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J.L.Y.

WITNESS STATEMENT

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NAME: THOMPSON, FRANK W.

CWA

OCCUPATION: AIRCRAFT REPAIR TECHNICIAN

ADDRESS: 355d TO Det
101st Abn Div
APO SF 96503DATE OF ACCIDENT: 2 July 1969
DATE OF REPORTING: 4 July 1969

AVIATION EXPERIENCE & BACKGROUND:

INTERVIEWER:

This statement may not be used as evidence or to obtain evidence in determining line of duty status of any personnel; as evidence before evaluation boards; as evidence to determine liability in claims against the government; or as evidence to determine pecuniary liability. The sole purpose of this statement is to aid the prevention of accidents.

1. I, CWA, Frank W. Thompson, SSN: 455 34 0033, SN: W908308, 35 d Transportation Detachment, B Troop 2d Sqdn 17th Cav, 101st Airborne Division, APO SF 96503, make this statement concerning the crash of a UH-1H helicopter, SN 67 17694, and areas of information asked for by the president of the investigation board. Most of this statement is based only on assumption on my part, based on my experience. I started flight school in January 1954, graduated in June 1954, was grounded in January 1967 by the Surgeon General and he recommended that a waiver not be granted for Class III flying status. I have been associated with aircraft maintenance and supply since starting to flight school and have been maintenance officer or technician since early 1958 with about half of this time at direct support level. This is my second tour in Vietnam in direct support maintenance, the first tour being with "B" Company, 17th Transportation Battalion, 1st Cavalry Division, the first year the unit was in Vietnam.

2. The aircraft in question has been assigned to this unit since it was new. A capable crew chief has always been assigned and the aircraft has always been maintained. I considered this aircraft to be in top condition, so much so that it has for the past few weeks been utilized on many occasions as a Command and Control aircraft. FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

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3. The night before this aircraft crashed it was positioned within forty yards of the maintenance office. The tail rotor and battery were removed this same night so that they could be taken to 355th Transportation Company early the following morning.

4. The day the aircraft crashed I departed at 0720 hours for Camp Eagle with the Troop Commander, I arrived back in the area at 1555 hours. As soon as I arrived I was notified that I had a UH-1C down and the parts were not available. The technical inspector had not checked these parts and he and I spent an hour or so checking the technical manuals and physically checking the aircraft prior to going to chow. I asked how the PB was moving along on 67-17694. I was informed that the final TI was being completed and that as soon as chow was over, they would re-install the seats, weapons and other gear and that it would be ready for a test flight before dark. After chow as normal, I checked the aircraft as they returned so the proper crews would be assigned and got the status of the aircraft for the following day.

5. At 1850 hours I returned to the maintenance office prior to going to a meeting at 1900 hours. While at the maintenance office, CW2 Holditch came from the mess hall and asked if 694 was ready for flight. He was told the aircraft was ready. He said that he wanted the crew chief or someone to ride with him. I understood that the crew chief was at chow. SFC Tovey told someone to get his helmet and that he was going along to get out of the area for a few minutes. I told them not to be gone long because the command radio's had to be put in the aircraft. CW2 Holditch said it could not take long, probably only thirty minutes. I went on to my meeting. I'm not sure of the time but around 1910 hours I saw the aircraft take off.

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6. I went back to the flight line and thought no more about the aircraft until around 2015 hours when I was back at the maintenance office. SFC Conr notified me that the aircraft had not returned. I immediately tried to call him on the Troop FM frequency utilizing the PNC-25 at the maintenance office, with negative results. SFC Cone and I then went to operations and tried several times to contact the aircraft utilizing tail number. We did not receive an answer. The operations officer, CPT Livingston, was in the immediate vicinity; he immediately made a ramp check of our flight line and returned to operations. The Troop Commander was preparing to make a check of the known flight pattern and asked me to go along. We utilized a U-11 and were over the crash site within minutes after being airborne. We were unable to locate the wreckage because it was some one hundred yards off shore in the water and it was dark by this time. We searched all known test flight areas and were assisted by several other aircraft in the search. We returned at 0015 hours with only negative results.

7. At around 0610 hours the following morning I was notified that the aircraft had been located and that I was to go to the crash site within twenty minutes with the Troop Commander. The crashed aircraft was in some ten feet of water. We orbited the area, both high and low, for a long period of time. The current had moved many parts of the aircraft in a definite pattern. Only one object was visible that did not seem to be a component of the aircraft. I asked if anyone recognized the four blue objects that were in the water. The second time I asked, it seemed to be everyone's opinion that the blue objects were upholstery material that were in fact gray but appeared to be blue because they were under water. After landing I went to the area in a LCH and we hovered close enough to one of the blue objects for me to decide it as a parachute that had been cut, or torn in to pieces.

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8. When the investigation board members arrived I was asked various questions. I drew a rough sketch of the crash site to include the major aircraft components and the direction the current had moved my aircraft components. I also stated at this time that I thought the aircraft had hit a parachute and what I believed to be four pieces of this parachute was in the water in the same area that the current had moved the aircraft components.

9. I was told by one of the divers that both front seats of the aircraft had broken loose from the floor and were both turned sideways in the cockpit. The same diver said both personnel in the front were still holding the cyclic control sticks that had broken loose from the floor. After seeing the aircraft as it was being offloaded from the boat I found that very little of the above could be true. Both sets of seat belts had been cut to remove the bodies. An aircraft seat does not turn more than a few inches with the seat belts intact. The left cyclic control stick was broken from the floor from what appeared to be a hard blow from the rear, a few inches from the floor. Also the leather hand hold on the left door was pulled apart.

10. As to the type PS that was performed on the aircraft the day it crashed I have not seen any of the aircraft records because the board had picked them up and I can only assume that the PS was performed in the normal manner utilizing proper maintenance procedures.

11. As to CW2 Holditch's condition at the time of the crash. For the past six weeks his normal day was from 0700 hours to around 2200 hours. The quitting time at night varies with later than 2200 hours being much more normal than an earlier time. He was normally flying most of the noon hour either to or from Sam Ky for maintenance of aircraft at the location. Immediately after chow at night he and I normally were back on the flight line at 1715.

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When he was late for chow because of a flight he normally was out of the maintenance area only twenty or at the most twenty five minutes for chow. He told me on a number of occasions that he was just plain tired all over and it would take many days of rest away from aircraft before he could consider himself normal. I have flown in the aircraft with him many times and noticed that while flying that his awareness or attention to his immediate surroundings was almost nill, so much so that he wouldn't answer the intercom on many occasions until his name was called at a louder than normal conversation tone. Through the day no matter how hot or how little wind was blowing he would go to sleep immediately after laying on the bed. At around 1730 hours the day of the crash while hovering from a hoverment he hit the right synchronized elevator on a UH-1H, not bending it badly but enough to require sheetmetal repair.

12. As to how the accident occurred I can only assume, but I would say that he was flying south over the water fifty yards from shore at an altitude of not more than soventy five feet, with an airspeed around ninety knots. Already being to close when he notices a blue parachute he dove the aircraft to the left front, he struck the parachute with the main rotor blades and just prior to hitting the water he attempted to level the aircraft. He did not pull pitch because he knew the parachute would tangle his main controls if he pulled up into it. I assume he attempted to level the aircraft because the tail boom is flattened along its bottom all the way to the rear and the bottom of the fuselage is struck both from the front and bottom.

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