

# HEROLD, RICHARD WALTER

Name: Richard Walter Herold  
Rank/Branch: Captain/US Air Force  
Unit: 56th Special Operations Wing  
Udorn Airbase, Thailand  
Date of Birth: 03 December 1944  
Home of Record: Plattsburgh, NY  
Date of Loss: 02 September 1972  
Country of Loss: Laos  
Loss Coordinates: [192500N 1030600E \(UG005488\)](#)  
[Click coordinates to view\(4\) maps](#)  
Status in 1973: Missing in Action  
Category: 2  
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O1F "Bird Dog"](#)  
Other Personnel In Incident: William C. Wood and Robert R. Greenwood (missing)



## REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The low, slow and vulnerable Cessna O1F Bird Dog 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 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, which added a limited degree of armament to this daring little aircraft. The Bird Dog 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 Bird Dog's upper wing was painted white or orange to emphasize the slow-moving FAC's position to friendly strike aircraft.

On 2 September 1972, Capt. Richard W. Herold, pilot; and a Royal Lao forward observer comprised the crew of an O1F aircraft (serial #2799); call sign "Raven 23," that departed Vientiane, Laos to conduct a Forward Air Control (FAC) mission for a flight of aircraft striking communist anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) positions located in the Plaine Des Jarres (PDJ), Xiangkhouang Province, Laos. The Bird Dog's call sign was "Raven 23." Capt. William C. Wood, pilot; and then Major Robert R. Greenwood, weapons systems officer, comprised the crew of the #2 F4E (serial #64-0335) in a flight of two, call sign "Tufa 2," that was conducting the strike mission. At approximately 0900 hours, Tufa flight departed Takhli Airbase, Thailand to rendezvous with the FAC.

On approaching the Plaine Des Jarres, Tufa Lead established radio contact with Raven 23. After providing the Phantom aircrews with current mission information, Capt. Herold cleared the fighters onto their targets. The AAA sites had been interfering with American aircraft over flying the region on their way to and from other missions.

Tufa 1 and 2 made two attack passes on the communist AAA emplacements. Capt. Wood and Major Greenwood were rolling out of their third pass when Lead observed the trailing aircraft burst into flames after being struck by hostile ground fire. Further, it appeared the crippled fighter possibly collided with the Raven 23. The Phantom remained intact, but stayed on a ground-impacting course. Two ejection seats; one, and possibly a second, parachute were also seen to leave Tufa 2 by Tufa Lead.

One fully deployed parachute and a second object were observed falling at the same rate of speed, but were not followed all the way to the ground. Other debris was seen in the air and possibly two ejection seats associated with the F4 crew were also sighted. After the incident, no radio contact could be established with Capt. Herold. After a brief search, his aircraft's wreckage was located on the ground just west of a grove of trees. While Tufa 1 did not see any sign of survivors, the aircrew did see two parachutes roughly a mile apart and in fairly close proximity to the Bird Dog. It was later confirmed that Raven 23 had in fact crashed.

The wreckage debris fields were located roughly 1 mile apart with the Bird Dog's located 3 miles southwest of Xieng Khouang Airfield and the Phantom's 4 miles southwest of the same airfield. Both Locations were approximately 69 miles southeast of Louangphrabong and 100 miles north-northeast of Vientiane, Laos. The Plaine Des Jars was generally open and flat with forests and rice fields scattered among the small hamlets and villages that dotted the region. The entire PDJ was laced with streams, roads and trails of all sizes that connected the various villages and fields together. Several single runway airfields and small airstrips were also located in the PDJ. Because of its strategic location and historical importance, the Plaine Des Jarres was highly prized and hotly contested.

After notifying the airborne battlefield command and control center (ABCCC) of the situation and requesting a search and rescue (SAR) operation, Tufa 1 initiated a visual search for both downed aircrews. Tufa Lead observed several additional parachutes on the ground near both crash sites, but it could not be determined if they were personal or flare parachutes. Further, communist Pathet Lao troops were visibly active in the area. As Tufa 1 prosecuted its mission, they were aware of the fact that the communists had already moved the tail section of the Bird Dog from its original position.

During the visual search throughout the region, no emergency radio beepers were heard and no sign of survivors was seen. Due to the extensive enemy presence, no ground search was possible. At the time the search effort was terminated, Richard Herold, William Wood, Robert Greenwood and the Royal Lao observer were reported as Missing in Action.

On 26 September 1972, the Pathet Lao's news service reported that an F4 had been shot down on 1 September over the Plaine Des Jarres and it was believed by US intelligence analysts that this referred to the loss of Capt. Wood's and Major Greenwood's aircraft. According to the US Air Force, on 4 January 1973 "evidence of the death" of Richard Herold was received by our government. However, specifically what that evidence was has not been made public.

After Operation Homecoming in 1973, all the returning Prisoners of War were debriefed by US military intelligence personnel regarding their loss incidents, capture, experiences in captivity, etc. Of intense interest to American officials was the fate of all Americans who remained POW/MIAs. One of the returned POWs, Major Richard M. Brunhaver, reported hearing Robert Greenwood's name through the tap system while in captivity in the Zoo.

In 1987, US investigators traveled to the Plaine Des Jarres to investigate the loss of Raven 23 and Tufa 2. The team located wreckage at the two crash sites including a propeller possibly associated with Capt. Herold's O1F aircraft and other wreckage that appeared to correlate to an F4.

In 1992, a National Security Agency (NSA) correlation study of all communist radio intercepts pertaining to missing Americans, which was presented to the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs in a classified format, was finally declassified and made public. According to this document, a total of 4 North Vietnamese radio messages were intercepted and correlated to these two incidents - one of Capt Herold and 3 of Capt. Wood and Major Greenwood.

For Richard Herold, the NSA synopsis states: "Unidentified aircraft reported shot down by probable AAA fire east of Dong Ong Do"

For Robert Greenwood and William Wood, the NSA synopsis states: "Lost on a run-in to target. Possible mid-air collision with the FAC (Raven 23). 2nd Platoon, 1st Company, 14th AAA Battalion, 316th Division; claims possible shutdown of an F4. Shot down by MiG-19's. No reflection of crew status."

Robert Greenwood, William Wood and Richard Herold are among the nearly 600 Americans who disappeared in Laos. Many of these men were known to be alive on the ground. The Laotians admitted holding "tens of tens" of American Prisoners of War, but these men were never negotiated for either by direct negotiation between our countries or through the Paris Peace Accords that ended the War in Vietnam since Laos was not a party to that agreement.

If Richard Herold, William Wood and Robert Greenwood died as a result of their loss of the respective aircraft, 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.

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 and Laos were called upon to fly 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.