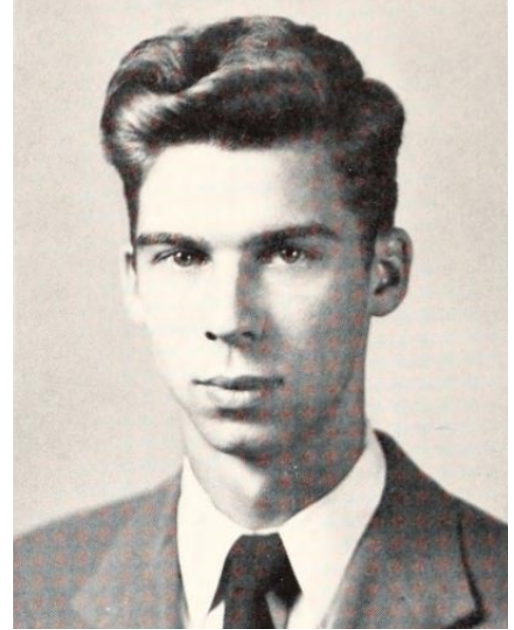


Night Haze

The summer between Edward Allen Smith's junior and senior years at Clemson, the United States went back to war. That summer of 1950, Smith, an industrial education major from Spartanburg, joined hundreds of other Air Force cadets at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois for several weeks of training in preparation for their senior year in ROTC programs at campuses all over the country. No doubt these cadets were paying close attention to the situation half the world away in Korea.

Smith was a member of Iota Lambda Sigma, the honorary society for industrial education. He served on the YMCA Council and was a member of the Arnold Air Society. As an Air Force ROTC cadet, he served as a first sergeant and later as a first lieutenant and platoon leader.



Accepted into the Air Force's flight training program, Lieutenant Smith learned the skills of a fighter pilot. In March 1953, Smith deployed to the combat zone as a pilot in the 336th Fighter Interceptor Squadron, the "Rocketeers." Flying F-86 Sabre jet fighters from Kimpo Air Base, the 336th carried out air-to-air missions against Soviet built (and often Soviet piloted) MIG-15 jets. Smith flew as the wingman to an Air Force ace and earned an Air Medal in the process.



Lieutenant Smith on mission alert at the controls of his F-86 in Korea.

Smith returned to the United States in March 1954 and was assigned to the 612th Fighter Bomber Squadron at England Air Force Base near Alexandria, Louisiana. That May, he married Betty Jean Turner.

The 612th was selected by the Air Force to test night combat operations. In Korea, World War II era B-26 medium bombers had flown night ground attack missions. The Air Force, in its Night Hawk program, sought to test similar operations using F-86F Sabre jet fighters. One of the challenges to be overcome was the F-86's paucity of navigational equipment. Night Hawk sorties were all flown at night from Smith's new base at Alexandria to distant bombing ranges where the aircraft would deliver their ordnance. Umpires on the ranges would score each

mission based on the pilot's ability to find and hit his target. Upon return to Alexandria, the pilot would position his aircraft in a 9-mile-wide corridor at an altitude of 18,000 feet some 15 miles from the end of the runway. The pilot would then be guided back home by ground controllers using new technology called Super Precision Approach Radar [SPAR] to provide vectors to the runway.

At 0200 hours on August 6, 1954, Smith took off on a nighttime training flight. Smith's F-86F Sabre was among a group scheduled to fly to a range in Arkansas, identify targets, and return. Upon arrival back at Alexandria, the flight was to be controlled by SPAR until the individual aircraft were in a position from which the pilots could land visually.

Weather conditions that night were typical for summer in Louisiana. Even in the middle of the night, the temperature was nearly 80 degrees with 89% humidity. Visibility was 10 miles in clear weather. First Lieutenant Eugene Auen was flying the aircraft in front of Smith's. As Auen approached Runway 14, he encountered haze at approximately 3,500 feet. It was, Auen later testified, "definitely a restriction to forward visibility." Auen broke out of the haze 500 feet above the field and completed his visual landing. Auen, who experienced temporary vertigo when he flew into the haze, reported the hazard to both the tower and to Lieutenant Smith, who acknowledged the information.

As Smith began his approach to landing, the ground controller issued him a heading to align his aircraft with the runway's center line. At approximately three miles out, with Smith's aircraft yet to align with the runway, the controller issued a new heading. This turn was not completed. The controller informed Smith that he was high and off course and advised that Smith visually execute a missed approach. At 0321 hours, Smith's aircraft crashed and exploded 7,000 feet short of and to the right of the runway.

The accident investigation board thoroughly examined all the available information about the flight. It determined that First Lieutenant Smith was experienced with more than 650 flight hours and that he was well-rested before his final mission. As Smith was a "teetotaler," alcohol was not a factor nor was mechanical failure of the aircraft. The board, in its final report, opined that "the pilot experienced vertigo while flying through a localized area of restricted visibility." The vertigo caused Smith to lose track of his jet's attitude and his position relative to the ground.

Edward Allen Smith was survived by his wife who was then pregnant with their daughter Susan, his parents, and a sister. He is buried in Spartanburg's Greenlawn Memorial Garden.





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