

## Tail Rotor

Robert T. Basha of Mount Pleasant was a mechanical engineering major. A member of Clemson's Class of 1958, Basha was selected for membership in the campus chapter of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Basha was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army and climbed through the ranks. In 1978, he was a colonel and the commanding officer of division artillery for the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division then headquartered at Bad Kreuznach, West Germany.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had fought in Germany during World War II. After the war, it returned to the United States and was deactivated. In 1950, the 8<sup>th</sup> was reactivated at Fort Jackson and in 1956-57 returned to West Germany as part of the United States forces helping to secure Western Europe.



On June 27, 1978 Colonel Basha and members of his staff boarded an Army UH-1 Iroquois helicopter at their barracks in Baumholder for a flight to the Army's training area at Grafenwoehr about 270 miles to the east. The Grafenwoehr training area included space for maneuvers and an artillery live-fire range.

At slightly beyond the halfway point of the flight, just south of Wurzburg, one of the blades of the helicopter's tail rotor separated, throwing the rotor's gearbox out of balance and causing the remaining tail rotor blade to cut the helicopter's tail boom away aft of the horizontal stabilizer. This led to the shifting of the aircraft's center of gravity and caused the mast of the helicopter to bump and lose the main rotor. According to a member of the accident investigation team, "the pilot did everything right." He entered autorotation, shut the engine down, and was headed to a clear landing site, but the shift of the center of gravity caused the helicopter to crash. The investigator cited a



manufacturing defect as the cause of the accident which killed Colonel Basha and eight others.

Robert T. Basha had earned the Combat Infantryman's Badge and parachutist's jump wings. He was survived by three brothers and a sister. He is buried at Saint Paul's Lutheran Church Cemetery in Mount Pleasant.

