

# WALKER, BRUCE CHARLES

Name: Bruce Charles Walker  
Rank/Branch: Captain/US Air Force  
Unit: 20th Tactical Air Support Sq  
DaNang Airbase, South Vietnam  
Date of Birth: 22 November 1946  
Home of Record: Pueblo, CO  
Date of Loss: 07 April 1972  
Country of Loss: South Vietnam  
Loss Coordinates: [165150N 1070338E \(YD194656\)](#)  
[Click coordinates to view maps](#)  
Status in 1973: Missing in Action  
Category: 2  
Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: [OV-10A "Bronco"](#)  
Other Personnel In Incident: Larry F. Potts (Prisoner of War/Died in Captivity)



REMARKS: EVADED 11 DAYS; NVA APPROACHING

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.

On 7 April 1972 then Air Force 1st Lieutenant Bruce C. Walker, pilot; and Marine Corp 1st Lieutenant Larry F. Potts, aerial observer; comprised the crew of an OV-10A (serial #68-3820), call sign "Covey 282," that was to conduct an armed reconnaissance mission south of the DMZ. Capt. Walker departed DaNang Airbase at 1010 hours and flew north to Hue/Phu Bai Airfield to pick up Capt. Potts who was to act as the naval artillery spotter during this mission. After departing Hue/Phu Bai Airfield, Covey 282 proceeded to Quang Tri to direct naval gunfire against any targets they located.

At 1105 hours, an O2 Birddog pilot operating as the onsite Forward Air Control (FAC) whose mission was to control all aircraft working in this region, observed a SAM launch, then a short time later he heard 1st Lt. Walker radioing on guard frequency from the ground. Bruce Walker reported he was uninjured and his location was pinpointed in the trees in a fairly flat area.

Search and rescue (SAR) aircraft were immediately called in. They located both parachutes on the ground and established radio contact with both crewmen. Larry Potts and Bruce Walker each reported to SAR personnel that he was uninjured. Before rescue could be achieved, the SAR aircraft were driven off by heavy enemy ground fire. It was further hampered by the massive invasion force of NVA troops and tanks pouring across the DMZ in what later became known as the communist's "Easter Offensive." Visual and voice contact was maintained with 1st Lt. Walker, but all contact was lost with 1st Lt. Potts shortly thereafter.

The Bronco was downed approximately 3 miles west of Highway 1, 4 miles north of Highway 9, 5 miles northeast of Firebase Vandergrift, 9 miles south of the DMZ, 10 miles southwest of the coastline, and 12 miles northwest of Quang Tri City, Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. Weather conditions at the time of

loss were clear with winds estimated to be 20 to 30 knots from the southeast. The terrain was fairly flat, forested and sparsely populated in this hotly contested region.

On 8 April, a North Vietnamese unit reported from Quang Binh that two pilots had been captured the previous night. Other reports on 9 April mentioned one aircraft shot down, but there was no mention of the fate of the crew. Also on 8 April, Radio Hanoi broadcast a report about the downing of an aircraft in Quang Binh Province, the southern most province in North Vietnam, and the Vinh Linh Special Zone, their name for the DMZ, but there was no reference to the capture of any aircrews.

Later in April 1972, an NVA soldier reported seeing an American POW approximately 7 kilometers north of 1st Lt. Walker's last known position. He was reportedly one of two crewmen from an OV-10 downed by a heat seeking surface-to-air (SAM) missile on 7 April 1972. According to the communist soldier, the second crewman, a Negro, was killed trying to escape. Other reports of the sighting of a black American who was wounded, captured alive, and died circa July 1972 in prison camp K-4 in Quang Binh Province were received. These reports, while not confirmed, were correlated to Larry Potts.

Bruce Walker was able to use his signal mirror over the next several days to help SAR forces pinpoint his location as he directed air strikes against camouflaged enemy ground targets. Finally, on 15 April, a survival kit was dropped to him. The SAR forces worked with Bruce Walker to have him move toward the east to safer area for rescue.

On 18 April, Bruce Walker's eastward progress was much quicker than anticipated. That morning he radioed that he had encountered hostile forces, and at 0718 hours he made his last radio transmission with rescue personnel telling them not to attempt a pickup because the enemy was closing in and he was receiving enemy fire. The pilot of the spotter aircraft reported seeing 1st Lt. Walker surrounded by some 40 NVA soldiers.

The FAC directed an airstrike by an F4 Phantom around 1st Lt. Walker's position to suppress the NVA's progress. This caused hostile ground forces to partially withdraw. When last seen, Bruce Walker was lying in a ditch within 50 yards of 20 enemy soldiers who were coming after him. Shortly thereafter, Capt. Acer and Lt. Fain, two of the pilots working this rescue mission, reported that hostile forces came upon Bruce Walker's radio and that they heard whistling, yelling, and laughing before it was apparently turned off. Search efforts continued until 1000 hours on 19 April when no further contact could be established with either crewman. In spite of all the information known about the probable capture of Bruce Walker and Larry Potts, both men were listed Missing in Action at the time formal SAR efforts were terminated.

Later Captain Walker's parents were given a tape of a conversation recorded by a pilot who was in voice contact with their son during those 11 days he spent on the ground escaping and evading. There is no question that at the time the recording was made; Bruce Walker was alive, well and desperately trying to regain his freedom.

In July 1990, a joint US/Vietnamese investigation was conducted in Gio Lin District, Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam. A reported gravesite was excavated, but no remains were recovered. Witnesses stated the remains were exhumed several years after they were first buried. The team was unable to visit the area of the former K-4 prison camp in Quang Binh Province, North Vietnam.

In April 1991 the US government released a list of Prisoners of War and Missing in Action who were known to be alive in enemy hands and for whom there is no evidence that he or she died in captivity. This list, commonly referred to today as the USG's "Last Known Alive" list, included both Larry Potts and Bruce Walker.

In January 1992, members of the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting (JTFFA) who were allowed to examine war artifacts exhibited in the Hanoi military museum found Bruce Walker's ID card in a case displaying a large number of ID card belonging to American military personnel. Some of these ID cards

belonged to Prisoners Of War who were released during Operation Homecoming. Others belonged to Americans whose remains have been returned since the end of the war. Still others belong to men who are still POW/MIAs.

In 1992, a National Security Agency (NSA) correlation study of all communist radio intercepts pertaining to missing Americans, which 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, 2 North Vietnamese radio messages were intercepted and correlated to this incident. The NSA synopsis states: "Note; shot down during FAC for naval gunfire mission. Initial voice contact established and later lost during SAR. AAA unit . Shot an enemy aircraft into flames with a direct hit and were sending out a group to search for the pilots on the night of 6/7 April. DIA preliminary assessment; DIA concurs with the initial correlation for this case . . . does not indicate crew status for this incident . . . does not add any new information about Refno 1820."

If Larry Potts and Bruce Walker 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 he survived, there is no question each man would have been captured and his fate, like that of other Americans who remain unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, could be quite different. Either way there is no question the Vietnamese know what happened and could return him or his remains any time they had the desire to do so.

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.

Pilots in Vietnam 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.