

SANDERS, WILLIAM STEPHEN "BILL"

Name: William Stephen "Bill" Sanders
Rank/Branch: Captain/US Air Force
Unit: 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron
Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand
Date of Birth: 09 April 1943
Home of Record: Winthrop, ME
Date of Loss: 30 June 1970
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: [164858N 1063138E \(XD616601\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Killed/Body Not Recovered
Category: 2
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [OV10A "Bronco"](#)
Other Personnel In Incident: Albert H. Mosiello (rescued)



REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The North American (Rockwell) OV-10 Bronco was designed as the Counter Insurgency (COIN) aircraft of the mid-1960s, at a time when jets were not planned for brushfire wars such as Vietnam. With the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, the US no longer voluntarily withheld its jets, and the OV-10 went into combat as the most powerful of the light Forward Air Control (FAC) aircraft. The Bronco was often as capable of destroying a target as it was of marking it.

MACV-SOG, or Military Assistance Command Vietnam Studies and Observation Group, was a joint service command unconventional warfare task force engaged in highly classified operations throughout Southeast Asia. The 5th Special Forces, Airborne, 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," "Prairie Fire," "Salem House" or "Daniel Boone" missions.

The area of eastern Laos being scouted included rugged jungle covered mountains that were laced with various sized arteries of 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 to an untrained eye 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.

The 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron (TASS) provided air support for MACV-SOG's Mobile Launch Team 3 (MLT 3), code name "Heavy Hook." Both the 23rd TASS and MLT personnel were stationed at Nakhon Phanom Airbase, Thailand. The commander of MLT 3 at the time of this mission was then Major Bill Shelton.

On 30 June 1970, Capt. William S. "Bill" Sanders, pilot; and SFC Albert E. "Al" Mosiello, airborne observer/controller; comprised the crew of an OV10A (aircraft #3807), call sign "Nail 44," that was

conducting a visual reconnaissance mission in support of MACV-SOG, Command and Control North (CCN). The aircrew was flying at a lower than normal altitude searching for possible landing zones (LZs) for an upcoming Prairie Fire mission.

Because of the special and unique requirements, the 7th Air Force had granted Prairie Fire FACs special clearance to fly below the standard minimum flight altitude of 1,500 feet established for all aircraft operating in this region. The clearance was granted because of the frequent need to take hand-held 35mm photographs of checkpoints, LZs and other areas of interest.

As the Bronco pulled up through 1,500 feet above ground level, the NVA opened fire with anti-aircraft artillery (AAA). A 37mm AAA shell struck the Bronco in its left side adjacent to the pilot's position. Not seeing any response from Capt. Sanders, SFC Mosiello tried to gain control of the aircraft as it nosed over, but the stick only shuddered in his hand. When Al Mosiello realized the Bronco was no longer airworthy, he ejected from the crippled aircraft. Once his parachute deployed, he was under canopy for only 4 to 10 seconds before reaching the ground. In his debriefing statement, SFC Mosiello reported he believed the AAA fire that damaged the Bronco killed Capt. Sanders. Further, he did not see the pilot eject or another parachute deploy.

The crash site was located in rugged mountains that were heavily forested with dense undergrowth approximately 500 meters southeast of the village of Ban Klou, 3 miles west of the Lao/South Vietnamese border and 12 miles south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separated North and South Vietnam. It was also 23 miles northwest of Khe Sanh, South Vietnam, 27 miles due east of Binh Tram 34 - a way station located along Highway 19 and 21 miles northeast of the major NVA controlled city of Tchepone, Savannakhet Province, Laos.

A second Prairie Fire FAC who was also operating in the vicinity heard SFC Mosiello's emergency beeper. The FAC pilot made radio contact with the downed observer, then notified the airborne command and control aircraft (ABCCC), call sign "Hillsboro," of the situation. At the same time, the 56th Special Operations Wing (SOW) headquarters was also informed of the Bronco's loss and a HH53C search and rescue (SAR) helicopter from the 40th Air Rescue/Recovery Squadron (ARRS), Udorn Airfield, Thailand was immediately dispatched to the area of loss.

