

HULL, JAMES LARRY

Name: James Larry Hull
Rank/Branch: 1st Lieutenant/US Air Force
Unit: 20th Tactical Air Support Squadron
DaNang Airbase, South Vietnam
Date of Birth: 28 December 1945
Home of Record: Lubbock, TX
Date of Loss: 19 February 1971
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: [160559N 1071807E \(YC462812\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Killed/Body Not Recovered
Category: 4
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O2A "Skymaster"](#)
Other Personnel In Incident: William Fernandez (remains recovered)

NO
Picture
Available

REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The Cessna O2 Skymaster was the military version of the civilian Model 335 Skymaster. The twin-engine, twin-tailboom O2 had greater endurance and a little more speed than the more familiar O1 Bird Dog, but still remained essentially unarmed carrying only smoke rockets. Like its predecessor, the low flying, slow moving Skymaster was used primarily as a Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft to mark targets for both attack aircraft and ground troops.

MACV-SOG, or Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group, was a joint service high command unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces channeled personnel into MACV-SOG (though it was not a Special Forces group) through Special Operations Augmentation (SOA), which provided their "cover" while under secret orders to MACV-SOG. These teams performed deep penetration missions of strategic reconnaissance and interdiction that were called, depending on the time frame, "Shining Brass" or "Prairie Fire" missions.

On 8 February 1971, South Vietnamese President Thieu announced Lam Son 719, a large-scale offensive against enemy communications and supply lines in that part of Laos adjacent to the two northern provinces of South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The mission was to interdict the flow of supplies from North Vietnam. The South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) would provide and command ground forces, while US forces would provide airlift and supporting fire. Phase I, renamed Operation Dewey Canyon II, involved an armored attack by the US from Vandegrift Base Camp toward Khe Sanh, while the ARVN moved into position for the attack across the Laotian border. Phase II began with an ARVN helicopter assault and armored brigade thrust along Route 9 into Laos. ARVN ground troops were transported by American helicopters, as the US Air Force provided cover strikes around the landing zones.

On 18 February 1971, one of six reconnaissance teams, call sign "RT Intruder," was inserted into the extreme southwestern portion of the infamous A Shau Valley in conjunction with Lam Son 719. A short time later the team was being extracted by STABO rigs dropped through the double canopy jungle by the helicopter crew when the aircraft was struck by anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) fire and crashed at the base of a sheer cliff.

On 19 February, a search and recovery (SAR) ground team, call sign "RT Habu," was inserted into the crash site to recover the remains of the 4-man UH1H helicopter crew and the 2 MACV-SOG reconnaissance team members the helicopter crew picked up just before being shot down. The Huey's aircrew were CWO2 George P. Berg, aircraft commander; WO Gerald E. Woods, pilot; SPC Walter Demsey, crewchief; and SPC Gary L. Johnson door gunner. Their call sign was "Commancheros." The RT Intruder team members were Capt. Ronald Watson, team leader; and Sgt. Allen Lloyd, assistant team leader.

The Huey's wreckage lay at the bottom of a sheer cliff making the recovery operation both tricky and dangerous. The crash site was located in the rugged jungle covered mountains bordering the extreme southwest edge of the A Shau Valley approximately 1 mile northeast of the South Vietnamese/Lao border, 10 miles south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ), 29 miles west-southwest of Hue/Phu Bai Airfield and 57 miles west of DaNang, Thua Thien Province, South Vietnam.

The bodies of all 6 men were gathered together, put in body bags and placed on top of the Huey's wreckage in preparation for pick up. As this recovery operation was underway, the NVA took steps to destroy all US assets involved in it.

The FAC coordinating this rescue mission was 1st Lt. James L. Hull, US Air Force pilot; and SFC William Fernandez, MACV-SOG observer, call sign "Covey." They were flying in an O2A Skymaster. As 1st Lt. Hull flew low over the area of loss, NVA gunners successfully shot the aircraft down. The unarmed observation aircraft crashed into the rugged jungle right on the South Vietnamese/Lao border, approximately 4 miles west of the A Shau Valley and 6 miles northwest of the Huey's crash site. It was also located approximately 12 miles south-southeast of Luoi, Laos; and 30 miles southwest of Hue, South Vietnam.

Originally listed as being shot down in South Vietnam, the country of loss was later changed to Laos. This correction was made when the loss data and the Skymaster's crash site location in relation to the ill-defined border area were reexamined.

The downing of the Skymaster further complicated everything with the recovery at the base of the cliff. It also delayed plans for retrieving the body bags containing the bodies of the men killed in the Huey loss. Another recon team was inserted into the Skymaster's crash site shortly after its loss. The SAR team found both crewmen dead in the wreckage. They successfully extracted the body of SFC Fernandez, but were unable to recover 1st Lt. Hull's remains. His body was buried underneath the mangled aircraft wreckage. At the time the SAR operation was terminated James Hull was immediately listed Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

The original SAR mission personnel were unable to remove the remains before dark and were forced to stay at the Huey's crash site overnight. During the night a reinforced NVA company pinned the SAR members against a sheer drop and likely would have overrun them at dawn except the team, with half its men wounded, escaped by jumping off the cliff, then made their way to a designated area for their own emergency extraction.

For months the NVA left the body bags containing the remains of Allen Lloyd, Ronald Watson, George Berg, Gerald Woods, Walter Demsey and Gary Johnson out in the open and in plain sight hoping a MACV-SOG ground team or helicopter crew might attempt to recover their friends and countrymen. In the end, no such attempt was made. It was also believed the communists set a trap at the site of the Skymaster wreckage.

In 1977, US recovery personnel from the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC) first attempted to locate and recover 1st Lt. Hull's aircraft and remains. Since then at least three other search teams under the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting (JTFFA) have searched for the Skymaster's wreckage through 1997. To date none of these operations have been successful in finding it.

While there is no doubt that James Hull died when his aircraft was shot down, he has a right to be returned to his family, friends and country. For other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, their fate 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 America Prisoners of War remaining captive throughout Southeast Asia TODAY.

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.