

**Oral History**  
**of**  
**Oviedo Plane Crash (1962)**

An Interview Conducted by

Geoffrey Cravero

March 6, 2021

Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences, and  
Stories (RICHS)

*University of Central Florida RICHS*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Geoffrey Cravero

Transcriber: ENG 4832, Spring 2022:

Abigail Ayers, Robert Clark, Allanah Dawkins, Jaclyn Diaz, David Fullenkamp, Derek Garayua Caraballo, Tabitha Guthrie, Hunter Hurtubise, Amara Keizer-Quintanilla, Sarah Pierre, Jadanith Ramirez, Glenn Ritchey, Rosemaria Rodriguez Diaz, Vanessa Tamayo, Grace Weston

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of RICHES, History Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

RICHES is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interviews on the Oviedo Plane Crash (1962) are unrestricted. The interview agreements were signed on March 6, 2021 .

## **Abstract**

On Saturday, March 6, 2021, a historical marker was unveiled honoring the crew of a 1962 plane crash in Oviedo. A Naval A3D Skywarrior Airplane based at the Sanford Naval Air Station would crash in the Oviedo area narrowly missing a school ground full of children. The pilot, Lt. Charles Hodgate, was credited with navigating the airplane away from the school ground, defying orders to bail out, and subsequently claiming three members of the crew including Navy Petty Officers John W. Bush, Horace Marks and Lt. Charles Hodgate

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in the crash. Hodgate would later be the basis for the narrator character in the community-storytelling series from Creative Sanford entitled "Celery Soup."

## **Oviedo Plane Crash (1962)**

Oral History Memoir

Crash Witnesses: Jim Jones, Steve Mello, Mary Courier Scott, Tom Minter, David Evans, Thad Lingo, Thomas Moon, Charles Richard Hodgate, Tracy Hodgate Montour

Interviewed by Geoffrey Cravero

March 6, 2021

Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

**Jim Jones**

**Jones**

Okay, I'm Jim Jones. Uh... I was in the 11th grade, at Oviedo high school the day of the plane crash. I was in Jack Calbert's 11th grade English class, uh, staring out the window, instead of paying attention to my studies like I should have I guess, and uh, looking out over to the west I saw three planes suddenly appear over treetop. Well— uh, the two outside planes, on either wing, were, uh, vigilantes— later designated as A3Js. They were helping escort the wounded um, or crippled I should say, uh, A3D plane, and as soon as they uh— this all happened in an instant— as soon as they cleared the treetops a parachute appeared.

The two wing planes peeled away 'cause they saw it was a school, and then the A3D, uh, commanded by Lieutenant Hodgate, realized it was a school and he could not clear it, so he only had two choices, either crash into the school, or to, uh, do a maneuver to avoid it, and he did just that. He maneuvered the plane, and it became vertical, and he crashed into the ground there about 50, probably maybe 75 yards, from the school property.

And, uh, that's about it. After that, uh, my business teacher, Novella [Noella] Holland across the hallway came and got me and she said, "Jimmy go over and check on Mert and Bill Ward," friends of hers that lived there by the crash. So, I took her old car and managed to get over there. 'Course they were okay, and I went to the scene of the crash. Nothing anybody could do, of course.

And, uh, that was about it. It was, uh, a tragic day. It was a hectic five or six seconds is all that it took. Thank you.

0:01:49

**Steve Mello**

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**Mello** Okay. My name is Steve Mello. I started at Oviedo in—in the 5th grade. Um, moved over here from Sanford. Um, I was at the school when the plane incident happened. I was out in the playground area, having Phys-Ed (*clears throat*). I was in the, uh, 8th grade at the time.

I noticed the plane coming in, but I really didn't pay much attention to it. I wasn't sure what I was looking at. Then all of a sudden I saw a parachute come out and then the plane started to turn. And as it was turning it was coming down and crashed over by Clark Street, I guess. A bunch of us started moving down the railroad tracks at that time and, uh, they stopped us and said, "Don't go—don't go down that way. You know, just, uh, hold fast where you're at." And that was about it.

And it took a while for it to sink in, what had actually happened, you know, then they talked about it in school the next day in assembly. And that—that was, uh—that was my experience with it.

