

2 February 1962

UC-123B “Ranch Hand” s.n. 56-4370, Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base, RVN.

On 2 February 1962, the Air Force lost its first aircraft in Việt Nam. It was an Operation Ranch Hand UC-123B from the 1st Air Commando Squadron, 464th Troop Carrier Wing, 13th Air Force, flown by Capt Fergus C. Groves II, Capt Robert D. Larson, and SSgt Milo B. Coghill. The crew would be the first Air Force fatalities in Việt Nam.

The aircraft crashed while on a low-level herbicide spraying mission, distributing defoliant over a Việt Cong ambush site along RVN Route 15, between Biên Hòa and Vũng Tàu on the coast.

Ranch Hand, a technological area-denial technique, was designed to expose the roads and trails used by the enemy.

The aircraft in this incident had been assigned temporary duty to Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base, RVN. Although proof was never obtained that the UC-123 was downed by hostile ground fire, Air Commando T-28Ds were soon tasked to fly armed escort for future spray missions.

