

SHANLEY, MICHAEL HENRY, JR.  
Remains Returned - ID Announced March 1990

Name: Michael Henry Shanley, Jr.  
Rank/Branch: E5/US Army  
Unit: 129th Aviation Company, 17th Aviation Group, 1st Aviation Brigade  
Date of Birth: 12 September 1945 (Lowell MA)  
Home City of Record: La Mesa CA  
Date of Loss: 02 December 1969  
Country of Loss: South Vietnam  
Loss Coordinates: 141944N 1085447E (BR750850)  
Status (in 1973): Missing In Action  
Category: 4  
Acraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH1B

Other Personnel In Incident: William C. Dunlap; Wm. Sanderlin; Martin Vanden Eykel (all remains returned)

Source: Compiled by Homecoming II Project 01 April 1990 from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, interviews.

SYNOPSIS: On December 2, 1969, CW2 Martin VandenEykel, aircraft commander; CW2 William C. Dunlap, pilot; SP5 Michael H. Shanley, gunner; and SP5 William D. Sanderlin, crew chief, were flying in the second UH1B gunship (serial #64-13959) in a flight of two in a night ground support mission in Binh Dinh Province, South Vietnam. (Note: some records place this incident in Kontum Province, but according to coordinates, it is in Binh Dinh Province.)

At 2030 hours, CW2 Dunlap's aircraft and the flight leader's aircraft departed LZ English to provide fire support for a long range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) that had radioed for help.

The two helicopters were led to the reported LRRP location by another helicopter equipped to drop flares. Upon arrival at the target area, the flare ship began dropping flares, while the two gunships tried to make radio contact with the LRRP team. CW2 Vanden Eykel radioed that he had made a turn to avoid crashing into a mountain, and the ground forces lost contact with him. CW2 Vanden Eykel's acknowledgement was the last known radio transmission in the vicinity.

The Bong Son region of South Vietnam, which is where the operation was taking place was so well-known for its treachery to aircraft that it became known as the "grave yard of helicopters." Many had been lost in that area.

Following the loss of the helicopter and crew, a board of inquiry was held. A Vietnamese woman stated at the hearing that she had seen the helicopter go down and the crew was captured by the Viet Cong.

In July 1973, Vietnamese woodcutters reported finding the wreckage of a helicopter in that vicinity. Investigation disclosed that the aircraft was not a helicopter, but a fixed wing airplane and not related to this case.

In December 1974, another source reported finding aircraft wreckage in this area, but upon investigation, it was found that the wreckage was that of a Vietnamese helicopter, rather than one that was involved in this case.

There has been no further word of the crew of the UH1B helicopter. No one saw them die; no one found the wreckage of their plane. To this date it is not known if they died or survived to be captured by the enemy.

In March 1990, the U.S. Government announced that the Vietnamese had discovered the remains of Dunlap, Sanderlin, Shanley and VandenEykel, and they had been returned to U.S. control. These families finally could begin their grieving, knowing at last their loved ones were dead.

We may never know exactly what happened to the ill fated UH1B that day in December 1969. For over 20 years, these men were prisoners of war -- dead or alive. And although it is clear that they are now dead, we may never know how...or when they died.

Thousands of reports have been received by the U.S. Government that Americans are still alive, held captive in Southeast Asia, yet official policy is that "no conclusive proof" has been obtained. Detractors allege the Government is debunking good information. While the possibility exists that Americans are being held against their will, there can be no question that we must do everything we can to secure their freedom. They deserve no less than our best efforts.