

McDonnell Douglas RF-4C #65-0889

October 2, 1969

On October 2, 1969, RF-4C #65-0889 took off from Mountain Home AFB, Idaho, for a night-time, low-level navigation training mission. The aircraft was with the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing, 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron. In the pilot's seat was Major Walter R. Biolley, and in the rear seat was navigator 1st Lt. James E. Coleman. Their instructions were to fly east to Idaho Falls and back, following several checkpoints along the way. If weather and fuel allowed, they were instructed to make one practice photo run at the Saylor Creek bombing range before returning. At 9:30 p.m. the flight radioed the wing command post and was cleared for a pass over the range. Shortly after this #65-0889 encountered bad weather, and at 9:51 p.m. the RF-4C collided with terrain about 35 miles south of the base. The aircraft was completely destroyed and both men were killed instantly. The Air Force, metal salvagers, and souvenir hunters have removed much of the aircraft in the years since the accident, but several large pieces still remain. Special thanks to Christopher Baird and Tate Ogden for help with finding this crash site. Site visited on 8/25/21.



Aircraft mechanic Tate Ogden inspects the empennage of #65-0889



Another view of the empennage, which is missing the vertical and horizontal stabilizers



Part of a landing gear tire



A brake rotor from the landing gear



A braided steel hose



Part of a hydraulic pump



A large piece of thick plexiglass



A data plate with the aircraft type stamped at top right



This twisted piece shows the tremendous force of impact the RF-4C sustained



Both Genera Electric J79 turbojet engines from #65-0889



Another engine view. The rear half of each J79 has been removed by salvagers.



The American flag with part of the debris field



Major Walter R. Biolley, from Los Angeles, CA
(Courtesy of the Biolley family)



1st Lieutenant James E. Coleman, from Columbus, GA
(Courtesy of U.S. Air Force Academy)