

McDONALD, KURT CASEY

Name: Kurt Casey McDonald
Rank/Branch: Colonel/US Air Force
Unit: 336th Tactical Fighter Squadron
Ubon Airfield, Thailand
Date of Birth: 19 August 1934 (Salt Lake City, UT)
Home of Record: Bellevue, WA
Date of Loss: 31 December 1964
Country of Loss: South Vietnam
Loss Coordinates: [160631N 1075320E \(ZC090830\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Missing In Action
Category: 4
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O1F "Bird Dog"](#)
Other Personnel in Incident: Edward R. Dodge (missing)



Kurt McDonald - Japan 1962

REMARKS: LAST SEEN TURNING AC IN VALLEY

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 31 December 1964, then Capt. Kurt C. McDonald, pilot, and SFC Edward R. Dodge, observer, comprised the crew of an O1F Bird Dog on an administrative flight with a secondary mission of visual reconnaissance. Their flight plan called for a "round robin flight" wherein they departed DaNang Airfield flew to the A Shau Special Forces Camp where SFC Dodge was to deliver "SOI" documents and a new field radio to Detachment A-102 at the Special Forces Camp as part of his duties as his detachment's assigned courier. From there they were to fly to Tako, then on to Aro, and back to DaNang. All locations were within Quang Nam Province, South Vietnam.

The Bird Dog departed DaNang at 0815 hours in marginal weather conditions and began the first leg of its flight plan to the A Shau Special Forces Camp. This camp was a triangular shaped compound located in triple canopy jungle, and surrounded by elephant grass twice as high as a man. The pilot of another O1F aircraft, flown by Chief Warrant Officer 1 George Bundus, saw the Bird Dog flown by Capt. McDonald near Hill 3350, just south of the Bac River in the Nam Dong Valley northwest of DaNang. It made a 180-degree turn and began flying toward DaNang. CWO1 Bundus lost sight of the aircraft when it entered a bank of clouds that completely obscured the ridge to the north and extended down to just above the triple canopy jungle.

When it was determined that the Bird Dog was overdue in returning to DaNang, search and rescue (SAR) operations were initiated and concentrated along the route of flight. A total of 669 hours were expended during search operations that lasted from 31 December to 6 January. The terrain in this area consisted of rugged mountains with a heavy jungle canopy that extended an average of 200 feet above the ground.

Later analysis of the loss incident led to the conclusion that because of the weather conditions, their secondary mission, the location of loss and the altitude the O1F was flying at, it was quite probable they were downed by enemy ground fire. Further, under the circumstances of loss and the type of aircraft involved, the survival of the crew was highly likely. Both Kurt McDonald and Edward Dodge were immediately listed Missing in Action.

In a 1995 US government letter to the family, they were told: The crash site was found on a steep hill with a stream at the bottom. Locals said 2 bodies were found after the crash and the bodies were not buried. An investigation of the site yielded no remains, no personal effects and no burial - only some pieces of unidentifiable wreckage.

While no returned POWs saw Edward Dodge or Kurt McDonald in captivity, one source selected the photographs of both men as being among those held captive by the Communists. This information counters the Vietnamese' sketchy account of remains being seen after the crash to which they could provide no information of substance to support that claim.

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.

American servicemen in Vietnam were called upon to operate in many dangerous circumstances both on and off duty, and they were prepared to be wounded, killed or captured. It probably ever occurred to them that they could be abandoned by the country they so proudly served