

Cook, John W.
Dates in the 57th – 1967 - 1968
WO1 - Pilot
Birth Date: December 13th 1946
Long Beach, CA
Killed In Action Date: February 29th 1968
Laos - Japan



<https://directory.vhpa.org/details.php?m=7oPliTQXLtUEL166Ed8ISimHs4LDeEupzAh7yu0KBmVklv5nOTLsHsXWOatPJ08HEzohZH5h0gfiwEMewHXXCQ%3D%3D>

John W Cook
Military rank: WO1

Status: KIA - 19 Feb 1968

There is more information about this person on the [VHPA web site](#).

Flight Class(es):
67-17

Call Sign(s):

Unit(s):
57 AHC (67-68)

Branch of Service:

AR

<https://www.vhpa.org/KIA/K10425.HTM>

COOK JOHN W

[Click here](#) for more information about this incident

Name: WO1 John W. Cook

Status: Killed In Action from an incident on 02/19/1968 while performing the duty of Pilot.

Died 10 days later on 02/29/1968.

Age at death: 21.2

Date of Birth: 12/13/1946

Home City: Long Beach, CA

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

Unit: 57 AHC

Major organization: 1st Aviation Brigade

Flight class: 67-17

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

The Wall location: 42E-003

Short Summary: Shot down by B-40 or RPG. Pulled out by SF SGT Zabitosky. Died in Japan later of burns. CPT R. Griffin AC. 1st 57 AHC pilot KIA

Aircraft: UH-1D tail number [66-16282](#)

Service number: W3157737

Country: South Vietnam

MOS: 062B = Helicopter Pilot, Utility and Light Cargo Single Rotor

Primary cause: B-40 or RPG

Compliment cause: fire or burns

Started Tour: 11/13/1967

"Official" listing: ground casualty

Location: Pleiku Province II Corps.

Military grid coordinates of event: YB665498

Additional information about this casualty:

Johnny's Dad had told me pretty much all that was known, and I've since talked with (then) Capt. Griffin. Johnny (his Mom and Dad always called him that) was a truly remarkable young man. He, David Fraser and I were best buddies since junior high

school. The three of us were inseparable until my family moved to the San Diego area just before my senior year. I visited Johnny and Dave in Long Beach whenever I could and they came down to San Diego when they could. In fact, it was down here that I introduced him to a girl I was dating and the next thing I knew, they were dating each other! That didn't make me angry at all, since the girl and I were really just "good friends" and they were so happy together that I was naturally glad for them both. Johnny rode his motorcycle down from Long Beach every chance he got, sometimes for just a few hours' stay. I haven't mentioned the girl's name because she broke up with him after two years when the boys in her high school began to notice her, and... Not long after, Johnny decided to join the Army and head to flight school. Dave signed up with him on the buddy system then in effect. I was away at college at the time, and it was too late for me to catch up with them. When I next saw Johnny it was just after he'd graduated from flight school and was on leave just before shipping over to Vietnam. I decided to enlist and follow the same path he and Dave had, but the recruiter told me I was likely to be drafted soon and my papers couldn't be processed in time for WOC school -- the draft would take precedence. So I enlisted for 67N20 school and that's how I ended up wearing enlisted crew wings while Johnny and Dave were wearing pilot wings. I was still at Ft. Rucker when word came that he had been shot down. Then a few days later a chaplain came to tell me the bad news. I had no idea why I was being called to the orderly room, but when they opened the door to an inner office and I saw a chaplain was waiting to see me, my heart turned to stone and sank to the pit of my stomach. No words were necessary, and I think the chaplain dreaded speaking them as much as I dreaded hearing them. The Army allowed me leave to go to Arlington for the funeral. Johnny's Dad met me at the airport. We had two days together there for the funeral and some time to talk before I had to return to Ft. Rucker. Johnny is buried just a little down the hill and to one side from the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. You can hear the sound of marching feet and the clack of the rifles being handled at the changing of the guard. When I visited Arlington a few years ago with my family I learned that there are some twenty-two other John Cooks buried there. One of them won the Medal of Honor in the Civil War. We saw his headstone when we took a wrong turn going to Johnny's gravesite. The name "John Cook" has been shared by a lot of good men down through the years, including Johnny's Dad. John Cook, Sr. still holds the world's endurance flight record (fixed wing) jointly with Bob Timm. They set the record back in 1954 (I think). Their airplane is now on display at McCarran airport near Las Vegas where they set the record. Johnny was always so proud of his dad in every way and loved telling the story of how they did it. I didn't mean to go on so long like this. I started out just wanting to say "Thank You" for your help, and all the rest of this just came gushing out. Instinct tells me you are one who will understand what I've never been able to explain to someone who wasn't there. Thanks for your patience in reading all this. If you'll indulge me just a little longer, I want to include a tribute I wrote for Johnny a

