

## Contract Pilot

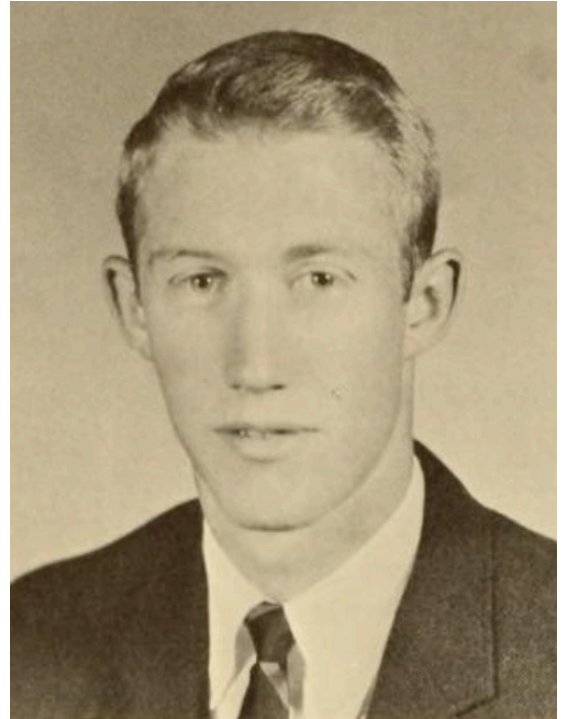
Wilson Harvey Smith, Jr. of Charleston attended his hometown college, The Citadel, for two years before enrolling at Clemson as a member of the Class of 1965. At Clemson, Smith served as president of Beta Sigma Chi, the old Charleston County Club which had evolved into a service fraternity. A civil engineering major, he was a member of both the Society of American Military Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers. Smith also had a passion for flying which he nurtured as a member of the campus Aero Club. This passion would lead Smith to an unusual career.

After graduation, Harvey Smith joined the Coast Guard, serving for two years, including time as a member of the Presidential Honor Guard in Washington. He then took a job with an engineering firm working on a government contract in Vietnam. Upon his return to the States, Smith renewed his passion for flying and attended aviation school in Santa Barbara, California. His flight school classmate, Gerald Brenc, remembered Smith as an innovative thinker and visionary spirit. He and Smith often flew together to accumulate flight hours. After he earned his multi-engine pilot certificate, Smith accepted a pilot's job with Continental Air Services, Incorporated or CASI. CASI was a subsidiary of Continental Airlines which was under contract to the Central Intelligence Agency to provide airlift support during the conflict in Laos.

On July 14, 1973, Smith was flying from Vientiane, Laos on what was ostensibly a mission to drop rice in support of the Agency for International Development.

In reality, Smith and his observer were taking aerial photographs for intelligence purposes. Their airplane, a Pilatus Porter, crashed into a mountain near the village of Muang Phoum, about 130 kilometers northeast of Vientienne.

Smith's fellow CASI pilot, Richard Bridges, speculated that the crash might have been caused by a faulty pitch control mechanism on the aircraft's propeller. Bridges said that the same mechanical problem had contributed to other Porter accidents.



*A CASI Pilatus Porter in Laos*

Smith was survived by his wife, LeShia and their daughter, Lyn. His body was recovered and returned to Charleston for burial in Magnolia Cemetery.

