

# REX, ROBERT 'F' "BOB"

Name: Robert 'F' "Bob" Rex  
Rank/Branch: Captain/US Air Force  
Unit: 23rd Tactical Air Support Sq. Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand  
Date of Birth: 28 November 1941  
Home of Record: Odebolt, IA  
Date of Loss: 09 March 1969  
Country of Loss: Laos  
Loss Coordinates: [165219N 1062548E \(XD524658\)](#)  
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)  
Staus in 1973: Killed/Body Not Recovered  
Category: 2  
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [O2A "Skymaster"](#)  
Other Personnel in Incident: Tim L. Walters (missing)



## 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.

On 9 March 1969 Capt. Robert F Bob Rex, pilot and Army Special Forces SSgt. Tim L. Walters, observer, comprised the crew of an O2A aircraft (serial #67-21425) that departed Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand on a FAC combat support mission over Savannakhet Province, Laos for SSgt. Walters special operations unit, MACV-SOG.

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.

The area of Southern Laos they were operating in was well known as a communist stronghold with well-entrenched enemy installations guarding the infamous Ho Chi Minh Trail. 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.

At approximately 1150 hours the Skymaster crashed into the rugged jungle-covered mountains for unknown reasons approximately 1 mile south of an east/west running primary road, 2 miles west of a power line, and 3 miles north of a secondary road that ran from the southwest to northeast intersecting the primary road to the east of the crash site. Knife 55, another aircraft operating in the same area, reported the Skymaster's loss to the air control center along with the crash site location as being roughly 3 miles west of the Lao/Vietnamese border, 30 kilometers northeast of Xepon and 2 kilometers northeast of Ban Biang, Laos.

A ground search team visited the crash site a short time later and reported both crewmen died in the crash. Further, they reported the aircraft's engine was on top of SSgt. Walters trapping him in the wreckage and that special equipment would be needed to extract him. The ground team recovered the aircrew's weapons, map case and camera from the Skymaster before hostile ground fire forced the search team to depart the area without recovering Capt. Rex's remains. Because of the constant enemy presence in and around the crash site, no further attempt to recover the aircrew was possible. Both Bob Rex and Tim Walters were immediately listed Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

In March 1999, a joint US/Lao team from Joint Task Force for Full Accounting (JTFFA) excavated the Skymaster's crash site. During the excavation, wreckage, personal effects and fragmented bones and teeth were recovered. All remains were eventually sent to the Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii (CIL-HI) for anthropological analysis. Those partial remains were identified through dental records as belonging to Tim Walters on 30 November 1999. None of the bone fragments or teeth were identified for Bob Rex.

On 11 December 1999, Tim L. Walters was laid to rest in the Silverbrook Cemetery, Niles, Michigan next to the monument of his uncle, Harry Leroy Walters, an Army Air Corps pilot killed in World War II whose remains were never returned.

Bob Rex and Tim Walters are among 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 which ended the War in Vietnam since Laos was not a party to that agreement.

While the fate of SSgt. Walters is finally resolved and his family, friends and country has the piece of mind of knowing where he now lies; for Capt. Rex, whose fate is not in doubt, but whose remains have not been turned over to the United States, questions still exist. For other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, their fate could be quite different than that of the Skymaster's crews. 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 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.

Bob Rex graduated from the Air Force Academy in 1964.