few years ago inspired by an essay written about "Best Friends and Bookmarks." You've probably seen it in a book written about The Wall. The idea is to write a tribute to our best friend brief enough to go on a book mark suitable for books about Vietnam. What I wrote for my bookmark appears below. Sincerely, Bob Gladson RLGladson@aol.com John W.W. Cook Warrant Officer helicopter pilot born December 13, 1946 wounded February 19, 1968 died of wounds February 29, 1968 Panel 42E, Line 003 Born in Blythe, California, he grew up in Long Beach, California. He was much loved by his family and friends. He made new friends wherever he went. He never let his friends down in any way, he would never have forgotten us, nor will he be forgotten. Each of us lucky enough to be his friend considered him to be our best friend, and he was. He never spoke an unkind or disrespectful word about his parents or friends -- a truly remarkable young man.

Reason: burns

Casualty type: Hostile - died of wounds

single male U.S. citizen

Race: Caucasian

Religion: Protestant - no denominational preference

Burial information: ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY, VA

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: warrant officer

This record was last updated on 09/30/2001

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<https://www.vhpa.org/KIA/incident/68021942KIA.HTM>

Information on U.S. Army helicopter UH-1D tail number 66-16282

Date: 02/19/1968 MIA-POW file reference number: 1054

Incident number: 68021942.KIA

Unit: 57 AHC

Laos

UTM grid coordinates: YB665498

Casualties = 03 BNR, 01 DIN, 02 W . .

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. Also: 1054, SOG Vol III by Saal P:237+ , SOG by Plaster P:200+ ()

Summary: Shot down and crashed during Recon Team extraction. SSG Zabitosky won the Medal of Honor for rescuing the pilots.

Loss to Inventory

Crew Members:

P WO1 [COOK JOHN W](#) KIA

CE SSG DYE MELVIN CARNILLS RR

G SSG GRIFFITH ROBERT SMITH RR

AC CPT R GRIFFITH WIA

Passengers and/or other participants:

SFC GLOVER DOUGLAS J, AR, PX, RR

SSG Zabitosky Fred W, AR, PX, WIA

REFNO Synopsis:

SYNOPSIS: Melvin Dye was the engineer and Robert Griffith the door gunner aboard a UH-1H helicopter performing an emergency extraction mission in Laos. They were extracting a reconnaissance patrol team consisting of three U.S. Army Special Forces personnel and three indigenous personnel. The aircraft carried a crew of four. Douglas Glover was one of the Special Forces personnel aboard. As the helicopter picked up the team four miles inside Laos west of Dak Sut, it received a heavy volume of small arms fire. It is not known whether the aircraft was hit by hostile fire or hit a tree, but it nosed over, impacted the ground and

exploded, bursting into flames. The pilot, co-pilot WO Cook and one passenger Special Forces Sergeant Fred W. Zabitosky managed to leave the aircraft. Because of the fire and exploding small arms ammunition, rescue attempts for the others were futile. Cook died later in Japan from burns. Zabitosky was awarded the Medal of Honor. See Zabitosky's story in Vietnam magazine February 1996. There were six U.S. and three indigenous personnel aboard the helicopter. When search teams reached the site the same day, they could not account for the other U.S. personnel. Five were accounted for, but could not be recovered because of intense heat.

War Story:

Special Forces Staff Sergeant Fred W. Zabitosky was at the end of a normal six-month active mission cycle with FOB 2 based at Kontum. He was the One-Zero, team leader, of RT Maine but on this mission was helping SSG Glover become the new team leader, so 'Zab' was the One-One, assistant team leader. On 18 Feb., RT Maine was inserted into 'The Bra,' the river curve where Highway 110 split eastward from Highway 96, the Ho Chi Minh Trail's major north-south route. Their mission was to learn whether the NVA were pulling back, reinforcing or resupplying their Tet offensive activities in the Central Highlands.

Not long after their insertion, they made and broke contact. There were at least two other RTs active in this same area, so they had to wait their turn for airstrikes and worked their way back to the LZ. The NVA had set up 12.7mm guns around the LZ and the USAF Covey FAC could see at least four NVA companies converging on the LZ. The NVA launched two assaults on the nine-man team's position but were stopped by napalm, cannon fire, and the team's weapons. Covey had the team run 150 yards to an alternate LZ.

The first slick lifted out one SF and two Yards which left Zab, Glover and four Yards still on the ground. The NVA then struck in four successive waves which were all stopped but the team was almost out of ammo. It was now or never. The second slick went in as gunships and jets blasted the area. Both the NVA and Maine seemed to be racing for the helicopter. The door gunners and the SOG men were shooting like mad. Zab recalls that the NVA were so close that blood from one he shot splatted the Huey.