*(Background chatter).*

0:02:57 **Mary Courier Scott**

**Scott** Hi, I'm Mary Courier Scott. I was in the 4th grade when the plane crash occurred, and I was on the east side of the building, so I did not see anything. I was in Marguerite Parton's, uh, room. And she had two daughters at the high school then (*background chatter*).

And all I know is that we heard a crash and we saw a lot of smoke. And heard a lot of commotion going on. And then later learned from our teacher what had happened, and we had to stay in the classrooms for the rest of the day. But what a sacrifice this man made for us.

And my grandmother lived in Sanford near the, uh, naval air base. Actually rented, uh, an apartment to navy pilots, and one of them knew about the crash and all. So anyway, a sad day. But what a great honor for us to be able to do this and have the family with us. Thank you.

0:04:01 **Tom Minter**

**Minter** Uh, I'm Tom Minter. Uh, I was in the 10th grade. I was on the playground. Uh, actually heard the planes coming just as they cleared the, uh, oak trees on the west end of the field. Um, I was later told that the two outside planes were actually trying to give him some lift on that center plane that was having engine trouble.

When he saw the kids on the playground, he just pulled the thing up and

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did a backflip, flipped off kind of to his right side. Um, one of the guys parachuted out and, um— and crashed right there. Um, and that was just kinda pretty much it. It was, uh— it happened just in mere seconds, uh, just a real split-second decision on his part to, uh— to avoid hitting a playground. And, um, I'm sure it saved a lot of people's lives right there when he did it.

Playground was pretty much full. Well, as much as it could be at that time. But anyway, um, that's my account. That's about it. Thanks.

0:04:58      **David Evans**

**Evans**      All right my name is David Evans. Uh, I was born in Orlando, a—at— um—at the, uh, old, uh, Florida Hospital, uh, Orlando Sanitarium. And, um—but I grew up in Oviedo, and I was in the 8th grade. Um, and what I remember so distinctly is that we were out on the—out on the playground, and we heard this crash, uh, we ran down the railroad track, uh, towards the corner of, uh, Lake Jesup and Clark Street. And a—a ball of— a ball of smoke was going up, uh, and there was a parachute in a tree, uh, on the corner there. Um, the northwest corner was a Dancy tangerine grove owned by Billy West. And up rolls up a fire engine, uh, from the volunteer fire department, um, and it was all a blur and, um, at, uh, 14 years of age and in the 8th grade, um (*background chatter*).

Now some 50 some-odd, 60 years later it's a little—a little difficult to, uh, to separate all of it, uh, but it was, um, really remarkable. I've looked up—the A3D is, um— was the first, uh, jet bomber that the navy had that was capable of landing on a—a—a, uh—uh, landing on a, uh, aircraft carrier and also capable of, um, of, um, carrying a nuclear weapon, and to—it was one the first early jets that did not have ejection seats, which kind of explains why uh, the—the pilots and, uh, the crew were not able to get out except for—for the one survivor.

So, um, that's my record—recollection and, um—and I'm just excited to be here and—and, um—and honor the pilots and, uh—and the crew, uh, and the—and the family that was able to return back to Oviedo here some, um—some, uh, 50 or 60 years later. Um, alright. Thank you much.

0:07:05      **Thad Lingo**

**Cravero**      Alright.

**Lingo**      My name is Thad Lingo. I—I was, uh, 16 years old when the event occurred. I was in English class on the first floor of the two-story school. Uh, uh, we always heard jets, but on that particular day the jet noise was real loud. We all looked in the direction it was coming from and there

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was a jet airplane flying very low coming right at the school.

I saw a guy come out of the airplane on the left side. It was right over the treetops when he went out and the jet exhaust blew his parachute open, he was horizontal, and then he was on the ground that quick. And during that same happening, the pilot pulled the nose of the plane up, made a right turn, and went I think tail first right into the railroad bank, and there was a humongous explosion. We could feel the heat in the school coming through the window – the windows were open ‘cause we didn’t have air conditioning.

Uh, it was – as soon as it happened, I thought, “Well, the fire department needs to know about this.” So – (*background chatter*) and I happened to remember, at 16, the fire department. So, I ran from the school to the fire station, we had, uh, an air raid siren. Push the button for that would sound the siren to get the fire department involved. And my dad was fire chief.

