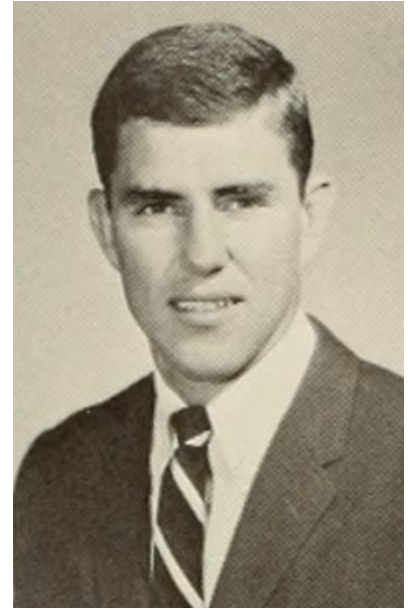


## Close Encounter

A dozen witnesses told the same story, but a government spokesman dismissed their accounts. Regardless of the cause, sixteen Americans were dead including John Hamilton Dinneen, Jr. a member of Clemson's Class of 1968.

Dinneen, the son of a Navy captain, was an economics major from McLean, Virginia. He was a two-sport athlete at Clemson, playing outfield on Coach Bill Wilhelm's baseball team and also playing on Coach George Krajack's freshman basketball team. He was listed on the ACC Honor Roll and was a member of the Block C Club. Dinneen was selected for membership in Phi Eta Sigma and Sigma Tau Epsilon national academic honor societies. He served as a residence hall supervisor and was a member of Phi Kappa Delta fraternity where his brothers nicknamed him "Johnny Dollar" for his rendition of a popular song of the time. Dinneen was also an Air Force ROTC student, rising to the rank of cadet major and commanding the 5<sup>th</sup> Squadron.



Classmate and fraternity brother Bill Anderson recalled Dinneen as "a great guy and a good friend" who attended graduate school at the University of Georgia. Andy Ulmer remembered Dinneen as "a fine young man [who] was a pleasure to be around. I never heard him say a cross word." Ulmer wrote that Dinneen was known for his enthusiasm. This accomplished athlete and scholar chose the Air Force as a career.

In the autumn of 1975, Captain Dinneen was participating in a NATO exercise in West Germany. Such exercises involved forces from NATO's many member countries and were restricted to specific maneuver areas to avoid disruptions to local economies. On September 26, Captain Dinneen was a member of a twelve-man team tasked to survey a maneuver area in the vicinity of Hessich Oldendorf, West Germany.



Dinneen, the other members of his team, and four flight crew members boarded an Air Force CH-53 helicopter at Wiesbaden. The flight flew southeast to Ramstein Air Force Base where it made an intermediate stop. It then headed north on its 150-mile route to Hessich Oldendorf.

Shortly before 1030 hours, the flight crew radioed air traffic control at the British Royal Air Force Base at Guetersloh requesting clearance to descend from 8,000 to 5,000 feet. Then, something went wrong.

Witnesses told German police that two Dutch Air Force jets made a simulated attack on the helicopter, causing its rotor blades to separate from the aircraft. A German police spokesman reported that “the helicopter fell like a stone into a meadow, exploded and burst into flames.” German firemen extinguished the flames using a special foam, but there were no survivors.

A spokesman for the West German Defense Ministry disputed the eyewitness statements. He acknowledged that two Dutch fighter jets were in the area and that they witnessed the crash, but denied that they were in any way involved in the accident.

Subsequent investigation revealed that it wasn't the close encounter with the Dutch fighters that led to the disaster. The helicopter suffered dual engine failure due to ice ingestion. The pilots' efforts to autorotate came too late to save the aircraft and those aboard.

Captain John Hammond Dinneen, Jr. was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, National Defense Service Medal, and Air Force Longevity Award Ribbon. He was survived by his parents and buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

