

OV-10 crash in Darwin Canyon  
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by  
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My cousin Ken Hoffman, Jim Angione and I watched the Bronco crash in 1983. We had just climbed Mt. Darwin that day. I will never forget it.

We were cooking dinner a few hundred feet below the col, roughly level with the bottom of the Darwin glacier across canyon and heard the sound of a plane coming up the canyon. The weather was mildly bad with snow flurries and a steady wind. We all stood up to investigate and sure enough we spot the plane very low in the canyon making the turn around Mendel. The plane sounded like it was struggling, the engines just didn't quite sound right, I think one or both of the engines were mis-firing.

It dawned on us that there wasn't room for it to turn around and that the canyon was a dead end. "Oh my god that plane is going to crash," somebody said (I don't remember who). The bottom of the canyon was getting closer and closer and the plane was barely climbing.

When it got even with us it was about 50 feet off the deck and suddenly made a hard right turn towards Darwin. It cleared the cliff band below the flat area (I think there is a small lake there) by only about 20 feet and still climbing made it to about 50 feet off the deck.

Suddenly we heard an explosion or two and the two guys ejected shooting straight up quite aways into the air. One fellows chute instantly tangled up in his seat and he dropped to the glacier like a rock from what looked like at least 100 feet in the air. The wind caught the other fellow's chute (which deployed properly) and blew him up the glacier a few hundred feet. His landing was pretty rough as he was dragged along the ground for another hundred feet or so. The plane dropped straight down and almost completely disintegrated upon impact.

We immediately ran back to our camp, turned the stove off, put our boots on and headed down into the canyon. Before we had gone more than 100 yards or so we heard yelling from across the way. Two other climbers that had done Mendel that day called over for us to head out and report the crash and that they would stay with the injured guy. The other guy was clearly dead.

We packed up and headed out crossing Lamarck Col at sunset. It was a moonless night and we hiked out by feel not having any lights to illuminate the trail. We arrived in Bishop around 10:30

and went to the Sheriff's office. He made some calls and found that there was a plane reported missing from the base near Sacramento (McClelland AFB?). We headed to Keough to soak after promising him to be ready at 5am. The military said they would have a rescue team at the Bishop airport by 6 am.

In the morning the Sheriff drove over to Keough and escorted us to the airport where we arrived by 5:30. There was a bit of a crowd there with Bishop news reporters, assorted rangers and law enforcement. Pretty soon we could see a big helicopter coming up the Owens Valley from the south. It was the kind that has one large prop and one small that can probably hold 2 or 3 jeeps. They landed and we all went into a conference room at the airport to get organized.

They quickly hatched the plan that I would fly up with the rescue team to take them to the crash site. We loaded up and off we went. They cautioned me to bring my cold weather gear since the copter was being revamped and had no glass in the rear windows, only the cockpit.

Pretty soon we were at altitude and the views were awesome. The pilot called me up into the cockpit and I pointed out Lamarck Col and then soon after, the crash site. He remarked that we were too heavy to land though and would have to burn off 500 lbs. of fuel before going in. So we circled around the high peaks for awhile and then headed into the canyon. We could see the guys on the ground swinging their jackets in the air and he brought it down about 50 yds. away from them. He then told us that it was too high altitude (~12,000-12,500?) to shut off the engine and we would have to keep it on the ground with the engine (engines?) revved while the rest of us jumped out.

In addition to the pilot and copilot, there was a doctor, a nurse(male), two soldiers and I. The soldiers and I headed over to the dead guy (probably 250 yards away) while the doctor checked out the survivor. He had a broken nose and other small injuries.

The plane was so totaled that the biggest piece I saw was a section of the wiring harness.

One of the soldiers pulled out a big knife and we cut the dead guy out of the ejector seat and laid him on the Stokes. We carried him to the copter, everybody jumped in and we flew back to Bishop with just enough fuel to make it. The two climbers decided to hike out, although we took their packs out.

When we got home I found a news story in the LA Times about the crash. It turned out that the pilot that died was a veteran of

the Vietnam war. The guy that survived was much younger.