Capt. Leroy C. Schaneberg, pilot; Major John W. Goeglein, co-pilot; SSgt. Marvin E. Bell, flight engineer; SSgt. Michael F. Dean, pararescueman; and MSgt. Paul L. Jenkins, pararescueman; comprised the crew of the rescue helicopter (aircraft #8283), call sign "Jolly Green." As the aircraft hovered at an altitude of approximately 150 feet above SFC Mosiello's position, an NVA soldier fired a Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG) into the rotor head of the helicopter. As the rotor assembly separated from the fuselage, it rolled over and crashed in a fireball on the ground. No emergency beepers were heard emanating from the helicopter's crash site. The rescue aircraft's wreckage was located roughly 1 mile north of the Bronco's crash site, and Al Mosiello was located on the ground between the two crash sites.

Lt. Col. Bill Shelton relayed a message through the onsite FAC to SFC Mosiello that he should prepare to escape and evade toward South Vietnam. At the same time he was considering calling a halt the rescue operation due to the late hour and approaching darkness, Col. Sam Crosby, the 56th SOW commander, called on the telephone. He reported that the 37th ARRS stationed at DaNang was prepared to launch a H3 rescue helicopter for another recovery attempt and asked if he wanted a flight of A1E aircraft to be armed with tear gas for fire suppression. Major Shelton said yes, and the mission was launched.

Major James Z. Elkinton, pilot; Capt. Dale R. Clark, co-pilot; SSgt. John C. Alcorn, flight engineer; and SSgt. Jules C. Smith, pararescueman; comprised the crew of the H3. Once all aircraft arrived in the area of loss, the A1E's laid down a protective screen of tear gas between the downed observer and the NVA. The H3 helicopter hovered over Al Mosiello and dropped a penetrater with SSgt. Smith on it through the dense jungle. The PJ secured SFC Mosiello and himself to the penetrater and the two men were lifted out of the jungle, then flown back to DaNang.

The next day Capt. Fred Parrott, another pilot assigned to the 23rd TASS, and Major Shelton returned to the loss area to conduct an electronic and visual search for the other missing men. During this search, no beepers were heard and no signs of survivors were detected in or around the wreckage of either aircraft. At the time the aerial search operation was terminated, Bill Sanders, Leroy Schaneberg, John Goeglein, Marvin Bell, Michael Dean and Paul Jenkins are listed Killed in Action/Body Not Recovered.

Bill Sanders, Leroy Schaneberg, John Goeglein, Marvin Bell, Michael Dean and Paul Jenkins were among nearly 600 Americans who disappeared in Laos. Many of these men were known to be alive on the ground. The Lao 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 the Paris Peace Accords since Laos was not a party to that agreement.

In 1992, a National Security Agency (NSA) correlation study of all communist radio intercepts pertaining to missing Americans 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, 6 North Vietnamese radio messages were intercepted and correlated to this incident and 9 messages correlated to the loss of the rescue helicopter. The NSA synopsis states: "Seven American prisoners held at Liaison Station 19 . . . and later Liaison Station 36 . . . During the timeframe and near the location of which correlates to the time and location of this aircraft loss. 35th AAA Battalion . . . Shootdown of one OV-10 and one UH-1A. No reflections of aircrew status."

In December 1992, a team from the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting traveled to the crash site of the HH53C. The site was first surveyed, then excavated. In addition to aircraft wreckage and crew-related items, the team recovered possible human remains. On 24 March 1993, in excess of 120 bone fragments, a dental prosthesis and part of an ID tag were turned over to US control and transported to the Central Identification Laboratory, Hawaii (CIL-HI) for examination. The dental prosthesis was identified as belonging to Paul Jenkins through comparison with his dental records. The laboratory was able to determine partial the dogtag belonged to Michael Dean based on the available data. None of the small bone fragments could be individually identified due to their size and poor condition. They were identified as "the recoverable remains of an incident involving the five individuals manifested on the aircraft." On 24 March 1995, the identification of remains of Leroy Schaneberg, John Goeglein, Marvin Bell, Michael Dean and Paul Jenkins was announced. At the time the recovery work was being conducted for the crew of the rescue helicopter, attempts to locate the wreckage of the OV10A were also made. However, due to the terrain and dense jungle, no crash site was found for Bill Sander's Bronco.

The families of Leroy Schaneberg, John Goeglein, Marvin Bell, Michael Dean and Paul Jenkins have the peace of mind of knowing where their loved ones lie. While the fate of Bill Sanders is not in doubt, like the crew of the rescue helicopter, he has the right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. For other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, their fates could be quite different.

Since the end of the Vietnam War, 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.

Aircrews in Vietnam and Laos were called upon to fly in many dangerous circumstances, and were prepared to be wounded, killed or captured. It probably never occurred to them that they could be abandoned by the country they served.