

BECKER, JAMES CHRISTOF

Name: James Christof Becker

Rank/Branch: O2/US Army

Unit: 71st Aviation Company, 14th Aviation Battalion, 16th Aviation Group, 23rd Infantry Division (Americal)

Date of Birth: 18 April 1944 (Oxford NE)

Home City of Record: Palestine TX

Date of Loss: 15 August 1970

Country of Loss: Laos

Loss Coordinates: 154943N 1070111E (YC509163)

Status (in 1973): Killed/Body Not Recovered

Category: 3

Aircraft/Vehicle/Ground: UH1H

Other Personnel in Incident: Peter A. Schmidt (missing); Michael D. Christ; Raymond W. Anderson (both rescued)

REMARKS:

SYNOPSIS: On August 15, 1970, 1Lt. James C. Becker, pilot; CW2 Raymond W. Anderson, aircraft commander; SP4 Michael D. Christ, crewchief; and SP4 Peter A. Schmidt, door gunner; were flying a UH1H helicopter (tail number 69-15375) on a reconnaissance team extraction mission in Laos.

Because of the difficult terrain in the area of the planned extraction, the recon team was to be lifted out by ladder. The helicopter hovered 50 feet over the pickup zone and dropped the ladder from the right side of the aircraft. Five of the team members climbed onto the ladder, and the helicopter began to lift off. At about 100 feet the aircraft began to receive small arms fire and crashed.

The five team members were stripped off the ladder by the trees as the helicopter descended. After the crash, CW2 Anderson checked the two crewmen on the right side of the aircraft, noticing that 1Lt. Becker was upright in his seat, however, it seemed that he had hit his head into the overhead instrument panel in the force of the impact. Becker's helmet was gone, and there was blood on the floor. CW2 Anderson stated that Becker did not appear to be breathing. Anderson then unsuccessfully attempted to free Schmidt from the right gunnel. He noted no blood on Schmidt, but stated that Schmidt did not appear to be breathing.

SP4 Christ checked SP4 Schmidt and noticed that he was breathing, and in short gasps, and was losing a great deal of blood. Christ had dislocated his collarbone, so was unable to free Schmidt from the wreckage.

Christ and Anderson returned to the pickup zone and were extracted. No attempts were made to return and recover Becker and Schmidt because of the location and hostile forces in the area. Although no other personnel are listed as missing from this incident, the fate of the team members on the ladder remains unknown. They were either recovered (dead or alive), or were indigenous personnel (and would not be listed on U.S. casualty lists).

Becker and Schmidt are among nearly 2500 Americans who remain missing from Vietnam. Schmidt, at least, was not dead when last seen by the surviving crewmen of the crashed helicopter.

With thousands of reports having been received by the U.S. Government, and still being received today, of Americans still held captive in Southeast Asia, most experts believe there are hundreds of Americans still prisoner in Southeast Asia. There can be no certainty that Becker and Schmidt died the day their helicopter crashed. They could be among those said to be alive. If so, what must they be thinking of us?