

CONLON, JOHN FRANCIS III

Name: John Francis Conlon III
Rank/Branch: Major/US Air Force
Unit: 557th Tactical Fighter Squadron
Cam Ranh Bay Airbase,
South Vietnam
Date of Birth: 18 February 1941
Home of Record: Wilkes Barre, PA
Date of Loss: 04 March 1966
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: [133700N 1090000E \(BR836079\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Stayus in 1973: Missing in Action
Category: 3
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O1E "Bird Dog"](#)
Other Personnel In Incident: Stuart M. Andrews (missing)



REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The Cessna O1E "Bird Dog" was used extensively in the early years of the Vietnam war as a Forward Air Controller (FAC) because it could provide low, close visual reconnaissance and target marking which enabled armed aircraft or ground troops to close in on the enemy. The communists feared the O1E because they knew that opening fire on it would expose their location and invite attack by fighters controlled by the slowly circling Bird Dog. The enemy became bold, however, when they felt their position was compromised and attacked the little aircraft with a vengeance in order to lessen the accuracy of an impending strike.

On 4 March 1966, then Major Stuart M. Andrews, pilot, and 1st Lt. John F. Conlon III, observer-in-training, comprised the crew of an O1E aircraft that departed Qui Nhon Airfield at 1520 hours. 1st Lt. Conlon was a fighter pilot on temporary duty to Major Andrews' unit to learn the method of operation and procedures of becoming a Forward Air Controller.

At 1540 hours they made radio contact with the Special Forces Camp in the area and were directed to investigate campfires that had been reported in the vicinity of the camp. During that last radio transmission, there was no indication of enemy activity observed or problems with the aircraft. The Bird Dog was operating over heavily forested mountains approximately 1 mile west of Van Canh, 11 miles northwest of Binh Thanh, 17 miles west of the coastline, and 17 miles southwest of Qui Nhon Airfield. There was a single-track railroad line and a primary road running side by side that were paralleled by a river, and all three running generally in a north-south direction, located approximately 2 miles east of the Bird Dog's last known position.

When the Bird Dog failed to return to base, a ramp check of other airstrips in the region were queried to see if they had been forced to divert to one of them. Shortly thereafter search and rescue (SAR) efforts were initiated. During the search, no trace of either the downed aircraft or its crew could be located in the dense jungle-covered mountains in which they vanished. At the time the formal search was terminated Stuart Andrews and John Conlon were immediately listed Missing in Action.

If Stuart Andrews and John Conlon died in the loss of their aircraft, each man has a right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. However, if they survived the loss, they could well have been captured by communist forces known to be operating in that region; and their fate, like that of other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, could be quite different.

Since the end of the Vietnam War well over 21,000 reports of American prisoners, missing and otherwise unaccounted for have been received by our government. Many of these reports document LIVE American Prisoners of War remaining captive throughout Southeast Asia TODAY.

American military men in Vietnam were called upon to fly and fight in many dangerous circumstances, and they were prepared to be wounded, killed or captured. It probably never occurred to them that they could be abandoned by the country they so proudly served.