

F-86F #52-5251

September 14, 1954

On the morning of September 14, 1954, Captain Vanley T. Johnson took off from Wendover Air Force Base, Utah, in North American F-86F #52-5251. He was assigned to the 563rd Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 388th Fighter-Bomber Wing at Clovis AFB, New Mexico. That morning he was at Wendover for air-to-air gunnery training north east of the base with three other F-86 pilots. A little after 11 a.m. Capt. Johnson radioed the flight that he had smoke in the cockpit and he was aborting the mission and returning to the base. At 15,000 feet of altitude his wingman advised him there was a trail of white smoke coming from his tailpipe. Capt. Johnson declared an emergency, and the tower at Wendover cleared him for a straight-in approach. At 13,000 feet he began to sound incoherent in his radio transmissions. At 10,000 ft. it appeared that he passed out from the smoke and slumped forward into the control stick, because the aircraft nosed over and entered a 60-degree dive. It struck the ground several miles short of the runway, killing Capt. Johnson instantly and blowing a ten-foot-deep crater in the desert.

In the years since the accident, Capt. Johnson's relatives placed a small monument at the crash site. Local residents and racers attending events at the Bonneville Salt Flats have stopped and placed pieces they found from the aircraft next to the monument. In 2009, Southern California Timing Association president Roy Creel and his wife stopped at the monument, found Capt. Johnson's dog tag, and returned it to his family. Today pieces of the F-86F can still be found several hundred yards from the impact area. Special thanks to Craig Fuller for help with locating this crash site. Site visited on 2/23/21.











Capt. Johnson's dog tag which was discovered at the crash site in 2009 and returned to his family (Courtesy of Hotrodhotline.com)



Two photos of Captain Vanley T. Johnson, USAF, from White Mills, Kentucky.

(Courtesy of the Elizabethtown Kentucky News-Enterprise)