to pick up the other survivors. Immediately the most seriously injured aviator, CW2 Hokanson, was placed aboard 96W and medevaced to LS 272. Another helicopter was there shortly after 96W departed in order to carry the less seriously injured aviator, CW3 Hart to LS 272. The aircraft caught fire shortly after the last helicopter landed at HIGH TOWER pad.

H-90 and 96W were Air America helicopters.

