

HOLMES, DAVID HUGH

Name: David Hugh Holmes
Rank/Branch: Lieutenant Colonel/US Air Force
Unit: 22nd Tactical Air Support Squadron
DaNang Airbase, South Vietnam
Date of Birth: 26 March 1938
Home of Record: Belmont, MA
Date of Loss: 15 March 1966
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: [164548N 1060821E \(XD214536\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Missing in Action
Category: 2
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O1E "Bird Dog"](#)
Other Personnel in Incident: (none 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 O1E was feared by the Communists 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 15 March 1966, then Capt. David H. Holmes was the pilot of an O1E "Bird Dog," call sign "Hound Dog 54," on a Forward Air Control (FAC) mission on the east side of the of the Se Nam Kok River Valley approximately 11 miles northwest of Tchepone, Savannakhet Province. Laos, in the operational area code named "ECHO." At 1435 hours, Capt. Holmes was flying over a large concentration of NVA troops who were maintaining a truck park along the Ho Chi Minh Trail when his aircraft was struck by ground fire from at least one of the 6 gun emplacements - 3 anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) and 3 automatic weapons - which were located in the same area. His Bird Dog crashed into the foliage on the east side of the Se Nam Kok River Valley about 300 meters from the village of Ban Keng Khan Kao.

A second FAC, call sign "Hound Dog 50," who was operating in the same general area was dispatched to investigate the crash site. He observed Capt. Holmes sitting in the cockpit of his aircraft, apparently unconscious. Hound Dog 50 also observed an OV1A Mohawk flown by Major Glenn McElroy and Capt. Mike Nash enter a line of anti-aircraft fire from the NVA gun emplacements, crash and burn on the west side of the same valley.

A flight of F-4 Phantoms, call sign "Oxwood 95," and A1E Skyraiders were called into the battle area because of the enemy troops and gun emplacements. They continuously bomb and strafed the area for 4 to 5 hours that afternoon. Because of the constant hostile threat in the area, no ground inspection of either crash site was possible. While the fighters kept enemy troops occupied, numerous photo runs and search and rescue (SAR) missions were flown over the wreckage searching for any sign of the downed crew.

On 16 March, a search team was inserted into the Se Nam Kok River Valley. While inspecting the crash site of Capt. Holmes' Bird Dog, they found the cockpit empty. Their report stated David Holmes was either removed from the aircraft or left it under his own power.

Over the next six days emergency radio signals were heard on four separate occasions. Even though all three missing Americans carried emergency radios, it was believed the signals were initiated by enemy troops trying to sucker in rescue forces because voice contact could not be established. David H. Holmes was immediately listed Missing in Action.

Capt. Holmes is 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 negotiations between our countries or through the Paris Peace Accords which ended the Vietnam War since the Laotians were not a party to that agreement.

Since the end of the Vietnam War well over 20,000 reports of American prisoners, missing¹ 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 and aircrews 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.