

# HEISKELL, LUCIUS LAMAR

Name:	Lucius Lamar Heiskell
Rank/Branch:	Major/US Air Force
Unit:	23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron, Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand
Date of Birth:	06 February 1940
Home of Record:	Memphis, TN
Date of Loss:	06 Feb 1967
Country of Loss:	North Vietnam
Loss Coordinates:	<a href="#">174600N 1054800E (WE847643)</a> <a href="#">Click coordinates to view maps</a>
Status in 1973:	Missing in Action
Category:	2
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground:	<a href="#">O-1F "Birddog"</a>
Other Personnel In Incident:	Patrick H. Wood, Richard A. Kibbey and Donald J. Hall (missing); Dwayne Hackney (rescued)



## REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The low, slow and vulnerable Cessna O-1F Birddog Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft were inherited by the Air Force from the Army when the Army lost command of this fixed-wing observation fleet during 1965. The aircraft itself usually only carried white phosphorous target 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 February 1967, then Capt. Lucius L. Heiskell was the pilot of an O-1F aircraft, call sign "Nail 65," that was the lead aircraft in a flight of two conducting a FAC mission for strike aircraft operating in extreme western North Vietnam. His wingman was Capt. Gerald Dickey. The mission identifier was Steel Tiger, Cricket Area 4," a region that included the portion of North Vietnam bordering Laos that included the Mu Gia Pass, one of the two primary gateways into the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail via Route 15. Between 17 April 1965 and 31 December 1971, 43 American airmen were lost and listed as POW/MIAs in a 33.3-mile square window of the world known as the Mu Gia Pass.

When North Vietnam began to increase its military strength in South Vietnam, NVA and Viet Cong troops again intruded on neutral Laos for sanctuary, as the Viet Minh had done during the war with the French some years before. This border road was used by the Communists to transport weapons, supplies and troops from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, and was frequently no more than a path cut through the jungle covered mountains. US forces used all assets available to them to stop this flow of men and supplies from moving south into the war zone.

Weather conditions were extremely overcast with tops at 3,000 feet and low scattered clouds underneath. Visibility was 4 to 5 miles in haze. The terrain consisted of extremely rugged karsts covered in moderately heavy jungle growth.

Once in the area of operation, Capt. Heiskell identified an underwater bridge for attack. The target was located on Route 1501 that ran through a small valley approximately 1 mile east of Route 15 and 7 miles due north of the Mu Gia Pass. Capt. Dickey was directed to hold to the south while the strike was being conducted. Two US Navy A-4 Skyhawks were assigned to this mission. The lead pilot was directed to the chosen target, and he acknowledged that he had the underwater bridge in sight. Capt. Heiskell turned west to fly over the west edge of the valley in which the target was located. Capt. Dickey also turned his aircraft toward the west and momentarily lost sight of Lucius Heiskell.

As both Birddogs pressed through their turns, Capt. Heiskell reported receiving ground fire. Capt. Dickey also began taking ground fire and both pilots immediately took evasive action. Shortly thereafter, Lucius Heiskell reported, "I'm hit." Gerald Dickey turned his aircraft to the left and saw Lead's aircraft in a descending left turn. The Birddog's horizontal stabilizer had been badly damaged by flak from an enemy anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) battery hidden in the jungle below. Capt. Heiskell reported that he "could not control the aircraft and would have to bail out."

Capt. Dickey watched Lead's aircraft as it crossed over the center of the valley heading east. Lucius Heiskell was able to partially roll out of his turn. As he reached a point near the center of the valley, his aircraft started trailing a thin line of white smoke. Capt. Dickey continued to watch from a distance of roughly 1 mile as the Birddog reached an altitude of terrain plus 1,000 feet when he saw a parachute deploy and descend into a forested area 4 to 5 kilometers east of the valley. Gerald Dickey immediately contacted the airborne battlefield command and control center (ABCCC) with a situation report. In turn, the ABCCC initiated a search and rescue (SAR) operation for the downed pilot.

