

# TEST FLIGHT

My name is Thom Iannarino: I am an Army Major Retired and a Master Aviator. I flew over 1300 combat hours in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) during my tours with the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in 1967-68 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade in 1969-70. The incidents you are about to read and view occurred during my second tour.

In June of 1969 I was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade's 244<sup>th</sup> Surveillance Aircraft Company (SAC). The 244<sup>th</sup> was located at Can Tho in South Vietnam's delta region at the junction of the Lower Mekong and Can Tho Rivers, about 90 miles southwest of Saigon.

The mission of the 244<sup>th</sup> SAC was to provide side looking area radar (SLAR), infrared (IR) and photo imagery intelligence to U.S. and RVN units in the IV Corps area of operations (AO). The aircraft used to accomplish these missions were OV-1 Mohawks. There were 8 OV-1B SLAR, 8 OV-1C IR and photo, and 2 OV-1A training and photo aircraft in the 244<sup>th</sup> SAC.

My primary duty while assigned to the 244<sup>th</sup> SAC was as the aircraft maintenance officer/test pilot. One of my main responsibilities was to test fly all aircraft upon their completion of a 100-hour phase maintenance inspection. During the course of the test flight all aircraft systems, flight controls, instruments, etc. were checked to insure their safe and proper operation prior to being returned to an operational status

- 1 Following a phase inspection of OV-1C 61-2697, I checked the logbook to insure all entries were correct and to see if anything special needed performed during the flight. Upon completion of reviewing the logbook, I conducted a thorough walk around 697 checking everything: ejection seats, fluid levels, tires, skin, flight control surfaces, etc.
- 2 When the logbook and the preflight inspection were completed, I climbed aboard 697 to initiate the pre-start checklist, engine starts, communication checks, etc. I was finally ready to taxi out of the revetment to the aircraft run-up area. After performing the by-the-book run-up, systems checks, and hi-speed taxi, I was ready for take off and the test flight.
- 3 Once airborne, I flew over Can Tho airfield and its' surrounding compound. The runway was laid out East-West and approximately 2,000' long. It's perforated steel planking (PSP) was not user friendly, especially when wet.
- 4 During the test flight of 697, I followed the checklist, made a few notes and returned to Can Tho pleased that Grumman's OV-1C performed as advertised. After landing, I taxied back to the unit's maintenance area on the ramp and backed 697 into the 8' high 3' thick 3-sided revetment. Upon completing the post flight check, I made my way to the flight line maintenance building where I finished the required paperwork to release 697 to an operational status.



- 5 About five minutes after I began completing 697's flight paperwork I heard a very unusual noise on the flight ramp, a noise not normally associated with aircraft run-ups, taxiing, etc. I walked out of the building to see if anything was a miss. All appeared OK, but a minute later one of the maintenance personnel came running into my office yelling: "Sir, come and see what happened to the aircraft you just flew."

I immediately left the office to where 697 was parked. I could not believe my eyes. The left main landing gear was broken at the inside of the wheel just above the axle spindle. I just stood there for what seemed an eternity thanking God that the break did not occur on my landing. I could have been, at a minimum, seriously injured and the aircraft totally destroyed. A broken gear strut would not have fared well going down and along the PSP runway.

- 6 When I recovered from my initial shock as to what could have been, I took a close look at the gear strut. All sorts of questions entered my mind to include: "Was my last landing on the test flight a hard landing?" (After conferring with my tech observer on the flight, we agreed it wasn't a hard landing.) "When was there a hard landing?" "Was there ever a hard landing?" "Was this incident a result of metal fatigue?"
- 7 As I rolled all these questions in my mind, I returned to my flight line office and took the logbook for 61-2697 and entered a RED X on Form 2408-13 grounding the aircraft due to a broken left main landing gear.

To this day I do not know why the gear broke. I submitted paperwork, pictures, etc but I never received an answer. I just thank God no one and nothing else was broken