He pulled up. It was just us two there at the time. He said, “Son you take that fire truck, I’ll take this one.” And I drove to the scene of the crash. And it was a horrible, horrible sight. And I’ll never forget the man that got out had walked across the street to the crash site. He was standing there looking at that thing, and it just was heartbreaking to see that. And, uh, that’s it.

0:09:08      **Thomas Moon**

**Moon**      Okay. Thomas Moon. I was in the – the 6th grade at the time. And, uh, we were on the playground out here in high school – or Oviedo High School at that time. And uh, we heard a big roar coming our way and turned around and looked and saw two planes go over. And I happened to see a parachute drop into the orange grove right there on the corner of Lake Jesup and, uh, Clark Street. And then all of a sudden, we had a big – that big fireball came up when it hit the – hit the ground there. And I mean the playground just cleared out. Everybody was running towards the – towards the bank – the main buildings. And it was really a scary situation.

And I grew up right on Clark Street. And my mother said that the windows shook in the house when that plane hit the ground. And just everybody was so, you know – e – everybody was so worried about the people that were on board. And even at 12, 11 – 12 years old – it really – it really was a shock for a long time there before it kind of got up – a little bit got over it. And pretty much, uh, you know, we – I tried to keep up with the names of the guys when they – when the – the three that were in the plane and then the one that parachuted out. And there was a little

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article in the Orla—in the *Sanford Herald* at that time about him. How he broke—broke a leg or two. And that was his third time bailing out of an aircraft going down. And he said, “I think I’m going to look for ground duty (*laughs*) from here on out.”

My dad said, uh, “I don’t blame him. I think the first one I would’ve been looking for ground duty after that.” But, uh, pretty much that’s, uh, that’s the account that I have.

**0:11:17**      **Charles Richard Hodgate**

**Hodgate**      I’m Charles Richard Hodgate. I was born in Sanford, Florida in 1960. Um, my mom—Charles—Lieutenant Charles Hodgate was my father. My mom moved to Massachusetts about 1964, which is where I—I live today. Um, say that I was very, very young when my father passed away. So less than two years old. My sister wasn’t—wasn’t yet born. So there was—I only have the vaguest memories of my father. Being picked up by strong hands and whirled around when we were hurt. And tickled a little. And rough whiskers and kisses. And laughing. And I’m not even sure that those memories are real. But I hold them dear, nonetheless. My sister doesn’t even have that, as my mom was pregnant when the—my father died.

So it was—I don’t know how much of it was a sense of loss, but there’s always been a piece missing in the family, who, uh, growing up, um, I—it doesn’t go away, really. Yeah. ‘Cause I remember one day, uh, my daughter asked me when she was adult on Christmas night, you know, if I could have had anything for Christmas what would it have been. And I said, “I wish I could just play catch with my dad one time.” That’s what I—that’s the one thing I could do. Wish I could’ve played catch with my dad. That’s all I’ve got.

**0:12:54**      **Tracy Hodgate Montour**

**Montour**      Hi, I am Tracy Hodgate Montour. Um, Lieutenant Charles Hodgate was my father. Uh, he never knew I existed. Um, my mom realized she was pregnant the day of the funeral. Um, we grew up, uh, in Massachusetts. after I was born here in Sanford. Um, but we moved to Massachusetts to be close to my father’s mother, who was—uh, he was her only child. So he had grown up in Fall River, Massachusetts. And that’s where we grew up as well.

Um, we grew up hearing stories not so much from our mom but from my dad’s best friend, who is also, um, my brother’s godfather. Uh, we would meet with them probably once every couple of months. Get together on



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*(background chattering)* a regular basis. And that's where we learned most about, um, my dad and what he liked and what he didn't like, um. And, uh, you know, we—we grew up knowing he was a hero, but we didn't know the whole story of what happened until Jim Jones contacted us and he gave us his, um, *(background chatter)*—his memories of it. And that—that's kind of clarified things a bit for us. And we've just—we've just been amazed with everything that we've learned here and all the people we've met. And just so grateful to have been able to come here. Thank you all.

*End of Interview*