They were 75 feet up and almost clear of the LZ when an RPG blast rocked the Huey, spinning the tail boom into the main blades. Zab came to about 20 feet from the Huey and rolled clumsily on the ground to extinguish his burning clothes. The Huey had snapped in two just behind the pilots' section and burned furiously. The

troop compartment lay on its side and Zab heard the final cries from the three Americans and four Yards in the burning wreckage.

Zab moved away from the wreckage then looked back to see the pilots still strapped in the burning nose section. He returned, opened the door and grabbed the semiconscious WO Cook and pulled him out. Everything was burned off the man except his leather gun belt.

The pilot was still inside. Zab could feel his flesh burning as he undid the pilot's harness. The fuel cells exploded in the other section and blew both Zab and the pilot clear.

Overhead SF medic Luke Nance had watched these events in horror but had seen Zab. The pilot made a couple of passes and confirmed there were survivors. This ship landed. Together Nance and Zab carried and dragged the two burned pilots to the Huey and they escaped.

SSG Fred Zabitosky received the Medal of Honor for his actions that saved the lives of two 57th AHC pilots. Sadly, WO Cook passed away ten days later in Japan due to burn related injuries.

The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced today that the remains of three servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.

Army Staff Sgt. Robert S. Griffith, of Hapeville, Ga., will be buried on Oct. 23 in Fairburn, Ga. The group remains of the other two soldiers which could not be individually identified -- Army Staff Sgt. Melvin C. Dye, of Carleton, Mich., and Sgt. 1st Class Douglas J. Glover, of Cortland, N.Y., will be buried at a later date. The men were aboard a UH-1H Iroquois helicopter on Feb. 19, 1968, when it was shot down by enemy fire in Laos. They were involved in an attempt to extract a long-range reconnaissance patrol in the mountains of Attapu Province. Three other American service members survived the crash and were rescued, but three Vietnamese Montagnard's did not survive.

Several hours after the crash, a team was dispatched to survey the location and reported seeing remains of at least five people. Enemy activity prevented remains recovery at that time. The following month a second team was sent to the crash site but found no remains.

In 1995, a joint U.S.-Lao People's Democratic Republic team traveled to the recorded grid coordinates for the crash site but found no evidence of a helicopter crash. The team then surveyed a second location in the area where they found helicopter wreckage and human remains. In 2006, a follow-on team was not able to resurvey the same site due to severe overgrowth and time constraints. Another team excavated the location in late 2007 recovering human remains, wreckage and military-related equipment.

Among other forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command used dental x-rays in the identification of Griffith's remains.

Since late 1973, the remains of 938 Americans killed in the Vietnam War have been accounted for and returned to their families with 1,708 service members still missing.

For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, call 703-699-1169 or visit the DPMO Web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo>.

DISCLAIMER: Following personal recollection is based on memories (pleasant and unpleasant) of events that occurred almost 43 years ago. Please forward as you see fit to help educate those who know so little about the Vietnam War and the responsible soldiers who responded when called. Hugh

Story published below by the Department of Defense on 10 October 2010 concerns lost crewmen from the unit that I (then a Captain and unit maintenance officer) was honored to serve with in Kontum, Vietnam (my second Vietnam tour) during the 1967-1968 timeframe. I remember the faces of four crewmen well. They were a great crew and team; most dependable troops who took excellent care of their helicopter and each other. The best of a great generation that was given so little credit by an unappreciative people/nation and deceitful government.

Return of Vietnam War related remains is so very important to our veterans and the lost soldiers' families because it helps with closure of wounds related to the conflict.

The 300 or so men in this unit that normally had assigned 29 UH1H helicopters were among the finest and bravest that I saw during a 35-year active duty career. They lived in one of the most adverse and dangerous field environments and were occasionally subjected to 122mm Katusha Rocket attacks (similar to those rockets

being deployed against the Israelis today) and other types of harassing ground attacks/fire. They were undeterred by the daily dangers they faced; worked hard, maintained safe aircraft and flew challenging missions. I learned something from them almost daily.

The aircraft/crew loss described below was the second loss (both attributed to combat action) after the unit arrived in Kontum (Central Highlands) in October 1967 after nine months of training at Fort Bragg, NC; however, it was the first to suffer crew losses. My recollection is that these very dangerous cross border missions were flown by the unit for six of the first 12 months the 57th was in country. Missions were highly classified since the US would not publicly acknowledge operating in Laos and Cambodia at the time.

As a matter of interest, I should point out that during the six weeks prior to the loss of this aircraft, our unit had lost many brave soldiers (six killed and over two dozen (?) wounded) and nine (?) aircraft due to two major ground attacks by North Vietnamese troops.

