

THOMAS, DANIEL WAYNE

Name: Daniel Wayne Thomas
Rank/Branch: Captain/US Air Force
Unit: 23rd Tactical Aerial Surveillance Squadron
Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand
Date of Birth: 04 September 1946
Home of Record: Danbury, IA
Date of Loss: 06 July 1971
Country of Loss: Laos
Loss Coordinates: [144700N 1071700E \(YB460352\)](#)
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)
Status in 1973: Missing in Action
Category: 4
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [OV10A "Bronco"](#)
Other Personnel In Incident: Donald G. Carr (missing)



REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: The Bronco was among the most feared aircraft in the US air arsenal by the Viet Cong, NVA and Pathet Lao because they knew when the Bronco appeared overhead, an air strike would most certainly follow. The two-man crew had armor protection and could use machine guns and bombs to attack enemy positions, as well as rockets to mark targets for air attacks. Although the glassed-in cabin could become uncomfortably warm, it provided splendid visibility. This versatility enabled the plane to fly armed reconnaissance missions, in addition to serving as a vehicle for forward air control (FAC) missions.

On 6 July 1971, US Air Force then 1st Lt. Daniel W. Thomas, pilot; and US Army Special Forces Capt. Donald G. "Butch" Carr, observer; comprised the crew of an Air Force OV10A Bronco (tail #67-14634), call sign "Nail 48." Capt. Carr was the Deputy Commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam/Studies and Observation Group (MACV-SOG) element at Nakhon Phanom, Thailand. 1st Lt. Thomas and Capt. Carr were conducting an afternoon Forward Air Control (FAC)/visual reconnaissance mission over the southern Steel Tiger region of Laos, which included that portion of Laos that bordered both South Vietnam and Cambodia.

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. In 1971, MACV-SOG's Command and Control North, Central and South were re-designated as Task Force Advisory Elements 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Nail 48 departed Nakhon Phanom Airfield, Thailand and proceeded to their area of operation, which encompassed a 10-mile radius of the panhandle of Laos and contained major 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 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.

1st Lt. Thomas and Capt. Carr were to orbit at an altitude of 9,000 to 10,000 feet in order to monitor selected enemy radio frequencies. There was no reason for them to descend below that altitude because of the type of mission and the fact the terrain made it extremely dangerous to do so. The mountains varied in height from 400 to 6,300 feet and were covered by triple-canopy jungle with many streams running through them.

20 miles from the target area, Nail 48 passed Nail 49, the FAC who was just completing his mission. After arriving back at base, the pilot of Nail 49 spent some time in the base command center monitoring all activities in Steel Tiger. His first indication that something was wrong was when Hillsboro, the airborne command and control center, contacted the Army Support Facility to see if Nail 48 had checked in with them.

At 1530 hours, the last radio transmission from 1st Lt. Thomas was received when he radioed the appropriate Army Support Facility that they were in the target area, and were experiencing unfavorable weather conditions. There was almost a solid undercast of clouds with only some open areas where the aircrew could see the jungle covered mountains below. Further, heavy rain restricted visibility under the clouds to about one-half mile. During that radio contact, there was no indication Nail 48 was experiencing any difficulty.

Team Hoang Loi, a Vietnamese led cross-border ground reconnaissance team from MACV-SOG's base at Kontum, South Vietnam was operating in this same region. The team had been inserted into the J-9 target area and in the vicinity of the enemy's Base Area 613. The team was safely extracted by helicopter at 1630 hours. Upon their return to Kontum, the team members reported hearing a loud explosion or impact northeast of their location at 1600 hours. This was also 30 minutes after the last radio contact with Daniel Thomas and Butch Carr. The ground team was unable to estimate the distance from them because the thick jungle distorted the sound.

pBy 1638 hours, Hillsboro reported they had had no contact with Nail 48 for approximately an hour. 1st Lt. Thomas and Capt. Carr were scheduled to depart the target area at 1700 hours, and at that time, they also were to check in with the Army Support Facility. Because the airborne command and control aircraft had the primary responsibility for all aircraft in its operational area, the Army Support Facility passed to Hillsboro the operational UHF, VHF and FM radio frequencies assigned to this flight. Further, a check of other bases in the area was made on the outside chance 1st Lt. Thomas diverted to one of them, but none of them had contact with the missing Bronco.

Nail 48's last known position was on the west side of a primary road running generally northwest to southeast. The road crossed into Cambodia approximately 13 miles south of the tri-border area where Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia meet; 14 miles north of the Lao/Cambodia border and 18 miles west of the Lao/South Vietnam border, Attopu Province, Laos. It was also 28 miles east of Attopeu, Laos; and 28 miles west-northwest of Dak Seang, South Vietnam.

At the time the Bronco was reported overdue, an extensive aerial search and rescue (SAR) operation was initiated. An electronic surveillance was conducted throughout the night. The next morning Nail 49 arrived back in the target area at first light. The crew concentrated their search to the high terrain area to the north and north-northeast of the mission sector. This area was a known 23mm and 37mm anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) weapons location that guarded a major route of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was also a region that afforded the enemy ample protection, food and water. In fact, enemy troops frequently fired at American aircraft with small arms and light machine guns from this sanctuary. Visual and electronic searches continued for the next five days, but found no trace of the Bronco or its crew. At the time formal SAR efforts were terminated on 11 July, Daniel Thomas and Butch Carr were listed Missing in Action.

A source reported that in early July 1971, he had seen an American POW in that area. The source learned from a guard that the POW was a pilot of an OV10 that had been downed a week prior. This information was thought to possibly correlate to either Capt. Carr or 1st Lt. Thomas by US intelligence personnel.

During 1991, a Laotian courier brought out information about a crazy American being held at a POW camp in Laos. Shortly thereafter, a photograph of that man also made their way out of Laos. Initially the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) conceded that the picture maybe genuine. Later DIA analysts determined it was actually a photograph of a German national, and therefore a hoax. However, DIA had no explanation of what an elderly German national was doing in a communist-run POW camp in Laos.

Daniel Thomas and Donald Carr 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.

If Butch Carr and Daniel Thomas died as a result of their loss, each man has a right to have his remains returned to his family, friends and country. However, if they survived as intelligence reports indicate, they most certainly could have been captured and their fate, like that of other Americans unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, 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.

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.