Firefly 13 and 14, a flight of F-4s, arrived on scene to assist in the SAR mission to rescue Lucius Heiskell. Capt. Dickey gave them the direction and the column of smoke believed to be from the crashed aircraft. After some minutes, Capt. Dickey saw a burst of AAA fire over Capt. Heiskell's location and turned to avoid the ground fire.

During and after this time Capt. Heiskell came up on his survival radio with beeper and several voice transmissions. He said, "the people on the ground were after him and he was hiding his parachute." Capt. Dickey continued to monitor his flight leader's transmissions for 4 to 5 minutes, after which time he could not be raised on the radio. Rescue helicopters arrived onsite, but were also unable to make radio contact with him or gain any signal from him.

Major Patrick H. Wood, pilot; Capt. Richard A. Kibbey, co-pilot; SSgt. Donald J. Hall, flight mechanic; and A2C Dwayne Hackney, pararescueman (PJ); comprised the crew of the lead HH-3E rescue helicopter (tail #65-12779), call sign "Jolly Green 05." The call sign of the number two helicopter in the flight was "Jolly Green 36."

When contact was finally reestablished with Lucius Heiskell, Jolly Green 05 descended through holes in the undercast of clouds, which were lying on top of some mountain peaks. Capt. Heiskell assisted Major Wood in locating his position with voice vectors. At 1634 hours, the SAR helicopter successfully recovered the downed Birddog pilot in the helicopter's minimum time. Major Wood notified Sandy Lead that he had the pilot onboard and was leaving the area to the south while looking for a hole in the clouds to ascend through.

At 1635 hours, JG 05 transmitted he had been hit and was on fire. The Sandy pilots immediately saw extremely heavy and accurate 37mm AAA fire directed toward Jolly Green 05 as they raced through the clouds. Fire was observed in the top part of the helicopter just below the rotor blades. Lead continued to the south with flames streaming behind, and continued forward for approximately 1 mile after being hit. Just before crashing into a karst peak, Major Wood transmitted that the whole aircraft was on fire. Other pilots and aircrews watched in horror as Jolly Green 05 flew directly and perpendicularly into the karst outcropping at a high rate of speed while on fire scattering flaming wreckage everywhere. The crash site

was located less than ½ mile east of Route 15, 3 miles northeast of the North Vietnamese/Lao border, 6 miles due north of the Mu Gia Pass and 59 miles northwest of Dong Hoi, North Vietnam.

All during this time the weather conditions worsened, and due to the weather, the SAR operation for the down helicopter's crew and passenger was cancelled. Sandy Lead requested that Jolly Green 36 make a pass between the cloud layers to look for survivors in and around the new crash site before departing the area. After completing the first aerial inspection and seeing nothing, Sandy Lead requested that he satisfy himself that there were no survivors and made a second pass to do so. Jolly Green 36 conducted a 10-minute low-level search of the crash site and surrounding area. The SAR aircrew observed and identified two deployed parachutes on the ground, 1 was located 30 yards from the wreckage and the other 60 yards away from it.

As Jolly Green 36 was inspecting the debris field, Firefly flight heard an emergency beeper signal emanating from the area of loss. At 1640 hours, A2C Dwayne Hackney, the Lead helicopter's PJ, ignited a smoke flare to identify his position and was recovered by SAR personnel near the parachute farthest away from the crash site. No other survivors were seen near the other parachute or the wreckage. A2C Hackney reported that only he and Capt. Heiskell were wearing parachutes at the time his aircraft was struck by AAA fire and that he had been blown out of the helicopter by the force of the crash. At the time all formal SAR efforts were terminated Lucius Heiskell, Patrick Wood, Richard Kibbey and Donald Hall were listed Missing in Action. Further, due to the intense enemy activity in the area, no other SAR effort was conducted.

If Major Wood, Capt. Kibbey, SSgt. Hall and Capt. Heiskell died in this sequence of loss incidents, each man has the right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. However, if they survived, they most certainly would have been captured and their fate, like that of other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, could be quite different. Either way, the communists have the answers and could return them or their remains any time they had the desire to do so.

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 America Prisoners of War remaining captive throughout Southeast Asia TODAY.

Pilots and aircrews 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.