Per unit records, several other aircraft/crews were lost before the unit was deactivated or left country in mid-1972. If my memory serves me correctly, the 57th was close to the last Assault Helicopter Company to leave at the conclusion of direct combat by US forces. Believe, with the discovery of the two crewmen's remains, the unit now has only six lost crewmen whose remains have yet to be found (classified as body not returned).

Hope the story below shows you how remarkable the Vietnam era soldiers were in dealing with tough missions and maintaining their sanity at the time. Interesting details of many more of the Special Operations Group Missions conducted by SOG Central and flown by the 57th and other aviation units at the time can be found in two excellent paperback books by John Plaster; the one entitled "SOG" is the only title I can remember. These books are available at Amazon, Borders, Barnes and Noble, etc.

May God richly bless all that served in our nations wars and the families that stood by their sides.

Hubert "Hugh" G. Smith
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Retired (1997)

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/49269/arlinton-national-cemetery#view-photo=554759>



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ARLINGTON NATIONAL
CEMETERY
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WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT
AT ALL TIMES**

**PLEASE REMEMBER
THESE ARE HALLOWED GROUNDS**



https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/125343229/john-w_w-cook

WO John W W Cook

BIRTH	13 Dec 1946 Blythe, Riverside County, California, USA
DEATH	29 Feb 1968 (aged 21) Vietnam
BURIAL	<u>Arlington National Cemetery</u> Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia, USA
PLOT	Section 6, Grave 9744-A
MEMORIAL ID	125343229 · <u>View Sourc</u>

Inscription

California
Warrant Officer
57th Aviation Company
Vietnam

Information on U.S. Army helicopter UH-1D tail number 66-16282

Date: 02/19/1968 MIA-POW file reference number: 1054

Incident number: 68021942.KIA

Unit: 57 AHC

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Story published below by the Department of Defense on 10 October 2010 concerns lost crewmen from the unit that I (then a Captain and unit maintenance officer) was honored to serve with in Kontum, Vietnam (my second Vietnam tour) during the 1967-1968 timeframe. I remember the faces of four crewmen well. They were a great crew and team; most dependable troops who took excellent care of their helicopter and each other. The best of a great generation that was given so little credit by an unappreciative people/nation and deceitful government.

Return of Vietnam War related remains is so very important to our veterans and the lost soldiers' families because it helps with closure of wounds related to the conflict.

The 300 or so men in this unit that normally had assigned 29 UH1H helicopters were among the finest and bravest that I saw during a 35 year active duty career. They lived in one of the most adverse and dangerous field environments and were occasionally subjected to 122mm Katusha Rocket attacks (similar to those rockets being deployed against the Israelis today) and other types of harassing ground attacks/fire. They were undeterred by the daily dangers they faced; worked hard, maintained safe aircraft and flew challenging missions. I learned something from them almost daily.

The aircraft/crew loss described below was the second loss (both attributed to combat action) after the unit arrived in Kontum (Central Highlands) in October 1967 after nine months of training at Fort Bragg, NC; however, it was the first to suffer crew losses. My recollection is that these very dangerous cross border missions were flown by the unit for six of the first 12 months the 57th was in country. Missions were highly classified since the US would not publicly acknowledge operating in Laos and Cambodia at the time.

As a matter of interest, I should point out that during the six weeks prior to the loss of this aircraft, our unit had lost many brave soldiers (six killed and over two dozen (?) wounded) and nine (?) aircraft due to two major ground attacks by North Vietnamese troops.

Per unit records, several other aircraft/crews were lost before the unit was deactivated or left country in mid-1972. If my memory serves me correctly, the 57th was close to the last Assault Helicopter Company to leave at the conclusion of direct combat by US forces. Believe, with the discovery of the two crewmen's remains, the unit now has only six lost crewmen whose remains have yet to be found (classified as body not returned).

Hope the story below shows you how remarkable the Vietnam era soldiers were in dealing with tough missions and maintaining their sanity at the time. Interesting details of many more of the Special Operations Group Missions conducted by SOG Central and flown by the 57th and other aviation units at the time can be found in two excellent paperback books by John Plaster; the one entitled "SOG" is the only title I can remember. These books are available at Amazon, Borders, Barnes and Noble, etc.

May God richly bless all that served in our nations wars and the families that stood by their sides.

Hubert "Hugh" G. Smith
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army
Retired (1997)

This record was last updated on 10/27/2010

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/125343229/john-w_w-cook#view-photo=195883645





JOHN W W
COOK

CALIFORNIA

WARRANT OFFICER
57 AVIATION CO
VIETNAM

DECEMBER 13 1946

FEBRUARY 29 1968

AM-PH