

DEICHELMANN, SAMUEL MACKAL "SAM"

Name: Samuel Mackal "Sam" Deichelmann
Rank/Branch: Major/US Air Force
Unit: 56th Special Operations Wing Udorn
Airfield, Thailand
Date of Birth: 24 September 1938
Home of Record: Montgomery, AL
Date of Loss: 06 September 1968
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: [105007N 1074246E \(YS960990\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Missing in Action
Category: 4
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O1F "Birddog"](#)
Other Personnel In Incident: (none missing)



REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The low, slow and vulnerable Cessna O1F Birddog Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft were inherited by the Air Force from the Army when the Army lost command of this fix-wing observation fleet during a transition period of the war in 1965. The aircraft itself usually only carried white phosphorous marker rockets that were mounted beneath the wings. The aircrews, however, carried their own personal weapons that added a limited degree of armament to this daring little aircraft. The Birddog was not only vulnerable to enemy ground fire, it was also at risk of being accidentally hit by friendly fire because its shape and speed helped it blend into its surroundings. Later in the war, the Birddog's upper wing was painted white or orange to emphasize the slow-moving FAC's position to friendly strike aircraft.

On 6 September 1968, then Capt. Samuel M. "Sam" Deichelmann was the pilot of an O1F aircraft, call sign "Raven 45," that departed Bien Hoa Airbase, Bien Hoa Province, South Vietnam on a classified single aircraft operational mission. The flight was to culminate with him ferrying his aircraft back to his home base of Udorn, Thailand.

Everything known about this flight is unusual. For example, Capt. Deichelmann test flew this aircraft the day before specifically to check it out. He also made it a point to talk to his brother, who was also stationed in Vietnam, the day before his final mission. In retrospect, this call seemed odd to his brother. Since this was a classified mission, no normal flight plan was logged prior to takeoff. Once airborne, Sam Deichelmann established contact with the US Army communications center at Bien Hoa Airbase to verbally file his flight plan. Further, it was abnormally vague even for a classified mission.

As he flew north along the coast of South Vietnam, Capt. Deichelmann checked in with the communication centers at Tuy Hoa, Phan Thiet and Cam Ranh Bay. At 0810 to 0815 hours, approximately 15 minutes after departing Bien Hoa Airbase, the coastal center at Phan Thiet thought it heard a garbled transmission from Sam Deichelmann. Because of the confusion surrounding this classified mission with its built in secrecy, the lack of a standard filed flight plan outlining in detail the intended route, and no set schedule for radio check-ins, no search and rescue (SAR) operation was initiated until 1100 hours. An air search of the general region in which Sam disappeared, found no trace of the missing Bird Dog or its pilot.

The last known position of the Raven 45 placed it over a jungle covered mountain less than 1 mile north of Highway QL1, the primary east/west road running between the town of Xuan Loc and the coast. It was also approximately 8 miles due east of the village of Ap Rung La that was situated along side Highway QL1; 12 miles northwest of the coastline, 30 miles east-southeast of Xuan Loc and 66 miles due east of Saigon. Small hamlets dotted the jungle on both sides of the highway.

There has never been any indication if the Bird Dog vanished due to enemy action or mechanical failure. If Sam Deichelmann died as a result of his loss incident, he has a right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. However, if he survived, his 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.

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